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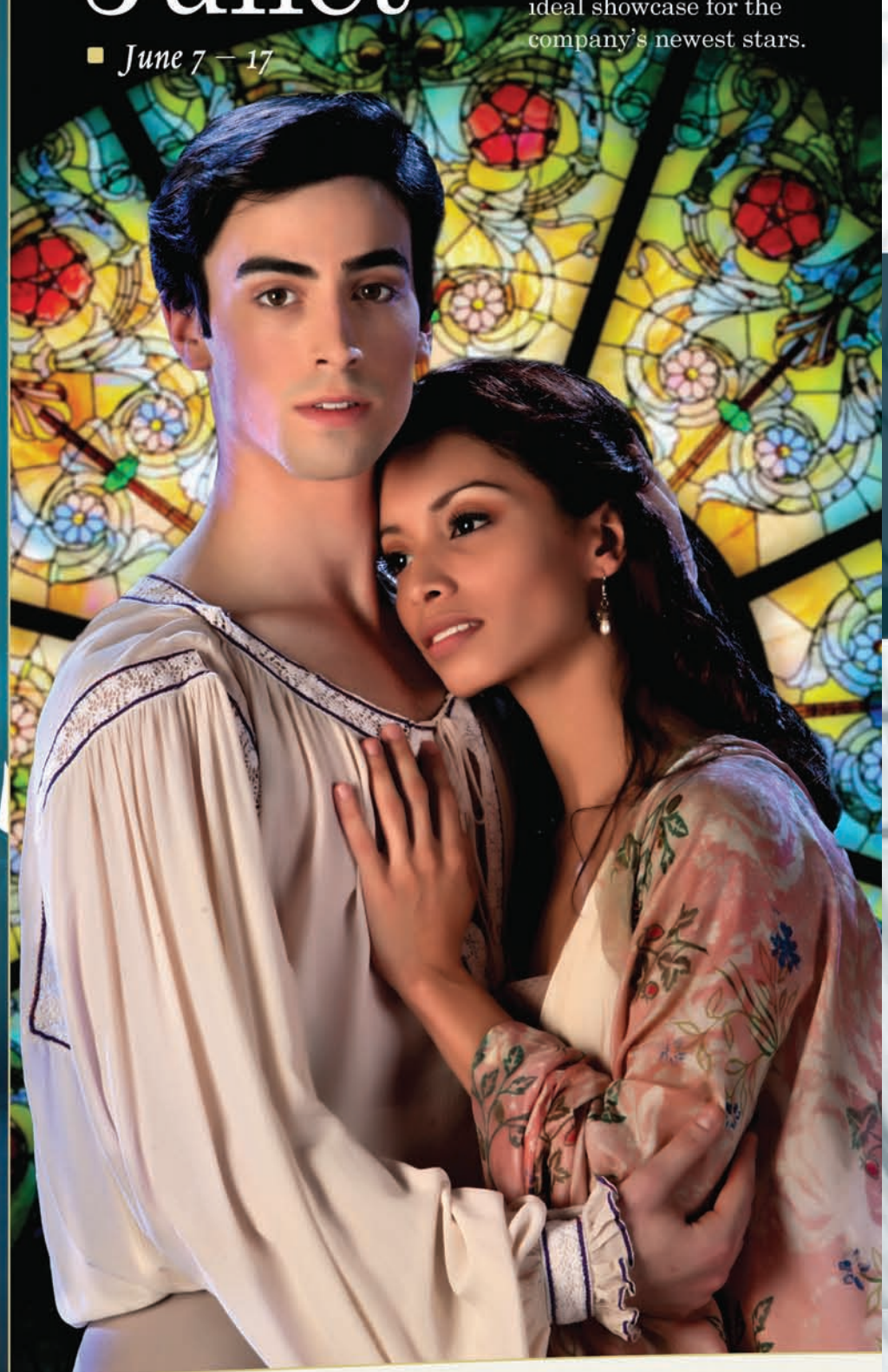
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www.currentsnewmedia.org | parallel-contact@earthlink.net

EDITOR'S REMARKS



It's my seventh issue performing the job of editor, so it's time to rock the A + C ship.

Starting next month, Devon Britt-Darby, former Houston Chronicle art critic, assumes the role of visual arts editor, allowing me to focus on the performing arts/literature/film and have a lot more fun at openings. His byline generously appears in this issue as well.

Bold. Sassy. Necessary.

We don't claim to cover every inch of the arts in these pages. We can't, so we want our choices to be as thoughtful in scope as possible. That takes someone like Britt-Darby, who knows the scene inside and out.

With our little visual mischief riffing on the "texts from Hillary" meme, we launch a monthly feature called Art/Ad Bomb, in which we invite an artist to make a small ad-size intervention. So, you get some original art in A + C!

More changes are in store. With the June issue, we move reviews online where they might have some impact, and this month we add the "worth the trip" feature, to keep you better informed of artful adventures across the region. I also moved into the Museum District; it now takes me all of three minutes to get to our esteemed houses of art.

The May issue is full of milestones, risk takers, and other stories worthy of your gaze. From HJ Bott's three gallery road trip, to the upstart WindSync, to the Art Car's big anniversary, you will see that playing it safe is not in the plan.

When I started this job, I called it a "work in progress." Here's hoping we've made some. I know for certain that I've had fun trying.

Nancy Wozny
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ON THE COVER

DETAIL OF HJ BOTT'S *MESOCARP MISCHIEF*, 2012, CO-POLYMER ON CANVAS,
48 X 72 INCHES,
CURRENTLY ON EXHIBIT AT ANYA TISH GALLERY, PAGE 8.



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Strung Prints by Alliea Murphy-Price, lithograph on waxed masa paper, 21 x 16 inches, 2009. Courtesy, Wade Wilson Art

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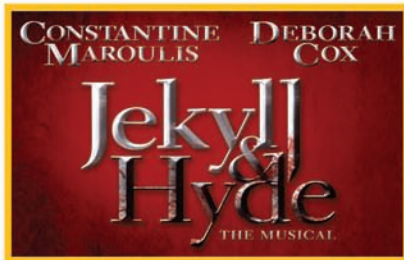


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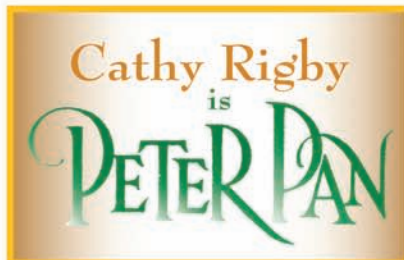
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ARTIFACTS

THE HOUSTON METROPOLITAN Dance Company has been invited to perform on Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Inside/Out stage on August 25th. This is only the second time a Houston troupe has performed on the prestigious outdoor stage.
www.houstonmetdance.org

GARY TINTEROW, DIRECTOR OF the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (MFAH) announced the appointment of Mahrukh Tarapor as senior adviser for international initiatives for the MFAH. Google announced a partnership with the MFAH to bring its pioneering Art Project to Houston, TX. The partnership is part of a major global expansion of the project, which now has 151 partners in 40 countries.
www.mfah.org

THE 2012-2013 ALLEY THEATRE season includes Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, David Mamet's, Jeffrey Hatcher's *Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Suicide Club*, Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*, Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*, Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park*, and Aaron Sorkin's *A Few Good Men*.
www.alleytheatre.org

JONATHON GLUS, PRESIDENT & CEO of Houston Arts Alliance, has named Marie L. Jacinto as the agency's new Director of Communications. Ms. Jacinto takes the post at HAA after serving The Society for the Performing Arts as Director of Marketing.
www.spahouston.org

MUSIQA HAS RECEIVED THEIR fifth consecutive Arts Work grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in support of their educational outreach programs.
www.musiqahouston.org

HIGHLIGHTS FOR MERCURY'S season include works by Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn and Schubert, and collaborations with renowned soloists, including the orchestra's first collaboration with Grammy Award winning soprano, Ana María Martínez.
www.mercurybaroque.org

DOMINIC WALSH HAS BEEN inducted into Fox Valley Arts Hall of Fame and will be honored at a black tie gala in Aurora, Illinois. "I am excited to be in such dignified company as my very first dance instructor, Lise Boehm, who was inducted ten years ago in 2002," states Walsh, whose company, Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, will end its 10th anniversary season this month.
www.dwdt.org

KAREN STOKES DANCE HAS WON a Dance Magazine Editor's Choice



PHOTO: SIMON GENTRY

Frame Dance Productions.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & MOODY GALLERY

Michael Bise, Children, 2011, Graphite on Paper, 42 x 63 inches.

award for her video *Gallery Construction I*, made specifically for the camera. "This video relates movement to the architecture and geometry inherent in Gabriel Dawe's work, using dancers to show scale in relation to the sense of fun and color to show the transparent quality of the threads as light," says Karen Stokes. "The music by Bill Ryan aligns with the transparency, minimalism, and peaceful joy of Dawe's work."
www.karenstokesdance.org

REBECCA GREENE UDDEN, EXEC-utive artistic director of Main Street Theater, has won a 2012 distinguished Alumni Award from Rice University's Association of Rice Alumni's laureates program, which recognizes the contributions and accomplishments of outstanding Rice alumni and friends of the university.
www.mainstreettheater.com

DIVERSEWORKS APPOINTED JEN-nifer Gardner as director of external

range plan. Four firms will compete for the design of the MDI, with a final selection expected by early June 2012. The shortlist includes Tatiana Bilbao (Mexico City); David Chipperfield Architects (London); Johnston Marklee (Los Angeles); and SANAA (Tokyo).
www.menil.org

CHARLES HALKA'S COMPOSITION *Por la Fuerza las Tierra* was selected to be featured in CONTEXT, a multi-sensory arts gallery presented by Frame Dance Productions starting May 11-13. His compositions have been performed in the United States, Mexico, Russia, and Lithuania. Halka, currently a doctoral candidate at Rice University for Music Composition, is the 2011-2012 Artist-in-Residence at the Foundation for Modern Music.
www.framedance.org

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA (HGO) announced that six new artists will join its prestigious young artist development program in the 2012-13 season. The six incoming fellows are Andrea Carroll, soprano (USA), Peixin Chen, bass (China), Kevin Ray, tenor (USA), Natalya Romaniw, soprano (UK), Carolyn Sproule, mezzo-soprano (CAN) and Elena Lacheva, pianist/coach (BUL).
www.houstongrandopera.org

STAGES REPERTORY THEATRE'S 2012-2013 season includes *Life Could Be a Dream* by Roger Bean, *Steel Magnolias* by Robert Harling, 2 Pianos 4 Hands, by Richard Greenblatt and Ted Dykstra; *Winter Wonderettes* by Roger Bean; *Panto Mother Goose*, book and lyrics by Kenn McLaughlin, music by David Nehls; *Wittenberg* by David Davalos; *The Language Archive* by Julia Cho; *Dollhouse* by Rebecca Gilman; and *Road Show*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by John Weidman.
www.stagestheatre.com

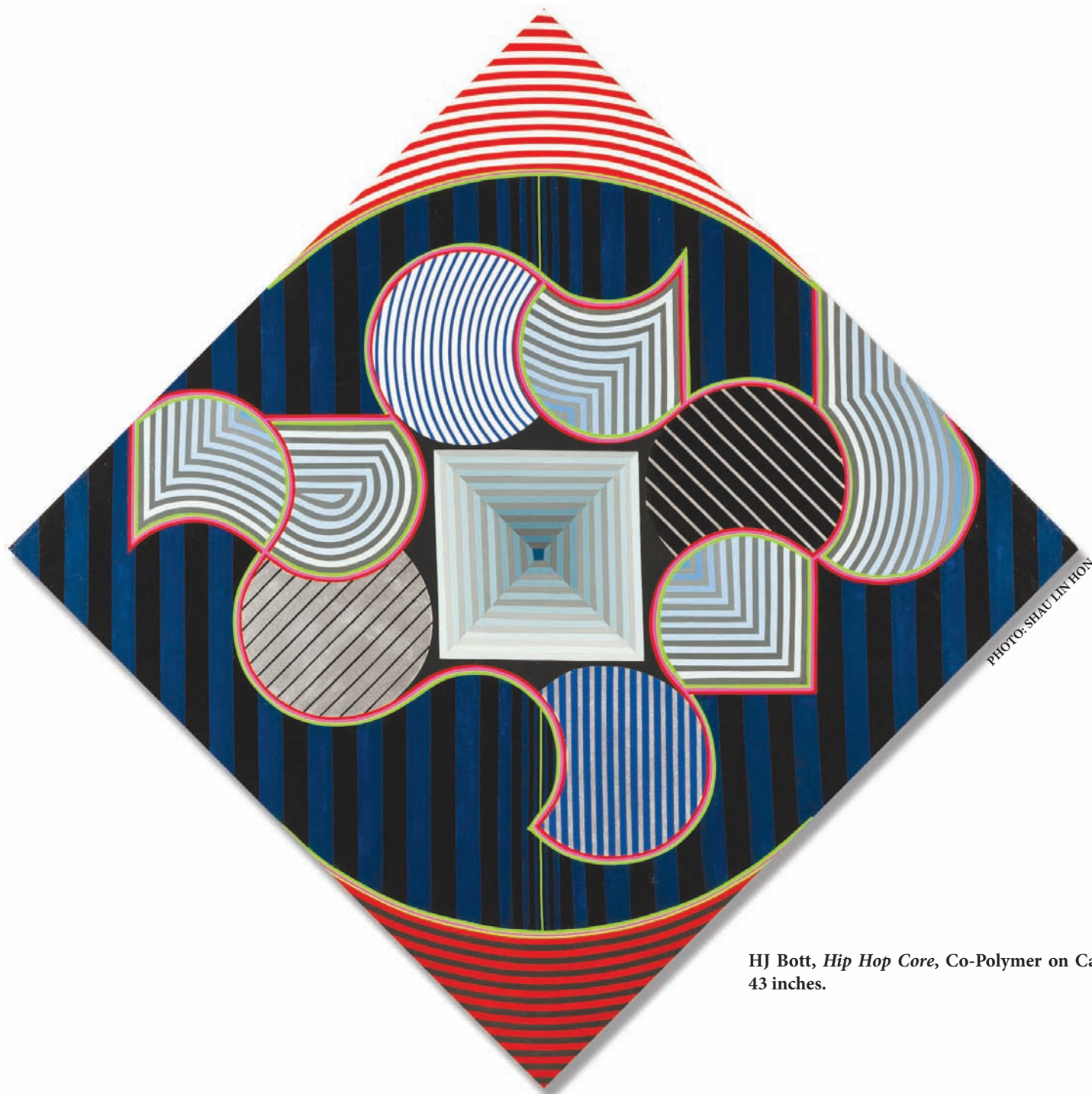
CLASSICAL THEATRE COMPANY'S 2012-2013 season includes *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg, *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry, and *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.
www.classicaltheatre.org

HUNTING PLC ANNOUNCED that Children by Houston artist Michael Bise is the winner of the \$50,000 Hunting Art Prize for 2012. The graphite drawing was selected from over 100 finalists in the 32nd annual award program, which is sponsored by the global oil services company and is the most generous annual art prize in North America for painting and drawing.
www.huntingartprize.com

affairs. Gardner will be responsible for coordinating the organization's marketing and publicity efforts as well as expanding and strengthening community relationships.
www.diverseworks.org

A NEW, THREE-YEAR COLLAB-oration between CORE, Dance Source Houston, and Diverse Works is launching to stimulate the creativity of local dance artists. To this end, the three organizations have aligned Fieldwork and 12 Minutes MAX! in order to foster creativity, allow time for experimentation, and provide space for pushing boundaries.
www.dancesourcehouston.org

JOSEF HELFENSTEIN, DIRECTOR of the Menil Collection, announced that the Board of Trustees has narrowed the international search for an architect to design the Menil Drawing Institute (MDI), the first major building project under the museum's ambitious long-



HJ Bott, *Hip Hop Core*, Co-Polymer on Canvas, 43 x 43 inches.

Pump Up the Volume: The Quiet Genius of Harvey Bott and the DoV

“ALL ‘STRAIGHT’ LINES BEND through space,” Harvey Bott tells me.

That sounds like something having to do with math, and (here it comes) I was told there would be no math. But damn, if it doesn’t look like art.

Then, he hits me with some figures: “Universally, there are only 23 different scribbles/marks,” educating me on the limitations of the so-called straight line.

The truth is, it’s not math. It’s artwork based on and generated from equations, constructs, and systems. Being the German-blooded gal that I am, that’s an art-making approach I can get behind.

“It’s the treatment of materials and combinations making the vast variety we witness in mark-making endeavors. The moment the line begins to not be straight is the opening to becoming organic a non linear scribble.”

Sift through the 43 pages of just paintings and drawings on his website and you’ll see these ideas in physical form. You’ll also come across his 1972-born DoV Systems Concepts, described as,

“...circles displacing themselves in squares within a circle in a square an acknowledgment of having found an anthropologically oriented tiling system, certainly paying homage to most antecedents, while investigating

major archetypal symbols used and abused everywhere.”

You might want to read that again, and take your time with the next paragraph or two, especially since Bott considers this discovery to be the most incredible, yet overlooked aspect of his work.

“I would almost rather these concepts be ‘felt’ rather than imposed as a new geometric whoop-de-do. As well, some series are highly imbued with sociopolitical narrative. I’m not sure it’s necessary for my narrative to be an in-your-face experience,” he says. “Too much information may destroy the basic visual intake-interaction of the quasi-unique techniques: juxtaposing color

harmonies and discords, fade-ins and outs of hues, as color saturation drifts through the layering of lines. Hopefully, the paintings provide very personal association catalysts for all viewers they are of themselves so.”

As a painter with a background in sculpture, Bott says that he tends to perceive the infamous 23 lines more dimensionally than other painters. He recognizes, and is enthusiastic by the fact, that the DoV allows him to work in contrasts (straight vs. curve). He often spends 12 to 15 hours a day exploring the Phenomenon-of-the-Line in his Systemic Lineation Painting Series,

Continued on Page 20

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Unmapping Houston

Artists Navigate the City's Geography

YOU HEAR PEOPLE SAY HOUSTON is a hard city to love. But, it's also a hard city to see. When you imagine Houston, at times it is difficult to conjure an image outside of shopping centers and pavement. Maybe that's why when people pick up *Houston It's Worth It* (HIWI) off your coffee table, they have trouble setting it down.

HIWI was born of a blog created by Houston-based public relations firm Tweak. Creators Randy Twaddle, David Thompson and the Tweak team began with the biblical sounding 20 afflictions (*The Humidity, The Flying Cockroaches, The No Mountains*) and asked people to respond "why Houston was worth it to them," says Thompson.

Peeling through the pages of the original *HIWI* book is like discovering hidden treasure, the photographs and quotes project a more nuanced version of the city than we are used to. As a PR campaign, *HIWI* is loose. The submissions are from all kinds of folks. The photos aren't too polished or artsy. What they do, is reveal parts of Houston's anatomy that we typically don't see, helping us see beyond all our tempered glass and steel. To mark Rice University's upcoming 100th anniversary, Tweak is asking Houston to contribute their experiences again.

Thompson reflects, "Is Houston a tourist destination? I personally don't think it should be framed that way." Which begs the question, how do we frame this city?

This is a question I have been thinking about since 2006 when I took a collaboration class sponsored by the University of Houston's Mitchell Center for the Arts. Taking our group inspiration from Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Phillips's *A Humument* and Turchi's *Maps of the Imagination*, we set out to grant Houston dimension through what we called *The Houston UnMapping Project*.

Our collaboration documented a bus ride from Westheimer and Dunlavy, through the East End to the Ship Channel, and back to the southwest side. Riding the line to the very end, we got off and waited for another bus to take us back. We spoke to people, witnessed arguments, looked out the windows, filmed, stared and wrote. Through the bus window, I saw international grocers, taquerias, bright orange walls, long stretches of telephone wire slicing into the sky, and miles of terminal where hundreds of buses stood patiently like waiting cows. The ride opened my eyes. Despite living in Houston my whole life, the city rose before me as unfamiliar. I



PHOTO: APRIL LEVY

ABOVE: Grandma standing her ground from Ray Carrington III's *Eye on Third Ward* project. OPPOSITE RIGHT: Submission for upcoming book *HIWI: Rice*.

realized I hadn't even begun to scratch the surface of Houston.

I found myself longing to challenge Houston's visibility--its representation--from the outside and from within. Our *UnMapping Project* seemed like a revelation at the time, but it was a short flash in a long line of artists attempting to dimensionalize Houston.

Local writer and artist John Pluecker infected me with the idea of creating a set of Houston cronicas, a South American genre of short stories that describe daily life in the particular neighborhood. In places like Brazil, local governments hire writers to create cronicas, in hopes of enhancing the mythology of the city. (Pluecker's Antena Books: Pop-Up Bookstore and Literary Experimentation Lab runs through June 24 at Project Row Houses as part of Round 36.)

Houston artist, Carrie Schneider's project *Hear Our Houston* comes very close to accomplishing the work of a cronica, as it requests the public to contribute their own walking tours. Individuals can go to the website and upload their own images, map and mp3 of their tour. The tours document places in Houston through the lens of personal significance. Schneider has been working on the project since 2011 and feels her work is a product of Houston's geography and culture that produce

a specific strain of "independent, mischievous devil-may-care projects."

"Houston itself is ephemeral," Schneider admits. "The climate makes things mildew and fade and there's no zoning. We were built on a swamp, so that's not so permanent. Houston is efficient at moving people around...it's this relentless copy and paste....You won't find the best places to be by reading signs or looking it up. You really have to know somebody.... That makes things under the surface. That's why it's not as tapped out as Austin, because we are still a little bit covered up. That makes it more real."

Listening to the walking tours, what is most apparent is their creator's devotion to the particulars of the space. "I just think I like to not lose what's already there," offers Schneider. "...I want to make sure that what's really beautiful and valuable is loud enough that people can hear it or bright enough that people can see it."

Ray Carrington III and his photography classes at Yates High School have been granting access to Houston through *Eye on Third Ward* for nearly 17 years now. He and his "little ducks" document the historic district by walking the furthest boundaries of the neighborhood.

"I believe in the absurd sometimes..." Carrington admits, leading a line of

students along the sidewalks, cameras hanging from their necks, fingers perched at the ready while their teacher darts between curbs offering lessons on light and perspective.

Carrington, who has lived in the area since 1966, and his students make work of people and space that is invisible to most of the city. He realizes the growing importance of their project as even the name of *Third Ward* recedes. "They are trying to call it Midtown.... People who drive to UH don't see the Third Ward. Nobody is even sure of the boundaries...."

Carrington sees Third Ward disappearing as Midtown encroaches on his neighborhood's identity, gentrification nudging longtime residents out, rather than incorporating them. Through his collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, the project has been working to assign a different kind of value to the community. Visiting Carrington in his classroom on the vibrant Yates campus, anyone can see that his mission is not simply photography. "It's about life lessons," Carrington says. "Work ethic, a value system."

As Carrington prepares for the next exhibition of *Eye on Third Ward*, he also is beginning a new collaboration with Houston Advanced Research Center on a digital storytelling project. Meanwhile, the Yates students are claiming their space and granting the rest of us the rare

opportunity to look through their eyes.

These projects are creating a body of work that demonstrates what all great cities know. Important places are made up of a series of smaller cities, neighborhoods and streets; the people who live there endow them with their culture and individuality. Houston is now the most diverse city in the nation and yet it's difficult to see what constitutes our local texture. We do not have a place or face that defines us. What is important about Houston is personal and diffuse.

If New Orleans is the Big Easy, then Houston would have to be the Big Not Easy. There is nothing easy about this town. But, maybe that's just the point. Grappling with difficult places does tend to do interesting things to people. What it seems to be doing here is driving artists to build frames. It's not just one or two projects, but a whole community of projects where the artists position their ideas as vehicles for framing Houston: Communograph, Countercrawl, Shrimp Boat Projects, Carroll Parrott Blue's Storymapping and dozens more. What the projects all share is their deference to the community's vision and knowledge, while the artists act as conduits for all of us to reflect back on ourselves.

Carrie Schneider says it better, "I love Houston a whole bunch. I think it's bizarre and like a big hyperbole and insane, insanely big and sterile and concrete....It's the epitome of capitalism....That's why to do something

defiant like record people's stories or Ray Carrington's project is so radical because it's in this context of this big corporate place. So the humans that are being real humans are amazing."

-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 classes in Houston.

Communograph
www.communograph.com

Shrimp Boat Projects
www.shrimpboatprojects.com

Storymapping
www.storymapping.com

Countercrawl
www.countercrawlhouston.tumblr.com

Ongoing:
Hear Our Houston
www.hearourhouston.com

Through May 28:
Eye on Third Ward
www.mfah.org

Upcoming:
HIWI: Rice
www.houstonitsworthit.com



PHOTO: MAX TRAUTNER

ANYA TISH GALLERY

HJ BOTT: Rhythm & Rhetoric

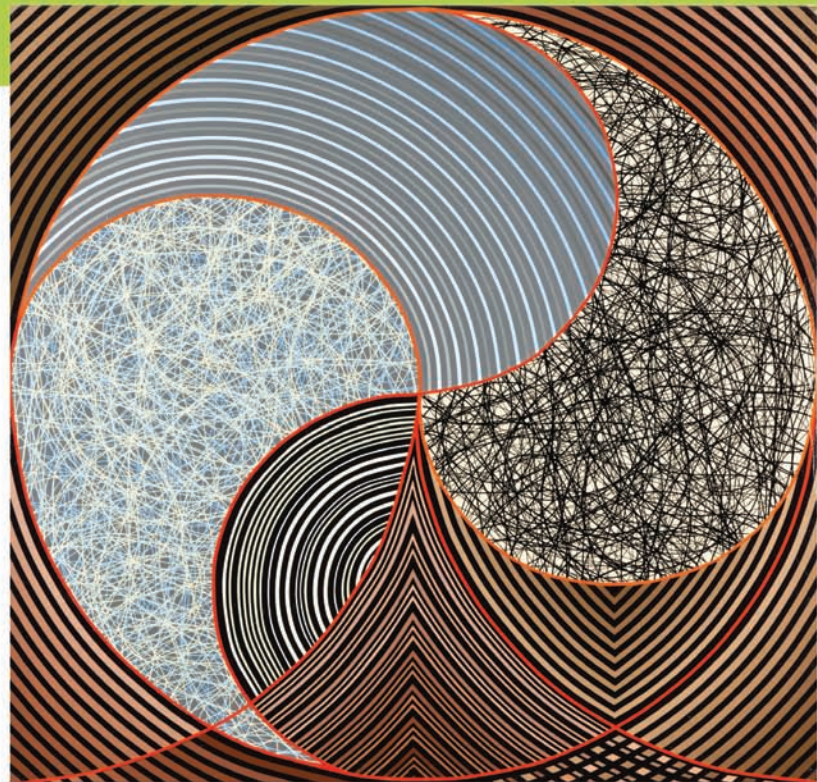
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Made in America

Houston Ballet Blurs the Boundaries



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

ABOVE: Nao Kusuzaki and Artists of Houston Ballet in Marius Petipa's *Giselle*. BELOW: Jun Shuang Huang and Katharine Precourt in George Balanchine's *Theme and Variation*.

DOES IT MATTER WHERE A ballet is made? Houston Ballet's trio of works under the banner of *Made in America*, followed by *Giselle* and *Romeo & Juliet*, offer a rich discussion of regionalism in ballet.

Mark Morris's breezy *Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes*, commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov for American Ballet Theatre, is a perfect example of Morris's idiosyncratic blend of naturalness and impeccable musicality. Morris is a dance cowboy if ever there was one, a renegade son of the great northwest, and one of the most larger than life personalities in all of dance. If Americans are known for extreme individualism, Morris holds that mantle in dance.

"Growing up in Australia, I was exposed to the more dark, intellectual thread running through European contemporary dance, and less

knowledgeable about American modern dance. Mark's work is heavily documented, so it was on my radar," says Stanton Welch, Houston Ballet's artistic director. "He is a unique American voice. There's always this joy in his work, often a smirk, and a sense of pleasure. His work makes me wish I was still dancing."

Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes, known for its glorious casualness, is set music by American composer Virgil Thompson. "I appreciate Mark's attention to American composers," says Welch. "Look at *Sandpaper Ballet*, which is set to Leroy Anderson."

The plot thickens when we get to Nicola Fonte's world premiere, *See(k)*. Fonte may be from Brooklyn, NY, but his career was mostly built in Europe, where he danced with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal and the Compañía Nacional de Danza in

Madrid. "You can see Kylián, Duato and Forsythe's influences in his work," says Welch. "He absolutely brings that European aesthetic."

As we continue into the season, there's a further bounty of riches in considering a ballet's lineage. *Giselle* has one convoluted history. It premiered in Paris in 1841, but it's the 1884 Russian version that we know and love. Houston Ballet will perform their most recent production at Miller Outdoor Theatre in May, staged by Russian ballerina Aigul Gaisina, who spent her later career at The Australian Ballet. "You see the Russian influence in the Vaganova technique, which uses a straighter back and less rounding of the shoulders, than in Maina Gielgud's version," says Welch. "Think of it as the same script, but with a different accent."

Balanchine looks to imperial Russia in *Theme and Variations*, originally created



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

in 1947 for American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancers Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch. Everyone knows the Russian born Balanchine became the pinnacle of American modernism in ballet. His famous quote, "I am more

Continued on Page 23

WindSync:

Savvy, Smarts & Sass

THERE'S NARY A MUSIC STAND in sight when woodwind quintet, WindSync, swaggers street-gang-style to tunes from Bernstein's West Side Story or adorably masks as woodland denizens for a whimsical rendition of Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf. Whether they're costumed and mischievously peeking from behind fanciful sets, or smartly perched at the stage edge in chic, after-five attire, WindSync's true gold-mine is a seemingly boundless repertoire that encompasses works as diverse as John Williams's soaring Harry Potter theme, the world premiere commission of Garrett Schumann's *The Ballad of Robin Hood*, and woodwind aficionado delights like Paquito D'Rivera's *Aires tropicales*.

This month, WindSync returns home from a two month transcontinental mega-tour (Houston to Los Angeles and Vancouver to Staten Island) to top off their season with *Homeward Bound*, a concert featuring the music of American composers and songwriters including Aaron Copland, Eric Ewazen, Billy Joel, and David Maslanka.

creative and interactive performances with audiences of all ages. Jacobson launched the group in 2009 as a senior at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, and she isn't shy about her ambitions for WindSync.

"I've always been one for making my own opportunities, so essentially I went around to my friends and colleagues and asked them about joining this rebel woodwind quintet, and lucked out with some fantastic musicians," Jacobson says, adding, "We wanted to be famous rock-star classical musicians! Our challenge was how to accomplish it."

For Jacobson and her crew, the rebellious road to classical musician rock-stardom is paved with a dedication to audience engagement and community building that sets the group apart. No one can possibly accuse the quintet of being all hat and no cattle, what with their inventiveness, grueling tour schedule, and unwavering dedication. WindSync played fifty concerts this season in Houston plus their grand North America tour, bringing their singular panache to



PHOTO: RICHIE HAWLEY

L to R: Tracy Jacobson, Garrett Hudson, Anni Hochhalter, Ben Haeuser, Kerry Hughes.

The quintet's Herculean work ethic exemplifies Houston's unrivaled 21st century entrepreneurial spirit and good ol' fashioned cowboy go-get-'em. In short, WindSync makes it happen, and they do so with charming bravado to boot.

Tracy Jacobson, founder of WindSync, bassoonist, and community arts engagement maven, joins forces with Garrett Hudson, (flute) Kerry Hughes, (oboe) Ben Haeuser, (clarinet), and Anni Hochhalter (French horn) to share

museums, farmers' markets, churches, schools, libraries, hospitals, cafés and concert halls. They are, unequivocally, bringin' it to the people.

"We've carved a niche for ourselves as specialists in interactive concerts, that is to say, we incorporate bits of choreography, poetry, theater and singing into our performances, as well as audience participation," says Jacobson. "We pretty much operate under the principle of playing only music we

Continued on Page 24

FRESH ARTS SPACETAKER

HOUSTON'S GUIDE TO ALTERNATIVE ARTS

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MAY 11 • WORTHAM CENTER'S CULLEN THEATER

Mercury Baroque

HEROIC BEETHOVEN

Mercury will perform Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony and his masterful 2nd Symphony on period-accurate instruments for their Season Finale.



MAY 18 • DIVERSEWORKS ARTSPACE

Diverse Works

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MAY 19-20 • CYNTHIA WOODS MITCHELL CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT UH

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INSIGHT|OUT

A weekend of performance and visual arts presented by the Mitchell Center, Aurora Picture Show and DiverseWorks.



MAY 25 - JUNE 9 • DIVERSEWORKS ARTSPACE

The Catastrophic Theatre

AMERICAN FALLS

Miki Johnson's sort of Our Town for our times, American Falls, asks what it is to live, to become an adult, to grow old and to die.

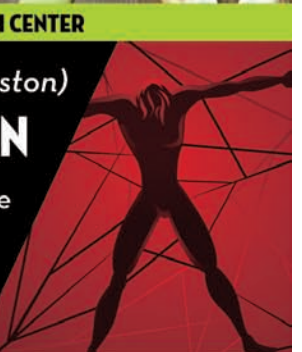


MAY 31 - JUNE 17 • TBH CENTER

TBH Center (Talento Bilingüe de Houston)

KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

Manuel Puig weaves a sharply provocative tale of love, victimization, fantasy and friendship between two men sharing an Argentinean prison cell.



High Art and Low Riders

Art Car Parade at 25



PHOTO: ED SCHIPUL

ABOVE: *The Beatles* art car by Rebecca Bass.

THE GIANT ROACH CAR. THE ONE that looks like a dragon. The one with all the fish and lobsters on it. These are just some of the rolling sculptures that cruise through Houston's downtown every May as part of a beloved tradition known as the *Art Car Parade*.

This year's 25th annual *Art Car Parade*, which is powered by the Orange Show, is an art-on-wheels extravaganza that's just one part of the weekend filled with wild revelry, funky self-expressionism, and an unabashed love for folk art.

"These are all just amazing, colorful, completely unique pieces of art," says Jonathan Beitler, spokesman for The Orange Show. The folk art institution is the umbrella organization for the parade. The Orange Show dates back to 1956, when its founder, Jeff McKissack, built an eclectic celebration of the orange, his favorite fruit. Today, the museum on Munger Street attracts visitors looking for the weird and the cool. The whole building, has mazes and balconies and is a love letter to sculpture built with reclaimed items. It has everything from

bricks to tin sheets, and images of the orange abound.

"Every corner has its own story," says Carol Simmons, who serves as the volunteer coordinator for the space.

The same can be said of the cars that make up the parade. The Orange Show Foundation commissioned the Fruitmobile in 1984, a cheeky nod to the Orange Show's patron citrus. In 1988, the Show teamed up with the International Festival to launch the first art car parade. Today, many of the folks associated with the event laugh over its humble beginnings.

"Oh, that first year, we had maybe 40 entries and a couple hundred spectators," remembers Barbara Hinton, one of the Orange Show's board members.

This month, expect several thousand to line the streets along Allen Parkway to catch a glimpse at the 266 entries that have descended on Houston from as far away as Minnesota and California. Hinton says she loves seeing the cars

pass by, and really appreciates the joy and delight on spectators' faces.

"The parade brings such a diverse group of people out," she says. "Not just the artists themselves, but also people who come to watch the parade. They're from all over."

"This is all about folk art and visionary art," says Simmons. "And it's a great way to get art in the hands of the public without any pretentiousness or stuffiness to it. It's just plain fun."

Anything that rolls on wheels is a welcome entry to the *Art Car Parade*, whether it's an old clunker dressed up with fountains and paper mache animals, or a little red wagon tricked out with motors and bright colors. It's also a lot of work to create one. Just ask Rebecca Bass, the Houston Independent School District art teacher who's made 27 cars for the event, many of them with her art students.

"Making the car teaches them about creativity, project management, and

how to work with other people," she says. "There are fantastic life skills they pick up, and the kids really love it. Of course, they never quite realize just how much work is actually involved."

This year's project is called *Earth, Wind and Fire*, and students from five of Bass's classes are involved, and will also collaborate with the kids in fellow teacher Pamela Garner's robotics class. The \$500 car features a waterfall, hydraulics and fog. Bass says her students are part of the whole process, from drawing plans, to making a model sculpture of the car, to fitting all the pieces together.

As of press time, Bass and her students were still painting and welding. So was artist Mark "Scrap Daddy" Bradford, whose workshop hummed with the sound of saws and blowtorches.

"I'm changing out a motor," he explained. "The car got so heavy, I needed to switch out to something that could better handle the weight."

Bradford's car will be his thirty-third. He



PHOTO: ED SCHIPUL

Art car by Mark Bradford.

saw his first art car parade in 1987 and was hooked on the idea of these wacky sculptures on wheels. He made his first parade entry in 1988 with what he calls a “crazy motorbike.” And the rest is history.

“I like to bring the metal to life,” he tells me. “All of my stuff has some kind of nature representation in it, whether it’s an animal or a growing thing.”

This year, he’s rolling out *Mr. Green*, an homage to recycling that’s made with nearly 100 percent recycling material.

“He’s like an ox, pulling a cart,” Bradford says of his 13-foot-tall creation. “And I’m driving him.”

That may sound off the wall, but Beitler says that the cars are not only well-loved by parade-goers, but some have also been coveted by collectors and shown in museums all over the world. One of Bradford’s cars was shown in Germany, and several artists’ cars are on display through the Orange Show. Many Art Car fans, including the artists themselves, eagerly anticipate the new pieces by returning creators.

I’m looking forward to see what David Best and Kenny Browning come up with,” says Bradford. “They’re just great and I love their stuff!”

Hinton is excited to see Bradford’s *Mr. Green*. She also loves *The Sashimi Tabernacle Choir*, the car with all the fish and lobster mounted to it.

“This event is the greatest way to experience art without even realizing it,” says Simmons.

The Orange Show does all it can to

ensure that art comes to the people. The Friday before parade day, Main Street Drag brings many of the cars through the streets of the Galleria and the Texas Medical Center, both to whip up excitement about the parade, but also to allow school children and people in nursing home and health care facilities to experience some of the wonder and creativity. That evening, the cars will be lined up in the streets around Discovery Green Park, allowing visitors a chance to see them and talk to the artists. The parade starts at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 12.

“Come out and experience it,” raves Hinton. “This whole thing takes art off the walls and out into the street.”

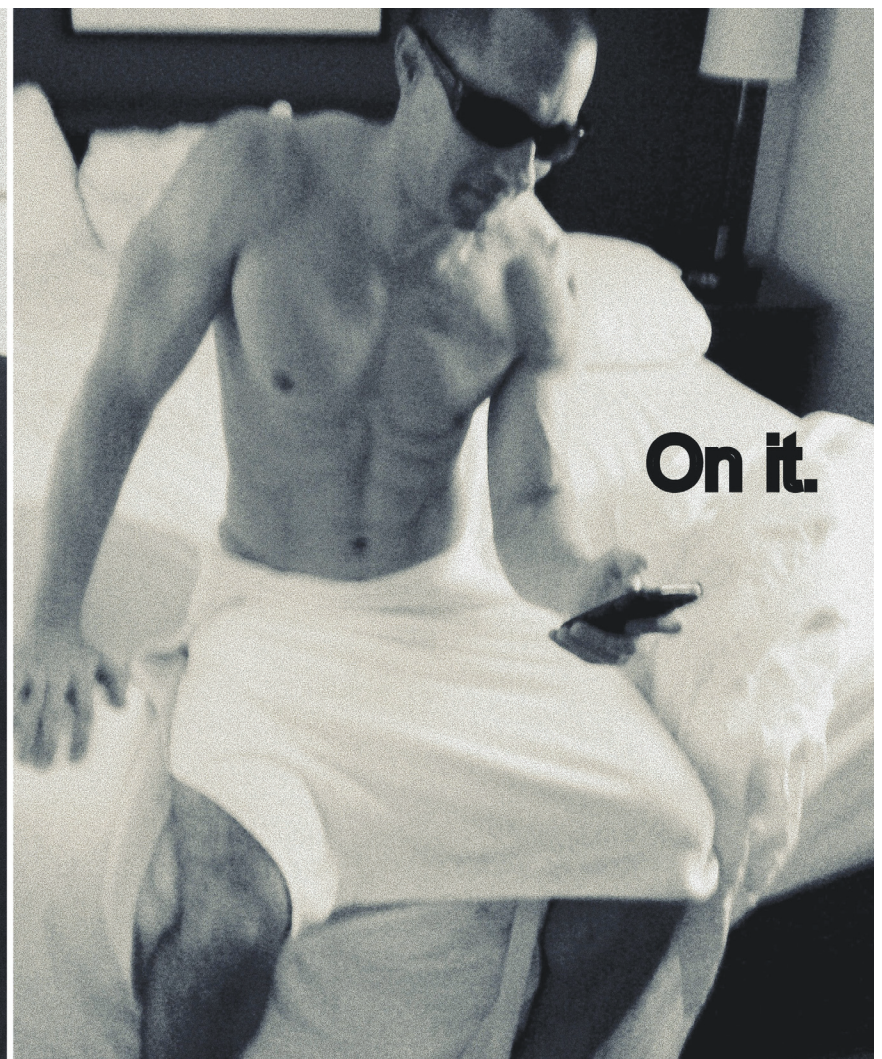
—HOLLY BERETTO

Holly Beretto participated in the Art Car Parade once, dressed as a Valkerie on roller skates, part of the entourage for the Houston Grand Opera’s art car.

May 12, 1-3pm
Art Car Parade
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www.orangeshow.org



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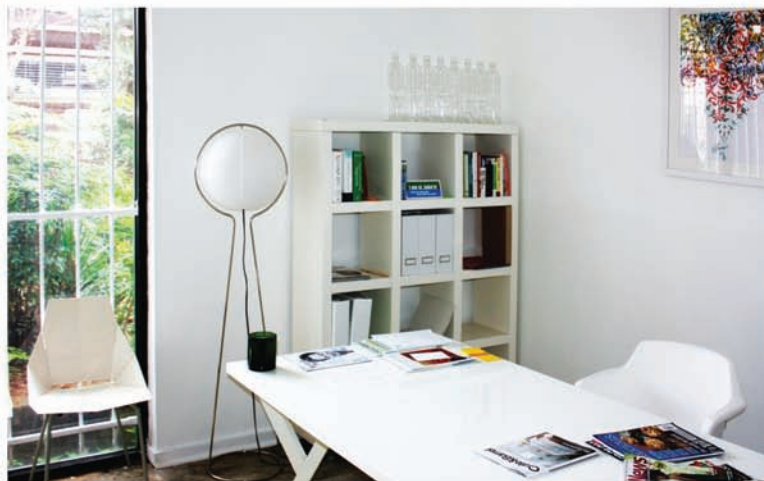
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Disappearing Acts

Jonah Bokaer Responds to Lee Ufan



PHOTO: MICHAEL HART

On Vanishing Guggenheim Rehearsal, Summer 2011. Choreography by Jonah Bokaer.

FOR SOME, DANCE'S EPHEMERAL quality is a problem. For Jonah Bokaer, it's a choreographic challenge that drives the engine of his work, and often poses questions of time, space, objects, and the body.

In Bokaer's *On Vanishing*, a site-specific choreographed work, originally created for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in response to the exhibition *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, Bokaer ponders, "How does the body erase itself to prefer matter against presence?" An interesting inquiry for a choreographer/dancer who has an impressive presence as a dance maker and collaborator with leading visual artists.

As Bokaer is a master of reengineering performance space, *On Vanishing* will be recreated for the recently opened Asia Society Texas Center, in response to *Relatum-signal*, a commissioned sculpture by Lee. The performance, sponsored by Houston Arts Alliance, is presented by the Asia Society in collaboration with the University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, and part of Bokaer's residency at the Mitchell Center.

Bokaer, an internationally known

choreographer and media artist, stands on the forefront of dance and technology. He has danced with such seminal artists as Merce Cunningham (2000–2007), John Jasperse (2004–2005), David Gordon (2005–2006), Deborah Hay (2005), and Tino Sehgal (2008), among others. He's also a frequent choreographer for Robert Wilson. Bokaer is named one of the New York Times "Nifty Fifty" and Crain's New York Business "40 under 40," and has received numerous awards and is involved with the founding of New York's two leading arts incubators, Chez Bushwick and the award-winning Center for Performance Research. This summer, he returns to Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival to perform with ballet legend David Halberg. Lucky for Houston, his ties to the Bayou City continue through the Mitchell Center.

I first came upon Bokaer's work when he was performing *The Invention of Minus One* at *DiverseWorks*. My response to his work was immediate and profound. Bokaer's work challenges our perceptive muscle at every turn, whether he's deconstructing movement or the way we see and experience a performance. What proved most curious was that the work did not lose an ounce of its impact on my laptop screen. This makes perfect

sense when you consider Bokaer's rather expansive approach to where he performs.

Bokaer relishes in giving up the controls of the black box by performing in museum settings. "Museums and galleries tend to be more nimble and agile," he says. "They implicate the body differently. We can directly address the audience as the 4th wall is broken."

Bokaer is a heady artist, who thinks about the exact elements of his work with the cunningness of an engineer, philosopher and scholar. *On Vanishing* allowed him to dig deep into some of the differences in methodologies between choreography, visual art, and dancing. He sets "opposing the act of vanishing" as a working question. "Not only are choreographic works endangered, it's an occupational hazard, but in a single dance, each moment passes." Bokaer says, "I wanted to decouple choreography from dancing. Dance is easy to repeat, choreography is the design. The design disappears to become a performance."

Bokaer has gathered a diverse group of performers, including Adam H. Weinert, CC Chang, Sara Procopio, and James McGinn. Loren Kiyoshi

Dempster contributes music with a rare live performance of John Cage's *One*⁸ (1991) for solo cello.

On Vanishing begins mostly in stillness with music. The audience has time to acclimate, to literally take in the body as object, before it becomes a moving object. "I wanted the music to command attention, and for the audience to look a still space," he says. "There's a leveling of the elements."

Bokaer's approach often dismantles previously held convictions in our perception of the body in motion. Every piece is a lesson in seeing. "How is the body choreographed by the material around it?" asks Bokaer, during our recent conversation. And those materials can be stunning, such as 10,000 ping pong balls in *Why Patterns*, his collaboration with the design firm Snarkitecture, or his investigation of a collapsing cube in *Replica* with Daniel Arsham.

In *On Vanishing*, he uses Daitoku paper in a section that references Lee's 1969 performance installation, *Things and Words*, for which there remains little documentation. The dancers take and leave shape in the paper. "It's very sculptural," adds Bokaer.

In this version of *On Vanishing*, Bokaer will consider the entirety of the Asia Society Texas Center's container and the proximity to Ufan's new installation. One major difference for the Asia Society performance is that the dance will not occur in the same space with Ufan's work, offering yet another level of vanishing. It's not a problem for this protean artist. "The public will walk by Lee's installation before arriving in the adjacent performance space," says Bokaer. "The piece will be more like an echo."

Unlike much of contemporary dance, where our vision is directed with a "look here" order, Bokaer offers a more spacious experience. Our gaze is less constrained, we are free to wander among the work's disparate elements, much like we do in a museum. *Vanishing* is rarely this substantial.

—NANCY WOZNY

May 17 & May 18, 5:30pm
Asia Society Texas Center
www.asiasociety.org/texas
www.mitchellcenterforarts.org

Civic Reinvention

The Julia Ideson Library Renovation

ON DECEMBER 5TH, 2011 THE City of Houston was given a beautiful jewel. After two years, 32 million dollars and a painstaking restoration by Gensler's Barry Moore, the Julia Ideson Library, one of Houston's earliest and most prominent libraries, was reopened to the public.

The library, home to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC), features a new environmentally controlled archival wing for its rare books and objects, and a fully restored interior space. The coffered ceilings, painted wood, historic lighting fixtures, polished brass, and terra-cotta tiling has been returned to its stunning original state. Like many public libraries the country-over, it endows the reader with a sense of sophistication that fits an elevated pursuit of knowledge. It is without a doubt one of the grandest of Houston's public spaces. Houston could benefit from a bit more public grandeur.

The Julia Ideson Library was first opened to the public on October 17, 1926, as part of a major civic plan for Downtown Houston; a plan that would have included a City Hall (City Hall eventually arrived, but decades later, and in an Art Deco style). The architects Cram and Ferguson, with William Ward Watkin (also architects of many original buildings at what was then The Rice Institute), were awarded the job.

The original plan for the library shows that a second perpendicular wing, pointing south and parallel to Smith Street, was intended for the library, but

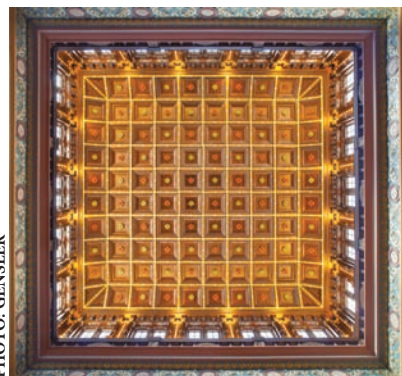


PHOTO: GENSLER

there were financial troubles, and the wing was never constructed. The library, as it opened in 1926, was whole, but never fully complete; and its presence on the block confirms this recently fulfilled potential. The library sat on roughly half of the city block and relegated the South side to trash collection, mechanical spaces, and empty wind-swept



PHOTO: GENSLER

ABOVE: Tudor Gallery inside of the Julia Ideson Library. BELOW: Detail of the newly restored ceiling.

dereliction. Nobody used that space as it was virtually an enlarged alley. Not so any longer.

The new 21,500 square-foot wing, the wing that was originally drawn by Cram, Ferguson and Watkin, now expertly reintroduced by Barry Moore, revitalizes that entire city block and possibly the entire small four-block city-hall area. Instead of a wind-swept ally, the Ideson Library offers citizens of this fair city a lovely outdoor reading space protected but still integrated into the urban outdoors.

This new arm of the building not only reinvigorates the exterior urban space, but liberates the interior public space to accommodate new and varied uses. The majority of the books (including 4.5 million photographic images of historic events and everyday life in Houston, 150,000 sets of architectural drawings, 7,000 volumes of rare children's books, 15,000 volumes of rare books and pamphlets, and numerous rare books, such as a fifteenth-century illuminated *Book of Hours* from Flanders, a 1520 edition of *The Odyssey*, and 1615 edition of *Don Quixote*) are now stored in the advanced climate-controlled environment of the recent addition. This means that the 1926 historical space of the library has been repurposed as an

event space, reading rooms, a gallery, and, quite simply, elegant public space. There are places to sit, study, work and read, as well as now several large rooms for private events, parties, galas and other celebrations.

Consequently, these historic rooms at many times feel somewhat empty. During normal business hours, there's simply not much going on. Additionally, there's a kind of expectant or longing quality to the rooms, as if they are memorials to a glorious past or anticipating some kind of future activity. Right now, they are literally waiting rooms that wait. And despite its free admission and open policy to the public, one isn't really convinced that this is a public library, at least not in the same sense as the main branch lending library across the street designed by Morris Architects, that at any given time is crowded with urban citizens using the various computers and materials. Nor is it like the many other public libraries across the country (places where I grew up in the hours after school had closed and I needed a supervised place to study before my parents came home).

The Julia Ideson Library is a public space with the feel of a grand civic function that has lost something of its relevance in today's downtown Houston. It stands

between two worlds; the height of Houston's public library usage and its currently much-curtailed civic utility.

One can't help but notice that the renovation comes at a particularly sensitive time in the history of Houston's Public Library service, where the operating budget for the library system has been reduced across the board by 70% over the last two years and the very existence of the public library is hanging by a thread. One might surmise that the event spaces and reception rooms in the newly renovated Julia Ideson Library are an attempt to offset some costs from dwindling public support, but it's perhaps best that one doesn't pry too much into such affairs. It is, after-all, a very generously donated public space to the city and we should be thankful at least for that.

—NED DODINGTON

Ned Dodington is the Director of Caroline Collective, a founding board member of C2 Creative, Chief Editor of AnimalArchitecture.org and a designer at PDR.

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HJ BOTT CONTINUED

identifying the practice as “the most satisfactory endeavor.”

He cites the discovery of the work by Liubov Popova, Max Bill, and Rhoda Kellog as the reasoning for his “pursuits of the Phenomena-of-a-Line as an obsession.” And for decades, he has used

the DoV Systems Concepts to create much more than the aforementioned geometric whoop-de-do. He has formulated abstract artworks from drawings to paintings to sculptures to installations to (a personal reaction to performance art). The DoV’s displaced circles and squares result in



PHOTO: SHAU LIN HON

HJ Bott, *Roar Shock Well*, Co-Polymer on Canvas, 36 x 36 inches.

shapeshifting “modules” combinations and transformations that resemble boats, bathtubs, robotic men, half-hearts, and more. They are enmeshed in grids, optical illusions, and complemented by textures and relief.

Bott is understandably proud that his DoV System Concepts is currently celebrating 40 years since its discovery. His related exhibition of new works (*The Systemic Lineation Series*) launches at Anya Tish on May 12, followed by a mini-retrospective of DoV System Concepts works at the Galveston Art Center (June 2 - July 8, 2012), and an opening on October 13 in the “Noted Space” at Kirk Hopper Fine Art, Dallas.

The past 40 years have served Bott and his discovery well, and to be expected, his new works continue with the DoV. These new paintings, are more colorful and vibrant than in recent years now with sharper lines, dynamic prisms, visual reverberations, and calculated ripple-effects taking charge of the canvas.

“The current painting I’m attempting to complete for Anya Tish’s show is a tribute to the string theory physicist Joe Polchinski. It will be called, *Polchinski Perturbations*,” says Bott. “If only I had the intellectual capacity for advanced studies in super-string theory. These theories have brought an entirely new approach to the universal findings of Rhoda Kellog’s *23 Marks/Scribbles*.”

If only. But, as fate would have it, Bott is a self-proclaimed “dedicated Baroque-

Minimalist” and not a super-string theorist. The work of practitioners in fields other than art and string theory have similarly affected him, mostly in the ways of human compassion and psychological understanding. Bott’s work has also been influenced by some of the rather unexpected jobs he has held over the years, including working as a rehabilitation services director, patrolman, and propaganda analyst. Through these positions, he learned the differences between what he recognizes as sympathy and accurate empathy, along with an understanding of “non-defensive genuineness.”

But always, one teacher beckons and Bott answers: “The canvas is calling.”

– NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator who can’t seem to stay away from Houston.

May 12–June 9, 2012

HJ Bott: Rhythm & Rhetoric: New Works Celebrating 40 Years of the DoV System

Anya Tish Gallery–Houston
www.anyatishgallery.com

June 2–July 8, 2012

HJ Bott: A 40 Year Celebration
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www.galvestonartscenter.org

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Worth the Trip

Currents: The Santa Fe International New Media Festival



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Peter Daverington, *Arcadia*, Video Still, 2012.

NEW MEXICO IS KNOWN FOR artists and scientists, not just green chiles and hot air balloons. Georgia O’Keeffe may never have hob-nobbed in Los Alamos with J. Robert Oppenheimer, but her paintings and his work with the Manhattan Project certainly changed the way the state was perceived by the rest of the world. Today, according to Frank Ragano, one of the co-founders of the Santa Fe International New Media Festival, there is a perfect blending of science with the visual arts, thanks to new technologies.

New Media is the term that encompasses video art, multimedia performance, web gaming, and interactive installations. The 2012 Festival in Santa Fe (June 22-July 8) brings together over seventy leading artists from eight countries. Thirteen states will be represented in this year’s show.

Houston artists, Hillerbrand+Magsamen were selected to participate in the Santa Fe event. They are a married couple who create experimental videos and installation projects based on their family life, often including their two children. One of their acclaimed projects, *Elevated Landscape*, was shot on location at the Lawndale Art Center and explores the idea of a suburban lawn as a metaphor for a couple controlling their space. *Transcendental Smoothie*, was another installation that included giant balloons on which images were

projected of their children cutting out cookies. Their intention was to comment on how we form our children’s identities and struggle with our own.

The Festival is held on several sites, including a 35,000 sq. ft. space at El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe. “The goal is to create an immersive environment,” Ragano said, “a space where attendees can wander in a unique atmosphere of light, sound and image. It’s also a showcase for New Media talent,” he said. Evening presentations will include a demonstration in which scientists from Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratories will show how they are using 3D projections to help fellow scientists wrap their minds around concepts which include vast amounts of data. All events and entrance to the installations are free.

“We don’t have a problem entertaining people,” said Maiannah Amster, the Festival’s other co-founder along with Ragano. “We’re looking for work that is strong, whether it’s playful, profound, or both,” she said. Some of the latest technology includes interactivity, which artists have “stolen” from Xbox and Wii, the video games which introduced sensors that would pick up on the movement of players and respond accordingly.

“Of course, the technology is always changing,” she said. “This year we noticed that several artists were

presenting an aesthetic that simplifies things, taking images back to the idea of drawing lines on paper, old-fashioned as that sounds.... Others are creating work in real time, creating images that exist only in the moment.” While she admits that some conceptual art leaves her cold, Amster assures, “We’re always into beauty.”

Another Texas artist, David Stout,



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Iga Puchalski, *Primp*, Video Still, 2012.

teaches at UNT Denton and will present an installation, *Shadow Box Attractions* as well as a performance by Noisefold, an ongoing collaboration with Cory Metcalf. Working with a live cellist, Frances Marie Uitti, Noisefold promises that their work will combine cinema, data sonification, and acoustic music as an integral whole. Noisefold seeks to reinvent the laptop performance as an embodied dramatic form.

Last year’s festival drew approximately

four thousand people, according to Ragano, and with its international focus and expanded venues, this year’s event promises to be even more popular. “The work is really high quality and very diverse. An outreach program involved students at schools in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and the Navajo Nation, who will present their work,” he said. “We showed them some of the works from our previous festival to show them what was possible, and they got very excited.”

“Our name is getting out there,” Ragano said. “We’re trying to create an internationally known New Media Festival in Santa Fe. People say this could be at MOMA.”

—MICHAEL WADE SIMPSON

Michael Wade Simpson is editor of *Culturevulture.net* and a freelance writer for *Pasatiempo Arts Weekly* in Santa Fe, NM.

June 22-July 8, 2012
Currents: The Santa Fe, New Media Festival
 Santa Fe, NM
www.currentsnewmedia.org

Cultural Warrior

Mercury's Antoine Plante

ONE OF THE CITY'S LEADING early music organizations, Mercury Baroque, has recently re-branded itself as Mercury-the Orchestra Redefined. Antoine Plante, conductor and artistic director, left Montreal to attend Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He started Mercury Baroque in his home. Mercury has since become one of the city's leading chamber orchestras. Plante talks change with A + C editor Nancy Wozny below.

Let's start with your big news. You changed your name and opened up your scope. I often wondered if you ever got the urge to play music outside of the Baroque era. Can you bring us into this decision?

What makes Mercury's performances unique is the way we perform (the quality, dynamism, passion and intimacy) rather than the repertoire. 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. As a result of an expanded repertoire and programs, we are able to further our roots within the community, impacting more people.

This also provides an opportunity to redefine the role of the orchestra in our community. We are working hard to impact the lives of more people. Live music is special and has the capacity to transform our lives. It is beneficial to the whole society. Making music more accessible is really important to me. So, on top of the name change, we also just announced a new concert series, three programs performed in four neighborhood venues. That's many more concerts, touching more people.

What was the oldest work Mercury has ever performed? The newest?

We often perform renaissance music in chamber music context. The earliest work we did in our main stage series may have been early Italian baroque music from Monteverdi. The newest composition we performed is Piazzolla's *Four Seasons*, which we pair with Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Piazzolla is a

tango composer who died in 1992, not really Baroque. We will keep having a lot of Baroque music in our concerts. It's great repertoire that I love. I'm not planning any contemporary music next season (we stop at Schubert), but it may come.

Will you continue to use period instruments and those warm sounding gut strings too?

We are committed to perform the music using the instruments that the composer had in mind when creating the music. It speaks to the quality of the art we present. The change of name does not affect that. It allows us to present more easily how Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert sounded at the time.

You end your season in a grand Texas style with Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3 "Eroica"* and *Symphony No. 2* played on period instruments for the very first time. Can you talk about this choice?

Beethoven symphonies are really important works to me. We performed the 1st Symphony a few years ago. We are continuing the cycle this season with *Symphony 2nd* and *3rd*. Next year, *4th* and *5th*.

How do you trace your stability now to Houston Arts Alliance's (HAA) MODE program?

HAA MODE's program was a great opportunity for us. The program is designed to help small organizations grow. We moved in our first office space at HAA with the program. They also helped with grants and conferences. We stayed three years. We were a different organization at the end of it.

Now you are even helping others in HAA workshops, which is terrific. The middle is a lonely place in the strata of Houston arts organizations. What are the challenges of being the shining star of the middle?

Our challenges are: how do we reach and impact more people and how do we maintain and raise the quality of what we are doing? It's a lot of work and it's hard. We are lucky to have a community that really supports us. As the organization grows, situations change and things



PHOTO: SIMON GENTRY

ABOVE: Antoine Plante, artistic director of Mercury. BELOW: Mercury, the Orchestra Redefined.

are different. I would say that in the middle, we still don't have the name recognition of the big ones, but we have big responsibilities.

When you were a grad student at Rice did you ever dream you would be sitting atop a successful orchestra?

I always knew that I had a certain talent at making classical music fun, accessible and meaningful to audiences. But, at Rice, I came with a specific goal: how to learn to play my instrument (the double bass) really well. After I graduated, I started asking myself hard questions about in what way I wanted to use my talent. The rest is history.

What can we look forward to under the new Mercury banner?

A fantastic season. It starts and finishes with masterpieces: Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. In the middle are lots of great baroque music. French national Christophe Rousset, one of the world's best harpsichordist, is coming to lead and perform. Our Christmas concert is a selection of seasonal music. We are pushing the repertoire to Mendelssohn and Schubert with a concert of string quartets arranged for orchestra, and great soprano and Houston's favorite Ana Maria Martinez joins us for the Valentine's Day performance. I can't wait.

Obviously, music is in your blood, in that you hark from a musical family. Were your toys period instruments?

We had a collection of early instruments (over 150 of them) in the house where I grew up. So, in a sense, yes. I do have memories of playing the hurdy gurdy, the talabard, and bagpipes as a young child. It was great to grow up surrounded by music.

Do you do anything that has nothing to do with music. Surprise us!

I'm raising kids, ages 4, 5, and 6 years old. That takes up most of my non-working time. I do manage to play racquetball early mornings. I dance tango, grow things and cook. Music is a huge part of my life, and I don't try to get away from it. On the contrary, when I fantasize about having time by myself, I think of listening to music.

May 11, 2012
Heroic Beethoven
Wortham Center, Cullen Theater
www.mercurybaroque.org

MADE IN AMERICA CONTINUED



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Aria Alekzander and Artists of Houston Ballet in Mark Morris' *Sandpaper Ballet*.

American than Russian," reminds me of the time when the nation grew its ballet roots from the talent of those who landed on our shores. Yet, Balanchine still turned to the music of the great Russian composers, notably Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, for his ballets. "*Theme and Variations* feels American to me,"

adds Welch.

Romeo & Juliet, running June 7-17, premiered in 1940 in Russia. We might guess that Ben Stevenson's version would lend an English flavor, having come of age around the great English choreographers, but according to Welch,

we would be wrong. "It looks like Ben, he's every intercontinental," he says. "Ben merges American and European style. You can see traces of Englishness in his understated style." Like Balanchine, Stevenson grew his choreographic chops in America, first at National Ballet in Washington, DC, then here in Houston,

where he led Houston Ballet from 1976-2003.

For Welch, the boundary lines in ballet get murky, especially in considering his own Australian heritage. "We are all immigrants. That's what makes America and Australia so special. That's what made Balanchine love this country."

"I've coming to the point where I've been in Texas almost as long as I danced with The Australian Ballet. At what point do I become a Texan?" Welch asks. The choreographer can carry off a pair of Western boots like the best of them, and his ballet *Tales of Texas* is spot on in its characterization of the Lone Star State. Clearly, the man has earned his Stetson.

Welch takes the idea one step further. "We don't create from where we were born, but from where we are."

-NANCY WOZNY

May 24-June 3
Made in America
Wortham Center

May 11-13
Giselle
Miller Outdoor Theatre

June 7-17
Romeo & Juliet
Wortham Center
www.houstonballet.org

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WINDSYNC CONTINUED



PHOTO: JAMIE JAMES

WindSync plays *Classical Revolution Vancouver* at the Prothouse Cafe, April 2012.

absolutely love and never program music just for the sake of it being standard or traditional. We also like performing in smaller, intimate and unconventional performance spaces. It lets our concerts take on a really casual and fun vibe.”

With their crackerjack musicianship and endearingly impertinent presentation style, they landed the enviable gig as Ensemble in Residence with the Da Camera of Houston Young Artist Program for 2011-12. The program

offers professional development and career expansion opportunities to emerging instrumentalists, singers and composers, as well as fosters young artists’ life-long commitments to music-making in their communities and beyond.

Jacobson praises their Young Artist experience, “We have had the most fantastic year working with Da Camera. When we were considering auditioning in the fall, all we really had to do was

read Da Camera’s mission statement to realize that it was really a perfect collaboration.”

As the quintet garners accolades like their year with Da Camera, additional artist residencies, and continued performance outreach with Young Audiences of Houston, their member’s careers are transitioning: WindSync is now a full-time ensemble. Rewarded for their adaptability, rock band attitude, personal flair, and a deep connection to audiences, they’re embracing the big change.

“One of the most amazing changes for me has been transitioning from a struggling student ensemble to a thriving full time professional ensemble. It’s just so fantastic to be able to shift your mindset from struggling, to gaining momentum, to hanging on for the ride as your career takes off! We are throwing out some radical ideas in terms of how classical music is presented, but it honestly seems to come quite naturally in the spaces we perform. When we bring our style into concert halls, it actually fits wonderfully, and we find audiences and fans right there with us. We think what’s most important for our future is that we remain flexible and adaptable as artists, while still working toward achieving our mission to enrich the lives of children, families, and community members

through innovative, interactive chamber music. For us, the sky is the limit,” Jacobson effervesces.

Audacious, adventurous, interactive, cheeky, bounded only by big sky. These are your neighborhood classical music rock-stars. What’s not to love?

— MISHA PENTON

Misha Penton is a classical singer, new opera-music performer, poet, theater-media artist, and general shaker-upper.
www.mishapenton.com

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Homeward Bound
First Unitarian Universalist Church
www.windsync.org

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RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

Mary Stuart

Houston Grand Opera

April 21–May 4, 2012

www.houstongrandopera.org

The tragedy of Geatano Donizetti's *Mary Stuart*, which had its Houston Grand Opera premiere last month, is that there's so much drama, intrigue and passion in the real story behind rival queens Elizabeth I of England and Mary, Queen of Scots, you can't help but wish the composer had relied upon the history. Instead, the opera is a tale of hell having no fury like a woman scorned, and gives us an Elizabeth, who executes her cousin Mary because Mary is in love with Elizabeth's own favorite, Robert, Earl of Leicester.

None of this true, nor is it Houston Grand Opera's fault. For that, we'll blame Donizetti himself for fabricating it off of a play written in the same era by Friedrich Schiller. And yes, this is also opera, not the History Channel.

So the bad news is, if you can't suspend your disbelief over the happenings on stage, it will be a very long evening. The good news is that the performances and the music are quite wonderful.

Joyce DiDonato sings Mary, the doomed Scottish queen, with dignity and pathos. Act I's "O Nube," in which she laments being a prisoner and longs to be free as a cloud, is longingly and lovingly rendered. Act II's "De te di un umile preghiera," her final prayer, showcases DiDonato's powerful and emotional range. She effortlessly captures Mary's proud dignity, and it's awesome to see.

Katie Van Kooten's soprano lends Elizabeth a shrill and shining anger as both a woman rejected and queen enraged. In *Va preparati furente*, Act I's towering climax, her voice rings with bright energy. While the confrontation between the two queens never happened in real life, here on stage, Van Kooten and DiDonato trade stunning vocal fireworks, the depth and richness of DiDonato's mezzo a gorgeous counterpoint to Van Kooten's ringing soprano.

Tenor Eric Cutler brings empathy to Robert, Earl of Leicester, alternately pleading for mercy on behalf of Mary and offering comfort to the exiled queen. And Oren Gradus's bass is perfectly crafted for Cecil, Elizabeth's most trusted advisor, as he pushes the queen to order the death of her rival.

Patrick Summers leads the orchestra through Donizetti's score, and his deft handling gives us music that rises up in argument and indignation, and falls

to the softness of a lullaby. Donizetti's score captures the very real drama of the age in a way the libretto does not, and Summers uses this to full effect.

Set and costume designers Neil Patel and Jessica Jahn make their HGO debuts, and their dark, rich colors with shimmers of reds and golds convey the opulence of 16th century England.

As history, *Mary Stuart* doesn't quite hold up, but as opera, it more than passes the test.

—HOLLY BERETTO

Holly Beretto writes about the arts, food and wine, and interesting people for a variety of local and regional publications. She fell in love with the story of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I in the Henry Barnard School library when she was nine and is fascinated with them still.

The Unexpected Man

Stages Repertory Theatre

April 18–May 13, 2012

www.stagestheatre.com

I should first confess that you may count me among the people who didn't like Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage*. Are there other such people, or was it just me? It expressed a worldview that I felt had so very little to do with how I lived my life, or how anyone else I knew lived their lives, and I could not quite accept that we are all in one way or another secret barbarians waiting to wreak havoc.

After seeing *The Unexpected Man*, I am at a loss to understand why *God of Carnage* has received so much more attention. *The Unexpected Man* has everything to do with the way we live our lives. It is a play about how time eats us – how our lovers age and die, how people who were once our friends and fans and great supporters grow to find us repetitive and dull. It is a modern day answer to Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*; hell is other people, but not because you are forced into contact with them, but because you lose them one way or another. It explores the kind of alienation that people in their twenties can only guess at (in the interest of full disclosure, this writer is in his twenties).

If the play is that good, Stages' production suits it. James Belcher and Sally Edmundson nail these characters. The curve of Belcher's lip is, indeed, bitter, but we still get a sense of him as an essentially likeable old man, while Edmundson evokes something elegant and old-world, but human and self-conscious. She reminded me of nothing so much as an aging Sophia Loren, with



COURTESY OF HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

Joyce DiDonato in Houston Grand Opera's *Mary Stuart*.

the heart of a schoolgirl.

The design is so cohesive that director Seth Gordon and designers Kevin Holden (set and lights), Tim Thomson (Sound), Macy Perrone (Costumes) should all be congratulated; this is a real meeting of the minds. The set is designed to look like a giant clock, but also a kind of afterlife – the actors are suspended on a rotating platform in the middle of a white nothingness. I did occasionally wonder why the lighting design drew so much attention to itself (I spent some time trying to reason out the logic behind their changing colors), but ultimately that just contributed to the otherworldly quality of the design.

Some plays ring truer than others, and this one rang true for me. After seeing it, I think if Yasmina Reza and I found ourselves sitting across from each other on the train, we would have something to talk about.

—ZACHARY DOSS

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

La Cage aux Folles

Theatre Under the Stars

April 23–May 5, 2012

www.tuts.com

George Hamilton kissed a guy. OK, so a few other things happened before that in the Theatre Under the Stars production of *La Cage aux Folles*, starring the ever-bronzed Hamilton as Georges and Broadway veteran Christopher Sieber as Albin.

La Cage, suitably received six Tonys when it premiered in 1983, and even more for its revivals in 2004 and 2010.

It has staying power for all the right reasons: it's a heart warming story, the music is divine, and we are still in the thick of the gay rights debate. The tale focuses on the mayhem that occurs when Georges's son Jean-Michel (who was raised by both Georges and Albin), returns to announce he is marrying the daughter of an antigay politician. Of course, Jean-Michel wants them to play it straight, which allows for some hilarious imitations of John Wayne's famous walk.

With some half of the country still in favor of denying human rights to gay couples, it's amazing how fresh the idea that a family is made up of people who love each other, regardless of gender, can be. I never tire of that message, and I guarantee there were few dry eyes in the house when Jean Michel (Michael Lowney) apologizes to his mother (Albin) for trying to hide his identity from his stuffy conservative future in-laws.

With music by Jerry Herman and based on a book by Harvey Fierstein, it's hard to mess up this material. Director Terry Johnson didn't venture too far off the *La Cage* path, and generally, it was one fun night.

Though Hamilton was a tad wooden (possibly due to an injury), he's still such an iconic Hollywood feature that we just want to cut him some slack. Sieber, who played opposite Fierstein on Broadway, is simply divine in the role. He's such a terrifically physical comedian. I left humming the soaring *La Cage* anthem "The Best Of Times" and wanting to kiss George Hamilton.

—NANCY WOZNY

Reviews Continued on Page 26

REVIEWS CONTINUED

Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlos*

Houston Grand Opera

April 13–28, 2012

www.houstongrandopera.org

What does a choir of red crosses, pyrotechnics, and a wooden cart carrying chained heretics make? In Houston Grand Opera's version of Giuseppe Verdi's *Don Carlos*, it's the turning point from a mediocre opera to a memorable one.

From a mess of prom dresses, Godfather-like mob suits, and what looked sometimes to be high school bleachers, the set and costume design by Johan Engels and Carl Friedrich Oberle respectively blossomed once the Inquisition took control. Indeed, it was when heretics went up in flame that one was suddenly awestruck by an august conglomeration of sound and sight. As the black backdrop transformed into a piercingly red cross, the totalizing effect became complete.



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ

Houston Grand Opera's *Don Carlos*.

Don Carlos is the second-to-last opera of HGO's 2011-2012 season, with just Gaetano Donizetti's *Mary Stuart* to come. It will be difficult for *Mary Stuart* to outdo this production, directed by John Caird, if not simply because of the music. Under the baton of conductor Patrick Summers, the uncharacteristically dense score Verdi composed takes on vibrant life. Uniquely expressive, Summers's fingers seem to paint the sublime Wagner-like chromatic lines and harmonic changes for which Verdi suffered criticism.

The first two acts of HGO's production should have stayed in the practice room warming up the costumes and set were underwhelming, and the early start (the opera began an hour earlier than usual) seemed to catch some singers' voices off guard. But, Act Three was stunning, and by the time *Don Carlos* died, all lost track of the world outside of the Spanish Inquisition. Tamara Wilson, playing Elisabeth de Valois, conveyed the purity and beauty of her tragic character epically with her voice, showing uncanny breath control in sensational high notes in the final two acts. Brandon Jovanovich, making his role debut at HGO as *Don Carlos*, dazzled all with his commanding tenor voice, and the virtuosic arpeggios and trills Verdi is famous for seemed remarkably effortless for Christine Goerke, who sang the part of Princess Eboli.

Don Carlos is more rarely performed in the full five-act French version. Competing with several other versions of different lengths including the more often heard Italian text the French version that HGO performs is worth the extra hour or so. After this performance, it's suddenly terrifically hard to rise out of one's seat and exit into the blind light of twenty-first-century reality. It is opera in its element.

—SYDNEY BOYD

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

Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography & Collage

Houston Museum of Fine Arts

March 11–June 10, 2012

www.mfah.org

A woman in a white dress her lower half anyway, floats dreamily against the backdrop of a hazy Manhattan skyline; her head and torso eclipsed by a giant bird's feather, from which a pair of pistol-wielding human hands spring. Meanwhile, the headless body of man plummets past the skyscrapers to a sure demise, inevitably conjuring up thoughts of 9-11.

But, the montage *A Trait Angel*, which Japanese artist Okanoue Toshiko created with fragments from American magazines such as *Life* and *Vogue*, dates to 1955, when postwar Japan remained subject to the cultural and political dominance of the United States. Okanoue's juxtaposition of fantasies with nightmares strikes a conflicted mood that pervades much of the group show *Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography and Collage*.

As the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's contribution to FotoFest, *Utopia/Dystopia* smartly connects the basic activity of photo-based collage cutting and pasting found or captured images to create new ones with artists' impulse to dream up imaginary societies and places, both hopeful and disturbing.

Featuring historical figures such as Hannah Hoch and László Moholy-Nagy alongside contemporary artists like Vik Muniz and Wangechi Mutu, the show grew out of assistant photography curator Yasufumi Nakamori's desire to present Okanoue's work in a transnational context with Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield's scathingly satirical 1930's photomontages that warned of the coming fascist dystopia. (The international mix includes

Houston artists John Sparagana and Dana Harper, who use appropriated magazine imagery to distinct ends, and Josh Bernstein, who weaves photography into a mixed-media retelling of a 16th-century colonial explorer's memoir.)

It's a context that spans most of the history of photography and encompasses practices approaches ranging from constructivism to conceptualism and even commercialism: In 1893, Ezaki Reiji, a Tokyo studio photographer, combined his portraits of as many as 1,700 infants in *Collage of Babies*, an advertisement for his business that seemingly foresaw the city's continued economic and population growth.

Nakamori likens Ezaki's early depiction of an "anticipated utopia" through "the selection of images from a seemingly endless source" to Joel Lederer's digital photos of landscapes in *Second Life*, an online virtual world in which users create and share virtual property. An image from Lederer's *The Metaverse is Beautiful* series has the cheesyluminosity of a Thomas Kinkade painting. Given *Second Life* leaseholders' ability to montage landscapes from memories and found images, Kinkade may well have inspired Lederer's appropriated kitschscape.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS HOUSTON

Okanoue Toshiko, *A Trait Angel*, 1954, Collage. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the artist. ©Okanoue Toshiko

Using appropriation more pointedly, works from Martha Rosler's powerful *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* series (1967-72) juxtapose images from lifestyle magazines with found Vietnam War photography to wrench a distant, all-too-real dystopia into the living rooms of middle-class Americans. The chairs in *Patio View*, a recent MFAH acquisition, look onto a Vietnamese cityscape that has been laid to waste by American bombs.

In one of Nakamori's own uncanny juxtapositions, Rosler's montage hangs alongside El Lissitzky's surreal 1929 portrait of Russian avant-garde filmmaker Dziga Vertov, whose head fills the iris of a giant eye, along with a caption bearing Vertov's chilling aphorism: "In the face of the machine we are ashamed of man's inability to control himself."

—DEVON BRITT-DARBY

Artifactual Realities

Station Museum

Through May 13, 2012

www.stationmuseum.com

I had difficulty grasping the curatorial remit of *Artifactual Realities* when I first learned of the exhibition. Billed as part of the Fotofest Biennial, the exhibition featuring the work of eleven artists purports to explore the Occupy movement and tenets of spirituality and horizontality.

Reading the description of the exhibition and viewing images of the works on the Station Museum's website did little to further my understanding of either the works themselves or concept behind the installation. I imagined the entire premise to be an incongruous mishmash of genre and themes. However, upon viewing the exhibition, my understanding of the exhibition shifted and fell into place.

The scale and form of the works in *Artifactual Realities* resonate with the Station Museum's interior architecture that is comprised of a series of interconnecting rooms. This sense of spatial harmony is mirrored in the strong thematic through-line that manifests through each of the works and imbues the entire gallery with an almost spiritual aura. Yet, what connects the separate pieces is each work's exploration of confluence, not in a trite or facile fashion, but by bringing disparate elements together to shape some form of cohesion. It is this cohesion that is beneficial whether formally, in terms of societal structures, or regarding the environmental realm.

Three of the works in the exhibition deal directly with the Occupy movement. In the far corner in the north of the gallery, a black and white projection



Mel Chin, *Masters of War Volume XX, No.2*, 2011, Excised Printed Pages from *The Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, 1954, by Wilfred Funk, Inc. Archival Water Based Glue on Imported Artist Paper, 17 x 23 inches.

showcases video footage of Occupy Houston activists, who discuss what they feel are key doctrines inherent in the movement. Though their views may differ slightly, there are commonalities. August Bradley's *99 Faces of Occupy Wall St.* and Vanessa Bahmani's *We are the 99 Percent* both are comprised of portraits of participants in the Occupy movement. Bradley's images feature large scale cropped head shots in color that are arranged along the wall in a gridded formation, while Bahmani's black and white portraits feature individuals holding a dry erase board with a handwritten statements that relay their reasons for supporting the Occupy movement. Both bodies of work depict activists from diverse racial, cultural and economic backgrounds illustrating the diversity of those who are involved in the movement and belying the media's portrayal of the movement as heterogeneous.

Other works speak to the theme of confluence using other formal approaches. Both Mel Chin and Ann Harithas employ collage in their respective works. Chin's *The Funk and Wag From A to Z* incorporates images culled from an edition of the 1954 universal Standard Encyclopedia by Wilfred Funk, Inc. Using black Canson paper as a support, his two-dimensional paper assemblages conflate disparate images into hybridized and surreal new forms that reference issues of colonization, labor and class. Harithas draws her source materials from magazines and creates collages that "liberate" her source material "from

pulp advertising and propaganda." Her work *Elephant Cherub Tire* alludes to Christian and Hindu religious imagery. The collage centers on a nude Christ-like infant in the teaching pose, a halo fashioned from an Atlas rubber tire, and two elephants flanked on both sides of the infant.

Joe Cardella's installation *Contemplation* takes the form of an altar, a large ink-jet photo of a Buddha figure is hung on the wall aloft a table with bowls containing various pulses and a dried rose. The artist statement articulates the connections between war, greed, economic conflicts and the destruction of the earth. The overlaid imagery in Celia Alvarez Muñoz's *Semajante Personajes/Significant Personalities* documents Latino visual artists based in San Antonio and speaks to the power of community and the collective.

—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.

Yasuaki Onishi:
Reverse of Volume RG
Rice Gallery
April 13–June 24, 2012
www.ricegallery.org

Nebulous mountains hover in space. Yawning caverns glow supernaturally as they sway in the air. Yasuaki Onishi transformed Rice Gallery into a perplexing, organic space with *Reverse*

of Volume RG.

The viewer first sees *Reverse of Volume* from the outside through the large Rice Gallery windows: a seeming terrarium for the glowing landscape within. Black spindles of a hairlike substance climb from the form, appearing as tangled vegetation before anchoring into the near invisible suspension above the work. The skeins of black threads create an atmospheric effect, much like rain or mist stuck in time.

Within the gallery space, the form is a clear and dominant force that implores the viewer to walk inside. The viewer enters a glacial cave peppered with black, tadpole-like spots lit from below with diffused light. From the inside, the once hazy structure appears falsely rigid. The craggy, luminous substance vaults from near-knee-height to high above the viewer. However, the structure delicately trembles with minor disturbances in the air. The form interacts just as sensitively with the light pouring in from the windows, revealing touches of green and reflected light from other viewers' clothing.

Onishi shaped this form by creating an irregular ridge of cardboard boxes on scaffolding and laying plastic sheeting over the boxes. He then dripped black hot glue from the support on the ceiling down to the sheeting, anchoring the work. The artist can only drip the glue from an arm's length at a time, requiring regular readjustment of the boxes and

Reviews Continued on Page 28



PHOTO: NASH BAKER @ NASHBAKER.COM

ABOVE: Yasuaki Onishi, *Reverse of Volume RG*, 2012, Commission, Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, Texas. BELOW: Shahzia Sikander, *Hohlraum*, 2011, Ink, Gouache and Graphite on Prepared Paper.

scaffolding. This incremental assembly takes a painstaking three weeks. Onishi cleared the boxes away after the glue had set, leaving only a loose mold of the boxes' topography suspended by thousands of tiny filaments.

Onishi arrived at working in this fashion through his study of sculpture and casting. As he worked with the process, the artist found himself more interested in the mold than the cast object. Emphasizing the ephemeral and negative on a grand scale, Onishi departs from traditional cast-making techniques and arrives at a meditation on landscape, architecture, and sculpture.

Sometimes a means to an end is an end in itself.

—GEOFF SMITH

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

**Contemporary Asian Art:
Texas Connections**

Asia Society Texas Center
April 14–September 16, 2012
www.asiasociety.com

Considering the fact that the Asia Society Texas Center has been active in Houston for over three decades, one might think that by finally gaining a permanent home in the museum district would be a cementing of the old rather than the beginning of something new. But, with the opening of the Yoshio Taniguchi-designed building last month, the Center has already shown itself ready to dive

headlong into redefining itself as not just a facilitator of events, but as a steady source of thoughtful art exhibitions.

In curating the inaugural show spanning the building's first floor, Rice Gallery's Kim Davenport has done an impressive job of balancing the need of representing the vast scope of the Asia Society's swath of the globe against the risk of essentializing the variety of cultures or, alternately, being too myopic. The iconography that constitutes most westerners' impressions of Asian culture such as; crowded street markets, noodles and chopsticks, anime characters, serene landscape painting, porcelain tea services, and calligraphy is present throughout, but the artists work with these tropes as if they constituted merely another material or medium from which to create.

To wit: Huang Yan's *Chinese Shang Shui Tattoo No. 6-2 Series* is a photograph in which a snowy mountain landscape has been painted upon the torso of a man; Shao Fan's *project no. 1 of 2004 chair* deconstructs, literally, a Ming Dynasty-style chair, suspending each piece in clear acrylic; and Vietnam's Dinh Q. Le's *Untitled (SPAM)*, a woven photograph created using traditional technique uses images of war and western product packaging as its source material.

Shahzia Sikander, Pakistan-born and one-time Glassell Core Fellow, offers the most strikingly organic synthesis of traditional and contemporary with her large-scale piece *Hohlraum*. Like a manuscript page, it features neat lines of calligraphy illuminated by delicate

gouache doodles, creating a charming haze amidst which other images emerge. Most significantly, a hand grenade. Japan's Yayoi Kusama's two contributions, the painting *Nets Obsession TTS* and the sculpture *Untitled*, are more cryptically abstract, but delight just as much and extend the aesthetic realm of this small, but exquisitely organized show.

With the grace of a legerdemain trick, Davenport has given the visitor a rewardingly deep experience while making them feel that they have merely dipped their toe into what the Asia Society will be able to offer with their new gallery space.

—DAVID A. FEIL

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



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

**Shifting Paradigms in
Contemporary Ceramics: The
Garth Clark & Mark Del Vecchio
Collection**

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
March 4–June 3, 2012
www.mfah.org

You may know Lucio Fontana as the Italian painter whose slashed canvases echoed the devastation of World War II while violently activating the space behind the surface. But, the best place to see Fontana at his most affecting is a sprawling ceramics show at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Made in 1968, the year of his death, *Spatial Concept, Oval*, a pair of ovoid porcelain sculptures (one black, one white), bears the punctures made familiar by Fontana's *Buchi* (holes) paintings. Yet the ruptures feel all the more wound-like in clay, reminding us of our own vulnerability.

Given clay's importance in myths of the origins of human life, Fontana is hardly the only artist featured in *Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Ceramics: The Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection* to use the material to examine life's fragility. Others include Denise Pelletier, whose installation *Vapours* (2000-05) consists of dozens of porcelain invalid feeders suspended from the ceiling; Araki Takako, whose frayed, battered ceramic Bible pays testament to her Christian brother's slow and painful death from tuberculosis; and Andrew Livingstone, whose *Automateriality* (2006) features a kitschy, found figurine alongside an unfired twin copy that is ostensibly being kept alive only by a feeding tube of molding slip, but which degrades over the course of the exhibition.

All this mortality notwithstanding, *Shifting Paradigms*, which Cindi Strauss, MFAH curator of modern and contemporary decorative arts and design, organized to spotlight the museum's 2007 acquisition of the dealer-scholar-collector couple's extraordinary collection, largely strikes a celebratory tone, not a funereal one.

Rightly so. The show, which includes works by relative newcomers alongside such seminal figures as Peter Voulkos, Ken Price, Ron Nagle, Beatrice Wood, Adrian Saxe and Viola Frey, highlights a major coup for the MFAH while giving contemporary craft a moment in the sun.

Typically exiled to the MFAH's off-campus house museums and stepchild spaces on campus, decorative art objects occasionally get to come out and play in grander settings, but usually in multidisciplinary shows that break down barriers and sometimes hierarchies between media.

PAINTED SCULPTURE BY RICARDO PANIAGUA

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"Candy Cane Neo-Geo Centrifuge Forever and Ever" Lacquer on Douglas Fir 9 in. x 9 in. x 9 in. (2012)



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Lucio Fontana, *Concetto Spaziale / Spatial Concept*, 1968, Porcelain. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio Collection, gift of Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio.

Salutary as those exhibitions can be, it turns out a sprawling ceramics “only” show is perfectly capable of trampling the art-craft divide in lively fashion--encompassing practices and aesthetics from functional to sculptural, from allegorical to conceptual, from messy to minimalist. At any rate, the works on view end up incorporating virtually every medium you can think of, even photography and video. That’s how omnivorous ceramics and the eye of the dealer-collector couple who amassed this extraordinary collection can be.

Still, I kept coming back to the Fontana, just as Fontana kept coming back to clay. It was the only medium he stuck with his entire career, in contrast to similarly celebrated artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Anthony Caro and Arman, who also make memorable appearances in *Shifting Paradigms* but whose engagements with clay have been more occasional. In the hefty catalogue, Clark writes that Fontana developed his *Buchi* and *Tagli* (cuts) in clay “long before they reached the canvas” and calls Fontana “arguably the most important ceramicist of the twentieth century.”

That startling assessment cries out to be substantiated in a Fontana ceramics survey, one of several projects it’s easy to imagine arising from the Clark-Del Vecchio windfall.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

REVIEWS CONTINUED

COURTESY OF HIRAM BUTLER GALLERY



Jasper Johns, *Two Flags*, 1980, Lithograph.

Mike Beradino: *Freq Out*

Art Palace

April 13–May 19, 2012

www.artpalacegallery.com

To the naked eye, Mike Beradino's acrylic paintings at Art Palace look like the kind of simple images the gallery says he used to create on a Commodore 64 in the early 1980s; animals or objects rendered in basic outlines consisting of keyboard characters. Hold up an iPad or smartphone, however, and a cartoon-like version of a rat, snake, skull or bomb pops into view: The paintings function like QR codes, the matrix barcodes found in advertising that require a smartphone or iPad to read.

The effect is even more dramatic and slightly unnerving in the case of a pedestal that's missing a sculpture until your app reveals the bust of a man in a green T-shirt.

The paintings' imagery is less interesting than the tension between the antiquated technology they evoke and the perhaps soon-to-be antiquated technology and the Facebook-era penchant for sharing used to view them. They also highlight and take advantage of a lingering digital divide: As ubiquitous as smart-phones are, not everyone has one, and not

everyone who does has downloaded or enabled the app that allows it to scan the codes.

This meant that Beradino's opening reception bridged traditional and digital forms of social interaction as viewers huddled over shared devices, paying attention to their phones, the art *and* each other. If you check out the show, bring friends, Facebook or otherwise, to share the virtual experience in real time. Just make sure at least one of you has an app for that.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

Jasper Johns: *Two Flags and Prints*

Hiram Butler Gallery

April 14–May 19, 2012

www.dbhbg.com

For some painters, printmaking is merely a means of reproducing their images so they can make them available to collectors who can't afford their paintings. Not so Jasper Johns, whose endless experimentation has transformed his images of what he famously called “things the mind already knows”— flags, targets and maps, to name a few – into what he described in a 1964 interview as “a thing's not

being what it was. With its becoming something other than what it is, with any moment in which one identifies a thing precisely and with the slipping away of that moment, with at any moment seeing or saying and letting it go at that.”

Each of Johns' three *Two Flags* prints – two lithographs, one heavily worked silkscreen – on view at Hiram Butler Gallery, has that elusive quality. They keep what appealed to Johns about flags – a readymade uniform composition – even as his restless, crackling line makes each flag take start to become something else.

In the next room, Johns' one-time lover, the late Robert Rauschenberg, anchors a satisfying group show called, simply, *Prints*. For some of the artists included, such as Fred Sandback, Sol LeWitt and James Turrell, printmaking feels incidental to their main body of work. But, Rauschenberg's endless capacity for surprising juxtapositions and his seeming desire to bring as much of the world as possible into each picture find perfect expression in lithographs like *Landmark* (1968), which he made using images from Life magazine.

Other highlights include Agnes Martin's meditative grids, which lend themselves perfectly to their 12-by-inch format here; a John Cage score printed on smoked paper, reiterating his embrace of chance; and an achingly beautiful smudgy gray Cy Twombly lithograph.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

John Adelman: *Elixir*

Darke Gallery

April 13–May 5, 2012

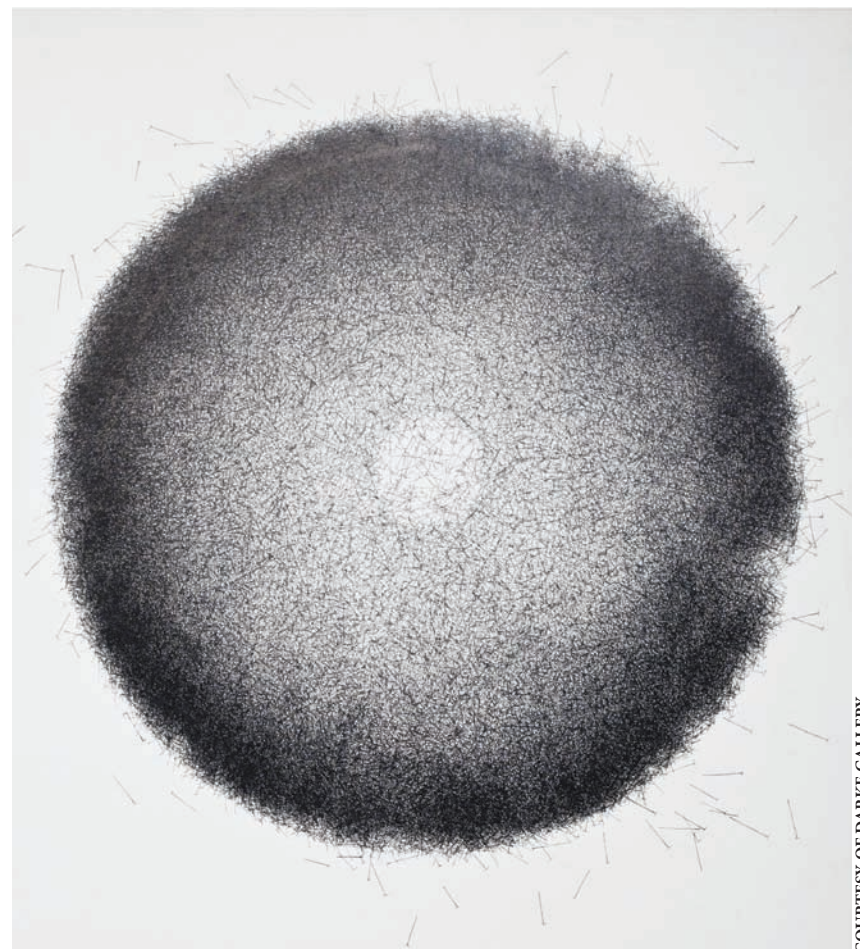
www.darkegallery.com

Despite getting off to a seemingly unpromising start gel ink pens as the medium, bone-dry conceptualism as the method John Adelman's obsessive drawings at Darke Gallery have a delicacy and beauty that makes looking at them a surprisingly rewarding experience.

What looks from a distance like a dandelion beginning to disperse turns out to be, on closer inspection, what its title says it is: *47,615 nails* or, more accurately, Adelman's layered tracings of thousands nails. (I'm content to take his word for the exact number.) Another drawing, *Erased Painting (46,573 paintchips)*, includes not just 46,573 paintchip tracings but the word “paintchip” printed it 46,573 times.

In text-only drawings, Adelman moves through the dictionary, writing each word and its definitions until completing the formula; each new work takes its title from the last word of the previous drawing. Adelman was working on the word “elixir” when gallery owner Linda Darke asked him for the show's title. The word has a nice ring to it that goes well with Adelman's concoction.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY



John Adelman, *47,615 Nails*.

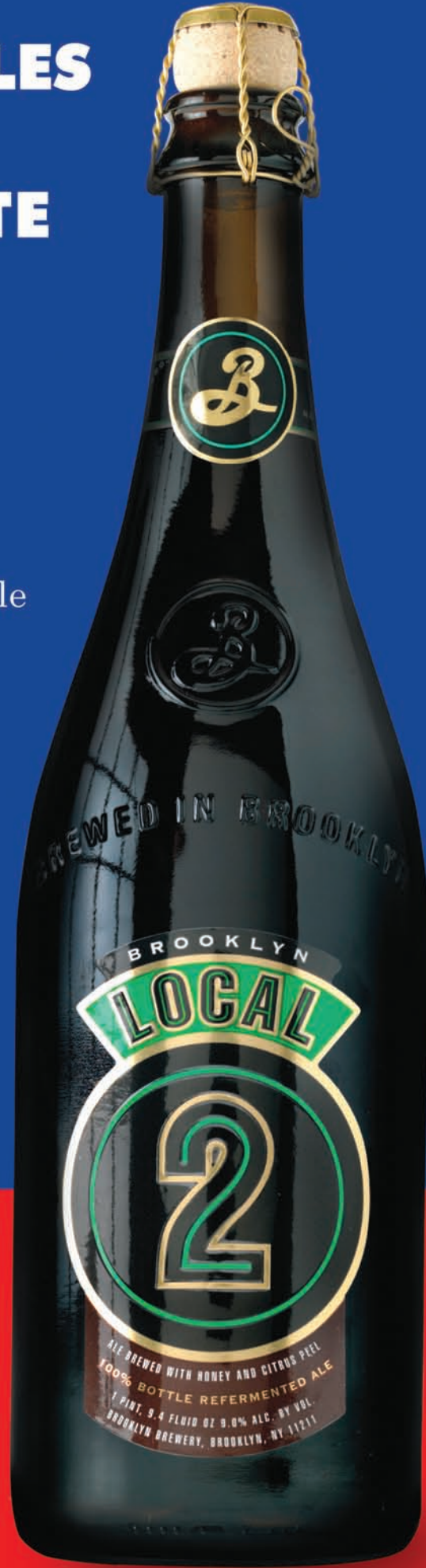
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