

N·O·A·R

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ANALYSIS

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2014



*"Mark of the Feminine" at the CAC
Jeremiah Ariaz - Chakaia Booker - Francis X. Pavy - Rolland Golden*

THE HARVARDWOOD INTRODUCTION TO PROUST



STEVE BACHMANN

ABOUT THE BOOK: This concise overview makes a sweeping, timeless literary classic more accessible to modern readers. The year 2013 marks the centennial of the publication of the first volume of Marcel Proust's masterwork, *À la recherche du temps perdu* or *In Search of Lost Time*. The first volume was titled *Du côté de chez Swann* or *Swann's Way*. The full story extends to more than a million words. While it is a masterpiece of world literature, it is not something that can be digested with the ease of, say, a sonnet by Shakespeare, or a painting by Matisse. The goal of this brief introduction from Harvardwood Publishing and Unlimited Publishing LLC is to democratize Proust, and also to induce more readers to celebrate him. It includes extensive references for scholarly study.

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Cover — Jeremiah Ariaz: *Tucumcari Inn*, 2009. Color photograph. See essay, page 27.

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Ronna Harris: *Marital Bliss*. Oil on canvas, 40" high.

A Sidelight on "Mark of the Feminine"

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

MARK OF THE FEMININE
A Group Exhibition
Contemporary Arts Center
New Orleans, LA

...those individual people, naked under their clothes, blood coursing under their skins, all of whose exposed heartbeats together would drown out the united voices of the machines. — Martin Buber

IN A CULTURE that persists in apportioning itself into social compartments — all the while blaring our differences, then derogating those very differences — it is scarcely a surprise that we can still see an exhibition like the CAC's "Mark of the Feminine" — or, at the same institution, last season's "30 Americans." We get what we deserve.

To a degree, social compartmentalizing is inevitable, even in post-reformist America. But now, somehow, the divisions seem to be deepening. Headline tragedies, occurring and reoccurring, make that clear. This is not the classless union we like to imagine, nor is it the one we are supposed to be. Some observers blame the overzealous media — the way it transforms every conflict into hideous theatre; the way it underscores apartness; the way it creates, wittingly or not, a sinister "other." Worse still, the way it dehumanizes the individual. In this context, Buber's words, quoted above, aptly signal the media machine's demonic power over the individual.

And the media's view has become our own. Despite the presumed alertness and presumed sophistication of this era, we still mistrust the individual. We still look askance. There is no question: those in labeled groups are manifestly "individuals."



Natalie McLaurin: *Beard Measuring Contest*, 2013. Photograph, 34" high..

And their experiences are necessarily complex, urgent, often keenly vexed — but those experiences can be, in the hands of artists, transformed into poignant images. Thus, any exhibition centering on a detached social sphere — a constrained “other”— should claim attention. “Mark of the Feminine” reminds us, at least in certain works, that the feminine experience, when seized by abiding modes of subjugation, is indeed such a sphere.

Like many others, I have long found the very notion of such shows distasteful and rather pointless. Their time, it seemed, had passed. They served only to open old wounds and possibly to rekindle ideas about two ugly social realities: hierarchy and power — realities we sometimes fantasize as annulled. Isolated pieces in this display, and in *30 Americans*,² have altered my view. There is still no question that most political art is frail politics; it is simply the wrong vehicle — too detached, too sensitive, too slow. But artists should, and must, make art about what stirs them, what stirs them profoundly. In “Mark of the Feminine,” at moments, that fervor is affecting.

THESE THOUGHTS CONJURED one of the rare examples of truly eloquent political art in our time, Barbara Kruger’s *Untitled (Questions)*, 1990. Its form was a mural of nine questions painted startlingly large on the exterior of Los Angeles’ Temporary Contemporary. Among the queries: “Who is bought and sold? Who is free to choose? Who follows orders? Who is beyond the law? Who laughs last?” Kruger obviously presumed answers, and per-

haps lively polemics, from passersby. But any answers they might submit had to consider one unavoidable thing, the singular “who.” And the implied scenario, of course, would feature the “who” — the individual — faced with the spectre of power on one side and the American dream of equality on the other. This forceful work had a capacious sweep, not excluding the social and political concerns of the “feminine,” (in quotes, as it is presented in the wall text at the CAC).

“MARK OF THE FEMININE,” in the main, does not pursue the notion of the feminine as a labeled “other.” In the exhibition, only a few works assert that today, in the wake of third-wave feminism, sexist culture remains a crushing truth. And, further, few works here suggest that this truth has something to do with women as individuals — individuals either rejecting prescribed roles or conforming to them. The show’s premise, rather than evincing a rejoinder to sexism, declares a broader aim. And, it would seem, a milder one. As stated by curator Regine Basha, it is “not necessarily a narrative theme show, or a feminist manifesto, but more like a question about the term ‘feminine’ itself, posed to female and female-identifying artists of New Orleans.”

This, to be sure, is an all-welcoming construction, clearly positing diverse views on femininity. And, Basha, reflecting on her chosen pieces, notes that “the ‘feminine,’ in its full spectrum, speaks to a timeless yet ever-evolving, set of greater shared human concerns affecting our society at large.” From these words, you



Monica Zeringue: *Narcissus*, 2014. Graphite on primed linen, 18" high.

infer perhaps a still broader take — one that might underplay any treatment of gender-related iniquities. You anticipate meditations on the “shared human concerns” of our common trek — the trials, engagements, and joys — but probably not impassioned ripostes to social transgressions.

In large part, this is so. But there are persuasive exceptions, works that carry political pungency at a time when such a thing should be unnecessary. The most compelling pieces are unapologetically feminist, or they directly question feminine identity. Several are deceptively playful or subtle, and a certain few deeply serious, with lacerating effect.

The themes are wide-ranging — from relationship dynamics to political irony, from gender roles to family and family history. Among the memorable pieces is Edna Lanieri’s photograph *First Round Knockout*. It depicts a young female boxer enduring a pummeling, her face shielded by raised arms, her eyes at once horrified and incredulous, mainly incredulous. You quickly read this: a woman, helpless and hopeless in a man’s world. Natalie McLaurin’s *Beard Measuring Contest* is a splendidly preposterous masquerade. With this single image, she reduces all emblems of machismo to sheer silliness. There is also Boyfriend’s trenchant video *Like My Hand Did*. It has a similar objective and a similar effect, but it’s more brutal. The piece is derisive, coarse, and on-target. Notable, as well, is *The Banquet Table*, by Amanda Cassingham-Bardwell, a splendid mockery of conventional female roles

Ariya Martin’s arresting video is a zoom-in of a woman’s hand snipping a man’s ear hairs. You perceive the intimacy and

tenderness of the moment, but also a tincture of the sinister. In *Keep It Up*, Vanessa Centeno presents a mountainous heap, or an inundation, of phallic symbols — an inundation, indeed, of a fairly embarrassing fixation of our time and, pointedly, of the male gender. Ronna Harris’s painting *Marital Bliss* is a tour-de-force of realist technique and of psychological force. To some viewers, the painting’s title may seem too obvious and off-putting, but its content — its depiction of shattering ennui — is unavoidable.

Jennifer Shaw’s photographs are probably the gentlest in the exhibition. You quickly think of Sally Mann’s *Immediate Family*, the phenomenal series of images of the photographer’s children just being children, but shown in a haunting yet lyrical grey-scale world. What distinguished Mann’s signature work was the disturbing sense of innocence compromised or threatened. Shaw’s images of her children have a strikingly similar look, and they are cast in similar settings — typical childhood antics. Their merit, however, relates more to photographic technique than to anything ominous. Images like *Back Door* and *Belly* are the very essence of innocence. Lovely photographs, but without Mann’s seductive hint of anecdote, and little of her mysterious timbre. What does emerge, however, is an absolute mastery of pictorial structure and chiaroscuro, and a pervasive warmth. This results in images that vacillate between pure, intelligent form — the high modernist “significant form” — and affectionate genre scenes. In *Belly*, you are tortured and captivated by the close-harmony of greys and blacks. It feels initially like surrealist near-abstraction. With inspection, though, there is a child’s hand, a mother’s abdomen. It is complete. Some pictures, decidedly, are impossible to resist.



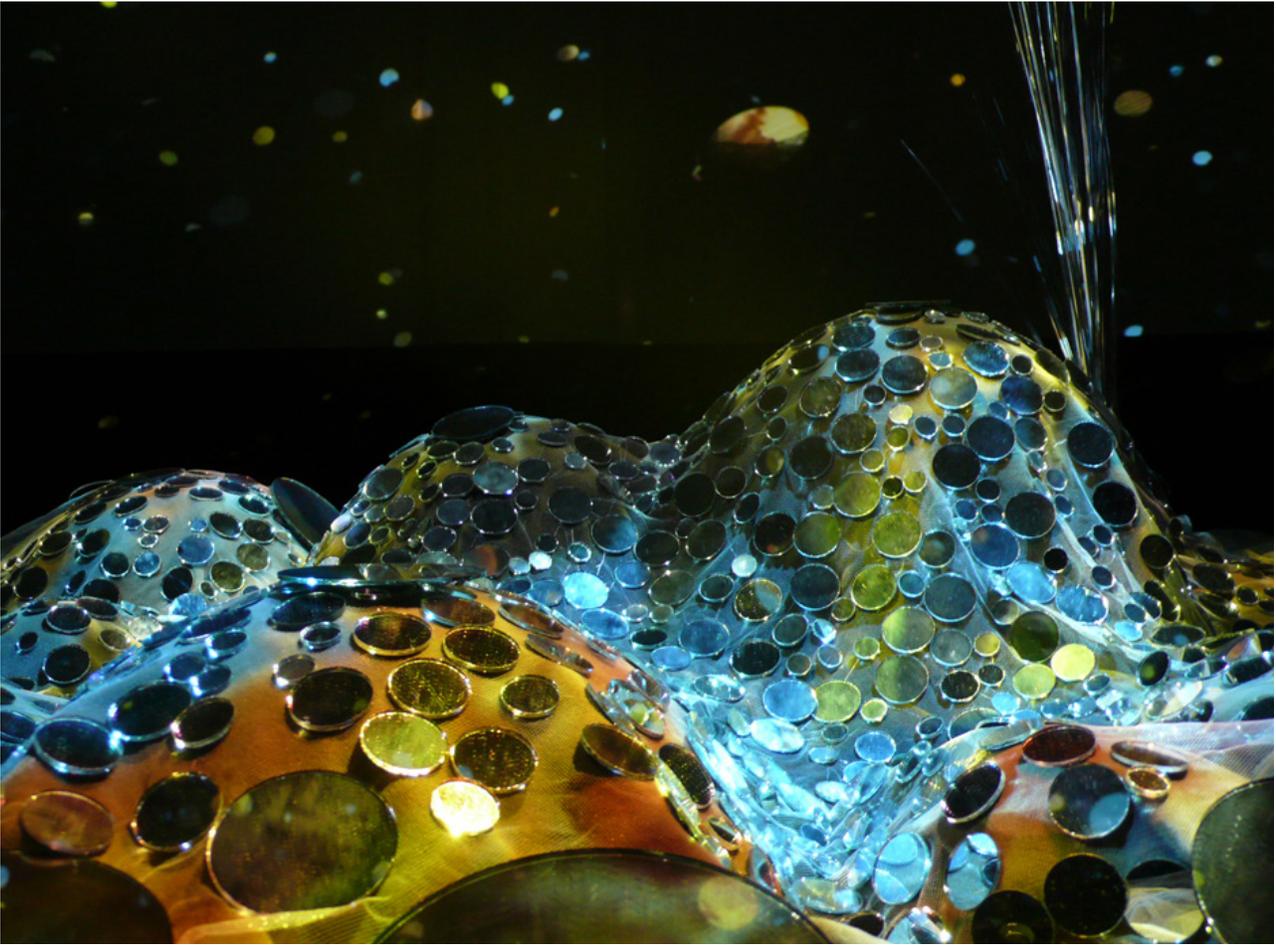
Edna Lanieri: *Cathy*, 2010. Silver gelatin print, 20" square.

As in most of her work, Monica Zeringue's pieces here depart from the mundane. Her femininity is seen via le merveilleux. The drawing *Narcissus* is, in one sense, a salute to classic Surrealism. Its formal strategy relates to the Magritte mode. She wields a pictorial magic with water reflection not very unlike the Belgian master's legendary play on windows and clouds. But beyond strategy, it is Zeringue's subjects that overtake you. They are enchanted women, and they inhabit an enchanted domain — one characterized by pristine and irresistible implausibilities. Together, they seem to provide both an antidote for, and an escape from, the trials intimated in some other works seen here. Zeringue's women have a singular, unassailable experience.

If "Mark of the Feminine" were solely about gender identity, Lanieri's *Cathy* would be its linchpin. The piece is certainly the most provocative in this regard. It is also the most affecting in every sense. In this photograph, Lanieri's posture is the precise opposite of the conventional, widely sanctioned outlook on portraiture. The "conventional" entails compromise, crippling compromise; not a true looking at the subject, but a mitigation of the artist-subject encounter. Most photographers do this by attempting to share a subject's condition, whatever that may be — to join in the pathos or joy. This generalizes the subject, eradicates her/his particularity, eradicates the humanity. The result, invari-

ably, is a decline into sentiment. Lanieri's piece is surpassingly un sentimental. The subject is a cross-dresser. The photo is about specifics, dense, chilling thereness. It betrays the artist's resolve to sustain her gaze, to refuse to look away, to tell the unshrinking truth. To grant consummate humanity. Chiefly, you sense an artist with the courage to be unmoved. As a consequence, she moves us. And that is a rare thing today; we have seen too much to be moved easily.

In lieu of sentiment, Lanieri offers a sustained etiquette of feeling, a quality that dignifies while knowing, while grasping; it amounts to compassion at the end of its tether. On occasion, I have noted a similar posture in the photographs of George Dureau, an artist who often portrayed models with handicaps, either physical or social. But Dureau's compassion is silked by style, a refined style like no one else's. For Lanieri, notably in *Cathy*, style translates as restraint. She is rigidly honest, with a blatancy approaching that of disinterested photojournalism — but, somehow, she soars poetically above that. Perhaps, it is the sort of Baudelairean poetry you perceive in the utter candor of this image, a poetry of "the melancholy, untempered real." You look at Cathy's face and at the elegant surroundings — who, precisely, is this? — and you consider our private and public masks. You consider also the splendid but fragile life of the individual. □



Shawn Hall: from *Pastoral Universe*, 2014. Video installation, Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

Inside Nature, Looking Out

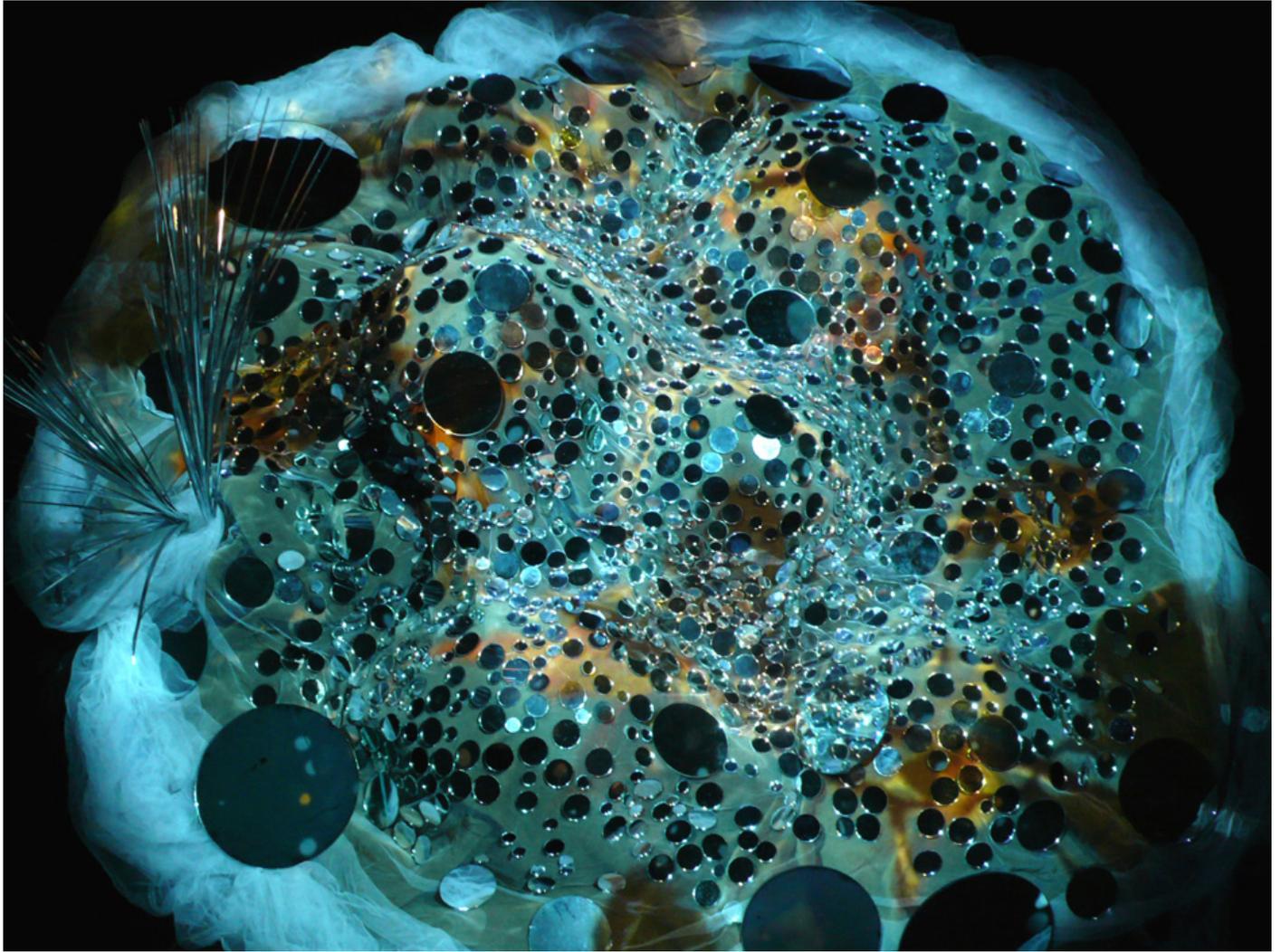
BY REBECCA REYNOLDS

SHAWN HALL
Pastoral Universe
An installation
Ogden Museum of Southern Art
New Orleans, LA

PULLING THE HEAVY black velvet curtain back, there is a moment of anticipation. What might be lurking behind the drapes? What magic might lie ahead? The room is dark, and a circular shape in the middle of the floor sparkles. More circular shapes cover the walls and ceiling, shimmering with light in green and yellow-orange tones. A pinging sound recalls dripping water, but its echo betrays an electronic edge. At first, the room seems static, but after a while, the light shifts from a golden yellow to a silvery blue. The colors on the walls are shifting too, as if something is moving behind the screen of circles and ovals. We have entered the world of Shawn Hall's *Pastoral Universe*, a video installation that aims to replicate the feeling of being inside nature, looking out. Based on the sound of the water, one can guess that we are in a coastal landscape. A few long blades of grass suggest a marsh. The shimmering colors

on the walls could be leaves and plants moving in a gentle breeze, seen through the holes of a screen. The breeze picks up and suddenly the light and colors are dancing, only to settle back down to a slower pace a few minutes later. I am reminded of my own childhood growing up on the coast of South Carolina, where I learned to become sensitive to the sounds of the marsh, to the patterns created by light flickering through moving branches and Spanish moss. It's striking to remember how beautiful flickering light in nature can be. Yet the darkness of the room and the structure of the circular forms also resemble a starry sky. This universe is celestial as well.

Pastoral Universe could be a dream of the landscape that we are losing, a desire to return to the Edenic state before hurricanes and the oil industry ravaged the coast of Louisiana. The pastoral tradition referenced in the title summons visions of shepherds and shepherdesses living in harmony with nature, perhaps as painted by Claude Lorraine in the 17th century. Ancient Greek poets such as Theocritus and Virgil created the utopian realm of Arcadia that was then revived in early 16th century Renaissance art in examples such as Giorgione's *Pastoral Symphony*. Arcadia was always a fantasy, motivated by a desire to escape the problems of life. To-



Shawn Hall: from *Pastoral Universe*, 2014. Video installation, Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

day the dream is alive and well in Thomas Kinkade's paintings at the mall, whose glowing cottages reiterate John Constable's 19th century painting, *The Haywain*, in which a farmer is pulling his cart through a picturesque pond next to an even more picturesque cottage. What Constable doesn't show is the Industrial Revolution, then threatening the rural landscape that he depicted. The pastoral flees from such change. It is a dream of the 'simple life,' free of the distractions and challenges of modern life. No traffic, no cars, no phones, no computers, no ipads, no texting, no technology at all.

The black velvet curtain reminds us that Arcadia is only a dream. This helps explain the more obviously artificial elements of Hall's installation. The lumpy masses covered with netting and mirrored discs fail to produce any illusion that we are in the marsh. This feels like a weakness at first, the craft store materials undisguised. But creating a perfect illusion of the marsh would not be germane here. The pastoral universe lies in our imagination, not in our reality. In this updated version of the pastoral, technology is not rejected. Instead, it makes an artificial nature through video that reflects off of the mirrored floor element and disperses onto the walls and ceiling. In her 2011 work *How to Build a Forest*, Hall also constructed an artificial nature: an entire forest that was built and dismantled in the course of an eight-hour performance. The ar-

tificiality of *Pastoral Universe* inspires a sense of wonder. It could be a model of how to use technology the right way, in support of the landscape. Or it could express the wish to return to the innocent state of childhood, of how a child experiences nature as a wondrous light show before learning about ecology or technology or what man has really done to the landscape. Or it could be a way to preserve the feel of the landscape in case we do lose the real thing.

Hall's vision is much more honest than the rhetoric that exhorts us to 'get back to nature.' Everything is 'green' now, but the advertising and marketing companies have pounced on pastoral desire and used it to sell everything from paper towels to cars. Take, for example, a new ad for Prius that situates the 'green' car as a pastoral solution. The car faces a green wall of trees, perhaps fir trees in the Pacific Northwest, with bits of blue sky poking through. A happy couple poses before the car, dressed for a hike or camping. The Prius and the couple call out to us, "let's lead the way." The pastoral is a dangerous mode in our own time if we believe that there is a pure nature to find on this hike. Perhaps a more artificial nature, such as the one that Shawn Hall creates, would do a better job of getting us to think about what it really means to live 'with' nature. □

Chakaia Booker: Layers of Content

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

CHAKAIA BOOKER
Eradication: A Form of Obsession
Newcomb Art Gallery
New Orleans, LA

CHAKAIA BOOKER'S SCULPTURES at Newcomb Art Gallery have generated praise and excitement throughout the summer in the New Orleans art community. Booker is no stranger to this city, and her return as an art hero is duly heralded by this praise. She has exhibited here since the early 2000s, and her monumental sculpture *Foci* inhabits the stretch of public artworks placed along Poydras by "Sculpture for New Orleans."

The dominant oval shape of that form suggests an up-ended eye watching the city, not unlike Louise Bourgeois' eye benches did from Lafayette Square. Those sculptures, the victims of vandalism – their corneas were stolen for scrap – have left the city. Now it seems Booker's work is the watcher, and perhaps with better success.

There is at least one strong formal contrast between the "eyes" by Bourgeois and Booker. Bourgeois' comparatively diminutive benches were cast in bronze, that monumental medium so useful in commemorative sculpture. Booker's monument is composed of scraps of rubber and other industrial materials culled mostly from reclaimed tires. Her work establishes a new monument medium: detritus.

Booker sculpts herself as a monumental figure, donning elaborate headdresses made of patterned cloth. Her costumes evoke Nick Cave's sound suits – which were here just a few years ago in the last iteration of the Prospect biennial. The costumes are imbued with protective as well as foreboding qualities, like an *nkisi nkonde* figure – a ritual, fetish object imbued with both medicinal and avenging qualities. "Nkonde" refers to the role of the hunter, who tracks down offenders.

Booker and her sculptures suggest those qualities. Like a post-apocalyptic warrior, her sculpture *Wrench (Wench) II* is composed on the axis of a handle that curves in a spiky wave, concluded in the "head" and "feet" at either end. Besides the massive scale, arrowheads of slashed tire rubber prevent any regular handling of this utilitarian object, which slithers through space, opening its mouth in an aggressive yelp. The union of geometric and organic shape results in a strange figuration, much like the static yet active *nkonde* figure, which is stuck with shards of found objects through ritualistic practice, traces of each time it actively served its purpose. The eradication of dystopian forces is physically marked with the presence of another object.

Booker herself ascribes content about society and race to

the work. *Nkonde* figures hold a strong social purpose about them – in general, solving problems and maintaining social order. The references to these figures and their cultural context are palpable, if not entirely overt, in the sculptures. Race is suggested by color. The color black starkly contrasts the traditional white gallery wall and pedestal, themselves inventions of European strictures on the field of fine art. Booker utilizes these standards to subvert them, emphasizing tension between not only the construct of viewing the work, but the Dadaistic medium with which the work is made.

Marcel Duchamp was a punk who broke the art-institution rules that are reflected in the paradoxical context of viewing Bookers' work in an art gallery. Booker, too, is not only of the era of punk but also iconoclastic in her use of the medium of tires. Imagine her as a witness in the Mad Max-like, post-apocalyptic world of New York in the 80s, watching cars burn in her neighborhood, which she said was in part the impetus for using the tires as her medium. Dan Bischoff quotes her in an article about a retrospective of her work at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey as saying, "the whole tire thing started with people burning cars on the street," near her home on Tompkins Square in the Lower East Side. This anarchy echoes the fervor of the French Revolution, then the workers' revolts throughout Europe in the mid-nineteenth century – aggressive moments of extreme social change. The origin story of the material imbues it with anarchic content.

Booker took the "melted and sometimes charred" tires to her studio. Lugging the tires strapped to her body, she must have seemed like a walking *nkonde* figure – an avenger of this waste. The scars she earned in cutting them apart marked the invocation of her spiritual force. This anarchy mirrors Dadaists' own iconoclasm, now a hundred years ago. The force of the bicycle tire on a stool reflects through the prism of history, fanning out into the curls, shreds, gouges, and tears of the Goodyear tires mounted on posts and walls, almost like prizes or spoils of war.

Booker finds patterns in the treads, and in the interior of the rubber. She curls these outward in her forms, as in *Conversion*, which is more directly figurative than *Wrench (Wench) II*. An arm and leg formed from painted pipes jut out from the side of the sculpture, which sits atop a white pedestal. The skin of this dwarfish figure curls backward, revealing an infinite number of asterisks and hatches. It steps to the side as though trying to remove itself from the gallery spotlight, slide off its pedestal, and creep back into the sidelines. Imbalanced, it pushes against the gravity that wants to topple it. New Orleans is home to hundreds of such figures, hunched and imbalanced on crates under hot sun. Booker touches on such huge issues as the homeless in society with blurry abstraction – which combines formal grace with raw and shredded form.



Chakaia Booker: *The Color of Hope*, 2010. Rubber tires, steel, wood, 14 feet wide. Photo by Owen Murphy.

Masked Appeal vaguely resembles the profile of a brain. This small wall-hanging sculpture is composed of convolutions of tire, squeezing forward from the wall like meat emerging from a grinder. The peels of the rubber seem referenced in the title, as well as “peeling out” and shredding treads as a result of moving too fast. The slow deliberation of folding the treads, the forceful push of them from the wall, and the contrast of their gentle curves and the origin of the material suggest the intellectual processes we are asked to participate in when addressing the work. In addition, there is appeal in the idea of reconstituting the tire to make the object on the wall.

Four seemingly innocuous collographs frame the main entrance to the gallery where Booker’s tire sculptures wait like and assembled army. These seem like concessions to traditional art practice. The medium of the collograph is the closest link to the sculptures – they are assembled from pieces and parts - two-dimensional scraps – and repetitively pressed together for permanent adhesion. Giant, heavy machines exerting enormous pressure assist in the process. That heavy lifting, which recalls the hellish images captured by Diego Rivera in *Detroit Industry*, is magnified in the brutal construction of the giant tire sculptures.



Chakaia Booker: *Conversion*, 2006. Rubber tires, wood, steel, 67" high.

The issues of race, society, and the environment that Booker began addressing with this work in the 80s and 90s were old when she arrived at them, and continue to press themselves today. The sculptures in this exhibit are dated from the first decade of the twenty-first century through the more recent past. Booker's persistence in using this material – continually reconstituting it in different forms by re-combining the same kinds of formal language - suggests the perpetual pervasiveness of the issues that she addresses.

The eradication of these materials from the landscape will continue to result in sculptural objects that help us remember the spiritual and intellectual force needed for their removal. Sculpture takes time, and massive amounts of energy, to produce. As Booker forges through each of these works, she tears through some other layer of content. We can expect the painstaking process to continue both in the work and in our daily lives. □



Chakaia Booker: Installation view, Newcomb Art Gallery. Photo by Owen Murphy.



Francis Pavy: *Tears of a Small Sun*, 2014. Oil and block prints on canvas. 24" high.

Francis Pavy: Variations of the Common Historical Seed

BY KARL F VOLKMAR

FRANCIS X. PAVY
Third Coast Suite
Arthur Rodger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

AS THE FIRST impressions of standing amid a chaotic sea of colors and shapes was slowly beginning to resolve itself into individual entities and images, I began to sense an empathy between a vaguely discerned memory rising from within me and the artist's work: that this was like an experience that had happened before, when first arriving and feeling overwhelmed by the oxymoronic diversity of this polysemous aggregation of cultures that is southwest Louisiana. As individual works were beginning to engage my attention, images and patterns and relationships were becoming

more apparent much as the new immigrant began making sense of the new geography in which he found himself with the first of many driving trips exploring the Florida Parishes east of the River and west into the wetlands and prairies east and south and west and north of Lafayette, following winding roads that seemed to follow no logic other than their own will through sugar cane fields, past watery rice paddies reflecting the sky, the bobbing white buoyed expanses of crawfish ponds, the sound of chugging irrigation pumps, and the occasional soy bean field.

The abstract nature of chromatic harmonies, transparent and translucent planes, crystalline/geometric and amoebic/amorphous shapes, ambivalent edges, images, and objects, and skirling and swirling patterns of the kaleidoscopic *When the Day Meets the Night Where the Land Meets the Sea* coalesce like the reminiscences of a story teller whose visual stories weave together the



Francis Pavy: *Night Flier*, 2014. Oil and block prints on canvas. 19" high.

strands of tales that have passed from one mouth to another, being constantly transformed in each retelling, yet each maintaining an elemental germ of truth from which an individual's and a culture's art evolves.

The contours of a fish are iterated in swirling lines echoed in multiple variations throughout the work as line becomes shape and shape becomes line and figure becomes ground and ground becomes figure. Lily pads float in the air and banana trees grow from the ground. The self-reflexive name suggests the transitional and ongoing, the meeting of night and day and land and sea in the numinous passage of one to the other that is neither yet partakes of qualities of both, not day, not night, not land, not sea, but the passage, as the *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is not about form or about space per se but about the 'forms of continuity in', or the descending of the nude, neither the nude nor the staircase themselves as things. Like the tide and the crepuscule, one is never sure of the moment when day and night are land and sea and day and light and land complement the night and dark and sea.

Each image in *Third Coast Sunrise*, each object, engages

the viewer's attention however momentarily like the words of a vaguely discerned libretto, of fragments of whispered conversations, within the flow of the melody as associations emerge from within. A place, a time of day, a transition from darkness to light, night to morning represents the waking duration of diurnal life as if emanating from the accordion at the right (a metaphor for the artist's process and presence?). Subtly modulated tonal harmonies and contrasting complementaries signify quiet transitions and sudden shifts as the eye drifts across the surface, forwards and backwards. A moth immersed within the planes hovers like a swept wing glider. A dragonfly plummets to the earth. Fish float around the base of a banana tree. Oblate tear-like raindrops ooze from the sky over fragments of hinted landscapes. The gathering of plants and leaves and animals and motives are like the sounds of an accordion played by a master improvisational artist expressing in the free association of object, image, and color relationships the artist's empathy with the world around him.

Details of *Thunderhead* intermingle with memories of driving along rural southwest Louisiana byways: the subtle in-

terplay of colors and changing patterns across the visual field; concentric spiraling yellow lines lying side by side with a violet surface from which rises a burgeoning campfire whose abundant flames writhe upwards; a giant cuttlefish swimming off to the right; a dimly seen conch shell; clumps of red, blue, and dark green grasses and cane silhouetted against immeasurable red, red yellow, and yellow spaces inflected with fluttering birds a school of fish drifting effortlessly; a spattering of small rectangular shapes.

Dynamic relationships of color and composition, the vaguely seen and the immediate recognized, intersperse with remembrances of sounds of Cajun and Zydeco and the occasional gospel song broadcast from small local radio stations filling the space of the car drifting out the open windows intermixing in perfect empathy with flowering plants in the roadside ditches, fences, trees, and telephone poles draped with massive robes of wisteria, thundering skies and drenching rains, bursts of sun through slate gray clouds, and hordes of massive cumulus clouds marching across the skies on drives along the bayou from Arnaudville to New Iberia, gliding beneath passion fern-coated live oak trees on the roads from Rosedale to Maringouin and Livonia as the sun rises and shines and sets and clouds accumulate and white egrets and blue herons flutter and flit over the fields and ponds and paddies on the way to Iota, Mamou, and LeBeau, Angelle's, Slim's, and D.I.'s. Higher still lightning streaks across a blood red sky as undulating waves transition into an accumulating blue green thunderhead oozing the colored rain characteristic of late summer afternoons/early evenings as ambiguous silvery, silvery green masses float amid a flock of flying birds approaching an intensely orange sun while a great white exploding star lily glimmers behind a transparent guitar.

Corpus Obscuratio is the most rigorously geometric of the works in the exhibit with its two concentric spirals, circle of yellow sun, transparent yellow green orb, and blue circles seemingly connected by bands of color like the belt of a lyrical Klee-like machine. Black and white rectangles reminiscent of de Stijl compositions hover among washes of color and value, reinforcing the geometric nature of the circular forms and the half erased red maze within the blue circles at the right.

The double spiral from *Corpus Obscuratio* reappears in *Partial Eclipse*. Orbs of golden sun and silver moon lie haphazardly hidden in the miasmic air in which appear a ghostlike eagle, a flock of birds, a school of fish, and spiky stalks of cane. Writhing sinuous lines write themselves across a colorful sea. A precisely rendered fish, patterns, rhythms, a ghostlike tortoise, myriad shapes, colors suggesting other things, their thing-ness dissolving into then reasserting itself amidst the colors and the contours. On the right a strong vertical accent is defined by full height canes. Areas of color like pockets of miniature landscapes rise in a column on the left. The iteration and reiteration of birds and fish, the omnipresence of circular patterns and shapes, a golden sun disc, a bright yellow flower with radiating petals enlivens the composition. A silver moon-like shape glides in from stage left, half hidden among the cane leaves.

In the hands of the artist as lyrical poet laureate, deftly manipulated chromatic scales give voice to the richness and the sense of wonder, the dramatic in the ordinary that seems extraordinary, the natural as supernatural, a world that shapes and is shaped by those whose lives are lived within it and the experience of the

recent immigrant overwhelmed by the nature of southern Louisiana. The indigenous are reminded of the complexity that may have become overlooked in the jaded routine of their lives; the newly arrived are presented clues that help one begin to understand, the former to re-cognize, the latter to become aware of, the prairies and marshes and swamps and bayous and woodlands that are the habitat of unassuming plants and animals and humankind's cultural practices.

The *Secret Oyster Bed* represents a private domain from which that succulent seafood can be harvested during any season of the year. The irregular organic concentricity of the oyster shells is echoed in the radial symmetry of palmetto fans, a coil of rope, a yellow sponge-like mass. The geometric regularity of the three phases of the opalescent pearl-like moon is mimicked in white circles bubbling here and there. Clusters of simplified piscine silhouettes, bright red and green arabesques and jagged spears of lightning, multi-colored clumps of grasses, the symmetrical irregularity of a crab shell, and the rigorous geometry of a transparent double tetrahedron are coequal in their gliding sliding floating drifting through this nacreous world.

The search for connections between images and compositions and titles leads to discovery of images and things and patterns here and there in one work and then finding similar or variations thereof elsewhere in another, suggesting associations of intentions and interpretations. In *Tropical Storm*, patterns of lines, concentric echoes of a cast stone, a breeze rippling across the bay, insects dancing across the waters, a fish breaking up from below, a snake swimming just beneath the surface, serpentine, arabesques, sinuous lines, spiraling eddies, eels suggest the immanent turmoil of the storm.

Each work can be read from right to left and left to right, from bottom to top and top to bottom, experiencing transitions and transformations, appearances and disappearances. In *Aigle Rouge*, a bright red eagle soars across the surface, wings echoing the curving contour of the petals of a lotus blossom. A green spiral repeats the yellow below iterating the sound hole of a guitar lying half hidden beneath a blue starfish; a thicket of light green grasses rises vertically into long yellow fronds into a pale white rectangular cloud. The yellow lotus blossom drifts above a slow spiraling pattern against a blue green textured ground. A fisherman's knot not yet pulled tight echoes the light blue guitar that mimes a map star. Vertical accents, horizontal rhythms, layers of directional lines counterpointing each other, transparent and opaque layers revealing and hiding what lies below are like the parts of a melody winding its way through a rhythmic space adorned with arpeggios and syncopations of images patterns.

Ambiguous titles allow one to elude the grip of reason. The eye roams freely, deliberately, recognizing leaves, a stream of scalloped green waves, a sailboat, a chevron pattern overlapping a great blue whale, alternating light and dark textured triangular shapes, the ubiquitous fish and circular spirals, the ghost of an alligator, and the constantly shifting flow of color in *New Moon*. What do an alligator and a wood campfire have to do with the *Tears of a Small Sun*? A chaotic explosion of color, pattern, and shape signifies the perigee of a *High Tide* at the moment when incoming and outgoing attain an indefinite point of equilibrium. A huge cephalopod watches patiently, inquisitively, disinterestedly out of the visual melee that is *Ink Behind the 7th Wave*. Swirling lines like



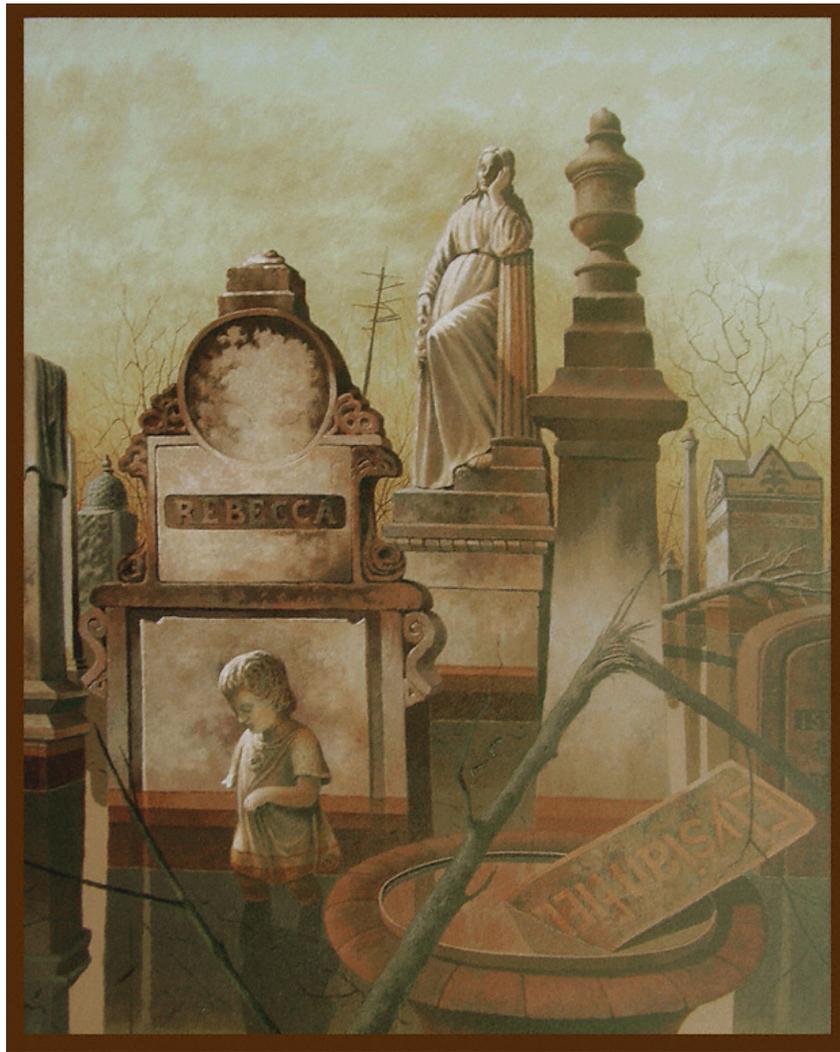
Francis Pavy: *Secret Oyster Bed*, 2014. Oil and block prints on canvas. 1/2" high.

the flight path of the moth in *The Moth Code* are like a mystical hieroglyph.

Fall Migration with its low saturation colors and darker values is a surreal landscape that incorporates elements found in other works, each image pattern object woven into the whole with overlapping planes, iterated contours and shapes, and varied rhythmic patterns of lines. *Half Shell Conglomerate* is a quieter work, a crepuscular nocturne: a dominant horizontal with minor vertical chords, a muted range of tones, few strong and never dominant contrasts of line, colors, shapes, a subtle push pull, an elegant pattern before one sees the crab, the simple abstraction of half oyster shells, quiet transparent overlays, an elaborate nautical knot, a concentric disk asserting a counter plane to the flatness of the dominant mode, a single blue line iterates the motion of the scal-

loping wave-like lines three above one below as two slithering forms work their way.

The conflation of the iterative character of block printing and the individualistic nature of oils mirrors the traditional basic structure of the old French music that underlies subsequent invention and improvisation. Like an avid dancer to Zydeco and Cajun who appreciates and moves in harmony with the subtle variations that distinguish one song from another and the same song played by different musicians and adapts his/her rhythmic response to the nuanced differences underappreciated by outsiders, the artist writes/plays/prints/paints his variations of the common historical seed. It would be very interesting to invite musicians who are adept at improvisation to respond to Pavy's works as experimental 'musical' notation. □



Rolland Golden: *Elysian Fields - Land of Gods*, 2006. A/C, 50" high.

Rolland Golden: Two Exhibitions

BY JUDITH H. BONNER

ROLLAND GOLDEN
An Alternate Vision
Ogden Museum of Southern Art
The Artistry of Rolland Golden
Garden District Gallery
New Orleans, LA

SOUTHERN ARTIST ROLLAND Golden is celebrating his nearly six-decade career in art with the publication of his memoir and two exhibitions of his work held simultaneously at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the Garden District Gallery, both of which opened on White Linen weekend, with a book signing at the nearby Garden District book store. The Ogden Museum's retrospective show, "An Alternate Vision," which includes more than 80 oil paintings, watercolors and drawings, includes his work from the beginning of his career to the present, thereby providing the

full range of his *oeuvre*. The exhibition focuses on Golden's work through what he considers to be "abstract realism." "The Artistry of Rolland Golden," shown at the Garden District Gallery, features more than 30 recent works. Not unexpectedly, many of these portray Louisiana and Mississippi landscapes.

Golden's memoir, *Rolland Golden: Life, Love, and Art in the French Quarter*, was just released by the University Press of Mississippi. The text contains 54 color photographs and 94 black-and-white photographs and illustrations. The book reads more like a romance novel than the usual memoir, but it remains true to Golden's personality, character, and devotion to his wife, his family, and his art. Golden sets the stage with his return home from boot camp in 1953, a time when he first met Stella Doussan, literally "the girl next door," although their homes were across the street from each other.



Rolland Golden: *Sharecropper's Legacy*. A/C, 37" high.

With his discharge from the U.S. Navy in 1955 to the present, their lives were cemented with their marriage on August 31, 1957. During their years in the Quarter, the Goldenes were very much a part of the Jazz scene, for a time living a few feet from the recently established Preservation Hall (1961) and listening to the music from their balcony—particularly that of their close friend, Pete Fountain. Although Golden sketched the musicians at Preservation Hall, they are not a prominent subject in the majority of his works—although there are several drawings and paintings of jazz musicians on exhibition in his retrospective at the Ogden, including views of the Second Line for trumpeter “Kid” Thomas Valentine’s funeral.

On his return to the city of his birth, Golden entered regionalist painter John McCrady’s School of Art on Bourbon Street in the Vieux Carré. Golden finished his course of studies with McCrady two years later, at which point he and Stella married and took up residence in the Quarter near his studio. Throughout his career, Golden would adhere to McCrady’s teachings, which emphasized adherence to the basic principles of art, with a distinct emphasis on drawing, composition, and the use of space, value, and line, remembering that McCrady advised there were two sides to every line. Like McCrady’s work, much of Golden’s is characterized by hard edges and strategic areas of saturated color, although many of Golden’s paintings are far more vivid.

Golden describes life in the Quarter during the 1950s and 1960s, accounts that are interspersed with historical notes on world history and current events, but especially with notes on the history of the Vieux Carré. He discusses artists who lived there and the places they frequented regularly, particularly the Bourbon House at the corner of St. Peter and Bourbon Streets. Other art-

ists who are named in the book are Andrew “Andy” Lang, Richard Hoffman, Barbara “the Witch” Reed, Oscar Leonidas “Chick” Coleman, Sidney Kittinger, Chuck Fish, Jack Cooley, Dick Allen, Johnny Donnels, and Noel Rockmore, providing insight into their lives. Other Quarterites include Barbara and Pete Fountain, Jon and “Gypsy” Lou Webb, and Larry Borenstein, from whom Golden rented Edward Woodson “Pops” Whitesell’s old studio on St. Peter Street, naming it the Patio Art Gallery. It was at this location that many of Golden’s first successes took place, including sales to actor Vincent Price for Sears and Roebuck’s traveling art program.

In describing his artistic development, Golden notes an art course he took in college and the influence of French Quarter artist Anthony “Tony” Shemroske. Golden, who admired Shemroske’s rapid painting technique, was also a close friend of Charles Reinike, another Vieux Carré artist who painted with rapid brushstrokes. It was not until fellow artist Francisco McBride told Golden about Rockmore’s exhibition at the Downtown Gallery, which Golden visited several times, that he realized the absolute necessity of concentrating on planning the composition and on the execution in his work. This approach is evident throughout Golden’s oeuvre, which reflects his artistic development through personal explorations in compositional layouts.

The memoir spans the period from 1955 to 1976, culminating with his traveling exhibition in the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the Cold War. This exhibition, which featured 51 of his watercolor paintings focusing on the American Civil War, toured through Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and Odessa. To date Golden is the first and only American artist to have had a solo touring exhibition in the USSR, for “The Art of the Wyeths” was a three-generation exhibition that occurred a decade



Rolland Golden: *Essence of Evening III*. O/C, 20" high.

later.

Before his manuscript was complete, Golden suffered a stroke and Stella Golden wrote an epilogue that covers the couple's time visiting in the USSR and a brief account of her husband's succeeding decades. Her narrative is succinct; her assessment of his artistic development is discerning. She points to Golden's move from the wet-into-wet technique taught by McCrady into a more controlled application of paint using a dry brush technique. She further cites his introduction of increased patterning into his paintings and his use of slight exaggeration of natural elements, which created a tight focus on his compositional designs. This is evident in particular in his scenes of plowed fields with shadowy furrows and in the shadows of clouds.

The Goldens' decision to raise a family in the French Quarter is extraordinary and sets them apart from the typecast of seediness that is usually ascribed to the artists' community during the 1950s through the 1970s. Their love for the history of the Vieux Carré and its historical structures is apparent throughout the book. Their involvement in the fighting of the proposed raised expressway in the "Second Battle of New Orleans" from 1964 to 1969 is presented from the view of an insider. Golden writes of those involved in that struggle, including Bob and Jan Carr, Bill and Edith Long, and the Parents Association of St. Louis Cathedral School and the Vieux Carré Property Owners group. He also cites the many places frequented by families, especially Brocato's Ice Cream Parlor, pastry shops, and the French Market.

Beyond Golden's telling of his artistic development and his work ethic, this book is important for his openness in discussing the stress of striving continuously to produce successful artworks, and especially for his frankness in revealing his panic attacks and clinical depression. Such honesty is rare in artists' memoirs. Gold-

en's revelations about his experience with the Bryant Gallery is insightful, both in his initial excitement with becoming successful artistically and secure financially when he first signed a contract with the gallery and in his eventual difficulties in receiving commissions for paintings sold by that gallery and his resultant successful lawsuit.

Most of Golden's works exhibit the full range of the elements of art, as well as the principles of design students learn in the first course in art: balance, variety, movement, rhythm, pattern, repetition, proportion, and unity. For the most part, each work exhibits the full range of values, although the extreme range of white or black might be a small area that serves to direct the viewer's eye to a critical point in the composition. His mastery of perspective takes on a different viewpoint in each work. Several scenes are visible through an open door or window, or in a similarly arranged composition.

Visitors to the Ogden Museum and the Garden District Gallery will discover some elements in common, particularly his use of a barren tree with its branches spread over the open skies to unify the composition. A number of early works at the Ogden feature dominoes, checkers, and Chinese checkers that are emphasized in foreground arrangements in front of mid-ground landscapes. These children's games underscore Golden's familial activities and his application of their patterns of game pieces in his compositions. Several paintings are executed from drawings he made while in New York, Virginia, Russia, and France. A diptych pays homage to the surrealist artist René Magritte in its imagery while at the same time the pastel palette appears to pay a tribute to Monet.

Invariably, Golden's viewpoint is different from the expected. A 1977 watercolor titled *Inside the Kremlin* departs from



Rolland Golden: *Morning Fog*. Watercolor, 34" high.

the usual view of the onion domes of St. Basil's. In this winter scene he shows the unmistakable shadow of a dome falling on stone steps that lead to a building constructed of large blocks of stone; he introduces humans into the picture artfully with the indentation of footprints in the snow made by an unseen pedestrian. Perhaps the latter is a subtle comment on the oppression of the common man during the Cold War, almost certainly a drawing or photograph taken during his visit to that country.

Throughout his life Golden has had a number of residences, including those in Natchez and the Mississippi Delta. As a child his family moved back to New Orleans from their home in Grenada, Mississippi, finding a small cottage in Gentilly. The different places of his residence and his travels in the Deep South had a lasting influence on his visual aesthetic. With time and a measure of success, Golden would move from the French Quarter, but he continued to have a gallery presence there. For more than three decades, Golden has maintained a residence on the North Shore. His works were exhibited in the Vieux Carré at Nahan's Gallery and later in the Crescent Gallery—his daughter's gallery, until after Hurricane Katrina when the city was devoid of visitors.

Generally, Golden's exhibitions have focused on a central theme. Haunted by the devastation to New Orleans following Katrina, he developed a body of work on the flood, the trauma and deaths caused by the flood, and the destruction to the city's architecture and neighborhoods. These works were exhibited in 2007 at the New Orleans Museum of Art, with a large number of the sketches, photographs, and paintings acquired jointly by NOMA and The Historic New Orleans Collection. A few works from this series are included in the Ogden exhibition. *Elysian Fields*, *Land of the Gods*, a 2006 painting in acrylic, is anything but an Elysi-

um. A New Orleans cemetery scene, a street sign reading "Elysian Fields" is partially submerged in a cement flower urn. A broken statue and a sculpture of a weeping woman, images frequently found in New Orleans cemeteries, manifest the sad plight of the post-Katrina city.

A Paradox of Time, an acrylic painting and its preparatory sketch, depict all too painfully the decline of a Mississippi plantation home in Claiborne County, now known as "Windsor Ruins." Both are shown at the Ogden. The painting was executed for Golden's 1970 exhibition at Bryant Gallery in Jackson, "The Death of The Plantation." An elderly African-American man leans on his cane in foreground, resting against a masonry pier and contemplating the scene of a decaying plantation house before him. The still solid mass of fluted columns provides contrast with the airy horizontal ironwork bannister with its continuous linear diamond-shaped motif. A vine in the foreground recalls Walker Percy's description of vines overtaking buildings and highways in his 1971 novel, *Love in the Ruins*.

A taciturn scene titled *Sharecropper's Legacy*, painted in acrylic, pictures a disintegrating barn adjacent to a field of cotton in full bloom and ready for picking, but without a worker in sight. Several paintings represent Golden's 1975 "Demolition by Neglect" exhibition at Bryant's in New Orleans. These depict buildings in the Central Business District, some with cranes or bulldozers parked and ready, though driverless for the moment, but with the understanding that the building would soon be destroyed—often for no better replacement than an asphalt parking lot.

"By Any Other Name," a 1976 exhibition, focused on the difficult life of tenant farmers and small farmers. A painting of the same title depicts a large scale red rose, arranged vertically and

prominently in the foreground and superimposed on an abandoned shack in the mid-ground. In his memoir Golden notes that in the South, such buildings are variously called cabins, shanties, cottages, or shacks, thus the name of his series. Rural cabins and gray textured weathered wood are recurring subjects throughout his career. Golden is most successful in one particular painting in which he applies heavy impasto to simulate the textural effect of wood.

The exhibition at the Garden District Gallery, “The Artistry of Rolland Golden,” points to a new direction in his artwork, yet his debt to McCrady is unmistakable throughout these paintings, which are executed in oil, acrylic, and watercolor. Evident in all the works in the exhibition is his strict adherence to the principles of composition and his development of color theory. A number of graphite value studies included in the show are strong exercises, both in feeling and in their use of a full range of values from light to dark. One scene of snow-covered trees titled *Winter Totems* is depicted, appropriately, in lighter values. A 2009 grisaille watercolor of Morning Fog is essentially a study in value and underlying horizontal elements.

Color in Golden’s recent paintings is often bold and electric, particularly those that are heavily dependent on red and yellow tones. Typically, the intensity of the blazing red is balanced by cool areas of gray or neutral shades. The work most dominated by the use of saturated red is a minimalist oil painting titled *Forty Acres and a Mule*, a flood scene executed with ironic undertones in 2011. In this scene a gray timber-framed farm house is submerged in luminous vermilion flood waters that reflect an ominously fiery sky. The gray branches of a barren tree climbing into the red-tinged clouds, an outhouse, the gray banks on either side of the shore, the gray reflection of trees and architectural structures, and neutralized waters in the foreground offer balance. Despite the warmth of the red tones, there is an underlying sense of chill. This flood scene, as in many of the works of this exhibition, is characterized by Golden’s sense of slightly up-tilted perspective that draws the viewer into the scene.

Although the red-and-gray palette is dominant in *River Sculpture*, the composition differs in that the foreground structure is a waterlogged decaying tree trunk rendered in a range of gray values, its trunk splitting outward like the warped splats of a rotting barrel. Its asymmetrical shape and blue-gray rippled water in the foreground contrast with the nearly symmetrical background, which recedes to a vanishing point just off center.

A study in a cool palette, *Tuesday’s Gone: A Tribute to Lynyrd Skynyrd* shows a railroad track with the receding lines of its rails disappearing in the distant off-center vanishing point. A railcar, its yellow-lighted windows and red tail light disappearing near the focal point, emphasizes the theme of departure. Here this tribute to the Southern rock band is executed in pale grays. The snow in the foreground has a mottled texture; the tracks of an unseen vehicle create a crisscross grid in mid-ground. A cluster of single story buildings in the background anchor the composition, one of them a neutralized red—another device to draw the viewer’s eye to the background.

In a watercolor painting titled *Sienna Evening*, reddish skies, which occupy the greater part of the canvas, are muted with burnt sienna in the foreground waters. The red skies are oblique and the shore in the foreground is rendered in neutral tones. In the right background, a barren tree is juxtaposed against a dark

grayish-green cluster of trees. A number of these works feature horizontal bands of color or shape, including *Over the Bank*, another watercolor. Here horizontal strips of mottled reddish-pink areas of a river appear sandwiched between foreground trees and a distant shoreline, while a wide swath of blue sky gives balance to the warm tones of the water.

A hint of McCrady’s skies appears in a couple of Golden’s works: a biomorphic figure forms in the clouds, especially in *Evening Palette*, a vivid 2011 oil and acrylic work. The composition recalls McCrady’s so-called “multi-stage” technique, which he executed in oils over an acrylic underpainting. Golden, however, is more restrained in delineating clouds.

The underlying compositional arrangement of *Essence of Evening III* is a dominantly horizontal format with diagonal elements for interest. Executed in oil and acrylic in 2004, cerulean and purple tones dominate this painting. Similarly, *Over the Bank* features red and pink hues above the trees with horizontal strips of sky above a distant shore. A 2004 exploration in intensely saturated yellow, *Crystal Evening II*, features diagonals of a field converging in the center under bands of yellow, cerulean, and a medium blue.

Golden departs from his river scenes to re-focus on landscapes. *Passage de la Vache*, with its black and white spotted cows, clearly a reference to “cattle crossing,” shows an autumn scene. In the foreground, a tree is spotted in gray and ochre like the spots on the cattle crossing the roadway. Lest one miss the meaning, Golden depicts a yellow highway sign picturing a cow, which is tacked on a tree that clearly sends the message. The muddied legs and underbellies of the cattle serve as a transition to the brown muted areas of the composition. Bands of color on angles are subdued. Green, rust, ochre, gray-green, gold, and brown leaves fly through the blue sky. This theme of floating multi-colored leaves also appears in *Yellow Blizzard*, a watercolor and gouache composition exhibited at the Ogden.

At the Garden District Gallery a hilly landscape set in Virginia, *Near Dusk II* shows a ribbon of highway with the double yellow stripe in the center of charcoal blue with white stripes at the edges. Golden, who as a child frequently stood behind his father on long Sunday drives, has held a life-long fascination of such man-made ribbon-like roadways inserted into a natural landscape. This theme has recurred throughout his career, as well as a focus on highway signs, which send a message to the viewer. In this Virginia setting, the foliage of each tree is reminiscent of self-taught Mississippi painter Theora Hamblett’s landscapes, with variations in the separate color for the foliage of each tree: green, pink, purple, green. The hilly landscape provides Golden with the opportunity for blending the hues of a red sunset: a progression of rainbow colors moves gradually from the blue skies at the top of the composition, through the warm colors of the sunset in mid-ground, and back to green grass and blue shadows in the foreground.

Numerous paintings in these two exhibitions reflect Golden’s concentration on different seasons, time of day, and weather conditions. *Eternal Passing*, an oil and acrylic work at the Garden District Gallery, portrays New Orleans’ architectural tombs in the foreground; these structures are set against horizontal strips of yellow, gray-blue, and coral in the river and sky. A small partially visible sun in the distant sky draws the viewer’s attention and reinforces the concept of sundown and “eternal passing.” A departure from the other paintings, *Brighten My Day* features large



Rolland Golden: *French Quarter Revisited*. Watercolor, 39" high.

sunflowers, one of which is depicted in a childlike circle radiating from the lower right, just off the corner. The flower occupies nearly half the foreground composition with a weathered rural cabin in the background; colorful strips of rust and green suggest an old tin roof. The diagonals of the hipped roof, with a porch at the left end of the building, suggest the intrusion of hard-edged geometric shapes inserted into and against a natural setting.

A similar painting at the Ogden, *Sunflower County II*, executed in 1981, depicts two large sunflowers, one frontally and one from the reverse, showing the botanical structure of the plant. Three small buds offer balance and variety in their shape, their placement, and the direction in which they are shown. Continuing the theme of antiquated architectural structures, Golden portrays a weathered barn in this recent composition.

The Golden moved to Natchez in the summer of 2006, where he drew inspiration from the Mississippi River. After executing numerous river scenes, Golden again sought subjects from the French Quarter where he studied, lived, and exhibited his work for many years. *French Quarter Revisited* features sharp contours, rectangular architectural shapes, and a subdued color palette. A steeple in the distance is visible above the roof lines, a device used by many of the artists who drew inspiration from Vieux Carré street scenes. Despite physical challenges, Golden continues to paint, drawing his inspiration from the rich architectural, cultural, and geographic features of the South. Overall, the artworks exhibited at the Ogden and the Garden District Gallery are exercises in which Golden perseveres in testing the limits of compositional elements and color theories. □



Mitchell Lonas: *Grouse Feather III*, 2014. Incised, painted aluminum. 32" high.

Mitchell Lonas: Balanced Form

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

MITCHELL LONAS
Balance & Perception
Callan Contemporary
New Orleans, LA

THE STANZE DELLA Segnatura of the Vatican Palace houses the Renaissance master Raphael's most famous frescoes. *The School of Athens* is perhaps the best known of these paintings, in which Raphael fantasized about a gathering of ancient intellects – portrayed as contemporary heroes – in one perfectly perspectival location. The artist painted a self-portrait in a black beret to the far right of the composition, peering out from behind illusionistic architecture toward the viewer, as though looking up from the lesson unfolding beneath his gaze.

In this same corner, Raphael pictured the Greek mathematician Euclid in the midst of inscribing, with white chalk, geo-

metric forms on a dark slate. Euclid elegantly balances his weight on one leg, forming a parabola with his extended arm, himself becoming a mathematical shape. The compass in his hand extends from his fingers as though the instrument of measurement, useful for creating perfectly circular shapes, is a part of his body as well. The eurhythmy of Euclid's pose suggests the ideal perfection of his study, which was key to the development of the transcendental space of Raphael's composition.

In the early 1500s, Raphael was three centuries past the development of the Fibonacci numbers, posed by Leonardo Pisano, who later became known as Fibonacci, in his *Liber Abaci*, or the "Book of Calculations." Based on the multiplication of rabbits' procreation, Fibonacci numbers describe the regular increase of breeding pairs. The sequence of numbers can be tracked throughout other natural patterns, and is one of the most basic relationships of math and nature.



Mitchell Lonas: *Sparrow Nest*, 2014. Incised, painted aluminum. 34" high.

The proportions of the numbers in sequence are quite roughly two-thirds to one, and when mapped, spiral out through the sections of The Golden Rectangle. Employed by other Renaissance masters like Leonardo and Botticelli, this mathematically derived geometric form has been beloved by artists since classical antiquity for its regularity, harmony, and asymmetrical balance. It is a means of organizing the chaos of space into relatable compartments, a way of tapping into natural forces and shaping them within the boundaries of human creativity. It is strikingly elemental, as well - it serves as a basic compositional strategy in two-dimensional foundation courses in contemporary academia, especially as it can so easily be found in the world just outside the doorway to the classroom.

The overall form of Mitchell Lonas' new works in the exhibition, "Balance and Perception," at Callan Contemporary, is loosely based on this compositional strategy. Balance in composition is both form and content in the work, and the perception of the overall title seems to reference the artist's personal fascination with Fibonacci numbers in nature. For his third solo exhibition at the gallery, Lonas presents the viewer with shimmering metallic images inscribed into velvety-black backgrounds. The reflective metal on black fleetingly recalls Euclid's slate, and it is possible to imagine Lonas leaning over his substrate with his customized tools as Euclid bends over his lesson in Raphael's fresco, himself precariously balanced. The labor of the process and Lonas' burgeoning focus in the mathematic potential of his imagery are key ideas behind newer subject matter and methods that may not be utilized, at this point, for their greatest potential.

The sublime quality of the void, which recalls the abstract space of paintings by German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich, is omnipresent in the new work. Feathers and nests, which have become iconographic in Lonas' work, float in clean white and smooth black planes, twisting gently in space. The gentle curves of the Golden Spiral begin to seem more consciously composed in these turns, though the central compositional placement of the forms detracts from that effect.

Feathers, nests, trees, and now waterfalls emerge with murky Baroque tenebrism from the dramatic dark that seeks to envelop them. Lonas carves out the forms from this darkness, literally revealing them toward the focused, theatrical spotlight of the gallery. The textures of his sculptural marks vibrate as the viewer moves in front of these two-, then three-dimensional planes, which change when the flat forms become illusions, threading themselves into our space. Twigs and hair, the barbs of the feathers, droplets of water, and the frilly surface of leaves and bark both gently rise from the surface and psychically project their reflected light from the exposed metallic surface. The marks freeze the staccato and adagio gestures of Lonas' arm attached to his own devices, again recalling Euclid's determined movements in Raphael's masterpiece.

The drama of Lonas' work is literally diminished by scale. His work is most effective when the proportions of the figure are subordinate to the ground, like Friedrich's tiny monk in face of the vast sea before him. The Romantic links that are expressed in Lonas' choice of subject matter from nature work more in his favor when the overall scale consumes the viewer.



Mitchell Lonas: *Kauai Waterfall*, 2014. Incised, painted aluminum. 59" high.

Much of the work in this exhibit is small, and thus consumable itself. Lonas' commercial success, and the gallery's success as well, are not to be discounted by any means. His ability to navigate the world of his art in a corporate context – he reports having made work for the *Twilight* series among his commercial triumphs – is commendable. But, it is questionable whether the content of the work may begin to suffer on a continued small scale – as well as whether this is a concern for Lonas. Raphael himself worked for the desires of his patrons, but it seems the independent, Romantic spirit of Lonas' work might at times depart from the strictures of that kind of relationship.

Press for the show clearly indicates the influence of math and its sometimes covert, sometimes overt presence in nature on the work, which relates Lonas' established Romantic tendencies with classical study. Much of the work is formed with bilateral symmetry, suggesting a desired link between human forms and the trees and nests of the iconography. For Lonas, this link makes sense – nests, in particular, have strong familial and human associations for him. But, in the context of Fibonacci, the work as a whole might lean toward asymmetry – as is the case in the two images of waterfalls. In them, forms follow the compositional grids and curves most clearly, though the relationship of the waterfall itself to Fibonacci numbers seems esoteric at best. The proportions of the substrates sometimes follow the proportions of the Fibonacci sequence and sometimes do not, and so the major relevance of

this context to the work is questionable. An image of an ammonite fossil incised in a 34" x 34" square is the clearest reference to the mathematical/natural context.

Lonas has been experimenting with color in these works. The ammonite is richly brown in areas. Gold, green, pink, and blue tints – the colors of Rococo, a style of the elite – subtly emerge from *Sparrow Nest II*, the single nest-on-white in the show. This one did sell.

The most technically fascinating examples of this investigation into color and layers occur in two images of grouse feathers, in which the pattern of the plumage softly coalesces with the texture of the barbs and the darkness of the ground. Baroque tenebrism is very effective here, as is the evidence of Lonas' technical ability.

Like a Romantic, Lonas also appears to have become increasingly interested in the content of time. He has titled many of these works with reference to time of year: "mid-spring," "late spring," and "mid fall" are examples. Constable similarly labeled his studies of clouds in the 1820s with the hours during which he worked on them. The record of time is one of the most intriguing conceptual qualities of those paintings, and the emphasis on the record in the titles evokes questions in Lonas' work. In general, this moment in Lonas' production seems a transitory one, where changes both in form and content are beginning to develop. Where time will take him, we will have to wait and see. □



Jeremiah Ariaz: *Tucumcari Inn*, 2009. Color photograph.

The Ogden's 'Louisiana Contemporary'

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

LOUISIANA CONTEMPORARY
A Juried Exhibition
Ogden Museum of Southern Art
New Orleans, LA

IT SEEMS A FACILE exercise to disparage the Ogden Museum's "Louisiana Contemporary," just as New Yorkers have, for many years, disparaged the Whitney Biennial. The target is an easy one. Such exhibitions — whether open, salon-style competitions or curated invitationals — are primed for various levels of disaster. The initial task, gleaning worthy pieces from a myriad of aesthetic impulses, is only the beginning, and that, in the case of the Ogden, was left to a single juror (always a dicey proposition). Even more of a trial, perhaps, is the design of such a show. The charge: an installation that insures stylistic and philosophical distinctions, that permits unhindered flow, and ultimately gives the illusion

of cohesive simplicity. Nearly impossible, of course. But generous space helps. And the Whitney has it. The Biennial employs separate galleries, separate floors — most often, three floors. The museum makes a full commitment. And yet, the usual thanks is journalistic vitriol.

A telling exception was the 2012 edition, a much smaller show than the usual surfeited affair. It was steered by two indefatigable curators. They went to great lengths to clarify the faceted tenor of the art scene at that moment, a task realized by judiciously sparse installation. A second feat: they managed to secure a selection of unassailing, non-sardonic, and deeply thoughtful art — art of unambiguous quality. And quality is chiefly what salvaged their project. It clearly contributed to a warmer — or at least more tolerant — critical response.

These two points figure in the ultimate bearing of "Louisiana Contemporary," as well. The exhibition presumes to be a gauge of today's art, as director William Andrews stated, "to give . . . a voice" to our art community. You expect, to some degree, a survey of the current scene — and, sanguinely, the highest achieve-



David Armentor: *Trucks*, 2012. Archival pigment print.

ments within that scene. But this is where the show falters. You take the sense that variety mattered more than quality, that the aim was to be fully inclusive at any cost. The result is a cacophony that undermines the strong pieces on display.

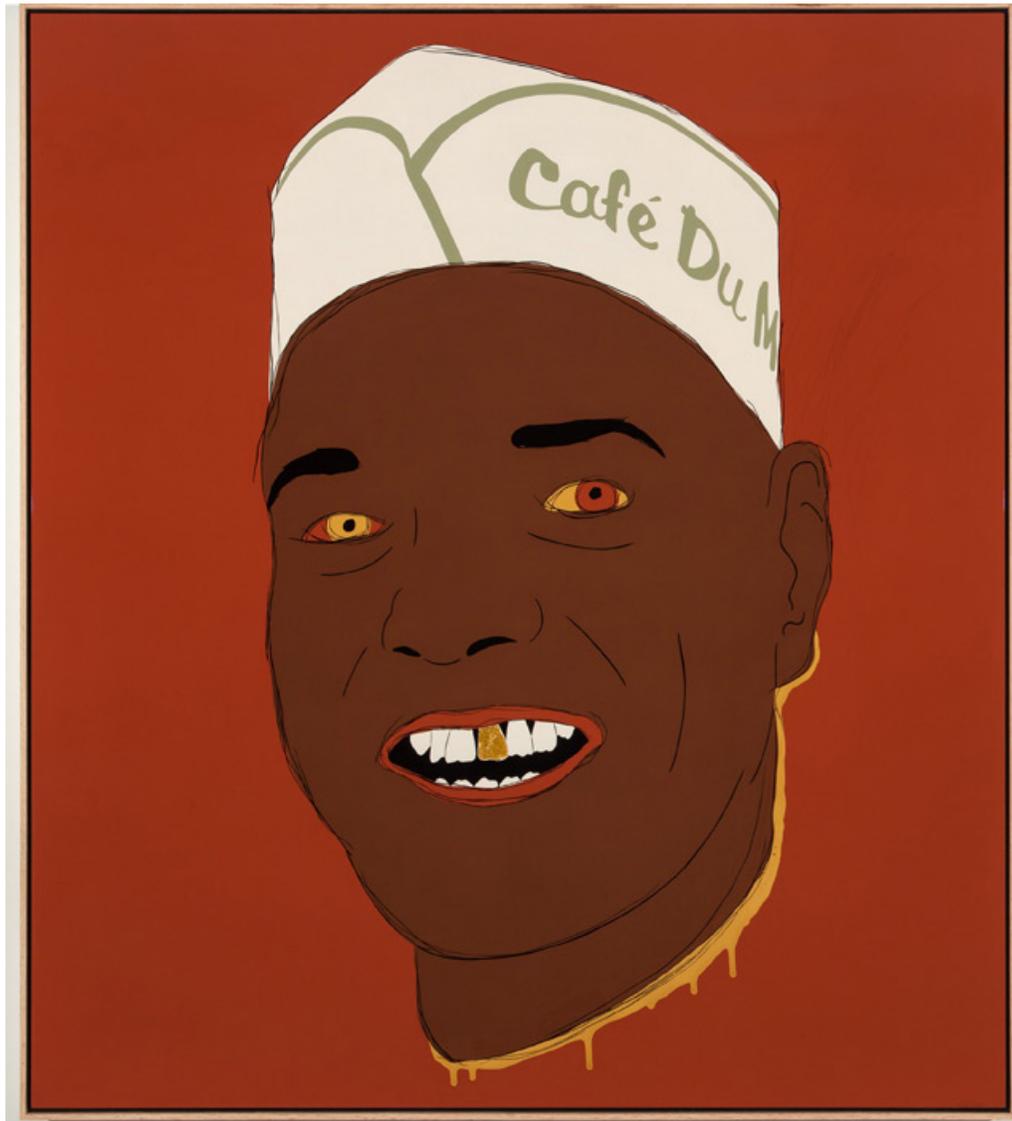
Of course, I hasten to add, this is an open show, not a curated one, and the juror clearly had a maddening commission. He was dependent on entries in the open call. He was obliged to structure a conception of Louisiana's aesthetic character using only what he was offered. It seems he was offered a limited number of our best.

There are ways to deal with this sort of thing. Some museums and art centers have chosen simply to circumvent it by creating a hybrid: an open call that also issues invitations. Others resort to ruthless editing — a sure solution to chaos and, very possibly, something that may have sustained the Ogden this year. This was an instance where a far smaller selection would have suited, a final list abridged to a handful of outstanding artists — say,

Jeremiah Ariaz, David Armentor, Blake Boyd, Laura Gipson, Ann Hornback, Keith Perelli, Clifford Tresner, and two or three others — each one given space for a substantial, unified body of work. In effect, a series of solo exhibitions.

These artists did not have that opportunity, but their work, despite the visual tumult, did make an impression. Especially memorable among them were Ariaz's photographs. These are images that — by means of pondered color, shape, and space — manage to convey the fragility of urban culture, and by extension, the fragility of all human ambition. In *Main Street, Night View*, Ariaz wields those formal elements to excruciating effect. You grasp the lyricism of his design — the color deadened by shadow, the jutting silhouettes at the skyline, the rhyming arches — but his sense of human loss falls upon you too. You know that this ghost town was, at one time, a place of hope.

More affecting, still, is his *Tucumcari Inn*, a shot of the entry of a somnolent motel. The composition is suffused with sym-



Blake Boyd: *Zombie Café du Monde*, 2013.

bolist moodiness. And there are two figures here, seated inside, their faces numbed with resignation. In spite of this, or because of it, Ariaz tempts the eye – lyricism again; the whole is a plane of rich color, magenta and deep olive green. Thus, he submits the paradox: the bleak reality, the optimizing veil.

Another camera artist, David Armentor, has garnered considerable interest since his show last year at Cole Pratt Gallery. His mesmerizing *Trucks*, from the “Sugar Mill Sessions,” is one of those images you fancy as indelible. Everything is right about it – its schematic structure, its mood, its control of tone and mass. It is like a photographic Rothko, complete with the somber, nebulous beauty. But there is also something beyond form. Armentor positions these behemoth machines low in the format so that they constitute a narrow horizontal band, somewhat dwarfed under the dominating misty sky. You imagine them dissolving into nature, subdued. Or, rather, do you see them emerging, coming into focus, and with imminent might? Armentor, it would seem, poses that question. He places industry and nature uneasily before us.

That sense of the indelible image, in a vastly different way, is present also in much of Blake Boyd’s work. You immedi-

ately know – or assume you know -- his blazoned subjects, but you constantly question them. He has the eye and the skill to re-create icons. His *Zombie Café du Monde* (from “Zombie Katrina”) is both portrait and emblem. It depicts the animated face of a coffee shop server, certainly an unremarkable subject in New Orleans. And yet, it manages, with shrewd simplicity, to clasp a particular notion of the city. What lifts it above out-and-out kitsch is pictorial discretion. Actually, Boyd’s brand of discretion subsumes kitsch, maneuvers it. He simulates the flagrant aura of advertising art, all the while adorning it with luxe surfaces and sophisticated chromatics. In this painting, he takes the familiar representation and fashions it with a disarming close harmony: burnt umber on burnt sienna, with both colors set in deep tonality. This exercise in “good taste” is countered by its blatant opposite: a superwhite smile with a single gold tooth. The man’s visage has been, at once, exalted and cartoonized. The work rides the tension between societal embrace and parody. And further, as in most of what Boyd does, it celebrates, with a certain abandon, the vividness of commercial culture. □



No Dead Artists, 2014. Installation view, Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

No Dead Artists, 18th Edition

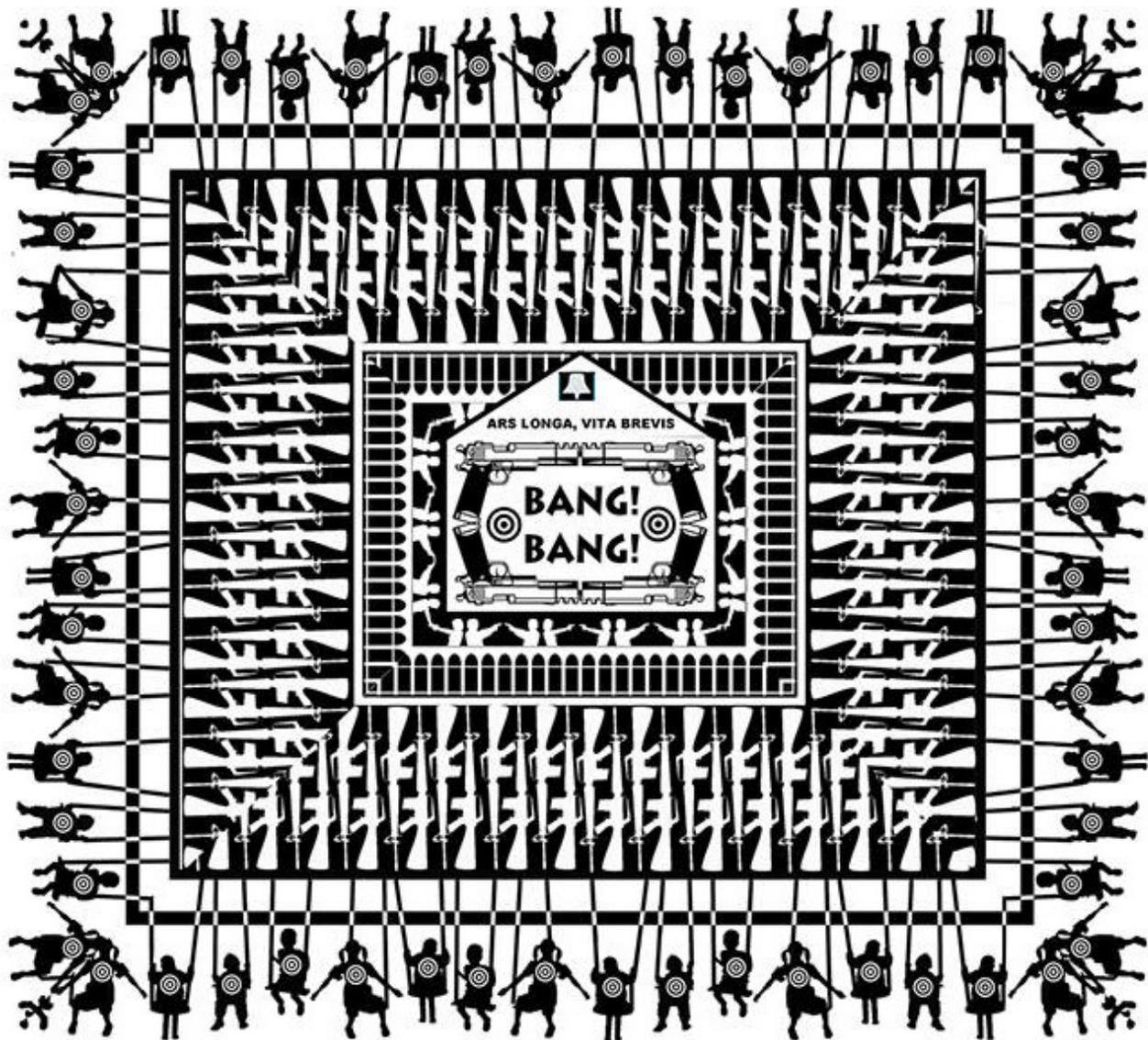
BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

NO DEAD ARTISTS
 18th Annual Juried Exhibition
 Jonathan Ferrara Gallery
 New Orleans, LA.

IF ANY OF the recurring “No Dead Artists” exhibitions hosted by Jonathan Ferrara Gallery were given a singular title, the eighteenth iteration might be called, “slick.” Formally, the shows transitions fluidly between non-objectivity and representation, and the media

is polished and buffed in composition and texture. Color pops like flashes on a red carpet, and illusionistic slights-of-hand in processes including collage, assemblage, installation, printmaking, photography, and painting offer the viewer a variety of visual delights.

It is this red-carpet sensibility that underscores the annual juried exhibition. It has consistently brought focused attention to the selected artists: Terrance Osborne, Jeffrey Forsythe, Frank Relle, Matthew Kirscht, Aaron McNamee, and Dan Rule – all with solid New Orleans connections - plus others have gone on to gain national and international acclaim. In addition, the jurors are art-world celebrities themselves – for instance, artist Tony Fitzpatrick and curator Dan Cameron have both filled this role. This year, Bill Arning, Stephanie Ingrassia, and Nick Mayor, each with strong affiliations in the worldwide network of the visual arts, juried the exhibition. The “no” in “No Dead” used to



Margi Weir: *Bang! Bang!*, 2014. Black vinyl. Variable dimensions.

stand in part for New Orleans, when the call was limited to locals. Now, it simply means “alive,” and particularly, up-and-coming on the international scale. Hundreds of artists from around the world now apply for the call, and only a select few make the cut.

Last year’s winner, Margaret Munz-Losch, just concluded her solo exhibit at the gallery – the grand prize awarded to the jurors’ choice. This year, Margi Weir again gained acceptance, a successful second nomination to the esteemed ranks that fill the walls of this group show. Her continued acceptance into the show, with a different set of jurors, is a marker of the appeal and strength of her work.

Weir’s vinyl cut out, *Bang! Bang!*, is particularly suited to our city. Weir hails from Detroit, Michigan, where media scrutiny has passed in a way familiar to New Orleanians; there is horror as the world watches at its rapid decline, succeeded by an acute case of amnesia. *Bang! Bang!* pulls its imagery from the world of gun violence, no strange thing to either locale, and focuses specifically

on lost youth. Black silhouettes of children on swings, marked with targets on their chests, form the perimeter of a radially balanced, plastic tapestry visually interwoven with images of assault rifles pointing in every direction. Shiny and black, the vinyl suggests the slickness of gun metal, and also reads as a monumental sign of the ubiquity of violence. Its scale is effectively confrontational, sublimely swallowing the viewer in close proximity.

Weir’s vinyl works are sometimes exhibited on the floor, and so it seems appropriately juxtaposed with another nearby work that defies the expectations of presentation. Though also sleekly meticulous and geometric, the title of Paul Glenn’s *Birth Carpet* immediately connotes the opposite force represented in Weir’s work. His patterns are derived from religious sources, and his media from European traditions. The integration of disparate influences suggests a search for balance and harmony, as does the overall pattern and analogous color scheme of the composition.



Sam Metcalf: *Array*, 2014. Mixed mediums.

The painting lacks the installation component of metal bowls indicated on the price list and the artist's website, but the form of the painting in isolation is enough to communicate the overall idea.

Three sculptures dominate the space between and before these two two-dimensional works. *Pom Pom Infinity Column*, a towering, suspended cylinder composed of seemingly infinite strands of silver Mylar sandwiched between four mirrored disks, is newly minted Master of Fine Arts Mark Palmen's contemporary homage to the obelisk, the triumphal column, and Brancusi. One imagines a multitude of hidden cheerleaders within, electric with potential energy - holding out their arms, gently trembling fists disappearing into the pom poms, heads down and ready to burst into space with a holler of victory. The explosion of cheer would spread metallic plastic confetti everywhere, like the shattered remains of the Vendôme Column. The potential energy in this structure is compelling, particularly because it references such an ancient form.

Mauricio Saenz's *Shipwreck* anchors that energy with the calming sound of flowing water. Disturbingly, the water fills the inside of one section of a small boat foundered on the floor.

A screen protrudes from a vertical post located aft, like the head of an extraterrestrial rower. The screen plays footage of waves crashing on a shore, as though this survivor, or cast away, is showing us the open space into which his broken boat cannot venture. There is a marked sense of longing in *Shipwreck*. The pieces are all there, but hopelessly disconnected, in part for their own safety against the electricity running the screen above the flowing water.

Trunk, also by Saenz, similarly evokes the impossible, which is one of the artist's key conceptual interests, according to his statement. This disembodied chunk of the aft section of a car hides a video screen at its rear, which films action in and in front of the open trunk space. The slickness of the design contrasts with the heavy bulkiness of the form. It is easy to imagine a predator watching a victim struggle in the closed trunk via live feed, just, perhaps, as the object itself is the record of the artist's own struggles with impossibilities.

Sam Metcalf's works are neatly arranged on one wall to the side of Saenz's sculptures. *Array* is an arrangement of framed acrylic tubes holding a series of multi-colored liquids. Its design



Mark Palmen: *Pom Pom Infinity*, 2014. Mirrored acrylic disks, silver pom poms. 108" high.

and title suggests the ways in which consumable goods are displayed, lined up on shelves. These goods – soaps, detergents, drinks, hair products, and other consumables that are most often hawked in similarly vertical containers – show through their packaging, revealing the icky scum the consumer never sees through the opaque plastic. The piece is neat and flashy and dirty all at the same time, much the way the thrill of the purchase may lead to the shame of the gluttonous impulse that drove the consumption.

All this, plus Terence Hannum's four small-scale works made of layered cassette tape, Jay Hendrick's "erased paintings" – homages in digital print to Rauschenburg's analog version of the concept - and Marna Shopoff's massive painting, *Layered Between*, fill the viewer's space in just the front gallery. The rest of the vi-

brant show is tucked in the two smaller rear galleries, bursting with the same energy as Palmen's column. The effect is overpowering, and it is tempting to turn away from the dense wall of energetic art, like the somber starlet turns in Robert Frank's photograph, *Movie Premiere, Hollywood* (from the series, *The Americans*).

But, there is an inevitable attraction to the electricity, the slick surfaces, and the conceptual cunning of this work. It is seductive. The concepts of violence, loneliness, impossibility, and rampant consumerism are sublimely terrifying. But, the execution of the work is both delightful and exciting. The myriad combination of elements continues to mark this show through each of its iterations, and we wait with baited anticipation for next year. □



Darrell Brown: *New Orleans Jungle*, 2014. New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

The Academy Faculty: Beyond Essential Principles

BY JUDITH H. BONNER

NEW ORLEANS ACADEMY OF FINE ART
Annual Faculty Exhibition
Academy Gallery
New Orleans, LA

WHEN VISITING THE New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts, viewers can always expect to find that all the works, whether representational or non-objective, adhere scrupulously to the principles of composition. This is especially true with faculty exhibitions. The current exhibition follows true to this expectation. Nineteen of the twenty-two faculty members presently associated with the Academy exhibit their recent works in this year's show, with the usual subjects represented: portraits, landscapes, still lifes, figure studies, marine scenes, abstracts, and non-objectives. Most of the

works are truly tactile in their visual appeal, a celebration of the textural properties of the oil or acrylic medium in which they are painted. Generally, the works on exhibition in the Academy Galleries exude a sense of quietude. Many are on loan from private owners or from the artists' affiliated galleries.

Also included are photographs and a small bronze sculpture of *Eve* by Kim Bernadas, the smooth surfaces of *Eve's* body contrasting with the patterns of the serpent that twists around her ankles. This work is narrative in its approach, for *Eve* hides the apple behind her back, a small textural area on the apple defines the bite that she has just taken; her arm thrown over her head emphasizes the moment of her realization of the gravity of her actions. The serpent has an unmistakable symbolic foothold over her.

Zack Smith's photographs are straightforward in their focus on local musicians, including a black-and-white photograph



Evelyn Menge: *Fallen Stars*, 2014. New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

of *Little Freddie King* and a formal group photograph of a group of musicians seated or standing beneath the spreading limbs of a large oak tree. The landscape setting with massive oak tree emphasizes the origin of jazz in this state. Victoria Ryan, on the other hand, combines photography with painting and sculpture in her mixed-media construction. A black-and-white photograph featuring ferns and other foliage is hand-painted in strategic areas and mounted on an acrylic panel, with textural leaf-like shapes painted around the borders; another acrylic panel is bolted to this structure to form a cover. Ryan then painted brownish-ochre tendrils on the acrylic cover parallel to those on the base photograph, which provides a three-dimensional feel to the scene.

In her encaustic mixed-media work, Nikki Martin Rue combines a series of vintage photographs that appear to have come from a scrapbook. Arranged in a horizontal strip on a piece of old wood, the photos relate to a stable man, with a family riding in a carriage, a child awaiting her turn to ride a pony, the stable man himself, and a house near a pond—perhaps the home of the stable man. Rue's gouache still lifes retain a sense of a sketch. *Grandmother's Utensils* and a still life with onion are simplified and restrained in their arrangement, but with attention to the geometric shapes of the objects and the background.

Nell C. Tilton's large mixed-media non-objective, which is reminiscent of works by Ida Kohlmeyer, presents a balance of color, pattern, variety, and rhythm. Patti Adams's watercolor and

gouache works explore her talent as an expert calligrapher, whether incorporated into a landscape or a non-objective like *The Morning Star*, with its gold leaf lettering set against a mottled dark blue ground. Bonnie Maygarden gives a new twist to a basis design exercise, that of taking a crumpled or irregularly folded piece of paper, uncrumpled or unfolded, and creating a design with color. Her works, painted in acrylic in saturated monochromatic tones with contrasting accents, have a glowing quality.

Several artists focus on still lifes, but the treatment of each differs in composition and handling. Kathleen K. Matthews' small still life paintings are very much in the tradition of Academy founder Auzeklis Ozols, but with more textural brushstrokes, both in the ground and in the depiction of the floral subject and other objects in her compositions.

Darrell Brown's dense arrangement of a stalk of plattains fills the entire background and mid-ground. The massive area of broad green leaves is relieved by the large lavender blue blossom, accented by red areas on the interior of the petals, by a single red petal lying on the table, and by the brownish-ochre areas of a strategically placed wilting leaf in the mid-ground. Though more formal in their presentation, Sarah Thibodeaux's floral still lifes are more textural in their execution. Billy Solitario focuses on the home front, so to speak, with Louisiana seafood. His depictions of Louisiana blue crab are lifelike, successfully capturing the glistening color of the crabs that ordinarily dissipates as soon as the water



Auseklis Ozols: *Watch*, 2014. New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

dries from their shells. Solitario's sea creatures seem temporarily paused, but ready to take self-protective action.

Diego Largaia's still lifes appear to have a casual placement of buttons and keys or objects placed on an "unfolded" sketch of a landscape showing a haystack near a pond. His works are exercises in compositional arrangement with pronounced attention to the principles of design, particularly balance, variety, contrast, and proportion.

Auseklis Ozols' curiously titled portrait, *The Compass*, shows a seated gray-haired man wearing a white physician's coat, his bright pink tie offering contrast to the white coat and black slacks. An area in the lower left presents a still life within the larger composition. The doctor holds a stethoscope, with the black tube looped near the ovoid shapes of a compass and its cover. The linear black tube contrasts with the sharp geometric shapes of two medical journals with red covers, the entirety of which rests on a wooden artist's palette that takes on a biomorphic shape. An inscription in the upper left hand corner Ozols identifies his sitter as local cardiologist, Dr. Frederick Kushner.

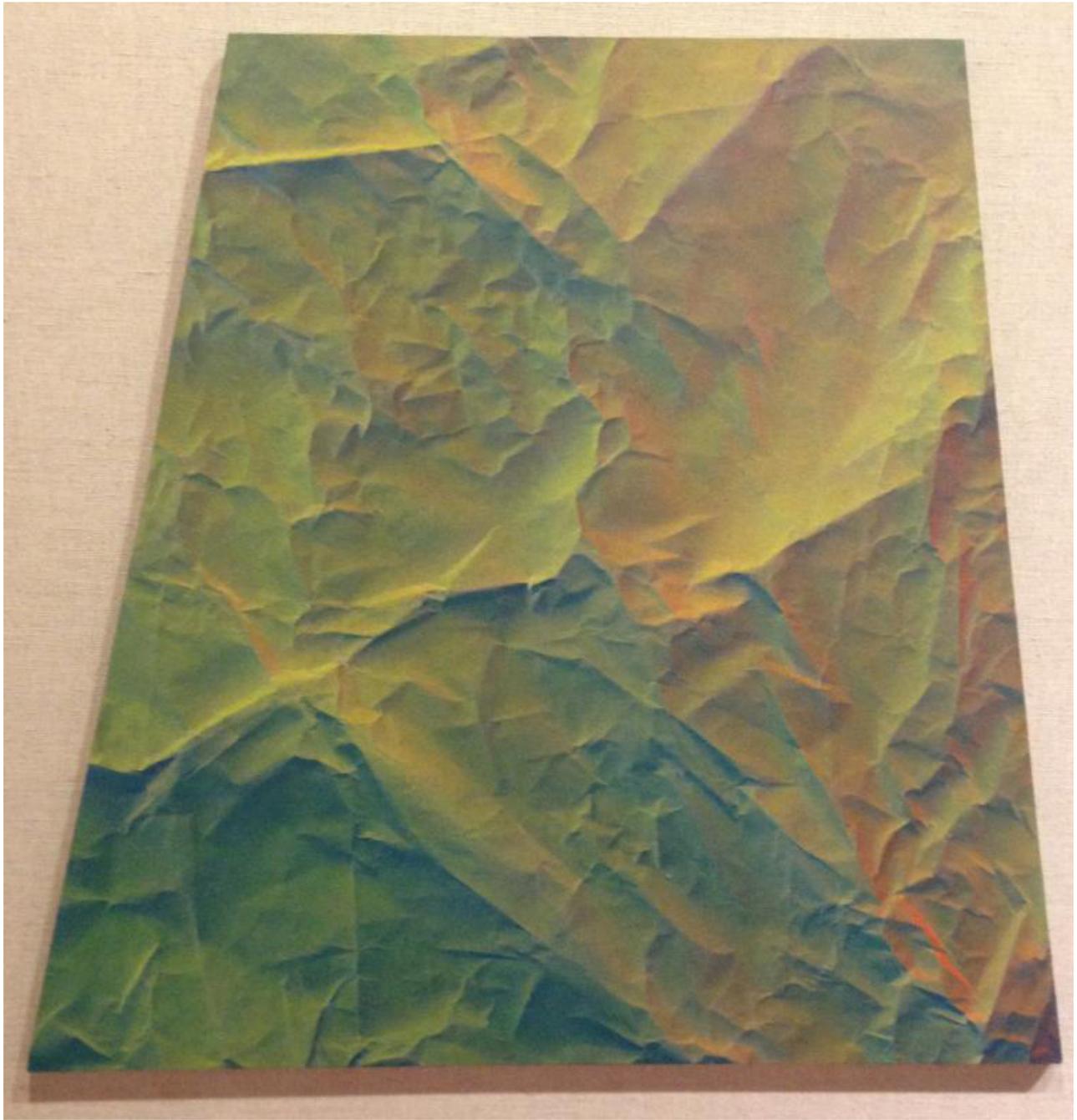
Ozols also exhibits two canvases with Louisiana Irises as the subject and a large oil figure study of a reclining female nude propped on three large pillows with geometric patterns and a large bouquet of flowers in a vase forming another still life within the composition. The figure is painted in the smooth finish associated with Ozols' usual work. In *Watch*, Ozols depicts a pocket watch

resting on an open book in front of her, perhaps a suggestion of the limited time the bored woman must hold her pose for the painter—or a metaphor for the passage of time. Carol Peebles' competently rendered female nude studies are characteristic of the type of figure studies made in art classes.

Evelyn Menge's watercolor compositions have social undertones. *Hold Tight* is a close-up view of the door of a weathered building secured with a heavy chain. *Fallen Stars*, a 2008 composition, suggests a political statement, with an American flag appearing to have fallen between an ironwork balustrade and a building façade behind it. Viewers can ponder the date of the painting as the year of the national election in which Barack Obama was elected, or during the difficult days after Hurricane Katrina when C. Ray Nagin was mayor of the City of New Orleans, or general dismay over social and political issues in the country at large.

Several artists exhibit landscapes, including Phil Sandusky's always competent and appealing city scenes and rural views. His *Mississippi River from the Butterfly* shows a grain elevator on the distant riverbank. Sandusky's city scenes include the Rayne Memorial Methodist Church, with its steeple paralleling another steeple. *House of the Reading Lady*, which is partially hidden behind foliage rendered with thickly applied oil paint, could be either a local scene or one in any small town.

Two of Anne Cicero's acrylic non-objectives suggest the Louisiana landscape and its atmospheric conditions, while a



Bonnie Maygarden. Academy Gallery, the 2014 Faculty Exhibition.

third canvas titled *Indigo Morning* is more obvious in its subject. Claude Ellender presents recognizable Louisiana marshy scenes. *Winter Morning* varies in its application of thinly applied paint and areas with densely applied pigment. The foliage and the tangle of angular gray branches contrast with vertical tree trunks and their reflection in the foreground waters. Ellender's views of the Bogue Falaya in Covington are more colorful in the skies and in the foliage.

Jean Cassels exhibits five small works with different approaches. In *Selfie*, the artist stares straight outward with a star-like motif seen in her pupils. The manner in which she holds her hand to her mouth almost feels as if her head arises from her hand. The

rhythmic pattern of the delicately rendered hair is textural in appearance. *Fire* features a single tree set against a red ground; its branches appear like partially consumed tree limbs. Another ominous work titled *August 29, 2005*, the date of Hurricane Katrina, shows the red and black flag of hurricane warnings and a figure 8-shaped symbol. As such, Cassels portrays the calm before the storm. While most of these works suggest a moment of stillness, there lies within many of them the potential for a quick action to an outside force, whether environmental or human in origin. □



Lee Morais: *Memories*, 2014. Foundatuoin Art Gallery.

Surrealist Moments

BY KATE BRUCE

LEE MORAIS
The Gilded Edge
Foundation Art Gallery
New Orleans, LA

NATHAN DURFEE
Glimmer Steady Inside the Stone
LeMieux
New Orleans, LA

TWO SURREALIST-THEMED EXHIBITIONS in New Orleans take the gallery visitor on playful yet completely different adventures. Lee Morais recalls historical figures in many of his paintings in his energetic exhibition “The Gilded Edge,” at the Foundation Art Gallery on Royal Street in the French Quarter. Nathan Durfee incorporates fantastical characters in his captivating show “Glim-

mer Steady Inside the Stone,” at the LeMieux Galleries on Julia Street. For both, storytelling is at the center of their work, and neither is afraid of taking himself too seriously.

Lee Morais, who has been actively involved in the New Orleans art scene for decades as an artist, educator, and advocate, showcases over fifteen framed works in his exhibition. He collects frames from local galleries such as LeMieux, and combines various remnants to create quirky, one-of-a-kind frames unique to each finished piece. Morais reflects on his use of frames in his artist statement. He refers to the Post-Impressionist artist Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), painter of *Starry Night* (1889), who once said “a picture without a frame is like a soul without a body.” After seeing this exhibit, Morais’ imagery and frames go hand in hand.

The artist works with collage, giclée, and various other mediums in his large-scale works. His active incorporation of ar-



Lee Morais: *Into the Good Night*, 2014. Foundation Art Gallery.

tistic mediums, both inside and outside the frame, allows the viewer to pause before each work. For “The Gilded Edge,” Morais combines historical storylines and figures with surrealistic styles and themes. This style appears in *Into the Good Night*. In this multi-layered image, it is hard to distinguish between the mediums he incorporates into frame, which itself is as fragmented as the composition. This scene is set on water, and Morais utilizes the entire space -- the foreground, middle ground, and background. What could be a historical print of a ship at sea appears in the foreground, montaged in front of a blue, starry background. He is known to incorporate “travel post-cards, museum and art gallery invitations” into his work, and perhaps this is a perfect example of an appropriated image. One thing is for sure, all is tranquil in this mystical composition—it is indeed a starry night.

Morais pays homage to the French Impressionist artist Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), in his montage *Renoir Vase*. A combination of used paint brushes are set inside a blue-colored vase where a fragmented image of a Renoir-painted woman appears in the bottom right edge of the rounded vase. Paint brushes

appear in other works by Morais, as in *Brushes*, which is showcased in one of the large windows facing Royal Street as the visitor nears the gallery. Another historical reference that appears in several of Morais’ works is the grandiose politician Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). A freestanding sculpture of the infamous Frenchman greets the visitor in the other window facing Royal Street. As if the paintbrushes aren’t enticing enough! You’ll see this figure in many of Morais’ collages, and it reinforces the artist’s playful approach to his art. According to the Foundation Gallery, Morais incorporates Bonaparte not only to suggest his ties to New Orleans, but to also utilize his famous face in a repetitive fashion reminiscent of works by the groundbreaking Pop Art artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987). Napoleon confronts the viewer in several works, and every time in a completely different way. In the collage *Napoleon in Morocco*, Morais showcases his skill as an artist by effectively laying various artistic mediums.

While Morais’ style is consistent, his storylines are anything but, and that element of surprise keeps the exhibit stimulating for the viewer. His work *Memories* is one of the strongest in



Nathan Durfee: *Conversation Over Coffee*, 2014. Oil on panel. 30" high.

the show. Like *Under the Southern Sky*, Morais incorporates imagery of ironwork balconies, similar to those which appear in the French Quarter. *Memories* is reminiscent of Surrealist paintings by artists like René Magritte (1898-1967). Through his construction of the highly fragmented frame, the narrow vignettes that comprise the composition, and the heavy shadows that fill the corners and edges of the collage, it is almost as if the viewer is able to step inside the active display before them, to another time or place, as the title suggests. In a cropped image in the left background, a lush landscape, possibly set in Louisiana, is visible by looking through the drawn curtains covering a round window. Before this vignette is an image of a woman who appears to be dressed in lavish clothing from the 19th century, a reminder of a bygone time. While *Memories* appears to evoke notions of the past, *Snowy Night* is set in a place far away from the tropical environment of Louisiana. This mysterious setting is captivating, from the bold woman smok-

ing a cigarette in the right foreground, to the brightly lit streetlights that adorn the snowy street in the background. The trees literally glisten with snow. Once again curtains are drawn, as if inviting the viewer to enter into the company of this stranger.

The incorporation of Surrealism also appears in the work of accomplished artist Nathan Durfee. Durfee, who is based in Charleston, South Carolina, uses “whimsical characters [that] are faced with tough, yet universal decisions.” These characters appear in various ways throughout his exhibit “Glimmer Steady Inside the Stone,” at LeMieux. His show incorporates thirty-six illustrious oil paintings, drawings, and mixed media works to form a cohesive display. Durfee’s unique title for his show is striking. For the artist, the title “is a reference to our necessity to dream. Even if we feel dull, hard, and weathered on the inside, it’s important to preserve that light of imagination that’s inside us. Several characters in my show exemplify this desire to keep a youthful



“Nathan Durfee: *A Moment Amongst the Trunks*, 2014. Oil on panel, 8” high.

spirit in trying times.” These characters come to life in large-scale works like *Conversation Over Coffee*, which greets the viewer at the entrance of the gallery. In this oil on panel painting, a pixelated youth appears surprised. The character’s head is painted in a multitude of colors--reds in various shades that contrast sharply against tiny squares of greens and blues. Painted near the open mouth is a comment bubble with the word “HI” written near the lips. The character’s brightly painted fingernails are held up in surprise, and nearby a tiny coffee cup is suspended in the air. The figure is caught in a moment, and through Durfee’s jilted use of perspective, the viewer is invited to wonder what has just unfolded in the painting before them.

The theme of a starry night also appears in the mixed media work *Relaxing Under the Starry Night*. Durfee’s approach varies from Morais’ incorporation of the night sky, though, and interestingly enough Durfee appropriates Van Gogh’s painting *Starry Night*. In this piece, two men relax on a bed and appear to be watching television. Durfee leaves clues like a television remote on the corner of the bed to aid in the viewer’s interpretation of the picture. Above the bed, and the two men’s heads is a sketchy drawing of *Starry Night*. This rather ordinary scene is compelling, though not as much as quirky pieces like *A Moment Amongst the Trunks*. Fashioned on top of a young bearded man painted in the foreground is a blue-colored headdress of sorts, with brightly colored yellow glasses over his eyes. This figure is set before a

muted landscape of tall, slender tree trunks. Perhaps the artist has incorporated a self-portrait of himself in this painting.

Durfee incorporates his interest in Surrealism in mixed media works like *Lost Himself* and *Lost Herself*. Like Morais, Durfee explores the subconscious and the dream-state, that subject matter so revered by the Surrealist art group. In *Lost Herself*, a young girl appears suspended in time and space. Even though just her face is visible, her body appears weightless, as if drifting. She stares upward, though no sky appears above her head. This work is painted in grays and muted tones, and pieces of newspaper form the backdrop of the scene. Nearby, the work *Lost Himself* is on display. Here, the figure of a boy has literally lost himself-his head is separated from the rest of his body. It floats upward, as if it will drift outside of the composition and frame. Surrounding the grays that color the image are brightly painted orange lines that frame the story. Small works like these are captivating, and at times, humorous, like *The Touch*. Others are charming, such as the small series of four vignette paintings that adorn one wall. In each rounded frame, a tiny redbird is perched above a human body, each differently dressed but headless. With titles like *Carol Reflects* and *Caleb Reflects*, one can’t help but think that Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) would smile if he saw these paintings, and others, in Durfee’s show. □



Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

Killing Me Slowly

BY JOHN MOSIER

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY
Director: Tomas Alfredson

TOMAS ALFREDSON IS not exactly a well-known director, but in his film adaptation of John le Carré's 1974 novel, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, he manages to lead us through the usual Le Carré wilderness of spycraft, treachery, and intrigue with a surprisingly deft touch. The film is, as befits a Swedish sensibility, slow. But it has its moments, particularly at the end, when Alfredson reveals a surprising flair for the cinematic. Viewers who doesn't succumb to the pacing will find it worth watching, even if they're not enamored of cheesy spy novels. It's not a masterpiece, but it's considerably better than one might think, even without considering the source for the script.

For those folks not interested in the genre, and who've never slogged through Le Carré, the basic plot is fairly simple. The head of the Secret Intelligence Service, known as Control (John Hurt), suspects there is a Soviet mole at the highest level of the agency. He's not sure who it is, so he calls the four members of the inner circle of the "Circus," by code names. Those code names give us the title. Actually there are five suspects, so the title is misleading, but ignore that—the author of the novel did.

Control has contacts, one of whom can finger the mole, so he tells one of his lesser agents, Jim Prideaux (Mark Strong) to go to Budapest and get the name. Prideaux is caught,

kidnapped, and tortured; in the resulting scandal Control is forced to retire, is replaced by Percy Alleline (Toby Jones) and his henchmen slash associates: Toby Esterhase (David Dencik), Roy Bland (Ciarán Hinds), and Bill Haydon (Colin Firth).

Along with Control goes George Smiley (Gary Oldman), and Control promptly dies. But the idea of a mole won't go away, particularly when an AWOL agent, Ricki Tarr (Tom Hardy) calls the minister and claims he has information to the same end.

The world of British spycraft is certainly a strange one, with agents disappearing for months without anyone seeming to care, phone calls placed to high ranking government officials, and the head of it all identifying suspects by taping head shots to chess pieces.

It must be said, however, that the sober reality, painstakingly recorded by Peter Wright in *Spycatcher*, is even more bizarre, and the basic warrant for the story is, alas, soberingly true. Soviet agents were working at very high levels of British intelligence. Nor is there any cause for Americans to gloat. They were also operating at high levels in the government of the United States. In other disturbing news, there is no Tooth Fairy.

The complication of the plot is that the Soviet spymaster, Karla, has a Soviet agent in the London embassy who is a deep agent—he's totally clean—and Karla is using him to pass information to the Circus. This, called Witchcraft, is Alleline's big coup. He doesn't realize that he's being given chickenfeed, nor does he understand the whole point: this is how Karla wants to get valuable information from the Americans.



Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*: The Final Confrontation.

He figures, correctly, that the Circus will use Witchcraft to get back into the good graces of the American agencies, who were for some reason deeply suspicious of the British agencies (huh! Imagine that!). So this supposed treasure trove of information will lead the Americans to exchange secrets with the British, and the mole will then pass them on to the Soviets.

It's a tortuously complicated gambit, but the film does a good job of explaining it, without any of those tedious moments when someone basically holds up a flag that says 'exposition' and talks the audience through the story.

It should be said, by the way, that this whole notion of spycraft, no matter whether swathed in Le Carré's stodgy naturalism or James Bond type dash, is basically bunk. We now know that virtually all the serious intelligence came either from defectors completely disillusioned with the Soviet system or from code breaking. The whole notion of complicated spying is a sort of romantic fantasy designed to make the British feel much more important than in reality they actually were.

Moreover, it is romantic in quite another sense. The great difficulty in this line of work is not so much in finding out the enemy's secrets, but in getting the men who must make the actual decisions to act on them. We know this was true of Stalin, and some historians have made a good case that it was also true of Roosevelt. And before rushing to condemn either man (and a good many others), it's important to note that a lot of what seems at the time to be extremely convincing intelligence subsequently turns out to be a dud.

In other words, the whole notion is largely a type of fantasy. True, it appears to be firmly grounded in reality, and Le Carré practically bludgeoned his readers into believing this was so. But the world thus revealed is simple Middle Earth on the next sound stage.

So at one level, the aesthetic, the slowness of the film is a way to imbue it with seriousness, to cover up the inherently fantastic nature of the story.

But to return to the story. Smiley is brought out of retirement to find the mole. If he exists. He manages the trick neatly enough, and largely alone, although he needs a dapper young agent, Peter Guillam (Benedict Cumberbatch) to wander in and out of headquarters and extract key documents for him. Apparently looting the files of Great Britain's secret intelligence service is a trick about on a par with stealing books from the average public library.

But then at every turn we run into the inherent goofiness of the story. Tarr, who triggers the alarm, is a very junior agent. His source is an attractive young woman who's a member of the Soviet trade delegation to Turkey. Sure, like everyone else connected with a Soviet "delegation," she's a spy. But the notion that someone that far down the food chain would know what was being talked about at the highest levels of Soviet intelligence is stretching it pretty thin.

The list of similar improbabilities is long, and it's pointless to discuss them, since we're not talking Tolstoy here. The only one that's truly puzzling occurs towards the end, when Smiley interviews Haydon, now unmasked and a prisoner.

That's when Haydon apologizes for his affair with Anne Smiley, explains Karla's reasoning. Colin Firth, it must be said, rises to the occasion. He quite looks the part, and his delivery is perfect. Having explained it was to throw Smiley off, he then observed that it worked, A pause. In a fashion. Perfect timing. But you always suspected.

Smiley agrees.

That comes as a jolt. There's never any hint of that. Frankly, this revelation comes dangerously close to the worst sort of cheating. How is it that Smiley always suspected Haydon? There's not a clue. The only things that are clear is that he was skeptical about Witchcraft and convinced that there was a mole.

Now to be fair to the director, it's quite possible that he tried to explain this puzzle and the scene was cut. There are several places in the film where it seems that some-



Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Smiley Reflecting.

one chopped out a segment simply to shorten it down to a reasonable theatrical length (slightly under 130 minutes).

A problem that nowadays is almost generic. Very few directors seem able to tell a story in 120 minutes, much less in the under 100 minutes length that was once the hallmark of the cinema. They should all take lessons from George Bernard Shaw, who once wrote to a friend that he had written him a long letter because he didn't have time to write a short one.

It seems probable that Le Carré complicated the plot in all sorts of ways, mostly by revealing key bits and pieces in flashbacks, simply to paper over all the inherent improbabilities. Then a trio of scriptwriters followed that technique faithfully, leaving it to Alfredson to figure out how to make them comprehensible on screen.

At the same time, nothing is given to us in straightforward fashion in the novel, and Alfredson has to deal with that problem as well. For example, as the movie unfolds, some time passes before we realize that Alleline, Bland, Esterhase, Haydon, and even Smiley, are the men Control suspected, and it's not until one of the final scenes in the film that we learn that Prideaux gave Control's trap away to Haydon, and that the two men were more than just friends. This last bit of information isn't really made clear until the final minutes, in fact. Not just friends, but lovers.

All this sounds frightfully negative, but then the film is flawed from the start, given the novel. The producers probably assumed that Le Carré fans would line up to see anything based on one of his novels, and then added enough starpower (Oldman, Cumberbatch, and Firth) to guarantee they'd get their money back.

That being said, the film has its moments, and although the plot slowly disintegrates the more closely you look at it, the end product is considerably more absorbing than any summary can possibly suggest.

One reason—for most people the only reason—is a world class acting job by Gary Oldman. Frankly, Oldman makes the film work. He's always been one of those rare actors who can steal every scene, draw the viewer to him, regardless of whether he's Beethoven or some futuristic villain.

But here he does it without any quirks. He's almost somnolent. The body language is tightly controlled, and there are only two scenes where he shows any emotional reactions at all.

The first sight of him comes as a surprise. With his big glasses and thinning hair, he looks very much the middle aged Brit: quiet, reserved, almost immobile. It's an astonishing transformation, particularly given his usual freneticism. But Oldman is so good at it that he really becomes George Smiley, not simply an actor playing a role in a film. But he still manages to walk off with any scene he's in.

For a foreigner, Alfredson has a surprising sensitivity to the strengths of British actors. Although Colin Firth is quite eclipsed by Oldman, this is probably his best performance on screen. He has the look and feel of the fictional Bill Haydon, and in his final scene with Oldman, he really gives us a glimpse into the only really fascinating mystery in all this, which is what on earth possessed a small group of Britain's best and brightest to throw their lot in with a totalitarian state that was exterminating its citizenry by the millions?

No one else gets much of a speaking role, but Toby Jones, who plays Alleline, is surprisingly good. The two junior agents, Tarr and Guillam, are clearly on the opposite side of London in the swinging sixties. The former comes across like a hippy, the later a preening peacock. The idea of a generational gap in the institution is actually much more interesting than the story itself, but Alfredson's too busy trying to make the plot work to do much with it.

There's more to the film than Oldman and a supporting cast however. Unusually in a film of this sort, aimed exclusively at a mass audience, important details are only revealed visually. They're inserted into the scene but never commented on. If you're not watching closely, you'll miss them (another reason for the film's deliberate pace).

We learn early on that Smiley's marriage is an on and off again affair. Anne keeps leaving him. We never really see her face, but at the agency Christmas party, we see a rather cheery looking florid patterned dress sitting with Smiley, and later, we see the woman in this same dress in an intimate embrace outside. It's a detail Flaubert would have delighted in: the dress



Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. The Santa Claus Lenin.

is the person. And since we never see her, she really is just a dress. A nice touch, and it's not simply an extraneous detail.

Who's her lover? Later there's a scene where Smiley walks into his house, to find Haydon sitting at the dining table. He has a story about dropping off a painting that Anne liked, but as he speaks, we see him surreptitiously putting his shoes on under the table. So we figure out that Haydon was the man we saw, that he's Anne's lover. And eventually we find out that we're right, and why he seduced her.

Alfredson's ability to direct our attention to details like this without having to fall back on dialogue is impressive. So the film rewards the person who watches it closely. There are also some scenes, or sequences of scenes, that are startlingly cinematic, and they really work.

There's the agency Christmas party, for instance, a scene that's highlighted by a man in a Santa Claus suit and a Lenin mask who leads the revelers in singing the Soviet national anthem—in Russian.

Now it's true, that scene was swiped from a real life incident that took place decades earlier and involved the Germans. The British code name for Germany was 'Twelfth Land,' and there was a party in a neutral country where the German staff all stood up and sang "Deutschland über Alles," substituting the German word for "Twelfth Land" for "Deutschland (in German it works perfectly).

But still, it's a cinematic moment that's both surprising and entertaining, which, to be quite frank, are not words that could ever be associated with Le Carré's novels.

Alfredson also makes no attempt to capture the seedy and somewhat pathetic, ideologically speaking, atmosphere that permeates the novels. Nor is there any of the anti-Americanism that he simply can't keep to himself. There is in fact always the suspicion that at bottom, Le Carré was, like a great many British intellectuals of his generation, both anti-American and pro-Soviet, that his sym-

thies were really with men like Philby and so on, men who betrayed their country and caused the deaths of a good many of their fellows.

Probably the complementary explanations given by two of their fellow agents (Peter Wright and Malcolm Muggeridge) are correct, but the one Haydon gives at the end is not only dramatically much more satisfying, but it may very well hit on the truth.

So Alfredson rightly emphasizes the personal relationships that dominate the action. He downplays the suspense and plays up the interpersonal relationships. Tarr, who tips off the minister that there's a mole, does so because he's fallen in love with the Russian woman he was sent to turn (actually, he was sent to turn her alleged husband, but that's another story). She wants to defect, and this is his gambit to get the British to trade for her.

Everything is personal. Haydon, who turns out to be the mole, had an affair with Smiley's wife to keep Smiley from being suspicious of him. Karla's idea was that Smiley would feel his personal feelings were clouding his judgment. When Haydon is caught, and locked up, Prideaux shoots him. Not apparently because he was a traitor but because he's a jilted lover.

That doesn't become clear until the very end of the film in a series of scenes tied together by a French popular song. Frankly, these final segments, with the song running as the soundtrack, are actually rather exciting. They remind us of what the cinema can really do, and you have to give Alfredson credit, he really pulls the whole complicated mess of the story together in those final scenes. That's an increasingly rare event nowadays. Whatever its faults, whatever Alfredson's problems, he's able to bring the film to an end that's both satisfying and deeply cinematic, a collage of sounds and images, with nary a word spoken. □

Was Proust a Neuroscientist?

BY STEPHEN R. BACHMANN

IN 2008, JONAH Lehrer published a book entitled *Proust was Neuroscientist*. The bad news is that the chapter he devotes to Proust interprets Proust more as an archaeologist investigator of memory than a philosopher of life. The worse news is that later discoveries have suggested that Mr. Lehrer's integrity does not consistently match his cleverness.

Nevertheless, neuroscience moves on, and the Proust's relation to it continues to merit discussion.

In 2014, Daniel Levitin published a book entitled *The Organized Mind*. The smarmy how-to-succeed smell of the title belies the actual content of the book, which actually pursues some quantitative and chemical rigor as it evaluates the situation of the human mind in the 21st century. To wit,

In 1976, the average supermarket stocked 9,000 unique products; today that number has ballooned to 40,000 of them, yet the average person gets 80-85% of their needs in only 150 different supermarket items. That means we need to ignore 39,850 items in the store.

... In 2011, Americans took in five times as much information everyday as they did in 1986 – the equivalent of 175 newspapers. During our leisure time, not counting work, each of us processes 34 gigabytes or 100,000 words every day. The world's 21,274 television stations produce 5,000 hours of original programming every day as we watch an average of 5 hours of television each day, the equivalent of 20 gigabytes of audio-video images. That's not counting YouTube, which uploads 6000 hours of video every hour. And computer gaming? It consumes more bytes than all other media put together...

... Our brains do have the ability to process the information we take in, but at a cost ... Neurons are living cells with a metabolism; they need oxygen and glucose to survive and when they've been working hard, we experience fatigue.

... In order to understand one person speaking to us, we need to process 60 bits of information per second. With a processing limit of 120 bits per second, this means you can barely understand two people talking to you at the same time. ...our brains evolved to help us deal with life during the hunter-gatherer phase of human history, a time when we might encounter no more than 1000 people across the entire span of our lifetime. Walking around midtown Manhattan, you'll pass that number of people in half an hour.

...

A critical point that bears repeating is that attention is a limited-capacity resource – there are definite limits to the number of things we can attend to at once.

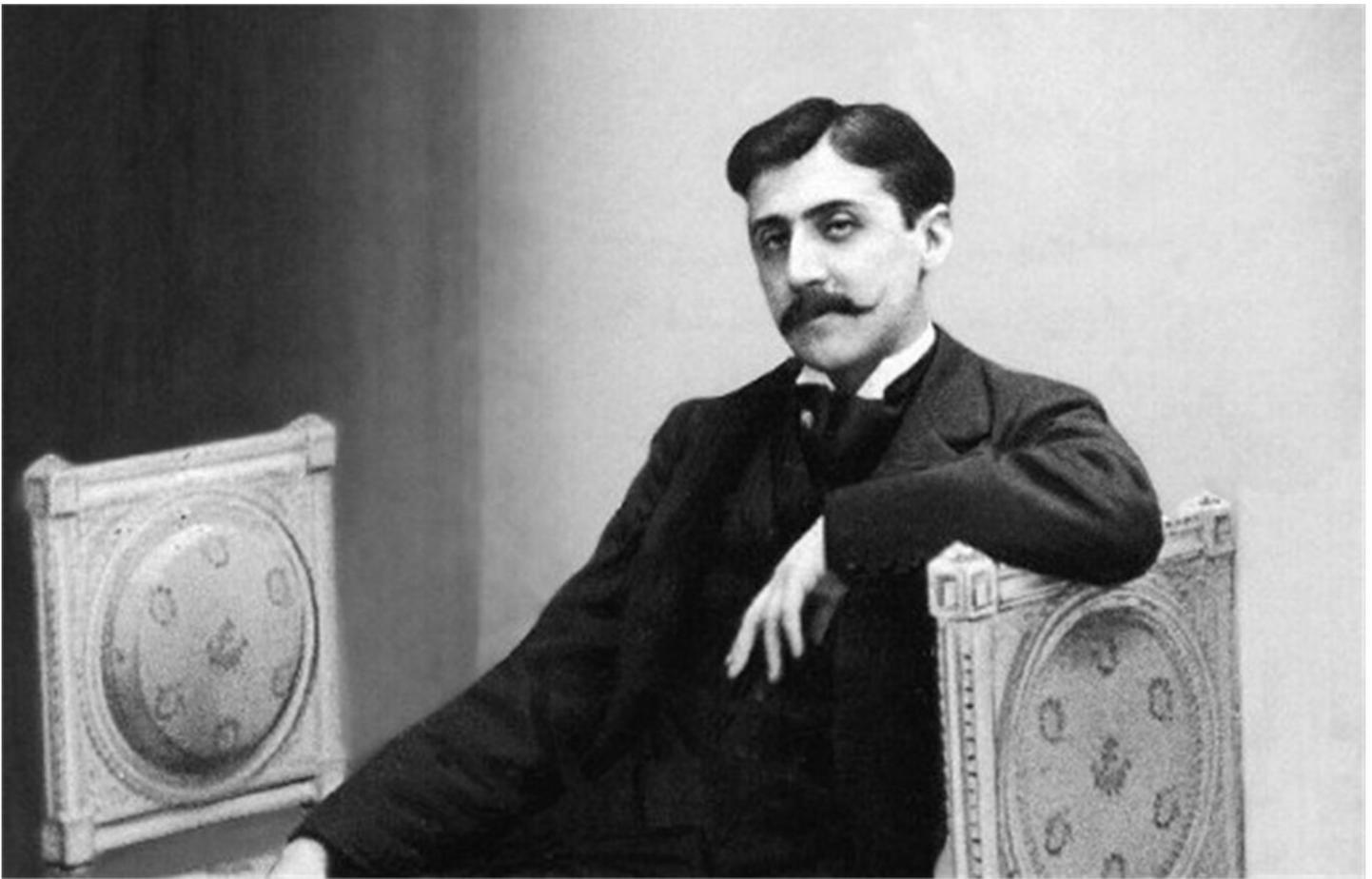
How does the brain deal with this aggravating mess?

Levitin postulates four components to the “human attentional system,” a mind wandering mode, an attentional (focusing) mode, an attentional filter (which monitors “everything” and rings bells when change occurs in the environment) and an attention switch (which turns the brain from focus to meandering, or back). The second half of his book devotes itself to discussing how one might employ insights concerning these components in hopes of functioning better in a world growing ever more complicated.

The subtitle of Levitin's book is *Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*, which suggests a utilitarian ethos. Given his evidence about humanity's growing problems with overload, it would seem that we need all the help we can get. The problem, though, is that while Levitin may certainly help one function in the world, but it may not be a world in which one would want to keep function on for very long. Indeed, there exists a question of how many animals – even when they are not human – would be excited if such were all their worlds had to offer. Achievement, “success,” and functional viability may be overrated. In his *On Deep History and the Brain* (2008), Daniel Lord Small writes:

... humans take an interest in modulating their brain-body states. Many animals do this to a certain degree. Horses who get bored or lonely while isolated in a paddock sometimes take pleasure in startling themselves. A lively snort causes a chemical feedback that induces a startle reflex and an exciting wash of neurochemicals. Birds who flock around trees bearing fruit that is somewhat past its prime and eat the alcohol-laden fruit have found a way to ingest, rather than manufacture, a mood-altering substance. Cats are drawn to catnip. None of the behaviors induced by these chemicals is [from evolution's natural selection perspective] particularly adaptive. In the case of drunken birds, the behavior is downright dangerous....

... All animals ... engage in mood-altering activities... Thanks to the operations of a consumer economy, we are now surrounded by a dizzying array of practices that stimulate the production and circulation of our own chemical messengers... Movies, gossip TV shows, novels, music, shopping, sport, coffee, alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography – all these institutions, practices and commodities, and many more besides, have psychotropic effects.



Marcel Proust photographed circa 1900.

We can tell because of their mildly addictive properties, because of the mood swings they engender or assuage... (127, 160-162)

Proust actually takes a position on these issues, although not necessarily in the terms set out by Levitin and Small. In the handful of sentences that might actually serve as a summary to his long novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Proust has written:

...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. ... This work of the artist, this struggle to discern beneath matter, beneath experience, beneath words, something that is different from them, is a process exactly the reverse of that which, in those everyday lives which we live with our gaze averted from ourselves, is at every moment being accomplished by vanity and passion and the intellect, and habit too, when they smother our true impressions, so as entirely to conceal them from us, beneath a whole heap of verbal concepts and practical goals which we

falsely call life. ... Our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits have long been at work, and it is the task of art to undo this work of theirs..." (vi, 298, 299-300)

Interestingly, if one inventories the things that Proust does not like, one would come up with the following:

1. daily preoccupations
2. conventional knowledge
3. everyday life
4. vanity
5. passion
6. intellect
7. habit
8. verbal concepts
9. practical goals
10. our spirit of imitation
11. our abstract intelligence

This "evil eleven" actually tie directly into the brain functions that Levitin finds important. They (except vanity perhaps) are the utilitarian things that the brain does in or-

der to function in reality and society. Yet while Proust might acknowledge the need for Levitin's utilitarian brain, he does not think that much of it. He observes that the full sway of that part of consciousness may actually divert us from what makes life worth living, viz., the "brief lightning-flashes" involved in "those moments of perception ... [that make one] think that life was worth living." (vi, 507) Proust's initial encounter with this world occurs in his famous encounter with the madeleine:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me . . . (i, 60)

The rest of his novel is devoted to investigating and understanding this phenomenon. It is helpful to observe that the French title of Proust book (*À la recherche du temps*) can be translated into *On Research Into Lost Time*, which echoes Madame Curie's "*Recherches sur les substances radioactives*," published in 1904, ten years before the publication of the first volume of Proust's masterwork. Proust wanted his work to be appreciated seen as scientific investigation. Proust repeatedly speaks of his works in terms of experiments, and parallels the work of the writer to that of the scientist. (vi, 275-6, 276-277, 279-80)

Deliberating, then, on "the cause of this felicity," Marcel concludes that his impressions have been "extra-temporal," "outside Time": "This explained why it was that my anxiety on the subject of my death had ceased at the moment when I had unconsciously recognized the taste of the little madeleine, since the being which at the moment I had been was an extra-temporal being..." (vi,262) Marcel has experienced "a fragment of time in the pure state," the "essence of things," "freed from the order of time" (vi,264) and thus "even if the simple taste of a madeleine does not seem logically to contain within it the reasons for the joy, one can understand that the word "death should have no meaning for him." (vi,265)

Thus, unlike some of Small's birds and humans, Proust would not look for happiness or meaning in life at the bottom of a booze bottle. Getting buzzed is not the same as his rapture. Nevertheless, Proust would appreciate Small's point that animals and humans are simply not satisfied with the life that Levitin's utilitarian brain would provide.

There are other ways to conceptualize the human brain. Paul MacLean has suggested conceiving the human brain in terms of three levels, a reptile brain, a mammal brain, and a human brain. It would compare to an avocado, with the reptile as the seed, the flesh as the center, and the skin as the cortex. The reptile brain centers around gross survival behavior, including fight, flight, turf battling, ritual, copulation and domination. The limbic system centers around emotion, imprinting and bonding: the reptile learns to cuddle. The cortex constitutes the rational part, and makes possible language, logic, reasoning and planning. Levitin's concerns might fit into this system at the level of the cortex. Proustian rapture might be grounded in the limbic system.

However one wants to parse the human brain and the experiences those parts engender, the ultimate point is that ordinary reality seems boring for cats, birds, humans, horses, and all the other animals. Cats, birds, humans, horses, and all the other animals seem aware that better states of being exist; and if they don't look for them, if they happen upon them, they will embrace them. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. The state of attention which Levitin explores provides evolutionary benefits of finding food and not finding oneself becoming someone else's food. But a state of general anxiety underlies this quotidian condition; it should be no wonder that a being experiencing it would be delighted to find something where the anxiety is replaced with contentment, if not happiness. Indeed, Levitin cites the work of Olds and Miller where electrodes were placed in rats' dopamine-producing "pleasure centers" (the nucleus accumbens of the limbic system) where humans "light up" with a gambling win, an orgasm, or a cocaine hit. The rats were given the option of pushing a level to stimulate their pleasure centers; which they did; and which they enjoyed so much that they ignored food and sex, and died from starvation or exhaustion. (100-101)

Recent neuroscience thus echoes – or even ratifies – the Proustian vision we have noted. Proust's "evil eleven," like Levitin's attentional activities, begin in the mundane functions of surviving as a human being with a vulnerable body on a problematic planet earth. Certainly, they serve evolutionary functions. But such does not suffice for human or animal happiness. Rats push levers, birds get drunk, and humans gamble and take cocaine. Proust, probably, would respond with understanding, if not sympathy; he would certainly argue that even better options exist over casinos, cocaine and booze. Again, he finds the superior quality of the "madeleine moment" is its self-evident nature. If one achieves it, one knows it (perhaps like the rat pushing a lever). However, even Proust seems to imply that it could require a life's work (not to mention 1,000,000 words in a long novel) to reach the insight that the "madeleine moment" provides the best of all possible worlds. Some or most people may prove too dim or too lazy to reach Proust's level of understanding. And again, life seems to provide an array of lesser alternative pleasures, which may prove even more seductive and problematic than the "evil eleven."

Human experience thus provides differing rewards at differing levels. Understanding them helps one begin to understand oneself; and, moreover, the world in which one finds oneself. We rightfully appreciate our material successes, yet there remains the sense that humanity does not live by bread alone. Commercial society tries to respond to this with various forms of buzzes, which at best intimate the better pleasures Proust has found and proffered. □



Lesley Dill at Arthur Roger Gallery.

Calendar

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

A GALLERY FOR FINE PHOTOGRAPHY – 241 Chartres St. 568-1313. www.agallery.com - Where: The Exploration of Photography and Place, 1843-2014 (photography), October 23, 2014-January 31, 2015.

ACADEMY GALLERY – 5256 Magazine Street. 899-8111. <http://noafa.com/> Annual Faculty Show, through September 27; Garth Swanson and Nancy Dawes (painting), October 4 – 31.

ARIODANTE GALLERY – 535 Julia St., 524-3233. www.ariodantegallery.com - Wanderlust: Cheri Ben-Iesau (paintings), Renee Melito (pottery), Stephen Palmer (mixed media), and Chigusa Nishimoto (jewelry), through September 30; The Space Between: Gustavo Duque (painting), Peg Martinez (furniture), Debbie Villa (jewelry), and Ben Hamburger (painting), October 4 – 26; Matilde Alberny (painting), Chester Allen (jewelry), and Karen Ocker (painting), November 1 – 30; Cheryl Grace (painting), Kiki Huston (jewelry), Ginger Kelly (glass), and Ellen Macomber (painting), December 6 – 28.

ARTHUR ROGER GALLERY – 432 Julia St. 522-1999. www.arthurrogergallery.com - Beautiful Dirt: Ballgowns of Lightness & Dark: Leslie Dill, 7000-Day Candles: Dave Greber (video), Feel Good Paintings for Feel Bad Times: Deborah Kass (neon and paintings), Troy Dugas (sculpture), October 4–25; John Alexander (paint-

ing) and Luis Cruz Azaceta (painting), November 1 – December 20.

BARRISTER'S GALLERY – 2331 St. Claude Ave. 525-2767. www.barristersgallery.com - Sugar After Stranger: Susan Bowers (painting), 1+1=3: Ibeji Twins: Kristin Myers (sculpture), through October 4; Jessica Goldfinch, October

BOYD SATELLITE – 440 Julia St. 899-4218. www.boydsatellitegallery.com Undivided: Pinkney Herbert (painting), through September 30

BRUNNER GALLERY – 215 N. Columbia St. Covington, 985-893-0444. www.brunnergallery.com - New Sculpture and Furniture Designs: Rick Brunner, Gallery Artists Group Show, ongoing.

CALLAN CONTEMPORARY – 518 Julia St., New Orleans, 525-0518. www.callancontemporary.com - Balance and Perception: Mitchell Lonas (painting), through September 21; Imagined Shores: Raine Bedsole (sculpture and works on paper), October 4 – 26.

CAROL ROBINSON GALLERY – 840 Napoleon Ave. at Magazine. 895-6130. www.carolrobinsongallery.com - Transience: Cathy Hegman (painting), through September 30; The Archeology of Solitude: Bernard Mat-



Raine Bedsole at Callan Contemporary.

tox (painting), October 4 – 26; Virtual Exhibition, ongoing.

COLE PRATT GALLERY – 3800 Magazine St. 891-6789. www.coleprattgallery.com - Stephan Hoffpauir (painting), September 30 – October 31; James Beaman (painting), October 28 – November 30; Karen Stastny (painting), December 2 – 27.

COLLINS DIBOLL ART GALLERY – Loyola University. 861-5456. <http://www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/> - Alumni Highlights Exhibitions: Leftovers: Tasheka Arceneaux (graphic design) and Reconciliation: Peter Barnitz (painting), October 2.

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER – 900 Camp St. 210-0224. www.cacno.org - Mark of the Feminine: curated by Regine Basha, Bombay Sapphire Artisan Series National Juried Exhibition, Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Awards, through October 4; Prospect 3: Notes for Now, October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015

HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION – 533 Royal St. 523-4662. www.hnoc.org - Shout, Sister, Shout!: The Boswell Sisters of New Orleans (photography), through October 26; From Cameo to Close Up: Louisiana in Film, through November 26; Creole World: Photographs of New Or-

leans and the Latin Caribbean Sphere, through December 7

ISAAC DELGADO FINE ARTS GALLERY – 615 City Park Ave. 361-6620. <http://www.dcc.edu/departments/art-gallery/> - Prospect 3: Notes for Now, October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015

JEAN BRAGG GALLERY OF SOUTHERN ART – 600 Julia Street. 895-7375. www.jeanbragg.com - New Work: Charles G. Smith (painting), October 4 – 26; Acadian Asteur: Chuck Broussard (painting), November 1 – 30; B is for Banana, Bayou & Bungalow: Carol Hallock (painting), December 6 – 28.

JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY – 400a Julia St. 522-5471. www.jonathanferraragallery.com - 18th Annual NO DEAD ARTISTS (various media), through September 27; Guns in the Hands of Artists (various media), October 1, 2014 – January 28, 2015.

LeMIEUX GALLERIES – 332 Julia St. 522-5988. www.lemieuxgalleries.com - Glimmer Steady Inside the Stone: Nathan Durfee (painting), through September 27; Art, Environment & Observations: Deedra Ludwig (painting), October 4 – November 15; Stories Told: Vidal Blankenstein (painting), November 1 – 29; Unseen Works: Paul Ninias (painting), Paintings and Drawings: Dusti Bongé, November 22 – December 27.



Jean-Michel Basquiat at The Ogden Museum of Southern Art.

NEWCOMB ART GALLERY – Tulane University. 865-5328. www.newcombartgallery.tulane.edu - Eradication: A Form of Obsession: Chakaia Booker (sculpture), One and Together: Katherine Taylor (sculpture), through October 2; Prospect 3: Notes for Now: Hew Locke, Monir Farmanfarmaian, Ebony Peterson, and Andrea Fraser, guest curated by Franklin Sirmans, October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015.

NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART – City Park. 606-4712. www.noma.org - Behind Closed Doors: Art in the Spanish American Home, 1492-1898 (various media), through September 21; Robert Rauschenberg and the “Five from Louisiana” (various media), through October 5; Drawings from Life of Pi: Alexis Rockman, through October 21; Sphere of Influence: Pictorialism, Women, and Modernism (photography), through November 23; Forever Mural: Odili Donald Odita, through April 30, 2015; Prospect 3: Notes for Now, October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015.

OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART – 925 Camp St. 539-9600. www.ogdenmuseum.org - An Alternate Vision: Roland Golden (painting and drawing), One Place: Paul Kwilecki and Four Decades of Photographs from Decatur County, Georgia (photography), through September 21; Louisiana Contemporary, juried by Jonathan Binstock (various media), New Orleans

Chapter of The Links HBCU Exhibition (various media), through September 28; Into the Light II (photography), through October 12; Shawn Hall’s *Pastoral Universe* (installation), through November 2; “Before I Die...”: Candy Chang (installation), through February; Ogden Photo Camp 2014 Exhibition, ongoing.

SOREN CHRISTENSEN GALLERY – 400 Julia St. 569-9501. www.sorenchristensen.com - New and Retrospective Work: Jamali (paintings), Group Work: Selections from the Roster, September; Brand Loyalty: Bill Dunlap (painting), October.

STELLA JONES GALLERY – Place St. Charles, 201 St. Charles Ave. 568-9050. www.stellajonesgallery.com -

STEVE MARTIN GALLERY – 624 Julia St. 566-1390. <http://www.stevemartinfineart.com> - Steve Martin and Emerging Artists, ongoing

UNO-ST. CLAUDE GALLERY - 2429 St. Claude Ave. 280-6410. <http://finearts.uno.edu/gallery.html>. 14th Annual Center Austria Artist Exchange: environmental scanning: Katharina Cibulka and Nicole Weniger, through October 5; Prospect 3: Notes for Now, October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015. □

Photorealism: The Sydney and Walda Besthoff Collection

On view November 8, 2014 - January 25, 2015



Cat's Eye and the Best of 'Em, 1993 (detail), Charles Bell, oil on canvas; Collection of Sydney and Walda Besthoff, Image © Charles Bell, Courtesy Louis K. Meisel Gallery

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