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RE-figuration



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NATHAN WORCESTER considers how outsider art challenges our conceptions of figuration

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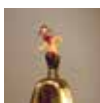
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New Art Examiner

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

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

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

1. No writer may review an exhibition originated or curated by a fellow faculty member or another employee, or any past or present student, from the institution in which they are currently employed. The *New Art Examiner* welcomes enthusiastic and sincere representation, so the editor can assign such an exhibition to other writers without the burden of conflict of interest.
2. There shall be no editorial favor in response to the purchase of advertisements.
3. The *New Art Examiner* welcomes all letters to the Editor and guarantees publishing. Very occasionally letters may be slightly edited for spelling or grammar or if the content is considered to be libellous.
4. The *New Art Examiner* does not have an affiliation with any particular style or ideology or social commitment that may be expressed or represented in any art form. All political, ethical and social commentary is 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.

Introduction to “RE-figuration”

In his article “What’s happened to figurative art?,” written for *The Guardian* in 2009, Jonathan Jones could declare that, “when it comes to modern art, craft is dead.” More than ten years later, it seems that his postmortem was premature. After a century dominated by the concept and lost in abstraction, much of today’s increasingly politicized art is dominated by a strangely regressive impulse: the will to direct representation of the world.

What’s *that* all about?

Appearing as they do at times of disruption and uncertainty, do our most radical visions of the future conceal a nostalgia for some old, uncomplicated order—the way those Soviet-era social realist tractors got to have it both ways, standing in for both wholesome, agrarian past and glorious, collectivist future, all without straying anywhere near good taste? Or is there something new under the sun?

In our opening essay, Diane Thodos rages against the death of life drawing. Repulsed by conceptualism and postmodernism, she argues for the liberating potential of close attention to the human figure, concluding that life drawing “has the regenerative power to help us rediscover the reality of the self that lies within.” Michel Ségard considers recent trends in portraiture, identifying a tendency toward honest, psychologically sophisticated representation. He places African-American, Latinx, and LGBTQ artists at the vanguard of this particular revolution. Rounding out our thematic essays, K.A. Letts profiles four African-American artists from Detroit who are taking figurative art in exciting new directions. On her account, they are “employing the visual vocabulary of establishment portraiture to subvert the genre for their own purposes.”

Figuration is a prominent theme in many of our reviews. Examining a show at Chicago’s One After 909 gallery, Evan Carter is moved by a collection of figurative works that are, in his words, “distinctly different and distinctly Chicago.” Emelia Lehmann whisks us away to Palette & Chisel, a bastion of traditional fine arts housed in an 1870s mansion on Chicago’s Near North Side. As rendered in her lucid prose, Palette & Chisel feels at once atavistic and strikingly contemporary. Nathan Worcester visits “Outsider Art: The Collection of Victor F. Keen” at Intuit. He considers the widely disparate figurative strategies on display, relating them to our cultural model of the artist-as-individual-genius. Ann Sinfield exposes us to figurative and non-figurative works at “Stolen Sisters,” an exhibition highlighting the violence experienced by indigenous women and girls.

Other reviews are less concerned with figuration, though no less fascinating as a result. Kristina Olson tours “Andrea Zittel: An Institute of Investigative Living.” She draws out similarities and differences between Zittel and the Bauhaus movement; while Walter Gropius saw the task of art as “giv[ing] form to space,” Olson sees Zittel’s practice as one of “*defining* space.” Madison Moore is both delighted and disoriented by Silke Otto-Knapp’s “In the waiting room” at the Renaissance Society: “It’s a stand-offish arrangement,” she explains. Finally, Ben Nicholson introduces us to the Museum of Jurassic Technology, a SoCal oddity out of the fever dreams of Dr. Caligari, or possibly Crispin Glover.

Read on and join us as we explore how figuration is being reimagined.

The Editors

The Body in Exile: Figure Drawing as Radical Act

by Diane Thodos

It's no coincidence that the rise of Conceptualism, both in our museums and in the academy, corresponds to the devaluation of traditional schooling in the arts. Who needs to go through the rigors of drawing from the figure...if all an artist has to do is find a predictably outrageous outlet for a predictably outrageous opinion?

Mario Naves,
*On the Importance of Drawing*¹

...[T]he human body, as a nucleus, is rich in associations, and when it is turned into art these associations are not entirely lost... It is ourselves and arouses memories of all the things we wish to do with ourselves...

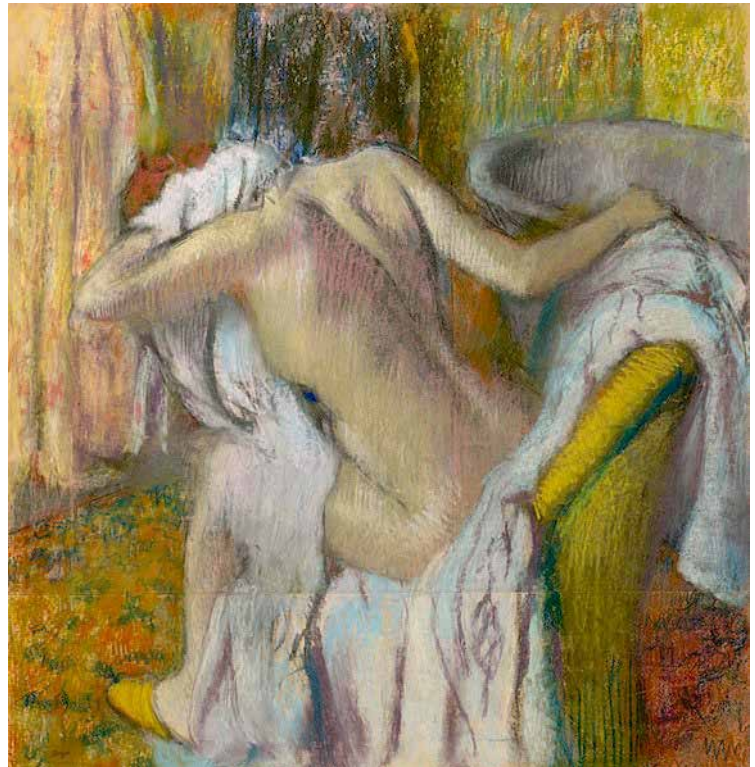
Kenneth Clark,
*The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*²

It is hard to deny that we are now living through post-human times, in no small part because of the power of mass culture, technology, and propaganda over our lives, political systems, and the very life of nations themselves. In his 1964 book *The Technological Society*, Jacques Ellul warned about the

increasing standardization of culture that has come to pass, not merely through technological mechanization, but through the colonization and control of thinking itself: "Technique requires predictability... It is necessary, then, that technique prevail over the human being...the individual must be fashioned by techniques...in order to wipe out the blots of his personal determination..."³

The postmodern and conceptual currents of the mainstream art world reflect this same phenomenon. Conceptualism by its very nature embraces the deskilling and de-education of art students and uncritically appropriates technically driven media accompanied by corresponding modes of conformist application and use. Examples of this tendency include Dan Flavin's fluorescent tube installations and Joseph Kosuth's readymades, which are accompanied by wall texts. Ellul understands how the embrace of technological "techniques" masquerades as creative discovery precisely because "[t]rue technique will know how to maintain the illusion of liberty, choice, and individually."⁴ Is it any wonder why an art magazine like *Artforum*

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself*, circa 1890–1895, 41" x 39".





Left: Egon Schiele, *Squatting Woman*, 1918, graphite on paper, 17.7" x 11.6". Collection of the Tate.



Right: Gustav Klimt, *Pregnant Woman and Man*, 1903–1904, black chalk on paper, 17.6" x 11.8". Collection of the National Galleries of Scotland.

has always promoted figuration that ridicules itself through repetitiously deskilled, technical and banalized conceptual forms? This corresponds exactly with Ellul's assertion that, "if technique demands the participation of everybody, this means that the individual is reduced to a few essential functions, which make him mass man. He remains 'free' but he can no longer escape being part of the mass."⁵

This is why the supremacy of conceptualism—a kind of mainstreamed "mass" art culture—doomed human life study and skill, essentially derailing the search for meaningful self-expression in art training. But even as Ronald Barthes' postmodern assertion of the "death of the author" became the popular mantra of art theory in the '80s and '90s, the instinctive and intuitive drive to render the human figure and relate stories of human experience gave revitalized importance to the auteur in the form of the graphic novel and animated films. Even for digitally based animation, life drawing is important. Karl Gness, who has trained Disney animators for decades, explains its critical role:

"You can draw animation and gesture without life drawing, but life drawing skills give you proportion, structure, perspective, and a certain vitality through rhythmic gestures.... Animators feel like these classes stimulate their creativity, because of what it takes to

refine those skills. They're creating neurological pathways for better imagination."⁶

These quasi-popular art forms gave artists an outlet to reengage with storytelling, draftsmanship, and a relationship to their audience that avoided the exclusionary arrogance of the postmodern mainstream. Human content and skill were cynically banished from the center, forcing expressive media into the margins of the conceptual "fine art" mainstream.

A typical example of the application of Ellul's "technique" in postmodern art is how life study was replaced with copying from photographs. Figures traced or rendered from photos often look dead for a good reason. No actual human presence is witnessed. No act of observation and using eye-hand coordination took place. No relationship between the artist and the human subject existed.

Today, learning to render the human figure with concentration and skill has become a radical act for a simple reason. Our technology-driven Internet age has made us comfortable with erasing the need to skillfully witness and attend to the human presence, and, by association, ourselves. Technological displacement and substitution detaches us from the core of creative experience. Figure drawing does the opposite. It increases the sense of human connection through



Left: Praxiteles,
*Hermes Bearing the
Child Dionysos*. Parian
marble, H. 7 ft. 1/2 in.
Archaeological Museum
of Olympia, Greece.



Right: Lucian Freud,
*Painter Working,
Reflection*, 1993. The
Lucian Freud Archive/
Royal Academy of Arts.

the discipline that comes from hours of observation and eye-hand coordination. According to author Peter Steinhart:

“For many artists drawing is a way of exploring life. Edward Hill, professor of art at the University of Houston, declared, ‘The object of all drawing is to intensify experience.’... Because its aims are gradual and cumulative, drawing is a discipline, an organizing and training and honing of the imagination so that one may be ready to work spontaneously whenever called upon. It is a discipline that requires constant exercise.”⁷

Between roughly 500 and 100 BC, Greek sculptors and sculptures such as Myron (*Discus Thrower*) and Praxiteles (*Hermes Bearing the Child Dionysos*) effectively invented the nude. Their great achievement was the unification of the body with the spirit into an idealized whole. This idealization was lost until the Renaissance, when the rediscovery of Hellenistic sculpture inspired great artists such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci. But according to Clark, the tradition was lost once again during the neo-classical period of the 19th century,

“...when nude figures, which had been evolved to express an idea, ceased to do so, and were represented for their perfection alone, they soon lost

their value. This was the fatal legacy of neoclassicism....The academic nudes of the nineteenth century are lifeless because they no longer embodied real human needs and experiences.”⁸

In the Modernist period of art from 1880 to the present, the transformative power of the ideal of the nude has been lost due to the loss of anatomical knowledge, concentration, and skill, along with a devalued sense of the body itself. But in spite of this loss, there are artists of the Modernist era like Edgar Degas, Auguste Rodin, Gustav Klimt, and Egon Schiele who are celebrated draftsmen of the figure. Even their simplest drawings radiate a tremendous vitality and immediacy of the human presence with masterful skill and expressive force.

It is worth mentioning the work of two British figure artists whose art has survived the conceptual bias of the mainstream. It was fortunate that Jenny Saville and Lucian Freud each received a solid skill-based education from their respective schools—something, as Saville has pointedly remarked, that has disappeared from art training. For both artists, the figure is observed with an almost furious concentration that exposes their subjects’ flaws with vulnerability and pathos, but also with an undeniable animal energy and fleshy intensity. The interiority of their subjects is

filtered through the interiority of themselves, reasserting the power of subjective vision and the uniqueness of the human presence. Freud's and Saville's many years of mastery achieve this double reflection: that of their sitters and of themselves.

Like the mass culture that surrounds us, the mainstream art world has turned away from the life world we inhabit, abandoning the tools we need to express our all-too-human condition at a time when we need them most. This is why returning to the skill of drawing from life is radical. It breaks from all the "techniques" of mass culture by concentrating our minds and skills back on the human subject, and, by extension, our own subjectivity. Developing life-drawing skills brings about the possibility of reconnecting with life and resisting alienation. It also has the regenerative power to help us rediscover the reality of the self that lies within.

Diane Thodos is an artist and art critic who lives in Evanston, IL. She exhibits internationally and is in the collections of the Milwaukee Art Museum, the National Hellenic Museum, the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, the Block Museum at Northwestern University, and the Illinois Holocaust Museum, among many others.

1. Mario Naves, "On the Importance of Drawing," *Too Much Art: Writings on Visual Culture by Mario Naves*, mnaves.wordpress.com, 2012
2. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, Kingsport Press Inc., Kingsport Tennessee, 1971, p. 8
3. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, Vintage Books (a division of Random House), New York, 1964, p. 138
4. Ibid, p. 139
5. Ibid, p. 207
6. Susan Karlin, "Learning in the Flesh: Why Disney Sends Its Animators to Life Drawing Classes," *Fastcompany.com*, July 23, 2014
7. Peter Steinhart, *Undressed Art: Why We Draw*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1964 p. 22-23
8. Clark, p. 26



Jenny Saville, *Time*, 2010, charcoal on paper. In private collection.



Auguste Rodin, *Nude lying on her back with right leg up*, pencil and watercolor, 12 3/4" x 12". Jules E. Mastbaum Collection of Rodin Drawings, Yale University Art Gallery.

Portraiture Rebounds and Refocuses

By Michel Ségard

Over the last few years, we have seen an increase and change in the direction of portraiture in U.S. contemporary art. It has been led largely by African Americans like Kehinde Wiley, Lorna Simpson, Hank Willis Thomas, and, more recently, Devan Shimoyama, Danny Ferrell and Alfred Con-teh, to name the first half dozen that come to mind. In addition, there are artists who are not exclusively portraitists but whose style and content are compatible with this group of artists, such as Kerry James Marshall, Henry Taylor, and Meleko Mokgosi. Mostly members of the African-American, LGBTQI, or Latinx communities, many of these artists use their work to establish an equal and *fully human* status in our broader culture.

These artists have set a tone of portraying the soul of the sitters rather than just their social status and fame. This is dramatically manifested when one

compares Simmie Lee Knox's portrait of President Bill Clinton with Wiley's portrait of President Obama.

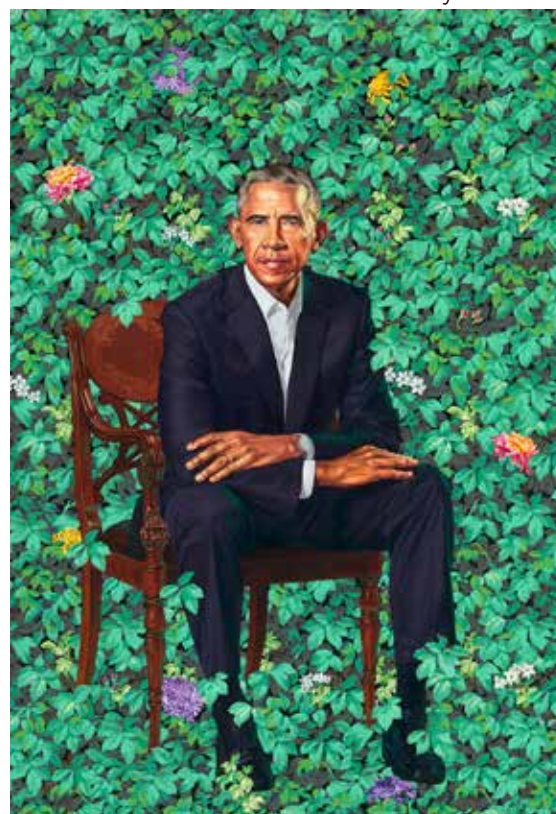
Note that Clinton is portrayed with the trappings of his office and in a formal pose. This is a typical portrait of someone of status in a traditional style that goes back centuries. On the other hand, Obama's portrait shows no signs of his status; the background is a collection of foliage and flowers and makes no reference to the presidency. He is not even wearing a tie, and his pose is definitely casual. The expressions on their faces are also clearly different. Clinton has a relaxed half-smile that suggests he may be hiding his true feelings. On the other hand, the wrinkles on Obama's face reveal the stress of the job and the seriousness of his responsibilities. As this example illustrates, it is the change in what is being revealed that makes this resurgence in portraiture significant.

This change in the content of portraiture is not confined to African-American artists. Last year's Whitney

Simmie Lee Knox, *President William Jefferson Clinton*, oil on canvas, 2001. The White House Collection, Washington, D.C.



Kehinde Wiley, *President Barack Hussein Obama*, 2018, oil on canvas, 84 1/8" x 57 7/8". National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. © 2018 Kehinde Wiley.





Left: Curran Hatleberg, *Untitled (Mantis)*, 2018, inkjet print. Collection of the artist. Image courtesy of Higher Pictures, New York. Photo courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art. **Center:** Elle Pérez, *Mae (three days after)*, 2019, pigmented inkjet print, 50" x 33 3/8". Collection of the artist; courtesy 47 Canal, New York. Photo courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art. **Right:** Kyle Thurman, *Suggested Occupation 30*, 2019. Charcoal, gouache, ink, and pastel on seamless paper with wood frame, 75" x 48". Collection of the artist; courtesy CENTRAL FINE, Miami Beach. Photo courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Biennial had three artists who presented portraits that stood out as fitting into this shift in focus: Curran Hatleberg's *Untitled (Mantis)*, *Mae (three days after)* by Elle Pérez, and Kyle Thurman's entire *Suggested Occupation* series. Hatleberg portrays a working-class woman who probably has had one beer too many and who is about to light a cigarette. She is staring at a praying mantis that has landed on the hand of her drinking companion. The personal ravages of working-class struggles are revealed in her face. Pérez shows us a young woman who has recently undergone extreme physical trauma—she has a pair of black eyes and an ominous scar on her neck. We can only surmise what the circumstances of these injuries were. Thurman presents a series of seven "full body" portraits of ordinary men, four in pairs in undefined and mostly unhappy and possibly tragic circumstances. What the works of these artists from the 2019 Whitney Biennial

have in common is that they portray ordinary people entrapped in the everyday tragedies of life.

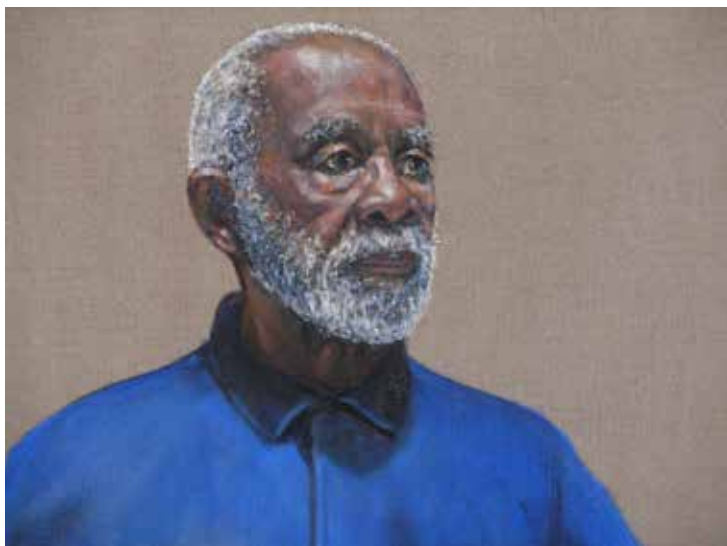
In Chicago, Riva Lehrer is noted for her portraits of people with physical deformities, bringing out their struggles and conquests of their disabilities. Her portraits are an embodiment of the humanity of the disabled. Robert Pioch is a watercolor artist who does strikingly empathic watercolor portraits of ordinary people. Also locally, Jesse Howard showed large portraits of African American subjects at Hofheimer Gallery in the Spring of 2019 that fit into this context. In a show of work by artists who have survived cancer at Chicago Art Department, a gallery in Pilsen, Eileen Powers showed a series of self-portraits called "Can You Make Hair for Me" where she demonstrated the tenacity and humor that got her through the loss of hair from chemotherapy. The portraits show her with hair made of different substances: ribbons, yarn, lettuce leaves,



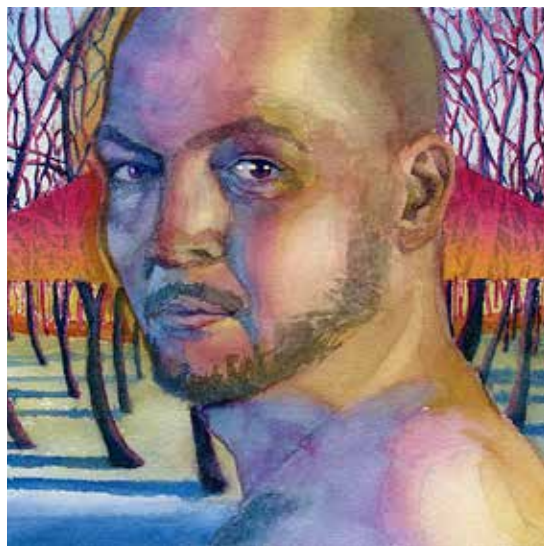
Left: Riva Lehrer, *Susan Nussbaum*, 1998, acrylic on panel, 16" x 26". Courtesy of the artist.



Right: Jesse Howard, *Lady with a Red Ribbon*, charcoal, acrylic paint. Courtesy of Hofheimer Gallery, Chicago.



Left: Catherine Jones, *Second World War Veteran*, 2016, oil on linen, detail. Courtesy of the artist. **Right:** Robert Pioch, *Aaron*, 2017, watercolor. Courtesy of the artist.



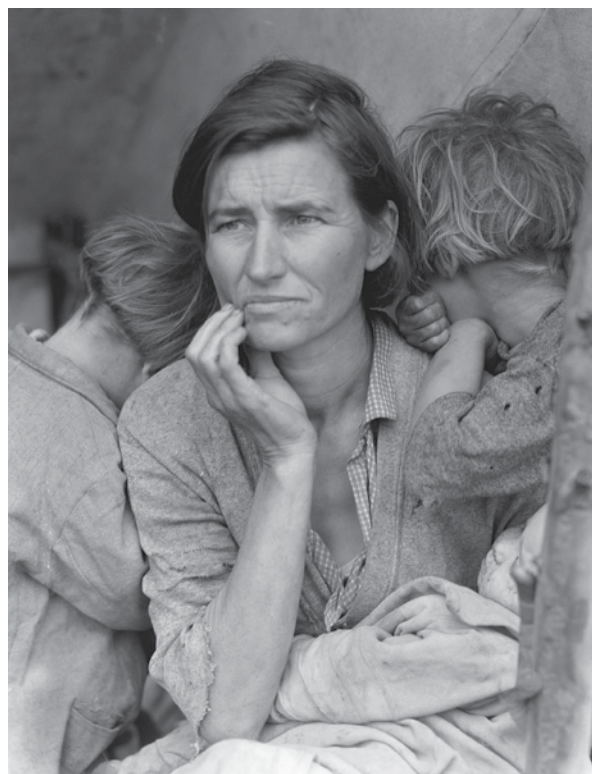
curly noodles, etc. Hers were not portraits of position or political power or social circumstances, but portraits of a determined will to survive both physically and mentally while maintaining a sense of humor. Also documenting the effects of surviving traumatic circumstances is the portrait series of armed services veterans from a variety of conflicts, started in 2003, by Canadian artist Catherine Jones.* The series depicts the pride and pain that shaped the demeanor of these men as a result of their service, no matter what side they were on, and it has received wide acclaim in Canada and Europe.

Historically, portraits of common folk rose to popularity with Impressionism. Much earlier, in the 17th century, Rembrandt van Rijn painted a number of honest, resonant portraits—but they were mostly of the wealthy merchant class or of himself. They showed the social position of the subjects, who were mostly the bourgeoisie, not the wealthy or nobility, and they were benign and decorative—with Renoir, sometimes even cloyingly sentimental. One could go all the way back to the 18th century and name Francisco Goya as the “originator” of portraits of ordinary people. His were



Left: Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait*, 1937, oil on canvas, 75 3/4" x 35". Art Institute of Chicago, © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Right: Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, 1936, photograph. National Museum of American History—Smithsonian Institution.





Left: Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, oil on canvas, 60" x 45 7/8". Private collection.



Right: Lucian Freud, *Eli and David*, 2006, oil on canvas, 56" x 46". Courtesy of the Lucian Freud Archive.

not particularly psychologically "pleasing," often bordering on cruel caricature.

It was during the period between the two world wars that portraits started to pay attention to the soul of their subjects and show suffering and not just their low-brow social status. We have George Grosz, who railed indignantly against the hedonism and political corruption of the Weimar Republic. But he was obsessed with exposing a corrupt social and political system, and his work overflows with righteous indignation. Then there is Max Beckmann, whose self-portraits reveal his skepticism about the world, especially in the self-portraits

of 1917 and 1937 (both in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago). Perhaps the most famous portraits of the '30s to come out of the U.S. are Grant Wood's *American Gothic* and Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*. Wood portrayed an archetypal couple, a farmer and his daughter. Neither model who posed for the painting were farmers. The man was a dentist, and the woman was Wood's sister. On the other hand, Lange's model was an actual pea picker in California and the mother of seven children. Lange showed us the reality, not an exemplar.



Above: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #92*, 1981, chromogenic color print, 24" x 48". The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures.

Right: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Lisa Lyon*, 1982, gelatin silver print, 19 1/8" x 15 1/16". The Los Angeles County Museum of Art. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.



Left: Jenny Saville, *Rosetta II*, 2005–2006 Oil on watercolor paper, mounted on board, 98" x 72.8". Private collection. © Jenny Saville. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian.

Right: Andrew Salgado, *Now & 4 Ever*, 2013. Oil on soft (yarn, cotton, fabric), 74.8" x 90.6".



After World War II, portraiture receded into the background as abstract expressionism took over. But there were a few notable examples from the post-war era. The two most famous are probably Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud. Bacon's series of screaming popes, based on the 1650 portrait of Pope Innocent X by Velázquez, is an example of the change in attitude caused by World War II (and the dropping of the atom bomb). Lucian Freud did portraits that are very much in keeping with today's approach of capturing the mental state of the sitter. It is particularly true in the very late painting *Eli and David* from 2006. A bare-chested man reclines in an armchair with his dog asleep in his lap. David's face is subtly contorted with care and/or fatigue as his dog Eli sleeps peacefully unconcerned. This work suggests that Freud is a kind of link between mid-20th century portraiture and contemporary trends.

There is only one artist dealing with portraits in the 1960 and '70s that most people think of—Andy Warhol. But Warhol was not depicting a person or their spirit, he was depicting a brand and commodification. In the 1980s, things began to change. Mapplethorpe emerged as a major portraitist. Like Warhol, he was obsessed by famous personalities, but unlike Warhol, he focused on their self-identity (their egos) rather than their brand. (Then again, there is the occasional hint of fan worship in some of his work, like his portrait of Warhol with a halo-like light behind his head.) Cindy Sherman, on the other hand, produced almost exclusively self-portraits in various feminine roles, exposing and disrupting the ways femininity is socially constructed. Her work leaves one thinking uncomfortably about female stereotypes in our society. One particularly disturbing image is *Untitled Film Still #21* from 1978, in which she looks like a drag queen. The 1990s produced

little new or innovative work in the area of portraiture. It was almost as if the art world was taking a break to figure out where to go next after neo-expressionism had played itself out.

Since the turn of the century, however, a portrait style has emerged that is partially indebted to the style of Lucian Freud and that is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Jenny Saville and Andrew Salgado. Their work is characterized by strokes that creates prominent faceting, breaking up the face and leaving drips and splatters. This faceting and "deconstruction" of the face has become widely used, sometimes done with a palette knife that leaves a heavy impasto. Most of this work concentrates on capturing the personality of the sitter. It is less concerned with social position or power, although a number of artists are now using this style in the traditional way to address the issues of power and position regarding sexuality and racial and social bigotry.

The re-emergence of portraiture in contemporary art in the last decade or so has been led by African American, Latinx, and LGBTQI artists. They are the ones that find it necessary to define who they are and to establish their humanity and individuality—to come out from under the mantle of minority stereotyping. This has resulted in a fertile and varied body of portraiture that has refocused our attention on our own humanity and thereby enriched us all.

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DETROIT VIEW

Claiming Privilege

by K.A. Letts

Four African-American figurative artists from Detroit claim their place in art history.

The official likenesses of Barack Obama, with its carefully rendered floral background, and of Michelle Obama, her face rendered in grisaille atop a bold and colorful swirl of skirt, could only have been painted by Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherard, respectively. These two African-American artists realize the political potential of the official portrait, breathing new life into that musty, fusty genre. They aren't alone, though. Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, Faith Ringgold, Wangechi Mutu and Amoako Mofo are just a few contemporary black artists who mine various corners in the figurative traditions of art history to tell their story. Now four of Detroit's emerging artists of color, Mario Moore, Taurus Burns, Sydney G. James and Tylonn Sawyer, are adding their personal virtuosic methods to the trend, employing the visual vocabulary of establishment portraiture to subvert the genre for their own purposes.

Mario Moore

Mario Moore is the most established of the four, with work recently acquired by Princeton University, Detroit Institute of Arts and the Studio Museum in Harlem. In contrast to public, celebratory works by Kehinde Wiley, Moore concentrates on the humanity and vulnerability of his subjects.

His self-portrait, *The Student's Dream*, exemplifies this intimate approach, as well as showcasing his knowledge and use of art historical tropes to communicate personal meaning. Moore relates this painting to a predictive dream involving his surgery for a benign brain tumor in 2015. The large-scale canvas makes apparent reference, both in subject matter and in its use of light, to 19th century paintings by Thomas Eakins of publicly held medical demonstrations. As in Eakins's *The Agnew Clinic*, anonymous figures in doctors' coats stand in conference over the prone body of the artist. The patient is lying, fully conscious but immobile, facing the viewer, his expression difficult to read. Rather than a public arena, the scene seems to be a domestic setting, yet it appears to be staged. The large white dog, an enigmatic presence and occasionally recurring image in Moore's work, rests under the examination table. In the foreground of the painting, a skull rests on a stool; it both refers to the genre of *vanitas* painting and adds an element of foreboding to the mood of the artwork.

Moore's artist residency at Princeton University in 2019 provided the inspiration for his recent exhibition in Princeton's Hurley Gallery, "The Work of Several Lifetimes." Drawing on his own background as a blue collar worker and in tribute to his father's experience as



Left: Mario Moore, *The Visit (Valeria)*, 2019, oil on linen, 96 x 66 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and David Klein Gallery.



Right: Mario Moore, *The Student's Dream*, 2017, oil on canvas, 80" x 68". Photo courtesy David Klein Gallery.

Right: Sydney G. James, *Black List*, 2016, mural near Cutter's Bar and Grill in Eastern Market, Detroit for Murals in the Market. Photo courtesy Murals in the Market.

Below: Sydney G. James, *Oprah Said I Get a ...*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 64" x 54". Photo courtesy Playground Detroit.



a security guard at the Detroit Institute of Art, Moore chose models drawn from the anonymous black workers at Princeton who serve the food, clean the halls and maintain the operations of the school. The portraits depend on both their large scale and their adaptation of the conventions of official portraiture for their considerable power. For his 8-foot tall painting of Valeria Sykes, Moore placed the dining hall worker next to her prized red sports car, posed against an idyllic landscape, confident and comfortably dressed. The impact of the portraits is enhanced by their context; the pieces hang in prominent locations at the university that are customarily reserved for benefactors and socially prominent graduates.

Sydney G. James

Portrait artist, illustrator and muralist Sydney G. James's relationship with her subjects is an intimate one, like Moore's, though with a distinctive feminist twist. She often paints her female friends and family, regally seated and facing the viewer. In James's portraits, the women claim their space on the sofa and in the foreground rather than in the background, where women of color have often been required to serve and stand. Her recent exhibition at Playground Detroit, "Sit Down Somewhere," features outsized head and shoulder portraits of friends and family. In these likenesses, James favors a kind of double-image portrait, where the subject is contained within the silhouette of an African American public figure meaningful to the sitter. In *Oprah Said That I Get A...*, a larger-than-life-size face of her good friend, Candice Fortman, confronts the viewer, bounded by the outline of the eponymous, gesturing celebrity. The interior image is slightly distorted, as if seen through a fisheye lens. The two images co-exist in dialogue, surrounded by light-filled white.

In addition to painting portraits, James remains active as a muralist, nationally and internationally, with murals completed in Detroit, New Orleans, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Honolulu, Ghana and, most recently, Sierra Leone. James maintains that the work in her murals is directly related to the pieces she produces in the studio, although the scale is much larger. Her personal relationships fuel the work, and each mural abounds with allusions to her fellow creatives. Her 2016 wall painting in Detroit for Murals in the Market,

Black List, is a case in point. The young woman in the painting engages the viewer with her direct gaze while holding a sign that reads, “The definitive list of everything that will keep you safe as a black woman body in America,” quoted from a poem by Detroit writer Scheherazade W. Parrish. The bird tugging at her hair is an oblique reference to her friend, artist Rashaun Rucker, and his totem, the rock pigeon. A grisaille mask typical of Tylonn Sawyer’s portraiture peeks out from her breast pocket. By tying her work so closely to that of her fellow artists, James makes images that engage the public while remaining deeply personal.

Tylonn Sawyer

In contrast to Moore’s and James’s emotionally intimate portraiture, Tylonn Sawyer’s monumental paintings are presentational in nature. They often reference formal black and white group photographs, but with the subjects’ identities masked (literally) by handheld likenesses, in grisaille, of famous black celebrities and historic civil rights figures. The meaning of this masking is ambiguous and changes subtly with each painting. In *DNA*, anonymous figures pose frontally in a row, in water up to their thighs. They hold paper masks of prominent African Americans in front of their faces. An inverted American flag hangs in the background. The meaning here is difficult to parse. Are these individuals hiding behind their famous role models? Obscured by them? Celebrating them? Although a definitive meaning remains elusive, the ambiguity yields resonance appropriate to any discussion of race in America.

In *Aretha (Three Graces)*, three obviously individual women dressed in white each hold a mask of Aretha Franklin in front of their faces. The fact that the figures are holding the masks on sticks seems to indicate a willful act on their part, but to what end, once again, one cannot be sure. The color of each mask is leached out, as if the true identities of the black subjects are obscured by a mask of whiteness that renders them publicly visible.

Another recurring and multi-valent visual strategy in Sawyer’s portraiture is his use of the collapsed figure. In *Post*

Hope, a canvas depicting the fallen, life-sized figure of Barack Obama, the subject is face down with his (white) mask discarded, lying on an American flag. The white stripes in the flag contain photographic images of racial strife, Ku Klux Klan rallies, civil rights demonstrations and the like, from the archives of the Smithsonian Institution. Is he exhausted? Defeated? Dead? We don’t know. In another painting, *White on White*, the collapsed figure of the artist himself reappears multiple times. His face obscured and dressed in white, Sawyer lies atop of a low relief depicting the Confederate monument at Stone Mountain, Georgia. The memorial, completed in 1972, is a fairly recent commemoration of historic figures from the Confederacy, as well as a subtle celebration of Jim Crow. Sawyer’s virtuosic handling of the crumpled white clothing worn by the fallen figure and its twisted posture recall Mannerist paintings of the saints. The draped bodies

Top: Tylonn Sawyer, *DNA*, 2019, charcoal, collage, gold leaf on paper. Photo courtesy N’Namdi Center for Contemporary Art.

Bottom: Tylonn Sawyer, *White on White*, 2019, oil on canvas, 144” x 60”. Photo courtesy N’Namdi Center for Contemporary Art.



obscure, yet don't—or can't—obliterate the figures beneath.

Taurus Burns

Taurus Burns shares with Tylonn Sawyer and Sydney James a preoccupation with historical figures and celebrities and how they relate to the artists themselves, though he views them from a slightly different angle. His mixed-race background renders him uncomfortable with the categorization of humans as members of distinctive groups; where others see black and white, Burns sees gray. In a recent interview, he describes himself as living at the uneasy intersection of dual identities. Working through that unease forms the core of his art practice.

In his self-portrait *Touched*, Burns grapples with the claim each racial identity has on his loyalties. Ulysses Grant grips his right shoulder, Robert E. Lee his left arm. He is surrounded—literally—by a pantheon of significant cultural figures: Ralph Ellison and Jacob Lawrence, Huey P. Newton and Richard Pryor, to name a few. At the edges of the composition on either side, white-hooded Ku Klux Klan figures lurk. The blank sketchbook in his hand declares his ambivalence. Burns is flanked by two ravens, meant to express his uneasy sense of personal danger. He says, “I wanted the painting to convey [my] fear of falling victim to hatred and the anxiety of living in a racially polarized country.”

Taurus Burns, *Touched*, 2018, oil on panel, 46" diameter. Photo courtesy Taurus Burns.



Burns's *The Shooting of Philando Castile* marks the artist's progression from the personal to the polemical. The artist describes the killing as a catalyst in his thinking about the direction of his work, toward more overt political expression. The artist has chosen a pentagonal canvas that roughly echoes the shape of a car window. The figure of Castile on the left, almost out of the picture frame of the composition and covered in blood, assumes the supine posture of the martyred Christ, and represents any number of renaissance pietas. At first, one hardly sees the hand on the right that shoots the gun, killing him.

The story of modern and contemporary art in the 20th and 21st centuries has been one of artists discarding established figurative traditions in search of new forms and methods. Now, young African-American artists are energetically engaged in retrieving the figurative baby that might have been thrown out with the art historical bath water, turning it to their own overtly political and social ends. They are appropriating for themselves the highly skilled techniques of realistic figurative painting to demand cultural credibility for their social mission to place racial identity and equality at the center of the contemporary art world's consciousness.

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Taurus Burns, *The Shooting of Philando Castile*, 2018, oil on wood, 30" x 40". Photo courtesy Taurus Burns.



REVIEWS

“Down by Line” One After 909

“**Down by Line**,” an exhibition of four Chicago-based artists at West Town’s One After 909 gallery, drops its viewers into a twenty-first century reflection on an American cultural moment through figurative drawing. Mixed media works on paper by Tom Torluemke, Tony Davis, and father and son Paul and Jason Lamantia are filled with ornately drawn images that are sometimes dire in narrative and often obsessive in execution.

Curator and owner of One After 909 Stano Grezdo has a keen interest in artists working outside a contemporary art world that has only recently begun to re-embrace figurative work. In the past few years, we have seen the canonization of Kerry James Marshall’s masterful paintings and 2019’s Whitney Biennial showcasing an array of figurative paintings, sculptures, and photographs, often at monumental scale, by many artists, including Jennifer Packer, Nicole Eisenman, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya, to name a few. “Down by Line” offers something distinctly different and distinctly Chicago.

The city’s history appears in the work of these four artists in a variety of ways, but the thread that ties them together is the aesthetics of self-taught outsider artists. Tony Davis’s drawings catch the eye with

Tony Davis, *Hell Cats* (2010). Ink and marker on paper, 16” x 20”.
Image: One After 909.



Tom Torluemke, *Shame*, 2019. Graphite, charcoal, and acrylic on paper, 32” x 48”.
Image: One After 909.

vibrantly colored scenes of 1970s-era pimps and prostitutes. At first glance, the images led me to believe they were made by a young artist, maybe a teenager. But upon looking more closely, I saw a sophistication in the level of detail of both the scenery and the figures. The faces specifically are emotionally expressive and imbue the images with narrative potency, alluding to power, class, sexuality, and exploitation. The figures in Davis’s work crowd the scene like revelers in a James Ensor painting. But they are handled like comic illustrations. This serves Davis well in his production of images, grim in their subject matter while simultaneously filled with warmth and sentiment; this may be a tough pill to swallow for a contemporary art audience.

Tom Torluemke has images in “Down by Line” that also embrace familiar, even classical figurative motifs fused with techniques from the world of illustration. A staple of Chicago’s public art scene, Torluemke is a prolific maker working in painting, drawing, and printmaking. The pieces included in “Down by Line” are highly political or deeply personal. Central to this exhibition is Torluemke’s *Shame* from 2019. As if creating a figure study from an academic drawing class, he uses black and white charcoal pencils on paper tinted with a middle ground of blue. But veering from the traditions of the academy, he draws an elaborate scene of old-world public shaming in a contemporary setting.



Tom Torluemke, *Painting the Elephants*, 2019. Graphite and watercolor on paper. Image: One After 909.

A community of grotesques from across the age spectrum hurl fruits and vegetables at a naked man who is standing on a stump. The man holds himself, looking down in sadness while the townsfolk rage at him or applaud his misery. All of the figures are cartoonish caricatures that seem to exist in an Alfred E. Neuman fever dream.

Shame and another large drawing, *Painting the Elephants*, share a quality with Davis's. At first, they appear cartoonish and humorous, but upon closer examination, they portray a grim reality from everyday life. But Torluemke's work is heavier on metaphor than Davis's. Also in two colors only, *Painting the Elephants* depicts a scene where suited men, presumably politicians, paint the bodies of elephants from buckets filled with red. In the background, naked bodies hang from a tree dripping blood into buckets below and provide a medium for these rabid men in suits. *Shame* is less heavy-handed when it comes to metaphor yet manages to breathe life into what is constantly happening out of sight: the online public shaming that occurs on social media. Instead of alluding to the technology itself, Torluemke provides an image of what this

behavior might look like in the physical public square as opposed to the digital one.

The thematic connections among these four artists' works are uncanny. The convergence of the personal and the political is ever present. Davis harks back to his time on the streets of Chicago, while Torluemke memorializes his political and cultural outrage but also processes personal trauma in a series of pencil drawings that read like storyboards for a film.

Jason Lamantia also engages in figurative introspection with five colorful and obsessively drawn ink and marker pieces that depict the horrors of war, militarism, and the capitalistic fetishization of violence. Lamantia's images are filled with human-weapon hybrids and explosion-filled battles (as well as a psychedelic version of the Chicago Air and Water Show). The most strikingly stark and personal is *Rampage*. Like so many Americans, Lamantia grew up watching television and playing video games, both of which have been filled with violence since their invention. *Rampage* is set in a living room where a once-human figure is bursting open, a bloody mess of biomechanical weapons and gory appendages. This gruesome being walks away from a television as though about to go out into the world, reborn as a violent machine ready to wreak havoc on the society that has transformed it.

Jason's father Paul, a fringe peer of the Harry Who, has the most abstract pieces in "Down by Line," including one dating back to 1971 titled *Liquid Love and the Geek*. But his more recent pieces contain figurative elements that further emphasize the re-emergence of figuration. In *Tick-Tock*, we see a psychic space that feels like an apocalyptic nightmare version of a political convention. *Conversation* alludes to the mortifying nature of our social existence, in which personal interactions are buried in coded messages driven by a capitalistic cultism. The wonderfully chaotic *Bone*

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Jason Lamantia, *Rampage*, nd. Image: One After 909.



Point, Line, and Plane: Andrea Zittel's Spatial Investigation

Miller Institute for Contemporary Art

"Rules are a liberating restriction," asserts Andrea Zittel in the 21 beliefs that she's been writing down since the 1990s; she posts them here on the gallery wall under the heading, "These things I know for sure (as of January 6th, 2020)."

It seems appropriate to take stock of this rigorous artist's self-imposed guidelines in the wake of the year-long celebration of the Bauhaus's 100th anniversary. In "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus," Walter Gropius concluded that the point of the school's teaching "is a demand for a new and powerful working correlation of all the processes of creation. The gifted student must regain a feeling for the interwoven strands of practical and formal work."¹

Elizabeth Chodos, director of the Miller Institute of Contemporary Art at Carnegie Mellon University, has curated a generous and thoughtfully installed array of new and existing work by Zittel, "Andrea Zittel: An Institute of Investigative Living." The artist's practice embraces a variety of media that similarly elide boundaries between practical and formal work, between art and applied design. The exhibition prompts consideration of connections reaching back to the design principles and experimentation embraced at the German school as well as forward to the extended practice of today's like-minded artists for whom social, ethical,

and environmental considerations are essential to their aesthetic projects.

Zittel established her first studio as A-Z East in a live/work space in Brooklyn after completing her MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1990. Since 2000, she has worked from a settlement in the California High Desert, A-Z West, on a variety of research initiatives, including her Institute of Investigative Living (the focus of this exhibition). Installed across the three floors of this sizable gallery are examples of her signature all-in-one living spaces, sculptural shelving units, crocheted wall hangings, woven rugs placed on floors and walls, simple garments (the *A-Z Uniform: Fall/Winter 2011-2012*), and reliefs and drawings. Zittel's flat, geometric style unifies the diverse objects presented along with her common palette of dark red, black, white, gray, and ocher.

The shadow of the Russian avant-garde falls over much of this work. The Suprematist patterns of Lyubov Popova's textile designs come to mind, and the abstractions of El Lissitzky are openly evoked in the diagonal composition *Study for Planar Configuration Variant #2* (gouache and watercolor on paper, 2016) and related reliefs in painted wood (*Study for Planar Configuration #1, #3, #6*, 2017). But what can be made of this seemingly incongruous association of an American artist

Left, *A-Z Uniform: Fall/Winter 2011-2012*, 2011-2012. Yellow and black crochet short-sleeve shirt. Right, *Study for Planar Configuration #1, #3*, 2017. Wood and paint.
Photo by Tom Little, 2020.



Left, *Linear Sequence #1*, 2016. Powder-coated steel and aluminum, tung oiled birdseye maple plywood, brass, 3 cushions. Dimensions variable. Right, *Parallel Planar Panel #3* (grey, black, off-white, pink), 2017. Powder-coated aluminum and steel and woven wool textile. 94 1/8" x 59 1/2" x 33 1/4".
Photo by Tom Little 2020.





Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*, 2015. Cardboard, plaster, gauze, paint. Dimensions variable. Photo by Tom Little, 2020.



Andrea Zittel, *RAUGH Furniture: Energetic Accumulator II*, 2008. Wood, Danish oil, rigid wrap, electric tea kettle, ceramic mugs, wool, radio, felt, glass jars with tokens on carpet. Dimensions variable. Photo by Tom Little, 2020.

working deep into the 21st century with the Utopian principles and formal experiments of a hundred years ago? Though Zittel seems drawn to the energized abstractions of the Russian modernists, there is no trace of their transcendentalism in her work. Nor is there any hint that she is advocating for a new zeitgeist, like the Bauhaus masters. Thankfully, as someone who is always aiming for simplicity and clarity, the artist provides the answer to this question in her posted “rules” and video running in the ground-floor gallery.

Zittel’s *Dynamic Essay About the Panel* (video, 2014) makes plain the seamless conflation of her studio practice with built designs incorporated into her own home. She joins the ranks of many artists who have set aside emotional expression or psychological revelation for the boundless possibilities of formal exploration within self-imposed restrictions. The essay’s footage considers the spatial extension from a point, to a line, to a plane and the permutation of those abstract elements in built forms.

Projects placed nearby illustrate the artist’s conceptual framework. Neatly arranged directly on the floor in *Linear Sequence #1* (2016) is a series of beams and planar elements in powdered-coated steel, aluminum, and plywood that could be related to the repeated abstract forms of Donald Judd’s Minimalist sculptures. However, the added cushions and bowl immediately recast the composition as a compact living room with sofa and coffee table, calling to mind a build-it-yourself kit from IKEA or the artist’s own portable Living Units of the 1990s. Installed on the adjacent wall is a different solution to this play with planes. *Parallel Planar Panel #3 (grey, black, off-white, pink)* (2017) consists of a vertical black metal rectangle mounted flat to the

wall with a woven wool “rug” installed perpendicularly, jutting into the viewer’s space. Expectations about spatial orientation and domestic and artistic materials are neatly conflated and reinforced by the textile’s design, which looks like an architectural plan.

Other projects foreground the artist’s commitment to a sustainable practice. The several versions of the *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* (2015) are shelving units made from recycled cardboard boxes that are unified by a layer of white plaster. In their empty state, they look like frameworks for Louise Nevelson’s assemblages. But viewed up close or seen in photographs storing the artist’s belongings, their quirkiness and individuality come through. Also constructed out of repurposed materials, the *RAUGH Furniture: Energetic Accumulator II* (2008) makes good on one of Zittel’s rules: “Forms have to look good as they age.” She began the series in 1998 with the desire of embracing imperfections in used plywood rather than trying to cover them up. In this example, two rough-edged, irregularly carved planes—one wall-mounted and the other free-standing—provide a backdrop for another living space. An added *Aggregated Stack* provides storage on one unit, while a built-in bench and shelves in the other unit incorporate domestic necessities like a tea kettle and radio. A grid of framed prints nearby gives the visual *Rules of Raugh* (2005), suggesting possibilities for handling these unpainted laminated wood planes that allow them to deteriorate and show signs of wear.

Like Gropius’s belief that good design could improve the world, Zittel’s similar conviction brings enviable order to the chaos of her lived experience. The Bauhaus director wrote, “The objective of all creative effort in the visual arts is to give form to space....

This conception of space demands realization in the material world, a realization which is accomplished by the brain and the hands.”² Zittel seems to share this allegiance to thinking through making but prefers to see the task as *defining* space. Point #20 on her posted list states, “Space can’t be ‘made’, instead it is defined by boundaries, divisions, walls, compartments, etc. In essence, space is created by the physical boundaries that we build to contain it.” Surveying Zittel’s long career, this exhibition shows the impressive range of her creative solutions to making physical boundaries in the domestic environment that take into account the interrelated issues of aesthetics, ethics, and sustainability. Considering the looming environmental apocalypse and the acrimony of contemporary life outside the gallery doors and beyond the artist’s desert compound, maybe the world would be a better place if we could all make a similar commitment.

Kristina Olson

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"Down by Line"

Continued from page 18.

Daddy is filled with monsters but somehow feels like a breath of fresh air for its painterly looseness and playful ambiguity.

Metaphor, deceptive humor, the convergence of personal and political narratives, and illustrative

Paul Lamantia, *Tick-Tock*, nd. Image: One After 909.



“Andrea Zittel: An Institute of Investigative Living” is on view from January 25 to March 8, 2020 at the Miller ICA at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

1. Walter Gropius, “The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus,” originally published as *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhaus Weimar* by the Bauhaus Press (Bauhausverlag), Munich, 1923 in *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), p. 343.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

Living Room of AZ West main house near Joshua Tree National Park, California, with view of Andrea Zittel, *AZ West Linear Sequence*, 2019. Photo by Sarah Lyon. © Andrea Zittel, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles.



techniques: these are all hallmarks of the figurative world of art, which was once dismissed but which seems to be returning with a new edge. Here in the U.S., we live in a contentious cultural and political moment that has been on a slow boil for decades and has finally overflowed. Now we have a mess to clean up. The trouble is that we *are* the mess. The artists of “Down By Line” are not merely representing this circumstance—they are processing it themselves, creating documents of a conflicted sense of self that feels ever more pervasive in our society.

There is a hideous kind of truth in this work, the kind of truth people tend not to face out of either fear, discomfort, or ambivalence. There should be a greater fear that we face this kind of truth less and less as a collective society. In not facing the horror of our own humanity, we risk sinking deeper into it.

Evan Carter

Evan Carter is an assistant 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*.

Palette & Chisel Academy of Fine Arts— Faculty Showcase

February 8 - 23, 2020

For those who have never been to the Palette & Chisel Academy of Fine Arts, think ornate Victorian town-house—specifically, the William Waller House, which the Academy purchased in 1921. Tucked in amid the looming apartment buildings of Chicago’s Gold Coast, the Palette & Chisel feels like a remnant of another era where horse-drawn carriages raced through cobblestone streets and men tipped their top hats to women in petticoats. As one mounts the steep concrete staircase and arrives at the large double doors that creak open with a sigh, one has entered a unique artistic world.

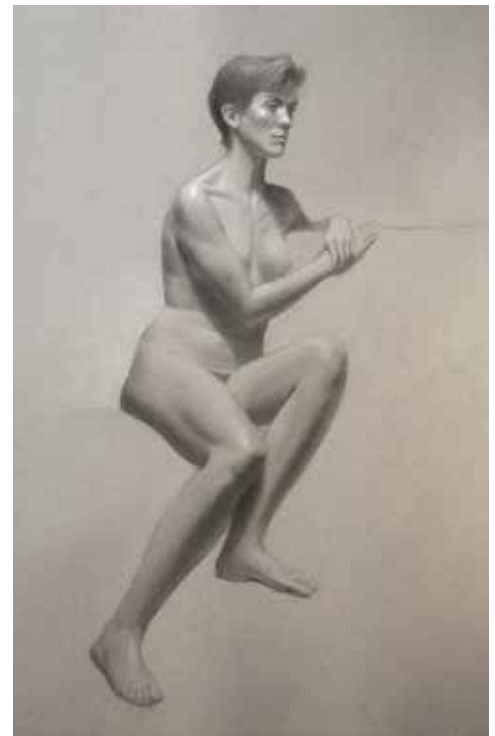
The Palette & Chisel is first and foremost a working studio and art school. Since its formation in 1895, it has promoted the practice of “working from life,” providing students with the opportunity to use live models and develop formal training in art and architecture. As the United States’ second oldest artist organization, Palette & Chisel has preserved the ideas of the European academies and salons of the nineteenth century that were en vogue when it was first established. 125 years on, this Academy continues to explore the legacy of academicism and its practice today.

The gallery is a one-of-a-kind exhibition space. A long hall divides the two rooms hosting the show, which were likely once the receiving room and dining room. Green velvet panels take the place of today’s white-washed gallery walls. Parquetry decorates the floors, marble fireplaces gleam in the center of each room, and the ceilings are a collage of elaborate molding. In the corner, framed by floor-to-ceiling windows, stands a stately grand piano. This is no white cube, but rather a house-turned-studio-turned-exhibition hall. The layers of history, all carefully maintained, lend a sense of nostalgia to the gallery space.

Highlighting the artists who work and teach at the school, the showcase is divided into more than a dozen sections to feature samples of each faculty member’s work, including painting, drawing, and sculpture. These individuals hold memberships in arts societies around the world, some formally trained at arts academies and others learning through their own artistic practice. Yet amid this array of backgrounds, materials and aesthetics, there is a uniting theme of realism and the human figure. The various works denote a studied and referential understanding of the world that is



Left: Stuart Fullerton, *Abbey*, 2018, charcoal on paper, 24” x 18.” Image courtesy of Stuart Fullerton.



Right: Stuart Fullerton, *Figure Study*, 2017, graphite on paper, 24” x 18”. Image courtesy of Stuart Fullerton.



Above: John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-1852, oil on canvas, 30" x 44". Photo © Tate. Released under CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

Left: Michael Van Deyl, *Lo Tienes*, 2016, oil on panel, 48" x 36". Image courtesy of Michael Van Deyl.

stylistically reminiscent of artists such as John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase.

Stuart Fullerton, one of the artists featured in the exhibition, produces hauntingly realistic drawings. With simple black and white charcoal and large sheets of paper, Fullerton brings his models to life on the page. His portraits illustrate his attempts to capture human expression and individuality.

The life-like nature of his work is exquisite. Indeed, the only hint that you are not looking at a photograph is that everything apart from the human figure is blank. In one drawing, a nude leans her arm against a wall that is left to the viewer's imagination while sitting upon a seat that does not exist. Although you can see how the material forms affect her posture and her body — the flesh on her hips, for example, contours to the surface of the invisible chair — you are left admiring the human form and its adaptability to the environment in which it exists.

Fullerton's creations were not the only works that stood out. One of the most dynamic works is a painting of a woman partially submerged in turquoise water and surrounded by red and yellow flower petals. The vibrant colors lend a sense of romance and mysticism to the space, while the figure's pose hints at a deeper story waiting to be discovered. This modern creation by artist Michael Van Deyl reminds me of John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia* (1851-52), now in the collection of the Tate Britain. Depicting the tragic figure from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the painting was exhibited

at the Royal Academy in London in 1852 and is one of the most widely studied artworks of the nineteenth century.

While the space appears filled with serious artistic practice and art historical references, it is also an incredibly open and welcoming environment. From the moment I enter the house, I am surrounded with the hustle and bustle of students eager to create their own works of art. One young man rushes in with a large black folio tucked under his arm and dashes up the heavy wooden staircase to the second-floor classrooms. A drawing teacher scurries down the hallway and into a hidden closet for supplies. As I walk around the two rooms of the gallery, a student wanders in and takes a seat at the grand piano. Still in his winter coat, his un-gloved fingers begin to whip across the keys, producing a beautiful classical melody. But as quickly as he begins, he stops and abruptly runs off to a lesson upstairs.

I am standing before a portrait of a woman when a man wanders in and introduces himself as Andrew Conklin, one of the drawing and painting teachers at the Palette & Chisel.

"She's the wife of a famous architect, Hans Lüttgen," he tells me. "There was a famous photograph of the two of them by August Sander... but then Lüttgen divorced her. So, I copied her face and put her in this fencing jacket to give her a more confident look." Then he excuses himself and rushes off to begin a class.

Continued on page 33.

Intuiting the Figure: “Outsider Art: The Collection of Victor F. Keen” at Intuit Gallery

Where does art come from—within or without?

In *Meno*, Socrates tries to prove that knowledge is innate by coaxing the answer to a geometry problem out of one of Meno’s slave boys. Millennia later, innatism still has a lot of appeal. Some version of it is embedded in any notion of the lone creative genius—that useful fiction or profoundly humbling reality which, among other things, helps distinguish what we regard as fine art from the far wider sea of popular culture.¹

This issue of the *Examiner* is focused on figurative work. Accordingly, I walked through “Outsider Art: The Collection of Victor F. Keen” at the Intuit Gallery with an eye to those forms.

Figuration presents a challenge to any innatist theory of artmaking, as it cannot simply come from within. The outside world is and must be a reference point; even fantastical creatures, the stuff of nightmares, are cobbled together from bits and pieces of observed reality.

On the other hand, outsider (or intuitive—or naïve—or [INSERT NEXT YEAR’S EUPHEMISM]) art requires an authentic, rough-edged, unmistakably *individual* artist. In short, it requires some kind of genius. The play of external forces is certainly significant; in many cases, those forces are the cause of whatever individuating factor defines the outsider artist as such.

In the end, though, the outsider artist as category feels more like some demigod in our cult of the Individual. Outsider artists’ figurative strategies (or lack thereof) are commensurately distinctive.

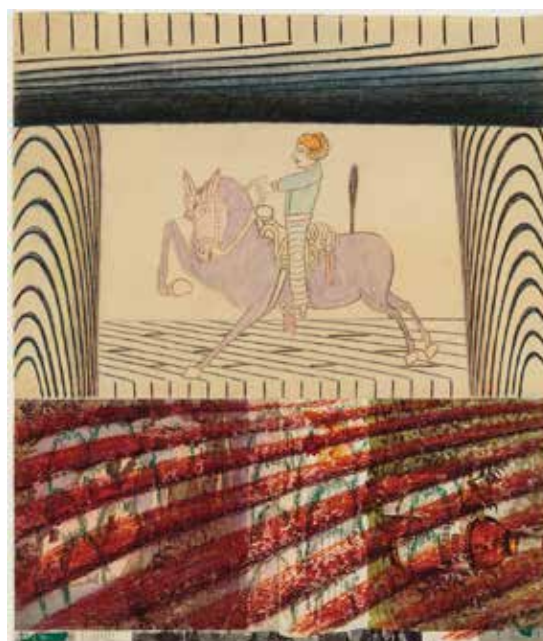
Why is George Widener the way that he is? Widener couldn’t tell you. A Rain Man-like autistic savant, when he lifts an arm, he can perform staggeringly complex calculations in his head—or so it was said during a public conversation involving Keen, gallerist Frank Maresca and Intuit curator Alison Amick on February 8. They added that Widener has grown more savvy about the art world during his years in the spotlight—a reminder that neuroatypicality is sometimes less of a barrier to interpersonal sophistication than it may seem.

The human figure is absent from Widener’s canvases. Still, representation and abstraction (the latter of an almost transcendental flavor) jostle against each other in interesting ways. Like Wesley Willis, Stephen Wiltshire, and many other autistic artists, Widener is given to creating vast, vaguely inhuman cityscapes. Uniquely, his appear to be governed by cryptic numerologies—results of deep ratiocination in the service of something internal and otherwise incommunicable. Widener’s enormous, Titanic-themed *CATCH 22*, an idiosyncratic take on reincarnation, exemplifies this tendency. It is no coincidence that a different George



Left: George Widener (American, b. 1962). *CATCH 22*, 2013. Mixed media on joined paper, 83 1/2" x 59". Collection of Victor F. Keen.

Right: Martín Ramírez (Mexican, active in America, 1895–1963). *Untitled (Caballero)*, n.d. Crayon on paper, 30 3/4" x 24". © Estate of Martín Ramírez. Collection of Victor F. Keen.





Left: Marcos Bontempo (Argentinian, b. 1969). *Untitled (Man with raised hand)*, 2012. Ink and salt on paper, 39 ½ x 27 ½ in. Collection of Victor F. Keen.

Right: Bill Traylor (American, 1853-1949). *Four Men, Bottles on a Shelf*, c. 1939-42. Crayon on cardboard, 13 ½ x 7 ½ in. Collection of Victor F. Keen.



Widener died on the Titanic—Widener believes he may be a distant relative of this historical double.

Amick's curation, both witty and sensitive, points up contrasts in the artists' approaches to the figure. Thus, one of Marcos Bontempo's ink and salt agonies *Untitled (Man with Raised Hand)* is juxtaposed with a Bill Traylor (*Four Men, Bottles on Shelf*). Both depict silhouetted figures reaching upward. Yet the two images could hardly be more different. Bontempo's works, painted rapidly on paper while he crouches on the ground, exude a sort of demonic force. He seems to draw from the same well of nightmares as illustrator Stephen Gammell. Though sometimes verging on tragic autoethnography, Traylor's figures are far more playful than pathetic. Consider the character in the upper righthand corner of *Four Men, Bottles on Shelf*; his dynamism is expressed through an elongated arm, which reaches toward one of the eponymous bottles.

Martín Ramírez's figures, caught up in the intermeshed lines of pencilwork for which he is famous, reveal yet another approach to the human form. One iconic caballero (*Untitled*), confident astride a wild-eyed bronco, brings to mind the carbon traced characters of Henry Darger. Even if they were not literally copied, Ramírez's figures have an iconographic quality that places them in the brackish waters where inner and outer mix. Is he recycling generic motifs, remembered, perhaps, from his younger days in Mexico? If so, the wider context for that imitation—one both visual and biographical—only reinforces the artist's inescapable individuality (diagnosed schizophrenic,

Ramírez produced his work while institutionalized in a series of asylums).

This diversity of figurative strategies corresponds to the diversity of artists in Keen's collection. Of course, figuration is but one of many intriguing threads in this show. Considered as a whole, the exhibition is a clear success. Its only failing is its sheer eclecticism. For example, an array of Catalin radios, though fascinating, made me feel like I had stumbled upon a particularly highbrow yard sale.² This is, at worst, a minor lapse. As is so often the case at Intuit, the show rewards multiple visits.

Nathan Worcester

Nathan Worcester is the managing editor of the *New Art Examiner*. Heckle him on Twitter @theworcesterest or via email at nworcester@gmail.com. He lives in Chicago.

1. Excluding the Renaissance or widespread contemporary practice of workshops (which, in the case of middlebrow favorites like Kehinde Wiley, extends to the neoliberally logical step of outsourcing production to China).
2. Catalin, a Bakelite-like thermosetting polymer, was used to manufacture cabinet radios from the 1930s until the 1950s. The material tends to deteriorate rapidly, making genuine Catalin radios a rarity.

"Stolen Sisters"

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Crossman Gallery

"**Stolen Sisters**," on view from January 30 to February 29, 2020 at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Crossman Gallery in Whitewater, WI, features artworks by 30 regional, national and international indigenous artists and allies to address—and protest—the continuing violence against, and loss of, indigenous women and girls. Curated by Teresa Faris and Nieves Galvan, the exhibition presents an opportunity to see work created for many reasons: to raise awareness, to celebrate individuals, to cope with loss, and to express rage.

This diverse group of artists employs a variety of strategies to powerfully convey love, resilience, connection, and loss. Some of the work is born from direct personal experience, while other work grapples with larger social contexts. Although this issue of the *New Art Examiner* focuses on figuration, conceptual and abstract modes are as potent here as representational efforts. Figuration is but one strategy within a larger art practice, and it does not function simplistically in this exhibition. The artists have selected their strategies for

specific reasons, usually choosing the mode that hits the hardest.

The human figure is referenced throughout the gallery, including in artworks that are not directly representational. For example, in *Unheard*, Drew Askenette Lacefield presents an incomplete grid arrangement of earrings on the wall. Beaded pairs hang together, but some hooks are unadorned. The empty spaces are most noticeable, the jewelry shocking because of its absence. Nearby, Valaria Tatera creates a line of red ribbons cascading along a wall, all imprinted with one word, which is also the work's title: Justice. The ribbons glisten and shine, and they flow like blood—another stand-in for those who are lost.

In the hands of Courtney M. Leonard, three *Constellation | Sailor Valentine* studies spell out statistics of assault and violence towards Native women on Disney "Pocahontas" paper plates, to jarring effect. Effortlessly melding commodification and violence, the mass-produced, cartoon versions of John Smith and the most famous Native woman in Eurocentric history

Courtney M. Leonard, *CONSTELLATION | SAILOR VALENTINE STUDY #1*, 2015–2020, paper on velvet, 13" x 13" x 1.5". Image courtesy of the artist.



Avis Charley, *Protectors*, 2019, colored pencil on antique paper. Image courtesy of the artist.





Tom Jones, *Julia*, colored pencil, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist.

are physically punctured by factual statements about domestic assault affecting Native populations, such as, “39% of American Indian and Native Alaska women will be subjected to violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.” The punched-out letters decorate the surrounding velvet like stars in the night sky. The brightly colored children’s party plates no longer serve a cleaned-up, easy-to-swallow historical fiction, but instead illustrate a grim reality. The animated decorative figures become a disturbing metaphor for the widespread public ignorance of ongoing violence and a bitter proxy for the bodies of the missing.

In *Protectors*, Avis Charley turns to ledger art, a 19th century art practice born of the forced relocation of the indigenous people of the Great Plains. With long-established ways of working ripped away, artists utilized any tools they had available, including discarded administrative documents. Here, a contemporary artist chooses this vintage format to represent three women in traditional clothing. Neither identifiable as individuals nor rooted in any particular time period, the figures can still be understood as specific to particular peoples. In style of dress and choice of medium, the artist presents a powerful sense of identity and place. By utilizing a long, expressive tradition that was born out of scarcity and neglect, the artist creates a hopeful vision, rooted in tradition and pride, that celebrates those who fight for desperately needed reforms.

The work on the title wall is a drawing by an artist better known for his photography, Tom Jones. *Julia* is represented in profile, with head high, shoulders back, eyes closed, and hair blowing over her shoulders. This is not a generic figure, but a carefully drawn, individualized portrait of a person of obvious strength. In colored pencil on a handkerchief with an embroidered border, the handwork, visible in the stitching on the cloth and the delicate pencil strokes that make up the figure, conveys a sense of intimacy and care. This is close, time-consuming work requiring a patient attentiveness that suggests a direct personal connection. This is also a stunning drawing, shocking in its gentleness and beauty, heartbreaking in its implied loss.

“Stolen Sisters” is a coming together of artists, the creation of a community to promote awareness and to educate, to acknowledge ongoing efforts, to celebrate, remember, grieve, and heal. Sharing resources and stories, the artists build bridges and make the strong connections that are necessary for survival and moving forward.

Although figuration can be considered a simple choice to clearly identify oneself or memorialize a loved one, choosing it in this context is not a straightforward act. In an exhibition that considers ongoing violence affecting a community, stating one’s connection to that community is an essential political statement—aggressive, but necessarily so. These artists are asserting their existence in a world that ignores people like them. They are saying—softly, loudly, through pain, with anger and joy—“*We matter.*”

Ann Sinfield

Ann Sinfield is an independent curator and writer. She is also Exhibits Lead at the Harley-Davidson Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The featured artists included Antoinette Thompson (ATA), Alfonso Cervera, Avis Charley, Chrystal Tourtillott Lepscier, Craig George, Courtney Leonard, Dakota Mace, Diane Hill, Drew Askenette Lacefield, Elias Jade NotAfraid, Gregg Deal, Harmony Hill, Jennifer Connors, Jennifer Curtis, John Hitchcock, Kaluhyak[^]le Stephenie Muscavitch VanEvery, Laritza Garcia, Lorena Lazard, Lyndon Tsosie, Nieves Galvan, Ray Scott, Rebecca Burns, Sébastien Carré, Scott Hill, Shawn Stevens, Teresa Faris, Tim Herrera, Tom Jones, Tonya June Rafael, and Valaria Tatera.

Process and Ritual: Silke Otto-Knapp's “In the waiting room”

I first encountered the Renaissance Society exhibition space by accident, nestled on the third floor of Cobb Hall, one of the University of Chicago's most unassuming academic buildings. When I was a student there, I first came upon the bright, high-ceilinged room on my way to class and was surprised to discover that it existed. Now, returning a few years later for Silke Otto-Knapp's “In the waiting room” and climbing those familiar stairs, I was excited to step into that unexpected space once again.

“In the waiting room” is a series of black and white paintings mostly hung on temporary, exposed wood walls. A freestanding five-panel screen, *Screen (Trees and Moon)*, is the first piece you encounter. Each piece has been given a lot of space to stand alone; it seems that they are not meant to be seen in direct relation to one another. Their organization splits the viewer's eye, and so I approached them one by one, circling them and weaving between them, almost expecting their backs to reveal something too.

They are all paintings, but the process of creation is well obscured. The gallery statement describes a technique that is water-based and heavily layered, yet the paintings almost appear to be dusted on, the whites gauzily transparent and the blacks failing to fully obscure. About halfway through my visit, I found

watery glimpses of the artist's technique: first, on two of the paintings, faded water marks on the black background. Though they had taken on the chalky texture of the work, they read unmistakably as the remains of some small splash, evidence of the layering process I had been promised. Later, as I followed the canvas of the freestanding screen around to its back, where the canvas had been methodically stapled to the wood supporting it, I found a series of small diluted splatters that felt loose and free. Rewarded by the ability to spot some evidence of Knapp's making, I pulled back from the paintings and began to consider them on a formal level instead.

They are hazy portraits of solid colored figures that read as shadows or silhouettes, or sometimes as people. Though most of the figures exist in empty spaces, some are woven into organically patterned seasonal imagery, branching trees or flat, blooming flowers. Only one of the paintings, the standing screen, sheds the figures entirely; in doing so, it evokes decorative ceramic art, recalling the dramatic black and white surface design of Mata Ortiz and native Mexican pottery. It also feels more functional than the other pieces, dividing the room in a way that the others cannot do without their walls.



Silke Otto-Knapp, “In the waiting room,” *Screen (Trees and Moon)*, 2019, watercolor on canvas, 5 panels, overall: 96” x 160” x 3/4”. Installation view at the Renaissance Society, 2020. Photo: Useful Art Services.

Silke Otto-Knapp, “In the waiting room,” *Forest*, 2019, watercolor on canvas, 3 panels, overall: 59 1/8” x 118 1/8” x 3/4”. Installation view at the Renaissance Society, 2020. Photo: Useful Art Services.



Silke Otto-Knapp, "In the waiting room," *In the waiting room* (9), 2019, watercolor on canvas, 4 panels, overall: 59 1/8" x 157 1/2" x 3/4". Installation view at the Renaissance Society, 2020. Photo: Useful Art Services.



Silke Otto-Knapp, "In the waiting room," *In the waiting room* (7), 2019, Watercolor on canvas, 3 panels, overall: 59 1/8 x 118 1/8 x 3/4 inches. Installation view at the Renaissance Society, 2020. Photo: Useful Art Services.

Even when posed in positions that clearly imply motion, the figures in *In the waiting room* (9) and *In the waiting room* (7) feel deeply rooted to the undefined space where they stand. They exist as individuals and are mostly solitary, overlapping with others only slightly and superficially. They seem deeply focused on themselves—their bodies—and so detached from each other despite occupying the same space. Other figures, particularly in *Group (moving)* and *Group (reaching)*, participate in crowds. Their implied movement is not just choreographed, but rehearsed and collective. Their bodies blend together, but up close, they remain separated by line work in charcoals and grays, faint and delicate. The crowds seem completely feminine, and in this way, softer and lighter—but they're more monstrous too. From a distance, they are a conglomeration of limbs, less restrained than the separated figures.

My favorite piece, *Forest*, faced completely away from the rest of the room; it combines pattern and landscape with figures posed in a kind of habitual action. They're at home in these paintings, locked in familiar, ordered tracks. The piece is spread across six sections that suggest the passage of time and the blossoming of new things. It is ritualistic; it depicts a preordained kind of process, and it loses much of the stiffness of the other figures. In the fifth panel, a man sits and

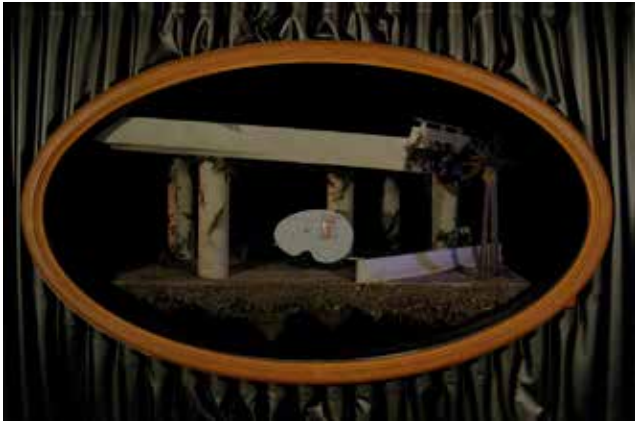
bows towards the viewer; the perfect mid-toned gray of his head is a penetrating glimpse into the world of the painting, one that is denied in almost every other piece. He's vulnerable to the viewer here in a pose so intimate and self-contained amid the relative grandness of the natural background that I felt lucky to be seeing him, privy to his moment of reflection.

In the end, the installation space itself was something that lingered in my mind. Each painting is so solitary. It's a stand-offish arrangement. I could never see them all at once. It was possible to arrange myself so that I only saw the unadorned wood of the temporary walls and none of the paintings themselves. As I moved among these frozen figures, I wondered if they had been placed this way because they needed asylum from my gaze, if they craved a time without looking—were given a reprieve as I turned away. I thought of myself in a waiting room with them, anticipating a movement or an intimation that would never come.

Madison Moore

Madison Moore is a Chicago-based artist, writer, and children's book editor. She is a recent graduate from the University of Chicago and can be found online at thegirlandthelamb.com.

Rumor Gives It: Encountering the Museum of Jurassic Technology in the Capitalocene



"Teardrop" Mobile Home Diorama from "The Garden of Eden on Wheels" exhibit. Photo credit: Jennifer Bastian.

The light in Los Angeles always seems to be passing through a dusty film. While the streets and hills are lined with a mass of non-indigenous plants, the color they would suggest is muted, a rumor of a bright place.

Some confluence of drought, exhaust, ash, and pollen coats the cars that roll past of the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City, a ten-mile drive west from downtown Los Angeles (a journey which, of course, can occupy between twenty and sixty minutes of your time depending on how many fellow motorists are accompanying you). It is not obviously a museum, but rather a squat green and gray building flush with other structures on either side, topped with faded red adobe roof tiles and, on its façade, a matching marquee announcing its name. There are no windows on the first floor, and its door, a surprising shade of teal, is offset to the right. Whenever I go with someone to the Museum for the first time, they typically ask me, upon arrival and before entering: "Is this it?"

The Museum of Jurassic Technology has hidden in plain sight since 1988 with little to draw your attention, its name eluding easy explanation. If it's a museum, it boasts none of the pomp and reverence that you may expect to find when approaching its threshold; it doesn't hail you from afar, it doesn't assert itself spatially. To the extent that it's concerned with the Jurassic, one supposes that in an urban market with a high rate of rivalrous turnover, thirty years of presence is relatively ancient—yet there is not a dinosaur in sight. And as a purveyor of technology, the Museum eschews neon

enticement for two pairs of small lamps, one pair to light its marquee and the other to highlight the small, waterless fountain that occupies two-thirds of the outer wall (the doorway, notably, is unlit); these are joined by a final lamp whose light falls upon a vertical banner depicting the Museum's logo, a pale, mask-like face, and a reiteration of its name. All of this is to say that given the manner in which the Museum is instantiated, its viability as a destination in a city filled with competitive spectacle doesn't appear to make sense. So, when you find yourself about to enter the Museum of Jurassic Technology, you may ask yourself, in the words of David Byrne: "How did I get here?"



Museum of Jurassic Technology Facade—9341 Venice Blvd. in Culver City. Photo credit: Jennifer Bastian.

The most frequent explanation I have heard is that one arrives at the Museum because one has heard a rumor: "I think the whole thing is the work of one guy and his wife"; "I couldn't tell what was real and gave up trying"; "It's making fun of museums"; "It's a proposal for what museums *should be*"; "A dog lives on the

second floor.” You don’t come to the Museum because it persuaded you to do so; you come to the Museum because you saw a look in your friend’s eyes and heard a tone in their voice. Unlike other museums, which traffic in marketing, expensive programming, and the promise of transferable cultural capital, the Museum’s allure is in the retelling of the experiences shared by its visitors. In this way, upon the invocation of the Museum’s name and before you’ve taken even a single step inside, you are already participating in the Museum’s sociality, a thirty-year performance in the circulation not of objective knowledge, but of communal curiosity.

But enough preamble; let’s take that single step and encounter what is contained within. Despite the Museum’s apparent disregard for the imperatives of capitalist self-promotion, its first room is a ticket counter and a small gift shop packed with oddities that one imagines will be given context in the moments to come. The light is dim but warm and, by the time you’ve rounded the first corner past the counter to the right, you are already beginning to realize mystery within specificity: set into the wall behind glass is an oblong wooden box with an ellipsoidal cutaway revealing what appear to be rooms and passages inside, accompanied by a small brass plaque reading “Noah’s Ark, scale 1 inch = 12.5 cubits” with no additional detail or explanation.



Model of Noah’s Ark at the Museum of Jurassic Technology.
Photo credit: Museum of Jurassic Technology.

This initial encounter with one of the Museum’s many objects, texts, displays, and films acts as a microcosm of the Museum itself, a metaphor for how one is “to be” within the space. There is a signification of knowledge, but it is a lost knowledge that cannot be recovered, only reimagined; you must invent its significance for yourself. That is to say, you have entered a labyrinth that will keep you captive only so long as you choose to wander within its walls. And make no

mistake—the Museum of Jurassic Technology is a maze, one that seems to exceed the spatial dimensions of the building you witnessed outside just moments before. To navigate the Museum is to be engaged in repeated surprise as a narrow passageway opens into a dark room filled with microscopes, or as the haunting ringing of bells draws your gaze to a doorway you had missed the first time you passed it. There are clusters of tall wooden display cases with corded telephone receivers hanging from the sides, buttons at the ready to provide tremendously specific details about ambiguous historical happenings. If you travel to the back of the Museum, you will discover a permanent exhibit titled “Tell the Bees: Belief, Knowledge, and Hypersymbolic Cognition,” which houses an elaborate assortment of folk maladies and their remedies.

Throughout the Museum, there are benches at which you may rest while you observe films discussing the surrounding objects, including a biography of Hagop Sandaldjian, an Armenian-Egyptian violinist who also created “microminiatures,” small, painted models of famous figures affixed to the eyes of needles (you can see Goofy, Napoleon, and the Pope in the displays next to the film).



Detail view of *Duck’s Breath* from the exhibit “Tell the Bees: Belief, Knowledge, and Hypersymbolic Cognition.” Photo credit: Museum of Jurassic Technology.



Detail view of a microminiature sculpture of Goofy by Hagop Sandaldjian. Photo credit: Museum of Jurassic Technology.

While I could describe in greater detail the other strange matters on the first floor of the Museum (additional exhibits include titles such as “The Garden of Eden On Wheels: Collections from Los Angeles Area Mobile Home Parks,” “Rotten Luck: The Decaying Dice of Ricky Jay,” and “The Floral Radiographs of Albert G Richards”), in some ways, description seems to defeat the experience of a visit. When you visit the Museum of Jurassic Technology, you are choosing to abide ambiguity, to succumb to circuitry, and to confront your assumptions about what it means to “know something.”

For although you pay for admission at the door, the experience of walking through the Museum undermines the capitalist covenant of transaction and consumption. In a traditional museum, one feels pressure to preemptively analyze a floor plan of exhibits and to strategize the most efficient path past the most “valuable” cultural artifacts; one is on a mission to *acquire and accumulate experience* (a mandate that is often accompanied by copious picture taking). In the Museum of Jurassic Technology, not only are you not permitted to take pictures inside, but there is no map other than the one you develop in your memory; it is

quite possible, perhaps likely, that you will miss things that would have surprised you and that you will be surprised by the things that you can’t recall how you found.

The Museum seems designed to defeat one-off accumulation and instead to promote a kind of cyclicity where any given trip is a study not in objects, but in the process of encounter and reencounter. To try to optimize your visit, to bilk each instant of its value, is to resist the fluidity that the Museum offers; this is a place of wandering and wondering where the metered cost of time is best forgotten.

This radically destabilizing way of “consuming content” undermines the greatest imperatives of life in the Capitalocene, the historical moment where neoliberalism has become the prevailing global hegemonic order: where a museum would be designed to direct traffic in a rigorous flow, to accommodate the greatest volume of customers, the Museum of Jurassic Technology is full of soft collisions and lingering; where a museum is governed by the promotion and rotation of exhibits and programming, the Museum is a continuum of subtle changes and curious details that emerge only on repeated visits; where a museum’s wall didactics would suggest conclusions, the Museum’s exhibits spiral out in a proliferation of new questions. This is to say, at the Museum of Jurassic Technology, one feels out-of-time, if not out-of-capital.

On the second floor of the Museum (which is hidden up a set of stairs off of a hallway containing working replicas of old dynamic theater sets), after you pass the “Lives of Perfect Creatures: Dogs of the Soviet Space Program” exhibit (featuring portraits of dogs who heroically sacrificed their lives in the service of early space exploration), you finally arrive at the tea room, where an attendant generously offers you hot tea and light cookies. You may lounge in one of the cushioned chairs or, perhaps, drift out to the rooftop garden with its population of cautious-yet-restful birds. Sometimes there will be old dogs sleeping on the ground; sometimes there will be a man playing music on an arcane-looking instrument. You’ll notice other visitors assessing their surroundings and talking quietly, as if they are sharing secrets (though not jealously, but rather as a courtesy to other guests, so as to not foreclose diverse imaginings of the place). It’s difficult to leave the garden, which is where I seem to inevitably spend my last moments at the Museum before returning home, wondering if the birds ever feel like leaving.



Rooftop Garden and Colonnade at the Museum of Jurassic Technology. Photo credit: Museum of Jurassic Technology.

Back on the street, I'm usually disoriented, unsure of how much of the day has passed and somewhat disappointed that time has become a concern once more. Once, as we headed to my car to rejoin the community of commuters, a friend asked me: "What just happened?" I don't recall what I said, but I heard a rumor that it went something like this.

Benjamin Nicholson

Benjamin Nicholson is a PhD student in Media Arts + Practice at the University of Southern California. He can be found around Los Angeles giving performative PowerPoint presentations, discussing corpses, and sharing potatoes with friends and strangers alike.

Palette & Chisel

Continued from page 23.

As a photograph-turned-painting, the figure of Dora Delfs Lüttgen transcends mediums and forms of artistic expression. At first glance, she has the look and feel of a modern woman. In Andy's fencing jacket, she is sporty and individual. Her strong profile is framed by a sharp bob haircut, and her gaze is determined and fresh. Yet her side-view silhouette is also reminiscent of neoclassical sculpture and currency. Her name, appearing almost carved into the canvas in Latin lettering, juxtaposes the aesthetics of antiquity with that of contemporary portraiture.

The Palette & Chisel is certainly not your typical art gallery. From its Gilded Age architecture to the murmur of students scribbling in sketchbooks and dabbing at easels, the Palette & Chisel is unlike any other exhibition space in Chicago. Here, not only is art being shown, but it is also being taught, studied and created. Through their classes, these artists are keeping alive the traditions that have inspired some of the greatest artistic movements of all time, including realism, romanticism, and impressionism. By conflating the spaces of the studio, the classroom and the exhibition hall, the Palette & Chisel offers a wholly unique look into the artistic practice as a whole—of learning, creating, and celebrating the human figure in all its forms.

Emelia Lehmann



Andrew Conklin, *Dora Delfs Lüttgen*, 2015, oil on linen, 16" x 11." Courtesy of Andrew Conklin.

Emelia Lehmann is a recent graduate of the University of Chicago and an aspiring arts professional. An avid writer and researcher, she loves exploring the incredible arts and cultural opportunities in Chicago.

The Faculty Showcase was on view at Palette & Chisel from February 8 - 23, 2020.

Can You Believe What You've Missed in 20 Months?



Volume 32, Issue 6: July/August 2018

Patric McCoy, pioneering South Side art collector
Seven reviews of shows by South Side artists
Cleveland prepares to host FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art
Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists-sponsored show features Martyl and (art)ⁿ



Volume 33, Issue 1: September/October 2018

James Elkins updates his 2003 treatise on art criticism
Siegesmund and Spector on the critic's essential role
Eight noted artists and critics offer their own opinions on the purpose and value of art criticism
The MCA's sprawling show "I Was Raised on the Internet"



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Nathan Worcester examines "The Hairy Who? 1966–1969" at the Art Institute of Chicago
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K.A. Letts and Stevie Hanley each report on Art Basel Miami Beach and surrounding art fairs
Kelli Woods surveys Nashville's vibrant, thriving art scene

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