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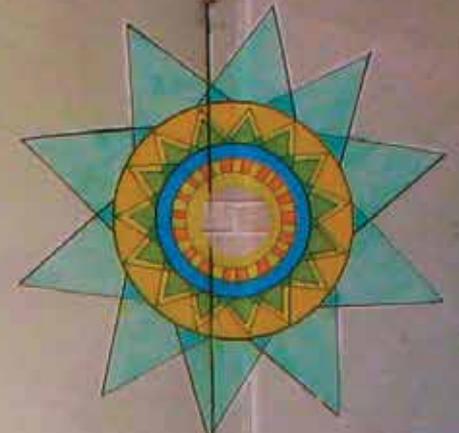
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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York

Volume 32 No. 6 July/August 2018

*The  
South Side  
& Beyond:  
A Chicago  
Art Legacy*



**INSIDE**

**Patric McCoy, Pioneering South Side Art Collector**  
**Seven Reviews Cover Shows of African-American Artists**  
**Cleveland Prepares to Host International Art Triennial**  
**Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists-Sponsored Show Features Martyl and (art)™**

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## New Art Examiner

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

## EDITORIAL POLICY

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

1. No writer may review an exhibition originated or curated by a fellow faculty member or another employee, or any past or present student, from the institution in which they are currently employed. The New Art Examiner welcomes enthusiastic and sincere representation, so the editor can assign such an exhibition to other writers without the burden of conflict of interest.

2. There shall be no editorial favor in response to the purchase of advertisements.

3. The New Art Examiner welcomes all letters to the Editor and guarantees publishing. Very occasionally letters may be slightly edited for spelling or grammar or if the content is considered to be libellous.

4. The New Art Examiner does not have an affiliation with any particular style or ideology, or social commitment that may be expressed or represented in any art form. All political, ethical and social commentary are welcome. The New Art Examiner has actively sought diversity. All opinions are solely of the writer. This applies equally to editorial staff when they pen articles under their own name.

5. The general mandate of the New Art Examiner is well defined in the statement of purpose above.

# FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art

by Tom Mullaney

**Y**ou have heard of the Whitney Biennial and the Venice Biennale. Well now, make way for the Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, otherwise known as FRONT International. It opens officially on Saturday, July 14th and will run through September 30th.

The organizers are saying that FRONT will partner with leading cultural and educational sites throughout Cleveland and elsewhere in the area (including in Akron and Oberlin, for example) “to explore artistic collaborations, intellectual exchanges and curatorial dialogues connecting the city and the Great Lakes region to broader global, political and economic networks.” Quite a mouthful there.

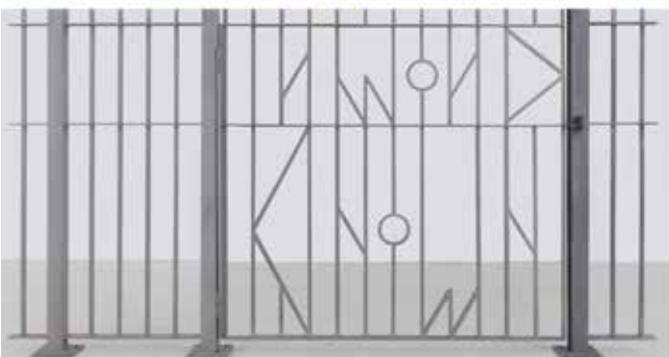
Leading this grand design are Fred Bidwell, FRONT’s executive director, and Michelle Grabner, its artistic director. Bidwell is an entrepreneur, art collector, and philanthropist. Grabner is a professor in the Department of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The theme of the triennial is “An American City.” It will spotlight Cleveland’s downtown as a backdrop for several architectural installations. “We are very much aware of putting the exhibition within the context of a cityscape,” says Bidwell. “It is about using Cleveland as a canvas for the artists in an urban context.”

Grabner has experience curating art biennials elsewhere. She was one of three curators for the Whitney Biennial 2014 in New York and the Portland Biennial in 2016.

As of early June, 114 artists were scheduled to participate in 28 venues across the city. Of this number, more than 45 are American artists while the rest are international.

Of this number, at least 11 artists are from Chicago: Dawoud Bey, Kerry James Marshall, Michael Rakowitz, Jennifer Reeder, Kay Rosen, Rebecca Shore, Diane Simpson, Jessica Stockholder, Tony Tasset, Jim Trainor and Anne Wilson.



Four of the 11 Cultural Exercises at FRONT Int'l Triennial



Fred Bidwell, FRONT Executive Director.



Michelle Grabner, FRONT Artistic Director.

Grabner has chosen 11 artists to create “Cultural Exercises” that will be displayed at sites throughout the city such as the Cleveland Museum of Art, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Clinic, St. John’s Episcopal Church and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

One of the most ambitious exercises is Canvas City, a mural program across nine downtown blocks that revives Cleveland’s 1973 City Canvases program and the iconic mural by artist Julian Stanczak.

FRONT itself serves as a “front” for the boon of cultural tourism, which many American cities have found to be a heretofore unlikely economic engine driving urban revitalization but much more critical as a means of replacing lost industrial production.

Bidwell says his idea for FRONT took shape over the 2014-15 period. He was inspired by his travels to other major European festivals, including the Venice Biennale, documenta and Monumenta. He is adamant that FRONT is the opposite of the ubiquitous art fair model: “FRONT is linked by a place, a space and stories. What makes us unique is the breadth of collaboration.”

Grabner echoes the power of that 13-letter word. “Collaboration is critical to FRONT’s overarching program,” she declares. “By facilitating connections among various distinct cultural voices and institutional frameworks, FRONT aims to ... actively renew, redescribe and recontextualize contemporary aesthetic experiences.”

The goal of the Triennial, Bidwell claims, is to give Cleveland “a more complex and nuanced understanding of what the city is all about” as well as to showcase Cleveland as a vibrant Midwestern arts platform between the two coastal art centers.

Grabner echoes this sentiment when speaking of what she hopes to achieve: “I want to see what happens when you infuse artists from all over the world onto a Midwestern platform.”

“What art does,” says Bidwell, “is allow you to wrap your head around more complex ideas” such as identity, race and gender. FRONT has great potential as a new arts model that other cities may seek to emulate. ■

**Tom Mullaney is the managing editor of the New Art Examiner.**

# The South Side and Beyond: A Chicago Art Legacy

At the New Art Examiner, we have set out to provide a forum for intellectual inquiry and serious art criticism. It is our belief that art criticism has too much cultural value to be constrained by traditional institutional models. On our pages you will find coverage of exhibitions at major museums, pop-up galleries, and everything in between.

In recent months our volumes have taken shape around topics in the art world that we feel deserve closer examination. In so doing, we have begun a process of expanding the reach and breadth of our criticism. We have tackled art schools, art media, and who gets represented in the (so-called) serious art world.

For this issue we decided to focus on a place: Chicago's South Side. Building on a rich history, this collection of neighborhoods has evolved into a hub for contemporary art where new forms are explored and put into practice. Of course, in discussing the South Side, we cannot ignore the fact that it has earned a negative reputation in American culture thanks in large part to the media. This reductive vision of a predominantly African-American community can fool even the most well-meaning people into believing that identity politics and social justice are at the heart of art and culture on the South Side. This may be a part of the story, but it is not the whole.

In this issue, we talk to Patric McCoy, who offers up a poignant critique of the art world from his vantage point as a collector of African-American art. We also speak with artist Cleveland Dean, who says that he wants to get beyond the label of being a black artist and address universals through his work. Additionally, we discuss how art centers employ creativity through collective action to generate culture and define the roles artists can take in their communities.

We are proud to present an issue that provides space for these historically neglected artists and subjects. We hope that we have not only focused on the ideas behind artists' endeavors but that we have also captured the nuanced role of identity in different artists' lives.

The South Side has emerged as a pillar in Chicago's art community and is helping to shape our national cultural discourse. As we continue to grow our network of artists and thinkers, we look forward to continuing this conversation and seeing how it unfolds.

# Diasporal Rhythms: The Story and Vision of Patric McCoy's South Side Art Project

by *Evan Carter*

Patric McCoy is the founder of Diasporal Rhythms (DR), an art collector group that encourages individuals to become collectors. This nonprofit organization promotes art produced by artists from the African Diaspora. Consisting of fifty collectors, DR holds seminars, workshops, tours, and other events that aid the mission to support the legacy of African-American artists.

This mission is no easy task—African-American artists have largely been left out of the canon of art history. It is only in recent decades that the contributions of artists of color are gaining the level of exposure and critical inquiry that has been afforded to predominantly white and male figures.

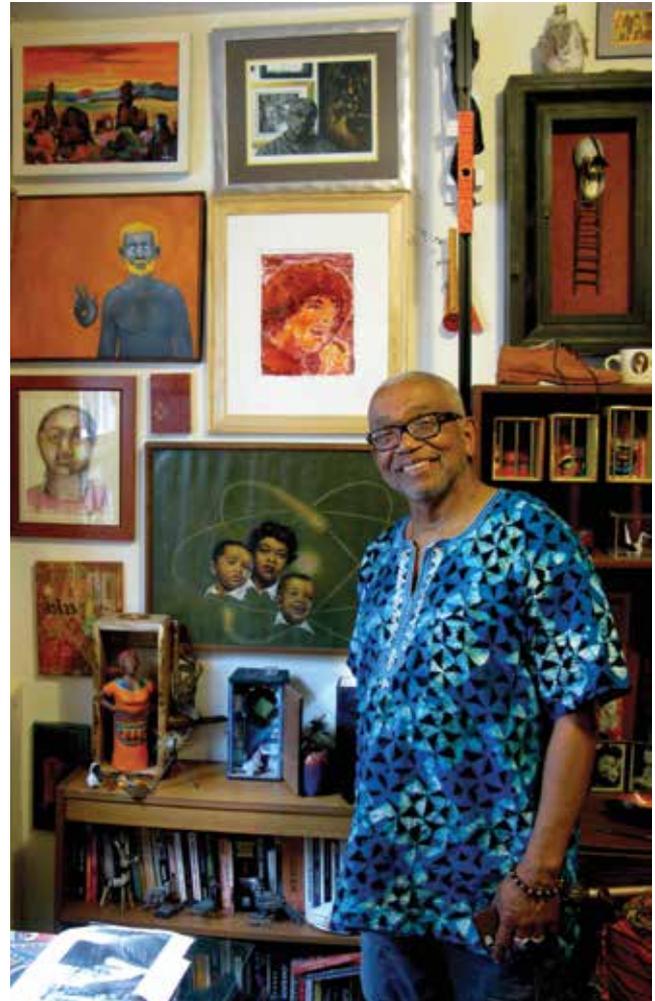
Thanks to Kara Walker, Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley (among many others), artists of color are writing new chapters in the history of Western civilization. But for many people, the work of these artists and the art world itself feels distant and inaccessible. That's the gap Diasporal Rhythms is working to close.

Patric McCoy, Dan Parker, Joan Crisler, and Carol Briggs were invited in 2003 to speak at a panel on collecting art at the South Side Community Art Center. Diasporal Rhythms' mission is not informed solely by the need for exposure and market viability. It is primarily meant to revitalize the intrinsic value of being an individual collecting art today.

I got to sit down with Mr. McCoy recently to hear his story and how he came to be a leader in this effort. McCoy was born and raised on Chicago's South Side on 63rd Street. He fondly states that the sound of the L was probably the first sound he ever heard in his life.

Growing up in the Washington Park neighborhood close to Woodlawn, McCoy described a community that was thriving despite the turmoil of racial inequity that marked the mid-twentieth century. His parents were intellectuals and his father a practicing artist.

McCoy remembers his father, Thomas, having a show at a local gallery. He remembers being in awe at seeing his dad's paintings, through the storefront windows, up on those walls. Despite his father's dedication to his craft, he was denied opportunities to achieve the career he wanted. As a young adult, he was accepted into a prestigious college of art and design on the East



Patric McCoy with some of his collection. Photo by Evan Carter.

“(We) consider ourselves lovers of art more than collectors”

**The Art Institute of Chicago** hosted a celebratory reception in the Modern Wing on June 8th, given by the museum's Leadership Advisory Committee at the opening of an exhibition of works by the mid-century African-American artist Charles White. Close to 700 persons attended and were in the mood to party as well as view art. The Examiner moved through the crowd and spoke with several African-American collectors about their history of collecting and the artists they favored. Here is a selection:



Charles White Reception at the Art Institute of Chicago. Photo by Tom Mullaney.

**Morris Gearing**—“I am collecting mid-century artists. I have the largest collection of a Chicago artist, Margo [Hoff], a collection of over 100 pieces that started in 1947. Margo is a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and she’s a great joy to collect.”

What about the newer artists, like Kerry James Marshall? “He’s a prince. I love Kerry’s work, I love Theaster [Gates], and I had my portrait done by Dawoud Bey. And may many more black artists sell at the rate that Kerry sold at last week in New York.”

**Diane Dinkins-Carr**—“I collect all artists, the ‘Old Black Masters.’ I collect emerging artists. My parents were collectors so I know a lot of the old black masters like Charles White, Elizabeth Catlett, Archibald Motley. So I support a wide variety of emerging artists like Martha Wade and Kevin Williams.

“When my parents were collectors, it wasn’t considered a big thing. The word ‘collectors’ just started in the late 1990s and early 2000s. We always had art on our walls. My husband and I consider ourselves lovers of art more than collectors.

“I’ve seen collecting by black collectors grow, and I’ve seen it slow down. Now, we have the young people, the new millennials here tonight. It’s a good way for them to experience fine art like Charles White. It’s all about education.”

coast, but his admission was revoked upon the institution discovering his African-American heritage.

Amidst the economic decline of the neighborhood, McCoy witnessed the effects that came with it: “It was a cultural regression. This place is absolutely boring compared to what it was. It’s horrible. We didn’t realize how great we had it. Because it was the norm. And you are living in this mindset of segregation and racism, so you are being told that you got the bad end of the stick.

“In actuality, we didn’t. We actually were living in a really, really exciting place. Because it was very dense, people were very communicative with each other, they were connected to each other very strongly. But we thought we were in ‘the ghetto.’”

Compared to today, this “ghetto” was “heaven on earth” says McCoy. The schools were excellent, and all kinds of culture and entertainment had once filled the neighborhood shops. Many of the jazz and blues clubs were driven out and erased by gentrifying economic forces like the University of Chicago. Ironically, this is the institution that McCoy attended for his undergraduate studies and where some of his views on art, culture, and society began to take shape.

“U of C was...strange. It was good and it was bad. I believed that I got a very good education. It made me think about things in a completely different way than when I went in. But, at the same time, it was bad and is still bad in that the institution in its desire to be is very destructive. And the longer I stayed there, the more I saw it. And it gets disturbing that something that is giving you something that is so good is so bad. And that creates a tension inside of you. I still have that.”

The Black Power movement was emerging during this time and making changes in American culture. A whole set of images were generated around this movement and McCoy’s close family connection to art allowed him to make a connection. He had been attending art shows and events as a social activity but it was when his roommate, who was an art major, brought home a lithograph that caught his eye. He purchased it from his friend and his initial collection began.

McCoy has since filled his home with art objects he acquired over the years but didn’t think of himself as a collector until much later in life, after his collection had grown substantially. Instead, he wanted to make his environment much like the one in which he grew up, which was filled art and furniture made by his father.

“I was acquiring art for a very long time. To the point that other people were noticing it and saying that

I was an art collector. I would reject the term because I believe, and that the majority of people in this country in the West believe, that an art collector has to be rich and that...is a person who acquires art but is not sharing it. (They believe) that an art collector is inherently somebody that knows, a lot about art; is academic, encyclopedic. An art collector is somebody that is doing this with an understanding of the investment potential of this thing."

McCoy believes commonly-held notions about what it means to be an art collector are the cause of a widespread cultural decline similar to the one he witnessed growing up. He sees two sides to the coin of the recent acquisition of Kerry James Marshall's *Past Times* by Sean Combs a.k.a., Puff Daddy. McCoy lauds the fact that a work by a black artist can be sold to a black collector for this sum of money but laments the fact that it reinforces the idea that art is exclusive to the wealthy.

"We should not do things to discourage people from looking at visual imagery as a cultural phenomenon that they can be a part of," McCoy says. This is why he formed *Diasporal Rhythms*. He sees the elite world of art collecting as a false form of cultural production that is focused more on power and status.

**Robert Smith**—"I would say I've considered myself a collector for the last 18-20 years. I gravitate more to the South Side era, to earlier artists of the black experience."

**Like who?**—"There were artists like Craig Robinson and Charles Thomas. And the art was often exhibited in churches because that was there a black crowd could be found."

**Any new artists?**—"Not really. They're going into new directions that I'm not too familiar with. They're going into extravagant art. I'm from the old school where if it's a portrait, I'd like it to look like a portrait."

**Gina Gay** (Aspires to be a collector)—"I would say this event has opened my eyes to art in a way that I didn't have access to previously. I think young professionals who didn't grow up in a creative space might be slightly intimidated by the art world, but this event has helped open my eyes."

**Langdon Neal**—"Well, my family, particularly my mother (Isobel Neal), opened her art gallery which featured African-American artists exclusively in 1991. That began this wonderful adventure into the wonderful world of art collecting. We always bought one work from every show.

"We watched the young artists, who didn't have a lot of fame or recognition but were tremendously talented, and

Patric McCoy's living room. Photo by Evan Carter.



we invested in them. So, now, 30 years later, we can see their work appreciated and increased in value.”

**What about now?**—“We don’t focus on any particular style. I always like to recognize those who came before us because we all stand on the shoulders of someone. So, we have to appreciate artists like Kerry James Marshall and those that came before him, like Romare Bearden, Charles White and artists of the ‘30s and ‘40s who set the stage. But now, the young artists can look back [and] see where they can make a living from their art which very few artists could back in those days.”

“The South Side Community Art Center deserves attention because it started at a time when African-American art wasn’t in vogue yet they were committed to neighborhood South Side artists and giving them an opportunity. They deserve their praise. Now that it’s popular, that we see Kerry James Marshall and what his art sells for, he stands on the shoulders of those who came before.”

**Sidney Dillard** (a woman in her 30s and a collector for about 15 years)—“At least for me, and I think a lot of other African-American collectors, we buy what we like, as opposed to what’s the hot new thing” that the art world likes.”

**She seems to favor more current artists than older artists from older generations.**—“You’re right about that. I’m attracted to artists who are doing newer things, like a number of artists out of Atlanta who are doing fabulous things, like Chukasokoye, bridging African with African-American art. I’m attracted to things that really capture your eye.”

**What about Chicago’s art scene?**—“I think our art scene is good. I wouldn’t say it’s the most vibrant art scene. New York and Atlanta have a more vibrancy. It’s not so much what’s in galleries but more about what’s in festivals and fairs where you can get a chance to see what you wouldn’t otherwise get to see.”

**Calvert Hall**—“[I] started buying art about 30 years [ago]. I had an art dealer who had gone to the same college as my wife (Ohio State), and he introduced me to a number of artists who were Abstract Expressionists, and I got involved in that whole thing. People like Ed Clark and Richard Mayhew. And over the years, I became acquainted with a lot of other people. I was a member of the art committee at the Union League Club [of Chicago] for years and at the time they bought a Kerry James Marshall and inducted him as a Distinguished Artist.”

“I’d buy all of the people I’ve mentioned, but the big persons, if I had unlimited funds, would be Kerry and Jean-Michel Basquiat, Ed Clark and Herbert Gentry to Al Loving and all those guys. I’m a couple of million dollars short.” ■

Tom Mullaney

There was a tipping point that let McCoy know collectors had power. In 2003, the Art Institute of Chicago held an exhibition titled “Century of Collecting: African American Art in the Art Institute of Chicago.” The title was misleading; they had some works from the early 20th century and more recent work, but there was a gap in the mid-twentieth century.

There was a tipping point that let McCoy know collectors had power. In 2003, the Art Institute of Chicago held an exhibition titled *A Century of Collecting: African American Art at AIC*. This was misleading since they had some works from the early 20th century and more recent work but there was a gap. At a panel discussion for the exhibition, seven artists were on stage to discuss their own work making its way into the collection.

Onstage, these artists were very critical of the Art Institute and McCoy found that shocking. Wouldn’t that hurt their careers? Later in the day, he was at an opening where he met art critic Nathaniel McClaren, who was also at the event. He asked him why the artists would be so hard on the institution. McClaren told McCoy that “art institutions don’t pay any attention to artists. They pay attention to art collectors.” In other words, McCoy learned, “If you want to get your word out, you have to speak as a collector.”

Through *Diasporal Rhythms*, McCoy has created a platform to educate and motivate public discourse and cultural production that empowers individuals and dispels the premise that art is for a select few. He knows he can’t change what he refers to as the “top down art institution that has existed for a millennium” but that he “can do something with the audience.”

That something is to show people that they do not have to “buy into the myth that hurts us culturally.” Instead, they can generate the culture themselves and begin to re-write the narrative of art collecting. ■

**Evan Carter is a contributing editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He earned his MFA degree in 2017 from the University of Chicago and wrote about Documenta 14 in a prior issue of the *Examiner*.**



A sampling of McCoy’s collection. Photo by Evan Carter.

# Artistic Agency and Cultural Production at Two South Side Art Centers

## Introduction

**Art education** is happening all over Chicago in a variety of forms. There are still traditional models like the painting class or ceramics workshop, but other course offerings have emerged that focus on issues outside of the classroom. Much like the contemporary art revolving around social practice and exhibition as form, discourse has become part of the creative process, resulting in outcomes that do not just yield objects but also, and sometimes exclusively, offer ideas that expand on and strengthen culture in the community.

There is a strong legacy of artistic practice on the South Side of Chicago. Collectors like Patric McCoy and institutions like the South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) preserve this legacy of predominantly African-American artists.

The SSCAC was founded in 1941 and announced to the nation in a dedication speech by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. It gained historic landmark status in 1994. This 77-year-old mission to create a space for African-American artists has been foundational to establishing Chicago's South Side as a hub for art and culture.

It is thanks to this legacy that the South Side pioneered a foundation for other institutions to expand on institutional models and connect the South Side to the larger cultural and artistic discourse of the contemporary moment. One of the most influential figures in this process is Theaster Gates.

Gates established the Rebuild Foundation and the Arts Incubator at the University of Chicago, and he serves on the board at the Hyde Park Arts Center (HPAC). As one of the most influential contemporary artists today, Gates works across disciplines to address aesthetic, social, and cultural concerns about identity and society.

Thanks to the inclusion of contemporary art forms and ideas, this area has become a place where cutting-edge ideas and forms are being explored by students and professionals of all ages. Contemporary artists have not only come from the South Side but also are attracted to it by the opportunities it has to offer.

Nathan Worcester and I got to sit down with the educational directors at HPAC and the Arts Incubator to take a closer look at their histories and what makes their educational models unique and relevant in our contemporary cultural moment.

**Evan Carter**

## Hyde Park Art Center

HPAC occupies a unique niche in a neighborhood where art and ideas freely mix. Through all kinds of changes, HPAC has balanced its dedication to the local scene with its commitment to nurturing and exhibiting artists and arts educators who have often gone on to greater fame.



*Children of the Wall* mural by Liz Lasdins, detail.

HPAC was created in 1939 by a group calling itself the Fifth Ward Art Guild. They did so with the support of future U.S. senator Paul Douglas, who had just been elected Fifth Ward alderman. From its earliest days, HPAC blended artistic production and education with community engagement, often in unconventional ways. In a 1976 booklet, *History of the Hyde Park Art Center*, Goldene Shaw noted that at one point, exhibitions chairman and “double image” painter Harold Haydon “literally papered the walls with children’s pictures collected from neighborhood elementary schools.”

HPAC reached new heights during the 1960s under the guidance of exhibitions director Don Baum. Beginning with the first HAIRY WHO exhibition in 1966, Baum’s HPAC helped launch the careers of Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Roger Brown, Christina Ramberg, Ed Paschke, and other anti-coastal originals. Lake Forest College art historian Franz Schulze dubbed them the Chicago Imagists. Unique forms of community engagement during this period included early screenings of



Anna Kunz, *Color Cast*, image by Tom Van Eynde.

“underground film” (scare quotes in Shaw) by Andy Warhol, Jean Genet and others.

HPAC entered its current era in 2005 when it moved from the Del Prado Hotel to a new facility at 5020 S. Cornell Ave. Today, HPAC seeks to foster artistic development without shying away from social and political engagement.

“Whenever we’re putting together programs or exhibitions, we tend to ask ourselves how we’re serving the needs of people outside the building and how we’re having an impact on the world that we live in,” said Mike Nourse, Director of Education at HPAC.

Describing the center’s sense of purpose, Nourse conjured up a vivid simile that he originally heard from a former colleague: “An art center is like a museum and a community center had a baby.”

“Because of our network and history working with so many artists, we can bridge that gap between people

*Children of the Wall* by Rahmaan Statik, detail.



who have a track record as artists but want to take a step in their career with working professionals,” he added.

Nourse drew special attention to HPAC’s yearly Center Program, which enables 20 artists to develop new work in an environment in which process and underlying purpose are heavily scrutinized.

He credited the introduction of that program in 2011 with spurring many key changes at HPAC, including a renewed emphasis on coordination across departments. Notable alumnae include Amanda Williams, whose work was recently included in the U.S. pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale. Her Center project, which involved painting abandoned properties on the South Side of Chicago, touched off a broader conversation about color and value.

Nourse also touted HPAC’s ongoing “Fugitive Narratives” exhibition, which pairs abstract art with stories from the artists about their works. He considers it especially resonant in an era when more and more people are questioning and looking beyond the information they receive from the media, either directly or through the algorithms that determine the news they receive online.

“It isn’t always just about making something. It’s about making a difference,” Nourse concluded.

## Arts Incubator

The Arts Incubator occupies the corner shop at East Garfield Boulevard and South Prairie Avenue. Opened in 2013 under the vision and leadership of Theaster Gates and supported by the Arts + Public Life initiative at the University of Chicago, the Incubator is a cultural anchor for the Washington Park community.

It is housed in a classic storefront space adjoining its fellow establishments, BING bookstore and the Currency Exchange Café. Together, they make up the Arts Block, a hub in central Washington Park where people can not only enjoy books and coffee but also engage in some intellectual discourse around art and life.

Though this space serves as a home base, the Incubator incorporates the network of people from all over the Washington Park and Chicago area who are engaged with its activity.

I spoke to Education Programs Director Quenna Barrett and instructor Gabe Moreno about its educational programs. Three programs are designed for teens: the Design Apprenticeship Program (DAP), the Community Actors Program (CAP), and the Teen Arts Council. Each program is designed so that students

may arrive at a place where they can be agents of change in the community. The programs are free and invite students with an interest to apply.

DAP fosters practical skills in design and concludes with students working on local projects like constructing furniture for a local business or fencing and planters for a public space in Washington Park. These projects are often carried out in conjunction with the offices of local aldermen or Chicago Park District, further strengthening students' roles in the community. This is also a paid internship connecting students to professional life in tradecraft.

CAP is a theater-based program where students write and perform a play based on their own personal interests and stories. Drawing upon Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the program creates a space where students generate an interactive theatrical production that addresses personal narratives and social change. Director Barrett took the lead in designing this program based her theater training. She paired this with her drive to expand on how theater represents people and their stories that typically don't have access or representation in the medium.

The Teen Arts Council is a curatorial endeavor where students arrange and execute an art exhibition. In this process, they build an arts network and participate in the Festival in the Park program. This creates a space where students can engage in cultural discourse around art with their peers and generate a network of engaged community members.

According to Barrett, these programs are not only designed to aid students in skill development and



Design Apprenticeship Program, Arts + Public Life.  
Photo by Gabe Moreno.

community engagement but are also intended to give the instructors, all of whom are practicing artists, craftsmen, or organizing leaders, the ability to incorporate their ideas and practices into their educational model.

Ultimately, what makes the Incubator's educational model unique is the degree to which students and teaching artists have agency--not only in generating knowledge in the classroom but in making a measurable impact on the community—through cultural production. ■

**Evan Carter and Nathan Worcester**

**Evan Carter and Nathan Worcester are assistant editors at the New Art Examiner. Carter generated and oversaw feature content for this issue.**

Correct Opinions, opening reception at the Arts Incubator Gallery, Arts + Public Life, March, 2017. Photo by Jean Lachat.



# An Artist Who Probes Ideas and True Identity

by Tom Mullaney



Cleveland Dean

**Tom Mullaney:** I'm in the studio with artist Cleveland Dean, whose show, "Recto/Verso-Duality of a Fragile Ego," is currently on view at the Chicago Cultural Center through July 29th. Dean grew up in a rough neighborhood—West Pullman—where he was "involved in a lot of stuff" and says he's lucky to still be alive at age 36.

In his studio on the far side of West Grand Avenue, he's telling me about how, in 2005, he started one of the first "Thing Parties" in Bucktown. Each week, one artist would have a show in the club, and he would display 3 to 10 pieces and have the artist complete a work by the end of the evening.

**Cleveland Dean:** The name of the event was called "Collective Reasoning." There'd be the art, some music and sometimes a fashion component to it. I wanted people to get acclimated to art in a different kind of way, to see the process.

**TM:** You've been interested in art from an early age. When you were doing the events, at what date would you say you started identifying more as an artist than an event organizer?

**CD:** I remember September 28, 2005 as the date of my first show, and I really didn't consider myself as an artist yet for about another six months or so. But yeah, it was a slow process because there's an over-romanticized idea of what an artist is.

I didn't feel I fit that bill of being an artist necessarily. But then, as I grew and continued to practice,

I realized that I've always been this way—always had these ideas and concepts, and I've always expressed them in some kind of way. I used to do music, rap or perform spoken word.

**TM:** When you were starting in 2005-06, what medium were you using for your art? Because now, in 2018, you're into wood and poured paint. What was early work like?

**CD:** Very [Jackson] Pollock-esque. A lot of drip and action painting and then it went from Pollock to a little more Pollock-[Yves] Klein amalgam. I just kept constantly working and then it started evolving into something like this (pointing to a work). Rorschachs had a lot of influence on me.

**TM:** So, you want your art to have some psychological and sociological component.

**CD:** Yes, I think, like now, we're in an era where we don't think a lot. So, I want to abstractly, conceptually, through installations, photography, videography, whatever, try to re-spark that thought process, 'cause thinking is very basic. So, even with the "Apotheosis" period, there's a lot of history in there.

One, I never use color for color's sake. I use color to have a psychological effect on people. And two, the technique of burning of the wood is called *shou sugi ban*. And it's used to preserve the wood.

But now, I've taken this burned wood and turned it into a symbol of preservation. And sometimes I may use salt in my work because salt is a preservative, a symbol of purity, it's used as currency. It's all of these different things. So, when you take all of these elements and fuse them with all these symbols and combine them in one piece, now I'm speaking a language.

**TM:** Having seen the show at the Cultural Center, you want the viewer to see themselves and think about themselves. Certainly that's easier when you're using mirrors wherein viewers can see the reflection.

But where you are using a piece like *Mercy*, which is really black, or *The Luxury of Brevity*—how do you want the viewer to see themselves in that? I can understand your language but, if the viewer hasn't the knowledge, and can't get the associations with the salt or the wood, how should viewers take your work and see it for self-examination?

**CD:** I haven't lived the viewer's life, so I have no idea how they are going to take it. Or how am I going to explain a particular piece? I can't tell you what to see because that sparks a confrontation because, if they see something and have a certain ideology and I say I see something else, they are going to abandon their thought because I'm the "creator." For me, that's not how you communicate. I want them to connect however they connect with it. For the people who know the aesthetic, I feel that I'm talking to them. But the people who know what *shou sugi ban* is or know the psychological effect of the colors, I'm talking to them as well.

**TM:** The major concept of the "Recto/Verso" pieces is identity. Is that [what] you see your art going to be going forward?

**CD:** I mean that would definitely have a lot of influence. If I were to sum all of my work up, it would be about duality. And, for me, playing in the middle between the left and the right and the extremities and finding your own vision, your own mission in the middle.

**TM:** And we all have an ego that is very fragile.

**CD:** Yes. We all do no matter how much we try to say we don't or convince ourselves that we're different.

**TM:** Let me ask you about *Mercy*. It's got several elements in it, and I'm wondering, when I see some texture that comes down the canvas, is that poured paint? It's an effect I see in several of your pieces.

**CD:** I tell people all the time, "I can't paint all the technical aspects but I know how to manipulate materials." So, it's a mixture of acrylics, resins. What I do have is layers of experience with the work.

**TM:** How long would you say it took you to get the ideas and execute the works for the show at the Cultural Center?

**CD:** I did two works in 2010 (*of first and last* as well as *in search of sanity and all things related*) that appeared in a pop-up gallery downtown. I did them literally in two days. Then I didn't do another one like those for two years. I just read. I studied the technique, I studied wood burning and associations with wood and fire. I looked at what fire represents from the religious standpoint of all religions. And, after that, I did this piece (shows a large canvas against the studio wall).

**TM:** That was 2012-13.



Cleveland Dean, *Number 11*, (2018).

**CD:** Yeah, about that. I did that and maybe one other one and took another two years to study more what I wanted them to be and what form they should take. In 2015, I met some people who asked me to do a show, and I had maybe a month lead time to get the work done. So, I did the show. But it was a very long process.

**TM:** About *[Of] One*, this very large silver canvas in the show, it doesn't seem as if there's that duality but that it is a unified piece.

**CD:** Well, with that one, there's two 8 ft. by 8 ft. panels with a clear division in the middle. And actually, the tones of the silver are slightly different. I wanted to create the apparent and visual separation but that it is seen as all one.

**TM:** On *Brevity of Luxury*, I really like the use of the mesh. Is the mesh underneath all your paintings and you just do an overlay?

**CD:** No, it just looks that way. I wanted to introduce metal but in a different kind of way. And, two, it's a necessary bonding agent. What I wanted to do was take

common elements that aren't commonly used and use them as a medium. I'm big on texture.

On "Recto/Verso," I wasn't using it in terms of art but more in a literary sense. When you open a book, the right hand page is recto and the back page is verso. So, I looked at it as turning the page of Life. The entire concept was sparked from a watch. There's a watch—Jaeger-LeCoultre—with a front face that when you slide it over, it shows the other face.

**TM:** What have you learned about the Self Project, and about how many people have taken the Instagram poll?

**CD:** That too was a long time in the making. I've been wanting to do that for seven years. I figured people would gravitate towards it. You know, 1.4 million selfies are taken every day. So, what I wanted was to use social media as a medium, like paint.

Every time someone takes a picture, they are creating a reflection of themselves. And I wanted it to be not only a reflective surface, but I also wanted the phrases to be highly reflective to the viewer and think and become a very personal experience—you're a part of it, and it's a part of you. People gravitate to it so much

Cleveland Dean, Installation view containing (left to right) *Of One*, *Pillars 17-20*, *Pillar 21*, and *Number 74*.





Cleveland Dean, #THESELFPROJECT, (2018), Installation view.

and sometimes do a testimonial to it. I wasn't expecting that.

Over a thousand people have taken the poll. I wanted to create an online community of people from different sectors, different races, different ages. We all ask ourselves the same things, we all feel the same things. The goal now is to take this project to ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, Michigan which draws 60- to 80,000 people.

**TM:** Since you feel we're in a non-thinking age, you posed the question at the exhibit: what is social media doing to our thinking and how is it affecting us? How do you come at that question?

**CD:** The way society is now, I think social media is a dangerous thing because it promotes fallacy more than fact. People don't investigate. I'll watch four or five different sources of news on one story to see who's including this fact, who the biases may be. I grew up with people who did this. People don't do that now. People now read 140 or 280 characters and think they're an expert, but they're not.

And social media breeds instant gratification. I came from an era, if I went to my parents and said that

I want something now, they'd slap me in the back of my head. People have been trained to "Want Now, Want Now" whether they deserve it or not.

**TM:** Our issue is themed around artists of color. I understand you don't totally identify as a "black artist". What is your relation to that term?

**CD:** I'm an artist. It's like labeling me a black artist is something that ignorant people do because they don't have any other idea about how to justify different races in this realm. If you look at the work and hear me speak, you'll see I'm talking about humanity, about universals.

For the people who want to label me a black artist, black art is typically about historical black elements, about oppression about social injustice. Especially to my own people and to all the others, I want to say this: "We're black people. We can talk about other things. We're pretty smart. We can talk about a whole lot of different things." ■

**Tom Mullaney is Managing Editor of the New Art Examiner.**

## REVIEWS

### “Hank Willis Thomas: Unbranded”

#### The Block Museum of Art

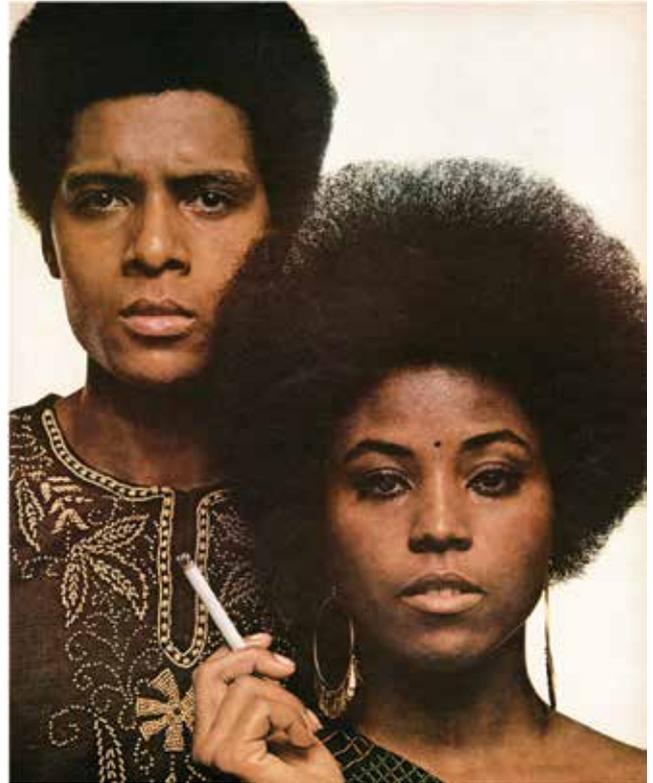
**H**ank Willis Thomas wants us to think about the power of advertising. His current exhibition at the Block Museum of Art, titled “Hank Willis Thomas: Unbranded,” consists entirely of print advertisements, over several decades, blown up to poster size, from which Thomas has erased all of the text and branding information that would normally declare the advertisement’s use.

Half the works in the show are from a series called “Unbranded: A Century of White Women 1915-2015.” They focus on advertising images of white women. The other half are from a series titled “Unbranded: Reflections in Black by Corporate America,” focusing on advertising images of black people.

Thomas has consistently explored American consumer culture, particularly as it relates to African-American subjects. His appropriated imagery from advertisements investigates the subtle and not-so-subtle ways advertising reinforces ideas about race and race relations. He is a 2017 recipient of the Open Society Foundations’ Soros Equality Fellowship, which is awarded to practitioners from a variety of fields to support work that advances racial justice. He has also been a W.E.B. DuBois Institute Resident Fellow at Harvard University.

By removing the branding information, Thomas challenges us to consider more deeply how the people in the ads are being portrayed. Without the context provided by the original product information, the pictures seem dreamlike, idyllic, or absurd. Many portray characters engaged in something sexy, confident, or even heroic. Several also employ stereotypes that could easily offend.

Some ads are instantly recognizable, such as an iconic Honda scooter ad from the 1980s featuring Grace Jones or the movie poster from *Mr. Mom*. Others are generic in nature, showing idealizations of everyday situations, such as a woman baking, a group of business people having a cocktail, or a family exercising in the park. Every image is eye-catching, as the advertising artists intended them to be from the start.



Hank Willis Thomas, *Farewell Uncle Tom*, 1971/2007, LightJet Print, 55 x 46 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

And yet if these were only pictures of ads without words, this exhibition would be little more than quaint, which is why removing the branding from the ads was not Thomas’ only intervention. He went a step further by replacing the original advertising slogan for each picture with a new slogan in the form of an artist’s title.

One image in the show portrays a confident, smiling white woman in a military outfit lighting a cigarette. Thomas titled the picture *They Satisfy*. Another image portrays a white woman dressed in animal skins inside of a cage. Outside the cage is a white male hunter with two glasses of something boozy. Thomas titled the picture *The Taming of the Shrewd*.

For an ad that portrays two beautiful, confident, proud black faces—one male and one female—with natural hair styles in which the woman is smoking a cigarette, Thomas titled the image *Farewell Uncle Tom*.

On their own, each of these images shows a generalization, an idealization, or an absurdity. Thomas takes it up a notch by giving them titles that further diminish the subjects in overt ways. Upon first reading them, I reacted to these titles as though they were as cynical and offensive as anything I would expect from marketers. I wondered what intentions Thomas could possibly have.

My relationship with advertisers is cut and dried—they are trying to convince me to buy something. The only advertisements that bother me are the misleading ones, like product placements, or media reports placed by PR firms, or celebrities on social media showing off what products they use.

My relationship with artists is less well defined. I am always skeptical of art until I figure out whether the artist is going to let me think for myself.

At first, this exhibition got me asking: Is Thomas trying to sell me a point of view? Is he selling the idea that advertising is prejudiced? Or, as his titles imply, is he the one who is prejudiced? Is he critiquing the misogyny in the advertising world? Or is he the misogynist? Or by getting down in the mud with those who originally created these images, is Thomas just bickering with sharks and proclaiming the obvious—that capitalism creates a manipulative cultural wasteland?

Ultimately, I realized I was missing the point. It doesn't matter how I feel about these images, or about the titles Thomas gave them. The point of the show is not to get me to think about these pictures at all. The point is to make me think about who has the power.

Who do I let have the power to show me what humanity looks like? Or to feed me messages about gender, race, sexuality, or success? With these works, Thomas is claiming that power for himself and putting it to use. The result is visually fascinating and intellectually challenging. Even if, at times, the whole operation—from the original ads to Thomas' appropriated interventions—seems cynical, I have to remember that there is a reason why cynicism exists. Sometimes, even artists need to be cynical in order to make a point. ■

#### Phillip Barcio

**Phillip Barcio is an art writer and fiction author whose work appears regularly in *Hyperallergic*, *IdeelArt*, *La Gazette Drouot* and the *New Art Examiner*. His fiction has appeared in *Space Squid* and the *Swamp Ape Review*. He has work forthcoming in *Western Humanities Review*.**



Hank Willis Thomas, *Bleach and Glow*, 1975/2008, LightJet print, 61.9 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Hank Willis Thomas, *They Satisfy*, 1942/2015, 2015, digital chromogenic print, 48 1/4 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York..

"Hank Willis Thomas: Unbranded" is on view at the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University through August 5th, 2018.

# “Brian Dovie Golden: Silver Lining”

## Elephant Room Gallery

Primarily a watercolorist, Brian Dovie Golden uses painting and drawing as an introspective tool for understanding issues of identity, race, gender and mental health and as an attempt to reconcile himself to the harsh realities of life..

The works in “Silver Lining” include eleven portraits—realistic, personal and attractive images of young, African-American men and women, all with cartoon-style inclusions somewhere within the picture plane.

Golden might be a new artist on the scene in Chicago, but he’s not just another pretty face off the elitist art school treadmill. Already in his mid-thirties, he just began to present his work to the public in 2013 after receiving a BFA from the International Academy of Design and Technology.

He may be late out of the gate, but Golden already has enough life experience to motivate any artist’s muses to action. An exhibition statement mentions the loss of his son two years ago and generalized anxiety disorder. There’s also the reality of growing up and living as a black male in racially and economically segregated Chicago.



Brian Dovie Golden, *The Passion of Anxiety*, Watercolor, acrylic and ink on paper, 26 x 27.5 (Framed). Image courtesy of the Elephant Room.



Brian Dovie Golden, *...that sinking feeling or something like it*, watercolor on paper, 24.5 x 30.5 (Framed). Image courtesy of the Elephant Room.

Some of the people portrayed in BDG’s paintings are real people who seem to show evidence of personal connection: *...that sinking feeling or something like it* purportedly depicts the artist’s wife, underwater up to her nose but quite stoic.

Cartoonish and sketchy elements depict angels, halos, devils, ropes and ribbons that bind and unwind, claws that cling, faces in crowds and huge teeth clamped like bear traps. Some of the works are untitled, and a few reference biblical passages.

Golden started adding patches of gold leaf to some of his works in 2014. It works. Black and gold is visually high contrast, with plenty of potential for metaphor and a touch of humor (his name, after all, is Golden).

Golden does not blank out faces with simple blackness as does Kerry James Marshall, nor does he abstract and stylize them like Jacob Lawrence, Archibald Motley, Jonathan Green or Chris Ofili. Golden’s direction

Continued on page 40.

# “Never a Lovely So Real: Photography and Film in Chicago, 1950-1980”

## Art Institute of Chicago

This summer, beyond two glass doors in the Art Institute of Chicago’s photography galleries, is a rarely seen collection from Chicago’s past. It is the people’s history of this city from 1950 to 1980 as told through photography and film. The backdrop is poverty, segregation, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, gang rivalries and the astounding resilience of Chicago’s communities.

Many of the photographers whose work is displayed were photojournalists for black newspapers and periodicals including the *The Chicago Defender*, *Ebony*, *The Black Photographers Annual*, and *Muhammad Speaks*.

Their photos are raw. Children peer out from windows that were once grinning. A man is silhouetted

against a cracking cement wall, smoking after working in the stockyards. Men practice defense against police dogs. A young girl sits on the curb holding a black power sign. A woman faints beside the pastor during a service at the Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church. Activists lie down on State Street in protest. Some activists even protest integration, like the young white men in Gage Park captured by Darryl Cowherd.

Gordon Parks, a black man from Chicago who went on to become *Life* magazine’s first black staff photographer, is well represented in the exhibit. He had once been allowed into a Chicago church to photograph a service even when his white colleague from *Life* was turned away for committing a critical *faux pas*.

Valeria “Mikki” Ferrill. *Untitled* from *The Garage*, 1972. The Art Institute of Chicago. National Docent Symposium Endowment. © Mikki Ferrill.



Bob Crawford. *Untitled (Wall of Respect)*, 1967. The Art Institute of Chicago. Through prior gifts of Emanuel and Edithann M. Gerard and Mrs. James Ward Thorne. © Bob Crawford/ courtesy Romi Crawford.





Billy Abernathy. *Mother's Day* from *Born Hip*, 1962. The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of the Illinois Arts Council.

Ten years later, he was far removed from that community. Successful and well-traveled, Parks returned to Chicago to shoot a voyeuristic portrait of the Nation of Islam. He reflected on his status as an outsider in an accompanying essay in *Life*, “I Was a Black Man in White Man’s Clothing.” His photos hum with well-exposed and expertly framed drama, but they lack the vulnerability his less technically impressive contemporaries were able to capture.

One such contemporary, Valeria “Mikki” Ferrill, photographed *The Garage*, a pop-up music venue. Every Sunday for over ten years, it transformed a garage into a safe haven for black music and culture. In some of those photographs, prints of past photos decorate the walls. People knew her and called her “The Picture Taking Lady”; when she was around, they danced as if no one was snapping photos. The exuberant, blurry images feel authentic in a way no perfect Parks photo could.

The introductory text to the exhibit invokes the bittersweet Nelson Algren quote about Chicago: “Like loving a woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real.”

It is a wonderful sentiment, one that many of us may find relevant to our own lives in Chicago, but it doesn’t square with the story the images tell. It is a romantic understanding of a wild city. Turn to the words of black people in Chicago—like Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)—and you will find a much starker reality.

Or hear it straight from the mouths of those who lived it. Perch on a stool in the back of the main exhibit gallery to watch “The Corner,” a 1963 documentary by Robert Ford narrated by young members of the Vice Lord gang. Their stories are laced with grim realities of poverty and race.

When you first enter the gallery, you face Algren’s quote and a wall of portraits of everyday Chicagoans. The collection comes from Black Arts movement photographer, Billy (Fundi) Abernathy, who published a book pairing his photos with the words of poet Amiri Baraka.

Baraka described the photos in the collaboration as “Portraits of life. Of life being lived.” That seems to encapsulate the exhibit far better than Algren’s rosy quote. The exhibit tells about the people and the strength they found while dancing, praying, marching, and persevering. It’s not Chicago that is lovely and real, but the people who struggled and triumphed there.

The exhibit only includes photographs through 1980. Follow the story into the hallway with a first view of *Latrice McElroy Holding Her Baby, Cabrini Green, Chicago* (1988) by Marc PoKempner and *Matt and Joaquin* (1995), an example of the unique portrait work of Chicago photographer Dawoud Bey.

Bey’s signature style creates images from mismatched shots. His images are never in quite the same scale or taken from the same angle. The result is a fragmented whole, a reminder that truly seeing someone is never as simple as putting the pieces together. ■

**Evangeline Reid**

**Evangeline Reid graduated from the University of Chicago, where she studied English literature and art history. A former editor and writer for *The Chicago Maroon* and *Grey City* magazine, she has covered art and culture in Chicago since 2013.**

“Never a Lovely So Real” runs through the end of October.

# “Out of Easy Reach”

DePaul Art Museum, Gallery 400, Stony Island Arts Bank

The impetus for Out of Easy Reach, an innovative cross-institutional show came from a conversation in early 2016 between Julie Rodriguez Widholm, director of the DePaul Art Museum and curator Allison N. Glenn. All three directors (Widholm, Lorelei Stewart at Gallery 400 and Theaster Gates at Rebuild Foundation) issued a combined statement about the multi-venue exhibit that read, “Out of Easy Reach...from its inception, has recognized the gaps and failures of an art system to celebrate, exhibit, honor or even acknowledge its many makers”. The exhibition is “committed to lifting the veil” to allow the feminist part of the art system to be shared with larger audiences. This translates into a wider representation of black and Latina artists and greater attention to the show’s central themes: race, identity and gender.

## “Out of Easy Reach— Gallery 400”

The Gallery 400 portion of “Out of Easy Reach” presents work by nine artists from the black and Latina diasporas whose art practice converges around issues of spatial politics, mapping and migration.

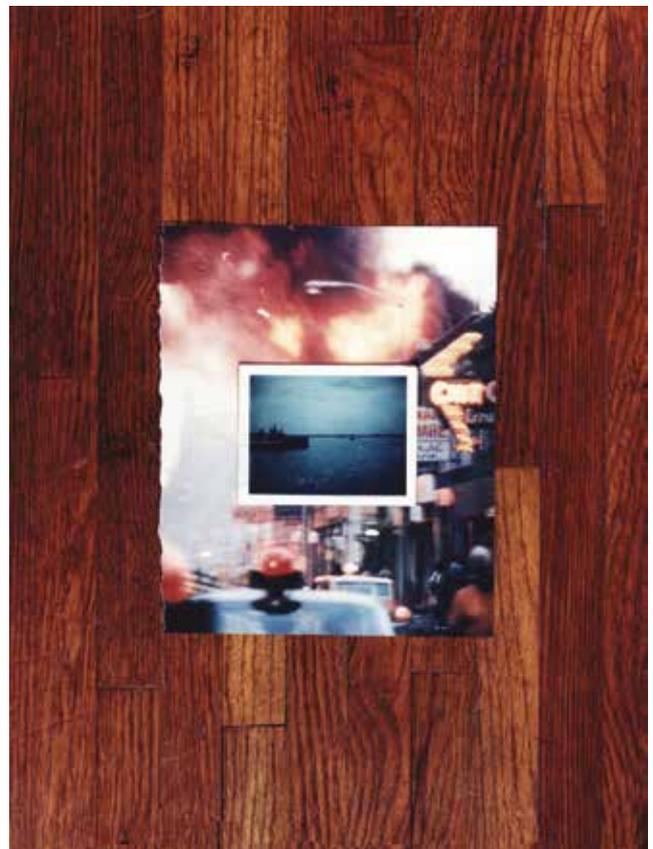
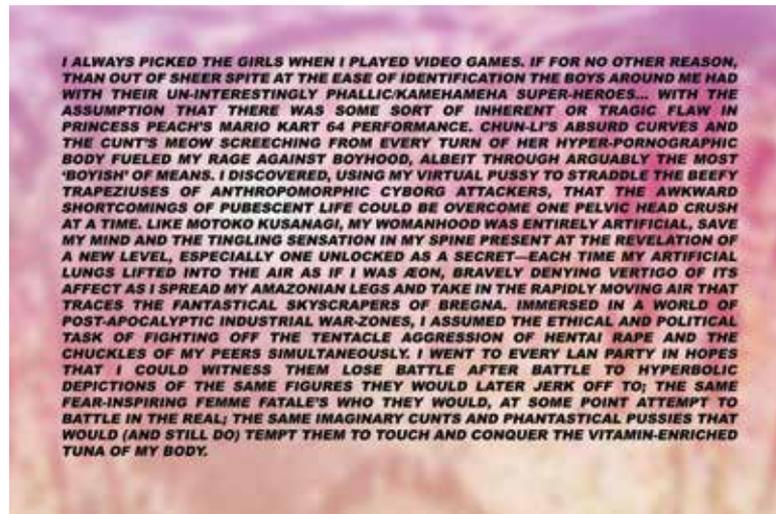
Three artists who engaged my attention were Juliana Huxtable, Howardena Pindell and Lisa Alvarado. Huxtable’s *Untitled (For Stewart)* presented an extended text filled with personal history and pop-cultural references. Pindell’s *Free, White and 21* focuses the camera on herself and speaks to the racism she encountered as she came of age as a black woman in America.

Alvarado’s mixed-media use of fabric, embroidery and paint for her *Traditional Object* series was mesmerizing. Her double-sided tapestries combine abstraction with the ceremonial crafts belonging to traditions of the aftermath of cultural erasure. ■

“Out of Easy Reach,” April 27 to August 5. Gallery 400 is on the campus of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) at 400 South Peoria Street

(Top) Juliana Huxtable, *Untitled (for Stewart)*, 2012, Color inkjet print, 20 x 30 inches. Image courtesy of the artist.

(Bottom) Leslie Hewitt, *Riffs on Real Time*, 2008, Color photograph, 40 x 30 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins.



## “Out of Easy Reach—DePaul Art Museum”

The DePaul Art Museum features 13 of the 24 artists exhibiting work in “Out of Easy Reach.” The exhibition is curated by Allison Glenn, associate curator of contemporary art at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

The range of themes covered across the show’s three venues creates an opportunity to present the central theme from different angles. However, the theme is ultimately singular: the representation of female artists of color.

The DePaul portion addresses the body, landscape, and the archive. This selection of works seems to walk the line between overt politics and maximalist material concerns, favoring the formally elegant. Given that DePaul is the only exhibition site with the word “museum” in its name, it seems typical that this selection of works lacks the bright colors and densely packed assemblages of found objects. Instead, the expected role of the museum to display elegant, formal objects is fully embraced.

Markedly absent from the modern art historical canon, the female artists of color theme has nevertheless employed one of the canon’s key tenets—abstraction. We not only get to see contemporary abstract work in the DePaul space; we also get to see the canonizing validation that so many of these artists were historically denied.

There is excellent painting, sculpture, photography, and video by Candida Alvarez, Caroline Kent, and

Ariel Jackson, to name a few. Maren Hassinger’s *Fight the Power* is a poignant symbol, albeit a literal interpretation of the exhibition’s title. But it is the works that reimagine the archive that seem to truly embody curator Allison Glenn’s mission.

The exhibition is divided into three rooms on the ground level. Entering into the central room, one is confronted with a collection of large grids. Good News by Ayanah Moor features 24 prints of textual musings on who women are likely to date in various American cities. The text has been lifted from a section of *Ebony* magazine titled “Where are the Eligible Black Men,” and the gender of the subjects has been switched from male to female.

The blue-collar vernacular of this cavalier commentary suggests an alternate reality in which same-sex relationships between women are a part of everyday life and popular culture. Regardless of any given viewer’s skepticism that there was and is a platform friendly to statements like “Most of the women want more than one woman,” the pervasiveness of heteronormative values is strongly implicated. In addition, the ideation of a society is presented where women can discuss same-sex relationships with the same candor as their straight counterparts.

Proceeding clockwise brings one to Bethany Collins’ *Southern Review, 1985 (Special Edition)*. On the wall, sixty-four framed pages from books hang like miniature Rothkos in gray-scale. Upon closer examination,

Ariel Jackson, *The Origin of Blues*, 2015, HD video. Image courtesy of the artist.



these pages contain text that has been redacted in black charcoal. The redacted pages come from a 1985 edition of a literary journal, *The Southern Review*, in which only writings and artworks by people of color were published.

This repeated gesture of selective editing is a comment not only on the historic lack of representation so central to this exhibition but also on the masking of this obfuscation under aesthetics of modernist abstraction, i.e., a grid of Rothko-esque rectangles. Though this original publication was an attempted remedy to a lack of representation, Collins' choice to block out most but not all of the text is reflective of how people of color have continued to be omitted from certain cultural platforms.

The archive continues to transform. Similar to the piece by Collins, the invitation to take a closer look is present in the installation *In an effort to be held* by Kellie Romany, but its implications are quite different. This piece functions less as subversion of cultural conventions and institutional discrimination and more as an invitation to experience intimacy and vulnerability through material interaction. Dozens upon dozens of small, white clay discs rest on a table. Each one is painted with oil colors evocative of skin tones, and viewers are allowed to don the provided gloves and handle the small painted clay objects.

The metaphors are rich and varied in this piece as are, presumably, viewer experiences with it. What is most present is a visualization of the range of skin tones of practically all races, from light pinks to dark browns, all existing on a stark white substrate. One of the many possible comments that could be extruded from these material metaphors is that whiteness is the most pervasive of socially constructed racial systems and that, even as we examine our diversity, white hegemony is still a domineering force that society is grappling with today. ■

### Evan Carter

(Top) Abigail DeVille, *I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me* from the *Nobody Knows My Name* series, 2015, Mixed media. Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

(Center) Caroline Kent, *Procession*, 2015, Acrylic on unstretched canvas. Image courtesy of the artist; photograph by Reneé Yamada.

(Bottom) Candida Alvarez, *Chill*, 2011, Oil, pencil, enamel, and acrylic on canvas. Collection of the Artist. Photograph by Tom Van Eynde.



## “Out of Easy Reach—Rebuild Foundation, Stony Island Arts Bank”

The Stony Island Arts Bank (SIAB) portion of “Out of Easy Reach” presents three American artists working with abstraction and assemblage practices to address personal and universal histories, identity, and sociopolitical and cultural issues. Each artist has an outstanding track record. These three remarkable artists are Shinique Smith (born 1971, Baltimore, MD), Sheree Hovsepian (American, born 1974, Isfahan, Iran) and Barbara Chase-Riboud, (born 1939, Philadelphia, PA).

An uncluttered and sophisticated presentation at SIAB allows each work to command space and gravitas. The entire former bank lobby, now a white, box-shaped cube, is given to Shinique Smith’s *Forgiving Strands*, which consists mostly of bundled and stranded fabrics strung from wall to wall high up near the ornate vintage ceiling. In this case, Smith’s work is more installation art than assemblage.

Shinique Smith, *Forgiving Strands*, 2014-present, Fabric, clothing, ribbon, rope, plush décor and accessories, Dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of David Sampson.



In one corner, a group of hanging bundles of black fabric looks eerily figurative, suggesting a squirming, tarred body, while in an opposite corner, a defeated-looking teddy bear hangs like a suspension of childhood belief. Nearby, a worn-out dream catcher is a stand-in for a fading star. I imagined the strands from wall to wall to be lifelines, timelines, pathways and voyages, the bridging of continents and interpersonal constellation, the ties that bind us.

It’s important to view *Forgiving Strands* from various viewpoints and distances, as the bundles take on different personas while new forms appear and disappear. The bright lighting on *Forgiving Strands* is a shadow slayer; one can imagine what the effect of shadow play might have been like in this presentation.

Also by Shinique Smith, there’s a baled, bundled, upright and ironically rigid monolith of clothing and textiles called *Bale Variant No. 0022*. Both of Smith’s pieces sent my imagination to wondering just who the people were who once wore these articles and scraps of clothing and what their lives might have been like. One can almost feel their presence and hear their whispers. They’ve all been compressed and imprisoned in one homogenous block in *Bale Variant No. 0022*.

There are five pieces by Sheree Hovsepian included. Four of them are based upon old-school, analog photographic processes such as photograms and dye transfers, which are used as elements in mixed-media constructions. Three of these pieces (*Sway*, *Lotus Position* and *Form Body*) make much use of layered shapes of stretched nylon to suggest minimalist, stage-like environments behind architectural veils.

*Reveries of a Solitary Walker* is the largest and most complex of Hovsepian’s photographic constructions presented here. An attached and weathered wood stick divides the picture plain vertically and diagonally. References are made to star maps, planets and to the four directions. A cross over a rainbowed heart hovers above a small silhouette of a walking figure.

Hovsepian’s large ink and walnut oil-stained painting on paper, titled *Peaking*, is similar to classic and gestural abstract expressionists like Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock. It’s got calligraphic motion and form like a Whirling Dervish twirling above the blank white space of the paper. Hovsepian’s very modest use of color is thoughtful, elegant and mysterious.



Shinique Smith, *Bale Variant No. 0022*, 2012, Clothing, fabric, fashion accessories, bedding, ribbon, twine, and wood, 90 x 30 x 30 inches. Collection of Jack and Sandra Guthman, Chicago. Courtesy David Castillo Gallery.

The star and matriarch of the SIAB portion of “Out of Close Reach” is Barbara Chase-Riboud, a 78 year old with a record of accomplishments longer than Mount Everest is tall. She also happens to be quite a successful novelist and poet.

Chase-Riboud’s larger than human-scale stele, *Little Gold Flag*, consists of a bulky, crumpled, reflective, and lost wax bronze form above a skirt made of strands of knotted silk. It’s like bumping into a dazzling one-eyed warrior who is wearing a tribal rope kilt.

*Little Gold Flag* is part of Chase-Riboud’s Malcom X series of monumental stela sculptures, which she began creating in memory of the slain civil rights activist in 1969 and has continued for 48 years. The contrast of bronze and stranded silk threads is striking, and while it would be easy to dig for meaning here, the artist has stated that the work is meant to be purely abstract and beautiful. Here’s the quote from an interview with the artist in *Artforum*, Oct 24, 2017:

“The work is pure abstraction, pure beauty—that’s the only thing I’m really interested in. Most activism sacrifices the aesthetic part of making art for the message. I never do that. For me, the message is the message.” ■

**Bruce Thorn**



Sheree Hovsepian, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, 2015, Archival dye transfer, graphite, acrylic, silver gelatin prints, wood, ink drawing on paper, brass nails, string, 50x40.” Photo courtesy of David Sampson.

Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Little Gold Flag*, 1985, Polished bronze and silk, 78 x 26 x 15.” Photo courtesy of David Sampson.



# “In Their Own Form”

## Museum of Contemporary Photography

“In Their Own Form” at the Museum of Contemporary Photography highlights work by Afrofuturist artists who use photography to address issues specific to people of African descent. Afrofuturism combines the mythologies of African cultures with tropes found in science fiction and fantasy genres to create a unique perspective from which viewers may contemplate their relationship to history. The realities envisioned by these artists create a sense of displacement that also seduces the viewer with heightened aesthetic value.

The exhibition is an interesting examination of photography as a medium. In her introductory essay, curator Sheridan Tucker Anderson writes about the importance of photography for portraying blackness. Recognizing its potential for humanizing black people in the public eye, Frederick Douglass embraced photography and was the most photographed man of his era. His photographically reproduced likeness worked to counteract the stereotypes that had previously served to represent black people. “In Their Own Form” follows in this tradition. The artists employ different ways of creating and displaying photography, thus reflecting a unique approach to the medium.

Photography can become symbolic by simultaneously representing and manipulating time while existing as a two-dimensional object. *Wild as the Wind* by Ayana V. Jackson uses photography to create a visual rift in time that is reminiscent of the use of time travel in Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred*. In *Kindred*, a black woman from 1976 is transported to the pre-Civil War era every time her distant ancestor, the white son of a slave owner, is in mortal danger. The novel reflects the tragic way that hate and prejudice are interwoven with the history of America. For Jackson, fashion is a time machine. The modern quality of the lighting and imagery are in contrast with the 19th century garb of the women in her photographs. Time is frozen with the arrested movement of the subject, and the context of place is removed by the studio setting.

Mary Sibande uses the studio as her setting in *A Terrible Beauty*. The photograph depicts a black woman serenely standing amidst a mass of purple tentacles. They emerge from beneath a white apron and float above her head. This image is in reference to the



Ayana V. Jackson, *Wild as the Wind*, 2015, Archival pigment print on German Etching, 43 × 46 in; 109.2 × 116.8 cm. Image courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Purple Rain protest in South Africa, during which police sprayed protesters with a purple dye to mark them for future arrest. This particular purple is key to the image. Aside from the color, it is otherwise visually opposite to photographs of the Purple Rain marches. In contrast to the violent speed of the purple spray of water cannons in those depictions, the purple creeps outward from the subject in Sibande’s photograph. There is a sense of serenity and power in the woman’s face and pose. The photograph claims power from this color that was previously used to inflict violence. It is something straight out of a comic book, the tragic origin story of a supernatural being.

Similarly to Sibande’s work, Fabrice Monteiro’s creatures emerge from their polluted environments. Monteiro teams up with fashion designer Doulsy to build elaborate costumes out of detritus from along the coast of Dakar, Senegal. These monstrous beings are ancient genies, awakened and angered by the destruction of their environment.

Teju Cole has three framed pieces in the main room and one large print in a dedicated room towards the rear on the first floor. These works employ a variety of

different strategies for displaying photographs as well as combine image and text in an interesting way. The photographs are subtle and almost mundane, but they are given context by the words accompanying them. Cole writes about the way photography can both reveal that which was previously unseen, as with the eyes of a subject emerging from the shadows of a scanned image, while being at the same time remaining an unreliable medium: “What is seen is greater than what the camera can capture of it, what is known is finer than writing can touch.” Although these pieces are rich with theories about photography, they seem extremely rooted in the present, making them feel a bit out of place amidst the supernatural beings in the surrounding works.

On the third floor, the work is not quite as strong as the rest of the exhibition. The size of these photographs pushes the detail to the extreme until they break apart and the subject has to compete with the medium. For example, Alun Be’s photographs are much more effective online than in person because the photographs are rough and pixelated. There are also several prints that are stills from Alexis Peskine’s *Aljana Moons*. These too lack quality and do little justice to the video they are taken from, which is quite phenomenal.

The most prominent piece in the exhibition is a three-channel video by Mohau Modisakeng called *Passages*. In this video, each channel shows a view of a boat

in water. Given time, we can tell that two boats are sinking while one is rising, an effect created by reversing the video. The music is enchanting. Subtle differences and shifts in the actions of the characters become very important. By the end of the video, nothing unexpected has happened. The characters are simultaneously submerged by or have emerged from the water. This predictable end raises an interesting question: if time runs backward or forward, what has really changed?



Mohau Modasikeng, Still from *Passages*, Three Channel HD Video, 18:49 min, 2017. Courtesy of What if the World Gallery

Mary Sibande, *A terrible beauty*, 2013, Archival Digital Print, 46 1/2 x 44 1/2 in; 118 x 113 cm. Image courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Photography.



The artists in this exhibition are brought together to examine the conflicted and often violent relationship black people have with history. It is a survey of the photographic medium with each artist utilizing it in unique and exciting ways. Their engagement with Afrofuturist aesthetics allows viewers to enter sublime new realities in which the power has shifted to amplify the voices of people within the African diaspora. ■

Rebecca Memoli

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

“In Their Own Form” is at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, April 12–July 8, 2018

# Kehinde Wiley

## Skirball Cultural Center—Los Angeles

I was never a huge fan of Kehinde Wiley's work, I have to admit. I saw the Obama portrait as illustrative, more like a painted photo. The paintings always seemed flat, with the figures and background strangely disconnected. With this bias in mind, I tackled the work with the supposition that first thoughts are not last thoughts and that the role of a writer is to elucidate, educate and, finally, to challenge and question one's own assumptions and judgments.

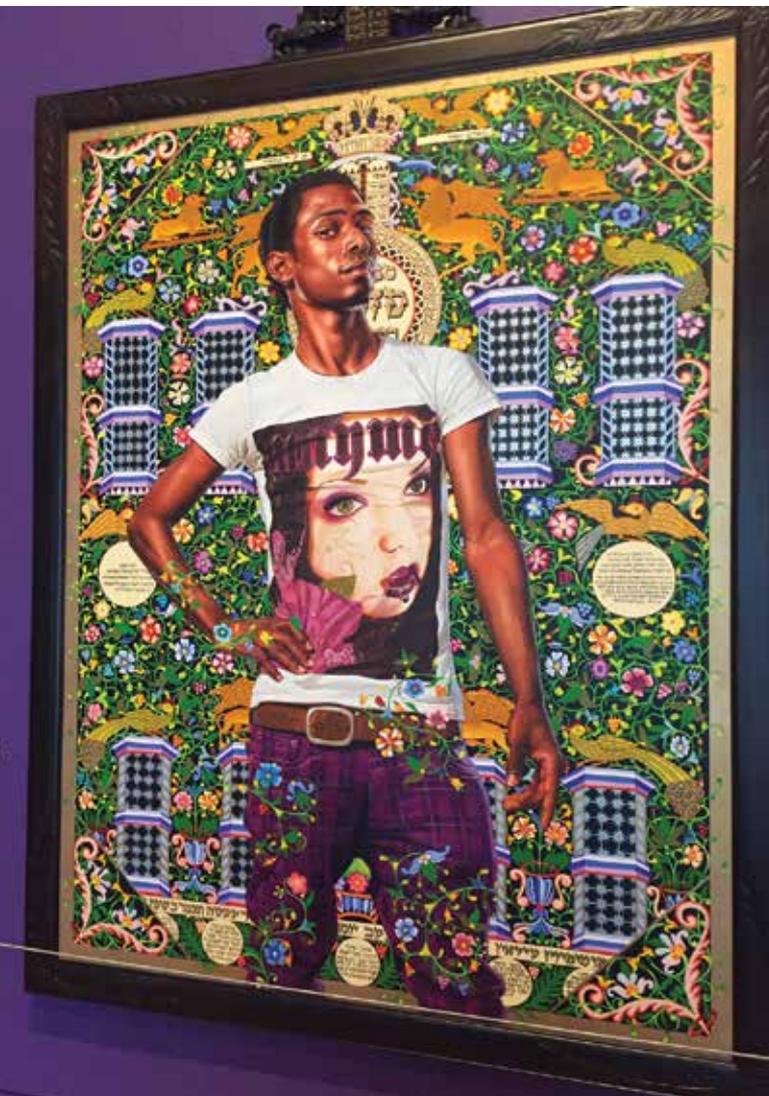
The exhibition is at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. For those visiting LA, it is a stone's throw from the Getty Center. Over the years, I would occasionally stop there as parking is free, the admission is moderate, and the center is easily accessible and quite pleasant. The Center focuses on cultural aspects of the Jewish experience and, as such, features diverse and varied programming as well as a permanent collection.

The Kehinde Wiley exhibit features two large paintings of Ethiopian Israeli Jews, as well as an accompanying video. The two works are respectively titled, *Solomon Mashash* and *Benediter Brkou*. Both titles reference the subjects of the portraits. These works are part of a larger series of paintings entitled the "World Stage," featuring an international roster of portraits of mostly young black men throughout the world.

A short history of Israel would include the resettlement of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. The "Beta Israel" were considered "Jews" and one of the lost tribes. Under the right of return, they were airlifted to Israel in the 1980s and 1990s. Numbering more than 100,000, they are an ethnic minority in a country initially defined by European roots. This anomaly of identity is at the core of the work, as Kehinde's portraits of two Ethiopian Jews provokes questions regarding culture, class, and identity.

Both figures in the painting are portrayed frontally, one as a full-length portrait and the other as a truncated figure. Each is wearing a t-shirts, with Solomon's juxtaposed with the image of the lion and Benediter's with a Magnum cartoon spanning his chest. The gaze of the subject orientates the point of entry into the work as well as the surrounding composition.

Brkou looks slyly into the camera with the figure shot from below. We look up as he looks down. In the classic sense, power and position are defined through posture and scale, and the stance is certainly embedded in the history of portraiture. Reciprocally, the more frontal portrait of Mashash seems softer and gentler, as the subject is shot directly and, although the figure is truncated, the gaze is more intimate and approachable. The symbol of the crown of the Torah hovers over his head and ties directly into the embellished



Kehinde Wiley, *Benediter Brkou*, 2011, Oil, gold and silver enamel on canvas, 95.75" X 71.75." Photo by Neil Goodman.

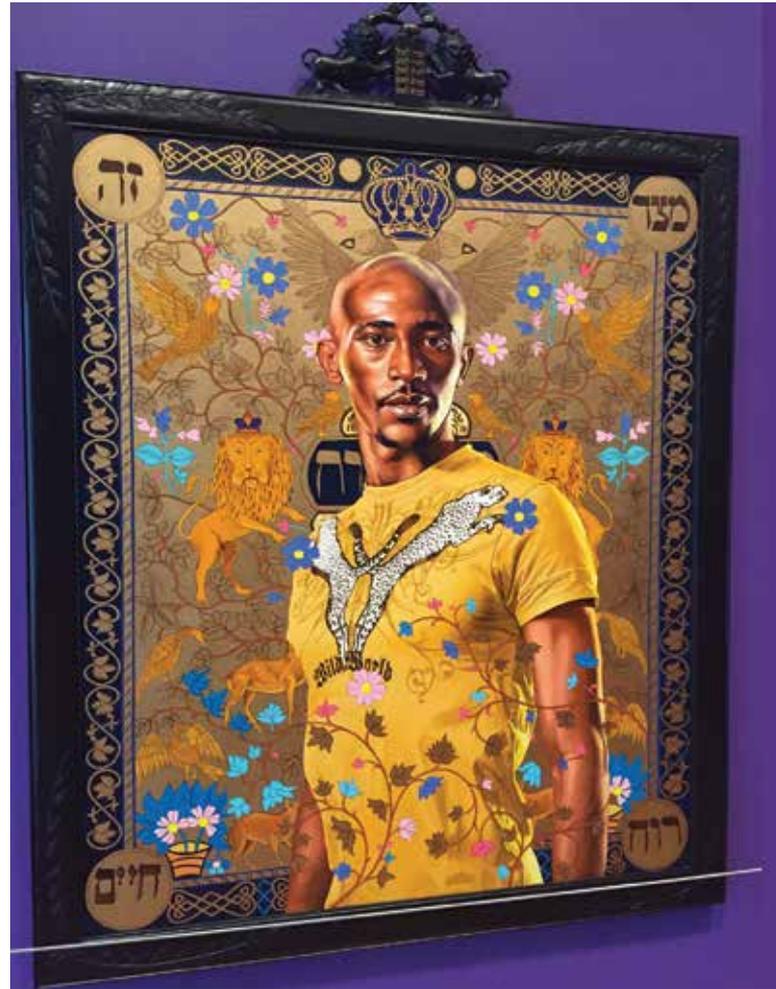
wood frame. In this way, the work, although similar, is remarkably different, as each portrait has its' own mood and personality.

The patterned backgrounds are both decorative and symbolic and reference symbols of Judaica as well as Hebrew text. Similarly, carved frames envelope the work and are capped with figures of lions, the Ten Commandments, and folded hands. In this case, pattern and symbol coalesce, giving the figures context and history. The stylization of background is perhaps also a nod to both Arabic and Judaic pictorial traditions as they historically had similar restraints on figurative depictions.

As a viewer, I was struck by how the paintings use portraiture to address some questions that superseded my formal concerns. The work tackled stereotypes and gave a broader interpretation of who is considered an Israeli. The depiction of two Ethiopian Israelis painted by a non-Jewish African-American artist creates a complicated dialogue between identity and nationality. In a country that can easily be "stereotyped" as homogenous, the representation of diversity creates a broader field for what is modern Israel and, ultimately, asks us to question Jewish identity.

Like the Magnum cartoon, the impact of globalization spans the horizon. We see these subjects as complex and unique individuals, crossed between culture, language, and history and their own individuality. This anomaly seems to be at the core of the work and presents a human aspect to those figures that might be marginalized. Through Kehinde Wiley's gazing portraits, we see both the complexity and irony of contemporary Israeli culture.

If the work was not initially my taste, I can also state that the paintings have a clarity and directness that is provocative. The images linger and they bring something to the table that transcends their photographic source. The scale is arresting and the works have a confidence and single-mindedness that is hard to dismiss. If they are not John Singer Sargent, they are Kehinde Wiley. They speak of their time in both subject, source,



Kehinde Wiley, *Solomon Mashash*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 72" X 60.125." Photo by Neil Goodman.

symbol, bringing us forward and succeeding in asking us to look in new and unexpected ways. ■

Neil Goodman

**Neil Goodman, (Professor Emeritus of Fine Arts) is a sculptor with a long exhibition and teaching history. He is currently preparing for a large-scale sculpture retrospective at the Museum of Outdoor Arts in Denver, opening next fall. He divides his time between studios on the central coast of California and in Chicago. He holds an MFA from the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia.**

# Works that Caught Our Eye



(Upper Left) Howard Finster, *Heaven Is For All People*, 1983, Paint on wood with burn engraved wood frame, 46 x 28.5 inches. Seen at the Carl Hammer Gallery.

(Middle Left) Anna Kunz, *RGB*, 2017, acrylic on canvas 64x64 inches. Seen at McCormick Gallery.

(Lower Left) Diane Cooper, *Genten/Color*, 2016–2017, mixed media, fabric, wood, leather, 12 x 12 in. each. Seen at Jean Albano Gallery.



(Upper Right) Jim Rose, *Six Drawer Starburst Counter*, Hot-rolled steel, found painted steel, 50w x 38h x 15d in. Seen at Gallery Victor Armendariz.



(Middle Right) Lauren Carter, *The One that's like a Cake (It's all for you)*, 2017, Mixed media and found things, 71 x 36 x 17 in. Seen at the Condo Association Gallery.

(Bottom Right) Jason La Mantia, *Devil's Air Show*, 2000, Mixed media on paper, 40 x 45 in. Seen at Co-Prosperity Sphere.



# “It is Two Minutes to Midnight”

Weinberg/Newton Gallery

“It is Two Minutes to Midnight,” an exhibition of virtual reality (VR) experiences, PHSCologram (pronounced skol-o-gram) sculptures, and more conventional art on display at Weinberg/Newton Gallery from May 11-19, was a deliberately didactic show on a topic of the highest seriousness—namely, the catastrophic potential of nuclear weapons, climate change, and the other destructive forces unleashed when technology is unconstrained by ethics. This put it in an interesting position at the intersection of representation and reality (to the extent that physical reality can be sussed out from the simplifying abstractions and frequently conflicting narratives of science, politics, and history).

The show featured the work of Ellen Sandor and her (art)<sup>n</sup> collaborators, 3D modeling expert Diana Torres and architect Azadeh Gholizadeh. Some work was created with the help of computer engineer Carolina Cruz-Neira and her laboratory, The Emerging Analytic Center at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The show emerged through a partnership with the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Most works were inspired by the illustrator who created the *Bulletin’s* iconic Doomsday Clock, the late Martyl Langsdorf (Martyl). Like many early *Bulletin* associates, Martyl was closely connected to the development of the atomic bomb. Her husband, Alexander Langsdorf, Jr., took part in the Manhattan Project before joining the fight against nuclear proliferation.

The first PHSCologram that viewers encountered in the exhibition, *CRISPR-Cas9: A Ray of Light*, was not actually inspired by Martyl or nuclear weapons. It was instead inspired by the revolutionary new gene editing tool CRISPR-Cas9. As Sandor explains in an accompanying video, her interest in CRISPR-Cas9 was motivated by the possibilities it represents for her autistic grandson; he was the one who named the piece “ray of light.” She and he both feel that the technology offers him hope, at least in the long run. In addition to offering hope, however, CRISPR-Cas9 raises difficult ethical questions and reasonable concerns about unintended consequences. This makes it very like nuclear technology and the fossil fuel-burning technologies to which climate change is generally attributed, which

*CRISPR-Cas9: A Ray of Light*, 2017, Ellen Sandor & (art)<sup>n</sup>; Chris Kemp; Diana Torres; Azadeh Gholizadeh; Jennifer Doudna; The Doudna Lab: RNA Biology, UC Berkeley; Megan Hochstrasser; Innovative Genomics Institute; UC Berkeley. Special Thanks to Caleb Sandor Taub. PHSCologram Sculpture 33 x 33 x 62 inches. Image courtesy of Ellen Sandor.



also have their advocates and demonstrable benefits. In conversation, Sandor acknowledged that the

is more concerned with the harmful potential of CRISPR-Cas9 than she.

From a curatorial perspective, *CRISPR-Cas9: A Ray of Light* felt shoehorned with the pieces inspired by Martyl, which were visually, experientially, and thematically consistent. Recent events on the Korean peninsula suggest that the nuclear threat remains grave enough in and of itself to warrant a single, focused treatment. Moreover, the show’s Martyl tie-in would have been reinforced by that approach. Considered by itself, however, the piece is visually striking and, as intended, dense with information that grows more comprehensible the longer it is contemplated. The three-panel PHSCologram display sits atop a twisting plastic base that represents the DNA double helix. Sandor, Torres, and Gholizadeh explained that they went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that the piece was both visually interesting and scientifically accurate. This emphasis on precision can seem paradoxical at times; however precise the representation may be, it is still a representation of an abstraction or, horror of epistemological horrors, merely a useful metaphor nested within other useful metaphors that bear no absolute correspondence to reality.

Many of the other pieces in “It Is Two Minutes to Midnight” are most effective when the visual metaphors



Martyl, *Have a Nice Day*, 2002, Ellen Sandor & (art)<sup>®</sup>; Keith Miller, Pete Latrofa, Janine Fron, Digital PHSCologram, 30 x 40 inches. Image courtesy of Ellen Sandor.

within them remain precise, both in relation to their referents and with respect to the mental and emotional response they seem intended to elicit. *Have a Nice Day*, co-created in 2002 while Martyl was still alive, stands out as a particular success. In it, the PHSCologram technology serves the formal and thematic elements of the image rather than the other way around. Two small versions of the clock, perhaps meant to evoke the moon and the sun, hang in a twilight sky above a muted desert landscape resembling Martyl's *Tent Rocks*. The triangular, two-dimensional geometry of the weatherbeaten rock formations is extended forward toward the viewer in the PHSCologram's third dimension. The rocks finally end at an enormous, translucent Doomsday Clock, which lends the image an even more fearful symmetry. In this blend of representation and metaphor that challenges the two-dimensional conventions of its antecedents, this work feels like a distant, post-apocalyptic cousin of Salvador Dalí's *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubus)*. Martyl's Doomsday Clock—big, simple, urgent, and memorable—metaphorizes the viewer's sudden awareness of nuclear weapons' destructive power within the appropriately dry, desertified scene of their nativity; I myself experienced something similar while driving through Alamogordo, New Mexico, near the site of the first nuclear tests.

The other PHSCologram sculptures are less informative and evocative than the VR tour (*Have a Nice Day II: VR Tour Through the Doomsday Clock*) from which they were excerpted. The subtle menace that pervades *Have a Nice Day*, a product in part of its formal simplicity, does not emerge from the hyper-dramatic jumble of *Have a Nice Day II*. At a certain point, the viewer

has reached a state of (literal) metaphorical saturation. The PHSColograms begin to seem like randomly selected picture postcards dispatched from a land of visual metaphors.

In fairness, *Have a Nice Day II* is more intelligible after the aforementioned VR tour, which takes the viewer through a landscape created using aerial photography of greater Los Alamos. The *Bulletin's* Rachel Bronson narrates as the viewer navigates a Doomsday Clock timeline from 1947 to 2018.

As a creative recapitulation of the *Bulletin's* online timeline, the piece is certainly educational and, at times, moving. It also reflects the depth and breadth of Sandor's and her husband's art collection. I was not the only viewer impressed by how far back the hands of the clock moved during the late 1980s and early 1990s with the passage of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and similar achievements at the end of the Cold War. Unfortunately, and as the title of the exhibition indicates, our species is now as close to the brink as ever, at least according to the *Bulletin*.

Over the course of the VR tour, the play between metaphor and reality is carried out in the vocabulary of editorial cartoons, which are, in general, unapologetically didactic and, at times, convincing. At one point, for example, the viewer watches as a three-dimensional globe is drained of water; the viewer can then peer inside it. Experienced alongside Bronson's calm recitation of the facts, the 3D Los Alamos-esque landscape, the pulsing soundtrack, and a range of distant Southwestern backdrops modeled on Martyl's paintings, this visual metaphor is appropriately dramatic and grim. It also showcases VR's potential as a vehicle for artistic expression. However, not every visual metaphor meets the high standards of exactness or, indeed, gravity that this subject matter demands. For example, a scene in which a bear nuzzles an eagle is meant to represent a hoped-for reconciliation between Russia and the United States. However, it looks more like an outtake from the short-lived Adult Swim cartoon *Xavier: Renegade Angel*.

Its occasional missteps aside, the show deserves credit for providing viewers with an imaginative education on humankind's ongoing history of de- and re-nuclearization. Unfortunately for the human race, the timing was perfect. ■

Nathan Worcester

**Nathan Worcester is the assistant editor for the New Art Examiner and writes for various publications. He has a B.A. from the University of Chicago.**

# “A Home for Surrealism: Fantastic Painting in Midcentury Chicago”

## The Arts Club of Chicago

What is home? Is it the architecture? The landscape? The accoutrements of a building? Or the behavior of its inhabitants? Perhaps home is a mode of existing within space. And, if so, does that locate home inside our bodies and minds? American Surrealists distinguished themselves from their European counterparts by exploring these kinds of questions.

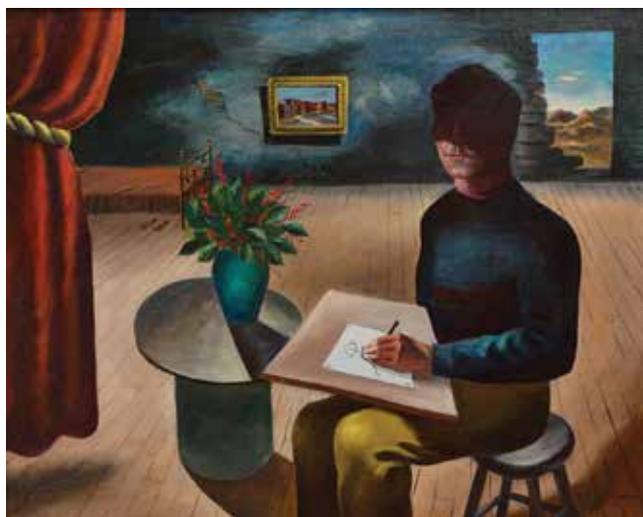
While the political fuel of war and Existentialism formed the big questions propelling the Parisian Surrealists, American Surrealists queried the constructions of cities spreading into America’s expansive landscape and, extending from this, the construction of identities—both those of the self and of their culture.

In “A Home for Surrealism: Fantastic Painting in Midcentury Chicago,” the Arts Club of Chicago offers space to consider the work of several Chicago-based Surrealist painters. The paintings propose alienation as a form of the uncanny rather than the extreme absurdity associated with Surrealism’s broader influence.

The exhibition seems structured to highlight three areas of focus. In the first room, the work is divided into a section for self-portraiture and a section for small paintings of rooms, objects and furniture. The second room expands out of the mind and home, pivoting toward relationships, neighborhoods and culture.

In Harold Noecker’s self-portrait, *The Genius?*, we are confronted with a man staring at us from inside a large room. With his eyes in shadow, we cannot fully connect with him despite his direct stare. As he stares,

Harold Noecker. *The Genius?*, c. 1943. Oil on canvas; 30 x 36 in. (76.2 x 91.4 cm). Collection of Bernard Friedman, Chicago. Courtesy of The Arts Club of Chicago.



Julia Thecla. *People and Planets*, 1946. Oil on panel; 15 1/4 x 14 in. (38.7 x 35.6 cm). Collection of Bernard Friedman, Chicago. Courtesy of The Arts Club of Chicago.

he draws a stick figure. Is it himself or the viewer that he portrays? Behind him, there hangs a framed painting of a house-lined street beside a jagged open doorway revealing an arid, uninhabited wilderness. The artist is positioned between the two.

In Gertrude Abercrombie’s *Self-Portrait, the Striped Blouse*, there is a similar relationship to an interior looking out into wilderness. However, the interior is cramped, and the wilderness appears fertile. The artist stares past us and, although similarly in shadow, her eyes are legible.

These artists were contemplating the relationships of their inner worlds with the expansiveness of the uncolonized landscape, juxtaposing the idea of a constructed self with the wilderness of the world outside the mind. What does it mean to be at home in one’s own mind? Does it require the construction of an individual identity? Or does it require the capacity to resist such construction and let the wilderness in?

The small—sometimes tiny—paintings of rooms, doors and mostly unoccupied spaces are displayed on a wall with a faux fireplace mantel. The arrangement may be intended to evoke the coziness of a home, but it more effectively operates as a reminder of the objectness of the paintings and the items within them.

Continued on page 40.

# The Difference that Forty Years Make

John Schacht at Iceberg Projects and  
Kyle Vu-Dunn at Julius Caesar

The evolution of how gay cultural politics has affected gay artists' subject matter over the last 40 years was an issue that dramatically manifested itself through two simultaneous exhibitions this Spring in Chicago.

In April-May, Julius Caesar gallery exhibited works by Kyle Vu-Dunn, a young East Coast artist from Baltimore. In May, Iceberg Project showed a selection of works by John Schacht, a Midwest artist whose career spanned from the 1970s until his death in 2009.

Titled "In a house, Tinted and Patterned," the Schacht exhibition was curated by C.C. McKee. The pieces were drawn from Jane Wenger's archive collection of Schacht's work, most of them created in the 1970s and 80s. McKee mainly focused on the segment of Schacht's oeuvre that showed how he dealt with homosexual content in his art. This segment consisted mostly of small black and white drawings that were never shown in public. In addition, there were a handful of brightly colored watercolors whose subject matter did not deal with sexuality.

As a largely self-taught artist, Schacht's style borrowed from a number of sources. McKee, in his essay for the exhibition, noted that: "Ornamentation, as Schacht deploys it, negotiates and exceeds its limitation to the decorative, a foundational assertion for

theories proffered by Gottfried Semper and Alois Riegl at the end of the nineteenth century." But this was not a conscious act on Schacht's part; he just incorporated elements of what he liked into his work. Schacht, who lived in Chicago in the 1970s, also absorbed some of the stylistic conventions of Imagism, which was the dominant aesthetic in Chicago at that time. And his affinity for surrealism is manifest. But he did not belong to any particular group. More significantly, there is a spiritual component to his work that overshadows these formal technical conventions. The drawings are ritualistically repetitive—like prayers or mantras being repeated over and over again.



John Schacht, *Untitled*, 1970s, watercolor on paper. Image courtesy of Iceberg Projects.



John Schacht, *Untitled*, 1972-75, pencil on paper. Image courtesy of Iceberg Projects.

In his drawings, Schacht expresses his sexuality symbolically. His drawings are mostly hard-edged outlines, uncolored, and have a cartoon-like or coloring book quality about them. In them, he uses the outline form of the penis as the symbol of his sexuality—almost a hieroglyph—and embeds it somewhere in each of his drawings—almost like a cartouche. But it is not necessarily treated in an erotic way. It is a symbol of everything psychologically and culturally connected to his sexuality, and it functions much like a meme. (Keith Haring later deployed a similar strategy.)

His watercolor pieces are dramatically different. They are intensely colored and more abstract. But he still embeds symbolic forms that have special personal meaning in the pieces. In one, it is a favorite chair; in



John Schacht, *Untitled*, c 1985, acrylic and marker on paper. Image courtesy of Iceberg Projects.

another, it is a blue teapot. These works have a distinct “chinoiserie” look to them. Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, permeated popular culture in the early '70s. And Schacht did a whole series of brightly colored mandalas, one of which was included in the exhibition.

But in no image did Schacht ever address affection or any kind of person-to-person relationship. Like the song says: “What’s love got to do with it?” When there is an individual, it is a solitary male and he is usually depicted in an erotic context. The emotional isolation implied in his work is palpable and is characteristic of the closeted gay culture of the '70s and '80s.

Move forward 40 years and things look very different. Overlapping the Schacht exhibition, Chicago’s Julius Cæsar gallery showed the works of Kyle Vu-Dunn. This young (30-something) Baltimore artist also showed two different bodies of work. He is best known for his acrylic paintings whose surfaces are built up with plaster-reinforced foam and coated with fiberglass. The pieces have irregular edges and evoke a vaguely *bas-relief* feel. Vu-Dunn also presents a number of acrylic works on watercolor paper. The larger fiberglass pieces are brightly colored. The colors in paper pieces, on the other hand, are more subdued.

But in Vu-Dunn’s work, and with apologies to Tina, “love has everything to do with it.” His subject matter is his partner and he paints him with the same passion that 19th and early 20th century artists painted their models and paramours. The works are often about the emotional interaction between people. Although many of the images are male nudes, eroticism is not the

works’ main point. Most of the nudes are “portraits” that express certain emotional states and are not frontal. Several contain two individuals interacting in some way, as exemplified in the painting *Pink Crush (Greenhouse)* or the paper piece *Bad News*, both from 2018.

Person-to-person interaction *never* appears in Schacht’s work. In his time, showing such work to the general public was unthinkable. Homophobia was so strong and prevalent then that it often inhibited the development of close personal sexual relationships between gay men. (Schacht was once beaten up for being gay when he lived in Iowa.)

But 40 years later, Vu-Dunn is free to openly depict his sexuality and sensuality in the context of such relationships. That is a seismic cultural shift in so short a time. It is a shift that has dramatically affected the subject matter of art produced by members of the LGBTQ community. It has freed LGBTQ artists to produce art with overtly homosexual content that concentrates on interpersonal relationships and that is not necessarily tied to political protest.

Sometimes the world does get a little better than it used to be. ■

Michel Segard

**Michel Segard is editor-in-chief of the New Art Examiner.**

Kyle Vu-Dunn, *Pink Crush (Greenhouse)*, 2018, acrylic on fiberglass and plaster reinforced foam, 34x28x1 inches. Image courtesy of Julius Caesar gallery.



## John Vinci: Life and Landmarks

Chicago's best-known architects tend to be from somewhere else. Daniel Burnham was born in upstate New York; Louis Sullivan in Boston. Frank Lloyd Wright's formative years occurred in southwestern Wisconsin; Mies van der Rohe came from his native Germany when he was 51. This hasn't changed in recent years: Helmut Jahn is from Germany, and Jeanne Gang is from Belvidere, Illinois.

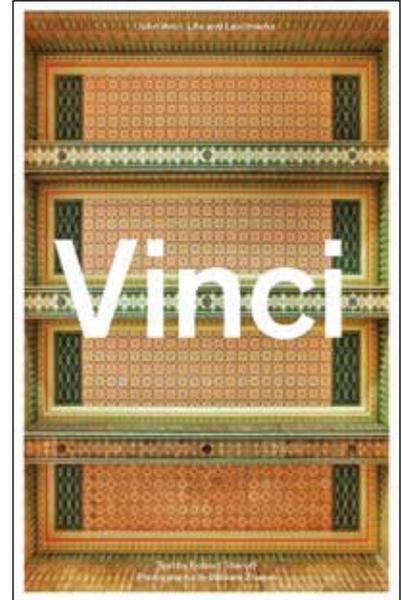
John Vinci, the 81-year-old subject of *John Vinci: Life and Landmarks* (\$65, 272 pages, Northwestern University Press) is a notable exception. Born and raised in Armour Square on the city's South Side, he has lived in just three houses—all within the city's limits—over the eight-plus decades of his life.

Vinci would seem an unlikely hero of Chicago architecture, yet he has left a substantial, if often overlooked, mark on the so-called "Birthplace of Modern Architecture." Architects tend to be best-known by their creative work. But how does one properly evaluate the work of a designer who is best known for his strong preservation advocacy and the renovation of other, better-known architects' work?

That's the Vinci dilemma. His six-decade-long career stands most publicly on his physical rejuvenation of

masterworks such as Louis Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room (now installed within the Art Institute of Chicago) and the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio in Oak Park.

Vinci's architectural education is a product of his provincial upbringing. He attended the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) because it was within walking distance of his parents' home. The fact that he would study under modern master Mies van der Rohe (and be one of the first students to occupy the Mies-designed, now-Chicago Landmark structure S.R. Crown Hall) was something of a fortunate accident.



Chicago Stock Exchange Trading Room at the Art Institute of Chicago. Photo by William Zbaren.



Landscape architect Alfred Caldwell taught an architectural history class at IIT that opened Vinci's eyes to the importance of Louis Sullivan's work, which was rapidly being destroyed in the neighborhoods bordering where he lived. Documenting these structures, and saving pieces of ornament from them, awakened Vinci to their importance—and began his considerable efforts as an advocate of historic preservation.

When the pioneering Richard Nickel—who Vinci had befriended while still a student in the 1950s—died in 1972 excavating the wrecked remains of the old Chicago Stock Exchange, the then-35-year-old Vinci became *de facto* head of Chicago's nascent preservation movement.

And despite his distinctly local background, Vinci has been an unlikely player in Chicago's art scene. His involvement began early in his career through luck and happenstance. Working for architect Dan Buren in the early 1960s, he would meet his boss once a month at 5 AM at the Blackhawk restaurant on Wabash Avenue, where they'd hang art exhibits, which Vinci recalls included a Francis Bacon "screaming" pope. He also hung Warhols at the Standard Club and Ravinia. Eventually, he was asked by a curator at the Art Institute to do an exhibition, "The Art of the Sepik River," which established Vinci's bona fides in the art world. He has now designed over fifty exhibitions, including the recent, well-received "Wiener Werkstätte, 1903-1932: The Luxury of Beauty" at the Neue Galerie New York.

The book's clear and thoughtful text, which covers most of biographical territory noted above, is by Robert Sharoff and is an informative supplement to photography by William Zbaren. Architectural photography is an art unto itself, and Vinci has found a real collaborator in Zbaren. The core of the book is the portfolio, which documents 20 individual projects spanning 1971 to 2005. Seen through the single lens of Zbaren, the consistency of Vinci's architectural approach quickly comes into focus—a sensibility that stresses clean, elegant, and rational solutions, regardless of style.

The best known, not surprisingly, are the preservation projects—Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange and Carson Pirie Scott Building, the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Wright's Peter A. Beachy House, and Burnham & Root's Monadnock Building. Vinci's most publicly known work of his own design is the 1997 Arts Club of Chicago, which not only re-uses the iconic stair from the club's Mies van der Rohe-designed previous home but recreates many proportions and finish

Modern  
Elliptical  
Staircase in an  
1880s Lincoln  
Park Residence.  
Photo by  
William Zbaren



materials from the same. While Mies' dictum "Less is more" is clearly articulated, it is easy to feel that Vinci's original work is almost self-negating.

The art world has had an enormous impact on Vinci's work. Vinci ticks off his artist friends— Daniel Buren, Dan Flavin, Gerhard Richter, Anselm Kiefer, and Aaron Siskind among them. And many of Vinci's private commissions have been for Chicago area collectors, including the Manilows, the Buchbinders, and John H. Bryan. His clear IIT-inspired personal preference for clean lines and white walls has been applied to new construction and renovation alike, provided neutral backgrounds for a wide variety of art. Even his own home, a modest structure built in the 1800s, features art—a bold graphic decal that Daniel Buren applied to Vinci's refrigerator.

The book concludes with a catalogue raisonné featuring 228 individual projects by Vinci, including the 20 featured projects in their broader context. Some are documented by postage stamp-sized illustrations, suggesting that this already weighty tome could have been much bulkier than it is.

"I like to think of my architecture as coming from me, not books," Vinci told me shortly after the book was released. But that doesn't mean that his work—and the accompanying book—can't provide inspiration and instruction for others. ■

Ed Keegan

Ed Keegan is a contributing editor at *Architect Magazine* and Principal at his namesake Chicago architectural firm.

Brian Dovie Golden—Continued from page 18.

is towards a more traditional and illustrational kind of work, closer to Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald, creators of the official Obama portraits.

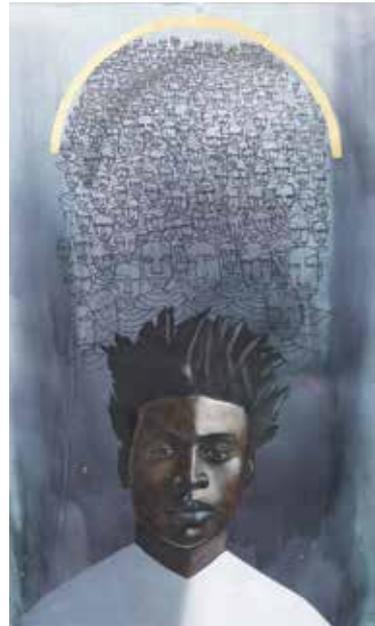
Whereas Marshall usually places his figures within a landscape or architectural setting, BDG blanks out backgrounds. His work doesn't rely as much on stylized pop as someone like Tyrue "Slang" Jones, nor does it have the overt politics of William Walker's *Wall of Respect*. A couple of dead white artists also come to my mind: Gregory Gillespie and Norman Rockwell.

Golden is onto something that is his own. It's beautiful and powerful as graphic design, painting and human testament. He's somewhat of an outsider, safe from the group think of the MFA crowd, while offering some serious and emphatic work.

Portrait painting has a long history and is very competitive; it's not an easy field in which to develop an original style and get to the top of the game. I'll be keeping my eye on the work of Brian Dovie Golden and expecting more good things to come. ■

**Bruce Thorn**

"Brian Dovie Golden: Silver Lining" is on view at the Elephant Room Gallery, May 12 through July 7, 2018.



Brian Dovie Golden, *Promises...promises*, watercolor, acrylic, and ink on paper, 47 x 73 (Framed). Image courtesy of the Elephant Room.

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

Surrealism—Continued from page 33.

Abercrombie's *The Past and the Present* depicts a small room with a daybed and little else. There are two doors to the room—one blocked by the daybed and one door with a window above it. A framed image of an empty landscape with a solitary building hangs above the daybed. The small paintings offer much of the same emotional resonance as the self-portraits. The primary difference is that, because of their scale, they compel you to come close and feel the confined spaces of the rooms more viscerally, heightening awareness of the space that we occupy outside of the paintings.

The paintings in the larger room consider relationships, neighborhoods, and landscaping. In Julio de Diego's *Blueprint of the Future*, we see robed characters in a landscape of ancient ruins conversing over their plans for something new. In Eldzier Cortor's *The Couple*, one person sleeps enclosed within a mesh of cosmos while a second person stares directly at us, awake, alert, and connecting with us outside of the painting. Above their head hangs an unlit light bulb

with a newspaper crumpled around it. The bulb's cord falls to the center of the person's forehead with a die at its end. This character sees us and is connected to the events of the present while their partner is bound within the netted abstraction of spacetime. This room asks questions about how mind and space are occupied to build the spaces we call home.

The exhibition succeeds in building a case that notions of home were a distinctive and pronounced interest for Chicago's Surrealists. This case seems so concise that it leaves no surprises, which is the exhibition's weakness. Its strength lies in that it has brought together many lesser-known American Surrealist artists, like John Wilde and Julia Thecla, who illustrate America's complicated, disorienting and ever-changing ideals about the nature of "Home." ■

**Shanna Zentner**

**Shanna Zentner is a Post-MFA teaching fellow in the Department of Visual Arts (DOVA) at the University of Chicago. This is her second appearance in these pages.**

## Remembering Richard Gray

Chicago has lost one of its leading cultural ambassadors, art dealer Richard Gray, who died in May at age 89.



While known mainly as the head of his namesake gallery, Gray and his wife, Mary, were intimately connected with many of the city's leading cultural institutions, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Humanities Festival, the Art Institute, the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago and WFMT.

Two of his major philanthropic efforts are the Richard and Mary L. Gray Wing for prints and drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago and The Richard and Mary L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry on the University of Chicago campus.

The gallery began modestly in 1963 at 155 East Ontario Street. Gray was looking for a new career after working for his father's construction business. The gallery soon moved to 620 North Michigan Avenue, where it remained for nearly 30 years before moving to the John Hancock Center in 1995. Gray opened a warehouse venue on West Carroll Street in the Kinzie Industrial Corridor last year. He also had a Madison Avenue location in New York.

The gallery's sales currently top \$100 million. Its clients included collectors and museums from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America. Natalie van Straaten, founding publisher of Chicago Gallery News, was quoted as saying that he "helped transform the Chicago art gallery world" and was "a mentor and a model of integrity for other dealers" in that same publication. He helped found the Chicago Art Dealers Association in 1967 and served as its president from 1967-75.

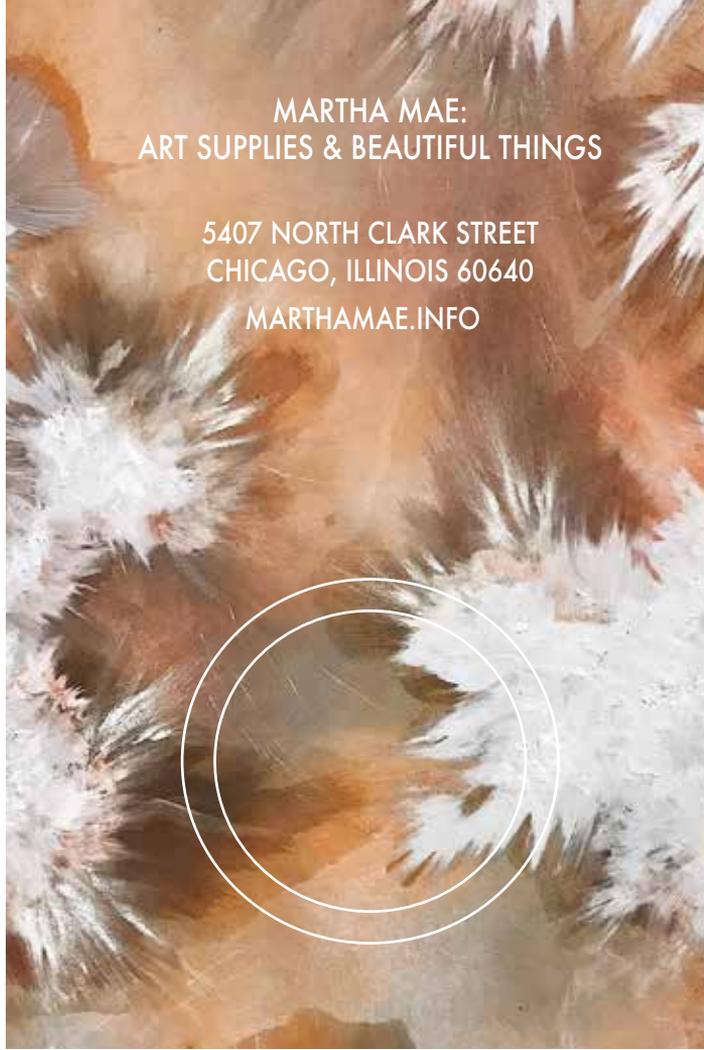
The gallery represented a number of leading modern and international artists, including Jim Dine, David Hockney, Alex Katz and Jaume Plensa. Among the newer additions to his roster are Rashid Johnson and Theaster Gates.

A number of artists mourned his passing. Plensa, creator of the Crown Fountain in Millennium Park, called Gray "a beacon in the art world. We are orphans without him" as quoted in the Chicago Tribune. And Jim Dine, whose association with Gray spanned 40 years, said, "His humanity and appreciation for the human condition was immense. His deep love of drawing suited my obsession for the medium to a tee. To me he was a great dealer and a great guy."

Tom Mullaney

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We introduce Scouting the Blogs



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Part 1: The Illusion of Progress  
Tom Mullaney wonders why top museum directors avoid taking a public stance on Art  
Feier Lai — For whom and for what does the artist perform?



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David Lee examines Nicholas Serota's new leadership of the Arts Council



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



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