

Special Focus:  
REVIEWS MARATHON, NEW YORK

*DRAWINGS BY PAUL DAVIS*

Recently ArtReview has been staring at its growing pile of press releases and wondering: 'Is it possible to see (almost) everything?' So this month it forced four NYC reviewers to each review 26 shows in the space of a week in order to see if they would be reduced to gibbering wrecks or provide us with a coherent account of the artworld in all its varied glory. Shooting from the hip (because they were too tired to do anything else), and staring face-to-face with the good, the bad and the ugly, our writers tell you what it's like to be reviews-marathon-men. (PS: The answer's probably no.)

UPPER EAST SIDE AND 57TH STREET	CHELSEA	BROOKLYN/QUEENS	LOWER EAST SIDE
JOSHUA MACK	JONATHAN T.D. NEIL	TYLER COBURN	ADAM E. MENDELSON
DAMIEN HIRST Lever House Art Collection	MORRIS LOUIS Paul Kasmin	JEANNE THOMSEN Galeria Janet Kurnatowski	UN-MONUMENTAL New Museum
DAMIEN HIRST / TARA DONOVAN	PAT STEIR Cheim & Read	GUY BENFIELD / GEORGE BARBER	VARIA Janos Gat Gallery
Metropolitan Museum of Art	BJORN MELHUS Roebbling Hall	Jack the Pelican Presents LYNN TALBOT	CAMERON MARTIN Eleven Rivington
NICOLAS GUAGNINI Andrew Roth	ADRIAN PACI	PIEROGI	CUT Thierry Goldberg
PHILIP GUSTON & JASPER JOHNS	Peter Blum Chelsea NINA KATCHADOURIAN	AIR KISSING Momenta Art	AIDA RUILOVA Salon 94
Leo Castelli & Brooke Alexander Editions	Sara Meltzer Gallery REAR/VIEW	MICHAEL VAHRENWALD Southfirst	DO HO SUH Lehmann Maupin
TOM WESSELMAN	Freight + Volume	OVERBOARD / RETURN OF THE MASTERS	PHANTOMS Luxe Gallery
Maxwell Davidson Gallery	ERIC ANGLES & MATT SHERIDAN SMITH	Secret Project Robot KRIS MARTIN	ADRIAN PACI Smith-Stewart
PER KIRKEBY Michael Werner Gallery	Cohan and Leslie EPILEPTIC SEIZURE	P.S.1 EXTREMES & IN-BETWEENS	PETER GALLO Sunday
MAHOMI KUNIKATA / ASHLEY HOPE	COMPARISON Greene Naftali	Dorsky Gallery JEPPE HEIN	DISPLAY Museum 52
Tilton Gallery	HUGH WALTON Clementine	SculptureCenter WILLIAM MCMILLIN	KATRINA DASCHNER Thrust Projects
KONRAD KLAPHECK Zwirner & Wirth	MAGNUS PLESSSEN Barbara Gladstone	Repetti BROOKLYN VS. BALTIMORE	EILEEN QUINLAN Miguel Abreu
CHRISTOPHER WOOL Skarstedt Gallery	KIRA WAGER Rare	Schafler Gallery, Pratt SOMETHING FOR	LIZZI BOUGATSOS James Fuentes LLC
JULES OLITSKI Knoedler & Company	ALBERTO BURRI	THE COMMUTE Brooklyn Fire Proof	PINAR YOLACAN Rivington Arms
BRIDGET RILEY PaceWildenstein	Mitchell-Innes & Nash SHINIQUE SMITH	THE DOTTED LINE Rotunda Gallery	RASTER HAIRCUT Rental
DOUGLAS GORDON Gagosian Gallery	Moti Hasson Gallery CARL ANDRE	SONG OF MYSELF Powerhouse	JUST A GHOSTLY PAPER SIGH
KARA WALKER / JACOB LAWRENCE	Paula Cooper WADE GUYTON	Friedrich Petzel Gallery DANA MELAMED	31 Grand GEOMETRICS
Whitney Museum of American Art	Priska Juska JIM SHAW	Metro Pictures CHRISTIAN KOZUL	Gallery onetwentyeight HOLIDAY READING
ROMARE BEARDEN DC Moore Gallery	Lawrence Weiner Goff + Rosenthal	Goff + Rosenthal JAVIER PINON	Number 35 CHRISTIAN SAMPSON
LAWRENCE WEINER Marian Goodman Gallery	ZieherSmith THOMAS RUFF	ZieherSmith THOMAS RUFF	Never Work MARC SEGUIN
ROGER MAYNE Gitterman Gallery	THOMAS RUFF David Zwirner	THOMAS RUFF David Zwirner	Envoy ANDREW KUO
BARBARA KRUGER Mary Boone Gallery	IVIN BALLEEN Winkleman Gallery	IVIN BALLEEN Winkleman Gallery	33 Bond SCOTT TAYLOR
ED RUSCHA Craig F. Starr Associates	KAREN FINLEY Alexander Gray Associates	KAREN FINLEY Alexander Gray Associates	V&A Gallery SUZAN BATU
THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SIMPLE	ALAN SARET Drawing Center	ALAN SARET Drawing Center	The Phatory CALENDAR OF FLOWERS, GIN
L&M Arts CALDER AND MELOTTI			BOTTLES, STEAK BONES Orchard
Barbara Mathes Gallery			WILLIAM ANTHONY & THATCHER KEATS
TINO SEHGAL Marian Goodman Gallery			Christopher Henry Gallery BRIAN BELOTT
THE DEMOISELLES REVISITED			Canada
Francis M. Naumann Fine Art			
JUAN DOWNEY Nohra Haime Gallery			
		Pocket Utopia THE GUY DEBORD SHOW New General Catalog	

words JOSHUA MACK

START

On my way uptown, the subway is delayed and then rerouted because of a police investigation at 77th Street. As I'm sitting on the stalled train, a homeless man in a wheelchair pushes through the crowded car, clutching a filthy paper cup into which a few people drop change. It's the second time I've seen him; the weeping red patch across the top of his foot, where a rectangle of skin is missing, has dried a bit. But his feet are still cracked and his skin is ashy. Before, the wound made me sick. Now I feel desperate that this is what this country has become, and ashamed that most of the people around me are European tourists who now know what America is. What art means afterwards, I don't know.

But the excess of things like Damien Hirst shows, with their portentous titles, are simply unconscionable.

(1)

DAMIEN HIRST School: The Archaeology of Lost Desires, Comprehending Infinity, and the Search for Knowledge, Lever House Art Collection

(2)

The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, Metropolitan Museum of Art

His self-indulgently trite installation in the lobby of Lever House, the city's first glass-and-steel skyscraper, resembles a church. Thirty stainless autopsy tables are lined up in three rows, like pews; each carries a tank of formaldehyde in which a dead, skinned, trimmed lamb floats. In lieu of an altar, two sides of beef - a reference to Francis Bacon - a birdcage with a dove and an umbrella - Magritte - are arrayed in a larger tank. Steel-and-glass cases containing medications surround the room, lined up against the windows like altars in a nave or cabinets in a vestry.

Like the dead animals he reuses, Hirst is recycling iconography and ideas, such as this gem from the press release: 'Hirst is again commenting on the inevitability of death and the almost religious belief in drugs for eternal salvation.' As it happens, of the 32 medicines in the one cabinet that I looked up, far and away the greatest number - 13 - are treatments for HIV (angina and high blood pressure rate second, with five); so in fact these drugs do not abet a hopeless will to

words JONATHAN T.D. NEIL

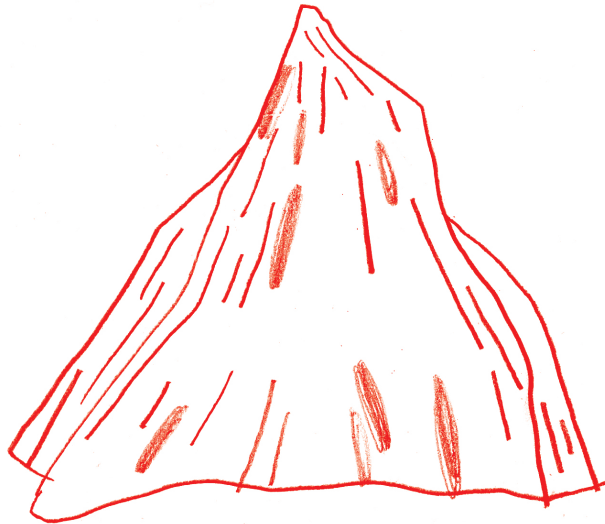
START

A short note by way of introduction: it hardly seems responsible, this kind of extended monologue on things seen and half remembered, but it is this notion of remembrance upon which I've had to rely in order to bring this 'slog', as I've been calling it, to a close. I take poor notes, when I take them at all, and the Miami art fairs intervened upon this writing, which is why I submitted this copy exactly a week later than my editors would have liked. Of course this means that close to two weeks passed between my having seen the artworks and shows about which you will read below, and my having written the same. Let's hope my memory does you justice.



We should probably begin with paintings - big paintings - and with painters who like liquid, who like the way it runs, the way it spills and pools, with the way, perhaps most importantly, that it gets pulled by gravity. We should begin, then, with (1) MORRIS LOUIS at Paul Kasmin, with works such as Dalet Aleph (1958), whose acrylic resin stains offer object lessons in how certain kinds of paint can run. Leo Steinberg once noted of Kenneth Noland's paintings that they were the 'fastest' he had ever seen - because Noland's compositions of horizontal lines seemed to speed away from the viewer who viewed them on the oblique. Louis's

words TYLER COBURN

STARTART EVEREST

(1)

JEANNE THOMSEN *New Paintings*,  
Galeria Janet Kurnatowski

Despite sporadic proclamations about how it may just be on the verge of happening, the Brooklyn and Queens gallery scenes have never amounted to much more than footnotes to the New York artworld - a fact that I've decided is mainly due to the geographical blinkers many Manhattanites sport. The outer boroughs, in short, are accepted as the place where artists live and work; Manhattan is the concrete marketplace they habitually enter to sell their wares.

Never was this suspicion more present than over Thanksgiving weekend. As Chelsea galleries swiftly recovered from the nation's gorgefest and powered through Friday and Saturday workdays, most of the Williamsburg galleries I came across were closed for the holidays. After 40 minutes of wandering through industrial Greenpoint, I finally came upon Galeria Janet Kurnatowski's low-lying space, featuring a series of small paintings by Jeanne Thomsen. From the surprised look of the director upon my entry, to her subsequent decision to follow close behind as I made my way through the show, I got the sense that the space was wanting an audience. And much as I inclined to appreciate Thomsen's Hofmann-esque abstracts, whose oranges and purples so suited the autumnal air, I left the show rather unimpressed.

words ADAM E. MENDELSON

START

(1)

*Un-Monumental: The Object  
in the 21st Century*,  
New Museum

What can one say about this landmark institution amid the almost unanimous flurry of favourable remarks generated within minutes of its doors opening? After not less than five consecutive galas before opening to the public for 36 hours straight, the first of a three-cycle series of shows under the umbrella theme *Un-Monumental*, the highly anticipated new digs for the New Museum was riddled with contradictions, seemingly scant actual exhibition room, slightly choked spatial flow and lots of donor plaques gracing every square foot available (down to the toilets). Still, the architecturally arresting new building, with its venerable curatorial team of Lisa Phillips, Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman and Massimiliano Gioni, promises to help the New Museum remain one of the most relevant institutions in the city, if not the country, and is responsible for a new system of satellite galleries heralding further transformation (for better or worse) to the cultural landscape of downtown Manhattan.

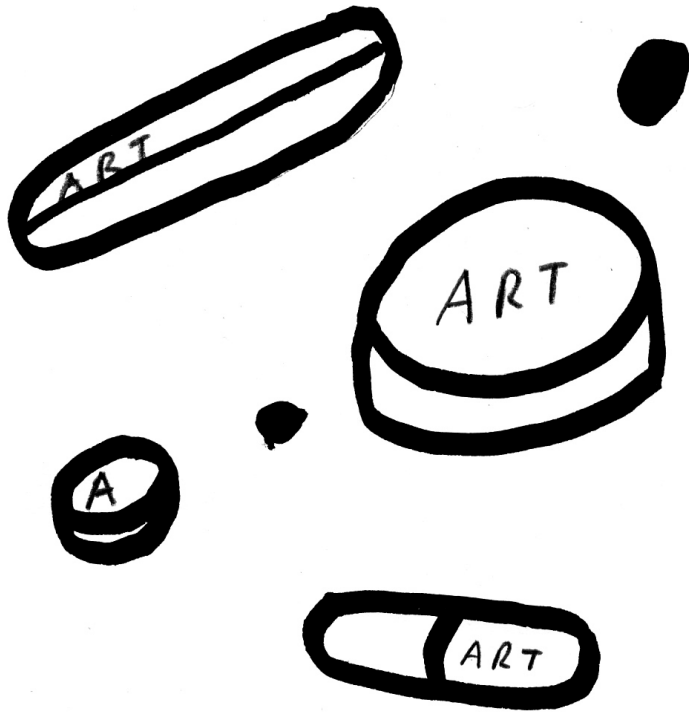
DONOR

(2)

*Varia*, Janos Gat Gallery

Janos Gat is one of those classic New York galleries that show a diverse range of work by artists off the radar of trendy contemporary audiences. It's a curious above-ground space that is impressively airy, well designed (by owner Janos) and at the same time a little out-

live, but allow millions to enjoy long, productive and creative lives. That a straight, and I presume healthy, white male who has made a fortune selling such ideas to other wealthy straight white men would make such a comment using anti-retrovirals - taken in the main by homosexuals and coloured people - is, to this gay man, disgustingly offensive.



## BITTER PILLS

What is sick is a medical system in which corporations profit off people's pain. Of course, Hirst's stainless steel and glass looks decidedly corporate in this - oh my - steel-and-glass lobby. Indeed, the little shock and shiver his dead flesh and dissection tables deliver is really no different from the little frisson delivered by the snippets of blood and the whir of the coroner's saw on American television serials like *CSI - Crime Scene Investigation*.

Then we have his shark, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), installed at the Metropolitan Museum with three paintings meant to establish a historical context: a copy of John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (c. 1778), which pictures an attack on the comely Watson as he swims in Havana Harbour; Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (1899), in which a muscular black sailor sits stoically on the deck of his small boat, its mast snapped, as sharks rise menacingly from the waves; and Francis Bacon's

paintings, for their own part, may be some of the slowest, insofar as one can see at every point along the edge of the artist's pours the way that the paint leeches into the canvas and softens that cutting edge where mark gives way to unprimed canvas. *Dalet Aleph* in particular, more than 7 *Bronze* from the same year, transforms the thinnest veil of paint into that slowest of materials: weathered metal. The simplicity of Louis's gesture reminds us of the myriad failures that must attend the making of such paintings: that for each work that makes it to the gallery wall, there must have been dozens that didn't work. Call it painting as gamble.

The problem is that this gamble was being made nearly 50 years ago, and it's not quite clear whether (2) PAT STEIR's new monumental canvases at Cheim & Read renew it or simply rehash it. Most of Steir's canvases cross something like Louis's enlistment of gravity with Barnett Newman's zips. The palette is primarily Newman's too, though the Newman of *The Stations of the Cross* (1958-66). What Steir has done, however, is to bring speed back into the equation with her signature 'waterfalls' of paint. This is most evident in *About the Black I* (all work 2007), where the sheet of silver-white paint drawn over the right side of the canvas has splashed aggressively across the canvas's primarily black ground. Other works, such as *White, Black and Dusk*, echo the tripartite structure of Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* (1966-7), while Steir's *The Dark*, an absolutely gargantuan field of graphite grey and black pours, is bisected by two thin double-zips that recall the red, and rehearse the structure (though with a larger horizontal expanse) of Newman's *Onement I* (1948).

Only a few of Newman's paintings ever reached the size that Steir offers here. His were formal studies that kept an eye towards how a viewer perceives, and reconciles, that very specific and particular confrontation with painting. Steir's work is not so specific; it's all confrontation. But whereas one expects that Steir would like that confrontation to resemble an encounter with a force of nature (eg, waterfalls, torrential rains or, for that matter, the legacy of Newman himself), the result is more spectacular than sublime.

It's a different, more literal kind of echo that (3) BJORN MELHUS created at Roebbling Hall, titled *If You See Something Say Something* (the title itself is a triumph: the direction having been cribbed from public-service placards recently plastered across New York City at the behest of the Police Department and meant to remind the populace of its civic duty to remain vigilant against such terrorist threats as unmanned - ie, lost - luggage and handbags, or the occasional ornery Sikh taxi driver). Melhus filled - literally filled - the gallery's two main and many interstitial spaces with monitors

(2)

GUY BENFIELD Mother Door Spirit Level and  
GEORGE BARBER The Long Commute, Jack the  
Pelican Presents

I've seen some excellent and some unabashedly terrible exhibitions at Williamsburg's Jack the Pelican, and through them all have retained an undying affection for the space. Few other galleries can boast such a seat-of-the-pants and balls-to-the-wall attitude, as the current exhibitions of Commonwealthers Guy Benfield and George Barber yet again prove. Benfield's DIY pottery studio installation, replete with his pseudo-spiritual collages and materially incongruous assemblages (foam, mirror, vulvic cast), produce the scope of visceral and conceptual titillation one expects from the Pelican. Benfield's a recent transplant to Brooklyn and came into artistic maturity in his native Australia in the early 1990s, so we can forgive his work for suffering from an incidental trendiness (all that Day-Glo, metallic spray paint and greyscale collage sure looks Sterling Ruby to me), but only up to a point...

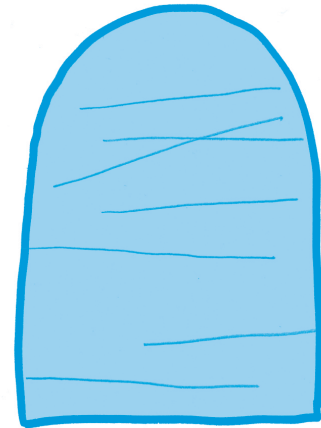
The real treat came in finding English film and video artist Barber occupying the back room of the gallery with two installations, titled *The Blue Commute* and *The Long Commute* (both 2007), in which MDF ellipses act as screens to bird's-eye footage of cars circling in endless loops. These works reflect Barber's recent shift away from the 'scratch' videos that made him such a seminal practitioner in the Thatcher years towards quasi-situational and frequently automotive works (works, I might add, that led *Art Monthly* to call him 'the Henry Ford of independent video'). While I found Barber's minimal presentation and pared-down, even pathetic, symbology to make for a rather appropriate treatment of a middle-class British 'anybody', as he puts it, there was a part of me that indulged in the low-tech, quasi-videogame tweeness of the footage and actually empathised with those small, infinitely circling commuters. Only later did I realise that, in so doing, I became that exceptional sucker who all but proves Barber's rule about the false security of the bourgeois lifestyle.

(3)

LYNN TALBOT Recent Paintings, PIEROGI

Lynn Talbot's paintings allegedly explore the optical and psychological differences entailed in the perception of still-life painting and abstraction. I'd be more than willing to follow the artist down this path, if her formal solution - to have gigantic, geometric forms hover above colouristically analogous displays of fruits, sweets and sundry ephemera - wasn't so simple. Suffice it to add that the smattering of enticing works by other gallery artists (stacked under Talbot's paintings and waiting

of-step with the surrounding neighbourhood (though not so much to pass up an opportunity to run a 16-day revolving exhibition series marking 'the opening of the nearby New Museum'). Judit Reigl's abstract *Guano* paintings were the real find here (*Guano-Menhir*, 1959-63, is a lacerated arching stonelike monolith emerging from a dark ground that is rather pleasing and substantial with its heavily worked and textured surface), along with works by Knox Martin and Boris Lurie. Martin, a onetime teacher of Robert Rauschenberg, creates work that is sly and beautiful, and which augured a whole new generation of American abstraction.



LACERATED ARCHING  
STONE-LIKE MONOLITH  
EMERGING FROM A DARK  
GROUND IS PLEASING.

(3)

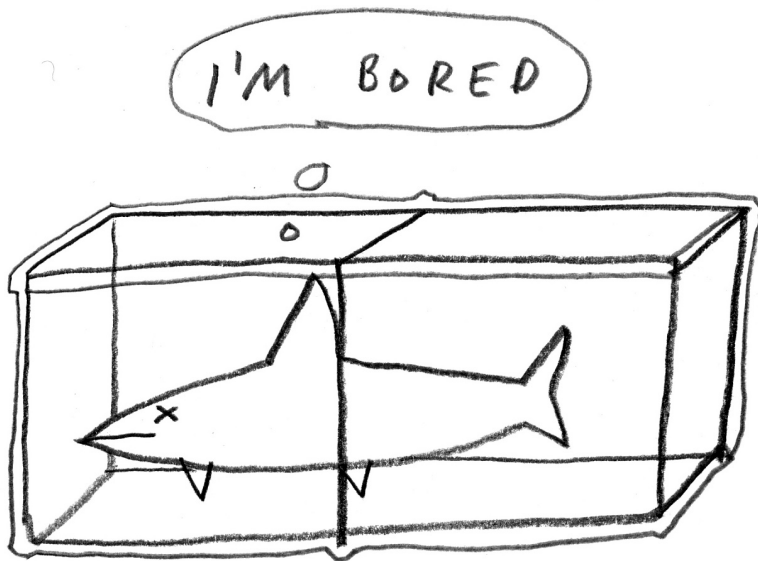
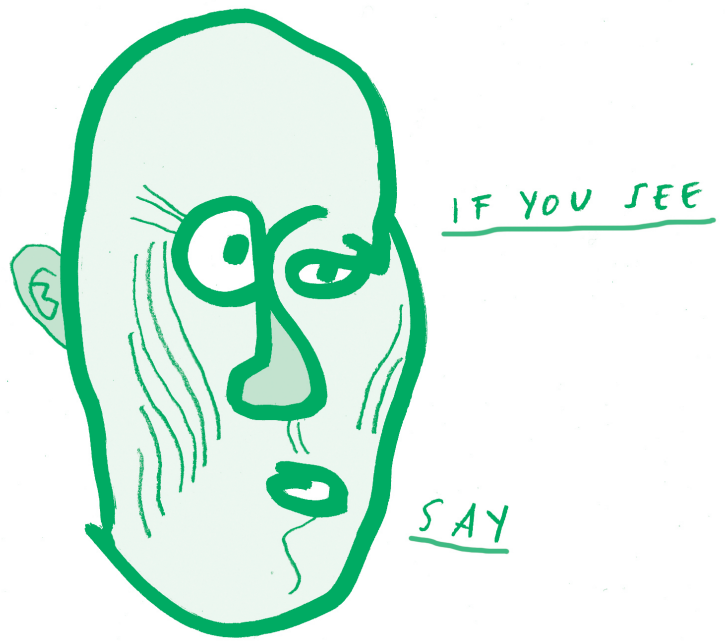
CAMERON MARTIN, Eleven Rivington

Just two months and one exhibition after opening last September, Eleven Rivington were invited to show at NADA Art Fair in Miami, which amply demonstrates the savvy of this recent emigré to the Lower East Side. For their second show, Cameron Martin displayed three slick, austere paintings of what appeared to be the same lunar-looking rock formation, with only subtle tonal variations distinguishing them as separate works. Executed in a kind of photorealistic grisaille, Martin's paintings reveal nothing of their facture and emit a cold, focused mood. The nonpainterly application of paint annoyingly drudges up enduring issues surrounding painting's relationship to photography, and I couldn't help but find the overall slickness (part of the fun of looking at this work is trying to find a bit of fluff or a stray hair on the surface) something of a contrivance. *Arbiter 1-3* (all 2007) imply in their titles the sublime, authoritative power of nature and prod the viewer to think about our own imminent ecological judgment, which makes me wonder if meaning rushes in to fill a void where there is none.



Head 1 (1947-8), in which a howling maw seems to devour the face in which it sits.

Beyond the obvious presence of gaping jaws, these paintings are presented as examples of Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime, in which terror is supposed to evoke an aesthetic and emotional rush greater than provoked by beauty. When you consider the stolid resignation of Homer's sailor, the naked Watson's desperate reach towards a nearby boat or the rough, angry surface of the Bacon, which is a visually stunning metaphor for cruelty to the self, art's ability to communicate emotional truths becomes clear. As to Hirst's shark, it seems pretty and decorative in its tank, more like a specimen in a natural history museum than an object that might encourage contemplation of life and death - beyond that of the shark's. It must have been magnificent when alive. What a waste.



(3)

TARA DONOVAN *Tara Donovan at the Met*,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Donovan's installation, tucked into a rather drab gallery between the first and second floors in the Met's contemporary wing (and on the way downstairs from the Hirst), is just as slight. Drawing on her obsessive, labour-intensive use of everyday materials, she has affixed innumerable small loops of Mylar across the room's three walls, thus creating networks that recall the masses of bubbles which often form on the surface of ponds, the cracked pattern of ice on a window and the accumulation of wax into honeycombs and mud into hives.

Ideally the silver Mylar should reflect light, giving the piece a shimmering, somewhat disembodied presence; although on the dreary day I saw it, it seemed particularly limp. A *tour de force* of physical effort seemingly for no purpose. Easy art for a general public.

and projections playing *The Meadow*, *The Castle*, *The City and Captain* (all 2007), the last of which is the first work for which Melhus has used actors other than himself to mouth lines culled from, in this case, old episodes of *Star Trek*. The video is replete with the show's campy sound effects, sets and rudimentary special effects, which never fail to give one the impression that the characters are being attacked by lights from a broken disco ball. In other episodes, Melhus redubbed scenes from *Bambi* (1942) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to create David Lynchian noir and absurdist encounters. It all takes a bit of time. But it's refreshing to see videowork presented this way: many channelled and variably installed (two monitors placed at ceiling height like they do in hospitals, a column of four others in a hallway, a grid of LCD panels, three straight-up projections and three single-channel works).

I should note that Roebing Hall's installation makes the way other galleries present video appear rather precious, as if we don't live in a world saturated by moving images on myriad screens. Of course this is in no way a commentary on the art, only on the fact that the white cube/black box dichotomy that Chrissie Iles pressed into service a few years ago at the Whitney with her otherwise excellent show *Into the Light* (2002) seems even more untenable today, unless we're willing to accept that the artworld, as Peter Plagens once noted (but regarding different circumstances), really is the 'poor man's Hollywood'.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the mini-theatres we have to suffer don't show some good and entertaining fare. (4) ADRIAN PACI's second run of *The Weeper* (2002) at Peter Blum still outshines the artist's newest work: an installation of frescoes showing storyboard scenes of family life in the artist's home country of Albania. The three *Facades* (2007),

to be packed up to go to the Miami art fairs) distracted me from her uninspired offerings.

(4)

Air Kissing: Contemporary Art About the Art World, Momenta Art

The ghosts of New York institutional critique seem to have the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program's curatorial chapter in a headlock - or such was my impression after seeing its spring 2007 show on economics and the art industry, which made tried-and-true works from Louise Lawler and Hans Haacke sit alongside austere images of Elmgreen & Dragset's *Prada Marfa* (the duo's 2005 Prada storefront built in the Texas desert), among others. So naturally I balked at the prospect of a show titled *Air Kissing*, curated by one of the programme's alumni, and nearly turned heel at Momenta's entrance, where two more images of that damn Prada hung opposite Jeff Preiss's video documentation of an Andrea Fraser performance. But I stuck it out and was happy I did. I have to give credit to curator Sasha Archibald for setting a humorous tone to a normally dry affair, courtesy of vintage works by Alex Bag and Lee Lozano. And I would normally extend further credit for her inclusion of some younger voices, like Jason Irwin and William Powhida, had their additions to the exhibition amounted to anything more than cheap satire. Seeing those works sit alongside some of the greats of the discourse, I started to wonder whether institutional critics voluntarily beat the drum of their heyday for lack of a more sophisticated, contemporary alternative.

(5)

MICHAEL VAHRENWALD The Mythic Has No Medium, Southfirst

I loved Vahrenwald's large nighttime photographs of grassy hills lit by the unending glare of surrounding strip malls when I saw them at the Whitney a few years ago, but I also knew that the artist had only so many more in him before they became shtick. I'm pleased to say that his current exhibition is a departure, if a conceptually tired one. Interweaving series of images of suns, lightboxes and desert-based scientific facilities has something too 1970s-conspiratorial-cinema about it, though those lightboxes - captured at that halfway point between Celmins's heater and Magritte's Surrealism - are truly strange (and yes, illuminating) things.

(6)

Overboard and Return of the Masters, Secret Project Robot

Given that Secret Project Robot got its street cred as an aesthetic playground for the Williamsburg locals, it seems a bit beside the point to hold it to the standards of contemporary

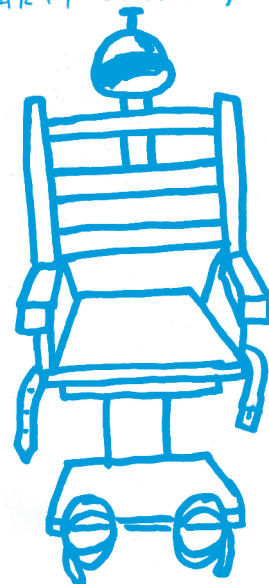


(4)

Cut, Thierry Goldberg

Fortunately I managed to get to this group show before official opening time, because the gallery looks as if it can only tolerate about 20 people. Keren Cytter's three-channel video *Repulsion* (2007) was a lo-fi, psychologically claustrophobic (or maybe that's just because the 'project room' is so small) kind of horror melodrama that borrows its title from Roman Polanski's first movie in English. Although something of a cyclical narrative resulting in a girl getting her head bashed in by a man, *Repulsion* compels the viewer to rubberneck to catch the action across monitors placed on the south, east and north walls, each of which showed a cut-and-pasted version of the same thing, though staggered as a means to disorient and play with narrative readings. Meredyth Sparks's collages riff on Malevich or El

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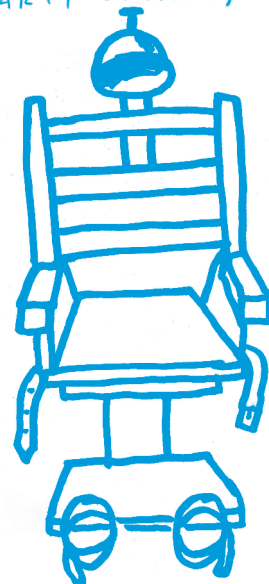


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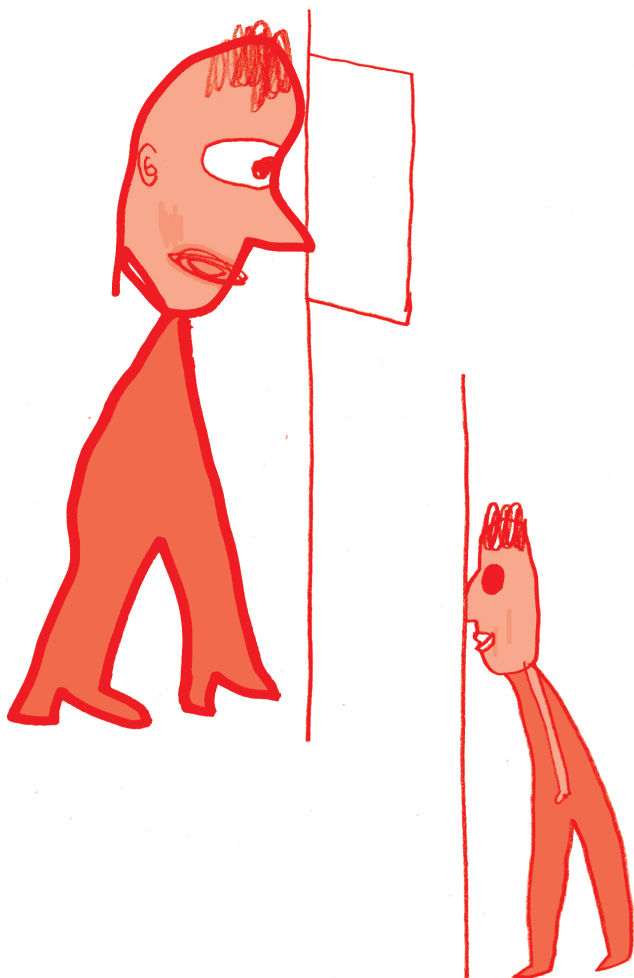


critical discourse. From my experience, a successful show at this candy-coloured warehouse is one that has no apparent physical boundaries, which is what I found with its latest efforts, as I stumbled out of the main gallery into a hallway lined with monster masks, spray-painted TV sets and vintage speakers, in a vain search for a working bathroom.

(7)

KRIS MARTIN, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center

'Kris Martin's exhibition at P.S.1', or the story of how curator Neville Wakefield traded Matthew Barney-size complexity for the heavy-handed, the fatalistic and the dull.



(8)

Extremes & In-Betweens, Dorsky Gallery

Joshua Altman's addition to Dorsky Gallery's ongoing series of independently curated exhibitions takes a look at animation-based work of contemporary practitioners. Few of the artists, Altman claims, were trained in the medium, though all of them appear to share a burning desire to rend it at its seams. Collectively, this makes for one of the more irreverent and spirited shows I've seen in a good while. Martha Colburn's *Spiders in Love: An Arachnogasmic Musical* (2000), for example, finds her virtuosic practice in a characteristically psychotropic zone, as legions of fetish-girl arachnids stomp and

Lissitzky, taking appropriated images of Annie Beatrice Henry (the second woman to be given the electric chair in Louisiana) to make constructivist-ish compositions from positive and negative space. Seen as formal compositions, the works are rather mundane, but they become more arresting when considered alongside the subject. It's just that the shadow of Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series (1962-3) looms long and heavy over such work.

(5)

AIDA RUILOVA Lulu, Salon 94

Yet another uptown gallery extension, Salon 94 sits on the former premises of Silo, whose passing is worth mourning, even though Salon 94 is just about the prettiest gallery space to open recently on the Lower East Side (let's set aside any nitpicking arguments about whether this stretch of Rivington can be considered the LES). Presenting something of a departure from Ruilova's previous videowork - colour video that swings around black-clad figures set against white architecture, chopped and edited to produce a kind of amphetamine music - was her colour-saturated video piece *Lulu* (2007). Using Wedekind's turn-of-the-century femme fatale as the central motif, Ruilova cast three men as the female protagonist and set them in the Victorian drawing rooms of the National Arts Club in Gramercy Park. What remains consistent in the current work is Ruilova's choppy, though musical editing. What has changed is the layers of narrative complexity and the higher production values. Ultimately, *Lulu* is an accomplished reworking of an intimidating artwork that delivers an almost baroque rumination on unbridled passion.



information he provided play painted areas against negative space, allowing viewers the fun of filling in the blanks: how does that snippet of blonde hair spilling into *Study for Bedroom Painting #56* (1982) relate to the woman whose body is suggested by those exaggerated nipples and the breast-shaped scoop of blank paper?

But to what end did Wesselman use his considerable formal talent? Clearly to indulge an obsession with nipples and aureoles - the one element that appears in virtually all these works - and a secondary fetish for bush. Cause, one hopes, for an active private life, but here the source of a deadly, repetitive art all the more claustrophobic for its technique. What would happen if that woman and Guagnini had babies?

(7)

PER KIRKEBY *New Paintings*,  
Michael Werner Gallery

Given the wealth of new painting today, this exhibition of Danish artist Per Kirkeby, who came to prominence during a similar boom during the 1980s, should be a welcome chance to reevaluate neo-expressionism, now almost terminally out of favour, and to provide a context for what's going on today. Instead, these 11 new paintings, most dated 2007, seem wan and one-note.

All but one is organised around a series of vertical bands, each distinguished by colour and brushstroke: for example, diagonal jots of Kelly green over a purple ground; a scribble of yellow down the edge of a canvas; or three squarish patches, one on top of the other. Layered strokes and the placement of brighter over darker colours give these works the feel of landscapes. Kirkeby made good use of that conceit in his heroic work of the 1980s. These just seem like slapdash daubs.

(8-9)

MAHOMI KUNIKATA *The Devil Within YAOI*,  
Tilton Gallery  
ASHLEY HOPE *Ripeness Is All*, Tilton Gallery

One would hope that Japan, a country so repressed that strait-laced office workers get shit-faced and puke on subway platforms, would produce art with more depth than the manga-derived work of the school of Murakami. But as this show of Mahomi Kunikata, a member of Murakami's Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd., indicates, not here, not now. Instead we have the usual bright colours, the same sloe-eyed naifs, the floppy-eared bunnies, some with a bandage, some with... oh dear, is that blood?, acting out a pseudo-tragedy in some amusement park kiddyland.

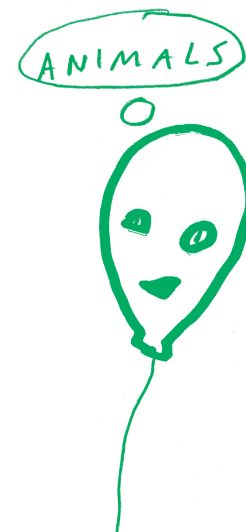
As the bondage scenes photographed by Nobuyoshi Araki evince, there's more to Japan than Hello

## MEDIATED PHENOM- ENOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT



camera's - way. The problem is that as much as one could talk about such heady things as the work's 'mediated phenomenological engagement', its 'challenge to our epistemological model of seeing-equals-knowing', the 'panoptic regime of surveillance', the 'ethics of captivity', our own problematic 'speciesism' and so forth, the work only appears to exist as a prompt for such discourse and not much more.

The single piece that seems to escape this fate is the one that is marginal to the installation itself. There, on a single monitor that stands at the entrance to Katchadourian's Zoo, we see a worker standing at the entrance to a real zoo. She is overloaded with balloons to sell to visitors and is caught in both a mild but gusty wind and underneath the rather low ceiling of an entrance pavilion. It's Sisyphean, quite beautiful and quite sad - and largely because it escapes what we might as well call the 'discourse problem'.



kick their way through a mishmash of retro collages. There was even a Cecily Brown animation from 1995 - her only to date - comprising rotoscoped porn footage, though its explicitness was a bit of a bummer, in that it deprived me of that voyeuristic kick I get from looking at her canvases and trying to separate sensual painting from painted sensuality. The only other nagging concern this otherwise excellent exhibition presented was the number of artists situated mainly within the artworld - many of whom have representation at top Chelsea galleries. Were there to be a second chapter to this exhibition, it would be interesting to see how these works dialogue with those of contemporary animators not associated with the art industry.

(9)

JEPPE HEIN Illusion, SculptureCenter

CAUGHT IN AN  
INSIDIOUS OPTICAL  
TERRAIN



Phenomenology so often enters artmaking as manipulations of matter and scale that bully viewers into false states of sublimity. Walking into Hein's solo exhibition at SculptureCenter, I expected as much - I mean, this is an artist whose primary media include fire and water. But I have to say, *360° Illusion* (2007) didn't have any of the scenery-wrecking testosterone of the Dane's past works; rather, his two massive mirrored panels simply and impassively rotated, trapping viewer, gallery et al. in insidious optical terrain.

(10)

WILLIAM MCMILLIN Yes, Yes, Repetti

Never mind that I accidentally went to see William McMillin's exhibition on a day the gallery wasn't open, or that the person who

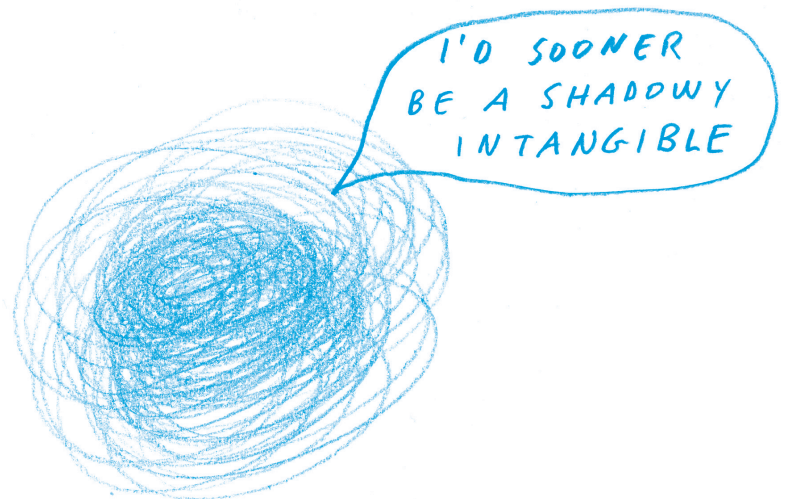
(6)

DO HO SUH Part Two: Reflection,  
Lehmann Maupin

Although this two-venue show is partly contingent on *Cause and Effect*, on view at the gallery's Chelsea space, it's perfectly acceptable to appreciate *Reflection* as a solo presentation. Comprising an ornate double gate fashioned from steel tubing and blue translucent nylon, the work hovers miraculously in the gallery's double-height main exhibition space. If this no-nonsense show seems ghostly or otherworldly, that is in keeping with the artist's expression of residual memories: shapeless, foggy, elusive, intangible things. If one is to simply appreciate the work on its own terms without searching for justification, there are many rewards to be had. Looking at the work from the second-level viewing deck is a spectacular experience wherein the illusion of the gate being reflected, as if floating on a clear surface of water, is completed and made all the more sweet by the knowledge that it will be gone shortly.

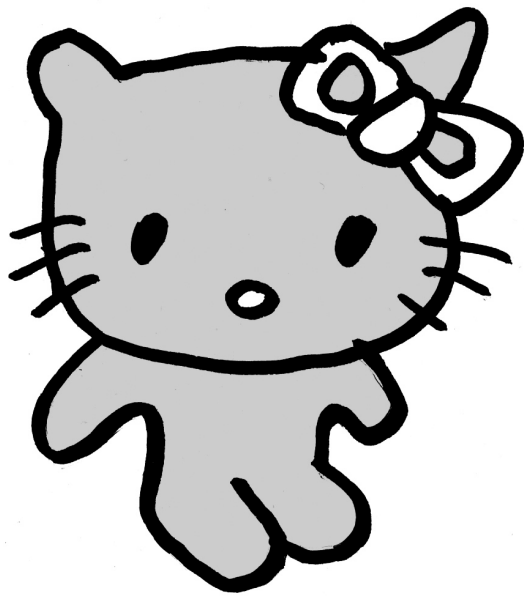
(7)

Phantoms, Luxe Gallery



It's always amusing to bang on a gallery door 10 minutes after they've closed and ask to be allowed in, especially when they've just switched off all of the projections. According to the poetic press release, written by Heather Bennett, one of the four artists included: 'Phantoms calls up shadowy intangibles, dusky opacities shrouding a hovering yet vacated presence, stealing away on a foggy midnight in a muddied white dressing gown without a trace'. Nice writing! But perhaps a stretch in terms of talking about her own work, *Sonhouse* (2006), a large noirish iris print depicting a man and modelesque woman gazing anxiously out of the back window of a fancy car - calling more to mind an outtake from an advertising shoot than 'shadowy intangibles'. Dominik Lejman's *Diorama* (2007) is a fascinating bit of video-painting; in one section of the canvas is a projected video loop of flamingos, whereas in the top

THERE'S MORE TO  
IT THAN JUST ME



Kitty. Thank God. And for the record, artists like Hiroshi Nakamura and Tiger Tateishi engaged with illustration and cartoon decades ago. Using the *manga* connection to justify work is now marketing bullshit.

Upstairs, Ashley Hope's paintings based on forensic photos of women murdered for the sexual thrill of offing someone reduce hideous content to a happy marriage between Ted Bundy and Elizabeth Peyton. Violence is reduced to a few visual ciphers: bloodstained panties, blood splattering a woman's face - no more awful, in these bright compositions, than the little bit of juice that seeps from a roast beef. Now that is an achievement. The purple ruffle of a jacket rings the bared shoulders of a corpse as if it had been carefully arranged, not pulled down during a slaying. Where Schiele, whom such passages reference, captured the depth of erotic fixation, these works fail to convey the things for which these women were killed: passion and pleasure.

(10)

KONRAD KLAPHECK *Paintings*, Zwirner & Wirth

Klapheck's lugubrious images of oversize machines and swollen vacuum tubes, which the artist has been painting since the late 1950s, owe as much to Magritte as to the antiquated typewriter he bought when he entered art school in Düsseldorf in 1955. Here four oval escutcheons can stand for the artist's *My Four Little Vices* (1958), as the painting is titled, and pipes can be labelled *Liberte, Amour, Art* (1964).

More interesting than the surrealist influence is the question of what that outmoded typewriter might have meant to a young man in Düsseldorf in 1955: a bit of nostalgia for the past? A

Now whether this 'discourse problem' is a real problem for other artists may be debatable, but there are certainly other examples of artworks that manage to dodge it, and by other means than the accidental autonomy of Katchadourian's balloon-lady video.

(6) In Jeremy Kost's *Another Morning After* (2007), a standout in Freight + Volume's group show REAR/VIEW, we see, filmed from the back seat of a nondescript car, a young woman who looks suspiciously like Mena Suvari - it turns out that it is - pull into a parking space in some LA neighbourhood and then proceed to apply, using the car's rearview mirror, the requisite makeup that even a moderately fashionable young woman might 'need' before presenting herself in public. On goes the eyeliner, which is then promptly rubbed off with a tissue; on goes the powder, and then it too is wiped away; next comes eye shadow, then off it goes; lash curler and mascara, futile; lipstick, no good - at least not for the lips: as a final act, our heroine rubs out the rearview mirror with the lipstick and then quickly exits the car.

It's painful, not the idea of so much nervous and apparently wasted energy, but to see someone attack their own face over and over again. It's the physical abusiveness, the rawness, that's both difficult and utterly fascinating to watch, and it outruns any of the myriad theoretical (ie, discursive) issues that may be brought to bear upon its assessment.

In other words (and to use a popular bit of contemporary jargon), the affect of Kost's video renders paltry any talk of 'the gaze', 'narcissism', the 'fragmented' or 'split'

ATTACK



MY FACE

subject, etc. There is certainly a place for this discourse, but it requires the velvet bookends of history to keep it in check and to muffle its echoes in the present. Which is where (7) ERIC ANGLES and MATT SHERIDAN SMITH's two-person show at Cohan and Leslie comes in: it self-consciously screams for discourse.

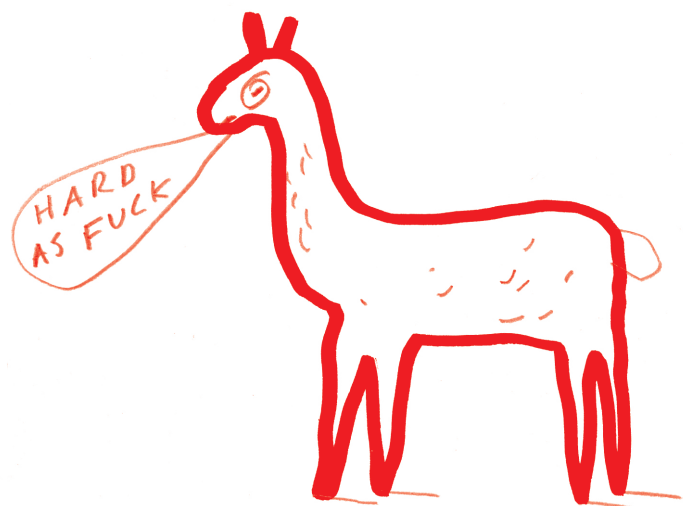


let me in didn't know how to operate the single video projector: from what I could see, this was a strong show. McMillin's assemblages of wood and foam slid down the hallway, echoing the structural design of the elevated train track that stood outside the second-floor gallery's windows. According to the press release, the video I would have seen at the end of said hallway composited various shots of elevated trains from popular action movies; presumably its soundtrack offered a noisy counterpart to the external racket, thereby collapsing the boundaries of the institutional and the public; of art and society... so I would have rambled. Otherwise, McMillin's wood sculptures efficaciously infected the white cube with remnants of their own production and transport history, and his digitally produced abstract paintings (exhibited as c-prints) performed an aesthetic extrapolation of contemporary information networks comparable to Peter Halley's cell-and-conduit takes on 1980s simulation, so I left feeling sufficiently inspired.

(11)

Brooklyn vs. Baltimore, Schafler Gallery,  
Pratt Institute

There was a time when Pratt was known for producing figurative painters; RISD for psychedelic drawing; and CalArts for dry conceptualism (this era is, as yet, ongoing). And while it may be dangerous to characterise the pedagogical leanings of any art institution based on the movers and shakers stocking its faculty, it's nevertheless a rather fun activity to take up from time to time. This surely would explain why curator Gabriel Martinez recently put on a juried exhibition of works by students from Pratt (Brooklyn) and MICA (Baltimore), with the (unstated, though inevitable) aim of taking stock of their respective pedigrees. From what I could surmise, students roughly divided into the Oldenburgian camp (*Soft Bags*, 2006, the title of Lindsay D'Addato's sculpture, suffices to explain) and what I would call, for lack of a better term, 'nostalgic naturalism', as evidenced in May Wilson's prostrate plaster-



left corner is a projection of the viewer, whose act of contemplation is projected and frozen in ten-second time lapses.

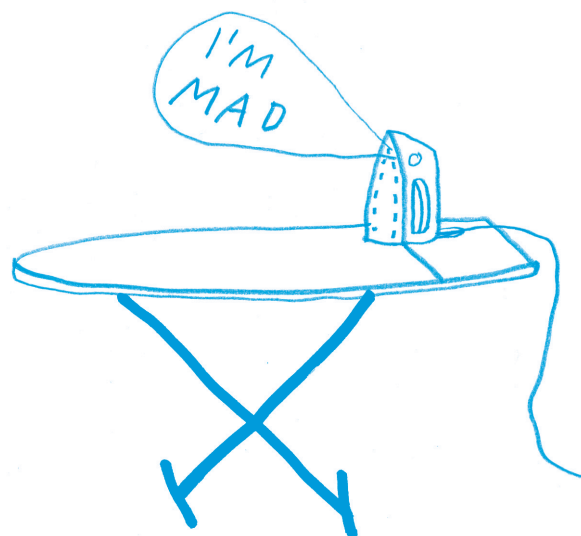
(8)

ADRIAN PACI Centro di Permanenza Temporanea,  
Smith-Stewart

The Albanian-born Paci, who has several works about town at the moment, has saved his first solo presentation in NYC, titled *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (*Centre of Temporary Permanence*), for Smith-Stewart. A single-channel video installation, the piece deals with the state of limbo and limited options that illegal immigrants in camps face. Paci consistently draws from his own experience, specifically the instance when he left Albania to begin a new life in Milan, when making work. The grim situation of captive immigrants is competently illustrated - and that may be its fault. Perhaps the artful presentation (rather than a just-the-facts-ma'am account) and slightly stylised camerawork undermine the gravity of the real-life socioeconomic disaster, although I've never heard anyone complain about the aesthetic value in Goya's or Manet's paintings about war.

(9)

PETER GALLO I Will Not Be Judy Garland,  
Sunday



Peter Gallo, a forty-nine-year-old mental-health professional based in northern Vermont, has already had some shows in the city, notably at White Columns and Freight & Volume, but is still considered an emerging artist. Here he presents mainly text-heavy paintings and drawings installed in a fun, uneven fashion, using materials as diverse as dental floss and toothpicks, crumbled eggshell, an ironing board, and - my favourite - a snowshoe. The work tends to reference literature, art and music, is dirty without being about dirt, and is assembled out of scrap-pile or yard-sale junk in an at-once deliberate but nonprecious way. It's difficult not to think of it in terms

symbol of all that had been useful but was swept away in the mechanised rush to war? The irony that during its postwar economic boom Germany had once more placed its faith in industrial production and soul-numbing conformity? These oversize contraptions, which lack all function, seem both menacing and impotent, suggesting all of the above. No wonder Klapheck wrings both humour and pathos from them.

(11)

CHRISTOPHER WOOL Pattern Paintings,  
1987-2000, Skarstedt Gallery

Like so much of Andy Warhol and Donald Baechler, Christopher Wool's pattern paintings look like the efforts of someone playing on the Xerox machine or learning to silkscreen. Rendered in black media that seem to float on large sheets of paper or white aluminium, they have a flatness that telegraphs reproduction. But the drips in those flower motifs and the misregistration of screens in those leaves reveal the hand behind the mechanical. Still, the scroll motif in one resembles the wrought-iron quatrefoils of the gallery's street door in an unfortunate coincidence.

In addition to adding a human touch, however, the slips make the visually satisfying passages in the work seem (almost) accidental. Occasionally Wool will spray-paint sections of a work or apply wide strokes of white through which the black patterns below remain hazily discernible. Such interventions add a level of pictorial depth, but his work still seems a bit a like Cady Noland's, minus the figural and conceptual slap.

(12)

JULES OLITSKI The Late Paintings,  
a Celebration, Knoedler & Company

Olitski's last paintings - the pioneer of colour-field painting died in February 2007 - are a maddening mix of slop and glop and assured technique. All the works are heavy with paint, and in the larger canvases, pools and eddies of intensely saturated hues play off areas of matte colour, while fissures in the surface reveal complementary tones below. Several pictures recall landscapes, as if the artist had depicted protean flows of lava or matter exploding during the Big Bang. But given their crustiness, they seem more about material than form.

Lacking this density, the smaller paintings don't engage the eye; and the problem with the larger ones is that the novelty of their technical bravura wears off. There's a question to be raised in all the shows by midcareer and late-career artists I've seen on this crawl: how do they keep from producing technically proficient clichés of their former innovations?

Smith's *Untitled (Congratulations)* (2007), a series of 38 glass vases placed in an incomplete grid on the floor with a bouquet of irises occupying a single one, demonstrates just how deafeningly mute the readymade can be. Anglès's *Open Edition eQX* (2007) takes this reticence to an extreme in its offering of free newsprint broadsheets that have been run through presses without any typeset. The result is a mostly blank print-run, with the occasional palimpsest of previous editions bleeding through.



The fact that the sheets are free, with subscriptions available too, points up Anglès's interest in manipulating standard circuits of exchange: each work is 'sold' according to certain site- or rather exhibition-specific pricing 'algorithms'. We've seen this kind of thing from Seth Price, but whereas Price may be a bit more academic, even didactic, Anglès's work is, well, more 'open', which means it's vulnerable to all sorts of unthought permutations and evolutions, both more and less 'fit' for the current market landscape, which means it may - but only potentially - have more to say in the end.

Of course there is another way to avoid or short-circuit discourse, and that's to interrupt the brain's own electrochemical signals, something that (8) PAUL SHARITS tried to do with *Epileptic Seizure Comparison* (1978), a 16mm-film dual projection installation at Greene Naftali. Sharits is perhaps best known as one of P. Adams Sitney's 'structural' filmmakers, a loose grouping of artists who took film to its avant-garde extremes during the late 1960s. Though Tony Conrad, another new and welcome Greene Naftali 'find', produced one of the first self-conscious 'flicker' films - called - what else? - *The Flicker* - in 1966,

and-hair canine (*Dog*, 2007), Anna Thompson's equally prostrate papier-mâché catfish (*Big Ol' Catfish*, 2007) and Brittany Janaszak's performative take on the plight of the albatross (2007). Given that the works I just listed fell on both ends of the Northeastern seaboard, it's rather difficult to parse the ideological quirks of the respective institutions. If anything, it seems a fondness for animals prevails: on the part of the artists, their schools or perhaps just Mr Martinez.

(12)

Something for the Commute,  
Brooklyn Fire Proof

When I was a Yale undergrad, I elected myself to notetaker and aspirant biographer of the MFA graduates who walked in my midst and occasionally talked to me, under the false supposition that I was one of the anointed few. So it's been with great interest that I've followed MFA alumna Katy Lynn Porte's recent curatorial programme at Brooklyn Fire Proof, as she gives exhibition opportunities to a number of notable (and sometimes horrendously unappreciated) Yale artists. The latest exhibition assembles work by Ethan Greenbaum, S.E. Nash and Karla Wozniak under the rubric of urban and digital commuting. There's not much sense to the grouping, particularly given that Wozniak's straightforward approach to painting (she paints on canvas) makes her the odd one out in this otherwise highly inventive show. Nash's geopolitically charged displays, from *Cruise Poop* to *Palm Island* (both 2007) extrude the type of brash, love-me-or-revile-me aesthetic that brings Elizabeth Murray to mind, and while I usually opt for revilement, it's not without



of faux naive art via Golub, Mamma Andersson and, dare I say it, Darger.

(10)

Display, Museum 52

*Display* is the inaugural exhibition for London's Museum 52's space in New York. The show brings some of its London stable as well as some additional local artists. It's slightly unclear how it examines modes of display, although the first floor seems to investigate ways of mounting and hanging artworks. Sarah Greenberg Rafferty's photographs of souvenir plates are stuck to a dark-purple velvet support and seem to play around with notions of domestic marital trophies. George Henry Longly uses basic cuboid forms and rearranges them. Philip Hausmeier's *Untitled (Cabinet)* (2007), a large rectangular sculpture made from hundreds of shards of glass and steel, is explosive and arresting, and contains multiple readings, although its longer fascination is found by the myriad plays of light that delight the retina. It's also perhaps the best cubist funhouse mirror I've seen.

(11)

KATRINA DASCHNER Fear Eat Soul Up,  
Thrust Projects

For her first solo show in NYC, Katerina Daschner makes interesting use of embroidery. In *Nature, nature I'm your bride, take me as I am* (all works 2006), delicate needlework reminiscent of home-sweet-home needlepoint kits is made to produce multilayered readings of gender roles, with the inclusion of spurs, a riding crop and a tie. According to the press release, this piece takes its cue from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928). In *Harbor of Love* Daschner creates a sort of imaginary map out of embroidery stuck to a raw canvas with a video loop projected onto the surface. Running on a one-minute loop, *Naima and Naima* uses footage from a 1940s Egyptian movie starring Naima Akef, who plays both the role of a seductive belly dancer and a keen sailor. The nicely rendered drawings of chicks with dicks, freaky found personal photographs and other stuff comes dangerously close to old-hat gender-politic issues. While fairly aggressive in promoting what seems to be the artist's personal agenda, the work is also compelling by virtue of its ability to map out thought-provoking connections with a capable imagination. I don't really like the show, but I feel that I am not really meant to like it, which is annoying.

(12)

EILEEN QUINLAN Photographs, Miguel Abreu

For her debut solo outing at Miguel Abreu, Eileen Quinlan has created a very precise programme that allows her to milk the formal and conceptual enquiry set by the relatively

(13)

BRIDGET RILEY Recent Paintings and Gouaches,  
PaceWildenstein, 32 East 57th Street  
and 534 West 25th Street

For example, Bridget Riley, master of Op art, who continues to experiment with eye-popping patterns but, judging by her newer paintings and gouaches, has become formulaic. You see her working the same motifs, altering the colours in her leafy, Matisse-cutout-like compositions. In one case the result is light and vibrant, in another more plodding. Clearly Riley is adept at, and devoted to, mining this territory; but couldn't one achieve the same shifts with a graphic-design program?

(14)

DOUGLAS GORDON Self-Portrait of You + Me, After the Factory, Gagosian Gallery,  
Madison Avenue

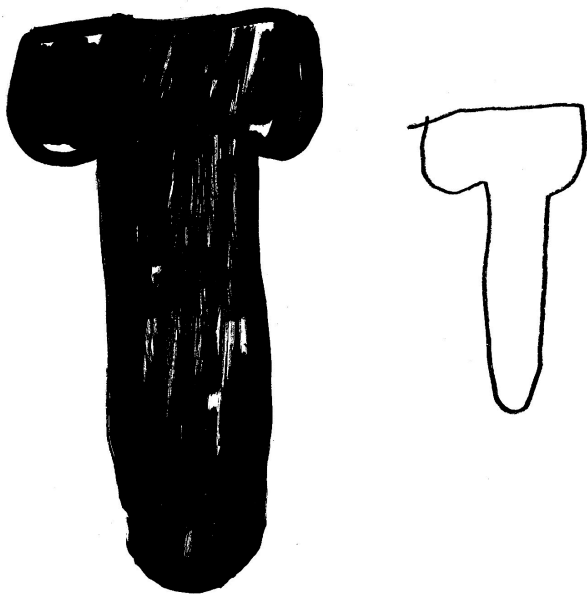
The initial effect of Douglas Gordon's show is stunning. Just off the elevator you encounter two works composed of images culled from Warhol that the artist burned and affixed to mirrors. Those fragmentary Jackies and that singed Empire State Building bear the force of our collective traumas.

Then you come upon the main room, painted and carpeted in black, in which a veritable catalogue of defaced Warhols confront you from shimmering, reflective mounts. At best this stuff smacks of Affichistes like Mimmo Rotella. At worst, it reeks of window dressing.

(15-17)

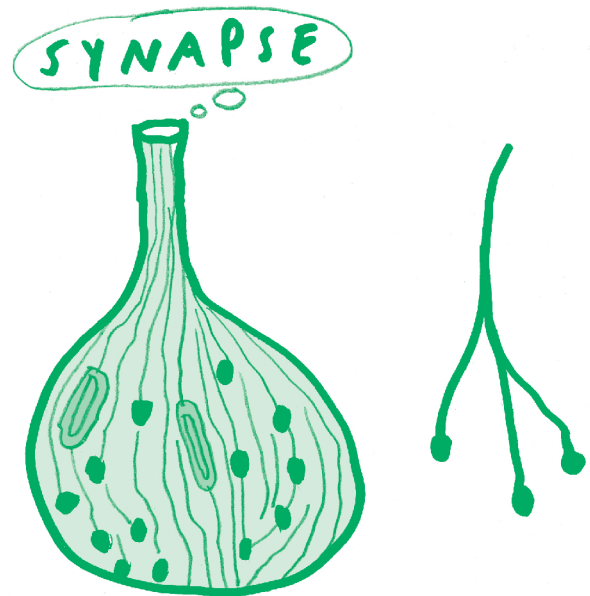
KARA WALKER My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love and JACOB LAWRENCE's Migration Series Selections from the Phillips Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art; and ROMARE BEARDEN A Black Odyssey, DC Moore Gallery...

COCKS of AMERICA



Sharits made the structure of alternating light and dark film frames something of his signature, with works such as *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* (1968) and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1968). Like these earlier films, *Epileptic Seizure Comparison* assaults the audience with strobelike flashing footage of two epileptic seizures and what sounds like a high-pitched screeching drone. The setup is immersive, and the effect is hypnotic and repulsive. Whether one's consciousness is rendered epileptic, as Sharits had hoped, is beside the point. What is for certain is that faced with this onslaught of image, light and sound, there is no thinking at all.

There is likely a segue here that could serve as a quick dismissal of (9) HUGH WALTON's videos at Clementine, which show the unmelting of frozen alphabet soup, or urine, into words and phrases such as 'totally fucked' and 'pissed'. But the footage, however inane, is somewhat mesmerising, as time runs in reverse and the block-letter forms slowly reconstitute themselves.



Perhaps it's time to return to painting. As the Louis/Steir pairing I hope made clear, contemporary painting must take very seriously how paint actually makes it onto canvas. (10) MAGNUS PLESSSEN possesses one of the more individual methods of doing just this, while at the same time finding the kind of mundane subject matter and imagery that seems to fit his wide, scraping strokes. (Somewhere along the way to this show at Barbara Gladstone, Plessen also lost the 'von' that used to precede his last name; perhaps the process of refining his stroke required some nominal honing as well.) Somewhere, perhaps in reference to Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze notes how, for the painter, the canvas is never blank, but is rather always already full of the images and history that accrue to that privileged two-dimensional space. It is the painter's task to scrape away, to 'excavate', all of this sedimentation in order to get at the 'painting'



a degree of respect. Greenbaum's acrylic-on-Sintra paintings, on the other hand, fit hyperreality like a glove: painted in a palette of pastel-neons unknown (or, more likely, outlawed) until the 1970s, the artist's ongoing network of small, loosely iconographic images (*Archive*, 2006-) evince a similar level of sophistication as Liam Gillick's coloured Plexiglas structures. Greenbaum, like Gillick, is an appropriationist for the post-capitalist era, negotiating the structures of visibility and advertising from the position of virtual consumer: hands down, he succeeds.

(13)

The Dotted Line, Rotunda Gallery

After writing three reviews in a row (in rather more of a wine-addled state than I'd usually care to admit), I wouldn't feign the capacity to do justice to curator Colby Chamberlain's exhibition on bureaucratic documents and art, which is why I recommend referring to the recently published review in *Time Out New York* (though I haven't read it, for sake of critical originality), or any of the others that the *Cabinet* managing editor and critic-about-town will presumably have received by the time this issue is published.

(14)

Song of Myself, Powerhouse

For her first exhibition with publisher/gallery Powerhouse, curator Adriana Hernandez asked nine photographers to respond to Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (1855) and contribute new or old works that chimed with the poem's celebration of subjective expression. I don't doubt that Hernandez's choice of artists was thoughtfully made, but positing any exhibition in such a relativistic framework can only result in a tautology: artwork is a mode of self-expression, ergo I choose to exhibit photographs that express me. Indeed, much of the work on display could have coalesced better under a different heading, such as, say, *Mapping Societies Near and Abroad* or *Anthropological Imagery from a Globalised World*. And while many of these images - from stalwart photographers like Charles Harbutt, Alex Webb and Lucille Fornasieri-Gold - were quite nice to look at, the most interesting were the oddest-ones-out: twenty-five-year-old Naho Kubota's daytime snaps of unlit neon on white backdrops. Lacking visual clarity and semiotic communicability, these images were pressingly inquisitive, when most of the other works came across as reapportioned photojournalism.

(15)

SIMON ROBERTS Motherland,  
Klompching Gallery

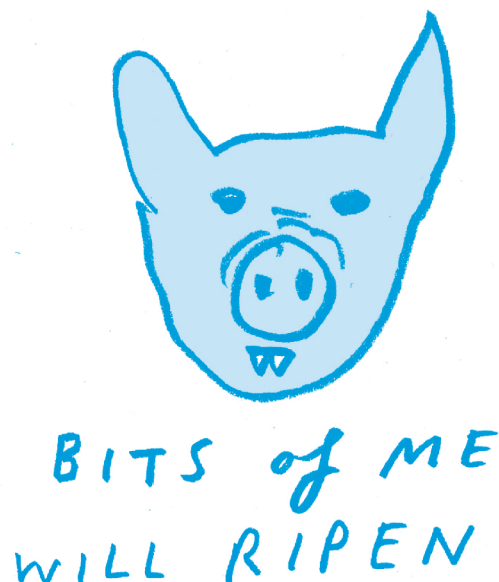
Perhaps my recent listen to NPR's Intelligence Squared debate 'Is Russia Becoming Our Enemy Again?' didn't prepare me well for Simon

unexplored potential for photography's place in modernist abstraction. It's an impressive show that unfolds gradually and delights the viewer with seemingly unlimited potential for formal and aesthetic invention. As part of her ongoing series *Smoke & Mirrors*, the photographs are also particularly successful in taking advantage of analogue as opposed to digital film in rendering subtle textures and moods. Some of the works, such as *Red Goya (diptych)* (all works 2007) and *Yellow Goya* appear to be the same composition, and Quinlan messes around with scale and lighting effects to create vibrant images where texture and surface quality jar with the fractured, angular compositions. There are also departures from the mainly zig-zag, geometric forms in images like *Black and White Backdrop #1* (2007) where evidence of more leathery, skin like surfaces can be seen.

(13)

LIZZI BOUGATSOS Street Feather,  
James Fuentes LLC

Lizzi Bougatsos is in two bands, Gang Gang Dance and I.U.D., both of which tour extensively. She is reminiscent of the type of artist who inhabited the LES during the 1980s, the last time it passed through such a vibrant moment. *Street Feather* begins with a story and some



writing by Bougatsos, and it seems irresponsible not to include some of that here. Briefly, walking around the East Village one day, Bougatsos saw a birdhouse in the street that looked to be made by a homeless person, and she found it moving. She decided to recreate the birdhouse to human scale as a kind of monument to that bit of fleeting, fragile, gutter humanity. From the outside *Birdhouse for Humans* (2007) looks like a homeless shelter. Inside are photocopies of semi-familiar-looking people and hanging pieces of raw pork loin, one of which becomes a necktie for an unidentified Xerox man, while another hangs from the flies of a pair of photocopied

...in which I, a relatively privileged white man, touch on the no-win situation of race in America as presented by those on the very short end of the stick (perhaps not market-darling Kara Walker).

Kara Walker has always been a problematic artist for me. Her silhouettes impress me as aesthetically dull; her works on paper, as sloppy doodles; and her exaggerations of nappy-haired piccaninnies and scrawny-dicked whites hungry for black cock, juvenile in their crudeness, although accurate in nailing the white American's fear that people of colour have bigger dicks (witness the sexual humiliations visited on prisoners at Abu Ghraib). So I find this show, with its repetitive catalogue of horrors and hatreds, vaguely sanctimonious.

However, in putting these stereotypes of race in front of us, Walker suggests that as a society we have never come to terms with the obscene legacy that the ancestors of some of us owned those of others of us. I find that an effective message (maybe outdated, as a black man is now running for president), but does the force of her work derive from the work itself, or from the racist trauma it evokes? Sometimes the music to her films adds more pathos than her imagery does. I suspect this art makes rich white people feel that they're overcoming racism by buying the stuff. No need to give to the beggar with the soon-gangrenous foot. (Although if you can afford Walker, you don't ride the subway.)

Upstairs at the Whitney, 17 paintings from Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*, which depicts the mass movement of African Americans from south to north during the First World War, nail the scope of the racial tragedy in this country. Flat and almost childlike in their straightforwardness, they eschew anger and allow the hardship of individual lives to speak for millions. That scrawny child peering up onto the empty table is hunger; the curve of the laundress' shoulders as she leans down to stir the washing is backbreaking effort. But Lawrence keeps his head high; these people will die with their pride if nothing else, and that hurts. This is art getting close to the homeless man's foot.

Romare Bearden's 1960s collages of African Americans in the inner city are a graphic precedent for Walker's language. But what's on view at DC Moore is a series of works from the late 1970s based on *The Odyssey*. By the time he made these, the force of Bearden's gritty, 1960s work had ebbed into a more decorative, fanciful style recalling the forms and rhythms of Matisse cutouts. There's a political rub in the work on view in that it casts Homer's characters as black (which some probably were), uses African motifs and casts some characters as modern city-dwellers.

that may be the artist's own. Plessen's work is about as near to a literal translation of this Deleuzian prescription as one might find today. The clotheslined shirts of *Execution* (2006) appear as if they have been peeled apart from the thin, internal layers of the canvas; *Portrait* (2007) looks like a rubbing; *Stage* (2006) reveals its figure through the simple application of a nine-stroke ground.



There must be something about the photographic image that demands this kind of mark. Plessen also works from photographs, and his scraping style was developed, at least in part, as a means of distancing his painting from what we should call the tyranny of the mimetic. (11) KIRA WAGER, Plessen's contemporary from Norway, showing at Rare, has developed a remarkably similar strategy, though the panels that Wager works on are more sympathetic to the scrape of the palette knife than are Plessen's canvases. Wager works much harder to conjure the photographic images from which the paintings get their start, while Plessen's work has swung closer to the pole of illustration (again, the shirts of *Execution* are exemplary here).

Wager has also figured a way to reflect her method into the larger formal structure of her paintings. For example, in *Oslo 1.2* (2007), the facets of Wager's mark find their echo in the grid divisions of the canvas, the 'collaged' panels that divide and interrupt the scenes, dividing the women's heads as if different quadrants had been 'exposed' with different lenses or were drawn from different images altogether. And herein likely lies the distinction between Plessen and Wager: Plessen's method is deeply involved with the materiality of the individual stroke and its limited ability to generate legibility. The

Roberts's photo-essay *Motherland*, at the recently opened DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, Brooklyn) gallery Klompching, as I found myself balking at the press release's suggestion that Roberts's series dispels 'the clichéd view of poverty-stricken post-communist Russia'. The photos deployed now-systematic tactics for capturing a region of the world - stunning landscapes paired with full-body portraits of the local colour, from Cossack soldiers to wrestlers (photos which, in the best cases, suggested Rineke Dijkstra; in the worst, Wes Anderson). Roberts was wise to let his content do the talking, and more often than not, Russia's history loomed unsettlingly in the background like a nagging reminder. The brightly coloured Chechnyan market scene of *Outdoor Market* (2005), set against a row of decimated brick houses, may be the most heavy-handed evocation of this residue, but it is equally one of the most elegantly wrought.

(16)

*Sex in the City*,  
Dumbo Arts Council

*Sex in the City* considers the most delectable property of sexuality and successfully channels it into aesthetics: with so many ways to say no, curators Dean Daderko and Marina Adams celebrate 'so many ways to say "yes"'. Most of the works appeared to benefit from the libidinous framing and delivered the erotic goods to more or less immediate degrees (though I'd challenge the inclusion of Edie Fake and Dewayne Slightweight: D.D., they're twee asexualists, not eroticists!). My favourite may have been A.K. Burns's *Title* (2007), comprising a slab of frozen grey acrylic paint atop a pedestal (which, by the time I encountered it, had left a mess of McCarthy-esque defecation on the gallery floor). But in a show predicated on the have-it-your-way ethic of contemporary sexuality, the only thing my critical preference could possibly say about me is that I'm a stone-cold fetishist.

(17)

*Site Matters: Brooklyn Represents*,  
Brooklyn Arts Council

Given the palatial scale and curatorial virility of the Dumbo Arts Council, I had high hopes for its borough-wide superior. Yet I left its exhibition disappointed and bemused: not because all of the artwork on display was of middling quality (though some of it was), but because the gallery consists of the hallway and conference room of the council. It's impossible to perambulate the space without absorbing some of its offic(ial)ism, from the blandly patterned chairs to the perma-hushed tones of the phone-shackled staff.

(18)

JASON GANDY *Atixip: Te Foxl*,  
Rabbitholestudio

trousers. One imagines the pork loins as being birdseed for humans, and it's impossible not to think about the stink they produce as they ripen during the course of the show. There are also street signs, telephone cables, found posters and such culled from Bougatsos's gamine adventures. It's nothing new (or perhaps it's so old it's almost new), but Bougatsos's wild, poetic jouissance is attractive and genuine.

(14)

PINAR YOLACAN *Maria*,  
Rivington Arms

For this show, Turkish photographer Pinar Yolacan has made a series of opulent portraits about colonialism and the damage it has done to cultural identity. It includes 22 colour-saturated portraits of women shot on a small, economically depressed island off the northeast coast of Brazil. They all have the look of Old Master-style portraits in which figures emerge



from a pitch-black backdrop and are bedecked in sumptuous, colour-rich drapery. The fabrics were bought from local merchants, and some of the garments are made with placentae and other animal parts. Yet almost all the women appear totally natural in these crazy outfits, and it says something of Yolacan's skill as a photographer that she is able to elicit so much attitude and self-confidence in her sitters. One lady is totally at ease with a pair of testicles hanging around her neck. Apart from their obvious aesthetic and sociological appeal, the pictures ride a very fine line between patronisation, exploitation or ridicule and a genuine desire to make a powerful image that is sympathetic to her subjects.

(15)

*Raster Haircut*, Rental

For those (like me) not familiar with Rental's concept, it's a ready-made space that international galleries can hire to mount

(18)

LAWRENCE WEINER, Marian Goodman Gallery

It's kind of cool seeing Weiner at the same time as Kara Walker, since both use graphic media applied to the wall, and as Ed Ruscha (see below), who also plays with the use and meaning of letters and words. I love Weiner's bushy beard and his loping, sloping gait; that he keeps a boat in Holland and that it seems his wife is always with him. He probably drinks a ton and screws a lot and has a grand time, which is refreshing in this city and artworld where everyone seems focused on the pleasures of the bank account. I also love how open-ended his work is: epigrammatic, it can touch on so many ideas and set your mind to thinking. Ultimately, it's about the cogitation that underlies the process of art: making it, viewing it. In his case, you think it, you own it.

However, all these things written in different typefaces on the wall or printed on posters and exhibited together look like a catalogue for a print shop.

(19)

ROGER MAYNE, Gitterman Gallery

Mayne's photographs of shabby London, Sheffield, Leeds and Dublin streets during the 1950s, the patched doorways, the crumbling plaster, the kids with grimy faces and moth-eaten jumpers, telegraph the physical and psychological discomfort of lives lived in damp poverty. Their matter-of-factness eschews commentary, heightening their aesthetic and emotional punch. They are sober and communicative, highlighted by moments of joy, as when a boy dances with his arms outstretched while his urchin companions look on. This is as good as it gets. Like Jacob Lawrence, someone else's life gets in your guts.

(20-21)

BARBARA KRUGER Picture/Readings: 1978,  
Mary Boone Gallery, ED RUSCHA Gunpowder  
Ribbon Drawings, Craig F. Starr Associates

Barbara Kruger's deadpan images of nondescript buildings shot in California and Florida - pink stucco balconies, a droopy plant in a plastic pot seen through a window and suchlike - owe a debt to Ruscha's photos of parking lots and gas stations, those equally generic places that define so much American urban space (there are also nods to Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler and John Baldessari). Opposed to each image is a story describing a scene one could imagine happening within these anonymous structures. In one a woman who has discovered a lump in her breast watches smoke rising from a cup of instant coffee. Not the kind of content the macho Ruscha would go for.

image itself still reigns in Wager's work, and her method appears akin to peeling the skin off the face of the world.

Perhaps only Cheim & Read rivals Mitchell-Innes & Nash for miniature museum-quality exhibitions. But while the former was indulging itself in Steir, the latter put on a generous display of (12) ALBERTO BURRI's art, spanning practically the artist's entire professional career. There's a work from 1951, *Nero e Oro*, an early mixed-media collage that already evinces Burri's singular interest in pure matter's potential for aesthetic candidacy. But Burri realised quickly that art required some form of intervention, some type of transformation; only, in Italy in the 1950s, there could be no triumphant artistic promotion of the self as there was in the US. One had to find other ways of intervening, so Burri took to burning the papers, vinyls and plastics that made their way into his *Combustione* series of paintings, which he began during the late 1950s and continued to make until the mid-60s, when he turned to 'accretion' as a new means of 'making'.

Is it possible that contemporary artists do not see these avenues of practice as open to them today? Certainly the *Cellotex* works that Burri began making during the 1980s demonstrate that even the best artists cannot maintain the pace of innovation and must sometimes settle for reconfiguration. Or resettle: Burri's *Grande Sacco* (1953), an arrangement of stretched, painted and sewn-together burlap panels, shows the artist hard at work finding other ways of 'making' a picture.

Like Burri, (13) SHINIQUE SMITH begins with similar reconfigurations - of discarded clothing and assorted everyday items. The artist's first solo show, *All Purpose*, at the Moti Hasson Gallery, takes these items and bundles them, quite literally, into piles, and at times into shrines, in an effort to overcome their resolute 'thingness'. But it is Smith's collages that move back into the territory of innovation: there the graffiti mark, the calligraphic stroke, is made a 'thing' in and of itself, which forever alters its connection to a 'maker'. Similar to the clothing bundles, the collages are rife with the traces of some kind of subjectivity - the wearer's, the artist's - but one that has been lost, or perhaps discarded.

To borrow Ian Hacking's terminology, one must be fully engaged in both 'representing' and 'intervening', in both the philosophy and experiment of artistic practice; and again, Burri's work demonstrates just how intertwined were these concepts in a postwar Europe for which traditional aesthetic categories and practices had been rendered obsolete at best and bankrupt at worst.



A good friend once advised me that my career decisions should be made on the basis of who I want to party with for the rest of my life. As a naive college student, I naturally considered her proposition in terms of which industry stocked the cutest boys and, rather decisively, deemed art to be a better course of pursuit than a Comparative Literature Ph.D. My inclination has been confirmed time and time again; most recently, when the studly (but evidently straight) director of basement DUMBO hub Rabbitholestudio toured me around this exhibition of Jason Gandy's work. The director apologised profusely for the lack of a press release (it was undergoing 'revision') and for the somewhat disorganised nature of the space (it doubles as a for-rent photo studio). The bohemian in me found ample sympathy for these inconveniences, extolled the merits of the

shows. How smart is that? Beyond being a gimmick, it's also a totally valid way to think about the future of galleries; or perhaps it simply sheds a little transparency on how they already function. Putting forward the idea that hair itself, not style or hairdos, is such an important part of the everyday landscape that it's totally acceptable to mount a show about it, *Raster Haircut* (mounted by Polish gallery Raster) is one of the most amusing conceits I've come across. Raster even goes so far as to suggest that close observation of hair can cause one to 'sense slowly emerging from chaos, the promise of a new order'. Included in the show are four Polish artists: Rafal Bujnowski, Aneta Grzeszykowska, Przemek Matecki and Jan Smaga. Bujnowski's paintings of women's hair sans face (almost like a wig) are standouts.

(16)

Just a Ghostly Paper Sigh, 31 Grand

Having opened in Williamsburg in 1999, 31 Grand picked up sticks and established itself last July on one of the hippest blocks on the LES. As the title suggests, the loose theme of this show is works on paper, although paintings by Gina Magid of folksy and thrashed-to-death-some-years-ago Steppenwolf-type images managed to slip through the cracks of the curatorial parameters. What is nice about these, however, is that they are made on satin, with a seam running across the picture. Magalie Guérin's labour-intensive, accomplished little drawings in ballpoint pen demonstrate immaculate technique but seem to be about nothing in particular. Rebecca Chamberlain uses the ink from ballpoint pens to make really rather attractive, nuanced drawings on vellum that tend to depict cold but stylish interiors. Also of interest are Jasmine Pasquill's well-rendered ink drawings that hint at mysterious wintry pagan rituals.



MYTHOPOETIC  
UNDERPINNING

artist-run space and anti-commercial, basement-lying integrity (not that I wasn't being sincere; just that his muscles made me a conduit for their own end). From what else I allowed myself to see, I can say that Gandy's work, made entirely of wood, is best viewed without reading up on its mythopoetic underpinning: his figurative work has a precision (read: obsessive-compulsiveness) that recalls Liza Lou; his small, bonsai-inspired wood structures and boat stern jut out from the gallery walls in a persuasive-enough fashion to suggest that an institutional limit may simultaneously function as imaginative departure-point. Good on Gandy; and good on Mr Director for showing him to me.

MY MEANING  
LURKS





The works are a bit dry, and visually a bit dull, but what Kruger is groping for is the connect and disconnect between image, word and meaning, which she exploits so well in her classic 1980s work. That too owes a debt to Ruscha, but his drawings of words, which seem to be spelled out by lengths of ribbon, are too fun and witty to have Kruger's kind of depth. The letters in *Tulsa*, pictured from above, unspool across a flat background as if they were the buildings that form the city photographed from an aeroplane. *Pee Pee* (1976) is a visual pun for the two big Ps at the beginning of each word - guys are so focused on the functions of their dicks.

(22)

*The Complexity of the Simple*, L&M Arts

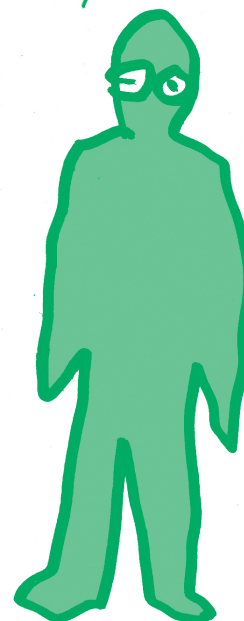
L&M specialise in exhibitions of superlative pieces - witness their painfully beautiful selection of late de Koonings last fall - contextualised with curatorial intelligence and concision (and aimed, of course, at selling available works to the lucky collectors who can afford to buy at this level). What happened? I simply don't see what a small Anselm Reyle of crinkled foil has to do with an Agnes Martin from the 1980s. Or how Liza Lou's beaded tree branch relates to one of the most sublime John Chamberlains, 1962 no less, one is likely to see anywhere. Mark Rothko and Mark Handforth? Are they crazy? True, apparently simple visual statements can be astoundingly poetic, but dull art is just dull art, and it looks even worse in great company.

(23)

CALDER AND MELOTTI *Lyrical Constructions*,  
Barbara Mathes Gallery

Well not every aesthetic category: Burri (like Manzoni) couldn't get off the wall. The pictorial frame remained the laboratory within which any kind of material experiment might take place. But it would have to be Carl Andre who inherited that material sensibility on this side of the Atlantic. More than any other minimalist artist of that generation, it was Andre who understood the potential of matter as a readymade (just as Warhol understood the new potential of the image as a readymade). But the problem with this 'discovery' is that one either follows it to its logical conclusion, at which point not the readymade but 'matter' itself becomes the problem (indeed, the very possibility of raw matter understood as a readymade requires the concept of matter to have undergone any number of redefinitions, which, of course, is exactly what was happening for a generation that was just coming to terms with the conundrums of quantum mechanics), or one becomes trapped by the logic of the 'discovery' itself, whereby its moment of revelation is endlessly restaged. Which is why there really was nothing 'new' about (14) ANDRE's *Timber Works/Copper Works* show at Paula Cooper. It's not so much that the moment of these works had passed, it's that Andre continues to refuse to use his work to ask the tough questions - the questions that his work made possible in the first place - ie, how does one represent 'matter'?

I, MATTER



This is a deeply interesting question for perhaps one-tenth of one percent of the general population. For everyone else it is deeply uninteresting, or simply trivial, but it underpins the kind of experimentation or 'intervention' that we see in Burri's work, and which appears wholly lacking in Andre's. Yet both artists came to the question of matter because it had been made particularly timely: Burri because postwar Italian artists needed anything that could resist the weight of the

(19)

INFINITU ET CONTINI Repeated Histories,  
Reinvented Resistances, Smack Mellon

I wouldn't dare claim that Smack Mellon has, thematically speaking, resolved the ongoing problem of how to exhibit video art en masse, though it must be said that its current exhibition adopts a theme (militarism) that is perhaps most effectively experienced through visual and aural dissonance. There may have been some quality works set amid the hum, rumble and occasional ironic soundtrack of the dozen-odd videos on display, but I couldn't bear to be in the space long enough to view them. At the expense of the exhibited videos, Smack Mellon's installation strategy more than made its point.

(20)

ELWYN PALMERTON The Revolution,  
HQ Gallery

Elwyn Palmerton's exhibition ostensibly concluded on 16 November, which was a sad fact for this reviewer, who's always keen to give fellow critics-cum-artists-cum-critics their due. Yet as I walked by HQ Gallery en route to other shows, the revolution, it seemed, was carrying on, albeit in a darkened room behind closed doors. I tried my best to decipher the press release and messy, product-laden assemblages through the storefront window; had clarity been more forthcoming, I do think I would have liked them.

(21)

JUAN JOSE CAMBRE Chromatism,  
The Hogar Collection

What fascinated me most about Juan José Cambre's exhibition was the press release, which performed a pretty unexpected exhumation, in this post-post-post-structuralist's opinion. Foregoing mention of deconstruction, libidinal economies and subcultural discourses, writer Eva Grinstein raised the figurative roof for Kandinsky, Goethe and even the venerable Isaac Newton. Her ensuing discussion of colour theory was fascinating - far too fascinating, it must be said, to accompany the dull, painterly investigations on display.

(22)

Early Worm Gets the Bird,  
Cinders Gallery

The argument was probably more eloquently stated during the years when the practice was a consequential player on the commercial art scene, but in the case of the current exhibition at Cinders (well, in the case of pretty much any exhibition at Cinders), it bears repeating: that 'f' in 'faux-naive' stands for facility. Think what you will about bearded Providence and Portland fellows producing fantastical images of flute-playing dogs and faerie

(17)

Geometrics,  
Gallery onetwentyeight

Aha! Just when one thought the days of founding *movements* were over - you know, with manifestos, international members, etc - *Geometrics* comes along. This show not only introduced me to [geoform.net](http://geoform.net) ('a scholarly resource, international forum, and curatorial project that focuses on the use of geometric form and structure in contemporary abstract art') but also to an artists collective called Criss-Cross, who are obsessed with pattern and structure, and are connected to the P&D (pattern and decoration) movement of the 1970s. Each artist here is interested in a specific style of P&D painting: tessellations, fractals and geometric form repeated at scaled intervals, from overlays and altered Islamic artforms. The easy criticism to level at this show is that it was a little like stepping into a time capsule, but that is equally true of shows all over town. As a critic, one is used to wading through knee-high rivers of pretentious, obnoxious, noncommittal, bad, pompous, contrived, gimmicky art, and *Geometrics* was a welcome dose of folks making art just because they're into it.

(18)

Holiday Reading, Number 35

*Holiday Reading* has a fairly tight Christmas-themed curatorial parameter that still comes off as straight-up marketing, but hey, these galleries gotta shift some product to stay in business. The idea is to show artworks that incorporate an object alongside a text (diptych fashion): sometimes a book alongside a painting, other times newsprint cutout and rearranged, a handwritten postcard alongside a wall painting, you get the idea. The work looks fine and is clever, and some of the associations between object and text reap humorous and thought-provoking rewards.

(19)

CHRISTIAN SAMPSON, *Never Work*

As has been the running theme for many of the galleries on my beat, *Never Work* is a single-owner artist-run space that opened last September. After having worked at Marianne Boesky for several years, Siobhan Lowe started the gallery with a mind to showing New York-based artists. So far there are only three artists in her stable, so any unrepresented New York-based artists better get their skates on! For the third show at the gallery, Christian Sampson exhibited paintings that recall nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts as well as Middle Eastern kilims. Sampson constructs his paintings out of black-and-white cords nailed to a panel, making for a sort of cake-decoration effect via Op art.

This is another version of the L&M ilk of show in that it's cleanly curated, gorgeously installed and intended to recontextualise one artist, Fausto Melotti, to appeal to collectors who buy another. According to the press release, the two share an engineer's precision and a sense of whimsy. I am mad for Melotti's ceramics; but Mathes is showing his metal sculpture, and charming though it is, Melotti's no Calder.



Calder's work has a formal and aesthetic rigour. His mobiles occupy and enliven space. The play between the angular red base, the spiralling brass counterweight and the moving elements of his *Yellow Triangle* (1965) create an aesthetic synergy that gives the work energy and presence.

Melotti is static. *Contrappunto Libero* (1972), in which discs, crescents and rings cut from sheet copper are affixed to a tower-like frame, lacks visual and material tension. The result is almost twee. His *Untitled* (1978), in which he painted and scratched a plaster block in an evocation of the misty Venice Lagoon dotted with gondolas is, however, gorgeous. Melotti is worth knowing about, just not compared to Calder.

past; Andre because sculpture could only reach its own zero degree once all 'composition' became a given material's own (a far more radical gesture than simply exchanging the idea of 'sculpture' for 'specific objects', I think).

And we'd do well to keep this in mind when approaching (15) WADE GUYTON's newest monochrome inkjet paintings at Friedrich Petzel Gallery. As 'process' works, which is how they are regularly positioned by Guyton's supporters, the paintings are uninteresting. But as 'inkjet' paintings, as works which attempt to intervene in this new technology, in this new 'matter', and use it in a heterodox manner (think Burri and his precious Celotex), the work is very successful, if underdeveloped.

(16) DANA MELAMED achieves something similar with her new series of heavily worked drawings at Priska Juska, which incorporate the leftover trailings of Letraset stencils or transparency film and printing waste to create urban scenes that echo Piranesi's *Carceri* (1745). Melamed's gesture is not quite as clean or conceptually driven as Guyton's, but the experimentation is genuine and the thought fully developed.

Does it all have to be so serious? Perhaps not. (17) JIM SHAW has certainly demonstrated that a little entertainment can be injected into the otherwise staid galleries of high culture. Shaw did this to great effect with his *The Donner Party* (2003), recently on view at P. S.1, and at Metro Pictures he does it again with his most recent contribution, *Dr Goldfoot and His Bikini Bombs* (more exhibitions need to rip off their titles from campy 1960s Vincent Price movies). Shaw is the Hollywood studio version of Tim Hawkinson's indie-arthouse quirkiness: less philosophy but higher budgets.

He also appears to have incredibly clear dreams. Much of what Shaw offers the audience are various 'dream objects' that reconfigure bits and pieces of the body into pop-surrealist bits of sculpture. For example, Shaw's *Dream Object (Butt-Head Bucket)* (2007) rethinks half the human head as a clear and open container with a shallow filling of pink foam, the 'overhead' view of which looks like a cartoon ass. *Nose Sculpture Wall Sconce* (2007) looks exactly like it sounds, while *Dream Object (At a LACE meeting with Liz Taylor in some warehouse I realized I could make (as Dream Objects) stuff I'd not dreamt of like the giant ear lounge chair)* (2007) looks at once just like - and then a little less like - what its title describes. (And really, who wouldn't want a giant ear lounge chair?)

You could ask the same thing of (18) CHRISTIAN KOZUL's big black feathered, sequined and studded mechanical bull at Goff + Rosenthal, though this is less a dream object than



folk; there's no denying that they know how to draw. Still, technique alone cannot justify the Peter Pan syndrome that continues to sweep pockets of the secular world: boys, it's time to grow up.



(23)

STEFAN SEHLER New Paintings,  
Parker's Box

Yes, yes, Stefan Sehler's process (painting onto the reverse side of Plexiglas) has interesting conceptual ramifications; yes, yes, his choice to depict banal subject-matter like flowers and landscapes does necessarily lead a contemporary spectator to focus on the painted surface, not the painted content; and yes, yes, these paintings exhibit considerable technical versatility. All well and fine. Yet these aforementioned points (even when executed by a slightly more interesting artist like Ann Craven) somehow always have a way of leaving me colder than cold.

(24)

RINDFLEISCH/RAPEDIUS Monte Vera,  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

Precocious gallery Klaus von Nichtssagend periodically mounts shows that put much of the Manhattan scene to shame. So it was with Rindfleisch/Rapedius's second solo outing at the gallery, where a recent sojourn in Argentina provided fodder for a small series of objects, drawings and photographs. The artists' sensitivity to materials had the overall effect of trapping their works in an ambiguous state between illustration and outright abstraction

(20)

MARC SEGUIN Dissidence, Envoy

Canadian Marc Séguin's large-scale, spare, mainly black-and-white representational paintings deal with a range of themes (speed, commodities, the abject, the modern world, surveillance) and come across angsty and, at best, like cool skateboard graphics. Four of the six paintings feature a hooded skater figure (I suspect it's the artist) cast in various 'meaningful' tableaux. In *Untitled (Endangered Species)* (all works 2007), the hooded figure has his back to us and is pissing out colourful (the rest of the world is in gloomy black and white) sturgeon and turtles, which are - you guessed it! - endangered species. In *Untitled (Atheist)*, the hooded man is kneeling in front of a surveillance camera and has blood coming out of a stigmata. I'm not sure I've ever seen a more literal depiction of that Michael Jackson song that goes, 'I always feel like somebody's watching me...'

(21)

ANDREW KUO What Me Worry, 33 Bond

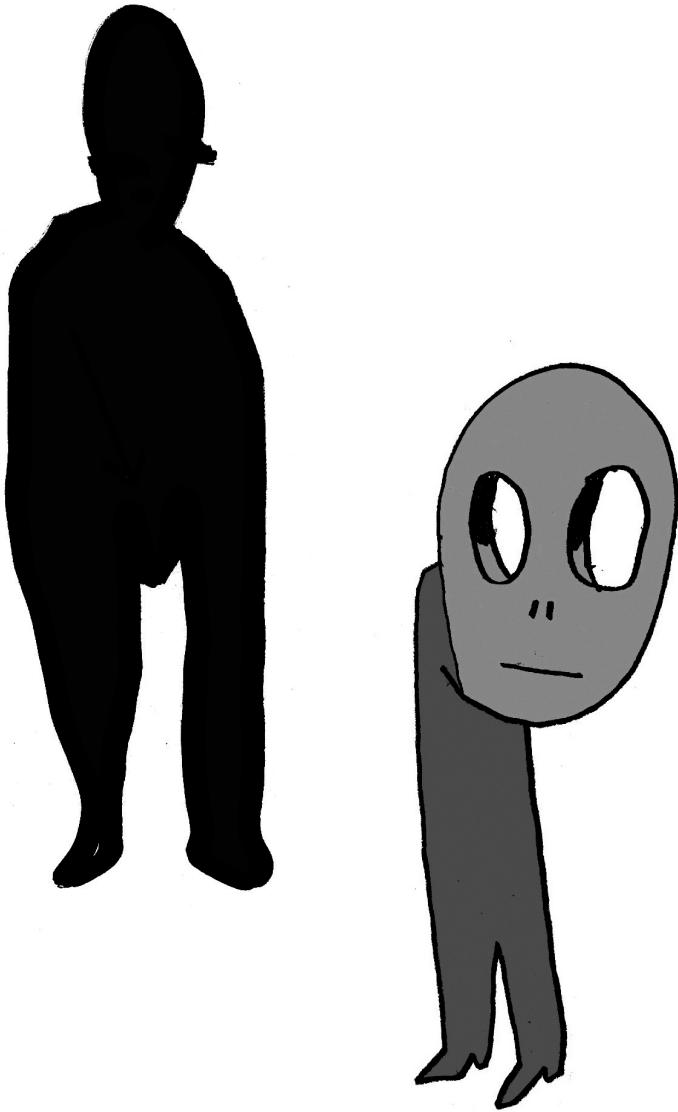
33 Bond isn't really the LES, but it was included on the boundLES flyer, so I guess it counts. Apparently Andrew Kuo suffers from panic disorder, neurosis and anxiety, and makes charts, collages, drawings, paintings and sculptures to help himself deal with it. This can be seen in the minimalist, brightly coloured sculptures in which he has assigned each piece a colour that corresponds to some type of music, anxiety or list of uncomfortable activities. In *Rock Right Now* (all works 2007), Kuo has made a kind of sculpture bar-chart and assigned colours to his present ordering of favourite rock bands: the tallest being Animal Collective (pink); the shortest being Deerhunter (yellow). Other works use this same organising principle of daily concerns and personal angst to form colour-field-type abstractions - *My Life Up Until November* or *My Favorite Places as of November*.

(22)

SCOTT TAYLOR Eve's Law, V&A Gallery

For the current show, Scott Taylor expounds on his ongoing series of imaginary portraits using Eve as a universal standard for the female art object. Taylor's palette and brushwork are reminiscent of artists as diverse as Frank Auerbach, George Condo, European primitivists and Paul McCarthy. In *Sideface* (all works 2007) we see a grotesque Eve made by pushing and pulling the paint around in frenetic gestures until something of a recognisable visage appears. *Eve as Dora*, which uses the same limited palette of greens as *Sideface*, clearly references Picasso. My favourite of the group, *Mr. FF2*, is a kind of Old Master-style portrait infused with a dose of linear painterly excess.

Six people were having a stilted philosophical conversation about love and economics - I guess about the nature of social and interpersonal exchanges. As they did, they made exaggerated, contorted movements. I was the only observer, and stayed for more than an hour, during which time they attempted to draw me into their dialogue. When that didn't work, one of the guys turned to me and said, "I noticed that your right shoe has a crease by the toe and the left one doesn't. You're well-dressed, and your hair really suits you, but there is this fold. I thought to myself, 'There's a lot of heart to this guy.'" He wasn't really hot, but I'd noticed that his light-blue socks matched his belt and that the top of his butt was visible when he leaned over. I was totally turned on. Then, as I was leaving, the six



uttered the title of the work: "Tino Sehgal, *This Situation, 2007*". A veil of artificiality dropped. I suppose any exchange is somehow scripted, and any exhibition is an artificial situation in which, ideally, the viewer has a conversation with the work.

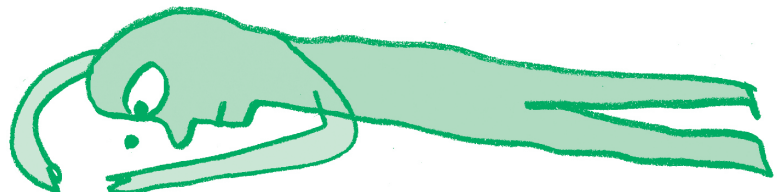
something like an invention of Sacher-Masoch's after a visit to Tombstone (or after having met Matthew Barney). It's also rather otherworldly when turned on, especially when viewed from outside, across the street, which is a shot captured in the short video of the piece included on the gallery's website. From just a little distance, the gothic details recede and the movement becomes more uncanny, less mechanical.

The cowboy thematic, which Kozul uses to good effect (aside from the bull, there is a red, white and blue hat, pair of boots and saddle), is a popular one, though its iconic status has been sullied by the political climate in the US, the duelling sides of which always seem to be looking for ways to out-America one another. And viewed from this perspective, it becomes easier to read the cynicism of Kozul's gesture.

(19) JAVIER PINON, in contrast, seems to have managed to keep that icon from devolving into a punchline or a photo-op, but that is because Piñón has never thought of the character of the cowboy strictly within the vernacular of the American West. The artist's most recent series of collage pieces at ZieherSmith reimagines the cowboy as any kind of mythic hero, from Perseus to Don Quixote. The latter serves as the title character of the show, and Piñón's depictions of the imaginary knight preparing to do battle with century-old windmills look like illustrations out of a new fantasy bestseller that has yet to be written.

So at this point we have reached 19 shows. That leaves a few to go. But I am seriously questioning whether I have anything more to say...

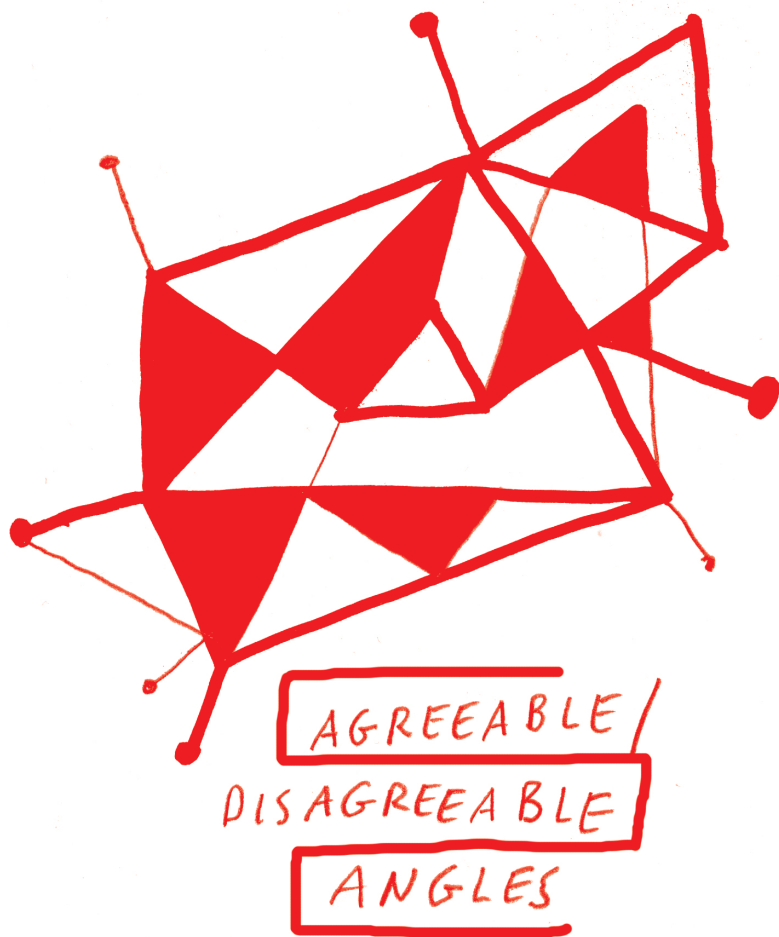
Except to say this: (20) THOMAS RUFF's new photographs at David Zwirner look better in reproduction than they do when viewed in person, which, when you think about it, serves as a fascinating reversal: usually it's bad paintings that look better in reproduction, especially when that reproduction is digital, which can flatten out and sharpen up otherwise unaccomplished work. Ruff, as we know, works with JPEGs culled from the Internet, which are then scaled-up to the size of paintings. The digital impressionism that ensues may seduce at the outset, but after six or seven prints, regardless of content, the conceit begins to feel just like that: a conceit.



- and quite effectively so - from the economical, hanging black thread of *Waterfall* (all works 2007) to the exhibition's *pièce de résistance*, *Monte Vera*, in which freestanding rolls of paper are cut to resemble regional topographies, and somehow also come to instantiate an uprising of the round, the organic and the natural against the white cube's institutional edges. I'll choose to forget the moments where depiction got the better of the artists - did that paper really need those cutesy llama drawings? - and forever recall Klaus codirector Sam Wilson, inexplicably clad in *Ancient Mariner* getup, as he toured me around the space. Certainly the most notable case of performative salesmanship since Emmanuel Perrotin wore Maurizio Cattelan's pink rabbit suit...

(25)

Etsy!, Pocket Utopia



I refrained from attending this show, less on account of laziness than my fundamental disagreement with its angle. Etsy.com has become a unique virtual forum for tens of thousands of artists to peddle their handmade wares, so what could an actual exhibition of said works add? If anything, taking a selection of the website's 800,000 artworks and presenting them in a gallery actually makes the artworld - and its accepted tenets of commerce and display - feel parochial by comparison.

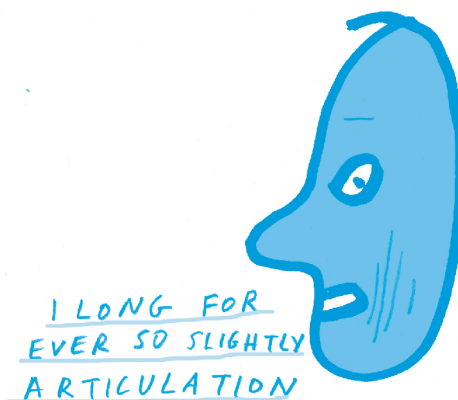
(23)

SUZAN BATU Pleasure Principle, The Phatory

Owner/director Sally Lelong opened shop as a way to combine her own artistic practice, recapture the energy of the neighbourhood that she had experienced in the past and offer access to a dynamic exhibition space to people who, like herself, have day jobs - hence the Phatory's late-evening (until 11) and weekend hours. Turkish artist Suzan Batu presents vibrant, lyrical paintings that are somewhere near gestural abstraction and purely formal, almost graphic, design. It's not surprising to learn that her background is in linguistics, specifically Islamic calligraphy. Her linear quality is graceful and immediate, and the paintings are well executed. My favourite painting in the show, *Serif I* (2007), is a more complex arrangement of calligraphic figures that elegantly unspools across the canvas, at times seeming (ever so slightly) to articulate volumes. Further readings involving Islamic art simply add weight to work that already holds the attention.

(24)

calendar of flowers, gin bottles,  
steak bones, Orchard



Writer and photographer Moyra Davey (who also curated this group show) made a series of photographs, assembled on the wall as a sort of grid or calendar, depicting empty whisky bottles, old valve-amps in a car boot and flowers in vases. They seem rather literally to present the journal entries of John Cheever - 'drinker, dog owner, lover of cut flowers' - that partly inspired the show. Davey came across the image (which was a misfire) of an empty liquor bottle at the tail end of a contact sheet she was developing and recognised it as a poetic marker for time; she has for several years now been making photographs of empty bottles of booze. Claire Pentecost has made large-scale palladium prints of her drawing/photographs depicting aspects of consumption in her series *Appetites*, and James Welling's well-known series of flamboyantly coloured silhouette flowers completed what was an enjoyable show in this fantastic artist-run co-op.

(25)

The Demoiselles Revisited,  
Francis M. Naumann Fine Art

It's not just that this is the penultimate thing I'm writing about, but this group show (recommended by a friend), mostly of pastiches whipped up to celebrate the 100th birthday of Picasso's painting, leaves me wondering why artists would show slapdash jottings based on a monument of mankind's cultural patrimony.

(26)

JUAN DOWNEY Meditation Drawings, Nohra Haime  
Gallery

Which brings me to the end, a show visited and written about in exhaustion, but a joy to have seen. Juan Downey, a Chilean artist who spent much of his career in the US and died in 1993, lived with the Yanomami Indians in the Amazon in 1976 and 77. Every day he meditated, and afterwards, in a half-trance, made small drawings, fusions of tantra paintings and pre-Columbian geometric patterns. Spirals, circles, eggs, mazes highlighted with coloured pencil. They swirl and glow. Contemplative, magical, personal and universal; unknown to me, and the kind of show that makes me glad I took the often thankless assignment of slogging through 26-plus galleries trying to find an intelligent thing to say.



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But when the images are returned to their original size and viewed within the space of a computer screen, the scenes are once again sharpened up and the images regain coherence. The 'art' of the original image would appear to read through, which to some extent is exactly Ruff's intention. Our experience of the 'work' cannot hinge solely upon our direct confrontation with it, because the point of Ruff's project is exactly its interest in mediation. In fact, it may be safe to say that an experience of Ruff's newest work is necessarily incomplete until one is able to see the works in reproduction, preferably online.

And this: *trompe l'oeil* is underrated as an artistic device. (21) IVIN BALLEEN's reliefs at the Winkleman Gallery demonstrate just how far this strategy can be pushed, and just how many possibilities remain unexplored. Of course, Ballen's work could be categorised as relief verging on sculpture, but the exacting way in which the artist represents plastic, cardboard and duct tape in fibreglass, resin and acrylic paint reveals a deep intelligence at work: Ballen is both representer and intervener.

And maybe this: why is it that we have such a difficult time accepting contemporary political art as either aesthetically significant or historically important, at least in the US? One would think that we should have found our George Grosz by now, our John Heartfield. We are in the middle of a war, after all, and we have been subject to a political administration that, no matter your politics, has guaranteed that 'incompetence' will be forever be known as America's number one export. So where is the art to match? What is our response? (And no, this is not a call for incompetent art.)

(22) KAREN FINLEY's show *Nation Building*, at Alexander Gray Associates, seems to suggest that part of the problem may be generational. It's not that younger artists engage politics in their work, it's that when they do - even when they do it well - we dismiss it as the product of youth's rebelliousness, of a naive idealism, which could do with a few more years slugging it out in the 'real world'. Finley's suite of drawings make contemporary politics utterly personal: drawn, literally, from Finley's dreams, each piece demonstrates just how deeply saturated the artist's psychic life has become with Condi Rice and the Bushes, and with the way that these and other political icons find themselves folded in with the rather vacuous popular culture that occupies at least as much of the news cycle as politics: one drawing imagines 'Dubya's' face tattooed on Anna Nicole Smith's breasts (after which the *Times* runs a story calling George a 'boob'); another imagines that, on the matter of cloning, the President makes an exception for James Brown. Coming as this does from Finley, who was in her teens during the height of the



(26)

The Guy Debord Show,  
New General Catalog

What, pray tell, would Mr Debord have thought of New General Catalog's exhibition, which, in truth, was a programme of performances, conducted locally and abroad and aired nightly via the gallery's website? And how, heaven help us, would he have reacted to the following: that after having given the Catalog's website an initial perusal a week ago, I today returned to find the virtual equivalent of a ghost town - a series of automatic relays that ultimately dumped me at a disapproving search engine? I honestly haven't the foggiest: some thinkers are best left in their time; and some feet firmly planted on the ground.

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(25)

WILLIAM ANTHONY and THATCHER KEATS,  
Christopher Henry Gallery

Always nice to discover new galleries, and this one happens to be in a particularly charming old church that has been beautifully renovated by its current occupants. For its two-person inaugural show, the gallery showed a wide selection of works by the collector of odd historical facts and artworld satirist William Anthony as well as a series of black-and-white photographs by Thatcher Keats. Keats began as a printer for Larry Clark and, like Clark, is interested in all manner of Americana. In one picture we see a kind of parade with Native Americans dressed in costume waving a big flag of John Wayne's face, seemingly unaware of the irony. Other images of kids shooting guns in the desert, getting stoned and hanging out in their crummy environments are competent records of rural America. Anthony's drawings are especially charming, and in the fantastic *Hamiltonian* (2005), we get a sendup of Richard Hamilton's illustrious collage *Just What Is It...* (1956) scrawled in Anthony's signature style (which recalls *Beavis & Butthead*).

(26)

BRIAN BELOTT Swirly Music, Canada

Brian Belott makes paintings on Plexiglas using things like Day-Glo chalkboard paint, glitter, foil, spray paint. His new body of work incorporates these elements with sculpture, installation and sound. The first thing one encounters is *TV and TV, Throw in a Fireplace Too* (2007), a pair of monitors resting on faux-plaster plinths. It looks as if Belott has compiled, and recorded onto analogue video, the lead-ins to Saturday-night movie slots from the 1970s. At other times one of the monitors shows a loop of a log fireplace. Atop each monitor are digital picture frames that present a slideshow of TVs in various domestic environments. In a separate gallery, Bellot has created an installation with paintings, homemade speakers mounted to the wall that play swooning casino music and a cardboard wall sconce running the circumference of the gallery: wooden clotheslines and door keys arranged to create a kind of piano keyboard. Altogether Bellot has created a fun show of original-looking work.

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Vietnam War, it's easier to accept as authentic. From someone 20 years younger, such direct engagement would come off as self-indulgent.

And finally this: hands down, the best show one could see was not in Chelsea, but at the Drawing Center in SoHo. (23) ALAN SARET: *Gang Drawing* defies discourse in a wholly different way: it simply demands that one see it, and that's all I could think to say.

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