

NEW ART examiner

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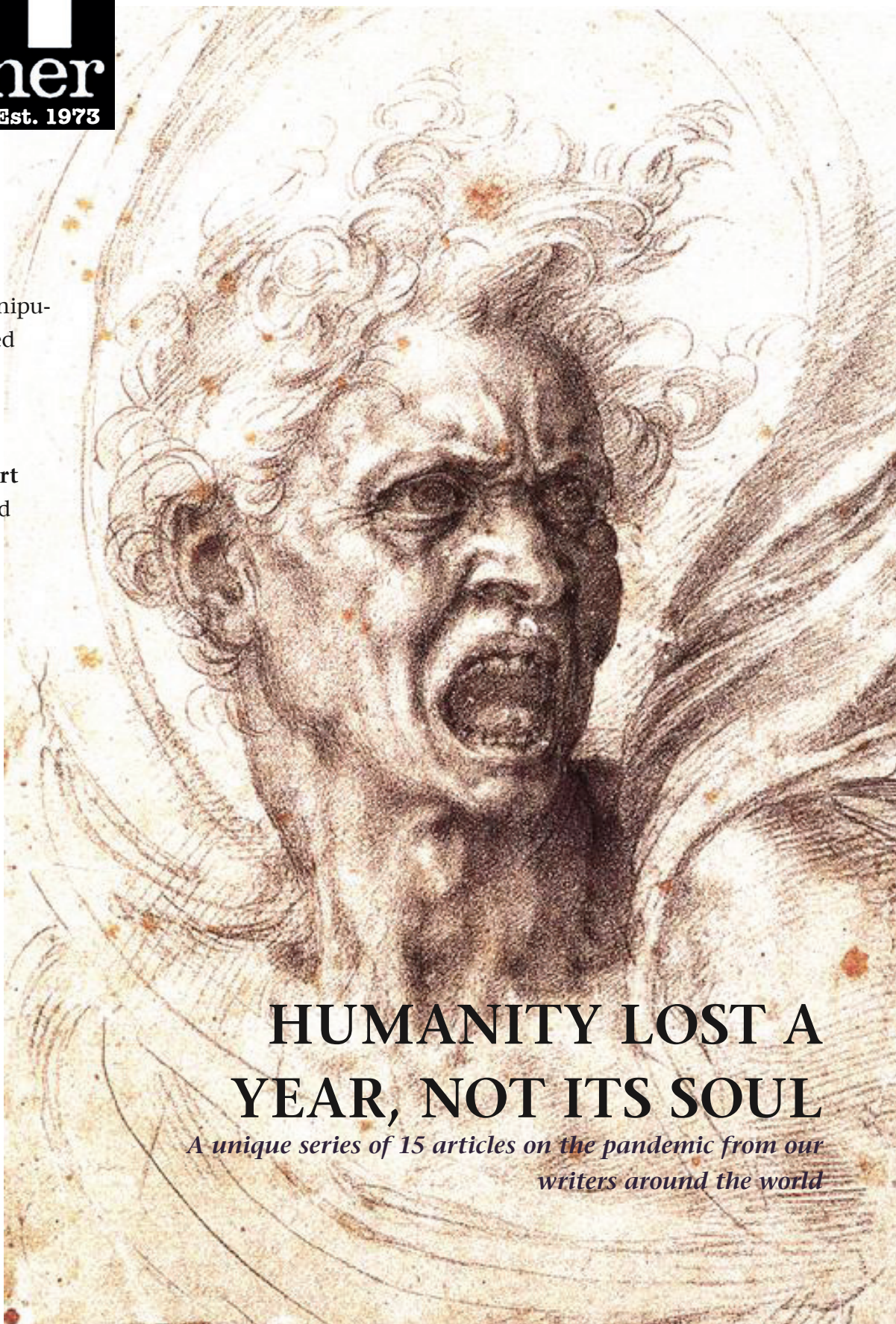
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HUMANITY LOST A YEAR, NOT ITS SOUL

*A unique series of 15 articles on the pandemic from our
writers around the world*



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

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

You can participate directly by sending letters to the editor which are published unedited.

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The Attentive Artist



Ibn Zamrak 1333-1393 a poet of the court of Muhammed V and the king's private secretary. As a court official he was both an assassin as well as being assassinated in his turn. But it is not the words and their translation, or his life that is interesting here. Words set on the page are the book version of architecture. The internal rhythms and flow of the letters, the columns, the setting in the page's own gravity by centring and margin widths. The leading seated like flooring upon which the words stand or sit. It is no wonder that language can be found in almost all ancient buildings because written language springs from the way we build, the harmonies we look for in our buildings and the manner in which, outside of the stone and the words themselves, we establish meaning.

The Art of Intimacy: Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture Dodds, Menocal and Balbale
Yale University Press 2009

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

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COLIN FELL read English Literature at the University of St Andrews, pursuing postgraduate research before moving to Cornwall, where he lectures in Further Education.

GILL FICKLING has been a documentary film-maker for more than 30 years based in London, Spain, Geneva and New York. She spent the last 15 years working for the United Nations. Traveling the world, her films covered human rights, refugees, climate change and gender violence and have been shown internationally. She now lives in Cornwall, UK where she paints.

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SUSANNA GÓMEZ LAÍN is a practicing artist and lawyer or vice versa. In her works she tries to conciliate both worlds using concepts and experiences extracted from her daily study and practice, using art as a legal language and weapon to subtly voice universal human concerns and dilemmas, trying to bring a ray of light wherever she finds darkness.

JOSEPHINE GARDINER has spent most of her working life as a journalist. Born in Oxford, she has lived in London, Barcelona, and Brighton (among other places), and is now based in Penzance, Cornwall. She has recently started writing fiction and her first novel will be published in October 2021.

LYNDA GREEN is a short story writer who likes to play with reality. Occasionally published, always trying. She also loves films and art, and enjoys being given the opportunity to write reviews for the *New Art Examiner*. She works as a cab driver, a source of endless copy and amusement.

SCOTTI HILL is an attorney, art critic, and curator from Salt Lake City, Utah. She previously received a master's degree in Art History and taught art history courses at Westminster College and the University of Utah. She serves as a regular contributor to the *Deseret News* and *15 Bytes: Utah's Art Magazine* and has curated exhibitions for Granary Arts, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, the Topaz Museum, Modern West Fine Art, and the Rio Gallery.

AL JIRIKOWIC is a long-time cultural observer and participant, commentator and humorist lurking in the fringes of Washington DC... Designer of bars and restaurants as oasis from the untold stresses of the city... free spaces where hopefully humans could interact on human terms, on art terms...and maybe relax.

DARREN JONES is an art critic, curator, and educator. His writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *ArtUS*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artslant* and *Artsy*. He is a contributing editor for the *New Art Examiner*. Curatorial and artistic projects have been covered in *The Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *Artforum.com*, *Huffington Post*, and *Scotland on Sunday*. Jones' book, *The Contemporary Art Gallery: Display, Power and Privilege*, (co-authored with David Carrier) was published in 2016. He currently teaches Curatorial Studies, at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Jones lives in Fire Island Pines, New York, and Key West, Florida.

MIKLOS LEGRADY is a visual artist, writer, anti-hero and protagonist who's expecting trouble. He steps out of the art world's blind spot, uncovering myths and deconstructing fictions. He has a B.Sc. in visual studies workshop from Rochester, N.Y. and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

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FRANCES OLIVER has published seven works of fiction and self-published three memoirs. She was born in Vienna, grew up and married in the USA, and has since lived and travelled in a number of countries. After her husband's death she and their daughter settled in Cornwall, where she devotes much time to environmental campaigns.

LORETTA PETTINATO was born in northern Italy. After her humanistic studies, she specialized in physiopathology of infantile development. She taught for years. She lives in Milan; she is an art lover and is one of the ONLUS Volunteers For Museo Diocesano. She is involved with their artistic and cultural initiatives proposed every year

CARMELLA SARACENO is a creative entrepreneur, community participant, an artist, writer, co-owner and president of Methods & Materials, Inc., co-founder and director of (A+CCT) Artists and Children Create Together and mother of two young women, living in Chicago, Illinois and Gary, Indiana, simultaneously.

SHÄNNE SANDS is a poet and author her non-fiction work *Bombay City of Sands* was reviewed as one of the most lyrical books ever written.

ALEXANDER STANFIELD is an art historian, writer, critic, and commentator with a BFA in Art History and an MA in Art History and Criticism.

PENDERY WEEKES is the publisher of the *New Art Examiner*, together with an extraordinary worldwide team.

ANTHONY VINEY is based in West Cornwall. His work uses images and words to explore themes of transience and evanescence. In lockdown he's been developing these themes in hand-bound artist's books featuring drawings and haiku. www.anthonviny.com

**If you have ideas for articles or are a writer
please get in touch:**

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LETTERS

Venice – Not Only the Biennial

Editor,
Frankly, reading this review hurt! It hurt because all that Venice has to offer us is locked up in our lockdowns. I feel nostalgia, I feel homesick and sad at the prospect of not being able to travel freely to Venice whenever I want. Apart from the financial aspect of the high cost of travel, the thought of not being able to go to this unique city of art represents real pain for me and my dreams that have been crushed, thanks to this miserable virus.

Jose Alemano 06/11/2020

Editor,
Reply to Jose Alemano:
But you can visit Venice, and everywhere. Online shows abound- ing have allowed us to travel the world to see museum and gallery shows without spending on airfare or lodging. It's not ideal as you cannot experience the size and majesty of the art, but it is accessible.

Nancy Nesvet 17/01/2021

Editor,
Reply to Nancy Nesvet:
No way can I find virtual travel "to see museum and gallery shows" stimulating or satisfying. I think we all, or most of us, have had enough of virtual living. Artworks need to be seen in person; just as our world treasures need to be seen in person and not online.

George Dalin 04/02/2021

Editor,
Reply to Nancy Nesvet:
virtual is not even close, the smells, the colors, the light!

Ian Russo 05/02/2021

The Presence of Painting

Editor,
Concise and beautiful! As I have turned from painting to digital imagery I have gained in that I can create dozens of new ideas while friends create one or two paintings. But their paintings have a visual force that graphics created as light cannot achieve. Prior to Newton, color to painters was not light but a property embedded in physical material. As such, color theory back then comprised the element known as luster. Yellow white and black on coats of arms were originally gold silver and sable to yield a far more powerful visual effect.

Stephen Luecking 16/01/2021

Editor,
Beautiful, sincere, & insightful, as always Steve!

Adam Fung 29/11/2020

Editor,
There is simply no substitute for being 'in person' to take in art. There is no real virtual art world. This is a very difficult idea for many to grasp. Everything, all the art, you see on line- is compromised. The exception may be digital art itself which may have to do with the aesthetic of compromising itself. Keep painting!

Al in Washington DC 24/11/2020

Editor,
A wonderful article. Thank you, Steven.

Anon 22/11/2020

Editor,
Sending article to artist' son in FK.
Mary Wade 22/11/2020

Time to End the Whitney Biennial

Editor,
Totally agree with Al Jirikowic. When a major exhibition consistently promotes artists from the most powerful New York and L.A. galleries, then the museum is a marketing ploy for those galleries and not an attempt at an objective look at the art of today.

Miklos Legrady 05/12/2020

Editor,
Reply to Miklos Legrady:
Where does the art we consider really important come from and why do we dare bother to ask these questions? Apparently we seem not to in terms of major museums and galleries ... or do we?

Al in Washington DC 02/01/2021

We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say.

If you would like to start a conversation, or enter one please visit

www.newartexaminer.net

or write an email to

letters@newartexaminer.net

QUOTE of the Month:

"I start a picture and I finish it. I don't think about art while I work. I try to think about life."

Jean-Michel Basquiat

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EDITORIAL

Al Jirikowic

No art, worth its salt, is ever obvious. This is why art is enthralling, for art, in all its forms, constantly unfolds before us, often mysteriously. Throughout history we have never looked away from art despite everything that has shaken us. Indeed our compulsion for art exists to uncover all our stories. Bewitched by art we endeavor to understand and absorb all it tells us. Art criticism is about getting to the bottom of this creative instinct because we need, essentially, to live with this unfolding witness in the image, this wonder of artists' minds which have marked humanity and nations for over 75,000 years. Whether the artist or the viewer knows why or if one ever actually understands a work of art - is not the point, because we make it anyway. Whether we like it or not or if it drives us mad, so what? We do it. It is our human need. But in the last 150 years or so the nature of art has changed a lot. I would say humans have not really changed, but the character of art has certainly changed as we have become oh so modern. I state the word with attitude because that change seems to be a focus of much speculation these days. Especially when it comes to culture or its lack. Art is where it has always been, in struggle.

Art has been given a new function lately, especially in the habits of the professional art world. Art is big business now, used as a store of value in ways that delimit the fundamental characteristics of art itself. It is used as a trust cover, for tax evasion and wealth transfer schemes, to exchange currency, as bargaining positions in blue chip stock trades or position covers. Art is bid up, like stocks, by major dealers and trades on markets no different from a stock exchange. Banks own major art auction houses. Boards of directors are selected to lend their private art collections to museums for mutual financial advantage and often these boards dictate what a gallery or museum is to purchase in their collections so as to bid up the value of the art the boards themselves are holding. Massive mutual financial back-scratching is what the major museums often yield to, for they are in the game of survival and billions of dollars are at stake. Often the last to reap any financial advantage of these rigged transactions are the actual artists. Of course galleries are constantly on the search for young hot artists to promote, sell and then forget when maximum profit has been squeezed from them.

The young artists are urged to pay attention to the art market as the success measure in their lives; to abandon the reasons they ever decided on an art calling. And often they are left heartbroken, feeling betrayed by a march they had no control over. They will never realize if they were ever successful or unsuccessful (notice I did not say failure) on their own terms. Of course you are always being told you are crazy if you want to be an artist in the first place. It does take uncommon courage to be an artist. There are those who stay in one place, quite comfortably.

Continued on Page 36



Each issue, the *New Art Examiner* will invite a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

SCOTT WINFIELD SUBLETT is a screenwriter, playwright, film director, professor at San Jose State University in California, and author of *Screenwriting for Neurotics*.

THE AMERICAN SCHADENFREUDE EPIDEMIC

When an evil clown rules your land, you have to expect a certain decline in moral tone, and rest assured that, last year, schadenfreude reached unprecedented peaks in the United States of America.

The term appeared in English as early as the mid 1800s, combining the German words for ‘damage’ and ‘joy,’ and meaning, ‘delight taken in the misfortune of others.’ It’s funny that the word we use for such a thing should be German—you’d think French, right? Or Russian, where they have the useful proverb, “It is not enough that I should have a cow—also my neighbor must not have a cow.” Substitute ‘Guggenheim grant’ for ‘cow’ and you have a formulation that has passed through the heads of many an artist schadenfreuder.

As a writer and academic, there are days when I think that if it weren’t for schadenfreude I’d have no Freude at all. My usual dish of it is the pleasure of seeing a competitor taken down a notch, but I’m not entirely without decency: it has to be a someone whose work is meretricious. Artists being an honest breed, most of them will privately admit their susceptibility to schadenfreude toward rivals (or, as I hope the Germans say, *Rivalen-schadenfreude*), and who can blame artists, when their vocation is so full of rejection, poverty and humiliation? The scientific truth is that we humans care right down to our cells where we rank in the pack, and indeed a study proved that the telomeres of low-ranking British civil servants are more frayed than their bosses’.

The kind of schadenfreude we direct at rivals blends into a somewhat nobler kind—the schadenfreude we feel when a true devil gets his due. The US had an epidemic of that type of schadenfreude when Donald J. Trump contracted Covid. President Drumpf (the family changed the name before leaving for America) gleefully took pleasure in the misfortunes of others, picking especially on the weak. He mocked refugees, the disabled, and

“losers” who lost their lives serving their country in the armed forces. Most contemptible was someone like Sen. John McCain, stupid enough to get himself tortured in a steaming, tropical prison camp, something Trump neatly sidestepped by skipping military service altogether.

When the Evil Clown was diagnosed with Covid, nary an American liberal didn’t think, “Why, that’s the prettiest poetic justice I’ve ever seen.” It’s not that many of us wanted him dead: just suffer enough to learn that folks should wear masks during a plague.

My therapist tells me that ‘shadow’ emotions such as fear and anger are integral and necessary parts of our psyches. We bury them at our peril. I intend to own my schadenfreude and, what’s more, be disappointed when it’s denied me. Booth Tarkington’s novel *The Magnificent Ambersons*, later made into Orson Welles’s second-best movie, was about a snooty aristocrat sorely in need of a comeuppance. When he got it, the people who would have relished it weren’t around to see. Similarly, Adolphus Crosbie, the cad who jilted Lily Dale in Trollope’s *The Small House at Allington*, finally gets his comeuppance, but the people he damaged don’t find out, and Trollope reflects that villains frequently do get their just deserts, but hidden from view. That’s all very profound I’m sure, but comeuppance unseen is schadenfreude denied, and I’ve got a bottle of good, French champagne chilling for the day I see Donald J. Trump in jail. My therapist says that’s OK.

letters@newartexaminer.net

Humanity Lost a Year, Not its Soul

Our writers from around the world reflect upon their disparate Covid experiences.

Locked Down in California: Notes of a Curmudgeon in Paradise

Scott Winfield Sublett

For a lot of us, the big frustration of the pandemic is how it puts the future on hold. For me, that means freeze-drying my long-treasured dream of moving to New York, something people don't understand because their fantasy, as was mine, is that you get to California and the rest of your life is painted by Gauguin, or at least Hockney. However, as the 1940s movie siren Rita Hayworth wisecracked about her divorces, "They go to bed with Gilda, they wake up with me."

Let's start with the honeymoon. Back in the 1990s, soon after I got here, Derek Guthrie, wise and august co-founder of *The New Art Examiner*, came to visit. We strolled the 100 feet from my sunny studio apartment (back then only 600 bucks a month) to Venice Beach, settled onto the sand, and broke out the pitcher of Manhattans I'd concocted to complement the sunset. Under an orange-gold darkening sky, we gazed at the horizon as waves crashed softly at our feet, and gulls cried, "Ha! Ha!" A squadron of pelicans winged over the water. A few feet below them, dolphins broke the surface of the teal sea in playful arcs.

A silence, as the spectacle sank in, then Derek growled: "I don't fucking believe it — this isn't real." He sounded like someone who suspects he's being conned, but underneath that, perhaps a note of regret, like a man who lost his virginity at 45 and suddenly realized what had been missed.

As usual, Derek was on to something. California has ravishing sights, but less of it is beautiful than you think, and beauty has a price. I don't mind earthquakes (walls fall away so that apartment buildings look like dollhouses), but now forest fires turn downtown skies a blackish orange, with air that's 'the equivalent of smoking 10 to 20 packs of cigarettes a day,' which makes you think, what the hell, have a cigarette, but if you did, the looks you'd get would be deadlier than fire.

Even worse are the cost of living and inconceivable homelessness, cheek-to-jowl with so much wealth. The big lucre is mostly made by the art-hating droids of tech, who even when they pull down \$250,000 a year seem somehow unable to rustle up the down payment on a typical two-million-dollar bungalow.

Worse for one's morale is when people deserve to be richer than you. For example, at my last pre-Covid19 dinner party in San Francisco, my host boasted that the goat cheese had been ranked number one in the state and was fresh off the ranch of his buddy, a prominent pediatric surgeon. OK, so Doc Wonderful spends his weekdays performing delicate operations on adorable children of all races and creeds, and on the week-end curdles up the best chèvre in the state? I'm supposed to go on living my worthless



Photo: Wiki commons

life knowing that? It makes one want a proper drink, but if you order anything but wine, or craft beer at 12 dollars a can, Californians think you're a peasant and a lush.

My disillusionment with the Golden State probably comes down to my inability to say, "Have a nice day" to people I'd like to slap upside the head. There's a shrewd saying in the US: 'East Coasters are kind but not nice. West Coasters are nice but not kind.' And when you think about it, nice-but-not-kind is a good working definition of passive-aggressive, of which California is the world capital (I would say Capital of the Universe but God's silence is the ultimate passive aggression). California's passive-aggression often takes the form of faintly sanctimonious retorts that subtly call into question your liberal piety. You say, 'Nice sunny day!' They say, 'But what about the drought?' You say, 'Damn — rain again!' They say, 'But don't you care about the drought?' To all this, you might be saying, 'Stuck in California. Isn't yours rather a first-world problem?' In which case, congratulations, you're going to love California.

When I tell friends that I'm divorcing the Golden State, they ask, "Won't you miss the sunshine?" Yes, but my theory is this: when you're depressed, a gray sky is a tragedy, but weather doesn't matter when you're happy. The happiest country on Earth is Finland. So, when the lockdown is over, I'm going to New York, unless I go to England, where my drinking will seem perfectly normal.

Only Connect – E. M. Forster and the Joys of Online Teaching

Colin Fell



E.M. Forster

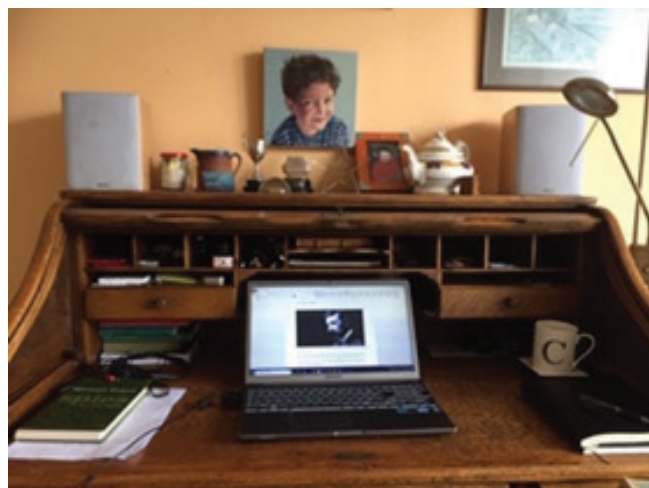
In a sealed room, somewhere within the bowels of the earth, a woman named Vashti is lecturing to her unseen listeners. She's been lecturing from underground most of her life – 'the clumsy system of public gatherings had been long since abandoned; neither Vashti nor her audience stirred from their rooms...'

While lecturing, she turns on her isolation switch; when she finishes she turns it off again, and immediately all the accumulations of the last three minutes burst upon her ... what was the new food like? Could she recommend it ... etc.'

She speaks to her son, Kuno, via The Machine, temporarily emerging from isolation; to her dismay, he has a request: "I want to see you not through The Machine ... I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine ..." Vashti cannot contemplate a journey through the surface of the earth, which she describes as "only dust and mud". She emphasises the dangers of such an expedition; "you would need a respirator ... or the air will kill you ..."

Although, I hasten to add, I haven't been sealed in an underground chamber here at Fell Towers, there's something uncannily resonant about this description of virtual teaching in lockdown. Vashti and Kuno and their disturbing world were magicked into being by the great E. M. Forster as long ago as 1909. In that faraway Edwardian world, the novelist more famous for his precisely satirical portrayals of the hypocrisies and emotional paralysis of the English upper middle classes, somehow appeared to foretell not only lockdown, but also computers, Facebook and Instagram. If anything could increase my admiration for this wonderful writer, this can.

Since the college campus closed to students for the second time in mid-December, my days have followed a pattern familiar from the long months of the long lockdown of 2020. I wake up later than usual, head downstairs to my grandfather's old desk, turn on the laptop, open up Microsoft teams, and prepare to spend a day talking to a blank screen. The lively, animated young people with whom I'm fortunate to spend my working life have temporarily disappeared, sentenced to listen to me chuntering on at



Colin's Desk

them from a screen. I have to admit that the very fact that I'm doing it at all is miraculous; on our first lockdown, nearly a year ago, my classes were clearly sceptical that I'd have the ability to operate Microsoft Teams and grasp its mysteries. Somehow, despite my Luddite tendencies, I have. I have an additional advantage over Vashti, as despite the limitations of our Machine, the young minds of west Cornwall remain communicative, reflective, challenging; they are indomitable, and they will return. Although I cannot see them, I know they're there – they'll take the mic, and they'll contribute their insights via chat, effortlessly adapting to a technology which I suppose has come of age as they have. And I'm so impressed by their engagement and understanding, perhaps even more so than usual. In a creative writing session this morning I was honoured with such original and thoughtful phrasing in a description of a cold day, the sun is described as 'pushing its way through ... like tin trickling out of ore.' More lyrically, 'Birds sing the melody of winter'. Alert to changing moods, another wrote of a girl 'Using her finger, she slowly traces the shape of a face into the condensation forming on the glass, two eyes and an exaggerated frown. As if the universe could hear her inner misery ...'

Perhaps typing encourages a greater freedom of self-expression than trying to articulate it orally in public? Never in my experience has literature become more immediately alive, and reflective of the young people engaging with it. Holding familiar texts up to unfamiliar lights enables the refraction of new, poignant colours. Coleridge's poem *This Lime Tree Bower My Prison* explores the frustration of the poet, grumpily confined by an injured leg to his Exmoor garden, imagining the epiphanic vistas opening up to his friends as they ramble over familiar paths without him, and we have all to some extent been him, immured within our homes, left to imagine another freer, external world. The Ancient Mariner, adrift upon his penitential oceans, has rarely enjoyed so much company – like him, we have all felt 'Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide wide sea!' At times the need for each other's company has trumped all other requirements; students turn on their cameras, chat, introduce beloved pets and

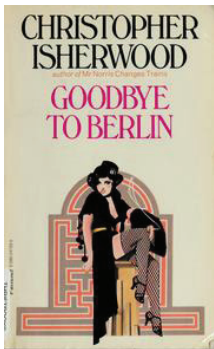
family members. 'I'd forgotten how good it was just to talk' is a not unusual response, and it's impossible not to feel their pain. The two years of college, in England the bridge between school and university, is a time of discovery; of one's friends, one's voice, one's nascent adult identity. But for much of the last year, young people have been confined within the family, unable to have new experiences, to make new friends. And yet while one clock is frozen, apparently interminably, another advances inexorably; university applications have been made and offers received; and yet this moment of transition has never felt more fraught with the difficulties of the unknown. 'How will I feel about living away from home?' is a perennial question for 18-year-olds, but which has now acquired a new piquancy, and to its siren voice has been added the counterpoints of 'Will I get any teaching? Is it going to be worth the money? Should I bother with

university at all?' I can only begin to imagine the countless pedagogic research projects which, over the next few years, will dissect this strange period of our lives.

Back to Forster. Vashti completes her lecture, and sits back, awaiting audience reaction. There is none. There is only silence, and Vashti knows that is it; the machine is stopping, and it is the end of the world. Unable to face the horrors of direct experience, she dies. As we emerge blinking into our own countryside, our towns and our cities, we can relish our own direct experience. Never again will we take for granted the mundane pleasures of expressing ourselves through the thousands of social interactions of which a day is composed. Except perhaps on a rainy Thursday morning in February. Forster's famous phrase in *Howards End* is 'Only Connect', and thankfully, and thanks to the machine, and however imperfectly, we do.

I, Too, Am a Camera

Josephine Gardiner



Once every week, regardless of weather, I can be found sitting on a chair in my tiny granite courtyard with a big bowl of soapy water at my feet. I am surrounded by plastic bags of groceries delivered by the local supermarket. The task is to wash each item before passing it to my husband to put away in the kitchen. This seems normal now, after a year - the idea that death could arrive attached to a packet of frozen beans, or perhaps, with spiteful irony, clinging to a bottle of disinfectant. "I will show you fear in a handful of dust".

The risk from viral particles on surfaces ('fomites') is underplayed by scientists, but this washing, an occult ritual, imparts a sense of control. And it's less disturbing than the knowledge that the virus's preferred means of transport is on the breath of your family and closest friends, hidden like a stowaway in the words of their conversation - their shared thoughts - and the fear that for this reason you may never sit across a table with them again. As I sit there washing and rinsing, I think 'is this what I'll remember, when this is over, if I survive?' Or will I just be left with a blurred impression of absence, stasis, the frustrating passivity of 'shielding', the hideous ticker-tape statistics of the dead appearing in the online newspaper just above those relentlessly positive articles on knitting cupcakes and getting fit in lockdown? The welcome (to an introvert) acres of time to read, write, lose yourself in the woods without a timetable? The suspicion that everyone is experiencing something similar, or similarly ambivalent, but since you never see people offline, it's hard to tell? Probably none of these. The dominant images of a traumatic event take time to make themselves known.

Likewise, interpretations of such events need time to settle and ferment before they emerge transfigured in painting, film, writing, and music. I predict that we will see a rush of attempts to dramatise or make sense of the pandemic in the arts, but that these early efforts will not be the best. T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which I quoted above, appeared four years after the end of World War 1, and two years after the pandemic flu of 1918-20. *The Third Man*, the best film to come out of World War 2, was not released until 1949, while the reverberations of that war's holocaust are still felt in 21st century fiction. Perhaps painting is more swiftly responsive: *Guernica* was painted the same year the fascists bombed the town (1937), while Otto Dix, as we saw in the last issue of the *New Art Examiner*, was able to capture the stranger aspects of Weimar Germany all around him as well as painting the horrors he had seen in the trenches.

Contemporary culture, particularly in film, has within a few months acquired an unnerving veneer of the antique. New dramas on Netflix and Amazon already seem to be representing something as distant and unreachable as the Roaring Twenties or *fin de siècle* Paris. No matter what the film is about, or who or where the actors are, the reaction they provoke is similar: look at them all at their office parties, crowding round bars in pubs, taking trains across Europe, planes across the planet, oblivious. Films from the 1970s or 80s seem no more dated now than those made in 2019, give or take a few phones. In a couple of brilliant paragraphs at the end of *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood describes the look of the city just after Hitler had taken power. The sunny streets, the trams and stations "have an air of curious familiarity, of striking resemblance to something one remembers as normal and pleasant in the past - like a very good photograph".

Epidemics Come and Go

Frances Oliver

This is the fourth epidemic which has made abrupt changes in my life (see article in the Jan/Feb edition of the NAE); so perhaps I am less surprised by it, and less affected by lockdowns, than most people.

As a writer in lockdown: during the first lockdown I kept a boring daily diary, just for my records. During the next ones (how many - I lose track) I've been re-reading and re-organizing old notes, letters, photos, etc. and also re-reading some discarded manuscripts to see if anything can be revived or reworked. I hate wasting manuscript: as much as I hate wasting food, which in fact I never do. Not wasting writings is harder.

Missing trips abroad and the chance to use my other languages, French and German, I've made a point of reading in them. My most ambitious project was reading in the original German the whole of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, which I'd wanted to do ever since being deeply impressed by the English version when I was in my teens. Well worth doing - but not quite the great classic I remembered. Inspired by Annie Markovich borrowing my Volume I, I also finally read Volume II of Rebecca West's fascinating, exhaustive (and exhausting) book on just

pre-World War II Yugoslavia, *Black Lake and Grey Falcon*. Two of several things I'd probably never have done without lockdown.

I have reflected again and again how lucky I am to live in a beautiful place with beautiful walks from my front door, walks that include uphill so I won't lose my mountain legs, and how equally lucky to have a large collection of books. Some of the books I did finally force myself to get rid of in the past now inspire regrets.

The *New Art Examiner's* statement of purpose reads: 'THE NEW ART EXAMINER is a not-for-profit whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society, etc. etc. ... and in particular the interaction of these factors within the visual arts milieu.' I'd like to see more material on 'the definition and transmission of culture' in general, not just selfishly because that's what I myself tend to write, but because I feel it would bring the NAE to a wider group of readers; also because it is important to see that the ephemeral, trivial and clique-dominated character of so much in the visual arts infests our culture as a whole.

Continental Tribal Drift

Anna Maria Benedetti



Mural showing Galen and Hippocrates. 12th century; Anagni, Italy (Wiki commons)

We are not immortal and we are not even humble.

There have been numerous epidemics throughout history: typhus, smallpox, plague, cholera. Viruses mutated and reappeared over time. The

only defence was respect for simple rules of daily hygiene, frequent hand washing, keeping a safe distance from others, protecting the nose and mouth, while today we say 'wear a mask'.

In the Bronze Age, the Yamnaya moved from the steppe to Europe and settled in the north. Disease had weakened these organized and prosperous Europeans, which allowed the settlement of the new people who were immune to the bacterium *Yersinia Pestis*. In 2015, studies conducted on the DNA found in the

teeth of skeletons in the steppe dating back to 5000 BCE showed the presence of *Yersinia Pestis*. It is no coincidence that Europe, which on closer inspection can be considered a peninsula of Asia, speaks Indo-European languages.

In the fifth century BCE cholera was already known to Hippocrates: the name derives from the ancient Greek, meaning gutter, because it seemed 'as if the intestine poured water from a gutter'. Only in 1849 did Dr John Snow, during an epidemic in England, suspect that the cause of transmission of cholera was putrid water. Cholera from sewer-rat fleas passed to humans, yet another passage of the disease from animal to man.

In the world of nature everything seems connected, as man humbly tries to survive

Art responds to challenges in so many ways, by expressing its anger and disgust at what it does not share or by taking refuge in the spiritual to survive. In the 20th century there are numerous art movements in this sense. Everyone reacts as best they can, we are not immortal and very often we are not humble in the face of disease. Our weakness is the same as that of 500, of 5,000 years ago. The world goes on, some help today comes from technology. With it, during the lockdowns, we have united. There is nothing new under the sun. The message of hope comes in a smile.

The Guardians of the Earth

Liviana Martin

In response to the invitation of Julia and Daniel to write a brief account of the pandemic, my reflections centred not on my own moods (sense of loneliness, helplessness, fear of the unknown), which I think are common to most, but on the spread of the virus, which is also linked to environmental destruction.

Our robbery and indiscriminate subtraction of the world's resources, which we think are at our disposal, is at the heart of a photographic exhibition (even if calling it such would be an understatement) that I have just visited, entitled *The Yanomami Struggle*. It was created by Claudia Andujar in Milan and which unfortunately will close in early February.

The artist is an extraordinary person. Born in 1931 in Switzerland, her father, a Jew, was deported to Auschwitz, where he was killed. Claudia moved to Brazil and since the 1970s has been interested in the cause of the indigenous people of the Amazon. In particular she got to know the Yanomami people, who live between Brazil and Venezuela. Claudia lived with them, communicated with gestures and expressions, photographed them and tried to reveal their souls, their real world and the supernatural world they believe in, making visible an invisible world.

As their spokesperson, the shaman Davi Kopenawa, asserts, the Yanomami people are the guardians of the forest, they take care of it, know more than 500 species of plants and live off the resources of the territory. The land-forest for the natives is a living creature, part of a complex cosmology that involves human beings, trees, animals. Claudia says, "We walked for hours. The forest for the Indians is like a city for us. They know all the intersections and how to deal with them, the same way we cross a road." In the 1970s/1980s the Brazilian military dictatorship launched an infrastructure program of roads across the Amazon, while gold prospectors poured into these territories, polluting the rivers with mercury. The result is a series of diseases unknown to forest peoples (from measles to malaria), which led to the decimation of entire villages. When, in 1977, the government expelled Claudia from the Yanomami territory, the photographer devoted herself full time to obtaining political rights for indigenous people and founded an NGO with other activists.

In the 1980s the NGO promoted a vaccination campaign in hard-to-access Amazon regions. The series of photos *Marcados* (Marked) presents portraits of men, women, and children with a tag around the neck indicating the medical record number, necessary for the identification of people who do not have a defined name during their lifetime, but change it several times. The art-



Claudia Andujar: *The Yanomami Struggle*

ist draws a parallel with the experience of her family, marked first with the Star of David and then with the number assigned in the concentration camp. But the Jews were branded to die, these people were branded to live.

The activists' struggle finally led to the demarcation of the Yanomami territory in the 1990s, even if the battle for survival continued. Today, President Bolsonaro threatens their achievements.

The black and white or infrared photos in the exhibition, along with numerous videos (in some cases shot by the natives themselves), drawings made by people who for the first time used paper and colours, tell us about everyday life, about house collectives, religion, shamans induced into a state of hallucinogenic trance, death and funeral rites. Respect for the land means that hunting is aimed at their needs, the houses built in collective houses, are burned to avoid risk of contagion when a group moves.

Today we know that many of the epidemics we have experienced or are experiencing are caused through disrespecting our environment through pollution, deforestation and intensive farming. And we forget more and more that we are not the masters of the world, but the guardians who must take care of it.

The Yanomami Fight by Claudia Andujar, Triennale di Milano, until the beginning of February 2021.

The Washington Post

Survival During the Pandemic

James Cassell

I'm a creature accustomed to, if not dependent on, routine. In part, I suppose, it's my nature. It's how I obtain some stability. I think of myself as high-strung, and I seek a steadiness and a certain predictability and control in some of the basic areas of my life. I make the bed each morning. I have my cinnamon toast followed by my oatmeal and black tea, and I read *The Washington Post*. After working in my studio, I walk most afternoons along the creek near my house. In the hot weather I go outside and garden late in the day when the sun has died back a bit, grunting and sweating and happily wearing myself out.

As an artist I consider routine and structure necessities. It's the scaffolding that surrounds the creative process. In making art you want to be a little unhinged, I think. As you walk into the void to create something from nothing, you let go. There are no constants, except a necessary amorphousness. But outside the studio, you want to know there's something recognizable you can grasp hold of.

This rhythm seems to have worked fairly well for me during the pandemic. I've gone more inward, become more insular. In any

case, to be an artist is, by definition, to be inward-oriented (there may be exceptions. One thinks of Andy Warhol). You can feel a tinge of guilt, though, a sense of being privileged, as you inhabit your own world, your own reality. I sometimes worry that the pandemic has made me further removed from the world in an unhealthy way. Is there a danger in that? Will I face a heightened timidity when in-person socializing resumes?

I miss my friends to be sure. I'm frustrated that I can't seem to get vaccinated, angry that there are still significant shortages all over the country. I feel equally angry and depressed living in the dark and toxic climate that the actions and inactions of Trump et al have largely brought about. Like so many, I suffer from pandemic fatigue.

But I know I'm lucky. I have a wife whose company I enjoy, and who doesn't seem to tire of conversation and my companionship. I have my work and the absorption of the artistic process. It's a world I can enter whenever I want. An alternative world, but one no less compelling, I like to think, than the one that bears down hard on me each day.

Lockdowns are Green

Lynda Green



I observed the lockdown last April; it was easy, the weather was outstanding, there was long awaited decorating to be done at

home, and finally I had time to put my allotment in order. For a week or two I listened to the news and became increasingly paranoid about getting ill. To the point that in Aldi, my heart began to pound, tunnel vision set in and I thought a heart attack was on the cards. I went home and, standing in my kitchen, tore myself off a strip, told myself to pull myself together or I would be giving myself something to worry about, a stroke or even a desire to jump off a cliff.

Thereafter, I promised myself to take care, but not to overthink the pandemic. Actually I don't use the word, neither will I use the word 'bubble' in relation to my social life, not that I have one, some things never change! After that I got on very well. I gardened, lazed in my hammock reading lots of books I'd had for years and not got around to reading and, in the allotment grew some nice vegetables, while also being able to shout to fellow allotmenters and put the world to rights.

I went back to work in July, ferried lots of holidaymakers about, putting the world to rights with them too. It was good to be back. The second lockdown I chose to carry on working. The weather was wintry, not conducive to outdoor work, and all our customers were very respectful, grateful to us for working. None of the drivers became ill, and I got optimistic reports from various reliable sources that we in Cornwall were doing very well.

Now, in lockdown again, I am continuing to work. I have my opinions on the way our government has handled and is handling these troubled times, as I'm sure everyone has.

As I write this I am glancing over to my gate posts on which I

sprinkle bird seed each day. I have pigeons and blackbirds (or are they crows?) come down to eat. One good thing about the quieter year we have had is that it's given nature a bite of the apple, a chance to heal, if only a little.

I have missed, not in any order, car boots, writing group meet-

A Year of Doing

Mary Fletcher

How has the past Covid year been? I am surprised how quickly I have got used to such a restricted life.

I loved dancing and going to St Ives jazz club, meeting other NAE writers, seeing exhibitions, putting my art into shows, mooching about in shops, wondering if I could visit Greece again. But now I get by with a walk round the park and a few words with my neighbour, zoom meetings and email and phone calls. I've had various things wrong with my health, but it's the first year I ever remember not having a cold or chest infection.

My husband died in June 2018. Since then I've continued my existence on a far lower level with what spark of life insists on enjoying brief moments. I can't help thinking how different it would have been if he had been alive and well and we could have enjoyed being together. I feel envious when I meet couples out together, but it's not really worse for being in lockdown.

There are 30 books waiting to be read, lots of art on YouTube, the flute I am trying to play, my piano needing to be tuned, and a painting I want to finish. I get up late, go to bed early and fail to get on with several book projects - but writing for NAE is still enjoyable and I keep drawing.

I hope to avoid the suffering that catching the virus would bring, that we come through to resume more social activity, that this

ings, smiles on faces and oh, visits to the library. Finally I hold firm the thought that there have been more serious plagues and pandemics, and we shall get through this one as we have done before. It will be interesting to see what the history books make of it in the fullness of time.



life, like being under house arrest, can eventually be left as the memory of a strange affliction that passes.

Will art and the absurdities of its marketing, its fame circuits, its hierarchies, resume unscathed, or will some changes develop?

Politically will folk demand better services, more equality, socialism in fact, or will the Tories carry on crushing the workers to serve the capitalist machine? World War 2 motivated Labour votes, the making of our NHS - can the Covid crisis bring similar benefit?

Haiku Reflections

Anthony Viney

uninvited guest
sleeping in the hall -
chased out by soap and water

Throughout lockdown I've been writing haiku. It's been rather like having a daily training session (well, more like a couple of times per week if I'm honest) and it has helped trim my somewhat flabby lockdown mind into a rather more defined shape - mainly by encouraging me to observe and reflect on nature and its many subtle resonances for humankind. I've actually been using haiku in this way for the past few years as part of my practice as a visual artist, but as a discipline it has become far more significant and poignant since Covid made its appearance.

I often create haiga - a marriage of drawing and haiku - using my

haiku. And, having found the combination of words and images a very good platform from which to explore my changes of mood and understanding, I'd like to share some further reflections here.

coronavirus
what goes around comes around -
ah, musical chairs!

When I look back at the haiku I wrote last year they seem to move from the strangeness I initially felt at our new lockdown lives, through the loss of freedom and the gradual slowing down of life in general, finally to a sense of the truly terrible loss of life - and the realisation of the grief that accompanies each and every one of these deaths.

it's another quiet day –
sitting all alone
on the top of mount Fuji

only on this day
having done six months inside –
beetles on the run

I look at the menu
and choose sleep –
it's the perfect choice

there is a vast past
that is fast melting away –
we're splashing in the puddles

Because all life is precious, an enhanced sense of transience can only make it feel more so. And while I'm sure there will be a renewed sense of life and energy once we finally emerge on the other side of the pandemic, some of the lessons lockdown has taught us will surely serve us well throughout our lives.

the fire of life –
blazes every morning
until day dies down

There were also some undoubted upsides to the lockdowns. London for one experienced clear blue skies for weeks on end in spring 2020, and the quietness that enveloped many neighbourhoods was a balm to our anxious souls.

London's lockdown –
knocked out bars
and clear blue skies

A Thank You Letter

Alexander Stanfield

The term 'unprecedented' has been thrown around a lot as a means to come-to-terms and describe what we have been dealing with over the past year. While 'unprecedented' is extremely applicable, my past year has been sponsored by 'managing'. Just trying to stay afloat like many others. The need for stability, or to find it; mental support, physical and emotional well-being are all understandable priorities. As these uncertain times continue, needs overtake wants for most of us. Wants are what we can consider when needs are met. Yet, I am at a point of realization. Not epiphany, it's more of an acceptance with a heavy dash of self-awareness. My want to write about art, to experience it, to share it, meets with my need to be part of the larger conversation.



Anthony Viney: What Goes Around Comes Around

My final haiku in this piece was given to me by email. On one particular morning during lockdown, the subject lines of three arrivals in my inbox all began with the words 'time to', then continued with 'recover', 'reflect' and 'refresh' respectively. As that still seems good advice, I offer it as a final thought about my lockdown experience:

time to recover
time to reflect
time to refresh



With the Arts almost decimated in many places it is daunting for someone like myself who has been trying to establish themselves. I love to talk about art. It brings me a sense of purpose that I crave. Liquid crystal displays just don't have the same effect that an in-person encounter with an artist or show can deliver. This is why I am thankful to be part of NAE. Even though I have not been able, mentally or physically, to contribute as much as I ideally want to. It is inspiring to know I work with like-minded writers and artists.

Lockdown Love

Gill Fickling

I have been in an unrequited love affair for over 30 years. And what better time to indulge my passion – or at least immerse myself in his legacy of genius – than as we enter the sixth week of the third lockdown in the UK in less than 12 months. Our confinement this time falls in winter. The wettest January in years and a pervading dense greyness of cloud-cover are conditions that neither bode well for morale – nor as a landscape painter. Unlike many artists, I fail to get inspired by the UK landscape in winter. My painting tradition was born and grew during the 16 disjointed years that I lived in Spain. I yearn for those saturated colours of southern Spain, those red-ochre rocks, those blue-grey olive trees against cobalt-skies and the sounds they conjure of cicadas at midday, the screeching swallows at dusk and the hum of bees on the almond blossom. Had it not been for the pandemic and Brexit, I would have been back in Spain by now. So what better way to bask in these visionary pleasures and to hang out with my love-object than to spend these weeks of lockdown studying and copying the works of that great Spanish ‘Master of Light’, Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923).

The Valencian-born painter created many of his best works on his home turf and in the great gardens of Andalucía. He first captured my heart when I moved to Valencia 30 years ago and took up oil painting. Since then I have snapped up any opportunity to study his originals in the flesh, getting my nose as close as possible to his canvases without being ejected, in exhibitions around Spain, in New York and, in 2019, the first ever retrospective of his work in the National Gallery in London. How did he create that effect? Which colour layer of paint did he put on first? Look at the direction of that brush stroke! But analysing the paintings and trying to recreate them are two entirely different things. So why not spend this lockdown trying to find answers to my frustrated endeavours at capturing light in paint. Using the book *Sorolla Painted Gardens* (Pub: Rizzoli Electa) as reference, I accompanied him on a winter walk through the gardens of the Alcazar in Seville (*Gardens of Charles V, Alcazar of Seville*, 1908 marvelling at the wealth of greens and the lemon light; I have joined his daughters in the heat of their siesta (*Siesta in the Garden in Valencia*, 1904), grappling to capture his turquoise shadows in the

overhead vine and the creases in the girls’ white dresses; and basking in the colours of his *Fountain at the Alcazar of Seville* (1908) with the magical lilac shadows on the yellow wall and the unlikely use of red in his foreground shadow. Studying his virtuosity under a microscope and copying his brushstrokes has only increased my passion – and it’s certainly helped to ease the lockdown blues. And now excuse me as I’m off with Sorolla to the Alhambra!



Joaquín Sorolla: *Fountain at the Alcazar of Seville* 1908
(author's copy)

Life is Finite

Christian Hain

Maybe it's time to savour the simple fact again – challenging, empowering, terrible, all-encompassing, and indeed: beautiful. A fundamental verity that is one of the most neglected, if not actively suppressed, insights in the modern world. A globalized technocentric society has no place for fragility and contempla-

tion, it seems; the swarm knows no limitations: it just is, and computers won't die (well, hardware does, thanks for reminding me – there'd better be a time machine in the cloud.) The eight-billion-and-counting entity that forms humanity today doesn't need a *raison d'être*, numbers will provide all the justification



Pieter Bruegel's The Triumph of Death reflects the social upheaval and terror that followed plague, which devastated medieval Europe.

necessary. Living 90 years is better than living 80 years, being a billionaire is better than being a millionaire – simple, evident truth accessible for everyone. Who'd think to ask this actually makes sense?

Massified humanity wants, and probably needs, to be ruled by numbers, resulting for instance in staged images of 90-plus year olds getting vaccinated, sold to the public as the highest – not merely medical but overall human – achievement of recent decades. A visual critique would not omit the cartoon sweater, worn to make the nonagenarian look as hip and fresh as possible (PR people in general are rather stupid).

The same imagery would have appeared absurd a few years ago. But it's all in the air of the times, in line with overprotected children bereaved of every chance to develop an individual personality, a singular character moulded by dangerous and even hurtful experiences – up to pensioners who'd never go cycling without wearing a helmet, still not having found a meaning in their life – and consequentially death.

Never having consciously applied meaning, there's much unfinished business that gets ever harder to push aside, and the angst grows stronger the older a society gets.

We experience the reality of a world where politics impair human dignity in the name of life and health, as human beings are

no longer allowed to be social entities. People are taken prisoner not just of their own fears but literally by others: sentenced to life, to subsist at all costs. Haven't we all heard stories of somebody's relatives unable to leave their cell – pardon, suite – in a retirement home for months, against their will, because only the will to live is deemed rational, superior to all other values?

Maybe it's time to think about quality again, shouldn't the way we live now be as important as the mere fact of existence? There's a close connection between art and death, the former having always been – among other things – an expression of the attempt to overcome the latter. Just like science seeks to vanquish it today, not necessarily more successfully, but certainly less humanely. To seek and to assign meaning to one's life and consequently death, means to make sense in the sense of a mental creation. The construction of meaning – that's also one purpose, and power, of art.

One morning, digging into my air-trade-certified-eco-friendly-muesli-with-soja-milk, a heretic thought crossed my mind: what if all those vegan, organic, environmental hipsters like me realized that an epidemic is as natural a process as ever it gets? Mother Nature sorting out the old and the weak, particularly where there is a flagrant overpopulation of a given species (mankind's reproduction number 'R' being skyrocketing high, and

arguably the reason for most, if not all fundamental problems the world and we are facing today). Mother Nature eating her parents, it's Cronos reversed.

That's cynical and spoken in the abstract, whereas in reality who wouldn't fear for his own life when it's endangered, who wouldn't worry for his relatives? Rest assured, I do. But then again, maybe it's time to transcend our primitive instincts. Let's savour the truth again: Life is finite. Art ... maybe less so.

We're living through a time of crisis, and the slogan 'May you live in interesting times' suddenly sounds 'so 2019', right? It's probably the closest to an existential crisis contemporary generations have ever gone through, yet it's still not clear whose fault that is: the virus's, or the virus's politics, and which one causes more suffering. Honestly, it's not really that serious a crisis. Without wanting to talk the risks down, we shouldn't exaggerate Covid. Compared to the plagues of the past - and present, in certain regions - it's rather tame. Now here is one scary thought: To what means would our leaders and self-proclaimed healers resort if one of those, or a successor, broke free and roamed around the globe? It's hard not to detect at least traces of mass hysteria on a global scale today. Sometimes, running headlong into the storm might be better than being paralysed by fear without a way out, than life in the conditional tense, ruled by fear: What could go wrong, if I left my home? Live and let die, or lead death into life.

How will artists make use of the situation in future works? Being used to working in the studio, and with all kinds of technical equipment that Bezos and others deliver to their doorstep, the means of production have not altered. But imagine a new Botticelli coming forward in maybe a year from now (if the plague is over by then), and presenting the Decameron's Hollywood version: 10 people equally composed of all phenotypical variants, sexual orientations, age and socioeconomic groups, get together on Zoom!

Human beings get used to anything and everything. Being a rather weak character myself, I headed full of optimism into the situation when it all began almost a year ago, developed the outline of another work project, mail-ordered some work-out equipment and academic literature (for dummies) from a discipline, I (still) know nothing about. At some point in summer, I stopped caring about all that, and slid into Kung Fu movies from the 1960s/70s. Once, and purely by chance, I even watched *Braveheart* when it was running on TV. That final scene in all its historic bs-ery and pathetic Hollywood kitsch, but he had a point, right?

But imagine a new Botticelli coming forward in maybe a year from now ... and presenting the Decameron's Hollywood version: 10 people equally composed of all phenotypical variants, sexual orientations, age and socioeconomic groups, get together on Zoom!



Art handlers are comfortable coming to work at Tate Liverpool.

Freedoom on the executioner's block, what an impressive image. What are others doing to pass the time? Not artists: the people behind, otherwise exposing, and selling, them? Windows exhibitions are one way of dealing with, and in, the situation, but don't get too risky, as Mehdi Chouakri, whose endeavours were shaken by a rather amusing obscenity complaint, will confirm: a prudish neighbour alerted the authorities. Reading the galleries' mails was fun, the most professional following marketing guidelines to the letter: there is no bad situation, if you don't mention it. How long did it take you to realize that their doors are actually closed, and you may only visit the show online in, say, Sprüth Magers' newsletter? Art exhibitions now work like a take-away menu, with optional click&collect. Uber eats art - that actually sounds like a great business model! At the end of the day, every crisis is a chance. One really smart, or at least business-minded, dealer clan turned their exhibition space into a Covid test centre. Physical art fairs might be done for good, but the guys from Basel won't mind. If your brand is strong enough, the change offers a great savings potential. Who in his right mind would travel to Basel when he can spend some quality time with his tablet on board a yacht in the Caribbean?

Meanwhile, museums opted for video tours, and it will be exciting to observe what happens once they're open again. Will people come back? Or will they be too used to contemplating art on screen, in their pyjamas? Perhaps fearing this, *Berlinische Galerie* offered audio walks to architectural sites in the institution's neighbourhood. Kindl Brewery's Art Foundation combined window shopping with a very similar experience: behold art through the windows, listen to an audio installation on the dedicated app, and hold a - well, Sterni, or Brlo, or whatever brew you prefer. Some jointly managed Berlin public galleries like the *Gemäldegalerie* (Picture Gallery) went a step further, and offered guided visits by phone. And no, not for the blind, but for everyone.

For the rest, professionals and audiences alike are still waiting for all this to blow over. After weeks and months in lockdown, I feel like I badly need a haircut.

Socially Distanced to All

Susana Gómez Laín

For me, the magazine is my actual link to the art world. I am not inspired to do any artistic work and it is difficult and dangerous to gather with other people to do so. So, through the reading of the magazine and the reviews I send, somehow I keep in touch until normality comes back and I have a good reason to go to exhibitions that otherwise maybe I would not attend because of all the restrictions and rules. As for the rest, my work as a lawyer has also been much paralyzed for the same reasons, and when

this finishes we expect an overload of cases to come.

I don't really care much about the future. I am trying to live everyday as I can and don't make many plans. I think the best strategy is to get on with what we have and go with the flow. I am open to changes, that I don't mind at all, which is good in these times. I hope the magazine goes on and on and can bring at least some joy to the readers.

For the rest, I wish you all good health and hope.

The Sea and Me

Annie Markovich

During this unprecedented crisis and opportunity I enjoy the sea. The sea in Cornwall continues to be a steady ground when distorted thinking looms its ugly head. The water cleans the barnacles of confusion in my mind. Does it sound unrealistic, escapist or self-ish? Local Cornish women and men swim in the rain and cold, sometimes with rolling waves. It is supposed to be good for the immune and inflammatory systems. The soothing rhythm of water when it hits the sand, rocks, seaweed, the rhythm of push and pull that is primal unleashes anxieties and fear.

Twice a day walking also helps keep the mind clear. Suddenly I didn't have to fill every minute with tasks or projects. There is time to breathe cleaner air. Smiles from strangers who were out for their daily permitted exercise. Finally I finished reading *Middlemarch* and am happily surrounded by books galore where I can pick and choose rather than click and collect. Was it Jim Brewer, later attributed to Groucho Marx, who said, 'Aside from a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside a dog, it's too dark to read'? Everyone, it felt like the whole world stopped.

Mother Earth spoke, did I hear her?

Each day was different and the same, shopping with a mask, wearing glasses and continually sanitising hands and surfaces challenged everyone while juggling backpacks, shopping trolleys or bags. I am grateful for time to reflect, look, listen to all sounds usually silenced by traffic, motor vehicles, and airplanes. I enjoyed cleaner air, less pressure to produce, along with stress



Cornwall Coast

of universal problems of unemployment and economic collapse. A month flew by like a week. 'Surviving the day with a level head' became my mantra.

Thank you to the generation who lived during WW2 as they know what it was like then: how to be focused, courageous and steadfast in the midst of chaos and death. The older generation gave inspiration to continue believing that we can get through this together.

Never before have I written so many phrases, addresses, outlines, titles, prayers and appeals to a higher power. Books I grab without looking if they were meant to be for journals, a blank paper is enough to hold fleeting thoughts. Last but not least, yes, there is the medicine of laughter, song and art in the midst of unprecedented sadness, grief and loss.

Voices from the Art Front

Carmella Saraceno

March of 2020 was the month the world decided the best thing to do was stand still. Artists I know just kept on making art. They are creative and unstoppable.

After art school, I moved to NYC and quickly learned to exchange art installation and fabrication skills for an income that would allow me to make the artwork I wanted to make and still pay my bills. Sculpture Chicago, an international venue, lured me westward. By 1992 we were incorporated, and remain today a small group of nine creative people who derive their financial security from providing specialized fine art-rigging and artifact handling services. Our clients are individual artists, collectors, museums, galleries, universities, curators, landscape architects, construction companies, and corporations. We have steadily carved out a niche as specialized service providers. Since Covid, we are also now regarded as essential workers, because the work we perform is in unison with the construction industry. When the news of Covid began whispering westward from New York, we wondered what we would do if we were told we must close, and how we could prepare. What would our employees need to make it through? There was no easy answer.

So we decided to do what we always do when faced with a challenging project: we unpacked it, and laid the pieces out on the table, facing up. We talked among ourselves. By the time the shelter-in-place mandate began on March 21st at 5pm CST, we were prepared to sit down and take a break along with the rest of the world. All the while we kept our antennae keenly tuned, listening for any clear message in the static.

While quarantined at home we realized our good fortune; our home and work life are located only 2.7 miles apart. Only two of the nine employees live outside of that radius. If necessary, we could all walk to work. During this time one rigger did venture into the shop alone to take apart and reassemble his motorcycle by following a YouTube video. Another acquired and restored a vintage sailboat. Our project coordinator moved even closer to the shop, and yet easily continued to work from home.

Significantly, we learned the difference between being laid off and being furloughed - something 30 years in business had never required us to do or understand. We also realized that we all enjoyed our work, even if for different reasons, and that as long as we had projects to plan, we could easily work from home. We waited.

The first solid sign that business was about to change came in March, when we were notified that seven of our already scheduled, on-site installations planned for March, April and May were postponed - but for how long? We had to do something we had never done before; we furloughed five art installers. No sooner did we take this step when Wintrust Bank reached out to explain the process of applying for Payroll Protection Program Funds; a net appeared.

The project coordinator, the HR coordinator, the director of field operations and myself continued to work from home. Worth not-

ing, when a project is postponed, there is also work involved in postponing the project. First and foremost, the crew members, then the equipment rental, the insurance riders, the permit dates, the storage, and the tentative reschedule. At that point, rescheduling was not an option because no one could predict how Covid would change our lives.

Back before Covid, in October of 2019, Roger Machin, our senior rigger, had flown to London to oversee the installation of the Colossus sculpture as part of the King Tut exhibition at The Saatchi Gallery. The deinstall scheduled for May of 2020 was postponed, and then rescheduled, but this time Machin rose to the challenge of travel limitations to oversee the de-installation of the 8000 lb. Colossus statue via zoom, from his dining room table in Chicago, starting at 2am.

All seven previously postponed projects were eventually rescheduled and completed during the months of May, June, July and August. Corporate offices became super-safe indoor spaces, as nobody was present. Outdoor spaces were safe; Methods & Materials' crew members were the only people allowed inside the construction zones.

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Some projects originally postponed due to the shelter-in-place mandate, such as the *Sculpture Milwaukee Outdoor Exhibition*, were postponed a second time, due to protesters in the streets. Additionally, Milwaukee, Wisconsin was scheduled to be the site of the upcoming 2020 Democratic national convention and when the convention was cancelled another delay occurred. Later a decision was made to move forward with the outdoor exhibition. Social situations impact art and culture, and often affect what we do. George Floyd's cruel death by a Minneapolis police officer sparked massive protests. Civil unrest erupted across America and the debate over the removal of confederate statues was re-ignited. The statues in people's communities across America were, for some, being noticed for the first time. For most citizens, bronze statues of men are mere decorations - objects we drive by on our way to and from wherever we are going. For others, the one-sided version of the story the statues present is, in itself, reason for their removal. These statues no longer represent the whole truth. Some tell a singular perspective and others in some way speak of the ugly truth of prejudice. This awareness, wheth-



The Colossal:
Tutankhamun Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh, Saatchi Gallery (Getty Images)

er stewing or sudden, became something people could act on, and certain commemorative sculptures became targets of anger. This atmosphere led to a call which came at 3 o'clock in the afternoon from the mayor's office requesting we immediately remove the oversized Christopher Columbus statue from Grant Park, in downtown Chicago, and another from Arrigo Park in another part of town. By that time our crew had already completed a 12-hour workday. We declined for safety reasons, hoping to be able to do the de-install the next day. The following day we were all grateful to read in the morning papers that both statues had been successfully removed and put into storage by city employees and resources. Their eventual fate would be decided at a later time.

We complied in March 2020 when we were asked to stay home, to wash our hands, and to always wear a mask. We've all been tested and re-tested and we continue to use our hand sanitizers and botanical disinfectant spray. None of us thought we would still be doing any of this a year later. Yet the calls for art installation, de-installation and restoration continue, and we are staying busy. The Covid pandemic has, in many ways, held a mirror to our life's work, and reaffirmed that art is vital to a civil society. The services we provide within our society have truly been a great honor and privilege to orchestrate. We hope the vaccine

fabrication and distribution process along with continued safety precautions of masks wearing and social distancing will bring us back to the ease of movement and socializing that we all miss.

*Carmella Saraceno, Artist, Writer, Creative Entrepreneur,
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How Do You Taste?

HOW VALUE IS DECIDED (AND DEFENDED) IN THE ART SYSTEM

Darren Jones

In the commercial gallery and museum systems taste has been abducted from public access, armored and relocated within the jurisdiction of a minority of stakeholders. It has been jealously deployed to control what is (and isn't) deemed important art, and so successfully that one can be discouraged from trusting one's own sensibilities. This ensures that hand-picked artists - the coat-hangers of history - meet no resistance en-route to their pre-eminent positions. If enough effort and money are invested, an artist might reach that critical mass of exhibitions, press, celebrity (notoriety) and sales beyond which critical dissent becomes futile.

This system is impregnable. Even after artists cease to contribute meaningfully and have run off the cliff-edge of relevance like so many Wile E. Coyotes, they continue to be propped-up. That moment is sometimes detectable - Marina Abramović's disastrous tango (and tangle) with Jay-Z; and Ai Weiwei's re-staging of Nilüfer Demir's viral photograph showing the dead body of three-year-old Syrian migrant Alan Kurdi washed ashore.

Declines can be slower as artists petrify and revisit the acts that made them. Richard Prince's tedious thievery of other peoples' images, and Sarah Lucas still beating the meat, eggs and dead horses, are exemplary. Rachel Whiteread has entombed herself in *House*, the full-scale cast-sculpture (the title is literal) that won her the 1993 Turner Prize and, on the same night, the K Foundation Award for Worst British Artist. Her endless spatial castings are fading echoes of that early work. Incidentally, the polemics of artistic worth have rarely been addressed as spectacularly as that astonishing incident. The K Foundation's £40,000 award was funded by Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty of the electronic, Hip hop-inspired band The KLF. Their purpose - via iconoclastic advertisements, actions and installations - was to undermine existing art world hierarchies, and through intervention and insurrection initiate "the amending of art history." The unflattering award was presented to Whiteread outside Tate Britain where the Turner Prize ceremony had just taken place. Unwilling to accept the dubious accolade she was informed that if she didn't the K Foundation would burn the money. What would you have done?

It's not to say that any given artist is undeserving of a successful career; it is to say that usually one artist is not more deserving than tens of thousands of others. What makes the difference is the investor's (institutions') ability to convince the art world, then inform (never ask) the public. Nepotism and cultural technics can also help. But typically the gallerist must also be an alchemist who turns base opinion into fact - an unenviable task that requires subverting the truth that everyone's taste is equal.

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The architecture of galleries is contrived to aid that process by impressing reverence and awe upon the visitor. To enter a hushed gallery is to leave behind one's physical relationship to casual surroundings on the street and enter a highly controlled environment. Often there will be no greeting, even if someone is sitting at the front desk. This is not welcoming but not terribly unwelcoming—it's slyly disorienting. There is usually nowhere to sit so we must stand, and how to stand before art can be fraught and awkward. Further, the lighting isn't designed for people; it's there to glorify objects, and we can feel awfully exposed and vulnerable under the harsh glare when alone in a stark room.

These settings are so arresting that if we speak we whisper. The atmospherics literally silence us. If you cannot talk you cannot disagree. Try speaking very loudly next time. It's a small act of disobedience but it's wonderfully liberating because it breaks the electrical current on the gallery's invisible dog fence. If you feel rude, disruptive or out of place you're supposed to. These characteristics might cow even seasoned visitors. They would probably overwhelm the uninitiated - the public that the system so often claims to challenge or question but usually ignores because it has no interest in discussing its differing opinions. The intention of galleries is similar to that of churches—those Wendy houses of mendacity. They sell products and they don't appreciate heretics scrutinizing their imprimatur. Interestingly, the homograph 'curate' refers to both organizing an exhibition and to a member of the clergy.

Knowing the etiquette and submitting to what you're told is tasteful is the entry fee to these crucibles. If the codes weren't imposed, would the visitor come to realize that these hot new artists, groundbreaking art and must-see exhibitions, are often borrowed from the emperor's closet?

The language of art is also employed to discourage mutiny. The solemn tones of press releases, catalog essays, panel discussions and curatorial statements are pitched to buttress the rightness, even nobility, of the gallery's choice. Claims are staked and posi-

tions defended so that the status quo hardens. Even in casual discussion the prevailing narrative is vigorously protected.

Some years ago, at a smart New York art gathering while talking with a philosopher, a critic and a historian, this writer witnessed a most shocking blast of critical napalm – for the crime of aesthetic sedition. The critic expressed his enjoyment of Thomas Kinkadee's paintings. "Why?" asked the incredulous historian.

"Because his bucolic scenes are redolent of the timeless, arcadian environments of my rural upbringing; and of time spent exploring forests and mountains as an adolescent wanderer. Because his vignettes are so removed from the relentless technology that dominates our lives. The contentment, solitude and union with the natural world are so alluring. Because it is tantalizing to think about stepping into his paintings and abandoning all responsibility to venture towards those distant peach-crimson horizons."

"Then you are an idiot!" came the historian's reply, followed by invective and chastisement that the critic was failing to do as critics must – educate the public in what the historian considered the correct taste, the right art, because "the masses need to be told what to like." An argument ensued over what was the greater threat to the public's trust in contemporary art – the historian's dogmatism or the critic's supposed naiveté.

There, in the citadel of artistic ratification, a distinguished academician's withering authoritarianism was the censure handed down to those who stray from the carefully written script of history. But perhaps what he actually felt was concern, even fear – that dissent permitted might undermine the canonical structure and with it his position and privilege. Socratic argument and counter argument – the engine of modernity – is dead in the art world.

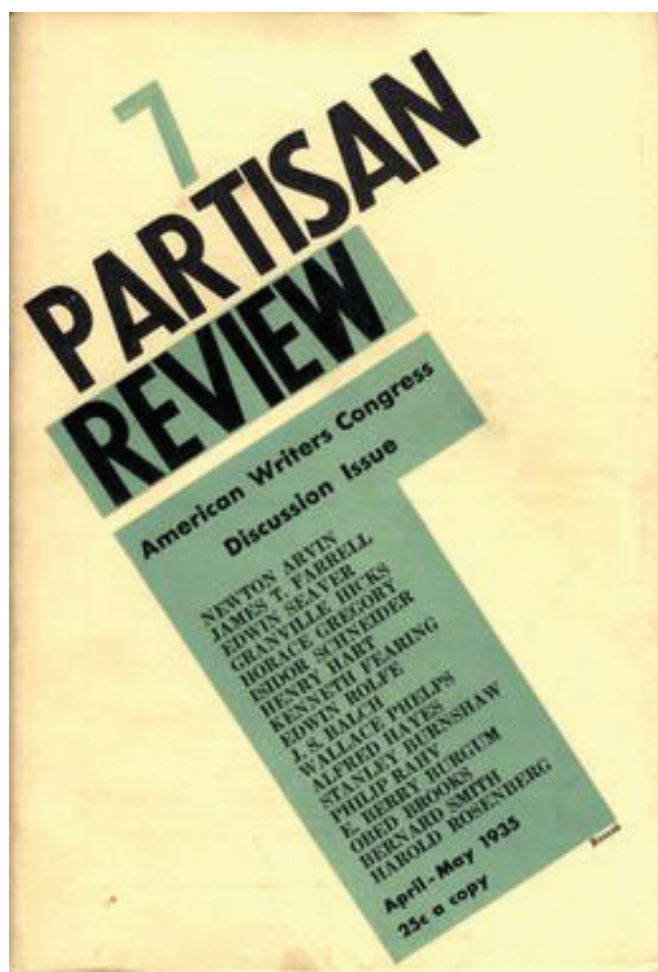
Instinctive connection with a work of art is a rare and profound experience; it is the greatest treasure that art can offer and it's necessarily a rare occurrence. Ridiculing that is an elitist act intended to humiliate, to extinguish a person's spiritual union with what they find beautiful and resonant. The critic was equipped to defend himself, but how would someone outside the art world visiting a museum or gallery assert his dislike of the art within, or indeed his own taste? Would he have the opportunity or the confidence? Who would even listen? As audiences largely acquiesce to the presumption that if it is in a great museum then it must be great art, the story of art continues unchallenged. But if that conceit isn't argued down, the apparatus and the public it claims to serve are not connected, but kept apart by the former's proclamations and the latter's shrugging acceptance.

There's an irony in the horror that Thomas Kinkadee and his ilk

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incite within the intelligentsia – the populist appeal; the factory production; the cynical commercial grab; and the kitsch, gaudy imagery. But that could equally describe the work of Jeff Koons, Brian Donnelly or Gilbert & George to name a few – whose auction hauls outstrip their slender talents and bankrupt the concept of artistic innovation. Hypocrisy is the key; financial plundering is fine as long as it's presented in limited editions at Sotheby's and not en-masse in shopping malls. If it comes with scholarly license, almost anything crass will do. Academia is one of the foundation pillars of art as only another stream of market economics.

In conversations about contemporary art between those who make it, sell it, exhibit it, deal in it, study it, write about it, or buy it, taste is only ever referred to as singular. There are never tastes. The implication is that there's really only one. It's a subtle but dominant detail about the system's appetites, and its corruption of why artists exist at all.



Clement Greenberg's essay "Avant Garde and Kitsch" published in Partisan Review in 1939, and only his second essay for the magazine, is still an excellent analysis of the formulation of taste.

Future Lovers: the Terrifying Union of Science and Art

Minwen Wang

Scientific progress can be controversial, especially when it comes to our bodies. The genetic modification of organisms, including our future selves, is a particularly sensitive issue that tends to grab headlines. Bio-scientific development can cause public alarm because for many people it strikes at our fundamental assumptions of personhood, religion and ethics. And while we benefit from such advances – in medicine for example – it can also seem threatening to our understanding of our place in the world. Human curiosity ensures that new discoveries are inevitable and with that comes a fear of the unknown. It may change us before we really know what ‘us’ means. Contemporary art has become one of the most dynamic crucibles for discussing this dilemma.

Art that experiments with the processes that sustain life became known as BioArt, a term coined by Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac in 1997. The emergence of BioArt not only brought artists into dialog with existing tensions in the field of science, it ignited a further round of debate over the relationship between scientific and artistic experimentation.

In 2000, Kac (working with French genetic scientist, Louis-Marie Houdebine) produced his notorious GFP (green fluorescent protein) bunny named Alba – a transgenic rabbit that radiated green luminescence. Predictably Kac was tagged as the proverbial mad scientist – a progenitor of new lifeforms, and scandal ensued. Aside from some observers’ consternation about the rabbit, there was also anxiety about whether artists’ creative readings of the facts, mathematics and physics behind biotechnology might undermine the public’s understanding of a very complicated subject.

Victimless Leather (2004) is another example of artists interpreting what life can mean. Created by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr—as *Tissue Culture & Art Project* – the artwork consisted of a small meat jacket (formed in a bioreactor womb) born from human and mouse stem-cells which could continue to grow – given certain nutritional intake. The work was in part intended to address animal abuse in clothing manufacturing by creating a consumer product without harming or killing animals, using collections of cells rather than whole organisms that are so often kept in dreadful conditions – think minks and geese.

However, when the work was exhibited in *Design and the Elastic Mind* at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 2008, there was an unexpected, and rather grim, incident more commonly associated with science fiction horror. The curator, Paola Antonelli, elected to have the jacket’s food supply stopped because it began to expand far more quickly than had been anticipated. Some wondered if this act had ended the jacket’s life. The incident increased the project’s profile and fomented further concern re-

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garding the potential outcomes and complications of using engineered tissue and how to manage or care for it. Do such products have rights? What are our responsibilities in creating and raising them? These questions move beyond ethics and into our daily lives and even into our wardrobes.

Scientific research can bring benefits, but economic gain for the most powerful industrial stakeholders is undoubtedly a major factor. It is vital to examine how we have been shaped mentally and physically by commerce, clinical technologies and for-profit conglomerates. Wherever fantastic sums of money are involved, public skepticism naturally increases, muddying the balance between improving human living conditions and environmental and social considerations. Matters of conscience regarding human interference in natural law and evolution are also important factors.

Taking a different approach, Critical Art Ensemble comprises a group of artists who investigate the political, human and economic impacts (and dangers) behind bioscience and technology, and how field discoveries can be manipulated by governments, industrial manufacturers, and capitalist enterprises. CAE’s performative work *Flesh Machine* (1997-98) involved profiling volunteers’ genetic make-up as part of an examination of the history, legacy, politics, moral issues, and discriminatory concerns of eugenics. They also considered its possible future use and the grave implications of selecting or creating desirable bodies, and how such practices can be exploited and monetized for cultural or political gain. Their aim generally has been to challenge authoritarianism and government overreach; and to reflect critically on the human, societal and environmental risks of financial or state control in biotechnologies. Critical Art Ensemble can be considered BioArt activists tolling the bell against corporate greed, political dominion, and the nefarious efforts of companies and regimes to consolidate power by harvesting or altering fundamental aspects of humanity and collective behaviors for profit.

As scientific subjects reach further into our lives, art continues



Terrance James Jr., “Choleric” (2020), Polyvinyl acetate (PVA), expanded polystyrene (EPS), polyurethane (PU) tubing, steel, dye, 11 x 8 x 10 in (image courtesy of the artist)

responding and flourishing. The combined beauty and potential of art and science dissolves some of the boundaries between them and sets the stage for marvelous experiments and possibilities. An increasing number of artists are engaging poetically with biotechnological themes and their sociological effects and potential, through new and traditional media.

Terrance James Jr is a Brooklyn-based artist who uses photography, sculpture and installation to investigate the

mysteries and consequences of biotechnology, genetic engineering, and their effects on human physiology, racial inequality, socio-politics and the environment. Influenced by science-fiction classics including Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979), and Octavia E. Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood* (1987-1989), James’ figurative works juxtapose the horror and beauty that can manifest in material change and decomposition, stoking our fears and hopes about industrial and technological progress. James taps into a rich historical seam that connects with the dark romance and imaginative qualities of Bram Stoker, Edgar Allen Poe and H.P. Lovecraft which so often compensate when our knowledge reaches its limits. The artist’s themes of interest are reflected materially. By mimicking the texture of human flesh using artificial products, James raises the prospect of transformation between inanimate objects and living material.

James’ practice draws on his experiences as an African American by reflecting on themes of alienation and difference (hallmarks of science-fiction and very real human subjugation) and considering how 400 years of systemic racism and institutional prejudice have been used to disenfranchise and harm Black people. James’ thoughtful use of color, and its absence, subtly alludes to cultural context, and geopolitical narratives that influence interpretations of the meanings of colors. In *Achromatic* (2015-20) and *Quantum Corpus: Panspermia* (2020) James restricts the materials and palette to grayscale so that the biomorphic sculptures allude to polemics of black and white, while cleverly hinting at the common phrases ‘gray area’ and ‘gray matter’ to denote respectively, a subject that is unresolved or undefined, and the function of intellect and the brain. James states:

“I’m interested in the social construct of race, biodiversity, and the implications that pseudosciences have had on society. My colorful palettes are a way to explore the politics of color. The color Black for instance, it implies very different things depending on context, country, culture etc. It’s the same with White. The introduction of vibrant colors is similar. There’s this book,

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Chromophobia, by David Batchelor. That breaks down color and the fear of color; corruption from a western perspective, the book breaks down color theory, history, etc. in short, I use vibrant colors to examine otherness.”

James’ interests extend to the detrimental effects of environmental damage, climate change and ecological disaster, particularly on society’s most vulnerable groups. This implicates scientists, geneticists, social engineers and civic planners in the detriments and safety of those most at risk from inadequate living conditions, exacerbated by natural phenomena and human mismanagement—too often poorer and marginalized communities of color that are frequently moved to the social, economic and geographic peripheries. Furthermore, biological challenges such as the Covid pandemic have exposed yawning gaps in medical care, access and support between the very richest and the majority. The artist states:

“I began to examine bioengineering as a means of resistance. Taking into account the pharmaceutical industrial complex, environmental racism, and human experimentation, I built a practice around speculative biology.”

Ting-Tong Chang, a London-based Taiwanese artist, often collaborates with scientists to create ink drawings, durational performances and kinetic sculptures. Chang’s installations attempt to convey a unique sense of time and space allowing viewers to see scientific processes in action and be immersed in them.

Chang’s installation *Second Life: Habitat* (2016) consisted of breeding chambers for eight-thousand Asian Tiger Mosquitos and an accompanying computer system. The mosquitos lived their entire life cycles in the chambers. The death of each mosquito generated a virtual human avatar through electrical signals that could be operated by visitors using the computer. After a ten hour lifespan the termination of each avatar released Chang’s blood into the machine to breed a new generation of mosquitos. If, as the first law of thermodynamics claims, energy can’t be created or destroyed, only changed from one form into another, does this mean that our energy will transfer to other things, even the intangible soul, mind or spirit? Will our lives have a second chance in the virtual world like the mosquitos, and can our essences interact with other forms of life? Will that process be controlled by ourselves, an alien civilization, or a universal creator? While Chang’s work explored the interaction between virtual and real life, his environmental intention was to note



Ting-Tong Chang and Andrea Nunez Casal, "Human Makgeolli" (2019), mixed media, dimension variable (photo credit to Sarah Kim at Asia Culture Center (ACC), Korea)

global warming's effect on the increasing prevalence of zoonotic diseases transmitted to humans from blood-hungry arthropods. For another installation titled *Ten Thousand Spirits* (2019) Chang worked with a Korean shaman and a bioscientist to construct an installation which combined the features of a temple and a machine that contains makgeolli—a sacred rice wine used in shaman worship rituals, manually produced by the shaman. Named *Human Makgeolli*, it was produced with bacteria from the shaman's hand through scientific methods. Although many people believe that such customs amount to little more than superstition, there are still many who practice these traditions. Chang states:

"In Korea, the figure of the shaman stands out as the one who bridges the moral and spirit worlds. Shamans are entrusted with the ability to communicate with nature spirits, ancestors, or a culture's gods and goddesses. They function variously as oracle, doctor, psychotherapist and other roles."

Ten Thousand Spirits aimed to link science and witchcraft, which can be considered extremes on the spectrum of knowledge—or belief. It offers audiences an ancient, mysterious dream where the shaman's spirituality faces science; and where past, present and future are connected. One cannot define easily if the *Human Makgeolli* is a scientific creation or a religious one. The artwork provides a space to reflect on history, and on how both religion

and science have influenced human cultures and societies through millennia. Have some aspects of religion shed their founding principles – their skins – and become scientific? Will science bring more studies in the future which will resonate with and find common ground with ancient religious beliefs? We may not yet have answers to these questions but we can have a peek, through Chang's work, at some possible outcomes.

When we observe and engage in wonderful and searching investigations as these artists have, we begin to ask important questions. In turn we gain confidence and empowerment that can assuage our fears. Their sensitivities and inventiveness, along with that of many other artistic thinkers working at the vanguard, provide previously unimagined prospects and new modes of thinking.

Such creativity does not exclusively belong to art. It also exists in scientific curiosity. The union of science and art involves breaking boundaries, forging connections—sometimes terrifying and magnificent combinations—and suggesting pathways forward. The hope must be that these inquiries can help us fight against destructive hierarchies, economic divisiveness and racial prejudice. If we accept the responsibility of committed exploration, the union of art and science can lead us to greater understanding between cultures, expanded knowledge, and the tools to build more equitable futures.

UMFA's "Black Refractions": A More Accurate Account of Our Shared American History

Scotti Hill

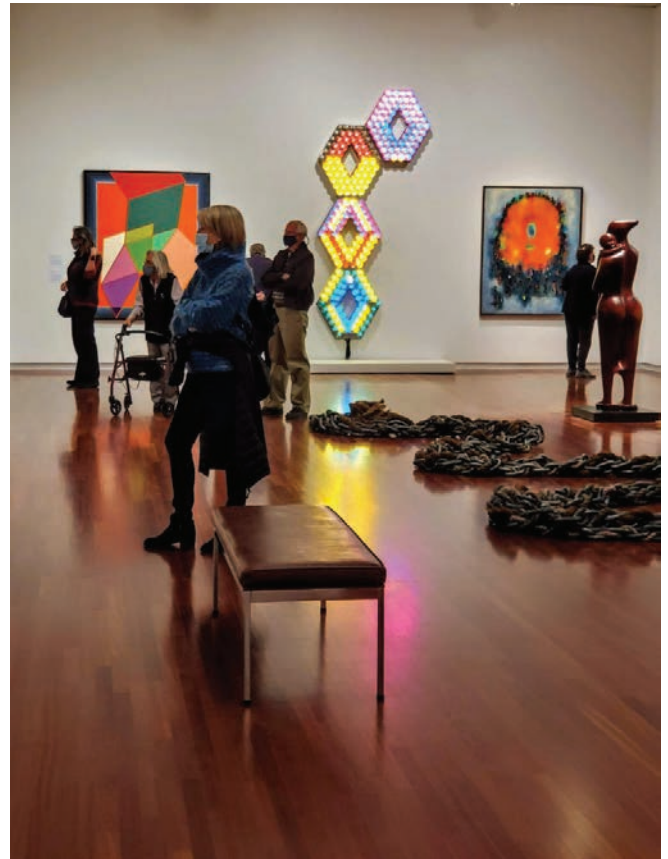
On July 3, 2020, *The New York Times* reported that the Black Lives Matter protests in response to the May 25th death of George Floyd likely constituted the largest in United States history, garnering a half-million participants in over 500 locations at their peak. The magnitude of these events collided with an America encountering a once-in a century health crisis, creating a timely recipe for a collective awakening regarding how Black and brown Americans have, since the nation's inception, been subjected to persistent and unimaginable injustice. Inevitably, visual culture is responding to this moment, evidenced by spontaneous murals, artworks, and literature taking note of history unfolding.

Indeed, art is among the most powerful tools through which to exercise a nation's history—individually through the voices of artists, and collectively through the movements and institutions they create. Far too often however, such personal narratives conflict with an idealized cultural cohesion imagined by the dominant caste, who, either through submission, apathy, or tokenization, relegates minority art as monolithic or distinct from instead of intrinsically part of American history.

Now, "Black Refractions: Highlights from the Studio Museum", a new exhibition on view at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, offers Utahns a rare glimpse into the deep and multi-faceted collection of Harlem's Studio Museum, one of America's most groundbreaking institutions.

The traveling exhibition showcases more than one hundred artworks by nearly 80 artists from the 1920s to the present. This monumental exhibition is arranged thematically, offering tantalizing avenues through which to contextualize this rich body of work. Among these themes are "materiality," or the ways in which artists of African descent explore abstraction using non-traditional media; "framing blackness," highlighting and critiquing visual representations of black identity; and "notions of progress," an evaluation of how and to what degree progress has been attained.

The Studio Museum's core mission is to collect and foster work made by American and international artists of African descent, as well as work inspired by black culture. Founded in 1968, a pivotal moment of social and political activism in America, the Studio Museum's creators vied with the status quo for an institution shaped by black voices. Adding to the urgency of activism were growing frustrations over institutions like the Whitney Museum of American Art, host to the controversial 1971 exhibition *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, which imagined shows without the insight and contributions of black artists and curators.



Installation view including Tom Lloyd's Moussako, centre of the wall, (photo by UMFA)

Indeed, this issue of equity persists in the modern day. The act of recognizing the contributions of persons of African descent, as well as Native American and other non-white artists, is multi-faceted. Should the goal be to expand the all-powerful art historical canon or to demolish it? Does one invariably lead to the other? For institutions and curators, representation is a start, but often does not go far enough. As the Whitney debacle demonstrates, it isn't enough to merely show the work of Black artists, it's vital for viewers to partake in exhibitions crafted by Black artists and curators using their own creative agency.

It is then important, to say the least, that such a collection would reach Utah. The state composed of a majority white population – 90.6% as per the 2020 census – can now engage with works that inform and challenge perceptions about black experience. Importantly however, while much of the exhibition grapples with the personal and the political, many of the works concern mate-



*Kehinde Wiley: Conspicuous Fraud Series #1 (Eminence), 2001, oil on canvas
Published by The Studio Museum in Harlem
© Kehinde Wiley*

riality, experimentation, and abstraction – affirming that the work of artists of African descent need not be defined merely by their biographies, but, of course, by their practices as well. For UMFA, the process of obtaining the exhibition was an interesting one that began five years ago, when the museum was closed to undergo widespread renovations. Whitney Tassie, UMFA's Senior Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, says that the Studio Museum, who prior to this show had never toured their collection, had the specific intent of bringing their collection to a larger audience. "We had to jump on this because we knew this was a phenomenal collection and this was a once in a

lifetime opportunity," says Tassie.

Although UMFA secured the show years ago, as the exhibition drew closer, the Covid pandemic presented real obstacles, including a delay in the exhibition schedule, a rapid shift to online programming, and devising a strategy to account for in-person museum attendance in a safe manner. Adding to the ordinary stress of installing an exhibition of this size was the fact that the two curators who would normally travel to assist the museum with the installation were required to assist remotely instead. In a remarkable feat, the museum was forced to re-vamp their installation schedule and communicate with the curators over

Zoom and Facetime, which meant the installation took longer than the two-week timeframe. Despite such challenges, the exhibition is stunningly executed, replete with neatly organized sections of visually and conceptually tantalizing works that call for multiple viewings.

At the outset, Glen Ligon's large light sculpture *Give us a Poem*, 2007, presents the large words "ME" atop the word "WE." Light moves back and forth as each word lights up in succession, highlighting the interplay between the personal and the collective. Adjacent to the museum's grand hall are a series of works which concern a diverse array of experimentation—some showcasing the power of the abstract mark and many others which demonstrate the remarkable possibilities of materiality. Tom Lloyd's *Moussako*, c. 1968, composed of aluminum, lightbulbs, and plastic laminate, is striking — at once evoking a high-modernist sculptural milieu while simultaneously calling to mind mechanical car parts and traffic lights. Lloyd's work, as per the museum's label, "embraces abstraction at a time when audiences expected works by artists of African descent to be socially relevant and representational."

Mickalene Thomas' *Panthera*, 2002, is a dazzling work composed of rhinestones on birch panel showcasing a panther— a symbol of Black feminine power for the artist—sprawling in a lush canopy of hanging vines, teeth out and ready to pounce. From a distance, Kori Newkirk's *Solon 6:12*, 2000, takes inspiration from the negative press bestowed on tennis ace Venus Williams, whose beaded hair was deemed inappropriate for her 1997 U.S. Open appearance. At a distance, the work, consisting of plastic pony beads, looks like a beautifully contrasted abstract painting. Upon closer inspection, the physicality of the work is evident, as the beads hang down in delicate threads.

Elsewhere, Leonardo Drew's *Number 74*, 1999, made of rust, fabric, string, stuffed toys, and wood, is both unruly and painstakingly devised, evoking themes of subjugation, decay, and memory. Among the most striking of works in this materiality category is Maren Hassinger's *River*, 2011 (first constructed 1972), a sculpture devised of chain and rope. The work coils in a snake-like manner throughout the floor of the large gallery space, haunting and unrelenting as it beckons for our attention. Hassinger's interest in manufactured materials unmistakably evokes the horrors of slavery and the Middle Passage, forcing a painful reckoning with the nation's past.

Hanging regally on a blue wall at the entrance to a separate gallery, Barkley L. Hendricks' remarkable *Lawdy Mama*, 1969, captivates. The portrait, devised of oil and gold leaf on canvas, is the museum's signature PR image for the show — it represents a Black woman with arms folded and pose erect, gazing sharply at the viewer. The figure's apparent strength and royal visage, shrouded in gold, evokes a Byzantine icon of early-Christian lore. The power of such posture is emphatic, elevating the feminine Black figure to the role formerly preserved for saints and, singularly, for white figures.

The works in these adjoining galleries grapple with notions of marginalization, representation, and progress. Among the most stirring works in the exhibition are Titus Kaphar's *Jerome IV* and *Jerome XXIX*, both 2014, two small paintings comprised of oil, gold

leaf, and tar on wood. On the surface of each modestly sized work a man's face is visible atop a bright gold background. Each face is half-obsured by thick, dark tar, evoking a sensation of muzzling and suffocation. This visual device is emblematic of the work's narrative, as these painted mug-shots began with the artist "searching online databases for his father's prison records, [in which] Kaphar found ninety-nine other men who shared the same first and last name and were jailed for nearly identical crimes," according to the museum's label.

Elsewhere, Steffani Jemison's video piece *Maniac Chase*, 2008-09, depicts an endless loop of running figures moving through various settings. The repetition and arduousness of the task symbolizes the fight for social mobility in a deeply unequal America. Seeing this in the year following the horrific death of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man murdered by two white men while jogging down a residential street in Georgia, the work takes on even more searing weight.

Still other works directly address the art historical canon's white domination. Works such as Lois Mailou Jones' *Still Life with Portrait*, 1944, is a striking example: a work in which a portrait of a Black woman is interposed with a still life and an Ionic column, recognizable symbols of white Western tradition. Two works by Kehinde Wiley — *The Gypsy Fortune Teller*, 2007 and *Conspicuous Fraud Series #1 (Eminence)*, 2001 — each implicate the dominance of white bodies in art historical masterpieces and, by extension, what viewers have come to connote with elegant "masterpieces." The large tapestry of *Fortune Teller* is a visual wonder, weaving the intricacy and style of an 18th-century French tapestry fit for a royal palace with a grouping of Black men at its center. The act is at once powerful and subversive — undermining the art historical "masterpiece" of Western lore with a post-colonial appropriation. Additionally, the title of Wiley's *Conspicuous Fraud* gives us a hint that the figure dominating the work's composition — a Black man with large, intersecting locks of hair—may be considered an outlier. The painting's subject is dominant and unmistakably captivating, reminding us of how rarely in the art historical canon are we granted permission to marvel at the beauty and stoic presence of a powerful Black male.

For many, the calamity of 2020 has ushered in an urgent reminder of the need for prioritization and reconciliation. The varied works of *Black Refractions* invite us to consider the indelible role of Black artists in shaping art historical trends and institutions. Aside from such academic concerns, as Utah's demographics become increasingly diverse, it is incumbent on us all to avoid treating the contributions of minority artists as merely 'distinct' histories but see them, in fact, as a more accurate accounting of our shared American history.

First published in 15Bytes, Utah's Art Magazine.

Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, through April 10 2021.

How to Raise the Water Level in a Fish Pond

Aleksander Hudzik

It was a warm night in June, 1518, in the modest town called Strasburg, which nowadays sits on the border of Germany and France. There was music and there were people dancing. A woman named Frau Troffea started to dance around sunset, other people joined her and by around midnight there was a group of 50. By the next morning there were over 400. Streets were filled with dancers for six days or maybe more. There were victims; some people died of heart attacks, but the crowd kept dancing, without reason and without purpose. Authorities were sure it was a satanic possession causing their bodies to writhe like that. But we know that it was something different. Perhaps it was a virus, a collective hallucination, or perhaps it was a resistance to law and order. The real cause will never be known, but raising this question in Poland AD 2021, after a year of pandemic life and the biggest protests since 1989, might tell us something relevant about ourselves.

'Gathering of moving bodies is a manifestation of social disobedience' recalls the group of three curators: artist and DJ Gregor Róžański, Anka Herbut, who works mostly in theater, and Michał Grzegorzek, a curator whose practice connects dance, performance and queer art. The exhibition *Three is Already a Crowd* at BWA Wrocław shows how dance and choreography reflect current tensions in art and society.

Imagine a gallery on the top floor of a beautiful, quiet, old railway station with elegant wooden panels and soaring metal columns, iron staircases and stone floors that lead you to the top floor. The entrance to the gallery faces a chapel. The gallery has been here since 2018, the chapel was just recently opened for tourists feeling the need to express their religious elation just before their departure. The gallery and chapel are so close that they might be mistaken for each other; there is a certain feeling of pause before we enter the space. Behind door number one is God, behind door number two, art, and perhaps the hand of the devil.

It doesn't take much to understand why we might find a devil in this art. Work number '0' is titled *Church Of Euthanasia Archives*. It's an installation by US-based artist Chris Korda, who breaks the status quo with slogans like 'Save the Planet, Kill Yourself', 'Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong', and 'Eat a Queer Fetus for Jesus'. This last one especially taps into the current situation of Polish woman, who face the strictest abortion laws in the EU.

And this is only the introduction. Church, even for such uncanny practices as the worship of anti-natalism, is a gathering of bodies. Bodies are essential to the concept of this mostly video art exhibition, with some exceptions, like the work by Chinese con-



ceptual artist Zhang Huan, who in 1997 invited 40 migrant workers living in Beijing to stand in a local pond to answer the titular question of his work *How To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond*. This beautiful gesture is depicted in mystic photography of bodies half submerged in the cold water. The answer was 'yes, you can raise the water, but how many people are needed for the uprising?'

What might look like a playful joke quickly turns into real political tensions. A collective body of Polish protesters is presented in a series of photographs titled *Public Protests Archives*. We can't hear them, but it's not hard to guess that those bodies are united under the spell of "***** *****". What we see are anonymous bodies that dance, that run, that are escaping attack, single bodies transformed into a new kind of being.

Right next to this series of images is a video of performances and dances by Marta Ziółek, evoking these notions of choreomania, dancemanía, or whatever Frau Troffea started five centuries ago, but also powerfully channeling the emotional tenors of the current state of Polish society. Ziółek can be ominous and commanding, and full of sexual energy, she can also be vulnerable, but she is never possessed.

This thread continues in the adjacent work *Dance or Die* by Georgian artist Giorgi Kikonishvili which shows the riot in Tbilisi after police raided the techno club Basiani, *Run From the Gun* by young Belarusian artist Rafina Buzlova, and in a video recording of the first pride march in Croatia, shot by Igor Grubic. This

two-channel video juxtaposes documentary footage of brutal attacks on LGBTQIA+ supporters with a re-enactment of that footage by a group of dancers. The footage is raw, the camera-man's hands are shaking with fear, and we feel the tension in every movement of the camera. Streets are drowning in the blood of those being attacked, as police stand idly by. Personally, I felt this was the most shocking work in the entire exhibition. The symbolic death that must occur, as told in the chapel next door, before the resurrection.

Because the resurrection is now; born of rage, anger, and hope. It is scrawled across an enormous canvas in the main room of the gallery, and her name is *wypierdala* (get the fuck out)². Her echoes

can be heard from Hong Kong, to Minsk, to Warsaw, to St Petersburg and at BLM protests across the US. This “get the fuck out” is the hope that when we protest, there are not only the bodies of the other protesters behind us, but also history, and all those who oppose inequities and injustices around the world.

[1] in Polish, the asterisks stand for “JEBAC PiS”. Prawo I Sprawiedliwość is the current ruling party in Poland whose name in English translates to “Law and Justice”. The slogan ***** translates to “FUCK PiS”

[2] ‘wypierdalać’ has become another slogan for the 2020 abortion-rights protests in Poland

CORNWALL

Sic Transit English

Frances Oliver

So – the meaningless ‘so’ now used to begin statements by anyone questioned on the BBC – I’m going to rant on again about what is happening to the English language.

I’ve already written about the absurd twists and turns of politically correct pronoun gender avoidance, which produces gems like: ‘Why would a man beat their wife?’ (Maybe because she – sorry, - they – is a bigamist?) I’ve also written about how unfettered free-market capitalism has come to dominate our figures of speech. Many have commented on the ‘grocer’s apostrophe’ and Lynne Truss has written a brilliant book about misused punctuation in general (*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*). I could do a whole diatribe on the unquenchable ‘incredible’ and ‘incredibly’, almost the only modifiers left, and the new BBC buzzword ‘nuanced’, meaning (I guess) detailed, or varied, or complex or – maybe just about anything. I could also go on about another new ‘verbed’ noun, ‘transition’ used for ‘transfer’ or ‘change’. When we take trains again, no doubt we’ll have conductors saying “Will you please transition to another carriage”. Its pretentiousness would be in line (or on the line as we’re on the train) with the fallacious ‘where this train terminates’ meaning ‘where this journey ends’.

Present-day English is rife with ‘verbed’ – and that’s another – nouns taking over the customary verbs. The BBC has almost given up ‘lend’ for ‘loan’. The next time we hear that famous speech Polonius made advising Laertes, it may well be “Neither a borrower nor a loaner be”, and I hope the audience will know what it means and not think Polonius is exhorting Laertes not to spend too much time alone. The very newest verbed noun I’ve heard is ‘medal’, from an athlete who said “I hope to medal in the Olympics.”

‘So’ – why does any of this matter? A living language changes and

adapts. We should be proud of our ever-changing English, glad we don’t have an Academy like the French that defines correct speech. In fact, modern linguistics tells us, there is no such thing as ‘correct’ English (of which the dear old BBC was once a bastion). ‘Correct’ English is elitist, exclusive, a form of snobbery.

But using longer and more ambiguous words where simple ones will do – is that not also a form of snobbery? Or a deliberate obfuscation? And using a plural pronoun with a singular subject, which could in most cases be easily avoided by making the subject plural (i.e. ‘all who’ or ‘people who’), is that not populism (my own new ism), snobbery in reverse – or just kowtowing to a politically powerful minority?

Anyhow, we don’t need a concept of correctness. We do need a concept of clarity. Language is communication. When communication is unclear, or the distinctions and forms available to it diminish, language is not growing but shrinking. Take, for instance, changes in prepositions. Jane Austen used ‘whisper’ without a ‘to’ as we use ‘tell’. We’ve put the ‘to’ for ‘whisper’ back. That should not bother anyone. But when we lose ‘waiting for’ and use only ‘waiting on’, what are we sure of if we hear, for instance, “The butler refused to work for the man he was waiting on”? And will we always know if ‘duty on’ is an obligation or a tax?

That should not bother anyone. But when we lose ‘waiting for’ and use only ‘waiting on’, what are we sure of if we hear, for instance, “The butler refused to work for the man he was waiting on”? And will we always know if ‘duty on’ is an obligation or a tax?

Then take some common words. 'Unique' means 'one of a kind'. If we say 'very' or 'quite', qualifying the unqualifiable, the very idea of 'unique' is lost. As with 'exaggerate' which means what those who stupidly prefix it with 'over-' want to say. Then there is 'over-interpret' which is jargon used for over-emphasize or what could be in good simple English 'read too much into'.

Another lost distinction I've noticed is that between 'stand' and 'stood'. 'I was standing' means just that, whereas 'I was stood' means someone placed you there, as in 'He was stood before the firing squad'. Should using only the passive of 'stand' tell us something about the standing of freedom and democracy?

And why, mysteriously, have all those words like 'condition' and 'proportion' acquired a meaningless '-ality', a suffix especially loved by politicians (obfuscation again?). More mysteriously yet, 'special' which did have its '-ity' now has an ism, 'specialism'.

'So' – here, all from my radio, are a few examples of misused words and faulty sentence structure, not communicating but obscuring whatever the speaker meant to say:

'Assuage' instead of 'assail', 'Disfunctionality' for 'imbalance' (the -ality again) from the Housing Minister

'Denigrate' instead of 'degrade' (from a Ph.D. historian)

'Entitlement' instead of 'requirement' (from the Education Secretary)

'Critique' instead of 'critical question'

'We are quite juxtaposed to the Lib Dems.' (from UKIP)

'Embalmed for months ago, designs are being drawn up for a tomb.'

'Tributes have been paid to soldiers who were killed in Afghanistan following the release of their names by the BBC.'

'As a stickler for law and order we are talking about a Muslim extremist.'

And my absolute favourite:

'The doctor was struck off because he performed abortions while attending church on a Sunday.'

You Are My Oasis

You are my oasis
The fertile spot
In the desert of
My life -

From you and only you
Words will flow like water
From the underground-well -
The spiritual oath
Needed by poets
Will always be sacred -

You are my illustration -
More than my ideal -
My symbol of victory
Like the leaf of a palm-tree -
But you are also my pannier -
A kind of beast of burden
Carrying all the mistakes
I must never make -

And in the end as in the beginning
You are my love -
Where all poetry
Becomes leopards
Wild, untamed and free -

Where panic ends in sleep -
And muddy years have moved away -
No rust will settle on your panoply -
No brittle speech
Will rot your poems
Or mine -

You are my open respect
For bits of typewriters
And pieces of white paper -
Although the pain is
Terrible at times -
You are my altar
For a thousand dancing words -

Shänne Sands



Edward Carey: *The Swallowed Man*

Lynda Green

The Swallowed Man is a short novel, easily read in a sitting, and if you are happy to suspend reality and appreciate beautiful writing, then you'll enjoy it. Sprinkled with charming illustrations by the author, it is the reminiscences of Geppetto, the creator/father of Pinocchio, while he is in the belly of a gigantic fish. Edward Carey mixes words which shouldn't work together, yet they do, conjuring Geppetto's moods, emotions, fears and hopes. I was so enchanted with the way he writes, I found myself staring into the middle distance, savouring the beauty of it.

An artist and carpenter, Geppetto does not let his isolation thwart his creativity; he also insists on taking pride in his appearance, despite his circumstances. It is interesting to reflect on this, in these trying pandemic times. My creativity seems to have taken a dip, to my shame.

After describing his surroundings, Geppetto goes on to explain how he made the wooden puppet which, to his amazement, starts to come to life even as he is carving him. We are treated to a drawing of the component parts of the puppet, and to a wonderfully funny yet poignant sketch of a sparse wig he has made for himself out of seaweed, his own mirth-producing wig having been lost at sea. How gloriously vain he appears, even when almost alone. He sculpts a bust of himself; the smile he tries to give it will not stay on, but keeps slipping down. We have all known that feeling at times, over the last year.

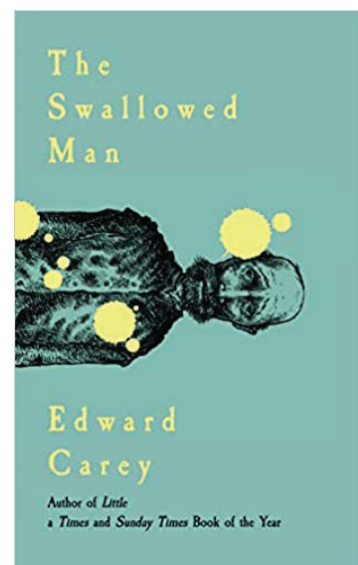
For a while Geppetto has an unlikely companion in a tiny crab, which he is pleased to have reside in his beard. He is less pleased by an ethereal, sinister presence which he senses and fears is up to no good. Here we have a drawing, a dark little figure, howling

or screaming; perhaps it represents Geppetto's fears for Pinocchio and himself – he had admitted right at the start that he is afraid of the dark, and counts his days by the number of candles he has left.

The novel is charming and odd, part fairy story, part parable, it certainly made me ponder on decisions I have made, paths I have taken.

Edward Carey admits to a fascination with the book *Pinocchio*. I, as many others I'm sure, was introduced to it via the Disney Film, yet that film is a pale rendition of the original story, as I found when I first read it as a child. The Italian film *Pinocchio*, directed by Matteo Garrone, which I reviewed in a former issue, is the truest version, and should *The Swallowed Man* be made into a film, it will be a wonderful sequel.

Just as in the film *Titanic*, we all know the ending, it's the journey that is so wonderful. So, I would encourage you to read it. I promise you, you won't be disappointed.



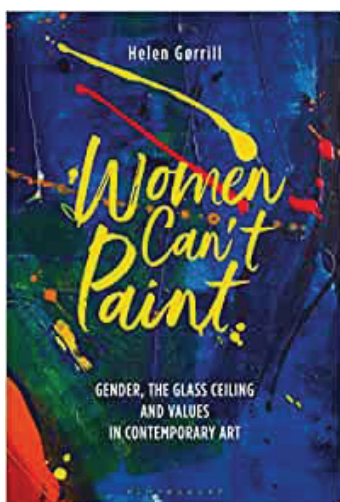
Helen Gorrill: *Women Can't Paint: Gender, the Glass Ceiling and Values in Contemporary Art*

Mary Fletcher

The regrettable title of this book, which I deplore, is taken from a remark by Georg Baselitz.

At the start of the first chapter Gorrill refers to “masculinities and femininities in contemporary art” that I see as perpetuating

unhelpful stereotypes. There is a continued muddle about these terms in the book, which would have been better if it had kept clearly to being about the question of how successful women and men are at present as painters, and the reasons for this.



The author has compiled a lot of worthy research using graphs and percentages to show the continuing position of women artists as making less money than male artists, being collected less by museums, winning fewer prizes, etc. Many reasons are given, such as women being impeded by more childcare, less networking, and sexism and ageism in society.

We are probably all aware of

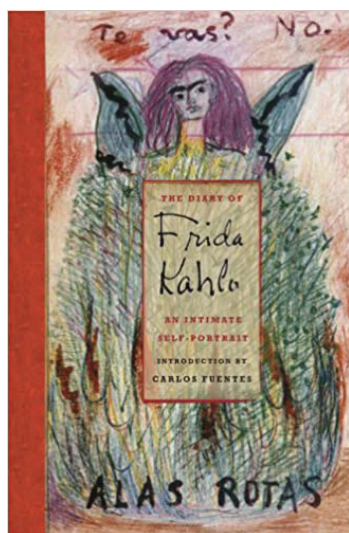
many examples, but Helen Gorrill has put in the graft to prove the unequal state of affairs in the area of painting. It's impressive but rather dull and repetitive. There are no photographs of paintings, and as Alice said, "what good is a book without any pictures?" Many remarks are attributed to anonymous women, which makes these artists seem lacking in guts if they can't own their views openly.

At the end the author proposes a few solutions that require quotas and equality rules in institutions and research funding. Ending with the words "let the revolution begin" seems strange when many of us are well aware of all the work already done which can be built on.

The pathetic ridicule heaped on this book by the reviewer Alexander Adams in *The Critic* magazine serves to illustrate why such a book has been written.

The Facsimile Diary of Frida Kahlo

Mary Fletcher



This is as close as I can get to holding Kahlo's actual diary.

Most of it is written in Spanish in a very legible rounded script, helpfully translated at the back of the book with black and white reproductions of the pages so that you don't get confused, despite the lack of page numbers.

The diary has drawings also and is colourful, spontaneous looking, presumably done with no thought of publication. I

don't find the images particularly wonderful and Kahlo clearly refined her ideas visually and intellectually when she painted for exhibition. I have seen a show of her works - which are not very large, lack some panache in the execution but are very expressive of her life: her painful experiences after her ghastly bus accident and operations, her difficult life between the two cultures of America and Mexico, her turbulent relationship with Diego Rivera.

In the diary two things particularly struck me - her almost adolescent adoration of her husband, who had been her teacher, expressed in declarations of love in block capitals, and a similar insistence on admiration for Stalin - which I have not been aware of before. The latter is unmissable though, as it is repeated several times.

Were Stalin's crimes unknown to her? If she had an affair with

the visiting Trotsky, who was shortly afterwards assassinated by Stalin's agent in Mexico where Diego was hiding him and his wife - did they not discuss politics?

I see Kahlo as a very alarming person, suffering so much, acting selfishly, accepting Diego's infidelities to some extent, but now I have to suspect a lack of political moral rigour, a simplified dedication to the communist cause despite what I see as the failure of the early revolutionary hopes as Stalin became a ruthless and paranoid dictator.

Kahlo idealises the Aztec heritage, which was a cruel, blood-thirsty culture; Diego, who was an unfaithful lover; and Stalin, who was an antisemitic ruthless dictator. Kahlo and Rivera both had European Jewish roots and boldly said they were Jews when checking into an American hotel that would have refused less famous Jewish guests.

The introduction by Carlos Fuentes, who once saw Kahlo, is a fanciful, wide-ranging celebration of her. The essay by Sarah M Lowe refers usefully to the actual journal.

The contents of her diary are perhaps not as interesting as its appearance, which somehow reminds me of her flamboyant style of dress. I can imagine her sitting in bed writing and painting in it, making of it a colourful flowing statement of her state of mind during her last 10 years.

The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait. Hardcover - Illustrated, by Sarah M. Lowe (Author), Carlos Fuentes (Introduction). Published 1995 and 2005 - £10

The Mole Agent

Gill Fickling



Do not watch this film if you are on the verge of committing yourself, or being committed, to an old people's home. It will make you inclined to fall on your sword instead. That being said, if you feel like a good laugh followed by a good cry, then this is the film for you. A quirky documentary that you think is a drama at first due to its tantalising opening shots, this is the story of Sergio, an octogenarian recruited by a private detective as an undercover spy, to be planted in a residential care home for the elderly in Chile. The task: to find out whether

one of the home's residents, the mother of the detective's client, is being maltreated by the carers.

After some touchingly funny scenes of Sergio grappling with the digital tools of his new trade - from learning how to send daily reports via social media to the wearing of spectacles housing a hidden camera - our spy settles into the home only to become an instant hit with the residents. With a 40:4 ratio of women to men, and Sergio seemingly the only male to still have his faculties intact, it's hardly surprising! But as his time in the home progresses, his focus switches from the task of espionage to that of a deep concern at the abandonment endured by his new friends. With no signs of maltreatment in the home on the side of the staff, the film, and Sergio, lead us to feel that it is the structure of society that is the real abuser, a society that encourages families to abandon their elderly relatives to the sad confines of such institutions. A thought-provoking film on the sadness of old age.

Director: Maite Alberdi. Watch on YouTube, Curzon Home Cinema or general release.

Peter Doig Talks to Karl Ove Knausgård About Edvard Munch

YOUTUBE, 1 HOUR 10 MINUTES. NOVEMBER 2019

Mary Fletcher



Ove Knausgård

I had not thought there was a connection between the work of Doig and Munch, but it seems Peter Doig consciously gave his picture *Echo Lake* similarities

to the background in Edvard Munch's *Ashes*. There is a similar use of swishy shapes of paint and horizontal bands of composition. There's a similar sort of intensity and memorable imagery. It turns out Doig was also influenced by casually seeing the film

Friday 13th and the picture has the same composition and imagery as a shot in the movie.

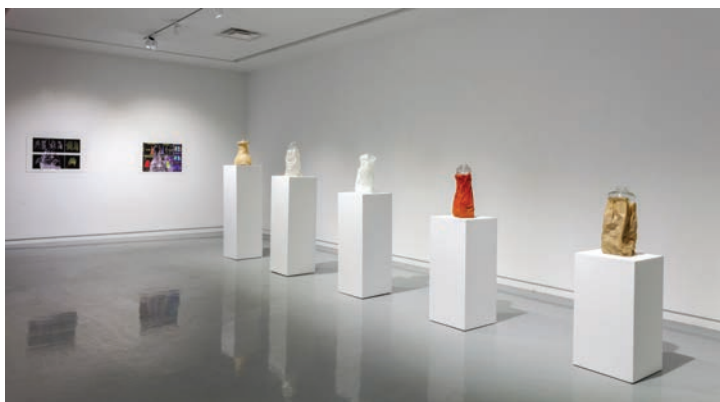
It's enjoyable to hear conversation between people who love the paintings and are able to talk about them sensitively, not glibly. Both Doig and Knausgård like the painting Munch did of a field of cabbages, which makes Karl think of death. Not being an art historian, he has no qualms about simply reacting personally to the works. They speculate about a late Munch picture of someone painting a house - is it some sort of self portrait or just a reaction to a man being there painting an outside wall?

The main benefit of watching the video is that, like a talk given in a gallery, it keeps us in front of the work, looking and feeling and thinking, held by the conversation and given the opportunity to share the experience of encountering paintings by Munch.

Michael Joo: Sensory Meridian

KAVI GUPTA, CHICAGO

Phillip Barcio



Michael Joo: Sensory Meridian (Installation)

Michael Joo's latest solo exhibition at Chicago's Kavi Gupta gallery is perfectly tailored to our time: exclusive and a little alienating, just like pandemic viewing restrictions.

Climbing the dimly lit stairway to the second-floor exhibition space by myself, my feelings of strange solitude were amplified by the sounds of soft, incomprehensible whisperings emanating from an unseen audio installation. Inside the gallery I was greeted by six glass sculptures set atop a line of white plinths descending in height. Eerily set aglow by dedicated spotlights in the otherwise darkened room, the sculptures resembled disposable paper or plastic sacks, like the ones you might see blown around in an urban alley, stuffed with empty bottles and cans or ripped up lottery scratchers.

Joo collected bags from the streets of New York, and inflated them with his own breath to create the molds for these works. He calls the series *Single Breath Transfer*. On a wall next to the line of sculptures, a pair of inkjet prints offer visual analyses of data points collected during the making process.

On another wall, two silver nitrate paintings belonging to Joo's *Various Low Mass Stars* series read at first like purely abstract, nearly monochromatic works. Beside the paintings hangs a selection of prints, documentation of the painting process. Joo made the paintings in situ, securing them to the ground inside abandoned architectural ruins and allowing their surfaces to be exposed to the elements. The paintings are like photographic echoes of a specific place in a specific span of time under specific conditions – analytical hyperrealism masquerading as formalist abstraction.

In the back of the gallery sit two sculptures of severed body parts. One is of the hollowed out face of Anne Sullivan, the teacher who dedicated her entire career to a single student, Helen Keller. The other is of the clenched fist of Abraham Lincoln. Both of these sculptures are riddled with projectiles resembling something between mushrooms and giant Q-tips.

In a darkened side gallery, the source of the whispering is revealed; it's the soundtrack of a video of a neuroscientist, who has been filmed describing a series of human actions that she can see, but which we cannot see.

Watching the video heightened the sense that I was not so much a viewer in an art gallery as an interloper in an abandoned laboratory. I started to wonder whether I was being watched, and whether I was, in fact, the most important part of the show.

I called Joo and asked him about this feeling I had that I was somehow disconnected from the work, but also part of the work. "Yes, exactly," he said. "There's a direct address in this show of the missing body."

The Anne Sullivan and Abraham Lincoln body parts, Joo explained, were made from 3D prints of works in the Smithsonian archive.

"It's kind of an evocation of literal body parts, avatars of the body," Joo explains. "These objects are inaccessible right now, and yet, through this scanning technology, are available online to the public and therefore more accessible than ever."

Joo then mentions almost as an aside that he has also started a YouTube channel, called *SSDA ASMR*, on which he is uploading more videos like the one in the show. They portray his collaborator, filmed from behind, performing whispered "cold reads" of artworks that the viewer of the video cannot see.

"It's about being dematerialized, but still having a presence," Joo says. "It's something that's indexical, but constantly disappearing."

The title Joo gave to this eerie and wonderfully fetishistic exhibition is *Sensory Meridian*. A meridian might refer to a high point, or a connective line between two locations. Or, in acupuncture or Reiki massage, a meridian is a pathway for life energy. Each definition suggests Joo was less interested in staging an exhibition of objects of art during Covid, and more interested in instigating experiences that agitate in favor of human curiosity.

Most of what lingers with me from *Sensory Meridian* is visual and auditory – memories of physical stuff – the sensory part. But Joo

also got me with that idea of meridians. He's raising important questions about connections and transmissions, and about when, how, and whether we are present.

Michael Joo: Sensory Meridian is on view through 10 April 2021 at Kavi Gupta in Chicago, 219 N. Elizabeth Street, Chicago, IL, USA.

MADRID

Banksy: The Last Romantic

Susana Gómez Laín

"They seek him here, they seek him there
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere
Is he in heaven or is he in hell?
That damned elusive Pimpernel"

Baroness Emmuska Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

With him/her/them (we don't know yet), in a context of pandemic, scandal arrived at the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Fine Arts Circle) in Madrid out of the unauthorised exhibition *Banksy, the Street is a Canvas*.

I don't know if it is a pity or luck that whenever an exhibition of this artist comes to the town, like a circus parade, the result is more about the expectation that the artist causes than the show. The works themselves are secondary.

The reason is that this halo of mystery around Banksy's identity, the sneaky working method crossing the red line between legality and crime, appeals to our most recondite emotional needs: for adventure, for enigmas and to fulfil a romantic void in our dull, daily routines. And we love it. Like a reborn Scarlet Pimpernel, saving us from the twin blades of commercialization and gentrification of art. Or like a new Robin Hood stealing the right of owning art from the rich to bring it to the poor. At least, that is what we want to believe.

The inauguration of the event predictably became a dialectic war among the cultural forces in favour or against the artist. One accused the Circle of holding a standard exhibition to make money (the entrance cost €16 even for me with a press pass) from the works of an artist whose motto is to make art available for everyone at no cost. But is this the true intention or is it just a strategy to mark a difference from others and be original, a rebel or a kind of anarchist in the contemporary art realm?

From a legal point of view, this accusation is for children. Nobody can profit from others' intellectual or artistic works without his

authorisation. At least, not in occidental cultures, rarely in others. This cannot be true. They could be sued right away and asked to take precautionary measures by closing the premises. If they remain open, it is because Banksy or the organization behind him permits it. It is part of the show, of the game. I don't understand how people with a reasonable educational level can fall in that rudimentary trap. Maybe out of fascination or infatuation. Anyway, self-deception can be a good therapy sometimes.

A very important achievement I grant to him: he has taken to the top the meaning of conceptual art because whenever you look at his works, you only think that what matters is the idea, the message behind the work. You don't look for aesthetics, you don't search for beauty, composition, coherence, or a new style; you don't long for a Stendhal syndrome; you just look for headlines, you just see the concept behind it, social, political or just human, to see if it fits or not with your own opinions, putting aside other traditional artistic considerations. What fits your discourse, you like, what doesn't, you don't. That simple. You don't judge the work, you judge the idea. That is really new.

Like Hemingway did with the shortest tale ever: *For sale: baby shoes, never worn*, Banksy, in most of his work, leaves an almost blank canvas for us to paint. That can be the reason why *Girl with a Balloon* is preferred by the British public to Turner's masterpieces. The first is affordable, makes us all a bit artists and even dares us mentally to give a final touch to the piece and be transported with the balloons to a cloud of nostalgic memories of happier times in this world. The latter makes us small and clumsy and sends us out of this world to talk directly with Gods, and that can be too painful or too intense for some. This awkward choice derives from the evolution of thinking in the last centuries, from the sacred to the profane. Or at least, I want to think so.

(Exhibition ends 9th May 2021 at time of going to press)

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WRITE FOR THE NEW ART EXAMINER?

DEADLINES:

FEBRUARY 3RD, APRIL 3RD, JUNE 3RD, AUGUST 3RD, OCTOBER 3RD, DECEMBER 3RD.

PAYMENT: £25 BY BACS OR PAYPAL. INTERNATIONAL WRITERS BY PAYPAL OR AMAZON VOUCHERS OR OTHER.

Men and Women on TV in a Zoom Meeting

Mary Fletcher

I am watching *Question Time*, which during the Covid crisis presents us with a wall of zoomed members of the public. I am trying to draw the speakers.

What strikes me is how very different men and women look. The men all wear a uniform of suit, shirt and tie if on the panel; those in the audience have a tiny bit more variation. None of them wear make-up.

The women are more colourfully dressed. Many of them are heavily made up with eyebrows equally heavily drawn on, sharply defined lipsticked mouths, and very darkly outlined and shadowed eyes. Many have obviously dyed hair in bright blonde or dark red shades with luxuriously long curly tresses or perfectly straightened bobs. Most have covered their skin with a layer of concealing foundation with highlighted cheekbones.

What does this say about our society? Men are very restricted in what they wear, very natural looking in their faces. Their hair and beards are mostly trimmed and groomed.

Women are often like painted dolls, very contrived, very image-conscious, ears ringed, with degrees of flamboyant disguise, presumably thinking to make themselves attractive.

These conventions are so very compelling. This at a time when more people are rejecting the sex they were born into to adopt an alternative gender identity. If there was a good deal more leeway for variation in how a man or a woman can present themselves in public, would it be better and less restricting? Would



there be fewer people feeling drawn to alter their gender? Maybe lipstick will be less used when we are wearing masks. Eyes are more prominent. Haircuts are more scarce. But the grip of our culture shows little sign of relaxing its gender-role conformity.

From Page 3

Those individuals are, perhaps, the hardest to communicate with critically, for often they know not how, or by what means, they may challenge themselves. This is a problem in anyone's life but it is often tragically apparent in the arts; who can tell anyone the truth today? How effectively? It seems we have come to a critical halt in our culture, our politics, our economy, and even with one another. The present pandemic makes it no easier, but in an ironic way the pandemic is merely revealing a world that existed prior to Covid. History isn't waiting for us. What are we to do? I say, think and have courage.

This state of stasis is a challenge to the artist, but the larger problem is just not being aware of it. It is usually this choice alone that separates the mediocre from those who make interesting statements and want the public's attention to effect a noteworthy change. I think this is best dealt with through discourse and dialogue. Factors so pathetically absent in today's cultural discourse because we are creaking under the weight of so much deferred attention.

Enter the *New Art Examiner*. When first created through utter frustration about articles not being published by the *Chicago Tribune* – articles that had been slated to be published – Jane Addams Allen and Derek Guthrie chose to publish themselves what they thought was sorely lacking in the Chicago art scene. They took a courageous step to shake the rafters and lift some art souls. We are still doing that today: publishing criticism/discourse/dialogue that has never been, in my not so humble opinion, more warranted. The Examiner does not have the pressure of art games, commercial success or faculty positions to fill in some in-house political drama. The Examiner is composed of a uniquely international, visually sophisticated readership and staff. And the Examiner can be a beacon of light in these hard-to-navigate times, away from the deluded rough shorelines of mayhem, ennui, and insult, back to the normal seas of difficulty and accomplishment or whatever is interesting.

So start a drawing, pen a letter, perhaps tell your boyfriend he stinks but check out the *New Art Examiner*. Good medicine for the postmodern stomach ache. And who knows, we may connect.

Artists On Writers | Writers On Artists

In the premier episode of *Artists On Writers | Writers On Artists*, author Hanif Abdurraqib talks to producer/composer Devonté Hynes about their love of sports, their reverence for sampling, and how they find a balance between pessimism and hope.

Artists On Writers | Writers On Artists brings together luminaries in the fields of art and literature to have the conversations they themselves wish to have. This bi-weekly web series is a joint production of *Artforum* and *Bookforum*, and is sponsored by the Morgan Library & Museum.

Artforum March issue

Find it on YouTube



Metro Picture Gallery, New York

New York's Metro Pictures Gallery to Permanently Close

New York gallery Metro Pictures announced today that it will close its doors after this year's programming, ending a historic four-decade run. An email sent by the gallery cited "a demanding year of pandemic-driven programming, and the anticipated arrival of a very different art world."

The decision marks the latest of many upheavals to an art scene whose landscape, like that of most cities, has been transformed by an ongoing pandemic that has decimated jobs, necessitated digital exhibition models, and shuttered small and midsize art spaces.

ArtForum March issue

NAE Continues to Grow

This month we passed 1 million and 400 thousand unique visitors since the website went live in 2017.

According to Google Analytics we are visited by readers from over 75 countries.

A selection of our widely read articles:

Rebellion and Art in Hong Kong, Leung Suk Ching, volume 34 no 3 January – February 2020, pp 10-11 – 26,695 readers

Museum of Modern Women, Katie Zazenski, volume 34 no 1 September – October 2019, pp 7-9 – 22,400 readers

No Art Superstars from Israel, Daniel Nanavati, volume 34 no 4 March – April 2020 – 17,582

A Brief History of Permanence, Liviana Martin, volume 34 no 4 March – April 2020 – 17,170

Dutch Avant-Garde Fashion Designer Brings a Technological Shock to Daxiliu Museum of Art, Li Liting – (online content only) 16,000 readers

Volume 32 no 6 July – August 2018 – 14,900 readers

Matthias Grünewald's Pain and Suffering, Dr Sheng-Yu (David) Peng, Taiwan – (online content only) 10,800 readers

Living with Hopper, Lynda Green, volume 34 no 2 November – December 2019, pp 7-9 – 10, 300 readers

If You're a Recent MFA or PhD You're Not an Artist nor a Curator, Miklos Legrady, volume 34 no 1 September – October 2019 – 10,000 readers

She BAM! Interview with Laetitia Gorsy, Viktor Witkowski - volume 34 no 6 July / August 2020 – 8,793

Aliens in Our Own World, Katie Zazenski, Volume 34 no 2 November - December 2019, pp 28-29 – 8,700 readers

www.newartexaminer.net

March paint and ash on canvas
Stephen Lee

John Moores Painting Prize 2020

