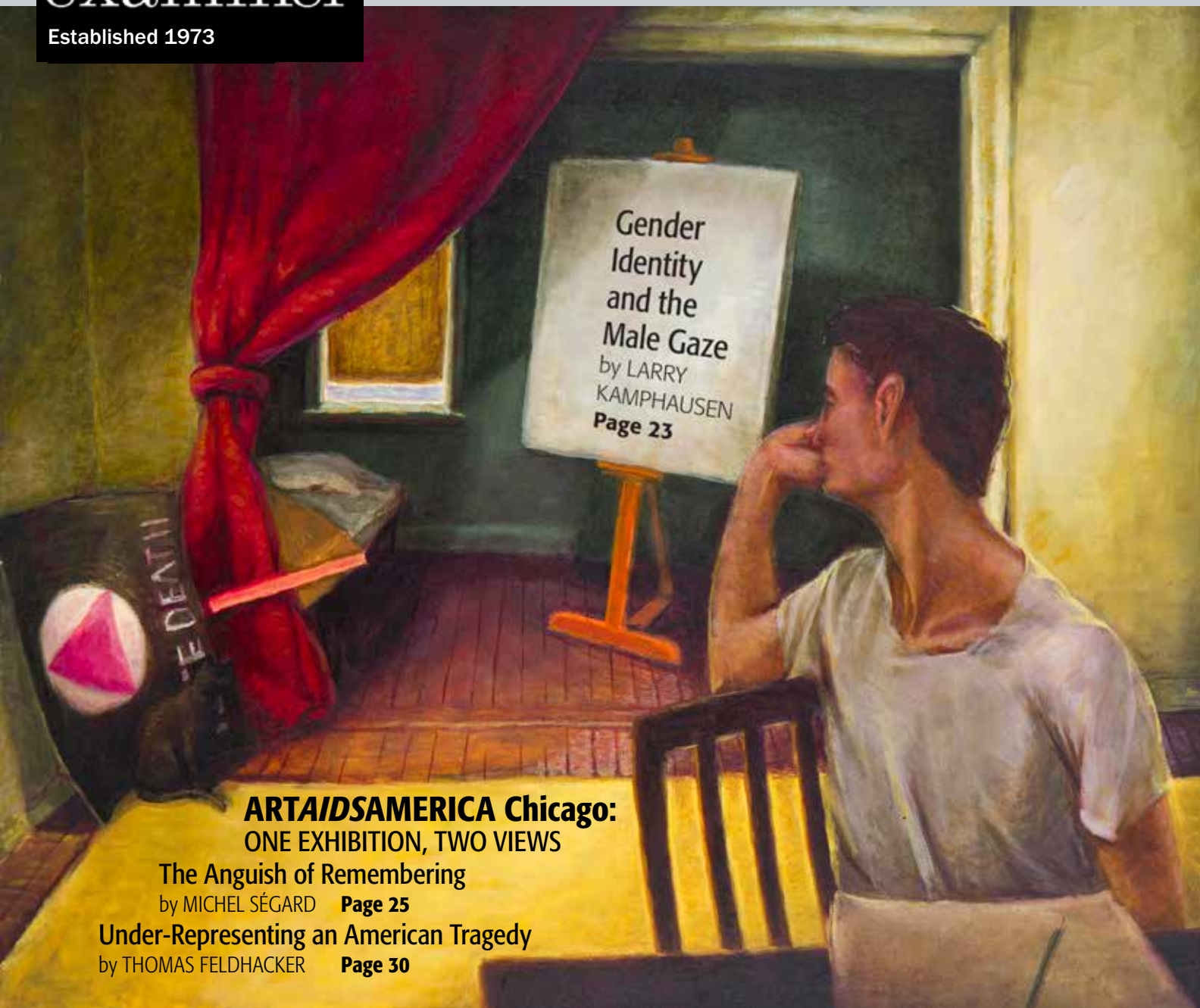


GENDER POLITICS IN ART



ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago: ONE EXHIBITION, TWO VIEWS

The Anguish of Remembering

by MICHEL SÉGARD **Page 25**

Under-Representing an American Tragedy

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“The Will to Ignorance: The Role of Academia in the Postmodern Debacle”—JORGE BENITEZ’S third installment in his trilogy, **The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism** **Page 17**

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New Art Examiner

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WANTED: WRITERS

The **New Art Examiner** is looking for writers interested in the visual arts in any major metropolitan area in the U.S. You would start with short reviews of exhibition in your area. Later, longer essays on contemporary visual art issues could be accepted.

Please send a sample of your writing (no more than a few pages) to:

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a publication whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

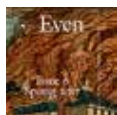
EDITORIAL POLICY

As the New Art Examiner has consistently raised the issues of conflict of interest and censorship. We think it appropriate that we make clear to our readers the editorial policy we have evolved since our inception:

1. No writer may review an exhibition originated or curated by a fellow faculty member or another employee, or any past or present student, from the institution in which they are currently employed. The New Art Examiner welcomes enthusiastic and sincere representation, so the editor can assign such an exhibition to other writers without the burden of conflict of interest.
2. There shall be no editorial favor in response to the purchase of advertisements.
3. The New Art Examiner welcomes all letters to the Editor and guarantees publishing. Very occasionally letters may be slightly edited for spelling or grammar or if the content is considered to be libellous.
4. The New Art Examiner does not have an affiliation with any particular style or ideology, or social commitment that may be expressed or represented in any art form. All political, ethical and social commentary are welcome. The New Art Examiner has actively sought diversity. All opinions are solely of the writer. This applies equally to editorial staff when they pen articles under their own name.
5. The general mandate of the New Art Examiner is well defined in the statement of purpose above.

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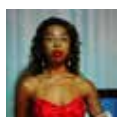
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Hugh Steers, *Poster*,
1990. Courtesy of
the artist's estate and
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ciates, New York.

Dear Reader,

This issue institutes a change in the organization and leadership of the New Art Examiner. Due to unresolved administrative issues between the U.S. and United Kingdom editors who generate the magazine's content, the New Art Examiner will no longer carry articles that originate from the UK.

As a result, our leadership has also changed. There is no longer an individual called the Publisher. That role is reserved for our sponsoring not-for-profit organization, Art Message International. As Editor-in-Chief, I will be shepherding the New Art Examiner through the challenges of bringing its content up-to-date and taking its distribution system into the 21st century, i.e. electronic information distribution—the internet.

We start with updating the content of the Examiner. The magazine will be more current about cultural and political issues that are affecting the art world. For example, in this issue, we have introduced a special section on Gender Politics in Art to coincide with Gay Pride Month in June. The section contains an essay by Larry Kamphausen titled "Gender Identity and the Male Gaze" and two reviews of the "ART/AIDS-AMERICA Chicago" exhibition.

One by Michel Ségard is titled "The Anguish of Remembering" and views the exhibition as a memorial to the early days of the AIDS epidemic from the point of view of a senior who lived through it. The other, titled "Under-Representing an American Tragedy," was written by Thomas Feldhacker, our social media editor. As a millennial, he searches for the necessary attention the ongoing epidemic needs for those most affected by it today, a situation he felt was lacking in the exhibition.

We will be assembling special sections on current, relevant topics as the opportunity arises. For example, we would like to do a special section on racial politics in the arts in the near future. Another highly relevant topic is the emergence of alternative distribution networks for artists.

We have made a tentative start to covering that topic with Bruce Thorn's essay on Gallery Weekend Chicago 2017. Also, there are a number of alternative artists groups who are almost never covered because they do not show in major galleries. We are making a commitment to go to them and report on and review their efforts, good or bad.

Of course we will continue to cover the deeds and misdeeds of major institutions and galleries. But they will not be the dominant focus of our editorial content as so often they've been in the past. In the tradition of co-founder Jane Addams Allen, our goal is to make the Examiner a truly open forum for the discussion and exploration of contemporary issues in the visual arts via the publication of provocative articles, reviews and lively letters to the editor.

Finally, the Examiner is entering a new distribution stage. Confronting the increasing shift of information dissemination via the internet, we are creating a new website, newartexaminer.org, where all content will be free. That site will be online in early May.

Subscriptions hereafter will be only for those wishing a printed copy of the magazine. Subscription payment will be made possible via PayPal. The print version of the magazine will still be available at as many outlets as possible. In this issue, our present outlets are listed on the Subscription and Advertising page on the inside back cover.

We hope, dear reader, that these changes meet with your approval. We trust that you will let us know your verdict via your letters and through social media on our Facebook page. We will strive to meet your visual arts information and analysis needs. Here's looking to tomorrow!

Michel Ségard
Editor-in-Chief
New Art Examiner

The Future of Art Criticism:

Four Editors Trade Views at the College Art Association's Annual Meeting

By Kate Hadley Toftness

The College Art Association's annual conference, the largest international gathering of visual arts professionals, was held in New York this past February. Where better, I figured, to take the pulse of art criticism? The overflowing agenda of professorial opinion featured a noontime forum, "Key Conversation: Art Criticism," with four editors who traded viewpoints about the future of their practice.

The best editor is the one who can get you money for what you're doing.

Such was the proverb shared by David Velasco, an editor for *Artforum International Magazine*, who reminded the audience that some people try to do this for a living. Offering some hope, he suggested, "If there's a future of art criticism that's probably what it is: you have to find a way to pay writers."

In a sea of academics sorting themselves into phyla of intensely specific conference sessions, those inclined toward art writing for a general audience seemed ready to embrace this pragmatic diagnosis. The four panelists included founding editors of the up-and-coming magazine, *Even*, and the website *4Columns*, as well as online editors from industry giants, *Hyperallergic* and *Artforum International Magazine*. Observing these professionals perched at the front of the ballroom as specimens of an endangered species, the audience settled in to absorb their defenses and deconstruction of art criticism.

The ambitions of the hour launched quickly. Questions of craft, the ethics of funding publishing platforms, and the formation of intentional communities of writers and readers were set forth as primary topics. But, in fact, the arc of the

conversation was compact and useful. I would summarize it as: How to Do It, How to Pay for It, How to Do It – Part II, and finally, Why Do It?

How To Do It

"Get a rough draft out, no matter how painful it is—and it's often painful—leave it for a day, and then come back to it and make it comprehensible to other people."

The editors began with some basic advice. Speaking to the day's context, Jason Farago addressed critics who come from an art history background and their lack of understanding editorial mediums. Farago's own magazine, *Even*, assigns 5,000 word essays, but when he writes art reviews for *The New York Times*, it's 800 words, and at *The New Yorker* a mere 100.

Is word count all that defines a medium? No. Farago hinted at an equation that takes into account audience, intentions of the publication, and potentially the cost of space on a page, whether that page is virtual or "rather handsome paper," as *Even* boasts of its printed stock. Which leaves one to wonder: where does craft end and product begin?

Seph Rodney of *Hyperallergic* (quoted above) called his process of writing a "habit," but that seems too self-focused for his repeated emphasis on reception by "other people." Rodney elaborated on this trade-off, "All these faculties that I suspect I have, but that I'm not always sure I have, come into play in that moment of thinking, 'oh, I have to make sense of that,' for someone else." The answer to the how of writing is here synonymous with trusting one's ability to clarify something for your reader. It is a service model.

HYPERALLERGIC

Screenshot of *Hyperallergic* logo from their website.



(Left) Cover of *Artforum*, April 2017.



(Right) Screenshot detail of *Even*'s home page.

How to Pay for It

In his appraisal of art criticism's value, Rodney ascribes to the diagnosis of 20th-century sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman:

The critic has been rendered obsolete by the marketplace.

That's the concern. When I searched *artforum.com* for an "about" page that might outline their mission, the closest thing I found was a paragraph posted for potential advertisers: "the site has become an essential resource for a growing art-world audience that is sophisticated, engaged, and poised to spend." The page then lists a dozen data points on the gender, household income, and education level of their site visitors as well as the percentage of those visitors who consider the site to be "essential" and "smart."

Artforum is no longer required to validate its identity to its readers, only its stockholders. Though it was noted that advertising often plays an important role in an arts publication's overall budget, it was not made clear during the panel if there is a direct connection between advertising and the compensation of writers.

Panelist Margaret Sundell previously led the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program, and the other editors praised her for the importance of this crucial support to writers. In September 2016, Sundell started her own venture, *4Columns*, as a non-profit literary website. It was structured and brought into existence for the purpose of appropriately compensating

writers, specifically critics (Note the simple tagline of *4Columns*: Art Criticism Weekly). As of now, there are no advertisements on the site.

In contrast to *4Columns'* non-profit model, *Hyperallergic* and *Artforum* have ads and other sources of revenue (such as events)—"we aren't struggling," said Rodney of *Hyperallergic*. Despite its youth, *Even* magazine already showcases a bevy of luxury brands and high-end art galleries. Farago says bigger clients are the ones that remain reliably disinterested in the tenor of their content. His publisher reports that smaller galleries tend to want reviews in return for ads. That's a deal-breaker.

But what, in the end, is being bought and sold? The marketplace, a panoply of things designed to attract and distract attention, now dominates culture. In this milieu, art criticism is a lens, perhaps a prosthetic, for narrowing vision. "To be able to say this is worth looking at and this thing is not, I think is ultimately helpful to you," said Rodney, "At least I hope it is." But lest we think that is all there is—shortcuts to preferred forms of consumption—Rodney shared a simultaneous goal of illumination: "There's an object, and through that object you can see an entire universe that you were not able to see before, and I just want to be able to point out some of the things in that universe that are available by paying attention to this object, this experience." The ability to bear such insights with authority is part of the debate. Where does this authority come from?

How to Do It—Part II

Go forth and figure it out.

Rodney shared that his editor-in-chief empowers him to trust his accumulated knowledge to make sense of things for readers. Indeed, opinions are required. (*Hyperallergic's* tagline: Contemporary Art and Its Discontents). Once the need for meaningful judgments was established, Farago interrogated this to suggest that deeper, maybe secretly-held values, might be unearthed.

On the subject of universal truths, Farago admitted, “Of course I am there to make pronouncements with the force of truth behind them, otherwise why would you pick up the paper?” (Tagline for *Even*: Global Perspective on Contemporary Art.)

Farago framed two lineages of art criticism. The first is the “Enlightenment-inspired” model of formal principles as descended from Diderot through Clement Greenberg. The other is an open-ended, possibly literary tradition out of 19th-century Germany often called art writing. Farago seemed to fall closer to the Enlightenment tradition.

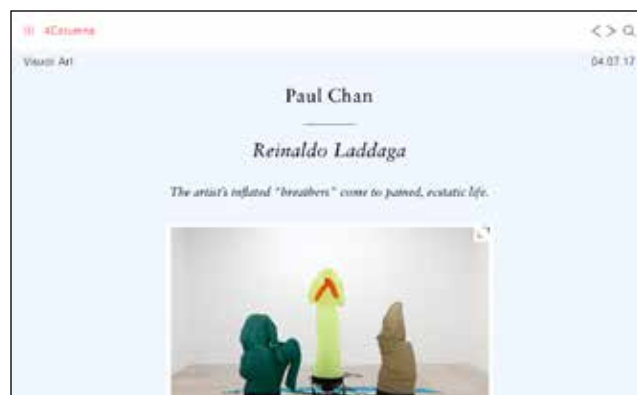
At least, he kept prodding his fellow panelists to expound on making authoritative judgments. And yet *Even* waxes at lengths that would be difficult to categorize as anything but literary. The magazine’s online description paints a romantic picture of repairing the “misunderstood gap between culture and the world.”

If it seemed that authoritative judgments are incompatible with post-Greenbergian art criticism, Sundell provided a more neutral route to reconciling criticism with tolerance: “Just simply choosing to cover something or not covering it is a judgment.”

So Why Do It

“At what point do you ignore and at what point do you tackle something that you don’t like? At what point is it productive for you?”

Velasco addressed reluctance to take on critiques of works that fall short. While the editors remained wary of negative reviews that could disproportionately impact an emerging artist’s career, they were prepared to take up the mantle of defrauding “bad art.” Rodney feels compelled to dislodge any work that approaches a state “draconian in its intention to get you to think a particular thing,” Farago is inclined to write more skeptical reviews when “principles that seem con-



Screenshot of page from 4Column website.

gruent with a failed aesthetic practice are ones that I can’t support.”

Sundell invoked the stakes of history: “The future of criticism is very interested in this political moment, and in this historical moment, and the role that the critic has as someone who operates with a foot in the present ... in the trenches ... [who is] also in relationship to the stakes of history.” The stakes of history, she said, stand for the stakes of truth. Taking the political imperative as a hinge for reframing authoritative judgments as staked claims rather than universal truths marked a path forward.

While an audience of self-selected scholars might not be the right focus group for an unbiased look at the state of art criticism, I exited pleased at the resolutely sincere perspectives offered by the editors and how their decisions relate to the larger field. Their common consensus was that art criticism proceeds. And some corners proceed in largely ethical and literary ways.

As an editor, Velasco leans on a network of trust. “I don’t know where the future of art criticism is, I don’t know where the present of art criticism is, but I know who I trust in the world and I think that building those communities of writers and people, artists, who we trust is probably the most important thing to me about this field we’re in right now.” ■

A recording of this February 16, 2017 conversation is publicly available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rPpzagcPU0>.

Kate Hadley Toftness is a Chicago-based writer and organizer of things and culture. She is currently leading a project to connect community archives and artists across the city towards a more dynamic and inclusive experience of art history. chicagoarchivesandartists.org

American Art's International Champion

Terra Foundation Announces Major Expo Next Year of Chicago Art and Design

By Tom Mullaney

The Terra Foundation of American Art is a major art philanthropy that is probably unknown by most Chicagoans. One reason may be that it funds primarily museums and art activity rather than artists. It is what remains of the ill-fated Terra Museum of American Art, which opened in Evanston in 1980 and relocated to North Michigan Avenue from 1987 until its closing in 2004. While it boasted a respectable art collection and mounted some very worthy exhibitions, it failed to generate a high degree of public interest.

The Foundation is the success the museum never was. Its mission now is to foster greater appreciation in other countries of American art created between the 18th Century and World War II. Its grants help mount museum exhibitions that promote greater study and preservation of American Art's value throughout the world, including scholarly research. Its CEO, Elizabeth Glassman, calls the foundation a "museum without walls."

Terra recently announced that it made \$11.4 million in grants during the 2016 fiscal year and distributed more than \$80 million to 30 countries since its founding in 2005. It funds one in four of the requests it receives. In the Chicago area, Terra, over the past five years, has made 24 grants to local exhibitions totaling \$2 million.

Glassman has been an ambassador (befitting her early educational background in international relations) on behalf of American art created prior to World War II. "We look at art as an opportunity to create a dialogue. We use it as a jumping off point to reach audiences about the nature of their own national culture."

Terra has funded 800 projects in 30 countries to date. Yet, unless you are aware of its sponsorship of many Art Institute and worldwide exhibitions, its art collection of approximately 800 works and its operation of the American Museum of Art in Giverny, France, its identity remains a mystery.

However, throughout 2018, Terra will take a giant step toward making its presence felt in Chicago more strongly. Last month, Terra announced

a year-long initiative, **Art Design Chicago**. In partnership with the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Terra will present a celebration throughout 2018 of Chicago's legacy to American culture in art and design via exhibitions, hundreds of public programs, scholarly publications and a four-part documentary.

"We are blessed in Chicago to have long been the home to major art schools, art libraries, art museums, public art, and artists. And yet, the story of many of the city's contributions has not been well researched, documented, or integrated into the larger national and global narratives. Through *Art Design Chicago* the city's important role will finally receive the attention it deserves," said festival co-presenter, Richard H. Driehaus of the Driehaus Foundation. "Our plan," Glassman explained, "is to explore what makes the visual culture of Chicago distinctive." Late last year, I sat down with Elizabeth Glassman, its president

Elizabeth Glassman, President and CEO of the Terra Foundation of American Art. Photo by Tony Smith.





Ms. Glassman addresses the crowd at the Cultural Center announcing Art Design Chicago on April 4th. Photo by Tony Smith.

and CEO, who has run both the museum and the foundation since 2001.

EG: We decided (once the museum closed) that we wanted to be a museum without walls and that our mission should be to take our collection and story out to the people and not just for the people who came to us.

Dan Terra was appointed by President Reagan to be the cultural ambassador. He really believed in the power of art to express our national culture.

NAE: So, by taking the art further out, that is how you got involved in the mission of underwriting and giving support to exhibitions of American art.

EG: We decided that, instead of spending our money on bricks and mortar, we would animate that mission through a foundation. And what we do is make grants for exhibitions, teaching fellowships, publication fellowships and travel grants for curators. We focus our grants on anything that has the capacity to expand our mission of advancing American art.

EG: On October 31, 2004, we closed the Terra Museum. And our first grants were started in 2005. It was a new form but with the same mission. I'm a very strong believer in donor intent. Dan Terra wanted people to know about American art both in Chicago and around the world. We use our collection to model the complicated and interesting exhibitions that we'd like to see happening or we use it to springboard a larg-

er exhibition. For example, last year, we did a big exhibition with the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and the Pinacoteca in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The subject was "Landscape Paintings of the Americas from 1850 to 1950."

It was American art in a larger context of a global dialogue about what landscape painting means in all those different cultures. Another way we use our collection is we have an ongoing partnership with the National Gallery in London where we do an exhibition every 18 months in which we contribute some of our collection.

NAE: What was this conversation on culture you had in Paris in early 2017?

EG: So, Michael Shapiro wrote a book containing interviews with 10 museum directors. We decided since there are five exhibitions on American art up in Paris this season ("we funded four of them"), we wanted to sponsor a program.

NAE: When the museum opened downtown in 1992, I feel there was a perception that American Art was not as noteworthy or needed. It was looked at as maybe not as important as the European masters. Through your work and your funding, how would you say American Art has grown in stature?

EG: When we started our program in 2005, we had maybe 10 or 15 percent of our grant requests from non-U.S. museums. Ten years later, we now have maybe 60 to 70 percent of our grant requests from museums outside America orga-

nizing exhibitions on American art. And we only fund projects up to 1980, so we are not just talking about contemporary art.

I feel there's a huge increase of interest in American art throughout the world. It has to do with a couple of things. One is a real interest in learning about American culture. Another is that curators from around the world are coming here to secure loans, to travel and when they see works by (Winslow) Homer and (Thomas) Eakins and (Marsden) Hartley, they think "Why have I not seen this artist in my country?" So, I think it's a matter of rising familiarity.

Another thing I find is that people are interested in art that tells a national story. We've done several large exhibitions in China and what the Chinese art historians talk to me about is "How do we articulate our story and how do they articulate theirs?" A Hallmark of the Terra approach is that we don't just export exhibitions. We get non-U.S. curators to write about and be involved with the shows.

NAE: Does the foundation add to its collection?

EG: Oh yes, yes. Last year, we bought a gorgeous painting by Arthur Dove and then we bought a Jacob Lawrence and a Romare Bearden. Those are in a show right now in Paris. We lend about 30 percent of our collection at any given time. We have 40 paintings at the Art Institute and paintings in Australia.

Recently, we announced a large gift to the Archives of American Art. In 2005, when we started, we asked "How can we make resource material available to scholars around the world?" So, we gave two 10-year grants, totaling \$10 million, to the Archives which are available on the Smithsonian's website. I believe we've given a total of \$12 million to the Smithsonian museums.

NAE: In the last 10 years, it seems like your network of institutional partners, like the Ashmolean and others, has also blossomed.

EG: We both are what we call proactive where we go out and we lend our collection or organize shows together. Say, if I'm in London, I meet with all the major museum directors and I say "Are you working on any American art shows because we could help you with that?"

And, as we have gotten so much more well-known, people have come to us. In 2015, we conducted an attendance survey at all of the shows that we funded and it's more than 24 million people. When we had the museum, we might have had 150,000 or, sometimes, 200,000 visitors in a year. Now, we've impacted many more.

NAE: If someone says to you, "Elizabeth, you are so wedded to the foundation and we know you eat, sleep, think of the Terra Foundation." What are the two or three things that give you the most personal feeling that you've made a difference?"

EG: I worked for many years for Dominique de Menil, who started the Menil Collection. And Mrs. De Menil, who was very wealthy, was someone who believed that her capacity to make a difference was not a right but a responsibility.

I feel incredibly privileged to work with my board and my incredibly talented staff to steward all of these projects around the world. We have a saying at the end of our mission statement: "We believe that art has the power to distinguish cultures and to unite them."

Before I decided I wanted to be an art historian, I wanted to be a diplomat. I've always been a believer in the power of international conversation to create peace and the capacity to understand each other.

NAE: It seems like a wonderful confluence of events that you, who wanted to be a diplomat, have been working for a man who was a diplomat and had the same vision of what art could accomplish.

EG: Yeah, really. It's very gratifying to hear other people talk about their national story and how do you tell that story in Russia or China. Also, we have a lot of teaching fellowships—in London, Oxford, Paris, two in Berlin, two in Beijing, Spain. And when these professors visit us or talk about their experience, they tell how gratifying it (telling their national story) is to them. ■

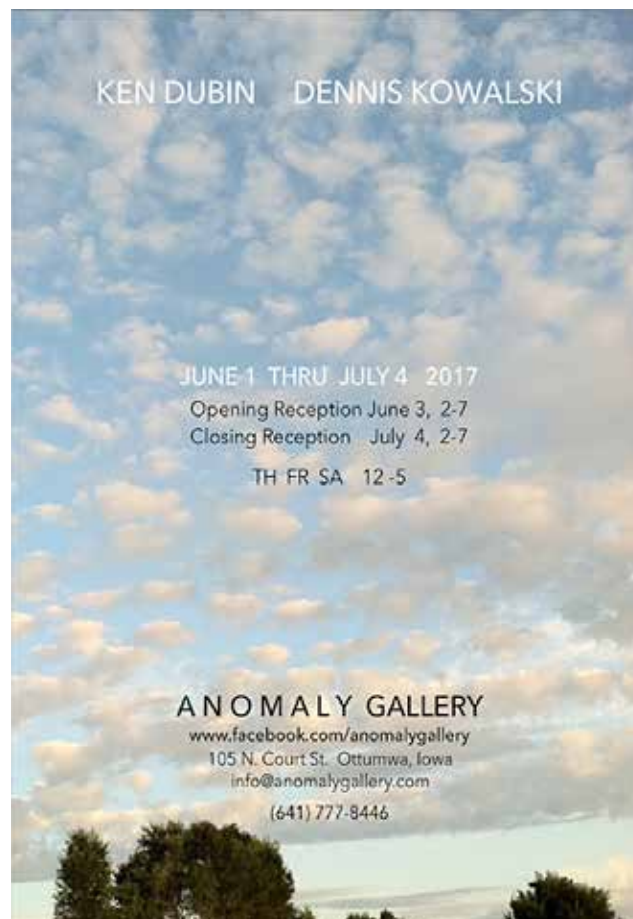
Tom Mullaney is the Senior Editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He has followed the activities of Terra both as a museum since 1987 and as a foundation since its earliest days.

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Gallery Weekend Chicago 2017 Features A Cavalcade of Chicago Galleries

By Bruce Thorn

EDITOR'S NOTE: This essay is the first of a series by various authors on alternative viewing and distribution venues for artists.



John Preus, *Prussian Blue/Ground Floor Plan*, at Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

The 2017 “Expanded Exhibition” iteration of Gallery Weekend Chicago offered 25 exhibitions by local galleries and curatorial projects all in one location. Expanded opened with a private preview party on March 8 and ran through March 12 at MANA Contemporary in the Pilsen neighborhood. I went to see the art and to learn about Gallery Weekend.

The first Gallery Weekend Chicago (GWC) was held on Sept. 16-18, 2011. GWC was organized by Monique Meloche and gallery director Whitney Tassie, working with an affiliation of several other local art dealers. The enterprise was modeled after Berlin’s successful Gallery Weekend. Eleven galleries participated at Chicago’s first GWC: Andrew Rafacz, Corbett vs. Dempsey, devening projects + editions, Donald Young, Kavi Gupta, moniquemeloche, Rhona Hoffman, Shane Campbell, Three Walls, Tony Wight and Western Exhibitions. Eight of the original galleries came back for the 2017 Expanded Exhibition.

In its first years, GWC was held concurrently with the much bigger, more established Expo Chicago. Now GWC has set itself apart by moving to a less competitive date. This seems appropriate. Expo Chicago is a blue chip playground whereas Expanded could be described as more contemporary, experimental and conceptual.

The question of what can be done to energize the social and commercial presence of contemporary art, on a practical community level, has crossed more than a few minds lately. The public has limited access to the art of the times, while many excellent and proven artists have no place at all to exhibit their work. Many galleries have been going out of business in recent years. Do we just live with this, along with so many other diminished expectations cast upon the times, or can anything be done about it? When non-stop griping eventually wears out its welcome, one can begin to look for ways to improve the situation. GWC Expanded Exhibition offered an opportunity to examine such questions while experiencing new artwork.

Gallery Weekend began in Berlin in 2004 as an initiative of Berlin galleries, curators, collectors and civic partners who all wanted to showcase their burgeoning local art scene. GWB has since grown and established itself as a leading event for contemporary art in Germany. The 13th edition of GWB takes place April 28-30, 2017 and involves 47 Berlin Galleries. There is a long list of sponsors and GWB has become an internationally utilized general model for organizing contemporary exhibitions. Original goals included: to serve as a point of contact for curators and collectors; to present the gallery as a space of exchange and discourse; and to present emerging and established galleries within the same context.

A fascinating aspect of the original Gallery Weekend Berlin model was that each gallery presented one show and GWB shuttled VIPs from gallery to gallery in sponsored black BMW limousines. Several galleries claim that GWB is their highest sales weekend of the year. That reminds me of a paragraph in Andy Warhol's book *Popism* from 1980 wherein Warhol explained how he'd gotten all of those notable celebrities like Bob Dylan over to parties at The Factory by picking them up in limousines. A resident freak at The Factory had a gig driving a limo and few celebs declined the offer of a limo ride to Warhol's parties.

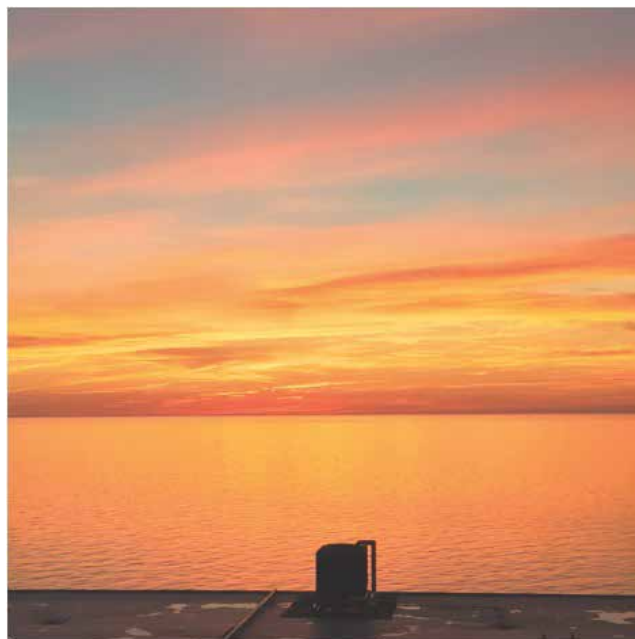
The success of GWB has attracted competition. The two major annual art fairs in Germany are Gallery Weekend Berlin and Art Cologne. These two shows have always been presented on different dates to avoid conflicts. In 2017 Germany's two most important art events will be taking place during the same week. Art Cologne has co-opted the same dates as Gallery Weekend Berlin, to be held April 28–May 1. It will be difficult or impossible for collectors to visit both shows because the two cities are a half-day travel apart. Galleries and curatorial projects must also choose where to participate. It remains to be seen how the conflicting schedules will affect business. Berlin is not happy about the change of date by Art Cologne.

Gallery Weekend Chicago, in partnership with MANA Contemporary, enlisted Vienna-based curator Michael Hall for the 2017 Expanded Exhibition. Hall has extensive contacts and experience within the Chicago art community. He founded the Chicago Project Room, a contemporary art gallery, in Chicago in 1996. Daniel Hug



Andrew Holmquist, *Shower Scene*, 2010 at Carrie Secrist. Photo courtesy of Carrie Secrist Gallery.

Loyola Condenser, *Orange*, 9-9-2016, at Lawrence & Clark. Photo courtesy of Lawrence & Clark.





Chris Bradley, *Cinnamon Scent Machine*, 2010
at Shane Campbell Gallery.

Jessica Stockholder, *Catapult Anime Stack*, 2015 at Kavi Gupta.



joined CPR in 1998. They moved the gallery to Los Angeles in 2000 and closed it in 2002. Daniel Hug is now the Director of Art Cologne.

The location is only a few miles from downtown but it's more accessible by car than by public transportation. Situated near a recently shuttered coal-fired power plant, the building is industrial and mammoth. Finding the 2017 Expanded Exhibition wasn't easy for newcomers to MANA Chicago. There were no signs for the exhibition in the parking lot, entrance or lobby. For a visitor arriving in the empty lobby, the only hint of an exhibition appeared when the large freight elevator came down and was opened by a liftman asking "what floor?"

The Expanded Exhibition was presented in an immaculate 20,000 square foot, fourth floor loft. Curator Michael Hall brought together 25 Chicago galleries and curatorial projects and suggested that each present a one-artist exhibition. As it was, two of the exhibitions were two-artist and one was multi-artist, all the rest were solo projects. Entering Expanded, one was immediately impressed by the un-crowded and minimal presentation. Temporary display walls set up for many of the exhibitors did not negate the open, naturally lit expansiveness because there were no walls in the entire center third of the space. This offered a shotgun view of the entire exhibition from each end. Large windows ran the length of the east and west walls and offered spectacular industrial views of the city through dirty and cracked windowpanes.

The first display upon entering Expanded was by "trans-interdisciplinary artist" John Preus at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, presenting an encampment of whimsical furniture made out of materials salvaged from closed Chicago Public Schools. CPS closed 50 schools in 2013, all in poor minority neighborhoods. *Prussian Blue/ Ground Floor Plan* welcomes visitors like a rustic ranch entrance to a hippy commune out West. Timbers forming the entrance were artfully fabricated from deconstructed bits of the furniture and architecture of classrooms. Even the blueprint of the school's floor plan is included. One might ask if this is what public education has come to, being ripped apart and transformed into expensive toys for art collectors. Close-up viewing of Preus' constructed furniture offers many visual treats.

At Lawrence and Clark, Instagram artist Loyola_Condenser (Lisa Barensen) presented a

series of photographs of the scene looking out of her apartment window on Chicago's north lake-shore. Like Monet contemplating haystacks, she presents the same view and the same format in each photo. The view is over the large flat rooftop of a shorter building upon which sits a 20-foot tall heating and cooling unit (a condenser?), looking quite small, past the rooftop, towards the horizon over the waters of Lake Michigan and up to the glorious sky. The same view looks quite unique in each image due to differences in time of day, lighting, colors, weather, zoom and mood, proving that there is still plenty to be gained from straight-forward observational work.

Carrie Secrist Gallery offered a large presentation of paintings, ceramics and works on paper by Andrew Holmquist, a recent graduate of SAIC (MFA 2014) who has already had four solo shows at the gallery and is included in the exhibition "Eternal Youth" at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art. Holmquist produces a steady stream of predictably delightful abstractions. Narrow stage depth is a common device in this body of work. Interestingly, the brightly glazed ceramic works relate to forms within the paintings. The paintings look methodical, smart, relatively easy, cheerful and commercial. What would happen with more ambition, tougher challenges and less concern for prettiness?

Shane Campbell Gallery gave up their entire exhibition space to one single work by Chris Bradley. *Cinnamon Scent Machine* (from 2010) hung from the ceiling and performed a Whirling Dervish sort of loud mechanical dance every 5 minutes or so, powered by an orbital sander and making a noise that was audible throughout the entire exhibition hall. It made for one bizarre headshot: an exploded basketball Cyclops with a cinnamon stick neck that left powdered spice in its wake on the ground beneath into which visitors scrawled words and names. It's all very amusing indeed, for a few minutes, and loaded with easy metaphors. Like Edgar Allen Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum," *Cinnamon Scent Machine* turns one way, then the other, as inertia sets in.

At Kavi Gupta, we had Jessica Stockholder and James Krone. Both artists subscribe to the less is more approach to art. Krone offered a simple paint between the lines sort of picture of a parrot named "Francis." Next to this was a twin Francis painting made by pressing the wet painting against another blank canvas, produc-



James Krone, detail of *Cus-Sub-Her-Vir-o Is Lim*, 2015 at Kavi Gupta.

Shane Huffman at 65GRAND, *Was our first vehicle a mother or a meteorite? (My son holding Uncle Robbie's bones in one hand and meteorites from the field museum in the other, pregnant woman's breasts)*. Photo courtesy of 65GRAND.





Dominick Di Meo, detail of *Personage*, 1971 at Corbett vs. Dempsey.



Daniel Baird, *Capsule (the Malaise)*, 2015 at Patron.



Rita Ackerman, *Jezebels* at the Soccer Club.
Photo courtesy of the Soccer Club.

ing, in effect, a monotype print. On the opposite wall was the intriguing, similar but larger “monotype” painting *Cus-Sub-Her-Vir-O Is Lim*. Krone’s pressed paintings offer more mystery than his cool, clean, paint by number sidekick parrot.

Jessica Stockholder, Chair of the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago, considers her own art to be an intersection of painting and sculpture. Before U.C., she chaired the Sculpture Department at the prestigious Yale School of Art. Stockholder says that her work “developed through the process of making site-specific installations.”

With the right idea, attitude, context, arrangement, manipulation, presentation and artspeak, almost anything can be art, right? That is indeed the zeitgeist of the times and Stockholder has received a freight train of accolades for adhering to the company line. Playful, yes; fun, yes; fill the museum like a party house, check; entertaining, yes; colorful, yes; universally acclaimed by academics, check; cute, check. Except, wait a minute, what about those of us looking for more than temporary amusement, hungry for art and ideas that might last longer than the dust that they collect? As much as I try to be curmudgeonly about Stockholder’s work, I can’t help but enjoy it. That’s pretty cool.

I like to take the time to experience art first before reading about it. Coming to Shane Huffman’s work for the first time at 65GRAND, with no previous knowledge of his work, I sensed interests in metaphysics, poetry and self-discovery. Then, looking for titles, I found instead lengthy literary descriptions, like the caption below:

Was our first vehicle a mother or a meteorite?
(My son holding Uncle Robbie’s bones in one hand and meteorites from the field museum in the other, pregnant woman’s breasts).

Corbett vs. Dempsey Gallery exhibited two Dominick Di Meo paintings: “Personage” from 1971 and “Untitled (White Personage, 1970)”. The powerful pairing looked quite contemporary despite the vintage. It appears that the same stencil masks were used on each painting for the legs and heads. There’s quite a range of experimentation between the 1970 and 1971 versions. One personage sits above a pile of garbage, or is exhorting above the crowds like a general headed into battle, while the other is cozily jumbled up in a faded-out-to-white world, with legs detached, arm and hand reaching out.

At Patron, Daniel Baird's 2015 *Capsule (the Malaise)* offers allusions, signifiers and metaphors: driftwood, large screen television, international power transformers, all in the service of non-committal abstract reflections, a stream of consciousness visual poetry.

Iranian born Orkideh Torabi is a 2016 MFA graduate from SAIC. The works on display at Western Exhibitions are from his series called "The Heads." Working with fabric dyes on stretched cotton, Torabi is an exceptional colorist and subtle commentator. The Heads are too educated to be outsider art but share a similar sense of intense empathy.

Jeux D'Été exhibited a grouping of works by Montreal-based Valérie Blas, exploring different sculptural materials and techniques. Her work seemed to pose questions about female identity and human progress. An empty, hollow pair of woman's pants on a pedestal strikes a very relaxed, fluid pose (*Don't Be Shy*). Another female form made of Forton polymer, titled *I want to be everything you didn't know you were looking for* looks a lot like a headless, plump piece of plastic meat. *I see your nose grow* is a technically ambitious, double-sided work on a thick slab of professionally shaped granite with a very slick laser-etched image on each side. This two faced monolith sails on the floor like Stanley Kubrick's 2001 Space Odyssey through space, bearing images of clamping devices and a Neanderthal.

From the entrance to GWC Expanded, looking just past John Preus' works at Rhona Hoffman, one could see moniquemeloche's display of Brendan Fernandes' work, consisting of a grouping of institutional, orange and chrome coat racks on wheels. There were no coats hanging, even though it was still coat weather in Chicago. Nothing exactly visually rewarding there, hmmm, must be conceptual art. My photographer's eye went in close looking for an engaging shot and learned that the coat hangers (there were 1-13 hangers on each rack) were hand-pulled crystal. They are quite beautiful up close, like Cinderella's glass slippers. One could devise a lot of narrative from that and still ask "so what?"

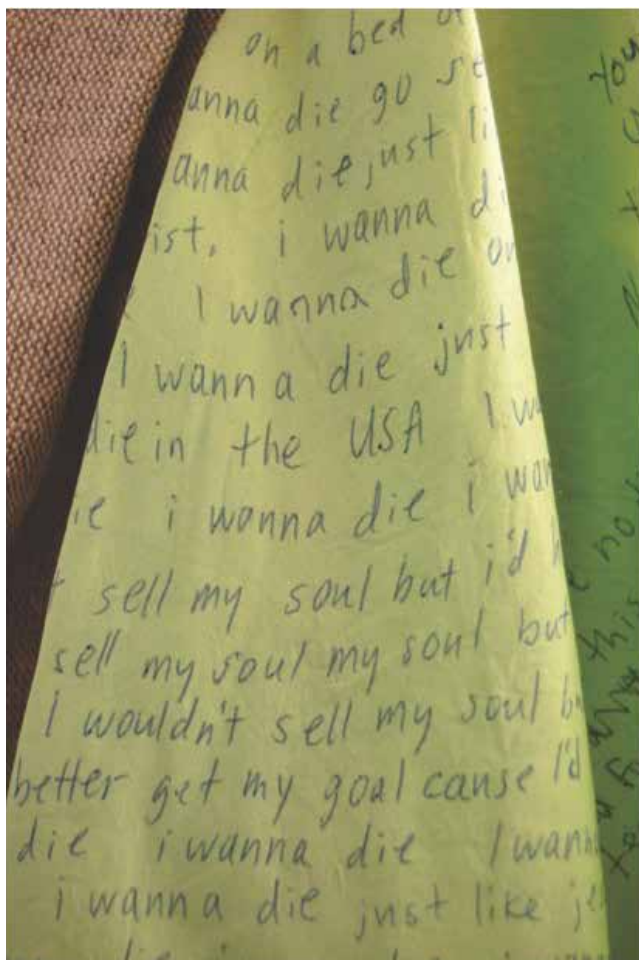
Chaveli Sifre entertained notions of spiritual healing at Produce Model Gallery. Hanging fabrics were dyed to represent auras, coconuts were filled with healing tinctures and plugged with crystal corks, and a humidifier produced custom scents. Sifre is an MA student of museum studies



Azadeh Gholizadeh, *Drawing 8, Relic*, 2017 at Goldfinch.

Valérie Blas, *Don't be Shy*, 2017 at Jeux D'Été.





Melina Ausikaitis, *Honey's Dead*, 1992, 2016, at Regards.



Orkideh Torabi, *I'll Catch You!*, 2017 at Western Exhibitions
Photo courtesy of Western Exhibitions.

in Berlin, and her enthusiasm keeps up with bigger dogs in the show.

One of the most endearing features of Expanded was the airy, sunlit, uncluttered presentation that made possible contemplation of each artwork within its own space, while maintaining a grander view of the whole shebang. Soccer Club's set up consisted of just one large album of photos on one large table. The photos are by Richard Kern and were all derived from a painting by Rita Ackerman from 2002 called *Restlessness and Angry Optimism*. Violence and sex co-mingle and the women are dressed to kill, literally, as if for ISIS. The photos are all from the concurrent book release by Ackerman and Drag City called *Jezebels*.

Goldfinch presented a strong selection from their flat files of works by several artists, including: Sherwin Ovid, Dianna Frid, Azadeh Gholizadeh, and Nazafarin Lotfi. Claudine Isé has a good eye and intends to offer quality original contemporary artworks at modest prices. Is price point a successful model for collectors or artists? There are probably a million answers to that question.

Regards presented a quirky mélange of works by Melina Ausikaitis, including: delightful child-like drawings, works made from stiffened items of clothing and gloves, lots of words, and song lyrics written in ballpoint pen on a lime green skirt (*Honey's Dead*, 1992, 2016, canvas and silk skirt with the lyrics of Jesus and Mary Chain's 1992 album *Honey's Dead*.) Ausikaitis addresses vulnerability, childhood and femininity through seemingly personal, biographic or autobiographic routes.

At The Mission, Jeroen Nelemans presented works that use commercial, backlit electric sign kits to produce clever light boxes that juxtapose environments and light sources. Nelemans has a Dutchman's mind for design. Also on view were a group of photographs from his "Scapes in RGB" series and a selection of ceramics.

At Weekends, a curatorial side project by GWC 2017 curator Michael Hall, Margaret Welsh covered the floor with two large, painted paper drop cloths, titled *Mother* and *Ideal Woman*. Both were painted with seconds from home improvement stores and somehow ended up looking like vinyl.

At Efran Lopez, multi-layered and transparent plastic paintings by Monika Bravo complimented aluminum sculptures of twisted beams by Amalie Jakobsen. The Franklin presented Jaclyn

Mednicov, a 2016 MFA recipient from SAIC and a promising painter. Mednicov littered the floor with carpet squares painted white-on-black with poetic, personal urban scrawl.

Much of the work in GWC Expanded was experimental and, like poetry spoken to the wind, was probably intended to be temporal and to promote a heightened sense of appreciation of the moment. GWC Expanded had the fun feeling of a graduate thesis show at an MFA program. It would be nice if something sells, but so what if it doesn't?

Donald Kuspit once spoke to me about being skeptical about everything presented as "art." Indeed, warning lights should go on whenever retired hedge fund traders and wealthy individuals position themselves as the defining mavens of culture. Whimsical, non-committal and non-chalant is non-compelling by nature. For good or bad, some trends of the times were observed at GWC: efforts to obfuscate and trivialize meaning, a lack of compelling conviction, and an over-use of metaphor and ambiguity. I found myself searching for jewels and mysteries hidden within the details of individual artworks. It felt like having candy for desert but skipping the main course. That's not necessarily good or bad; it's just a sign of the times.

There was no place to sit down and talk shop at GWC. Maybe next time GWC will offer a guest lounge. Artists aren't the only people who appreciate the ethereal, fleeting moments of life. GWC Expanded was not intended to be everything for everybody, but it was an important and successful exhibition of contemporary artworks in a city that needs more of that. Curator Michael Hall organized an intriguing show. It was a beautiful thing, watching 25 galleries and curatorial projects work together to create an inspiring cultural event. ■

Also exhibiting at GWC 2017:

Nick Albertson at Aspect/Ratio

Alison Veit and Jack Schneider at Beautiful

Clay Mahn at devening projects + editions

Sterling Lawrence at Document

Danny Giles at Andrew Rafacz

Jonathan Muecke at Volume

All photographs by Bruce Thorn unless otherwise noted.



Jeroen Nelemans at the Mission.



Brendan Fernandes, detail of *Free Fall*, 2016 at moniquemeloche.

Bruce Thorn is a Chicago based painter and musician. He has degrees in painting and drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is also a contributing writer to Neoteric Art.

The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism

Three Essays on the Limits of Postmodernism after November 2016

by Jorge Miguel Benitez

Third Essay:

"The Will to Ignorance: The Role of Academia in the Postmodern Debacle"

In the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche asked and answered a question that still haunts the developed world: "What is the task of higher education?" — To turn a man into a machine."¹ Decades after Aldous Huxley and George Orwell published *Brave New World* and *1984* respectively, Nietzsche's self-answered question resonates with frightening power.

Does higher education turn the *person* into an *object* disguised as a *subject*? Contemporary education provides unprecedented amounts of quantifiable data. Unfortunately, data is not knowledge, and knowledge is not wisdom. Without critical thinking, without connoisseurship, without the discernment that separates education from ordinary training, the student graduates without the means to separate fact from fiction, reason from irrationality, and culture from kitsch.

Such a person knows plenty of data yet finds the world incomprehensible. Again, it pays to revisit Nietzsche: "One has to learn to *see*, one has to learn to *think*, one has to learn to *speak* and *write*: the end in all three is a noble culture." Unfortunately, a "noble culture"² is no longer a fashionable aspiration, but it should be, if for no other reason than survival.

The lessons of twentieth-century totalitarianism should serve as evidence of the suffering, destruction, and death that emerge from the failure to see, think, speak, and write. Art is essential to a "noble culture." As Albert Camus wrote: "It is not surprising that artists and intellectuals should have been the first victims of modern tyrannies,

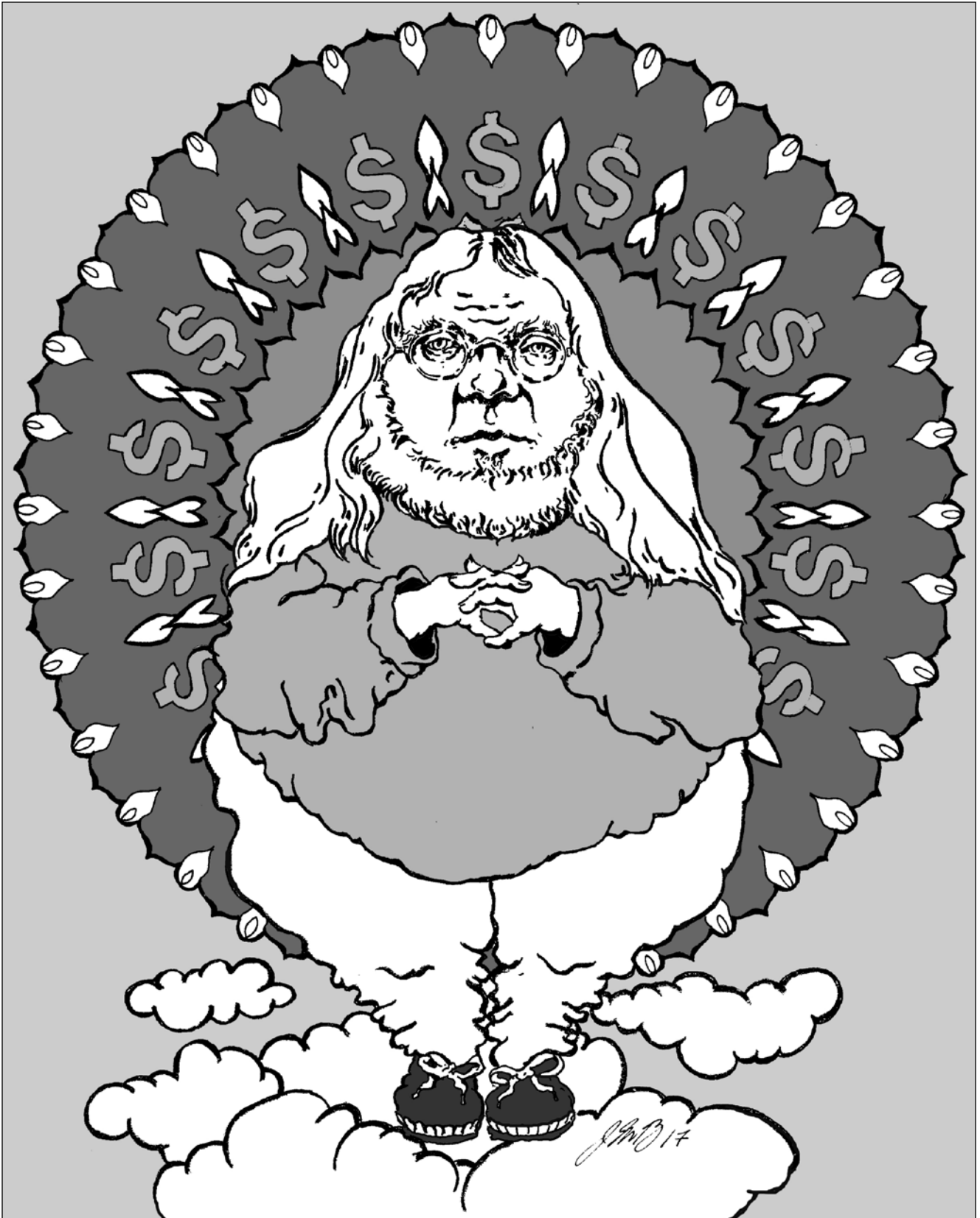
whether of the Right or of the Left. Tyrants know there is in the work of art an emancipatory force, which is mysterious only to those who do not revere it."³

Since it is disturbing to think that modern liberal democracies could fear the arts, is there any evidence that the arts are in danger? In the United States alone, the arts appear to be thriving. There have never been more galleries, artists' spaces, *blockbuster* shows, art fairs, and assorted arts gatherings, including literary events. Indeed, the art scene seems vibrant and healthy.

Behind the façade of postmodern erudition, replete with its incomprehensible jargon, lie ignorance, confusion, solipsism, and a mercenary mix of social consciousness and naked careerism.

Regrettably, it is often a delusion. A closer look at the work and conversations with many of the artists soon reveal a profound lack of canonical understanding, aesthetic depth, or genuine vocation. Behind the façade of postmodern erudition, replete with its incomprehensible jargon, lie ignorance, confusion, solipsism, and a mercenary mix of social consciousness and naked careerism.

The contradictions become clear when an exchange with a star graduate student reveals not only ignorance of basic art history and theory but hostility to the suggestion that they may



Jorge Benitez, *The Gallerist*, 2017, ink and digital printing. Courtesy of the artist.

be important and useful. When the university itself supports the student's anti-intellectualism as an expression of "relevance," it becomes clear that the institution is invested in something other than the arts or even education. Only then does Camus' dark observation assume a democratic guise. Perhaps the "emancipatory force" of the arts threatens *free* societies as well as authoritarian regimes.

Within the modern university and its art departments, the will to ignorance does not necessarily result from illiteracy, a lack of information, or an absence of technical knowledge. After all, even the most educated are doomed to ignorance. No one can know or master everything. The problem, therefore, is not the ability to acquire information but the lack of understanding that should, in turn, lead to an endless series of open questions.

For the arts and humanities, definitive answers risk becoming ideologies that can degenerate into dogma. In that sense, the will to ignorance is a quest for certainty. Artists, in particular, must distrust the allure of certainty: they must keep their questions alive without losing their historical and cultural perspectives. Only an understanding of historical precedent can mitigate the arrogance of contemporary relevance.

A willful dismissal of the past breeds ignorance and false originality. Under the postmodernist umbrella, a contradictory mix of pluralistic relativism and absolutist intransigence has come to dominate fine arts graduate programs. Still, it would be unfair and historically untenable to blame postmodern theory alone for the current situation. The debacle is postmodern only in the sense that the theory coincided with social, political, and economic changes that led to the appropriation of ideas that could be applied to the refinement of a more efficient, controlling, and, above all, profitable institution.

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It is important to remember that many of the older administrators in today's art schools emerged from the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s to become stalwarts of the *system* they once pretended to loathe. As bourgeois veterans of the era, they grasped that the revolutionary rhetoric of their youth could be packaged, branded, and sold as an ethos of personal identity and freedom.

Furthermore, they realized that the observations of social activists such as Saul Alinsky could be adapted to capitalist ends. They also understood that Frankfurt School critical theory had enormous exchange value. Marx himself could be commodified along with Che Guevara and Patrice Lumumba. The quest for social justice and the liberation of the marginalized could be offered as consumable pedagogical products.

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Victimhood and revolution became hot items along with the psychotropic medications that by the 1990s were proving their worth as tools for the control of children and would allow educators to keep students under a tight leash. Eventually, the arrival of smartphones and social media would combine with the Patriot Act and the expanded powers of Title IX to produce an amalgam of Foucault's panoptical society, Huxley's soma-fueled dystopia, and Orwell's nightmare of "groupthink" and "newspeak."

Within academia, what Saul Alinsky had criticized as the society of "consensus"⁴ had replaced the "conflict" he described as "the essential core of a free and open society."⁵ Thus the university was able to consolidate power and maximize profits while projecting a progressive image. The "free and open society" gave way to an environment of fear, suspicion, and self-policing where the exercise of academic freedom could result in expulsion for faculty and a pariah status for students who questioned the dogma of their peers.

Repressive speech codes, the denigration of Enlightenment values, and the celebration and elevation of personal dysfunction granted the

A century after Duchamp's first readymades and the Dadaist revolt against a suicidal civilization, what passes for art is as formulaic as it was in the days of *l'académie des beaux-arts*...

institution a level of authority and profitability it never enjoyed when it was openly traditional. Power and greed could now hide behind the pursuit of social justice while tuition and administrative salaries rose to unprecedented levels. Only the sports coach, that beloved paragon of collegiate parasitism, could challenge the nearly one million-dollar salary that some university presidents enjoy.

For the arts, the results were nothing less than a validation of mediocrity. Aesthetics surrendered to identity politics as the primary focus of art. Propaganda triumphed as the dominant genre in graduate programs where cookie-cutter installations and ever-duller performances unself-consciously mocked the notion of an avant-garde.

A century after Duchamp's first readymades and the Dadaist revolt against a suicidal civilization, what passes for art is as formulaic as it was in the days of *l'académie des beaux-arts*, but with a crucial difference: more often than not, it lacks the technical, art historical, and theoretical rigor necessary to surpass its limitations. Can postmodernism be held responsible—does it have the ideological cohesion to account for the debacle?

In the same way that an entrepreneur studies Marx in order to be a better capitalist, a good administrator studies the postmodern analysis of power in order to exercise it more efficiently. Consequently, it cannot be said that postmodernism ruined the arts. Instead, its better thinkers unwittingly provided the analytical tools necessary for the manipulation of students, parents, consumers, and voters across the ideological spectrum.

Michel Foucault never intended his understanding of the panopticon to be used for its expansion, but it nonetheless aided in the creation of an increasingly surveillance driven society. Jean-François Lyotard never meant for his concept of the micro-narrative to be an invalidation of history and the canon, yet it still served to justify the erasure of historical memories for the sake of mass control.

Tragically, the postmodern questioning of modernist certainty became a self-fulfilling proph-

ecy about a world in which *uncertainty* would serve the interests of corporate and political entities devoid of self-doubt. Art schools could not escape the trap. They eventually became the tomb of the avant-garde: a place where the illusion of progress killed and buried the remnants of the rebellious and inquisitive spirit that defined modernism.

Systematically denied the means to see, think, speak, and write, the art student graduates as a neurotic and ignorant machine trained to parrot

Art schools...eventually became the tomb of the avant-garde: a place where the illusion of progress killed and buried the remnants of the rebellious and inquisitive spirit that defined modernism.

radical slogans for a revolution that will never be. Under the circumstances, it is fitting to revisit Camus: "The first concern of any dictatorship is, consequently, to subjugate both labor and culture. In fact, both must be gagged or else, as tyrants are well aware, sooner or later one will speak up for the other."⁶ This leads to a troubling question: at a time when "labor and culture" are both in doubt, who will speak for whom? ■

Footnotes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 95.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, 76.
3. Albert Camus, "The Artist and His time: Create Dangerously," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1988), 269.
4. Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 62.
5. Alinsky, 62.
6. Albert Camus, "Why Spain?," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1988), 95.

Jorge Miguel Benitez holds a master of fine arts degree in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University where he currently teaches drawing, art theory and the history of visual communications. He currently participates in regional and international exhibitions. His work is represented in corporate collections and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.



ACT UP NY/Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, 1989, detail. Photo by James Prinz.

GENDER POLITICS IN ART

GENDER POLITICS IN ART is the first in a series of special sections in the New Art Examiner that will be devoted to current broad issues in the visual arts. Each will be a collection of essays dealing with some aspect of the broader topic.

This section is timed to coincide with Gay Pride Month in June. It features three essays to introduce the topic of gender politics in art to this publication and will be followed by subsequent essays in future issues.

Larry Kamphausen starts out our exploration of the topic with an essay reflecting on "Gender Identity and the Male Gaze." It is followed by two essays about the "ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago" exhibition that recently closed at Alphawood Gallery. The first, "The Anguish of Remembering" by Michel Ségard, views the exhibition as a memorial to the early days of the epidemic and to the people that were lost. The second, "Under-Representing an American Tragedy" by Thomas Feldhacker, examines the exhibition as a documentary of the AIDS epidemic as a whole.

Gender Identity and the Male Gaze

By Larry E. Kamphausen

“The Gaze” is a well-known term in art. We who enjoy a work of art fixate intently on both the object as well as upon a work’s subject. Historically, it was the female and the feminine who were objects of this artistic gaze. The ubiquity of the nude, the most common female figure, is illustrative of this gaze.

Woman, the artist’s most common muse, is also a component of the male gaze—Gala as Salvador Dali’s muse, for example. In the 20th century, women artists increasingly demanded to be seen as having that identity and not simply as muses. In making space for women in a once male-dominated world and remedying the traditional state of affairs, a woman artist’s gender identity came to be recognized, accepted, and expressed in their body of work. In this way, artistic space was enlarged for others beside the cis male*.

Gender politics, like all identity politics, aims at rectifying and reforming a system that has excluded a certain class of person. But in this attempt at inclusion, it fixates on the identity of the excluded at the expense of seeing the identity as an expression of a well-rounded personhood.

In the case of visual art, the art of women becomes about the female identity. This raises the question of a parity of expectation between the male-identified and the female-identified. Masculine identity has been the vantage point from which we gaze upon a work of art and conceive of a body of work. If the dominant identity isn’t questioned, the male gaze prevails.

The remedy of focusing on letting other identities have access may not mean that the arts have escaped the question of the male gaze. As a result of women needing to be seen as artists, an unspoken expectation is that femininity or being female is the subject of their body of work. Yet, no

one expects a cis male artist to be talking about masculinity unless he explicitly says so. No one asks of the cis male artist to explain the relationship between his art and his gender.

We may ask it of the transgender male artist, but we would want to see an expression of being transgender, not masculinity. In needing to be seen, the art can be reduced to gender expression of those who aren’t male. I’m not questioning the expression of the artist: cis male, cis female, transgender. Rather, I’m after how we are continuing to conceive this issue in terms of the male gaze where the cis male remains the vantage point from which cis female or transgender male or female is received or understood.

What I continue to see and experience is that cis masculinity is assumed and does not need overt expression. Nor is it questioned in evaluation of an artistic body of work, if perceived to be cis male. The male artist can be seen as just an artist, his work need not be about his gender identity. The cis male artist is free to perform his art without an examination of his masculinity. Whereas the female or transgender artist will at some point feel the pressure to give an account of their gender identity in relation to their body of work. It remains worthy to qualify the artist as female or transgender, while it remains unremarkable for an artist’s body of work if the artist is male.

Peter Paul Rubens, *The union of earth and water*.



*Cis gender is a gender identity that is consistent with biological sex, or the gender assigned at birth. As such cis refers to gender identity and not sexual orientation. A gay man who identifies as male is cis gender. This essay is focused upon gender identity, though sexual orientation and gender identity certainly have moments of overlap in regard to the male gaze in art.



Frida Kahlo, *The Two Fridas*, 1939, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico.

The male gaze in art while often heterosexual isn't necessarily about the male sexual gaze upon the women. Rather it is a gaze that assumes a vantage point that isn't represented, but from which things are seen. This creates an ambiguity for the gay artist who shares the masculine vantage point but would not share a heterosexual orientation of other male artists. Thus, we do find that, though in relation to his gender, the homosexual artist shares the male gaze. In terms of gender identity, he shares the same assumed and unquestioned vantage point as the cis heterosexual male. But in terms of his sexuality, he may find himself needing to identify his work in some way with his sexual identity. The ambiguity is that the shared masculine vantage point of the cis male heterosexual artist doesn't include the homosexual as such. Thus, in order to be seen in his full identity, the gay artist finds that his art needs to be about his sexual identity. Like the female artist, to be seen by the male gaze his body of work must be about his sexuality.

There is both good and bad in what I'm questioning. In part, the situation I describe above is a political good: a means to correct the lack of access and of recognition of the female identified (and others) excluded in the past, when the art world, like most institutions, was a "man's world." However, without the corrective of identity, we still find ourselves under the male gaze. While the art world is filled with other identities, we don't see masculinity, rather masculinity remains the vantage point from which the art of the female is observed.

This all suggests that the remedy has not changed the vantage point from which art and artist are viewed. Only the cis male artist need not have his work be about his gender identity (the exception that proves the rule is a gay man who wishes to be seen in a way that acknowledges his orientation). These other identities are included but there is pressure for the remedy to take effect—for the female artists to explicitly and firmly express their gender identity in their art. Even as other identities are included in the art world other gazes are not. The artistic gaze remains the male gaze.

If we began to see art from multiple vantage points, what would it look like when the male gaze wasn't the vantage point of our seeing? What if we could begin to speak not only of the "male gaze" but the "female gaze"? We would perhaps begin by asking what a male artist's work may or may not say about his masculinity—that is, to begin to see men as well as women, and not assume the male when seeing the feminine.

Seeing with another gaze would also mean that critics would have to question their own aesthetic values and measurements for critique. Why doesn't the critic ask the question of the role of masculine gender identity in the work of the cis male identified artists, as the critic asks it of the female artists? For the female critic it may mean being willing to ask what she sees, rather than what "he" expects "her" to see. It may mean also accepting that the female identified, cis or transgender, needn't be saying anything about their gender or gender experience in their art, just as we expect and accept that most of the time a cis male artist isn't constantly referring to their experience as men.

If we can escape the male gaze, we would recognize the complex relationship between an artist's identity and their work of art. If we find our way to these other "gazes," we would see the artist's identity as inclusive but not fixated upon gender identity. An artist's individual or whole body of work may speak of their gender identity but also whether male-identified or female-identified, their body of work may not speak exclusively of their gender identity and experience. ■

Rev. Larry E. Kamphausen, OJCR is an icon painter, theologian, writer, ordained minister, and goth. Larry also writes for the dark alternative Kilter Magazine. He has shown his work at the now defunct Gallery B1E and the Rogers Park Art Gallery.

ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago: The Anguish of Remembering

by Michel Ségard

ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago was a documentary about the early days of the AIDS epidemic in the United States as told through works of art. And for those of us of a certain age, it was also a memorial that reopened the never-quite-healed wounds of loss and rejection. We could not see the exhibition as merely a documentation; it was too much a family album.

The works in the exhibition were placed into four categories that represented the four dominant themes of the show: **Body, Spirit, Activism,** and **Camouflage**. The categories worked for understanding the exhibition as an analytical documentary. But for those of us who lived through those early days, **Body, Spirit,** and **Activism** merged into a nightmare of despair, hope, and anger. By blending the pieces from each category together in hanging the show, that anguish became an overarching category of its own.

Body concentrated on the physical ravages of AIDS on the human body and the role of sex and drugs in the spread of the disease. Eloquent summarizing the physical devastation, the solitary bony appendage in Nan Goldin's *Gilles' Arm* creates a deadly slash across white bed sheets.

Also noteworthy in this category is *AIDS, Time, Death* by Luis Cruz Azaceta. A wheel that is also a clock rolls down a hill covered in skulls, blood seeping into the ground below. It is a variation of the Doomsday Clock on the cover of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist, designed by Suzanne Schweig (Marty) in 1947, and conveys the same sense of impending annihilation.

For me, the most thoughtful piece in this category was Keith Haring's *No Title*, 1988. It depicts the connection between sexual arousal and the sensation of pleasure in the brain and how the need to satisfy that dynamic dominates one's



Nan Goldin, *Gilles' Arm*, Paris 1993. ©Nan Goldin, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

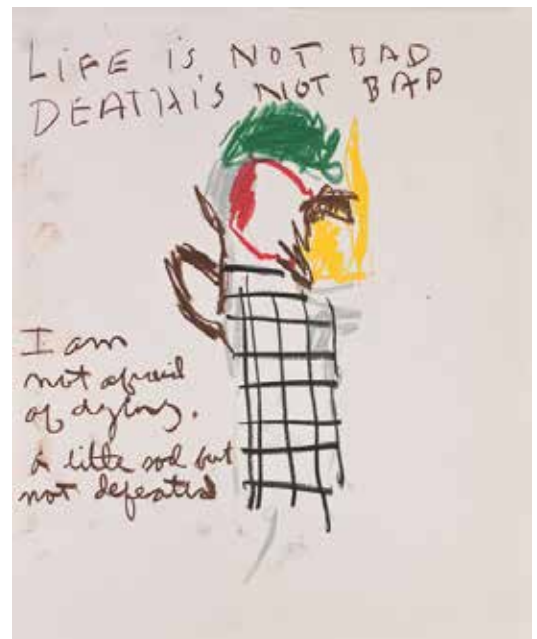
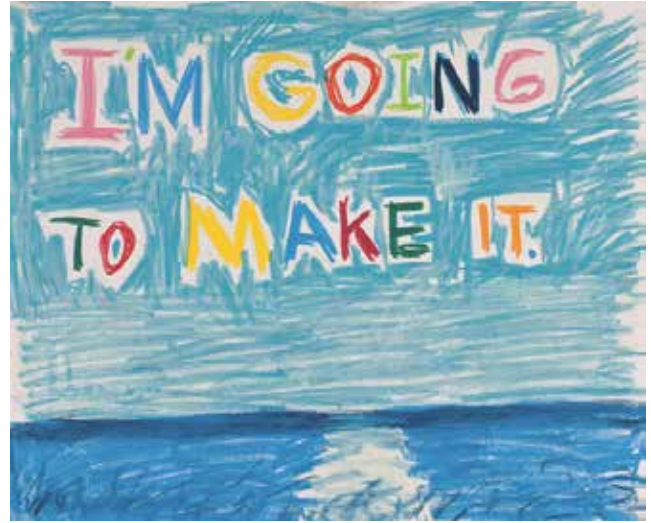
Luis Cruz Azaceta, *AIDS, Time, Death*, 1989. The New School Art Collection. Photo by James Prinz.



life—and how it becomes one of the causes of the spread of the epidemic. The work provokes the viewer into confronting the dilemma of satisfying biological needs versus the desire to stay alive—the primal internal conflict we still face today.

The **Spirit** category was mostly devoted to finding comfort in religious or other spiritual practices, or just each other. In *Ebony Ball Manhattan* by Gerard Gaskin, two young men embrace. It was one of the rare pieces in the exhibition that showed any kind of affection between two people. But was this a one-night stand? Were they finding solace in each other? Or was this a love that would see them through this holocaust?

More than a decade before Gaskin's image, Larry Stanton, a portrait artist, made two drawings the year he died. First while hospitalized for pneumonia, he declared "I'm going to make it." And later, just before he died and rendered in a very child-like style: "I am not afraid of dying. A little sad but not defeated." To declare victory in the face of death at such a young age (37) must have taken extraordinary faith.



(Clockwise from top)

Larry Stanton, *Untitled (Hospital Drawing)*, 1984. [I'm Going To Make It] Courtesy of Arthur Lambert and the Estate of Larry Stanton.

Larry Stanton, *Untitled (Hospital Drawing)*, 1984. [Life is not bad, Death is not bad] Courtesy of Arthur Lambert and the Estate of Larry Stanton.

Gerard Gaskin, *Ebony Ball, Manhattan*, 1997.

Keith Haring, *No Title*, 1988. Collection of the Rubell Family Foundation. © Keith Haring Foundation.
Photo by James Prinz.

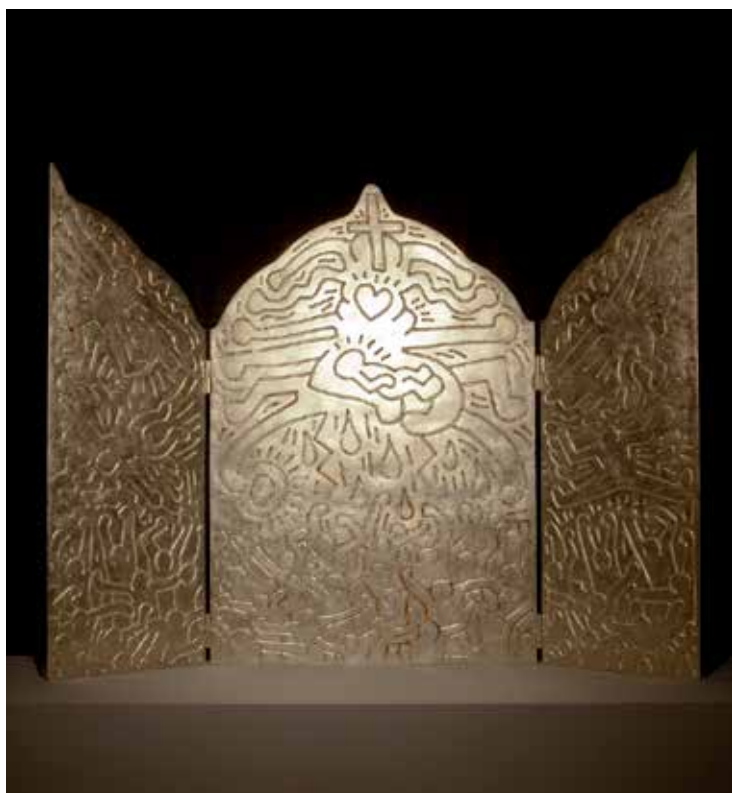


The most overtly religious piece in the exhibition was Keith Haring's very moving *Altar Piece*. In the center panel of this triptych according to Christian creed, Mary holds out her infant son for all to see and to contemplate the sacrifices that they made. It speaks directly to our inconsolable loss. This piece has so moved the Christian community that versions of it are to be found in churches in Manhattan, San Francisco, and Paris.

Eventually, the anger—no, rage—started to manifest itself. Jonathon Horowitz's *Archival Iris Print of an Image Downloaded from the Internet with Two Copies of the New York Post Rotting in Their Frames* exemplifies the fury depicted in the **Activism** category. In this triptych, two unpreserved copies of the New York Post report on the death of President Ronald Reagan, the President who failed to publicly mention AIDS until 1987 (cowardice? bigotry? both?), while below them is the print of the corpse of a victim of AIDS. Horowitz's piece depicts, in the most graphic way, ACT-UP's slogan "Silence=Death."

ACT UP NY/Gran Fury's poster *Kissing Doesn't Kill* was commissioned as a public service announcement to go into buses and subways. The intent was to educate the public about the realities and politics of HIV/AIDS. What it produced was a furious backlash. Local Chicago and Illinois state governments proposed legislations to ban the poster, and it was routinely censored and defaced by the very people whose inaction on HIV/AIDS led to the death of thousands. Today the poster seems innocuous, and it is hard to remember what outrage it caused.

Hugh Steers' painting *Poster*, of a young man looking across a barren room at an ACT UP poster and an empty bed, poignantly summarizes the feelings of many of us from that time. No matter how much you demonstrated, that bed would remain empty—your loved one could not be brought back to life. But it must be remembered that although political activism cannot change the past, it can shape the future and, therefore no matter how painful, it must be done.



Keith Haring, *Altar Piece*, 1990. Denver Art Museum, Gift of Yoko Ono.
© Keith Haring Foundation. Photo by Michael Tropea.

Jonathan Horowitz, *Archival Iris Print of an Image Downloaded from the Internet with Two Copies of the New York Post Rotting in Their Frames*, 2004.
Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome.



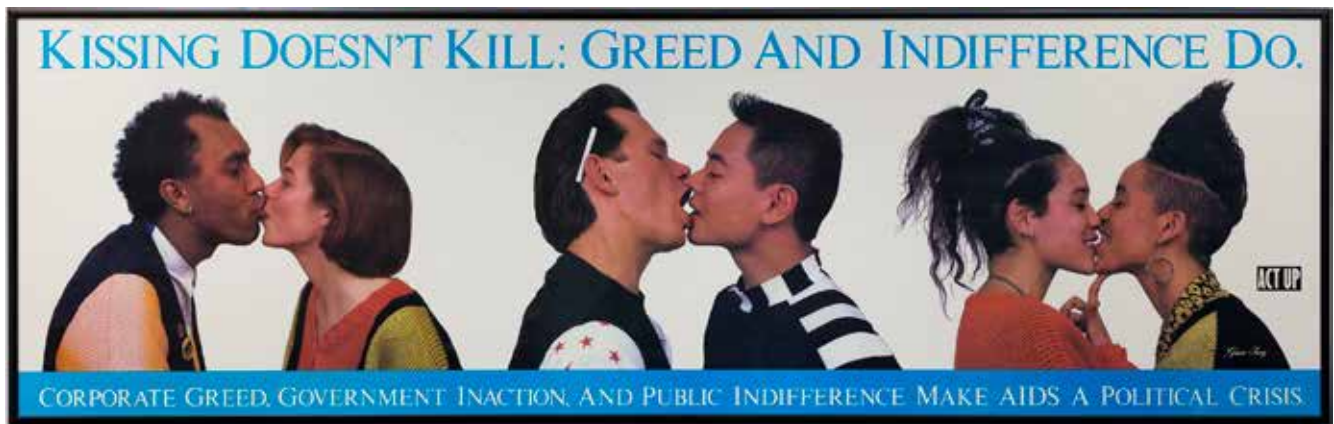
For me, the **Camouflage** category was the weakest category. Since overtly AIDS-referential art was being rejected, the intent was to hide the message by using coded symbols or language and get the work seen in mainstream art venues. But it amounted to preaching to the choir in code. Many of the hidden symbolisms were so obscure that most people would never know that they were there—never mind what they meant. The whole strategy could even be thought of as kind of cowardly activism. Nevertheless, there were a few noteworthy pieces.

Carrie Yamaoka, in *Steal This Book #2*, photographed a spread from Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*, his manual for social revolution. She then obscured or erased all the words except "slaughter" and "history." Yamaoka's experience as an AIDS activist led her to understand that these two words were "the baseline of all forms

of human experience," according to the wall note accompanying the work.

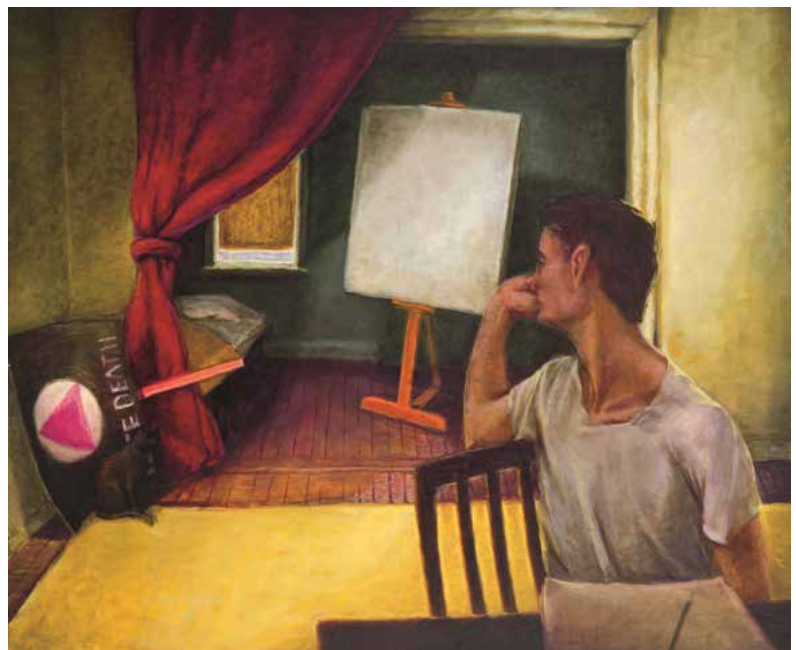
In 1983, Roger Brown painted *Peach Light*, an image of a skeleton with a leather hat backed by concentric peach colored rings that slowly change to black. The color is a reference to the Gold Coast Bar, a leather bar in Chicago that bathed the room in peach colored lights so that Kaposi's sarcoma lesions and the gaunt frames of their patrons would be less noticeable. As mentioned in the wall note, the cruising posture of the skeleton interweaves desire, eroticism, mortality, community and illness into one image.

The most moving piece in this category, for me, was Rudy Lempke's *The Uninvited*. It is a video projection of Balinese style shadow puppetry that tells the story of a homeless gay Vietnam veteran with AIDS. It draws attention to the parallels between the two deadly catastrophes, the



(Above) ACT UP NY/Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, 1989. Photo by James Prinz.

(Right) Hugh Steers, *Poster*, 1990. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.



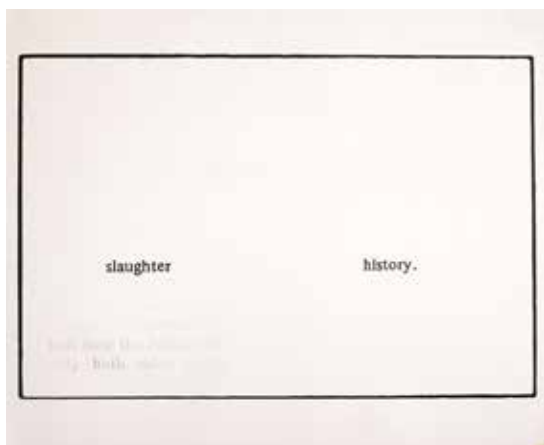


Vietnam War and AIDS, thereby refuting the tendency to consider people with AIDS as “other.” The message is augmented by the sheer formal beauty of the work, drawing you into its tropical false paradise permeated by death.

There were a number of pieces in the exhibition depicting African Americans, mostly in the form of videos. And there were a handful of pieces devoted to women with AIDS. But the exhibition concentrated mostly on the experiences of white gay males. They were the ones most affected early on in the epidemic, and it was their initial political activism that brought about the public awareness of the horrors of AIDS in the United States and the need to aggressively fight the disease. Later, the epidemic spread to the African American community and to women.

For those of us who lived through the early days of the epidemic, this exhibition was not just a documentary. It inevitably functioned as a requiem to those we lost. Marcus, Jerry, David... we will never forget you! ■

Michel Ségard is the Editor-in-Chief of the New Art Examiner.



(From top)

Roger Brown, *Peach Light*, 1983. Photo: James Connolly.
Kavi Gupta and the Roger Brown Estate, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Carrie Yamoaka, *Steal This Book #2*, 1991.

Rudy Lemcke, *The Uninvited*, 2003. Video still.



ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago: Under-Representing an American Tragedy

By Thomas Feldhacker

America has approached an interesting point in time where it can look back on its recent history with enough distance to be reflective on the effects of the pain and hope it experienced. It can also see the potential for change in the future and the demons that continue to haunt it. The “ART/AIDSAMERICA Chicago” exhibition was an attempt to be that reflective agent about the HIV epidemic in America as well as an agent for continued progress socially, politically, and individually. However, it sorely missed the mark in any comprehensive way and has opened up the conversation to older, deeper cultural wounds surrounding identity politics. Instead, the poorly thought out original curatorial message was muddled with a public service message from private donors that used the art and the pain of the past it represents as a tool to sway the audience into a cautionary stance on the disease. In essence, this show was reworked from its original purpose of surveying the influence that the disease had on the visual arts to promoting safe sex practices within the gay community. The result was an overwhelming amount of great art out of context that under represented the comprehensive damage inflicted by this disease.

Curatorially, this show has only one thread that binds each piece of art together: the influence of HIV. The range of mediums, messages, contexts, and artists were very broad, and there was no defining aesthetic. It would be perfectly apt to call this show a thematic survey exhibit. To help navigate these sub-genres the curators devised a symbol system that categorized each piece into four general ways the art related to the epidemic: Body, Spirit, Activism, and Camouflage. This system was helpful to contextualize each piece since there was very little thematic layout to the space. The objects were placed where they were best displayed in a very unconventional space. One could spend hours just reading the labels and contextualizing each piece individually. The emotionally exhausting journey would take you

through the countless experiences of distress, hope, loss, love, anger, and so on of these artists. Any connoisseur of Post-Modern American art would fall in love.

The exhibition was a collaboration between two curators, Jonathan David Katz of the University of Buffalo and Rock Hushka of the Tacoma Art Museum. The project included a travelling exhibition and a book of the same name and content. The exhibition was not accepted by any elite institutions, only second tier museums and independent galleries. Chicago was not on the tour because no institution, not even lower tier institutions, would accept to host it until the Alphawood Foundation decided to buy a space and fund the exhibition. The foundation has a special interest in gay rights activism and it should be no surprise that it decided to fund this landmark exhibition.

For those who have been following the exhibit know that it was not well received upon first opening. Although it was seen as culturally imperative to create an important documentary of the disease and the art that resulted, it did not do so in a fully representative way that caused the exhibit to become a platform for conversations about other identity politics to take place, specifically around race and gender, America’s timeless social problems. Tacoma, the opening of the tour, was protested when it became clear that of the 107 artist represented only four were black and only one of those four was a woman. This is absolutely outrageous considering that the black community is disproportionately infected and there were many artists that could have been chosen to represent them.

There are two explanations for why this could have been the case. The first one is that the intensity of the cultural war after AIDS became known as the gay disease focused around those artists that had money and influence to fight the institutions; i.e. wealthy white men. They had the resources and/or the connections to produce art that was shown in prominent institutions. The second explanation is that the curators, in

an attempt to court elite institutions, chose only those artists with prestige and gallery representation to give the show perceived legitimacy. The big names that were included in the show to bring credibility were those such as Judy Chicago, Félix González-Torres, Keith Haring, Annie Leibovitz, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Neither explanation is very satisfying. It is inexcusable to ignore these other dynamics of the epidemic when all you had to do was look and you would find all the examples you would need. As the exhibit travelled from Tacoma to West Hollywood, Atlanta, and finally at the Bronx Museum in NYC, the exhibit had earned the hashtag #stoperasingblackpeople. What was intended as an attempt to be a reflective agent about HIV in America and its effects socially and politically turned out to under-represent most non-gay experiences, especially those experiences of children and people of color. Only in the Chicago exhibition did the curation change to include more women, artists of color and local Chicago artists.

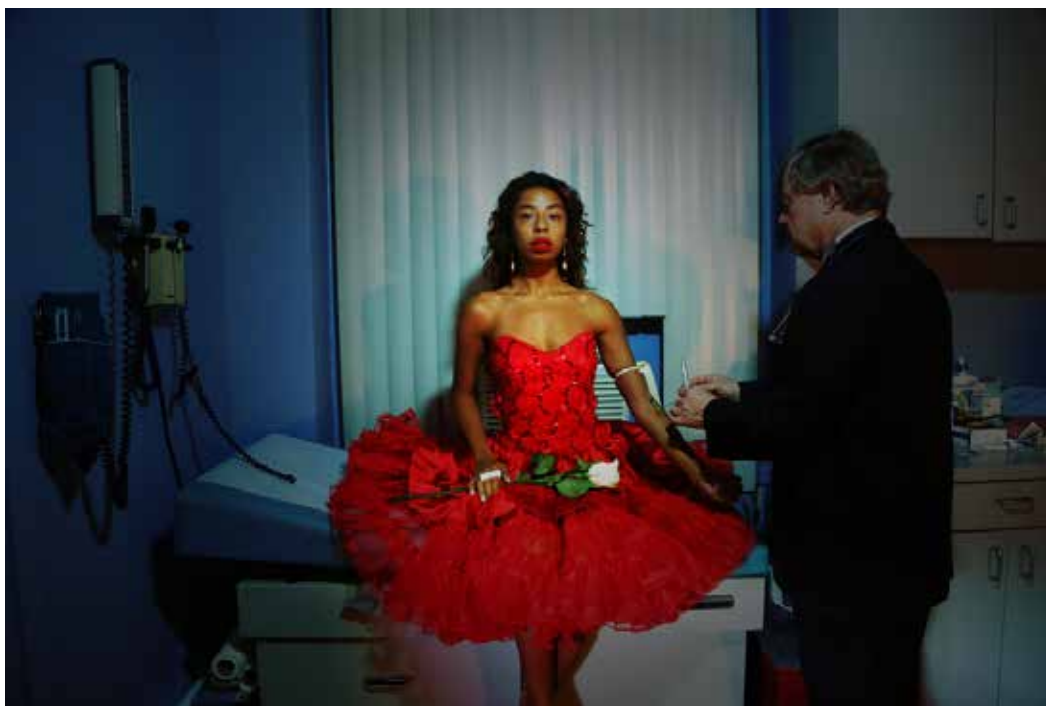
When the Alphawood Foundation took on the project of exhibiting this show, it did so by trying to correct some of these under-representations as well as making the current state of the epidemic very clear. The very first experience the audience has when they walk into the gallery space is a video that goes into the history of the activism in Chicago. To complicate an already messy cura-

tion, the foundation added this other layer to the exhibit that focused on what was happening now with the epidemic. This focused primarily on a new generation that is dealing with an entirely different situation than the older generation that lived through the crisis and view the exhibit with their own sadness and nostalgia. The overall message being that the experience was horrific and yet we still have not dealt with the problem. Advances in treatment have given HIV-positive people the same life expectancy as HIV-negative people but because of our collective amnesia to the pain of the past, transmission rates are about as high as they were during the peak of the crisis in the 80s.

The result of the exhibition was an overwhelming amount of great art pulled out of context that still did no justice to representing a holistic picture of the epidemic. Even as you walk through the exhibit, you notice that the most famous artists and artworks were on the first floor with prominent spots while the diverse additions added by the Alphawood Foundation were put on the second floor. They still felt like an afterthought. The change was a good start but it left much to be desired. ■

Thomas Feldhacker is the Social Media Editor of the New Art Examiner.

Kia Labeija *Eleven*, from the second installment of the ongoing series '24'. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Cyclical Dialogues of Materials and Making

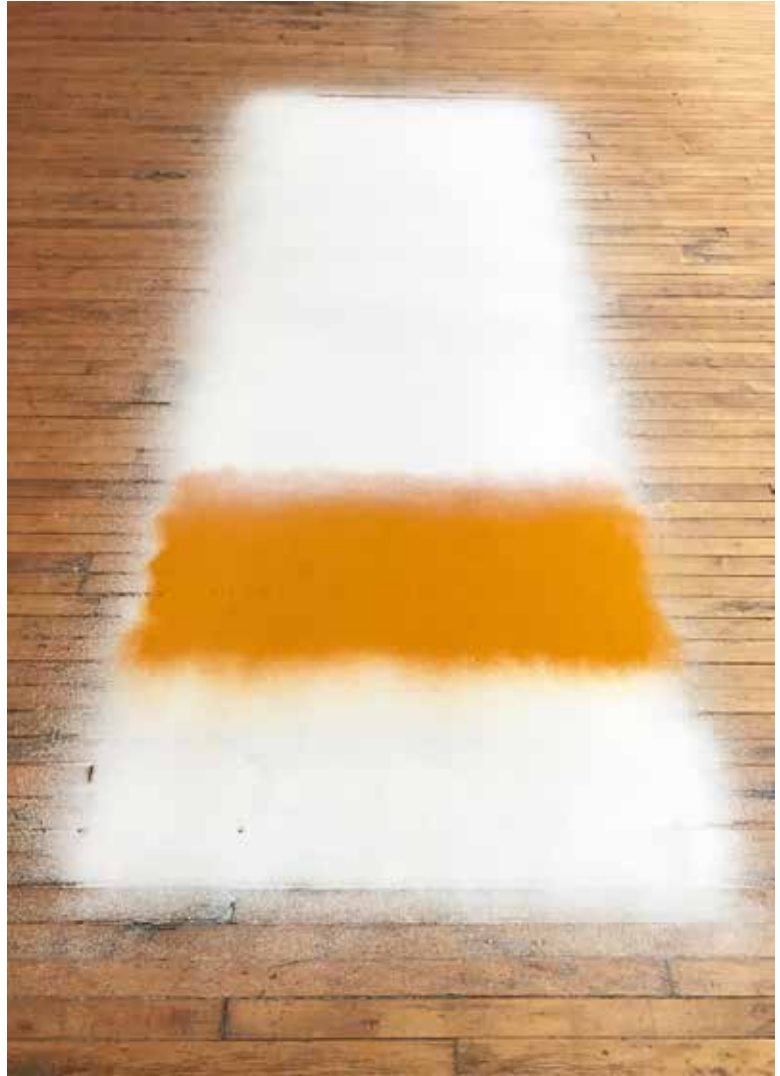
"What Lies Beneath": Works by Gunjan Kumar

by Elizabeth Hatton

Gunjan Kumar is an artist who explores materials in space and time, using ingredients, such as turmeric and salt, that have degraded even since the opening of "What Lies Beneath," her show on view at the Chicago Art Department in Pilsen.

Walking into the gallery, the work immediately arrests the viewer with a sense of spirituality that is both sensuous and reverential. A white bed of salt with a pillow of brilliant golden-orange turmeric—a collaboration between Kumar and the landscape artist Kevin Benham—coaxes you into the space. This untitled piece is dreamy and pristine at first glance; however, coming closer reveals the effects of human interaction and the surrounding environment. The salt and turmeric have finger marks, shoeprints, a soft edge abruptly sharpened to a line and the spices have fallen between the cracks in the wood floor. These human-made marks are, I think, a testament to the fragility of faith, but also to the humility of the faithful.

Kitty-corner to the floor piece, another undisturbed composition made of turmeric and rice is arranged on a cylindrical pedestal. It is lit from above, which gives an impressive glow as the light reflects off of the materials. This piece literally begins heightening the raw materials off the floor and onto the wall into positions of authority and reverence. Walking to the wall, we are now face-to-face with pieces that become more direct and challenging, evolving from an ephemeral mist of salt and turmeric into carefully constructed cones and shrouds of turban fabric. A cone missing from one piece is present on the shroud next to it; small bits of koalin are rolled into tiny coils and layered in various iterations throughout, such as Echo 1 and Echo 2 which have multiple layers of koalin on duralar, a wonderful, semi-transparent polyester sheet that allows for great effects of shadow and light.



Gunjan Kumar, *Untitled*, 2017, turmeric and salt. Photo by Kevin Benham.

The evolution of process and ingredient is really important here. Salt has long been a precious commodity which, in many cultures, symbolizes purification, while turmeric has ancient ties to womanhood, healing, and magic in Indian culture and eastern religions (notably its use in the dyeing of sacred textiles), themes that I feel come through in the work.

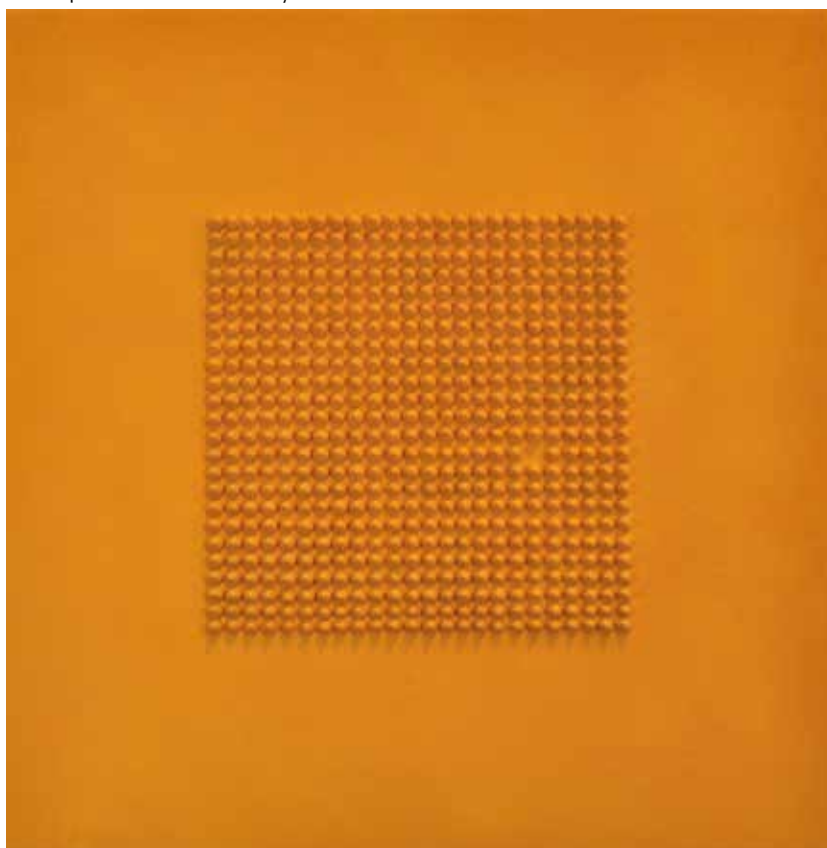
Kumar also refers to cave paintings that have inspired her work and the sites she has visited since 2013. Speaking about the materials used to paint these cave walls, she says, "the process involves ground earth to be mixed with water and organic matter in slow rhythmic movements to

form contemplative surfaces.” It is easy to imagine her initially playing with the components in their most basic forms, such as the floor piece, then gradually incorporating other materials to see what happens. The connection of questioning material really starts to transform into questions of existence.

Most of Kumar’s work speaks to the idea of appearance and disappearance, challenging the idea of permanence and the separation of the physical and spiritual. She describes the idea of non-duality, which “[by] definition...means ‘not-two.’ It does not mean that all is one or that there are no opposites, but rather that these opposites are an integral part of each other.” Her work seems to migrate between landscape and intimate domestic space, each piece referring to both outer and inner—work that reflects on itself and invites viewers to not only observe this reflection but to become introspective themselves.

This metaphysical dialogue with the viewer—and even the simplicity of the materials—brings one back into the body, back to the floor, the dirt, and basic existence, and the longer you stand in front of any piece, the more you contemplate this cyclical dialogue.

Gunjan Kumar, *Sifr*, 2017, tumeric and earth minerals on mulberry paper on wood panel. Photo courtesy of the artist.



The only section that fell flat was the combination of photographs and small canvases on the far east wall. The photographs somehow took away from the sensory experience that I had with the rest of the show. *What Lies Beneath 2* was one of my favorite works—a piece of dyed string protruding from a nest of hemp shrouded in turban fabric—but it seemed disrupted by the surrounding photographs. Where each of the constructed pieces felt both calculated and improvisational, they still felt organic, but the photographs flattened this experience and lent a different kind of documentation that I felt did not fit with the rest of the show.

Even though Kumar most likely carefully chose the Hahnemühle paper to help elevate the prints, which I hoped would reveal something, I was still distracted by the artificiality of the prints themselves in relation to the rawness of the surrounding work.

Overall, the gallery space makes these works feel incredibly spiritual. But, like most things sacred, it tempts the viewer to reach out and touch them, to scream out during the prayer. There is also something playful about them, a very simple exploration of elements that seems to develop throughout each piece. That basic human curiosity seems to be a theme from beginning to end. This blending of traditional and contemporary components is something that seems to strongly play into the concept of non-duality, seductively bridging the ancient and the modern both visually and materially. ■

“What Lies Beneath” was at the Chicago Art Department East, located at 1932 South Halsted #100, through April 14, 2017.

Elizabeth Hatton is a multidisciplinary artist and SAIC alumna living in Chicago. Curious and open to new adventures, she is constantly looking for ways to encourage public engagement with art through music, conversation, writing, and visual media.

Two French Photographers Across Generations: Sabine Weiss, "Intimate Memory" and Laurent Millet, "Somnium"

by Evan Carter

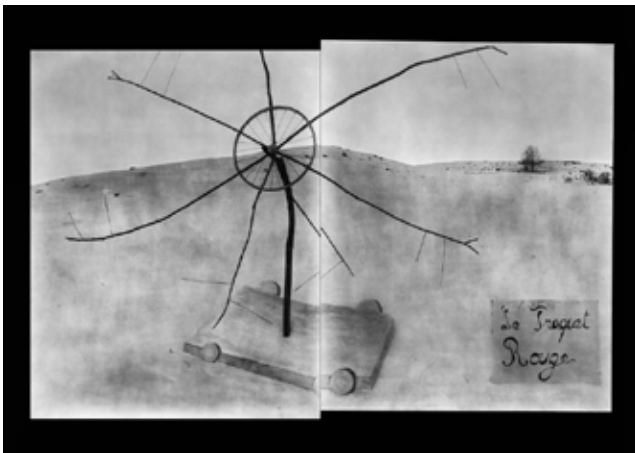
Photography can document, illustrate, abstract, and capture images of the world around us in an infinite number of ways. As we saw with last summer's exhibition at the MCA titled "Witness," the politics of photographer, subject, and viewer are complex and inescapable.

Time, place, and process contribute so much to what we see. Looking at two neighboring exhibitions of photographers from different generations currently on display at Stephen Daiter and Catherine Edelman galleries give viewers a chance to examine the role traditional photographic media and process play in the twenty-first century.

Sabine Weiss, a Swiss-born, globe-trotting photographer carved out a place for herself in the male-dominated world of photography during the mid-twentieth century. Associated with the French Humanist School, she captured candid images of everyday life.

"Intimate Memory" at Stephen Daiter Gallery is only Weiss' second show in the United States though she is 92 years old. The first was at the Art Institute in 1954. There is no mistaking these prints for anything other than vintage given the small scale, softened details, and occasional crease. But what is most striking is Weiss's bold curiosity and talent for crystallizing the raw humanity of her subjects rather than offering up flourishing compositions of what feel far more scripted than candid as can be the case with the more well-known French Humanist images.

La Chasse 12, 2003, © Laurent Millet. Images courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.



Gypsy girl, Pilgrimage at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 1960
Gelatin silver photograph, c. 1960 print. Photo courtesy Stephen Daiter Gallery.

As a result, viewers are treated to studies of life where play and labor intersect and unfold. The girl dancing in *Young Gypsy* is familiar but the image has an air of mystery. Is the dance part of a shared celebration or is this young girl making a living. Perhaps both, but the image does not need to tell us. Rather, the viewer is posited with the task of making meaning from the ambiguous framing of this corner of the world.

A trailblazer in her time, Weiss used photography to explore the complex emergence of form in the simplicity of human life. Her mode of working is a kind of photography most people are familiar with today. One gets a camera and goes out into the world to shoot light, architecture, people, and activity. But photography as a tool that reveals form has evolved into a narrative unto itself.

This performance of intellectual mechanics is something that is explored with evocative introspection and occasional humor in the work of contemporary artist Laurent Millet whose work is being shown at Catherine Edelman Gallery in the exhibition, "Somnium."

Though Millet is producing work today, the images exhibited at Edelman employ arcane photographic processes such as silver gelatin and platinum palladium prints. The first images are bleak landscapes inhabited by sculptures made by the artist. These are the more bland and intro- (Continued on page 36.)

Imagists, Pinball Art and Pop Culture

“Kings & Queens: Pinball, Imagists, and Chicago” at the Elmhurst Art Museum

by Evangeline Reid

Pinball machines whirr and ding amidst groans of frustration or shrieks of excitement. These are sounds at a current art exhibit, but one that is decidedly aware of its context. Imagist art was never meant to be neat or easily categorized. It was a fusion of academia and pop culture from its beginning, and it seems only right it be exhibited in the same spirit.

“Kings & Queens: Pinball, Imagists, and Chicago” was curated by Dan Nagel for the Elmhurst Art Museum which is nestled in the Chicago suburbs. The exhibit tells the story of a lesser-known art movement and its link to one of the most pervasive American art styles of the mid-20th century—pinball art, of course. Imagist art and pinball machines were both notable Chicago exports, and their influence on each other is undeniable. Bright colors, strong delineating lines, and fantastical images define both.

Chicago Imagism was the name given to young artists experimenting in similar ways. Like most art movements, it was not a cohesive whole, but rather a stylistic, thematic, and geographic association. It began with students from the School

of the Art Institute of Chicago. They first shared their work in 1966 at the Hyde Park Art Center in an exhibit called “Harry Who,” which became the group’s working name.

Many more shows at the Art Center followed, and the movement quickly grew beyond the Harry Who members. Curator Nagel wrote in the exhibit’s accompanying essays that the Imagists looked to comic books, Mesoamerican pottery, indigenous art of Oceanic peoples, hand-painted signs, and artists Miró and Max Beckmann’s work for inspiration. Though each artist had a unique approach, abstract, colloquial, and grotesque imagery was the common thread.

The art of pinball machines combined many of these elements, making them an important Imagist source of inspiration. Though the proof lies mostly in the images themselves, there are also more distinct connections. Jim Nutt, in a direct homage, back-painted a wildly colorful mug shot on Plexiglas (*Officer Doodit*, 1968).

Other Imagists followed suit. Perhaps the best-known Imagist, Ed Paschke, found a friend and (Continued on page 36.)

“Kings and Queens: Pinball, Imagists and Chicago” at Elmhurst Art Museum. Photo by James Prinz.



Two French Photographers

(Continued from page 34.)

spective of the works and the sculptures feel like folksy or tribal decorations more so than spatial signifiers but there is no denying the dedication to the craftsmanship that went into the process of making these images.

Progressing through the series, the photography itself becomes the subject with the appearance of three-dimensional grids constructed in string accompanied by the shadow of the photographer himself. The ideas of form, gaze, and presence are reduced to simple structures in a way that is both playful and contemplative. The images become more specific as well as humorous when Millet appears as a blurry figure staring closely at toy-like structures composed of transparent cubes and pyramids in the “Somnium” series.

Whether it was the artist’s intention or not, there is something funny about the male ego made manifest in the act of straining himself to make sense of the world around him. Like it or not Millet has taken the traditional role of photographer as documentarian and turned it inside out revealing the inner alchemist of the material

image maker.

The staging that occurs in Millet’s images is a major part of the work. His choice to capture these tableaux and utilize arcane photographic processes confuses the sense of time viewers may place the images in. We are left with a questionable veil of nostalgia that leaves the images feeling illustrative and theatrical.

Even Weiss’s images, despite their datedness, transcend a sense of time in their presentation of candid human moments that are still relatable today. Weiss’s work reinforces the value of the photographer as someone who engages with the social structures of the environment while Millet withdraws from it. In that process of withdrawal the photographic process is relegated to the philosophical world of painting and drawing where the two dimensional surface becomes a portal into a psychic space rather than a window into which we see the capture of a real moment in time. ■

Evan Carter hails from Worcester, Massachusetts. He studied Painting at Mass. College of Art in Boston and is currently an MFA candidate in the Department of Visual Art at the University of Chicago.

Imagists, Pinball Art, and Pop Culture

(Continued from page 35.)

collaborator in pinball artist Constantino Mitchell. In 1982, Paschke organized an exhibit about pinball machines at the Chicago Cultural Center. [Flip! Flash!] treated the pinball machine and its artists with just as much reverence as any other art form.

“Kings and Queens” continues that exhibit’s legacy in 2017, though it’s reasonable to ask why Elmhurst is the place to tell this story that seems so innately tied to Chicago. The answer is twofold. Elmhurst College provided much of the art in the exhibit. In the 1970s, the college built the largest single collection of Imagist art while decorating their library with the fresh and affordable works of Chicago artists. (That collection can be enjoyed free of charge in the A.C. Buehler Library, just a block from the museum.)

Elmhurst was also home to the Gottlieb family, owners of a pinball empire. D. Gottlieb and Co., a Chicago company, was the main producer of American pinball machines for decades.

Their machines, and the artwork on them, dotted towns across the country, but their story started in Elmhurst.

The Elmhurst Art Museum created something truly wonderful in this exhibit. It is history, art, pop culture, and amusement all wrapped into one. Serious art lovers and arcade enthusiasts alike will be delighted by the collection and its sense of discovery. Many art movements are so well-charted, but this one, despite its age, is still mysterious.

The museum also boasts Mies Van der Rohe’s McCormick House (1952), David Wallace Hoskin’s *Skycube* (2015), two installations from Matthew Hoffman’s “You Are Beautiful” project, and smaller rotating exhibits of contemporary artists’ work, making it worth a visit even after the Kings and Queens exhibit leaves on May 7th. ■

Evangelina Reid is completing her studies at the University of Chicago, where she studies English literature and art history. An editor and writer for *The Chicago Maroon* and *Grey City Magazine*, she has covered art and culture in Chicago since 2013.

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