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

Some of the output of now-forgotten London painters has great charm and freshness. When John Middleton, proprietor of an artists' supplies shop at 80-81 St Martin's Lane, had himself and his household portrayed by an anonymous artist in the 1790s, they posed in their London drawing room 'over the shop' and surrounded by clues to their sophisticated tastes: wineglass, gilt-framed landscape, musical instruments and books. Middleton clearly made a good living from retailing art supplies despite stiff competition, and it is tempting to speculate that this picture was painted by an impoverished artist to settle his account with the colourman.

Artists' London from Holbein to Hirst, Kit Webb with Lucy Peltz and Cathy Ross (Merrell Publishers Limited) companion book to the exhibition *Creative Quarters: the art world in London 1740 – 2000*, Museum of London, 2001.

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:

ERIC BOOKHARDT was a New Orleans writer and art critic. He was the Louisiana regional editor of *Art Papers* and editor of the New Orleans arts and entertainment publication *Offbeat*. He was also a catalogue essayist for the Contemporary Arts Centre's *Visionary Imagists* exhibit (December 1, 1990 to February 10, 1991). He died in 2020.

STEVE CARELLI received a BA in Studio Art from Wheaton College in 1990 and an MFA in Painting from Northwestern University in 1995. He lives in Chicago with his wife, the painter Louise LeBourgeois, and he teaches at DePaul University.

CATHERYNE KELLY is an ambitious, energetic and dedicated individual who is currently studying for a BA in English at University College London. Excellent academic record, quick and keen to learn, thrives in a demanding environment and relishes a challenge.

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. Travelling the world, her films covered human rights, refugees, climate change and gender violence and have been shown widely internationally. She now lives in Cornwall, UK where she paints.

MARY FLETCHER is a multimedia artist Flaneur: www.axisweb.org/p/maryfletcher. She has an MA in contemporary visual art and writes the blog: www.4maryfletcher.blogspot.com. She is a humanist, feminist and socialist, influenced by psychotherapy. She lives in St Ives, Cornwall, UK.

PABLO HALGUERA is an artist, performer, author, and educator. From 2007 to 2020 he was Director of adult and academic programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He is currently an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

JELA KREČIČ is a lecturer at University of Ljubljana. Her work is focused on aesthetics, contemporary art, and popular culture.

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 BSc. in visual studies workshop, Rochester, N.Y and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

LIVIANA MARTIN was born in Northern Italy and lives in Milan. She has a degree in Philosophy and she taught for many years. She is keen on ancient and contemporary art, because she is absolutely confident that "the beauty will save the world".

DANIEL NANAVATI is the European editor of the *New Art Examiner*, author of many children's books and sometime poet. He runs www.footstepsbooks.com.

MARGARET RICHARDSON is a lecturer in art history at Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia, USA, where she teaches modern, contemporary, and Asian art. Her research specialties include cross-cultural exchanges and influences in global modern and contemporary art and connections between the literary and visual arts. She has authored various articles, reviews, and exhibition catalogue essays as well as a book, *Between Reality and Dream: The Aesthetic Vision of K.G. Subramanyan* (2013).

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. She was the first writer to deal with drug addiction in the UK in *Is Rosemary Your Daughter?*

SCOTT TURRI is represented by James Gallery. He is an educator and holds a full-time lecturer position in the studio arts department at the University of Pittsburgh.

MARTHA BENEDICT is recent art history graduate. She is passionate about interdisciplinary art, the ephemerality of live events and the human exchanges that take place when these are experienced collectively. Her background has informed her perspectives on culture, politics and the importance of creativity within society. She edits the website *Arts Content*. https://medium.com/arts-content

.

SAM VANGHELUWE is a Belgian painter, art historian (specialising in African arts), critic and translator. He questions preconceived notions in art theory and criticism, and what Samuel Beckett called 'academic dementia'.

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

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Letters

In Memoriam - John Link on Art Teaching

Editor,
Thank you for reposting this interview. John Link is among a handful of influential people in my art career. I was fortunate to have be hired by him, have him as my Department Chair for a brief time, and be supported and advised by him as an artist, educator, and friend for over 38 years. I will always honor his special place in my life. May he rest peacefully.

Margaret McAdams 02/08/2021

Editor,
In Reply to Margaret McAdams:
I met him twice but corresponded with him for five years. He was a strong guiding light in the re-emergence of the *New Art Examiner*. Do you write about art and art practice?

Daniel Nanavati 03/08/2021

Editor,
John Link was a GREAT artist, and astute observer of culture, and a great arts educator.

Russell Pensyl 19/07/2021

Editor,
RIP John Link.

Lucas 14/05/2021

Editor,
In Reply to Lucas (above)
We are all deeply saddened by the loss of John Link as a man, friend, teacher and writer. A great, thoughtful article.

Garry Noland 15/05/2021

Eat Bread and Salt and Speak the Truth

Editor,
"More often than not, critical analysis of much modern or post-modern art is stymied by its simplicity of appearance." Al, you're so right. Didn't someone say 95% of NFTs will lose their value in the near future?

Miklos Legrady 06/08/2021

A New Look at Italy

Editor,
Great article. Great classifications of artists in their time. In addition, to me the impressionists analyzed and classified the structure of visual language. One more thing… I've been studying Duchamp for 15 years and written a lot on him. After all that time, the documents show that everything Duchamp did grew out of his Dada years. Picabia said that "art was a pharmaceutical product for idiots" and Duchamp, not to be outdone, said "painting is dead". Marcel did not know of non-verbal languages such as visual language, he thought the optical, visuality, was just pleasure for the eye, whereas in science we learn non-verbal languages say things that cannot be said in words. We have been sold Duchamp as a brilliant genius, but now it looks more like he was out to shock people but not much of an intellectual.
In a 1968 BBC interview with Joan Bakewell, the year before he died, Duchamp said that he wanted to discredit art, yes, on purpose, there's an unnecessary obsession with art today that he cannot understand, he wanted to get rid of art the way some had gotten rid of religion. That's the Dada speaking. https://youtu.be/Zo3qoyVk0GU The urinal wasn't his according to a letter Duchamp sent his sister; it was sent in by Dada artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven; she also showed found objects as art 3 years before Duchamp, who appropriated both found objects and urinal a few years after Elsa died in a mental asylum. Duchamp is not the person we were told he was, he's not a brilliant artist with foresight. The academy used him as a figurehead to promote intellectual art, once all artists started going to university to learn how to be artists. It didn't work out so well… lol

Miklos Legrady 09/08/2021

Cultural Conflicts in the Visual Arts

Editor,
Thanks for this article. I hadn't noticed the giraffe, which made me look closer at every part of the painting. Of course a Christian would show a respectful Muslim audience in awe at a Christian preacher; true believers act the same worldwide, it's typical human nature. I long thought that in the past, war made up the bulk of cultural exchange, and was likely the quickest way that skills and knowledge spread across vast territories.
Good suggestion and perhaps a hint to contemporary artists, that we're enriched by the influence of other cultures. Influence is distinguished from cultural appropriation by intent; one wants to appropriate while the other is influenced; their perspective expands.

Miklos Legrady 28/07/202

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

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or write an email to

letters@newartexaminer.net

QUOTE of the Month:

"If I create from the heart, nearly everything works; if from the head, almost nothing."

Marc Chagall

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EDITORIAL

From the moment we are born we begin to interact with the world around us. How we handle those interactions is the birth of ethics. So, too, the moment we commit ourselves to artistic expression we are communicating to the rest of the world and in all communication there is an element of political expression.

This is not the same as using art for political purposes. Every hustings has its posters, every dictator his statue cult. This is arch manipulation.

The act of creation describes something you want to explore, something you want to say and something you want to communicate. Maybe through what it represents and maybe over-and-above what it represents. We are all aware of the little emblems and associations artists have sneaked into their works down the ages that expand upon the theme of the work. It is the visual art version of Haiku, where every pictogram references not just itself, but where it has appeared in the literature before and the association it has with its own origins in imagery. (As an example of this: the pictogram for 'sunrise' derives from the fishing boat putting to sea because fishermen go to sea early in the morning.)

Artists are, in many cases, political animals even if they don't want to be, because people respect them. And what they are can be seen as subversive, irrespective of their work, which is why many people believe Lorca was murdered not for his poetry but because he was homosexual and Franco's Falangists hated anyone not heterosexual.

With this in mind this issue reads as a very political issue. Maybe more than usual. We have an article on whether or not high art exists, which goes to the heart of art politics. Art politics, for anyone who does not know, is the modern version of the academies where galleries and museums and nation state organisations, like the Arts Council in England, decide what is and what is not worth exhibiting. Miklos Legrady asks if Duchamp set the foundations in society for Donald Trump to gain power. Of course, not directly, but the rise of fascism is directly attributable to artists not being allowed to do their job. Which is to comment without fear or favour, with or without patronage, so that people can gain an idea of themselves as a nation.

Scott Turri interviews Robyn Day about her photography and 'photographic truth' and the way in which her work both shapes and informs the narrative of queer identity in the US. These are two people who fully understand the political necessity of the visual arts.

And then we have Jela Krečič whose work we read on eflux and her insights into the way in which modern fascist Hungary is using the visual arts. A vital read for us all.

The more we know, the more we need to know and we don't know nearly enough about ourselves. Each of us is in charge of a brain that is large enough to encompass the universe of things, even if it is in broad brush strokes, and the visual arts can liberate us from the stultification of state politics and guide us into the politics of self and through this show us how little we have made ourselves compared to what we could be.

Editorial next issue: All politics is art.

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. Bookhardt was born and raised in New Orleans and attended the University of New Orleans. In the late 1960s he moved to New York City, where he worked as an archivist at the Museum of Modern Art. He helped establish *Gambit* as a leading voice for the arts in New Orleans: "He was a gifted writer and a great friend to all of us at *Gambit*. He will be missed by all who knew him and by many more who read his columns."

Modernism, Formalistic Abstraction's Lost Sibling

An article, titled "Controversy vs Quality", was featured prominently in the May 21 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, and was fairly typical of its kind, in that it was an appeal to do away with the National Endowment for the Arts (*NEA*) as we know it. The pretext for this execution call was the *Awards of the Visual Arts* (AVA 9) exhibition at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

The author, purportedly one of the journal's editors, was at pains to differentiate himself from the "yahoos" and "Bible-thumpers" (his nomenclature) in whose legion he was marching. And he had no complaints about obscenity, since the show had none. Instead, the business journalist was outraged by what he perceived as an art establishment "orthodoxy" bent on imposing "mediocrity" and "arid drivel" on an innocent, unsuspecting American public. "The artist's work, no matter how reductionist or outrageous, has to be understood," he railed. "If they have created a movement it would have to be called hyper-solipsism."

Hyper-solipsism. That caught my attention. The article's a fairly typical partisan rant, itself an example of hypersophism in that it failed to mention that the *NEA* only funded a fraction of the mostly private underwritten *AVA 9* show. The exhibition, organised by the South Eastern Centre for Contemporary Art, was not exactly cutting-edge and may in fact have elements of mediocrity. What it was, however, was in many ways representative of pluralistic, postmodern American art.

Further, the author revealed himself to be unaware that historically most new art was not instantly accessible, and thus had to be 'understood' over time. Still, the "hyper-solipsism" remark was intriguing, even haunting in some strange way. Perhaps because the self-referentiality implied is a notion ordinarily associated with the abstract expressionist variety of modernism. Postmodernism, on the other hand, has supposedly positioned itself against what modernism has stood for. But has it really? It might be instructive at this point to be generous, to afford the Journal's man a degree of tolerance he seems unwilling to grant those in the art world's evil "orthodoxy." Why was this poor soul so deeply hurt by work whose range of meanings was not instantly "understood" by him, so that he felt compelled to dismiss it all as "solipsism," among other things? (And does he expect artists to find junk bond theory – postmodern economic appropriatism – any less baffling?) He may have been disappointed that the *AVA 9* show comprised what is generally known as idea art, something so typically devoid of traditional 'aesthetics' or 'taste' (favoured buzzwords of the *New Criteria*), that paranoid right-wingers have come to view it as a leftist conspiracy (as if the left still existed!). Someone should have sat those poor fools down a long time ago and explained the facts of art world life to them.

Postmodern art is not any sort of commie plot as our friend from Wall Street and his "yahoo" and "Bible thumper" cohorts seem to suspect

Once, in those rosy days when most of us were either very young or not yet born, and artwork as an art object was a tangible thing, finite, whose existence seemed as specific as its physical dimensions. But, by the late 1950s, something funny had quietly happened that changed everything – mass media, especially television, became so omnipresent, and everything so wired, so photographed and re-photographed, but nothing was the way it had traditionally seemed. Direct perception of events was replaced by ever shifting camera angles, and native experience was replaced by pre-packaged production values.

Philosophically, the authenticity of our experience came into question. Necessarily, art followed suit and became, no longer an object, but a complex of processes whose meanings were dependent upon the context of their presentation. As the formalistic modernism of abstract expressionism had represented the last gasp of the 'aesthetic object' era in art making, the new media-inspired artists emerging in the late 1970s (Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Cindy

Sherman, Richard Prince, Jenny Hotzer et al.) seemed emblematic of the process and context orientation that became identified as postmodernism.

Such art was celebrated in densely academic, scientific seeming tracts by writers such as Rosalind Krauss and Fredric Jameson, among others, who generally made it sound like some new kind of breakthrough. All this set the tone for the art of the 1980s, including the context-conscious art in the *AVA 9* show.

What most of these writers failed to fully acknowledge was that we had been through all this before with Pop – the first major media art movement – and the force which initially laid to rest formalistic modernism. British art critic Lawrence Alloway – way back in the 1960s – described Pop as manipulating the codes, "the sign systems of American culture." Which is essentially how critics like Krauss validated artists such as Sherrie Levine, while quoting from Roland Barthes, among other structuralist and post-structuralists, who themselves were expanding on ideas already

This then is the deep, dark secret: Postmodernism is the new academic art.

laid out by Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s (though McLuhan himself was rarely, if ever mentioned). Ultimately, the media image appropriation of Sherrie Levine and others seem to differ very little from similar media appropriation tactics utilised by Rauschenberg or Warhol some 20 years before.

So why all the hoopla? Cynics have suggested that in the wake of the 1970s conceptualism, the galleries need something more tangible to sell, and some people had made a real killing off of pop art, so ... Others have suggested that since nothing much of cultural or technological significance has happened since the 1960s, we have to keep repeating fragments of that decade until something else finally comes along.

Pop had been a perfect illustration of the (field theory) of electronic media, a force that by the 1960s had become totalising in its omnipresence. Thus Pop fulfilled the traditional role of the avant-garde (art about the idea of art): it reflected through new art the changes in consciousness imposed by new levels of technology. If abstract expressionism was the art of post-war high industrialism, then Pop reflected late industrialism so what does postmodernism reflect? Continuing late industrialism... ("Post-industrial" is simply the polite way of saying we lost our industry to Japan.)

But there are a few differences. Where Pop had been irreverent and fun, postmodern art seems to take itself pretty seriously. And if Pop had seemed accessible, much postmodern art seems pointedly inscrutable – you pretty much have to know the theory or else you'll never 'get it'. In other words this is a kind of literary art, and to know what it's 'about' you have to know the literature. (And if you are a Wall Street Journal editor – how the hell are you going to find the time, right.)

And so, the reality of postmodern art is not that it is any sort of commie plot as our friend from Wall Street and his "yahoo" and "Bible thumper" cohorts seem to suspect, but that it is utterly enmeshed in quasi-scientific, academic theory. University art has increasingly become a discipline as specialised as, say, theoretical physics.

This then is the deep, dark secret: postmodernism is the new academic art. And while there is nothing in any of this to suggest that this art would necessarily tend to be "mediocre" or "arid drivel," there is implicit in it the distinct suggestion of an intellectual game, a game of codes and contexts. Such a game could be extended indefinitely – familiar forms yielding to endless opaque riddles posturing as new art-about-the-idea-of-art about-the-idea-of-art about-the-idea-of-art, ad infinitum, add absurd (but this may seem trivial). Furthermore, postmodernism may not even be post-modern. Its emphasis on manipulating ready mades, mass images, and objects taken out of context, can be traced back before Rauschenberg and Warhol – way back to America's early experience with Marcel Duchamp, who many regard as this country's avant-garde father of... modernism. So postmodernism may simply be the alternative modernism, formalistic abstraction's lost sibling.

So where does this leave us? Good question.

If we go back to the beginning of art, we find ourselves in a cave. Art originally dealt with the conditions that people faced – hunger, the bison situation – back when the physical and metaphysical world were one, but life's challenges were many. While postmodernism's underlying theories often reflect real life issues, much postmodernist art itself seems oddly hermetic, or "solipsistic," as noted by our Wall Street scribe. Certainly not all – Peter Halley's work uses abstracted computer circuitry as a metaphor for the abstraction of meaning posed by mass communications, a bison situation of consciousness – but most postmodernism seems curiously insular.

In New Orleans there is a loose knit group of artists that have come to be known as the Visionary Imagists owing to their signature blending of imagism and a kind of visionary surrealism (or magic realism) of the sort found in Latin America, Louisiana, and the American southwest. While neither modern nor post-modern, this art deals in a somewhat accessible way with real-world issues of environment and gender – as well as media and the abstraction of meaning.

The wave of the future? It is 'too soon to tell' what the movement's contribution might ultimately be, notes art historian Mary Warner Marien in a story on the visionary imagists in the June 25, 1990 issue of the Christian Science Monitor. Noting, however, the way in which it expresses "global concerns through a local style," the article concludes "the movement goes a long way to redeem what has disparagingly been called provincial art. As part of an emerging new American regionalism, Visionary Imagism calls into question the whole notion of a cultural mainstream."

If this, or any other such socially and environmentally oriented art catches on, it will be interesting to see what conspiracy theories and *NEA* bashing it might inspire. But, come what may, it probably won't be dismissed as "solipsistic".

First published in the *New Art Examine*r Volume 18, no 2 - October 1990: Publisher Derek Guthrie, Managing Editor Alison Gamble.

Cancelling Art: From Populists to Progressives

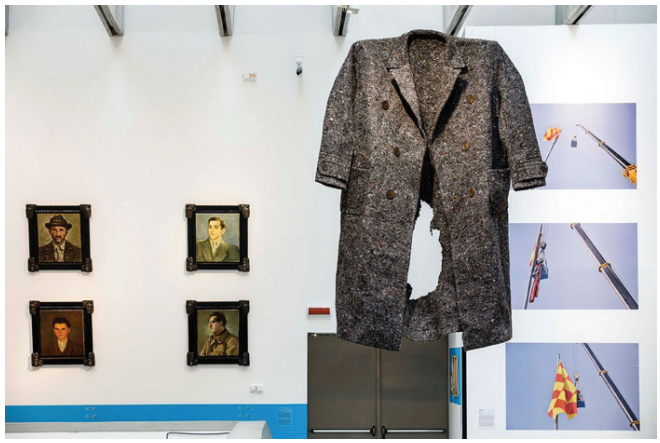
Jela Krečič

According to the Slovene philosopher Mladen Dolar, the Covid pandemic acts like a magnifying glass that exposes and magnifies the more dire antagonisms in contemporary societies, from rising social inequality and the increased exploitation of women to contemporary forms of racism. It's hard to judge if Covid-19 also amplified latent and already visible antagonisms within the art system all around the world. One could argue that the lockdown and the standstill brought to light certain vulnerabilities of the art system, especially the precarious positions of artists and other workers in art institutions—many of whom were laid off and denied compensation or left without labour protections because they were in flexible or freelance positions. On the other hand, without the audience and global events that usually invigorate the art world, the pandemic enabled many cultural workers, including artists, critics, writers, and all who engage in art discourse, to take a step back and analyze some intriguing conditions in the art sphere that point to broader sociopolitical phenomena.

Art for Populists

In January 2021, the Slovene ambassador to Rome, Matjaž Kunstelj, revoked the embassy's endorsement of the upcoming exhibition *Bigger than Myself: Heroic Voices from ex-Yugoslavia,* curated by Zdenka Badovinac at the National Museum of 21st-Century Arts (MAXXI) in the Italian capital. He retracted his support because the exhibition didn't agree with the ambassador's notion of an appropriate celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia. The ridiculous part of the story is that the exhibition never intended to address either Slovenia or its historic accomplishments; in fact, it was planned years before, delayed only because of the pandemic, and meant to historicize and document the art scene of the former Yugoslavia, expressed through its relations in a wider Mediterranean region. The other ridiculous detail to this story is that neither the embassy nor the ambassador were asked to endorse the exhibition in the first place. Thus, it seems that there was a certain urgency on the ambassador's part to publicly share his (artistic) sentiments, not realizing that his take on the role of art would jeopardize his stance in the diplomatic community. The whole situation is best described as embarrassing: embarrassing for the ambassador and therefore for Slovenia itself, which appeared as tone-deaf to the functioning of art as well as to foreign politics, especially given that the Slovene foreign ministry and the ministry of culture endorsed the ambassador's decision.

Art institutions, therefore, enable us to look at things critically; they make us see the status quo as already failed, and its every improvement as a sign of impending doom. In other words, they demand that viewers give up their many prejudices (about art and life) and look at the collected items from a different perspective.



Bigger than Myself: Heroic Voices from ex-Yugoslavia, *curated by Zdenka Badovinac at the National Museum of 21st-Century Arts*

The whole event unveiled the pitiful conditions of Slovene domestic and foreign affairs today, but more importantly, it also disclosed a specific right-wing populist stance towards art—namely, that it should function as nationalist propaganda. It therefore came as no surprise that on Prešeren Day, the Slovene national holiday on the eighth of February dedicated to celebrating art and culture, the Slovene prime minister Janez Janša reprimanded all artists in the country who, as he put it, were enhancing divisions and hatred in Slovenia during the pandemic. "From culture, which is the key to nation's spiritual existence and as such a source of people's power when faced with dire challenges, I would expect a different, more state-building attitude."

And there we have it: the times are crucial and difficult, so artists should not take advantage of their freedom; they should not contemplate their precarious situation, but rather try to help the state prop up its image. That is the position of today's right-wing populists. Moreover, one can see that challenging and antagonistic art – art that does not actively serve state-building purposes—is not welcome in Slovenia, or at least not eligible for state funding.

This is just one case of a right-wing, populist government in Europe executing its power in the domain of art. By prescribing the roles of art and artists, it has joined frightening nationalist tendencies in several countries in Eastern and Central European, from Hungary and Poland to Serbia to Slovenia.

The strains of populism coming from the above-mentioned countries are explicitly critical of former authoritarian communist regimes and former communists, while their strategies—although in the service of a different ideology—are almost identical to those of

Matija Jama, (1872-1947). Willows, *1900*
Jama was part of the Slovenian Expressionist school

past totalitarian rulers. That said, one must realize that in the former Yugoslavia, at least in the 1980s, many forms of dissidence, including controversial art, were more or less tolerated or even endorsed by the Communist Party. So one has to conclude that the right-wing populists in Eastern Europe are adopting even more hardline manoeuvres than their authoritarian communist predecessors. Like the former ruling authoritarian Communist Party, today's right-wing populists think that art should empower the state and celebrate the nation or the regime. In both cases, art has a clear task provided by the governing party, and the art community must adhere to it. Those in power today believe that the art sphere should not have autonomy because it is largely subsidized by public money (at least in Slovenia); art must serve the rulers' agendas. It shouldn't surprise us that these populists so often rail against disciplines that challenge such an understanding of power. The political agenda overrides any professional objection. And, of course, if you are not satisfied by the rulers' decisions, you can always try out your artistic or other ideas on the open marketplace. To emphasize how much this political line has strayed from the most modest democratic standards would be to state the obvious. However, at least in Slovenia, one should take notice of how quickly the transition from a relatively normal-functioning art system to a populist one took place over the course of the last year or so since the current government came to power.

Pre-emptive Cancellation

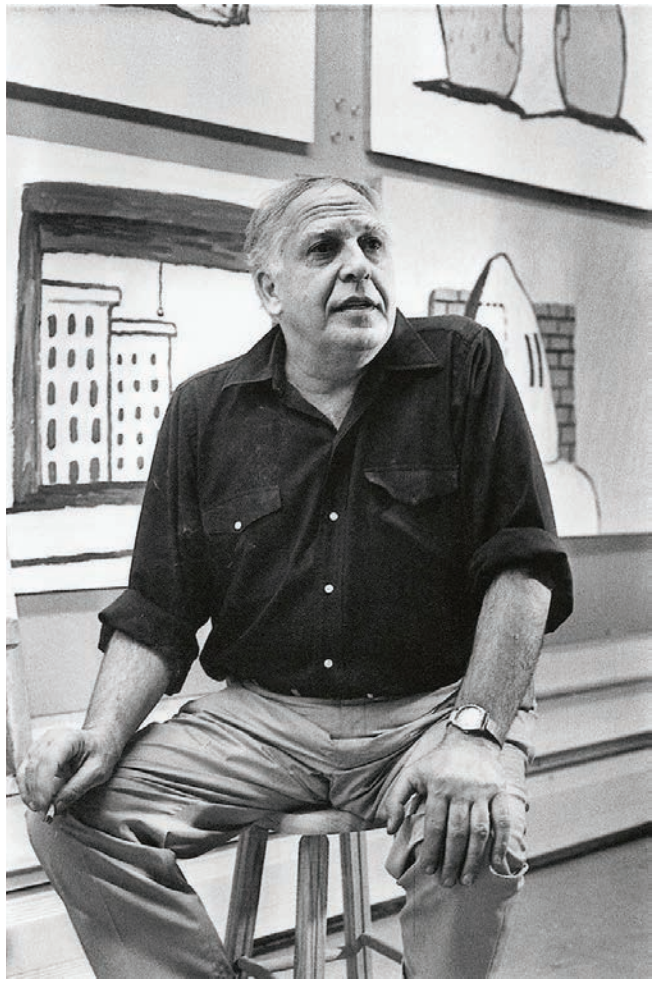
At the end of last year, another story came out that raises parallel concerns while demonstrating a different form of (self-)censorship. The National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and the Tate Modern decided to postpone an exhibition of Philip Guston's work titled *Philip Guston Now.* Guston needs no introduction as he is considered one of the greatest American painters of the 20th century. From very early on in his adult life, in the early 1930s, he was an avid civil rights activist, when such engagement was not yet fashionable but highly risky. Later, in the 1960s, he produced paintings that depicted members of the Ku Klux Klan. These works can be understood as a critical reaction to white supremacy based on Guston's first-hand experiences of extreme American racism, which he endured as a Jew. The leaders of the four acclaimed institutions expressed concern that, in a time of the Black Lives Matter movement, Guston's images could trigger people of colour and activists for black liberation. Kaywin Feldman of the NGA, Matthew Teitelbaum of the MFA Boston, Gary Tinterow of the MFA Houston,

and Frances Morris of the Tate Modern explained that they decided to postpone the exhibition "until a time at which we think that the powerful message of social and racial justice that is at the center of Philip Guston's work can be more clearly interpreted."

It has become abundantly clear how 'politically correct' discourse and the sensibilities of so-called 'cancel culture' have become tools of the art-system hierarchy, enhancing an image of museums' self-doubt and self-reflection. As much writing by contemporary activists and theorists of black liberation show, this is only a cosmetic reaction. The new social climate demands that the artistic sphere recognize its blind spots and start accepting those who were systematically excluded from museum collections, exhibitions, and canons. To a certain extent, one can only commend the few art institutions that admitted that the art system was almost always a willing accomplice to dominant social power structures and their accompanying ideology. Now some have started to rethink and rebuild their collections and exhibitions more and more from the point of view of those without power, though many have opted for cosmetic rather than structural changes, as seen in the Guston fiasco.[1]

I believe it is important for art institutions to contemplate their role in the (re)production of social antagonisms, though I don't believe 'political correctness' can contribute to any relevant systemic change. The main goal of this type of liberal, representational politics is to satisfy the prescribed demands of the enlightened liberal elite while the power structure of the museums, including the art market and capitalism, remain unscathed. One could also speculate whether and to what extent the museums' new politics further enrich the elite—under the umbrella of diversity.[2]

But my dispute with the four museums does not concern their sensitivity to what has become known as cancel culture. I can accept that institutions, especially if they want to flourish in a wider social environment, have to communicate with their audiences. However, in the case of Philip Guston, I was alarmed by the pre-emptive withdrawal of the exhibition. Before there was any protest, before there were any offended individuals on the horizon, the museums had already decided to wait for a more suitable time, which will allegedly secure "a clearer interpretation" of Guston's work. In this respect, the four eminent institutions de facto subordinated themselves and their programs to a standard that has very little to do with art (or social justice), and that they themselves remain the progenitors of. And not only that: they are subordinating art to a standard that cannot stand as a standard. It is more a subjective whim that can come from anyone in any given moment without any reason or argumentation, based solely on a the kind of feeling usually formulated in a Twitter rant. Furthermore, does any work of art, even the oldest of masterpieces, have "a clear interpretation"? The only art that has a clear interpretation is either art conceived and promoted by totalitarian regimes (Hitler's and Stalin's come to mind) or commercial art: graphic design and advertising. With these two examples in mind, there are connections to be drawn between the way liberal forms of museum self-censorship operate and the way several countries in Eastern and Central European have begun to troll and withdraw funding for non-nationalist art.



Philip Guston

The Politics of a Cemetery

I have always considered museums as essential to any society because they present very specific types of artefacts and knowledge to the public. The workforces in museums—the curators and all of those who take care of and preserve collections, who create and design catalogues, the writers and the critics, the cleaners, programmers, educators, and guards—are the backbone of art. They guarantee (at least ideally) that the works on display or in the collection are carefully chosen and studied for the benefit of the public. The institution stands for these choices, investigations, and explorations of art.

I would like to further elaborate this point by referring to Boris Groys's essay *On Art Activism,* in which he compares museums to cemeteries. Museums, he claims, mortify objects. A certain artefact loses its function the moment it enters the museum. However, he finds this function of the museum to be its most important. Contrary to our everyday reality, to our consumer culture, and to cutting-edge designs and new technological 'breakthroughs' that profess to improve our daily lives, the museum gives up on ideals (of progress) in advance:

The aim of design is to change reality, the status quo—to improve reality, to make it more attractive, better to use. Art seems to accept reality, the status quo, as it is. But art accepts the status quo as dysfunctional, as already failed, from the revolutionary or even

post-revolutionary perspective … By defunctionalizing the status quo, art prefigures its coming revolutionary overthrow. Or a new global world. Or a new global catastrophe.[3]

Art institutions, therefore, enable us to look at things critically; they make us see the status quo as already failed, and its every improvement as a sign of impending doom. In other words, they demand that viewers give up their many prejudices (about art and life) and look at the collected items from a different perspective. In the museum, visitors are not strictly reduced to consumers and they are not 'to be consumed.' Going to an art museum is a complete waste of time (and usually money), but this is its most important quality in an era where everything and everyone has to be accounted for. In museums, viewers confront times and spaces from the past; they can acknowledge corpses (artefacts) of our civilization in new ways, and maybe even realize that our global civilization is already a corpse, at least in some respects. In a museum's dedication to the defunctionalization of artefacts, one can indeed find its most political dimension: the museum engages people differently from supermarkets or any other consumerist institution.

To demand that art be non-offensive, polite, and all-inclusive, that it conform to fashionable social norms and sensibilities, is to deprive it of its main power: to challenge the constraints of our senses, our sensibilities, our minds, and our world.

To put it in another way, museums conform to different standards of exhibiting and engaging with audiences, so they should be given the benefit of the doubt. One has to assume that the works on display were selected by professionals who followed professional procedures and codes. And one has to assume that the artworks are not exhibited to hurt anyone's feelings, although they may (intentionally or not) provoke strong emotions.[4]

This does not mean that one has to agree with a museum's selection, its collection, or its exhibitions. A museum should challenge viewers, it should provoke polemics. However, these polemics should be articulated in a reasonable fashion: not through 'cancelling'. Self-censorship based on the presumption that someone might be offended by the professional work of an artist and of museum employees goes against the mission of both art and museums, and against public well-being too. Moreover, one could argue that cancel culture prevents real political change by trying to use cosmetic reforms to address deep social injustice, thereby sweeping that injustice under the rug. One can only imagine how the art world would look if all its constitutive elements were judged from the point of view of their possible offensiveness, potential harm, toxicity, etc. I am quite confident that there would hardly be any art left, historical or contemporary.

If one part of my argument against cancelling Guston and cancel culture in general is based on the function of museums, the other part concerns the function of artworks. I would argue that in modern Western history, the prevailing function of art was to be offensive to dominant sensibilities. In the modern age, art was never

Contemporary Slovene artist Ištvan Išt Huzjan
Unnamed Figure*, 2015*
(Courtesy of the artist and Proyectosmonclova)

created to make people feel good, to further their well-being, to reinforce their prejudices; on the contrary, it undermined established aesthetics and sometimes prevailing social values and orders through the function of the works' production and reception. To demand that art be non-offensive, polite, and all-inclusive, that it conform to fashionable social norms and sensibilities, is to deprive it of its main power: to challenge the constraints of our senses, our sensibilities, our minds, and our world. No one can prescribe in advance what a good piece of art is, or what its effect is going to be; no one can say what kind of art resonates with the challenges of our reality. This is exactly the reason why we should restrain ourselves from imposing any such restrictions on art, and rather focus on allowing art to challenge dominant forms of power, aesthetics, and violence. Constraining it for the wrong reasons—for example, to fulfil liberal notions of self-censorship and to avoid controversy—is in some ways to do something very similar to what the populists are doing—the only difference being the criteria for cancellation: populists cancel art that isn't sufficiently nationalistic, while institutions that pretend to be 'progressive' cancel art that they construe as potentially harmful to viewers, while inflicting actual harm on these viewers through their connections to systems of global violence. Instead of heeding and responding to

the legitimate demands of liberation movements, such forms of cancel culture take the place of structural changes and produce a patina of progressiveness.

Judging What's Cancelled

Here I would like to turn to Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment, i.e., judgment of taste. Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment is a useful tool for examining the destructive effects of so-called cancel culture. It also offers a way forward. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant writes:

"If [someone] pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says that the thing is beautiful, and does not count on the agreement of others with his judgment of satisfaction because he has frequently found them to be agreeable with his own, but rather demands it from them. He rebukes them if they judge otherwise, and denies that they have taste, for he nevertheless requires that they ought to have it; and to this extent one cannot say, 'Everyone has his special taste.' This would be as much as to say that there is no taste at all, i.e. no aesthetic judgment that could make a rightful claim to the assent of everyone".[5]

Kant's argument about aesthetic judgment here seems contradictory. If judgments of taste are based on the pleasure or displeasure of the individual, then they are judgments based on subjective feelings. At the same time, these kinds of judgments demand the assent of others, meaning that aesthetic judgments are subjective but also seek universal acceptance. How does one understand this? I believe Kant's point is actually very coherent. The field of beauty (or ugliness) is a unique one. Viewers approach it with the subjective senses that they possess (feelings of pleasure or displeasure), but to debate these feelings they have to elaborate judgments in a way that can be endorsed by all reasonable people.

Kant implies that the form of aesthetic judgment has to be inclusive of everyone. (He stresses that acknowledging everyone's 'taste' isn't possible, since if it were, we would not be able to talk of taste at all.) So in an aesthetic judgment, one has to mold one's immediate impulse (a feeling) into a form that can be understood by anyone. This doesn't mean that everyone has to agree, but it does mean that everyone should be able to understand and respond to it. Its (inclusive) form is agreeable to everyone, although some can passionately disagree with its content.

Although some things grouped under the label 'cancel culture' are on the right side of liberation, too often they take an individual impulse (pleasure, displeasure) and express it in a form that destroys social bonds. Kant's notion of aesthetic judgment is rooted in the perspective of a social, communal, public good. You are allowed to disagree, but your disagreement must come in a form that does not diminish our common public domain.

At its worst, cancel culture can be a force of social disintegration. Anyone who feels offended can launch a violent verbal attack and demand that this or that problematic artefact be removed. The aggressiveness of cancel culture seems radical to liberal sensibilities, when in fact it is not radical enough. Instead of supporting real processes of radical change or heeding the demands of liberation movements, it covers up social problems with mandates for capitalist 'diversity, equity, and inclusion'. The problem is not just the violent single-mindedness of this sort of judgment, but also the presumption that the 'I' is always right, and that this 'I' has a right to claim its right. For the agents of cancel culture, their right, and being right, is the goal in itself. It doesn't matter to them if the form of their judgement is destructive. Kant argued the opposite: it is not important to be right (to have a correct judgment); what's important is to have the right form of judgment (a Universal form), regardless of the substance.

One can of course debate furiously with directors of major museums and demand that they respond. However, the form of criticizing museums cannot be just a slur or an angry complaint. If it is, the museums are not obliged to respond.

I find Kant's reasoning productive not only for the contemporary art field but also for the field of politics. It is not enough for a given political struggle to be 'right'; the form of struggle is crucial. Any progressive political project requires not just the 'right' political agenda, but also on the 'right' political form. If it is to be genuinely political, if it is to deliver meaningful systemic change, its form has to be an inclusive form. We might also say, in a further extension of Kant's argument on aesthetic judgment, that this inclusive form is the only way to fight the dangerous forces of contemporary right-wing populism.

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https://www.e-flux.com/journal/119/401729/cancelling-art-from-populists-to-progressives/.0)

Notes:

1: Contemporary art institutions can simultaneously celebrate politically correct agendas and guarantee that the wider political power structure (along with its antagonisms) stays intact. Let us recall the reopening of MoMA in late 2019, when protesters pointed out that the $450 million investment in renovation and expansion of the museum was endorsed by two very problematic board members. Steven Tananbaum's company Golden Tree Asset Management controls over $2.5 billion of Puerto Rico's debt. Board member Larry Fink, CEO of investment management company BlackRock, was scrutinized for his company's investments in private prison companies. For more information on MoMA's problematic sources of financing, see the website of a new coalition of activists targeting MoMA: Strikemoma.org.

2: Before the opening of the renewed and enlarged and diverse MoMA, the employees of the museum protested because of their precarious status within their institution. I believe this is a lovely illustration of how relations of capitalist exploitation can go hand in hand with absolute political correctness and museum diversity politics.

3: Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (Verso, 2017), 54.

4: I am, of course, fully aware that sponsors, donors, and board members of big art institutions dictate museums' programming as well. This is also something that needs to be addressed and taken into account.

5: *Immanuel Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kritik der Urteilskraft) (1790; Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98.

When We Create We Cannot Escape The Aesthetics Of What We Create

Daniel Nanavati

Does high art exist? This is not a question most people consider relevant today. That I consider it relevant is because there is no tribe we know about that has not worshipped images. If the visual experience can lead to devotion and, in the case of outright religious worship, the ignorance of human sacrifice and the blood-letting of religious bigotry, then the greater the understanding we have of this visual experience the greater our inoculation against such excesses. If art is a cultural statement of who we are as peoples, then that statement naturally sets a standard in each generation.

The arts have been assaulted by legions of people who believe that to write three lines on a piece of paper makes it a poem; to throw colour on a canvas makes it a painting; to work on shape makes it a sculpture; to record sounds makes it music. Further, they suggest opera need not be the highest form of art, as Mozart would have it, or that poets are not the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world' as Shelley would have it. I can only deal with the visual arts, but the essence of what is said here is applicable to all the arts.

There is such a thing as 'purpose'. In everything we do and everything we create there sits a concept that needs to be communicated. Sometimes it is obvious – we build houses to live in them. We created mathematics as a tool to open up things we cannot understand through our senses alone. We make clothes to give personality to our bodies. We have an aesthetic at play with everything we create. Because we have evolved within nature we are imbued with the sense of her beauty and ugliness.

So we are aware of something that has become a truism: when we create we cannot escape the aesthetics of what we create.

We know what we are attracted to have in our own living space. We know that beautiful people have it as a career choice to go into movies because the public expect movie stars to 'look' good. People swoon over their music stars, legions of stylists of one form or another are the underpinning of the 'look' on every TV screen. And we now know that the first hand-prints and some stone hand-tools were made for their 'look' alone, which makes that their entire meaning.

Our forebears in the Academies thought there was such a thing as high art and the entire Renaissance was kick-started by finding out the Greeks had an incredible aesthetic for pseudo-realistic statuary. These standards demanded skill gained through practice and to some extent were artificial: you had to learn to paint certain things.

Art has always told us who we are. It is why Egyptians painted stories on walls and why bas-relief adorned Roman and Greek temples. It is why the imprint of carvers is found on every ancient nation's cities and homes. It is why stonemasons carved their own faces onto gargoyles high in the vaults of cathedrals. They believed their work would live on. They had little reason to suppose their societies would ever end.

What a king can have made must be important because kingship – another human creation – has to be pre-eminent. The rich had libraries and mosaics and even the earliest cities had shape – from the rectangles of Alula to the Hittite huddle of roofs. Buildings were made to fit the physical space people encompass in groups when they stand close together or gather in family units. The resulting idea of enclosing space while maintaining expanse is the foundation of every palace and every cathedral.

Filling these places with visual art continued the sordid relationship of worship with the image, growing right out of the superstitious creation of clay figurines and imbuing the inanimate with power. The most ludicrous idea ever to come out of humanity. But what was put in the palaces and cathedrals was the desired aesthetics of power, the power to impress and impose ideas on a population. And the closer an artist came to achieving those visual effects the greater they were considered. Hence the consideration of skill came to be inseparable from art. But it is to money that creativity, like all else in our nations, went to find means. And whatever else our artists want to do they have to have patrons and they have to make what they were employed to make. So upon the inherited aspects of our senses and the need to wield power, high art emerged in our nations as a 'fact' of wealth. And what was created informed successive generations what it meant to be French, German, Chinese etc.

But high art will continue to exist. As the befuddled generations pass, new generations will look for definition and description and explanation. You cannot go from Turner to Emin and expect to be dealing with the same nation or the same people. We have become lesser, as has America.

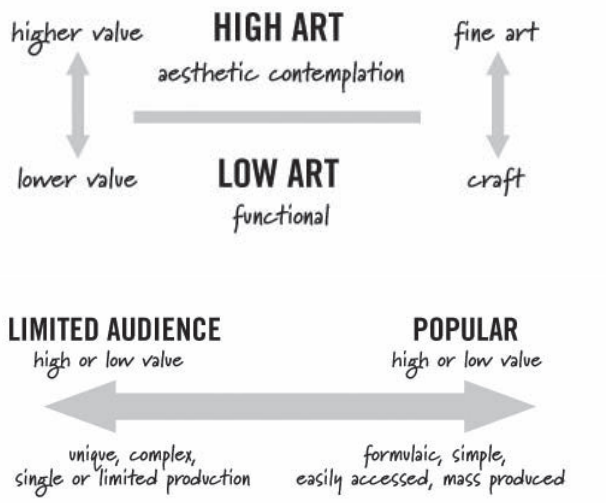
Does it exist anymore?

Well not if Kusama, Banksy, Condo, Koons, Weiwei or Hirst are our examples. And, going back a generation, not if Jackson Pollack, Marcel Duchamp or Helen Frankenthaler are our standard. But then, is there a standard? Isn't the whole point of Modernism and Postmodernism that high art became an artificial creation that stultified the artist?

Standards today are not very definable. And it is the difficulty in definition that is at the heart of this debate. Adorno said, "an artist paints a painting, not what it represents". Brilliant in its observation because it includes everything. But it isn't just this, it is the

Every artist who practices art knows that it is their business to create, nothing more; what the world does with what they create is up to the world.

whole meaning of why anyone creates for the mere sake of creation itself. Why they change what they make and how they make it, why they strive to portray something from inside themselves. Every hand is unique. Every painter recognisable for their style. The intellectual, emotional, evolutionary-wise foundations of their work are the important aspects of their creative process. You will always recognise an artist through their life and you will find out their lives flow directly from their thinking and we as peoples making nations take them up as expressions of ourselves. Art plays a central role in identity because it is never confined to galleries and museums. It is all around us in the design of everything in our built environment.



Images from The Rapidian
© Matt Plescher

Every artist who practices art knows that it is their business to create, nothing more; what the world does with what they create is up to the world. After all, once it is in being it belongs to the world not the artist. High art, if it exists, unlike patrons, cannot be about ownership, power or, as Berger pointed out, what we have learned from the publicity machine.

The hand-prints on those cave walls were looked upon with wonder by those who lived in the caves but did not think to make them. Hand-prints made today are a self-conscious choice to create a fashionable commodity. Are the bas-reliefs on Greek temples high art? They are certainly beautiful and they show immense skill and knowledge about the materials, but they were done by working tradesmen and women, done for pay all over Greece and done for gods. Power and superstition do not make high art if the life of the artist is as important a factor in the definition as the work. They are advertised to us as high art, of course. Back to Edward Bernays, who described the growing ability of advertising to mimic propaganda in his 1928 book *Propaganda*.

But none of this really helps us to define high and low art. We create, we get paid, we live the life, we comment on our generation, we are accepted or not by successive generations. Skill no longer exists, form is permissive, perspective fluid, colouration optional, patronage governmental, prizes widespread and the academies dead.

The power of art to define a people, a nation, is ignored. It is, to focus the points in this article, highly political. It is strange that liberalism looks to the colour, gender, social status and sexual orientation of artists as relevant. It brings artists down to social commentators. Cities have huge galleries that are more public spaces for people to meet up and hang out than engage in discussions about art. And since the demise of criticism along with definitions of art you may think high and low art can no longer exist. And yet we still have the strange phenomenon of artists surviving their lives to be appreciated by succeeding generations while others vanish, no matter how famous they were in their lifetimes.

It is here that we will find such ideas as 'shared history' and engagement with the 'eyes' of another human being. To see the world we have come from, defined by another human being who was there. Anything that is only fashion will disappear. Such as Lozano-Hemmer, Weiwei and Kusama and 99% of all installations.

The self interest of a political class, the self interest of collectors, the self interest of curators and the flow of money between them all prevents them from looking at an art work for its own sake. I know you will say collectors do, but name one who cannot tell you how much one of their works is financially worth? And maybe none of us can define high art in our own generation because that is not for us to do. Successive generations make the choice. We can highlight only by looking back, and do.

Yet eyes like William Hazlitt's in England made choices that were stunning in their accuracy. But then, as a critic, he met and engaged with everyone. Today the methods of control are so absolute that writers and artists do not commune as they did in the past. Salons are dead, manifestos mundane and artists too diffident to show power of thought. The 'everything is art' nonsense has quelled their spirit.

But high art will continue to exist. As the befuddled generations pass, new generations will look for definition and description and explanation. You cannot go from Turner to Emin and expect to be dealing with the same nation or the same people. We have become lesser, as has America.

High art will exist where an artist lives the work, speaks for a nation and continues to speak long after their generation has gone. They can have nothing to do with fashion and in a very real sense, touch a quality of timelessness and they will always be indifferent to marketing.

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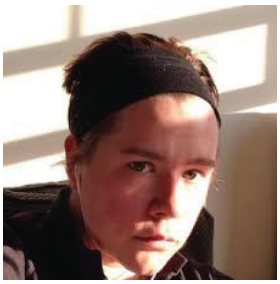
Interview with Robyn Day

SCOTT TURRI



Chicago-based artist Robyn Day uses photography and all of its inherent complexity as a vehicle to explore and engage with queerness: identity, gender, sexuality, culture, and community. The work is conceptually driven and often attempts to subvert or reinforce perceptions about the nature of photography. However, Day is beholden to her craft as well. Because of this complex and nuanced interplay, it functions on many levels with multiple entry points. Although the nature of her exploration of LGBTQ issues has personal, social, and political implications, it ultimately never feels didactic. Instead, it encourages the audience to reconsider and reflect upon how their perceptions and beliefs have been constructed. In a recent conversation with Robyn on the heels of her solo show, *Nobody Knows* at Elizabeth Houston, we discussed the broader themes behind her work and her intentions.

Scott Turri: Photography has been and still is often thought of as a factual medium that records the truth. In *BURY ME in SHOCKING PINK*, your project in Germany, you frame it as documenting the queer lifestyle. What role, if any, do you see yourself having in shaping the narrative, do your subjects shape the narrative, or is it some combination of the two?

Robyn Day: It's some combination of the two. So for me, that project was unique because it was more of a kind of immersion. I don't want to call it a blind immersion (laughter), but it was more about finding out through photographing, whereas some of my previous work has been very narrative. I don't know if you've seen those bodies of work, but they were driven more by conceptual frameworks; this one was more open in a sense - being documentary in the way of responding to what I experienced. I think the photographer always plays a role obviously in terms of just the person I am, the preconceptions I might have, the beliefs, and how I've grown up. So it's always that way. You are an artist when you're a photographer. So you are, in a sense, even what you choose to frame, you're putting certain details in, and you're leaving others out, and that's either intentional or sometimes unintentional because it can't be avoided. But I feel like speaking about photography as documenting just fact or truth is not accurate.

ST: I agree. The reason I mentioned that was more about the fact that some part of the population still sees it that way.

RD: Yes, and that can be dangerous, although that's another conversation, and indeed there are probably photographers who use that to their advantage. But no, for me, that project was strictly documentary. I responded to what I was learning and experiencing on the job. I did not go in with a conceptual framework, a strategy that I might have used in the past with other work. So, for example, being in Berlin was interesting for me because and this is something I maybe didn't know initially but they have some prohibitions around photography, actually in spaces. There are definite, historical reasons for things like this. And you might see it even amplified or heightened more in queer spaces in particular. So, I set myself up for a real challenge to try to make a photographic project in a place that was not always as welcoming or open to the idea of photography or being photographed. So, for example, you might see a lot of signage with cameras crossed out.

ST: Wow. Huh.

RD: So a lot of it was asking permission or gaining trust.

ST: Well, that leads into the next question. In a way, you describe your work in Berlin as an anthropologist; you state that privacy was paramount to the LGBTQ community, but you immersed yourself in the queer scene there. And you stated that privacy was paramount to the LGBTQ community, actually extending beyond into the broader culture. What was this like; did you get much pushback from being an outsider (not German)?
How did you navigate? Were you accepted?

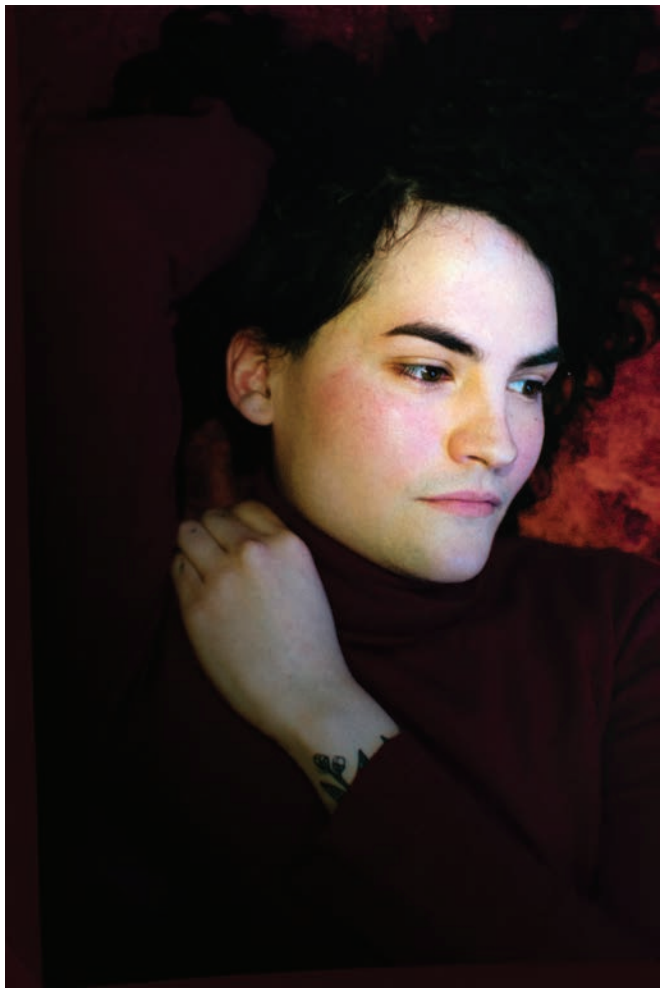
Vogue

RD: Yes, I think I felt accepted by certain folks in certain ways, and oddly, maybe it was very easy for me to make friends there. So I wouldn't say it wasn't welcoming, I but I would say regarding what you're speaking to, in terms of being an outsider, not being known, I did experience in some instances, pushback, particularly in places as I said that had no photo policies. And there are ways of working around that. So a friend of mine, Masha, and I at Silver Future, a queer bar where they had this really cool wooden concoction which is like a camera that they've designed themselves at the bar and we use that for example, you might have seen that photo to take images in the space (laughter). So yes, for sure I'm very respectful. I started initially as a street photographer, and that's way back in the day. Still, understanding that not everybody wants to be photographed or values privacy very highly was a challenge to navigate, but an interesting one too.

ST: Now I would like to move on to the *Nobody Knows* series, featured in your most recent solo exhibition at the Elizabeth Houston Gallery in New York City. By assuming the role as a type of archivist who digitally and physically manipulates these photos, you take on a more active role in shaping the narrative. Should this suggest that you are tacitly supporting the idea that archives are essentially a construct by those who have assembled them?

RD: (laughter) Yes, but I don't think I would put it quite that way. Yes, they are assembled, and it's important to know that there's an actual person behind that or someone who's doing it. We each bring different things regarding the way we perceive what we're studying or thinking about or different preconceptions that we have. But I let me address something else quickly; in terms of narrative, it's true that I've worked that way in the past. So if you were to go back, say a few years now, to work like *Suburban Jungle* or *Naturescapes* or *Plaza of the Americas*. I'm starting there with a narrative, and it's telling a story that investigates something more psychological or emotional. And then, for this work, I'm not sure it's a narrative as much as it is an experiment. So I do take your point about the construction of all archives. I mean, the construction of history is a particular viewpoint, and that's not to say it's divorced from reality (laughter). I wouldn't take a position like that, but specifically, just thinking about queer history and how it has been presented; either it varies too, of course depending on where you are, how you're thinking about it. But in legal or medical narratives or how it's preserved, having to then go back to that and try to interpret it - what it means today or what it might have meant, there's a lot to be pieced together. I guess the word I was thinking was rediscovered or interpreted. So this archive is not an archive really (laughter), in the sense that I've taken that approach, really to a drastic sort of end, which is that I'm constructing something for sure. I mean, I'm not telling a story, but I'm envisioning things, presenting them in a particular type of way. I think that way might be more mysterious, ambiguous, or enigmatic would be the way that I would see it or think of it. But yes, I take your point - all archives are constructed, and this one is maybe just an exaggeration of that.

ST: Well, I was thinking that when you were talking about if it was

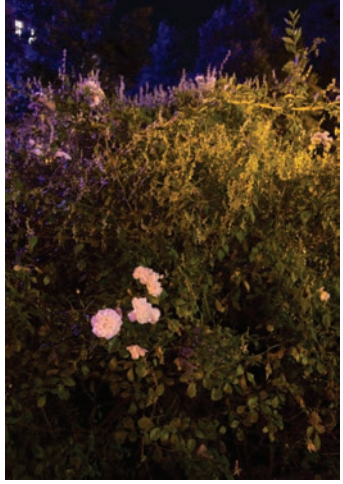


Elle Submerged

a medical, political, or legal archive referencing LGBTQ issues, then it would be constructed in a particular way. Were you trying to deconstruct those kinds of narratives? Or were you trying to create a counter-narrative? As if you were recontextualizing it and presenting it as an archive related to your personal experiences and their impact on how you navigate the broader culture.

RD: Yes, I think that's a fair point. Deconstruct might be the right word or a way of approach or thinking about it. I put it more as queering the archive, the archive itself, being an assembling of knowledge, or that's how it's traditionally thought of or considered, and throwing that conception out the window a bit because it is nebulous. If you think of where history, and I'm talking in really broad strokes here, but I mean, it has been told in certain ways. We have records from court cases or things like that; it has been pathologized. And when we talk about identity, that complicates this, even more, I would think. And what I mean by that, I don't want to think of it as being a-historical or trans-historical in this way. But I would say, and this might sound strange (laughter). Thinking of what I was doing as a kind of drag or performative. I want the viewer to know that something is being created and to be aware that it is being created. And yes, you could probably call it a counter-narrative. I think that would be fair and also at the same time and I don't want you to think this is just me, dodging your

Remnants of Pride



Glow

The Club

question, but, you can see in it what is relevant or salient to you, and I feel that any viewer can do that with almost any art. So, I think you're right in a sense deconstructing, and I would say queering the archive.

ST: Gotcha. So some are found photos and some you have taken yourself. Because of how you manipulated them, it feels like the photos are from a different era. They feel worn or just aged. This approach differed from your other projects where you used perhaps more traditionally based photography techniques. Here you used more physical processes to alter them. I found this to be very interesting, and I'm assuming that it had something to do with the idea of queering the archive, where you were bringing in your personal experiences and allowing yourself to work through something and this physical manipulation became part of it?

RD: That's a fair point. I do think that I was more interested in the material in a sense and that there are a couple of reasons for that, but one is just very simple. I'd say some of my previous work had been very conceptual or abstract, and I wanted to work more with my hands. So I still see this work as very experimental, seeing what happens when you play with photographic substrates. But the other part of that, I think to your point is I think when some people look at photos, they're not necessarily looking at the material or the photo as an object. In this case, I was trying to do that, pointing out that it's an object. So, I think changing formats; there were digital processes and analog processes, hopefully, encouraged the viewer to look at and try to figure out how did this come about, or how was this made. Not knowing the answer to that or not figuring it out makes you approach a photograph as an object itself. So considering it in that way, not just as a window to the world, which goes back to the point you were saying about how some folks still view photographs as documents - in this way, these photographs are very constructed. So there's that aspect, but I think it was also more personal because I just wanted to work with the medium, with my hands, and that sparked it initially.

ST: Sure. Yes, I think you are making it clear to the audience that these are objects because of this manipulation; the viewer can sense your presence as the artist who made the object. When you look at photographs and again maybe not me so much anymore, I think your point about how sometimes photographs, and in many ways, I think your series that we were just talking about, does this, you get a sense that you are just looking into a window. You don't necessarily think about everything that went into it, which can be a very good experience. I think in many ways because, obviously, you're not necessarily getting that intermediate step. You just feel like I'm there; I'm right there with the person or in the scene. With these photographs, you can tell you crinkled the photographs, or you used some chemical techniques to make them appear aged.

RD: That is part of it. But also, if I can expand the idea that they're constructed but that all photos are constructed, they're all viewpoints. And in this case, for this particular project that archives are constructed. I did want them to feel aged, though. You're right about that just because I wanted it to be sort of not idiosyncratic or not anachronistic, just more broadly about queer history and what these things, terms, ideas, identities, or communities meant in certain times and what they mean now. And how we think about that, and there's not necessarily an answer, it's just more of a question that's sort of posed. So talking about found photographs, really, I don't love this conversation generally because sometimes people are a bit glib. They point to the fact that there are so many images or the proliferation of images, and I'm not thinking in those terms; that's not why I started using found photos. For me, it's looking at a history, discovering something, trying to imagine or reinvent something, or thinking about an image and wondering about its implications. It might stem in a sense from just being interested in history, reading about history, certainly in an amateur sense, not as a historian, but I do have those interests. I think found photographs are a way of thinking about or working in that capacity. There's a continuity, and I think that's a part of the work that I'm making right now.

ST: With the found photographs, did you mine certain archives? You don't have to reveal your sources, but I was just curious. Did you have certain places that you went to gather these found photos?

RD: For sure, I was also just looking for them in unexpected places. So, for example, I mentioned I live in Andersonville, and there are many antique shops on Clark Street, which is fairly close to me, and one of them has this wall that's just amazing. It's just a wall filled with photos, family photos, some snapshots, just quotidian, but you could even think of it as an assembled archive. It's not an archive with any intention, but it landed there and made

A Queer Sense Of Unreality

Rose Dive

itself. So there are all sorts of things to mine there that are really interesting but even just going through that and looking to see, can I find traces of queer history in them. So even that is a source, but there are official archives and things like that also.

ST: So in the example of the antique shops, you look through pictures and find photographs that you think might show something about queerness?

RD: Yes

ST: So the notion of a family archive, where you have somebody who is photographing a family, their role and how they were thinking about recording what they were seeing, could be a lot different from somebody working as more of a legal or medical photographer. So that brings up a whole other set of variables that could complicate the equation or just make it more expansive (laughter).

RD: (laughter) Yes, and then to your point, the meaning of those photos or the punctum would be very different for them than obviously for me, but I think, and I don't want to wax poetic, but there's something poignant and maybe even a little sad about those kinds of personal moments just sort of being now, in an antique shop. Do you know what I mean?

ST: Oh yeah, sure.

RD: Because they meant a lot to someone but they can't ever really mean the same to us.

ST: But they can still mean a lot to someone who doesn't have anything to do with them potentially.

RD: Yeah. Differently, I think.

ST: Okay, so I have one question left.

RD: (laughter)

ST: So you're almost off the hook here. On your website, you mention that you are framing queer identities in response to hetero-normative assumptions, which makes sense to me, but if that is the case, then is this series a reactive approach? Or do you look at it more as an attempt to enlighten or educate someone who might have a very narrow view of these issues? Or do these things not come into play at all?

RD: No. It comes into play in all kinds of different ways, but it's just so complicated, and there are so many answers to what I see is a few questions. But I would say I don't want or think of my work as being reactive. I mean, folks have described it as a celebration in a sense, and I'm okay with them using that word. That's okay.
In terms of trying to educate? It's not pedagogical or anything like that. I think it's more trying to get folks to think about things.

ST: Maybe bring it to light to make it more personal or personalized, so it's not just an abstract concept?

RD: I think many artists are working in that way, and their concerns are primarily representation, and there is good reason for that. But I think for me if you look at my Wo/men series, there is a lot behind the scenes in thinking about certain things or studying certain things. Still, I do feel that many folks, not everyone, but they use these words, women or men, for example, without ever thinking about what does that mean? Or how do I define that? And is the way that I define that very different from the way this person does, or that person or a hundred people. If you start to think about it as a category, it undermines itself by containing its own contradictions. It's not that I'm trying to teach somebody something at all. It's more just trying to get folks to think about things that maybe they haven't spent that much time considering in the past. I do think that's important, and there's a politics to it, for sure. And we could get into that (laughter). Maybe that would be for another conversation. I would say the work is to get folks to question or think about things such as gender identity or sexuality. It's opening or raising questions, I hope...

letters@newartexaminer.net

Evasion of the Material - NFTs and Conceptualism

Catheryne Kelly

Last issue saw Al Jirikowic equate the NFT to 'mental dust', and as this phenomenon continues it's high time to lift it's veil of total intangibility with a brief glance towards Conceptualism.

"[P]rofound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful" said Paul Valéry, and if I were as gifted a wordsmith, I would have uttered the same upon furiously clicking through my first block-chain-based virtual exhibition. Hosted by Francisco Carolinum, Austria, it was all very Minecraft-esque. After 'spawning' as an invisible avatar you're free to teleport across a vast, multi-story digital gallery space to survey all the oddities that this metaverse has to offer; tanks, aliens, zombie Furbies, Nyan Cats and glitchy cartoon nudes. Not for long though, while it's already headache-inducing for me, the psychedelia of it all seems all too much for my elderly laptop, the 'gallery's' ambient background music stutters, some internal fan begins to whir, and the web page crashes.

Many of us expected the hype around NFTs to falter in a similar fashion - to have internally combusted under the sheer absurdity of their premise - but whether we like it or not, it looks like they're here to stay. Now a crypto artist boasts of being among the top three most valuable living artists of all time, raking in over $69 million for a work that makes motifs of beheaded Buzz Lightyear and naked Donald Trump. But how on earth did we get here? Of course, we could plumb the depths of digital art history to fish out direct ancestors of the NFT and find Andy Warhol to be the patriarch, making scrappy sketches of his usual insignia - soup can, banana, flower et al - on his Commodore Amiga 1000 in the 1980s. Yet much of the theory behind the form, and certainly much of what is tantalizingly frustrating about it, isn't new and is, rather, in complex dialogue with the Conceptualist movement.

Any cynic worth their salt knows that NFTs are, first and foremost, hampered by their claim of immateriality, so custodians attempt to refute this by referring to the NFT as a modern continuation of Conceptualism. The argument goes that Conceptualism's focal shift away from the materialism of the art object and towards the idea embedded in it, as represented by instructional documentation, legitimizes the NFT as an intangible form almost by default. After all, when an NFT is purchased, what is really bought is documentation on the blockchain denoting the transaction because ownership of the 'art' itself is a slippery concept when everyone else on the internet can access your content for free. And thus, a market is made for virtual bragging rights.

While we'll see that the course of this comparison does not run smooth, there's nevertheless a lot to be said here about this merging of artwork and paperwork, and we've got Marcel Duchamp to thank for much of it. Although his *Monte Carlo Bonds* (1924) slightly predate the movement he spearheaded, crypto artists such as Rhea Myers have picked up and ran with the questions they raise, after proving central to the NFT experience. Behind the Bonds is the idea of purchasing an artist's 'receipt'; you fund their craft (or their gambling, in Duchamp's case) and, with any luck, get a share of an appreciating asset in return. While Duchamp is referenced across the body of Myers' work, this idea in particular is brought into the 21st century in her project "Is Art". Here she attempts to transcend materiality by using the NFT as a medium in itself. It is no longer merely a blockchain registry tool. Much like the Bonds, the art here is a document and the document, in turn, 'is' the art. And with that, the Duchampian 'ready-made' has made its comeback.

Computer Bank

Yet, much like Fountain (which has, coincidently or no, become a popular symbol of NFT art) all rests on the act of nomination. For her work, Myers set up an Ethereum smart contract that contains the assertion that it either "is" or "is not" art and any investor who has access to the contract can elect its status - a status that is legitimized by its place on the blockchain. The entire endeavour, however novel, seeks to rekindle Conceptual debates aired nearly a century ago. We're still left asking if a document can ever actually 'be' art. If so, where do we draw the line? And, just as importantly, who gets to draw it? Can this be a collective endeavour? However ironically, Myers is drawing upon the democratic veneer of crypto markets, which self-present as a decentralized system that big players can't monopolize. Cheery thought that, but after the apotheosis of the likes of Beeple, it's not the practical reality.

There's another catch though, if we were to accept wholeheartedly that a document can be art we'd also have to accept, in turn, the concept that art can be no more than an idea. Now we're in hot water, and this is where NFTs take a break from their Conceptual connection. While the movement attempts to de-commodify the material artefact by reducing it to a linguistic level, NFTs actually confront us with the inverse. We're now being faced with a system that monetises freely available content and does so on a blockchain that is powered by very real infrastructure that produces very real environmental implications. To legitimise the status of "Is Art" on the blockchain, for instance, it takes "the strength of millions of dollars of computing power a day." So, while on the surface it may not seem as such, nothing in this game is inconsequential. Ultimately, NFTs can never evade the material.

Needs must, and when faced with this fad that's gone too far it's comforting to grasp onto any ties that may embed it in an organised past, a past, we've seen now, to be less dormant than it once was. But art imitates life and NFTs parachute us into unprecedented territory, and while too neat a fit into art history risks subscription to the NFT's guise of immaterialism, debates provoked by Conceptualism are certainly useful in navigating this uncertain terrain.

Did Duchamp Pave the Way For Donald Trump?

Miklos Legrady

Miklos Legrady intends the following arguments to form the basis of a new book to be published in 2022.

Let us not praise our past mistakes.

This research is a game-changer and the game it changes is everything we know of art and art history. We'll never see them the same way again.

In the 1960s Marshall McLuhan pointed out that art was anything you could get away with, which is rather frightening when you realize that art is culture, it shapes the future. The public saw Duchamp's urinal seemingly worshipped like another golden calf, and they saw the art world getting away with it. As a result, that strategy gained acceptance; there are ethical concerns but if it works for the arts then why not for politics? Politics today seems like what you can get away with; did Postmodernism enable the post truth era? Did the 1960s pave the way for Donald Trump?

Such statements sound extreme until you consider how the art world operates. Think of Duchamp's life as a pie, from which scholars offer only the slices that fit the status quo, because aFnything else risks their reputation. No one in the academic curatorial network would want to believe we were taken in by a myth told by vested interests... and yet new documents have come to light that suggest that very thing; a scandal is brewing in contemporary art history.

Will Gompertz, previously at the Tate and later writing for *The Guardian*, describes how Duchamp chose a urinal he called *The Fountain* as the perfect entry for the Society of Independent Artists show; his goal being to ridicule the pretentions of the stuffy middle class judges. He signed it 'R. Mutt' with a flourish and put it into the show. Gompertz's tale is satisfying but nothing could be further from the truth.

Based on the French Société des Artistes Indépendants, the society held annual exhibitions of all avant-garde artists who paid a small fee. There had never been any judges or prizes. According to a letter by Duchamp to his sister, the urinal was sent in by a female friend of his who goes by the pseudonym R.Mutt, and seeing nothing obscene in it, Duchamp, as one of the directors, accepted the urinal for the show.

That friend was most likely Dada artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who had done a previous plumbing work, and was also the first artist to show Found Objects as art, perhaps three years before Duchamp. Duchamp appropriated the urinal after Elsa's death from syphilis in a mental asylum, long after the Independents' show. The old stories of the urinal are marketing glosses now being revealed by historical documents.

Duchamp said that taste is the enemy of art. To unpack that we have to question taste. Our taste in colour and shape, style and song work the same way. Sensory input returns a value judgment that determines our choice. Without taste we have no choice, without choice we have no art. Marcel Duchamp was mistaken; when he said it was an enemy; it was the Dada talking. Dada failed because rebelling against the system gets harder once you are the system.

At a 1998 panel discussion entitled *Vision and Visuality* sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation, Rosalind Krauss mentioned that (except for Mondrian and Seurat) Duchamp despised optical art and disliked artisanal work. We would be surprised to read that Shakespeare despised grammar, that Mozart loathed musical notes, or that Baryshnikov spurned the grand jeté; these are things to respect, not to despise. Marcel Duchamp promoted ideas as the most important aspect of visual art, but pure ideas are made to be written down. Ideas belong to literature, whereas visuality is for seeing.

And yet... on finding some errata in the archives I was drawn into a 15-year study of Duchamp, which grew to include Walter Benjamin, Sol Lewitt, and numerous others whose talent made them world-renowned and yet whose ideas, theories and writing, were sadly but fatally mistaken

Dana Schutz: Trump Descending an Escalator *(2017)*
(courtesy of Phillips)

Hannah Höc: Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Beer-Belly of the Weimar Republic, *1919.*
The influence of German politics and Dada cannot be unravelled.
Courtesy Staatliche Museen, Berlin

If you remove sensation from vision you have a sight no longer sensible. You've lost the incentive for visual art because you're aesthetically blind.

This highlights how much our notion of Duchamp lacks context; we were never told of his consistent speech rejecting art, repudiating and denying art, all of which was likely a Dada shock tactic, a marketing strategy that turned around and bit the biter. In a 1968 BBC interview with Joan Bakewell, the year before he died, Duchamp said that he wanted to discredit art on purpose, there's an unnecessary obsession with art today that he could not understand, he wanted to get rid of art the way some had gotten rid of religion.

As a result of consistently claiming that art was discredited, Duchamp eventually convinced himself. He lost interest in making art, couldn't do it anymore though he kept trying with *Étant Donnés* for 20 years, but the muse was gone. It was like a broken leg, he told John Cage, you didn't mean to break do it but there it was.

These and similar embarrassing facts get swept under the carpet because they contradict the academic mythology. We have made prophets of Duchamp, Walter Benjamin, Sol Lewitt and others. Instead of appreciating their art, we looked to them for worldly wisdom; everything they said we enshrined no matter how flawed. By the turn of the 21st century the art world so lacked standards that it was riddled with charlatans; if art is a cultural precursor then every indication suggested that humanity was on a downhill trajectory.

The artists, writers and the remaining culturati were influential in disseminating ideas that science has proven wrong, ideas still influencing and misleading all aspects of academic and creative activity. Ideas and assumptions contradicted by biology, psychology and even anthropology, which describe a primal creativity in the dim beginning of human consciousness.

None of our artists' erroneous statements have been corrected, their mistakes are still confusing students who lack the experience to judge what they're taught. Michael Asher's graduate students were offended at being asked to define art, called the question unfair, yet every other profession knows what they are doing. This is most likely the influence of Duchamp who said we cannot and should not define art.

Our cultural heroes made mistakes that should never have passed peer review, which proves that current peer review is not a reality check. Fabulous contradictions were either ignored by the art world so as not to confuse the public, or else adopted, glorified and held as gospel in the academic-curatorial network. The methodology used in my critique hopes to add to common knowledge, including what we once swept under the rug.

There has been such a corrosion of history in the last 40 years that we need to dust off the history books, to understand that our myths of art and artists, which we thought were historical facts, turn out to be fables. This is the story of talented artists whose genius in their field brought them so much fame, status, and credibility, that whatever they said was praised without question or comprehension. Standards fall to vested interests. Recently an article in *Arts and Letters Daily* told us that for Walter Benjamin art was mystical, an awe-inspiring and immortal mystery. These are alternative facts, Benjamin actually said the opposite; "the art of the working class ... the art of the proletariat after its assumption of power ... brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery."

Fabulous contradictions were either ignored by the art world so as not to confuse the public, or else adopted, glorified and held as gospel in the academic-curatorial network. The methodology used in my critique hopes to add to common knowledge, including what we once swept under the rug.

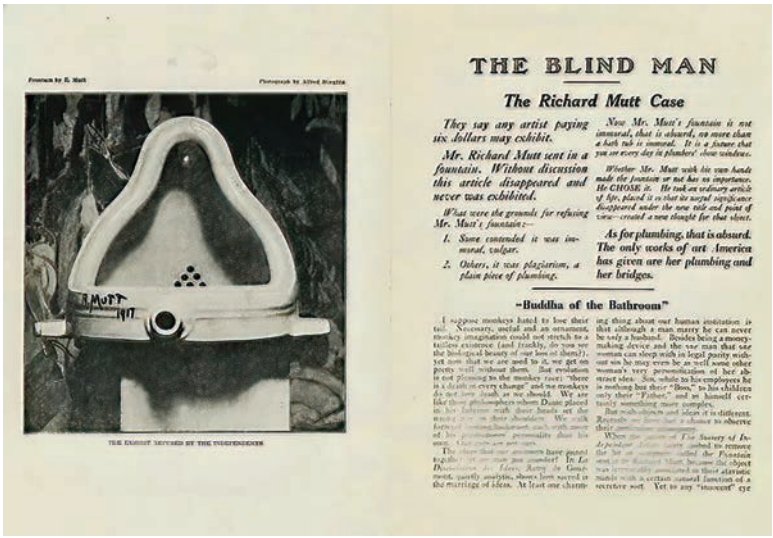
R.A. Fischer was a pre-eminent statistics theorist who built the foundations of modern statistical science" In 1947 he was invited to give a series of talks on BBC radio on the nature of science and scientific investigation, which applies as much to the arts of today. "A scientific career is peculiar in some ways. Its *raison d'être* is the increase in natural knowledge and on occasion an increase in natural knowledge does occur. But this is tactless and feelings are hurt.

For in some small degree it is inevitable that views previously expounded are shown to be either obsolete or false. Most people, I think, can recognize this and take it in good part if what they have been teaching for ten years or so needs a little revision but some will undoubtedly take it hard, as a blow to their *amour propre*, or even an invasion of the territory they have come to think of as exclusively their own, and they react with the same ferocity as any animal whose territory is invaded.

I do not think anything can be done about it ... but a young scientist may be warned and even advised that when one has a jewel to offer for the enrichment of mankind some people will clearly wish to tear that person to bits."

Cognitive bias is real, hence this trigger warning. Questioning Duchamp is as offensive to the arts community as questioning the divinity of Jesus to a Christian. Seemingly the art world has replaced religion for cultural workers. Most students, artists, curators, professors feel disturbed on hearing that someone did not

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven



Hurt by criticism in 1912 of his Nude Descending a Staircase*, he was ready in 1917. This time he orchestrated the controversy himself thanks to an article in the magazine which he co-founded,* The Blind Man. *The urinal, under the title of* Fontaine *enters the history of art.*

accept Duchamp as their personal savior.

And yet on finding some errata in the archives I was drawn into a 15-year study of Duchamp, which grew to include Walter Benjamin, Sol Lewitt, and numerous others whose talent made them world-renowned and yet whose ideas, theories and writing, were sadly but fatally mistaken but have been cherry-picked and promoted. They are the shades of nonsense that are academia's Achilles' heel. It is evident that in the early 1960s the academic-curatorial complex decided to forsake analysis and common sense in favor of an iffy social construct. It's quite a story.

I did not research history with the aim of looking for scandals; the scandals found me. My original quest was for patterns in art history that describe the psychology of art. I was as surprised as anyone to find our philosophy based on flawed ideas, fabulous myths, untested assumptions that should have failed peer-review, all published in the best academic journals. We need this truth: that in our time mass delusions and the structures that maintain them are a serious danger to our State structures. We can correct our trajectory and repair our mistakes if we question our assumptions and face the facts.

Duchamp said he wanted to get rid of art yet the art world gave him a free pass, made him a prophet, and now demands that art students follow his teaching. The urinal says that art is to piss on, what's not to love? Why would an artist deny their vocation? Unfortunately Marcel played the devil's apprentice and the devil turned on him. He fidgeted with one piece for 20 years and devoted himself to playing chess. Considering that there's little creativity in chess, Duchamp lost his mojo.

Why did the art world deify him? Why does it give us a fraction of his thoughts on art history? Why are we taught to look as if through a few cells of a bee's compound eyes?

In ancient times Pilate washed his hands of it but there are criteria by which we can know the truth, the first being verification. Then there's an intuition based on instinct and life experience; by age two children play with lies, truth, and fiction. Our notion of truth being limited by experience, science gives us peer review as a backup. But when even our peers turn delusional, the final arbiter of truth is consequence. A glissade of integrity in architecture, for instance, gives us collapsing new buildings.

It was Robert Storr, MOMA curator and later Dean of fine arts at Yale, who observed that in the 1960s the art world moved from the Cedar Tavern to the seminar room.

Another highly respected theorist was Sol Lewitt, a brilliant visual artist whose *Sentences on Conceptual Art* and *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* show a failure of logic; his practice consistently contradicted his theories. Lewitt refutes these charges by saying a conceptual artist is a mystic who overleaps logic, but he fails to explain how such miracles happen. When read without adulation and hero worship, his writing makes little sense, having only poetic and mythical appeal. It's an ill omen that no one noticed the obvious, or thought this through.

It does look like the art world in the 1960s invented our 'alternative facts', when art became "anything you can get away with". This philosophy found consent in academia, gained cultural influence and shaped today's social landscape; Postmodernism may own the post truth era and Donald Trump.

The Moorhouse Fish: Heirlooms and History

Martha Benedict

Mantelpieces are places of memory and connect us to family history through the objects we choose to display there. Growing up I was always fascinated by the unusual stone fish that occupied, rather precariously, the fireplace at home. After a particularly raucous birthday party the fish fell from its perch and its tail snapped off! Knowing that it was an heirloom that my dad had been given as a child, I began to look into its obscure history, primarily out of guilt at having damaged it and then, as I learnt more, it became something more akin to charting an unexpected offshoot of my family tree. The findings were fascinating.

The Moorhouse Fish

Maker's mark

On the underside of the fish is the etched lettering and numbering system of a maker's mark - the encrypted signature of the craftsman. The alphabetic numerical signature of 'E .9. 1758' can be traced back to Eli Weetaluktuk who was one of three brothers working in the Kangirqsukallaq camp in the Inukjuak region at the north of Canada's Hudson Bay. The date of Weetaluktuk's carving is unknown but can be dated to the late 1940s due to the natural faults in the stone which predate the 1948 exploration, and influence, in the Inukjuak region by James Houston. Houston returned two years later with a grant of $8000 from the Northwest Territories Council: some of this money went towards buying a fishing boat for the Weetaluktuks, meaning that they could journey farther afield in search of better grade stone with fewer structural weaknesses, The Moorhouse Fish clearly has had no outside influence either. Weetaluktuk's carving stands on the doorstep of a revitalisation of indigenous Inuit arts and crafts, a new era where works such as *The Moorhouse Fish* were commodified by the Hudson Bay Company's encouragement and support for Inuit communities by means of their artistic creations.

After the collapse of the Canadian fur trade in the early 20th century, the Hudson Bay Company was set up to support the weakened livelihoods of indigenous communities. The HBC saw the opportunity for a new department within their shops for the sale of Inuit artworks and community co-ops were set up so that artists could form a network between the centralised Company and themselves. A network of artists co-operatives that fed into the centralised HBC: a social network built on fair division of proceeds and the importance of people's connections to things - a far more socialist economic structure that places the means of production, and therefore the results thereof in the people's hands. The biographical beginnings of Weetaluktuk's carving offer a material insight into the networks that sustained the Inuit population and has meant that their traditional way of life has been maintained for generations even if it has had to adapt with the times.

The life of *The Moorhouse Fish* changes drastically, and becomes more personal, once it was taken out of the commodity sphere of the HBC. It is unknown as to the date, but as a worker for the Northwest Territories Council, the fish came into Mr Moorhouse's possession, most likely in the early 1950s and was then given by Mr Moorhouse's daughter in her old age to my father as a child in the 1970s. It was most likely given as a gift in the first instance due to its faults, meaning that it could not be sold: the material origins of the object dictating its trajectory and its exchange in the form of a gift. The process of gift giving means that unlike value accumulation in purely economic terms, the value of gifts is far more social and hard to pin down because of the human influence of generosity rather than that of monetary gain. It is the significance of human generosity that analyses such as those by Wilk and Cliggett neglect to address because they cannot be put into theoretical terms (see Further Reading). Human connection to objects and heirlooms such as *The Moorhouse Fish* is at the forefront of the carving's biography but can only appreciated by those that have interacted with it on a personal, material level - having heard its anecdotal, intrinsically familial history.

The concept of objects inspiring either resonance or wonder in their viewer is particularly pertinent when encountering *The Moorhouse Fish*. The carving has a tangible resonance: a personable, experiential human connection that gives the object it's own agency and connects current day involvement with that of the past. It has

Something's Fishy here…

a place and a character within my own family history and holds particular memories of personal history as one of my father's most treasured objects. However, as a result of its previously unknown history it has held a mystical status as an embodiment of a foreign, unknown culture and therefore. *The Moorhouse Fish's* biography occupies a place within history similar to that of objects from colonial collections that have had meaning mapped onto them by external influences; the difference with this artwork being that the people associated with it have personal experience or knowledge of the culture and folkloric traditions surrounding its creation.

As an indigenous artwork that was taken out of its native cultural context, *The Moorhouse Fish* is a prime example of a transnational object. Unlike many museum collections, the object's journey between the Northwest Territories of Canada and England was not as a result of institutional colonialist plunder and thus the carving does not have the associated problematic politics of other transnational artefacts. Instead, *The Moorhouse Fish* spans two disparate cultures connecting time, place and people: proof of the carving's independent historical agency. Furthermore, in many Inuit cultures family is seen as a extended group - not just those that are related by blood but those that may be linked by marriage or trade and as such, the carving may be seen as a token of bonding between the Weetaluktuk, Moorhouse and Rigby families. The transnational identity of the carving, without the typical associations of imperial influence, has formed a network around the object that has expanded time and again throughout the Fish's life and gives a material context to the belief and familial systems of the object's indigenous, and latterly, adoptive cultures.

The biography of *The Moorhouse Fish* is an evolving story that has been transmitted through generations of oral story-telling. Parallels can be drawn between the Inuit oral traditions and my introduction to the object through the stories my father told me about his primary encounters with the carving at a young age: it is these stories that sparked my initial interest in the Fish. Here we see an extension of the folkloric tales and histories that have been passed through centuries of Inuit communities, forming a part of their indigenous palimpsestic collective identity and connecting them to their origins. Moreover by my own titling of the carving, dubbed *The Moorhouse Fish*, I have contributed to the ongoing biography of the object. Primarily a family heirloom, the carving brings up questions surrounding transfer of personal historical knowledge; childhood acquisition of knowledge through language and first hand encounters; the attribution of meaning and value; the networks and economies involved in *The Moorhouse Fish*'s life and how all these factors have affected the biography of this key example of early 20th century aboriginal Canadian soapstone carving.

The objects we surround ourselves with, no matter how trivial, come to represent something of us: our identity, history, the places we come from - geographical or otherwise. Our personal connections further the life cycle of such personal effects forming a continuous narrative that connects objects and people to their pasts, presents and futures.

Further Reading:

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Crafting Time: Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi at the Richard H. Driehaus Museum

Steve Carrelli

In his 2013 book *Visual Time*, art historian Keith Moxey writes, "Visual objects disturb and disrupt chronology rather than organize it." He argues that works of art must be understood in terms of two temporal axes: heterochrony and anachrony. Heterochrony can be understood as the awareness that there are multiple narratives that exist in any given time – that "there is no natural hierarchy of times." Anachrony asserts that the meaning carried by a work of art is shaped not only by its relationship to the time of its origin, but also by its relationship to the viewer's time. The past shapes the present, but the present also shapes the past (and therefore the art). Time in this view is neither singular nor linear. There is not one narrative, but many. The artwork's meaning is not fixed for all time, like a specimen in a jar. It is alive and evolving.

These two temporal axes intersect powerfully in the current exhibition on the second floor of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum. Curated by Kekeli Sumah, *A Tale of Today: Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi* inserts the work of two contemporary Chicago artists into the context of the restored Gilded Age mansion of a 19th century banker and his family. In lieu of the familiar figure/ground relationship in which works of art are displayed in the white cube of the art gallery, the work here is site-specific and interacts slyly with the historic setting, inviting viewers to interpret and reinterpret their relationship to the house and the times of which it speaks.

Installation photography of A Tale of Today: Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi
Photo by Michael Tropea, 2020.
Courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum

The Driehaus Museum is a house museum of a type that will be familiar to many. Referred to in the press as "the Marble Palace" when it was completed in 1883, the house was built to be the home of Samuel and Matilda Nickerson and their children Adelaide and Roland, and to display the Nickersons' art collection. Like many such museums, it tells a story focused primarily on the owners of the home. This story features the extraordinary richness and craftsmanship of the home's decoration: walnut paneling, coffered and painted ceilings, Low Art ceramic tiles, finely crafted furniture by some of the leading designers of the Aesthetic Movement, an art gallery illuminated by a stained-glass dome. The rooms on the first floor also display a small portion of the Nickersons' art collection: American and European paintings and sculptures, as well as sculptural works from Japan and China. In 1900, the Nickersons donated much of their collection to the Art Institute of Chicago and left Chicago permanently, selling their home to Lucius G. Fisher and his wife Katherine Eddy Fisher.

On the second floor, in what were once the family's bedrooms, other stories emerge as we encounter the works of Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi. The encounter is a slow one, in small part because of the capacity limits and the need to direct the flow of foot traffic in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but to a greater degree this is due to the scrupulously deliberate and measured placement of the work among the Nickersons' furnishings.

Beginning in the northeast corner, one enters Adelaide Nickerson's bedroom. Suspended from a cornice on the entrance wall is Nate Young's sculpture *Untitled*, a finely crafted sycamore cabinet resembling a bedside table. Its coffered panels and carved details echo precisely, though in lighter wood, the design of the cabinet surrounding the fireplace on the opposite wall. A dark cavity in the sculpture houses a haunting holographic image of a bone – perhaps a horse's vertebra. On another wall is *Flash of Perception*, a painting consisting of a matte black script on a semi-gloss black ground. The text, though difficult to read, is legible and begins, "Is this life my own or is there a bitter truth to my persistent suspicion." One has to move about in relation to the surface glare in order to make out the full text, but even then it remains cryptic. We learn from a wall text that the artist's great-grandfather, William Nathaniel Jackson, rode his horse from North Carolina to Philadelphia during the Great Migration, that the horse died and was buried, that Jackson committed suicide, that he left a note. We read that this happened "during the tail end of the Fisher family's occupancy of the Nickerson Mansion." The room acquires more occupants, and the time becomes more complex.

Nate Young has made similar interventions in two other rooms on the east side of the house, and the same elements – the note, the horse bones, the meticulous emulation of period woodwork – recur in varied configurations. His works reward slow and careful attention, and they invite repeated viewing over an extended time. His sculpture *Time Travel* is a working pendulum clock in a mahogany case whose fluted pilasters, decorative mouldings, and recessed panels again echo the room's décor. In the dark space behind the swinging brass pendulum, we glimpse another ghostly image of a horse bone. The clock appears to tell time, but the second hand spins counter-clockwise. Young disturbs and disrupts chronology to tell multiple narratives that move freely through time: forward, backward, back and forth.

Crossing the wide hall to the west side of the house, one enters Mr Nickerson's former bedroom, where Mika Horibuchi's works are almost, but not quite, camouflaged. In the center of the room, a neo-empire armchair (ca. 1883) and a Renaissance revival table sit atop *Mr Nickerson's Carpet*, a painting by Horibuchi in oil on unstretched linen that rests like a rug on the floor, though slightly elevated as if floating on a hidden platform. The pattern of Horibuchi's 'carpet' mimics that of the bedroom's decorative ceiling, though the color palette of pale blue-greens, white and tan, with dark grey-green accents appears calculated to contrast with the sombre browns and golds of the room. This piece also obliquely references the room's walls, covered in recessed canvas panels stenciled with a pattern of rampant lions and floral motifs. On the table sits *Signed Samuel M. Nickerson*, a painting on shaped panel that suggests a book or journal. In a corner of the room is a label-stand nearly identical to those used by the museum for exhibition didactics. This stand, however, holds a painting in the form of a didactic label, with a portrait bust of Mr Nickerson in grisaille accompanied by blank grey text boxes, as if the text has been redacted.

What is the job of a museum? The story it tells? Whose time is represented? In a brief video accompanying the exhibition, Nate Young states, "Craft is skill, and skill is time." Both Young and Horibuchi use skill-based crafts in their work. Like the objects displayed throughout the house, their artworks reflect a human investment of time and touch.

Horibuchi works in the tradition of *trompe-l'oeil* painting. More accurately, she references the practices of *trompe-l'oeil* while gently bending the form to question the veracity and interpretation of images. Her style is illusionistic, but it is flattened just enough to give away the deception, forcing the awareness that her paintings are not what they initially appear to be. Far from disappearing into a perfectly eye-fooling illusion, her quasi-counterfeit book, carpet, and label all combine to make our attention to the particulars of the exhibition more acute. This intentional betrayal of the form – the refusal to create a completely seamless illusion – opens up a gap between expectation and experience, and Horibuchi uses this gap to focus our attention on what we see and on what we don't see. In this instance, she complicates the very practices of museum presentation in order to uncover histories that are easily overlooked in the familiar, dominant narrative.

This is perhaps best understood in the final room of the exhibition. It, too, is an ornate bedroom. Six museum label stands are evenly spaced along the room's four walls. One of these explains that this was the bedroom of Roland Nickerson, and goes on to describe the features of the room: maple wainscoting, canvas wall-covering with stenciled floral pattern, fireplace decorated with 'Japanesque' tiles of English manufacture reflecting the Nickersons' interest in both European and Asian decorative arts. The

other five stanchions support paintings in the form of exhibition didactics. Each of these depicts blank grey text boxes on a white ground and a single image representing an item from the Nickersons' collection of East Asian antiquities displayed on a graduated grey ground. The objects depicted here no longer reside in the mansion, as the Nickersons donated them to the Art Institute of Chicago. Each painting is titled after the museum's description of the object depicted: 'Small Covered Oblong Box,' 'Covered Box in the Form of a Peach,' 'Netsuke in the Shape of a Rabbit,' etc. One might read these paintings as remembrances of objects that are now absent. This is part of the story, but not all of it. Further complicating the narrative is the fact that these paintings don't depict their titular objects directly. Instead, each painting depicts the object as it appears in a photograph taken for the purposes of museum collections documentation. What, then, is the subject of these works? Is it the story of the Nickersons, or that of the objects themselves, or that of the museums that collect and display them? Or perhaps it is a nexus of all these stories combining to reflect the role played by culture and identity in determining what is valuable and what is seen.

What is the job of a museum? The story it tells? Whose time is represented? In a brief video accompanying the exhibition, Nate Young states, "Craft is skill, and skill is time." Both Young and Horibuchi use skill-based crafts in their work. Like the objects displayed throughout the house, their artworks reflect a human investment of time and touch. In this way, they speak to the house and its history in its own language, cracking open its time in a way that permits us to see relationships that we've long known but rarely examined in this context.

The temptation of a museum like the Driehaus is that it will tell a simple story: that it will look only backward and only at a very limited part of the picture. To its credit and benefit, the museum has welcomed the multiplicity of narratives that artists like Young and Horibuchi introduce. These counterpoints to the dominant narrative succeed in making the story of the house and its time more relevant to our own.

Installation photography of A Tale of Today*:* Nate Young and Mika Horibuchi
Photo by Michael Tropea, 2020.
Courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum

A Quantum of Solace: The Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

Sam Vangheluwe

Jan de Bray: Portrait of a Young Woman*, c 1665 (fragment)*

A long while ago, as a student at the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts, I would step out into the street on a Sunday morning and be overcome by silence. As if the whole city was still asleep, or lazing over breakfast. Very few cars about. Starlings chirping. Peace and quiet.

From time to time, to avoid the onset of the urban bustle, I headed for the Museum of Fine Arts, treading lightly so as not to wake my fellow citizens. Its doors were duly open (as were those of churches at that time, but with fewer devotees about). Bought me a ticket from a tiny box office in a corner of the pronaos, climbed the monumental marble staircase, and without design, entered whichever deserted hall took my fancy. For hours, seemingly, one could wander around without encountering a soul. Accompanied only by the silent song of painting. And every painting and sculpture was in its place, always. Ah, those were the days. Should a pandemic have broken out then, the Museum would have been the safest haven. A question of social distancing.

Very undemocratic, all that, downright elitist. Reactionary, no doubt.

In this brave new world, museums and exhibitions are inclusive, democratized, immersive, 3D, digitized; they are educational theme parks, family-friendly entertainment centers, nocturnal recreation, practical jokery, merchandise distribution hubs, the Greatest Show on Earth with bells and whistles. It takes a virulent pandemic to empty a fine arts museum these days.

By way of exception, the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts has been closed for renovation since 2011. An intriguing fact: to date, no popular uprising has occurred.

Luckily we also have a Museum of Fine Arts in the pleasant city of Ghent. Although of a somewhat later date, it too was conceived in neo-classical style (as are most national and municipal museums of the Napoleonic legacy): a lofty temple of the arts, symmetrical, high-ceilinged, with zenithal light filtering through vast skylights. Ample seating upholstered with green velvet.

When I last visited the Ghent Museum following a previous renovation (2003-2007), I was full of joy and praise. The museum exuded a rare serenity, favourable to calm contemplation, with little to distract attention. I was so gratified that, in my soft-heartedness, I overlooked certain shortcomings. These have now come to the fore.

Ever since the pandemic, museum directors and curators must be secretly rejoicing: no visitor can escape the course as laid out by them. No more wandering. No escaping the thematic order.

Recently, the Ghent Museum has undergone another refurbishment. It now displays its proper collection, spread over 40 halls, thematically and sometimes monographically ordered. As a rule I dislike thematic exhibitions. Ever since the pandemic, museum directors and curators must be secretly rejoicing: no visitor can escape the course as laid out by them. No more wandering. No escaping the thematic order.

Previously, the colour scheme throughout was subdued, unobtrusive. This has now been abandoned. One wonders if curators these days are at all aware that paintings interact with their background. You cannot with impunity hang any painting on a yellow, bright blue, or emerald green wall. It is deplorable. Once again, painting is sacrificed in favor of a theme. I am loath to forgive whoever came up with this abomination. Yet, my fondness for this institution inspiring self-restraint, I tell myself that walls can be repainted.

Prosper De Troyer: With the Birds, *1928*

René Magritte: Perspective II, Manet's Balcony, *1950*

Concerning the lighting, I am uncertain. I suspect the prevailing curatorial heliophobia. Many of the skylights were covered - but possibly temporarily. Indeed, there was some noisy work being done on certain parts of the roof. Perhaps the curators will see the error of their polychromatic walls, once the paintings are again naturally lighted.

Not new but irksome as ever is the interstitial positioning of pieces of 'contemporary' art. These hardly ever 'enter into dialogue', as the curators would have it, but demand full attention by their mere bulk. As you take a few steps back in order to see a painting from the pertinent distance, you trip over them. Conversely, I have never before seen paintings of the Flemish Primitives, for example, interspersed among the exhibits in a museum of contemporary art (although I would not put it past them). The supposed dialogue is unilateral, apparently.

During my previous visit, I could not help noticing an emphasis, particularly in the arts of the 18th and 19th centuries, on what can only be called 'bourgeois' art - conservative, conventional, fashionable genre art. 'Neo-medieval' painting, for example - too insipid to irritate. I wonder why this is. Why are the modernists not firmly put to the fore? Is this the 'old' museum forfeiting its artistic relevance in favour of the SMAK (Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art), just a stone's throw away? After all, collections of contemporary art do not resort to thematic ordering (or do they?). A grave problem with the thematic approach is this: when the museum elects to "confront innovative with conservative artists," invites us "to contemplate the image of woman, the relation between city and country, through the ages," *et tutti quanti*, a perilous process is set in motion. Paintings are then no longer appreciated for their inherent painterly or artistic value, but are rounded up as mere educational materials. Pretty illustrations in a textbook that was written by whoever conceived the theme. Indeed, short texts accompany many of the works at eye level for the benefit (or to the detriment) of the young visitor ("The boy steps into the water. There are little fishes in the water..."). The museum seems determined to socialise children into reading text instead of looking at paintings (yes, museums win awards for this kind of 'public outreach').

The many masterpieces that the Museum possesses, deserve better. A tiny selection of the range: Hieronymus Bosch (the enchanting *Christ Carrying the Cross*), Van Eyck, Patinir, Pourbus (the delightful *Portrait of a Young Lady*), Tintoretto, Rubens (*The Flagellation of Christ*), Van Dyck, Jordaens, Géricault, Daumier, Corot, Rouault. And when will the Anglo-Saxon world finally discover the modern painters from our neck of the woods: the magic of James Ensor, the vigour of Jean Brusselmans, the master of black and white Frans Masereel, the forceful Constant Permeke, and the in equal measure intense and sensitive Gustave De Smet. De Smet's *Head of a Child* (1916), could easily fill an entire museum hall by its lonely self.

There are many great painters. And there are too many others who fabricate images, fit only for thematic scrapbooks. In and by themselves, these masterpieces warrant more than one visit to the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts. And here's to hoping that the curators of the Antwerp Museum of Fine Arts will dare to let their treasures sing for themselves.

Breath, Ghosts, Blind

Liviana Martin

This venue, once a Pirelli factory, has been converted into a 15,000 square-metre exhibition space, one of the largest in Europe, and consequently has the ambience of a secular cathedral. Here, where until recently locomotives and agricultural machinery were assembled, three works by Maurizio Cattelan are being shown, under the enigmatic but important title *Breath, Ghosts, Blind*.

Cattelan is a provocative artist who has exhibited all over the world. In Milan you can see his installation *L.O.V.E* (acronym for Freedom, Hate, Vendetta, Eternity), and *The Finger* - a five-metre high sculpture of a hand with the fingers all severed except the middle one. The mocking Finger faces Palazzo Mezzanotte, seat of the Stock Exchange.

In 2004, on the branches of a centuries-old oak in a central square of Milan, Cattelan hung three realistic puppets of children. Barefoot and dusty, they looked down at us, representing the suffering of modern day children. The work scandalized the right-wing, to the point that a protester tried to tear them down.

Now, after 10 years of absence, Cattelan returns to Milan, at Hangar Bicocca.

His new work is a trilogy that symbolically represents the cycle of life, from birth to death, and develops in close relationship with the architecture of the building. In a profound silence, a dark space welcomes the visitor, who feels almost overwhelmed by the immensity of the place.

Breath is a white marble sculpture of a man and a dog lying in a foetal position, illuminated by a light that pierces the darkness. The position of the bodies indicates a link between the two subjects. The man evokes the figure of the homeless, while the dog is a symbol of fidelity, but also, in classical mythology, a guide in the passage between the world of the living and the dead. The two are united by the vital act of breathing. The figures resemble those we often meet on the streets, but the use of marble for the sculpture confers a sacred quality, elevating them to the works of Michelangelo or Canova.

Proceeding along the aisles, *Ghosts* is thousands of taxidermy pigeons, looking down on us, arranged along the walls, between the pillars, singularly or in groups. Already, in two Venice Biennials, Cattelan had surprised visitors to the Italian Pavilion by filling it with pigeons, like intruders observing the spectators, just as Cattelan considers himself an intruder into the world of artistic institutions. The pigeon has a positive value for him as a messenger during war, a bird that is also a type of dove, a symbol of peace and of the Holy Spirit in Christian iconography. But if in everyday life we are used to meeting these birds in all our squares, inside the Hangar they constitute a disturbing presence by colonizing the interior spaces and making us feel almost strangers. By association, the final sequences of Hitchcock's *The Birds* come to mind, when the birds are about to attack.

Maurizio Cattelan: Breath
Human figure: 40 x 78 x 131 cm, Dog: 30 x 65 x 40 cm
Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan and Marian Goodman Gallery

Finally, *Blind*: a black resin monolith crossed by the shape of an aeroplane. The reference to the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 is immediate. But there are other readings of the work, which almost becomes a memorial to the fallen, speaking to us of our fragility, of human pain in the face of immense tragedies. Cattelan has always reflected on dramatic historical events, such as the execution of the politician Aldo Moro or the assassination of Kennedy in Dallas, and investigated the themes of murder and death. Blind also alludes to the blindness of human beings, and their inability to see and feel the suffering of others.

This is another provocative exhibition by Cattelan which involves the viewer and makes us reflect. As the artist says: "Today art enables me to show things from a different point of view, from another angle. What you do is not always interesting or relevant, but sometimes you manage to touch a nerve, to take something that is there for all to see and put it in a light that awakens people, makes them think and discuss."

Maurizio Cattelan, Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, from 15/07 to 20/02/2022.. Reservation required. Free admission.

SANTANDER

PICASSO IBERO

Gill Fickling

©Centro Botin Santander

I've never really liked Picasso. Call me a philistine, call me art-ignorant, but I've always found his work cold, detached and cruel. Except for *Guernica* of course, which reduced me to tears. My antagonism was reinforced on reading the book *Life with Picasso* by Francoise Gilot, his lover and mother of two of his children. He did NOT sound nice! His misogyny, temperamental disposition and lack of respect for women as whole and equal human-beings, illustrated in the way he dissected their bodies, putting bits where they shouldn't be and creating monsters, has always angered me. However, much to my surprise, I was transfixed by a recent exhibition of his work at the Centro Botin called *Picasso Ibero* (Iberian Picasso) which shows how influenced he was by the ancient statues and cave-paintings of the Iberos, Spain's original inhabitants and indigenous people. The exhibition juxtaposes examples of works in stone, bronze and ceramic from all over Spain, some dating back to the 11th century BC, with an array of Picasso's drawings, paintings, ceramics and sculptures. The simplicity of the lines in those ancient works seems to have inspired his reduction of detail down to pure abstraction; the ancient facial features are mirrored in his portraits and the stick-like animal figures on the cave walls influenced his animal depictions. I found particularly fascinating the progression in his studies of a bull, one of his key subjects. Alongside a large stone statue of a bull, there is a series of 11 lithographs created over just a few weeks in 1945-6 starting with a beautifully-crafted, detailed figurative depiction of a ferocious bull progressing through different stages to arrive at a unadulterated abstract bull consisting of just a few lines in the inimitable Picasso style. The exhibition shows how the Iberian relics led to his invention of a new artistic language for the 20th century: cubism. I spent hours poring over the well-documented artefacts, largely sourced from the Louvre, alongside his works; returning several times for further analysis. Understanding the roots of his work helped me to overcome my resistance. Next time there's the chance of a Picasso exhibition I'll be first in line – along with everybody else who took less time to recognize his genius!

Picasso Ibero, Centro Botin, Santander, 1 May - 21 September 2021

LONDON

Paula Rego – There are no Words

Catheryne Kelly

How do you solve a problem like reviewing Paula Rego? The fact is, I'm at odds with where to start. This is a retrospective that over-delivers, overstimulates, and quite frankly I've been given too much to think about. Yet I'd be disappointed with anything less. Her work minnows in and out of fantasy and reality, politics and folklore, voodoo and surrealism – it's innately subversive and slippery – and it's part of the fun to mentally bathe in the utter weirdness it exudes. It's a shame, then, that Tate Britain, across their collection of over six decades' worth of her art, managed to hamper the spirit of an artist whose work demands imaginative misinterpretation.

They're intent on presenting her as a political artist. This is not untrue in the main; Rego's teenaged radicalism (a product of her experience under Salazar's fascist dictatorship in Portugal) is continued even in her most recent series on gendered experience. Yet despite this prolonged focus it's surely a stretch to label her art 'political'. Broad strokes won't work with Rego, her corpus is too vast and she's got too much to say. Forever sporting a complex liminal standpoint through a multitude of media, she plays with mixed messages and sensations.

With such a casual approach to clarity comes an obscene amount of boundary blurring. Animals become people and people become

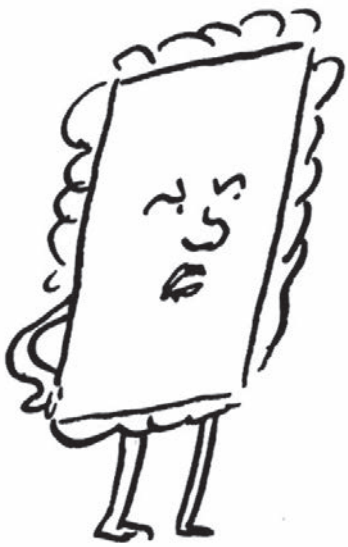
animals. From the predatorial gazes of *The Family*, to the visceral, feral rage of *Dog Woman*, social norms are scrapped, and the scales of power are stacked jarringly. In a triptych series, one of Rego's trademark full-skirted, dark-haired girls torments an expressive dog while her own, abstracted look never wavers. She ties a heavy chain around her companion's neck or suggestively lifts her skirt up to his total incomprehension. Ignore the wall text and it's all there to grasp, here she's merging the bestial and human to foreground the diffusion of ambiguity, abuse, eroticism and violence. There's a play-off between darkness and Disney, and as is often seen in her most arresting pieces, the haunting undertones of this work are quelled by a soothing picture-book aesthetic that lures us into repressed subconscious depths. Read the gallery's key beside it, however, and any richness of association is limited to symbolizing the artist's strained relationship with her deteriorating husband.

Rego's work is not that egocentric. The very pleasure of experiencing her work stems from its evocation of universal feelings that don't have a name. The reception that Rego demands is so utterly subjective that the wall texts are rendered completely void.

Art articulates itself. If an artist needed words, they'd use them. We rely far too much on the security that language brings to define, to explain, to tell us what we should and shouldn't think every day. No doubt, it's quite effective – what's signified by language is arguably a lot closer to the sign that we use to describe it – every 'thing' has a name after all. But in art, particularly Rego's art, just one sign could give off a myriad of impressions, and that's when we feel lost at sea. Let it wash over you then, indulge in the obscurity. There's something almost baptismal about unmediated experiences with great art. Just as Rego herself shouldn't be reduced to enact a singular activist role, don't let Tate's descriptions reduce your reception of her work to conform to one prescribed conclusion, one sensation, one feeling. Some experiences aren't meant to be tacked to the wall with words like pins through dead butterflies.

The Dance, 1988
Photograph © Paula Rego

Paula Rego at Tate Britain, until 24th October 2021.



"Can't you date one of our own?
He is a sound piece, for God's sake."

The Masterpiece Delusion

Laura Gascoigne

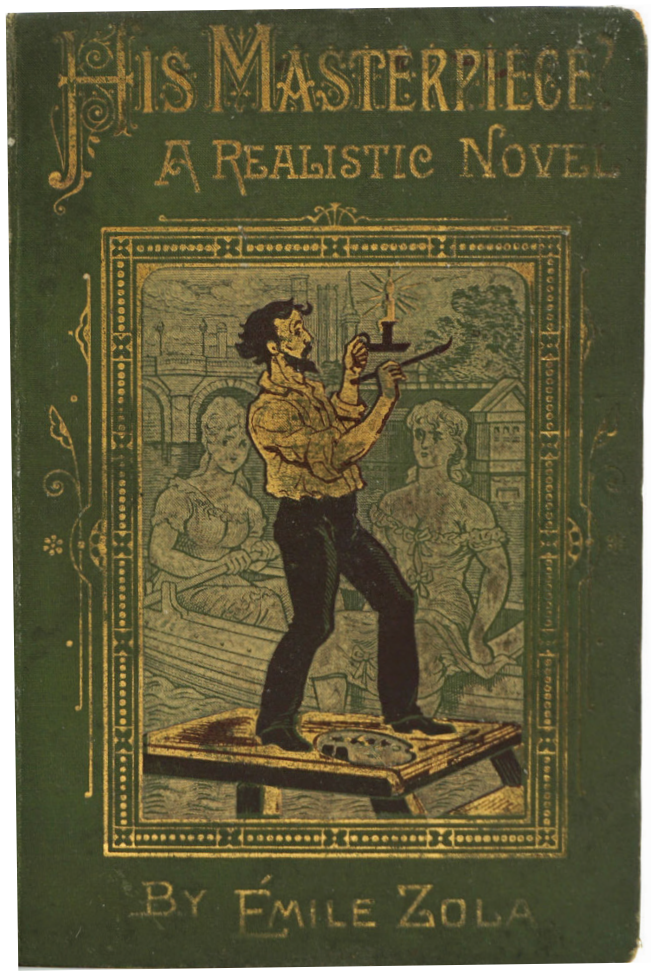
Thank God for books. When shut off from real life, you can see it reflected in novels. But how accurate is the reflection? Does the mirror distort? In month 10 of the no-longer-new-abnormal I sat down with a stack of novels about artists. Some I'd read before, others were new, chief among them the *fons et origo* of the genre, Émile Zola's *L'Oeuvre*, first serialised in French in 1885.

At 500 pages Zola's book is certainly an oeuvre, though not a masterpiece. The 14th novel in his Rougon-Macquart series, it's the one most closely based on personal experience. His friendship with Paul Cézanne, going back to their school-days in Aix-en-Provence, gave him an early entrée to the Paris avant-garde; at 26 he came out fighting on behalf of Manet and co in a series of critiques of the Salon of 1866. *L'Oeuvre,* written 20 years later, represents "the Parisian art world as it really was," claims Edward Vizetelly, its first translator into English as *His Masterpiece.* The novel is a *roman à clef* with composite characters that don't necessarily fit particular locks. Its doomed painter hero Claude Lantier is a mash-up of Cézanne and Manet, while his best friend, the novelist Pierre Sandoz, is quite clearly Zola and gets all the best lines, eg: "How can a man be sufficiently wanting in self-doubt as to believe in himself?"

The book is said to have ended their friendship but in fact, apart from the "bluey tinge" of his palette and his lack of social graces, Lantier hardly resembles Cézanne at all. For a start, Zola makes his hero the illegitimate son of a laundress living on a small allowance from a benefactor who recognised his talent. Cézanne's background was too bourgeois for Zola's purposes: the son of a provincial banker, his friend lived on a family allowance he was so desperate to keep that he hid the existence of his mistress and son from his father, only marrying in 1886, the year of the old man's death. No wonder Hortense looks so sour-faced in pictures. The line in the novel Cézanne was least likely to forgive is put into the mouth not of the painter Lantier but the art critic Jory: "And so we waited for my father's death, and then I married her."

But I suspect what Cézanne couldn't stomach was the melodrama. "A fever stiffened him, he worked on with the blind obstinacy of an artist who dives into his entrails to drag therefrom the fruit that tortures him." Pur-lease! The mix of metaphors alone would be a turn-off for any painter of apples. And Lantier's obsession with creating a single masterpiece is ridiculous. What Zola gets right, though, is the dedicated artist's essential selfishness; as Lantier confesses to the equally doomed heroine Christine on day one: "As for me, when it's a question of painting, I'd kill father and mother you know". She couldn't say she wasn't warned.

Solipsistic selfishness is a constant in the characters of artists in novels. "He is an exceptional man," Vermeer's friend van Leeuwenhoek warns the heroine of Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring.* "His eyes are worth a room full of gold. But sometimes he sees the world only as he wants it to be, not as it is. He does not understand the consequences to others of his point of view. He thinks only of his work, not of you."



The first edition of Emile Zola's novel His Masterpiece

Clutton, the leader of a gang of young English artists on the loose in Paris in Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, is a chip off the Lantier monomaniac block: "The only reason that one paints is that one can't help it… One paints for oneself, otherwise one would commit suicide." Lantier takes that final option, but Maugham's hero Philip foresees a less dramatic end for Clutton: he saw him "in twenty years, bitter, lonely, savage and unknown; still in Paris … at war with himself and the world, producing little in his increasing passion for a perfection he could not reach: and perhaps sinking at last into drunkenness." Clutton's own hero is a

chap he met in Brittany who's just off to Tahiti – a former stockbroker with a wife and family. "'He chucked it all to become a painter.' 'And what about his wife and family?' asked Philip. 'Oh, he dropped them. He left them to starve on their own account.' 'It sounds a pretty low-down thing to do.' 'Oh, my dear fellow, if you want to be a gentleman you must give up being an artist... An artist would let his mother go to the workhouse.'"

No prizes for guessing the identity of this ungentlemanly chap. Gauguin had a fascination for Maugham, who returned to him four years later in *The Moon and Sixpence*, the story of a London stockbroker who abandons his wife and children to go to Paris and become an artist, ending up in Tahiti. Like Lantier's, his paintings have a strange power. "They seemed to me ugly, but they suggested without disclosing a secret of momentous significance," is the narrator's verdict when he first sees them in Paris. Years later in Tahiti he learns from the local doctor of a climactic cycle of paintings burnt on the artist's orders after his death. "I think Strickland knew it was a masterpiece... He had made a world and saw that it was good. Then, in pride and contempt, he destroyed it."

What would the real Gauguin would have made of this romantic flim-flam? I suspect he'd have liked it even less than Cézanne liked Zola's *L'Oeuvre*. Gauguin had plenty of pride and contempt, but it was not directed at posterity. He was in fact a rare example of an artist sufficiently wanting in self-doubt to believe in himself. For a reality-check on how artists actually think, novelists could do worse than to read his final memoir, *Before and After*, written on The Marquesas in 1903. Gauguin was no self-destructive Strickland: "I have worked and spent my life well, intelligently, even courageously, without weeping, without tearing things," he concludes, "– and I have very good teeth." Nor did he treat his family heartlessly, if you believe Émile's defence of his father in the preface to the first edition. "It is a good story," Émile says, dismissing the Gauguin myth, "It is a pity to contradict it, so many credulous souls have been entertained by it. But alas, it is not true."

Many credulous souls are entertained by novels about artists but alas, they're not true either. The one exception is *The Horse's Mouth*, whose author Joyce Cary, like Maugham's Philip, studied art in Paris but gave it up when he realised he was third-rate. Cary's anti-hero Gulley Jimson (illustrated, played by Alec Guinness in Ronald Neame's 1958 film) has the artist's essential selfishness and ambition to paint masterpieces, but it's the practicalities – the getting of materials and walls to paint on – that exercise him. There's no diving into entrails for torturous fruits. Jimson is a desperado, not a fruitcake.

Of all the novels about art and artists, Cary's is the only masterpiece. But let's give the last word to the non-fictional Gauguin: "As you see, everything is serious and ridiculous also. Some weep, others laugh... What is one to do about it? Nothing. All this must be; and, after all, it's of no consequence. The earth still turns round; everyone defecates; only Zola bothers about it."

First published in *The Jackdaw*, July 2021

The Mountain Lake Symposium and Workshop: Art in Locale

Margaret Richardson

Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, away from urban art centers, a "radically subversive" program began in 1980 with the goal of cultivating a "meaningful context or 'culture' for art". The Mountain Lake Symposium and Workshop provided a serious but friendly forum for artists, critics, and academic and local participants. Eschewing the concerns of the commercial art world, programs encouraged collaboration, mindful creation, and meaningful community and critical engagement. This radical approach is documented by the program's founder, artist Ray Kass, and co-organizer, art historian Howard Risatti, in a thoughtful catalogue that accompanies a traveling exhibition and captures the Mountain Lake experience up to 2017. Part history, part memoir, the volume is richly illustrated and impressive in scope, providing a comprehensive compendium of the events that, for a time, grounded an international community in rural Southwest Virginia.

A collaborative spirit and deep respect for the creative process are reflected in the recollections and the text's design. Organized thematically, 12 chapters composed of essays by Kass, Risatti, and other participants contextualize, describe, and reminisce, provid-

ing a conversation of overlapping information and perspectives. Texts are visually supported by a scrapbook-like design, amply interspersed with sketches and documentation of activities and artwork. Including appendices with background on key methods and participants as well as a list of programs and contributors, the text is an accessible and indispensable resource.

The first half of the book offers an overview and covers key workshops that define the themes of the second half. Front matter establishes the catalogue's structure, with curator Ashley Kistler introducing Mountain Lake's events and themes while recalling her own experience as a participant. Esteemed art critic and regular participant, Donald Kuspit, supplies further commentary, fondly recalling the symposia's critical engagement. The chapters that follow similarly intermix historical essays with personal reflections.

Chapter 1 opens with sketches of participants by Gary (Chico) Harkrader who expresses a common sentiment acknowledging the profound effect this "giant 'salon'" had on his "art, education, and philosophy." Complementary essays by Risatti and Kass follow, linking the symposium to artist-led workshops, providing insight into the programs' formation and concepts, and explaining significant participants like Kuspit. In Chapter 2, Kass explicates personal intentions revealing the community of influences from which programs grew. Cultivating and expanding those relationships distinguish the workshops highlighted in the remaining chapters.

Chapters 3 through 6 focus on visionary artists who defined the workshops' themes. This section fittingly begins with chapters on John Cage and Howard Finster, who, Kass notes, "were defining figures in the evolution of the Mountain Lake Workshop." Essays recount Cage's increasing involvement throughout the 1980s and Kass's role in facilitating these activities. Chance-based practices and inspiration from Asian philosophies formed the basis of Cage's ego-less, mindful expressions, and these practices established a philosophy for the entire Mountain Lake series as apparent throughout the book. They connect to Chapter 4's subject, Howard Finster, who similarly embraced chance and collaboration using a basic set of parameters within which various creations could happen. Essays convey different recollections of Finster's "workout" workshops for which he supplied "dimensions," paper stencils of "discovered" images, for participants' use.

Cage's and Finster's methods set the stage for other workshops and chapters. In Chapters 5 and 6, Risatti introduces the early 1990s workshops of Japanese artist, Jiro Okura, and Kass's own workshop which produced watercolor polyptychs. Okura utilized chance, natural materials, and a stenciling method to facilitate collaborative, meditative works while Kass similarly devised chance-based, meditative methods and "motivational exercises" to help him paint like nature operates.

These interconnections between artists, nature, and cultures culminate in Chapter 7 which focuses on Ki no Ichiku (Relocating the Tree), an interdisciplinary study-abroad program, 1997-2000. It included instruction in Asian art and architecture and hands-on projects working with Japanese and Chinese traditions. Risatti and Kass give an overview of the program followed by participants' personal recollections. Related workshops involving Okura, Peter Lau, Michael Hofmann, and Xiao Yan Gan are also highlighted. These essays underscore strong connections between the workshops and Asian traditions and link to other workshops covered in the book's second half.

Chapters 8 and 9 cover workshops involving traditional processes and materials and technology. Essays identify a community with common influences—Duchamp, Cage, and Asian traditions—and provide background and personal reflections on various workshops including Helen Frederick's papermaking and Alston (Stoney) Conley's fresco painting as well as projects with potter-poet, M.C. Richards; eco-artist, Lynne Hull; sculptor, Lee Sauder; graffiti artist, James De La Vega; Scottish painter James Donnelly; Cy Twombly; Mierle Laderman Ukeles; Jackie Matisse; Bruce McClure; and Sally and Jessie Mann. The chapters' organization reflects a community's formation: one workshop and artist interrelated to another through common relationships and methods.

Chapters 10 and 11 make these connections clear and illuminate Cage's lingering influence. As Risatti explains, the 1994 *Appalachian Trail Frieze* project related to earlier workshops by Cage and Kass and subsequently influenced a 2013 event. A Cage-inflected workshop by French artist Jacques Pourcher is also featured along with a project utilizing Cage's practice sheets. The random marks produced by wiping his brush inspired John Cage's Zen Ox-Herding Pictures for which artist and Zen scholar, Stephen Addiss, paired 10 practice sheet 'paintings' with texts selected from Cage's published 'found' writings. Chapter 11 comes full circle with accounts of Cage's *STEPS: A Composition for a Painting*, first staged at Mountain Lake in 1989 and subsequently performed by other individuals or groups from 2006 to Cage's Centennial Festival, 2012-2013. Taken together, these projects reveal how a community continued to evolve and expand and lead into Risatti's epilogue summarizing Mountain Lake's "collaborative spirit" as its most enduring lesson and legacy.

An essential resource on Kass's Mountain Lake experiment and Cage's artistic legacy there, this text documents these radical, utopian efforts. Lacking the posturing and hierarchy of typical conferences, this program provided a unique opportunity to reach across cultural, disciplinary, and regional divides and make sense of the world together. Beyond mere records or reminiscences, this valuable volume offers inspiration and a blueprint for future endeavors.

Ray Kass and Howard Risatti, eds. *The Mountain Lake Symposium and Workshop: Art in Locale.* Farmville, VA: Longwood Center for the Visual Arts, Longwood University, distributed by University of Virginia Press, 2018. 352 pp. $49.95

[Other contributions by Steven Addiss, Steven Bickley, Tom Coffin, Alston (Stoney) Conley, Jane M. Farmer, Gary (Chico) Harkrader, Taro Hatanaka, Rachel Talent Ivers, Ulrike Kasper, Joe Kelley, Ashley Kistler, Sam Krisch, Donald B. Kuspit, Peter Lau, Liz Liguori, Jessie Mann, Bruce McClure, Alwyn Moss, Ann Oppenhimer, Jerrie Pike, Kathy Pinkerton, Roger Reynolds, Lee Sauder, Brian Sieveking, and Georg Weckwerth.]

Peter Fox - Art Exhibition at Redwing Gallery, Penzance

Mary Fletcher

St Ives on Fire

There are 11 new paintings in this show. Peter Fox has been able to work during lockdown, relishing the quiet and the increased bird-song. Birds feature largely in these works, plus the enigmatic bird-headed goddess figure he first drew years back, whose origins probably lie in Vinca northern European culture from a time before writing.

These images are arranged with great care and impact and their symbolism is mysterious - encouraging speculation. One painting shows an ancient Cornish shrine - Dupath Well – but the others do not reference anything local, but seem nevertheless timelessly rooted in all sorts of wild myth and legend.

Having seen Peter Fox's work before, I felt the new ones have more calm and space in them. Another viewer had noticed a new placing of figure and bird looking eye to eye.

Also in the gallery are several of the artist's witty and unusual sculptures incorporating found objects.

If you like a change from the conventional seascapes of familiar places that abound in Penwith galleries, with their loose brush-work and uncomplicated repertoire, you may enjoy seeing Peter Fox's latest show - the work of an original and unusual artist that provokes thought and reverie.

Truth

When most denied, most alive -
When a castaway on overheated shores,
Or left standing in an empty field -
Where something more than peace
Heals the damage or crime -
When squeezed into overcrowded
Streets or left to freeze -
Or broken like tiny frail twigs
From young bushes -
Or like the palest wild rose -
Just daring to be fragrant -
Most holy, most sacred, most divine;
Neglected, but a giant against
The throng's pale insincerity -
There is only one shrine
Where miracles change
Water into wine -
And that O torn deceivers -
Is mine -

Shänne Sands
(Excerpt: Shadows and Realities)
Published in Moonlight on Words, FootSteps Press, 2011.

Podcasts worth catching according to the Critic's Notebook at the *New York Times*

Recording Artists

Helen Molesworth gives some of the most incisive and insightful exhibition tours of any contemporary art curator of her generation, and her new podcast Recording Artists, produced by the Getty, puts this intellectual-storytelling skill set to good use. https://www.getty.edu/recordingartists/

Talk Art

On Talk Art out of London, Russell Tovey, an actor-collector, and Robert Diament, a musician-turned-gallerist, host freewheeling and wide-ranging talks with some big visual artists and bold-name creator-collectors. https://play.acast.com/s/talkart

Awaye!

Produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), this radio show and podcast focuses on Aboriginal culture, including art, music, theater and fi lm. https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/

In Other Words

Produced by a division of Sotheby's called Art Agency Partners and hosted by Charlotte Burns, In Other Words comes closer than other podcasts to the intimacy and insider feeling of being seated at a chic gallery dinner next to a hotshot dealer or curator. https://www.artagencypartners.com/podcast/

Dr. Janina Ramirez – Art Detective

In these podcasts, Dr. Janina Ramirez presents herself as an art-object sleuth, "your chief investigator of images," but she acts more like that memorable college teacher – the one who shared such enthusiasm for her topics that you found yourself interested in dusty corners of art history that had never intrigued you before. https://play.acast.com/s/artdetective

What Artists Listen To

Imagine the ever-popular BBC radio program Desert Island Discs with an artist-only guest list and a feminist bent and you'll get What Artists Listen To. https://www.whatartistslistento.com/

The Sculptor's Funeral

Jason Arkles is an American figurative sculptor who settled in Florence because of his work, and his show is a deep dive into the giants of the past who inspire him, from the ancient Greeks through Donatello and Michelangelo to modern legends like Rodin. http://www.thesculptorsfuneral.com/episodes

The Art Newspaper Podcast

The Art Newspaper, a London publication that reports on international art, has created one of the most topical podcasts around. Hosted by Ben Luke, the weekly show is not a digest of recent articles, but a chance to hear experts talk in depth about new developments or trends. https://www.theartnewspaper.com/podcast

Momus: The Podcast

These monthly conversations with international artists, writers and curators come from Momus, the online magazine based in Toronto that bills itself rather self-importantly as a "return to art criticism." https://momus.ca/momus-the-podcast/

The Lonely Palette

Tamar Avishai asks museumgoers to describe a particular artwork, then fills listeners in about the artist and the making of the work. http://www.thelonelypalette.com/

The Art of Madness (or On Madness in Art)

In 1922, Westphalian-born Hans Prinzhorn published a book that was the first of its kind: *Expressions of Madness: The Art of the Mentally Ill* (Bildnerei der Geisteskranken: ein Beitrag zur Psychologie und Psychopathologie Der Gestaltung). The book is a record of individuals on whose cases the

author had worked, patients whose creativity had led them to the production of art. The book gave voice to the artistic practices of disturbed minds in psychiatric institutions –a fact which, of course, caused discomfort among those within the realms of high culture, among those who decide what's art, and what's not.

www.faena.com

Artists exhibition banned for being 'Communists'

lluminate Coral Gables used art exhibits from two artists who are sympathizers of totalitarian regimes who have imprisoned, repressed and murdered opponents in attempts to silence them. In a community, which has thousands of exiles from communist-socialist repressive regimes, the use of these artists was seen by some who brought the issue up to Commissioners as tasteless.

Cai Guo-Qiang has long been a reported sympathizer of the Chinese regime. In an interview in 2018 with Frontpage, he was credited with saying, "Communism was successful in making people feel as though they have been transformed from being slaves to becoming the masters of the earth. Communism promoted a kind of utopian universalism. Communism is a very resourceful kind of -ism. It can make a large majority of uncultured peasants suddenly feel that they have thoughts and philosophy!

Gable Insider July 16th (Miami, Florida)

Liste Art Fair Basel 20–26 September
Liste Art Fair Basel 2021

New fair location
Messe Basel, Hall 1.1
Maulbeerstrasse /
corner Riehenring 113
4058 Basel

Liste Showtime Online, 15–30 September

Liste Expedition Online, October onward

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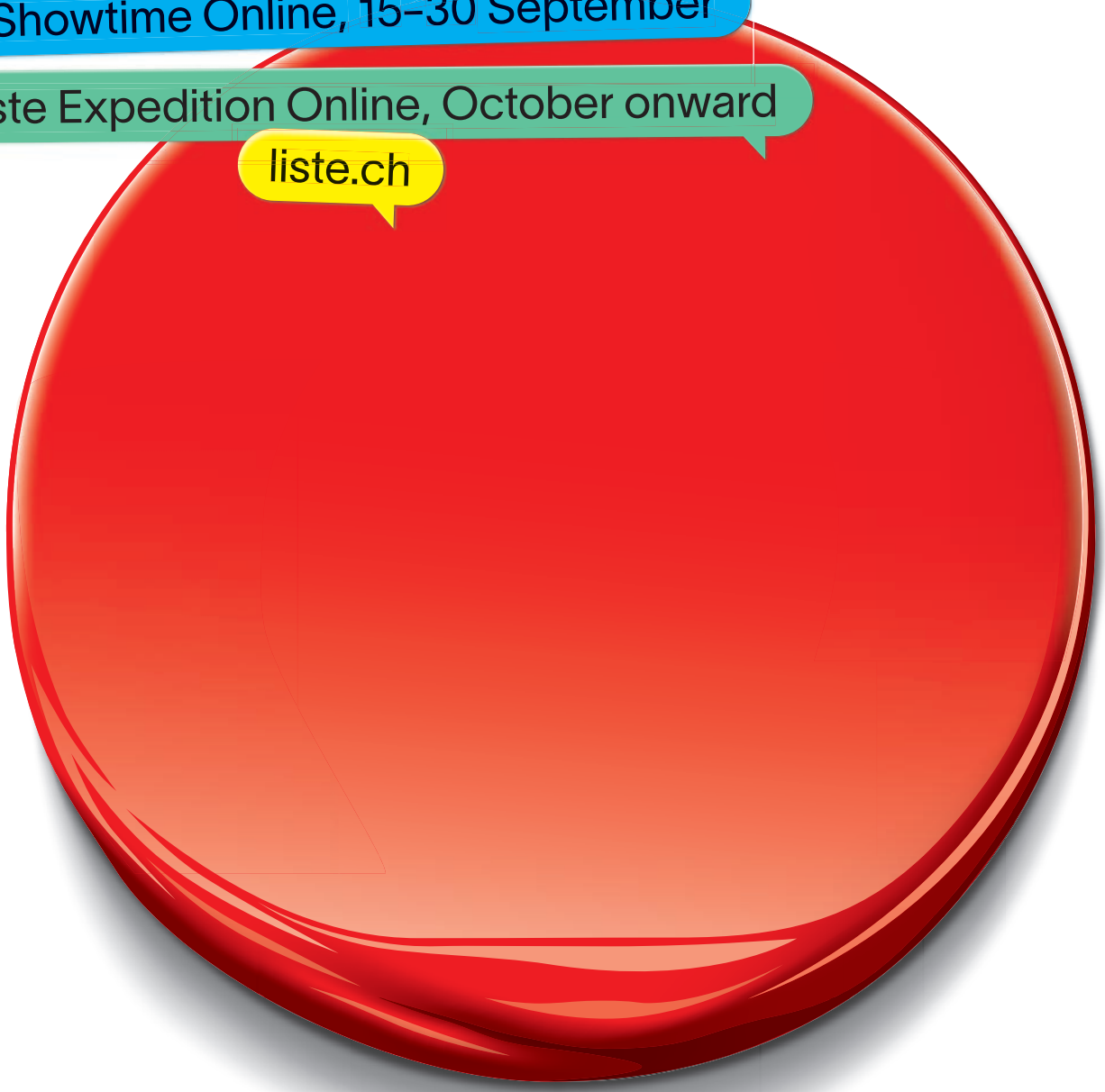

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