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Off the Wall

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NEW ART EXAMINER

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NEW ART EXAMINER 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.

Letter to the Editor

A Postscript for "A Meditation on Art in The Time of Chaos: The Creation of Art During a Global Pandemic"

(NAE April issue)

Since the essay was written, the US has reached a terrible milestone of one million deaths due to COVID. It also was written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine; however, there are certain connections that emerged since. When watching cellist, Denys Karachevtsev, playing a Bach suite on a stool in the road in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, the city that has experienced relentless Russian shelling since the invasion, I am reminded of my reference to the HBO series Station Eleven where the survivors of a global pandemic continue to celebrate the arts. Or where I invoke, due to Putin's Nuclear threat, at the end the essay, the novel On the Beach, with the Australian residents waiting for a radioactive nuclear cloud to reach them, continue to live a semblance of a normal life.

Corey Postiglione

Denys Karachevtsev playing a Bach suite on a stool in the road in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. Image from globeecho.com/news/

COVER IMAGES

Front Cover: Sterling Toles, *Potential Transformer*, 2022. Installation: PT transformer, orange vinyl strip space dividers from a coal plant, neon. Photo by K.A. Letts with permission from the artist.

Back Cover: Terling Toles, *Contemplation 5/Humanity*, 2022. Installation: blue vinyl strips, discarded metal scraps from coal plant. Photo by K.A. Letts with permission from the artist.

Hello dear readers,

Summer is here and wow what a year it has been so far. It seems like the issues of the day continue to grow more fraught every time we put one of these letters together. But has the art world changed much? Something we have seen is a boom in the market of both NFTs and IRL art. And quite frankly we are over it. For the most part at least. It is time to start getting interested in art itself again. Not just who buys it and how it moves from one collection to another but what it looks like and what it makes us think and feel. Hence, we are moving "Off the Wall" and into the hearts and minds of those who care about art and what it does. This is going to be yet another thread in that strange sweater, the New Art Examiner, dragging on the floor behind us as we walk.

To kick things off we thought we would take a temp check. What's happening? What's interesting? What are people not talking about? Two contributing writers who also happen to be artists of different generations, Neil Goodman and Evan Carter, have a discussion about their experiences as artists and where they see the world of visual art heading. KA Letts looks at what's happening at Detroit's MOCAD through the lens of the modern American kunsthalle. Of course, we have our requisite commentary on the effluviant decadence that is Chicago's art EXPO and to spice things up we turned it into a three-way review. A ménage à trois examen if you will, featuring Michel Ségard, Diane Thodos, and Evan Carter. None of whom will confirm or deny consent to that description and on an unrelated note we have also created a special section for Pride month featuring an article on Devan Shimoyama and the way his images deal with the complexities of queer aesthetics.

And reviews glorious reviews! What better way to know what is happening in our respective creative communities and beyond? A globetrotting photographer whose work deals with pan-African themes and contemporary issues of exoticization gets a crossed look from Evan Carter. Rebecca Memoli pays a visit to our friendly Chicago artists coalition to ponder memory and sanctity. And if you don't know enough about Nick Cave (not the bad seed) and the depth of his work and career well, Andrew Peart has you covered with his coverage. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. We are welcoming new writers and new spaces with this edition. As always, we are happy that you are along for the ride. Stay sharp, stay critical, and stay tuned.

Thank you,

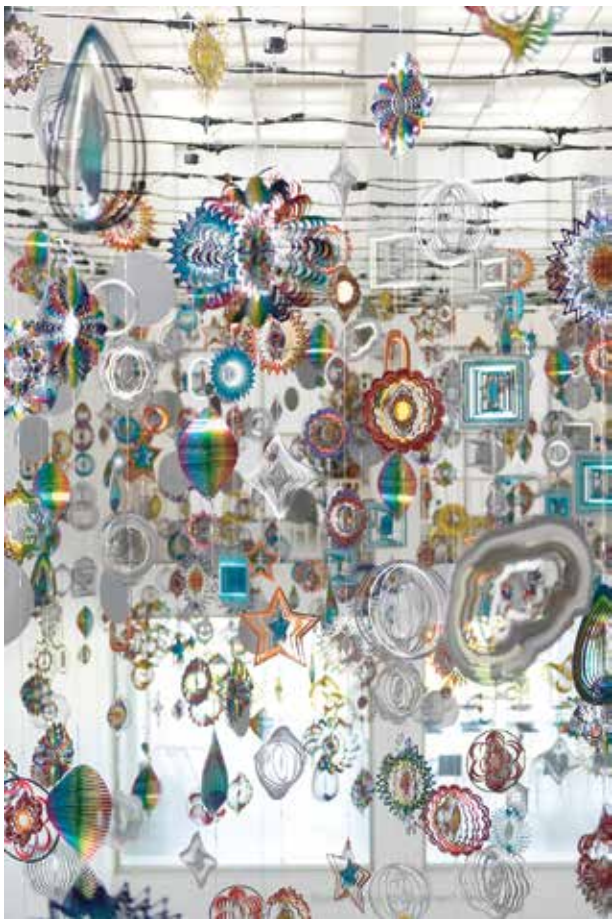
The Editors

Nick Cave: "Forothermore"
Remembering the Gloom beneath the Glamor.

By Andrew Peart

Entering Chicago-based artist Nick Cave's first career retrospective, "Forothermore," on the fourth floor of the Museum of Contemporary Art, the viewer immediately encounters an installation titled *Spinner Forest*. This enormous shimmering environment occupies and transforms the hall visitors walk through to reach the exhibition's title wall, and it hints at some of the exhibition's key themes. Comprised of hanging mobiles made from multicolored metallic garden ornaments, the installation seems at first to hold an arcadian atmosphere: the viewer sees sunbursts, stars, and peace signs. But up close, as many commentators have noted, the viewer starts to see unnerving shapes: pistols, bullets, and teardrops. *Spinner Forest* is the overture to a large-scale exhibition that spills beyond even these transfigured museum walls. On view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA) from May 14 to October 2, "Forothermore" extends its ambitions for community engagement through a fashion-oriented stage show, which debuted in late May at the DuSable Museum of African American History. From the outset, the opening installation at the MCA signals to viewers that here is an artist, just as comfortable on the runway as in the gallery, who will not shy away from hard and troubling truths, who has something more to say.

This is just one of the meanings of Cave's exhibition title, the punning portmanteau "Forothermore." Cave holds our attention with an implicit *furthermore*: Beneath the glitz there is gloom, *Spinner Forest* reveals, and that gloom foreshadows a hard-edged reckoning. "Forothermore" also suggests ongoingness, that the 63-year-old Cave has been digging deep below the surface like this for decades and will be at it *forevermore*. The exhibition encompasses a body of work dating back to the mid-1990s and extending to the present. Like the somber reality beneath the surface glitter, renewal and rebirth are a key theme of the exhibition. Cave's famous Soundsuits, for example, take those who don the elaborate costumes on what the artist calls an "out-of-body experience," a kind of cosmic journey from an old to a new self. They also invite wearer and



Nick Cave, *Spinner Forest*, 2020. Hanging mobiles made from metallic spinning garden ornaments, dimensions variable. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Nick Cave, *Spinner Forest*, 2020. Hanging mobiles made from metallic spinning garden ornaments, dimensions variable. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

viewer alike to inhabit a state of otherness outside the self entirely. This is what puts the *other* in "Forothermore," and it's another of the exhibition's key themes. Cave's is an art that aspires to the condition of community by asking us, as an audience, to come together in an estrangement from ourselves. Self-estrangement can be scary, though. And just as viewers face some haunting images in walking through *Spinner Forest*, there's no way to reach community without a little unsettling.

Cave's Soundsuits have evolved in technique and tenor across different phases of his career, according to the exhibition's curator, Naomi Beckwith. His iconic first Soundsuit, from 1992, emerged in response to the videotaped police beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles the year before. Cave, a Fulton, MO-born graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute, had come to Chicago soon after earning his MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1989 and was teaching fiber arts at the School of the Art Institute. Following the release of the King video, Cave met silence rather than support from colleagues at his office, so he decamped to a park across the street. He sewed together his original Soundsuit from twigs he collected there. "I was making this sort of second skin, something to protect my spirit," Cave says. "I needed to be shielded by a protective element in order for me to function." The Soundsuit took its name from the rustling created by the garment when worn and put in motion. (Viewers get to see a 2011 reiteration of this Soundsuit in "Forothermore.") Around 2005, Beckwith notes, Cave began making Soundsuits of a new variety and calling them Trees. Still arboreal, they left behind branches for blooms. Beckwith describes them as "knitted-doily suits combined with armatures that include floriated, topiary-like structures of found birds and colorful metal flowers around the head and shoulders." Most

Nick Cave, various Soundsuits, 2013–2022. Fourth from left: *Soundsuit 8:46*, 2021–22. Mixed media including vintage textile and sequined appliqués, metal, and mannequin, 102 × 29 × 29 inches. Right: *Soundsuit 9:29*, 2021–22. Mixed media including vintage textile and sequined appliqués, metal, and mannequin, 98 × 33 × 22 inches. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Nick Cave, various Soundsuits, 2008–2022. Third from left: *Soundsuit,* 2008. Mixed media with mannequin, 100 × 25 × 14 inches. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Nick Cave, various Soundsuits, 2008–2022. Left: *Soundsuit 8:46*, 2021. Mixed media including vintage textile and sequined appliqués, metal, and mannequin, 99 5/8 x 33 x 22 inches. Center: *Soundsuit*, 2014. Mixed media including beaded and sequined fabric, bugle beads, shoelaces, fabric, metal, and mannequin, 97 1/2 × 28 × 25 inches. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

of the Soundsuits viewers see in "Forothermore" belong to the Trees aesthetic or to a recent series of sculptures with a similar style that Cave calls Soundsuit 2.0. Alternating between the titles *Soundsuit 8:46* and *Soundsuit 9:29*, which reference the time spans former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee onto George Floyd's neck, these pieces address our current moment of racial reckoning.

In so doing, the sculptures comprising Soundsuit 2.0 help reveal what the somberness is all about in many of Cave's works: they often act as memorializing rituals. Many observers have emphasized Cave's descriptions of his early Soundsuits as protective shields. The garments do cloak the wearer's race, class, and gender, scrambling our everyday shorthand for identifying others. But the garments also push in the opposite direction, communicating an excess of information on their own surfaces. The newer Soundsuits in particular look almost like intricate symbolic systems. Many of them seem to have stepped out of funerary rites. The multiple iterations of *Soundsuit 9:29* are excessive in their patterning and surface detail. At top, neat crosshatched rows of flowers, mostly black, create scaffolding for multilayered and multicolored blooms. The face of the figure, as it were, has been distended into an oblong shape that evokes any number of images from a funerary procession: a tall religious headdress, perhaps, or a flower-adorned bier. At bottom, sequined footwear hints at a wearer who will seek catharsis from the music and dance of such a procession. Critics have noted several possible reference points for this ceremonial aspect of Cave's suits, including the dress of Mardi Gras Indians and representations of Haitian vodou *loa*. In their floral imagery, the *Soundsuit 9:29* sculptures suggest cycles of death and rebirth; in the level of adornment and decoration they bring to the human figure, they suggest the kinds of spectacles performed to sway the spirit world.

"Forothermore" allows viewers to see examples of *Soundsuit 9:29* and its counterpart, *Soundsuit 8:46*, in relation to their stylistic precursors. Cave's *Soundsuit* (2008) belongs to the artist's Trees series. The topiary structure around the head and torso interleaves white flowers, possibly hydrangeas, with gilded ones; a pair of sunflowers sits on the crown. There is a light symbolism here, with the seasonal flowers evoking impermanence, the gilded leaves intimating permanence, and the sunflowers implying a regenerative source. Like the Soundsuit 2.0 sculptures, this piece mixes bright and variegated surfaces with a subtext inscribed by the cycles of death and rebirth. Cave's work so often has a memorializing feel precisely because it manages to remind us of death while depicting resilience. His Trees series is not allegorical, but neither is it too far removed from the tree of life archetype in blending what's transitory with what's eternal.

Soundsuits outline a space that is liminal and haunting. "I made something that was scary," Cave says of his original Soundsuit, "something that hid my gender, race, class, something that forced you to look at it without judgment, because, as you know, we always want to categorize things." What exactly was it about this garment that scared Cave? "I knew that it would change my life," he says. Soundsuits take the individual beyond the self, beyond categorization and classification, and into a transient state of being where the individual starts to become a new person. Over time, as they've evolved into Trees

Nick Cave, *A-mal-gam*, 2021. Bronze, 124 x 96 x 96 inches. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

and then into Soundsuit 2.0, these works have only added more layers to this theme of constant regeneration. When Soundsuits are seen for the unsettling self-transformations they embody, they can strike viewers as celebrations of a new becoming or as testaments to loss. Their ability to represent the passage from known to unknown states, an important part of any memorial, helps give Soundsuits like those honoring George Floyd an especially potent memorializing force.

With *A-mal-gam*, Cave's first large-scale human figure in bronze, the artist casts his sights from memorial to monument. The work is a kind of metallic Soundsuit. A seated human figure rests on a pedestal. Its legs and torso are covered by vines, leaves, and flowers; its shoulders support a thicket of branches, instead of a head, and an array of perched birds. *A-mal-gam* is about 10 feet tall. Cave told WBEZ that he hopes to use the sculpture as the prototype for a public monument five or six times that size. He imagines it in an outdoor setting, perhaps a park. The exhibition wall text puts *A-mal-gam* in the context of recent national debates over Confederate monuments and other statues targeted for removal because of their links to racism, slavery, and colonialism. *A-mal-gam*, says the wall text, is Cave's response to questions about what to do with the empty platforms left behind by monument removals. His choice of a hybrid human and arboreal form may suggest that the sculpture is his emblem of a more perfect union. As Cave notes, "A tree is a migration hub where flocks of birds come together collectively."

A-mal-gam seems quite pointed, then, as a model monument for the urban settings where many far less inclusive national symbols have stood. Its arboreal symbol of migration would make it at home in Chicago or other US cities with historical ties to the Great Migration and waves of foreign immigration. Just one of several forest or tree images in "Forothermore," as we've seen, this one is perhaps Cave's most Whitmanesque: out of diversity comes unity. It's a theme Cave takes to new heights in the stage event *The Color Is*, but its significance here is that Cave is striving for a language in which even his static visual works rise to

Nick Cave, *Truss*, 1999. Mixed media including metal, resin, and gloves, dimensions variable. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Nick Cave, *Truss*, 1999. Detail. Mixed media including metal, resin, and gloves, dimensions variable. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

the level of public art. He turns to the traditional form of bronze sculpture so that his art can be for *others* in the sense of mass public display.

"Forothermore" puts Cave's recent sculptural works in dialogue with his early works of assemblage. Some assemblage pieces on view show the early signs of Cave's penchant for memorialization. Two, in particular, have the qualities of private memorials. *Truss*, from 1999, comprises a series of work gloves encased in resin blocks, some of which rest inside metal frames and others on metal bases, with a rectangular set of wheeled shelves serving as a three-dimensional frame. Tube lights suspended inside the hollow center of this frame illuminate the resin blocks from behind. *Truss*, as the exhibition wall text indicates, "memorializes a friend who died of an AIDS-related illness." The work doesn't give the viewer much more information, operating instead by a private system of figurative meanings: the gloves bear an unstated relationship to an absent wearer, but the resin tells us that this is a reliquary for someone who's been lost. Backlighting casts the gloves in ghostly silhouette while bouncing off the resin for a golden penumbral glow. The work is both haunting and ethereal, evoking the cycle of death and rebirth.

Time and Again, from 2000, is similar in its approach to memorialization. While the horizons of a sculpture like *A-mal-gam* may be the monument, the purview of *Time and Again*, like *Truss*, seems to be the personal shrine. A patchwork of metal plates is stretched like a large-scale canvas, and hanging from it, is a collection of objects once belonging to the artist's grandfather, who died not long before the work's creation. The left side is full of the grandfather's tools and religious artifacts, and the right side holds a wooden chair with a small pig figurine upon it. Not unlike *Truss*, *Time and Again* conveys meaning through a kind of code. It's a system of dyads: the organic (wood) and the inorganic (metal), the natural (pig) and the technological (tools), the agrarian (pig, tools) and the industrial (metal), the earthbound (metal, tools) and the divine (crucifixes). This symbolic system creates an order of its own, one in which the life world of the grandfather's things can

Background left: Nick Cave, *Time and Again*, 2000. Mixed media including vintage metal, found objects, and wood, 96 × 192 inches. Installation view. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

Nick Cave, *Untitled*, 2018. Mixed media including a table, a carved eagle, and 119 various carved heads. 48 1/4 x 120 x 45 1/4 inches. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

persist as values. The copper disks at the base of the assemblage complete the memorial. As either cymbals or offering plates, they suggest a means of communicating with the other world.

Many of the more recent sculptural works included in "Forothermore" also feature found objects. They often also have a *memento mori* effect, though they frequently contain additional layers of meaning. Several derive that extra meaning from the way they reframe objects Cave calls Relics. These racist stereotyped figurines and other memorabilia come under other, less hopeful names (Beckwith calls them Black kitsch; some collectors and historians call them "negrobilia"), but Cave's nomenclature reflects the meaning he intends them to have through his critical *détournement*. Consider *Sea Sick* (2014), a kind of wall-hanging readymade sculpture. The centerpiece is a found object: the bust of a Black man with an open mouth, rendered in a Jim Crow racist caricature and originally marketed, the wall text tells us, as a spittoon. Next to the bust, flush with each ear, is a pair of upturned cast hands. Above the bust is a gold-colored plastic ship. On all other sides of the human figure are more found objects: oil paintings of galleons and multimasted schooners. Beckwith, like other critics, notes that these kinds of ships were used in the transatlantic slave trade, meaning that the piece situates Jim Crow racism in a longer history of subjugation and oppression.

Cave's choices here in reframing his Relic, the central found object, add humanity and pathos to a dehumanized caricature. Around the border, the helter-skelter orientation of the painted ships do suggest seasickness, as the title announces. Meanwhile, the cast hands adjacent to the Relic can be read in multiple ways. Juxtaposed to a human face, they heighten its emotional significance. Perhaps these hands are lifted in surrender or to be cast down in resignation. Perhaps they are cradling the head in pain or sickness. Maybe they are covering the ears, fixed there to block out harmful or distressing stimuli. If instead they are raised to the sky, are they held there in prayer or despair? All of these readings suggest a figure expressing anguish. Hence Cave's juxtaposition gives an emotional character to a face that had been created as an object of derision. (Another formal choice by Cave, to place the gold ship above the head and hands, adds irony and even more pathos to the possible prayer gesture: these hands are up-

Nick cave, *Sea Sick,* 2014. Mixed media including oil paintings, ceramic container, cast hands, and plastic ship, 96 × 72 × 10 1/2 inches. © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

lifted not to the heavens, it seems, but to the hull of a slaver.) "Just bringing the empathy, the sympathy, and the humanness," Cave told Beckwith, is the thrust of his recent work involving the human figure.

Another recent mixed-media sculpture elicits the viewer's empathy and connects that emotional response to the memorial genre so central to Cave's ambitions in "Forothermore." The objects comprising *Untitled* (2018) include a table, a carved eagle, and 119 miniature wooden heads that Cave says he collected from antique shops, eBay, and Etsy. The eagle dwarfs the miniature Black busts and has its open beak threateningly close to one of the few upright Black figures. The symbolism is clear: an emblem of American majesty has been reframed as an image of US state terrorism. The sculpture's pedestal, an American colonial style dining table, helps build that symbolism into an allegory of oppression: the eagle, representing the American state, rests on a base of colonialism as it preys on the huddled Black masses. The 119 Black figurines display great variety in their collectivity. Many are male, but some appear female. Some have painted eyes, and some do not. Some look like they could be portraits, while others are archetypes, including some that look like African masks. None are face down, meaning these human faces have at least some access to the realm above. We might think of them as free floating, but one has a chain affixed atop it, meaning bondage is an underlying reality. All have closed mouths, even the upright head receiving the eagle's cry, the only sign of vocal sound in the piece.

The allegory here is multileveled. Individually, these figures of Black humanity seem to receive the state's aggression in stoical silence. This is not defiance, exactly, but more like persistence—a keeping on keeping on—in the face of a threat. That persistence disarms the threat and even makes it look a little silly. Collectively, though, this mass of Black figures, carefully arranged to seem haphazard, has a more harrowing look: that of a mass grave. But notice the height of the central upright figure relative to the eagle's perch. If this is a graveyard, then it's a graveyard at treetop level, with faces oriented toward the heavens. Cave's use of scale ensures that the image, taken one way or another, is a subversively triumphal one. The sculpture's haunting intimations of death suggest this image could be a memorial to generations of lives lost under oppressive forces, but this memorial is not elegiac. Cave imbues it with a tougher emotion.

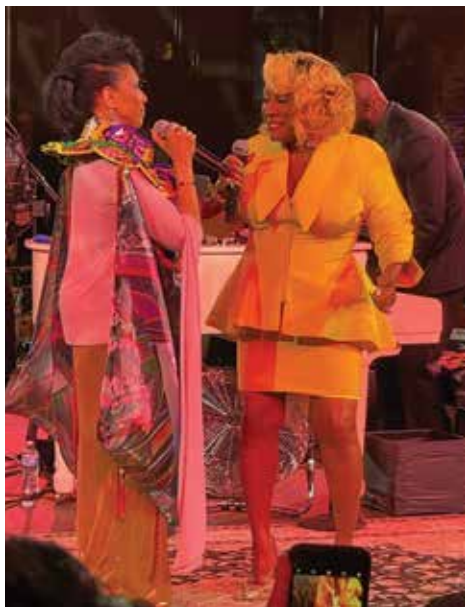
* * *

Giving artwork emotional content is a key prerogative for Cave. Walking through "Forothermore," the viewer understands that you're always meant to feel something when you see a Nick Cave exhibition. The same holds true for the exhibition's performance extension, *The Color Is*.

Staged in somewhat different iterations on three successive nights (May 21–23) at the DuSable's Roundhouse, *The Color Is* combines a fashion show with a musical performance. Invited as a member of the press, I attended the gala presentation on opening night. Trying to make myself inconspicuous among the Chicago art patrons and politicos (it wasn't hard), I took my standing-room spot in the Roundhouse with notebook in hand.

A circular stage stood in the center of the Roundhouse. The perimeter between the stage and the crowd formed a circular runway for the fashion models. During a 20-minute fashion show, models sporting a range of looks emerged one by one from a center aisle within the crowd

The Museum of Contemporary Art hosted a gala titled "ArtEdge: Nick and Jack Cave: The Color Is" on May 21, 2022, at the DuSable Museum of African American History Roundhouse. (Left) Part of the Fashion Show. (Right) Patti LaBelle performing with the band. Photos: https://chicago.gopride.com/entertainment/.



and made full-circle rotations around the runway, in both directions, before disappearing again. Sometimes two models would hug as they passed one another. Above the stage hung the installation *Augment* (2019), a mélange of large multicolored yard inflatables, including a rabbit with black spots, an orange Halloween ghost, a green dinosaur, and a heart-shaped US flag. Cave, when he eventually appeared, took the stage with his two main collaborators on the event, his brother Jack and his partner, Bob Faust. Addressing the crowd, Cave saluted what he called "this rainbow melting pot of people," declaring joyously that this is what Chicago is all about and what his practice is all about. His unique turn of phrase provided a mini manifesto for the performance and his career retrospective overall. But what did that phrase mean?

Cave's "rainbow melting pot" combines the rainbow metaphor of the gay rights movement with the melting pot metaphor traditionally used by proponents of cultural assimilation. It's a striking choice: conjoining the two terms produces some tension. Where the rainbow implies pluralism, or the maintaining of different identities in a patchwork whole, the melting pot implies a more complete fusion into a shared identity. But the choice of words also seems intentional. As we've seen, Cave uses arboreal images throughout "Forothermore" to suggest that difference and diversity don't preclude synthesis. *The Color Is* restates his commitment to a third way: amalgamation.

Perhaps it's the fiber artist in Cave that allows him to thread this needle. The fashions in *The Color Is*, totaling 80 looks in all, were created by Cave and his brother Jack at the Facility, the workshop and living space established by Cave and Faust in Chicago's Old Irving Park neighborhood. These looks weren't exactly Soundsuits, but they had some of the same materiality and aura. I saw a lot of woven moccasins, sequined boots, and beaded vests that reminded me of the ornamented trunks, if not the concealing headdresses, of Soundsuit 2.0. By and large the garments let the models—a multiracial and sometimes gender-fluid mix of professionals and nonprofessionals—show their faces. Most striking to me, though, were a couple of purplish gray braided masks that gave their wearers' faces a vine-covered look. I also took notice of a hat with a tall black wool crown and a large doily-like brim, heavy and low-hanging enough that it purposefully obscured the model's face. These looks enhanced the effect of the models' absorption in themselves and one another. The fashion show was not about audience participation, but two women standing near me did succeed in making a young male model break his expressionless composure when they sent admiring cheers in his direction.

The Museum of Contemporary Art hosted a gala titled "ArtEdge: Nick and Jack Cave: The Color Is" on May 21, 2022, at the DuSable Museum of African American History Roundhouse. (Left) Part of the Fashion Show. (Right) Patti LaBelle performing with the band. Photos: https://chicago.gopride.com/entertainment/.

Audience participation did come to the fore when Patti LaBelle and Nona Hendryx, performing as Labelle, followed Cave, Jack, and Faust on stage to close the night with their musical set. Cave has cited a number of influences on The Color Is, both in its looks and its sounds: Ebony Fashion Fair, the traveling fashion show from the Johnson Publishing Company that made couture accessible to Cave's family in small-town Missouri; the movie musical The Wiz and its Emerald City sequence, which Cave says showed him "a Blackness that was everything I could imagine"; the community-oriented high-school talent shows of his youth; and the artist's own training in dance with Alvin Ailey, beginning in his Kansas City college years. But one of Cave's cited influences stood out above the rest that May evening: the Chicago-born tradition of house music. The presence of Patti LaBelle, an icon for decades among house DJs and clubgoers, alongside her longtime collaborator Hendryx, known for her own genre-bending music and LGBTQ activism, helped bring the ritual energy of Cave's retrospective to a crescendo.

House music matters to Cave because it's a cathartic ritual. "I'm interested in working the shit out on the dance floor. And that's what house music allows," Cave told Beckwith. "And it's because there's this undescribed way in which you could exist out there—after all, there was no script, it was just everybody. Trans, Black, some whites, anybody who was ready to just let go." The gay and trans social world of house music, built on performance, offers a way to purge old identities and the freedom to find new ones. Cave's "rainbow melting pot" is just as much about release as it is about blending.

The cathartic ritual of *The Color Is* came into full effect for that gala audience when LaBelle and Hendryx sang "Can I Speak to You before You Go to Hollywood." That night LaBelle and Hendryx dedicated the 1973 song to the third member of the Labelle trio, Sarah Dash, who died just last fall. This memorial tribute was a fitting musical reprise for a retrospective exhibition that concentrates so much emotional energy not in grieving but in testifying to the enduring power of those who have been lost. Hendryx, who wrote the song, told the audience that it was about friends who had become celebrities and no longer took time to stay in touch with other creatives from their old circles. A memorial to Dash, the song also sounded to me that night like an implicit tribute to Cave. Surrounded by longstanding friends and fellow creatives at the DuSable Roundhouse, Cave showed himself to be an artist who does take the time to stay in touch with and for others—no matter how high his star rises.

Andrew Peart is an assistant editor at the New Art Examiner. He has a PhD in English language and literature from the University of Chicago. Before joining the Examiner, he edited Chicago Review and worked on staff at the University of Chicago Magazine. He lives in Chicago.

Re-imagining the Contemporary Art Museum

by K.A. Letts

In the early 21st century, art museums are finding it necessary to respond to a rapidly changing and polarized cultural landscape, with a museum audience that is ever younger, more politically and racially diverse, more demanding. Nimble and sensitive adaptation is now required from institutions that once depended upon a more homogeneous, affluent, older audience to support their collections and programs.

What is happening?

Museum planner and cultural theorist Barry Lord asserts in his 2016 book, Art and Energy, that we are in a period of profound transition, as the fossil fuel economy gives way to a new system of renewable energy in response to climate change. This will, he maintains, transform the culture. Extrapolating from that central thought, one can persuasively argue that other recent society-wide crises—political unrest, pandemics, supply chain disruptions—and now even war—are merely corollaries to this momentous transition.

With a relatively light burden of commitment to prior art forms, contemporary art museums like Detroit's Museum of Art and Design (MOCAD) are developing new paradigms of cultural experience with relative ease. The physical shape of the museum, the selection of available experiences and the stories that can now be told, describe an art community in productive transition.

Paradoxically, social unrest and economic dislocation in Detroit cleared out a space early on for experimentation. Founded in 2006 and described in the New York Times as a "radical rejoinder to a seismic shift" in the fabric of the city's economic and cultural ecosystem, MOCAD represents an intriguing alternative to the individualistic, capitalist identity of the late 20th century art museum.

Strictly speaking, MOCAD is a kunsthalle—a non-col-

Nep Sidhu, *Medicine for a Nightmare* (from the series When My Drums Come Knocking, They Watch), 2019, cotton, wool, jute, Zari, hair, steel, 222 x 108 inches. Photo: K.A. Letts.

"Ground Up: Reflections on Black Abstraction" at MOCAD, installation. Photo: Clare Gatto.

lecting institution similar to an art gallery that houses art exhibitions and cultural events. The lack of a collection can, depending upon one's point of view, be seen as either a defect or a welcome release from established aesthetics. The institution lacks the physical artifacts to demonstrate a narrative of its worldview but has the countervailing advantage of being untethered to established ways of thinking that might limit its cultural explorations. Cranbrook Museum of Art's collection in the nearby Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills, which houses a distinguished archive of objects and images anchored firmly in a mid-century aesthetic that is even now receding in the civilizational rear-view mirror, illustrates the trade-off. That retrospective view is under challenge by MOCAD's more provisional aesthetic for the 21st century. The absence of a collection might be an advantage, at least for now.

Housed in an abandoned car dealership in the city's midtown, the physical architecture of MOCAD functions as a statement of its institutional priorities. Andrew Zago, the designer of the space, intentionally left in place the raw surfaces and peeling paint of the Albert Kahn-designed structure of exposed brick and concrete block. Rather than hiding mechanical systems on the roof, he left them exposed at the entrance behind a chain link fence. The rough finishes are designed to allow adaptation and alteration of the space to accommodate art exhibitions and performances. There is a bar/coffee shop that hosts events, and adjacent to the main building a modest ranch style house, the Mike Kelly Mobile Homestead, perches on the museum grounds like a U.F.O. from the suburbs.

The four exhibitions now on view at MOCAD demonstrate the museum's priorities and testify to the interconnectedness that characterizes the art community in Detroit.

Harold Allen, *Port Bar Pigeons*, 1995-1997, acrylic and oil on canvas, 46 x 46 inches. Photo K.A. Letts.

dream hampton, *Freshwater*, video still #2. Images courtesy of the artist and MOCAD.

Ground Up: Reflections on Black Abstraction

Upon entering the museum, a group of paintings and a few sculptures from the collection of Detroit artist and collector James Dozier, entitled "Ground Up: Reflections on Black Abstraction" establishes a baseline of context and connection with the other exhibitions in the museum. Works by Carole Harris, Allie McGhee, Gilda Snowden, Charles McGee and others comprise a who's who of Detroit's contemporary abstract artists. Book of Turns by Allie McGhee and a small drawing by Charles McGee, Noah's Ark: Time Modules IV are representative examples of work by two of the city's most accomplished painters, while Dozier's own comic mixed media piece Is It What's Up Front That Counts? and Harold Allen's Port Bar Pigeons are welcome discoveries.

In an interview, Dozier expresses optimism for the future of visual art in Detroit. "Now is the best era of Detroit Art," he asserts. "There's more artists and more venues than there ever were... I feel like artists have many more opportunities now to show their work than they would have had 10 or 20 years ago." The Dozier collection serves as a reminder that Black artists have always worked productively in all visual idioms—including abstraction—even as younger creatives like Tylonn J. Sawyer, Mario Moore and Sydney G. James rediscover figuration.

Freshwater by dream hampton

Freshwater, a video created and directed by dream hampton, recently debuted in MOCAD's gallery dedicated to time-based artworks. The experimental short film poetically evokes the fluid nature of memory as it flows, ebbs, disappears and wells up from the sub-conscious. Filmed in Detroit's neighborhoods during the devastating floods of 2021, the camera travels past inundated streets, the swollen Detroit River, Belle Isle—all familiar scenes rendered strange by mist and fog. Water comes down from above and rises from underground, an inexorable force of generation and devastation. Hampton alternates her narrative of flooding basements and incipient decay with muted passages of white-clad children playing, riding in cars, stepping through cloudy water where photographs of unknown characters float and dissolve.

Freshwater tells a story of remembrance and loss. The

dream hampton, *Freshwater*, video still #3. Images courtesy of the artist and MOCAD.

mood is eerily similar to Peter Weir's 1978 film The Last Wave, with its ever-present water and its slow-moving premonitions of catastrophe. One also feels the same sense of an eternal reality undergirding everyday existence, unseen yet ever-present.

Paradox of Harmonics: Nep Sidhu

It is so vanishingly rare to see something entirely new in the world of contemporary art that a moment of vertigo accompanied my first encounter with "Paradox of Harmonics," an exhibition of sculptures, tapestries, costume designs and musical elements by Toronto artist Nep Sidhu and his extensive cast of collaborators. (These include, but are not limited to, video artist Phil Boljeu, musician Kahil El'Zabar, D.J. Mike Huckaby, Craig Huckaby, Rajni Perera and Devon Turnbull.) Sidhu, whose deep ties to the Punjabi Sikh Community and to Black popular music inform his multi-media arts practice, weaves together cultural, conceptual and technical components from his traditional background in South Asia and other civilizations worldwide with added elements of hip-hop inflected Afro-futurism. These synergistic projects range from video and installation to more traditional art forms and music, all of which express Sidhu's description of himself as "an artist in continuum, linking the ancient with the here and now."

Nep Sidhu, *Wait for Me/and/ I'll Wait for You*, date n/a. Metal and various materials, 60 x 57 x 47.5 inches.
Photo: K.A. Letts

Upon entering MOCAD's cavernous main gallery, a sound mixer flanked by two enormous amplifiers aggressively confronts the visitor, but there is something surreal about these normally utilitarian fixtures. The mixer is topped by a dish-shaped receptacle upon which a stick of incense continually burns. The amplifiers function as both sound-producing equipment and art objects. Their constituent parts, made of cast glass, metal and woven patterns, create the impression of other-worldly presences. The tracks emanating from the amplifiers combine the spoken word and instrumental music in an unquantifiable matrix, suggesting but not fully committing to a recognizable melody or mantra. There is a sense that something is being overheard and only half understood. If artists from another planet landed in Detroit, this might be the exhibition they would mount.

The central three-part installation is ringed by a group of richly colored and elaborately dyed and worked textiles and mixed media sculptures unlike anything I have seen. The two-dimensional works are collages of painted canvas interwoven with fabric components and applique embroidery. The imagery ranges from South Asian calligraphy to flat decorative elements to more conventionally pictorial passages within a single artwork. In the two largest pieces, long metal rods are installed in front of the tapestries,

Nep Sidhu, *Paradox of Harmonics* at MOCAD, installation view. Photo: Charles E. Letts.

suggesting altar rails, hung with braided and woven decorative fringes. The sculptures installed throughout the gallery include bulky assemblages of metal, clay, dirt and other elements that are richly referential but presented without specific context. They project a dream-like mood reminiscent of the early surrealist constructs of Alberto Giacometti.

MOCAD's senior curator Jova Lynne describes "Paradox of Harmonics" in a statement:

"Through material investigations of textile, sculpture, painting, video and sound, Sidhu's work seeks symbolic pathways that help to realize the formlessness of the divine. His work celebrates endless possibilities and the discovery one undergoes in searching for self-identity... Detroit embodies a spirit of cosmic vibration that is eternal. The overlaps, influences and coincidences that brought us to this moment amidst a pandemic, closing of international borders and many obstacles in between feel fateful."

Sterling Toles S(h)elves?

Detroit artist Sterling Toles is one of a growing cohort of Detroit creatives who are radically re-thinking what it means to be an artist in this place and time. His multi-media art practice encompasses music, painting and installation directed toward the goal of recovery for his immediate community. During his 6-week residency at the Mike Kelly Mobile Homestead, Toles created two bodies of work in close collaboration with friends and family battered by pandemic, flooding and economic hardship. In one grouping, figurative portraits peer out from circles in found metal sheets. In another room, he has collected industrial equipment from a decommissioned power plant to metaphorically evoke another kind of energy flowing from his spirit through the spirit of the community and back in a constantly self-reinforcing, life-enhancing flow. His sculptures and installations, rather than dwelling on the status of recycled objects as damaged or useless, re-imagine them as totems of power.

In yet another demonstration of the intricate web of connections among the artists now at MOCAD, Toles is the musician and composer responsible for the sound and score of dream hampton's Freshwater.

The four exhibitions at MOCAD right now resonate with each other—and with the museum's architecture and its public—in a kind of subtle synergy that is more of a proposition than an assertion. They suggest a developing model of museum-going that combines esthetic contemplation with entertainment, connoisseurship, and consumption. The museum lets the city in even as it reaches out to the community with an evolving vision of a shared culture that is collaborative, communal, pluralistic, multi-ethnic, spiritual.

Ground Up: Reflections on Black Abstraction will be on view until August 14, 2022. Artists in the exhibition: Harold Allen, Anita Bates, Andrew Crawford, James Dozier, Derick Gaston, Carole Harris, Jack Johnson, Charles McGee, Allie McGhee, Eric Pryor, Gilda Snowden, Chris Turner, Shirley Woodson. Curated by Jessica Allie and Daniel J. Saleh

dream hampton: Freshwater is running in the video gallery at MOCAD until August 14, 2022

Nep Sidhu: Paradox of Harmonics is on view in the main gallery until September 11, 2022

Sterling Toles: S(h)elves? was on display through June 14, 2022 in the Mike Kelly Mobile Homestead.

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Sterling Toles (from left), *Contemplation 1*, 2022. Cutout vinyl figure on Hilti gun cases from de-commissioned coal power plant, 58 x 19 x 6 inches; *Contemplation 4/Identity* (portrait of dancer, movement artist and friend of the artist Jennifer Harge) 2022. Found copper sheets, portrait acrylic on wood, 60 x 35 inches. Photos: K.A. Letts.

"To Hear the Earth Before the End of the World"

Sound Installation by LaMont Hamilton at University of Colorado Art Museum.

by Ed Roberson

At the 57th Conference on World Affairs in Boulder, CO (April 6–9), where sessions were held on everything from *The Power behind Bitcoin* to *Feeding the World Without Killing the Planet*, there was also a one-room art exhibition. "To Hear the Earth Before the End of the World" (February 3–July 16), a sound installation created by University of Colorado Art Museum artist in residence LaMont Hamilton, was the centerpiece of this year's gathering.

Hamilton, the recipient of several fellowships and awards including the Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, is a multidisciplinary artist and wide-ranging in his scope, like the topics of the conference. Yet his exhibition, curated by CU Art Museum director Sandra Q. Firmin, is as focused as a monk's room.

In a telling parallel contrast to the conference itself as a notoriously loquacious, up-to-the minute affair, "To Hear the Earth" is a large room, empty except for the four walls of panel reflecting pale, barely perceptible changes in color. Five white cubes are arranged for seating, one roughly in each corner and one at the center of the room. Four groups of speakers project the soundtrack environment Hamilton created for the room. The work is contemplative, even hypnotic to some visitors; it has the quality of quiet, timeless interiority—a listening stillness—at the center.

"To Hear the Earth" is organized around the five elements of earth, air, water, fire, and aether. According to the wall text, "hearing glaciers cracking, smelling forest fires, the mechanical cacophony of land being razed—are all

LaMont Hamilton. Photo: www.colorado.edu/

Visitors at CU Art Museum, explore the light and sound installationsof LaMont Hamilton's "To Hear the Earth Before the End of the World." Photo: Laurids Sonne.

felt on a cellular level to understand our changing Earth." A daylong sound loop for each of the elements extends the work over the period of the five-day exhibition week. Visitors come and go and come back, bringing their homework or returning for an after-yoga meditation. They are immersed in the modulated noises of nature and contemporary society that the installation interweaves with digital and instrumental sounds.

Hamilton's work "deals with the spiritual, ecological and subconscious through sound installation, performance, poetry and lens based medium," according to the wall text. The installation's "Water" segment, which I spent an afternoon hearing and rehearing, incorporates the recorded sounds of sperm whale songs, crabs in mating migration, waterfalls, water droplets, surfs, and floods. They are digitally enhanced, manipulated, and sequenced. I can't exactly call the flow a narrative, but the episodes, with their tensions and resolutions and attending emotions, were all there. As if hearing the musings of an ancient mariner, a listener can feel the current, the voyage.

Since the early discoveries of phonographic sound recording, the sounds of an occurrence have been increasingly freed from the event's happening in time. Concurrently, our repertoire of the audible has extended beyond what was earlier described as hearing. Once sound was retained and made reproducible, a noise could be made to echo dramatically, and independently of its source, as if in memory. It could be called up in recognition of an association made beyond the sound itself, as if in metaphor. Sound can even be made into an *idée fixe*, such as a theme, an anthem, and a background soundtrack that defines a place.

There are sounds of which we were never aware that we now find physically perceptible by means other than the ear—in other parts of the body or in certain bones. Certain sounds are effectively only heard electromagnetically in the body's electrochemical processes. Researchers have graphed finally what musicians have long known—that sound has emotional effect. Programmatically, E flat and D flat, for example, are associated with sadness and tragedy. Sound also has image capacity. The equivalent wavelength of a D at 588.8 Hz corresponds to the color blue, and 527.35 Hz with the color green. From there it is easily conceived that sound has lexicon.

Sound study even allows humans access to the world experience beyond our own species' perceptive and communication systems. Hamilton has arranged digitally manipulated whale and dolphin songs, otherwise inaudible bird and insect sounds, and the audible frequencies of sounds from the surfs of different beaches. He includes geological sounds too low, too long, too deep to be heard, except through the study of their individual digital ma-

LaMont Hamilton exploring an Alaskan glacier. Photo: www.colorado.edu/

nipulation. Hamilton has compiled his interdisciplinary insights into an iteration similar to a series of vignettes, a sound narrative. It is a song, a tone poem of earth, air, fire, water, and aether. His work converts sounds into environment—an architectural room of sound.

Hamilton has new instruments, new brushes with which to paint the new information these tools bring about the Earth. With them, Hamilton draws the portraits of our responses. All of these individual elements, skills, and evidences are manipulated together into a fact of their occurrence within our experience of this new form. This is the art that is created and presented here. More than an event or a happening, it is participant instigated, timed rather than chanced or accidental. It is most obviously not art on the walls. It is not even a specific attendance for which anyone paid entry. It has no commodity to possess to take away. There is no takeaway from this exhibition more valuable than the art that comes from its installation and participation.

Ed Roberson is Emeritus Professor, Northwestern University. He is the author of many books of poetry, most recently *Ask What Has Changed*, 2021 (Wesleyan University Press), and *MPH and Other Road Poems*, 2021 (Verge Publications).

Art Audience

some came in looked around at the blank walls
  turned and walked out

others came and spent time
  they seemed interested to be there

they seemed to have brought themselves
  rather than an aesthetic shopping bag

one perhaps institutionally emblazoned
  bought with Art

rather than the one carrying themselves away
  having been through an installation of sound

art a wash a bathe of
  what the folks who know healing

call de bush bath or some more formally
  see as a Bethesda or Gilead.

Ed Roberson

Two perspectives—Two Generations:
A conversation between Evan Carter and Neil Goodman

Writers have their own bias, and in a world where words do matter, what we know about them gives us a barometer in understanding their aesthetics, as differing critics often have very divergent points of view. Criticism can also be very timely, as one's generation often embraces and champions distinctively different points of view as well as similarly associated values. Both Evan and I came of age under very different umbrellas. This conversation explores some of the issues we both share and differ on, as well as reflecting on our experience as both writers and artists that have lived and worked in Chicago throughout their careers.

Neil Goodman

Neil Goodman

Evan Carter

Neil: I came of age when the Chicago imagists were synonymous with Chicago Art. In the eighties, the Chicago artworld began to shift, as there was an influx of dealers who both represented regional and nationally based artists. In most ways, we were second only to New York City (NYC), and with Art Expo originating in Chicago, we had a strong international presence. How do you see the Chicago Art world today and do you think we have lost our standing as a major destination in the artworld?

Evan: I don't think Chicago has lost its standing. Of course, I wasn't here until 2014 when I moved to Little Village from Boston. I had first heard of the Imagists from one of my undergraduate professors, Barbara Grad who studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). I got a sense that Chicago had a unique art scene but that it was somehow smaller and 'local'. I associated it with the unique art scene in Providence RI that introduced the world to the fantastical aesthetics of DIY Freakazoids like Lightening Bolt and Forcefield, the latter of which was featured in the Whitney Biennale. When I finally showed up in Chicago and went to the museums and galleries, I knew it wasn't NYC, but it was more than I had expected. And what I have come to realize is that Chicago's strong historical identity with art, politics, and activism paired with its affordability and access to space makes it one of the best places to be for a young artist who wants to take risks and make work that challenges conventional ideas.

Ed Paschke, *Minnie*, 1974. Oil on linen, 128 x 96.5 inches.
© Ed Paschke; Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

Neil: Artists have always tackled sociopolitical issues, for instance the work of Ben Shahn, and Honoré Daumier to name two. Do you think that the renewed interest in political activism has both changed the museum world as well as becoming the current canon that defines contemporary art?

Evan: Bigtime. For better or worse museums today are making huge efforts to appeal to the broadest possible audience and offer public programming and educational opportunities that bring people in from communities that, for a multitude of reasons, have been made to feel like art spaces are not for them. Furthermore, we have seen big money patrons booted off museum boards because of the industries they have built, such as the Sackler name being removed from the Guggenheim or Warren Kanders being pushed to resign from the board of the Whitney Museum. But one of the most prevalent things I see the museums (and many galleries) doing is reconfiguring the canon. So much of contemporary curatorial practice is about righting the wrongs of the past. Obviously there have been exceptions and Chicago has a fairly strong legacy of African American artists, but many of them are just now getting their due. I find this interesting on so many levels because it is elevating so much discourse not only around the ways in which we assign cultural value to artwork but also the

Ben Shahn, *Mine Disaster*, 1948. Tempera on plywood, 24 x 30 inches. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

(Left) Honoré Victorin Daumier, *The Past, the Present, the Future*, plate 349, 1834. Lithograph in black on off-white wove paper. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

way in which we are re-opening the books on all of art history and theory and asking questions about the ways in which those 'books' were written.

Neil: My very early sculptural influences were largely mid-century modernism, particularly Henry Moore, Alberto Giacometti, Brancusi, and then later the more reductive sculptors. Do you think that younger artists feel a broader sense of art history or that the long view is important in their current practice?

Evan: Sadly, I would say no. I may not fully understand your distinction between a broader sense and the long view, but I think art history plays less of a role to young artists and that (and this is not exclusive to young people) most folks these days are short term thinkers. I see so much art, mostly through the academic pipeline, that is so esoteric and speaks to such a small audience. It is my sense that many of these artists are operating under the illusion that in working within the academic/institutional art world, they are engaging with and contributing to the art historical canon. I would bet that this won't pan out to be the case. The art that stands the test of time is often controversial, subversive, and often rejected by the critics and historians before it comes to be appreciated by the larger public. Artists who strain themselves to work within the confines of the acceptable will probably have decent careers but may not fulfill the ambition of moving culture in a long-term way.

Neil: Who are the critics that have most influenced your writing?

Evan: Embarrassingly, I do not read a whole lot of art criticism and when I do it is often in the NY times. I do follow Jerry Saltz on Instagram because he is hilarious, and his feed is a kind of brilliant hybrid of performance art and art criticism. But my approach to criticism has been influenced by some folks outside of the art world space like media critic Anita Sarkeesian or film critic Amy Nicholson. Sarkeesian is a figure who has put up with a lot of misogynistic slander which I find ridiculous because she opens many, if not all, of her video reviews by saying 'we can still be critical of the media we enjoy.' Nicholson is another one whose philosophy and approach is similar as she has talked about the harshest critics being the most passionate about the thing they are critiquing. It's not that they hate the art or the artist but that they want it to be the best version of what it is.

Henry Moore, Working Model for UNESCO *Reclining Figure*, 1957. Bronze, cast in 1957, 55 x 94 x 48 inches. © Artists Rights Society, New York/DACS, London. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

Neil: Evan, you are an artist who also writes. Why do you write?

Evan: I'm an all-around creative. Writing does what art can't do and music does what writing can't do and so on in circles until the end of time. But when I was younger writing was a way to make sense of some of the visual ideas I was pursuing. Text often appears in my drawing and painting, and I love blurring those lines. I also write fiction. You are also a writer so what are your thoughts on the subject?

Neil: It gives me a broader focus and a way to consider artists and their careers. It is kind of a teaching tool for me, as the weeks that I spend on an article or review, sometimes changes my perceptive as well as gives me the opportunity to have a longer look.

Neil: In the eighties, there were any number of very good mid-level galleries. Rents were cheaper, and the artworld seemed to have a more moderate price range. The gallery world was seen as the conduit to the museum world, as that was the point of introduction. It seems from my point of view that with a paucity of commercial dealers, that artists find their way differently in today's climate. Can you comment on this?

Evan: I wish I had more experience and knowledge in that regard. But it does seem like there are more steps in the process. Artists must get noticed in school to build a network, then get grants or residencies if they haven't yet been plucked by a gallery. Then once they start getting shows, curators who like them may put them in a museum group exhibition. But it also seems that nowadays the big schools like Yale, Rhode Island School of Design, SAIC, and others, are places where people get scouted. And curators themselves bounce around more and curate across institutions. So, an artist could be making work that aligns with a particular curator's mission and that becomes a relationship which is different from the artist—dealer relationship. What was your experience like as an artist coming of age in the eighties?

Neil: The gallery world seemed to have a certain curatorial presence, as artists would often show in a variety of

Constantin Brancusi, *Leda*, 1915–1925. Marble on concrete base, 48 x 48 inches. © Artist Rights Society, New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

Richard Serra, *Weights and Measures*, 1987. Hot rolled steel, 133 x 208 x 3 inches. © Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society, New York. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

venues. As my work seemed to follow my own trajectory, I seemed largely on my own. I think certain curators, like Mary Jane Jacobs at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art brought in some amazing work which certainly changed my perspectives. For me, it was the opportunity to see a variety of work, which as a young artist was extremely important and influential. I particularly remember the Phillip Guston exhibition at the MCA, and what a large influence it was amongst so many Chicago artists, and how that introduced a very different idea of painting and figuration.

Neil: Likewise, in the eighties, both the Sun Times and the Chicago Tribune had several weekly columns focused on contemporary art. Alan Artner was also the longtime critic for the Tribune. His Friday Column reviewed gallery exhibitions and his Sunday feature focused on museum exhibitions. Most artists were aware of his bias, and he could be equally blunt as well as encouraging, and almost always challenging. In this sense, the New Art Examiner (NAE) fills an important role in reviewing exhibitions and tackling subjects that other publications might be reticent or have ceased to cover. Are there other Chicago based publications that reciprocally fulfill this mission?

Evan: I'm not aware of any, but I have not looked very hard. When I joined the NAE some six odd years ago it was being run by our current Editor and people's champion Michel Ségard as well as Tom Mullaney who is now less involved. Both were adamant that art criticism had gone soft, especially locally, and that writers were too afraid to upset people and blow future networking opportunities. Thus, the writing became not much more than promotional material and boring descriptive overviews. We wanted to change that. That is why what I mentioned above about the critics I admire is so resonant.

Neil: In the past number of years, reviews seem largely informational, and generally if a show is written about, it means the critic chooses to write about the exhibition as opposed to another exhibition because they liked it. Do you find this to be true and has criticism lost its punch, and is it valuable to write a disparaging review, and would you write a disparaging review?

Evan: My previous answer covers a bit of this. But I have and would write a disparaging review. Not out of spite or for the sake of doing so but because I want the work to go further. What ends up happening though is that there are so many art shows, many of which are uninteresting, that is better to cover the interesting ones. The reviews are not always positive, but I have been told that I am "diplomatic" in my criticism. Do you think we should be seeing harsher reviews? Why or why not?

Neil: Harsher reviews might not be the best way to frame the conversation. I prefer the more Socratic method of asking questions and see where they go. Maybe the ques-

Philip Guston, *Couple in Bed*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 81 1/8 x 94 5/8 inches. © The Estate of Philip Guston. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

tions we ask are tepid, and that could equally be directed towards ourselves as well as others. I have often seen writing as a way of extending my interests past my own studio work, as it allows me to explore ideas and connect with differing points of view. Has your writing affected your studio work?

Evan: It may make me a harsher critic of myself, but it also helps me locate my own values and push my work to reach a standard that I would expect or desire when looking at art. If you want something to speak to a large audience, that poses a greater challenge to the creative process.

But this would be a good time for me to ask you about influence. In one of your preliminary questions, you asked who my influences are. This is always something I have grappled with because I have never been able to emulate artists and artworks I admire. The closest thing I can say is that the artists whom I discovered, after the fact, were doing better versions of what I was already messing with. For example, when I started playing guitar as a teenager, I loved to make up my own random tunings and pluck the strings with found objects like marbles. I never thought this could ever be considered music until I heard bands like Sonic Youth or composers like John Cage. When I realized there were other artists that already explored things I was stumbling upon, it felt like permission to follow my own instincts. So, my influences were not people or things I was trying to imitate or emulate but simply things I could relate to. I want to know what influence means to you and how it shapes your work and process.

Neil: You pretty much end up with yourself after years of work. Generally, one idea morphs into another, and occasionally you might find a space that is more yours than someone else's. I often have tremendous respect and admiration for someone else's accomplishments, but at this point, my language and interests mostly follow my own trajectory.

Over the years, the scale of artworks has increased dramatically, as the more important the artist the larger the piece or installation. I think we have come to expect that supersizing and see that as a sign of success and importance.

In an era where we are becoming increasingly aware of our ecological footprint, what responsibility do we have as artists to be conscientious about our use of materials, as well as the future generations' expectations to care for that work?

Evan: I somewhat disagree that art is still scaling up. We saw the Art Institute of Chicago change its collection in the modern wing from a few dozen large or gigantic pieces to hundreds of smaller ones. And biennales around the world are showing more smaller artworks by diverse groupings of artists who have more cultural relevance than name recognition. There is also a contemporary movement in art to produce work that is immaterial or ephemeral, where the social experience is central to the form. In terms of the responsibility we must take for material production and consumption, I think the answer is yes we should. We produce and consume very little in comparison to other industries like food, fashion, fuel, film and television, tech, and so on. But artists are the ones who use culture to critique societies and civilization itself so yes, we do have an obligation to express the urgency to be more conscious of what we produce and consume. Not as any kind of apology for artmaking but as an example for the rest of society to aspire to.

Neil: I always thought that a museum retrospective was a result of a long career. Do you think the trend towards exhibiting younger artists is market driven?

Evan: Is that a trend? I can't think of a big retrospective of a young artist. Who are you thinking of?

But I think there is a lot to investigate in the question of the market and curatorial practice. Art is now a speculative market and exhibiting young artists could be like an "art world IPO" where institutions want to test viability for certain ideas, aesthetics, personalities, etc. It is a strange and incestuous world we live in that is driven by capital and power struggles more so than cultural and philosophical exploration.

Neil: What kind of work generally interests you to write about, and could you give a favorable review to work that is very much outside of your interest or aesthetic?

Evan: It's fairly easy for me to talk and write about painting because that is a comfort zone for me. But I have been very lucky to have received an art education that covers the breadth of media from objects to ephemera. Another critic I failed to mention is Lori Waxman, with whom I share the sentiment that art is something we experience, and that is where the criticism should begin. I always approach art with an open mind and leave any preconceived notions at the door. So yes, I could write something positive about art outside of my comfort zone. If I don't have anything positive to say it is because I did not have a positive experience with the work.

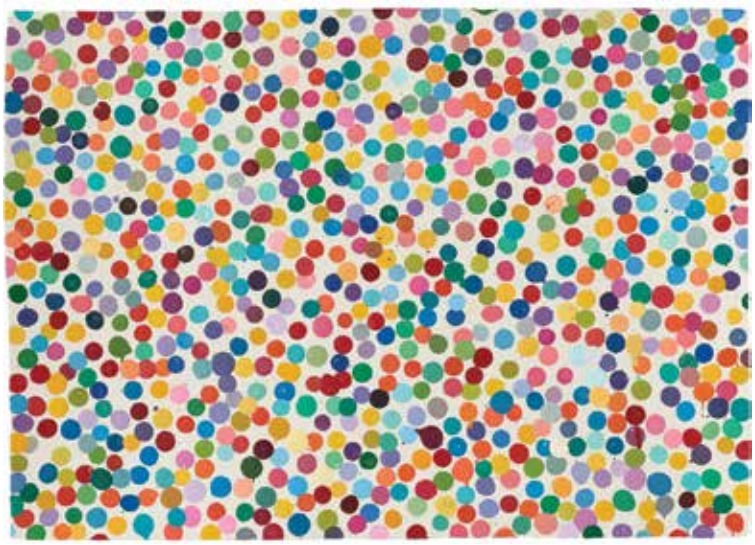
Neil: Do you imagine different forms of communication and distribution for contemporary art? What will the future look like in this respect?

Evan: I think it is already happening with social media. Instagram is a big place for artists to show their work and so much of it seems like it is made to be consumed on a screen rather than in real life. Of course, this whole non-fungible token (NFT) thing is a strange phenomenon that could become the new norm or totally flop. Beeple, who I think is the top selling NFT artist, thinks NFTs will become so ubiquitous their market value will drop, and just a select few will be top sellers. Kind of like the art world of today. But maybe the future will create a system that rejects this capitalistic form of distribution. Maybe people will form their own art economies that are more accessible and based around the exchange of goods and services rather than capital. Like a barter system.

Neil: As the NAE is Chicago's oldest art publication, how do you see its future?

Evan: The NAE is still growing, and I have been lucky to be a part of that and help shape what it has become today. I want it to keep growing and go beyond the traditional art-world. We are already beginning to include reviews of poetry and music and it is my hope and goal that we can grow our digital platform and start covering all forms of media such as film and television and even video games. There is so much interesting work being created and equally a lot of filler. I would love for us as a publication to tackle all the art forms and apply our editorial and critical philosophy to grow a community of deep thinkers and creatives. Of course, the more traditional print edition could remain a visual arts journal. I see the art world as something that stands in contrast to art in the world.

Neil: I agree, as we work both for each other and for a broader public. In this respect, the New Art Examiner certainly continues the many conversations that help define and question what we are as artists and to give a platform for an ongoing exchange of ideas and thoughts.



Damien Hirst, One of 10,000 images in "The Currency" series. Can be acquired as a painting or NFT. Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved/ DACS, London/ Artists Rights Society, New York. Photo: New York Times.

"Timely Sanctification"
at Chicago Artists Coalition

By Rebecca Memoli

"Timely Sanctification" at the Chicago Artists Coalition intertwines the works of HATCH residents Jade Williams and Gabriel Chalfin-Piney in an examination of oral history, family history, and how spirituality plays a role. Both artists use found objects to build intricate sculptures that reference memories, meditation, spirituality, and magic. Curator Cristobal Alday activates the gallery space with the installation of hanging sculptures as well as freestanding works. Pieces by Williams include rich blues which are nicely paired with the yellows found in the beeswax used throughout Chalfin-Piney's work. This material is formed into oddly shaped candles and melted over the found objects. The visual works are accompanied by sound pieces by Devin Shaffer which creates a meditative feeling throughout the space.

The Space feels full of sacred objects. Pulling together themes from Catholicism, Judaism, and adding some magic, Chalfin-Piney's sculptures interpret and conceptualize the story of Saint Seraphim and incorporate materials that are mentioned in the narrative. Small trinkets, oddly shaped beeswax candles, crab shells are arranged on various altars throughout the gallery space. Williams also incorporates various objects that have personal history tied

Gabriel Chalfin-Piney, installation view of *Maror* (Early goldenrod, littonware dish, sand, water, wooden boot, beeswax candle, wooden chair); and *Zeroah* (Littonware dish, sand, soldered crab, mountain goat, beeswax, candelilla wax, linseed oil, wooden chair), 2022. Photo: Ang Zheng.

Gabriel Chalfin-Piney, *Nostos and Algos* (two nuns). Two axe handles, wax. Photo: art.newcity.com/.

to them. It is not just any button or scarf she has collected for her artwork, but a bald eagle button from her aunt and scarves from her mother and grandmother. It seems that for both artists, objects are sanctified through a personal connection rather than a church or holy figure.

Both artists work with the concept of memory. Chalfin-Piney examines the suffering that is inherent in nostalgia with Nostos and Algos (two nuns). Nostos and Algos, Return and Suffering, are represented by two axe handles partially covered in wax. The sculpture is an interesting combination of materials but the meaning of the work and the connection to the two nuns in the story written on the adjacent wall is hard to discern.

Williams approaches memory in a more analytical way. In When I Think of Home, Williams uses cyanotype to create a large grid of blueprints. The blueprints collage together photographs and imagery that feel like a schematic for her memory of home. There are three rows of five different prints, that fill the wall from floor to ceiling. Although they are the only works on paper in the exhibition, the size of the installation gives the viewer the sense of being inside the blueprint. The layers of grids, from the negative space between the prints, to the grid pattern on larger-than-life fingernails, and the repetition of words gives the work the feeling of some sort of mystical blueprint or instructions for building a time machine. The handout for the exhibition describes it as "jump[ing] timelines in order to create an ideal world for [Williams'] younger and future selves."

Williams also creates altars in some of her sculptural pieces. At the entrance to the exhibition stands Salvation and Glory (Where Were You When I Needed You), a wooden structure built out of window frames and a ladder from her grandparents. The structure is reminiscent of a mantel in a home where sacred personal objects gather to collect dust. The gathering together of these personal objects speaks to the way objects can be sanctified by memories.

The sculptures built by Chalfin-Piney remind viewers of the mystical side of Judaism. Several works are titled after aspects of different Jewish rituals including the Passover Seder. At first glance sculptures like Beitzah, Karpas, and Oranges on the Seder Plate have a raw mystical quality

Jade Williams, *When I Think Of Home* (installation), 2022. Cyanotype collage prints on cotton paper, set of 5. Photo: Ang Zheng.

like Haitian Voodoo altars and relics which are built from found materials. The objects in these works, in contrast to Williams', feel less personal and more symbolic, but what exactly they symbolize is difficult to decode.

"Timely Sanctification" takes a very contemporary look at what is sacred. Memory is a key factor, as it can transform an object into a relic. The pairing of these artists in this exhibition works well as they have different aesthetic and conceptual approaches to the same ideas, but still come to a similar conclusion. Williams' work is easier to read and can be related to more intuitively, where Chalfin-Piney requires prior knowledge or research into theology to fully understand. Because the meaning feels cryptic it leaves the viewer asking a lot of questions. The didactic that is provided poses several of its own questions like, "Can a sacred space fit in a sock?" "What makes a holy place deserving of a souvenir shop?" "What happens when we don't get the answers we are looking for?" Although these are great questions for the artists to ponder, after viewing the exhibition they still feel unanswered.

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.

Pride Month 2022 Reviews

Anna Campbell: "Dress Rehearsal for a Dream Sequence"

By Paul Moreno

One of the challenges of art viewing is that all you get is what is in front of you. When a show is steeped in theory, historical reference, personal history, or more simply, references an average viewer may not know, the work can become impenetrable. The challenge for the artist who is working with such esoteric references is to make art, that despite its resistance to immediate understanding, is still seductive enough to lure the viewer in. This feat is accomplished with aplomb in Anna Campbell's exhibition at PARTICIPANT INC, "Dress Rehearsal for a Dream Sequence."

This exhibition is the third in a series and takes place in three "scenes." The space is filled with what the press release describes as "provisional structures begotten from a praxis of precarity, not of beauty." This alliterative statement presents a few prominent premises of this performative presentation:

The scaffolding structures that organize the space are site specific and one assumes would not be the same in another space. These scaffoldings also provide places to display a combination of found and fabricated objects that could easily stand alone beyond this installation. The scaffolding, though integral, may not be essential. The objects that Campbell makes are not reliant on the scaffolding to have meaning. But the scaffolding, in the way it occupies space and contextualizes the objects unite the objects in a sort of gestalt.

Campbell, who is an academic as well as an artist, clearly knows her stuff. Her stuff is queer history, art history, art theory, queer theory. The exhibition has a brute strength of physicality however. The scaffolding and any objects around it look heavy and hard to manage, the installation is elegant and craftsman like. If you had no idea what the show was about, the materiality, the steel and wood, the cast objects, the marquetry, the architecture, all take the viewer on an exciting journey of texture, text, images and imagination.

The heady press release reveals a pile of references that pile up like a tower of books about to topple. This

Anna Campbell, "Dress Rehearsal for a Dream Sequence," 2022. Installation view. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

may be what is meant by precarity. The precarity may also be the daunting task of putting together a show of this magnitude without blue chip gallery resources. The precarity could be the nature of working as an artist/professor/ feminist/queer in an age where all these monikers broadly speaking are increasingly suspect.

The big irony of the show, which is already filled with irony and humor, is that these precarities are a strength and from that strength springs a beauty that is hard to overlook. Anna Campbell does not hit you over the head

Anna Campbell, *Title IX*, 2022; Photos: PARTICIPANT INC.

with a mandate, rather she provides gaps where the viewer marinates in their own mysteries. There are the simple mysteries, like what does this sculpture mean, but larger ones about how we live our gender, how we perceive and speak about the gender of others, what is our history, is there an "our" history. When you feel saturated with these quandaries, however, Campbell provides something great to look at, you can always just go back to the looking.

The checklist includes twenty-one pieces, each of which stand alone, but also lend themselves as components of the larger installation. The sculpture one first sees upon entering is *Title IX* (2022). Free standing sign letters, vintage in style but made by the artist, spell out "TITLE IX." "TITLE" is atop an L-shaped scaffolding structure. The letters follow the path of a long sheet of woodgrain veneer that flows off the top of the structure and ends in a birdbeak cut resembling a long bookmark. I and X sit on wooden dollies at the bottom of the L-shaped structure. The illuminated sign suggests that TITLE IX, the federal civil rights law that protects against gender discrimination in education, is a beacon. That the TITLE and the IX are split connotes the divide that the law has created in American society. The large "bookmark" perhaps indicates this is something to come back to, or a pause for contemplation. Near this assemblage is a piece called *Ribbed Bat* a sort of hybrid baseball bat/honey dipper. This object could narratively suggest that Title IX is broken or that the premise of Title IX is based on a binary of two opposing genders which requires dismantling. *Ribbed Bat*, itself, might be a baseball bat possessing knobs of multiple bats that would be manufactured to accommodate different users based on age, size or gender. The bat does not ask you to choose or designate, it tries to avail all but perhaps due to its unconventionality, avails none, outside this dream, this exhibition.

Anna Campbell, *Title IX*, 2022. Detail of IX. Photos: PARTICIPANT INC.

Anna Campbell, "Bookmark" detail, 2022. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

This interpretation is of course all speculation but this longing for a narrative thread, a reference, or meaning, indicates of the strength of the show. The grandeur of the TITLE IX sign in tension with the demure bat; the seemingly innocuous separation of letters; the scaffolding which is so present but also just quietly keeps the letters aloft; all compel a viewer to want to know what this thing they are looking at might mean. I think of how I feel when watching a dream sequence in a David Lynch movie—Campbell evokes that feeling.

In another work, *Studiolo Gubbio model* (2022), two objects on modeling stands are pushed against one another. The first object is a black leather pillion seat from a motorcycle. The other is a wooden sculpture, a sort of inverted ziggurat. A little research revealed that the sculpture is based on the foot print of the titular Studiolo Gubbio, Designed by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, ca. 1478–82, for the Palazzo Ducale, commissioned by Duke Federico da Montefeltro. A little more research revealed that the interior of the sculpture is finished in a cherry veneer that echos the intricate intarsia marquetry found in the studiolo. I had to visit the Metropolitan Museum website, the artist's instagram, and Wikipedia to figure this out, but this is our everyday epistemology, and I feel this is a point the artist is making. How do we know things? How is information passed along? How do the things we know move in our mind?

In the photo of *Studiolo Gubbio model* on Anna Campbell's instagram, the sculpture is sitting on a 1970s TV tray. The faux bois table top of three of these TV trays hang on

Anna Campbell, *Ribbed Bat*, 2022. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

Anna Campbell, *Studiolo Gubbio model*, 2022. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

the wall of the gallery to form a piece called *Null-Channel* (2022). The description of the work on the checklist is "TV trays, loop." The artist is making a polyvalent joke here. A null channel is an electronic channel that for whatever reason has no working signal. The "loop" suggests there should be some media that plays over and over again. The joke is that there is no signal because we are looking at TV trays, not TVs. The joke is that we are in fact looking at a loop, in that each time we look, we see the same thing. The joke is also something about painting.

Each of the "wood veneer" TV trays is framed with a gold moulding that implies that these can be seen as readymade paintings. When you start to compare the "paintings" you can find where the industrially printed woodgrain repeats. It is never in the same place so each one is a little different but they are also all the same. This Duchampian gesture however twists the idea of erasing adoration of the art object to inspire a viewer to fantasize why the artist might be memorializing these TV trays. We start to wonder what crucial moment occurred in the artist's life that is now symbolized by the TV trays. The euphoria of the joke with the impossible attempt to reclaim a memory creates a slight tingling of fetish, leaving us staring at these tv trays blindly, which is kind of funny, and the cycle of the joke starts again.

In *Sondheim/Dworkin duet* (2022), the artist first provides a harrow, teeth-down, on the floor. The viewer does not immediately know if the harrow is a found object, or one made by the artist. If I assume it is found I am filled with the greasy-handed feeling of routing through old machinery. If I imagine the artist made it, I am impressed by the artist's prowess. I think the artist wants me to feel both of these sensations. I then wonder, who knows what a harrow even is.

The harrow is paired with a panel of marquetry made by the artist. On the panel a geometric pattern is adorned with flowing banners that read:

Some people got it and make it pay

Some people can't even give it away

Anna Campbell, *Null-Channel*, 2022. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

Anna Campbell (Left), *Sondheim/Dworkin duet*, 2022. Harrow and marquetry panel. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

This people's got it and this people's spreadin' it around

But someday someone will notice: that people called women were buried in a long silence that meant dissent

And that the pornographers—with needles set in like teeth of a harrow—chattered on.

The first part of this text is from the 1959 Jule Styne musical, Gypsy, with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. The second part is from the 1985 Andrea Dworkin essay, "Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography, and Equality" in *The Harvard Journal of Law & Gender*. One must ask why the artist is pairing a gay icon's lyrics about the frustrated rantings of a burlesque dancer's stage mother with a quote from a radical feminist essay about the fatal danger of pornography. Is this a joke?

I think the answer is yes and no. As a gay man, I feel that this work says something about being a woman. As a gay man, I feel I need to say I am a gay man when writing about the art of a queer woman. We are at a moment when speaking about gender in the most incidental ways can be suddenly complex. As queers we have multiple theorists, artists, writers, legislators and friends and strangers providing a sequence of conflicting ideas about ourselves and our bodies. It can be complicated to navigate these ideas and when they collide it can be devastating. If we confront the devastation there can be beauty, as we find here.

Paul Moreno is an artist, designer and writer working in Brooklyn, New York. He is a founder and organizer of the New York Queer Zine Fair. His work can be found on Instagram @ bathedinafterthought.

Anna Campbell, Marquetry panel detail. Photo: PARTICIPANT INC.

"A Counterfeit Gift Wrapped in Fire": The Introspections of Devan Shimoyama

By Michel Ségard

Devan Shimoyama is one of the leading Black artists today. His exhibitions "Cry Baby" at Pittsburgh's Andy Warhol Museum in 2018–19 and "All the Rage" at the Kunstpalais Erlangen in Erlangen, Germany in 2021 have stirred international interest in his work. Shimoyama's most recent exhibition at Kavi Gupta Gallery (Chicago) is titled "A Counterfeit Gift Wrapped in Fire."

This show of 13 pieces provokes several questions about what the artist intends. Shimoyama himself asserts:

> "Part of this show is about paying attention to omens and thinking about how mythology is integrated into everyday life. When I think of the title, I think of how it feels to give something that's fake, but mimics a more luxurious or expensive gift. It's also about humor though, and the danger of failing to look beyond the faux finish of what we think we perceive."

So, is the counterfeit gift the glitziness of his paintings that obscure a deeper meaning behind the glitter? Or is the gift the veiled, deeper meaning in his works? And where's the fire?

The questions begin to be answered as one enters the gallery and confronts *Before the Storm*, a hanging sculpture of glitter-encrusted sneakers and artificial flowers suspended from a heavy metal chain. Behind it is a huge purple face with Will Smith's sorrowful eyes, from the closing scene of the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, staring out at us. At the end of the exhibition space is another hanging sculpture, called *Cloud Break*. This piece consists of four pairs of shoes hanging over a wire. Three of the pairs are laden with glitter, and one pair of Timberland boots is left undecorated. Flowers adorn several of the boots. A pair of shoes hung over a telephone or electric wire is a symbol of gang or drug dealer territory in urban settings. Perhaps this is some of the "fire" that Shimoyama referred to.

The first two paintings in the show are based on tarot cards. *La Mort* depicts a skeleton death figure that has just decapitated someone (the artist?) The death card in a tarot deck does not signify death as such as much as it signifies change. This can be interpreted as a comment on the volatility of contemporary society. As Bob Dylan sang, "The times they are a changin.'" The companion painting to this piece is *Tempérance*, another tarot card. It is associated with balance, patience, moderation, and taking the middle road. The painting shows Shimoyama with golden rays emanating from his head and pouring water from a vial into a cup and eventually into a stream. Surrounded by flowers, the all-blue figure has white wings, a Christian symbol for an angel; and in the background on the left is a

Devan ShImoyama, *Before the Storm*, 2022, installation view. Timberland boots, rhinestones, silk flowers, epoxy resin and chain. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

Devan ShImoyama, *Cloud Break*, 2022, Timberland boots, rhinestones, silk flowers, epoxy resin and coated wire. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

yellow brick road. This painting has a superficially childlike cheerfulness and sense of optimism.

Around the corner is the painting *Winning Love by Daylight*, in which Shimoyama depicts himself with butterfly wings and holding a sunflower. There is an array of eyes around the main subject, three in the painting and four pairs on the wall along the side—seemingly stylistically referencing manga comics. Paintings of a gay man with wings is not new. The Greek painter Janis Tsarouchis used that motif extensively in the 1960s and 70s. In his work *Study for the Month of May*, Tsarouchis depicts a seated, handsome, nude young man with a defiant expression and wings and a halo behind his head. It was a clear challenge to the homophobia of the Greek Orthodox Catholic church. (See *New Art Examiner* Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 55.)

On the long wall of the gallery are, to this viewer, the most significant paintings of the exhibition. Shimoyama has done five self-portraits, all made in 2022 and each paying homage to a drag queen persona based on a popular music personality: Aaliyah, Coi, Left Eye, Patti, and Ronnie. In this series, Shimoyama explores the concept of androgyny and the role it plays in his own identity. Every one of the portraits highlight a particular aspect of femininity, illustrated by the hair style and skin color in the portrait. It's as if the artist is trying to decide who they are (or will be today) by trying on different wigs. It is a

Devon Shimoyama (left) *La Mort*, 2022. Oil, colored pencil, sequins, glitter, jewelry, silk flowers, collage, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 84 x 68 x 2 inches. (Right) *Tempérance*, 2022. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, jewelry, silk flowers, sequins, collage, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 84 x 68 x 2 inches. Photos: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

Devan Shimoyama, *Winning Love by Daylight*, 2022. Oil, glitter, colored pencil, collage, jewelry, silk flower, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 84 x 68 x 2 inches, and four vinyl wall prints. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

courageous and powerful public baring, giving the viewer a deep look inside the artist's soul. The star of this group of alter egos is Akasha, from 2021, a painting not in this show but shown at Expo Chicago 2022 in Gupta's booth. It is interesting to note that none of the figures in this show have black or brown skin. Their complexions are all shades of the rainbow, an acknowledgement that androgyny is an issue for all humans (and a subtle nod to the LGBTQIA+ community).

For a gay man, the acceptance of the androgynous part of one's being is a lifelong struggle. Coupled with the hypermasculine tradition of the Black male culture, this struggle becomes gigantic. It reminds me of two films that touch upon the subject: *Paris is Burning* from 1990 and its quasi-sequel *Kiki* from 2016. The films are about New York City drag balls, about how participants don a persona, costume and all, and vogue for an audience of like-minded individuals. That act of voguing helped give them a sense of belonging and legitimacy they so badly needed. So, by displaying this series of portraits, in a way Shimoyama is voguing for us.

On a dark purple wall at one end of the gallery are two paintings: *A Counterfeit Gift Wrapped in Fire* (the show's title piece) and *Sustheno*. They symbolize the duality of this exhibition. *A Counterfeit Gift Wrapped in Fire* depicts pairs of eyes surrounded by streaks of bright colors like fireworks. This is the glitter and glitz of Shimoyama's paintings, as colorful and joyful as a Fourth of July fireworks display. But next to it hangs *Sustheno*. The name is a play on *Stheno*, the cruelest of the three gorgons from Greek mythology. In this portrait, the gorgon snakes are part of Shimoyama's hairdo. He has become a gorgon, warning us of the delusional nature of the "pretty picture" (the kind Renoir advocated was the road to success for a painter). One snake is even about to eat one of the flowers that are dotted throughout the background. The dejected expres-

Devan Shimoyama (Left to Right) Self Portrait as Aaliyah. 2022. Oil, colored pencil, collage, Flashe, sequins, and glitter on canvas, 48 x 36 x 2 inches. *Self Portrait as Coi,* 2022. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, fabric, collage, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas stretched over pane, 48 x 36 x 2 inches. *Self Portrait as Left Eye,* 2022. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, fabric, collage, jewelry, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 48 x 36 x 2 inches. Photos: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

Devan Shimoyama, *A Counterfeit Gift Wrapped in Fire*, 2022. Oil, glitter, collage, Flashe and embellishments on canvas, 72 x 64 x 2 inches. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

Devan Shimoyama, *Sutheno*, 2022. Oil, colored pencil, silk flowers, jewelry, collage, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 72 x 60 x 2 inches. Photos: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

sion of the portrait also alludes to the difficult dilemma that an artist faces over whether or not to tell the truth in their work. The intensity of that situation is highlighted by the hellish red and orange palette of the picture.

Shimoyama is not the most technically accomplished contemporary painter. His collaged segments sometimes have signs of being less than perfectly cut out. And his painting skills are sometimes a little unsophisticated. But his sense of color is impeccable, and his ability to aesthetically juxtapose textures is unsurpassed. What he brings to the canvas, which so few contemporary artists can, is the ability to cause viewers of his work to look deeply beyond the obvious and to provoke serious contemplation on the condition of our existence. And rarely do we see an exhibition that delves so profoundly into the mind of the artist. Publicly baring your soul takes an amount of courage that very few of us have.

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.

Devan Shimoyhama, *Self Portrait as Patti,* 2022. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, fabric, collage, jewelry, sequins, Flashe, acrylic and embellishments on canvas, 48 x 36 x 2 inches. *Self Portrait as Ronnie,* 2022. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, fabric, sequins, collage, acrylic, Flashe and embellishments on canvas stretched over panel 48 x 36 x 2 inches. Photos: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

Devan Shimoyama, Akasha, 2021. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, acrylic, costume jewelry, rhinestones, and collage on canvas stretched over panel, 72 x 72 x 1 1/4 inches. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery.

"Subscribe: Artists and Alternative Magazines, 1970–1995"

by Denny Mwaura

There's an appetite that mainstream magazines offer us, namely a desire for a good life. Flip through publications like *Architectural Digest*, *Harper's BAZAAR,* or *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, and in there lies a coercive force that drives our cultural attitudes. In those glossy images and articles, celebrities, singers, and political leaders draw the contours of their lives in a fashion that induces a feeling of wanting some proximity to their economic power and social experiences.

In our capitalist society, the material benefit of acting upon this feeling—say by subscribing to a magazine, service, or brand—is to be absorbed into broader popular culture. We become held together by a desired relation, a "moral-intimate-economic" activity that enables us to consent to the ruling class's interests.1 Though consenting to their interests might, sometimes, conflict with our personal morals. The influences that power regimes have on our social, personal, and political life were defined as cultural hegemony by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci, a thinker of social relationships, believed dominant groups in society govern and determine what normalcy is to subordinate groups through media.

Normalcy as defined by mass media and other social conventions is always a point of struggle. During the 1970s, a group of underground magazines emerged out of cultural resistance against the omission of marginalized narratives—queer, trans, Black, Latinx—in the publishing industry. As a means of survival and recognition, they intervened with dominant culture to represent themselves on their own terms. "Subscribe: Artists and Alternative Magazines, 1970-1995," an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, surveys this history and the communities that formed and shifted British and American publications.

The show, as organized by Solveig Nelson and Michal Raz-Russo, is an arrangement of over 130 magazines displayed as front and two-page spreads in glass display cas-

"Subscribe: Artists and Alternative Magazines, 1970–1995," installation view

(Left) Cover of *i-D* magazine, September 1980 (no. 1). (Center) Cover of *OUT/LOOK* magazine, Summer 1992 (vol. 5, no. 1, issue 17). Private collection. © E. G. Critchton and Jeffrey Escoffier, Founders, *OUT/LOOK* Magazine. (Right) Cover of *THING*: She Knows Who She Is magazine, Spring 1991 (no. 4). ©THING Magazine. Photos: Art Institute of Chicago.

es. From known publications—Andy Warhol's *Interview*—to zines including Vaginal Davis's photocopied zine, *Fertile La Toyah Jackson* and Robert Ford's *Think/Ink*, "Subscribe" is compelling in underscoring queer histories, AIDS activism, and alternative exhibition spaces.

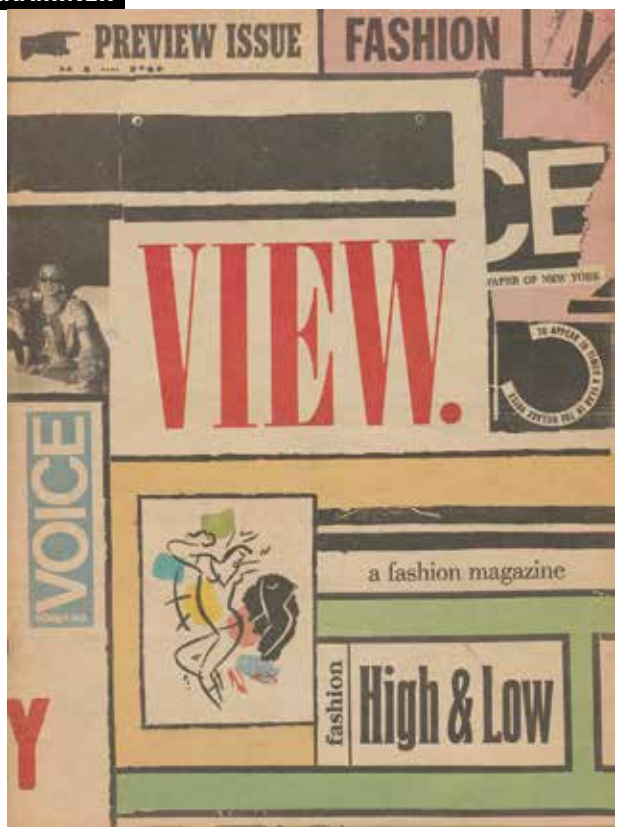
Enter right of the gallery and three rows of *i-D* magazines invite you to its early retro, pop-colored issues. Established in 1980 by Terry Jones, a former art director for British Vogue, *i-D* has sought both underground and mainstream talent in the music and fashion industries. On display is the first issue, whose high-contrast cover (large hot red 'i-D' letters sit against a black background) detail the magazine's straightforward attitude towards its brand identity and content. Its column "Straight Up" characterized this in its representation of street-casted, full-body portraits of London's working-class and students. In the third issue, a young Isaac Julien—who today is renowned for his film *Looking for Langston*, poetic meditation on Langston Hugh's life as a Black gay man—is pictured wearing an oversized plaid blazer and complemented by short descriptions of his favorite clubs and where he bought his attire.

Magazines are another medium artists employ as an alternative space to experiment with conceptually and strategically consider display methods. Barbara Kruger's art direction for the San-Francisco-based counterculture magazine Rags offers a glimpse into this approach and her early editorial career. Published between June 1970 and July 1971, the short-lived magazine was the venue for Ed Ruscha's debut of his photo series "Tanks, Banks, Ranks, and Thanks" and Peter Hujar's portraits of Ara Gallant, a hairstylist and gay photographer known for trendsetting the "flying hair" look in editorial shoots during the 1960s and 70s.

Chic 1970s street styles of New York City are blithely animated in the works of Hujar and Jamal Shabazz. While Hujar is revered for his richly tonal black and white portraits of cultural producers like Susan Sontag and Isaac Hayes, "Subscribe" reveals another, lesser-known aspect of his practice through a digital slideshow of an unfinished street style fashion shoot.

Elsewhere, in Jamal Shabazz's photographs, everyday performances of a Black cool are enacted through hand signals, enigmatic poses, and dress. Shabazz's subjects, composed of individual and group portraits, gesture their selfhood and tastes by donning Adidas shoes, Kangol bucket hats, and boomboxes. Looking at these images provokes the thought of listening to them and wondering what they could have been listening to. Privileging the mundane and intimate, Shabazz also captures intimate, social activities such as two lovers kissing in a corner with their backs turned against us. Some photographs are displayed on a wall in plexiglass frames, though a photo album next to the two indicates how they were originally preserved. Their saturated color and print quality carry a nostalgic character that brings to mind what you might find in a family photo album.

The staggering domination of magazines incites a desire to gloss through them as one would at a library, or perhaps to collect them for archival purposes. The overwhelming text and images are disrupted by four videos by American photographer Nan Goldin, Ghanian-Russian photographer Liz Johnson Artur, British impressario Malcolm McLaren, and American artist and journalist Glenn Belverio. Out of all—Goldin's and Artur's being visual essays—Belverio's work, a piece titled "One Man Ladies," stands out for its humorous social critique of compulsory heterosexuality and mainstream feminism during the 1990s. The parodic 29-minute episode takes place in New York City's streets, where Belverio's drag persona Glenda Orgasm and the performance artist Vaginal Davis talk to white women about their relationships and marriages. Guided by Laura Schlessinger's book *Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*, Orgasm and Davis consider, in a satirical



(Left) Cover of *View: A Fashion Magazine*, April 1985 (Preview Issue). © Yolanda Cuomo. (Right) Cover of *The Face* magazine, March 1985 (no. 59). Photography © Jamie Morgan. Photos: Art Institute of Chicago.

manner, what heterosexual women must do to have a successful marriage: the performers splice their advice from and to women—the catchy phrase "third finger, left hand" suggests the secure commitments marriage offers—with clips of Schlessinger justifying her conservative views in a live-audience interview.

There are pleasant surprises, like writer Hilton Als's and artist Darryl Turner's collaboration for Bomb magazine. For the 1992 issue, Als and Turner produced "Minority Pin-Ups," a four-page spread of collaged images and texts sourced from their personal archive and a rejected photographic essay Diane Arbus had pitched to *Esquire* in 1965. Among the featured and many marginalized subjects Arbus photographed in her oeuvre was Stormé DeLarverie, a butch lesbian and drag king who, as legend has it, threw the first punch at the Stonewall Uprising. Als's and Turner's novel approach to magnifying exclusion and difference was later picked up as a feature column for Vibe. The two produced "Minority Pinup" at the Quincy Jones–founded music and entertainment magazine where they imaged Black and Latinx models as movie stars in still frames.

Exhibition curators Solveig and Raz-Russo also underscore the ways magazines demystified the AIDS epidemic during the 1980s. At the time in New York City, activist groups like Testing the Limits deployed video as a vehicle for educating the public on the epidemic and to historicize ACT UP's demonstrations. On a two-page spread in *The Face's* April 1987 issue, British science writer Marek Kohn notes, "The definition [of AIDS] has evolved along with the epidemic, beginning with the first reports of unusual illnesses among gay American men in the summer of 1981. It would take two or three years more to find the virus responsible, and it will be another 20 or 30 before the full extent of the havoc the virus can wreak is understood." Reading this text 41 years later, during a period that has brought us all the way to clinical trials for an HIV vaccine, the viewer begins to see in the legacy of alternative magazines a history of protest and progress, one in which the stakes can sometimes be—for many, myself included—a matter of life or death.

Denny Mwaura is the Assistant Director of Gallery 400, UIC. Exhibitions and public programs he has organized and supported include "A Species of Theft" (2022), "Crip*" (2022), and "Young, Gifted and Black: The Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection of Contemporary Art" (2021) at Gallery 400; "Malangatana: Mozambique Modern" (2020) and "Igshaan Adams: Desire Lines" (2022) at the Art Institute of Chicago.

1. Lauren Berlant, Cruel Optimism. (Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

Expo Chicago 2022 Reviews

Painters Feel the Boom

By Evan Carter

The 2022 iteration of EXPO Chicago does what I have come to expect it to do. In unison it showcases a not quite modest swath of what contemporary art has to offer while also revealing the character of the market that elevates this work to its supposed cultural viability and value. To me EXPO has often betrayed its own inherent vice that is the tension it creates between cultural capital and monetary capital. However, this year it was somewhat more interesting to me than it has been in the past, primarily because it seems to no longer want to hide this aspect of its character.

I may have limited experience with EXPO Chicago having only visited most of the events since 2015 and from what I have heard past iterations of this art fair have been bolder, more avantgarde. What marks this particular year's showing as being more interesting are two factors: the strength of much of the work, and the almost crystal-clear transparency through which we can see the dominant force of capital. Let's start with the latter.

Like I said, I have only been visiting EXPO since 2015 and am not really counting the online only version we recently had in April 2021. What I do recall from past iterations is the spectacle of it all. I think it was my first or second visit that featured a large colorful sculpture by Jessica Stockholder constructed of plastic laundry baskets that seemed to touch the three-or-four story high ceiling. It was a piece that simultaneously indulged in the grandiose spectacle of the art fair while also, probably more discretely to most of the visitors, poked holes in the absurd scale to which culture is converted into commerce. This year we had little to no spectacle. 2022 was all business.

This was apparent from the lack of larger works that take up a lot of space and are maybe a tough sell, if even for sale at all. It was also apparent by the fact that it was not just large sculptural installations that were missing, but sculpture itself was largely absent. And the few that were there could easily be packed into a crate and shipped or even fit in the trunk of someone's car. In other words, EXPO 2022 was almost all painting.

Throughout my career as an artist (and you could hardly call it that, really), I have heard that painting is the privileged medium. It sells. It's what people want. It is the most market ready. I never doubted it, but if I had, EXPO 2022 would have changed my mind at the drop of a hat. People want to buy art more than ever it seems and there was no way that a gallery was going to come up short. And when it comes to art, cubic feet are a valuable thing, which brings me to what also seem to be two more stark omissions. There were notably fewer booths featuring artwork from local art programs, which I'm sure generate less revenue but at least create an opportunity for fresh grads to cut their teeth on sales and the art fair experience. The other omission is in the lack of socially anchored and time-based artworks such as performance or interactive installation work. I have always made a point to trot up to the upper level banquet rooms of the expo center to see what kind

Terron Cooper Sorrells, *Bill of Sale*, 2022. Oil on Canvas, 84 x 120 inches. Photo: Steve Turner Gallery.

Pieter Schoolwerth, *Get in Here #1*, 2018. Oil, acrylic, and giclée print on canvas, 98 × 72 inches. Photo: Petzel Gallery.

of weird stuff is going on. This time there were no neon tubes suspended from wires or people in colorful pajamas writhing on the floor. Instead, I just found that these rooms were now filled with crates of artwork. I assumed it was storage until someone sitting at a table told me it was more shopping. Any potential buyer could come up and browse a catalog of what was in storage. You did not have to do your shopping in the gallery booths alone.

I do not recall if that was the situation in more recent years. I have fresher memories of the more interesting installations and performances that would occupy these spaces for the few days of the fair. To me, even if the work was nothing to write home about, they lent more credibility to the art fair as an "exposition" into what is happening in contemporary art. It may have been dominated by sales and wealth creation, but at least, there was a space to showcase ideas outside of the traditional media. That being said, there was no shortage of ideas hanging on the walls this year.

Though the market may be unabashed in its power this time around, it is at least circulating a vibrant array of gifted creators who have things to say. Never before at EXPO have I gotten a sense that so much of the work was honest, curious, challenging, and aesthetically exciting. Again, it was mostly painting, for which I am a sucker. But whereas in the past, I have quickly gotten bored and exhausted, this time around I found myself circling back to see work that got my attention. And there was more of it than usual.

A few things have become clear in recent contemporary painting. The figure is making its way back in, and the artists being elevated are not as white and male as they used to be. These two characteristics mingle in interesting ways, and this EXPO provided an interesting sample of how. For starters, in spite of the re-introduction of both figuration and the human figure, there is a distinction of how the figure is depicted. A kind of realism or naturalism is present in images where Black and African American figures are being depicted. Pieces like Terron Cooper Sorrells's *Bill of Sale* (Steve Turner Gallery) vividly depict three black women working on an intricate quilt while three other (mostly) white brokers stand by discussing the inevitable acquisition of the quilt. The piece speaks volumes on the current state of race and capital in America, and it also takes a far less subtle jab at the art world than anything else I have seen at EXPO, laundry baskets included.

I saw a fair amount of work that continues the project of representing the black community through realism, which is part of an American Renaissance in contemporary art. This is not to say that other figurative work is vacated of meaning though. Orkideh Torabi, an Iranian born artist represented by Half Gallery, has a series of paintings that, while playfully, tackle serious issues of masculinity and sexuality by depicting images of men that may not go over well with more conservative audiences.

Another figurative theme I picked up on had more to do with stripping identity away from the figure rather than shining a spotlight on it. Alienation in the modern, digitized world seems to be making its way into the collective consciousness of artists. I do not know how some of these artists identify, but I have pondered in recent years the degree to which white artists making figurative work are not burdened with a sense of urgency to feel seen and are instead afforded the privilege of exploring broader themes of what it means to be human. Perhaps we are seeing this now in works like Pieter Schoolwerth's *Get in Here #1* (Petzel Gallery) in which figures lack clear signifiers of identity and whose faces are lost to a kind of pixelation. The piece materials listed are oil, acrylic, and inkjet on canvas, bringing the element of technology into the process as well as the content.

Both the more transparent role of capital and the quality of the work were a refreshing surprise. Even the abstract painting was more varied and skill based than what I am used to seeing at EXPO. I found myself contemplating the nature of art more than the nature of capital, and arrived at thoughts about how art changes and evolves during trying times. Coming out of what we hope is the worst of the pandemic to face political turmoil around the globe, as well as war and genocide in Ukraine and beyond, it is no wonder that artists are generating work that has weight and meaning. Now all we can hope for is that this kind of cultural production will have some positive net effect on the near future. Fingers crossed.

Evan Carter is a visual artist and assistant editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He joined the team in 2017 while earning an MFA from the University of Chicago and has been covering arts and culture in the city and beyond ever since. He is invested in the creative community and its capacity to make meaning and reveal truth in everyday life.

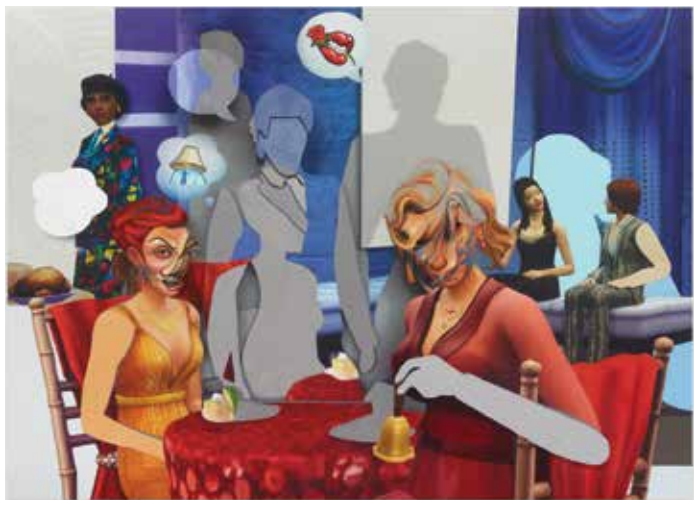
Figuration's Divergence: A Cultural Turning Point?

By Michel Ségard

Expo Chicago 2022: At Spinello Projects' booth, Jared McGriff shows us a trio of ordinary Black men, one in a wheelchair, spending time together. Titled *Increasing Odds by Trying*, this large oil on canvas from 2021 is loosely rendered in a sketchy style that helps bring out the humanity of each of the three men. There is no bravado, no grandiloquence in his images—just homey honesty.

At Petzel Gallery's booth, Pieter Schoolwerth's *Shifted Sims #14 (Luxury Party Stuff)* tells a different story. A group of women are attending a party. Their faces are grotesquely distorted in a Baconesque sort of way. A Black woman stands in the background (a servant?). One of the women in the foreground is ringing a bell, hinting at a stark power dynamic and the racial discrimination present in the white middle class. The shadows of two men lurk behind the seated women, almost like ghosts. There is no empathy in this image. It is all vulgarly nouveau riche—a biting criticism of the structure of our present-day culture.

These two pieces demonstrate the major divide found in the figurative work shown in this year's fair. And the divide seems based on the artists' race. For the most part, the figurative work shown by Black artists concentrates on their place in history and their *personhood*. The faces in their works are always seen, and figures are presented as individuals, not just as place markers. For example, Stan Squirewell, shown by Claire Oliver Gallery, depicts contemporary Black people in the costumes of white middle-class attire from the 1800s, employing an elaborate collage technique. Gary Burnley has done similar work that is not as ornate (*New Art Examiner* Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 33–35). Allouche Gallery showed three large pieces by Frank Coffie (*Honorable Steps*, *Couple of Times*, and T*he Watch Is Not Over*, all from 2021) that also focus on the individuality of the subject, but in a more abstract way. In a more realistic approach, James Everett Stanley's portraits in traditionally rendered oils were shown at Hirschl & Adler Modern. In *Land of Fools*, he captures the expression—character, mental state—of his subject; the painting feels alive and reminds you of someone you know. Yet the



(Top) Jared McGriff, *Increasing Odds by Trying*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 120 x 195 inches. Photo: Spinello Projects. (Bottom) Pieter Schoolwerth, *Shifted Sims #14 (Luxury Party Stuff)*, 2020. Oil, acrylic, inkjet on canvas, 80 x 112 inches. Photo: Petzel Gallery.

Frank Coffie, (Left to Right) *Honorable Steps*, 2021. Oil and embroidery on canvas, 83 × 47 inches. *Couple of Times*, 2021. Oil and embroidery on canvas, 83 × 48 inches. *The Watch Is Not Over*, 2021. Oil and embroidery on canvas, 83 × 47 inches. Photos: Allouche Gallery.

disjointed background in his pieces creates a sense of unease that conflicts with the familiarity of the portrait.

In a political vein at NOME Berlin, Dread Scott, originally a Chicagoan and attendee of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, showed more aggressive imagery. In *Pirate Jenny (Silver)*, an attractive, smiling young Black woman with her arms crossed stands in front of an image of a pirate ship on her left and, on her right, images of a police car (all in red) being burned in a protest demonstration. This was the most overtly political piece I encountered at the fair. At Steve Turner gallery, Terron Cooper Sorrells showed a large canvas, *Bill of Sale*. It depicts three Black women finishing a quilt, while in the background, a white woman and two businessmen discuss the purchase of the piece. The racial divide and implied inequity dominate the image.

An outlier in this selection of figurative works by Black artists is Devan Shimoyama's *Akasha*, shown by Kavi Gupta Gallery. In this large square piece, Shimoyama depicts himself as a drag queen, replete with an elaborate headdress encrusted with gold, precious stones, and feathers. The work is primarily in green and gold with Shimoyama's signature glitter and jeweled eyes. Here we encounter the otherworldly life of a gay Black man in our contemporary society, one who only feels comfortable in a self-manufactured fantasy world—not the type of discrimination that we are used to facing. But even with this make-believe personage, we feel this person's inner struggle coming through. Derrick Adams's diptych print *Interior Life (Man & Woman)* at Michael Steinberg Fine Art was another outlier. In these pieces, the woman is dressed in a man's suit and the man is dressed in a femine paisley garb. The artist seems to be acknowledging that there is a degree of androgyny in all of us.

James Everett Stanley, *Land of Fools*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. Photo: Hirschl & Adler Modern.

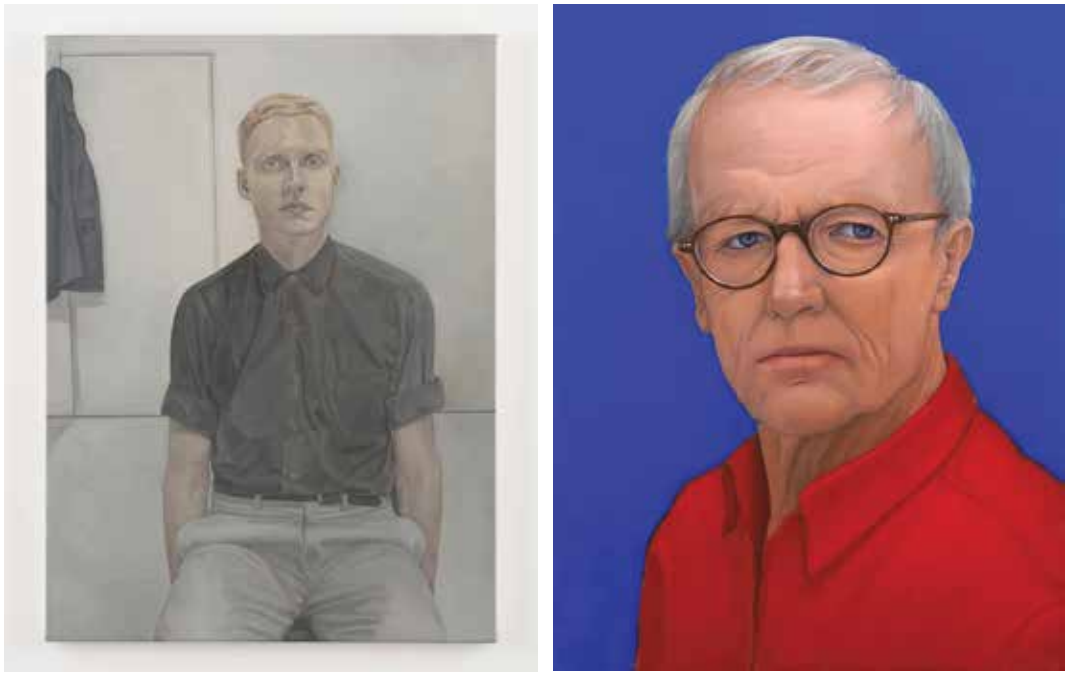
Dread Scott, *Pirate Jenny (Silver)*, 2022. Screen print on canvas, 56 × 84 inches. Photo: NOME, Berlin.

Notably missing from this year's fair is any work by Kehinde Wiley, the artist who painted President Obama's official portrait. He is famous for presenting ordinary African Americans as iconic figures surrounded by elaborate vegetative backgrounds, all done in a highly realistic style. Neither his New York nor his Los Angeles galleries showed up at this year's Expo. And Kerry James Marshall, a Black figuration superstar who taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago for 13 years, was sparsely represented, with three small pieces by Lusenhop Fine Arts. Could it be that, because his major works now sell at auction for millions of dollars, his larger pieces are too "rich" for this fair?

Figuration done by non-Black artists had a significantly different focus. Figuration by non-Black artists is more surreal, abstract, or hyperrealistic, and often carries a sense of alienation. For example, Gilliam Carnegie's *S,* shown by Cabinet Gallery, is a meticulously rendered oil on canvas of a young man, done mostly in muted grays and tans. But it is a mug shot, not a portrait. There is no personality in the piece; it could be a photo for a driver's license. William Beckman's *Self Portrait in Red on Blue* at Forum Gallery is the closest to a traditional portrait that I encountered at Expo. Here the somewhat dour expression of the artist is clearly discernable. Both pieces have a distinctly somber tone.

Then there is the use of the figure as a symbol for some cultural trait. An artist who goes by the name of Vassilis H. at Allouche Benias Gallery from Athens, Greece showed a piece called *Adonis*. This highly simplified rendering of a bodybuilder standing in front of the Acropolis is not a painting of a person but of a cultural ideal/tradition. The same dynamics occur in Salah Elmur's *Bride and Groom,* a

(Left) Devan Shimoyama, *Akasha*, 2021. Oil, colored pencil, glitter, acrylic, costume jewelry, rhinestones, and collage on canvas stretched over panel, 72 x 72 x 1 1/4 inches. Photo: Kavi Gupta Gallery. (Right) Derrick Adams, *Interior Life (Man & Woman)*, 2019. Pigment print on Hotpress Published by Eminence Grise Editions; Printed by Andre Ribuoli; 24 x 18 inches. Photo: Michael Steinberg Fine Arts.



(Left) Gilliam Carnegie, *S*, 2016. Oil on canvas, 31 x 23 inches. Photo: Cabinet Gallery. (Right) William Beckman, *Self Portrait in Red on Blue*, 2022. Oil on panel, 21.12 x 16.25 inches. Photo: Forum Gallery.

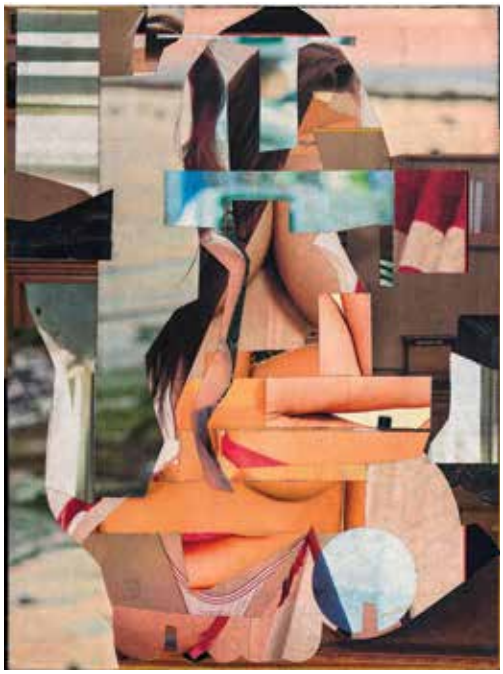
diptych shown at Martin Arts Projects. The Egyptian artist presents paintings that symbolize the marriage traditions as practiced today. They are not about individuals; the figures are place markers that illustrate how people fit into their culture, much as religious figures are depicted in stained glass church windows.

Another approach to figuration by non-Black artists is the fragmentation and abstraction of the figure. Moris at Rolando Anselmi showed *Lashidas 10*, a small mixed-media piece that suggests the body of a woman but is made of collaged body fragments that do not resolve into an actual figure. Sarah Dwyer at Jane Lombard Gallery had a piece that, although highly abstracted, does resolve into an actual figure, but of uncertain gender and in a very sketchy, soft-edged style. *Playing at Chauvet* is disturbing; the figure seems to have two heads (one on a platter?), and the cultural context is unclear. Is the artist referring to the prehistoric paintings in the French cave by that name?

Then there are the cartoony paintings by Chris Akordalitis from Cyprus at Dio Horia Gallery. *Sleepless Night* is a charming picture of a man in a contorted position and unable to get to sleep. Its humorous and slightly erotic tone speak to an event in life, not an individual.

Daata presented a more sinister interpretation of life incidents in a still from a video performance by Rosie Gibbens called *The New Me*. Gibbens is costumed in a

(Left) Vassilis H., *Adonis*, Photo: Allouche Benias. (Right) Salah Elmur, *Bride and Groom*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 74 x 26 inches each panel. Photo: Martin Projects.



(Left) Moris, *Lashida 10,* 2018, Mixed media on canvas, 15.7 × 11.8 inches. Photo: Rolando Anselmi. (Right) Sarah Dwyer, *Playing at Chauvet*, 2021. Oil, oil bar, and pastel on canvas, 29 1/2 × 24 inches. Photo: Lombard Gallery.

robotic-looking outfit, on which she has spilled a plateful of food, suggesting the motional limitation of robotic entities. It also suggests the total elimination of individual thought or emotion. Descending to the outright infantile, Allison Zuckerman at Art for Change showed *Sunshine Delight*, a print on canvas. This post-pubescent female is surrounded by birds, bunnies, and insects. She has oversized eyes and lips rendered in exaggerated, oversaturated colors, especially the purple, and is in an old cheesecake pose from 1940s girlie calendars. In a similar sexist mode, Poligrafa Obra Gráfica presented Miles Aldridge's five piece series titled W/T. In *Venus Etcetera (after Veronese)*, a Barbie-like model unsuccessfully tries to cope with housekeeping. The one pictured here is lying exhausted on a couch in a disheveled room, dressed in a scanty negligee, and entangled in a vacuum cleaner hose. The other four images in the series are equally adolescently sexist. One can only presume that all three of these artists are commenting on the continuing sexual objectification of women in our society.

One figure that is no slave to the male gaze is Su Richardson's *Travelling Man with Bag*, shown at the Richard Saltoun Gallery booth. This tall, crocheted nude male figure has his tongue sticking out but no other facial features, except for dark stringy hair. His body has two distinguishing features: his nipples and his genitals. The rest

(Left) Chris Akordalitis, *Sleepless Night,* 2022. Oil on canvas, 56.7 × 47.2 × 1.6 inches. Photo: Dio Horia Gallery.
(Right) Rosie Gibbens, *The New Me*, 2022. Video Still. Photo: Daata Gallery.

(Left) Allison Zuckerman, *Sunshine Delight*, 2022. Print on stretched canvas, 30 × 24 inches. Photo: Art for Change. (RIght) Miles Aldridge, *Venus Etcetera (after Veronese)*, 2021. From the series: W/T. Screenprint in colors with silver ink, 43.75 x 59.75 inches. Photo: Poligrafa Obra Gráfica.

of the body is a flat, uniform crochet stitch. Next to the figure is a bag with a shoulder strap. There is no hint as to who he is, where he has been, or where he is going.

What I saw at Expo Chicago 2022 was the significant increase of figuration in the works presented. But there was a divergence into two broad categories, mostly based on what seemed to be a racial divide. Black artists tended to concentrate on the inner person of their subjects, on the reality of their subjects, and on the position of their subjects in our society. It was interesting that two Black artists, Derrick Adams and Devan Shimoyama, dealt with the issue of human androgyny, a critical issue in our age of growing LGBTQ+ awareness. Most of this work was hopeful and ennobling. My favorite piece in the entire fair was Jared McGriff's *Increasing Odds by Trying* because it embodied these sentiments, even down to the casual painterly style.

Non-Black artists tended to move toward an iconographic style that they used to depict cultural stasis or to portraying a dehumanized, emotionally empty cultural environment where the individuality of the subject is irrelevant. They only showed us a world of alienation and make believe, which was ultimately depressing. The most depressing work was Miles Aldridge's W/T series, which depicts woman as little more than a blow-up doll. Unfortunately, alienation is the reality of much of the white middle class and has been so for more than half a century.

It seems that figuration is headed in two directions: one is the expression of confidence, dignity, and hope for the future, as seen in figurative works by Black artists; the other is the expression of alienation, existential angst, and the desire for cultural stasis, as pictured by non-Black artists. Which would you rather have hanging on your wall?

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.

Su Richardson, *Traveling Man with Bag*, 1979–80. Hand-dyed crochet cotton and lurex yarn, 78.75 x 37.4 x 3.5 inches. Photo: Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Chicago Art Expo 2022: Getting to the Story

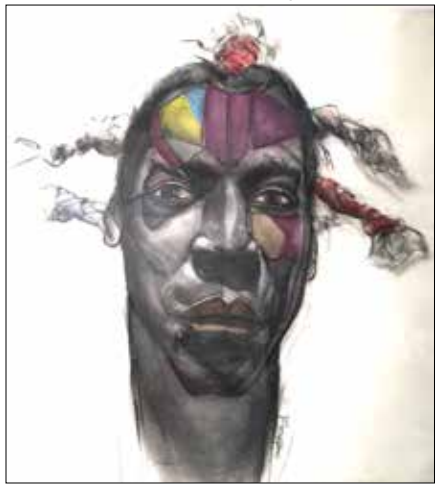
By Diane Thodos

Whenever writing about the gobsmacking variety of art that Expo Chicago dishes up, there is no way around being forced to choose what story you are going to follow. It can be exhausting to cope with the mind-numbing horde of images, serving up large amounts of kitsch and glitter mixed in with quieter works that call for private concentration.

I cannot help feeling weary of the predictable production of endless novelty tailored to feed overheated market appetites. Truly we no longer have art movements, but art markets—which are inimical to contemplation, critical interpretation, analysis, skill, and a sense of history. Still, every year I am tempted to sort through Expo's offerings to find the thread of a story that is able to glean something about our current cultural situation. It is worth the challenge to try and peel away the spectacle and institutional framing of Expo to give an alternative view.

For the last few years there has been an explosion of young Black artists who are heavily promoted by high-level galleries. To what degree does it reflect an actual cultural shift of awareness about Black consciousness in the larger culture? I decided to start with the work of older artists as a means of understanding the present. Elizabeth Catlett's *Negro Es Bello* (1970) reflects a monumental solidity expressed through the graphic tradition of Mexican muralist art. The faces in Kerry James Marshall's *Untitled (Man)* (2017) and *Portrait of a Black Man in a World of Trouble* (1990) make bold eye contact with the viewer, directly expressing critical self-consciousness about Black identity and self-empowerment. These themes bring to mind aspects of Marshall's mentor and former teacher, the social realist artist Charles White. Both Catlett and Marshall are grounded in traditions of social realism dating back to the 1930s, which is significant to how they use the figure to

(Left) Elizabeth Catlett, *Negro Es Bello* (1970). Color lithograph on paper, 27.75× 21.5 inches. Photo: Lusenhop Fine Art. (Center) Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Man*) (2017) detail. Two color woodcut on paper, 24 x 18 inches. Photo: Lusenhop Fine Art Cleveland; (Right)*Portrait of a Black Man in a World of Trouble* (1990., Acrylic on burned American flag mounted to rag board, 10 × 8 1/2 inches. Photo: artsy.net.



(Left) Jesse Howard, *The Emergent of A Black Man*, 2022. Charcoal, pastel, graphite, 30 x 30 inches. Photo: Bert Green Fine Art. (Right) Frank Morrison, *Respect the Process*, (2022). Oil and spray on canvas 60 x 30 inches. Photo: Richard Beavers Gallery.

express a deep awareness of cultural politics and Black identity.

Frank Morrison's *Respect The Process* (2022) and Jesse Howard's *The Emergent of a Black Man* (2022) partake of this same sense of cultural politics and Black identity. Though neither John Ahearn nor the artist known as Swoon is African American, Ahearn's South Bronx relief portraits and Swoon's etchings of women in such works as *Cairo* (2022) make strong eye contact and express a proud sense of minority identity. Subjects are carefully observed holding their bodies and gazes with confidence, which gives us a sense of who they are as real people and often reflect the attitudes and cultures of the communities and neighborhoods where they live.

Robert Peterson's impressive hyperrealistic portrait *Sunshine* (2022) is rendered in high detail yet also reflects how fashion can construct identity in a way that camouflages the self. Derrick Adams's print series *How I Spent My Summer* (2021) shows swimmers with polka dotted swim caps. The cheerful blue water and colorful inflatables belie a sense of uncertainty and loneliness in the subjects, who show a moody lack of fulfillment from the empty promises that consumerism and "the good life" bring. Jonni Cheatwood's *I Can't Because of Reasons* (2022) goes a step further with alienation, covering the faces of two Black women in incomprehensible colorful abstract blotches that ooze with Dadaist depersonalization.

Lynthia Edwards's *Ten Little Black Girls* (2022) shows the artist's heavy stylistic reliance on Romare Bearden's expressive collage method, which she repeats in her large canvases. The same Bearden-inspired collage technique is apparent in Adams's *Interior Life (Woman)* (2019). Mickalane Thomas's print *July 1977* (2019) combines Bearden's and Jacob Lawrence's collage techniques with a 1970s blaxploitation-style female nude. Assessing the work of Edwards, Adams, and Thomas, I cannot help feeling that such an homage gets too close to appropriating a certain collage approach into a branded context. The strategy seems to require the treatment of the figure as an alienated postmodern self appropriated and reassembled from the fragments of the modernist past. What does it mean to have "Black identity" signified by so many artists using the same strategy of graphic stylization? Scholar Kobena Mercer talks about this problem. Mercer, notes

Jonni Cheatwood, *I Can't Because of Reasons*, 2022. Oil and acrylic on primed and sewn Textiles, 72 x 50 inches. Photo: Makasiini Contemporary

(Above) Derrick Adams, *How I Spent My Summer,* 2021, Detail. Screen print and collage, 18 x 18 inches each. Photo: Rhona Hoffman Gallery. (Below) Robert Peterson, *Sunshine*, 2022. Oil and Glitter on Panel. Photo: Claire Oliver Gallery.

art historian Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, gave a brilliant cautionary talk at the annual James A. Porter Colloquium (last spring), cosponsored by Howard University and the National Gallery of Art, about the speed with which Black images by African-born and African American artists were entering the market, moving into collections as financial investments that doubled as symbols of wokeness, but were not publicly visible long enough to be engaged critically by art historians. Mercer openly questioned whether the plethora of easily consumable images of blackness and Black people on the market is a good thing.[1]

In a similar fashion, the production of abstract art at Expo reveals disturbingly intense market imperatives at its core. An endless train of Zombie Formalism continues to dominate contemporary abstraction, with no sign of relief in sight. There is some difference between the attitude of postmodern abstraction from the 1980s and 90s and

(Left) Lynthia Edwards, *Ten Little Girls* (2022) detail. Acrylic & Mixed Media on canvas. Photo: Richard Beavers Gallery. (Right) Derrick Adams, *Interior Life (Woman)*, 2019. Pigment print on Hotpress Published by Eminence Grise Editions; Printed by Andre Ribuoli; 24 x 18 inches. Photo: Michael Steinberg Fine Arts.

Mickalane Thomas, *July 1977*, 2019. Print 41 x34 inches. Photo: Tandem Press.

abstraction now. Abstract art today has conveniently dispensed with the baggage of postmodern deconstructive rhetoric—all that talk about the "death of the author" and "the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." There is no longer any need to crack open October magazine, read Arthur Danto, or dig into Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. Any number of ready-made decorative designs in minimalist, color field, op art, and abstract expressionist stylization—or amalgams thereof—will suffice, thank you. The market is waiting!

Looking at the abstraction from different periods on display at Expo is instructive. Joan Mitchell's 1960 abstract expressionist graphic prints at the F. L. Braswell booth become a cynically appropriated "textual" fragment in David Salle's print *Syrie* (2014). All pretense of even nominal historical self-consciousness is lost in Liliane Tomasko's slapdash regurgitation of Willem de Kooning's brushwork in *all that we want* (2021). Stanley William Hayter's 1936 *Untitled* shows painstaking attention to the emergence of surrealist automatism embedded within a Kandinsky-inspired abstract landscape. Chelsia Culprit's large charcoal sketches on unprimed canvas at the Revolver Galeria booth turn surrealist automatism into a quickly executed graffiti-style cartoon.

All this is a sign of entropy and cultural stagnation as much as it demonstrates the degree to which abstraction from modernist times (before 1960) has failed to establish any culturally meaningful legacy in the present. Today modernist abstraction and African American art of the modernist era have become reified as symbols of styles that can be easily codified and branded to fulfill market needs. In addition, it is noteworthy that Expo had less representation of mid-career artists than in the past, showing a gap of continuity between older blue-chip art and the youth culture generated styles of the present.

The alienating and impersonal effect of so much of the "branded" art on display is a symptom of exactly what Karl Marx and György Lukács had predicted. Art creation that has abandoned the human life world of social relationships and meanings has become reified as a commodity object within a totalizing market system. It can be confusing to try and comprehend how a Rembrandt, a banana taped to a wall, an invisible sculpture, and a cookie jar owned by Andy Warhol all operate on the same level as pure market commodities divorced from any basis of shared human cultural values or experience. That is why the "art object" has become excruciatingly arbitrary.

As with Expo, this market orientation also reflects the economic systems we live under on a larger scale. Consolidated power among elite monopoly corporations get to dictate what our economic system is like, in much the same way that a tiny number of dealers and their ultra-rich clients get to determine what is significant. "The

David Salle, *Syrie, Turquoise*, 2014. Lithograph, 55 x 42.25 inches. Photo: artspace.com/david_salle/syrie-turquoise.

Liliane Tomasko, *all that we want*, 2021. Acrylic and acrylic spray on linen 68 x 62 inches. Photo: Natalie Karg Gallery.

Art Market Is a Scam (and Rich People Run It)," a Wendover Productions video available on YouTube, has a lot to say about this extraordinary consolidation of power:

> "Forty-three percent of art dealers, nearly half, had fewer than 20 unique buyers in 2020. ... Thirty percent of solo exhibits at museums in the US, considered the hallmark of success, featured artists represented by just one of five galleries (Pace, Marian Goodman, Hauser & Wirth, Gagosian, and David Zwirner)".[2]

In spite of these well-worn realities, I came away from Expo remembering the works of figurative artists who remain grounded in their sense of self and dedicated to using their skill to communicate human feeling and genuine social experience hidden away from the distracting bright lights of market sensationalism and the effects of concentrated wealth. Here's to hoping we see more of their work next time.

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Footnotes

1. The Many Problems with Deanna Lawson's Photographs Gwendolyn D. Bois Shaw Hyperallergic Sept. 23, 2021. https://hyperallergic.com/679220/the-many-problems-with-deana-lawsons-photographs/.
2. The Art Market Is a Scam and Rich People Run It https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ3F3zWiEmc.

Stanley William Hayter, *untitled*, 1936. Oil on paper 11 x16 inches. Photo: Dolan Maxwel Inc.

General Reviews

"Posthumous Dialogues with F. N. Souza:" Homage to a Goan Artist

Museum of Goa, sponsored by The Raza Foundation

By Kelli Wood

Several painters (and one sculptor) in Mumbai formed the Bombay Progressive Artists' group in 1947, the year India finally won its independence from British imperial rule. The "Progs," as they called themselves, sought to pioneer an Indian modernism in line with European and American avant-garde movements—an intentional contrast to the nationalism of the then establishment Bengal School. The group's most outspoken member, F. N. Souza, witnessed a second liberation in 1961 when his native state of Goa, which had been under Portuguese control, overthrew its colonial governors. Aggressive and expressive, Souza's style was deeply influenced by Picasso, and his works incorporated Goan landscapes and Catholic iconography. In 2015 the four-million-dollar hammer price of Souza's Birth (1955), a canvas depicting his pregnant mistress Liselotte as a reclining nude, broke auction records as the most expensive Indian painting ever sold.

"Posthumous Dialogues with F. N. Souza" celebrates the memory and continued impact of Souza's legacy on contemporary art in Goa and across India. The show opened with a performance of 'My Dear Progs' by Debayani Kar and Sapna Shahani. Dramatic excerpts of letters exchanged between Souza and fellow progs including S. H. Raza gave glimpses into the artist's life and mind as he strove to break into the London art scene.

> "My dear progs | I had thought that life would change completely upon arrival here... I was disappointed. | One can't paint because color and canvas cost more than food. | But what I've seen in a week you will never see in all your life in Bombay. I've seen six Rembrandts which give me enormous joy and understanding, which I didn't get by examining 600 of his reproductions in books. | The reason why European painters don't visit India to study its arts is because the best representative collections of Indian painting and sculptures are in their own museums. | All the arts dealers are racketeers. | They charge 23% commission on sales. | Strange, but on arrival I had an acute nostalgia for my birthplace, 5360 miles away, Goa. I felt like an extremely lonely man here."

F. N. Souza, *Birth*, 1955. Image in the public domain.

"My Dear Progs" performed by Debayani Kar and Sapna Shahani at the Museum of Goa, April 23, 2022. Photo by Kelli Wood.

For curator Sabitha Satchi, Souza's struggles as a minority, immigrant, and artist and his often violent and distorted figures resonate today in a world grappling with isolation, disease, and sectarianism. Satchi focused the show on the iconographic, stylistic, and conceptual influences of Souza's work rather than Souza's eminence as a writer or his sometimes notorious personal life. In her words, "Brutally humanistic, unabashedly raw, aesthetically pitiless, and violently alive, Francis Newton Souza's art has a renewed relevance today. F. N. Souza gave the figurative a radically new aesthetic language: bold, brutal, pained, intense, and often provocatively erotic."

Over 25 artists exhibited paintings, prints, sculptures, and mixed-media works in the high-ceilinged and light-filled industrial space of the Museum of Goa, situated just miles from Souza's birthplace of Saligão. Nationally recognized artists such as Atul Dodiya and Vivan Sundaram contributed works to the exhibition alongside other prize winning and up-and-coming artists. Many artists responded to Souza's prolific career as a portraitist, invoking and sometimes challenging the psychological, emotional, and erotic intensity of his oeuvre. Santosh Morajkar has long engaged with Indian modernism, and his Portrait with Souza (2022) translates aspects of Souza's work as a painter into the medium of sculpture. The imposing presence and weightiness of the hybrid animal form activates the patterns and vibrant colors inspired by Souza's palette to express a viperous carnal charge.

Subodh Kerkar, director of the Museum of Goa, turned sculpture toward the distorting and cubist tendencies visible in Souza's self-portraits, molding forms and making marks evocative of Picasso and his debts to the power of African masks. Sweety Joshi's *Decoding* (2022), the layering produced by additive shells and subtractive burn marks that reveal the substrate, expands the pictorial space of the mixed-media work. Expressive black lines of pitch coal form abstracted geometric faces stabbed by thorns that attest to the crucifixion imagery of Goan Catholic art. Cowrie shells stand in for Souza's exotically oriented gaze and simultaneously orient the viewer to the historical conditions of mercenary economics across Africa and throughout the Indian Ocean.

Museum of Goa exterior, 2022. Photo: Kelli Wood.

Santosh Morajkar, *Portrait with Souza*, 2022. Fiberglass and pencil, 49 x 28 x 21 inches. © Santosh Morajkar.

The architecture of Goa takes center stage in printmaker Shripad Gurav's exhibited works. Hearkening to Souza's focus on landscape in the 1940s, Gurav's Palacio de Goa (2022) takes shapes from local flora and the distinctive Goan architectural forms from arches to oyster-shell–paned windows to terracotta roofs. Pairing plate and print foregrounds Gurav's process, while the diptych format nods to Souza's frequent use of iconography depictions of Goan Christian catholic architecture. The formal, structural, and pictorial language of religious art and architecture inhabits the frames of Saba Hassan's art and reorients the exhibition toward India's multicultural heritage. Hassan incorporates the flow of Arabic calligraphy and encompasses aspects of Safavid manuscript painting within traditional Islamic architectural forms, such as mihrab niches.

In Hassan's hands, organic materials such as fabric, grass, tea, coffee, and clay are fashioned into works that often emphasize women's solidarity, and the emotional tone of her distressed surfaces critiques the hardship of political strife, such as the outcry against the recent Citizenship Amendment Act that excluded Muslims from new pathways toward Indian citizenship.

Through its tribute to F. N. Souza and its gaze toward the past of Indian modernism, the Museum of Goa and curator Satchi furnished a space for many contemporary artists to debut innovations in craft, process, materiality, and concept. Goa's active and growing artistic community is claiming local and national renown that complements its already globally admired vistas of the Konkan Coast beaches and architectural heritage.

Artists who exhibited in "Posthumous Dialogues with F. N. Souza": Atul Dodiya, Chaitali Morajkar, Charudatt Pande, Harshada Kerkar, Julio D'Souza, K M Madhusudhanan, Kalidas Mhamal, Kedar Dhondu, Pradeep Naik, Pramod Prakash, Praneet Soi, Saba Hasan, Sachin Naik, Santosh Morajkar, Shailesh Dabholkar, Shripad Gurav, Siddharth Gosavi, Siddharth Kerkar, Siji Krishnan, Subodh Kerkar, Sudhir Patwardhan, Sweety Joshi, Uday Shanbhag, Viraj Naik, Vitesh Naik, Vivan Sundaram.

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Subodh Kerkar, *Portrait of Souza 2*, 2022. Mixed media on fiberglass, 20 x 13 x 38 inches. © Subodh Kerkar. Subodh Kerkar, Portrait of Souza 2, 2022. Mixed media on fiberglass, 20 x 13 x 38 inches. © Subodh Kerkar.

(Left) Saba Hassan, *Untitled*, 2021. Mixed media, 7 x 9.5 inches. © Saba Hassan. (Right) Sweety Joshi, *Decoding*, 2022. Mixed media on paper, 17 x 11 inches. Photo by Kelli Wood. © Sweety Joshi. (Below) Shripad Gurav, Palacio de Goa, 2022. Plate and print, 26 x 19.5 inches. © Shripad Gurav.

Material and the Mechanics of Belief:
Yusuf Abdul Lateef, "Placebo"

By K.A. Letts

The influence of artist Yusuf Abdul Lateef, painter, installation designer, teacher and social activist, can be felt everywhere in Toledo's creative community: at the Toledo Museum of Art, or the Toledo Opera, at Bowling Green State University and the University of Toledo, where he teaches two-dimensional design, drawing and beginning sculpture, or in nearby Ypsilanti, Michigan, where he mentors at-risk youth with the Michigan Youth Arts Alliance. When I visited his temporary studio in downtown Toledo in the spring of 2022 during his residency at Contemporary Art Toledo, he was participating in a variety of disparate projects and works in progress, many of them in collaboration with other artists and arts organizations.

Lateef had recently worked with seven other Black artists from the Black Artists Coalition—a group he co-founded—to create an online exhibition for the Toledo Museum of Art in honor of Juneteenth. "Out of the Dark: A Historic Journey" explores works by Black artists in the museum's collection and how the city's contemporary artists respond to them. He was also at work on a collaborative mural related to the Toledo Opera's production of Blue, an original opera composed by Tony Award-winning composer Jeanine Tesori and NAACP Theater Award-winning librettist Tazewell Thompson. (Scheduled to open this fall, Blue was named Best New Opera by the Music Critics Association of North America in 2021.)

During his spring 2022 residency, Lateef completed an impressive number of new paintings in addition to work that was shown concurrently at River House Arts in his solo show "Placebo." That's right—in addition to his other community-related activities, the artist somehow found the time to put together a thoughtful collection of 15 paintings and 7 assemblages that go a long way toward explaining his creative process and the philosophy that animates him as an artist.

Yusuf Abdul Lateef, installation, (top, left to right) *Wisdom*, 2022. Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches; *Feet of the Mother*, 2022. Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches; *Power the Fight*, 2022. Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches; (bottom, left to right) *Cousin Ernie,* 2022. Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches; *93' Til*, 2022. Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches; *Washington's Lookout*, 2022 Acrylic on museum board, 41 x 32 inches. Photo: K.A. Letts

(Left) Yusuf Abdul Lateef, (top) *Untitled* 1, 2022, 49" x 36," acrylic on canvas; (bottom) *Untitled* 2, 2022, 49 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas. (Right) Yusuf Abdul Lateef, *Have Mercy*, 2022, 59 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas. Photos: K.A. Letts.

Six moderately-sized paintings installed together in the gallery illustrate the ease with which Lateef travels from style to style, effortlessly moving from the linear schematics of 93' Til to the painterly realism of Cousin Ernie to the highly symbolic Power the Fight, and sometimes, as in Washington's Lookout, fluidly combining the abstract with the figurative. Such is the artist's comfort with the medium that there is no sense of dislocation among various modes of expression; they all seem to belong seamlessly together. Lateef's compositions almost always share a single strong central image placed before a horizon line that bisects the center of the painting. Pattern-painting gets some attention in the pair of paintings *Untitled* (2022). Installed together, the two cartoonish heads show how very little it takes to suggest the human form. He gestures toward three-dimensional space in Have Mercy, a humble stocking cap cowering at a table.

Lateef's creative strategy for producing a painting is highly idiosyncratic and yet, somehow, methodical. He described the process to me as a kind of spiritual journey that he visualizes as playing out through Tarot-like archetypes, beginning with The Atheist (Line) progressing to Conversion (Value), to Neophyte (Color), to Crucifixion (Form) to Resurrection (Texture) and finally to Belief (Meaning). He views this mystical sequence as a constantly recurring spiritual process with which he approaches each painting.

The artist's preoccupation with the metaphysical is evident in the somewhat improvised constructs he has assembled to go with his two-dimensional compositions. The painted imagery in combination with crudely fabricated three-dimensional elements—many borrowed from his work in construction—constitute a kind of thought-in-process about creativity, materiality and its relation to the transcendent.

Yusuf Abdul Lateef, *Lectern*, 2022, 18 x 18 x 15inches, scrap wood, painter's screen. Photo: K.A. Letts.

(Left) Yusuf Abdul Lateef, (on wall) *Divining*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches; (on floor) *Kneeling Bench*, 2022. Knee pads, plywood, foam, 30 x 8 x 5 inches. (Right) *Interruption*, 2021. Mixed media, 76 x 47 x 20 inches.

(Below) Yusuf Abdul Lateef, installation, (on wall) *Divining*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches; floor (left) *Kneeling Bench*, 2022. Knee pads, plywood, foam, 30 x 8 x 5 inches; floor (right) *6'8"*, 2022. Mixed media, 80 x 24 x 24 inches. Photo: K.A. Letts. Photos: K.A. Letts.

Though he is now a practicing Muslim, Lateef grew up in a Christian family—a self-described "p.k." (preacher's kid)—and it shows. One of the objects in "Placebo" is a makeshift pulpit, made of scrap wood and painter's screen. The empty lectern invites an open-ended question as to who, exactly, is going to occupy this position of authority. Is it the viewer? The artist?

Nearby in the gallery, *Divining*, a square painting of a bullseye in uncharacteristic rainbow colors, makes Lateef's pre-occupation with the incremental and ongoing process of creativity crystal clear. In front of the composition, to which a dowsing rod is attached, we see an impromptu kneeler, a sacred object upon which rest prosaic knee pads, workaday tools turned to the improvisational nature of daily devotion. Near *Divining*, a tall wooden chair or platform, carelessly knocked together from unfinished 2 x 4's, invites us to look heavenward. The construction rests on a slab of plywood with letters taken from the phrase "Black Lives Matter" in an acrostic, a recurring element seen throughout the artist's work. A crudely wrapped brick with the intimation of a face—perhaps suggestive of a trickster god—occasionally rests on the top. Or it can be re-purposed as a playing piece for a tossing game nearby.

Lateef's small installation, *Interruption*, combines the artist's sense of the uncanny with his characteristic humor and playfulness. He recalls being impressed by a painted image of Jesus he saw on the side of a truck in Mexico. He took a photo, and when a board later fell out of a window overhead, he took it as a sign from above (literally). The resulting impromptu game of cornhole that he created is cryptic, funny, profound, and speaks to his sense that there is very much more to the universe than meets the eye.

Lateef credits the influence of Theaster Gates and David Hammons in his art practice, evident in his use of rough and often re-purposed materials and in the way he combines painted images with three-dimensional installation. He also shares with them the sense that the material is only a means by which to approach the immaterial. Or as he says, "there is no obligation to material for the purpose of uplifting material, but a vow of building value and investing in the spiritual through use of material." Lateef lives this belief in his community art projects as well as in the privacy of his studio where he wrestles with what he calls "the mechanics of belief. What we take apart and what we glue together." It is in this private dialog between the material and the immaterial and in his more public vocation as a collaborator and force multiplier that Yusuf Abdul Lateef centers his creative calling.

"Placebo" was on view at River House Arts Toledo, February 26 – April 2, 2022.

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

Crossed Looks

By Evan Carter

This past fall I had the pleasure of discovering the expansive photographic world of Namsa Leuba, whose first solo exhibition in the United States was on view at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in Charleston, SC. The exhibit chronicles the breadth of Leuba's work, from documentary and fashion photography to abstraction and narrative futurism. At the heart of these modes is Leuba's challenge to reductionist views of identity through the constraint of the Western gaze; her challenge here seems to be in service of elevating the complexity of indigenous cultural traditions in the 21st century. Though this is a fraught endeavor, Leuba herself is uniquely positioned to understand the Western gaze from both sides. Describing herself as being of dual heritage—Guinean and Swiss—she has experienced the assignment of otherness by members of both cultures.

Featuring over 90 works, the exhibition includes noteworthy images from Leuba's collaborations with fashion designers and philanthropic celebrities as well as work she produced at various artist residencies: four in African countries and one, the genesis of her most recent series, produced in Tahiti.

NGL (next-generation Lagos) presents lush and colorful photographs of sitters posing and sporting looks that reflect Nigeria's progressive, vibrant youth culture. Another series, *Tonköma*, showcases high fashion inspired by Guinean traditions. It emerged as part of a campaign to promote equitable trade in Africa for the label Edun, founded by Ali Hewson and U2's Bono. Leuba has also taken commissions from well-known brands like Dior and Nike.

What is striking in the work is not a sense of lamentation for the harms of colonialism and globalization but rather a bold curiosity and a kind of cultural euphoria around the artist's subjects and their worlds. Leuba seems to perceive, extrapolate, and elevate a deeper complexity in these images, a complexity that has been stifled by centuries of exoticization and infantilization from the geopolitically dominant Western world. *YA KALA BEN* and the more recent *Illusions* series most strongly reflect Leuba's bold artistic vision and her willingness to take risks that challenge the presuppositions of viewers from across the sociopolitical spectrum.

The *YA KALA BEN* series is multifaceted and somewhat controversial. The artist traveled to her mother's homeland of Guinea Conakry to collaborate with local people,

Namsa Leuba, Cocktail, © Copyright Namsa Leuba. Photo: namsaleuba.com.

Namsa Leuba, Series for WAD magazine, No. 53/Cocktail. © Copyright Namsa Leuba. Photo: Evan Carter.

exploring and documenting but also re-interpreting some of their cultural icons and traditions. One set of photographs features costumes and accessories Leuba actually designed for her subjects to wear for the shoot. In the images, models strike poses referencing sculptural objects from their cultural traditions, but these figures also merge with the contemporary Western forms and aesthetics of color and fashion in which Leuba is well versed. Leuba's own website includes information indicating that some members of the community felt this augmentation of their culture to be sacrilege. The Halsey Institute simply states, "Among Guinean audiences, the importance of the sculptural references is widely comprehended."

The series wanders into documentarian territory with Leuba's more photojournalistic captures of Guinean acrobats, who participate in festive masquerades and traditional ceremonies alike. The project culminates in a spread of shots from one of those traditional ceremonies laid out in a special publication featuring the images.

The most recent of Leuba's series featured in the exhibition is *Illusions*, comprised of photographs produced during the two years she lived in Tahiti. Both inspired by and critical of the works of Paul Gaugin, Leuba's work here pursues a subversion of the exoticizing and essentializing of the Tahitian female image. Drawing upon myths and folklore from Tahitian culture, the artist once again designed outfits and adorned her subjects with elaborate makeup of vibrant colors. Some, if not all of the models are members of the LBGTQ community, specifically *mahu* (men considered to be effeminate) and *rae rae* (transgender women). Again, we see the artist generating images in which non-Western cultural traditions, Western art historical references, and 21st-century globalized capitalist aesthetics converge.

Sharing a gallery with the selected works from *Illusions* are photographs from the *Weke* series (2017), as well as *Cocktail* (2011) and *The African Queens* (2012). In the earlier work here, Leuba uses her sense of the aesthetics of high fashion to produce images that the Halsey describes as visualizing the "figure of the 'queen' as a hero, prophet, and warrior." There is some truth to this. But the work here is an idealization of images that, while empowering the models, also indulges in and confronts the viewer with the exotic. The women posing in the images are not only

Namsa Leuba, *The Acrobats, Guniea*, 2011. © Copyright Namsa Leuba. Photo: Evan carter.

Namsa Leuba, "Crossed Looks," installation view. © Copyright Namsa Leuba. Photo: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

wearing fashionable African-inspired designs; they are also wearing accessories made of tropical leaves and flowers in the forms of hats and elaborate collars.

The designs are quite beautiful, and the models in most of the images pose confidently, albeit in a somewhat sexualized manner, as is the case in just about any fashion shoot. The problem here is not in the work itself but rather in the Halsey Institute's apparent apprehension about presenting these images as confrontational and subversive. The wall text deserves credit for stating that the work "plays on the cliché of the exotic," but this feels like a safe way to gloss over the ways Leuba's work both caters to and implicates the gaze of the Western viewer. It is doubtful that Leuba's work is purely about strength and empowerment. It also carries a deeper political critique of lasting perceptions that reduce people of non-Western heritage to a simplistic "other,"

It is no mistake that the Halsey Institute placed selections from *Cocktail*, *African Queens*, *Weke*, and *Illusions* in the same gallery. Though the work spans some eight years, there is a striking relationship in the bold and colorful visual style and in the nuanced and expressionistic depictions of various cultures. *Weke* is a particular standout, given that the images feature models as well as psychedelic visual abstractions representing Vodun spiritual practices centered on spiritual communications with "mythical gods." These three series reveal the formal foundation of the work Leuba would produce in Tahiti for *Illusions*, in which the models themselves appear to embody mythical beings that exist between the physical and spiritual world. They emerge from shadows or stand in nature, their skin painted vibrant blues and reds. They pose as if frozen in time, and their gazes carry a weight unique in Leuba's work. It is in this series that a world is being constructed rather than depicted, with Namsa Leuba as the architect.

There are many layers to Leuba's work, and they are a joy to unravel. While her images can be passed over as eye candy for a well-meaning liberal audience, to a more critical eye they reveal an artist not just trying to please but also challenge the viewer. This is by no means an antagonistic gesture but rather an aspirational one. It allows us, as consumers of culture, to widen the lens through which we perceive the world and ourselves.

Evan Carter is a visual artist and assistant editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He joined the team in 2017 while earning an MFA from the University of Chicago and has been covering arts and culture in the city and beyond ever since. He is invested in the creative community and its capacity to make meaning and reveal truth in everyday life.

Namsa Leuba, "Crossed Looks," installation view. © Copyright Namsa Leuba. Photo: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

Suzanne Rose: "Moments of Being"

By Tom Mullaney

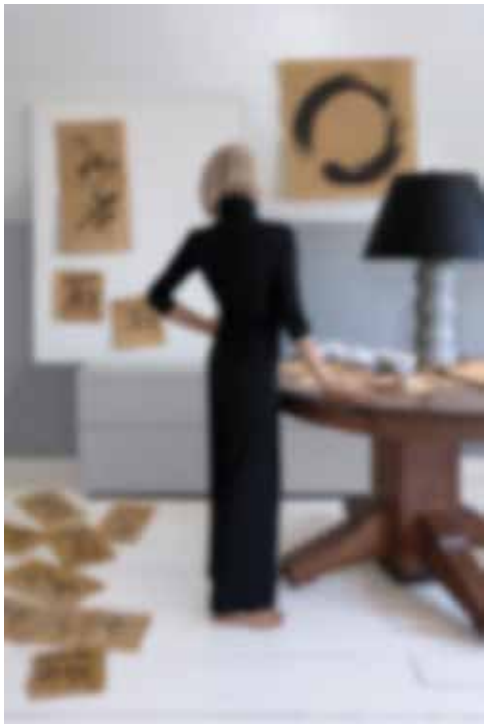
Self-portraiture is currently a ubiquitous genre but one that dates back to antiquity. The introduction of oil paint around 1500 helped artists, such as Durer, Holbein and Rembrandt, to adopt the new opportunity to portray themselves on canvas. Today, photography has replaced the canvas and become the defining visual trope of the twentieth century. And, during the last fifty years, self-portraiture, with the advent of the internet, has become a commodity.

However, the self-portrait remains a serious endeavor for exploring and depicting a subject's character, mood, and identity. And rather than focusing on the face, lips, and eyes, as in olden days, the emphasis now is on the whole body.

That is the technique photographer Suzanne Rose uses in her show, "Moments of Being", now at the Zolla Lieberman Gallery. Her five large (five-foot high) and one smaller print are arresting at first gaze but then give way to a serious examination of the works. Giving the prints a deeper viewing, I admired Rose's assured sense of composition and control of the camera. Rose, as both artist and model, adopts the self-portrait mode but then flips the standard frontal pose and turns her back to the camera, shifting the series' focus onto the story her works tell of love, loss and grief.

The image that first caught my eye, *Undressing*, depicts the artist in her bedroom, back turned, frozen in thought, with the left side of her dress hanging off her shoulder and

Suzanne Rose (Left), *Undressing,* 2022. Pigment ink jet print on museum weight paper, 56 x 42.5 inches. (Right) *Bath*, 2022. Pigment ink jet print on museum weight paper, 56 x 42.5 inches. Photos: Zolla Lieberman Gallery.



Suzanne Rose (Left) *Anniversary*, 2022. Pigment ink jet print on museum weight paper, 56 x 42.5 inches. (Right) *Brushwork*, 2022. Pigment ink jet print on museum weight paper, 56 x 42.5 inches. Photos: Zolla Liebertman Gallery.

reaching down to her waist. Her mood appears to be one of reflection and some inner turmoil. That pose drew me in to view the entire show and deduce the story behind the prints.

There are three more backward-facing self-portraits and two in profile. A second one, *Bath*, shows Rose in profile with her head on the bath rim, hands overhanging the tub, looking forlorn. The portrait is a masterful depiction of someone at a pivotal moment of solitary loss.

With *Anniversary*, the previous photos serve as preview of the show's dramatic intent. Rose is sitting in a side chair with her left arm on her forehead, alone in her thoughts, looking at a hanging black dress, recollecting on the day's happy occasion gone wrong. Rose, in her artist statement, reveals that these reenactments of distressing turning points in her life, relive the painful letting go of her beloved home and her long-standing marriage.

Her suite of self-portraits, chronicling a private and overwhelming period in her life, struck me as brave and skillfully staged. The work avoided both the pitfalls of narcissism and limp cliche.

Rose has said she turned to poetry to help pick up the pieces and chart a new course. She confessed that she was particularly consoled by Elizabeth Bishop's poem, One Art which reads, "The art of losing isn't hard to master; | so many things seem filled with the intent | to be lost that their loss is no disaster."

Rose seems to have taken those lines to heart and, in the exhibit's final shot, *Brush Work*, she turns to her art for centeredness and meaning. Yet, that is no happy ending. The circle on the wall (a Zen meditation Ensõ) shows a broken circle, a sign that the artist has more self-work to do to make it whole. This provocative exhibit is recommended for your viewing and reflection. The show continues until July 30.

Besides portraiture, Rose has photographed a variety of subjects. One is a suite of formal, black-and-white studies of the natural world, part of a series documenting the destructive consequences of the Anthropocene. That term signifies the current geological epoch we are in, marking human's dominating and damaging impact on the natural environment, resulting in climate change, pollution, and a grave loss of biodiversity.

The suite, "Blind Spot", viewed online, consists of 34 images, mainly of bare or disfigured trees. Some are beautifully lit by sky or the moon. One striking image is of three tall mounds of excavated earth resembling sand dunes, Rose skillfully captures these "subjects," nature's evidence of the harmful environmental impact caused by man.

While a number failed to make much of an impression, either due to blandness or sheer repetitions of the subject, there were close to ten prints that I lingered over. They exerted a stronger pull, vividly documenting evidence of the Anthropocene. Two prints that showed Rose's mastery are *Clear Cutting* and *Hunting Blind in an Open Field*. The first shows two groves of trees ripped in half to make way for a miles-long thruway of electrical poles. The second, picturing a blind spot, is a stunning, chiaroscuro image of a cabin in a field. The blind spot is a stucture in which a hunter can

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"High Cube Wide Turn"
at Ignition Project Space

By Lauren Iacoponi

The gallery environment is ideal for representing an object for the sake of philosophical contemplation. Javier Jasso consciously stages scavenged objects and repurposed materials such as tiles, bricks, and wood, which he collects from alleys, front yards, empty lots, and abandoned houses in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. His installations are largely composed of preexisting structures and objects with a life outside the context of an artwork. Jasso incorporates elements from his physical surroundings to shelter memories and demonstrate a need to preserve neighborhoods and their living heritage.

For the past five years, Jasso has collected objects from abandoned houses in the neighborhood. Drawn to construction materials, he imagines discarded wood and bricks that once might have provided shelter for someone. Jasso's work points to a Chicago urban landscape inching toward demise. In his exhibition "High Cube Wide Turn" this May at Ignition Project Space, a palpable sense of place characterized by thoughtful interplays of industrial materials and porcelain objects is viewed through the context of displacement.

The zeitgeist of the 2020s is a political and cultural nexus of anxious energies and precarity, with a conscious effort to move towards sustainability, equity, and inclusion. The emotional current of our times has led to activism, a call for reform, and the remodeling of many societal structures. Jasso confronts contemporary issues on a local level, relating to disenfranchised communities throughout Chicago. He is but one artist experiencing the dehumanizing forces of the present day first-hand through neighborhood gentrification.

Jasso's work engages with the politics of space through contemporary cultural criticism. Pulling objects and imagery from a place that is experiencing immense physical and community-level changes, Jasso's exhibition goes beyond formal attributes to trace social affiliations. The textures are balanced, ranging from polished porcelain surfaces, iridescent as oil, to the chalky tactile crumbles of pulverized red brick, each an ode to the neighborhood from which the materials came. Items such as raw construction ma-

Javier Jasso (left to right), *Untitled* (assemblage), 2022. Slip cast porcelain bone, golden acrylic paint, hand built ceramic angle mounts/metallic glazed, found object wood fence, dimensions vary; *Untitled* (assemblage), 2022. Mixed media assemblage: hand-built ceramic, metallic glaze, slip cast porcelain, tiles, wood palette, Chicago bricks, dimensions vary; *Untitled* (painting), 2022. Wood panel, acrylic black mate house paint, graphite, pulverized Chicago red brick as pigment. Photo: Ignition Projects.

Javier Jasso (left to right), *Untitled* (assemblage), Mixed media assemblage: hand built ceramic, metallic glaze, slip cast porcelain, tiles, wood palette, Chicago bricks, dimensions vary; *Untitled* (wall installation), 2022. Found object picture frames with drawings, hand built ceramic branch, metallic glazed, found object candlestick, slip cast porcelain bird, dimensions vary; *Untitled* (painting, image out of view), 2022. Wood panel, acrylic black mate house paint, graphite, pulverized Chicago red brick as pigment, *Untitled* (sculpture), 2022. Ceramic hand built sink, gold acrylic paint, dimensions vary. Photo: Ignition Projects.

terials and found wooden fences inserted in the gallery space are objects with geographical importance, found in abandoned South Side buildings. The political essence of the materiality cannot be removed; it inserts itself in the gallery and imitates its origins as a material meant for building domestic space.

The following excerpt from Jasso's artist statement gives insight into the notions of the domestic that animate the exhibition. "Jasso brings three co-existing realities that he has experienced in his neighborhood: domestic (home), the unstable environment of displacement, and homelessness." An estimated 58,273 people experienced homelessness in Chicago in 2019. The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on lower-income communities has pushed many more Chicagoans into homelessness. Empty lots, closed businesses, and condemned houses can be seen across the Southwest Side of Chicago, where the artist resides. There is what Jasso calls a "paradox of stability" in the exhibition: his found objects reflect their place of origin but also reveal how that place is gradually being hollowed out.

Sometimes the artist's found objects are translated into a mold and then into slip-cast porcelain. Jasso casts objects because he likes the idea of sculptures with empty insides, like a shell for protection or a ghost. He chooses to cast with porcelain because it is finer than clay but also very fragile. He casts small porcelain birds, associating them with prosperity. The birds also serve as geographical identifiers. His own block is full of cardinals, sparrows, and house finches.

Jasso's visual lexicon is also characterized by the prevalence of wheels. Wheels can be seen attached to rudimentary drawings of tools, carts, architectural structures, and sculptural platforms. The wheels embody notions of movement, permanence, and impermanence; they also come from Jasso's own narrative. Born in Chicago, Jasso moved with his family to Guadalajara, Mexico, when he was only three years old. Together they lived in 34 different houses. When searching his neighborhood for source materials, he often seeks objects that remind him of other places in which he has lived. Sometimes when he sees an object that reminds him of his childhood, he tries to replicate it.

Jasso treats color without artifice, preferring hues coming naturally from the object's physical condition and materiality rather than a painted facade. Natural coloration communicates the object's history, transformation, and movement. Jasso admits that when working in ceramics, he has not yet located a glaze that can replicate the same effect nature has on an object.

He prefers metallic glazes on his ceramics, which appear industrial or toxic. The Back of the Yards is an industrial neighborhood, so the coloring is evocative of its history and essence. The most extravagant color choice within the exhibition comes from gold acrylic paint, which he uses deliberately. One such object is a handmade clay sink Jasso painted gold as a memorial to a friend who passed away. Other gold objects include a slip-cast porcelain bone and an empty candlestick seated on a decorative display shelf. Most of Jasso's gold-painted objects are hidden within the exhibition. In a sense, the artist activates the space by engaging the viewer in a search for gold. Structures conceal the objects from plain view; they sit behind a weathered picket fence and in the angular space between a slanted painting propped against the wall. The viewer must look behind the painting to locate the gold faucet, or behind the wooden fence to find the golden bone resting on the gallery floor. In each case, gold seems to serve a memorial function or to conjure notions of the macabre. While his work communicates a living history through objects, it also illuminates a profound sense of loss.

Construction and domestic imagery are seen throughout the gallery: picket fences, carefully curated gallery walls, and paintings with absurdist line drawings of moving carts and the scaffolds of a house on wheels. Jasso's large-scale paintings incorporate pulverized Chicago red brick as pigment on matte black wooden surfaces. Notably, the center installation consists of a pallet on wheels

that serves as a makeshift platform fitted with floor tiles where thin towers of porcelain objects are displayed. The porcelain pieces are tethered by a thin snaking wire to a pile of bricks, where a small porcelain bird is perched on the gallery floor. The bricks ground the platform, which might otherwise be perceived as mobile. The wall configuration comprises three modestly sized drawings hung in decorative frames and two sculptural ceramic objects resting on ornate display shelves. The drawings depict architectural structures, organic shapes, and a docked sailboat with a headless and limbless human torso. The last drawing refers to past work featuring two plaster cast torsos. The first imprisoned in the stilts of a towering house-like cage and the second a hollow bust penetrated by a wooden beam. Each depicts housing as a trap or a harmful appendage.

Javier Jasso, *Untitled* (wall installation), 2022. Found object picture frames with drawings, hand built ceramic branch, metallic glazed, found object candlestick, slip cast porcelain bird, dimensions vary. Photo: Ignition Projects.

There is a visible rhythm between the elements of the gallery and the objects Jasso chose to occupy its space. The gallery facade has a brick wall mirroring the pile of bricks; the gallery tiles mirror the tiles on the makeshift platform. Jasso punctuates this latter symmetry by trimming his pallet platform with matte black paint, the base color in each of his large-scale paintings. These visual elements create a sense of belonging for the work within the space: a temporary home for a transitory body.

Lauren Iacoponi is a Chicago-based artist, curator, and writer. Her work can be found on *Sixty Inches from Center*, *Chicago Artist Writers*, among other local art publications. Iacoponi is the Director and Co-founder of Unpacked Mobile Gallery,a roving project space exhibiting out of the bed of a moving truck. Instagram handle: @lauren.ike .

"Moments of Being"

Continued from page 67.

Suzanne Rose (Left) *Clear Cutting*. (Right) *Hunting Blind in an Open Field*. Photos: https://suzannerose.com.

hide and wait for his prey, birds or a defenseless deer, to come into shooting range. The odds of a kill strongly favor the shooter.

Rose makes clear that she is no disinterested photographer. She clearly is upset by all the spoilage she sees. The Anthropocene poses the existential question of whether, given its record of misguided destruction, the human race will survive. Rose plans to continue the series theme, documenting more examples of human domination. Judging by the relative success of this suite, Rose may be a Rachel Carson with a camera.

Tom Mullaney, former Managing Editor of the New Art Examiner, now serves the magazine in a consulting capacity. He authored an arts blog, "Arts and About" for nearly a decade and has been published in The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Chicago Magazine.

In Memoriam: Sam Gilliam
November 30, 1933 – June 25, 2022

By K.A. Letts

Sam Gilliam, 88, the first African American artist to represent the U.S. at the Venice Biennale, died on June 25, 2022 at his home in Washington D.C. Gilliam is best known for color-saturated, dyed canvases that escaped the conventions of easel painting, draping and plunging in space, suspended from ceilings and walls or lying supine across sawhorses or hanging from improvised lines.

Unlike many of his Black artist contemporaries of the 1960s and 70s, Gilliam was devoted to abstraction. Throughout his half century as an artist, he refused both the figure and overt political messaging, choosing instead to follow his own quietly radical path. In a 2018 interview with arts writer Jose da Silva in the *Art Newspaper*, he asserted that "The expressive act of making a mark and hanging it in space is always political. My work is as political as it is formal."

Gilliam was born in Mississippi on November 30, 1933, the seventh in a family of eight children. He grew up in Kentucky and studied at the University of Louisville, where he earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in painting. Moving to Washington, D.C. in 1962, with his wife Dorothy Butler (the first African American woman to be hired by the *Washington Post*) he quickly found a home in the conceptual space between painting and sculpture. He combined formal elements of color field, stain painting, abstract impressionism, and shaped canvases of the 1960s and fashioned them into something new. The expressively draped, sensuously colored, and provisionally hung swags of canvas—changing with each installation—aggressively questioned whether painting needed to be two-dimensional. When the art critic Jerry Saltz encountered Gilliam at a residency in Michigan in the 1970s—just after the artist had returned from his exhibition at the 1972 Venice Biennale—he observed, "I've never felt the past, the present and the future congeal quite this way."

Sam Gilliam in 2020. Photo: dreamideamachine.com/.

Although Gilliam is best known for his draped canvases, he was also a fearless explorer of new methods and materials. His lifelong output included experimentation with found scraps of fabric collaged onto other fabrics and use of materials like glitter and string. The craft of quilting and the musical inspiration of Jazz also fed his creativity in the studio.

After his early success in the 1970s, Gilliam continued to show his work in galleries from Philadelphia to San Francisco and Chicago to Houston, but he suffered a long period of critical neglect from the New York art establishment. In the early 2000s though, interest in his work rebounded. Curators and galleries like David Kordansky in L.A. and the Corcoran Gallery began to show his work, and the artist emerged stronger than ever for his final act on the art world stage.

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

Sam Gilliam, *Double Merge* (Carousel I and Carousel II), 1968, acrylic on canvas, installation view. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston © Sam Gilliam/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York.

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