





The Independent Voice  
of the Visual Arts  
Volume 34 Number 5, July 2020

ART  
in the Time of  
**COVID-19**

\$15 U.S.





Vol. 34, No. 5 Spring Quarter 2020

# ART IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Cover: Mosher, *The Basic Steps for Hand Washing*, 2020. Mural. Photos courtesy of the artist.

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NEW ART EXAMINER

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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.

WANTED:  
WRITERS

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

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

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The Need for Systemic Change

As artists, writers, critics, and all around cultural thinkers, we at the *New Art Examiner* believe in free expression as a core value. Everyone in this country deserves the equal right and opportunity to stand up and speak out when they are not treated equally under the most basic tenets of public safety, civil rights and the law.

For far too long people in America have been told that their lives are not something they can fight to protect. They are told they are going about it wrong, need to be quiet, or aren’t allowed to be angry in the face of injustice. This is antithetical to what we believe.

At the *New Art Examiner*, we work hard to dig deep into art, culture, and public life here in Chicago and beyond. Nevertheless, we do so from our own position of privilege. The arts, after all, is a privileged cultural space to which not everyone has access. That is why it is so important that we do the work to advance arts and culture within and across communities. It is also why in the face of so much oppression and injustice against the people who make up these communities that we support the recent protests and continued calls for systemic change that have emerged after the killings of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, and so many others whose names have been spoken out in calls that have been met with silence and inaction for years and years.

We are a small group at the *New Art Examiner*, but we are a community. And until all communities are treated fairly and equally in this country, no one can truly be free. It is our hope that in the days ahead progress will manifest itself in as many forms as possible. It is our goal to contribute to that progress not only by continuing to explore every corner of the arts that we can, but also by elevating voices that are not heard often enough. We will do so in concert with the greater collective purpose that we see moving hearts and minds every day now. Black and brown lives matter to us. Queer and trans lives matter to us. The lives of all faiths and identities that are marginalized matter to us. We cannot lose momentum. We must not stop or get distracted. Together we must continue to stand and speak loudly and freely to define who we are as community, as a country, and as a culture. Art belongs to everyone and can connect anyone. It has a role to play in this fight, this journey. For us, it starts here.

The Editors



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

USA/Canada      \$55      postage incl.  
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Art in the Time of COVID-19—Introduction

Nobody can really experience art.

Let’s back up. Anybody can experience art. Anybody can turn on a computing device, go to a search engine, and look up, say, Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*<sup>1</sup>. For many of us, this pales in comparison with seeing art in person. But who’s to say that seeing art in person is a richer and more authentic experience? In a crowded museum or gallery, you must bustle past the exhibits, barely registering each individual piece. Unless you go by yourself, the art is competing against your social obligations—and you’re probably more interested in impressing your date than in really understanding and appreciating the work in front of you. Your computing device, on the other hand, creates no such demands. Zoom in—zoom out—look up information about the artist. The screen, our new and universal mediator, is also and inescapably disintermediating. Fully liberated, fully individuated, the screen user is fully and completely alone—“a beast or a god,” or, in some cases, the plaything of screen-mediated mass movements.

To reiterate: nobody can really experience art because nobody knows what it means to “really” experience art—not anymore. Yet for all the current epistemic instability, reality has a way of slamming its foot on the proverbial brakes.

In this first quarterly issue of the *New Art Examiner*, we acclimate to the “new normal”<sup>2</sup> imposed (or excused) by COVID-19. Phillip Barcio goes Hegelian, arguing that the pandemic may be creating space for smaller players in the art field. Emelia Lehmann reflects on virtual exhi-

bitions from three different spaces—the Art Institute of Chicago, the Catherine Edelman Gallery, and the Renaissance Society. K.A. Letts reviews *The Plague Review*, a topical new literary and arts journal launched by Detroit’s Rotland Press. Finally, in part one of a multi-part series, Evan Carter asks members of Chicago’s large and diverse arts community how they have experienced life under lockdown. In this issue, Carter interviews Quenna Barrett, Jessica Stockholder, and Lori Waxman.

Kicking off our reviews, Francine Almeda looks at “Latent Tapestries,” a remarkably timely exhibition of works by Nate Lewis (many of Lewis’s pieces dissect monuments to Confederate soldiers). Next, Janina Ciezadlo analyzes Jeff W. Huebner’s *Walls of Prophecy and Protest: William Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Art Movement*. Walker’s murals commemorated Nat Turner, Malcolm X, Amiri Barks, and other cultural icons from his own African-American community. Michel Ségard examines Norbert Bisky’s “Desmadre Berlin,” a virtual exhibition from Galerie Templon in Paris. Emily Rapport considers “Touch Your Mirror” from Logan Square’s EXTRA Projects. Rebecca Memoli, meanwhile, reviews “The Allure of Matter.” Neil Goodman examines an exhibition of Rembrandt’s paintings of Jewish subjects at Solvang, California’s Elvehøj Museum of History and Art. Having battled cancer himself, Michel Ségard is moved by “Artoma: The Art of Cancer,” an exhibition at the Chicago Art Department. Finally, Emily Rapport enjoys Hofheimer Gallery’s “Chicago Streets and Ways.”

Nathan Worcester

1. I have deliberately chosen a work that will appear in your mind’s eye when you hear its name.  
2. This phrase brought to you by the same people behind “the old normal.”

Mosher, *The Basic Steps for Hand Washing*, 2020. Mural Located near N.California Ave. and W. Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois . Photo courtesy of the artist.



# COVID-19 VS. The Art Field: An Anti-Thesis

by Phillip Barcio

It was a typical Chicagoland Memorial Day: squirrels chittering, kids rolling through the alley on bikes, a whiff of lighter fluid as a neighbor fired up their grill.

No sign of the pandemic that had already robbed humanity of more than 350,000 family members.

As I ambled down the sidewalk with my terrier mutt Rocky leading the way, I noticed a delightful surprise: a pop-up art show. It wasn't much—just two works installed on the porch of a town-home—but it was the first in-person exhibition I had had the chance to see since mid-March, when Illinois went on COVID-19 lockdown.

The work's character perfectly complemented the architecture of the exhibition space, mobilizing a subtle, Modernist grid to support semi-abstract compositions evocative of nature and home.

Gazing at the works, my inner life expanded slightly outwards; the unseen became temporarily seen; a new, unexpected relationship emerged between me and my ordinary world. Things like this happen when humans interact with aesthetic objects in real space—a reminder why art is best experienced in person.

A sign on the porch announced who besides the artist, Lea Basile Lazarus, to thank for this unexpected hit of the good stuff: an initiative called ART-IN-PLACE, sponsored by Terrain Exhibitions and CNL Projects, two Chicago-based organizations that support creative art interventions that, as their website says, "make private space public." Every artist in the world is invited to participate in ART-IN-PLACE, which means this particular exhibition on my street is one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, taking place right now, across the globe, maybe in your neighborhood. Maybe at your house! (What's stopping you?)

So, who says COVID-19 has eliminated our ability to see art in person?

Undoubtedly, the pandemic has hobbled the art market's usual revenue centers—galleries, museums and art fairs—a fact that has spawned a torrent of news articles,

blog posts, social media rants and opinion/editorials, in which art world insiders pontificate about what the so-called "new normal" might mean for the so-called "art world."

That's the thesis. Here's an anti-thesis: There is no art world. There's just a world, which includes an art field and an art market, which are two separate things.

The art market consists of transactions in which people buy products. It's no different from the blue jeans market or the wet market where the COVID-19 pandemic began. The art field, by comparison, is massive and diverse. It exists regardless of whether any art transactions take place, and it includes everyone who works in any capacity to facilitate humanity's roll-out of aesthetic phenomena.

## An Uncovering

Apocalyptic is the proper term for the COVID-19 pandemic. The word apocalypse comes from the Greek *apokalupsis*. It means, "to uncover or reveal."

COVID-19 has revealed much: how many of the world's nations are led by egotistical navel-gazers, how interconnected earth's population has truly become, and how limited technology is when it comes to curing loneliness.

What has it uncovered about the art field? Indianapolis-based artist Richard Emery Nickolson, Professor Emeritus of Painting at Herron School of Art, believes *The Apocalypse Tapestry* holds a clue. Completed in 1382, the 90 "scenes" within this medieval textile artwork portray the Battle of Armageddon as foretold in the Christian Bible's Book of Revelation.

Nickolson points out that if we look carefully, *The Apocalypse Tapestry* actually includes a 91st scene, which plays out along the bottom margin of the entire tapestry.

"That scene is full of nature. There are flowers blooming, and at one point, when things are getting really bad up above, there's this rabbit in the lower margin who dives down a hole. For a while he just goes along and goes along.



**Left:** Lea Basile Lazarus, *The Importance of Staying Connected*, 2020. Woven paper pulp paintings, printmaking, paint, 30 x 22 in. Image courtesy of Lea Basile-Lazarus. **Right:** Installation view of works by Lea Basile Lazarus as part of ART IN PLACE. Photo by the author for the *New Art Examiner*.

Then at the end, after all the cities have all crumbled to the ground, the rabbit peeks his head out."

Nickolson's point? Every apocalypse contains dueling narratives. Some stories tell of threatened giants battling each other for dwindling resources. Others tell of creative denizens surviving by taking refuge in humble accommodations and giving more to their ecosystem than they take.

Remember, when the asteroid killed the dinosaurs, whichever giants weren't immediately wiped out fought each other to the death for the last remnants of food, while the tiniest, meekest creatures, who had long ago learned to survive on next to nothing, evolved into us.

## Down the Rabbit Hole

Marlene Krygowski operates GAG (Garden Apartment Gallery) Chicago in the garden unit of her townhome in Chicago's East Garfield Park neighborhood. The tiny

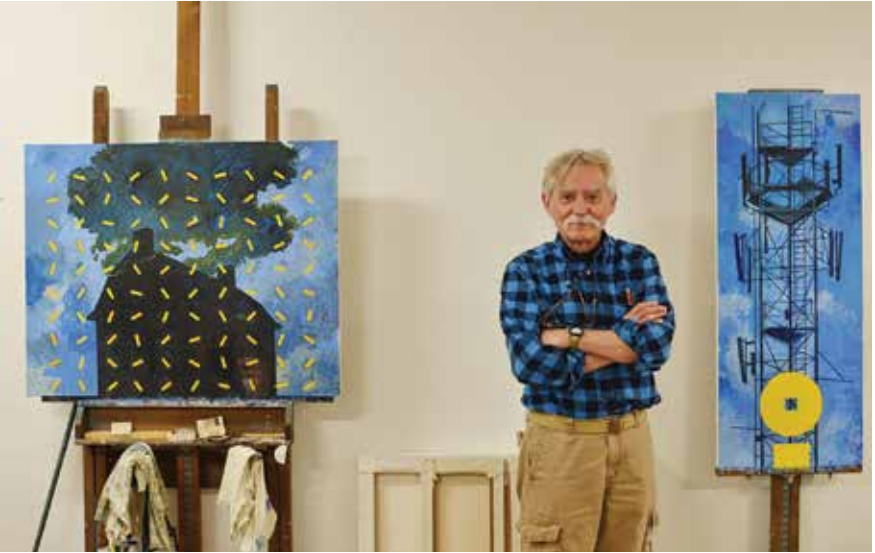
artspace hosted its inaugural exhibition, "Concrete Campground," in October 2012.

"It was a rough exhibit," Krygowski recalls. "Tents scattered, coolers, cookware, branches hung from the ceiling and a fake fire. Bad lighting, no heat, junk boxes everywhere, no real focus. It was a blast."

Krygowski paid for it all herself, as she has done for all of the approximately 50 group shows GAG has since hosted, featuring works by more than 300 artists and attracting more than 10,000 viewers.

Far flung from Chicago art market centers like the West Loop and River North, Krygowski's exhibitions attract a varied audience.

"There are drastically different experiences here in East Garfield Park," Krygowski says. "My neighbor Tyrone said, 'I don't get it. No need to invite me to openings.' At the opposite spectrum of responses is endless support. For



Richard Emery Nickolson in his studio. Image courtesy of Jennifer Delgadillo.





Detail view of the *Apocalypse Tapestry*, showing a rabbit peeking its head out in the bottom margin. Image courtesy of Kimon Berlin under Creative Commons License.

example, there was an unexpected snowstorm on April 27, 2019, the opening night of the *Bad Ass Women of East Garfield Park* show. Five lady artists (Tracy O. Haschke, Andrea Jablonski, Kelly Reaves, Edra Soto, and Alla Yanovsky), who all live within five blocks of GAG, were exhibiting. The streets were empty, full of snow, yet GAG was packed. Everyone came out to support the neighborhood gals.”

Krygowski doesn’t charge admission. If anything sells, the money goes to the artists. She supports her operations by occasionally Airbnb-ing the gallery out, or by hosting private events in the space.

Why do this?  
“It’s all about personal contact with the artist,” Krygowski says. “GAG is accessible to anyone who wants to talk to the artist, and not be intimidated by the gallery experience. For people who are new to viewing art, or don’t have a lot of money, going into a big gallery, you’re like, ‘Whoa, I’m out of my league here.’ But I do things that are slightly off from a normal gallery. It’s more personal.”

For example, Krygowski personally hands out fliers for her shows: “I hand them to people, look people in the eye and say come to my home, come see my gallery. That resonates with people. They show up. I also always have group shows,” she jokes, “so at least there will be five people here.”

Krygowski is not concerned about the economic implications of COVID-19 as much as the pandemic’s effect on the currency of community.

“If physical presence is out of the mix, I would be really miserable,” she says. “The vigor and shenanigans of a ruckus party makes me happy. During a crowded event while people are appreciating the talents of artists, I think, ‘I brought them together.’ It’s an extremely fulfilling and emotional reflection for me. For this reason, adapting to an elongated pandemic would be difficult.”

I found another rabbit sanctuary in Bucktown at Firecat Projects. The rather traditional looking, white-walled

gallery hides an unusual operational model: owner Stan Klein takes no commissions from the sale of work, passing all proceeds directly to the artist.

When he first opened in 2011, Klein solicited support from art patrons who financed exhibitions without knowing who the artist was going to be, and without expectation of a material return. Lately, he adopted a model similar to that of GAG, renting the space out for occasional private events to help subsidize exhibitions.

Firecat Projects has hosted solo exhibitions for almost 100 artists, so far. The model succeeds, Klein believes, because unlike a traditional gallery, he is not responsible for nurturing an artist for their entire career.

“I’m a one off,” Klein says. “I invest in the artists, but it’s for a single moment in time in their career. Hopefully, it’s a stepping-off place, a place to find a new direction. I try to help them focus and talk with them about what that means. It’s a learning experience. When the show is up, they get the feedback, they learn about their artwork, about how they communicate their ideas, about how it all fits into an exhibition space.”

Klein mostly wants to give artists who are at a turning point in their career a chance to imagine what the next level might look like. He also encourages his artists to learn how to promote their own exhibition. “I tell them, ‘You have the responsibility to share with me.’ That starts weighing on people a little bit, and I try to get them through that, so the next time they do it, they have all those boxes they know need to be checked.”

Klein had the idea for Firecat Projects while working as an artist assistant for artists like Andrew and James Wyeth, Robert Indiana, and Kenneth Noland.

“I always heard them talk about their dealings with galleries,” Klein says. “One of the artists said it’d be nice to have a gallery that didn’t take a commission, but we wondered, how would that work? He sort of left it, but I kept thinking about it. It evolved in my mind about how



Installation view of works by Edra Soto (left) and oil paintings by Brian Wells at GAG. Image courtesy of Marlene Krygowski.

to go forward with it. My dad was a teacher, so I have that teacher gene in me somewhere. This model fits for what I wanted to do.

Some artists instantly gravitate to Klein’s approach, he says. “Others just drop the artwork off and say, ‘You hang it.’ Everyone has a different approach.” Regardless, Klein has his own reasons for doing what he does. “For me, I walk through a door and it’s an experience of learning and seeing that enhances every show. I learn about people, about artists, about art, about how they see the world and see themselves in it.”

Serendipitously, Firecat Projects opened “Jon Gnagy: You Are the Artist” just as the pandemic put Chicago on lockdown. Gnagy could be considered the world’s first remote art teacher. His instructional drawing and painting

show was a forerunner of, and inspiration for, Bob Ross’ *The Joy of Painting*.

Gnagy also inspired Klein: “He was giving his viewers the tools to create. How far you wanted to take it was up to you, and your enjoyment of it. He never confronted you with a product. He wasn’t telling you, ‘Now buy this.’ He said, ‘See if you like it, if you enjoy it, if it hits your creative spirit to go forward.’”

### Beneath the Fray

Art galleries like GAG and Firecat Projects offer flexible business models for an uncertain economic climate, but even Krygowski and Klein would admit that their efforts would be nothing without their collaborators, the true rabbits of the art field: the artists.

Interior view of Firecat Projects in Chicago’s Bucktown neighborhood. Image courtesy of Stan Klein.

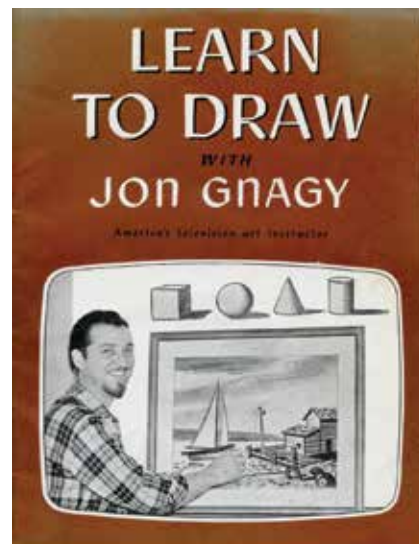






**Left:** Robert Burnier, *Valora Stono 6*, 2019, Acrylic on aluminum, 4 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 4 in. Image courtesy of the artist.

**Right:** Cover of "Learn to Draw with Jon Gnagy." Image courtesy of Stan Klein at Firecat Projects.



When not in the studio, Chicago-based artist Robert Burnier holds a day job as an art handler and preparator at the Art Institute of Chicago. His dual role as independent working artist and caretaker of one of the world's most important institutional art collections gives him perspectives both from the highest heights of the art ecosystem, and from the ground floor.

"The last thing we did at the museum before the pandemic was the 'El Greco: Ambition and Defiance' show," says Burnier, recalling how that ambitious exhibition, for which nearly 60 works were sourced from all over the world, was nearly mothballed by COVID-19. "The whole world kind of cooperated. Loans got extended."

The Art Institute has stretched the show through autumn, yet, who really knows if crowds will be welcome again even then? Meanwhile, Burnier's role at the museum is evolving: "the Art Institute has been on our side in trying to extend as much as they can to keep us all employed. Our work is normally very physical, but we've been doing a lot of data work lately, going over the website, going over art records, which you can do remotely. We've also done a little bit of work contributing to scholarship."

As the institutional art model shifts online for now, Burnier is optimistic about what that means for art in general.

"The core museum mission is to have people look at art," Burnier points out. "I'm no there to quote numbers, but our website traffic has gone way up, and the curatorial staff seems excited about that in a weird way."

The pandemic has also given Burnier a chance to constructively re-imagine his own art practice:

"I'm letting this situation help me discover some new ideas. It's having the opposite effect than if I was completely chained to my studio, which is at a big building. It's still open, but I don't want to travel on a train, so I'm staying home. Instead of my usual tools and environment, I've scaled it back. The results have been interesting."

It reminds Burnier of once when he was doing an art

fair in Copenhagen. It was expensive to ship work, so he planned something instead that he could carry in a suitcase.

"Because of the pandemic, certain types of artwork might become amenable to a more austere environment," he speculates. "Scale and transportability might become a thing for a while. Then again, it's almost disappointing to talk about. It's innovative, but it's also purely an economic decision. That could be negative as people try to make things to fit the market."

Burnier's co-worker at The Art Institute, Chicago-based artist Rufino Jimenez, also sees the transition of bigger institutions to an online model as a net positive for the art field.

"It hardly costs a thing to start an online gallery, which is why up until this point online galleries have sort of been looked down upon," Jimenez says. "As big galleries and museums start showing artwork online more often, that normalizes it and opens it way up for individuals who have less money. Now that people see this is a legitimate form, it's the time to say, ok, let's do something new."

Jimenez notes how the pandemic is also challenging foregone conclusions about social media's relationship to art:

"Small artists have been posting their work on Instagram and doing online things all along because they can't afford exhibition space or sell enough work to attract a gallery. Now these big galleries are also re-embracing Instagram and other social media platforms, which again legitimizes what used to be looked down upon, and kind of creates a market in a place that people didn't used to see as high art."

On one hand, this creates opportunities for less established artists who are now sharing the same playing fields as giant dealers. On the other hand, can the online ecosystem possibly feed the appetites of dinosaurs and rabbits alike?

Jimenez points out that major galleries have been heading this way for a while anyway, shifting away from in-person exhibitions, having more private viewings, and only offering works at unapproachable price points.

"At a gallery like Gagosian, most of the art sells before the show even opens," Jimenez says.

If they can make the shift to online sales work for them, he muses, some big galleries might walk away from the brick and mortar model for good. Regardless, Jimenez suggests none of this will affect the bulk of artists who have been sustaining the art field all along.

"In Chicago, especially, we've got a really good underground scene where people have apartment galleries and pop-up galleries and collaborators who get things done," he notes. "Some artists get plucked out of obscurity by galleries, but all these other artists are still just making art all the time. It doesn't matter what's going on out there. If the economy is great, we'll make art and put it out there. When the economy is terrible, we'll do the same thing. It's the underground driving force of the industry. The artists just keep making artwork, regardless of what the cost and value is, no matter who wants it, whether it's important or not important."

Burnier agrees: "There's always that flora and fauna under the big trees. That floor covering gives life to the ecosystem. It's always there. None of that can change. Art as part of human history has found a way through every horrid epic, every plague, every upheaval. Art was being

made in the most tumultuous of times. And I think artists, their daily lives, are like that. The precarity of artists' daily lives makes them used to finding ways to survive. Artists solve problems."

No one doubts that COVID-19 is pitting the lumbering beasts of the art market against each other for dwindling grant money and acquisition budgets. Their struggle for resources may exhaust the landscape of their operations. The art market bulges and whimpers in response to changing economic conditions. The art field, meanwhile, carries on, as it has since the ancient ones first painted their handprints on cave walls, not for money, immune to circumstance, fueled only by the currency of compulsion. In the underbrush, beneath the fray, the artists, collectives, artist-run spaces, apartment galleries, muralists, taggers, street performers, and the passionate patrons who support their work while asking nothing in return, are like the tiny mammals that even the dinosaur-killing asteroid could not kill. They are the beating heart of the art field; the ones who have always thrived on next to nothing. COVID-19 won't stop them from doing their work. ■

Phillip Barcio's writing has appeared in *Western Humanities Review*, *Hyperallergic*, *Momus*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, *IdeelArt*, *New Art Examiner*, *WIDEWALLS*, *Tikkun*, *Space Squid*, the *Swamp Ape Review*, various exhibition catalogues, and is included in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art. He hosts *Apocalypse Mixtape* on [WQRT.ORG](http://WQRT.ORG) every Saturday at 7PM ET.



Rufino Jimenez in the process of making a live, performative charcoal drawing. Image courtesy of the artist.



El Greco, *The Assumption of the Virgin*. Oil on canvas, 158 3/4 × 83 3/4 in. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago



# Virtual Visual Culture

By Emelia Lehmann

As museums and galleries have closed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many have sought to maintain audience engagement by moving content online. While most would agree that the experience of seeing a work in person has far more impact than scrolling through JPEGs or flipping through Instagram feeds, shelter-in-place orders have left few alternatives. And as visual culture becomes virtual, many are reassessing the nature of art exhibitions altogether. Facing an over-abundance of digital content, arts organizations are exploring the ways in which entire shows can be put online—and whether such a model can hold the same appeal as a real exhibition. After all, exhibitions are so much more than just the artwork that fills a space, regardless of whether that space is real or virtual. Digital programming can highlight both the hard work and discoveries that make an exhibition successful and the challenges that come from the absence of physical artwork.

## The Art Institute Of Chicago—“El Greco: Ambition And Defiance”

Four years in the making, “El Greco: Ambition and Defiance” has been heralded as one of the art world highlights of the year. Developed in partnership with the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the exhibition explores El Greco’s life and character through his monumental artwork, generously loaned by collections around the world. Like most museums and galleries, the Art Institute closed abruptly in March, placing this show, along with many others, on an extended hiatus.

“It felt like one day the museum was open, and the next it was closed. Everything changed overnight,” says Rebecca Long, Associate Curator of European Paintings and Sculpture. Like many museums, the Art Institute of Chicago has had to adapt to these changing circumstances. “For safety and security, no one could get into the museum.

So, we had to get creative with the resources we already had available.” This content has become “El Greco Online,” which has proven to be a popular alternative in the days of social distancing. The virtual portal allows viewers to explore the exhibition through abridged audio guides, blogs and articles, and interactive features. A video tour hints at the more than 57 works that fill the gallery’s walls; however, only a fraction of these images can be explored on the site. While viewers cannot bask in the glory of the *Assumption of the Virgin* or the *Vision of Saint John*, this online exhibition instead shares the years of work and scholarship that went into creating this show with audiences around the globe.

For Long, this exhibition offers a unique look into the life and personality of El Greco—an “ornery old goat,” as one research assistant jokingly refers to him. “He was a very contemporary artist for his time,” remarks Long, “and he was really focused on his *career* as an artist.” In fact,

Long notes that far more is known about El Greco than his peers due to the vast number of lawsuits he filed throughout his life. In constant legal battles over fair pay and artistic rights, El Greco certainly seems right at home amid today’s art news headlines.

“The exhibition was formed around the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Art Institute’s collection,” says Long. “It was El Greco’s first commission in Spain, an important piece for him.” This work was one of nine paintings and five sculptures that made up an elaborate gold-framed altarpiece, which El Greco designed in 1577 for a convent in Toledo, Spain. Dismantled and sold in 1830, *Assumption* was eventually acquired by the Art Institute in 1906. (An article outlining the fascinating story of how the work came to the museum is accessible on “El Greco Online.”)

In 2018, in preparation for the exhibition, the painting underwent its first major conservation treatment in 100 years. In addition to removing centuries-old varnish that obscured its vibrant colors, researchers gathered important data about *Assumption*’s 450-year history, including collecting samples of El Greco’s paint and uncovering an 1830s restoration that altered the work’s original borders. To complement this scholarship, El Greco’s other works from the original altar have been brought to Chicago to be displayed together for the first time in nearly 200 years.

While visitors can’t experience this monumental work in person, the Art Institute has developed ways to share the extensive research undertaken for this show. An inter-



El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*. Oil on canvas, 87 1/2 × 76 in. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

El Greco, *A Boy Blowing on an Ember to Light a Candle*. Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 × 20 in. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.







Daniel Beltrá, *Amazon Amapa iron mine* (#226), 2017. © Daniel Beltrá. Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.



Daniel Beltrá, *Amazon scarlet ibis* (#222), 2017. © Daniel Beltrá. Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

active feature sheds light on the discoveries made during conservation, while another page contains a detailed timeline of El Greco's lifetime (and lawsuits) illustrated with his artwork. Much of this information might have filled wall labels and exhibition catalogues, overshadowed by the works themselves. But online, this research takes center-stage over JPEG images of the artwork and viewers can, for once, explore these resources at their leisure.

Welcoming people back into the galleries remains a major goal for Long, who has extended the show past its June 21 closing date through fall 2020. "Especially with works like these, nothing can replace seeing the scale and artistry in person," confirms Long. "And we have some truly unique pieces in this show, like *Assumption*, that can't be seen anywhere else." But even while galleries remain closed, "El Greco Online" continues to draw virtual visitors from around the world. "Hopefully, this online exhibition will raise awareness of these works and their stories and will encourage people to come see them someday."

### Catherine Edelman Gallery—"Daniel Beltrá: The Amazon"

In West Town, a prominent commercial gallery is grappling with similar issues of viewing, engagement, and display. The Catherine Edelman Gallery had just opened "Daniel Beltrá: The Amazon" on March 13 when they had to close their doors. Now, the glorious photography exhibition can only be experienced online—JPEGs of photographs mediated by a computer screen.

The show features beautiful and striking images of the Amazon rainforest, taken over the course of 20 years and illustrating everything from migration to wildfire, habitat loss and human environmental impacts. Photographing from small planes or helicopters, Daniel Beltrá captures extremely remote and isolated scenes where humans and nature collide. During the last 2 years, Beltrá and the gallery's director, Catherine Edelman, selected a mere 15 photographs out of over 100,000 images to include in this exhibition.



Daniel Beltrá, *Amazon solo defoliation* (#204), 2013. © Daniel Beltrá. Courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

Since the closure, the gallery has continued to showcase this exhibition online, building up a robust platform with installation shots from the show, written content outlining Beltrá's vision, and video interviews with the artist and leading environmental activists. According to Edelman, much of this is business as usual. "We've always done a lot online and what we are doing now is not really different."

As a gallery showcasing artists and selling artwork to collectors around the globe, having a digital showroom is a crucial part of their business. "90% of our sale come from out-of-state, so our website is important in keeping us connected with the public and our artists," says Edelman. "For as long as we've had a website, we've put our exhibitions online."

The gallery's existing process for extensive digitization and programming succeeds in sharing Beltrá's perspective with the audience, even virtually. Videos and photographs of the exhibition space have always been an online staple, as have high-definition images of every work. This time, Edelman has also digitized a detailed timeline of Beltrá's career, mounted on the gallery wall, that complements and contextualizes his work. And with so much available content, visitors can explore his photographs and career in depth. His poignant images illustrate human impact on the natural world, highlighting the loneliness and isolation

that comes with devastation. In this time of uncertainty, visitors can travel to distant lands previously unseen and unexplored through these images.

Even though so much of the show can be seen online, Edelman notes that there are challenges and drawbacks to losing the physical exhibition: "For one thing, it's completely different to look at a JPEG online than to see a work in person." Especially for monumental works like Beltrá's, these vibrant and complex images deserve to be seen as they were intended—blown up and big-scale. Then there's the personal aspect to it. "Artists like Daniel want their work to be seen, and socializing is a big part of this business. We want to meet people and educate them on our artists," says Edelman. "While Daniel understands that postponement is inevitable and we're continuing the show online, the sadness for him is that people haven't been able to walk through the gallery and experience it."

As for the future, Edelman remains optimistic. "We haven't had to recreate the wheel," she notes. With the exhibition already installed, it is only a matter of waiting until they can welcome visitors to the space once more. "Staff plan to return to the gallery on June 2, and we will re-open Daniel's show. We are extending the exhibition until the beginning of July," says Edelman. "So he'll end up having a four-month show. Well, it will feel like four months to us, but really the public has only had access to it for 5 days."





**Left:** Miho Dohi, *buttai 23*, 2013. Copper and acrylic, 10.5 x 7 x 7.5 inches. Courtesy of the Renaissance Society. **Right:** Miho Dohi, *buttai 38*, 2016. Wood, thread, cloth, and acrylic, 6.7 x 13 x 8.6 inches. Courtesy of the Renaissance Society.

**THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO— “MIHO DOHI”**

In historic Hyde Park, another museum has come to terms with another scenario: no physical exhibition at all. The Renaissance Society intended to open “Miho Dohi” to the public on April 18. More than a year in the making, the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago and the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University co-organized this exhibition, which is the first large-scale US showcase of the Japanese sculpture artist. But at the last minute, nation-wide closures forced the Renaissance Society to change course.

“This is not a moment for the museum to be open to the public,” noted Renaissance Society Curator Karsten Lund, “but we still want to share this work with our audiences in other ways.” Instead, the show has been moved entirely online, with photographs and reimagined digital programming standing in for tours and events.

Lund views this time as a unique challenge—and opportunity—for the art world to rethink their relationships with viewing and online engagement. Documenting exhibitions is extremely important part of the Society’s work, and they have been putting photographs, installation shots and programing online for years to archive their shows. Lund explains, “As an institution, we were already exploring how we can share that past and preserve it online so that people can access it even when it’s over. Each exhibition is a unique moment in time, and we want to find a way to capture that in our online presence.” Now, they are exploring not only how to archive past exhibitions but how to host present and future exhibitions online as well.

In fact, the Renaissance Society’s show raises several interesting questions about what makes an exhibition an *exhibition*. Certainly, months of planning have gone into

selecting these works, coordinating loans from around the world, and collaborating with the artist to bring together “Miho Dohi.” This behind-the-scenes work is not lost online, but it has had to adapt to a virtual audience who are unable to experience the works around which it is built. All of this scholarship and inquiry now surrounds a show which, for all intents and purposes, does not physically exist.

With travel restrictions and closures occurring around the world in the months leading up to the exhibition, many of the works remain in other cities waiting to be shipped to Chicago. No works have been installed. In fact, if one could enter the Renaissance Society today, one would likely find blank walls and empty galleries. This absence is felt throughout the virtual exhibition as well, which lacks installation shots and connections with individual artworks. Especially in sculpture, physicality and space is central to artworks’ existence. So how has the Renaissance Society attempted to create an exhibition while unable to install any work?

High-resolution photographs of each sculpture against a white background make up the bulk of the online exhibition. Called *buttai*, meaning ‘object’ in Japanese, these sculptures are complex compilations of materials that explore relationships among shape, color, form and texture. These editorial images are taken from multiple perspectives, encouraging viewers to try to imagine their three-dimensionality. For Lund, these objects “are really quite relevant to this moment. Her sculptures are small and intimate, and that mirrors what a lot of us are experiencing right now. We are finding there is power in what is modest too.”

Online, the *objectness* of these *buttai* is relegated to photographs instead of sculptures. The Renaissance Society has instead developed a network of programming to make these images more tangible to viewers. Lund, for

instance, has provided an audio tour that explores Dohi’s methods and materials for creating these sculptures. Poet Hoa Nguyen has presented a haunting and beautiful reading of her work in response to Dohi’s exhibition. And writer Shannon Stratton plans to live-stream her insights and reflections into these sculptures. However, without the experiences that come from placing and viewing these works within time and space, these exercises feel somewhat ephemeral. This show highlights that, both for the audience and the creators, there are limits to what can be seen or understood from 3D artwork that has only been experienced through photographs.

Moving forward, Lund hopes that the exhibition will open with some of the works installed later in the summer, although this will depend on how public health measures unfold. This way, audiences will have the opportunity to see the *buttai* in person and the Renaissance Society can finally realize their vision for this exhibition. But Lund believes this experience will inspire future collaborations and creativity when it comes to displaying artwork in the digital arena. “The relationship between physical spaces and online offerings is an ongoing conversation. I don’t see it as a matter of one replacing the other—instead, I like to consider how virtual components can *complement* and *expand* upon the offerings in the gallery.”



Miho Dohi, *buttai 57*, 2019. Wood, aluminum, brass, copper, red ink, acrylic, and paint, 8.6 x 16 x 15 inches. Courtesy of the Renaissance Society.

**Exhibiting the Exhibition**

The vast educational content and creative programming that these three institutions have developed is astounding, especially given the sudden and ever-changing situation we are facing. From a world-class cultural megolith to a wide-reaching commercial gallery to an independent contemporary art museum, each has cultivated a different relationship with virtual viewing and digital resources. But together, they also illustrate the importance of situating artwork within a physical space, whether or not it can be accessed by the audience it is intended to engage. In this virtual world, content appears to be based less around the actual works of art and more on what is gained from studying and analyzing them. When an audience can only experience artworks as JPEGs, they rely on other forms of content to tell the story of the artwork and the exhibition. The behind-the-scenes process of studying, curating, and installing works therefore becomes critical to developing an in-depth understanding of the exhibition that can translate online.

The installation shots and visual tours, conversations with scholars and curators, and in-depth research into the works themselves all help an online viewer envision the exhibition as actually existing. In a gallery, these behind-the-scenes features might be overlooked in favor of the actual artwork. But as website links and computer screens mediate between people and their encounters with art, this background work is paramount in understanding the exhibition and creating engaging content that can transcend the physical and enter the digital world. ■

**Emelia Lehmann is a Chicago-based writer and graduate of the University of Chicago. She works as a fine art associate and claims adjuster with the Haven Art Group.**

The Plague Review:  
A New Journal for the Age of the Pandemic  
from Detroit’s Rotland Press

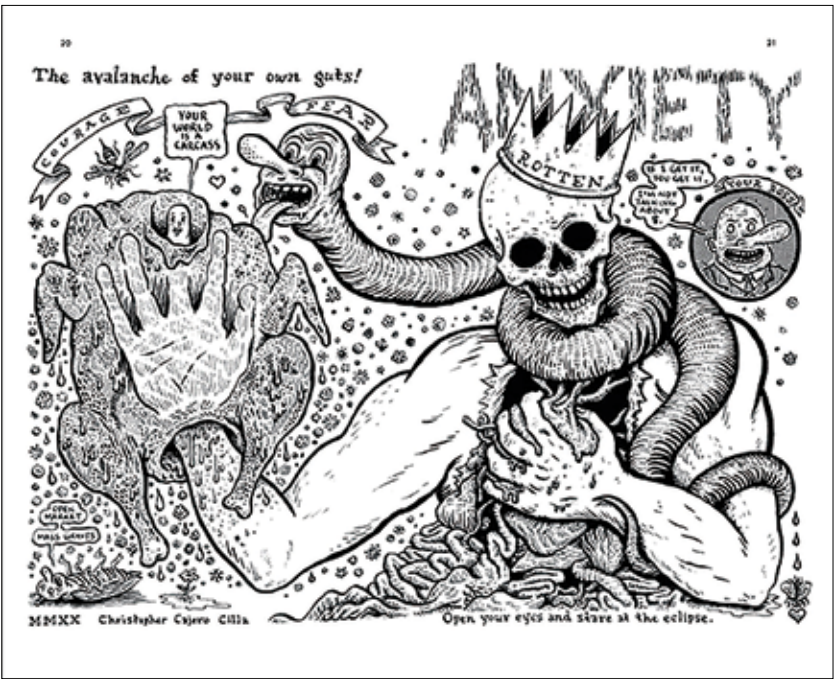
by K.A. Letts

Every time I write about art these days, I find I have to start with a disclaimer: “I have not seen this work in person, only online.” And here I am once again. What follows is my review—or perhaps it’s a book report—on *The Plague Review*, a new project from Detroit’s Rotland Press. Today it’s exclusively a virtual literary/visual art journal suitable for viewing online. The publisher, printmaker, media archivist and social commentator Ryan Standfest, promises that a physical edition of the publication will be available when “the scourge of Covid-19 has lifted.” Whenever that is.

Standfest includes interviews, sketchbooks, comics, and poetry by a like-minded cohort of contemporary artists, printmakers, and graphic artists in this first online edition of *The Plague Review*. The contributors share a deeply held worldview that privileges humanist values and environmental concern over the prevailing late-capitalist system, which they express in a variety of styles and artforms. A

number of the contributors, including Standfest himself, also exhibit a distinctive nostalgia for vintage—and often low-brow—cultural media such as taxidermy, sensationalistic penny dreadful-type stories and illustrations, political satire and comics. This international group, many of whom are regular participants in other projects by Rotland Press, can only have been assembled in the age of the Internet, when creatives from all over the world can form a virtual global village of shared values.

The cover design by Detroit illustrator Stephen Schudlich neatly conveys the content to be found within the pages of *The Plague Review*. Fred Stonehouse’s dapper—and rather cheerful—skeleton with the word SORRY stamped on its (skull) cap, informs us that we are about to get a therapeutic dose of what Standfest describes in his artist statement as “absurdist humor, gallows humor and satirical absurdism that ... give[s] form to collective trauma.” He describes his motivation for this project: “There



Christopher Cajero Cilla, *The avalanche of your own guts!*, 2020. *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, pages 20-21. Image courtesy of Rotland Press.

is a more general pathology of despair that interests me now, a place between optimism and resignation with a greater social struggle towards finding resolution.” Standfest and his fellow contributors have been mining this particular line of thought since 2010, but our current predicament has now caught up with his perspective, making *The Plague Review* particularly timely and topical.

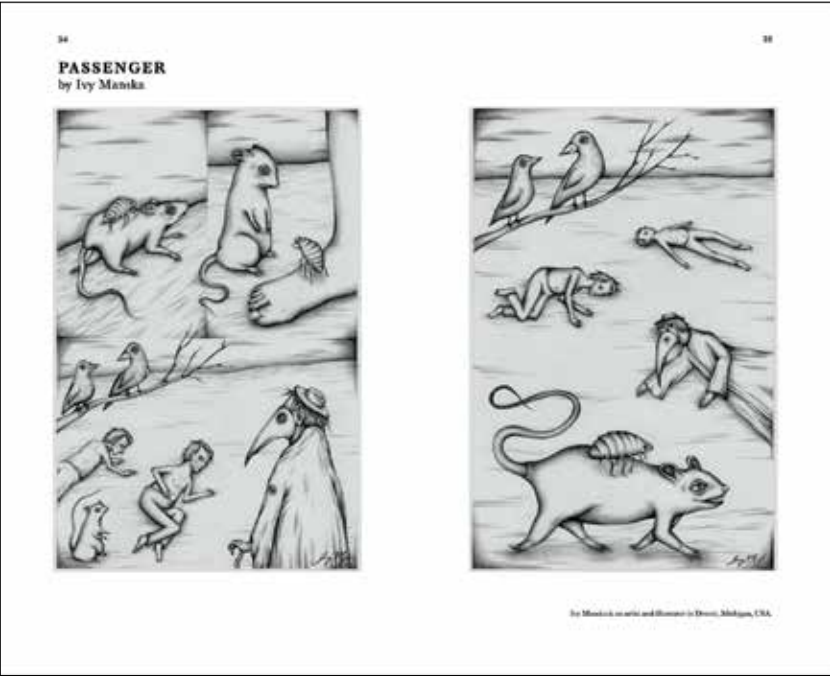
Ryan Standfest’s opening editorial introduces us to the Review’s perspective with a description of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Matthias Grünewald (Since I was reading the review online, a photo of the *Altarpiece* was only a mouse click away, but when the publication is released in a phys-

ical edition, it’s not clear if there will be an accompanying image.) He draws parallels between the psychology of suffering depicted in the painting, created during the era of plague in the 1500s, and our anxiety and grief response to the COVID-19 crisis of 2020, a grief that is especially felt in Detroit, where the virus has hit the African American community with particular ferocity. His conclusion: while the externalities of a pandemic change, the psychology of suffering remains the same.

Salted throughout *The Plague Review* are cartoons and illustrations that share a sensibility, if not a style. David Shrigley, a British visual satirist, illustrator, cultural critic



Left: Stephen Schudlich, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1 cover.  
Right: David Shrigley, *The party, we were all having fun and then*, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, page 11. Images courtesy of Rotland Press.



Ivy Manska, *Passenger*, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, pages 34-35. Image courtesy of Rotland Press.



and weekly contributor to *The Guardian's Weekend* magazine, contributes a couple of his faux-naïve drawings, which deftly encapsulate our flat-footed astonishment at the arrival of doom. Chicago-based artist Chris Capoyianes, whose black and white drawings are often organized around actors within a theatrical proscenium, captures the poignancy of an empty theater with *Intermission* (*In Quarantine*). Oregon-based cartoonist and printmaker Chris Cajero Cilla and Chicago's Paul Nudd share a creative approach that owes something to the gleefully grotesque figures of Jim Nutt's early work. Detroit artist Ivy Manska's creatures with attendant parasites recall the multi-figural, monster-infested landscapes of Hieronymus Bosch.

Martin Rowson, a British editorial cartoonist who contributes regularly to *The Guardian* and the *The Daily Mirror*, has contributed some comic verse entitled, "The Enemy Within: A Paranoid Round in a Time of Pestilence." It's a neat parody of hypochondriacal anxiety's circular thought.

*The Plague Review* also features two thoughtful interviews with artists Joanna Eberstein and Sue Coe, whose distinguished and longstanding art practices are having a moment of particular relevance in light of the pandemic.

Ebenstein, a Brooklyn-based photographer and connoisseur of death's culture and customs, is best known as the co-founder with Tracy Hurley Martin of the Morbid Anatomy Museum, a "death-centric" museum that operated in Gowanus, Brooklyn from 2013-2016. *The Morbid Anatomy Anthology* (<https://www.morbidanatomy.org>), edited by Ebenstein and Colin Dickey, predates the museum and contains essays and illustrations by many scholars, artists, and writers working at the intersection of anatomy, culture, and mortality. More recently, Ebenstein has created a new volume, *The Anatomical Venus*, which de-

scribes life-size—and life-like—18th century models of the female body for use in medical study, and through that meditates on beauty, sexuality and their relation to death, among other things.

The interview in *The Plague Review* updates Ebenstein's thoughts on mortality through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic:

"We have had the immense good fortune to live, for many years, in a time when we had the luxury of seeing death as something exotic and other, something that would happen to us after a long, full life. I think on some subconscious level, we felt that our technology insulated us from the natural world, and from death. What is happening now is a brutal reminder that this is not so, and that life is not a promise—it's a temporary gift."

Coe, a printmaker, illustrator, painter, and animal rights activist, describes herself as anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian. Now her passionate 40-year mission against animal cruelty has found a time uniquely suited to her talents. The public is suddenly starkly aware that the coronavirus has jumped from animals to humans because of the inhumane treatment of animals in China's wet markets. Western factory slaughterhouses are likewise in the spotlight at this moment, not only for their brutal treatment of animals, but also for their callous attitude toward the workers in the facilities where the virus is spreading. One can imagine that current events will provide Coe with plenty of inspiration going forward, although, as she points out in this interview, she has previously made bodies of work that expressly address zoonotic infections.

**Left:** Chris Capoyianes, *Intermission*, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, page 8. Image courtesy of Rotland Press.  
**Right:** Sue Coe, *Maga Doctor*, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, page 36.



"I have been consistent in fighting speciesism and for animal liberation. It's always been crystal clear to me: it can happen here, and it did happen here. The crystallization [of public consciousness against cruelty toward animals] has to happen for the mass of people for there to be structural change."

This may be that moment.

The first edition of *The Plague Review* ends with a brief commentary by Standfest acknowledging Italy as a fellow sufferer in the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured is an illustration by Lorenzo Mattotti of a de Chirico-inspired figure in close combat with the Corona-monster. The painting appeared on the cover of *Robinson*, a cultural supplement to one of Italy's daily newspapers, *la Repubblica*.

Standfest seems more energized than depressed by the grim facts of the pandemic and its accompanying

economic depression. Perhaps he senses that this inflection point in human history presents an opportunity to rethink and reorganize society in more humane ways, and a chance for us all to work in support of the environment rather than against it. ■

In the time it took to write this review of the first edition, a second iteration of *The Plague Review* has appeared, as has a new series of the single-page online publication *Detroit Sequential*, described as "inspired by the oversized four-color comic strips that once graced the pages of America's Sunday newspapers." It is available free weekly by subscription, and I highly recommend. Go to <http://rotlandpress.com/plague-review>.

**K.A. Letts is a working artist (kalettsart.com) and art blogger (rustbeltarts.com). She has shown her paintings and drawing in galleries and museums in Toledo, Detroit, Chicago and New York. She writes frequently about art in the Detroit area and is the *New Art Examiner's* Detroit Editor.**



Stephane Blanquet, *Dessin soir: March 12, 2020* and *Comme de rat: March 22, 2020*, *The Plague Review*, Issue 1, pages 26-27. Image courtesy of Rotland Press.

## Culture in Quarantine: Seven Interviews from Chicago

by Evan Carter

### Introduction

A few months ago, the rapid spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic seemed like the definitive issue of 2020. There was no way to predict that a national and even international rise of civil disobedience and social disruption in response to systemic racism would overpower the fear and necessity of quarantine. But it justifiably and rightly has and will continue to do so. Less shocking but still disturbing is the further descent into authoritarian reactionism on the part of the administration and its enablers in the government and national media. In spite of this, I have to confess I was struck with a greater sense of fear and anxiety back at the end of March when cities began to rapidly shut down and people started losing their jobs. The fear had less to do with my health and financial well-being than with something broader. The media was abuzz with talk of looming death tolls and economic decline, and though these are relevant and practical concerns, it was what was not being discussed that worried me. I imagined all the things that would slip through the cracks; the poor and marginalized, a shared sense of safety and community, culture itself, and all the harmful actions of a regime that so many had been openly fighting without the hurdle of quarantine. For anyone who had ever mused upon the coming of a second dark age, it felt as though it had arrived.

This fear was only amplified by the narrow public discourse around the crisis of the pandemic. I know that in such an emergency, it is important to keep people informed first and foremost. But the questions of what culture could do and how it might change lingered in my mind. So, I decided to search for answers by reaching out to members of Chicago's large and diverse arts community. We had long conversations with our seven interviewees (Quenna Barrett, Jessica Campbell, Carlos Flores, Stevie Hanley, Patric McCoy, Jessica Stockholm, and Lori Wax-

man) that were commiserative, uplifting, cathartic, contemplative, and informative. It was not only restorative to simply just connect with people but refreshing to hear from folks who think critically about the world on a daily basis. Though things are changing and have changed a great deal since these conversations took place, it is my hope that they can continue to provide relief, comfort, insight, and inspiration as we move forward into uncertain times. I know I found these discussions helpful, and if you are reading this, I hope you do too.

Here are the first three interviews. The next four interviews of Jessica Campbell, Carlos Flores, Stevie Hanley, and Patric McCoy will appear in the next quarter after July.

### Quenna Barrett

Quenna Lené Barrett is a Chicago-based theater artist + practitioner, developing programs to amplify teen + community voice and hold space to rehearse, tell, and change the stories of their lives. She is currently the Associate Director of Education and Engagement at Goodman Theatre, and has developed two applied theatre programs at the University of Chicago's Arts + Public Life. She is a company member with the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health's For Youth Inquiry, Associate Artist with Pivot Arts, co-curator for Theatre on the Lake, and artist-in-residence at Free Street Theatre. Barrett received her BFA from NYU Tisch in Drama, her MA in Applied Theatre from the University of Southern California, and is a doctoral candidate in Educational Theatre at NYU Steinhardt. Continuing to build the world she wants to see/live in, she is developing practices of poetic and participatory performance, and is re-writing the Declaration of Independence. Sort of.



### Jessica Stockholm

Jessica Stockholder was born in 1959 in Seattle, Washington and currently lives and works in Chicago, Illinois. She has exhibited widely in museums and galleries internationally. Her solo exhibitions include shows at The Power Plant, Toronto (2000); MoMA PS1, New York (2006); the Musée d'art moderne, Saint-Étienne Métropole, France (2012). Her work is represented in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the Whitney Museum of Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); the Museum of Fine Arts–Boston; the British Museum, London; and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Stockholder had her third solo exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, "The Guests All Crowded Into the Dining Room," in the fall of 2016 and a solo exhibition titled "Relational Aesthetics" at The Contemporary Austin in 2018. Currently, she is the subject of a solo exhibition titled "Stuff Matters" at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, The Netherlands.



### Lori Waxman

Lori Waxman (Chicago, USA) is a Chicago-based critic and art historian. Her reviews and articles have been published in the Chicago Tribune, Artforum, Artforum.com, Modern Painters, Gastronomica, Parkett, Tema Celeste, as well as the defunct Parachute, New Art Examiner and FGA. She has written catalogue essays for small and large art spaces, including: Spertus Museum, Chicago; threewalls, Chicago; SPACES Gallery, Cleveland; Institute of Visual Art, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Turpentine Gallery, Reykjavik; and Dieu Donné Papermill, New York.

She has published essays on Arturo Herrera, Jenny Holzer, William Cordova, Eugenia Alter Propp, Raissa Venables, Gordon Matta-Clark, Joel Sternfeld, Emily Jacir, Taryn Simon, Ranbir Kaleka and Christa Donner. Waxman teaches art history at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has a PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, where her doctoral research considered urban walking as a revolutionary aesthetic practice of the 20th century. She received a Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant (2008) for her project 60 wrd/min art critic, which traveled to venues around the United States through 2011.



## Quenna Barrett

**New Art Examiner:** How are you doing in this current situation?

**Quenna Barrett:** I've actually just been reading an LA Times article about how some people are like, "This is pretty great." (laughter) And some days I feel like that, you know. I'm super kind of grateful just for the spaciousness and for this and I wish that it could happen under different circumstances. I'm really trying to sort of center my needs and other community needs in this time and just take stock and not be always on the go in this moment. So, I'm grateful for that. But you know, it does get challenging. It does get lonely at times. So, I sort of go back and forth as many of us probably do.

**NAE:** Have you had time off from your work at the Goodman Theatre?

**QB:** I don't necessarily have time off. I've been working from home. I don't think I spend the same amount of time or that time looks different. I sort of scaffold it differently than I would normally, but we have been consistently working.

**NAE:** To the best of my knowledge, plays and productions have been stopped because of the orders from the city. How concerned are you about the theater in general as an art form?

**QB:** I'll probably answer this question on a number of levels. I'm thinking about specific theaters, but then also thinking about the institution of theater as an art form, and so I do think that some theaters will fare far better than others, you know, sort of older institutions who have been around for some time, who have a kind of resource that the younger, scrappy or more storefront theaters might not have—and that is very concerning because often I think what we see is that in the storefront theaters, that's where a lot of experimentation is happening that's where a lot of young artists of color are actually able to make and produce work and you know, they don't have the same kind of resources that these older predominately whiter institutions [have], so I think those smaller companies and those smaller theaters will have a tough time sort of coming out of this, which is really unfortunate. I've seen lots of different kind of fundraising campaigns though and, you know, hopefully people are able to support, but my instincts or my gut is that a lot of the folks to go to those spaces are artists themselves who are also out of work and won't be able to continue to support those organizations. So, I think it will be really telling. What is kind of exciting is that a lot of those same smaller companies have found a way, pretty quickly, to adapt online, and obviously theater is made to be experienced in person, in the room, and so you know, it's a different kind of form, but they're figuring it out, they're trying, they're experimenting, which is exciting and inspiring.





From Santa Fe Art Institute Event where Barrett performed *Re-Writing the Declaration Monologue*. Photo courtesy of Quenna Lené Barrett.



From a play Barrett directed and lead-devised for Free Street Theatre's 50in50 project, *Coming Home*. Photo courtesy of Quenna Lené Barrett.

**NAE:** What are some examples of work that has shifted online [that] you feel stands out?

**QB:** Lots of theaters that have archival recordings of different productions that they have put online, and most of those have sort of a paywall, you know, and so for those smaller companies that's really helpful. So, for example, what's the theater, TimeLine—they put up their show "Kill Move Paradise." That's the title of the play, directed by Wardell Julius Clark, which I had a chance to see before it got shut down, but it did get shut down. It's a beautiful, beautiful piece, but it did really well online, and it was at an affordable price point. People were able to witness it online, and so lots of folks are doing that. And then you have theaters who are also trying to develop new content for... this sort of new medium, and so that looks like Zoom readings, like readings of plays. Some folks are fully producing plays. So, I'm not necessarily a company member but an associate artist with Free Street Theater, and they have a play that's coming out that was supposed to open in person... It's their youth ensemble show. But they've pivoted to sort of make it. They're producing it fully, just making it fully online. And so, you know, they're sending out camera crews or like camera equipment to these young people's homes so that they can do high-quality recordings of themselves for this new platform. And so you're seeing a lot of live content being developed as well as like some blended, and so it's not quite film, you know, but still trying to capture the essence of theater just in these tiny boxes, or, you know, whatever way we can.

**NAE:** Have you viewed any Zoom content that you found to be exciting or interesting that you want to highlight?

**QB:** I'm going to try to not be biased. What have I actually tuned into? Most of the stuff...again, I have been enjoying this kind of pause from the theater, and so I have not been engaging because before this, like, 24/7, that's pretty

much what I was doing in some form or another... and so I've been trying to sort of limit my engagement in certain ways. So that being said, I did help to coordinate a sort of virtual theater festival, which I thought, you know, really cool and inspiring just to see how people were responding and, you know, we had directors direct these short plays with folks, and I think that was really successful. It had its challenges, but I do think it was cool to see.

Something else that comes to mind is this program at the [Washington Park] Arts Incubator actually, that Arts + Public Life developed. It is a program that they had already got to transition online called the South Side Home Movie Project. What they do is they show these clips of these home movies, like older home movies from folks' personal records that they've archived, and then they pair DJs with that, so there is this DJ like spinning in the background of these black and white films that are playing and curated. So that's kind of cool just to see because I think it's like not just people like talking right, like there's a lot of webinars and stuff that I've been doing for work, so anything that's like not that I tend to be drawn to.

**NAE:** I'm kind of curious about the sort of like pop culture use of this form. Have you engaged with any of that and do you have any opinions about the sort of larger pop cultural use of the form?

**QB:** Typically, I'm not like in the pop culture Zeitgeist, most of it just sort of goes over my head. I did have this thought though earlier that sort of the pandemic is a great moment for black culture. And so, I've been tuning into lots of the stuff on Instagram Live. So, like there's this 24-hour, like today, it's Stevie Wonder's 70th birthday. And so, this group of DJs is doing like a 24-hour set all of his music... I've just been, like, listening and jamming to that like all day while I'm working, or in meetings it's like on in the background. Last Friday – there is this series called Verzuz—#Verzuz or something. So, they've been pitting these artists together, so a couple weeks ago, the big one

was Teddy Riley and Babyface, who are two black producers. And this past weekend was Erykah Badu and Jill Scott. And that was really, really kind of, like, lovely to watch just these two beautiful brown women like magic makers uplifting each other, they sort of flipped the battle? (inaudible) on its head and were really we're just, like, vibing out to each other—and that was really, really lovely to see. So that's the kind of pop culture I've been tuning into and all of that is happening on Instagram Live.

**NAE:** How would you characterize the condition of the cultural moment on a social level or emotional level? How are you seeing the world right now?

**QB:** I'm thinking a lot especially in this second half, after the initial, like, shock of it all, about sort of the impacts of this on black and brown communities, pretty much on any marginalized communities, but especially those that have historically had less access to resources. And I feel like that's been exacerbated by this pandemic, and I think

that that is sort of coming to the forefront for lots of folks who weren't thinking about that before. And so, you know, my hope is that because more folks are having to engage with these issues that we'll see a cultural shift [in] how we treat and respond to these communities moving forward. I think that's going to take a lot of work still, right? I think you have to really tune in and like actually do stuff, but I am sort of seeing lots and lots [of] conversations and real work happening around Mutual Aid initiatives, you know, there's a large Mutual Aid project happening in Chicago. It's kind of broken up neighborhood by neighborhood, and folks are really organizing and trying [to] connect with their neighbors. I think that, you know, people will start to know their neighbors again in, like, real and deep ways. Lots of people are sort of self-organizing things, but folks are also, like, coming together in community. I think also we'll, you know, even like through art, folks will have to think about community differently, right? They'll have to start to think more about who is in physical proximity



From a play Barrett co-wrote and co-directed with FYI, *This Boat Called my Body*. Photo courtesy of Quenna Lené Barrett.

to them and how do they build relationships that way, in ways that I think we've gotten away from in the past decades or so.

**NAE: I think of you as someone who is very much engaged with artistic practice and bringing about social change or somehow helping in cultural preservation and production. How do you see that playing out in the near future? Are you thinking about new forms, new projects, new ways of engaging to continue that both during and after this? What are you thinking about creatively and in regard to that practice?**

**QB:** Yeah. I have two thoughts. I'm on this sort of advisory committee with "Ingenuity." This project is called the "ArtsEd Response Collective" (ARC). So, they've been doing these listening sessions with different educators, students, and families trying to think about what is the sort of arts education response to this? And something... I keep bringing to the group is, how will we use arts as a healing mechanism post this? Again, because lots of the students in CPS are going to be impacted in very real ways by what's happening. And so I think we have to be thinking about art, you know, not just as... extracurricular but like, you know, how does art making and engaging, how does that become central to this and how we move through this and how we move beyond this? So, I don't know what forms that takes quite yet but I think we have to be, as collectives, sort of really using that in this moment. Personally. . .I've been working to develop this piece called Rewriting the Declaration, which seeks to center... folks who were left out of the original table, specifically looking at black women, women of color, queer folks, queer folks of color. So, sort of grounding those identities and centering what a new sort of inclusive document might look like or what that might call for; what kinds of systems need to be in place. . .like as a participatory play. And so, I've really been struggling because a lot of that, like the development of that piece requires me to engage with folks. Like it's not me writing this play on my own. It's me having

these conversations giving folks prompts and encouraging them to together wrestle with this question.

A sort of mentor of mine [who] has been helping me develop this project, Coya Paz, said to me yesterday that those questions are, like, even more perhaps important in this moment. And so... how does it shift sort of to serve this moment, you know, do we engage people sort of via the web and some kind of interactive way? What might that look like?... And so you're not already thinking, you know, trying to experiment with this form of participatory theater now. What does that even look like? And so, we're just at the beginning of a kind of, like, thinking that through.

But it in terms of the form, you know, I think what feels new or different. What feels outside of the norm still feels like... it still requires other people's involvement, you know, and I think that that is not a way that lots of artists make. You know some folks they need to be siloed, and I fundamentally believe that we need a different kind of process if we're making art sort of for or about communities. They need to be centered in that it. And so that for me feels like the experimentation is to truly center folks and their needs.

**NAE: There are people who are clearly struggling, dealing with this big change in their lives. Do you have any advice for folks or anything that you want to share that you think might help people to cope and deal with the situation?**

**QB:** Yeah, I don't know that I would frame it as advice just because... you know, I think we all have really different needs right now. And... I think that that's okay. That is the advice, is that to just be where we are in this moment is okay, and that there are sort of different resources, you know, in different ways to plug in no matter what it is that you need. People are out here thinking about you and, like, what your needs might be. For me, even the days when I struggle, it's really just about reminding myself that it's okay to feel what I feel, it's okay to be where I am. It's okay

to, like, not be productive or to not, you know, to shift my thinking around productivity because this is... new for all of us, and I think we are going to have to develop new tools in some ways to deal with it even on personal levels. So that the thing I've been trying to share, you know, with folks in my circle, is that wherever you are, it's okay, and it's okay to reach out if you need support.

**NAE: You have already touched upon this, but what else do you think is being revealed in this situation that was previously overlooked or under-considered?**

**QB:** Yeah, I think my answer to that would be the circumstances around marginalized poor communities. And also, actually... the lie of capitalist productivity, right? Like, we don't need to show up to a workspace 40 hours a week. We don't need to burnout in order to create great things. And I think that is sort of being exposed; the myth... of the American mode of operating. I think that is just kind of being torn to pieces. That's one of my hopes, is that we recognize that we don't have to move at that speed, that we can sort of prioritize ourselves and each other more beyond this moment... I think that we have to examine fully re-examine all of our systems that feed into all of those things. Clearly, they don't serve us. They didn't protect us in this moment... and I think had we had healthy ways of being in community that... we would have better been able to shift to this.

**NAE: I do find it troubling that the goal of the government and of the so-called "economic experts" is to return to that level of productivity and there does not seem to be a lot of consideration on an Institutional level for like how we reshape things and rethink things and how we turn the moment into something productive. I do find that frustrating. What would you say? What would you tell these people? I mean you really already kind of put it into words and articulated it in a really thoughtful way, but I don't know, how could you reach these people? Can they be reached?**

**QB:** I don't know that I'm interested in engaging with those people. I think they have to go. I think we need new people in their place. I think that artists in particular have an enormous capacity to. . .do the leadership work that's not happening at the national level. You know, I've always thought that if there were artists in those rooms while decisions were being made that lots of decisions would be made differently. And so—I don't even know what that question was. What would I say to those people? Step aside. Let somebody else figure it out because we can you know, and I think we truly have the capacity to imagine a different thing. That's what we do as artists every day. We build worlds... I think we can practice that in real life.

Jessica Stockholder

**New Art Examiner: How are you doing?**

**Jessica Stockholder:** Well, kind of interesting. I don't mind being at home. I'm fortunate to have a relatively nice home [with] a tiny patch of yard, and [I] can see the outside. Hyde Park is a quiet neighborhood, so I can go for walks, and the days flow surprisingly quickly.... [My] son is in New Jersey [living] alone, so I keep him company with video chats... and my brother is in Islamabad alone—his family's in Vancouver, Canada. I also call [to keep him company. I stay in touch with my father who is in his late 80s living in Vancouver. And then there are all kinds of friends, colleagues and art world people. Though I'm not teaching this quarter I am on various committees, we have faculty meetings and I'm also advising students. So, it's not hard to pass the day, a lot happens.

**NAE: That sounds like a really busy schedule. And [that] you're on screen almost all of the workday.**

**JS:** I also make artwork... I don't have access to my studio [now]; it's locked down as it's part of UChicago. I've been working at home on a series of collage drawing things that are amenable to the circumstances here.

**NAE: How would you characterize the cultural moment right now? Just like how are you seeing the world?**

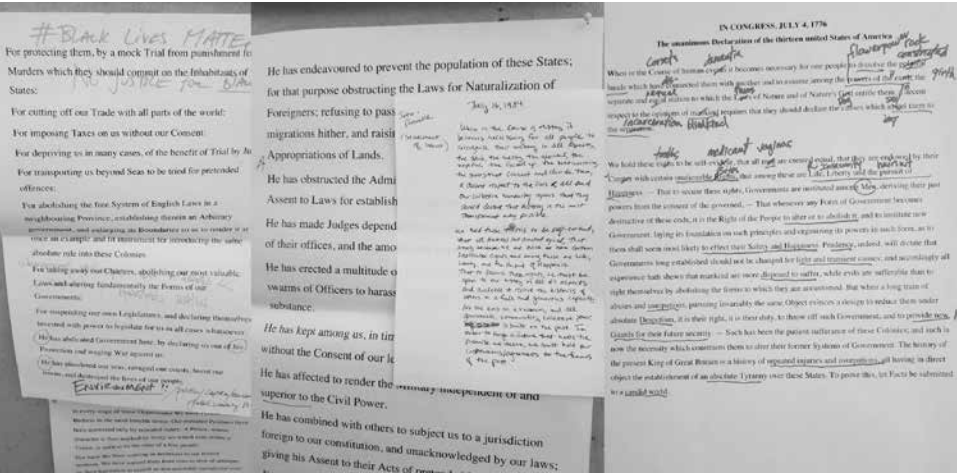
**JS:** Well, I don't see much of the world (laughter). I'm undated as so many of us are, I'm sure you are too, with [an] enormous number of videos and online programming from galleries, museums and all kinds of people, and... as I have to spend a [fair] amount of time online anyway... I don't find that terribly compelling... People are reaching out [and] trying to stay in touch... [which] feels good... but it's also kind of painful. [I] feel exhausted afterwards.

**NAE: Have your feelings towards the creative process changed at all? Are they serving a different purpose for you or does it feel the same? What are the differences?**

**JS:** It's kind of nice to be working without any [goal-oriented] pressure... I [always] make art as a way of making sense of being alive. I care about the thinking that happens in that way. I [do] need people to see it eventually; it's not just for me, but I imagine [that] one way or another people will see what I'm doing... I have engaged a couple of online events: an online interview for Kavi Gupta Gallery about a recent body of work I made in Kathmandu, and Max Estrella Gallery in Madrid invited me to do something similar focusing on the work I've been making since the lockdown...

I'm fortunate that I'm here with Patrick. [It would be] really different to be locked up alone for months on end [without] another person to... talk [with] and [to] share work with. That matters... [I] also have friends in the neighborhood who I can walk with at a distance. So, I'm not totally isolated... This [reduced social situation] makes

From Santa Fe Art Institute Event where Barrett performed *Re-Writing the Declaration Monologue*. Photo courtesy of Quenna Lené Barret.







**Left:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #19: It's normal to feel anxious during a pandemic (NY Times)*. April 14, 2020. Made of: dusting mitt, two kinds of paper, paint, pencil crayon, pen, pencil. 16 x 17 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

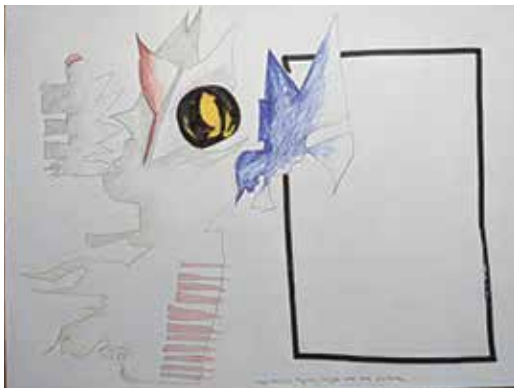
**Right:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #14: (Comic Series) Super hero trying to get into the picture plane*. April 11, 2020. Made of: pen, marker, pencil crayon, pencil, paper. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

me aware of the way in which my work as an artist is often a solitary endeavor [that nevertheless] needs other people. I don't have anything definitive to say [about that; I'm] just kind of ruminating around the way in which it does need other people, but also doesn't for the time being.

**NAE:** Some people I've talked to have mentioned that in knowing there isn't an immediate audience or an immediate obligation to get the work out there, it has changed their approach to making work.

**JS:** Going to galleries and museums looking at contemporary art, I'm very aware that the scale of production and the money that goes into producing [much of it] is enormous. I mean a person can't make really large things without money... Most people don't have [those resources]. Some few artists are anointed with the privilege [to produce large things]; either they're born into wealth, or the market picks them up... There isn't a lot of really successful artwork being produced at a small affordable scale... What does that mean? Why is that? I think that the mar-

**Left:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #25: (Comic Series)*. May 5th, 2020. Made of: pen, marker, pencil crayon, pencil, paper. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.  
**Right:** Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #27: (Comic Series)*. 21.5 x 15.5 inches. Made of: handmade paper from Nepal, thread, vellum, silk fabric, paint, pencil, pencil crayon, printed magazine paper ink. Photo courtesy of the artist.

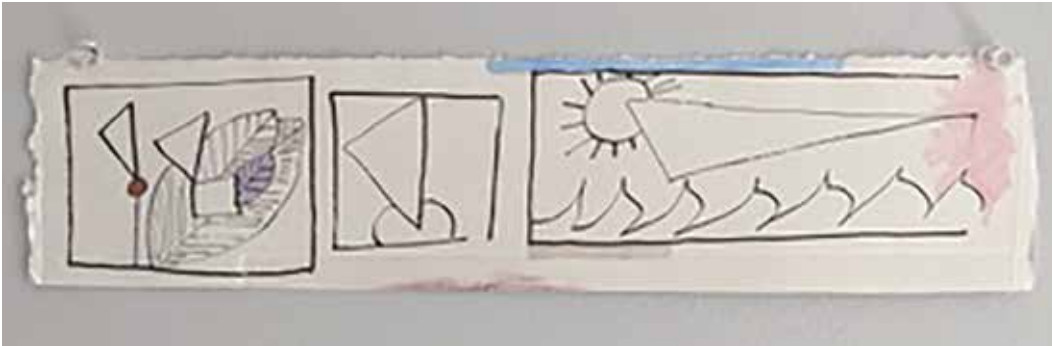


ket produces a kind of pyramid with just a few at the top whose work becomes a kind of currency. [It sometimes feels as if there's] deliberate exclusion of people who can't afford to participate.

[I feel] very fortunate to have a career... These questions about scale hover around my work. I like making big things. I enjoy space. It's not just about money; there are all kinds of significance and meaning that come from working with [scale]... Right now, I'm enjoying the challenge to make things within a much more limited framework, and I wouldn't be at all unhappy to see the whole world shift gears a little, to welcome that more vulnerable quieter smaller piece of being human...

**NAE:** Since you did not teach this past quarter have you talked to your colleagues about how the adjustment has been to teaching art courses online?

**JS:** Yes, and I will likely have to teach online in the fall, so I have a keen interest in how they're doing. It's been interesting... I think that there [have been] some good things



Jessica Stockholder, *Corona Virus Homework #9: (Comic Series)*. April 5, 2020. Made of: pen, marker, embossed and silkscreen printed paper, pencil crayon. 4 x 15.25 inch. Photo courtesy of the artist.

about it... One of my colleagues expressed yesterday that the students are able to make themselves more emotionally available online than they tend to in the classroom... I've been doing online studio visits with some of the MFA students; some of those conversations are really great. And I think that there's something about people being sort of slowed down and having to take stock and develop a new relationship to what they're doing that is productive.

At the undergraduate level it's certainly possible to orchestrate a class that enables something of value to happen... [There is also a lot] missing. Especially the parallel play part of the classroom where students notice each other and influence each other even though they're not talking to each other. They [usually] don't know each other [at the outset], but [slowly] get to know each other as they work side by side.

**NAE:** What do you look forward to doing the most when things are back to 'normal'?

**JS:** I guess [I] just look forward to being able to move around in the world without fear... To be with people and have dinners together. My son who's in his early twenties... really wants to travel... [For now,] I'm happy to have given up traveling. I'm happy to be slowed down with my feet on [the] ground.

**NAE:** Obviously, everybody handles this differently, but would you like to suggest, share, or put anything out there for people who may be struggling? What's a simple thing that you think is being overlooked but is easily accessible [and] easily accomplished by people who are struggling or dealing with anxiety?

**JS:** I think maybe a simple thing is that anybody can make drawings. People tell you, 'I can't draw.' Anybody can draw. It's just a question of accepting what it is that you bring to it and then going from there and enjoying it. Everybody can be creative and get something going... it's not like you have to be a genius or make the best thing in the world to make something of value and move your thoughts along that way.

**NAE:** Absolutely, that is good advice.

## Lori Waxman

**New Art Examiner:** How are you doing?

**Lori Waxman:** Like most of the families I know, we are all exhausted and it's crazy, but we're spending more time as families than we ever get to. There is a lot of good in that.

**NAE:** So you just wrapped up a semester of teaching?

**LW:** Yes. Classes are done, such as they are, but they've extended the grades deadline at SAIC to try and help as many students as possible complete the semester. So we are still grading for a few weeks. I like it. I'm kind of sad the semester is over actually.

**NAE:** Was teaching online a big adjustment or was it a fairly smooth transition?

**LW:** It was a huge adjustment, but it also was pretty smooth. I am not a technologically apt person. I have a flip phone. But I teach art history as opposed to studio art, and it does transfer. The kind of class I was teaching is a lecture with slides. I just kind of shuffled and tweaked a couple things, and I made some more participatory projects and discussion forums online. It's the basic stuff that you can you do for this kind of class. It's been fine.

**NAE:** How would you asses the larger cultural moment right now? What have you been thinking about in terms of cultural shifts in the country and the community?

**LW:** I'm not looking more than one week forward at a time. I find that I am stopping myself from doing that because for me it's futile. It's fruitless. Who the [bleep] knows, so why am I going to expend my energy trying to imagine what there will even be in the middle of the summer?... I'm not able to do half of my normal work, which is review exhibitions, because there aren't any live exhibitions going on. The [Chicago] Tribune is not taking freelance writing, and I'm technically a freelancer. If I were a staff writer, I'd probably be reduced to covering whatever form of art is still being released online. I mean, there are online exhibitions happening and that sort of thing, but it's not the beat I'm being given, so I'm not really paying attention to it. I don't really want to look at a screen anymore. Even

though I realize it's a massive lifeline right now, and it's how my kids are learning, and it's how I'm teaching—but it's so much screen interface. I have to stop it there. So, I'm not engaging beyond that.

The most useful thing for me has been to try and get all historical on this. Whenever I see something about the 1918 Spanish flu, or the bubonic plague, or all the various pandemics of the past, I read them. Or I'm like, "Give me something on World War II and Jews in hiding for two years!" I find that very helpful in terms of perspective and an understanding of the cycles of trauma and seclusion and fear... that human civilization has gone through. And then I can try and just relax into it and realize what luxury our version of that is so far. And not worry too much, even about my kids losing half a year of school or a year of school, if that's what it turns out to be. I mean, nobody went to school in war.

**NAE: Looking to history seems like a great approach that I don't hear too many people putting into practice. I mostly hear people coming up with ways to cope that responds to their immediate situation, and technology plays a big role in that. You are pointing out that technology can be exhausting, which I think is true. Do you have a critique for the approaches that you see playing out on a mass scale in addition to maybe look at history more?**

**LW:** I don't really want to go critiquing whatever anybody is doing to get by.

**NAE: Fair enough.**

**LW:** It's more about figuring out what is sustainable on a day-to-day and on a long-term basis for me and my family. And I know that I can't look at a screen all day, and I can't tolerate screens being on in my environment all day. It depresses me massively, because I am already screen-phobic. I have these fears that predate the pandemic, of reality being reduced down to two dimensions, like all facets of reality... I've had to ease up on some of that right now, because that is what we have. My kids are getting two-dimensional teaching, and it is working. I'm grateful for it, but I'm going to try not to give into it more than I have to right now. And I worry about that in the long term. I worry about us coming out of whatever and whenever the other side of this is and being so used to two-dimensional experience and so fearful of touch, everything tactile, and dealing with people outside our very immediate environment. That would be the other reality. That is my great fear.

**NAE: Would you even be interested in reviewing or writing criticism of shows only seen online or on screen? Would you be willing to do that or do you draw the line there because it's not a full experience?**

**LW:** I'm willing to do it if this goes on long enough. I will probably start up a new version of this performance project I've been doing; the "60 wrd/min art critic." I'll do one

for postponed exhibitions, and it will be anything anybody feels should have a review right now, except the show isn't happening. But the work is done, and they can send me some digital version of what they want reviewed. I will do it from the safety of my own home. It will all pass through the digital interface, because the project is already a lot about making do and getting by. There is always a deal that's made. For example, I'll review a lot of artists, so you get a review, but you get less... I'll review a lot of art still, but it's going to all be digital because that's all there is right now. There is always this question, "Is it still worth it? It is still worth something?" So it'll be a new version of that question. Can worthwhile criticism still be generated in this temporary situation? We will see.

**NAE: With your class on walking and your recent book it seems fair to say you are an expert on the culture of walking. Can you comment on how that particular form could be interpreted differently through this lens of diminished public engagement?**

**LW:** It turned out to be a really nice class to do remotely, because there are a lot of art historical works on walking that anybody can recreate. There are a couple of days during the semester when I have my students recreate them. So when I was translating the course to be remote, I looked through my whole archive of walk scores, and I rejiggered a [bunch] of them so that they could be done in the students' apartments or in a safe way outdoors. I was able to give them all these walking projects to do, providing them with prompts and experiences to have, even despite the restrictions right now. Also, everybody's walking now. I mean, if you can get outside of your house pretty much the only thing you can do is go for a walk. So there have been all of these articles appearing in the newspapers about walking. Which is great for me and also hilarious. A dance critic in The New York Times has written a piece on walking, watching everyday people perform this new choreography of skirting other people. It is choreography. It has a whole new register temporarily. I've certainly been talking to my students about it.

**NAE: Have you heard anything interesting from the students that stuck with you about their experiences? Have they expressed how they feel about walking, taking your class, and dealing with the public situation?**

**LW:** The taking of the class has always made students just that much more aware of what it means to walk and different ways of walking. How their own walking can be changed by, like, taking out the earbuds or trying to get lost when you're not using GPS, that sort of thing. And so, they're already really aware as walkers so they've all been noticing this. What I found most interesting was that a few of the women and one somewhat female-presenting male student told me that they are feeling safer lately when they walk, because there's this bubble of germs around you, and people leave you alone. I teach a lot of

young women. They are used to being harassed when they go for a walk. They don't go for walks. Not in the same way. It is as if you have to find an excuse to go for a walk. You have to find a friend to go for a walk. You have to have a prop with you when you go for a walk, like a school bag or something. And it's easing up a little bit, I've noticed.

**NAE: I wonder if that would be sustained in any capacity—probably not.**

**LW:** I don't think so. But for them it's one of the silver linings that they found.

**NAE: It's sad to see things like [The] 606 [Trail] closed. If people can walk on the street, you'd think that maybe they could open that park up so people can have a refuge as long as they maintain distance. But perhaps I'm being too generous with people's behavior.**

**LW:** I don't think you're being too generous. I actually think the city made a wrong move in shutting down all the green spaces. I remember the day they did it. It was that first beautiful day, and I was on the lakefront thinking, "Oh shit, this is not going to last." They just shut everything down the next day, instead of realizing they need to do a better job of educating people, and to do that over the next couple months because the weather is going to be... all that weird spring weather. There are only a couple beautiful days ever, but otherwise people do actually need all that space and yes, they're getting jammed together on sidewalks and are desperate for whatever green space there is—which is getting overused. So I think it was short-sighted of them given that this is going to continue. They could have used this time to train us to be safe on the lakefront.

**NAE: Are there any other things that you think this situation has revealed whether it be cultural or political? What are you thinking about that's really risen to the surface in this cultural moment?**

**LW:** Beyond the president being an absolute and complete idiot? But we knew that already...

I don't know that I've had any wow moments, good or bad. I wish I could say I had. Bill Gates predicted this a couple of years ago. I read a lot of dystopian fiction. I read Severance a couple of months ago. It's basically this moment. It's a very good novel, but I'm not reading any more dystopian fiction for a while. I think about this stuff normally in a very abstract narrative way, and now here it is, and I'm just not surprised. Looking at some of these historical moments, we've been kind of overdue for it. We are just woefully unprepared on a national structural level. We are also unprepared psychologically and familially in terms of the way our social lives are structured. I mean, my kids lose their [bleep] when the internet goes out.

And people are lonely who are living alone. People don't know how to occupy themselves. I read an interview, early on in the stay-at-home order, with a man who's in his

late nineties, a Holocaust survivor who was talking about hiding from the Nazis for two years. And he's thinking, no, we were never bored, there was this girl I liked, and you have to always have to be on watch, and we didn't have Netflix... And it just gave me a kick in the pants.

**NAE: This is something we're all aware of but maybe now it's more palpable that we rely on these creature comforts that, though valuable, can still stifle resilience or adaptability in the in a situation like this.**

**LW:** One continually hears that people are actually quite resilient and adaptable, children especially. I both believe this and don't. On a day-to-day level, in contemporary times, I think it is nonsense. Make-believe. We wish we were. But I also know that I am being very short-sighted, that resilience and adaptability can take time (and desperation) to develop, to really show themselves. And hey, it's only been a couple of months. Maybe we'll turn out to be strong and flexible after all.

**NAE: Imagining things are "back to normal," what would you want to do the most?**

**LW:** I want to let my six-year-old son play freely with his best friend, who lives two houses down the street from us. The other day he said to me, pleadingly, "If we wear gloves and masks, can we hug?" That was my little heartbreak of the day. ■

The next four interviews will be available online in July and will be in print in the October issue.



# Nate Lewis: “Latent Tapestries”

by Francine Almeda

It began as a hum—less of a note and more of a feeling. It felt like the groan of a well-rosined bow being dragged across cello strings; the droning heat of a hot day. A noise which poured from my speakers and settled in my chest. Suddenly the track exploded with sound: a chatter of voices, the shiny notes of a flute, snippets of a trumpet, the harsh notes of a synth. I strained my ears to land on a familiar sound or phrase, but the score changed with dizzying irregularity. The voices fell away to echoes, lapsing over each other as a conversation with no reason. Music and dissonant cacophony became one. And then, as quickly as it began, it came to a halt. In the moments of silence, I found myself tense with anticipation for the next reprise: I was not recoiling from the sound, but rather eager to be thrown back into the chaos.

I was listening to the soundtrack accompanying Nate Lewis’s (now online) solo exhibition, “Latent Tapestries.” The Fridman Gallery in New York had moved their exhibitions to online viewing rooms amidst the COVID-19 closures—a solution which has become a godsend, albeit one that is begrudgingly accepted. In this new digital land-

scape, “Latent Tapestries” is a refreshing emulation of the exhibition experience.

Lewis presents a striking arrangement of visual, audio, and time-based works influenced by his unique background. Before becoming an artist, Lewis earned a BS in nursing from Virginia Commonwealth University and spent nine years working in a critical care nurse. Reading diagnostic charts such as echocardiograms and electrocardiograms were daily necessities in the ICU unit; at the same time, he was becoming more and more interested in music, specifically jazz. Identifying, coloring, and creating rhythm became a driving influence in his practice.

In Lewis’s words, “output imagery of medical diagnostics is a unique language critical to understanding a patient’s condition, one of colors and patterns. Depicting the invisible by color and subtleties of shades and distinctions in shapes, shifts, clarities, rhythms, and textures can indicate the potential for change.”

As I scrolled through “Latent Tapestries” online viewing room, I felt the deep attention that Lewis took with each sculpted image - not only in his meticulous care for



Installation shot of Late Lewis’s “Latent Tapestries” at the Fridman Gallery. Image courtesy of Fridman Gallery.



Left: Nate Lewis, *Signaling XXIX*, 2020. Hand-sculpted inkjet print, ink, graphite, frottage, 44” h x 42” w. Right: Nate Lewis, *Signaling XXIII*, 2020. Hand-sculpted inkjet print, ink, graphite, frottage, 28” h x 41” w. Images courtesy of Fridman Gallery.

his materials and techniques, but also in his care of the figures themselves.

Lewis collaborated with avant-garde jazz musicians such as Melanie Charles, Ben Lamar Gay, Matana Roberts, Luke Stewart and Kassa Overall to produce an accompanying score for the show. The final collection of artist soundtracks reflects the diversity of their musical expertise: experimental Americana and progressive jazz flow into traditional Haitian flutes. At times their tones clash, overlap, or fall into syncopation. However, it is this exact dissonance which is so beautifully mimicked in Lewis’s sculpted photographs.

Contrasting patterns set each figure in the series *Signaling* aglow. Lewis uses a small razor on the surface of his photographs. The incision reveals the white interior of the paper like a white scar. Lewis repeats this process thousands of times, engulfing the face of his figures in a tapestry of cuts; however, although their faces are obscured, the grace of their form remains intact.

In *Signaling XXIX*, an androgynous figure lunges forward. Their body stretches with a strength and grace which is at once both masculine and feminine; however, their gender feels irrelevant. I am captivated by the archi-

ture of their body. Their chest curls to meet the taut tendons in their neck. Parts of the body which appear solid such as the front leg and the waist are, in fact, studded with oblong patches of white dots and vertical stripes. The patches are lodged in between sharp lines like a soft organ caged in bone.

I am fascinated by Lewis’s quick transition between patterns—I wonder how it must have felt to create each different line. Would the small dots require a confident stab? Would the curved line glide open with a smooth cut? Would the short stripes need to be attacked with a decisive stroke? In considering these questions, I found myself reading the shapes of the body much like Lewis would have examined the electrocardiogram of a patient—not only as a collection of lines, but as symbols of the rhythmic life-force they represented.

However, Lewis does not ignore the role which patterns and rhythms play in society’s current political landscape. Born into a mixed race family, Lewis states he has “conversations with relatives whose views I oppose” but he “[listens] to them, and [wants] to know how to navigate these conversations in a productive manner.” He reconciles the fallibility of American narratives in both his first



Nate Lewis, still from *Navigating Through Time*, 2020. Two-channel video installation with sound, 4:07 minutes. Image courtesy of Fridman Gallery.



Nate Lewis, *Probing the Land V*, 2020. Hand-sculpted inkjet print, ink, graphite, frottage, 44" h x 62" w. Image courtesy of Fridman Gallery.

video work, *Navigating through Time*, and his most recent series, *Probing the Land*. In these series, the sport of boxing and Confederate statues are his subjects of focus.

In *Navigating Through Time*, he uses the repeated movements of a boxer to evoke its connotations of survival, defense, and community recreation in African American history. The split video shows two pairs of hands which flex and then throw; flex and then punch; flex and then punch, punch, punch. His movements are that of a fighter and then a dancer; a fighter and then a dancer; until I lose track of the difference between aggression and grace. This video generates a striking call and response effect with the exhibition soundtrack. My attention is further drawn to Lewis's ability to command synchronicity between vision and sound. This piece explicitly bridges the gaps between the worlds of his work: music, energy, and the body. His movement through these mediums is that of an exploration—a literal navigation of the African American narrative across perceived boundaries.

In *Probing the Land*, Lewis manipulates photographs of controversial Confederate statues which line Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. He distorts their faces and chests with jagged lines. In one particularly powerful moment in *Probing the Land VII*, he carves open the puffed chest of a statue. His skin seems to splinter at the edges, and, past the menacing edges of the chest cavity, I notice a red hue and the delicate curve of a heart. The bronze statue seems to be gently bleeding.

"Latent Tapestries" is a testament to Lewis's unique method of rhythmic interrogation—and during this time of COVID-19, its online exhibition is a much-needed re-

minder of the tactility of art. Although I was viewing his works through a screen, I was moved by his unique background and techniques. In singularity, one cut is an insignificant action; but repeated a thousand times, it becomes an inexorable force. His work is a documentation of his rhythmic, disciplined process. Like the vibrations of a droning beat, Lewis is able to destabilize historical narratives—not through brute toppling, but with a patient hand. ■

"Latent Tapestries," including the above-mentioned quotations from Lewis, can be accessed at <https://www.fridmangallery.com/latent-tapestries-viewing>.

**Francine Almeda is an artist and curator. She holds a BA in Philosophy from Boston College and is currently the manager of Heaven Gallery, located in Wicker Park.**



Nate Lewis, *Probing the Land VII*, 2020. Hand-sculpted inkjet print, ink, graphite, frottage, 70" h x 36" w. Image courtesy of Fridman Gallery.

# Walls of Prophecy and Protest: William Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Art Movement

by Jeff W. Huebner

by Janina Ciezadlo

All of the issues of race, public art and collaboration that artists and audiences struggle with today, which may seem new to us now, were the vital center of the career of William Walker. Walker, an African-American muralist, is known in Chicago for the Wall of Respect and other work he created during the 1960s and '70s. Jeff W. Huebner's meticulously researched, clearly written book, *Walls of Prophecy and Protest: William Walker and the Roots of a Revolutionary Public Art Movement*, published last fall by Northwestern University Press, elucidates Walker's life and the historical, political and social environment on the South Side of Chicago where many of his murals were painted.

Huebner parses the murals, most no longer extant, and narrates the building of community among collaborating artists and in the streets as Walker painted. The book gives an account of the many struggles a working-class African-American man would face in his unwavering commitments to art and to his marginalized community. The

Wall of Respect helped spark a national public art movement that would focus on community involvement and integration with the people in neighborhoods where art could deliver, in Walker's words, "a message of respect and understanding."

Born to a poor family in Alabama, Walker studied art in Ohio before coming to Chicago. Even in Chicago, however, he was outside of the mainstream of the African-American art community. Though famous for painting a series of murals, mainly on the South Side of Chicago, during the late '60s and '70s, his career began before that and lasted longer. Chicago is a famously hyper-segregated city, with most African-American communities on its South and West sides. *The Wall of Respect*, Walker's most well-known mural, expressed all of the cultural and political ferment of the late sixties in Chicago and the country. It featured portraits of Black heroes and heroines from slave rebellion leader Nat Turner and Malcolm X to poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Amiri Baraka. Singers Nina Simone and Are-



William Walker, *Wall of Respect*, 1967, 43rd & Langley. Original Organization for Black American Culture version, August 1967. Photo: Robert A. Sengstacke. Destroyed 1972.



**Left:** William Walker, *Peace and Salvation: Wall of Understanding*, 1970, 872 N. Orleans. Destroyed 1991.  
**Right:** Walker at *Peace and Salvation*, 1970. Photos courtesy of the Chicago Public Art Group.



tha Franklin shared the wall with thinker and activist W. E. B. Du Bois and boxer Muhammad Ali among others portrayed in groups.

Walker was influenced by his study of the works of Diego Rivera; he saw his murals not as masterworks, although he was an excellent painter with a distinctive, incisive style, but as a community process. While Walker was the main creative force, along with the most “dedicated” of his collaborators, Eugene “Eda” Wade, the wall was launched by a collaborative group call Organization of Black American Culture (OBA-C), an acronym based on the Yoruban word oba, meaning “king.” About 20 artists worked on the wall as it grew and changed from August 1967 until 1972, when the building caught fire and the wall was destroyed.

*Walls of Prophecy and Protest* offers an important look back at an alternative model of art and aesthetics in light of all the controversies concerning historic and contemporary public art as well as the entry of artists of color into galleries, museums and art historical canons. Jeff Donaldson, another one of the Wall of Respect’s key figures (and

a founder of the AfriCOBRA collective the following year) pointed out that “the unauthorized painting of the wall”—it belonged to a white absentee landlord—“was to be a revolutionary act in and of itself beyond the astounding effects the project would itself engender. Before the Wall was finished on August 24, 1967, it had become an instantaneous shrine to black creativity, a rallying point for revolutionary rhetoric and calls to action, and a national symbol of the heroic black struggle for liberation in America.”

Walker, humble and altruistic, had an unwavering belief in the connection between art and community, and while his dedication gave his contributions to the mural movement value and meaning, the larger art world was not just unaware but probably uninterested in black work that did not fit the white art world narratives (and the market) of the time. As Huebner puts it, “socially conscious outdoor ‘street’ murals are a significant but overlooked feature of Chicago’s cultural legacy.”

Walker’s vision addressed the people in the streets who would gather and participate while Walker and his collaborators worked; the walls became sites for dedications,



William Walker, *All of Mankind: Unity of the Human Race*, 1971-74, Cabrini-Green, Clybourn & Evergreen (exterior, 1971-1972). Photo: Courtesy of Chicago Public Art Group. Destroyed 2015.

William Walker, *All of Mankind*, interior.



rallies, festivals, poetry readings, and “the exchange of food, feedback, friendship and ideas was... an expression of the ‘call and response dynamic’” as noted by art historian Michael D. Harris. Another way of saying it would be to connect the murals to the African aesthetic processes of collaboration, community building, improvisation and bricolage, or in Walker’s own words “the spirit of the people”:

“The spirit of the people was tremendous...I was privileged to be part of it, to be part of the people trying to do some good things.”

Huebner has a journalist’s gift for narrative, and while he hits all of the important art historical points, compelling stories give his account a sense of human drama rather than academic argument. It makes sense that a community project and ephemeral murals, most of which have been lost to the dynamic changes of urban neighborhoods, would be preserved in a series of stories and accounts, centering the history of the mural movement as process and performance rather than a set of documents that prove provenance. William Walker’s engagement with the city of Chicago came at a time of turmoil and progress; there were internal and external factions, riffs, contentions, supportive partnerships and influence. Elijah Muhammad threatened to sue Walker because he was painted on the wall with Malcolm X. A woman’s mural

was desecrated with yellow paint. A gang member associated with the *Wall of Respect* was later shot. In time, some of the OBA-C artists migrated to well-known collective AfriCOBRA.

Towards the end of his career, Walker was particularly critical of Ronald Reagan’s policies, Reaganomics, which he saw as fostering poverty, neglect and devastation in the neighborhoods he cared about. His later murals contained scathing, unstinting caricatures of Reagan, as well as others who preyed on the vulnerability of poor neighborhoods like pimps and drug lords.

Overall, Walker’s engaged and humane vision was clear in the titles of the Wall of Respect and his subsequent murals: *All of Mankind: Unity of the Human Race*, *Gift to the World’s Children*, and the *Wall of Dignity*. The mural movement spread—Walker himself worked on several murals in Detroit—but the complicated and detailed account of what Huebner calls the “roots” in Chicago will be key to understanding black aesthetics, public art and American art when it is represented in all of its myriad, formal, material, multiracial, multiethnic, variously gendered, layered, geographic histories. ■

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William Walker, *History of the Packing-house Worker*, 1974, 49th & Wabash. Photo: John Pitman Weber. Restored, 1998. EXTANT.



# “Desmadre Berlin”

Works by Norbert Bisky, Galerie Templon, Paris

by Michel Ségard

The Coronavirus pandemic has brought about bizarre situations in the art world when it comes to reviews. Many major galleries have resorted to virtual exhibitions on their web sites. One such is Galerie Templon in Paris (and Brussels). One of this gallery’s two showrooms in Paris is featuring an exhibition by Norbert Bisky called “Desmadre Berlin.” Bisky is an East German artist born in 1970. What is strange is that this review is being written by a Frenchman born in German occupied northern France during WWII and who now lives in Chicago. How international and transgenerational can you get? “Desmadre Berlin” (Screwed up Berlin) has been on view virtually since March and was just recently reopened as stay at home orders have been eased in Paris.

Norbert Bisky is not very well known in the United States. He has had only eight U.S. shows: four shows at Leo Koenig Inc. in New York City in 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2012 and group shows at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Port-

land, Oregon in 2002 and 2004, Nicholas Robinson Gallery in New York City in 2009, and at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading, Vermont in 2017-2018. Also, MoMA owns 14 works on paper from 2003. In Europe, however he is very well known having had shows in most western European countries as well as in Australia, Brazil, China, India, Israel, and South Korea.

Bisky’s considerable technical skill is based on the Socialist Realist propaganda painting and posters he grew up with. It is the backbone of his mature, contemporary style. He follows in the footsteps of the New Leipzig School and shows some influence from that group’s David Schnell and Schnell’s explosive compositions. This group of artists (the most well-known being Neo Rauch) were confronted with the task of finding a new relevance for their work and turned largely to surrealism for inspiration. They would have been very comfortable in Chicago in the pre-Imagist era with the likes of Seymour Rosofsky and



LEFT: Norbert Bisky, *Snax*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 ¾ x 59 in. CENTER: Norbert Bisky, *Monuman*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 94 ½ x 74 ¾ in. RIGHT: Norbert Bisky, *Wedgie*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 51 x 43 ¼ in.

Don Baum. Although also originally from Leipzig, Bisky’s work is not like theirs. He studied with Georg Baselitz and later with Jim Dine. His work is more akin to British artist Jenny Saville and Canadian painter Andrew Salgado, two artists known for their contribution to the resurgence of portraiture. (See *New Art Examiner*, Vol. 34, No. 4, “Portraiture Rebounds and Refocuses,” pg. 12) But his work is not really about portraits, although they play a central role in many of his paintings. His portraits are more symbols of a utopian past that probably never was, rather than likenesses.

Before examining the particular pieces in the show, Bisky’s technique deserves mention because he is a superb painter. Although he uses oils, his application is very thin and has the translucence of watercolor. He has unsurpassed anatomical mastery. His ability to delineate musculature is as good as you will see anywhere—and

comparable to historical masters. And he has a vibrant sense of color. His favorite color scheme is a purple/yellow complementary pair because purple and lavender contrast so perfectly with Caucasian flesh tones (see the reproductions of *SNAX*, *Monuman*, and *Wedgie* above). He does have two flaws: his blocks of pattern are often distracting and sometimes fail to serve as anything more than a fig leaf or a formal compositional device. The other is that he occasionally uses a splatter technique to apply random black dots to a painting, usually on the face of the subject. To this viewer, it is unnecessary, distracting and a bit of a gimmick.

“Desmadre Berlin” is purported to be a look back to the Berlin nightlife that existed after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. I think it is more than that. This show has as much to do with the present world as with the past. The painting *Noctambule* is a prime example. The central image of



LEFT: Norbert Bisky, *Noctambule*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 ¾ x 59 ½ in.

RIGHT: Norbert Bisky, *Peyote*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 ¾ x 59 in.

All image courtesy of Galerie Templon, Paris – Bruxelles; © Adagp, Paris, 2020.



LEFT: Norbert Bisky, *Tanztee*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 ¾ x 59 in.

RIGHT: Norbert Bisky, *Stadtbad*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 ¾ x 59 in.





"Desmadre Berlin"  
installation view.



"Desmadre Berlin"  
installation view.

this painting is the portrait of a beautiful young man with a furrowed brow, limpid eyes, and a doubtful or quizzical pout. All around him is chaos: Bauhaus-style buildings at skewed angles, fragments of a wallpaper(?) pattern, another young man climbing an unseen structure, and a dark turbid sky. The central face functions as a utopian icon for the present, looking into the past and wondering what to make of it. In the similarly composed *Peyote*, the buildings are newer; the sky is lighter; the figure in the distance appears to be falling but is in a dance pose; the pattern fragments are based on camouflage; and the young man's expression is one of "so that's where we are." The two pieces are shown almost next to each other in one room of the gallery, allowing a read of past-to-present. The name of this second piece also suggests the function of a seer, as peyote has been used by American native shamans as a tool to see into the future—to say nothing of its role in the 1960s counterculture and its role in the worldwide

drug culture as well as that of present-day Berlin. In these two paintings, the central face is unobstructed. But there is a trio of paintings that have Bisky's signature chaotic elements partially obscuring the face. The face in *SNAX* has an angry, shouting expression, and it is peppered with black dots (intentional splatter?) along with a few fragments of the background pattern. Similarly, the face in *Monuman* has these characteristics, but in addition, one of the pattern fragments appears to be coming out of the person's mouth, like spittle. Both of these pieces are quite large, measuring 7 1/2 feet tall for *SNAX* and almost 8 feet for *Monuman*. A smaller piece, *Wedgie*, also has this signature treatment, but in this work, the figure is not as disturbed. He appears to be almost wistful and seems to be holding a bow. These three pieces indeed convey the chaos and anxiety suggested by the title of the show. Then there is a pair of large pieces that can only be described as softcore erotica. The figures in *Tanztee* and

*Stadtbad* are shown from the chest up, and both seem to be encompassed in sexual anticipation. *Tanztee* (the only black model in the show) is surrounded by fragments of a map of Berlin, but they are positioned in such a way that they suggest butterfly wings. Meanwhile, the model in *Stadtbad* has his hands (tied?) behind his back and is confronted by a phallic form to his left—something that his facial expression suggests he is trying to ignore. The tension in these paintings is heightened by BDSM props positioned in the center of the gallery on pommel horses. They include whips, rubber gloves, chains, collars, etc. The practice of placing props in the gallery along with his paintings has been a recurring theme in Bisky's exhibitions. To be fair, the props are sometimes sculptures that he has created—but not this time. And to call them an installation would be a stretch. The thing that these three sets of paintings have in common is that they are all portraits of beautiful young

men, and they all have homoerotic undertones. But the underlying reference of the beautiful athletic young man is the propaganda paintings and posters of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In Bisky's paintings, these figures are aspirational, utopian images of conditions that never were and never will be. There is also a subtle leftover of Nazi supremacist undertones that can be perceived by older Europeans like this author. In interviews, Bisky has strongly denied this intent. A fourth group of works are collages of oil on canvas painting fragments affixed to mirrors. They are a jumble of body parts, portions of faces and abstract forms. These are truly chaotic. Two of them, *Gmf* and *Emdi*, have faces that might actually belong to women. *Gmf* is particularly ambiguous because the feminine face is juxtaposed with a detached masculine arm. That juxtaposition is not present in any other painting in this show. Is Bisky perhaps addressing the contemporary concept of gender neutrality



**Pg.40**  
**LEFT:** Norbert Bisky, *Gmf*, 2020. Oil on canvas on mirror; 23 5/8 x 19 5/8 in.  
**RIGHT:** Norbert Bisky, *Emdi*, 2020. Oil on canvas on mirror; 39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in.

**Pg.41**  
**LEFT:** Norbert Bisky, *Chem Party*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 78 3/4 x 59 in.  
**RIGHT:** Norbert Bisky, *Vector*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 51 1/8 x 66 7/8 in







LEFT: Norbert Bisky, *Hyperarousal*, 2020. Oil on canvas on mirror; 39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in.  
RIGHT: Norbert Bisky, *Acid Tram*, 2020. Oil on canvas; 51 1/8 x 66 7/8 in.



within the context of the social chaos that he portrays?

But now we get to the meat of the exhibition! Five of the paintings in the show are about overt gay sex. *Lab* depicts an orgy going on behind a man whose head is encased in a purple rubber mask revealing only his open mouth. In *Rummelsburg*, another orgy scene is partially covered by pattern fragments whose sources are wallpapers from GDR government housing. *Chem Party* also contains the wallpaper pattern fragments, and they partially obscure a scene that is just getting started. What is unusual about this piece is that the models are not as well built as the models in the other paintings; they are getting a little thick around the middle. *Vector* is a tangle of naked limbs in what is obviously a sexual episode. And finally, *Lustgarten*, part of the collage series, contains a hand clutching a green cloth and a form below that looks like a pierced penis. A sixth piece, *Hyperarousal*, is not overtly sexual and shows only a well-muscled torso, but as one of the mirror collages, the walls of the gallery room are reflected in the piece making for a striking juxtaposition, because what you see will depend upon where you are standing. And this is the room that contains as props a collection of restraining gear used in BDSM play.

The only historical references in these pieces are the wallpaper pattern fragments that refer to the GDR past. Bisky claims that they mainly refer to the nightlife that emerged in Berlin after 1989. But, what are these paintings really about? Careful examination of them reveals that the participant in these orgies display no pleasure in what they are doing. Are these encounters a drug to blot

out the misery of the present? This hypothesis is partly supported by the titles: “Chem Party” suggests the need for pharmaceutical help in achieving sexual satisfaction; the Rummelsburg part of Berlin has a number of gay nightclubs; and “Lustgarten” translates to pleasure garden and is a park in central Berlin. Sex, then, just becomes a way to forget. This “soma for the people” attitude is supported in another painting in the show, *Acid Tram*. In this painting, a young woman is dancing in a trance-like state with someone copying her moves behind her. She seems completely unaware of her surroundings and is effectively dancing alone. So, is this what is “screwed up” about Berlin? It seems to be a larger statement about Western society altogether.

Although at first glance, this exhibition is titillating, it is ultimately depressing. All those gorgeous faces are as real as the putti in renaissance and baroque paintings. Ultimately, the more you study it and in spite of its lush color, the show generates a sense of loneliness and despair that seems to be insurmountable. Existential angst has long been an important part of the German zeitgeist, and it has played a significant role in exposing humanity’s faults. Bisky has successfully mined it for the content of this show. Nevertheless, for the rest of us, life must go on. But where in all this chaos is love? ■

**Michel Ségard is the Editor in Chief of the *New Art Examiner* and a former adjunct assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is also the author of numerous exhibition catalog essays and former curator of KPMG’s Chicago office art collection.**

# Different for Girls: “Touch Your Mirror”

## Reflects on Female Adolescence

By Emily Rapport

In “Touch Your Mirror,” on view at EXTRA Projects in Logan Square through April 18, artists Jessica Frances Martin and Taylor Morgan delve into the secret world of the teenage mind. More specifically, the female teenage mind. In art history (and in popular culture), the male gaze often determines ideals of beauty which are absorbed as social norms. Modern beauty aesthetics has vacillated between the delicate, chaste ideal popularized in Victorian art and early advertising to the overtly sexual appeal of early film stars like Jean Harlow. Through film and advertising, mass media has amplified and further standardized Western beauty ideals. The end of World War II, and the advent of the American teenager in the 1950s, shifted focus to a new force in the marketplace: the American teenager. The teenager embodies duality, both innocent and imbued with sexual power. Half child and half adult, the teenager is driven by the need to be accepted as well as to assert their independence and flout societal restrictions. Martin and Morgan explore the internal and external

transformation of youth through the lens of female adolescence as self-awareness shifts the individual into more complex relationships with society.

The passage from child to woman is something that happens in public. It is physical in a way that male adolescence is not because a woman’s body acquires a cultural weight and attention as it changes. With that in mind, **Jessica Martin’s** childlike fantasy collage-drawings of Brooke Shields and Jennifer Connelly are haunting in their contrasts. These are young women half-in and half-out of childhood, thrust into an adult world where beauty and sexual viability determine their primary value. The film *The Blue Lagoon*, shot when Brooke Shields was 14 years old, is referenced as Brooke’s disembodied headshot emerges from a colored pencil blue lagoon/kiddie pool.

Rainbows and butterflies surround the underage Venus while a sedate swan hovers (or lurks) nearby. Framed by perfect hair and a made-up face, her eyes offer a view of an internal struggle. We all have a desire to please and



Left: Jessica Frances Martin, *Brooke Emerging from the Lake*, 2018, 22” x 28”, inkjet print.  
Right: Jessica Frances Martin, *Green Girl*, 2018, 44” x 54”, oil on canvas. Photos courtesy of EXTRA Projects.



**Left:** Taylor Morgan, *Couch (What a Way to End a Playdate)*, 2018, 40" x 46", oil on canvas.  
**Right:** Taylor Morgan, *Portrait of the Artist as One of the Local Boys Who Helps Out Around the House*, 2018, 11" x 13", ink on paper.



to be liked, especially as children. In an industry that is known to churn through women, and girls particularly, the dawning awareness of their own desirability is complicated by a sophisticated understanding that to achieve success they must conform to expectations and please their audience.

Martin's paintings have an ethereal translucence. The flat, barely descriptive lines are dreamy and agitated, evoking an eerie sense of *deja vu*. In *Green Girl*, an anonymous girl-next-door type looks resolutely away from an unseen viewer. Her pink mouth downturned, her girl-ish limbs posed awkwardly, she is in-between states and perhaps not fully present in herself. Ghost-like tree limbs flicker like a past that can't be recalled with accuracy. The immediacy of the foreground, with the heaviest paint application, depicts tall, spiky grass and claw-like flowers. These innocuous details feel like they provide the focus the subject needs to get through something unpleasant.

In **Taylor Morgan's** painting, *Couch (what a way to end a playdate)*, two girls conspire to remove a bloody looking stain from a pink flowered couch. The girls are illuminated by the golden glow of a table lamp, while sharp angles lead the viewer's eye toward a slash of shadows and (presumably) adult knowledge of transgressions. The male gaze is referenced and disavowed in the sharp turn of an elbow (reminiscent of Balthus' paintings of young girls arranged in unlikely but advantageous positions). The girls also look away from the viewer, but for different reasons. Unlike the subject in *Green Girl*, these girls are present in the moment and, significantly, not isolated. They are imbued with the power of self-belief (*we WILL* get this mess cleaned up and not get caught). These girls have more important things to do than to please a voyeur of youth and beauty. Bonded in a heroic challenge, girlhood will not surrender quietly to the demands of adulthood.

Boys and young men have their own obstacles to endure, but they are not judged or constrained the way girls usually are. Morgan's drawing, *Portrait of the Artist as One of the Local Boys Who Helps Out Around the House*, positions her protagonist crouched behind towering sunflowers, jeans torn, peering around a corner at a waiting tractor. The tractor is the get-away car, the ability to adventure in the world, beyond the domestic, internal confines of home or the expectation of beauty: a boy's privilege.

The drama of the teenage world, the heightened awareness of the physical self as we struggle with who we might become, is mirrored in the endless fascination and importance given to youth in our culture. It is a hero's journey of its own, a rite of passage where we all experience the visceral hum of transformation. Childhood is when imagination and emotion seem to burn brightest, if only because every experience is new and uncharted. How identity is empowered or disempowered, how we see ourselves versus how society sees us, and how we value our self-worth in terms of pressures to conform and grow up, are at the root of this inviting and energetic show. ■

EXTRA Projects at basic studios presents recent paintings, drawings, and prints by Jessica Frances Martin and Taylor Morgan, curated by Jesse Pace. The show was on view through April 18, 2020. A closing reception took place on April 18, 2020 from 6-9 PM. Located at 3551 W Diversey Avenue, Chicago, IL 6064, hours are April 8, 9, and 12, from 12-5 PM and by appointment.

**Emily Rapport studied painting at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York and received her BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005. In 2018, Emily opened Eat Paint Studio, a working studio and gallery in Chicago.**

# Human or Man-Made Material: "The Allure of Matter" Visits Chicago

By Rebecca Memoli

**T**he Allure of Matter: Material Art from China" has come to Chicago from Los Angeles County Museum of Art and taken up residency at Wrightwood 659 in Lincoln Park and the Smart Museum on University of Chicago campus—two spaces on opposite ends of the city. The works included at Wrightwood on the North Side speak more to topics of man-made materials through repurposing and finding unconventional ways of using those materials. Works at the Smart Museum on the South Side focus on the human as material. Artworks there employ the viewer as a more active participant in interesting ways like movement and smell. Together, the two halves of "The Allure of Matter" are an introduction to some extraordinary Chinese artists. By subverting, distorting, and recycling of material for art, these artists show how, like DNA, matter encodes the function of humans and connects humanity to their place of origin.

Wrightwood 659 is in a building that doesn't look like a museum. Four floors in total, the Wrightwood is much larger than its exterior lets on. The theme of architecture rings throughout the works at Wrightwood. Standing al-

most two stories tall is a temple-like structure built out of salvaged materials. That work, Liu Wei's *Merely a Mistake II*, sets the tone for the rest of the exhibition. The works at Wrightwood maintain their object-ness while transforming into something else. *Kill* by Sui Jianguo, for instance, is a rug composed of rubber and thousands of nails mimics the coil of a centipede giving new and dangerous life to an otherwise inanimate object. Throughout the museum, the artists utilize materials that have conventional uses in China but are unconventional as materials for art or are used in non-traditional ways.

Some of the installations appear seamlessly in the space, like Shi Hui's *Float*, which at first glance appear like a permanent fixture suspended throughout the vaulted space of the front lobby and mezzanine. Journeying from floor to floor permits a closer look, revealing that the vent-like shapes are constructed out of handmade paper, called *xuan*, over a delicate wire mesh.

*Xuan* is used by several artists throughout Wrightwood, highlighting the versatility of the medium as well as its cultural significance. Zhang Yu uses the paper to explore



**Left:** Sui Jianguo, *Kill*, 1996. Installation view, "The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2019–20. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA. Detail.  
**Right:** Liu Wei, *Merely a Mistake II No. 7*, 2013. Doors and door frames, wooden beams, acrylic board, stainless steel, and iron. Installation view at Wrightwood 659. Courtesy of the artist Long March Space.





Shi Hui, *Float*, 2000/2007/2013, Wire mesh and xuan paper pulp. Installation view at Wrightwood 659. Courtesy of the artist.

gesture through the delicate surface of long sheets of hanging *xuan*. *Fingerprints* was created by the artist by dipping his finger into water and pressing it into the surface of the paper. The result is a mesmerizing pattern that is nearly invisible.

On the top floor, *Wave* by Zhu Jinshi feels cramped in the space. The delicate shape of the wave is skewed and pinched in a way that feels claustrophobic. The piece itself seems to be designed to speak to the seeming lightness of paper. Each sheet is meticulously crumpled and hung. Lines of stones are attached to segments via fine strings as though they alone are preventing the work from floating upwards. If given more space the effect could bring more attention to the material quality of *xuan* paper, which as a single sheet can be light as air, but in mass, weigh a considerable amount.

Traveling south to the Smart Museum, the exhibition continues with artists who focus on natural rather than man-made materials. In contrast to the Wrightwood,

artists here lean toward the use of material in referencing the human as a part of that materiality or as a participant with the material. Either through action or through the byproduct of the human body, there is more interaction with the viewer in these works through the senses and with the action of the viewer walking, drawing, and smelling.

Xu Bing's *Tobacco Project* takes a poetic look at the history of tobacco and how its production and targeted sales have ravaged working-class communities in China. The scent of tobacco, rich and sweet, permeates the first gallery. This aroma is produced by *1st Class*, a large installation of a tiger pelt rug constructed out of thousands of carefully placed cigarettes. The orange of the filters and the white of the paper create the stripes of the Bengal tiger. The tiger rug is a symbol for the allure of exotic luxury like a single cigarette, the danger of something that seems benign, but that in mass has had a crushing impact on the Chinese.

**Left:** Zhang Yu, *Fingerprints*, 2008, Longjing spring water on xuan paper. Installation view at Wrightwood 659. Courtesy of the artist.  
**Right:** Detail.



Xu Bing, *1st Class*, 2011. Installation view, "The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2019–20. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.



Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Civilization Pillar*, 2001/2019. Installation view at the Smart Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artists.

Sun Yuan and Peng Yu have a morbid reverence for the matter they use to create their work. Human fat for the artists is a material that reflects the excess in modern society while simultaneously vacillating between life and death. Yu explains in Susanna Ferrell's essay *The Great Significance of Fat*:

"I think this material is especially magical, because when we first saw it, the feeling of death was particularly strong. There was a kind of silence, devoid of life, but the fat was very lively. It was flowing and shining—this material itself really evokes the feeling of being alive. This is why I think the material has so much feeling."

Thus, standing thirteen feet high is Yuan and Yu's *Civilization Pillar*, constructed out of human fat mixed with wax. The room in which the pillar of fat stands has a musty animal smell to it. The fat was collected via liposuction clinics over the course of five months from more than five hundred different live sources. The pillar is described by the curator as a monument to excess. It is comprised of material created by excessive consumption and then discarded by its creators at great expense.

Object-materials vs subject-materials is at the base of the art philosophy of *gu wenda*, who believes that if the material source is from the subject, it creates what he calls a "first nature" as opposed to a "second nature." Sculptures created with material sourced from the subject directly are thus one degree less removed than those made of a separate material.

The exploration of this philosophy has taken shape with *united nations: american code*. This sculptural monument takes the form of a house-like structure. It is constructed out of braids of human hair sourced from Americans. The braids have been dyed in all the colors of the rainbow. Inside the structure hangs a wall of tapestry-like panels. On the panels there are cryptic words written in various languages; these are also woven out of human hair. These



gu wenda, *united nations: american code*, 1995–2019, Human hair. Commissioned by the Smart Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, and Peabody Essex Museum. Installation view at the Smart Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.



interior words reference the dispersal of language in the Tower of Babel story. The viewer is welcomed to navigate through the monument that is literally “of the people.” Despite the size, there is not as visceral a reaction elicited by the structure of wenda’s monument as there is by the *Civilization Pillar*. It is unnerving to see human fat outside the body. It is yellow and glistens. But the nature of hair is to be seen, dyed and braided, as it is in wenda’s installation. Also, the form of the pillar feels more like a feat of engineering than the hair structure. It stands more like a monument and does not invite the viewer to interact, but instead looms over the viewer, commanding attention. A direct, human connection to a place of origin through material is underlying all the work in the exhibition and it continues with the Smart Museum’s youth outreach programming. On view in the lobby, there is a collection of student works created by juniors at a UChicago Laboratory high school program. In response to the exhibition, the students have created their own works of art that echo

the spirit and thesis of the Allure of Matter. By tying together, the materiality of their own homes with the issues that they encountered in the exhibition, these students have connected in a meaningful way to artists on the opposite end of the globe. Most notable were works by Destiney Williamson and Ethan Kern. Williamson’s mixed media piece, *The Pride in My Hair*, connects the artists through the cultural significance of hair for black women. In a similar way that gu wenda sources the hair for each United Nations monument from the country it represents, Williamson too has sourced her materials from her community. “The hair I bought at my local beauty supply store, and all the other materials I received from the school. Hair connects to me in the same way that it connects to the Black community. It represents a shared sense of identity and culture.” Williamson has woven the word ‘black’ with her hair reflecting that it is the blackness of her hair that makes the material imbued with power.



gu wenda, *united nations: american code*, 1995–2019. Detail, entrance.



Destiney Williamson, *The Pride in My Hair*, 2020. Amour braiding hair on cardboard with acrylic paint. Photo courtesy of Smart Museum.

Ethan Kern’s *Needle Toque* incorporates hypodermic needles in a half circle at the bottom of a map of Canada. Kern uses the physical objects that deliver the addictive drug that has affected so many people. “I want the viewer to feel a sense of shock and maybe even nervousness at first, seeing the amount of needles spread onto this large board.” A dark echo of the ravages addiction has on his hometown of Vancouver, the inspiration for this piece was drawn from the Xu Bing’s 1st Class from the Tobacco Project. There is a dangerous tactility invoked using needles that recalls the rusted nails in Jianguo’s rug at Wrightwood 659. The contrasts between the two parts of “The Allure of Matter” are interesting to consider in reference to the geography of Chicago. Travelling from one location to the other can give visitors a chance to traverse the span of the city. The works included and even the spaces themselves point to a contrast of temperament within the city itself. While Wrightwood, a more private museum in a more conservative part of town, has strong work, the bolder, more

controversial works are at the Smart Museum. There are more pieces on view at the Wrightwood, but if you are looking for Xu Bing and Ai Weiwei, their works are on view at The Smart Museum. A visit to either will likely not disappoint, but those faint of heart might be more interested in the less abject works at Wrightwood. ■ Both museums are free, but tickets for Wrightwood must be reserved online. The exhibition at Wrightwood is scheduled to close on May 2nd; the Smart Museum’s exhibition is scheduled to close on May 3rd. No official decision has been made about whether the exhibition will be extended due to the COVID-19 closures. Until museums are open again, all the works along with in-depth interviews with all the artists are available on the website, [www.theallureofmatter.org](http://www.theallureofmatter.org). Rebecca Memoli is a Chicago-based photographer and curator. She received her BFA from Pratt Institute and her MFA in Photography from Columbia College. Her work has been featured in several national and international group shows. Her latest curatorial project is “The Feeling is Mutual.”

Ethan Kern, *Needle Toque*, 2020. Wood, brush paint, spray paint, sharpie, and needles. Photo courtesy of Smart Museum.





# “Legacy of Decency: Rembrandt, the Jews and the Danes”

Elverhøj Museum of History and Art, Solvang, CA

by Neil Goodman

In 2012, my wife JoEllyn and I bought a house in the small town of Los Alamos in the central coast of California. The nickname for Los Alamos is “Almost Lost,” and, with two of our kids, the population rose by four percent. Overlooking a vineyard with a hypnotic view of the Los Padres National Forest and the San Rafael Mountains, I felt more like Turner than Giacometti as my urban roots were quickly replaced by small town life.

Solvang is a small Danish town nestled in the Santa Ynez valley (twenty minutes south of Los Alamos and 154 miles north of LA) founded by a group of Danes (1911) escaping the harsh midwestern climate. To this day, the community is firmly entrenched in its Danish roots as well as surrounded by excellent wineries and a bucolic landscape. Occasionally a subject of Garrison Keillor humor, it is noted for both its traditional Danish architecture and as the location of the cult classic film *Sideways*, starring Paul Giamatti. In fact, you will drive by the ostrich farm

featured in the film on the way to Solvang.

Solvang’s Elverhøj Museum of History and Art occupies a historic hand-built structure in the former home studio of two artists, Viggo Brandt-Erichsen and his wife Martha Mott. Opened in 1988, the museum serves the community as both a cultural and historical institution and has permanent and temporary exhibits. As it is on the road, so to speak, from LA to San Francisco, the museum is well attended and has strong local support. Ironically, the town’s quaintness and traditional Danish architecture provides a steady source of revenue for the community and, as such, tourist income parallels and supports its identity. The next time you are visiting LA and decide to take the northerly route on Highway 101 on your drive up the coast, stop by the Elverhøj in Solvang. You will find a museum committed to many local exhibitions that celebrate the joys of regionalism as well as showcasing Danish history and culture.

Elverhoj exterior—image of the exterior of the museum, handbuilt by the artists who made it their home. Image courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self Portrait with Plumed Hat and Lowered Sabre*, 1634. Etching on laid paper, 5 1/8 x 4 3/16. Image courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.

The Elverhøj exhibition “Legacy of Decency: Rembrandt, Jews & Danes” is actually a pairing of two distinct exhibitions. While initially discordant, the work is oddly well suited to the times, as the central theme of the show is about empathy, both individually and collectively. Their juxtaposition proves to be an insightful historical and educational dialogue, and as such, the show’s strength is both conversational and aesthetic. This material is also a bit of a departure for the museum, as most of the art exhibitions are contemporary and regional.

The twenty-one prints by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) are borrowed from the permanent collection of the Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum of Art in Santa Barbara or Montecito, California. The prints were a gift in 2014 from the collection of Fran and Howard Berger with the intent that the work would be available for public exhibition. As stated in the catalog essay, “Their goal in collecting Rembrandt’s prints was to demonstrate Rembrandt’s special relationship with Amsterdam’s citizens of the Jewish faith.”

Within this rubric, the prints specifically address stories of the Old Testament. Titles for the prints include *Abraham and Isaac*, *David in Prayer*, *Joseph Telling His Dream*, *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, and *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

One of the most poignant images in the exhibition is *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. Rembrandt’s print embodies both revelation and action, the quintessential moment between life and death. The horror of sacrifice unfolds, as the epiphany of faith and individualism are at the razor’s edge. These questions are profound and eternal and seem to be at the core of the human experience. The image is haunting and unrelenting, yet somehow cathartic, as we watch the drama unfold while knowing the ending. Today we are more like Abraham, where every day we negotiate faith and fact, belief and hope. Perhaps we could wish for the same redemption and divine intervention. Yet unlike the Sacrifice of Isaac, our ending is uncertain and still before us.

As I mentioned, the exhibition and motivations for col-

LEFT: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Joseph Telling His Dreams*, 1638. Etching on laid paper 4 1/4 x 3 1/4.

RIGHT: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, 1655. Etching on laid paper with pen and ink and ruled lines 6 1/8 x 5 1/4. Images courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.





**LEFT:** Rembrandt van Rijn, 4. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1636. Etching on laid paper, 6 1/4 x 5 1/2. **RIGHT:** Rembrandt van Rijn, Ephraim Bonus, *Jewish Physician*, 1647. Etching, engraving, and drypoint on laid paper, 8 1/8 x 7. Images courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.



lecting the prints are both historical and political and canonize Rembrandt as both a celebrated artist and a friend to the Jews. Whether this is entirely true, based on the catalog, seems to be open to a bit of a debate among historians, as there are differing interpretations. What we do know is that Rembrandt lived close to the Sephardic Jewish quarter (ghetto). The Spanish inquisition of 1492 and the Portuguese expulsion in 1496 brought a great migration of Jews to Amsterdam, and many lived within close proximity to Rembrandt with a relative ease of social and religious restrictions. The occasional use of Jewish models also points to a loosening of biblical prohibitions in the Jewish community regarding figurative representation.

The prints, illustrating themes from the Old Testament, were possibly an important source of revenue for Rembrandt, as Dutch Reformed churches publicly banned pictorial images in their houses of worship (similar to syn-

agogues). The prints then had multiple functions, including religious education and family worship, and certainly embraced a longer and visually engaging view of biblical Jewish history based on stories from the Old Testament.

The irony in Rembrandt, through our modern lens, is that this appropriation of “otherness” is precisely what we admire, as he crosses boundaries and empathetically brings one culture to the next. Whether or not this was his original intention can be debated, yet in Rembrandt’s case, this “borrowing” countered the grotesquely exaggerated caricatures typically used to portray Jews in the Middle Ages. This “humanism” is at the core of Rembrandt’s portrayal of Jews, as he organically recalibrates physical stereotypes by linking representation with content. The sad fact of European anti-Semitism was that his voice ultimately was more singular than collective, yet it continues

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Denmark was occupied by German troops 1940–1945. King Christian won popular support when he carried on with his daily horse ride in Copenhagen’s streets. The king came to symbolize the nation’s resistance to the German occupation during World War II. Image courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.



The rescue of the Danish Jews occurred during Nazi Germany’s occupation of Denmark during World War II. In 1943, the Danish resistance movement, with the assistance of many Danish citizens, managed to evacuate 7,220 of Denmark’s 7,800 Jews, plus 686 non-Jewish spouses, by sea to nearby neutral Sweden. Image courtesy of Elverhøj Museum of History and Art.

# Artoma: The Art of Cancer

Michael Gallagher, Eileen Powers, Nancy VanKanegan, Barbara Youngquist, Richard Zeid.  
Chicago Art Department, January 10–31, 2020

*by Michel Ségard*

When I saw the announcement for “Artoma: The Art of Cancer” on The Visualist, I was both intrigued and suspicious. As a person who has been battling cancer for four years, I was curious how the experience had affected these artists’ work, but as a critic I was skeptical—suspicious that this exhibition might be just another therapeutic exercise to help the participants personally cope with their fate. As worthwhile as such a therapeutic pursuit might be, not all image making or crafting is art. Often it is just therapy. I am glad to report that my suspicions were largely unfounded. Yes, there was a small amount of the therapeutic element, but the main focus was on how these artists used their art to communicate to the world how the experience of battling cancer affects one’s psyche and one’s life. Each of these artists has been affected in a different way, and their work in this show reflects those differences.

Let us start with fiber artist **Barbara Youngquist**, a 24 year survivor of ovarian cancer. At the age of eight, she

had been taught to knit by her grandmother. Later, during a trip to Ireland, she became attracted to the fiber artistry of that nation’s handspun cabled sweaters. She eventually learned to weave on a continuous loop tri-loom, making pieces of clothing to donate to charitable organizations. Her work embodies intricate patterns and subtle colors to make very wearable garments. In this respect, she, more than any other in the group, follows a craft tradition that allows functional items to have a strong aesthetic quality.

She depended on her interest in knitting to serve as a distraction during her chemotherapy.<sup>1</sup> And it was the ability to create beautiful objects that transcended their therapeutic value even during the difficult process of chemotherapy that helped keep her going and that has informed her art ever since—a kind of artistic power of positive thinking.

**Eileen Powers** has a similarly positive attitude toward the effect of her cancer. She was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2018. After enduring months of fear, constant pain,



**Barbara Youngquist:** a blouse and a shawl. Photos by Michel Ségard.





Eileen Powers: two pieces from the “Can You Make Hair For Me?” series. Photos by Michel Ségard.

and misdirection, she finally found a medical solution. She described this period as a strange, yet oddly positive time. As a result of chemotherapy, she lost all of her hair, which resulted in the loss of her sense of self, especially her physical identity.

Out of that came her project “Can You Make Hair For Me?” She has asked people to create hair for her out of any material they choose. As a photographer she then created a series of self-portraits depicting her with the hair made by various people from an assortment of materials: ribbons, wood shavings, lettuce, red cabbage, feathers, curly noodles, etc. As she states on her project website, *canyoumakehairforme.com*, “The goal is to show that loss is real, but our ingenuity in dealing with loss is what makes us stronger, more compassionate humans.” She has pursued this project with an extraordinary sense of humor and created quite an uplifting series of images. In doing so, I feel that she has indeed regained her identity, particularly as an artist.

Ceramist **Richard Zeid** also lost his hair during six rounds of chemotherapy while being treated for lymphoma. But he incorporated the fallen hair into his work, using the hair like a local glaze to impart a pattern to his otherwise unglazed vessels. For this show, these vessels were affixed to three outlines of a male body crafted from plywood sheets and mounted like tables. So the hair was “returned” to its rightful place. This symbolism dovetails with his passionate pursuit of the perfection of forms—the perfection achieved by wholeness.

Yet there is another possible interpretation of these vessels. They remind me of cremation urns. The question is: do they symbolically contain the ashes of the cancer and, therefore, the “passing” of the disease, or are they the metaphorical expression of a personal loss, a foreshadowing of the inevitable—or both?

Fortunately for Powers and Zeid, hair grows back after chemo. **Michael Gallagher** was not so fortunate. At 52, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and underwent



Michael Gallagher: wall installation of 52 plaster walnut shapes. Photo by Michel Ségard.

a prostatectomy. Although this cured his cancer, he was left with the sense of profound permanent loss. When thinking about permanent losses that impact your identity, one thinks of breast cancer and mastectomies, which make women feel less than whole both individually and sexually. The same dynamic happens with men and prostatectomies. They are left feeling less like a man and have to struggle to adapt to limited sexual function that can sometimes be severe.

Gallagher expressed his sense of loss via an installation of 52 large, walnut-shaped plaster sculptures, one for each year of his life, hung in four rows of 13 on a black field. (The choice of walnuts was because the prostate is often described as about the size of a walnut.) This abstract arrangement indirectly calls to mind Maya Lin’s Vietnam Memorial where confronting the list of names of those who died brings to focus the sense of loss. In Gallagher’s piece, the loss becomes palpable with the repetition of the walnut shape. Gallagher’s is the most cathartic and direct expression in the show. With the walnut forms reduced

almost to the point of abstraction, the work conceptually addresses the permanent damage caused by cancer, both physically and emotionally.

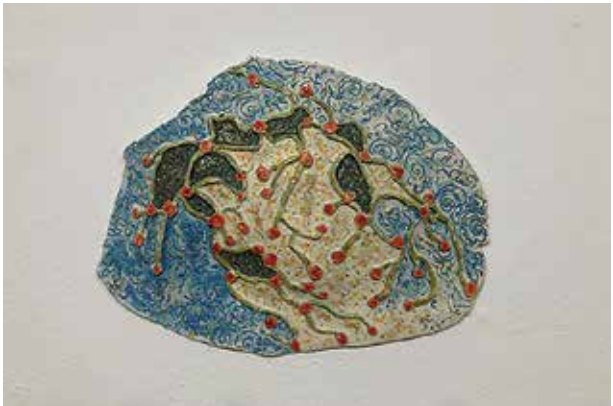
**Nancy VanKanegan** has a different outlook on the effects of her breast cancer. She has undergone surgery, chemotherapy and radiation to combat her cancer. In her words, “I’ve come to see my breast cancer treatment as a ‘gardening and pruning’ of the physical self through the ‘miracles’ of science.” Science gave her the inspiration for the series of ceramic plates she created that expressed her cancer experience. Each plate is based on a scan of her tumor or lymph nodes. In each bas relief plate, the pattern and texture of the cancer is contrasted with that of the normal tissue surrounding it. The ability to recognize differences in patterns is one of oncology’s fundamental tools for localizing the site of a cancer and determining the efficacy of a given therapy. VanKanegan turns this skill into a series of works of art, giving credence to the notion that the mental processes used in art and science are

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Richard Zeid: two of the three “torso tables” with ceramic pots attached. Photos by Michel Ségard.

Nancy VanKanegan: two ceramic plaques based on tumor biopsy slides. Photos by Michel Ségard.





# Memory and Meaning: William Dolan and Karen Perl in “Chicago Streets and Ways”

By Emily Rapport

“Chicago Streets and Ways,” on view at Hofheimer Gallery through April 25, forms an eerie visual premonition of the current coronavirus pandemic. The streets and alleys we expect to see bustling are still. Buildings are dormant, windows opaque, as if waiting for the vital spark of human life to restart the city’s hum of interconnected pathways.

Both Perl and Dolan are from Chicago. In fact, they each grew up in the same West Rogers Park neighborhood and even attended the same elementary school (although separated by about a decade). They share a Chicagoan’s native pride in their city and find touchstones to their personal history in the mutable but familiar urban landscapes they choose to depict. Although architecture is a primary subject, the urban landscape is not only about buildings. As every artist’s work is to some degree a self-portrait, the architecture of the city spans interior and exterior realms of experience. However, where a painter like Edward Hop-

per may have painted desolation in the separateness of figures from himself, Karen Perl and William Dolan bring us closer to each other through their meditative renderings of solitude and their present observation of the moment.

**William Dolan’s** ink drawings of Chicago alleys and side streets have the stillness of the morning of a national holiday—or a cataclysmic event. *Alley with Safe Zone* betrays some recent activity; shallow puddles intimate that it has rained and a car or two has passed this way. A mattress, still white, is propped up against the ubiquitous blue and black bins that line Chicago’s alleys, and a smattering of golden leaves litter the foreground below a bullet ridden “Safety Zone” sign.

Dolan has an affection for the distinct and incongruous details of his native Chicago surroundings. The particular cobalt blue bins of the maligned Chicago recycling



William Dolan, *Alley with Former Loading Dock*, 2019, ink on paper, 15” x 22”. Photo courtesy of the artist.

program, a down-at-the-heels apartment building with its enclosed porch abutments (always an indefatigable lite margarine yellow), the warm gray lean of weathered phone poles, and the chaotic jumble of wires above are all depicted with the familiarity of a childhood friend.

In *Alley with Former Loading Dock*, long-limbed shadows stretch across cracked pavement, around cars, and up the sides of buildings as if testing the limits of their dominion. If eyes are the windows to the soul, then windows (and reflections) represent an internal world in art. The lack of lights and scant reflections in the windows of Dolan’s buildings do not reveal the life within. Windows, half-lidded with gray shades or colored in with a sketchy black scribble, seem agitated by their vacancy.

Dolan’s few El track drawings offer a different viewpoint. *Alley from Across the Isle* contains the viewer in an abstract, compressed space rather than letting us roam

the streets at will. Here, surrounded by cold but jaunty cerulean and cobalt blues, we are afforded a view of the city through a porthole-like window. Sedate earth tones and blank windows stare back at us, as if the city has grown up around our single car. We had expected a momentary delay—instead we are entombed inside an incandescent box.

In contrast to Dolan’s ink drawings, **Karen Perl’s** moody, desaturated oil paintings depict the less densely constructed Rogers Park and Bronzeville neighborhoods. Wide, empty streets yawn between buildings, their expanse marked by an occasional car or ghost-like figure or animal. Where Dolan’s line drawings form an indelible imprint of a particular space in time, the quiet in Perl’s paintings has a dream-like sensibility. Perl seems to concentrate on the space between things. Her paintings are sparse in subject and material—areas of paint are scraped off and simplified. She provides just enough information



**Left:** William Dolan, *Alley with Safe Zone*, 2019, ink on paper, 15” x 11”. Photo courtesy of the artist.  
**Right:** William Dolan, *Alley from Across the Isle*, ink on paper, 2019, 15” x 11”. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Karen Perl, *Touhy, Ridge, & Rogers*, 2012, oil on wood, 11” x 14”. Photo by Tom Van Eynde.



Karen Perl, *Gone (Randolph & Peoria)*, 2005, oil on wood, 7" x 14". Photo by the artist

to convey mood and a sense of place. The muted palette is nostalgic, intimate, meditative. Street signs and businesses are left unnamed, as if their specificity is no longer required by the ghost-like figures who drift through them. In *Touhy, Ridge, and Rogers*, two cars come from opposite directions. The street appears wet, and a red stop signal glows, bouncing light across the pavement. Although the streets are quiet and the buildings boarded up, a chance meeting between these vehicles seems possible. The “decisive moment” has yet to occur.

Perl has spent much of her career painting *en plein air*, and *Gone (Randolph & Peoria)* benefits from this experience. The heavier application of paint feels built up and alive (reflective also of the industrial scene she is painting). The industrial corridors and factory buildings at the heart of Chicago, rooted in work, find a sympathetic pursuit through the artist as laborer. Both manufacturers and artists share a similarly uncertain fate as development and economics make these spaces untenable. The sweep

of clouds across a blue sky, and an impasto passage of pale pinkish tones over a sea of grey-green asphalt is a benediction, the sublime moment of unlikely beauty painted into existence.

*Landlocked (Clark and Rogers)* goes to the opposite extreme. Painted in crisp contrasts, sun-warmed brick emerges against a cold, cloudless sky. Signs and windows are bereft of words or interior details—they need only temperature and tone. The stillness of the scene is subtly activated by morning light nudging the shadow of a neighboring building awake. A budded branch peaks at its coral framed reflection, and a seagull coasts past a faded “No Parking” sign, photo-bombing the day.

Perl’s control in paring down architectural elements to their essential shape and color, and her strategic removal of paint as a technique, add meaning to the occasional appearance of animals. As humans, we seek out faces, gestures, a tone of voice to understand our position in society and to communicate our needs. Buildings also have faces.



Karen Perl, *Sight Hound (Ridge & Bryn Mawr)*, oil on wood, 2015, 60" x 30". Photo by the artist.

Windows are eyes, the door a mouth. Where buildings exist in painted and unpainted states, between simultaneous realms of past and present, the human lifespan renders figures nearly invisible. We are impermanent creatures. In contrast, the things we create, remain—at least for a while. Animals are, in a way, omni-present; for humans, they can represent filial connection and even a spiritual guide. In Homer’s story of Odysseus, only his dog Argos recognizes him when he returns home disguised as a beggar. Upon his master’s return, Argos dies having “fulfilled his destiny of faith”.

Evoking this deep symbolic history, a shy dog gazes at the viewer in *Lost* as an American flag waves in the distance. *Sight Hound* shows another dog at a crossroads, looking into the distance as the sun sets, a round moon overhead. As representatives of nature and creatures that have been bred by man, these animals provide a vehicle for our faith and perseverance, signaling our inherent responsibilities as caretaker and archivist in the world.

It’s the simple things that each artist chooses to reflect upon in their portraits of Chicago’s urban landscape. “Chicago Streets and Ways” offers a slowed-down, un-peopled opportunity to revisit what makes and keeps us human. This link to both our own history and a shared cultural history is poignant in our current period of social distancing. When normalcy is turned on its head, memory makes meaning. Our connections to place and community are critical. Our responsibility to care for each other (humans and animals), and to see beauty in the everyday, resonate through the artists’ renderings of familiar Chicago vistas. We are the connectors if we are willing to be engaged. ■

All work can be viewed on the Hofheimer Gallery website at <https://hofheimergallery.com/current/>

Emily Rapport studied painting at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York and received her BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005. In 2018, Emily opened Eat Paint Studio, a working studio and gallery in Chicago.



Karen Perl, *Landlocked (Clark and Rogers)*, oil on wood, 2015, 20" x 10". Photo by the artist.



“Legacy of Decency”— continued from page 50.

to remain powerful and moving and resonates in today’s world.

This brings us to the Danes. If Rembrandt’s voice was singular, the Danes was collective. The second part of the exhibition focuses on this aspect of Danish culture which made their role in the rescue of the Jewish population unique in the Holocaust. In the history of WWII, their courage and shared action were a beacon of light in a world adrift with horror. The Danish story is told through large placards placed in the gallery and highlights key moments in that particular period of Danish history. The Jews in Denmark were relatively safe until 1943, when the Gestapo reversed its policy and moved towards mass arrest and deportation. After the new policy was leaked to a prominent Dane, the Danish community both hid and transported Jews to neutral Sweden within a three-week period, thereby rescuing over ninety-five percent of the Jewish population. It is a remarkable story that resonates in so many ways in the times we live in, and as events fade it is important to pass these stories from one

generation to the next, for they are worth remembering and they are at the very core of the best of humanity.

As we confront the challenges of our daily life, I am deeply grateful for how others maintained and fostered their empathy and morality in other difficult times, and how we as artists have given voice to the depths of the human experience. We are our story, and how history remembers us will perhaps become another generation’s archetype in how they collectively confront adversity while maintaining their humanity. Through their art and action, both Rembrandt and the Danish resistance created a lasting “legacy of decency.” ■

The exhibition opened in mid-March and closed shortly thereafter in response to the pandemic. It will hopefully reopen at a later date.

**Neil Goodman is a sculptor formerly based in Chicago with an extensive exhibition history. Presently living in the central coast of California, he retired from Indiana University Northwest as Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts. He is currently represented by Carl Hammer Gallery as well as serving as the Los Angeles correspondent for the New Art Examiner.**

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actually quite similar. There is the added psychological benefit of visualizing a disease to help stimulate the body’s immune response to fight it.

VanKanegan’s works then serve multiple purposes. They act as an affirmation of the will for survival; they show us the similarities between art and science and how one can influence the other; and they help visualize the disease to mobilize the body’s immune response.

None of these artists indulged in maudlin expressions of victimization. They all faced the reality of their situation and expressed it in clear artistic language, giving the viewer some understanding of the dynamics of what they had gone through and the subsequent consequences. The informative nature of this show comes as no surprise, given that three of the five (Gallagher, VanKanegan, and Zeid) are also educators. And there is the liberating aspect of “coming out” with your disease and relieving yourself of the burden of keeping it a secret and pretending that everything is okay when it isn’t.

This was a substantive exhibition that, in spite of its serious initial content, turned out to be uplifting because of the artistic and educational skill of these artists. It shows that even when art is used as a therapeutic tool, it can also embrace serious aesthetic goals and speak to us about the larger issues of life. There are plans to do additional exhibitions of this kind in the future; I hope they come to pass. ■

**Michel Ségard is the Editor in Chief of the New Art Examiner and a former adjunct assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is also the author of numerous exhibition catalog essays.**

1. I am very familiar with this strategy. I took on the leadership of the *New Art Examiner* as a distraction during the initial treatment of my prostate cancer, which consisted of 45 session of radiation therapy along with a year of chemotherapy. I have recently undergone an additional 25 sessions of radiation therapy to treat two metastases and will be on chemo for another two years. Being the *New Art Examiner’s* editor in chief definitely helps me keep my sanity and sense of worth to my community. M.S.

