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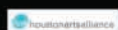
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EDITOR'S REMARKS



Art sometimes points the way. Take Ai Weiwei's "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads," now guarding McGovern Lake in Hermann Park. They seem to be telling us to look to the lake and beyond, once you figure out what animal you are, of course. (I'm a sheep.)

In our Cultural Warrior interview, Matthew Lennon, Houston Arts Alliance Director of Civic Art & Design, goes into great detail on how public art can enliven a city.

Showing us what we might have missed seems a covert theme of this issue, from Nancy Zastudil's musings on Liliana Porter's surreal world now occupying Sicardi Gallery to Debra Barrera's investigations of Richard's Serra's bold drawings at The Menil Collection.

It's part of a documentary maker's job to shine a light on the unseen. Marene Gustin chronicles the lives of Houston's film storytellers, who do just that on a range of subjects, from Alex Luster's vivid portrait of Houston's street art culture in "Stick em Up!" showing at the MFAH, to Douglas Newman's searing portrait, "The Reconstruction of Asa Carter," airing on KUHT/Channel 8.

Every month, the cultural landscape of Houston shifts. Sometimes, the terrain can change right underneath us, quite literally, like the artists taking over Russ Pitman Park this month.

Spring marks the opening of the Asia Society Texas Center, the next month of FotoFest's in depth survey of contemporary Russian photography and iFest's focus on Argentina. Our heritage as an international city comes full circle with Corella Ballet making their Houston debut on the Society for the Performing Arts stage. But we have to love that the company is dancing a Stanton Welch ballet!

In our stories and reviews, we aim to share what we have seen, and to reveal what has been pointed out to us. Who knows, I may even venture out on one of those paddle boats. Ai Weiwei's animal heads seems to be saying, "Go for it."

Nancy Wozny
editor
nancy@artsandculturetx.com
@artsculturehou

Arty Party Alert!

Please join us for our first ever Cultured Cocktails to benefit Fresh Arts, and to celebrate the joining of Spacetaker and Fresh Arts Coalition in holy artimony on April 19, 5- 10 p.m. at Boheme.



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THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN TEXAS

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ON THE COVER

LILIANA PORTER'S "DRUMMERS," DIGITAL DURAFLEX, 90.2 X 64.8 CM., EDITION OF 5,
ON EXHIBIT AT SICARDI GALLERY. CURRENTLY THROUGH APRIL 29, 2012.



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PHOTO: MATTHEW LENNON



ARCHIVE PHOTO COURTESY OF DOUGLASS NEWMAN



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(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Author Asa Carter in Clinton, TN, 1957, featured in Douglas Newman's documentary "The Reconstruction of Asa Carter," page 13; Fanette Ronjat in Classical Theatre Company's "As You Like It," page 12; Olg Tobrelut "Eve," 2005–2011, Kodak Metallic Print at Deb Colton Gallery, "Dallas Art Fair," page 22; Opening day of Ai Weiwei's "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads" at Hermann Park. "Cultural Warrior," page 22.

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www.galvestonartleague.com

Galveston Arts Center
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www.contemporaryartgalveston.org

J. Bangle's Silk Stocking Gallery
1124 25th Street • 409.763.6161
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www.PeckArts.com

Wagner Sousa Modern Art
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www.wagnersousa.com

The Water's Edge Studio & Gallery
1302 21st Street • 409.762.1925
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www.renewileyart.com

OTHER WALLS

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www.galvestonhistory.org

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HAPPENINGS

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Glow
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The Grand 1894 Opera House,
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ARTIFACTS



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Joseph Walsh in George Balanchine's "Ballo della Regina."

WITH THE ADDITION OF THE tagline, "the orchestra redefined," Mercury Baroque is changing its name to Mercury. The orchestra's repertoire has expanded in recent seasons to include works outside of the Baroque era. While Mercury will still maintain its tradition of bringing Baroque music to life, it is the organization's goal to have its brand reflect the natural growth and evolution of the orchestra.

www.mercurybaroque.org

THE BOARDS OF DIRECTORS OF

Fresh Arts Coalition and Spacetaker are merging their organizations. In a joint statement, Fresh Arts Coalition Board President Karen Farber and the new organization's Board President Harry McMahan expressed their enthusiasm about this decision. "We believe that by bringing Spacetaker and Fresh Arts Coalition together, we can create a "1+1=3" opportunity, where we draw on the complementary assets of two wonderful organizations to serve artists, arts organizations, and the art-loving public better than ever before."

www.spacetaker.org

AURORA PICTURE SHOW WILL be moving to a permanent location at 2442 Bartlett in June. The new space has an outdoor area to host backyard community gatherings and a flexible interior space perfect for screenings and education programs. It will also house the Aurora Video Library, and offices. Aurora will continue to partner with organizations such as the Menil Collection, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Project Row Houses, MFAH and others.

www.aurorapictureshow.org

GALVESTON ARTS CENTER IS

pleased to introduce a new program, "Conversations at the Center," featuring presentations and discussion by area artists. The inaugural gathering will feature Galveston-based artists Eric Schnell and Ann Wood. The event will begin at 6 p.m. on Thursday, April 26, at the Galveston Arts Center, 2501 Market Street. It is free and open to the public.

www.contemporaryartgalveston.org

JOSEF HELFENSTEIN, DIRECTOR

of the Menil Collection, has named Sheryl Kolasinski as the museum's Deputy

Director and Chief Operating Officer. Ms. Kolasinski will work closely with Mr. Helfenstein on strategic planning, as well as the gradual implementation of the museum's master site plan. The Menil Collection has also announced that it has been awarded a grant to restore 12 sculptures by the American artist John Chamberlain through Bank of America's Art Conservation Project.

www.menil.org

HOUSTON BALLET ARTISTIC DI-

rector Stanton Welch promoted Joseph Walsh to the rank of principal dancer after his performance as the Prince in Mr. Welch's production of "Cinderella." Houston Ballet has also been recognized for 2011 by the American Marketing Association's Houston Chapter as the top Houston marketer in two categories: Arts: Performing and Retail, and Consumer Products/Services for Houston Ballet's Nutcracker Market. In addition, C.C. Conner, Houston Ballet's former managing director, will be honored with the Trustees Award from Dance/USA.

www.houstonballet.org

DA CAMERA OF HOUSTON AN-

nounced its 2012/2013 25th anniversary season of chamber music and jazz concerts. Season highlights include world premieres of Da Camera commissions from Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho and Houston-based Richard Lavenda and Pierre Jalbert; classical virtuoso Elliot Fisk teaming up with jazz guitarist Bill Frisell; Houston debuts of France's Diotima Quartet and early music ensemble Le Poème Harmonique; Shostakovich String Quartet cycle; and the premiere of Sarah Rothenberg's production "In the Garden of Dreams."

www.dacamera.com

FRAME DANCE PRODUCTIONS

celebrates its second birthday with five grants, residencies at Puffin Foundation, Houston Arts Alliance, Rockbridge Artist Exchange, Hope Werks and Rice University Dance Program, eight new works and six collaborations with new musicians, writers, and visual artists. "It's been a two year whirlwind," reports Lydia Hance, artistic director of Frame Dance Productions. "In year three, you'll see a push toward connectedness and interaction with the audience: integrated curatorial and educational elements to our shows."

www.framedance.org

SUNDANCE CINEMAS HOUSTON

announces the opening of the Screening Room. April films include "Natural Selection," "Goethe in Love," "Salt of Life," "This is Not a Film" and "Monsieur Lazhar."

www.sundancecinemas.com

KEITH HOLLINGSWORTH TOOK

top prize at the Museum of Fine Arts' 16th Annual Citywide African American Artists Exhibition, displayed at the Community Artists' Collective and in

the Heritage Plaza Lobby in February and early March. Vonetta Berry was the second-place winner, and Kula Moore was named third.

www.mfah.org

www.thecollective.org

THE TOMMY TUNE AWARDS FOR

high school performers will take place on April 17, at the Hobby Center. The winners of the Best Leading Actor and Actress categories will represent TUTS, all expenses paid, as they go on to compete at the national level for the Jimmy Award at the National High School Musical Theater Awards in New York City in June 2012.

www.tuts.com

HOUSTON FAMILY ARTS CEN-

ter just received notification from the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) that it has been selected to receive the national Twink Lynch Award. This prestigious award will be presented at the AACT National Convention in New York City on July 14, 2012. The award focuses national attention on HFAC as a leading force in Houston's thriving community theater scene.

www.houstonfac.com

OPERA IN THE HEIGHTS' 2012-

2013 season is built around the works of Shakespeare that have been made into operas, and includes Gioachino Rossini's "Otello," Vincenzo Bellini's "I Capuleti e I Montecchi," along with two operas by Giuseppe Verdi, "Macbeth" and "Falstaff," to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Verdi's birth.

www.operaintheheights.org



PHOTO: TERRY ST. JOHN

First-place winner Keith Hollingsworth stands before his "In the garden, we worship a higher source" from his Spiritual Landscapes Series (oil, color pigments, beeswax and resin on canvas).

Look Here: Liliana Porter's Situational Portraits



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Liliana Porter, "Them with Nazi," 2011, Digital Duraflex, 52.1 x 68.6 cm, Edition of 5.

"HEY, PORTER! HEY, PORTER! ...I WANNA LOOK AROUND."

— Johnny Cash, 1954

Liliana Porter is a gatekeeper of emotional capacity, whose artwork is heavily informed by the psychological perception of objects in the physical world — which is to say that it relies on our understanding of her work primarily through our senses (for reference, consider how we understand depth perception). She is able to harness the power of the relationship between imagination and composition, activating inanimate objects through considered placement. But not in the conventional, representa-

tional ways you might assume.

Though Porter is proficient in multiple techniques, including printmaking, works on canvas, photography, video, installations and public art, she maintains the use of a cast of colorful main characters — a myriad of metal, plastic, ceramic, glass, and porcelain objects and figurines.

Picture the attic or basement storage box filled with Christmas decorations, old toys, a salt or pepper shaker with no match, a doll head, feathers, dollhouse furniture, playing cards, collectible figurines, miniature plastic animals, a

brooch, bits of paper and string, compact mirrors, hair combs and souvenirs, plus other odds and ends squirreled away over time.

Next, think of the flea market: similar contents now displayed, shelf after shelf, ready and waiting to embark on their next lifetime. Now, think of the adult life-lesson stories constructed from such child-like theatrical elements: Pinnocchio, The Nutcracker, and Alice and Wonderland as she grows big and small, almost drowning in her own tears.

This is Porter's world, complete with recognizable figures like Jesus and Mickey

Mouse, plus other general and familiar characters like Drumming Bear, Crying Duck, Mr. Snowman, Choir Singer, Pink Farmboy.

Porter is gracious enough to let us have a look around.

Her body of work includes numerous object-drawings on paper (literally, small objects placed on a piece of paper. For example, a collage of a simple line-drawn bunny whose face is partially disguised by a tiny, colorful clown mask), photographs of objects in relation to one another (for example, a miniature poodle figurine with painted eyebrows

raised, looking at herself in the mirror), or videos (perhaps of the never-ending exhaustion of a wind up monkey toy, with the exception of those who are winding and watching).

“I am an optimist,” she says. “My works are reflections of experiences or maybe desires. For instance, the possibility of dialogue among dissimilar things, communication among diverse temporalities, opposite origins and languages.”

Porter’s self-proclaimed optimism explains and informs the humor so evident in her work. As a result, we are left to point and laugh as we recognize, and ultimately accept, our shared sitcom of human errors.

For “Fragment of the Cast,” her exhibition at Sicardi Gallery, she presents a series of recent color photographs and a wall installation.

She explains, “I called the series of objects and figurines that I use as subjects in my recent work ‘The Cast’ in order to create ‘situational portraits.’ This is the work that gave the title to the exhibition.”

Included among this cast of characters is at least one pink paint-covered figurine, the idea for which Porter attributes to “...a situation out of control; the con-

tainer overflowing liquid that is many times the capacity of itself.”

As we see, this is not child’s play. Only as adults do we perceive the irony, humor, and awkwardness in Porter’s scenarios. After decades of personal and shared experiences, we can imagine the implications of an armed toy soldier, a figurine with broom in hand attempting to sweep up a mess 10,000 times larger than himself, or a small candle angel continuing to sing while a flame burns atop her delicate and quickly melting head.

Creating these curious dioramas must at times make it difficult for Porter to perceive her “real life” situations at face value, without re-arranging the characters and objects in her mind, if not her sketchbook. I asked if she ever finds herself perceiving real-life social situations in vignette form. Her answer?

“All the time.”

— NANCY ZASTUDIL

March 15–April 29, 2012
 “Liliana Porter: Fragment of the Cast”
 Sicardi Gallery
www.sicardigallery.com



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

ABOVE: Liliana Porter, “Joan of Arc, Elvis, Che,” 2011, Digital Duraflex, 88.9 x 73.7 cm, Edition of 5. BELOW: “Yellow Duck,” Digital Duraflex with Assemblage and Acrylic Paint, 51.1 x 76.8 cm, Unique.



Alexey Kuzmitchev, *Poetess*, 2006. Courtesy of the artist

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RICHARD SERRA IS ALWAYS IN the process of making. Over 35 years and 1000 square feet of black pigment fill the contemporary galleries of Houston's Menil Collection. Organized by Menil curators Bernice Rose and Michelle White, "Richard Serra Drawing: A Retrospective" began at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, traveled to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and concludes here in Houston. The drawings are a survey on Serra's lesser-known media that prove as arresting as his steel sculpture. Walking through the exhibition, nothing rings more true than Serra's own words, "There is no way to make a drawing--there is only drawing."

In the hall of the Menil's west wing are open sketchbooks under plexiglass. Housed like holy relics, Serra simply remarks that his sketches had "nothing to do with his larger works." Despite the separation, Serra's sketches are a foothold for most of the exhibition if for no other reason but to remind us that drawings are essentially marks on a flat surface: black material, white grounds, and lines of perspective. Serra's art is a process.

The large drawings are generous: the subject becomes the space around the drawing — the subject is the viewer. Serra was one of the first modern artists to fully take advantage of this dynamic on a grand scale within architecture, and the result is powerful. The viewer becomes the drawing and builds a relationship to the artwork through experience. Serra's process enforces architectural change by creating form from matter as he explains during the Menil preview, "I believe in process, and I've always been involved with matter — matter brings form to form."

In the first main gallery are early drawings Serra created after *Circuit*, his first groundbreaking sculpture. During this time he worked alongside Philip Glass and Jasper Johns; he remarked on the early seventies nonchalantly as when "I was moving furniture and making art." Works done in his thirties like "Drawings after *Circuit*" and "Heir" feel timid and purposeful simultaneously. In "Untitled," 1974, Serra makes his first cut as line, a motif he comes back to in his later works. In these early drawings we see Serra, like Matisse and Cezanne before him, wrestle with the notion of perspective, line, material, and form as he tries to reshape the concept and very history of drawing itself.

The second exhibition gallery features four early videos and Serra's drawings from 1974 to 2011. Working from intricate models alongside curator Michelle White on the design and fluidity of the space, the end result is a masterful walk-through full of spatial surprises and immersing visuals. The gallery is broken up into four main series from oldest to newest bodies of work: "The

Drawing with Gravity

Richard Serra at The Menil

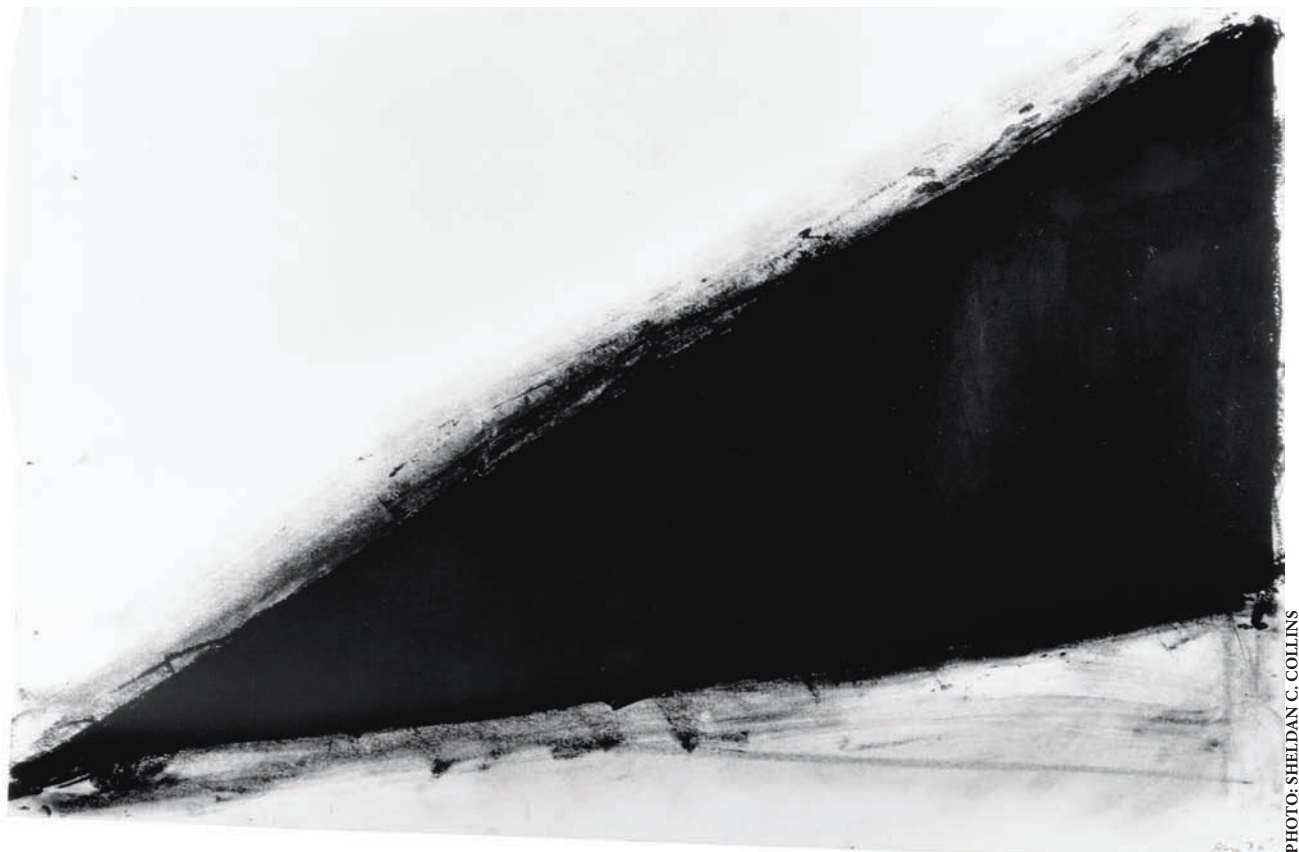


PHOTO: SHELDAN C. COLLINS

Richard Serra, *Untitled*, 1972-73, Paintstick on Paper, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase with Funds from Susan Morse Hilles.

Installation Drawings," "The Diptychs," "The Rounds, out-of-rounds, and Line Drawings" and "The Solids." Masterfully curated, these galleries feel as if you are part of an invisible procession where time, space, perspective, and the subtle shifts of daylight lead you through turn after turn.

"I had an obstinate belief that what I was doing was relevant," Serra quipped to over 60 onlookers standing in front of "Triangle," the first large-scale installation drawing on linen from 1974. Serra's statement at the Menil preview tour incited laughter as he humbly smiled. In these early "Installation Drawings" works like "Triangle," "Diamond," and "Institutionalized Abstract Art," we are face to face with first grade geometry. In 2011, during a talk on his retrospective at the Met with museum consultant Magdalena Dabrowski, Serra remarks: "[Creating the large drawings] was the sheer joy of making, they got to be hysterical..."

Hysterical, although a poignant adjective for his early works, cannot encapsulate Serra's later and larger drawings. In "The Diptychs," which were completed during the destruction of "Tilted Arc" in 1989, drawings like "No Mandatory Patriotism" and the "United States Government Destroys Art" feel heavy. Oversized drawings like "Taraval Beach" and "Blank" slowly change expected percep-

tions and create an ominous atmosphere through solid darkness and sheer size. As Serra explains, "Blank," "[the work] is going to contract the space, the weight shifts." Unlike "Triangle" and "Diamond," these monumental works along with "The Diptychs" recreate space in a more transformative way. Like giant ship hulls arriving at the docks, these later drawings exemplify Serra's statement that "The media for understanding is time and memory."

Richard Serra's "Rounds" and "Line Drawings" from 1996–2002 are a temporal experiment Serra describes as "Letting gravity create the drawing." In these pieces Serra pours melted paintstick onto a table, laying a wire mesh or screen on top, and then transfers the pigment by pushing on to the back of a sheet of handmade paper. Serra explains that this technique "allows the process to express itself in the activity of making." The high viscosity surface texture reduces rigidity and flatness by revealing the microcosmic nature of the material. These drawings reveal what Serra has written on his drawing surfaces, "Black is not a quality, it is a property."

Flanking the sides of the final exhibition space are two large black trapezoids spanning over 50 square feet each. Serra sums up the experience, "When you walk into the room the floor seems to move up...the entire room is the draw-

ing." Created in 2011 as part of "The Solids" series, "Elevational Weight, Weight for Weight I & II" are like a hybrid of Stanley Kubrick's monolith in "2001: A Space Odyssey" and Monet's "Water Lilies" at the Musée de l'Orangerie. They are endless and singular — moving and unyielding. The drawing is experience, conjured by the tension between surface depth, perceived weight, and skewed perspective. I told Serra this installation was like being forced down a wedding aisle, Serra's eyes widened in agreement, "I like that."

"What artists do is they fulfill in all of us something we lack, so that's what we try to do, we try to fulfill in ourselves something we lack," muse Serra. Therein lies a truth: Serra, even at his most poetic, is fundamental. Likewise, these drawings allow for spatial participation on a basic level. Walking into the Menil, we become conscious of how space is constructed in real time and we begin to recreate our reality — like Serra, we too are in the process of making.

— DEBRA BARRERA

Debra Barrera is a local writer and artist.

March 2–June 10, 2012
Richard Serra Drawing:
A Retrospective
The Menil Collection
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What's Old is New Again

Classical Theatre Company Goes Bold

JOHN JOHNSON, KNOWN THROUGHOUT Houston's tight-knit stage community as "JJ," is happy enough sharing the official motto of the troupe he founded, for which (as with his name) Classical Theatre Company invariably gets shortened to "CTC." But he's happier to share what he calls the "more subversive" version.

"Boldly Re-Envisioning Classical Drama," he intones seriously, turning a bit theatrical without burlesquing himself. "That's lifted from our mission statement, and it's on every page of our website." Johnston lets a small grin sneak in. "Still, if people are ready for a different approach, what we really like to tell them is — 'New Plays Suck.'"

As founder and executive artistic director of CTC, Johnston rides herd on Houston's best shot at making "What's old is new again" come alive onstage. After having the basic notion in late 2006, putting on a first reading at Brazos Bookstore in 2008, and then launching the first season that fall, Johnston is clearly a guy who doesn't mind swimming against the current. He's also a guy who understands the ultimate theatrical paradox: in a city that generally embraces the new, the different, the weird, the avant garde, it just might take more guts to stage Shakespeare or Sophocles.

"We're not ones to run our Shakespeare in doublets and hose," he laughs, then gathers his focus to attack the challenging issue of being true to plays without turning them into museum pieces. After all, they weren't written to be museum pieces. "Whether it's a wild take on something or just emphasizing a theme that's not normally emphasized, we take old plays and give them a never-before-seen quality. It's a delicate balance, on a production-by-production basis. But everything always comes back to the script. That's what's existed for decades and centuries, and in some cases for millennia. If you change the meaning of the words, then I think you change the play."

In keeping with Classical Theatre's inspirations amid Johnston's acting for the annual Houston Shakespeare Festival, the Bard gets to be front and center this month. With the company's latest resident actor, local favorite Philip Lehl, in the pivotal role of Prospero, CTC is presenting "The Tempest" at the Obsidian Art Space.

On the eve of the company's fifth season, marked by an autumn move to a space shared with fellow upstarts Stark Naked Theatre and Mildred's Umbrella, "The



PHOTO: JAN SAENZ

Pamela Vogel in Pierre de Marivaux's "The Triumph of Love."

Tempest" should prove a meaningful reminder of how the adventure began.

A native of Houston, schooled as an actor in Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York City, Johnston found himself home in Houston due to "one of those life events, something that wasn't part of my original plan." Seeing his hometown through fresh eyes, he realized that while D.C. (for instance) has four companies devoted to the classics, the much-larger Houston had none. Neither, it turned out, did the entire state of Texas. And neither did the entire region. In a casual way, Johnston vowed to think about starting such a company someday, presumably when "this acting thing" started to wind down.

A conversation at a Christmas party, however, unexpectedly led to some start-up funding, which in time led the Classical Theatre Company into a three-year incubator program called MODE, overseen by the Houston Arts Alliance. Johnston and friends staged a reading at Brazos — a "lost play" called "Love's Last Shift" — followed a few months later by a more official debut. "Shylock, or the Jew of Venice," a two-man drama starring Thomas Prior and David Wald, transported Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice" into a Nazi concentration camp. The story was pared down, obviously, with the impact striking many as freshly distilled, profound, even breathtaking. What's old, audiences at that first production realized, could indeed be new again.

Over the years since, the Bard has en-

joyed his fair share of the CTC lime-light (along with Aeschylus, Sophocles, Moliere, Chekhov, Ibsen and Shaw), at times forcing Johnston to ponder how far his plays have traveled from the Shakespeare Festival.

As both an actor and a director, he knows it's all about the space. The huge stage of Miller Outdoor, separated from even the closest audience members by a 25-foot-wide orchestra pit, demands that actors move and speak for people seated a very long way away. Even with the mandatory wireless microphones, this makes for theater that's more about proclamation than connection. While remaining a huge fan of "Doc" Sidney Berger and the festival he founded, Johnson believes CTC can do things with these great tragedies, comedies and histories that no one else in town is even trying to do.

"In just two weeks, the Festival has bigger audiences than some companies in Houston see in a whole year," Johnston observes. "But theatrically that can be a profound challenge. You already have a barrier with the elevated language. And you have the barrier that, in popular culture today, going to a play is not something a lot of people do, or think of doing. What I want to do is remove as many barriers as possible. Breaking all that stuff down and making sure the audience is in the play is so important."

To date, Classical has done what most start-up theater groups do — taken its productions from rented space to rented space. Johnston offers that, to his amaze-

ment, it will ultimately be more affordable to split the year-round cost of the new Studio 101 at Spring Street three ways than for CTC to rent rehearsal and performance space for only its three shows a year. That venue change is due to begin this fall, when the company's budgetary planning has time to catch up with the shared opportunity. CTC's administrative offices will follow in time, once the MODE arrangement has been fulfilled.

"I'd love this to be recognized as one of the top handful of theater companies in this city," says Johnston, who also teaches arts administration at University of Houston-Downtown and directs many of the CTC productions, including this month's "Tempest." "We've made a lot of headway in a short amount of time. I want the classics to be hip, and hip is different. We are different. We're not just reinventing the wheel — we're going back to the original wheel."

— JOHN DeMERS

John DeMers hosts the "Delicious Mischief" food and wine radio show heard weekly in Houston, Dallas and Austin. www.deliciousmischief.com

April 12–29, 2012
"The Tempest"
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Obsidian Art Space
www.classicaltheatre.org

The Life of Documentary Filmmakers In Houston

“WE MADE A LITTLE MONEY OFF of T-shirt and sticker sales and a screening last year,” says Alex Luster, whose three-year-in-the-making documentary about Houston street poster artists “Stick em Up!” will be screened again at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in early May.

“But it all went to entrance fees for film festivals. “Now we sit and wait and see if we can break even on the film.”

Marian Luntz, MFAH’s curator of film and video, agrees that the life of a documentary filmmaker in this city isn’t always easy. “But I do think the community has become more active in recent years. There’s a new generation of filmmakers here doing some incredible work and they’re very supportive of each other,” she adds. “It’s not that different then when Rick Linklater started the Austin Film Society to support like minded filmmakers there.”

Luntz points out that the MFAH screens local documentaries and there are several venues of support from the Houston Film Commission to the Documentary Alliance and the Southwest Alternative Media Project, lovingly known as SWAMP, which celebrates its 35th anniversary this year of supporting citizen filmmakers and their non-commercial films.

“I think the documentary community here is very rich,” says Mary Lampe, executive director of SWAMP. “Michael Moore, love him or hate him, really increased awareness of the genre. And we’ve really had some wonderful Houston documentaries in the past few years.” Lampe ticks off such high profile films as “Hot Town, Cool City” by Maureen McNamara and “For the Sake of the Song: The Story of Anderson Fair” directed by Bruce Bryant.

“Some have gone on to the festival circuit and are gaining some national attention,” she says. “But is it possible to make a living doing them? I don’t know; most documentaries are a labor of love.”

That’s true for Luster who works a day job in television but says he doesn’t mind pulling an eight-hour shift and then working on documentaries for ten hours. “I love living life through other people’s eyes,” he says. “I like to see their perception of this city I love.” Luster adds that he can see the day where he can make a living doing documentaries. “Not only can I see it, but I will do it,” he says.

Retired attorney Vivienne Schiffer is a first time documentarian, working with filmmaker John Carrithers on “Relocation, Arkansas” a film about the Japanese American internment camp in the town Rowher, Arkansas where she grew up. Schiffer previously wrote a novel about the camp called “Camp Nine.”

“Writing is such a solitary pursuit,” she says. “It’s been a hoot to do film because it’s such a collaborative experience. And it’s been great for me to work with a story in a different medium.”

Schiffer says her legal background has been an asset in the business aspect of filmmaking and she’s had help from SWAMP in the technological side. “Anybody with a iPhone can go out and make a documentary now,” she says. “But to make a quality film takes money.”

“Relocation, Arkansas” should be finished later this year, and Schiffer plans to hit the festival circuit and hopefully swing a distribution deal with a network. And now that the documentary bug has bitten her she’s already at work on a second film, and has about “30 more ideas.”

As for Carrithers, he has more than 14 years experience in producing, filming and editing documentaries, commercials and television programs and is currently working on a documentary directed by Francois and Susan de Menil about the Byzantine Chapel.

“I’m a for-hire filmmaker and in another part of my life I do my own documentaries,” Carrithers, an Army brat who moved here 12 years ago says. “The commercial stuff helps pay the bills and buy equipment for my own work. I’ve been lucky to be able to support my wife and son doing work I like.”

Carrithers believes there are a lot of talented filmmakers in Houston and there’s some networking going on, although there’s room for more.

Douglas Newman’s experience is a little different than most documentary filmmakers here. Although he grew up in Houston he made his bones in New York City where he spent five years as a producer at ABC News Productions working on long form documentaries for the Discovery Channel, A&E and the History Channel. But now he’s back in Houston.

“I don’t feel like there’s a need to be in New York City to make documentary films,” Newman says. “I feel like there’s



PHOTO: LOGAN BECK



PHOTO: ALEX LUSTER

ABOVE: John Carrithers shoots the Byzantine Frescos at the Byzantine Fresco Chapel for a documentary film produced by Francois and Susan de Menil. BELOW: Gonzo of Aerosol Warfare from Alex Luster’s documentary “Stick em Up!”

more opportunity here, smaller pond, bigger fish, and compared to my friends in New York I’m doing more interesting work here.”

Newman’s documentary “The Reconstruction of Asa Carter,” an hour-long film exploring the life and legacy of the best-selling author of “The Outlaw Jesse Wales” and “The Education of Little Tree” airs on PBS on April 24. And he’s currently working on two historical documentaries for Rice University and “Mothers at War,” true stories from

mothers serving as soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Mothers at War” has a strong web presence,” Newman says. “And that’s huge, especially to create buzz and maybe generate a traditional distribution deal, for documentaries.” Newman is director of creative programming at Mouth Watering Media, a Houston-based multi-platform company his brother Steven founded, so he’s very savvy when it comes to the Internet.

Continued on Page 21

New Notes

Composers in Houston

ANTHONY BRANDT THINKS Houston is a composer's city. Brandt, a professor of composition at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and Artistic Director of Musiqa, a collective of five composers, knows what he is talking about.

"I can't prove this, but I'd venture to say that Houston currently has more composers than Beethoven's Vienna," says Brandt, with his signature eager excitement. "What's very striking about that is that 1800s Vienna was considered a musical Mecca, whereas Houston is still generally 'under the radar.'"

Even with a plethora of organizations, artists and others arguing and demonstrating otherwise, sadly there are still those in Houston and elsewhere who think that opportunities for contemporary classical music here are hard to come by. However, if you really look, the facts tell a completely different story.

Known for their exceptional commitment to new music and living composers, the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO) will premiere Brandt's latest work, "Maternity— Women's Voices Through the Ages," with Libretto by David Eagleman, and sung by Karol Bennett." on April 21. Brandt describes his new work as a "celebration of motherhood reaching back through time all the way to the first mother in history."

"Mozart is dead. We're not," says Alicia Lawyer, founder of ROCO. In the seven years the orchestra has been in existence, ROCO has premiered 28 new works. That is more new music than most orchestras do in twice that amount of time, or longer. The ensemble has also demonstrated a rare commitment to composers living and working in the location in which they exist. Earlier this year, ROCO premiered an exceptional new work by composer and jazz pianist Paul English.

"There are not too many places that have a first rank orchestra who commissions, let alone from local composers," says Brandt about ROCO's commitment to Houston composers. "The performances are first rate."

When you consider just the composer faculties at the local music schools, recent grads and students who have stayed in town, you could easily get to over 60 composers living and working in the

Bayou City. Then there are those independent composers like Richard Ford. Born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Oklahoma, Ford has lived and worked in New York City and Los Angeles, and has enjoyed a busy career writing music



Composer and Musiqa artistic director Anthony Brandt.

for theater and film prior to his arrival in Houston. It was his wife's career that brought him and their new son to the Bayou City.

Although his background is primarily in writing for theater and film, Ford is exploring concert music in Houston. "When I arrived here, I immediately met musicians who liked playing new music and composers who, surprisingly, were interested in other composers," says Ford. "It's much more competitive in New York."

Ford is the Composer in Residence of the newly formed Heights Orchestra, where his latest piece, "Bolts of Melody," will receive its premiere on April 15. The Heights Orchestra is a great indicator of the climate for composers and new music in the Houston. Formed just this past fall, the new orchestra is offering composers the opportunity to have their works read by the orchestra during rehearsal, which is entirely rare in the orchestral world.

Houston Grand Opera has a long history of commissioning and premiering opera, which includes a number of landmark works of the 20th Century, including the 1983 premiere of Leonard Bernstein's "A Quiet Place," the 1987 premiere of John Adams' "Nixon in China" and the 1991 premiere of Meredith Monk's "Atlas."

Recently, through its "Song of Houston" project, the company's efforts have been increasingly focused directly on its hometown. Beginning in 2007 with "The Refuge," featuring music by the now former Houston resident Christopher Theofanidis, the company has sought to tell the story of Houston's immigrant

hosts the annual Robert Avalon International Competition for Composers.

Da Camera of Houston uniquely includes composers alongside musicians in its Young Artist Program, and there is a growing number of up and coming young chamber ensembles, like WindSYNC and the Quartus Chamber Players, who regularly feature contemporary music on their concert and educational programs.

This wealth of activity as not gone unnoticed, NPR's "All Things Considered" reported on Houston's contemporary classical music community as part of a series on unexplored music scenes

community through words and music. The most recent addition to the "Song of Houston" cannon is "The Bricklayer" with music by Gregory Spears who, although not a Houston resident, is nevertheless a young American composer to watch.

HGO also has made a call out directly to Houston-based composers, soliciting creative proposals that are based on stories and text supplied through the "Song of Houston: Home and Place" project. The result of which will be a song cycle that will reflect and mirror back the stories taken from the partner schools and community centers.

Looking elsewhere around the Bayou City, one sees a variety of opportunities and audiences for new composers and their music. The Foundation for Modern Music has recently showcased the work of important young American composers Avner Dorman and Mohammed Fairouz. Additionally, the organization

around the country back in 2008. What was the verdict, you ask? The contemporary music scene in Houston is thriving. In the words of Da Camera Artistic Director Sarah Rothenberg, "When you go to a place like Houston, Texas, you discover just how complex America is. And all the stereotypes that people might carry around really go out the window."

— 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.

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Angels in Houston

Corella Ballet on the Threshold of Change

THE CELEBRATED AMERICAN ballet Theatre principal Angel Corella is one of the world's greatest ballet dancers. His passion is now evident in his company, Corella Ballet, making its Houston debut, presented by Society for Performing Arts on May 5 at Jones Hall. Corella visited with A+C editor **Nancy Wozny** while the company stands on the threshold of becoming the Barcelona Ballet.

A+C: What made you want to bite the company bullet? Can you talk about your desire to have a company of your own?

ÁNGEL CORELLA: Ever since I was a young dancer in the ballet school in Madrid, I didn't understand why Spain did not have a classical ballet company like every other country, especially considering the number of talented dancers that come out of Spain every year. When I was in Victor Ullate's company, I dreamed of dancing the big story ballets, like "Don Quixote," "Swan Lake," "La Bayadere" and "Le Corsaire," but there were simply no opportunities to do so in my home country. This was something that really bothered me, and at one point I even considered giving it

up out of frustration of not being able to dance the ballets that I had seen only on videos.

How did you end up at American Ballet Theatre?

My friends and family encouraged me to participate in the Paris International Ballet Competition, so I signed up and in the end I won the Grand Prix. Natalia Makarova was head of the jury and she set me up with an audition at ABT, so I went to NY and was hired as a soloist, and after a few months they promoted me to principal dancer. I have been very fortunate in my career and, having had the opportunity to experience all of that made me realize even more the need of a classical ballet company in Spain.

Give us a flash history of Corella Ballet.

After several years of work, the Corella Ballet was born and began its first rehearsals in Segovia, Spain in 2008. Since then, the company has acquired a large repertoire, and has toured all over the world with a great response from audiences and critics. After four years in Segovia, the state (Catalonia) provincial



COURTESY OF CORELLA BALLE

Ángel and Carmen Corella in Manual de los Galanes' "Soleá."

and city governments of Barcelona have offered our company greater support, so in February, the company relocated to Barcelona and will soon be called Barcelona Ballet. This is a huge step for the company, we are all excited, this really positions us well for the future.

You are also passionate about bringing ballet training to Spain as well.

I started the Fundación Ángel Corella (Angel Corella Foundation) with two main missions, the creation of a classical ballet company in Spain and the establishment of a residence ballet school



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with both artistic and academic studies integrated, another thing that does not exist in Spain. The second mission of my foundation will be achieved with the opening of the ballet school with integrated studies and dormitory in Figueras in 2013–2014.

Talk about working with your sister Carmen Corella.

My family and I are extremely close. They have supported me throughout my entire career. So when I began to think about creating a foundation with a school and ballet company, it was only logical for me to want them to be a part of it from the beginning.

When I started considering options for an associate artistic director for the company, I had many names in mind, but Carmen seemed the perfect fit, not only because she is my sister and I completely trust her, but also because we have almost always worked in the same companies and our artistic vision usually coincides. The company would not be where it is today if it were not for her. I also have a very talented staff that is not family that make the project work. Our General Manager, Matthew Bledsoe, is actually from Houston.

That's wonderful! But, there is another Houston connection in that we are all every excited to see Stanton Welch's ballet minimalist and moving ballet "Clear" on your company.



PHOTO: ROSALIE O'CONNOR

Corella Ballet in "Bruch Violin Concerto."

It's rare to see a piece with almost all male dancers and only one female. I felt like it was the perfect piece for our company, considering the high technical level of our male dancers. "Clear" formed part of the first performance that the company ever performed in 2008, and from day one proved to be a hit with the audiences. This piece is also particularly special to me because Stanton created the ballet on me for ABT. I wanted to pass all of the experiences that I had working with Stanton to my own company as well, as the emotional importance of what it meant to perform

this amazing work after 9/11.

How did you choose the rep for this evening?

I really wanted to choose a program with a lot of variety to showcase the company in many different styles. We open the evening with "Bruch Violin Concerto," originally created for ABT with choreography by Clark Tippet. This is a very Balanchinesque, colorful and vibrant classical tutu ballet that really opens the performance on high note.

Then comes "Clear," by Stanton Welch, who, in my opinion, is one of the great-

est choreographers working today. The performance continues with a pas de deux called "Soleá" created by Maria Pagés for my sister Carmen and me. This is a ballet/flamenco fusion piece that portrays the relationship that I have with Carmen.

The evening ends with "DGV," by Christopher Wheeldon, another one of the best choreographers working today. It was originally created for the Royal Ballet with music by Michael Nyman. The ballet is packed full of energy and some really beautiful pas de deux, and ends the performance on a very high point.

You have been admired all over the world for your virtuosity. How do you define virtuosity?

For me, virtuosity is not only the way that you are able to turn and jump on stage, rather the way you are able to control your body and use it to express what you want to express at every moment while you are dancing. It's the harmony of controlling your body to the point that you do not have to think about the difficulty of a turn or a jump, while never losing the connection with the audience.

May 5, 2012
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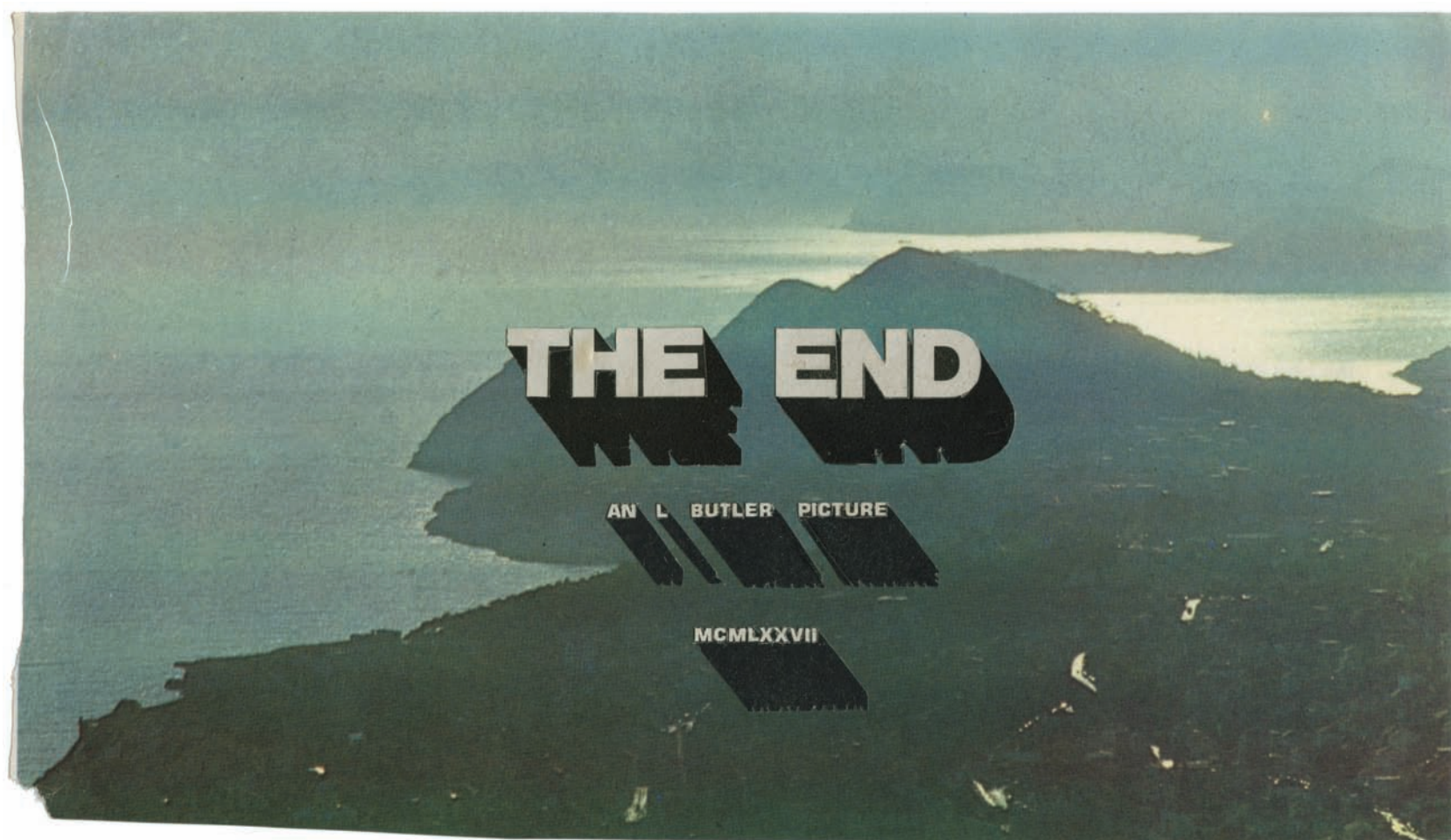
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COURTESY SILVERMAN GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

TOP: Luke Butler, "The End 54," 2011, Collage, 5.25 x 8.5 inches. OPPOSITE PAGE: Dan Rees, "Artex Painting 24," 2011, Oil on Canvas, 140 x 100 cm.

All Is Fair In Art?

THE DALLAS ART FAIR (DAF) makes two unspoken promises that, prima facie, seem at odds — untenable in the coupling of the radically new and the easily recognizable. The DAF proposes to be the most hip, happening, and avant-garde event of the year while also simply being a marketplace, a mall for art and its denizens.

In the history of art, the avant-garde has consisted of those who buck the norms of bourgeois politesse. Similar to the unforeseen movement of an atom swerving away from the straight downward shuttling of all other atoms, they attempt to remove themselves from all the rest, or what Nietzsche called the "herd." Why would the local artistic avant-garde want anything to do with the officially nipped-and-tucked of the DAF? It is not so important whether or not the avant-garde, if it exists, wants to be part of the market or not because the market precedes all, at least in the developed world. To follow the syllogism at work here, you are already nipped-and-tucked even if you thought otherwise.

Undoubtedly, the artistic avant-garde and market exist in a tenuous if not tortured relationship, at least by the weathered and worn definition of the term. In reality, the avant-garde is nothing other

than capitalism in raw form. It is the cool and chic object, performance, or thinker doing its thing proverbially outside-the-box. As capital inchoate, that thing does not so much get sucked into the box but relocate the box itself, giving it a fandangled, more easily consumable appearance. And so, the avant-garde is what capitalism looks for in its hunt for ever-greater expansion, whether in the form of real estate or brightly colored gewgaws.

In writing about modernity, the French poet Charles Baudelaire called it *nouveauté*, or novelty. The French context of the mid 19th century, Paris to be precise, gives to us the earliest instance of the artistic avant-garde and, at the same time, the most forthright and perhaps elegant articulation of the interwoven fellowship between the established power of the capitalist State and the rising power of the avant-garde. Since the early 18th century, the French had been holding in Paris an official exhibition each year — the salon — showing the best and most prized works of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the state sanctioned school of art. In 1863, Emperor Napoleon III, leader of the French state, sponsored le Salon des refusés, the Salon of the Rejected, an exhibition showing thousands of paintings rejected by the official jury.

So emerged the (officially State-sponsored) avant-garde.

There will be a mingling of establishment and renegade forces come the weekend of the DAF, April 13–15 at downtown's Fashion Industry Gallery, with the many high caliber galleries from around the country exhibiting their wares at the DAF and our very own Salon des refusés in the form the Dallas Biennial, or DB12. Also known as Dick Higgins (named for the Fluxus protagonist and the coiner of the term "intermedia"), DB12 will host events and show the work of artists off-site at the Oliver Francis Gallery near Fair Park. They are notably not rejects of the DAF but simply ancillary.

In short, an avant-garde measure is one taken against or outside of the majority. The placement, relevance, and importance of an artistic avant-garde within any given city, including the Metroplex, is discussed below by gallery owners participating in the DAF and DB12.

Katherine Gray, Sue Scott Gallery, New York, NY

A critical approach that doesn't accept the prevailing modes of art production is always necessary to reassert the changing needs of successive genera-

tions and what they require of culture. Over the past few years Dallas has invested in the arts on a level that is both admirable and inspiring. The DAF is a manifestation of that tremendous commitment, and, quite simply, it allows both Dallas patrons and those from outside the community to participate in the transformation an art fair can bring. As a catalyst for that change, DAF can help reorganize the art scene locally and nationally at an important time for galleries as they reassess their roles in the global art market.

Laura Greene, Valley House Gallery, Dallas, TX

As a gallery, we are drawn to the expressive individuality of the artist. We seek the avant-garde on an individual level, rather than seeking the avant-garde for avant-garde's sake. Artists who develop their own expression, rather than trying to follow the collective, trending avant-garde, are to us the most interesting kind of avant-garde. Each of the artists [we will show] has developed their own personal visual iconography. Each of these artists is experimental in that they are inventing new ways of visual expression that reflect their individuality. They are innovative in that they are each following their own artistic voice,

which strikes us as non-conformist in the purist sense.

Hudson, Feature Inc., New York, NY

There really isn't an avant-garde any longer. That was an intellectual and esthetic discussion, a notion that disappeared some decades ago. You are probably referring the cutting edge, which is more about trends and what's hot. There are numerous art worlds/art markets and change occurs swiftly, every year or two, all of which is market driven.

Nancy Whitenack, Conduit Gallery, Dallas, TX

Pushing the edge, thinking out of the box, daring to go beyond the current prescriptions are necessary to a vital, energetic art scene. Dallas is no exception. Work that questions existing attitudes, i.e. politics, morality, commerce, need to be examined, and artists must find ways and places to put forth those ideas. In truth, The DAF and the avant-garde have little room for relationship. An art fair is driven by commerce...the need to sell works of art. More conservative work has been shown in art fairs the last several years, due in large part, to the economic downturn. As the economy improves, galleries are willing to be more risky and show challenging work that pushes boundaries. The DAF this year, with a roster of young, brash new dealers may prove to be quite interest-

ing. DAF could encourage avant-garde ideas by having lectures and discussions during the fair which question art-making and its relationship to the political climate, and to the community. I believe the role of the DAF is one of building a larger, more involved local community who are willing to look at a broad range of artworks and ask questions about underlying themes and artists' intentions rather than deciding to "like" or "dislike" a work of art. It's a commercial endeavor to bring more people to the city and discover the richness of the arts here.

Stephanie Wilde, Stewart Gallery, Boise, ID

The question of the place of the "avant-garde" is important to any city — especially now — forward thinking is a must. The arts have been affected greatly during this economic time. To bring attention to the visual arts on the level of the Dallas Art Fair is a reflection on the city. A good political, community and commercial move. The founders of this particular Fair invite highly respected dealers, this process keeps the Fair at a certain level and sets a precedence. This is a thoughtful group that knows what they want and how to accomplish it. When you bring energy like the Dallas Art Fair to a city — with its events that are educational, insightful and enjoyable — everyone wins. This fair is becoming something that is discussed in my circles

Continued on Page 24



COURTESY JONATHAN VINER, LONDON

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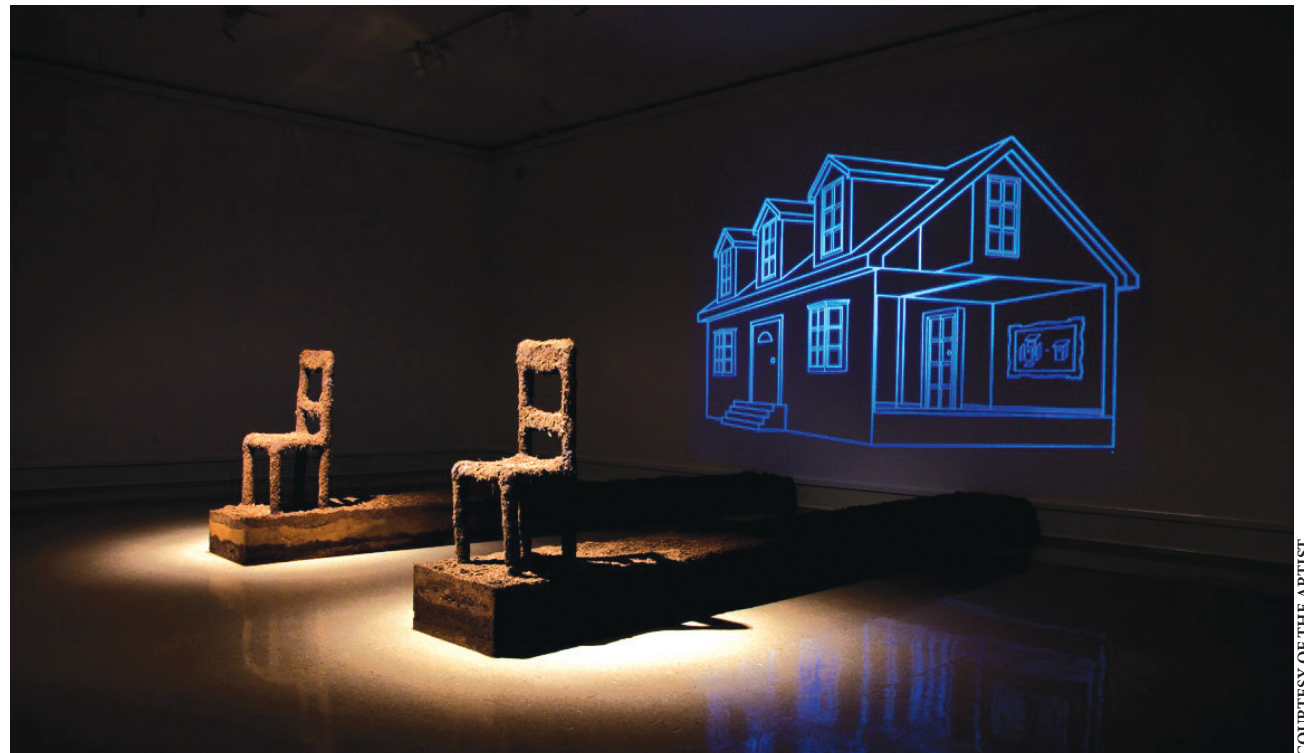
Park Place Projects: The Art of Russ Pitman Park

“I’M INTERESTED IN LAND, POLITICS, the idea of connecting to the earth — as in artist Ana Mendieta’s ‘Silueta’ series,” says Divya Murthy, curator of “It’s a Phase,” an exhibition of on-site artist projects at Russ Pitman Park that encourages the evolution and deeper consideration of the broad (if not outdated) term “environmental art.”

Invited to curate the show by previous park exhibition organizers June Woest and Lucinda Cobby, Murthy considers the process to be an organic learning opportunity, considerately explaining, “It feels kind of like cooking in someone else’s kitchen. When you’re done, you make sure everything is put back in order, and then you have to give the kitchen back.”

Russ Pitman Park, located in Bellaire, Texas, just inside the 610 Loop, is a lush four-acre public home for native Texas plants and wildlife — and artworks, at least temporarily. The park’s significant landscape and wildlife (a variety of beetles, large beehives and over 80 species of migratory birds) allows artists to articulate, through their individual artworks, relationships to a specific site and its environment. This is not the first time art has been installed in the park, but it is the first large-scale exhibition Murthy has curated.

After a public call for proposals and word-of-mouth recommendations, Murthy invited artists Lina Dib, Ned Dodington, Tobias Fike, Allison Hunter, Barna Kantor, Gabriel Martinez, Adinadi Meza, Emily Sloan, Annie Strader and Matthew Weedman to participate in the exhibition. She has spent the last several months facilitating the installation of the projects within the borders of the park.



ABOVE: Annie Strader and Matthew C. Weedman, “Shelter,” Soil and Projection, 2012. BELOW: Tobias Fike, “Landscape Photography,” 2008.

Murthy is quick to point out that “It’s a Phase” is an exhibition about artwork in a specific environment, but it’s not specifically environmental art. While “green” issues of sustainability are not a primary concern of the exhibition, Murthy and the artists welcomed the opportunity to more fully consider the impact and integration of the artworks with the help of park educator and staff naturalist Eric Duran. Duran aided in the artists’ introductions to the park, project development, and installation, an invaluable role since the majority of the participating artists did not have a relationship with Pitman Park until Murthy contacted them.

Enter Dodington — whose radar admit-

tedly gets pretty weak past Kirby. He had no idea that the park existed prior to Murthy’s park exhibition project. Dodington’s general art practice is based on forming connections, illustrating overlaps, and exposing inconsistencies in an anthropocentric world-view, with a goal to make visible the actions of life and cross-species interaction and participation. For “It’s a Phase,” he is trying to talk about, or talk with, the birds in Pitman Park. He describes, “My project ‘Urban Aries’ is a way to illustrate alternate ways for birds and humans to participate in the time-honored tradition of watching — be it at a feeder, a perch, or a nest. It is a collaborative cross-species approach to architecture and design, and also simply to help me gather data and test some scenarios about this whole idea.”

Allison Hunter, who admires the seemingly laid back attitude of the park, was able to keep her project ideas flexible. She initially proposed a music video based on snails and the sounds they make as they move across surfaces. However, she wasn’t able to find the snails, much less record their movements. She also learned that snails are deaf. For her, it seemed sad to make music that they couldn’t hear, so she went back to the drawing board.

In light of her introduction to and experiences in Pitman park, Hunter says, “There were lot of moments where I was amazed at how things in the park were not as they seemed. I want to bring that

kind of surprise to my work.”

For that reason, she is keeping the finer details of her installation under wraps until the actual presentation, revealing only that it will involve a video and a small enclosure.

Other artist projects in “It’s a Phase” include “fake” holograms, listening posts, a cosmos display, drawn stencil pieces, and other interventions such as use of the park’s leisure spaces (i.e. benches).

Murthy looks forward to seeing how the exhibition will move beyond this phase and into the next, resulting in the expansion of art term definitions and the promotion of Russ Pitman Park — not only as an incredible ecological pocket, but as an alternative exhibition space for artists to create new works.

— NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator who parks herself in front of artworks whenever and wherever possible.

April 4–May 13, 2012
“It’s a Phase” On-Site Artist Projects at Russ Pitman Park, Houston
Opening Reception: Saturday, April 7, 6–8pm
www.kickstarter.com/projects/russpitmanpark/public-art-projects-at-russ-pitman-park



DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS CONTINUED

Between the Internet and Houston's airport, Newman sees no reason not to be based here.

"When I need to go to New York or on location somewhere, I go," he says. "I just don't feel the need to live there and pay those high prices. I don't think of myself as a Houston documentary filmmaker, I think of myself as a documentary filmmaker who lives in Houston."

And that may be the key to future success for local documentarians.

"The use of social media as a way to raise funds and generate interest is changing things," says the MFAH's Luntz. "And I think the accessibility of equipment has made a difference."

Who knows? Maybe the teens of today, shooting documentaries on their iPhones and linking them to postings on YouTube via Twitter and Facebook will someday be holding Oscar statuettes for Best Documentary.

"The technology is great," says Luster. "We sold out three screenings of 'Stick em Up!' last year using only social media. But it does lessen my chances of get-

ting into film festivals because there are more entries."

And, much like the book-publishing world and print journalism, so far no one's really figured out how to make money online without a traditional distribution deal.

But that isn't deterring the new wave of Houston documentary filmmakers.

— Marene Gustin

Marene Gustin writes about Texas culture, food, fashion, the arts and even Lone Star politics and crime for magazines, websites and newspapers nationwide.
www.marenegustin.com

May 4-6, 2012

Alex Luster's "Stick em Up!"
Museum of Fine Arts Houston
Brown Auditorium Theater
www.mfah.org/films

April 24, 2012

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www.reconstructionofasacarter.com

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CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART TEXAS CONNECTIONS



New exhibition of work by pan-Asian artists with ties to the Lone Star State. Curated by Kimberly Davenport, Director, Rice University Art Gallery.

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Cultural Warrior

Matthew Lennon: HAA's Director of Civic Art & Design



PHOTO: SONTERA DRESCH

Matthew Lennon with Ai Weiwei's installation of "Circle of Animals/Zodiac Head."

WITH AI WEIWEI'S "CIRCLE OF Animals/Zodiac Heads" guarding McGovern Lake at Hermann Park, now seemed like the ideal time dig deeper into ideas surrounding public art in Houston. A+C editor Nancy Wozny chatted with Matthew Lennon, Houston Arts Alliance's director of Civic Art & Design.

A+C: The days of "plop and drop" are clearly over. How would you describe the current thinking?

MATTHEW LENNON: In the past, the push had been to respond to architecture. The result was a lot of "plop" and what the artist Shelia Klein called "Jumbo Jewelry." A lot of this was to cover up the banality of the architecture. Today, it's about creative place-making, celebrating human and municipal aspirations and providing platforms for culture, that helps define our civic spaces in terms of use. This goes beyond art and architecture. It's about the actions we take in creating a good place to live. We still want to build a substantial municipal collection. To do that, we have to be strategic and opportunistic. The main

objective is to avoid CRAP (Culturally Regurgitated Artistic Plonk).

I'm all for avoiding CRAP. Let's jump in with how that current thinking is manifesting itself in Houston.

The prevailing statement I hear seems to be that "Houston is poised to be an important 21st Century city." Hate that, sounds submissive, like we're waiting for permission. Do we really need another decade of convening to solve our urban design problems, to understand the value of artistic interventions to Houston's quality of life?

So, what should we do?

Houston is heaving with energetic, innovative, entrepreneurial people. And the point of creative place-making is to bring the diversity of the cultural sectors together—tech, art, design, business, transportation, science...and act. We can't afford to be passive.

Imagine a city that embraces its own aspirations and fosters an environment that welcomes its creative citizens and their work, where culture and partici-

pation are virile. Imagine art that isn't decorative or an object but engaging, interactive or coded to be global.

Civic Art needs to partner with the business sector and neighborhood development and management organizations. Economic development and cultural sustainability need to be married. Smart cities partner with their artists and designers to facilitate designs that are about civic participation.

Cities were often known by some landmark sculpture, and those days are shifting too. That said, is there one piece that imbues a sense of the city's identity?

I don't think Houston needs an identity. It's a young city. It's evolving. It's a city of risks. I'd like Houston to be known as the place to go if you have an idea and want to make it happen. Recently, with the P.O.D.A. program (Portable On Demand Art) and the Mark Dion Invasive Plant Eradication Unit, we've produced models of practice and partnership that I hope we can cultivate. These are models artist can sink their teeth into. Elaine Bradford's work at Vinson Library demonstrates the case for working with emerging artists and supporting the unexpected. Luca Buvoli's "Vector HH" at Hobby Airport is another example. These works add to the experience of place and the work benefits from that context. Louis Jimenez's "Vaquero" is wildly eloquent, just as Jaime Plensa's "Tolerance" is quietly profound.

The public realm should be where we reveal our time, place and the effort it takes to be here; where we acknowledge our complexities; and fuse our actions together to make the city the icon.

You mentioned that when you arrived here you thought of Houston as an incomplete city. In what way can public art complete a city?

I like incompleteness. Great cities are in a constant state of reanimation; that's what makes a place exciting and challenging. It means there's room for experimentation, risk and growth.

I notice that public art people use the term "address the space." Listening to you talk about the process makes me think it's one of the more fun parts of your job.

Placement makes all the difference when you install in a public space. Site wrong and great work can look like it could be anywhere. When you're doing a project in the public realm you have to design in a way that is experiential and in context to place. For "Zodiac," I placed the work at McGovern Lake, addressing the theater and park, allowing people several diverse sight lines and approaches. It means you can get into one of the paddle boats to engage the work.

I plan to take out a paddle boat soon. What else should we plan on?

We're contracted with Buffalo Bayou Partnership to manage the art component of the Buffalo Bayou Park Project. Selection is complete and the artists are Ball Nogues Studio and Anthony Shumate. Ball Nogues will design an installation for the Memorial Drive Viaduct. Anthony will work with the design team to facilitate artistic amenities throughout the park. The project will run from now into 2015.

Clearly there's a whole set of moving parts in any public art project. More Houston artists might apply if they were better prepared. In what way is HAA helping artists figure out how to work with designers, architects and the like? How does an artist learn to talk to the concrete guy?

Most artists will never work in public art. Artists working in the public realm have to be box clever, collaborate and understand that civic art is not a grant program. It's a turnkey contractual situation. They need to grasp the context of the city, its aspirations and complexities, help reveal contemporary issues and sometimes turn it all on its head. And do this under the pressure of construction schedules and budget limitations. There are lots of concerns beyond the art from other contractors, engineers, architects, security, and clients.

Fortunately, the city is enthusiastic for arts programming, and this ripples through every department. HAA can guide the artists through its complexities, but the artist needs to build their own team of engineers, fabricators and installers. We have some new RFQ/RFPs going out, and we are going to offer a consultation day to help artists prepare their presentation packages.

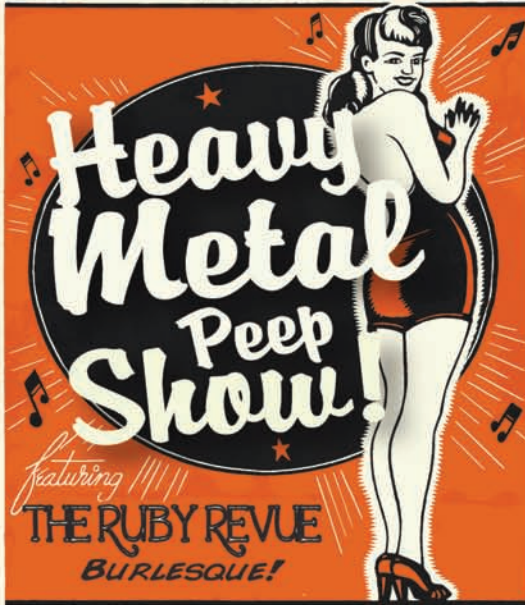
From construction worker to painter to public art guy. Explain.

Construction work is about more than just the trades. Job sites have camaraderie and conflict and the need for collaboration. There's a rhythm to a big job. If something goes wrong you can get hurt, someone can die or tens of thousands of dollars go down the drain. Construction work taught me about how things are made in 'real world' terms, about collaborating, managing projects and contracts. Most importantly, it taught me about delivery. It made for a good apprenticeship in dealing with public art.

I think I became the 'public art guy' when I moved to Newcastle upon Tyne. I wanted to see if all the independent curating experience could translate to a municipal setting. I was hired to be the city's public art curator. I shifted from the cultural program to the urban design team. With the support of that team and its lead designer, Michael Crilly, we began instilling civic art and design as a key component of master plans, development, regeneration and municipal planning. We presented art as part of the infrastructure. And now I'm here.

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ALL IS FAIR IN ART? CONTINUED

with such a positive attitude, from the generousness of every person that you deal with on the team of the Dallas Art Fair — an all inclusive attitude towards the dealers and the exchange of ideas. We, of course gain by reaching a larger audience, recognition for our Stewart, our artist and new clients.

Cris Worley, Cris Worley Fine Art, Dallas, TX

Experimental art movements, happenings and phenomena are important to any group, and society at-large, for a multitude of reasons. In the larger art historical schema they often act as a mirror to current events and societal trends, giving us greater perspective on a zeitgeist. As in any place, to be a well-rounded city, Dallas must foster both the norm and the anti-norm. It's a healthy intellectual balance that should occur in culture much like the balance we find in science and the natural world. In general, art fairs are primarily centered around commercial and consumer endeavors. It's important to be clear that this is true not just of the Dallas Art Fair, but all art fairs, and there's no reason to be bashful about this fact. After

all, it is a forum in which dealers travel to locations outside of their own cities, countries, and galleries to promote their artists to a larger audience. This is an essential part of the art world - promotion.

Michael Mazurek, DB12/Dick Higgins (Oliver Francis Gallery), Dallas, TX

I'm uncertain of the existence of the artistic avant-garde as a concept in our present moment. The classic concept of the avant-garde attempts to exist outside the limitations of a strictly commercial framework. From the time of the earliest avant-garde experiments until now the world has become increasingly even more commercial and market dominated. For no fault of its own the DAF appropriately represents this market. Within the confines of the DAF, viewers may find exceptions to the rule. However, for the most part art fairs typically exhibit and promote works that are made of a certain size and scale that does not normatively attempt to dismantle the status-quo. Unfortunately most artists I know do not look to the legacies of Dada and Constructivism as their source.

— CHARISSA N TERRANOVA



COURTESY OF MOODY GALLERY, HOUSTON

Al Souza, "Garman 1," 2011, Mixed Media, 12 x 13.5 inches.

The Dallas Art Fair, April 13–15, features more than 70 prominent national and international art dealers and galleries exhibiting paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints and photographs by modern and contemporary artists in the revitalized downtown Arts District. Information at www.dallasartfair.com.

The Dallas Biennale is a discourse concerning past, present, and future exhibition practices, along with a large-scale, city-wide, international exhibition as context for those discussions. The Biennale will show at various North Texas locations throughout the year, including at the Oliver Francis Gallery beginning April 13. Information at oliverfranciscallery.com and www.dallasbiennial.org.

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RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

“Dead Man’s Cell Phone”

Mildred’s Umbrella Theatre Company

March 22–April 7, 2012

www.mildredsumbrella.com

Within the first five minutes of Mildred’s Umbrella Theatre Company’s recent production “Dead Man’s Cell Phone” you understand that the place you are about to encounter is not your own. This is a bizarre parallel to the world you know. The play takes you through the curious adventure of Jean, who has happened upon the relentless ringing of a dead man’s mobile phone.

Director Rob Kimbro approaches the text with a sparseness. The rotating set pieces are minimal and the lighting unembellished, which places all emphasis on the actors and their actions. Mildred’s Artistic Director, Jennifer Decker, plays Jean with a quiet peculiarity. She moves through the world of the play with little trepidation. Nothing about the strange way in which she has encountered this cell phone, the odd family it has brought her to or the fact that the damn phone will not stop ringing, feels anything other than normal. She has a steady calm of someone that is either incredibly average or a potential sociopath. Several of the characters describe her as comforting; the dead man’s mother going as far as to compare her to a “casserole,” the ultimate comfort food.

Jean finds herself consoling several characters; among them is the dead man’s mistress, portrayed by the seductive and superbly funny Candyce Price. Price finds the perfect characterization of a 1950s femme fatale, and she steals every scene she is in, which there were not nearly enough of. The other scene-stealer is that of the dead man, who is brought to life exceptionally by Mark Roberts. In the retelling of the day of his death, Roberts is commanding, arrogant and self-centered; paradoxically the man who died is the most unsympathetic character of the bunch.

All of the acting worked rather well. The absurdity of the plot and the writing gave the actors plenty of room for a mixture of raw emotion and straight-faced deadpan.

The big ideas of the play, communication, human connection, religion and the ties that bind all of these things together could have been made stronger through the direction, though. There were several moments that just missed their intended mark. A choreographed piece of white-masked cell phone talkers starts out creepy and effective, but goes on for too long to become a mockery of itself. Overall, the excellent acting and



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Karina Gonzalez, Connor Walsh and Ian Casady in Stanton Welch’s Ballet, “Tapestry.”

fine writing of author Sarah Ruhl are the highlights of this production.

— ABBY KOENIG

Abby Koenig is a Mass Communications professor, a creative writer and a playwright. She is regular contributor to the *Houston Press’ Art Attack* blog. www.blogs.houstonpress.com/artattack

“In the Next Room, or The Vibrator Play”

Stages Repertory Theatre

Through April 8, 2012

www.stagetheatre.com

I dare you to bring your Mom to this play, which features more orgasms than I’ve ever seen on stage in a long history of theatergoing. True to its subtitle, “The Vibrator Play” aims to shock and titillate, but Ruhl is too smart to write a mere period sex farce; the play also has a healthy share of the playwright’s trademark sensitivity and insight.

The first act brings the laughs in introducing us to Catherine Givings, wife of Dr. Givings, and Dr. Givings’ “therapeutic massage” device, used to treat women of their “hysteria.” Patients like Mrs. Daldry (Kristin Warren) come in weeping and melancholy, and leave in much better spirits. Much ado is made of Mrs. Daldry’s “healthy glow” when she leaves Dr. Givings’ office as it becomes increasingly apparent that no Victorian man has ever seen a post-coital woman before. However, the play turns to more serious matters as we explore the ins and outs of Catherine’s desire to connect with her daughter and her husband and her in-

ability to do so, Mrs. Daldry’s repressed desires, and the deep sadness of Catherine’s wet nurse, Elizabeth (Courtney D. Jones), who recently lost her child. Much of the credit for the effectiveness of the play’s humor goes to Tracie Thomason’s impeccable comic timing and incredibly animated face. David Matranga is humorously wooden as Dr. Givings, who, while able to treat countless women for “hysteria,” does not seem to be able to recognize and treat his own wife’s increasing desperation.

The designers deserve kudos for the lush, beautiful environment, especially costumes; designer Claremarie Verheyen and her crew either found or built some of the most beautiful dresses in the city for this play.

Houston has long enjoyed a love affair

with Sarah Ruhl; most of us have seen all of her major plays performed here over the last several years to great acclaim. Stages’ “In the Next Room” is another Ruhl hit not to be missed.

— ZACHARY DOSS

Zachary Doss is a freelance writer. He has his BA in Creative Writing and Theater from the University of Houston.

“Rock, Roll & Tutus”

Houston Ballet

March 8–18, 2012

www.houstonballet.org

Stanton Welch’s new ballet “Tapestry” made for one gorgeous vehicle to show off his current crop of ballet athletes. Launching with an expansive solo by Houston Ballet’s newest principal, Joseph Walsh, “Tapestry” revealed ample showmanship, musicality and Welch’s signature breathtaking and daredevil partnering.

As always, the fearless Karina Gonzalez moved like a luminous current of energy, all zest and sparkle. Audiences gasped while she sky skipped from Connor Walsh to Ian Casady. The bold Melissa Hough conjured an ice dancer in her whip-fast turns.

Welch’s penchant for air dancing characterized the ensemble work. Joseph Walsh’s crystal clear, yet sumptuously generous, dancing ended the ballet. It’s quite amazing to watch him command every inch of the stage; it’s as if the air gets out of the way when he storms through it.

Holly Hynes’ costumes combined intricate patterns and bold structure, mir-

Reviews Continued on Page 26



PHOTO: BRUCE BENNETT

Tracie Thomason, Kristin Warren, David Matranga in Sarah Ruhl’s “In the Next Room, (or the vibrator play).”

REVIEWS CONTINUED

roring the ballet, while Lisa J. Pinkham's lighting cast a velvety glow. The hanging robes backdrop, on the other hand, did little to enhance the ballet. I kept expecting these glorious dancers to weave the robes into some grand tangle. Alas, I had to be satisfied with the stellar dancing.

Christopher Bruce's "Rooster" focuses on The Rolling Stones more memorable and haunting songs. Katelyn May's pitch perfect portrayal as the girl who always gets left out was simply adorable, while Christopher Croomer's body perfectly held the slumped, but proud, posture of the era. The evening wrapped up with an equally rousing and razor sharp performance of Welch's "Divergence," Welch's in-your-face rubber tutu ballet.

— NANCY WOZNY

"Il Trovatore"

Opera in the Heights
March 15-25, 2012
www.operaintheheights.org

With hidden identities, passionate love, and a gypsy's vicious revenge, it is no wonder that Verdi's dramatic "Il Trovatore" remains so popular. It's a task to add passion to this already effusive opera, but this is precisely what sets Opera in the Heights (OH!) apart in their production — it draws out emotion to the point of tasting it.

This is the final production in Oh!'s season and acts as a striking preview of the season to come. It also marks the end of artistic director Enrique Carreón-Robledo's first season at Oh! A precise and enthusiastic director, Carreón-Robledo's second season — which is an all-Shakespeare line-up including two Houston premieres — will no doubt also bring new energy to operas of old.

From the rolling timpani to the closing cry of revenge, Oh!'s production is an

dramatic ride. Soprano Michelle Johnson, playing Leonora, brought poignancy to the forefront, dominating after intermission. At the tragic torture scene, Johnson's exquisite voice proved its full range, seeming to pour sorrow from her very heart in powerfully scintillating notes contrasted by a last quiet high pitch that floated off sweetly. Dominick Rodriguez, playing her lover Manrico, added intensity. His rich tenor voice combined with Johnson's seamlessly, making their final duet beautifully anguished.

The visual aspect was at its height when the gypsies took the stage in Act Two. Stage Director Brian Byrnes captured the ghostly essence in a trick of shadows and lighting. As Azucena relays the horrible truth about her mother's death amid disgruntled-looking gypsies, a shadow of blue light dances behind her on the wall, making it easy to imagine it is her mother's apparition indeed swooping in as an owl.

Oh! makes this opera more than a spectator's sport: it is permeating, palpable, and incredibly real. To feel horror is natural — any time a gypsy recalls an infant's flesh charred by fire is an obvious monstrosity. But the unique experience of being able to see the singer's expressions — the very eyes of Azucena pop as she makes cries of revenge — is exclusively to be had at this venue.

By the vengeful close, the opera seems to be much less in 15th-century Spain and more in the reality of all. With uncommon flair, Oh! breeds a complete immersion in the music. Expect that even after the final curtain has dropped, hairs will still be standing on end.

— SYDNEY BOYD

Sydney Boyd is a graduate student studying English literature and opera at Rice University.



PHOTO: DAVIS TUCKER



PHOTO: ERIC SAUSED

ABOVE: Anthony Barilla Rehearsing Apocalypse Town. BELOW: Michelle Johnson (Lenora) and Dominick Rodriguez (Manrico) in Opera in the Heights' "Il Trovatore."

"Apocalypse Town"

DiverseWorks Art Space
March 21-25, 2012
www.apocalypse-town.com

Sure, the word 'apocalypse' might bring to mind a scorched-earth wasteland, an image of a world abandoned, forsaken — an image which a project concerned with life in post-conflict Kosovo might want to conjure — but let's not forget that at its core, the word is built on the idea of revelation, of lifting the veil before our eyes. Anthony Barilla's "Apocalypse Town," part-monologue, part-musical-revue, frames itself in this idea of revelation; yet each time Barilla reaches for the veil, shows us where it hangs, reminds us how little we Americans remember about a war we fought only 13 years ago, he doesn't so much lift the veil as become hopelessly mesmerized by its texture, happily or uneasily lost in its threads.

While Barilla as monologist spends the night promising to finally tell us the truth — about the war, the NATO intervention, the aftermath, the hope for a better future — the audience comes to understand that his inability to do so, his pathological urge to digress into pop culture minutiae, is the point. Rather than become the impossible revelator, the man with the answer, Barilla settles with being a reveler in the kind of trivia where truth and falsehood share a bed.

While the monologic portions of the show, with their simple man-at-a-desk staging, weren't always filled with as much vitality as one might have wished for, the musical performances never failed to pick up the slack. The back and forth pace between the two mode became a comfortable rhythm, both for the audience and for Barilla himself, whose stage presence grew with each interlude. With a tight six-piece band backing him up, Barilla's lyrical wit and charming arrangements communicated as much about his complicated relationship with the subject as he could have spent hours

explaining.

In the end, there isn't so much the feeling that truth about this foreign land — "Imaginary Kosovo" as Barilla calls it — had been glimpsed behind the gauze, that resolution had won out, rather that even if there isn't a way to lift and see past the veil, there is a way to see it from the other side, another view from which uncertainty glimmers and frightens. Over the course of the night, the people of "Imaginary Kosovo" become both more human and more ghost-like. Then again, from the other side of the veil, the audience realizes, so do we.

— DAVID A. FEIL

David A. Feil is a writer and educator in Houston.

"Debussy's Paris"

Da Camera Houston
March 3, 2012
www.dacamera.com

Long known for its inventive and contextualized programs, Da Camera Houston did what it does best with its recent presentation of "Debussy's Paris." "Lisle Joyeuse," the Debussy favorite for solo piano was paired with the Sonata for Violin and Piano allowing for a brilliant contrast of style and mood. The former is awash with the familiar and happy blend of the then new exotic and the ancient, and the later, the last substantial work of a man who's body was ravished with cancer and who's country was ravished by World War I, lingers in a bittersweet melancholic dream-like state. As one would expect, violinist Cho-Liang Lin and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott gave brilliant and engaging readings of both works.

Contrasting these two pieces were two works by Debussy's contemporaries; Andre Caplet's haunting "Conte fantastique" for harp and string quartet began the program, and Ernest Chausson's

rarely heard “Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet” rounded out the evening’s music.

Notable throughout both of these works was the signature sound of the Enso String Quartet. Now a long-time Houston favorite, this ensemble ages like a fine wine. Their playing is as refined, elegant and crisp as ever and they moved easily between the other world that is conjured in the Edgar Allan Poe inspired “Conte fantastique” and the more stately style of late 19th century France, which is exemplified in the “Concerto.” With a magical blend between the Enso and Cho-Liang Lin, contrasted with the brilliant and articulate sound of pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, the Chausson provided the performance highlight of the night.

— CHRIS JOHNSON

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Society for the Performing Arts

March 2-4, 2012

www.spahouston.org

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater’s recent Society for the Performing Arts three-day engagement had a monumental feel to it. Yes, it was sold out. Yes, Ailey new artistic director Robert Battle is obviously at the top of his game, and yes, they put on a show to remember.

With three Battle works on the bill, his influence was in full evidence. Samuel Lee Roberts commanded the stage in Battle’s “In/Side.” The leggy Alicia Graf Mack showed off comic skills and lightening fast technique in Battle’s quirky language driven piece “Takademe.” Battle’s “The Hunt” revealed Ailey’s more primal edge. In striking contrast, how regal the company looked in Paul Tay-

lor’s masterwork “Arden Court.”

There was something about Rennie Harris’ “Home” that demonstrated the depth and sheer emotional tonality this troupe is capable of. A highly layered composition, “Home” mixes the personal with the public, juxtaposing individual strife with group action. It’s a powerful piece, striking in both its fresh hip hop vocabulary and complex horizontal structure. “Home” spills out over the stage with an uncanny momentum, spreading its heartfelt message of pain, healing and reconciliation.

Alvin Ailey’s 1960 masterpiece “Revelations” closer has a ritual element. By now, most of us know these famous shapes, and we enjoy the reenactment on new dancers. That said, it’s hard to take your eyes off of veterans Matthew Rushing and Hope Boykin. Rocka my soul indeed.

— NANCY WOZNY

“La Resurrezione”

Ars Lyrica

March 6, 2012

www.arslyricahouston.org

After hearing Ars Lyrica’s rendition of Handel’s oratorio “La Resurrezione,” one must wonder why this little-known work about the story of Jesus’ resurrection is not performed more often. With gifted musicians on period instruments and a quintet of magnificent guest vocalists, Ars Lyrica created a sonic experience that was truly memorable.

Canadian soprano Gillian Keith stole the show from the first scene. Dressed in an elegant silvery dress with stark white hair as the Angel, she captured the full attention of the audience from her first strut onto the stage. I, for one, was so

mesmerized by her performance that it did not even occur to me to read the supertitles. Nor did I even have to in order to gather the meaning of the words, for Keith has that rare ability to communicate the emotion of the text through her extraordinary vocal expressivity and lyricism.

The deep authoritative voice of Timothy Jones as Lucifer matched Keith’s vocal fireworks. Together, they formed a wonderful dynamic onstage in the opening scene, a tough act to follow. Although much less theatrical than her vocal counterparts, soprano Meredith Ruduski as Mary Magdalene provided a delicate, mellifluous voice that was a nice complement to the more commanding voices of Keith and Jones. Countertenor Ryland Angel produced a smoothly controlled timbre in the role of Mary Cleophas, while tenor Zachary Wilder delivered a beautiful transparent tone as St John the Apostle.

The instrumentalists, conducted under the dazzling harpsichordist Matthew Dirst, brought a clarity and musicality to the production that was nothing short of refreshing. The use of period instruments is of course key to the performance, avoiding all the balance issues that typically arise in interpretations of Baroque music that use modern instruments. There were so many delightful moments, for instance, where the timbre of the vocalists perfectly synced with the instruments to create an altogether new and interesting sound.

— KENYA GILLESPIE

Kenya Gillespie, a native of Salina, Kansas, is a Master’s candidate in Music Composition at Rice University.

FotoFest 2012 Biennial

“The Young Generation 2007-2012”

March 17-April 28, 2012

www.fotofest.org

There was a chasm, according to the curatorial statement, a trench clawed into the cultural memory that separates the young Russian artists, who started making work in the last decade, from any sense of national continuity. The 22 artists that are represented in FotoFest’s “The Young Generation” did not have the advantage of a national infrastructure or even access to most of the photographic works from previous generations. No structure, no dialogue.

Some of these artists had the benefit of a mentor, some traveled, others came from journalism, and the rest are autodidacts. The curators have dubbed them “the internet generation,” but the photographs at Vine Street do not reference New Aesthetic: no pixels, artifacts, colliding infostreams, or multiplatform assaults. And yet, there is evidence of Etewaf mining, deep echoes from the entire history of photographic production. These works harmonize Josef Sudek, and Daido Moriyama, and Emmett Gowin, and Wolfgang Tillmans, and André Kertész, and so many more. Echoes from beyond the medium like Kir Esadov’s murky images of cackling death, too brutal for Metal; or Vasilia Nezabarom whose sense of play feels a serious as Dada; or Daria Tuminas whose folk tale images are equal parts Gondry, Saint-Exupéry and Amarcord.

The most surprising aspect of this smorgasbord of influences and references is that it’s pierced through with such a consistent tone, hard to define, almost ineffable, but very precise; this exhibition’s approach is not historical or even anthropological, this show is a mixtape.

There is much talk of poetry in the various texts that cling to these images, but poetry is perhaps the wrong analogy. Most of these works share a fragility and an openness that is closer to pop music. And the transitions from one body of photograph to the next make sense in the way that tone is picked up and complicated or turned around from artist to artist. It’s difficult to walk out of this show with a solid idea of the factual lives of young Russians, but one is left with a very real understanding of what it feels like, for some, to exist in this time, in that place.

Much of the work even approaches musicality in its very construction. Petr Rakhmanov, Alexandra Demenkova, Dina Shchedrinskaya, Nikita Pirogov and Alexandra Stukkey all present groups of images that are meant to be read as single units rather than series. This allows for rhythmic play, fugue-like constructions, modulations of visual ideas,

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PHOTO: PAUL KOENIK

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Rennie Harris’ “Home.”

REVIEWS CONTINUED



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Nikita Pirogov, "Twins," 2010, From the Series "The Other Shore."

surprising transitions, and subtle changes in temporal perception. For the most part, this is the work that is most affective. When the music is strong enough, we don't need to recognize the places or the names; we know what the song is for.

— SEBASTIEN BONCY

Sebastien Boncy is an artist and educator living in Houston.

2012 Core Exhibition

Glassell School of Art

March 16–April 20, 2012

www.mfah.org/fellowships/core-artists-residence

At first glance, the Glassell School of Art's "2012 Core Exhibition" seems disjointed and aimless, the exhibited work like nomadic strangers that have gathered only accidentally under the same roof. This is not surprising, considering the artists are brought together only through the Core Artists in Residence Program — in which eight artists per year are given studio space and a stipend — rather than any cohesive theme. Indeed, the artists on view in the "2012 Core Exhibition" come from diverse backgrounds and work with a wide range of materials and techniques. However, after spending some time experiencing each artist's work, compelling connections come into view.

Miguel Amat's "Capitalism and Avant-Garde" (2006) is visible whether one enters the exhibition from MFAH's Cullen Sculpture Garden or from the parking lot on the other side of the long building. Suspended from the ceiling and in a double-sided frame, Amat's photographic diptych is additionally framed by the architectural elements of the exhibition space. Made of lacerated strips of gelatin silver prints, the piece conveys a deconstructive impulse that is apparent in many other works in the show. The resultant image depicted in the décollage appears like an aerial photo-

graph of a dense — but deserted — network of highways. Reminiscent of early twentieth-century avant-garde photographs of urban environments by artists like László Moholy-Nagy, "Capitalism and Avant-Garde" also resonates with the increasingly global context of the present day. Unlike the ashen and vacant (though congested) terrain of "Capitalism and Avant-Garde," Jang Soon Im's "Landscape" (2012) presents a crowded battle scene in psychedelic colors such as highlighter yellow, bright orange, and neon pink. But like Amat, Im conflates past and present, bringing the tradition of Asian landscape painting into contact with contemporary popular culture and the aesthetics of the video game.

Clarissa Tossin also employs photographic manipulation in her work. However, in contrast with Im's playful animations, Tossin's artistic practice is more politically engaged. Addressing environmental and social implications of reshaping the landscape, "Geographic Accident (9,468 miles collapsed)" (2012) exhibits thematic and formal depth. In this sculptural photograph, a color print of a satellite image like one might view on Google Earth lies discarded on the gallery floor. Deliberately folded to create paper peaks and promontories, "Geographic Accident" is akin



Clarissa Tossin, "When Two Places Look Alike," 2011, Photograph.

to a topographical map. Tossin zooms in in "Em estilo americano (systemic permutations)" (2011). Each photograph in this multidimensional work portrays the artist's hands holding up a picture of a lower-income house in front of another, similar house. Mapping one constructed space onto another, the work references the economic downturn and its effects on the real estate market.

The residences captured by Tossin are physically present in Lourdes Correa-Carlo's installation "Ironclad" (2011–2012). Recalling Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural slicing and dicing, a corner of a roof sits desolately on the gallery floor, rendered useless, and a photograph dissects an imposing wall of cinder blocks. While Correa-Carlo's work demonstrates an interest in vernacular architecture and (de)construction, Fatima Haider emphasizes a different kind of labor — that of repetitive and time-consuming mark-making. Made of rubbed graphite on paper, "Space under this bed" (2011), highlights the very basics of artistic creation.

Gabriel Martinez's "Colophon" (2012) is more literally about its own making. The word-based print prosaically informs that the font used is 11-point Adobe Garamond Pro, that the ink is water based and bone black, and that the acid-free paper is a 300 lb Arches 88. Unlike this deadpan description, the language in Martinez's video installation is poetic and profound. "A thin projection of the world onto mottled grains of silver / A reminder of everything that's not here." Though in a more subtle way, self-reflexivity is still at play. Each of the projected images of fictional parks — another type of man-made landscape — is washed out when it first appears on the screen, like an under-developed photograph. As the video progresses, the still images heighten in contrast before the viewer's eyes — much like a photograph's "grains of silver" would develop in the chemical baths used in traditional darkroom practices. "A reminder of everything that's not here" at once signifies the sad fact that such analog photographic processes are increasingly becoming obsolete, and highlights Martinez's use of the

digital video medium.

While Tossin superimposes one image on top of another and Martinez overlays image and text, Anthea Behm's video imbricates text and text. As indicated by the title, "Adorno/Bueller" (2010–2011), Behm's video is based on two scripts — one adapted from German philosopher and cultural critic Theodor Adorno's theoretically complex "Aesthetic Theory" (1970), and the other from director John Hughes's 1986 cult classic movie "Ferris Bueller's Day Off." For "Adorno/Bueller," Behm filmed various people performing monologues excerpted from the esoteric book and the lighthearted screenplay. As lines from the two texts begin to intersect, the spoken language becomes nearly incomprehensible. While the actors' speech emphasizes structural breakdown and instability, their movements are deliberate and clearly rehearsed as they walk through the galleries and public spaces of the Art Institute of Chicago, where the video was filmed.

Nicole Miller's "Dagging" (2012) treads an entirely different territory from the other works in the exhibition. Filmed in a dance club, in this mesmerizing (and at times disturbing) video hips gyrate, legs spread, and booties bounce. The sexually provocative dagging on view — a Caribbean-born style of dance that involves simulating hardcore, aggressive sex acts — is in stark contrast to the rehearsed and institutionalized choreographed movements of the actors in Behm's video. Drawing viewers into the intimate space of the human body rather than its architectural or environmental surrounds, Miller's "Dagging" is the only work in the exhibition that provoked a visceral, emotional response. Although the Glassell School of Art's Core Artists in Residence travel various paths, the works on view in this year's exhibition converge in interesting ways, resulting in a rich and expansive landscape of artistic practices and concerns.

— KATIA ZAVISTOVSKI

Katia Zavistovski is a PhD student at Rice University, and the Menil Curatorial Fellow at the Menil Collection, Houston.

"Amy Blakemore: New Pictures"

Inman Gallery

March 2–April 7, 2012

www.inmangallery.com

Looking at a distant hillside, we see the colors of the landscape fade to the palette of the sky. We know, of course, that should we travel there, we would not find shadowless blue dirt, shadowless blue trees. Those seemingly invisible particles of air in the emptiness between, we are told, add up and cast their own effect upon the image.

On first seeing Amy Blakemore's new

exhibition of photographs, the subjects and scenes likewise appear to exist in a faded distance — sharing not a specific color or palette, but a hazy sense of emptiness that has somehow cast its own pallor on the images. The photographs are not grand landscapes. For the most part, they show, one after another, arrangements of objects, the casually pushed about artifacts of everyday existence: flowers, knickknacks, patio furniture, storage tubs.

It isn't until the viewer comes upon the only two images, "Missy" and "Sarah," that contain living human figures that they realize how empty and abandoned the world of the other photos has been. The unifying effect of the collection ends up not being the honesty of the commonplace, as Blakemore appears to strive for by including these more-or-less typical candid portraits, but the understated psychological space of emptiness that they bring out through contrast, a space that serves a handful of the images better than others.

The most successful works do not accentuate or contradict their subject's state of neglect but leave it muted; they use their detachment from the active world as a substitute for freedom, allowing the images to pretend at something more. "Pool," for instance, depicting a black hose left haphazardly laid out in an empty concrete pool, does not ask its subject to be more than the static scene that it is, and yet the photograph delights in its mere desire for movement. The framing of the composition in "Steps" achieves a classical beauty, an effect which then gives way to the very simplicity of the scene itself: a small hedge, a strip of grass, wide concrete steps.

Though the individual pieces vary widely in their effectiveness, there is an imagination in several of pieces that arises outside of the subjects themselves, a sort of effect that adds up in the yawning of the emptiness, as the air does between a traveler and distant mountains, as dust does on objects left to themselves.

— DAVID A. FEIL

"Priya Kampli: Color Falls Down"

Houston Center for Photography
March 9–April 22, 2012
www.hcponline.org

Priya Kampli's "Color Falls Down" is one of three new exhibitions to open at the Houston Center for Photography. Part of the FotoFest Biennial 2012, the individual exhibitions by the three photographers all explore the domestic realm, though in decidedly different ways. Kampli's works are the smallest in terms of number and scale but her works more than hold their own against the larger works of her fellow exhibiting artists, emitting a quietude that is powerful and compelling.



Amy Blakemore, "Steps," 2012, Chromogenic Print, 12 x 12 inches, Edition of 10.



Priya Kampli, "Me (Flour)," From the Series "Color Falls Down," 2009, Archival InkJet Print, 9 x 20 inches.

According to the exhibition essay that accompanies the exhibit, Indian-born Priya Kampli lost both of her parents as a teenager and then moved to the United States shortly thereafter. Each of the nine photographs in the series is a digital composite of imagery. Sepia-toned family photographs often appear alongside self-portraits of the artist, occasionally separated or framed by embroidered borders in color atop faint backgrounds of cloth. Knowing of the artist's loss of her parents at a fairly young age it is near impossible to read the images in the series as anything other an attempt to remember her familial body.

In the diptych "Me (Polpat and Tumeric)," the spice tumeric is flattened and spread against the surface of a circular slab. The yellow hue of the spice figures prominently against the pale white tones of the slab. On the right side of the photograph is a self-portrait of the artist. Clothed in traditional Indian garb she sits cross-legged in a mustard colored armchair, in a floor-length pea-green skirt, her linked hands clasped over her knee. Tumeric is caked over the length of her arms. Another self-portrait titled

"Me (Flour)" depicts the artist kneeling on a wooden floor in a white gown that is decorated in a botanical pattern that appears to be made with flour. The work is also a diptych; beside it is a pewter tin containing a cone of white flour. This half of the work image, dominated by white and silver tones, appears to be devoid of color. The overlapping elements of tone, cloth and food serve to invoke the senses and convey textural properties that extend beyond the two-dimensional surface of each print.

It is interesting that none of the images of the artist depict her face. Kampli's works seem to attest to a loss of identity and fragmentation that occurred on both cultural and geographical levels. Through her depicted fusion of corporeality and materiality the artist once again becomes whole.

— SALLY FRATER

Sally Frater is currently a fellow in the CORE Critical Studies residency program at the Glassell School at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

"Happy Happy"

14 Pews

March 23, 2012

www.l4pews.org

"Happy Happy," a cruel and satirical comedy on the nature of Norwegian relationships, is a strange and confusing film by Anne Sewitsky.

Kaja, frantically played by Agnes Kittelsen, is a bubbly and nervous schoolteacher who lives with her husband Eirek (Joachim Rafalsen), who has a Brokeback Mountain Complex (likes to go hunting, but doesn't do much hunting), and their son Theodor (Oscar Hernaes Brandso). Elisabeth (Maibritt Saerens) and Sigve (Henrik Raelsen), a couple with an adopted Ethiopian son named Noa (Ram Shihab Ebedy), rent a home from Kaja and Eirek in hopes of rekindling their love life.

The games begin early when Kaja, weeping after confessing that she hasn't made love in a year, decides to fellate the handsome and charming Sigve. They have a wonderful time romping around for a few weeks while Eirek, unable to admit he's a homosexual, also falls for Sigve and gets rejected by him after a romantic post-jogging stretching session. The plot is predictable, but high energy levels keep the film rolling and the laughs coming.

The action is segmented by cuts to a charming quartet of American singers who sing traditional spiritual and folk songs. The breaks reminded me that it is some sort of a game, and nothing should be taken all that seriously.

However, the bitter and hilarious antics eventually give way to a sappy sentimentality that lacks the bite of the first half of the film, and, because there wasn't much time for character development during the antics, the sentimentality feels shallow.

"Happy Happy" falls limp in the attempt to create social commentary by having the white child re-enact slave rituals with Noa, the naive Ethiopian boy, during their play time. And what makes it stranger is that the string of racism, neither parodic nor meaningful, is resolved by Noah watching a youtube video of Barack Obama discussing globalization and modernity.

Amidst all the drama between Sigve, Kaja and Eirek, I could not help feeling that Elisabeth became lost in the story. She is reduced to a simplistic, bitter and cold presence, who suddenly, now that her husband has fallen in love with another, needs his love. It's revealed that she had cheated on Sigve and that's why they moved out to the country, but the opportunity to explore the nuances of

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their relationship is lost, which would be fine if it were the comedy it sometimes is, but when confronted the banality of sentimentality, a more thorough examination of relationships is called for. It's hard to feel a connection with the ensemble when each character's role and destiny is so predictable.

"Happy Happy" is good for a number of laughs and gasps, but in the end it falls victim to an identity crisis, unable to connect lucid comedy with its desire to explore anything meaningful in the problems of betrayal, forgiveness, or love.

— JOSEPH WOZNY

Joseph Wozny is a writer and musician in Houston.

John Webb: "Pile" Sculpture

Peel Gallery

March 2–April 30, 2012

www.peelgallery.org

Tendrils, tentacles and vesicles writhe in absolute stillness. John Webb's pale forms mark their respective territories on the Peel Gallery floor. These are not monsters, but sculptures.

The works of wood belie their medium by appearing molded, cast or extruded as if from clay; only the natural color of birch and telltale striations of plywood indicates the material. Despite the imposing scale of these sculptures, there is lightness about the work. Webb forms large cavities within several of his pieces, allowing the shapes to breathe and provides the viewer several layers to peer through. Other pieces attain this effect through a nest-like construction.

While all of Webb's work in "Pile" has a playful, organic sense about it, many of the sculptures have an austere element to impose an order. Piercing and penetrating rods counter rounded forms and add structure; others use carefully interlocking forms. Some of the more wild sculptures are made from stacks of smaller curvilinear pieces. Held together by gravity and tension alone, Webb creates synergy out of seeming chaos.

Webb designs his sculptures on a computer the way an architect might design a building — in fact, Webb is an architect! In this way, the artist is able to plan and craft the wood to create the complex shapes in the exhibition. Webb's background as both a sculptor and an architect impart a certain earnestness when addressing the materiality of his work. He respects the intrinsic qualities of the plywood and features the natural finish proudly.

The awareness and delicate treatment of the material imparts a quality of reverence to the sculptures. The creation of these fluid forms from rigid plywood acts as a foil to the nature of plywood: a form of life that was forced into a building material. Not quite returned to a natural state, the sculptures exist in a state of tension.

Within the context of architecture, the viewer is allowed to question the sense of scale in these life sized sculptures: are we viewing the model of a building or a scaled up bone structure? Perhaps a little of both. The viewer is left to reconcile the similarities between the organic form and the built environment.

— GEOFF SMITH

Geoff Smith is a twenty-something arts enthusiast, printmaker and occasional curator.

"Improbable Worlds, an Anthology of Texas and Louisiana Poets" Edited by Martha Serpas

Mutabilis Press

www.mutabilispress.org

My problem is I never know when to read to poetry. It's not something I want to read in bed at night or on a lazy Sunday afternoon. Poems require a different quality of reading commitment than other forms of literature. You don't have the luxury of just watching the words go by. In her introduction to "Improbable Worlds," Mutabilis Press's Carolyn Florek recommends stealing "a poem or two at lunchtime or before bed, to take [her] briefly away from [her] busy thoughts." Her use of poetry, this manner of poem snatching, I can relate to. It transforms the poem into a kind of prayer, or maybe a guided meditation.

Perhaps that was just the point of choosing poet Martha Serpas, to edit Mutabilis's recently published, "Improbable Worlds." Serpas, a trauma chaplain, earned a master's from Yale Divinity School and now teaches writing at the University of Houston. "Improbable Worlds" asks poets from Texas and Louisiana to address the difficult question, "Given our noisy marketplace of belief, how or where can the sacred be found?" And it is through these two seemingly unwieldy frames that these writers work.

In this anthology, readers are bound to face weather, a Gulf fixation. But what is particularly striking is how nature is reverberating within the corporeal world, the most harrowing aspect of belief's marketplace. The turns of phrase in Jericho Brown's "The Ten Commandments" that bend violently inside the



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & PEEL GALLERY

John Webb, "Find the River," 2008, Plywood, 4 x 4 x 5 feet.

reader. The fullness of desire in Hayan Charara's line, "She love us like/a piece of fruit loves/to be eaten." The astounding vividness that stomps through Janet McCann's "Grammar" and floats across George David Clark's "Jellyfish," applies layer by layer a tangible complexity until the reader is drawn into a localized reverie, making the familiar unfamiliar. These poems do not force the reader to reach out, but rather beckons us to reach in.

Serpas has managed to string together some of the most talented poets, laureates and old guard included, who have been known to reside east of El Paso and west of Bogolusa. In reading a collection of poems by a single poet, I usually search for the arc, for the author's eye. But in an anthology, I consider the vision of the editor. I wonder why they include three works by this author and only one from the other. I notice how the poems are organized and observe how each author rubs up against and complicates the other. To me, anthologies are more than collections; they are collages. Each piece is an individual work of art, but as a collective the pieces should offer a larger view of the world it inhabits. Each piece of the collage, each

poem, should press against each other to forge an argument, staking a particular space in our consciousness. Despite its seemingly facile alphabetical ordering, "Improbable Worlds" accomplishes this effort. Serpas' cultural and spiritual pre-occupations firmly bind the anthology.

Reading each work, one does get the sense of torn pieces of the divine. Though, no individual poem in "Improbable Worlds" quite adequately addresses the question that Serpas initially poses, the whole of the anthology does the work. And in each poet's attempt to reveal it's sacred space, the poems somehow infuse energy into the reader, rather than draining it. Perfect work for the prayer.

— NICOLE ZAZA

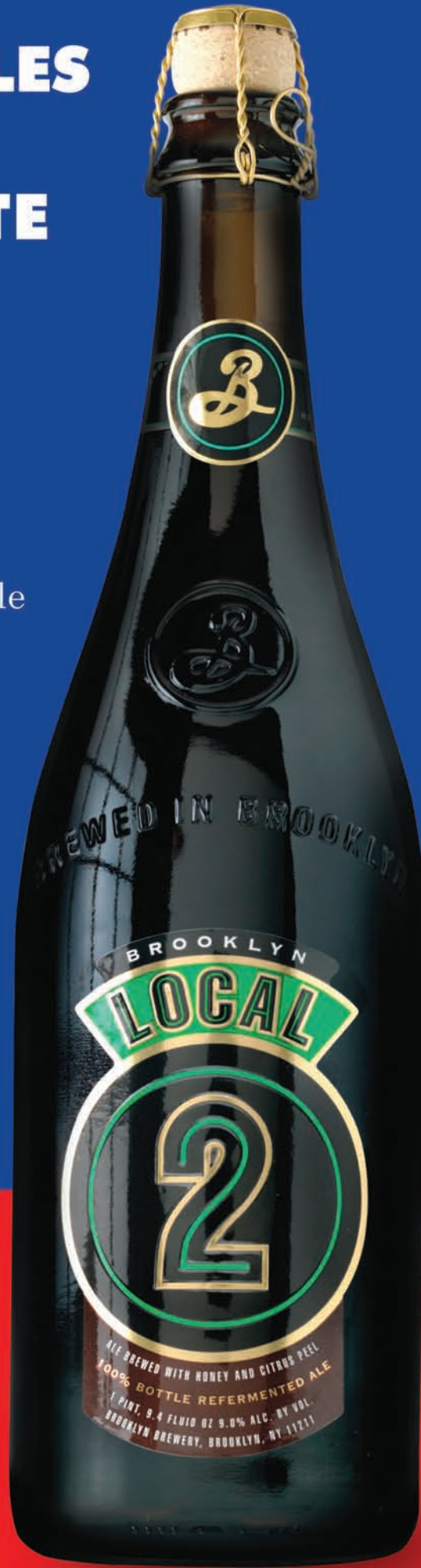
Nicole Zaza worked as an editor for Gulf Coast and Envy Magazine. She recently graduated with an MFA from the UH Creative Writing Program and completed her first collection of essays. She teaches writing in Houston.

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