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$20 U.S.

NEW ART examiner
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The Power of Art

Vol. 37, No. 2,January, 2023.
Compilation of October, November, and December 2022 online articles and reviews.

COVER IMAGES
Scott Hocking, *Celestial Ship of the North (Emergency Ark) aka Barnboat*, 2015, salvaged barn permanent site-specific sculpture and large format photograph 33 x 49 inches. Photo courtesy David Klein Gallery.

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NEW ART EXAMINER

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Website:
www.newartexaminer.org

Office:
5555 N. Sheridan Rd., Unit 1415A,
Chicago, IL 60640, USA.

Inquiries:
nae.msegard@gmail.com
All Letters to the editor are printed. Send to:
nae.msegard@gmail.com

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
Editor in Chief
New Art Examiner
nae.msegard@gmail.com

Introduction

As some observers of the world gain more years in their lives, they may find themselves asking, 'Is the world changing or am I just getting older?' As civilization and culture around the world continues to shift with time, so too does the notion of what is "contemporary." Technology has transformed our ideas, aesthetics, discourse, and human life itself for most people on this planet if not all. Technology has also connected us but arguably made us more alienated in some sort of covert Faustian trade off. It is perhaps in this new era of contemporary convolution that we find ourselves looking more and more to the past.

New Art Examiner is no stranger to change and transformation. This past year has prompted us to make a number of changes that we hope will steer us on a path to continue our mission of understanding the complexities of our world and the culture that inhabits it. We are no longer framing our quarterly editions around a single theme. There is simply too much to discuss in these times. But the themes have provided our editorial team with additional frameworks for our approach to criticism and the perspectives we bring with us when we engage with art.

Our recent coverage and this winter quarter edition of 2022 (labeled January 2023) highlights a convergence of the past, present, and future. It can almost be encapsulated by Evan Carter's review of The Arrival of Spring at the Art Institute of Chicago which presents the work of known commodity David Hockney making impressionist paintings on an iPad. We also remember sculptor John Raymond Henry in an obituary by Neil Goodman who draws the serendipitous connection between an artist working in steel and the definitive folk song of the mythical John Henry. And speaking of history, Michel Ségard covers Wrightwood 659's chronicle of gay life and culture in art with his review of "The First Homosexuals: Global Depictions of a New Identiy, 1869–1930."

Interesting interplays of worlds and times can be found in K.A. Letts's review of Jason Revok's exhibition at MOCAD and Annette LePique's review of Michiko Itatani's paintings at Wrightwood 659. And Paul Moreno is twice featured highlighting the visual art practice of Joe Brainard who was known more as a writer and poet, while also covering Gabriel Orozco's Spacetime at Marian Goodman gallery. Monumentality also seems to be a re-emerging form of interest in art and can be seen in the Work of Scott Hocking at Cranbrook Art Museum, also reviewed by K.A. Letts.

As always, we hope you enjoy what we offer, and know that we are grateful for your support as we continue to grow. Have a great year!

The Editors

John Raymond Henry: A Steel Driving Man

by Neil Goodman

Well every Monday morning
When the bluebirds begin to sing
You can hear John Henry a mile or more
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring, Lord, Lord,
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring

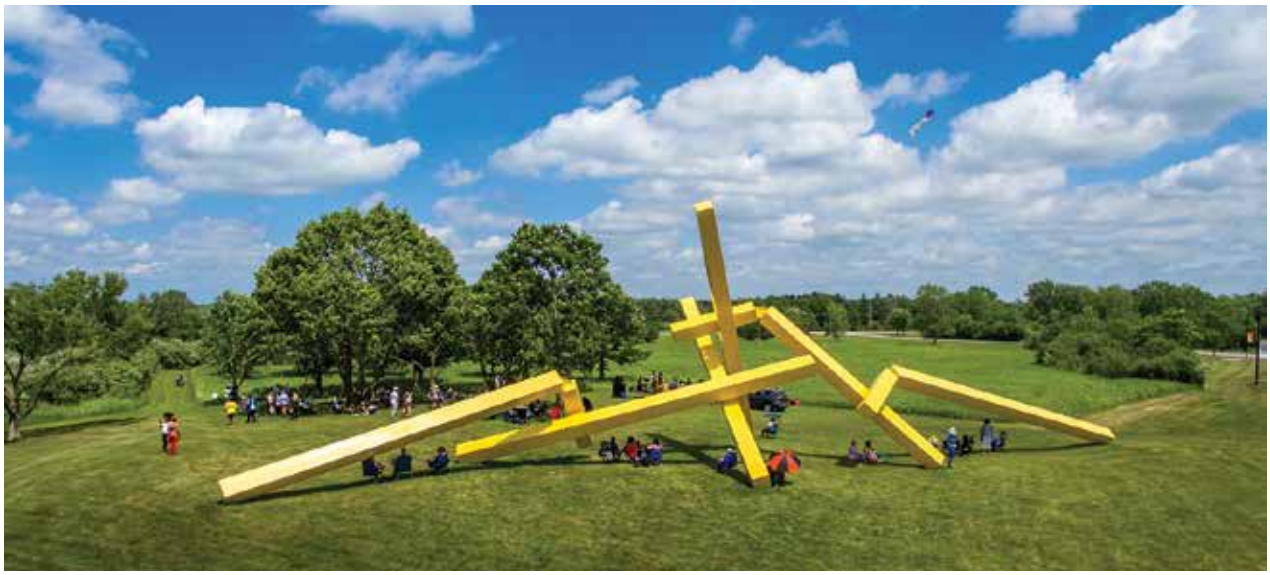
John Henry was a steel-driven man. Known for monumental works throughout the world, he passed away in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on November 1, at the age of 79.

Although I did not know him well, I mostly knew of him. In the sculpture world of the 1980s, he was a giant. Along with Mark di Suvero, Lyman Kipp, Kenneth Snelson, and Charles Ginnever, he helped form ConStruct Gallery, based in Chicago. Though ConStruct's time span was limited, its impact was not, as they were instrumental in placing and promoting nonrepresentational sculpture in a multitude of venues throughout the country at a time prior to the proliferation of public works.

John Henry was known for assembled and joined-steel rectangular forms that were welded and bolted to create massive, towering works. His sculptures are a composite of repeated forms, with a careful orchestration of weights and balances resolved with a certain harmonic sensibility. In many ways they are the perfect asymmetrical antidote to the post-Miesian hard-edged architecture that personifies much of our modern urban landscape. If the architecture was staid and orderly, John Henry's sculptures were vibrant, gestural, and explosive.

One sculpture seems to stand out for me in his oeuvre in both placement and scale. Titled *Illinois Landscape #5 (1976)*, it is the monumental capstone for the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park at Governors State University. Nestled on a berm, the work both spans and embraces the planar Midwestern prairie and harkens to a time when sculpture was defined by a kind of John Ford heroic muscularity—powerful, direct, and uncompromising. It is a sculpture that I have returned to over the years, and it

John Henry, *Illinois Landscape #5*, 1976. Yellow painted steel, 36hx 134l x 26d feet. Nathan Manilow Sculpture Garden Governors State University Park Forest South, Illinois.



John Henry, *Chevron*, 2016. Blue painted steel. Source: Etsy.com

is a quintessential example of a perfect synthesis of form, color, scale, and site.

With a long and distinguished career, numerous accolades and awards, and an extensive list of exhibitions and public commissions, John Henry was a man of his times. If his work seems obvious and perhaps overly familiar, look at his work with a fresh eye, and you will see a sculptor with an extraordinarily clear and directed brilliance—a singular vision uniquely his own. His influence is large, and, though it has been passed on to so many others who have followed in his footsteps, he is still the one and only John Henry. I am grateful for the many doors he opened, for the work he left behind, and for the world to have had heard "John Henry's hammer ring." ■

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*.

John Henry at work. timesfreepress.com/news

Myths of Ruin and Resurgence:
Scott Hocking at Cranbrook Art Museum

by K.A. Letts

...Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies...

From Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Urban archeologist, historian of the transient, and visionary lover of a once and future great metropolis, installation artist Scott Hocking tells the story of Detroit's decay and rebirth in his mid-career museum retrospective. The elaborate constructs and documentary photographs in the exhibition go far beyond the voyeuristic photographs of urban devastation—often called ruin porn—that were fashionable in the early 2000s and to which they are occasionally compared. His thoughtful and empathetic examinations of the city's abandoned spaces, augmented by built interventions and documented in all their precarity, have provided a conceptual template for projects beyond the city, in the artist's native upstate Michigan, in Florida and New York, and even further afield in France, Germany, Australia, Iceland and China.

Hocking's work is difficult to represent in a museum setting, since his iconic installations are site specific, often monumental in scale, and ephemeral—either by happenstance or by design. However, Cranbrook Curator Andrew Satake Blauvelt has managed to assemble an assortment of documentary photos of Hocking's most memorable works, along with reconstituted installations and large-scale sculptures that accurately represent what the artist has been up to for the last 25 years. Hocking, a gifted writer, has also contributed a series of wall titles for the exhibition that provide eloquent commentary throughout. An accompanying 344-page catalog, with ample supporting text by Blauvelt, an interview with the artist by Laura Mott, chief curator of Cranbrook Art Museum, and a scholarly essay by Michael Stone Richards, rounds out

Scott Hocking, *Zigguarat and Fisher Body 21, East Summer 1*, 2008. Large format photograph 33h x 49w inches. Photo courtesy David Klein Gallery.

Scott Hocking, *Egg and Michigan Central Train Station*, 2007–2013, #4718. Large format photograph, 33h x 49w inches. Photo: David Klein Gallery.

a complete consideration of the artist's accomplishments and projects to date. "Scott Hocking: Detroit Stories" will be on view at Cranbrook Art Museum until March 19, 2023.

A self-described working-class kid from Redford Township on the outskirts of Detroit, Hocking grew up in a modest home on a dirt road, near a railroad track. He became, early on, an intrepid seeker of grand, derelict spaces and structures in Detroit. As he explored the city on foot, he was one of the few to see something brave and worthy of salvaging in what most had dismissed as a failed city.

Hocking's creative impulses have often begun with irritation—from his annoyance with the cute and kitschy public art animals painted decoratively in various cities in the early 2000s to his anger at the sheer waste of the once opulent and now neglected buildings to which he is drawn. He scouts locations; in the past they have been grand and desolate urban structures where an atmosphere of privilege lingers. Responding to the residual beauty in these former showplaces, Hocking casts about the immediate environment for materials. Then, slowly and painstakingly, he reconstitutes them in new form in a process he describes as a meditation on postindustrial obsolescence.

One of Hocking's early installations, *Ziggurat and Fisher Body Plant 21* (2007–2009), both encapsulates and foreshadows the direction of his art practice in the years since. Ziggurat was a site-specific sculptural installation made from 6,201 square chunks of end grain wood the artist found within Detroit's abandoned Fisher Body Plant 21. Vacant since the early 1990s, the enormous, 650,000 square foot FB21 had become a man-made cave, complete with stalagmites. Trees grew on the roof. "The Packard [plant] was (and is) seen as the big fat shining symbol of Detroit's failures, the once-mighty auto capital turned into the shrinking city of the future," he says in an interview. Scrappers had long ago stripped the factory, but the floor blocks remained. Inspired by the factory's concrete-columned industrial architecture, Hocking began to imagine the interior, characterized by tranquil natural

Scott Hocking and Clinton Snyder, *RELICS*, 2001-present. Mixed media assemblage, size variable. Photo: K.A. Letts.

light and soaring space, as a sacred environment to house a kind of stepped temple. Beginning in August 2008, and for 18 months thereafter, Hocking gathered the scattered blocks and stacked them painstakingly into a pyramid. "I wanted to question the idea of a ruin versus a monument, building a ruin within a ruin and juxtaposing postindustrial ruination with the ancient past," he explained. The structure lasted only a few months. He describes the fate of his ad hoc monument:

> It was destroyed when the EPA took over and cleaned out the hazardous creosote-preserved floor blocks. Five months later, the EPA was gone and FB21 was again reclaimed by scrappers. Since then, the site has been repeatedly boarded up and torn open, with occasional press declaring a potential renovation, a loft complex or a music venue, including the latest proposal to transform the beast into an apartment and retail complex by 2025.

Ziggurat and FB21, like many of Hocking's constructs, exists now only as a memory and a documentary photograph. The artist views the final state of his works to be large-format color photographs of the elaborate structures he has laboriously created. He has accepted both the intense labor required to alter his chosen settings and their ultimate impermanence as they become part of the perpetual struggle between human effort and natural forces.

One of Detroit's most famous architectural ruins, Michigan Central Station, provides the site for another of Hocking's best known built visions. In *The Egg and MCTS* (2007–2013), monumentality and ephemerality are conceptually balanced in a surreal, delicate, and precariously balanced ovoid form. Temporary yet timeless, the installation and photography project was created on the eighth floor of an architectural ruin that had been vacant for over 20 years. In that time the interior of the building had slowly shed sheets of broken marble from its walls, providing the raw material for Hocking's stacked egg. The artist described the archetypal form's intended meaning as "the unborn potential, yet to be hatched, the new beginning, rebirth, the gestating of primordial matter, creation and the etheric aura that surrounds each human."

Scott Hocking, *Celestial Ship of the North (Emergency Ark) aka Barnboat*, 2015. Salvaged barn permanent site-specific sculpture and large format photograph 33h x 49w inches, (detail). Photo courtesy David Klein Gallery.

The *Egg* was destroyed in 2014.

Fortunately, not all of Hocking's artworks have been reduced to their photographic—if handsome—documentation. Several large and satisfyingly physical installations have been reconstituted in the museum for this retrospective, the viscerally physical wall installation RELICS among them. Working with fellow Detroit artist Clinton Snyder, Hocking has, over time, collected thousands of bits and pieces of the city's substance into 200 carefully curated and displayed boxes that fill an entire wall of the gallery. Here are tiles, skulls, embroidered name tags, rope, plastic toys, statuettes of galleons and scantily clad ladies, abandoned signs, keys, tools, bottles, pipes, and more in neat rows. The intent is to overload the viewer with the sheer abundance of artifacts that make up Detroit's natural history. Hocking explains, "These are our contemporary relics, and within them is our history.... In 300-some years, Detroit has gone from marshes, forests and wildlife, to farmland and expansive industry, to postindustrial wasteland and waning population, and now, once again, it is rebirthing like a phoenix from the ashes."

Though Hocking's strategy for producing art was formed in Detroit, he has since exported his method to locations outside the city. His *Celestial Ship of the North (Emergency Ark) aka The Barnboat* (2016), a site-specific in-

Scott Hocking, *Arkansas Traveler*, 2022. Installation, Cranbrook Art Museum. Photo: K.A. Letts.

stallation and permanent sculpture, was commissioned in 2015 by Jim Boyle as the second in a series, *53 North Detroit to Port Austin. Barnboat* was constructed over four months from the scraps of a collapsed 1890s barn located on the Bill and Lorraine Goretski farm in Michigan's "thumb." The ghostly yet lyrical form recalls ancient vessels and mythic stories of the Biblical deluge; built into the concept of the structure is the expectation of its eventual decay and destruction from natural forces of wind and weather.

In 2020 Hocking was commissioned to create a sculptural work for "State of the Art 2020" at the Crystal Bridges museum in Bentonville, Arkansas. A 100-year-old, 40-foot-tall, tri-legged Aermotor 602 windmill that the artist discovered lying derelict in rural Michigan provided inspiration for what became a meditation on the transience and environmental waste inherent in the industrial history of the nation. *Arkansas Traveler*—named for a song, a legend, a tomato plant—lounges drunkenly on the gallery floor and brings to mind a haloed Madonna or Don Quixote's misapprehended windmills. The structure has been painted "bone black," an ongoing element in the artist's work based on its historical association with Detroit manufacturing. (The charred skeletons of animals—most particularly, bison bones—were shipped by rail from the West to the city in the 1890s, where immense piles of them were processed to make fertilizer and additives for refining sugar, as well as for their use as a pigment. Bone black is still produced in Wayne County, Michigan.)

Hocking's keen interest and proprietary sense of ownership in Detroit's regional history finds poignant expression in *Kayaking Through the Quarantimes 2020–2021*, a single channel video that compiles the artist's numerous

Scott Hocking, *Kayaking through the Quarantimes*, 2020–2022. Video still. Photo: K.A. Letts.

Scott Hocking, *Nike of the Strait*, 2020–2022. Decommissioned US Coast Guard buoys, channel markers, various steel and hardware, 216h x 120l x 108d inches. Photo: Joan Mitchell Foundation.

kayak trips into a narrative that, over time, observes the industrial waterfront as it transitions back into its primordial natural state. The water-level vantage point and the quiet of the river brings us back to a time before noisy civilization arrived. As the video closes, Hocking smiles his satisfaction with this return to nature. "As technology spreads into the future," he says, "the obsolete are left behind. New things are created while past creations decay. Nature begins to take apart what we once struggled to assemble. There is a threshold that's hard to pinpoint, when the man-made object becomes nature again.... For most of my life Detroit has epitomized this transition."

Hocking's recently completed sculpture, *Nike of the Straits* (2021), adds a poetic coda to his communion with the waterfront. A winged tower looking out over the Detroit River and made from repurposed metal buoys, the work's visual reference to the Greek goddess of victory is immediately apparent. But this Nike has suffered greatly—and prevailed.

The identity of Detroit has changed—is changing—from 20th-century beleaguered victim of inexorable macroeconomic and social forces to scrappy 21st-century multicultural city, all hustle and hard work. As this new iteration continues its lurching progress toward full viability, Hocking's focus seems to be moving ever back in time, receding into the past, before the artifacts of the industrial city itself were built. He looks back to the era of the voyageurs 300 years ago, and before that to the time of the Anishinaabeg people, and even earlier, to the 6,000 years when nature ruled the river and the straits. Hocking's considerable powers of observation—his idiosyncratic combination of archeology, anthropology, on-foot and by-boat research, transformed into physical installation and observed through photography—will serve as the means by which his investigation of his native place continues. ■

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

Scott Hocking is represented by David Klein Gallery.

"Joe Brainard: a box of hearts and other works"

Tibor de Nagy Gallery, October 22–December 3, 2022

by Paul Moreno

The art of Joe Brainard is having a moment.

Joe Brainard, who to some is better known as a writer and poet, was perhaps underappreciated as a visual artist. This tide appears to be turning. In October Rizzoli published *Joe Brainard: The Art of The Personal*, a beautiful monograph about Brainard's visual art. In the past year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art received a gift of 16 important works by Brainard, making the Met the largest public collection holder of Brainard's artwork, with 42 pieces. Word on the street is that an exhibition from their collection of Brainard works is on the drawing board. In November three works on paper by Brainard came up for auction at Sotheby's New York. The first, a mixed-media collage, with an estimate of $5,000–$7,000, achieved a winning bid of $44,100. Then two drawings, both with estimates of $2,000–$3,000, sold for $44,100 and $94,500, respectively.

If you were in New York City this fall, you also would have had a chance to see a lovely jewel box of an exhibition of Brainard's work at Tibor de Nagy Gallery. The exhibition, called "Joe Brainard: a box of hearts and other works," consisted of 68 artworks. As someone familiar with Brainard's work would expect, the items ranged from not too large to very small. The largest pieces in the show were two untitled cut-paper works, one 29 x 23 inches, and the other, 29 x 23 ¾ inches. In each, paper is delicately cut into botanical silhouettes, and then the silhouettes are layered into a frame to create something that is at once a drawing and, in a way, a sculpture. The light in the room as well as the viewer's movement around the pieces create subtle shadows and motion. These works are vague monochromes when viewed in passing or from afar. But in his poem, "Out in the Hamptons," Brainard puts things this way:

Joe Brainard, *Untitled (Box of Hearts)*, undated. Mixed media assemblage, 7 1/2 × 6 inches. Photo: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Joe Brainard in the early 1970s.

the late colors of autumn
subdued into subtle combinations
too intricate and transitory to pin down
unless perhaps with paint

In both this passage and those two largest works from the show, Brainard captures an understanding of nature, as seen from a car passing along a country road. Or perhaps, to the urbane, they represent a nature that is beautiful for the way it's being interpreted, reframed, and presented in a gallery on a busy corner of Manhattan.

Joe Brainard, *Flower Painting*, 1966. Mixed media collage, 13 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches. Photo: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

The exhibition took its title from one of the tiniest works in the show, (one of several in a vitrine in the middle of the gallery), *Untitled (Box of Hearts)*. It is 7 ½ inches x 6 inches, but one could imagine it even smaller. The checklist describes it as a "mixed media assemblage." I wonder if Brainard would have thought of this work in those terms. This work consists of many small elements displayed with the care of the most adroit prop stylist. A Swedish matchbox, the cardboard kind that slides open, reveals a cache of little treasures, all heart shaped. One is a shiny red paper heart held in place with a tiny red plastic clothespin. One appears to be red felt. Three appear to be charms that would be at home on a bracelet: one pale blue enamel, one gold that feels slightly Catholic, and a silver one with a little plastic gem in it. There is also, hanging from a bit of string, a little scalloped paper tag decorated with a red paper heart. It is easy to assemble a fantasy of this little collection. It is easily something a young girl might have pulled together. Maybe a young boy even. But what does it mean when a grown man has amassed this small fortune of hearts? And was it meant as a tiny installation or was it just a peculiar petite keepsake? When did it become art?

When one thinks of sculpture being made in the mid-1970s (a likely approximate date for this matchbox piece), one might think of Robert Smithson's giant land sculptures, Richard Serra's early lead structures, or Barry Le Va's gallery-size scatters. In the air there was a shared notion of expanding the field, taking up space, challenging the viewer, proving something. Brainard, with the elegance of a poet, does not participate, does not desire to prove something. He is just showing, sharing, letting you in rather than taking you out. One does not feel that he was making a piece of work for consumption in the gallery world so much as just assembling a trove rich with personal meaning and reference. With his box of hearts, he embodies a vulnerability to letting the viewer speculate what memory each heart represents and to ponder how Joe got those Swedish matches. In this piece, he also points to something frequently present in his work: a celebration of queerness, an embracing of the sissy, a love for the pansy, a dignity for the nancy.

Joe Brainard, *Untitled (Pansies)*, c. 1970, 1966. Oil on canvas, 10 x 8 inches. Photo: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Joe Brainard, *Untitled (The Avant-Garde)*, c. 1968. Collage, 18 h 24 inches. Photo: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Pansies, of course, are blooming throughout the show. They are tucked into a gorgeous "mixed media collage" from 1966, *Flower Painting,* which, even within its title and description, presents an interesting challenge found in Brainard's work. His work is often crafty, feeling handmade; it is the most excellent example of the kind of art making that can stop just short of actually being art. He employs a skill set that is often reserved for beautiful handmade greeting cards. Brainard, however, takes these humble forms and uses them with a wit, an irony, and a sincerity that transcends from itself to become a genuine formality that is austere but with a wink. *Flower Painting*, with its tension between brights and pastels, its visible scissor edges and marker ink, is as joyful as an Easter card (secular). But when you think of this work as an explosive rebuffing of being called a pansy, it suddenly has all the gravitas of an Easter card (religious).

More pansies are found nearby in a small, gorgeous oil painting, *Untitled (Pansies)*. Against a pale taupe and pink background, two small vessels contain one cut pansy each. One with a lion's face seems to stare back at the viewer, and another monochromatic violet-black one appears to glance over at the fancier one. This simple still life really appears to become comically figurative. On one pansy, a stem becomes an arm; on the other, a green bit of leaf

Joe Brainard, 1977. Photo by Peter Hujar.

Joe Brainard, (Left) *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, c. 1972. Conté crayon on paper, 11 3/4 x 9 inches. (Right) *Jasper Johns*, 1972. Graphite on paper 14 x 10 5/8 inches. Photos: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

suggests a hand. Each little flower appears to have a hand on a hip, flirtatious and sassy.

Nancies abound in an exuberant collage from about 1968 called *Untitled (The Avant-Garde)*. Held within a highly decorative frame, which seems to have been selected by the owner of the work as opposed to the artist himself, is a double-spread collage of iconic images from modern art. Warhol, Picasso, Matisse, Pollack, Mondrian, Manet, and others are represented. But each image contains an intervention in the form of Nancy, from the Ernie Bushmiller comic. A screaming Nancy appears stuck in a Mondrian square. Picasso's *Woman Ironing* now has Nancy's exasperated frown. Nancy contentedly snuggles another Nancy in Courbet's *Le Sommeil*. Brainard is challenging, if not daring, the viewer to get all the references, both high and low, coyly setting a trap in which, if a fella gets all the references, Joe knows the fella might be a bit of a nancy too. It is very smart and subversive.

Joe Brainard. *Untitled (Whippoorwill)*, 1974. Oil on canvas board, 20 x 24 inches. Photo: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

In and among Brainard's jests, there is not only poignancy but also simply lovely painting and drawing. A subtly erotic Conté crayon self-portrait, a deadpan portrait of Jasper Johns, and a monochromatic oil painting, *Untitled (Whippoorwill)*, all express a seriousness of purpose that exists in tension with an air of improvisation, as if one just snapped these images, as one might today, with their phone.

Two standout paintings are a pair of related cityscapes from 1978, *Soho at Dusk* and *Soho at Night*. The Rizzoli monograph on Brainard shows a third, similar painting, *Untitled (Soho Window View I)*. All three of these oils on canvas portray the same view at different times of day. The daytime painting is filled with a haze that covers a large brick wall, below a flurry of architectural detail, below a blue-gray sky. The dusk painting captures the glorious moment of crimson light that sometimes fills Manhattan. The buildings in the painting are reduced to silhouettes ranging from a pale salmon to a deep rusty brown. The night painting brings back some architectural detail while maintaining the reduction of form into blocks of plum, putrid yellow-purple, and graying aubergine. The paintings are crowded with buildings, but not a person is visible. In all paintings the Holland Plaza Building and the now demolished Church of St. Alphonsus Liguori are identifiable landmarks of time and place. In the dusk painting, what might be a random window appears on the large brick wall in the foreground. The window is not there in the other two. Is it just a sunset reflection of the westerly facing window from which these paintings are being made? This moment of refracted light is one in which Brainard quietly inserts himself into the city. This gesture captures something important about a young gay man who left small-town life for New York City both to be an artist and just to live his life unencumbered—the struggle to forge an identity and the desire for and struggle against anonymity. ■

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

John Brainard (Left) *Soho at Dusk,* 1978. Oil on canvas 16 x 12 inches. (Right) *Soho at Night*, 1978. Oil on canvas 16 x 12 inches. Photos: Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Celestial Stage
Michiko Itatani at Wrightwood 659

By Annette LePique

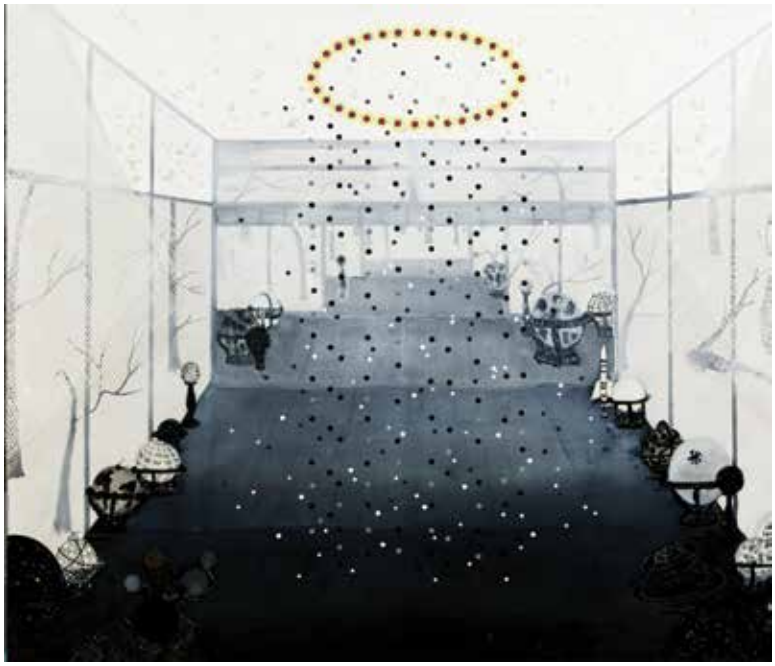
There's a certain ambivalence inherent to an encounter with Michiko Itatani's work. In each of the 65 paintings and drawings that compose Wrightwood 659's "Celestial Stage," the artist's optimism in human discovery exerts a compelling force upon the viewer. Itatani believes in the promise of human inquisitiveness in the face of an unmoving universe. Such faith breeds wonder: it is the feeling that every discovery, from the printing press to the Hadron Collider, brings forth something good. There is an implicit trust in the possibility of human progress. Yet, under the market's invisible hand, Itatani's faith proves difficult terrain to navigate. Who can be free to wonder under mass inequality? What can discovery look like when the planet burns? What can optimism feel like when it is sold to the highest bidder?

Such questions spiral into larger ones. Who is left behind under progress built upon the backs of others? How can we come together to wonder, to create, to move forward, together?

This is the bind you find yourself in when experiencing Itatani's scenes. While viewers can chart the changes in the artist's practice through "Celestial's" shifts in visual vocabularies, they can't ignore the artist's consistent fascination with humanity's search for knowledge. Recalling the memory palaces of antiquity, Itatani creates architectures of the mind to explore how and why humanity desires to understand the world. For Itatani, knowledge ties intimately to the arts and technology, pursuits that express humanity's vulnerabilities and resilience; the shared desire to connect with one another, to know and be known.

From monumental geometric forms to dynamic interior scenes, Itatani's images suggest interrelation and the dynamic potential of art or technology in all Itatani's pieces. Yet even with all of her rockets, trombones, globes, pianos, telescopes, and harps, Itatani is a painter conscientious of scale. Both scientific and musical instruments are miniscule against windows that reveal vast expanses of the cosmos. We, the viewer, also remain small against these starry skies. Each piece functions as a stage for

"Personal Codes" from *Cosmic Geometry 19-B-4*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 78 x 96 inches. Photo courtesy of Michiko Itatani.



"Cosmic Wanderlust" from *CTRL-Home/Echo 11-B-1 (CHR-2)*, 2011. Oil on canvas, 78 x 96 inches. Photo courtesy of Michiko Itatani.

these slivers of human potential against the immensity of the universe a moment in a long line of moments. This is the human condition: an inescapable, unavoidable ephemerality in the face of a burning desire for permanence, for solid ground beneath one's feet. Yet the world keeps turning unabated, and the land beneath crumbles away. Here lies the work Itatani asks of viewers. How do you—how can you—believe as the world burns? Where does beauty live in a world like ours?

Itatani is a storyteller: As a young adult, she aspired to become a fiction writer. Her early short stories are reminiscent of William Gibson's cyberpunk noirs and Octavia Butler's speculative futures. One such story, titled "Encounter Seven" and included in the show's catalog, speaks to the interests that haunt her body of work: what it means to be alone, to know, to doubt, to believe in another, to have faith. The idea of faith is Itatani's central concern: faith in humanity, faith in the future, faith in *a* future.

Untitled painting/installation 78-J-3 (1978), the oldest of the works on view, is a monolithic column created from canvas and acrylics. Eighty-five inches tall, the piece is painted a deep matte onyx with rivulets of metallic silver undulating over the surface. Itatani utilized a syringe to form the metallic lines that skim across the work's velvety black backdrop. In the exhibition's catalog, these lines are compared to a fine mesh or the delicate staff lines within musical notation, an observation befitting Itatani's reverence for the arts. Yet these slopes and whorls also share kinship with lines of planetary orbit—that is, paths of transformation and movement. The monolithic structure speaks to the mysteries of faith: think Stonehenge and

"Distant Earth & Moon" from Infinite *Hope 22-C-2*, 2022. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches. Photo courtesy of Michiko Itatani.

"Personal Codes" from *Cosmic Geometry 19-B-4*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 78 x 96 inches. Photo courtesy of Michiko Itatani.

humanity's predilections to memorialize, with the inky canvas embodying a compact unknown.

Let us think of *Untitled* as a guidepost for Itatani's practice and its many iterations. "Celestial" showcases distinct stages within Itatani's oeuvre that can be identified through the artist's experiments with scale, color, space, and line. In Itatani's *Tesseract Study 21-F-1* through *F-6 (2021)*, precise graphite lines dominate the compact frames. Each of the works in the series depicts orbital lines bursting forth from a central polyhedron figure, the titular tesseract. Though it is left to the viewer to identify whether the lines are the paths of atomic or planetary material, the scale of each piece (measuring no larger than a foot squared) leads the viewer to assume the renderings are at the level of atomic particles. Such experimentation with size and perspective is intriguing when we think in terms of intimacy, connection, and presence, for what is humanity's desire to connect, to know, if not a desire to be known in return? The search for knowledge is a confirmation of one's presence in a vast and sometimes overwhelming world. The act of leaning forward to grasp the intricacies of each piece forces the viewer to engage the work in a new way, a movement that serves to rearticulate the questions of permanence that run throughout the exhibition.

The figure of the tesseract reappears throughout Itatani's work. In *Cosmic Encounter 19-D-7* and *D-8* (2019), pinpricks of light, luminous oils haloed in shades of blue surround the central figure, darkened in shades of black that deepen in opacity and tone. Itatani's tesseract has

Albrecht Durer, *Melancholia I*, 1514. Engraving, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Alberto Giacometti, *Le cube*, 1934-35. Bronze,36.8 h x 23 l x 22.8 d inches. Photo: Foundation Maeght.

been likened to the figure in Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia I* (1514) and Alberto Giacometti's *Le cube* (1934), both pieces that take the process of creating art and human genius as their central ground. While Itatani's engagement with the tesseract also touches upon the struggle and desire inherent to artistic creation, there is also an element of ritual within the figure's repetition. The tesseract here is indicative of the decision to consciously pursue art, pursue knowledge, and pursue connection in the face of the ephemeral. The figure is the tension, the friction inherent to the human condition: the finality of death.

Death and its many questions loom throughout the exhibition, for what gives art meaning if not that it asserts all of life's brilliant viscera? There is a certain comfort to be found in these unavoidable ends; Itatani, I think, finds pleasure in these shadowed spaces too.

In Itatani's painted halls, there is a recognition of humanity's foibles and weaknesses, of our smallness and persistence within the chaos, of our ceaseless searching. These central stages, some painted with vibrant colors and others that shimmer in cool grays, are the exhibition's exposed nerves; they gush with electricity. They are ambivalent and ambiguous, constantly questioning with no clear answers in sight. This speculation is the bedrock of Itatani's belief in humanity: it is doubt that imbues our need to connect, however briefly, with meaning.

It is this search that stands at the heart of Itatani's practice; it is the choice to believe in one another, the choice to make, the choice to create. Choice is the first step: we must choose to believe in one another and build something better, together. ■

Annette LePique is an arts writer. Her interests include the moving image and psychoanalysis. She has written for *Newcity*, *ArtReview*, *Chicago Reader*, *Stillpoint Magazine*, *Spectator Film Journal*, and others.

Jason Revok: Now you see him, Now You Don't

By K.A. Letts

What's an artist to do when he loses faith in himself and in his chosen medium? Jason Revok claims to have spent the past 10 years wrestling with this existential question. In that time, he has refashioned his identity as a well-known L.A. graffiti writer into that of an artist in good standing with the elite world of fine art. The results of his reported wanderings and questionings are on display now in his solo exhibition "Jason Revok: The Artist's Instruments" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD).

Born in Riverside, California, in 1977, Revok grew up suburban and working class. Art, he says, consisted of "album covers, skateboard graphics and comic books." He discovered, and then embraced, the outlaw life of a successful graffiti artist, stealing paint from the hardware store, getting a rush of adrenaline from his unauthorized activities—and occasionally getting caught. But by 2009 the tagger reports feeling alienated and bored as he began to question the social pathologies associated with his chosen lifestyle. He explains, "I had designed my life over the years in a way where I could prioritize painting graffiti all the time. For years and years, I was basically a full-time career criminal, and as a result, I was getting exhausted with all of the stress and anxiety, not to mention the constant legal drama." In 2010 he spent two months in jail for his illegal graffiti writing.

In his carefully curated autobiographical narrative, Revok claims to have moved, in a more or less orderly way, from outlaw tagger into the art mainstream. The truth, as it emerges, is a little more complicated than that. Reliable rumor has it that he continues to write graffiti even as he has developed an art practice that features more gallery-friendly artworks. His upstanding public identity as a fine artist coexists with his continued activity as an unrepentant graffiti writer still operating in the shadows.

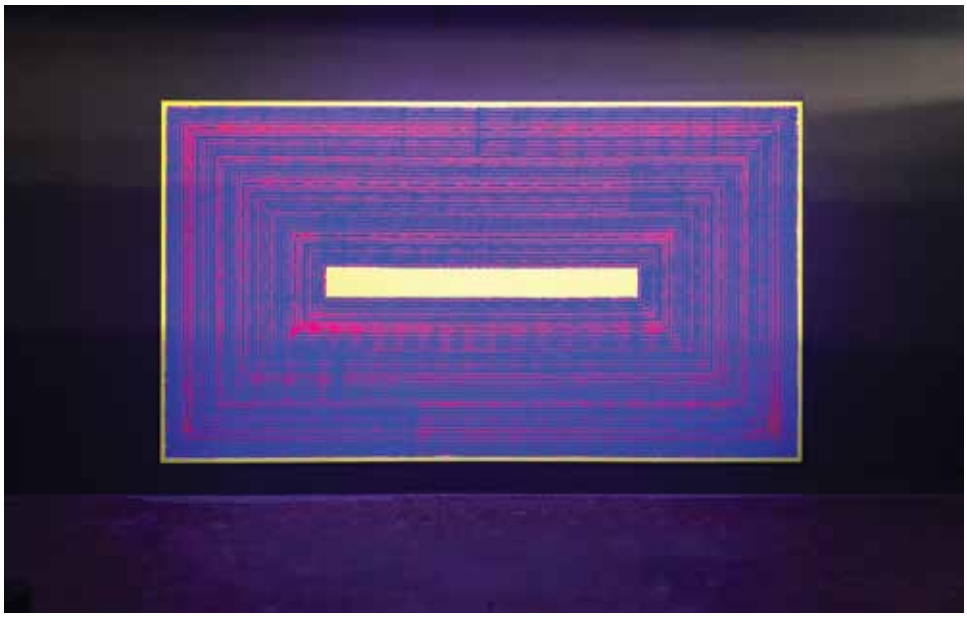
When Revok fled L.A., post-incarceration, to pre-bank-

Jason Revok, "The Artist's Instruments," 2022. MOCAD, installation with truck. Photo: K.A. Letts.

Jason Revok, AI_04X3_10/22, A,B,C. Oil enamel and synthetic polymer on wood, mounted on steel frame (Installation view). Photo: Samantha Bankle. Courtesy the artist, MOCAD, and Olu & Company.

ruptcy Detroit in 2011, he found a beleaguered city more open to street artists than most, with plenty of vacant buildings and a more or less welcoming populace. Like many native Motown artists, he was drawn to the abundance of raw materials that could be salvaged for his nascent studio practice. "My scavenged materials were from homes, businesses, churches and schools that had been abandoned. The exteriors of these buildings revealed stories of what was and still is happening there, like the skin of the body of Detroit," he explained. The resulting body of work, which was shown in his solo exhibition "Ordinary Things" at the Library Street Collective in 2012, made use of the battered integrity of local detritus to create a promising series of exuberant geometric collages. Colorful, with juicy patterns and recognizably "street" materials, the work had a kind of wild energy that merged the renegade spirit of graffiti art with a refined sensibility at home in the gallery. In the current show at MOCAD, heavy wood constructs created in this way, *AI_04X3_10/22 A,B* and *C,* are new iterations of this highly decorative and slickly finished assemblage.

Revok continues to use spray paint along with more conventional acrylics in his studio practice but began to work with lighter substrates in 2016. His experiments in working with homemade instruments, particularly improvised, single-use rastrums—think of the old-timey tool for drawing lines that music teachers used to draw staves on blackboards back in the day—result in parallel striped



Jason Revok, *K Loop_XL_ FlourRed_Blu_FlourYl_8/22*, 2022. Synthetic polymer and oil enamel on canvas. Photo: K.A. Letts.

Jason Revok, *Selfportrait_B_2/21_9/22*, 2022. Synthetic polymer and mounted drop cloth on canvas. Photo: K.A. Letts.

compositions moving wavily across stretched canvas in various patterns. This is Revok's self-professed strategy for subverting the painterly gesture of his graffiti style while preserving the physicality of making marks. Several artworks produced by this method, such as *K_Loop_XL_FlourRed_Blu_FlourYl_8/22*, are on display in the "The Artist's Instruments." They are optically active, minimalist canvases, elegant and impressive in scale, but ultimately corporate, impersonal. They hang, humming on the darkened walls of the gallery, but no tune emerges.

Similarly mute are the three artworks entitled *Selfportrait_A, B, C_2/21_9/22*. Their thinly tinted colors are beautifully luminous, and the wrinkles and tears in the rough drop cloths—which are attached to painted and stretched canvas—add a pleasing physicality. Self-portraits are often the most personally intimate works an artist produces, but these formally exquisite paintings instead seem to be acts of self-censorship. His choice of the title "depersonalization-derealization" for a 2019 exhibition featuring similar works is telling. Clearly, he is hiding something.

Revok finally begins to reveal himself in the dark interior of a delivery truck parked in the gallery. In it, we find a video of the artist engaged in making his spirograph paintings, arguably the most personal (though still recessive) work in "The Artist's Instruments." Once again, it is a kind of mesmerizing choreography in the body of the artist as he creates, and we begin to see a ritualistic pro-

Jason Revok, *Spirograph* (installation view), 2022. Photo: Samantha Bankle. Courtesy the artist, MOCAD and Olu and Co.

Jason Revok (Left) *Spirograph_Ellipse_4/20/21/22_Cyan/R/O/Y/W/NAP/BlkR*, 2022. Synthetic polymer and acrylic spray paint on shaped canvas, shown with plywood, paint, spirograph frame and gears (artist's instrument). Photo: K.A. Letts. (Right) Process image. Photo: Lyndon French. Courtesy Library Street Collective.

cess at work while patterns emerge. A dozen of the smaller paintings hang in rows of six, one row on top of the other; we observe as they begin to glow and pulse. Some are incandescent on a black background, while others float against a rosy sky. There is a kind of transcendence here that almost justifies Revok's refusal of the personal gesture. Almost.

In "The Artist's Instruments," Jason Revok has managed to keep his telltale fingerprints off the art, but perhaps he has succeeded too well. He has come up with a durable—and, I'm sure, marketable—art practice, but the work is altogether too buttoned up. Now that he has learned to color within the lines, he will need to integrate the opposing impulses that coexist within him, to merge the appetite for risk and transgression of the street with the formal elegance and craft of his studio practice. ■

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

"Through a Different Lens"
Neil Goodman at Carl Hammer Gallery

by Rebecca Memoli

Looking through a lens provides an enhanced view of the world. Lenses can create the illusion of closeness or allow a view wider than the human eye can see. This fall the exhibition "Through a Different Lens" at Carl Hammer Gallery included sculptures from two recent bodies of work by Neil Goodman. The sculptures are designed to be looked through, and, like lenses, they create a perspective that is changed. For Goodman, that change came after moving from the backdrop of industrial Gary, Indiana, to the picturesque landscape of the California coast.

All the works are first carved in wood and then cast in bronze. Some are finished and textured with patinas. There is an interesting juxtaposition in which metal is used to sculpt the natural elements of his current landscape. The hard metal materials, like the industrial landscape of South Chicago, become the physical manifestation of the artist's perspective as he studies the landscape of his new home.

A series of polygonal sculptures were displayed on shelves at staggered levels along the south wall of the gallery. Each of these sculptures have a similar shape with a negative space carved out of the center. The works in this series are what Goodman describes as lenses—the slices of bronze offer a portal from one landscape to the other. Here both locations exist in the same space, and the lenses are like eyes that gaze inward and outward reflecting changes "both metaphorical and physical," as Goodman puts it.

Negative space plays an equally important role as the metal form that surrounds it. The sculpture called *Ripple* interacts with the viewer by way of this negative space. The void cuts into the center of the sculpture and morphs its shape when the viewer walks around the sculpture. The shape and form of the negative space are especially interesting in *Ripple* because of deep folds that run through the middle of the piece, which create sharp bends in the

Neil Goodman, *Ripple*, 2018–2021. Cast bronze, 15 1/4 h x 3 1/4 d x 28.5 w inches. Photo: Neil Goodman.

Neil Goodman, *Rudder*, 2018. Museum of Outdoor Arts and Manilow Sculpture Garden. Photo: Neil Goodman.

opening. *Ripple* is one of two sculptures that are on pedestals to allow movement around the works. The rest sit on shelves installed into the gallery walls so that they can only be viewed from one side.

The lens works feel like studies for a larger sculpture, *Rudder*, which is featured on the postcard for this exhibition but is actually on view at the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park at Governors State University. The larger scale of this sculpture allows the viewer to walk around the work and view the landscape through the sculpture.

Another body of work accompanies the lens sculptures. Toward the front of the gallery was a group of tall, elongated forms standing on two legs, giving a more anthropomorphic presence in comparison to the other works. These sculptures are described by Goodman as "gateways." They are inspired by a more topographic view of the California coast. Unlike the lens sculptures, these sculptures are best viewed from one vantage point. At other angles the pieces are abstracted, but, if viewed from the front, they show the layers of a landscape. *Crown*, for instance, has two peaks at its top like mountains, with the vertical lines on either side drawing shapes like fields. For Goodman this is the vineyard that he can see out of his second-story window.

Carl Hammer Gallery features primarily Midwest-based artists. The connection to the Midwest is apparent in Goodman's work. The landscapes formed in the gateway sculptures have a rounded architecture, like the landscape elements in a Roger Brown painting. Brown's work also puts a great emphasis on the negative spaces of the windows inside the buildings.

Goodman's Midwest influence also comes through in his industrial materials, but sometimes the industrial aspects overshadow the natural elements that connect the work to the California landscape. The gateway sculptures work better at conveying that theme visually than the lens pieces. The mountains, if the viewer looks for them, do emerge from beyond the vineyards.

The exhibition includes a lot of work, which reflects how prolific an artist Goodman is. The gallery space, however, doesn't do the work justice. Goodman has a minimalist style that can make the meaning of the works hard to discern without his explanation. In a gallery setting, the smaller scale sculptures are harder to read as landscapes or lenses because the view they afford is of the wall behind them. The site-specific work *Rudder*, however, is successful at activating the landscape, given how its large scale interacts with the space. ■

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

Neil Goodman, *Crown*, 2018–2021. Cast bronze, 36 h x 17 d x 20 7/8 w inches. Photo: Neil Goodman.

William Corwin: "Lethe-Wards"
at Geary Contemporary, Millerton, NY

By D. Dominick Lombardi

Visiting an art gallery in a small town will always end with varying results, especially when you're looking for challenging contemporary art. When you find an exhibition in such circumstances that prompts you to think and expand your aesthetic experience, the rewards are well worth the effort it takes to get there. Millerton, NY, a small upstate town, stands in the midst of corn fields, grain silos, and slow-moving farm equipment. Its population is well under 1,000. This is the setting of Geary Contemporary, which offers a diverse roster of exhibitions and artists, some with studios in New York City. Currently, William Corwin's installation "Lethe-Wards" fills the sun-drenched storefront space with a number of cast iron objects, most of them presented on a low-level platform that braces two sheets of four-by-eight-foot plywood with eight, short, brown sawhorses. Added to the mix are a few small shelves and pedestals here and there that very nicely round off the space. The exhibition's title, "Lethe-Wards," refers to John Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," which alludes to the Greek myth that, if you drank from the waters of the river Lethe, you would be free from all memory of your past. With Corwin's work, there is the distinct feeling that those collective recollections of the past can begin to be restored within the forms of ancient boats, seen here as small-scale sculptural symbols. And as symbols, they revive that long past desire to discover, and the ingenuity to achieve such things by traveling great distances across seas and along rivers.

Most of the boat sculptures, several cast iron and one plaster, are "inspired by ancient burial boats used in Egyptian, Anglo-Saxon, and Mapuche societies," says the artist. My first thought in seeing these works, though, was of the long-lost Pre-Columbian boats rediscovered in various locations in the Americas, both on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. For me, these boat sculptures fully transmitted the artist's intention of inspiring thought about the rigors, risks, and rewards of some of the earliest modes of distant travel.

Adding layers to the narrative of travel, change, and discovery in these sculptures is the inclusion of ladders

William Corwin, "Lethe-Wards," installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and the gallery.

William Corwin, "Lethe-Wards," installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and the gallery.

(another symbol of transition) and text such as *HAD SUNK*. What I find most impressive is the fact that Corwin collaborates with the Rivers of Steel at The Carrie Furnaces in Pittsburgh, where he uses repurposed iron donated by the DMV of Pennsylvania to create his sculptures. Corwin's process—one half of the free-formed molds for the bottom and another for the corresponding top—is done quickly and instinctively by hand, with no preliminary sketches. When placed together, these two newly formed molds create an encasement for the proposed positive object, which is formed in turn by the pour-in of the liquid iron. This primitive type of mold-making leaves distinct marks of the artist's process in the form of finger impressions. The molds' organic looking roughness is very pleasing to the eye and gives these works their timeless appearance.

To be able to pour iron into these one-off hand-formed molds, Corwin must add channels that enter from above, as well as venting shafts for the resulting off-gasses and hot air. And here is the one minor rub. The artist uses a hacksaw or some such tool to cut off the unwanted or unintended iron buildup from the pouring channels and vents. These clean, somewhat shiny cuts are counterintuitive in color and texture to the intended organic surface and patina of the cast iron, leaving one aspect of the artist's process in clear view. It's an element that contradicts the very natural looking dull gray surface of boats. If the material were not too brittle, these areas could be worked somehow to fit in better aesthetically with the rest of the tactile qualities of each piece; however, that may not be possible. On the other hand, the little bits of rust here and there on some of the works, such as *Small Charger, Curragh 2* (2021), give the iron life, as if it is still becoming something. With all these details aside, the overall presentation of the boats is quite striking and very memorable.

There are two additional works in the exhibition that relate to the process, texture, and historic references of the boat series, though they are quite different in subject. They are homages, of a sort, to the classic, iconic, mythical goddess Artemis of Ephesus. A second difference is that these three-sided sculptures are an "open face" pour, according to the artist's terminology, which means a partially shaped mold is used to create the front and sides without an opposing mold to form the back. In addition, the larger of the two sculptures is aluminum and bears a beautifully pitted texture colored by the warm glow from the gallery's lighting. Corwin's versions of Artemis of Ephesus are similar enough in shape and composition to make a visual connection to their historical referents. At the same time, they have a direct connection to the process involved in Corwin's boat sculptures, with strong indications of the erosion of time and the unforgiving challenges of struc-

William Corwin, *Had Sunk* (2022), cast iron, 24 ½ l x 8 ¼ d x 5 h inches. Image courtesy of the artist and the gallery.

William Corwin, *reddress*, 1998–2011.
Mixed media, 63 1/2 l x 70 d x 50 w inches.
"eyehand: selected sculpture from 1975–2011,"
19 November–14 January 2012, L.A. Louver,
Venice, CA

tural integrity. Corwin's methods point to how exposure to the elements leads to the obliteration of detail.

My first thought when seeing *Artemis Ephesia* (2022) was of Picasso's more misaligned, mangled cast bronze sculptures and of Giacometti's portraits or heads—a first impression that dissolved quickly upon closer inspection. Corwin's interpretation of the goddess Artemis is much more about the economics of process in the way that it simplifies form, and it is reminiscent of Art Brut or CoBrA in its emotional content. The disbandment of details as a result of the techniques used to create the mold leaves behind a loosely haunting, and very penetrating, presentation that clearly commands its allotted space. If we were once meant to look up to such figures as Artemis of Ephesus in the life-sized or even larger versions made by the ancients, Corwin manages to achieve that level of adoration with an object that is barely over a foot and a half tall.

Overall, what we have with this installation of Corwin's works is a reinvigorated sense of history. His art is a counterpoint to banal passing afterthoughts or waning remnants of cultures salvaged by museums and archeologists that have lost their depth of meaning in today's digital, meme-defined, politically fueled, and social media–crazed age. Corwin is asking us to remember and investigate, and to ignore the one-sided views of history that we all grew up with; he asks us to take a more global view of the world around us. Some cultures are built on passion and poetry, others on icons of self-serving projections of laws and punishment, and still others on overwhelming domination and fear. Corwin is steering us towards a truth that is substantiated by actual, concrete, physical facts, and the openness to be enlightened. ■

D. Dominick Lombardi is a visual artist, art writer, and curator. A 45-year retrospective of his art recently traveled to galleries at Murray State University, Kentucky in 2019; to University of Colorado, Colorado Springs in 2021; and the State University of New York at Cortland in 2022.

(Left) William Corwin, *Long Boat, Two Passengers* (detail of cut metal) (2022), cast iron, 25 ½ l x 10 d x 5 h inches. Image courtesy of the artist and the gallery

(Right) William Corwin, *Artemis Ephesia* (2022), aluminum, 18 ½ h x 12 l x 4 ½ d inches. Image courtesy of the artist and the gallery..

Gabriel Orozco: "Spacetime"
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York City

by Paul Moreno

One of the most striking pieces in "Spacetime," is *Moon Tree,* an example of a series of sculptures Mexican artist Orozco made between 1996 and 2010. An artificial ficus tree sits in a very ordinary pot one could find at any hardware store. The tree is nearly six feet tall, and, within its foliage, a majority of its plastic leaves have been intersected with white paper disks. The artificial tree per se is a bit banal, something that you might find in the corner of an office anyplace in the world. One easily assumes that Orozco found the tree at a home decor or office supply store. His intervention, the insertion of the white disks, does something interesting. First, it makes you look at the ficus, which, in an unadorned state, might not warrant a second glance. The white disks thicken the foliage with their delicate addition of mass and in the way they reflect light and create shadow. Placing an artificial ficus in a room, in most circumstances, would at best be a gesture of bland and easily overlooked elegance. Here it suddenly becomes a considered act. The white disks imply someone cared about this tree. The tree's second effect is how it plays with the light in the room. The artificial tree, like a cucoloris, casts an organic shadow on the wall. That in itself is quite beautiful, but you might not even see it, because you are looking at the tree. It is as though the tree becomes a tool to make a painting in shadow.

Behind *Moon Tree*, on the wall, in its shadow, hangs an aluminum sculpture, *Modular Sequence: Caterpillar*. This five-foot-long rod is formed from a series of alternating large and small shiny aluminum spheres fused together. The larger spheres are then ornamented with more small spheres. This brilliant caterpillar of so many gazing balls almost looks back at the viewer. It adds a depth and shimmer to the *Moon Tree* shadow. A joke about a caterpillar in a tree makes itself and may or may not have been intentional. What does seem very intentional is that this work when photographed has always appeared to be a horizon-

Gabriel Orozco, *Moon Tree*, 1996–2010. Ficus tree, plastic leaves and branches, paper discs, plastic pot, 96 1/2 h x 59 d inches. Photo: Marian Goodman Gallery.

Gabriel Orozco, *Modular Sequence: Caterpillar*, 2015. Aluminum, 3 7/8 w x 3 7/8 d x 62 l inches. Photo: Marian Goodman Gallery.

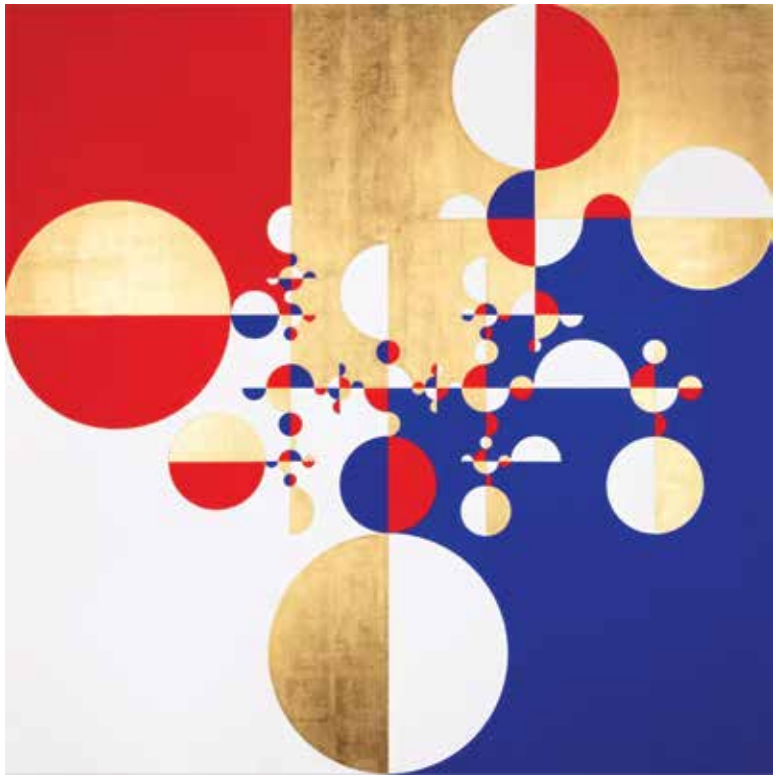
tal line and in fact appears so on the exhibition website. But here in the gallery, it is vertical. This simple and almost arbitrary decision captures the spirit of the work of Orozco as well as the *alegría de vivir* of "Spacetime."

"Spacetime" has been open for nearly a year at the time of this writing. It is expected to be open until the middle of 2023. Its opening was quiet; the press was not alerted; there was no 6 p.m. reception with white wine. I discovered the show quite by accident when I went to see the Lawrence Weiner show upstairs in Marian Goodman Gallery. "Spacetime," it should be noted, is also under the purview of Marian Goodman Gallery and is described as an an "off-schedule" exhibition. When another gallery vacated their space, Goodman took it over with the intention of using it for a back office. Orozco proposed using the space for the project that is there now. In the same way that *Moon Tree* plays with notions of natural (the way light falls through trees) and artificial (a tree made of plastic), in the same way that the *Modular Sequence: Caterpillar* is a horizontal that can also be vertical, "Spacetime" offers something like a small retrospective exhibition but not strictly so.

If one visits the website for the show, go-spacetime.com, one sees a security camera view of each of the rooms of the exhibition. However, these are actually short amateur videos played on a loop. At this point, as works in the show have been sold or simply swapped out, the video does not even represent the installations as they exist today. The checklist of the show numbers well over a hundred items, and some of these items consist of multiple components.

Throughout his career Orozco has made *Working Tables*. These works are accumulations of objects that the artist feels live well in each other's company. It is difficult to say if any one thing belonging to a working table is an

Gabriel Orozco, (Top) *Model (White Sea Shells)*, from Working Table objects, c. 1990s. Graphite on three shells. (Center) *Model (Yogurt Caps)*, from Working Table objects, c. 1990s. (Bottom) *Model (Spitted Lemon)*, from Working Table objects, c. 1990s. Lemon skin, plasticine. Photos: Marian Goodman Gallery.



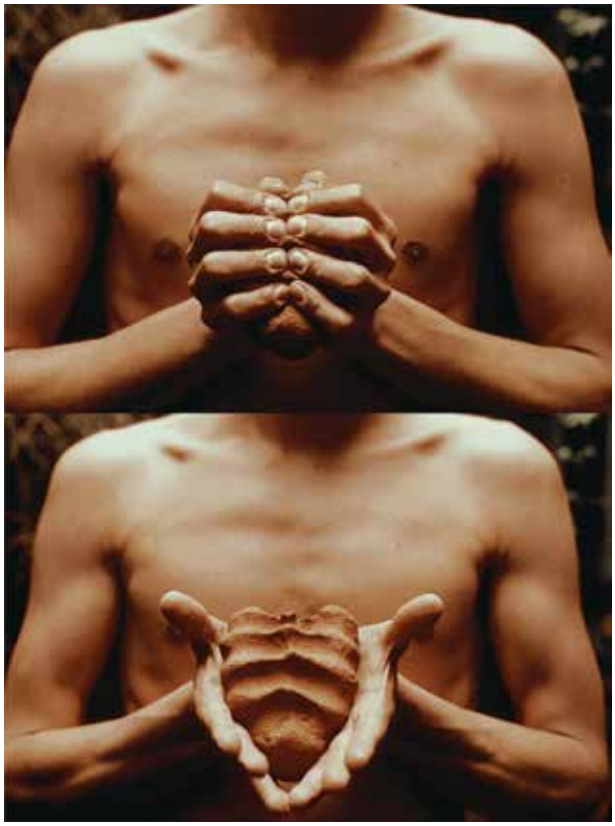
Gabriel Orozco, *Samurai Tree (Invariant 28L)*, 2022. Tempera and gold leaf on linen, 47 1/4 x 47 1/4 inches. Photo: Marian Goodman Gallery.

Gabriel Orozco, *Light Tiger, Lac Du Bourdon Summer*, 2010. Gouache, pastel on paper, (paper) 72 5/8 x 39 1/8 inches. Photo: Marian Goodman Gallery.

art item unto itself. These may include a number of small wax works the artist has playfully shaped; a collection of shells the artist has decorated with grids of graphite, a pyramidal plastic bag of seed pods, yogurt cup caps, models and maquettes for larger works, a pressed flower with a printed puffer, a lemon peel preserved in plasticine, experiments and ideas. Whatever is included is then artfully arranged on a large plinth. One room in the gallery seems to be an immersive and evolving example of this type of work.

Everything I have written about so far is found in just one room of "Spacetime," ROOM TWO of four rooms that the show occupies.

Along with a number of sculptures and works on paper, the largest room, ROOM ONE, presently contains an example of Orozco's signature paintings, *Samurai Tree (Invariant 28L)*. All the Samurai Tree paintings are inspired by diagraming the Samurai opening in chess and the sequence of moves that follow it. All the *Samurai Tree* paintings are identical in composition and always only include the colors red, blue, white and gold—this is the rule. The paintings then differentiate from each other as variables are introduced: size of canvas and distribution of those four colors. Although these paintings are created from a system of rules, the results are paintings that possess a spiraling explosion of vivid color that feel as loose and organic as something that grows in nature; but the paintings also reminds us that nature does not spiral randomly, but in strict patterns. Games, rules, and rules' exceptions are frequent themes in Orozco's work. In the *Samurai Tree* paintings for example, there is a tension in material selec-



Gabriel Orozco, *My Hands Are My Heart (Mis manos son mi corazon)*, 1991. Silver dye bleach print (cibachrome, 2 parts), 9 1/8 x 12 1/2 inches. Photo: Marian Goodman Gallery.

tion: humble matte tempera paint is the rule, luminous gold leaf is the exception.

Between ROOM ONE and ROOM TWO, a framed work on paper functions as a door. The work on paper, *Light Tiger, Lac Du Bourdon Summer*, is from 2010 and is part of Orozco's Corplegados series. Meaning "folded bodies," these door-size works on paper were made to be folded into a size that could easily fit in carry-on luggage. Made at a time of intense travel, Orozco could take these projects wherever he went and work on them wherever he happened to be staying at the time. They were sometimes worked on unfolded on the floor or the wall; they were sometimes worked on while folded on a desk. They contain elements of collage and cut-outs, and they are inherently double-sided. This example of a Corplegado is somewhere between a portrait of a tree and a splatter painting. Russet branches support green obovate leaves. Two eyeholes cut out of the drawing seem to allude to *Moon Tree*, which, of course, alludes to *Samurai Tree*.

If you open the door/drawing, you enter ROOM THREE, which contains a small selection of sculptures and models and a few beautiful, understated charcoal drawings. What most gives one pause is that you suddenly feel you've entered a place you should not. The experience does not feel like an exhibition anymore; rather, it feels like you have wandered into the office. On my initial visit, I pardoned myself but was surprised to be invited into the next room, SPACESHIP ROOM. This next chamber of the warren is filled with bright white light. Cubbies line the walls and contain artist objects, some of which are finished work, some of which are models. There are stacks of framed works wrapped in paper. On the day of my first visit, a "Spacetime" attendant was at a folding table unwrapping framed works, archiving them, then rewrapping them. I again pardoned myself for intruding, and she graciously invited me to continue to explore. She also graciously shared information about the project and encouraged me to go up a tiny staircase to THE OFFICES, where a selection of photos and works on paper were either displayed or stored.

This is where I was happy to see one of Orozco's best-known images. *My Hands Are My Heart (Mis manos son mi corazon)* is a photograph in two parts. The top half shows the artist's chest; his hands are gripping a mound of clay. The lower half shows his hands now open and the clay holding the shape of his grasp. It is a simple and beautiful gesture. The shaped clay in the photograph does in fact become a finished work. A model of this was included in the initial installation of "Spacetime." This work particularly captures the spirit of the "Spacetime" experiment.

Orozco is letting the viewer behind the curtain but in a way is also saying the curtain was never there. If one sets aside questions like, "Do I know how to apply gold leaf?" when looking at Orozco's work, one can often see how the thing is made and how one could make a version of it themselves. Gabriel Orozco's art making is very much about chance, experiment, the rules of games, and breaking the rules of games. In "Spacetime," he points to the arbitrariness of distinguishing work from model and work from play. This show is honest and vulnerable. He has put his heart out for the casual passerby to explore. ■

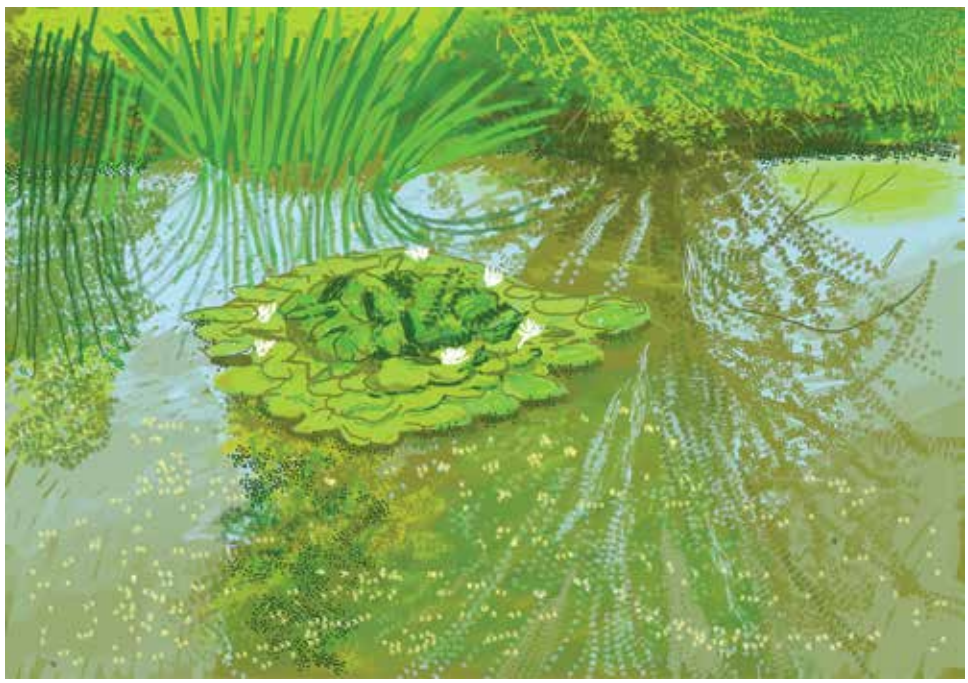
Paul Moreno is an artist, designer and writer working in Brooklyn, New York. He is a founder and organizer of the New York Queer Zine Fair. His work can be found on Instagram @ bathedinafterthought.

Up Close and Impersonal "David Hockney: The Arrival of Spring, Normandy, 2020"
at the Art Institute of Chicago

byEvan Carter

Visitors to "David Hockney: The Arrival of Spring, Normandy, 2020" are greeted by a television monitor affixed to a wall across from glass doors that open to a gallery featuring an exhibition of David Hockney's recent digital renditions of bucolic Normandy France. Displayed on a loop, the monitor shows a timelapse video with the centralized image of a tree. It begins as a series of lines making up its trunk and branches that gradually bloom dots of green leaves before the loop starts again. It is a forecast of the daffy celebration of Impressionism through the medium of new technology that is this exhibition. These digital renderings of trees, flowers, grassy hills, rain, sunrises, and sunsets evoke the subjects of Hockney's impressionist forebearers but lack just about all of the subtleties that can be afforded by the human hand and eye as well as the medium of paint itself.

According to the Art Institute website "He had first explored the technology in 2011, but this time developed an app which was adapted and developed to his specific requirements with new brushes and shapes." It may come as a surprise to some that Hockney "developed, adapted, and developed" this app because the work seems so utterly conventional in its use of digital tools and, at times, cartoonish in its execution. On this particular visit, walking through this rectangular loop of a gallery one could hear snickering laughter and see perplexed smiles on the faces of viewers. Certain images of raindrops hitting water are particularly silly in Hockney's use of a curly-cued "v" shape representing each individual splash. These drawn forms are akin to what one might find in a child's drawing where the sun is a yellow circle with lines pointing away from it or the sky is one blue stripe across the top of a page.



David Hockney, *No 340, 21 May 2020*, iPad drawing. © David Hockney. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

David Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967, Acrylic on canvas, 95.5 x 96 inches. Tate Collection, London.

Better brushwork can be seen in art made by artificial intelligence, which granted is still yet to work *en plein air*.

This is not to dismiss the value of childlike whimsy and wonder in modern art. It is just that in this case it does not seem intentional or affecting. Instead, it is a disappointing reminder of the limitations that have been placed on such a skilled, visionary artist as David Hockney by the chosen medium. It must be mentioned that all this artist's gifts were not lost in this approach. One of the stronger pieces titled *No. 340, 21st May 2020* is a firm reminder of Hockney's skill as a colorist. The image depicts a cluster of lily pads floating on the surface of still water that reflects a pale blue sky, green leaves, both punctuating a murky brown that is familiar to anyone who has ever visited a pond. Unlike many of the sprawling vistas featured in "The Arrival of Spring," *No 340* feels like a discernible space. At a glance it has an almost photographic quality that, after one step closer, crumbles under the presence of the clunky lines and repeated brush patterns of the custom iPad app.

Consistently, this work teases the idea that we are looking at painting. Also from the Art Institute website; "...his iPad works possess all the qualities of his paintings on canvas...." In spite of the fact that Hockney himself

David Hockney, *17th April 2020, No. 2.* iPad drawing. © David Hockney. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

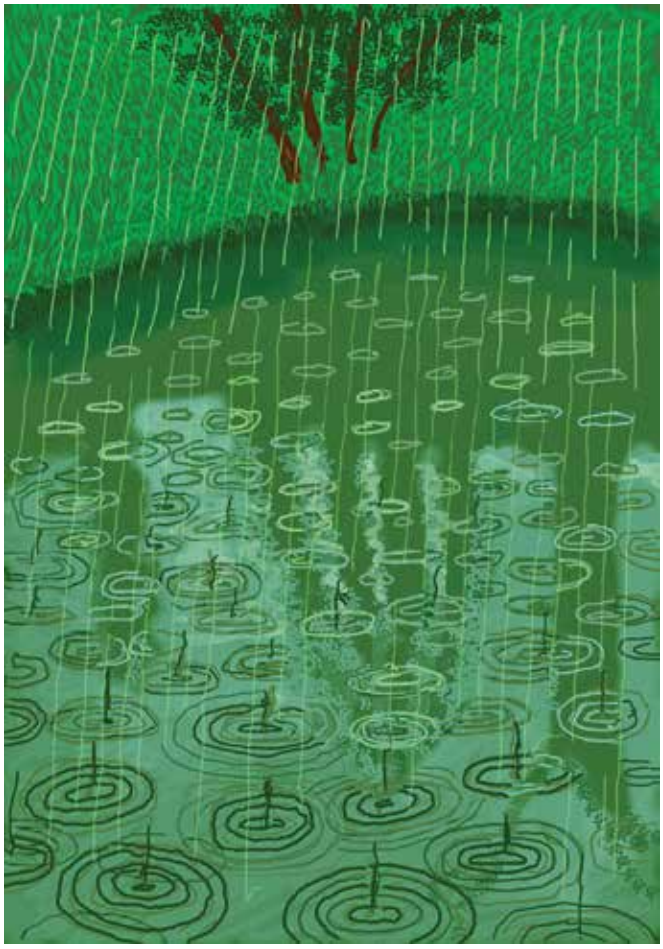
David Hockney, *Nichols Canyon*, 1980. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. Private collection. Photo: Arthive.com.

clearly enjoys this digital medium, this statement is a reductive take on his career as a painter and artist as well as an insult to the intelligence of those who follow his work and view this exhibition. A more apt description would be that this series is another addition to the diverse body of work by an artist who has explored figurative and abstract forms across a range of media. To say that any artist's work possesses all the same qualities of what they produce in a completely different medium is just lazy.

Hockney is known for his bold use of color which can be subdued and predictable like in 1967's *A Bigger Splash* to the hyperbolically saturated landscapes such as *Nichols Canyon* painted in 1980. The colors in "The Arrival of Spring" are not only highly saturated, they are also highly predictable. Leaves are green. Tree branches are brown. The sky is blue. The grass is also green. Oh boy is it green. So much so that, well, let's just take a moment for the color green. And what better way than with an anecdote.

In FX's televised series Fargo, a criminal mastermind played by Billy Bob Thornton prompts Colin Hank's naive police officer to answer a question: "why can humans see more shades of green than any other color?" Viewers are later treated to an answer stating that it is due to human evolution selecting our eyes to discern predators in the wild, thus lending us the ability to perceive more shades of green. Assuming this to be true, it is perhaps also what makes the

David Hockney, *27th April 2020, No. 1.* iPad drawing. © David Hockney. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.



David Hockney, *No 346, 22nd May 2020*, iPad drawing.
© David Hockney. Photo: Art Institute of Chicago.

excessive use of the "G" in RBG so oppressive to the eye in these…paintings? drawings? If we have evolved to be more sensitive to green, is it any wonder we see so little of it used on our illuminated computers, televisions, and phones?

Digital imaging relies on RBG color meaning red, blue, and green are the primary colors used to make all other colors we can see on a screen. However, these three primaries are not equally weighted. Green has a much higher mcd (millicandela) rating than its red and blue counterparts. This is presumably by design so that technology has an optimized starting point for color mixing, making that familiar neon green a gateway to so many other colors. But as many a graphic designer or digital artist can likely attest; it can be tedious to generate a shade of green that is bright and natural looking without making you feel like you are staring at a piece of kryptonite.

It seems that the RBG color system may have posed a certain challenge with this body of work, not only to Hockney, but to the designers of this exhibition. The gallery walls are painted a cool dark gray offering a shadowy backdrop to these practically neon images that, like so many others, are viewed on a screen often with a black border, as opposed to the white wall of the contemporary art gallery. Though these images still radiate like uranium on the walls, it seemed like a wise decision. So much neon green on white walls may have called for photosensitivity warnings outside the gallery. In the least, it may have resulted in so many of these landscapes just sort of bleeding into one another and making one big schlocky mess.

There is something to be said for painters exploring the uses of new technology in the creation of art. It is just disappointing to see the technology place such dull constraints upon a painter whose storied career has produced work that has so wondrously straddled the line between the conventional and arrestingly unique. The video display outside the gallery promised something new, a vision previously unseen and now unleashed—an artist's view of the natural world once stifled by the analog but now liberated by innovation. After leaving the gallery, that same video just felt like an apology. ■

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.

"The First Homosexuals": The Interplay of Art and Language

Wrightwood 659 Gallery, Chicago

By Michel Ségard

Owe Zerge, *Model Act*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 53.1 x 19.7 inches. Private Collection. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

Wrightwood 659, once again, presents us with a thought-provoking exhibition on the history and role of homosexuality in our culture. In 2017 the Alphawood Foundation presented Art AIDS America Chicago. A year later, Wrightwood 659 gallery was completed, and in 2019 the exhibition "About Face: Stonewall, Revolt, and New Queer Art" was mounted there, curated by Johnathan Katz. Now in this space Katz has staged a fresh show, "The First Homosexuals: Global Depictions of a New Identity, 1869–1930," an exhibition that explores the art-historical role the term "homosexual" has had since it was coined by the Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1869. And this exhibition is just a preview of a much larger offering on the same topic scheduled for 2025.

This exhibition is not about the art per se. The aesthetics of any given piece play a very minor role here. In this show, we are looking at how the term "homosexual" affected how we interpreted the art that was produced after its incorporation into our language. The thesis of the exhibition is that, before 1869, the concept expressed by the word "homosexual" was an adverb, describing something someone did. After the term itself was coined, the concept became a noun and began to describe someone "indulging" in a same-sex lifestyle. Because this show only includes art produced up to the 1930, it does not reflect the aesthetics and cultural attitudes of our contemporary society.

Structurally, "The First Homosexuals" is organized into nine sections, each addressing a particular aspect of the homosexual experience and highlighting a particular subset of imagery with homosexual undertones or content, some of it explicitly depicting sexual acts. Most of the work is from the United States and Europe, but some comes from China, Japan, and other Asian countries.

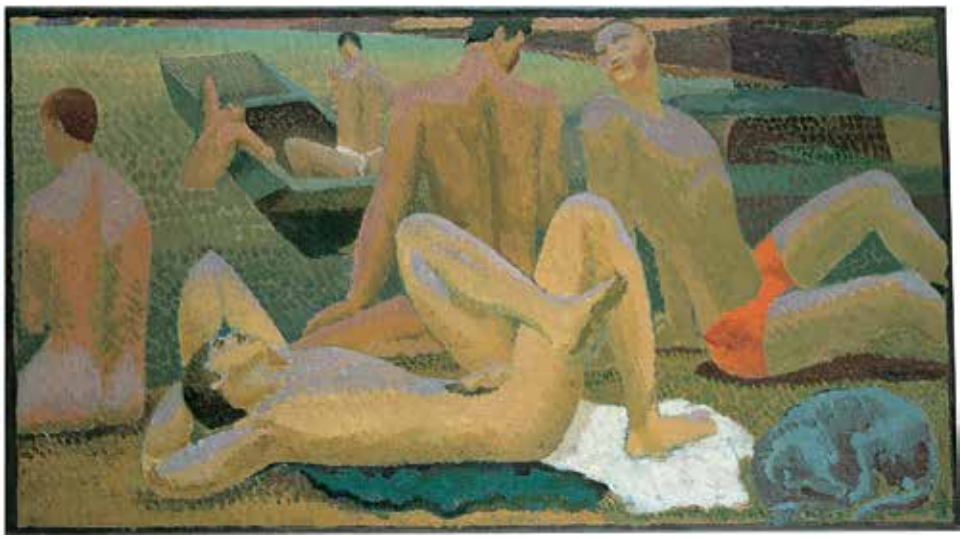
Before "Homosexuality" looks at how cultures around the world perceived homosexual acts and desires. There are three pieces from late 18th- and early 19th-century

French school, circle of Jacques Louis David, *Academy of a Reclining Man*, c. 1790, Charcoal and white chalk highlights on paper, Michael Sodomick Queer Art Collection. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

Europe that portray same-sex relations between men in which one is passive and plays the feminine role. This view of homosexual relations between men dates back to ancient Greece, where no stigma was attached to it. It was considered a natural part of life. *Academy of a Reclining Man* embodies the European stereotype. In this drawing by an artist in Jacque Louis David's circle from around 1790, the full-frontal figure is reclining, seemingly asleep, and totally vulnerable, yet endowed with a virtually perfect physique. Also in this section is a Japanese scroll from around 1850 that depicts sexual acts between an older female attendant, a samurai warrior, and a Buddhist monk in various combinations. No sexual act is preferred or impugned. Also included are a piece from China and one from early 19th-century Japan that shows two men engaging in sodomy. It is clear that, in the East, same sex activity was fully acknowledged and practiced, also seemingly without social stigma. It is disappointing that, effectively, **Before "Homosexuality"** had only three works from the West. Homoerotic art was produced in the West at least since the Renaissance, with Michelangelo and Caravaggio producing works that lend themselves to such interpretation. It would have been helpful if a few other pre-19th-century examples had been included to round out what had gone before in Europe. It is interesting to note that all the Asian pieces showed overt sexual acts, while the European pieces only depicted objects of desire.

Sascha Schneider, *Growing Strength*, 1904. Oil on canvas. Photo: glreview.org

The next section in the exhibition is **Archetypes**. In a way, this section codifies the stereotypic, neoclassical depiction of male homosexuality in late 19th-century art—an alluring youth being admired by an older man, as seen in Sascha Schneider's 1904 large oil *Growing Strength*. In some circles, that stereotype lingers to this day. But there is an evolution in male imagery, mostly in the decades between the start of World War I and the mid-1930s. The male object of desire, although young and handsome, becomes admired by other men of the same age, as seen in



Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond*, © Estate of Duncan Grant. All rights reserved, DACS, London / ARS, New York. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

Duncan Grant's *Bather by the Pond* (1920–21) or Eugène Jansson's *Bathhouse Study*. We see similar scenarios a little later in the works of Paul Cadmus.

The next section, **Desire**, illustrates the difference in sexual imagery between the West and Asia. The wall panel for this section describes it best:

> "In this section, you will notice significant distinctions between Western and Eastern imagery in relation to desire. While Western art sought to seduce its viewers' fantasies with highly suggestive imagery, only rarely was sexual penetration depicted, and never in a fine art context. This gulf between art and pornography in the West…makes little sense in an Asian context where sex was understood as a part of life. It was only after Japan opened to the West in 1869 that it began to police homosexual representation—not because the dominant culture objected to it, but because they feared the West would find it distasteful, potentially damaging Japan's overtures to Europe and the Americas."

Jane Poupelet *Nu de dos à califourchon sur une chaise*, 1906. Sepia on paper, 23.8 x 15.3 inches. Photo: centrepompidou.fr.

But another phenomenon begins to appear in this section. Two European pieces that were not frontal, Konstantin Somov's *Standing Male Model from Back* (1896) and Jane Poupelet's *Nu de dox à califourchon sur une chaise* (Nude from the back astride a chair) (1906), suggest more than mere physical attraction. In these pieces, desire becomes more directed to the whole individual by virtue of not seeing their external sexual characteristics. It becomes more "intellectual" in nature, in contrast to the introductory piece to this section, Owe Zerge's Model Act (1919), which is primarily erotic and highly romantic.

Appropriately following is the section **Couples**. Here we are presented with portraits of artists' romantic partners. Of the 11 paintings in this section, only three are of couples together. The most noteworthy is Louise Abbéma's painting *Sarah Bernhardt et Louise Abbéma sur un lac*

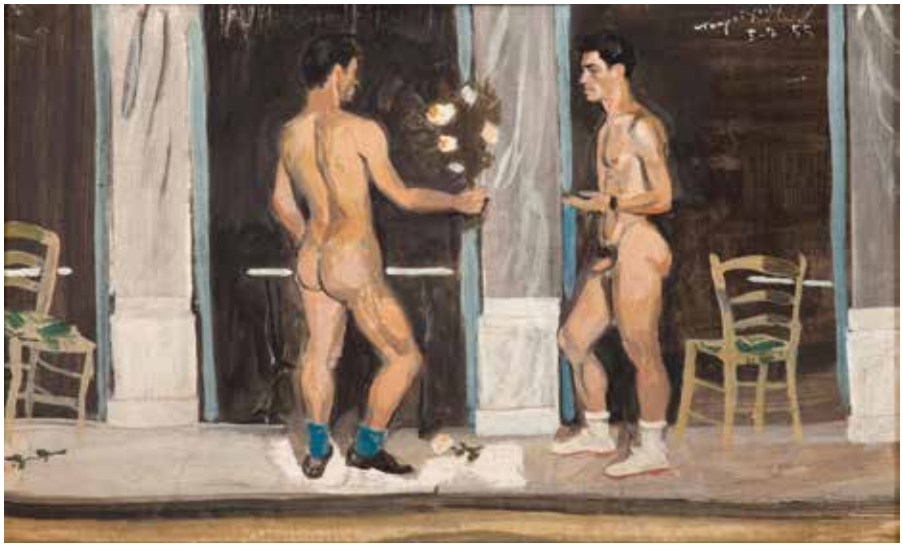
Louise Abbéma, *Sarah Bernhardt et Louise Abbéma sur un lac*, 1883, Oil on canvas, 63 x 82.6 x 1.2 inches (framed). Collections Comédie-Française. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

(Sarah Bernhardt and Louise Abbéma on a lake) from 1883. In this painting, Bernhardt is seen lounging at one end of a boat, while Abbéma, her companion, stands at the other end, dressed in mannish clothes. As the wall text states, "This is an example of a painting speaking to two audiences at once. For most viewers, it was a portrait of Bernhardt at leisure, while for a few, it was a portrait of domestic intimacy."

Another interesting painting in this section is Frances Mary Hodgkins's *Friends (Double Portrait) [Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders]*, done between 1922 and 1925. It is the second of only five paintings that actually show couples. (Two of them are small images from China and Japan that show couples in coitus.) In Hodgkins's vaguely Matissian painting, the partners in the couple are side by side but not engaged with each other, each looking in a different direction. This painting also chronicles an exception to 20th-century heteronormative society in the West. Female same-sex couples were allowed to exist publicly—not so for males.

The only paintings addressing male couples are the ones from China and Japan, mentioned earlier, and Alastair Cary-Elwes's *Rupert Bunny* from 1887. Cary-Elwes and Bunny were both artists from affluent families who shared a studio in Paris. Bunny was married to what we call a "beard," a woman who is married to a homosexual man for appearances. In this painting, Bunny is depicted playing the piano in a serious, attentive mood. There is no hint of Cary-Elwes in the painting. Male homosexual couples are extremely rare in Western

Frances Hodgkins, *Friends (Double Portrait)* [Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders], 1922-1923. Oil on canvas, 24 h x 30.3 w inches. Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago. Photo: Wrightwood 659.



Janis Tsarouchis, *The Bouquet*, 1955. Mixed media on canvas laid on board, 8.9 x 14.4 inches. Photo: bonhams.com.

art. Yannis Tsarouchis did a few; *The Bouquet* from 1955 shows one nude man handing a bouquet of flowers to another nude man. However, note that it was done in the mid 1950s, much later than the timeframe of this exhibition. Meanwhile, the book "LOVING: A Photographic History of Men in Love, 1850s–1950s" (5 Continents Editions, 2020) has hundreds of photographs of male couples. But these photographs are snapshots from daily life and not normally considered works of art.

The exhibition continues with **Pose**. Today, when we hear that word, we think of Madonna and voguing. Its meaning within the context of this exhibition is not that far removed. The section starts with the Mexican painter Roberto Montenegro's *Retradto de un anticuario o Retrato de Chucho Yeyes y autorretatron* (Portrait of an Antiquarian or Portrait of Chucho Yeyes and a Self Portrait), painted in 1926. The first thing one notices is the pursed lips of the subject and the "limp-wristed" hand gestures. In this portrait, the subject's sexuality is being exposed for all who know how to read the code. As modernist as this work is, the painting pays homage to the past by borrowing from Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini double portrait; the portrait of Montenegro is a reflection in the glass globe on the desk.

In addition to exposure, a pose can also indicate overwhelming confidence, even arrogance. Much of these characteristics are evident in noted lesbian artist Florence Carlyle's *Self Portrait* of 1901. From Ontario, she studied painting in Canada and France and worked mostly in an impressionist style. As the exhibition wall label states, her favorite subject matters were "domestic, feminine spaces, focusing on the intimate lives of contemporary women, including her lover, Judith Hastings." Carlyle moved to Crowborough, England, around 1903 and spent the rest of her life there with Hastings.

(Left) Florence Carlyle, *Self Portrait*, c. 1901. Oil on canvas. Photo: www.bookworkjw.ca.

(Right) Roberto Montenegro, *Retrato de un anticuario o Retrato de Chucho Reyes y autorretrato*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 40.4 x 40.4 nches. Colección Pérez Simón, Mexico. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

August and Louis Lumière, firm short of Loïe Fuller doing the *Danse Serpentine*, 1897 © Institut Lumière. Photo still: hoyesarte.com.

The next section, **Between Genders**, is of commanding political interest for the LGBTQ+ community today. As the section's wall text states, "While the term 'homosexual' implies a union of people of the same gender, it obscures the difference between one's biological sex and one's gender identity, two terms we are today coming to better understand and embrace as part of the trans revolution unfolding around us." This section looks at cross-dressing (drag) and what we now sometimes call gender bending.

The section starts with a traditional cross-dressing example. Henri Legludic's 1896 book *Notes et observations de médicine légale* published the account of Arthur W., who preferred to go by the name The Countess. The wall label summarizes Arthur's life from the time he became the "mistress" of a wealthy aristocrat at 13 to his later years as a sex work on the streets.

This section also includes a film short by August and Louis Lumière, *Danse Serpentine [I]* from 1897. It shows Loïe Fuller doing her famous Serpentine Dance, along with a drag version by the Italian actor Leopoldo Fregoli. Nearby are two photographs from 1903 of two Black actors (Charles Gregory and Jack Brown), with Gregory in drag, dancing the cakewalk. There is also a digital reproduction of a film by the Lumière brothers of Gregory and Brown dancing,

Gregory again in drag. These pieces demonstrate the beginning of the acceptance of cross-dressing in modern Western society. (It must be noted that in 16th and 17th century European theater, female roles were played by men in drag.)

But there is a more subtle development taking place around the early 20th century. Some artists are feminizing normally male subjects in their work. Two examples in this show are Jan Zrzavý's *St. John, Disciple whom Jesus Loved* (1913) and František Drtikol's untitled photograph of a young male youth. Drtikol feminizes the youth by the use of light and shadow to emphasize the boy's androgyny. As a result, the image appears to oscillate between genders. The acceptance of gender fluidity has grown in modern times to include gender-neutral individuals who dress in a gender-mixing and sexually ambiguous way, along with the use of the gender-neutral pronouns they, them, their, and ze/hir.

Untitled [Two Black actors (Charles Gregory and Jack Brown), one in drag, dance together on stage], c. 1903, Process print with watercolor, 5.5 x 3.5 inches. Wellcome Collection. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

The Serpent Charmer, Galerie Goupil & Cie, after Jean-Léon Gérôme, c. 1894. Photogravure. Photo: Wrightwood 659.

Colonizing, the next section of the exhibition, addresses the impact of European colonization on the changing attitudes regarding same-sex relationships and eroticism. From the wall text introducing this section:

> "While a number of indigenous cultures carved out what was often a respected place for same-sex sexuality, "homosexuality" came to be imposed on these cultures, investing them in Western ideologies that literally rewrote indigenous relationships to their own histories and social practices. This ideological colonialism was so successful that some countries that once accepted same-sex relations now harshly punish them according to the dictates of colonial-era law, despite being long-liberated from European colonizers."

What is not stated in this wall text, but implied elsewhere, is that much of the changes were based on economic grounds—in other words, the willingness to alter one's cultural traditions for economic gain through trade.

The Serpent Charmer, a photogravure after the famous painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, depicts a naked young boy "handling" a snake while being looked on by older men. Clearly he did not need to be naked to work with the snake. Here we are exposed to the double standard then prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula. Mature men were allowed to "enjoy" young boys as long as they had a heterosexual relationship with a wife, an attitude with roots in classical Greece. The "I'm not gay as long as I am the top" attitude still survives today in some parts of the world.

The most striking piece in this section is David Paynter's large painting *L'après-midi* (c. 1935). Done in a vaguely Gaugin-like style, the painting depicts two naked young men "exchanging glances" (as Sinatra once sang). The one facing us holds a flower with a conspicuous stamen—in this case, a phallic symbol. There is not only the sense of desire on the face of the youth holding the flower but also an undertone of melancholy. Same-sex relationships in Ceylon where Paynter lived (now Sri Lanka) were not originally taboo. But, as the wall text to this painting states,

> "British colonial rule criminalized homosexuality in South Asia in 1861, effectively toppling its acceptance among indigenous populations. As both an indigenous and European artist, Paynter occupies an in-between subject position, shedding light on the colonial interactions that defined the development of sexual politics in modern South Asia."

David Paynter, *L'après-mid*i, 1935. Oil on canvas, 39 x 48 inches. Brighton & Hove Museums. Photo: artuk.org.

(Above) Charles Demuth, *Eight O'Clock (Early Morning)*, 1917, Watercolor and graphite pencil on paper, 8 1/16 × 10 5/16 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

(Left) Marsden Hartley, *Berlin Ante War,* 1914, Oil on canvas with painted wood frame, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio: Gift of Ferdinand Howald. Photos: Wrightwood 659.

While containing only half a dozen pieces, this section turns out to be, for me, one of the more politically powerful, showing how the European official policy of Victorian frigidity affected the cultural values of the parts of the world that it colonized.

The wall text for **Public/Private** defines this section in these words: "Given the privatization of homosexual lives, it is perhaps not surprising that a number of artists sought to confuse or repudiate the distinction between public and private. For these artists, homosexuality and the realm of public life are not divorced, and they worked to expose a queer viewpoint on dominant culture." There are two pieces in this small section that spoke to me. The first is Marsden Hartley's *Berlin Ante War* from 1914. Hartley was enamored of a German officer, Karl von Freyburg. His beloved died in October 1914, during the early part of World War I. Hartley's work is an elegy in oil; the bottom three panels of the painting depict an idealized prewar Germany, which Hartley admired, while the upper panels show von Freyburg ascending into heaven on a horse, surrounded by Greek crosses. This is one of the very few works in the show that directly address the love of another rather than the desire for someone's body. By contrast, the painting of Bernhardt and Abbéma in a boat have the two far apart, and they don't even look at each other. It is a work primarily about their homosexuality, not their love.

The other painting in this section that impressed me was Charles Demuth's 1917 watercolor *Eight O'Clock (Early Morning)*. Demuth is best known for his precisionist paintings of industrial scenes and his iconic *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* from 1928. But there is another side to Demuth. He was openly gay and had a lifelong romantic relationship with interior decorator and stage designer Robert Evans Locher. *Eight O'Clock (Early Morning)* is a very subdued sample of his work addressing his homosexuality. His *Dancing Sailors*, a watercolor and pencil piece from 1918 (not in the exhibition), shows sailors dancing, two with each other and two looking one another over, and another piece from 1918, *Turkish Bath with Self Portrait* (also not in this show), has flooded the reproduction market. Other Demuth drawings and watercolors even cross over into pornography.

Charles Demuth, *Dancing Sailors*, 1917. Watercolor and pencil, 8 1/16 x 10 1/8 inches. Cleveland Museum of Art. Photo: clevelandart.com.

(Left) Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion, entrance the the Cyclorama.

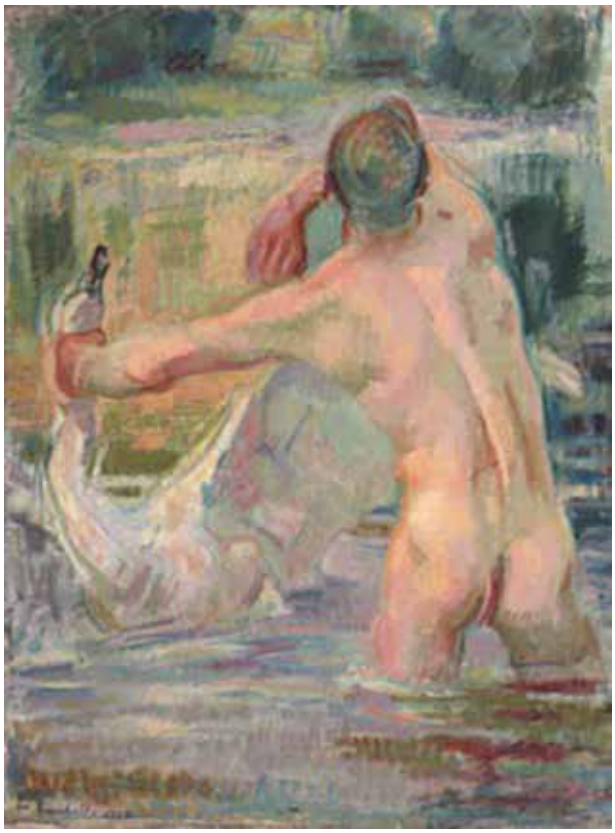
(Right) Elisàr von Kupffer striking a neoclassical pose. Photos: ultrawolvesunderthefullmoon.blog/.

These two artists had a very different response to their homosexuality. Hartley was firmly in the closet, but Demuth was as out as you could be for his time.

The last segment is called **Past and Future**. This section concentrates on the Elisarion, a social movement started in Switzerland in 1926 by the German artists Elisàr von Kupffer and his partner Eduard von Mayer. They transformed a Swiss villa into a temple/museum formally named Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion. The goal was to embrace homosexuality and restore its rightful place in history, and the Elisarion was sought out by men from all over Europe. Von Kupffer and von Mayer even invented a new religion called Clarism. It was a utopian doctrine that encompassed theosophy, but with a German flavor and fascination with ancient Greco-Roman civilization. The 15 prints from the Getty Research Institute in this exhibition reflect Clarism's attempt to create an androgynous ideal. One print shows a room in the villa that had a mural depicting this idealized androgyny. The other prints mostly show von Kupffer posing nude in a variety of "classical" positions.

Gerda Wegener, an artist from Denmark, presents the lesbian ideal in her painting *Venus and Amor*. In this picture, Cupid is gender queer, having both male and female attributes, and Venus, who is helping Cupid draw his bow, has somewhat masculine body proportions. Also in this section is Finnish artist Magnus Enckell's *Man and Swan*. In the Greek myth, Zeus turns himself into a swan and rapes Leda. There is another classical story of Zeus turning him-

Gerda Wegener, *Venus and Amor*, (not dated), Oil on canvas, 35.4 x 49.2 inches. The Shin Collection, New York, Image Courtesy of Shin Gallery, New York.



Magnus Enckell, *Man and Swan*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 42.5 x 31.5 inches. Serlachius Museum Gösta, Finland. Photo: advocate.com.

self into an eagle to rape the youthful Ganymede. Enckell merges the two myths, and the swan (Zeus) is thwarted by Ganymede as he asserts his right to his own body.

This section demonstrates how homosexuality was idealized by artists emulating classical forms. What has not yet fully evolved is a legitimacy that can survive in present-day society. So, homosexuals, be they anyone in the spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community, sometimes still have to assume roles or characters and cannot truly be themselves.

The exhibition closes with a video clip of a bare-breasted Josephine Baker dancing the Charleston and making her famous cross-eyed faces while holding one finger from her hand on top of her head. This image was disturbing in its self-deprecation. Her most "famous" dance was the banana dance. It was explicitly sexual—these days, we would equate it to twerking. Yet Baker was famous in France as a performer and a resistance fighter during World War II. She became a French citizen and was awarded the Resistance Medal and the Croix de Guerre and named a Chevalier of the *Légion d'honneur* by Charles de Gaulle. Although she was married four times, according to her adopted son Jean-Claude, she had numerous lesbian relationships, including with the French novelist Colette and the American Black expatriate singer Bricktop.

Homosexuals needed to "act" in order to be accepted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were either in the closet or, sometimes, inhabiting a grotesque caricature of the person they wanted to be. This dilemma still exists, albeit in a much diminished form. And this exhibition brings home the continuing international struggle for acceptance and a place to fit in socially. Today, it is somewhat easier, but the struggle for authentic self-definition of homosexuals continues. ■

Josephine Baker dancing the Charleston, date unknown. Still from the video *Dancing Up a Storm* on youtube.com.

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.

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