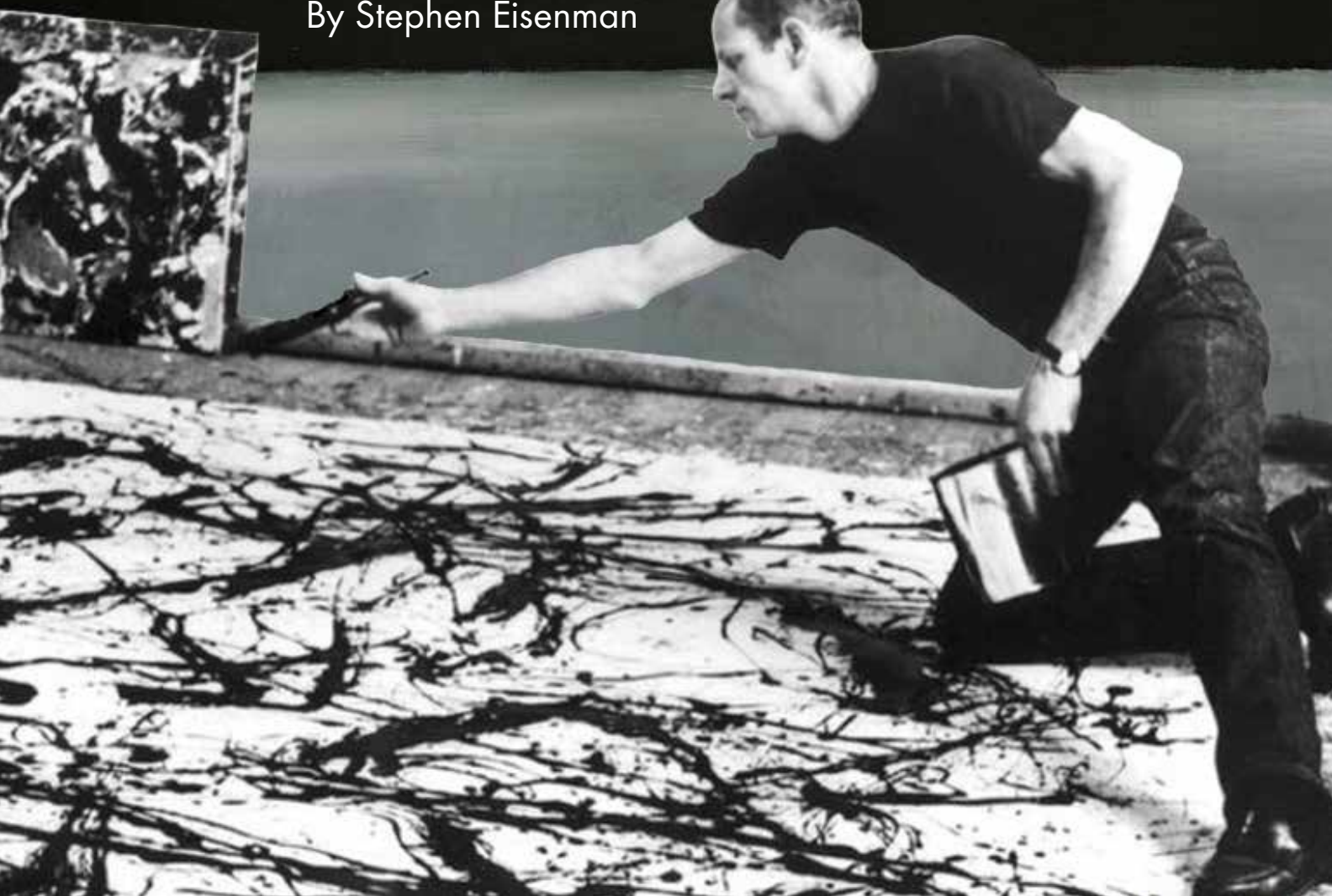


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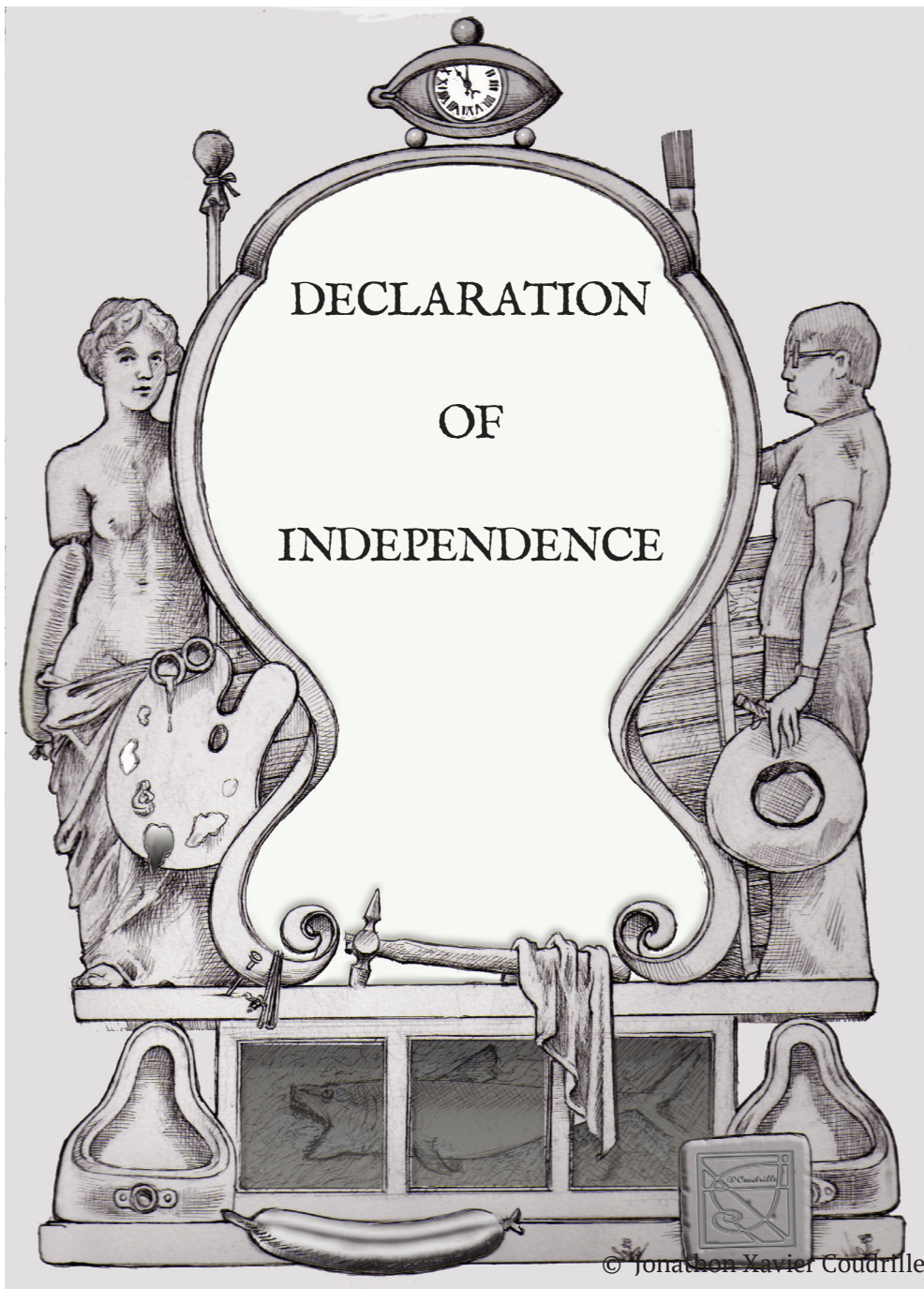


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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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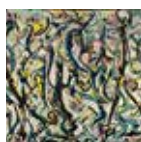
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November 8, 2016



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# New Art Examiner

Derek Guthrie, Publisher and Co-founder  
Vacant, Associate Publisher

Daniel Nanavati, UK Editor  
[ukeditor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:ukeditor@newartexaminer.net)

Annie Markovich, U.S. Editor  
[useditor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:useditor@newartexaminer.net)

Tom Mullaney, Senior Editor

Thomas Feldhacker, U.S. Business Manager  
[thomas.feldhacker@newartexaminer.net](mailto:thomas.feldhacker@newartexaminer.net)

Thomas Feldhacker, Social Media Editor

Anne Godden Ségard, Copy Editor

## Contributing Editors

John Link, Michigan  
David Houston, Georgia  
Donald Kuspit, New York  
Darren Jones, New York  
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Michel Ségard

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## UK Office:

Rosehill, Altarnun, Cornwall. PL15 7RL. UK.

## US Office:

5542 N. Paulina St., Chicago, IL 60640. USA.

## Inquiries:

[advert@newartexaminer.net](mailto:advert@newartexaminer.net)  
[contributor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:contributor@newartexaminer.net)  
[subscribe@newartexaminer.net](mailto:subscribe@newartexaminer.net)

All Letters to the editor are printed.  
[letters@newartexaminer.net](mailto:letters@newartexaminer.net)

Chris Smith, Chair of the UK Associates  
Roland Gurney, Treasurer

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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.

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Dear Editor,

### Measuring The Un-Measurables In The Arts

Was Pablo Picasso a 'better' artist than Salvador Dali? Or is Leonardo Da Vinci the 'greatest' artist that ever lived? Or is Damian Hirst the 'winner' of our modern artists because of his commercial success and wealth? I do not think so, as these terms 'better', 'greatest' and 'winner' are subjective, competitive and capitalist market terms, that in my opinion, cannot and should not be applied to art or indeed the arts in general. Like beauty, love and happiness, the arts fall into the elevated category of the un-measurable and cannot and should not be compared, measured or be competing for prizes, awards nor indeed patronage.

When one is observing the Turner Prize, the Oscars or some other competition in the arts, see it for what it is; a commercial and entertainment enterprise along the lines of television's X-Factor or the Great British Bake-Off and not a true measure of true art or the true artists. The need for a new language, a new art economy and a new thinking is vital and necessary now more than ever, during these turbulent times of this 'brave new world'.

I propose a new art movement (yet to be named) should have a 'Hippocrates- type' oath, art events that are rewarded with 'favourite', 'most relevant' and 'most collaborative' prizes & awards and maybe a monetary (or some other alternative currency) award system based on the 'honesty box' or art auction concepts by paying what one feels the art work is worth or what the patron can afford, maybe with a minimum guide price feature. Redwing Arts Centre is the perfect location to launch such a movement and whilst it launches its own crowd funding campaign to purchase the building for its own survival, maybe including some of these ideas, will help secure not just the building but 'light the fire' for this new art movement. 'Viva la revolution'.

*Dominic A. Ghisays*  
Penzance, Cornwall.

### SEVEN HUNDRED PAGES (or, The Moribund)

We have become mountains,  
The cold, seeping upwards  
Through the wick of our bones,  
The skin of us,  
From the solid ground below.  
Shrouded in cloud, we lay,  
Our days tended toward healing,  
Or the reeling sense of death,  
Wheeling us to the grave;  
We are horizontal — but creative.  
Half in and half out  
Of all the worlds,  
We lie to one another,  
Debaters in our own juices,  
Revealing our congealing  
Points of view, speaking  
Our atrophied philosophies  
In the face of oncoming war.  
Locked into our  
Gated communities,  
We disengage, or disagree,  
Fearing  
Spaces without answers,  
Struggles without resolution...  
Reduced to icons, symbols,  
Syllables,  
We voice disillusion  
In daubs, and bytes,  
Tweets to the left,  
Tears to the right,  
While the art of argument, and  
Face to face conversation  
Is stifled,  
Entombed  
In the icy sanatorium  
Of the endlessly like-minded.  
Listen!  
In the echoing room  
We are moribund;  
The unique consumptive  
Coughs alone.

*Fiona Hamilton*  
Feb 6th 2017

Dear Editor

I recently listened to your founder Derek Guthrie speak in a discussion at Student Plymouth College of Art Convention, the debate was aiming to provoke ideas on the role of the art world today.

One thing he said was that the artists need to speak out to show everyone the energy and enthusiasm there is in the creative world. In every walk of life, as liberal minded people, we tend to mutter under our breaths and not verbalise our feelings when faced with some iniquity. We need to escape our retiring natures and speak out against injustices, nipping in the bud false truths before they become normality.

I would like to tell you about a recent example of corporate interference, curtailing freedom of expression that could be at very least, considered as an attack on our freedom of speech. But I feel it is symptomatic of institutional censorship. Truth is tailored to suit the aims of corporations and governments in an attempt to maintain the status quo.

Plymouth college of Arts students wanted to advertise their conference whose theme was the "importance of creative education," by placing a film loop on the big screen in Plymouth shopping Centre. This was taken off the air by the College Branding department on the grounds that the use of words like cuts and protest they considered were too inflammatory and not in keeping with the institution's message. Presumably they think the students should toe the line and not disagree with their policies.

The world is going through turbulent times, the stability of the last 40 years seems to be over and the only way individuals can make a difference is to stand up and speak every time we see even the smallest wrong.

Regards  
Mark Corfield

Dear Editor,

I am one of the group of students which organised The Art Students Conference (TASC 2017), held at Plymouth College of Art on 26th January. It was great to see both Daniel Nanavati and Derek Guthrie in attendance and thank you to them for their support. We were honoured to have Derek as one of our keynote speakers; the general theme for the day was Creative Education — with provocation based discussion.

I would like to congratulate and thank Derek for his outspokenness and anti-establishment stance; it was a pleasure to behold and he stoked the fire of debate brilliantly, whether you agreed with all, some or none of his views didn't matter! Perhaps some Derek Guthrie sound bites relating to the art market, art education, the art class divide, art as a weapon in class warfare, etc could be published adjacent to the NAE letters page, as provocations to keep the debate running.

On behalf of the organising group I would also like to thank our other speakers, Dom Jinks, Director at Plymouth Culture and artists, Isha Bøhling, Dan Wheatley and Pete Ward, also Rhizome, for helping to make a great day.

Sincerely,  
Guy Barkley-Smith

## WANTED: WRITERS

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

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Michel Ségard  
U.S. Editor  
**New Art Examiner**

at  
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## Judging Art in a Post-Modern World

If skill is a thing of the past – or at the least has become disassociated from the artist – and there are no standards by which to judge works, where are we left?

Too much philosophising can lead thinkers into blind alleys and back tracking is as hard a task as breaking new ground in thought. But a little back tracking is necessary to keep the interesting discoveries of Modernism while moving forward because right now we are stuck in a model of art that has remained unchanged for too long.

In 2016 when meeting with students at the Slade I was informed the new generation deals with art history better than the YBA. This was interesting as I believe that conceptualism threw everything out and impoverished itself. While giving us some fascinating insights it also produces the ridiculous – such as the mounds of crumpled up packaging paper from Amazon placed on a pedestal.

It is not sufficient to view the world in a unique way because we all do that. We have no choice we are all unique individuals and we filter reality in our own subtle ways even when agreeing with each other. So how do we actually set about judging the art we see?

This problem has confused the public and many artists. Judgment has gone nowhere even though critics have been diminished. But the reasons for judgment have been jumbled up and become enmeshed in the 'everything is art' concept of post-modernism. Everyone has their own discernment and everyone has ideas of what is art, what is artistic, what is crafted and what is

crafted well. But the voice of discernment is silenced by the fear that we cannot upset the social science mantra that we are all artists. If that were true we would not be living in the world we are living in. It is far more true to say that we are all salesmen but it is simply wrong to say we are all artists. Even if we were all engaged in artistic activity which we are not, some would have a better eye than others. To notice this is to be a critic and we all notice it.

Rethinking where we are is the next vital step in art history. To achieve that wisely we must rethink Duchamp, analyse government patronage of the arts and make public discourse the centre engagement because it is in discerning words we will find the future, for words and art have always gone hand-in-hand and it was their disconnection that has debilitated art.

*Daniel Nanavati*  
UK Editor

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# Art in Our Time and Political Milieu

*by Bruce Thorn*

We each pay the price for the times we live in, but what crazy and discomfoting times these are. To the arts falls the task of reflecting our times in meaningful and insightful ways. Good luck with that, Vincent. We struggle as individuals in a world where honesty, truth and justice have lost all meaning. The smells of corruption, greed and injustice are everywhere. How can we address monumental problems facing the world today? Don't read this looking for answers because all I have is a freight train full of lonely questions.

Must contemporary art be politically engaged to maintain relevance? Must artists always focus on war, genocide, racism, police brutality, the orange monster, poverty, climate change and other issues that make me skeptical of the human race? Is it valid for artists to offer non-political antidotes to problems? I keep moving along, exploring new visual and audio environments but real world big issues keep dragging me back to the same old walls that we forever bang our heads against without making necessary improvements.

Making art might seem decadent in these times, but is it up to artists to solve social, political and environmental problems? Subjects taught in art schools differ greatly from those covered in political sciences. Artists are often good with color, line, form, space, light and even history, but not so versed in economics or warfare. They might learn how to get critical attention, but not how to solve existential problems facing humanity. The way of the artist is to keep eyes, mind, ears and heart open.

Art always struggles to compete for attention in the face of dramatic events and sundry disasters. Corporate media sensationalizes and baits every angle and has failed us by design. Cheering onward this or that team or special interest group won't yield any real winners because the only common goal out there today is the hollow accumulation of power and wealth, with its flip

side of austerity and miserable competition for losers. The media is the message and the message is corporate. We get splashy headlines and roadside disasters, without in-depth, non-partisan, follow up analysis.

Too much contemporary art does a fine job of reflecting these times with shiny, shallow, one-line, over-priced, tribal, trans-fat merchandise that might very well be completely irrelevant tomorrow. Nuance does not sell and the spirit of the times denies personal responsibility. Artists should confront big issues with personal integrity and honesty, not by adding to the stench with more corrupt, phony constructs. The marketplace pimps temporary personal and group identity as hooks and ploys while losing sight of universal objectives. Art can only avoid this trap through transcendence, by being so damned good that it just knocks everybody's socks off. Maybe in the near future art making will be outsourced to programmed robotic enterprises. The ruling class would be good with that and there might be broad based bi-partisan support.

What artists usually do in periods of uncertainty is to take a few steps back and have another look. The world is a fine mess, but I still want to paint my pictures and play guitar. Think of the myth of Nero fiddling while Rome burned. Fiddles didn't exist in 64 AD. Many Romans believed that Nero started the fire himself, in order to clear land for his planned palatial complex. Did the fire result from Nero's eccentric habit of dipping Christians in oil and burning them live to illuminate his groves at night? I have a few fine old guitars and they each sound much better than any of today's talking heads or palace lackeys.

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

# Art is Our Weapon

by Stephen Felminham

*Art is our weapon. Culture is a form of resistance.*  
Shirin Neshat

Neoliberalism as an economic ideology is based on promoting “rational self-interest” through policies such as privatisation, deregulation, globalisation and tax cuts, in which we now see the widest gulf between rich and poor in modern history. Culture and the arts have not been spared- artists have steadily fallen into the trap that has meant that art-working is at worst impossibly precarious, at best neurotic, always-on, freelance and wired, an existence that figures quite neatly with the demands of the neo-liberal agenda. As Liam Gillick has said: “Artists are people who behave, communicate, and innovate in the same manner as those who spend their days trying to capitalize every moment and exchange of daily life. They offer no alternative to this.” In many ways we have what we always dreamed of- art and life have become one, except it has materialised in a de-regulated nightmare, a “continually mutating capitalism of the moment.” (Gillick). The results for creative arts education are apparent. We see the results of government cuts to creative subjects, by now well-rehearsed in the media, with shrinking provision for anything outside of the sciences in schools. Philanthropy and private funders are meant to pick up the slack. Politicians and ministers, often with cultured and educated backgrounds themselves, are responsible for a diminishing of the arts for generations of young people.

But I believe some of the responsibility has to be shared by creative arts education itself. We have been guilty of a lack of vision in two ways: firstly that we have argued very successfully for creativity as a cross-disciplinary tool in education, uncoupling it from the study of the Arts as discrete subjects. Secondly we have found it hard to argue for the outcomes and benefits of creativity in a convincing way that has not had to use the language of the market and its metrics. This

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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.

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first point has led to the closure of the art-room, as the government has been made to see how creativity is present in all subjects: we now have sci-art in schools, we write creatively about geography and this has been a gift to the market-forces that see the spaces and resources of arts in education as wasteful. But the second statement is more worrying and has more to do with a wholesale marketization of creativity. If artists are the ultimate capitalist workers, then the failure of the arts education to adequately describe its benefits even to itself means that the gap is closing from both directions- corporate models of creative strategies play out in education settings and the prevailing narrative is of innovators and design thinkers who service the miracle of the £84 billion creative economy.

What we have perhaps forgotten is the transformational potential of art for its own sake. This is the ability of a painting or art object to change everything, completely, in the life of its beholder. An outcome that may take twenty, or fifty years to manifest but is nonetheless that of the collective human project. But history is passing us by now. We had better get our message across, and fast, to make the case for the intrinsic worth of art to society before we find it becoming the province of only the wealthy.



Stephen Felminham is Programme Leader: BA (Hons) Painting, Drawing & Printmaking Plymouth College of Art. He gained his doctoral thesis at the University of Leeds. His areas of research interest are landscape, drawing, place and the contemporary sublime. He studied MA Drawing at Wimbledon School of Art where he won the Postgraduate Drawing Prize and was shortlisted for the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2009.

# Energy in Motion

“Abstract Expressionism” at London’s Royal Academy of Art

*By Stephen Eisenman*

The decade and a half between 1945 to 1960, the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, may turn out to be the most consequential in the history of the planet. That’s when the human impact on nature became so great that the survival of life itself was threatened.

The U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Soon after, both the U.S. and Russia tested hydrogen weapons. By 1960, nuclear residues were detectable everywhere, including in breast milk. In 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world teetered on the edge of destruction.

The same period saw accelerated economic growth and equally rapid degradation of the environment. Every graph of socio-economic trends shows a precipitous rise in the use of energy, water, transportation, metals, minerals and fertilizer. And following from these, increased ocean acidification, precipitous loss of tropical forests, elevated levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane, and higher temperatures.

Scientists have determined the changes were so dramatic that the period marked the start of the most recent geologic epoch, the Anthropocene, when earth systems no longer followed their natural course but were instead directed by humans.

What does the Anthropocene have to do with Abstract Expressionism? Put simply, one was a precondition of the other. The energy and destructiveness of the former finds expression in the latter.

Clyfford Still’s paintings, such as *PH-123* (1954), included in the recent, Royal Academy exhibition, “Abstract Expressionism,” suggest post-apocalyptic landscapes made of shards, scars and geologic ruins. Mark Rothko’s stacked rectangles are invitations to another world. But once entering, we detect a disturbing radioactive glow—they are a refuge and a tomb.

Willem de Kooning rendered women and urban life as a sum of derangements—the body and the city cut in pieces. The Art Institute of Chicago’s great de Kooning, *Excavation* (1950), not lent to London, is the paradigmatic example. Figure presses against figure, surface against depth and edge against center in a battle of all against all. Barnett Newman both reduced painting to elemental geometries and expanded it to global scale.

With his mature, nearly black rectangles such as *Abstract Painting* (1956), Ad Reinhardt sought to eliminate personality and history in the name of a refined and purified art of negation. More

Jackson Pollock, *Mural* 1943



than any of the others, Jackson Pollock represented the frenzy and fallout of his age. When he described his paintings as “energy and motion made visible” we should take him literally. They were derived from the energy of atomic power, fossil fuels and the motion of fast cars on new highways. Pollock’s was not an explicitly political art—it was a visualization of the uncertainty, danger and dynamism of the age.

The Abstract Expressionists represented the last generation of Americans to experience in their youth a society not yet fully capitalist. And their biographical particulars made them particularly sensitive to this historical circumstance. Rothko was born in Dvinsk in 1903, in pre-Revolutionary Russia and migrated to Portland, Oregon at age ten. In his teens, he heard speeches by Bill Haywood, Emma Goldman and the other anarchists associated with the IWW. By the late 1940s, he had fully abjured representational art.

Gorky was a year younger than Rothko, and born in the village of Khorgom, in what is now Turkey. His family fled the Armenian genocide in 1915, and nearly his entire career was based upon memories or dreams of that distant and haunted land. *The Orators* (1947) and *The Limit* (1947), both included in the exhibition, contain vestiges of pre-industrial farm machinery and suggestions of cultivated fields.

De Kooning, one of Gorky’s closest friends, was born in Rotterdam, also in 1904, and arrived in the US in 1927 as a stowaway. He worked as a house painter and odd-jobber before joining the Federal Art Project. His mature art was existential, affirming the value of being over meaning. By the late 1940s, abstraction and representation were the same to him—affirmations of sheer existence and nothing more.

Pollock was born in Cody, Wyoming and grew up in Arizona and Southern California. He was expelled from Manual Arts High School in L.A. for being a communist. Later, he spent time in the Southwest, learning about Native American culture. His drip technique was inspired in part by Navajo sand painting and in part by the rhythms and movements of modern dance.



Barnett Newman, *Galaxy* 1949

Pollock was the pre-eminent artist of the movement and the one who best apprehended the dawning Anthropocene. The titles of his pictures—*Eyes in the Heat* (1946), *Shimmering Substance* (1946), *Alchemy* (1947), *Lucifer* (1947), *Vortex*, (c. 1947), *Phosphorescence* and *Enchanted Forest* (1947)—allude to the nearly unfathomable power and destructiveness of the period.

“The modern painter,” Pollock told an interviewer in 1950, “cannot express this age--the airplane, the atom bomb, the

radio--in the old forms of the Renaissance or of any other past culture.” His medium was automobile enamel, aluminum paint, and thinned oil paint and turpentine, applied to unprimed and un-stretched canvas. Rather than use brushes, he employed sticks and open cans to drip, pour, and ladle paint in loops, ribbons, whorls, coils and splashes. The colors are un-natural and automotive, and phrases like “pink Cadillac,” or “silver- trimmed Studebaker” come to mind when you see *No. 1, 1949* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), which is not in the RA show, and *Blue Poles* (1952), which is.

Securing *Blue Poles* for “Abstract Expressionism” was a coup. It is big, fragile and the best artwork in Australia. The picture was dramatically lit at the RA and easily overwhelmed the eight-foot *Mural* (1943) hung on the opposite wall. *Blue Poles* has a clotted yet animated surface, and every inch is covered by tightly woven skeins of paint. The composition, however, has a steady rhythm supplied by the regularly spaced, diagonal poles that resemble the flagged spears used by picadors in Spanish bullfights.

Had Pollock been reading Hemingway’s “Death in the Afternoon” and poured over its grisly illustrations? Peggy Guggenheim was their mutual friend, and it is impossible to imagine that the writer and the artist didn’t know each other’s works. But whereas Hemingway in the 1950s, for all his celebrity, remained a creature of the literary salons that gave him his start, the younger Pollock was a product of the post-war American imperium. He couldn’t have recognized “anthropocene” if he had seen it in a dictionary, but his restless, energetic, anxious and refulgent art

*Untitled*  
(1954) and  
*Yellow Band*  
(1956)



made him its early avatar.

The curators at the Royal Academy generally occluded this history, focusing instead on individual careers and personalities. Most of the galleries were devoted to works by single artists, though some were an omnibus, chock-a-block with artists left over from the main account: Philip Guston, Jack Tworkov, William Baziotis, Joan Mitchell, Lee Krasner, Norman Lewis and others.

But lacking a number of essential works, such as De Kooning's *Gotham News* or the great Pollocks from MOMA or the Met, or the right combination of pictures, these mini-retrospectives are often unsatisfying. As a result, the exhibition was less than the sum of its parts. Consider the examples of Rothko and Gorky.

Rothko was represented by eight canvases hung in an octagonal room in the middle of the exhibition space. The intended effect was presumably something like the Seagram Murals at the Tate Modern in London, the Rothko Chapel in Houston, or the Rothko Room at the Phillips Museum in Washington, D.C. But in those cases, the artist either created works to be hung in an ensemble or, in the case of Phillips, helped with the selection and installation. He believed not only that his works were intolerant of proximity to paintings by his contemporaries, but sometimes even other works by him!

His caution was unfortunately validated at the Royal Academy by the placement of *Yellow Band* (1956) beside *Untitled* (1954). The anti-freeze green of the latter, surrounding a central field of salmon-pink is already a difficult combination. Seen beside the mustard yellow, orange-red and salmon of the former, it becomes incoherent. Instead of connoting, as the late John Berger

wrote, "an intense premonition, as it might have occurred in the flash of the Big Bang," the Rothko installation comprised an assemblage of discrete and clashing colors. Not so much premonition as competition.

Gorky was well represented with a Picasso-inspired *Still Life on a Table* (1936-7), the great *Self-Portrait* [with no hands] from 1937, the liquid and dreamlike *Water of the Flowery Mill* (1944) and *The Limit* 1947. But even here, segregated from contemporary pictures by Baziotis, Lewis, Rothko, Pollock, Krasner, Gottlieb and even De Kooning, renders the Gorky pictures homeless. Their engagement with myth and what Rothko and Gottlieb called "the tragic and the timeless" is obscured. (The paucity of works by Norman Lewis—just one small picture—is scandalous. The recent exhibition in Chicago proved the breadth and depth of his vision.)

More than 60 years have passed since Pollock's death in a car crash. In that time, the authority of his work and that of his contemporaries has only grown. The reason is not simply their intelligence and originality, but our own recognition of the salience of their historical moment and its environmental legacy. We are all Abstract Expressionists now—children of the Anthropocene—and we had better come to a reckoning with that fact.

(London, Royal Academy, September 24, 2016 to January 2, 2017; Bilbao, Spain, Guggenheim Museum, February 4 to June 4, 2017.)

Stephen Eisenman is a professor of art history at Northwestern University and a contemporary Art expert.

# The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism

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

*by Jorge Miguel Benitez*

### Second Essay:

### **"Blood-drenched Brushes and Golden Easels"**

**D**oes the art world bear any responsibility for the rise of right-wing nationalism? Prior to Brexit and the 2016 American presidential election, the question could be dismissed with postmodern nonchalance. It can no longer be avoided, especially if France veers to the extreme Right and others follow the United Kingdom in abandoning the European Union. Furthermore, has the West ceased to believe in the Enlightenment? If that is true, then modernity is indeed over. The Western liberal democracies that kept the global peace while giving rise to the liberation movements we take for granted will surrender to fascism and to a combination of religious fanaticism and anti-humanism. The irony is not lost on writers such as Salman Rushdie and other cosmopolitan intellectuals who know the dangers and sometimes pay with their lives for being genuinely multicultural and therefore capable of thinking critically about everything, including their *identities*. Under the circumstances, the two questions assume a sense of urgency unknown in the arts since the 1930s, a period when many artists failed to see the Fascist and Stalinist threats while those who fought against the totalitarians either died or had to flee. Have we reached that point?

Addressing the issue fully would require multiple volumes and a perspective not yet available in 2017. Nonetheless, a number of signs pointed to the debacle. The most obvious and easy to attack was the rise of the United States as the pre

eminent global power after World War II. Critics ranging from Herbert Marcuse to Susan Sontag and Angela Davis to Noam Chomsky pointed to American economic, political, and military power as the primary cause of the world's ills. Some of their criticism was accurate and well deserved while most was ideologically driven nonsense that overlooked the complexities of the post-war world. For example, who could have predicted, during the Cultural Revolution, that *Communist* China would become, through mostly capitalist means, the world's second largest economy in the early twenty-first century? Who could have imagined at the time of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that the Soviet Union would disappear in 1991 or that Bolshevism would metamorphose into neo-Tsarist industrial feudalism replete with a former KGB agent's alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church. How did the muscular, self-reliant feminism of Betty Friedan devolve into whiny, self-pitying demands for *safe*

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Duchamp noted...“And then, of course, there is the terrific commercialization. So many artists, so many one-man shows, so many dealers and collectors and critics who are just lice on the back of the artists.”

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*spaces and trigger warnings.* Why did the secular Arab nationalism of Nasser and the early Arafat give way to Islamist imperialism? Lastly, could any comedian have foreseen that someday the most extreme American liberals would embrace the flag, praise the CIA, and call for a president to be tried for treason due to allegations of collusion with the Russians?

Given these tragicomic twists, Surrealism should be revisited as the one art movement that could have understood the beauty of the pseudo-drama by stating, *Ceci n'est pas un président*, or, *Ceci n'est pas une identité*. If only Magritte were still alive, what would he have made of all this? In truth, not much: Surrealism may have played with the absurd, but the artists themselves were firmly grounded in reality. From the 1960s onward, the artists became increasingly solipsistic and absurd while their art moved from the studio to Wall Street as exotic yet often unseen commodities. Duchamp noted the shift when he said, “And then, of course, there is the terrific commercialization. So many artists, so many one-man shows, so many dealers and collectors and critics who are just lice on the back of the artists. [...] But today the artist is integrated, and so he has to be paid, and so he has to keep producing for the market. It's a vicious circle. And the artists are such supreme egos! It's disgusting.”<sup>1</sup> When those “supreme egos” eventually found validation in the slogan “the personal is political,” the results were disastrous for what little remained of modernist integrity.

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While the art world masturbated in front of an audience, the “deplorables” organized, bought guns, lied to pollsters, prayed, waited, and unleashed their fury on Election Day.

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Of course, the personal is not automatically political, aesthetic, or even worthy of discussion. Blurring the line between politics and private life erodes the crucial distinction between personal responsibility and collective brutality. It can lead to a non-committal postmodern version of the war criminal whose only defense is that he “followed orders.” It also belongs to a tradition that in modern times justified the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, the murderous excesses of the Russian Revolution, and the genocidal frenzy of the Nazis. All three spoke for the oppressed and their personal narratives, and all three butchered in their name. It should be noted that, as with the intercession of saints, the oppressed are merely a tool for access to power. Once the revolution triumphs, they become expendable.

When the art world embraced Jean-François Lyotard's micro-narrative, it opened a portal to the hypersensitive universe of “alternative facts” and paved the way for the triumph of inductive rea-

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If traditional socialism emphasized discipline, stoicism, and hard work as a means to personal and collective good health, then the sixties became a validation of self-pity, self-indulgence, and entitlement maintained through the work of others.

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soning at the heart of today's progressive politics and right-wing conspiracy theories. Whether the boogeyman was the Western patriarchy or Islam made no difference. Dark forces lurked behind every bush in order to victimize women, people of color, sexual minorities, and God-fearing WASPs. Until that moment, artistic subjectivity had existed against a canonical backdrop that provided context, precedent, and resistance. One could rebel against the canon, but one could not escape it. Modernism could be personal without being solipsistic. The cult of the self had limits grounded in objective reality. Even the Dadaists understood that there was a barrier between self-aware irrationality and insanity. That barrier disappeared with the sloppy application of postmodern theories that did not work as socio-aesthetic solutions. Predictably, the resulting chaos invited absolutist fanatics and opportunistic demagogues who offered concrete answers as an antidote to the

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin Tomkins, “Marcel Duchamp,” in *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1980), 67.

relativistic vacuum. While the art world masturbated in front of an audience, the “deplorables” organized, bought guns, lied to pollsters, prayed, waited, and unleashed their fury on Election Day. Yes, the new administration lost the popular vote, but under the American electoral system it was a minor detail. In the end, the votes that truly counted were found in states that a smug

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Pollock never trusted his wealthy patrons:  
 Warhol wooed his like a eunuch in the  
 Forbidden City while playing the liberal  
 with an occasional political piece.

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and snobbish coastal bourgeoisie dismissed as backward and irrelevant. History was on the side of the first woman president. Hegel had spoken: there could be no other outcome. Everyone, it seems, had forgotten the lessons of the twentieth century. Unfortunately for the Hegelians, reality does not know the meaning of teleology.

If traditional socialism emphasized discipline, stoicism, and hard work as a means to personal and collective good health, then the sixties became a validation of self-pity, self-indulgence, and entitlement maintained through the work of others. The ensuing half-baked Dionysian-Christian-Marxist ideology of debauchery and revolutionary utopianism would, by the twenty-first century, celebrate weakness, illness, and despondency. American postmodernism had rejected Emersonian emotional and moral self-reliance along with the Marxian insistence on the dignity of labor. Yet leftist contempt for the working class did not emerge from twenty-first-century narcissism. It was already evident with the rise of Pop Art in the sixties when seemingly overnight a tribe of passionless esthetes eclipsed the working stiffs of Abstract Expressionism. Pollock never trusted his wealthy patrons: Warhol wooed his like a eunuch in the Forbidden City while playing the liberal with an occasional political piece. His legacy lingers in the obsession with sales, wealth, and fame. Art sells for ever-higher prices while having ever-lower value, as witnessed by the yawn with which what passes for a cultural elite has responded to the destruction of Palmyra and other ancient sites throughout the Middle East.

By the 1970s, the counterculture had split into three branches: the first produced the creative

explosion in science and technology that led to the digital revolution of the twenty-first century; the second expanded the commercialization of a once vibrant and original popular culture; and the third infiltrated academia to dismantle critical thinking through the denigration of the Western Canon, the promotion of identity politics, and the implementation of draconian speech codes. The world of high art became a hybrid of the three branches and attached itself to business and government “by an umbilical cord of gold.”<sup>2</sup> From 1968 onward, the working class would be reduced to a theoretical concept for the aesthetic Left, and it would never be invited to the reception except to serve the vegan canapés and clean the mess. Meanwhile, as the art world protested from the comfort of New York and San Francisco, steelworkers, coal miners, waitresses, farmers, janitors, and maids sent their sons to Vietnam. If the Chicago police turned on the demonstrators with hatred and ferocity during the 1968 Democratic convention, it was in part because the proletarians in its ranks were fed up with the false Left. Unfortunately, only the Right understood the political meaning and potential of an event

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it exploited with cynical mastery. The Left has yet to grasp its significance as the moment when the working class that had backed FDR and won World War II lost faith in the party of its parents. To this day, the only explanations heard in liberal circles resort to the reductive standbys of racism, misogyny, and homophobia. No, the brushes may not be drenched in blood, but they are far from clean.

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

2 Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art and Culture*, ed. Clement Greenberg (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 8.

# Has the Arts Council Betrayed Its Origins?

As Nicholas Serota assumes control of the Arts Council as well as the Tate, we examine the history of this body and test its current policies against its founding principles

*by David Lee*

**S**erota takes over at the Arts Council this month, 47 years after being employed as a regional arts officer, in what was his first job after university. In those years the Council has developed into a blunt instrument. An ethos it co-authored with Serota during his 27-year dictatorship at the Tate has been forcibly imposed throughout the contemporary art field. Assisted by less important bodies, including a number of charities, half a dozen influential dealers and a legion of devoted apostles and brand-obsessed super rich collectors, the Arts Council and Serota's Tate evolved a common purpose.

By concisely rehearsing the Arts Council's genesis I want to examine how a body, which didn't start life with its present agenda became the principal funding agent for what they themselves call a 'challenging', 'innovative' art; an art from which hardly anyone else but those professionally involved in it benefits, and in which the wider public—who pay for it—express indiffer-

ence or derision.

So what happened to produce the monster we have today, with its Westminster HQ, exaggerated sense of entitlement, uniforms, swanky websites, overmanning, pretentious drivel, gender and ethnic obsessions, and self-promoting literature concerned only with the decaying rump of the avant garde?

The Arts Council evolved out of the Committee (later Council) for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts formed in December 1939. The first general Treasury grant ever for the arts, £25,000, was offered in April 1940 for classical music, drama and art. This matched £25,000 given by The Pilgrim Trust for touring concerts and exhibitions, seven-eighths of the money going on music. Government subsidy was increased to £85,000 in 1942 when the Pilgrim Trust pulled out and when opera and ballet were added to the roll-call of recipients; it was £175,000 a year by the war's end.



The Queen at the opening of the Barbican Centre. Photo © Barbican Centre



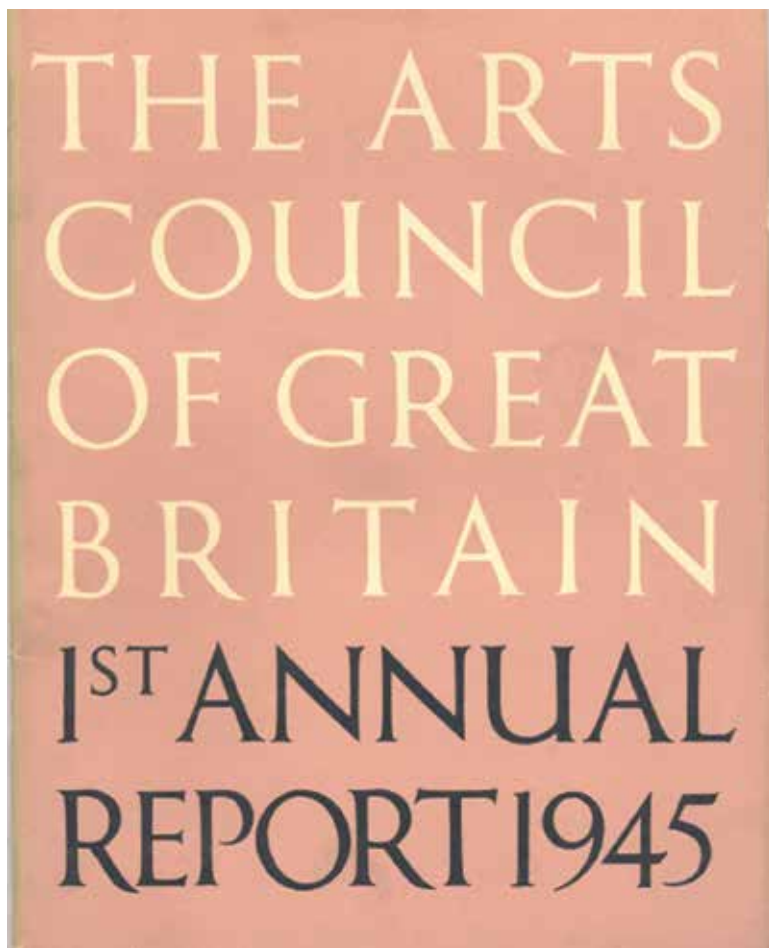
Selection of Front pages from Arts Council Annual Reports

Before CEMA was established arguments had reverberated for 20 years as to whether art should be publicly funded. A compelling case for subsidy arrived with the war. The first awards were considered shrewd commercial investments by Exchequer mandarins. For the tiny sums cited above the morale boosting potential of art and music (especially sing-songs) for an undernourished and overworked civilian population of mainly women was considered more than compensation. The impact of these touring plays, concerts and exhibitions was so overwhelming, the public reaction so vocally grateful, that the continuation of Government support in peace time was a foredrawn conclusion. Additionally, throughout the war, and especially from 1942 when he took over CEMA, Maynard Keynes lobbied tirelessly for the post-war continuation of subsidy.

Things undoubtedly had to change. As William Coldstream explained in the mid-'30s, artists didn't expect to sell work except occasionally to their friends or, if they were lucky enough to have one, to a patron. Recession had destroyed any impulse for art sales. In the wake of the 1930s

Depression and then the second great war, the market for modern work being dead, the need to help painters and sculptors survive had become an imperative. Even well-known artists struggled to live. Most scraped a subsistence by teaching and from occasional sales to a few wealthy supporters. A process of rigorous, almost cruel natural selection by quality was in place. In 1939 writer Raymond Mortimer pleaded that artists "need saving." Soon after the war, critic Cyril Connolly described the practice of private art collecting as "extinct." In proposing State subsidy Keynes suggested that; "We must learn by trial and error. But anything [that is, any policy of State assistance for the visual arts] would be better than the present system. The position of artists today is disastrous." [Unless you happen to be one of those The Jackdaw calls 'the usual suspects', those magnificent few deified by the Arts Council a cynic might shout 'No change there then!']

The end of the war, with its promise of a better place for the exhausted and beaten down, provided the impetus for the creation of a supportive organization which would help circulate the arts



widely, and thereby—crucially—stimulate over time **a desire to collect artists' work among a much broader population.**

The Arts Council was founded in August 1946 and given £235,000 to spend (the equivalent of £29 million today), the bulk of which went (as before) on classical music, opera, ballet and drama with art a distant fifth—touring exhibitions and artists' materials were altogether cheaper than the backing required by travelling orchestras, bands, troupes and reps. By the mid-'50s classical music alone received six times the subsidy spent on the visual arts. In 2015/16, the last published report available, the Arts Council spent £463 million of which a small fraction (it's a difficult figure even to guess but it settled at between 5% and 10% in the '70s) is spent on the visual arts. In addition, the Council is also responsible for disbursing their slice of lottery cash, £268 million a year, a sizeable portion of which throughout its 20-year history has been spent on capital visual arts projects and also, more recently, on revenue grants to favoured 'core' clients (the Serpentine Gallery, for example, has received no fewer than

twelve lottery awards).

In the 70 years of the Council's existence the State has effectively assumed complete control of visual art, whereas prior to 1939, and with the exception of funding for the national museums, the creation of the National Theatre and a one-off grant for creating an orchestra in Birmingham, the influence of Government was non-existent: painting and sculpture had in those days been left to the market, then understood to be the best arbiter. Some, of course, argue that it still is.

On the founding of the Arts Council, early commentators (Orwell among them) expressed serious concerns that state patronage would quickly come to imply censorship and a dictatorship of taste—obviously bad things. With hindsight how perceptive were their fears.

A lengthy discussion of precisely this potential problem took place in March 1944 when a letter appeared in *The Times* signed by MPs and artists, condemning what they perceived as an obvious 'Modernistic' bias in the selection of CEMA's exhibitions. Signatories

included printmakers D Y Cameron and Frank Short, painters Alfred Munnings (soon to be elected PRA) and Frank Salisbury and sculptor Richard Garbe. They berated the poor quality of exhibitions circulated by CEMA as being "devised to carry on the baleful influence of what is known as 'Modernistic' art" at the expense of "traditional glories." Keynes's reply to this charge is highly revealing. He lists the 25 exhibitions circulated to date, only six of which had been mixed shows of modern artists—the only two one-man shows featured Sickert and Wilson Steer, neither of whom would have considered themselves remotely 'Modernistic'. The list also included historical surveys from national collections and selections from Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions. Among the "mixed bunch of fogeys" (this is Keynes in self-deprecating mode) selecting the exhibitions were artists Tom Monnington, Duncan Grant and Henry Moore. Keynes could not have stated CEMA's policy more clearly when he wrote in conclusion: "Our own practice and deliberate policy is to allow every form of serious endeavour its opportunity." Supporting Keynes,

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other correspondents praised the “wide and catholic” choices from “modernistic to academic.” The most enthusiastic and moving letter of commendation for the touring shows came ironically from the Ashington Art Group of miner painters in Northumberland, who testified that in their community they had received three exhibitions which elicited “golden opinions” from schoolchildren, youth groups, women’s organisations and church parties. They especially enjoyed seeing original work of a kind only previously known through bad reproductions.

There is no evidence here—not a scrap—to suggest that the precursors and founders of the Arts Council had any intention of showing only ‘Modernistic’ art, or of favouring vanguard styles at the expense of others. The reverse is demonstrably true. Their intention was to show everything of merit and the positive response of the Ashington Group is testimony of their success.

Throughout the Arts Council’s existence, and especially in its later maturity, it has undoubtedly taken to an extreme the private views and preferences of those who willed it into existence. Today the Arts Council does precisely what Fry, Bell, Keynes, Clark, Read and others wanted it to do in encouraging appreciation of the avant garde, except that it now does it to the exclusion of everything else. The Arts Council’s founding principles, written by Keynes almost word for word, were, however, pragmatic for having been argued over. In the Royal Charter for the Arts Council of August 9th 1946 (three months after Keynes’s death), this is what it says should be developed: “a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm, to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts and to advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with those objects.”

Such slippery bureaucratic flannel is now irrele-

vant and has anyway long since been superseded by tinkering and other vague ‘forms of words’, through which calculating fixers could drive their carriage and fours. The fact is the Council now exhibits, encourages and buys for its collection only what it describes as “innovative” and “challenging” work. Naturally, the Council itself decides what these words mean and to what and to whom they can be applied. The effect is that everything else has had to fight its own battle for survival. The Council no longer represents the visual arts as a naturally diverse entity, as Keynes intended, but only a corner of this potentially rich tapestry. And the Council is comfortable with this. It no longer makes any show of even-handedness where style is concerned, to the extent that it has become the censoring organization Orwell feared it might. Whereas in the beginning it may have paid lip service to balanced provision of styles and techniques, it now tells us to accept what we’re given whether we like it or not. Additionally, there are now also the Council’s sinister and prurient obsessions with ‘diversity’, ‘accessibility’ and gender/minority quotas. If only in place of this puerile stab at social engineering they were as interested in exhibiting a representative ‘diversity’ of approaches and mediums instead of so relentlessly monotonous a diet of conceptualism.

With the creation of the Arts Council, for the first time the State took on responsibility for funding Contemporary Art, a phrase in which ‘Contemporary’ would come to mean ‘Extreme’.

One other inheritance from CEMA requiring

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With the creation of the Arts Council, for the first time the State took on responsibility for funding Contemporary Art, a phrase in which ‘Contemporary’ would come to mean ‘Extreme’.

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acknowledgement is the collecting of art. In 1942, in an attempt to increase the number of exhibitions they were capable of preparing quickly, CEMA allocated £750 for the purchase of works by living British artists. Some of this cash was spent commissioning limited edition prints from the most famous artists in order that they might circulate the same collection to different venues simultaneously. All these works (including numerous items inherited from the The Pilgrim Trust bought for the same purpose) were passed

on to the Arts Council who continued with the policy of buying works from a gamut of painters and sculptors. The early collections are online in full. Look at them, their range is faultless. Selection was omnivorous and over the collection's history it became an important means of assisting young artists at the fragile incipient phase of their careers. In 1975 when the Council was driving headlong towards greater control of its clients, and when it was still claiming that its job was to "maintain and improve the traditional arts" (already then a barefaced lie), the Council's budget for purchases was increased by 300%. As with other aspects of Arts Council policies in the visual arts the works bought today are only those considered, yes, 'innovative', 'cutting edge' and 'challenging'. To ensure compliance purchasing is now done by six officials who are most often either directly or indirectly employed by the Council itself. Naturally, they don't buy modern figurative painting, except in rare cases where it ticks ethnic or other minority boxes.

Equally important, in the touring exhibitions of CEMA and those of the British Institute of Adult Education in the 1930s, was the need to decentralise and to circulate modern art to regions where it was unknown. It was always the intention of the Council's founders to use the shows as a vehicle to encourage greater public participation in the visual arts, especially with more difficult recent work for which exhibition selectors themselves were important advocates and patrons. Despite the misguided concerns of bias raised in 1944 mentioned above, when the Arts Council appeared, selection continued to be even-handed. The varied list of exhibitions the Arts Council supported initially and throughout the 1950s and '60 are testimony to this. Even from as late as the founding in 1968 of the Hayward Gallery (Arts Council created and funded) the diversity of



Visitors viewing Richard Huw's mobile water sculpture at the Festival of Britain, 1951. Photo © Historic England.

work was exemplary in providing something for everyone. Indeed, until this century the Hayward was an indispensable part of my own education, until, that is, it shut the door on the past and other aspects of the present with which its hierarchy exhibited no sympathy. At this point the Hayward started showing the same international conceptualism by a seemingly limitless supply of foreign unknowns as the Serpentine, South London Art Gallery, the Whitechapel, Camden Arts Centre and the godfather of them all, the Institute of Contemporary Art, more about which below.

This desire to engineer a new audience for art has also been a headline aim of the Arts Council. Initially they were still idealistic enough to believe their own laudably democratic rhetoric: at that stage they couldn't have known any better. The fact that this 'widening of access' mantra is still, 70 years later, burning brightly throughout

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Also in A Policy for the Arts, indeed in its very first paragraph, it states: "No one would wish State patronage to dictate taste..." ...Unfortunately, in subsequent literature, and despite it being echoed by Arts Council chief Lord Goodman in 1970, this estimable sentiment was soon toed under the settee while no one was looking.

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their self-promotional literature is an indication of the Council's lack of success in establishing an audience for the work it wishes to show. Over the lifetime of the Arts Council the demographic of those interested in art, and especially in extreme art, is unchanged. Art remains the preserve of the well-educated and those professionally involved with culture industries. However impossible it is to engender participation in the otherwise uninterested, and despite knowing by now that such efforts are anyway perennially doomed to failure, the Government likes to hear this often repeated ambition—and so it is destined forever to remain a stalwart of the Council's principles in order to please political masters who then allow them 'arms-length' freedom to spend taxpayer cash on their own fascinations. We have seen sufficient evidence over recent decades to know that attempts at implementing deterministic policies are doomed to failure if they are—without whole-sale populist debasement of content—to preserve

what makes museums and galleries worth visiting in the first place.

The first time that what the Arts Council stood for in the visual arts had been written down in detail was in Labour's document called A Policy for the Arts published by the first Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee, in 1965. This is the matrix for any art policy statements published since. All the old boilerplate favourites are here Brassoed to a high shine: "the arts being made more widely available" especially in "drabber industrial areas"; the financial difficulties of artists must be immediately addressed; to follow universal education and universal national health there must be universal art provision; the removal of "the cheerless, unwelcoming air" of galleries; new art centres for all; grants to help young artists get started; "a new social climate ... is essential"; everyone deserves the best ... and so on. We've heard this litany myriad times since—they are now the default phrases programmed into the computer of every Arts Council drone.

Also in A Policy for the Arts, indeed in its very first paragraph, it states: "No one would wish State patronage to dictate taste..." Oh no definitely not. God forbid. Perish the thought. Unfortunately, in subsequent literature, and despite it being echoed by Arts Council chief Lord Goodman in 1970, this estimable sentiment was soon toed under the settee while no one was looking. It never re-appeared.

In the immediate aftermath of Jennie Lee's aspirational document a significant development took place in the Council's relationship to the visual arts. Policies which until this time had concentrated on touring exhibitions, artists' bursaries and purchases for the collection

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... new galleries would eventually be designed so that no other kind of work except conceptualism and installations could be shown properly.

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were expanded to include the gallery domain itself. From now on the Council would try to control not only what was exhibited but the venues themselves, including their programmes. Even better they would start their own galleries. This was a crucial strategy in furtherance of revised objectives to control every aspect of visual art provision. It was the tactic by which taste dicta-



Map taken from the 1981-82 annual review- [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)

torship specifically disqualified as anathema by the Labour policy document emerged as a clear though unstated aim. This change did not result from any single decision (not that we should ever have known because Arts Council meetings have scandalously never been minuted). Instead, it evolved gradually as the number of new galleries increased. These were created specifically to give outlets for those making Modern Art. Indeed, new galleries would eventually be designed so that no other kind of work except conceptualism and installations could be shown properly. Significant increases in Government funds to the Arts Council promised in Lee's document allowed them to effect this important change.

The original outlet of this franchise system was the ICA, the first "rallying ground" for extremism as Wyndham Lewis called it, which had been helped before (since its foundation in 1948) but which from 1968 received an annual subvention. This has continued to date and currently runs at £1.5 million a year with the add-ons of bail-outs (due to maladministration) and Lottery funds. What started only as ad hoc assistance in the case of the Institute of Contemporary Art moved into top gear with the founding of the Hayward Gallery (also 1968), the Serpentine (1970), the Whitechapel (from the mid-'70s), Camden Arts Centre, Matt's Gallery (1971), Chisenhale Studios (1983) and, later, South London Art Gallery. Other galleries opened in the provinces, Ikon in Birmingham for example as early as 1965, though state subsidy came later. By 1975 the Council was keeping afloat three London galleries, the ICA, the Hayward and the Serpentine, and six regional ones. Additionally, a national network of Council-funded photography galleries followed the founding of The Photographers' Gallery in London in 1971. The Council also soon began subsidising new art magazines whose purpose was to write about what was shown in its own galleries. And so the Council's approach to visual art quickly evolved into a neat self-contained operation which outsiders might easily have believed was independent.

This process of opening franchise galleries quickened after the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994, that jackpot for the arts whose funds led to a rash of arts centres around the country with similar agendas dictated by the Council. Some of these were notorious white elephants and led to the wasting of tens of millions. (Like the bankers in 2008, Arts Council/Lottery

functionaries never get sacked even for the most egregious mismanagement.) It is an irony that the appalling wastes of money of which the Council has been guilty have coincided with their predictable annual complaints about Government parsimony. If you were starting from scratch a process of public funding for the visual arts you'd look at the Arts Council as a risible demonstration of how not to do it.

The Council was now also susceptible to the growing and irresistible current of Modernistic novelties, that selling out to 'progress' for its own sake described in the last issue (What Happened to Art Education?, *The Jackdaw*, 130), which affected all national institutions after the war. In *The Demon of Progress in the Arts* Wyndham Lewis identified this current as early as 1954 and had described it as "a contagion that hurries an artist to zero and to the death of talent" and "a mad bug which has entered into the body of the arts." He said the relentless drift was towards "infantile extremist sensationalism." Considered a crank by many, Wyndham Lewis's views were in hindsight astutely prophetic.

Official zeal for more avant-garde approaches to making art expressed by the early godfathers of the Arts Council would find its apogee in the exhibition policies of these new Arts Council franchises. The previously feared prescriptiveness and censorship would blossom here. For the first time the Arts Council could exercise complete control over who and what was shown, and where, by placing these financially dependant clients under the directorship of their own staff. This was key. Of course they continued paying lip service to the politically expedient phrases listed above, whilst ignoring them completely. An early example of how Arts Council philosophy could be maintained within house is the fact that the next Chairman of the Arts Council, Serota, who, as has been stated above, from 1970 had been groomed in the Council's offices, started his gallery career in 1973 as the director of one of these new outlets, the Museum of Modern Art (as it was then called) in Oxford, which had opened the year after Jennie's Lee's document and had been created by the Arts Council to promote its own policies. Three years later Serota moved up to another burgeoning Arts Council client, Whitechapel Art Gallery, which though it had existed since the 19th century had been gradually repositioned as a gallery of the avant garde. Having one

of its own in charge meant that the right kind of work by the right kinds of artists would be shown, Serota having already proved himself reliably on message.

Accompanying Arts Council cheques came the inevitable coercion. For the Council, paying the piper now meant calling the tune and by the early '80s strings had become blackmail with menaces. I had personal knowledge of this now ubiquitous practice. During the '80s I contributed to a photography magazine whose existence relied exclusively on Arts Council subsidy. This money, a pittance, was not awarded because this was a seriously edited publication with an international reputation commanding tremendous devotion among informed devotees. It was given

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From the '80s onwards newspapers were weekly exposing the ridiculous antics the taxpayer was funding. The fact that there were scores of these enormities, all of which were claimed as significant by their protagonists, and which now are forgotten, is indicative of the shocking waste of scarce resources they represented.

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in order to further the Council's own ends in what might crudely be termed its snowballing social engineering agenda. The editor of *Creative Camera*, who was a friend and a person of considerably greater knowledge and accomplishments than anyone then working in the Council's visual art and photography departments, was told that continuation of his grant depended on demonstrable conformity to what would later become known as Political Correctness. He once casually confided to me that he had been asked by his paymasters to supply immediately the names of black photographers whose works had appeared on the cover. As he explained to me, he didn't know the answer because it had never occurred to him to ask. Flippant non-compliance, he was told, would seriously affect his next annual application. The Council also demanded representation on the magazine's governing board. This now insidious and common tactic is employed by the Council as a first step to takeover. A short time afterwards my friend quit in disgust, the magazine becoming a shadow of what it had been, forced as it now was into chasing approval from its paymasters.

The Council's determinism was now shameless.

Also during the Thatcher years Arts Council policy in the visual arts overlapped exactly with activist leftism. As a common enemy Thatcher unified in animosity everybody of other political persuasions. In the visual arts the Arts Council became nakedly left wing. It said it wasn't, but you didn't need to look further than the revolutionary agendas of some of their revenue clients, especially in the photographic field, for evidence of the contrary.

This politicising bias wasn't the only area for which the Arts Council began to attract regular mockery. They were now prepared to support anything at all Progressive, especially if it endorsed the Council's anti-bourgeois credentials. Increasingly public subsidy became associated with stunts that offered nothing remotely interesting to the public. From the '80s onwards newspapers were weekly exposing the ridiculous antics the taxpayer was funding. The fact that there were scores of these enormities, all of which were claimed as significant by their protagonists, and which now are forgotten, is indicative of the shocking waste of scarce resources they represented. Nothing has remained of them. The most infamous incident, and the harbinger of what was to come, was the award in 1975 given to three men to walk around the countryside with poles on their heads. The Council later admitted its mistake. Unfortunately, having nailed their colours to the mast of novelty for its own sake, it was an error their regional outposts couldn't resist repeating in pursuit of vanguard credibility.

From the early '80s onwards newspaper and magazine readers were treated to regular exposés of the Council's perverse *modus operandi* in the visual arts. In a series of articles in *Art Monthly* Michael Daley demonstrated the relationships between recipients of funds and those who were on the Council's committees; too often, he discovered by meticulous research, they were the same person. Membership of the Council's visual arts committee had also been engineered to be doctrinally compliant. They comprised directors of Council-created and -funded galleries who were now among the major recipients of Council funds. Not surprisingly they awarded themselves more and more money. Exposed by a Sunday newspaper as corrupt conflicts of interest these committees were quietly disbanded.

When Serota, the Council's own man, went to

the Tate in 1989 and institutionalised Contemporary Art in a new version of the Turner Prize, publicity about which would monopolise visual art coverage throughout the year, the emergence of State Art was complete. Its disconnection from anything wider society might recognise as art was achieved. From now on it would be four legs good. We entered the New Age of the Modern Art Evangelist, the robot who floats about in black trying to look and sound like 'one of us' and whose career depends on saying and writing the right things. There was no longer any pretence in Arts Council galleries that they would show all contemporary art or even acknowledge that any recent art history other than their own had ever existed. We had entered the Year Zero age when Contemporary Art fixers believed art history had begun the previous week. They no longer wanted or needed to know anything that had happened prior to that. Another small matter was the language they invented in order to explain their preferences to the rest of us: unfortunately it wasn't English.

And this is the condition we find ourselves in now. Fuelled by the taxpayer and the working class gambler here is the finished article of State Art, whose functionaries operate with impunity and who are knighted and medalled, and whose policies both main political parties cravenly support.

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The crucial position of the Arts Council in dictating what we see in the visual arts is not likely to be relaxed whilst absolutist Serota is in charge, for he is State Art. More likely, under him power will be centralised even further. As local authority funding is squeezed to a drip, help from the Arts Council will become even more essential and, therefore, the potential for coercion and dictatorship proportionately increased.

If ever there was an intended attempt to socially engineer a new constituency for visual art it has failed miserably. In order to achieve this an audience is needed and this is precisely what the State Art exhibited by the Arts Council doesn't have. Indeed, it is even more exclusive than the allegedly old fashioned, class-exclusive work it replaced. There is no audience for the style of Contemporary Art the Arts Council favours and this is the reason why its galleries, especially those in the provinces, are eerily empty.

The Arts Council was started with brave aims. It now bears no resemblance either to what it was or what its fathers intended it to be.

For 70 years the State has poured money into visual arts in order to produce mountains of what is stillborn and instantly forgettable: the Switch House, State Art's new Parnassus, is an expensive monument to the indifferent. The effect has been first to encourage and then to institutionalise a truly epic quantity of local, national and international mediocrity hardly anyone cares about but which costs a small fortune to store, conserve and transport and wouldn't exist without public subsidy. Serota will make a perfect figurehead for such a flabby, wasteful, complacent and self-important system.

And finally, when it comes to prescience in anticipating the failure of publicly funded extremism, the gold medal with laurel cluster must go to T. S. Eliot. In the 1930s he expressed anxiety that public funding of the arts would too easily lead to state control and a proliferation of mediocrity in place of the prospering of what was then a genuinely unpredictable avant garde. Some crystal ball!

David Lee trained as an art historian. He was the editor of *Art Review* and now runs *The Jackdaw*, a polemical art paper, which he founded in 2000. He has contributed to newspapers and magazines and has made popular television series for ITV and BBC2.

# SABINE WEISS

## Intimate Memory



The legendary French photographer, Sabine Weiss, now 92 years-old, is making an exceptional visit to Chicago to attend her show at the Stephen Daiter Gallery on April 7th. To this day, her only solo show in the U.S. was at the Art Institute in 1954! On display are over forty black and white photographs from the 1950s filled with compassion, playfulness, and a genuine tenderness toward humanity. The exhibition brings Weiss' photography to the forefront, defining her as the last representative of the French Humanist School of Photography.

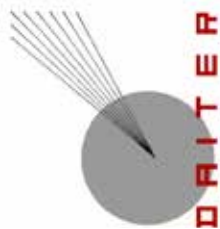


**February 10th—April 29th**

**Artist's Reception:**

**Friday, April 7th, 5-8 pm**

Sabine Weiss will be present at the artist's reception



Stephen Daiter Gallery

230 West Superior St., 4th Floor, Chicago | 312.787.3350 | [stephendaitergallery.com](http://stephendaitergallery.com)

## "There was a whole collection made: Photography from Lester and Betty Guttman"

by Jennifer Murray

Anytime a large donation from a private collection is made to a museum one has to question the impact that has on programming and the overall freedom the curators have in incorporating the new works into their exhibition plans. Obviously, it is a good thing to be gifted artwork but whose agenda comes to the fore when a large gift is made? How is a context for the new collection articulated?

"There was a whole collection made: Photography from Lester and Betty Guttman" is gleaned from an enormous gift of photographs made to the Smart Museum by long-time Hyde Park residents. The exhibition presents several hundred works of the 830 total pieces donated. The Guttman's collection comprises 414 different artists and spans over 160 years of photographic history including William Henry Fox Talbot, Man Ray, Diane Arbus, Chuck Close, and Carrie Mae Weems to name but a few. Thus the resulting exhibition feels more like a survey of photography than a visual guide to the unique predilections of a quirky art collector. It's an overwhelming exhibition—in a good way. And speaks not only to the photographic survey it provides but also to the beauty and passion of collecting. The sheer quantity of images the Guttman's collected over 30 years is a testament to the value they placed on the photographic image and its power to connect with and exemplify their humanist values.

The exhibition is organized in thematic clusters as opposed to a more obvious choice to organize by artist or along a timeline. While this lends to a slightly more disjointed exhibition, it challenges the viewer to see each image as it relates to its theme (and thus the collectors' interests)—beyond the taxonomy of artist's name and year the work was created. While traditionalists will want to see all of the works by contemporary



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Three Bathers*, 1912, Gelatin silver print, Sheet/image: 9 5/8 x 11 3/4 in. (24.4 x 29.8 cm). Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman, 2014.489. © Ministère de la Culture—France /AAJHL.

artist Vik Muniz or all of the historic Paris photos of Eugène Atget together, it is easy to appreciate the context that the various themes provide: *The Natural and Built World*; *Experimentation: Interrogation of the Medium*; *Documentary: Telling Real Stories*; *Portraiture: Pose and Counterpose*; and *Fifteen Minutes of Fame*.

The themes themselves are arbitrary dividers designed to engage with the collectors' professed humanist ethics and allow the curators Laura Letinsky (Professor, Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago) and Jessica Moss (Smart Museum Curator of Contemporary Art), to make sense of a vast group of images and to provide a reflection of the collectors as people. Why do we collect and what does a collection say about us seem to be at the forefront of this exhibition.

While it is the Guttman's collection on display it is clear that this exhibition is also about the persona of the collector and praises col-



Carrie Mae Weems, *Black Woman with Chicken*, 1987, Gelatin silver contact print with printed text, 14 9/16 x 15 3/16 inches (image size), 24 13/16 x 20 11/16 inches (framed). Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman, 2014.833. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

lecting as a way of life—a high-end means of integrating one’s values with culture. This is evident in the last gallery, which includes a space designed to evoke the Guttman’s living room with easy chairs, art books, and a flat file filled with artwork in storage waiting for the opportunity to be displayed. Puccini’s famed opera *La Bohème* is piped through the speakers and the wall text speaks of their beloved Siamese cats, Rudy and Mimi. This diorama of living with art is both charming and elitist. In the end though, the contribution the Guttman’s have made to the Smart Museum’s collection is impressive and the exhibition provides a refreshing take on collecting as a part of life and personalizes the collectors and their compulsion to collect photographs whether you can identify with them and their lifestyle or not.

“There was a whole collection made: Photography from Lester and Betty Guttman” was on view: September 22, 2016–December 30, 2016 at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Jennifer Murray is a Chicago-based artist, curator, and educator. She is the Executive Director of Filter Photo, a non-profit organization supporting photographic practice in the Midwest. She is also an Instructor of Photography at Loyola University Chicago.

## “Kemang Wa Lehulere: In All My Wildest Dreams”

by Evan Carter

Clearly the large paned glass windows that rise up from the floor of the Art Institute’s Modern Wing make the front of galleries 182-184 feel like a retail space. Artists who have exhibited here in the past have highlighted this affect, Lucy McKenzie being a prime example. In the current exhibition, South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere (born Capetown, 1984) makes the space perform in a similar fashion with the installation *In the Neck of Time*.

Through the boutique-like windows and upon entering the space, patrons encounter an arrangement of ceramic shepherd dogs poised upright. A number of them are shattered with pieces strewn on the floor between suitcases

Kemang Wa Lehulere. *Still from Lefu La Ntate*, 2005.  
© Kemang Wa Lehulere. Courtesy of STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg.



filled with earth, green grass and all.

The piece is bound between the glass windows and a grey wall featuring a drawing in chalk of a classic wall-mounted schoolhouse pencil sharpener; a wall drawing in chalk on blackboard finish titled *When I can't laugh I can't write*. Though it seems possible to walk amidst the shards and luggage there is no such invitation, which reinforces the feeling that the piece is window dressing for some kind of high-end back-to-school sale display.

We are also greeted with the ambient sound of a warm African melody being sung to a mellow tempo. As the sound grows louder, it becomes clear that this audio is emanating from a pedestaled monitor displaying a grainy video of a standing cigarette burning down to the filter. The video, titled *Lefu La Ntate* is running at accelerated speed. Themes of memory and time should be apparent by this point if they have not already been so.

Around the bend, sculptures constructed from salvaged materials like tires, crutches, old school desks, and a taxidermy parrot evoke the tired language of Neo-Duchampian assemblage. There is humor and some wordplay but without any of the provocation. This becomes a greater challenge every day that goes by almost a century after the Frenchman attached a bicycle wheel to the seat of a three-legged stool.

It is the salvaged materials that seem to be trying the hardest to perform Lehulere's vision of 'deleted scenes' from South African history which associate curator, Kate Nesin, references in the exhibition guide. The school desks in particular, rich with markings from years of student sitters, evoke lost history through artifact.

In a less obvious but more conceptually complex way is the performance of lost history by the artist himself in *Echoes of Our Footsteps: A Reenactment of a Rehearsal*. Here, Lehulere documents a performance that took place in the gallery. Displayed on a wall before the makeshift stage are its remnants via video projection. The layers stack up quickly in this documentation of a performance



Kemang Wa Lehulere. *One is too many, a thousand will never be enough*, 2016.

© Kemang Wa Lehulere. Courtesy of STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg.

where the artist with actor and artist, Chuma Sopotela, perform scenes from memory of a play Lehulere acted in as a child. Only a few individuals who saw the actual performance in the gallery got to experience it as a performance. What is left for new viewers is a visual remnant flattened by time and the limitations of the documentation.

What is a 'deleted scenes from history'? Is it something that never happened but possibly should have? If so, Lehulere attempts to rewrite history with *To Whom it May Concern*. The artist presents three letters written to the Swedish Academy requesting that South African author, Sol Plaatje, be awarded the 1914 Nobel Prize for Literature. Or is a deleted scene something that did happen and has been erased and forgotten like the stories of all the students who carved into those desks?

The idea of depicting such a thing is a compelling one. It seems to be what is driving the artist to produce work rather than what one experiences in viewing the work. We are greeted with a promise and left with the desires it stirs in us. Some formal and aesthetic investigations are left as a consolation. Perhaps this is as much as a deleted scene from history can be.

"Kemang Wa Lehulere: In All My Wildest Dreams" was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago October 27, 2016–January 16, 2017

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

# "Unreal Realms"

Five Outsider Artists at Intuit Gallery

by Evan Carter

Since his work was revealed to the public in the early seventies and rose to worldly acclaim shortly thereafter, Henry Darger has become the rule by which outsider art is measured. "Unreal Realms," on view at Intuit Gallery, presents a selection of works by five artists, including Darger, and proposes that they are all united by their visions of alternate worlds.

The works in the exhibition are small and preserved under framed glass in low light to compensate for their poor archival quality. Each artist is given their own section of a wall in the rectangular room so viewers can move easily from one artist to the next. The lack of integration of the works reinforces the idea that these artists worked in isolation.

The title "Unreal Realms" places value on the imaginary worlds these artists inhabited but the creativity in the curation stops there. Instead, we are presented with the artists in chronological order despite there being no evidence that this exhibition is about history.

The first artist in the chronology is Adolf Wölfli whose life and practice predates that of Darger. Their lives bear similarities. Both were orphaned in childhood and believed to have suf-



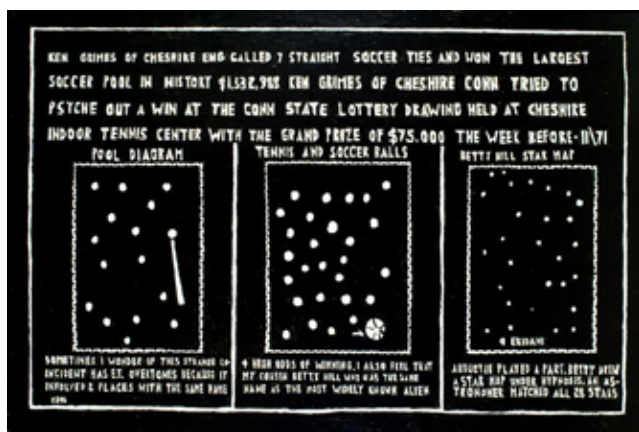
Adolf Wölfli (Swiss, 1864-1930). *Untitled*, 1928. Collection of Audrey B. Heckler. Photo by Visko Hatfield

fered physical and sexual abuse leading to lives of institutionalization and social rejection.

Though Wölfli's drawings are less illustrative than Darger's, they too are a product of an extensive autobiographical and fantastical narrative penned by the artist. Wölfli's did not follow illustrative traditions but relied on pattern and ornamentation akin to art objects from pre-modern practices like indigenous American totems or Bhuddist mandalas.

Henry Darger (American, 1892-1973). *18 At Norma Catherine. But wild thunderstorm with cyclone like wind saves them*, mid-twentieth century. Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY, Photo credit: James Prinz, ©American Folk Art Museum / Art Resource, NY





Ken Grimes, *Untitled, Soccer Pool*, acrylic on masonite, 2001

Continuing in this clockwise manner are works of a similar scale by Charles A. A. Delschau. An American also working in the late 19th century, Delschau created images of elaborate aerial vehicles made up of cabins, propellers, and balloons. His work had a narrative basis that revolved around a secret club of flight enthusiasts. Some background research was done to see if this secret club actually existed but little evidence was found.

The precisely crafted architectural images by Achilles G. Rizzoli employ a different visual language. Rizzoli worked at an architecture firm so the work bears semblance to architectural illustrations. However, Rizzoli was also crafting a world based around an international exposition-style event he called 'expeau'. What is striking about his work, as noted in the curator's description, is that his architectural drawings of buildings were actually symbolic portraits of friends and family. This is the strongest example of how significant a role symbolism plays in these artists' works.

The only piece free from the wall is one of Darger's long scroll-like illustrations framed under glass with images visible on both sides. The piece is untitled but its central placement in the gallery emphasizes that in this curation everything revolves around Darger.

In addition to his images that depict events through populated landscapes, Darger created a

lexicon of the creatures that inhabited his unreal realm. A few of these drawings are titled with the name of the creature and where it comes from. The 'Cat Headed Blengin' and the 'Young Gazonian Blengin' hail from a place called the Catherine Isles. This display of Darger's narrative work as well as the lexiconic element further suggests a privileging of Darger's practice that is already obvious by the fact that the whole exhibition is directly referencing the first portion of his fictional work's long title.

The last artist on the clockwise path is still living and the most aesthetically distinct. Ken Grimes' works on larger panels, with only black and white paint, relies mostly on text to construct his narrative around his interests in coincidental phenomenon and extraterrestrial life. The wall text supports the artist's claim that his use of black and white is representative of his investment in the distinction of truth vs. deception. The most minimal of these works feel the most urgently persuasive.

Wölfli and Darger have a sense of dire need to tell the story of their worlds as well but are handled with more illustrative techniques than Grimes' more didactic pieces which read more like sign boards.

The commonalities that are discussed in the wall texts pertain to the lives of the artists and the imaginary worlds they envisioned. There is little to be said about their processes, methods, and materials likely because, for the older artists, little of that information was known.

The dramatically formatted quotations floating above the works on the gallery walls speak to a valorization of the gifted madman archetype being celebrated here. The exhibition reads as a kind of voyeuristic look into minds of the artists that reinforce their outsider status.

This is perhaps Intuit's goal, since their claim is to celebrate

"artists who demonstrate little influence from the mainstream art world." However, this makes the assumption that there *is* a mainstream art world. There is potential in this exhibition for Intuit to put pressure on that idea instead of sustaining it.



Achilles G. Rizzoli *Mr. and Mrs. Harold Healy Symbolically Sketched/First Prize, First Anniversary*, 1936

## "Yve Klein at the Tate Liverpool"

by Guy Barkley-Smith

Upon entering the exhibition space one is immediately struck by the uniqueness of what is being shown. One's eyes scan for the fabled trademarked IKB (International Klein Blue), which is present in abundance.

Klein was an important figure of post war avant-garde art and arguably the last of the twentieth century's great French modernists. Klein—a philosopher, theorist, spiritualist and conceptualist was a founding member of the *Nouveau Réalisme* art movement.

His minimalist paintings—exercises in pure colour, performance art and film influenced and considerably pre-dated and foresaw much that is contemporary.

I am told by the attendant that, of the *Monochromes* 1955–1961—rectangular tablets of varying size, support thickness and surface texture, in clear Perspex box frames—*Monochrome Green, Untitled [ M35 ]* 1957 was once owned by Warhol, whom Klein met in 1961. Particularly striking in this group, and one of its largest works, was *Monochrome White, Untitled [M 70]* 1957, which made an ultra gorgeous art object by the sumptuous, minimal gilt frame that decorates the clear box it inhabits.

There are four of Klein's smaller Fire Paintings, 1960-61, one of which belonged to Lucio Fontana and examples of larger scale Fire Colour paintings: (FC 28)—the composition of scorch and singe marks, mixed with gestural splashes of IKB, on specially treated cardboard on panel, is a delight. At the centre of the exhibition are Klein's sponge relief paintings, sponge sculptures and Anthropometry paintings.

The very cleverness of the sponge paintings and sculptures surely cannot fail to inspire awe; *Blue Sponge Relief (Little Night Music)* 1960, an imposing 1.5 m x 1 m in size, is typical and incorporates pebbles and stones within its lunar surface; the sculptures project odd surrealist



Yve Klein *IKB 79* 1959

presences, hanging in space, combining the very natural with vividly coloured, sometimes lurid (mustard yellow, dusty pink) pigmented resin. The Anthropometry (performance art) paintings, in essence body mono-prints, were created at collaborative events in 1960; there is adjacent black and white footage of the ever dapper Klein, female models wearing only IKB and a small orchestra performing before an audience at such an event. The best of these is *Untitled Anthropometry*

[ ANT 90 ] which features, poignantly, above the blue torso and between the outstretched arms, the red lipstick traces of a kiss from another time and world. Collateral interest is provided by photographs of Klein as judo player, Klein throwing himself into space (in fact, photomontage) and footage of his 1961 *Monochrome* and *Fire* exhibition.

The final room is dedicated to, perhaps a dozen, maybe more, of Klein's Blue Monochrome paintings, with their characteristic rounded corners, serving to reinforce the feeling that one has had a glimpse into the mind of one of modern art's greatest original thinkers.

This is not a large exhibition and it does not purport to be anywhere near comprehensive but it shows enough to whet the appetite for more—the monogolds, portrait reliefs, *Blue Rain*. It upholds Klein's reputation as one of modern art's most enigmatic players.

There is no doubt that Klein's work belongs in the vast white spaces endemic in modern art appreciation and his place in its pantheon is just and deserved.

Guy Barkley-Smith is a second year student at Plymouth College of Art and one of the editors of SUB magazine.

## **"The Arts Club of Chicago at 100: Arts and Culture 1916-2016"**

*by Evangeline Reid*

"The Arts Club of Chicago at 100: Arts and Culture 1916-2016" is not a particularly inviting title but the book itself is. Part institutional biography, part historical reflection, the book offers a thorough—if not particularly critical—history of an esteemed cultural body, its reinventions through the years, and its lasting legacy in Chicago's art world.

The book, edited by Jenine Mileaf, the club's Executive Director, and Susan F. Rosen, collects thematic essays about the Club's century-long history of supporting a large variety of art forms—visual art, architecture, music, dance, and theatre—alongside an exhaustive history of art exhibitions divided by period. Footnotes are consigned to the back pages to facilitate read-



ing but the text is annotated by images. Photos of art exhibits, members conversing, and the club's various homes through the years create an immersive tale.

The Club's early years—when its commitment to experimental art was more unusual—are particularly engrossing. It was formed after Chicago's mixed response to the infamous International Exhibit of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show, at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1913. The Club was created as a gathering of "art lovers and art workers" three years later, under the leadership of a group, which included AIC trustees, to support the period's more "radical art."

Led by a series of visionary women presidents (Alice Roullier and Rue Winterbotham Shaw) and art curators, it brought work by Picasso and Matisse to Chicago long before they were in vogue and formed strong partnerships with European giants like the Bauhaus and architect Mies van der Rohe.

It sponsored lectures by influential artists like Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp and purchased avant-garde art, most famously Brancusi's *Golden Bird*. Exhibitions, lectures, and performances—often public but sometimes only for members—defined the organization.

By 1931, the *Chicago Evening Post's* art critic, C.J. Bulliet, described the Arts Club as a pioneering educational force, bringing progressive art onto common ground. "Through its activities, Chicago, more surely than any other American city...has been kept aware of what is going on in the world beyond its gates."

For several decades, the group's primary focus was modernist art, but eventually modernism became corporate and common. In his essay, Thomas Dyja describes the 1967 placement of *La Femme*, a soaring Picasso sculpture, on Daley Plaza, beside a government building as an achievement for the Arts Club. With that renewal of the avant-garde spirit at the heart of the organization, the club sought newer and more radical experiments in art.

Today, 104 years after The Armory Show, The Arts Club of Chicago is no longer the same pioneering force. It is just one of many institutions invested in contemporary art, most more well-endowed than the club. It's the more social, salon

aspect that now sets the club apart.

The Arts Club was always a social group as much as an exhibitor of art but the book does not dwell on that. The social aspect comes to light most in moments of critique. Essayists note in passing the exclusive nature of the group where high society members enjoyed luxurious meals.

Social issues like race are also acknowledged: The group was glaringly ignorant about art being created in African-American circles, even in its own city, and actively denied black artists membership. But these comments are mere sentences in the larger text.

Yet, despite worries about exclusivity, formally bringing people together accomplishes a lot. Architects and academics, poets and painters mingle in the group, discussing the developments of art and culture across territorial boundaries. Artists are among those sponsoring exhibits, performances, and purchases, an almost radical departure from the process that brings most art to the public. A long-held tradition also offers members the chance to exhibit their work once a year.

Perhaps more importantly, the group's diverse membership connects "art lovers" with a history of patronage to creators. With federal arts budget cuts on the horizon, private investors matter more than ever. The club's ability to impact the next century of art is hidden in the pages of essays but made clear in its final pages, "Acquisitions Since 1995."

The Arts Club of Chicago has charted a long and impressive path in the last century. While today it is just a small part of the artistic world it nurtured and continues to support, its impact on American culture is certain. This volume is a loving tribute to the Arts Club's illustrious past. One can only hope that Ms. Mileaf can chart an equally celebrated future.

"The Arts Club of Chicago at 100: Arts and Culture 1916-2016" is published by the University of Chicago Press, 2016

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

## "Before Pictures"

Douglas Crimp's autobiographical tale reveals his early days in the New York art world and his active gay lifestyle

*by Tom Mullaney*

Douglas Crimp is an important figure in the development of postmodern art theory. He influenced a group of such 1970s artists as Robert Longo, Philip Smith and Cindy Sherman, whom he dubbed the "Pictures Generation."

Crimp made his mark curating a small show in 1977, titled "*Pictures*" at New York's Artists Space gallery that has gained iconic status as a seminal moment in postmodern art history.

His reputation was cemented by his thirteen-year association with *October*, the influential art journal that championed postmodern art and French post-structural theory.

Readers coming to "Before Pictures" hoping to delve deeper into Crimp's pre-Pictures art life and ideas will be disappointed. The book, instead, chronicles his first ten years in the city (1967-77),

giving only a cursory glimpse of its explosive art scene alongside his wider adventures as a promiscuous gay man during that pre-AIDS era.

Crimp appears to have led a charmed life during that decade. His tale is one of relatively little struggle as he navigates his way in the city's highly competitive art world.

At 18, he wins a scholarship to study art history at New Orleans' Tulane University. No reference is made to what he learned in class. Instead, he reveals that he visited his first gay bar and had his first post-puberty sexual experience while at Tulane.

When he moves to New York, he shares an apartment with two college friends. He quickly falls in with an artistic circle who help him, through the years, land a series of apartments,

### BEFORE PICTURES



DOUGLAS CRIMP



Douglas Crimp in his Chambers Street loft, New York, c. 1974. Photographer unknown.

starting in Spanish Harlem then moving downtown over the years to Chelsea, Greenwich Village and Tribeca.

Next, he lands a job at the Guggenheim Museum because he visits the museum the day the director has just fired the guest curator of a Peruvian art show. Crimp talks his way into installing the exhibit and becoming a curator.

He starts writing reviews at *ArtNews* in 1972 because the magazine's managing editor is a friend of Diane Waldman, his curatorial friend at the Guggenheim.

Finally, he enrolls at City University of New York's Graduate Center in 1976 to study contemporary art theory with *October's* founder, Rosalind Krauss. Within a year, he is appointed the journal's managing editor.

All in all, this contemporary *Candide* was living in the best of all possible worlds. This is not to deny that Crimp clearly possessed formidable intellectual and writing chops to power his uninterrupted success but must also attribute some of his good fortune to his fortuitous friendships.

Crimp's writing style is fluid and holds one's attention. As someone who also lived in the city at that time, I found his evocation of a dynamic and grittier New York during the 1970s appealing, though I longed for more recollections about artist hangouts and the gallery scene.

He mentions Fanelli's Café on Prince Street in

passing but a more constant hangout was the late Max's Kansas City bar. Rather than stay in the front room where the art crowd gathered, he preferred the back room with Andy Warhol's Factory crowd and other gay patrons. A Dan Flavin sculpture that hung above a booth in the corner dominated the room.

The chapter titled *Disss-co* (A Fragment) is the book's best chapter. It brings the underground scene of private, late-night gay bars in commercial buildings and lofts to life. This is where Crimp spent endless ecstatic nights dancing till dawn while occasionally high on drugs.

As a highly handsome gay man, he revels in recounting his active sexual escapades, picking up tricks in bars and also engaging in anonymous sex behind delivery trucks on the far Westside.

The book's art design deserves mention. A particularly fine touch has each chapter opening with a photo of the five dwellings Crimp lived in his first decade in the city: Spanish Harlem (1967-69), Chelsea (1969-71), Greenwich Village (1971-74), Tribeca (1974-76) and the Financial District (Since 1977).

"Before Pictures" tale combines autobiography with some cultural history. The narrative skews more toward his adventures as a gay blade. I found Crimp's tell-all account of his gay youth off-putting at first but came to see that art and sex were inseparable strands of his identity.

In that respect, Crimp can serve as an avatar of that era, a time when our ideas about art and attitudes toward sexuality were in highly transitional flux.

"Before Pictures" is a co-publication of the University of Chicago and Dancing Foxes Press, 2016.

Tom Mullaney, New Art Examiner's founding U.S. Editor, now serves as Senior Editor. He has written on Art for The New York Times, Crain's and Chicago Magazine. His arts blog is at [www.ArtsandAbout.com](http://www.ArtsandAbout.com).



# Scouting the Blogs Progressing in a Digital Age

*By Thomas Feldhacker*

Three New Art Examiner issues ago, Founder and Publisher Derek Guthrie and I sat down for the first time at a neighborhood restaurant in

Chicago to discuss our views of the contemporary art world. Although we are generations apart, it was enlightening to see that we had true consensus on its current state and came to the realization that our different skills and life experiences had still brought us to the same conclusions. Since then the magazine has been gaining momentum with planning and organizing as it rebuilds itself. From that conversation with Derek onwards, the NAE team has set into motion plans on reaching corners of the art world that are not represented by the majority of art institutions and leveraging technology to bring out more voices that are hidden away in odd corners of the internet.

Coming soon I will be posting on our social media pages to links of my previous columns so that you may read them in their original contexts. We also challenge our followers to take their phones out of their pockets, photo the art around you, and share it with the community. Discourse

is created through the exposure to and dissecting of what is new, relevant and/or cast aside. We look forward to new discoveries and new opinions.

While the NAE team has been working very hard to bring the magazine to the digital era, it is continuing to produce a print edition. Scouting the Blogs was our way of combing the internet for other relevant, interesting, and independent voices within the visual arts community and give them a highlight, to share with our readers while creating a bridge from the print publication to the online platforms. Coming soon will be a website with a more robust set of exhibition reviews, book reviews, special features, and our very own blog. As we build out our website with news and criticisms of the art world from all over the world, we ask you to engage with us on Facebook (@thenewartexaminer), Twitter (thenewartexam), and Instagram (The New Art Examiner) as we build our community around the world through the technology that connects us and the new art yet to be discovered. If you have pictures of art to share or criticisms to give, hyperlink us (#NAE, #thenewartexaminer) we would love to hear new voices and share the news of the art scene. For now, this is the last Scouting the Blogs in the print edition. I'll see you online.

# Can you Believe What You've Missed in 18 Months?



## **Volume 30, Issue 1 : September/October 2015**

We visit the Venice Biennale with the co-founder of the Eden Project, Jonathan Ball.  
Derek Guthrie is interviewed by Sam Thorne, director of the Tate St Ives.  
US Editor Tom Mullaney, writes about arts journalism in the digital age



## **Volume 30, Issue 2 : November/December 2015**

Chicago's Architectural Biennale.  
Henri Giroux's book *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*, reviewed.  
The Berlin Art Fair with George Care



## **Volume 30, Issue 3 : January/February 2016**

Screenwriter John Stepping on the Art of Identity.  
Derek Guthrie on the Englishness of English Art.  
Hit and miss Royal Academy Curating with gallery owner Richard Sharland



## **Volume 30, Issue 4 : March/April 2016**

How the moving image makers mold conformity.  
The widening chasm between artists and contemporary art with John Link.  
Daniel Nanavati on artists going off grid and being successful



## **Volume 30, Issue 5 : May/June**

Orwell's *Newspeak* haunts the contemporary art world.  
David Lee talks about the hype of arts council funded sculpture.  
Carinthia West on Saatchi Gallery's exhibition about the Rolling Stones



## **Volume 30, Issue 6 : July/August**

Darren Jones calls upon New York's art critics to resign  
John Link on how art seceded its detached authority  
Edward Lucie Smith's reprint from the *Jackdaw*, *The Degeneration of the Avant-Garde into Fashion*



## **Volume 31, Issue 1 : September/October**

Derek Guthrie on museum practice over the years  
Daniel Nanavati on how death stalks Damien Hirst's imagination  
Jane Addams Allen in 1986 on where collectors' money is taking the art world



## **Volume 31, Issue 2 : November/December**

Charles Thomson examines art's role on society  
Tom Mullaney interviews the Arts Club and the Renaissance Society leaders  
We introduce *Scouting the Blogs*



## **Volume 31, Issue 3 : January/February**

Jorge Miguel Benitez — *The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism*  
Part 1: *The Illusion of Progress*  
Remembering David Bowie  
Feier Lai — *For whom and for what does the artist perform?*

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