

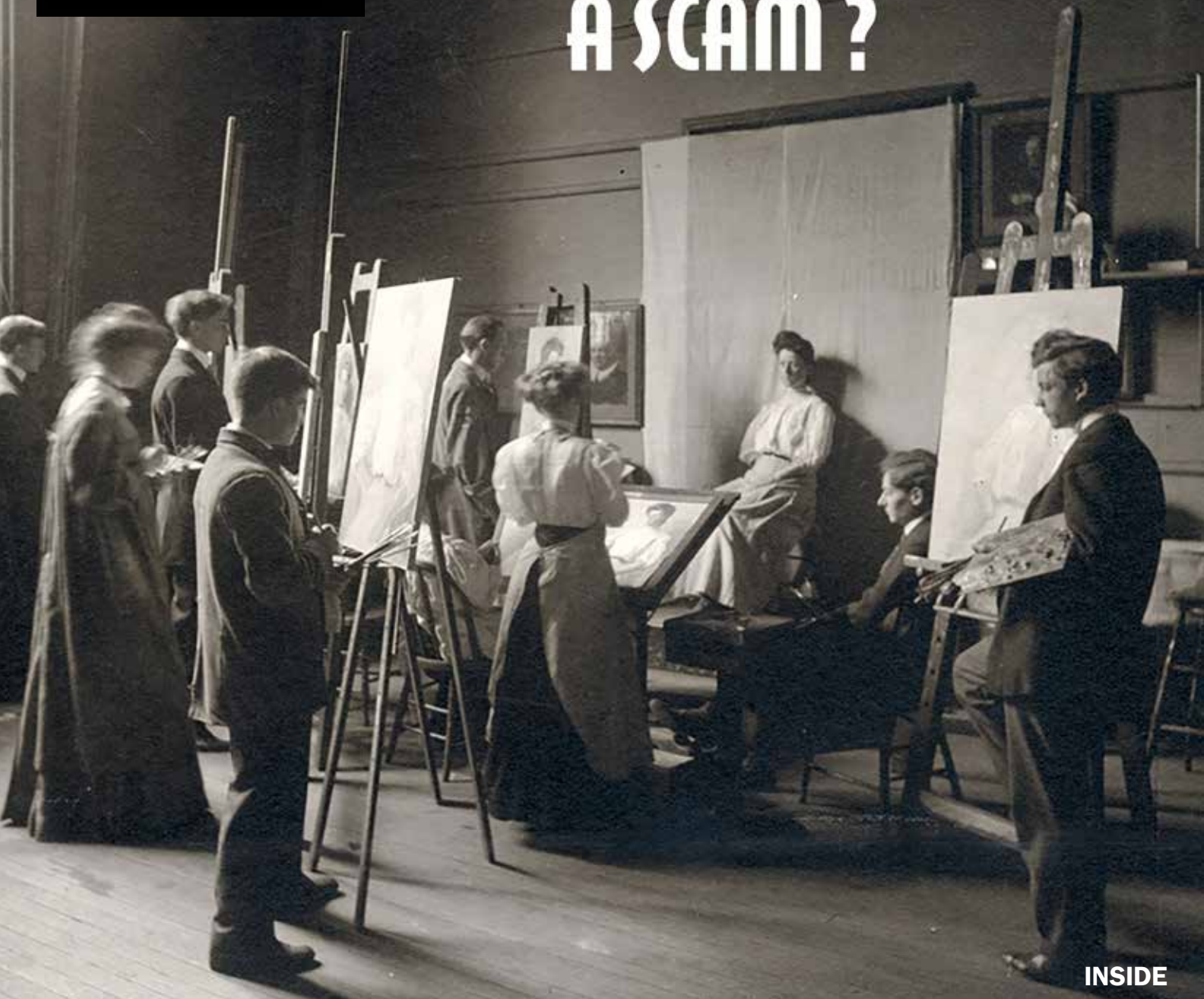
**NEW
ART**
examiner™

Established 1973

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Volume 32 No. 3 January/February 2018

IS ART SCHOOL A SCAM?



INSIDE

\$8 U.S.
\$10 Canada

RICHARD SIEGESMUND delivers a harsh critique of current students' art education

JEN DELOS REYES offers ideas about a radical school of art and art history for the 21st century

EVAN CARTER shares his experiences in art school and guides students in choosing the right school

DIANE THODOS describes the 1980s takeover of art schools by neoliberal economic values

MICHEL SÉGARD reviews a rare exhibition of French photographer Hervé Guibert's imagery

CONTENTS

COVER IMAGE: .A photo of a Yale School of Fine Arts studio painting class taken circa 1900–1920.

IS ART SCHOOL A SCAM?

4 Introduction



5 The Flawed Academic Training of Artists

Art and Design Professor, RICHARD SIEGESMUND, delivers a harsh critique of current students' art education amid today's triumphant cultural marketplace.

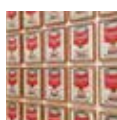
8 Re-Thinking Art Education (Revisited), Again

Artist and art administrator, JEN DELOS REYES, offers new thoughts on the idea and potential of a radical school of art and art history for the 21st century.



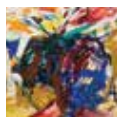
12 Art School Today: Fast and Loose

University of Chicago 2017 MFA graduate, EVAN CARTER, speaks of his experiences in art school and guides future students about choosing the right art school.



15 How Neoliberal Economics Impacted Art Education

DIANE THODOS, a 1989 MFA graduate of New York's School of Visual Arts, describes the 1980s takeover of art schools by neoliberal economic values.



19 Artist Biography with a Bias

Elaine de Kooning was a well-regarded artist and mentor to fellow artists. PHILLIP BARCIO thinks she deserved a better biography than one full of catty comments.

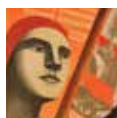
21 Works That Caught Our Eye

Examiner critics choose noteworthy artworks from shows that they visited.

Contents continued on next page.

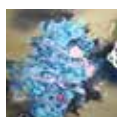
Contents Continued

GALLERY REVIEWS



22 **Visions and Voices: Two Russian Revolution Shows**

On the centenary of an epic world event, ANIKO BERMAN visits exhibits at the Art Institute and the Smart Museum of Art.



24 **Jackie Tileston: “Handbook of Unknowing”**

BRUCE THORN reviews the show at Zg Gallery of an accomplished abstract visionary painter.



26 **“Infinite Games 50/50”**

NATHAN WORCESTER reviews a conceptual art show in an unusual gallery space, curated by John Preus, that features 50 artists creating improvised artworks from the remains of 50 shuttered Chicago public schools.



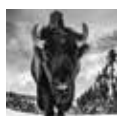
28 **“Hervé Guibert: How could it be otherwise?”**

MICHEL SÉGARD offers an appreciation of a French photographer, shown at Iceberg Project, who deserves to be better-known in the United States.



31 **From Degas to Picasso: Creating Modernism in France**

TOM MULLANEY reviews a fascinating 200-year survey of drawings and paintings by French artists at the Milwaukee Art Museum.



33 **David Yarrow: “Wild Encounters”**

NICHOLAS OGILVIE finds the stunning, life-size photos of endangered animals in the wild at the Hilton/Asmus Gallery accomplished and moving.



34 **Bill Walker: “Urban Griot”**

REBECCA MEMOLI tours the Hyde Park Art Center’s exhibit on Bill Walker, creator of the Wall of Respect on the city’s southside as well as other scenes in the African-American community.



36 **Neil Goodman: “Twists and Turns”**

BRUCE THORN finds delight in the parallel world of sculptor, Neil Goodman, on view at the Carl Hammer Gallery.

New Art Examiner

The New Art Examiner is published by the New Art Association. The name "New Art Examiner" is a registered trademarks of the New Art Association. Copyright 2017 by New Art Association; all rights reserved. Authors retain the copyright to their essays.

Editor in Chief—Michel Ségard

Senior Editor—Tom Mullaney

Copy Editor—Anne Ségard

Design and Layout—Michel Ségard

Contributing Editors:

Evan Carter

Bruce Thorn

Web Site:

www.newartexaminer.org

Cover Design:

Michel Ségard

The New Art Examiner is indexed in:
Art Bibliographies Modern, Art Full Text &
Art Index Retrospective and Zetoc

Office:

5542 N. Paulina St., Chicago, IL 60640, USA.

Inquiries:

info@newartexaminer.org

All Letters to the editor are printed. Send to:

letters@newartexaminer.org

WANTED: WRITERS

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:

Michel Ségard

Editor-in-Chief

New Art Examiner

at

nae.segard@comcast.net

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.

IS ART SCHOOL A SCAM?

Art School and its value is a hotly debated topic. The criticisms being leveled against it include that it is too expensive, its curricula are too outmoded and that it is failing to produce an acceptable number of graduates who succeed in the art world. How can it justify a success rate below five percent? We think Art School can be accused of being a scam.

One problem is that too many art schools exist that have little business offering the Bachelor's or Master's fine arts degree. U.S. News and World Report ranks 200 "Best Graduate Fine Arts Programs" in the U.S. Such a figure is laughable. Anyone attending an art school below the Top 50 is not making a sound educational investment in their future.

To explore the topic in this issue, the Examiner features essays by two art teaching faculty, one at Northern Illinois University and the other at the University of Illinois, along with personal reflections by two MFA graduates. We share with you below a series of axioms penned by Robert Storr, noted art critic and former dean of Yale University's School of Art. We hope you find this editorial package informative and challenging.

Tom Mullaney

Robert Storr's "Rules for a New Academy"

Students go to art schools to get what they lack.

Students don't always know what they lack.

The purpose of art schools is to prepare students with the things they know they lack and a way of finding the things they don't know they lack.

Schools that do not recognize what students lack should rethink what they are doing.

Schools that do not rethink what they are doing are enemies of art and anti-art. They should close.

Any student who goes to art school is an academic artist.

Non academic artists are generally fairly poor or fairly rich; academic artists tend to make do or make out.

Non academic artists are either exceptionally intelligent or exceptionally neurotic, and sometimes both; academic artists for the most part are smart, sane and hard working.

SOURCE: "Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century," MIT Press, 2009

The Flawed Academic Training of Artists

by Richard Siegesmund

Over the last 100 years, the education of artists has been driven by some questionable assumptions about the nature of art, the function of artists in society, and the assignment of cultural value.

At the beginning of the 20th century, some artists felt that art was a revolutionary social endeavor. The Russian Constructivists were an example. However, other artists, like Picasso and Matisse, possessed little if any revolutionary ambition. They sought to excel in a neo-liberal marketplace that successfully catered to wealthy individuals who not only purchased work through private galleries but also served on the governing boards of non-profit cultural institutions.

Artistic success was defined not only by just selling your work at exorbitant prices but in also securing the promotion of your work through an interrelated cultural network of private collectors, museum curators, critics and academics. In this contested history, revolutionaries lost; economic artistic entrepreneurs won.

Today the neo-liberal cultural marketplace strides triumphantly. Art and design professors are expected to participate in this system, and students are taught to aspire to follow their professors' lead and join as well. The highest international levels of achievement (elite private galleries, invitation only extravaganzas and fawning reviews) receive the most acclaim as success in this system is uncritically accepted as evidence of excellence. To have one's work featured in museum exhibitions and accessioned into permanent collections is the goal to which professional art preparation seemingly aspires. No questions asked. Anyone with the temerity to pose questions is silenced through ridicule.

Since its founding, The New Art Examiner has questioned these assumptions. Examiner writers have refused to accept that the system of gallery shows, museum exhibitions, high profile government aid and private foundation funding was a cultural meritocracy.



Students install research projects for exhibition. Photo by Tom Murphy

Instead, it was a tawdry carnival. Nevertheless, the model continues to endure.

With so little critical examination of context, the training of artists is fundamentally a skills orientation task requiring mastery of different materials. Curriculum is therefore a demand for sequencing through a variety of skills training. A broad curriculum might include a variety of two and three-dimensional materials that might range from drawing and video to fibers and metal casting.

A more focused curriculum might allow a student to concentrate in a specific area like printmaking and become skillful in intaglio, lithography, silkscreen, and letterpress. This is further reinforced by a romantic notion that artists learn by doing in direct contact to materials. Curriculum is largely organized around extending the students' time in the studio with materials. Words are superfluous. Hands on; minds off.

The model is now under considerable stress coming from a number of issues. First among these are unconscionable costs that an undergraduate must incur for a degree in art. Base tuition at some private art schools for a four-year undergraduate program is now approaching a quarter-of-a-million dollars. Not surprisingly, students are becoming more cost conscious and demanding that instruction have some kind of connection to learning. The old justification of "this is the way teaching has always been done" doesn't cut



Students at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, define their research project. Photo by Tom Murphy.

it anymore. Students want to see a clearer connection for the dollars they have to pay.

Furthermore, if one wants to become a potter, there are plenty of free tutorials on YouTube that will explain this to you. Anything you want to know you can learn online. This has resulted in the “flipped classroom” where the skills training is delivered online in non-school hours and class time is devoted to answering questions related to the online experience.

This is complemented by a robust network of community colleges that will happily teach you just what you want to know, and not drag you through a bunch of additional courses (and cost) like art history, because “it’s good for you” (i.e. we need your tuition dollars to support the faculty salaries in our antiquated curriculum). After all, there are no national certifying boards that anyone has to pass to become a painter or an animator.

Along with the reprehensible costs incurred with an art degree comes the brutal acknowledgement that perhaps 5%—the most generous estimate—will actually secure a place in the neo-liberal marketplace. The other 95% are the regrettable, but necessary, collateral damage that occurs in the pursuit of the needle in the haystack.

To foist staggering levels of debt on students who will later be discarded as collateral damage is morally repugnant. In short, the entire edifice of professional artist development is at best a myth. More likely, it’s a scam, and a new generation of students has figured it out, thus the precipitous drop in four-year college enrollments across the United States. The professional

academic field of training artists, as it has existed since the mid-20th Century, is in crisis.

How might this problem be resolved?

To begin with, the teaching of artists needs to be more than business training in making cool stuff for the marketplace. Art schools do not have to stop students from making cool stuff; for those students who want this training it is perfectly appropriate. Of course, schools should be upfront with these students and inform them that they have a less than 5% chance of making any kind of viable living after graduation.

Therefore, preparation for participation in the neo-liberal marketplace cannot be the foundational reason for teaching art. To pretend otherwise would be to suggest that tuition dollars guarantee the purchase of a winning lottery ticket. Regrettably, this is how many schools that offer BFAs in art currently market themselves. It’s fraud. We can do better.

Instead of the current reliance on what galleries are showing your work, what collectors purchased your work, how many museum shows you participated in and how many academics wrote about your work, I would substitute an inquiry-based model of art education.

This would begin by asking the artist these questions: What is your research question? Why do you believe this will make a difference in the world? How do you intend to pursue this mode of inquiry? What will be the empirical outcomes? And what criteria do you suggest for judging the success of your work?

Having asked these questions, a community of artists and scholars can make an informed judgment on the success of the student’s efforts and provide

insightful interventions on how to improve. These suggestions would undoubtedly include an investigation of other artists or cultures through time who have taken up similar issues to those the student is interested in.

Such an alternative model of artistic education currently exists. I will offer three here. First, art education is a form of thinking that is broadly applicable in life. This is not a new idea. Allan Kaprow, the inventor of Happenings, proposed this curricular shift for art schools in the 1960s.

In his view, art education (thought broadly to include all art instruction beginning in primary school and continuing to graduate education) was a system of inquiry distinctively different from systems of inquiry taught in the sciences. Learning different systems of inquiry helped students prepare for the challenges of life. In Kaprow's view, art education had nothing to do with making or appreciating art. It was about a series of tools to unpack the phenomena of living. Nobody listened to Kaprow then, perhaps it's time to listen now.

The structure for this change exists in higher education. Many programs already allow students to choose between the BA in Art and the BFA degree. However, right now, the BA is often regarded as a default degree for students who don't have the skills to complete the BFA. Radical rethinking of the BA is necessary to make it an authentically interdisciplinary program with its own research component. It would also require a diminishing of the importance of the BFA degree. The BA would become the backbone of artistic education.

Second, the art education curriculum as currently practiced at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) in Dublin provides an example of inquiry-based practice. Ireland is a fertile ground for this shift in art education as the arts are culturally accepted as providing essential social critique. It is well

Learning block printing. Photo by Tom Murphy,



understood that the very concept of the Republic of Ireland was a poetic fabrication before it was realized as a political reality. Thus, there is popular support of the arts for provoking the social imagination.

Third, with the change to authentic interdisciplinary programs, new movements, like socially-engaged art, would have more structure and intellectual rigor. In a recent issue of *Field: The Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, art historian (and former *New Art Examiner* contributing editor) Grant Kester bemoaned the lack of skill in structured inquiry by artists who participate in socially engaged practice (as well as the lack of fundamental inquiry skills in the art critics who write about this work).

Kester finds an over-reliance on French continental philosophy highly problematic when exploring the social consequences of artistic interventions. In short, this form of artistic activity requires more rigorous training in the social sciences. The new inquiry-based foundations curriculum at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago is a step in the right direction.

Alternatives to the current dominant neo-liberal focus must be developed as the current path for training artists at the college and university level is untenable. It is an edifice that no longer has the financial foundations to support itself; a house of cards ready to collapse.

There are only three choices ahead: continue as is and the programs will face financial extinction as students pursue free and low-cost training for the skill sets they feel they need. Second, allow outside boards of directors or university councils to make ill-informed cuts in an attempt to preserve artistic education. These bodies are likely to make crass decisions: maintaining the marching band as it provides halftime entertainment during the football game. Third, and regrettably least likely, artist educators from within the field need to take responsibility for shaping their own future and crafting curriculums that face the challenges of the 21st century. The clock is ticking and time is running out. ■

Richard Siegesmund is Professor of Art and Design and Education at Northern Illinois University. He recently completed a Fulbright residency in the Faculty of Sociology at the Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven, Belgium. The second edition of his book, *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* has just been released from Routledge.

Re-Thinking Art Education (Revisited), Again

Jen Delos Reyes

A lot of things require revisiting. Art education is one of them. In 2014 I was invited to give a talk on the theme of Education as part of a national series of breakfast lectures for creative communities called Creative Mornings. My talk was titled “This is About Options: Education, Art School, and Other Ways.”

The following year I was invited by Pamela Fraser and Roger Rothman to contribute to the book they were editing for Bloomsbury, *Beyond Critique: Contemporary Art in Theory, Practice, and Instruction*. What I did for my contribution was to revisit the lecture I wrote in 2014 for Creative Mornings and include my track changes comments on my updated thinking on art education.

These sidebars trace my coming back around to the promise of public institutions, and once again falling in love with the idea and potential of a radical school of art and art history for the 21st century. What follows is a truncated excerpt from my chapter from *Beyond Critique*, updated with additional new sidebar notations reflecting my current thinking on art education in 2017.

This is About Options: Education, Art School, and Other Ways

I know that for myself a large part of my education came from participating in the local Winnipeg music scene of the mid-90’s—infused with the energy of Riot grrrl and DIY. How I work today is rooted in what I learned during these formative years as a show organizer, listener, creator of zines, and band member. I place a high value on what many might dismiss as incidental education.

I have had many other teachers in my life, some of which have come in the form of challenging experiences, or people. These are usually the lessons we never ask for but, if we are open to learning from them, can be immensely powerful for personal growth.

For this talk today I am going to tackle the following questions:

How does teaching change when it is done with compassion?

What should an arts education look like today?

Can education change the role of artists and designers in society?

How does one navigate and resist the often emotionally toxic world of academia?

With the rising cost of post-secondary education in this country what can we do differently?

I think it is worth starting at the beginning.

Comment: One of the things I asked myself while writing this talk was would any art school want to hire me after I give this lecture?

I sent a copy of the transcript of this talk to the Director of the School of Art and Art History at UIC, and then less than a year later I am now working directly with her with the goal to create the most impactful, relevant School of Art & Art History of the 21st Century.

Comment: This question has taken on a new significance for me as my new role as the associate director of a school of art and art history and working for the first time in the administration of an entire school.

Comment: The answer is obviously yes, but now I feel like it is more important to switch our attention to how art education can help impact larger social change not just for those identified as artists and designers. I think this is where museum education departments in their work with multiple publics have real power and potential.

Comment: It is now 2017 and I am still asking myself this question.

¹ Fraser, Pamela, Rothman, Roger, eds. *Beyond Critique: Contemporary Art In Theory, Practice, and Instruction*. Bloomsbury Academic, NY.

What is the impetus behind education? Where did it come from? What is education for?

The standardized education system that we know today comes from a historical, societal base of industrialization and militarization. Since its formalization, society also turns to the school system to provide its citizens with critical lessons in socialization. As education critic Edgar Friedenberg wrote,

What is taught isn't as important as learning how you have to act in society, how other people will treat you, how they will respond to you, what the limits of respect that will be accorded really are.²

Radical approaches to education fundamentally believe that learning can teach us so much more. These schools of thought believe education can liberate, empower, and assist in the creation of a more just world. I personally believe that formal education must serve in the creation of thoughtful, caring, and compassionate members of society.

Is art school a state of temporary delusion? In Dan Clowes' 1991 *Art School Confidential*, he illustrates the rarity of the art school instructor who is willing to "level with students about their bleak prospects," stating that, "only one student out of one hundred will find work in her/his chosen field. The rest of you are essentially wasting your time learning a useless hobby." The sad reality is, as Clowes puts forward, that many students who are in the system believe they will be the exception. That art school really will work for them. The New York based collective of artists, designers, makers, technologists, curators, architects, educators, and analysts BFAMFAPhD's research findings show of all of the people in the United States who identify as making their living working as an artist, only 15.8% of them are fine arts degree holders.

Another fundamental problem is outdated curriculum. I often got flack from the art school professors I would challenge during my BFA about assignments and approaches I thought were irrelevant. I did not want to draw nudes and still-lives. I didn't want to make a color wheel. When I pushed back for more applicable work I could be doing in my art education I was once aggressively yelled at by a male professor, "If you don't want to do what I tell you why are you even in art school?" Never thinking to ask himself—why was he teaching this way in an art school?

My belief is best summarized by Canadian Artist Ken Lum:

What students need to be taught is that art is about making everything in the world relevant.³

My next issue is the lack of critical care. When I say lack of critical care I am talking about two separate, but equally problematic deficits. First is a social deficit. The lack of a real emphasis on community building, as well as what I feel is an epidemic of teachers who lack a real investment and care in their students and the creation of a learning community. Second is a

Comment: What would be the measures of assessment for this? I am currently in the process of doing program assessments for a university and am thinking about how different things would look if this was one of the outcomes we were expected to measure.

Comment: One of my first tasks at UIC was to take on thinking about what self care could look like in a 21st century art school & art history and find ways to foster and model the daily implementation of self-care into the lives of artists/students. My name for this initiative is Critical Care—this endeavor will emphasize notions of care and wellness centered on collective courage, emotional fierceness, and embodiment and joy. Holding the space in our creative practices to maintain our personal well-being, give into public exuberance, maintain relationships, face our emotions head on, and build community is what makes it possible for us to continue to do the important work of artists in the 21st century.

Comment: Two years later this initiative is still underway and works to address student needs around mental health and wellness, as well as build community in the school.

² Edgar Friedenberg, "What the schools do," 1969.

³ *Art School: (Propositions for the 21st Century)* edited by Steven Henry Madoff.

widespread lack of care in whether or not the curriculum has real value and application outside of an art school or art world context.

Currently most of the art programs that focus on socially engaged art are Masters of Fine Arts programs. I believe that an artist's relationship to and placement in society should not be an area of specialization, or afterthought, but instead a core component of the education of all artists.⁴ But can education actually change the role of artists and designers in society? Yes, but that means changing how and what we teach. I believe that this change needs to happen first at the foundations level. This Fall, Carnegie Mellon University will be the first art school to make this kind of approach to art making a foundations level **requirement**. Another new and incredibly promising and relevant undergraduate program is the newly formed Art and Social Justice Cluster at the University Illinois Chicago.

You don't need the creation of an entire program to foster these ideas in how you teach art and design. How I teach is social. It is from a de-centered position of power. It is about respecting and valuing all of the contributions of the group equally. It is about finding ways to make the work we are doing as learners and makers socially relevant. And it is about having the contributions of students seen as valuable to multiple contexts.

A friend and fellow artist and educator Nils Norman introduced me to the book *Streetwork: The Exploding School* by Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson. It had a major influence on how he teaches and it did the same for me. I am going to share how that was put into practice for me from 2008-2013 when I was co-directing an MFA program in art and social practice. I believe in learning in the world, and that environment has an impact and that student interests can drive the direction of the class. I know that being a listener is one of the most important contributions to the world. There needs to be a focus on teaching active listening. Understanding that we are bodies, and not just brains, is also important. Yoga, basketball, and walks were staples in the program. But maybe most important, and even less emphasized is love.

To quote American educator and founder of the Highlander Folk School, Myles Horton:

I think if I had to put a finger on what I consider a good education, *a good radical education*, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be about loving people first.⁵

The last problem I will address about art schools is one of the biggest: the cost. Seven of the top ten most expensive schools in this country are art schools.⁶

How much would it cost if each of us in this room (100 people) received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute Chicago (a more expensive art school) and an MFA from Portland State University (a lower cost state school)? Even before adding interest on loans, or cost of living expenses, both together would cost us \$9,128,000.00. What other options could that money have if we approached education differently?

Comment: Since writing this talk I spent a semester doing a fellowship at Carnegie Mellon and teaching a class on Art in Everyday Life at their School of Art.

Comment: CORRECTION: Professor Michelle Illuminato informed me after I gave a talk at Alfred earlier this year that this has been a component of their freshman curriculum for years.

Comment: I am now currently the Associate Director of the School of Art and Art History at UIC, the state's land grant university. The school remains committed to serving the needs of the people of Illinois and asking what that means in terms of access to arts education. I have never before been part of a school or administration that so actively pursues a mission of social justice and art.

Our school in the landscape of Chicago art schools is an underdog. For many in my ART 101 class this fall it was their first college class ever. For some they are also the first person in their family to go to college. It was humbling to be in the words of my friend Jovenico de la Paz, "the first face of college" for this group. I am looking forward to the responsibility of teaching this foundations class and exposing this group to so many ideas that I hope will help shape them into thoughtful artists, and more importantly present and conscious human beings—the true goal of education.

Comment: While inspired by approaches to education ranging from the Highlander Folk School to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed the program at Portland State has made no explicit statements on the philosophy motivating the program.

Comment: I struggle with this daily, and even while teaching at an "affordable" public research land grant university I still believe the cost of education is prohibitive.

⁴ Jen Delos Reyes, *Ten Lessons Graphic Designers Learn That Every Artist Should Understand*, 2013.

⁵ Paulo Friere and Myles Horton, *We Make the Road By Walking*.

⁶ <http://bfamfaphd.com>

I want to propose some other ways that artists could approach their education. Ways in which we take control, work together, and shape knowledge collectively. In the words of Myles Horton, “You have to bootleg education. It’s illegal, really, because it’s not proper, but you do it anyway.” I think that many people would be surprised to know that Oxford was started by rebel students from Paris, Cambridge by rebels from Oxford, and Harvard by rebels from Cambridge.⁷ If these schools which were born out of revolution could become amongst the most revered sites of learning in the world, who is to say that other radical propositions could not be valued equally?

I am going to come to a close this morning by sharing an anecdote with you about a conference I attended last month in Cleveland. Members from BFAMFAPhD were also presenting at the conference and shared a lot of their research. During the Q&A portion someone from the audience asked an inflamed question about “who their target is?” The person was concerned that the end goal of the group was the closure of art schools. BFAMFAPhD ensured that was not their goal, and they were in no way interested in mass layoffs and tenured faculty losing their jobs. That night over dinner someone at my table knew the woman in the audience who had made that comment and said that she thought it was so important that she spoke up, especially since the group was presenting in the context of an art school. I am going to paraphrase what I said in response:

This is not about targets and takedowns. This is about options. What we really need is to change our structures of value so that we can respect and acknowledge other approaches to education, whether that be free school, self-taught, community based education, or other. We need to get to a place where culturally we truly value education and knowledge over purchasing power. ■

Jen Delos Reyes is an artist whose research interests include the history of socially engaged art, artist-run culture and artists’ social roles. She is founder and director of Open Engagement, an international conference on socially engaged art. She is the Associate Director of the School of Art and Art History at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

⁷ *Talking Schools* by Colin Ward.

Art School Today: Fast and Loose

Evan Carter

While I pursued graduate study in visual arts for the past three years, my perspective on what art education in the 21st century looks like is limited. There is no single, agreed-upon, method for how to teach art at the graduate level. Educational models in the arts have become more varied and expansive over time, especially in recent years.

We could trace the history of art school back to the guilds of the Renaissance but that is another endeavor. Either way, we end up in our contemporary moment where the value of art is contested in our society and the ways of teaching it are motivated by a variety of ideological views.

In her essay, 'Lifelong Learning,' curator and writer, Katy Siegel, deftly refers to the 'star' model of art school, unabashedly pointing out a tendency for institutions to admit large numbers of students on the hope that a lucky few will be 'the next big thing' in the art world.

Programs, particularly graduate level, located in or near big cities attract curators to student's studios and sign them to galleries before they even finish their degree requirements. This is the capitalist art market at work and who is to say it's a problem? Not many perhaps, but a growing number.

Despite the narrow view of what being a successful artist is, in the context of these kinds of programs, as well as the narrow success rate this model manages to produce, the star model is still the most prevalent one in art schools in the U.S. and worldwide. This is true of both Bachelor's and Master's programs, the latter of which must typically be completed in two years. If few students graduate and go on to make a career solely out of the sale of their work, what do the rest of them do?

Only three years ago, *The Atlantic* magazine cited a study from the art research and activist group, BFAM-FAPhD, showing the rising number of Americans acquiring MFA degrees. The number was well over 15,000 in 2014 and the trend shows it rising.

In *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise*, Gregory Scholette describes the larger structure of the 'star' model that we do not see. Much like stars of movies, the lead actors get all the attention. Few people pay attention to the rest of the crew that makes the cinema experience possible. Same is true of the "Art World." The difference is that people in support roles at art institutions enter and leave art programs likely identifying themselves as 'artists' as opposed to crewmembers or laborers.

Even a community message board becomes a collaborative artwork.



This may sound like a negative outlook on the current state of affairs in which artists pursue higher education in the arts hoping that they too will ‘make it.’ The star model of art school perpetuates this hierarchical regime that barely hides a capitalist fervor behind the flag of a modernist ideal, but alternatives exist.

Scholette’s critique is not one to expose the art world as some pyramid scheme but to empower the majority of trained artists through collectivism. Art school coordinators are not blind to this. Progressive educational models date back to the early twentieth century with Germany’s Bauhaus school or Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina.

These progressive models have influenced art school as we know it today but younger programs are also returning to a less competitive and more collaborative model. Programs in Portland, Oregon like Pacific Northwest College of Art’s collaborative design program or Portland State University’s Art and Social Practice MFA are some examples of how art education is responding to the shifting landscape of the creative economy and its social fabric.

‘Interdisciplinary’ became the buzz word of 21st century MFA programs with universities funding such programs while more traditional art schools scrambled to rebrand. Faced with this expanded field of artistic education across a range of institutions, the new art student is faced with a daunting task: How do I choose?

Every student is different. Some seek degrees on the path to meeting a variety of career goals. The MFA is required by accredited institutions to teach art at the college level. Other students try their luck with the star model and usually can afford to do so. Another group enters programs knowing they will not exit having secured a lucrative career but are comfortable working in the non-profit sector or supporting themselves with a non-art related job.

As a recent graduate of an MFA program, I have had my own personal experience with this choice. I looked at a number of programs, attending a post-baccalaureate program in painting at SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago) for a semester before switching to DOVA, the MFA program at the University of Chicago.

SAIC is a school with incredible resources, faculty, and history but it definitely falls under the star model description. While I attended, there were roughly 70 graduate students between the post-baccalaureate program and the MFA program in the painting department alone. This large group made it difficult to meet



A student poses in studio wearing a mask.

with faculty who understandably dedicate more of their time to the MFA students. In talking with some of the MFA students many talked about the lack of opportunities to get teaching assistant positions since there just were not enough for everyone. This results in a program where students have ample time in the studio but if students are looking for a wider range of skill-building and professionalization from their art degree, they may want to think twice about the hefty price tag that comes with it. There is the chance they may be awarded one of the coveted and rare full tuition scholarships.

After realizing this kind of program was not right for me, I looked into the program at DOVA. Some of the faculty at SAIC suggested an interdisciplinary program might be better for me and I agreed. With a total of 16 graduate students between both years, I found the smaller student to faculty ratio (about 1 to 1) at DOVA much more appealing. The requirement of working as a teaching assistant each quarter, the opportunity to take courses at the University, and the equal opportunity for students to receive tuition funding were strong influences on my choice. And I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the amazing faculty.

This brings me to my next point: critical environment. You can’t grow as an artist without having your ideas and methods challenged. A huge difference in my experiences at these two schools was the critique. At SAIC, there were fewer faculty in our post-bac critiques and they were mostly painters. At DOVA, the faculty are artists from every discipline and practice who critique your work from different angles. They also make it a point to invite guests to weekly and quarterly critiques.



Two students work in a communal work space.

At SAIC, the role of the market and its influence on process seemed to be an essential, underlying theme held by some while others tiptoed around it without questioning its authority. More often than not, I would hear the typical comment that some piece, or part of a piece ‘just isn’t working.’ No one ever responded with ‘working for who? Or what?’ It was just accepted that something ‘not working’ meant the artist needed to make a change, more or less figure it out on their own, and come back next time with a better product. Again, my experience at SAIC was limited but this was something I noticed.

Attending a critique at DOVA as a prospective student and for the two years following I cannot recall hearing anyone say ‘this isn’t working.’ What I do remember is, if similar scrutiny was given to a piece or part of a piece, it came with self-reflective analysis relating that viewer’s experience of the maker’s work rather than a vague appraisal based on a hypothetical, undisclosed standard.

I know this sounds like propaganda for the program that gave me a degree but that is not my intent. DOVA is not perfect. No MFA program is as far as I know. I chose to apply to graduate school because I was making work and questions kept emerging that I didn’t know how to even begin to answer. I needed to immerse myself in a critical environment. I found that critical environment at DOVA.

Getting back to less personal reflections, this program casts a wide net in terms of skill-building. You get studio time, academic coursework, teaching experience, and are more actively involved in contributing to the ongoing development of the program itself. If there were any drawbacks, it was having such a packed schedule. I occasionally missed the extra studio time I once had but found the rigors of the program far more valuable.

This raises the question of time. Some programs offer an answer in the form of a third year. How this additional time is used varies but, with the expanding range of job market demands and what a graduate art program’s expectations entail, a third year can provide students an opportunity to invest their time and energy into building their professional skills.

Some graduate programs use the additional year at the beginning to plan how to spend their time and form a strategy for the next two years. Others allow students to focus on completing their non-studio coursework at the beginning. An additional final year of professional development work and transitioning into a career is another approach.

Adding an additional year is a lot to ask of any educational program considering the funding it would require and the demands on staff and faculty but large institutions have accomplished more difficult tasks. More importantly, as the notions of what it means to be a professional artist in the 21st century expand, greater demands are placed on institutions to deliver value, particularly the self-described interdisciplinary programs housed in major research universities.

If institutions want to improve and sustain their programs, they need to turn out students who can look back on their education as contributing something of value to their professional life. The best way to do that is to invest time and energy into making sure students get the most out of their education. An additional year is not only a way to give students greater opportunity to invest their time and energy but also to allow faculty to ensure the students are meeting the standards of their required coursework.

I would urge interdisciplinary programs to break from this time constraint and consider how their programs could benefit from meeting the challenge of remodeling their program through the addition of an academic year.

If you are seriously considering a graduate degree in visual art, know that each passing year has a higher risk of return. Look at as many programs as possible and talk to as many people who work within them as you can. Just remember, not everyone gets to be a star. ■

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 a prior issue of the Examiner.

How Neoliberal Economics Impacted Art Education

By Diane Thodos

Examining the extent to which Neoliberal economics and its ideology have infected every corner of life and thought can be an overwhelming task. It is as though the “elephant in the room” has suddenly swallowed us, imparting a sense of amnesia that we ever were separate beings from the elephant that is digesting us.

What is Neoliberal economic ideology as the term is used today? It is the belief in the dominance of the private sector (think: transnational corporations) through austerity, privatization and deregulation at the expense of government protection and funding for public sector good: social programs like health care, social security, welfare, civil rights, infrastructure, public parks and the like.

Over the past 40 years, this ideology has taken hold of our government, democratic institutions and has been an unconditional success. How does this all relate to my topic of art education? When I began art school, I became a critical witness to the slow-motion transformation of art education, along with the practices of museums, galleries, curators, collectors and dealers.

This shift resulted in an ever-greater emphasis on monetary values. I began to see the humanistic basis of fine art instruction displaced by the monetization of art. Today, prices for art paid at auction are the absolute arbiter of an artwork's value.

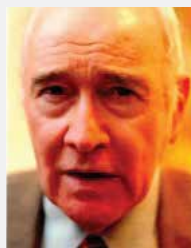
When I began my education back in 1980, figurative art was still a vibrant part of the art scene and the Neo-expressionism was starting to make its debut. Learning to paint and draw from life were established requirements. A student could venture into video art, conceptualism or installation, but these were not emphasized over the necessity of learning skills and being left free to intuitively discover and explore a full range of techniques and aesthetic possibilities: drawing and painting from life, printmaking in etching, lithography, woodblock, silkscreen, sculpting in wax, wood and metal among many others.

I also took glass blowing and minored in computer graphics. John Dewey's *Art As Experience* was required reading, stressing how art was connected to one's way

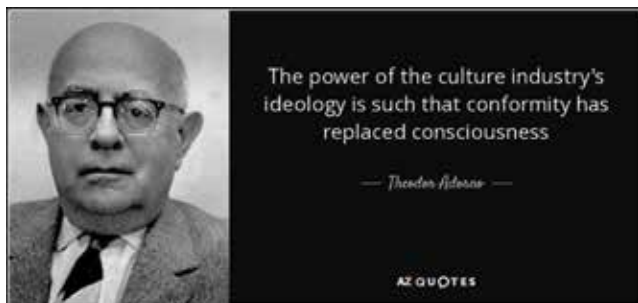
of life. “In the development of the expressive act, the emotion operates like a magnet drawing to itself appropriate material.” For Dewey, the self, emotion, and its material manifestation through technical skill was the central focus.

My education was transformed by the New York intellect and art critic, Donald Kuspit. He became my teacher while I was enrolled and worked for the School of Visual Arts from 1987-92. Kuspit had been a student of Theodore Adorno of the Frankfurt School of Social Research, famous for his critique of the “culture industry”: how popular culture mimicked the way standardized factory goods were used to manipulate mass society.

Kitsch culture created false consciousness by manipulating and distorting real human needs. The intellectual depth of Kuspit's critical and dialectical perception, his “critical consciousness,” made him



DONALD KUSPIT is one of America's most distinguished art critics. In 1983 he received the prestigious Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism, given by the College Art Association. In 1993 he received an honorary doctorate in fine arts from Davidson College, in 1996 from the San Francisco Art Institute, and in 2007 from the New York Academy of Art. In 1997 the National Association of the Schools of Art and Design presented him with a Citation for Distinguished Service to the Visual Arts. In 1998 he received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 2000 he delivered the Getty Lectures at the University of Southern California. In 2005 he was the Robertson Fellow at the University of Glasgow. In 2008 he received the Tenth Annual Award for Excellence in the Arts from the Newington-Cropsey Foundation. In 2013 he received the First Annual Award for Excellence in Art Criticism from the Gabarron Foundation. He has received fellowships from the Ford Foundation, Fulbright Commission, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Guggenheim Foundation, and Asian Cultural Council, among other organizations. D.T.



Theodore Adorno

the most significant interpretive voice in the art world from the 1980's onward. One need only read his *New Art Examiner* articles from the 1980's and 90's to see what I mean. Five years in his class prepared me to understand and interpret the shocks and changes that were to happen to the art world over the next several decades, and develop my own critical consciousness in the process.

I learned to keep a skeptical outlook on the claims that art made, and to test those claims to see if they stood up or fell apart under scrutiny. Kuspit and I reconnected after my *Ideological Warfare* letter to the editor appeared in the *New Art Examiner* in September 1999. Our discussions resulted in a series of interviews on the changing nature of the art world and the culture at large. You can read them at <http://neotericart.com/category/donaldkuspitinterview/>.

Armed with a sense of Dewey's philosophy, an appreciation for skill and Kuspit's *critical consciousness*, I began to notice changes happening in the 1990's. I noticed many graduates from my alma mater, Carnegie Mellon University, stopped painting and drawing, focusing on video art, minimalism and installation instead. In their graduation catalogs the presence of technology and readymade objects abounded while drawings, paintings, and sculpture dwindled.

When I began writing art criticism for the *Examiner* in the mid 1990's, I witnessed the same thing happening to art in museum exhibits and galleries. My *Ideological Warfare* letter described how the mainstream art world—and art education in particular—was ideologically oriented towards being “anti-art, anti-aesthetic, anti-subjective, and anti-tradition.” As an art critic I could not ignore how *Artforum* magazine ditched the critical standards it had once held in the 1970's and 80's to become a tool for the promotion of the trendiest art being packaged for the auction houses.

In the pages of the art journal, *October*, I read writings based on the ideas of post-structuralist theoreticians like Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard,

applied as a sort of mangled rhetoric, used to justify the existence of the conceptual “art object” and favoring the approaches of Warhol and Duchamp as the most successful models. What I term the “intellectual acrobatics” of post-structuralist theory often appeared in art critiques during the culture wars of the 1980's and 90's. I heard stories of how painters in the Whitney Museum of Art Study Program were severely rebuked for painting with expressive brush marks, which signaled collusion with “white male domination.” Paint could only be used correctly if it was used theoretically, in an ironic, conceptual or self-denying fashion.

Clearly conceptualism and postmodern ideology had worked to de-skill the art object and detach it from its human content and relation to life. I saw how this “emptying out” paved the way for neoliberal market values to fill the void, dictating which art would become popular in higher education programs.

I noticed an escalation in the auction prices of newly-minted young artists with very short exhibition histories. What had once taken artists like De Kooning decades to achieve happened practically overnight. Hot art became a speculative commodity that needed to be quickly produced to fill market demand. Traditional ways of making art could not fit the new market model: subjectivity was too messy and inconsistent to be streamlined for market sale, and creating art that required artistic skill would take too long to produce for a market that demanded fast turnover. I figured out this was why career success inherently favored the de-skilled art forms of minimalism, pop art and conceptualism.

In true neoliberal fashion, the art market system demanded that the artist be detached from their

POP ART: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962
Wikimedia commons



humanity and skill mastery if they were to become a participant in the new way the system was run. The enticements of dealers and curators in museums and galleries who supported art that got with the program were too great to ignore. The organic link between the creative self and skill was ruptured and art school education reflected the values of this market-driven, neoliberal, state of affairs.

To find evidence of this I made a study of the School of the Art Institute's faculty in 2010. I discovered that, out of 90 teachers, only 20 had work that demonstrated some developed skill level (often with an Imagist emphasis) with 6 reflecting a mastery of drawing from life. The remaining 80% of the faculty reflected work in a de-skilled range of art movements: pop, conceptualism, and minimalism. The majority of faculty reflected the trend towards theoretical deconstruction of the art object which in turn had prepared the way for artmaking dictated by commercial and market success.

Consciously or not, students were trained to be intuitively self-censoring against choosing skilled ways of self-expression early in the art learning process. Why not appropriate a picture of a nude rather than learning to draw one? Why not put a bunch of bricks or wood beams on the ground like the minimalist artist, Carl Andre, rather than actually trying to sculpt in clay or carve in wood? It was much easier to go with a ready-made, de-skilled strategy as long as you had a clever intellectual argument handy when critique time came around.

Democratic diversity in discourse and artmaking was replaced by the power of money. Today, the whims of a tiny cabal of billionaires and multi-millionaires determine who will be the winners in a highly competitive market system. Think of Murakami, Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons setting up factories that mass-produce art commodities to appease the commercial appetites of their extraordinarily wealthy patrons.

The social history of art, art's engagement with a public audience, has become irrelevant. Why bother about public opinion or developing an audience when all the power for success is supplied by a small group of insiders? I have heard accounts of museum curators visiting the trendiest art schools to hand-pick graduating art student "winners" right out of their programs, young artists readymade for institutional promotion with a hopeful hedge on generating financial returns at auction.

All parts of the mainstream art world—from art fairs to auction houses, from museums to galleries,



Minimalism: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1965.
ALBIN DAHLSTRÖM/MODERNA MUSEET/©DONALD JUDD
FOUNDATION/BUS, SWEDEN/VAGA, NEW YORK

from art education to art magazines and media—reinforces the inertia of the whole system. Power resists change and the greater its consolidation, the harder it is to transform.

Art school education fell in line with the market's gravitational pull. There also has been a loss of connoisseurship, the neglect of art historical context and the pressure to revise the writing of art history to reflect the profit driven needs of the market. This reflects Orwell's famous observation as it applies to the misuses of historical revisionism: "He who controls the present controls the past, he who controls the past controls the future."

Another art school scandal is the cost. What were costs like when I was an art student compared to now? In those pre-neoliberal economic times, antitrust regulations were strong, there were few billionaires and far fewer monopolies



Conceptualism: Joseph Kosuth, *Five Words in Neon Green*, 1965
From Pinterest

than exist today. Political power was still concentrated in a substantial middle class that kept unions and government regulations strong. In 1980, the entire cost of my tuition was \$9,000 a year and the government paid 25% of that cost, reducing it to \$6,700. After graduating my rent was \$160 a month and with a part-time job, I was able to get by with enough time to paint.

Last I checked, tuition at SAIC was \$46,500 a year. The sad truth is that, after graduating, only 5% of art students at most find a job in the art world—very poor results considering the high price of the degree. With that kind of burden, how can any art student feel free to question the content of their curricula? All other values pale before the money question and many a worthy talent is turned away at the door without it.

The monetization of education has made students prisoners of the system. The federal subsidies that used to support higher education have reverted to corporate giveaways and tax cuts for the wealthiest, making the cost 4 to 6 times higher in real terms than in my day. Debt bondage is a great deterrent to freedom—both in students developing the capacity to critique the basis of how they are taught and in the outrageous costs they will be burdened with for decades afterward.

That is one bitter truth to swallow. Like our contemporary society, art education today reflects the economic inequality of our neoliberal times: less democratically grounded in terms of the openness of the

system and freedom of choice, and more authoritarian in terms of all other values being subsumed to those of filthy lucre.

In the 1850s, Karl Marx made many insightful observations about what he saw happening in the British textile mills of Manchester, England at the beginning of the industrial revolution. In his famous 3-volume study, *Capital*, his theory of alienation describes the psychological transformation of farmers and craftspeople when they were forced off the land and into factories.

Large debt burdens were placed on them due to escalating rent and land values combined with low wages. Workers became dramatically estranged from the creative and human aspects of their humanity as a result of conforming mechanistically to outside demands. Former craftsmen became deskilled by performing repetitious tasks over and over again. They became deprived of the right to conceive of themselves as having agency over their own actions, an extremely relevant observation in our age of neoliberal economic globalization.

I have to question the value of an art education that imprisons students with outrageous debt burdens and esteems deskilled artmaking, while sacrificing the creative self to the dictates of market demands.

Moreover, Marx observed that all other human values—those of community, caring, creativity, and dignity—were jettisoned as worthless before the power of the profit motive. The art world was once the place where individuals and groups cultivated a strong sense of their creative agency and autonomy. This strength allowed them to express existential truths about the world they lived in. With the market-driven cooptation of our educational and institutional art systems, the question remains: Will that creative space ever exist again? ■

Diane Thodos is an artist and art critic who lives in Evanston, Illinois. She is the recipient of a Pollock-Krasner Grant in 2002 and has exhibited at the Kouros Gallery in New York City. She is represented by the Traeger/Pinto Gallery in Mexico City and Thomas Masters Gallery in Chicago. For more information visit www.dianethodos.com

Artist Biography with a Bias

by Phillip Barcio

Elaine de Kooning deserves to be memorialized through biography. Without her efforts, 20th Century art history would have unfolded in dramatically different ways. She was what we might now call a super-influencer. She encapsulated all three personality types outlined by Malcolm Gladwell in his bestselling volume, *The Tipping Point*, on why certain things spread through the culture like viruses.



De Kooning was a connector—someone adept at making introductions that help people maximize each other's potential. She was a maven—a specialist with the ability to share expert information with the masses in easily understandable ways—and she was a salesperson—

someone with the charisma to inspire others to invest materially in her convictions.

Her dedication to personal artistic excellence was legendary. In her studio, she routinely worked 60+ hour weeks. Besides that, she lectured, taught, and wrote more art reviews than many dedicated art writers complete in their entire career. Her reputation as a painter was exceptional enough that she was chosen to paint several official portraits of President John F. Kennedy. Her prowess as a writer changed journalism by convincing art media power brokers that an artist can be an authoritative, fair, insightful spokesperson for the work of other artists.

Most importantly, de Kooning was a generous, classy human being. She never yielded to cynicism, conspicuously overlooking the flaws of others, focusing instead on their strengths. She shared her possessions and wealth. And she encouraged other artists, connecting them with teachers, collaborators, dealers, curators, editors and collectors, creating relationships that helped many talented but underestimated individuals persevere through difficult times.

For those reasons and more, I was looking forward to reading *A Generous Vision: the Creative Life of Elaine de Kooning*, by Cathy Curtis, the first attempt

at a biography of this artist (Oxford University Press, 2017). But instead of the exhaustive exploration of her professional genius this essential artist deserves, Curtis presents little more than a barrage of anecdotes, offering a judgmental vision of de Kooning the person, and a stingy vision of the artist, writer, and tastemaker. Worse, I found the book to be sexist and full of opportunistic jabs that place de Kooning in the shadow of male artists, especially her more celebrated husband.

Its hyperbolic, diminishing perspective is established in the first two sentences:

“Everyone knows that the painter Willem de Kooning was one of the titans of twentieth-century art. But few people realize that his wife, Elaine de Kooning, was a prime mover among New York artists at mid-century.”

I would be surprised if even a fourth of Americans alive today have encountered the work of Willem de Kooning, let alone would describe him as a “titan.” But the bigger issue here is that the author began an artist's biography with a statement about another artist, an ungenerous trait that continues throughout *A Generous Vision*.

We learn much about Willem, but most of what we learn about Elaine boils down to gossipy minutia, about which Curtis frequently moralizes. Consider this comment following a biographical detail about Elaine's mother:

“Marie was twenty-seven when she wed Charles Frank Fried on September 4, 1915. (Whether she felt ambivalent about marriage or lacked earlier suitors is unknown.)”

Or this remark Curtis makes about Elaine's birth:

“Christened Elaine Marie Catherine Fried, she was born at home on March 12, 1918—a long three and a half years after the wedding. Perhaps that's why Marie lavished so much attention on her.”

Chastising someone for the age at which they married and for how long after marriage pregnancy occurred isn't just judgmental or passé—it's medieval.

And this condemnatory strain continues throughout the book.

Curtis comments relentlessly about the rate of cigarette and alcohol consumption amongst de Kooning and her associates, going far beyond the role of a biographer—which is to state the facts of a person's life—delving instead into that of a proselytizer, passing personal judgment over how much smoking and drinking is an acceptable amount.

Most insidious are the petty assumptions Curtis employs. When detailing de Kooning's portraiture of JFK, she writes, "The dowdy jumper and blouse Elaine wears in photographs of the sittings suggest that she was intent on blending into the background." Later, after quoting her as saying that in their later work, artists use "the part of the brain that dreams" Curtis pretentiously clarifies that "dreaming is actually a function of the entire cerebral cortex."

In no other situation did de Kooning ever seek to be perceived as demure in the presence of powerful males. Nor was she a buffoon who did not understand brain function—she was being poetic. This would be obvious to any sympathetic observer.

Curtis has an inherent bias toward her subject, a fact crystallized by a passage near the end of the book:

"[Elaine] included Monet in a group of artists called "The Magic Ones": Bill, Gorky, van Gogh, Giotto, Giacometti, Matisse—and herself. In her view they shared "a quality of grace—as though they can do nothing wrong—a quality little children have." It was a curious statement to make about her own work, an aspect of the wishful thinking that was her ballast against depression."

Elaine de Kooning fits naturally on that list of names. But because her biographer does not believe that to be true, this book is full of stories about what parties Elaine threw, who Elaine slept with, what Elaine was wearing, how much Elaine spent at the liquor store, how many cigarettes Elaine smoked, how much money Elaine borrowed and how inadequate Elaine was as a housekeeper, according to her chauvinist husband.

I wanted art reviews. De Kooning wrote more than a thousand. Yet Curtis includes not a single one in its



Elaine de Kooning *Charging Bull #7*, 1959

entirety—just snippets. I wanted pictures. This book contains 31 color images, 28 of which are paintings by Elaine de Kooning. But her oeuvre includes thousands of works, encompassing dozens of aesthetic evolutions. Curtis points out that no comprehensive collection of de Kooning's articles exists, and that most of her paintings are in private collections, making a definitive catalogue difficult.

That only begs the question. Why not have completed the difficult task of tracking a subject's creative output before writing her biography? Analyzing an extraordinarily full life means focusing on those aspects of the examined life that were extraordinary. An opportunity missed here.

This book reminds me of how de Kooning used to marvel at critics who looked only at the superficial subjects of her paintings without looking at the brushwork, the energy, and the feelings those elements evoke. A *Generous Vision* continues that tradition. It is a good read for anyone looking for superficial data, hearsay, and judgmental commentary about 20th Century social norms. But it is, regrettably, of little use to those seeking to understand de Kooning as the intellectual leader she was. ■

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.

Works that Caught Our Eye



Above: Marcelo Eli, *Apariciones Del Sol*, 2017. Seen at the CAC benefit auction for Mexico and Puerto Rico



Left: Larry Kamphausen, *Living Water*, 2017. Seen at Agitator Gallery



Above: Michael Nuauert, *The Wind Is a Sort of*, 2017. Seen at Sidewinder Gallery



Right: Jeni Spota, *Giotto's Dream (Dreaming of the Polish House Version)*, 2007. Seen at Lawrence and Clark Gallery



Left: Amy Shaw, *Make a Joyful Noise*, 2017. Seen at ARC Gallery

Right: Corinna Button, *Caught in the Fast Lane*, Seen at Media Made Great.



Visions and Voices: Two Russian Revolution Shows

by Aniko Berman

This year marks the centennial of one of the 20th Century's epic events. Print and electronic media, however, have devoted little coverage to understanding the Russian Revolution and its bloody aftermath, even unto the present. Instead, they fixated on Russia's interference in last year's election.

Two local art museums attempt to rectify and fill this void in our historical consciousness. *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia!* at the Art Institute and *Revolution Everyday* at the Smart Museum of Art, examine this milestone, though it cannot be easily summarized, particularly as its nuances shift with history's endlessly shifting vantage point.

Such an observation about most historical events is a truism. However, the complexities of the Russian Revolution, whose breath-taking idealism and subsequent cynicism set off intensely devastating and profoundly generative forces, seem more difficult to parse than most.

An example of the revolution's arguably positive characteristics is the radical aesthetic developments it spawned, demonstrating the revolution's highly paradoxical nature: idealistic, "truthful" art, design and architecture, put to the service of less pure, propagandistic intentions.

The aesthetic aspect proves a worthy subject for scrutiny, and these two shows attempt to do justice through varied presentations of revolutionary and Soviet objects and artifacts from the everyday to the rarified. The result is an immersive foray into the visual culture of a people, hurtled from servitude under tsarist rule into the cauldron of freedom and warfare. A sort of melancholy nostalgia for revolutionary idealism subsequently arises, at a time when our own societal failings, as a nation and as humanity in general, feel acutely apparent.

The Art Institute's sweeping historical presentation consists of eleven themes or "models" which themselves echo the notion that the revolution would be "modelled" in every aspect of daily life.

The sheer amount of material on view, mostly paired with lengthy and engaging explanatory labels, is an



Kazimir Malevich. *Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4th Dimension*, 1915.

The Art Institute of Chicago

impressive feature in and of itself. This may undermine the show's attempt to sufficiently inform viewers by dividing their attention instead.

Propaganda posters, documents, furniture, photographs, paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, books, magazines, films, even dishware fill the exhibit's entire floor. Each object a delicious morsel, yet so many that one may gorge rather than savor.

Still, there are exceptional highlights. Two architectural recreations are particularly noteworthy: one is Alexander Rodchenko's 1925 *Workers' Club* prototype designed for the Soviet Pavilion at a decorative arts fair in Paris. Social spaces for workers at work and home were a new feature of everyday Soviet life. This

room—with all parts immediately visible upon entry and all elements, from chairs to chess pieces, and unified in design—physically embodied this new notion of community.

Another is Eli Lissitsky's amazing model for a museum exhibition space, *Room for Constructivist Art*. With paneled walls alternately painted in black, white and gray, the space's visuals literally change as the viewer walks through it, with the viewer's perceptions of the paintings (works by Piet Mondrian, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Oskar Schlemmer among others) changing constantly as well. The effect is striking.

Artists, designers and architects believed that the new worldviews, proposed and then forcefully imposed by the authorities, should be exemplified by new and radical ways of seeing our environment. This awesome, idealistic belief in the power of aesthetics to literally change the world is moving, however misguided such changes may have been.

Imagining the power this new visual world might have had on someone unaffected by the relentless and numbing 21st Century image bombardment was an awe-inspiring and humbling delight.

Missing from the Art Institute's presentation is the human toll of all this moving aspiration. The Smart

Museum makes a special point of showing it, particularly as it pertained to the female experience (the Revolution's emphasis on gender equality is another of its paradoxical positives).

At one point in the exhibition, co-curator Zachary Cahill, himself a visual artist, has assembled a touching group of drawings on paper, portraits of some of the specific protagonists whose stories come alive in the rest of the show; a clear indication that the human dimension takes precedence here.

And their voices abound. Dziga Vertov's 1938 documentary, *The Three Heroines*, presents interviews with a female navigation director and a female collective farmer, their laudatory accounts of Soviet life clearly intended as aspirational models for their peers and comrades.

In contrast, Valentina Kulagina's story, presented through diary excerpts, some of which were written on the back of her drawings (on view) shows the harsher realities Russian citizens faced under Stalin. A central figure of the Constructivist movement, along with Rodchenko and her husband, Gustav Klucis, Kulagina was severely affected by the revolution's degeneration into Stalinist terror.

Klucis was ultimately arrested and Kulagina's anxious accounts of her everyday struggles to survive, in the aftermath of his disappearance, are harrowing. She, and millions more over subsequent decades, were devoured by the very revolution for which they had fought.

One object in the Art Institute exhibit quietly and unintentionally demonstrates this fall from grace: *Painterly Realism of a Football Player—Color Masses in the 4th Dimension* (1915), one of Kazimir Malevich's first Suprematist paintings. An example of the "Zero" in art, the work at one point modelled a radical aesthetic mode intended to overthrow all previously-known visual forms and offer a new notion of visual purity and truth.

Pre-dating the revolution itself, the composition—austere, meditative—once held the germ of revolutionary clarity, the promise of a new path forward. Today, its formerly pristine surface is riddled with swirling craquelure. Even the loftiest of ideals are subject to the inevitable laws of nature. ■

Aniko Berman is an art writer based in Chicago. She previously covered the art world in New York, writing reviews and artist interviews for various publications including *Flash Art International*. She is currently Director at Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Valentina Kulagina, *International Working Women's Day Is the Fighting Day of the Proletariat*, 1931, Ne boltai! Collection.



“Handbook of Unknowing”

Jackie Tileston

By Bruce Thorn

“**H**andbook of Unknowing” is Jackie Tileston’s sixth exhibition at Zg Gallery since joining their roster in 2004. The works in this show continue on the path that she’s been forging since the start of her artistic career and offer a consistent follow-up to her 2014 exhibition, “Field Guide to Elsewhere.”

Tileston’s personal history is an international mix-up of intercultural experiences that have become her template for making abstract, visionary paintings. She has developed her own pictorial vocabulary and symbolism; a semiotics that incorporates references to Eastern philosophies and her multinational upbringing in the Philippines, India, California, and France.

Tileston takes inspiration from Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism and yoga as points of departure. Like Takashi Murakami, her discourse on Oriental memes wears psychedelic, pop threads. Her paintings are more fluid than Mark Tobey’s linear reflections on Chinese calligraphy and Baha’i cosmogony; her strength is in expansiveness and enthusiasm.

Personal experiences, memories, beliefs and dreams all help to form self-identity. It’s as if the separate components of Tileston’s works each signify various pieces of her history and sense of self. These self-referential abstractions might be described as unusual selfies.



Reckoner of Bliss, 2017

Tileston almost always works over a background of raw linen coated with rabbit skin glue (with an occasional sprinkle of glitter and dry pigment). She masters atmospheric, misty washes that emulate J.M.W. Turner’s ecclesiastic skies and sets these to drift across the linen picture plane over which she superimposes bouquets of multi-colored liquid fireworks of unknown hybrid shapes that float and orbit like a pleasant, bright, Walt Disney universe. It’s very operatic and *Reckoner of Bliss*, 2017, is classic Tileston.

There are tactile forms built from thick globs of paint, thin washes, wet fluxes, hard edges, flat brushwork, linear meanders, occasional spray paint and a few collage elements here and there, some of them cloned from the other pictures. Tileston’s works often reference one another and she frequently repeats motifs.



Steep Tempest, 2015

Steep Tempest (2015) is a little different from the other works here. The abstract shapes all seem to join together out of the linen expanse to form a single entity with suggestions that it could be human, animal, deity or inner self.

There is no tonal modeling; washes and mists create the illusion of shading and take the place of chiaroscuro modeling effects. Tileston’s method of approaching

a painting follows a pre-determined, step-by-step manufacturing process. Whatever is spontaneous in each painting is also controlled in its placement.

Unified field theory in physics refers to fundamental forces and elementary particles in a single, universal field. This is where physics and metaphysics intersect, but Einstein's theory has never been proven. Tileston's works are not "field painting," like Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman. Her paintings aren't so much about a unified field as they are about energy, shapes and forms that pass *over and through* the field. Her game is eclectic, like the artist's identity.



Hypnotic Blur, 2015

Tileston has it all—the fundamentals of painting, engaging material, beautiful colors and surfaces, dreamscapes, but she too often adds predictability. There's the linen background, then glitter washes and wisps of Turner, all followed by other forms and shapes that get sent hurtling through space. She claims to be after what she calls "contemplative space."

It's easy to imagine forms, characters and faces coming out of the misty void, but the didactic and repetitive use of visual devices can corral and discourage exploration beyond recognition of ambiguous possibilities.

For this exhibition, Tileston has added painterly atmospheric washes and shorthand brushwork directly to sections of the gallery walls. This touch doesn't add much to the overall effect of the show. There are also three small cutout MDF shapes with digital laminations that regenerate details from other works.



Emergent Delirium, 2016

Hypnotic Blur (2015) presents a digital transfer of an altered photo showing a detail from a previous work, mounted on a scroll-sawed panel that resembles a jumbled thought bubble where any ideas are hopelessly entangled. The new cutouts do not have the lush surface and careful finishing of the linen paintings.

This might point to new directions in the future and hints that this artist might be ready to toss out her old rulebook. There are many fun things happening in the three cutout pieces. Expect good things when the artist approaches these with more ambition.

"Handbook of Unknowing" intends to be positive, light, colorful, contemplative and safe, but the plentiful and earnest references to Eastern philosophies seem overtly quixotic and new age. Unknowingness doesn't jive with habitual self-reference. Is it possible to forget, or to "un-know" the self?

What would happen if Tileston tried working without her usual methods and really came to terms with unknowing? Would she face the possible horrors, along with the delights, of a blank slate, or would she still inhabit a consistently pretty, intergalactic stage set of tamable, candy-colored cosmic storms?

By bravely discarding fallback devices and exploring more of the exhibition concept of *Unknowing*, Tileston could possibly shift from being a very good abstract painter to being a giant among modern painters. ■

Bruce Thorn is a Chicago based painter and musician. He has degrees in painting and drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is a Contributing Editor to the New Art Examiner.

“Infinite Games 50/50”

Open House Contemporary

by Nathan Worcester

To appreciate “Infinite Games 50/50,” an exhibition at Open House Contemporary curated by local artist and woodworker John Preus, it helps if you know the controversial history of Chicago Public Schools under Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

The first “50” is the number of public schools that Emanuel’s Board of Education closed in 2013 due to declining enrollment and poor test scores. In addition to leaving memories, the closings left physical artifacts: the desks, chairs, cabinets, and other items that untold thousands of CPS students and staff had used.

Enter Preus and the second “50.” When Preus learned that many of those items were available, he acted, moving six semi-loads of furniture from the shuttered schools into storage. In the years since, those items have formed the basis for much of his own work. Now, with “Infinite Games 50/50,” he has invited 50 other artists and designers to play with those same materials.

Though it’s easy to place the word “raw” before the word “materials,” it’s hard to describe the specific materials that Preus rescued as “raw,” even in emotional terms. They have had too many lives, including several years sequestered in a warehouse. They have served the usual narrow range of institutional functions, stiffening spines and mass-producing good citizens as defined by politicians and educators.

More interesting, though not surprising to anyone who can remember being even mildly rebellious as a kid, the objects’ users have left traces of themselves behind. For example, the graffiti “Rafael Sucks” and “Rahm Blows” were found on pieces of the salvaged CPS furniture. The “Rafael Sucks” table even formed the basis for a stereo-equipped writing table that Preus himself designed (*Rafael Sucks, adaptation of Le Bloc*). The exhibition’s participants have proven that the personal and institutional history of these objects has not yet ended.

For some adults still processing the events of 2013, negative memories of the schools as institutions may have been softened by nostalgia, or perhaps by sympathy for teachers on the school-to-pension pipeline. Thus, in one interpretation, straightforward nostalgia pervades Jim Duignan’s *Portable Fast Pitch*.

The piece consists of a drawing board marked with lines of tape. On his website, Duignan describes it as the reflection of his childhood knack for drawing fast-pitch strike zones on school walls and other flat surfaces. Although *Portable Fast Pitch* might invite nostalgia, it can also invite the viewer to pick up the nearest ball and hurl it at the school’s window. There are, after all, many ways to go back to the drawing board.

The exhibition also includes many feats of aesthetically-enriched engineering, which is unsurprising given the industrial forms to which the salvaged furniture lends itself. Tadd Cowen’s *Legs that go all the way up* falls into this category. Though the punny title teeters on the edge of trite, it succeeds as an art object. Rising above their earthly station, the CPS-grade hairpin table legs suddenly evoke the skyscrapers and Skyway so beloved by Chicago’s booster-type locals, I among them. Barbara Koenen’s *A Thousand Points of Light*, a paint-splattered, perforated desk chair lit from behind to evoke George H.W. Bush’s famous (or infamous) ode to volunteerism, is another amusing contribution in this vein.

While many participants tinkered with the configuration or appearance of materials, others foregrounded

John Preus, *Rafael Sucks, adaptation of Le Bloc*





Alberto Aguilar, *Left Behind (Iowa Rest Stop)*

context in their engagement with the show's themes. The exhibition features several prints of work by Alberto Aguilar, whose transitory, eerily symmetrical *objets d'art* gain meaning because of the viewer's familiarity with the furniture's history. At what future point would the chair and desk represented in *Left Behind (Iowa Rest Stop)* recede into the weeds that surround them?

In somewhat the same way, Louis Mallozzi's *Spot* operates on the basis of its geographical and cultural coordinates. The viewer peers through a telescope, which reveals an altered chair atop a nearby building. This could be perceived as cleverness for its own sake. It could also be perceived as a short-form psychobiography of the viewer, who is praised for ignoring the beeping, buzzing distractions of city life to briefly focus on several thousand students who lost the communities where many felt safest.

Some of the most interesting works blur the line between art and design, occupying a conceptual space in which cleverness is generally a virtue. Preus's own contributions are on this continuum. While the *Rafael Sucks* desk has retained the original writing table's function within a radically transformed context, his less design-oriented *Prussian Blue* series makes use of actual school blueprints. Brilliantly enough, these are framed by CPS wood from the closed schools that were first conceptualized by those blueprints.

Misha Kahn's *The Loner*, a grandfather clock resembling a Tim Burton prop that sprouted a few tumors, is another intriguing entry in this camp. Perhaps the most playful (though not unserious) work in the exhibition comes from the composer and instrument designer, Walter Kitundu. With his *CPS Xylophone* and the bass-like *Sound Footing*, Kitundu has overlaid new and unexpected functions on materials that could have ended up in a landfill.

The exhibition occupies three floors of Open House Contemporary which is an Air BnB residence. The works fit quite organically within this alternative art setting as though they are part of the venue's original design. ■



John Preus, *Prussian Blue*

Open House Contemporary, 740 N. Ogden Ave.,
Chicago, IL, 60642.

Call (773) 294-4284 to inquire on viewing hours.
September 14, 2017–March 16, 2018.

Nathan Worcester is a writer living in Chicago. He holds a B.A. from the University of Chicago. He once unintentionally filled his car with fast food wrappers, but none of them were salvageable.

“Hervé Guibert: How could it be otherwise?”

Iceberg Project, Chicago

by Michel Ségard

Hervé Guibert was a French photographer and writer who became well-known in France in the 1980s and early 90s, mostly for his writing. He was very influential in bringing awareness to the AIDS epidemic in France until his own death from the disease in 1991 at the age of 35.



Autoportrait, 1989

He is virtually unknown in the United States outside of the LGBTQ community. This show at Iceberg Project in Chicago is only the third exhibition of his photography in the U.S. The two prior American exhibitions of his work were at the Slough Foundation in Philadelphia in 2007 and at Callicoon Fine Arts in New York City in 2014.

Guibert is better known for his writing. A number of his books have been translated into English, including “Mausoleum of Lovers,” “Ghost Image,” “Crazy for Vincent,” and, probably his best-known work, “To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life.” This last book centers on his relationship with literary critic and philosopher, Michel Foucault, until Foucault’s death from AIDS in 1986, and Guibert’s coming to terms with his own HIV-positive diagnosis in 1988. His writing style falls under the general category of autofiction, a form of fictionalized autobiography. And this literary style is the portal to understanding his photography.

Hervé Guibert, *Autoportrait, rue du Moulin-vert, 1986*



Guibert proclaims his position about photography with the statement: “The image is the essence of desire and if you desexualize the image, you reduce it to theory.” His photographs are replete with various forms of desire, sometimes overtly sexual. But the key to understanding Guibert’s aesthetics is to realize that it is closely related to his autofiction literary style.

This can be seen in the way he very carefully sets up his photos, “fictionalizing” the subject and setting to elicit specific emotions. His staging technique is sometimes similar to Cindy Sherman, but with a European sophistication and economy of detail. A good example of this approach is *Auto-portrait, rue du Moulin-vert* from 1986. In this image, he portrays himself as a corpse covered by a shroud in a typically French bourgeois drawing room.



Hervé Guibert, *Emménagement rue du Moulin-vert, 1981*

Another example of this very deliberate technique is *Emménagement* [Moving in] *rue du Moulin-vert* of 1981. This portrait of his mother as a young woman is set free from its frame in a barren and worn-down space (by American standards), and set next to the door. Is she about to escape this Hopperesque space for freedom from a confining marriage? The photo also illustrates another theme that suffuses this selection of photographs. All the spaces are time-worn, garret-like. They are the kinds of spaces I remember when, as a youngster, I lived in France during and shortly after WW II, but these photos were made in the 1980s. The yoke of European history and age permeates Guibert’s architectural spaces, adding a subtle subtext to his work.

Guibert is not afraid of depicting explicit sexual desire. But again, this is with a European finesse rarely seen in American works of art dealing with the same subject matter. (For example, the lasciviousness of Paul Cadmus' painting *The Fleet's In!* from 1934 is more what one sees in American paintings about sexual desire.) In an



Hervé Guibert, *Sans titre*, 1979



Man Ray, *Le Violon d'Ingres*, 1924

homage to Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres*, done in 1924, Guibert's *Sans titre* [Untitled] from 1979 shows a nude male abdomen, the bottom of the rib cage and the pelvis combining to suggest the form of a violin. The male body becomes an instrument to be played as a source of pleasure.

But for Guibert, desire can be separate from the context of a personal relationship. In *Vincent* (date unknown), we see the nude body of one of his lovers, about whom he wrote an entire book, "Crazy for Vincent." The light comes in from a window to highlight Vincent's torso, while his head stays in shadow; we only see the carnal part of their relationship. But it is not depicted in a prurient way; there is a certain sense of *belle époque* romanticism, almost nostalgia, in the way that the bed sheets are arranged and their folds accentuated by the light. This picture could have been taken in 1890. The softness of his approach is in sharp contrast to Mapplethorpe's male nudes which are often politically and provocatively homoerotic.

Two other pieces underscore this "classical" approach. In *écriture* [writing], a nude Guibert is sitting at a table with his back turned to the viewer, supposedly writing. Light streams in from a window above,

illuminating the time-worn room and unmade bed. There is a faint hint of Vermeer in the way the light falls on the figure and one can almost hear the echo of arias from "La Bohème." This highly romantic perspective also permeates *Santa Caterina*, where Guibert lies in bed reading by the light streaming in from an open door. European cultural history infuses these two photographs with a palpable sense of melancholy.

But he also can be brutally truthful. *Suzanne et Louise* shows his two aunts in their bathroom mirror, uncoiffured, minus makeup, totally unadorned. The truth of their age and weariness dominates the picture. Yet his self-portrait from 1989, *Autoportrait*, (see page 28) is less truthful and more romantically, almost seductively self-pitying, with justification—it was taken a year after he was declared HIV-positive.

Another suite of pictures is disturbingly dominated by toys. *Autoportrait rue du Moulin-vert* from 1981 shows the reflection of Guibert taking a picture of a doll dressed in 18th century garb that is hung by its neck from a ceiling medallion. *Néfertiti* shows a puppet dressed in vaguely priestly garb. The title suggests that this Pinocchio is cross-dressing as the Egyptian queen Nefertiti. Lastly, *Le petit soldat* [The little soldier],

Hervé Guibert, *Vincent* (date unknown)



Hervé Guibert, *écriture*, 1983





Hervé Guibert, *Suzanne et Louise*, (date unknown)

taken in 1989, shows a toy soldier charging into battle, an open book and writing paper in the foreground. It has been suggested that the soldier stands for his battle against AIDS, which by this time had already started to take its toll.

In the homemade film of Guibert's last year of life, *La Pudeur ou l'impudeur* [Prudence or Imprudence] Pinocchio shows up as a prop in a sequence where Guibert prepares a suicide dose of digitalis and places it next to the puppet. These images of toys become another type of self-portrait, revealing more deviant and darker facets of his persona.

Finally, the film confronts the truth about dying. It shows the artist struggling to survive, doing exercises to keep mobile, preparing and taking medication, sorting mail, taking a dip in the ocean, talking with his aunt, ultimately shadow-boxing with death as his energy drains and his body wastes away.



Hervé Guibert, *Autoportrait, rue du Moulin-vert*, 1981

Why has this artist's work not been better received in the U.S.? Imagine Guibert's photographs next to the overtly aggressive work of Robert Mapplethorpe, Robert Banchon or Roger Brown. Guibert's poetic, autobiographical musings would be drowned out by

the political polemic of those artists and their peers. Nor would he fare any better against Keith Haring or Jean-Michel Basquiat. The shrillness of American art during the 1980 and 1990 period was not an environment conducive to works of quiet introspection. Yet sometimes, the most enduring message is rendered in a whisper. ■



Hervé Guibert, *Le petit soldat*, 1989

Except for the Man Ray, all photos are courtesy of the Hervé Guibert Estate and Callicoon Fine Arts.

All the photographs in this exhibition are included in the online version of this review at www.newartexaminer.org.

Michel Ségard is the Editor-in-Chief of the New Art Examiner.

Still from the film *Pudeur ou l'impudeur*



Degas to Picasso: Creating Modernism in France

Milwaukee Art Museum

by Tom Mullaney

For more than two centuries, from the early 19th through the 20th century postwar era, anyone who deigned to call themselves an “Artist” had to be versed in drawing and printmaking. When the epicenter of the modern art world moved from Paris to New York following World War II, drawing lost its equal standing with painting in the face of Abstract Expressionism’s more muscular, grand gestures.

Drawing and prints were once essential parts of an artist’s toolkit. Artists turned to drawing to fashion preparatory studies before putting paint to canvas or as finished compositions in their own right. Drawing was the artists’ common thread and a practice they regularly employed in their search for new, innovative ideas.

It is uncommon to currently find museums mounting drawing exhibitions (unless the artists are named Leonardo or Michelangelo). Even the Art Institute, which houses a world-class prints and drawings collection, has been reluctant, in recent memory, to showcase this prized archive with a full-scale exhibition.

Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait du Dr. Gachet*



Jacques-Louis David, *Veillard et Jeune Femme*

Which is why it’s refreshing and commendable that the Milwaukee Art Museum has mounted a revelatory exhibit of 150 works from both the holdings of two noted Chicago collectors. The show arrives in Milwaukee after a successful run at the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford, England and will be on display through January 28, 2018.

It traces the evolutionary development of modernism in France. In the early 19th Century, the practice of art and who might be considered an artist were rigidly controlled by the French Academy which emphasized slavish devotion to classical themes drawn mainly from ancient history and mythology.

Artists increasingly chafed at such restrictions and sought the freedom to find their own styles. This movement began in the 1830s and 1840s by such pre-Impressionist artists as Millet, Pissarro and Manet. These precursors gave way in 1874 to the Impressionists led by Monet, Cezanne and Renoir to be followed by Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Post-Impressionists.



Jean Metzinger, *Landscape*

Exhibition curator, Britany Salsbury, has mounted a very intelligent exhibition aided by the quality of the drawings at her disposal. She has arranged the works in a chronological survey encompassing seven art movements throughout 11 of the museum's galleries with informative wall texts that begin with "Academy and Avant-Garde" followed by "Half a Century of Revolution," and several galleries beyond with "Moving Into the Modern World," closing with "Wild Beasts (Fauvists) and Cubists" and the 1912 show of Cubist art known as "The Golden Section."

Simply seeing the works on the walls, one might get the mistaken impression that art's movement from Classicism to Cubism was a seamless and serene progression. Not so. The 19th and early 20th century period witnessed full-scale revolt by French artists for artistic freedom that led to the birth of modernism.

The primary collection is fully capable of supporting such a wide-ranging show. It is comprehensive in

scope with no historical or artistic gaps in the coverage extending from such lesser-known figures as Louis-Leopold Boilly and Theodore Chasseriau to more textbook figures as Delacroix, Honore Daumier, Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas and through modern art giants like Manet, Matisse, Monet, Gauguin and Picasso.

Among the many highlights in the exhibition are Jacques-Louis David's drawing, *An Old Man and a Young Woman*, Van Gogh's portrait of Dr. Guchet, his only known etching, Jean Metzinger's *Landscape* and Picasso's *Female Nude*.

Yet, rather than focus on the art stars, the show's purpose is to draw attention to the great technique and versatility of so many artists. I found one of the exhibition's pleasures in discovering, and reveling at, stunning work by lesser-known figures such as Raoul Dufy (*Sainte Adresse Seen Through the Trees*), Albert Gleizes (*The City and The River*) and Jacques Villon (*L'Equilibriste—The Tightrope Walker*).

A few more weeks remain to catch this richly rewarding show of a now less familiar genre, once an indispensable part of an artist's vocabulary. While paint is the fuel that propels the contemporary art world, this exhibition claims that we are foolishly overlooking an equally rich heritage of pen and ink. ■



Pablo Picasso, *Female Nude*

Tom Mullaney is the New Art Examiner's Senior Editor. He has written on art for The New York Times, Chicago Magazine and Crain's Chicago Business.

David Yarrow : “Wild Encounters”

Hilton/Asmus Gallery

by Nick Ogilvie

On first entering the David Yarrow show at Hilton | Asmus gallery, I stepped back in amazement at the oversize photo of an elephant in full charge mode. With increased poaching and ever more animals being hunted to extinction, the conservation of wild animals has never been more urgent.

This sensitive issue is central to Scottish fine-art photographer, conservationist, and writer, David Yarrow. He creates compelling stories through his gripping images of these rare and endangered beasts and their threatened realms.

In “Wild Encounters,” Yarrow attempts to bridge the gap between the disparate worlds of the manufactured human environment and the natural animal kingdom through his wildlife portrait photographs. Yarrow calls this collection, “Iconic Photographs of the World’s Vanishing Animals and Cultures” and every image is evidence of this theme.

Yarrow captures these magnificent, endangered animals in towering prints of overpowering impact. He captures them in a range of stunning settings, from the frozen Alaskan tundra to the tropics of South Sudan. Yarrow has scoured every world continent to bring what remains of the wild natural world to human awareness.

In the gallery’s tight quarters, his animal subjects appear life-size, at just arms-length, ready to step out of the frame and pounce. That is the feeling I experienced

David Yarrow, *American Idol*



David Yarrow, *The Circle of Life*

eyeing both a bison (*The American Idol*) and elephant (*Lugard*).

Through his keen sense of composition, it’s the balance of motion and stillness that imparts each image with its sense of life and energy. Whether it be a teeming mass of moving cattle in *Mankind II* or a striding Giraffe caught mid-gait amidst streaming clouds of dust, framed by a beautifully still sky in *Heaven Can Wait*; the essence of captured motion makes the animals come alive.

This rich imagery, presented in crisp black and white tones, makes it easy to feel the sense of the animals’ natural majesty which Yarrow seeks to capture. Part conservation effort, part tribute to the beauty of the natural world, and part semi-mystical examination of the world beyond the human vision, such provocative imagery manages to renew and revive the connection of human and animal.

I reacted strongly to the beautiful ways in which the deliberate use of monochrome frames each of the photos. Yarrow himself cites a Warhol quote in the description for one of his photos, wryly noting that “my favorite color is black and my other favorite color is white.” His use of monochrome shines, whether in starkly contrasting photos like *The Factory*, where a herd of zebras contrast and play against each other; or through a depth of tones, such as in *78 degrees* where a polar bear strides off into the distance enveloped by a field of pristine snow.

Continued on page 35,

Bill Walker: “Urban Griot”

Hyde Park Art Center

by Rebecca Memoli

“Urban Griot” at the Hyde Park Art Center (HPAC), on view through April 8, 2018, features the works of Bill Walker whose murals have inspired generations throughout Chicago. Walker was a pioneer of public art. His most famous piece of work was *The Wall of Respect* at 43rd Street and Langley in the city’s south side.

The Wall of Respect, featuring heroes of African-American culture is celebrating its 50th anniversary and was featured earlier this year at the Chicago Cultural Center. This exhibition includes works on paper on loan from the collection housed at Chicago State University. Curator Juarez Hawkins, a native Chicago artist and educator, has included works primarily from three bodies of work: *For Blacks Only*, *Reagonomics*, and *Red, White and Blue*.

The works are raw and powerful. Walker offers a pointed critique of the government, the way it has ignored the struggling lower and working classes and those who prey on and profit from the deterioration of the community, namely pimps and drug dealers. Although the imagery is often dark and sometimes nightmarish, Walker praises community efforts to come together and embody the light needed to combat the darkness.

The role of the griot is that of the historian of a community, a speaker of truths who is respected for their vision. It is a most fitting title for this exhibition as we see the reflection of Chicago in the 70’s and 80’s through Walker’s eyes. His work paints a tale of complex



Bill Walker, *For Blacks Only #21* (no date)

corruption in its many forms as crime trickles down from the highest places into these poor communities.

At the gallery entrance hangs the earliest work included in the exhibition made in 1972. It is an untitled work in ink on paper. Three faces emerge from a dark, almost geometric form. Each face is in profile as their gaze follows an outstretched hand with pointed finger—pointing a finger at who is to blame.

Throughout the exhibition one can see the repetition of this gesture from one section to the next. In the piece, *For Blacks Only #21*, the pointed finger belongs to a pimp adorned with a diamond ring. He directs this gesture towards a crying woman on the ground as though to say, “Look what you made me do.” She hides her face in fear and shame.

Onward, we follow the pointing fingers and arrive at *Reagonomics #2*. We see a dinner table with three people seated around a meager meal of beans and bread. The figures on the right and left sides of the table have their heads bent in prayer while the center figure looks directly at the viewer with a middle finger raised. Above, the word “Reagonomics” is written across a banner of red, white and blue, but below there are figures with empty plates outstretched.

Around the corner, in an almost separate section of the gallery, are works from the project, *Red, White and Blue*. These works focus more on racial tension between whites and blacks and heroin addiction. *Red*,

Bill Walker, *Reagonomics #2*, 1981



White, and Blue #15 takes place in a courtroom. There are no solid blocks of color, only outlines of figures in red, blue, and black ink that give the sense of flattened space.

In the center is a pimp wearing a crown, surrounded by addicts with hypodermic needles sticking out of their heads and large holes in their bodies. They are all pointing in unison towards a mass of people whose bodies are practically indistinguishable from one another. Again we see blame dolled out but it is coming from those who are partly responsible.

The works are displayed within mattes and black frames. The frames give the work a constrained feeling. Although HPAC is in itself an interesting space that works to break away from the typical white walls gallery model, the black frames and mattes behind glass reinforce just that model. The work is nevertheless powerful and speaks volumes through the glass used to preserve its message for future generations.

Walker's imagery is chilling because it reflects a dark truth about our society. Viewing this work inspires reflection on the nation's current state of affairs. What has changed? Are things worse? Will drugs, violence and racism still consume the public?

Now, another celebrity president is in office and, when the news is on, things feel even more hopeless. That hope can be swiftly reborn with a visit to Hyde Park Art Center. There, real power and light are cultivated to fight against corruption. Perhaps, with the flourish of local and public art, positivity can trickle up for a change. ■

Rebecca Memoli is a Chicago-based photographer and curator. She received her BFA from Pratt Institute and her MFA in Photography from Columbia College. Her work has been featured in several national and international group shows. She has curated seven group exhibitions and her latest curatorial project is *The Feeling is Mutual*.



David Yarrow, *Mankind 1*

“Wild Encounters” continued from page 33.

Still photography is a difficult medium to control and capture the alive nature of wild animals. There's something beautifully simple about Yarrow's use of monochrome that frames each photo. Settled on this spectrum of monochromatic color, the detail of each animal, from individual hairs to droplets of water and dust, pops off the page.

Humans, it seems, have a role to play in the visual world that David Yarrow envisages. In *The Don*, a nude model stands astride a cheetah in the desert. In *Mankind I*, a sole human hangs on a pole amongst a teeming field of cattle. Humans and the way in which we too are involved in the natural world fascinates Yarrow.

A striking example of this interaction is *The Wolf of Main Street*. A wolf strides on the bar top of an old

saloon with patrons drinking and shooting pool nonchalantly in the background.

Documentation is a method of preserving the natural world that exists beyond the confines of our restricted modern lives. These moments, so elegantly captured before our eyes, are symbolic of things that are slowly fading away. This presentation of aesthetic beauty is indicative, in an ironic way, of the very destruction being inflicted upon such majestic creatures. ■

The exhibition has been extended until early February.

Nick Ogilvie, who hails from Scotland, is enrolled in his sophomore year at the University of Chicago. He also contributes writings on the arts for “The Maroon,” the student newspaper.

Neil Goodman: “Twists and Turns”

Carl Hammer Gallery

by Bruce Thorn

Perspective and perception, like many things in life, can change dramatically by taking just a few small steps. An enveloping sense of a parallel world descends upon one when entering “Twists and Turns” at Carl Hammer Gallery. Crossing the threshold, leave the whirlwind of Wells Street behind and enter an oasis populated by nine of Neil Goodman’s bronze sculptures from the past three years.

It’s required here to forget the busy Chicago scene outside, slow down and come to terms with a new, minimalist strangeness where everything must be observed and contemplated from all angles. It’s like a detective story with a dark patina; you really can’t just take anything at face value here. You have to search all around. Still, there are no definitive conclusions, only different views of the multiplicity in a hall of mirrors.

Neil Goodman, *Twist*, 2015-2017, cast bronze.
Photo courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery



Neil Goodman, *Cabal*, 2015-2017, cast bronze.
Photo courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery

There’s a feeling of jet lag and culture shock that goes with being in a place with no glitter or flash. The “one-liner” is an extinct artifact at Carl Hammer’s, a place that never imbibed pop art. Instead of “Zap-Pow-Bam,” we have quiet mysteries in somber tones. Take a breath, spend some time and ponder.

The exhibition includes 7 approximately human-scale, free standing, vertical bronzes and two smaller, horizontal bronzes on pedestals. With the vertical pieces, Goodman has taken a basic “U” shape and repeated, inverted, conjoined and rearranged them in a number of ways with small but significant variations. There is a linear game going on with the interplay of repetitive movements and shapes that puzzles the eye.

Goodman has been known for works consisting of many cast components that are carefully arranged on walls. The works in “Twists and Turns” are one-piece

ponies and the only arrangement necessary is when considering where to place them in the room.

The vertical pieces could be perceived as anthropomorphic abstractions of walking or dancing figures. Six of the vertical pieces are three-pointed. *Twist* joins elongated “U” shapes into a tightly coiled snake-like form that twists and pirouettes. The “heads and feet” are flat and shaped slightly like ginkgo leaves.

Razor’s Edge, For Somerset Maugham presents tight undulating waves with blade-like protrusions at top and bottom. It’s much thinner than *Cabal*, which is also three-pointed but offers more ample and elongated circular negative spaces and points that could be head and shoulder profiles, with cone heads like silhouettes of *Zippy the Pinhead*.

Goodman’s sculptures in “Twists and Turns” don’t have definitive fronts or backs; one must view them from all sides like a cubist circus carousel. While each viewpoint has subtle differences, the play of positive and negative space gives the works the appearance of added volume and depth. Lines are used to give the impression of form.

Goodman mentions Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966) as a major influence. Both artists present thin, vertical walking figures. Like Giacometti, Goodman’s work shows a plentiful trail of evidence of labor-intensive hand finishing of the castings and a dark patina that adds a primitive and tribal feel. His work also brings to mind David Smith (1906-1965) and Stuart Davis (1892-1964).

Perhaps Goodman’s figures would not be too out of place in an Yves Tanguy picture (1900-1955). One difference from these earlier artists is that Goodman’s work presents more complex arrangements when observed in the round, largely due to being able to see through the negative spaces.

Looking at Goodman’s bronzes, it’s hard to ignore the fact that a simple shape has been copied and arranged in ways that appear to multiply the actual complexity and heft, and those shapes also function as linear, calligraphic elements that imply constant motion. There’s a feeling of being on a surrealist stage set.

Turn is six-pointed and has a more complex feel than the three-pointed vertical figures. There’s a resemblance to bobby pins or tweezers and a feeling of seeing double. *Turn* seems to imply motion with the carousel going round faster and faster.



Neil Goodman, *Twilight 1*, 2015-2017, cast bronze.
Photo courtesy of Carl Hammer Gallery

The two horizontal pieces, *Twilight 1* and *Twilight 2*, function conceptually as landscapes. They riff on variations of a basic horizontal trapezoid and maximize the synergy of positive and negative spaces. This kind of abstraction is quieter and cooler than the alcohol-fueled, emotionally wild doings of 1950’s Abstract Expressionism.

The skies were overcast and there were no shadows on the two days that I visited “Twists and Turns.” It would be interesting to see the shadowplay that Mr. Goodman’s characters and landscapes cast upon the walls on a day with the sun beaming through the windows.

At this point in the game, Goodman is a branded and established sculptor who has reached an advanced level of art and craft. There are no big career-changing surprises expected. Mr. Goodman definitely has what it takes to show us what he’s got. ■

Bruce Thorn is a Chicago based painter and musician. He has degrees in painting and drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is a Contributing Editor to the New Art Examiner.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The **New Art Examiner** has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Subscription rates include six issues, print and digital version sent by email.

USA/Canada	\$55	postage incl.
UK	£41.50	postage incl.
Europe	€ 46.5	postage incl.
Rest of World	\$80	postage incl.

Please send checks, along with your name and address, made payable to:

New Art Examiner
5542 N. Paulina St.
Chicago, IL 60640. USA.

ADVERTISING RATES 2018

FULL PAGE Inside front cover	\$500
Inside back cover	\$400
FULL PAGE	\$300
HALF PAGE – portrait/landscape	\$200
QUARTER PAGE – (editorial page)	\$125
(add \$25 for inclusion on web site)	
QUARTER PAGE – portrait/landscape	\$125
(add \$25 for inclusion on web site)	
EIGHTH PAGE – landscape	\$75
TWELFTH PAGE ‘Tweet’	\$25
(suggested for artists and others)	

All rates are for “camera ready” art.

Black and white or color prices are the same.

NAE Facebook page \$125 month

For further information, contact:

advertising@newartexaminer.org

NEW ART EXAMINER IS AVAILABLE FROM THE FOLLOWING CHICAGO OUTLETS:

57th Street Books

1301 E 57th St, Chicago, IL 60637
(773) 684-1300

ARC Gallery

2156 N Damen Ave, Chicago, IL 60647
(773) 252-2232

Corbett vs Dempsey Gallery

1120 N Ashland Ave, Chicago, IL 60622
(773) 278-1664

Fahlström's Fresh Fish Market

1258 W Belmont Ave, Chicago, IL 60657
(773) 281-6000

Firecat Projects

2124 N Damen Ave, Chicago, IL 60647
(773) 342-5381

Hilton | Asmus Contemporary

716 N Wells St, Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 475-1788

Kavi Gupta Gallery Bookstore

835 W Washington Blvd, Chicago, IL 60607
(312) 432-0708

Lawrence & Clark Gallery

4751 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 459-0586

Linda Warren Projects

327 N Aberdeen St #151, Chicago, IL 60607
(312) 432-9500

Mars Gallery

1139 W Fulton Market, Chicago, IL 60607
(312) 226-7808

Martha Mae Art Supplies and Beautiful Things

5407 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60640
(872) 806-0988

Thomas Masters Gallery

245 W North Ave, Chicago, IL 60610
(312) 440-2322

Printworks

311 W Superior St # 105, Chicago, IL 60654
(312) 664-9407

Sidewinder Gallery

4880 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60640
(773) 961-8022

HILTON | ASMUS
CONTEMPORARY

**DAVID YARROW
WILD ENCOUNTERS**

716 N. Wells Street
Chicago, IL 60654
www.hilton-asmus.com
info@hilton-asmus.com
312.852.8200



ANDREW BAE
GALLERY

Exhibited Artists

Leeah Joo
Kwangjean Park
Jae Ko
Tetsuya Noda
Jungjin Lee
Keysook Geum
Young June Lew

andrewbaegallery.com



Some Familiar Faces

CARL HAMMER GALLERY
740 N. Wells 312.266.8512

AARON SISKIND: NO TWO ALIKE
AN EXHIBITION OF VINTAGE VARIATIONS

Show runs December 1, 2017 through February 24th, 2018

Stephen Daiter Gallery

330 West Superior St., 4th Floor, Chicago | 312.787.3350 | stephendaitergallery.com



McCormick Gallery
contemporary and modern art

17 years in Chicago's West Loop
835 West Washington Boulevard
312-226-6800
www.thomasmccormick.com

Can You Believe What You've Missed in 18 Months?



Volume 30, Issue 5: May/June 2016

Orwell's Newspeak haunts the contemporary art world.
David Lee talks about the hype of arts council funded sculpture.
Carinthia West on Saatchi Gallery's exhibition about the Rolling Stones.



Volume 30, Issue 6: July/August 2016

Darren Jones calls upon New York's art critics to resign
Michel Ségard on Tony Fitzpatrick
Edward Lucie Smith's reprint from the Jackdaw, The Degeneration of the Avant-Garde into Fashion.



Volume 31, Issue 1: September/October 2016

Tom Mullaney examines museum ethics
Daniel Nanavati on how death stalks Damien Hirst's imagination
Jane Addams Allen in 1986 on where collectors' money is taking the art world



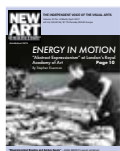
Volume 31, Issue 2: November/December 2016

Charles Thomson examines art's role on society
Tom Mullaney interviews the Arts Club and the Renaissance Society leaders
We introduce Scouting the Blogs



Volume 31, Issue 3: January/February 2017

Jorge Miguel Benitez — The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism
Part 1: The Illusion of Progress
Tom Mullaney wonders why top museum directors avoid taking a public stance on Art
Feier Lai — For whom and for what does the artist perform?



Volume 31, Issue 4: March/April 2017

Stephen Eisenman looks at "Abstract Expressionism" at London's Royal Academy of Art
Jorge Miguel Benitez — The Avant-Garde and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism
Part 2: Blood-drenched Brushes and Golden Easels
David Lee examines Nicholas Serota's new leadership of the Arts Council



Volume 31, Issue 5: May/June 2017

We address gender politics in art with Larry Kamphausen's "Gender Identity and the Male Gaze"
and two reviews of ARTAIDSAMERICA Chicago
Jorge Benitez presents the third essay "The Will to Ignorance: The Role of Academia in the Post-modern Debacle" in his trilogy "The Avant-Gard and the Delusion of American Exceptionalism."



Volume 31, Issue 6 : July/August 2017

Three Top Summer Art Reads.
What's This Social Practice Art Thing? An Interview with Artist Paul Druecke.
The Changing World of Alternative Art Spaces in Chicago.
Reviews of Jim Dine, Robert Frank and Arlene Shechet.



Volume 32, Issue 1 : September/October 2017

Chicago Architecture Biennial 2017
Graphic Novel Channels Daniel Burnham's Plan
Amanda Williams: Architecture's Sharp Social Critic
Report from Kassel on this year's **documenta 14**



Volume 32, Issue 2 : November/December 2017

William Blake and the Age of Aquarius at the Block Museum
Tom Mullaney interviews Jaume Plensa, creator of the Crown Fountain
Expo Chicago: Three Examiner critics trade opposing views
Evan Carter on Artistic Disruption and the New Institutionalism

Subscriptions to the New Art Examiner are \$55 for six issues, postage included.

Send check made out to New Art Examiner, 5542 N. Paulina St., Chicago, IL 60640 or
logon to www.newartexaminer.org and subscribe via PayPal