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Utah Plays Ball with New York



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The New Art Examiner welcomes ideas for article and short reviews.

Please send a sample of your writing (250 words) and any pitch to contributor@newartexaminer.net At present we pay £25 for a published contribution in any one issue. We are happy to accept articles in your native language as well as English. We will only publish in English, but when we post the article online we will include the original language version. If you look at our website www.newartexaminer.net you will see we have already published in Italian and Mandarin.

Our deadlines are as follows:

August 3rd, October 3rd, December 3rd, February 3rd, April 3rd, June 3rd

Plus ça Change 20 Years Later

This letter was sent to the Royal Academy's commercial director Norman Rosenthal and President Sir Philip Dowson in response to their commercialisation of London's showing of the major Monet exhibition back in the 1990s. At Boston in the States an actor dressed as the artist with Monetesque beard greeted visitors! Needless to say neither recipient responded.

To Whom It May Concern,

We went to the Monet blockbuster last week and had a fabulous time. The six hour wait on Piccadilly and in the courtyard was a fantastic idea as lots of people recognised us in the queue. Now they know what a family of culture vultures we are. Wandered round the shop for ages and bought so much stuff we couldn't get through the doors into the gallery. It didn't matter though as we hired some of those headphone things and listened to the show over nosh in the cafeteria.

Loved the catalogue which is a bit too long to read but has got some great pics. It'll be occupying pride of place on our coffee table at least until the next big show. Saw the leaflet about your funding crisis. What a bunch of meanies they are at the Treasury. Still, I don't suppose everyone can be art lovers like you and us. During the wait to use the lavatory I had a great idea to cash in on your punters. With so many kids and old fogeys spending ages in the loo (3.07 minutes each by my watch) why not extend the show into the toilets themselves and charge a £1 a time for their use.

You could create a mini-Monet virtual reality experience complete with Giverny-scented flowers and lilies. Loo rolls printed with Rouen cathedral, haystacks, Venice scenes etc and with some nifty plumbing the flush action could be made to duplicate the waterfall in Monet's garden. Then by impregnating the fragrance of the flowers into the

merchandise packaging you'd stimulate sales no end. If you like my idea just send us some freebies for the next blockbuster as now we're art lovers we'll be coming to all your shows from now on. Our kids have their bedrooms decked out with Monetabilia and little Darren won't go anywhere without his Kermit the frog.

Of course we struggle with looking at the actual paintings usually throwing up after a few minutes. The doctor says it's either an allergy to lead in the paint or a nervous reaction because they're not on a computer screen. But I reckon it's all that wholesome food in your café, can't you switch the catering concession to McDonalds?

Anyway, we can't wait for the next big show. Art used to be so dull and boring when there were only exhibits to look at. But with all the technology, media coverage, vast milling crowds, merchandise, videos, badges and stuff it's great and really makes you feel part of the art scene. Have you ever thought of starting a Monet supporters' club like at Manchester United? Just think of all those marketing angles? Good luck with future shows. How about one on Van Gogh – her work goes for megabucks? Or Picasso ÷ he's really big.

Vaughan Allen

The Canonisation of Surrealism in USA

Editor,

Years ago at an exhibition of Salvador Dali in Spain, a small child left an unforgettable impression on me and other visitors while talking animatedly about the paintings on display. He had a very clear vision and found the images perfectly normal to his imagination. Could it be that the unconscious mind of a child has the key to the potential of our creativity?

Rosemary Caron 24/06/2020

Rosemary Caron,

The psychology of our individual creativity, evolving from a very creative natural world, is fascinating. But as adults it stems from wanting to understand – whatever it is we are trying to understand.

Daniel Nanavati 25/06/2020

Daniel Nanavati,

Are you implying that children don't want to understand whatever it is they are trying to understand? Children are able to understand many things intuitively, while as adults we mostly lose this ability. However, I think that children also want to understand.

The best of Surrealism gave us a glimpse inside the human mind, whether it showed a loss of control or not. Do you think Surrealism is a loss of control?

Rosemary Caron 25/06/2020

No Art Superstars in Israel

Editor,

What a sad reality you portray! Where do the Israelis get their inspiration, their creativity? At least their food is delicious; that too could be considered art.

John Hopkins 11/06/2020

Editor,

It was about time someone wrote about the art scene in Israel, though the article is not much of a surprise considering.... (I would say more, but I don't want to risk having my comment moderated like they do in the *Daily Mail*.)

James George 06/06/2020

James,

I would be happy for you to say more. There is much to the malaise the art world sickens with throughout the western world but only by discussing it will new thinkers arise to create finer works.

Daniel Nanavati 08/06/2020

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QUOTE of the Month:

“Art is the only serious thing in the world. And the artist is the only person who is never serious.”

Oscar Wilde



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EDITORIAL

When did all the artists die?

Artists are not suffering alone. Through the aridity of cultural thinking in our society, which is the inheritance of monetarism, survival is all that informs style, and style prevails over content. The artist is not there to argue finer points of colour, form, line or philosophy with other artists but to win over them, garner the plaudits before them and, by establishing wealth, affirm talent. Anyone with a real social conscience, like Banksy, is consumed against their will into the money-making machine until everything they do is only a pretence at social realism. Others like Emin and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer side-step conscience altogether and fill the cavernous museums and galleries with the purpose-made ego of a liberalism incapable of challenging the hegemony of the unethical monetary system.

Social imagination has been hamstrung by the allure of money and the willing worship of the crowd for those who have it. No one kisses the hands of the artist out of love, no one learns the poet's words out of awe, no one sits at the feet of the philosopher out of respect if they pronounce on the barbarism and soullessness of working for a salary. Even as we witness how antithetical to nature our economics has become, we do not change. Species die at our hands, seas are polluted, children waste away before our eyes, all at the altar of making money. We do not possess the wit to change ourselves, nor the leaders with the courage to change us. Post Second World War art-world has betrayed us; it has become self-absorbed and in so doing no longer describes who we are as individuals, as tribes, as states or as nations. It panders to the illness that is killing this planet: monetarism now called neo-liberalism, in an ineffectual attempt to hide its wholesale blood-letting of everything living. When the artist bows to money, the art in them dies. Artists have dodo-fied themselves.

And while the world devolves before our eyes into fascism, dressed as an individuality that only breeds indifference, artists fiddle away for more money readily provided in small sums from governments with strict rules to follow to access their grants. 'Artists following the rules' is a contradiction in terms. Remember Omar Kayyam – "Ah love, would thou and I with fates conspire, to take this sorry scheme of things entire, would not we shatter it to bits and remould it nearer to the heart's desire." You can 'remould' nothing in a state-run gallery, you can 'shatter' nothing in a fashion-conscious museum. And no one listens to the provinces, the final resting place of any heart. Contemporary artists support the system that is killing the planet. So does every worker, so does every banker. There was a time when if you exchanged an artist for a prime minister you would effect social change. No longer. Used toilet paper is the art form at which we all excel.

Daniel Nanavati

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

Darren Jones is an art critic, curator, and educator. His writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *ArtUS*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artslant* and *Artsy*. He is a contributing editor for *New Art Examiner*. Curatorial and artistic projects have been covered in *The Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *Artforum.com*, *Huffington Post*, and *Scotland on Sunday*. Jones' book, *The Contemporary Art Gallery: Display, Power and Privilege*, (co-authored with David Carrier) was published in 2016; in 2018 he was a recipient of an Andy Warhol Foundation Art Writers Grant; in 2020 he will be the critic-in-residence at SPACES in Cleveland. Jones gained a BA from Central Saint Martins College, London, and received his MFA from Hunter College, New York. He currently teaches Curatorial Studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Jones lives in Fire Island Pines, New York, and Key West, Florida.



Introduction: A Cartographic Analysis of Art in Utah

There isn't a representative American art; nor is there discourse that fully includes art in America. What is meant by these rather disingenuous terms is that fraction of sanctioned art which is shown in New York, Los Angeles, and a few other well regarded provincial museums that fits certain aesthetic tenets; art that has been vetted by a hegemonic critical corps and is funneled through the museum system - from studio to collection - to the satisfaction of fiscal and canonical shareholders.

What is dismissed - or never noticed at all - is the vast creative output of artists across the United States who do not live or work close to the art system's power centers - what might be considered the New York/Los Angeles Axis of Easel. If you can't make it there, you can't make it anywhere, as the song, and the mean arc of what we are told is art history, would have it.

It is to the detriment of every stratum in (or outside of) the art world(s) - geographic, cultural, political, local, environmental - that this is so. Art workers throughout the country, across class, race, gender, and age, struggle to gain traction when the spotlight is fixed so far from them, and so rarely illuminates their own endeavors. The art made and shown in New York is not 'better' than that made elsewhere, nor is it more important, but it is marketed as though it were. As that work is seen, it is written about, and then elevated into the public realm. It becomes art history. But it doesn't represent art history. It represents financial investment, a narrow framework of value, private insistence, and only occasionally genuinely worthwhile art.

Each state must contend with these predicaments if its artists are to gain traction inside and beyond its boundaries - without having to leave. In this series of articles we look to the American West, and Utah specifically, to explore the Beehive State's art scene, how it is

responding to these outdated mores, what initiatives it has established, and what it might yet do to develop and elevate its position as an art producing region. This endeavor proceeded from a series of critical sessions involving art workers from across Utah, who came together in the summer of 2019 under the auspices of Granary Arts in Ephraim and its co-founder and executive director, Amy Jorgensen. The intention for this mobile think-tank, named 'Critical Ground', is to share and act on ideas that will develop the connectivity, efficacy and dissemination of critical and artistic engagement between practitioners and audiences.

Scotti Hill has contributed an in-depth 'diagnostic' survey of museums, art galleries, seminal figures, artists, public initiatives and funding sources that underscores the vibrancy of Utah's scene, along with notes for progression. Christopher Lynn has focused on emerging alternative models of exhibition, innovation and collaboration that are helping to evolve how Utah's artists present their work, while Darren Jones considers Utah's modern artistic legacy, and how that might guide current art laborers in developing the state's reputation and fulfilling its creative potential.

We are undergoing an unprecedented reckoning. Utah, like the rest of the United States, is roiling in the devastating wake of the coronavirus, the raw, tumultuous aftermath of George Floyd's murder, and the traumatic legacy and reality of racism. However we recover, it is incumbent upon us all that we do so with a restructured cultural, political and civic panorama. In the arts, as in life generally, there has to be a fairer distribution of institutional largesse, decentralized structural influence, and a final assault on the ivory towers of obscene jurisdiction that have prevailed, suppressed and dictated for too long. Only then might we pave a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable road to take us all forward.

The Changing Landscape of Utah Art

By Scotti Hill



Ruby Chacon, mural outside Catholic Community Services building, Salt Lake City. (Courtesy of the artist.)

As a state, Utah conjures two predominant associations: Mormonism and mountains. Maybe parks and monuments too. But Salt Lake City, one of the youngest and fastest-growing metro areas in the nation, is today animated by a vibrant counterculture, overflowing with coffee shops, microbreweries, and community murals. Utah boasts a thriving arts community in SLC and in rural pockets throughout the state. At the same time, Utah's artists and institutions face obstacles common to smaller art markets.

Those challenges are well-documented: less state funding, smaller collector base, cutbacks to regional publications, a drive toward online 'click-bait', and fewer venues for exhibiting work. Salt Lake faces serious inequities caused by gentrification, and the devastating fallout from COVID-19. Despite or because of these struggles, notable threads of an artistic identity have emerged in unexpected ways. Utah also has growing communities of color, and an LGBTQ population that ranks as the seventh highest in the nation. Diverse artists and their allies continually seek ways to amplify these voices, along with new innovators in the arts, in a state that has long been majority white, and religiously conservative.

Utah's expansive topography bears witness to a history of Mormon pioneers displacing the native Ute tribe, from whom the state claimed its name. The white, masculinist settler ideologies of Manifest Destiny and abundant, conquerable land have left their imprint on a history of Western art. Today's Utah artists and arts professionals grapple with and challenge this legacy. But they also seek to move beyond traditional forms of Western art, pushing their practices forward, and developing venues and an ecosystem

that will represent Utah's future.

"So much of building an arts community is about constructing a critical mass for buy-in, an infrastructure of a creative community, for makers and creators," says Amy Jorgensen, executive director and chief curator of Granary Arts, located two hours south of Salt Lake City in Ephraim, Utah. Housed in an 18th-century granary built by Mormon pioneers, Granary has proved an incubator of critical dialogue for Utah artists. In 2019, Jorgensen, in partnership with art professor Ed Bateman and the University of Utah's Red Butte Press, crafted an indispensable portfolio and collection of essays, *De-Marcation: A Survey of Contemporary Photography in Utah*. The collection and its traveling exhibition showcased 20 Utah artists whose works create new frontiers for Utah's art.

Utah's dramatic natural landscapes inspired what are perhaps its most famous artworks: the Land Art masterpieces of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, and his partner Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973-76), near the ghost town of Lucin. The Utah Museum of Fine Art, the state's flagship museum, has for decades fostered education and scholarship about the state's Land Art treasures, and it has produced urgent initiatives and traveling exhibitions like *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art* (2015), a blockbuster which showcased over 60 artists throughout the 20th century.

Determined to escape the pigeonhole of Western art, Utah artists also create work with a national audience in mind. The Utah Museum of Contemporary Art helps ambitious local artists forge a distinct conversation that responds to larger national trends. UMO-



Jann Haworth, 'SLC Pepper' mural (downtown Salt Lake City).
(Courtesy Chad Kirkland Photography)

CA's recent exhibition *Abstract is Just a Word, But I Use It* (2019-2020), for example, showcased the fascinating array of Utah's experimental and abstract art. Indeed, the artists transforming contemporary art in Utah are plentiful: the bending geometric illusions of David LeCheminant; Nancy Rivera's photographic renderings of art historical still-lives; the floating spacemen and rich layers of collage in Andrew Rice's work; Lenka Konopasek's gargantuan paper sculptures; Horacio Rodriguez' subversive, repurposed object-sculptures; Cara Krebs' uncanny sculptural oddities; the crowded and lively installations of Frank McEntire; Trent Alvey's illuminating light sculptures; Jiyoun Lee-Lodge's sumptuously detailed drawings; the flirtation of release and control in the abstract paintings of Nolan Flynn; the mixed-media intricacies and technical detail of Jacqui Larsen's collages—and many others.

Several notable local galleries, like Modern West Fine Art and Nox Contemporary, promote these artists who otherwise struggle to find exhibition sites beyond a modest roster of committed spaces. It is equally challenging for them to connect with collectors who could support their practices. Some commercial galleries continue to tout tourist-friendly desert arches and snowy scenes for Sundance Festival goers. As in any market, Utah needs collectors to fuel new trends in contemporary practice.

"The biggest challenges facing Utah artists are opportunities for exhibiting and selling their work," says Jorge Rojas, multimedia artist and director of learning and engagement at UMFA. "It's back to the problem that there is no real market here to speak of and there is a shortage of venues showing local artists. I realize that it's no different here than any other city, which is the point. The art market in this country is not designed to support artists, it's designed to commodify the arts so that a minuscule percentage of artists become art stars and everyone else struggles to pay the rent."

In response, Utah artists have used their creativity to construct alternative venues, building artist-run collectives, situated in residences or noncommercial spaces such as Washer/Dryer Projects and Openroom.

Though artists enjoy comradeship from working in an inclusive art scene, they often bemoan the lack of attention that their work receives from local publications. Although *15 Bytes: Utah's Art Magazine* and *Salt Lake Underground* (SLUG Magazine) play a

vital role in arts coverage and criticism, the state's newspaper arts reporting has drastically decreased in recent years. But mere coverage of the arts is not enough. Artists, viewers, and collectors crave a more robust circle of critics who can evaluate Utah's art in connection with larger national and global trends.

Utah is also working to build initiatives designed to bolster inclusiveness, diversity, and emerging figures in the arts community. Initially performed at SLC's annual Performance Art Festival in 2016, Rojas's *Hands Up, Don't Shoot!* invites participants to respond bodily to that vocal proclamation. It considers the violence of racial profiling and police brutality as a "response to the continued inhumane, institutionalized violence against black and brown lives in the United States," according to Rojas. The work resonates now more than ever; as of this writing, SLC and the nation are reeling from, and protesting against, the fatal consequences of systemic police violence against African Americans, and other marginalized constituencies.

Rojas' art, advocacy, and educational initiatives complement those of influential grassroots organizations on SLC's west side, like Utah Arts Alliance, Art Access, Sugarspace, and Mestizo Institute of Culture and Arts (MICA), which is devoted to art and activism. Once located inside a neighborhood coffeehouse, MICA has launched significant exhibitions of minority artists and enriched Salt Lake City with the visions of curators Renato Olmedo-Gonzalez and Jendar Morales-Collazo.

Though state funding is limited, Utah's Division of Arts and Museums provides crucial public support for artists and institutions, supplying curatorial and development grants for artists, maintaining a state collection, and operating the Alice and Rio galleries.

Additionally, Salt Lake City is devising new programs to promote culturally diverse artists within the state and make their work accessible for various populations. "Our current mayor, Erin Mendenhall, has prioritized gentrification—mitigation and equity and inclusion, both of which include arts as a way to facilitate these goals," says Felicia Baca, executive director of the Salt Lake City Arts Council. The city incentivizes what Baca calls "a more robust public art policy, [which dedicates] additional dollars to public art, expands notions of public art as temporary and placemaking based, and incentivizes private property owners to include art in their developments." One such initiative is 'Tickets for Transit,'



Jorge Rojas' performance, "Hands Up, Don't Shoot!" Salt Lake City Public Library, 2016. (Courtesy of the artist.)

which enables travelers to use transit passes as entrance tickets to regional arts, culture, and sporting events.

Women like Baca play a crucial role in the development of Utah's art scene. Gretchen Dietrich and Laura Hurtado are the executive directors of the Utah Museum of Fine Art and the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, respectively. Many art galleries and spaces are helmed by female leaders, including Julie Nester Gallery, Phillips Gallery, Granary, Luminaria, and Modern West.

Among the many talented women artists of Utah is Jann Haworth, an internationally-acclaimed Pop Artist whose mural *SLC Pepper* is a local variation of the Beatles' famous Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album cover, which Haworth co-designed with then-husband Peter Blake in 1967. Recently, various exhibitions celebrating the centennial of women's suffrage have been post-

poned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing viewers to wait a bit longer to see the exciting work planned around this commemoration.

At this turning point in American history, we are faced with the reality that for too long, minority voices have been suppressed, much to our collective detriment. Art serves as a powerful lifeline for those seeking to create a movement, and as Utah's population continues to grow, so too will its burgeoning art scene benefit from these diverse perspectives. Artists, however, will likely continue to face the challenges of working in a small art market for years to come. Despite these obstacles, the state has crafted a fertile art scene, an example of how acts of creation can be fueled by the very barriers that would deter them.

Contemporary Art and Ambition in the American West

by Darren Jones

Utah is a romantic wanderer's grail: its chromatic spectrum, the metaphysical power of its topographies and its geopolitical location combine to make it the nexus of lore and industry which defines the Western United States. Utah's history has often set epic human endeavor against celestial grandeur, casting this vast territory in mythic terms. The landscape's breadth, with its possibilities and challenges, is reflected in the state's pioneering artistic story. In 1899, arts patron Alice Merrill Horne - only the second woman elected to the Utah House of Representatives - proposed legislation that would establish the Utah Arts Council and a state art collection. It was the first such initiative in the United States, making Utah a ground-breaking force in municipal investment and support for art and artists. Under the auspices of the Utah Division of Arts and Museums, the archive - now the Alice Merrill Horne Collection - continues to chronicle the state's creative journey, educate local audiences, and record the diverse narratives of the Utahns. The artscape of Salt Lake City reveals the legacy of that entrepreneurial spirit. Institutional anchors include the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, and Utah Arts and Museums. The latter administers the Rio Gallery, located in the Rio Grande Depot, and the Alice Gallery, in the historic Glendinning Mansion, along with government buildings - the state capitol among them - as the principal display venues for the collection. The associated traveling exhibition program takes art into colleges, universities, and public galleries statewide. Recent shows highlighted current, Utah-based indigenous artists in *A Living Legacy: Celebrating Native American History Month*; explored works by a range of emerging and established artists, in the latest edition of the *Statewide Annual*; and acknowledged the 150th anniversary of Utah women becoming the first to exercise suffrage rights in the United States, in *Women to the Front: Perspectives on Equality*,



Ed "Big Daddy" Roth's *Ratfink Museum*, Manti, Utah

Gender, and Activism, which is currently viewable online.

In addition to civil support, enterprising individuals have opened a slew of commercial and artist-run sites, deepening the presence and impact of contemporary art in disparate communities, while



David Brothers' studio, Salt Lake City, Utah

also looking beyond state lines to nurture Utah's relationship to the national apparatus.

Many states, located away from the coastal governments of artistic taste, contend with chronic underfunding, condescending perceptions about the parochialism of art made there, creative exodus, and dismissal by critical hierarchies. How then might a balance be struck between inward investment and procuring external interest? Perhaps that is both the question and the answer.

Unlike the (ironically) homogenous fashions for certain artists, palettes, or aesthetics that often define each art season in New York, where the desire and effort required to simply be there can exact immense costs upon artists, less populated locales offer time and, possibly, living environments more conducive to production and consistency. They are also less prone to narrow definitions of what constitutes valid modes of expression. Artists are more likely to retain interest in local characteristics and influences - distinguishing strengths, and points of difference - that may be shed when an artist relocates to an art metropolis, where paradigms are shaped by a few powerful voices that elevate only a sliver of the massive quantity of work produced there.

For example, artist Wendy Wischer has investigated how politics and economic cravenness threaten and change fragile habitats. For *Displacing Vibrations* (2019) Wischer and geologist Jeffrey Moore recorded seismic reverberations within Utah's rock arches, part of

national monument land that has been decreased in size, to allow corporations to tap - and potentially destroy - resources. Subterranean rumblings were synchronized with photographic animations of the rock to create a rich visual soundscape that 'breathes'. The effect is mesmerizing and terrifying; a clarion call to nature's sacking, against the greed that fuels it.

Also in contemporary dialog with ancient environments, Jean Richardson uses found or discarded items - envelopes, tumbleweeds, bottles - to form patterned planes and spidered impressions. *Traversed* (2017) consists of large wallpaper tracts made from yellow envelopes, that look like maps of barren, sun-baked fields seen from high above. They once contained gifts, administration, or love letters; were sent and delivered. Now, emptied of their cargoes, they act as poetic remonstrances to the melancholy of time, distance, and lost touch. In another series, *Naturalized* (2019), wind-blasted, spindled orbs bloom with exotic rose-colored flowers. But a closer look reveals them to be lifeless, tumbleweed skeletons that have gored pink foam packing peanuts, used in mass distribution deliveries. Whether in her objects or her videos, Richardson strikes an eloquent, romantic balance between the lost and found: *Life-Jacket Blanket* (2015) portrays a lonesome figure adrift, wearing a mantle of buoyancy aids in the Great Salt Lake; a sphere of umbrella-hoods titled *Brolly Ball* (2014) is situated in the vast expanse of Utah's Salt Flats.

David Brothers' stage sets are an opulent evocation of the cheese, hysteria and fairground clanging of American game shows. His studio is a cavernous space on an industrial complex in Salt Lake City, filled with props - cardboard palm trees, puppets, billboard signs - the viscera of America's blazing technicolor television dream. To stand on that stage, lights flashing, heat emanating from the electrics, but in total silence - no crowds, no camera, no action - is to experience the emptiness of a sales pitch in which we all are either involved, or targeted by. Brothers' constructions are the eerie shadow of theme park fakery. His riotous and fascinating evocations are as seductive as the cash prizes, spinning wheels, fleeting fame, and glittering promises of the culture he skewers. Apart from contemporary art, but with lessons which that field might learn from, is the Ratfink Museum in rural Manti. It's a magnificent testament to Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth's antihero,

as authentic a commentary on American society as any blue-chip proselytizing. The antithesis of Disney's saccharine Mickey Mouse, Roth sank his abject junkyard wastrel into the greasy fabric of America's hotrod underbelly - a necessary stain that no detergent can remove. A visit there will be seared into one's memory, just as quickly as a trip to any major museum and its tired McDonald's menu of canonical names will be forgotten. Perhaps such differing metiers can't be compared, but in an age when contemporary art has been plasticized and petrified by corporate dictate, Ratfink's unshackled *joie de vivre*, counter-establishment integrity, and magnetic originality, can.

If it were even possible to find consensus among Utah's art workers, what might they want to achieve from a redoubling of collective efforts to raise the state's profile? Were the goal to surmount the frustrations previously mentioned, Utah could foster more incisive criticism, help choreograph the dance between traditional Western iconographic art - cowboys, ranches, mountains - and sharper conceptual pursuits oriented toward today's foremost urban discourses. It could also guide conversation and apply pressure where needed to trim the fat, encouraging a leaner output. Sometimes words have also to be the sword.

But that isn't easy to cultivate; it would require insightful writers to stay in Utah, writers capable of objective, occasionally searing dissection, not just description and advertisement. Valuable commentary on the art and gallery scene, sprung from a profound belief that Utah could become nationally regarded, might agitate fresh perspectives. It wouldn't be helpful to scythe the crops without replanting afterwards. Difficult truths might have to be voiced to artists and gallerists, who critics would doubtless run into during exhibition openings. It might get awkward. But is



Western Star, in the artistic community of Spring City, Utah

that what Utah wants? A coastal model of potentially invigorating criticism which ignites discussion, even fervor, but may be very tough to swallow? What might retain, or attract such a critical corps? It may help to stoke artistic responses rooted in the currencies of what is unique and powerful about Utah - its

history, landscape, commerce, politics, religion - contextualized as relatable issues to many other places; and to do so without inferiority that what is happening in New York or other art capitals, is somehow more interesting. It isn't. When that ingenuity and turbulence fosters excitement, it emanates across borders, prejudices and stereotypes. It is then that attention is gained, not chased. There is precedent.

Until the 1950s, Glasgow (UK) was one of the world's dominant industrial powers, known as the 'Workshop of the Empire'. Shipbuilding on the River Clyde was pre-eminent, 'Clyde Built' was an internationally envied stamp.

Lanarkshire's abundant coal and iron reserves fuelled the city's manufacturing: up to a quarter of the world's locomotives were built there. But heavy industry declined due to increased competition from the Far East and the rise of the airline industry. The subsequent financial devastation, social dereliction and civic incompetence left an indelible scar on the city for decades, architecturally rife even today. But the ideals of physical labor, organization and communal action within the workforce (hallmarks of the city's political history) informed a renaissance that began in 1983, with the 'Glasgow's Miles Better' campaign. Glasgow's art workers were at the forefront.

Until the late 1980s Scottish artists often left to study or live in London or Europe, as American artists leave Utah, Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, or Idaho, for New York. But a remarkable change came to fruition in the early 1990s, although it had been decades in the making. The legendary promoter Richard Demarco had brought many international artists to Scotland from the mid 1960s - Joseph Beuys, Marina Abramovic, and Paul Neagu among them - under the auspices of his Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh. The links that he and others helped forge between Scottish artists and institutions and their European counterparts became lasting bonds. Later, in large part through the dynamism of Sam Ainsley, David Harding and Sandy Moffat (inspirational leaders at the Glasgow School of Art) the city's art status evolved from historical contributor (The Glasgow Boys, Charles Rennie Mackintosh) into a buoyant modern hub, particularly through the Environmental Art Program, which prompted artists to engage with Glasgow's cityscape. Reinvention was based on community and collaboration: Glasgow School of Art became a locus of productivity and excellence, attracting students from around the world, while newspaper criti-

cism helped elevate the profile of artists and galleries. State support, new festivals and urban regeneration began to transform the city's reputation. In the past three decades, commercial and artist-led spaces, both past and present - Transmission Gallery, Tramway, The Modern Institute, Mary Mary Gallery, Sorcha Dallas Gallery, Washington Garcia Gallery, Kope Astner, Patricia Fleming, and Frutta among them - have played their part in Glasgow's resurrection. They have attracted investment, helped forge Turner Prize winners and international careers. Since 2005, the Glasgow International biennial has shown local and international practitioners, as has the Edinburgh Art Festival, established a year earlier. The effects have spread throughout the country, to other cities and rural regions, culminating in a potent, supportive and sustained Scottish art world, something quite different from the commercial art industry of rugged landscapes, snow-capped peaks and romantic mythologies that dominated Scottish art for centuries and still caters to tourists. Does that sound familiar to Utah readers? Glasgow has become a major global center of contemporary artistic production in a short time, because of its past, sensibilities and individualism - not despite them.

Scotland and Utah, Glasgow and Salt Lake City, differ too greatly for direct comparisons, but artistically there are similarities: the historical - perhaps overbearing - influence of the landscape on artistic perception, socio-economic factors, and distance from

centers of supposed sophistication. Glasgow had no collector base, little investment, decades of civic stagnation, and a drain of creatives to larger cities. It was dismissed as derelict, rough, dangerous, provincial and poor; a rusting hulk subject to xenophobic, patronizing English attitudes. It has overcome many of those handicaps, and while it cannot rest on its laurels, what Hans-Ulrich Obrist termed in 1996 (with gruesome evangelism) 'The Glasgow Miracle' has been realized, however demeaning and unfit his phrase may be. Glasgow's success came not from a biblical supervisor, but from the molten tenacity and shipyard anvils of its art workers.

Utah has everything it needs to enact its own emergence as a chamber of creative industry. The DNA of Utah's modern artistic progenitors flows through their successors today: immensely talented people, grounded in Utah's potential, who have already formed a circuitry committed to propagating and quickening existing infrastructure. Love for one's homeland and its constituencies, and belief in its stories, combined with intellectual capacity, unified vision, and organization, can move ... mountains. If those reformers in Utah are to accrue enough cultural matter to ignite a new Western star in the art firmament, and fulfil their forbears' beginnings as an inclusive, dynamic capital of aesthetic engineering, they have only to make it a reality

Peaks and Valleys: The Rise of Utah's Alternative Art Platforms

By Christopher Lynn

Geologically, the state of Utah is a panoply of strata, formations, and colors. From the sterile expanses of the Bonneville Salt Flats, to the soaring peaks of the Wasatch Mountain Range, to the otherworldly red rock deserts of the south, Utah is constantly and slowly changing. Wind and water contour stone; floods and droughts reveal, and submerge the land; while underground volcanic, and tectonic activity pushes and pulls the surface into craggy wrinkles. A magnitude 5.7 earthquake shook northern Utah as recently as March this year.

In Utah's evolving cultural landscape, there are only a few steadfast art museums that have weathered corroding social and economic factors over the decades, and of those, there is only one that is not directly tied to a university. Over the years, smaller, artist-initiated projects have emerged then eroded away. Such endeavors are generally founded to provide opportunities that would otherwise be absent given the paucity of galleries and museums. What has changed is the sheer number of initiatives that are continuing to crop up. They each have a stance on sustainability, engagement, and scope - variations that make their coexistence interesting, and relevant.

Pal Gallery started in Provo, Utah, in the spring of 2018, with an

apartment show of seven artists. Eric Edvalson, the curator and organizer who recently graduated from Brigham Young University's (BYU) MFA program, initially thought of it as a one-time



Installation view of RIBBA vs MOSSEBO group exhibition, October 9, 2018, image courtesy of the artists and Pal Gallery



Gregory Eddi Jones, Brokkenfreute and Other Similar Pictures 2020. Installed at Washer Dryer Projects, 11//72020 - 21/4/2020, (image courtesy of the artist and Washer Dryer Projects)

thing, but also considered lending the project some legitimacy by naming the space. “There is something interesting about calling it a gallery, and stating that this is our first show.” Assuming that wearing the mantle of a gallery conveys authenticity, a platform is then established for artists to surpass the pall of amateur endeavors and invite people into their homes, welcome other artists, and avoid the awkwardness in offering casual approaches - “Hey, would you like to display your art in my house?”

Edvalson named his gallery Pal because he saw it as a chance to build relationships, strengthen friendships he already had with his exhibiting artists, and form new connections by asking people into his sanctum. Given the spatial challenges of his apartment, the shows could only last for one night. He produced pocket-size print catalogs for each exhibition to document their fleeting nature, and used Instagram both to advertise and serve as his sole digital archive. The future of Pal is in question with the onset of COVID-19, when bringing strangers into one’s apartment is not currently an option, but it does provide Edvalson with time to reevaluate where, and how, he invests his energy and resources. He always hoped that Pal would be a catalyst, saying, (with tongue partially in-cheek) “Part of me doesn’t want to do these things. I’m just doing them because no one else will. And if other people start doing it, then I won’t have to.” This do-it-yourself drive is very common in the arts in Utah. There is not a multi-tiered ecosystem in which artists can thrive. As such, artists must create their own opportunities, or languish waiting for others to lead the way.

Another BYU alumnus, Mitchell Barton, sought to fill those same opportunity gaps in the fall of 2018. He didn’t have the funds to start a space, given Utah’s rising real estate prices. What he had, though, was an unfinished laundry room that he thought would make a suitable antithesis to a sterile white-cube space. His wife was pregnant, and extremely sick at the time, so to reduce their stress they decided no one would actually come to their apartment. They embraced their situation, and Washer/Dryer Projects became

an exhibition space that was only publicly accessible through online documentation. Work was physically installed, and photographed for Instagram, and the Washer/Dryer Projects site. Barton treated the shows as he would any public exhibition, keeping work up through the entire stated duration, and moving it only as needed to keep the laundry room functional. When their living situation changed, they no longer had a dedicated laundry room, so Barton invited others to franchise the idea, resulting in upcoming projects in other artists’ laundry rooms.

For many Utah artists, as elsewhere, the digital realm is a more manageable and efficient location. Most art is consumed via photos on the internet rather than in-person experiences. Their own artistic output is also more likely to end up on Instagram or web-based portfolios than in a bricks and mortar gallery. Such physical sites are no longer the ultimate destination. Documentation has expanded the chances of professionally beneficial outcomes, while still adhering to traditional presentation standards.

Radical Hope is a good example of this approach. Initiated by Madeline Rupard, who studied at BYU, and is now based in New York, its curatorial team includes Utah-based artist Aloe Corry, Pittsburgh-based Isabelle Brouman, and Ohio-based Connie Fu. The affirmative project opened on May 28th, 2020, and was built using ArtSteps, an online platform that employs a 3D gaming engine to create virtual environments, with a retro feel. Launching in the middle of the Coronavirus shutdown, the exhibition leveraged its decentralized nature to assemble works inexpensively from artists around the world into the bespoke space. The curators used this fantasy world to play with scale and display, free of physical limitations.

The PARC Collective began when artist Ron Linn was looking to collaborate with and support other cultural producers around Provo, where he was based. Initially, he approached the artists Tiana Birrell and Art Morrill. Since Birrell was living in Salt Lake City (45 minutes north) and Morrill lived near Ogden (a further half-hour north), they aimed to widen their net geographically. Their inaugural curatorial effort was an exhibition of emerging and established artists from across the northern part of the state. After that, they brought artist and designer Sarah Waldron Brinton into the collective. Before they could develop their plans further, COVID-19 interrupted production, causing a necessary shift. Birrell spearheaded a partnership with the Granary Art Center, a more established, artist-run non-profit in Sanpete County, and the collective began curating from art submitted via Instagram. The result was Incubation Period, an online exhibition, with a proposed publication. Linn has stated that, as an artist, he worked harder when he felt that his community was watching. He said that by assuming the role of an organized group, the PARC Collective could encourage other artists to work more fruitfully, and think more about what it means to be producing work in Utah.

Henry Becker, Nolan Flynn, Josh Graham, and Andrew Rice, inspired in part by Pal Gallery, rehabbed Becker’s garage into a



Natalia Janula, Laminar Bodies, May 7, 2020, installed at the Great Salt Lake, Utah, (detail. image courtesy of the artist and Final Hot Desert)

small gallery space and named it 'the_openroom'. They built-out programming that included exhibitions, and accompanying online artist presentations. The art is generally only accessible for one night, but their focus is on post-internet practices, which lends itself to digital documentation and archiving. Since the pandemic isolation restrictions came in they have shifted focus to online discussions with artists and curators, and teamed with the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art on an internet-based project that invites public collaboration on artists' digital images. Of the individuals and groups featured in this text, the openroom is the only one to state that it is dedicated to a sustainable practice in Utah, rather than being provisional and ephemeral. Currently their collective is entirely self-funded, but they see it as "investing in [their] culture".

Final Hot Desert is the creation of artist Ben Sang. He attended Snow College, in remote Ephraim. Feeling distant from the art world he was studying, he spent a year researching and writing about contemporary artists. After accepting a corporate job, he dedicated his newfound disposable income to inviting artists to Utah to install their work in unique locations. His first exhibition consisted of work by two locals who responded to, and presented their work at, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*. Later, Sang used re-

lationships he had cultivated over Instagram to invite national artists. He works with his guests to identify ideal locations for their work, which have included the Salt Flats, Little Cottonwood Canyon, and *The Tree of Life* sculpture near Wendover. There are no opening receptions or public viewings, only crisp photo-documentation that has earned his project an international reputation. For Sang, Final Hot Desert is about establishing and nurturing networks and relationships, and reaching out from Utah - which is often perceived as a cultural desert - to introduce himself and his state to the outside world.

The youthful optimism that permeates these examples has shaken the cultural ground of Utah. Artists are learning from these individual and collective efforts and are communicating and networking across geographic divides as never before. They are experimenting within their artistic practices and with modes of installation and display. By encouraging and supporting each other, and questioning the necessity of standard exhibition models, they are creating excitement, and establishing innovative working methodologies. Whether we are beginning an ascent to a lofty summit, or heading back down into a valley of cultural apathy is yet to be determined.

The Canonisation of Surrealism in the United States

by Sandra Zalman: Part 2

Historicizing Dada and Surrealism

As Barr contemplated his retirement as Director of Collections at MoMA, he chose a young art historian, William Rubin, who was then working on a major study of Dada and Surrealism, to be his successor. In 1966, Rubin was hired as a guest curator for the exhibition *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, which would eventually open at MoMA in March 1968. Rubin recognised Dada and Surrealism's vibrant legacy for contemporary American artists like Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol and included work by Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and such Pop artists as Claes Oldenburg in the exhibition. As a collector of contemporary art, Rubin was heavily influenced by formalist criticism, but he also believed the MoMA had a unique position in its ability to make historical arguments. Thus, one of his main goals for the exhibition was to establish Dada and Surrealism's place in a linear narrative of modern art.

Rubin and Barr agreed that Dada and Surrealism were essentially, in Rubin's words, "life movements, or philosophical movements, movements that were really more interested in poetry, psychology, politics, action on various levels, than specifically in works of art."

In planning the exhibition, Rubin had Barr's show of three decades earlier very much in mind, writing that his exhibition would 'be the first comprehensive survey of these movements since Alfred Barr's *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* in 1936'. He and Barr were in regular communication about the exhibition. But unlike Barr in 1936, one of Rubin's goals for the exhibition was to secure a place for Surrealism in the canon of modern art. However, the canon he was thinking of was very much based on a formalist understanding of modern art, as espoused by Greenberg, and despite extensive knowledge of the expanded field of contemporary artistic production, Rubin's exhibition still favoured painting and sculpture. Furthermore, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* was intended to shape the recent history of American art by subsuming Dada and Surrealism into a history of Abstract Expressionism, while also affirming Dada and Surrealism as precedents for Pop art. Rubin and Barr agreed that Dada and Surrealism were essentially, in Rubin's words, "life movements, or philosophical movements, movements that were really more interested in poetry, psychology, politics, action on various levels, than specifically in works of art." But with the added vantage point of 32 years, Rubin's exhibition could confront the "irony... that what remains of these movements and what best characterizes for us the historical [import] of these two movements, is the work of art itself." Dada

Rubin was heavily influenced by formalist criticism, but he also believed the MoMA had a unique position in its ability to make historical arguments.

and Surrealism's cultural relevancy was of secondary importance to Rubin, who felt that the time had come to inscribe the movements in the history of modern art, writing: "I have proceeded from the assumption, therefore, that the works can be described in terms that make sense for art history in general and for the discussion of modernist painting and sculpture in particular". Dada and Surrealism were accepted as art movements, but they had not been institutionalised as such.

Thus, it was important for Rubin to convincingly present the Abstract Expressionists' debt to Surrealism despite the Abstract Expressionists' desire to obscure Surrealism's influence in their early works. One example of this was Rubin's inclusion of Mark Rothko's 1944 painting *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea*, which Rothko had censored from his 1961 retrospective at MoMA. Writing to *New York Times* critic John Canaday, Rubin explained his inclusion of these works, while also revealing his bias against them:

"As the Surrealist-influenced but quite fine early work of such painters as Rothko, Newman, and still is little known except to people who were assiduous gallery goers in the 40's, I felt that a substantial amount of this material should be included."

Rubin's phrasing – 'Surrealist-influenced but quite fine' – implies that despite the Surrealist influence in the early work of Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clyfford Still, the paintings are still worthy of exhibition. Thus, he subtly undercuts the very body of work he seeks to account for, understanding the historical interest in Surrealism while implicitly acknowledging it as something to be overcome. Even then, such important critics as Irving Sandler and Sidney Tillim still refused to fully credit Surrealism's influence on the New York School.

Rubin's exhibition re-inscribed the views of French modernist critics who understood Miró as a key painter in the history of modern art, also reinforcing Greenberg's views. Miró is often singled out in formalist accounts because there is no need in approaching his work to reconcile elements of representation, academicism, or populism found in other manifestations of Surrealism. In order to make this case, Rubin highlighted Miró's large-scale painting *Birth of the World* (1925) as a crucial forerunner for mid-century Abstract Expressionism. He wrote to the owner of the painting:

"Since this painting [La Naissance du Monde] has never been seen in this country and since it is so important historically – I consider it as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* for the Informelle – I should just



Mark Rothko Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea

him between an established European avant-garde and 'the generation of Pollock' demonstrates how Rubin sought to establish Miró as an aesthetic lynchpin between the European avant-garde and the New York School.

Rubin's motive for the exhibition was not lost on contemporary reviewers, who recognised that instead of showcasing Dada and Surrealism, the exhibition marked an attempt to rein in these unruly moments of modernism, forcing them into an aesthetic lineage and thereby reducing their revolutionary impact. In May 1968, Rosenberg wrote in *The New Yorker* that the sole purpose of Rubin's show could only be "to knock out the philosophical underpinnings of modern art. The show is a remarkable, if not epoch-making, instance of a museum's openly intruding on current art history as an active partisan force by posing its own conception of value and its own will regarding the future against the will and ideas of the artists it is displaying." Rosenberg saw the museum, with Rubin as its agent, as trying to fix a place for Dada and Surrealism by firmly placing them in the category of art,

like you to know that to be able to have this picture for the New York showing of the exhibition would give me the greatest single satisfaction of any loan I will be getting; but even more, it would be a revelation for our tremendously attentive audience of painters and amateurs whose image of Miro has never been in balance due to the absence in America of such works as *La Naissance du Monde* and many smaller pictures painted in that direction. ... You will especially appreciate the recognition of *La Naissance du Monde* to help confirm Miro as the real foundation of post-Cubist abstraction."

Rubin's conviction – that Miró was the real foundation of post-Cubist abstraction – is underscored by his comparison with Picasso's *Demaiselles d'Avignon* and further reinforced through his selection of 24 Mirós for the exhibition. *Birth of the World's* large dimensions – over 8 by 6 feet – and Miro's use of automatism and free play of drips made the painting a convincing predecessor to Pollock's work, though the painting had not been shown the U.S. and thus was almost certainly unknown to Pollock. Nonetheless, the Surrealists' automatism was a widely-recognised influence on Pollock. Rubin unequivocally stated his admiration of Miró in an interview about Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage for the television show *Camera III* in 1968:

"I think that Miró is by far the best artist in that exhibition. And he is the best artist of the generation between the two wars. In other words, between the generation of Picasso, Matisse and Bonnard, and the generation of Pollock let's say, the greatest painter in the modern tradition is Miró. And he is the only great painter, in my estimation, in this exhibition."

Rubin's candid assessment of Miró – and the explicit way he places

and in relation to a certain set of standards for contemporary art practice.

In light of the social upheaval of the 1960s, MoMA's presentation of Dada and Surrealism seemed untenably conservative to contemporary critics. The most scathing reviews came from those critics who realised that a history of art based exclusively on form excluded the social dimension of art, draining the lifeblood from images that were meant to convey revolutionary ideas. Describing the rift that had ignited the partisan reaction to the show, critic Max Kozloff wrote in the left-leaning journal *The Nation*:

Formulated once again in terms of history, the debate pivots on whether you take seriously the idea that art issues primarily from art, or accept literally the Surrealist assumption that art can transcend itself (i.e., its historical moment and hermetic instincts) and permanently affect life in the same way as could an "action."

Kozloff goes on to react with thick sarcasm to the position of such formalist critics as Michael Fried, who believed that 'the extent to which a painting is contaminated by the Surrealist sensibility is the extent of its failure'. Even the notion of a Surrealist sensibility demonstrates that Surrealism exceeded stylistic categorisation, and instead could be classified as a way of perceiving and responding to the world. Unlike critics who dismissed Surrealism unilaterally, Rubin was keenly aware of the problem that Surrealism posed to art history and alluded to Surrealism's difficulty in the exhibition catalogue. There Rubin acknowledged, "obviously a definition of style that, for Dada, must comprehend the work of Duchamp and Arp and, for Surrealism, that of Miró and Dalí, will be problematic. Yet the alternative is not simply to accept confusion". For Rubin, the key difficulty was that Dada and Surrealism "fostered ac-

tivities in the plastic arts so variegated as almost to preclude the use of the terms as definitions of style”.

The glaring issue that remained after Rubin’s show was not about Surrealism’s place in the canon, but what the canon of modern art meant to designate. Critic James R. Mellow alluded to this when he noted of Rubin’s exhibition that ‘there is an ironic significance in the fact that the boisterous, anti-esthetic, prodigal sons have now come home to rest on the great mothering breast of the Museum of Modern Art’. Mellow’s assessment, typical of much of the criticism of Rubin’s show, underscores MoMA’s power at this point in its own history to define the canon through the artwork it displayed, regardless of the original intentions of the artists.

Rubin’s exhibition, reinforced by his installation of the permanent collection at MoMA, legitimised Dada and Surrealism as part of the canon, but inadvertently exposed a larger problem – that in the expanded production of avant-garde artistic practice a canon based on form alone was not sustainable. Protesters at the opening of Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage drew attention to the de-politicization of modern art in what they considered the museum’s sterilised displays. MoMA’s hegemony began to be more consistently challenged in the 1970s by the next generation of artists, critics and art historians. In a sweeping critique of MoMA published in 1978, art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach argued that the MoMA’s installation of its permanent collection presented Surrealism as having “unseated the last vestiges of reason and history and ... you end up in the Abstract Expressionist realm of myth ... in which abstract form signified the Absolute. This is the climax ...”. For Wallach and Duncan, MoMA’s installation positioned Surrealism as a gateway through which one passed, and ultimately dispensed with, on the way to the triumph of abstraction.

Challenging the Modern

For critics and scholars alike, it was increasingly clear that the narrow formalist parameters that MoMA espoused in the 1970s demanded reappraisal. One such critic was Rosalind Krauss, a prolific writer at *Artforum* from 1966-1974. In 1976, Krauss co-founded the influential journal *October* which for her coincided with “a transitional period in which the modernist canon, the forms and categories that had defined and elucidated it, were everywhere in question. This situation, which we have subsequently come to call postmodernist, required in our estimation an intensive effort of re-assessment and analysis”. Krauss recognised the inadequacy of formalist tools to account for the range of modern artistic production and became particularly convinced that she could challenge the prevailing stylistic understanding of modern art by considering Surrealism’s photography. Inspired by art historian Dawn Ades’ 1978 exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* at the Hayward Gallery, London, Krauss wanted to focus on Surrealist photography because as an indexical, reproducible medium operating at the centre of an avowedly anti-aesthetic movement, it offered a concise way to interrogate the underpinnings of modernism.

L’Amour Fou: Surrealism and Photography, curated by Krauss and Jane Livingston, represented Krauss’s intervention into the debates about the historicization of Surrealist work, though the venue this time was not MoMA, but the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. The seeds of the exhibition had been planted in

the 1970s, when Krauss had seen the catalogue published by the Art Institute of Chicago in conjunction with curator David Travis’s exhibition *The Julien Levy Collection Starting with Atget* (on view from December 11, 1976 to February 20, 1977). In a later interview, Levy described the American art world’s attitude toward Surrealism: “There was always a remaining prejudice against surrealism, because it’s not serious even about politics, or it’s decadent, or it’s European or purportedly dead, or I don’t know just what.” In the 1930s, Levy had originally wanted his gallery to specialise in photography, but there had not been a sustainable market for the medium in the 1930s and he had pivoted toward Surrealism as a result. The purchase of a major part of his photography collection by the Art Institute in the 1970s marked a belated coup, indicative of the burgeoning institutional interest in photography by major museums.

While Krauss’s decision to curate a major exhibition that would focus on Surrealist photography was inspired in part by photography’s increasing institutionalisation, she also sought to recuperate a kind of photography that would disrupt the modernist canon. Instead of the formal attributes of photography promoted by John Szarkowski, curator of photography at MoMA from 1962-1991, Krauss wanted to foreground the Surrealists’ experimental photographic practices, in which they undercut ‘straight’ photography and imbued it not only with the subjective presence of the photographer, but also explored themes of sex, desire, and violence through darkroom manipulation. At the same time, even straight photography was being re-theorized as surreal at its core. As cultural critic Susan Sontag argued: “The mainstream of photographic activity has shown that a Surrealist manipulation or theatricalization of the real is unnecessary, if not actually redundant. Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in the second degree,

Krauss recognised the inadequacy of formalist tools to account for the range of modern artistic production and became particularly convinced that she could challenge the prevailing stylistic understanding of modern art by considering Surrealism’s photography.



Brassai, Involuntary Sculptures, 1933

narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision". As photography received increased attention in the 1970s, critics also recognized the medium's inherent Surrealist qualities, while simultaneously discounting Surrealist 'manipulation or theatricalization.'

Surrealist photography thwarted the accepted stylistic categories of Surrealist artistic practice – it was neither automatist/abstract nor academic/illusionist. Instead Krauss wanted to dispense with the issue of style altogether, asserting that "issues of Surrealist heterogeneity will be resolved around the semiological functions of photography rather than the formal properties operating the traditional art-historical classifications of style". Krauss advocated for a new understanding of Surrealism via the theories of George Bataille and formlessness. Reviewers of the *L'Amour Fou* exhibition recognized that rather than place value on this body of art works in the traditional sense, Krauss's objective was instead, as art historian Hal Foster put it, "to displace the formalist model of modernism by means of its 'cursed part', Surrealism". Krauss marshalled critical theory to expose the fissures in the construction of the modern art canon in the U.S. and articulate a postmodern condition.

If today the stranglehold that formalist criticism once held on art historical discourse in the U.S. in the post-war period seems irreconcilable with our increasingly globalised and pluralist contemporary art world, it is in part because Dada and Surrealism consciously challenged reigning understandings of modern art, pushing on the category of art itself, and thereby rejecting the very

premise of canonisation. Barr seems to have anticipated this position as early as 1936, when he declared Surrealism 'a way of life' and began to associate Surrealism with the idea of the broader notion of the 'fantastic,' which was in some ways conceived as a counterpoint to and expansion from the formal values that were already associated with evolving understandings of modernism. Despite Barr's inclusive view of modern art, Greenberg's persuasive art criticism inscribed formalism as the basis for aesthetic evaluation. Rubin, though he departed from Greenberg's stringent criteria and embraced Pop art, still considered style to be the fundamental through-line in the narrative of modernism he sought to delineate. Reacting against both Greenberg and Rubin, Krauss sought to open up the discourse of modernism by using Surrealist photography to challenge the limits of the modernist canon. Surrealism's aesthetic diversity, alongside its political and philosophical commitments, literary experiments, and absorption into mass culture, have contributed to its fraught relationship with the canon of modern art in the U.S.; yet Barr's multifaceted view of modernism – in which a Dada-Surrealist trajectory could be traced alongside, and especially intermingle with, an Abstract-Cubist one – is accepted today, as the proliferation of scholarship on Surrealism – and its long and variegated legacy – attests. Surrealism may be modern, but the questions it poses about what constitutes the canon, and how to expand the understanding of artistic practice, are decidedly contemporary.

She BAM! Interview with Laetitia Gorsy

by Viktor Witkowski

In 2018, Laetitia Gorsy opened up her gallery She BAM! in the Spinnerei, located in the East German city of Leipzig. Over three decades, the Spinnerei - a former late 19th-century cotton factory - has become a hub for artists, galleries, residencies, other cultural institutions and ventures attracting tens of thousands of visitors from across the world each year.

There is no other gallery like it: owned by a woman, operated by women and exhibiting only women artists. Laetitia, who is a French national, studied modern literature before she switched to graphic design. While working on her M.A., she developed collaborative projects by creating self-published books, fanzines and newspapers. Soon she was circulating and exhibiting books by placing them in bookshops and book fairs. In 2014, she was selected for a French curator-in-residence project called Generator at the 40m Cube. After her move to Germany, she started working at a commercial gallery in Leipzig. During the same period, she enrolled in the curatorial studies program at the HGB Leipzig (Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig). When the gallery permanently shut its doors two years later, Laetitia Gorsy used it as an opportunity to come up with her own concept by addressing a void in the global art market.



Laetitia Gorsy (photograph by Walther LeKon)

Describe what She BAM! is and when you first decided to bring it to life.

LG: She BAM! is an art gallery that exclusively represents women artists, an all-women gallery. The program is international and the desire is to join forces with artists and collaborators to showcase

the diversity that current artistic practices can represent. She BAM! is multilingual and works with emerging, mid-career and established artists from France, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Poland, the US. Outside the exhibition program, She BAM! collaborates with women who work in the world of art including design, graphic design, publishing, fashion, as well as other people who support women across artistic fields. She BAM! sometimes takes the form of a ‘hub’ or ‘think-tank’ by organizing events, talks, round tables and workshops. She BAM! intends to support and manage women artists and their careers. It is an initiative that believes in the importance of women who create spaces for other women without competition, without malice. It stands for a continuity of sharing, a transfer of power.

After having worked for almost a decade in the art world, the need to create a place like She Bam! became abundantly clear to me. I wanted to find a solution to the underrepresentation of women working in leading positions in galleries, museums, and art fairs - as though women are unable to undertake anything serious. She Bam! was born out of a necessity to change the present situation. This commitment is political and social. But it is also important to underline that my engagement with artworks and artists’ concepts is not limited by She BAM!’s broader agenda. It is not a question of offering exclusively ‘feminist’ exhibitions, but rather to show a variety of artistic practices independent of their content.



Installation Shot of Diane by Theresa Möller in Leipzig, Germany (Courtesy of She BAM!)

According to a September 19th, 2019 article on *artnet.com*, the market for work by women doubled over the past decade. But the sales of work by women account for only two percent of total art sales between 2008 and the first half of 2019. Some people in the art world think that they can already congratulate themselves for promoting women artists, but these numbers suggest that there is still a lot of work ahead of us. Do you believe that She BAM! can address this disparity and how so? What else needs to be done to achieve equality in the arts?

LG: Women artists have been marginalized and under-represented; art history has been written by men, for men. Men and their money also dominate the art market. This creates a situation that is not easy to manage. To operate within this system, you have to stay strong in the face of these pressures produced by men and their money. You have to be aware of the art world’s failures and operate

around these circumstances. It’s embarrassing when I hear that investing in a woman is bad business. To get out in front of these problems, you really have to dig in, unmask the system, have courage, be patient, resist and denounce these abuses of power.

I believe in the possibility of generous and open networks for artists and dealers that do not compete with each other. It’s true that not everyone can work together, and I admit that the idea of a global network seems complicated. The idea is above all to support each other to build professional alliances, to give each other a chance to speak up and be heard, to share experiences with people who feel the same way and to put ourselves in a position where we can trust each other.

Even though She BAM! is not a project space, it is not a traditional gallery either. You organize exhibitions that take place in changing locations in Leipzig, Paris and other cities. In this way, She BAM! offers more flexibility for its artists, their work, and the various art-viewing publics you reach. Are you proposing a new gallery format? And if so, how can we expect She BAM! to develop and grow in the future?

LG: Maybe I just don’t like to follow what people or art professionals expect me to do. I follow my feelings and take time to reflect on the conditions that I am facing. Once I get a sense for a potential project, I either go for it or not. But what I don’t want is to be stuck in a box, because I prefer to experiment as much as possible.

Any new gallery format poses opportunities and challenges, but maybe it is more about adapting the format to the actual world: being flexible, unexpected, dynamic. I am curious how it will evolve and grow. I want it to become big of course! I want to support artists and advance their careers and create bridges and connections beyond borders. I also intend to build a tightly knit and dynamic She BAM! team. At the same time, I want to retain my ability to work independently and follow my vision.

How do you seek out and pick artists? And what are your responsibilities as curator?

LG: When I decide to work with an artist, it is a mix of something that attracts me: coincidence, intuition, an encounter and a vision that I want to realize. I have to believe in it and be able to defend it. It is also important to me to have a good feeling about, and a meaningful relationship with, an artist in order to trust each other.

My responsibilities go beyond just being a curator. It is about being the founder of the gallery, being responsible for all communications, the sales, being responsible for the conditions that I create for the artist, including any fees for transport and travel as well as production costs, etc. This has to be taken seriously. As soon as you defend a practice or work by an artist, you are invested, and you should work hand in hand with the artist until the end of the process. In some cases, you might have to halt a collaboration, because it is better for both sides. But in general, my goal with She BAM! is to offer the best possible exhibition conditions for my artists and help them to develop their practice in new ways. I also provide close support to the artists throughout the process of putting together a show – from guiding their vision to displaying it. I think of each exhibition as a collaboration. My responsibility is also to promote each exhibition to the public and its supporters. All

in all, I shoulder the entire project of She BAM! and try to keep it moving to a new level each time!

Earlier this year you organized an exhibition with the Guerrilla Girls that ran from January 11th through the 15th of February in Leipzig. How did this show come about and are there other established artists that you are planning to work with?

LG: That appeared to me as something essential and urgent! I first learned about the Guerrilla Girls when I was taking art history classes a long time ago in college. When I was an art student, I was looking at their work with admiration and respect. Then, last year, I saw one of their works in São Paulo, at the MASP (The São Paulo Museum of Art) in the Lina Bo Bardi display, and I decided that I had to do a show with them at She BAM!. I saw it as my responsibility to show their iconic work at the gallery - as a reminder, as necessity, as something we have to keep in mind moving forward with our discourse on equality. I also wanted to show them outside their regular exhibition context which tends to be museums or blue-chip galleries. Of course, I work with many emerging artists and artists from my own generation, but I am totally into working with more established and mid-career artists. This goes with my idea of intersectionality, diversity and, yes: there are already several projects in the pipeline.

Several artists who you work with are either based in Leipzig or studied in Leipzig at the HGB (Leipzig Academy of Fine Arts). In what ways does Leipzig and its artists differ from cities like Paris, London or Berlin? What do you think needs to change in Leipzig and what can other cities learn from it?

LG: Leipzig interests me because it is challenging. I saw the gradual change of the city when I went there in 2012 for the first time. I can't say how it is different to Paris, London or Berlin, except that I find it a very good platform where you can develop works and ideas without the stress of working and living in a metropolis. Every city has its own vibe. For me, it is more a question of destiny: I came to Leipzig with the intention to eventually leave. But now, I have learned to like Leipzig. I don't really know what other cities can learn from it, but I think Leipzig has learned from other places as there is an influx of people from different parts of the country and from abroad. I like to uphold my outsider status in this city; it



Installation Shot of Tabula Smaragdina by Chloe Piot in Leipzig, Germany (Courtesy of She BAM!)



Guerrilla Girls. Not Ready to Make Nice

allows me to keep a distance to its art scene. I also have the same feeling when I am in France, since I am traveling back and forth between both countries.

The art worlds in Germany and France are very different from each other. For instance, art professionalism plays a different role in both countries. In France, art schools are becoming aware that it is their responsibility to not only support students' practice, but to prepare them for their career as professionals. And a lot of young, recently graduated French art students have trouble turning their practice into a career. I wouldn't say that it works better in Germany, but there are more artist-run spaces by students for example and other such initiatives which demonstrate a robust interaction between students and the professional art world. In France, the government allocates less funds to artists. Social and health care benefits are also quite chaotic, bureaucratic and in need of reforms. In Germany, the Arts are perhaps considered a more essential aspect of society. In general, Germans seem to take it more seriously: as a profession rather than just a romantic idea. But generalizations aside: in the end, it is all about nuances and the distinct ways in which each culture approaches art.

It's a real advantage to help artists with their professional growth and defend women artists.

She BAM! is very active in Leipzig but it also has a presence in France. For example, I have been working on a program with pop-up events in France and I maintain a close relation to art professionals based there. I think Leipzig is important, but She BAM! is not connected to a specific place: I want it to be immaterial and everywhere.

Anything else you want to share?

LG: It is hard to say, but to think of equality as something that only concerns a minority of people is very sad. Whenever this question is raised, people start thinking more about equality. But equality should not just be supported because it is the fashionable thing to do at any given moment. The increased attention paid to women artists could become a more common phenomenon within the next few years. But as soon as you stop fighting for their visibility, that tendency might dissipate, and patriarchal domination returns like mould on a wall. No one will ask you to fight for women and minorities' rights, but if you commit to doing it, you have to continuously keep up the pressure to keep it alive.

Who was Olympia?

by Vaughan Allen



Édouard Manet *Olympia* 1863, oil on canvas
(Courtesy wiki commons)

An instantly recognisable woman's face appeared in two notorious paintings by 19th-century French artist Édouard Manet – but who was she? In *Le Déjeuner sur L'Herbe* (The Luncheon on the Grass, 1862-3) a naked woman nonchalantly disports herself next to two men: the artist's future brother-in-law Ferdinand Leenhoff, and a hybrid of his brothers Eugène and Gustave. Unperturbed by their being fully dressed, the woman turns to meet the viewers' gaze with a disconcertingly blank stare. This ground-breaking work so enraged some visitors to the 1863 Salon des Refusés they actually struck the canvas with canes or umbrellas.

Similar condemnation and disgust met his portrayal of the same woman two years later, lounging provocatively as a flagrant *demi mondaine*, her maid alongside bearing an admirer's bouquet. With left-hand strategically placed to preserve a modicum of propriety, the painting was – surprisingly – accepted by the official Salon judges, but two attendants were required to prevent physical attack. Entitled *Olympia*, the figure, naked apart from some adornments of the courtesans' trade, again confronts the spectators' gaze with a look of studied sang froid. So who was this siren of the salons?

Manet had probably first encountered the woman who became his favourite model in the atelier of Thomas Couture for whom she modelled at the age of 16. Although he may have noticed her in the street carrying her guitar, which, along with the violin, she played well enough to give lessons. Not a conventional beauty, Manet was nonetheless drawn to her "unusual" look and striking ginger coloured hair. She was first painted by him as *The Street Singer* early in 1862.

Victorine-Louise Meurent was born on February 18, 1844 into a family of artisans. Her father was a *ciseleur-patinator* who worked with his sculptor brother finishing bronze statuary and ornaments. Victorine's strict, unfeeling mother ran a millinery-laundry shop near the Folie-Mericourt. Disliking the presence of her only child

on the premises, Victorine accompanied her mean-tempered father and kindly uncle to their places of work, which sometimes included Couture's studio. Always clad in overalls, she occasionally stood-in for figures of boys in his paintings until she started convent school aged seven. As she grew up Victorine developed a marked independent streak and tomboy personality, plus a noticeable lack of interest in boys. This latter feature suited her mother who, witnessing the downfall of so many youthful customers, equated premature pregnancy with ruination. Responding to Victorine's shrewd, wilful, androgynous persona, Manet painted her in 1862 in the costume of an *espada* (swordsman who delivers the coup de grace in the bullring). In 1866 she appeared again as *The Fifer*, a military flute-playing boy, then another four times before her last sitting in *Gare Saint Lazare* in 1873. Meurent also posed for Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Puvis de Chavannes, and Belgian artist-teacher Alfred Stevens with whom it was suggested she was romantically involved, although no concrete evidence for this exists.

However, Victorine Meurent was not content merely to appear in others' paintings, because she held artistic aspirations of her own. Although the Ecole des Beaux-Arts didn't admit women until 1897, several of the school's professors did provide tuition in their studios. One such was Couture, who had admitted Victorine for informal drawing lessons while still a teenager. Eschewing the avant garde, Victorine was more comfortable with the academic techniques of portrait painter Etienne Leroy. His teaching enabled her to develop skills whereby her work was accepted at the official Salons of 1876, 1879, 1885, 1904, plus on two further occasions. She also studied under historical painter Tony Robert-Fleury at the Academie Julian. He later assisted her induction into the Société des Artistes Français, which he founded in 1903.

These successes helped Meurent earn a small living as a magazine illustrator and garner sales of her paintings in restaurants and cafés where she sang and played guitar. During this time she took an apartment in Montmartre at Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière, a year later moving closer to establishments such as Le Souris, Le Hannequin and Le Rat Mort along the Boulevard de Clichy, which stayed open throughout the day and night where she'd meet her lover Janine, a milliner and gambler who frequented the races at Longchamp. They regularly ate at Chez Coquet's, where women of similar Sapphic persuasion dined, including neighbours Sarah Bernhardt and her partner Louise Abbema.

After Meurent's father died in the early 1880s, his wife's failing health led to the closure of the Rue Popincourt shop and her relocation to the suburb of Asnières, where Victorine was obliged to make frequent supportive visits. The straitened financial circumstances that resulted compelled her to act upon Manet's supposed pledge to ensure her a dividend from the sale of any paintings for which she had modelled. Preoccupied with the aftermath of her husband's death in 1883, Madame Manet didn't respond to

Meurent's written overture. Throughout the 1880s she continued with her magazine illustration, but in the following decade this began to diminish. After Meurent's possessive erratic lover Janine's departure, Victorine fell into a temporary decline. However, she did receive some portrait commissions from well-off Montmartre shopkeepers, thoughtfully passed on by former teacher Etienne Leroy. The publicity surrounding the posthumous auction of Manet's *Olympia* also generated interest in her work and Tony Robert-Fleury helped boost her income with the occasional financial 'donation'.

It was at this time that her ex-drinking partner Toulouse Lautrec regularly took male friends to 69 Rue Douai in Montmartre under the porch of an old house in which he'd once lived, up five flights of stairs to an attic door. His knock was answered by a diminutive, wrinkled ginger-haired woman, whereupon Lautrec, with his penchant for redheads, raised his hat and presented her with a bouquet of flowers, box of bon bons (invariably containing a generous gratuity) along with the salutation "may I introduce the beautiful *Olympia* of Manet".

With his continued support and that of Robert-Fleury, Victorine secured employment as a theatre usher, an important position in fin de siècle Paris. There she met fellow usher and piano teacher Marie Dufour with whom she entered into a loving relationship. After acceptance of her entry to the Paris Salon in 1904 and at Marie's suggestion, two years later they decided upon a move to Colombe, an outer suburb popular with retired artists, where they purchased the house at 22 Rue Clara-Lemoine. Enjoying this pleasant semi-rural locale, Victorine could paint in peace whilst Marie took

secretarial work and gave piano lessons. Meurent's membership of the Société des Artistes Français entitled her to financial assistance, instalments of which were granted in 1909 and during WW1. The two women lived a pleasant retirement together until Victorine died on March 17, 1927.

Though there were periods of her life given over to excess, Meurent distinguished herself as a woman ahead of her time. Refusing to accept a place in society circumscribed by her gender and humble beginnings, she abjured the usual passive role of artist's model or grisette to become a successful painter in her own right. By doing so she identified with fellow feminist contemporaries such as Louise Michel, Rosa Bonheur and rival Suzanne Valadon, thereby forging a link between them and 18th-century revolutionary France's proto-feminists Pauline Léon, Théroigne de Méricourt and even modern inheritors like Simone de Beauvoir and Antoinette Fouque. While Victorine Meurent may not have been a great artist, she certainly made the most of the talent she did possess. And like artists of our own time such as Tracey Emin, overcame adversity and scandal to achieve both artistic prominence and respectability. Likewise, through determination and the good fortune which often accompanies a strong personality, went on to find recognition within an established society of her peers.

Sadly, none of her works were thought to have survived, yet in 2004 an accomplished portrait of a young girl holding a palm sprig came to light from the 1880s called *Le Jour de Rameaux* (Palm Sunday). Having been restored it now proudly hangs in the 'Musée Municipal d'Art et d'Histoire de Colombes.



Edouard Manet - La Nègresse (Laure)
(Courtesy wiki commons)

this prostitute showed no sign of being ashamed of her profession; she stares - impassive, commanding, contemptuous - directly at her spectators, daring them to comment. Today though, many people might feel more disturbed by what is obscured and ignored in *Olympia* than by what is included.

Since 1865 and until very recently, discussion of this powerful painting has focused entirely on how Manet subverts convention on painting nude women. Art critics have pointed out that naked *Olympia* does not seduce or flirt, her eyes are not downcast, she shows none of the soft, sly submission of her many predecessors. Her big, broad hand is clamped over her sex like a padlock. Victo-

On Olympia

The reason why Manet's painting of Victorine Meurent in *Olympia* outraged the gallery-going public of 1865 was that it appeared to show a prostitute: the artist included many items which, apparently, were associated with prostitution in mid 19th-century Paris, though their significance would be lost on the modern viewer. Worse,

the reason why Manet's painting of Victorine Meurent in *Olympia* outraged the gallery-going public of 1865 was that it appeared to show a prostitute: the artist included many items which, apparently, were associated with prostitution in mid 19th-century Paris, though their significance would be lost on the modern viewer. Worse,

by Josephine Gardiner

rine/*Olympia*'s indifference to the male gaze has made her something of an early feminist icon.

But mainly it's all been about *Olympia*, the white woman on the couch.

There are of course two women in the picture. The one on the right, the maid standing to offer the flowers, was named Laure. Nobody seems to remember her surname. Laure's voluminous pale clothes emphasise her darkness, and in general there is so much white in the painting - sheets, pillows, Victorine's paper-white body, Victorine's white slippers, the white wrapping around the pale flowers - that Laure's face is almost lost against the dark-green curtains. You need to see a very good reproduction to identify her features at all; in many, her face appears merely as a black absence. She is background. Her presence serves only to enhance the painting's (admittedly superb) composition, with her physical appearance operating as a negative counterweight to the white subject.

Laure appears again as a nursemaid in *Children in the Tuileries Garden*. Here her face is entirely obscure (at least in reproduction), but so are most of the others in the work. Manet does attempt to capture Laure's individual humanity in one portrait (1863), though

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The Mindless Image Making of A.I.

by Stephen Luecking

Most of what the general public regards as artificial intelligence is not intelligence at all, but simply brute force computing that enables the analysis of monstrously large sets of data in a split second.

There is a romantic notion that art is the last bastion of truly human expression. Consequently, news of inroads of artificial intelligence into art invariably generate apprehensions of AI's deleterious effect on all things human. At the center of that phobia is the algorithm. Somehow this seemingly mysterious entity has taken the role of a Frankenstein of the soul that is destined to replace the human in human endeavor. This fear propels sales of books that recklessly flog AI as an existential threat.

A little understanding of AI and the function of an algorithm can go a long way toward easing such fears.

Most of what the general public regards as artificial intelligence is not intelligence at all, but simply brute force computing that enables the analysis of monstrously large sets of data in a split second. Based on instructions (algorithms) written into the program, the program seeks out patterns in the mountain of data and then processes them as instructed. One example of brute force computing occurred when IBM's Deep Blue super-computer defeated chess master Garry Kasparov. Deep Blue's processing speed, employing 120 parallel chips, could run through all possible scenarios for outcomes up to 20 moves ahead. It did so using a library of 700,000 grand master games. Human chess champions on the other hand can barely consider seven moves ahead.

Deep Blue lost the first round of matches in February of 1996 after some surprise moves by Kasparov. Consequently, programmers beefed up Deep Blue under the tutelage of grand master Joel Benjamin. The super computer then edged past Kasparov for the win in May 1997.

Since these matches, the field of artificial intelligence has added machine learning, wherein programs have added layers of processors capable of tweaking algorithms that had failed a task in their first running. Processing speeds permitted many, many test runs and many, many tweaks until the algorithms, rewritten by the machine itself, succeeded. Success usually arrived after many millions of attempts. The new algorithms might be chaotic clusters of code, but they could work.

A recent case of brute force computing applicable to the arts has been the animation of scanned photographic portraits to speak while executing convincing facial expressions. If the computer can scan a number of photographs from different views, the resulting video appears completely natural to human perception.

The program is, in part, a massive upgrade of facial recognition programs which identify 20-25 points on a face and then compares these with faces kept in databases. Facial recognition programs



AICAN, St. George Killing the Dragon, 2017, sold at auction for \$16,000

come in two basic types, both with their origins in the arts. One based on methods developed by Albrecht Durer uses the location of facial features on a grid; the other, created by Leonardo da Vinci, denotes these positions as a network of linked triangles. Either one of these systems can categorize up to 17 quadrillion faces.

By contrast, the animation program begins by stipulating 10,000 points on a face to establish the full array of bones and muscles needing animation. Like Deep Blue, it references a huge library, in this case faces in motion, to maintain accuracy in the animation. (AI libraries typically run into the millions, even billions of items related to the program's task. There are now companies dedicated solely to providing data sets for AI.)

Another incursion of AI into the art world has garnered more attention since it made it to the top of the world art market. The ink on paper *Portrait of Edmond Bellamy* looked enough like the market's conception of art to sell at Christie's in 2018 for \$432,500. This marker of success generated further interest, such as the subsequent exhibit 'Faceless Portraits Transcending Time' by Dr. Ahmed Elgammal at HG Contemporary gallery in New York City's Chelsea district.

Like the 'Bellamy' portrait Elgammal, who directs Rutgers University's Art and Artificial Intelligence Lab, used GAN – an acronym for 'generative adversarial network' - technology. Under GAN the AI program harnesses one set of algorithms to generate forms derived from a library of faces or other data while commandeering a second set of discriminating algorithms programmed to accept or reject the offering and sending the test image back to the drawing board. Hundreds of layers of processing structures known as

neural nets modify the generating algorithms and offer new results. Millions of these exchanges can take place every minute before the generating algorithms can satisfy the discriminators.

The gallery touted the 'Faceless' show as the first dedicated to an artist working in AI. In fact, the show may have come 50 years too late to claim this honor. In the late 60s Harold Cohen stood out from his fellow pioneers of computer graphics by plotting drawings that appeared drawn by the hand of a human artist. Although the computer that produced *Bellamy* possessed 34,000,000 times the processing power of the mainframes employed by Cohen, Cohen's work was far superior as art ... and considerably more intelligent.

Cohen had diligently studied children's drawings and Native American rock art, as well as interviewing artists, with the goal of ascertaining the minimum conditions by which marks can function as art. He translated these conditions into his program Aaron and subsequently provided the program choices by randomizing the algorithms as to what shape to draw and where. With the first shape drawn the algorithm is still random but with a bit more limits – based on the principles Cohen adopted from his research. Meanwhile the movements of the plotter were themselves randomized to waver unpredictably in simulation of the human hand as the pen headed down its path.

Aaron was, by today's definition, not an artificial intelligence because the algorithms did not rewrite themselves: they did not learn. However, in Aaron's time artificial intelligence research concentrated on heuristics, that is, the machine logic was based on if/then statements. Programs were loaded with sets of if/then assertions with some expert programs referencing up to 4,000 such statements. In Aaron's case the 'if' comprised the previously drawn elements. The 'then' was a number of options to be chosen randomly, but with certain options assigned a greater likelihood of selection.

In 1974 Cohen presented Aaron's drawings at a national conference at Purdue University on computer art organized by Dr. Aldo Giorgini. The effect of these drawings was stunning. Amidst presentations of highly mechanical and repetitive patterns Aaron's work stood out, appearing hand drawn and not at all the output of



Athlete Series. AARON/Harold Cohen, 1986
(image: NY Times)

By the 1980s artist/researcher Karl Sims was delighting in the penchant of these algorithms to generate unexpected new forms from parent forms and, further, that through randomization each offspring could be distinctive and unique.

a machine.

Soon other programs followed to create machine-generated art. These exploited genetic algorithms, which could couple two clusters of code to reassemble into new sets of code. This created the effect of two graphic forms meeting and breeding new forms. The most robust of these breeding algorithms grew under John Holland and his students at the University of Michigan, who were developing genetic algorithms in the late 1960s. These became the precursor to machine learning and could yield results that mimicked evolution.

By the 1980s artist/researcher Karl Sims was delighting in the penchant of these algorithms to generate unexpected new forms from parent forms and, further, that through randomization each offspring could be distinctive and unique. Of these the artist chose a select few that would then survive to breed a new generation. In enough generations forms could eventually evolve to satisfy the artist.

Sims was unique in that he wielded expertise in both art and computer science. Most artists, such as William Latham, collaborated with advanced technicians. In Latham's case he, with Stephen Todd at IBM Science UK, fashioned virtual sculpture that resembled the bizarre organisms that had evolved just after the Pre-Cambrian extinction. Latham went on to design the games *Evolve* and later, *The Thing* in which creatures evolved through the course of play.

AI researchers however, sought to script more autonomous programs where the artist need not interpose. This was the role of the discriminating algorithms cited above: to eliminate the artist's husbanding of the generating process.

Some artists/researchers such as Dr. Elgammal saw this addition as shifting the authorship of the art toward AI. Elgammal based his discriminating algorithms on principles of formal analysis as set down by art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1846–1945). In order to reinforce the role of art history, Elgammal assigned value premised on the importance and historical longevity of images bearing these principles.

Reasoning that art historical precedents might better simulate the choices artists make, Elgammal opined that this procedure moved his program, AICAN, toward autonomous art-making. In some exhibits he lists AICAN as his collaborator and in other exhibits he grants the program chief authorship of the images.

Most researchers and users of AI would sharply disagree with Elgammal's assigning creative agency to AICAN. Janelle Shane in her book *You Look Like a Thing and I Love You* avers, for example, that since the choice of database images, the program used, and the principles of discrimination are all in control of the artist, then the artist clearly retains authorship of the work. Most importantly, it is the artist who chooses which works to hang. However, the artist does not control the image processing once the program is running.

The machine bears no ideas, metaphors or symbols. The deep learning process requires a homogenous data set with no divergent image, further narrowing expressive possibilities.

Real image making begins with ideas that ultimately govern the modes of execution and the imagery referenced in the art, not to mention metaphors and symbols.

In general researchers and practiced users of AI regard these programs as assistants with the skill to carry out an expert's grunt work. In fact, most consider the human component essential to the practical operation of AI. In this regard, data guru Nate Silver has cited how accuracy of weather forecasting as offered by AI has revolutionized the field for the better, but its effectiveness increases by 20% after review by weather scientists. The same holds true when sports teams use AI to select recruits: the intervention of a seasoned coach ensures a 20% greater success in predicting a rookie's successful career.

Ellammal's assertion that AICAN is the prime creative agent is in line with the hyperbole that has always seemed to permeate discourse on AI. In the summer of 1957, for instance, the first research team to investigate AI assembled at Dartmouth and coined the term of artificial intelligence. They disliked the term because they believed that they were to create real intelligence, but chose the qualifier artificial so as not to put people off. They believed that their task would be completed by 1962.

Now nearly 60 years later such intelligence is not even close. Current optimistic predictions set that achievement for the decade of the 2040s. This is the timeline for what Ray Kurtzweil, director of AI for Google, has dubbed the 'singularity': the point at which AI meets and then exceeds human intelligence. However, most serious researchers doubt that this will ever happen.

True intelligence requires that the machine gain 'common sense' awareness, such as arises in humans as a result of their interaction with the world from infancy on. This in turn requires 'embodiment', that is, a brain linked to the world by an operational carrier with a system of sensing paraphernalia (eyes, ears, etc.) and a network (nervous system) to transmit and respond to information garnered from the world. By means of these the brain becomes a mind.

Much of the hyperbole surrounding AI is founded on the faith that digital processes can be made to imitate the analog processing of the human brain, and that a faithful enough imitation of intelligence equates to the real thing. One famous test for machine intelligence is, for example, premised on such imitation. The Turing test, suggested by Alan Turing, has a person typing up an extensive chat with a hidden machine. If the person is fooled into believing the chat is with another person, then the machine is likely intelligent. Faith in digital imitation disregards, however, the gross complexity of the human brain: 86 billion neurons with 10,000 dendrites, each connected to another neuron to yield 860 trillion connections, plus another 900 billion glia cells to assist the neurons.

Due to mindless processing, much of the artistic imagery of AI has an uncanny sense of disconnect as if the machine 'just doesn't get



Robbie Barrat, AI generated nude, 2018. Barrat is the artist responsible for the portrait of Edmond Bellamy.

it.' GAN imagery, like that of the *Portrait of Edmond Bellamy*, imitates art without a feel for art. The images develop from algorithms batted back and forth between a database and a set of discriminating algorithms without referencing a meaningful context or purposeful expression. The elements are sliced and diced to be reassembled with a tattered logic that is completely internal to the data processing.

An example of AI logic would be grouping teeth and fingers because both sets feature parallel repeated alignments. An image might result featuring a mouth with fingers protruding or a hand sprouting a row of teeth.

The machine's imaging always produces logic. This logic is often unpredictable and therefore surprising, catching the fancy of AI artists. Consequently, practitioners point to surrealism as sanction for this image-making as well as to Francis Bacon's haunting figuration. Both assertions fall short. Surrealism sports connections that at first blush appear absurd, but go on to unveil deeper meanings. Bacon's rending of the human figure, while disturbing, opens to haunted expression. AI's gratuitous slashing and reassembly of the figure are simply disturbing.

The machine bears no ideas, metaphors or symbols. The deep learning process requires a homogenous data set with no divergent image, further narrowing expressive possibilities.

Real image making begins with ideas that ultimately govern the modes of execution and the imagery referenced in the art, not to mention metaphors and symbols. Further, in the case of painting, there is the physical actuality of the work: textural effects and the practiced indications of the artist's hand. This yields the complexity and richness of a human mind and not an artifice of intelligence.

Reviewing the Reviewer

A Review of Peter Schjeldahl *Hot, Cold, Heavy, Light, 100 Art Writings 1988-2018*

by Victoria Howard



Peter Schjeldahl in September 2009
(Wiki Commons)

Jarrett Earnest has compiled 100 of the art writings of Peter Schjeldahl, the art critic on *The New Yorker*. I imagine Earnest and Schjeldahl chose together which pieces would go in the final version. Earnest's other contribution adds little to the book. His division of the reviews into *Hot, Cold, Heavy and Light* is downright irritating. He tries to explain his playful, idiosyncratic choices without convincing. The first 10 reviews under the *Heavy* category are about sculptors, which makes sense. However, the remaining reviews are about painters, a critic (Greenberg), a religious reformer (Luther) and an art dealer (Castel-

li). How the 'Heavy' epithet applies to these I cannot imagine.

I have commented in a previous review on James Elkins' lamenting that art critics now merely describe art rather than judge it, in my article *Elkins on Art Criticism* (NAE Volume 34 no 3 January – February 2020 pp 35-36). Peter Schjeldahl is an exception. He describes art beautifully - poetically and eloquently - and he judges it. This however is a relatively easy task as he is commenting on art which is generally not contemporary to him. Sixty four per cent of his reviews about individual artists are of dead artists (three of these are almost like obituaries as they are reviews of exhibitions taking place shortly after death – Basquiat, Haring and Kippenberger). That's easy isn't it? History has already pronounced its verdict. Shouldn't the task of a critic be to evaluate what is new, what is happening now? Far harder to judge what is going to stand the test of time, than to comment on what has already passed the test. Far easier to look back over an artist's life and see what s/he has contributed to art, than to judge whether a present-day artist is going to sink beneath the waves. He does concede in his review of Lucien Freud that "Retroactively conferring 'greatness' on an already high-priced artist transmutes inventories of his work from silver to platinum". Schjeldahl is referring to commercial value, but in a sense this is what he is also doing with his retrospective reviews. With the pieces on long-dead artists (Rembrandt, Zurbaran, Velazquez, Bronzino, Mantegna, Bellini, Donatello), he is really seizing the opportunity to wax lyrical about his favourite works. And why not indulge yourself after a long life as an esteemed art critic? He claims that Velazquez's *Las Meninas* is "the best painting in the world". The majority of his reviews on actual artists were on dead ones (64%) instead of living artists (36%).

What else can a reviewer of mostly past works bring to the table? Schjeldahl brings quite a lot. Although the reading of it was quite

I think Schjeldahl's prairie upbringing has a lot to answer for. I imagine the uniform landscapes of his youth led to his describing visual art with such richness.

frustrating - I had to read the book with a dictionary in one hand (*imbroglio, echt, limned, exegete, mensch, toppers, tyro, spondaic, katzenjammer, lucubration, gulled, palimpsestic, velleity, demotic, tatterdemalion* – a person dressed in ragged clothing – who knew?). With the other hand I needed to access the internet to look up images of the artworks under discussion which were not familiar to me. However, if the book had been illustrated it would have cost many times more.

There are many redeeming features. Schjeldahl writes beautifully (he is a published poet). James Elkins thinks that art criticism is elevated by intrinsic literary and, at times, poetic value. When asked what they think is important in art criticism, art critics' top three answers were: description, historical context and writing well (Columbia University's survey of art critics in Elkins). Schjeldahl nails all three of these criteria.

His descriptions are richly imaginative:

Seeing Van Gogh's *Portrait of Joseph Roulin* from 10 feet away, then close up:

'The near-far contrast, like the blue-green clash, generates aesthetic and psychological heat. Formally, there's a mighty push-pull. The modelling of the face seems to carve back into shallow space while the background presses forward... But you'd have to be pretty phlegmatic to savor the picture as a formal exercise. When Van Gogh looks at Roulin, what does he see? Pride which he endorses. (Roulin is his friend.) ... the dignity ... the preening masculinity of the well-tended double cascade of the forked beard. ... With the painting's floral symbolism and its light ... Van Gogh associates Roulin with nature. The virile postman is plainly a baby-maker!' (my exclamation mark).

I think Schjeldahl's prairie upbringing has a lot to answer for. I imagine the uniform landscapes of his youth led to his describing visual art with such richness. He was born in North Dakota in 1942 and grew up in various small towns around Minnesota, the US grain basket. I think the flat plains, the visual landscape of his youth, must have influenced his desire to seek stimulation in art. He dropped out of college at the age of 20 and started as a junior reporter in Minnesota. He then went to Paris for a year and returned to New York in 1965 where he began writing poetry and pieces of art criticism. In 1998 he joined *The New Yorker* as an art critic. He has won many awards for his art writing and he is proud of the fact that he is not an academic and doesn't write like an academic. In an interview with *Blackbird*, the online Journal of Liter-

The astute art critic is like a psychologist, mining the subject's personality, values, motivations and meanings and coming up with a theory of that person which may carry some truth.

ature and the Arts in 2004, he said that he wants to write things that people want to read. He maintained it was important to have an opinion even if you were wrong; but also that there isn't a right or wrong when it comes to art and he reserves the right to change his mind. He reckons he takes over where the artist leaves off and then the reader takes over from him.

His wide knowledge of art history is impressive:

'When Edouard Manet, discovering Velazquez at the Prado in Madrid in 1865, said that he wondered why others, including himself, bothered, he expressed an enduring thought: painting has been done, and Velazquez did it.'

Time and again he places his artists in an historical context.

His eloquent writing digs deep to the heart of things:

'We can use Velazquez for remembering how to love life: directly, with an attentiveness and a responsiveness that drive thoughts of "love" and "life" out of our heads and consume us like a clear flame. How to make inanimate matter, such as paint, dance attendance – as if the flame painted the pictures – is a secret probably lost forever, but we won't be wrong in taking it as a compliment. One of us did that.'

Maybe he has a tendency to take liberties with his subjects and ascribe motivations and feelings to them which are invented. He says:

'Degas' ballet dancers are not the spun sugar that middlebrow taste supposes. Rather, they are relentless looks at women torturing themselves to be on display. Degas loves to watch them fight balky muscles and gravity, and he doesn't give a rat's ass about them otherwise.'

Maybe. Maybe not. But then the astute art critic is like a psychologist, mining the subject's personality, values, motivations and meanings and coming up with a theory of that person which may carry some truth.

Schjeldahl has plenty to say on the nature of art criticism. He refers to Oscar Wilde's view that there are many honest painters who object to criticism whose work,

'... stands in no intellectual relation to their age. It brings us no new element of pleasure. It suggests no fresh departure of thought, or passion, or beauty. It should not be spoken of. It should be left to the oblivion that it deserves.'

Bad artists always admire each other's work. They call it being large-minded and free from prejudice. But a truly great artist cannot conceive of life being shown, or beauty fashioned, under any conditions other than those he (she) has selected. Creation employs all its critical faculty within its own sphere. It may not use it in the sphere that belongs to others. It is exactly because a man (woman) cannot do a thing that he (she) is the proper judge of it. YES!

He can demolish artists in a phrase: he describes Urs Fischer as a mildly talented Swiss-born sculptor – the international art world's chief gadfly wit since Maurizio Cattelan faded in the role.

Finally, he has the ability to make you see art, to see it more and see it differently. Bear with me while I give a long quotation from



*Las Meninas, by Diego Velázquez which Schjeldahl considers the greatest of all paintings
(Wiki commons)*

his review of Willem de Kooning:

'He was an intellectual giant among painters, with an analytical grasp that registers in every move with pencil or brush. A mark by de Kooning always has more than one thing on its mind: direction, contour, composition, velocity. The mark lies on the surface and digs into pictorial space. It makes a shape of itself and describes shapes next to it. Such doubleness derives from Cubism, which gave de Kooning his initial orientation. With crucial guidance from Arshile Gorky, who showed him ways around Picasso's intimidatingly authoritative permutations, de Kooning blew open the Cubist grid, changing its mode from structural to fluid. De Kooning is to classical Cubism as flying is to walking.'

You see what Schjeldahl is doing here? You don't have to like de Kooning but Schjeldahl illuminates his contribution to art, which you can do no less than appreciate. There is more:

'Memories of depiction cling to every stroke. They contribute to a fabulous complexity that, as you look, can supercharge your capacity to maintain disparate thoughts simultaneously.'

Surely we all need more of this ability in our world of prejudice, repression and discrimination.

Discussing Louise Lawler's photography, Schjeldahl says:

'There is a recurrent moment, for lovers of art, when we shift from looking at a work to actively seeing it.'

Schjeldahl helps us to do just that.

James Elkins, What Happened to Art Criticism? (Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2003) Peter Schjeldahl, Hot, Cold, Heavy, Light, 100 Art Writings 1988 – 2018 (Abrams Press, New York, 2019)

From Digital to Material

The Curious Case of the *Nativity with St Francis and St Lawrence* by Caravaggio

by Anita Di Rienzo

In 1936 Walter Benjamin published *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, a short essay on the reproducibility of artistic artefacts through the technological innovations of the 20th century and the consequent repercussions on the art scene. The central idea of the essay was based on the concept of the aura, meant as the uniqueness and the intrinsic value always present in every artwork. Yet, more than 80 years after the first release of the paper, the question that arises is whether or not it is still legitimate to consider the mechanical reproducibility of works of art as a factor which prevents the presence of the aura. The intricate story of the Caravaggesque *Nativity* of Palermo could, however, lead to an answer.

The Sicilian altarpiece of the *Nativity* by Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio, has been for years at the centre of heated debates regarding its dating and commission. But since October 1969 discussion of these issues has been overshadowed because the fate of this work of art was shrouded in mystery.

The canvas, which was displayed in the Oratory of St Lawrence in Palermo, Italy, depicted the birth of Christ through a rich palette of bright colours. The miraculous event took place in a hut with a thatched roof over crossed wooden beams in the presence of St Lawrence, (standing on the left in a yellow cloak), a shepherd, St Francis, and St Joseph (the latter is on the right of the painting). The Virgin Mary, melancholic and weak, was placed in the middle of the composition while, visibly tired, she rested her gaze on the newborn baby Jesus. Just above the Child an angel with a scroll reciting *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest), occupied the upper portion of the painting, measuring the space with his arms and thus giving dynamism and depth to the scene. To complete the joyful event the ox and the donkey were depicted in the semi-darkness of the shed.

The *Nativity* was one of four early 17th-century canvases left by Caravaggio in Sicily (the others were *Burial of Saint Lucy*, *Raising of Lazarus*, and *Adoration of the Shepherds*) and it differed from the others precisely because of the use of colour, the treatment of light sources and the spontaneous attitude in which the characters were represented. Indeed, a distinctive feature of Caravaggio was his capacity to take inspiration from ordinary people for the protagonists in his compositions, immortalizing them in spontaneous poses and thus succeeding in making his artworks come alive. Perhaps the irresistible charm of this canvas made someone fall in love with it - steal it in order to possess it. More likely it was stolen because it was a very valuable painting by Caravaggio and was inside an Oratory with no surveillance systems. Who knows?

What is clear is that sometime during on the night of 17th October 1969, some thieves broke into the oratory through a door with a defective lock, cut the canvas out of the frame with a razor blade and vanished without a trace. A theft foretold. The next day, when the disappearance of the painting from its support was discovered,



Rafa Rachewsky printing the *Nativity in Factum Arte* workshop in Madrid

it took several hours before the theft was reported to the police. Therefore the thieves had about 12 hours of advantage to cover long distances... or maybe to not cover them at all. The case proved complicated from the outset. The investigators identified two possible perpetrators of the theft: a gang of inexperienced thieves who were hoping to get rich by selling the painting, or the Mafia. The second lead of investigation soon began to seem the more promising. The area of the oratory was controlled by Pippo Calò's family, the future cashier of *Cosa Nostra* (Sicilian Mafia). As the months went by, various ransom demands and confessions - mostly from mobsters - were made, but not a hint of the whereabouts of the stolen canvas.

Today, after more than half a century, the alleged movements of the *Nativity* by Caravaggio remain one of the most fascinating mysteries of the art world, which continues to get excited about ongoing breakthroughs in the case.

This series of unfortunate events led to an interesting initiative in 2015, when the television broadcasting company Sky commissioned a replica of Caravaggio's *Nativity* from Factum Art, a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2009 in Madrid whose mission is 'constructing a bridge between new technology and craft skills'. It has been an innovative collaboration between traditional art history and the most advanced technologies available today. The aim was to create a reproduction of the painting using multi-layer digital printing on canvas. The operation, known as 'Operazione Caravaggio', started with an in-depth research phase in which scholars studied the techniques, pigments and styles of the three canvases of the Contarelli Chapel in the Church of St Louis of the French, in Rome. The overlap between the pictorial surface detected by analysis of these paintings with some black and white plates from the ISCR (Higher Institute for Conservation and Restoration) and a colour photo of the painting taken in 1968 by Enzo Brai, an Italian photographer, has made it possible to map a truthful pictorial sur-

face. Therefore, the direct response of technology and its digital artisans has rematerialized the Nativity, bringing it back from a digital to a physical state.

As Edgar Degas said, “Art is not what you see, but what you make others see”, and the case of the Sicilian altarpiece seems representative of this statement. Indeed, although figurative art is closely linked to the medium, technology has made it possible to re-establish emotional and religious bonds with the painting, though with

the loss of what Walter Benjamin calls the aura, as well as devaluation of the painting’s monetary worth. But, while we are waiting for the original *Nativity* to be recovered, the print produced by Factum Art can be considered as a masterpiece of our time, worthy of public admiration.

BERLIN

Un-/Veiled: Art in the Time of Corona. A Christo & Jeanne-Claude Retrospective at Palais Populaire, Berlin

by Christian Hain

Berlin galleries are open again under certain restrictions due to the on-going ‘virus crisis’. Wearing a face mask is obligatory, and patrons need to book a timeslot online for their visit. Most institutions and commercial galleries have opted for a soft re-opening, extending the run-time of shows that started before all the trouble began, and they are now busy rewriting their programme for the rest of the year. Deutsche Bank Collection’s Palais Populaire used the involuntary break to install something new. On the first day it was possible again, they have opened a retrospective show that had been scheduled for the spring, and – lucky coincidence - it perfectly fits the circumstances. Hardly any artist’s works would feel more appropriate to contemplate from under a face mask than those of wrapping legends Christo & Jeanne-Claude. Though it is a bank’s art collection, and it still feels ironic to be asked to hide one’s identity, here of all places. Think of all the security guards who suddenly find themselves forced to retrain their most basic instincts, and display their own bank-robber look even on distinguished collectors! Also, not all of them will think it funny, should you arrive in Halloween disguise instead of the boring regular thing (don’t ask).

After all these years, Berlin citizens still cherish fond memories of Christo’s Reichstag project in 1995, when the artist and his collaborator/assistant/wife Jeanne-Claude (who passed away in 2009) dressed the historical German parliament house in their typical manner. A retrospective of their career should be a huge success, making Deutsche Bank’s decision to offer free entry during the whole run-time appear all the more laudable, the (PR) idea behind this being to comfort the lockdown-stricken population with art. The ‘Wrapped Reichstag’ earned the couple a lot of fans, and even collectors, in Germany. Among the latter is Mr Thomas Jochheim

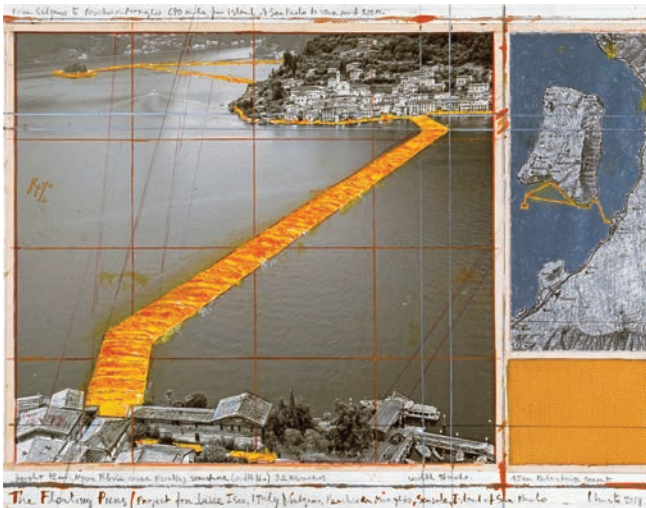


Plans to wrap the Reichstag

who calls the installation one of his two favourite Berlin moments, on a par with the Kennedy speech in 1963 that he witnessed as a child. Today, with his wife Ingrid, he owns one of the largest C&J-C collections in the world, and for this show they’ve collaborated with Deutsche Bank in lending most works (you might risk a guess about what financial institution they trust with their non-artistic investments). Despite belonging to the infamous risk group for the ‘Coronavirus’, the collectors personally visited the preview, eager to tell anecdotes about their relationship with Christo and Jeanne Claude that has developed over the years from business to friendship - who would have thought the artist “mixes the best

Bloody Marys in all New York City”?

Not simply aiming at a nostalgic look back, nor to praise a cherished client and collector, this retrospective has been motivated by a brand new installation in another European capital. The wrapping of Paris’ Arc de Triomphe was projected to take place this autumn, but, *mince alors*, has had to be postponed to September 2021. To help us through this long period of anticipation – it’s like staring at a wrapped parcel that you cannot wait to open even though you know what is inside, Palais Populaire serves a thorough overview on the artists’ careers, involving documentation, photographs, newspaper clippings, original works, early wrapped magazines and objects from the mid-1960s and, often both at the same time, preparatory drawings for the large installations from one of the earliest, *Wrapped Coast*, (Australia, 1969), to the latest,



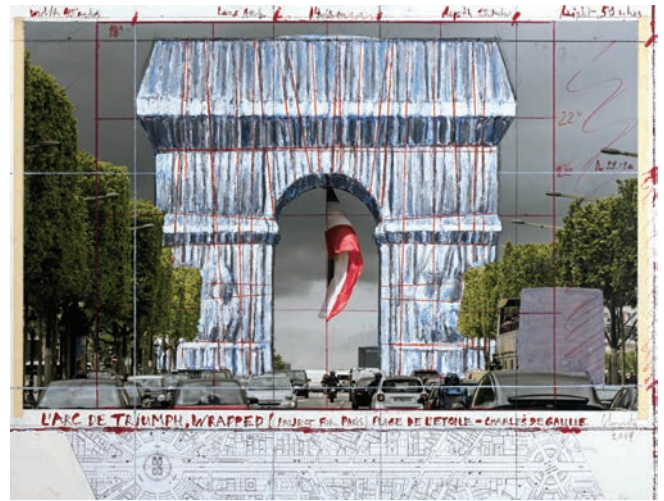
Floating Piers, *Lago di Iseo, Italy, 2016*

Floating Piers (Lago di Iseo, Italy, 2016).

We probably don’t need to describe these installations in detail, certain images and associations are linked to the artists’ names all over the world, but being confronted with them once again, you realize just how brilliant this art is, in that it combines two seemingly disparate approaches. Despite the rather abstract concept, the results – and preparatory drawings – are not incompatible with conventional aesthetics, which explains the public success most, if not all, their projects have achieved. Once the routine protests are overcome, public reaction and general media alike have been enthusiastic, and that’s great publicity for contemporary art as a whole.

It is impressive to see how much work hides behind every finished – and abandoned – wrapping project. The almost concluded preparations for the Arc de Triomphe began in the 1970s, while the first Reichstag drawings date back to 1983. Christo hardly ever gives up on an idea: half of the approximately 50 projects he has seriously taken into consideration have seen the light of day. It teaches a lesson in perseverance, but also reminds us of how political or societal priorities can decide the fate of an artwork.

Enabling frequent comparisons between drawing and photograph of the finished end product, today’s exhibition proves once more how meticulously the artist prepares every detail in advance, anticipating the effects of each shadow and every potential air move-



L’Arc de Triomphe

ment.

Some might scoff about the works on paper as no more than a means to finance the ephemeral installation, merchandising, memorabilia or fan service, and yet, there is something to them, as they exceed the conventional sketch, and occasionally evolve into three-dimensional objects by the addition of tiny wrapped elements.

Considering the ideas behind the concept, the readymade tradition of course plays a role, so do Fluxus and Mail Art, as is most evident in the early works. Ultimately, it’s all about taking an existent creation, wrapping it like a parcel - and not posting it.

To wrap, to cover, to veil, something that generally bears negative connotations, as we seek to ‘dis-cover’, to unveil, the ‘truth’ behind an appearance, and to break through marketing lies that hide the content under an appealing packing. But there is also the phenomenon of a gift made more desirable by its wrapping - would not birthday presents be only half as nice without the paper? Packing often heightens the interest in what lies beyond, underlining the proverbial truth of ‘wanting a thing is better than having’. All anticipation culminates in the moment, when you finally lay hands on the wrapping, and tear it apart (from then things might go downhill). Being polite, you’re not supposed to throw the contents away immediately, only the ephemeral packaging will be discarded the morning after.

Every giver adds something of himself to a gift: this is not just a vase, it is ‘the vase Aunt Emily gave us for the wedding - ugly as it is, we cannot throw it away’, which is true no less for objects that already have a long history of their own, from second-hand clothes to antiques. When Christo wraps historical sites, he presents (or ‘clothes’) them like a gift from the past, for which we need to show (at least feign) some respect and gratitude, even if it comes with a burden. More fundamentally, every artwork can be considered as an artist’s gift to the world, and when Christo wraps other people’s (i.e. architects’) creations, it involves a nod to their original creator. In cases where the found and veiled object is neither a building, nor a bridge or similar, but of natural origins, this not merely implies a transformation process from nature to culture, the artist directs our attention not only at himself, not only at those trees, at this valley, that river or lake, but also, implicitly, at their initial creation, no

matter what forces the recipient chooses to perceive there.

Wrapped or veiled, an object, a building or any site gets redefined in a new context, and – this admittedly might sound trivial – all art is a beautification of life, while a veil, a dress, and even cosmetics, reach for the same goal. Every disguise has the power to uncover truths that would otherwise remain hidden, not only *in vino veritas*, but also behind a mask - costume parties can reveal a person's inner self, be it for the better or the worse.

It doesn't work in every case. Regarding pictures of Christo's first Paris installation, wrapping the Pont Neuf in 1985, this might have been his least overwhelming project so far. At least in photography – and few of us will have witnessed it in person – it seems too reminiscent of regular preservation works on a historic monument. Maybe this is one reason why he's wanted to return to the city, and, hopefully, will next year. For the future, the artist has new ideas, although he's abandoned the Colorado River project for good – sometimes, the initial protests prove too powerful for a project, even in a country where anything goes.

Buildings and natural sites in what could be called a custom burka are an impressive sight, yet there is also the drawing of a Wrapped Woman (a project for the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, 1968/1997), which will inevitably be interpreted differently now than at the time. Not only does it evoke the more anthropomorphic sculptures of Tony Cragg (and Loris Gréaud's wrapped sculpture "[I]" at the Louvre in 2013), but further going beyond the 'body bag/corpse in a rolled carpet' associations, the mere mentioning of a 'wrapped' or 'veiled' female body sounds different today than at a time when hardly anybody would spare a thought for Muslim extremism, immigration, and clashes between clericalism and the liberty of art in this context. It happens all too often, real life developments changing, overshadowing, indeed, masking,

art and its perception.

Then again, the artist undoubtedly has a fascination for the Orient. Jeanne-Claude was born in colonial French Morocco. One still unrealized project is the Mastaba for Saudi Arabia. The title refers to a different series of works from the wrappings - sculptural installations halfway between oversized toy brick and decapitated pyramid, of which there have been previous manifestations e.g. in London (The London *Mastaba* on the Serpentine Lake, 2018), and Philadelphia (Institute of Contemporary Art, 1968). Like those, the version for the most important oil nation of all will be built from barrels, but as a novelty it is planned to become the artist's first ever permanent installation.

The Arab term *mastaba* translates as bench; it originally designates a central architectural element in Egyptian pyramids. In Christo's drawings it could also be described as a large cube, which might still meet with some reservations - think of the Kaaba (and Malevich) influenced Cube that German artist Gregor Schneider once put in front of Hamburger Kunsthalle, after a heated controversy kept it out of Venice in 2005.

Whether the future will unveil this or another project, it certainly is a great idea to visit Palais Populaire this summer - if you can make it to Berlin despite all travel restrictions - it is certainly an exhibition offering insights into many aspects of a long, varied, and immensely successful, career in art.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude: Projects 1963-2020. Works from the Jochheim Collection, 6 May-17 August 2020, Palais Populaire, Berlin

This review was written in May before the artist's passing.

MILAN

All Our Difficult Moments, or Finger-Painting from the 1400s

by Anna Maria Benedetti

Before flying to the Metropolitan Museum in New York and then to the Louvre, the only painting by Leonardo in the Vatican collections or anywhere else in Rome was exhibited for three months in 2019 at the Braccio di Carlo Magno in St Peter's Square. The image of San Gerolamo was painted on a walnut panel (103 x 74 cm) inside a beautiful gold frame from 1931 and was protected by an invisible climate-controlled display case. Admission to the exhibit was free. The painting has now been returned to the Vatican Museums.

San Girolamo (c347-419/20) was Father and Doctor of the Church. Disappointed by the ascetics of Aquileia and by the hermits of

Chalcis, who were continuously in disagreement, he became profoundly depressed. It often happens in times of crisis that we somehow seem to find the answer to our problems, as expressed in the ancient Greek word *krino*, which means to judge: judgment presupposes reflection and from reflection comes the answer.

Leonardo also went through a difficult moment in his life in 1482: he found the right expression for his feelings in painting this picture, a subject that many workshops of the time were dealing with. It is his most tragic work. In his diary are the traces of his melancholy: "The greater the man, the more his ability to suffer grows", or again in the annotation on the edge of a page of his *Codex At-*

lanticus, “My Leonardo, why do you suffer so much?” (author’s translations.)

It is one of his most enigmatic paintings; there is no architecture, which is typically found in the paintings of his time. There are rocks in the background, those rocks that accompany the works recognized as by the artist, as in the *Mona Lisa* and *The Virgin of the Rocks*. There is no trace of a preparatory cardboard of the painting, though on closer inspection it appears Leonardo made changes right on the panel. While scrutinizing the work, we can see that the background was spread with the palm of his hand.

The Story of Women

Starting from January 2020, various Italian cities began promoting different cultural initiatives which revolve around the female universe, to pay tribute to women. Inside the Martinengo Palace in Brescia an exhibition has been organized with artwork from 1500 to 1900, entitled *Women in Art*. There are 90 paintings by artists such as Tiziano, Guercino, Boldini as well as lesser known artists like Appiani, Palizzi and Sassoferrato. These canvases, which all come from private collections, portray both human and artistic scenes, experienced by women in different eras and social classes, revealing their working and domestic life, religion and sensuality. The subjects include both biblical heroines and queens, commoners and gentlewomen, saints and sinners. Next to a *Maddalena Penitente* by Tiziano and a *Santa Caterina da Siena* by Sassoferrato, one can admire the *Standing Pair of Lovers* by Klimt and other beautiful and sensual women by Boldini and Appiani.

Giovanni Boldini, a famous portraitist, immortalized middle-class women wearing refined dresses, as well as transgressive women who posed naked in order to exhibit their perfect bodies, as in the painting *Calze Nere*. Andrea Appiani, who was among Napoleon’s favourite artists, is also present in this exhibition with his painting *Ritratto di Francesca* (1803). Francesca, known as Fanny, was a noblewoman from Brescia who abandoned her husband to flee with her lover. The portrait highlights her attractiveness: a supple body, black hair and eyes, and a slight hint of a smile.

K - A Triptych on Power

Before being closed for Covid19, for a few days the Prada Foundation in Milan celebrated the genius of Kafka with an exhibition conceived as a triptych that includes a film, a soundtrack and an installation.

Most curiously, the line that in Tuscany dominates painting of the time is attenuated with the ‘finger-painting’ technique. It gives the contours a poorly defined appearance, the gradient, for which the artist became famous. The presence or absence of the ‘finger’ or ‘hand’ technique is fundamental for the attribution of a work, as recognized by the artist’s fingerprints.

The contours are not well defined because we are uncertain; the rocks are in the background because in life there is always something hard to face and overcome. The choice of technique adapts to the representation.

by Loretta Pettinato
Translated by Laura Pettinato

Very different are the paintings showing women’s occupations, which in many cases were dangerous and humiliating. Glisenti captured young peasant brides, who throughout the 19th century were obliged to be submissive to their mothers-in-law, almost a form of slavery. Other paintings represent women performing very tiring jobs, like in Palizzi’s painting *Donne che scavano a Pompei*, where barefoot girls carry baskets full of rocks and debris on their shoulders (1870).

Whenever jobs were unavailable, there were female beggars, portrayed while holding a sort of poverty certificate, which allowed them to panhandle. The exhibition also has a small but interesting section dedicated to women artists: here one finds *Cleopatra morsa dall’aspide* by Artemisia Gentileschi, in which the queen’s marble white body stands out on the canvas’ black background, as well as a few works by Orsola Caccia, a lesser known self-taught artist, but still a passionate painter who kept making art even after being locked away in a convent.

This exhibition is interesting both for the quality and the quantity of the canvases. What really moves the spectators is what these works narrate, the long path followed by women from the 16th century onwards. This path is often painful and covered in pitfalls and even though progress was made, the final goal still hasn’t been reached. The goal is to eliminate many grey areas, which make life more problematic for the part of society known as ‘half the sky’.

by Liviana Martin

In the novels that make up the Trilogy of Solitude (*The Trial*, *Amerika*, *The Castle*), K. is the initial of the names of the protagonists, the many alter egos of the Czech-born author, Franz Kafka. These unfinished novels are imbued by a deep sense of solitude,

lost memory and anguish, with protagonists crushed by an overwhelming bureaucracy together with the innocent's sense of guilt, which cannot be expiated, because it cannot be known. In fact K. in *The Trial* ignores what he is accused of, and his negligence is completely irrelevant to the punishment inflicted in *Amerika*. Land surveyor K. is exhausted while waiting in vain to be admitted to the fortress (*The Castle*), due to a series of absurd bureaucratic events.

Orson Welles' film of *The Trial*, with a disturbing Anthony Perkins as K. and the director himself in the role of the lawyer, is a powerful black and white representation of a man caught in the gears of the judicial system: enigmatic characters surround K., who meanders around in the desolate, overcrowded environment of the court until the tragic conclusion. Human rationality disappears in the impenetrable universe of the court, while the degradation of every norm is visible in the disorder and sordidness of the surroundings.

The images from the film accompany me to another large space in the Prada Foundation, similar to a fortress, where Tangerine Dream, a German band, evoke the atmosphere of *The Castle* through magnetic, electronic music.

Today in the lockdown I remember what the landlady in the novel says to the land surveyor K., who doesn't understand how to gain access to the castle: "Wherever you may be, never forget that you're the most ignorant person in the village; and be cautious." I also had this feeling of not understanding what was happening around me, not just because of the often contradictory or incorrect information from the experts and government, but above all because of the climate of anguished expectation: Will there be a cure for this virus? Will it come in the form of a drug? Or a vaccine? I felt like K., helpless but loyal to the rules that I did not always understand.

And finally, to return to the exhibition, the final *coup de théâtre*: the visionary reconstruction of the 'great theater of Oklahoma', cited in the third novel, *Amerika*, where 16-year-old Karl Rossman is accused of seducing a waitress and is kicked out of his home by his father and sent to America to rehabilitate. In an America that seems to embody the very idea of boundless freedom, Karl becomes lost. Martin Kippenberger's installation *The Happy End*

Lockdown is a running stream
Trapped by a binding dam
Lockdown is vulnerable and exposed
Like sitting ducks on an open pond
We wait and wait and wait
Lockdown looms over us
Lifelike

Staring at the world with sullen eyes
Life is now like a trapped animal
In a cage ricocheting against itself

William Foster

of Franz Kafka's Amerika refers to the part of the novel in which the protagonist seeks employment in the 'largest theater in the world'. The German artist recreates a football field, where he inserts over 40 combinations of tables and chairs, with elements of vintage design and flea market furnishings. The aim is to recall the job interviews that could take place around those tables. The title of the installation refers to a happy ending, rare in Kafka's novels. In reality, the writer describes America not as a land of opportunity (as young Rossmann hoped) but as a world dominated by exploitation and abuse of power.

As the curator Udo Kittelmann points out, the exhibition can be considered a narrative of the 'darkest areas of human life', as Walter Benjamin thought applied to Kafka's work. In the three elements of the triptych, comparable to an altarpiece, the central 'panel' is made up of *Amerika*, and the other two elements form the side panels, defining a vision of the anxieties of life. After all, as Kafka wrote, "... the inconceivable is inconceivable, and that we knew already".

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Keith Piper: *The Perfect City* (2007), 12 mins, Vimeo

by Mary Fletcher

This video work was first shown as a two-screen installation in PM Gallery London, funded by Film London. The version on Vimeo is a compelling short narrative by the artist with a complex series of images. There is the paper model of the design he is making of an archetypal city. There are shots of people in London, of police, of beautiful scripts in different languages, of fire and water, of the Tower of Babel in past art, and of maps. The sound includes quietly sonorous menacing music and a ticking clock.

Piper speaks of the “memory of drowning” - floods - the refuge Tower of Babel that he says challenged God. Aptly for our time of Coronavirus there is a section on contamination, pandemics, the use of infected bodies as weapons, of smallpox inflicted on Native Americans. What Piper calls “the memory of amputation” shows boundaries between areas of wealth and poverty. This is followed by cleansing, regulation, surveillance; the words are spoken calmly with the disquieting soundtrack behind them.

Finally, there is burning, the destruction by God of Sodom and Gomorrah, his angels having failed to find 10 pious people. Fires are mentioned that destroyed St Pierre in Martinique, and in Plymouth in Montserrat, both in the 20th century, and before that the Fire of London, 1666, that ended the Plague. Piper says that God seems to have a fondness for fire.

It ends with Piper reciting that God gave Noah the rainbow sign - still a symbol of hope, as we have seen recently, putting rainbows

in our windows in lockdown - but “it won't be water but fire next time”. I don't know if Piper believes in God or simply finds the Biblical stories suitably apocalyptic. It's not a narrative with a clear plot, but what is clear is that he expects the worst.

Keith Piper, born 1960 in Malta but brought up and living in Britain as a black artist, part of a group called the BLK art group, has done a great deal of work, exhibited widely, and teaches at Middlesex University.

I loved his work that I saw in Derby about how everyone has moved from one place to another, everyone's family has been migrants for personal betterment or to escape something. This was done very cleverly by inviting visitors to answer a questionnaire which was projected on the wall to reveal every person as a migrant.

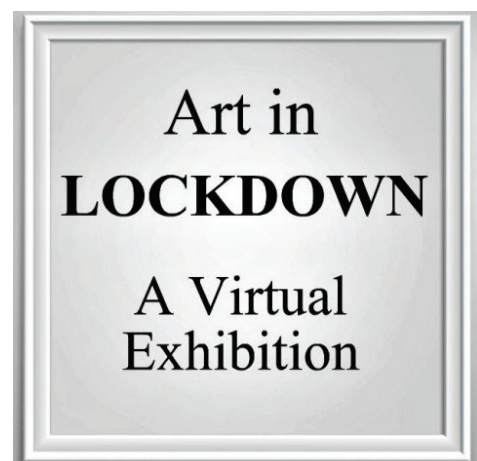
He has done work about slavery - the *Lost Vitrines* that were installed in the V&A to bring a new awareness about the Georgian exhibits and that era. In 2017 his *Unearthing the Banker's Bones* used fiction, history painting and video to make a complicated show about the evils of class and race discrimination.

Keith Piper is not an artist to repeat a signature piece. His work tackles serious and political themes in a variety of media. It's often complicated and requires time to absorb. I think he is saying important things in imaginative and powerful ways. Somehow this doesn't make him well known but he keeps at it with a controlled passion.

The Great Exhibition of 2020

by Pendery Weekes

With shops locked down and transformed into gallery spaces from one day to the next, the *Great Exhibition of 2020* surpassed exhibitions of all time for its extraordinary and extensive size in square kilometres, the largest international exhibition ever opened. Notwithstanding the great expense incurred by this Herculean exhibition, sadly it was also the worst one ever organised - a true embarrassment to the art world. It had no sense; it was very badly curated and hastily put together without any logic. With such an immense exhibition space, this unfathomable and aesthetically displeasing event had an emotionally numbing effect on its visitors. On display were abandonment, uncertainty, apathy, emptiness, grief, worry, acceptance, silence and fear; it was difficult to take everything in. The PR surrounding the event was exceptional, with media atten-



tion everywhere – little else was covered except a series of hosted side events concerning the exhibition. It was one of those immense shows that people would want to one day tell their grandchildren or great-grandchildren about – it will leave that kind of memory.

It was like an outdoor museum that visitors could admire in real-time, a live event with a semblance between science fiction and fantasy. No tickets were necessary since it was free of charge to look inside the window displays curated by each shopkeeper, as though an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) had been unleashed. The window displays indicated the season, the last vestiges of the winter sales leading into spring. Hurriedly closed, abandoned to themselves, these shop windows were like an old photograph that depicted another era. It created a macabre and magnetic attraction for the visitors who wandered by in a sort of lethargic, dreamlike trance and who were left with a glimpse of what our lives once were only a few months back. The experience was so intense that visitors risked the Stendhal syndrome some with accelerated heartbeats, others with confusion, or they were left wondering if it were all a hallucination.



Penzance in lockdown

The artefacts of these shops were represented by clothing, greeting cards, toys, books, mobile phones aging on the shelves, furniture, paintings by real artists, hardware supplies. Empty pubs and hotels. It was as though everything was in black and white though there were colours. The colours in the shop windows faded in the sun, losing their vibrancy as spring turned to summer. Decay was a key aspect to this show; flies lay dead in the window displays, surrounded by a layer of dust. Particularly striking were the sheet covered armchairs and couches in a furniture store window, implying a long-term covering, like one does in summer houses before the coming winter. It was all about stopping, with everything motionless, lifeless and silent. This is the painting I saw of a once vibrant town.

The standstill on show at the exhibition contrasted sharply with the liveliness and excruciating beauty of the warm, flowery spring of 2020 with its pink, violet, blue, yellow, red, white and many shades of green. It looked like the curator had walked out at the last moment and left it all to chance. In fact, attendance of this show was

quite poor, as was predicted by the press before it opened. With no closing or opening times, as bad as it was, I went to visit this widely disputed show almost daily in the long afternoons of the spring, rain or shine. It totally mesmerized and captivated my attention with its spectral, eerie feeling that the displays transmitted – it was seriously powerful. Rare is the opportunity to take in a show that can disturb so greatly and leave such a substantial impact on its visitors. The show was like a glimpse into everyone's worst nightmare, though I was able to only see the sideshow of the main venue of the Wuhan/Milan/Paris/London exhibitions – what I saw was grim enough.

It was the nauseating image of social distancing, where we all become strangers, which gave the atmosphere of death that permeated the streets, showing the demise of our social fabric on display. These displays contrasted with the street performances of the actors with their pathetic two-metre distances between one another. Each mirrored the other, performance vs museum, live vs dead in a dance of desperation, a dance of fear and terror. Geometry of space, lines drawn to emphasize how far apart each actor had to be between one another. Sometimes the lines were crossed and zig-zagged along the pathway, creating an erratic, unrepeatable artwork based on fear. The humans were out of tune, making a cacophony of performance art with their furtive moves when passing other actors, invariably repeating the same phrases: "sorry" "thank you", or worse, pulling up their scarves or face masks in terror to protect from the lurking germs that may have leaked from a person drawing near. The few people attending this exhibition would quickly glance and move on to the next display, almost too embarrassed to even be seen at the show.

Empty buses going through the lonely main streets gave the only kinetic sense to the exhibition – movement without the motion of people, with the bus drivers being the only actors involved.

The deathly atmosphere permeated the entire show, as the demise of our social fabric. As I walked around the show, Williams Arms Fisher's melancholic lyrics *Going Home* written to Dvorak's 9th Symphony rang in my ear: "Going home, going home, we're just going home". The funeral march proceeding in the background of my mind; gone is the lifestyle of yesterday to be replaced with a new, unknown dimension. The exhibition was "a moving expression of that nostalgia of the soul all human beings feel." (Fisher) Looking back with sorrow on what we all have lost, embodied in this questionable show, one wonders if we might not have lost something worth losing. Though it was an exhibition I would have preferred not to have seen, once it opened I couldn't stop visiting it and had to see it in all its hues. However, it is my opinion that the organisers should never reopen this exhibition again; we can live - without this artwork. So how do you fix a painting you don't like?

Variable dates, ready to recommence at a moment's notice (England, March 23 – still running)

Fictitious Landscapes

by Ivy Leung



Andrew Luk, *Haunted, Salvaged partial-1*

Due to the ravages of Covid-19, the Art Basel Hong Kong 2020 held in Hong Kong every March was cancelled. The works of Hong Kong-based artist Andrew Luk (b.1988) and the post-war master Chu Teh-Chun (1920-2014), originally planned to be exhibited in Art Basel, are in the de Sarthe Gallery exhibition, *Shifting Landscape*.

Andrew Luk redeveloped his large hanging mobile installation *Haunted, Salvaged* in the de Sarthe Gallery. On the steel rods of the rotating device, disfigured orb-like objects of different sizes and uneven surfaces are hung. The orbs are constructed of layers of polystyrene, carved and corroded to compose an imaginary artificial constellation. Each orb resembles extensive catacombs that have been turned inside out. Our eyes trace the surfaces of the rounded outer contour of the orb-like objects while travelling through their cavernous interiors; inside are forms reminiscent of geological stalactites. These caverns reference the cliff face dwelling of our prehistoric ancestors from which we have modelled modern buildings. On the ground, underneath the swivelling orbs, is a desert-like 5m by 8m landscape of stainless steel mesh. Totem-like cement sculptures emerge in the landscape. The cracks between the cement blocks force out cactus-like tumorous blobs of dried expanding foam, creating a wasteland of disarray. Taking a closer look, each sculpture is built of concrete and antiquated electronic devices, such as Walkman and Gameboy.

The installation depicts a fictitious landscape which is full of anthropogenic contamination. It binds the natural and the man-made together. The artist realizes that the entities and forces that we cre-

ate are as much part of nature as we are. Culture and technology have their own organic development with inherent needs, effects, and by-products. Contained in these entities is also the capacity for self-destruction. It is an inevitable stage in the cyclical progression of nature and evolution. As humans, we are both the participants and subjects of this process.

In the 21st century, complex petroleum-based materials have been used for human architecture. The materials are extracted from nature and refined through complicated processes. These materials are lightweight, cheap, and quick to manufacture, making them easily discardable and yet permanent fixtures on the earth's surface. This represents a potential crisis for the destruction of the earth, but is merely understood as an environment undergoing inadvertent changes.

Human beings are a terraforming social species.

They have been rapidly transformed by the culture and technology of previous generations. We must accept that this world is not inherited, but constantly being transformed. It is a world that has created immediate consequences. Humans should be like the fungi in the installation that have taken refuge. We must all learn from the environment and adapt ourselves in our own time. We have to embrace that reality is like a vaccination. It is a taste of an uncomfortable bile-like future.

At the other side of the gallery is a work titled *Untitled* by Chu Teh-Chun. He has created a painting with strong colours with a unique technique, freehand, known in Chinese as Hsieh yi. His broad, stretched, expressive brushstrokes elicit vast unexplored landscapes that are illustrated through a deeply rooted consideration of the traditions of Chinese painting and calligraphy. Nature unfurls within the canvas by distorting the viewer's expectation of horizon and perceptive. His poetic expression of natural expanse uncovers realms of abstract form and proposes an alternative interpretation of medium and its capabilities. The vigorous power of the painting is impressive.

The two artists have very different perceptions of the natural world. No matter how nature will change, or how the terrain will shift, we should imitate the two artists, pay more attention and give more appreciation for Nature. And, at the same time, reflect more on human lifestyles.

continued from page 21

he titles it *La Negresse*, rather than, say, 'Laure', or even 'woman in a turban'.

While it seems pointless to speculate about Manet's own attitudes and intentions 150 years ago, the importance of recognising and reassessing the use of BAME models in art history seems obvious, and this, albeit belatedly, is happening. Last year, an ambitious exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (*Black Models: from Géricault to Matisse*) invited visitors to look again at some of the most famous masterpieces of French art, illuminating the way in which French citizens of African descent have been relegated to the periphery of national history and culture, their individuality obliterated by titles like 'negro' 'native' or 'mulatto' (a word, incidentally, that derives from 'mule'). The curators worked to identify the sitters, retrieving as much biographical detail as possible. They also gave several paintings new titles: Olympia was renamed Laure, while the name of Marie-Guillemine Benoist's graceful model in *Portrait of a Negress* (1800) was finally returned to her, so the picture becomes *Portrait of Madeleine*. Madeleine was painted in the interval between the abolition of the French slave trade after the French Revolution and its reinstatement in 1802. She wears the colours of the tricolour, which, together with her classical pose, strongly suggest Marianne, personification of liberty equality and

fraternity in the French republic, giving this work an ironic resonance across time.

The restitution of names seems crucial even if surnames are lost, because to identify someone by 'racial' type is as dehumanising as doing it by number-tattoo, and this went on well into the 20th century: last year, Kelvingrove Art Gallery rightly renamed Andre Lhote's *Negress* as *Head of a Woman*. The painting dates from 1921. The Orsay show was preceded by a similar one at Columbia University, titled *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*. Perhaps the UK, with its long colonial history and wealth of great art, should embark on a similar adventure. The results should be interesting.

Included in the Orsay show was Vallotton's (1922) portrait of Aicha Goblet. Here at last is a painting of a black person which captures the subject's particular individuality. She and she alone is the centre of attention - not a type, not a curiosity, not a servant, not a victim, not a symbol of something else. Her theatrical clothes reflect her profession (Goblet was an actress), rather than an attempt to exoticise her, while the close attention the artist gives to her features and expression (that hint of melancholy scepticism in her eyes) and the way she holds her hands, create the impression that you know her. She even has a surname.

Slavery Refined for Liberals

by Annie Markovich



Kara Walker - *The Katastroph Karavan* 2017

When it was possible to visit the Tate in person, toward the end of February, all the press packs for *Fons Americanus* were gone. A double bill

with Olafur Eliasson's *In Real Life* drew crowds, and on a Friday night Tate Turbine was packed, hopping with a dance club atmosphere. Massive halls, which seemed to be looking distractedly around while searching for something. "Check it out", the walls announced.

In keeping with the Turbine's size, a massive 42-foot sculpture made of 'recyclable or reusable cork, wood and metal' in the middle of the ground floor near the main entrance dominated. Kara E. Walker's fountain, *Fons Americanus*, a Hyundai commission, was to be on view until 5 April, 2020. From afar, the fountain looked cartoonish, Jeff Koonish in scale, a confection of white clay, an invitation to look closer in the cold, hollow Turbine Hall.

Up close, here was an historic reminder of slavery in Western society within the United States and Britain. Taking a closer look hurt. As a white female I feel unqualified to write about this topic. I am not an historian and the subject of slavery both black and white is

continually being addressed, researched and revised. All I can do is share my gut response of attraction and repulsion.

Fons Americanus addresses systemic endemic racism in the Western world by sculpting a people imprisoned in slavery, from images of captains on the high seas. Acclaimed artist Kara Walker has succeeded in riding the wave exposing America's and Britain's role in the slave trade, which scarred humanity and continues to plague our collective conscience.

In a review for *Artnews* (February 26), African American artist Rianna Jade Parker wrote:

'African-American artists have accused Walker's distressing scenes of being inappropriately titillating, with Howardena Pindell and Betye Saar among her biggest detractors. In the 1991 PBS series *I'll Make Me a World*, Saar said, "I felt the work of Kara Walker was sort of revolting and negative and a form of betrayal to the slaves, particularly women and children; that it was basically for the amusement and the investment of the white art establishment.'" *Fons Americanus* presents women, children and men as stereotypical images of the way African people have been depicted in thousands of cartoons and drawings.

Fortunately, Art can offer another way of representing Black Africans as heroines and heroes reinterpreting African form as spiritual warriors, victorious and nuanced. The lack of subtlety negates the nobility of a creative people who gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

Tate Modern, Turbine Room, exhibition has been extended.

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