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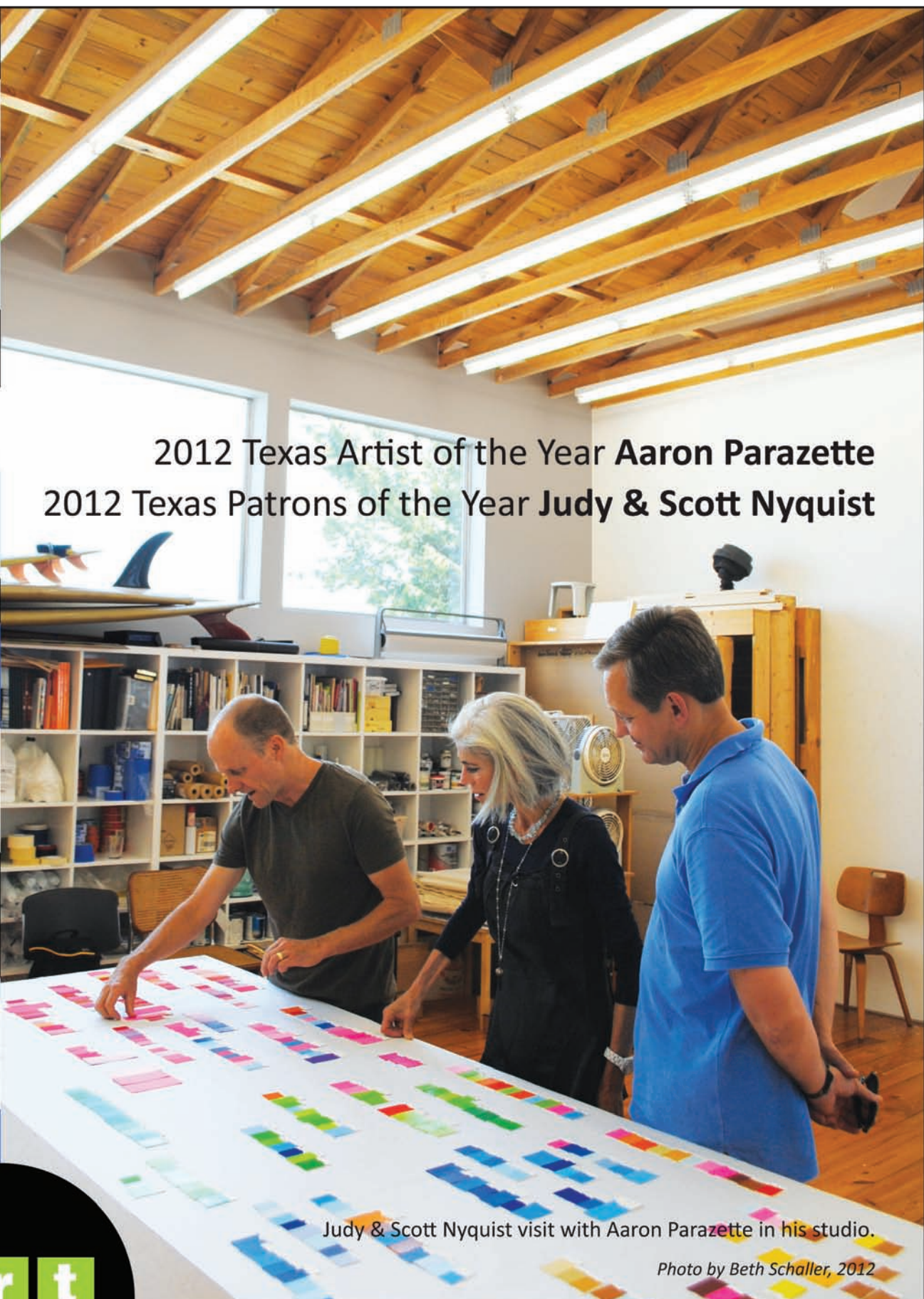
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2012 Texas Artist of the Year **Aaron Parazette**
2012 Texas Patrons of the Year **Judy & Scott Nyquist**

Judy & Scott Nyquist visit with Aaron Parazette in his studio.

Photo by Beth Schaller, 2012

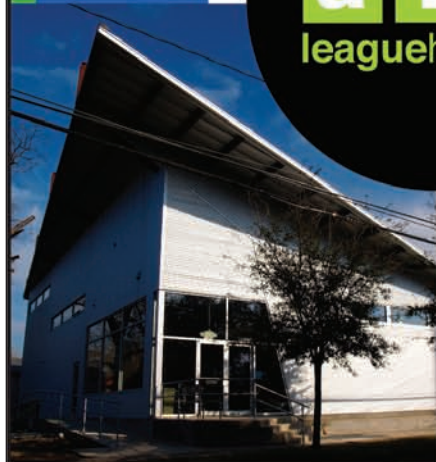


September 7 - November 2, 2012

FLYAWAY: New Work by the 2012 Texas Artist of the Year **Aaron Parazette**

TEXAS ECLECTIC: A selection of Texas artists from the collection of the 2012 Texas Patrons of the Year **Judy & Scott Nyquist**

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EDITOR'S REMARKS



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

Over a year ago, A + C publisher Ken Villalovos bombed south down I-45 with the idea of launching a sister publication to Arts + Culture NTX. Welcomed by some, considered slightly nuts by others, he persevered.

So here we are, celebrating one year on the streets as Houston's only arts-only publication. Who would have thought a new print publication would still be on its feet in 2012?

I guess you did. Thanks for that.

A few milestones emerge: We joined the current century with a web presence. We added film, literature and architecture to our coverage. Vitamin A + C, our weekly e-blast, launched this summer, so we can go a little "breaking news" on you from time to time and keep you informed of incoming web content.

Devon Britt-Darby came on board as visual arts editor to much fun and fanfare, never mind saving me from needing to be three places at once. In addition to his sharp insights, Britt-Darby added art to this little art rag. Be sure to find September's Ad/Art Bomb, *conversations with andy warhol's wig (for sasha)*, courtesy of Houston artist Nancy Douthey. Visit her at www.elizabethtayloraidfoundation.org/.

Gracious thanks to the advisory board for helping steer the A + C ship, especially Judy Nyquist, who first suggested we form one; to the Dallas A+ C team, who guided us early on; and to all the writers who have graced these pages over this past year.

This issue has come together while I've been holed away in the Green Mountains of Vermont. From reading Britt-Darby's dispatch on the Houston Fine Art Fair to Nicole Zaza's look at Inprint's impact on writers, I'm ready to return to the flatlands and all that Houston has to offer this season.

One of my last art treks in the Berkshires was to see Jeremy Choate's work at MASS MOCA. Houston mourns the loss of Choate, an extraordinary dance and theater lighting designer. Jeremy taught me that light has a choreography all of its own. I'll be thinking of Jeremy as the first light shines on a Houston artist this fall.

Now, for September....

Nancy
Nancy@artsandculturetx.com



ARTS+CULTURE MAGAZINE

THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN TEXAS

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ON THE COVER

DANNY ROLPH, *CARDINAL EESE*, 2011, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 213 X 183 CMS. ROLPH IS IN "DUKE OF BURGUNDY," HIS UPCOMING EXHIBITION WITH BARABARA DAVIS GALLERY (SEPT. 7-OCT. 5). ROLPH WILL ALSO BE FEATURED IN DAVIS' BOOTH AT THE HOUSTON FINE ART FAIR, SEPT. 14-16.



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©PETER POOR



PHOTO: ANITTI AHONEN

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INPRINT
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Stanton Welch's *Madame Butterfly*, the story of a beautiful Japanese geisha who gives up her faith and her family to marry an American naval lieutenant, is at once compelling and heartbreaking. Also on the program is Welch's *Clear*, a poignant ballet danced to Bach.



Women@Art

September 20 – 30



Three of the world's leading female choreographers take Houston Ballet on a spectacular odyssey of dance with a fall repertory program unlike any other. Featuring Julia Adam's *Ketubah*, Twyla Tharp's *The Brahms-Haydn Variations*, and a world premiere by Aszure Barton.



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Left: Nao Kusuzaki and Nozomi Iijima in *Madame Butterfly*. Photo: Amitava Sarkar.
Right: Karina Gonzalez © Matthew Karas/Dance Magazine.

ARTIFACTS



PHOTO: ROSALIE O'CONNOR

Houston Ballet's newest Demi Soloist, Soo Youn Cho, in Darrel Grand's *Box the Outside*.

DIVERSEWORKS ARTSPACE WILL relocate to Midtown at 4102 Fannin Street on September 7, 2012. Rachel Cook has been appointed to the newly created post of Assistant Curator. DW also announces two new programs: DWoW (DiverseWorks on Wednesdays), which will feature a wide variety of activities including spoken word, film screenings, workshops, lectures, music, dance, and theater performances; and Diverse Discourse, a visiting lecturer series. www.diverseworks.org

TONI VALLE IS THE NEW GEN-eral manager of Karen Stokes Dance (KSD). Valle brings 12 years of professional experience on and off the stage to KSD. As project director of Dance Source Houston for 11 years, Valle oversaw A Weekend of Texas Contemporary Dance at Miller Outdoor Theatre, the Dance Card, the Dance Source website and the Dance Table. www.karenstokesdance.org

AARTADIA: THE FUND FOR ART and Dialogue is accepting applications for the Artadia Awards 2012 Houston

from all visual artists living and working in Harris County, TX. Award recipients will be selected in the fall of 2012 through Artadia's two-tiered jury process. Application deadline is September 24. www.artadia.org

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PERFO-rming Arts has added Shen Wei Dance Arts to their 2012/2013 season. The celebrated company will perform on May 18 at the Brown Theater at Wortham Center. www.spahouston.org

HOUSTON BALLET'S ARTISTIC director Stanton Welch premiered a new work for the Joffrey Ballet at Jacob's Pillow. Houston Ballet has added several new dancers, including Soloist Aaron Robison (former Principal at Barcelona Ballet), Demi Soloist Soo Youn Cho (former Principal at Tulsa Ballet). The company was also awarded a New York Choreographic Institute Fellowship Initiative Grant to support a new work by First Soloist Melissa Hough. www.houstonballet.org

LYDIA HANCE IS THE NEW education manager at Hope Stone, where she will direct the Hope Stone Kids (formerly known as Kid's Play) and other education programs, which include a multi-generational music class, creative movement, creative dramatics and youth yoga. www.hopestoneinc.org

DANCE SOURCE HOUSTON EX-ecutive Director Stephanie Todd Wong was accepted into the Leadership Institute for Nonprofit Executives (LINE) program at Rice University, where she will gain increased proficiency in the areas of leadership, financial management, legal and ethical issues, marketing and public relations, human resource management, fundraising and organizational effectiveness. www.dancesourcehouston.org

HOUSTON CENTER FOR CONT-emporary Craft welcomes five new resident artists at the beginning of September, including Tarina Frank – metal, Chanda Glendinning – clay, Susan Fletcher King – fiber, Jaydan Moore – metal and Robert Thomas Mullen – metal. www.crafthouston.org

collections, including the Museo Nacional del Prado and Britain's National Trust. The MFAH has also been awarded a grant of \$102,811 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support the conservation of some 900 silver alloy works of art in the permanent collection. www.mfah.org

JOHN BRECKENRIDGE, PRESID-ent and CEO of Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS), is proud to announce Bruce Lumpkin will join the staff as artistic director. In this position, Lumpkin will maintain artistic oversight of TUTS' producing operations, including all self-produced shows and galas, as well as provide creative direction to TUTS' Humphreys School of Musical Theatre. www.tuts.com

BAYOU CITY CONCERT MUSICALS kicks off its 2012-13 season with a fully-staged concert version of the classic musical, *One Touch of Venus*, for five performances at the Heinen Theatre, 3517 Austin, September 6-9, 2012, followed by two cabaret productions at the Performance Centre at the Ensemble Theatre. www.bayoucityconcertmusicals.org



COURTESY OF SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS

Shen Wei Dance Arts in *The Rite of Spring*, part of Society for the Performing Arts 2012/13 season.

MFAH DIRECTOR GARY TINTE-row has announced the appointments of David Bomford and Zahira (Soni) Véliz to key conservation positions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Bomford is formerly of the National Gallery, London, and the Getty Museum. He has been appointed Director of Conservation. Véliz is a longtime independent conservator and art historian working with international

VITACCA PRODUCTIONS & CO-mpany (Vitacca P&C) 2012/13 season's guest artists include choreographers Autumn Eckman, Artistic Associate from Giordano Dance Chicago; Andy and Dionne Noble, Directors of NobleMotion Dance and Assistant Dance Professors at Sam Houston State University; and Joseph Walsh, Houston Ballet Principal Dancer. www.vitacca.org

Back to the Booths

Houston Fine Art Fair Returns, Emphasizes Local Scene

ONCE UPON A NOT-SO-DISTANT time – less than two years ago, in fact – gallerists, collectors and civic boosters wondered aloud whether the art world really needed another fair and whether Houston could support it. Months later, a rift between that fair’s organizers spawned the birth of a rival fair, and talk shifted to whether the city could support *two* fairs held not over the same weekend, but a month apart.

It turned out the city could – well enough, at least, for organizers of both fairs to say they’d met what they said their attendance goals were – about 10,000 visitors at each fair – and to ink contracts for return engagements. First up: the Houston Fine Art Fair, which is hoping for a 50 percent increase in visitors to its presentation of more than 70 galleries from 28 mostly American, Latin American, and European cities, September 14-16 at Reliant Center.

Also back are most of the Houston galleries who showed at last year’s inaugural HFAF run. Many of their proprietors noted that the fact most attendees were locals didn’t seem to hurt sales and in some cases led to renewed contacts with people who hadn’t visited their brick-and-mortar locations in years. Returning galleries Anya Tish Gallery, Barbara Davis Gallery, Darke Gallery, Gallery Sonja Roesch, Hiram Butler Gallery, Koelsch Gallery, McClain Gallery, and Sicardi Gallery will be joined by HFAF newcomers Devin Borden Gallery, Hooks-Epstein Galleries, McMurtrey Gallery, Peel, PG Contemporary, and Wade Wilson Art.

With Fran Kaufman, last year’s director, rolling back her role to creative consultant, Melissa Grobmyer and Janet Hobby, partners in MKG Art Management, a Houston art adviser and appraisal firm, are serving as show advisers, a role that involves audience outreach and development as well as participating on a selection committee that vetted applicants for booths.

When it came to recruiting out-of-town galleries, part of the process involved canvassing a committee of Houston collectors, asking each to name the five they’d most like to come to the fair.

Grobmyer and Hobby then passed the names onto fair staffers in the hopes that word of local interest would woo them to the fair.

Aiming to put Houston in the spotlight for more than its dollars, the fair is also deepening its ties to the MFAH’s Glassell School of Art Core Program for artists- and critics-in-residence, which will again be the beneficiary of proceeds from the opening-night preview party on September 13. Additionally, Houston-based Core alum Trenton Doyle Hancock is this year’s HFAF Artist of the Year, and collectors and patrons Brad Bucher and Victoria Lightman are curating *MFAH Core Factor*, an exhibit at the fair of works by Core alumni including William Cordova, Todd Hebert, Leslie Hewitt, Julie Mehretu, and Aaron Parazette.

Other Houstonizing touches include drawing most of this year’s panelists from the city and making sure the VIP events at arts venues including Asia Society Texas Center; Menil House; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and James Turrell’s Skyspace at Rice University. Those and other VIP events require early online registration and a \$125 VIP ticket to attend.

Meanwhile, the fair is offering a full slate of panel discussions during Artweek, as it’s calling the days leading up to and coinciding with the fair. These panel discussions are free to regular ticket holders (\$25-\$75), starting with *What Lies Between: Contemporary Asian American Art, Politics, and the Social Value of Collecting*, a conversation between artist Mel Chin and collector Jereann Chaney, moderated by Rice University Art Gallery director Kim Davenport at 7:30 p.m. on September 13 at Asia Society Texas Center. Remaining panels will be held on site at the fair.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

September 14–16, 2012
Houston Fine Art Fair
Reliant Center
www.houstonfineartfair.com



Matt Magee, *Greentext*, 2010, Oil on Panel, 72 x 48 inches.

COURTESY HIRAM BUTLER GALLERY



Chul Hyun Ahn, *Vertical Lines #3*, Edition 2 of 3, 2011, Plywood, Color Gels, Fluorescent Lights and Mirrors.

COURTESY OF C. GRIMALDIS GALLERY

Barbara Davis Gallery



Danny Rolph	DUKE OF BURGUNDY	Sept 7th - Oct 5th, 2012
Ruth Shouval	NEW WORKS	Oct 12th - Nov 9th, 2012
Paul Fleming	SHAMBHALA	Nov 16th - Jan 4th, 2012
Mie Olise	CRYSTAL BITES OF DUST	Jan 11th - March 8th, 2013

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Front and Center

Houston Ballet Celebrates Women Choreographers



PHOTO: BRUCE BENNETT

Choreographer Julia Adam rehearses with *Ketubah* dancers Ian Casady and Lisa Kaczmarek

“BALLET IS WOMAN,” BALANCHINE famously proclaimed. Oh really? Some, women in particular, might think differently. Balanchine refers to the supreme role of the ballerina, which is indeed an exalted position in the field. Things did not work out so well when it came to positions of leadership, though.

The struggle of American women choreographers in the ballet world has been a real one. There are no artistic directors of major companies in America, although The National Ballet of Canada, The Paris Opera Ballet and The Royal Ballet all have women at the helm.

It's a sensitive subject in a world dominated by men at the top. For reasons of power, career and tradition, women have often been considered second class citizens when it comes to ballet choreography. The fact that their dancing careers generally last longer than men may also be a factor, yet other forces are at work leading to less exposure and opportunities.

Enter Houston Ballet, opening their 2012-2013 season with a strong focus on women dance makers with *Women@Art* on September 20-30, featuring a world premiere by rising star Aszure Barton, the reprise of Julia Adam's poignant *Ketubah* and the company's second work by the legendary Twyla Tharp, *The Brahms - Haydn Variations*. It's a strong statement by and for women in the ballet world.

This is Welch's second evening of all women choreographers. Adam was part of the first program in 2004 and feels strongly that women should get their due. “There are very few of us in ballet,”

says Adam. “The culture of the classical training never really asks a ballerina to speak up. Because there are so few males who show up to train in ballet, I think they are allowed to be who they are from the beginning.”

The problem goes back to the very heart of Balanchine's statement and the pressure on women dancers. “The level of competition for a young female dancer is so intense that simply closing up and following the rules allows a smoother path to ultimately becoming a ballerina and being the good girl,” says Adam. “By the end of your training and your career you lack esteem and an ability to call on your own creativity. It's very rare too that in the classical training you are asked to compose or improvise. You are asked repeatedly to imitate and perfect.”

Welch grew up with strong female ballet leaders, from his mother Marilyn Jones, who directed The Australian Ballet, and the female directors that came before and after her. “It's been said that every company has a gender. The Australian Ballet has always been a woman,” Welch says. “I don't know when the men took over.”

Despite the difficulties of women in the field, Houston Ballet has done its part and has a long history of supporting women dance makers dating back to 1977, when former artistic director Ben Stevenson took modern dance legend Doris Humphrey's *Water Studies* into Houston Ballet's repertoire.

The 1980s were a boon for women with *Café Soir* from British dance maker Gillian Lynn (*Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*). Then in 1986, Stevenson

commissioned *Suite Texas* from soloist Kristine Richmond, who would go on to become a principal, a Broadway veteran, and one of Houston's leading theater choreographers and actors.

For the inaugural season in Wortham Theater Center in 1987, the company danced *Roden Mis En Vie* by Baytown, Texas native Margo Sappington, who went on to great acclaim for her work with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and The Joffrey Ballet. From the late 80s until Welch's arrival, Houston Ballet brought works by Patricia Olade, former Paul Taylor dancer Lila York, and Natalie Weir's first work for the company, *In A Whisper*.

When Welch came on board in 2003, he continued the tradition with Adam's two works, *Ketubah* in 2003 and *The Accidental* in 2004, and another work by Weir.

Choreographers need to be nurtured, and they need programs that create opportunities. To that end, Welch

has also revived the choreographic workshops where company members Melody Mennite, Kelly Myernick and Melissa Hough created new works. Hough's work *C-Sharp Minor* even graced the 2011 Jubilee program, and she has recently won a fellowship grant from New York Choreographic Institute to create a new piece on her fellow company members.

Clearly, it's a situation that is going to take a shift in thinking - new infrastructures to support leadership and creativity for women in ballet. For Welch, the best way to address the problem is with action. Welch adds, “Let's get people talking about it by presenting strong work by women.”

—NANCY WOZNY

September 20-30, 2012

Houston Ballet Presents *Women@Art*
Wortham Center
www.houstonballet.org



PHOTO: JIM CALDWELL

Ian Casady and Lisa Kaczmarek in Julia Adam's *Ketubah*.

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Portrait of a Writer

Inprint Celebrates 30 Years in Houston



PHOTO: NINA SUBIN

Author Junot Diaz.

AS A YOUNG WRITER, I DREAMED I'd find a patron. She'd be blond and smartly dressed, a Lynn Wyatt type, and she'd take me under her well-formed wing and bake cookies while I pecked at the keys of a computer in a back room of her cold house. What ever happened to the lost art of patronage, when wealth needed expression for its guilt and solitude? Maybe wealthy people don't feel so lonely and guilty anymore. Or perhaps, patron energy has been redirected, evolving into a more sophisticated animal, the nonprofit.

Inprint, Houston's patron saint of writers and writing, is celebrating their 30th year in existence. The original focus of Inprint's patronage, The University of Houston's Creative Writing Program (UH CWP), draws writers from all over the world to Houston. Over the years, Inprint has funded over 700 fellowships and prizes to more than 500 individuals. As these writers work through their educations, they lean on Inprint for funding, space, work and support.

Houston's writing community has a large spread, like the city itself. And Inprint has expanded to serve as a connecting link, a place that draws all Houston's writers in at one point or another. There is an entire community of people living in Houston, living lives that have been shaped by Inprint's presence. Meet four:

Miah Arnold was terrified to interview Chitra Divakaruni and Gish Jen at the Hobby Center for Inprint's reading series last spring. Afterward though, she was glad she did the interview and grateful that she did it in Houston. "The Houston crowd was the first to take me seriously as a writer," says Arnold.

Arnold first encountered Inprint in 1998 at UH CWP's "Welcome Back Meeting". The Inprint staff stood up and introduced themselves to a small group of writers from all over the country. Inprint had supplied most of them with fellowships to pursue their MFAs and PhD's. Arnold had come to Houston to begin her master's degree in creative writing, and she would later earn her PhD as well. Without the fellowship, she simply could not have come. Inprint was first to give Arnold an opportunity to teach writing workshops. Fourteen years later, when her first novel was scheduled for publication, Inprint staffers, Marilyn Jones and others, sat down and helped Arnold brainstorm ways to publicize her novel. Arnold confides that her \$10,000 Inprint contest prize was central to giving her the opportunity to write the novel itself, *Sweet Land of Bigamy*, published this June by Tyrus Books.

Writer Brandon White was struggling to adjust to life in Houston and the graduate school ecosystem after life as musician in Harlem in 2007. Not long after White arrived, he crossed paths with Inprint staff and took a position teaching Senior Citizens in Acres Homes. White began building a steady following for his writing workshop at Lincoln Park Community Center. He points to his time there as the key to helping him adapt to life here. "Reading *Sula* with the seniors in Acres Homes definitely gives you a different perspective than the one you get in a [graduate] workshop." While teaching the seniors has clearly shaped his experience in Houston and his creative life, he stops short of seeing his own role in shaping the lives of his students. "I just give them the opportunity to write down the stories that they normally tell...they are clearly the storytellers in their family."

In the process, White says he feels like he found a family at Inprint. Staff member Krupa Parikh worked closely with White on his manuscript to complete his MFA. White credits Inprint with nurturing his writing life, exposing him to the literary world, funding his education and giving him an opportunity to teach in the community.

Leah Lax is the mother of seven children. She was suffering from bouts of punishing insomnia. She couldn't sleep, so she wrote. In her free time, she took to the public library to read poetry. The more she read, the more frustrated she felt by what seemed like an ever-widening gap between what she wanted to write and what she was putting down on paper. A friend suggested that she

take a class at Inprint. Lax inquired but realized she could not afford the tuition.

Inprint found Lax a sponsor, and she attended a writing seminar on a scholarship. Lax explains that, "Reading and learning to write helped her find a community...she wrote her way" into another life. Someone from her workshop suggested she apply to graduate school. Three days before the deadline, Lax applied. She had a letter of recommendation from a fellow writer and the teacher of her Inprint seminar. When Lax was accepted to the UH CWP, she was offered an Inprint scholarship.

It took nearly five years attending school part-time to finish her MFA. After graduation, Lax began teaching the very same seminars where she had been a student at Inprint. In 2006, when the Houston Grand Opera was looking for a writer to commission an opera based on the immigrant experience, Rich Levy from Inprint recommended Lax.

When it was staged in 2007, *The Refuge* received a full page review in the *New*

inspired the lawyer to keep tinkering at his own writing. With some guidance from memoirist and Inprint teacher Emily Fox Gordon, Grossberg published an essay in *Tablet* magazine and finally completed writing a novel manuscript. "I don't know that if I had written the book if not for Inprint," Grossberg admits.

He points to Inprint's healthy inception by a UH CWP founder, Donald Barthelme, and writer and Rice Professor Kathleen Cambor and her husband Glen. "Inprint started as a way to raise money to support the Creative Writing program and now it's a window for the whole community of readers and writers...If you want to hear Salman Rushdie read or learn to write your stories for your grandchildren or take your kids to see the guy who wrote *Lemony Snicket*...Inprint is there."

Whether we teach or take classes, attend a reading or book club, or subscribe to Gulf Coast, Houston's literary minds all intersect with Inprint. And if you have the luck or the brass to cross her path,



PHOTO: JOANN WONG

Miah Arnold reading at King's English Bookshop in Salt Lake City.

York Times. Soon after, Lax borrowed a room on the top floor of the Inprint house and informally became Inprint's first writer-in-residence. With funding from the Houston Endowment and the Brown Foundation, Lax wrote *Not From Here: New Americans and their Journeys* entirely in the attic of the Inprint house. The book is scheduled for publication next year by Bright Sky Press. This spring she will be teaching her 17th seminar at Inprint.

Marc Grossberg received his first rejection from the *New Yorker* when he was sixteen. Despite efforts to keep up a writing life, Grossberg went to law school and became a successful lawyer. Invited by a friend, he joined the board of Inprint nearly 25 years ago. Through Inprint, Grossberg found a place to focus his literary desires and eventually served two terms as board president. Attending the reading series, meeting and discussing the important writers

Inprint is a gracious patron and fosters every person (in the Greater Houston area) who believes that they have words written on their insides that must be let in or let out.

—NICOLE ZAZA

Nicole Zaza has worked as an editor for *Gulf Coast* and *Envy Magazine*. A Houston native, she graduated with an MFA from the UH Creative Writing Program on an Inprint fellowship. She works as an adjunct professor at San Jacinto Community College and teaches writing classes at Inprint.

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MFAH's Sweeping *American Made* Spans Centuries, Media and Styles

VIEWING AMERICAN ART AT the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, as at most institutions, has long been a piecemeal, largely compartmentalized experience. For paintings and sculpture, you visit Beck Building galleries that are currently mostly occupied by the traveling exhibition *Duncan Phyfe: Master Cabinetmaker in New York* (through Sept. 9). For decorative-arts objects made between 1620 and 1870, it's off to Bayou Bend Collection & Gardens, the former home of philanthropist and collector Ima Hogg.

If they were made after 1870, you see whatever American decorative-arts

American, British and Spanish Colonial-era and Mexican works. By putting paintings, sculpture, photography, film, watercolors, prints, furniture, ceramics, metals, textiles, costume, and even pieces of political propaganda in consistently smart juxtaposition to one another, Neff and Gervais create not so much period rooms as period moments – experiences that occur when a carefully curated space seems to pulse with an era's various energies.

Nowhere is this truer than in a room anchored by Elie Nadelman's *Tango* (c. 1918-24), a magnificent sculpture that until recently looked lonely and

Metal Company executive. The room's dynamism is further enhanced by a DVD transfer of *Manhatta*, Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's 1921 silent film that juxtaposes titles from Walt Whitman with imposing shots of the city, and a handful of dance images, from Edward Steichen's photos of Martha Graham and Ethel Merman to Harlem Renaissance sculptor Richmond Barthé's 1935 bronze of Senegalese dancer François Benga.

Each section reflects a noticeable effort by the curators to reflect both urban and rural perspectives, to take the nation's history and diversities into account and to present vernacular objects or popular-culture imagery alongside so-called high art. This is not an all-white, all-male, all-elitist tour of American art and history.

Nor does it pretend to be a comprehensive one. But whatever period you're perusing, you get intimations of what some people made, what some of them wore and sat on, how some of them decorated, what kept some of them warm, how some of them related to the land, what some of the architecture and industry was like, some of the religious movements that were gaining a foothold, and some of the conflicts that were brewing. Silversmith Paul Revere Jr. is represented both by one of his teapots and an incendiary, historically inaccurate print depicting the Boston Massacre (1770). The Civil War shows up in Winslow Homer's 1862 engraving of a sharpshooter and Constant Meyer's grand, if overwrought, history painting *Recognition: War and South* (1865).

It's hard to exaggerate how much heavy lifting photography, one of the major strengths of the MFAH's collection, does in this show, with respect both to the power of the images themselves and the way they inform works in other media. Carleton Watkins' 19th-century photographs of Western landscapes hang near Hudson River School painters' forays into the West. Mary Devens' Pictorialist *Harbor and Pier* (c. 1908) invites conversation with nearby Impressionist landscapes by William Merritt Chase and others. Photographs by Ben Shahn and Arthur Rothstein are critical to a grouping of Depression-era social realist works.

Harry Callahan's 1948 montage of multiple exposures of a Chicago apartment building facades acts as the rhythm section for a mid-century modernism room that surrounds a George Nelson-designed modular storage system and desk with hard-edge abstract paintings by Leon Polk

Smith, Toni LaSelle, John McLaughlin, Josef Albers and Burgoyne Diller; as well as Julius Shulman's iconic photos of Los Angeles Case Study Houses. And the adjacent gallery flanks Lutisha Pettway's mid-20th-century quilt – made entirely of worn denim trousers – with a generous selection of photographs from Robert Frank's seminal series *The Americans*, to near-magical effect.

The show makes a strong case both that American art needs more room to breathe on the MFAH's main campus and that the museum has built, and continues to build, a collection that deserves it. Most of that space won't come until the museum adds a building for 20th- and 21st-century art to its campus; this exhibition can be seen, in part, as part of the preparatory work toward that day. But don't be surprised if the show also leaves you hoping the MFAH finds more room for an integrated presentation of American art in its current quarters.

At the very least, after the Phyfe show and *American Made* conclude September 9 and 16, respectively, it will be intriguing to see to what extent the interdisciplinary approach seen here figures into the reinstallation of the permanent collection. Here's hoping it figures heavily.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY



PHOTO: THOMAS R. DUBROCK, MFAH ARCHIVES

Elie Nadelman's *Tango*, c. 1918-1924, on view through September 16 in *American Made: 250 Years of American Art* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

pieces make it into the temporary exhibitions in the Law Building's Alice Pratt Brown Gallery. It's similarly catch-as-catch can for photography and works on paper, American examples of which often find their way into exhibits in the Law Building's lower level and in a Beck Building room next to the American galleries.

Billed as the first American show of its kind in MFAH history, the sweeping survey *American Made: 250 Years of American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* tramples departmental lines to mix artworks of widely varying media and styles with a similarly omnivorous selection of material culture. The lively, inclusive presentation that results makes a strong case for the wonders of crossing curatorial boundaries while sticking with a straightforward chronology.

Organized by MFAH curators Emily Ballew Neff and Christine Gervais, *American Made* invigorates and historicizes the museum's various American collections, which, for the show's purposes, include some Native

misplaced in a hodgepodge gallery of mostly abstract expressionist paintings, but with a Claes Oldenburg soft drooping fan sculpture and a Louis Comfort Tiffany window thrown in. Here, Nadelman's dancing couple, newly encased in sleek Plexiglas, is in harmony with the swirling rhythms of Stanton Macdonald-Wright's and Morgan Russell's colorful "Synchromy" experiments on canvas, which in turn transition nicely into modernist landscapes by Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and, most show-stoppingly, Charles Burchfield, whose *Return of the Bluebirds* is a 1958 five-sheet reconstruction of several small 1917 watercolors.

Nadelman's couple also looks at home amidst Precisionist paintings and drawings, including Helen Torr's *Corrugated Building* (1929); Man Ray's *Rayograph* (1925) and Margaret Bourke-White's surprisingly glamorous photo *RCA Speakers* (1930); and sleek objects like a sterling silver Tiffany & Co. cigar humididor (1925) commissioned as a birthday gift for an American

July 7–September 16, 2012
American Made: 250 Years of American Art
 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
www.mfah.org



COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

Helen Torr, *American*, 1886–1967, *Corrugated Building*, 1929, Oil on Panel, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the Brown Foundation, Inc. and Isabel B. Wilson in memory of Peter C. Marzio.

THE WYETHS ACROSS TEXAS



James Browning Wyeth (b. 1946). *Andy Without His Glasses*, 1977/2008. Combined mediums on toned paper board, 15 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Long, Houston.

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She will also guide private tours through the exhibition on September 7 through September 9.

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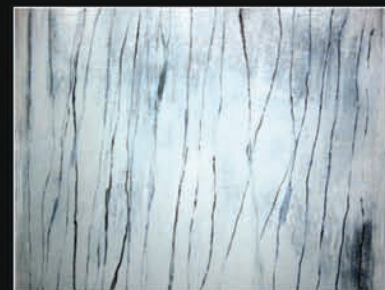
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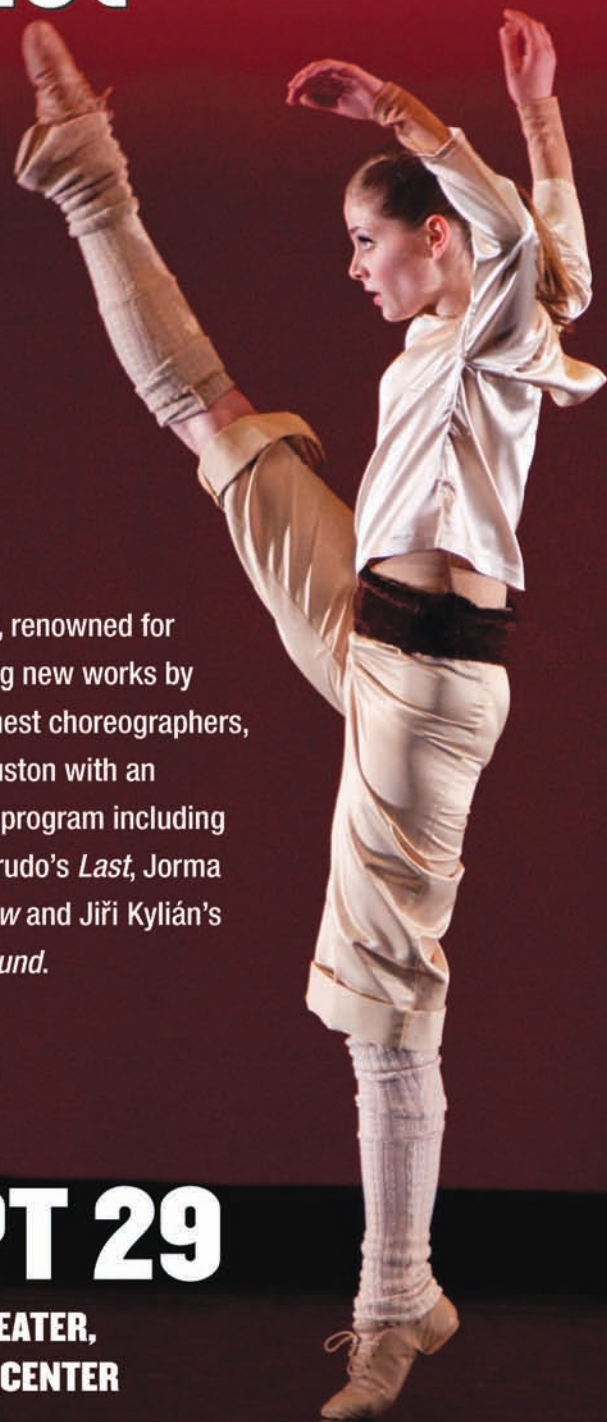
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Art-Making in the Here-and-Now

The Mitchell Center Calls Great Artists and Attention to Houston



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AS MANY READERS KNOW, FORBE'S recently named Houston "America's Coolest City" thanks in large part to our superb arts organizations. Defining itself amongst these, the University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts is dedicated to groundbreaking collaborations across the performing, visual, and literary arts.

Need some help absorbing that? Cue Karen Farber, Mitchell Center director.

"The Mitchell Center has always been about art-making in the here-and-now. There is an immediacy in the work of the artists we support," says Farber. "We select them based on their ability to tell us something new - to open us up to new ways of seeing and understanding the world around us."

When Farber arrived on the scene in 2003, it was uncertain exactly what the Mitchell Center program would look like. By experimenting with different things during the past few years - short festivals, long research residencies, curriculum, and all kinds of partnerships - she and her staff have grown the Mitchell Center into its current state.

She recalls, "We allowed the artists, along with our community, to inform the direction of our organization. I think that is a very rare thing and it's something I am very proud of."

Today, the center is committed to interdisciplinary collaborations, with Farber's vision shaping the stellar (and often unusual) programming. Her recent decision to formalize the Mitchell Center's commitment to artist residencies positions the organization as incubator for and presenter of the creative process. Interdisciplinary artists begin their residencies with research and experimentation, connecting with the industries, communities, and landscapes of Houston. From here, artists primarily

deal with issues of a quintessential 21st century city including energy and power, borders and urban sprawl, and new forms of art and art practice. The residencies culminate in a public showing of the new work the artists have created.

Farber explains, "Mitchell Center artists-in-residence may come to Houston to do research, to use source material from the city, or to collaborate with someone here. In this sense, we are the opposite of a rural artist retreat. Rather than operating 'off the grid' we ask artists to develop work 'on the grid' - connected to the people, the institutions, and the structures all around us."

As the Mitchell Center supports artists-in-residence, it seeks to flesh out its own resident relationship to Houston -- in turn developing a new kind of contemporary art patronage that allows for an organization to experiment with its mission, attract new audiences, and confront expectations.

"The Mitchell Center relies on artists and colleagues to spread the word nationally and internationally," says Farber. On the home front, we have the challenge of being a nomadic organization, since most people expect our center to be associated with a building, a theater, a gallery, or a space of some kind. But more and more, I think audiences are seeing the value of using the city as the landscape for exciting new artistic projects."

This fall season, Mitchell Center artists create hybrid forms that defy traditional art world disciplines and terms. So exactly what forms do these groundbreaking, transformative collaborations take? For starters, there's the intimate experience of a musician's heartbeat, and the story of humanity as told through sound and image. If that's not intriguing enough, there's

Continued Page 25

Dressing for Dinner

Pearl Cleage Returns to The Ensemble Theatre



COURTESY OF PEARL CLEAGE

Pearl Cleage.

PEARL CLEAGE'S *THE NACIREMA* Society Requests the Honor of Your Presence at a Celebration of Their First 100 Years opens The Ensemble's 2012-2013 season. Set in 1963, the play brings us into the glamorous world of upper crust Alabama when six elegant African-American debutantes are about to be introduced into a world of wealth, privilege and social responsibility. *The Nacirema* (American spelled backwards) *Society* follows the lives of 17-year old Gracie, her grandmother Grace Dunbar, and others as they confront a changing world, family politics and matters of tradition and romance over the course of a few days.

Cleage is the award-winning playwright of *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Flyin' West* and other works. Her first novel, *What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*, was an *Oprah Book Club* pick and spent nine weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Cleage spoke with A + C editor **Nancy Wozny** about her life, work and the full surround of her romantic comedy. *The Nacirema Society*.

A + C: When I read your play, I could imagine the talent pool at The

Ensemble doing a terrific job. It feels like a perfect fit for the company. What's your connection to Houston's historic Ensemble Theatre?

PEARL CLEAGE: They have produced many of my plays. I had a good experience, and I think they did as well. It's a great pleasure to be back.

Can you give us an idea of the production history of *The Nacirema Society*?

This will be the first production outside of its premiere and two-week run produced by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and the Alliance Theatre.

That's exciting for Houston.

It is, it's fresh, and ready to be out in the world.

We don't hear many stories about affluent African-American families. It's interesting that we are seeing a different side of the 1960s.

People are often surprised by this play. Class structures exists in every culture. This part of our culture is unknown to people outside of it. Grace Dunbar makes a case for her own involvement in the civil rights movement in a different role. She sees herself as someone who needs to be ready to step in to use the

right fork or learn to waltz, not march.

I grew up in the 60s in Detroit. Somehow, we think that everyone wanted to march for change. That's not true. Not all African-Americans thought that this was the way to go, or the best way to make change. That was certainly true for Grace Dunbar.

The career of "writer" makes a strong presence in the play in the character of Janet Taylor, the *New York Times* writer giving *The Nacirema Society* a second look after a critical piece, and in the aspiring writer in *Gracie*, the play's ingénue, who wants to go to Barnard instead of Fisk, where all the Dumbars go. I wondered if there is a little bit of you in Janet?

No, not really. As a journalist her

Oprah's much coveted book club. Did that change your life?

It didn't change the work I was doing, just the response. It gave me some wonderful momentum, but I was already on the journey. It changed my financial life; the book sold a million copies. It was also great to be introduced to Oprah's audience, which expanded my readership. I believe some of those people have stayed with me.

What are you working on right now?

I have a new play opening at Alliance Theatre, *What I Learned in Paris*. It's set in 1973 in Atlanta on the day that Maynard Jackson became the first African-American mayor.

Last thoughts on *The Nacirema Society*?



PHOTO: GREG MOONEY

The Nacirema Society.

requirements are different. I see myself more in *Gracie*, in that she wants to go to New York and become a novelist.

Do you see yourself more as a novelist or a playwright?

A playwright. I'm trained as a playwright and wrote plays before writing novels. I ended up writing a novel when a play I was writing had too many settings to be a play. I ended up writing seven more novels.

But you've had considerable success as a novelist with your first novel making

I love the play a lot. Because it is set in 1964, people think it's a serious, political story. This is a story about an American family, not just an African-American family. It's not a hyphenated story. I hope people find something in the play that rings true for them. We need to realize that your grandmother is probably a lot like my grandmother.

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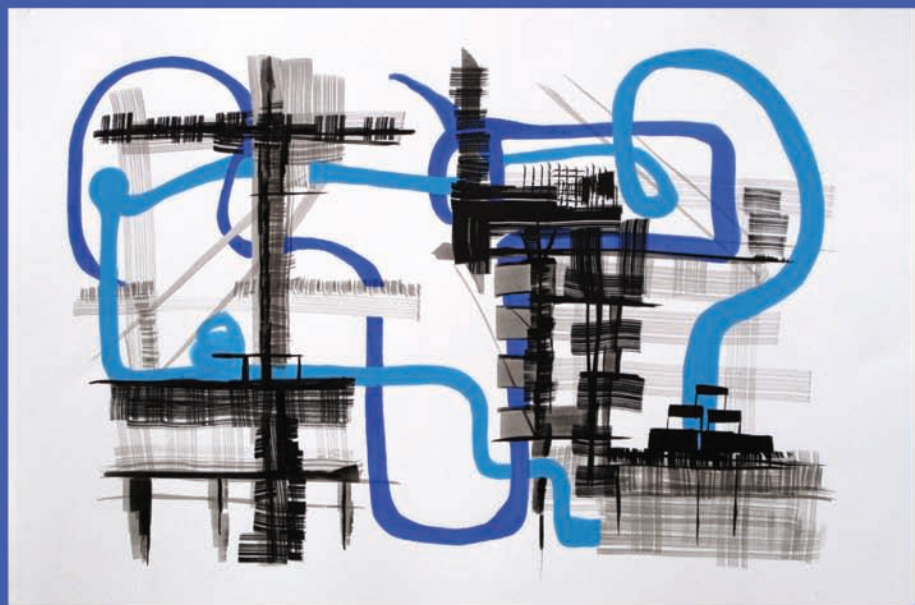
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Sheila Pepe, *Red Hook 4 (For Terminal)*, 2005, gouache and ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 19 inches, courtesy Carroll and Sons, Boston, MA

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Last Notes

Tokyo String Quartet's Final Houston Visit



PHOTO: MARCO BORGREVE

L to R: Martin Beaver, Kazuhide Isomura, Kikuei Ikeda and Clive Greensmith.

"IT'S SOMETHING LIKE A LOVE affair between the Tokyo String Quartet and the Houston Friends of Chamber Music," says violinist Kikuei Ikeda. First invited to perform in Houston just seven years after they officially formed at the Julliard School in 1969, the venerable ensemble has returned nearly every season since and have played in the

Bayou City more than any other string quartet ever.

It's hard to imagine the world of classical music without the Tokyo String Quartet, much less Houston. Entering the international stage at a time when musicians from Asia weren't nearly as prevalent in western classical music

as they are today, the Tokyo Quartet were pioneers in their youth. Sadly, the ensemble's long and storied relationship with Houston Friends of Chamber Music will end at the conclusion of their upcoming performance of Mendelssohn's *String Quartet in E minor, Op.44/2*. After 44 years as a professional ensemble, the Tokyo String Quartet has announced that it will retire in June of 2013.

Given that their presence in Houston has spanned the length of their mature career, one can trace the history of the quartet through their concerts in Houston, and there are three performances that stand out for the artists and audiences alike.

When founding violinist Koichiro Harada suddenly left the quartet in 1981, it was just prior to a concert in Houston. After the recital was initially rescheduled, the quartet had not yet begun the process of finding a replacement when they made the decision to perform as a piano quartet with pianist Ruth Laredo.

"It still gives me goose bumps to think

about this concert," says Ikeda. This was a pivotal time in the quartet's history and, as the musicians came on stage in Hamman Hall, the audience began to applaud and just wouldn't stop. The grateful crowd continued to applaud long after the ensemble had taken their seats.

Ikeda continued, "I think they were appreciative that we came, but I also think they were saying to us 'keep it going.' It was such an emotional way to start a concert. It was a special moment for us."

After doing a bit of collective soul searching, the quartet made the difficult decision to work with their first non-Japanese member when they invited Canadian violinist Peter Oundjian to join them as their first violinist and, after an extraordinary 14-year tenure with the quartet, his violin career came to a sudden halt with the onset of a repetitive stress injury to his left hand. There was a mini-farewell tour planned and on the short list of concert destinations was Houston. Camera crews were on hand this time as the artists walked on stage

Continue Page 25

ROCO *in Concert*

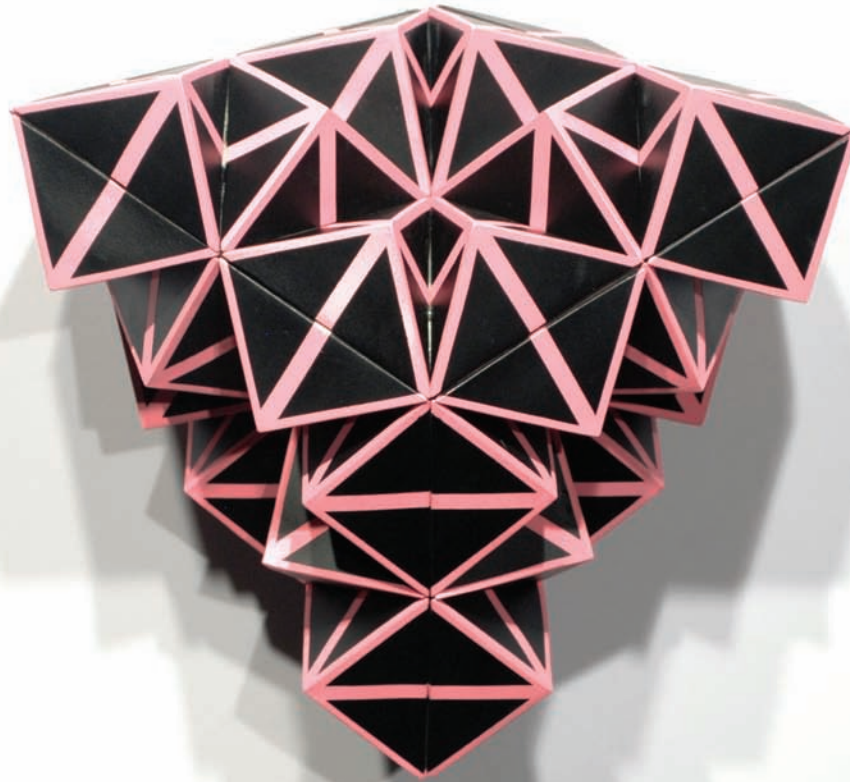
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Blaffer's \$2 Million Makeover

WORKac's Renovations Aim to Boost UH Museum's Public Presence



PHOTO: BEN KOUSH

Blaffer Art Museum's newly renovated exterior.

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON'S Blaffer Art Museum has long been awkwardly positioned in Houston's art scene, both because of its tucked-away location and from the difficulties imposed by its quirky floor plan on the first and second floors of the main campus's Fine Arts Center.

Ever since it opened in 1973 – one year after the massive and not a little foreboding Fine Arts Center, designed by Caudill Rowlett Scott, was inaugurated – visitors have entered via the internal courtyard of the arts building. It had no external presence save a tasteful (that is to say, hard to see) sign on the front of the windowless arts building. After parking, visitors literally had to walk around the building to enter the museum, whose exhibition spaces were either divided from within by a disruptive staircase or, in the case of the upstairs galleries, from each other due to the location of the double-height downstairs gallery.

In February 2011, Blaffer announced it had hired the trendy New York-based husband and wife architectural team of Dan Wood and Amale Andraos, whose firm is called WORKac (the last two letters standing for “architecture

company”), to solve those problems on a modest \$2 million budget. (Gensler served as the architect of record.)

In the 1990s, Wood and Andraos both cut their teeth at the avant garde and conceptually rigorous firm OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture), headed by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. Much the way that the atelier of German architect Peter Behrens employed Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius in the 1910s, OMA has functioned as an attractor and incubator for the best talent of the current generation of up-and-coming modern architects. (Zaha Hadid was an early member of OMA, and in Houston, Sarah Whiting, the dean at the Rice School of Architecture is another alumna.)

The conceptual apparatus that Koolhaas (and his many collaborators) have devised to guide their work revolves around a radicalized functionalism. They analyze the project requirements and recombine them in unexpected and often seemingly naïve ways to produce designs that begin to question underlying and unspoken assumptions about architecture and the way people interact with it. The only problem I

see with this strategy is that in practice it tends to produce episodic buildings – a cool thing here and another one over there grafted onto some sort of standardized armature.

Wood and Andraos seem to have taken both the good and the not-as-good from their tenure at OMA. The major architectural statement is a monumental glass and steel stair that projects from the front elevation of the Fine Arts Center. It replaces a once-prominent stair that used to come up in the middle of the galleries, apparently causing curatorial problems. The new stair has cool angles and is clad with channel glass in a mixture of semi-transparent and frosted sections. It contrasts with the solid beige brick wall from which it projects and doubles as a portico for the new front entry doors. At night, when lit from inside, the contrast is even more dramatic. A column supporting its uppermost corner is encased in a triangular concrete wall that visually blocks a loading dock directly next to the entry and serves as a background for new museum signage.

Inside, the central, double-height gallery still separates the two upstairs exhibition spaces. Previously they were connected by a narrow hallway that ran in front of the museum staff offices, which are now private. Exhibitions that were on view in the upstairs west gallery often continued into the east gallery, which also sometimes hosted small, stand-alone shows. Now, although the upstairs galleries are still linked by a narrow corridor, it has at least been moved to the front of the gallery space, parallel to the new stair.

The former east gallery has been divided into two dedicated spaces: a media gallery, which director and chief curator Claudia Schmuckli says will present curated film and lecture series developed in conjunction with the exhibitions, and a studio for Blaffer education programs, including the Young Artists Apprenticeship Program, summer arts workshops, and year-round hands-on art-making workshops for University of Houston students.

While moving the stairs may have eliminated some curatorial headaches, the problem created by the downstairs double-height gallery's interruption of the upstairs galleries has been shifted rather than resolved. Under the new design, when a visitor reaches the second floor – for example, during the Tony Feher survey that will open October 13 and take up both floors – they will first encounter not the second

part of the show but the media gallery and its related programming. Perhaps, had the taller gallery been shifted over to one side or the other, the two upper galleries could have been linked more effectively. I suspect that this decision was primarily a function of the modest budget that probably did not permit such large-scale structural changes to the space.

On the ground level, a new hallway connects the front entry with the existing courtyard entry, and the old reception desk area has been repurposed as a seating nook and kitchen with a pass through serving door that will be used during receptions and other functions requiring catering. The ceiling of the hall has fluorescent light fixtures applied seemingly at random, the arrangement of which, according to Blaffer spokesman Matt Johns, was inspired by Mikado, a Japanese version of pick-up sticks. The original dark colored brick pavers have been removed from the floors and new, light grey concrete has taken their place, which seems to be current standard floor finish for new art exhibition spaces.

Outside, in the areas directly in front of the new exterior stair and in the courtyard, new planting and paving was designed by the New York landscape architecture firm, SCAPE (one of whose two partners, Kate Orff, formerly worked at OMA). The landscaping, at least in the renderings, continues the use of triangle-shaped sections to demarcate different functions—seating, an outdoor theater, and walkways. So far, only the work in the front of the museum has been completed. Johns says the courtyard scheme is on hold because the university decided to include it in a larger landscaping project that would also rework the green space in front of the nearby Mitchell Center and the Moores Opera Center.

How UH arts facilities fit together once Blaffer's and its neighbors' landscaping projects have been completed remains to be seen, but for now Schmuckli and WORKac deserve credit for mostly delivering on ambitious goals for a shoestring-budgeted project.

–BEN KOUSH

Ben Koush is an architect in Houston. He writes for Cite magazine and Texas Architect.

www.class.uh.edu/blaffer

Cultural Warrior

Houston Museum of African American Culture's John Guess Jr.



PHOTO: BERT LONG JR.

John Guess Jr.

FOR A GUY PRONE TO JOKING that he'd like to get his hands on "whoever invented 24/7," John Guess Jr. is pretty good at it. A native Houstonian active on the boards of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Houston Arts Alliance, and other cultural institutions, Guess has spent the last three years as CEO of the Houston Museum of African American Culture, professionalizing its fundraising procedures and ethics and collecting policies while moving into a Museum District building and bringing a contemporary, multicultural emphasis to its programming. Guess spoke with A + C visual arts editor **Devon Britt-Darby** on what's next for HMAAC.

A + C: HMAAC has received kudos – from me as well as others – for being an African-American museum whose multimedia programming targets a multicultural audience. This year you're taking a similar approach to talking about gender with your series *If I Were a Boy ... Works by Women for All of Us*.

JOHN GUESS JR.: Our season this year is a discussion about identity, migration and romance which we explore through the series and other programs and exhibitions we will present. *If I Were a Boy* started off being a series of four lectures by prominent women that morphed into our current series thanks to talks I had with our curator Danielle Burns.

We wanted artists that followed in the

HMAAC tradition of transcending race, and in this case, gender. Then it was a matter of rounding up some of the most dynamic artists—filmmakers, visual artists, curators, writers—making art out there nationally, and as HMAAC has done the past two seasons, bringing that conversation to Houston.

So look for work from the likes of Ava DuVernay, Sundance Film Festival's first African American honored with its director award for her film, *Middle of Nowhere*; for British Nigerian filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa; for Pulitzer Prize-winner Isabel Wilkerson, who will talk about her celebrated book *The Warmth of Other Suns*; for Florida artist Eleanor Merritt and her *Revelations of Goddesses*; for former Glassell Core artist Nicole Miller and current Core critic Sally Frater [an A+C contributor]; and for local artist Jade Cooper.

Add to that mix New York Museum of Art and Design curator Lowery Sims and Carol Adams, president and CEO of Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History, on a panel about *Identity and Responsibility*, and I think we're once again bringing a dynamic discussion to the city.

Meanwhile, you're not ignoring the guys. What's this I hear about Bert Long Jr. creating a semi-permanent, multicolored ice installation?

When Danielle brought up Bert doing a show, I thought he was a bit saturated

in this market, but what they have come up with is artistically and intellectually a conversation that should resonate across the country during this election year. It's an ice installation titled *Melting Pot* and is meant to be a tribute to the promise of Houston and America and also the challenge in meeting what many feel is still unfulfilled about it. We've got a November panel being assembled where we have invited former Congressman Harold Ford Sr., syndicated columnists Clarence Page and Leonard Pitts Jr., and UT scholar Edwin Dorn.

Just as exciting is bringing home Peter Beste and his photography exhibition, *Houston Rap*, from his upcoming book of the same name. Peter is known for the seven years he spent photographing and documenting the insulated and secret community known as Norwegian Black Metal. All the while his fascination with the Houston rap scene never faded, and we get to see the fruits of it in January, as HMAAC continues to explore the cultural influence of Hip Hop with the assistance of the Houston Arts Alliance Folklife Program.

Now, if that doesn't get you excited, you should know that we are hoping to collaborate with the CAMH to have Kalup Linzy give a performance at HMAAC as part of CAMH's *Radical Presence* exhibition. This would be our third performance-based program deriving from a CAMH exhibition, and they have all been fabulous; Theaster Gates, composer Pamela Z and now Kalup. Wow!

In March, the Houston Chronicle's Molly Glentzer reported that HMAAC needs to raise a \$5 million endowment and \$1 million a year for operations. What's the progress on those fronts?

We're trying to do our part in bringing national excellence to our community. That has resulted in, I think, a renewed interest in the larger foundations here, and I am optimistic still about gaining that support. Remember, we're only in the third year of this organization's turnaround. So I remain optimistic that this is the year we break through to significantly more local support that recognizes our achievement, in addition to the Houston Endowment, HEB, Centerpoint Energy and the Scurlock Foundation, all of which have given us multiyear grants; and Gilbane Construction and Vinson & Elkins, LLP, which continue to provide us with pro bono assistance.

We are also trying to take advantage of our solid reputation across the country. We are putting together a small fundraiser in New York for January 2013, when *Roux*, our first traveling exhibition, opens in New York. We are negotiating a Def Poetry Jam benefit with Danny Simmons and have grant proposals being prepared for the Kresge

and Ford Foundations.

I've also become friends and entered into conversation with businessman, Huffington Post columnist and Brooklyn Philharmonic Symphony CEO Richard Dare about newer business models to support non-profits. Our partnership with AFFRM, a film distribution collaborative for African American films that includes our participation in the national theatrical release of *Middle of Nowhere*, is an example of such a model. So please go and see the movie in October; part of the ticket you buy will support HMAAC.

As for the \$5 million endowment, we have begun to approach individuals locally and nationally about chairing our upcoming *Making History* capital campaign.

For potential funders who have gotten used to watching HMAAC do more with less, what would doing more with more look like?

Doing more with more would allow renovations to drastically improve the building aesthetics and address climate control issues that prohibit some artworks being presented by us, would allow our building security to be improved, would allow current programming cost shortfalls to be met, would allow full staffing of at least ten people and would allow us to plan without being subject to constant cash flow challenges.

More would allow HMAAC to fully emphasize its ongoing arts education and expand it. Currently we give the building over for a month in the summer to a dance camp. Although field trips are a part of the camp, we could provide more in-house arts education to the kids. We could provide vocal lessons for Young Harmonies, a new children's group we are sponsoring, which performs at a number of venues including the Children's Museum of Houston, and will give concerts at HMAAC once a quarter.

We could have a regular tour van that originates at HMAAC and travels to the Gregory School, Emancipation Park/Project Row Houses and the Buffalo Soldiers Museum before returning to HMAAC.

It is the ability of HMAAC to join with these and other institutions including the University Museum at TSU, Museum of Cultural Arts Houston, the Community Artists Collective and others that will bring the greatest gift of African Americans to the city. One thing is for sure; you can count on this gift to Houston being delivered.

www.hmaac.org

High Altitude Dancing

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Returns to the SPA Stage



PHOTO: SHAREN BRADFORD

ABOVE AND LEFT: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's *Over Glow*.

IMAGINE A BALLET COMPANY that exists in two cities, doesn't go near a classic story ballet, cultivates groundbreaking choreographers before they become famous, presents other dance companies and has an award-winning folkloric outreach program.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (ASFB), making a pit stop in Houston on September 29, is all that and more.

The company has carved out a unique position in the ecology of ballet companies. Small and nimble, they have been able to fashion their own identity, drawn the vision of founder

Bebe Schweppe and co-directors Tom Mossbrucker and Jean-Philippe Malaty, both former Joffrey Ballet dancers.

"We were a total start up," recalls Mossbrucker. "There was nothing here, no notions of what a ballet company should be like." Being free of producing the old warhorse story ballets allowed the company to dive head first into contemporary work. That fact gave Mossbrucker and Malaty the freedom to start from scratch. Today the company is known for their eclectic repertory, fearless dancing and dual-city lifestyle.

The company moves into its 17th year

with a streamlined approach. Finding the best choreographers is high in their mission. "We are like a think tank for choreographers, although we don't have a resident choreographer position, we do develop long term relationships with certain artists," says Mossbrucker. The company has nine ballets by Nicolo Fonte, who just premiered a new work on Houston Ballet last season, and several from Jorma Elo, including four commissions.

ASFB has had so much experience with Elo's choreographic imagination, they look so at home in Elo's wild contours, mining its fantastical aspects with knowing bodies. "One of the key tenants is the look of the company," says Mossbrucker. "So many of our dancers have been with us a very long time. They are so committed." The company also boasts some new recruits, including Peter Franc, formerly of Houston Ballet.

Jorma Elo's *Over Glow*, a work for six dancers, anchors the Houston program. "Jorma knows the dancers so well, he really honed in on their strengths, who they are as artists," says Mossbrucker. "And he's right, no one quite dances Elo's work like ASFB, his style is in their DNA.

Elo uses music by Mendelssohn and a middle section with Beethoven's Violin concerto in D minor. "It's not typical of Jorma, it's almost classical, and so tender, there is bit of story going on,

too, which is really unusual. It's my new favorite ballet."

ASFB is also performing Juri Kylian's *Stamping Ground*, a work rarely seen in the states. "It's primal, animalistic, yet contains a dollop of wit. Expect to chuckle," quips Mossbrucker. "I also like that Elo worked under Kylian, so there's this link to the next generation."

Alejandro Cerrudo's newest ballet *Last* rounds out the program. Cerrudo is a resident choreographer for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and has been a rising presence on the dance scene. His work runs the gamut from vaudevillian comedy with ominous overtones to inky darkness from which dancers appear or disappear without warning. It's always intense and highly theatrical.

Unlike larger companies, ASFB has the flexibility to be who they want to be. In addition to the company, now touring 22-30 weeks a year, they have a school in each city and also present major dance companies. Mossbrucker describes the mission in a broad stroke. "We are not just one thing, a lot happens under our dance umbrella."

—NANCY WOZNY

September 29, 2012
Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
 Society for the Performing Arts
www.spahouston.org



PHOTO: SHAREN BRADFORD

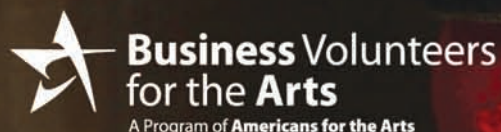
**Consultant.
Leader.
Innovator.**

Sara Kellner is the principal of Kellner Consulting which focuses on consulting in the arts, including organizational and creative planning, public art development and management, and fund development. As a Business Volunteer for the Arts, she is working with the newly created Houston Blues Museum to develop a business plan that will culminate in a mobile museum. Sara has guided the organization as they prioritize needs and set goals for the future with realistic expectations in order to achieve successful outcomes.

Business Volunteers for the Arts is a great way to show off your talent and your support for Houston's arts community, because when businesses and arts partner, everyone profits.

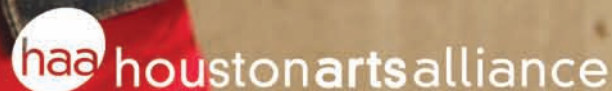
Submit an application online at www.houstonartsalliance.com, or for more information contact Nyala Wright at nyala@haatx.com.

BVA is a program of Americans for the Arts and funded locally by the Houston Endowment.



HOUSTON ENDOWMENT

A PHILANTHROPY ENDOWED BY JESSE H. AND MARY GIBBS JONES



Meet Sara Kellner

TOKYO STRING QUARTET CONTINUED



PHOTO: MARCO BORGREVE

L to R: Kazuhide Isomura, Kikuei Ikeda, Clive Greensmith and Martin Beaver.

in the then new Alice Pratt Brown Hall for what would be the final concert of Oundjian's career.

Tragically, one of the most memorable concerts in Houston came under unfortunate circumstances. It was on the morning of a performance while on tour in 1993, that violinist Kikuei Ikeda got notice that his mother was gravely ill. After immediately rushing to the airport to find a flight home that day, it was determined that the best he could do was to play the recital that night and take the first plane back to Tokyo the next morning.

"I have no idea how I played that concert. I was in such a state of panic," says Ikeda. In retrospect, the situation turned out as well as it could have. The concert went on as planned, and Ikeda left early the next day, making it home just in time to spend a few last hours with his mother before her death. "At the time, this concert wasn't that memorable," remarked Ikeda, "but looking back, I did the right thing by playing."

In addition to the Mendelssohn, for their 39th and final program in Houston, the Tokyo String Quartet will offer music by Haydn and Bartok. "This particular program was not meant to be a farewell program," says Ikeda. It was not

planned that the quartet would disband completely when violinist Kikuei Ikeda and founding violist Kazuhide Isomura decided to retire in November of 2011, but shortly after that announcement, violinist Martin Beaver and cellist Clive Greensmith decided that the best way to honor the quartet's 44 year history was bring it to a graceful close. Beaver notes in a public statement that, "It is a difficult prospect to replace one long-standing quartet member. To replace two of them simultaneously is a Herculean task."

"Although I love playing string quartets," Ikeda says, "there are things related to traveling that I can't do as easily as I used to. I want to make this decision on my own and not have someone make it for me, and I feel very strongly that the time is now."

—CHRIS JOHNSON

Chris Johnson is a radio host and producer, a violinist and a 2008 fellow of the NEA Institute for Arts Journalism in Classical Music and Opera.

September 20, 2012–7:30pm
Stude Concert Hall,
Shepherd School of Music
Rice University
www.houstonfriendsofmusic.org

MITCHELL CENTER CONTINUED

*SuperEverything**. And more.

The season's kick-off performance is The Heart Chamber Orchestra, a joint creative effort from the electronic artist duo TERMINALBEACH, (made up of PURE (Vienna/Berlin), who works in the field of abstract music and sound for performances, and BERGER (Helsinki), who focuses on information processes and feedback structures.) Together, the two artists have created an audiovisual performance where the music literally "comes from the heart," with musicians wearing electrocardiogram sensors to create an immersive visual environment and musical score generated in real time. The piece is performed by twelve members of the Houston-based Two Star Symphony and presented as part of Aurora Picture Show's Media Archeology.

Poised to be an extraordinary and unforgettable experience, Farber points out that the event ties together Houston's long time commitments to heart research and music.

"It will remind us what it is to be human," she says.

In October, the Mitchell Center hosts Texas-based sculptural artist Dario Robleto in-residence as he investigates the connection between creativity and loss. Known for his meditations on love, death, spirituality and healing (as well as his mind-blowing musical taste and pop culture knowledge), Robleto adopts the modes of both lecture and performance while questioning the role of memory as a device to combat death and loss. For *The Boundary of Life Is Quietly Crossed*, he places storytelling alongside his vast collection of rarely seen sounds and images, including samples from *The Golden Record*.

(Short history lesson: The Golden Record is humanity's story documented through sound and image and put on board the Voyager space probe, which launched in the 1970s and which has now passed the edge of the Solar System. Robleto considers it "the greatest DJ mix-tape ever recorded.")

The Mitchell Center invited Robleto, in conjunction with *The Art of Death and Dying*, a three-day symposium that addresses everything from cemetery design to the media's depictions of death to artistic interpretations of the afterlife, which is presented in partnership with UH Libraries, Blaffer Art Museum, the Department for Hispanic Studies, the Honors College and School of Art.

Later this fall, Mitchell Center artist-in-residence is The Light Surgeons,

a London-based performance group founded in 1995 by artist and filmmaker Christopher Thomas Allen. As part of the 2012 Houston Cinema Arts Festival, the Mitchell Center partners with the Asia Society Texas Center to present the group's live cinema event *SuperEverything**. The performance layers together documentary footage and motion graphics of Peninsular Malaysia with an original, live electronic musical score (think: stunning cultural kaleidoscope).

The Mitchell Center wraps up its season with the unconventional thespian Aaron Landsman, who brings to Houston his national project *City Council Meeting*, focused on "performed participatory democracy. *City Council Meeting* is co-presented with DiverseWorks, and marks the beginning of an ongoing partnership between the two organizations to develop and present new performances by groundbreaking interdisciplinary artists.

Experimental collaboration is the life current of the Mitchell Center, as evidenced by their ability to maintain an organizational focus (for example, residencies) while remaining flexible enough to respond to the immediacy that Farber recognizes. Communicating this to the public can be a constant challenge, especially as the organization tries new things. But then again, as Farber puts it, "The art itself is the best marketing we can hope for."

—NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil worked at Mitchell Center 2007-2010 and owns up to being slightly biased. She's also co-founder of PLAND and works for Dia/Walter De Maria's The Lightning Field and the Frederick Hammersley Foundation.

September 21, 2012
Heart Chamber Orchestra
TERMINALBEACH
Barnevelder Movement/
Arts Complex

November 9–10, 2012:
The Light Surgeons
*SuperEverything**
Asia Society Texas Center
Co-Presented by Cinema Arts
Festival

October 25, 2012
Dario Robleto
The Boundary of Life is Quietly Crossed
Dudley Concert Hall,
University of Houston
www.mitchellcenterforarts.org

Worth the Trip

Lucian Freud and Omer Fast in North Texas

I didn't exactly *want* to drive four-and-a-half hours to see *Lucian Freud Portraits* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. "Felt strangely compelled" is more like it, since the German-born British artist's labor-intensive paintings of "people that interest me and that I care about, in rooms that I live in and know," are nothing if not strangely compelling. All that pale, sagging, unsparingly observed flesh rendered, at times, with an over-the-top tactility – it's one thing to know you won't be able to turn away when you're standing in front of it; it's another to make a mini-pilgrimage for a case of the willies.

Still, what willies they are, induced by an artist who, as the Modern's chief curator Michael Auping writes in the show's terrific catalogue, Freud strove to shrink the distance between viewers and his sitters and to dive "into the intricacies of flesh, ... imparting a visceral facture to the skin of his subjects."

Though we don't always know Freud's sitters' names or their relationship to him, we can be sure he knew them well, since he took months, sometimes years, to finish a painting. (Freud, who died last year at 88, was known to work eight to 10 hours a day, seven days a week, with several paintings going at once.) One sitter, art critic Martin Gayford, wrote in his diary that he was spending more time with Freud than anyone but his wife and children – "and more time just talking than with anyone at all" – as he sat seven months for a modest-size head-and-shoulders portrait.

Freud even insisted on keeping his sitters in position after he'd finished painting them but still needed to work on the background, citing "how their size and demeanor relate to you and the room."

He did, however, accept stand-ins when necessary, borrowing Queen Elizabeth II's tiara and having someone her size wear it so she could go on about her business after he'd finished her face, in 2001; and replacing model Jerry Hall with his studio assistant David Dawson after she found midway through a painting that she could no longer commit the necessary time. What made the pasty, flabby Dawson a particularly unlikely replacement for Hall – and *Large Interior, Notting Hill* (1998) one of the show's most bizarre paintings – was that he had to pose as if breastfeeding a baby in the nude, as Hall had been doing in the background while an oblivious older man read a book in the foreground.

"I was disappointed at first that it didn't work out with her, but in the end it didn't really matter to the painting," Freud said. "There was a certain quiet drama I thought about the original scene, and then with David as her replacement the drama got a bit louder."

Early in his career, the drama – not to mention the remarkable level of detail in pictures like *Girl in a Dark Jacket* (1947) and *Girl in Bed* (1952), which seemingly capture every stray wisp of hair – arose largely from Freud's extreme proximity to his subjects. He sat so close and stared so intently that he got headaches and eye strain; the claustrophobia is palpable but not the flesh.

That changed in the mid-1950s when, under the influence of his friend, painter Francis Bacon, Freud started trying to "(pack) a lot of things into one single brush stroke." To that end, he switched to standing as he painted, constantly moving around to peer at his sitter from various angles, and abandoning his fine sable brushes for hog bristle. But while his brushwork loosened up, his process slowed as he mixed virtually every single brush stroke before applying it to the canvases. (The countless rags on which he wiped his brushes figure into paintings such as *Standing by the Rags*, 1988-89, in which a naked woman reclines awkwardly against a mountain of rags, for which Freud built an armature that's hidden from view.)

As Freud increasingly realized his desire "to make the paint work as flesh does ... to feel like flesh," the drama in his paintings came as much from the way he rendered flesh and its myriad eccentricities as from his sometimes performative setups or the psychological dynamic between the painter and sitters ranging from wives and lovers to fellow artists such as David Hockney and the corpulent, charismatic performance artist Leigh Bowery.

"Layers of paint were built up almost like subcutaneous tissue, and the attentive, subtle energy that is reflected in Freud's brush strokes is analogous to the pulsating liquidity of the breathing body that was in front of him," Auping writes. "This certainly is part of the reason why we feel a living presence in Freud's portraits, not just an image likeness."

Indeed, although he described his work as both autobiographical and a group portrait in progress, Freud's likenesses are rarely overly exact, and his pictures



COURTESY LUCIAN FREUD ARCHIVE

Lucian Freud, *Standing by the Rags*, 1988-89, Purchased with assistance from the Art Fund, the friends of the Tate Gallery and anonymous donors, 1990 © The Lucian Freud Archive.

contain strikingly little biographical information about him or his sitters. Though he painted many of his lovers – in some cases decades his junior – and 10 of his 14 acknowledged children, they are often anonymous, identified simply as *Woman Smiling* or *Woman With Eyes Closed*. Nor are there any references to the fact that Sigmund Freud was his grandfather, though one of Lucian's sitter-paramours told *Vanity Fair* the painter gleefully exclaimed, "What would my *ancestor* have made of this?" about one of her portraits. (She also said he preferred to paint her hung over.)

"When I become immersed in the process of painting someone, I can lose their relationship to me and just see them as beings, as animals," Freud said.

That uncanny animal presence – not to mention the fact that a Freud survey of this scale is unlikely to be assembled again, and the Modern is the only U.S. venue – is what makes Freud's portraits worth the willies – and worth the drive to get to them.

For a case of a different kind of willies, take in the Dallas Museum of Art's recently acquired copy of Jerusalem-born, Berlin-based artist Omer Fast's unnerving video *5000 Feet is the Best*. It's based on two conversations – one recorded, one not – Fast had with

a Las Vegas-based Predator Drone aerial vehicle operator who was understandably more careful about what he said on camera than off.

The film alternates between a recurring scene between the Drone operator and an interviewer and three seemingly unrelated stories involving a man who impersonates a train operator, a grifter couple and a family on the run.

Chillingly, as the Drone operator discusses the technical aspects of his job – at 5,000 feet, he says, he can tell what kind of shoes a human target is wearing or whether he's smoking a cigarette – his voice is laid over aerial shots of suburban landscapes, as if they were what the Drone operator was seeing. Shot with Hollywood-style production values while sewing an unsettling narrative confusion, *5000 Feet is the Best* is as enigmatic as it is timely.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

July 1–October 28, 2012

Lucian Freud Portraits

Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
www.themodern.org

June 23–September 30, 2012:

Omer Fast: 5000 Feet is the Best

Dallas Museum of Art
www.dm-art.org

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

COURTESY OF THE ALVIN BISHOP TRUST AND THIRD STREAMING, NEW YORK



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled*, 1975-86. Gelatin Silver Print.

Perspectives 179—Alvin Baltrop: Dreams Into Glass

Contemporary Arts Museum
Houston

July 20–October 21, 2012

www.camh.org

The Contemporary Arts Museum Houston prides itself on “exhibitions that exemplify the art of today.” What, then, to make of a CAMH show dominated by black-and-white, pre-digital-era photographs taken by a deceased, virtually unknown artist to document a demimonde that no longer exists?

Organized by the museum’s senior curator, Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Perspectives 179—Alvin Baltrop: Dreams Into Glass* fits into a recent pattern of CAMH historical reclamation projects such as the 2010 retrospective of Fluxus artist Benjamin Patterson and last year’s survey of Stan VanDerBeek, a new-media innovator whose experiments, though prescient, were quickly left in the technological dust. (Telephone murals, anyone?)

But while the alive-and-active Patterson and the long-dead VanDerBeek were pioneering figures during their artistic heydays – even if they soon slipped below the art world’s radar – Baltrop, a conventional though brilliant documentary photographer, was more of a pioneer in the Lewis-and-Clark sense of the word. That is, if Lewis and Clark were black, urban bisexuals whose expeditions took them not to the 19th-century West Coast but to the abandoned, dilapidated piers of Manhattan’s West Side during the 1970s and 1980s.

And the frontiers he explored weren’t geographic – although his photos’ physical settings often appear as sparsely

populated as wide-open terrains, and as fraught with danger and even violence as the Wild West – but sexual. The gay-liberation wave of the sexual revolution had unleashed a level of abandon that’s nearly unrecognizable to most people who came of age in the wake of the AIDS pandemic, which by the mid-1980s prompted the city to demolish or close the structures over the protests of Baltrop and others.

“Acts and expressions of the utmost intimacy took place among strangers who met in a public arena – and they could therefore be witnessed, whether from a distance or right up close, by someone who was also a stranger but might become an intimate, too,” writes art historian Douglas Crimp, a curator, critic and participant in the unpoliced public spaces Baltrop documented, in the catalogue. “The striking casualness with which all of this took place and the frankness that made it available to Baltrop’s camera make these photographs deeply moving records.”

Of course, the sex pictures, as Randal Wilcox, Baltrop’s friend, assistant and the executor of his estate, notes in the afterword, make up only a fraction of his piers photos, which also record the architecture, interventions by artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark, crime scenes and portraits.

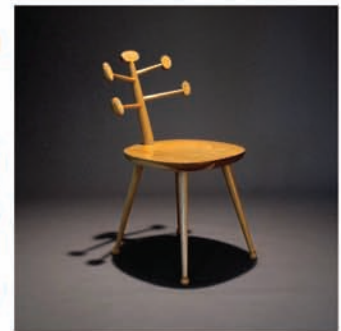
Indeed, the interplay of light and shadow, velvety tonalities and rigorous compositions of Baltrop’s images stand up to the modernist photographers who influenced him, even as his pictures’ diaristic qualities invite comparison with such contemporaries as Larry Clark and Nan Goldin. (The show also includes early photos from Baltrop’s time in the Navy, his street photography

Continued Page 28

 HOUSTON CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFT

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REVIEWS CONTINUED

and late pictures taken in hospice; he died of cancer at the age of 55 in 2004.)

“The limited narrative of the piers today (sex, art, and more sex) is fashioned by those who went there because they had a choice to,” Wilcox writes. “But many others went to the piers because they had nowhere else to go, and it was their stories that Baltrop largely related through his photographs: the stories of children abandoned by their parents, homeless men and women, the mentally ill, and those anonymous corpses who would regularly float to the surface of the Hudson River.”

Still, a little sex goes a long way, and the sex in some of Baltrop’s pictures went a long way toward shutting him out of the art world, some of whose players feared that his visual candor “would substantiate the public’s prejudice against those infected in the pandemic,” as Cassel Oliver writes.

Baltrop’s sex photos haven’t stopped being scary even now that AIDS is a manageable chronic disease rather than an automatic death sentence. The wildness Baltrop captured hasn’t so much vanished as migrated to air-conditioned settings, where barebacking parties are facilitated by hookup websites and smartphone apps, to the dismay of many who remember the plague years. Some old-timers also lament the changing emotional tenor of promiscuity, which has seemingly morphed from the cruisy camaraderie Crimp describes to a kind of cyber-driven consumerism.

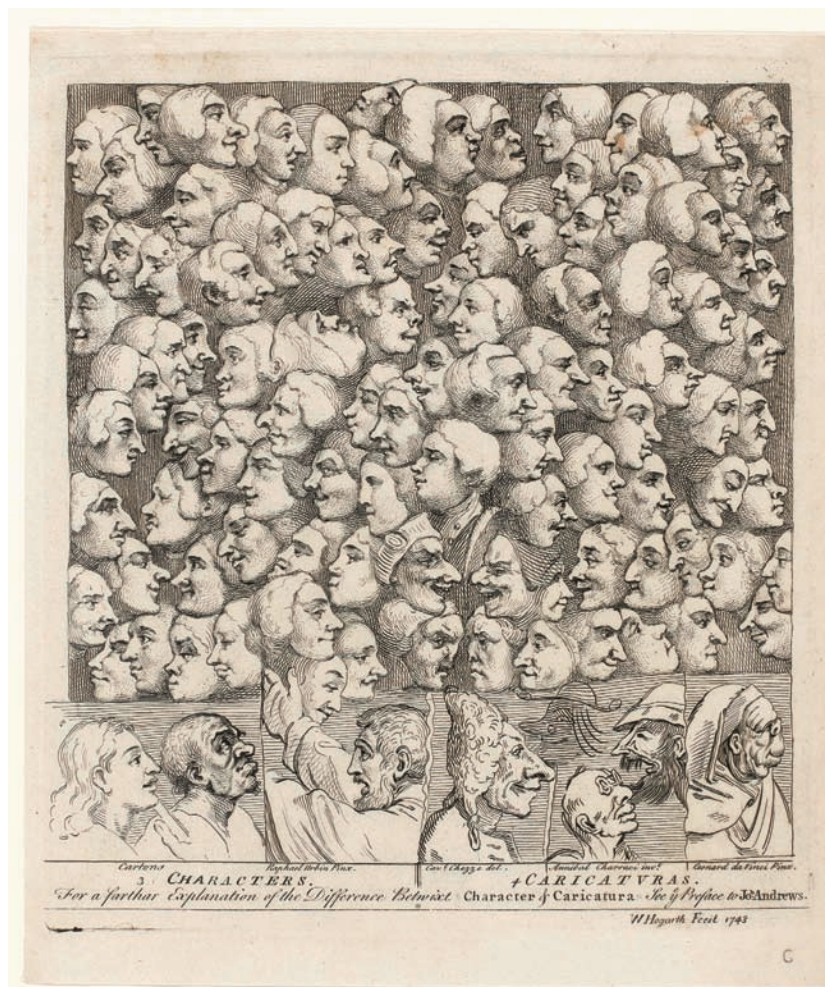
Also morphing are sexually transmitted infections that antibiotics cured cheaply and easily in Baltrop’s youth. With little connection to the recent past, are some of today’s young gay men living their own variation of the heady, naïve days Baltrop captured, one that might portend another version of the dark days that followed? I don’t know, but that possibility, along with a return to documentary photography by some younger artists, makes Baltrop’s silver-gelatin time capsules more contemporary than they appear at first glance.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

The Art of Exaggeration

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
July 1–September 23, 2012
www.cmfa.org

Walking through the *Art of Exaggeration* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston feels like being privy to an inside joke. From simple caricatures to controversial political satires, viewers are engaged



William Hogarth, English, 1697–1764, *Characters Caricaturas*, April 1743, Etching.

in a comedic, intimate, and disturbing discourse between artists like Francisco Goya, Man Ray, William Hogarth, and Robert Crumb.

Organized by Dena M. Woodall, MFAH assistant curator of prints and drawings, and Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation assistant curator Leslie Scatone, the exhibition’s roughly 60 works on paper come primarily from those institutions’ impressive holdings.

One of the earliest pieces is an etching after Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Published in 1559, *Fair Day of Saint George* depicts a religious celebration, but upon closer inspection countless scenes of debauchery are discernible, including dancing, drinking, and playing games. Somewhere in the crowd, one man warns against the pitfalls of human folly, turning the etching into a Renaissance-era *Where’s Waldo* for the virtuous man in tights.

Psychologically the darkest and most poignant works on view, Goya’s small etchings still hold emotional weight nearly 200 years after he began *Los Proverbios*, a series warning against human vanity and viciousness. Part of Goya’s *Los Proverbios* is *Disparate Desordenado*, *Disparate Matrimonial* (*Disparate Folly* or *Matrimonial Folly*),

which grotesquely fuses man and woman together. A gruesome caricature of “the old ball and chain,” Goya’s etching instills the fear of commitment in us all.

Caricature’s popularity reached new heights at the turn of the 18th century, and Britain produced some of the most



Francisco de Goya, Spanish, 1746–1828, *Hasta la muerte*, Published 1799, First Edition, Etching, Burnished Aquatint, and Drypoint, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase with funds provided by the Museum Collectors.

notable political cartoons. Featuring his wit and technical precision, William Hogarth’s etching from 1761, *The Five Orders of Periwigs*, mocks the British upper class by architecturally mapping out the overgrown powdered wigs of the aristocracy. Hogarth’s blueprints for the ornate fashion trend reveal a longstanding truth – only the wealthy can afford to look this ridiculous.

More recent is Surrealist Salvador Dalí’s 1977 etching *Lima de los Dientes* (*Hunting for Teeth*), an adaptation of one of Goya’s *Caprichos* (*caprices*), which opposed the popular beliefs and superstitions of Spanish civilized society at the end of the 18th century. Dalí’s modern addition of color and softer line bring the darkness of Goya to light by introducing odd buoyancy to the tragic subject matter.

A notebook-sized 1967 lithograph by Man Ray is of the most visually striking images – and the most vulnerable. A wall text says the image “is most likely a symbolic self-portrait, assembled with netting for hair, two eggs for eyes, and handprints.” Unlike the bulbous noses of 16th century peasants or American politicians standing on hooves instead of feet, Man Ray turns the art of exaggeration upon himself to reveal an inner caricature.

From illustrator Robert Crumb’s self-portrait drawn on a napkin to Thomas Nast’s meticulous etchings of political satire, *The Art of Exaggeration* is a hilarious, thought-provoking, and eye-opening exhibition. Full of surprises, each work initiates a dialogue blurring the line between fantasy and reality. Amongst the wall texts a quote from French poet Baudelaire resonates: “Caricatures are often the most faithful mirrors of life.”

–DEBRA BARRERA

Debra Barrera is a local artist and writer.

Silence

The Menil Collection
July 27–October 21, 2012
www.menil.org

Robert Rauschenberg’s 1951 work *White Painting (Two Panel)* – two side-by-side canvases coated in white oil paint with a roller – is the kind of eyeroll-inducing stuff that gives contemporary art a bad name. It’s hard to validate such a work without sounding like a pretentious jerk, smugly courting controversy.

Mainstream-minded musicians and music lovers felt the same way about avant-garde composer John Cage’s

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Photo of Mythili Prakash
by Jorge Vismara

REVIEWS CONTINUED

work, and perhaps no Cage composition inspired more air-wanking than *4'33"* (1952), in which a virtuoso pianist sat down at a piano, opened the keyboard cover, and remained frozen in silence for four minutes and 33 seconds, never playing a single note of music. Cage, the story goes, was moved to stage the piece after viewing Rauschenberg's *White Painting*. For many, both works represented a double-barreled blast of supreme arrogance.

But filtered through the contextualizing ears of Toby Kamps, curator of contemporary art for the Menil Collection, both pieces ring true, unburdened of their outrageous mythos. The exhibition *Silence* asks us to look and listen with alternately tuned senses. And as a result, something meaningful emerges from the meaningless.

Kamps explores silence as a void, waiting to be invaded by outside forces. A recording of *4'33"* emphasizes the "natural" composition: wind, raindrops, audience titters. The surface of *White Painting* flickers in the multicolored neon light of the Bruce Nauman piece installed nearby.

"There's no such thing as silence," Cage famously said, and that statement is practically proven with Kurt Mueller's

powerful work *Cenotaph* (2011), a Rock-Ola "Legend" 100-CD jukebox filled with 100 moments of silence – remembrances of fallen troops, tributes to pop stars like Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston, and the recently added moment of silence called for by President Obama for the victims of the Aurora, Colorado, movie-theater shooting. "Cenotaph" means "grave marker," and the piece effectively, sometimes irreverently, serves as such. Museum guards have been given a stash of quarters so that visitors may browse and play selections.

Don't miss the gallery in which Andy Warhol's *Electric Chair* series is juxtaposed with Christian Marclay's 2006 silkscreen series that appropriates Warhol down to the actual silkscreen technician who made the Warhol originals (how "appropriate"). Marclay zooms in on the execution chamber depicted in the Warhol series, landing on a sign above a door that reads "SILENCE." The works echo the haunting chill of the Warhols, which are owned by the Menil, and one wonders if Kamps is perhaps steering the museum toward some potential acquisitions. It almost seems wrong to separate the pieces now that they've met.

Kamps has filled the exhibition with

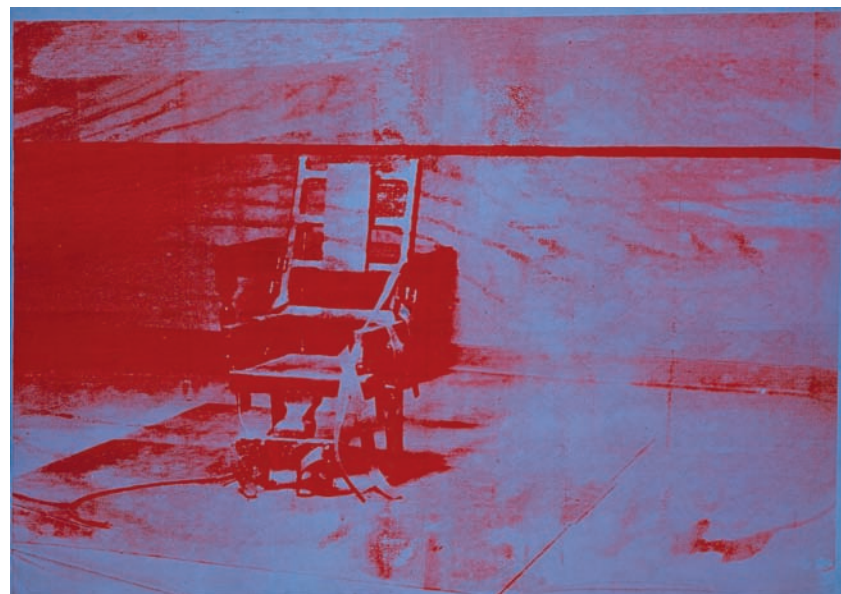


PHOTO: HICKEY-ROBERTSON, HOUSTON

Andy Warhol, *Big Electric Chair*, 1967. The Menil Collection.

thoughtful choices, from Joseph Beuys' readymade *Noiseless Blackboard Eraser* (1974) to a document of Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performance* (1978-1979), in which he spent a year in a cage without speaking, to the actual printed score of *4'33"* by Cage (essentially lines down a page). But, the absolute don't-miss work in the show is a piece by Tino Sehgal, who creates what he describes as "constructed situations" that are enacted by others according to his instructions. Sehgal's "perpetual performance" gets a gallery to itself.

A lone dancer writhes on the floor in a slow, choreographed roll from one end

of a room to the other, occasionally dragging his or her feet along one wall, leaving marks and scuffs. When possible, the performer makes eye contact with visitors in a catatonic stare. It's profoundly eerie as is; you feel a sense of helplessness combined with a voyeur's morbid curiosity, but even if the performer were absent, the scuff-marked wall would reverberate desperately through the empty room. The silence would be deafening.

–TROY SCHULZE

Troy Schulze is an actor and writer living in Houston.



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