NEW ART examiner
Established 1973

The Independent Voice of the Visual Arts
Volume 35 Number 3, 2021

DIGITAL FREEDOM OR silicon serfdom?

$15 U.S.

NEW ART examiner
Established 1973
Vol. 35, No. 3, 2021. Compilation of January/February/March online articles and reviews.

Digital Freedom or Silicon Serfdom?

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Back Cover: Gary Justis, Distal Splainer, digital photograph of projected light, 48 x 32 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist

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NEW ART EXAMINER

The *New Art Examiner* is published by the New Art Association. The name "New Art Examiner" is a registered trademarks of the New Art Association.

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NEW ART EXAMINER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

WANTED: WRITERS

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

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

Michel Ségard
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Introduction: "Digital Freedom or Silicon Serfdom?"

Think of all the problems humans have inflicted on the planet. Come on, go ahead. We'll wait.

We don't even have to name them—they're entering your mind right now.

They may seem daunting; some may seem like they can never be solved. Yet it is our very capacity to pinpoint, to name, to try to solve these problems—to anticipate the challenges of the future, and to muster our mental and physical energies against them—that can give rise to a certain very wild and, perhaps, culturally specific optimism.

Imagination may well be our only inexhaustible natural resource. After all, we didn't have to name any of our more exhaustible resources for you to imagine them, did we?

Digital technology is everywhere—inescapable—and, like any would-be monism, either crushing or liberating, depending on your disposition. As we approach the "digital future," whatever that means, it's not clear if the vast and darkling form that has blotted out our sky is some Kurzweilian asymptote—the Singularity—or a great silicon wall.

Whatever we're facing—now more obviously than ever—we can be glad that artists are here to engage with it. Art, after all, helps us to imagine. If we have imagined ourselves into a problem, we can imagine ourselves out of it.

K.A. Letts introduces us to three artists who have commented sharply on our current digital infrastructure and the sort of people it creates. With his *The Endless Doomscroller*, Ben Grosser implicates us all in shaping the Internet as it is—and reminds us of how the Internet shapes its users.

Kelli Wood speaks with Drs. Julia McHugh and Mark Olson at Duke University, who are using digital technology to make art and art history more accessible—and Nathan Worcester talks to artist Doug Aitken, who explains why he finds Instagram and other social media more promising than perilous.

Evan Carter reviews Robert Chase Heishman's "Image Workers" at Elastic Arts. Heishman's trans-cultural collaboration with a Bangladeshi photo editing company raises unsettling questions about the globalized production made possible by the Internet.

Neil Goodman interviews legendary Chicago artist Gary Justis, whose tech-focused practice has spanned decades. In Neil's words, "his work is light, shadow, sound, movement. It pulses, it glows, it rocks, and it torques. His constancy as an artist is growth and change, and like his machines, his work is 'never still in the wind.'"

Join us as we examine this uncertain yet exciting moment in our fast-changing times. With courage, curiosity, and, yes, imagination, none of us need be "still in the wind" either.

The Editors

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

USA/Canada	$55	postage incl.
Rest of World	$80	postage incl.

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On Art and Social Media
An Interview with Doug Aitken

by Nathan Worcester

Artist and filmmaker Doug Aitken has been exploring the aesthetic possibilities of technology in his work for over three decades. In recent years, he has capitalized on the immense potential of social media, curating one of the art world's most intriguing Instagram accounts.

In an interview with the New Art Examiner, he shared some of his thoughts on social media, the Lumière brothers, fiction vs. non-fiction, and Bruce Conner's visit to a thrift store, among other things:

***New Art Examiner*: I'm interested in some of the paradoxes in something like Instagram. What do you think it means for someone in fine art to capitalize on a medium that is, I think, genuinely democratizing, but that is also privately owned and data-mined—and that people often find invasive?**

Doug Aitken: There's always been a relationship between art and technology. I don't mean technology leading art—I mean working in different systems, trying to find ways to sculpt and shape different forms of communication. We can see this so far back, from the invention of perspective to the Gutenberg printing press…

To me, Instagram is very interesting. If we look at the arc of the moving image, the invention of cinema with, say, for example, the Lumière brothers, we see this language that really exploded in the 20th century. I think cinema's the great language of the 20th century. But as the 20th century progressed, we found ourselves having this very rigid time codes—these very strict formats that we had to work within. For example, movies at ninety minutes or two hours, or a short film has a [rigid] duration. Everything became very standardized. And I think that created siloing within communication, within film, within what formats could be used for what. I think it kind of calcified. A short film could never be taken seriously because a long film was supposed to be substantial—those kinds of clichés.

Doug Aitken, *Elevation-1049*. Photo courtesy of Torviol Jashari and Doug Aitken Workshop.

Doug Aitken, *New Horizon*, Crane-Estate, 2019. Photo by Jamie Barron.

With the revolution of self-publishing and the revolution of digital platforms, it explodes those structures and time codes. It blows them open…

There are different platforms that can handle [it]—or that you can excavate to work that way—that weren't there before. So, to me that's what's kind of compelling—the fact that we can experiment with a five second artwork or film or loop, or a thirty second piece. It allows for all these possibilities…

You [also] have this vast landscape of conversations and dialogues that can be activated.

NAE: This is somewhat my generational perspective, but to a certain extent, everybody who's grown up with these technologies is a creator, or sees themselves to some extent in that light… And yet it's also a particular infrastructure that is, to some extent and in some respects, under the influence of particular monied interests or states. There are other factors that intercede that we've become more aware of in the past few years.

DA: Yeah—but isn't that true of the history of communication?

NAE: That's true…
I looked at your *Flag and Debris* work. There it seems like you're highlighting phrases like 'Digital Detox' and 'Resist Algorithms.' What did that come out of?

DA: We're moving into uncharted waters. We find ourselves stepping into a landscape that's not really defined—it's kind of a haze on the horizon, almost. And that, to me, is extremely interesting. And this has been accelerated with COVID, with 2020, with all the kind of elements at play right now. But this would have happened anyways. We're moving fast, we're accelerating into this landscape that we don't really have an idea of how to navigate that

Doug Aitken, F*lag and Debris* Installation. Photo by Evan Bedford.

Doug Aitken, *Flag and Debris* Installation. Photo by Evan Bedford.

well... It puts people in a situation where they're insecure or they're overly confident. They don't quite know what the next step is.

With the body of work, *Flag and Debris*, I found myself at the beginning of COVID, like everyone else, locked at home, looking at four walls, not really able to do the things that I would normally do. And I started thinking about the subject that we're talking about right now—this new frontier that we're moving into. And I started thinking, 'To make art right now, maybe I should just set these parameters'—like Arte Povera parameters. I'd say, 'I'm just going to use what's around me in my house. Pull some fabric out of the closet, pull some discarded clothes, and start putting them together—making phrases, words, language...'

And the language that came to me were these very, very contemporary words and phrases. Speaking about algorithms, pattern, code—thinking about the phrasing and the language that's being pushed out that we're not even used to understanding yet, as a society. And with that work, I almost want to use the slowness and the stillness of the handmade, sewing these words and phrases which are very liquid and very accelerated—slowing down that information and reflecting upon those ideas.

For myself, the idea of art is something that's incredibly fluid. I don't really see the idea that someone's going to define themselves by medium—like, 'You are a painter.' We're people. We have ideas, and we use what's around us, or we invent mediums or ways of working... I think that's why, for me, Instagram is interesting, and it feels kind of intuitive. It feels interesting, being able to step into a space and know that the parameters are very short bursts of information—this very concise image or phrasing. And how can that work? How can that work if you have this little digital pulse that you just put out there, and you see how it radiates, or if it does?

NAE: It's powerful, because you can really see, 'Wow, this is something that people are responding to—that

Doug Aitken, *The Garden*, 2017, Photo courtesy of Doug Aitken Workshop

Doug Aitken, *Flag and Debris* Installation. Photo by Evan Bedford.

seems to speak to the moment.' But you also find yourself—I'm a bit of a contrarian, so I'll always push back—you also find yourself developing these feedback loops if you're not careful, where [you wonder], 'Is this something that I'm putting out because it's consumable, or is this something that I happen to be using this medium to put out?'

DA:: Yeah—and I think you've always seen art coopting popular media forms. Look at the DADA, reappropriating advertisements and cutting them up...

What's interesting to me is when someone takes a medium, like social media, and they actually do something with it instead of just use it to advertise—where they actually use the format itself as a new form of canvas, and they bring something to it that didn't exist before.

For the longest time, in the editorial world, there were editors who specialized in certain durations. There's a friend of mine who's just an incredible editor at thirty second spots—commercials. This was a specialty that was really in demand for decades and decades—someone who could really tell a story in thirty seconds.

The attention span for Instagram isn't thirty seconds—it's five to ten seconds. The commercial that we all grew up watching and digesting and repeating—that's almost like a feature film compared to the attention span of an Instagram viewer.

So, in this kind of attention merchant's way, you see this larger populace's attention has been reduced and eroded even further. So now you have to create a story or a narrative or an impact that has even less time to work with!

NAE: And if your focus is in presenting deliberately fractured narratives, which seems to be a theme in the way that you approach at least some of your work, then it seems like it's a particularly resonant medium for that...

DA: And you can see it as an experiment—as a way of workshopping these ideas that you have, putting out these little tests or experiments. That's one of the things that has been lacking in contemporary art. Isn't contemporary art supposed to be a space for experimentation? Isn't it supposed to be an area that isn't about only refinement—that it's also about losing it and really pushing ideas to their extremes, their breaking point?

I think that art has been increasingly conservative over the last decades, and maybe there's a moment now—this last twelve months or so—where the language of art can refresh itself. It can get back to the core of what it can or could to, as opposed to how it was subservient so much...

Doug Aitken, *Flag and Debris* Installation. Photo by Evan Bedford.

Doug Aitken, *Flag and Debris* Installation. Photo by Evan Bedford.

NAE: It seems like [*Flag and Debris*] was presented in such a gripping way televisually—but when I think about the concept of these dancers, these amorphous forms, occupying a vacant Los Angeles landscape, a lot of what's interesting is this notion of reengagement with something more real and concrete—something that's hard not to consume over digital media, simply because that's so central to the way we consume anything, but at the same time, it's sort of an attempt to 'digitally detox,' as you might put it.

DA: Sometimes you kind of question, 'What's fiction? What's non-fiction? What's real?' The last twelve months really put that into question—what is this world around us? What is Chicago when you look out your window and there's not a human out, every store is closed, the city is in lockdown. It's something we haven't experienced before...

Maybe this allows us to reflect, in a way—to question, in a way, which we just simply could never have done before. You actually have this time and space to think, to look at the long game, absorb something and come back to it again and again, not just replace it and move on. You and I and people who are engaged in creativity and culture, we really need to take those elements and not lose them. When we phase out of this, we need to fight to preserve the integrity of what's come out of this, and not find a situation where we're reverting back to the way it was.

NAE: You mentioned that you're especially interested in social media in new ways. Are there any other visual artists out there who have particularly powerful social media accounts?

DA: As far as artists, I'm not really sure. But there's people who really exploit it in strange, interesting ways.

There's actually this Eastern European electronic musician who does some great stuff. His name's Tommy Cash. It's completely fucked up, but I think, 'That's so fresh! Where did that come from?'

It also creates this portal where you discover other voices, other people doing things... [Tommy Cash] is making some of the most peculiar and disturbing short clips, and he has nothing to do with art, and he's not in the contemporary art world at all. And I think that's kind of refreshing in a way...

There's such an interesting history of artists trying to use media—I'm thinking of Chris Burden's *TV Hijack,* which is one of the most disturbing and violent things you've ever seen, where he's on cable access or public television in some small region—I think it's Irvine—and he starts taking the commentator hostage...

Bruce Conner made this movie in the fifties—he told me he went to a thrift store or something, and they were selling all these sixteen-millimeter newsreels, because they played newsreels before World War II in movie theaters, so you knew what was going on in the world... So, he found all these old black and white newsreels, and bought them for cheap, and they cut them up and made that tour-de-force of *A Movie*—a complete collage remix of the media at that point in time.

It's kind of in the blood of a lot of artists, and this is just another evolution of it.

Final thought from Doug:

"I don't think the artist should be beholden to their work existing inside a room, a space—and this allows us to push this further." ■

Nathan Worcester is the Managing Editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He lives in Chicago.

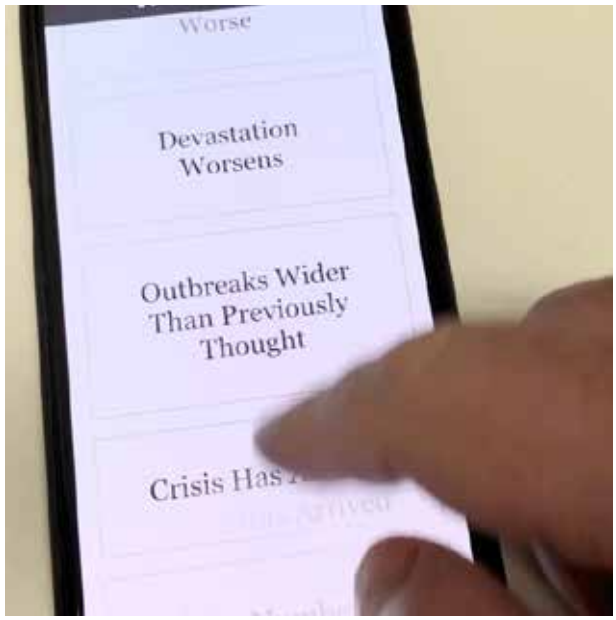
Three Artists Engage with Digital Technology

by K.A. Letts

When the World Wide Web was introduced to the world on August 6, 1991, most of us had no idea how it would change everything. In the 30 years since, the Internet has re-wired our brains in ways that were, while sometimes foreseeable, often completely unexpected.

To a startling degree, contemporary visual artists were enthusiastic early adopters of digital tools and online networks. The Internet has made it easy for creatives to research images, buy products and tools, and find a worldwide art audience. Graphic and animation programs, photographic capture technology and digital printing, to name only a few seductive new technologies, have transformed and enhanced existing analog skill sets. It has begun to dawn on us, though, that these marvelous digital gifts might come with some troubling strings attached. Social isolation, online bullying, political radicalization, and rampant conspiracy theories are only a few of the emerging downsides to our deepening interconnection on the web, now accelerated exponentially by the pandemic quarantine.

In their role as observers and creators of culture, a new generation working at the intersection of technology and art is examining the relationship of our analog embodied brains with the ever more encroaching digital environment. Three of them, all living and working in the Great Lakes region, make work that both describes this moment in our digital present and points to the possibilities and perils of our technological evolution.



Ben Grosser, still image from *endlessdoomscroller.com*, 2020, alternative social media interface, GIF. File courtesy of Ben Grosser.

Ben Grosser

Ben Grosser's work pairs technological commentary with mischievous social observation. As a provocative Internet prankster and digital critic, the Chicago-based Assistant Professor of New Media at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign thinks about the social implications of software and how it conditions our experience of the world. His interactive experiences, machines, and systems reveal how digital software influences our behavior, sometimes for better but often for worse.

As Grosser said in a 2014 *Hyperallergic* interview,

> *Software is now involved in nearly every aspect of our daily lives. It runs our banks, our phones, our cars, our refrigerators. Software tells us how to get somewhere, answers our questions, and suggests which film or book we might like next. Yet most people not only don't know how these systems work or why they do what they do, but they presume that software systems are neutral actors. This is a problem because software is not neutral—software comes with built-in biases from those who develop it, those who run the corporations who employ software developers, and increasingly, I would argue, its biases come from software itself.*

His curiosity about how social media is subverting human psychology has prompted him to develop a series of "demetricators" for Twitter and Facebook and (more recently) TikTok. These web browser extensions hide the metrics that are embedded in social media platforms—the goal of these digital tools is to free us from our neurotic dependence on their "likes," "followers," and "notifications." By making this data disappear, Grosser says, "Demetricator lets us try out Twitter without the numbers, to see what happens when we can no longer judge ourselves and others in metric terms."

In 2018, David Zweig of the *New Yorker* tested the extension and reported back about its effect on him:

> *I saw a blank appear below my name as the three critical metrics—"Tweets," "Following," "Followers"—vanished. I felt an eerie calm: my paltry follower count was no longer there to taunt me... After three weeks of using the Demetricator, the nature of Twitter, for me, changed completely.*

With his Demetricators, Grosser has deftly demonstrated how social media interfaces are insidiously designed to elicit certain responses. He has also shown that this isn't how it has to be—that these harmful features can be changed to benefit our mental health.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic provided Grosser with ample opportunity to observe our Internet conduct in crisis. He's noticed, in particular, how the constant drumbeat of bad news has engendered a practice now commonly known as "doomscrolling." He has now designed his most recent commentary on the online media's manipulation of our psychology: https://endlessdoomscroller.com/. He skewers our pandemic-induced compulsive reading of bad headlines, calling it "the result of a perfect yet evil marriage between a populace stuck online, social media interfaces designed to game and hold our attention, and the realities of an existential global crisis."

Abhishek Narula

Artist/hacker Abhishek Narula has leveraged a newly minted M.F.A. from the University of Michigan with a pair of degrees in electrical engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology to investigate our relationships with our personal devices and the shadowy entities that underlie them. In a video presentation from his M.F.A. thesis exhibit at Stamps Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan, last year, he described the basis for his art practice:

> *Whenever we go somewhere, whenever we go to a new city or a new place, the first thing we do is pull up Google Maps. We try to figure out where we are. We try to figure out where we're going... There's been this shift in how we use visual cues around us to locate ourselves in space... There's this quote that I really like which says that in architecture, when we shape buildings, they end up shaping us. I think the same thing is true for the digital ecosystem that we find ourselves in today—the difference is, though, that our digital ecosystem is very invisible—we don't see the radio waves or WiFi signals that are continuously around us.*

In his 2020 interactive installation *Sometimes I forget my phone gets lonely*, he has addressed what wayfinding software such as Google Maps can tell us about where we are—or are not—in the world. Narula uses the technique of GPS spoofing (faking) to make it appear via Google Maps that he (and his phone) are traveling between the towns of Ely, Nevada, and Austin, Nevada, along a desolate stretch of Route 50, even though both phone and artist are, in fact, in a gallery thousands of miles away. As part of the artwork, he invites gallery visitors to text his phone and inquire as to his whereabouts; his phone responds with a picture of its "location" in the desert landscape sourced from Google's Street View. In a video related to the installation, Narula muses, "What does it mean to be lonely today? Can we ever feel loneliness when we have

Abhishek Narula, *Sometimes I forget my phone gets lonely*, 2020, smart phones, Google Maps, installation detail. Photo courtesy of Abhishek Narula.

GPS trackers in our back pockets? What would it look like to disconnect from these technologies?"

Narula describes a companion artwork, *Map Jamming,* as a "participatory intervention in navigation systems." On entering the gallery, visitors can access Google Maps on their phones and are told to navigate to a prescribed spot on the map. Their phones appear to indicate that they are moving along a highway even as they remain physically in the gallery. Sometimes, if there are enough individuals in the space using the app, they can even make the software "think" there's a traffic jam on a completely empty road.

A pervasive mood of isolation and dislocation resonates throughout Narula's work. Travel has been a constant in his adult life, and one wonders whether his nomadic history has contributed to his interest in the fungible nature of physical location in the digital age. In an email, he says, "I grew up in India and moved to the U.S. when I was 18 in 2004. Since then, I have lived in more than 9 cities. I have always struggled with the idea of a 'home' and I have never really felt a deep connection to a place, town or even a country. It definitely influences how I see the world and especially the entanglement of technology, culture and society."

Sophia Brueckner

Sophia Brueckner has always loved computers. In 2005, her love of the technology landed her a job at a then-obscure little company in Silicon Valley called Google, where she designed and wrote code for popular apps used by millions. By 2008, though, her digital romance had cooled as she became increasingly critical of flaws in how online technologies were being developed. In a scholarly essay, Brueckner observed,

> *Popular connective technologies are designed to be efficient, not to be meaningful. By fixating on making connecting with others as easy as possible, as social networking applications do now, connection is cheapened. In addition, when connecting requires so little effort, we are overwhelmed with such a quantity of signals that they turn into noise. Paradoxically, though these technologies promised to save us time and keep us close to others, the very same technologies are increasing feelings of loneliness and making us more distracted than ever.*

She envisioned creating more ethically designed, human-friendly interfaces, and decided to apply her tech background to art, earning an M.F.A. in Digital+Media from Rhode Island School of Art and Design in 2012, followed by an M.S. in Media Arts and Sciences from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2014. Now an assistant professor at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Brueckner is actively engaged in designing and prototyping devices for a more humane digital world.

Brueckner has found inspiration for her inventions in science fiction, a literary genre that she describes as "an ethics class for inventors." She maintains that science fiction writers are great extrapolative thinkers who are good at imagining the way in which technologies might play themselves out in the real world. The science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, by Phillip K. Dick, provided the creative basis for her functional artworks *Empa-*

Abhishek Narula, *Map Jamming*, 2020, smart phones, Google Maps, interactive gallery event photo. Photo courtesy of Abhishek Narula.

Sophia Brueckner, *Empathy Box*, 2014, 14" x 7" x 6", wood, bronze, acrylic, heaters, electronics. Photo courtesy of Sophia Brueckner.

thy Box and a companion wearable, *Empathy Amulet*. The *Empathy Box* is a tabletop appliance, pleasantly retro in appearance, that uses shared physical warmth to connect with anonymous others. By grasping the handles, a user feels both the literal and metaphorical warmth of connection with another unknown person grasping a corresponding box in another location. The *Empathy Amule*t operates according to a similar principle, but asynchronously.

In her art practice, Brueckner aims to answer this question: "How can my work change what people believe is possible?" The originality and emotional warmth of her creative vision animates her ongoing investigation of naturally occurring supportive affinity groups online. She has found hopeful signs of shared human connection on the web in anonymous social networks, such as in the Amazon Kindle Popular Highlight algorithm and in the interaction of strangers all over the world engaged in the generous act of sharing videos of skies on YouTube. Brueckner notes that on a platform known for its toxicity, the interactions among the sky sharers exhibit only kindness and generosity.

In a recent lecture, Brueckner cautioned against what she calls techno-absolutism—the idea that given the right code, algorithms, and robots, technology can solve all of humanity's problems. She advocates, instead, that both users and designers of devices and programs cultivate what she calls "a critically optimistic attitude" that will allow us to examine problems with existing technology and to imagine thoughtful solutions.

The new media artists profiled here display an impressive array of technical capabilities and a variety of insights about where we are right now in our relationship with all things digital. While the inter-connecting constellation of social media platforms, personal devices, and programs that makes up the current digital ecosystem can seem like an overwhelming Pandora's box of both endless possibility and dystopian hazard, there's something hopeful, even optimistic, in the way that Grosser, Narula, and Brueckner wrestle with the complexities of an evolving digital environment.

These artists have all observed that as we have shaped the technology, it has in turn shaped us. But they know, too, that what humans create, they can also change. Donna J. Haraway, a prominent scholar in the field of science and technology, says it well: "Technology is not neutral. We're inside of what we make, and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections—and it matters which ones get made and unmade." ■

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

Sophia Brueckner, *Captured by an Algorithm (ongoing series)*, 2012-present, porcelain plates, *Kindle Popular Highlights* from popular romance novels, scanned romance novel covers using Adobe Photoshop's Photomerge algorithm. Photo courtesy of Sophia Brueckner.

"Never Still in the Wind"
An Interview with Gary Justis

by Neil Goodman

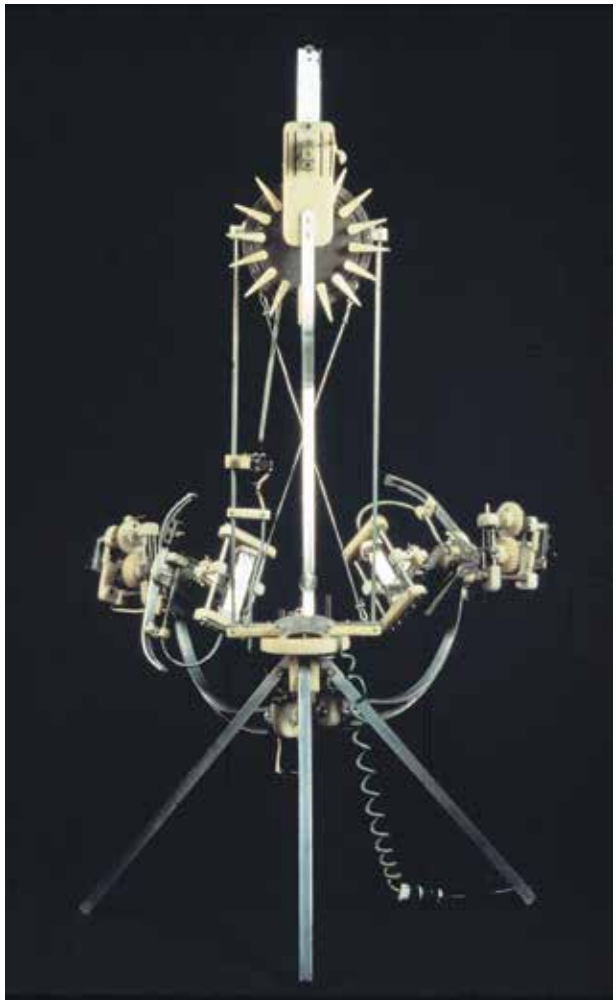
Thinking about Gary Justis in his early years, he was always a bit of a Tom Swift. Like the namesake character in his novels, Gary seemed equally matched with Tom as inventor, explorer, problem solver, scientist, and builder. Their imaginations sparked ours, propelling us forward into a world that was still unfolding and seemingly just beyond the horizon.

For most of us, childhood dreams fade, yet for Gary Justis, they simply matured and developed. For more than forty years, he has been at the forefront of the Chicago art world. His intelligence coupled with originality, he is an artist pushing and crossing boundaries, marching forward while nodding to the past. His work is light, shadow, sound, movement. It pulses, it glows, it rocks, and it torques. His constancy as an artist is growth and change, and like his machines, his work is "never still in the wind."

From the first time he exhibited at the Museum of Science and Industry, shortly after receiving his MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he has been the single most important Chicago artist encompassing technology as his base. If in the early 1980s we saw him as a kind of boy wonder, in later years he is more like Jules Verne, confidently charting a distinct and reliable course with authority and clarity. He is and always has been uniquely his own artist, and in surveying more than four decades of work, one sees the depth and rigor of his sculpture as an extraordinary artistic achievement.

I have also known and admired Gary for most of his career. For a while, we had the same dealer, and we occasionally exhibited together albeit with differing aesthetics. In the course of a significant portion of our time together in Chicago, we lived in the same neighborhood, and our studios were in close proximity and our conversations frequent.

This is a dialogue that started many years ago, and the questions posed address the long view of Gary's personal and professional experience.



Gary Justis, *Pendulum, State of Its Arc*, 1979, plastic, aluminum, motors, optics, white and laser light, dimensions variable, machine dimensions, 78 x 40 x 23 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

***New Art Examiner*: When you consider a sculpture, how do you arrive at the form, and are you after a certain emotional response?**

Gary Justis: Most times when I am in production of a work, the nature of the materials determines how the form is built. I have an accumulated internal catalog of forms in my head, I suppose, and this determines my choices of shapes and an object's functional identity. I'm finding that I cut out basic geometric shapes from sheet metal lately and combine them with motorized technical devices to effect movement, a sense of time, and lighting effects that shape space. When things are not right, it's because the materials, duration, and nature of the mechanical motion are not in harmony. I suppose that is a visceral and/or emotional awareness of incongruences within the work.

NAE: What sparked your early interest in machine technology?

GJ: One early advantage in my investigation of tech-based art was the availability of materials in a city like Chicago. There are discarded materials everywhere, some cast-off mechanical devices that I obtained either through a surplus outlet or off the street. With reconstituted mechanical apparatuses applied to my own sense of design, the element of time became more like a material… something that could be manufactured, containing qualities similar to malleable, physical matter. There was also the engineering aesthetic of "adjustability" in making machines pliable and true to their intended function. I found I could make anything perform if there was a component of maximum adjustability designed into the work.

NAE: There was a time that you revisited more traditional materials in creating your work, as well as non-kinetic form. What caused this shift?

GJ: Curiosity and a need to express some latent skills. In the early '90s, I was studying the work of Brancusi more seriously than I had in the past. I wanted to understand the seeming timelessness of his forms and his uncanny sense of scale and texture. The body of work that I made at the time was influenced by this study and built with an exhibition in mind for CompassRose Gallery in Chicago. I called the show "Quiet Works," and it contained a collection of small metal and wood pieces that were more expressive of mass and volume than my previous work. The heavy metal pieces were machined and were vaguely anthropomorphic, resting on carved wooden plinths. One work was a kind of standing bird form that was a tongue-in-cheek response to Brancusi. This piece was called *Da Boid*. Katherine Hixson, whom I mentioned earlier, believed these works to be a critique of early modernism. I do not know if she was referring to Brancusi in particular, but I would venture his reference was not lost on her.

Left: Gary Justis, *Head of Mithra,* 1980, aluminum, motors, light, 41 x 13 x 13 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.
Right: Gary Justis, *Da Boid*, 1991, stabile work, exotic hardwood, aluminum, 53 x 22 x 20 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Gary Justis, *Head on Horizon*, 2001, wood, aluminum, motors, digital projection, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist. https://youtu.be/tMuPSKzit0Y

NAE: Machines break, they demand attention, and in your case, they are uniquely attached to the builder. Do you think that the physical requirements essential towards maintenance have been a deterrent in collecting your work?

GJ: Yes, is has been a deterrent for many years. Other kinetic artists face this, so many strive to design and build high-quality components into the work. Time-based work has an obvious dilemma; the artist will not always be around to restore works, and this demands certain protocols for ensuring a work's longevity. On the other hand, the rigors of guarantees or maintenance schedules make a work of art like an automobile and less like an autonomous aesthetic experience. It's a tough one, and beyond making things standard enough that any tech person could repair or maintain a work, I do not know what the solution is, other than making sure the works are under the care of museums and institutions who are committed to understanding every aspect of a time-based work of art

NAE: I have found your photographs related yet independent of your sculptural oeuvre. What propelled your interest in photography, and what caused this shift?

GJ: I was collaborating with LJ Douglas in the early 2000s, producing animated video works, when I discovered that a digital camera could read light projections in a very specific way when using light-emitting diode (LED) light sources. When projecting light on a white, reflective surface, the camera reads projected light as pure color and all else as black. This allowed me to play with reflective and refractive filters and other objects to construct a fictive, photographic space. At the time, I was occupied with making light-producing sculpture… I found the two directions of research complemented each other, while remaining distinct [from] one another.

NAE: How do you know when a sculpture works?

GJ: Most of it is intuition, and a bit of it is training in the classical forms of composition, balance, and weight. This applies to machines as well as more traditional works. Good engineering holds a kernel of beauty within its identity and function. Sometimes I get a glimpse of this kernel along certain lines of my studio practice. Designing and building a machine is a process of understanding elegance in the interaction of carefully crafted components. If beauty isn't evident in this process, then I start over.

NAE: In our generation, we saw ourselves as builders and designers. Is this still an important part of your aesthetic?

GJ: Yes, largely because of the serendipitous nature of this work. In doing one's own work in all its aspects, discovery is always an important component of fabrication. This pushes the work forward with ever newer, substantive

problems and objectives. It's exciting to discover something in the act of making that formerly resided outside of one's intellect.

NAE: When you first started, your work had a considered economy of material in creating form. This limitation propelled a certain originality and specificity of form. Do you see a major shift as to how artists are working with technology and their use of material?

GJ: Yes, I have seen a major shift in the financial ambitions of producing technology-based work. Many works I've seen either in person or through print are heavily financed and superbly produced by industrial standards. Digital controllers and digitally rendered displays and Internet-dependent works are providing new explorations in informational and political sculptural research. The breadth and scope of time-based art is impressive and quite exciting.

NAE: With a long and varied artistic history, is there any particular sculpture or body of work that you can point to as your greatest accomplishment?

GJ: Over the past forty-two years, much of my work owes its inspiration to a work I built in 1979. The piece was a time-based piece called *Pendulum, the State of Its Arc*. This sculpture was a small work with a pendulum escapement that allowed a metal bar to swing in a continuing arc, much like an exaggerated pendulum of a grandfather clock. As the bar would swing, a laser was pointed at the piece, striking two spinning prisms that would redirect the light as an arc projected behind the sculpture on the wall.

I feel this work encapsulated the sets of concerns I was investigating at the time in my studio practice. It involved time both real and metaphorical. It critiqued the nature of the utilitarian machine, rendering it impractical in one sense, yet elevating it to the level of art. This piece was shown at the New Museum in New York shortly after it was made. Then in 1982 it was shown at the Museum of Science and Industry, my first museum solo exhibition. Much later in the late '90s, it was shown at Tough Gallery in Chicago.

I'm especially proud of the solo exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center, "Hyperfunctional Icons" in 1985. The show was curated chiefly by Deven Golden, with the direction of Greg Knight. Deven produced a catalogue with

Left: Gary Justis, *This Is the Thing*, 2000, stabile work, fabric, wood, aluminum, 108 x 42 x 28 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Right: Gary Justis, *Untitled (mantis)*, 2009, fabric, wood, 114 x 53 x 28 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

a solid essay by him, a collection of lovely photographs of work in the show, and a fine interview written by James Yood. Deven worked very hard on the exhibition, directing the construction of large wood plinths surfaced by a thick, black rubber material for the works to sit on. Thanks to the efforts of the folks at the Cultural Center, the exhibition looked superb. The show was housed in the same classical room setting where the work of Terrance Karpowicz had been years earlier.

NAE: Moving the conversation a bit more biographically, you lived in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago for many years. At the time, the area was bleak and largely desolate, yet surprisingly beautiful in its post-industrial sensibility. How did that topography impact your work?

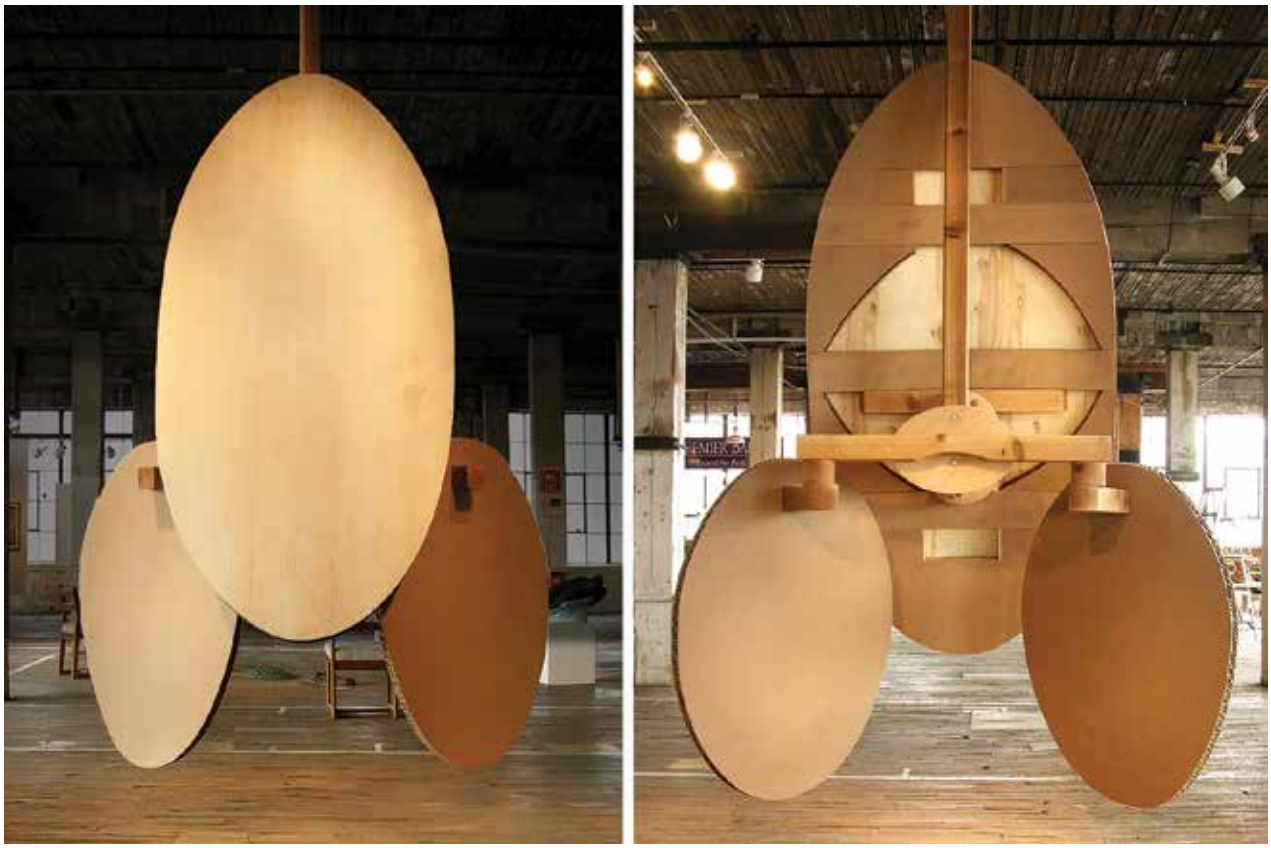
GJ: The area of Pilsen was a great place to live and build work during the '70s-'90s. The rent for my studio, an old creamery, was inexpensive and in close proximity to the Chicago Loop. I was fortunate to be close to Chinatown and certain areas where I frequented Mexican and Chinese restaurants. I found many cast-off materials in the industrial areas close to the studio and began to welcome some of the local folks, who would bring me things they found. Materials ranged from large amounts of plastic cut-offs to parts form copying machines and other scrapped mechanical objects.

There was a large railroad drawbridge that lay in between Pilsen and Chinatown [and] spanned the Chicago River. This bridge was a magnificent vertical lift bridge with huge stone counterweights on either end of it. The bridge would rise, lifting the entire horizontal span as barges silently glided under it. I spent a good deal of time on that bridge with my dog as we explored the undeveloped areas around it. We were on it several times as it rose to its full height of a hundred or so feet. This encounter was so exhilarating and enlightening to me that I made up my mind to strive towards the same visceral and spiritual experience through the production and presentation of my work

NAE: A career is both influenced by thought, place, and the artists we come of age with. When you started exhibiting, who were some of the Chicago-based artists that influenced your work?

GJ: The sculptors Dean Langworthy and Roger Machin were school chums, and we all certainly had influences on each other in more than just our sculpture activities. Both Roger and Dean had great fabrication skills, and I was constantly amazed by the work they did. You, Neil Goodman, were a huge influence because I admired your skill with wax-working and bronze casting. I saw your work as a direct link to Isamu Noguchi and to Brancusi, whom Noguchi worked with in Paris around 1926.

Gary Justis, *The Nader*, 2007, stabile work, wood and hardware, 143 x 108 x 37 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Gary Justis, *Big Onion*, 2021, LED light source, aluminum, colored Lucite, dimensions variable, object dimensions: 52 x 26 x 26 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist. https://vimeo.com/506271994

Wesley Kimler, L J Douglas, Phyllis Bramson, Paul Lamantia, William Conger and Ed Paschke were painters I admired and formed friendships with. Buzz Spector, Fred Holland, John Henry, Jerry Peart, Barry Tinsley, Tony Tasset, and Richard Rezac are sculptors I know and whose work I admire very much. George Blaha is doing very compelling work with images of fantastic digitally rendered sculpture, and Tony Fitzpatrick has made a huge impact on the Chicago scene with his incredible imagery.

NAE: As we embark on this journey of finding our own voice, we first listen to others. Who were those artists?

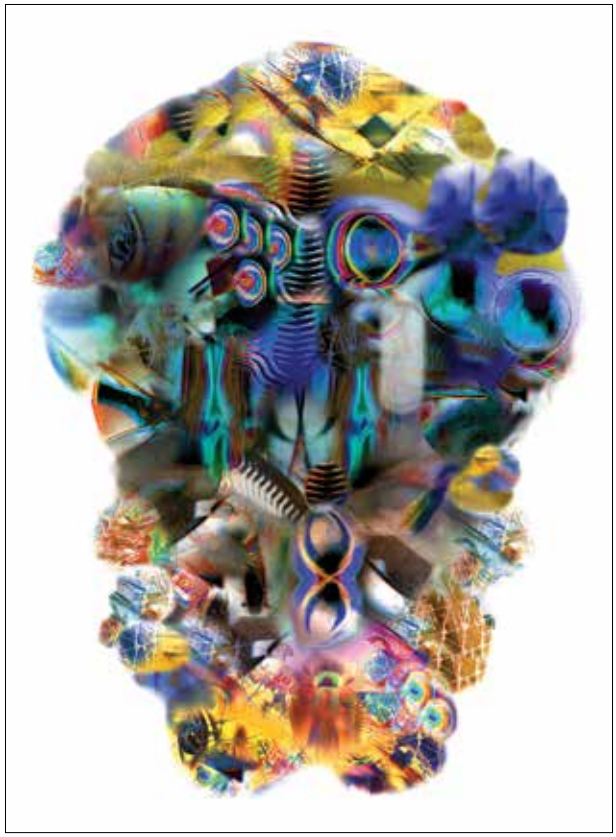
GJ: The artists who were historical that I was looking at and reading at the time were Duchamp (of course), Jean Tinguely (kinetic artist), Ed Kienholz, Man Ray, Rudy Autio and Dennis Oppenheim. Dennis had a profound effect on my work because I formed a friendship with him in the '80s, having helped with a couple of his installations and exhibitions in Chicago. I learned a great deal from the value of a creative person's emotional intellect, which totally directed his research and production. His brilliance and originality were quite inspirational, and I was encouraged to persist in my studio life.

NAE: You are married to the artist LJ Douglas. Do you collaborate and communicate with each other about your work?

GJ: We critique one another's work all the time. It has taken years to get to the point where we can be objective and explain our opinions about each other's work. Our conversations are usually brief and to the point, focused on what is visually in front of us. Collaboration is another thing where the work is evolving through a process that requires negotiation. We both love to collaborate when we are both able to communicate a strong vision and at the same time let go of a part of our control for the sake of the whole work. We've collaborated on animation projects examining various subjects—history, adolescence, war, etc.

NAE: I always enjoyed the strong mythological references in your early work. What literature influenced your thinking?

GJ: As a boy, I read about Greek and Roman mythology and learned habits, functions and antics of various gods and heroes. I was always fascinated by the similarities between these ancient characters and modern superheroes. Much later I was interested in novels like Robert Graves's *I Claudius* and *Memoirs of Hadrian* by Marguerite Yourcenar.



Gary Justis, *Large Heart Patter Flake*, 2018, archival pigment print, 48 x 36 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Both offered a practical sense of how the Romans incorporated their deities into their lives and into matters of state.

Probably the most influential book I have read is *The Timeless Way of Building*, by Christopher Alexander. It explores a theory of architecture that seeks to find a nameless quality of our perception of space. He sets out to define this nameless quality by examples of our human coexistence with material manipulated with the intent to interrupt thought and encourage contemplation. This moves human consciousness towards harmony with objects and structures in our environment. Architectural spaces are only charged and energized by the fluidity of human interaction.

NAE: You tend to remember your first dealer, as that is the point of departure from student to artist. Yours was Marianne Deson, as she was a hallmark for Chicago artists coming of age in the early 1980s. What was that relationship like?

GJ: Marianne was a supporter of my work early on. I remember joining her gallery in 1981 or '82. Our relationship was good and grew in intensity with time. She was very skilled at finding outside exhibition opportunities for younger artists. The showing schedules were a challenge to keep up with, but those early exhibitions launched my career in a very positive way. Marianne knew many prominent collectors and curators who all regarded her with awe and respect. She was able to get my work included in "Modern Machines," an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris. At the exhibition I met Carolee Schneemann, Robert Longo, the duo Andrew Ginzel and Kristin Jones, and others.

Marianne was an extremely interesting conversationalist with a broad range of knowledge and interests. She was charming, funny, and extremely persuasive. She introduced some of the most compelling Italian painters to Chicago. She introduced me to Dennis Oppenheim, whom I had assisted several times with his exhibitions at the gallery. Many of us who were starting out owe a great deal to her memory. She was a Chicago institution.

NAE: Reciprocally, you showed with Jim Rose, Bill Struve, and Paul Klein.

GJ: A great deal could be said of all three of these wonderful men. All three of them had a huge effect on the Chicago scene. Jim Rose was a former ad executive who had retired and wanted to pursue his love of art by starting a gallery on Huron, CompassRose Gallery. Jim was a very smart and savvy businessman with a charm that was infectious.

The painter and sculptor Deven Golden, who was hired as his director, introduced my work to Jim, and he brought me into the gallery. Deven and Jim made a fine team at a time when computers were just beginning to be utilized in commercial galleries. Deven was a former curator at the Chicago Cultural Center and brought his immense skills to CompassRose. I felt I had so much wonderful encouragement from both men, and we sold quite a number of works. Jim had a solid stable of artists. He introduced the work of Alice Neel and Fairfield Porter to the city. He also

championed the work of Stephan Reynolds, Dave Richards, and Dan Devening. Jim passed away from cancer in the mid-nineties, and his gallery closed. The city had lost a wonderful friend.

Bill Struve, whom you, Neil, and I knew quite well had a lovely, modest space in the gallery district. He was charming and very funny in our interactions with him. Like Jim Rose, Bill had his own way of encouraging artists and accommodating them during good times and hard times. He sold our furniture work and had lovely exhibitions. He sold the work of Wesley Kimler, Robert Barnes, and James Butler. What I remember best are the lunches we used to share with Bill's family (he employed his wife Debbie and son Keith) in the room where the painting stacks were kept. They had a harvest table, and we would all sit around sharing information, gossip, and stories. I miss their kindness and generosity. Bill passed away in late 2020.

Paul Klein had moved to an impressive industrial space (Klein Art Works) west of the gallery district in the mid-nineties. His space was one of the most interesting venues for showing sculpture. The floor was made of large, shiny, bluish steel plates. Large works looked great in the space. Paul was a challenging person in some ways, but his love of art, family, and his artists was deep. He sold my work and helped me during lean times, not asking any questions. Paul was a tough-love sort of guy, fiercely supportive. He had definite opinions about almost everything and was never afraid to express them. He hosted two major exhibitions of my work. My first exhibition was a two-part mini-retrospective show that took place simultaneously at Klein Art Works and Tough Gallery. This exhibition received national reviews. My second exhibition introduced my first upholstered works, which gained a great deal of attention with local and national reviews. Paul showed the work of Jun Kaneko, Josh Garber, and Dan Ramirez.

NAE: We have spent a lifetime doing mostly the same thing, yet neither we nor our work are the same. How has aging affected you and your work?

GJ: For myself, age just brought more challenges as far as my physical limitation go. I feel my work is better as I age, and I have a clearer objective to investigate the things I haven't learned yet. Age has a mellowing effect, so I'm not [as] anxious as I once was. This translates to the studio production. There is no hurry, but there is still a determined persistence in the practice of making.

NAE: For artists in particular, they have the measured knowledge and experience of a life internally defined and the durability to have sustained that creative ambition. You are certainly an exemplary example of this, and as a closing statement, what thought would you like to impart generationally?

GJ: Believe in the fact that for most creative people, persistence and genius are interchangeable. ■

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

Gary Justis, *Vasculum #2*, 2020, archival pigment print, 48 x 36 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Computational Curating: Tech Meets Object

by Kelli Wood

The horizons of preserving, interpreting, and displaying art and history have expanded to meet an increasingly virtual present. Curators now map visitor flow and test light effects on scanned objects rendered in 3D exhibition software. Galleries and artists rely upon chic design and seamless functionality for websites accompanying brick-and-mortar shows and sales. Collection managers wrangle the kraken's weighty and ever-expanding tentacles of data. Museums engage visitors through digital interactives and apps aimed at both education and entertainment. For many, the closures and isolation of the pandemic have clarified and amplified the possibilities and pitfalls that technology brings to media, old and new. For others, sights have been long set on the nexus of tech and object.

Duke University's Wired! Lab for Digital Art History & Visual Culture has interrogated the potential of new computational work in the realm of the arts for over a decade. A recent partnership with Duke's Nasher Museum of Art resulted in a fully online, interactive exhibition that was ready to debut in September 2020 despite the museum's physical closure in the wake of the pandemic.

"Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas" offers the online visitor an immersion into history and artifacts from the coastal cultures of central and South America. Dr. Julia McHugh conceived of the exhibit as part of a museum studies course that pivoted and changed its scope during the shift to remote learning. The exhibit came to fruition through a collaboration with her students and her colleague at Wired!, Dr. Mark Olson, who works on new media modes of representation and visualization.

In this interview McHugh and Olson steer the *New Art Examiner* through the technological waters that enabled the virtual exhibit.

Virtual exhibition of Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas, Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC. Photo courtesy of the Nasher Museum. Viewable at https://nasher.duke.edu/exhibitions/cultures-of-the-sea-art-of-the-ancient-americas/

New Art Examiner: For our next issue on the intersection of art and technology, we wanted to talk to folks who are taking the history of art, the history of things, into a digital platform. What started you off on this path?

McHugh: I came to Duke from Peru, where I was finishing up some projects with some local collections there. I'm an art historian by training, and I did my Ph.D. at UCLA, but I always gravitated towards museums and hybrid positions of curating and teaching. My position right now is both as a curator at the Nasher, and I also direct our Museum Theory & Practice concentration. We have a really collaborative approach to the digital and curatorial and pedagogical, which has been really effective—our work has led to a new team called "Virtual Nasher" to create future virtual exhibitions with Mark and the Wired! Lab.

Olson: I have a rather nontraditional career trajectory. My Ph.D. is in communications studies with a really strong critical humanistic perspective from UNC Chapel Hill. But because my son was on the way, I decided to take what turned out to be an eight-year hiatus in the middle of my degree to support interdisciplinary humanities efforts at Duke. At the time, because I was the guy who knew PowerPoint, I think, they said, why don't you help plan the technology infrastructure for our new humanities building? All my tech skills have been self-taught since then—and through workshops. Now I am on the faculty of Art, Art History & Visual Studies, teaching courses in media studies and working on tech with the Wired! lab.

NAE: So how did "Cultures of the Sea" come about?

McHugh: When I came to Duke, I started—and it's still ongoing—a massive assessment of what is a majorly understudied part of the collection: the Art of the Ancient Americas collection. That's around three thousand artworks. And I had early conversations with Mark Olson in particular about these holdings because he had done some other digital projects at the museum, and he was really interested in working with that collection through projects such as 3D modeling.

NAE: What technologies did you use to put it online and give the public access to it?

Olson: So, over the summer, we were pursuing two ideas, and one was to use a gaming engine to allow visitors to kind of freely explore. But it became clear that we weren't going to have enough digital resources to make that robust. Instead, we worked with 360-degree panoramic images. Our Office of Information Technology had a camera that we could borrow to run some tests. And we ended up using an open-source tool. Prior to the pandemic, the museum imagined using 3D models for physical public outreach—being able put the plastic printed model of a vessel or object in a kid's hands. Now the Nasher has really taken to the idea of 3D modeling as a future way of both archiving objects and providing public access to its objects online.

Chancay (Peru), double vessel, 1000–1470 CE. Ceramic, 10 inches (25.4 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Photo courtesy of the Nasher Museum.

McHugh: For me it also gives a whole new lens through which to study the artworks. When I'm pulling things off the shelves and examining them, I'm looking at them closely just with my bare eyes for their material qualities. But working with Wired! and 3D modeling has allowed me to view the often invisible parts of artworks. For example, we were able to see areas of damage on the pieces that weren't accessible to the naked eye. We were able to see some previously invisible maker's marks. Even for conservation we noticed, oh, this piece has a crack here that's not visible on the surface, let's be careful.

NAE: How did you create the 3D models? Did you use 3D scanning, or photogrammetry?

Olson: So, we did two passes. First, we did photogrammetric capture. [Photogrammetry creates 3D models by deriving contours and measurements from overlapping photographs of every angle of an object.] But then with another project I've been working on, with a history of medicine collection, I had developed a partnership with Duke Radiology. And second, we performed CT scans of several of the objects.

McHugh: We actually talked with the radiologists and had them interpret the scans, and [we] learned how to read them. It allowed us to see not just the outer but the inner surfaces and cavities of a lot of these ceramic vessels. We were working on a number of pieces that we thought were probably usable and that produced sound, and the CT technology allowed us to see that these were musical. They have empty cavities and secret whistling holes.

CT scan of the Double vessel, performed by Duke Radiology, in the Virtual Exhibition of "Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas," Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC. Photo courtesy of the Nasher Museum.

NAE: For physical models, currently most 3D printing is in plastic, which isn't ideal for replicas. Are y'all working on taking that to the next level?

Olson: Yes, Julia and I are presenting to our School of Engineering in March and we have some short-term things we'd like to try. That double barreled whistling vessel… we obviously can't pour water in it. Right. Fine. So with a 3D scan, we know the interior, and we can digitally model the acoustics and fluids. But it'd be great to reproduce something that might have the material resonances of ceramic and see what sound it might make without having to put the original at risk.

NAE: How did the art historical and curatorial methods play out in relation to the computational?

McHugh: It ended up being really close and dynamic conversations. Weekly team meetings where I met up with the Wired! team to talk through issues, to exchange ideas, and I was delivering or contributing a lot of the content with my students.

Olson: We really wanted to amplify the curatorial voices. One way of looking at the virtual tours we embedded is that you've got a student curator as a personal guide. My role in Wired! has always kind of been as a translator between tech and the humanities. So I've kind of become a liaison with the museum, working to use the Wired! lab as an R&D space to imagine how they might implement technologies in their spaces and then tackling the problem of how to sustain them.

3D visualization of the double vessel, in the Virtual Exhibition of "Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas," Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC. Photo courtesy of the Nasher Museum.

NAE: Where do you see the future of technology in museums and curation?

Olson: I hope we'll see a breakdown of barriers between the digital and the physical in-person kinds of experiences. Not that one can ever supplant the other, but we can see them in a much more dialectical relationship with each other that, you know, allows you to return virtually or to prepare before you go to the museum to kind of make those on-site experiences much more resonant. And I never worry too much about the digital supplanting things. In our experience, the digital only brings your attention more directly to the objects, the "thinginess" of the things.

McHugh: Yes, I totally agree with Mark that it's not a substitute for the in-person experience at all. I teach a course called the Museum Object where we approach the museum object through different methods, different senses, through all of these different technologies. I think they're a fantastic enhancement. We get to ask new questions and see how we [can] get to the bottom of them through technology. What more can we do? ■

Kelli Wood is Assistant Professor of Art History—Museum & Curatorial Studies at the University of Tennessee and the Southeast Region Editor of the *New Art Examiner*.

Julia McHugh is Trent A. Carmichael Curator of Academic Initiatives at the Nasher Museum of Art and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art History at Duke University.

Mark Olson is Assistant Professor of the Practice of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University and a founding member of the Wired! Lab.

REVIEWS

New Work/New Year
at David Klein Gallery, Detroit

by Mariwyn Curtin

So much time, if one can get past the terror of the capacious days. What has the quarantine quietude wrought?

"New Work/New Year" is a group exhibition that celebrates the production of artists in confinement and the end of 2020. Nearly all the works are from that unforgettable yet hazy year in which time was forbidden to be filled with doings and goings and gatherings. The show at David Klein, on view from January 16 to February 27, 2021, presents a stunning array of results from this extraordinary era in works by 15 artists.

One beautifully curated wall reads like a three-stanza visual poem about the slow tick and distortion of time in 2020. In *A Sweep of the Second Hand*, Robert Schefman's oil on canvas depicts a woman in a green satin slip as she writes an endless list of months in chalk on a black-painted surface, reminiscent of a prisoner's tally of days on a cell wall. Next to it hangs *Bending Moment No. 1,* in which Susan Goethel Campbell has bent a willow branch at unnatural angles around a wood panel trapezium. The slanted bottom edge of the gessoed panel makes the artwork feel farther away than it really is as my mind tries to square

Installation view at David Klein Gallery showing Robert Schefman, *A Sweep of the Second Hand*, 2020, oil on canvas. 64" x 48"; Susan Goethel Campbell, *Bending Moment No. 1*, 2020, wood panel, gesso, willow. 23" x 39" x 1 ¾"; Lauren Semivan, *Untitled, August 4, 1/5,* 2020, archival pigment print, 54" x 44" (framed); Ebitenyefa Baralaye, *Vessel #1,* 2020, stoneware, slip, soda-fired, 29" x 10" x 10". Photo by Samantha Schefman.

Installation view at David Klein Gallery showing Matthew Hawtin, *Verge*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48" and *Boundaries II*, 2020 acrylic on canvas, 48" x 48"; Mark Sengbusch, *Montessori*, 2020, acrylic on plywood. 18" x 18" x 12" and *Strawberry Shortcake*, 2020, acrylic on plywood, 25" x 31". Photo by Samantha Schefman.

the panel by sliding to the one point in the gallery where *Bending Moment No. 1* might appear as a true rectangle. I feel the passage of days or months between this work and the next as the single willow branch proliferates into a large bundle of twigs in the third piece on the wall.

Untitled, August 4, 1/5, is an archival print created via large-format film camera by Lauren Semivan. The photograph centers on a bale of branches, tied down or suspended over a battle of white and black paint, the field between those polarities like a blackboard wiped with erasers that need to be clapped. In my imagination, the woman in Schefman's painting became frustrated, rubbed away her litany of chalked months, and walked off, leaving a desolate still life of branches in her wake.

After experiencing the disorienting tilt of Campbell's piece, I would have thought I was prepared to turn toward Matthew Hawtin's paired paintings. From the length of the room away they zip in primary colors evocative of certain Barnett Newman works and look like they may also be wood that has been cut into slightly non-rectilinear shapes. On closer approach *Verge* and *Boundaries II* reveal themselves to be canvas stretched over supports that pop certain corners of the surface farther away from the wall than others. Even closer, the canvases seem to curve. I feel caught up in a swift rush of vertigo, as if the color fields generate some sort of spatial vortex between them. Although upon inspection, all the edges are confirmed to be straight lines, my eyes and brain feel like they are rolling in a half-pipe.

I summon my sea legs to slip around the wall into the next space to investigate the row of frames by Mark Sengbusch that contain brightly painted, curved and angled shapes of wood. The palette and title of each work, such as *Strawberry Shortcake* or *1970s Suit*, derive from pop culture inspirations. Geometric openwork lets the richly hued background peek through zig-zags and loops arranged like written language, a secret code, or a musical score. And there is music in this room: the jazzy jam of Soft Ma-

Kim McCarty, *Rainbow*, 2020, watercolor on arches paper, 16 ¾" x 54 ¼" (framed). Image courtesy of David Klein Gallery.

Ricky Weaver, *My First Mind Tells Me*, 2020, archival pigment print, 30 ¼" x 45 ¼" (framed). Image courtesy of David Klein Gallery.

chine that trickles out of Scott Hocking's digital film, *Kayaking Through the Quarantimes.* The film is a soothing drift on rivers and canals throughout Detroit and Southeast Michigan. It's something of a highlight reel that features the wildlife, shipwrecks, and rusty walls of passing shipping vessels that the artist encountered on 15 kayak trips taken between April and December 2020. Municipalities countrywide exhorted "the outdoors are still open!" to encourage mental and physical health while so much of our daily life was shut down. That Hocking actually takes up that advice while I am watching his adventures mediated through a video display feels typical of 2020.

The interiority that many have experienced during the pandemic is visceral in Ricky Weaver's archival pigment print, *My First Mind Tells Me*. A woman seen thrice simultaneously within a single room in divided time (and once in silhouette) expresses the sense of aloneness in a confined space: waiting, sitting, looking through a doorway, peering out a window. Discarded press-on nails resemble petals that have dropped to the tabletop from a bouquet, perhaps bought to enliven the solitude or celebrate an occasion without a gathering of loved ones.

Rainbow, a watercolor from Kim McCarty, is the one work that features anything resembling a crowd. Figures in a multitude of hues stand in three distinct groups, and so much closer to each other than COVID-19 guidelines would advise. The transparency of several figures evokes the feeling that the ability to gather in such groups is a fading memory yet also calls to mind the disappearance of family and friends lost to the coronavirus in the past year.

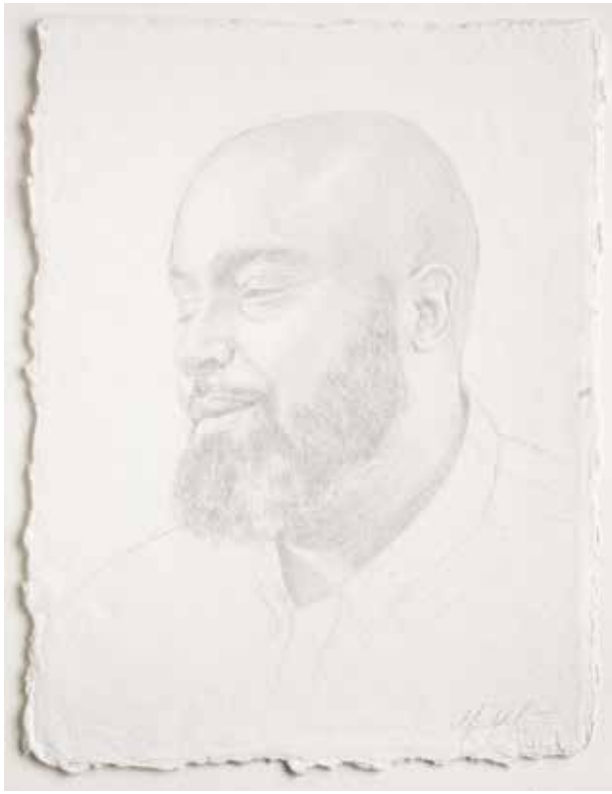
Cooper Holoweski, *Late Stage, New Age (Apple Products, Orange Hard Drive, Soap, Prism, Purple Aura*), 2020, mixed media, 43" x 28" (framed). Image courtesy of David Klein Gallery.

Transparent body parts are also an element in three panels from the *Late Stage, New Age* series by Cooper Holoweski. Aura-like backgrounds host computers and other means of quarantine connection, as well as equipment to exercise and maintain spiritual and physical health while confined in the home. These objects are far more solid than the images of hand or foot. It's as if our presence as bodily beings fades away while we are reduced to pixels on a screen to meet with others.

The only pieces in the show that at first glance seem to be from pre-pandemic times are delicate silverpoint studies from 2018 by Mario Moore: *Study for To Alleea Spann*, *Study for To Mesha Cherie*, *Study for To Toria Turner*, and *Study for To Amani Minter*. The nature of silverpoint, though, is that no matter how finely detailed and realized the drawing—as these portraits are—the work is not completed when an artist lays the stylus down. Collaboration with the air continues for months afterward; tarnish warms the traces of silver in the grayish lines. The atmosphere of 2020 has changed and become a part of these works, just as it has changed each of us and become a part of who we are as we move forward into the new year and beyond.

And it may be the traces of 2020 left in me that have filtered my view of some of these works as pandemic-related when they are not. Some artists, such as Ebitenyefa Baralaye, Jason Patterson, Marianna Olague, Kelly Reemtsen and Rosalind Tallmadge, have contributed pieces that clearly continue familiar bodies of work.

The organizing principle of this group exhibition is simply "New Work," and the strength of the collection here shows that the artists have put the quarantine times to good use in creating it. ■



Mario Moore, *Study for To Toria Turner*, 2018, silverpoint on prepared paper, 15" x 12" (framed). Image courtesy of David Klein Gallery.

Mariwyn Curtin is an artist and writer living in Detroit, MI. Primarily an author and editor in educational publishing, she previously interviewed ten award-winning photographers about their craft to write the copy for *Hasselblad Masters. Vol. 2: Emotion* and currently writes about Detroit art and artists for the publication *Essay'd*.

"Warriors of the Apocalypse"
at Bryan Sperry Studio

by Nathan Worcester

While the story of 2021 is still being written, the story of 2020 was, to all appearances, a masterpiece of dystopian literature.

From his Pilsen studio, artist Bryan Sperry expects this narrative to continue. His "Warriors of the Apocalypse" series, originally set in 3095, now takes place in the near future.

"What's happening—I thought it was going to happen in the future, but it's happening now," says Sperry.

The Warriors peer through the windows and line the walls of Sperry's studio. While each one has a unique backstory, they are united by a common origin and mission. Formerly human, they armored themselves with detritus and transformed themselves into cyborgs to fight the elite who destroyed the old world.

The Warriors are in a fundamentally tragic position: in order to save humanity, they had to extinguish much of what was human in themselves.

Some of Sperry's characters embody the moral ambiguity that is the result of this transformation. His *Ultimate Darkness*, an onyx, gold-striped character topped by a cattle skull, is the Warriors' point of entry to evil.

"This is the only guy that deals with the duality," explains Sperry. "We were put here in this realm to experience this push and pull."

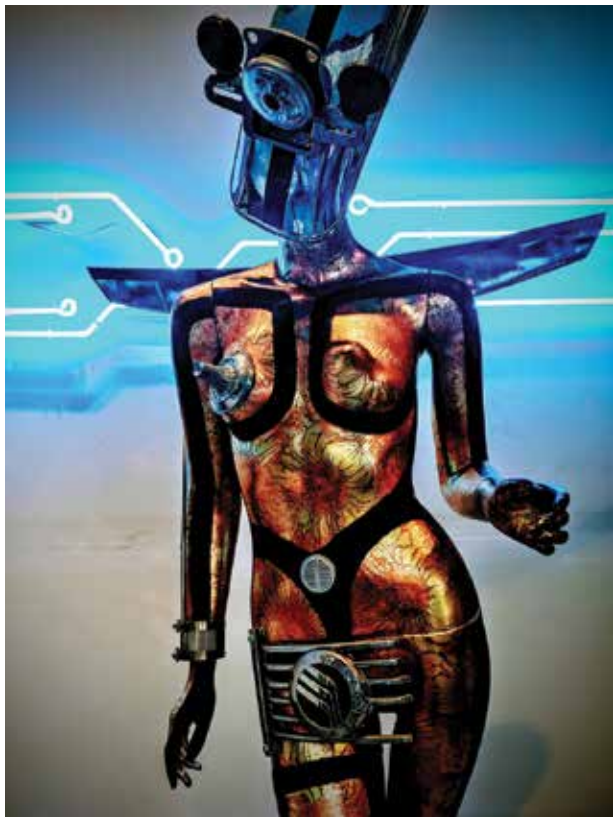
Beside *Ultimate Darkness* stands the *Oracle*, a high priestess of knowledge and wisdom whose soothsaying helps the Warriors plan their battles. Her lacy, fan-like headdress can be taken off the mannequin and donned by models. (Sperry notes he has hosted many photoshoots at his studio, a hint at his long involvement in the 18th Street arts community).

A third character, *Cyborg 2021*, is the Warriors' Delilah, a honeypot who uses her wiles to gain access to the elite and their gatherings—and *Chromium*, another woman warrior, can access the minds of the rich and powerful.

"She hacks Bill Gates' mind," says Sperry. "She hacks Jeff Bezos' mind."

Sperry's cyberpunk vision recalls classic sci-fi films like *Mad Max*, *Blade Runner*, and even Fritz Lang's

Brian Sperry, An early Warrior helmet. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Brian Sperry, ""Warriors of the Apocalypse," installation shots. Photos courtesy of the artist.

Metropolis. Just as J. R. R. Tolkien's tale of *The Hobbit* "grew in the telling," Sperry's tale ebbs and flows, based partly on suggestions from whoever happens to view it. In this way, his work is participatory and evolutionary, albeit in a non- or even anti-digital sense.

This facet of the Warriors also cuts against the project's conceptual limitations; though the Warriors are not-so-literally constructed from well-worn sci-fi tropes, their physical and narratological dynamism invite Sperry and his audience to reimagine their story on every new viewing. As current events unfold, or as new detritus becomes available, the Warriors, by their very nature, transform.

Sperry has been working on his Warriors for ten years. "It frees me… It gives me pleasure in my soul," he explains.

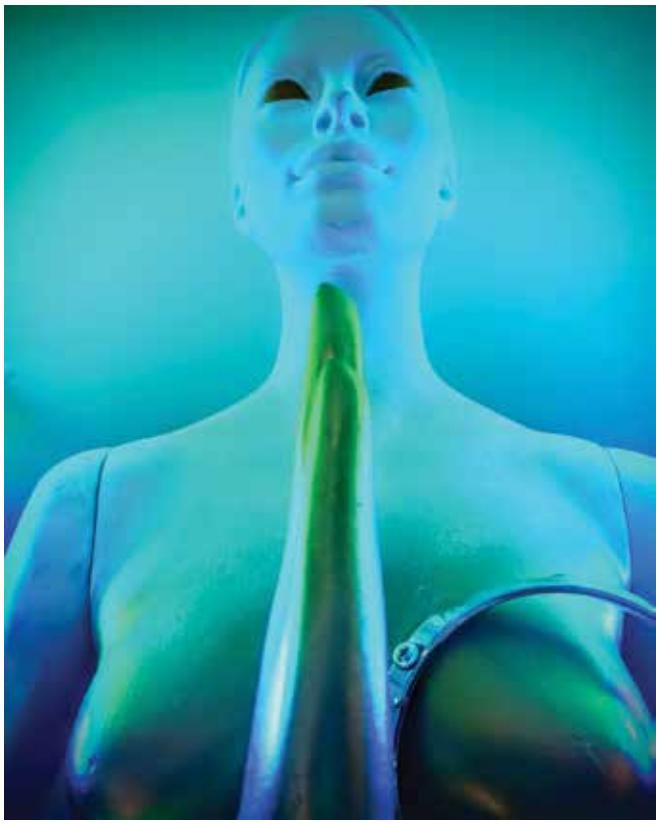
He also sees the Warriors as a kind of radical activism against what he views as the coming techno-apocalypse. This stance places him somewhere in the vast universe of political artists, though far afield from the sort of corporate- and state-backed "radicalism" that will secure you grants, professional sinecures, and other institutional pats on the back.

In an age of ubiquitous digital futurity, Sperry's hands-on methodology makes him a radical throwback. The Warriors are assemblages, created from car parts, musical instruments, old metal sleds, and the dizzying variety of items Sperry encounters on his walks.

His approach initially grew out of practical concerns. "Art supplies are very, very expensive," says Sperry. For the same reason, although some of the Warriors are pieced together from symbolically resonant objects—for example, the many gasmasks and, on at least one figure, an antique Masonic cameo—they are mostly assembled and armored from what was near at hand. Sperry's foraging is not terribly far removed from the Warriors' imagined activities.

Still, Sperry's need for cheap materiel, as well as his fascination with designed objects, ultimately led him to a technologically subversive approach. Why deal in bits and bytes when you can hack together found objects? The arena of the struggle determines its rules, and in the physical world, human beings have a home field advantage against AI.

His location in Chicago—and specifically Pilsen—may influence the themes of his work. On the brink of an uncertain future, the ruins of industrial society are no place for false hope. Corruption, violence, and cold weather add



Left: Brian Sperry, ""Warriors of the Apocalypse," installation shot. Photos courtesy of the artist.
Below: Brian Sperry dressed in Warrior garb. Photo courtesy of the artist.

to the strain on Chicagoans—though from an artist's perspective, they yield ample detritus for assemblage in word, sound, and image. And hardship may toughen the spirit.

Even a dystopian digital future does not lack possibility. As Sperry puts it, "neighbors, communities, and friends" are critical to human survival in the shadow of surveillance, censorship, and public-private collusion.

"We have to be good to everybody," he says. ■

Nathan Worcester is the Managing Editor of the *New Art Examiner*. He lives in Chicago.

Other Hues of Blue: A Pandemic-Era Biennial in Atlanta

By Tenley Bick

The 2021 Atlanta Biennial, "Of Care and Destruction," is framed by curator Jordan Amirkhani with a question via Toni Morrison: "...perhaps art is just all our care in extensive form?"[1] The question hints at a more capacious purview for the pandemic-era Biennial than the exhibition description, which describes it as a "a snapshot of contemporary art in a time of great grief, loss, isolation, and struggle."[2] At the Atlanta Contemporary—safely distanced through timed ticketing—the show gives us a picture of contemporary work in the Southeast that extends beyond the frame of the exhibition (and physical limits of the gallery) to do the work of care in a time of isolation and injustice.

In comparison to the two preceding Biennials since the exhibition's 2016 relaunch, this iteration is larger in scope (30 artists to 2019's twenty-one) and distinct in its definition of the Southeast. While its precedents exclusively included artists living in the region's "ten states," the 2021 installation highlights the region's multiethnicity and multiculturalism as related to migration and diasporic histories by including artists from or based in the Southeast, as well as those who exhibit in or address it through their practices. It includes artists born in the culturally (and colonially) connected regions of South America (Lucha Rodríguez, Jesse Pratt López) and the Caribbean (Lillian Blades, Yanique Norman, Hasani Sahlehe)—the latter a point shared by the 2016 edition, though on a smaller scale—as well as those whose personal narratives refuse the limited convention of geographical identification (see the wonderful work of Davion Alston, a self-described

Gallery view, 2021 Atlanta Biennial, "Of Care and Destruction," curated by Jordan Amirkhani, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA. The first main gallery included works, from left, by Nekisha Durrett, L. Kasimu Harris, Marianne Desmarais, Eleanor Neal, Donté K. Hayes (two works on pedestals), and Michelle Lisa Polissaint. Photograph by Kasey Medlin, courtesy of Atlanta Contemporary.

Gallery view, 2021 Atlanta Biennial, "Of Care and Destruction," curated by Jordan Amirkhani, Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA. The second main gallery included works, from left, by Hasani Sahlehe, Melissa Vandenberg, Regina Agu, Myra Greene (wall), Katie Hargrave and Meredith Lynn (tent and floor decal), Michi Meko, William Downs, and Yanique Norman. Photograph by the author.

"German-born, Atlantan transplant, and Georgia native").[3] It also includes artists of color from major Black metropolitan centers of the U.S. who show in the region or address it through their work.

Stated issues of confrontation, reckoning, belief, and desire get to the difficult relational work of artistic practice at the intersection of the pandemic and racial injustice. Art has the potential to be a "guide for how to live and think in fraught times"; much of that guiding is felt viscerally in this show. Destruction is not mentioned directly but instead comes in waves in the five gallery spaces. (See Ashley Teamer's *Is Our Fear Beautiful?* from 2019, one of four works from What Editions collective in New Orleans.)

An emphasis on craft clearly enunciates the varied work of process—of making, of care, of *processing* what has happened in both recent and distant pasts. The first gallery is especially strong in this regard. It presents Nekisha Durrett's 2020–2021 trio of magnolia leaves, collected from a cemetery in the artist's Washington, D.C. neighborhood, perforated with the names Atatiana [Jefferson], Alexia [Christian], and Kathryn [Johnston]: "individual Black women murdered by law enforcement in Atlanta, Georgia in the recent past."[4] Presented in wall-mounted lightboxes, the works invite us to contemplate the absence of these women by shining light through the holes that make up the letters of their names, punctured through material grounds—magnolia leaves—that are known in the South for their difficulty to be cleared. A sculptural drawing by Eleanor Neal (*Transcending Ambiguity*, 2020) accompanied by the sound work *Solitude* (2021, linked by

Davion Alston, *Once again... Two Seas on Both Sides Without and Within*, 2021, mixed media, newsprint, and photographic material, dimensions variable. Photograph by the Kasey Medlin, courtesy of Atlanta Contemporary.

Zipporah Camille Thompson, *boo hag blue, casting stars into swaddle cloth*, 2021, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photograph by Kasey Medlin, courtesy of Atlanta Contemporary.

QR code) on the history of the women of Gullah Geechee, is an energetic snarl of hair-like lines in indelible media that stains the paper.

Two black sculptural objects by Donté K. Hayes—*Fade* and *Lantern*, both 2020—are highlights. Their dark matte color makes it difficult to see textured surfaces that seem covered in woven thread or hair but are ceramic with black clay bodies. They both compel and defy visual perception as a way to know the world, as do three black quilted objects that conceal found objects in synthetic rubber—Marianne Desmarais' *anti-form* series. A photograph of two women engaged in hair braiding (a 2015 work from Michelle Lisa Polissant's *If Home Was Home* series, the show's earliest work) accompanies the wonderful *Hair Flip* (2019) from the same series, celebrating the care and joy of Black femininity—or the potential for that joy, as the series' conditional title suggests. Across the gallery is another pair of photographs about community and loss, from L. Kasimu Harris's *The Vanishing Black Bars & Lounges* series (2018, 2020).

Other works in the second main gallery extend the concentration on process as care, beginning with two adjacent mnemonic tableaux: they visualize spaces of memory and memorialization. Davion Alston's window-traversing tripartite *Once again… Two Seas on Both Sides Without and Within* (2021) is a diasporic network of images and materials. On the left side of the work, a four-part chromogenic print—featuring a single photographic image, framed by a white border, quartered and framed so that the border surrounds the set—captures some of the objects that appear across the installation in the gallery space. At center, in the window space, dried painted flowers and prisms of glass hang from thread, casting dappled light and color on folded paper doilies (made of plain paper and folded architectural plans for "designs for living," which span the work), and long-neck gourds arranged below. At right hangs a mudcloth-covered bulletin board, featuring personal photographs, pictures of West African sculpture interspersed with snapshots of Black subjects (in one painful image, a person is vomiting), a print advertisement for Beefeater Gin (in this context, an allusion to the British Empire), and a photograph of police surveillance, all traversed by thread and out-of-order numbers. The work seems to index histories of its own material elements; it seems to be engaged in remembering itself. Showing some elements to viewers "once again," Alston underscores the temporal and spatial correspondences that structure this work.

Zipporah Camille *Thompson's boo hag blue, casting stars into swaddle cloth* (2021) invokes the flying, skin-shedding

witch of Gullah culture who preys on sleeping dreamers. Plastic floral barrettes and other small, amulet-like objects are attached to woven nets of hair extensions, lavender ribbons, and raffia, surrounding a set of ceramic vessels (the center one notably marked "Breonna"). Both index the intimate but potentially expansive work of such constructions. Others still draw upon histories of fabric-making and quilting (Shanequa Gay's wall painting and Lillian Blades' hanging glass and found-object mosaic curtains in the lobby) or are installed to highlight procedural affinities and shared conceptual landscapes. Katie Hargrave's and Meredith Lynn's floor decal and tent-with-no-entrance, *Cumberland Island (Sea Camp)* (2021), is made of panels of inkjet-printed ripstop nylon that feature found photographs of tourists camping on the Georgia island. The cut-and-sewn material, a point highlighted by its juxtaposition with Myra Greene's quilted textile *Piecework #49,* stitches together images as well, screening white desire for adventure in colonized "public" land, while teaching us that there are federal definitions of such "wilderness."

Two works were especially powerful. Le'Andra LeSeur's video and sound installation, *There are other hues of blue* (2019/21), abstracts livestreamed footage captured by Sean Reed on Facebook Live at the time that he was gunned down by police in Indianapolis in May 2020. The blue sky captured as Reed was dying spans five ceiling-mounted screens positioned above a sixth screen on the floor, which shows us LeSeur in silhouette, all accompanied by their poetic, autobiographical spoken narrative. It is devastatingly powerful. Originally done as a performance, the artist modified the work after Reed's death to create a tender space for reflection.[5] The strength of LeSeur's work was also found in Danielle Deadwyler's durational performance and installation, *FOR(E)RUNNER* (2020–2021), that excavates the history of Black labor for the Atlanta Beltway, in the most compelling of four project spaces (entitled *Virtual Remains*) curated by T.K. Smith.

Some works may have benefited from different framings. Tori Tinsley's *Island with Two Lava Pits and Water Table* (2020), featured prominently in press images and printed material, is juxtaposed with the chromatic abstraction of Hasani Sahlehe's *Won't Have to Cry No More* (2020), whose pooled clear acrylic medium reads like puddles of tears. When I asked her to tell me more about the work, Amirkhani highlighted caregiving in Tinsley's practice: "Tori's topological 'island,' made of papier-mâché and plaster is reminiscent of her young son's toy car tracks as well as her earlier paintings where the physical tug of the medium points to the physical pull between loved ones extended into three-dimensional form [...]."[6] While other works in the gallery allude to islands (existential and topographical) and bodies of water, the work as installed edges toward the saccharine in a way that I expect it wouldn't have in a different setting.

Thoughtfully curated by Amirkhani, this Biennial tries to do a lot—and maybe that's the point. The exhibition is dedicated in the introductory description in the gallery and on its accompanying website to the "legacies and labor of Stacey Abrams, Helen Butler, Felicia Davis, and Nsé Ufot"—that is, to the work of Black women in Democrat-

Le'Andra LeSeur, *There are other hues of blue*, 2019/2021, six-channel video installation (01:03:17). Photograph by Kasey Medlin, courtesy of Atlanta Contemporary.

ic coalition-building in Georgia credited with turning the state blue in the 2020 (and 2021) elections.

On my drive home, I passed a chapter of the Sons of Confederate Veterans in southwestern Georgia, marked by an enormous Confederate flag at its entrance. I had driven by it on my way up to Atlanta. But on my return, in that moment, looking up at the blue sky, I thought of all the work I had seen, all the work of making those works, and all the work those works continue to do. "Of Care and Destruction" overwhelms with its extensive care. It is highly recommended for all of us. ■

Tenley Bick is Assistant Professor of Global Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History at Florida State University. She lives and works in Tallahassee, Florida.

Footnotes:

1 Toni Morrison, "Circles of Glory and Sorrow: A Talk Given to the Combined Women's Studies Sections, The Symposium on Love (1981)," unpublished paper, Toni Morrison Papers (C1491), Princeton University Library. My thanks to Amirkhani for sharing the source of Morrison's quote. Amirkhani, email correspondence with the author, March 2, 2021.

2 Jordan Amirkhani and Atlanta Contemporary, exhibition description, "Of Care and Destruction": https://atlantacontemporary.org/exhibitions/2021-atlanta-biennial.

3 Davion Alston, "Bio," artist's website: https://www.davionalston.com/cv-bio.

4 Extended object label for Nekisha Durrett's Magnolia | Atatiana, Magnolia | Alexia, and Magnolia | Kathryn in "Of Care and Destruction."

5 My sincere thanks to Le'Andra LeSeur for commenting on their work. Conversation with the author, Atlanta Contemporary, February 21, 2021.

6 Amirkhani, email correspondence with the author, March 2, 2021.

Danielle Deadwyler, *FOR(E)RUNNER*, 2020–2021, multimedia installation (with excavated materials, floating easements, and rail anchors), durational performance and single-channel video (00:04:21), digital, created in collaboration with Brandon Williams (editor), Chrissy Brimmage (animation), Munir Zakee (sound composition). Photograph by Kasey Medlin, courtesy of Atlanta Contemporary. Collaborators listed in the exhibition label and checklist.

"Paint Piles" by Natalie Lanese,
River House Arts, Toledo, Ohio,

by K.A. Letts

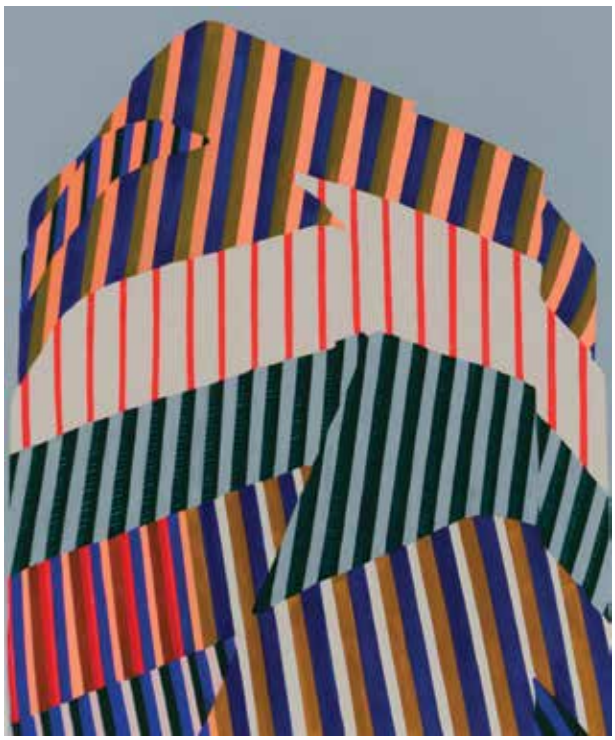
The vibrant paintings, prints, drawings, and installations of Natalie Lanese aren't shy about calling for your attention. The Day-Glo colors, jazzy patterns, and layered textures that characterize the work of this Ohio artist are ready to reach out and grab you. Or hug you. Or mug you.

The artworks in her solo show "Paint Piles," at River House Gallery in Toledo, Ohio from February 19 to March 22, represent elaborations on the visual themes and strategies for which she is well known, but this new, more intimately scaled body of work shows that time and thought have tempered her youthful ebullience into a more considered form.

Now working and living in Cleveland, Ohio, Lanese has enjoyed considerable regional success in the years since her 2007 graduation from Pratt Institute. Last year, she was one of ten Ohio artists working in paper selected for "Paper Routes: Women to Watch 2020-Ohio." Her paintings have been featured in the publication *New American Paintings*, and she recently received the Ohio Arts Council Fellowship 2019 20 under 40 Leadership Award.

Lanese's work depends on her inventive process for its offbeat visual charge. By manipulating cut paper in three dimensions—folding, twisting, cutting—and then extrapolating it into two-dimensional compositions, she synthesizes a vertigo-inducing world where illusory space is nev-

Natalie Lanese. *Day Heap*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, 48" x 40".



Natalie Lanese. *Night Heap*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, 48" x 40".

er static. It shifts and oscillates—it dances. Her innovative strategy grew from years of working in collage and from painting three-dimensional objects in installations so that from different vantage points they appeared to flatten into the surrounding space. That technique has been, and remains, a signature procedural device in the generation of her painted artworks.

On her website, she explains her method: "Collage serves both as a sculptural and conceptual expression: flat layers, cut-out images or objects that I arrange within, on or in front of the painted surface that deceive spatial perception."

In "Paint Piles," the graphics-inflected flatness of Lanese's earlier work has given way to a thoughtful exploration of the liminal space a few inches in front of—and behind—the picture plane. She engages in a constant, inventive dialogue between illusions of depth and flatness; the directionality of her signature stripes suggests the slip and fold of tectonic plates. Although her current work remains resolutely formal, the paintings have taken on the quality of geological features. They are reminiscent of promontories heaving up from below the earth or, alternatively, of the parallel layers of sedimentary rock formations.

Two medium-size paintings, *Day Hea*p and *Night Heap,* project a distinct impression that giant striped boulders are cheerfully looming and about to overwhelm the viewer. A sense of imminent peril provokes a distinct urge to step out of their path.

Lanese's series of works on paper, *Pile Study 1-3* and *Pink Pile Study*, reprises the lumpy, massy effects of *Day Heap* and *Night Heap*, but in this smaller iteration, they begin to take on qualities of a mysterious figure, a comic menace dimly seen through static-y layers of pattern. In contrast to the opaque patterning of her other paintings, these works show the artist beginning to explore the possibilities of layering textures to achieve the illusion of space and air within the pictorial space.

In a pair of larger works, *Shape Tectonics (Orange)* and *Shape Tectonics (Pink)*, Lanese uses Band-Aid-colored compositional elements to provide some negative space and much-needed relief from high-pitched chromatic incident of her earlier work and introduces a more horizontal component to the composition. She remains devoted to the splashy neons of her earlier work, but now juxtaposes them with more subdued, grayed-down colors that are suggestive of house paint. The Day-Glo colors appear to float in front of the picture plane, spilling over slightly onto the bricks that support the paintings.

Relief Pile, a modest-sized, painted relief hung on a painted wall—a kind of painting within a painting—seemed to me to suggest the most productive future path for Lanese's exploration of fictive space. Here, the militantly regimented stripes have loosened into elongated lozenges; the colors are more subdued. She skillfully manages the viewer's impressions within a narrow band of perceptual territory, creating a visual brain teaser that

Natalie Lanese, *Pile Study I, II, III, IV*, 2021, acrylic and graphite on paper, each 14" x 10 ¾".

Natalie Lanese. *Shape Tectonics (Orange)*, 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, painted found objects, 70" x 50".

Natalie Lanese. *Shape Tectonics* (Pink), 2021, acrylic, Flashe, gouache on canvas, painted found objects, 70" x 50".

shifts and subverts expectations. Also, it's quite fun to look at.

Natalie Lanese's "Paint Piles" marks a moment in her ongoing journey of creative exploration. It is also an opportunity for her to pause and take stock of where the work is at and where it's going, in conversation with her audience. This collection of artworks provides both a promising snapshot of the artist's art practice now and a roadmap for her future course. ■

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

Open by appointment, during the pandemic, masks required. River House Arts is located in the historic Secor Arts Building, 425 Jefferson Ave., Toledo, Ohio. (419) 441-4025. To view Natalie Lanese's work online, go to https://www.artsy.net/show/river-house-arts-paint-piles-natalie-lanese?sort=partner_show_position.

Natalie Lanese, *Relief Pile*, 2021, Foam, acrylic, Flashe, gouache, vinyl, 34" x 29" x 2".

Scratching the Surface of Globally Outsourced Image Production

"Image Workers" at Elastic Arts

By Evan Carter

It feels like an exercise in absurdity to think about how to measure the pervasiveness of images in the modern world. They are the blood cells of capitalist culture, being pumped through the socioeconomic infrastructure, pushing our communal bodies and systems from one day to the next. Just like blood cells, images need to be produced, distributed, and discarded. It is fair to say we take them for granted, and with the exception of a just a few knowledgeable experts, the process by which they are created also often goes un-considered. One of these people-in-the-know is artist and photographer Robert Chase Heishman, who recently embarked on a creative project that digs into the culture and economy of image production on the margins of our globally connected world. With "Image Workers," Heishman presents a series of mixed media collages that reveal a modicum of humanity from an otherwise invisible world of labor.

Elastic Arts is an all-encompassing creative space known for hosting events and live music in addition to exhibiting art. To see it empty with its eclectic lounge furniture and unused sound equipment makes it an eerily fitting venue for Heishman's work, which is deeply evocative of a sense of alienation that is all the more ubiquitous in a mid-pandemic neoliberal society. Each piece consists of three photographic prints assembled with colored tape. At a glance they read as digital color field abstractions or cutting room floor stills from a documentary film editing studio. Heishman's background as a set designer and painter seems to inform some of the aesthetic choices, but whereas his past work could be considered playful, the pieces in "Image Workers" are far starker.

A closer look reveals procedural evidence of image production and editing. An article of clothing is photographed next to a color test strip typical of professional photo

Robert Chase Heishman, *#3*, 2020, photographs & tape. Electric Arts installation. Image courtesy of Elastic Arts.

Robert Chase Heishman, *#4*, 2020, photographs & tape. Electric Arts installation. Image courtesy of Elastic Arts.

shoots. That same article then appears again in another edited image within the collage, cropped and hovering over a solid color background. Both images are adhered with tape to a third image of some ambiguous space—a room with framed pictures on the wall, a series of empty cubicles, or a cityscape at night through a window.

Seeing the clothing, a shirt, a shoe, my mind went immediately to the throwaway ads I see when scrolling news articles on the Internet—the cookie-generated, scattershot kind of advertising that forgoes quality of communication for quantity of clicks. These are not advertisements, but rather commissions paid for by the artist to a company in Bangladesh called Fast Clipping Path. In addition to the edited photograph of an article of clothing, Heishman requested that the worker provide an image of a familiar space from their everyday lives. As viewers we get a glimpse into the lives of the laborers who edit content that gets consumed on a near-constant basis around the world, but mostly in affluent countries..

The implications are many. The privileged position of viewing artwork immediately betrays our own complicity in yet another system of low-cost, globally outsourced labor. Then take into account the larger consumer-based system that drives the need for image production and the energy and resources that go into something so temporal, so expendable. I am not one to denounce digital artworks for their dependence on the grid. What is concerning, though, is the widening disparity in our economy of not only monetary but also cultural capital.

In just the past few days, we have seen digital art barreling toward the kind of speculative trade economy that has already swallowed up the gallery world. There has been a recent surge in debates around digitally made "crypto art," which is authenticated as an original work by being tracked on a blockchain as a non-fungible token, a.k.a. NFT. One of these pieces of crypto art (a JPEG) just sold for $69.3 million at Christie's, ramping up a lot of doom-saying about the corruption and demise of the art world

Robert Chase Heishman, *#1*, 2020, photographs & tape. Electric Arts installation. Image courtesy of Elastic Arts.

Robert Chase Heishman, *#2*, 2020, photographs & tape. Elastic Arts installation. Image courtesy of Electric Arts.

and the exploitation of the artistic masses trying to get in on the game. It is an emerging market rife with problems but only time can tell us where it will go.

The politics and ethics of the work is not lost on the artist. Far from it. In addition to his own artistic practice, Heishman does work as a photographer and image editor. This led him to take an interest in this expanding yet unnoticed form of labor. In contacting Fast Clipping Path for their services, he paid them a higher rate than their usual 29 cents per image edit, as well as $35 for the original images, and he included them in the artistic portion of the project, treating it as a collaboration. FCP will also receive 33% of the sale price of a purchased work, and though Heishman would prefer more of those earnings go to the individual worker, it is difficult for him to control that, being a client.

It was unclear to what degree the image workers were interested in or cognizant of the conceptual framework around the project. According to Heishman, their enthusiasm was concentrated in the acquisition of him as a new client, which is understandable. But what is a business partnership on one end is an inquiry-driven artistic collaboration on the other.

Heishman is still grappling with his own position as an artist, investigator, and documenter in this whole process, but the project has just begun. He is particularly observant of the fact that as an image worker in the United States, he has access to a market that allows him to utilize his skills and education as an artist to not only earn at a higher rate but also participate in a culture that affords him some degree of prestige. The growing demand for quick labor in this industry sparked this project. He sees it as the first step in an ongoing effort to unmask a growing class-based system in the world of image production while also hashing out the politics of his own role in that system. It is difficult and challenging work, and I am curious to see where it goes next. ■

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

"Image Workers" was installed at Elastic Arts from November 14, 2020 to March 7, 2021 and is available for online viewing at https://elasticarts.org/gallery/heishman/. It was curated by Alyssa Brubaker.

Robert Chase Heishman, *#5*, 2020, photographs & tape. Electric Arts installation. Image courtesy of Elastic Arts.

"Already Gone"
Seven Paintings by Adam Daley Wilson

by Michel Ségard

Aspect/Ratio/Projects is a small gallery in one of Chicago's newest gallery districts in the vicinity of Chicago Avenue and Ashland Avenue. The intimate storefront space is ideal for tightly focused shows. Adam Daley Wilson's show "Already Gone," consisting of only seven large pieces, was just such an exhibition.

One aspect of this show that made it interesting was that the pieces use a printed image on canvas as the base for five of the works, which are then overpainted in oils with phrases composed by the artist. The technique of overpainting photos is not new, but this reviewer has never encountered works this large and done in this way. The pieces vary from five to nine and three-quarters feet wide! There is just enough wall space in the gallery to hold them. In fact, during showings, the gallery desk has to be removed and put in storage to allow two of the pieces to be seen unobstructed.

Adam Daley Wilson lives and works in Maine, and his work is strongly influenced by his bipolar 1 mental condition. This condition shows up primarily in the choice of phrases Wilson uses in paintings. Many are simultaneously profound and ambiguous. And three of the works are acerbically aimed at the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, both in background imagery and in the choice of phrases overprinted on them.

Wilson has penned a few paragraphs for each of the pieces in the show. His writings are just as interesting as the paintings, and in fact, make inseparable pairs. Unfortunately, the writing is only available as a handout or online. It is the feeling of this writer that they should have

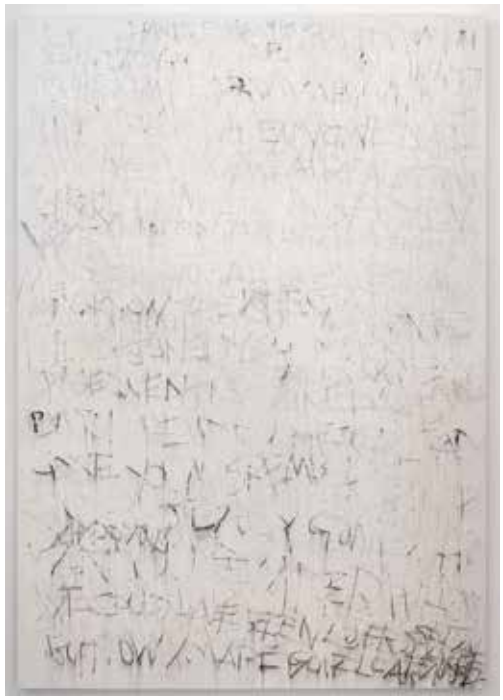
Adam Daley Wilson, *Notions of Secular Barely Made Sense,* 2020. Oil on new media. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

Adam Daley Wilson, *You Could Not Be A Less Relational Self*, 2020. Oil on new media. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

been somehow posted next to each painting. That would have made comprehending the work easier, because the full substance of each piece cannot be understood without also reading Wilson's comments.

The first work in the exhibition is called *Notions of Secular Barely Made Sense*. It is the smallest piece in the show measuring only 40 by 60 inches. A poetic image in pink and violet-blue of impending storm clouds is overwritten by the phrase "ALL THIS FOR THAT." In the paragraph accompanying this painting, Wilson wonders: "...how cognitive conceptions of reason and science could possibly account for the beauty that is present even in nature's most simple of moments..." The opposing concepts of impending violence and natural beauty are all distilled in a four-word phrase over an image of clouds.

The next piece, just to the right of *Notions of Secular Barely Made Sense*, and making a kind of suite with its neighbor, is a larger painting of an ocean horizon called *You Could Not Be A Less Relational Self*—nothing but blue water and blue sky in very soft focus. It contains the phrase "I COULD NOT FORGET YOU MORE." This piece is about remembering and forgetting, or as the artist poignantly puts it: "...sometimes we actively try to forget or remember another—and sometimes, against our will, we are powerless to determine what remains and what fades away." Again, the duality of this message monopolizes the work, even as the out-of-focus background image creates a disturbing unease. Did someone drown; was a doomed love affair "put to rest"? There is a subtle anxiety that emerges when trying to reconcile the wording with the image.



Left: Adam Daley Wilson, *We Could Have Been Lovers But Then You Were Gone*, 2020. Oil stick on canvas. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

Right: Adam Daley Wilson, *You Chose to Disremember So We Have Moved On*, 2020. Oil stick on canvas. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

Adam Daley Wilson, *Hold Me Back From My Humanity*, 2020. Oil on new media. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

The next two pieces in the show do not have a photographic background. They are about obsessive cacography. They also are the only two vertical pieces in the show, each standing seven feet tall. Neither of these two painting have decipherable writing, in spite of the fact that they are all script. For *We Could Have Been Lovers But Then You Were Gone*, Wilson writes:

> *...it seems we have intentionally decided to forget the purity and virtue of the laws of nature, and what they could teach us about equality and justice; we seem to remember the laws of physics and chemistry only when they further our next earthly desire.*

This thought is illustrated by the layer upon layer of writing that successively obscures the layers underneath until nothing is readable. Curiously, this piece is reminiscent of the early works of Christopher Wool and has the feel of graffiti—taggers after tagger trying to out-polemicize each other.

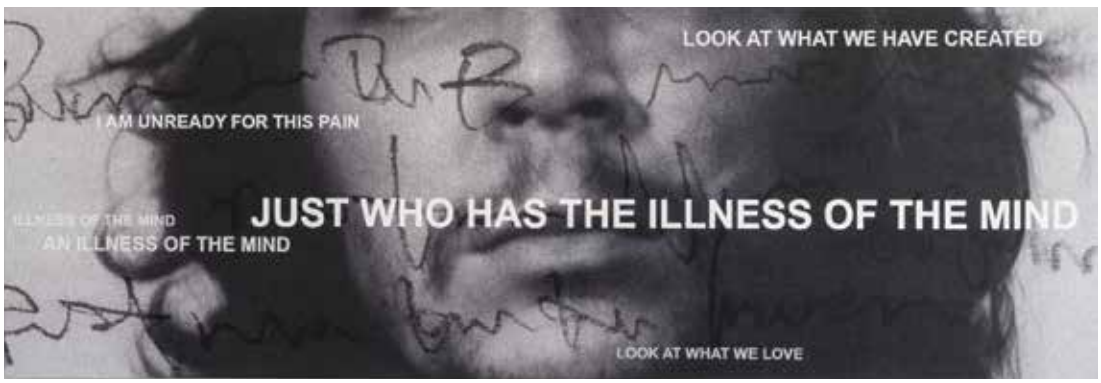
The other piece in this duo, *You Chose To Disremember So We Have Moved On*, is a depiction of the consequences of the previous compulsive writing. This piece has the feeling of an unearthed fragment from an ancient lost civilization. Our artifacts have faded and lost their meaning, suggesting the eventual demise of human civilization. Nature has moved on, not caring one bit. Wilson puts it this way: "The sanction for our decision to misremember is not punitive; this is natural law; the sanction is simply consequential causal fact. The rest of nature will move on."

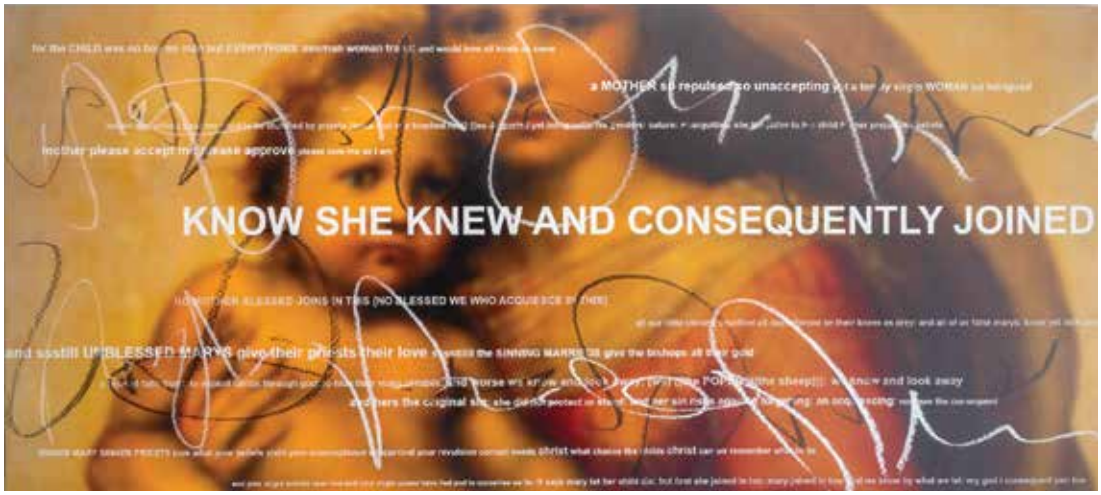
The last three pieces in the exhibition, shown next to each other along one wall, are about the Catholic Church. *Hold Me Back From My Humanity* juxtaposes the Catholic Church and the Mafia. Its primary phrase is "AN INCREASING ROT NOW TWO THOUSAND YEARS" painted over a fragment of Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* showing a part that depicts rotting fruit. It also has the phrases "EVEN GODFATHERS HAVE CODES" and "YOU ONLY HAVE TO BE SILENT" inscribed over the image. Wilson daringly states in the writing for this piece that:

> *...the Catholic Church meets all the legal elements to be indicted by a grand jury in federal court, under our RICO statute, as a corporate enterprise engaging in systematic racketeering and organized crime.*

As the next two pieces will show, there is no love lost between Wilson and the Catholic Church.

Adam Daley Wilson, *Third Portrait, Jesus Christ Dead Savior, In His Insanity of Peace*, 2020. Oil on new media. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.





Adam Daley Wilson, *I Am Unholy Mary*, 2020. Oil on new media. Photo courtesy of Aspect/Ratio.

Third Portrait, Jesus Christ Dead Savior, In His Insanity of Peace is the second of this trio. Here Wilson proclaims:

> *We challenge your long cherished narratives. We now reclaim our own voices. We will now participate, in all of it, and we will no longer be silenced by your stigmas. Because—as the primary voice of this story declares—do not forget, it is past time you remember, look at the evidence worldwide: It is not we—those you diagnose and dismiss as mentally ill—it is not we who have the true illness of the mind.*

This is the manifesto that combines Wilson's contempt for present social structures and the struggles of his "mental illness." The piece is inscribed with "JUST WHO HAS THE ILLNESS OF THE MIND" as a question over a fragment of *Guerrillero Heroico*, a 1960 photograph of Che Guevara by Alberto Korda. Note how similar the face is to many contemporary Western depictions of Christ. Two other phrases stand out: "LOOK AT WHAT WE LOVE" and "LOOK AT WHAT WE HAVE CREATED." The illegible writings beneath the painted messages accentuate the perceived madness of the situation.

I Am Unholy Mary is the final piece of this trio. Wilson's written narrative starts out with:

> *...the Christ child—not he or she but All, not one gender or race or sexual identity but All, not just intersex or transgender but Everything—this Christ (they/them) simply desires the most basic of human relational needs—freedom to declare their identity and a mother's unconditional love.*

In this sentence, Wilson puts into stark reality the injustice and hypocrisy of the Church by exemplifying its injustice to the LGBTQI community. The image is a detail from Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and the main phrase is "KNOW SHE KNEW AND CONSEQUENTLY JOINED." Wilson's interpretation is that "...Christ was crucified not only as an adult, but also as a child, systematically. Each time, Mary knew, watched, allowed, and thereby joined." According to Wilson, she was neither a virgin nor holy because of her complicity of silence. But this image, bathed in yellow, the color of cowardice, evokes an innocence of ignorance.

This last trio brings to mind Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. The Christ figure in both Heinlein's novel and in Wilson's religious trio of paintings is simultaneously all-knowing and naïve about their narrative and its outcome. And consequently, He is despoiled by the depravity of humanity's officialdom and Man's lust for power and position, challenging the supremacy of God himself.

Wilson's design style is fairly straightforward and unremarkable, resembling traditional advertising design in many ways. But that is what makes his works hover between art and propaganda, especially with the Catholicism trio. And this ambiguity is what pulled me in to read his descriptions and explore the deeper meanings of the work.

It is rare that one encounters an exhibition with such depth of social commentary. Wilson's method of showing how opposing forces merge and overlap is more a philosophical bent than an artistic one. But it brings a complexity and gravitas to his work that is too often lacking in contemporary art. ■

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

The entire show, including Wilson's text accompanying each piece can be seen at http://www.aspectratioprojects.com/already-gone.html.