

# NEW ART examiner

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## THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

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(Top Row) Kaywin Feldman, Minneapolis Institute of Art; Maxwell Anderson, Dallas Museum of Art; Thelma Golden, Studio Museum in Harlem; Michael Govan, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Glenn D. Lowry, Museum of Modern Art; (Bottom Row) Ann Philbin, Hammer Museum, Timothy Rub, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Matthew Teitelbaum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Gary Tinterow, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Julian Zugazagoitia, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City

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## NEW ART EXAMINER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit 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.



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The **New Art Examiner** is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.

If you have any interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.

The **New Art Examiner** has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, independent trading will determine success in this troubled art world.

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Hi Tom [Mullaney],

Thank you for the warm letter of encouragement! This April was the first time I had ever been to Italy; I traveled from Venice to Florence and visited countless churches and museums. I have to say Italy was the first place to ever make me so proud to be a painter (I have traveled to many other countries before).

Things in Michigan have been going very well. I had an interview in the Grand Rapids Art Museum with the cutting edge Dutch fashion designer, Iris van Herpen.

I will be doing a Miami Art Week report on Dec. 1-4, including Art Basel, Spectrum, and Context 20 different fairs happening at the same time.

I also visited the Milwaukee Art Museum two weeks ago for its well publicized exhibition "From Rembrandt to Parmigianino: Old Masters from Private Collections." I have a lot of opinions regarding that show. Let me tell you what I think about it:

When I walked in the exhibition, the first thing that struck me was that one of the museum employees came to apologize to me: there is only one Rembrandt in this show and there are two other paintings side by side to it that can not be confirmed as Rembrandt's. I have discussed this issue with other art lovers and museum goers; it seems to be a practice of smaller art museums lately. These days famous artwork is too difficult for them to obtain. Many museums will use this promotional skill, as an exaggeration to lure audiences to their museums to see a special show that actually disappoints in size.

I looked at the 11x14 inch Rembrandt's old man portrait, then compared side by side with the other two 8x10 studies. I had some suspicions about the other two paintings too and was glad they didn't confirm the others as Rembrandt's. I then walked through the rest of the 50 some paintings from the private classic collections of Wisconsin's wealthy folks, it had little emotional impact and I was hardly impressed. I came back to the unusual Rembrandt "Study of

the head of an Old Man with curly Hair, 1659" again, I have seen a lot of Rembrandt in my life, but I have to say this was such a treasure find. The complexities of emotions of an old man are still vivid, moving my soul after four centuries. It is a kind of senseless regret, repentance, as well as the feeling of time and tide waiting for no man.

This painting was done in the last ten years of Rembrandt's life, after his bankruptcy as well as losing his beloved lover and son. I assumed he was depressed as I noticed some critics said he might have been slightly mad during this period of his life. I think this is one of his self portraits, as art historians claim that one tenth of Rembrandt's paintings are actually self portraits. Myself -as a painter for more than three decades- I saw a genius who insightfully depicted humanity and spirituality; he was reflecting a truth of life on this old man's face. We came with nothing and leave with nothing, it is all vanity.

Technique wise he had reached the highest maturity, his special illuminated focal point against dark background perfectly highlight his sensitive emotions towards the old man in a way which no words can be used. The artist used his brush to pierce through viewers' souls and minds, and timelessly brings us to a spiritual realm. I saw loose brushstrokes of white color on an old man's curly hair and the pallet knife with oil pigment touched on the old man's rough skin. I have to say only the master of masters would be able to come out with such a bold approach to the canvas, and don't forget it was the 17th century in his time. During his last decade he produced some of the best art in human history, surly he was despised by many wealthy and people of nobility then. Losing the commercial productivity has won Rembrandt the true art and soul. I am glad I had come to meet the master in the Milwaukee Art Museum.

All the best,  
Lily Kostrzewa, Artist

## The Dilemma of Patronage

Let us understand what has been happening in our societies for the past fifty years.

The decision to try to end the poverty status of many artists and support them with tax payers' grants was, at its outset, a noble move. Patronage has always been a two edged sword and for every patron prepared to give Tchaikovsky a home and leave him to get on with his music, secure from money worries, there were twenty patrons who wanted the artist to ensure the patron's immortality with exact briefs and a set series of outcomes.

But both rich patron and Government agency have the same problem. Which artists do I choose? For the rich patron the answer is a mix of what they like and those they know have been accepted by their society as worthy—in other words anyone who has made a name for themselves.

But government patronage has to come with a different level of awareness, striving to make sure the tax payer sees money being spent wisely. And in so doing, over many years, the Arts Council and the National Endowment have become agencies of social engineering.

It is absolutely correct to say that rich patrons and the church were also agents of social engineering, also dictated what they thought the public should think, also made decisions behind closed doors on what art should be and where it should be shown. It is absolutely wrong to think for one moment that modern government grant agencies are any different. That they are not is something rich patrons have long known, which is why they have fed their own collections with money harvested from tax payers. In the June 2015 issue of the *New Art Examiner*, Dr Nizan Shaked writes:

“The extremely inflated price of art at this moment has increasingly transferred control of content away from the hands of professionals and into the sway of laymen patrons, who unabashedly use the institution to increase the value of their private collections.”

Across Europe these institutions are publicly funded. So once collectors and patrons knew they could increase their wealth through using public institutions and the grant system, they began to build bigger institutions. The public, coming from the religious world view where

cathedrals meant greater religiosity, thought big buildings meant greater culture. In their imaginations the museums and art galleries, extensions and mini-empires like the Tate, meant a healthy culture not a capitalist enterprise manufacturing profits by merging public and private funds. The public has been misled. They did not have to be but the calibre of men and women who run some of these institutions is little better than that of gangsters.

Regarding the Tate's purchase in 2005 of its trustee Chris Ofili's work, *The Upper Room*, *The Guardian* expounded, “The Tate has broken the law ... By law, trustees cannot receive monetary benefit from their charity without express permission, usually from the commission. The Tate failed to seek permission ... The Charity Commission's full recommendations and criticisms, laid out in a lengthy document, also said the Tate failed to manage conflicts of interest ... Failed to seek independent valuation of works by artist-trustees ... Had no defined policy relating to purchases from artist-trustees ... Had insufficiently clear acquisition policies ... Kept insufficient records of trustee meetings.

The *Daily Telegraph* called this verdict “one of the most serious indictments of the running of one of the nation's major cultural institutions in living memory.” (Charles Thomson, *The Jackdaw*, November 2016, p 21)

The man in charge of this is one of the most powerful men in the international art world, Nicholas Serota, soon to be head of the Arts Council and therefore in charge of policy and grant giving in the UK for years to come.

This behind-hand, self serving manipulation of the grant system for personal wealth creation is not new, but the public seems largely unaware of it. As Brexit and Trump's Presidential win have shown, for decades people have thought those who rule in our culture and rule our culture, are a law unto themselves, are distant and there is nothing the general public can do but let them get on with it. Revolts take a long time to mature. There is not only antagonism for the political status-quo, there is a growing antagonism for the art that has been foisted upon the people through them. Contemporary art in the blue-chip art world has nothing more to do with our culture and everything to do with profits and thus is as cor-

rupted as our banks have become. Patrons sitting on millions of tax-payers' money have power and are a new form of rich—able to play on the world stage, enjoying warm relations with billionaires, commuting between international galleries on a daily basis and doing deals worth millions. These Machiavellian manipulators of the art world will sell anything into a willing market place and it is this fact that has led to the supremacy of the 'everything is art' movement and not any coherent philosophy on what art is or what art means or even the place and role of the artist in society.

What people long for is a little bit of honesty from their leaders. Sadly they won't get it from Trump nor will they get it from the Conservative Party coup that has taken place in the UK. The making of money and the telling of truth are diametrically opposed, and so has become the making and exhibiting of art in our iconic spaces.

*"...Only voices, millions endless millions ever  
lonely  
Voices, in history's pale indifferent winds of  
no-rejoicing  
Only deep black whirlpools suck and spin  
around a stoney  
Joyless humanity trying in desperation to  
hoist  
Their battered souls above their votes, trying  
to care -  
The world's song is a marching-song against  
the wise -  
Bare are the breasts of dying dreams and  
where  
Skies are storm-torn and cruel, men tell lies ..."*

(Shänne Sands 'Power')

*Daniel Nanavati  
UK Editor*

## The Rise of the NAE Howler

As the New Art Examiner (NAE) continues to revitalize, plans are being made to introduce a sister publication called the Howler. A projected launch is scheduled for the spring of 2017. The Howler will be a substantial print-run publication for the mass-market, free of charge. This is contrary to the NAE that is a limited print-run, subscription-based publication. Consumers of art criticism and those who indulge in the culture fall into two polarized categories. To fully represent these two very different independent voices within the visual arts community, we have decided two canvasses are needed. By doing so, we hope to be able to fully express the varying concepts and ideas within a highly fragmented industry.

The Howler will possess a developed web platform with content capability that gives us exposure to more articles covering more topics from more locations around the world. It will also serve a dual purpose as an online meeting place for the arts community. A place where artists and art lovers can interact with each other in a more direct manner: from placing classifieds, to advertising events, to collaborating in the real world, and engaging in more in-depth discussion and critique.

The initial print-run will be about 5000 copies quarterly and will be distributed to over 200

locations across the Chicagoland and Northern Indiana area via coffeehouses, art galleries and art schools. Our goal is to set up roots in the communities that create and support art and in the end, broaden the reach of the NAE with quality discourse. Our structure will allow us to accept content from correspondents and contributors from anywhere in the world. Over time we will have the capacity to expand the print edition outside the Chicago area.

Currently, we are looking to build our team. Artists and other creatives, writers, editors, copy editors, web and print designers, cartoonists, photographers, marketing, promotion and public relations, advertising, sales, distribution, admin/staffing and well wishers are welcome to join or get involved in some capacity. Come join our new village! We gratefully welcome and acknowledge new ideas and involvement in order to make it a success venture for everyone in the visual arts community. Please contact me for details

*Michael Ramstedt  
Editor, NAE Howler*

## Assessing NAE's Growth in 2016

I write this Publisher's Editorial towards the end of December 2016 looking forward to escaping the cold of Chicago and to seek a kinder environment in Cornwall UK, and also to work with the UK team. Chicago is not known for its generosity of spirit. It is a hard culture. Yet the New Art Examiner survived, died and revived in spite of the parochialism of the Second City. Its revival in its birthplace is well underway.

The New Art Examiner is currently in the process of putting down new roots and gathering new energy. Our Christmas party organized by the new Chairman, Michael Ramstedt, gave evidence of this new momentum. Guests were welcomed, and new writers, new friends, and old friends congregated and shared food and drink with much chatter. They shared in the excitement of art talk and art criticism again functioning in Chicago. The transition to a younger generation is well in order. In this, the New Art Examiner renews itself without sacrificing its traditional ethical code.

We live in uncertain times. The general art scene in Chicago is not happy. But was any art scene happy in the Western World in the year 2016? A sense of brooding pessimism is strong in the Second City where many new and recent initiatives are fading, as the not-for-profit sector weakens and grant money diminishes. Private galleries are facing a difficult market as art fairs and auctions are changing the patterns of the marketplace. The optimism of the 80s and 90s has become stale and middle aged. The promise of the avant garde now seems thin, wilted and wearing out. This perception is more than well explained by Jorge Benitez' essay, *The Illusion of Progress*, in this current issue.

The New Art Examiner has to say goodbye to Tom Mullaney because Tom has less free time to volunteer his services as US Editor. Tom Mullaney led the Chicago group in our darkest days into our revival. The NAE has a long history of 43 years which tells a remarkable story in which volunteerism was the bedrock that produced an important critical art journal that competed on the national stage with the well funded New York art magazines. The established cognoscente of Chicago could not and even today can not come to terms with this reality. Tom Mullaney as US Editor kept the faith and respected the creative essence of the NAE. We are also blessed with

another unsung hero, Michel Ségard, a veteran board member, who has stepped forward and assumed the arduous duties of designer and Associate Publisher. We are also strengthening and recruiting new editorial resources as well as our support.

The New Art Examiner offers an opportunity for creative speculation and professional experience to all aspiring art writers, leaving aside the burden of political correctness—an increasing weight, in the opinion of this writer, which is squeezing the life out of American culture.

So I return to the UK feeling gratified as the New Art Examiner in Chicago is now secure. Support is increasing as at last some major authorities now realise Chicago cannot reach its desired status of becoming a major art centre without a critical journal of substance.

Derek Guthrie

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## Taking On a New Role

My association with the *New Art Examiner* dates from 1980. I walked into its offices at 230 East Ohio to offer my services as a writer. I wanted to put my journalism background to use studying what is termed "The Art World." And co-editor, Derek Guthrie (along with Jane Addams Allen) had just the assignment: an ongoing trial in Chicago District Court against the executive leadership of the George F. Harding Museum. Quite a tale of art world shenanigans and a great introduction to the larger topic of museum ethics. Art museums, their directors and operations have been my specialty ever since.

For the past two years, I have returned as the U.S. Editor of that publication because I believe in Derek Guthrie and the *New Art Examiner's* mission: to shine a light on art world practices and provide an independent, critical corrective to the mainly fawning coverage of the art press glossies.

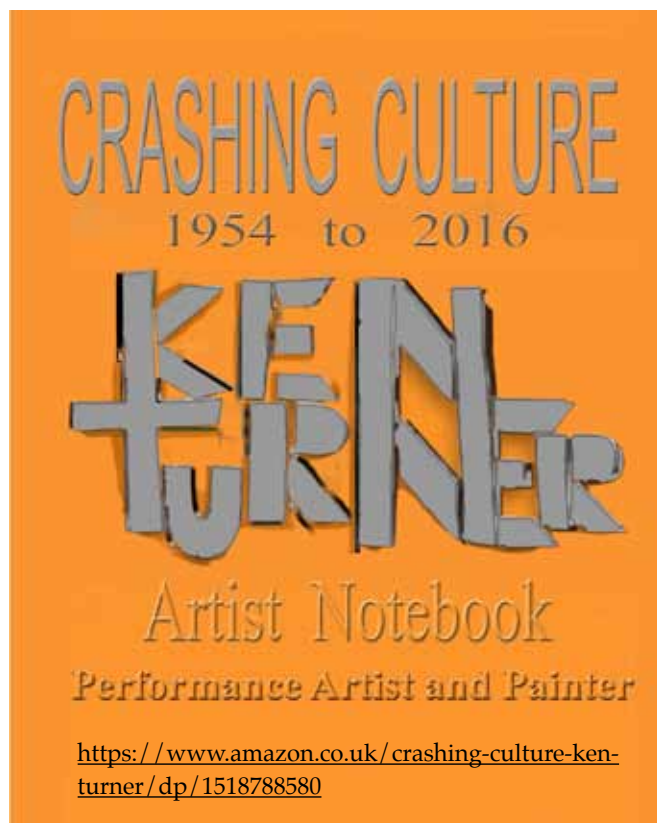
It has been a highly satisfying challenge to help breathe new life into an acclaimed publication that folded in 2002. I enjoyed assembling a new crew of writers, determining coverage with the editorial team in Chicago and England, re-establishing contact with the Chicago art community. It is now time for me to transition into a new role.

This issue marks my final contribution as U.S. Editor. It's been a good ride. With the next issue, I will become Senior Editor. This decision is prompted solely by the need to devote more time to other writing opportunities. However, I will continue to contribute to the magazine, continue choosing worthwhile art-related books for review and act as a recruiting scout for new talent.

The *New Art Examiner* has been my graduate school introduction to a fascinating world. It has been my privilege to have met many fine people among the director and curatorial ranks. I have seen museums evolve dramatically, taking on new roles and responsibilities over the last 35 years. For the most part, I've been impressed at how their leaders have steered that voyage yet ready to write critically when they fell short.

Thank you readers for welcoming us back to Chicago. Please continue to show your support by subscribing and making needed donations. Ours is an effort that demands a great deal of sweat equity and passion. Help us overcome those economic hurdles so we can become the art publication this city so richly deserves.

*Tom Mullaney*



Art into Life. Or is it Life into Art? The weld is seamless. The book's narrative is an artist's life-story. Equally a story of art told through the artist's multifarious works, from the public theatre of Action Space and his multi-media performance work, to the intense poetry of his painting and drawing, to his filmic running man commentary on poetry and philosophy and their essential role in the public life of art, architecture and education.

*Dr. Helen Mallinson Director Cass Culture Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture & Design London Metropolitan University.*

Ken Turner offers a uniquely visceral insight into one artist's dealings with the social, political and philosophical conundrums encountered in a professional career spanning the last seventy years, independent of the gallery and theatre systems.

*Dr. Amanda Ravetz, Senior Research Fellow, Manchester School of Art.*

Ken Turner was a lecturer at The Central St. Martins for many years and initiated Action Space in 1968. Also taught at Barnett Environmental design College and the Architectural Association as a Unit Leader. Now lives in Cornwall: performance art, reading philosophy and painting being his main occupation. The author's other book 'Kick to the Head and Heart', brings Drawing and Kick Boxing together within a core of philosophy of the aesthetic, with a new understanding of perception through seeing beyond the surface of things, phenomenologically. Available from Amazon. See also his website [www.imaginativeeye.co.uk](http://www.imaginativeeye.co.uk) for proposal on "Art Versus Culture": an important High Court Room Drama.

# A Ghost Ship of Tragedy and Crisis

by *Bruce Thorn*

Each issue the New Art Examiner invites a well-known, or not-so-well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest—whatever it may be.

**T**he horrific “Ghost Ship” fire in Oakland’s Fruitvale neighborhood on Dec. 2, 2016 was a tragedy waiting to happen. At least 36 young lives ended in a brief moment. Any of these victims could have been my own children or friends. We will never know the rewards of the music, art and poetry which these inspired young souls promised. Their parents, families and friends will forever mourn the loss of loved ones.

The tragedy of Ghost Ship will likely inspire tightening zoning enforcement and increasing disappearance of affordable artists’ spaces. Already high and rapidly escalating rents have been squeezing the working class and poor in many cities for decades. People priced out of good neighborhoods move to poorer, more dangerous and isolated neighborhoods with crumbling housing stock. That’s how capitalism works. For artists, escalating prices can be a huge burden when both work and living space are required.

Escalating costs are largely due to the existence of a global abundance of liquid capital looking for profits. This gives rise to all sorts of speculative bubbles and investment strategies. Working for a wage or making anything, let alone art, is no longer a guaranty of a roof over one’s head or worldly riches. Real estate musical chairs happen when creative people attract hipsters, upper middle class and professionals, who then price out older communities along with artists who made the neighborhood attractive for gentrification in the first place. Most property owners love it when artists and hipsters move into the hood because it means rising real estate values. There is never concern for the trail of tears left by the displaced.

Real estate speculation and resulting shortages also change the nature of cultural output. Should artists only be cultivated from among the well off? Should we shut out the voices of the less fortunate? As affordable studio space becomes harder to find, the nature of much contemporary art has also shifted to conceptual and digital practices that don’t require as much space.

Ghost Ship is a bell warning of a crisis in the arts in the United States. How are we ever going to

provide our non-commercial artists with a living wage, affordable housing and safe studio space, or any studio space at all? Everybody seems to want the arts in their communities, schools and lives, but nobody wants to pay artists. It’s like taxes, everybody wants somebody else to pick up the tab, but all want to enjoy the feast. There is currently little discussion or will to resolve this crisis. The art business crawls along because there are enough well financed players to support a rigged system.

Another elephant in the room is the near impossibility for young people to become art collectors and patrons. First they need secure and adequate jobs to live and pay off student debt and then they need homes. There just aren’t enough billionaires with egalitarian principals around to support everybody. If you don’t care about the arts to begin with, there is no crisis because life is an all-knowing marketplace.

Here’s an immediate call to action for those who do care about the arts and the lives of artists: do whatever you can to support artists whom you like. Don’t just wait for someone else to fix the system. Buy their work. If you own an empty building, make low rent space available for artists. When you are out entertaining yourself at generously offered free cultural events, after you drink the free cheap wine and beer to wash down those cheese crackers, please write a check for whatever amount feels comfortable to you. There’s no time for lip service anymore; go to a bordello and pay for that. Please make plans to do something real for the artists whom you love, then go out and encourage your friends and acquaintances to find joy by doing the same. Thank you.

Bruce Thorn is a Chicago based painter and musician. He is also a contributing writer to Neoteric Art. Thorn studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago.



# The Broad Has a Problem: Provincialism

*By Stephen Eisenman*

**T**he provincialism of collectors and curators of contemporary art is a signal fact of our culture. The geographical exclusivity, class narrowness, formal predictability, and political innocuousness of the art on view at even the newest museums and galleries of contemporary art is testimony to this fact.

Two cases in point: The “New Contemporary” galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago, which opened this year and the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, which debuted in 2015. Many people have written critically about the new galleries at the AIC including me, so I won’t repeat myself, except to say that its parochialism is compounded by the sin of pride.

All 44 of the works recently donated by Stefan Edlis and Gael Nesson, which constitute the core of the re-installation, must remain exactly where they hang for at least a generation. The current U.S. president might contrive a third term, the economy may collapse, and the planet may roast, but works by Jeff Koons, Gerhard Richter, Richard Prince, and Andy Warhol will remain exactly where they are, undisturbed.

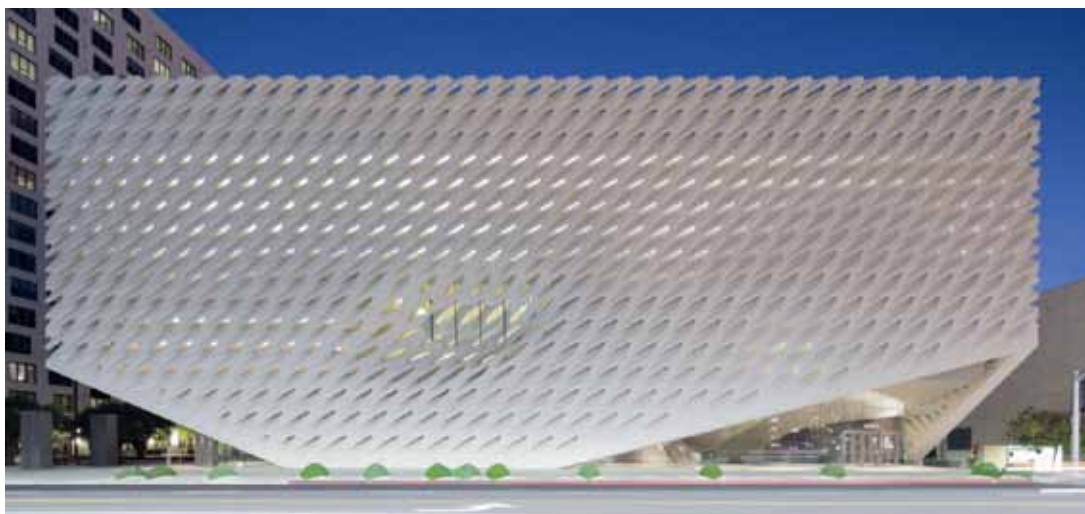
The Broad Museum is a larger and more ambitious undertaking than the New Contemporary and a clearer example of the problem of parochialism. Located on Grand Avenue in Los Angeles next door to Frank Gehry’s Disney Concert Hall, it stands opposite MOCA (designed by Arata Isozaki) in what is emerging as a contemporary art corridor.

On a trip to Los Angeles and vicinity last November, I visited The Broad twice and viewed the contemporary collections at the LA Country Museum of Art, MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) and the Palm Springs Museum.

Its other nearby, contemporary art rivals include the Geffen MOCA (formerly the Temporary Contemporary) about a half-mile to the south, and near that, Hauser and Wirth, a behemoth commercial gallery in a converted flour factory. Finally, about five miles west is the Broad Contemporary Art Museum at the LA Country Museum of Art, which opened in 2008. The artworks at the LACMA Broad however were transferred last year to the eponymous downtown museum.

At a total of 120,000 square feet, the Broad Museum is bigger than its rivals, and its architecture, by Diller, Scofidio and Renfro, more conservative. Its decorative, white, honeycomb facade recalls Edward Durrell Stone’s classicizing U.S. Embassy in New Delhi (1959) though without the brass, cruciform columns and portico. Its biomorphic lobby however is pure Hollywood.

In addition to the gift shop, it contains a pair of grey arterials, one for the escalator and another for the stairs, carrying visitors to the galleries on the third floor. In-between the gallery floors is a vast, storage area visible through a glass window-wall alongside the down-escalator. Transit up and down reminded me of the Cold-War cult classic



"Fantastic Voyage" (dir. Richard Fleischer) starring Raquel Welch and Stephen Boyd as scientists shrunk to micron size in order to travel by miniature submarine through the blood vessels of a comatose scientist. In this case, voyagers are treated to nothing more exciting than rack upon rack of art storage, with the works themselves largely invisible.

Inside the galleries are rotating exhibitions drawn from the 2,000+ works comprising the collection. At the moment, the lower galleries feature an exhibition called "Creature," concerned with human animality, though the thesis is generally indiscernible in the actual artworks. There were a few that contained actual bits of animals, including Meyer Vaisman's *Untitled Turkey XIV*, which consists of a stuffed turkey enveloped in wool fleece (its beak is just visible), perched on top of a pine crate.

The artist, who like many of the Broad artists came to prominence in the 1980s, (in this case via the so-called "Neo-Geo" movement) has recently foresworn effigies of humans and animals as part of his newfound Jewish orthodoxy. Turkey XIV unfortunately rehearses the clichés of teratology—that nature produces monsters and that visual pleasure comes from gaping at them.

Other works in "Creature" are more successful, some even compelling. These include a



Meyer Vaisman *Untitled Turkey XIV*, 1992

group of six enormous Leon Golub pictures: *Mercenary*, *Interrogation*, *White Squad*, *Wounded Sphinx* and *Thremody*. Unframed, hung from the wall with grommets, scraped raw like picked-at scabs, they remain today what they were when they were painted in the 1980s: indictments of U.S. sponsored torture, death squads, and terrorism.

Piotr Uklanski's *Nazis* (1998), consisting of rows of still photos (164 in all) of Polish and Hollywood actors dressed in the costume of SS officers, successfully conveys

the manner in which mass culture manages to familiarize and domesticate even the most rebarbative of subjects. (James Mason appears no less than three times in the pictures.) But other works here are overfamiliar or anodyne in the extreme including a Beuys felt suit, and neo-expressionistic paintings by Susan Rothenberg, Georg Baselitz and Jean Michel Basquiat.

The un-themed galleries upstairs include works by Warhol, Kara Walker (a dedicated room), John Baldessari, Jasper Johns, Keith Haring and Basquiat (also with a dedicated room), Cy Twombly (again a solo room), Robert Longo, David Salle, Beuys and Anselm Kiefer (in their own room), Damien Hirst, and Takeshi Murakami.

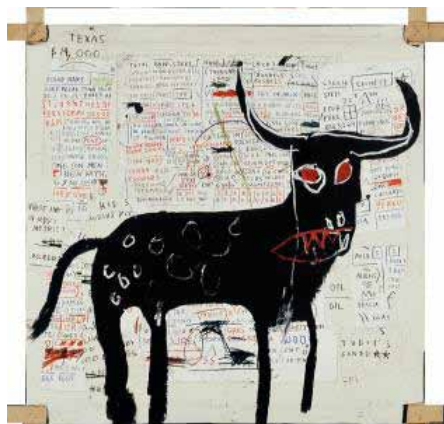
The Broad Museum, like its LA and Chicago rivals, promotes a highly circumscribed vision of contemporary art, one dictated by the big galleries, museums, donors, art fairs, auction houses and investors. It consists almost entirely of painting and sculpture, with the prominent exception of large-scale photographs by Cindy Sherman, Andreas Gursky, Jeff Wall, Richard Prince and one or two others.

There are no films or videos, no installations, no Fluxus or Neo-Dada, no conceptual works, no performance art, and no straight photographs. There are no artworks that may be described as "relational" or "social practice," and nothing associated, for example, with Creative Time, the non-profit that supports site-specific and politically engaged art.

None of the art at the Broad or its rivals

Leon Golub, *White Squad V*, 1984





Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Beef Ribs Longhorn*, 1982



Ellen Gallagher, *Watery Ecstatic Series*, 2004



George Condo, *Self Portrait Facing Cancer 1*, 2015

may be described as in any way functional. Its uselessness is vaunted. There are no agitational posters, broadsides, handbills, props, puppets, or other works of protest or tendency. There is no ceramics, glass, or woodwork. There is no furniture, textiles or wearable art or craft. None of the art is made for ritual use. None is made by amateurs, outsiders, children, or the mentally disabled. None is made by Australian Aborigines, Native Hawaiians, First Nation or any other indigenous peoples from around the world. None is from about 150 other countries represented at the United Nations. None is made for tourists or proletarians and none is affordable to any but the very, very wealthy.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. When European and American artists associated with the avant-garde first encountered tribal, indigenous and folk arts and crafts in the 1880s and '90s, it led to a transformation in their practice. No longer was art simply a matter of rendering a likeness or even establishing a new, representational style. It was instead a question of sheer expressivity, regardless of whether a particular person, place or thing was being explicitly depicted, or pure functionality.

At one level, this meant that European and American art could gain sustenance from (and even exploit) the art and culture of its colonies, both external and internal. But at another level, it meant a newfound appreciation and respect for the cultural achievements and even political rights of traduced nations, peoples and communities around the world.

It was not coincidental, for example, that the British Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau, and Dada and Surrealism were among the most

formally and politically advanced of the late 19th and 20th Century avant-gardes. The same can be said for Abstract Expressionism.

The art of Jackson Pollock and Norman Lewis, for example, does not simply document the desire to represent what Lewis called "universalism." (Pollock was influenced by Navajo sand painting and Lewis by traditional Chinese and Japanese calligraphy.) It is instead a plea for the actual inclusion of indigenous and non-Western art in the institutions and imaginations of the globally dominant classes and powers. It exists as a challenge to hegemonic authority.

But this critical history of engagement with difference, dating back to the 19th Century, has been largely broken by today's contemporary art—at least the art on exhibition at the most ambitious and well-funded museums of contemporary art in the U.S., such as the Broad. "I like the fact," Broad said, "that art reflects what's happening in the world, how artists see the world."

That sentence, inscribed near the entrance to the Broad's upstairs galleries, summarizes the perspective on contemporary art that I have been describing here—art as a passive mirror, not as an intervention; and artists, curators and critics as blinkered spectators rather than as critical agents. The time is right for a new internationalism, a new inclusiveness, and new institutions to exhibit the diversity of contemporary art. ■

Stephen Eisenman is a professor of art history at Northwestern University and a contemporary Art expert. This is his first appearance in the *New Art Examiner*.

# Who Runs Our Major Museums and Why Are They So Silent?

*By Tom Mullaney*

**L**ike the heads of major corporations such as Google or General Motors, being a museum director is an equally prestigious post and equally shrouded in secrecy. He or she may be a quasi-public figure who attends exhibition openings and dinners, hobnobs with art collectors and donors and signs appeal letters. But who are they as people, what do they think and what do they do in their office all day?

It's pretty much a mystery. Once they ascend to museum heaven, directors live behind a velvet curtain. While they head a leading institution in their city, they rarely write articles or speak on artistic issues and are seldom seen at civic events outside museum circles.

We can therefore thank Michael Shapiro, former director of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta for 15 years, for pulling the curtain back a good deal with his book, "Eleven Museums, Eleven Directors" (High Museum of Art, 2016). "One thing I'm intrigued about," he told a reporter, "is how people become art museum directors." The book gives us enlightening profiles of eleven top museum directors whom Shapiro interviewed in 2015, touching upon their early exposure to art, their circuitous career paths, generous mentors and favorite works.

Shapiro, as a fellow director, was able to elicit revealing vignettes from each colleague. The eleven interviewees were Kaywin Feldman at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Thelma Golden at the Studio Museum in Harlem, Michael Govan at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Glenn D. Lowry at the Museum of Modern Art, Ann Philbin at UCLA's Hammer Museum, Timothy Rub at

the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gary Tinterow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Julian Zugazagoitia at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. He also interviewed Maxwell Anderson, just before he left the Dallas Museum of Art and Matthew Teitelbaum at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto before he assumed the leadership of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

There are some significant omissions, perhaps due to scheduling problems or simply Shapiro's wish to cap the number. Still, it would have been more complete to have heard from Thomas Campbell at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Douglas Druick (still the head of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015) and perhaps Adam Weinberg at the Whitney Museum or Timothy Potts at the J.Paul Getty Museum.

What I found surprising to read was that many directors had no intention of entering museum work. It was, what Lowry and others call "utter serendipity." That was the case with Anderson, Lowry, Rub, Teitelbaum and Zugazagoitia. But for a few, their boyhood passions—collecting a penny for every year of Queen Victoria's reign for Anderson and making miniature museum displays for Tinterow—foretold their gravitational pull toward the museum world.

Some took an art history course as a college elective and got hooked by the art or a mesmerizing teacher, like Lane Faison at Williams College. For others, a museum internship was the spark. For Feldman, "Seeing Giotto changed my life."

Once they began working in museums, their path toward greater leadership was helped by mentors with whom they worked and from whom

Kaywin Feldman



Michael Govan



Glenn Lowry,



Timothy Rub



Matthew Teitelbaum



they learned. Shapiro provides a fascinating list of mentors that the directors cited at the back of the book. It is a fitting homage to several generations of famed curators and directors who tilled the soil before and set high standards. Leaders such as Philippe de Montebello, Anne d'Harnoncourt, Martin Friedman, Douglas Cooper and Jean Sutherland Boggs.

As one reads the profiles, it may seem that each director's ascension had an air of inevitability. That is not the case. In the rarified museum world, snatching the director's ring is often a matter of luck. After one has compiled a steady record of strong exhibits and scholarship, accolades and promotions, making the director grade comes down to getting an all-important call from an executive recruiter. Over the last quarter-century, the most prestigious museum posts have been filled by three outside headhunters: Malcolm Mackay, Nancy Nichols and Sarah James.

While the book is an engaging read, I closed Shapiro's study with a nagging feeling of frustration. It had ended too soon. The book's subtitle is "Conversations on Art & Leadership." While the book captured each director's past splendidly, it devoted precious little space to the leadership role these men and women face in the present—the main challenges they face along with their vision for the future.

Museums are no longer simply places where one passively looks at pictures. They are now about connecting with visitors, providing a more immersive experience and seeking a more interactive role with their community. Yet, as best I remember, Shapiro asked only four directors—Anderson, Feldman, Golden and Zugazagoitia—the direct question: "What do you see as the future of museums?"

Responses were mainly brief and conventional. Feldman and Golden had the most thoughtful responses. Feldman answered, "We need new kinds of jobs and positions in museums. We need some changed behavior." She targeted a need for museums to understand their audience better and she plans to make two new hires: an audience insights person and someone who can better connect the museum's content with its Minneapolis community.

Readers intent on glimpsing museums' future can turn to a 2015 report from the Center for the Future of Museums that identifies six trends: open data sharing; a need for museums to

revise their ethics statements on such emerging issues as unpaid internships, conflict-of-interest, provenance research and privacy of digital data; personalization; climate change; wearable technology and slowing down the museum experience for a hurry-up world. A fuller explanation of each trend can be found in the report.

Also last year, MIT convened a distinguished panel on the future of the museum that included two museum directors (Thelma Golden and Jill Medvedow), two architects (David Adjaye and Charles Renfro) and the artist Lorna Simpson.

They discussed the relevance of physical space for shaping cultural experiences in the digital era, the potential of museums to engage diverse and participatory audiences and inviting contemporary artists to lead the way in re-conceiving how museums might interact with the public.

Why can't the Association of Art Museum Directors convene some of the best and brightest directors featured in this book for their own public discussion of how museums can change—and shape—a more connected cultural environment? Or how about issuing a report of its own on the pressing themes explored at MIT? The AAMD has been notorious for speaking only to other directors and God.

Current museum leaders need to expand their public contacts, engage and enlighten the non-museum public on issues of cultural importance. As the public face of their institutions, they are the ones best entrusted with that responsibility. It's crucial to reach beyond amassing reams of impersonal digital data, Trip Advisor accolades and visitor experience surveys to have face-to-face contact or thought pieces in local or national media.

Museum directors need to do more talking the talk and walking the walk. Museums are not private domains for the privileged few but are chartered as public trusts for the many. Those profiled in Shapiro's book are among the field's best and brightest and appear up to the task. The museum world's past penchant for privacy among a chosen few now seems so 20th Century ■.

Tom Mullaney is U.S. Editor of the New Art Examiner. He has written about museums since 1980 and has interviewed many museum heads over three decades, including Philippe de Montebello, J. Carter Brown, Sherman Lee, James Wood, Earl A. "Rusty" Powell, Maxwell Anderson, Kaywin Feldman and James Cuno.

# Lies, Damn Lies and Serota at the BBC

*By Charles Thomson*

Sir Nicholas, director of the Tate Gallery, has used the platform of the BBC in a blatant attempt to deceive the nation. Either that or he has genuinely deluded himself. Both options render him unfit for major public office.

He was confronted on Radio 4 programme *The Reunion: Tate Modern*, on September 23rd, by Sue MacGregor, regarding the Tate's purchase in 2005 of its trustee Chris Ofili's work, *The Upper Room*. She observed with wry understatement, "The Charity Commission said you didn't quite follow the rules here." In 2006, as the BBC then reported, Charity Commission chief executive Andrew Hind said there were "serious shortcomings...In any charity we would be concerned that such basic matters were neglected, but in a charity of the size and stature of the Tate we are very disappointed."

The Guardian expounded, "The Tate has broken the law...By law, trustees cannot receive monetary benefit from their charity without express permission, usually from the commission. The Tate failed to seek permission...The Charity Commission's full recommendations and criticisms, laid out in a lengthy document, also said the Tate failed to manage conflicts of interest...Failed to seek independent valuation of works by artist-trustees...Had no defined policy relating to purchases from artist-trustees...Had insufficiently clear acquisition policies...Kept insufficient records of trustee meetings."

The Daily Telegraph called this verdict "one of the most serious indictments of the running of one of the nation's major cultural institutions in living memory."

"After an in-depth review lasting ten months by the Commission," stated The Times, Serota "accepted the criticisms" and "was genuinely contrite." The Evening Standard confirmed, "Sir Nicholas said today he accepted all the Charity Commission's findings."

In stark contrast, his response to Sue Macgregor ten years later was an astonishing and shameless attempt to hoodwink the nation and evade blame with a trivialising revisionism that implied gross misconduct by the Charity Commission. To the supportive laughter of his entourage

on the programme, Serota declared smoothly as if it were established fact the evasive nonsense, "The rules of course were invented after we had flouted them." Serota has a history of obfuscation, whether lies, half-truths, delusions, evasions or omissions. In 2004, he applied for a grant from the Art Fund towards the purchase of *The Upper Room*. He signed a form saying that there had been no prior commitment to the purchase of the work (a condition of funding). Thanks to journalist Chris Hastings and the Freedom of Information Act, it was revealed that, eight months prior to the application, the Tate had paid a £250,000 deposit. Serota blamed it on "a failing in my head." In 2005, I was quoted in *The Observer*: "Serota, as the director, chooses the trustees, and the trustees are then responsible for reappointing the director. The director then buys the trustees' work." In 2008, this was brought up in *Varsity* (the Cambridge Student Newspaper), where Serota defended himself with another flagrant falsehood: "I don't have any part to play in their appointment."

The September 2005 Tate board minutes state: "The Director [Serota] reported that two strong candidates were to be interviewed for the position of Artist Trustee by a panel comprising himself, Paul Myners and the Independent Assessor." In the May 2007 minutes, another trustee interview is on record with a panel of three trustees, the independent assessor and Serota. The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts 2005–2006, 2006–2007, 2007–2008, and 2008–2009 all say in the section on trustees: "The key stages of the appointment are overseen by a panel, which will normally include the Director."

Also in *Varsity*, Serota said about the trustees, "Why would I want to win their support?" The simple answer to that is that he is their employee, as he explained in 1993 in the *Independent on Sunday*, when he hoped to be appointed for a second seven-year term as Tate Director: "Tate trustees fall in and out of love with their director and I'll only discover whether they have fallen out of love with me in 1995 when they discuss my contract...The jury's out."

On the Radio 4 programme, MacGregor con-

fronted Serota about an event in October 2003 that became public the following year, namely “that Charles Saatchi offered you his entire collection...it was worth 200 million—for nothing.” Serota denied this: “I wish he had...he did have a great collection. Sadly he never did offer it to us.”

This response is consistent with Serota’s version to the press in 2004, when he said that Saatchi’s offer was not for a gift but for a loan of work, which he (Serota) immediately rejected (none of which was mentioned to MacGregor).

Surprisingly, Serota’s reply was immediately contradicted on the programme by former Tate trustee, Michael Craig-Martin, who admitted there had in fact been an offer of work: “Unfortunately what was offered to the Tate was not the great collection with the great things in it, most of which were already gone by that time. They had been sold by that time.”

As it happens, that is incorrect. At the time of the offer in 2003, Saatchi still had in his collection iconic Brit art works, including Damien Hirst’s shark, Tracey Emin’s bed, Rachel Whiteread’s plaster cast of a room, Mark Quinn’s head made from frozen blood, Sarah Lucas’s table with two fried eggs and a kebab, Marcus Harvey’s Myra Hindley painting with children’s hand prints, Ron Mueck’s sculpture of his dead father, the Chapman’s penis-nosed mannequins and Chris Ofili’s Virgin Mary painting with elephant dung. Serota continued about Saatchi: “Michael [Craig-Martin] and I with Janet De Botton spent a great deal of time in the late nineties trying to persuade him to give, not his entire collection, but maybe ten works from his collection as a founding collection for Tate Modern. But I’m afraid he didn’t feel for

one reason or another able to do that.”

This is obviously another failing in Serota’s head. In 2004, the Evening Standard reported that in 1998, “Saatchi offered 86 works by 57 British artists—including Langlands & Bell, Turner Prize winner Martin Creed and Glenn Brown” (as well as Richard Billingham, Richard Wilson and Chantal Joffé). A Tate spokeswoman confirmed the offer of 86 works, which were rejected as “The trustees felt on this occasion the works would be better suited in a collection elsewhere.”

Regarding The Upper Room scandal, Christopher McCall QC wrote to the press in 2005 condemning “expediency...which has an appeal to an overbearing executive.” The Times said of the Tate: “If it had been a company, the verdict would have sent shareholders into a panic.” No doubt if it had been a government, resignations or sackings would have followed the public outcry. Surely we have the right to expect the same standards across the board in public life, including the arts.

Serota has not displayed a level of behaviour and integrity to remain a figurehead and step into another prime position as Chairman of the Arts Council. His record is tarnished and far from admitting to his mistakes, he has the blinkered arrogance to pretend they never happened. We need leaders who do not have recurrent failings in their head ■.

Charles Thomson is an artist, writer, and co-founder of “The Stuckists.” The Stuckists movement is now international with active chapters in Europe and beyond.

## TURNER PRIZE HANKY PANKY:

Helen Marten won the 2016 Turner Prize on 5th December. The jury was comprised of: Michelle Cotton, Director, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn; Tamsin Dillon, curator; Beatrix Ruf, Director, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Simon Wallis, Director, The Hepworth Wakefield, and it was chaired by Alex Farquharson, Director of Tate Britain.

Of this pitifully small number of jurors two had a vested interest in the winner. Beatrix Ruf has supported Marten’s work since she was 26. Ruf gave Marten a solo show at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 2012. Simon Wallis Marten won the inaugural Hepworth Prize for Sculpture at the Hepworth Wakefield Gallery in Yorkshire.

The jury was stacked in her favour. Serota talked about inclusivity at the ceremony in the light of the insular looking voters who voted to leave the EU. But stacking juries is an exclusive practice. To such an extent, now, no one knows if Marten sharing the prize money she earns is her real nature or part of the sales package. She, of course, will be a millionaire before she is 40. It is the culture that is impoverished.

# The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism

## Three Essays on the Limits of Postmodernism after November 2016

*by Jorge Miguel Benitez*

In This Issue: **The Illusion of Progress**

*Why the election results should not have been surprising*

Future Issues:

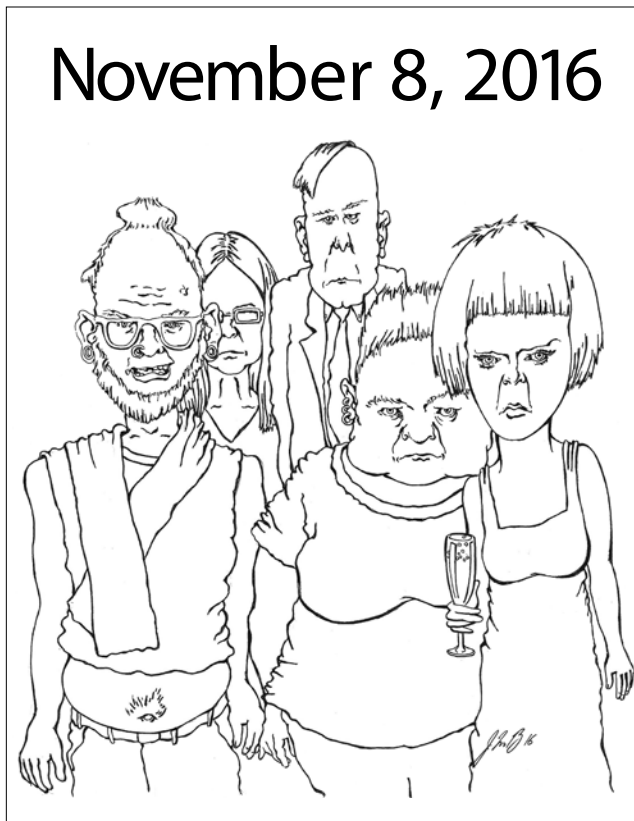
**Blood-drenched Brushes and Golden Easels**

*An analysis of what Derek Guthrie calls the "Americanization of the avant-garde"*

**The Will to Ignorance**

*The role of academia in the postmodern debacle*

Cartoons by Jorge Miguel Benitez



# The Illusion of Progress

*by Jorge Miguel Benitez*

**A** thing can move in any direction. Whether or not it progresses is strictly a question of perception.

Ever since Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Western understanding of freedom, justice, and equality has struggled between reformist evolution and revolutionary brutality. The problem does not lie with freedom, justice, and equality but with the inability to see and accept the contradictions inherent in humanity. When Hannah Arendt grasped, to her own horror, that most of humanity was capable of being like Adolf Eichmann, her insight offended progressive circles. It still offends. Only Nazis are capable of Eichmann's crimes, or so we wish to believe. In 1947, Albert Camus had reached, in *The Rebel*, conclusions similar to those of Arendt. The Parisian philosophical avant-garde rewarded his insights with expulsion. His crime was tracing the totalitarian excesses of the twentieth-century to Rousseau's naïve and Manichean view of human goodness and corruption. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau argued for freedom, justice, and equality in terms that left little room for compromise. His theory of the "general will" posited that once the majority had spoken, there was no turning back on the power it invested in its leaders. Any deviation from the "general will" merited death. Thus freedom, justice, and equality became forever linked to the guillotines of the French Revolution. Camus argued that the "general will" was manifest in the Gulag and the Holocaust. Arendt saw its face in the murderously obedient passivity of Eichmann. Beyond the Left's condemnation of *The Rebel*, Arendt and Camus defied bourgeois niceness and its insistence on preserving the illu-



Hannah Arendt

Adolf Eichmann

Albert Camus

sion of progress and goodness at the expense of truth. With the rise of postmodernism, truth itself would be relegated to the provinces.

Niceness is the hallmark of the bourgeoisie and the enemy of the avant-garde. The bourgeoisie and the avant-garde can only coexist in a state of conflict. Each must provide resistance for the other, and neither must win. The mission of the avant-garde is to force the bourgeoisie to reflect upon its nature, actions, and complacency. In turn, the bourgeoisie must reject the avant-garde with outrage. If the two are reconciled, both lose in a mutual pyrrhic victory. The true winner is the tyranny of niceness: a stultifying climate of pleasant meaninglessness that provides an illusion of edginess and risk in the same way that a voyeur enjoys a sexual spectacle without the dangers of pregnancy, emotional entanglement, or disease. Niceness is peace without life. It embalms what appears to be alive through a slow but painless asphyxiation that leaves the unblemished corpse of postmodern inanity for contemplation without insight.

Avant-garde is a violent term inseparable from its bellicose twin vanguard. It refers to the forward-most soldiers of an advancing army. Its modern meaning as a forward-thinking, experimental force was understood to imply disruption, revolution, and newness at the expense of tradition, predictability, and peace. Such a lineage is incompatible with either stability or the bourgeoisie. Yet, paradoxically, it poses more challenges for the avant-garde than for its opponents because a state of permanent revolution is unsustainable. If the avant-garde succeeds in its revolutionary mission, then it automatically becomes the bourgeoisie in everything but name. This was

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Niceness is peace without life. It embalms what appears to be alive through a slow but painless asphyxiation that leaves the unblemished corpse of postmodern inanity for contemplation without insight.

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the case with the Russian Revolution when it turned from modern art, music, and literature to Social Realism in the service of state capitalism. More recently, the Chinese Communist Party has become the world's foremost bourgeois oligarchy with a minimal pretense to revolutionary aspirations. In the United States, the most radical elements of the counterculture are entrenched in academic administrative positions where they enjoy six-figure salaries while imposing conformity and uniformity in the name of diversity, inclusion, and niceness. These developments are only surprising to those who refuse to look at history with fully open eyes. They are only mysterious to those who fail to recognize the universality of mendacity. As Salvador Dalí said in an interview at the height of the Franco dictatorship, "Picasso is a Communist and neither am I." Could the message be clearer? If the art world rejects Dalí's kitschy showmanship while edifying Warhol's, it is only because he was disconcertingly close to the truth. He had struck the raw nerve of avant-garde hypocrisy by shedding light on its sociopolitical contradictions. Dalí, the flamboyant Catalan, was not always nice whereas the fey and far more mercenary American was perceived as harmless, a quality admired in the land of Disney, a place where everyone loves Jesus, Mickey Mouse, and softness even when they pose as Leftists.

Like any revolutionary movement, the avant-garde dies through success. It ceases to exist the moment it enters academia, the museum, business, or government. It becomes traditional, conservative, and canonical through grants, acquisitions, retrospectives, awards, symposia, and board memberships. The avant-garde, like any rock musician who survives youthful debaucheries, grows old ungracefully. It can only be young, cute, and revolutionary for an instant. If it dies young, it is remembered as history, a cruel fate for anything that aspires to be hip. The contradictions are irreconcilable. Yet the

United States has worked diligently, not to reconcile, but to erase those contradictions under the dictum, "That which cannot be defeated can be purchased into submission." The declawing and defanging of the American avant-garde was, of course, an organic and collaborative process rather than a conspiratorial affair. Notwithstanding Clement Greenberg's involvement with the

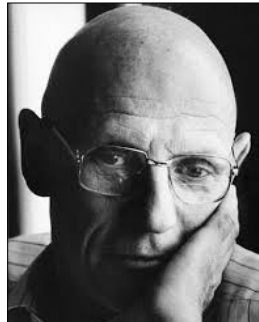
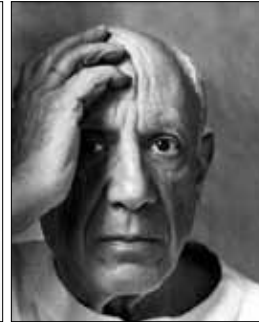
State Department during the Cold War, the American avant-garde was an anomaly destined to sit on the coffee tables of genteel homes. When wealthy Americans discovered that modern art went well with tasteful furniture, and postmodern performances and installations could be funded for the sake of tax deductions, the avant-garde became the lapdog of the very people it held in contempt. Unlike the old European aristocracy that actually lived with its art, the American bourgeoisie learned to talk and write about it dispassionately and incomprehensibly with the borrowed language of

French theories it did not understand yet learned to cite impeccably. A little Foucault at a cocktail party could impress insecure patrons into opening their checkbooks. Meanwhile, generations of aspiring artists mastered the tortured and pedantic phraseology of art journals in order to defend what should have been burned rather than shown. Like the Puritans who conquered Massachusetts for the sake of founding a theocracy in the name freedom, the American art world learned that newness wrapped in moral rectitude was the key

Salvador Dalí



Pablo Picasso



Michel Foucault



Andy Warhol

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When wealthy Americans discovered that modern art went well with tasteful furniture, and postmodern performances and installations could be funded for the sake of tax deductions, the avant-garde became the lapdog of the very people it held in contempt.

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to fame and fortune. The lie would hold as long as it could be repackaged every few months.

What now passes for an avant-garde is inseparable from contemporary liberalism. Yet unlike its progressive antecedents of the 1930s and 40s, twenty-first century American liberalism is an anti-sensual, anti-corporeal, and anti-humanist rejection of pleasure, pain, and life. It is a quest for numbness: an anesthetic and anti-aesthetic paralysis born of fear, neuroses, and all the insecurities that stem from a deeply held belief in salvation. It is the illegitimate child of puritanical repression and schoolmarmish institutions. It is, to borrow from Nietzsche, the “eternal no” that believes itself to be progressive but, in fact, goes nowhere. If it were a coherent ideology, it would be called Marxism-Calvinism.

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A little Foucault at a cocktail party could impress insecure patrons into opening their checkbooks.

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Twenty-first century American liberalism is not, of course, a coherent ideology. As with any child of an illicit union of incompatible parents, it has their DNA but lacks the upbringing. The intellectual rigor and discipline of Marxism and the stoic self-restraint and patience of Calvinism are completely absent. The resulting mishmash of beliefs retains only the class-based resentment and messianic hysteria of its parents. It wants revolution without undergoing the sacrifices necessary to achieve it. As a result, it must rely on the governmental and educational machinery of the system it hates in order to appropriate the power it thinks will grant it the pain-free life it deserves. Notwithstanding occasionally impressive protests that give an illusion of proactive energy, its means to power are predictably passive-aggressive. Since the movement rejects history and rigorous philosophical inquiry and lacks the linguistic and rhetorical skills necessary for meaningful self-expression, it can only win its debates by censoring its opponents. Without the tools with which to construct convincing rational arguments, it flails about wildly until it settles down sufficiently to proclaim that reason and facts are the weapons of the “oppressor.” Self-defined identity, tribal collectivity, and personal feelings replace the more pragmatic concerns of the American Left of the 1930s and 1940s. When

the anxieties of working class parents trying to feed their families fall prey to gender, sexuality, language, race, ethnicity, and an insincere empathy for the most retrograde religious identities, it is only a matter of time before the backlash finds a demagogue to represent its interests. If that moment has indeed arrived, it will not bother with freedom, justice, and equality but will retain the illusion of progress as the vanguard of the new revolution...then again, it can't happen here. ■

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It is an understatement to say that the 2016 presidential election continues to shock progressive circles. There is no need to go into political details to understand that what appears to be the beginning of a Right-wing revolution has deep cultural roots across the American ideological spectrum. Unfortunately, we seem to lack the means and will to attempt an understanding. The clichés of the 1960s do not do justice to the new reality. Nor do the analytical tools of postmodern theory explain what many see as the potential death of American democracy. New questions must be asked. New analytical tools must be developed without the utilitarian burden of solutions—at least in the short term. This essay, and the two that will follow in future issues of the New Art Examiner, pose painful questions within the context of Western history and culture since the Enlightenment. They will not provide answers, but they may provoke more questions beyond the comfort of postmodern dogma.

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 is a native of Cuba who spent his formative years in Belgium. His European childhood, along with his family's experience as Cuban expatriates, gave him a historical outlook that permeates his work and scholarly research. His theoretical interests also derive from an earlier career in advertising as well as his fluency in French and Spanish. He currently participates in regional and international exhibitions and writes on subjects ranging from the Cuban Revolution to postmodernism. His work is represented in corporate collections and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

# For Whom (and What) Does an Artist Truly Perform?

What does artist Ai Weiwei's complex identity as an activist mean for artists campaigning on human rights

*by Feier Lai*

There were two years, 2011 and 2015, that well-known Chinese contemporary artist, Ai Weiwei, appeared near the top of Art Review's "Power 100," a ranking of the most influential people in the contemporary art world. Both years happened to coincide with events connected to his arrest by the People's Republic of China.

In 2011, when Ai Weiwei was named the most influential artist in the world, he was also detained by the Chinese government as part of a crackdown on political activists. As part of the process, Ai Weiwei had his passport confiscated. Four years later, in 2015, he finally regained his passport and, with it, the freedom to travel and work abroad.

Later that year, he appeared in second place on Art Review's "Power 100" list. Correlation doesn't equal causation but, in this case, it's an interesting one to consider. It seems as if the artist's perceived greatness is closely connected to his uneasy political relationship with China. Is Ai Weiwei's greatest redeeming quality the act of challenging China on behalf of the West?

Between 2011 and 2015, Ai Weiwei was featured in two documentaries (discussing his political imprisonment and activism) and had work pertaining to social issues exhibited at Blenheim Palace in England. This exhibit included a pile of porcelain crabs. They take on meaning within a specific cultural context: The Chinese word for "river crabs" is a homophone for the term alluding to "censorship" in Chinese media; It's a term netizens often use when critical articles suddenly disappear.

Ai Weiwei's artistic thesis revolves around the freedom of expression. He believes that art is not only self-expression, but a demonstration of human rights and dignity. For Ai, speaking out against injustice is as much a part of his everyday life as the art he produces. He said in 2009, "My activism is a part of me. If my art has anything to do with me, then my activism is part of my art."



Ai Weiwei during documenta 12 (2007)

The curious aspect about Ai Weiwei's identity as an artist-activist is that he isn't known within China the same way he is in the western art world. Most Chinese don't know about him, and the few who do know of him heard about him from his arrests. He is the guy who "got arrested for tax evasion and pointing his middle finger at Tiananmen Square." What knowledge people have of Ai Weiwei can also be partly attributed to his famous poet father, Ai Qing, whose works appeared in many Chinese middle school textbooks.

Many who read about Ai Weiwei in the news dismiss him as a "typical crazy artist" or as a miscreant who is provocative for the sake of provocation. This impression comes from his irreverent approach to art. When he smashed Han vases that were regarded as cultural heirlooms, many Chinese saw him as being mindlessly disrespectful towards history rather than thoughtfully critical of it. Nevertheless, a majority of ordinary citizens are not concerned with Ai. The social

implications of his work are not discussed widely in the country that they are meant to affect. That means Ai Weiwei's real target audience (regardless of his intent) is outside of China.

Ai Weiwei's critical works about Chinese society are primarily consumed and discussed in the West. Looked at in that way, he seems to serve a performative rather than transformative purpose. His works become performances that validate preconceived notions of non-Chinese towards China. If he's not transforming Chinese society, and he is not an effective activist artist (the way he imagines himself to be), then what type of artist is he?

A quick online search will reveal that some critics believe Ai Weiwei isn't a great artist in either the aesthetic or conceptual sense. In a 2013 New Republic article, Jed Perl criticizes Ai Weiwei for being unoriginal in copying American modernism and merely inserting Chinese images. Perl acknowledges Ai's courage while dismissing his artistic merit with the verdict, "I admire the politics and am left cold by the art." He acknowledges Ai's importance as a political artist but Ai Weiwei's political identity is often difficult to pinpoint. He's a Chinese artist who makes a case for Chinese social change to an audience that is outside of China. At the same time, he tries to expand his experiences of social injustice in Chinese society into issues about international human rights. He wants to make his experiences relevant to every-

thing he sees in the world around him.

In November of this year, Ai held an exhibit in New York City called "Laundromat." In it, he displayed 2046 articles of discarded clothing from refugees who were forced to evacuate a camp along the Greek-Macedonian border. He cleaned and ironed the clothes because, growing up, he associated clean clothing with human dignity. His concern with the human experience of refugees is shown in his extensive visits to their camps. Since 2015, Ai has visited over twenty refugee camps across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East while documenting the impact of the crisis on people.

Ai attributes his passion to his family history. In the late 1950s, his family was sent to a labor camp when his father offended the Chinese Communist Party. Ever since then, Ai Weiwei has thought of himself as being a refugee and sympathizes accordingly.

The artist often toes the line between being outrageous and plain inappropriate, which doesn't stop when he addresses international issues. After taking a photo of himself lying on the Greek island of Lesbos, in reference to the famous 2015 photograph of Aylan Kurdi, a young Turkish refugee whose corpse washed onto the beach, Ai faced an immense backlash online. Art critic Mat Gleason, writing for the Huffington Post, called him out for mocking the tragedy and using it as a tool for self-promotion. He essential-

Study of Perspective  
Tiananmen (1995)





Protestaktion "Alle für Ai Weiwei" auf der DOCUMENTA 13.

ly accused Ai Weiwei of rubbernecking when he suggested Ai was simply in the area to "capitalize on tragedy" because he was collecting rubber pieces from refugee boats to make artwork.

A Chinese-speaking netizen commented on the backlash. A rough translation of his comment goes, "the West will back you (Ai) when you criticize the government no matter how distastefully it's done as long as it is your own government, but they won't really tolerate your input when you start talking about their government or other countries." It raises an interesting point.

Ai Weiwei seems discontented to comment solely on his motherland. He wants to be a global artist. The artist mounted an exhibit in Alcatraz, the former San Francisco prison in 2014, where he paid homage to victims and fighters for human rights all across the world including Edward Snowden and Martin Luther King. Although some of his motifs may be Chinese, the artist isn't confined to speaking about China. This isn't a surprise, but it is also no secret that criticizing China is his mainstay in the art world.

Almost every article about Ai begins by describing his rebellion against Chinese autocracy. That his audience most enjoys hearing him talk about China leads to some interesting questions. Are the issues that artists will be most recognized for defined by a single political identity? Who decides

that identity? Will a Chinese artist be taken more seriously in the West when they are talking about China in a way that reflects how the West likes to feel about China? Should a black artist only talk about the black community? Can a male artist talk about feminism and still be taken seriously? And if not, what are the implications of keeping each of us segregated within our niches?

Artists sometimes pick up labels throughout their careers which facilitate their discussion of underrepresented minorities whom they personally speak on behalf of. But at the same time, when these issues consume their practice and career, these artists spend less time engaging with issues outside of

their direct community. In a way, people might close themselves into a bubble. Do we do this because it's personally convenient and neat categorization makes content readily digested by a large audience?

If every artist plays a particular role, never to break character, then art becomes merely a performance with less relevance to the realities of a changing and nuanced world. Ai Weiwei is an artist who is simultaneously a political performer. It's impossible to conjure his image without envisioning Chinese politics. His claim to fame as an opponent of Chinese authoritarianism casts him as a specific archetype of an Asian artist. Just as tropes help viewers to quickly understand what type of movie they are watching, this archetype makes Ai Weiwei easier to position. This artist is still expanding his practice. Whether he will be equally valued as a global artist will reveal the art world's sincerity towards his politics. ■

Feier Lei studied industrial design at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She developed an interest in art as a form of storytelling. She likes to see how people convey ideas through their work while trying to make sense of their underlying narrative.

# Remembering David Bowie at St Germans

*by Carinthia West*

Yesterday, on the train from Penzance to Paddington, as I passed the tiny station of St Germans, I looked back, and high over the estuary bathed in the searing dawn light, was a perfect rainbow stretching over the rolling green lawns of Port Eliot, ancestral home of the Earls of St Germans. Port Eliot itself is not visible from the train, but so very visible in my mind's eye and my memories. It was here I introduced Peregrine St Germans, the owner of Port Eliot, to David Bowie, in 1981. It was on this lawn I photographed us all smiling and laughing in anticipation of a relaxed country weekend. David had a great love of Cornwall, its myths and its legends, so when I heard he was planning to take his son Joe (as he was then called) on a sojourn to the south-west, and knowing that my friend, Peregrine, was keen to have him play at his festival, the Elephant Fayre, I suggested a long weekend at an historic country house would give them the opportunity to discuss the possibility, plus a chance for me to catch up with my dear friend, Corinne Schwab, (known to friends as Coco), who was David's longtime PA, right hand, and trusted companion.

I had met David through my friendship with Coco in the late 1970's, and had shared many good times with them both. I'd travelled with them on a chartered boat up the Italian coast, watched David and his band perform at several concerts from the stage side wings, visited some of his film sets, hung out in homes in New York and Switzerland, and mine in Warwickshire, play Grandmother's Footsteps and Scrabble, and even be styled in London by David for my

first model shoot with a then unknown photographer called Mario Testino. (David had seen my portfolio of photos and pronounced them all 'rubbish'. "Rinthy", he said (his pet nickname for me), "there's this young Peruvian guy who's just done some pictures for me—I think he's really good—will you let me arrange a shoot for you?" One of the attributes that David had, and that I have not heard enough about in all the tributes and obituaries that poured in last January when the world woke up to the news of his tragic and untimely death, was that David was SO kind. He did not have to arrange anything for me, I was not his girlfriend, nor his protege, just a friend of his own best friend, Coco, and that was enough for him. He was also very funny, with a wicked sense of humour. Once on the set of 'The Hunger' a very old man approached me and said he was terribly sorry to bother me, but he was David's father and as David couldn't be on the set that day, he had been asked to look after me. It was only because everyone around us was sniggering, that I realized it was in fact David in full ageing Methuselah

Bowie, Eliot, Jago, Coco, and Carinthia relaxing in Cornwall in 1981.  
(Photo courtesy of Hugh Gilbert)



make-up. Later, when I left the modelling and acting world to be an unknown journalist in Los Angeles, he allowed me to do an interview with him for a music magazine. That interview put me on the journalistic map in America, and (in pre-internet days!) brought more commissions and just enough money to put the down payment on an apartment. He was always doing kind acts for people he liked, and the Testino shoot was just one. To my eternal regret, (and Mario's embarrassment) the negatives were lost at the lab, so David's hand at tweaking my Anthony Price dress, and Coco's assurances that my lipstick was not smudged, were lost forever, however the memory remains, and surely that is what matters in the end.

So we gathered at Port Eliot, David, Coco, myself, Joe (then about 10, and later to become the respected film maker Duncan Jones), and Marion, Joe's nanny and family friend. The weekend did not start auspiciously. Peregrine had some fixed views on children eating with grown ups and assumed that the four of us would sit down for dinner on Friday night (under the Rembrandt and drinking Leoville Barton) and Marion and Joe would "eat in the nursery." When I found out—minutes before their arrival—I was horrified. "David is here on a family holiday—he's a post divorce dad, and the whole point is that he sees Joe as much as possible. Marion is an integral part of the family. There is no way that David will want to eat in separate rooms." Peregrine was adamant and put on his best 'I am the 10th Earl of St Germans—this is my house so what I say goes' expression. "I have lunch at one and dinner at eight, and a no-children under 15 rule at each". I threatened to leave and take my friends with me to a nearby Cornwallian hotel, and grudgingly, Peregrine agreed, but the stage was definitely not set for the two men to bond. For all Peregrine's great charm and (much publicized) "eccentric hippie lifestyle," he was in fact deeply old-fashioned in some ways, and as the weekend progressed, despite some interesting trips like a visit to a local arts and crafts house, David never did play the Elephant Fayre. "Rinthy," said David conspiratorially to me, as Perry showed him the Robert Lenkowitz mural on his drawing room wall, and the maze with the bulls head buried at its centre, "I discovered the word 'Lucifer' scrawled in red on a mirror this morning. This place is too weird, even for me!" To be fair this probably had nothing

to do with Peregrine, as the mirror was in the rooms of the playwright Heathcote Williams, who at that time was lodging in a wing of the house.

So, as my London bound train glides over Brunel's aqueduct in 2017, I look back to Port Eliot's lawn in 1981 and I remember that I took a photograph of us all that weekend. I took it with the camera on a tripod, then whipped round to sit on the grass. There's David with Coco behind him, me shading my eyes from the sun, and Peregrine with his son Jago. I suppose it was an original "Ussie," David died a year ago in the week of his birthday, just before releasing his final album, Lazarus, and Peregrine died in August, just before his beloved Port Eliot Festival opened. Jago too had sadly died, a few years ago, much too young. As the train pulls in to Plymouth, the rainbow recedes, and a whole bunch of cheerful yet rowdy football fans board, (deeply unconcerned with anything other than the beautiful game) my moment of reverie has passed. Putting on my headphones, I bed down in my seat and listen to Lazarus, David's last album, and the title song with the extraordinarily prescient lines "Look up here, I'm in heaven, I've got scars that can't be seen, I've got drama can't be stolen. Everybody knows me now", which, of course, is true. They know the very public David, the multi-talented musician, singer, song writer, actor, alchemist etc. His death caused a huge outpouring of tributes from fans. Lazarus, the play, opened in New York and London, and various pieces of his art collection were sold at Sotheby's, raising millions, and no doubt the spotlight and tributes will roll in again on the anniversary of his death. His extraordinary legacy will live forever, but on the morning he died, so elegantly and quietly not even some of his closest friends knew (how like David). When I heard the news on the radio like everyone else, apart from the shaft of pure sadness that shot through me like a spear at the loss of someone I had personally known, I thought (rather selfishly on reflection) "no one will ever call me 'Rinthy' again"... ■

Carinthia West is a photographer and journalist. "The aim of showing my photographs is to give a glimpse of how we lived then. I think of it as an affectionate archive of a more innocent time. It is intended to inspire the young photographer to look around at their world and capture that fleeting moment before life moves on as it always does."

# Young Dutch Fashion Designer Conquers the GRAM

*by Isabella Li Kostrzewa*

Many times when looking for the latest innovation we seek scientists, engineers and technology. But what if I told you that there is a fashion designer who is combining art with technological innovation, collaborating with other artists, scientists, and architects, and is one of the premier design houses in the world? Iris van Herpen, the young, 33 year-old Dutch woman is proving there are no limitations to what can be done in the fields of art and design.

I was lucky enough to receive an opportunity to have an early viewing session of the new “Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion” show at the Grand Rapids Art Museum in Michigan. The show utterly blew my mind, featuring 45 pieces from 15 different collections, from years 2008 to the present. The pieces were some of not only the most beautiful designs I’ve seen, but innovative and intricate pieces of art as well. The show had pieces featuring fabric manipulated to look like smoke, glass mirrors that had been cut and pieced together, and magnetically pulled metallic textiles-among many other innovations-covering two whole floors of the museum. Iris has proven

that fashion innovation is still achievable with her designs, containing hundreds of hours worth of handiwork, and her use of new technologies such as 3D printing. Iris was one of the first designer to work with 3D printing technology. While showing us the first piece ever made with it (a white circularly designed top, far right in picture) she says, when they first started working with 3D printing, the idea was so unknown to the masses, they had to explain to people that what they were seeing wasn’t coming from a paper printer.

The only question here, how did the GRAM, a smaller midwestern museum, get the internationally acclaimed designer?

In interviewing Ron Platt, chief curator of GRAM, it became clear that Ron was ecstatic to have this show here. Ron first saw her work at the MET in NYC, where he was incredibly moved by it, later traveling to the Netherlands and seeing her workshop. He was part of the group that worked to bring this show to the USA, where it will tour several museums. He says “being chosen to have this show feels like being chosen to be in the Olympics. It’s a great honor.” When I asked Ron how he felt about having the collection at the GRAM,

he talked about how he really wanted to push the limits of the museum. He doesn’t want it to be just a simple, midwestern museum, but instead have it show the true innovation and design happening in the world today. Grand Rapids is a city that’s moving up, the people aren’t self conscious and are really ready to try new things. He thinks that people will respond well and will really appreciate the show on many levels.





important moments for me was to change my place from Amsterdam to Paris, like when I started becoming a guest member of the Parisian *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*. I think Paris is a very magical place for fashion. I think that has been a turning point for me to be able to showcase my work there, and to start working much more internationally. Another very important turning point has been this exhibition.

Iris shows us, not only how much there is to be achieved, but how age truly has no limitation on what you are able to produce. As I prepared to interview her, she stood patiently in a beautiful, intricately pleated, black dress. She seemed quiet, and kind, and I got the feeling she was always very observant of what was happening around her.

**IK:** Was fashion design always a passion for you? Did you always know that you would become a fashion designer?

**IvH:** When I was younger I danced a lot, classical ballet, until, I think I was 16 or 17. But at that time I already knew I wanted to go to the art academy (ArtEZ in the Netherlands). As a young kid I didn't know I wanted to become a fashion designer, but I was very much interested in sculpting and painting. I did one year of Art Academy where I studied different disciplines, I did sculpting and painting but, I also did fashion design, and I realized there that fashion was my discipline. It creates the space for me to still be working with the body and the movement, but also being able to sculpt and paint. It's the perfect marriage between all these disciplines.

**IK:** What has been your greatest achievement in your career, since you are so young, and you've already achieved so much?

**IvH:** It's difficult to say one, because I think it has been like a path, a walking path, from many different important moments. I think one of the

**IK:** Wow, really here? In Grand Rapids?

**IvH:** Yes here, and also where it started. This was my first big solo exhibition and it started off in the Netherlands, where I make my work. It has been traveling in Europe and now it's been traveling in the US. It's a very special moment for me to bring all the years together and to sort of time capsule all of the work.

**IK:** What is your advice for any young people trying to make it in fashion or in the art world?

**IvH:** Well the good thing is, there is not one way of succeeding. I think it's very important to find your own path, especially in this time, fashion is very transformative. There are a lot of changes happening in the fashion industry. But I think as a young designer you have to be very creative in the way you make your work, and the way you present it, and the way you communicate it to people. And I think there's a lot of freedom in that now. Much more freedom than we had before. So I think that's a good way of making use of it.

"Iris van Herpen: Transforming Fashion" is showing at the Grand Rapids Art Museum from October 23, 2016 to January 15, 2017. ■

## Romantic Realities

Speculative Realism and British Romanticism by Evan Gottlieb

Edinburgh University Press 2016

*by Daniel Nanavati*

Speculative Realism was born in 2007 at a conference in Goldsmith College, the same college that gave us the YBA.

Gottlieb wishes to ally to a grouping of speculative realist philosophers the names of the Romantic poets as a counter-balance to Kant and his followers. Despite his assertion that the links are so obvious and strong he does not suffer from a lack of historical perspective, his work has as much to recommend it as a work suggesting Darwin and Aristotle are linked.

Of course they are. But they are very, very different.

In brief, Speculative Realism separates itself from Kant. Kant asked the question “how do we handle knowledge?” because after Descartes no one had a good answer to the question “how do we know this is not all a dream?” Speculative Realists argue that you cannot reduce all existence to the human experience of existence. Like most philosophies there are as many positions taken on this as there are positions taken on what postmodernism means.

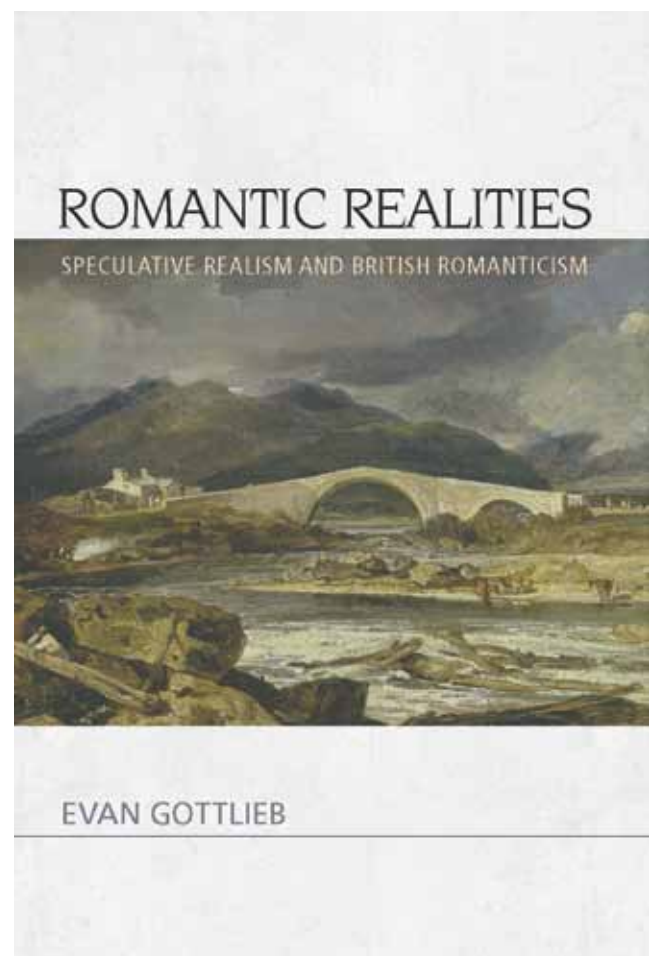
We should also be aware that today politics and philosophy are as intimately entwined with art, as politics and religion used to be and as such we should hold in our minds this is also an attempt to strengthen the academic foundation to the “everything is art” movement even as that movement is dying.

The Romantic poets were highly political. Byron’s only speech in the Lords inveighed against slavery; Wordsworth supported the early French Revolution when in France; and Shelley supported free thinking. Their lives are punctuated by a sense of women’s rights and the right to freedom of expression. They were a group of men who with Leigh Hunt published much about the misguided stringencies of conformity. Leigh Hunt was imprisoned for his publishing, Byron self-exiled for his lifestyle, Shelley and Keats died young. Their love of nature washes over the reader even today in much the same way as Shakespeare’s brilliant observances on human

character still ring out. Can we truly subpoena them to stand against Kantian expositions of what is knowledge and how our brains interpret reality?

This book runs to two exercises: to elucidate certain poems in terms of Speculative Realism and object oriented philosophy, and to interpret the poems in terms of Speculative Realism and object orientated philosophy.

Although they never had Kant, the Romantics knew the Declaration of Independence from the USA, knew about the new theories that were to become neuroscience and knew Darwin had published, in 1774, how animals had experience of the same sensations as humans. And here is where academics often mistake poets. Not every



poem from the same poet follows the same philosophy, not every thought is homogeneous with a consistent vision of the world. Ascribing poems to a philosophy of “things” is a grand exercise and as much use as ascribing all poetry to “entertainment.” True, of course. Insightful? Not a bit. It is a flake from the marble that is to become the statue. You can talk about this flake, where it was in the marble, its size, the day it was hacked away, why it had to go...but with all the talk at the end you are left with the flake, not the statue. So this book talks of the flakes of words from the Romantics but the political philosophy of nature these Poets describe is lost.

We may use astrophysics as a yard stick here. To test the accuracy of their theories astrophysicists work through their equations to see if they produce the necessary Universe for us to evolve. If we are impossible in their theory, their theory has the wrong parameters. In the same way poets and philosophers have long been trying to describe a reality in which thinking beings can question that reality “absolutely.” So far they have failed but new developments in brain research may help in the future.

Speculative philosophers could as easily go to Li Po as the Romantics for a theory of “things,” for an engagement with nature that side-steps Kantian theories of knowledge. For in every word ever written by every poet we can derive not questions of experience in and of itself but questions of what experience means. All poets are philosophers, politicians, sociologists, commentators, legislators, and prophets.

Gottlieb says: “Coleridge, like Wordsworth, was not prepared to accept fully the radical implications of a reality that exists autonomously from humanity’s thoughts and needs,” hinting that within their work we might find the exact opposite of what Gottlieb is trying to prove. And we can because he leaves out many poems and does not deal with the greatest element of Shelley, the rights of mankind and the loss of freedoms to ordered society with which nature endowed us.

There are great insights in this book:

“For Coleridge a cardinal value of the arts was that they humanized nature and so helped repossess it for the mind from which it had been alienated.” M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*.

And again the

“...epoch-making claim that the mind actively processes or organizes experience in constructing knowledge, rather than passively reflecting an independent reality.” Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism*.

But chief amongst them is Gottlieb’s observation that Byron was asking “What if society itself is an effect and not a cause?” The book that discusses this is a book worth reading.

But few of these are mined deeply as this is not primarily a book of literary criticism though most of its pages are taken up with close readings of famous poems.

Ultimately this book is an academic exercise, a good thesis for a Doctorate, but you cannot suborn to a modern philosophical movement names from the past without loss. The loss here is that the Romantics were all highly individual. They came together with a shared love of poetry and a deep empathy with nature. They were also wise critics of their society. They would have read and discussed Descartes, Berkeley, and Hume. Human rights were on their agenda both from the wild wind of change blown by Napoleon that fell on bloodied battlefields across Europe, and from the fall of Monarchies. These are all ‘real things’ to these thinkers. Pain and sorrow are caused and they understood the causes.

I am not unconvinced at the worthwhile endeavour to grasp as the nature of things and the processes of knowledge, but this book merely attempts to include in a field of many whose names are unknown, names that everyone knows. ■

Daniel Nanavati is the UK editor of the *New Art Examiner*.

# When God Was a Woman

Musings on the Art of Monica Sjöö (1938–2005)

*by Fiona Hamilton*

**T**he works of Monica Sjöö, Swedish born artist and radical feminist, explore themes of feminine power and socio-ecological responsibility.

Highly influential in the Goddess Movement, some of her early works, which sit on the distaff side of politics and religious faith, were banned. “God Giving Birth” (1968), of God as a woman in full frontal parturition, made her the subject of furious debate and objections which propelled her into the public record. Her later creatures in trees, fungal fruiting bodies, the spirits of place, are seen at times grimacing in pain, or with blank, pitiless stares of the immortal, of the divine, the numinous or the alluringly predatory.

Sjöö’s medium is oil and oil pastel on cloth and board. Her reverence for the environment, and for women of all backgrounds as repositories of a forgotten, hidden knowledge, becoming free and ‘losing their chains,’ were themes throughout her life. Depicting rounded and angular forms, portals and caverns, darkly or partially lit scenes, images of earth, sky, stones and vegetation, her work ornamented and embellished with serpentine, animalistic, shamanic paraphernalia. Her brush strokes are frenetic, with something of Van Gough’s frantic ‘seeing’ of life. Textures of the canvas surface are agitated, inviting us to strain our mind to see, as if beneath the changed surface of water, to visually travel toward things spiritual, ritual, primal, vital somewhere in our unconscious.

Women display archetypal symbols of female power; serpents, spirals, snakes, stone amulets, headdresses and staffs of office, as found in archaeological digs and descriptions from many of the world’s cultures. Full-figured women with exaggeratedly rounded buttocks and breasts, are flanked on thrones by power animals (lions, wolves, bears, bees), or strong, slim and proud figures carrying symbols of their power (Lilith’s the bar and ring, Inanna’s high hat, or fecund vegetation) enriched with ciphers and symbols, (zigzags, swastikas, cup marks, triangles, double axe heads, crescent moons, triple leaved flowers),

speaking of many older cultures. Monica Sjöö is best done ‘face to face.’ Don’t be fooled by the reproductions of these works on line.

The artist uses a range of greens, moon-grey blues and whites as sacred colours for her forests, temples and dimly lit subterranean landscapes. She picks out detail in visceral yellow and red ochres. Entrances were often gateways to other worlds and other realities, being simultaneously both vulva and womb-entrance of the Mother. Sjöö’s paintings carry that dual quality knowingly, with their megalithic tombs, neolithic chambers and holy wells. Proximity and special lighting reveal an extraordinary and singular experience of the hidden energy of her work. It is well documented that psychotropic substances used by our ancestors and by certain tribes and clans to this day induce trance-like states for shamanic travel. The frenzied brush strokes and vivid, visionary quality of the over 40 pieces exhibited in Cornwall after her death at the age of 66, worked on the audiences. We became a collective mind surrounded on all sides by the pulsing energy of all her worlds and all our pasts. As turning lights were adjusted to just a little more red, our already charged minds expanded; worlds and goddesses and shaman masks were moved.

Psychedelic and surreal we were inside our own creative femininity. In the words of one writer, the paintings “transformed ancient images and symbols,” returning them to our awareness. Directly influencing the feminist and Goddess movements, they go on awakening men and women to them as “contemporary icons of female power.” ■

Monica Sjöö Memorial Trust. For more information:  
<http://www.monicasjoo.org/>  
<http://www.monicasjoo.com/>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/sep/23/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries1>

Fiona Hamilton is a teacher, linguist, artist and modern prophetess. She lives and works in Cornwall, UK.

## Painters' Painters

### Artists of Today who Inspire Artists of Tomorrow

Saatchi Gallery, London, UK (November 30, 2016–February 28th 2017)

Works by Richard Aldrich, David Brian Smith, Dexter Dalwood, Raffi Kalenderian, Ansel Krut, Martin Maloney, Bjarne Melgaard, Ryan Mosley and David Salle

*by Helen Coakes-Blundell*

I anticipated this exhibition with mixed feelings. I wondered: are these artists all they're cracked up to be, or products of a genius marketing job? As an arbiter of good and relevant contemporary art Saatchi is doubted by many, indeed he has been accused of its 'commodification' and this exhibition is drawn from his own collection.

The Saatchi Gallery is impressive—a stateily columned building with 70,000 square feet of pale wooden floors, over which float pristine white walls, lit to perfection. What artist wouldn't dream of exhibiting their work in such a perfect setting? It would be hard to make work look bad in this space, indeed, I would venture to suggest that bad work could be made to look good. Which brings me back to the oddly named Painters' Painters, redolent of that awful expression "man's man." The underlying theme of this exhibition is that women's art is not as influential as men's.

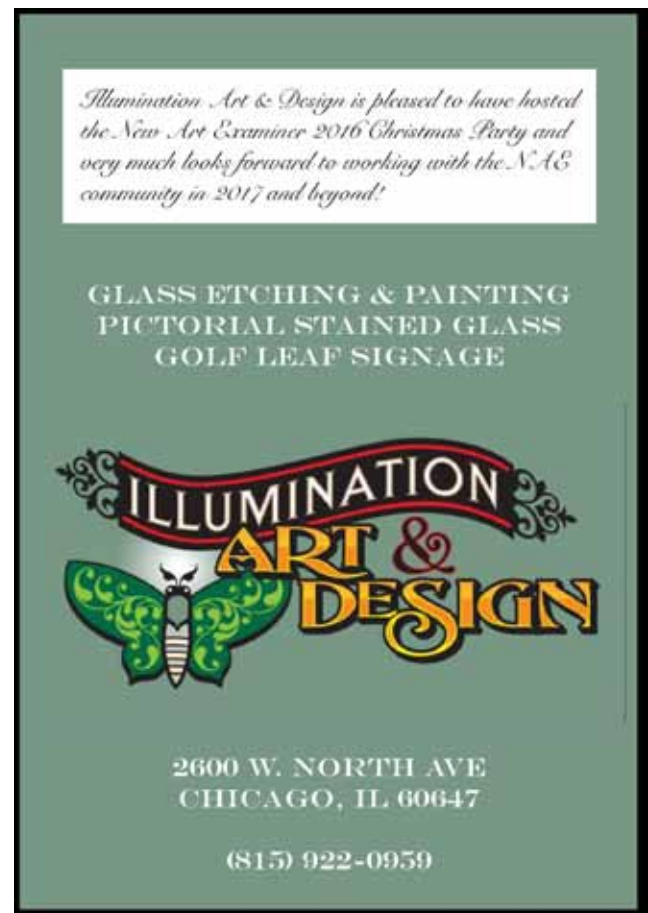
Large scale is obviously the way forward if you want to make it as a modern painter. Nothing in Painters' Painters is small, and most of it is very loud in content and colour, subtlety is also in short supply.

The other burning question for me is why only nine artists? Of course it's very neat that they just fitted into the nine rooms on the first two floors of the gallery, enabling each artist to have an entire room dedicated to their work. Some of it is not terribly recent, and none of it for sale at the moment.

I saw nothing that made me think "Yes, that's it, that's what I've seen influencing contemporary

artists of the last decade." I saw some good paintings, damn good in the cases of Ryan Mosely, David Brian Smith and David Salle, and decent in the cases of Dexter Dalwood and Raffi Kalenderian. But the collective works in this exhibition are being touted as the most influential for up and coming contemporary painters, and to "make it" their work needs to allude to these nine painters and their like. It is a narrow focus. Shame. I thought we lived in more enlightened times. ■

Helen Coakes-Blundell is currently studying BA (Hons) Painting, Drawing and Printmaking at Plymouth College of Art.



## Parade Excerpts at Corbett vs. Dempsey

Review of Cauleen Smith (October 21–December 3, 2016)

by Kate Hadley Toftness

“CONDUCT YOUR BLOOMING.” Large fabric letters in a quilter’s assortment of blues and pinks are stitched by hand onto a black, sequined banner. At twelve and a half feet long and bisecting a corner of the room, Cauleen Smith’s banner takes over the “East Wing” of Corbett vs. Dempsey. The tight space also functions as a meeting room, where the reflective surface of a large black table repeats the banner’s message but does so as if in an echo chamber. And yet it is best that the gallery has not pretended to make this work at home on a wall: it is meant to be on parade.

Smith created the banner for the *Black Love Procession*, which she organized in September 2015 in response to an exhibition at Gallery Guichard in Bronzeville. That exhibition included an artist’s restaging of Michael Brown’s death, specifically his corpse, which remained in the street about four hours after he was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Smith’s featured banner is one of seven in the complete work that together proclaim a line from a Gwendolyn Brooks poem: “Conduct your blooming/ in the noise and the whip/ of the whirlwind.” The poem Smith references on the banners is part of

Brooks’ *In the Mecca*, her 1968 collection depicting the troubled lives of residents in the historic Mecca apartment building in Bronzeville.

As coordinator of the *Black Love Procession*, Smith took Brooks’ words into action as the “conductor” of a spontaneous band of artists and friends to promote a different vision of what takes place on the pavement in Black neighborhoods. To celebrate love and hope as an antidote to ignorance and violence, participants—community gardeners of a sort—marched from the Chicago Defender newspaper offices to Gallery Guichard. In photographs documenting the procession, the standard-bearers appear to be wearing gardening gloves in eye-catching colors: pink, green, blue, purple and yellow. This gesture towards a uniform signals both the power of spectacle and purposefulness of community labor.

Processional performance is not new for Smith. Inspired by her research on Sun Ra’s Arkestra, Smith has organized at least five iterations of the “Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band,” as “on-site flashmobs” at various Chicago locations, from Chinatown to the Museum of Contemporary Art. Parades are loud, celebratory displays



of coordinated publics. For Smith, these qualities make this form useful as one of resistance.

"The thing is resistance. Resistance is the Thing," writes Smith in her manifesto included in *Human\_3.0 Reading List 2015-2016*. This publication accompanies the exhibition and it is what saves the gallery from rendering Smith's work a dormant relic. If the banner rests with the energy of potential future processions, Smith's publication contains the seeds of engaged conversation and evolution. Her reading list comes in the form of 57 drawings of books that she says will provide readers with a partial "vaccine" for the plague of violent policing and oppression that besieges Black people in America. "While standing in the street, talk about what you are studying. While renovating your greystone, plant something that will live longer than you."

*Conduct your Blooming* exhorts viewers to grow, using verbs that suggest this action is both measured and organic. One might interpret the statement as an artistic maxim, directing the artist to create beauty by cultivating natural expression. The tone of the phrase is preempto-

ry: Take control! A statement out of time, it is an invitation to begin an already ongoing process.

Cauleen Smith's work exists as a record of action to urge future action. Smith writes, "This reading list is for the Doers-Who-Think; not the academics who think there's no point." A banner can only come alive when it is raised and in motion. In the open air, the blue and pink letters evoke an evening skyscape floating atop the razzle-dazzle black sequins that catch the sunlight. Just as Smith's manifesto prescribes study as action, *Conduct your Blooming* offers the opportunity to reconvene our intentions and energy for another march.

Smith's 57 works on paper from the *Human\_3.0 Reading List* will be exhibited in Spring 2017 at the Art Institute of Chicago. ■

Kate Hadley Toftness is an arts writer based in Chicago. As an organizer of things and culture, she focuses on archival practices that promote new creative work and social justice. In 2017, she is curating a year-long project convening artists to activate underutilized archives across the city.



The complete work of which "Conduct Your Blooming" is the first part. Courtesy of the artists and Corbett vs Dempsey Gallery

# Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis

Chicago Cultural Center (September 17, 2016–January 8, 2017)

by Larry E. Kamphausen

As I ascended the majestic staircase of the Cultural Center, I wasn't prepared for what I was to find. I am familiar with Norman Lewis' contemporaries, such as Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. But Lewis' abstract expressionism was unknown to me.

At the start of the exhibition, we see a painting, "The Woman in the Yellow Hat," that echoes Cubism, yet has its own character. The early work featured in "Procession" is figure work and city scenes, including all-too-relevant subject matter: police officers beating a black man. In the city scenes, line and color evoked sight and sound. I could hear the city in these paintings.

Norman Lewis's work is noisy. It doesn't make sound visual like Kandinsky (though one piece in the show is probably influenced by Kandinsky) but one can hear as well as see the paintings. This came to full bloom upon encountering "Jazz Musicians." I heard jazz looking at it. It's an astounding and slightly disorienting experience to both see and hear paintings and drawings. Sometimes it was noise or one tone; other times, it was rhythm or melody.

The exhibition sought to establish Lewis as influenced by and in the school of de Kooning or Kandinsky. Yet Lewis's body of work has its own idiosyncratic path not contained within the categories of "White-European-Avant-Garde" and "Art Establishment."

Rollercoaster, 1946, gouache, pen and ink on board



March on Washington, 1965 Oil on Fiberboard

Clearly, Lewis was friends with these artists and in conversation with avant-garde and the western art traditions, but his body of work doesn't seek to be reframed or in rebellion against the European art world. The entire body of work is melodious, rhythmic, and visually overwhelming. Lewis has a severity sprinkled with whimsy that is almost missed but comes out in two pieces, "Sunday Afternoon" and "Untitled," painted the year before he died. *Procession* presents works from Lewis' differing styles and periods leaving the observer satiated. ■

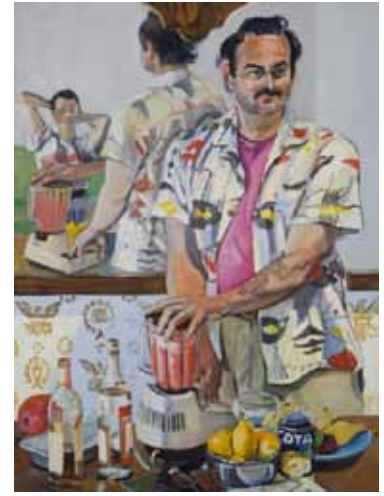
Rev. Larry E. Kamphausen, OJCR is an icon painter, theologian, writer, ordained minister, and goth. Larry also writes for the dark alternative Kilter Magazine. He has shown his work at the now defunct Gallery BIE and the Rogers Park Art Gallery.

## Rhona Hoffman 40 years Part 2: Gender, Race, Identity

(October 28–December 23, 2016)

*by Larry E. Kamphausen*

How to represent forty years of a gallery and the artists it has represented and shown? Rhona Hoffman Gallery is celebrating its forty years through three exhibitions of artists the gallery has shown over the years. Rhona Hoffman 40 years Part 2: Gender. Race. Identity showcases fifty pieces from eighteen artists, each with one to four pieces. At first Part 2 of this forty-year celebration was underwhelming: Is not all art on some level going to touch upon an aspect of either gender, or race or identity? In fairness, each of the artists in the show state that some aspect of their work is focused on either race, or gender or identity. Yet, to this observer, the works shown neither illumined, nor clarified, nor troubled gen-



Mike Glier— *Men at home: John* and *Men at Home: Jeremy*

Lorna Simpson  
Untitled Ebony  
Collage, 2013



der, race, and identity. What I saw presented what I expected to see about gender, race and identity. I realized this was partly so because no matter how old these pieces were this was all contemporary to me.

This is the art of my time, my culture. Mike Glier's "Men at home: John, and "Men at Home: Jeremy" are brightly colored sketchily painted figures. I lingered upon these striking images that catch moments in the motion of vacuuming and the blending of a drink. Lorna Simpson's untitled Ebony Collages, 2013, faces with waves of color floating around the faces captured my gaze. Also, Revolutionary Woman left me contemplating femininity. All the works shown had a certain power. The show consists of compelling, beautiful, and evocative work, if any of the pieces originally illumined or troubled gender, race, or identity, this was no longer the case. Now they only reflect what is common place and of our time. This isn't insignificant for a gallery's retrospective of its last forty years: Rhona Hoffman Gallery demonstrates it has had its fingers on the pulse of our time. ■

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.



# Scouting the Blogs Re-Politicizing the Art World

*By Thomas Feldhacker*

Boris Groys explains in an online essay titled “On Art Activism” that art activism is no longer effective through contemporary art because it commemorates

reality and the status quo, making it unpopular and useless to the mainstream. Society understands that it is organized by its inequalities but believes it can change its reality by pursuing upward mobility through natural talents and gifts. At least that is the attitude projected on to the unfortunate of the world. As if the world’s problems would all disappear once everyone realized their unique gift and capitalised on it. As Groys explains:

“[W]e are ready to protest against the inequality dictated by the existing systems of power—but at the same time, we are ready to accept the notion of the unequal distribution of natural gifts and talents. However, it is obvious that the belief in natural gifts and creativity is the worst form of social Darwinism, biologism, and, actually, neoliberalism, with its notion of human capital.”

Art activism, commonly titled “Art and Activism” within institutions, is a defining aspect of this period in art history. Many universities include a contemporary art and activism study as coursework in the curriculum which perpetuates the same approach and idealism to activism. This has become insidious yet ineffective at achieving political goals. The approach needs to change.

Both undergrad and MFA students at the USC Roski School of Art are actively fighting a repressive, authoritative administration committed to censorship. Each group has a Tumblr page dedicated to showing the public their efforts to form solidarity with staff and wellwishers, and to highlight the administration’s retaliation. In an effort to maintain solidarity, the entire MFA class that walked out in 2015 will show their thesis show

this upcoming spring in an alternative venue in LA as they would normally have done for their graduation. Although this is the most widely-known and actively followed example of student activism against their administration, it is not the only university facing this problem. Across the globe frustrated students are speaking up and yet they are disregarded as entitled and ignored. However, we forget that “consumers of education” are entitled to the quality education they were promised.

Scholar and art activist Sebastian Loewe breaks down the global Occupy movement and why it was ineffective in an online essay titled “When Protest Becomes Art”. Two reasons were attributed to the decline of Occupy in the art world. The first reason is that the turmoil being stoked in local demonstrations were initiated by insiders of the institutions that were being protested. The Occupy movement lacked a unified goal or platform and could easily be manipulated. If you were disenfranchised you could join the “99%”. Typically, a group of employees who wanted internal change but lacked the authority could easily persuade a group of people to demonstrate on the basis of abused ethics. Loewe infers that demonstrations that affected the institutions positively were quietly accepted, shutting down the public discourse that would have benefited the entire industry. The other reason for Occupy’s ineffectiveness were due to arts protesters natural inclination to the “aesthetics” of the protest. Protesters stopped churning political discourse in exchange for the opportunity to declare anger and desire for change, but without truly scrutinizing the system for changes needed to accomplish those demands. The public dismissed the fragmented demonstrations as works of art, reduced to an anarchic expression. Viewed as cliché and tasteless, in effect, it left them unproductive. For activism to be truly effective, Loewe says, “activists should put effort into the analysis of the systemic, antagonistic foundations of inequalities, damages and grievances in order to prevent moralistic criticism.”



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