

BIENNIALS AND ART FAIRS WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?



**Fill Me
with
Emotion**

NAVY PIER: CHICAGO EXPO 2023
Margaret Lanterman

PHOTO SHOW, LONDON
Gabrielle Bejani

BIENNIALS: ART FAIRS OH MY!
Nancy Nesvet

**NYC ART FAIRS: FRIEZE, VOLTA, 1-54,
FUTURE FAIR** Mark Bloch

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FUTURE** Elizabeth Ashe
A SPIRITED VIEW OF THE WORLD
Nancy Nesvet

CLAUDE CAHUN BY JENNIFER SHAW:
BOOK REVIEW Mary Fletcher

EDITORIAL Nancy Nesvet

SPEAKEASY – TIN BÒTA
Eleonora Schiarchi

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 this 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. 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



Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri (1960s - 2002)

A stock-man until he was 36, he began painting watercolours. He also became an expert wood carver. In a diving accident he lost the sight of one eye. He was a member of the Australian Aboriginal Papunya movement. His subject matter was the sacred lands. He died the day he received the Order of Australia.

This piece, Narripi (Worm) Dreaming extends the famous dream tradition of his people. Acrylic on canvas which was his preferred technique later in life helped him produce large canvases.

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.

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The New Art Examiner is an open forum for discussion and publishes unsolicited informed articles and reviews from aspiring and established writers.

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Editorial

Nancy Nesvet

In an incredibly busy, enlightening, and fulfilling two months, writers and editors at Art Lantern and the New Art Examiner visited and assessed the differing means and aims of art fairs and Biennales across the globe, gleaned important insights which we pass on to you, our readers, in this issue. We hope to make you aware of the distinctions between art fairs and biennales that we have endeavored to point out: that art fairs are largely economic endeavors where galleries and artists exhibit work priced to sell. In contradistinction, biennales do not price work, or sell work, but exhibit work to educate and inform the public about issues important and relevant to our existence on this planet. Bringing together masses of visitors from the art world and beyond, they largely accomplish their mission.

The differences in aims of the art fairs and Biennales are initially apparent from their designs. Whereas art fairs delineate each booth into its own kingdom, with border walls separating each gallery space from the others, Biennale Curator-chosen Biennale exhibits often exist with no border walls, as did the 2023 Venice Architectural Biennale Arsenale sector, in room-size open spaces, so viewers are aware of the work of other artists and artist groups from each vantage point. Art fairs are largely financed by participating galleries that sell work to recoup their costs and make money beyond those costs. Lately, and certainly in the art fairs covered in this issue, there is a concerted effort to show work concerned with social and economic justice. Whether that is due to the audience's concern, and therefore willingness to purchase work reflecting that concern, or whether the galleries are finding great work that reflects that preference is debatable.

Financing Biennale exhibits is more difficult. National pavilion's exhibits are financed by the partici-

pating nation, limited to those who are recognized with an embassy in Italy, where Curators can adhere to any theme they like, and choose any art they wish to display. Recognizing institutional donors who step up to make Biennale exhibits financially possible, where governments cannot or do not, Lesley Lokko, this year's Curator at the Architecture Biennale in Venice thanked the large institutional donors for their support in righting systemic resource inequality enabling artists and artist teams to participate in the 18th Architecture Exhibition at Venice. She convincingly wrote: "What the participants in this Biennale have managed to show is that equal opportunity is rightly and inevitably the basis for any discipline, particularly the creative arts.

Individuals have no control over the measure in which talent manifests in one person ...but individuals, through the state, control the circumstances in which creativity flourishes. The all important task of state and institutional support cannot be left to philanthropists or the free market to provide and resolve." (Lesley Lokko, Curator of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice 2023.

Elizabeth Ashe reviews an exhibition at the Beyeler Foundation in Basel, during Art Basel week which turned out the best installation she saw. Accompanying but not an official part of the Venice Architectural Biennale, Elizabeth Ashe also reviewed an exhibition in Venice at Palazzo Mora. Isabella Chiadini recounts the role of the Bumblebee Collective where Iranian students successfully navigated the art world, to make us all aware of the loss of rights and lives of Iranian women. Requiring few funds, proving the creativity of artists to achieve their goals no matter their economic circumstances, they produced a simply conceived but incredibly effective project.

QUOTE of the MONTH:

"When art critics get together they talk about Form and Structure and Meaning. When artists get together they talk about where you can buy cheap turpentine."

Pablo Picasso

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The New Art Examiner welcomes ideas for articles and short reviews in all languages for our web pages.

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Margaret Lanterman visited the Navy Pier 2023 Chicago Expo, an art fair on Navy Pier that straddled the border of Biennales with its special exhibit section showing the climate focused HOW ON EARTH exhibit and Janet Biggs' video "Weighing Life Without a Scale". Like the Lithuanian/Finnish exhibit at the Venice Architectural Biennale 2023, teaching children about forest ecology as they played with tree limbs, the Chicago Public Schools Project documented children's art at the Chicago Expo, proving that play and artmaking educates for the children's future and teaches them to take care of their future world.

Mary Fletcher's review of a book about Claude Cahun introduces us to a daring, innovative true character who we were probably not aware of.

Marc Bloch exhaustively visits four New York Art Fairs, taking him from downtown to way uptown, from old to new fairs, pointing out the differences in each.

Gabrielle Bejani, a newly minted graduate of the Slade School of Art in London writes her assessment of London Photo Fair, adding valuable current insights about work presented.

I had the pleasure of reviewing Hilma af Klint's and Piet Mondrian's show at the Tate Britain, following the careers of two wonderful artists who started out painting landscape and later painted a philosophy inspired by spirituality.

Although not part of an art fair or Biennale, Eleonora Schiarchi's speakeasy about Tin Bota, the disastrous flooding in Emilia Romagna used photographs and videos on social media to document the devastation and appeal to citizens of the world to help. Using the net when a physical space was not available or preferable to reach so many, recalled Lesley Lokko's, the Curator of the Venice Architectural Biennale this year's insistence that philanthropists cannot bear all the burden, but that individuals must be creative in providing help where needed.

We hope, with this overview to give you a taste of the differences in fairs and Biennales in our present art world so, if you cannot be physically present, you can virtually visit. Have fun, learn, discuss the art with friends and colleagues, and most of all, enjoy your forays into the art world with us.



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

Eleonora Schiarchi recently graduated from the University of Bologna and now works in the Netherlands where she specializes in contemporary art, digital art, and photography.

Fran a Mongardino Landslide

Tin Bòta:

CULTURAL HERITAGE DAMAGES AND COLLECTIVE RECOVERY EFFORT AFTER THE FLOODING IN EMILIA ROMAGNA

In early May, a series of intense floods struck several regions in Italy, with particular emphasis on Emilia-Romagna, located in the central-northern part of the peninsula. These natural calamities resulted in overflowing rivers, landslides, and mudslides, inflicting significant damage to the landscape. The tragedy unfolded in two phases, with fifteen days of almost relentless rain starting on May 2nd. Fifteen is the death toll, while fifteen thousand are the displaced individuals spread around the forty-four regional municipalities. The lives of the residents, whose connection to the land is oftentimes both professional and emotional, were tragically affected. Photographs and videos quickly started circulating on social media, spreading the image of an entire population grappling with a historically significant natural disaster.

Amidst this devastating scenario, the cultural sector has suffered greatly. Gardens and parks such as the Cardello-Casa Oriani in Ravenna and the Ginanni Fantuzzi Villa, as well as important libraries like the Manfrediana Library in Faenza and the Malatestiana Library in Cesena, have suffered severe damage. Numerous museums have also experienced significant losses, including the Carlo Zauli Museum in Faenza, dedicated to ceramics and the renowned 20th-century sculptor that gives the name to the institution. The museum, which has been hosting events, artist residencies, and educational programs since 2002, suffered devastation in its basements, ground floor, and garden. Many artworks from its

collection were destroyed, and the facilities and installations were damaged. In response to this tragedy, Matteo Zauli, the museum's founder, along with his sisters, initiated a fundraising campaign accessible through the website <https://gofund.me/51e5a625>. Despite the reduction in rainfall over the past two weeks, the hydrogeological risk alert shows no signs of abating. On Sunday, June 11th, the 41st consecutive alert was reported. To address this prolonged emergency situation, the severe weather decree was approved by the Council of Ministers at the end of May, providing immediate financial support of two billion euros. However, at present, the damages are estimated to amount to 8.8 billion euros, a figure that continues to evolve. This substantial gap may not be bridged in the near future, with severe consequences for the entire region. Thanks to the resilience and collective commitment of Romagna's inhabitants, the situation seems to have temporarily stabilized, allowing for the start of the bathing season, crucial for the economy of the region. However, last-minute cancellations affecting around twenty percent of reservations along the coastline in June alone foreshadow a more challenging summer than anticipated.

The consequences of this catastrophe will not only impact the tourism sector but also, as mentioned earlier, the cultural sector. Numerous fundraising campaigns have been launched by both the Emilia-Romagna Region and the affected cities themselves. How to support the reconstruction and resto-





The collapsed Ponte della Motta 2023

ration of the damaged heritage? One notable project is 'Romagna Tin Bòta,' an initiative promoted by photographer Marco Onofri. It involves a fundraising campaign where photographers and illustrators donate their works to support the region's recovery. Until June 30, through the website www.romagnatinbota.it, it is possible to purchase a high-quality A4-sized print. In addition to esteemed names like Oliviero Toscani and Guido Guidi, emerging photographers and illustrators have also decided to contribute to this cause. Donations start at a modest amount of one hundred euros, which includes the print and shipping costs. The proceeds will be allocated to the most affected areas of the flood through the partner organization Legacoop. All the artworks are also available on Instagram, on the profile @romagnatinbota.

With the message 'Tin Bòta, l'Europa è con vo' (Tin Bòta, Europe is with you), President of the European

Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, addressed all those affected by the flood. Tin Bòta, which literally means 'Stay strong' in the Romagna dialect, means to wear boots and hit the streets, shovel away mud and water, and support those who have lost everything by welcoming, comforting, and assisting one another. Thus, Tin bota becomes the motto of resilience for an entire community that extends beyond regional boundaries, with its strength lying in the determination to rebuild the territory. Nevertheless, the great collective effort may not be enough.

To donate directly to the region, you can use the following bank details:

IBAN: IT69G0200802435000104428964. In the payment description, please write
ALLUVIONE EMILIA-ROMAGNA (Emilia-Romagna Flood)

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Subject headed BOOK REVIEW

Please include the full details of the title, author, publisher, date and ISBN.`

Postcards From Iran

Isabella Chiadini

Two long panels covered with over 800 postcards occupy the corridor of the Collamarini Wing of the Bologna Academy of Fine Arts. One in a row, until they compose an installation, they are not greeting cards and they are not postcards. These are the works that hundreds of Iranian men and women (resident in Iran or abroad) have sent to Bologna in response to the invitation of the students of the Academy. Bumblebees is the Collective of Iranian students and artists who conceived and curated the project with the support of the student council. The two guiding images of the collective call were drawn by the artist and human rights activist Gianluca Costantini, who recounted how proud he was of his collaboration with the students.

"It is today's Iran with its struggles for freedom and its hopes for the future" declared Yasamin Marzoghfarhani of Bumblebees to the journalist of TG3 RAI during the inauguration of the exhibition; while Costantini emphasizes that what we see 'is an action rather than a real exhibition' everyone was admitted; well-known artists and people 'who have sent a simple photo or a simple writing: like postcards, they range from very high levels to very familiar levels'.

In fact, upon entering, one is immediately struck by an enveloping and almost shapeless mass of colours. The overview anticipates what we will see without there being a work which is given more prominence than others; without a hierarchy and without a subdivision by theme or by techniques. So the closer you get, the more the ginning dissolves; and image after image the peculiarity of each work emerges. It is precisely by getting closer that each postcard represents an original and free point of view; but it is the subjectivity of the eye of the beholder, most struck by this or that detail, by a line, by a colour, by a text, that makes that postcard singular. Each work is a microcosm and resumes its place as soon as you



take your eyes off it to look at another one; however there are some that, in different ways in each of us, demand more attention. So we are forced to go back, to linger on their call to look at them.

The image of Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old of Kurdish origin, whose death in prison for wearing the veil incorrectly triggered the protests of October 2022, recurs, reworked in different ways, in many postcards; many thank and pay homage to The Queen, as she is now called, and the slogan 'Woman, Life, Freedom' seals many of the works on display.

The slogan of Kurdish independence groups has merged with the protests of Iranian youth movements, a generational movement that is becoming something more. A rallying cry, so insistent during the demonstrations as in these works, is not a tinsel, or a ritual that one could imagine already worn out. What emerges is the strength and depth in the visual choices, which evoke, even on a sensory level, the desire for rebirth and renewal. And above all, the reiteration of those three words indicates how compact is the collective sharing of the meaning that Iranian men and women give to protest: they ask for a society rebuilt in the name of freedom.

'The mural of postcards we see is a wall that screams freedom' declares Denise Duina, vice president of the Student Council, recounting the incredibly positive response that the appeal received during the same television service.

'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' shouted a group of female students on October 29, 2022 from a classroom at the University of Tehran; and they sang 'Rise up! In the name of women, of life, of freedom. Let us free ourselves from



the shackles of slavery [...]'. Marzooghfarhani explains, confirming the impression one gets when looking at the processions and this mural that 'above all women are the source of inspiration for this revolution'. Unfortunately we know it: it is on women and on the control of their bodies that oppression almost always takes place. But it is equally true, as underlined by the expert on Iran and Italian journalist Luciana Borsatti, long-time correspondent from that country for the ANSA agency, presenting her book *Il Tempo delle Donne* (Castelvecchi Editore, Rome 2023) to Antonella Alba (RAI Culture 05.31.23), that 'A change has started, certainly irreversible and profound, in Iranian society and culture, which is led by women; women take charge not only of their own rights but of a series of questions that come from all of society [...]'. Yasamin Marzooghfarhani, from the Bolognese student collective, also chants the slogan Woman Life Freedom in front of the camera. Which said like this, with that emotion and that pride, expresses the granite will not to withdraw from those principles, in addition to the strong sense of community and belonging to a movement that will be hard to stop. The battle against the use of the veil has become, continues Borsatti, "a topic of confrontation and civil disobedience, a symbol of a wider and more transversal battle that has involved all levels of society; not only women but also men, students, the elderly and the workers".

All of this is continuing despite in recent days – June 20, 2023 – the United Nations High Commissioner, for Human Rights Volker Türk declared that the Islamic Republic is only formally committed to collaborating with the Agency, and according to reports



leaked through Norwegian human rights groups in Iran, at least 142 people were reportedly sentenced to death in May 2023; without counting the arbitrary detentions and summary trials.

On that mural in Bologna I read many slogans that reproduce now recognized (almost) universally principles; the basic freedoms, human, civil and political rights which cannot be ignored but, as Borsatti explains "If the right to freedom is irrepressible and radical, if claiming it is already revolution, if its value is fundamental, nothing is simple when we are talking about Iran". Nothing is simple but it will be *irreversible* and *profound* yes, that's that.

The tone of some of those works is irreverent, brazen, explicitly directed both against the hypocritical intransigence of the regime and against symbols considered unassailable: the veil, the turbans of the ayatollahs - trampled and kicked. The hair cut, another symbolic image of these protests, declares the will for radical change. Flags appear among the symbols, to underline the desire for a free country, where plurality of thought could finally be under the same banner. The flags also remind us that Iran has a millenary civilization to rediscover; as the students of Tehran sing "[...] So that we become sprouts, I, you, the others, we become again what we are. [...]" Many works shout and claim, even angrily, the will of those who sent them not to give up and to stay alive. One photograph shows a woman with bruises, presumably from being beaten; back and arms wounded by whipping. Slightly curved shoulders and hair brushed forward as if she were ready to visit a doctor who declares her salvation or not. We cannot help but see and feel, in that body, the effort to expose humiliation and fragility. But the woman, standing despite everything, submits herself to our gaze: she imposes herself, overcoming anguish and shame. She demands we watch her. The image is a slap in the face, it wakes us up from our torpor and



we can only feel the pain, and at the same time the courage, of whoever conceived, created that work and sent that postcard. The author is a man, talking about sharing intentions and painful situations for almost everyone living in Iran.

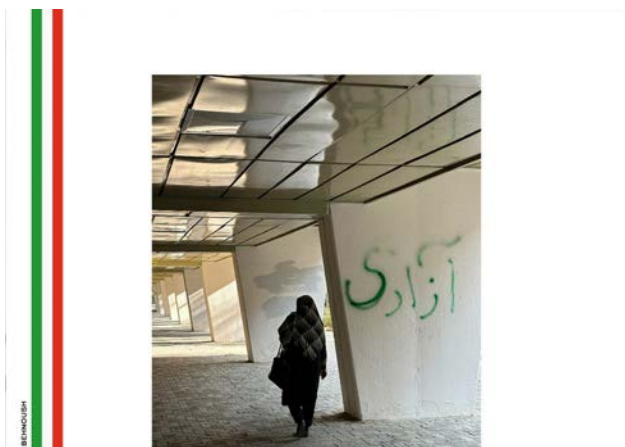
A veiled woman, seen from behind in a black and white photograph, walks next to a pillar on which we read freedom. It is probably the same word that has already appeared on another pillar, where an erasure can now be seen. But the word *freedom* comes back because it is impossible to erase it permanently. Its contrast with that dark veil makes the word even clearer and more indomitable. We don't know if the woman is affected by it, we certainly are.

In other postcards the smiles, the chats between friends are striking. In a small painting, where color emerges, a group of women – uncovered faces, hair in the wind, arms raised in fists – float and occupy a

space which, although delimited by the finiteness of the postcard, finally seems to be all theirs.

In front of the camera lens, children hug each other like footballers; a little shy and bold they make the sign of the V for victory. We smile with them, imagining that everyone can smile, not just for that moment. These postcards are a proposition of hope.

Others are more desperate, certainly protesting, but exuding disenchantment and pessimism: almost an acceptance of the lack of alternatives other than silence or annulment. But if even those works arrived there, one wonders, there must have been a vital force - and a kind of hope - that prompted that person to decide to send a sign saying 'look at me, I'm here'. In fact, we see those women and men and feel them close. Closer than the media images, to which we risk becoming addicted. Furthermore, very few of those images have reached us directly because, as



Freedom



the journalist Luciana Borsatti declares, 'it was not possible to document what happened from the area, yet we have a duty to go beyond this story'. The physical reality of postcards, by contrast, doesn't just represent the work of the person who sent it; it gives a face to those who are committed to filling those

postcard-shaped rectangles with words and bodies. They could be called postcards from the bodies – Iranian women's bodies above all – because most are so imbued with them you can feel them breathing.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Yasamin Marzoughfarhani explains "Here I am an artist free to express myself. If I had stayed in Iran, like so many of my friends, I would not have had this chance. This is why my other companions and I wanted to create an installation that could give a voice to those who struggle: a large mural that unites hundreds of postcards against the Iranian regime". A brilliant idea to have works sent in postcard format: this choice has given space to as many people as possible as well as once again having given art the role of messenger, in this case literally.

The transformative force of art is confirmed, art can corrode and mock power, crosses borders and awakens the consciences of those who know little or do not know anything; and perhaps it was therapeutic for many of the Iranians who worked on the postcards. The whole operation, or the action as Costantini defined it, is a successful work. Let's remember that we are talking about Iran, a country where even access to social media is controlled and some are blocked; yet these students have organized a network through which to circulate art and messages. Many minute stories arrived in Bologna, part of a larger story that is taking place. The collaboration of Gianluca Costantini, whose works in defense of human rights are known, has undoubtedly facilitated the widespread diffusion and visibility of the appeal. But the girls of the Bumblebees Collective, who are free to express themselves in Italy, as Yasamin Marzoughfarhani says, still have families and relatives in Iran; yet they exposed themselves, they were courageous; those who sent the postcards. I think a climate of enthusiasm has been created in everyone: the Collective, the Council of the students, Costantini and the Direction of the Academy of Fine Arts. These are those events that occasionally happen in the name of a goal that requires courage, and make it seem almost easy when it could not have been.

Postcards From Iran

Bologna Academy of Fine Arts February 4-28, 2023



From Palestine: Our Past, Our Future

Elizabeth Ashe

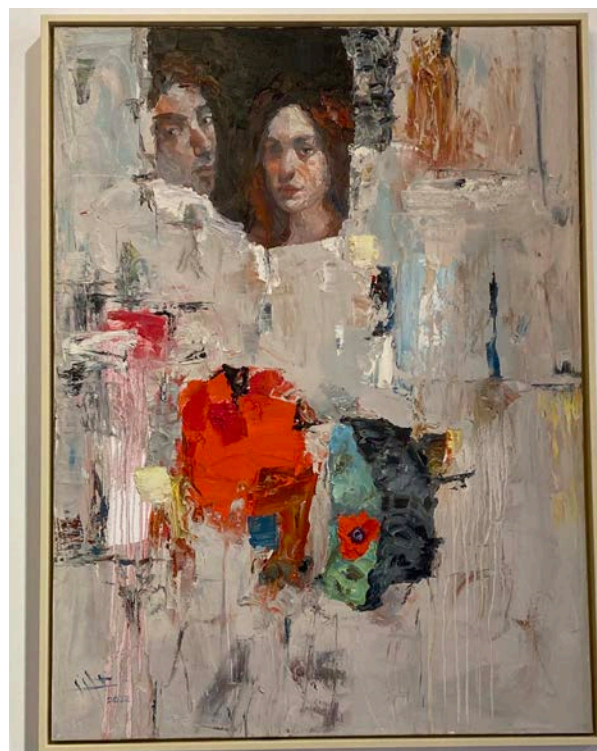
From Palestine: Our Past, Our Future fills a central gallery at Palazzo Mora, during the Venice Architectura Biennale. The exhibition focuses on two times, 1948-1955, and jumps to the contemporary. The older past of Turks and Bedouins are ignored, instead set on current living memory.

The Founder and Director of Palestine Museum US, Faisal Saleh, acted as first-time curator to produce the exhibition. In accounting for the core of his curatorial direction, he says for him, the focus behind the exhibition are the two maps, the animated one on a monitor with a time lapse of deaths and villages, and the map on the ground.

Music played overhead is tribal, but I don't know if the songs are traditional (likely) or contemporary (clinging to traditional with some modern changes). A map of Palestine, 1948, dominates the first half of the floor, raised off the ground as a sloped plinth. The map is the first of three monumental scale pieces. On the left wall, is a pastoral painting by Nabil Anani, titled *In Pursuit of Utopia*. The rolling hills and farm plots feels very European, even Italian, with scattered Cyprus trees. The next is John Halka's "Stripped of their Identity and Driven from Their Land," of his series *Forgotten Survivors*, a monochromatic painting with dark figures on a grey-white background, hatched like cuneiform lines or dried chaff. The figures carry nothing, except sometimes each other, and they're built-up and painted using 'survivors' and 'forgotten' stamps used like a contouring line. They could be survivors of anywhere, of any mass migration.

The best painting in the exhibit is *Jidar*, by Ghassan Abu Laban. It gives the viewer a named place, Jidar. A couple stands together in a cool, dark room, looking out from an uneven window. The wall is a gorgeous combination of abstraction and layers of facade. The painting makes me feel the dry air, the worn paint, their emotional closeness. Abu Laban's work could carry the recent past of one generation, as a theme.

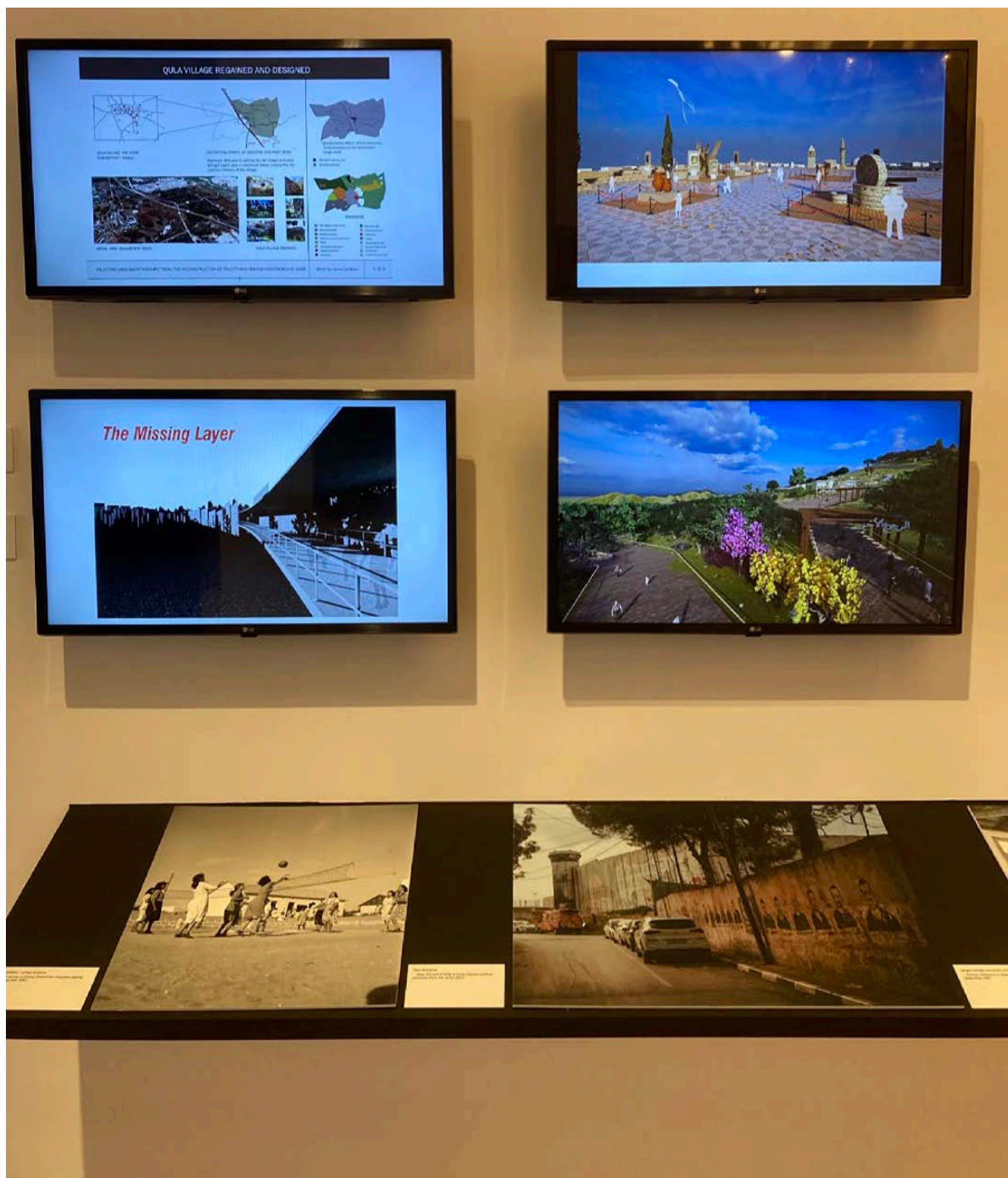
The abstract works could have been done by any abstract painter. Steve Sabella's *The Great March of Return* is a photo montage of figures, bombs, and stars on a rotating circle. It looks like it belongs more as a videogame, as it moves too quickly and there is too much photo manipulation for me. *Siege* by Samira Badran, is a print on fabric. It is clear that Badran is a



Ghassan Abu Laban: *Jidar*.
Exhibition photo - Liz Ashe

talented print maker, and I want to see more of her work. I'm intrigued by the narrative that could surface, the juxtaposition of a more defined army figure with trash and rubble. There could be valor and context, if there were more pieces that explain the rebar and trash coming out of the waistline/oil drum of a figure, the lower half of the body as army boots. Whose army does the figure belong to, and how old are they?

A museum-style display of monitors show students' work, award winners of the 2022 Palestine Land Society. The four village projects are architecture dreams, from the generation who were born into violence-torn cities and deserve the chance to make peace with the place and build a utopia. As designs situated on a blank slate, on past-village sites, I appreciate how the work looks to design the future. They are excellent projects, and I want to see more, I want to see them realized. Displayed on monitors, I miss seeing the village infrastructure, and the connection to the land and history. I would like to see



Exhibition photo - Liz Ashe

them solving history for the future, and I would like to see them considered as a viable next step away from generational refugee camps.

Overall, there are a few excellent pieces in the exhibit. I would like to have seen more work by a few artists, and much more about the students' projects. There are several beautiful photographs — historical ones in black and white, and contemporary ones in color, but they are lost beneath the row of moni-

tors. Margaret Olin's photograph of a mural painted in a refugee camp is a particularly poignant look at the contemporary architecture in peoples' lives, and I wish it was printed out large and on the wall. With more from fewer artists, I could connect with the work and learn how artists are treating architecture as a destroyed, or abandoned and reclaimed state where memory and cultures overlap, to envision the future and remember the past.



The Navy Pier 2023 Chicago Expo

Margaret Lanterman

Art Expo 2023 once again was the bustling and vibrant international destination for artist and artwork - to see and be seen. This April the Chicago art community entered its eleventh year as a leading international art fair, which included a huge array of 170 international galleries from 36 countries. Not-for-profit institutions, a discussion venue, and featured alignments throughout the city were also included. Across the city there were films, performances, after hours events and excitement in a week-long extravaganza that had something for every art interest.

With few exceptions, the exhibitors were open, friendly and quite willing to engage in informative private discussions. As this particular mile of presentations unfolded it became clear that something bold and fresh drifted through the 2023 EXPO. It celebrated a commitment to the counterbalance of social issues and professional quality art while neither overshadowed the other. Plunges into cultural heritage, prejudices, questions of respect, dignity and awareness were plentiful, insightful and timely, and were embedded as integral content of the high-quality art rather than as a message sitting on the surface. Environmental protection, climate change and personal involvement to that end was a significant theme to quite a few of the artists. Art and message were, in most cases, intertwined without grandstanding come-ons of shallow insight. Lush decorative art had meat on its bones, abundant portraits were with purpose, and history was represented with a continuity line. Impressive work by artists of color abounded, and some said 'stole the show'.

A complement of additional sections was available. EXPOSURE catered to solo and two-artist presenters from younger galleries. PROFILE consisted of solo booths with projects of tight themes. EDITIONS + BOOKS was as titled. SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS represented a select few non-profit institutions, organizations and museums.

A sampling of topics featured in The Dialogue Discussion stage included the following: a conversation with Chance the Rapper and artist Hank Willis Thomas, which had standing room only. The two artists spoke of their work in community building that featured underrepresented artists and public art.

Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pritzker Director of the Mu-

seum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA), Dimitris Daskalopoulos, NEON founder and collector, and artist Brendan Fernandes presented their ideas for another session.

The Center for Native Futures focused on the building of organizations for Native communities in the U.S. and Canada. Curators of the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale's U.S. pavilion were featured in a rousing round table discussion. November witnessed the 18th Architectural Biennial, titled *The Laboratory of the Future* and was curated this year by Leslie Lokko. This is the first time that the spotlight has shone on Africa and the African Diaspora.

Richard Bell brought insights into his practice and



Clive Smith: Friedrich Richter Dovecote, (2023) oil on wood panel 81.25x49cms

the imagery of his protest art which exists alongside First Nation rights in Australia. The exhibition *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s–Today*– at the Museum of Contemporary art was explored via conversation with Carla Acevedo- Yates, the Marilyn and Larry Fields Curator at the MCA.

There was a discussion with LAXART Director Hamza Walker (SAIC Adjunct Professor) on his forthcoming exhibition, *Monuments*, which confronts the ramifications of white supremacy as represented in public sculpture. LAXART, a nonprofit visual art space in Los Angeles, is dedicated to developments in contemporary culture and incorporates exhibitions, publications, and public programs to this end. In 2005, Lauri Firstenberg responded to the need for a venue to represent under-recognized artistic talent when she opened LAXART.

There were hundreds of exhibitors and thousands of wonderful pieces of art. We commend all the artists and exhibitors for their accomplishments, and represent a glimpse of as many as possible in these pages. At the Marc Straus Gallery presentation, we came to the impeccable trompe l'oeil paintings of Clive Smith. It was hard to believe that they were fully smooth, two-dimensional paintings. While this artist was researching geometric structures, he came upon the work of molecular biologists who are endeavoring to re-create extinct species with a combination of preserved DNA and the closest living species-match. Being fully enthralled, Clive Smith decided to mix the appearance of existing bird species to the DNA of painting to create his own new and amazing species. Through the style and content of these paintings, it is unavoidable to consider our reckless threat to all endangered species and the void their loss continues to create.

Not to be outshone in the content of bird conservation were the amazing bird anamorphs of Thomas Deininger, from the Ethan Cohen Gallery. As a wind surfer, it was unavoidable that he notice the huge mass of debris on the beaches below him. In his own statement to the catastrophic repercussions of human disregard for our environment, he created a series of sculptural objects which, seen from the side, clearly demonstrate a surreal jangle of strategically placed waste collected from the beach. Plastic skulls, shoes, cutlery, wire mesh- all examples of the debris he collected, are arranged in a strategic anamorph which, when seen from the front, appears as a very convincing and charming bird construction. Not only cheeky fun, but an engineering accomplishment that belies a strong aesthetic and moral statement are realized from these little gems.

Front view side view of anamorph construction In a

painted match for material lushness comes the work of emerging artist Daniel Mendez, of Cuban descent and now living in Miami, Florida. Represented by Cernuda Arte, his heavily textured and brightly colored paintings sing with the light and plant life of his own environments. As thick as the foliage is it does not belie a psychological tension between the plants and the secondary focus of human figures, sometimes integrated into the scene and other times appearing as a seeming mis-match of thinly painted people within the foliage, painted in a more com-



Daniel Mendez: Freedom (Liberated)
(2023) acrylic on canvas 48 x 36 cms

mercial style.

Belgium artist Gommaar Gilliam and DeBuck Gallery brought us the painting *In from the Night they Come and Go*, part 3. This is a visually compelling painting that seems stylistically familiar and yet challenges us with wonderment over the myths and imagery present. Imagery is informed by both mid-east and European symbolism. Closer viewing tells us that this work actually challenges traditional abstract expressionistic style with a contemporary combination of techniques and materials. Canvas first dyed with acrylic is stitched together to provide the painting surface for a contemplation of meanings of social conflict, fairytale symbolism and longing.



Gommaar Gilliam: In from the Night They Come and Go, part 3
Oil, oil stick, acrylic on painted and stitched fabrics 78.74 x 59.06 inches. Right: Zak Ove Another Country, 2022
Fabric Doilies 71.26 x 47.64 ins



Thomas Deininger: Grandmas' Nutcracker (European Goldfinch) 2023; found materials and hot glue, 25.4x 25.4x30.5 cms

Front View Left

Side View Right

De Bruck Gallery displayed work of far-flung variety, and one piece that contrasted with the painterly Gilliam piece was an arresting item by Zak Ove. This large two-dimensional collage-daily piece stood out for its contemporary take on traditional everyday lives. Clever use of color and texture incorporate daily Caribbean home-usage of crocheted doilies to create a strong composition. The work of Ove incorporates the African diaspora through his life in Trinidad, London and beyond in his dialogues using art to go between past, present and future political life. The layering effect put this viewer in mind of the stacked fabric art of the Guna peoples of the Panama area, where two-seven layers of colorful fabric are carefully layered, and incised shapes are cut out to reveal striking traditional imagery.

A very quiet yet powerfully compelling work by Nate Young, Monique Meloche Gallery, was constructed with master craft and combined a handmade rectangle of tinted glass with a small gestural drawing of a man and horse. These figures float in a larger-space that appears to be a perfectly proportioned environment for them. A wooden structure divides the space and also serves as a frame. Young is known for expressing ideas of race and theological thought, especially in a sense of shaping beliefs. In this work

he implies no definitive content, but rather a poetic suggestion. This work has a sense of vastness even while the Guan Mola traditional art, anonymous Nate Young, Detail, graphite on vellum small figures are situated intimately in the space, giving an awareness of a void and a fulfilled space at the same time-poetic and philosophical, meditative and approachable.

Looming over visitors from the Kavi Gupta Gallery space was the huge painting, Loretta (Ms. T) by AlfredConteh. In the forefront of American portraiture, this Georgia, USA native selects his subjects from his life encounters and tells the stories of the disparities that have been affecting their communities, and of the troubles that they have faced in the Southern US. His long ongoing series Two Fronts places his carefully observed subjects in simple environments that emphasize their identity. He often includes unusual elements such as battery acid, soil, melted plastic and rust, with deft skill, to emphasize their living conditions and the rough state of the environment that is their home.

The subject of this portrait is a woman with a reportedly sweet demeanor who chose to demonstrate fierceness, which is the topic of one negative stereotype of Black women.



Stacy Gillian Abe: Aunt Bito
acrylic and hand-embroidered details on canvas 150 x 200 cms

We realize that as the background of this painting seems to peel off, Loretta is in fact somehow merged into it. Slashed canvas was an effective feature of the painting by Cristina Camacho, Instituto de Vision Gallery. A top layer of canvas was painted on both sides and strategically cut and turned to reveal the bottom layer of canvas.

The effect is one of tactile richness and unexpected dimensions of both flat and high relief with a lively exchange of shape and color between them. Ceramic art was not in abundance at this exhibit, although some notable works were present. Such was the case with *Burnt Yams Barn II*, a large-scale wall installation by Nigerian artist Ozioma Onuzulike, with KO Gallery. Onuzulike has been tireless in his scholarly accomplishments with the prestigious Nsukka School in Southeastern Nigeria, and with his determination to use the metaphysical and mechanical nature of clay work (hammering, wedging, burning, cutting etc.) to communicate the oppressive socio-political and environmental issues, terrorism and climate change that are daily challenges for the people of his homeland. The work has a compelling

aesthetic appeal that draws one in to examine it further; to explore the texture, composition and evidence of human labor – and ultimately the sense of claustrophobia, damage and use that may also be attached to the associated humans.

The glossy ceramic sculptures of Bari Ziperstein at the Vielmetter Gallery exhibit were the first things you saw as you entered Expo from the east. This work was in high contrast to that of Onuzulike in that they are traditionally produced with high gloss glazes and bright colors. What these two clay artists have in common with each other is that both speak of their roots. Ziperstein focused her work on Brutalist architecture, family history, Soviet propaganda and the politics of aesthetics. Along with architectural-referencing sculptural objects were a series of heavily worked, squarish wall reliefs. All the objects incorporated vivid colors, texture, carved surfaces and active patterns that make them playful and full of joy despite a sometimes-oppressive subject.

A piercing gaze shines out from the paintings of Stacy Gillian Abe of Unit London Gallery. Figures depicted in the bluest black imaginable are a sensory



*Lily Kwong: Motherfire
55 Shou Sugi Ban posts, indigenous plants,
indeterminant size*

experience. The figures seem to be at rest, and aware of being viewed. Powerful emotions drift out gently from each figure and the gaze is frank and accepting. The subjects fill the canvas to a point where little background is necessary and the open space provides a cushion for the viewer to acknowledge their own reactions to this bold work.

Painterly and tactile, Mathew Eguavoen is a Lagos-based artist who explores issues of vulnerability, closeness and youth, gender and history.

Color here is acid sharp with strong contrast. Composition is key as he pulls the viewer in to investigate what he is telling them through these thoughtful and emotion-packed works at Badr El Jundi Gallery. Tony Fitzpatrick has a genius for detail and a love for the street culture of his hometown, Chicago, which is often the subject of his work. This print, *There is a Dog that Remembers the Stars and My Dad*, presented by Chicago Printmakers Collaborative, explores Chicago from a street level view. He takes the viewer through many minute details of his life; the stories he has lived, has heard and told. He collages not only the images, but also a variety of styles. We can see realism alongside surrealism and ordinary iconography mixed with a graphic novel sensibility. Each little symbol stands alone but eventually integrates into the thread of the narrative.

In the Special Exhibit section, *HOW ON EARTH* was a climate-focused exhibit meant to inspire the viewer, through the artwork, to take action and thereby generate hope for our planetary future.

Featured were acclaimed artists and activists Janet Biggs, Lily Kwong, Helina Metaferia and Jennifer Wen Ma. This exhibit space featured prime exam-



*Matthew Eguavoen: Do we have to decide now?
acrylic, oil paint, charcoal graphite pencil 130x100cms*

ples of art from each artist with the exception of the large installation of Jennifer Wen Ma, which greeted guests outside as they entered Art Expo.

These artists have been committed to environmental content in the projection of their artistic voices. The art exhibit was accompanied by several associated events including a panel discussion, The Chicago Dancemakers Forum performance and a pop-up Experimental Sound Studio performance. It was presented by two organizations:

the Natural Resource Defence Council, an international organization with over three million members that endeavors to protect the environment with legal, scientific and environmental specialists; and Art At A Time Like This, a non-profit organization that was born during COVID to work for dialogue and heightened understandings of different perspectives among global and local audiences.

Included is the art work of Janet Biggs, whose work is research based and immersive. Her works traverse the borders of science, art, culture and technology. Presented here is her 2018 video, *Weighing Life Without a Scale*, where three screens are filled with videos of distant and harrowing situations which enter into our consciousness. In making these videos, Biggs emersed herself with the individuals who lived in extreme and dangerous landscapes such as parts of Afghanistan, or with dangerous situations that required intense training and study. To continue her investigation of life in hostile environments she



*Jennifer Wen Ma, Turn of The Tide, paper and pigment,
38x10x8ft*

worked to become a member of crews at the US Mars Desert Research Station. Through her visually rich and episodic videos one can connect to challenges of life far from our usual imaginations.

Lily Kwong, of Los Angeles brought us a botanical installation, MOTHERFIRE, inspired by the largest California forest fire, the August Complex Fire. It is composed of fifty-five burned-out posts incorporating Shou Sugi Ban (an ancient Japanese architectural technique involving fire). Each charred post now provides a growth base for new indigenous plant life. This installation speaks not only of devastation, but also of the immense ability for forest systems to regenerate. This sculpture installation presents on a more cerebral level than the previous design work of Kwong.

Jennifer Wen Ma, Beijing and New York, greeted the public outside of the east entrance with her arresting installation, Turn of the Tide. Constructed of paper and designed to deteriorate in response to its direct exposure to the Lake Michigan environment, this piece speaks of the pollution of our waters and the growing threat of destruction and erosion due to climate-change induced sea level rise.

Lily Kwong, Motherfire, 55 Shou Sugi Ban posts, indigenous plants, indeterminant size Each of the collaged portraits of Helina Metaferia, New York, are composites of archives and dialogue with the subjects, all who are active in the cause that Metaferia presents through her collage photos. In Metaferia's Headdress 55 and Headdress 56, two women activists are crowned with an elaborate headdress comprised of many small images composed together,

each piece symbolizing some aspect of their cause. These four women, working in various venues, are united in their effort to bring environmental conservation and social conscience to the forefront with their artwork

One other Special Exhibit space deserve comment for exceptional work with youth through art. The Chicago Public School System (CPS) is the third largest in the country and so, in its vastness, many excellent programs go without proper recognition. CPS Lives is one such program that matches artists to a specific school for a year, awakening children to their creative selves and connecting them to art as a way to reach deeper thought and understanding. Ludwig Peres is one of the many resident artists who sought input and collaboration from students in the art-making process; in this case, 3-D photo art.

A person could have spent much more than a week of days at the 2023 Art

Expo and still not have taken in all that was on offer. It was an expansive view of what artists the world over have to offer, and one hopes this trend continues in future years.



London Photo Show

Gabrielle Bejani

For its 8th edition. From the 11 to the 14th of May 2023, Photo London opened its doors at Somerset House. The new director: Kamiar Maleki, previously Director of VOLTA Art Fairs in NYC and Basel, and Fair Director of Contemporary Istanbul, has over more than 20 years' experience in the field. He is replacing Michael Benson and Fariba Farshad who founded the Fair and ran it since its first edition.

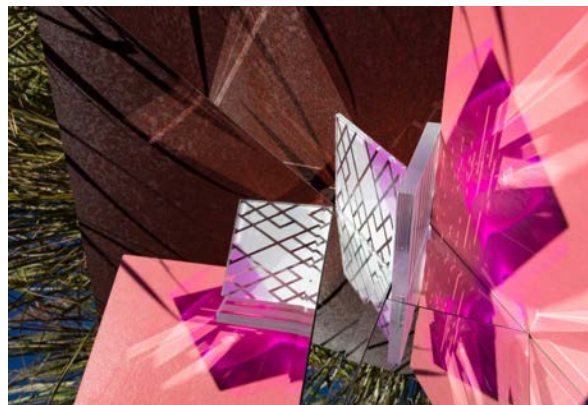
This year, the fair seemed to be traversed by a schizophrenic sentiment, torn between their effort to appeal for an art conscious public (which would further assert their legitimacy), and with the display choices of conservative galleries.

One of the celebrated goals of this edition was to reach a new level of internationalism. This year Photo London is showcasing 126 galleries from 56 different cities based across the world, something that I greatly appreciated while roaming from booth to booth. However, most of the galleries from the Global South are situated in more remote part of the fairs, which can be easily missed. I advise all visitors to venture to the second floor to discover galleries and artists which they may never have encountered before. I was delighted to visit galleries such as Blue Lotus gallery from Hong Kong and the Carlos Camano Foto gallery from Lima, where I discovered rich and complex photography.

However, disappointingly the fair is still dominated by very outdated Eurocentric and androcentric viewpoints. Many European galleries chose to showcase art that seemed out of touch with current artistic discourse. I was indeed surprised by the overall curating decisions at many booths.

One example is how a gallery from Amsterdam decided to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Pablo Picasso's passing by presenting a collection of photographs about his family, friends, and daily life. I find this ironic considering how recently his behaviour with his friends, lovers and his children has been criticised and denounced as abusive, which many claim puts his legacy into question. Picasso represents an old art world entangled in violent beliefs about the world and how to behave in it, an art world which many forward-thinking art professionals are working hard to put in the past.

One is also greeted by pictures of people from the Global South that can only be described as poverty porn and countless pictures of nude women contort-

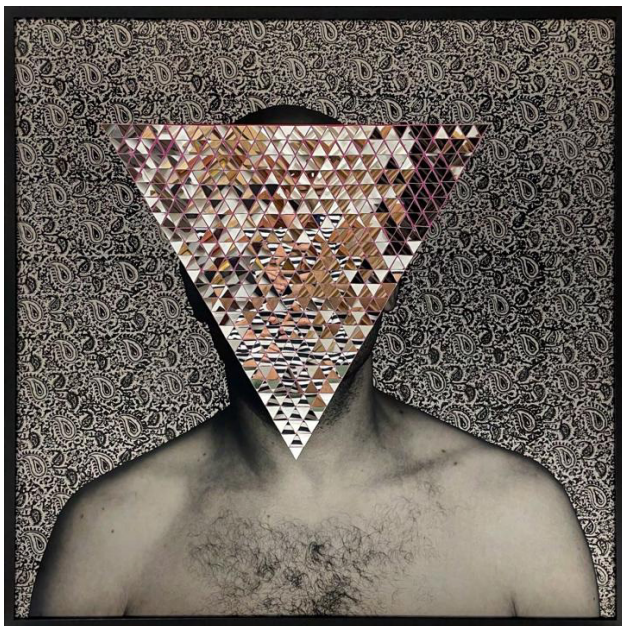


Extrapolate
Large scene 7859
Archival Pigment Print on Canson Canvas
92 x 122cms (2022)
edition of 5

ing their bodies in the most sexual manners. I believe this kind of art, while not being very interesting, appeals to these galleries' collector base. But surprisingly the public program seems to come from a completely different perspective.

One of the exhibitions in the program is: "Writing her own Script. Women Photographers from the Hyman Collection" 'Writing her own Script' celebrates many of the pioneering women photographers at work in Britain over the last 100 years. It charts a course from the 1930s to the present and provides an overview of photography in Britain that focuses on two strands: a humanistic documentary tradition and a more personal, performative, practice. The exhibition is curated by the Centre for British photography, a fresh new charity which had a notable positive impact on this year's fair. The charity supports photographers in Britain at all stages of their career while seeking to promote British photography to a wider audience. Alongside curating, the charity also holds a booth among the other galleries.

There is also a solo show of new work by this year's Master of Photography Martin Parr. The overview displays a certain quintessential Britishness which is appropriately celebrated in an art fair that is situated in the heart of the British art scene. One can admire his most recent pictures of British beaches which appropriately cater to his overall legacy. In a corridor can be found earlier work of the artist, black and white pictures from the fifties. It was very inter-



Inverted Pink Triangle
*Dye Sublimation print on raw metal hand cut mirror
 fragments
 plaster and acrylic paint
 95 x 95 x 5 cms (framed) 2022.*

esting to discover how Martin Parr used to work and delightful to observe that his subject matter remained the same; the British seaside but seen with an entirely different lens.

One of the highlights of the fair was the booth of Roya Khadjavi Projects and Nemazee fine art which displayed the work of six Iranian photographers: Ali Tahayori, Dariush Nehdaran, Farsad Labbauf, Maryam Palizgir, Mohammad Jahangir, Tahmineh Monzavi. Their practices are based on documentary engagements that intertwine social conscious and environmental works from the urban communities to the rural landscape. The artists challenge the taboos, related to ethnicity and sexual orientation as well as issues concerning the environment. They hope to shift the preconceptions and prejudices to social reconciliations. One of the artists, Maryam Palizgir won the fair's People's Choice Award which is chosen by the public from the 2023 Emerging Photographer of the Year shortlist.

This show felt rooted in real and personal sentiment rather than a strictly commercial outlook, something that comes through because of the particular relationships Roya Khadjavi holds with the artists she champions. She actively works to create spaces for Iranians artists allowing them to thrive in the western art landscape. I had the pleasure to interview Roya about this show and her curatorial outlook.



Public Toilet
*Inkjet Print on Archival Paper, Gouache Paint, Water,
 Body Fluid.. 27 x 18 cm, 2022, Unique.*

Gabrielle Bejani: My first question is, what does it mean for you to show Iranian artists here at Photo London?

Roya Khadjavi: It's very important for me to be part of Photo London, especially this year because of what's happening in Iran, and I think it's very important to bring awareness to the depth and the quality of the work that Iranian photographers make, and the variety of work and the different subject matter they produce. In this exhibition we are covering different things that are a little controversial, which is what's happening to land in Iran, what's happening to water, the lack of attention this regime has for all of these things and here specifically for the South of Iran. The recent work of TAHMINEH MONZAVI displayed here focuses on this matter. They are photographs of the the Dasht-e lut Which is a diluted desert, and the Baluchistan region, one of the regions of Iran which is in a lot of turmoil. There, a lot of demonstrations are happening, a lot of people are going to jail. A lot of people are arrested and killed. I wanted to bring awareness about all of this. How nice these people are and how deeply they're attached to their land. You may wonder why the Iranian government isn't taking care of them? Many of them don't even have identity cards because they are Sunnis and the majority of Iran is Shiites, that has created a sort of battle between the government and them. They think that by ignoring their needs, that these people will just disappear. I wanted to bring awareness to the beauty of this dramatic land and highlight that this is what you see when you come to Iran today.

Gabrielle Bejani: I've noticed that in the works selected there is a link between land, body, and identity. Was that a conscious curating choice?



Untitled no.204 / New York
(edition of 5) Archival Inkjet Print
48 x 33 cms, 2016 Edition no 1

Roya Khadjavi: Yes, exactly. That was a conscious choice because as I said, these are hard topics that the government doesn't want to really deal with. Land and water are issues, nature is kind of shrinking and disappearing. Regarding identity Here in our booth, we have the works by ALI TAHAYORI which is a queer artist. As a homosexual in Iran, he had to flee because he was found out in an underground party of gay men. somebody reported it to the police, and he was jailed. In his work you see an inverted triangle used as a sign of the defiance of the gay community, which is a reference to the persecution and mass murder of queers by the Nazi during World War two. And of course, he's also using this technique of mirror work, which is very much A traditional Iranian decorative art but at the same time you can see your reflections in the mirror. It's an invitation to look at oneself and to see how accepting one is of others that are different from them.

Gabrielle Bejani: Right. Something else I've noticed

is that a lot of the artists you're showing are part of the Diaspora, and I wanted to know what's your relationship to the diaspora in your curatorial practise.

Roya Khadjavi: I started my curatorial practice right when I went back to Iran after 30 years away. During this trip I discovered how vibrant and diverse the art scene of Iran was. I felt like the artists from Iran were very underrepresented. So, I made it my mission to challenge the underrepresentation of these Iranian artists who live in Iran. But you know. Soon, very soon, after I started my practise, I realised that there were so many Iranian artists who had to flee for various reasons and established themselves in the diaspora, they're everywhere. And I think our art show here at Photo London reflects that, I am showing artists that are living New York and artists that are in San Francisco, I have an artist from Iran and artists from Australia. It sort of tells you like how to spread out this community has become. Mostly not because of choice, they had to flee to be able to practise their art.

Gabrielle Bejani: one last question, can you tell me a little bit about, the curatorial process for this exhibition?

Roya Khadjavi: For this show, like for any of my curatorial project, I always think of a subject that is viable and relevant and then based on that theme I consult the artists that I work with and include their bodies of works that relate to the topic I'm interested in. That's what I did for this exhibition.



Claustrophobia -5545
Photo Collage, wood, bronze,
dried plant.
30 x 40 cms (2022) Unique



Biennales, Art Fairs, Oh My!

Nancy Nesvet

At the invitation of Art Basel to participate in the magazine sector and give a presentation about Art Lantern and the New Art Examiner, Daniel Nanavati, Nancy Nesvet, Elizabeth Ashe, Anna Gav and Isabella Chiadini attended the private and press days of Art Basel 2023 in Basel, Switzerland, coming away with some unique perspectives on the historical and current state of art fairs. Later, we attended the Venice Architectural Biennale 2023 which corroborated our belief that art fairs and biennales serve distinct purposes and serve vastly different purposes in the art world.

Art Basel, founded in 1970 when three Basel art gallerists, Ernst Beyeler, Trudi Bruckner and Balz Hilt came together to mutually present artwork and artists they represented in their city. Beginning as a typical art gallery environment, later adding the Art Unlimited Sector with its open plan environment in the 2000's Later, Conversations, where panelists presented aspects of collecting and exhibiting art, discussing the politics and economics of the art market, provided a global platform for gallerists, collectors, artists and the art public who attended Art Basel fairs. But was it a cultural incubator, as writers from Wallpaper magazine suggested in an article? Probably not, as Art Basel is a fair, with its gallerists intent on selling the work. Consequently, the work displayed appeals to the wealthy art market present, whether sensational, politically oriented, or merely top of the line artists' work.

At Art Basel Miami Beach 2022, art collective MSCHF displayed the real bank balances of wealthy users of ATM Leaderboard, at Perrotin's booth. Famously, Perrotin also displayed Maurizio Cattelan's 2019, *Comedian*, the banana taped to the wall, and later eaten by performance artist David Dautarna. The performance was named Hungry Artist. Having attended the December 2, 2011 Gate Theatre production of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* at DC's Shakespeare Theatre with John Hurt playing Krapp, Sophie Gilbert of Washingtonian Magazine noted the production expressed the loneliness of the human spirit! That production included a monologue by Krapp, speaking with a banana held like a microphone into a tape recorder, recounting his history as a failed artist.

The association of *Comedian* with Beckett's play was



Pablo Picasso: Homme assis et bélier (1967)
Pen and India Ink and ink wash on paper
49.5 x 65 cms. at Landau Fine Art, Montreal, Paris

only further implied when Dautarna ate the banana, making it a performance like that which undoubtedly inspired it. Amidst the chaos and breaking news of the banana mania, I sat with Mr. Landau at Montreal Gallery Landau Fine Art's booth at Art Basel Miami 2019, amidst a display of the finest art of the last century. He emphasized that people now buy art only for investment, not for the satisfaction of looking at a fine piece of visual culture (although he buys only art that he loves). Yet he was insistent that art must evolve, that other forms must emerge. I think, with a wink of his expert eye, he would acknowledge that this new form is indeed art, indicative of the culture that produced it. Unlike the Miro's Picasso's and Giacometti drawings displayed at the booth of Landau Fine Art, it is not sublime, not beautiful, not even original but perhaps, not ridiculous at all. But the uniqueness, the newness of these artistic jokes and sensationalism comprises the art at Art Basel that makes the newspapers and gives the buyer and artist prominence on the new art scene.

It is this lack of recognition by the Art Basel audience of inspiration for the projects, and insistence on their newness and stand as an artistic joke, a dada experience, which so opposes the intentional theses and inspiration for the important projects regularly displayed at the Venice Biennales. This underscores the history of fairs. Always





Firelei Báez: The Vast Ocean of all Possibilities
 Acrylic paint, plywood, polystyrene foam, moss and molded resin coral
 463 x 905 x 510.5 cms
 (Photo by reviewer)

commercial enterprises. Presently, there is an emphasis on including artists from long neglected countries and marginalized groups by galleries in the established artworld. I'm leery of the mass of galleries and museums showing the work of African and Asian artists because they have been neglected, without an understanding of the issues, feelings and unique histories presented by these artists, without imparting knowledge of cultures and histories. Frankly, it reeks of colonialism, whites giving a chance to blacks and browns to bring their culture for westerners to see, without understanding where their art is coming from, an understanding demanding histories not their own nor histories and cultures they have bothered to understand. Only now when it is economically advantageous, to sell the art are galleries showing indigenous art. It is neglecting, except for a few venues, the fact of successful galleries and museums in Africa and Asia showing their own, taking advantage, justifiably of this new lens trained

on them.

That is not the case with Biennales, where the lack of commercialism and prevalence of education and global community-building to present possible solutions to problems encompassing all of us has prevailed since the inception of the first Biennale in Venice. On April 30, 1895, a resolution of the Venice County Council on April 19, 1893, proposed the founding of a 'biennale national artistic exhibition' to celebrate the silver anniversary of King Umberto and Margherita of Savoy. The exhibition has grown from a further 1894 decree to adopt by invitation a section for foreign artists and to admit works by uninvited Italian artists, selected by jury to its 1907 biennale where national pavilions were constructed. Belgium, the first was followed in 1914 by pavilions of Hungary, Germany, Great Britain, France and Russia. In a nod to inclusion, as early as 1922, sculpture by African artists was exhibited with a historical archive of contemporary art established in 1928.



William Kentridge: Head (Man looking Left) (2017)
Stainless steel painted black
137 x 101 cms
(Photo by reviewer)

Curators of individual exhibits and the Curator of the Arsenale exhibits have used this lens well. I remember the 2019 Ghana exhibit at the Arsenale during the Venice Biennale d'Arte that year. The walls, by famed artist Anatsui looked made of gold, but that gold was in fact painted fanta caps, referring to the fanta addiction foisted on Ghanans by their British colonialist usurpers, and to the gold in the Ghanaian mines, wealth that was and is effectively stolen from this land and its people to advantage colonialist nations. I remember the Hegemony Museum and the Emancipating Opera where Chile's project offered *Altered Views*, a proposal for decolonization through a review of European history.

The cohesive thesis of the latest Architectura Biennale de Venezia 2023, one of the best I have seen, addressed the problems engendered by mining worldwide, especially in Africa, and the ramifications for the human race across the globe. It encompassed us all, brought us all together, provided possible solutions that required all of us to come together and work toward. It used technology, film, digital photography, not to show off new technology but rather

as a means to highlight the global crisis through contemporary means understandable and impactful on those who can work to effect change. Leslie Lokko, the Curator of the Venice Architectural Biennale this year is a Black woman architect from the African continent, a superlative choice based on her history as an architect but also her understanding of the unique characteristics of architecture and architectural history in Africa seen from the viewpoint of an African woman. Lokko has brought together creative minds who presented the problem and some creative approaches to begin to amend our world. One of those projects, essentially a peep show video in a cut out section of a concrete rectilinear column, forced me to look closely and solely. Another video, well above my head, at the entrance was an angry voice, necessary to introduce the solutions to devastation if we did not act. Yet there was a rhythm to the words, that kept me focused, that did not allow me to look away.

The 2022 Biennale d'Arte Venezia, postponed one year due to Covid, similarly had a timely and cohesive thesis. Curator Cecilia Alemani brought the whole world together to attempt an understanding



Mountain Pine Alphabet (Children's Forest Pavilion)
photo: Rasa Juškevičiūtė

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of how we are changing, as people, as animals, as a global living kingdom, with all of us victims, consequently asking, as Lesley Lokko does in 2023, how we can come together to avoid ultimate destruction and depletion of our planet's resources. It is this sharing of knowledge and creative approaches that is a hallmark of Biennales, particularly those in Venice. It is only that knowledge sharing that can save us together, and this is the value of the Biennales.

Creative solutions and global community building has become increasingly urgent, with wildfires in Canada polluting US air, with overflowing rivers in Europe stemming from Ice melt in Russia and far northern waters. For the 2024 Venice Biennale d'Arte, French-Caribbean poet and visual artist Julien Creuzet will present sculpture and performance incorporating immersive narratives informed by French, Indian and European culture in France's pavilion. In the UK pavilion in 2024, Josh Akomfrah will show art films and video installations addressing colonialism, racial injustice, migration and the climate crisis.

My favorite exhibit at this year's Biennale de Archi-

ice was presented in a space off the separate space on the street leading up to the Arsenale. The Lithuanian pavilion's 'Children's Forest Pavilion' was a playscape where children interacted with tree branches and each other to construct shapes and forms to play with and find uses for. Focusing on the ecosystem of the forest, the exhibit went on to highlight the woodlands of Finland and Lithuania as negotiated spaces where all must treat the forest responsibly for it to thrive. What better way is there to insure responsibility for the future of our world and the natural environment than to engage children?

Biennales are looking at the question and at artists who are finding creative questions, if not solutions, to pose. Perhaps, it is time not to drag an iceberg into the Thames, as Olafur Eliasson did years ago, to show climate change and its ramifications as the iceberg melts, but to ask artists and children and scientists to come together to find solutions. Artists are the most creative people on earth. Their creativity and motivation know no bounds; their camaraderie and cooperation allow them to come together as artists always have, not only to warn, but to act. Science

and art must come together calling on all the citizens of the earth to act and act quickly lest we destroy all.

More than 300 Biennales continue to address the important problems faced by humans worldwide including the Islamic Arts Biennale; Desert X, the Liverpool Biennale; the Helsinki and Sao Paulo Biennale; the Whitney Biennial (held since 1932), the Glasgow Biennale, the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, held since 1996 and funded by the Germany Government through the Federal Culture Foundation, the European Nomadic Biennial, which changes location every two years, the Rotterdam Ljubljana, San Sebastian, Palermo, Marseille and St. Petersburg Biennale. New talent, and artistic talent of longstanding is featured as artists including Dali,

Jackson Pollack, Rene Magritte, Sigmar Polke and William Kentridge, from nations worldwide were featured at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh. This worldwide effort to keep the arts alive and relevant to the world situation is thriving in the Biennales without any commercial pressure to sell, and that is important for the art world and for artists recognizing the impact their questioning and debating has for the world at large, and for all of us. May the Biennales live on and thrive in this complicated, frightful world we all live in, showing the power of art and artists to create a better world.



*Kaspar Müller : 8 Figuren (2023)
Part of Parcours - the public art section of Art Basel*



NYC Fairs: Frieze, Volta, 1-54 and Future Fair

Mark Bloch

After it was forced to cancel its 2020 manifestation and issue full refunds, Frieze New York 2021 reduced itself by two-thirds and moved to The Shed, the gimmicky building in Hudson Yards, leaving behind its beloved Randall's Island tent for the first time since its tumescent 2012 maiden voyage.

With May's art week expanding into what felt like a month, with the Independent, TEFAF, and Future Fair holding court seven days early, 68 international galleries set up shop at Frieze and its still-formidable, but reduced, four-story Shed location.

Conceptual artist Jessica Vaughn brought a giant dose of mail art to the entrance of Frieze as the recipient of the first Artadia Prize, a new special commission by the non-profit that celebrated her three-year conceptual exploration of the United States Postal Service (USPS). Monumental digital latex in-jet on linen and canvas show enlarged marks, stamps and USPS code in *The Internet of Things* (2020-23), remnants of pieces intentionally mis-mailed to US commerce-affiliated, "violence or leisure sites – from Silicon Valley to the gated Florida community where Trayvon Martin was killed in 2012 – so that the envelopes would return to sender. Vaughn sees a 'revisioning of the traditions of landscape painting' in her printed images of the geometrically chopped missives while Artadia's executive director cited 'the institutional politics of labour—in this case, the United States Postal Service.' The piece was beautiful in its hugeness that delivered visually for those of us who love the look of mail.

Inside, Frieze's Focus section for younger galleries and the more established galleries' solo presentations blended right into fair fatigue from the git-go, save for one glossy, glitzy Nan Goldin spotlight at Gagosian that, for me, was a commercial for *All The Beauty and All the Bloodshed*, the Laura Pointras film by Neon and Participant that delves into Sackler-centric power relations in the art world.

Speaking of glam-gore hybrids, from its prominent locale, the crowd-pleasing Artist Plate Project to benefit the Coalition for the Homeless boasted that every \$250 plate would feed 100 hungry people. In this, their third annual manifestation, snappy images on plates by Alice Neel, Marilyn



Scott Lyall: Talents (2023)
82 x 58 x 2 ins

Minter, Louise Bourgeois, Murakami, Peter Beard, KAWS, Maurizio Cattelan and many others, about 100 in all, mostly sold and provided the closest thing to a spectacle under the fourth floor lounge where branding, art and consumerism similarly co-min-gled but without do-gooderism.

But for art that simply conveyed a traditional feast for the eyes, at Mendes Wood (Sao Paulo, Brussels, New York) I enjoyed Paulo Nimer Pjota's acrylic tem-pura and oil on canvas. Four vessel images that looked collaged-on descended vertically like The Shed escalators against a warm yellow field sur-rounded by little bits of color and random 3-D bits. David Kordansky Gallery (LA, New York) featured eye-popping digital imagery by Lauren Halsey who mashes up dozens of computer-generated images inspired by funky Afrofuturism. Halsey, an LA artist, transformed the rooftop of the Metropolitan Museum across town. Finally, Raymond Saunders' tall,



Louise Nevelson: Untitled (c.1973)
painted black wood construction
94" x 36" x 16 3/4"

thin mixed media on panel piece at New York's Andrew Kreps was another random-looking composition executed pleasingly – some ducks, some postcards, some musical scores and paint, particularly circles of black and gold suggesting sunflowers while other flowers positioned like bullet holes brought a central dart board-mandala to life.

For the still-visual but more conceptually minded, Scott Lyall's work at Miguel Abreu Gallery, called *Talents*, offer several examples of two compressed planes of glass creating soft mirrored surfaces. The back sheet is a mirror; the front pane is covered in gel medium and nanoparticles of gold applied by the artist then printed on the inside with colored pixels. They constitute variegated monochromatic surfaces which brings to my mind the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt. To the artist they are reminiscent of golden backgrounds by Cimabue. Lyall, known to collaborate with optical physicists to create his sublime works, showed with Abreu five times previously Sprüth Magers and Karma International (both Swiss) jointly presented Zurich-based Pamela Rosenkranz whose works uniquely explore materi-

als. Her works *Anamazon* (Amasses) and *Express Nothing* (Tank) are 'acrylic paint on emergency blanke' and 'medium and pigments on mirror,' respectively. Her day-glo NYC now-iconic Old Tree, adorns the High Line presently over the intersection of 10th Avenue and 30th Street. The man-made 25 feet tall sculpture, is an electric pink and red system of branched human organs, blood vessels, and tissue, on view through Fall 2024, the third incarnation of the Plinth commission, which changes every 18 months.

Esther Schipper (Berlin, Seoul, Paris) showed AA Bronson's 2015 *White Flag #1* made of Rabbit skin glue, Champagne chalk, and raw honey on wool, cotton and metal grommet on linen. Bronson was part of the Canadian collective General Idea, whose *Polaroids* (*Sex and Responsibility*), is a set of nine 1976-78 Chromogenic Polaroids of skulls, Adolf Hitler, four of the General Idea members posing for snapshots amidst other imagery.

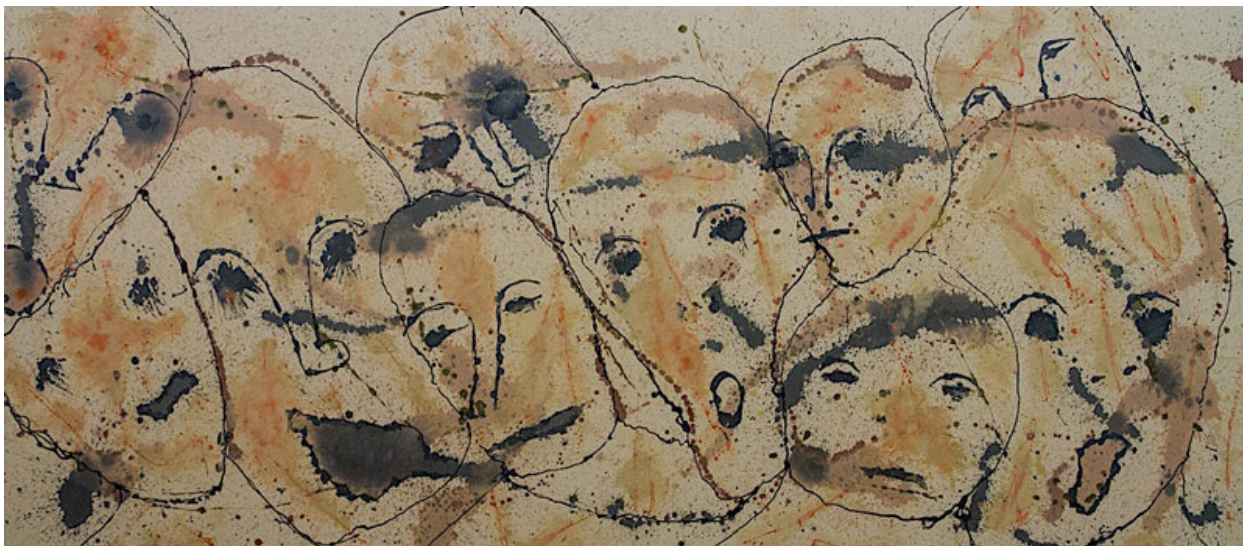
The Berlin-based Italian Rosa Barba's *Mending Clear Positions*, 2022 also animated Schipper's booth. Made of steel, glass, motor, 35 mm film, and aluminum, Barba often explores cinematic subjects. Here, sections of celluloid thread themselves onto seven revolving spools.

Finally, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery floated 1973, an exquisite exhibition featuring small works by a potent roster of female artists including Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), and ten others.

Fifty years ago, January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision landed with second-wave feminism at a peak. Not every piece in this presentation is overtly political, yet a subtext of matriarchal thought and struggle is perceptible in each work, explicating the mindset of 1973 life and art.

Powerful alchemical transformative works by Hannelore Baron (1926–1987) included No. 27, a mixed media collage; an assemblage box, SB-2, in wood glass ink paint, white pencil, metal wire and paper and two more boxes around the corner, one textual, enigmatic and impenetrable of wood, metal, nails and the other tall, in glass, wrapped in wire. Each looked delicate but conveyed strength. A magical glass and wood construction by the late Mary Bauermeister (1934–2023), spilled onto the wall above and below and back into this year near one of her timeless stone and sand works adhered to particle board. Lee Bontecou's (1931–2022), b&w graphite and gesso on paper countered Jay DeFeo's (1929–1989), *Untitled* black and white images—photo collages on black paperboard—including four surreal torso forms.

Nancy Grossman (b.1940) showed two drawings of



*Johan Wahlstrom: Stupid White Men.
Urethane, color pigments on canvas, 40 x 90 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Georges Bergès Gallery.*

faces made out of guns and a powerful zippered fetish sculpture made from black wood, paint, epoxy and a cast aluminum head in leather and metal hardware. Betye Saar (b.1926) made Adori, a bewildering boxed mixed media religious icon gathering found objects, flowers, halos, photographic images and a small frame containing a Madonna and child as centerpiece, flanked by plastic lobster utensils. Lastly, above that was Lenore Tawney's (1907–2007) mixed media collage with various papers, feathers, quills, thread, watercolor and ink on paper, a complicated mandala-chart-diagram invoking gods on horseback, perhaps an owl and Saturn. Bravo Michael Rosenfeld for the stellar cultural time capsule.

The Volta Art Fair, a Basel-born platform for younger galleries, started in 2005 and debuted in New York in 2008. Fifty convivial galleries showed up at the Metropolitan Pavilion this year.

FORMah, or the FORM Art House for emerging and mid-career female/identifying artists opened its Lower East Side spot a year ago. The owner, Maryana Kaliner, migrated from Tel Aviv, where her artist Noga Yudkovik-Etzioni, whose "disguis" works on paper, which use hybrid materials and fit inside a suitcase, currently lives and works after growing up in a Kibbutz. Her work, Chellis Baird's layered textures and Prema Murthy's smallish oils on canvas in either black or white, each highlighted FORMah's mission in stark monochromes.

I spoke with Kaliner and her fourth artist, colorist Rachel Rubenstein (b. 1985) who grew up in Southern California's idyllic Malibu which she conveyed has brought her to some dark places that emerge fur-

tively and beneath surfaces. A burgundy image conveyed the difficulty of a break-up. Elsewhere, vertical bands of color depicted angst and family-based strife. Rubenstein's transformative melding of abstraction, color field and painted strips of canvas, ripped and pulled apart, create rough, textured expressions similar to 20th Century *décollage*, but more delicate and controlled as the tearing does battle with smoothness and consistency.

Laurent Marthaler Contemporary of Montreux, Switzerland showed another LA-based artist, the self-taught Daniel Allen Cohen, who began in 2015, *This is Addictive*, a 'periodic element' format with supportive consumer information labels reminiscent of Damien Hirst's prescription drug explorations. Each of Cohen's objects of desire contain identifying letters, facts, a number and a 3D object, fetishizations of entrepreneurship, jewelry, luxury, cocktails, cigars and fashion.

'Luxury' is accompanied by caviar, for instance while "Entrepreneur" sports a copy of Napoleon Hill's book *Think and Grow Rich*.

I always enjoy the work of the veteran painter Johann Wahlstrom, currently showing monochromatic experiments with color and light with the Wadström/Tönnheim Gallery from Marbella/Spain & Malmö/Sweden. By building up the surfaces of his works in a slow moving process, he is also able to employ other investigations as they dry. The results are like peering into multiple cellophane worlds behind top transparent layers that unleash whimsical cartoony images lurking just below the surface that pivot in visibility as the light changes. What was demonstrated here, and in snapshots, is that, for col-



Zavier Ellis: Sites of Conflict
Acrylic, emulsion, spray paint, wax crayon, collage on
birch ply
23 3/5 × 18 9/10 in | 60 × 48 cm

lectors, sunlight brings out elements that other environments might not. Wahlstrom knows where he wants to go in this project and is embracing his process to get there. Matias Di Carlo's Aluminum sculptures and Ellen Frances' dance performance also brought the space to life.

Three performative works by Maria Palacios from the Mexico City based CAM Galeria created a mysterious allure. A drum with a thin piece of wood instead of a drumhead was positioned under a pair of drum sticks with large pointy thorns, making it hard to imagine how to hold and use the instrument, accompanied by two large photos: the artist bound in paper, cardboard, plastic bags and magnetic tape with an arm and foot barely exposed and a black and white profile with only her legs exposed, with the artist engulfed in air-filled packing materials. Blond Contemporary showed Gary Komarin and then Tafadzwa Masudi (b.1988) who moved from Zimbabwe to Cape Town turning himself into a hopeful stranger in a foreign land. Projecting optimism, Masudi's explosive palette also uses day-glo, depicting black males in benign, everyday poses positioned within fantastic balloon- and pattern-filled backgrounds.

Lastly, Blond's Xavier Ellis' rhizomatic *Sites of Conflict* series utilize deconstructed flags and checkerboards as staging grounds for prognosticative conflict. Ellis oscillates between the cerebral and the physical, mapping societal codes onto the painterly by collaging personal mythology over multiple canvasses conveying messages as archetypal street signs or graffiti.

He depicts Iran's protests against the laws prohibiting removal of the veil or hijab; Jewish populations in Israel marching against right-wing rule; and the 1789 Bastille juxtaposed against May 1968 and present day Paris. Delacroix and Goya portrayals intermingle with JFK, Nazis, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, and Michelangelo's Moses. These small rough hewn, layered works look as if they, themselves, had been tossed in the street, whipped by chains and then lovingly restored.

1-54

I headed to W. 127th Street in West Harlem to the 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair near St. Nicholas Avenue in the Manhattanville Factory District. I found it refreshing and inspiring for uncomplicated, old fashioned aesthetic reasons – just plain beauty. Dedicated to the African diaspora, the wares of the 26 galleries from Lagos, Ivory Coast, Dakar, Brussels, Paris and local venues felt daring, revitalizing and renewing.

Powerful photography by Malick Welli from Senegal drew me to Galerie Atiss Dakar's booth. Then another artist, Ousmane Bâ, did himself, Atiss Dakar and 1-54 a favor by being physically present to discuss his work. He creates colorful silhouettes of humanoid figures (and some animals) on wood panels using collage, sumi ink, and Japanese pigment. But Bâ's work came to life for me when I realized he adheres not found images but an array of delicate papers he creates himself including Japanese washi. Bâ was born and raised in Strasbourg, France on the German border. After using his left brain in the business world, he moved to Japan in 2017, showing collage, painting and digital works in Japanese galleries.

Another young artist visiting from abroad was Rufai Zakari via Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (London, West Palm Beach) who creates art by recycling packaging and other found materials by heating smooth colorful sheets that then literally are sewn and weaved together using helpers from his village to create stark images like a local woman holding her cell phone that became a transformative icon for the creators then for viewers. Close examination revealed product packaging residue being effectively



Ousmane Bâ: La Victoire de Samothrace ou l'Envolée (2021)

Paper, Sumi, Japanese pigment on washi, (Japanese paper), 100 x 70 cms

Courtesy of Galerie Atiss Dakar.

utilized to counter consumerism, environmental pollution, industrialization and exploited labor. Zakari (b.1990) lives in Accra, Ghana and his home town, Bawku, directly taking on Ghanian life with his literal "It takes a village" approach to user-friendly 2D constructions.

Mehari Sequar Gallery from Washington DC focuses on women-identified artists of the diaspora, but they ventured into their first-ever art fair not only with silhouetted imagery by Jamilla Okubo, an interdisciplinary artist exploring the intricacies of her American, Kenyan, and Trinidadian identity but also Werllayne Nunes, a self-taught painter who left Brazil to study medicine, but switching to portraying marginalized people, particularly children, highlighting race and socioeconomic status by creating charming portraits of empowerment of gorgeous faces re-contextualized against vibrant colorful backgrounds.

Finally, at this fair with too many worthy presentations to cover, let me mention Angèle Etoundi Essamba, born in Cameroon in 1962, who lives and works in Amsterdam with her thirty years of striking humanist photography of women, here engulfed in

sculptural headdresses. Galerie Carole Kvanevski in Paris shows both emerging and established artists like Essamba whose imaginative headshots were a highlight.

Now in its fourth consecutive year, 1-54 originated in 2013 in Marrakech by founder Touria El-Glaoui

Future Fair

Future Fair launched in 2020, making it perhaps the youngest of the fairs. With a title like that, I found it a bit unfortunate that there was nothing remotely futuristic. Nevertheless their return to Chelsea Industrial, an interesting building on 28th Street for their third edition allowed 50 local, national, and international exhibitors to share what they do.

The Bahnhof Gallery is nomadic, varying its locale according to need and currently based in Brooklyn. It was founded by Ekaterina Soriano, born in 1986 in Saint Petersburg but who grew up in the Siberian town of Omsk. An interdisciplinary artist she showed, Sabrina Haertig Gonzalez, is New York-based, receiving her BFA from Cornell last year and pursuing 'absurd phenomena within the commercial economy.' Her 2021 work Patronato Real Steel, made of silicone cast-chicken skins, resin cast double-jointed hands, and chain was an eerie sculptural



Tafadzwa Tega: Man with the hat (ca. 2020)

Acrylic on canvas

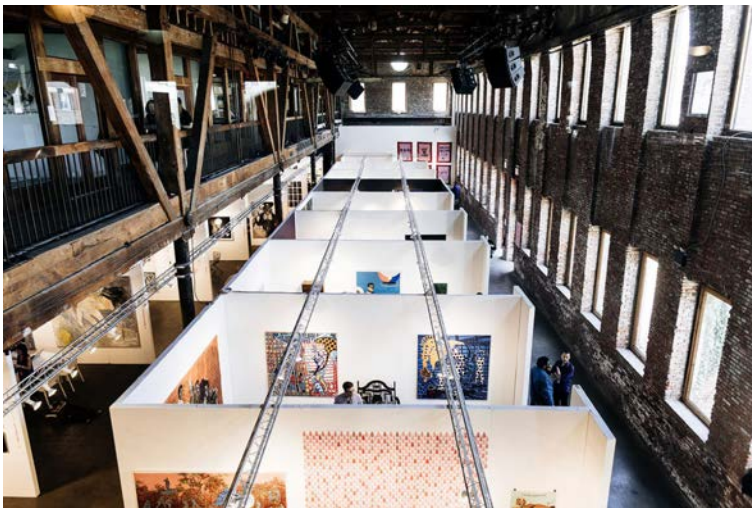
80 x 100 x 3 cms

structure of a figure stripped down to a few essentials and emanating foreboding darkness. The title refers to the Spanish colonial empire and the resulting tangle of trade, politics, and religion. Another work, conflating luggage and confinement was a see-through book bag from a larger work *S.1200 -- 99th Congress*, 2020, made of expanded sheet metal and steel rod, equal parts familiar, amusing, absurd and menacing, not in that order. It refers to the 1986 Immigration Reform Act passed by Reagan, essentially criminalizing migration.

Martin Art Projects, founded in 2020 in Cape Town and dedicated to African artists showed a new body of canvas works by Tafadzwa Tega that celebrate a spiritual richness while tackling migration, displacement and legacy. The artist depicts ex-pat Zimbabweans who become immigrants in South Africa like him, using bold, vibrant color including yet more masterful use of day-glo which seems to be a popular South African tool powerfully used this year. Keep an eye out for that and Tega's portraits.

While competent and living up to their goal of providing access, with so much competition in town, I found those two outstanding exhibitors at the Future Fair the exception not the rule.

Thankfully, Manhattan in May, despite widening out chronologically, was a somewhat sober affair, still exhausting, but perhaps a relief for an art-industrial complex weary of every discussion descending into a game of Bobbing for Earth Shattering Importance and/or another deadening treatise on auction prices. After three numbing COVID years, the masks-off culturati seemed hungry for something that just might make a little sense for a change. Regarding the work itself, another season of politically correct worshipping at the long-neglected altars of women and POC artists remains contrived yet good for the soul, opening things up aesthetically and refreshingly in ways that the "same old" can not. Sure, it is a mere fringe benefit, but a welcome one that could usher in a more mature phase for the Art Fair Division of our world's non-stop Impress-a-thon.

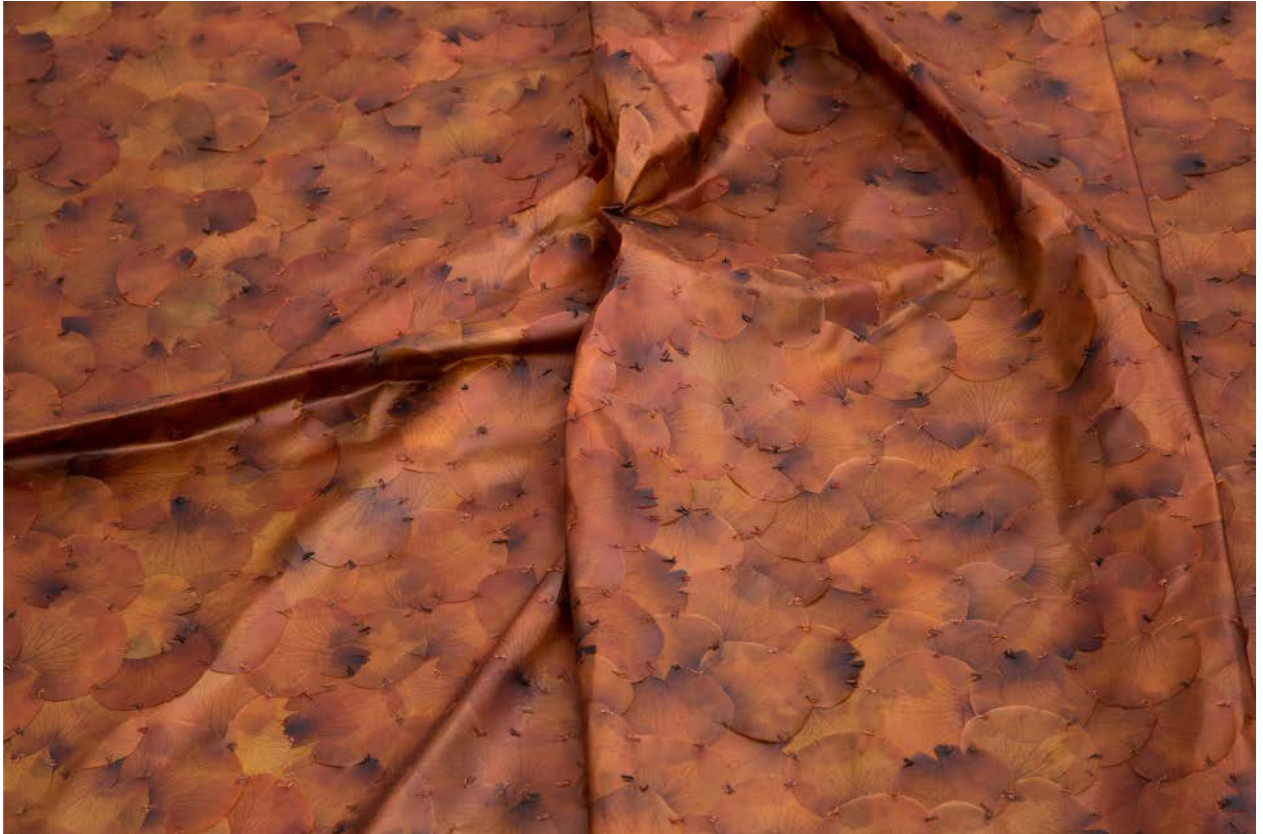


Top Left: 1-54, top right Future Fair,
Bottom left Frieze, bottom right Volta

Injustice Without Resolution:

DORIS SALCEDO, AT THE FONDATION BEYELER

Elizabeth Ashe



Doris Salcedo
Rose petals and Thread (detail)
1333.5 x 650 cm

Doris Salcedo's exhibit at the Fondation Beyeler is more than a testament to her career, more than a triumph. In the span of eight rooms, she brings the viewer into her sculpture installations with an incredible eye to texture, absent body, and material. Salcedo's ability to indicate the body, with or without naming the testimony, is unequalled. She has distilled it all into "a material presence that evokes the unnamed victims of oppression and civil conflict. {...} over the last decade, she has both challenged the temporal limits of materials and the definition of sculpture and the object" (exhibition catalogue, pg. 15). The exhibition is advertised right at the onset to Art Basel's info kiosk prior to arriving at Messeplatz, and truly, is the best thing during Art Basel without even being a part of the art fair.

Room 1, "Untitled," has a row of 17 rods, pierced

through the breasts of ten stacks of plaster-imbedded shirts. Plaster and white button shirts meld, and the stack turns each death as the same as the other. The deaths are old; blood has been bleached out as if the stacks were once painted marble. The sameness, of turning stacks of white button-shirts into masses of fabric and plaster, turns them into an architecture of death, like cemetery stones. They all had two things in common, they were plantation workers, and they all died. The varied stacks refer to varied 'official' death count records. The plaster gets to me as a sculpture and a building material. Home construction in Central and South America intentionally leaves rebar exposed. They do this out of optimism for the future, leaving the rebar ready to expand the home later. Depending on the country, it also means the property taxes are reduced if the building re-



Doris Salcedo: Palimpsest

mains “unfinished.” The plaster gives a weight to these lives. They were here, they knew the same spaces, had the same experiences, such that knowing their names wouldn’t make them any less gone to the viewer. Also in the room are four metal bed frames on the floor and two posed upright against walls, angled slightly-off like a body just leaning there. The ones against the wall, have mummified, wrapped shirts, and all the frames are wrapped tight in animal tissues. This wrapping is like a wound dressing, and I love the tightness, the sureness that wrapping the bed/body would heal the wounds. And the choice of animal tissues - a skin-for-skin healing, is more visceral than any cloth bandage. By wrapping the bed as a substitute for the body - a piece of furniture meant for bodies to rest, to heal from injuries - gives the metal bed frames a heightened importance. They are considered worthy of sharing the care they provide.

Room 2 smells of roses. Indeed, “A Flor de Peil II,” is a giant shroud of sewn rose petals. They have aged, but still hold the red color. It folds like a pinched and heavy sheet, and gives me the sense of bare skin. The petals are stitched together. These sutures heal the wounds of an ephemeral surface. The expansive size is enveloping, but it doesn’t cover any bodies or sculptures. We treat our skin with rose-scented lotions, drink rose tea, have our favorite colors and memories where roses are central figures. Roses are part of burial bouquets, as well as marriage beds. They are symbolic to so very many rituals and cultures. From the catalogue, the work is a “flower offering to a nurse who was kidnapped and tortured; it was the funerary ritual she was denied.” The monumental scale shows how much impact one life can have.

Room 3, “Plegaria Munda,” is full of wood tables, stacked to sandwich compressed soil between table-

tops, and grass grows through the underside of the top table. The grass’s determination to grow, is stunning. There are 53 pairs in a more pedestrian placement, like trees in a forest for the viewer to engage and walk around. Some slump, with uneven soil. These tables are not uniform. Yes, they are all simple, and some legs are shorter and they are old, they have lived generations of a family. The title means ‘mute prayer,’ is so rooted at a kitchen table. We pray out-loud or silently, while we eat. The two are eternally paired; eating and elevated, hopeful conversation. The grass is such an elegant touch, a sign of determined growth and bringing tender life back to domestic furniture.

Room 4, “Atrabiliarios,” brings animal tissue back as a surface, but now, as a box or screen like a screen of formaldehyde. Shoes trace the room, set into cubbies cut into the walls and then sutured into the walls with this yellowed skin membrane flat against the wall. I love how easily Salcedo uses sutures in her work; it keeps the body forefront healing wounds. Sutures secure a barrier. The shoes couple in pairs, or singly, from ballet to child to adult styles, and so many of them are leather. Behind the membrane they look like daguerreotype portraits or relics. Shoes are one of the harder things to be rid of, as stand-ins for a body and a story. They are an odd intimacy, a requirement for life that we put on and wear out. The cubbies are at varied heights, but never at the eye-height — making the viewer step back and acknowledge several, or lean down like when engaging with a child. Shoe boxes are stacked in the far corner. They are made of animal tissue as well, and you can see the veins, and the boxes have thick, jagged suture lines. As boxes, I’m also reminded of the two chambers of a heart beating.

Room 5, “Untitled,” holds a chapter of Salcedo’s work that so many are familiar with. Wood armoires, bed

frames, tables, chairs, are built into and away from each other. These pieces of furniture are lived-with heirlooms, define spaces and domesticity, and are morphed in such a way that they share memories with one another. They are also rendered unusable, as the furniture pieces they once were. Our needs and ability to keep furniture, changes. War and genocide, means abandoned furniture. The first piece in the room sets the mood - a glass-doors armoire, the shelves filled-in with concrete floated with children's clothes. Nothing else is left of them in this tomb; they cannot be folded and remolded fondly, they cannot be passed to the next generation. When you look close at these pieces, the joining seams and gaps are filled-in with concrete. Not in a mess like a rushed wall, but smoothed, like caulking. I appreciate the subtlety and added care needed to smooth the grey lines, making the sculpture even more architectural.

Room 6, is spare. "Disremembered" is a breather with absent bodies. Shrouds of air-thin blouses are stitched in hundreds of gashes. Ghosts - both as garment and altered, bent, sharpened and burned needles. Sewing needles and silk thread are the same patina, and each garment is pinned to the wall with needles. The cut thread is exposed where the fabric moves, like a needle leaving the skin. Can we heal, from all our cuts as plentiful as hair? How can healing become an armor? How can something ephemeral and personal, have shape? The attention to detail is just astounding. The works developed after Salcedo interviewed mothers in Chicago who lost their only child to gun violence. The loss doesn't end, it becomes who they are, what they wear. Mothers say their child's name constantly, even on shirts, as a way to mourn and remember.

Room 7 is "Palimpsest," raised off the ground, with a hydro system underneath and pressed marble, sand, and resin pavers. In the midline of each paver, are names written as slight indentations over each other, and fed by tiny pinhole spouts of water. The legibility of the names slowly fill and shrink away on the surface, like a tide on the shore. The sand weeps the names. Naming leads to acknowledgement, which society at large ignores. Salcedo is paying tribute to the 25,000 refugees and migrants in the last twenty years who have tried to cross the sea to Europe, but drowned. These are some of their names. The names surface as easy as breathing, and the tension of the water is a beautiful thing. The environmental simplicity of this room, the wall-to-wall takeover of the pavers, breaks the fourth wall. The audience has to walk on these pavers; there is no choice. I love this invitation and confrontation, and watching the dif-

ference between engaged and disengaged viewers. The good ones, linger and get close, walk on several, slowly. The others pass through in staccato steps, from entrance to exit in under a minute, which is a shame to just walk past the largest installation room. It reminds me of the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" in Berlin — intentional, architectural, refined, and it must be walked through to understand the weight of so many names (seen or left out). Room 8, "Unland: the orphan's tunic," holds three conjoined tables, each made of two parts. The first is fully-wrapped in fine silk cloth. The cloth is pressed into the contours and deep gouges in the wood, and is stitched-through with hair. A metal doll's bed is flipped on its side and sewn-in under the fabric. I wonder — which is the comforter, table to table, or cloth to table? The second table is full of all of the cuts, all the generational use. It's like a family portrait. The third table is again stitched, but only on one side. The fabric is once again stitched through with hair, cutting into the wood, crossing from one table to the next. The fabric is inspired from the last garment a little girl received from her mother, and wearing it daily was the last way she could remember her. Memory is as central as a kitchen table. We live around them, gather at them, talk and eat and show our love, at the kitchen table.

You can find her artist talk about the exhibit on the Fondation Beyeler's website, in addition to a seven minute podcast, "Nah Dran (close)", where Basel-based journalist Naomi Gregoris talks with people involved in initiatives about supporting refugees.

Salcedo's sculpture installations immediately change the atmosphere in the room. It is perfect. They shoulder the *memento mori*, the keepsake, the desire to heal and remember and take up space. I am touched and inspired by how Salcedo makes death, beautiful. Using domestic and personal objects brings to the forefront, that there is commonality even if you don't know an individual's story. She leaves room for the pieces to live, and acknowledges that there are more stories and histories; she doesn't close the metaphorical door on a project. Leaving them open, as in the stacked shirts with room still on the rebar, truly holds onto heightened tensions. Salcedo does not shy away from research, massacres, and delving into personal accounts of the commonality of grief. Grief builds up on her surfaces, creates and compartmentalizes into pieces the viewer can hold onto.

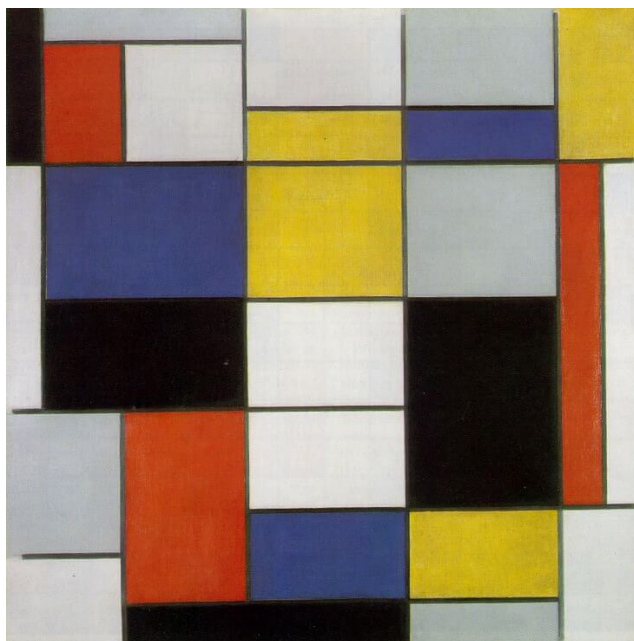
*Dora Salcedo, at the Fondation Beyeler
May 21 - September 7, 2023*



*Doris Salcedo: Untitled
Wood and Concrete*

A Spirited View of the World

Nancy Nesvet



Piet Mondrian: Composition II (1920)

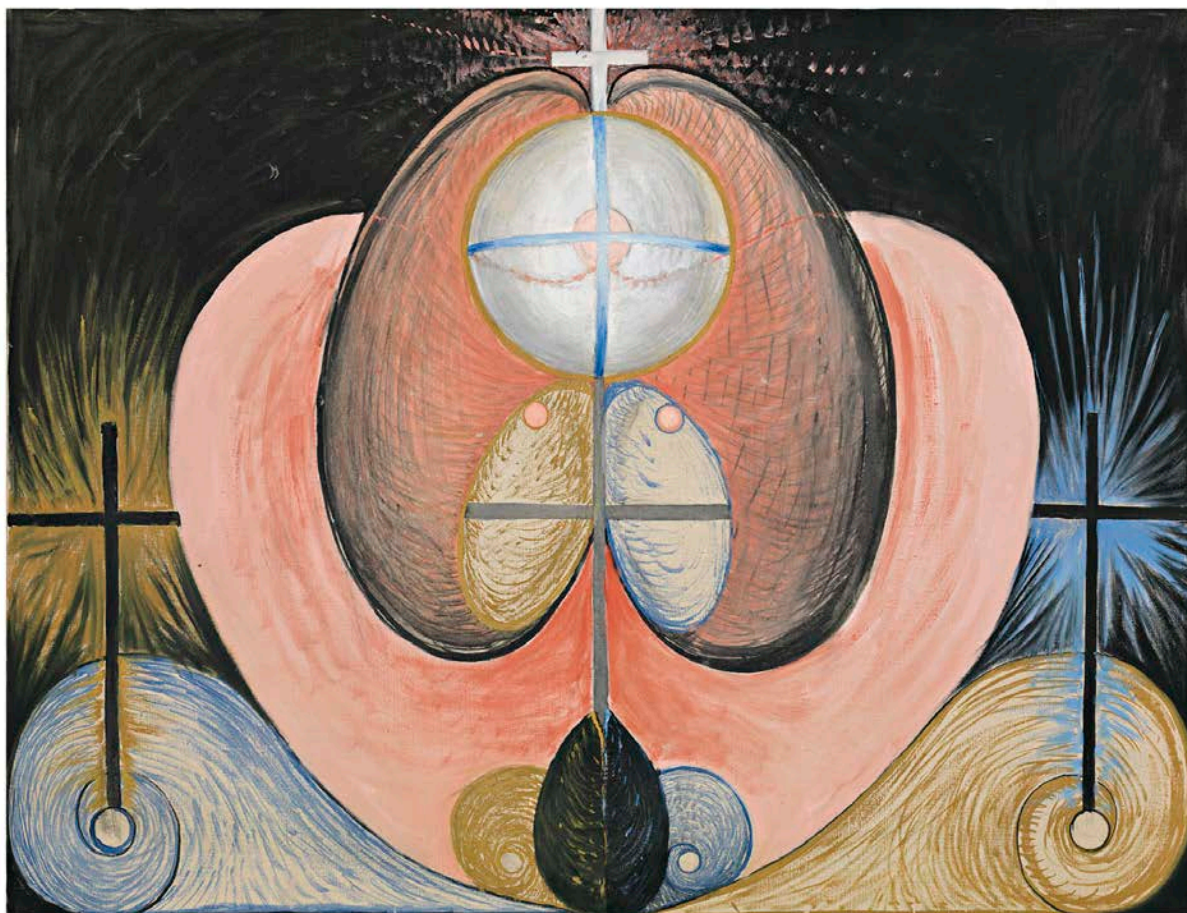
The exhibition of Hilma af Klint and Mondrian pairs two artists who began as botanical and landscape painters but delved into abstractions based on combining spirituality with natural beauty. For Hilma af Klint, her tall architectural paintings included symbols of the folklore and folk patterns of her native Sweden, while Piet Mondrian's vastly simplified work was based on successions of colors with which he claimed to spiritually connect -- going off the canvas, like the water in the Netherlands, and the never-ending latitude-longitude lines circling the earth. While I saw the lone flower, centered, reaching up to the sky in af Klint's paintings, Mondrian's early paintings were much more about landscape, horizontally oriented, with areas of color denoting natural landscape features. Mondrian's, even at this point, were divided by hard-edged lines, whereas af Klint's paintings featured curves and circles, predetermining her later work. However, those connections, with their commitments to theosophical principles were the only valid juxtapositions I saw in their work and wondered at the intention to pair them.

Only months after the ending of the 2022 Venice Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani, and based on

her readings of Leonora Carrington's *The Milk of Dreams* and vast interest in surrealism and the inclusion of bodies that are different and changing in the biennale, the work of Hilda af Klint in this exhibition continues relation of earth, flora and fauna realizing that bodies, especially of women and animals are changing, making this artist's work relevant today. For Hilma af Klint, those changes are effected by the influence of nature; for Cecilia Alemani, this author believes that she sees technology and climate bringing about change. But both artist and Curator bring to their audience the changes, whether beneficial or devastating that af Klint saw in the early twentieth century, and that we see now.

No one writing in the catalogue or about this exhibition has yet included af Klint in the annals of ecofeminism, perhaps because the term hadn't yet been used, but the work clearly not only stems from both feminism, including group participation and decisions made by the group of women producing it, with full credit to the group, but also stems from a concern for nature, and an attempt to literally communicate with nature, finding a language to do so. The influence of Rudolf Steiner and Madame Blavatsky as noted in the catalogue brought theosophy to the attention of Hilma af Klint, and she explored its principles and the ongoing structure of life forms to her work. But she went far beyond theosophy as a discipline, attempting to answer questions posed through the language of image making. As well, af Klint, in feminizing her work, pays heed to patterns and symbols used in women's textile design and embroidery but that also honor women's folk traditions. Her images of trees and of nature, produced and fed by the earth, communicate with other natural features and with people. Like the thesis presented in *The Hidden Life of Trees* where the natural ecosystem and trees communicate with each other, Hilma af Klint is interested in Yggdrasil, the world tree of Norse mythology, in her W Series, *The Tree of Knowledge* of 1913-15. Af Klint's spiral, used extensively throughout her work, is also nature's symbol, appearing in the plant and animal kingdom but also referring to that invisible world that she hints at, whether in the inner chambers of the spiral or the soil dividing the roots of the tree, from the leafy branches above.

It is this insistence on the spiritual, the invisible

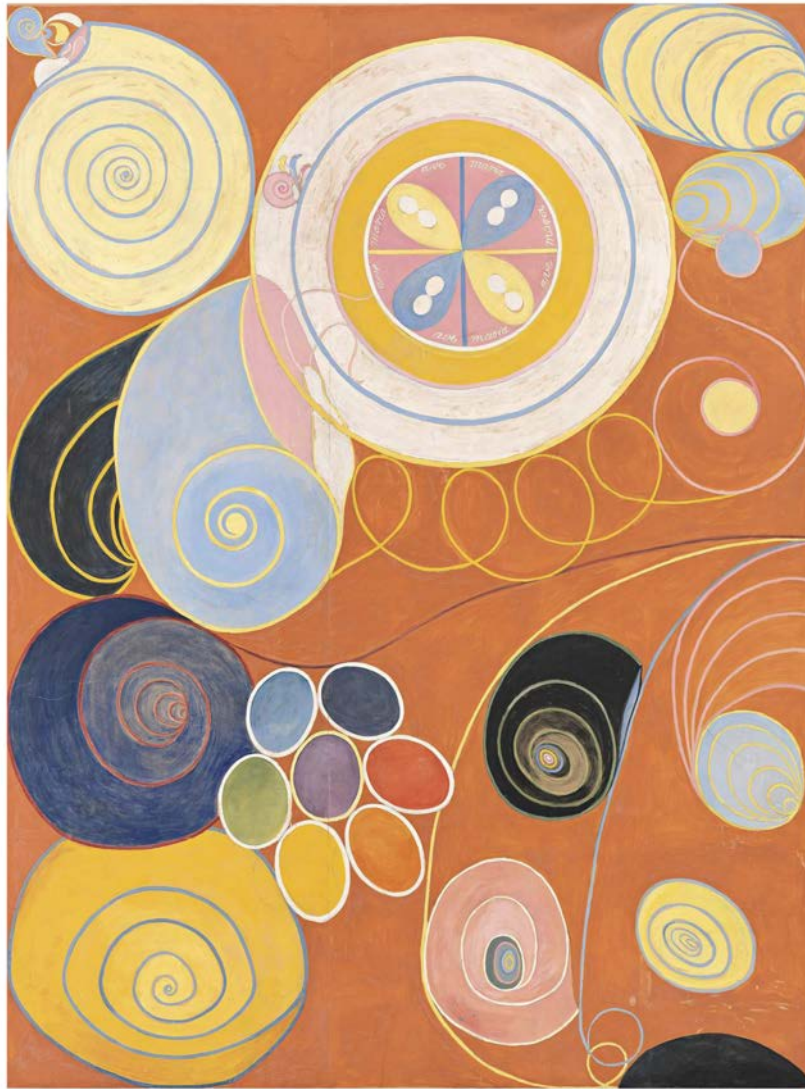


Hilma af Klint: Evolution (1908)

hand guiding the hand of the artist, and the unseen dictating the mortal appearance of the work and the laws of nature as in *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees* 1922 that corroborate Klint's use of "plant as meditative to express a spiritual bond with nature." (Catalogue, pg. 11).

Looking critically at work produced by af Klint's acknowledged and credited team of women artists, I do wonder if, in this age, when we finally acknowledge women's contributions to the art world, if the circular, curved structure, often including folkloric symbols from women's handicrafts, and shapes reminiscent of vulva and breasts, is not only spiritually inspired, but intentional. As af Klint painted her tallest work, the *Temple*, with shapes from a woman's body, we cannot escape remembering that the body is the temple of the soul, the soul that leads us back to af Klint's philosophy about the soul controlling emotion, and everlasting, and theosophy's concern with that soul. Yet Laura Stamps notes in the catalogue to the exhibition (pg. 87) that not only did Mde. Blavatsky and Henry Olcott seek to combine science, philosophy and religion as "a method whereby the soul could purify itself" passing succes-

sively through stages of purity as it grew closer to the divine, but also attempted to show how society evolved, spiritually growing as the earth evolved, growing ever closer to a new spiritual age, showing in af Klint's WUS Seven-pointed star series. Group VI, *The Evolution* (1908). In the eighth iteration in the series, the human soul resides in a snail; once people no longer connect physically but only spiritually, they fuse into a pure unity, apparent in *Blue Book 6: The Evolution* (no date). Going farther with the *Five*, a Christian spiritualist collective including af Klint, Anna Cassel, Mathilde Nilsson, Cornelia Cederberg and Sigrid Hedman created automatic drawings incorporating floral forms, intersecting lines, spirals, and leaf shapes seeking knowledge of the universe through divine revelation revealed by the teachings of the spirits. Those drawings influenced and became the basis of af Klint's larger drawings and paintings incorporating bodily shapes, spiral, circular, and biological forms. Later, hand-painted photographs are made of a single image of two parts, not mirror images, but closely allied. This mirroring of these erotic images is repeated extensively throughout her oeuvre, seen in No. 3,



Hilma af Klint: Group 4, No 3. The Ten Largest, Childhood (1907)
Courtesy The Hilma af Klint Foundation

No. 6, No. 8 and No. 9, all painted in 1908.

If we look at another “temple” produced a score of years later, by Leni Richtenstal featured in “Metropolis,” we do not see curves or shapes reminiscent of women’s bodies, but rather a “masculine” hard-edged linear skyscraper. Af Klint’s art is peaceful, and colorful, with pastel-like colors, soft but tall, bold but bright. Yet the reliance on the symbolism of Scandinavian folkloric tradition and iconography coupled with the emphasis on purity and spirituality keeps me from fully appreciating the beautiful curvilinear, and yes, feminine aspects of the work. I know what comes thirty years later. Writings of the group surrounding Hilma af Klint and the theoso-

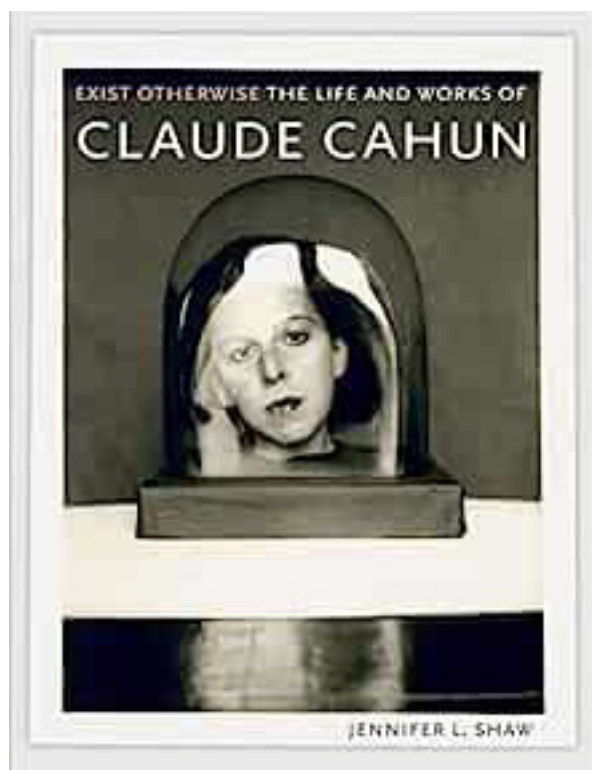
phists try to merge science of the period with art, but avoids, because there is no awareness yet, the detrimental and disastrous effects of the science being produced and discovered.

We cannot put ourselves into the mindset of the theosophists, of af Klint’s group but we can recognize the beauty of her work, and see the terrible beauty that transpired later, in the land where Alfred Nobel discovered the power to destroy, unbeknownst to those creating art in the earliest decade of the twentieth century.

HILMA AF KLINT & PIET MONDRIAN
FORMS OF LIFE Tate Modern, until 3rd September
2023

Exist Otherwise The Life and Works of Claude Cahun

Mary Fletcher



Claude Cahun's art was known to me via a handful of photos and I knew little of her life before reading this account.

It's a very beautifully designed book. There are four chronological chapters and an appendix of a few translated documents and a useful index.

Claude Cahun chose her name and from an early age was concerned with her own image and identity as a lesbian, inspired by male queer writers and the idea of an Ancient Greek utopia.

Her relationship with her mother was fraught and as her father was Jewish she suffered from anti-Semitism. She met her lifelong partner Suzanne Moore when they were both teenagers.

Claude had enough money not to need a job and moved in avant garde arty circles in Paris. She wrote the stories of various heroines such as Eve, Sappho, Judith and others, reimagining them from a modern viewpoint. In self portrait photos made with her partner she played with masquerade doll like roles using androgyny and theatricality.

Jennifer Shaw discusses the possible sexual symbolism in Cahun's montage images.

During the thirties Claude met Breton and other surrealists, made playful photographs and joined in

turn various political groups of artists to combat fascism. She veered towards Trotsky's idea of individual freedom for artists to express their inner world and in 1939 signed a manifesto that declared 'there will be no freedom until everyone is free'. Aragon criticised her as essentially bourgeois in her individuality.

Her strange constructions were photographed as illustrations for a disturbing children's fairytale book by Lise Deharme.

After the wealth of references and names of well known surrealists that Claude knew and enough details of her work to establish that she should be part of the canon of art history, the last chapter in which she is living in occupied Jersey with her partner is by far the most fascinating.

Claude and Suzanne agreed to devote themselves to placing anti war propaganda in a variety of inventive ways in their environment. It was written as if by a disillusioned German soldier, aided by Suzanne's fluent German language and the two of them spent a lot of time on this and put themselves at great risk.

Eventually they were arrested, sentenced to death and put in solitary confinement, saved from deportation by the progress the allies were making towards winning the war. Claude called this work 'militant surrealist action'. She despised the Jersey population's failure to resist the Nazi occupation and hoped to affect the behaviour of those German occupiers who could be influenced against Hitler.

Their prison experiences and subsequent release are remarkable and could make a wonderful film.

Unfortunately Claude's health was broken and she died, 1953, before their plans to return to liberated Paris were carried out. Suzanne Moore remained in Jersey, killing herself in 1972.

The wartime story is such a humdinger - I found it very moving and amazing and highly recommend the book for that well researched and fluently written account.

Exist Otherwise The Life and Works of Claude Cahun by Jennifer L Shaw 2017.

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