

# N.O.A.R

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

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SUMMER / FALL 2017



*SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE*

*Auseklis Ozols - Sibylle Peretti - Christopher Saucedo - Regina Scully - Cecilia Vicuña - Sidonie Villere*



# N·O·A·R

## THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

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Regina Scully: *Origin of Dreams*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 39" high.

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# *Regina Scully & Japonisme*

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BY TERRINGTON CALAS

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REGINA SCULLY/JAPANESE LANDSCAPE:  
INNER JOURNEYS  
New Orleans Museum of Art

REGINA SCULLY: WORKS ON PAPER  
Octavia Art Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

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“. . . Japonisme brought to Europe a new sense of color, a new decorative system, and . . . a poetic imagination which never existed even in the most perfect medieval or Renaissance pieces.” (Edmond de Goncourt, Journal, April 1884)

REGINA SCULLY’S FORTE is her sovereign brushstroke. It steers her art — and fairly epitomizes it. At first glance, the method seems freewheeling: all gesture and dash and images of clotted incident. But at core, there is a veiled rigor or, at least, a strategy beneath the teeming surfaces. And, to be sure, a pondered goal. This is paint-handling of some fierceness. It feels resolute. Thus, in a work like *Origin of Dreams* (2017), you perceive far more than the apparent wildfire of markings and detached planes. Like all of Scully’s work, the painting is an astute variant of landscape abstraction. It flirts with the anti-syntax of old-line “pure painting,” but, in fact, keenly pursues structure. In it, every shape is an emphatic shape. Briskly uttered contours and contrasts are everywhere. In passage after passage, Scully takes abstract motifs and

toughens them, vivifies them, renders them with the cogency of figuration.

And notably, she retains the landscape subject — a constantly insinuated presence. What might be a zone of slack geometries assumes the “thereness” of a hill or a riverbank. A bravura swipe becomes a dense foliage mass. Such leaps from technique to experience are, in the main, the chief pleasure in a piece like this. But Scully’s singular way is to put pleasure in the very vehicle of that leap: the brushstroke itself. It seems intended to gratify on its own. It suggests a fresh take on the traditional “artist’s touch.” You come away with a sense of roused nature, but equally with a sense of galvanizing technique. And it provides a lucidity rather wanting in much contemporary painting.

The enlivening effect of Scully’s technique is bolstered, in part, by a distinctive linearity. A pronounced edge and an implied scoring are persistent in everything she does. The paintings look graphic — but not entirely and not predictably. There is nothing of the mechanical character you might expect, nothing of the rigidity. Her line searches. It has the kind of grace and flow you see in Japanese prints and paintings. And seldom is any graphic approach so protean as this — or so versatile. Scully seems capable of managing every painterly trope — from staccato jottings to calligraphic whirls to buttery swaths — all of them within a single, chaos-risking composition. And throughout, somehow, the linear quality asserts itself, captivates.



Regina Scully: *Delos*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas. Collection of John Abajian and Scott Simmons.

An exhibition at the New Orleans Museum of Art — “Regina Scully / Japanese Landscape: Inner Journeys” — sought to underscore this, as well as other analogues to Japanese painting, specifically to Edo-period works in the museum’s fine Asian art collection. And those analogues are fairly evident: the stylized landscape forms, often clustered, often lyrically suspended; the shallow, “rising perspective” and; frequently, a blanketing Edenic tenor — these and her persistent, marshaling line.

Together, all of these qualities declare the keynote of Scully’s art, which is her abiding engrossment in nature. And significantly, her attitude here is complex. This may be the most intriguing revelation in the NOMA show. She obviously knows — and intimates — the contingencies we face when trying to grasp today’s natural environment. You see it in her range. At one moment, the posture indeed parallels that of much Edo landscape painting. She submits nature as a magical, poeticized sanctuary and, perhaps, with an air of the spiritual — not unlike a Nanga School work such as So Aiseki’s *Shadows of the Setting Sun*. At other moments, however, her images radiate a discernible air of foreboding. And, in a few instances, such as the powerful *Navigation 4* (2012), nature feels positively racked. Such shifting viewpoints suggest a wider purpose than the patent one of eloquent style. You sense Scully reaching beyond the racy line, beyond the

contrarian syntax. Her paintings, it would seem, evince a serious reflection on the realities of the environment in our time.

SCULLY’S MORE POETICIZED scenes are the natural entry to her oeuvre — if only because of their conspicuous beauty. They were stand-outs in the NOMA show, and similar works on paper dominated a handsome concurrent display at the Octavia Art Gallery.

They are reveries. In paintings like *Aurora* and *Delos*, though nominally abstract, you perceive a sojourn in some distant, untroubled land — a land where nature, sumptuously re-envisioned, holds sway; and where its pleasures seem all-embracing. Here, nature is something relished and inviolable. Scully conveys this chiefly with alluring surfaces — with her fluent, palpable brushwork; with insouciant composition, and, most notably, with the amiable color of a Watteau. And that color almost surfeits. It fairly declares pleasure. These pictures employ an aesthetic practice rarely warranted today: delectation. And they employ it in the service of ethical longing.

*Aurora* is a landscape, or rather a landscape intellection; it slyly evokes the felt presence of nature and, simultaneously, advances a paradisiacal tenor. Structurally, spatially, the painting feels defiant, but somehow also contained. It spreads and spreads



Regina Scully: *Navigation 4*, 2010. Acrylic on panel.

— a scatter of suavely stylized shapes that hint at vegetation and languid waters, all of it in pastoral greens and muted blue. The whole is serenity. A unique Arcadia. Scully fills the eye with easeful painterly effects. Her handling, for example, has a dance-like grace that develops into vigorous slashes. You see line and mass in what amounts to a genial skirmish. Shapes that denote natural forms — forests, lakes — are repeatedly intersected, or vaguely impeded, by undulant lines. A pattern emerges, implying an overall rhythm. And it's constant. The result is a discreetly sensuous surface. You think of the sensuousness of Claude Monet's *Nymphéas*, his final water garden paintings: those radical expanses of eddying, adagio strokes. The images approached abstraction but, at the same time, imparted an idyllic temper.

*Delos* yields a similar impression — signifying a domain of the splendidly implausible. In this case, however, Scully exalts the dream. There is now a certain lushness in her treatment, a fluidity, something akin to bravura technique, but hardly so florid. Again, cool color suffuses the field, but it is tonally richer, with a full range of lights and darks, mostly within a single hue. The image is a fête of blues and blue-greens — complex, yet lyrical, altogether frictionless. It intimates melodic space.

The rarefied aura in this work is heightened still further by specific painted details. These are would-be kitsch emblems that usually signify a romanticized landscape. Scully shrewdly modifies them, deleting their hoariness. And they become cogent metaphors. What you see are breezily eloquent pictographs — actually deft sketches that suggest far-off hills and meandering streams, sylvan idylls and ships and, it appears, temple architecture. Despite Scully's cursory-looking manner, these images convince. Together, they project an aura of idealized nature. And

they conjure a distant antecedent: the Baroque era's figment of classical Rome and the cultural bliss it implied. That world of perpetual springtime and late afternoons and utter concord is grasped and lyricized here. In *Delos*, Scully's Eden feels like an abstract Poussin.

THE AFFINITY BETWEEN Scully's work and Japanese painting has been obvious for some time. It fascinates chiefly because it appears to be instinctual, or perhaps subliminal. Until very recently, she had made no considered study of Asian art. Lisa Rotondo McCord, the curator who organized the NOMA exhibition, pointed this out. It does seem probable, however, given Scully's sophisticated education, that the Cubist-New York School axis would have been known to her. That historical phenomenon planted Japanese spatial devices and Japanese linearity onto the very surface of Abstract Expressionism. The influence is unmistakable in certain early Ab-Ex masters, to wit: Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning. And especially in de Kooning's two greatest works: *Attic* (1949) and *Excavation* (1950). This latter piece, in fact, bears some similarity to Scully's own series of the same title. It also relates to her splendid *Passage* (2012), a sweep of pulsing oranges — that notoriously vicious hue made palatable — with judiciously inserted blues and with hints of geological formations that easily evoke the de Kooning. Scully's *Passage* also echoes the famous "all-overness" that the Ab-Exers inherited from the Japanese.

Most often, however, Scully's art feels closer to the Japanese originals — closer to the dreamy, unfolding pastoral forms in Edo landscape. And interestingly, when you look at her paintings, the seminal 19th century moment of Japanese influence comes to mind. Her images possess the flavor of that East-West conflation.



Regina Scully: *Mindscape 5*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 40" high.

In the *Mindscape* series, and perhaps even more in the *Inner Journeys* at Octavia Art Gallery, her shapes swim and float and whirl, and they ornament their formats as if they were scrolls or folding screens. Mainly, they deliver the notion of garden, the very notion that suffused the first years of Japanese fervor in Western art. Indeed, that notion became Monet's focus. And he seems a crucial Scully forebear, an earlier quasi-abstractivist who was, in the period parlance, "Japan-persuaded." Scully's *Inner Journey 4* and *Mindscape 5* would be comfortably at home in a setting with *Les Nymphéas*.

IT MAY SEEM TODAY that the Japanese impact on modernism has been banalized by art history. But that impact was pivotal.

And it reached far.

Monet, in 1867, visited the first-ever Japanese pavilion at the Paris *Exposition Universelle*. He was staggered. There, in a display of art objects and artifacts, was the unique brilliance of a little-known culture. It seized his imagination and altered his vision utterly. He was hardly alone. *Japonisme* soon swept Europe. And from that moment, through the early 20th century, every vanguard artist was affected. Chief among them: Whistler, Manet, Van Gogh, Picasso.

After some years, Monet's own work surrendered completely. What had been his legendary, obsessive naturalism progressed into an art fashioned from — it might seem — pure style. The results were *Les Nymphéas*. To look at them is to see nature



Regina Scully: *Inner Journey 4*, 2017. Acrylic on paper, 22.5" high. Courtesy Octavia Art Gallery.

re-cast as a tapestry, a pictorial invention of nuanced color and abstracted motifs. But that artifice was, very possibly, the environment spiritualized — signaling a rapt absorption in nature. It was something not unlike the spiritualized tone in Edo-period landscape painting. And the effect was equally transporting. Monet had, in essence, created a metaphorical Eden. The pictures were a genuflection before the Japanese aesthetic.

That aesthetic, as I say, reached far. Largely, it did so in formal terms. The early moderns, at the outset, were fascinated by the “primitive” take on pictorial principles. What struck them were the extraordinary results from simple, direct methods — especially in the Japanese treatment of space. Paintings and prints were rendered in casual, spreading asymmetries. And, alarmingly, they possessed an almost heraldic flatness, a seeming anti-perspective — and, in effect, the refutation of a venerable Western tradition. Later, these novel constructs would become modernist conventions. As noted, American Abstract Expressionism adopted them fully. And ultimately, they would touch every subsequent mode of abstract painting.

Scully’s mode is no exception. There is no question that, formally, she falls in line with the long American tradition of gestural color abstraction — but only in trace measures. The fundamental elements are there — the compressed space; the energized, apparently unending terrain. But she differs. There is her exuberant stylizing of form, and her line — her singular “Japanese line.” In American abstraction, such a thing is far from common. We saw a distant counterpart in Mark Tobey’s “white writing” — a free calligraphic style rooted in Eastern mysticism; and, at se-

lect moments, it is also present in Richard Diebenkorn’s works on paper. For Tobey, despite the Asian influence, linearity was part of a purist interest in light and spatial ambiguities. His line was ceaselessly dynamic, leading to the very American frenzied tone in Jackson Pollock. That tone seems foreign to Scully’s sensibility. By contrast, her line is balletic: all grace and delicacy and a sly underpinning of force. This is scarcely part of the American abstract art legacy.

FROM WHAT WE SEE, Scully managed to bypass the sway of late-modernist abstraction and, instead, fastened directly onto one of its sources — unwittingly. The consequence is this: she has created her own private Japonisme. And it delivers. What hits the eye, no doubt, are the formal details. But after a time, you see her kinship to the other side of the Asian aesthetic — the reverence of nature.

As in the Edo landscapes on view at NOMA, as in the profoundest early modern offshoots of Japonisme, Scully’s technical control is a decided affair. And it is about surface beauty and visual impact — the loveliness of a brushstroke, the cleverness of a motif, the savoriness of a color. But all this exists to pull you into a unique meditation on nature. Her vacillations tell it all. On the one hand, she creates paradises. We need them, as the poet says — even fictive ones — in troubled times. But she also creates lands of uncertainty, lands of simultaneous desolation and the resonance of hope. Look again at *Origin of Dreams*. □



Christopher Saucedo: *Neapolitan*, Installation view. Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans.

# Neapolitan

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

CHRISTOPHER SAUCEDO  
 “Neapolitan”  
 Arthur Roger Gallery  
 New Orleans, LA

ACCORDING TO THE *Oxford English Dictionary*, initial references to Neapolitan ice cream in 1868 remark upon a desire to surpass the fineness of its flavor, though no indication is given of success in that endeavor. It’s the peacemaker of frozen desserts, a triad of tastes that when eaten together celebrate a commingled diversity of flavors, and when sampled separately offer their distinct, individualized characteristics despite being nestled in the same container.

For Christopher Saucedo’s exhibition at Arthur Roger, “Neapolitan (Comic Book Diplomacy, Go Cups and Water Bottle Buoy),” a digital print picturing three cups of strawberry, chocolate, and vanilla colored drinks serves as the visual metaphor that

the title indicates. Saucedo says he made this piece to try to encapsulate the whole three-part show. According to his research, after Italians brought gelato to America, the three most popular flavors were vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. In turn, three distinct bodies of work join in the artist’s first solo exhibition with the gallery.

The cups in the print are emblazoned with deteriorating images of three super heroes: The Hulk, Captain America, and Iron Man. The scuffed cups remind of beloved childhood drinking vessels washed and handled so many times that the images wore off. In fact, these are images of the cups that Saucedo’s family uses to drink milk and juice.

That tender connection to personal history is embedded with other iconographic imagery. Within the print is a subtle, out-of-focus reproduction of Jamaica Bay, part of Saucedo’s New York landscape, where he works and lives with his family. The cups themselves are filled halfway with drink, a reference to an earlier installation titled with the adage about optimism versus pessimism. While that sentiment is evident throughout the work, the superheroes reveal themselves as keenly important iconography in the rest of the exhibition.



Christopher Saucedo: *Neapolitan*, Installation view. Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans.

Saucedo's devotion to this kind of imagery is vastly apparent in a wall covered with plastic-bagged comic book covers, which he scanned in high resolution at larger scale then reprinted. He remarks that he started collecting these comics, which he found in international markets during travel, for a few reasons. First, they reminded him of the comics he read as a child, perhaps while drinking from an iconic cup. Second, it felt like a sociological experiment to collect these ephemera that presented familiar comic icons with different typography and design. Third, it made a connection with the boys and girls who read these comics in other countries. He says, "The personalizing and awkward signature on the cover of *Orumcek Adam (Spiderman)* by the prior teenaged owner who signed his first name, Yusuf, was welcome, as that ordinary Turkish kid became my international equivalent and suddenly the planet felt smaller."

Saucedo gently dissects each cover by branding with a large circle or concentric circles, and then replaces the central area with an image from another nation's version of the comic book character depicted in the larger picture plane. In this way Saucedo makes a delicate connection between different countries over pop culture references visibly similar through imagery – it's a testament to the power of the picture. There is tension between the "super heavy handed imagery of comic books," in the artist's words, and the delicacy of the burned mark making, itself individualized and unique; Saucedo never uses another method besides unpredictable burning to cut the paper. The interrelation between the pieces of paper, and the imagery and the process, conceptualize the balance inherent in political interrelations.

In smaller scale works, Saucedo then embroiders the image of a compass over some of the brands, tilting the northern

point of the rose slightly askew. The thread becomes stained in the process, joining the materials at a molecular level. The process holds the vulnerable materials together and speaks of the fragility of the relationship between the two geographical areas.

The turning of the circle within the picture plane – whether for formal or conceptual means – and the presence of the compass rose both point to an attempt to align disparate points of view through American pop culture references. Saucedo remarks that there is only the Superman of the United States present in the comic books, and there seem to be no superheroes indigenous to other countries. While this is a sign of American imperialism, it is also a suggestion about the desire to fight for truth and justice, purportedly the "American" way. They posit whether it is possible to share a love for a particular culture and maintain peace through that affection despite differences.

Larger comic book covers employ larger branded circles that are further burned with maps emptied of information about the countries they represent. These are placeholders for eastern and western hemispheres, and signifiers of emptied territorial and political areas. The maps create content about a global dialogue through comic books. Much like three disparate ice creams from a country across the globe together created palatable pleasure in an unfamiliar nation, the evidence of comic books in other languages suggests an American crossover to the rest of the world.

Some of the imagery is only formally arranged, but Saucedo does make conscious pairings to evoke socio-political content. The repetition of a handcuffed Superman recalls the notion that the United States sits in a complex position of power and control, and this must be structured with respect. There is tension between being in the position of peacekeeper, and one of potential



Christopher Saucedo: *Neapolitan*, Installation view. Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans.

hostility. Both brown and pink hands may hold Superman's white fists as they are chained, suggesting the push and pull of political relationships – and recalling the ice cream.

Images of women in bikinis, otherwise scantily clad, or openly within their skimpy superhero costumes often appear in the centers of Arabic comics. These placements are efforts to conceptually liberate the female form from cultural restrictions of dress with tongue-in-cheek references to the way comics historically objectify women's bodies. Saucedo aims for a sense of balance and equality throughout much of his work; it is a recurring theme, and requires either a conceptual or physical distribution of weight of various parts. In this sense, the work asks questions about social, political, and cultural issues rather than provides answers in a propagandistic sense.

The emptied maps that represent a space for this kind of consideration are absent of water, an element contrary to the fire of the branding and implicit in the making of the paper. Both have been destructive and devastating forces in Saucedo's life at various points, and both have led to the creative production of work. Again, the tension of differences and the possibility of marrying divergent forces speak to a delicacy of balance.

Branded images of cups and water bottles on handmade paper, iconic in Saucedo's work, are arranged in two installations in the third gallery of the space. The go-cups in particular are a reference to New Orleans, Saucedo's other home, but both vessels represent volumes – each is a unique image, and each represents

a space taken by a figure. The water bottle reappears as a larger-scale buoy made of Styrofoam – a permanent sculptural material in the age of overwhelming plastics - anchored with a stone. Though Saucedo moves back and forth across the country between New York and New Orleans, both places serve as anchors for him.

The buoys also reference the lobster and crab traps that provide a living for fishermen in both areas. The color codes on these traps indicate ownership, and to violate that sanctity by disturbing another's traps is a high offense. Saucedo colored his buoy in a particular way, referencing the conduct code inherent in the hues. The colors within the handmade paper used to create the branded cups serve a similar purpose. The coloration makes reference to territorial dispute, and a means of avoiding hostile interaction with clear (and visual) communication.

Saucedo recently posted online an image of a GIF of 137 plastic cup works, rapidly firing in repetition. The flashing colors begin to optically mix, and the multitude of images recalls not only Saucedo's prolific practice but also the repetition of prints that spread throughout the world in the form of comics, in so many different contexts. If Saucedo's work is primarily about tension and balance in a search for equality, whether through geometry or the bombastic formal language of comics, then this image in motion is a kind of kinetic version of that search. The delicacy of the fired brands is present within the water-like fluidity of the movement of the images, which pass like so much melting ice cream. The divergent images meld into one, balanced, cohesive, whole. □



Joseph Cohen: *422 with sound*, 2015/2017. Pigment, diamond dust, gold, and varnish on canvas over oak, 81" x 60" high.

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## *Between the Lines*

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BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

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JOSEPH COHEN  
Octavia Art Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

KATHRYN HUNTER  
Le Mieux Galleries  
New Orleans, LA

JOSE-MARIA CUNDIN  
Callan Contemporary  
New Orleans, LA

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ARE ADVANCES IN materials and our access to these materials governing the modus operandi of contemporary artists? Or, are artists consciously using nontraditional media to reflect the ever-increasing din of corporate infiltration? Perhaps they are simply acknowledging the ever-diminishing line that separates one thing from another.

Whatever the case, the very premise of Houston-based Joseph Cohen's "Ode to A Flower" at Octavia Art Gallery, recalls an NPR Radiolab segment about a carefully dissected caterpillar

revealing the makings of a butterfly, pre chrysalis. A very magical situation that would otherwise go unnoticed when merely gazing upon a caterpillar crawling across the hibiscus. Such awareness challenges our view of the caterpillar, i.e., there is more than meets the eye. The American physicist Richard Feynman expressed a similar sentiment in his 1981 "Ode to A Flower" interview, to which Cohen pays homage. In the interview, Feynman discussed the occupational viewpoints of an artist and scientist with regard to the beauty of a flower. In his artist's statement, Cohen says "... the human eye has certain limits; a designed myopia, where the eye cannot see what the intellect understands. Breakthroughs in material science have allowed me to work with specialized substances...to relieve these types of blind spots."

Thus, Cohen's interest in both what and how we see are in evidence at Octavia where the majority of paintings are monochromatic, most often dripping from three-dimensional birch panels. *Proposition 429*, a pigment, diamond dust, gold and varnish on birch, oozes the color red while an entire wall of variations on blue and white soothes human need for out-of-doors. Included in this litany is *Proposition 451*, whose uneven lower edge seems to allude to another interest of Cohen's, that being the sound of color.



Kathryn Hunter: *Can't Breathe 1*, 2017. Papercut, relief printing on mulberry paper, 25" x 18" high.

Only one of the pieces displayed actually incorporates auditory components, *Proposition 422 with sound*, a large, uneven surface of yellow pigment on canvas over oak containing diamond dust, gold and varnish.

WHEN WE SEE a printed bear we might think of the Grizzly emblazoned on the state flag of California. Or, we might think of the many bears in Louisiana printmaker Kathryn Hunter's "The Concurrence of Things" at LeMieux Galleries. LeMieux's website lists Hunter as being from Alabama's story-telling country which she left in search of the mountains in Montana and Wyoming, home to much wildlife and in particular, the Grizzly. Animals have been an ongoing feature of Hunter's mixed media linocuts. In this current outing, her strongest yet, creatures again take center stage, particularly the Black bear, and are oftentimes dressed or featured like masks on human torsos, adding to Hunter's strong sense of narration.

But, in "The Concurrence of Things," we are not partaking of Pooh's delight with a jar of honey or Goldilocks encounter with bowls of porridge. Rather, young and old be forewarned,

Hunter's bears are at times screaming in pain or downright defiant. Furthermore, an overall sense of alchemy is apparent in the artist's repetitive use of diamonds, snakes and string art to accompany her fables. *Can't Breathe 1*, a paper cut with relief printing on mulberry paper, is a smaller version of the mural *Can't Breathe 2*. In both, an anthropomorphic bear wearing a dress holds the United States flag and stands beside a dog whose chest is decorated with pistols. The sash across the bear's chest reads "Can't Breathe." The bear and dog in the mural version are made from laser cut steel, surrounded by an army of linocut swifts mounted on wood.

As with *Can't Breathe 2*, Hunter's larger works are the more confrontational pieces of "The Concurrence of Things." The 67"x39"x7" *Abduction 2* presents a laser cut steel bear mounted onto a yellow diamond that's been painted directly on the wall. Steel arrows pierce the screaming bear's belly containing an embroidered caduceus formation. Additional statements relating to guns are in a mixed media series of silhouetted paper cutouts of human figures with embroidered animal heads. Each figure holds a gun, with the titles *Won't Shoot*, *Don't Shoot*, and *Will Shoot*.



Jose-Maria Cundin: *The Supreme Leader*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 9.4 x 7.4 ft.

A CONJURING OF the soft, ethereal glow of twilight is recommended in order to assume the right frame of mind and full appreciation of Spanish-born Jose-Maria Cundin’s “The Supreme Leader and Other Ponderables” at Callan Contemporary. That, and an unbridled Bosch tintured with a tad of anime. Cundin, who moved to New Orleans in 1964 and resides in Folsom, presents a series of playful, oil on canvas satires that emit a warm glow of light from one painting to the next. Animating each painting are atmospheric smatterings of color that either define one of Cundin’s characters or the space therein. *The Unqualified Candidate*’s main attraction is the empty, pale yellow chair that offers a prop to an indecipherable, predominantly orange, figure.

Comedic by virtue of implication are *The Museum Visit* and *Exercises on Levitation (Extreme Yoga)*. In the former, one of

Cundin’s fanciful, doll-like creations is displayed atop a platform alongside the museumgoer shrouded in blues and at a loss for clarification. *Exercises on Levitation* is more descriptive, allowing us concrete information of pointing hands and ascending feet. *The Supreme Leader* is the largest painting in the exhibit, measuring over nine feet tall, and like most of the paintings is from 2017 and adorned with an elaborate frame. Here, a foppish fellow stands amid a state of disarray, his frightened cat clutching a doll beneath a wobbly table. If not for its size, the painting would fit quite nicely into a clothed version of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” □



Cecilia Vicuña: *About to Happen*, installation view. Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans.

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# *Vicuña and Resilience*

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BY REBECCA LEE REYNOLDS

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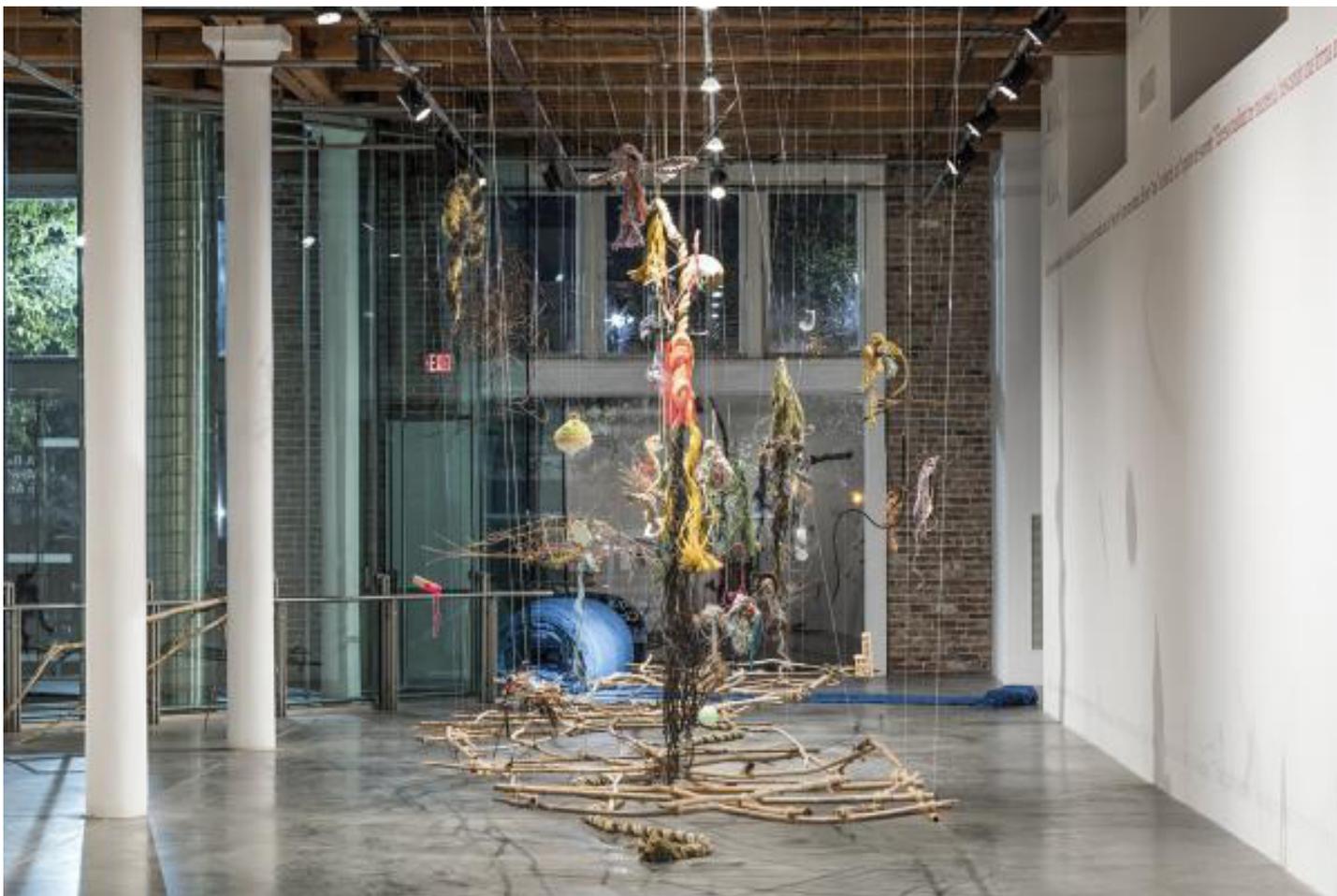
Cecilia Vicuña  
 “About to Happen”  
 Contemporary Arts Center  
 New Orleans, LA

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NORMALLY WHEN ONE enters a retrospective exhibition, a selection of work has been laid out for the viewer in a linear manner. But for Cecilia Vicuña’s retrospective exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, the viewer is met by a maze of textiles. These are the *Quipus*, long stretches of colored wool hung from horizontal tubes on a wire grid at the ceiling. About 15 feet tall, they flow back and forth with the air current and fall in puddles on the floor. Vicuña offers a forest of lavender, magenta, pale pink, rose red, and

creamy tan columns to get lost in. You will find yourself laughing as you wander amongst the colors, enjoying the sheer tactility of the material and your own bodily experience. It’s fun for selfies, obviously, and it’s fun to experience with friends or other viewers. The experience is radically introspective, embracing the viewer in a specific environment instead of offering a prospect out across the wide landscape of Vicuña’s career.

The installation is a fitting introduction to the themes of Vicuña’s work, which all revolve around tactile and experiential knowledge. The quipus, for instance, are knotted in different spots and named after the system of knotted cords used by the Incas and other Andean cultures in South America to store and communicate information. You will want to touch them, along with everything else in the show, and Vicuña uses that desire to counter the dematerialization of knowledge and bring us back to our bodies and back to our touch on the land. This has political resonance, given that much feminist work has focused on knowledge avail-



Cecilia Vicuña: *About to Happen*, installation view. Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans.

able through the body, and has also used textiles or ephemeral materials. Vicuña's work speaks to ecofeminism, a recent trend that connects the domination of women in patriarchal societies with the domination of nature. Ecofeminist artists work to counter that domination and protect the earth, just as activists do in the ecology movement. The CAC's presentation of such an artist is timely, not only for our awareness of land loss and the impact of industry on the Louisiana landscape, but also because Vicuña is receiving more attention lately due to her participation in Documenta 14. This year the exhibition has expanded beyond its usual location in Kassel, Germany to include a second location in Athens, Greece, where Vicuña is making a quipu out of Greek wool.

The CAC installation presents the artist's work according to series, such as the *Quipus*, along with a video room that cycles through various short films that show the artist interacting with her materials. In the video *Umbilico, a New York Quipo* (2012), Vicuña is on the roof of her New York studio with long red felt ropes that she is knotting. Everything but the red ropes has been desaturated in order to pull our attention to the ropes. She lets them down the side of the building like Rapunzel letting down her hair.

Long pieces break off and float away, while one strand makes it to the ground and starts to pile up. In *Quipu Austral for the Sydney Biennale* (2012), several quipu are displayed in a sunlit space that recalls an industrial pergola. We hear a howling wind and watch the strands float in the breeze as the sun casts long shadows against the yellow, red, and pink columns of wool. Bits of the wool's hair float in clouds on the plank floor and the sound of bell chimes suggests a ritual atmosphere.

At the end of the adjacent gallery is another long stretch of wool, this time in a denim blue, rolled up like a hay bale. The title, *Caracol Azul (Blue Snail)* (2017), refers to snails that secrete dyes as well as the idea of the snail trail as a form of writing. In fact, Vicuña is also known as a poet. Along one gallery wall is displayed a selection of her artist's books and scrolls. Many play with the associations between thread and line and writing by using actual thread that transitions from line into words, such as *Reality is a Line* (1994). The snail shells resting on the glassine used as a scroll in *The Sixth Extinction* (1990s) harken back to the *Blue Snail*.

Other books play with the format of the book itself, such



Cecilia Vicuña: *About to Happen*, installation view. Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans.

as *My Dad's Album* (2016). Playing with the book as a repository of memory, she uses her father's small photo album from the 1930s. Standing up on its edge, it becomes a display vehicle for feathers stuck between the pages. In *Cliff Book* (1981-82), the shape of a standing open book becomes a miniature cliff made out of white plaster. In *Precario*, Vicuña writes about cliffs on the Sendero Chibcha (Chibcha Trail) in Colombia, referring to the pre-Columbian Chibchas and the paths that they made across the Andes: "Poetry inhabits/certain places/where the cliffs/need only a signal/ to bring them alive;/two or three lines/a mark/ and silence begins/ to speak."<sup>1</sup>

*We the People* (2016) nods to the more explicitly political examples of Vicuña's work, discussed in the catalogue but otherwise not represented in the show. Red thread and colored pencil spell out the title of the work on canvas, pinned to the wall like a painting. Vicuña was one of the founding members of Artists For Democracy, and was influenced by the politics of her birthplace, Chile. Growing up under president Salvador Allende's rule, her activism was prompted by his death during the 1973 coup d'état. At

the time that Augusto Pinochet came into power, Vicuña was in art school in London, and afterwards she settled in Bogotá, Colombia. *Vaso de leche* (*Glass of milk*) is a performance that demonstrates her approach to political art. Performed in Bogotá in 1979, Vicuña wanted to draw attention to the government's lack of response to milk contamination that was killing thousands of children in Bogotá. For the performance, Vicuña set up a small glass of milk in front of Simon Bolívar's home, then tipped it over. The spilled milk referred to the death from milk contamination, while the intimate scale of the piece poetically clashed with the large scale of the scandal.

Ordinarily, one would expect a retrospective exhibition to include photographic documentation of such performances and of installations. But Vicuña has eschewed documentation in many cases; no photographs exist of her installation *Otoño* (*Autumn*), for instance. Executed in Santiago in 1971, the artist filled the gallery of the National Museum of Fine Arts with autumn leaves. The challenge for a retrospective is how to convey Vicuña's commitment to politics and place, given that so much of her work arises



Cecilia Vicuña: *About to Happen*, installation view, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans.

out of responding to a particular site. In addition to the catalogue, the curators chose to present a new site-specific work that addresses the specific context of New Orleans and the politics of our rapidly changing landscape.

Stretching across one room of the gallery is the *Balsa Snake Raft to Escape the Flood* (2017), made from materials scavenged in the New Orleans area. The base is a lattice of sticks creating a plane about one foot off the ground, with a curving outline that recalls a boat. Black and white braided rope curves on the ground underneath the raft, and bundles of flotsam and jetsam are hung from above with clear acrylic string to create the impression of floating in space. Some of the bundles are made up of sticks tied with bright blue and yellow and black raffia—the kind of plastic ties found on boats. There's also a fragment of a Styrofoam buoy, its color faded out; branches tied together in the shape of a fish; bright red netting; and an old faded basketball. A big piece of driftwood root system sits off to the side.

This raft would do little to help someone in a flood, so the reference is clearly symbolic—an entreaty to find a way to use our trash for good. The call to salvage what remains and build an escape vehicle recalls Dawn DeDeaux's *MotherShip* series, and the use of material evokes Pam Longobardi's work with oceanic

garbage patches. Clearly the idea was to model a respectful interaction with place, one that could be used by analogy for our own culture's interaction with the South Louisiana landscape. But it runs the risk of preaching to the converted—it is doubtful that the commercial interests who most damage the landscape here will be coming to the gallery and looking to be enlightened. In the context of New Orleans, the sculpture looks too obvious, and the floating effect of the flotsam and jetsam bundles feels simplistic.

I was more moved by the *Precarios*, tiny sculptures also made out of scavenged material. The precariousness of these pieces speaks to the issues of climate change in a less obvious way and engages the imagination more. Vicuña began making these objects in 1966 while still in Chile, and continued making them when forced into exile by the dictatorship of Pinochet. Each sculpture is a testament to the activity of walking, touching, and collecting: a reed with a starburst head, a twisting piece of driftwood, a piece of metal mesh. Each piece is supported by a small wood plane resting on two pegs coming out from the wall—a platform that sometimes supports baskets or bowls, such as a basket full of seed pods and a small ball of string. A triangular piece of rock rests on its own pedestal. A wire arch is tied to small rocks for feet, with jingle shells hung from the arch. Feathers abound—tied together in an X, or

two upright feathers tied to a bundle of colored wires that must be an electronic circuit board that washed up on the beach. Butterflies float on red string tied to a scrap of wood. A bay scallop shell is presented on an oblong piece of blue beach glass.

Vicuña works with driftwood, bird feathers, pieces of rope, tiny shells—all of the things that I remember being fascinated by as a child growing up on the coast of South Carolina. They remind me of my love for the beach, and to this day my house is full of shells collected from my visits back home, as well as small rocks from various trips far and wide. For me, there is one beach in particular that I grew up with; for Vicuña, that beach is Con-cón in Chile. She explains that the first pieces were improvised there, ephemeral objects washed away by the tide, with no thought of documentation: “born of contemplation, they were for the earth and the sun.”<sup>2</sup> Vicuña explains that she was reacting to desecration of the beach by an oil refinery built at the mouth of the Aconcagua River. She remembers that the impact was so strong that swimming in the ocean left one with black feet covered in oil.<sup>3</sup>

A selection of the Precarios on a rectangular patch of sand on the ground of the gallery represents the Con-cón beach. The regularity of the sand’s shape, though, contradicts the experience of beach geography and feels like an artificial stab at reconciliation with the white cube. As for the surrounding walls, the objects are installed in groups that repeat particular compositions, such as the vertical pieces grouped together in one area and arch-based compositions in another. Scattered somewhat regularly on four levels of the wall, the pieces make the viewer work to appreciate each one. You have to move very slowly, spending time with each one—a viewing mode that most people will not engage in because the crowded installation causes one’s eyes to glaze over, scanning instead of looking. We do too much scanning as it is—the kind of half-concentrated viewing typical of online experience.

While I loved each one of the Precarios, I did not love them en masse. Displayed all together, covering multiple walls and the floor of the gallery, they feel like so much stuff taking up room. The paradox of the work is that it is so subtle that it works best with traditional display methods. Installed at eye level, following a traditional white cube hang, would require much more editing, but it would be worth it. I’m reminded of Richard Tuttle, whose one tiny piece of white rope so infuriated the art world. That piece of rope is all you need—it is enough, it says. Enough to look at, enough to consider, to contemplate, to build a world upon. Vicuña offers a similar piece of rope: a frayed fragment of bright yellow braided plastic roping, arching over a simple peg. In another piece, Vicuña complicates the formula a little, adding a piece of metal and a fragment of sea plant that looks like lace above a discarded bit of teal plastic rope.

What makes all this work is the tension between the discarded object and its transformation into something worthy of respect and value. M. Catherine de Zegher argues that it is the logic of Arte Povera and Dada, specifically citing Vicuña’s interest in Kurt Schwitters and his merz series.<sup>4</sup> The effect of the presentation recalls reliquaries presenting holy relics, ordinary items endowed with magical power. It is one thing to use the power of the white cube to draw attention to natural shapes in driftwood or the beauty of a feather, but Vicuña shows that even our e-waste can be redeemed. I have watched my young niece do the same thing at City Park, collecting discarded bottle caps and food packaging and

string and using Elmer’s glue to make them into little sculptures. What others see as trash or junk is, for her, a find. It is that lost respect for objects that Vicuña recovers.

As she writes in *Precario*, “The raw material/waited/to be seen/as a way of hearing/an interior sound/asking us to/create/this or that union/a feather leaning/a trophy flying.”<sup>5</sup> The unions are created by simply tying pieces together—a literal connection that stands in for a poetic one as well. A quill is tied to a long screw with bright red thread, the screw’s head becoming the base of the sculpture. What these pieces do is reconnect us to looking, and especially to looking at nature. In *Semiya/Seed Songs* (2015), we get to see Vicuña in action, collecting dried plants, seed pods, and berries in the foothills of the Andes mountains in Colchagua, Chile. While we hear her voice singing chants of amorphous syllables, text at the beginning of the film reads, “A sound is the seed of the universe.” The camera zooms in to her outstretched hands, showing us a palm full of seed pods. A stream runs in the background, its sound and the movement of the water creating a peaceful mood. She bends over to smell the leaves.

In the video *Symbiosis* (2015), Vicuña plays with the *Precarios* after they have been sent back to her from an exhibition. Unpacking them, she pushes the pieces apart and recombines them into new pieces. Text on the screen reads “new creatures emerge” as the sped-up film shows her rearranging the pieces. As the word “reciprocity” appears, two pieces come together. Each is called a creature, treated as something that has its own agency. The approach is similar to the work of Lygia Clark, part of the Neoconcrete movement in Brazil, alongside Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica. Clark started making *Bichos* (Critters) in 1960—small sculptures of folding metal planes that the viewer interacts with—and went on to make various objects that were designed to be worn or interacted with by visitors.

The idea of reciprocity is crucial: that if we touch the land, it responds. This understanding is lost in modes that consider the land as natural resources waiting to be used by industry. There it is a mute object, with no agency of its own. Given that the landscape of our region has pushed back, we know all too well that another mode is needed. Vicuña expresses the sense of resilience that is the flip side of precariousness. Working from the Latin root of the word, she has explained, “Precarious means prayer, uncertain, exposed to hazards, insecure. Prayer is change, the dangerous instant of transmutation.” Vicuña exposes both the risk and the hope of precariousness. □

<sup>1</sup> *Precario/Precarious*, trans. Anne Twitty (New York: Tanam Press, 1983), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> *Precario/Precarious*, trans. Anne Twitty (New York: Tanam Press, 1983), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> Julia Bryan-Wilson, “Awareness of Awareness: An Interview with Cecilia Vicuña,” in *About to Happen: Cecilia Vicuña* (New Orleans and Catskill: Contemporary Arts Center and Siglio, 2017), 112.

<sup>4</sup> M. Catherine de Zegher, “Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots,” in *The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Precario/Precarious*, trans. Anne Twitty (New York: Tanam Press, 1983), n.p.

<sup>6</sup> Cecilia Vicuña, <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/introduction/> (accessed 12 May 2017).



Sidonie Villere: *Flattened Series*, 2017. Acrylic, plaster, foam, canvas, net, string, wax on plywood, 21" high.

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# *Sidonie Villere: New Territory*

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BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

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SIDONIE VILLERE  
"Interruption"  
Jonathan Ferrara Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

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SIDONIE VILLERE'S NEWEST work at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery, grouped under the exhibition title "Interruption," is a departure from the familiar ceramic sculptures for which she is known. The title indicates a halt in her practice, and the diversity of materials in the work suggests halting jumps from one medium to the

next. Each is an index of the artist's curiosity about the textures of the media she chooses, which are of such mundane origins as pantyhose and foam, plastic wrap and rope. Villere attempts to elevate them through the medium of painting, which in her work bridges the three-dimensional plane, in reference to the practices she has set aside for this exploration.

The dimensionality of the objects takes on figurative aspects. *Flattened*, a pentptych of panels addressed with acrylic, plaster, foam, net, canvas, string, and wax, recall the glass-pressed self-portraits made by Jenny Saville. Villere's use of white as hue is as



Sidonie Villere: *Squeezed* (detail), 2017. Acrylic, foam, felt, muslin, canvas, telephone wire, twist-ties on gesso board; 19.5" high.

subtle as the fleshy color shifts in Saville's work, and the fleshiness of Villere's materials presses against the edges of the panel's picture plane much like Saville's figures want to burst from their compositional confines. The circular forms near the top of the composition read much as heads, which connect to more angular, geometric shapes at the bottom of the picture plane. They form portraits in this sense; discernable in the way Arcimboldo's court portraits emerge via careful arrangements of edibles and flora.

The pentptych is placed next to a work called *Squeeze*, in which a pillow-like panel is delicately bound with telephone wire, string, and twist ties. Common kitchen materials unite to create a wound across soft tissue, in the process of being sutured. Here, the color white seems most significant, as it is the color that shows the body's way of replacing that which it has lost is to produce new, pale flesh. The foam and paint in *Wither* similarly function as scar tissue.

*Broken*, a triptych of foam and plaster blocks



Sidonie Villere: *Squeezed*, 2017. Acrylic, foam, felt, muslin, canvas, telephone wire, twist-ties on gesso board; 19.5" high.

stretched with string and nylon stocking, depicts the stretching of delicate material over an interior form. Like the thin layer of skin that protects a body's nervous insides, the nylon stretches to protect jittery, pulsing contours of the blocks of material beneath. The vulnerable nylon does well to hold the cracked shapes beneath it. However, there is an illusion of heavy weight beneath the translucent sheets, which recalls the density of bleached, broken bones or the remnants of broken ceramics that belies the potent delicacy of the nets that hold it together.

Saville's work and the healing processes of the body both point to moments of transition, which is what Villere emphasizes most in her words about the work. The color white signifies that concept in various ways. First, it is a symbolic and literal color of death, a place of transition from the state of life to another state. Second, it is the color of porcelain, which has historically been Villere's most consistent medium of choice. As a form, ceramics have been in a place of limbo regarding aesthetic status – whether they are to be considered craft objects or not – and Villere has persisted in placing them in a context where they are to be aesthetically rather than functionally evaluated.

She appears to be doing the same with painting, as one of the main media threads in this body of work is acrylic paint. Even the historical context of this medium suggests limbo – it was developed as an industrial material that found its way into the visual arts. All the mundane materials pieced together in the work appear to be coated with a shell of acrylic white. By placing sculptural elements within rectangular picture planes, Villere seems to be exploring the shift between two- and three-dimensional realms as well as pushing these homely materials to an elevated place in the context of painting.

In *Fade*, a diptych of larger scaled works, Villere positions a swath of netting over painted plywood. The shallow space of the net against the panel moves back and forth, as the net fades into the surface and reemerges in low relief. The net stretches around the sides of the panels, encircling the rectangle that confines it in a return embrace. While there is a shift in dimension, there is also a shift in the way the forms enclose each other. It may be that two- and three-dimensional spaces form a love relationship in this work.

The concept of fading is the content of *Stolen*, a series of five sublimated prints on aluminum. Each depicts an identical gray frame, weighted at the bottom, larger in scale than but proportionally similar to the way new, miniature Polaroid photographs are modeled. The white-on-white of the composition suggests the liminal moment before the image in such a photograph appears. The title suggests that it has been erased, over and over again, in the chase for the same image – indicated by the identical prints themselves.

There is a reference to Suprematism and pure painting in these compositions; Kasimir Malevich's

*White on White* painting of 1918 allowed for differentiation between white hues. In Villere's prints, gray is a tint of black, thus in a similar way a shift from white to something else. Malevich's work set the stage for the development of Robert Rauschenberg's *White Painting* of 1951, a modular set of canvases that showed no trace of the artist's presence. Their hand-painted similarities give no external reference, as do Villere's prints. Villere seems to consider the connections between photography and painting in this particular series within the exhibition, in addition to another Rauschenberg work, *Erased de Kooning*. Sometimes, the artist's presence is best determined by absence.

The art in Villere's exhibition is a step away from her familiar for the sake of experimentation. That fact begs the question whether these should be considered as final pieces, or as studies for something else. However, that question is as riddled with various opinions as the one about whether something should be considered fine art or craft. Certainties in Villere's practice are evident in the color and referential forms of some of her materials, like foam, and cracks in panels like cracks in porcelain. That her uncertainties about her practice and materials of choice are on display is an act of bravery, showing her own vulnerabilities in her investigations of new territory. □



Stephan Hoffpauir: *Stairs with Handrail*. 2017. Watercolor on paper. 34x25.5in. Cole Pratt Gallery.

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# *Hoffpauir: The Facade and Beyond*

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BY JUDITH H. BONNER

STEPHAN HOFFPAUIR  
Recent Works  
Cole Pratt Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

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AN INITIAL GLANCE at Stephan Hoffpauir's recent paintings on view at the Cole Pratt Gallery suggests that they are photographs. Upon closer examination, these photorealistic paintings are carefully executed watercolor paintings, with multiple layers of skillfully rendered washes and areas highlighted with gouache. Hoffpauir's subjects are varied, including still life paintings, interior scenes, city scenes, and views of New Orleans architectural structures. The works are distinguished by a demanding depiction of detail.

An architect by profession, Hoffpauir approaches his compositions with precision, but at times there are small areas where one detects the edges of a watercolor wash. Hoffpauir approaches each subject from a different point of view. One painting focuses on the front steps of a shotgun, while another focuses on the garret and upper floors of a Victorian home. Still another vantage point appears like a view through the porch toward two adjacent houses, like a snapshot as one walks through a neighborhood. The horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines in a side view of *Stairs with Handrail* are balanced and varied, with additional variety shown in a section of broken and rusting ironwork railing wrapped in chicken wire. Additional touches of life are visible in the open ice chest set out to air. The artist provides variation in the foliage in the trees, shrubbery, plants, and weeds growing through



Stephan Hoffpauir: *Conti Street*. 2017. Watercolor on paper. 25.5x25.5in. Cole Pratt Gallery.

the sidewalk. He meticulously depicts crumbling stucco, wooden columns and soffits, louvered shutters, and textural striations that are visible in the painted columns.

A partial view of the ochre-colored facade of a Conti Street structure is highly appealing in the artist's tactile rendering of the texture of the stucco of this archetypical building. Hoffpauir delights in rendering the mundane elements of ordinary life, blinds that are askew, a dying plant inside the door, empty bottles sitting outside the front door, a line of rust that has run down the stucco.

A painting showing aluminum chairs with green plastic seats is more of a still life than an interior scene. While the background shows the usual trappings found in Café du Monde—the sugar shakers and napkin holders—the primary focus is on the chairs themselves. The overall emphasis is on metal, carefully highlighted with areas of white or light gray gouache. As the only painting in this group that depicts human figures, the figures

are only incidental, truncated glimpses of the people who occupy some of these chairs on a brick-tiled floor. Areas of flesh-tones in the arms and legs are offset by limited areas of the diners' clothing, including leather sandals, denim jeans, and other fabrics. Leather purses and a camera are placed upon the chairs, with a partial view of a woman retrieving something from her purse.

The painting that dominates this exhibition, *Box of Pencils*, is an oversized view of just that, a collection of colorful pencils in a box seen from directly above these horizontally arranged writing implements, most of which are unsharpened. The brand names are recognizable, some of which are still in everyday use. Others seem to be collector's items, especially one group of pencils still contained within their original cellophane wrapping.

Another still life, *Lunchbox with Greens*, shows a child's lunchbox, shaped like a red barn with a domed asphalt shingled roof. A bunch of greens, their leaves secured by an ordinary rubber



Stephan Hoffpauir: *Box of Pencils*. 2017. Watercolor on paper. 25.5x34in. Cole Pratt Gallery.

band, stand upright beside the lunchbox; the images reflect in the shiny table upon which they are placed. The barn doors are open to show a cow munching on hay inside, while outside are a pig and three yellow ducks waddling toward the right edge of the lunchbox. The reflected scene appears much like a body of water, with the colors and values slightly lighter than the still life itself.

A tempting still life of *Lemon Tarts* presents itself as though the viewer stands in a pastry shop looking into a display case of chocolate eclairs and lemon tarts. The ovoid shapes of the meringue-covered tarts are balanced by the shapes of rectangular identification cards and the lines of the plastic-coated metal shelves. The lines of the metal shelf, like the pastries themselves, recede to a vanishing point in the unseen distance.

Hoffpauir's interest in perspectival views is evident in *Rainbow*, a distant shot of a parking lot filled with vehicles and a shopping mall in the distance. The automobiles and yellow park-

ing lines recede to the name of the Rainbow clothing store in the center of the composition. The colorful signs and names of the various shops are clearly identifiable as the Elmwood Shopping Center, but the artist's view is clearly different from that of the shoppers who frequent this mall. In observing the scene, one perceives how much mechanization and merchandise occupy much of our daily lives. The vast cloudy blue sky occupies more than the upper half of the composition with the vertical lines of numerous light standards punctuating it. Despite the absence of human figures in this scene, Hoffpauir implies their presence, here as in all the works in this exhibition. Overall, his watercolor paintings invite the viewer to linger and contemplate the larger context of humanity, to question that which occurs behind the facade, and to notice the typically unseen trivial objects that are generally taken for granted. □



Sibylle Peretti: *Orpheus*, 2017. Carved, painted and mirrored acrylic glass, silver and gold leaf applications, paper and photograph 25.5" high. Callan Contemporary, New Orleans.

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## *Enigmatic Narratives*

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BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

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SIBYLLE PERETTI  
"It Was Such a Beautiful Promise"  
Callan Contemporary  
New Orleans, LA

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CORMAC MCCARTHY'S POST-APOCALYPTIC novel, *The Road*, recently came up in, surprisingly, a candid and warm conversation. It might seem an unlikely subject for casual banter, due to its morbid and graphic revelation of an ecologically and personally destroyed future. Its appearance in this context seems significant, in an era of disbelief regarding environmental change. The dark, ash streaked landscape that threads McCarthy's fictive

narrative could well become a reality, if alternative facts can be disregarded for research-based evidence. At this point such a future is a possibility, though not necessarily a certainty. Indeed, the novel ends on an ambiguous yet hopeful note.

In Sibylle Peretti's third solo exhibition at Callan Contemporary, "It Was Such a Beautiful Promise," the thread of landscape becomes visually apparent. The depth of space in several of her works on glass and acrylic panels situate McCarthy-like grayed horizon lines, dusty with atmospheric perspective, in the background plane of subject matter that depicts children and feral animals. The future of these subjects, who are common in her work, hovers in that plane, indistinct and fearful in its uncertainty.

Vague references to an ambiguous moment in time recall the content of photographs by Gregory Crewdson. These depict subjects within liminal moments between before and after, life and



Sibylle Peretti: *Coyotito*, 2017. Carved, painted and mirrored acrylic glass, silver and gold leaf applications, paper and photograph\_36" high. Callan Contemporary, New Orleans, LA.

death, motion and stillness. A promise is also something in limbo, something awaiting fulfillment, and something in flux. A promise of a future is not guaranteed, and this appears as a theme in Peretti's work.

*Orpheus* directly references this concept, via the mythology associated with the tragic character. Peretti depicts a moment in a version of the myth, wherein Orpheus' decapitated head, severed by the Maenads, moves toward open water after his body is pulled apart in the frenzy of the Dionysian nymphs. It's a fate he may have found less horrible than losing his wife, Eurydice, a second time to Hades when he could not fulfill his promise to avoid looking back at her before leaving the underworld. *Orpheus'* half closed eyes peer gently and coldly at the viewer from the planes of the acrylic, as though mulling over this fate.

Peretti incorporates mirroring, gold leaf, and pearls into the otherwise achromatic images, which are an amalgamation of sculpture and photography. As *Orpheus* peers out, the viewer is reflected within his world, as though looking down upon him in the water. The mirroring provides a decorative element, as does the gold leaf, but it also functions to implicate the viewer in the

narrative. If *Orpheus* can also serve as a metaphor for a dystopian future, in which all that has been lost, the mirrors may act as a way to make the viewer complicit in that future. The audience bears witness to this death and is a part of it at the same time.

Peretti claims the pearls as symbolic of "hope, healing, and resolution," according to her statement in the press release for the show. She says, "they're seductive and beautiful and symbolize something you deeply desire." In *Orpheus'* case, the desire to see his beloved was too strong to ignore. In this image, these symbols of desire string like entrails from his neck, the gruesome remnants of desire, indicating the trail of water in which he floats. They act as bubbles delicately touching the surface of this river, like last breaths, or as *vanitas* symbols: iconography regarding the fleeting and vulnerable nature of life.

The use of pearls in *Coyotito* has a similar effect: they pile next to the reclining form of a coyote, though they litter the landscape on which it lies like so much detritus. *Pearl River* pictures a fox at the bank of the water, retreating towards the right of the picture plane. Its back is burdened with the weight of the pearls. While this might suggest a desire for the animal to beautify



Sibylle Peretti: *Urban Foxes*, 2017. Kiln cast glass, pigments, crystal inlay, 9" high. Callan Contemporary, New Orleans, LA..

itself, in a fairy-tale way, with the decorative elements, the animal appears to hunch with the increased gravity, the way that animals are sometimes inadvertently trapped by human refuse.

*Fields* is more hopeful. Hawks symmetrically descend on a pile of beads as though to remove them to their nests, in order to house their young. Even in the uncertain landscape, the desire to procreate and protect appears persistent. In this instance, the pearls symbolically function in a way that Peretti seems to intend, as objects that serve as markers of time and of “an intrinsic longing for shared values, cherished and passed on from generation to generation,” as stated in the press release. *Urban Foxes*, a sculptural coil of two sleeping animals, make a nest for crystals at their center. The delicate crystals grow from their embrace, suggesting that familial connectedness and youth are hopeful and have the potential to overcome the decline of the future.

Human children populate most of the works. Peretti regards them as vulnerable beings rich with potential, innocence, and hope. In a 2013 interview, “Uncovering Interior Dialogues,” linked on her website, she describes finding her grandfather’s medical books from the 1930s. The pages contained images of children as medical spectacle, and they drove her want to “endow

them with a higher dignity” than that ascribed to them as specimens. The children depicted in these works appear more catatonic than other two- and three-dimensional images in Peretti’s oeuvre, which may be a more direct reference to Peretti’s original source material. However, her use of a light-sensitive glass that changes under various conditions, from warm to cool, suggests gentle breathing. These children are emblematic of an ability to transform and adapt. Ever caught in a state of limbo, between one light and the next, under some light they find stability for a time. That potential stability indicates hope for some future.

Fairy tales and mythology underscore all of Peretti’s work. The enigmatic narratives contained in the subjects blur time and allow for fantastic possibilities. Fairy tales carry a certain degree of realism regarding mortal danger, and lessons for growth. Realism regarding ongoing ecological changes, in whichever direction they may go, is necessary in our world, and perhaps also in Peretti’s. Her materials, delicate and vulnerable as the children she depicts, evoke content regarding how disparately different growth may occur, for destruction or for construction, especially under uncertain relationships with the landscape. □



Richard Hricko: *Wunderkammer*, 2017. Woodblock on kitikata. 48 x 24in. Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

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# *A Beating Heart*

BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

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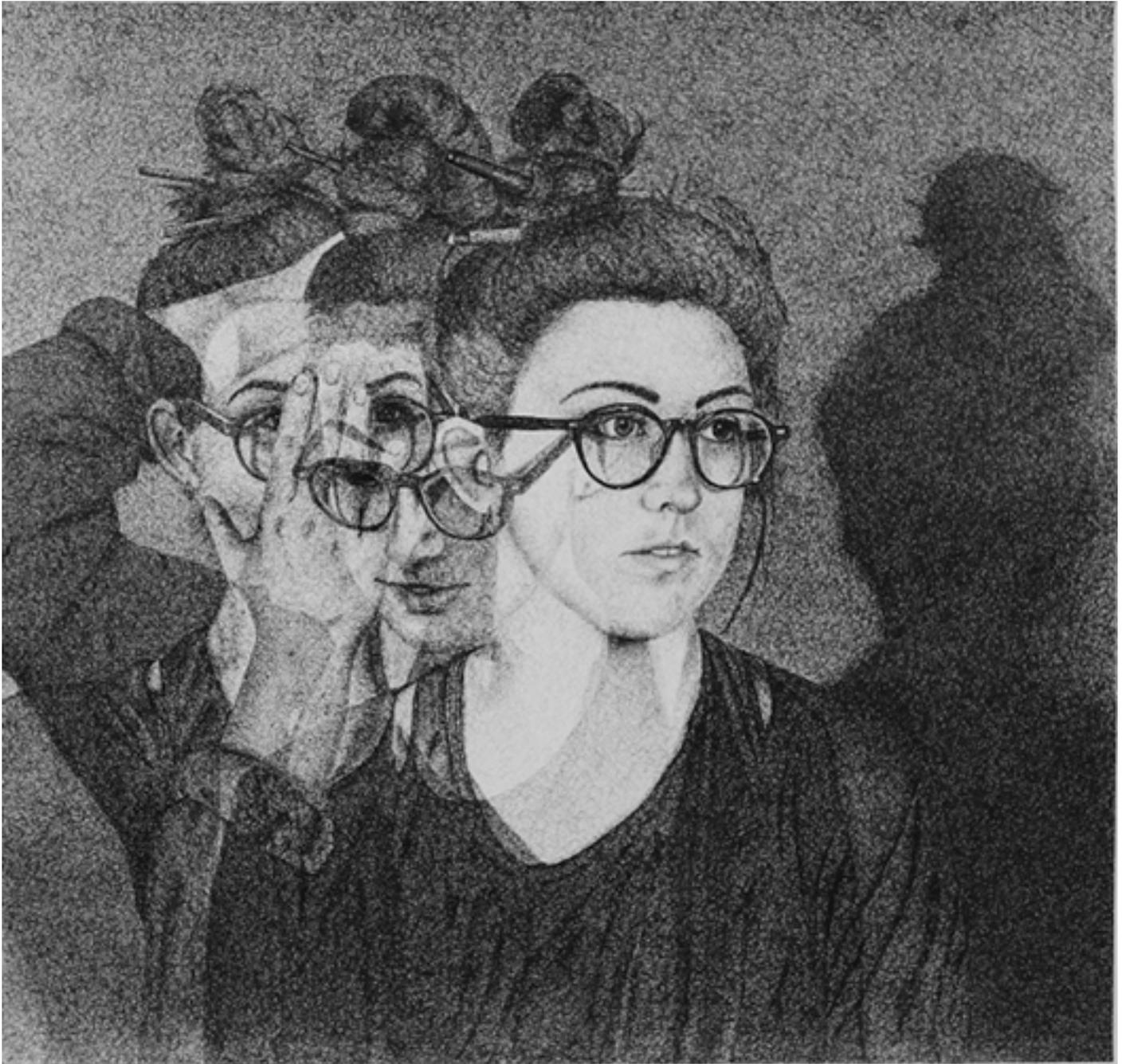
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21st ANNUAL NO DEAD ARTISTS  
International Juried Exhibition of Contemporary Art  
Jonathan Ferrara Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

ACCORDING TO THEIR website, Jonathan Ferrara Gallery's annual "No Dead Artists" was inspired back in 1995 by Jonathan Ferrara's desire to give "artists their first break in the art world" before rigor mortis set-in. Originally limited to New Orleans artists,

the competition eventually extended to Louisiana artists, and in 2010 became open to artists nationally. In 2014 "No Dead Artists" became an international competition.

While no one is guaranteed a beating heart, we will assume that the thirteen artists chosen from over five hundred artists were at least alive while the show hung. Overall, the first impression of the two and three-dimensional works in the 21st Annual No Dead Artists is one of chaos, of a barrage of works chosen at random and in haste, without thought as to how they would all appear corralled in the confines of a pristine gallery setting. Once bearings are gathered, however, and attention turned to individual



Mariah Morrell: *Madison*. 2016. 35mm micron pen on paper. Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

works, a common link begins to reveal the media driven times in which we live.

Hold that thought a moment, as we move onto another interesting aspect of the exhibit. It seems some of the artists' works are from their recent undergraduate thesis shows, which can be a good thing. However, one wonders why some of the work on display was chosen over stronger offerings. For instance, if University of San Diego alum Ivy Guild's life-size "pillow" figures had been on view in place of the jumbled installation *Pillow Talk*, the effect would have been much less distracting. Granted, Guild put

much effort into the multi-media *Pillow Talk*, sewing, quilting and block printing the pillowcases alongside the small, photographic cotton plush figures of men displaying the universal manspread.

A more traditional approach to figurative representation is found in the Micron Pen on paper drawings of Mariah Morrell. The drawings, from Morrell's B.F.A. exhibit at New Mexico State University depict multi-views of friends using an abundance of calligraphic lines. Says Morrell, "my work is about the excess and exuberance of youth." *Maddison* presents a bespectacled young woman repeatedly adjusting her hair and glasses.



Tony Dagradi: *Pioneer Woman*. 2017. Hardcover book, acrylic varnish. 8.75 x 6.5 x 1 in.. Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

Technically eye-catching are the large, plant-inspired woodblock on kitakata prints of Philadelphia artist and Tyler School of Arts printmaking professor, Richard Hricko. Looking more like large drawings than woodcuts, prints such as *Wunderkammer* are described as “a digitally manipulated image...laser cut onto wood before being transferred onto paper using...hand printing on an etching press.” Printed images of an appropriated nature are found in the altered books of New Orleans saxophone player and Loyola University professor, Tony Dagradi. Choosing vintage books, Dagradi states, “I seal the edges of the book and begin cutting page by page, removing everything but the images that appeal to me...it is very similar to improvising with a jazz

ensemble.” One might think of TextArcs in which an entire book is digitally placed on a screen with the main words emphasized. Conversely, in pieces such as *Pioneer Woman*, the hardcover book’s layered images evoke paper dolls, wherein Dagradi cuts through pages to isolate various illustrations, thus giving the viewer a visual synopsis of the book’s characters.

Hailing from Lowell, Massachusetts is Diana Zipeto. Zipeto’s Kirigami series continues a pervasive preference in “21st Annual No Dead Artists” for monochromatics. Says Zipeto of her gray toned, acrylic on canvas still life portraits featuring folded views of famous women, “Distorting photographs of women dis-



John Isiah Walton: Putin Z 2, 2014. Oil on canvas. 60x48in. Jonathan Ferrara Gallery.

rupts our conditioned first responses--ugly/pretty, young/old...my work shows there is purpose in changing...but also an exhaustion that must remain mostly hidden in order to continue forward.” One must strain to find the face in the stark accordion arrangement of *Gloria* (Gloria Steinem).

Color does appear in New Orleans artist John Isiah Walton’s matter-of-fact *Putin Z 2* and South Korean artist Yehrim Lee’s ceiling to floor installation *Shopping Spree*. *Putin Z 2*, the only piece representing Walton in the show, is an oil on canvas of Putin in blackface against a background of red. Says Walton of his Political Portraits series, “The portraits are a representation of my thoughts as a child with the curiosity about the identities of the people wearing the blackface riding the floats on Mardi Gras day...politicians will put on a mask to get where they need to go...”

Lee, currently Visiting Resident Artist at the University of Georgia in Athens, provides an apt description for her frenzied conglomeration of softly colored, free-form shapes in the mixed media *Shopping Spree*. “With my glazed forms, I explore appetite and gluttony. These flower and cake landscapes open and flow with icing and snow...Through clay surfaces, I explore dynamic, complex, fragmented, integrated, and internal reflections of human culture.” If our 1st century C.E. peers were to view the world at this juncture of the 21st century, surely they’d heave a collective gasp at how off-track we are. The artists included in Jonathan Ferrara Gallery’s “21st Annual No Dead Artists International Juried Exhibition of Contemporary Art” are obviously laying ties in earnest. But, as Lee’s *Shopping Spree* attests, it’s a jumble out there!

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William Dunlap: *Starnes House and Spook*. Polymer paint, pigment, gold leaf on paper. 58in. high. Soren Christensen Gallery.

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## *Old & New*

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BY JUDITH H. BONNER

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WILLIAM DUNLAP  
“Old & New: Recent Work”  
The Soren Christensen Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

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AS IS CHARACTERISTIC of William Dunlap, his recent exhibition at Soren Christensen’s Gallery does not fail to stimulate conversation and provoke questions among its viewers. The show, *Old & New: Recent Work*, presents earlier artworks along with recent creations, many of which are variations of earlier themes in his oeuvre. Typically, Dunlap’s works invite gallery visitors to think differently about landscapes and objects that are routinely taken for granted in an uncomplicated context. Some

paintings on exhibition in the gallery have a lighter meaning, but many convey more ponderous thoughts.

While most of the artworks on view are paintings, Dunlap also includes small sculptures created with familiar objects like door knobs, nails, and paint brushes. A pair of palm bracts are painted and hung as though they are sculptural artifacts, perhaps recalling Dada artist Marcel Duchamp’s snow shovel, which he exhibited under the title *In Advance of The Broken Arm*. A few of Dunlap’s paintings are executed in oil, but the majority of the works on canvas or wood panels are rendered in polymer paint with airbrushing to soften and blend colors. A number of the paintings are embellished with strategically placed touches of gold leaf and copper leaf.

Dunlap depicts subjects that are undeniably Southern, es-



William Dunlap: *Bittersweet Allegory*. Polymer paint on canvas with gold and copper leaf. 53in. high. Soren Christensen Gallery.

pecially landscapes with farm buildings and hunting dogs. Generally, his landscapes reveal a sense of uneasiness with the modern world. Vast views of lush farmlands appear to be threatened by encroaching industrial or technological development. This is especially true of his expansive landscapes occupied by barns and other farm buildings quietly tucked among trees or sloping hills with gray World War II combat planes flying overhead through darkened skies. The planes are generalized and non-specific, a calculated move that spurs viewers to debate the specific makes of aircraft and whether they are enemy planes. Only in one of his smaller works does Dunlap come close to identifying the aircraft. That work, titled *Nemesis - Circa '42*, clearly depicts a German fighter plane, the Messerschmitt Bf 109. One imagines Dunlap as a boy lying on his bed and looking at model aircraft suspended from the ceiling.

Hunting scenes with hound dogs contain elements of

the surreal. One painting in particular depicts equestrians sitting astride invisible horses and holding mysteriously suspended reins. One large painting depicts a red-roofed Palladian-style home atop a hill at right and a factory belching gray smoke in the far distance at left. In the immediate foreground, a classical sculpture depicts a female nude sitting on a lightly sketched rocky base. Dunlap inscribes the title in block letters against the green lawn: *Bittersweet Allegory*. One of the hunting dogs stands near the base of the sculpture, while a large hound marks his territory on the word, allegory. The symmetrical Palladian-style architecture undoubtedly makes reference to the fact that Southern planters often adapted it to their residences, particularly structures with a temple-front facade. The viewer perceives that the once-vast rolling landscape is infected by industry, rather than the acres of cotton fields that once characterized the land.

Dunlap presents a number of small square paintings fea-



William Dunlap: *Rebel Rose & Tunic; Brand Loyalty Series*. Oil and dry pigment on rag paper. 47in. high. Soren Christensen Gallery.

turing Southern subjects set singly or in pairs against a yellow, green, or light-colored ground, including hound dogs, fish, a sow, and a single red rose. The red rose, with its connotations of Southern romantic gentlemanliness and chivalry, seems especially appropriate in company of a number of paintings of Confederate uniform jackets. Lest a visitor miss the point, the artist depicts a single long-stemmed rose above a coat, suggesting the love the soldier has left behind. Dunlap titles this work, *Rebel Rose & Tunic; Brand Loyalty Series*. The placement of the flower also recalls the custom of placing a single red rose on a soldier's coffin.

*Walker Hound & Allegory* depicts the classic pose of dogs during a conformation, while *Downward Facing Dog* is a spoof on the well-known yoga pose. Dunlap departs the South in favor of some motifs of the American West. In *Bull Bison* a herd of bison roam the brown plains while a single bison is floating against the blue sky above.

Depictions of Confederate uniforms and contemporary jeans, appear much like fashion designs or costume designs, but always extend beyond the mere impression of designs for garments that will enter the market. These paintings have a sense of immediacy. These uniforms, mostly officers' uniforms, appear to have been worn. These garments are arranged as though an invisible person is wearing the garment. Dunlap re-visits the drip technique that was seen so frequently in paintings during the 1960s. The paintings with blue drips below the uniforms suggest that the wearer has been out in torrid rains that have left him dripping wet. Other views of coats with red drips clearly refer to the massive amount of blood lost in the brutal conflict, particularly those with period revolvers.

In some compositions the position of a pistol near the cuff suggests that the gun is within hand's reach. A profile view of one jacket depicts the moment of a bullet's impact in the back. The



William Dunlap: *Walker Hound & Allegory*. Soren Christensen Gallery.

wide variety of designs of uniform coats trimmed with gold braid remind viewers that there was not yet a standard in the design of military uniforms. Collectively, these compositions send a strong visual statement about the effects of war.

Similarly, Dunlap depicts his well-worn cut-off jeans as though on a designing pad. The artist's cut-offs, titled and subtitled, *Painter's Pants; Shorts*, are appropriately spattered with paint.

Dunlap, who maintains studios in Florida, Virginia, and in a small Mississippi town off the Natchez Trace, has a grasp of the Southern landscape and the types of structures that populate the land, be they residential or industrial. His studies of the land portray it at different times of the day, but he has a preference for views with warm skies. Some of the skies in these scenes have a near-neon effect over rolling green countryside.

A 1986 diptych departs from Dunlap's views of the Southern countryside for Italy, *Late Light: Umbrian Hill Town I &*

*Valley Senzo II*. Painted in oil and dry pigment, the skies are rendered in the same warm palette. The small hill town with closely spaced architecture is nestled among trees off a roadway, with the land sloping to the distance in the right. *Valley Senzo II* depicts a female nude in the right foreground, her back to the viewer as she faces the rolling landscape with a small town settled on a hilltop in the distance. The stocky nude figure, which departs from the usual classical nude, serves as a device to draw the viewer's gaze inward. Although there are a variety of artistic subjects in this exhibition, they are integrated into a cohesive whole. □



Edward Burtynsky: *Shasta Lake Reservoir*, 2009. Chromogenic Print. 41" high. Arthur Roger Gallery.

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# *The Passage of Our Distraction*

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BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

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EDWARD BURTYNSKY  
"Intentional Landscapes"  
Arthur Roger Gallery

MARFA INTRIGUE  
A Group Exhibition  
Octavia Art Gallery

FACE TO FACE  
A Group Exhibition  
LeMieux Galleries

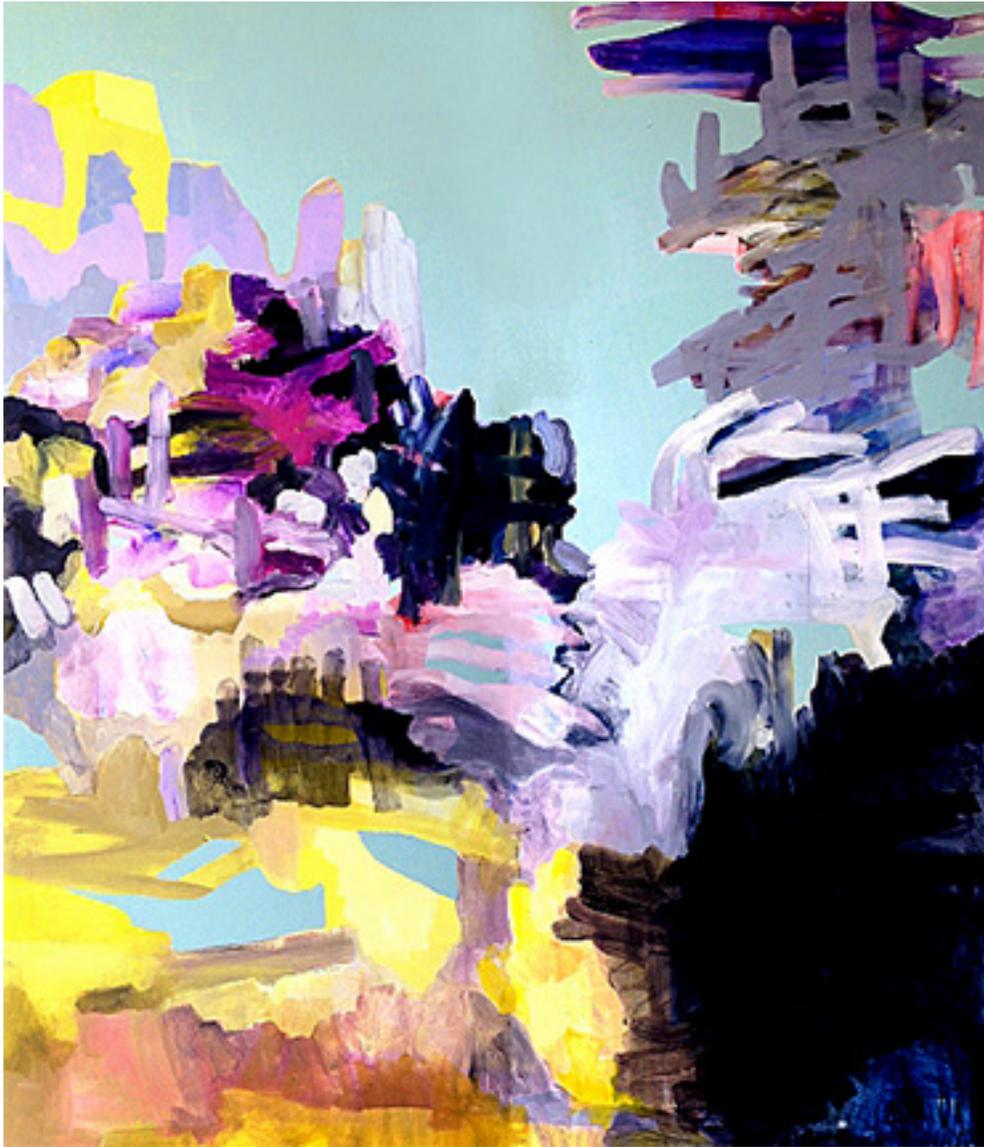
JIM SOHR  
A Retrospective Exhibition  
The New Orleans Art Center

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ARTISTS ARE ALWAYS willing to share the bounty of the view in ways that forever reinforce and redirect our forever-wandering gaze, thus narrowing the passage of our distraction. Perhaps in

an effort to jar us into looking more closely at the aftermath of progress, Canadian Edward Burtynsky presents a series of color photographs collectively titled "Intentional Landscapes" at Arthur Roger Gallery that defy orientation and require detailed titles to let us know just where and what we are looking at in the picture window images. As it happens, the isolated scenes, often shot from airplanes, mountaintops and drones, describe topography transformed by mankind's quest for sustainability. Says Burtynsky, "Our dependence on nature to provide the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction." Ain't that the truth.

Paradoxically, it is the scabs of our invention that permit Burtynsky to record the bitter fruits of our comfort. From afar, or to use the term of late, from a "remote" location, we often take offense at the mistreatment of unknown recipients, ignorant that we may in fact play a key role in the crime. Nonetheless, using the tools of our potential demise, Burtynsky beguiles with intriguing-



Ann Marie Nafziger: *Toward The Over There (Purple Mountains Majesty)*, 2016. Acrylic on Canvas, 70" high. Octavia Art Gallery.

ly disturbing views shot from on high. *Oil Spill #16, Mississippi Delta, Gulf of Mexico, USA 2010* evokes Yves Tanguy's distilled landscapes, soothing us with luxurious greens and browns from the spill while the tan colored *Navajo Reservation/Suburb, Phoenix, AZ, USA 2011* contrasts the stark reservation against a congested suburb separated only by a highway. All who've boarded the Coast Starlight from Oregon to California know firsthand that the majesty of Mount Shasta leaves no reason to seek the rewards of heaven. But Burtynsky's *Shasta Lake Reservoir, Northern, CA, USA 2009* depicts a faint view of the mountain foreshadowed by tufts of trees skirted with agate-colored banks that seem to float in motionless water.

THE STUPENDOUS BEAUTY of the land that holds us in limbo is anticipated when hearing the word "Marfa" included in an exhibition. The last time I visited Marfa, Texas was in the early years of the Chinati Foundation. I was impressed with the isolation of

the town and the open environments that the Chinati Foundation afforded its art as opposed to the confinement of a typical gallery. Art in the latter milieu can become devoid of origin whereas art in Marfa becomes a part of the space rather than an addition.

Octavia Art Gallery's "Marfa Intrigue," a group exhibit of six Marfa-based artists, presents something of a time warp and strongly recalls the nonrepresentational styles of the Sixties in which light, space and air helped mold both image and artist. Given the stark landscape of Marfa's high desert terrain and the state in which it resides, this is not unexpected. And, as one might expect, Donald Judd's Minimalist influence is abundantly evident in "Marfa Intrigue." However, grouping art from an arid countryside into a very humid one can have the unsettling effect of displacement. Coming to terms with this dichotomy is Marfa's mayor, Ann Marie Nafziger in *Toward The Over There (Purple Mountain Majesty)*, an acrylic on canvas featuring gestural strokes of fanciful color that befits both the festive side of New Orleans and



Sam Schonzeit: *Untitled*, 2017. Watercolor on paper. 40in high. Octavia Art Gallery.

the sublime energy of Marfa. Devoid of color are Charles Mary Kubricht's black, white and gray pieces that evoke astronomical imagery and make us wonder if she spends time at the McDonald Observatory less than forty miles from Marfa. Resembling a collision in space is the monochromatic *Imperceptible Affinities 29*, an acrylic on linen of multi-planed shards. Apparently taking a cue from Morris Louis is Sam Schonzeit's watercolor on paper *Untitled* of isolated bands of prismatic color.

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THE LANDSCAPE OF THE FACE is a view we never seem to tire of, always comparing "ours" with "theirs," and vice versa. Perhaps in an effort to reinforce and never forget, we humans dedicate much time to describing the topography of this all-important memorial of our being. Le Mieux Galleries' "Face to Face" exhibit presents a traditional approach to portraiture within a wide range of

styles by numerous gallery artists including Paul Ninas who lived in New Orleans from 1932 until his death in 1964. Ninas' 1929 pencil sketch of an Afro-Caribbean model predates his move to New Orleans, done most likely during his time in the West Indies. Eye-catching among the living artists is Aron Belka's *George*. Expressively painted and filled with light and a rich palette, the oil on canvas depicts a three quarter view of an African American male's face. Michael Deas, noted for his success as an illustrator including the 1991 *Columbia Pictures Logo*, uses the delicate medium of silverpoint on clay-coated paper to describe an askew portrait of a Caucasian woman in *La Chemisette*. Self-taught artist D. Lammie Hanson takes a different approach to metalpoint as seen in her dark valued *Portrait of Cherished Yamaye*. Here, Hanson uses lines of silver, brass and gold over charcoal to depict the strong profile of an African American woman. Although not self-taught, David Lambert's calculated naïveté conjures de Chirico's playful wisdom



Paul Ninas, 1929. Pencil sketch. Le Mieux Galleries.



Aron Belka: *George*, 2017. Oil on canvas. Le Mieux Gallery.



Jim Sohr: *Plugs* (aka *American Pigs*), 1993. Acrylic on canvas. The New Orleans Art Center.

as seen in the small acrylic on paper paintings *Visionary* and *Man Woman*. The latter features a blue-eyed person with beard whose oversized head and neck are supported by tiny upper torso adorned with a strand of pearls.

A WIDE-OPEN VISTA of human emotion is found in locally seasoned artist Jim Sohr's retrospective of paintings at The New Orleans Art Center. Eliciting the comedy of errors of life mixed with the onslaught of Red Grooms' human pageantry and Robert Gordy's exaggerated abstraction of human form, we navigate the unpretentious space of the Center in search of message upon message. From the outset, a novelty to this exhibit is the collaboration between Sohr and The New Orleans Art Center to title each of the paintings as the Center saw fit. As it happens, looking at the Center's website, some of those titles have since changed, which may be as it should be. Life is, after all, a state of flux. Labels aside, let us proceed, starting with the acrylic on canvas 1993 *Plugs* (aka *American Pigs*). Filled with more crosshatching than impasto, *Plugs* gives us a one-point perspective view of a city

street complete with buildings filled with robotic characters and cars implanted with plugs in order to connect. What would we do without electricity to keep the juices flowing?

Skipping the years to 2000, *Birds and Ladies* evokes Margaret Keane's "Big Eyes" paintings sans the modeling of form. Maybe twenty-four years from now the relevance of *Birds and Ladies* will surface. Aboriginal Dreamtime seems to have been at play in Sohr's 2008 pair of *Abstract* paintings, albeit with a Fernand Leger regiment of circle and line, while the most recent painting on view, *Triangles*, from 2012, portrays a pair of humanized triangles not unlike Hopi Indian Kachina dolls or even Oscar Uxa's PEZ candy dispenser. For sure, there is relevance in even the most mundane.

According to The New Orleans Art Center's founder Herman Kron, the nearly eighty Sohr has been creating three-dimensional pieces similar to *Triangles* that are too large to leave Sohr's studio. Hopefully soon, these sculptures will find their way into life's thoroughfare. □



Auseklis Ozols at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

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# *The Academy: A Celebration*

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BY JUDITH H. BONNER

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AUSEKLIS OZOLS  
DOROTHY J. COLEMAN  
New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts  
New Orleans, LA

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THE NEW ORLEANS Academy of Fine Arts is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of its founding with two exhibitions—one featuring recent works by founder Auseklis Ozols and the other showing a retrospective of works of Dorothy Jurisich Coleman. Ozols established the academy in 1978 to fos-

ter art in the manner of the time-honored tradition of the art academies of Europe and America. Shortly thereafter, Coleman partnered with Ozols and served as a benefactor of arts in the community. While the artworks in the two exhibitions share similarities in subject, the differences in treatment are distinct.

Ozols exhibits paintings of traditional subjects, including landscapes, river scenes, and nature scenes. His still lifes include sea life, flowers, and artists' tools. Although local visitors might expect his usual *tromp l'oeil* paintings, Ozols renders the paintings with broad textural brush strokes.

In many of the paintings in this exhibition, there is an implied human presence whether a park scene with a child's scooter or cement bench, a view of seafood in the process of being prepared, or a still life that has been arranged by human



Auseklis Ozols at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

hands. Some of the paintings have a more overt presence. In *Siesta*, an axe is set against the broad trunk of a tree while the legs of a reclining man are partially visible behind the tree. In a more overt landscape, *My Friend Lasix*, a man appears to relieve himself behind a tree. As in Ozols' past exhibitions, gallery goers detect a deeper meaning beyond the surface or title of a painting.

The most compelling painting in Ozols' exhibition is a portrait of Rachel Russell that clearly has its origin in John Singer Sargent's (1856-1925) 1883 portrait of Louisiana native Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau, known commonly as "Madame X," which met with much scandal when it was exhibited in the 1884 Paris Salon.

Rachel Russell is a descendant of Madame Gautreau on both the Avegno and Gautreau sides of the family. Russell

stands in the same stark setting as in the portrait of Virginie, with a round wood table providing the only visual relief to the dark brown background. Like Virginie, Russell faces forward, with her head turned sharply to the right in profile view. She wears the same black gown as Virginie, with gem-studded spaghetti-straps the only adornment on her pale shoulders. While Sargent originally painted the strap slipping from Virginie's right shoulder, he later re-painted the strap. Likewise, Ozols has painted it accordingly. Here, in particular, he captures the manner of freely applied brushstrokes as that in Sargent's portrait.

Ozols' larger-than-life depictions of sea life are highly appealing. He sets Gulf fish against a crumpled sheet of white butcher paper, as though they were just unwrapped. The crum-



Auseklis Ozols at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

pled paper is highlighted with textural pastel tones that add visual interest to the overall composition. The fish retain the appearance of lingering moisture, as though recently drawn from saltwater. Although Ozols is not the first to portray a flounder, he shows the fish from the rarely depicted soft white underside without its eyes showing. A painting titled *Artful Partners* depicts a red snapper side-by-side with bluefish rendered in shades of green. The curving bodies of the fish suggest that they are navigating through sea waters. This aspect and the juxtaposition of complementary colors creates a sense of vitality and intensity that parallel the work of Walter Inglis Anderson (1903-1965), but Ozols' treatment is distinctive from the earlier artist.

Two large paintings of a single oversize oyster on a half-shell are tantalizing, especially the one in which the oyster spills over the edge of the shell. Ozols depicts a large polished pearl next to each of these oysters, skillfully capturing the shimmering color combination of the fleshy oyster.

Again, the liquid quality of a freshly opened oyster is highly appealing and suggests that the oyster is freshly opened.

The artist's depictions of floral still lifes are interesting for the inclusion of produce not ordinarily found in American still life paintings, especial the one that depicts poblano peppers, which are usually associated with Mexico and the American Southwest. The painting *Artist Tools* shows a wide variety of brushes, pencils, a knife, and other tools spread across the composition, while *Retirees* shows a clear glass jar filled with old artist's brushes, some of which have been worn to a nub.

*Ménage à Trois*, a painting of three snowy egrets at the top of a tree, resembles a still life in its composition, but not in any kind of stillness. The central bird has its wings upraised, while the other two begin to take off. The green foliage, blue skies, and warm tones are balanced perfectly. In a similar work titled, *Three's a Crowd*, three centrally placed birds on a treetop seem to fight, while two egrets on a higher branch appear to be onlookers.



Dorothy J. Coleman at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

In a view of the Bonnet Carré Spillway, ocean-going vessels navigate the river, while one of the red gantry cranes that operate the spillway is located midway down the concrete structure in this scene. The latter small red area recalls the device employed by painters like Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), who frequently used very small localized areas of red to draw a viewer's gaze to the distance.

Historically, painters had depicted clouds in a manner that reflected or enhanced the narrative or mood of a landscape. A number of photographers have focused on cloudy skies as the primary subject. In his rendering of *Vendo Nubes*, Ozols conveys a sense of movement of clouds scudding across the picture plane. The sun begins to shine through these bubbling clouds, with its warm tones creating an overall feeling of warmth. This work is characteristic of the overall exhibition, for the tones of blue and mauve unite the gallery visually.

A 1941 NEWCOMB graduate, Dorothy Jurisich Coleman's retrospective represents 73 years of work as a practicing artist, from 1940 to the near present. After a period of hiatus for familial responsibilities, Coleman studied at the academy in 1979-1980, after which her partnership with Ozols began. She received recognition

for her work in the arts with a Sweet-Arts Award from the Contemporary Arts Center and a Mayor's Arts Award from the Arts Council of New Orleans (1998). At the time, Coleman was described as an arts visionary, an appropriate title for a number of her works that seemingly transcend the physical world around her.

A tribute to her art career, the foundation for the show is established with three portraits, including a 1986 oil painting by Bettina Etienne Steinke and an undated oil portrait by Xiang Zhang. Coleman's 1941 profile self-portrait is sensitive in its rendering.

Coleman's other subjects include landscapes, abstractions, and floral still lifes. A number of the latter are shown in glass vases. In others, flowers become simplified circular shapes. Coleman continues to work this technique as late as August 2012, with a bouquet of multicolored shapes.

One floral study is an interior scene with the vase set on a window ledge in order to show the landscape beyond. Like Ozols, Coleman takes the opportunity to depict a cluster of flowering plants at the base of trees, as in her 1998 work titled *Irish Garden*. A swamp scene showing yellow flowers also shows a gray shadowy figure in the background. The gender of this figure is indistinguishable but it clearly documents a human presence in this landscape.



Dorothy J. Coleman at the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts.

A couple of Coleman's early works show the influence of the Cubist movement, clearly under the instruction of Will Henry Stevens (1881-1949), who was on the Newcomb faculty from 1921 through his retirement in 1948. A 1940 painting by Coleman is unmistakable in its Cubist treatment. Simplified city buildings have peaked and triangular shapes, with two buildings having clerestories being the central interest. A tall vertical painting can be compared with any number of works by Stevens in palette and in treatment. It also calls to mind paintings by John Clemmer (1921-2014) for its floating effects. A 1956 still life focuses on a group of closely arranged vases of different colors and shapes, set before a window with rectangular panes. Similarly, a view of wood backed chairs of different sizes and shapes and from different historical periods are clustered together. The chairs appear alternately as though floating in space and as though grounded solidly. The linear patterns of the chair backs and trapezoidal shapes of the colored padded seats are balanced by rectangular areas in the background.

Another tall vertical painting of Venice shows an up-tilted view of the canal, with buildings aligned closely along the banks, has the usual gondolas, swans, stone bridge, and boats in the distance. It is the up-tilted view, however, which distinguish Coleman's painting from the typical views of Venice. *Cypress Lake*

borders on the abstract in the foreground images of trees rendered in purple, pink, and gold, which reflect in the waters of the lake.

A 1977 colorful floral study is reminiscent of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) in its geometric setting. Here rectangular blocks of color merge as though on a cloth-draped ground. The central panel is a darker blue, while the neutralized flanking panels appear more transparent. This work is signed "Gigi," a nickname that appears on several of Coleman's early works.

A 1974 cityscape of Duba (in present day Croatia) by Coleman, whose family came from Yugoslavia, features the boats in the harbor in the right bottom center, with their masts lining a stone embankment. A few two-storied buildings line the bank, with the red-roofed buildings of a settlement shown on a hillside, set off by mountains and a lake in the background. A graveyard with ironwork gate is nestled among the trees to the left of the village. This composition, as in many of Coleman's paintings, has a limpid, ethereal quality.

It is interesting to see the two exhibitions of the two main figures in the academy's history, to draw parallels and note the individual voices of these two painters. Both exhibitions offer a worthy experience for visitors to the gallery as they celebrate the anniversary of the New Orleans Academy of Fine Arts. □



Ruth Owens: *Conspiracies*, Installation view. Barrister's Gallery, New Orleans.

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# *Identity*

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BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

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RUTH OWENS  
"Conspiracies"  
Barrister's Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

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THE PAST OF human life casts a long and constant shadow on the present. Oftentimes, this passage of time is documented through photographs. Hence, family photographs lay the groundwork for a series of alla prima paintings and photo silkscreens in Ruth Owens' "Conspiracies" at Barrister's Gallery, as well as for her installation "White Specter" in an adjoining grotto. Of all the pieces on view, "White Specter," a clay, wire and gauze sculptural installation, is

the most successful in conjuring an aura of the past into the present with a jaunty woman decked out in a Sixties dress and hairdo walking a hound. "White Specter" strongly evokes one of Kara Walker's time-sensitive installations such as *A Subtlety* in which molasses-colored figures filled a defunct Domino Sugar refinery. The prototypes for Walker's installation represent a sticky past, literally and figuratively, just as there's a strong sense of complexity inherent in "White Specter."

Viewing any art exhibit cold is not unlike being introduced to someone for the first time. We wonder about their origin of accent, their profession, their age, and perhaps even their nationality since initially all we have is a name and a face. The same is true of an art exhibit. Without the artist, and without an



Ruth Owens: *Arnold and Ruth, Augusta, GA, 1968*. 2017. Oil on canvas. Barrister's Gallery.

elaborate gallery handout, all we have are titles and appearances, much like a name and a face.

The title “Conspiracies” leads us to anticipate something peculiar and illicit. What, exactly, is never quite clear. From Owens’ website we learn that her mother was a White German and her father was a Black serviceman from the South stationed in Germany. Eventually Owens earned a Doctor of Medicine degree at Northwestern Medical School and for twenty years was a plastic surgeon in New Orleans, but a decision to dedicate herself to art led her to the University of New Orleans where she is currently pursuing an M.F.A.

A statement from Owens’ website asserts “this show is my most personal work yet in which I use my family’s photographic archive to explore issues of race, sexuality, family secrets, and perception.” This statement, along with her choice of plastic surgery and the show’s title “Conspiracies” leads us to infer that appearances were and still are important to Owens. That she was a child during the Civil Rights Movement, born in 1959 to a racially mixed couple, obviously impacted her sense of self. In this series of paintings of predominantly muted ochres, one cannot help but be reminded of the remote observations of Fairfield Porter, and the class-conscious ruminations of Eric Fischl. In the uneven dip-



Ruth Owens: *Eva, Ruth, und Bubi, Botanischer Garten, 1964, 2017*. Diptych. Oil on canvas. 60x36in, 48x12in. Barrister's Gallery.

tych *Eva and Ruth, Augusta, GA, 1968*, Owens contrasts her very blonde, very pale mother Eva wearing a one-piece swimsuit opposite the artist as a little girl playing in the sand. Owens has used the diptych to create a division between mother and daughter. *Arnold and Ruth, Augusta, GA, 1968* depicts a candid view of the artist as a pig-tailed girl next to a black man named Arnold who proudly displays a string of fish.

Using proper names in lieu of more personal references such as “mother” and “father” for titles, Owens sets a tone of separateness. In the four-part, screen-print on mirror *Viewing My Parents*, Owens uses half tone photographs of her parents as specimens, scribbling clinical notations to objectively describe the

two parents’ differences in hair, lips and skin, as though these two human beings have been reduced to purely physical importance. Appearances will always play an important role in civilizations, not only to manufacturers of body products, but also to anyone who has to step into public scrutiny. We are in the 21st century, yet Robert Burns’ line still rings true. “Oh would some Power with vision teach us to see ourselves as others see us.” □



Dave Ivey: *On the Bayou*. Oil on canvas, 24in high. Carol Robinson Gallery, New Orleans.

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# *Countryside*

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BY JUDITH H. BONNER

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DAVE IVEY  
“Louisiana Wetlands”  
Carol Robinson Gallery  
New Orleans, LA

A VISIT TO the Carol Robinson Gallery to view Dave Ivey’s recent exhibition transports one to the peace and tranquility of the countryside. Not atypical of rustic scenes, Ivey’s bucolic scenes focus on farmhouses, barns, and farm buildings, as well as farm animals—dogs, cattle, and horses. The artist emphasizes his rural turf in North Louisiana by including an occasional deer or egret. Ivey’s oil paintings are highly tactile, with thick impasto spread alternately with a palette knife and a broad brush, and generally

a combination of the two manners of application. Ivey employs this technique primarily in the foreground areas of broad grassy fields or bodies of water. As one expects in renderings of natural scenery, his views are arranged in well-balanced, harmonious compositions. Most of these works, however, are characterized by a sense of minimalism.

Ivey frequently sets his landscapes near bayous, ponds, and rivers. In *North Lakeshore* and in *On the Bayou*, the larger part of the composition features water. *Below Cloutierville* reverses this compositional arrangement, with the broad area of foreground given to autumn-hued fields. The ochre and cadmium orange colors are also seen in three trees that line the shores of the Cane River, which cuts across the canvas horizontally, with lighter warm tones receding in the distance on the opposite shore.

A square painting, *Off LA One* captures the feeling of



Dave Ivey: *Intrusion*, Oil on canvas, 10in high. Carol Robinson Gallery, New Orleans.

quickly rushing by farmlands flecked with autumnal colors in the foreground grassy field and low-lying farm buildings in the background. The broad area of grass occupies the bottom two-thirds of the composition. Here, as in most of Ivey's landscapes, the area of sky is minimal, but the cool blue reflects on the roof of the barn and provides a balance to the warm tones. Viewers can contemplate "the well-balanced orderly disorder of nature" and man's role within that aspect of order and disorder.

*Guard Duty*, showing two dogs outside a barn, also implies a sense of witness. A picnic table, tucked under shade trees near the barn, is absent of people, as are all of these landscapes. Ivey's combined application by palette knife with brush strokes to convey a sense of wetness in the marshy foreground.

In a painting titled *Intrusion*, Ivey departs from the overall feeling of serenity in his other landscapes. While the scene appears to be on a par with the majority of these scenes having rural buildings, two steel silos are situated in the left mid-ground—a reference to the growing mechanization of the agricultural world. This context recalls the work of artist William Dunlap, whose paintings frequently reflect the technological changes that affect the Southern landscape. A tire swing suspended from a branch of an old moss-draped oak tree also recalls changing times, both in

the fact that the rubber is man-made, and in the fact that today many people have never experienced swinging in such a manner.

A horizontal format, *Joel's Pond* portrays an egret, eyes alert to an opportunity for a quick repast, and standing in algae-covered water near the far shore. The reflection of its white foliage serves as a device to untie the canvas. A nocturnal scene, rendered mostly in shades of blue and green, focuses on a single farmhouse in the distance. Titled *Night Light*, the light comes not only from a second-floor window, but also from a moon reflecting on the house and on a pond in the immediate left foreground.

Generally, gallery visitors can contemplate these landscapes on a variety of approaches. One can question why *Forgotten Well*, situated on a slope near a shade tree, is forgotten. In light of our changing times, is it simply because modern plumbing has made it unnecessary? Probably not a well that was fed from a natural spring, was it a rain-fed well? Or was water hauled into the area? Who would have availed himself or herself to the cool waters of the well? And is there a religious sub-text referring to the waters of Baptism? After viewing the painting called *Intrusion*, other works that ostensibly appear to be simple landscapes cause further contemplation on each painting and on the entirety of the exhibition. □



Still from HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey).

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## *Games of Media*

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BY JOHN MOSIER

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GAME OF THRONES  
A Home Box Office Production

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FILM CRITICS ARE always being asked to recommend films—and then getting blamed by viewers who didn't much care for the recommendation. That is particularly true of the more widely enjoyed examples, such as animation and television productions.

For the latter, the advent of *The Sopranos* in January 1999, signaled a seismic shift in both film and television. The series marked the end of the supremacy of the silver screen to lay claim to being the seventh art. *The Sopranos* was not the first

attempt by the Home Box Office network to bankroll get serious. In 1995 they had produced one of the earliest and best films about serial killers: Chris Gerolmo's *Citizen X*. That same year saw the appearance of a BBC effort, David Atwood's *Shot Through the Heart*, an equally well done film about the Bosnian wars.

All of these works appeared at about the same time. Taken together, they marked a sea change. They are all highly cinematic. The long tracking shot that ends *Shot Through the Heart* is a tour de force as effective and judicious as anything done by Luchino Visconti (*The Leopard*, 1963) or Michelangelo Antonioni (*The Passenger*, 1975).

It is not clear, however, that anyone in the film world in this country was paying attention. But the trend that has now become visible in hilariously grotesque remakes of comic books (comic books!!), film versions of television shows, and feeble remakes of the odd foreign film, goes back a long way.



Still from HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Aya Stark (Maisie Williams).

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One reason is that for decades the film industry was confident that the superior technical quality of film would mean that televised images would never be taken seriously. But the new high definition standard changed that superiority almost immediately: suddenly new reproduction systems were available at cut rate prices. The relative short march that had begun in 1998 had its capstone in 2002, when Alexandr Sokurov, made *Russian Ark*. The elusive and elliptical journey through Russian history is as complex and difficult a narrative as anything by Luis Buñuel.

The entire film was one long 99 minute shot in high definition video, a striking and successful innovation both for video and for the cinematic art. So in four years, a dramatic reversal occurred, during which the traditional film industry not only saw its technological superiority disappear but saw the core techniques established by successive generations of *auteurs* appropriated as well. So too with the whole notion of the *auteur*. The person most intimately associated with *The Sopranos* is the script writer, David Chase.

As we look over this new and somewhat curious land-

scape, we find all sorts of interesting objects. In any commercial medium, a great success spawns imitations, so it's hardly a surprise that the enormous success of *The Sopranos* led HBO and its competitors to churn out more mega series, which in turn has led to the grand return of serial publication.

Now *Game of Thrones* is a most unlikely candidate. It is an historical fantasy with a fiendishly complicated plot encumbered by so many turns and twists that the casual viewer is quickly lost. Anyone unable—or unwilling—to slog through what subjectively appears to be an endless series of episodes stretching over six seasons is understandably inclined to pitch the whole enterprise. To the problematics of fantasy, we must add the lack of any clear unity of ends.

As adapted from George R. R. Martin's novels, the story makes *Lord of the Rings* look like a tautly dramatic work. Tolkien organized his trilogy around a central quest to defeat evil. He limited his main characters to seven, and even when we add in the minor characters, we can hardly reach much over a dozen. The story is exclusively concerned with the seven, all of them males of great



Still from HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Daenerys Targaryan (Emilia Clarke).

courage and impeccable morals. We know their purpose, and the novel stays with their journey. Every event, every minor character, is clearly related to that. It's a model of good story telling.

Ample reason for the enduring popularity of Tolkien's trilogy, and now that *The Lord of the Rings* has become duly enshrined in popular fiction, any one picking at it is likely be savaged by an orc. But for those us old enough to remember when the trilogy first appeared—and was only available in the Shire, whoops, in Great Britain, that was exactly the reaction.

Tolkien was an old fashioned medievalist, which in his time meant an exclusive interest in the Anglo-Saxon north, with a secondary interest in philology. Anyone who had taken a few courses in medieval English literature could see where he was coming from. Rohan? Eowyn?

More seriously, Tolkien's world is not only devoid of females, but his males function perfectly well without them. When Peter Jackson turned the novels into a cinematic trilogy, he tried to finesse this by elevating the only passing romantic interest in the novels, bringing out Aragorn's romance with an elfish princess. Jackson did what he could, but the fact remains that the novels

reveal a strangely pre-sexual male view of the world.

Now while it is wrong for critics to start complaining that their author didn't write the novel they would have preferred him to write, the missing dimension is regrettable. Just because there aren't any women in *Beowulf* (aside from Grendel's mother) that doesn't mean the sagas weren't populated with both strong willed women and a good deal of male lust. Thordis and Aud in the *Gisli Saga* (which is definitely contemporary with *Beowulf*, and certainly known to Tolkien) are as bloodthirsty and active as any modern heroine.

The motivation and ultimate undoing of Arthur and his father is lust coupled with female vengeance. So although we should allow Tolkien his decision to tell the story sans femmes, it is perfectly fair to observe that it's a rather boring world without women in it, regardless of whether it's a fantasy or not. It is precisely this dimension that makes *Game of Thrones* so absorbing.

So here's the bottom line. Go straight to the final episode of season six. Forget the story. Does anyone actually know what was going on in an Antonioni film? Did you really understand why Bergman's characters did what they did (or mostly didn't do)?



Still from HBO's *Game of Thrones*. Lyanna Mormont (Bella Ramsey).

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The viewer who can forget all that, just sit back and watch, is in for a textbook exercise in the power of the cinema. In fact, there's no need to wade through the previous fifty installments; all the information needed to unravel the story is there, courtesy of lead scriptwriters David Bennett and D. B. Weiss. Miguel Sapochnik, who directed the last two episodes, is an experienced director, and Fabian Wagner's cinematography is spectacular.

The opening scene, with soft but faintly sinister music (very few instruments) composed by Ramin Djawadi, features an elaborate procession into a vast and ornate chamber. It all comes together to produce the sort of hypnotic effect that makes it impossible to stop watching, largely thanks to the music (the melody, titled "Light of the Seven," is flourishing on YouTube, as well it should be—it's a fine piece of music in its own right).

If you're a regular film buff, you've probably never heard of any of the people involved in this series, but they know what they're doing. Their abilities put them head and shoulders above what we're accustomed to seeing in most contemporary films. They understand that the cinema works with sounds and images, that it's not "illustrated radio," as Chuck Jones put it. That's right,

the creator of the Roadrunner knew more about film theory than several legions of pretentious directors who can't figure out how to tell a story without voice over.

Then, as the episode unfolds, we see what we imagine to be the key characters getting ready: a very young king, an aged counselor rising from the bed of a naked woman, an attractive woman being gowned. We follow the old man, who's portly, with an impressive beard. Although there's no need to know his name, it's Grand Maester Pycelle, played by Julian Glover. Like everyone else in the final episode he's been around in the previous seasons. In fact, just about everyone we see here has done forty episodes or more.

So all the actors have had years to develop their characters. That's one reason the acting is so convincing. They've all had time to develop their parts, which in the cinema is basically unheard of.

A small child is whispering to the Grand Maester, leading him into a gloomy chamber. He's visibly irritated, particularly when he sees that the only other person there is a slender man with a soft and courteous voice. Again, although there's no need to

know who he is to follow the scene, he's Qyburn (Anton Lesser).

He seems thoughtful, filled with compassion. A message of respect, of conciliation. The soft, courteous, voice continues: but sometimes, for the new age to come in, the old age must go out, Qyburn observes.

And suddenly the chamber is filled with more children, who plunge their knives into Pycelle, don't stop until he's dead. The scene is violent and grotesque. Notice the timing: the credit sequence was less than two minutes. Five minutes into the sequence and we've seen six major characters (and understand their roles), and now we see an abrupt massacre. Whatever their motivation, these children are vicious, out for blood. Their faces, like Qyburn's unctuous voice and the Grand Maester's portly complacency, aren't just visual props: they tell the story.

The seamless juxtaposition of scenes, the steady rhythm, explains to a great degree why *Game of Thrones* is so powerful. Each segment happens very quickly, one after another, and the quiet spectacle of the first segments is nicely balanced by the sudden violence of the last. There's hardly any dialogue until Qyburn's speech, and the soothing voice makes the contrast with the brutal stabbings even more dramatic.

And that's just the first five minutes. Before we reach the twenty minute mark (what would be the end of the first reel of theatrical film), the enormous audience chamber, together with everyone in it, has been blow sky high, and the regal looking woman referred to as the "queen mother," Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey), having disposed of all her difficulties (her son, the young king, has jumped out a window), and she now proceeds to bait one of her former captors.

This particular segment gets to the heart of why the series is so good.

Cersei's final act of revenge (having, as she casually remarks, wine in hand, eliminated everyone who opposed her), is to make her confession to one of the female religious, Septa Unella (Hannah Waddington), who tortured her. You don't need to know the details. But if you're interested, Cersei has a legitimate grudge, since the High Sparrow's idea of confession and penance would make Torquemada wince.

But Cersei's brief monologue is positively Dostoevskyan. She's almost sympathetic. I understand, she purrs. You enjoyed torturing me. It must have felt good. It certainly felt good when I got rid of everyone just now, when I killed my husband, and even better when I had sex with my brother. And then, musing, she observes that the woman is right, confession really does feel good. In the right circumstances.

That's right before she turns her helpless captive over to a really huge armored knight, who rapes her—probably just as a warmup.

Cersei is one wicked, scheming, woman. She's also extremely attractive, and Headley's got the character down perfectly. She saunters, wine glass in hand, views the enormous explosion that rids of her enemies with quiet satisfaction. And the script gives her a great deal to work with. She's the best incarnation of perfect female wickedness since Dumas created Milady in *The Three Musketeers*. Nor is it a coincidence that by this point—twenty minutes in—we know her, her motivation, her power, her wickedness: the casual remarks about sex with her brother sum up

an entire story.

And even at this point, we can see how strong female characters are central. In the great chamber, it is a much younger but equally attractive woman, Margaery Tyrell (Natalie Dormer), who realizes something is seriously amiss when Cersei refuses to show up for her trial. The chief judge, the High Sparrow (Jonathan Pryce) simply cannot grasp the implications of what Margaery is telling him—that everyone should leave. Whoever she is, whatever her role, she's clearly a power in her own right. The first-time viewer has no idea who she is or what she represents, but clearly she was in Cersei's way.

Her grandmother wants revenge, and her ally (another strong willed and vicious female) is prepared to help her get the assistance of yet another powerful queen, Deanearys Targaryan (Emilia Clarke). Deanearys Targaryan is thus is a sort of counterpoint to Cersei. She seems the last bloodthirsty, and by far the less wicked of the lot, but without giving anything important away, it can be observed that her sobriquet of "mother of dragons" is a good deal more literal than one might imagine.

Moreover, like Cersei, she's definitely sexually active—and attractive enough to have a good many men falling at her feet (or, more usually, on top of her). But an unvarnished view of history reveals a good many female monarchs who were the same. Catherine the Great was hardly unique, nor was Mary Queen of Scots.

For that matter, although the leader of the Stark clan, is not only a man (Jon Snow, played by Kit Harington), but a man of considerable talents, since he rises from the dead, but his half-sisters are probably the most interesting and aggressive women in the story (given the other females, no mean accomplishment).

At the end of the fifth episode, after Jon Snow defeats the supremely evil and talented Ramsey Bolton (Michael McElhatton), his one-time wife and rape victim Sansa Stark (Sophie Turner) turns a pack of starving dogs on him, and watches with angelic satisfaction as they devour him. And, as we reach the end of the sixth episode, her younger sister, Arya Stark (Maisie Williams) revenges the deaths of their family by murdering the sons of the man who killed them, serving them up in a pie to their father—and then reveals her true identity with great pleasure as she cuts his throat.

Perhaps the most impressive female in the group is the youngest, Lyanna Mormont (Bella Ramsey). She's still a girl, but it is her sarcastic and impassioned speech that causes Jon Snow to be declared King of the North.

And all this in less than two thirds of the running time it takes some self proclaimed "auteur" to lurch through a remake of someone else's work. Reason enough to watch, and for a good many neophytes, enough reason to go back and keep watching. □

# Art, Milieu, Morality

BY STEPHEN R BACHMANN

*You can see Mr. Bannon's basic or developing political and economic philosophy as half-baked, fully baked, or likely to explode in the oven. And it is fair to note his views haven't seemed to gel or produce very much in the first dozen weeks of the Trump era. But what Mr. Bannon offered in the interview was a point of view that was publicly declared and could be debated.*

—Peggy Noonan, WSJ April 13, 2017

THE FIRST PART of this article will explore the notion that at present we are in the middle of a crisis in capitalism, and our two authorities for the proposition will be Steve Bannon, a high official in the Trump Administration, and Wolfgang Streeck, a contemporary German Marxist. The middle parts will note why a journal like this New Orleans Art Review should care, and suggest that developments in capitalism have affected developments in art. The third part will pursue the question of whether and how recent, present, and future developments in capitalism might affect the recent, present and future developments in art that NOAR generally discusses.

## THE CRISIS

IN THE EARLY days of the Trump Administration, some began to sneer that Steve Bannon was the USA's real President. Since then there has been a stall or diminution in his influence, as noted by Pulitzer Prize winning columnist Peggy Noonan, among many. Unlike many, Noonan actually examined some of what Bannon has put into the record. The following Bannon remarks, pursued by Noonan, were provided by BuzzFeed, from a Vatican conference in which Bannon participated in 2014:

*I want to talk about wealth creation and what wealth creation really can achieve and maybe take it in a slightly different direction, because I believe the world, and particularly the Judeo-Christian West, is in a crisis. The underlying principle is an enlightened form of capitalism ... That capitalism really generated tremendous wealth. And that wealth was really distributed among a middle class, a rising middle class*

*But there's a strand of capitalism today — two strands of it, that are very disturbing.*

*One is state-sponsored capitalism. And that's the capitalism you see in China and Russia.... [a] kind of crony capitalism of people that are involved with these military powers-that-be in the government, and it forms a brutal form of capitalism that is really about creating wealth and creating value for a very small subset of people. And it doesn't spread the tremendous value creation throughout broader distribution patterns that were seen really in the 20th century.*

*The second form of capitalism that I feel is almost as disturb-*

*ing, is what I call the Ayn Rand or the Objectivist School of libertarian capitalism. ... that form of capitalism is quite different when you really look at it to what I call the "enlightened capitalism" of the Judeo-Christian West. [Rand libertarianism] is a capitalism that really looks to make people commodities, and to objectify people, and to use them almost — as many of the precepts of Marx ...*

*So I think the discussion of, should we put a cap on wealth creation and distribution? It's something that should be at the heart of every Christian that is a capitalist — "What is the purpose of whatever I'm doing with this wealth? What is the purpose of what I'm doing with the ability that God has given us, that divine providence has given us to actually be a creator of jobs and a creator of wealth?" I think it really behooves all of us to really take a hard look and make sure that we are reinvesting that back into positive things.*

*... when capitalism was I believe at its highest flower and spreading its benefits to most of mankind, almost all of those capitalists were strong believers in the Judeo-Christian West.*

*... The central thing that binds that all together is a center-right populist movement of really the middle class, the working men and women in the world who are just tired of being dictated to by what we call the party of Davos.*

*... The 2008 crisis, I think the financial crisis is really driven I believe by the greed, much of it driven by the greed of the investment banks. My old firm, Goldman Sachs — traditionally the best banks are leveraged 8:1. When we had the financial crisis in 2008, the investment banks were leveraged 35:1. Those rules had specifically been changed by a guy named Hank Paulson. He was secretary of Treasury. As chairman of Goldman Sachs, he had gone to Washington years before and asked for those changes. That made the banks not really investment banks, but made them hedge funds ... not one criminal charge has ever been brought to any bank executive associated with 2008 crisis. And in fact, it gets worse. No bonuses and none of their equity was taken.*

*I think you really need to go back and make banks do what they do: Commercial banks lend money, and investment banks invest in entrepreneurs and to get away from this trading*

*... The bailouts were absolutely outrageous, and here's why: It bailed out a group of shareholders and executives who were specifically accountable. The shareholders were accountable for one simple reason: They allowed this to go wrong without changing management.*

To risk a summary here, the enlightened Judeo-Christian capitalism that helped the USA achieve its greatness has come to compete with two perverted versions of it, crony Davos capitalism and Ayn Rand libertarian capitalism. These latter versions do not spread the goods. The selfish and greedy have corrupted them, abused them, and wasted them, and no one has held them accountable. If Trump had some sense of this development, and if Bannon helped him articulate it, it should surprise no one that that they are sitting in the White House, instead of Hillary Clinton and her own patrons from Goldman Sachs.



Steve Bannon. Photo: Ron Sachs.

How Bannon explains the fall from grace and how he proposes to solve it – and how he and Trump may actually try – and/or succeed – to solve it, are other matters. They might receive some sharp answers – or questions – from Wolfgang Streeck, a German Marxist who has his own perspective on the present state of capitalism. But it may speak to the validity of the empirical observations of both Bannon and Streeck that their observations seem so similar – even though their theoretical evaluations and prescription may differ radically.

A good place to start for Streeck's view of capitalism is his sardonic remarks on American Thanksgiving:

*Think of the gigantic potlatch organized every year before Christmas by the consumer-goods and retail industries, or of the day after Thanksgiving, ominously referred to in the U.S. as 'Black Friday' because of the ubiquitous price reductions and the collective shopping hysteria it inaugurates. Imagine the desperation if nobody showed up! The vital importance of a consumerist culture for the reproduction of contemporary capitalism cannot be underestimated. Consumers are the ultimate allies of capital in its distributional conflict with producers, even though producers and consumers tend to be the same people. By hunting for the best bargain, consumers defeat themselves as producers, driving their own jobs abroad; as they take up consumer credit to replenish their reduced purchasing power, they supplement consumerist incentives with legal obligations to work, entered into as debtors and enforced by lenders. (How Will Capitalism End?)*

This is classic Marx: The good news about capitalism is that it produces goods and pays wages so people can buy the goods. The bad news is that when owners produce, they must make profits and extract payments from wage working consumers. The consumers have to have enough money to buy, but not too much money to keep them satisfied so they won't go back to work. In the meantime, their bosses have to figure out how much they can pay their workers to bring them to work and allow them to buy, but at the same time fig-

ure out how little they can pay their workers so they can make profit.

For Streeck, this is capitalism's dynamic and fatal push-pull. If the owners win too much, people can't buy goods, and there is economic stagnation, recession and repression – besides which, people are pissed off, and all too ready to lynch some bodies, Blacks, Jews, Mexicans – even owners. Yet the owners' problem is that if they give their workers too much, their (the owners') capacity for profit falls, and they must look for ways to cut costs, cut wages, find new markets, outsource work, etc., etc.

For Streeck this has been going on at least since the invention of the modern factory in England during the 18th century. For Streeck's purposes, the most important developments are those from the last century (the 20th), when, after depression and two world wars, the owners had to give thanks and grant great concessions to those workers who had put up with the system and died for it. As Foucault summarized the deal:

*Now we are asking you to get yourselves killed, but we promise you that when you have done this, you will keep your jobs until the end of your lives. ...Social pacts of a kind that promised--to those who were asked to go to war and get themselves killed--a certain type of economic and social organization which assured security (of employment, with regard to illness and other kinds of risk, and at the level of retirement) ...The demand for war on the part of governments is accompanied ... by this offer of a social pact and security.*

Streeck describes the Foucault Deal in his own fashion:

*For the capitalist hunting license to be restored after the Great Depression, with its international repercussions and the subsequent global devastation, a high price had to be paid by the capitalist class, including a promise of politically guaranteed full and stable employment, steadily rising prosperity, redistribution of income, wealth and life chances in favour of ordinary people, social protection in the workplace through strong trade unions and free collective bargaining, and beyond the workplace through a comprehensive*

welfare state – all negotiated, as it were, with a pistol pointed to the head of liberal capitalism, forcing it into a shotgun marriage with social democracy.

In the USA, this meant goodies provided from 1935 to 1965, things like recognition of labor union rights, continuing wages increases, social security benefits, the GI Bill, Medicare...

But in the long run, the success of this model led to falling profits:

*By 1971 there were clear signs that the – in hindsight, idyllic – world of post-war Fordism was coming to an end. As workers began to rebel, demanding an increasing share of profits after two decades of uninterrupted growth and full employment, customers were also becoming more difficult. ...if the washing machine was still washing, why buy a new one? ...*

The owner response included attempts to cut costs, cut wages, outsource work, and fight unions that might protest such moves. Streeck also observes that worker militancy was vanquished, “not least through a secular expansion of the available labour supply, first by the mass entry of women into paid employment...” He might also have speculated on the impact of immigration laws liberalized in 1965 by Johnson (no more national quotas) and in 1986 by Reagan (amnesty for 3 million illegals).

Yet the owners’ workers were also consumers who were finding their wages cut and their mass purchase options more boring. Streeck suggests owners addressed the latter concerns through niche marketing, motored in part through the valorization of ethnic and sexual identity:

*More important for our context were the strategies that firms deployed in their attempt to overcome the crisis of the product markets...., capital’s answer to the secular stagnation of markets for standardized goods at the end of the Fordist era included making goods less standardized...the closer products came to the specific preferences of consumers, the more consumers turned out to be willing to pay – and, indeed, the harder they were prepared to work and the more they were prepared to borrow for the purchasing power needed to participate in the new paradigm of economic growth, with the transition it involved from saturated to affluent markets... Diversified consumption entailed hitherto unknown opportunities for the individualized expression of social identities. The 1970s and 1980s were also a time when traditional families and communities were rapidly losing authority, offering markets the opportunity to fill a fast-growing social vacuum, which contemporary liberation theorists had mistaken for the beginning of a new age of autonomy and emancipation. The possibilities for diversified consumption and the rise of niche markets, with the accelerated obsolescence they inflicted on first-generation consumer durables, also helped to motivate renewed work discipline, among both traditional workers and the newcomers to paid employment, not least the women.*

The problem of lower consumer purchasing power might have been addressed through higher wages, and taxes on the rich to finance transfer payments and redistribution programs. Instead, it was solved by a radical expansion of consumer credit, including large loans involving home mortgages. Investors began to find it more profitable to package loans than to make things. The house of cards rose in the 1990s and 2000s, and collapsed in 2008.

Unlike many Marxists, Streeck is not a hopeful optimist waiting for a redemptive revolution. This is because he views the “opposition” to capitalism in a dialectical fashion. When workers fight for their share of the pie, they fight for their ability to work and to buy and to maintain the system. When the owners defeat them, the

owners, in effect, destroy their system’s ability to reform itself. And alas for the owners, they have been proving quite successful of late:

*...having no opposition may actually be more of a liability for capitalism than an asset. ... disorganized capitalism is disorganizing not only itself but its opposition as well, depriving it of the capacity either to defeat capitalism or to rescue it. ...Capitalism without opposition is left to its own devices, which do not include self-restraint. The capitalist pursuit of profit is open-ended, and cannot be otherwise. The idea that less could be more is not a principle a capitalist society could honour; it must be imposed upon it, or else there will be no end to its progress, self-consuming as it may ultimately be. At present, I claim, we are already in a position to observe capitalism passing away as a result of having destroyed its opposition – dying, as it were, from an overdose of itself.*

It seems safe to say that Bannon would probably agree more with Streeck’s presentations of symptoms, as opposed to his analysis of the disease and his prescriptions for cure. We will have to wait to see what Bannon’s Trump Administration will do to try to rescue enlightened Judeo-Christian capitalism from Davos elitists and Ayn Rand hogs. (Actually, defining “Judeo-Christian values” will constitute a project of its own. If two Jews always generate three opinions, one must find the intersection with Jesus, who promoted his own version of Judaism which tended to prefer the poor.) Bannon’s Vatican talk implies some moral exhortation. But he also resorts to phrases like

- wealth was really distributed
- cap on wealth creation and distribution
- reinvesting that back into positive things
- rules had specifically been changed
- not one criminal charge has ever been brought

Such implies a willingness to resort to governmental intervention in the economy, ranging from social security, to wage and hours legislation, price controls (e.g., of prescription drugs), and regulation of investment activity (whether it be leverage ratios for Goldman Sachs, or the location of production facilities for General Motors). It may imply tax arrangements cultivated during and after Eisenhower. Criminal prosecutions also constitute government activity. At the very least, Bannon’s comments suggest some rejection of a “Market Ueber Alles” position; and possibly an appreciation of the fact that markets are never neutral: they are always constructed to reflect and reject certain constellations of values. (E.g., the market is regulated and restricted when child pornography is prohibited. That is fine with me, I assume Bannon would agree.)

#### THE PAST (PHASE ONE)

BANNON AND STREECK focus on what has been happening to capitalism since around 1980. But capitalism had at least one phase (1880-1980) before that; and another before that (1780-1880). What interests us a NOAR people is that each phase seems to correlate with its own phase in art.

During the first 1780-1880 phase, the modern factory came into being. Those who tried to run the first factories can viewed as exploiters, but they should also been seen as explorers and inventors. Pioneers and pirates, these individuals coped with a new way by which humans engaged and transformed the world. These entrepreneurs had to figure out how to best use the new factory gig. Year 1771 marks the establishment of the Cromford Mill by Richard Arkwright, and it was these machines and buildings

and methods that were copied in Britain (and smuggled by Samuel Slater into Rhode Island, USA, in 1793). It was in 1781 that James Watt patented an engine with power, mechanics, and motions, that radically expanded the potential of steam. The following year, the toy people were using Watts technology in their Soho Manufactory, and the epoch of Marx's steam mill had officially begun.

Owners also had to figure out how to best fit human beings into these new operations. What sort of rules, incentives and disciplines should apply? For example, work contracts used to be for a year, and if the worker failed in the contract he might be paid nothing, or put into prison. Another question was work rules within the factories. Could a worker be whipped? One reason factory owners like women and children was that it was easier to literally beat them into submission. During this first phase of capitalism, various protections developed for women and children; and, as the century wore on, men fought for limits on their working day, and other controls on wages, hours and working conditions.

If these issues were not enough to vex a poor owner, he then also faced the problem of competing with other owners. He had to learn how to contain costs, improve production techniques, master marketing and distribution, and survive business crashes. USA panics occurred in 1819, 1837 and 1857, while Britain experienced them after Napoleon, as well as 1824, 1847, and 1866. The whole economic world collapsed in 1873, beginning in Vienna in May, and erupting in the USA in September.

The vagaries of this opening epoch of capitalism reverberated in culture. While a Marxist might characterize it as a "superstructural" reflection of the base, one may simply note that the culture echoed the economy. Culture may or may not have created economy, reinforced economy, or derived from economy; at the very least it paralleled it.

In the 1780-1880 proto-industrial period, cultural productions were pursued in terms of the individual entrepreneur whose ability to cope with the material world seemed central to everything. Culturally this translated into the aspirational individual as well as his investigations of and engagement with concrete reality. This was the century of Goethe's Faust, Lord Byron, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, the women of the Brontes and George Eliot, and realists such as Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy. In painting, realistic investigations were pursued by Courbet socially, and by the impressionists scientifically. In science, Humbolt and Darwin demonstrated what could be achieved with a rigorous empiricism. Philosophically, the period began with the soft liberalism of John Stuart Mill, and ended with more flamboyant celebrations of individual struggle, in the myths of Herbert Spencer's social statistics, survival of the fittest, and Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra and uebermench.

#### THE PAST (PHASE TWO)

Struggle and individual heroism are all very good, but one critical lesson that every one seems to have learned during capitalism's first phase was that valiant individualism worked for no one. As Orwell once observed, the problem with competition is that it produces losers. Accordingly, to protect themselves, workers began combining and attempting to form unions. Owners turned to consolidation, incorporation, and trusts. In 1870, Rockefeller incorporated Standard Oil and in 1880, he consolidated his empire into a "trust" with other corporations. Germany, which came late to the party, resorted to cartels - and, moreover, tactics to pacify their

workers, in hopes of integrating them into a grand, co-ordinated, and hopefully harmonious national enterprise. A German Health Insurance Act was enacted in 1883, followed by a workman's compensation program passed in 1884. In 1881, the German government proposed the implementation of a social security system, for those incapacitated by injury or age. In the ensuing debates, Bismarck said "Call it socialism or whatever you like. It is the same to me." By 1889, Germany inaugurated its old age social insurance plan.

Aside from ameliorating the pesky matters of competition, all this co-ordination this made more and more sense in an industrial world growing more complicated, large, and powerful. Coal and steam were being replaced by petroleum and electricity. The electric light was invented in 1880, and in 1882, the world's first hydroelectric power plant was opened in Appleton, Wisconsin. The 1850s saw petroleum developed as source of lighting (kerosene); its use in automotive machinery had to wait for the invention of development of things like Benz' single cylinder motor car engine (1885), Diesel's engine (1892), and automobiles by Benz and Ford in 1893. The complexity of these technologies were accompanied by technologies which allowed for more complex communication and organization. In 1872 Bell invented the phone, in 1877 Edison invented the phonograph, in 1887 Godwin invented celluloid film, and in the 1890s Marconi made radio commercially viable.

It should surprise no one that this period opened with the construction and consolidation of grand political units, beginning with nation states, which then proceeding to imperialist empire. The establishment of nation states which opened the era included Italy (1860), USA (1865), Japan (1868), and Germany (1871). France secured Savoy and Nice for its territories in 1860; and after it recovered from the debacle of its war with Prussia, it began focusing on social consolidation through the enforcement of a uniform language for all of its territory. The conquest of colonies followed. In 1881 France entered Tunisia, and in 1882 Britain occupied Egypt. Germany followed suit in Togoland and Cameroon in 1884. Belgium had entered the Congo in 1882. Within a decade of conquering its own native population and officially closing its frontier in 1890, the USA turned its energies abroad in its wars with Spain and subsequent annexations of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam. This system of great powers in grand competition climaxed multiple eruptions of identity politics, now known as World Wars One and Two. Indeed, after 1945 the many grand powers consolidated and confronted each other as two (USA v. USSR)

It was a brave new world of mass production, mass marketing, and mass society, and such elements were to be found in the cultural developments of the period. A major story of this epoch was the new mass media which embraced the new order of mass production, viz., cinema, radio and television. Whatever one might want to celebrate from the "high" culture of the period, the fact was that "high" culture was peripheral, which produced limited goods for a limited audience. "Everyone" - including high culture aficionados - consumed mass culture. That is what the eyes and ears followed, and that is where most of the money went.

As for the "higher," more "classical" culture creators, they spent their energies protesting the implications of mass living and its dubious effects on the individual. When they could not be co-opted into a general mass marketing strategy, they would work at the margins, e.g., Joyce, Proust, DH Lawrence, Picasso, Schoenberg, Duchamp, Matisse.... While such artists thought to reject the

general values of the new vulgarity, they nevertheless justified their works in some terms of the new order. The realities of early industrialization were fairly straightforward, the work of ordinary mechanics. By contrast, the reality of corporate industrialism was more complicated and sophisticated. Complicated scientific inquiries of Taylor and Edison replaced the more straightforward pursuits of Watt and Arkwright. Success in corporate industrialism would require a closer investigation of reality where truths were subtle, and hidden. Instead of coal and steam, one had to learn electricity and petroleum. Darwin might be able to conceive of evolution through careful observation of surfaces, but Mendel would have to secure its legitimacy through careful investigation of things that happened under the surfaces. From such perspectives, “sophisticated” modern art could retain its prestige. Its critical approach to analysis and thinking echoed the complicated and complex pursuits of the leaders of industry. Its creations resembled the discoveries of modern science in that they were subtle, sophisticated, and counter-intuitive. Art and science both had moved from “Realism” (where reality might be apprehended directly) to “Symbolism” (where reality could be apprehended only through formulae). Plain presentations gave way to less penetrable propositions, whether it be from Dickens to Proust and Joyce in literature; from Courbet to Kandinsky and Cubism in painting; from Rossini to Berg in opera; Beethoven to Schoenberg in music; Shelley to Eliot in poetry; and so on.

#### PRESENT AND FUTURE?

THE GRAND SYSTEM of production and distribution grounded in large nation states was given one last run after the Second World War. For a while it seemed to do well. Then, for reasons of moral decline cited by Bannon, and/or the inherent contradictions of capitalism cited by Streeck, the system began to break down. Owners noted that continuing to ground their operations in the nation state seemed dubious when compared to the advantages offered by globalization. They turned from a nation grounded economic order to an international economy where work could be segmented, outsourced, reduced, and cheapened. “[T]hirty years ago,” Robert Reich wrote in 2105, “corporations began turning over full-time jobs to temporary workers, independent contractors, free-lancers and consultants.” Thomas Frank commented that “if we keep going in this direction, it will one day reduce us all to day laborers, standing around like the guys outside the local hardware store looking for work.” In February 2017, the Wall Street Journal observed “The contractor model is so prevalent that Google parent Alphabet Inc., ranked by Fortune magazine as the best place to work for seven of the past 10 years, has roughly equal numbers of outsourced workers and full-time employees, according to people familiar with the matter.” Wolfgang Streeck observed that “platform firms like Uber, Alibaba, Airbnb and Amazon ... have in common [the fact] that they have ceased to offer their workers regular employment.” The CEO of CrowdFlower summarized the situation with brutal concision: “Before the internet, it would be really difficult to find someone, sit them down for 10 minutes and get them work for you, and then fire them after those 10 minutes. But with technology, you can actually find them, pay them the tiny amount of money, and then get rid of them when you don’t need them anymore.”

Eventually, though, the citizens of these states began to recall that it was in the context of their nation states that they had cut advantageous arrangements with their em-

ployers; they wanted back their nations and their deals.

Our capitalist phases seem to occur in hundred year increments: proto-industry for 1780-1880, the cartelized industry of 1880-1980, and post-industry beginning around 1980. If we are only half way into this new post-industrial phase, it may prove premature to talk with finality about the cultural aspects of this period which would parallel its economic characteristics. As Hegel has observed, Minerva’s Owl does not fly until dusk.

Nevertheless, some analysis might be essayed, and some propositions tested. Post-industrialism may already have been manifesting itself in a number of cultural areas since around 1980 (just around the time of the founding of NOAR, for whatever that might be worth).

We begin with matters of form. As we have seen, the general economy has moved from few mass markets to many individualized niche markets. The very vehicles of culture demonstrate this. The 1880-1980 period gave us the new mass media of film, TV and radio. But these were experienced collectively: a limited number of movie, radio, or TV programs were broadcast at one time, and people had to sit down and pay attention to consume them. With the invention of items like the iPhone, these collective restrictions melted in the face of individual preference. Today the consumer can watch almost anything at any time in any location. Older readers may recall nationally shared media experiences like ROOTS; today the only event that can enforce a mass collective experience is the Superbowl (although Europe has Eurovision and the World Cup).

As for matters of content, the dour Herr Streeck observed how the women’s movement and identity politics derive directly from the economic needs of a sputtering mass capitalism. Not surprisingly, therefore, would be this epoch’s new foci on Women’s Art, Black Art, Hispanic Art, Gay Art, etc. Much culture is now discussed in those terms, particularly Oscar nominations. While such may call attention to previously ignored groups, such also motora the economy into new and additionally profitable venues.

A similar observation might be made from the perspective of the Nobel Prize for Literature. One (to India) was awarded outside Europe from 1901 to the World War Two; six, during the 35 years between 1945 and 1980; and twelve, during the 35 years from 1980 through 2015. For women during those periods the numbers are four, two and eight.

At this juncture, Bannon’s points concerning the moral degradation of capitalism might also be acknowledged – and here he might find himself agreeing with Streeck. Streeck argues that one way mass capitalism has tried to address its problems has been with the expansion of the market into new arenas: “Capitalist expansion, or development, consists of the establishment of market relations where hitherto there were none.” Some of this has occurred in the public sphere where what used to be given to society is now being transferred to “entrepreneurs” for profit making opportunities, e.g., schools, prisons, military defense, police and fire protection, “public utilities” including public transportation, infrastructure, utilities, airwaves, etc.

Equally unsettling are activities which used to be matters of personal fulfillment, creativity, honor, and love; but which now cannot be created and consumed without some money passing from some one’s hands to another: e.g., child care, elder care, home aesthetics (interior decoration and design), vacation, travel, tourism, sport, entertainment, etc.

And as people find they can secure the goods of life only through the market, they submit themselves more to the dictates of the market, by working harder, grooming their brains and their bodies as if they were a house to be flipped; a chunk of capital to be improved through investment activity; or, simply one more product to be huckstered at the marketplace:

*...an astonishing number of parents, single or coupled, have cheerfully adjusted to a high-pressure way of life somehow combining child-rearing with ever longer hours of more demanding and insecure employment. Rather than complaining or rebelling, many seem to take the stress as a test of their personal capacity for permanent improvement, much like high-performance athletes. Living the contemporary capitalist way of life, parents comply with social expectations that they subject themselves in good spirit to the strict regimentation of a self-enforced rigid time regime and take pride in enduring the hardships of a new sort of 'inner-worldly asceticism' in the service of career, income, consumption and human capital formation. In fact, looking at the idealized middle-class family of today, one is tempted to speak of the rise of a new protestant ethic leading to ever more detailed rationalization of everyday life. (Streck)*

*The banishment of the core unified self is experience daily in a thousand different ways by every single person who holds down a job, gets ejected from a job, gets sick, surfs the Internet, sits in a classroom, embarks on a love affair, watches a movie, emulates a celebrity, or states a family ... The fragmentation of the neoliberal self begins when the agent is brought face to face with the realization that she is not just an employee or student, but also simultaneously a product to be sold, a walking advertisement, a manager of her resume, a biographer of her rationales, and an entrepreneur of her possibilities. (Mirowski, Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste, 108)*

Market, in short becomes the ultimate determination of value; and we approach a system envisioned by Bannon with appropriate disgust, a "capitalism that really looks to make people commodities, and to objectify people, and to use them almost — as many of the precepts of Marx." When market becomes the ultimate arbiter of value, art achieves value by the prices it can command in the galleries and auction houses. A measure of value for a painting from the past becomes the dollars it can command at Sotheby's. It is educational and symptomatic to juxtapose a recent gush from the New York Times and compare it to an older excerpt from the late art critic Robert Hughes:

*New York Times: Joining the rarefied \$100 million-plus club in a sales-room punctuated by periodic gasps from the crowd, Jean-Michel Basquiat's powerful 1982 painting of a skull brought \$110.5 million at Sotheby's, to become the sixth most expensive work ever sold at auction. Only 10 other works have broken the \$100 million mark. "He's now in the same league as Francis Bacon and Pablo Picasso," said the dealer Jeffrey Deitch, an expert on Basquiat. (NYT, May 18, 2017)*

*Hughes: In a saner culture than this one, the 20-year-old Basquiat might have gone off to four years of boot camp in art school, learned some real drawing abilities (as distinct from the pseudo-convulsive notation that was his trademark), and in general, acquired some of the disciplines and skills without which good art cannot be made. But these were the 1980s. And so he became a star. ... Basquiat's career appealed to a cluster of toxic vulgarities. First, to the racist idea of the black as naïf or as rhythmic innocent, and to the idea of the black artist as "instinctual," outside "mainstream" culture, and therefore not to be judged by it: a wild pet for the recently cultivated white. Second, to a fetish about the infallible freshness of youth, blooming amid the discos of the Downtown Scene. Third, to an obsession with nov-*

*elty—the husk of what used to be called the avant-garde, now only serving the need for new ephemeral models each year to stoke the market. Fourth, to the slide of art criticism into promotion, and of art into fashion. Fifth, to the art-investment mania, which abolished the time for reflection on a "hot" artist's actual merits; never were critics and collectors more scared of missing the bus than in the early '80s. And sixth, to the audience's goggling appetite for self-destructive talent (Pollock, Hendrix, Montgomery Clift). All this gunk rolled into a sticky ball around Basquiat's tiny talent and produced a reputation. New Republic, "Requiem for a Featherweight," Nov. 21, 1988.*

The value of a contemporary artist becomes a function of his net worth, which is the only reason I can see for the reputation presently enjoyed by Jeff Koons. The New York Times has duly noted his recent contributions to "art":

*"They touch on the metaphysical: the right here right now and its connection to the past and the future. They're about shine, the basics of philosophy, passion, what it means to be a human, what it means to be an animal, the idea of transcendence." That was Jeff Koons, genius or charlatan, depending on whom you talk to — an artist known for elevating children's toys and vacuum cleaners to the stature of the Greek gods, sitting in the office area of his 35,000-square-foot studio meditating on his latest project: a multifaceted series he has been working on under conditions of the utmost secrecy for well over a year, entitled "Masters" [consisting of a] new line of handbags. Also scarves, key chains and small leather goods, including wallets and laptop sleeves — 51 pieces in all — done in collaboration with the French luxury house Louis Vuitton. Though Mr. Koons has flirted with fashion before, working on one-off collections with Stella McCartney and H&M, this is the first time he has created an original design for a brand, as opposed to simply plunking a reproduction of his work onto a product or remaking a sculpture as a necklace. NYT, April 11, 2017*

To the above we might juxtapose a quote from van Gogh written on 2 July 1889, to his sister: "So although yesterday more than half a million francs were paid for Millet's *Angelus*, don't go believing that more souls will feel what was in Millet's soul."

Fairness requires that we acknowledge that atavistic art of technological and moral rigor have not totally vanished from the years following 1980. At present the world's first rank artists seem to be Germans who were forced from an early age to grapple directly with real moral issues: Gerhard Richter, Anselm Kiefer, and Georg Baselitz. Thankfully, the USA may be cultivating its own contribution to morality and competence. Its representative in the Venice Biennale this year was Mark Bradford. He makes paintings with titles like *A Truly Rich Man is One Whose Children Run into His Arms Even When His Hands Are Empty*. He embodies the opposite of "the black as naïf or as rhythmic innocent, and to the idea of the black artist as "instinctual," outside "mainstream" culture, and therefore not to be judged by it: a wild pet for the recently cultivated white."

In the face of these bubbling concerns, Streck offers the integrity of his vision, which affords us no hope. Bannon seems to hold some hope, but we have to see his program to evaluate his efficacy and integrity. At the time of this writing it remains unclear what sort of Bannon-inspired capitalist redemption programs — if any — will see the light of day; and whether Trump embraced Bannon only as a matter of savvy electoral tactic. And art will continue to fend for itself, struggling to emerge from the contexts which create its makers. □



David Borgerding at Callan Contemporary.

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# Calendar

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COMPILED BY CHRIS LEWIS

A GALLERY FOR FINE PHOTOGRAPHY, 241 Chartres St. (568-1313, [www.agallery.com](http://www.agallery.com)). **Josephine Sacabo**: “Barking at God - Retablos Mundanos” (Pigment Prints), through Dec. 31.

ACADEMY GALLERY, 5256 Magazine St. (899-8111, [www.noafa.com](http://www.noafa.com)). **Diego Larguia**: New Work, **Phil Sandusky**: A Plein Air Exploration of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, thru Nov. 18.

ANTENNA GALLERY, 3718 St Claude Ave. (298-3161, [www.antenna.works](http://www.antenna.works)) **Chris Berntsen, Jason Childers, David Colanino, Jenna Knoblach, Avery Lawrence, Erica Lambertson, Colin Roberson, Maxx Sizeler**: “Pleasure, Performance, Politics; Louisiana Open Call, Cycle 2”. Opening Reception: October 14, 6-10. On view through November 5. **Lacey Prpic Hedtke**: “We Believe in Infinite Intelligence,” Through Nov 27.

ARIODANTE GALLERY, 535 Julia St. (524-3233, [www.ariodantegallery.com](http://www.ariodantegallery.com)). **Dana Manly, Nancie Roark, Nancy Susaneck, Carmen LN Gambrill**, Through Oct. 31.

ARTHUR ROGER GALLERY, 432 Julia St. (522-1999, [www.arthurrogergallery.com](http://www.arthurrogergallery.com)). **Ralph Bourque**: “Crossing”, Photographs. Through October 28. **Troy Dugas**: “Balancing Act”, (Recent Work) Through October 28. **Brian Guidry**: “Entangled” October 7 - October 28th. **Stephanie Patton**: “Sensitivity Training” October 7 - 28. **Stephen Paul Day**: “Queen of Mirth,” **Douglas Bourgeois**: “Spirit In The Dark,” Through December 23.

**Brent McKeever**: “Under 21,” **David Yarrow; Robert Mapplethorpe, George Dureau**: “Mapplethorpe & Dureau: Photographs,” Through Feb. 17, 2018.



Richard A. Johnson at Cole Pratt Gallery.

BARRISTER'S GALLERY, 2331 St. Claude Ave. (525-2767, [www.barristersgallery.com](http://www.barristersgallery.com)). **Mariam Stephan and Nikki Blair:** "Swing Shift," **Christopher Saucedo:** "Pop Up Show," Through Nov. 4th.

BOYD SATELLITE, 440 Julia St. (899-4218, [www.boydsatellitegallery.com](http://www.boydsatellitegallery.com)).

BRUNNER GALLERY, 215 N. Columbia St. Covington (985-893-0444, [www.brunnergallery.com](http://www.brunnergallery.com)). **Rick Brunner,** New Sculpture and Furniture Designs.

CALLAN CONTEMPORARY, 518 Julia St. New Orleans (525-0518), [www.callancontemporary.com](http://www.callancontemporary.com)). **Jose-Maria Cundin:** "The Supreme Leader and other Ponderables," September 28-October 30. **David Borgerding:** "New Sculpture" Nov 1-Dec 21st.

CAROL ROBINSON GALLERY, 840 Napoleon Ave. at Magazine (895-6130, [www.carolrobinsongallery.com](http://www.carolrobinsongallery.com)). **Jere Allen:** "Apparitions" New work in oil, October 7-31.

COLE PRATT GALLERY, 3800 Magazine St.(891-6789, [www.coleprattgallery.com](http://www.coleprattgallery.com)). "Art for Art's Sake," featured Artist **Stephen Strickland** (New Oil Paintings) for Art for Art's Sake. October 1- 28th. **Evert Witte:** "Inventory of the Possible," Through November 25. **George Havard Yerger** and **Leslie Anne Addison:** November 25- December 30, 2017.

COLLINS DIBOLL ART GALLERY, Loyola University, (861-5456, [www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/](http://www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/)). **Gary Metz:** "Encountering the Landscape and a Photographic Tradition," Oct. 18, 2017; **Gary Metz:** "Quaking Aspen: A Lyric Complaint," Sept 25 - Dec 15.

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER, 900 Camp St. (210-0224, [www.cacno.org](http://www.cacno.org)). **Tomás Saraceno:** "Solar Bell Ensemble," Through December 31. **Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp,** the fourth iteration of this citywide exhibition, Nov 18, 2017, through Feb 25, 2018. **Steven Matijcio:** "Swoon, The Canyon: 1999-2017," through Feb. 2018. **Erwin Redl,** through March 2018. **Sandra Cinto,** through July 2018.

GALLERY 600 JULIA, 600 Julia Street, (895-7375, [www.gallery-600julia.com](http://www.gallery-600julia.com)). **Linda Lesperance:** "Illuminations, New Orleans in the Night," Oct 7, 2017. **Charles Smith:** "Louisiana Light," Nov. 4, 2017. **Thomas Lofton:** "Déjà Views," Dec. 2, 2017. **Terry Kenney,** Jan. 5, 2018.

GEORGE & LEAH MCKENNA MUSEUM OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ART, 2003 Carondelet St. (323-5074, [www.themckennamuseum.com](http://www.themckennamuseum.com)). By appointment.

GOOD CHILDREN GALLERY, 4037 St Claude (616-7427, [www.goodchildrengallery.com](http://www.goodchildrengallery.com)). **Property of Emptiness: Ana Hušman, Jusuf Hadžifežović and Summer Acceptance.** Spatial intervention by: **Lala Raščić,** Oct 14 - Nov 5.



Billy Solitario at Le Mieux Galleries.

HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION, 533 Royal St. (523-4662, [www.hnoc.org](http://www.hnoc.org)). “Storyville: Madams and Music” (Photographs, objects) through Dec. 9. “A Most Significant Gift: The Laura Simon Nelson Collection,” (Artworks, Newcomb Pottery), through Nov. 4. **Waldemar Świerzy**: “Giants of Jazz: Art Posters and Lithographs: Daguillard Collection,” (Artworks, Posters), through Dec. 30.

ISAAC DELGADO FINE ARTS GALLERY, 615 City Park Ave. (671-6377, [www.dcc.edu/dnts/art-gallery](http://www.dcc.edu/dnts/art-gallery)).

JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY, 400a Julia St. (522-5471, [www.jonathanferraragallery.com](http://www.jonathanferraragallery.com)), **Nikki Rosato**: “Object,” Oct. 4-27, 2017; **Laura Tanner Graham**: “Campaign Julienne,” Oct. 4-27. **SIN TÍTULO** (Untitled) Curated By Dan Cameron, P.S. Satellites — A Project Of Prospect New Orleans: **Hugo Crosthwaite, Jose Dávila, Gabriel De La Mora, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Pablo Rasgado, Pedro Reyes, Martín Soto Clement**, through Dec. 30.

LE MIEUX GALLERIES, 332 Julia St. (522-5988, [www.le-mieuxgalleries.com](http://www.le-mieuxgalleries.com)), **Kathryn Hunter**: “The Concurrence of

Things,” Through Oct. 28, 2017. “Bombay Artisan Series,” Nov.4-18.

**Billy Solitario**: “Slivers of Land,” Nov. 25- Dec. 30.

LONGUE VUE HOUSE AND GARDENS, 7 Bamboo Rd. (488-5488, <https://longuevue.com/events/>).

LOUISIANA STATE MUSEUM CABILDO, 701 Chartres St. (568-6968, [www.lsm.crt.state.la.us](http://www.lsm.crt.state.la.us)).

MARTINE CHAISSON GALLERY, 727 Camp St. (304-7942, [www.martinechaissongallery.com](http://www.martinechaissongallery.com)). **Logan Ledford**: “Hello There,” Through Oct. 28, 2017. **Marjorie Pierson**: “Floating in Place,” Nov. 4-Dec. 30.

NEWCOMB ART GALLERY, Tulane University. (865-5328, [newcombartgallery.tulane.edu](http://newcombartgallery.tulane.edu)). **Rachel Beach, Morgan Blair, Amy Ellingson, Brittany Nelson, Alyse Rosner, Barbara Takenaga, Anne Vieux**: “Unfamiliar Again : Contemporary Women Abstractionists” Through December 23 2017. **Ana Gómez, Saúl Kaminer, Perla Krauze, María José Lavín, María José de la Macorra, Gustavo Pérez, Paloma Torres**: “Clay In Transit: Contemporary Mexican Ceramics,” Jan.17- March 25, 2018.



Robyn Leroy-Evans at The Front.

NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART, City Park. (658-4100), [www.noma.org](http://www.noma.org)). "African Art: The Bequest from the Françoise Billion Richardson Charitable Trust," Through Nov. 6, 2017.

"Orientalism: Taking and Making," through Dec. 31, 2017. "East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography," through Jan. 7, 2018.

NEW ORLEANS PHOTO ALLIANCE, 1111 St Mary St. (610-4899, [www.neworleansphotoalliance.org](http://www.neworleansphotoalliance.org)). **Annie Flanagan:** "Deafening Sound," Sept. 9-Nov 11.

OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART, 925 Camp St. (539-9600, [www.ogdenmuseum.org](http://www.ogdenmuseum.org)). **Kevin Beasley, Mark Bradford, Leonardo Drew, Melvin Edwards, Charles Gaines, Sam Gilliam, Jennie C. Jones, Norman Lewis, Glenn Ligon, Serge Alain Nitegeka, Shinique Smith, Tavares Strachan, Jack Whitten, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye:** "Solidary & Solitary," Through Jan. 21, 2018. "Prospect.4: The Lotus In Spite Of The Swamp," Nov. 18- Feb. 25, 2018. "Photonola Currents 2017," Dec.7-Feb. 4, 2018.

OCTAVIA ART GALLERY, 454 Julia St. (309-4249, [www.octaviaart-gallery.com](http://www.octaviaart-gallery.com)). **Joseph Cohen:** "Ode to a Flower," Oct. 4 – 28. **Meredith Knox Barineau, Anne Kinder, Marthann Masterson, Kathryn Rab-inow, Marie Figge Wise:** "Different Strokes," through Nov. 30. **David Row, Carole Eisner:** "The Shape of Things," Through Nov. 25.

SOREN CHRISTENSEN GALLERY, 400 Julia St. (569-9501, [www.sorenchristensen.com](http://www.sorenchristensen.com)). **Steven Seiburg:** "Under Light & Water," Through Nov. 28. "Group Work & Photonola 2017," December 2017.

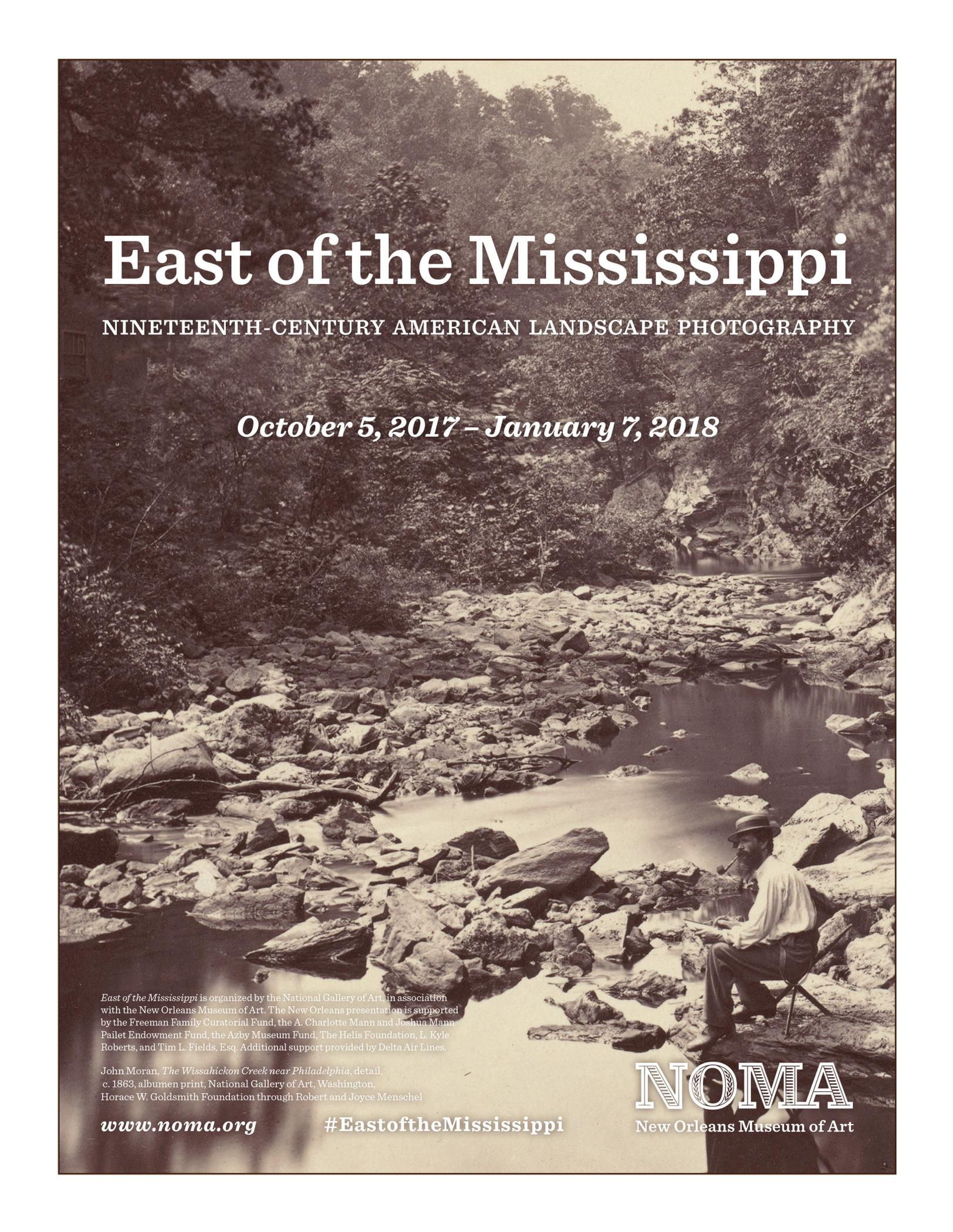
STELLA JONES GALLERY, Place St. Charles, 201 St. Charles Ave. (568-9050, [www.stellajonesgallery.com](http://www.stellajonesgallery.com)). **David Gaither:** "Exhibition not yet titled," Through Nov 10

STEVE MARTIN STUDIOS, 624 Julia St. (566-1390, [www.stevemartin-fineart.com](http://www.stevemartin-fineart.com)).

THE FRONT, 4100 St Claude Ave. (301-8654, [www.nolafront.org](http://www.nolafront.org)). **Robyn LeRoy-Evans:** "A Growing Dance," October 14- Nov 5, 2017.

THE NEW ORLEANS ART CENTER, 3330 St. Claude Ave. (383-4765, [www.theneworleansartcenter.com](http://www.theneworleansartcenter.com))

UNO-ST. CLAUDE GALLERY, 2429 St. Claude Ave. (280-6410, [www.finearts.uno.edu/gallery.html](http://www.finearts.uno.edu/gallery.html)). **Generic Art Solutions, Cheryl Hayes, Ariya Martin, Jonathan Mayers, Aaron McNamee, Jeff Rinehart, Kathy Rodriguez, and Dan Rule:** "Lakeshore Drive," October 14 - Nov 5, 2017. □



# East of the Mississippi

NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

*October 5, 2017 – January 7, 2018*

*East of the Mississippi* is organized by the National Gallery of Art, in association with the New Orleans Museum of Art. The New Orleans presentation is supported by the Freeman Family Curatorial Fund, the A. Charlotte Mann and Joshua Mann Paillet Endowment Fund, the Azby Museum Fund, The Helis Foundation, L. Kyle Roberts, and Tim L. Fields, Esq. Additional support provided by Delta Air Lines.

John Moran, *The Wissahickon Creek near Philadelphia*, detail, c. 1863, albumen print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation through Robert and Joyce Menschel

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