

N·O·A·R

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ANALYSIS

FALL / WINTER 2011-2012



*Double Issue — Fall/Winter
Sophie Calle, Willem de Kooning,
Wayne Gonzales, Nicole Eisenman, John Pilson, Joyce J. Scott*

MARTIN PAYTON



REGINA SCULLY



January 7 - February 19, 2011

Heriard-Cimino Gallery

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VOL. XXX NOS. 1-2

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Cover — Wayne Gonzales: *Seasted Crowd*, 2011. A/C, 68 x 86 inches
Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery.

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW is published bi-monthly during the art season (October, December, February, April, June) by the New Orleans Art Review, Inc., P.O. Box 51181, New Orleans, LA 70151, a non-profit organization funded in part by grants from the Louisiana State Arts Council and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, as administered by the Arts Council of New Orleans, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment of the Arts. Subscriptions: fifty dollars for five bi-monthly numbers. (noareview@netzero.com) Advisory Board: E. John Bullard (New Orleans Museum of Art), Mrs. Thomas Bernard, Mrs. M. M. Calas (Dubuisson Foundation), Mrs. James Coleman Sr., Mrs. Haydee LaFaye Ellis, William Fagaly (New Orleans Museum of Art), Mrs. Sandra Freeman, Mrs. Eugenie Jones Huger, Mr. Keith Marshall (Madewood Foundation), Mrs. Françoise Richardson, Mrs. Louise Reiss Rogas, Timothy Slater, Eugenie D. Vasser, Mrs. John Weinstock, W. Thomas Young. Editorial Board: Stephen R Bachmann, Marilyn Brown, Terrington de Martain Calas, Calvin Harlan, J. Towne Peabody. Editor-in- Chief: J. Towne Peabody. Managing Editor: Terrington Calas. Associate Editor: Stephen Bachmann. Contributing Editors: Thomasine Bartlett, Dale Betancourt, Judith Bonner, Marilyn Brown, Christopher Fischer, Simeon Hunter, John H. Lawrence, Carol Leake, Leah Levkovicz, Peggy McDowell, Marian McLellan, John Mosier, Natalie Rinehart, Kathy Rodriguez, Karl Volkmar. Original Graphic Design: T.M. Calas, Greg Leonard. Graphic Artists: Chris Lewis. Graphic Assistant: Michael Curry, Ha Ni Nguyen. All opinions printed herein are the opinions of the authors and do not reflect those of the New Orleans Art Review, Inc. or its board members. Communications can only be returned if accompanied by a SASE.



Willem De Kooning: *Suburb in Havana*, 1958. o/c, 6'8" High.

Probing, Balancing, Mangling

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

DE KOONING: A RETROSPECTIVE
Museum of Modern Art
New York City

IVA GUEORGUEVA
Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA

JEREMY WILLIS
Du Mois Gallery
New Orleans, LA

THREE RECENT PAINTING exhibitions – one abstract, one verging on abstraction, and one figural but with abstract manners – remind us of something we often choose to set aside: that the gestural, expressionist mode is an aesthetic case apart, an elusive genre. It is now, and always has been. True, it is probably the most fundamental of pictorial manifestations, the chief legatee of primeval mark-making.

But assessing it is a confounding business. It amounts to a facing off with pure subjectivity, the task of garnering meaning from an artist's instinctual maneuvers. Of what import, say, is an abrupt swipe of crimson or an undulating black ribbon? Or, further, is meaning itself really at issue? These

exhibitions suggest that technique, the sheer force of technique, can answer such questions. The implication is that emotional abstraction, throughout its long history, has depended on something as vague, but as undeniable, as artistic "touch."

THESE REMARKS ARE, in part, the consequence of a scheduling happenstance – and the enlivening pleasure of a brief New York sojourn. Iva Gueorgueva's new paintings at Heriard-Cimino coincided with the grand and authoritative Willem de Kooning retrospective presented by the Museum of Modern Art. The two shows – their display of staggering technical fluency, their overmastering spirit – make a strong case for the enduring relevance of abstract painting, despite its present-day curatorial neglect.

The third exhibition, at Du Mois Gallery, was a suite of works by Jeremy Willis, a stylistically unrestrained – not to say reckless – young painter who attempts a daring and resolute appraisal of contemporary culture. His show also says something about the current status of painting in general, and specifically about expressionist figurative painting. This matters because the above-noted curatorial neglect is, in fact, appallingly broad. In some quarters, painting itself is being marginalized.

FOR SOME TIME, Gueorgueva has ventured into a painting tradition that some see as safely bracketed within a mid-20th century moment – a moment of the Dionysian posture in extreme – the



Willem De Kooning: *The Cat's Meow*, 1987. o/c, 7'4" High. Collection Jasper Johns.

moment of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell and, most singular among them, de Kooning (1904-1997). Gueorguieva's exhibition and de Kooning's, taken together, serve to delete any brackets. The MOMA retrospective prompted one influential New York writer to comment on the "idiocy" of contemporary curators who look upon painting as "moribund and regressive." He proclaimed de Kooning's total body of work "visual wisdom for the ages." (The same writer also said the following: "For me, de Kooning proves that the idea of the ever-forward march of modernism is a crock – that all art is contemporary art.")

For the ages, indeed. Painting was an old art when de Kooning, at age twenty-two, immigrated to the United States from Holland in 1926. Through him, and others around him, the discipline was wholly transformed within a mere two decades. Of course, aesthetic revitalizations had occurred and occurred, but in this instance it was a question of full-tilt expressionist vehemence

linked to an assault on the figure. In de Kooning's work, that assault at times seems literal – to wit, his signature *Woman* series in which the female form is fractured, somewhat in French Cubist tradition, but with a passion that is demonstrably un-Gallic.

What distinguishes these works more pointedly, however, is an unambiguous technical rhetoric – a peculiar linearity that defines almost everything de Kooning did. A thick, loaded linearity that jolts and jabs and slashes. It is "painting-as-drawing," and he could make the drawn line signify every feeling from rage to ardor. At the same time, he showcased the gratifying quality of paint itself; he revealed paint as sensuous physical matter – as succulent, delicious. For these reasons, perhaps, the MoMA display has pieces from the 1980s that feel as alive and as persuasive as the *Women* of thirty years earlier. This, despite an established decree that the artist's work declined and faltered over the span of his long career.

Even de Kooning's more controversial phases look triumphant

phant at MoMA. It is usually obligatory to proclaim embarrassment in admiring the late-1950s “abstract pastoral landscapes,” those facile-seeming swaths of color that “imply” land, sky, architecture. They, apparently, are too lovely, in the way that Rachmaninoff’s symphonies are often said to be. Easy pleasures. But one could say the same about key works by de Kooning’s fellow Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko. In fact, a piece such as de Kooning’s *Door to the River* demonstrates his most exceptional gift with absolute clarity – the gift of natural, almost unwilling virtuosity. This is technique ostensibly unchecked but, nonetheless, commanding. Here, we see evidence of a painter for whom serendipity and risk are guiding forces. His legendary anxiety is retained, but quieted. He makes an observation in the real world. Then, with a few reflexive brushstrokes, he renders a translation that reads, somehow, as both tough and sumptuous. There is little embarrassment in acknowledging something so irresistible.

And there is more here. In the “landscapes,” in these broad fields of color, there is a recurring evocation of Constable’s revered cloud sketches – and not merely the famous kinetic brush-mark. What we sense is something of the Romantic’s encounter with Nature, a universal and timeless experience. In this phase, De Kooning’s technique is judicious enough and powerful enough to declare the sublime.

The fiercest, most searching phase was in the mid-1970s. And it confounded some of de Kooning’s long-standing devotees. There was mention of “self-indulgence,” of looseness “bordering on incoherence.” Actually, what he presented, in a work like . . . *Whose Name Was Writ in Water* (1975) or *Untitled V* (1976), was a panoply of visual pursuits, both linear and chromatic. (Unlike most Abstract Expressionists, he seems to have equally venerated line and color.)

The panoply intimates nature, but not in his late-1950s way. These do not abstract nature; they appear to rejoin it – and to regard it as a distant resource for a purely aesthetic goal: the modernist constructing of potent images on a flat surface. In *Writ in Water*, the slathers of paint fabricate vaguely pastoral forms, but their ultimate force has to do with how they energize pictorial space. These paintings are the height of de Kooning’s decades-long probe of Cubism and its dialogue with traditional perspective.

And his solution, no surprise, is an idiosyncratically technical one. Sudden patches and V-shapes create a guessing-game version of classic Cubist simultaneity. There are forms that vaguely suggest objects; you see their fronts and sides and backs. And, predictably, the forms seem to advance and recede, just slightly – but at times deeply, tensing and energizing the space. The brushwork is so dynamic that entire compositions feel like ceaseless equivocation, feel like the elusiveness of human perception – a central Cubist preoccupation.

De Kooning’s last phase is part of this, too, but the works execute the space-surface skirmish with utter discretion. And with nonpareil grace. When textbooks whittle down his career, they usually cite *Woman I* (1950-52) as most significant; some mention the seminal masterpiece *Excavation* (1950). After MoMA’s edifying survey, however, certain of the late paintings are sure to rival them.

At best, these paintings are a précis-like rendering of de Kooning’s total foregoing oeuvre. A sort of brilliant shorthand. Most notable is *The Cat’s Meow* (1987), a canvas that unites color and drawing in flawless rapport. Technically, it is among the leanest of expressionist pictures of any time – a mod-

el of restraint by an artist famous for compositional near-chaos. Here too, as I say, a spatial gambit is patent; he achieves a fluid carving of space within an insistent flatness. The key tool is a maze of thick-thin meandering ribbons that, like bas-relief, insinuate both depth and flatness at the same time.

In this painting, the perspectival illusion is further emphasized by color. De Kooning’s ribbons are as vibrant as his 1970s brushwork, but they are stranger – hot tertiary colors. More important, they ride, twisting unhurriedly over tenuous pastel hues that recede and recede. The legendary spatial tension is now a gentle one, and a disarmingly simple one. Chopin spoke of his constant dream of attaining formal simplicity. He called it “the hardest thing, the finest thing.” It is achieved in de Kooning’s final, pure abstractions.

AT THE OUTSET, one might construe Gueorguieva’s works as pure emotion: painterly evocations of every sort of temper. But this idea lumps her efforts with the myopic conceits of so many abstractionists today – younger artists intoxicated by a vague Action Painting romanticism. Such artists tend to regard a Pollock or a de Kooning as passionately rapt and oblivious to form. And they follow the mythical standard. Gueorguieva is a case apart. Her work, in fact, is surpassingly methodical, but her fluency veils the fact. The pictures take hold of emotion – and acknowledge it, and shrewdly marshal it with a double-edged technique. Her principal vehicles are line and collage – one element presuming to balance the other. The consequent turmoil is imagery that feels ineffably conclusive.

Turmoil, perhaps, is too strong a word. In a piece like *Clinamen*, the anarchic density is disquieting, but it also imparts a sense of intellectual rambling, as if the artist were exploring mental recesses – and doing so within the widest possible scope. And, as if that exploration overwhelmed her, but it simply had to proceed. Collaged fragments lead your eye through stormy layovers attended by boat-like shapes and architecture-like shapes and figure-like shapes, all of it in discordant colors – and, moreover, all of it seeming heavy with uncertainty and discontent. Reportedly, Gueorguieva, now based in California, intended this suite of paintings as “a direct and conscious effort to reconstruct her memories from” the three years she lived in New Orleans just prior to Hurricane Katrina. Any willed recollection might look phantasmagoric, as this painting does. A New Orleans recollection would positively look like this.

Gueorguieva’s use of line, sometimes fashioned by a collaged edge, is the mucilage that unifies *Clinamen*. The same is true of *Machine Vision*, this one a composition of painted steel. A key distinction, though, is a greater openness, a kind of jubilant expansiveness. And an evident invitation to delectation. The picture sits unabashedly in a locus of aesthetic sensation. Incendiary color dominates and delights you with multi-values of rust and red-violet; and the ancillary hues, rich greens and muddy blues, are squeezed out to the perimeter, completing what initially appears to be an orthodox scheme, truly beautiful – and orthodox.

In fact, the image could border on “merely orthodox,” but for the linear element. A masterful line – intrusive and governing. It recurs here in the form of menacing tangles and calligraphic motifs. Gueorguieva imposes them contrarily onto this lovely field with a measure of the fierceness that characterizes most of this exhibition. It quickly transforms the expanse of hot color into an inflammation. The effect is simultaneously witty and unnerving – a heady double message. One senses the artist’s joy in crafting formal beauty,



Iva Gueorgieva: *Machine Vision*, 2011. Painted Steel, 61in. high.

but also her earnest – and perhaps nettlesome – soul-searching. You are floored by the rank adroitness and moved by the inference of multivalent content – technique proving to be inexhaustible.

TO BE SURE, technique is also a cogent factor in Willis’s work. It seems almost to outdistance his thematic fervor, a fervor not very unlike that in certain phases of de Kooning’s oeuvre. For Willis, technique is almost a factor in service of itself. It approaches the extreme.

And increasingly, we see more artists like this – audacious-ly, and, perhaps felicitously, renegade. Not renegade in the legendary modernist sense – the sense of subverting standards in order to propose more advanced ones. Advancement is hardly the point. Rather, it looks more like defiance in the face of advancement. Specifically, it looks like a resolve to retain the methods and tastes of childhood art-making. These are artists who, despite patent skills and knowledge, choose, at essence, to trumpet eternal adolescence.

The surprise is that, today, they can fascinate and delight. At times, they can seem vital. On the national and international art scene, examples abound. Elizabeth Peyton’s awkward yet irresistible portraits of celebrities and friends fit into this category. They remind you of so many tenth graders’ untutored watercolors in the back pages of school notebooks. John Currin’s virtuosic, outlandishly mannerist nudes fit here too. So do certain pieces by Lisa Yuskavage and Jenny Saville. Theirs is an ethos born of erstwhile kitsch – pictorial hyperbole that, 20 years ago, would have horrified the art world.

And it claims our attention now. But why? Simply because this overall spirit coincides so precisely with a large swath of

contemporary culture. To a degree, it defines us. We live largely in a hyperbolic world, a world inundated with caricatures and masks and signs, the shrieking “denizens” that Pop art satirized 40-some years ago. Now they are our grammar, or, at least, a conspicuous part of it – leaping to the eye from the Web, from the media, from the streets. Like it or not, most of the gaudy and fatuous imagery we see in “protracted-adolescent art” looks and feels like now.

Of course, mere cultural resemblance can rarely signify very much. It is one thing to reflect a historical moment, no matter how persuasively, and quite another to suffuse that reflection with meaning. Vapid caricatures have become a commonplace – looking lively and saying nothing. But there are noteworthy exceptions. There are artists who interrogate the welter of human life in our unquiet, artificial age: interrogate the enigmas, the contingencies, the out-and-out falsehoods.

Willis’s exhibition *Fear is a Man’s Best Friend*, at Du Mois, purports just so ambitious a goal. His surfaces vex you with a Pop incandescence and Pop overstatement, but this is not conventional Pop art. Certainly not in the orthodox, circumscribed sense of the term. There are no emblematic markers of consumer excess, no smug mockery of societal triviality. Those were apt concerns in the 1960s. No longer. In these paintings, Willis attempts to lift the bar; the notion is graver.

The show unveils a present-day Boschian arena, a new world of moral auto-destruction. Willis declares urban decadence as the fatal vitiator of us all – of the artist most notably, but also of us all. It is an extreme viewpoint, an unsettling one, and very likely an accurate one. And he chooses to convey it via imagery of unre-



Jeremy Willis: *Circling the Drain*, 2011. Painted Steel, 61in. high.

lenting coarseness. Technique unfettered. The impact is irrefutable.

These are depictions of women. *Last Caress*, lurid in magenta and cobalt, feels abject; it takes Lichtenstein's famous reclining girl and displaces her, as it were, to Expressionist-era Germany; Kirchner could have painted this. *Hangover Headgear* is positively horrific; distortions and slippages dominate. It points to an ugly, familiar truth. *Circling the Drain* is both tasteless and thoroughly alluring. It is a bathtub scene, but hardly of the wholesome Bonnard variety.

Everything here evokes the strident assault Kirchner made on urban life in his Berlin paintings just before the Great War. But even he, inconceivably, was more discreet than Willis. In this new take on contemporary excess, he wields a jarringly frenzied style, complete with ruthless fragmenting of the figure, episodes of near grossness, and a full-tilt, truculent color sense.

That color sense is the initial spectacle. Audacious. You think immediately of the confrontational glares of the quasi-Pop, politicized painter Peter Saul. You think also of the saturated hues of a billboard, yet somehow more irksome. This, together with cartoon-worthy figures, confers, as I say, a misleading Pop aura.

And a fully advantageous one. It is rare today to find Pop vocabulary taken beyond the puerile. Willis does so. He employs it for psychological content, something foreign to true Pop. The point, as he says, is to "explore the intersection between pop culture and personal experience." He speaks of "the compromised nature of personal expression." Compromised, it would seem, by "the false promises of youth and pop culture" and by "hedonism." In a piece like *After Party*, these words ring true. One sees youthful beauty decimated. Here, and in certain other works, pleasure is perceived as a destructive force. And further, when you note a painterly sensuousness in the artist's method, a nomination for ultimate perpetrator emerges: the media, pervasive and fictitiously sensuous media.

At times, Willis's work seems almost to replicate popular media. But he subverts its function, directing it, for once, toward truth. This interpretation might cast his women as fashion beauties, as glamorous types now away from the cameras – and symbolically mangled. They are mangled until their faces disclose the duplicity of pop culture's promise. Notice the transmuting face in *Tears*. For Willis, that promise results in wretchedness, ruin – like the numbing imagery he submits in this exhibition. □



Sophie Calle. From *True Stories*, 2011. Prospect.2, New Orleans.

A Present Perfect Presence

BY KARL F VOLKMAR

SOPHIE CALLE
True Stories
Prospect.2

1850 House - Louisiana State Museum
New Orleans, LA

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THE LOW LYING layer of oyster gray clouds inflected with glints of pale blue sky held the humid warmth close on this very New Orleans fall day. On assignment to visit several sites within the broad embrace of Prospect.2, I had decided to allow the sensuous atmosphere that only New Orleans offers to prime my senses as prelude to my visitation. Prospect.2 is composed of installations woven into the whole cloth of the city, each venue a nexus like an aesthetic organelle within the connective tissue and fluids of the cultural body. As each has been purposely situated, the ideal

means of experiencing them would seem to be to follow the ways that connect one with another, beginning with the historic center established over two centuries ago.

Abandoning the elevated concrete skyway as soon as practical, I chose to begin at the Carrollton antipode and ride the streetcar into the heart of the city. The squealing and screeching of steel on steel and creaking wood slowly involved me in the mood of the city. As the tracks entered the tunnels of arching live oak limbs, my lungs were filled with the characteristic miasma of smells I have always associated with New Orleans. After passing by Audubon Park and Saint Charles Avenue widened into what might be four lanes, and the streetcar approached the barren volumes of the warehouse district, I realized that the line followed the history of New Orleans in reverse order as we were going back in time. Stepping down at the turnaround and crossing Canal Street, I walked through the narrow streets, entering the open space that is Jackson Square with its throngs of visitors milling around among



Sophie Calle. From *True Stories*, 2011. Prospect.2, New Orleans.

the tables of tarot readers, portrait artists, and covies musicians here and there.

How little I knew about this city, always seen from the outside, like all the tourists, of which I was one. What did I really know about the lives of the people who lived here? Certainly the intimate lives of the few close friends I had known gave me some insight into what it meant to live in the city. For the most part, however, my knowledge was limited to the facades and shops and restaurants and second hand accounts in books and literature, and the fragments of oral histories heard from horse drawn carriages passing by that not infrequently contradicted themselves. When I heard about Sophie Calle's installation at 1850 House, I had no idea that I was about to become engrossed in the artist's Proustian tale.

Stopping at the first Louisiana Museum sign, I asked directions to 1850 House where Sophie Calle's work was displayed. Passing the cathedral and turning right past the corner of the black painted iron fence, I walked towards the entrance hidden among the many windows and doorways under the long arcade.

As one enters the historic three-story 1850 House, in the Pontalba Buildings constructed for the Duchess Micaela Almonester de Pontalba in 1849, through the doorway facing the downriver side of Jackson Square, one is greeted by the musty smell of old

brick, plaster, and wood characteristic of old buildings in humid climes. After purchasing a pass at the gift shop counter and presenting it to the young woman at the table, one enters a narrow foyer at the bottom of the stairwell. A black cloth with a large white cross covers a coffin in the space beside the stairs. On the left is a small table. A copy of the deed for a cemetery plot stands on top of a large FedEx envelope. A salmon colored card printed with text explains that the plot has been purchased by 'I' and that the envelope is to be used to ship her remains from France where she lives to Bolinas, California, where the cemetery plot is located, after her death.

The sarcophagus at the beginning draws attention from that which was to that which will come to pass, suggesting a continuum from 1850 to an indefinite future within which the lives of the first inhabitants of the townhouse, the artist Sophie Calle, and we the visitors have been made participants. The space of 1850 House has been extended, westwards to California and east to Paris. The incongruity of the presence of the sarcophagus at the beginning of our tour, and the deed for the burial plot and the FedEx envelope, suggests both a dark humor and the willingness to talk about that most serious of subjects, death. The number '1' printed on the card indicates that there will be more, forty-four more to be exact, and that we are only at the beginning of a series of stories.



Sophie Calle. From *True Stories*, 2011. Prospect.2, New Orleans.

The tightly spiraling staircase rises to the second floor where Calle's installation project continues. Muffled sounds of footsteps treading on old wood floors follow one as we climb the stairs to the second floor where French windows look out onto a narrow balcony around the tiny courtyard. A small sign warns not to exit here. The installation continues on the third floor. The relative silence of the interior space after the business outside in the square instills a feeling of intimacy, only in afterthought surprising as one comes to realize how quietly and solidly the building has stood more than one hundred fifty years after its construction on a foundation of four hundred feet of mud.

Slowly passing along the narrow hallways, carefully moving around other visitors, pausing before each doorway, held back from entering by a thick red cord, and peering into each room, one's eyes slowly search each room with its period furnishings. The space seems as devoid of actual human presence as a seventeenth century Netherlands still life painting. In some historic buildings there would have been someone in period costume to demonstrate and explain a little bit about the room, the building, and the people who once lived there, always speaking in perfect tenses. Beside each doorframe in 1850 House is a small card with very basic information about each room, printed in serif font on white stock, both faded to the degree that the text is difficult to read, an unintended metaphor for the blurring of memory through the passage of time.

All this is as it was, a look into a world which one cannot enter, the red cord emphasizing this, a world of artifacts that amateur ethnographers and historical novelists read, reconstructing what life lived in such space might have been like, perhaps imagining whispered conversations or sounds of movement, the brushing of feet over carpet pile, the soft sounds of sitting on a plush cushioned chair, the whoosh of air as one sinks into the bed at night, the rustling of abundantly pleated dresses, details not included in the information printed on the faded cards.

Then one notices that all may not be as it at first seems. At the entrance to each room, just on the other side of the cord, on a small table, or attached to a glass pane in a window, are small rectangles of salmon card stock like that on the table by the cemetery plot deed, each imprinted with a number and a text. One looks down to read this text and looks up, raising one's line of vision ninety degrees, to look into the room. Perhaps one had noticed objects in the room that seemed out of place before reading the salmon cards: a single red woman's pump, some handwritten pages on the seat of a chair, a pig's snout mask, an coffee cup on a table, an empty tea kettle lying on the carpet and an overturned chair, a scarf decorated with matadors and roses partially covering a tour guide to Spain, [a few crumbs of a petite madeleine soaked in tea], or little white squares with numbers printed on them.

Each object has a context described by the accompanying narrative vignette. The last object Amelia shoplifted before her mother caught and told them about the big bad policeman watching their every move. A love letter she paid someone to write to her because she had never in her life received one. When she refused a man who tried to kiss her, he told her "You eat like a pig." She stole a coffee cup after having coffee with "the most intelligent man I had ever known." Various items including a chair were thrown at her on Tuesday, March 10, 1992, at 11:30 am. On a last trip to Spain before they broke up, her erstwhile lover told her his most intimate secret while depriving her of his love.

There comes a time when one understands, perhaps from the beginning, perhaps later on, that the numbers on the salmon cards correspond to the numbers on small white squares near significant objects in each room. Some may not at first be easy to locate. In the process of searching the room, details are absorbed more deeply into one's consciousness. And so it is that one reads and sees oneself through the installation, incident by incident, as the character becomes richer and richer. Slowly one becomes more and more aware, almost as if the something had happened and the person had just left. We have become voyeurs of the character's life as revealed in her intimate stories and signified by artifacts whose full significance is only revealed in the typed texts.

The contemporary nature of the artifacts, they are things that we recognize and may have seen in other contexts, brings the rooms into present tense. One is no longer viewing only artifacts from one hundred years ago. These are things with which one is familiar. The temporal boundary between perfected and present has been bridged.

One reads the little story and everything begins to fall in place. Consistent use of first person personalizes the narratives and makes them plausible. Specific days, dates, and times imply that from 1850 to the present is a continuum. The deed to the cemetery plot pulls attention into the future. References to distant places like China and Spain extend the space of the life of the character beyond the room. The events related on the salmon colored cards relate the viewer/visitor/voyeur to the wider world. Intimate personal encounters connect with the viewers' lives as one might hear oneself saying "I too have experienced something like that." Thus do the artifacts and their corresponding narratives elide time, space, and lived experiences. One feels like one shares the world of the narratives as one begins to know the narrator, her life as lived in these rooms, and the lives of those whose lives one can only imagine in 1850.

All this occurs in one's mind. It is ephemeral. It is fiction. Yet it has become part of one, of one's identity, a place where we too have lived, at least in our imaginations. We live in a world of signs whose meaning we may not fully understand, a world of signs adrift, without form context meaning, until it is provided, meanings that make sense because they are like the experiences of one's own life. Calle transforms the historic 1850 House, where visitors expect to observe from the distance of one hundred sixty-two years "a demonstration of life in 1850" with accompanying text panels describing "the history of the interior and the uses of the rooms, which are filled with period furnishings arranged to show how the rooms were typically used" into an intimate space through which a quasi-autobiographical character has recently passed as remembrances of things past become present memories. It is very French, in the manner of Flaubert, of Zola, of Proust, and of Robbe-Grillet.

As I walked slowly through the gift shop I paused to ask the attendants how they had responded to the installation. Leaving through the heavy door, I felt I was leaving something behind, yet an experience that would stay with me. I began working my way through the crowds, glancing at the tarot tables, listening to the musicians. The world of the senses that was my reality somehow seemed ephemeral and the historical that had seemed so distant had become palpable remembrance. □



Daniel Pressley: *The Soldier's Family*, 1947.

Self-Taught

BY JUDITH H BONNER

Self-Taught, Outsider and Visionary Art from the Collection of Alexa Kleinbard and Jim Roche
Group Exhibition
Ogden Museum of Southern Art
New Orleans, LA

SINCE THE EARLY 1970s, the husband and wife team Jim Roche and Alexa Kleinbard have amassed a large collection of American self-taught, outsider, folk art, and visionary art. The couple, both of whom are working artists, imposed their artistic sensibilities upon works they selected and subsequently promoted the acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of work by artists who are not trained academically. Their collection includes work by artists who are not well represented in other collections of vernacular art, including both private and institutional collections. Consequently, this exhibition has a sense of freshness unlike many shows of this kind.

Kleinbard, who received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Pennsylvania College of Art in 1974, collected her first piece of outsider art, a weathered painted *Bird House Church* by Alva Piachenza, a work that is included in this show. Roche, who earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Dallas in 1970,

collected a wooden work by Jesse James Aaron in 1972. A number of Aaron's sculptures, carved in high reliefs, are included in these galleries.

Other artists whose works are represented in the exhibition include John Robert Ellis, Columbus "Dude" McGriff, Roger Rice, O.L. Samuels, Willard "Texas Kid" Watson. Ellis demonstrates his awareness of political and current events, in his paintings of noted figures like Mikhail Gorbachev, Muammar Gaddafi, Martin Luther King, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan. In his crayon and colored pencil drawings Rice explores themes of religion, temptation, fantasy, sexuality, and crime.

Columbus "Dude" McGriff is well represented with numerous wire sculptures of animals, ships, planes and military vehicles. In all of his pieces McGriff uses the wire to form an armature for the basic shape and then continues to wrap the skeletal form with wire to fill in the form of the pig, duck, dinosaur, or vehicle. O.L. Samuels uses "found" pieces of wood to assemble or fashion his artworks. In one piece he uses three large cypress knees to form a tripod upon which he placed an irregular piece of wood with knots that inspired him to make select cuts to fashion the heads of various animals. Samuels' free standing wooden horses painted in glistening colors—gold, silver, red, and blue—are highly appealing. A carved moose, decorated with iridescent green



O.L. Samuels: *Edna*

candy cane-like hooks and dots, is set upon a flat base with rocks glued randomly at the moose's feet.

Kleinbard and Roche collected wooden canes by Buddy Boone and H.C. Williams, an unusual feature in outsider art. Both artists use small branches to form their canes. Boone's series of canes are decorated with doll's heads or billiard balls. Williams's carved and painted canes feature alligators, birds, horses, and female nudes that appear to emerge from the matrix, or cane. A number of undated wooden boxes, all anonymous works ostensibly made by prisoners, are each titled *Art of the Incarcerated*. The careful construction and craftsmanship of these boxes sets them apart from typical crudely-assembled "outsider art."

H. L. Gandy's *Jimmy Dean Movie Theater* stands apart from the other works which fall into the category of untrained or outsider art. This 1979 oil on canvas work is painted competently with correct anatomical proportions and an understanding of aerial perspective. John A. Geddes, who was trained to render simulated wood patterns, painted a number of small two-dimensional works by mixing ground pigment with beer as a binder. This curious combination causes one to question the stability of such a work and the probable damage that could be caused by insects, as well as the problem of storing these pieces in close proximity to other artworks.

While Mississippi is known primarily for its contributions to literature and music, the visual arts have also played an important role in shaping the cultural identity of the state. To this end, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art has highlighted the artis-

tic contributions of the state throughout its other galleries. One exhibition, also on view through September 18th, is appropriately titled *Spotlight on Mississippi*. This show includes drawings, paintings, and sculpture by luminaries as well as lesser-known artists who have lived or worked in the state, from its Hill Country to the Gulf Coast. Artists include John McCrady, Sam Gilliam, Walter Anderson, Theora Hamblett, William Dunlap, William Hollingsworth, Archie Bongé, Dusti Bongé, Bess Dawson, Halcyon Barnes, Ruth Holmes, Pappy Kitchens, Sultan Rogers, Tennessee Williams, and Ed McGowin. Like the works collected by Kleinbard and Roche, some of these artists were untrained academically, particularly Williams, who like fellow author D. H. Lawrence, tried his hand at painting.

A stroll through the museum's galleries causes one to pause and consider the relationship of contemporary art by academically-trained artists to vernacular art like that collected by Kleinbard and Roche, particularly those untrained artists whose works are presently considered mainstream. In her 1964 painting titled *Sorghum-making Day*, self-taught artist Theora Hamblett shows the activity taking place outdoors. The portrayal of the landscape is typical of her work, with a row of trees, their autumnal foliage executed like a translucent veil of orange filigree against the blue sky in the upper quarter of the painting. The composition is intuitively balanced; the palette is restrained and limited to secondary colors with accents of primary colors. Hamblett achieved cohesiveness in her works through her Pointillist-like method of application of paint, which is characterized by rows of carefully



Sylvanus Hudson: *Heart With Cross*

aligned dashes with select areas of dots to resemble foliage.

The innately talented Hamblett, who had once applied to the University of Mississippi for art training, was advised by the faculty of the art department that her best course was to continue painting in her own artistic style without the complications that would arise from academic training. Here Hamblett was challenged for a solution to depicting two cows that turn the cane mill (or cane press) to extract the juice. She showed the press in profile view while the cows are depicted as though lying flat on the ground; a light green circle around the press represents the circular path trod repetitiously by the two animals. The work is highly narrative and although this activity is a vanishing aspect of South culture, some of the process is still understandable from viewing this scene.

Another exhibition, *Mississippi Photographs, 1860s – Present*, features work by more than thirty photographers who have visited or lived in the state. In keeping with the museum staff's wish to emphasize the cultural influence of photography, these works underscore social and cultural characteristics of southerners. The survey spans a century-and-a-half, beginning with a circa-1864 tintype of Samuel McNulty who served with the Third Battalion Mississippi Infantry. The portrait, which is on loan from the Louisiana Civil War Museum at Confederate Hall, shows McNulty in his uniform standing posed stiffly as was typical of such portraits of young men who were setting out to serve their fellow countrymen during the War Between the States. From this point, the photographs focus on the people and land, with the strongest of these being near-monochromatic or black-and-white views.



O.L.Samuels: *Large Monster Beast*.

Eudora Welty's *Child on Porch*, which appears like a candid black-and-white snapshot of a barefoot little girl sitting on a wooden porch railing and leaning against a column, belies the patient manner in which Welty worked. She set up her camera; got to know her subjects until they forgot the presence of the camera, and then captured something of the sitter's inner character. In this simple scene Welty has portrayed something of that indefinable, elusive quality of life in the South, but the image belongs to an expansive view of life beyond the southeastern United States.

Through a series of views, Mississippi photographer Birney Imes documents the decline of a single establishment called "Whispering Pines," a café and bar in the Mississippi prairie. Imes shows the café, its proprietors, and its patrons from the mid-1970s until the café closed in the early 1990s. This is third and final in a series of three exhibitions, with the earlier two shows of Imes' work focusing on late night spots like "Juke Joint"—a series for which Imes has gained recognition. Many of his works, however, appear like casual snapshots.

One of the most memorable views is Kathleen Robbins' digital C-print of a 2007 nocturnal scene titled *The Skinning Place*, a worm's-eye view in which a non-descript single-story building is set against pitch black skies. The lower half of the composition focuses on the textural gravel drive imprinted with a network of deep tire tracks. In the distant right is the barely perceptible shape of a yellow vehicle. This view, magnified by its title, projects an eerie feeling like that experienced by outsiders confronted with the

more visceral aspects of life in the rural South.

Another unforgettable view, Walker Evans' 1939 silver gelatin print shows a movie theater with an African American man ascending the steps marked as the "Colored" entrance. The man is the sole figure in this understated black-and-white view, the entirety of which conveys a sense of being alone. The photograph is characterized by a strong underlying geometric compositional structure, particularly the diagonals. Tom Rankins' 1990 photograph of a dilapidated clapboard rural church is reminiscent of *Bird House Church*, the first piece of vernacular art collected by Kleinbard.

Also on view are photographs by Lyle Bongé, Maude Schuyler Clay, William Eggleston, Walker Evans, William Ferris, Lewis Hine, William Henry Jackson, Clarence John Laughlin, Milly Moorehead West, Marion Post Wolcott, and others. Another exhibition, *Mississippi Mud: The Potters of Mississippi*, presents works that recall the vernacular art in the Roche-Kleinbard Collection. Interspersed in these exhibitions are paintings, photographs, pottery, and other objects collected for their artistic merits—all of which convey to viewers some cultural, social, or historical aspect of the South. □

Ted Kincaid: *Mystery & Imagination*

BY KATE BRUCE

TED KINCAID
Every Doubt That Holds You Here
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

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TED KINCAID'S EXHIBITION at the Arthur Roger Gallery, *Every Doubt That Holds You Here*, invites the viewer to observe nature's wonder through an imagined world. Created purely by digital media but exhibited as photographs, Kincaid showcases over twenty images in this engaging show. The intriguing imagery enables the viewer to ponder the artistic approach of Kincaid, and to be transported into the mysterious scenes depicted by the accomplished artist.

Kincaid's work is divided into three different series—landscapes, seascapes, and celestial scenes. As a result of the show's installation within the gallery space, each series is clearly separated. While exploring Kincaid's show, the viewer is continuously invited to consider the show's title, *Every Doubt That Holds You Here*, and how it relates to his work. Focusing on the mediums of painting and photography, the Dallas, Texas resident is well known for his assimilated imagery that reflects his interest in art history.

The first series in the show, of landscapes, are beautiful and haunting images by Kincaid where reality, time and space are prevalent issues. *Forest Fire 210* features cavernous mountains in the background, dark birds flying in a sweeping formation, bending branches that hover in the foreground, and billowing smoke coming from a fire within the dense landscape. The red of the fire is in stark contrast to the monochromatic color scheme of this image. Kincaid's images in this exhibit are mostly presented in a monochromatic palette. In another landscape, *Mountains (for John Muir)*, Kincaid utilizes a keen sense of perspective that enhances his evident theme of nature's omnipotence. The viewer is invited into this uncultivated landscape through the placement of his low-

lying trees in the foreground, and also by the hazy mist that envelops the atmosphere. This image, a created photograph of an imagined place, also encourages the observer to reflect upon Kincaid's technical process. Scratch marks are visible on the smooth surface of the Hahnemühle paper, and this feature reinforces the artist's presence.

The exhibition progresses from Kincaid's mysterious landscapes to his enigmatic seascapes. These ethereal seascapes are among his strongest images. The artist integrates the viewer through his inclusive point of view. In *Open Sea 801*, the observer is on the same plane as the tumultuous and raging water. An ancient ship tilts precariously on the water's surface. The monochromatic palette also increases the stormy quality of the image. It is in images like this that the viewer clearly connects Kincaid's work to the show's title. In other images, for instance *Open Sea 315*, the viewer is distanced from the seascape. The man-made boat on the horizon line pales in comparison to its unpredictable environment, and this reinforces man's vulnerability to nature. Kincaid's *Iceberg 616* is in stark contrast to his rocky seascapes, and the observer becomes a part of the serene scene through the viewpoint created by the artist. The placid water is tranquil, and the cool color palette amplifies the chilly atmosphere of the image.

While Kincaid's landscapes are somewhat contained spaces, his seascapes like *Open Sea 205* seem endless, as the title suggests. This idea is reinforced continuously in works such as *Open Sea 77*, where the viewer can barely distinguish between the high waves of the water and the deep clouds in the sky. It is notable that human figures are not prevalent in any of his images, and this is particularly evident in this series. Kincaid's seascapes are somewhat lonely and isolated images, but there remains a quality of beauty in them as well. As in many of his other works, the viewer contemplates time. The ships featured in these images are from a period long ago, as in *Open Sea 720*. According to Kincaid, this romantic inclusion is influenced by literary and artistic sources researched by the artist.

Kincaid's ability to manipulate the created image by computer software, while also exploring the traditions of photog-



Ted Kincaid: *Forest Fire 210*, 2011. Digital Photograph printed on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320 gsm, 20" high.



Ted Kincaid: *Open Sea 801*, 2011. Digital Photograph printed on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Pearl 320 gsm, 20" high.

raphy, is again showcased in *Open Sea 731*. This piece resembles a Surrealist's solarized photograph, and emphasizes his interest in recalling noted darkroom techniques. The proficiency of Kincaid's mechanical approach suspends the image in time and space, and the boat appears as if it could disappear and fade away into the horizon.

The final series, which is so unlike Kincaid's previous series of grounded landscapes and seascapes, depicts planetary formations. This series is the smallest in scale, and the forms within the frames do not always fill the composition. These orb-like shapes stand alone, and are the main focal point of the arrangement. His pictures of the moon are actually constructed from close up images of a concrete floor. These planets feature deep and rocky

craters, and unexplored surfaces. The themes of time and space are also evident in these compositions, as in the commanding piece, *Lunar 4231*. The circular planet is suspended in space, and eclipsed by darkness. The edges of the paper are somewhat blurred like the edges of the planet itself.

Kincaid's enticing exhibition, *Every Doubt That Holds You Here*, showcased in Arthur Roger's well-known gallery space, transports the viewer from the bustle of the Central Business District of New Orleans into an otherworldly atmosphere. Through Kincaid's assimilated imagery that is developed from his creative imagination, viewers are able to explore, question, and expand the limits of their own imagination. □



John Pilson. *Night of the Hunter 1*. Still Image from Video. Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery.

John Pilson

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

JOHN PILSON
Video Installations
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

AN OWL STRETCHES its neck, its bulging eyes cast downward from its arboreal perch. Below, a rabbit cleans its face with front paws, blinding it to silent danger. The owl launches; a death knell rings out in a chirping scream. “It’s a hard world for little things.”

Rachel Cooper, played by Lillian Gish, stoically utters that last sentence at the end of a scene fraught with tension in Charles Laughton’s 1955 film *Night of the Hunter*. This scene, in particular, deftly illustrates the title of the movie. Robert Mitchum plays Preacher Howell, a diabolical hunter who greedily preys on the vulnerability of widows and children. The words “love” and “hate” tattooed on his knuckles both emphasize the irony of his title and character and describe the most elemental opposition of good and evil.

Cooper is his opposite. She selflessly protects Howell’s adopted brood, orphaned after his murder of their mother. In the

previous scene, Cooper is framed in fearful darkness, a silhouette akin to *Whistler’s Mother*. Protected by her gun, she rocks gently on the porch of her home while Howell bellows the sounds of a recurring hymn outside in her garden: “Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms...” Cooper answers, singing over him, “Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus...” Cooper is the moral right, the protector of all little things, calling to the Christian icon of the same character and strength. Howell, bathed in darkness, is pure, unflinching evil, leaning on his own murderous arms, stretching sinewy from his awful fists.

It is this scene that Kirsha Kaechele, the now-absent founder of KKKProjects/Life is Art Foundation, describes throughout *Night of the Hunter*, a two-minute single-channel video from 2009 by John Pilson, who describes the video as his friend Kirsha’s description of her favorite movie. At first, Kaechele, like Cooper, is framed in darkness; only her voice indicates her presence. After she pops into view, each successive scene gently overlaps the next in a dreamlike sequence akin to the surrealistic cinematography of Stanley Cortez, who filmed the 1955 original. Kaechele repeatedly sings the motif hymn throughout the video to several different companions, one on one. They each listen silent-



John Pilson. *Night of the Hunter 2*. Still Image from Video. Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery.

ly, or join her, or, in the case of a camera, emotionlessly observe. Her voice gains and loses volume as she eerily croons inside the fades of the film.

Pilson evokes the horror genre. But, in comic relief, Kaechele gets the lyrics wrong, or varies details through costume and scene changes. In one moment, she pauses dramatically; joint in one hand, she gestures reverently with the other to the scene she's just described as she lounges poolside in a mauve maillot. In another, her gold-sequined mini-dress glitters onto a wall that supports her oddly stretched frame, her lanky arms raised in fists, gently beating the air to the tempo of the hymn she sings – again - incorrectly. Apparently, she can only tell one story. It comes across as a superficial account of a visually tense moment.

Is Pilson suggesting that the inanity is horrific? Or does Kaechele's character symbolize perceptions of New Orleans? To Pilson, or even Kaechele – visitors and one-time transplants - the city must undoubtedly seem somewhat laissez-faire in its counter-approaches to violence and greed. Pilson's piece for Prospect.1 was a portrait of the city, so the idea of representing New Orleans would be familiar territory. But, both interpretations seem too political.

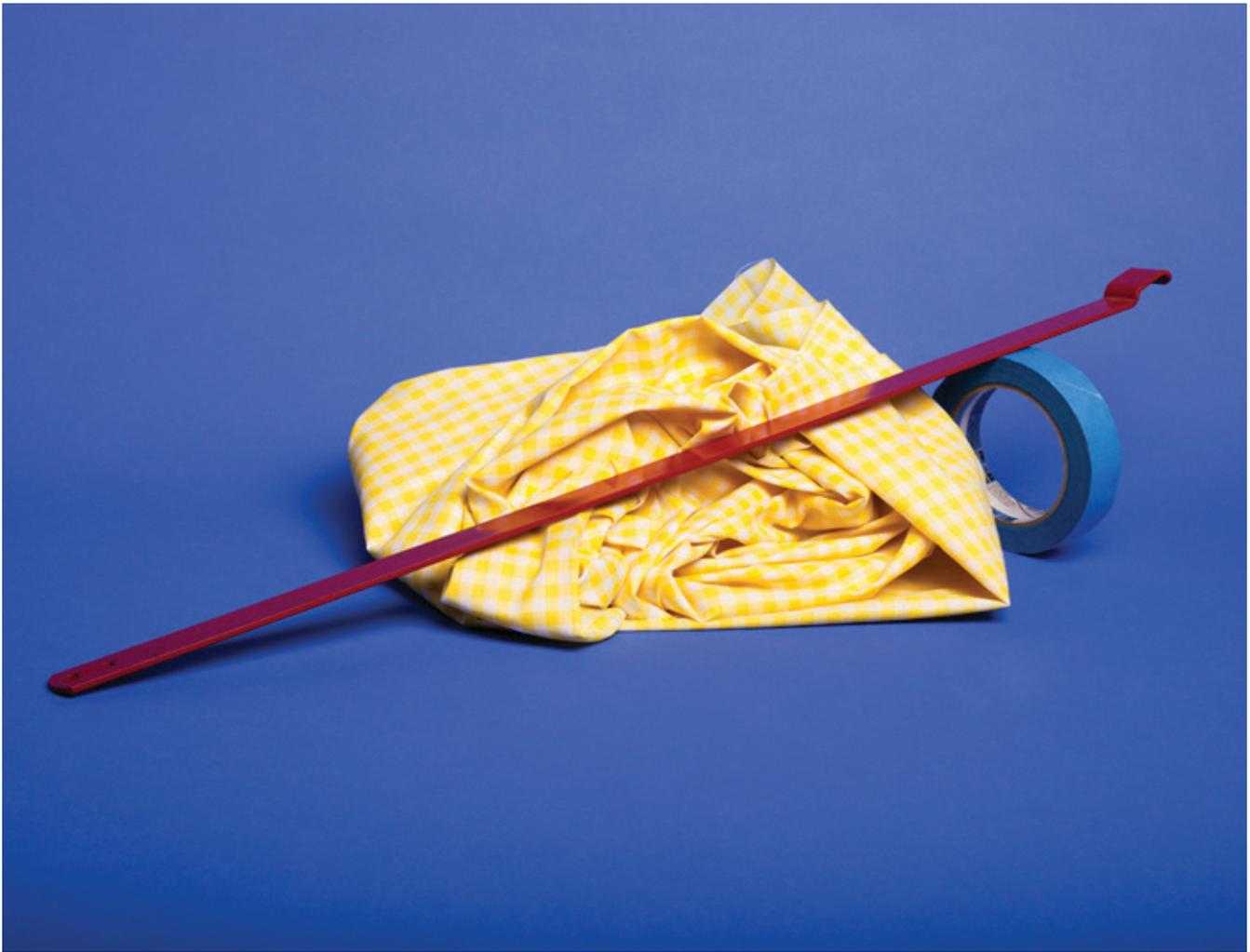
Great art brings us back again and again, ingraining it in our lives, and greatness is initially a subjective perception. And, greatness is limitless and somewhat indescribable – it can displease and confuse as much as it soothes and enlightens. Much like the details slightly change in Kaechele's reiterations, each experience with a beloved artwork is probably a little different than the last. Context is always in flux, slight differences reveal themselves

each time, and those details can enrich our relationship with art, ultimately resulting in completely new exchanges with familiar things. Like physical reproductions, the viewing experience can become so reproduced, that, in the sense of Walter Benjamin, the viewing risks losing its aura. But, that can bring art closer, too.

Good art brings us back over and over because, among other things, we find something identifiable, or familiar, or relatable in it, perhaps like Kaechele's comic relief. Humor pulses like a belly laugh in a young protagonist's story about a destitute couple struggling to pay their rent because their dog-washing company is going under in *Idea for a Film*. In the end, their friend, D-Man, bails them out. The idea, related by Nelson – the hero himself – is ripe with successful thematic content: love, despair, selflessness, conflict between good (the couple) and evil (the angry, greedy landlord). In contrast to the way Kaechele would have it, in the end, love conquers all. In the end, it is another iteration of the same trope of opposition.

The medium of film suggests stage set and illusion, a constructed environment. But Pilson is getting at an essential truth. He obviously filmed each short in New Orleans, in real and familiar places, but the scenes still feel artificial and so have a kind of universality. They are sketchy enough to read like studies or caricatures, even though Pilson identifies his characters by name. Like the character of Ignatius J. Reilly, the films do capture something essential about our city and at the same time complex, something like the way life needs art, or vice versa.

□



Sophie Lvoff: *Still Life #86 (Primary)*, 2011. Ink jet print on archival paper.

Common Ground

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

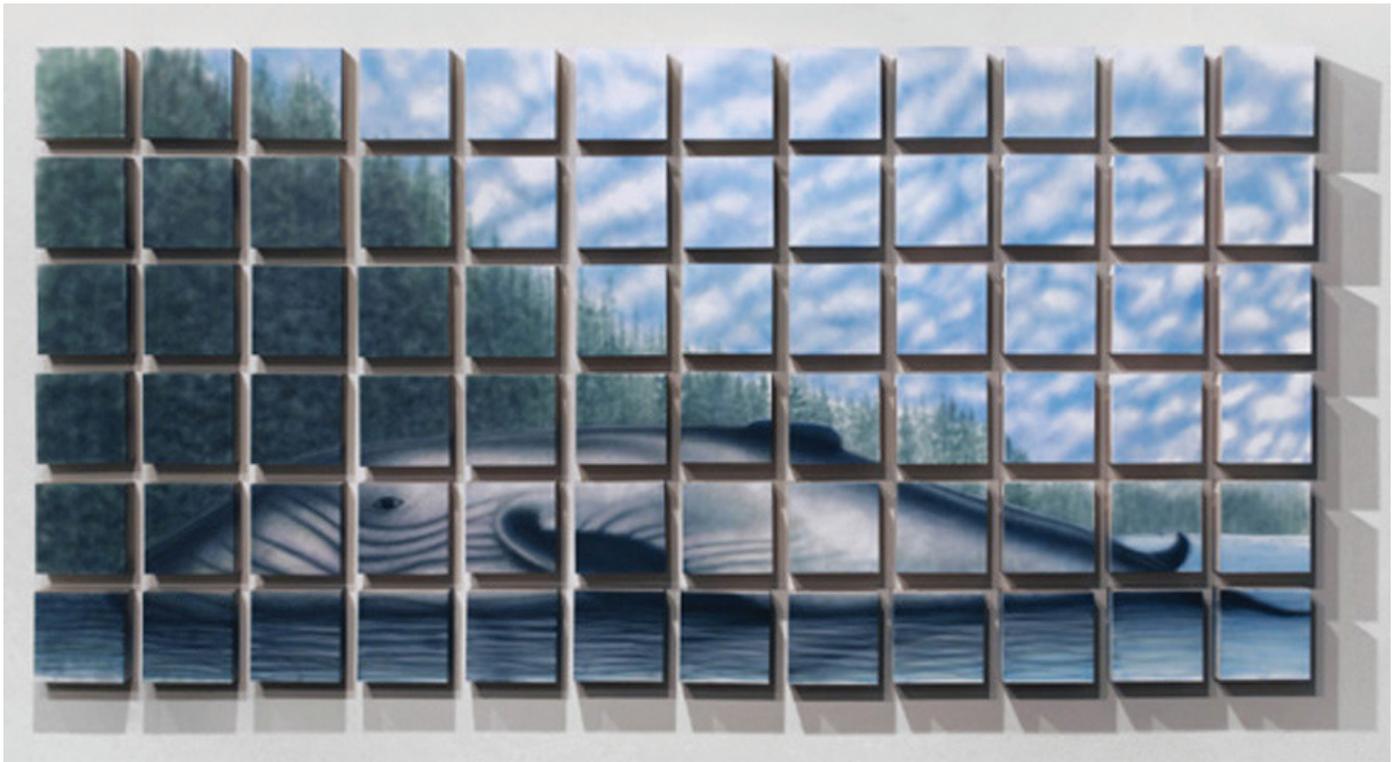
COMMON GROUND
Group Exhibition
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, Louisiana

COMMON GROUND IS an exciting expression of the creative energies of eight artists each of whom has connections with New Orleans (the common ground). Each has developed a personal art while drawing inspiration from different, multiple sources. All have received nurturing support through the University of New Orleans Fine Arts Department, and this exhibition testifies to the ability to develop individual sensibility through the student centered studio program and the capability of the artists passing through the program to articulate a creative direction that stands on its own critical merit. (The order in which each artist's work is pre-

sented in the following text is serendipitous and in no way indicative of any relative valuation.)

Megan Whitmarsh's *Giant Sculpture* is a delightfully delicious confection made tongue-shaped patched of fabric laid like dollops of gelato color gliding down the sides of a massive mound of pistachio sorbet. Tiny embroidered figures wander here and there like visitors around the base of a miniature Lumbert Dome. The dramatic contrasts in size evoke the Lilliputian scale of childhood memories when scoops of multicolored ice creams wowed young eyes at the local Borden's Dairy Store.

What a comforting idea to lap pieces of fabric together, drawing with thread to create a vision evoking associations with the bag of scraps in one's mother's sewing room or sixties animations like the *Yellow Submarine*. The soft warm tactile qualities of domestic fine arts materials overlap with the minimal design of cartoons, comic strips, children's drawings, folk arts like Hmong *paj ntaub* textiles, Kuna *molas* from the islands off the coast of Meso-



Joseph Ayers: *Deposition*, 2011. 36" high.

merica, and Early American samplers, creating a visual counterpoint for the dynamic push-pull of the dialectic between present experience and embedded memories of what has passed, between visual vibrancy experienced at a distance and the desire to touch that which is beyond one's reach.

The large eighty by forty inches *Junk Wall* demonstrates the artist's ability to command the ordering of large surfaces while maintaining the playful inventiveness of the artist's other, smaller works. The size and variety of materials incorporated into the work increases the visual complexity as well as references from viewers' experiences. A wall by virtue of the suggestion of the title, the agglomeration of image objects reminds one of those extraordinary tropical vehicles with attitude like the brightly painted ceramic trucks and buses packed to overflowing with people, fruits, and vegetables exuberantly expressing the good, happy, healthy life force of *La Pura Vida*. In this celebration of the pure joy of living a creative life, one can easily imagine the smiles on the artist's face as she discovers new expressive possibilities for giving form to her ideas and feelings so that we the viewers can empathize with the joy of life and art.

So it is a bit of a surprise to meet *Totem (Sad)* with its allusion to the less than happy. Perhaps inspired by the geometrical abstractions of traditional African sculpture (Brancusi too?), the practice of accumulating objects on community altars, or *el dia de los muertos recuerdos*, the artist's conflating of objects and patterns mimics the irrational juxtapositions of indigenous surrealisms. It also demonstrates the complexity of the artist's mind which, like that of a child, can be happy, joyful, and sad, and every shade or tint in between.

Jason Derouin's inkjet prints (*Destroyed Space Left, Wall Blocks With Gates*) are visually fascinating and conceptually intriguing from both contemporary and historical perspectives. The

inherent two-dimensionality of the print, like a photograph, which is the work of art, resolves the problems posed by the relationships among representation, illusion, and referent. The small constructions represented in the prints could themselves be considered works of art, except that Derouin makes it clear that the print is the finished work. Perhaps reminding one of early twentieth century cubist collage abstraction with its admixture of image objects, nineteenth century American *trompe l'oeil* paintings, *faux*, and *faux faux* surface ornamentation, the artist's delightfully delicate constructions suggest a sympathy with the simple geometry of Lissitzky's Constructivist prouns.

The artist's fascination with twentieth century modernism, especially that of mid-century domestic architecture is the beginning of a process involving photography, computer generated matrices, and printing, all of which are two dimensional, as preparation for designing and constructing the sculpture. With representations of textures and patterns photographed from real materials, printed on masking tape, and applied to surfaces of models, the artist creates convoluted visual circumlocutions that blur the boundaries between illusion and representation. It represents an interesting passage from three dimensions translated into two, then three, then, ultimately, two dimensional prints.

Derouin's representation of three-dimensional objects, expresses the artist's fascination with historical forms, and shares a degree of conceptual empathy with Lichtenstein's appropriation and reworking of art historical icons; similarly, too, the high-density appearance of the color of the inkjet print that elides pixilation with apparent continuous color and the older artist's re-presentations employing simulations of the simulations of commercial printmaking processes. The photograph qua print maintains a distance between the referent whose physicality one can only infer (unless the artist should choose to inform us) such that the representation of the print



Wayne Gonzales: *Untitled, n/d.* Gouche on Paper, 16 1/8" high.

mirrors the distance between the artist's present and the historical from which he draws inspiration.

The artist also seems to take pleasure in playing the role of the trickster in the pair of works like *The Bow Window Interior* and *The Bow Window*. As if revealing the secret behind the fiction of Interior by including *Exterior*, the unwitting viewer may not realize that s/he has been presented with one fiction to explain another. Who will question the fiction of the fiction when the proffered explanation seems so plausible? This is more than a display of a neodada wit from the perspective of Fred Ritchin, professor of photography and imaging at the Tisch School of Art. If the apparent objectivity of photography has been both the means of truth telling and deception, digital photography, with its ease of manipulation making it a tool of power, demands that one understand, and never make light of the fact, that deception is not a joke.

At first glance, Sophie Lvoff's *Still Life #86 (Primary)* may be read as an essay in color, form, and texture. If one understands 'primary' as a literal reference to the three primary colors, one can suppose that this is with respect to the red of what looks like a part of a windshield wiper, the yellow of the folded cloth, and the blue of the roll of tape. Primary, too, are the linear geometric design of the wiper attachment, the circular roll of tape, the regular grid of the yellow and white print on the cloth and the antithesis of the irregularity of the cloth, the crisp edges and surfaces of the roll and the blade attachment and the soft forms of the cloth, and the reflections of the cloth on the surfaces of the blade. With all these elements displayed against an ambiguous blue ground such that one's awareness of space is a function of the objects and the faint shadows they cast, *Still Life #86 (Primary)* could be appreciated as formal essay.

In a digital rendered world, however, with the capability

of imaging software readily available, and the possibilities for creating virtual reality, one can never be certain that that what we think we are seeing is merely the *verissimo* verisimilitude of simulacra. The clarity of line, shape, volume, and colors is as bright and shiny as an immaculate rain-scrubbed landscape seen through freshly polished windows. If one can never ascertain the truth of the reality one thinks one is seeing, at least one can luxuriate in the emphatic sur-reality of high density images.

Just as one may reasonably impute a disguised formalism as conscious intention or unconscious realization, one can also imagine a disguised symbolism in the spare compositions of elemental color contrasts and tonal harmonies with their allusive yet soft cozy fuzzy cuddly warm subtitles *Granny* and *Mother*. A quick search through one's art historical archives uncovers earlier examples of extreme realism and disguised symbolism in, for example, fifteenth century northern European painting and twentieth century surrealism. One might also refer to the photography of Paul Outerbridge's modernist chic as a prototype for the post-, or post post-, modernist chic of appropriation and simulation.

Both Sophie Lvoff's *Launch System* print, and Marlo Pascual's *Untitled*, involve a subtle humor whose effectiveness depends on a literal realism. The dramatic difference in scale between the pair of glass slippers and the container for the Cox Rocket Launch System For Launching Solid Propellant Model Rockets does not obscure the circumstance that both slippers and rockets have similar symbolic values. Both glass slippers, the stuff of young women's romantic fantasies (as represented in the archetypal story of *Cinderella aka The Little Glass Slipper*), and rockets (and do it yourself rocket launching kits), the embodiment of young males' science-based fantasies of reaching into outer space, represent figurative, i.e., social, and literal launches, a phenomenon employed by

Kabakov in *The Man Who Propelled Himself into Space*....

Marlo Pascual's sense of humor involves a triple entendre distant kin with conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*: a hanging basket as referent, a photograph of a hanging basket, and the hanging of a photograph of a hanging basket, with the photograph of the installation adding an additional layer of presentation/re-presentation to the palimpsest of representations, (perhaps the "referent" is itself a simulacrum). It is a good thing the artist chose to label the work *Untitled* to avoid confounding the viewer further! The credibility of the layers of illusions, allusions, and representations is supported by the cues of virtual realism. Even when the viewer walks around the work, as when examining an Elizabeth Murray collage painting, and the nature of the illusion becomes obvious, s/he may still enjoy the illusion by her/his willing suspension of disbelief.

The works of Wayne Gonzalez and Aaron McNamee represent different responses to media as inspiration. For McNamee's *Comix* and *9-Months-Times-Picayune*, news media are the literal substance of the works. Individual sheets of newsprint are laminated to form ply-paper that can support itself. The ink that once conveyed information is transformed into ambiguous shapes and patterns according to the nature of their interaction with the material substance of the paper and the glue used to bind the layers together. One may be reminded of the stained canvases of the mid-twentieth century that allowed paint to do what paint does, the playful misdirection between signifiers and referents in Jasper Johns' *False Start*, and newsprint employed by Johns in works like *Target with*.... The dynamic interplay between language as information and visual form in Art & Language here becomes submerged in an ambiguous mass of pulp.

The literal substance of the material obliterates the metaphorical substance of news as information, questioning the value of that which once moved its readers only to have been replaced by something new. Where Félix González-Torres made one aware of the number of murders that were committed in his installation *Untitled (Death by Gun)*, McNamee informs one of the physical mass of pulp used to print nine months of *The Times-Picayune*, reflecting the transience and substance of information and the media of its presentation. Beneath or beyond any of these considerations one can appreciate and enjoy the impasto texture in and of itself.

Wayne Gonzalez's gouache on paper *Untitled* works present a dialogue between image as information and the means of art inspired in part by Warhol's silkscreen paintings that reflect the subversion of meaning in modern news media. Gonzalez appropriation of images already decontextualized through the agency of various media.

The value of the images as information is further undermined by designating them untitled and numbered, and using the surfaces as a ground for painting. The applied paint follows suggestions in the images, not as information, but as formal indices, painting qua painting and floating sign system in which signifiers and signified are one. Warhol's later paintings of skulls and things demonstrate the evocative power of the skull as symbol despite its iteration and rich historical and cultural associations. Gonzalez subverts the means of painting, employing the medium of gouache whose opaque character literally and figuratively obscures what lies below, and provides a surface on which the artist can write his own tale.

Nina Schwane employs performance, video, website with

streaming video and acrylic on paper works to examine the intersection of the individual and the social where individual identities encounter cultural stereotypes representing socio-cultural normative behavior. In the video *K-A-T-E*, the artist performs in roles embodying cultural stereotypes with respect to women's sensuality as normative behavior. Through a sequence of transforming poses and expressions accompanied by lyrics, melodies, and conversations typical of those employed in media to enforce normative expectations, Schwane expresses the anxiety of one who has adopted behavioral templates inconsistent with one's identity that may reflect the pioneering work of Cindy Sherman. The lens of the camera functions as medium of documentation and the socio-cultural eye to whose expectations the many Kates adapt.

The more recent *Babe-Rental.com* website and *Babe-Rental.com Marketing Strategies* parody the sex for sale exploitation of women. The hyped burlesque sexuality of *Babe-Rental.com*, in which the artist performs various roles, is at once humorous and a critique of the exploitation of women as sexual commodity. In *Babe-Rental.com Marketing Strategies*, Schwane performs the role of an extravagantly dressed hooker working the streets of the French Quarter marketing on behalf of *Babe-Rental.com* by passing out business cards and chatting it up with visitors in the French Quarter. The performer/actress/artist adopts the character of one who, having assumed a pseudo-identity written by others, has discovered how to minimally fulfill the imposed role. Having apparently learned to work within its constraints and protect her essential innocence, well expressed in the artist's performance, the character maintains a fragile balance between innocence and exploitation.

The acrylic on metallic digital prints, *Babe-Rental.com Marketing Strategy #3: Zoe and Babe-Rental [.com Marketing Strategy #3:] Carmen*, like *Babe-Rental.com Marketing Strategy #3: Key*, [ready-made-assisted, borrowing a phrase from Duchamp] develop the marketing theme further. Presented as autographed [by the artist under each character's stage/street name] collectable cards [cartes des visites?] and poster size prints [suitable for framing?], along with artist-made business cards distributed in the French Quarter, are expressively brushed with white acrylic paint. What is the significance of the artist's use of gestural brushwork with its historical associations with expressionism in general and abstract expressionism in particular, applied over the portraits? Cultural critics like John Berger have presented a counter-argument, explaining that the association of gesture with expression is simply a cultural convention and nothing more.

The expressive brushwork in the artist's acrylic on paper *Offensive Line I II Dytich* offers an opportunity for a more elaborate explanation. The explosive energy of brushwork cascading through space like an elaborate display of fireworks seems at first to represent a quite different mode than the more conceptual performance and social critique. One could, however, propose that the two apparently different modes are sympathetic expressions emanating from the artist, and that the energetic painting of *Offensive Line* and the artist's exuberance in conceiving, performing, manipulating, and developing her ideas, and the ease with which she wears the delightfully outrageous costume are parallel manifestations of an essential idea or feeling.

In assuming the persona of an artist sublimating her deepest feelings and anxieties as an expressionist painter and an artist acting out multiple roles that express latent desire and anger,



Joseph Ayers: *Little Bird*. Acrylic on Panel, 5" high.

Schwane's work would be more than social critique. Perhaps the chosen title, *Offensive Line*, for the expressionist mode in isolation refers to taking an active rather than passive role? And that the active painting on the surface of the prints is the act of the artist as expressionist and the expression of the character whose image is printed as sublimated expressions of the conceptual-performance-painter artist? In feminist research studying the problematic relationships among identity, social models, and behavior, *whiting out* is used as a metaphor for covering up. Or perhaps the brushwork on the prints only has the look of expressionist brushwork without the metaphysical and psychological in the manner of Rauschenberg, Johns, and Mitchell, and is only what it is.

Joseph Ayers' deceptively simple paintings slowly work their subtle magic. Lulled into a state of pleasant languor by the unpretentious five by five by two inches small dimensions of a *Little Bird*, the mind only slowly begins to realize that there is something odd about what one is seeing. At first only a vague feeling, eyes begin scanning the gentle surfaces of the panel in search of something not quite right. Everything seems to be the way it should be: pale blue sky smeared with the hazy clouds typical of a hot and humid Louisiana summer day, a cardinal resting silently on a single branch, head slightly turned to look towards the viewer's space while showing off its downy neck and crested head....yet...where is the tree? Twig-like shapes extend from the mid-air perch seeming more like roots than twigs. Oh, but they are not twigs! These are the extended toes of the cardinal's scrawny feet. How odd and yet how natural it all seems. The more one sees the more one begins to look more carefully at the world, seeing even more. How perfectly natural is the little panel for a *Little Bird*!

From five by five to thirty-six by seventy-two inches! The difference in scale of *Deposition* would be enough to draw one's attention let alone the juxtaposition of iron bars, stranded whale, and tree-lined shallow cove. Yet the simple ratio of length (six feet) twice as long as height (three feet), the subdued range of grays, pale blues, and muted greens, and the unobtrusive brushwork evoke a quiet feeling equilibrium enhanced by the expressionless mien of the whale who seems unmoved by it all. Is s/he just resting, or has s/he been stranded when the tide went out? And where is the viewer standing to peer through an iron barred window at almost water level? The viewer seems to be standing in a room whose floor is below ground/water level. For someone born and raised in southern Louisiana this is a new experience. Basements do not exist in southern Louisiana unless filled with groundwater. It is enough of a problem to keep out the water from a slab house during a heavy rain!

What is happening, or, rather, not happening here? Perhaps the title offers a clue? Certainly not "taking testimony outside of court." "Molecules settling out of a solution?" Better. Combine that with "material (like sediment) being added to a landform." Even better. The swamps, marshes and beaches were formed through sediments deposited through millennia. Eventually the trees and whale will become petroleum reserves millions of years from now. Perhaps that is the explanation for the expressionless face.

□



Laura Gipson: *Losing Ground*. 2011.

Stitch in Time

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

STITCH IN TIME
Group Exhibition
Antenna Gallery
New Orleans, LA

IN A 2001 *New York Times* article, author Rita Reif recounts an early period in the career of Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. Just after 1956, Abakanowicz married and moved into an apartment measuring about 130 square feet that served as both home to the couple and studio to the artist. The space was too small for stretched canvas, and no resources existed for sculpture. Abakanowicz turned to what she describes as “the world of fiber,” a

realm unbound from tradition and limitless in its possibilities. Next came her monumental *abakans*, which found fame during the crafts movement of the 1960s.

Abakanowicz turned to the medium to solve a problem in her practice. It met her need. Fiber is practical like this; its variety of applications includes protection, enclosure, concealment, warmth, illustration, or fashion. The process of weaving or stitching literally links these disparate functions. Stitches themselves are conceptually unlimited – they are more than a needle pulling thread. Too much laughter brings stitches to the sides, and words stitch together thoughts by some indescribable process of organization.

Two exhibits at Antenna Gallery have considered the vast and various processes and concepts related to fiber. In 2008, the



Steve MacDonald from *Stitch in Time*, 2011. Antenna Gallery.

work of seven artists in the exhibit *Stitch* explored the process of creating art objects with fibers. Susan Gisleson, who curated the exhibit, suggested this process paralleled the ways information is disseminated, and that the form of fiber is directly linked to ideas about communication. For some, this kind of communication is the essence of art.

More recently, Gisleson and fellow artist and Antenna member Laura Gipson curated the second iteration on this theme, *Stitch in Time*. In this manifestation of the theme, the work specifically addresses content inherent in the process of stitching, particularly in terms of time and connection. Weaving and sewing both have a certain meditative quality to them, slowing time in their practice. Also, fiber fundamentally involves connectedness. As is often suggested by the work of Christo and Jeanne Claude, there is no amount of physical or metaphoric space that cannot be joined in some way, and the use of fibers is the most accessible means.

To accommodate larger areas of content, the original, all-female list expanded threefold. Emerging artists and male counterparts joined some of the artists from the first exhibit. Their work packed the gallery space: two- and three-dimensional pieces in most imaginable media descended from ceilings, mounted pedestals, projected in videos, and hung on the walls. Walking through the cramped gallery was like weaving through fine pathways left between the threads of the artwork framed by the gallery walls.

Gipson and Gisleson curated each other for the exhibit. Both treat the subject of motherhood, a theme closely linked with the content of fiber, through a combination of traditional sewing and unconventional forms. Gipson's *Wail* and *Angry Baby* take screaming children as subject matter. Gipson draws with the thread, leaving loose strands that read like cacophony emitting from their gaping maws. The drawing, on silk, floats above indiscernible layers of text – a palimpsest that suggests white noise.



Laura Gipson: *Angry Baby I*, 2011. Antenna Gallery.

The piece has architectural structure, and tension fills the negative space between the two surfaces. But warm, motherly love is imbued in the stitches, which embroider the design of even her most difficult moments. Gisleson's sculptural piece strings bubble packets dotted with birth control pills and imagery and text about reproduction. The stitch physically links the parts of the piece, but overall, and in line with the content of the exhibit, the work evinces ideas of counting and timing. It evokes the process of knitting, or methodically counting each day and pill, or perhaps even prayers rubbed along a strand of beads. Each process has to do with planning and preparation for, or against, motherhood, in physical and spiritual ways.

The surprising ways Gipson and Gisleson employ stitches are paralleled by their inclusion of video. The medium of video could be read as a process of weaving or stitching together single images into one, complex layer. Amanda Cassingham's *10,000 Buttons* might serve as such a visual metaphor. In this piece, thread weaves scattered buttons into a growing mass under the gentle direction of a voice-over, much like a teachable moment on Sesame Street. Rob Snead's *The Fix/When All Else Fails* falls within a nar-

rative tradition – an aspect of both film and fiber. The video hilariously traces the decline of Snead's sewing machine and the ensuing trials in completing his project. Some passages are painfully long, arousing the keen frustration peculiar to persistence in the face of defeat. In the end, there is catharsis. Despite the smoke, and the jams, and the multiple machines, Snead finally finishes a sewn soft sculpture: a Singer sewing machine. Then he throws it out of his window after kicking it to death.

Snead's piece is a metaphor for the practice of art itself. Though it can be extremely rewarding, often the studio is a war zone. Battles rage between the artist and the object, and the world that the artwork eventually meets. But, it is that process that imbues the work with meaning, again, like Christo. Fiber work in any form is extremely process-oriented, and the variety of interpretations on that theme is present in the *Stitch* series. The fact that the gallery produced a second version of the show is proof. It is dubious whether the question of fiber as fine art is still relevant, and this exhibit makes a strong case for blurring the distinction. □



Billy Solitario: *Oscillating Onion*. 2011. Oil on Canvas, 48" high.

Billy Solitario's New Paintings

BY JUDITH H BONNER

BILLY SOLITARIO
Recent Work
Le Mieux Galleries
New Orleans, LA

AS ARTISTS EXPLORE their subjects today, many of them paint in a super-realistic, or hyper-realistic manner; a number of them specialize in *trompe l'oeil* paintings, particularly still lifes. While Billy Solitario's works at first appear like *trompe l'oeil* paintings, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that the artist combines *trompe l'oeil* with textural brush strokes in order to produce a more tactile finish. His landscapes are generally more painterly in their overall finish.

Solitario's recent works at LeMieux Galleries, all oil paintings on canvas, focus on landscapes and oversize still lifes featuring seafood that is culturally associated with Louisiana and the Gulf Coast—primarily blue crabs, oysters, and fish. His still lifes recall the large-scale still life paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe, who reasoned that if an artist painted big still lifes, then onlookers would

take them seriously. Like O'Keeffe, Solitario depicts his oversize subjects realistically with an emphasis on geometrical form.

Two large canvases, each measuring four-feet square, depict sliced purple onions with the slices haphazardly stacked and reassembled, and the overall ovoid shape of the onion set against a gray ground. *Oscillating Onion* shows an ominous-looking fly under the ledge of one of the onion slices. *Onion Intimidating Garlic*, which also shows an insect on the top of the onion, contrasts a small bulb of garlic with an enormous onion, the volume of which is increased through irregularly stacked slices. Here the size of the onion and garlic also reflects the proportion of these ingredients in most recipes. This work, like all the paintings in this exhibition, is not overly detailed. Throughout this exhibition the artist restrains unnecessarily detailed elements in order to achieve compositional unity.

Several paintings, which depict closely-arranged oyster shells, appear as though they have been recently opened, for they retain a sense of moisture. The color palette is limited to ultramarine blue, cerulean, alizarin crimson, and gray with white highlights that suggest the fluid from the oysters. As a side note, the



Billy Solitario: *Oil on Cat Island*. 2011. Oil on Canvas, 30" high.

use of alizarin color recalls the red dye that derives from plants or insects, commonly cited as “cochineal.” A drop of water depicted in the top left background, also reinforces the impression of freshness, as well as making reference to water as the source of life.

In a near-grisaille work titled *Speckled Trout Lying on a Bucket*, the fish almost seems to merge with the bucket. The trout is set against a black ground to emphasize the silvery quality of the fish as it rests across the top of a silver-gray metal pot or bucket. The painting makes reference to man’s “catch” from nature juxtaposed to an object created through technology. Areas of the metal pot retain the integrity of the brush stroke. The fish’s eyes are clear as though the fish is newly caught, rather than the cloudy eyes of a fish that has been placed on ice. Throughout these works Solitario subtly underscores the abundance of seafood in Louisiana, nicknamed the “Sportsman’s Paradise,” and the culture and way of life for the people of this state.

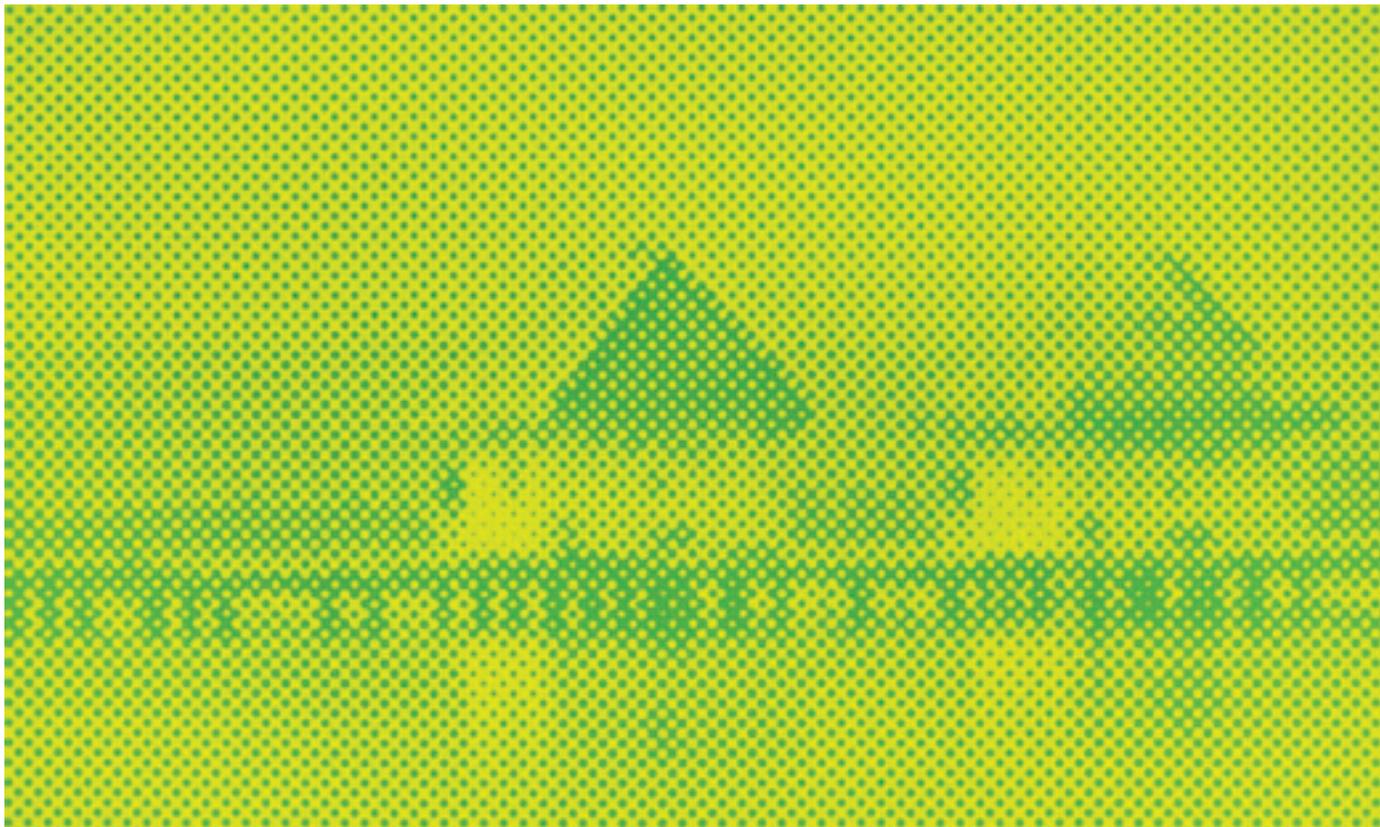
The dependence upon foodstuffs and the dominant flavors of certain foods is apparent in an epic-sized work titled *Crab and Garlic*, in which the crustacean is placed as though hovering over a garlic bulb, the outer paper-like membrane of the garlic already reflecting the effects from the crab; with which it will be cooked. Another work shows a *Blue Crab on Ledge* as though it is studiously observing all that takes place below. The orange joints on the crab’s claws appear like the irises of exotic birds or strange prehistoric creatures. A series of still lifes feature clusters of garlic bulbs with their pointed ends sliced off, a most unusual subject to occupy such large canvases. Although these works are easily recognized for what they are, they could possibly be another type of life form.

A small vertical painting of a crab, wherein the crab seems to be suspended by one claw, is reminiscent of the late 19th century *nature morte* paintings of birds, ducks, squirrels, and fish

in which the wild game is strung by a cord and hooked over a nail to drain the creature’s juices and tenderize the meat. While the emphasis of these early paintings fell on the lifelessness of the dead animal, Solitario draws attention to the liveliness of the subject. This is particularly true in his paintings of crabs, with the color still vibrant as though the crab has just been withdrawn from its watery habitat.

Solitario also exhibits landscapes, some of which have a subtext that might not be easily deciphered were it not for such titles as *Cleaning Tar Balls on Cat Island*. In *Cleaning Cat Island*, the workmen shown in mid-ground could be on another type of work detail except for the blue gloves that identify the wearers as handling hazardous materials. On an otherwise peaceful scene titled *Oil on Cat Island*, black lines along the shoreline and occasional black cypress knees identify the Deep Horizon oil spill. The black lines and a dead tree mark what would be an unblemished scene. The black line recalls the omnipresent brown line on New Orleans buildings after Hurricane Katrina. These markings make reference to man’s hand on nature and the questionable practices that have deleterious effects on nature.

On North Island, Chandeleur shows two men standing in a motorboat, one holding a fish. This appears like a peaceful scene with birds high in a cloudy sky and near the bluish greens near the horizon. A dark gray sky in one of Solitario’s pre-oil spill paintings of nesting pelicans portends the disastrous spill. His focus on the oil spill is perfectly understandable in consideration of the fact that he has made his home on the Gulf Coast in Mississippi, in Florida, and in Louisiana. Solitario is subtle in these landscapes; as a consequence the meaning is often not immediately apparent until one learns the title. And once the significance is revealed, there is still a sense of viewer comfort. Like his still life paintings, these compositions invite continued study. □



Wayne Gonzales: *Rigolets*, 20. A/C,

Gravity & Mechanized Space

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

WAYNE GONZALES
Light to Dark/Dark to Light
New Orleans Museum of Art
New Orleans, LA

WAYNE GONZALES IS ultimately a painter of melancholy. This is something of a surprise for an artist so apparently disposed to programmatic method. Seen in the exhibition *Light to Dark/Dark to Light*, at the New Orleans Museum of Art, his work, after some contemplation, shifts from fierce precision to quietly expressed emotion. In reproduction and from a certain distance, his method has the look of a divisionist-benday dot fusion. But for our historical moment, of course, this registers as digital pixilation, and, as such, feels mechanical, severe. You see endless pigmented units in carefully intersected fields. Gonzales's severity curtails the thrust of feelings, but keeps them readily at hand. Slowly, a certain solemnity, indeed a sense of melancholy, becomes ambient.

One reason for this is his circumscribed color systems – ghostly monochromes and near-monochromes that blunt the clari-

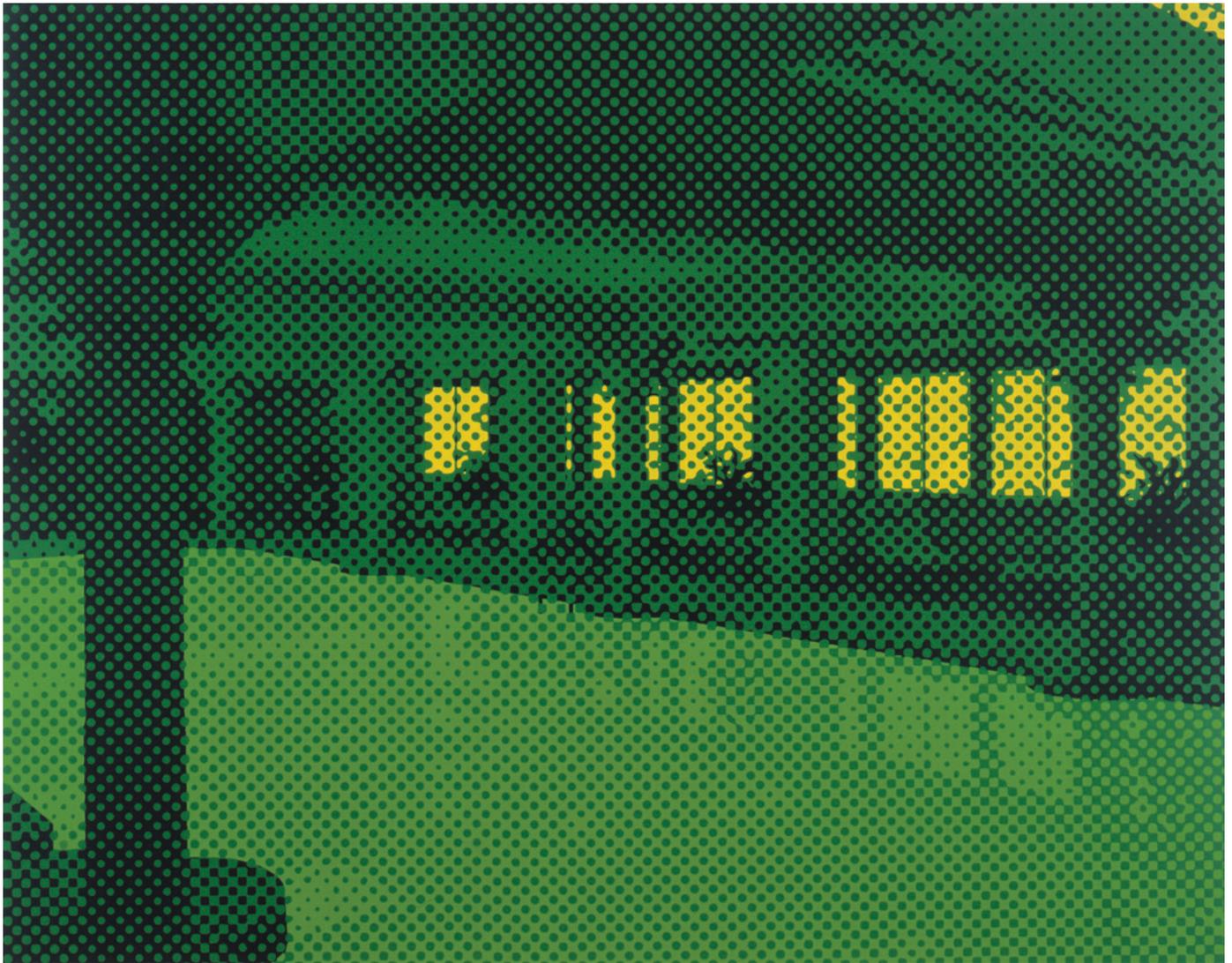
ty of your perception, and, in fact, of your thoughts. In a sense, one feels abandoned, yet thoroughly intrigued. Consider the nearly nine-foot wide *Rigolets*. Immediately, its massive presence and tight pictorial strategy imply a sort of South Louisiana sublime reduced to an icon. But as you close in, the canvas seems far less a strategy. It becomes a wraith of a landscape. Its legendary subject, those splendid old fishing camps, now storm-ravaged, are seen vanishing within a zone of perplexing almost-green dots. Sorrowful implications are unavoidable.

Owing something to the leanest of Seurat's *Gravelines* series, though far larger, *Rigolets* is mesmerizing and masterful, but I fancy a viewer saying, "I think I'm missing a great deal here." The image seems inchoate – yet absorbing, too – the way black and white photographs have always seemed, but especially the way they seem today. Like enigmas from an earlier era, wan palimpsests. In this, and other paintings at NOMA, with their cryptic and melting hues, Gonzales provides the barest evidence to convey somberness.

His technique, despite its evident formality, also contributes to this tenor. But it does so, as it were, unwittingly. When



Wayne Gonzales: *Seasted Crowd*, 2011. A/C, 68 x 86 inches. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery.



Wayne Gonzales: *Oceana*, 2005. A/C, 68'' high.

coupled with the haunted colors, his exacting approach is mitigated, and it generates a vaguely dramatic quality. A work like *Oceana*, to be sure, could read as a purist maneuver — visual sensation for its own sake. The pictorial structure is certainly elaborate enough. It's a dizzying asymmetrical pattern, shrewdly controlled, and compositionally flawless. But its restrained colors modulate the design — and give pause. They take it beyond purely formal considerations. Human psychology comes into play, however obliquely. Like other examples of Gonzales's "real estate paintings," the piece engages the spectre of power. Here, when his green units darken, blurring the markers of privilege, and his caustic yellows flood the windows, you think "power and emptiness" — yet another instance of depressed mood.

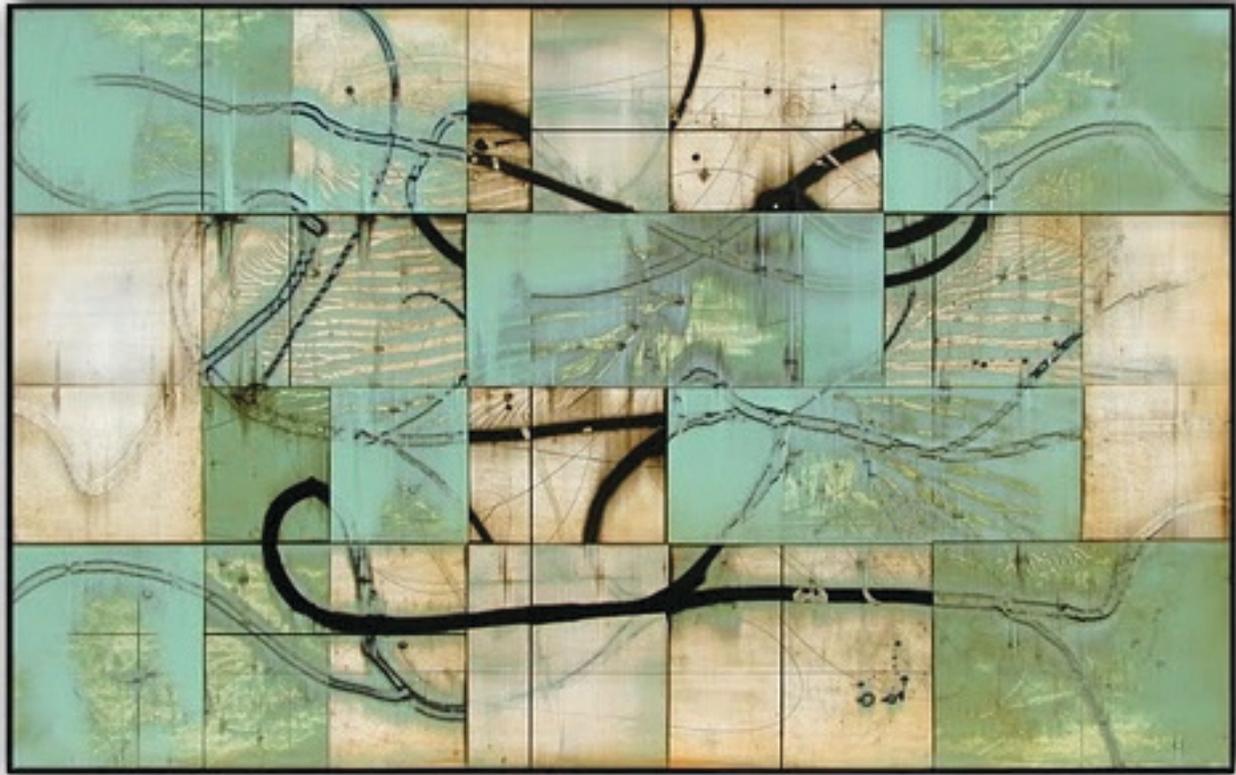
All of the patterning and mechanizing of space certifies Gonzales's acknowledged debt to Pop art, most notably to the silkscreens he studied in Andy Warhol's retrospective at MoMA in 1989. For a time, he too made silkscreens, grasping the notion of refashioning an image in unexpected ways. Now, over 20 years later, he continues to refashion and, indeed, to recreate images, and to overlay them with rigorously arrayed abstract schemes.

This regimen engenders a markedly poignant effect in his crowd paintings. The subject fits his mode utterly. It involves a

pre-existing pattern that he both accentuates and unbridles. In *Seated Crowd*, you note a measure of the familiar Pop remoteness that results from mechanical processes. But you also note a gravity that pervades the entire painting. Gonzales manages this impression, to a certain degree, with leaden chromatics, as I say. A mass of unwavering faces and unwavering gazes is blanketed in a curious tinted grey.

That gravity, however, is heightened, and keenly, by the sheer sensuousness of paint. In this instance, the paint is conspicuously more palpable, more gesturally applied. It enlivens, humanizes the whole. And it renders the figures distinct. Those unwavering postures start to signify something more. You consider many possibilities wherein contemporary history holds us hostage — political possibilities, commercial possibilities, technological possibilities. There is also the conception that, in this metaphorical crowd, our distinctiveness is rejected, engulfed by a rushing culture.

These ideas surface in all of Gonzales's crowd scenes, even those depicting an applauding audience or a sporting event. They suggest a certain bleakness in our condition. This is an instance of rapt art-making breaking down before the strange sadness of our time. □



Michael Kessler: *Duenna*. 2011. Acrylic on Board, 52" high.

Kessler's Southwest Landscape

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

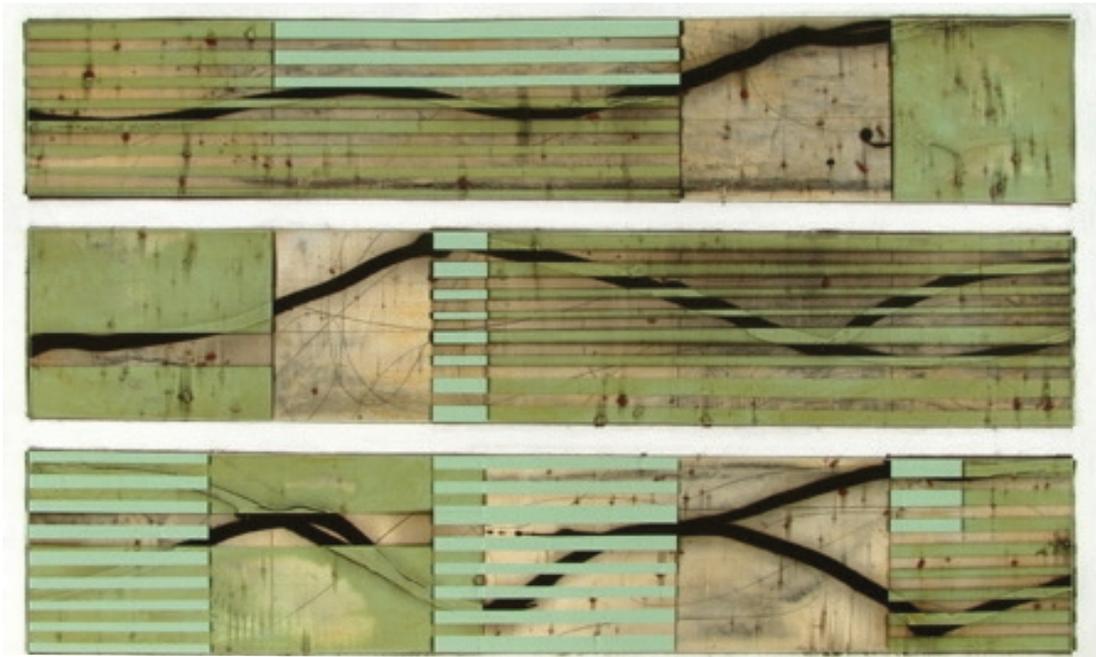
MICHAEL KESSLER
Bending the Curve
Gallery Bienvenu
New Orleans, LA

AFTER ENTERING THE GALLERY and wandering from one painting to another, the low key contrasts between pale lichenous greens and muted ochres, amorphous shapes and an assertive geometry gave rise to a vague sense of déjà vu. There was something familiar about the geometric precision with which the grids subdivided the fastidiously crafted surfaces. The rectilinear rigor of the compositions, which echoed the Spartan simplicity of the gallery space, seemed more in tune with the air-conditioned inside environment than with the intense humid heat outside, the quiet color schemes more empathetic with the out of doors than the inner geometry and coolness. That these contrasting elements were both mildly discomfiting and familiar for reasons that were elusive at the time was puzzling.

Only slowly, after further looking and musing, did the sense of déjà vu familiarity begin to crystallize as memories from

many miles and years of driving through the arid high deserts of the Southwest eased their way into consciousness. Having reached this state of remembrance of things past through observation and intrapersonal association, allowing time for the experience of the works themselves to develop into a degree of understanding before considering what the artist or others might have written, it was evident that a virtual convergence between viewer and the works of art had begun to coalesce. Later, reading that the artist had been inspired by the New Mexico landscape came as no surprise.

Perhaps Kessler is simply carrying on the tradition of mapmaking and the ability to layer various kinds of information to represent a site. Old maps can be very interesting for what they reveal about the state of knowledge at the time they were made and their imaginative inaccuracies very delightful as an unwitting art. The long lines sinuously meandering like dancing chromosomes through the eight feet high compositions of *Cornute* could have been inspired by old maps presenting the changing courses of wandering waterways (or the view of a delta plain from the air). The narrow range of colors employed by the artist is like those used to signify changes in the contour of the land on the state highway maps one picks up at the visitors' center after crossing the New Mexico (or any other) state line. Rectilinear grids are



Michael Kessler: *Condign*. 2011. Acrylic on Board, 40" high.

found on state maps where they indicate the limits of the counties and on topographic maps indicating longitude and latitude. It is ironic that the need to define the limits of civilization vis-à-vis nature is so strong that the boundaries of natural habitats, nature preserves, national parks, and national forest are defined by straight lines and right [rather than wrong?] angles like the bars of a zoo. The empty rectangles spaced here and there in the artist's compositions look that seem so contrary to the topographical character of the compositions are often seen in a slow download of a Google Map and the slowly resolving pastiches of Google Earth from this digital age. Perhaps the artist is contrasting the two kinds of information from the geological and from the digital, the observable information of the New Mexico landscape and the digital bundling and representation of the geological as electronic, in the medium of painting with acrylics is itself a synthesis of two modes, pre-industrial painting and industrial chemistry.

This convergence noted above, however, was not complete. As can happen with the matching of two images using a range finder lens, the two angles of perspective did not coincide in perfect congruency. As one focuses on the clarity of one plane when focusing with a macro lens with its narrow depth of field, what has just been seen clearly dissolves into uncertainty. The brain, unlike optical systems and the problem posed by depth of field, creates a whole vision of the world in which all is in focus, with what appears as soft focus effect actually due to particulate interference. The dynamic role of opposition in Kessler's works can be disconcerting but it is also important for the expressive efficacy of the work. Through the soft focus-like dissolution of edges and shapes, the artist effectively defines *passages* from one vaguely defined plane to another, creating an interlocking maze that suggests the influence of early cubist painting (avowed by the artist) and represents the visible topographical evidence of the geological forces that have shaped the New Mexican landscape.

An initial, general impression of immaculate, scrubbed, and polished surfaces upon first entering the pristine gallery space slowly yielded to comparisons from personal experience and

deployment of metaphorical language to characterize what was being experienced. The meticulous precision in the definition and alignment of rectilinear shapes was compromised by indefinite edges that dissolve into one another, an elision of boundaries, shapes, and apparent planes reminiscent of the dissolution of form by the intense, unmitigated light of the desert sun and the everywhere-one-looks eroded boundaries of stratigraphic formations.

In *Duenna*, a fifty-two by eighty-four inch acrylic on board, the rigorous Cartesian geometry of three horizontal rows and three columns vies with green and pale ochre rectangles. Asymmetrical serpentine lines reminiscent of early medieval illuminated manuscripts flow through layers of colors and shapes. Gridlines alternately affirm their authority as defining elements and disappear into sand-colored surfaces and green planes. Sinuous lines wind their way through the composition, submerging beneath verdant patches, their continuity here indicated by parallel lines and there by an even more obscure presence-by-implication as subtle as the traces of a snail's passage in early morning dew or a network of veins beneath translucent skin.

As intriguing as the amorphous and ambiguous areas of the painting — one of the myriad interesting qualities of southwest topography — may be, the severe regularity of the lines can be distracting. There is something disquieting about the contrast between the amorphous and the geometric, the ambiguous and the precisely defined that is consistent with experience of the southwest as a place where the straight lines and ninety-degree angles are the signs human activity. past or present.

For example, as one travels west along I-10 after entering New Mexico from Arizona, the sandy soil of the desert with its threadbare vestment of dusty green creosote bushes and sparsely distributed yucca and cacti give way to vistas of the lush green fields and pecan orchards of the Mesilla Valley against the backdrop of the desert aridity of the Organ Mountains. The edges and angles of civilization appearing here and there amid the natural hint at what will be discovered as one descends into the valley and discovers

the increasing signs of human presence such as one might expect to find if one could walk through a Mont Sainte Victoire landscape by Cezanne. Certainly the artist's obvious fascination with geometric order and its contrapuntal relationship with the natural is an essential quality of the composition, an aspect of the artist's work more in tune with the paintings of Juan Gris than the analytic cubism of Braque and Picasso.

Interesting insights can be gained by considering Kessler's response to the southwest landscape compared to those who preceded him in the Gila Wilderness, at Chaco Canyon, and the Pueblos. The Ancient Ones developed their architectural art using the resources of the land as their structures evolved from simple pit dwellings to round kivas to cliff dwellings constructed in barely accessible niches in naturally eroded sandstone canyon walls. The Anasazi used natural stone, some of which was shaped into approximately rectangular blocks, to construct circular and rectilinear structures whose order and geometry contrasts with the apparent irregularity of the natural stone. Although human artifice is remarkable, nature dominates.

If Kessler's confluences of the regular and irregular exhibits a degree of empathy with Anasazi architecture, the assertive dominance of the grid in his compositions can be seen as reflecting the structural difference between Pueblo architecture before and after the European invasion. While adobe is the common medium of both Pueblo and Colonial buildings, how the mixture of sand, earth, vegetal fiber, and water was used to build the walls was different in an important way. Pre-colonial Pueblo buildings employed the puddling method in which fluid masses of adobe mixture were applied by hand in amorphous layers to build up the walls. These easily eroded walls were combined in what seems like a random placement of one building adjacent to another, the shared walls adding structural support like a honeycomb, with small open plazas and enclosed sacred spaces included where appropriate. The result was an asymmetrical complex that reflected the integral relationship between nature and the lives of the inhabitants.

Europeans introduced the use of molds for forming adobe bricks that, together with the organization of urban spaces around the central plaza with its circumferential hierarchical social orders, represents the imposition of European concepts of order on the indigenous cultures and landscape of the southwest. This ordering has evolved into the building of adobe looking structures whose inner structure uses modern media while simulating the appearance of traditional handmade adobe. The question, then, is to what degree can one consider Kessler's gridded compositions a reflection of ordering through the lens of western cultural traditions. Are the grids an imposition or are they an effort to reconcile the artist's cultural training with the nature of southwestern high desert?

The grid is not necessarily a limiting element, as Agnes Martin has so elegantly demonstrated. The ephemeral luminosity of Martin's delicately penciled grids mimics the effects of the intense New Mexico sun. The incident light dissolves the structural character of the horizontal and vertical lines much as the midday summer sun transforms Pueblo complexes like those at the Isleta or Laguna Pueblos into luminous volume of light. In Martin's works of this nature, inspired from the area around the village of Cuba where she lived, the luminous disintegration of ordered structure is due to the lightest of pencil marks leaving the slightest of imprints of the canvas. The ordering of surfaces in Kessler's work is more aggressively insistent.

Kessler relates that he chose the media of art for expressing his fascination with the geology of New Mexico instead of science. The information and understanding that shaped his vision, however, were those of science, not intuition. As a product of western civilization with its encoded modes of organizing and processing information, even what constituted significant information, Kessler had to find a means for translating the materialism of the scientific world view into the ambiguities world of art.

Native Americans explained the world by means of creation myths and developed a shamanistic metaphysics that allowed the perception of some measure of control over that world. These mythologies, shaped by the data and phenomena of where they were living, included an amorphous notion of time that, among the Navaho especially, is similar to western representations of space in which one can move freely in any direction. Past and present and future co-exist as congruent and co-extensive.

This notion of time is rather like the space-time of geological processes in that one can see in the landscape the results of those phenomena. As the geology of New Mexico was a major inspiration for the artist's works, one might think of the ambiguous spatiality in some areas of the compositions, where boundaries are elided and the artist's manipulation of physical media mimics geological processes like sedimentation, deposition, and erosion, as analogous to the Navaho model of time. However, while the visual may serve as metaphor for geological processes, defying any effort to imagine a fixed model of spatial relationships, the strength of the geometric is reminiscent of De Stijl's stringent reductivism. Think artists and architects like Mondrian, Vantongerloo, and Rietveld. In the works *Quadrel* and *Condign*, the insistent patterns composed of small rectangles seem less the visual equivalent of the geological forces that shaped the region and more attempts to create visual equivalents of musical rhythms, schematic abstractions that tend to overpower the representational suggestions.

Seeing his work in the context of artists like O'Keefe and Martin who chose to live near Cuba to be closer to the primordial landscape of New Mexico and away from the distractions of major urban centers provides little understanding beyond the shared love for a place. The problem that the artist has posed for himself is not unlike that of earth artists like De Maria, Heizer and Smithson. Slicing through the eastern edge of Mormon Mesa overlooking the Virgin River Valley (*Double Negative*), Michael Heizer reveals the evidence of billions of years of geological activity. De Maria's *Lightning Field* is experienced through living in the on-site cabin for twenty-four hours, sitting on the porch and taking walks while watching the changing phenomena of reflected sunlight as it glides across the desert north of Quemado from late afternoon to early morning, reflecting from and appearing to dissolve four hundred plus stainless steel poles. These earth works, however, require one to make a pilgrimage to experience these presentations of nature at not readily accessible sites. The works themselves cannot be bought and placed in a gallery or museum. Kessler's has undertaken a challenge similar to that addressed earlier by Italian Futurism, i.e., translating multiple dimensions of experience in two, representing phenomena instead of fact, and his work can be purchased to decorate one's home, or displayed in a gallery or museum.





Nicole Eisenman: Installation, 2011. New Orleans Museum of Art. Prospect.2 New Orleans.

Davenport & Eisenman

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

BRUCE DAVENPORT JR
NICOLE EISENMAN
Prospect.2
New Orleans Museum of Art
New Orleans, LA

THE ARTWORKS OF Bruce Davenport, Jr., and Nicole Eisenman literally confront each other, facing off from the two parallel walls in the Great Hall at New Orleans Museum of Art. The spatial divide is wide enough that they can be read as two distinct exhibitions. But, their curious juxtaposition invites questioning and comparison.

Eisenman became known in the early to mid-1990s for her figurative paintings and installation. From the same clutch of figure painters as John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage, her works were characteristically, terribly funny. She pulls from her own identity and draws from art history, gender issues, libido, wide cultural spans, and the sensual act of painting itself. The results, in both large and small scale, pay homage to as varied sources as Philip Guston, Renoir, the Fauves, the Renaissance in Northern Europe,

German Expressionism, and cubism, to name just a few.

The paintings at NOMA, less compositionally complex than their forebears, resemble cubist mug shots. They are straightforward distillations of shape and color, but monumental in scale. They tower over the viewer at about six feet in height, which is extended by their positions far up on the wall. Eye contact is impossible. Their expressions might be likened to the static, stoic images of known criminals that appear regularly in all forms of media in a format now ubiquitous and easily recalled. The titles of the paintings are just as generic, and anonymous: *Guy Capitalist* (who sports silver dollars for pupils) joins *Guy Artist* (in a beret) and *Guy Racer* (wearing goggles). Though the paint is lushly applied in areas, it loses its tactility in most others, emphasizing the viewer's distance from these caricatures and the safeness of their anonymity.

Eisenman collaged floating images of non-Western ritual masks and statuary on the surface of the canvases. Initially, it is a quizzical choice, but it makes sense in the context of the cubist fracturing of the faces of her subjects. *Guy Artist* appears to snort one of the masks up his right nostril like a drug, perhaps in reference to the ways Picasso filtered the formal qualities of such



Nicole Eisenman; *Guy Racer*, 2011-oil-mixed-can.

masks into early cubist painting. *Guy Artist* and his companions hold the collaged forms in their attention but seem to disallow them movement, which is intrinsic to truly appreciating them. They deny the performances that imbue them with meaning. Eisenman seems to comment that the cubists missed the point too.

The Break Up features a single portrait like the three paintings it joins. In this group, it is the only portrait that gazes inward and includes hands, which clutch a mobile device. The title and the gesture suggest the coldness of a text message separation, further illustrated by the figure's slumping posture. Unlike his mates, his neck has totally disappeared into his body, comparatively shrinking him just a few inches in both scale and composition. The mask-like face references the collage in the adjacent paintings, though there is no collage in this composition. Eisenheim reveals only her subject's four o'clock shadow that

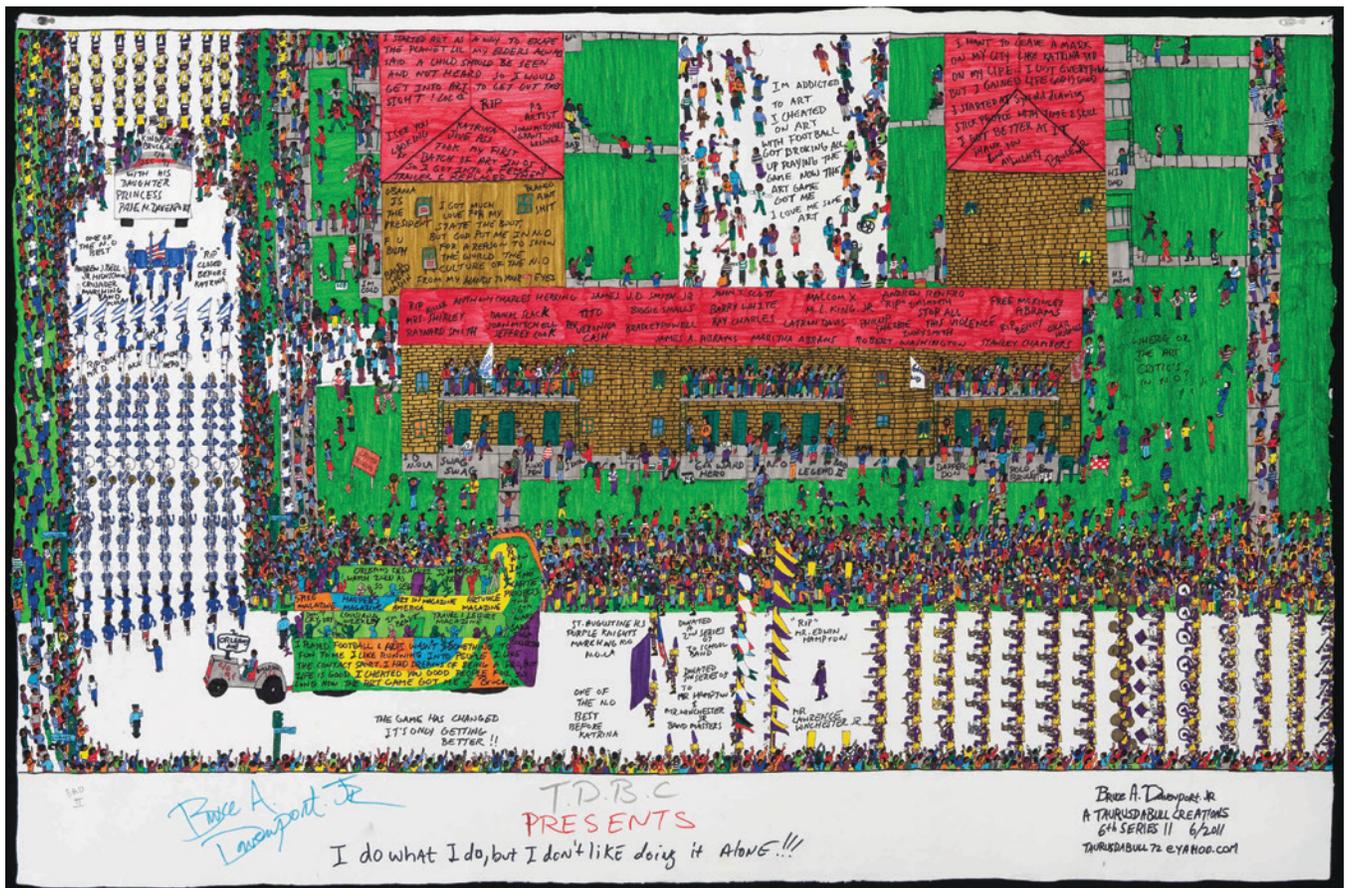
surrounds a mouth consisting of a straight line of red paint squirted from the tube. The expression implies resignation to a lonely fate.

Eisenman's Fauvist palette contrasts her figures' emotionless expressions. Her paintings, which zoom in on the faces of her figures - odd, because she gives this investigative vantage point to anonymously abstracted figures - also contrast the trademark, distant, aerial-but-side view of Davenport's drawings. Despite the distant vantage point, Davenport's images convey closeness. Davenport, or B.A.D. II, or Taurus da Bull Creations - all of which appear as signatures at the bottom of his works - is known for standard-sized drawings of marching bands in pen and marker on white paper. His compositions are filled with figures rendered with color and line, resulting in a horror vacui that evokes the feeling of packing into a Mardi Gras crowd.

These works, which Davenport labels as his sixth series,



Bruce A Davenport Jr: Installation, 2011. New Orleans Museum of Art. Prospect.2 New Orleans.



Bruce A Davenport Jr: *I do what I do but I don't like doing it alone*, 2011. Courtesy the artist.

depict just that. It is initially difficult to discern his specificity, but Davenport maps the most well-known parade routes – Canal Street, St. Charles. He joins the city’s marching bands with the thronging crowds that bear witness to their annual performances along these streets. The choreographed lines of the marching bands radiate from the crux of the neutral ground, where the denizens of the parade turn to complete their route.

Davenport fills the spaces between the lines with text. Overall the text is extremely didactic, reading like notes in a diagram. But, unlike Eisenman’s somewhat clinical analysis of form, Davenport’s text is personal and autobiographical. He relates a history that is embedded in his own life experiences. Making My Grandparents Proud of There Grandbaby (sic) is homage to his grandparents, who he says kept him inside drawing when he might have been getting into trouble. This seems to be the origin of most of his practice and training. The text narrates the arc of his childhood experiences toward the first time he saw a marching band practice and made a drawing to show what he saw. He further explains that after Katrina’s “jive ass” – Davenport’s term for anything dislikable – he began donating his drawings of marching bands to the public and Catholic schools that sponsor them. It is from this initial publicity that his international exposure began to grow.

Getting anywhere in the art world requires a certain degree of business and hubris, and Davenport does not lack. He

intersperses biographical and historical information with shout outs to his agent, Diego Cortez (of Basquiat fame); Dan Cameron, the international curator who is a fan; and Joan Mitchell (R.I.P.). He also includes his resume, educational history, complaints about neighbors, and self-affirming statements. They serve as a conversation with the viewer, but they are an obvious advertisement for his art. His email address is there, too.

“I’m finally in NOMA/about time” appears to sum everything up. But, like his shout outs, phrases like this are also an expression of gratitude; Davenport relates that at age six or seven he visited the museum with his class and proclaimed to his teacher that one day he would have work here. The accomplishment is worth noting.

Davenport says he kept making pictures of marching bands because they make people happy. They are historical documents in themselves, direct narratives about the city’s past and therefore a precious commodity (and, because these have already sold to Benetton, they are indeed commodities). Despite their distant vantage points, Davenport’s drawings are far more intimate than Eisenman’s close up abstractions. Figuration begs identification, and though the anonymity of Eisenman’s portraits verges on universality, Davenport’s figures embody a collective local history that is becoming more and more familiar to the world.



Elemore Morgan: *Untitled 13698 (Flowers in Vase)*. n/d. Gouache on Paper, 12" high.

Revisiting Elemore

BY KARL F VOLKMAR

ELEMORE MORGAN JR
From the Estate
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, Louisiana

HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY to view a gathering of Elemore Morgan paintings and drawings is like having an opportunity to visit with an old friend. Coming face to face with works ranging from small scale eight by five inch gouaches on paper to thirty-four by sixty inch acrylics on masonite offers an intimate experience infused by memories extending over more than fifteen ago when I first met the artist and his work soon after having moved to Louisiana from Ohio by way of Wyoming, New Mexico, and California. For me the art of Morgan is inseparable from the artist as a person; and even though I may pretend to be objective, my image of Louisiana, especially southwestern Louisiana where I now live and work, has always been filtered through the lens of Morgan's art.

The flower paintings are a bit of a surprise for, in earlier exhibitions, there were never more than a few, and I had given them only passing attention. In one sense they are unique in that, quite different from the vistas and horizons of the artist's typically larger scale landscapes, the flowers and leaves and vases are situ-

ated in ambiguous spaces that are as confined as the landscapes are extensive. The intense warmth of the pigments of *Untitled 13707 (Leaves)* and *Untitled 13698 (Flowers in Vase)* seems as if scraped from blocks of pure pigment. The colors glow with a gentle incandescence. In places the angularity of the drawing seems as eccentric as some of Cranach's, the colors as concentrated as a Rouault. The shapes and volumes are tightly contained by the frame or cropped like fingers reaching beyond the cage.

The amaryllises of *Untitled 13692 (Flowers and Pots)* rest after their orgasmic spurt of growth as if their energy has been spent. Long blade-like leaves begin to droop. The gaggle of pots snuggles together as if needing each other's strength to support the rising stems. Another amaryllis stands attentively with nubs remaining after the blossoms have fallen. Pale ghostly horizontal lines seem to describe a translucent screen backdrop. One blossom in its eager entry into life seems to have slipped through the slats in its enthusiasm. Three irises, only one of which is blooming, in *Untitled 13724 (Iris in Bottles)*, stand elegantly in narrow-necked vases. A surrounding miasma of light reveals and obscures. Streams of yellow waft across the field like a gentle breeze.

What drew the artist to paint these flowers? Was it their sensual beauty, the rich colors, the scent of the flowers themselves? Fluid washes and brushwork seem to conjure the delicate leaves and blossoms from a simulated humid atmosphere. Or was it the



Elemore Morgan: *Untitled 13721 (Landscape)*, n.d. Chalk Pastel on Paper, 12" high.

challenge of the drawing? Morgan loved drawing and the challenges it posed, challenges the artist set for himself, but even more perhaps the artist loved to teach others drawing. Or was it the act of drawing and painting itself, standing in front of the motif, filled with the sense of being alive, immersed in a larger whole, art making as an act of integration.

The artists was drawn to the warmth of the flowers like bees in search of nectar, translating the energy of nature into the life of art as bees make honey, the liquid amber that has transmuted the intense Louisiana sunlight.

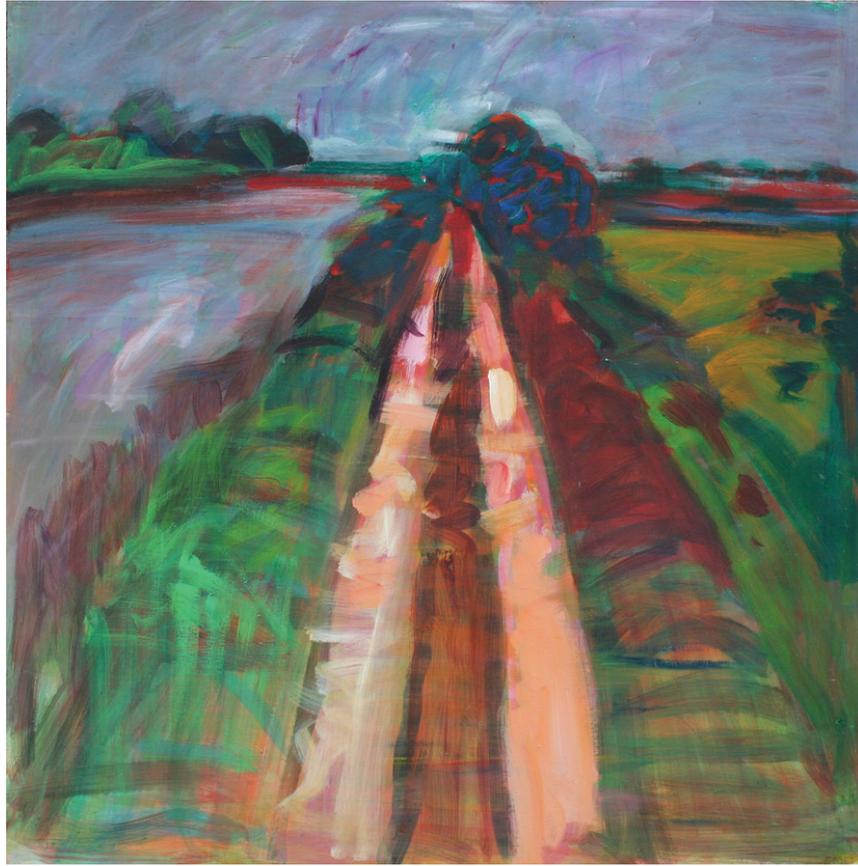
Morgan's still lives and landscapes often seem to express an absence that is simultaneously an affirmation of existence and an existential reflection on the nature of being. The blossoms that seduced with scents and colors are severed from their source and displayed while beauty ebbs and substance decays. Living nature has often served as symbol of the evanescence of existence as well as of sensuality and beauty. The French language expresses this in *la nature morte*, dead nature, the term for still life. Perhaps we should consider Morgan's subjects in the context of *memento morii*, the *vanitas* theme which still lives and landscapes have symbolized in art by artists from the Netherlands from the seventeenth century through Van Gogh. In these paintings human existence is implied by its absence and by artifacts in stages of dissolution.

Morgan immersed himself in the humid world that had shaped his physical and spiritual being, as much a part of nature as nature was an extension of the artist and the person. The prairie was his subject and his home, for when he was able he built his home at the end of a long gravel road amid the fields he loved to paint. I remember visiting with him at the site before the home would be built as he talked enthusiastically about his work and proudly revealed his collection of old wood. He painted what he loved and what filled him with a sense of belonging. The result was vital landscapes pulsing with latent energy, prairies aglow as if they themselves were the source of the light that illuminated

them, and multicolored skies at various times of day and in different weather conditions, transubstantiations of the exhalations of the fertile prairies into art.

Several landscapes reflect this aspect of the artist's work. In *Thunderhead* a line of blue gray clouds march along the horizon like a fantastic chorus line of pachyderms dancing beneath a dome of clouds illumined by the late afternoon sun during summertime when none of the weather services were even suggesting the possibility of a storm. The complementary colors of *Untitled 13718 (Cloudscape)* from fifteen years earlier define an almost palpable mass of deep purple clouds floating above a thin green strip of land below, the accumulation of chalk pastel marks emulating the meteorological phenomenon of cloud formation. The artist shifts focus to the land in the chalk pastel on paper *Untitled 13721 (Landscape)* and gouache on paper *Untitled 13722 (Landscape)*. Both have approximately the same dimensions. With the horizon/tree line lying at three quarters of the height, the land is the subject and the air/sky serves the supporting role. Fluid green yellow green strokes of gouache stream over the warm toned earth beneath a sky where a storm is forming. The furious blizzard-like flurry of strokes of color moving every which way everywhere in *Untitled 13695 (Landscape)* are like animating spirits in a panentheistic nature suddenly loosed from their responsibility to give life to materiality and now engaged in their own ecstatic dance celebrating their freedom.

In *Untitled (Road and Fields)*, a levee road rises steeply from the lower edge between the river/canal on the left and the fields on the right. The curving surfaces of the land and water and the swollen banks and flesh-colored wheel tracks with the dark center rise dividing them are expressions of the lush and fertile substance of the land. In other works the artist stands at what seems like a great distance, taking in the broad horizontal vistas to represent the breadth of the land in *Untitled 13694 (Landscape)*. Warm washes of pale golden sunlight on the left transmute into an



Elemore Morgan: *Untitled (Road and Fields)*. n.d. Acrylic on Masonite, 48" high.

early evening indigo on the right. Silvery pale blue, like the trail of a snail in early morning dew, below the trees along the horizon suggest the lingering presence of flooded fields reflecting the early morning/evening light of the rising/setting sun.

In a view of *Baton Rouge*, the city on the river where the artist was born, is viewed from the other side of the river that he came to call his home, from a distance as if a vision of the Promised Land or that from which he came and to which he will not return, the city which he never entered to find subjects for his art, even later in his life, never forced to work within an urban setting as Pissarro did in his later years because of problems with his eyes. The shape of the composition with its rounded lower corners is an example of the artist's experimentation with unusual shapes, setting problems for himself, or perhaps accommodating his unique vision, shapes one wonders where they might fit in a prospective purchaser's home.

Morgan's paintings are a *mélange* of nineteenth century Romantic and Impressionist landscapes and the active gestures of an abstract expressionist with a disquieting sense of the sublime. The artist seems to have found a sympathetic echo of his deepest feelings and expressed them in the nature of his art. His paintings render the Southwestern Louisiana landscape as palpable space, a land shaped by the dreams and needs of the Cajun and Creole people who lived and continue to live there. But these visions are curiously devoid of actual human presence as if the people have gone away or otherwise disappeared (Morgan does present them in his photographic work).

Sometimes I sense that the artist's landscapes represent an elemental nature that existed long before humans evolved, a

natural world that will continue long after all human presence has vanished from the earth and the signs of mankind's manipulations have been erased. This eternal aspect evokes comparison with the wide horizons of Pissarro's *Four Seasons*, the ancient trees and forests of the Barbizon painters from mid-nineteenth century France, and the vast skies and distant horizons of seventeenth century Dutch landscapists like Hobbema and van Ruisdael. Morgan's landscape suggest the possibility of the coexistence of the eternal and the immediate, the ineffable yet intimate, the infinite yet infinitesimal, attributes that were earlier exclusively attributes and manifestations of the supernatural, qualities that metastasized into the world of nature in Western thought some four hundred years ago.

Morgan's landscapes suggest more than that which once was, for these fields are still being worked for their cane, the paddies harvested for their rice and crawfish, each gathered according to its season. They represent a world quite different from the heavily industrialized corridor of the Mississippi that lies between Saint Francisville and New Orleans. Morgan was clearly aware of art history and the history of theorizing about art, but the Oxford educated painter chose to follow his intuitions in the development of his art. As a result, Morgan created an art whose richness grows from the agriculturally and culturally rich soil of Southwestern Louisiana where the artist chose to live and work along the bayous and amidst the prairies, cane fields, rice puddles and crawfish ponds that have shaped the culture of southwestern Louisiana.

Elemore would show up at the most obscure of music venues late at night making sketches, taking photographs, maybe doing a dance or two when asked, and did he love to dance, a



Elemore Morgan: *Untitled 13724 (Iris in Bottles)*. n/d. Gouache on Paper, 22.5" high.

passion that he shares with the two very different artists Trakas and Mondrian. The artist immersed himself in Southwestern Louisiana's natural and cultural landscape, a landscape within which Creole and Cajun cultures evolved, a nature from which flow the Cajun and Creole Zydeco music and dance that the artist also loved. His is an art that reconnects the rhythms of the heart and the soul with the life of the world when we have happened to stray too far for our own good. We should be thankful that the fertile soil of the land that lies to the west of the mainstream has given us artist-poet-philosophers to remind us that we are of a world that can be both lyrical and sublime.

It would be wonderfully romantic to think of the landscape artist as a product of his environment like the cane that grows in the fields and the live oaks that have survived and thrived

in a hurricane scoured land. But this would be a reversion to an ancient way of thinking in which the artist is but the medium of the muses' inspiration, nature a vital organism in a pantheistic world animated by infinite forces, and would deny the artist his due. Nature is reality and all are subject to its laws to which we must adapt if we are to survive as the artist and his Cajun ancestors have done. But nature cares not one whit whether we humans do or do not survive. Nature does not care. Humans do. And we write our joys and concerns on the blank slate that is nature. Morgan's landscapes are the expression of the artist's struggle to negotiate an uneasy truce between the representational, the formal, and the technical on the blank slate of his art. The uneasiness of this truce, experienced as a sense of irresolution and restlessness in response to these landscapes, may be a perfect expression of the human condition. □



Katalin Gergo. Courtesy the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art.

Barnidge & Gergo: Tradition Seen Fresh

BY JUDITH H BONNER

BRENT BARNIDGE
KATALIN GERGO
New Work
Academy Gallery
The New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts
New Orleans, LA

TWO EXCITING EXHIBITIONS opened at the Academy Gallery in conjunction with Art for Art's Sake on October 1st, one featuring acrylic paintings of swamp scenes by Katalin Gergo and the other showing figural fiberglass sculptures by Brent Barnidge. These two artists, both having formerly taught at the Academy, make the gallery visitor aware of the environment and draw the viewer into the artwork itself. Both are inspired by past art historical trends, but they interpret their subjects differently and freshly.

Gergo's paintings are drawn from her visits to the swamps of south Louisiana, including Manchac and the North Shore, Cat Island, and waterways to the Gulf of Mexico. As such, Gergo is within the tradition of Louisiana landscape painters from the late 1860s forward, particularly in her renderings of bayous. Although most of those artists painted from the shore, Gergo's landscapes appear to be based on photographs taken while she was traveling

in a canoe on the bayous and other waterways. The artist does not strive for photorealism in her works, but in capturing an overall sense of the mysterious marshes. As a consequence the viewer is not distracted by detail; instead one feels in the center of the boat behind the artist. Additionally, the 19th century landscape – with a few exceptions like George David Coulon – painters favored a palette of dark greens, browns, and ochre. The gray in Gergo's paintings is more true to nature, especially in the dead of winter. She also captures a sense of wetness in the submerged trees trunks, as though the waterline has recently receded.

Formerly a watercolorist, Gergo achieves the limpid effect of watercolor painting in some of her acrylic paintings; all of her twenty-one paintings give a convincing impression of the marshes and bayous without being overly detailed. Many of these scenes appear textural, especially in the areas of the bark and clusters of Spanish moss. With the gaining popularity of acrylic paints in the late-1960s, most works painted in this medium were flat, unlike the jewel-like depth and luminosity achieved through the use of oil paints. Artists like James Rice, best known for his children's books, experimented with transparencies early, yet there remained a sense of flatness in his landscapes. Certainly with the aid of such



Brent Barnidge. Courtesy the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art.

technological advances as glazing mediums and “flow releasers,” Gergo has achieved some of the luminosity in her paintings that often eludes painters using this medium. These landscapes demonstrate her respect for the medium; nonetheless, she exceeds its characteristic flatness.

Needless to say, Gergo’s works are highly appealing, capturing the seemingly endless variations in nature, centering on the cypress trees, with a change in palette signifying a change in seasons or in the time of day. In a small work titled *Spring Dance*, lively colors appear to flit and dance over the mid-ground. Similarly, in *Below Water Level*, trails of spring-green algae begin to climb the trunks of dark-gray cypress trees, which seemingly are still in their winter dress. One senses life teeming below the surface of these ochre waters. In *Manchac Monuments* the artist focuses on the detail of the lower trunks of massive cypress trees submerged at the water’s edge. Again the shades of grays are relieved by the spring greens in the background, a subtle reference to Hope. *Waterless Recovery*, with its luscious texture and emergent green growth, also makes a reference to the damage that the swamps suffered during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Springtime Burst provides variation in the colors of the changing season. Here are lavender Louisiana Irises contrasting with yellow foliage, with these complementary hues providing more intense color in this landscape. *Signs of Recovery* also conveys a double meaning, of the seasonal emergence after winter or post-Katrina, with the rebirth of tender plants seen against the base

of a gray cypress. This sentiment is echoed in *Swamp on the Mend*, with its ever-present moss, cypress knees, textural bark, and undergrowth in the murky swamp. A blanket of Lily Pads interspersed with marsh grasses and palmettos create a smoother textural effect in *Secret Pond*.

Two monumental canvases, *Summertime* and *Winter Calm*, anchor this exhibition and envelop the viewer. The latter shows interlaced dead branches and soft reflections of light on the bayou waters in mid-ground. In *Summertime*, a work reminiscent of Seurat’s oversize *Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, Gergo balances vertical and diagonal elements with hanging vines in the foreground; the viewer feels the urge to duck, as if being present at the scene. The network of overlapping slender branches in her work titled *Blue Lace* resembles the delicate, intricate openwork in filigree. The light comes from the back of this scene, highlighting the contours of the trees and reflecting in the foreground waters. *Contrasting Textures* focuses on a nearly hidden alligator in the yellow foliage covering the water’s surface; whereas *Bump on a Log* shows the leathery creature fully emerged from the water and taking in the sun. Her title for the latter underscores typical Louisiana humor.

Gergo, a post-Katrina displaced Orleanian, returns regularly to Louisiana to take guided daytime and evening canoeing expeditions through the Honey Island Swamps, Bogue Chitto Wildlife Area, and the Atchafalaya Basin. Two of her paintings depict small groups of people in the distance as they trek through



Katalin Gergo. Courtesy the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art.

the swamps, their bright red and yellow jackets providing vivid color in an otherwise gray composition. *Room to Roam (Secrets of a Dry Pond)*, portrays the swamp in its winter dress—the intense reds in distance marking the human presence in an area that serves as home for alligators, snakes, birds, turtles, and other wildlife.

With an equally fresh approach, Brent Barnidge masters a relatively new medium, with sculptures first modeled in clay and then cast in fiberglass. The majority of these works are one of a possible edition of ten. Each is masterfully sculpted, particularly in anatomy, architectural setting, fabric, and hands, which are often elegant and graceful. While these works are foremost artistic, they are instructive for their reference to the Renaissance use of perspective. Yet Barnidge has produced works that are more like stage sets in high relief populated with actors in three-dimension. One can imagine Piero della Francesca's paintings as having come to life without the artificial aid of three-D glasses. Several of these sculptures are conceived as worm's eye views, but here they are a digression from the straight lines of single-point perspective. Some suggest three-point perspective with curved architectural lines as though they are seen through a rotating lens camera, which creates a distortion of straight lines. Though they may remind viewers of some of the current paintings and posters with New Orleans architecture that appears to fall inward, these sculptures are not gimmicky.

The only one of Barnidge's sculptures in this exhibition to be cast in plaster is *All God's Children*, in which three-dimensional figures crowd in front of St. Louis Cathedral. The church itself is cast in relief, with the architectural elements being more prominent than the usual overall flat background. In this work Barnidge comments on race, gays, gender, and religion. The figures include St. Peter, a woman in bishop's mitre, and French Quarter character, "Ruthie the Duck Girl." The eccentric Ruthie, a long-time familiar sight in the Quarter, symbolized endurance and survival, for she was part of the "Quarter scene" for over six decades.

Most of Barnidge's eleven sculptures appear to have their

origin in the street life of the Vieux Carré. *Busker II*, a person who entertains in a public place for donations, features one of the many songsters who entertain on the streets and shows pigeons flying above as the busker extends his hand forward into space.

Six works in Barnidge's series called St. Anne appear to make reference to the various performers in the French Quarter, or perhaps to New Orleanians' historic love of entertainment. The first in the series of small white fiberglass sculptures shows a dancer; the second shows a dancing girl whose twirling skirt resembles a flower with unfurling petals—the girl forming a stamen, the reproductive organ of a flower. Another sculpture shows a woman in medieval clothing and a pig with a hand-held drum, both of which appear to be performing; the next is a three-quarter length muscular male figure with a bull's head—which could refer to the *Boeuf Gras* of Mardi Gras, or to the bull dancers of Minoan Crete, with the figure of the male dancer actually merging with the bull. The most famous image of bull dancers is seen in the fresco at the Palace of Knossos. While that scene is two-dimensional, Barnidge has developed his figure in three-dimension.

The European influence is also reflected in a figure who wears a Venetian carnival mask with a long beaked nose, a type of mask that is seen more often in souvenir shops than on Mardi Gras maskers in New Orleans. One is reminded that the wearing of masks not only conceals the wearer's identity, but it blurs the distinction between social classes. With this realization, the pig with a drum comes into focus; on first viewing the pig seems out of character with the woman in medieval clothing.

This series is shown together as a group—separate, but nonetheless presented as a continuity of theme. The final sculpture of this set shows two muscular three-quarter length dancers, fully developed in the round, which reveals the artist's mastery of human anatomy.

Pops' Line shows two streetcars, the one at the right in higher relief having just stopped, and the one on the left obviously regressing into the distance. A crowd of people, obviously just



Brent Barnidge. Courtesy the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art.

having disembarked from the streetcar, look upward ostensibly to check for rain, while a couple of others have their umbrellas already opened and held over their heads. This work comes close to narrative, and yet there is a tension with the concept of this scene as merely portraying a moment in time—a time that is only too frequent in this subtropical city.

Another local scene, *Saenger Bus Stop*, shows a group of people, either standing or sitting on a bench. At the far end of the bench a young man leans his head back as though he has fallen asleep. Barnidge takes delight in sculpting his stretched neck and up-tilted chin. Similarly, he demonstrates his skill in the graceful hand of a young woman in the foreground who holds a cigarette, her elbow close to her waist and her upraised hand bent back at the wrist, the cigarette almost an extension of her hand. Despite the woman's slender limbs, her stomach extends forward, a slouching posture that Barnidge also explores in the paunchy stomach of a middle-aged man in another of these sculptures. *A Necessary Evil*, which is limited to an edition of five, likewise portrays a woman with an extended stomach, a suggestion of the current national problem with overeating. Here the treatment of the distorted architectural lines is the most pronounced of these works. The European-influenced walls in the interior of the Saenger, articulated with arches alternating with colonnettes on raised bases, curve inward toward the recessed ceiling and culminate with the low-relief clouds of the frescoed ceiling.

In *Rabble-Rouser*, a young girl with flying pigtailed is suspended from the background by tiny connections to her elbow and to her skirt. Similarly, a nude *Woman in Mirror* is attached from a single point; she is fully developed in the round, seemingly looking at herself in an oval-framed mirror, her arms upraised as she

arranges her hair. Inside the mirror, the reflection is also developed in the round—truly a “woman in mirror.” The details of the room behind her are executed in bas relief.

All on a Mardi Gras Day, limited to an edition of three, is set in front of the Cabildo, with the corner of St. Louis Cathedral visible at the left and the corners of the Upper Pontalba Building and Le Petit Théâtre and the buildings of the 600 block of Royal Street visible in the distance. This sculpture is a comment on Mardi Gras in its historical sense, as a crowd of costumed revelers dance in the street toward the viewer. In the immediate foreground a skeletal “Horseman of Death” and an angel with a nude temptress clinging to his arm are almost medieval in their treatment. A jazz band mingling with the crowd in the distance is more contemporary in its appearance as it marches behind the skeleton, angel, and temptress. Curiously, a figure resembling actor Vincent Price appears in three of these works, beginning with *All God's Children* and ending with *All on a Mardi Gras Day*, in the latter of which he wears sunglasses. Both of these works share St. Louis Cathedral as a background setting, and Barnidge's use of the inclusive “All” is notable.

Barnidge clearly draws upon the history and literature of the Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance periods for artistic subjects. Viewers will have much to ponder after seeing his exhibition. The reasons are not clear for his choice of St. Anne, the mother of Mary, and patron of families, as the name of his series. The true meaning of *A Necessary Evil* is also unclear. Perhaps the reasons are truly private, but the entirety of these works actively pique the gallery-goers' curiosity. His exhibition and Gergo's make unusually good neighbors in the galleries. □



Nick Cave: InStallation, Newcomb Art Gallery. Prospect.2 New Orleans.

Making One Feel, Making One Think

BY KARL F VOLKMAR

NICK CAVE
JOYCE J. SCOTT
Prospect.2 New Orleans
Newcomb Art Gallery
New Orleans, LA

TO SEE THE work of Nick Cave and Joyce Scott requires that we leave the crowded, noisy streets of the historic center with its intimate spaces and bits of green growth in small courtyards protected by walls of brick and stucco and travel uptown, following Saint Charles Avenue with its rows of mansions reached across elaborately sculpted and shaded yards. Stepping down at Audubon Park break, our search for the Newcomb Art Gallery where we will find the work of Nick Cave and Joyce Scott takes us through the campus maze of Loyola and Tulane Universities with their mixture of classical, medieval, and modernist architectures.

The arched rhythms of the gallery façade can be

seen beyond a screen of live oak trees, the rigorous geometry and semicircular arches of the architecture parodying the undulations arches of the boughs, a simple expression of the sympathies between natural and artificial forms. As one moves towards the entrance, one becomes aware of a yellow limned figure [by Joyce Scott] clinging silently to a limb overhead as if conjured from the essence of the tree, suggesting that one is about to enter a space very different from those of the quarter and 1850 House. Architecture endures because it follows principles of design based on natural laws that determine the physical world. The yellow figure clinging to the limb is of another order, the manifestation of social and psychic forces that determine the wellbeing of humankind, capable of disrupting the harmony between humankind and nature when out of control, able to ameliorate the same when directed properly.

The way in passes through the windowed veil of the façade and across the semidarkness of the narrow transverse narthex in a way reminiscent of the cloister en-



Joyce J Scott. Newcomb Art Gallery. Prospect..2 New Orleans.

trance to a medieval monastery church. As one mounts the steps into the entrance hall, a tall, pale figure [by Nick Cave] standing on a pedestal looms ahead, seeming to nod in subtle deference in acknowledgment of our presence. The hooded head rises like a bishop's mitre in a graceful arch, the sacred hood of a penitente from an esoteric spiritual cofradia, or a gelede dancer from West Africa. Such a presence one would not be surprised to see performing in processional dance at the cathedral in the quarter or participating in a solstice ritual at an ancient sacred site.

In examining the design of Nick Cave's solemnly elegant soundsuit, one discovers it's composition of many layered and overlapping swatches of fabrics decorated with nacreous arabesques of beads glistening like the luminous passages of subatomic particles through a cloud chamber. Yet, what at first appears as superficial ornament behaves like the arabesques of an art nouveau, or emanations from

a fundamental, essential ayn sof. Are the patterns mere superficial decoration or the expression of deeper substance? Or could it be that the dynamic vitality is inherent in the soundsuit itself? Costume can be what one wears to cover up (masking) or a means of representing oneself as we wish to be known. Cage's soundsuits are more than masks. The wearer is transformed by the spirit of the soundsuit.

For a while one's attention centers on this central figure until the eyes are drawn to the walls and openings that lead to other rooms and works. At this point one has a choice of whether to allow one to be seduced by the brightly lit room beyond the greeter, where the work of Joyce Scott continues from the prints hanging from the walls in the foyer, or to enter the dimly lit room on the right. Regardless of which path is chosen, everyone returns to the entrance foyer. There is no *hina* or *maya yana*.

A small group of soundsuits has gathered in the

dimly lit room, posing as if the visitor had sensed their existence and, turning to see what was there, just before they would have appeared in the corner of the eye, they, the soundsuits, sensing that they were about to be discovered, have as if they had never moved. Yet the soundsuits are waiting to be donned, and in the dance that follows, draw together disparate individuals into a community of sound and sight in a synergistic celebration of pure sight, sound, and movement. Multicolored shimmering sequined surfaces seem to radiate light energy, tatted doilies serve as foci of centrifugal and centripetal forces echoed in the twistings and turnings of dancing. Lengths of wooden sticks are sewn together in an earthly incarnation of animistic energies, like the jipae dancers of Oceania and the Tyi Wari rituals of the Bamana, and formal kinship with as diverse as Senufu firespitter masks and the shaggy limbs of the Joshua tree.

Channeling Robert Kushner's exuberant efforts in pattern and decoration, with the whimsy of Nancy Graves and *The Hairy Who*, and the serious play of Dr. Seuss and Maurice Sendak, Cave has rescued remnants from their earlier lives and given them life as tissue in new design. With an intuitive understanding of each material's essential possibilities, as if each remnant had been waiting for the creative direction of the master composer-designer-conductor, Cave joins them in synergistic conflation. When activated dance performance, the dynamic relationships between dancers and soundsuits, generating music as s/he moves, creates rapport with the audience in a social ritual which establishes, reinforces, and maintains communal bonds.

The soundsuits stand, like fabulous chrysalises, waiting for the perfect moment, to infuse a wearer with their spirits, waiting to infuse the wearer honored with the privilege of donning them, in an epigenetic empowerment of the being within who becomes the soundsuit. What a delight in this technological age with its plastics and synthetic materials, where materials science is more important than fundamental research, to have something so bright and cheerful and lively and fun and delightful. The power of the soundsuit is the power of the shaman to direct the creative energy of the individual and the community.

SEXECUTION IS THE title of three Joyce Scott prints hanging in the entrance foyer declares in no uncertain terms that the potent and unpleasant are the subjects of the artist's work. Careful crafting and technical competence serve to underscore human ugliness as did Goya's nuanced handling of etching and aquatint in his *Los Caprichos* and *The Disasters of War*.

The violence that is too common in the world is an underlying theme in a number of the artist's works. A series of screen prints from 2008 share the common title *Sexecution* and the image of a padded table with straps to hold the victim in a lethal injection room. *Sexecution: Pussy* includes a cat; *Sexecution: II*, the ghostly figure of an African female fertility image. *Sexecution: III*, the figure of a dominatrix wearing stiletto heels, the briefest of panties, and a long leather-gloved arm raised above her head. In how many different ways can the multiple themes be combined and interpreted: murder, death, sex, violence,

submission, fertility, infantilizing colloquialisms et cetera?

Scott's other works in the exhibition are positioned along the walls, except for two large works on pedestals in the center, in the large, brightly lit room behind the soundsuit sentinel. Scott is like the shaman whose objects, in which the vital forces recognized within the contingent belief system in which she operates are present, are a means for directing the powers that be in the healing practice of the relevant shamanistic psychiatry. For the esthetic shaman, the fetishes are nexus for the convergence of the social and psychic forces that must be understood so that their malevolent form can be redirected into life enhancing channels.

The carefully crafted objects are created through processes of selecting, harvesting, sorting, stringing, knotting et cetera as healing rituals in which the synergies of the whole surpass the sum of the individual parts. Beads are strung on thread and wire. Porcelain figures, in the shape of western courtiers, articles of exchange and trade, are combined with African sculpture. The traditional African sculpture whose cultural value as the embodiment of traditional values is destroyed when extracted from its culture and placed in collections, is reinvigorated by the artist and given new life in a process consistent with the artist's African roots. Scott's fetishes, however, represent the modern spiritual forces of the psyche rather than the animisms of the shaman's world. From this perspective, Scott as artist shaman revitalizes the integrative role of traditional art practice.

One appreciates the crafting of materials and the directness of what is neither pretty, nor cute, nor quaint. In *Head Shot*, a brown seed bead head, white eyes and teeth framed by lighter brown lips, misshapen like a shrunken trophy head, supported by a hollow coca-cola bottle green cast glass hand holding a pistol with finger on the trigger and pulling, filled with brass cased bullets, slowly impresses its horrible-ness on one's consciousness. In another group of works, the artist has responded to the murder and dismemberment of albinos in Tanzania. The pale pink seed beads used for *Tanzanian Flayed Albino Man's* and [uncircumcised] *Penis* and the face misshapen without the support of a skull captures the grotesqueness of the murders. In *Decapitated Tanzanian Albino Boy Head, 2009-2011*, made of blown and beaded glass, beads, thread, and flat-linked chain, the anamorphic glass head may remind of the flayed Saint Bartholomew in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*.

Sexuality and identity are the subject in *Yaller Girl*. The base for *Yaller Girl* is an African mask. The yellow bead girl, supported by a frame resting on the mask, holds the legs of a brown beaded figure hanging upside down while giving birth to a large black and white painted gourd, irregular strands of blood red beads, representing perhaps the bloody afterbirth or a miscarriage, fall from her arms. *If I Were a Tree*, like *Inkisi*, stands on one of the freestanding pedestals in the middle of the room., made of blown and kiln-fired glass and other media, a white head extends from the top of the tall trunk of a long uncircumcised phallus, small flat and three dimensional figures lie around the base. *Inkisi: #2*, is dressed in a green glass skirt made of hanging penises, amulets, and small African sculptures. *Inkisi* has a



Joyce Scott: From *True Stories*, 2011. Prospect..2 New Orleans.

massive presence, of dimensions that would fit within a two foot cube in its celebration of fertility and female maleness.

In other works, Scott's social commentary treats racial and ethnic themes in the amusing but should one really laugh From the Still Funny Series: an Asian/Negro, an [Native American] Indian in a Boat, Flutist, a biracial Couple, and Mammy/Penis from a plastic salt and pepper set holding a large scale bead penis. If one feels uncomfortable, that is good. One should. You Have to Get New Jokes because Blacks Aren't the largest Minority Anymore ridicules racial jokes with its tongue-in-cheek commandment to make jokes about other ethnic groups. In a series of work with the key name Ancestry Dolls, Ghanaian and Malawi figures are used as legs, Japanese ceramic figurines representing eighteenth century European court figurines as arms, found crocheted miniature clothing and many other objects.

Joyce Scott's beaded and mixed media and found object sculptures representing subjects with ironic twists and expressively distorted forms. The artist employs media that in the United States are typically designated craft as distinct from art, the latter conveniently overlooking the fact that complex ideas and associations, and sophisticated drawing and design go into the making of a work. Indeed,

the privileging of specific media because they are traditional in one cultural value system, i.e., western, male, should not blind one to intellectual truth. Was it not the willing suspension of intelligence that Marcel Duchamp poked such wonderful fun at with his L.H.O.O.Q.? The painter appreciates the skillful technique of another painter, and technique can itself be the subject. Postmodern, multicultural re-education of western sensibilities suggests that craft is often one of the terms employed by those in roles of power to stigmatize those subject to, and suppressed by, their power. Scott, looking to her African roots, and other ethnic identities, adopted what was hers to begin with, openly avowing the essential and vital thread of continuity between past and present while using the adopted medium as a means of visualizing significant social situations. One acknowledges the ingenuity and cultural irony of the expressionist, cubist, and surrealist aesthetic mining from pre-industrial, non-western cultures to redefine an art that reflected the evolving complexities and anxieties of emergent modernity. So might one consider Scott's work as a medium for commenting on the dangers of the postmodern, especially a postmodern world where economic power relations seem to be experiencing geographic shifts as significant as continental drifts.



Johannes Krisk in Götz Spielmann's *Revanche*

Revenge and Remorse in the Vienna Woods

BY JOHN MOSIER

REVANCHE
Director: Götz Spielmann

REVANCHE OPENS WITH a shot of a placid pond in a peaceful wooded setting. An unidentified object is thrown in, and we watch the spreading circles mar the smooth surface. A mysterious beginning to a film whose action seems not only at odds with that pastoral image, but at odds with itself. The next scenes are inexplicable, disconnected: a buxom woman with a pensive expression in a kitchen; outside some one is mowing the lawn. It's a pleasant setting, almost rural, and her sad, mournful, look seems out of place.

A grimy looking man seated on a bed in a dingy apartment, looking through the window at a train going by. If

you look closely—very closely—you can divine that we're in a disreputable part of Vienna.

It's only then that we see the beginnings of a story. The doorbell rings, the man goes to the door, an attractive young woman enters. They talk in some strange language (no subtitles), then begin making love. The language is Ukrainian, and eventually we learn that the young woman is named Tamara (Irina Potapenko), that her lover is Alex (Johannes Krisk). Still later it emerges that the sad woman in the kitchen is Susanne (Ursula Strauss), and that the man mowing the yard is her husband Robert (Andreas Lust).

A chance remark later in the film that reveals where Tamara is from, although her broken German makes clear she's definitely not Austrian. For that matter, you have to listen carefully to catch the curious idioms of the Viennese, the only real clue to where we are. So too with identifying Robert. We first see him



in Götz Spielmann's *Revanche*.

in close up on the police firing range, realize he's a policeman (the insignia give away where we are, if you look carefully), and shortly thereafter, realize he was the fellow mowing the lawn, that the house is his, the woman with the sad face is his wife.

Viewers pretty much have to put all this information together on their own. Götz Spielmann, who wrote the script and directed the film, has no interest in providing his audience with cues, explanations, or continuity. Like the later Tolstoy, he strips out contexts, backgrounds, back-stories, and even basic transitions. We jump from one scene to another, have to figure out what's going on. But the cuts (editing by Karina Ressler) are smoothly done. We have the feeling we're seeing a continuous narrative, even though we can't quite figure out what it is.

Instead, he relies on repetitive shots and facial expressions. Both are perfectly displayed. The woods that Robert and Susanne drive on the way to their idyllic little house is not simply a pretty piece of scenery. We'll see it again and again. It establishes where much of the action occurs. Martin Gschlacht's camera manages to record key pieces of background in such a way that the viewer can instantly recognize them: the woods, the pond, the house, the farmhouse where Alex's grandfather lives (and its interior) are all captured perfectly: each shot gives us the essence of whatever it is that Spielmann wants to convey.

So too with the faces, which are extraordinary, to the point that the dialog is almost superfluous. That enables Spielmann

to concentrate on the essentials; so we learn very quickly that Susanne is sad, depressed, probably because she's miscarried, that she's dubious about another pregnancy, that the problem lies with her husband, that Alex dreams of leaving his squalor, taking Tamara with him to Spain.

Spielmann is like the later Tolstoy in another way: he's interested in how lives suddenly become intertwined through random events, and, more importantly, how man struggles with grace and wickedness, how the essentials of humanity prevail despite circumstance. It's the Tolstoy of *The Forged Coupon*, his last long fiction, a work of astonishing modernity. Writing at the dawn of the twentieth century, in old age, he anticipates every development in modern fiction, even though his aims are theological rather than psychological or formal. Alas, in the general dumbing down that seems characteristic of the contemporary cinema, such accomplishments might as well be recorded in Mayan, as far as most contemporary directors are concerned. A case in point: in *The Frozen Land* (2009) Finnish director Aku Lohimies turns *The Forged Coupon* into what looks more or less like your local evening newscast—and with about the same deep understanding of human behavior.

The adjective Tolstoyan doesn't just mean an epic sweep, or lots of action, or telling a story on a grand scale. It means a deep and compassionate concern with the inevitability of sin and its consequences, not least of which is a redemption worked out by

the individual on his own. So too with *Revanche*, which is about how the least among us can achieve grace, and how the best among us can fall. There's no judgment, no simplistic justice, but there's a strong sense of morality. That might seem a paradox, but this is a sobering and curiously moving film. It's slow, difficult to follow in its simplicity, although visually accomplished. By the time you reach the end of the film, you realize that there hasn't been a single shot, a single image, that was extraneous. When you look back, everything starts to make sense. It's the classic case of letting the images unfold.

Alex works in a brothel, doing odd jobs. Probably that's where he met Tamara, since she's a prostitute, one of the many bereft children of the defunct Soviet empire who drifted westwards, only to exploited and abused, see her dreams shattered. Two decades on, hardly a new theme, but the film doesn't dwell on it, doesn't make it the center. This is how it is, which of course is historically true. Tamara is a stock character out of the tales of Arthur Schnitzler, Vienna's most famous playwright and novelist, the only difference being that she's from Ukraine, rather than the Bohemia or Galicia of Austro-Hungarian times.

Alex too is typical. He's the basic down on his luck loser of the film world, obsessed with moving up, cheerfully willing to become a criminal if that's what it takes. So it's no surprise that his scheme for getting ahead involves robbing a bank. Tamara is dubious, fearful. An interesting dichotomy; despite his toughness, his mean look, Alex is emotional and idealistic. He has dreams. Tamara, with her childlike expressions, reinforced by her pigeon German, is wise and prudent. But then, as the film develops, we see an interesting set of oppositions in Robert and Susanne as well, oppositions that set up another set of parallels, or convergences, between the two men and the two women.

That takes time to realize, but in the meanwhile, it's doubtful that anyone watching *Revanche* thinks this projected robbery is going to turn out well. This idea has Doom written all over it in big black letters.

Nor is there much surprise at how the parallel story of Robert and Susanne is going to intersect: he's the cop, Alex is the robber. Moreover, we've by now seen there's a geographical intersection. Robert and Susanne live close by the small farm where Alex's grandfather lives, drive through the same pleasant woods to reach their houses. Old Hausner (Johannes Thanheiser) is a crusty old peasant who speaks an impenetrable dialect. He doesn't have much use for his grandson, who comes out on occasion to cut wood for him. There's another connection as well: Susanne comes by and drives him to church on Sunday.

These are the sorts of casual, almost random, relations that Arthur Schnitzler made famous in *Reigen (La ronde)*, vectors of trivial circumstance that link people in different classes of society, and *Revanche* could quite tellingly be subtitled, "A Tale of Three Viennas," because there's the squalid and claustrophobic post-1989 world of emigrant prostitutes and pimps, the beautiful green fields and lovely woods right outside the city, and Hausner's almost timeless farm, the old, primitive, rural, Austria that still embraces the great metropolis.

One of the problems (one among the many) of so much contemporary film is that the director seems to think that his evocation of some tired and creaky trope is new and original, that in this case, a film with a prostitute heroine/victim is new and

original, just because she's from Slovenia or Moldova. We've seen that recently with two wretched cartoon-like works: *Call Girl* (2009), by Damjan Kozole, and *Import Export* (2007), by Ulrich Seidl. So it's pleasant, intellectually speaking, to see a filmmaker at work who incorporates elements into his story, but keeps them as simple elements.

Which is not to say Spielmann's film is totally devoid of suspense or surprise. We know the robbery isn't going to come off, for instance, but we don't know why or how. So there's a certain modest surprise in what happens. Tamara and Alex get in an argument about the robbery. She's upset about the fact that he's going to use a gun, but when he assures her it isn't loaded, she decides, stubbornly, that she'll go with him. She's sitting there at the back of the bank, and Robert wanders up, the cop on the beat, checking out the situation, mildly curious as to what's going on. Alex exits the bank, sees him, brandishes his (unloaded) gun, speeds off. He's made Robert lie down on the concrete, so now he gets to his knees, starts firing at the car.

We already know he's not perhaps the best of shots with his pistol. We've seen him on the firing range, seen his colleagues teasing him. So one supposes it's no surprise that in trying to shoot out the tires, he misses, and a stray bullet kills Tamara. Does anyone see that coming? It's highly doubtful. So now Alex has a bag full of money and a dead girl-friend. Whatever his faults—according to his grandfather they're numerous and criminal—he was really in love with Tamara. He has the face of a suffering animal. This is a man mortally stricken.

But then so is Robert. It never enters his mind that he hit anything, and when he learns that he accidentally shot the girl he'd been talking to a few minutes before, when he sees the photos of her corpse, he's if possible even more distraught than Alex. They're both caught up on a human feeling that has been surgically removed from the contemporary cinema: true remorse.

There's a curious parallel. Alex has no one to talk to, so he doesn't. Robert can't bring himself to talk to Susanne, withdraws into himself. Both men take refuge in routines. Robert goes for lengthy runs through the woods, and Alex saws logs in his grandfather's barn. The old man grudgingly impressed. He has a shrewd insight. Alex should get married, he observes. Women like men who work. It's a non sequitur of the first order, particularly given the situation, but it is weirdly relevant.

Susanne, brooding over her husband's remorse, sees more and more old Hausner, which means she encounters Alex. His feelings for her—the wife of the man who killed Tamara—are barely controlled. He tells her to stop coming around. There follows a strange and unpredictable moment: suddenly, she suggests he come to her house, that Robert won't be home. It's a sexual proposition, and without anything being said, they both realize it.

Like the reactions that Robert and Alex have, Susanne's proposition is a surprise. Another link with Tolstoy, who had noticed that human beings are given to acting on strange impulses quite at odds with what they know they should be doing. There are in fact a whole string of these little surprises, slowly and inevitably leading up to when Susanne, seeing the picture of Tamara on the kitchen table, realizes this is the same girl Robert had mistakenly shot (like Alex, he's haunted by her face—in his case, the recognition shot of her in death).



Johannes Thanheiser and Ursula Strauss in Götz Spielmann's *Revanche*

She knows his girlfriend was murdered, but she's come to tell him that she can't continue their affair. One revelation leads to another. If this is the same young woman, which it obviously is, then Alex is the bank robber who got away. It's a very fine scene, mostly because her reaction is so understated. In a way, it's like Tamara's death. When you see her in the car after she'd been shot, before she slumps over, she seems almost normal. Spielmann doesn't let his actors mug. They register their feelings, their reactions, in small, subtle ways. But you can tell what's going on—in this case that Susanne isn't going to tell anyone what she now knows. She understands Alex's torment, perceives his suffering—and her husband's.

That scene has a parallel. Alex, sitting on the bench by the pond, confronts Robert, engaging him in conversation about the killing. When he brings up the idea of reprisal—isn't Robert worried that the dead girl's boyfriend will come after him, kill him in revenge—Robert, looking out at the lake, shrugs, waves his arms. Let him, he says several times. He's resigned, fatalistic

to the point of perhaps even wishing for death as a release from his torment. But then, before he resumes his run, he says that he would ask this man one question: why did he let the woman come along with him? It wasn't like it was a picnic.

A fair question; we know Alex didn't want Tamara to come, that she dug her heels in, insisted stubbornly. So the responsibility for her death is not so simple, particularly since Robert is in agony. He leaves. Alex, looking out at the pond, throws the gun into it. The agony has registered just as much as the questions, as Robert's despair.

Hausner is in the hospital, Alex goes back to the farm, is picking up apples from the tree in the yard. Fine winter apples, the old man has said. A very fine film: perfectly composed, understated, and deeply moving.

□

Proust v. Kant

BY STEPHEN R BACHMANN

FOR THE EPISTEMOLOGIST, a Kantian is a person who believes that true reality cannot be ascertained, because whatever is out there is mediated when it comes into the finite human brain. We cannot hear the high pitches that dogs hear because we are built that way. Similarly, whatever is “out there” is pressed and reduced into categories of space and time before we can comprehend it.

Recent brain science has ratified Kant’s assertion that what we get in the head is qualified by the head.

[T]he brain ... is, in many respects, a true design nightmare. ... When we compare the human brain to that of other vertebrates, it becomes clear that the human brain has mostly developed through agglomeration. The difference between the lizard brain and the mouse brain does not involve a wholesale redesign. Rather, the mouse brain is basically the lizard brain with some extra stuff thrown on top. Likewise, the human brain is basically the mouse brain with still more stuff piled on top. That’s how we wind up with two visual systems and two auditory system (one ancient and one modern) jammed into our heads. The brain is built like an ice cream cone with new scoops piled on at each stage of our lineage. [ACCIDENTAL BRAIN, LINDEN, 243.]

The brain, in short, is an inferior contraption for apprehending the full richness of reality.

For the purposes of this essay the point is less to establish that Kant was right—which he was—than the extent to which he might be wrong. In other words, it is one thing to say that the brain takes input from the outside world and reduces it to its own terms—that seems clear, given the jerry built contraption which is the human being, with her agglomeration of nerves which take input, and the agglomeration of nerves (the brain) which tries to make sense of all that stuff.

However, it is another thing to say that what the brain does is reduce everything into space/time components. Or, per-

haps it does, but is that the only way to crunch reality? Is it the best way?

Proust, at least, provides an alternative for dealing with all this stuff.

At first blush, Kant makes sense, if one considers the notion that experience comes to us in serial segments. The formula a,b,c,d,e,f, etc., etc. can be used to describe the series of events that one experiences from the moment of one’s birth, or from the moment one wakes up this morning, or from the moment one reads this sentence. The point, though, is that the alphabet which represents the series of events extends a very long way (eg., a,b,c ... z, aa,bb,cc, ... aaa,bbb,ccc.....aaaaaaaa,bbbbbbbb, etc.. At some point we learn that it makes some sense to comprehend a,b,c,d serially, where a = 1, b = 2, c=3... In other words, a happened before b, a happened before aa, and we can make sense of our experience if we keep that sequential stuff in mind, and order a, b, bb, and ddd in a sequential fashion.

It is this ordering of events in sequential fashion that helps us make sense of them. Most often when we tell stories we do so in a narrative fashion that respects the sequence of time. Certainly it helps the reader to make sense of the story. The attentive reader may remark that not all stories narrate events in sequential order. Homer’s *Odyssey* is one of the earliest and most obvious examples, starting in the middle of chronological time, moving backwards and moving forward. But most of us understand that Homer’s re-arranging of events is done for the purpose of presenting a more entertaining story. If we applied that method to hunting down a rabbit, we would never catch the rabbit.

As much as it makes sense of think of experience in terms of sequence, a,b,c,d,e, etc., one may raise an initial objection which observes that a,b,c,d,e provides a somewhat analogy to reality as we experience. Abcde might be more accurate than a,b,c,d,e, in that one experience in the head usually blends into the next experience; seldom do the experiences come in as separate separated events. Perhaps one can look one way, shut one’s eyes

and turn one head and open one's eyes again and the separation between a and b might make more sense. But a and b would still have some connection through other items that connect them; in each, the stomach ache that attends view a as well b, or the sense of curiosity and exploration that one brings to a, and which he continues to b when he opens his eye to the new view of b.

However separate or not the abc series might be, another factor to consider would be the fact that some experiences register more intensely than others. In other words, abcdef assume that abcdef have equal impact when taken in, recorded, and remembered. The truth is that abcdef is recollected more like abcDef where abcef are boring parts of the day, and where D entails more excitement: e.g., an excellent meal, a kiss from one's beloved, or a flash of terror or humiliation. Thus, reality is structured emotionally beyond the neutral grid of time.

Acknowledging emotion and remembrance is what brings us to Proust. Proust would argue that while a,b,c,d,e (or abcde) might work as a model for the mental experiences of the newborn infant, by the time she is 10, 30, or 50, the model becomes much more complicated. In other words, by age forty, our sequences have gone at least to zzz,aaaa,bbbb,cccc, etc., etc. But the important thing to note about bbbb is that it consists not only of stuff on and from the time grid Number 80 ($3 \times 26 + 2 = 80$). It also consists of other stuff, e.g., the cD of the earlier experiences abcDef. A concrete example which Proust provides is when, as an adult, he encounters a boot which calls to mind an experience of his lost grandmother, and he begins to weep. The boot (bbbb) is thus more than the immediate experience of the boot, bbbb = cD where memories of grandmother accompany the boot.

Proust's most famous description of this phenomenon involves his encounter with a madeleine in *In Search of Lost Time*. His mother gives him a madeleine, and a flood of sensations accompany it. In the language we have been trying to use here, mmmm would consist not only of the present experience mmmm, it would also consist of a number of other citations from the past (e.g., bb, aaa, etc.). Depending upon what constitutes the mmmm, it might become an emotionally intense MMMM.

Proust devotes his multi-volume novel to exploring this phenomenon. Part of his conclusion is that this peculiar aspect of experience leads to the only real reality that really exists. As I have written elsewhere, Proust makes this assertion in part because of his embrace of neo-Platonism. Like Stendhal, I believe that Plato is more poetry than truth, so I question whether Proust has discovered real reality. However, for me what makes Proust worth reading is his assertion that his real reality is the only reality that counts, it is the only reality worth talking about:

...we have to rediscover, to reapprehend, to make ourselves fully aware of that reality, remote from our daily preoccupations, from which we separate ourselves by an even greater gulf as the conventional knowledge which we substitute for it grows thicker and more impermeable, that reality which it is very easy for us to die without ever having known and which is, quite simply, our life. [TIME RECOVERED, PROUST, 298]

In other words, the only real life we really live is when we access that real reality. In essence, Proust says that when one looks at

one's life as a,b,c, ...LLLL....zzzzzzzzzzzz, and the LLLL (a few days of passionate love for instance) is the main thing worth remembering, then that is what one should write about--because it is the only thing worth considering:

In any case, though an ambitiously-minded man should feel an ideal love—even though his ambitious thoughts may not be transfigured by it—that love, alas! is not the whole of his life and often is no more than the few best days of his youth. It is with that part of himself alone that a writer composes his book . . . [AGAINST SAINTE-BEUVE, PROUST, 160]

It is hard to abandon the “daily preoccupations” and the “conventional knowledge” of the Kantian way of organizing life along lines of abcdefg. Again, if we abandon this Kantian way of organizing reality, we are likely to lose a lot of rabbits and finally starve. This Kantian way of organizing reality probably has long evolutionary roots. In the words of Prof. Guthrie:

Tracking is a highly cultivated ability that enables the hunter to imagine the other animal's emotions and behavior . . . a tracker creates a template or story upon which he works to piece together what may have happened or what may be happening. [THE NATURE OF PALEOLITHIC ART, GUTHRIE, 227]

Yet Proust will assert we live an impoverished if not empty life if our way of organizing experience stops at these edges of “daily preoccupations” and “conventional knowledge.” As he argues, it is the task of art to undo the work of our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence [and] our habits. We need to open our eyes to other prizes. If this means privileging a reality where grandmother never dies, so be it. At least that is what Proust would say, but not Kant. I doubt Kant would agree with Proust's assertion that it is better to dream live than to live it. The question is whether it is better living in Proust's world than Kant's. □



Josephine Sacabo at A Gallery for Fine Photography.

Calendar

COMPILED BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

A GALLERY FOR FINE PHOTOGRAPHY – 241 Chartres St. 568-1313. www.agallery.com - Óyeme con los Ojos: Joséphine Sacabo, through February; Trees of Life: Joyce Tenneson (photography), January 16 – February 28

ACADEMY GALLERY– 5256 Magazine Street. 899-8111.

ARIODANTE GALLERY– 535 Julia St., 524-3233. www.ariodantegallery.com - Myra Williamson-Wirtz (paintings), Erica Walker (jewelry), Stirling Barrett (photographic collage), Quinten Herrington (handcrafted fishing lures), December 3-31; True Blue: Gary Perez (photography), Bonnie Miller (jewelry), Pamela Marquis (painting), January 7-31, 2012

ARTHUR ROGER GALLERY – 432 Julia St. 522-1999. www.arthurrogergallery.com - Dale Chihuly (glass sculpture); Every Doubt That Holds You Here: Ted Kincaid (photography) through December 24; Aspects of a New Kind of Realism: Group Exhibition (painting), Luis Cruz Azaceta (painting), January 7 - February 18, 2012

BECA GALLERY– 527 St. Joseph St., 566-8999; Albuquerque, NM. www.becagallery.com; <http://www.becaicad.org/>

BARRISTER’S GALLERY – 2331 St. Claude Ave. 525-2767. www.barristersgallery.com - Vaginas: Clifton Webb (sculpture), December 10 – January 4; Gary Oaks, January

BRUNNER GALLERY– 215 N. Columbia St. Covington, 985-893-0444. www.brunnergallery.com - New Paintings: Edwin Pinkston (painting) and Old Dog, New Tricks: Rick Brunner (sculpture), ongoing

CAROL ROBINSON GALLERY – 840 Napoleon Ave. at Magazine. 895-6130. www.carolrobinsongallery.com - Annual Christmas Exhibition: Group Show (mixed media), December 3 – 31; Virtual exhibition, ongoing

COLE PRATT GALLERY – 3800 Magazine St. 891-6789. www.coleprattgallery.com - Randy Asprodites (painting), November



Richard Boseman at Arthur Roger Gallery.

27 – January 1; Body, Remember: Denyce Celentano (painting), January 1 – 29; Recent Paintings: Mac Ball (painting), January 29 – February 26; Songs for the Gulf Coast: Susan Downing-White (painting), February 26 – April 1

COLLINS DIBOLL ART GALLERY – Loyola University. 861-5456. <http://www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/> - Animated Drawing: Avish Khebrehzadeh (drawing), November 8 – January 29; Southern Graphics Council International Juried Membership Show (printmaking), February 8 – March 29.

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER – 900 Camp St. 210-0224. www.cacno.org - Swagger for a Lost Magnificence: NOLA Now, Part I: Group Show (mixed media), Prospect 2, Expose: Angela Driscoll, Taney Roniger, and Ying Zhu (installation), through January 29; NOLA Now II: Landscape, Seascape, Cityscape, February 25 – March 25; Abstraction, April 1 – 9; The Human Figure, May 5 – June 3

d.o.c.s. gallery – 709 Camp St. 524-3936. www.docsgallery.com - The Bull and The Dream: Marianne Lerbs and Thomas Glover W. (sculpture), through February 2; Shae Freeman (sculpture), February 4 – April 5; Jammin on Julia: Thor Carlson (sculpture), April 7 – May 3

GALLERY BIENVENU – 518 Julia St. 525-0518. www.gallerybienvenu.com - Moving in Colors: Keysook Geum (sculpture), December 1 – January 26

HERIARD CIMINO GALLERY – 440 Julia St. 525-7300. www.heriardcimino.com - Washed (to the sea and other waters): Anastasia Pelias (painting), through December 31; Regina Scully (painting), January 7 – February 25

HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION – 533 Royal St. 523-4662. www.hnoc.org - The 18th Star: Treasures from 200 Years of Louisiana Statehood, through January 29; In Katrina's Wake: Restoring a Sense of Place: Stephen Wilkes (photography), December 8 – March 3

ISAAC DELGADO FINE ARTS GALLERY – 615 City Park Ave. 361-6620. Prospect 2: Below Sea Level: Pawel Wojtasik (installation), through January 29

JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY – 400a Julia St. 522-5471. www.jonathanferraragallery.com - The P.2 Projects (mixed media), through January 21; State of Nature: Marcus Kenney (mixed media sculpture), and Steady Creep: Hannah Chalew (mixed media sculpture), January 24 – March 17

LeMIEUX GALLERIES – 332 Julia St. 522-5988. www.lemieuxgalleries.com - Louisiana's Landscape and Grass Roots: Philip Gould (photography), through December 31; Mann's Mind: Thomas Mann (sculpture), and American Ghost: Olivia Hill (painting), January 7 – February 25



MARCUS KENNEY AT JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY.

NEWCOMB ART GALLERY – Tulane University. 865-5328. <http://www.tulane.edu/~newcomb/artindex.html> - Prospect 2: Works by Nick Cave and Joyce J. Scott (sculpture), and Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women, & Art (mixed media), through January 29; Tamarind Touchstone: Fabulous at Fifty (lithography), February 15 – April 15

NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART – City Park. 606-4712. www.noma.org - Prospect 2: Bruce Davenport, Jr. and Nicole Eisenman, through January 29; Light to Dark/Dark to Light: Wayne Gonzales (painting), through February 26; Making a Mark: The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection (mixed media), through April 8, 2012; Forever Mural: Odili Donald Odita (painting), through October 7, 2013

OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART – 925 Camp St. 539-9600. www.ogdenmuseum.org - Photographs from the Permanent Collection of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art (photography), and George Dureau (painting), through January 3; Óyeme con los Ojos: Joséphine Sacabo (photogravures), through January 8; Ashton Ramsey (mixed media), through January 29; Architect of Dreams: Ery (mixed media), through February 26

SOREN CHRISTENSEN GALLERY – 400 Julia St. 569-9501. www.sorenchristensen.com - Inside the Box: Evelyn Jordan (sculpture), and Home and Away: Jack Kotz (photography), for Photo NOLA, through December 31; Wall-Paper, January

TAYLOR BERCIER FINE ARTS – 233 Chartres St. 527-0072.

www.taylorbercier.com - Apophenia: Carlos Estevez (painting), through January 31

STELLA JONES GALLERY – Place St. Charles, 201 St. Charles Ave. 568-9050 . <http://www.stellajones.com> - Mahalia Jackson: Queen of Gospel Music: Group Show (mixed media), through January 6

STEVE MARTIN GALLERY– 624 Julia St. 566-1390. <http://www.stevemartinfineart.com> - Contemporary paintings and sculpture by Steve Martin and other Louisiana artists, ongoing

3 RING CIRCUS ARTS & EDUCATION CENTER – THE BIG TOP – 1638 Clio St. 569-2700. www.3ringcircusproductions.com - Taint Modern: a Critique Group exhibition: Kelly Casey, Valerie Corradetti, Matthew Duguid, Myrna Enamorado, Laura Gipson, Holis Hannan, Rachel Jones, Matthew Kirscht, Ryan Lindburg, Ariya Martin, Jeff and Natalie Rinehart, Kathy Rodriguez, Amanda Turpen, David Webber, and Kathryn Zansler (mixed media), January 7 - 28

UNO ST. CLAUDE GALLERY - 2429 St. Claude Ave. 280-6493. Prospect 2: The UNO Fence: Ivan Navarro, through January 29; MFA Thesis Exhibitions: Summer Winston (photography); and Shelly Barq (painting); February 11 – March 3; thINK: Boston Printmakers (printmaking), for Southern Graphics Council International, March 10 – April 7



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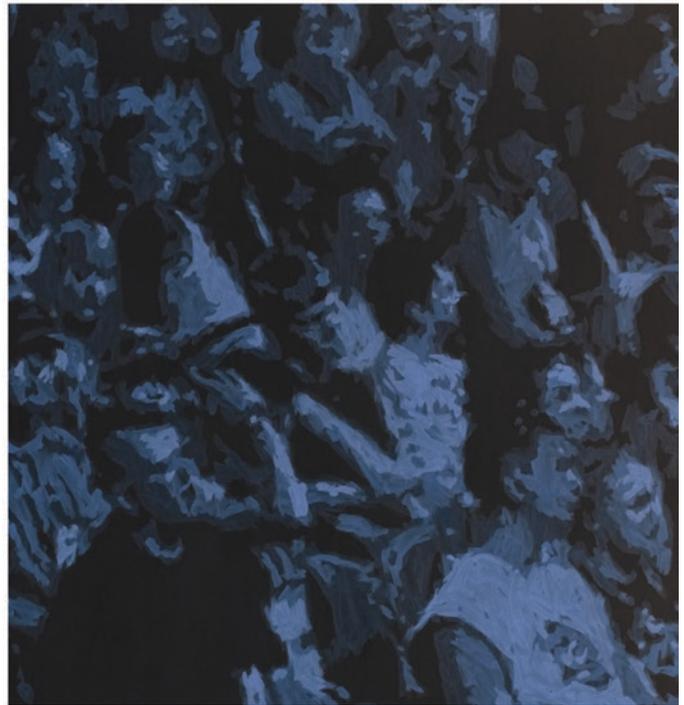
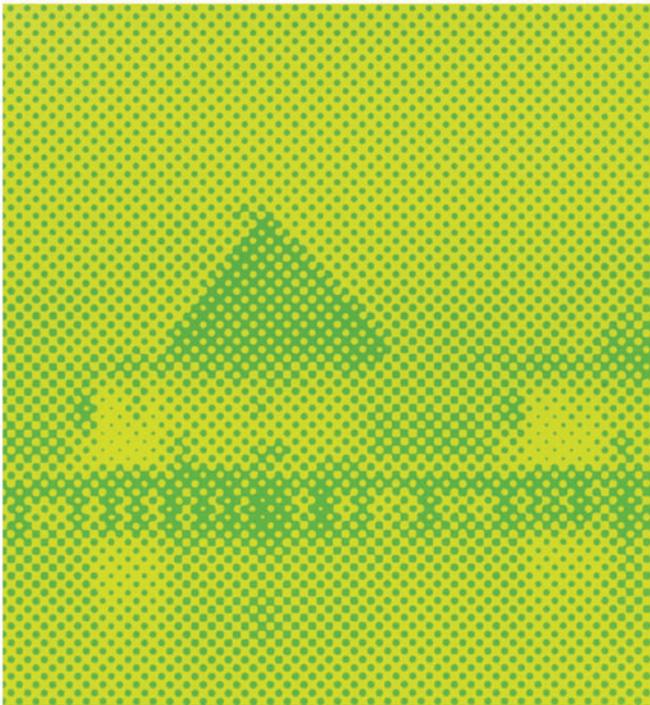
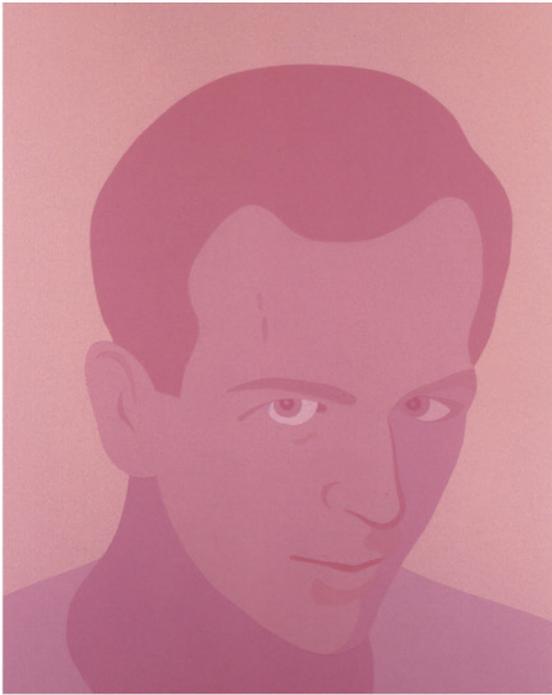
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WAYNE GONZALES: Light to Dark/Dark to Light
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