

NEW ART examiner

Established 1973

The Independent Voice of the Visual Arts

Volume 35 Number 4, July 2021

in

outside

\$15 U.S.

COVER IMAGE

Steve Sherrell, *Broken*, 5/9/2010, acrylic on canvas on 4 panels, 68 x 96 in. Photo courtesy of Steve Sherrell.

Contents

ARTICLES

3 "Outside IN" —Introduction



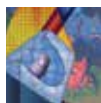
5 "Da Region" On the Arts Centers in Northwest Indiana

NEIL GOODMAN introduces us to spaces in Gary, Munster, Michigan City, and other Indiana communities just across the state line from Chicago.



10 Sculpture Milwaukee 2021

DANIELLE PASWATERS surveys Sculpture Milwaukee, which was curated by Theaster Gates and Michelle Grabner.



14 Water Street Studios

MICHEL SÉGARD tours Batavia's artist work and display complex and looks at the art of participation artists.



19 Passings

NATHAN WORCESTER AND EVAN CARTER reflect on the deaths of two Chicago legends: Helmut Jahn and Karl Wirsum.



31 Look at Me! The virtual edition of Chicago EXPO

EVAN CARTER looks at EXPO Chicago through a screen, an experience he ultimately finds "radically boring."



33 "In the Language of my Captor":

Paintings by Gary Burnley

ALISON MARTIN takes in a show from Gary Burnley, a collage artist whose works engage issues of race, power, and privilege.



36 "Journey's in Place" Fiber Art by Carole Harris

K.A. LETTS reviews fiber artist Carole Harris's solo show at Hill Gallery in Detroit.



39 Justin Marshall: "The End"

K.A. LETTS considers the work of Justin Marshall, whose paintings were exhibited at Public Pool in Hamtramck, Michigan.

REVIEWS



24 "Mise en abyme," Paintings by Rachel Pontious

K.A. LETTS examines Rachel Pontious's first solo show at Playground Detroit, finding in it "an emotionally eloquent distillation of our COVID-19 year."



27 Telling Their Stories: "ArtFields"

PETER CHAMETZKY is impressed by "ArtFields," an exhibition featuring hundreds of artists from a dozen states in the American South.



43 Charles Henri Ford/ WITHOUT TOUCHING

PAUL MORENO looks into the life and work of queer photographer Charles Henri Ford.



51 "Dancing in Real Life": Works by Yannis Tsarouchis

MICHEL SÉGARD discusses Yannis Tsarouchis's art, which blends homophilic Platonism with themes and motifs from Orthodox Christianity.

PRIDE MONTH SPECIAL REVIEWS

NEW ART EXAMINER

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NEW ART EXAMINER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

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: "Outside *IN*"

Summer is upon us and with Independence Day fireworks popping in the typically drawn out, nightly fashion, some aspects of American life are steadily seeping into our daily routines. Independence is a fitting motif for the release of this issue of the *New Art Examiner*. As we thread a larger narrative from one issue to the next, we find ourselves having critiqued the impacts of technology and capital on art production and distribution. With "Outside *IN*" we now find ourselves taking a closer look at the production of work in localities that either were or still are on the margins of what the capital-driven art market deems worthy of consumption.

Neil Goodman elevates the artwork of "Da Region" a collection of cities in Northwest Indiana that have experienced various degrees of economic decline. It is an invitation to look closer at communities that often go ignored and a call to artists and culture makers to build something new where there is opportunity to do so. Our regional explorations also took us to Water Street Studios in Batavia, IL where we see artists carving a space in their community for craft and expression. In other regions, like Milwaukee, WI home to "Sculpture Milwaukee" and Lake City SC, host of the "Artfields" prize, we can see some of this cultural investment in action.

What is obscured and nearly forgotten is not always lost though. Wrightwood 659 presents a large-scale retrospective of Yannis Tsarouchis, the artist well known in his native country of Greece but a missing link in the history of queer art for much of the art viewing world. With the examination of Charles Henri Ford's photography and inner circle, Paul Moreno unearths a more nuanced origin story of queer art and culture. There is no better time than Pride Month to celebrate pioneering queer artists who helped us on the journey toward equality.

We hope that you are able to get out into the sun and enjoy the wonderful city of Chicago or wherever else you may be. While you are at it, glean some cultural food for thought from these paragraphs and take it out into the world with you. As we start living our best lives again, we must remember the value of ideas and what it means to share them.

Cheers and have a great summer,

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.

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Rest of World \$80 postage incl.

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“Da Region”

On the arts centers in Northwest Indiana

by Neil Goodman

“The Calumet region” is roughly defined as Northwest Indiana and includes Hammond, East Chicago, Whiting, Gary, Highland, Griffith, Hobart, Lake Station, and to some extent Munster, Merrillville, Michigan City, Valparaiso and Chesterton. For lifelong residents, it is also referred to as “Da Region.”

Although the cities and towns, are geographically close in proximity, they are surprisingly distinct economically, ethnically, and racially. Each town seems to have some sort of artistic presence, yet for the most part, the cultural map of the region consists of more satellites than constellations. For artists living in the region, there are the advantages of affordable studios and cheap rent, yet the non-nuclear cultural arena is challenging for both artists and audiences.

In many ways the towns are period pieces from the beginning of the 20th century, paralleling the growth of the steel industry, and reflecting waves of immigration, first European and later African American primarily from

Southern states. Northwest Indiana was also an anomaly in relation to the rest of Indiana, strongly union and Democratic in a largely Republican state. Economic prosperity and stability were linked to the mills, and as they closed, the more staid, largely White middle class moved into newer adjacent communities. Once-thriving city centers gave way to malls, and those malls eventually became other malls. Some towns like Munster prospered as mostly bedroom communities to Chicago, yet others, such as Gary and East Chicago, languished in their past without new industries replacing the former glory days of plentiful work in the mills.

Although there are several art galleries nestled within each community—i.e. Paul Henry’s in Hammond, Lake Street Gallery in Gary, and the Chesterton Art Center—a quick overview would point to South Shore Arts in Munster as one of the region’s most successful and enduring art centers. Located near the border between Indiana and Illinois, and originally called the Northern Indiana



South Shore Arts, Munster, IN.
Photo: Tripadvisor.com.



Lubeznik Center for the Arts,
Michigan City, IN.
Sculpture by Terry Karpowicz.
Photo: michigancitylaport.com.

Arts Association, its name change a number of years ago reflected a more regionally connected arts community. Home of the Northwest Indiana Symphony Orchestra, South Shore Arts also includes two exhibition venues, studio classes, a performing arts center, and room for brunches, receptions, and speakers. Under its umbrella it also has two satellite exhibition spaces in Hammond and Crown Point, Indiana. Over the years its mission has expanded organically, and with strong and stable leadership by its executive director John Cain, it remains a fixture in its community. In the classic arts tradition, one goes for

one reason and stays for another, which ensures a steady audience for its gallery exhibitions. No doubt, the upper middle-class economy of Munster juxtaposed with ample parking, a convenient and safe location insure its stability, longevity, and local support. In many ways, it has quietly done its job over the years expanding its mission, enriching the arts, while consciously broadening its mission to include less affluent communities.

Similar in many respects to South Shore Arts is the Lubeznik Center for the Arts in Michigan City. The center hosts diverse and challenging exhibitions of both national



The Brauer Museum of Art,
Valparaiso University. Sculpture by Richard Hunt.
Photo: usa-artmuseum.
worldorgs.com.



Arthouse, Gary, IN. Photo: latentdesign.net.

and regional artists, as well as arts education and outreach. With an attractive exhibition gallery that is a convenient stopping point from Chicago to Michigan, it has both a regional and Chicago-based audience. Current exhibitions include twenty years of work by the Chicago-based painter Phyllis Bramson, prints by Robert Indiana, and an installation by Mayumi Lake.

Although there could be some dispute whether Valparaiso, Indiana is technically considered part of the region, the Brauer Museum of Art housed within Valparaiso University had been an important cornerstone in exhibiting, collecting, and showcasing regional and national artists, both contemporary and historical. With recent pandemic-related university redistribution of resources, the museum is temporarily closed. Hopefully the Brauer

will resume its mission as a significant cultural anchor in the Valparaiso community.

If the region has one city that embodies both the past and present, it is Gary, Indiana. With thirteen thousand abandoned houses, totaling almost one third of the city, parts of the city have passed the point of serious decline. Immortalized as the home of the Jackson family, Gary was once a model city with a strong educational system, a vibrant music scene, a thriving downtown, and a diverse ethnic community. Several years ago, the Jackson family seemed poised to create an entertainment-culture center in Gary, a kind of urban Graceland, although for various reasons, the project never materialized. Presently the population of just under seventy-five thousand residents represents a sharp drop from its heyday of 178,000. Once-



The Marshall J. Gardner Center for the Arts, Gary, IN. Photo: nwitimes.com.



Indiana University Northwest
School of the Arts.
Photo: nwitimes.com.

vibrant neighborhoods and parts of downtown Gary echo what was, while struggling to become more than a shadow of their glory days.

Within recent years, one of the most adventurous and proactive community-based initiatives in downtown Gary has been ArtHouse, A Social Kitchen. Initially under the umbrella of Theaster Gates and funded in part by Bloomberg Philanthropy and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Arthouse was imagined as a collaborative cooking school, restaurant, and exhibition space. At present, the measure of its success and longevity is very difficult to discern, as it opened a few years prior to the pandemic. While one hopes that good intentions will have positive results, it is yet to be determined whether

ArtHouse can establish itself as a cultural oasis in a very economically challenged area of downtown Gary.

Adjacent to the shores of Lake Michigan, and still considered part of Gary, is Miller Beach. Miller has always been a bit of a hub for artists, writers, and poets. The well-known artist Kay Rosen has lived there for years, and earlier in the 1950s Nelson Algren had a summer home in Miller with Simone de Beauvoir. If you say you are from Miller, you mean Miller Beach and not Gary, as the communities, although housed under the same umbrella, are historically different. Miller's economic corridor is Lake Street, which is home to the Miller Beach Arts & Creative District, the Marshall J. Gardner Center for the Arts, Lake Street Gallery and the Calumet Artist Residency. Miller



Tom Torluemke, *Shade Parties, They're All The Rage*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 128 inches. Photo: Linda Dorman.



Nick Black exhibition, 2003,
Uncle Freddy's Gallery, Hammond, IN.
Photo: Linda Dorman.

is desirable for many reasons, including proximity to the lake, affordable housing, accessibility to Chicago, and a solid developing middle class. Miller is as an area primed for development, as its defined geography gives the arts district both support and an audience.

Although perhaps reflecting my bias as a former faculty member at Indiana University Northwest, one of the most durable and sustainable models for cultural growth and development in Gary is the recent addition of a new fine and performing arts center at the university. Under the rubric of the School of the Arts, the university supports two exhibition spaces and a new theater, as well as expanded studio facilities. The school is also spearheading significant outreach into the Gary and Northwest Indiana community with their Art + Action Community Lab. As academic institutions benefit from both state funding and stable academic positions, IUN is foundational to the Gary community as it has longevity coupled with strong academic programming that insures both a campus and community audience. In this way, established institutions provide essential services, as education, culture, and employment are symbiotic within the role of the university.

Although there are many artists that have made their home in Northwest Indiana, there are fewer that have made northwest Indiana their subject. A visual cross between Bob Seeger and Bruce Springsteen, the painter, sculptor, and muralist Tom Torluemke seems to be the region's Reginald Marsh. In an art world which is increasingly international, it is still refreshing to identify place with person, and if we want to reimagine the region one hundred years from now, his cast of characters will be an animated visual encyclopedia of both where and how we lived.

From 2002 until 2009, Tom and his partner, now wife (Linda Dorman) ran Uncle Freddy's gallery in Highland. Now closed, it was a bit of a cross between a salon and a gallery, as well as gathering point for like-minded artists in the region, including many of the graffiti artists (such as Ish Mohammad Nieve) of East Chicago. In those

seven years, Uncle Freddy's Gallery hosted more than seventy exhibitions and events as well as working with over four hundred artists. While Uncle Freddy's gallery was short lived, its impact pointed to the idea that borders are still open, and boundaries are still undefined.

Many artists on the periphery of large urban centers, they live, work, and contribute in ways that impact their community, yet without star recognition. Many of these artists seemingly work on the sidelines, yet in their own venue they are well known and important players in their respective communities. In this respect, their impact is hard to measure, as the indicators of success are more elusive in these environments. For each artist imbedded in their community, they, at the very least, create a conversation that would not be there without them. And if it is hard to tip the scale, they still weigh in.

Perhaps a young curator with vision and determination could create a biennial with a massive site-specific installation based on the location of former steel mills. A show and tell through the region, and a romantic pairing of the past with the future. I would like to imagine this as a tipping point for urban and economic revitalization, as location and proximity to Chicago are as attractive now as they were a century ago. In some future world, perhaps the abandoned will be re-examined and revitalized, and the richness and unique history of the region will be given voice, but until then, in the words of Buffalo Springfield,

*Something is happening here, and what it is ain't
exactly clear*

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

Sculpture Milwaukee 2021

Theaster Gates and Michelle Grabner guest curate
“there is this We”

by Danielle Paswaters

Whether from Chicago or Milwaukee, if you are at all familiar with the local and/or national arts scene, the names Theaster Gates and Michelle Grabner are likely to mean something to you. For the first time ever, Sculpture Milwaukee (SMKE) is presenting guest curators and an official exhibition title. Bringing on Gates and Grabner to curate this year’s show extends a hand to Milwaukee’s Chicago neighbors and aligns with what seems to be the exhibition’s themes in community and collaboration. Gates and Grabner’s chosen exhibition title, “there is this We,” was inspired by the opening line of the poem “An Aspect of Love, Alive in the Ice and Fire” by Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black poet to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize. Grabner states:

The poetics of perseverance and determination vibrate in the art that Theaster and I have selected. There are exciting and palpable energies at work in these sculptures; we feel it in the sonic reverberations of Kevin Beasley’s acoustic mirrors, in the foliage quietly grow-

ing in the bed of Virginia Overton’s pick-up truck, and in the rattling cry of the tambourines that comprise Allison Janae Hamilton’s tower. The exhibition’s title reflects the collective power of the works included in the 2021 exhibition and honors a belief in social change through the provocations of the artistic imagination.

Now more than ever, our society is recognizing the power that lies in art (particularly public art) to break down social barriers, inspire change, and promote cultural competency. According to Sculpture Milwaukee Board Chair Wayne Morgan, “This extraordinary exhibition could not be more timely. On the heels of the hardships wrought by the pandemic, as well as issues of racial inequities brought to the forefront via the Black Lives Matter social justice movement, Theaster and Michelle are inviting us to consider some incredibly challenging questions and give thought to how we intend to move forward as a community and as a country.”



Kevin Beasley, *Who’s Afraid to Listen to Red, Black and Green?*, 2016, mixed media. Photo by Adam Reich.



Alison Janae Hamilton, *The people cried mer-cy in the storm*, 2018, Tambourines and steel armature, 18 ft. x 36 in. x 36 in. Photo: artist's website.

SMKE, its curators, and its artists have all committed to these themes of social change through collaboration and community by deliberately extending their outreach and partnerships this year. Some of these pioneering collaborations include:

- Betty Gold's sculpture *Monumental Holistic III* (1979) will be permanently installed at the Milwaukee Art Museum during the June opening.
- Artist Matthias Neumann will be traveling to Milwaukee to construct his sculpture on site with the help of architecture students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- Works by Salvador Jiménez-Flores were produced through the Arts/Industry program at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center.
- Community engagement programs are slated for the summer and fall in conjunction with new and returning partners, including the Urban Ecology Center, TRUE Skool, Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, 3rd Street Market Hall, and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.
- SMKE will be teaming with Jumpst (ART) Busker Festival in correlation with the USA Triathlon weekend on August 7 and 8, providing street music performances



(Left) Salvador Jiménez-Flores, *Nopal Espacial/Space Cactus*, 2019, brass, cast iron, rose gold plating, and brass hose, 64 x 36 x 36 inches. Photo: artist's website. (Right) Thaddeus Mosley, *Illusory Progression, True to Myth, Rhizogenic Rhythms*, 2020. Photo: Chris Roque.



Virginia Overton, *Untitled (Late Bloomer)*, 2018, Dodge Ram 150 pick-up truck, jack stands, rubber wheel chocks, mirrored vanity plates, decal, rubber hose, water pumps, water, lotuses and fountain, 90 x 96 x 222 inches. Photo: Sara Morgan. Courtesy of the artist and Socrates Sculpture Park.

alongside the SMKE sites throughout the Third Ward, East Town and Westtown. There will be over 100 hours of live music throughout these neighborhoods over the weekend.

It's not only the curators that tout direct links to Chicago. This year many of the participating artists have direct connections to Chicago as well. You may recognize some of their names: Kevin Beasley, Betty Gold, Salvador Jiménez-Flores, Allison Janae Hamilton, Kara Hamilton, Brad Kahlhamer, Deborah Kass, Thaddeus Mosley, Matthias Neuman, Virginia Overton, Dan Peterman, Jason Pickleman, Sara Greenberger Rafferty, John Riepenhoff, Christine Tarkowski, and Lauren Yeager.

Eight artists will feature works that were made for the exhibition, including those by SMKE's Guest Artist Lauren Yeager, the first large-scale sculpture by Jason Pickleman, and a new cast bronze work by Thaddeus Mosley.

On view from June 2021–Autumn 2022, SMKE was initiated in 2017 and is in its 5th season this year. Over these past five years, SMKE has made its name as one of the largest annual outdoor exhibitions in the country focusing on large scale contemporary sculpture and is free to the public.

Editor's Note: Images are representative samples of the artists' work and not of the pieces actually in Sculpture Milwaukee 2021.

Guest Curators

Theaster Gates is a Chicago-based artist and curator whose practice encompasses sculpture, performance, and land development-based projects. His work has been widely exhibited in museums, galleries, and biennials nationally and internationally, including recent solo exhibitions at Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago and Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Michelle Grabner is a Wisconsin-based artist, writer, and curator. She co-curated the 2014 Whitney Biennial and was named a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow. Her work has been the subject of several national museum surveys. She is presently represented by James Cohan, New York and Green Gallery, Milwaukee.

Sculpture Milwaukee

Sculpture Milwaukee is an annual outdoor exhibition of public sculpture in downtown Milwaukee that serves as a catalyst for community engagement, economic development, and creative placemaking. Sculpture Milwaukee is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization funded through private grants, in-kind donations, and sponsorships. sculpturemilwaukee.com

Danielle L. Paswaters is an art museum and gallery professional with nearly 15 years of academic, curatorial, and arts administrative experience. She holds a B.A. in Art History with a Business minor and is currently pursuing an M.A. in Contemporary Art History with a focus on Performance Theory and DEI in Museum Studies at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Trained as an entrepreneur, a paralegal and an art historian, she is currently the Mentor Curator for Milwaukee Artist Resource Network (MARN). Contact Danielle L. Paswaters at paswate2@uwm.edu. Follow her on Facebook at Danielle.Paswaters or Instagram at DaniellePaswaters.



Christine Tarkowski, *Molten Drawing*, 2018-2019, molten glass and copper poured over steel. Image Credit: Artist website.



(Left) Jason Pickleman, digital study for *Hand Heart*, 2021, produced for Sculpture Milwaukee. Photo courtesy of the artist. (Right) Lauren Yeager, *Basketball Collection*, 2020. Image Credit: Field Studio.

Water Street Studios

by Michel Ségard

Just under 50 miles from Chicago on the Fox River, a few miles north of Aurora, is the historic town of Batavia, Illinois, the home of Fermilab (Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory). First settled in 1833, the town became famous during the 1890s as the world's leading center for the manufacture of windmills — only appropriate given the town's Dutch name. Before that in 1875, it briefly hosted Mary Todd Lincoln in a sanitarium for women. It is also the home of The Child City, Mooseheart, the Moose Lodge's home for children in need.

But it is also the home of a thriving artists community centered around the Water Street Studios (WSS). This complex of artist studios and galleries is home to a very active and socially engaged visual arts center. Not only does it house 25 studios, shared by 27 artists, but its three galleries in the complex allows the exhibition of work from all over the country. Only one of the galleries is reserved

for artists in the Water Street Studio Artist Collective, a group of 24 additional artists both local and regional. The other two galleries house exhibitions that are consistently sponsored by local businesses and arts philanthropies. This allows the center to host 24 juried and curated exhibitions per year. All its shows are free and open to the public.

WSS is also highly involved in its community and holds grant-funded art classes at St. Mary Catholic School in Elgin, the Kane County Jail, Mercy Housing Apartments in Batavia, and Covenant Living Retirement Center in Batavia. The center also provides STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) classes for students from 8 to 13 years old to learn through an arts curriculum.

Who are these artists? The first demographic that stands out among the studio artists is gender: there are 20 female artists and only 7 male artists. The next is also

Jeremy Foy (Left), *Flip Lid Vessel*, 2019, 8" d x 21" h; (Right) *Facilitate*, 2016, stoneware, 6 ½ x 6 x 7 inches. Photos courtesy of Jeremy Foy.





Al DaValle, two images from the series "A Silver Lining," (Left) *Plate #9 (path with trees)*, (Right) *#28 (barns)*, 2021, photography. Photos courtesy of Al DaValle.



striking—there are no artists of color. The demographics for the Collective are a little different. In that group, there are 15 men and 9 women. There is only one person of color in that group, Perry Slade, an African American man from Aurora. This is not surprising; Batavia is 84.2 percent non-Hispanic White, 2.4 percent African American and 8 percent Latinx. On the other hand, Aurora, Illinois, only a few miles away, is 35.6 percent non-Hispanic White, 10.1 percent African American and 43.4 percent Latinx. Most Aurora artists apparently do not choose to participate at WSS. But I am told by members of WSS that those who visit the exhibitions are much more racially diverse.

What kind of art do the artists of WSS make? These are artists who, for the most part, have chosen not to pursue the gallery/museum circuit. Most of their work focuses on refining a technique and developing a locally salable product. Their aesthetic is often rooted in a craft tradition. The reason for this can be seen in the demographics. This is a very White, middle-class, suburban group that is steeped in the work ethic and the need for a socially relevant justification for what they do and make, i.e., the Christian Protestant ethic — ergo the social involvement with schools, seniors, and felons. But little of this “good work” shows up in their art. The social activism they practice rarely seems to enter their work, which is mostly decorative and certainly NOT overtly political or confrontational. This situation is a kind of paradox, given that a purely decorative and non-utilitarian object goes against the Protestant ethic that dominates their culture.

Yet, many of the works are highly competent, aesthetically well thought out, and technically as good as anything

you will see in the average urban gallery. Here are a few artists that I found particularly engaging.

Ceramist Jeremy Foy created some of the most innovative work that I saw at WSS. His flip lid vessels “allow for the vessel to reveal an extended interior that can become the exterior,” as Foy describes them. He has also created some very interesting cube sculptures in clay and some in wood.

Al DaValle is perhaps the most accomplished photographer at WSS. His series *A Silver Lining* reflects a Robert Frost-like understanding of the Midwest landscape in winter that captures the season’s beauty as well as its melancholy. Overall, his work has expert composition, lighting, and tonal control that maximizes the aesthetic impact of his scenes.

Senior artist Steve Sherrell is the director of exhibitions at WSS. He is also one of the most accomplished painters of the group. Educated at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, his work shows the influence of both Imagism (he was a student of Ray Yoshida) and geometric abstraction, two combating forces in the Chicago art world in the 1970s. His work, *Broken*, is the cover image of this quarter’s print issue. He has also branched out in digital imaging.

In addition to the artists with studio space at WSS, there are an additional 24 artists who are part of WSS’s Artist Collective, a group of artists that support WSS’s mission. These artists are from all over the country and are by and large more accomplished. A few even (if timidly) address social issues in their art. But they all have one thing in common: they are technical masters of their

Steve Sherrell: (Top) *Oil #14 (Flora)*, 2021, oil on unstretched canvas, 39 x 52 inches; (Bottom left) *Painting in Revolt*, 2008, mixed media collage on unstretched canvas, 48 x 60 inches; (Bottom right) *Thumbby*, digital image done with Photoshop 7, 16 x 20 inches. Photos courtesy of Steve Sherrell.



craft. Their works are almost too finished, too refined, and therefore didactic when they could have been provocative and open to interpretation.

Richard DeVeau's paintings are an exception. In his work the accident is allowed to be part of the creative process. And he addresses contemporary issues like in the painting titled *Covid #5 Vaccine. Tabernaculum #1* has what looks to be a buried heart in the lower half of the painting, suggesting a grim circumstance. *Old Man in the Canvas* has a silhouette that does not appear to be of an old man. The shoulders and posture are too straight, and the hair on top of the head is too voluminous, bearing a contemporary silhouette. Then what is the meaning of the title? Who is the figure?

Perry Slade is another exception. His work consists of digital photography. Among his images of scenes from Aurora, Illinois, and surroundings, where he is located, are a number of photos that have politico-racial content. But he is not confrontational; rather he chronicles the events of

the time as he sees them. His Juneteenth shows two black youths celebrating the holiday. Stop portrays a dilapidated building that has been painted over in various colors, both uplifting its plight while emphasizing it. The stop sign in front suggests a variety of social messages. In his Puerto Rican Day Parade, the ethnic pride is shown by an anonymous woman waving a Puerto Rican flag, while the background signage reveals that she is actually in Aurora.

Lisa Goesling is an example of an artist who is obsessed with novel technique. She etches her images into what is called a Scratchbord®, a hard board covered in a layer of kaolin clay and then India ink. She scratches away the India ink to reveal the white clay underneath. After the image is fully etched, it can also be colored. The challenge is that mistakes cannot be corrected in this technique. The late Ellen Lanyon used a similar linear style in her paintings of plants and flowers but with a decidedly surreal context that spoke to the angst of her time. Goesling, on the other hand, concentrates solely on the rendering of

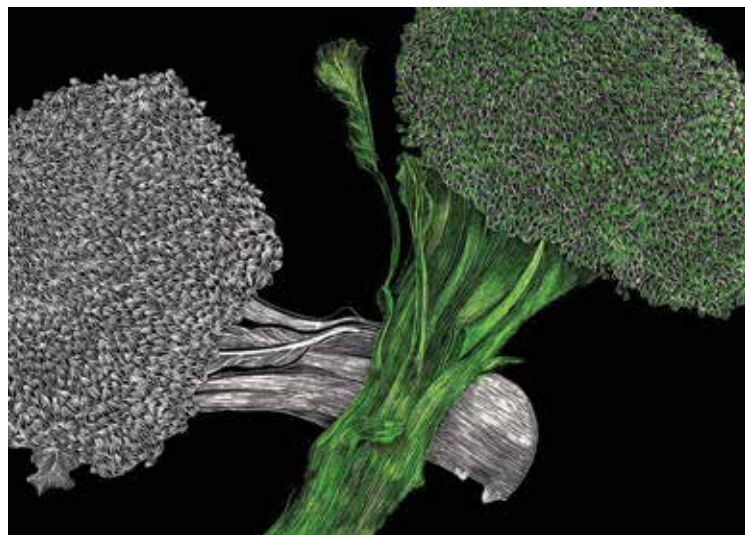


Richard DeVeau (Top left), *Covid #:5 Vaccine*, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 inches; (Top right) *Old Man in the Canvas*, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70 inches; (Bottom left) *Tabernaculum #1*, acrylic and pigment on canvas, 60 x 40 inches. Photos courtesy of Richard DeVeau.



Perry Slade (Left), *Juneteenth*, 2018, photography, 13 x 19 inches; (Right), *Puerto Rican Day Parade*, 2010, photography, 13 x 19 inches; (Above right), *Stop*, 2012, photography, 13 x 19. Photos courtesy of Perry Slade.





Lisa Goesling, (Top left) *Layer of Weeds*, 2011, Scratchbord®, 22 x 22 inches. (Top right) *Multiple Weed Flowers*, 2011, Scratchbord® with colored inks. (Bottom left) *Broccoli*, 2012, Scratchbord® with colored inks and pencils, 26 x 31 inches. Photos courtesy of Lisa Goesling.

the plant material as faithfully as she can. There is no social comment underlying her images. Still, they hold their own aesthetic beauty and reward one's appreciation for stunning technique.

All these artists have chosen to stay out of major urban centers to pursue and market their art. Most were educated locally at nearby colleges. And most market their work through the network of local suburban galleries and exhibition venues. Around Batavia, there are galleries in Aurora, Elgin, Geneva, Joliet, Lockport, Naperville, and St. Charles. These venues are augmented by online promotions and sales through individual websites and sites such as Etsy. I have been to Manhattan several times on gallery tours, and I have seen show after show of the quality that is exhibited by some of these artists and with the same strengths and shortcomings. Why have these artists chosen (or been forced) to stay in suburbia to pursue their careers? The reason probably varies with each artist: family concerns, urban phobia, gallery rejections, career timidi-

ty, affordability, etc. On the other hand, some artists may prefer the more relaxed and slower-paced environment of suburbia, especially if a growing family is involved.

The result of all this is that around Chicago, there is a vast network of art education resources, artist centers, and exhibition venues that support a substantial population of working artists who many of us never see. With the commercial gallery system becoming increasingly challenged by internet self-promotion and sales by individual artists, the art exhibition venue network as we know it will change and may become as decentralized as white-collar corporate work. It makes increasing sense for serious artists to live and work outside of urban centers—and centers like WSS may play a significant in that evolution.

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.

Passings:

Helmut Jahn and Karl Wirsum

Chicago, always a study in contrasts, recently lost two very different leaders in its artistic and cultural life. Karl Wirsum, one of the Hairy Who and an icon of Chicago Imagism, died May 6 at hospital in Lake View of cardiac arrest. Two days later, Helmut Jahn, a leading postmodern architect and sometimes controversial contributor to the city's skyline, was struck down on his bike in suburban Campton Hills, Illinois. Both were 81.

We aren't here to write conventional obits—there were obits aplenty for both in May. In this semi-regular, possibly one-time “Passings” column, our editors examine the lives, and deaths, of two celebrated figures from rather unique, but honest, angles.



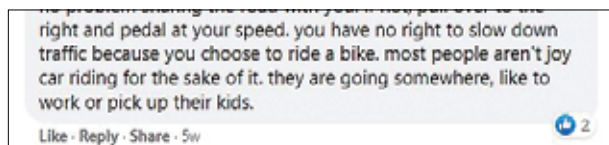
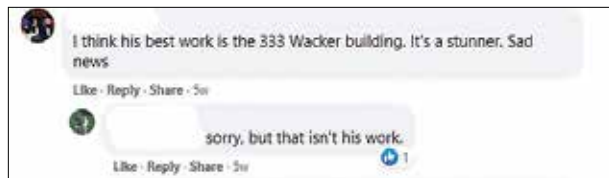
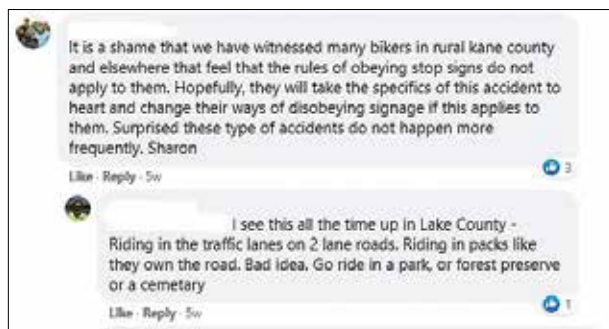
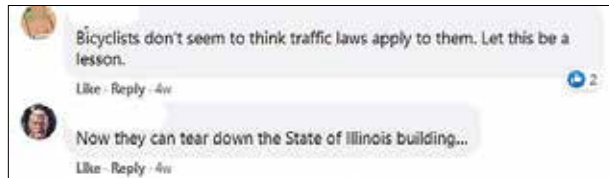
Murphy Jahn, *Sony Center*, 2000. Berlin, Germany.

Helmut Jahn

My friend, an even more committed cyclist than I am, thinks architect Helmut Jahn's fatal crash in May 2021 could be the most high-profile bicycle-related death in history. It's hard to think of many others that come close, at least outside the ranks of professional cyclists. Here in Chicago, journalist Elizabeth Brackett's tragic death on the Lakefront Trail in 2018 still resonates. But no cars were involved, so we did not have to endure a subsequent debate about whether, and to what extent, she deserved to die. Not so with Jahn.

In an uncomfortable way, the whole thing mirrors Jahn's fraught relationship with Chicago, his professional home, and the site of many of his most famous works. Picture the great continental architect, serenely unaware of his surroundings, perhaps shifting a gear as he blows a stop sign (which in many cycling-friendly countries are a rarity), only to be struck down by one and then another automobile—the speeding-when-not-gridlocked, human-hostile, inescapable exurban traffic that, like Jahn's work, is one of modernism's many offshoots.

How did Chicagoland react? Facebook offers some clues:



The Thompson Center has its flaws. Yet the level of popular hostility to it, not unnoticed by Jahn during his lifetime, can reach feverish extremes. Over three decades after it debuted, the building remains a standing rebuke to some conceptions of taste, of grace, of utility. It is anti-conventional, aesthetically inaccessible, and, to the vast, suburbanized majority, more than a little offensive—a lot like cycling, come to think of it.



Helmut Jahn, *IIT State Street Village*, 2003. Chicago. Photo: Jahn-US.com.



Murphy Jahn, *The Thompson Center*, 1985, Chicago, Illinois. Photo: The Architect's Newspaper.



Helmut Jahn, *University of Chicago Boiler Plant*, 2005-2010. Photo: Jahn-US.com.

Though cycling goes in and out of fashion, over the long run, it has proven to be a lasting contribution to human-scale urban life. Given our need for physical exercise and our collective concern with carbon emissions, it could be argued that the bicycle is a more powerful machine for living, and living well, than any static structure—certainly more so than the sepulchral columns in the air that Le Corbusier imagined.

Could the same be said of Jahn's work? Do his contributions, created as they were in a postmodern mode still overshadowed by Miesian modernism, seem likely to withstand the test of time?

Maybe, maybe not.

Maybe not the Thompson Center—a less successful experiment in exposing the inner rhythms of The City That Works to brain and eye and open air than, say, Jahn's South Campus Chiller Plant at the University of Chicago. The Chiller Plant, like his Jeanne and John Rowe Village on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, reveals and then magnifies the enticement of mechanical technology—as forward-looking (by Chicago standards) as the Green Line cars that clatter past the latter train-shaped complex.

When they merge the playful with the practical, Jahn's "joy buildings" live up, in some strange way, to the beautiful setting in which many were first unveiled—specifically, the dome at the top of the Jewelers' Building in downtown Chicago, home to Jahn's showroom. Yet something in the city still mistakes a sense of play—or joy itself—for lack of seriousness and purpose.

What to say? Helmut Jahn did not deserve Chicago. Chicago did not deserve Helmut Jahn.

Nathan Worcester



Karl Wirsum, *Scream J Hawkins*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 48 × 36 inches. Art Institute of Chicago. © Karl Wirsum.

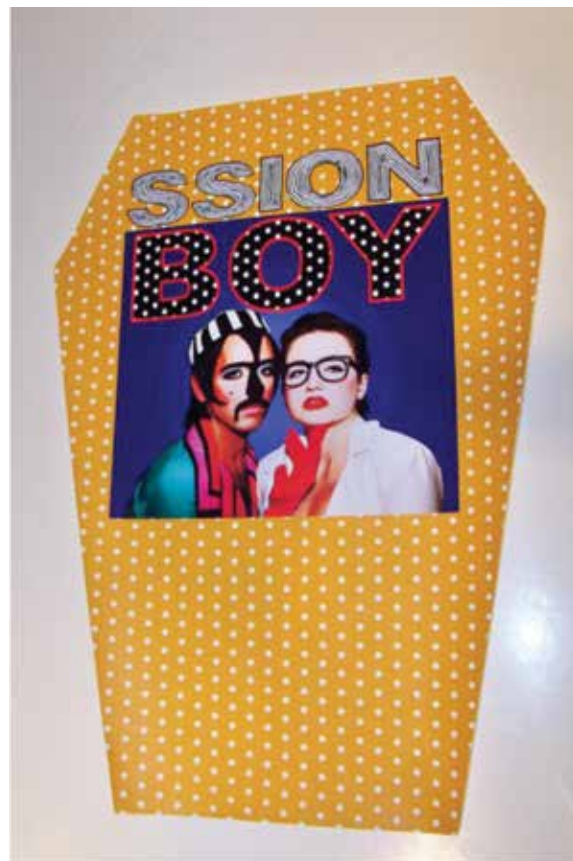
Karl Wirsum

The first time I encountered work by Karl Wirsum was some eight or nine years ago, on my first visit to the Art Institute of Chicago. It was before the acquisition of the 'New Modern' collection and the galleries contained fewer works, and they were also of greater monumentality. The giant 'Mao' by Warhol. 'Mercenaries' by Golub. A whole room of Richters. It was by this Richter room that a smaller space was partitioned off. It contained (if I remember correctly) the only pieces by the Chicago based 'Hairy Who' group in the entire Modern Wing of the Art Institute. My initial reaction to seeing these artists' works presented in such a way; corralled, relegated to a margin that even if aesthetic, regional, or marked by time period, nevertheless felt undervalued. It seemed that the implication was that these pieces did not mix with those of the greats of New York and beyond. This re-enforced the notion that the Art Institute was a museum of the world that must merely nod to one of the most celebrated groups of artists from its own locality.

As I pursued my studies in Chicago, this idea persisted. I would often hear mild disdain for a supposed overblown sense of local pride for the Hairy Who artists. This contrasted with the lament that these artists were not valued enough and deserved a more prominent place in the canons of art history. There seemed to be a kind of



(Left) Cody Critcheloe with SSION, *Custom Leather Jacket with Oil Paint*, 2010; (Right) Cody Critcheloe with SSION, *BOY Box*, 2010. Print with photographic image Photos: Smart Museum of Art.



polarization amongst those who gave a damn about art in Chicago. Like so many others who have established some vague conception of the art world hierarchy in their minds, I placed them below the biggest names in a similar way that the museum had. A typically default position for someone who had sipped on some of the art world 'Kool-Aid'.

It was on another first visit, this time to the Smart Museum of Art, that I saw a small exhibition of work by some of the 'Hairy Who' artists, mostly Jim Nutt, paired with the multimedia work of contemporary artist Cody Critcheloe, a.k.a. SSION. Critcheloe's work traded heavily in the aesthetics and subjects of queerness and party culture. The selection featured works from the series BOY Box such as an illustrated leather jacket or a small coffin featuring more of the artists graphic illustration. SSION's project seemed to culminate in a disco punk rock opera video called BOY that features tracks like 'Street Jizz' and 'The Woman,' a beat driven feminist anthem sung by a titular "Bitch Goddess."

This is when I began to think about the 'Hairy Who' artists differently. The proposal by the Smart Museum seemed to be that these artists of different generations were connected by their place in the margins. That they lived in subcultural worlds that fascinate them and give them life that it seeps into their work. The first piece by Wirsum I saw at the Art Institute, a well-known image of *Screamin' Jay Hawkins*, an artistic icon in his own right, is an early example of this. Wirsum, being born in 1939 and having grown up on the South Side of Chicago, had a personal connection to the music culture of the city. It was also fitting that the first Hairy Who exhibit was held at the Hyde Park Art Center. This was a group of artists comfortable, even thriving in the shadow of the art world.

According to the Art Institute it was Wirsum who coined the name 'Hairy Who.' Though the work of this short lived collective, active from 1966–1969, has continued to be elevated. It is Wirsum's work that upon close examination feels more resonant with much of art today. That of course is an almost meaningless statement on its face given the pluralistic nature of art in the 21st century, so let me elaborate. Karl Wirsum was a painter's painter, a drawer's drawer, a sketcher's sketcher. His work was an early hybrid of the austere abstract, the sharply graphic, the disturbingly and comically surreal. He was not alone amongst his Hairy Who peers in this regard, but he executed this hybrid aesthetic with great comfort and playfully striking confidence. And beyond aesthetics it is clear, that he was a great observer of the world around him. This is not only apparent in his kinetic 'portrait' *Screamin' Jay Hawkins*, but also from the pages of his sketchbooks which are available for online viewing thanks to Corbett vs Dempsey and their 'Big Dig' project.

As an artist who relishes the exploratory comfort of the sketchbook, it is this collection of Wirsum's own pages that provide the gift of insight into his process and vision of the world. Love it or hate it, what is very apparent is the unabashed inclusion of 1960's fashion and attitude. Bowler hats on dog faced men and women with big hair shimmer in tritone psychedelia. He seems to pull imagery from both photos and his own observations. I see so much in these drawing what I merely got a glimpse of in

his paintings; a slice of life from the times in which he lived, filled with energy and humor that is simultaneously satirical and affectionate.

It is this side of Wirsum's work that makes it so clear as to why 'The Hairy Who' seems to be garnering more praise and celebration. It also helps that the Art Institute has, in 2018, showcased their work in a special exhibition titled after the group. Moreover, so much of what I see today that drives artists was present in this work from over half a century ago. Graphic qualities familiar from comics, cartoons, and advertising exist in a disharmonious pastiche with iconographic portraiture and expressionistic forms that speak to more primal sensory experiences. It was, after all, the 60's. But our idealized version of flower children and Woodstock is somewhat dismantled by Wirsum's edge.

Perhaps it is because we are in a political moment that runs parallel to that of the 60's (albeit to amplified extremes) that is part and parcel to the relevance of this work today. But it is undeniably more than that. It is not just the aforementioned SSION, so many artists (Jeniva Ellis comes to mind) and artistic spaces that feel akin to what Wirsum and his peers began to carve out. The work

flew in the face of the academy long before it was cool to do so. And now that it is practically a convention, Wirsum feels like a seer whose gaze cut through pomp and circumstance in pursuit a more purely honest form of expression. The possibilities of what can be generated through the convergence of the graphic, the figurative, the expressive, the surreal, can be found across the walls of studio spaces, in breweries, on the outsides of buildings, all over the internet, and even tattooed on people's bodies. Wirsum is a big part of the artistic legacy of this city and of contemporary art. Like so many, I am grateful for his mark on this world and know that he will be missed.

Evan Carter

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

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.

Karl Wirsum, (Left) *Untitled*, January 20, 1966, colored pencil and ball-point pen on sketchbook paper 14 x 11 inches; (center) *Untitled*, March 4, 1966, colored pencil and ball-point pen on sketchbook paper 14 x 11 inches; (Right) *Untitled*, January 4, 1966, colored pencil, graphite, and ball-point pen on sketchbook paper 14 x 11 inches. Photos: Corbett vs Dempsey.



REVIEWS

“Mise en abyme,” Paintings by Rachel Pontious at Playground Detroit

by K.A. Letts

Spring 2021 finds us in transition from the isolation of the Covid-19 pandemic to something like the status quo ante. Rachel Pontious’s first solo show at Playground Detroit, “Mise en abyme,” treats us to an uneasy assessment of where we have just been, and where we are going. In her statement she says, “This body of work has been simmering in my mind for a while and changed many times throughout the past year as we all adjusted to new ways of existing, caring, communicating, coping.”

The twelve paintings in “Mise en abyme” mark the unsettled portal in the artist’s mind between present stasis and hazy future. The title of the collection refers to a formal technique, in both literature and visual art, of placing a copy of an image within itself, often suggesting an infinitely recurring sequence—mirrors within mirrors into infinity. In addition to this strategy, Pontious has incorporated imagery derived from her close reading of the Tarot—specifically of the seven cards in the minor arcana (swords, pentacles, cups and wands) which refer to transition, crisis and change. She has incorporated these formal

methods and cultural references into a dense matrix of intuitive meaning and emotionally fraught content that describes the artist’s feelings of depression, confusion and isolation. An accompanying ‘zine provides detailed commentary on the elaborate literary and art historical underpinnings of the work.

The paintings in the exhibit are rendered within a narrow chromatic band: black, white, and a queasy green. If free-floating anxiety has a color, this murky malachite might be it. Instead of grisaille, perhaps we can refer to it as “greenaille.” The clotted greenish blacks and grays of the four largest paintings suffuse the gallery with an ambience of dread.

The *mise en abyme* device and the minor Tarot arcana are central to the imagery and composition of the series of four door-size paintings that dominate the gallery. Each painting represents a threshold into a psychological space of slippery intent and shadowed meaning. The first in the series, *Seven of Swords*, features a slim, vertical band of spiraling stairs resting between two narrow strips



Installation: “Mise En Abyme,”
paintings by Rachel Pontious
at Playground Detroit. Photo:
Samantha’s List.

of darkness, as if we were looking through a slitted door. The painting has a kind of nightmare quality, with stairs appearing to lead both up and down. A mysterious hallway in the middle leads off to an unknown destination. The mood is one of disorientation. *Seven of Pentacles*, is, if possible, more claustrophobic and even less formally satisfactory. The monumental canvas looms, a solid wall of dreary architectural decorative painting, stopping us in our tracks. There is no escape; a sense of futility intrudes. While neither of these artworks is particularly pleasant, Pontious has effectively evoked in them the depressive emotional state she seems to be aiming for.

The other two large canvases in the series mark a subtle shift in tone. *Seven of Cups* makes better compositional use of the large canvas and seems more closely tied to the artist's personal experience. It is a bar scene, seen from above and behind, as if we are leaving the convivial group, smokes, drinks and all. The well-painted de Chirico-esque *mise en abyme* (within yet another *mise en abyme*) positioned high above eye level, gives some



Rachel Pontious, *Seven of Pentacles* (detail), 2021, oil on canvas. Photo: Samantha's List.



Rachel Pontious, *Seven of Swords*, 2021, oil on canvas, 96 x 60 inches. Photo: Samantha's List.

sense of opening possibility. The erupting volcano in *Seven of Wands* finally delivers an explosive payoff for all the confusion and frustration of the first three paintings. The roiling clouds of smoke heave up and out, while the small staircase surrounded by sheltering hands in the lower third of the painting invites us enigmatically down and within.

The mood changes yet again with the four diminutive paintings in *Suitmarks*, lightening from the anguished histrionics of the larger paintings to something simpler and more hopeful. Each 6 x 6 square refers to a suit of the minor arcana employing images of common bar staples: a plastic cocktail sword, a glass (cup), a coaster (pentacles), a book of matches (wands). Together, they make a pleasing corollary to the impromptu still life at the foot of the larger *Seven of Cups*. The monochrome green palette, here, pleases the eye in the smaller paintings, the flat white



Rachel Pontious, *Suitmarks: Swords, Cups, Pentacles, Wands*, 2021, oil on panel, each 6 x 6 inches. Photo: K.A. Letts.

background in each delivering an airy sense of space and light.

Pontious seems at her most comfortable with the imagery and scale of the four 24" x 18" paintings that recapitulate the *mise en abyme* strategy, but with the inner image filling a larger portion of the overall composition. Rather than dominating or competing, the loosely painted outer surround provides a complementary frame for the images within. In each, a sprightly skeleton incised on gray encaustic (and representing the artist herself) capers through the composition, sometimes alone, sometimes not. These figures, taken from the artist's sketchbooks, are intimate and appealing—even humorous—and provide some relief from the gloom of the larger scale work.

Pontious says in her artist's statement: "This past year has felt like a forcible placement into the abyss. A thresh-

old that promises the future actually leads us to forget what we were looking for; it isn't the future at all." The paintings in "Mis en abyme" are, in sum, an emotionally eloquent distillation of our COVID-19 year, with its lost time, lost friends, lost creative momentum. They represent one artist's reflective pause before the present becomes the past and we plunge into the post-pandemic future.

"Mis en Abyme" was on view at Playground Detroit from April 10 to May 15. For more information, go to toplaygrounddetroit.com.

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.



Rachel Pontious, *Strange Chalices of Vision*, 2021, oil, pencil and encaustic on panel, 24 x 18 inches. Photo: Samantha's List.

Telling Their Stories: “ArtFields”

Lake City, South Carolina, 2021

By Peter Chametzky

A Black man stands offering his broad back to the viewer. Clad in camo pants and capped in the stars and stripes he contemplates the Pledge of Allegiance, embossed onto a glowing gold leaf ground. All-American and strong, but vulnerable in his Hanes. Such is the image and effect of Clarence Heyward’s painting, *PTSD* a timely stand-out in this year’s “ArtFields” in Lake City, SC, the eighth edition since 2013. The Clayton NC artist’s statement in the TRAX Visual Art Center asked: “What happens when you are Black and grow up to realize that the allegiance that you have to America isn’t reciprocated...When you ‘fit the description.’”

From April 23 to May 1 ArtFields 2021 showed 330 artists in forty-one venues ranging from small shops to large spaces like TRAX and others created in former agricultural markets and processing sheds, including the cavernous “R.O.B.” (“Ragsdale [Tobacco] Old Building”). Billionaire businesswoman and local native and resident Darla Moore’s vision of art building community and jump-starting the economy of this whistle-stop in the ru-



Clarence Heyward, *PTSD*, 2020. Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas. 61.5 x 49.5 inches. Photo by Susan Felleman.



Lake City, South Carolina, April 23, 2021. L: Joe's Barbershop, R: Herman A. Keith Jr. *From This Moment Forward*, 2016. Mural inspired by Gee's Bend Quilters, 100 W. Main St. Photo by Peter Chametzky.

(Left) Levon Parrish, *Reinvention*, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches. Photo courtesy of Lake City ArtFields Collective. (Right) Chris Lawson, *(Q) Quilt*, original photographs and mixed media on fabric. 78 x 64 inches. Photo by Susan Felleman.



ral, central inland Pee Dee region seems, at least on the street-level, to have paid off. An expanding program of permanent public murals and sculptures provides art year-round. And a volunteer work force assisting the paid staff brings diverse ages and races together. Upscale boutiques, coffee shops, wine bars, and even a downtown hotel now rub elbows with stalwarts such as ArtFields venues Joe's Barbershop, Pirate's T-Shirts Plus, and Bold and Sassy Boutique. Owners and organizers curate the works to match the business's sensibilities and ambiances. In Joe McGee's barbershop, for instance, a grooming and gathering spot for African American men, figurative works tend to focus on heads while probing souls, such as this year's Merit Prize winning *Reinvention* by Atlanta's Levon Parrish.

With a top prize of \$50,000, ArtFields bears comparison with Grand Rapids' more lucrative "ArtPrize." With the caveat that I have only toured ArtPrize once, my impression is that ArtFields is closer to *documenta* in the range, quality and *contemporaneity* of the work on display than to the more populist ArtPrize. Asked, then, why ArtFields limits entries to artists working in twelve southern states, Executive Director Jamison Kerr, a cosmopolitan native of the region, states: "these artists need to tell their stories."

ArtFields' works are juried into the show by outside experts, and prizes are awarded by a separate jury. This year's jury included rising artworld star Jacolby Satterwhite, who spoke at the awards ceremony about coming home to South Carolina and recalling how art had em-

(Left) Charles Eady, *Anna*, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist. (Right) Zaire McPhearson, *Church Mothers*, 2020, plaster, books, wood, paint. 60.5 x 14 x 14 inches. Ronald E. McNair Center, Lake City, SC. Photo by Zaire McPhearson.





Micheal Austin Diaz and Holly Hanesian, *New Histories: The Gadsden Farm Project*, 2021, multimedia installation. 36 x 36 x 120 inches. Photo by Susan Felleman.

powered him to tell his story as a young Black and gay man. Satterwhite was in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and in the "About Face: Stonewall, Revolt and New Queer Art" in 2019 at the Wrightwood 659 gallery in Chicago. Many of the stories ArtField's artists told in 2021 related to their identities and that of our country. Numerous White male artists ruminated on their feelings of both privilege and privation. *(Q)quilt* by Chris Lawson of New Orleans recalled at first glance folk art or Rauschenberg's *Bed* riffing on it. Lawson's statement started: "As a White male born and raised in the South I've thought a lot about ways to address my complex and abject ancestry," and went on to reveal in words and pictures his familial history and his debt to horror movies and queer cinema.

Overt references to Trump were largely absent, but were present in two critical pieces: Ashley Tayler's *Destroyer/Disgrace* and Cherie Bosela's *Verbatim*. Only one or two pieces made explicit references to COVID. Racial justice and injustice, as well as resilience and reading, seemed more to the fore, as in Heyward's painting and the first prize winning work by Charles Eady of Ocala, FL. The painting *Anna* portrays a character from Eady's book, *Hidden Freedom: The South Before Racism*. The eponymous, folded arm heroine of the frontal portrait pledges to "read myself free."

The town that tried to bar Ronald McNair from borrowing books from the public library now honors the MIT Ph.D., who became our second African American astronaut



Teddy Pruett, *"Whatever Happened to Baby?"*, 2020, textiles. 75 x 75 inches. Photo by Susan Felleman.



Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton, *Transparent Voices*, 2021, fabric, gold thread, sticky rice, fake marigold flowers, metal rods. 240 x 180 x 180 inches. Photo by Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton.

and who tragically died in the January 1986 Challenger explosion. He is remembered with a monumental memorial and a learning center that tells his story and serves as an ArtFields venue. This year its dominant piece was *Church Mothers* by Zaire McPhearson of Durham, NC, five steles celebrating the Sunday hats crowning African American women and the multiple, difficult journeys they traverse, represented by the stacks of warped and rotatable books supporting the busts.

New Histories: the Gadsden Farm Project, a social practice piece displayed in a new and atmospheric venue, The House on Church Street, by Michael Austin Diaz and Holly Hanessian of Asheville, N.C., was an installation similar to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* on the history of Gadsden County, Florida, "once a thriving agricultural center...now the poorest in the state...and the only...with a majority African American population." Featuring live produce and ceramic plates dedicated to farming families and crafted by Hanessian, and redolent of the alfalfa hay beneath the table, the installation also included recorded interviews with residents softly wafting through the wainscoted dining room.

In Bold and Sassy Boutique, Teddy Pruett of Lake City, FL, showed *Whatever Happened to Baby* an assemblage of children's clothes with witty, Ringgold-like story lines stitched into them, such as: "Lattie Amelia loved to sing but no one wanted to listen so she sang to the chickens.

They were okay with it." In Pirate's T-Shirts Plus a simply sophisticated interactive political piece by Cody Gatlin of Johnson City, TN invited people to begin *Paying for America's Sins* by (illegally) stamping likenesses of Harriet Tubman or Chief Joseph onto U.S. legal tender.

Sisavanh Phouthavong Houghton, who won the top prize in the painting category in the 2019 ArtFields, for *Clustered Debris: Secret War on Laos*, a large-scale geometric acrylic abstraction inspired by the brutal American bombing of Indochina. Born in Laos, Houghton's earliest years were spent in refugee camps before the family finally found refuge in the United States. Now a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, her 2021 *Transparent Voices* consisted of hundreds of rice bag sections loosely stitched together with gold thread and hung tentlike in the R.O.B., with each panel photo-printed to bear the ghostly likeness of a fellow refugee with name and number emblazoned across the chest. The floor was strewn with artificial marigolds while the form and sway of the piece movingly evoked movement, migration, and temporary shelter. Another hanging piece in the same space, *Proletariat* by Masela Nkolo of Duluth GA, consisted of dozens of recycled and deconstructed lanterns reconstructed into small animal-like creatures. They commemorate the abused Congolese children who mine the cobalt that powers our devices and the neo-colonial extractive economy.

Video, sound, and light installations were also present among the many paintings, textiles (abstract, representational, metaphoric), sculptures and installations, as was the impressive thirty-five minute dance film, *Birth of Pleasure* by Anicka Austin and Lev Omelchenko of Riverdale, GA., inspired by the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche and by Audre Lourde. The multiracial company enacted bodily movements and group rituals "which teetered between episodes of violence, humor and joy."

Through the high quality, sophistication, and diversity of their work, ArtFields' 2021 artists engagingly allowed us to see, to read, and to listen to their stories, as we all dance on the volcano that is these United States.

Peter Chametzky is Professor of Art History at the University of South Carolina. MIT Press will publish his new book, *Turks, Jews, and Other Germans in Contemporary Art*, in September 2021.

Look at Me!

The virtual edition of Chicago EXPO

by Evan Carter

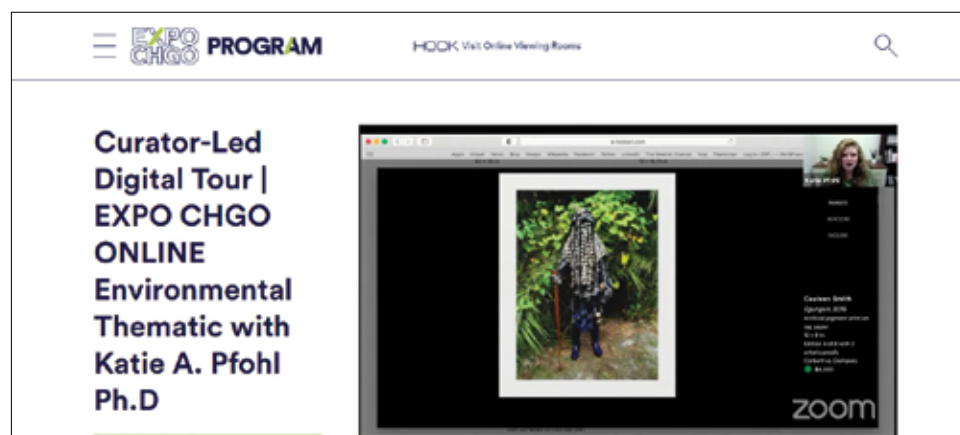
Someway, Somehow EXPO Chicago seems to elude me every year. I never quite get to experience it in full. Mostly because no matter how much I think I want to attend, I find it to be a daunting chore. Although others can probably relate, I am speaking for myself when I say that it is a short lived, inconveniently scheduled, and expensive (for some) event to participate in. Based on my past experiences, I have found it to be alienating, exhausting, and a great way to de-sensitize oneself to aesthetic experience, thereby neutralizing and containing one's interest and, dare I say, passion for art. This is achieved through the sheer volume and excess of not only the innumerable art objects but of the overpowering presence of manufactured social and cultural capital. This year's virtual rendition of EXPO is different in a way that is radically boring.

Recalling past experiences I have had at EXPO Chicago reminds me of the palpable energy generated when market forces and culture collide. I remember coming up the escalators and catching the annual event's signature aromatic umami of freshly painted drywall, expensive perfume, carpet shampoo, and Hannah's Bretzel. I would then proceed into the expansive space and wander from wall to wall searching for something interesting, challenging,

familiar, aesthetically pleasing, new. At a certain point I would stop being able to tell if what I was seeing could be characterized by any of those words.

The most radical change that has occurred is that this year's EXPO was a one-hundred percent online art fair. How is anyone supposed to schmooze? How can we know what the latest looks are from wealthy art patrons and hip poor (or rich) students performing some soft aesthetic rebellion? Where are we supposed to get that uncomfortable feeling of being lost in a labyrinth of white walls and people mulling about with their faces pointed at their smartphones? Is this not what the art fair is about? Ambivalence, capital, and the glassy-eyed hopefulness of those who have neither but want it oh so badly? Not this year. But what better a place to feel as though you are tumbling down an infinite spiral staircase of conflicting ideas and emotions about culture and taste than the internet.

EXPO Chicago has already had an online presence in recent years, hosting panel discussions and artist talks not all that different from the ones that comprise the online programming of 2021. In the past I spent more time at Navy Pier wandering obsessively to satisfy a neurotic impulse to see every work before getting the heck out of



Screen captures of an online event at EXPO CHGO ONLINE 2021.

Screen captures of an online event at EXPO CHGO ONLINE 2021.



there. I find that is an easier thing to do on foot. Sitting at a computer and scanning the digital archive provided by HOOK is just as dull as any other experience I have had scanning digital archives filled with photographs of objects that are meant to be viewed in person. As good as the HOOK archive is as a presentation tool, with all the typical attributional text and a nicely expanded image over a black background, I found it difficult to linger in front my screen. It is as though this online version of an art fair somehow cemented things I already suspected or knew. Such as that art fairs are first and foremost about money and a thin veil of critical inquiry barely even attempts to disguise the true nature of the event. Obvious. Or that digital images on a computer screen are not ideal for the art viewing experience. Even more obvious.

Inverting my past experience at EXPO I spent far less time doom-scrolling pictures of paintings and tuned in to the video discussions instead. If you have not yet been primed by the past year of remote living, I would love to hear your story. But like most people, Zoom culture is now a part of my life, so tuning in to a number of the online events organized and hosted by EXPO felt like business as usual. I enjoyed a talk with artist Omar Velasquez and curator Carla Acevedo-Yates on Puerto Rican folklore, music, and painting. It was a lovely retreat into the creative realms we can explore just by listening to artists who refrain from hiding their creative thought processes from public view. Other events included 'Environmental Thematic' in which curator Katie A. Pfohl presented a selection of works addressing climate change and the environment. A valiant effort but one undermined by a failure to characterize the role art may or may not play in this crisis and whether or not it adds value to the larger effort of addressing climate change. Since an art fair is about selling objects, the work in this selection felt more illustrative than demonstrative, making me wonder what this presentation was for. Of

course, every artist needs a platform. But since the target audience is collectors, the sale of work purporting to address the climate crisis feels like a quick and easy way for collectors to mark the 'climate' box on their virtue signal checklist.

Collectors were front and center for virtual EXPO. A virtual seminar on collection management covered the difficulty of collecting in covid while reminiscing for better times. I know collections management business took a hit during covid—but talk about first world problems. The seminar also briefly mentioned increased regulations in the art collecting and accounting space but there was little detail in the discussion, if any, of how this would affect artists and what scale of collections were coming under greater scrutiny. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the recent rise of NFTs in this particular talk.

I was not able to attend every event. I'm not sure how anyone could. Maybe I missed something exciting or innovative for this year's virtual EXPO but I can't help but think there was a missed opportunity here to create something unique, to showcase more artists and give them a platform, to explore cultural space addressing the very issue that so radically changed this annual event. I am not an expert on EXPO. But in addition to the most obvious missing element, physical space, there were other things missing here as well: a sense of community, vision, deep critical inquiry. The question is whether or not those things could ever really be found at EXPO—or any of the other major art fairs.

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.

“In the Language of my Captor”

Gary Burnley at Elizabeth Houston Gallery, NYC

By Alison Martin

Every picture tells a story, even if it's several pictures combined into one to tell a bigger story. At least that's how it was with Gary Burnley's exhibition titled “In the Language of my Captor.” Burnley's show, held earlier this year at the Elizabeth Houston Gallery on the Lower East Side in Manhattan, consisted of 20 photographic collages of different people from different points in time. These images range from the iconic, like the Mona Lisa, to his personal history as a Black American.

In these works, Burnley uses modern-day photographs of Black people as a means to assert their place in history in a context similar to that of the well-known practice of wealthy 18th and 19th century Europeans to sit for portraits. He's giving them the same opportunity as their “captors,” so to speak.

The title of the exhibition comes from a poem of the same name by Shane McCrae. In it he writes:

*I cannot talk about the place I came from
I do not want it to exist
The way I knew it
In the language of my captor.*

About his work, Burnley has said, “It's not so much that Black Americans inhabit a different world from their White counterparts, but that they live in the same world differently.”

Gary Burnley, 71, was born and raised in St. Louis. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe since the early 1980s. He received a BFA from Washington University in St. Louis and an MFA from Yale University.

Burnley has a particular interest in transit art with notable public projects that include the design of a New York City subway station in 1983. He also was one of the leading designers of St. Louis's light rail transportation system completed in 1994.

In this recent New York show, one notable work was titled *Smile #2* and featured a close-up view of the Mona



Gary Burnley, *Smile #2*, 2019. Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 22 x 17 inches. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

Lisa cast in a very pale shade of blue. Right next to the subject's iconic half smile is a similar type of smile on a Black woman staring straight ahead with a hopeful, determined look in her eyes.

The image of the Black woman is shown in a royal blue light and is juxtaposed over the Mona Lisa. It is not a whole image, but one that has circular cut-outs scattered in various spots situated in a way that reveals key components of Mona Lisa's expression while also revealing key components of the Black woman's expression.

Gary Burnley, (Left) *Kenisha*, 2019. Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 22 x 17 inches; (Right) *Edward*, 2019. Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 22 x 17 inches. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Houston Gallery.



A similar work, *Kenisha*, consists of a woman created with several juxtaposed images, including that of Marie Antoinette. The character in the collage has the 18th century French queen's elaborate hairdo, jewelry, and gown. Here, Burnley is putting the Black woman on the same level as Marie Antoinette who symbolized great wealth and indulged herself in a luxurious, lavish lifestyle and treated her inferiors poorly. The juxtaposed toothy grin of a Black woman mimics the queen's confident smile, while circular cutouts revealing other parts of the underlying image against a backdrop of distant hills.

Burnley makes this same point with *Edward* who is modeled after Shakespeare's King Edward III. The collage consists of an image of the lower half of Edward's face revealing his chin and beard as well as his lacy white collar. The rest of the image, from the nose up, is that of a Black

man. These two juxtaposed images make up one authoritative character portrayed by two different races, putting the Black man on par with White people in power.

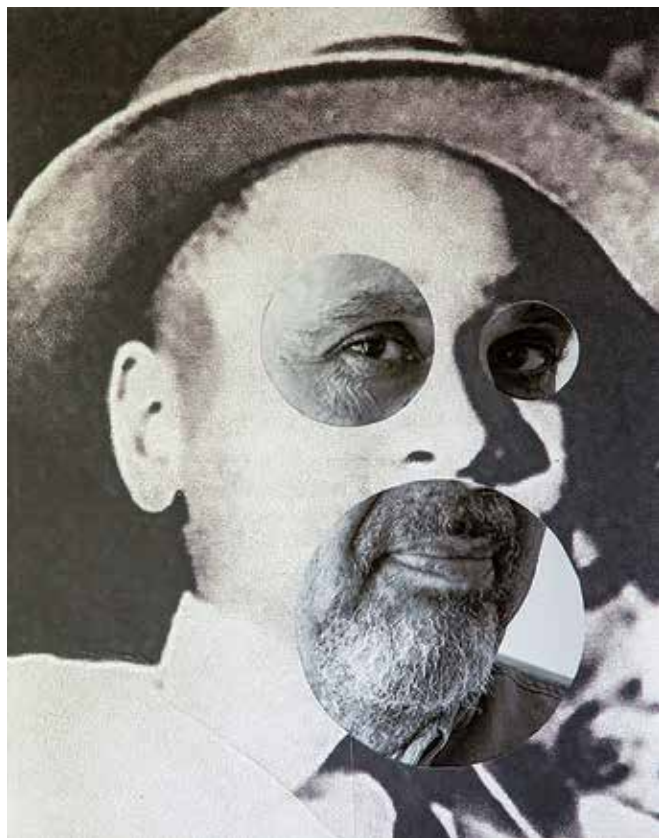
In an untitled collage, the forehead and eyes of a White 18th century young woman with curly brown locks and a thin, pink headband and royal blue formal gown is juxtaposed with a black and white photograph of a Black woman with curly dark hair and a broad smile also wearing a formal dress, (but in a more 20th century style) and a corsage of white roses on her left shoulder. Her photograph is placed in a way to connect directly to the features of the White woman, altogether conveying an image of cheerful innocence.

Burnley completely transforms a silhouette from 1796, the only known silhouette of an enslaved female from that era, and Seymour Joseph Guy's 1870 painting *Story*



Gary Burnley, (left) *Untitled*, 2018. Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 22 x 17 inches; (Right), *Knock, Knock*, 2019, Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 39 x 32 inches. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Houston Gallery.

Gary Burnley, *Self-Portrait*, 2016. Framed unique archival inkjet photo and mixed media physical collage, 22 x 17 inches. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Houston Gallery.



of the *Golden Locks* into one piece with *Knock, Knock*. In Burnley's version, he uses the young woman in her bedroom from the Guy painting but right in front of her is the silhouette titled *Flora*, which morphs into a shadow of the girl in the painting.

One of the most poignant works in the show is Burnley's *Self-Portrait* in which he uses a well-known photo of 14-year-old Emmett Till who was brutally and publicly murdered in Mississippi in 1955 where Jim Crow laws were strongly practiced and enforced. Till was lynched for supposedly talking to a White woman in a grocery store which was prohibited at the time. Unfortunately, Till was neither the first nor last person of color to face such horrific treatment by Whites and more than 60 years later it's still going on. Burnley takes the photograph of Till and covers Till's eyes and mouth with his own. Burnley's point here is that Emmett Till could have very easily been him as he is subject to the same type of abuse just because they share the same skin color.

With this series, Burnley does a fine job conveying to the viewer the timely and powerful theme that Black Americans should have and should have had a more prominent and positive place in history. While there are plenty

of Black heroes such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr., Black Americans are also still remembered by too many people as being inferior. It's a theme that sadly continues to this day with cases such as George Floyd's murder which is an example of how much differently Blacks are treated by police. However, with the Black Lives Matter protests and with more positive black role models such as Barack Obama and inauguration speaker and poet Amanda Gorman, that inferiority is starting to fade.

Alison Martin is a lifelong resident of New York City and has a great appreciation for the arts. While living in Manhattan, Alison takes time to enjoy its cultural offerings and takes advantage of exploring the latest exhibitions at the city's many museums, galleries, and other art related venues.

“Journey’s in Place”

Fiber Art by Carole Harris

By K.A. Letts

“Fabric has memory, it holds on to time.”
Carole Harris

In her solo show, “Journey’s in Place” at Hill Gallery in Birmingham, Michigan, Detroit’s most eminent fiber artist continues her journey through the world and through art history with 24 new fabric and paper collages. Each piece appropriates and amplifies the visual language of contemporary abstraction, revived and enriched by the artist’s extensive knowledge of traditional crafts and materials. During a career spanning half a century, Carole Harris has followed her inner compass, persistently applying a fresh eye to the material potential of fiber as an art form.

Taught needleworking in childhood by her mother, Harris’s early work employed traditional American patchwork quilt techniques to create richly colored artworks reminiscent of the idiosyncratic geometry of the Gees Bend quilters. The formal influences on her work have changed and grown over time, though, as the artist has

continued her research into worldwide textile traditions. Her art practice now includes influences from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean as well as visual strategies absorbed from modern abstract expressionists like Richard Diebenkorn and Al Loving. Her aesthetic vocabulary ranges from traditional American quilt-making, felting, dyeing and embroidery to the influence of Boro. This traditional Japanese craft involves the reworking and mending of textiles through piecing, patching and stitching, treating damage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. Exposure to this concept seems to have freed Harris to embrace the intrinsic beauty of imperfection in her materials as a source of expressive power.

In this most recent body of work, Harris continues to innovate. She has added yet another dimension to her creative output with an exploration of the traditional art of Joomchi. The technique, which is similar to felting, is a Korean method of making textured and colored paper by hand from mulberry fiber. It results in a product stronger

Carole Harris, (Left) *Flowers for Breonna*, 2020, mulberry paper, threads, fabrics 19 x 21.5 inches; (Right) *Momento*, 2018, mulberry paper, threads, fabrics, 34.5 x 36.5 inches. Photos courtesy of Hill Gallery.





Carole Harris, (Left) *Migration*, 2020, mulberry paper, threads, fabrics 40 x 38 inches; (Right) *Aftermath of a Dream*, 2020, mulberry paper, threads, fabrics 34.5 x 36.5 inches. Photos courtesy of Hill Gallery.

and tougher than traditional paper and lends itself well to combination with fabric and other materials. Harris makes full use of this adaptable craft by layering fabric with the mulberry paper in dense strata that suggest an almost geological accretion of material, layers of color and texture literally embodying history, memory and time's passage.

She says of her recent work:

It's not as precise and pristine as some of the things that I did before, but I think that's what happens over time. Time kind of fades things, and gives a nice little patina, and has nicks and scars and scratches that give something character, but it also tells a story. A lot of what I do has holes in it, but I like the holes because it reveals something about what's below the surface or what's behind it. Often in life, what you see on the surface doesn't begin to tell the whole story.

Her 2020 artwork, *Flowers for Breonna*, demonstrates some of the artist's procedural strategies. The modestly sized combination of fabric, mulberry paper, applique, and hand stitching makes full use of the expressive qualities of the torn and irregular edge of each constituent piece. A variety of hand-dyed fabrics, from pink cheesecloth to teal muslin to heavily worked mulberry paper, form the ground of the artwork. Hand-stitched embroidery, ran-

dom chartreuse stitched dashes and strings of deep green on the surface of the artwork intimate stems, the loose threads and frayed edges of the layers of fabric implying light and air. Alternate red and green layers, placed one over the other, create a concentric frame for the composition within; elliptical voids allow a glimpse of the material underneath. Small circular, blossom-like appliques are attached to the surface with traditional French knot



Carole Harris, *Blue Then Green*, 2020, mulberry paper, threads, fabrics 12 x 15.5 inches. Photo by K.A. Letts.

Carole Harris, *Etude*, 2020-01, 2020 mulberry paper, threads, fabrics 12 x 9 inches. Photo by K.A. Letts.

embroidery. Harris uses each technique with the easy mastery of long practice; each mark made fulfills a formal goal entirely outside the normal confines of traditional craft.

With *Momento*, Harris makes more extensive use of the free form planes and subtle tonalities of the mulberry paper and fabric. Her skillful manipulation of warm pinks, reds, oranges and yellows shows the artist to be an accomplished colorist as well as a master of formal composition. Four oval striped figures dominate the lower portion of the composition, with small other holes echoing the freeform shapes at the edges of the artwork. The patient intentionality of the recurring, colored lines formed by the layers of fabric and paper creates a sense of inevitability that would be difficult, or impossible, to reproduce in painted form.

In the larger artworks now on display in the gallery, Harris sacrifices some of the attractive tactile features of sensuously edged smaller pieces in order to highlight surface and pictorial elements on a more monumental scale. A particularly successful example is *Migration*, which depends not at all on the intrinsic interest of the layers outlining the edge of the composition. The mulberry paper takes on the quality of a hide or skin, marred and scarred. The relatively limited palette employed in *Migration* suggests printed material such as a map or a set of cryptic directions to a mysterious destination. The running hand stitches on the surface are extensive and appear to refer to the contour maps of marine charts. Harris leaves us to imagine for ourselves a trip to the stars, a voyage to an unknown destination or a psychological journey through time.

As the critical boundaries between previously generated crafts and fine art have become increasingly porous over the last few years, we can hope that the achievements of fiber artists like Harris will find a broader and more appreciative audience. This recent body of work amply demonstrates her continuing innovation:



I now draw inspiration from walls, aging structures and objects that reveal years of use. My intention is to celebrate the beauty in the frayed, the decaying and the repaired. I want to capture the patina of color softened by time, as well as feature the nicks, scratches scars and other marks left by nature or humans. I want to map these changes and tell the stories of time, place and people in cloth, using creative stitching, layering and the mixing of colorful and textured fabrics.

In this collection of new work, Harris employs the vocabulary of formal abstraction, enriched by the tactile surfaces, voids, edges and textures of her materials to demonstrate, in a uniquely felt way, ephemerality and endurance, persistence and memory. Her artworks show her to be a master of her materials as well as an acutely sensitive observer and maker, actively exploring and expanding the limits of her chosen medium.

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.

Justin Marshall: “The End”

At Public Pool, Hamtramck, MI

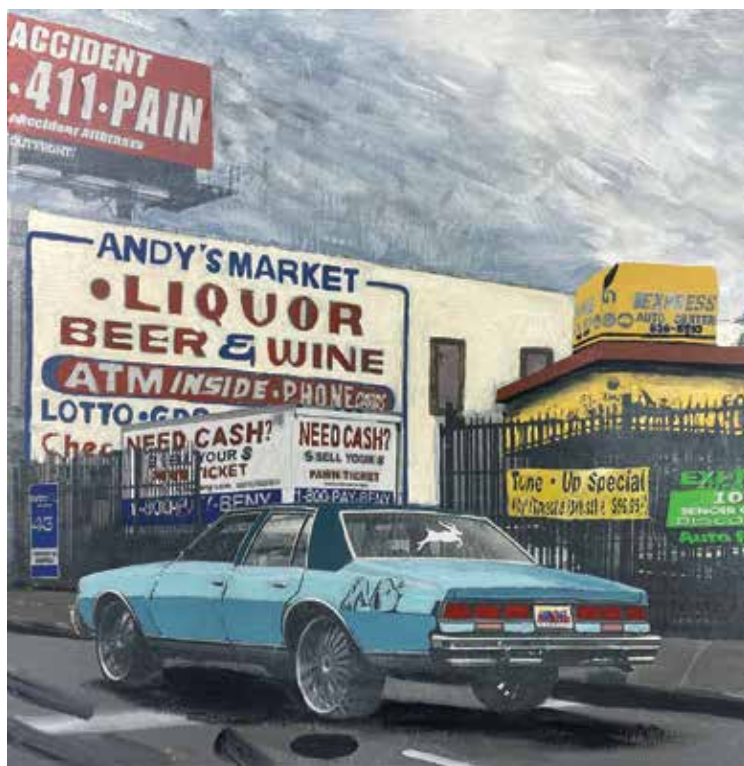
By K.A. Letts

It's spring 2021—masks are off, and we are all eager to put a big, emphatic period at the end of our pandemic sentence. Yet the scars of 2020 remain; prolonged isolation has forced many artists into an existential reexamination of their priorities and assumptions. With his solo show of figurative painting—appropriately titled “The End”—Detroit painter Justin Marshall joins in.

In his artist statement, Marshall says, “I do not recognize this country anymore, the ideals I believed I grew up with are gone and it seems as though they will never return. In retrospect I find that this is a driving force in the subject matter of my paintings.” His investigations, now at the member-operated gallery Public Pool in Hamtramck, MI, include two contrasting bodies of work that consider death, the decline of 21st century capitalist models, and the ephemerality of celebrity, all viewed in the light of recent collective trauma.

Three of the most formally satisfying artworks in “The End” tell the story, through cityscape, of social and economic transition in a city that once aspired to greatness but now struggles merely to survive.

The foreground of *Andy's Market* features a frequently seen automotive artifact of Detroit. The blue Chevrolet Impala from the 1970s, carefully preserved and lovingly personalized, is a visual testament to the care and persistence with which Detroit's inhabitants combat the forces of entropy constantly threatening the physical integrity of the city. This resistance to decay is not without cost; surrounding the car are skillfully painted signs—“411-Pain,” “Need Cash”—along with the usual invitations to



Justin Marshall, *Andy's Market*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 inches. Photo courtesy of Public Pool.



Justin Marshall, *Speedy Greasy*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Photo courtesy of Public Pool.

self-medication. They leave the hardships of daily life in 21st century Detroit in no doubt. The light is flat and affectless, and the sky is gray. In spite of the lively visual incident in the painting, *Andy's Market* is devoid of human presence.

This desolate mood is recapitulated and amplified in *Speedy Greasy*, which captures the empty sweep of the streetscape, populated only by automobiles. Leafless trees peeking over the top of the buildings suggest empty lots behind the commercial strip, the bleakness of the deserted scene somewhat mitigated by the cheerful yellow of the building's façade and signage.

Occupying a central location in the gallery is *Jay Dee's Mart*. Though similarly titled to *Andy's Market*, this painting presents a subtle emotional contrast. Under a clear blue sky, a grand, classical block of

a building—possibly a former bank—has been converted to a new use appropriate to modest present-day needs—the grand capitalism of the past yielding to the small-bore economic activity of a poor neighborhood. The elegant Greek columns have been freshly overpainted in the green, black, and red stripes of the pan-African flag, while the pattern surrounding the threshold of the building, a modified version of Buddhism's endless knot motif, has been only partially refreshed in black and red and hints at a change in the ethnicity of the ownership.



Justin Marshall, *Jay Dee's Mart*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 48 inches. Photo courtesy of Public Pool.



Justin Marshall, *Three Tates*, 2020, acrylic, aerosol and flocking on canvas, 3@24" x 24" each. Photo: K.A. Letts.

Jay Dee's Mart encapsulates a common urban story of ethnic transition in the city's population and economic status over time. That this is a typically American story is emphasized by the American flag hanging on the side of the building. Even though no humans are visible in the painting, the door of the market is open, and there is an open container to the left of the entrance. What the grand architecture has lost in former dignity it gains in the implied vitality of renewed economic activity

Marshall has produced another body of work for "The End" which is conceptually ambitious, though less successful formally. In contrast to the thinly painted street-scenes, the oversize portraits of deceased celebrities and an imaginary character Marshall calls "Peter Ott," feature curdled, heavily painted layers of acrylic over flocking that embody the ghastly effect of imperfectly embalmed corpses. These distressed—and distressing—images have an ambiguous emotional aura.

In *Three Tates*, nearly identical versions of one the Manson family's murdered victims are arranged in a row. Her face is obscured by a thick, mask-like puddle of amber acrylic the consistency of hard candy floating on the surface of the canvas. She seems to be peering through the barrier at the viewer, her intent unclear. In these paintings, Marshall seems to be reaching for a resolution to his perception that something has been irrevocably lost, though what that is remains obscure. These paintings have the hermetic quality of artwork produced by the incarcerated, perhaps an inevitable consequence of this year's enforced isolation, and a comment of its own. The artist demonstrates a willingness to take risks with his work here that is to be applauded, even when the results are problematic.

Oddly enough, the heavy textures and clotted paint that vex the surfaces of the large portraits work better in a smaller format. Marshall's painting *Sears*, while only a fraction of the size of the portraits, eloquently memori-



Justin Marshall, *Sears*, acrylic and flocking on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Photo by K.A. Letts.

alizes the end of 20th century capitalism. An abandoned big box store and derelict parking lot occupy the scene's middle distance under a turbulently cloudy sky. The friable texture of the composition's surface accords perfectly with the gritty grayness of the day and the ruined architecture. The empty mouth of the deserted building marks the center of a bitter architectural memorial to the demise of a certain kind of hubristic consumerism.

But making art is inherently an act of optimism, at least from the artist's perspective, and in "The End," Marshall doesn't leave us hopeless. In a graceful coda, he introduces a welcome breath of fresh air with a small picture, *Milo's Pheasant*. Pheasants are a fairly common sight in post-pandemic, post-bankruptcy Detroit, where urban woodlands now flow like green rivers through the city. In this lyrical avian portrait, recently painted by the artist for his young

son, beige- and green-dappled light glints off the healthy bird's glossy plumage. The bird signifies renewal and suggests that while humans come and go, nature remains and retakes its space.

Marshall's paintings at Public Pool mark the end of a traumatic plague year. They suggest that, like nature, artists—and people—are resilient. In spite of the past year's suffering and isolation, they will survive and recover, experiment, fail, and succeed.

"The End" was view at Public Pool through June 12.

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.



Justin Marshall, *Milo's Pheasant*, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas, 12 x 18 inches. Photo by K.A. Letts.

PRIDE MONTH SPECIAL REVIEWS

Charles Henri Ford/ WITHOUT TOUCHING

By Paul Moreno

In the midst of the pandemic, in a second-floor gallery space, in a Lower East Side building one would easily stroll by without note, Mitchell Alkus Gallery mounted an exhibition of photographs by Charles Henri Ford and work by members of his circle. Curated by Allen Frame, "Charles Henri Ford: Love and Jump Back, Photography by Charles Henri Ford and items from his estate" is not the kind of show that one popped into by happenstance on a day of cruising the galleries. It was a sweet, small, but expansive exhibition that one had to seek out, have already known about, and had made an appointment to see.

Charles Henri Ford was part of a group of artists and intellectuals working in the 1930s–1950s which was brought greater attention in 2019 with a show organized by David Zwirner gallery. The show, *The Young and Evil*, took its name from Charles Henri Ford's 1933, once banned,

now out of print, surrealist novel, co-written with film critic Parker Tyler. These artists, mostly queer men, included Paul Cadmus, Jared French, George Platt Lynes, and Ford's long-time partner Pavel Tchelitchew, as well as the female artists Fidelma Cadmus Kirstein and Margaret Hoening French. They worked, inspired, documented each other, and cavorted together in New York, Fire Island, Provincetown, Rome, Paris, and beyond. The work of these artists is seductive in its portrayal of bohemian life lived in busy studios and on sunny beaches. These artists constantly turned to each other as subjects, posing one another in scenarios that inspire a desire in the viewer to know their biography, the back story, the dirt.



Charles Henri Ford and Pavel Tchelitchew, c. 1940s (photographer unknown). Photo: Mitchell Alkus Gallery.



Pavel Tchelitchev, *Watercolor drawing*, 1930s.
Photo: Mitchell Alpus Gallery.

One can easily assume there are stories to be told about Ford. He was born in 1908 in a small town in Mississippi and by the age of 25 had left Catholic school, published a magazine, and became part of Gertrude Stein's circle in Paris. When he was first published by the *New Yorker*, he adopted the French spelling of 'Henri' for his second name, not wanting to be connected to the more famous Henry Ford, to whom he had no connection. He had a long relationship with acclaimed Russian painter, Pavel Tchelitchev. He seemingly also had one with a would-be actor and son of a carpenter in his employ in Italy. In the 70s Ford met Indra Tamang who would be his assistant, companion, and collaborator until Ford's death in 2002. Tamang became the caretaker of Ford's sister Ruth until her death in 2009. Ford and his sister both had apartments in The Dakota, though they rarely saw each other or visited each other's apartment, rather, they spoke by phone. Upon Ruth's death, Tamang inherited the entire estate of both siblings.

Ford is inextricable from other members of his circle; and their work is also included in the exhibition. One example is a seemingly simple drawing by Ford's long-time partner, Pavel Tchelitchev. It is a quick wispy rendering of an artist in a loose jacket, palette balanced on his arm, brush in the air. The model, in a robe, leans back in an invisible chair. His open collar and bare feet suggest an easy relationship between artist and subject, as opposed to a formal sitting for a commissioned portrait. I imagine the artist in a dusty studio, light filtering through a garret window, as his model poses casually. The artist is carefully landing his brush somewhere, but where?

In one reading, the artist's brush appears to be touching the actual face of his subject. The right-side corner of the room is drawn, and the left corner is implied by other lines, depicting a narrow room where we see the artist and the model. The plane of canvas that would exist between the artist and subject is missing. It is omitted so that it does not block the viewer's eyes from the subject. There is a subtle sexual tension created by the removal of the barrier of the canvas. With the hairs of his brush, the artist is not marking his portrait but extending a caress to the model.

Another reading is that the lines that implied the right-side corner of the room are actually the top and right side of the canvas and we are looking at the artist and his art, and the model is outside the picture, probably to the artist's left. If we believe that we are actually seeing not the model but the painting of the model, then a formal relationship between the artist and model is re-established. If we believe that the horizontal and vertical line denote the canvas's edge then we embrace the strict boundaries in the triangle of artist, art, and subject. But then what

Charles Henri Ford, *Peter Watson and Pavel Tchelitchew*, 1930s, Printed early 1980s, I/V. Photo: Mitchell Algas Gallery.



about the model's naked foot? The lines which represent the floorboards move from the actual floor into the painting, underneath the model, whose bare foot we now see touches the leg of the artist.

I do not know if the artist represented in this *Tchelitchew* drawing is Tchelitchew himself. Maybe it was Ford, standing in as the painter as his lover painted him and a third companion. Maybe Ford was the model for the model. Though it is fun and revealing to let scenarios play out while viewing this work, the details may not be retrievable nor their veracity essential. If we are too caught up in the story, we miss the picture. On the other hand, Ford's photographs are formal and adroit to the point of being deceptively simple. The photos are layered, evoking

narratives with complexity that transcend the limits of fact-checkable biography.

An occasional model for both Tchelitchew and Ford was British art patron and dandy-about-town, Peter Watson. Watson seemed to be very much at home with Ford and Tchelitchew and maybe it was even him in the aforementioned Tchelitchew drawing. Tchelitchew and Peter Watson are presented to us in a stunningly beautiful photograph made by Charles Henri Ford. This room is hardly a garret. The farthest wall is tall and book-filled. A large painting hangs above an English mantle. Tchelitchew leans forward at a console table dressed with a birdcage, a crystal decanter, books, small pots. In front of him, Watson leans back into the corner of a tufted sofa with fringe trimmed cushions. In the very foreground is a heavy and ornate table on which there is a large



Charles Henri Ford, *Pavel Tchelitchew*, 1930s, Printed early 1980s, I/V. Photo: Mitchell Algas Gallery.



(left) Charles Henri Ford, *Italy*, 1930s, printed early 1980s. Photo: Mitchell Alpus Gallery.

(Right) Salvador Dalí, *Lobster Telephone*, 1936 – West Dean College of Arts and Conservation, part of The Edward James Foundation. © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, DACs 2017.



vase of flowers and more translucent objets. Tchelitchew is buttoned up in a striped suit. He is looking down at something he is drawing or writing, his hand which is barely lifted looks large. Watson's suit is blousier, a newspaper is folded in his lap, his face is slightly obscured by a record he is holding up to read its label. The bottom of the photo is very dark and broken up by twin columns of Watson's trousers, of which we see the cuffs, but no ankles, no feet.

Did Ford just see this perfect moment and snap a photo? The moment is perfect. Tchelitchew is half-lighted and half in shadow. Watson is basking in sunlight coming through a window that is implied by a thin line of lit drapery. The amount of Watson's face we see is just enough to give a sense of concentration as well as to show that this is a classically handsome man. We can imagine that Ford is taking a picture of his lover, Tchelitchew, who is making a quick drawing of his muse, Watson. The table, the sofa, the console, and Watson all separate Ford from Tchelitchew. Was Watson a beautiful object who came between the two lovers? Was this parlor a salon where the two artists and a patron bonded over aesthetic concerns. Was Watson's patronage being secured by these two artists, rendering him from both directions? The imagination runs wild with narratives, but the narratives are all reliant on the abundantly skillful light, angle, and composition rigorously at work in Ford's seemingly casual photograph.

Compare the depiction of Tchelitchew in the double portrait with his depiction in another 1930s photo. In both photographs, one imagines that Ford is shooting from a low vantage point. In the London photo we can nearly imagine Tchelitchew as a bust on the hidden console. In the second photo Tchelitchew also appears almost as a

bust, but the base on which he sits is created by the photo's bottom edge. Tchelitchew's body is angled away but his head is turning toward the viewer. Tchelitchew was ten years Ford's senior and perhaps more recognized as an artist and force in the creative world. Ford in both photographs depicts his lover with dignity and reverence.

In the second picture however, Tchelitchew is removed from the gracious interior he occupied in the first photo and is placed into a world of Ford's whimsy. Tchelitchew gets very little space in the portrait, his bust is placed below the curves and twists of an autumn tree dominating the picture area, expanding like a contour drawing. It is possible that Ford shot this photo spontaneously, finding the "decisive moment" as it were. Ford was a friend and admirer of Henri Cartier-Bresson and was surely familiar with this trope of photography. But Ford was not from the world of reportage. He was from the world of literature, painting, stagecraft. Bresson famously said that photography is not like painting but Ford challenges that in this carefully composed photograph that knocks on the door of non-objective painting. Tchelitchew almost looks as though he has been cut from another photo and pasted in. In the opposite corner another tree pops into the frame and balances Tchelitchew; it appears placed, or at least planned.

These tensions, staged vs. spontaneous, photographic vs. painterly, reportage vs narrative, can be found in another photograph of an Italian woman, dated from the 1930s. The photo has affinities with the tree portrait of Tchelitchew. Shot low, the photo edge cuts the woman off at the elbow. She is sculptural in a robe that is at once

crumply but billowy, her dark features are sharp and shadowed. Behind her a bit of hair and perhaps a cloth ribbon holding her hair or kerchief move in a breeze as do several palms that occupy the corner of the image behind her. She may be moving but, to my eye, is standing still, and the breeze moves around her. Have I mentioned there is a giant zucchini balanced on her head? Again, in terms of real estate in the picture area, the zucchini wins, if not in square footage at least in placement. Again, it appears as though the zucchini could have been collaged in. Is she carrying this giant phallus to market? Was it balanced there in a sort of surrealist performance? It does share an affinity with *Lobster Telephone* by Dalí.

Speaking of Dalí...

Were Ford, Salvador, and Gala just out one day, strolling, and they decided to take a fun picture? Maybe. There is something funny about their disembodied heads, a pair of tiny jack-o-lanterns in the photo. Dalí's head is just below the center of the field. Gala's head is just to the right. Dalí is the straight man. Gala smiles slightly. This comical decapitation takes place in a formal geometric heaven. The heads rest on a perfect horizontal in the classical structure that surrounds them. The strong verticals of engaged columns, and the bold diagonals of the steps, one of which perfectly hits the corner, make this a nearly mathematical photo about architecture.

I wonder if there was some meaning in decapitating them so. Dalí and Gala had a celebrated romance that lasted until Gala's death. The New York Times spoke of their 'ideal union'. When Ford died in 2002, Tchelitchev

was called his companion and Tamang, his chief companion. Ford and Tchelitchev were an intellectual and artistic force as well as lovers, but even their own artistic circle portrayed queer relationships in coded ways, steeped in the rigid formality of artistic training, flagging only to those who knew how to see the signs. Was there a part of Ford that resented the way Salvador and Gala loved openly in a world that would gladly see two homos' heads roll? Even in the gay 30s, when homosexuality was somewhat accepted in some hamlets and corners of international cities, Ford's surrealist novel had been banned not for its surrealism but for its queerness.

Ford's firm grip on composition feels somewhat looser in a photo of a young man or boy, also taken in Italy in the 30s. The setting for the photo is a seesaw. This might suggest that the subject in the photo is more of a boy than a young man, as do his knickers. The horizontal created by the fulcrum of the seesaw is angled, lacking the mathematical rigidity of the horizontal in the Dalí and Gala photo. It might suggest that this in fact was a spontaneous photo of a boy who maybe fell on the playground. The shot is from above and seemingly not far from the boy who has fallen to a contrapposto. His right foot is bent back so that the top tip of his shoe hits the ground. His left foot is splayed out to the left, and his knees seem to spiral left where his hips twist right. We see his hands push out in opposite directions and his elbows push back lifting his shoulders up. His butt is dead center, the fabric of his knickers is tight around it and looser around his thighs. It is hard to imagine why he is on the ground like this, the weight of his torso holding down a seesaw beam. We see



Charles Henri Ford, *Salvador Dalí and Gala*, 1930s, Printed early 1980s. Photo: Mitchell Algu Gallery.

Charles Henri Ford, *Italy*, 1930s,
Printed early 1980s. Photo: Mitchell
Algus Gallery.



the back of his head as he looks up, and this is easy to miss, but he is looking at a man in long pants, sitting on the opposite side of the fulcrum, straddling another beam. The man's leg creates a line that is continued by the fallen boy's left leg. That line forms an X as it crosses the line created by the boy's right leg and the beam he holds down, which rises from under his body. It suddenly feels perfectly composed. Like a Renaissance painting depicting a putto's innocent eroticism.

Putti are symbols of the sacred and the profane. There is something sweet about the boy splayed out on the playground. There is nothing really wrong with a gentleman noticing, or even contriving this moment of viewing the posterior of this young man in his knickers. What causes tension, what makes the photo delicious, is that by snapping the picture, we catch Ford's interest in this sight. Further, we catch Ford being caught looking, by the man in the long pants. We are all caught in our dirty thoughts sometimes, looking at this boy's butt. We are embarrassed or maybe even feel the photographer is somehow predatory. We are shocked by our own ability to see the fallen cherub as someone's prey.

It is important to touch upon a portrait Ford made of James Van Der Zee, a prominent photographer and important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. The largest figure in the photo is actually Joe Louis, who appears in the background, in a poster for "Spirit of Youth". Louis was a highly regarded boxer and hero in Black America. He had occasional acting gigs in race films, like "Spirit of Youth" in which he played a boxer whose story was very much Louis's own. Van Der Zee stands in front of the poster and, as in other Ford portraits, takes up only a small amount of the frame and is only represented from the chest up. Ford presents us with a photograph of a photographer in front of a picture of a boxer playing the part of a boxer.

The layers of representation on a certain level point to the distance between Ford and the world of this Black man. Van Der Zee was not part of Ford's queer circle. Ford was not part of Van Der Zee's world. Where Ford and Van Der Zee connect is the world of image making.

Van Der Zee documented the street life of Harlem in the first part of the twentieth century. Van Der Zee also created beautifully staged and elaborately retouched studio portraits of the denizens of Harlem. These portraits convey a luxury and a glamor that one wonders to what extent permeated the actual lives of his sitters. His photos of Black men and women were often styled with Victorian and Edwardian props and garments that convey the artifice of fanciness. Van Der Zee is elegantly dressed in Ford's photo, but Ford catches him in the street in front of a movie poster, literally placing him in front of a backdrop that says Van Der Zee lives in Black America in the Golden age of Harlem. Ford, who lived within 'The Young and Evil' circle had to know the safety of small worlds as well as their limitations. They both also understood the importance of layers, codes, obfuscation, that their work and their selves required to be presentable to a larger public.

In the show there is an uncredited photo of Ford and Tchelitchev. It almost looks like a movie set. A shallow boat rests on a rocky shore against a rock wall. Nets, floats, and ropes litter the scene. A swooping diagonal is created by a taut line over which canvas is placed creating a small scrim wall. In front of the scrim Tchelitchev sits on the ground, all legs and arms. Behind the scrim, Ford sits, dressed in white shirt and pants, looking at the camera.

Tchelitchew looks away, his large hand dangles between his bare legs. They are together. They are apart.

Ford was, perhaps primarily, a poet. In a stanza from his poem, *Dismemberment*, he wrote:

*How is it possible to walk without legs? Ask the Snake.
How many legs make a perfect wheel? Three. What
part
of the animal is most edible? The leg. What else is
the leg good for? To take us where we do not want to
go,
to lead us away from where we should like to be.*

In his photographs, Ford shows us the possibilities of a moment. He asks questions. He shows us situations that require discernment. How did this gay boy from Mississippi become part of an infamous circle of culture makers? What would that circle be without the tangles of romances, flirtations and posings of its members? How do we live and how do we survive? What do we present and what do we protect? He asks with a sophistication that invites us as deeply as we wish to go and with the elegance to not push too hard. His naked foot comes off the paper and touches our leg.

As I offer this metaphor, this touch already feels somewhat romantic, and maybe old-fashioned, viewed with today's eyes. The representations of queerness in photography today are free of having to rely on codes that trigger the queer viewer but remain elusive to the casual heteronormative gaze. Today, one may be walking down the jet bridge to board a flight and realize that a major airline has an advertisement on the wall featuring two men seated in premium seating. With wide pleather seats spread behind them, one has his in-flight magazine open on his tray table. His large hand holds a drink. On his shoulder, his companion rests his head.

He has removed his headphones to pay attention to something he is being shown in the in-flight magazine. They are handsome, young, White, nearly identical, which is code for something, but no-one here is hiding that the guys are playing gay. And broadly speaking, no-one cares. In terms of representation of male/male relationships, this cultural triumph is already banal. And perhaps thankfully so. No-one should care if I put my head on my boyfriend's shoulder.

This branch of commercial images that grew from the seeds of Charles Henri Ford is, per se ordinary; but there is another branch that is more enticing. This branch extends to artists such as Alvin Baltrop, Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, Collier Schorr, Jess T. Dugan and Matthew Morrocco. These artists, and others too many to mention here, have inched images of the LGBTQ community, in the milieu of fine art photography, forward to places of inclusion, acceptance, embracement, and expectation. We have a collective picture of queerness that goes beyond two men, seated slightly closer to each other than one might have imagined, to one that represents a full spectrum of race, various genders, and a broad range of lived experience.

I look at the 2019 photograph, *FIGURE (0X5A0918)*, by Paul Mpagi Sepuya, along side Charles Henri Ford's photograph of Peter Watson and Robert Heber-Percy, included in the Ford show. In Ford's photograph, Watson and sometimes-homosexual Heber-Percy are situated on a carpet on the floor. Behind them is a wall with wain-



Charles Henri Ford, *James Van Der Zee*, 1930s, Printed early 1980s, I/V.
Photo: Mitchell Alguo Gallery.



(Left) Charles Henri Ford, *Peter Watson and Robert Heber-Percy*, London, 1930s, Printed early 1980s, I/V. Photo: Mitchell Alguo Gallery; (Right) Paul Mpagi Sepuya, *FIGURE (0X5A0918)*, 2019, Photo: Artland.com.



scoting, damask, gilded-framed paintings, a diverging mirror, and an elaborate scone. Watson, in a suit, has a wolf mask pulled on top of his head and his hand holds a cigarette with aplomb. Heber-Percy is in a sweater and woolen pants. Both bodies are slightly twisted. Watson's lower legs are out of frame and his slightly hunched body rests on his fisted left hand extended on the floor behind him. Heber-Percy twins this position but his right hand holds the bottom of his right foot. He has striped socks and brogues on. Ford, based on the camera angle, is down on the ground with his two friends as he shares his elegant and playful view, free of any macho posturing but not transgressing far from the gentlemanly.

Sepuya's image brings us full circle back to the artist's studio. Sepuya, often employs the help of friends, not only as models, but collaborators. In *FIGURE (0X5A0918)*, two men, both black, twist their bodies into entwinement. The background is a white wall and a concrete floor. A minimalist plywood bench supports the models and on a crate in foreground there is a shirt, a hat and another camera. I say 'another' because one of the models is Sepuya himself. Facing opposite directions, but cheek to cheek, Sepuya holds the other man and rests a camera in the crook of his neck. Sepuya's legs are dancerly, a knee lifted in the air, one foot on the bench. His other leg angles to the floor, his foot barely resting on it. We mostly see the back of Sepuya's companion, we see the back of his head and bits of his legs and one arm. We see Sepuya's arm wrapped

around his companion. This photo, one assumes, is taken in a mirror, and a couple of glares or smudges appear in the picture.

The codes and mystery I described in Tchelitchev's drawing at the start of this article, are gone in Sepuya's work. Here the artist openly touches his subject. Though I do not know the two men's relationship outside the photograph, that is unimportant to understanding that this photo—boldly formal with its strong lines, the clean verticals of the bench, the sculptural beauty of the bodies—is about male intimacy. Their touch is bold and fearless. Their queer bodies are not in any drag. The artist does not rely on innuendo or even excuse himself from the frame of the photo. The openness of this image is emblematic of the social progress the queer community has advanced in the past 90 or so years since Ford shot the photos I have discussed here. It is this social advancement that allows us, the viewers, to not look at Ford's work in its biographical and historical context, but to see them more fully for their elegant beauty, psychological depth, and blatant sincerity.

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“Dancing in Real Life”:

Paintings by Yannis Tsarouchis

by Michel Ségard

This is a story of reconciliation—the attempted merging of the ancient philosophy of Platonism that is part of the basis of Western civilization, and the equally foundational Christianity that was hostile to many of its tenets. Christianity from its beginning was influenced by Platonism, but traditional Christian teachings on homosexuality have been in conflict with the active/passive and same-sex love relationships that Plato advocated in his dialogues, particularly the *Symposium*—accepted practices in ancient Greece. The artist Yannis Tsarouchis (1910–1989) was an ethnic Greek brought up in the Orthodox Church and a closeted homosexual. As a committed Platonist, his artistic career was largely devoted to trying to reconcile these conflicting influences.

Not well known in the United States, Tsarouchis has a solid reputation as a painter and national figure in Greece. Yet he holds an enigmatic relationship with the Greek establishment. As a closeted gay man trying to live and create art in an ultra-conservative Greek Orthodox culture, his national patriotism allowed many Greek art world officials to turn a blind eye when necessary.

“Dancing in Real Life,” the exhibition of his work at Wrightwood 659 in Chicago, documents that struggle as expressed through Tsarouchis’s art. The title refers to a Greek dance called the Zeibekiko, a slow, rhythmic, loosely structured dance that allows a great deal of improvisation. In real life, you have to navigate the structure of your society with your own improvisation to do what you want. That was, perhaps, Tsarouchis’s greatest talent.

From a young age, he was already influenced by Byzantine iconography, having studied with Photios Kontoglou, a Greek icon painter and poet. Tsarouchis went on to attend the Athens School of Fine Arts from 1929–1935, and during that time, took the trouble to learn the basics of many early 20th century styles, Cubism and Fauvism in particular. Matisse especially caught his eye. In 1936 Tsarouchis did a suite of paintings of cyclists that had an oriental undertone to them. The riders have voluminous clothes that billow in the wind. *Cyclist with Crescent Moon*,



Yannis Tsarouchis, *Sailor in the Sun*, 1968–1970, oil on canvas, 88 x 41 inches. Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.

Yannis Tsarouchis, (Left) *Cyclist Dressed as Evzone, with a Temple at the Bottom Right Corner*, 1936, oil on canvas. 13.6 x 11.4 inches. (Right) *Study for a Portrait of the Student A.X. with a Blue Jacket*, 1936, oil on canvas, 22 x 14.2 inches. (private collection). Photos: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.



Cyclist with a Red Vest, *Cyclist with Mauve Sleeves*, and especially *Cyclist Dress as Evzone with a Temple at the Bottom Right Corner* are some of the most romantic paintings Tsarouchis did. They stand out from his other work because of their bright colors and exuberant forms. For me, they were the most joyous paintings in the exhibition.

Much of his work in the middle 1930s was heavily influenced by Matisse. That style allowed for the hedonistic beauty of the male body to stand out as in *Naked Italian*, *Seated En Face* and *Seated Dark-Haired Youth in Overcoat*, both from 1937. But the style's flatness and "cotton candy" palette didn't allow for the not-so-pleasant realities of life to be properly expressed. Still, his painting *The Thinker* (1936) from this period is one of his best works, even as it is highly reminiscent of Max Beckmann's *Self-Portrait* from 1937 at the Art Institute of Chicago. Ironically, Tsarouchis's *The Thinker* has the more congenial expression. Also from this period is a small painting, *Study for a Portrait of the Student A.X. with a Blue Jacket* (1936). The contorted posture of the subject is the kind of pose we would not see again until the work of Francis Bacon after WWII.

In this chromatically toned-down painting, we begin to see the torturous and difficult position of the gay man during the 1930s.

On Tsarouchis's colors of this period: he mixed his pigment with animal glue in his larger paintings, diluting their intensity and making them not so "sweet." This may have been partly a result of economics to stretch out expensive pigments, and it may also have been a way to reduce the saturation of the colors to bring them closer to reality and away from a Matissean idealization. Just the same, versions of the deep blue, pink, red, and ochre palette stayed with Tsarouchis long into his career. His painting *Seated Sailor and Reclining Nude* from 1948, made famous by being pulled from an exhibition because it showed a man in uniform beside a reclining nude figure, uses this palette, but with pure pigments undiluted with animal glue.

In the very late 1930s, Tsarouchis's style started to explore a more traditional rendering of the figure with modeling, depth, and shadow. The colors became darker, more somber. It is during this period that a composition first appears that will reappear from time to time in his



Yannis Tsarouchis, (Left) *Naked Italian, Seated En Face*, 1937, pigments with animal glue on paper, 39.2 x 27.2 inches. (Right) *Seated Dark-Haired Youth in Overcoat*, 1937, Pigment with animal glue on paper, 38.6 x 24.6 inches. Photos: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.



future work—the nude male with a vase of flowers. *Naked Youth with Oleanders and Bandage on His Hand* from 1940 is perhaps the best example. Is the bouquet the secret symbol for a submissive lover, the acknowledgement of the androgyny of the young lover?

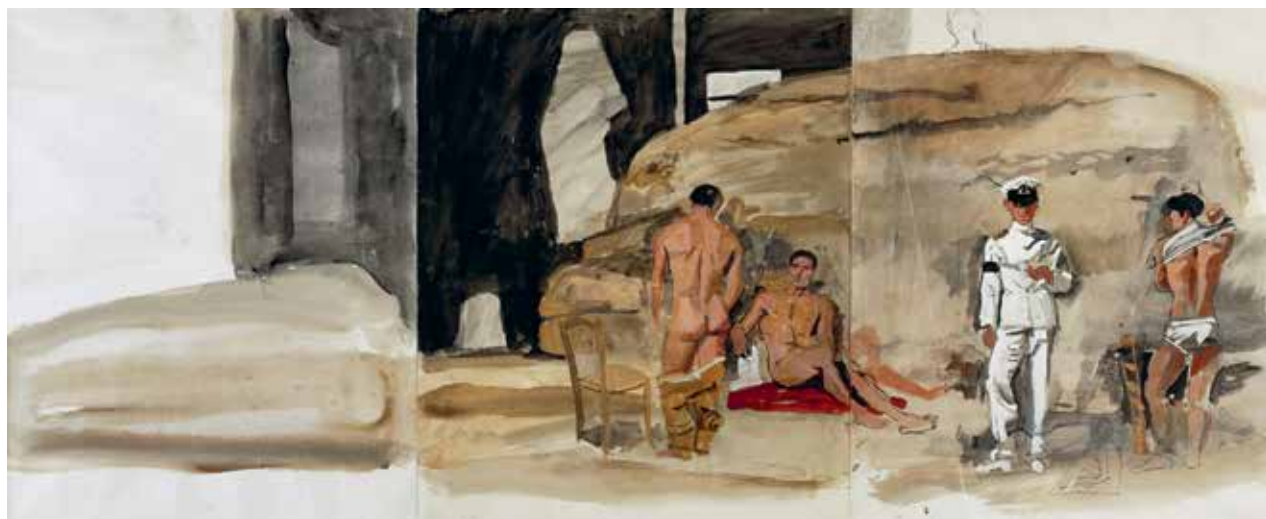
After WWII, the Greek Civil War broke out, and Tsarouchis's style changed again, this time indirectly influenced by Picasso's *Guernica*. Tsarouchis did a series of small watercolors depicting the horrors of that war. In them, the symbol of the nude youth with angel's wings first appears. But keeping with his more modeled style, he did a painting of a Greek military policeman, which was also to become a reoccurring symbol in his work. *Greek Military Policeman in Front of Pink Wall with Two Palm Leaves* from 1950 is a prime example. It should be noted that in all of his renderings of military police when viewed frontally, there is a noticeable genital bulge, giving the figure an added aggressiveness (and possible source of titillation for the gay viewer). The policeman is also fundamentally different in tone from the sailor in white uniform that also appears in many paintings. The sailor is much more sympathetic and passive, and often paired with nude males in an outside setting, as in the large 1962 *Study for The Beach*. Here the sailor is a dispassionate onlooker (a guardian?) as two men undress, and another nude awaits them.

Clearly, the man in uniform had symbolic meaning for Tsarouchis—the sailor in white more comforting, less threatening than the policeman in khaki, perhaps standing for a certain protectiveness, stability, or order. Significantly, and unlike the policeman, the sailor never carries a weapon. One of his large sailor paintings, *Sailor in the Sun* from 1968-70, greets the visitor at the entrance to the exhibition.

But the policeman can be disarmed. In *The Forgotten Guard* from 1957, the largest painting in the show, the military man is naked except for his shoulder harness and boots. With his back to the viewer, he is looked upon by a completely nude comrade and another man in a white tunic on the other side of the painting. The onlookers do not seem to be attracted to the military man; rather,

Yannis Tsarouchis, (Top left) *Seated Sailor and Reclining Nude*, 1948, oil on plywood, 12.4 x 14.2 inches. (Top right) *Naked Youth with Oleanders and bandage on His Hand* (unfinished), 1940, oil on canvas, 67.3 x 25 8 inches. (Bottom right) *Greek Military Police in Front of Pink Wall with Two Palm Leaves*, 1950, oil on canvas, 17.7 x 10 inches. (Private collection) Photos: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.





Yannis Tsarouchis, *Study for the Beach*, 1962, watercolor on paper, 34.25 x 13.8 inches. Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.

they seem to be having a mundane conversation. Separating the two nudes from the clothed man is a bouquet of flowers!

The mystery of Tsarouchis's flower imagery seems to be solved in his 1955 painting *The Bouquet*. In this work, the nude man on the left with his back to us is handing a bouquet of flowers to another man who is in a partial state of arousal—the only sexually explicit piece in the entire show. That bouquet stands for what it stands for in all relationships, the love between two individuals. Here it is about a same-sex couple. The Platonist notion that love is not gender dependent was deeply engrained in Tsarouchis's thinking, as he was a strong believer in the teachings of the Symposium, even though it clashed with the tenets of the Orthodox Church.

This conflict expressed itself in a strange way in his paintings. Early on, in the sketches about the Greek Civil War, Tsarouchis depicted nude men with wings as an-

gels. But angels, except for cherubs are not nude in the Christian iconography. So Tsarouchis started to depict his angels with dragonfly wings. They became spirits, with all the romanticism associated with those mythological characters. The exhibition includes a pair of drawings that emphasize this contrast. In *Eros Arresting a Military Policeman*, the nude Eros sports wings, and he is the power that overcomes earthly constraints, as symbolized by the policeman. In *Military Policeman Arresting the Spirit*, the spirit has dragonfly wings and is restrained by the earthly policeman.

The problem with the winged spirit was that it was too feminine. Around 1965, Tsarouchis started substituting dragonfly wings with mostly monarch butterfly wings. In this series the figures are partially clothed, well-muscled young men, except for one dramatic painting, *Ennui Over Thessaloniki*. Here, the winged nude spirit sits dejectedly on a cloud. The title says bored, but the figure looks de-



Yannis Tsarouchis, *The Forgotten Guard* (left and right sections), 1956, oil on canvas, 82.7 x 57.1 inches. (private collection) Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.



Yannis Tsarouchis, (Left) *Eros arresting a Military Policeman*, 1964, watercolor and pencil on paper, 12.4 x 9.6 inches; (Right) *Military Policeman arresting the Spirit*, 1965, watercolor and pencil on paper, 12.8 x 9.7 inches. Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.

pressed. Is the purely spiritual life not what it was expected to be? Too much sweetness resulting in blandness?

The bouquet and the winged man angel come together in an illustration for C.P. Cavafy's poem, *Lovely White Flowers*. The winged youth mourns the untimely death of his friend by laying a wreath of white flowers on the body. The poem is not as romantic as the illustration; it expresses anger and bitterness over the loss.

Two aspects of Greek culture, Platonist philosophy and the dogma of the Greek Orthodox Church, consistently clashed in Tsarouchis's life. He spent much of his painting career trying to express the Platonist side and depict his homosexuality as a holy state. So how to placate the Orthodox side? Influenced by Byzantine icon paintings, Tsarouchis chose not to copy their style, but their tone. It appears in many of his paintings. In particular, he did a

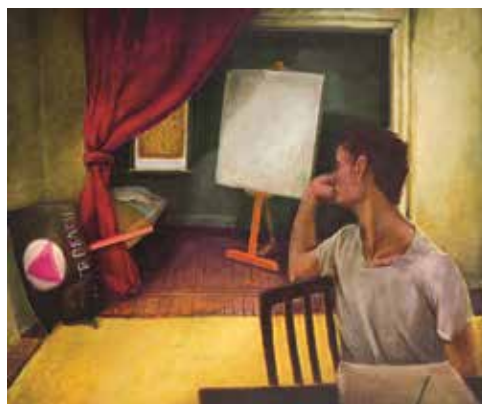
number of painting, portraits really, of the months of the year and the four seasons. In one of the month studies, *Study for the Month of May with Mauve Vest*, the Platonist view dominates, but the figure is melancholy. There is no joy in any of the studies for the months. One however, *Study for the Month of May* from 1973 shows a seated male nude with angel wings and a mandala—a defiant expression on his face! "I am a man, I am gay, and I am holy!" In his study, *The Four Seasons*, all the characters have mandalas AND wings. A woman depicts Spring; a male youth is Summer; Dominique, one of Tsarouchis's models, stands for Autumn; and Tsarouchis himself is depicted as Winter. In the end, the orthodoxy of the Church is stood on its head as its iconography is appropriated to express the Platonist world view. So, the spirit arrested the policeman (the Church) after all. And the Sailor (Platonism) looked

Yannis Tsarouchis, (Left) *Ennui Over Thessaloniki*, 1984, oil on paper, 52.2 x 31.5 inches. (private collection); (Center) *Study for the Month of May with Mauve Vest*, 1967, acrylic on paper, 18.9 x 12.8 inches; (Right) *Study for the Month of May*, 1973, oil on canvas, 31.5 x 21.7 inches. Photos: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.





Yannis Tsarouchis, (Left) *The Four Seasons*, 1976, oil and pastel on paper mounted on board, 20.3 x 16.5 inches each image (private collection). Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation. (Below) Hugh Steers, *Poster*, 1990. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Alexander Gray Associates, New York.



after the mere mortals weaving their way through life.

There is a series of three paintings, all called *Departure with Oval Mirror*, that speak to the pain of being forced to leave one's home. Each has an empty bed, an oval mirror on the wall, a vase of flowers and a young man sadly packing his belongings. These paintings were done between 1962 and 1970. In 1990, Hugh Steers did a painting called *Poster*, featured in the ARTAIDSAMERICA Chicago show in 2017, that depicted an empty bed, a discarded ACT UP poster and a blank canvas gazed upon by a dejected youth. The similarity in tone and sense of loss in both the *Departure* paintings and the Steers *Poster* immediately struck me. Loss, the empty bed, the unfulfilled dreams stymied by life's realities are all factors that affected Tsarouchis's art and life—as they did the gay community during the AIDS epidemic.

Tsarouchis never publicly acknowledged his homosexuality. But his art is an effort to reconcile its legitimacy as espoused in ancient Greek philosophy with the homophobic teachings of the Greek Orthodox Church. Tsarouchis's life was a elegant *zeibekiko*, danced in real life, as he improvised to survive and meet the needs of his time, but still express his inner soul. Through his paintings, he was able to declare, as lyricist Oscar Hammerstein put it in the song "We Kiss in a Shadow" from *The King and I*,

*Behold and believe what you see
Behold how my lover loves me!*

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.

Yannis Tsarouchis, *Departure with Oval Mirror*, 1970, Oil on Canvas, 18.5 x 35.8 inches. Photo: Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation.



