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OCTOBER 27–DECEMBER 9, 2017



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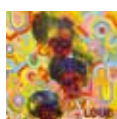
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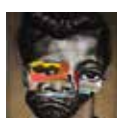
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New Art Examiner

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The **New Art Examiner** is looking for writers interested in the visual arts in any major metropolitan area in the U.S. You would start with short reviews of exhibition in your area. Later, longer essays on contemporary visual art issues could be accepted.

Please send a sample of your writing (no more than a few pages) to:

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a publication whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

EDITORIAL POLICY

As the New Art Examiner has consistently raised the issues of conflict of interest and censorship. We think it appropriate that we make clear to our readers the editorial policy we have evolved since our inception:

1. No writer may review an exhibition originated or curated by a fellow faculty member or another employee, or any past or present student, from the institution in which they are currently employed. The New Art Examiner welcomes enthusiastic and sincere representation, so the editor can assign such an exhibition to other writers without the burden of conflict of interest.

2. There shall be no editorial favor in response to the purchase of advertisements.

3. The New Art Examiner welcomes all letters to the Editor and guarantees publishing. Very occasionally letters may be slightly edited for spelling or grammar or if the content is considered to be libellous.

4. The New Art Examiner does not have an affiliation with any particular style or ideology, or social commitment that may be expressed or represented in any art form. All political, ethical and social commentary are welcome. The New Art Examiner has actively sought diversity. All opinions are solely of the writer. This applies equally to editorial staff when they pen articles under their own name.

5. The general mandate of the New Art Examiner is well defined in the statement of purpose above.

“William Blake and the Age of Aquarius”

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University

by Bruce Thorn

When visionary poet William Blake died over 200 years ago, his poems were not highly regarded. He was an iconoclast who paid a heavy price for his own originality, a political rebel with a leaning towards egalitarianism, pacifism and utopianism.

Yet his influence as artist, poet and prophet grew steadily and surged in the 20th century, particularly with a whole generation of American counterculture artists, musicians and writers from the 1940s through the 1960s.

The show, the first to consider Blake's impact on postwar American artists features more than 150 paintings, drawings, photographs, films, posters and mediums from the 50's through the 70's and more than 50 rare Blake engravings and pages from illuminated books. It is explicit in wanting viewers to extrapolate and make connections to our contemporary cultural and political landscape.

Stephen F. Eisenman, the exhibit curator and Professor of Art at Northwestern, and his team conducted remarkable and lengthy research into the subject with much support from the university, which has a commitment to studies of the 1960s.

The show, seven years in the making, is accompanied by a stunning, richly-illustrated catalogue published by Princeton University Press and Northwestern.

So much has appeared about the exhibit, and Blake in general, that I must ask myself just what do I have to offer here. My best solution is to offer the perspective of an artist who, as an elementary school youth, during the last millennia, was deeply influenced by Blake's poetry and reproductions of his works.

I plead guilty to harboring a preference for viewing artists on their own terms and within the context of their own times, rather than as props for other people's theses. But it must be said that this show is an exemplary production that succeeds brilliantly in its intention to elucidate Blake's sphere of influence within our recent time period.

The first part of the exhibition, crowded into the first of four galleries, was devoted to a fine collection of the master's engravings, drawings and portfolio pages.

Those who only know Blake's work from reproductions will be surprised by the miniature scale of the engravings, such as those from *The Book of Job*, which seem even more technically amazing than works by Albrecht Durer. Much of the line work is too small for the eye to isolate and thus appears as tonal magic.



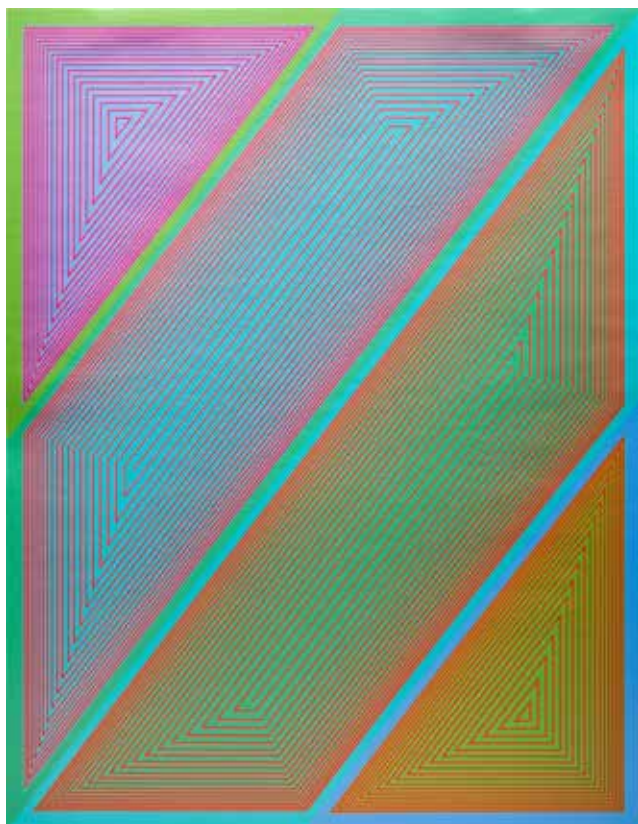
William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*, Plate 2, 1793
Relief etching, with some white line etching and hand coloring.

The text on pages from *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience* is too tiny for most people's eyes, even though the lettering was amazingly produced by hand-painting stop-out varnish backwards, with a brush, onto engraving plates. Did Blake work with a powerful magnifier or was he severely myopic? One has to wonder if Blake had ever contemplated the luxury of scale.

A great treat and show-stopper is the original drawing and watercolor, *The Number of the Beast is 666* (c.1805). Another eye-opener, which I had never seen before and which utilizes a more simplified subject and composition, is the etching and engraving, *A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs from a Gallows* (1796). It shows the same brutal honesty found in Goya's *Disasters of War*.

The exhibition presented Blake's works double hung with little space between pieces. Most of "The Age of Aquarius" portion were works by artists who were influenced by Blake. These artists' works were better displayed but still tightly packed. These offerings, which include video, photography and published materials, are mostly two-dimensional pieces, all fun-packed, nostalgic and seriously relevant.

The show proceeds chronologically, beginning with Blake, before leaping almost 120 years forward to the 1940s and works by Jackson Pollock and his teacher Stanley Hayter. (Pollock also studied with Thomas Hart Benton).



Richard Anuszkiewicz, *Inward Eye #2*,
From the portfolio *Inward Eye*, 1970, screenprint.

A diminutive and dramatic series of surrealist ink and gouache drawings from 1945 by Charles Seliger borrowed its title from Blake's *An Island in the Moon*

(1785) and seems to stage a cast of fantastic micro-bi-otic creatures in otherworldly situations.

The number of artists influenced by Blake is surprisingly large: Agnes Martin, Clyfford Still, Sam Francis, Robert Smithson, Diane Arbus, Jess, Robert Duncan and Helen Adam. Professor Eisenman makes the case for Blake's casting of a very large shadow, or a lot of light, on the creative extravaganza that was the Sixties circus.

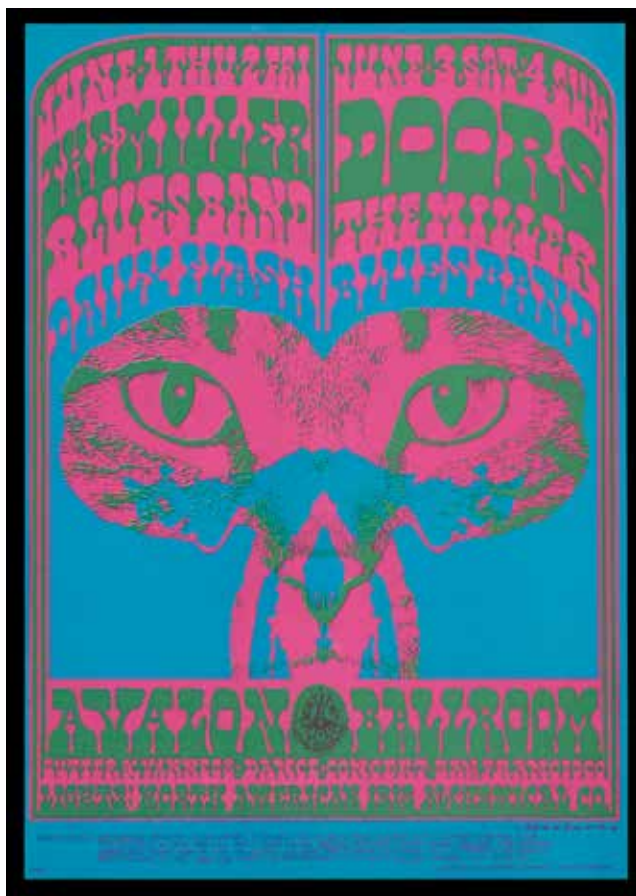
Selections from *10 Screenprints by Ad Reinhardt* (1966) insinuate a Blakean mystic joy. The most recent works in the show were a set of ten screenprints from Richard Anuszkiewicz' *Inward Eye Portfolio* (1970). These exhibit a busier, more electric energy and might remind one of contemporary light works by James Turrell. I'm not sure that all ten prints were needed to get the point across.

There is an intriguing, silent black-and-white video showing Jay DeFeo's hefty, outsize work, *The Rose*, being stabilized, crated and moved through a San Francisco bay window that has been enlarged, then placed onto a cherry picker and lowered down into a large moving truck by a crew of professional movers. *The Rose* is breathtaking.

There are many published artifacts on view, such as a Village Fugs record cover from 1965, *The Fugs First Album*, along with work by Allen Ginsberg, Maurice Sendak, Ed Sanders (of the Fugs) and the alternative paper, Chicago Seed. Videos offer the Doors, the Mamas and Papas and old-school projected light shows. I could have lived without the deflated beanbag chairs that visitors tripped over in the darkened mini-theater.

Want to see the psychedelic art that was of a piece with that era's excitement? The show contains many band posters and graphic art. It can be revelatory to include pop music in dialogues about cultural trends, periods and influences. It's always fun to see graphics by the likes of Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelly (aka Mouse and Kelly, known for their Grateful Dead poster art), Milton Glaser and Rick Griffin, who designed the poster for the film, *Lucifer Rising*.

Milton Sharp's *Mr. Tambourine Man, Blowing in the Mind*, printed with foil on paper and combining drawn and photographic images, is a prime example of the highly-accomplished state of screen-printing art that existed in the Sixties. Warhol wasn't the first or only artist to pioneer the medium.



Victor Moscoso, *The Doors*, *The Miller Blues Band*, Daily Flash June 1-4, 1970, Screenprint.

Eisenman makes much of the notion that Jim Morrison got the name for his band, The Doors, from a line of Blake's in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790): "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

What that probably means in contemporary, everyday language is that humans have by necessity evolved to view and understand experience primarily within the limited terms of practicality.

Morrison and most of his generation would have been quite aware of Aldous Huxley's 1954 classic, *The Doors of Perception*. Huxley, a proponent of the psychedelic drug LSD, who even dosed himself upon his deathbed, had reportedly begun experiments with psychedelics because he was hoping to momentarily achieve visionary results "similar to Blake's art and poetry."

It was largely through Huxley that Blake gained the attention of a drug-imbibing youth culture trying to expunge the horrors of the Vietnam War, social conformity and racism. So a generation or two embraced non-conformity and turned to an eclectic menu that included drugs, communes, cults, art, rock

Jess Collins, *Untitled* (gift of Jerome and Diane Rothenberg) 1963, Collage.



music, alternative life styles, Eastern religions and mystics such as Blake, Rilke, Maeterlinck, Hermann Hesse, Maria Sabina, Rumi and Walt Whitman.

Blake's authentic mysticism as a visionary and spiritualist will always lie beyond the knowledge or grasp of most people. He proposed total equality between races and sexes. These traits of course made him a near-perfect avatar for postwar non-conformists and dissidents, who used him as validation of a generation's hunger for escapism to a more enlightened, moral and pacifist path.

Mysticism is not about seasonable fashions, unlike most of the art world. Beatnik and hippy pseudo-mysticism and hedonism were at odds with idealistic notions of community. The culture train moved onwards towards more accessible musical realms: from Punk, Disco and New Age to Hip-hop, House and Rap with corresponding shifts in the visual arts.

My one problem with the show is that there aren't any major works from the 20th Century in the show that can hold a candle to Blake. DeFeo's *The Rose* is seen only on film. None of the works by Pollock, Sam Francis, Agnes Martin, Still and Arbus are knockouts.

In our perfect neo-liberal world, the "magic of the marketplace" seeks to discount, dilute and commercialize any authentic mysteries. This is why I hope,

one-day, to witness a large-scale museum survey devoted to William Blake and just Blake.

There is a lot of interesting and enjoyable material here but only Blake's work is sublime. The problem with interdisciplinary and discipline-based approaches to art is that they become about a thesis, not about the art.

It has long been common to quote Blake out of context. Famous lines from his poems get presented like inspirational fortune cookies or Confucian wisdom but manage to forego the complexity of the man's thinking as a spiritual visionary who disavowed organized religion. Blake as a poet had much more in common with Rumi or St. John of the Cross than he did with Alan Ginsberg or the Village Fugs.

As a visual artist, Blake was closer to Matthias Grunewald than to Stanley Mouse. He was difficult, inspirational and not afraid of contradiction; his work was about opening minds, not boxing thoughts into useful and popular packages. "William Blake, the Age of Aquarius" eschews a comprehensive presentation of the man's art or writing. As for me, I prefer my Blake straight up. ■

Bruce Thorn is a contributing editor to the New Art Examiner.

William Blake, *The Circle of the Lustful: Paolo and Francesca*, from Dante's *Inferno*, canto V, c. 1825-27, Engraving.



Expo Chicago

Three Examiner critics offer their Expo impressions

Expo Chicago: Atmospherics and Art Excel

The five-day, sixth edition of Expo Chicago under Tony Karman's direction reported record attendance—40,000 visitors—and strong sales by 135 dealers from 25 countries.

I caught a strong whiff of success and excess immediately upon entering Navy Pier's Festival Hall. It was the opening night's Vernissage and the hall was abuzz. I spotted more gowns and formal wear than in past years and the VIP lounge featured a stunning, top-of-the-line Rolls-Royce priced higher (\$400,000) than most of the art on display.

As I scanned the exhibitor list to guide my art walk, I saw some of New York's top dealers such as Gagosian, David Zwirner, Dede Young (Galerie Lelong), Edwynne Houk and Matthew Marks Galleries. Chicago was well-represented with 15 local galleries including Kavi Gupta, Richard Gray, Rhona Hoffman and Corbett vs. Dempsey



Installation shot of galerie gmurzynska.

My eye caught familiar European names such as Galerie Daniel Templon (Paris), galerie frank elbaz (Paris) but a number of once familiar names from the Continent were missing such as Karsten Greve, Anthony d'Offay, Thaddaeus Ropac and Hauser & Wirth.

This was a fair with a lot of new names unfamiliar to me. A number of explanations can account for this. First, there is always a large amount of "churn" in the market among new and established galleries. Second, Expo's international jury may not have invited them, seeking names that were "hot" and creating all-important buzz.

A final, key factor is that the number of art fairs and the costs involved in participating have grown exponentially since 2012, Karman's first year producing Expo Chicago. Dealers I've spoken with say the cost (shipping, air, hotel and meals) can be almost \$50,000 per fair.

Dealers must now be strategic about which domestic and international art fairs they will participate in. In speaking with dealers, the average number they enter is about five, down from almost double that number over the last decade.



Installation shot of galerie gmurzynska.

The first gallery I encountered made the best impression. It was a newcomer from Switzerland that came loaded for bear. On view were a stunning array of 20th Century masters including Joan Miro, Fernand Leger, Robert Indiana, Yves Klein and Wilfredo Lam.

Among the other dozen or so galleries I visited at the Vernissage, I found the quality of art on hand to be very high. Dealers were now bringing their best pieces with prices in the half-million to million-plus category. But I also saw a good deal of quality art in the mid-range market.

Great credit must be given to Karman and his board of art advisers who literally brought this fair back from mismanaged collapse following the fair's move from Navy Pier to the Merchandise Mart.

Many dealers took a chance on coming back during the 2012-14 years. But they returned because many said that Chicago had great collectors and was an important market to tap. Word-of-mouth amongst the trade has grown more positive every year since and prompted

many to return while others put Expo on their exhibition schedule.

Once this year's fair ended, dealers delivered a raft of glowing testimonials. Eric Gleason of New York's Paul Kasmin Gallery said, "Sales ... were so strong this year, that by the end of the first day, we knew we would return to Expo Chicago in 2018."

And David Nolan, whose gallery bears his name, gave Chicago a five-star endorsement. He said, "Chicago-based clients are taking the fair a lot more seriously than in past years. The number of collectors from the Midwest has increased and business was particularly strong this year. Expo Chicago is quickly becoming a major player in the global fair circuit." ■

Tom Mullaney

Expo 2017 vs. 2016: A Big Difference

The 2017 Expo Chicago was noticeably different than the 2016 Expo Chicago on a number of levels. We noticed this when we first walked in and my companion remarked "it seems a little smaller." I did some checking afterwards and found that the number of major galleries was down from 121 last year to only 106 this year. The number of smaller booths designated to their "Exposure" section increased from 26 to 31. (Originally only 17). With the new edition of 5 "Expo Profile" solo artist booths this year it maintained its traditional 140 +/- total exhibits.

Expo Chicago has been in its current form since 2012. Prior to that, it was Art Chicago. Art Chicago was started in 1980 and was Chicago's longest-running

major contemporary art exposition. It was held in various locations including the old Navy Pier, Grant Park and the Merchandise Mart. Expo Chicago has always been held at Navy Pier.

Expo Chicago has traditionally been divided up into 3 main categories: 1) Exhibitors—Major art galleries that receive 400–1000 square feet at a cost of \$24,000–\$52,000 and can have multiple artists; 2) Exposure—Galleries open less than 8 years that receive 200 square feet for \$8000; and 3) Editions and Books—Publishers that receive 200 square feet at a cost of \$2000–\$4000 and are always relegated to a strip on the back end.



Roger Hiorns *A Retrospective Pathway*.

This year, the expo also launched “Expo Profile,” a presentation of 5 solo artists or collectives provided by established international galleries. These were highly curated, limited availability and tightly focused thematic exhibitions. They were definitely a nice addition to the overall artwork of the show and each created a very immersive and singular experience.

The Expo also always includes 15-20 “Expo Projects” and “IN/SITU” in the event space itself, in and around Navy Pier, and spread across the greater Grant Park and Lakefront area. These site-specific installations highlight large scale and performative works by emerging and established artists. They are always a fantastic and overlooked part of the show and are visually impacting. One of our absolute favorites was Roger Hiorns “A Retrospective Pathway.”

Hiorns interactive art piece was set at the front entrance to the Pier next to the fountain area. It was comprised of large stainless steel tanks that pumped out massive amounts of foam. The idea was to present “continuous change in a joyous and ebullient manner” as the foam is shaped by the wind and spread across the landscape. It allowed the artist to engage with

his surroundings and for the public to interact with the foam and become the “connective tissue between the individual and the artwork” and to “blur the lines between where the city begins and the art ends.” With the majestic skyline in the background and throngs of giggling children and masses of Navy Pier visitors, it most certainly did.

It has always been my estimation that Expo Chicago and SOFA are the two best and premier art exhibitions that the city has to offer. This year’s expo seemed cleaner, leaner and better managed than last year. The space was less crowded and easier to navigate and enjoy. It also featured a better curated, higher quality assortment of artists than last year. The increase in smaller Exposure booths, which keep growing over time, and the addition of the Expo Profile solo booths also offered a greater variety of newer art to enjoy.

The Chicago Expo is now heading into its seventh year (2018) and seems to be getting better each time. Director Tony Karman deserves a tip of the hat for salvaging, maintaining and continuously expanding this wonderful event. ■

Michael Ramstedt

Lackluster Showing by Big Names Eclipsed by Alternatives

This year’s Expo Chicago, for me, was another year of lackluster performance by the major galleries. Fortunately, the “secondary” galleries and institution spaces provided enough interesting material to make the fair worth seeing.

That isn’t to say that the major commercial galleries did not provide some noteworthy pieces. For example, Richard Gray Gallery showed a very nice Jean-Michel Basquiat portrait from 1982—a body of work by this artist that is not often seen. The same gallery also showed a delightful Jim Lutes, *Lip Lobes*, from 1994.

On the other hand, Wendy White’s *We Go High* from 2016, shown by Nabuani Mercier gallery, was an unsuccessful attempt to “diefy” Michelle Obama. The piece just did not have the necessary gravitas, and it is far too soon to be attempting such an undertaking. It merely came off as a piece of partisan propaganda.

Another failure was Sara Dwyer’s *Long Sole Sound* from 2017 shown at Jane Lombard Gallery. It was a tired, post expressionist piece whose style has devolved into high-priced decorator art. It is a pretty piece, but nothing more.

Far more interesting was *High Maintenance (art after November 6, 2016)* by Yvette Mayorga presented by the Chicago Artists’ Coalition. Her installation was a provocative take on today’s politics of feminism. The pink wallpaper background and “baroque” application of plaster “frosting” like cake decorations recall the kitsch feminine stereotype of the 50s, but in a way that makes one think about today’s role of women in our society.

In contrast, Davis Cone’s *Heart Nocturne/Harvest Moon*, 2007-8, a super realist rendering of an Art Deco movie palace, is purely nostalgic and sentimental. It looks backward and is critical of the coldness of the present as depicted by the modern automobiles in the foreground.

But Sappar Contemporary showed work by Faig Ahmed that demonstrated how a traditional form and technique can be adapted to contemporary concerns. Ahmed has taken the millennia old craft of oriental rug weaving into a contemporary context. He breaks with traditional forms and gives us a new perspective on oriental rugs: we see one devoted to the interpretive depiction of DNA, one that suggests portals into

the present, and one that “plays” with the technique in a retro 70s manner.

On a serious note, Honor Fraser gallery showed several large pieces by Meleko Mokgosi that hauntingly depict the death rituals of the African American community. For me, they were some of the best works of this year’s Expo. One piece in particular, *Untitled* from 2016 measuring 72 x 144 inches was especially striking, not just for its size, but for its somber symmetry and superb but subdued use of color.

There were a number of works in a roughly geometric abstraction style. One of the best was *70 (million miles per hour that the Earth orbits around the sun)* by Hayal Pozanti. Presented by Jessica Silverman Gallery, this large acrylic (60 x 132 inches) has very little to do with astronomy; its shapes are more weapons oriented and actually become threatening upon contemplation in spite of its sophisticated, soothing color pallet. There are shapes that resemble a flint lock pistol in the center, a hand grenade on the left, and a bomb on the lower right (a mini history of weapons of mass destruction?).

Two installations that were next to each other were especially engaging. Part of the Exposure group of galleries (galleries that are relatively new), Fold gallery from London showed a version of *In Absence* by Finbar Ward. This booth sized installation is a small version of

the much more substantial piece shown at the gallery in 2016. The evenly spaced rows of white tooth-like trapezoids projecting from the walls create an orderly, yet somewhat menacing space, feeling a little like being in the mouth of a shark.

Nearby, Mars/Patron from Sao Paulo showed an interactive installation by Lucas Simões called *Perpetual Instability*. This piece allows patrons to walk on an unstable cement floor that moves and starts to crack into irregular segments as people walk on it. It’s a novel experience to, in effect, be part of creating the work as its form evolves from walking on it.

Finally, in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s booth had a thoughtful piece by Óscar González. *One Minute on, One Minute Off* was a “throw rug” made of varicolored toy soldiers, all lying face down. Are we being invited to tread on the sacrifices made by thousands of men in humanity’s seemingly endless wars?

The established galleries did what established galleries do: try to sell from their stock of modern masters (much of which we have seen for years). It was the galleries in the Exposure portion of Expo that made the fair interesting and stimulating to visit. That is where the future lies. ■

Michel Ségard

Meleko Mokgosi, *Untitled*, 2016, Acrylic, pastel, and charcoal on paper, 72 x 144 in.



Works at Expo Chicago that Caught Our Eye



Hayal Pozanti 70 (*Million miles per hour that the Earth orbits around the sun*), 2017—Jessica Silverman Gallery.



Joan Brown, *After the Alcatraz Swim #2*, 1975—Anglim Gilbert Gallery.



(Above) Lucas Simões, *Perpetual Instability*, 2017—Marso/Patron.

(Left) Óscar González, (*One Minute on, One Minute Off*) 2017—School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



(Left) Faig Ahmed, *Virgin*, 2017—Sapar Contemporary.



(Right) Jim Lutes, *Lip Lobes*, 1994—Richard Gray Gallery.

A Vision of Our Time

Gerald Williams at Kavi Gupta

by Phillip Barcio

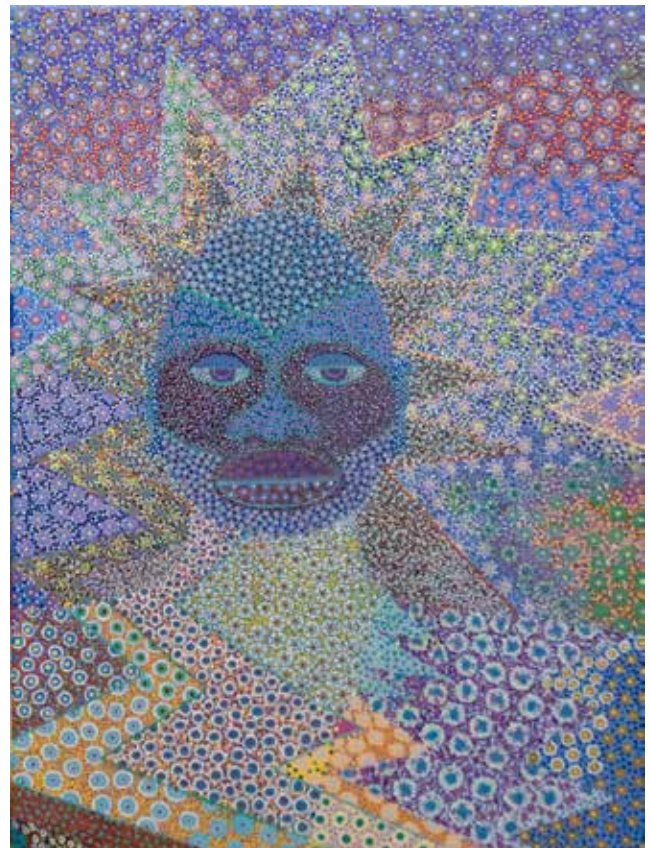
Fifty years ago, the south side of Chicago cradled what arguably became the most influential black art collective of the 20th Century: AfriCOBRA, or the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. Even if you have never heard of this group, you have seen echoes of their aesthetic legacy. Over the course of a turbulent decade, from 1967 through 1977, their work traveled the United States in a series of landmark exhibitions that established what many scholars consider the definitive visual articulation of the Black Arts Movement.



Say It Loud, 1969, Acrylic on canvas, 34 x 26 x 2 in.

Before they made history, AfriCOBRA started as a loosely-knit group of five black artists (Jeff Donaldson, Wadsworth Jarrell, Jae Jarrell, Carolyn Lawrence and Gerald Williams) who met casually once a week to talk about aesthetics. They were curious about what each other thought were the defining visual elements

of their time and culture. Over cups of tea, they shared their observations about the physical world, and their thoughts about the purpose of art. Gradually, they distilled those ideas into an artistic vision described by formal principles. Then they turned those principles into paintings.



Portrait Z, 2016, Acrylic on linen, 24 x 18 x 1 in.

What made AfriCOBRA special was not only that their vision was clear, concise, and well-communicated, but that it was also forward thinking. It was hopeful and transnational, based on the idea that identity is the physical manifestation of a mental construct.

This past September, Kavi Gupta's Elizabeth Street gallery in Chicago's West Loop neighborhood mounted the first solo exhibition in a generation of the paintings of AfriCOBRA's co-founder, Gerald Williams. Williams is in his late 70s today. This exhibition spanned his entire oeuvre, from 1969 to the current moment,

offering a glimpse at how his aesthetic vision has evolved over the course of his extraordinary life.

The last time Williams exhibited with AfriCOBRA was in 1977, the same year he received his MFA from Howard University in Washington, DC. The Black Arts Movement was at the height of its influence then, and Williams, newly credentialed, could easily have followed the path of teaching at a university, working in the studio, exhibiting, and seeking major gallery representation. Instead, he volunteered for the Peace Corps, working for two years as the Pre-Vocational Director at the Jacaranda School for the Mentally Handicapped in Nairobi, Kenya. After that, he returned to D.C., and worked for four years as a public school teacher. Then he signed up for what became a 20-year position running arts and crafts centers on U.S. Air Force bases in South Korea, Japan, Italy, the Azores, and South Carolina.

All the while, Williams kept painting. He continued embracing the conceptual framework of identifying and expressing an aesthetic vision of his surroundings, expanding that vision over the decades in concert with his expanding experience of the world.



Message from a Giant, Acrylic on canvas, 47 1/2 × 47 1/2 × 2 in.

The fruits of that search, and of the universal philosophy that has grown out of a life of service, informed the work on view at Kavi Gupta.

The dozen or so paintings were arranged in chronological fashion, allowing viewers to follow Williams' aesthetic evolution in a straightforward way. First up was *Say it Loud* (1969), a painting which, emblematic

of the AfriCOBRA vision, expresses fundamental visual elements of late 1960s black American culture, such as vivid colors, stylized text, and layered, multifaceted forms.

Next came *My Parents* (1975), a less textured, more abstract painting than *Say it Loud*. In this piece, text has given way to ambiguous symbology. Faces melt together with colors and forms. It is a confident, loving, picture that invites contemplation about changing times.

Next came *Message from a Giant—Garvey* (1976/2017), which felt as though it was intended to serve as a chronological and aesthetic bridge between Williams' AfriCOBRA work and the work he makes today. Visually, this work is a fit representation of what Williams' has described as his mature approach to painting, a strategy he calls "mimesis at mid-point." In the mimetic tradition, he distills what he wants to express down to its universal essence then communicates it using a visual lexicon that inhabits the mid-point between figuration and abstraction.

This painting marked the point in the exhibition after which all of the work seemed to me to radiate an intangible, transcendent quality. It made me wonder about the vision Williams has of our time. The pictures he and the other members of AfriCOBRA made in the 1960s and '70s were not of demonstrations, riots, or the endemic division in America. Rather, they explored the simultaneous hope, empowerment and beauty that were just as real, and just as prevalent within the culture.

Is Williams' vision of today just as progressive? Compared to the oversimplified, brash, cynical tone that pervades much contemporary visual culture, Williams' new paintings are invigorating. I would not call them idealistic. They feel humanist and grounded. They are not illusionary images of a fantasy world. They show a multitudinous reality--complicated, deep, uncertain, but also harmonious.

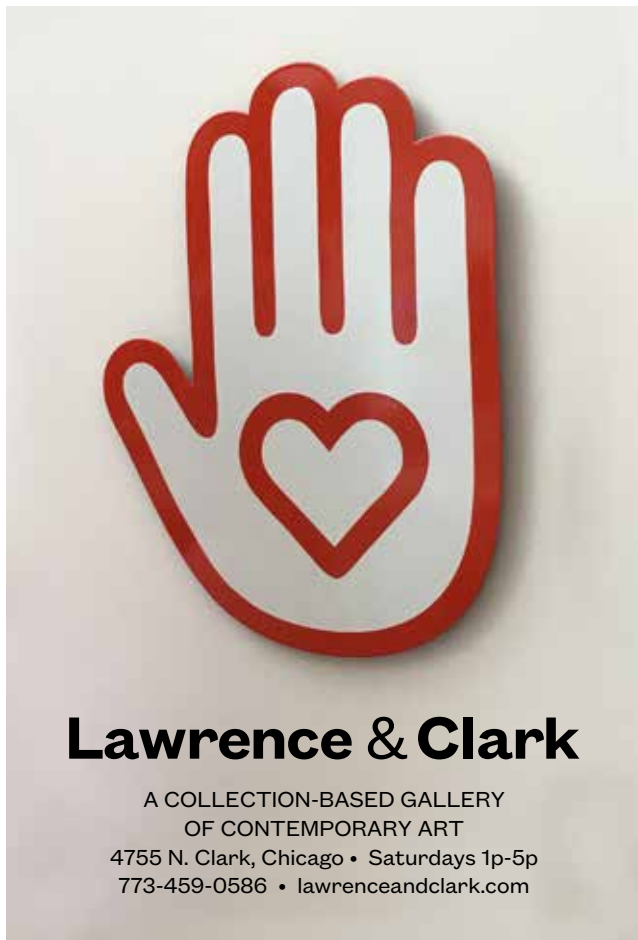
After viewing the work, I noticed Williams was in attendance. I greeted him, and he introduced me to a small group of people with whom he was talking. He said, "This is Wadsworth, Jae, Carolyn," the other surviving co-founders of AfriCOBRA. (Jeff Donaldson died in 2004). All had flown to Chicago for the opening, to show their support. Starstruck, I shyly commented that I was in the presence of history makers. Jae Jarrell smiled and said, "That's exactly what we were trying to do. Make history."



AfriCOBRA founders (left to right) Gerald Williams, Wadsworth Jarrell, Jae Jarrell, Carolyn Lawrence.

I asked what was next for the group. I was told that Kavi Gupta had invited Williams to curate another exhibition sometime in the spring of 2018; a group show featuring the work of all of the AfriCOBRA founders. I hope that, as with this exhibition, it will include the work these artists are making now. They helped define the aesthetic of 1960s and '70s. They communicated the truth of that era, and expanded the scope of American art. I am fascinated to experience their vision of our time. ■

Phillip Barcio is a fiction author and art writer, recently transplanted to Chicago, whose work has also appeared in *Hyperallergic*, *Tikkun*, *IdeelArt Magazine* and other trustworthy publications.



Jaume Plensa and His Pursuit of Beauty

Jaume Plensa's name may not be known to many Chicagoans but his art certainly is. During the years that the artist has been represented by the Richard Gray Gallery, his work has been exhibited throughout the world. His local notoriety came with the installation of the Crown Fountain in Millennium Park in 2004. That ingenious take on the traditional fountain template has delighted hundreds of thousands of city children who love to stand under the water-spouting mouths of a thousand-assorted Chicago faces.

In 2014, several of his gigantic, elongated alabaster heads took up residence inside the park at Madison Street for more than a year to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Crown installation. In September of this year, Plensa exhibited several new female heads at the Gray Gallery's Warehouse on West Carroll St. We spoke with him on the day of that unveiling. (The conversation has been edited for reasons of space).

Tom Mullaney—I have the pleasure of speaking this afternoon with Jaume Plensa, a Spanish artist, architect and sculptor from Barcelona whose work is exhibited internationally and is especially well-known here in Chicago. You have visited Chicago many times. Tell me about your relationship with and feeling about this city.

Jaume Plensa—Well, actually, when I got the commission for the piece that would become the Crown Fountain, the initial idea was to do a traditional fountain, a project with water. They wanted to do something that would be in conversation with the fantastic fountain (Buckingham) you have on the other side of the park.

I was doing a project at the time that I called the "Miraculous Fountain." And I did a show at the Jeu de Paume (museum) in Paris and some of the advisers from the city and the Crown family visited that show and were very impressed. I was selected as one of the three artists for the competition. Working on that commission made my relationship with Chicago incredibly strong because I was coming one week every month for four years. I got to like Chicago as my city and almost my second home.



Jaume Plensa, *Crown Fountain*, Photo by Laura Plensa.. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery.



Jaume Plensa, *Crown Fountain*. Photo by Laura Plensa. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery.

And the Crown Fountain is a very special and specific project I've never wanted to repeat, even in a similar shape in any other place.

TM—There is something about the fountain that is singular, just one-of-a-kind.

JP—Exactly.

TM—I know from your work that, when you have a theme, you make numerous interpretations but not here.

JP—My main concern was to try to do something for Chicago and the idea of community which is very important to me. The people, in a very anonymous way, have felt it to be a part of the city. Normally, we are talking about buildings and buildings and monuments. My piece was really an homage to the anonymous people in my city.

TM—Can you pinpoint how you went from the practice you were doing in the '90s (drawing) to the period in the mid-2000s when you switched to the stainless steel heads known as "Self Portraits" and now with the growing body of oversize heads.

JP—Actually, I can tell you that I started work in the '80s with the human body and intuitively exploring the border and very fine line between an animal and a human being. Back then, I spent a lot of time working on that idea in cast iron and I was beginning to be known internationally.

And then suddenly, that shape disappeared and I spent almost the next 10 years in the emptiness, the absence of that body, working with doors and handles. The handle gives you the size of the hand. The door gives the relationship with the scale of the body. That is something that happens often in my work, that one project is not the beginning but the end of a process. The Crown Fountain was the end of my work with the cells, where people were invited to open the doors and go in. That changed into the alabaster head Portraits.

TM—So, the Crown Fountain was the ending of your work with cells. You said you wanted to combine photography with the water to create a new form.

JP—The thing that I wanted for many years was to merge photography and sculpture which I'm now doing with my "Portraits." When I finished (my work on) a video project, I decided to continue on the portrait track but with very traditional materials—alabaster, marble, bronze, wood—but trying to merge my concept of photography because many of my sculptures seem not real, like a hologram. Many times, when people are seeing a photo of my installations, people think it is Photoshop.



Jaume Plensa, *Self Portrait III*, 2017
Installation shot. Photo by Tom Mullaney.



Jaume Plensa, *Private Dreams*, RGG Photo by Tom Van Eynde. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery.

TM—In looking at the Portraits, I want our readers to understand how you create one of these heads. You start by taking photographs of young women and I understood that you basically shoot just the head and the neck and then what happens next?

JP—Well, actually, I want it to be as precise as possible, taking the information of one's head because the head is the palace of one's dreams, it's where everything happens. And then I've been exploring the scanning of the head because, with the scan, you have all the information. It's not interpretation, it's the real thing. The scan gives the three-dimensional shape of one's head. And then, in the computer, I continue to manipulate and elongate the head and to making scratches sometimes.

TM—Today, at the warehouse, I was seeing these little waves in Julia's hair. Is that also done in the computer?

JP—Well, she was like that. I'm not changing the expression of that portrait but only changing the volume of that portrait.

TM—I look at these faces and the scale and I wonder, "Are these supposed to be totemic figures" like the ones on Easter Island? It's similar in a way.

JP—No. It is always the same, people need to find connections. I don't know why but it's life and an obsession. My pieces and those pieces on Easter Island were done by human beings so obviously there is some memory there. I return to the tradition of the head that is true. Because in Mexico, it's the tradition of the Olmec heads or the heads of Buddha in Cambodia.

If you do a thin figure, it doesn't mean you are copying Giacometti because, maybe, Giacometti was copying El Greco or Modigliani. And if something is a little bit fat, it's already Botero. I don't know. I hate this kind of problem (laughter).

TM—In the last 15 years, your practice has solidified. You are now identified with the text (Self-Portraits) and the heads. You are seen as a 'public sculptor.' When I think of other sculptors who have had such major impact, I can only think of two other artists: Alexander Calder and Henry Moore. Do you see that comparison?



Jaume Plensa, *Seattle Echo*, Photo by Benjamin Benschneider.
Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery.

JP—Probably. But I prefer to say “art in public spaces” than “public art” because I think all art is public. I guess Calder, which I love this artist and Henry Moore who is a great artist, probably had a similar feeling like me that the relationship with the community is beautiful and is a very democratic way to spread art. I think it’s very beautiful the dialogue that you can create around one piece.

The other day, I visited the Picasso sculpture which is having its 50th anniversary. There’s a beautiful mosaic not so far away by Chagall which I think is lovely and is a completely different attitude and farther, there’s a beautiful Calder and a little before, it’s Dubuffet. And Miro is in this strange corner. But, in any case, Chicago has an amazing, amazing public space for public art.

TM—You said “When you introduce art, you are transforming what previously had not been thought of as places but spaces. I think it’s great because suddenly the community feels proud that beauty is coming to them as well. It doesn’t automatically go to the rich. I think that is something important.”

JP—I don’t believe I said rich but probably I said “more cultivated people.” Like I said before, you must try the

democratic idea to expand beauty because beauty is the only concept that everybody knows, even if they can’t explain it... Beauty is one of the best tools to create a bridge between art and the viewer.

TM—To get back to the Portraits, you say that you see the person and then you ask the parent if they mind if you scan their daughter and they are always surprised. Do you just pick someone out from a crowd?

JP—Yes, sometimes it is by accident. Sometimes you know somebody or you know the family. Now many people are offering themselves to be scanned. I do a selection.

TM—I took down the names of some of the portraits: Anuria, Irma, Chloe, Laura, Dunya, Awilda and today, Julia. Although the heads are always the same, same technique, the same volume—is naming a way to create a work of art specifically for a new site?

JP—No. It’s always the same. I’m not giving the name to different sculptures. It’s like Giacometti did the portrait of his brother Diego, 8,000 times. I started to work on these portraits since 2004. In 13 years, I did maybe 35 portraits. But some of those I did many times, in many shapes, in different scales, because they have a tremendous capacity to express different ideas even if it is the same face.

Like with Awilda. I did Awilda in marble, I did Awilda in bronze, I did Awilda in alabaster. But for a project I did in Rio de Janeiro, I did a very tall one, a beautiful piece in the water. That piece, that was conceived for that space, at the end of the show, I took it back to Barcelona. And then Millennium Park asked me to do a celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the park. I decided to install Awilda here in the park at Madison St., which splits the city north and south. And so Awilda was in two different spots—not anymore in Rio but in Chicago. And now, the piece has been bought by the museum in Miami, so now it’s in Miami facing the water again. It was a funny journey for the piece which started in Rio, moved to Chicago and is finally in Miami. Awilda is special.

TM—I was in Nice, France in 2013 and I was astounded seeing your piece, in the Place Massena, of seven kneeling figures on top of seven 40 ft. high columns which represent the seven continents. I was a little mad

at you when I recently saw that you did the same idea for Gothenburg, Sweden. It seemed unfair.

JP—I have the same figures atop of the columns (The Poets) in many places in the world because I always understood that the poet lives a little apart from society with a tremendous capacity to influence the society. And it was one of my dreams that, one day, we can look at the world from far and see all the poets in different places all together. It was an idea. Sometimes it is one single one and sometimes two or three.

TM—Although you just work with the head, you say the body is a container of energy. Energy is what helps us create, makes us more alive. This container of energy is within us. In many ways, your art is always looking inside where the energy is.

JP—Well, I always felt that every human being has an amazing beauty hidden inside themselves. When I installed the piece of Awilda in Rio de Janeiro, many people said “But Jaume, how come she has her eyes closed surrounded by so much beauty around?” I said, “because I am trying to emphasize the interior beauty all of us have.” And energy is something you cannot see from others but you can expand.

That was the wisdom that I liked so much in that short poem by William Blake, “One Thought Fills Immensity” because that energy is probably for him—well, he expressed so well my intuition that our thoughts are just energy filling up space. But that is something in the air. When we are talking, where are our words going? We are filling the air with something.

TM—You were saying today, “My intention is that art is always something that is a path to wisdom. I think how you channel your energy is to become wise and to have greater understanding of the world and our place.”

JP—That’s it. All human beings are trying to understand who we are, where we are going. The main questions are always there, thank God. Art has a tremendous capacity to open doors. And beauty is a fantastic tool of art. Many times I said that sculpture is the best way to put the questions. The answer is less important. The beauty is when you are dreaming and somebody else wants to share those dreams with you. That is a privilege. But to explore that path of wisdom is something we should do a lot.

TM—The next time you come to Chicago in a few years, might your work be going in a new direction?

JP—Maybe yes (laughter). Why not? Well, it’s true that I’m always making moves. Sometimes the movements are shorter or more gentle than other times.

TM—As you said before when you came to the end of the period with the cells, do you feel you may be at the end of the period with faces?

JP—Who knows? I don’t know. I will tell you at the next meeting. ■

Jaume Plensa has two shows at Richard Gray Gallery through November 11, 2017. “Secret Garden” is on view at Gray Warehouse, 2044 W. Carroll Ave. and “One Thought Fills Immensity” at the 875 N. Michigan Avenue gallery.

Tom Mullaney is the Senior Editor of the New Art Examiner with which he has been associated since 1980. He previously served as U.S. Editor from September 2015 to December 2016.

Venice, Jaume Plensa, *Mist & Together*, Photo by Jonty Wilde. Courtesy of the artist and Richard Gray Gallery.



New York's Lower East Side: A Potpourri of Experimentation and Tradition

by Michel Ségard

The most noteworthy thing about my tour of Lower East Side galleries this October was that there was no trend; there was a little bit of everything. And the quality of the work I saw varied from the exciting leading edge in electronic art to the curatorially disastrous.

The New Museum's "Trigger: Gender as a Tool and a Weapon" was for me a curatorial disaster of thematic indecision and clichéd representations. However, the show did contain five visually engaging pieces by Tschabalala Self. Using an innovative mix of assemblage and collage, she created works that "confront[ed] the visibility of the black female body" in a compelling way. It was a pity that only three of them were labeled—a recurring problem of the exhibition.



Tschabalala Self, *Lone*, 2016.

For the rest of the exhibition, we were repeatedly confronted by works whose connection with the title of the exhibition were weak and/or obscure at best. Then there were the videos of over-the-top drag queens and

limp wristed overly campy youths trying their best to be ever so gay. As a senior member of the LGBTQ community, I felt insulted by being represented through such cheap Hollywood caricatures of our community. Never mind that there was no depiction or even reference to anyone living who was over 35 years of age. Curatorially, this show was strictly amateur hour.



Collette, *Mermaid in Attic Wall fragment*, 2017.

In a more traditional mode, Steve Harvey Fine Arts showed five charming abstract watercolors. Small, only 5 1/2 x 4 inches, they had a quiet sensitivity that helped soothe the frantic urban bustle of the Lower

East Side. Similarly, Lily Ludlow's ten gouache and colored pencil drawing on buff paper at CANADA had a calming effect. The abstract forms are suggestive of living creatures but never resolved into recognizable beings, resulting in a pleasant speculation about what the form might represent.

Kai Matsumiya Gallery has a solo exhibition of work by Craig Kalpakjian. One piece was noteworthy for its novelty. *Projection, Reflection, Structure, Structure (Intermittent Control: event-driven multiplex)*, 2017, consisted of a support truss holding up a moving-head spotlight that shown on a mirror and two black monochrome inkjet prints. The spotlight created a shifting abstract pattern that was both calming and architectonically interesting.



Ted Barr, *Untitled*, 2017, Oil, Tar, Acrylics on Canvas.

At Dacia gallery, Ted Barr showed paintings with an unusual mix of materials: tar, oil, and acrylic. Romanian born and living in Israel, Barr is influenced by the spiritual and by cosmic dualities. These images, inspired in part by Hubble photos of the cosmos, are rendered entirely using a novel choice of tools—chopsticks rather than brushes.

At Mitchell Albus Gallery, Colette Lumiere showed some very timely pieces that had a bearing on some of what the New Museum was trying to accomplish with its exhibition. *Mermaid in the Attic Wall Fragment, Arrived*, and *"Homage to DuChamp's Estant Donne" II*, all recent works, have their roots in the exaggerated feminine stereotype that evolved in the Gay 90s and became popularized in vaudeville and, later, in performances by drag queens. It is a very baroque approach to femininity that is glaringly out of step with the contemporary notions of gender identity but helps to document its evolution.



Rad, *Walking Comic*, 2017.

On a completely different tack, Con Artist Gallery showed pieces based on the techniques and subject matter found in comic books. For example there was a dress made by Sue Karnataka that depicted female super heroes. One of my favorites was *Walking Comic* by RAD. The modest sized drawing depicting a cell from a comic strip had the dialogue balloon that said "Insert dialogue here," a gentle comment on the interchangeability of our culture.

There were several installation shows. Miguel Abreu Gallery had an exhibition that consisted entirely of packaged works of art scattered about the gallery that looked like they were ready to be shipped. It seemed that they were between shows when you first walked in



Susan Cianciolo, installation shot from *RUN PRAYER, RUN CAFÉ, RUN LIBRARY*.

Much more thoughtful and interesting was Susan Cianciolo's installation pieces at Bridget Donahue

gallery. *RUN PRAYER*, *RUN CAFÉ*, *RUN LIBRARY* has three spaces each constructed with thin lumber 1x2s. They are large enough to walk in and each has a function suggested in the title of the show. They are charmingly familial and comforting. Perhaps that is an underlying theme in much of the work being shown: artists are trying to produce works to counteract the frantic nature of the 21st century global and urban environment.



Jess Johnson and Simon Ward, *Worldweb Allthing* (video), 2016.

Ironically, the best works I saw celebrated the technology and information saturation of our time. At Jack Hanley Gallery, Jess Johnson showed works that were inspired by science fiction, horror movies, video games and comic books. There were large panels that were 4.7 x 13.7 feet. But most interesting were the video versions of some of these drawings. *Worldweb Allthing*, an image of a “worm” that perpetually devours itself, was

especially compelling—simultaneously beautiful and grotesque.

But bitforms gallery took top honors for technological innovation and sheer beauty. Daniel Canogar created sculptures made of flexible LED panels. Each piece was driven by circuitry that interpreted real-time environmental data gathered from the internet into changing patterns on the LED panels. The electronics that made this possible are housed on the back surface of the panels and create sensuously tactile surfaces. These works were breathtaking in their beauty and visual simplicity, belying their conceptual and technical complexity.



Daniel Canogar *Troposphere*, 2017, Flexible LED panel.

What can be said about the Lower East Side gallery scene is that it is more richly varied than the other NYC gallery districts. It's a little seedy, even by NY standards, but its breadth of content makes it more exciting. ■

Michel Segard is the Editor-in-Chief of the New Art Examiner

Intersection, Disruption, and Knowledge Production: A Review of *Beyond Objecthood*

by Evan Carter

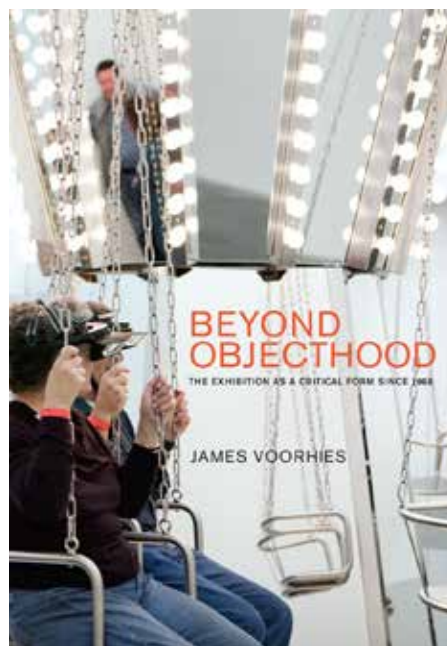
Contemporary art is an ever-expanding field with rapidly shifting and expanded boundaries. This situation presents a challenge in locating form that puts pressure on established conventions and furthers the artistic mission of changing the way we look at the world.

In his book *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (MIT Press), James Voorhies presents a compelling summation of a moment in contemporary art that has recently emerged. He cites a pool of artists, collaboratives, and institutions that, simultaneously, have produced work engaging what has, ostensibly, been disparate processes of curation, spectatorship, and discourse in the art world.

A Google search reveals that the author is a curator and art historian of modern and contemporary as well as Dean of Fine Arts and Associate Professor at California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

The introduction titled 'Warning' alludes to artwork by Carsten Höller which, by virtue of its interactivity, requires the exhibiting institution to provide a warning that excuses them from any liability of injury sustained by participating viewers. Voorhies asks the question: "How did we arrive at this moment in contemporary art where there are legal waivers, helmets, warnings, and queuing-up in a museum for experiences that can be had better and more cheaply at a county fair or suburban waterpark?"

He raises the distinction between art exhibition as critical investigation versus entertainment that generates capital. He alludes to relational aesthetics as an idea that prioritizes the 'search for new aesthetic criteria' and highlights the misuse of the term under the auspices of social practice-based art and self-interested institutions that need a gimmick to get people through the door. Voorhies examines the various major biennials that since the 1970's that have not only grown in popularity but also been fraught with critical debate. And of course Michael Fried's essay, 'Art and Objecthood,' famous in the academic discourse of contemporary Western art, plays a significant role in his proposal.



The first chapter traces the steps that led to the idea of an exhibition itself existing as an art object rather than a staging ground for them. Michael Asher's 1970 installation at the Gladys K. Montgomery Art Center at Pomona College in Claremont, California provides Voorhies with a representation of the art exhibition stripped of the modernist object and replaced with an architectural augmentation of the white cube. Asher's work is deliberately untitled and refuses the inclusion of outside objects relying on the architecture of the space to generate an aesthetic experience where light, sound, and the path of the viewer through the space comprise the artwork being experienced.

Asher's piece provides us the most straightforward example of a work that considers the act of going to a gallery to 'look at art' as a thing unto itself by being so deliberate in its omission of what is conventionally thought of as art. Asher's piece helps establish the idea of viewing as an act unto itself. Further examination over the years by various artists show how different ideas of the exhibition as form occupy this kind of a space. Early and later examples include Group Material, Robert Smithson, Liam Gillick, Apolonija Šušteršič, and Thomas Hirschhorn to name a few.

Voorhies appears to be opening a lot of doors in the early chapters of the book but ends up focusing much of his analysis on New Institutionalism. In keeping with the value of exhibition as form, this movement places greater value on the ‘integrated engagement between art, spectator, and institution.’ The most prevalent symptom of this transformation is the widespread trend in having artists curate exhibitions or curators come up with exhibition concepts for artists to work within.

This process came to prominence in the multi-venue biennials and quadrennials of recent decades. Documenta V was a milestone in this timeline, thanks to the controversial curatorial effort of Harold Szeemann who turned the formerly ‘100-Day museum’ into a ‘100-Day event’. This event would consist of inviting artists to occupy spaces throughout Kassel and produce works guided by Szeemann’s theme of *Questioning Reality—Image Worlds Today*.

A number of prominent artists, even some that had participated in Szeemann’s previous groundbreaking curatorial effort at the Kunsthalle in Bern, rejected his handling of Documenta V and withdrew from the exhibition. They did so on the grounds that the curator was taking too much authority over the content of and works included in the exhibition, making the revered event feel more like a spectacle than exhibition. This shift in institutional roles between curator, artist, site, and spectator laid the groundwork for New Institutionalism which, in the fourth chapter, Voorhies treats as a terminal investigation that will go no further.

In his third chapter, Voorhies takes a backward step out the door to get philosophical and point out some of the cognitive tools we have to translate the experience of the new aesthetics. Citing the written works of Jacques Rancière, this chapter assesses the aesthetics of a critical art while addressing the shifting role of the spectator and the capacity for art to bear responsibility for the generation of tangible change. Rancière’s toolkit deploys the upsetting of aesthetic norms in order to provoke a critical thought process that influences the ‘ways in which we make sense of the world’.

In this process of making sense of the world and acting upon impulses to change it, likely for the better, the politics of institutional structures come under scrutiny. Much like Asher’s Pomona piece exemplifies the exhibition as form, the collages of Martha Rosler provide a clear example of Rancière essentializing the disruption of aesthetic norms.

Rosler’s collages utilize images from mass media platforms ranging from photojournalism to interior design catalogs. Through the lens of Rancière’s notion of aesthetics, Voorhies argues that media shows us the world in a way that governs our behavior without changing our comprehension of reality. It is in the media’s disruption of established aesthetic norms that our perception of the world and our ability to act changes.

Besides addressing the failure of New Institutionalism’s power to sustain defying norms, Voorhies expands on the result of this process. The aesthetics of New Institutionalism became grounded in educational systems as seen in the failed efforts of Manifesta 6 to generate a ‘new public.’ The idea of knowledge production occurring in the institutional space where the roles of curator, artist, and spectator are blurred is where any engine of change has settled.

Voorhies alludes to an astutely critical question from Claire Doherty in which she asks “If the exhibitions and projects ... mimic the experience economy of the ‘real’ world, does this lead to yet more coded patterns of behavior for visitors rather than potentially surprising or liberating points of engagement?”

When it comes to surprise and liberation, Voorhies’ book upended a basket of snakes. Though he managed to wrangle a few in the end with his in-depth analysis of the rise and fall of New Institutionalism and dexterous use of Carsten Höller’s work to represent three sides of one argument, there is still much left unsaid in *Beyond Objecthood*.

Hardly any seemingly relevant performance work or more recent institutional critique comes to mind. And the role of the museum gets left behind in the dust of capitalism. In that regard, there is a conversation to be had that is lost with the complete omission of the work of Tino Sehgal who is not even mentioned and Andrea Fraser who gets a name drop or two but that’s it. When it comes to the disruption of established norms of institutional aesthetics, those are two artists that seem essential to the conversation, particularly in addressing the shifting role of the museum. Regardless, *Beyond Objecthood* is a welcome insight into a contemporary moment that will undoubtedly continue to unfold in fascinating ways. ■

Evan Carter is a contributing editor of the New Art Examiner. He earned his MFA degree in 2017 from the University of Chicago and wrote about Documenta 14 in the prior issue of the Examiner.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

“Nothing’s Funny” at Rhona Hoffman Gallery

By Tom Mullaney

Nathaniel Mary Quinn spent his youth with two strikes against him. Strike one was growing up in the violent, infamous environment of Chicago’s Robert Taylor Homes. The second occurred at age 15 when he returned home one day from school only to find that his family of four brothers and father had fled, leaving no word or forwarding address.

That is certainly an uncommon way to start an art review but it is germane to understanding the man and his art. Today, Quinn is a swiftly- rising contemporary artist. Jerry Saltz, in a 2016 article in *New York* magazine, named him one of eleven artists “poised to have breakout years.”

Saltz was clearly prescient. Quinn has since enjoyed shows and good press coverage in Los Angeles and New York. His work is now part of the collection at the Art Institute and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His second show at Rhona Hoffman Gallery in September sold out on opening day.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Bring Yo' Big Teeth Ass Here!*, 2017.

At my first entrance into the gallery, I knew nothing of his once dark life. What I viewed was work, both brilliant in conception and technically flawless. His show of nine fragmented portraits clearly demanded one’s attention.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Uncle Dope*, 2017.

Quinn’s artistic toolkit for his portraits usually consists of black charcoal, soft and oil pastel, gouache, paint stick and, on occasion, the use of acrylic gold powder to striking effect, all on vellum paper. This pastiched style is a unique vision and calling card.

The artist’s practice is to paint most of his subjects straight on with a foreshortened view of head and neck. Quinn distorts the faces with a jumble of layered bodily features in the manner of collage but which, astonishingly, are all painstakingly painted. So, one subject may sport a stranger’s eye while his nose may be someone else’s flared nostrils.

This effect of disfigurement and distortion speaks of bodily and psychic damage. Yet, Quinn, a lifelong fan of comic books, also invests some subjects with superhero qualities who can set things right or simply fly away, freeing oneself from the calamities life inflicts.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *I Wish a Muthafucka Would*, 2017.

Escape and salvation figure strongly in Quinn's life. The youngest of five brothers, his devotion to school and drawing earned him a scholarship to a boarding academy in Indiana. His abandonment at 15 led to his completing studies at Wabash College and getting a master of fine arts degree from New York University.

He has not seen his family in over two decades. He now connects with them and his early life through his art. He has said, "The loss of my family, the memories of them and maybe even fantasies of what our home life could have been are things I'm still working through."

The painting *Bring Yo' Big Teeth Ass Here!*, is a ferocious homage to his mother who died soon after he left home for boarding school. Her appearance in his paintings, as well as his adopted middle name, are acts of reconnection. Portraits like *Lit Match* and *Uncle Dope* are riffs on the humor of stinging black comedians like Richard Prior, Eddie Murphy and Dave Chappelle that he used to listen to on records with his father.

In his own way, Quinn is also delivering a brand of social commentary on the joys and travails of black urban life in America. The title of his show, "Nothing's Funny," employs comedy as a foil to tap into deeper themes of loss, damage, anger and, ultimately, explosive rage.

Lit Match riffs off a Prior skit but the explosion could also be symbolic of black rage. I cannot look at *Uncle Dope* without seeing a sad figure, weighed down

by life and unfulfilled dreams. And *I Wish a Muthafucka Would* captures a face twisted by hate.

Many reviewers say his art depicts not just black but universal themes of humanity. Quinn speaks of the inclusiveness of his art as well. Yet, this show seems not just a family scrapbook but also an echo of the Black Lives Matter movement. And the default retort that All Lives Matter seems, to me, a false equivalence.

Now is an auspicious moment for many contemporary black artists. Names such as Theaster Gates, Nick Cave, Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, Jennifer Packer plus those enjoying a renaissance, McArthur Binion and Gerald Williams, are all receiving major museum shows and media attention. Photographer Dawoud Bey was recently named a MacArthur Fellow.

Kavi Gupta, Binion's dealer, has sold works to the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has one in its collection.

Quinn is among that deserving group. His dramatic tale reflects a committed devotion to craft, a humanistic outlook and a transfigured life. ■

Tom Mullaney is Senior Editor of the New Art Examiner

Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Lit Match*, 2017.



“Cleromancy”

Monique Meloche Gallery

by Nathan Worcester

Nate Young’s “Cleromancy,” the new show at the Monique Meloche Gallery, is a resurrection tale. From materials to intention (plausibly ascribed but ultimately undividable), the exhibition registers as a spirited meditation on the buried and unearthed.

Young uses horse bone and graphite (representing horse bone), as well as calfskin and dirt. Three objects (*Exhumed*, *Grave Goods*, and *Internment*) house some of those bones behind plexiglass within an LED-lit walnut enclosure.



Nate Young, *Untitled*, 2017, Walnut, horse bone, graphite on paper, dirt, plinth: 50 x 9 1/2 x 9 1/2 in., drawing: 30 x 12 1/2 in.

The bones, we are informed, belonged to the horse that Young’s black great-grandfather rode North during the Great Migration after his escape from jail. There was, in the artist’s telling, a literal disinternment.

The three objects, looking almost like your grand-ma’s old speaker system from afar, at close range form a dimmer, grimmer, and necessarily unscientific variation on the sort of now-controversial anthropological

exhibits displayed at the American Museum of Natural History and similar institutions.

Eye-straining text describes the buried history of African-American horseracing in the American South, which Young links to his ancestor’s story. In the old myth of American migration, the rugged individualist seeking freedom on his horse was supposed to look like John Wayne, or whoever John Wayne happened to be chasing. The new myth, though equally stylized in this remembering, is believable when represented as an organic outgrowth of America’s actual history. Even



Nate Young, *Grave Goods*, 2017, Gold leaf, walnut, plexiglass, horse bone, spray paint, LED, 28 1/2 x 16 x 6 in.

when he relies upon representational artistic techniques, Young resists the rigid limits of physical and social science. Like a concave mirror, his work enlarges and distorts to display certain facets of lived experience more clearly.

The actual process of cleromancy involves the casting of lots. Instead of being chalked up to blind chance, the results are attributed to God or some other

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Gregory Scott: “Van Gogh’s Bedroom”

By Amanda Lancour

It’s not common, when touring a gallery exhibit, that one picture steals the whole show. Yet that is exactly what happened at the Catherine Edelman Gallery recently when I gazed at artist Gregory Scott’s video that explores the literal recreation of a master’s work, Vincent van Gogh’s *Bedroom* (1889).

Scott turns an icon of 19th Century art history into a live, addictively alluring creation, injecting elements of surprise and levity. He manages to concoct a carefully crafted cocktail of oil painting (oil on panel), photography (pigment print) and a close to nine-minute video into a mesmerizing tour-de-force.



Gregory Scott, *Van Gogh's Bedroom*, 2017, Multimedia.

As a self-portrait imposed onto a master’s work, Scott presents himself as Van Gogh. He physically builds and enters the artist’s bedroom universe. We see Scott painting the floor, installing the walls and filling the room with furnishings—chair, window, nightstand with wash basin and pitcher and the bed.

He expertly mimics the original work’s tranquility, creating an intimate relationship between himself, Van Gogh and the viewer. Entering his recreation, Scott sits in the simple wooden chair, looking past a famous vase of sunflowers out the window. Scott then appears at the window, dressed as the Mona Lisa, while a splendid *Starry Night* appears behind her. Next, he takes mail out of the desk drawer and hands it to the mailman whom we can identify as Postmaster Roulin.

Scott ribs modern culture by taking a selfie with a selfie stick as we see Van Gogh’s famous self-portrait on the background wall. He then places a hat on his head and another self-portrait appears in a frame on the wall. His work complete, the artist sits on the bed enjoying the fruit of his labor.

How does Scott do it?

Piece by piece, brush stroke by brush stroke, I found Scott’s meticulous dissection and rebuilding of art history a wet, tangible seduction. All of the wiring and other physical components are attached to the inside of the frame, making his works self-contained. In this way, Scott gives viewers a glimpse of art history in what is essentially a television frame.

One can enjoy the art without looking for a hidden meaning or motive behind what the person is viewing capturing art history’s timelessness while, at the same time, ribbing modern technology. Besides Van Gogh, Scott has created a suite of video recreations that explore the artistic process and creative thought, moving portraits of such artists as Mark Rothko, James Terrell, Frank Stella and Cy Twombly. The series is meant to combine high and low art, uniting art outsiders and connoisseurs. By successfully merging the past with the present, Scott treats each at face value.

These short digital film animations take viewers on a witty journey through various art genres while fully exposing the ways in which the “secret sauce” is created. One can easily stay watching *The Bedroom*, transfixed in place, and let it loop again and again. ■

Amanda Lancour is a commercial and advertising photographer with a background in art history and gallery curation during her formative years. She has recently relocated back to Chicago from New York City

“Don’t Forget to Move Your Feet”

Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago

by Rebecca Memoli

An interesting range of attendees, both young and old, came out to the opening of photographer Paul D’Amato’s exhibition to support an artist whose work touches people from a diverse range of communities.

“Don’t Forget to Move Your Feet” is sound advice that encourages us to stay light and allow things to happen. The subjects of D’Amato’s work traverse demographic and socioeconomic barriers in a skillful and sensitive manner.

The more than 40 photographs in the show are curated together rather than grouped by project, creating an opportunity to make new connections between them. Until you read the dates, early works are virtually indistinguishable from more recent ones. *Girl Reaching Rose* (1985) hangs directly next to *Red Sunday* (2005). In *Girl Reaching Rose*, a young girl hangs playfully from a green bannister and reaches towards a red rose.



Paul D’Amato, *Red Sunday*, 2005.

The youngster’s reach directs the viewer to the next photograph of four women all adorned in red suits with red hats standing together. Here too are roses, but they are pinned to the lapel of each woman. Green and red, young and old, both images complement each other and connect through the presence of flowers. Twenty years had passed between both photograph’s creation but both have an ageless quality to them.

Some of the photographs are taken from D’Amato’s book, *Barrio* that focuses on the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods in Chicago, the result of a 15-year photo project. The project began with D’Amato getting to know a gang called La Raza, but evolved into something much bigger and, to him, more interesting.

Eschewing the sensational, D’Amato builds an honest view of this community by focusing on the subtlety of individuals and families. For instance, in the photo *Madonna Esme*, the toughness and beauty of the two women in black with matching eyeliner is apparent even though they look away, casually waiting for something.

The photographs included in the show are not necessarily the famous images from this series. Instead the exhibition has purposefully included lesser-known works.

D’Amato’s photographs from the 90’s made in Portland, Maine, have a strikingly different feel. They are grittier and, in the show’s edit, appear to focus on younger subjects. Most are shot using a bright flash. The work from this time period most prominently displayed is the Rave series.

Rave, an installation of 14 mounted C-Prints, is large and, aside from those on the gallery’s back wall, they are the only photographs not reprinted in the last year. The promotional image for the exhibition, called *Twiggy*, comes from this series.

When I think of D’Amato’s work, I think of the careful attention he pays to natural light. The use of hard flash is such a departure for D’Amato that the focus on these particular photographs is a bit surprising.

The Rave series ties into the title and its emphasis on being loose and present in the moment, but it seems strange to put so much emphasis on a project that is not indicative of D’Amato’s style. The Rave photographs also have a different feeling of engagement with the subjects than his other work.

The dancers are caught in the moment, frozen by flash, not engaged with the photographer but the music. This is a contrast to other portraits of D’Amato’s where the natural light acts to warm the subject visually and

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“Nandi”

Parker Bright, Elijah Burgher, James Kerley, Rohan Khanna, Michael Madrigali, Anwar Mahdi, Ignacio María Manrique, Kaveri Raina, Pfeiffer + Walz, Caleb Yono.
The Condo Association

by Larry Kamphausen

The name, The Condo Association, leads one to think of a structure. It isn't until one enters the non-descript building on North Avenue that one discovers a gallery in a condo unit. Not knowing what to expect from the show, “Nandi,” was equally opaque, but I had expected a visual interaction with some religious theme involving the erotic.

The theme of the exhibit, curated by Dominique Knowles, was two contrasting understandings of the Divine: the Hindu Kamadhenu or sacred cow whose blood is not to be shed and the Christian Eucharist in which the divine “Lamb of God” is consumed as bread and wine. The work of the ten artists was compelling, but it was a stretch to find either the Hindu or the Christian religious themes visually referenced in the works.

Apart from the theme, the work of the exhibiting artists drew me in with the differing media and artistic expression of the erotic in the two poles of the exhibit's theme. Most of the pieces in the exhibit, from the fine detail of the collaborative drawings of Pfeiffer + Walz to Rohan Khanna's simple dark blue and black cave, *Vertigo Canyon II*, presented erotic encounter as a setting apart and consuming desire.

The total effect of “Nandi” wasn't so much an interaction with the religious concepts but the religious concepts serving as a launching pad into the ways erotic desire plays between putting the romantic other upon a pedestal and seeking to bring the romantic other into oneself.

Putting Eros up on a pedestal is explicitly shown in Ignacio Maria Manrique's simple water color, *Felix and the Hermaphrodite in Paris*. Manrique's work depicts one featureless figure on a pedestal and a second shadowy figure in a pose of rapt attention. Eros as a consuming desire was hinted at in James Kerley's ceramic pieces, *Kiss*, each depicting two men in a kiss. In both pieces, the point of contact between the faces is blurred such that the kiss also gives the uneasy sense that the faces may be eating each other.

Caleb Yono's two untitled works dealt with the erotic themes less overtly than Kerley. Both paintings have central figures surrounded by strokes of blues and greens, giving the impression of the canopy of a forest with sky revealed between leaves. In one piece, we see a portion of the two figures, one a decapitated torso

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Anwar Mahdi, *Venus Escapes from the Underworld*.



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spiritual force. Young develops this relationship between apparent randomness and scrupulous design in *Casting 2* and the *Divining* series. Realistically rendered horse bones are arranged in what appear to be arbitrary positions near or partly within dark gray clouds. Whether or not the configuration is actually random, the acts of gathering, drawing, and framing them were not. Here again, a wish for rebirth is expressed using the sacralized remnants of the past.

An untitled piece plays out the formation of myth within the voids left by death and forgetting. A yellowed radius and/or ulna, the equine equivalent of a human arm bone, rises from a square of dirt in the center of a walnut plinth. This is juxtaposed with another drawing of a bone, again arranged in a seemingly random position behind a spreading gray cloud. Depending on your mood, the horse bone and drawing can be a zombie's forelimb magicked from the grave or a new myth in bloom.

In movies, resurrections seldom go off without a hitch. The dead like to stay dead, even though the living want them back. This pattern holds true for Young. In short snippets of cursive text connected by a network of vortical lines, the artist describes how new

information he learned about his ancestor changed his original memory and the story that he had constructed.

The horse that Young's great-grandfather rode in on was apparently stolen. Though nothing can be proven, there are hints of an abandoned family. Certain key artifacts, though perhaps still extant, can only be furnished from the artist's own memory or imagination. Another death entombs some answers forever.

We will always have more questions about our ancestors than can be answered. After all, there will always be enough past to swallow up you and any bones you uncover. That does not mean that the search lacks purpose. Unanswered prayers may still offer peace of mind because ritual can be gratifying in and of itself. Ancestor worship will always exist in some half-buried form because we can always choose to give thanks for (or curse) our mere existence.

Through Young's efforts, the materials and imagined processes cohere and yield something more than the sum of their parts. As its name suggests, "Clero-mancy" is a well-cast production. ■

Nathan Worcester is a writer living in Chicago. He has a B.A. from the University of Chicago where he too once rode a horse, though nothing mythic came of it.

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there is a clear engagement reflecting a sense of trust between photographer and subject.



Paul D'Amato, *Twiggy* from the *Rave* series (date unknown).

On the back wall there is a grid of 11x14 C-Prints for sale as a fundraiser for BBF Family Services in North Lawndale. The exciting part of this charitable gesture is having the opportunity to own a C-Print handmade by the artist. One can see the unfinished quality of the work print, which feels very special and gives the viewer some insight into the artist's work process.

The exhibition coincides with the release of D'Amato's newest book, *Here/Still/Now*. The book's photographs were all made on Chicago's West Side. The volume is broken into three sections, each prefaced by a short essay. Each essay addresses not just the impact of D'Amato's work, but also, in a poignant way, all that is problematic with a white photographer photographing in a black community. This honesty strikes me as sincere and serves to show D'Amato as an artist sensitive to all the complexities he is faced with in his art.

The experience of viewing the photographs is much different in book format. Holding a book allows the viewer to engage with the images in a more intimate way than with the larger framed photographs on the wall. ■

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embraced by the second figure of which we see only the head, shoulders and arms embracing the decapitated figure, giving expression to a merging. Yet the absent head also leaves a feeling of incompleteness and distance.

The second work, two canine/human figures are distinct but joined at certain points. We get a sense of a frozen moment in which their union is their separation. Yono's works depict Eros in movement from unitive consumption to adoration that keeps them distinct.

The most striking and most reflective of some western symbolic religious depictions was Anwar Mahdi's *Venus Escapes from the Underworld* with its vivid colors and chaotic and grotesque depiction of the land of the dead. Mahdi's piece was a feast for the eyes that reminded this reviewer of Dante and Hieronymus Bosch.

I returned to this piece many times simply captured by its vibrant colors and depiction of the grotesque. This piece didn't fit with the rest except that it captured one's gaze and its draw was in it being set apart, both in theme and placement in the stairwell to the condo's second floor.

"Nandi" didn't visually and conceptually explore the religious tropes of its theme, rather those tropes served as an organizing principle for works that largely explored erotic desire as a movement between Eros as distanced otherness and consumption of the romantic other. Once I set aside the expectation of a deeper visual engagement with the Hindu and Christian religious concepts and mythology, the exhibit's exploration of the erotic hung together.

One should approach The Condo Association without expectation. If "Nandi" is any indication of the future, exhibitions at The Condo Association may not be what one expects, but, no matter the proposed theme, one will not be disappointed. ■

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