

SELECTED SAMPLES OF ARTS WRITING BY MICOL HEBRON

What follows are selections from a variety of my publications from the time period between 2007 and 2012. I have included brief reviews, catalog essays, and critical essays that I authored and had published during this time. For a complete list of my publications, please refer to my Curriculum Vitae.

Hebron, Micol “Putting the Words back into the F-Word, an interview with feminist artists Audrey Chan and Elana Mann”, Interview, *ArtPulse*, August, 2012 Print.

<http://artpulsemagazine.com/tag/elana-mann>

Putting the Words Back into the F-Word. An Interview with Audrey Chan and Elana Mann



Audrey Chan and Elana Mann, organizers of Shares and Stakeholders: The Feminist Art Project Day of Panels at the 100th Annual College Association Conference, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2012. Podium skirt designed by CamLab.
Photo: Jean-Paul Leonard.

Since 2005, Los Angeles-based artists Audrey Chan and Elana Mann have been revitalizing feminist practice with their collaborative projects that engage historic models of first- and second-wave feminist strategies fused with contemporary relational aesthetics and social engagement.

Chan is an artist, writer and educator whose work addresses civic discourse, rhetoric and the feminist construct of “the personal is political.” Mann’s multidisciplinary artwork explores alternative economies, empathetic exchange, and the politics of resistance. Chan and Mann’s collaborative work asks important and honest questions about

feminism, acknowledges the still prevalent influence of past feminists, and fuels the hope and action of current feminists. Through the production of significant conferences, symposia, and performative events around the country (and soon the world), the duo's projects boast an inclusive and discursive interdisciplinarity that is substantially promoting and expanding the feminist dialogue.

In this e-mail exchange they talk with me about their generational perspectives on both old and new challenges of feminism as they discuss their particular feminist tactics, the shift in feminist agency from 'self' to 'group', collective focus from self to group, the influence of feminist movements past, and the hopes they have for future feminists.

--By Micol Hebron

Micol Hebron - Chan and Mann have had a pretty exciting year in 2012-the restaging of Leslie Labowitz-Starus' Myths of Rapeperformance at the LA Art Show, the exhibition "Chann & Mhann: A Historical Retrospective, 2005-2012," and the Shares andStakeholders symposium on feminism at MOCA, Los Angeles. Each of these projects has addressed ideas of history-both recent and past. Can you talk about your interests and objectives with regard to notions of historicization in feminist practice?

Audrey Chan & Elana Mann - Each of these projects is dealing with historicization in a different way. For *Myths of Rape* (2012), we were invited by Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy to re-create Leslie's original performance from 1977. It was part of Suzanne's project *Three Weeks in May* (1977), which aimed to bring public awareness to violence against women. Our aim was to adapt their strategies of agitprop performance to our contemporary socio-political context, in which rape awareness exists but the problem persists. We brought to the project our own visual and performative strategies inspired by the Occupy Movement (e.g. the People's Microphone). We also introduced color and movement in the design of the performers' wearable signs. Leslie was really interested in how we were going to interpret her piece, maintaining its core essence but bringing it to life in the present. They mentored us through the process and emphasized that we were the authors of this new work.

Our retrospective exhibition, which took place at Elephant Art Space, was inspired by the Pacific Standard Time (PST) initiative and how it reached back into the archives of Los Angeles art. But PST *only* focused on 1945 to 1980. Chan & Mann were born in 1982 and 1980, respectively. Instead of waiting all of our lives for our work to be 'rediscovered,' we thought we'd rediscover ourselves and bring everyone along for the ride. Some people assumed our retrospective was fake in some way, but technically, one can retrospect at any moment in time. Quoting from the press release for our exhibition, Chann & Mhann: A Historical Retrospective, 2005-2012: "Chan & Mann are not waiting for the dust to settle on their grocery bags full of old props. They are ready to historicize now."

Having organized the *Exquisite Acts & Everyday Rebellions* feminist project at CalArts as grad students, we were invited by the Feminist Art Project to organize a day of panels for the College Art Association conference in February 2012. We called our event *Shares & Stakeholders* to invoke the 'investment' in feminist art and discourse by a new generation of artists and scholars. Topics of discussion included feminist art educational models, the roles of men in feminist art, interventionist art strategies, radical queer art making, and feminism as a daily humanist practice. We experienced many

feminist symposia that seemed more rooted in the past than in the present. Although the history of feminism was invoked in our discussions, we wanted to move the conversation forward to reflect the complexity and subtlety of feminism today as it relates to politics, gender and daily practice.

M.H. - *I am interested to hear about how your work as a collaborative duo is different than what you do as individual artists. Elana, you have a practice of social engagement, political critique and performativity. Audrey, your individual projects are clearly informed by your role as a writer and educator and are often directly feminist, as with your performances as Judy Chicago's doppelganger. How does working together allow you to do things that you could not or would not be able to do as individual artists? What are your objectives in working together as Chan & Mann? What messages do you wish to convey? What legacy do you hope to leave?*

C&M - Working together, we are each other's audience, motivator, jester, life coach, helping hand and co-creator. We work much faster as a collaborative than we do in our individual practices. Together, we are able to perform with a higher level of confidence than is usually socially acceptable. What we usually do is we start on one side of a problem and then emerge from the other side of a different problem. Inspired by our suburban upbringings, multicultural education and 1990s issue-based pop culture, we seek to create a new way of making conceptual art.



Myths of Rape, 2012, performance by Audrey Chan and Elana Mann, a reinterpretation of Leslie Labowitz-Starus' Myths of Rape (1977), part of Suzanne Lacy's Three Weeks in May (1977). This production was presented by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) for Three Weeks in January (2012) as part of the Getty Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival. Photos Neda Moridpour.

M.H. - *Much of your work together seems to be about building enthusiasm for feminism and using art as a catalyst for consciousness, as in Soul Satisfaction (2005) or A MANNdate for CHANGE (2008), for example. It comes across as cheerleading, in a way. Can you talk about the strategies of feminism*

that you employ? How are these strategies different from feminist strategies of past generations?

C&M - We employ declarative statements and motivational speech. We realize now that the new age mantras and self-help culture that we witnessed in our adolescence was in direct rejection/response to the consciousness-raising strategies of the Second Wave Feminists. In our childhood, individuals were focused on the self as a site of transformation, rather than the group. Our interest lies in the place where self-exploration and social change intersect. We are extremely direct in our performances and message oriented, rather than hiding what we care about.

M.H. - ***You have worked with a lot of important feminists who were active and instrumental in Second Wave feminism of the 1970s. What have you learned from them? For example, Audrey, you cited your shopping trip with Judy Chicago as the best art history lesson of your life.***

A.C. - I started dressing as Judy Chicago's Chinese-American doppelganger, since she was one of my personal heroes. She caught wind of my adventures and suggested we go shopping to update my look (which was based on her 1970s-era style). While we were looking for a sparkly and color-coordinated outfit, Judy told me that she was happy that young women artists are connecting with her generation while they are still alive, so that they can take part in the transmission of their legacy. She was curious about how I supported myself, as a young woman artist today. I was surprised when she told me that she only recently felt a real sense of financial security and recognition as an artist.

E.M. - The artists active in 1970s-era feminism are the wise elders of our community. Once we established that we cared deeply about their work, they became so generous and open with us about sharing knowledge and experience. They were much more used to being ignored rather than celebrated by younger artists.

C&M - We've also learned about perseverance and the importance of continuing to do your work even when it's not accepted by the art mainstream or taught in art history classes. We often think about Adrian Piper's essay "Power Relations within Existing Art Institutions" (1983), which advocates for the artist to think beyond the studio and occupy multiple roles within the art world-for example, curator, historian, writer, critic, organizer, teacher. Piper's pragmatic and flexible model of change encourages us to reclaim our "...social, intellectual, economic and creative autonomy."



Myths of Rape, 2012, performance by Audrey Chan and Elana Mann, a reinterpretation of Leslie Labowitz-Starus' Myths of Rape (1977), part of Suzanne Lacy's Three Weeks in May (1977). This production was presented by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) for Three Weeks in January (2012) as part of the Getty Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival. Photos Neda Moridpour.

M.H. - F-word-Feminism--has a storied history, with previous associations with militant, sexist, aggressive, exclusionary tactics. Do you think feminism is still a dirty word? How would you define feminism today? What role do you think art has in the current feminist agenda?

C&M - Of course feminism is still dismissed and demonized in culture at large because it threatens the status quo. This attempt to control the language of progressive social movements is also reflected in the twisted usage of the word 'liberal' in American culture. While we notice some of our peers using feminist strategies but reject identification with the word, we also are part of a large community of young artists who openly identify with feminist art. We aren't interested in defining feminism per se, but rather exploring the power and beauty of ideas connected to feminism such as: the personal is political (and the political is personal), social justice, deconstructionist critique, historical revisionism and notions of representation. All along, feminist artists have given a visual language to the struggle for equality-think of the iconic fist in the Venus symbol and the coat hanger as a symbol of the struggle for abortion rights. Art can provide a place for dialogue and meeting that is currently diffuse in our society.

M.H. - It is fitting that you two met and began working together at CalArts, the site of Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro's Feminist Art Program. How has the history of feminism and feminist education in Southern California informed your practice?

C&M - Neither of us knew about the Feminist Art Program before we attended CalArts, which is absurd. In fact, we learned from our teacher Nancy Buchanan that students working in the CalArts library had found the archives of the Feminist Art Program in the school dumpsters. Ridiculous! So we were introduced to feminist art and education in Southern California when it was endangered and its erasure seemed imminent. Our work with feminism overlapped with Connie Butler's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, "WACK! Art and the Feminist

Revolution,” which was the first-ever museum retrospective of the feminist art movement. The dramatic shift from trash heap to museum walls taught us about the vaginal vagaries of history.



Chan & Mann, Asian-Jew Tablescape, installation of Asian-Jew misfortune cookies, decorations from Chinatown, menorahs, Buddha, incense, inkjet prints of images from the Internet and personal photographs, found Bar Mitzvah announcement, painted paper lanterns, Jewish stars of fame, 2012. Photo: Audrey Chan.

M.H. - You each have interesting personal relationships to feminism, as well. Can you talk about your individual backgrounds with feminism in your family and upbringing?

A.C. - In my household, my parents were equal breadwinners and had parallel careers as high-achieving academics. My parents disagreed with the traditional Chinese belief that boys are more valuable than girls. My sister and I were given the Chinese names ‘wen’ and ‘ming’ which together mean ‘civilization.’ So gender inequality was something that I learned about outside of my home. I feel that my elementary school education reflected the 1990s emphasis on multiculturalism, in that we frequently had conversations in class about racial diversity. But when I discovered a biography of Gloria Steinem in the school library, I asked the librarian what the word ‘feminist’ meant, and she just laughed at me! In junior high, my friends were making feminist zines and were into the Riot Grrrl movement, and my sister was reading Naomi Wolf and Camille Paglia. When I was growing up, I thought that feminist principles of gender equality were a given, but I didn’t deeply engage with the issues directly as an artist and advocate until grad school.

E.M. - I was raised in a religious household that practiced a feminist version of Judaism. When I was growing up, my mother was putting together feminist revisions and traditional Jewish prayers that only mention patriarchs and refer to God as a 'king of the universe.' All the older women in our congregation were getting Bat-Mitzvahed in droves, because when they were growing up only boys got to celebrate this traditional coming-of-age ceremony. So I was aware at an early age that eradicating sexism took work and intentionality. Simultaneously, my family would discuss politics around the dinner table, and I distinctly remember how much my dad despised Hillary Clinton and also how weird and embarrassed I felt over the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings. I think there were a lot of mixed messages in my childhood/young adulthood in terms of the role of women in society, particularly the stark contrast between what was going on in our spiritual community versus what I witnessed in 1990s political discourse. The year I got my period an abortion doctor in my hometown of Boston was shot to death, and I remember marching with my best friend in a protest rally carrying a giant papier-mâché coat hanger. I had no idea what that symbol even meant! Still, when I was in college most of my art teachers were men, and there was no education about feminist art or political art *at all*. Although most of the artists I was looking at on my own were feminist, I did not know about a larger feminist art movement until later.



Audrey Chan and Judy Chicago, shopping and performance, Los Angeles, 2012. Photo: Elana Mann.

M.H. - *There is a long history of 'groups' of men in L.A.-the Cool School, Light and Space movement, etc. Similarly, with Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, the Women's Building, Womanhouse, there is another history of L.A. through the actions of women collaborators. How would you characterize the contemporary art scene in L.A. in terms of collaboration and the relationship of collaborative practices to political positions that artists may take up?*

C&M - Artists come together for a lot of different reasons. Collaborative practice is not necessarily politically motivated, but can be a way to leverage group identity and recognition. It can also be a way to create alternative communities with political agendas. We have been involved in many collaborative and collective endeavors, as facilitators, organizers or participants. One example is the Artist Bailout, founded by Autumn Rooney and Elana Mann, which is a public meal designed to solicit community-driven financial support and democratically fund new work by emerging artists in Los Angeles. Many artists in Los Angeles are creating projects that serve as platforms for multiple different authors, such as Steven Van Dyke's Los Angeles Road Concerts, which

invites artists to take over unused public outdoor space along the entire length of one of L.A.'s very long streets with performances, installations and carpool happenings. During Occupy Los Angeles a group of artists formed a loose coalition called AAAAAA, which was a formless network that created work at Occupy, and a group called Up the Art Union! has grown out of these energies. Unlike some other art capitals, there are not many long-standing art institutions in Los Angeles, and so small upstart groups and spaces are often short-lived, but the impulse to create alternative structures remains strong.

M.H. - Writing, educating and collaboration are all approaches that are characteristic of historic feminist practices. They are also aspects of an artistic practice that can make it challenging to engage in the gallery system. It's much harder to 'sell' a practice that is not object-based. How do you think about your work within the art world and art market, with regard to galleries and museums?

C&M - Chan & Mann would be happy to find a benevolent patron, but we haven't met that special person(s) yet. We think more about what we're interested in making (e.g. motivating nature to overcome pollution, creating the ultimate feminist painting, producing Asian-Jew identity art) than trying to fit it in existing categories in the art world or art market. Chan & Mann is an idealistic endeavor. We started performing together when we were M.F.A. students and roommates at CalArts as a comic relief from the pressures of grad school. The discursive environment of CalArts may be one reason why we talk so much in our performances because we're trying to find a different language to use in our work and play.

M.H. - What do you want young(er) feminists to know? What advice would you give them?

C&M - We want younger feminists to know that feminism is a living, and not only a historical, movement. Social equality is unfortunately not a given and is an ongoing struggle. Feminist art advocates for the breakdown of patriarchal hierarchies, and patriarchy continues to try and suppress it. In our projects we have had to do a lot of digging and uncovering of feminist art, and we hope that in the future, young(er) feminists will not have to do that. We want feminism to move from the margins to the mainstream. This takes organizing, advocacy, engaging with the past, teaching, claiming your own space in the conversation and building networks of support.

M.H. - What do you want previous generations of feminists to know about your generation and future generations of feminists?

C&M - We consider ourselves 'post-backlash' feminists. But voicing and communicating is so different for us than the previous generation of feminists. While they roared, we purr loudly. We're living in a time when everyone has their own soapbox, which also means that more people aren't listening in the same way to a single voice. We are building coalitions and advocating for a more inclusive idea of what it means to be a feminist. We are building upon and adding to the voices that are already out there.

M.H. - What would be on the Chan & Mann 'must-read' reading list for young feminists?

C&M - Marcia Tucker's memoir *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, Judy Chicago's memoir *Through the Flower: My Struggle As a Woman Artist*, Adrian Piper's collected writings *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, volumes 1 and 2, Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Mira Schor's essays in *M/E/A/N/I/I/N/G-'She Demon Spawn from Hell'* and 'The ism that dare not speak its name.'



Chan & Mann's *New Fantasy*, interactive installation, acrylic on canvas, 2012. Photo: Jean-Paul Leonard.

M.H. - *Finally, what's next for Chan & Mann? Will there be another seven years?*

C&M - Headlining at Genghis Cohen, the ultimate Asian-Jew performance venue in Los Angeles. We're interested in feminist franchising opportunities and we plan to publish a book of slam poetry.

E.M. - Chan & Mann will have a solo show in 2013 at the Ben Maltz Gallery at the Otis College of Art and Design called *The glass ceiling is a glass hyman pierced by a glass dildo inside a larger glass vagina*.

A.C. - We've also been invited to present a feminist workshop and public performance inspired by *Myths of Rape* in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2014.

M.H. - *Do you listen to music when you work (together)? What is the Chan & Mann theme song?*

C&M - Our theme songs are *From a Distance* by Bette Midler and *The Impossible Dream* from *The Man of La Mancha*, *2 become 1* by the Spice Girls, and the soundtrack of *FernGully*.

M.H. - What's the most valuable tool your feminist tool kit?

C&M - (laughing) Laughter!

M.H. - Who are your heroes?

C&M - We have actually immortalized our respective Jewish and Chinese female heroes in the form of cut-out Jewish stars and hand-painted Chinese lanterns, which were featured in the *Asian-Jew Tablescape* installation in our retrospective.

E.M. - Jewish Stars: Anna Frank, Barbra Streisand, Miss Piggy, Emma Goldman, Bette Midler, Judy Chicago, Eva Hesse, Hannah Wilke, Lee Krasner, Gloria Steinem, Gertrude Stein, Hannah Arendt, my mom and dad, and Audrey Chan!

A.C. - My Chinese heroes were: Amy Tan, Michelle Kwan, Connie Chung, Empress Dowager Cixi (though she was rather tyrannical), Anna May Wong, Iris Chang, Mulan, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, Maya Lin, my mom and dad, my grandma and Elana Mann!

M.H. - What do you consider your greatest success (as a collaborative duo), and what has been your greatest failure?

C&M - We actually think failure is a great measure of success. From failure to failure, we successfully remain forever Chan & Mann.

Micol Hebron is a Los Angeles-based interdisciplinary artist. Former senior curator at the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art, she is currently an assistant professor at Chapman University and an editor at X-TRA magazine. She is a founding member of the LA Art Girls and co-founder of the Fontbron Academy. Recent projects include Intimate Exchange, a performance and workshop in Berlin, and Cultivision, a panel on cult aesthetics at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Hebron, Micol. “Mr. Winkle: Inside and Out”, Brochure Essay for the Exhibition
“Mr. Winkle: Object of Projection, Photographs by Lara Jo Regan, Utah Museum of
Contemporary Art, July 6 – October 20, 2012

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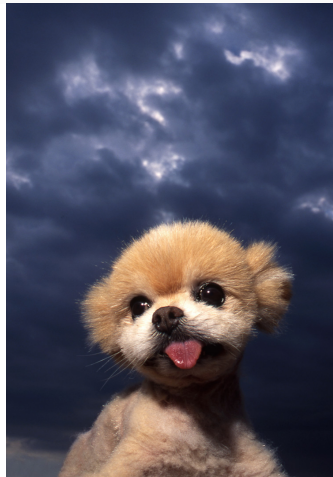
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Mr. Winkle: Object of Projection – Photographs by Lara Jo
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Mr. Winkle: Inside and Out

The images and characters of Mr. Winkle, created by renowned photographer Lara Jo Regan, are much more complex than the prima facie perception of an oddly cute and oft-anthropomorphized dog. They are simultaneously irresistible and perplexing; they harken back to the art-directed tableaux of early photo history but also canonize the first generation of internet celebrity; they reflect a universal penchant for zoomorphic cuteness; and are testament to Regan’s deft aesthetic skills as both an artistic and documentary photographer.

Mr. Winkle was first spotted in 1998 wandering erratically in the dark near a freeway off-ramp in Bakersfield, California. Initially appearing to be a tumbling piece of trash, he eventually made his way into Regan’s field of vision and into her life. Once behind her lens, however, he captured not just Regan’s imagination, but the attention and fascination of fans the world over, for years to come.

To give an overview of Regan's Mr. Winkle oeuvre, the works in this show are culled from five distinct series: the Hotel/Motel Nudes; Studio Nudes; Nature Nudes; the 'What is Mr. Winkle?' Characters; and the History Characters created for her third book ("A Winkle in Time, Mr. Winkle Celebrates the Underdogs of History"). Each series is infused with the visual lexicon of a traditional genre of photography. The Studio Nudes were shot with a large format camera and an eye towards the posed and austere classicism of nude human portraiture. The Hotel/Motel Nudes (shot in medium format) were created while Regan and Mr. Winkle traveled the country for book signings and celebrity appearances. This series mimes the documentation of the backstage lifestyle of a superstar, but also cites Americanographers such as Robert Frank or Stephen Shore as it examines the high- and low-class interiors of road-trip lodging and lounging. In the Nature Nudes, Regan cites the paradigm of shooting nude models – usually women – in natural settings, drawing a visual and linguistic association with the body and the landscape. The Character series evolved from the myriad public speculations about what Mr. Winkle might be, resulting from his remarkable appearance and demeanor. At times he seemed like another mammal; sometimes he assimilated inanimate objects, and in others he approximated mythical creatures. Regan painstakingly created detailed tableaux and costumes to visualize these possible incarnations. In the Underdogs of History, Mr. Winkle assumes a pedagogical position to remind us of important, overlooked figures in history across several eras and continents.

At the onset of portrait photography in the 1840s and 1850s, role-playing and fabricated sets were de rigueur. It was even common for portrait sitters to don costumes or props that allowed them to appropriate and perform a class, profession, or ethnicity other than their own. It was an experience and portrayal of an act of transformation. While Mr. Winkle has quintessentially neotenic and cute features – large eyes, small nose, fluffy fur – which are disarmingly cute, he is also deceptively diverse, simultaneously occupying realms of cute, kitsch, conceptualism, and classicism.

Over the years Regan has excavated every nuanced detail of a photographer's relationship to her muse. Because Mr. Winkle's excessive cuteness, it is harder to be duly serious about such an endeavor, but here too, there are important precedents in art history. Paul Cezanne made over sixty paintings of Mont Sainte Victoire, Alfred Stieglitz shot nearly 300 images of Georgia O'Keeffe's hands, and in the course of his career Giorgio Morandi painted over 1,350 images – nearly all of them still lives with bottles and dishes. Edward Weston spent two weeks in a bathroom in Mexico, studying every curve of a porcelain toilet before making his famous, eponymous image. Images of Mr. Winkle, too, now number in the hundreds. The photographer's muse – whether a mountain, a lover, bottles, or a dog – serves as a means of imaging introspection, self-reflection, and artistic existentialism. In Regan's case, images of Mr. Winkle also serve as visual antidotes to the gritty, documentary reportage that fills the other part of her photographic career.

As with artistic practice in general, the muse serves as both mirror and window – a reflection of the artist's vision and ideas, as well as a window onto other worlds of inspiration and observation. Mr. Winkle emerged as an object of projection from the very first year that Regan found him. He garnered unexpected amounts of attention and speculation, and ultimately rose

to internet fame – the first online animal celebrity, setting the precedent for innumerable furry colleagues in subsequent years (think Knut the polar bear, Maru the cat, Boo the dog). It was fan interest and suggestions that initially inspired Regan to start the Mr. Winkle photographs, also presaging the crowd-sourcing, wiki-models of creative production in the Web 2.0 era. Fusing elements from William Wegman’s anthropomorphized Weimaraner portraits, and Cindy Sherman’s polymorphic self-portraits, Mr. Winkle’s chameleonic subjects take on historical heroes, inanimate objects, human caricatures, rock star personas, and even a negativity-diffusing bodhisattva.

Recently there has been increased interest in the fields of anthrozoology, ethology, and epigenetics, as knowledge of the complexities of human-animal relationships has been expanded and foregrounded in social and scientific research. In some ways, Mr. Winkle presents depictions of these associations, but his images also present viewers with opportunities for a human-animal experience unto itself. Images of Mr. Winkle reference a number of canons of cultural production, from the onset of portrait photography to contemporary photography, from 19th century illustrations of anthropomorphized animals, to internet celebrity. Regan has astutely configured Mr. Winkle as a very complex subject – one who reflects, historicizes, soothes, inspires, provokes, and delights.

--Micol Hebron, Curator, Utah Museum of Contemporary Art

For more information about Mr. Winkle or Lara Jo Regan, please visit their websites:
www.larajoregan.com www.mrwinkle.com

Hebron, Micol. "Judy Chicago: Experienced." Catalog Essay, *Judy Chicago in Los Angeles, 1970s*, Jancar Gallery, Los Angeles, CA 2012 Print.
(Please see link to full catalog in the Creative and Scholarly documents section of my eportfolio)



JUDY CHICAGO

"Los Angeles - 1970's"

Judy Chicago: Experienced

by Micol Hebron

Judy Chicago's prolific career as artist and writer has spanned more than five decades. She has made work in nearly every medium – painting, drawing, sculpture, lithography, embroidery, ceramic, china painting, photography, performance, glass – and has written twelve books. Her most renowned work, the Dinner Party (1974-1979), introduced a complex and critical response to the canon of patriarchal modernism, and incited fervent discourse among poststructuralist feminists about the relationships between form, feminism, and art¹. Chicago had made a large, and less frequently discussed, body of work before the Dinner Party, and it was these earlier works (many of which are included in *Judy Chicago in LA* at Jancar Gallery), which not only paved the way to the Dinner Party and her subsequent practice, but also served as important precedents for well known works by other artists in every decade from the 70s until present day. Many of Chicago's works from the 60s and early 70s have not been written about or frequently shown until now.

The tenets of historical Modernism assert that the artists whom culture values most are those who are the most “original”, those who create unique, one-of-a-kind, never-before-seen works of art. We remain seduced by the notion of a Promethean savant who can concoct something from nothing. The boastful claims of precedent or superlative can automatically infuse a work of art with value: “the first__”, “the best__”, “the most__”... fill in the blank. If we apply these same standards to

¹ For an excellent and thorough articulation of Chicago's strategic use of central core imagery, as it refutes and subverts simplistic claims of essentialism, see Amelia Jones' essay “The Sexual Politics of the Dinner Party: A Cultural Context” in “Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History” (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996) 82-125

Chicago's practice, we will see a notable number of acts of originality and influence. This essay will illuminate some of the ways in which Chicago's works in this exhibition foreshadowed and inspired a broad range of artworks from diverse genres including activist art, conceptual art, earthworks, performance, and relational aesthetics.

Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.

Luckily, this is not difficult.

--Charlotte Whitton

Judy Chicago began art lessons at the Art Institute of Chicago at age 5. She later earned her MA in painting and sculpture from UCLA (1964) while in her mid twenties, and before she was 30, had formulated her ideas for a feminist art practice that would fuel the historic Feminist Art programs that she started at Fresno State College (1970-71) and California Institute of the Arts (in 1971 with Miriam Shapiro), as well as the Feminist Studio Workshops at the Women's Building (in 1972, with Sheila de Bretteville and Arlene Raven). For most of her career, Chicago worked in her studio 6 or 7 days a week for a minimum of 7 hours a day and worked out daily for 90 minutes. Now in her 70's her studio schedule is not quite as long though her exercise schedule remains the same. She still has a lot to say. In both her art and her writing, Chicago probes topics that remain underrepresented and unprecedented in art and art history – women's history, the experience of birth, the disfiguring affects of power, the holocaust, and human-animal relationships among them.

Throughout her entire career, Chicago has made work from her perspective as a woman. Like the notion of gender itself, this is a far more complicated and nuanced endeavor than it initially sounds. What does it feel like, look like, sound like, to be female? To experience being a professional, a mother, or a lover, as a female? To be a female in the male-dominated canon of art and art history? How does one manifest the physical and psychological experience of being female in relatable forms? Perhaps it is the very difficult, ineffable, and polymorphous nature of this task that accounts for the

virtual omission of this perspective in art and art history. Chicago discussed her early sexual experiences during a period that denied women's sexual agency – or needs. Her desires entirely contradicted the social attitudes of the time which led to an ongoing interest in fashioning erotic images from a feminist perspective, one that asserted women's sexual agency. She aimed to right the imbalance of representation, and to refigure the negative, Freudian notion of the female as “lacking”, and proposed instead that she be one of positive presence and significance. While studying at UCLA in the 60s Chicago created work that laid the foundation for a lengthy and formidable body of art that has been characterized by a feminist perspective.

This trajectory was not without its obstacles, however. While attending UCLA, Chicago was surrounded by male students and professors who were not receptive to her imagery or ideas about a centralized female experience, and as a survival tactic, she excised all content that overtly involved central core imagery or direct reference to female experience, turning instead to a coded and economical language of form and color (which would go on to hold an important place in the discourse about the male-centric and emotionless characteristics of Minimalism as it had been historicized²).

The works that Chicago created at this time do not appear to directly represent the body or a universal female experience. They do retain circular forms, domes, and layers of color and meaning. Consider the implications of Chicago's introduction of biomorphic forms and polychrome hues into the harshly rectilinear and drab vocabulary of Minimalist art³. While California had its own version of Minimalism--the Light and Space movement--the sensual glossy surfaces of lacquer and resin that graced the sculptures by John McCracken, Robert Irwin or De Wain Valentine were so flawless they

² For more on this topic see Saul Ostrow's catalogue essay for the exhibition at Nye+Brown, “Judy Chicago: Deflowered” (Los Angeles: Nye+Brown, 2012)

³ Jenni Sorkin's essay “Minimal/Liminal: Judy Chicago and Minimalism”, written for the exhibition that she curated, “Judy Chicago Minimalism, 1965-1973” (Santa Fe: LewAllen Contemporary, 2004) offers an insightful analysis of Chicago's use of color and form in her early works.

were industrially artificial, inhuman. It would take the likes of Judy Chicago and Lynda Benglis to subvert and undermine the seemingly impenetrable façade of Minimalist finish fetish.

Los Angeles was an important place for Chicago to have initiated her art career and develop her feminist ideology. The socio-political and cultural environments of the California art scene in the 60s and 70s directly affected Chicago's feminist consciousness. "Los Angeles was a place of exploration and self-definition"⁴ and it was this atmosphere that eventually made it possible for Chicago to define the feminist practice and pedagogy that she would pursue for the rest of her career.

In 1970, Chicago presented two iconic images in *Artforum* as advertisements for her exhibition at Jack Glenn gallery at California State University, Fullerton: *Name Change Ad*, and the *Boxing Ring Ad*ⁱⁱ. The conception of the latter image was also inspired by the fact that Chicago was, at that time, like "one of the guys" by association. She studied and socialized with the Ferus gang (including Billy Al Bengston, Ed Moses, Robert Irwin, John Altoon, etc.), and hung out at Barney's Beanery, the Hollywood bar that was immortalized by Ed Kienholz's eponymous art installation. However, the *Artforum* ad made it clear that she was forging her own identity and was ready to come into the ring fighting. She could hold her own with the boys who were dominating the art world. Chicago was not seeking to simply attain a position in the art world that was comparable to that of her male counterparts, she was looking to assert an alternative perspective, a female consciousness for consideration and recognition. It was a strategic and effective move to adopt the space of an *Artforum* ad as a venue for



Judy Chicago, *Name Change Ad*, *Artforum*, Oct., 1970



Judy Chicago, *Boxing Ring Ad*, Announcement in *Artforum* for Jack Glenn Gallery, 1971. Photo by Jerry McMillan.

⁴ Interview between Judy Chicago and the author, Belen, New Mexico, December 28-29, 2011.

criticality. Artforum was then, and remains now, a benchmark by which status and hierarchy in the art world are assessed⁵. While simultaneously rejecting her given names which had patriarchal lineage, Chicago was also asserting her new identity in the context of a male dominated art world.

Just three years later, in 1974, Lynda Benglis would also adopt the art magazine as a forum for discourse, and she presented two performative, photographic advertisements in Artforum that critiqued gender stereotypes. In the first imageⁱⁱⁱ she is posing with masculine coolness and confidence next to a car. She is wearing sunglasses, short hair, and a blazer, with one hand on



Lynda Benglis, Advertisement in Artforum magazine, April 1974



Lynda Benglis, Artforum magazine, 1974.

her hip, and the other on the car hood. In this image Benglis is emulating the photo documentation of the artists of the Ferus Gallery (the “Cool School”) in Los Angeles, or that of the New York school, picturing herself, as Chicago did in *Boxing Ring Aa*, as one of the boys. In the second image^{iv} Benglis is nude (except for her sunglasses), as she holds a giant dildo protruding from her crotch, purporting to assume the power and self-confidence that having a phallus affords⁶.

Chicago’s Artforum advertisement can also be thought of as a precedent for Chris Burden’s *Chris Burden Promo* video, in 1976^v. Like Chicago and Benglis, Burden appropriates mass media – now using television rather than publishing – as the canvas for his self-promotional artwork. In a 30-second commercial spot, Burden lists his own name at the end of a series of names of very famous male artists (Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent Van Gogh, etc.). In each of these artworks by Chicago, Benglis, and Burden, there are notions of



JChris Burden, *Chris Burden Promo*, 1976. Video still

⁵ In 2011 issues of Artforum average a 4:1 ratio of full-page ads for male artists to full-page ads for female artists.

⁶ This second ad is widely perceived as Benglis’ playful response to Robert Morris’ hypermasculine announcement card image for his Castelli-Sonnabend exhibition, also in 1974.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/25/arts/design/25benglis.html>

humor, critique, and context that play equally in the delivery of their message.

*Why do people say, "Grow some balls"? Balls are weak and sensitive! If you really
wanna get tough, grow a vagina! Those things take a pounding!*

--Betty White

As Burden's video attests, the male artist inherits the perspective of one who has agency and legacy. He is born into a position of advantage and can assume that he has a voice with which he can engage in cultural discourse. He can also expect an audience. While Chicago could certainly hold her own – at the bar and in the studio – with the Ferus boys, there were fundamental differences in her perspective that made it impossible for her to simply emulate the tactics of her male peers while developing her practice. Listening to their conversations (picture Chicago sitting between Ed Moses, Joe Goode, and Robert Irwin) she realized that when one of the men behaved offensively, the others would call him a "cunt". Now imagine that time stops, like on the clock heads in Kienholz's installation, and Chicago contemplates the fact that the male perspective held that "the worst thing you could be was a cunt". She then asks, "So what do you do if you *have* one?"⁷

This realization was a significant catalyst for Chicago's return to imagery that she had previously edited out of her practice while studying at UCLA. She thus resumes her construction of a visual lexicon of a female experience – through the reintroduction of central core imagery--and infuses her work with vibrant, pulsating images of vulvas, vaginal openings, butterflies, and clitorises, as visual depictions of the female experience. She uses a meticulous system of color and value gradients that cause forms to radiate, throb, and shift⁸. In this exhibition, *Tender Buttons #4, Private Landscape*,

⁷ Judy Chicago. "Judy Chicago: A Conversation With Her Younger Self" October 9, 2011. Pomona College. Claremont, CA

⁸ The ideas and color theory that Chicago uses to articulate these perceptual experiences are also clearly evident in the numerous additional early works that are on view in the exhibition at Nye + Brown gallery in Los Angeles, "Judy Chicago: Deflowered", from February 18-March 31, 2012, which runs concurrent with the exhibition at Jancar gallery.

and *Through the Flower #3* (1977) are representative of this return to previously excised imagery in Chicago's oeuvre.

Chicago sets out to reclaim the "cunt" as something positive and empowering. At Fresno State College, Chicago emphasizes a context that encourages her students to be and celebrate their own womanhood. In 1971 her students formed the Cunt Cheerleaders, who engaged in a happy, exuberant, and proud reappropriation of the word. By revoking authorship of such a term from the misogynist male perspective, and returning it to the female, she can thus reclaim agency and empowerment. Chicago's courageous reclamation of a derogatory term is precedent for a tactic that returns to the art scene more commonly in the 80s and 90s, in the wake of the culture wars and in the midst of art engaged in identity politics. Famous examples can be found in Catherine Opie's portrait *Dyke*^{vi}, 1993, or Tracey Emin's appliquéd blanket, *Psycho Slut*, 1999.



Catherine Opie, *Dyke*, 1993

Anonymous was a woman. –Virginia Woolf

Chicago's consideration of language plays an important part of the development of her feminist ideas and artworks in other ways as well. While the word "cunt" was used as an epithet, and the term "feminist art" simply did not exist. The history of women in the arts, and in culture in general, is one of omission. It is therefore not surprising that a term for "feminist art" did not exist, even as late as the 1960s. But a thing must be named, if it is to be referenced, valued, and preserved in society and in the annals of history. To name someone/thing gives it voice, dignity, identity, and a place in the community.

After spending two years in a self-guided study, immersing herself in the history of women's art and literature along with readings in women's history and biographies, Chicago emerged from this pedagogical room of her own with ideas on how to formulate a feminist art program. In so doing,

she gave name, image, and structure to feminist art. Interestingly, Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" was published in 1971, a year after Chicago's started her Feminist Art program at Fresno State College, a program that fostered a number of prominent women artists including Suzanne Lacy and Faith Wilding.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell. –US Military, 1993

If you see something say something. – Department of Homeland Security, 2010

Chicago directly articulates her musings on what constitutes a feminist art in *What is Feminist Art*, 1977. In *Peeling Back* (1974) Chicago describes and visualizes her experiences of being rejected during studio visits with prominent curators because she was a woman. And in *Love Story* (1971) she deliberately pairs an explicit image with an intense prose that articulates and acknowledges the physical and psychological violence imposed upon women as a result of misogynistic attitudes and actions. In this piece Chicago reprints an excerpt from the Pauline Rago's "Story of O" below an image of a gun being thrust into a woman's buttocks, to create an indexical testimony of the degree of emotion and trauma inherent in these violations. The artistic tactic of coupling intense imagery with strong texts was employed



Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah: What Does This Represent/What Do You Represent*, 1978

again in the work of the 1980s, as the culture wars and AIDS crisis evoked ire from the artist community. David



David Wojnarowicz, *When I Put My Hands On Your Body*, 1990

Wojnarowicz's powerful combinations of image and text directly recall Chicago's poignant pairings^{vii}. In *Gunsmoke*, Chicago presents the image of a woman (herself) violently compromised and objectified, the gun an impersonal phallus thrust down her throat. This juxtaposition of forceful

weapon and vulnerable body is echoed in Hannah Wilke's later series *So Help Me Hannah: What Does This Represent / What Do You Represent (Reinhart)*, 1978–1984^{viii}, in which Wilke appears

naked, in a corner, surrounded by toy guns. One can also find similarities between Chicago's text/image pieces, and Barbara Kruger's artwork, especially with regard to the use of first and second person pronouns to implicate the viewer directly. Kruger began her text/image collages in the late 1970s. It is also possible to draw parallels between Chicago and Duane Michals, who included handwritten anecdotes or phrases on his black and white photographs in the 1970s^{ix}. Not coincidentally, it is during the 1970s that MOMA director John Szarkowski's efforts to affirm photography as fine art effect a paradigm shift with regard to how contemporary artists used photography in the United States at that time⁹.



The unfortunate man could not find the way he loved, it had been described through by the love, slowly, his fingers became like and his hands, gradually breaking, but he began to wear down on his hands to relieve the pain, it never occurred to him to break the love.

Duane Michals, *The Unfortunate Man*, 1976



Carolee Schneemann, *Bloodwork Diary* (detail), 1972

Chicago again uses photography to create a direct representation of female experience in *Red Flag*, 1971, which is the first photo-based depiction of menstruation that occurs in art history. The image is a close-up of a hand pulling a bloody tampon from a vagina. *Red Flag* was soon followed by Carolee Schneemann's pieces *Bloodwork Diary*, 1972^x, and *Interior Scroll*, 1975¹⁰. *Bloodwork Diary* consists of five panels of tissues blotted with menstrual blood,



Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975

and *Interior Scroll*^{xi} was a performance in which Schneemann pulls and reads a scroll from her vagina¹¹. Over forty years after these pieces were made, we now live amidst a preponderance of overt sexuality in the media, frequent

⁹ Chicago uses photography infrequently in her practice after the 70s. When asked about the fact that her husband, photographer Donald Woodman, works predominantly in the one medium that she uses the least in her artwork, she joked "...together we make one perfect person". Judy Chicago, interview with the author, Belen, New Mexico, December 28-29, 2011.

¹⁰ In 1976, Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document* was exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, and newspaper headlines derided the notion of "dirty nappies as art".

¹¹ We can only conclude that historical amnesia accounts for the fact that Tracey Emin's use of menstrual blood in her installations (such as *My Bed*, 1998) has been discussed as though it were without precedent.

“accidental” celebrity crotch shots, and myriad ways to have one’s pudendum decorated at the salon (rhinestones, feathers, temporary tattoos). There is no end to the objectification and aestheticization of the female body, and yet sincere, earnest images about the lived female experience are nonetheless rare and discomfiting. The image of the vagina, the overt depiction of feminine sexuality and bodily functions, remain red flags in the contemporary visual lexicon¹².

In addition to her photo/text pairings, and fusions of photography and painting in collaboration with her husband Donald Woodman¹³, Chicago has employed numerous other mediums in her practice, including auto-body painting and pyrotechnics. Chicago has always been invested in the physical craft of each body of work, and she frequently references her formal training in painting and sculpture. However, her practice in the 1960s presaged that of post-modern, post-studio artists in that she did not focus her practice on one medium, but instead moved fluidly through a variety of materials.

The Finish Fetish movement was prominent in the Los Angeles art scene in the 1960s and shared a reciprocal influence between the surf and car cultures. Chicago went to auto-body school to learn to paint cars, and in 1964 she presented her first painted car hoods, nearly 20 years before Richard



Richard Prince, Car Hoods, installation view.

Prince would also work with car hoods^{xii}. Chicago embellished her hoods with graphical, totemic, and symmetrical imagery, as seen in the studies for *Bigamy Hood*, *Flight Hood*, and *Birth Hood*. By overlaying corporeal content upon the hoods, Chicago invaded and undermined the machismo of the formalist

¹² Though not referenced in this exhibition, it should be mentioned that Chicago’s installation *Menstruation Bathroom*, 1972, at Womahouse, also sought to dismantle the secrecy and fetishism of menstruation. Priscilla Monge’s *Room for Isolation and Restraint*, 2001, an installation of a detainment cell padded with unstained menstrual pads, showed at the Brooklyn Museum (where the *Dinner Party* is now permanently housed) as part of the *Global Feminisms* exhibition in 2007.

¹³ Chicago and Woodman collaborated for 8 years on the *Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light*, 1985-1993, which merges photography and painting.

aesthetics that were promoted in the artwork of her male contemporaries and in the proto-modernist writings of Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer. She had once again infiltrated the “boys club”, working with the same materials as the male artists did, while simultaneously subverting the masculine formalist paradigms by applying imagery that depicted female experiences.

As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, Minimalism gave way to earthworks as artists critiqued the gallery system and object fetishism of the art world, and again, Chicago was there with precedent-setting projects. Her atmospheric and pyrotechnic, site-specific installations and performances that occurred between 1969 and 1974 were created as temporary paintings of sorts, feminizing and beautifying the



Allan Kaprow, *Fluids*, from *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1967.
Photo by Dennis Cooper



Wolf Vostell, *De-Coll/age Happening*, 1964

landscape. Working with dry ice, road flares, and fireworks, Chicago’s ephemeral *Atmospheres* acted as beautiful and peaceful antidotes to the aggressive, large-scale and more permanent marks made upon the earth by artists such as Michael Heizer or Robert Smithson. On January 21st of 2012, Chicago performed *A Butterfly for Pomona*, which resumed a series of fireworks pieces that she last performed for the Oakland Museum in 1974 with *A Butterfly for Oakland*. This beautiful fire painting, strategically performed in the middle of a football field, was concordant with her ongoing objective to depict feminine consciousness and experience, and the yonic butterfly glowed and pulsed and ecstatically erupted, multiple times, with multicolored sprays of fire. While it’s possible to claim that Chicago’s *Atmospheres* have precedents in Allan Kaprow’s *Fluids*, from *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*,

landscapes. Working with dry ice, road flares, and fireworks, Chicago’s ephemeral *Atmospheres* acted as beautiful and peaceful antidotes to the aggressive, large-scale and more permanent marks made upon the earth by artists such as Michael Heizer or Robert Smithson. On January 21st of 2012, Chicago performed *A Butterfly for Pomona*, which



Cai Guo-Qiang, *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9*,
Munden, Germany 1992

1959^{xiii} or Wolf Vostell's *De-collage Happening*, 1964^{xiv}, one could also consider her *Atmospheres* to be the antecedents to Cai Guo Qiang's numerous pyrotechnic paintings and performances from the 90s to the present^{xv}.

The rich histories and insights of Chicago's works in this exhibition, and of the works in *Judy Chicago: Deflowered* at Nye + Brown Gallery, Los Angeles, resonate throughout the last half a century, and will no doubt be influential and impactful for decades and generations to come.



Carrie Reichardt as *Super Vag*, 2011.
Photo by Neelum Bassrall

In a public lecture on October 9, 2011, Chicago cited British artist Carrie Reichardt's performance *Super Vag*^{xvi} as an example of a return to central core imagery in contemporary practice. "Feminist theorists are very fond of saying that gender is a changing construct. That may be true theoretically, but in terms of most women's lives, it's not--as reflected by the fact that many young women artists are taking up the same themes of the 70s... Because for them the cunt is the same kind of impediment it was for me when I was young, and like me, they want to overcome that, and they want to be proud of who they are."¹⁴

Micol Hebron

-Los Angeles, 2012

¹⁴ Judy Chicago. "Judy Chicago: A Conversation With Her Younger Self" October 9, 2011. Pomona College. Claremont, CA

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- ⁱ Judy Chicago, *Name Change Ad*, Artforum, Oct., 1970
- ⁱⁱ Judy Chicago, *Boxing Ring Ad*, Announcement in Artforum for Jack Glenn Gallery, 1971. Photo by Jerry McMillan.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Lynda Benglis, Advertisement in Artforum magazine, April 1974
- ^{iv} Lynda Benglis, Artforum magazine, 1974.
- ^v Chris Burden, *Chris Burden Promo*, 1976. Video still
- ^{vi} Catherine Opie, *Dyke*, 1993
- ^{vii} David Wojnarowicz, *When I Put My Hands On Your Body*, 1990
- ^{viii} Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah: What Does This Represent/What Do You Represent*, 1978
- ^{ix} Duane Michals, *The Unfortunate Man*, 1976
- ^x Carolee Schneemann, *Bloodwork Diary* (detail), 1972
- ^{xi} Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975
- ^{xii} Richard Prince, *Car Hoods*, installation view.
- ^{xiii} Allan Kaprow, *Fluids*, from *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, 1967. Photo by Dennis Cooper
- ^{xiv} Wolf Vostell, *De-Coll/age Happening*, 1964
- ^{xv} Cai Guo-Qiang, *Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9*, Munden, Germany 1992
- ^{xvi} Carrie Reichardt as *Super Vag*, 2011. Photo by Neelum Bassrall

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Salt Lake City: Jared Steffensen at Nox Contemporary," *Art Forum* May 2011 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=28269>

Jared Steffensen

05.17.11

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

04.15.11-06.03.11 Nox Contemporary

Surrounded by a crown of enormous mountains, and boasting the dictum "This is the place," Salt Lake City compels artistic sublimation of the monumental landscape that surrounds this place and dwarfs its residents. "Lofty Peaks and Wide Streets," Jared Steffensen's first solo exhibition at Nox Contemporary, offers up twenty-one pieces in various media that inventory the experience of place, and toy with American nostalgia for the Western frontier. Steffensen jockeys the intimate and the inventive, presenting low-tech configurations of material that seek to reconcile the human scale of personal experience with the mythological intensity of geologic and social histories.

Three handmade ladders in *Lofty Peaks* (all works 2011) are painted in gradients ranging from brown to white and capped with white glitter to form scalable mountains. In *Rah! Rah! Rah!*, plastic red party cups are arranged in rural brambles to spell GO TEAM, an oxymoronic cheer for nature, writ in trash. *Your Hood vs. Mine* is an ersatz hand of Luke Skywalker that thrusts from the wall, a small pine tree emerging from the base of his lightsaber. *The After Party* is a Zen-like audio recording of the sounds after a snowstorm. Steffensen's steadfast (and mildly humorous) allegiance to place is furthered with several pieces that explore the very roads that lead to and from Salt Lake City. A two-channel video piece, *Walls*, tracks the passing landscape as the artist drives the length of the easternmost and westernmost roads of the Salt Lake Valley. Mimicking these opposing trajectories in Steffensen's piece *Round Trip*, two lines of hand-scrawled text circumnavigate the room and chart the songs that carried the artist on a drive to and from Los Angeles. The entire show is a bit like a mix tape on an epic American road trip, surveying that which lures you away from—and keeps you coming back to—a sense of place and home.



Hebron, Micol. "Separation Anxiety at the Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art." *Art Pulse*. Vol 2 No. 3, Mar-May, 2011. 74. Print.
<http://artpulsemagazine.com/separation-anxiety>



Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art - Rancho Cucamonga, CA
Curated by Denise Johnson and Rebecca Trawick

By Micol Hebron

As most women know, few things will invite a quicker escort out of the art world than having a baby. Despite the high numbers of artists with children, parenthood remains highly stigmatized in the contemporary art world. You can't make art *and* be a mother (being a father is more acceptable, but still rarely discussed). When an artist announces she is pregnant, her shows get postponed, galleries remove her from their roster, and patrons talk in hushed tones about the unfortunate loss of potential, as if pregnancy were a shameful disease.

One of the most life-changing states of being, parenthood affects everything—one's relationship to their own body and identity, the understanding of love, survival instincts, the balancing of work, art, and family, and much more. It is therefore confounding that discussions of parenthood remain so taboo in the art world. Co-curated by Denise Johnson and Rebecca Trawick, "Separation Anxiety," at the Wignall Museum of Contemporary Art in Rancho Cucamonga, California, dares to open the conversation, with multidisciplinary work by 16 contemporary artists who examine various facets of parenthood.

The exhibition is introduced with the video *California Civil Code 43.3* (1998) by the collective M.A.M.A (Athena Kanaris, Lisa Mann, Lisa Schoyer, and Karen Schwenkmeyer). Titled after the law that permits breastfeeding in public, the video is a montage of women breastfeeding, as seen from the mother's point of view. A narrative voiceover presents numerous women describing experiences of breastfeeding and the changes in her sense of her body that are invoked as a result. The dialogue of the video raises complicated and candid observations about the body as object of desire - a simultaneous source of sexuality and nourishment.

From the image of the child's suckling mouth, it is interesting to move to Monica Bock's *Cheek by Jowl* (2008), twelve haunting silver and gold casts of her daughter's teeth. Overtly Freudian, each set of teeth bears the holes where baby teeth have fallen out. A record of genetics and identity, the dental casts also immortalize the child's body while it is in a state of rapid transition, alluding to the nostalgic desire to sustain and covet childhood.

Conversely, it can also be problematic when children are rushed too quickly into adulthood. Mark Stockton's meticulous drawing *Jon Benet* (2009) shows misapplied projection of adult notions of beauty and femininity as the pageant star's overly coiffed body is positioned at the bottom of the pictorial plane. She is vulnerable and dwarfed by the large empty space of the paper above her.

Given up for adoption as a youth, Marcos Rosales uses imagery and text to explore the impact of too little attention, or abandonment, upon the child. In *Eau de Toilette* (1995), Rosales presents fictional stories of foster home children, often mentally disabled, who exhibit disturbing, deviant, and sometimes comical behaviors that are often the result of sublimated anxiety from early interactions with the now absent parents.

The other works in the show continue to probe the intricacies of parenthood and childhood that are often too uncomfortable to articulate. Ellina Kevorkian and Haley Hasler examine the expectations and responsibilities of the mother, while Rebecca Edwards' work is about expectations of the child. Claudia Alvarez explores the child as victim or perpetrator of violence and Kate Kretz is concerned with the child's delicate vulnerability. Jennifer Wroblewski and Leslie Dick each collaborate with their child; Abbey Williams addresses the taboo of the artist-mother; Connie Hatch and Carol Flax's projects are about time and lifecycles; Erika de Vries and Elizabeth Douglas's photos show what the mother sees.

In many cases there is a palpable sense of loss portrayed in the works in the show-loss of time, of youth, of independence, of sense of self, of previous lifestyle. However, through these works of separation and loss, the viewer gains an enriched understanding of the polemics of parenthood from an artist's perspective.

(October 11 - November 13, 2010)

Micol Hebron is the senior curator of exhibitions at Salt Lake Art Center. She is a contributing writer for *Art Forum*, *Flash Art International* and *Arte Contexto*.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Hilja Keading at Angles Gallery," *Art Forum* December 2010 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=26956>

Hilja Keading

12.03.10

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

11.06.10-12.23.10 Angles Gallery

In *The Bonkers Devotional*, 2010, Hilja Keading presents a four-channel video installation that deftly weaves together allegories of archetype and absurdity, all informed by her interest in nature. The exterior walls of a room within the gallery are disguised by projections of golden aspens, their leaves fluttering in the wind. Inside, the ceiling is covered with a canopy of military camouflage netting, while projections fill two adjacent walls with offset views of the interior of a small room not unlike the one in which viewers sit.

In the video, Keading herself is seated on a bed, uncomfortably close to an enormous black bear, her stoic expression betraying subtle anxiety. Sometimes she accepts the bear's nudges; at other times she shies away with fearful anticipation. The eight-hundred-pound bear takes up most of the room, and Keading's blonde locks conjure childhood fairy tales. Ursine icons accent the room—a child's stuffed animal, bear-patterned sheets—and, by contrast, fortify the actuality of the natural bear. Hairy and brutish, the bear seems quite male in his dominant and clumsy yet powerful presence, and he appears to hold the girl captive, physically and emotionally, with his mere potential for violence.

Each video is meticulously edited and reveals parallels between the actions of Keading and the bear, as they each look out the window, look at a clock, stand near a dresser, and sit on the bed. The piece elegantly offers up an exploration of common dichotomies: nature and culture, interior and exterior, masculinity and femininity, delicacy and intensity. As Keading and the bear tolerate and negotiate each other's presence without resolution or capitulation, we are reminded of the profound complexities of the worlds we inhabit.



Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Michael Dopp at Kinkead Contemporary" *Art Forum* May 2010 *Art Forum* n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=25642>

Michael Dopp

05.21.10

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

05.08.10-06.05.10 *Kinkead Contemporary*

The thirteen monochromatic paintings in Michael Dopp's first solo exhibition, "Dilate," form an intelligent and poetic meditation on archetypal dialogues of abstraction, with a self-conscious playfulness that inserts elements of language and corporeality within retinal formalism. The works recall psychologist George Henry Lewes's definition of emergence, wherein "every resultant is either a sum or a difference of the co-operant forces." Here, Dopp frames his "forces" in categories that correspond to four deliberate series—"Kites," "Vanishing Points," "Anemic Paintings," and "Variations on a Room."

Taking cues from Duchamp's 1926 film *Anemic Cinema*, these paintings are visually anagrammatic, engaging a deceptively simple formalism that pushes and pulls between states of generality (the universal, fundamental elements of painting) and intimate specificity (the indexical, the somatic, the imperfect). Elements from each piece are carried into the others, akin to a perpetually looping, psychedelic cross-dissolve. The painted "walls" within the "Variations on a Room" works morph into trapezoidal forms in the "Kite" paintings, and the receding loci of the "Vanishing Point" series move forward in the pictorial plane to become the oculi of the "Anemic" paintings, which in turn mimic the chromatic circles in the "Vanishing Point" pieces, and so on. In the process of dilation, the eye and mind take in increasing amounts of information until the aperture is too great—overexposure obscures the image and a silhouetted afterimage echoes in the mind's eye. Dopp elicits the same effect with this body of work. Through meticulous arrangement of complementary and antagonistic elements, he activates the pictorial space of the picture plane and cites both body and architecture as core elements of the exploration of abstraction.



Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Stanya Kahn at Susanne Vielmetter," *Art Forum* March 2010 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=25180>

Stanya Kahn
03.23.10

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

03.13.10-04.24.10 *Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects*

Stanya Kahn's first solo exhibition at this gallery features three thirty- to forty-minute videos that smack of YouTube vernacular: handheld camera; on-camera mic; footage of friends, family, and little kids playing piano. Closer observation reveals masterful application of Eisensteinian editing, with meticulously choreographed sound tracks and threads of epistemological ruminations that indicate a philosophical conscientiousness that's often overlooked in conversations about Kahn's work. Each video canvasses the concerns and coping mechanisms of a contemporary subject who is forging her way through a world in crisis. Before you roll your eyes at the apparent pedantry of it all, consider that each work is peppered with slyly subversive jokes—about butts, blondes, and sex—as well as remarkable personal stories and an impressive stream of eclectic facts about animals, ecology, and health. Kahn's characters are contemporary flaneurs, and each is steadfast on a physical or linguistic *dérive* that takes the viewer through narratives of mortality, trauma, family, and the ethics of civic and ecological responsibility.

In *Sandra*, 2009, Kahn's seventy-year-old mother matter-of-factly discusses her own funeral arrangements, her views on the (im)pertinence of religion and politics, her tenure as a shipyard worker, and the lowbrow criminal exploits of an ex. In *Kathy*, 2009, Kahn's close friend contemplates her own motherhood, a recent C-section, fantasies of her narcissistic mother's death, and the gut-wrenching tribulations of the victims whom she treats as a therapist. Kahn fuses the gritty realities of these two videos into an even grittier fiction in *It's Cool, I'm Good*, 2010. Here she physically embodies the elements of abjection and wisdom foretold by the women close to her. Bandaged and bloodied from an unnamed accident, a metaphor for the Sisyphean baggage we all carry with us, the artist ambles through the seductively apocalyptic landscapes of Southern California. She deftly uses humor and language to disarm, navigate, and give form to the yarns we construct to tackle the human condition.



Hebron, Micol. "Strength in Numbers: Taking the Pulse of the Los Angeles Gallery Scene." *Arte Contexto* 25 Feb. 2010: 55-64. Print

<http://www.artcontexto.com/en/magazine-25.html>



Strength in Numbers: Taking the Pulse of the Los Angeles Gallery Scene

Los Angeles is characterized by its pluralism. It is a city that has its foundations in both utopian and postmodern endeavors. It boasts diversity in everything from demographics to geography. The art scene there is no exception, and the recent American recession has taken effect in the form of a surprising dichotomy among Los Angeles galleries: on the one hand, many galleries are moving and growing, and are stronger than ever; on the other hand, more and more artists are rejecting the traditional gallery and starting alternative spaces and projects.

The gallery scene in Los Angeles has no single center, but rather a few nuclei with dense gallery rows. Culver City and China Town have the most active and popular clusters of galleries, but established and emerging individual galleries are rooted all over the city.

When the market began its downward spiral in 2007, widespread pessimism bore speculation about how many galleries would be lost in Los Angeles and New York. Many galleries on both coasts did in fact close (Los Angeles lost over 20 small and mid-range galleries), but lately the Los Angeles gallery scene has also been marked by three notable expansions. Introducing the "Supergallery". In 2007 Shaun Caley Regen lead Regen Projects to more than double its West Hollywood exhibition space and open Regen Projects II, showcasing a new Charles Ray sculpture (Hinoki). In September 2009, Tim Blum and Jeff Poe inaugurated their new museum-like space with a group show in a 2,045 square meter building on La Cienega Blvd in Culver City, lending possible credence to their self-described position as the "best gallery in Los Angeles" (if not the best, they're certainly among the biggest). In 2010 Larry Gagosian will unveil the Michael Paladino-designed 1,080 square foot expansion of Gagosian Beverly Hills. Votes of confidence in the strength and longevity of the Los Angeles Art scene are further evidenced in the larger number of new galleries, alternative spaces, innovative programming and art-world

collaborations that have occurred in Los Angeles during the last three years.

Culver City, located in the geographic center of the Los Angeles region, has been the ever-growing gallery hotspot since Blum and Poe first moved there from Santa Monica in 2003. For the last 6 years galleries have engaged in chess-like maneuvering to relocate their spaces in the area, forming a dense, mutually beneficial gallery row on La Cienega Boulevard. Soon after Blum and Poe came Susanne Vielmetter, QED, Sandroni Rey, LAXART, Honor Fraser, Walter Maciel, Cardwell Jimmerson and several others. Last year Cherry and Martin, Roberts and Tilton, David Kordansky Gallery, and Peres Projects moved into the area and in January of 2010 Western Projects and Angles Gallery joined them.

Cherry and Martin and David Kordansky are galleries with rising influence, and all-star rosters that include Nathan Mabry and Elad Lassry respectively. Kinkead Contemporary has distinguished itself with good emerging artists (including Heather Cantrell), a short-term residency program, and intelligent salon discussions on current issues in the arts. Lauri Firstenberg's programming at the non-profit LAXART is among the most visionary and innovative in the city. Programming includes commissioned artist projects, site-specific works, billboards, murals, panel discussions, and projects for a miniature version of Maurizio Cattelan's Wrong Gallery, which is housed inside LAXART. The latest LAXART billboard project artists are Mungo Thomson and Shana Lutker.

The Culver City gallery group has suffered losses too, with closures of The Project, MC Kunst, Lizabeth Oliveria, Anna Helwing, and Kim Light/Lightbox. Former QED director David Quadrini will move his current space, Angstrom Gallery, and Honor Fraser will conduct non-profit events in his old space. Those who wish to drown their sorrows, celebrate a successful opening, make a deal with a collector, or listen to a trendy artist DJ can be found in the Mandrake after exhibition openings. Located in the heart of the gallery row, Mandrake is an immanently hip art bar co-run by artists Justin Beal, Drew Heitzler, and Flora Wiegman.

Closer to down town Los Angeles, the China Town district has been the site of a young and smart gallery scene since Giovanni Intra opened China Art Objects in 1999. A dense and prominent cluster of galleries is situated along and near Chung King Road, a walking street peppered with paper Chinese lanterns. Sam Lee, Happy Lion, David Salow, Solway Jones, Sabina Lee, L2 Kontemporary, Redling Fine Art and Jancar galleries round out the scene. In 2005 Mara McCarthy (Paul's daughter) opened the Box LA with the mandate of providing a diverse program with "artists of all generations, many of whom have had little or no formal recognition by the art world at large". Barbara Smith and Stan Vanderbeek are two examples. A few doors down, the Public School offers free classes on topics from Walter Benjamin to Queer Technologies. Dealer Anat Egbi and artist Annie Wharton opened The Company in 2008, with an emphasis on video and performance. European ex-patriot Francois Ghebaly, of Chung King Projects, has spearheaded numerous collaborative projects including multi-gallery performance and video festivals in China Town. Gallerists Kathryn Brennan, Steve Hansen, and art world veteran Tom Solomon have teamed up to run the Cottage Home consortium, allowing each gallery to mount satellite exhibitions through a shared common space. Nine of the China Town galleries teamed up in August 2009 to present the First Annual Malibu Art Fair.

As for China Town casualties, painter Roger Herman and dealer Parker Jones shuttered Black Dragon Society in 2009 after 10 years and Jones opened his own self-titled space. Gone too are INMO, Kontainer, David Patton, Jack Hanley, Telic Arts Exchange, Mary Goldman, and Bonelli Contemporary. Mesler and Hug closed when Daniel Hug was recruited as director of the

Cologne art fair in 2008 and Joel Mesler left Los Angeles to open Rental Gallery in New York. Now WPA, an enthusiastic new gallery model for collaboration and social consciousness, exists in their old space.

Nearby, the downtown arts district is also home to many galleries. Gallerist Bert Green spearheaded revitalization efforts for this area and has succeeded in building a monthly gallery crawl that attracts hundreds if not thousands of people on the first Thursday of the month. While most of these galleries cater to a more amateur art aesthetic, a few serious spaces are nestled in the midst of the kitsch and the craft. Most notable is Glenna Jennings' collective and gallery Compact Space, with an emphasis on experimental photography and installation, as well as innovations such as Eve Fowler and Erika Voigt's critique classes. After a 4-year hiatus, Habib Kheradyar re-opened his former art space, POST (now PØST). From 1995 – 2005 POST presented over 200 exhibitions and claims to have shown nearly every artist in LA.

Some of the veteran galleries continue to hold their own in locations outside of the one-stop-shopping mentality of gallery rows. Margo Leavin, one of the grand dame gallerists, remains in West Hollywood. Since 1970 her gallery has boasted a top-notch roster of contemporary, conceptual, and blue chip artists such as Brenna Youngblood and John Baldessari. LA Louver has had its feet firmly planted in Venice Beach since 1975 with Elizabeth East, Kimberly Davis, and Peter Goulds at the helm. Their semi-annual Rogue Wave exhibition, curated by Christopher Pate and Peter Goulds remains a bellwether of significant emerging Los Angeles artists. Another stalwart, Christopher Grimes' gallery has been in Santa Monica since 1979. Douglas Christmas' ACE gallery has two locations (Beverly Hills and Mid-Wilshire) with huge, museum scale exhibition spaces. ACE is among the galleries that will boost the 2010 trend of opening non-profit organizations. With possibly the smallest space in LA, Richard Telles gallery can be found amidst designer furniture stores on Beverly Boulevard in the Midtown area.

Marc Foxx, ACME, and 1301 PE galleries still cling to the skeletal remains of the once bustling "6150" art complex, named for its street address on Wilshire Boulevard near the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Brian Butler's 1301 PE and Brain Multiples ("Ideas best expressed in multiple forms") tends to fly under the radar, but has a stellar roster of powerful and critical artists including Kerry Tribe and Rikrit Tirivanija. Down the street, Steve Turner has been a champion of new drawing and painting talent in LA (like Rowan Wood), but also holds one of the city's most important private collections of African American ephemera and historic photography. Once neighbor to Turner, Carl Berg recently closed his Mid-Wilshire gallery and opened Carl Berg Projects, an itinerant production now operating out of the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood. Gallerists Berg, Janet Levy and Tim Fleming have helped launch the Design Loves Art initiative in which galleries establish temporary project spaces in the "PDC" filling large empty showrooms with group shows and special projects culled from their regular stable of artists. The PDC was also the site of the new Art Los Angeles Contemporary international art fair under the directorship of Tim Fleming and featuring over 50 galleries.

In the constricted market some have refigured artistic practice into new models of livelihood. Cottage Home director Tim Christian also runs Real Art Works art consulting and professional services. Artist Karen Atkinson's enterprise GYST (Get Your Shit Together) sells software and workshops to artists on how to navigate all aspects of the business of being an artist. Bettina Korek's web-based art marketing firm For Your Art has its finger on every pulse and heartbeat in the Los Angeles area. Artist Dorit Cypis' created Foreign Exchange, a professional service that offers conflict mediation through artistic practices.

Belt-tightening has happened in the studio as some artists are modifying their practice – making paintings with acrylic paint instead of oil, making more drawings, or abandoning costly –object making in favor of performative activities. Adam Overton has been running a cutting-edge wiki, *Upload, Download, Perform*, an online open-source exchange of performance scores, concrete poetry, and audio pieces. For others, like My Barbarian or the LA Art Girls, working as a collective has been the answer. Though sales may be down temporarily, a reduced emphasis on the market has fostered and magnified valuable innovations.

Art activities in Los Angeles seem to be returning to an experimental, grass-roots mindset, with the use of food and home as centerpieces for artistic practices involving Bourriaudian Relational Aesthetics. Los Angeles has a rich history of house-galleries, starting in the 1970s with the Woman's Building and Allen Ruppersberg's Al's Hotel. Mary Leigh Cherry started her first gallery, Cherry, in her garage in 1996 and Dave Muller started Three-Day Weekend events at his house. Since 2005 artist Justin Baner Hansch has held semi-yearly exhibitions and events at JMOCA (Justin's Museum of Contemporary Art) in his multi-room house atop a hill the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles. Artist Curated Projects is an eponymous endeavor based out of the homes of Eve Fowler and Lucas Michael. Fucked Up Drawing Party is an open collective of young artists that have in-house drawing parties that, as their name implies, often involve intoxication to facilitate the creative process. Leonardo Bravo has spearheaded Big City Forum, a series of monthly topical conversations lead by artists and architects and hosted in homes or alternative gallery spaces.

Public space, community activism, and sustainability have become allying points for artist's projects, echoing the Happenings of the 60s and 70s. , The MAK Center will unveil 23 artist-designed billboards throughout the city in February and March including pieces by Allan Sekula and James Welling. Jules Rochielle has created the Portable City Project, a series of site-specific performances involving the presentation of food as a means of creating community and dialogue. Fritz Haeg's Sundown Salon gardens-as-art project and the fruit-picking, jam-making performances by the collective Fallen Fruit also employ the edible as medium. The Center for Land Use Interpretation and Farmlab are two organizations that encourage reconsideration of the terrain as site of artistic practice. Of the notable community based projects is Edgar Arceneaux's Watt's House Project, "a collaborative artwork in the shape of neighborhood redevelopment" in the historically poverty stricken neighborhood of Watts in South Los Angeles.

Art sales and object production may be down in some parts of Los Angeles, but collaboration, experimentation, discourse and reinvention are pervasive. In a city known for cinematic fantasy and plastic surgery, superficiality and indulgence, it is nice to be able to say that the strength and vitality of the contemporary art scene offers a profound, honest and intelligent cultural core that anchors this polymorphous metropolis.

Micol Hebron
Los Angeles

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Joe Sola at Happy Lion," *Art Forum* January 2010 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=24700>

Joe Sola

THE HAPPY LION

963 Chung King Road

January 9–February 13



Joe Sola, *Me'n Kippenberger*, 2010, watercolor and pencil on paper, 30 x 22".

As Joe Sola would have it, art is a culture industry that is simultaneously ridiculous and totally irresistible. His works relate to the field like an overenthusiastic child who squeezes the cute kitten to death. An LA art-world veteran, Sola's first solo exhibition at this gallery features six watercolors and a short video, each presenting weighty humor about the politics of looking and posturing.

The watercolors depict phalluses and fallacies while embracing and chiding the mechanisms of visual culture. *Yes Missile* and *No Missile* (all works 2010) are succinct summaries of power. The positive missile points upward as it is being sent. The negative heads downward as it's about to be received. In *Me'n Kippenberger*, the penises of two men in lederhosen are entangled in a square knot, while in the video *A Short Film About Looking*, two men embody familiar artistic antinomies—producer and consumer, artist and collector, subject and object, culture and nature—through catenary visual metaphors. A bohemian, artsy character, placed in the compositional foreground, is accompanied by scantily clad models in a messy studio while rectilinear objects perpetually catch his attention. His counterpart is more formally dressed and appears alone in the backgrounds of modernist architectural spaces, captivated by the spherical shapes around him. There is a whole lot of looking going on, as the protagonists's primary actions are to gaze deeply and contemplatively at their respective objects, the classic Lacanian *objet petit a*. The climax of the video is a tête-à-tête in a gallery (the Happy Lion itself), an intense staring match that culminates in *Scanners*-esque head explosions. I can relate—I often feel like art makes my head explode. At least the smart stuff does.

— Micol Hebron

Hebron, Micol. "Erin Cosgrove: What Manner of Person Art Thou." *Arte Contexto* 21 April 2009: 96-97. Print



Erin Cosgrove - Still from *What Manner of Person Art Thou?*, 2004-2008 - DVD. 64:40 min.
Courtesy the artist and Carl Berg Gallery, Los Angeles

All's Fair in Love and War
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
December 9 – March 15
What Manner of Person Art Thou
Erin Cosgrove

Erin Cosgrove's latest video piece, *What Manner of Person Art Thou*, is a 64-minute, 40-second narrative animation that offers an incisive commentary on the irreconcilable polarities of some of the world's oldest philosophical binaries: religion and science; peace and violence, personal and universal, tradition and modernity.

A compelling storyteller, Cosgrove weaves a Homeric tale of two men, Elijah Yoder and Enoch Troyer, who are the sole survivors of a puritanical, community of early American settlers. When their community is decimated by plagues of disease and amorality, Troyer and Yoder journey through time, searching the modern world for their descendants, as they long to find those whose ideologies might align with their own. They encounter many kinds of dogmatists – capitalists, corporate presidents, anorexics, fetishists, media gluttons, gamers – but not the pious faithful that they had hoped. It seems to the duo that the evils of the modern world have produced new loyalties, supplanting religion with capitalism and science. Enraged at their apparent lack of values and integrity, Elijah violently slays the new Yoders and Troyers whom he encounters while Enoch stands by his side tolerating, but not condoning, his actions. It is revealed at the end, that it is Enoch's unrequited love for Elijah that keeps him from leaving in protest.

Cartoons have a long history in art and politics (think Honor Daumier, Art Spiegelman, or Keith Haring). They allow for unlikely stories to be told, for impossible feats to be performed, for characters to have supernatural powers. In it's semiotic distance from the actual signified the cartoon can more easily, and more palpably, illustrate metaphors for life lessons that would be too difficult to depict in live action. And cartoons have historically been used as a means of transcending language, and educating the illiterate.

Cosgrove has worked for 4 years on this animation, creating an encyclopedic collage of visual, aural, and literary references. Visually there are echoes of Japanese woodblock prints, illuminated manuscripts, early American folk art, medieval drawings, Indian miniatures, as well as contemporary American cartoons such as South Park and The Simpsons. She has an astute mind for history, politics, and religion, and is careful to infuse the story with humorous details and visual puns, thus gracefully avoiding being as dogmatic as her protagonists. The sound track is eclectic and stunning as well. Like the story, it spans both ancient and modern, from Gregorian chants to Negro Spirituals, to contemporary rock music, and more. The literary structure and allusions include nods to the Bible, Greco-roman mythology, creation and origin myths, romance novels, radical manifestos, and others. The effect of all the stylistic influence and interlacing of past and present, is to give the impression that we are in fact the sum total of our global cultural history.

Cosgrove fashions a meticulous and expansive web of information in her story, and in so doing, poses some interesting and important questions. *How do we reconcile tradition and belief within a rapidly changing world? Are we more driven by faith or facts? What will – or won't – we do for love? Do we act to serve ourselves or the larger community?* Cosgrove offers the stark warning that for as modern and educated as we may think we are, emotion and compulsion will still supersede information and experience. Her piece comes at a time in which it is indeed important to take a good look at where we have come from, what drives us forward, and where we are going.

MICOL HEBRON
Los Angeles

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: China Adams at Steve Turner" *Art Forum* December 2009 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=24311>

China Adams
12.02.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON
11.21.09-12.19.09 *Steve Turner Contemporary*

My mail carrier faithfully delivers folios of third-class penny-savers and other spammy annoyances, while across the city, with equal frequency, China Adams finds free art supplies in *her* mailbox. For her second solo show at Steve Turner, titled "White Flags and Silent Chimes," Adams has transformed the gallery into a reverent, navelike space with all works made from recycled junk mail. The conversion of eminently discardable advertisements into objets d'art might be a dubious gesture if the result weren't so seductive and smart. Adams's practice has long been that of a benevolent Rumpelstiltskin, upping the commodity value of her personal and household detritus by reconfiguring it into well-crafted objects that are at once puckish and elegantly modernist.

Adams's flags look more like banners or scrolls and are suspended at eye level throughout the middle of the gallery. The junk mail has been painted white, then cut, scalloped, shingled, shredded, or rolled and carefully composed into six decorative banners and three wind chimes that hang from the ceiling by clean white cotton ribbons. The flyers' original barrage of advertising graphics has been muted, the pages now ushered into a new existence with no overt semiotic messages.

Once regal bearers of family crests, signifiers of royalty, patriotism, or territories, the banners and flags today are relegated to junk-mail status anyway: They advertise museum shows on light posts, proclaim sports team loyalties on car windows, or serve as kitschy, front-yard decor that announces the holidays or changing seasons. For Adams, these white flags of surrender serve as a clever if hushed revenge for the aesthetic blitzkrieg that seems to colonize and infiltrate today's urban landscape.



Hebron, Micol. "Drama of the Gifted Child: The Five Year Plan", *X-Tra Magazine*. Volume 12.2, Winter 2009. Print.



Drama of the Gifted Child: The Five Year Plan
Pasadena Armory for the Arts, CA

Micol Hebron

Summer group shows tend to function a bit like curatorial Muzak for the art world. They are innocuous, low-risk ways to fill space while curators and gallerists take the summer off. *Drama of the Gifted Child: The Five Year Plan* at the Pasadena Armory for the Arts annihilates this paradigm like an indie release of a superb grunge-punk-rock-ballad. David Burns, former assistant curator at the Armory and an artist (best known for his work with L.A.-based collective Fallen Fruit), assembled this impressive and atypically cohesive exhibition from a selection of Southern California art school graduates, all of whom received their MFAs in the last five years.

The show takes loosely as its premise Alice Miller's 1980s pop-psychology book *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, which sought to explain the identity crisis of kids who comprise Generation X:

...[T]he child who was so aware, consciously or otherwise, of the wishes of his parents and had such a strong desire to fulfill them...lost track of himself and his own identity. It's about the child who never discovered his "true self" because he was so concerned with pleasing those around him, and the repercussions of that later in life, as an adult.¹
[1]

This seems like an odd, and possibly even unflattering, context in which to place contemporary artists. One wonders, who (or what) occupies the role of the proverbial parent who has inadvertently fostered such sycophants. The Gallery? The Collector? The Critic? The Market? The Art World as a whole? Add to this dilemma the struggles of making art and finding one's identity in the post-9/11 world, post-art-market boom, and post-postmodernism, and you *really*

¹ Excerpted from a review of Miller's book by kgins on Serendip, an interactive teaching and research website developed by Bryn Mawr College. <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/node/493>, August 5, 2009

have a challenge on your hands. The artists in the show present some provocative solutions to the difficulties of making work in the current era of a globalized, decentralized art world. Their works share elements of humor and collage, which are frequently used in the service of hopeful, ontological inquiries into the role of the artist, the use of materials, and the layering of meanings. The press release claims that each artist's work evidences a negotiation between studio practice and the art market. But the finished pieces in the exhibition do not necessarily offer insight into the artists' processes, and there are few indications that the art market or marketability are central concerns for this group of artists. (Marco Rios's refusal to list the works of his that weren't for sale on the exhibition checklist is the exception.) Frankly, I wasn't feeling too much sympathy or interest in this solipsistic conundrum upon first approaching the show. While Miller's eponymous book may provide a temporal and cultural seedbed for this generation of artists, the relationship of the work in the show to the book's premise is not made clear. Other points of interest do emerge, however, that make for a rich and compelling exhibition.

That all of the artists participating in this exhibition are very recent graduates reflects the current state of the Southern California gallery scene, in which recent MFAs from favored programs are doted upon in galleries' desires for success and notoriety. The producing of *Kunstwunderkind* under this system is a phenomenon that was propagated, in fact, by the rise of MFA programs in the 1980s, which is the same era as the publication of the titular book. The art market boom in the 1990s resulted in a spate of shows of recent MFAs, which too often seemed to assert the alleged genius of the *pathetic aesthetic*—that late 1990s/early 2000s grunge aesthetic that yields flimsy sculptural installations comprised of tin foil, Styrofoam, balsawood, trash, and hubris. Such work is regrettably uninformed by its more politically substantive predecessors (including New Realism, Arte Povera, Art Brut, scatter art, and the informe). While grunge did interesting things for music and fashion, it was not good for the art world.

Drama of the Gifted Child: The Five Year Plan, presents a welcome antidote to the hurried and superficial work of the pathetic aesthetic era, and instead offers a dectet of artists with complex and compelling practices that together give a vision of optimism for art in the post-everything era. Their work presents polyvalent semiotic rubrics, well-crafted media, and conceptual foundations that acknowledge their postmodern forebears but also present well-considered innovations. Also notable is that this show did not include a single painting on canvas, but rather featured mostly videos and installations—genres most often overlooked in the gallery circuit.

The theme of the exhibition is best exemplified by Julie Lequin's video installation *Top 30 (en 3 temps)* (2009), which is the most directly narrative and self-reflective work in the show. Spanning the width of a wall, *Top 30* presents three videos projected side by side, each with audio that complements and overlaps with the other channels. The piece charts the three years leading up to Lequin's 30th birthday as she contemplates personal, artistic, and societal expectations of a woman of her age. In one channel, Lequin delivers a poetic, psychological distillation of each year as she holds up playful watercolor illustrations to accompany her narrative. Her voice sounds young, lispy, and naïve, yet if you listen closely for long enough it's clear from her diction and vocabulary that she's actually a crafty, sophisticated storyteller. The middle channel features a corresponding sequence of three machines that play music—record player, radio, and laptop. The third channel features black and white clips of individual women, including the artist, standing against patterned wallpaper. One woman sings an anthem, another looks silently into the camera, and a third sings an emo pop song a cappella. While watching this collection of videos, what at first appears quirky and esoteric comes to seem philosophical and poignant.

Forming a different category of work in the exhibition, Dan Bayles and Kelly Sears amass and

organize information, and repackage it into aesthetic systems. Bayles's installation *Hypergraphia* (2009) fills a wall with overlapping, pinned-up pages of various ephemera—drawings, photos, manifestos, graphs and diagrams—which function like a real-world bookmark bar. The kinds of information that the images track—weather patterns, weapon designs, rockets, kites, evidence of aliens, and military plans—infer a conspiracy theory. The project provides no conclusive proclamation, but offers a warning or prophesy of sorts. As a rhizomatous index, it alludes to the dissemination, collection, and reorganization of information to feed or quell anxieties.

Sears's video and two sets of mixed media photo-collages also recompose information. Each proposes a temporal collapse by using contemporary digital media to fuse dated, black-and-white, half-tone photographs with old-school, digital graphic backgrounds. Her video *The Body Beseiged* (2009) animates photos of women from a 1980s aerobics how-to manual against a pulsating background of alternating geometric patterns and textures. An industrial, electronica beat thumps in sync with the background texture. Akin to a Hans Richter film or Lazslo Moholy Nagy photo-collage, Sears presents these figures in decontextualized formal environments. Her compositions utilize strong diagonals, high contrast, and disorienting perspectives. The women's bodies grow and shrink in an infinite matrix reminiscent of Bauhaus aesthetics.

Another group of works embraces elements of horror, enigma and the macabre. Julie Orser's video *Blood Work* (2009) extracts quintessential visual and aural elements of horror films. One by one, archetypal props (teddy bear, high heeled shoe, lampshade, purse) are doused with bright red fake blood as familiar horror movie melodies and Foley effects amplify the drama. The scenes are inter-cut with images of the perpetrator, who dons a white janitorial suit and ineffectively mops up the pervasive red liquid. The iconic and succinctly paired images and sounds stand in for our psychological projections and sublimations. In its camp indulgence, the video alternately elicits shock, laughter, and uneasiness.

Rios's suite of photographs and sculptures fuse food imagery with gore. Laminated images in which body parts and hunks of human flesh are Photoshopped into pseudo-gourmet delicacies with names like *Heather Weiner Leg* (2009) sit atop color-coordinated pedestals. These campy visions suggest what you might find on the menu in a greasy spoon run by Hannibal Lector. The images contain obvious visual and linguistic puns that seem superficial when compared to their sculptural counterpart—*Untitled (Pacific Dining Car, Filet Mignon; Ruth's Chris, Porterhouse for Two; The Pantry, Tenderloin)* (2008). This set of beautifully fabricated, stainless steel casts of big, fat, juicy steaks at once literalizes the fetishization of flesh and points to the oft absurd indulgence and waste that results in the pursuit of culturally valued artifacts. One wonders what a Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles dinner might look like in bronze.

John Knuth, Spencer Douglass, and Bari Ziperstein investigate entropy, evolution, and decomposition in their works (respectively). Knuth's installation *Sugarland* (2009) consists of a ton of sugar piled in snowy heaps in the middle of the gallery floor. In a nod to art history, the piles recall earthworks, scatter art, and conceptual art. Sugar, like salt, is a substance with many allegorical possibilities in both its form and history. On the wall above the piles, eleven box frames encapsulate granulated sugar. Caramelized blobs of sugar reflected in the gold background of the frames reveal abstract expressionist forms. Provocatively placed adjacent to Rios's steaks, *Sugarland* calls to mind the wastefulness of an affluent society in which consumables are sacrificed for artistic experimentation.

Douglass's *Montana* (2009) is a rare example of compelling installation art. Like good poetry, it presents a carefully selected arrangement of forms that is comprehensible and substantive upon

first read, but also offers continued discovery and satisfaction upon subsequent readings. *Montana* is a mixed media installation much in the spirit of works we've seen before by artists such as Jessica Stockholder and Gedi Sibony. Douglass takes inventory of recent, familiar sculptural trends—including using deconstructed building materials, soothing photomurals of natural settings, and thrift store paintings of kittens (kittenkitsch)—and forms a sculptural dissertation on all of them at once. Douglass pits the formal elements of his materials with the kitschy implications of signifiers such as a sunset photomural, stickers on a broken mirror (“I heart Grandma” and “I heart Grandpa”), and a sea-foam blue carpet in which a small figurine fishes. His carefully calculated formal decisions and the inclusion of narrative elements lift the installation above categorization as pathetic aesthetic sculpture. The deal was sealed for me by the Eva Hess-esque ball of red yarn that rolls right out of one of the kittenkitsch portraits and onto the middle of the gallery floor. Ziperstein's sculptures could have resulted from a dinner party at the Bauhaus where Salvador Dali, M.C. Escher, and Sister Maria Innocentia Hummel sat at the table together. Ziperstein deconstructs found ceramic figurines and combines them with other found figures and alien shapes, so that a polygonal form might extend a torso, or a lightbulb might replace a head, or a tassel in place of pubic hair. The hybrid forms are then recast and meticulously finished to resemble their original kitschy sources. A menagerie of these chimeras populates a mass of similarly reconfigured pieces of furniture. If art is, at times, to provide us with visions of a potential, hypothetical reality different than our own, it isn't bad to imagine encountering one of these in a thrift store and envisioning a moment of French Romanticism gone fantastically, surrealistically awry.

While I've broken them down into sub-themes above, all the works in the show share an element of collage and self-conscious kitsch. Each artist layers ideas and materials to create works that are aware of their visual and structural predecessors. What intrigues me is that these artists offer works that seesaw between being sincere and snarky, as if these “gifted children” are trying to find their place in the (art) world. The many succinct and polished pieces offer playful, well considered explorations into content, material, and self-awareness that is inspiring. For the first time in a while, I walked out of a show feeling optimistic.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Rachel Khedoori at The Box LA" *Art Forum* October 2009 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=23897>

Rachel Khedoori

10.08.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

09.11.09-10.24.09 *The Box*

In Rachel Khedoori's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, the iconic installation *Iraq Book Project* (all works 2009) explores what we know and record about the Iraq war, which is now in its seventh year and counting. Sixty-six massive books are laid open on nine long wooden tables. The tomes contain a chronological compilation of English-language international news articles, found by Khedoori on the Internet, that include the word *Iraq*, *Iraqi*, or *Baghdad* in their titles. The articles date from the war's inception in March 2003 through the end of 2008. But as combat continues, the gallery functions as a research lab where assistants compile articles to be added to the annals for the duration of the exhibition.

Visually arresting and conceptually impressive, the neatly ordered books are poetic analogues for the weight and burden of information, as well as the impossibility of recording and accessing all necessary data, about the war, and for the act of acknowledging a course of events by committing it to print. Khedoori poignantly highlights the challenge of documenting an event that is interminable and undefined.

In the basement of the gallery, viewers find Khedoori's sculpture *cave model*. Like *Iraq Book Project*, this work is a structural metaphor for an amorphous entity that cannot be visually perceived in its entirety. The model is a manifestation of an underground dwelling comprising a tangle of plaster half-pipes that twist, turn, and overlap. This rhizomatous form alludes to neural networks, intestines, and, in the context of this show, the caves in which we imagine evildoers to reside.



Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor at David Salow Gallery" *Art Forum* Mar 2009 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=22152>

Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor

02.27.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

01.24.09-03.14.09 David Salow Gallery

Elisabeth Higgins O'Connor's debut solo show in Los Angeles aptly fulfills the Promethean artist-as-chemist role through an installation of ten large mixed-media sculptures that feature fastidious transmogrifications of twine, lace, tarps, and other textiles into large anthropomorphic animals. Her source materials are perfect fodder for nostalgia and the uncanny as they recall the discomfiting familiarity of dismantled thrift-store furniture, geriatric home decor, and discarded stuffed animals. The embodiments of an ordered chaos, these creatures are remarkably well composed, with skeletal infrastructures, physiognomic gestures, and even realistic anatomical features. While solid and impressive in form, they are also pathetic. Her "No Names" are plagued with abnormalities and defects: a peg leg, an extralong arm, two faces, or an oversize head. They are posed mid-lumber or slump, frozen in the gallery like slowly encroaching zombies (and there is indeed an attraction-repulsion impulse perpetuated by the paradox of their cute grotesqueness). Mythology, allegory, and fairy tale are bound to these monsters as tightly as the chunks of tacky sofa that O'Connor uses as limbs. But these desperate and beautiful bodies also bring to mind the dire need to reexamine, recycle, and recompose the materials around us that so poignantly resurface in times of economic hardship.



Hebron, Micol. "Locating Placelessness: Mapping Existence in the Works of of Jose Alvaro Perdices." *Arte Contexto* 9, October 2008: 45-49. Print
<http://www.artcontexto.com/en/readonline-18.html>



Locating Placelessness: Mapping existence in the works of Jose Alvaro Perdices

Theater, like art, is often ensconced in ontological explorations of the real. There are many tantalizing questions that theater proposes: What does it mean to act out reality? To create an identity? A character? To *perform* one's own identity? To find one's self? To lose one's self? To recreate an act(ion)? To *not* act? To rupture the fourth wall? To affect consciousness? What accounts for life being a performance, and for theater being like life? Such questions were most passionately addressed in the numerous avant-garde and postwar theater movements: Epic Theater, Theater of Cruelty, Theater of the Absurd, or Living Theater. Today, as we are inundated with reality TV shows and a prevailing re-examination of neo-realism and documentary in the art world, similar questions are posed in two recent projects by Jose Alvaro Perdices.

Perdices, a Madrid native, has been making art in Los Angeles for the last 15 years. His theatrical videos, photographs, and installations mine the interstices of identity, place, social behavior, and archetypal dichotomies that speak to human existence: inherent identity versus culturally imposed identity; hiding versus revealing; solitude versus community. Perdices' practice resists the typically American frenzy for easily consumable, discreet objects that has prevailed in the market of late. Instead, he tends to make polysemous, multi-channel or multi-part installations that are intellectually and semiotically complex. His projects reflect a more European affinity for existential and philosophical discourse.

Perdices' two most recent projects, *Sapeli Nova Mas* and *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful* are multi-channel video installations that use theatrical strategies (think Beckett, Beck, Artaud, and Sartre) as characters in his videos explore the grain of the voice, the purpose of their bodily presence, and the texture of place to deconstruct identity and subjectivity.

Sapeli Nova Mas offers a discomfiting manipulation of voice and emotion through two videos that juxtapose a man and a woman as they independently navigate a small room. This is a two-channel installation in which a large video projection fills the back wall of a room. This video features Lisa, a forty-something woman neatly dressed in a black cotton dress, pearl earrings, and hair tied back. A smaller projection plays on the right wall of the installation. This video features the male subject, Martin, who looks to be in his 30s and wears jeans and a black sweater that has a tendency to ride up and reveal his sexy stomach

In both videos, the camera slowly pans across a room in a small cabin, perhaps a vacation home, flooded with afternoon light and warmed by a robust fire in the fireplace. There are wood-paneled walls, a round table, a couch, some chairs, a wall-mounted light fixture, a mantle with an empty vase, a candlestick, and two very rusty beer cans. Voices are heard before any people are seen. Lisa's voice emphatically proclaims "*I am loving it!*" over and over, while Martin groans and wails in non-verbal utterances. Both characters seem to explore a wide range of emotion with their voices, adjusting volume, pitch, rate, and meter to connote ecstasy, agony, anger, despair, joy, etc. In different ways, both Lisa and Martin evoke Lacan's notion of *jouissance*², that torturous and delightful encounter with the object of desire that can manifest in expressions of pleasure (ecstasy) that are indistinguishable from expressions of pain (agony). Lacan identified repetition, such as Lisa's repeated phrase, as a hysterical symptom indicative of an eruption of *jouissance*³.

As Lisa moves into the frame, we see that she is moving slowly around the perimeter of the room, fondling the mantle, the candlestick, the couch, tabletop. As she repeats "*I am loving it!*" she varies intonation, emphasis and volume, as if to experiment with ways that she might convince herself and the unseen viewer that she *really is* loving it. The words take on myriad different meanings, until eventually they become meaningless. There is something exhilarating about watching Lisa in the throws of such emphatic expression, but this jubilation soon turns to consternation, as it begins to seem like she might be insane. In the other video, Martin seems helpless and anguished as he moans, wails, grunts, and whimpers. He drags his body, as if almost giving up, across the walls, couch, and chair. He throws tantrums on the floor, and howls in despair, too distraught to find language at all; a true state of trauma.

Perdices presents unusual dichotomy between Martin and Lisa. Typically, women are depicted as inarticulate, objectified, and diminutive. But in *Sapeli Nova Mas*, the video of Martin is physically smaller, he is childishly non-verbal, and seems to be a pathetically victimized by his own feelings. Conversely, Lisa is empowered through the play, experimentation and proclamation of her own pleasure while Martin is tortured by his inability to articulate his apparent displeasure.

Through Lisa's intentional palilalia and Martin's fits, Perdices constructs an intricate examination of language and meaning. As Ferdinand de Saussure⁴ and Charles Sanders Peirce⁵ taught us in their famous explication of semiotics, signs (words, gestures, sounds) are ambiguous until and

² Lacan, Jacques The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981

³ "Jouissance (Lacan)." Answers.com. 25 May 2007 <<http://www.answers.com/topic/jouissance-lacan>>

⁴ de Saussure, Ferdinand. Course in General Linguistics. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966

⁵ Peirce, Charles Sanders. Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic By Charles Sanders Peirce. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991

unless they are inscribed in a symbolic order. Young children learn to associate meaning with words by having those words repeated to them over and over. Later on in life, the child learns that if he or she repeats a word over and over, the word as well as the voice will soon sound alien and meaningless again. Repetition, on one hand, can emphasize importance. On the other, it can widen the gap between sound and meaning. In a 1976 performance, *Freeing the Voice*, Marina Abramovic explored the notion of liberating the voice from the body, and perhaps from semiotic relevance, as she yelled until she lost her voice. The voice, like fingerprints or irises, is an index of identity. To remove the voice from the body forces a relocation of the site of identity to the location of the body in space, the gestures that the body enacts, the expressions of the face.

The abstraction of language, the emptying of meaning from Lisa's speech is further compounded when she begins to recite numbers at random. As if to seduce the chair she is looking at, she whispers huskily "fourteen, twenty six...three thousand...one...one...one..." The numbers have no discernible significance, reiterating the fact that they, like words, are arbitrary codes, waiting to be paired with a context and meaning that is comprehensible to the viewer.

Place is an important consideration in Perdices' projects, and this room has a plurality of references. Moving into the 20th century we can call upon Sartre's *No Exit* when looking at *Sapeli Nova Mas*, for the characters in the famous existentialist play are, like Lisa and Martin, confined in perpetuity to a room with no bed, and they similarly experience a range of emotional responses to their environment. Mirrors are missing from these rooms, but nonetheless, the objects in Perdices' room – vase, candlestick, fire – evoke a vanitas, a classic metaphor for narcissism, self-indulgence, and mortality.

When the videos begin, Lisa's channel pauses on a light switch then slowly pans around the room. In both videos, we see the fireplace burning heartily. At the end of the piece, the fire has diminished into mere embers, and now Martin's channel rests where Lisa's started – on the light switch. The switch symbolizes the potential for something being turned on, or turned off, and the inconclusiveness of this ending is in perfect accord with the polymorphous and infinite implications of the actors' voices and gestures.

In a concurrent piece, titled *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful* (2006), Perdices explores similar themes of voice, place, and gesture. In this configuration, however, the room is dark and gritty, the light is cool, and there are several figures in the room at once. The setting is the rough-hewn cellar of a house in Los Angeles, between the support beams of the house and atop a raw dirt floor. Twenty spectators stand around the perimeter as silent versions of a Greek chorus, apparent witnesses to the actions of the three main actors. These actors, "Martina", "Paulo", and "Paul" were instructed to repeat their own names with varying emotional prompts, and at times with accompanying action. Martina calls out to her own vagina, acknowledging the biological component of gender and identity. Paul and Paulo call out to themselves – or each other – and it is worth noting that the Latino and Anglo iterations of the same name echo Perdices' own bi-cultural identity. The actors throw stones at the wall, break a light bulb with an axe, and one digs a hole in the ground in a Sisyphian gesture of futility. Their actions seem hopeless, directionless, and increasingly irrational as the scene progresses.

The installation of *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful* evokes the cellar itself, and features several free-standing walls in a room equally as dark and cold. Five walls feature projections of different views of the actors and the spectators. A sixth wall shows the hole in the ground at hourly intervals throughout the day, emblemizing an infinite and placeless landscape.

The actors inhabit a claustrophobic space in *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful*, with cool and eerie light seeping in from the outside, or emanating from a single dangling light bulb. Perdices likens it to standing inside Robert Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*—among the contrasting dynamism of the diagonally leaning beams and the stasis of the structure itself. Perdices' characters similarly occupy a conflicted space, one in which personal and collective identities are problematized, and one in which there is no exit.

For Smithson the *Woodshed* exemplified entropy, as the earth that he dumped on top of it would theoretically lead to the collapse of the shed itself, and the eventual reabsorption of the shed into the ground. Though the structure above the figures in *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful* thankfully does not collapse, the language - which provides integral social structure— is the system that succumbs to entropy in this case, as the actors' repetition of names or phrases leads ultimately to the annihilation of meaning.

A dystopic, Brechtian defamiliarization occurs as a result of this repetition and from the subterranean environs that seem to estrange the participants from a tangible sense of physical or psychological space.

Perdices' videos probe a sense of placelessness, a disassociation of place and body. The figures in *IRREVERSIBLEMENTE beautiful* are stranded in the dark, a purgatory between the earth and the structure of the house, in darkness that makes recognition of others even more difficult. Perdices conjures up Beckett⁶ to explore the futility of action, and the inability of humans to communicate effectively. This is exemplified as Martina, Paul and Paulo seem to want to communicate, but instead can only call their own name in vain, in a narcissistic version of Marco/Polo.

In *The Theater and Its Double*, Artaud seeks a utopian and primitivist recovery of “the notion of a kind of unique language, half way between gesture and thought. This language cannot be defined except by its possibilities for dynamic expression in space as opposed to the expressive possibilities of spoken dialog.”⁷ This indeed seems to be the effect of Lisa and Martin's vocal iterations in *Sapeli Nova Mas* as they feel their way through the room. Both actors are earnestly engaged in a performance of pure emotion, in what seems to be an honest and phenomenological experience. If Artaud seeks social awareness through theatrical performance, Perdices establishes awareness through a hyper-awareness of self and through the juxtaposition of the polarized attributes of Lisa and Martin's performances: masculine and feminine, aggressive and passive, articulate and incomprehensible. Lisa embodies the civilized, and Martin the primitive.

The characters in Perdices' videos traverse the various constructs and collapses of meaning, identity and place through language and gesture. Meanwhile, the viewers of these pieces are inundated with a cumulative layering of possible implications until the work becomes so dense it is indeterminate and uncontainable. Appropriately, Perdices succeeds in asking more questions than he answers and consequently reignites an existentialist discourse as a substantive alternative to the mere commodity fetishism that drives so much contemporary art.

Micol Hebron, Los Angeles, June 2007

⁶ Beckett, Samuel, *Waiting for Godot*, New York: Grove Press, 1954

⁷ Artaud, Antonin, *The Theater and Its Double*, New York: Grove Press, 1958

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Holly Andres at DNJ Gallery" Art Forum Dec/Feb 2008-09 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21928>

Holly Andres

01.28.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

12.20.08-02.14.09 dnj Gallery

Holly Andres's first solo exhibition at this gallery features fifteen large LightJet prints distinguished by their luscious palette and meticulous mise-en-scènes. The images recall an unlikely combination of sources, such as Sofia Coppola, Gregory Crewdson, and Nancy Drew, and depict a quartet of girls—perhaps cousins, sisters, or BFFs—making extraordinary discoveries within a middle-class suburban home. Andres's scenes conjure plotlines and allegories from familiar fairy tales and proverbs, but they are unsentimental and not excessive in their girliness. The protagonists appear simultaneously charming and empowered as they mischievously explore the confines of a home that is fraught with Freudian connotations. The girls peer and pry into many yonic talismans from daily life that represent the precipice of womanhood: a red purse, a sliced-open pillow, a birdcage, a locket, and a keyhole. In *The Glowing Drawer*, 2008, a girl kneels before an open drawer that emanates light from within as two other girls watch nervously in the foreground. In *Secret Portal*, 2008, three of the girls venture like Alice into two secret doorways in a hallway. The scenes are rich with the pleasure and discovery that characterizes adolescent life, when so many small things have profound and often personal significance. Andres's pictures offer a delightfully puckish complement to the patriarchal precedents of constructed narrative tableaux and are elegant successors to the feminist works of Pictorialist foremothers such as Gertrude Käsebier.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Carleton Watkins at the Getty Museum"
Art Forum Dec/Mar 2008-09 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21803>

Carleton Watkins

01.09.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

10.14.08-03.01.09 *The J. Paul Getty Museum*

Carleton Watkins's biography could be fodder for an epic movie. In the mid-nineteenth century, he traveled widely as a young adult, was a pioneer in the nascent technology of photography, created images that foreshadow numerous twentieth-century photographic greats, trekked through the great frontier with a mammoth plate view camera, worked tirelessly for fifty years, and died in poverty and obscurity in an asylum after nearly all of his negatives were destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. This exhibition, organized by veteran curator and Watkins specialist Weston Naef, features an impressive selection of the thousands of images Watkins captured of the western United States during its pivotal moments: the gold rush, Manifest Destiny, the Industrial Revolution, the completion of the transcontinental railroads, the burgeoning mining industry, the birth of the many western states, and the establishment of its national parks.

Watkins's evocative and beautiful images portend Ansel Adams's sublime compositions of Yosemite by fifty years and presage the topographic landscapes ruined by industry depicted in Robert Adams's works. However, Watkins's photographs also replace the Gothic cathedrals of medieval Europe, so favored by European photographers of his era, with the transcendental monoliths of the Half Dome and Three Brothers. *North Dome, Mirror Lake (Fully Reflected) Yosemite, No. 75, 1865–66*, features an anachronistic foray into abstraction. Using bodies of water to create perfectly mirrored compositions, Watkins captures the inversion of the image as it appeared through the ground glass of his camera. His visual meditations on singular trees, as in *Pacific Madrone, 1861*, and the stunning, formal austerity of a box of peaches in *Late George Cling Peaches, Kern County, 1889*, leave little doubt that his early efforts helped legitimize photography as an art form in California.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angles: Erin Cosgrove at the Hammer Museum"
Art Forum Dec/Mar 2008-09 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21844>

Erin Cosgrove

01.15.09

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

12.09.08-03.15.09 Hammer Museum

Artists have long infused social and political commentary into caricatures and cartoons; take Honoré Daumier, Art Spiegelman, and Keith Haring, to name a few. The latest addition to this list is Erin Cosgrove and her animation *What Manner of Person Art Thou?*, 2004–2008, a daring, postmodern depiction of quintessential philosophical themes. Over an hour long, the idiosyncratic work is a creation myth, a parable of good and evil, love and learning, faith and ideology, and a tour de force of traditional storytelling with an encyclopedic collage of visual and aural references. Cosgrove references American folk art, Japanese woodblock prints, Indian miniature paintings, medieval engravings, Gregorian chants, bluegrass, indigenous African music, and much more.

The protagonists Elijah Yoder and Enoch Troyer—sole survivors of an ancient community annihilated by proverbial vices and plagues—time-travel to search the modern world for descendants of the Yoder and Troyer clans. They encounter talk-show guests, corrupt CEOs, anorexic cultists, role-playing gamers, and many other manners of person. Relentless in his zealous orthodoxy, Elijah violently slays anyone whose ideology opposes and disappoints him, while Enoch follows unconditionally, meekly protesting but not daring to intervene. In the end, we learn he was blinded by love. Cosgrove balances the harshness of Elijah's immutable dogma by peppering the tale with humorous winks and nods to the viewer (a poster depicting an organization chart for the "Bush Crime Family," for instance), infusing the allegories and footnotes that enrich, entertain, and complicate the message. The animation is a biting commentary on the modern quest for meaning and on the oft-confused definitions of *religion and politics, desire and ideology, selfishness and selflessness.*

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Richard Turner at Grand Central Art Center" *Art Forum* Nov/Jan 2008-09 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21573>

Richard Turner

12.10.08

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

11.01.08-01.12.09 Grand Central Art Center, California State University, Fullerton

Richard Turner's multimedia installation *Contempt Mandala*, 1999–2008, offers a psychogeographic journey through a proposed collision between the characters and architecture of Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 film *Contempt* and the locales and structures that linger in the artist's memory of his youth in India and Vietnam. Departing from the theme of destabilization that undermines the marriage of Paul and Camille in Godard's film, Turner dismantles and reconfigures the subjectivity of the characters as well as his own authorial presence, via a Rube Goldbergian chain of associations. As a modern-day version of Ulysses, who is the subject of the film within Godard's film, Turner voyages through site and media to juxtapose elements of stable classicism with kinetic modernism: the familiar West with an unfamiliar East, a psychological interior with a geographic exterior. The exhibition consists of a large and elaborate sculptural mandala, a four-chapter video, and several paintings, all of which explore notions of autobiographical interpretation as cosmology. Turner catalogues his own artistic journey as he reminds himself and his viewers that, while everything we know and experience is interconnected, it is also in constant flux. The imagery and forms all function to document time and place—a mandala, an astrological observatory, reconfigured maps. Moving from the nostalgic to uncharted territory, Turner tracks how people and locations can be grounding, and how shifts in perspective result when life propels us away from the familiar and into new spaces, psychological or otherwise. Turner, whose public-art sculptures have been an important force in the Southern California art world since the 1980s, has now created a personal and very poignant installation, rife with complexity and quirkiness.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Yishai Jusidman at Angles Gallery", *Art Forum* Nov/Dec 2008 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21485>

Yishai Jusidman

11.21.08

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

11.01.08-12.23.08 Angstrom Gallery

The fourteen uniformly sized paintings in Yishai Jusidman's exhibition "The Economist Shuffle" derive from thumbnail images in the titular magazine's "The World This Week" section. While the gesture of making paintings from photographs is all too familiar, Jusidman's project resonates beyond trompe l'oeil gimmickry and the didactics of high/low culture that such a project inevitably elicits. The works have meticulous gold frames, a few have thick impasto grounds, and all offer a skillful application of egg tempera and oil that creates a notably traditional patina. The odd confluence of subjects—immigrants crossing a polluted river, firebombed cars, a man's belly overhanging his jeans, patriotic politicians, an African mother and child wading in water—seems at once timely and eternal. The paintings slow the temporality of the photographs, collapsing the space between the weekly news and the longevity of fine art. Without informational captions, one gets the sense that these subjects have been the hallmark of our economy since the beginning of modern civilization; that leisure and struggle, fame and anonymity, excess and scarcity, peace and violence, have polarized our economies for eons. In light of the current financial crisis, one cannot help but contemplate the polysemy of the terms *economist* and *economy* here: the economy of form and composition in a photograph that was initially only one and a half by one and a half inches, the artist as economist in his selection of these particular images, the effect of the economy on the subjects pictured in these paintings, and the effect of the economy on the art market.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Max Jansons and Elizabeth Tremante, Christopher Grimes Gallery" *Art Forum* Sept/Oct 2008 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=21117>

Max Jansons and Elizabeth Tremante

09.18.08

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

09.05.08-10.11.08 Christopher Grimes Gallery

Max Jansons and Elizabeth Tremante engage in old-school, professional, formal pictorial practices. Both are involved in the irresistibly seductive exploration of the painterly details and lexica that define medium, process, composition, and representation. The paintings in Jansons's exhibition, "Pleasure," are built from treasured sources of custom-crafted furniture tacks, hand-ground pigments, and lead-paint-primed linen. His works, with their consistent palette of taupe, olive, sienna, and brown, evoke Giorgio Morandi's practiced scrutiny of form, color, pattern, and objecthood. With an uncommon command of brush and pigment, Jansons paints small, graceful canvases that query the pivotal moments when abstract forms become objects and vice versa. As deceptively simple compositions, these dense works evince a profound knowledge of both painting history and painting technique. The quiet abstractions—a cartoonish houseplant, a modernist zigzag, a Swiss cross—have a timed-release impact, akin to the way a Zen teacher might smile calmly, sit back, and wait, with faith that the full beauty of the world will reveal itself to his student. These paintings elicit a very humanist concern and connote a smaller, more intimate and domestic view than the works in Jansons's last show at the gallery, which conjured images of fantasy, the cosmos, and history.

The works in Tremante's "I measure myself / Against a tall tree" also command a closer, slower form of looking and are likewise confident in the valor of their philosophy. These paintings examine the subtle and not-so-simple moments in the rural landscape that go unnoticed by cosmopolitan urbanites wary of dirt and weather. Tremante directs attention to beautiful instances of ugliness through a studied deconstruction of the traditional landscape, destabilizing and refocusing the viewer's outward and inward gazes. Depth of field is shifted to refuse the Romantic, perspectival panorama and to focus instead on a mud puddle, resplendent with rainbow raindrops, or a gloriously polychromatic spiderweb. The artist makes such small moments reminders that the bigger picture is not always about bigger things.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Tommy Hilding at Angles Gallery" *Art Forum* Feb 2008 n. pag. Web

<http://artforum.com/archive/id=19443>

Tommy Hilding

02.06.08

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

01.12.08-02.16.08 Angles Gallery

The sixteen paintings that make up Tommy Hilding's West Coast solo debut are calm, patient, and philosophical; they possess a distinctly European sensibility. Aesthetically and conceptually antithetical to the polychrome psychedelia and neo-hippie collage aesthetic that pervades contemporary West (and sometimes East) Coast painting, Hilding's reflective scenes do not boast the manic youthfulness and "primitivist" abstraction that is popular in the Southland these days. Instead, his gray and placid postindustrial landscapes capture a light that is readily identified with Scandinavia. Hilding, who lives in Stockholm, is strongly influenced by nineteenth-century Swedish landscape painting. He also incorporates soft-focus photorealism, postmodern layering, and a historicism characteristic of much postwar German painting to make images that filter urban consciousness through a serene contemplation of the substance of memory, life, identity, and family. Extending the influence of photography on this body of work, references to camera obscura inversions exist as upside-down landscapes that hover above industrial street scenes. In other canvases, Hilding layers images, like reflections or double exposures, that come from different times and places. He mixes realism and abstraction to depict a clear view of the present as constantly marred—or embellished—by the superimposition of abject smears, like the stains of memory. The images that constitute our (collective) consciousness become increasingly layered as we age. In Los Angeles, where the passage of time is the enemy of all starlets, Hilding's works remind us that not just wrinkles but also wisdom, beauty, and perspective come with time.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Dan Bayles at Chung King Project" Art Forum Jan 2008 n. pag. Web

<http://artforum.com/archive/id=19327>

Dan Bayles 01.23.08

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON 12.01.07-01.26.08 Francois Ghebaly Gallery

Lately, segments of the US economy have been marked by extremes—witness the crash of the housing market, the explosion of the art market, and the ever-increasing cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The \$750 million price tag on the as-yet-unfinished US embassy in Baghdad is an intriguing footnote to Dan Bayles's paintings of the embassy. His debut solo show features nine mixed-media paintings based on computer renderings that were leaked onto the Internet last year. The paintings depict the shell of a large yet unremarkable pseudomodernist structure in the midst of a nondescript landscape. There is no evidence of the macabre decimation that currently marks the region. Rather, the canvases are eloquently formalist exercises, with lines and colors that evoke Bay Area landscape painters like Richard Diebenkorn. Bayles collages tape, paper, and paint with a mature eye for balance and color, creating compelling perspectives and textures that are at first more apt to evoke discussion of painting's intrinsic characteristics than any subject matter, like a critique of contemporary politics. Yet it is precisely the overt absence of dogma that makes these images particularly poignant. Last year, it was revealed that construction on the embassy was \$150 million over budget and wrought with prohibitive structural and strategic problems. When images of the architectural plans surfaced on the Web, they were quickly removed, to allay spotlighting yet another botched component of US operations in the Middle East. Bayles's paintings historicize the incomplete embassy as a modern ruin, alluding to the irreconcilable gaps between Eastern iconoclasm and Western material indulgence.

Hebron, Micol. "And Not Or, Kim Schoenstadt's Composition for a Large Room in Three Parts", Exhibition Catalog Essay, La Verne University Press. Harris Gallery, La Verne University, 2007 Print.

And, not Or

Kim Schoenstadt's Composition for a Large Room in Three Parts

During the proverbial elementary field trip to the county museum, at some point we were most likely told: *Touch with your eyes, not with your hands*. This dictum immediately describes the relationship between spectator and art object, and elicits conflicting responses. On the one hand, it makes the art seem so exciting. If touching is taboo, the work *must* be really special, or at least, made by someone really special. And surely it's fragile, and important. On the other hand, there is the implication that the viewer is not worthy or authorized to touch such sacred artifacts, for fear he might corrupt the aura or tarnish the object's historicity. The very Modernist dichotomy of author and viewer is implicit in this simple imperative.

But the Modern era is long past and we have enjoyed the wry antics of Postmodernism for a while now. The role of the artist has shifted to one of 'director' and the role of the art object has been redefined through Duchampian and Warholian readymades and beyond. It's still generally taboo to touch the art in museums, but sometimes we can interact with it, and the more installations immerse us in an artsy environment, the more we come to look for and even expect non-traditional modes of display, viewing, and phenomenological experience. And the more we come to expect to play a role in the *viewer as author* paradigm that Barthes introduces in Death of the Author⁸.

Kim Schoenstadt's series of works in *Composition for a Large Room in Three Movements* for the Harris Gallery the University of La Verne coolly provokes and investigates the interplay between artist and viewer, as well as the mechanisms by which the artist makes choices, and therefore make art. Art has been a byproduct of subjectivity for as long as we can remember, but it is the site of that subjectivity that shifts through time. Through a series of collaged processes and materials, Schoenstadt hands the reins over to the viewers, at least for a while, transgressing the *do not touch* mandate and perverting the traditional location of authorship. Though at times understated, the choices that Schoenstadt makes are significant every step of the way as she leads the viewer/author to consider three canonical components of artmaking: materials, process, and subject matter.

One of Schoenstadt's most significant choices as the artist is the one to have others make choices for her. For this series, she invites the viewers to decide what is art, and what is not. She invites them to tell her what to do to make the art, and finally, she uses computer programs to automate aesthetic choices regarding form and color. The whole show is affected by the culture of Web 2.0 that has led to a society of wiki-logic⁹, in which it is expected that the viewers and consumers will at all times have the ability and option to apply alterations, commentary, and determinations to the 'product'.

The aesthetics of the exhibition recall a plurality of modernist utopias. The delineated architectural forms incised throughout the surfaces of each piece describe architectural structures from past world's fairs; buildings intended to herald all of the optimism and newness

⁸ Barthes, Roland, Image-Music-Text, USA, Hill and Wang, 1983

⁹ A wiki is a website that any member of the public can contribute to and modify via the internet

of the modern era. The formal elements of the collage, graffiti, and photography in the show are fittingly rooted in the alluring nostalgia of the 60s and 70s, an era that saw mass public protests, families living on communes, and the fear that socialist – I mean ‘communist’ – thinking might invade the American consciousness. The model of practice promoted in Schoenstadt’s artworks fuses elements from several different generations: the feelings of empowerment that triumphed in the economically strong early 80s; the ‘me culture’ engendered by the Gen-X-ers; and the neo-commune society of today’s wiki-culture in which the individual is enabled to participate remotely in the creation of a collective action. In *Composition for a Large Room in Three Movements*, Schoenstadt conducts participants to act as viewers, artists, and critics simultaneously.

The exhibition is introduced with *Discussion Wall*, which does indeed start things off with a conversation. Schoenstadt sets up a brick and mortar wiki in which the members of the LaVerne community were asked to collect examples of things in their environment that were and were not art. Participants placed their selections accordingly in one of two “contribution” boxes, and Schoenstadt later pinned them to the gallery wall in a random, sprawling patchwork entitled *Discussion Wall*. The resulting collage engenders a discussion-not so much about what is art and not art, but about artistic judgment and taste. What is the role of the artist? Is it, as Duchamp famously posited, to simply *declare*, by appellation or recontextualization, that something is or is not art? Is it to exhibit taste and beauty? Is it the recognition and representation of meritorious things in one’s environment? Perhaps, the role of the artist is to stimulate a discussion.

Discussion Wall also addresses the “art practice” as one composed of curatorial endeavors. Schoenstadt curates the participants and their choices as her objets d’art. The community members in turn curate from their environment, and Schoenstadt returns to contextualize their choices. She then added labels that declare which findings were categorized as ‘art’ and which were ‘not art’. There is no discernible system to decipher these choices otherwise, reiterating the absolute subjectivity that is inextricable from the artistic experience(s). It becomes clear that the subsequent display of all of these choices, as ‘art’ and ‘not art’, is in its entirety, art itself, and that Schoenstadt’s own position as artist is ironically reified through the exhibition overall.

As a coda to *Discussion Wall*, Schoenstadt signs the collage by drawing a biomorphic string of contours of modernist architectural buildings. The architecture seems to have an uncharacteristically organic evolution as one building merges with the next, as it grows with a crystalline algorithm across the posted papers. The architectural contours are derived from world fair pavilion architecture. While some of the other participants’ submissions to *Discussion Wall* may have been arbitrary, this choice is decidedly deliberate. Schoenstadt chooses the linear contours of architecture for their many metaphorical associations. Buildings are finite, solid and vertical – antithetical to the ephemeral, amorphous and horizontal plane of paper that has been mounted to the wall. Architecture is constructed, an organization of space that rearranges the landscape in which it occurs and alters the social use of that space, as Schoenstadt has done in *Composition for a Large Room in Three Movements*. The mutating chain of forms in this string of architectural contours mimics the progressive emergence of questions evoked by Schoenstadt’s process. She also chooses these buildings because they are the epitome of modernist optimism, in that they once showcased utopian ideas of forging ahead into a future that was to be better than the present or the past. There seems to be a concordant analogy in the contemporary art world as Biennial culture has exploded over the last 5 years, and the idea of pavilions are again a prominent and structuring force in the display of objects of wonder. Modernist architecture and style is again in vogue in western culture at large, as we are once again redefining ourselves at the advent of a new century.

The interrogation of the interplay between artist and viewer continues in *Can Control*, an enormous graffiti-covered canvas with a white spiral of architectural contours swirling into the center. Schoenstadt has asked the staff and faculty of the university to email her instructions as to what she should do to the canvas. Before she executed any of the instructions, she taped off a spiral-shaped drawing of architectural forms, with line quality similar to that of the buildings on the *Discussion Wall*. The spiral is seen as a fundamental form in nature, but it is also emblematic of that which is infinite and entropic. It has a plurality of references in (art) history – from the golden mean, to da Vinci, Bentham, Spiral Jetty, and George Crumb. In this piece one could also think of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, 1920 which was, appropriately, designed to be the quintessential utopian monument.

Schoenstadt uses the spiral in *Can Control* to mirror the similarly shaped musical score for *Makrokosmos*¹⁰ by George Crumb, the American avant-garde composer. Crumb created scores that were atonal and antiphonic, and his pieces often interrogated the role of the performer, the composer, the instrument, and the 12-tone scale. In one piece Crumb asked the audience members to leave the auditorium. Schoenstadt similarly challenges notions of the artist's authorship, the boundaries of medium, and the notion of giving direction in a work of art. As a composition, *Can Control* is an orchestrated symphony of indeterminacy. The *Can* of the title refers to the can of spray paint, but also offers permission, enabling the artist and viewer alike to 'do'. *Control* redirects us to the public's sense of intervention or imperative, but also to the artist's own ultimate control in the decision to make the work in this manner in the first place. The viewer can control the artist, while the artist has literal control of the spray can.

The canvas in *Can Control* serves as an indexical record of each e-mailed command, and with each instruction that is enacted upon the canvas the previous marks are obliterated or obscured. The participants who offer commands hold their position as author of the piece only until someone else gives another command and Schoenstadt executes that one on top of the last. The decision to 'end' the piece comes when Schoenstadt stops obliging the viewers' directives, and pulls off the masking tape that she had laid down before any spray paint was applied. The tape is removed to reveal a sort of inverse graffiti and white lines emerge through and on top of the myriad layers of spray paint, like the Spiral Jetty emerging from the fog.

The last movement, *Lake Powell Series* features three large color prints of family vacation photos taken by Schoenstadt's father-in-law at Lake Powell in the 1970s. More architectural forms are overlaid on the photos: perched atop a butte, clinging to a shore, or simply floating above the ground. The images act as proposals, enticing brochures for your imagination: "*Your modernist utopia here*". A third component – a solid colored, amorphous topography – is overlaid and interjected between the drawings of buildings and the landscape. The forms are complex enough to imply a specific derivation, but too complex to evidence the source. Using the 'magic wand' tool in Photoshop, Schoenstadt has digitally selected all of the pixels of an anomalous color in one of the other photos and digitally painted in the selected area that resulted. She has once again relinquished choice, but this time she hands it over to the algorithms of Photoshop rather than the subjectivity of a student or colleague. The resulting images contain visual layering that functions as a neat analog for the layers of meaning, process and contemplation inherent in the act of superimposing 'a' and 'not a'. In these postmodern landscapes, culture (architecture) invades nature, digital invades the photographic, and the present is entangled with the past. Schoenstadt amicably obliterates the neat canons that have traditionally allowed for those classic

¹⁰ This score was the artist's soundtrack while conceiving of and producing the exhibition, and it played in the gallery during the show.

binaries of art criticism and theory – avant-garde and kitsch, author and viewer, etc. She is creating an imaginary topography that engages elements of desire, aesthetics, history and culture that are culled simultaneously from the fin-de-sicle avant-garde, mid-century modernism, and contemporary post-post modern sensibility.

Each of the movements in Schoenstadt's exhibition is rife with playful and intelligent double or triple entendres. With architecture and line, she evokes polysemous notions of construction and composition. Her *Composition for a Large Room...* addresses composition in terms of artistic arrangement, musical scores, as well as written missives. Lines appear as drawn or written, throughout each of the *Three Parts* and the notion of siting is also recurring. As a component of architectural constructions, siting helps establish a building in its particular location. Schoenstadt includes websites as an integral part of her process (with images of the show on Flickr, and calls for viewer participation catalogued in email) and in so doing, parallels the physical or geographic site with the simulated site(s) of cyberspace. She promotes an entropic collapse of the stodgily modernist mandates for purity of process, material, and thought.

Schoenstadt sets out to break the rules, but does so through a process that acknowledges that revolution is a collaborative and collective process. In a discussion with the artist about what art is and what it means to discuss work, Schoenstadt referred to the myriad references in her work saying 'why does it have to be one thing or another, why do we have to choose, why can't it be *all* of those things?' She proposes that art-making doesn't have to succumb to the 'either/or' mandate, but can be 'and/and': modern and postmodern, individual and communal, certain and uncertain. In her willingness to promote such optimistic inquiry and heterologous practice, Schoenstadt herself furthers a new utopia.

-Micol Hebron
Los Angeles, 2007

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Manuel Alvarez Bravo at Rose Gallery"
Art Forum Oct 2007 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=18791>

Manuel Alvarez Bravo

10.23.07

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON
09.15.07-10.31.07 Rose Gallery

As Susan Sontag noted in *On Photography*, a photograph has multiple functions: to create beauty, to possess, to document, to mask, to reveal. The forty gelatin silver and platinum palladium prints by Manuel Alvarez Bravo in this exhibition, shot predominantly in Mexico in the 1930s, catalog delicately decisive moments: an anamorphic congregation of snails on a white background; a twist of braided hair juxtaposed with a zigzagging wrought-iron fence; a mathematical grid of peanut halves. Most of the prints here are previously unseen (or unpublished—a well-made catalogue accompanies the exhibition), and each confirms the rigor of Bravo's photographic eye and the force of an inner vision that is inexplicable and compelling. His images are poetic and transgressive, tranquil and unsettling. Bravo shares a formalism with his fellow modernists (Edward Weston, Alfred Stieglitz), social concerns with revolutionary peers (Tina Modotti), and a penchant for Surrealist fragmentation and disorientation (André Breton, Luis Buñuel). His images frame repetition and patterns in a way that converts the quotidian into an event, and in their technical and aesthetic virtuosity reconfirm his position in the modernist-photography firmament. It's invigorating to spend time with art that is dedicated to skill and vision and unfettered by postmodern critiques that can be creatively debilitating. Likewise, though many modernist photographers are now neatly canonized—and therefore tamed—Bravo's images communicate with immediacy across the decades.

Hebron, Micol. "Francys Alÿs, The Politics of Rehearsal." *Arte Contexto* 14
December 2007. Print.
<http://www.artcontexto.com/en/readonline-16.html>



Francis Alÿs

Politics of Rehearsal

The Hammer Museum

Los Angeles, CA

September 29, 2007-February 10, 2008

The *Politics of Rehearsal* at the Hammer Museum is Francis Alÿs' first major museum show in North America. It is fitting to Alÿs' decentralized practice that a Scottish curator (Russell Ferguson) in Los Angeles has invited him, a Belgian-born artist from Mexico City to present this show which is predominantly about the allegorical and dematerialist mechanisms through which nations and people resist and recompose the modernist ideals imposed by imperialism.

The *Politics of Rehearsal* features several videos, sketches, letters, and noticeably few commodifiable objects, that outline Alÿs' 20 years of exploring acts in which it seems that *doing (or making) something leads to nothing*. His practice is not about futility, however, but rather about readjusting expectations and perspective; about rejecting the modern hallmarks of progress and exploring a different notion of time and social interactivity. Both Alÿs' solo performances and his organized group actions embody paradoxical elements of allegory that oscillate between the monumental and the infinitesimal. In *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002), Alÿs organized a cadre of 500 volunteers to move in a single file line as they heave shovels-full of sand across a large sand dune outside Lima, Peru. While the dune appeared unmoved, a mass of people had in fact imposed a geologic shift, paralleling the collective action of a populous rebelling against government.

In *Paradox of Praxis I* (1997) Alÿs pushed a giant block of ice through the streets of Mexico City for nine hours until it melted away. The resulting 'work' is a 5-minute video documenting the act. Through these pieces, Alÿs offers retorts to art history—Land Art and Minimalism, respectively—through public behaviors that humanize the sterile legacies of modernism.

Several of Alÿs' videos infer a relationship to Fluxus as they explore situations put into motion by found and at times serendipitous forces. In *Caracoles* (1999) Alÿs films a young boy as he kicks a bottle up a steep street, waits for it to roll down, and kicks it again, continuously repeating the action as he slowly proceeds up the hill. It's hard not to notice the Coca-Cola label on the bottle and draw an analogy to the Sisyphean struggle that developing nations face while determining how to evolve in the face of industrialization while still retaining national identity. The film *Rehearsal I* (1999-2004) shows Alÿs repeatedly driving a red Volkswagen up a steep hill. As he drives he listens to a recording of a band rehearse a *danzon*. Alÿs accelerates when the music plays and allows the car to roll backwards when the music pauses. With the context of *rehearsal* as the paradigmatic framework for his oeuvre, Alÿs calls to question the veracity and significance of each action. Is this the real thing, or is it a precursor to some final, more perfect - and perhaps imagined - outcome? In the video *Politics of Rehearsal* (2005-2007) a stripper continuously undresses and dresses under the house lights as Alÿs' crew members mill around the staging area. In revealing the mechanisms of her performance, she is not sexy but simply pragmatic as she goes through the motions of her strip routine.

Alÿs restages actions, re-titles his pieces, and sometimes makes the same piece twice. He acts as a DJ of sorts, remixing time, actions, circumstance. Under the rubric of *rehearsal* he proposes that it's the act, and not the sovereign end product, that matters. Alÿs encourages singular shifts of perspective that are at times imperceptible yet offer profound implications for an alternative value structure.

Micol Hebron
Los Angeles, 2007

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Karl Erickson at High Energy Constructs" *Art Forum* Sept 2007 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=18726>

Karl Erickson and Andrew Falkowski

10.05.07

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

09.08.07-10.13.07 *High Energy Constructs*

The title of Karl Erickson and Andrew Falkowski's exhibition, "The Magnificent Bastards," refers to the devious artists themselves, the characters depicted in their artworks, and the political figures those characters seem to represent. Several years ago, Erickson and Falkowski, in an act of self-conscious machismo, began to compete with each other to see who could better draw *MASH* characters. Having further developed their ideas while doing graduate work at CalArts, the artists are currently exhibiting a more contemporary phase of that body of work—a selection of manipulated portraits of *Hogan's Heroes* and *MASH* characters that together form a sardonic, perverse, and particularly Gen-X pastiche that comments on the absurdity of the current war in Iraq. Falkowski paints photorealist black-and-white scenes with Colonel Klink, Sergeant Schultz, and Colonel Hogan in jubilant and vaguely homoerotic poses, at times wearing one another's clothes or offering a shoulder rub for support. Erickson's skillful drawings depict the heads of the *MASH* crew in psychedelic and surreal mutations: Klinger's face splits in two as he talks on the phone; Hawkeye and Hunnicutt become a Janus-faced bust. Images of a pensive Radar with a literal third eye and Father Mulcahy with a necklace of heads (of fellow characters) evoke Hindu iconography. In their statement accompanying the show, the artists assert: "If you can't stop 'em, describe 'em." Given the plethora of abstract figures, narcissistic self-portraits, and formalist sculptures dominating the LA art scene, it is nice that *someone* is saying *something* about the ridiculousness of our current political situation. And with ineloquence being par for the course these days, it is a revolutionary act to describe the reality at hand.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Tom LaDuke at Angles" *Art Forum* May/June 2007 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=15444>

Tom LaDuke

06.02.07

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

05.19.07-06.16.07 *Angles Gallery*

Art and movies have long been associated with magic; both present wondrous illusions that titillate the eyes and the mind. Tom LaDuke's exhibition of paintings and sculptures is a powerhouse of illusive—and elusive—imagery that is thoroughly seductive and magical in its technical virtuosity. He reminds us that the simultaneous luxury and agony of being an artist stem from the tautologous compulsion to make work about what it means to be an artist making work. LaDuke uses acrylic and airbrush on canvas (a new technique for him) to make monochromatic paintings that depict his studio as reflected on the screen of a television that is playing a pivotal scene of a cult movie (*Aliens*, *Donnie Darko*, *The Shining*, *The Elephant Man*). In some paintings, the artist also adds in the lens flare or camera flash of a photograph taken of this scene. Some of the paintings bear subtle evidence of other works in the show as they lie in wait in the artist's studio. Light and surface have been classic subjects of inquiry for photographers and painters alike, but this treatment of surface is so oneiric and elegant that it speaks to the mysticism of television (think *Poltergeist* or *Videodrome*) and of the multivalent site of the studio itself as a place of contemplation, entertainment, production, melancholy, and mystery. LaDuke's uncannily realistic sculptures are equally as stunning as his paintings. Each is made of colored, oil-based clay and rendered from the artist's imagination to reference ancillary objects from classical paintings. The poetic juxtaposition in one room of a heavy sledgehammer with an ineffably delicate dead sparrow is emblematic of the rich complexity that characterizes the whole show.

Hebron, Micol. "I Image I Minute," X-Tra Volume 8, Number 4. 2006. Print

MICOL HEBRON

Micol Hebron, Artist

Bartholomew Cooke, *untitled*, 2005

Copyright 2005 Bartholomew Cooke

I love this image because it is both polysemous and unique, because it is a paradoxical image, at once violent and graceful. It simultaneously presents a silence and a roar, and speaks to me on many levels. As a photo historian, I am reminded of Worthington or Edgerton's iconic milk drop images. Or the photos of the atom bomb clouds at Bikini Island or Hiroshima. Or Stieglitz's Equivalents. I think of Andres Serrano's images of blood and piss and semen. I am seduced by the modernist formalism of the swirls of white ink. This image is referential and abstract at the same time. It's a truly decisive moment, irreproducible, and entirely fleeting, for a moment later, the swirls would hold a different configuration. When I first saw this photo, I wanted to own it, knowing full well that one cannot really ever own an image. I just wanted to keep looking at it.

Micol Hebron is an artist who teaches the History of Photography at Art Center College of Design. If you are interested in participating in I image, I minute, please write to mhebron@sbcglobal.net.

Spencer Mishlen, Photographer

Spencer Mishlen, *Mom Holding Dovima with Elephants*, 2006

The most famous photograph in my world is *Dovima with Elephants* by Richard Avedon. It is the oldest image in my memory of something that is not my own. Before my parents separated when I was five, they had a framed poster print up in the house that we lived in. I had always assumed my mother was the woman in the photograph with the elephants. I didn't learn otherwise until I was about 14 when I found the print in storage and read the caption under the image. To this day I can still feel the love of my mother when I look at *Dovima with Elephants*.

Stephen Berens, Photographer

Earl Berens, 1946

When I look at this photograph of my dad, shot on his way home from a stint in the navy during the occupation of Japan at the end of WWII, I feel like I am looking at the photograph of a stranger. For starters, he doesn't seem to look like the person I know. I was shown this photograph for the first time only a few years ago, and it really surprised me. Here is this young man, in uniform, smiling, and looking directly into the camera while sitting in front of a romantic, though somewhat forlorn, backdrop that I imagine must have been used mostly by couples on a special date in the 1940s. He seems oblivious to the painted flowers and the trash on the floor. This photograph was taken before he met my mom, before he decided to go to college, before he became a veterinarian, before he had children, before he did almost anything that I associate with him or his personality, just at that moment before he started to become who he is.

Jim Welling, Photographer

Inge Morath, *Calder With Maquette of Gwenfritz, Roxbury, 1965*

This picture shows Alexander Calder walking with a three-legged table that holds a maquette of his sculpture the Gwenfritz, which is now installed outside at the Smithsonian in Washington. In the picture you see cows in the background and Calder is walking through the Connecticut landscape with hills behind. He's wearing a fisherman's sweater. There's an old wooden palette in the foreground and some weeds, just kind of a funky studio side-yard location. What I like about the picture is that it's almost as if he's taking the sculpture for a walk; it's on this bulky weird table with these very black, sharp, spiky things. In DC the sculpture looks like a gigantic bat with these big wings. It's the most sinister, ominous sculpture. Calder has domesticated it in this photograph where he's taking the sculpture out the studio. One of the things I think he's doing, that I find myself doing, is when you make something that is as strange spatially as this sculpture is, or you make an abstract photograph, you want to walk around with it, take it with you, take it inside, take it to bed, because you want to always look at it to understand the space. Calder's probably just moving the maquette outside to photograph it, but there's the sense that he can't be separated from it. The great pleasure of being an artist is that you are able look at your work in all sorts of conditions and sizes and scales; you can take it inside, take it outside. That's what I like about the picture. There's something truly wonderful about seeing these metal plates out in a landscape.

Hebron, Micol. "Critic's Picks, Los Angeles: Marnie Weber at Patrick Painter" Art Forum May 2007 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=15423>

Marnie Weber

05.29.07

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

04.21.07-06.02.07 *Patrick Painter, Inc*

Los Angeles-based artist Marnie Weber's distinctly vaudevillian practice comprises performances, videos, collages, and sculptures that are as enchanting as they are intelligent. The collages and sculptures that accompany her new film, *A Western Song*, 2007, are very cute. But they are also creepy, like macabre fairy-tale props. The imagery—on film and on paper—is marked by Weber's now-iconic sprites in country dresses, neutral white masks, and long wigs. The collages collapse scale as the Spirit Girls, as they are called, and multiple images of Weber herself populate constructed dioramas that look like rural princesses' dollhouses. Weber's strategic desexualization of the Spirit Girls presents a complex commentary on expectations of femininity, identity, and fantasy.

In *A Western Song*, Weber and her Spirit Girl cohorts leave their trailer home and embark on a meandering adventure to an Old West town. There they encounter a few rambunctious, banjo-playing clowns and some defunct circus animals. A hootenanny ensues in the spiderweb-strewn lobby of an abandoned saloon. The exhibition also features pristine mixed-media sculptures of the circus animals—but none have ears, an unsettling rejoinder to the cacophony that accompanies the film. (The noisy score was performed live recently, at the Hammer Museum.) The animals' deafness reads as an ominous message that perhaps we're not listening as much as we should (to the Spirit Girls? to other prophecies?). Weber has been showing and performing in this city for twenty years and is at the top of her game with this multimedia endeavor.

Hebron, Micol. "Multiple Vantage Points at LA Municipal Art Gallery" Art Forum March 2007 n. pag. Web
<http://artforum.com/archive/id=12957>

"Multiple Vantage Points"

03.24.07

AUTHOR: MICOL HEBRON

02.25.07-04.15.07 *Barnsdall Art Park / LA Municipal Gallery*

Presented as a complement to "WACK!" at MoCA, "Multiple Vantage Points" presents work created between 1980 and 2006 by fifty Southern Californian women artists. Unlike the exhibition that inspired it, this show doesn't emphasize revolutionary or overtly feminist pieces but instead celebrates the polymorphous diversity that second-wave feminists made possible in the careers of women artists who followed. There is an exciting and quirky range of artistic identities and practices on display, from craft-based objects to performance, figurative painting to video installation, photography to sculpture. It is interesting to note the oft-ignored parallels between these female artists' styles and several California movements typically historicized as predominantly male, such as the Light and Space art of the '70s and the surf- and car-culture influences of the Finish Fetish era. Highlights include Catherine Opie's full-body photographic portraits, Marnie Weber's oneiric, paganistic video, Phyllis Green's biomorphic ceramic sculpture, Sarah Perry's inventive, punny book sculpture entitled *Preature from the Black Lagoon*, 2003, in which the eponymous "preature" emerges from a bible, and Ellina Kevorkian's Pre-Raphaelite-inspired paintings of herself and her twin. Overall, the work is full of intelligent juxtapositions: frilly and formidable; Conceptual and essentialist.