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EDITOR'S REMARKS



The poetry of numbers surfaces this month.

World War I ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. On this Veterans Day, November 11, *WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* opens at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. As a proud daughter of a decorated WW II veteran, I will be there. Devon Britt-Darby fills us in on this show – some 10 years in the making – while Joseph Wozny highlights the five films that are part of *War on Film*.

Birthdays abound. Rice University is having centennial celebrations; Da Camera and The Menil Collection turned 25; Diverse-Works and Inprint turned 30; and SWAMP is now 35. Congrats to all who made it to these milestones.

Chris Johnson tells us about 600 guitars and other assorted refurbished instruments that end up in the hands of young musicians through Children's Music Foundation and Music Doing Good.

Some 40 films will screen this month at the Houston Cinema Arts Festival. Nancy Zastudil spoke with executive director Trish Rigdon and artistic director Richard Herskowitz to get an overview.

After an eight-year stellar career, Houston Ballet Principal Amy Fote says farewell. Choreographer Karen Stokes goes short form, trading the evening length for five short pieces in *Vine Leaf Dances*. Holiday gems? Houston's got them, too many to count, so I found four more to add to your calendar.

This month's Art/Ad Bomb, by Houston artist Anne J. Regan, may be the easiest one yet to confuse with a real ad, so look carefully, and to complete your experience of the piece, pay a visit to the establishment it mentions. You can also visit Regan in cyberspace at annejregan.com.

That's November – 30 days: fill each with some art.

– NANCY
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Cover Image:
 Cecil Beaton, English, 1904–1980, *A Royal Navy sailor on board HMS Alcantara uses a portable sewing machine to repair a signal flag during a voyage to Sierra Leone (detail)*, March 1942, Gelatin silver print, printed 2012, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation © The Imperial War Museums.

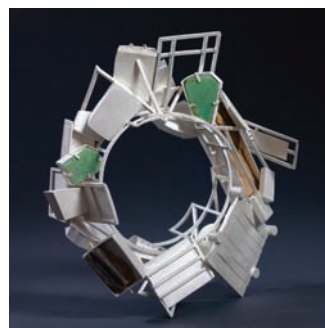
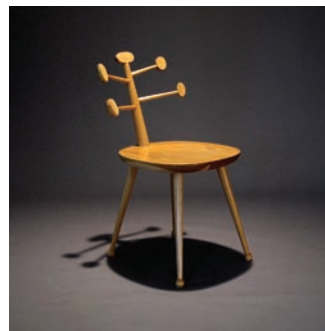
INSIDE THIS ISSUE NOVEMBER 2012

- 7 ARTIFACTS
- 8 COVER: WAR PIX @ MFAH
- 13 FILM: BATTLE LESSONS
- 15 FILM: SOCIETY OF CINEMA
- 17 KAREN STOKES
- 18 WORTH THE TRIP
- 20 AMY FOTE
- 21 KIDS WITH INSTRUMENTS
- 23 HOLIDAY GEMS
- 25 CULTURAL WARRIOR
- 26 REVIEWS

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ARTIFACTS

FOND FAREWELL

Theater LaB Houston bids farewell to its Alamo venue on December 2, 2012. Bayou City Concert Musicals will present the 2012 Kim Hupp Award to Gerald Blaise LaBita, founder and producing director of Theater LaB Houston, at a luncheon at the Ensemble Theatre, 3535 Main, on Friday, November 2, 2012. www.theaterlabhouston.com

ARTADIA AWARDS

The two recipients of Artadia Awards 2012 Houston at the \$15,000 level are Jillian Conrad and Carl Suddath. The three recipients of the \$5,000 awards are Francesca Fuchs, Seth Mittag, and Jang Soon Im. www.artadia.org

OH, OPERA!

Opera in the Heights (OH!) sadly announced the passing of William Weibel, artistic director from 1998–2010. Weibel transformed a small neighborhood organization into a significant regional opera company. Maestro Weibel led OH! through a period of growth and success, setting the standard for the future of the company. operaintheheights.org

BALLET BRIEF

Houston Ballet's James Gotesky has been promoted to soloist. He will be dancing in the Jubilee of Dance and in Ben Stevenson's *The Nutcracker*. HBII dancers Michael Ryan and Bridget Kuhns recently returned from a trip to Australia, where they performed as guests artists in a prestigious competition organized by the Australian Institute of Classical Dance. www.houstonballet.org

ARTS APPOINTMENT

Gary Tinterow, Director of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has appointed Deborah L. Roldán as Assistant Director of Exhibitions. Ms. Roldán, most recently curator and exhibition coordinator at the Fundación Juan March in Madrid, joined the staff of the MFAH on October 8. She will coordinate exhibition planning and relationships with sister institutions, with oversight of related publications, programming and installations. www.mfah.org

STONE SEASON

Hope Stone announces the second full season of its HopeWorks residency, presenting new artists/choreographers, including Donna Meadows and Neil Ellis Orts, Susan Blair and Amy Llana. www.hopestoneinc.org

ENSEMBLE EARNS

The Ensemble Theatre, now in its 36th season, has received a \$75,000 matching challenge grant from Beck and Ralph S. O'Connor. www.ensemblehouston.com

BABB TAPPED

Joe Angel Babb is the new director of education at Society for the Performing Arts. www.spahouston.org

STAUDER SHIFTS

Sarah Stauder is the new executive director of Aurora Picture Show. An experienced arts administrator, Stauder was both curator of exhibitions and collections and executive director of the Charles Allis/Villa Terrace Art Museums in Milwaukee, WI over a period of six years.

WIND WINNER

WindSync was named a winner of the 2012 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition with the Adventurous Artist Prize. www.windsync.org

INNOVATION FUNDED

The University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts recently launched a new program to fund innovative projects driven by the UH School of Art, Blaffer Art Museum, Creative Writing Program, Moores School of Music, and School of Theatre and Dance. In an effort to spur imaginative, transformational programming and underscore the role of UH as a generator of cutting edge artistic production, the Innovation Grants Program was launched in conjunction with the university's UH Arts initiative, and funded in part by a major three-year grant from Houston Endowment, Inc.

DIVERSE MOVES

DiverseWorks opens in their new Midtown location with *Franklin Evans*: houstontohouston on November 16, 2012. www.diverseworks.org

NOBLE IN NY

NobleMotion Dance, iMEE and Revolve Dance Company performed in New York City on October 12 & 13 as part of The Dance Gallery Festival. www.dancegalleryfestival.com

BRIDGE IN FLUX

The Houston-based performance collective, The Bridge Club, performed *Loose Snare* in Atlanta as part of Flux Night 2012. www.thebridgeclub.net

DANCERS TOUR

University of Houston faculty members Teresa Chapman and Becky Valls participated in the Harvest Chicago Contemporary Dance Festival Oct. 5-7th in Chicago. Valls travels to Atlanta in November to set a new work on CORE.



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Amy Fote and James Gotesky in Houston Ballet's production of *Madame Butterfly*



[COVER STORY]

Not What They Saw in the Movies

MFAH's *WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY*
Surveys Combat, from Advent to Aftermath

Standing over a model of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Upper Brown Foundation Gallery, MFAH photography curator Anne Wilkes Tucker reaches into one of the dollhouse-sized rooms to pluck out one of hundreds of miniature copies of war-related photographs that line the maquette's walls.

"This is one of the most horrific pictures in the show," she says of the 1991 photo by American photojournalist Kenneth Jarecke. "This is from the first Gulf War, and it's an Iraqi soldier burned to a crisp in his tank. Jarecke was with a press officer, who asked him, 'Why the hell are you making that picture?' and he said it was because he wanted people like his mother to know that war was not what they saw in the movies."

Drawn from combats from the Mexican-American War to the present day, the sweeping *WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* presents nearly 500 photographs, books, magazines, albums and photographic equipment, reflecting every process from daguerreotypes to cell-phone snapshots. They're drawn from thousands of images Tucker and fellow exhibition curators Will Michels and Natalie Zelt considered for a project whose origins lay in the MFAH's 2002 acquisition of an iconic photograph. (Michels is a photographer and instructor at the Glassell School of Art; Zelt is an MFAH photography curatorial assistant.)

Purported to be the first print made from Joe Rosenthal's negative of *Old Glory Goes Up on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima* (1945), the accession prompted Michels to ask Tucker why the MFAH had so few war photographs.

"I remember jokingly telling him it was because I was a girl," Tucker says. "I asked him to put together a list of what we should acquire, and then when I got that list and started looking at the books on war photography, I just didn't think they were that helpful, so that's how all this came about."

Noticing recurring patterns in certain kinds of pictures across conflicts, the curators organized the exhibition into 26 thematic sections starting with the advent of war and continuing through recruitment, embarkation, and training to combat and its aftermath, including both military and civilian deaths, grief, property damage, medical care, prisoners, refugees, and executions, to the war's end, memorials, and remembrance. (The various stages come together in a section devoted to the Battle of Iwo Jima.)

Mindful of the risks of a thematic approach "diminishing each picture's individual complexities and histories," the curators took pains to address the widely varying roles assumed by each of the more than 280 photographers from 28 nations.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MFAH

Clockwise, from top:

Josiah Barnes, Australian (1858–1921), *Embarkation of HMAT Ajana, Melbourne, July 8, 1916*, gelatin silver print (printed 2012), on loan from the Australian War Memorial (AWM PB0084)

Arkady Shaikhet, Russian (1898–1959), *Partisan Girl, 1942*, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Marion Mundy. © Arkady Shaikhet Estate, Moscow, courtesy Nailya Alexander Gallery, NYC

Mark A. Grimshaw, American (born 1968), *First Cut, Iraq, July 2004*, Inkjet print, printed 2012, Courtesy of the photographer. © Mark Grimshaw



Left: Dmitri Baltermants, Russian (1912-1990), *Attack-Eastern Front WWII, 1941*, gelatin silver print, printed 1960, the MFAH, gift of Michael Poulos in honor of Mary Kay Poulos at "One Great Night in November, 1997." © Russian Photo Association, Razumberg Emil Anasovich

Below: Thomas Hoepker, German (born 1936), *A US Marine drill sergeant delivers a severe reprimand to a recruit, Parris Island, South Carolina*, from the series *US Marine Corps boot camp, 1970, 1970*, inkjet print, Thomas Hoepker / Magnum Photos. © Thomas Hoepker / Magnum Photos



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MFAH



Eastern Front WWII (1941), which Dmitri Baltermants shot from the trench as troops charged over him; and Rosenthal's *Over the Top—American Troops Move onto the Beach at Iwo Jima* (1945), which shows infantrymen emerging from their landing craft into enemy fire. (The show even includes examples of fake photographs made to satisfy demand for images of skirmishes such as World War I biplane dogfights that the cameras of the day couldn't capture.)

But there are also sections devoted to the daily routine of war, as glimpsed in Sir Cecil Beaton's 1942 photograph of a Royal Navy soldier at a sewing machine; and to the tension-filled moments accompanying "the wait," as depicted in Susan Meisales's *Muchachos Await Counter Attack by The National Guard, Matagalpa, Nicaragua* (1978), which shows masked street fighters poised with Molotov cocktails in an alleyway.

For veterans and active-duty military personnel, free admission to the specially-ticketed exhibition is being underwritten by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation. Tucker says she hopes the museum lets other viewers use their ticket to return if one visit isn't enough to take it all in. (MFAH spokesperson Mary Haus says once the show opens, "we will have a better sense of how long it takes guests to view the show and whether they will benefit from a repeat visit.")

"Artists and amateur photographers make pictures for personal reasons; military and commercial photographers must work with some higher authority, be it an editor, news-agency director, or various levels of commanding officers, who may have their own ideas of what types of pictures should emerge, or even whether a photographer should be present," Tucker writes in the catalogue.

Naturally, one of the show's most extensive sections is devoted to "the fight." It includes images such as *Attack—*

"I don't think anybody can get through (the show) in one pass, and we know it's too big in that way," Tucker says. "But we just felt that if we were going to do it, we had to do it. We felt we had to convey all the ways in which war affects people – us – over time, so that's what the museum's letting us do."

Having worked on *WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY* for nearly a third of her 35-year career at the MFAH, Tucker once assumed she'd retire soon after wrapping it up, but plans for a new building devoted to modern and contemporary art are keeping her around. She's also working on a catalogue of the collection and thinking about how the MFAH can get more of it on the Web – and where it needs to go from here.

"In 35 years, we've acquired 26,000 photographs," she says. "It's time to pull back and look and see what you've got and what you might still need to acquire."

The MFAH's deep holdings include 20th-century American photography, the first area in which Tucker started seriously collecting; Czech, German, and French avant-garde work; and, increasingly, Asian and Latin American photography. Many of those pictures came as a result of the MFAH's exhibitions over the years, since "it just seemed that if we were going to do all that research and all that thought going into a subject, then it was worth putting in the collection, so we've acquired out of every show." (*WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY* is a case in point; the MFAH has acquired a third of the show's nearly 500 objects.)

CONTINUE ON PAGE 10

Lower left: Joe Rosenthal, American (1911–2006), *Old Glory Goes Up on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, February 23, 1945*, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Manfred Heiting Collection, gift of the Kevin and Lesley Lilly Family. © AP / Wide World Photos

WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

As for new acquisitions, Tucker says assistant photography curator Yasufumi Nakamori is working on “the very contemporary” and on strengthening the MFAH’s Japanese holdings, while she’s considering acquiring more 19th-century work and scrutinizing the museum’s Latin American pictures with an eye on how well they “complement the extraordinary collection” being built by Mari Carmen Ramírez, the MFAH’s curator of Latin American art.

In February, photography will figure into *Abstract Impulse*, a Ramírez-organized show that, like *American Made: 250 Years of American Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* – on view through Jan. 1 – will include works across disciplines. Curators hope to use that approach in some of the new building’s permanent-collection galleries, Tucker says.

“We sat around and threw out themes, and we didn’t have any problem coming up with some very serious – not just cute themes, but very serious, contemplative themes – that would investigate ideas that artists themselves had investigated across media,” she says. “That’s what Mari Carmen’s show is – one of the first.”

– DEVON BRITT-DARBY

WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY: *Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath*
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
November 11-February 3
www.mfah.org

Above: Alfred Palmer, American (birth date unknown), *Women aircraft workers finishing transparent bomber noses for fighter and reconnaissance planes at Douglas Aircraft Co. Plant in Long Beach, California, 1942*, gelatin silver print, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Will Michels in honor of his sister, Genevieve Namerow

Susan Meiselas, American (born 1948), *Muchachos Await Counter Attack by The National Guard, Matagalpa, Nicaragua, 1978*, chromogenic print (printed 2006), the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase with funds provided by Photo Forum 2006. © Susan Meiselas / Magnum Photos



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Shimomura Crossing the Delaware (detail), by Roger Shimomura,
acrylic on canvas, 2010. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution;
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THE WYETHS ACROSS TEXAS



N.C. (Newell Convers) Wyeth (1882-1945). *The Little Posse Started Out on its Journey, the Wiry Marshal First*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Gift of Mrs. H.S. (Johnie) Griffin.

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[FILM]

BATTLE LESSONS

War on Film at MFAH

In conjunction with its exhibit, *WAR/PHOTOGRAPHY: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston presents *War on Film*, a series of five films chronicling armed conflict in the 20th century. Given the extensive catalog of violence rendered on film, it seems hard to pick just five, but the selections cover important ground.

Paths of Glory, one of Stanley Kubrick's earlier films, is a profound moral drama. Made in 1957, Kubrick's film critiques the outdated patriarchal understandings of war and warriors of the First World War era. A "noble" French general (the actors playing Frenchman speak English) sends his men into a suicide mission, but when the mission is deemed futile, their commanding officer, played wonderfully by Kirk Douglas, orders a retreat to save the lives of his men. The old war guard accuses the soldiers of being cowardly and sentences some of them to death in order to make an example. Douglas does his best to step in the way of the senseless executions; it's a powerful statement for human life and against the pretense of nobility in war.

Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* is the most critically controversial of the films. The emotionally intense (IMO pointlessly gratuitous) Russian roulette scenes serve as the central image of the film, which is ethically troubling because it's never been shown that the Viet Cong ever made any American soldiers actually play Russian roulette. Directors of war films usually have enough terror to work with without making stuff up, but according to Cimino, it doesn't matter because his film is not political. Can anything involving war avoid being political? It's excessive and an hour too long, but I enjoyed its depiction of a blue-collar steel town in Pennsylvania. My misgivings aside, the performances of Robert De Niro, Meryl Streep, Christopher Walken, and John Cazale are top notch.

I still remember the first time I saw Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*. It was the first so-called "art house" film I'd ever seen. I was hooked.

La Grande Illusion glows, visually and emotionally. I couldn't believe that a movie made in 1937 could be so sharp and expansive. Three French officers in the First World War drift between German prison camps trying to alleviate the agony of boredom by perpetually attempting escape. It's a war movie, but instead of battles, the struggles are between upper and lower classes and their respective ideologies.

The aristocratic German officers give special treatment to Capitaine de Boileidieu, an aristocrat, while looking down on working class Maréchal and his Jewish friend Rosenthal. The performances are heartfelt and moving.

Watching *La Grande Illusion* is like stepping back in time to watch the old world order in its last throes. It's a beautiful, nuanced eulogy to nobility. I wouldn't miss the chance to see a quality print of the film.

Although it was made in 1966, *The Battle of Algiers* is still urgently relevant to global politics. It chronicles the 1956-57 conflicts between the French Algerian authorities and the National Liberation Front during the Algerian War (the Algerian people's struggle for independence while occupied as a French colony). This, along with several other struggles, marked a new phase in the way war was conducted – most notably the rise of civilian terrorist tactics and the widespread use of torture and intelligence to undermine that activity.

Although it was banned in France for 10 years after its release, the film isn't biased (it's hard not to feel sympathetic to the occupied in colonial struggles). The motivations, tactics, and costs of both sides' violence are clearly investigated with a nominal amount of dramatic flair.

In 2003, the Pentagon went so far as to screen the film in an effort to better understand the war in Iraq. The flyer read, "How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas ... The French have a plan. It succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film." In order to begin to understand the complicated mess that is foreign affairs in the age of constant post-



Julien Carette, Marcel Dalio, Jean Gabin, Pierre Fresnay in Jean Renoir's *GRAND ILLUSION* (1937).
Courtesy: Rialto Pictures/StudioCanal

colonial conflict, this film should be required viewing.

Went the Day Well? is a charming British film made before the end of World War II about a hypothetical situation in which German troops infiltrate a quaint country town posing as British. In theory, it seems like a sort of nationalist propaganda piece, but it's a novel idea and really quite good. The ordinary townspeople must band together to rise up and take back their town. And that's just what they do.

The scenes and spectacles of conflict have changed immensely in the past 100 years. The wind has blown over the soil of the trenches, dispersing it along with the aristocratic class and the nobility it carried. These days, soldiers pilot unmanned drones with Xbox controllers, which might as well be from a science fiction story told during WWI. While the tactics change, the ethical complications and contradictions are never resolved and every moment is a new catastrophe of ethics and the lack thereof.

Reconsidering history is stepping outside of our assured present, creating the possibility to think and consider, "how is this moment alike and different from the past, and why?" *War on Film* is a good chance to reconsider that history, and hopefully reconsider the present.

-JOSEPH WOZNY

Joseph Wozny is a writer and musician living in Houston.

War on Film
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www.mfah.org/films

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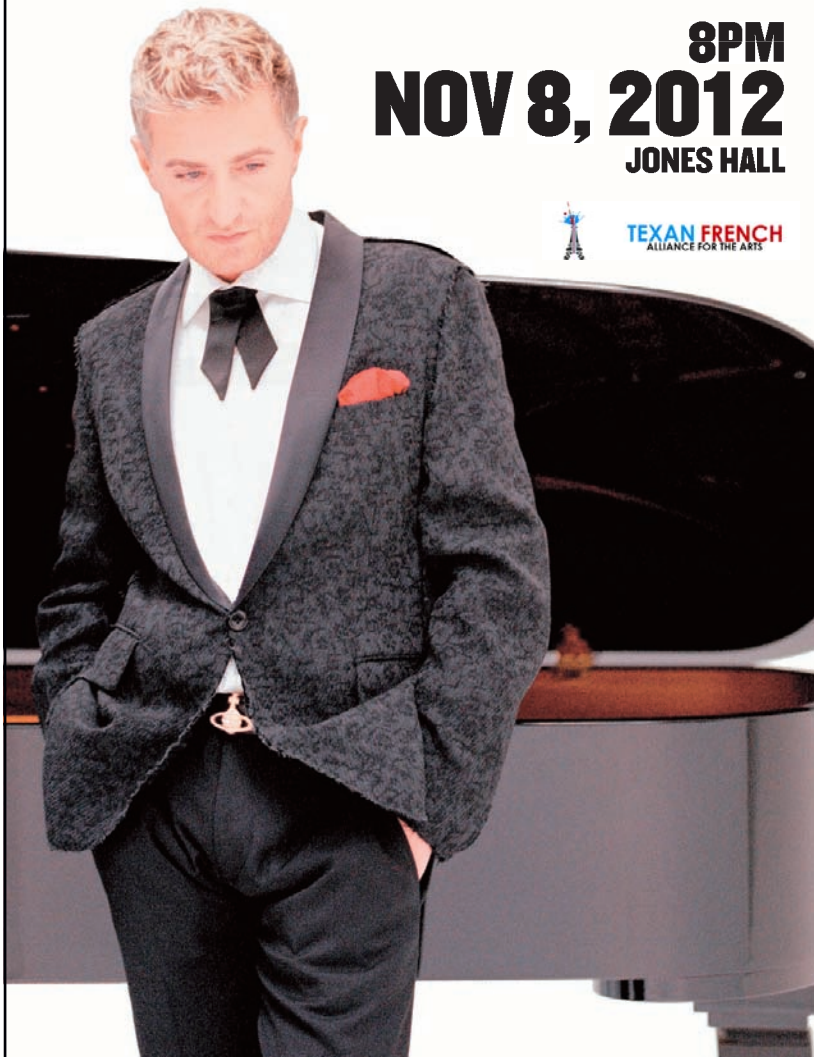
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A-R-S
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[FILM]

THE SOCIETY OF CINEMA

Houston Cinema Arts Festival Brings It All Together

The art of film is a major focus this month as the Houston Cinema Arts Society presents its fourth annual Houston Cinema Arts Festival (HCAF). The festival has created a niche for itself by being the only one in the world to emphasize films by and about artists. This year, with the addition of live music and film performances, HCAF continues to challenge traditional film viewing expectations.



PHOTO COURTESY NIGHT HOUSE HUNTER



PHOTO COURTESY ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA



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HCAF offers five days of the best-of-the-best in narrative, documentary and experimental cinema, collaborating with numerous art organizations and venues in Houston. And as the city is becoming recognized as a major art destination, HCAF executive director Trish Rigdon recognizes the festival as playing a leading role in that transformation. She explains that one major goal of HCAF is to become the premiere screening festival for artists and art lovers both inside and outside of Houston. And with nationally renowned film programmer Richard Herskowitz as HCAF artistic director, achieving that goal is highly likely.

Herskowitz's HCAF program selections balance the star-studded entertainment nature of major releases with the experimental creative pursuits of emerging independent artists by presenting works from established actors-turned-emerging directors, as well as projects that combine current high tech digital productions with earlier formats like 16 mm.

"The genre of artist films is endlessly fascinating to me and, I believe, to others," says Herskowitz. "As often as possible, we have filmmakers in conversation with the audience. We have live performances. And we are increasingly featuring media art installations that are interactive experiences for audiences."

Amidst this year's filmmakers and special guests (yes, famous ones like Robert Redford) and the over 40 screenings are two highly anticipated programmatic elements of this year's HCAF: Cinema on the Verge and Women Making Movies.

Cinema on the Verge is a selection of interactive media installations and screenings that honor the historical importance and contemporary relevance of 16 mm film – a format that is on the verge of obsolescence – paired with new works that push cinema to its creative edge. For festival organizers, there is a sense of urgency for the public to see the selection of works in this program because the non-digital cinematic 16 mm format is quickly disappearing as the necessary production materials and presentation modes become less available.

Cinema on the Verge is centralized at 4411 Montrose (the building also serves as the festival headquarters) utilizing both floors of the building to present work from artists that are engaged with 16 mm film in one way or another. The upstairs Cinema 16 Screening Room is devoted to the presentation of a series of 16 mm programs and includes works from film greats Andy Warhol and Stan Brakhage, as well as videos from featured artists whose works are installed in the downstairs gallery.

Cinema on the Verge also has a satellite component, presented in partnership with Project Row Houses and Aurora Picture Show, that offers two exciting films examining individual human identities: *whiteonwhite: algorithmic noir* from Eve Sussman, and *Question Bridge: Black Males* by Chris Johnson, a project that extends ideas of "blackness."

If you're not already intrigued, imagine being immersed in cinematic worlds of a haunting Victorian-like dollhouse, the beauty of Niagara Falls, meditations in the Pacific, and kaleidoscopic landscapes from around the world. Add to that the silvery, glistening beauty of 16mm film and Cinema on the Verge is poised to make the festival's "must see" list.

Another laudable aspect of this year's festival, along with Women In Film & Television, is the tribute to independent film distributors Women Making Movies and Milestone Films. Special guests include director Lourdes Portillo and Milestone Film founders Dennis Doros and Amy Heller who present HCAF film programs that examine women-made works, addressing topics such as the wide-reaching influence of Steve McQueen, Latino identity and the memory of cultural icon Selena, jazz, choreography, Beat poetry, and more.

Herskowitz emphasizes the importance of Women Making Movies HCAF program and independent activity in general. Had it been left up only to the mainstream film-studio production system, the history and support of women in and for film may not have existed. He sums up his mission. "It is the role of art media institutions, such as individual festivals, to provide a counterweight to the mainstream."

– NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator and freelance writer who can't seem to stay away from Houston.

November 7-11, 2012
Houston Cinema Arts Festival
4411 Montrose
Houston, TX
www.cinemartsociety.org

Left, from top:
Still from Stacey Steer's *Night Hunter House*
Still from Shirley Clark's *Ornette: Made in America*
The Light Surgeons in *SuperEverything**



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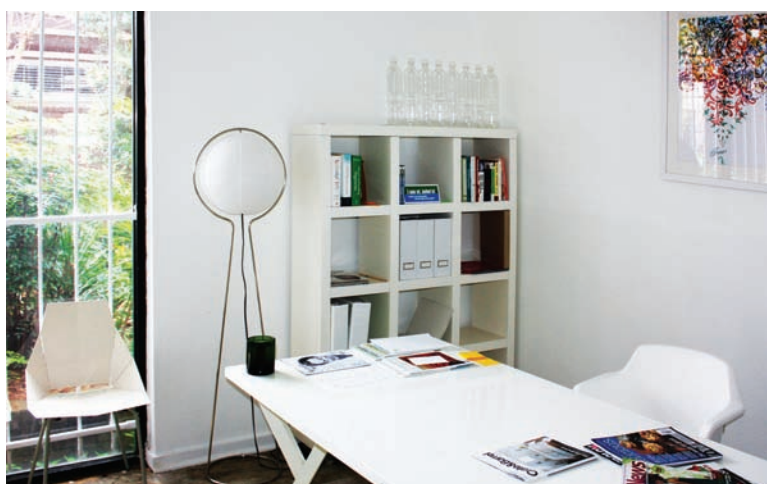
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SHORT STORY DANCES

Karen Stokes on Vine Leaf Dances

Choreographer Karen Stokes switches to short form in Vine Leaf Dances, which includes three premieres – *Just Us*, *Midnight and Distreston & Balia* – and one repertory work, *Prelude to Three Temperaments*. As artistic director of Karen Stokes Dance (KSD) and head of the dance division at University of Houston, Stokes is one busy dance maker and educator. She brings A + C editor Nancy Wozny into her creative whirlwind.



A + C: I've always suspected that dances grow on vines. Tell us about the title "Vine Leaf Dances."

Karen Stokes: The title is derived from the word "vignettes", referring to "stories that are so small they can be written on a vine leaf." Vine Leaf Dances features short story dances, ranging from five minutes to 25 minutes in length.

I love the idea that short form dances are a type of short story. I never thought about it that way. These days, everyone does evening-length work, and often without the

skills to sustain an entire evening, in the end making it harder for choreographers to develop their voice. What is your attachment to an evening of shorter pieces? I mean, really, Paul Taylor still does that.

The field does seem to be in a rather long trend of choreographers creating evening lengths. One of the challenges with the trend, as you point out, is that emerging choreographers move rapidly into producing evening length projects, often before they are ready for this challenge. Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, Martha Graham, and Trisha Brown have created incredible short works. It's good to remember our dance history.

What are some of the upsides of shorts?

I like works that have been carefully edited. I love being able to focus on quality rather than quantity – to edit—and short works encourage this process.

Talk a bit about your process. How do you know if you have a short piece or an evening length on your hands?

My process, as it has developed over the years, has been one in which I first develop short works that range in length from 5-15 minutes. The evening length projects that I have created over the last 12 years all began as short works. By the time I get to an evening length, I have fleshed out some solid and complete passages, which I believe helps make the evening substantive. In Vine Leaf

Dances, the second half of the show is billed as a "One Act" dance.

There you go with those literary terms again. Bring us into Distreston & Balia. And can you explain the title?

Distreston & Balia is actually two short works that bookend each other with contrasting concepts. The idea for this 'One Act dance-drama' was born with the creation of the 12 minute *Distreston* in 2008, and we are now in the process of creating *Balia*. The concept of this work was to explore two contrasting states of mind theatrically: one that is inhabited by chains of thoughts that cannot be "slowed down," leading to stress and darkness. The second state of mind represents a world of equanimity and balance.

As you have pointed out in the past, my work tends to anchor in a sense of place and community. These places can be real (as in *Hometown* - where Houston was the place) or they can be imaginary (as in *The Pronoun Pieces*). In exploring *Distreston*, I came up with a costume idea that automatically created a village -



PHOTO COURTESY KAREN STOKES DANCE

strange and dark village from sometime in the past. *Balia* represents the opposite - a clear light place - perhaps in the future.

I'm excited to see *Prelude to Three Temperaments* again. Something about its whimsical charms makes me think it's a signature Karen Stokes dance. For you, too?



PHOTO BY BUDDY STEVES

Prelude was the first piece I created after producing *Hometown* at Zilkha Hall in 2006. I credit the music of Stephen Mon-

tague for inspiring me to make the work in the midst of a large dose of post-production fatigue. The fast, quirky movement of *Prelude* contrasts the individual with a sense of togetherness. I think almost everything I have ever choreographed is about the uniqueness of the individual within a coherent community. So this is definitely a signature component. Finally, I would

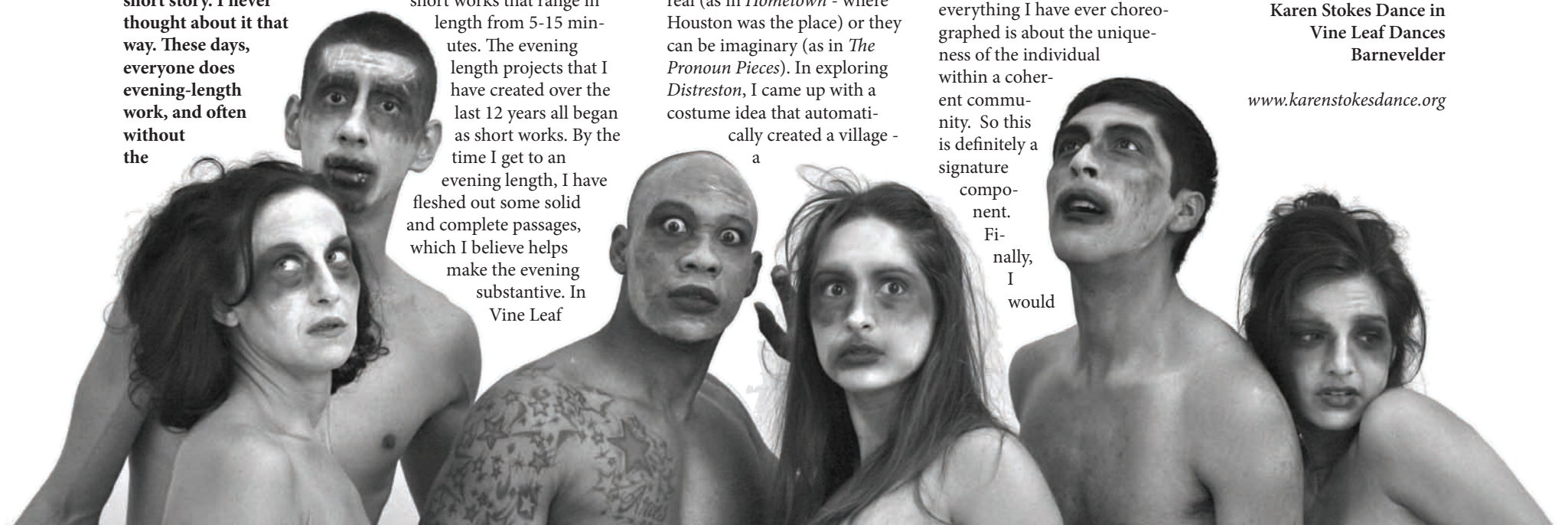
note the work has a "light" personality, and God knows I love to laugh! I like that you pointed out that it is a signature work – it has made me think.

Apparently, you have a day job. How do you manage your work at UH and a company?

Right now, I am working hard to identify out new ways to build the infrastructure of KSD. Growing the infrastructure of KSD will provide necessary relief in the juggling of my two jobs. So, we are working on that now. I'm talking about salaries for general manager, public relations, and benefits for dancers. That being said, I must emphasize how incredibly lucky I am, doing the work I love in two incredible ways: making dances and teaching dancers. How amazing is that?

**November 15-17, 2012
Karen Stokes Dance in
Vine Leaf Dances
Barnevelder**

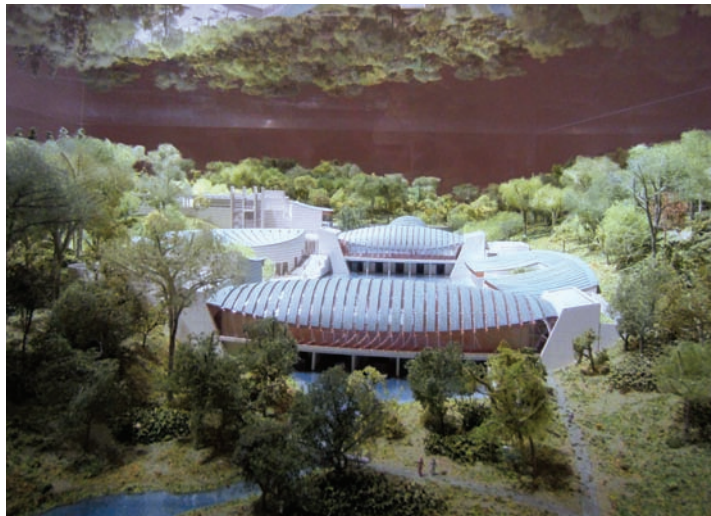
www.karenstokesdance.org



PHOTOS COURTESY KAREN STOKES DANCE

Crystal Bridges Museum Of American Art

I didn't get around to making the pilgrimage to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art – the Bentonville, Arkansas, institution founded by Walmart heiress and collector Alice Walton that opened just shy of a year ago – until mid-October, when it launched its new exhibitions. So I can't give you the lowdown on which permanent-collection galleries have been rehung or which works have been rotated in or out of view.



But the locals can, judging from conversations I overheard in the impressive crowd of fellow visitors whose accents suggested they hadn't traveled far. Rarely – too rarely – in big-city museums do I hear someone saying “that Marsden Hartley wasn't here last time,” but I got used to hearing variations on that theme over and over again at Crystal Bridges, which many people were revisiting to take stock of their museum's progress. (Facilitating those repeat visits, admission is free, courtesy of Walmart.)

That experience, which giped anecdotally with Real Clear Arts blogger Judith H. Dobrzynski's recent report that Crystal Bridges surpassed 500,000 visitors in late August – less than 10 full months after it opened – and that two-thirds of them came from within the region, was enough to make me a Crystal Bridges fan.

So was its collection, which is most impressive in works dating between the colonial era and the early 20th century – strengths include works by Gilbert Stuart, Martin Johnson Heade, Asher Durand, Thomas Eakins, Hartley, Arthur Dove and Stuart Davis – although the museum is still playing catch-up with art made since World War II. (This isn't an entirely bad thing; a dearth of major works by the big names makes room for interesting contributions from less-exhibited artists such as Janet Sobel, Grace Hartigan, Leon Polk Smith and Gene Davis.)

Apart from delivering on Walton's dream of sharing an important American art collection with a part of the country that has few museums, Crystal Bridges succeeds most profoundly in its integration of art, architecture and landscape. The Moshe Safdie-designed building, which is divided into pavilions connected by open spaces that overlook the surrounding forest and museum ponds fed by a nearby natural spring, nestles beautifully into the surrounding 120-acre wooded grounds.

The spaces between pavilions create what director Don Bacigalupi has aptly dubbed a “palate cleanser” of nature between galleries that are, after all, often filled with depictions of it. Then again, “palate cleanser” may shortchange the dramatic, even spiritual impact of the Ozark setting. Or perhaps I'm especially vulnerable to fall's charms, having so little occasion to experience them in Houston.

Safdie immediately connected with the site's spiritual

power during his first visit, Walton says in a video that's part of *Moshe Safdie: The Path to Crystal Bridges*, one of two temporary exhibitions that opened in October. Featuring architectural models, drawings and photos, the show traces Safdie's development through prior projects, including Habitat 67 in Montreal, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

Although Crystal Bridges's sculpture collection is small, art and nature come together most effectively with outdoor pieces by Roxy Paine, Mark di Suvero and Robert Indiana. A Cor-Ten steel version of Indiana's iconic *LOVE* sports a rich patina that's set off beautifully against the turning leaves on a trail leading to a James Turrell Skyspace, which is set in a circular stone structure.

Work by Turrell also appears in *See the Light: The Luminist Tradition in American Art*, an oddly cursory exhibition that unveils the museum's latest major acquisition, Mark Rothko's medium-sized 1960 painting No. 210/No. 211 (Orange), featuring three orange bands floating over a maroon ground. The Rothko, a much-needed boost to Crystal Bridges' anemic abstract expressionist holdings, may look better in the postwar galleries, where it will move after the show closes Jan. 28. Its impact in *See the Light* is blunted somewhat by having been installed under spotlights in a dark corridor.

Tacked onto a small gallery with a handful of paintings by Heade, John Singer Sargent and Dove, whose *Sea and Moon II* is hauntingly ravishing, the corridor is mostly devoted to neon and fluorescent sculptures by Dale Chihuly and Dan Flavin, respectively; theatrically lit works by Larry Bell and Robert Irwin, both loans from the Norton Simon Museum; and light works by Jim Campbell and Turrell, who lent *Sloan Red* (1968), a walk-in light installation.

The Safdie show is both more cohesively installed and more substantial, pointing out precursors to how he approached Crystal Bridges with respect to integrating architecture with landscape, exploiting dramatic outdoor vistas, using architectural concrete banded with cedar, and dividing a building into a complex of pavilions.

But if you're going to time your pilgrimage to Crystal



PHOTOS DEVON BRITT-DARBY



PHOTO: ROBERT LAPRELLE

Bridges to coincide with a special exhibition, the one that really matters is *To See As Artists See: American Art From the Phillips Collection* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth. (If you're driving, stopping in Fort Worth will add just over an hour to the 10-hour drive from Bentonville.)

Featuring top-drawer paintings by Winslow Homer, John Sloan, Philip Guston, and Richard Diebenkorn, among others, it's a revelatory look at just how rich the Washington, D.C.-based museum is in American works from 1850 to 1960.

From an eye-opening selection of paintings by the obscure modernist Karl Knaths to panels from Jacob Lawrence's powerful *Migration* series, you'll see much that complements both Crystal Bridges' holdings and the Amon Carter's terrific collection, stocking up your mental image bank before hitting the open road one last time for home.

--DEVON BRITT-DARBY

Moshe Safdie: The Path to Crystal Bridges
See the Light:

The Luminist Tradition in American Art
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art
October 13-January 28
www.crystalbridges.org

To See As Artists See:
American Art from the Phillips Collection
Amon Carter Museum of American Art
October 6-January 6
www.cartermuseum.org

Clockwise, from top left:

A model of Crystal Bridges in *Moshe Safdie: The Path to Crystal Bridges*.

A Cor-Ten steel version of Robert Indiana's *LOVE* is sited along Crystal Bridges' Art Trail.

Arthur Garfield Dove: *Moon and Sea II*, 1923
Oil on canvas 24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.7 cm)
Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.



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“I have learned that you cannot be anything you want to be, but you can be a lot more of who you already are.”

**–Amy Fote, Principal,
Houston Ballet**

ADIEU, AMY FOTE

Amy Fote bids farewell during the next two months. After an eight-year career at Houston Ballet, the treasured principal ballerina will be retiring after the final performances of Ben Stevenson's *The Nutcracker*. But not without a little fuss: The annual Jubilee of Dance on November 30 will feature a video tribute, along with Fote dancing selections from her favorite roles, including *Manon* and *The Merry Widow*. Known for her deeply human interpretations of complex characters such as Tatiana in *Onegin* and Cio-Cio San in *Madame Butterfly*, Fote fully embraced the acting aspect of dance. Her generosity as a performer came through in such ballets as Jerome Robbins' *The Concert* and Christopher Wheeldon's *Carnival of the Animals*.

Jubilee of Dance: A Tribute to Amy Fote
November 30, 2012
Brown Theater, Wortham Center

www.houstonballet.org

Amy Fote in Houston Ballet's production of
Stanton Welch's *The Four Seasons*

PHOTO BY AMITAVA SARKAR



Playing It Forward

Instruments Land in Young Musicians' Hands



There are three rules in a guitar lesson with Daren Hightower: 1) Always wash your hands; 2) Have fun; and 3) Play it forward.

It's a Sunday afternoon when I arrive at Hightower's house to sit in on a lesson with a 9-year old named James, who has a tooth-filled smile that is almost as big as his face. He also has Aspergers Syndrome, but you wouldn't know it as we both slowly work our way through the first notes of "Smoke on the Water."

Hightower has been teaching students like James tuition-free for the past 25 years, and is the founder, director and chief of everything at the Children's Music Foundation, whose mission is to spread the magic of music to young people who might otherwise not have access.

Given the recent history of budget cuts affecting school music programs, including last year's 5.4 billion dollar cut from the education budget by the Texas Legislature, the time is right for the non-profit world to step up to the plate.

As the role of music is disappearing in the public school system, there are more organizations looking to see how they can help fill the gap. Children's Music Foundation and Music Doing Good are two such organizations in Houston that are hard at work, providing access, instruments and music education for children.

After a rough patch in his life, Hightower discovered the guitar and a love for music. After getting started with a twenty-dollar six-string guitar, he immediately began to share his love for music, playing for his customers and ultimately teaching one of his co-workers how to play as well. It was through one of his clients that Hightower got connected with a local orphanage. Turned out that sixty-three children — the entire population of the orphanage — wanted lessons.

"So, that is when I founded the Children's Music Foundation," says Hightower. His all-volunteer organization is financed completely out of his own bank account. Hightower also left his very successful career as a full-time finance manager and became a consultant, allowing him to limit his work week to just three days per week, and to devote the rest of his time to his non-profit.

Through a speaking engagement at the Skyline Rotary Club, he met two people who altered the future of the

Children's Music Foundation: Reggie Adams, founder and director of the Museum of Cultural Arts Houston (MOC AH), and Don Vaughn, a neuroscientist, musician and model.

MOC AH is the beneficiary of a treasure trove of musical instruments from the music store Austin Bazaar. Adams initially approached the store looking for damaged items that he could turn into art projects. What happened next was unbelievable: In its first shipment the store delivered almost 10 pallets worth of instruments, about two-thirds of which were still in fair to good condition. Adams couldn't bring himself to turn these playable instruments into sculptures, so he called Hightower, who now makes a monthly trip to Austin to pick hundred of instruments ranging from guitars to accordions.

Vaughn, recently voted the Texas Bachelor of the Year by *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, is now the official spokesman for the Foundation. He has helped to shine a popular spotlight on the Foundation by using his run for the national title of *Cosmopolitan's Bachelor of the Year* to promote the Foundation in appearances on numerous local and national television and radio programs.

Music Doing Good (formerly known as Diva's World Productions) has also recently launched a program matching needy young musicians with instruments. They are in talks to partner with MOC AH and the Children's Music Foundation, with hopes of impacting

the Houston area public school-based band and orchestra programs. They have already set up drop-off booths at several Houston Symphony concerts in an effort to solicit anyone who may have an unused instrument hiding in their closet or attic.

"Personally, I have four friends that I know have an instrument sitting in their spare bedroom that has not been touched in years," says Kirsten Johnson, Music Doing Good's program director. "I was in band too. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It



PHOTOS: AMY COLLIER

taught me about discipline, how to treat others, team work and about being a part of something bigger than myself. Why not help give that to another child?"

As Johnson points out, the benefits of exposing children to music are innumerable. Recent studies have suggested improvements from better brain function, better test scores and social skills, but for my new friend James, it's very simple. "I love to play guitar because it helps me sort out all of the thoughts in my head," says James. After spending an hour with him, I can relate. Somehow, all of the thoughts in my head are sorted out as well.

—CHRIS JOHNSON

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

Above: Chris Johnson, James and Daren Hightower Jam during a lesson at Children's Music Foundation

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Holiday Gems

There's a bounty of holiday art activity every year, from the mainstays like *A Christmas Carol* and *The Santaland Diaries* at the

Alley Theatre to Houston Ballet's ever-popular Ben Stevenson production of *The Nutcracker*, this year with principal Amy Fote giving her last performance on a Houston Ballet stage.

The Ensemble Theatre returns to *Cinderella*, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra to Bayou Bend and the Houston Symphony offers four chances to hear Handel's *Messiah*. Here are few more joyous events to add to your holiday radar.

Panto Mother Goose
Stages Repertory Theatre
November 30, 2012 - January 6, 2013
<http://stagestheatre.com/>

I look forward to requesting my tickets at Stages Repertory Theatre's annual Panto show. "Two in the screaming section, please." It's quite normal to hiss at the villain, warn the good guys, and just basically cause a ruckus during a Panto show. This year, Kenn McLaughlin (book and Lyrics) and David Nehls (music) Panto-ize *Mother Goose*.

"It is straight-up old-fashioned nursery rhymes with true love at stake and one nasty, nasty villain in the mix," says McLaughlin, Stages artistic director. "Ryan Schabach, as Buttons, is playing a very harried wedding planner who has to plan the royal wedding reception for Old King Cole and Mother Goose. Of course, even with as much audience help as he can muster, mayhem ensues. And Ryan is doing double duty here in that he's also directing this one."



PHOTO: JEFF GRASS

Clockwise, from top:
Amy Fote in Houston Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker*

Ryan Schabach plays "Buttons" and a "Dog" in Stages Repertory Theatre's *Panto Pinocchio*

Houston Chamber Choir in *Christmas at the Villa*



PHOTO: BRUCE BENNETT

Christmas at the Villa
Houston Chamber Choir
December 15 & 16
<http://houstonchamberchoir.org/>

You will find beautiful voices, including Grammy Award-winning vocalist Cynthia Clawson, in a gorgeous historic place at Houston Chamber Choir's holiday concert. "Our Christmas at the Villa concerts have become a Houston holiday tradition," says executive director Becky Tobin. "The Villa de Matel is an oasis in the middle of South-

east Houston and one of the city's architectural gems. The Chapel, built in 1928, is modeled after old Northern Italian basilicas, and when paired with the angelic voices of the Houston Chamber Choir, produces a radiant musical experience."



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

A Baroque Christmas Mercury – The Orchestra Refined
December 16 & 17
<http://mercuryhouston.org/>

Mercury takes a break from *Messiah* with a new program of rare holiday gems. "There is a lot of other beautiful and

interesting Christmas music composed in the baroque era, and we felt it was time to present something other than Handel's *Messiah* this Christmas," says Antoine Plante, Mercury's artistic director. "We will perform rarely-heard French Baroque carols by Michel Corrette, the famous *Christmas Concerto* by Arcangelo Corelli and the recently rediscovered *Gloria* by Handel with wonderful soprano, Lauren Snouffer."

Sanders Family Christmas
A.D. Players
November 21-December 31
<http://www.adplayers.org/>

If there's ever a time to get nostalgic it's the holidays. Why do you think we are still watching James Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*? A.D. Players offers *Sanders Family Christmas*, set in 1941 at a Christmas Eve service just before the men are shipped off to World War II. Christmas carols and hilarious yuletide stories fill the evening with Christmas cheer in this richly entertaining family musical. "The members of the Sanders family are each real and alive, and the music they play gets in your soul. Audiences will laugh, celebrate the season, and for that time in the theater, become part of the big extended Sanders family," says Jeannette Clift George, A. D. Players artistic director. "The Christmas season is a celebration of the joy of Christ and his love for families. In that joy we present a favorite programming of the *Sanders Family Christmas*, and in its joy, I welcome everyone to celebrate."

OPEN!

FULL PAGE

FOR SALE

CULTURAL WARRIOR

DiverseWorks's Elizabeth Dunbar

It has been a busy year for Elizabeth Dunbar, who became executive director at DiverseWorks in January. As the multidisciplinary arts space celebrates its 30th anniversary, Dunbar has honed its programming focus, brought in new staff and a new artist board, and prepared for a move from its north-of-downtown location to 4102 Fannin in Midtown. She sat down with A+C visual arts editor **Devon Britt-Darby** to discuss what's in store for the new DiverseWorks.

“I think we can find our niche at the intersection of performing and literary and visual arts.”

A+C Houston: Let's talk about how you decided to move to the Midtown space.

Elizabeth Dunbar: Those conversations about moving to a more central, accessible location took place for many, many years. People have such a difficult time finding DiverseWorks. When we moved to that building 20 years ago, there was the thought that the art world was moving to that part of town, but it just didn't really take hold, so we want to be more connected with the rest of the community and what's happening around the city.

Of course, we're losing some things at the same time, but we felt that for us right now this is the best solution.

What are you losing?

We're scaling down total square footage, so we're at about half the footprint of the current location, and most of that is the theater. We couldn't afford to have that kind of space in a location like Midtown, and more and more of our programming is focusing now on the intersection of performing and visual and literary arts. Performance and the way it has been presented in the past at DiverseWorks is shifting, and in our new location that will happen inside the gallery space itself, so we won't necessarily require a black box theater space as much as we have in the past. There certainly will be times when we need one and we'll rent that when it's necessary.

What niche do you see DiverseWorks occupying in the city's art scene?

Since I arrived in January, there's been a lot of thought put into the question, what does DiverseWorks need to look like in the Houston arts ecology? For me, it's a

matter of looking to our past at the successful and exciting things that DiverseWorks has done, and asking, how do we update that? DiverseWorks has always been known for very active, engaging, lively, experimental, unexpected programming, at least in its early years, and I want to bring those things back to the core of what we do, even while acknowledging that there are other things in town, and that we need to differentiate ourselves. I think we can find our niche at the intersection of performing and literary and visual arts.

Prior to my arrival, the programming was somewhat bifurcated, in the sense that visual arts programming had a separate curator and performing arts had its own curator, and occasionally they would mingle and there would be a project that was kind of in both areas, but they operated fairly independently. Moving forward, I would like to see those things come together and move toward a fusion of those disciplines, and that really is an acknowledgment of where contemporary art is right now anyway.

What role do Houston artists have to play in all this?

We've just relaunched our artist board with about 25 artists from all disciplines. They're very active and have helped us design some of the programming. You may have heard of DiverseWorks on Wednesdays, which will be a weekly event every Wednesday night from 6 to 8 p.m. The artist board is taking ownership of this program, selecting between two and four activities that will happen every Wednesday night. It could be anything from a film screening to a lecture to a performance to a workshop to a dance. Every week it'll be different.

Given that you're moving the performance you present from a black-box-theater mode to a gallery setting, it seems that a

big concern will be: what is the gallery like when there isn't, say, a live element? How is it activated when the performers aren't there? Because we've all seen uninteresting examples of that.

Yes, and it's very difficult to convey the energy and content using solely documentation, so we're very conscious of that as we move forward on this project. What does the gallery experience look like? What happens when it's not animated by a live person? Does it stand up on its own? We're very much aware of those problems. We've divided the new space into ... a more traditional gallery space and an adjacent flex space. The flex space is where our DiverseWorks on Wednesdays projects happen, so that is constantly changing and being animated on a weekly basis.

Whereas the exhibition space, well, take Franklin Evans's piece (which will open in DiverseWorks's Midtown space November 16). He's a visual artist; he's a painter; he works a lot with literary texts, so there's a literary element as well as a performative element that animates the exhibition aurally, so it's a fully immersive experience. If you drop in on a Thursday afternoon, are you going to see somebody performing? No, but you're going to hear the sound component; you're going to see the visual. It will still be active and alive.

And that's the point. How do you translate that over a ten-week period?

And some things are going to be one-offs. It's just going to be an event, and it's going to be over, and there will be documentation somewhere, but we're not necessarily going to present it. That's the beauty of this kind of art form: some of it, if you missed it, you missed it.

*Franklin Evans: houstontohouston
DiverseWorks
November 16-January 5
www.diverseworks.org*



PHOTO: FRANK WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

There is no archive in which nothing gets lost
Glassell School of Art
September 7- November 25

www.mfah.org/exhibitions/there-no-archive-which-nothing-gets-lost/

When nothing becomes something, things get interesting. Such is the situation in *There is no archive in which nothing gets lost*, a video exhibition curated by Sally Frater, a critic-in-residence at the Glassell School of Art and an A+C contributor. The show consists of three video works, installed in separate areas of the gallery, that portray black women in four different environments.

Artist Sonia Boyce and DJ and sound engineer Ain Bailey collaboratively created *Oh Adelaide* from found footage of a 1935 vaudeville show performance from the famous jazz singer Adelaide Hall. Responding to each other's manipulation of the footage, Boyce and Bailey present an engaging and disturbing ethereal portrait of moving image and sound. Much of Hall's

ground in a barren landscape – perhaps a log or section of a tree. She proceeds to hack forcefully at the object; though making very little noticeable physical progress, her cutting produces harsh, clanging, reverberating noises. Backlit by the setting sun, the woman walks away and up a small hill as the video ends with five progressively slower fade-to-black video cuts, similar to a blinking eyelid as it gets heavier and heavier.

Frater describes the exhibition as one that “seeks to examine notions of ‘place’ as explored through depictions of architecture, geographic locations, and memory.” She has carefully curated video works that require attention not to documented specifics, but to constructed memory and assumptions which we, in turn, respond to because of our relative places in and understandings of time, society, and culture.

For example, *Oh, Adelaide* replaces details with flattened visual and audible elements, forcing viewers to mentally populate the scene. *Corridor* references the

Tony Feher
Blaffer Art Museum
October 13-March 17
www.class.uh.edu/blaffer

In 1987 Tony Feher had a revelatory experience: Chancing upon a collection of red marbles in a shop window, he was struck by their shininess, their combination of translucency and opacity, and their varying shades. For Feher, it gave him the sense that “anything was a possibility; no shard of anything was too humble or cheap to ignore.” It was a watershed moment and spurred Feher to stuff a five-inch-tall glass honey jar with multiple red marbles.

Accordingly, the product of this origin story, *Untitled* (1987), opens the artist's traveling 25-year survey, the inaugural exhibition at the newly renovated Blaffer Art Museum. (Blaffer director and chief curator Claudia Schmuckli organized the exhibition, which debuted at the Des Moines Art Center.)

Walking into the central, double-height gallery, viewers are confronted by a classic Feher arrangement: a plinth resting on plastic crates covered with a variety of found objects. *Take It Up with Tut* (2008) was inspired by carpenters' notations still visible on one of King Tut's outer coffins.

Above it a glass jug, tilted just so and filled with bright blue Windex, hangs from a clothesline strung diagonally across the room, the excess rope casually pooling in the corner. For Feher, pigment is superfluous when prosaic Windex presents such pure color. In a similar vein, Feher laid out a flat surface in his studio to create *Tut* and allowed objects to pile up over time in what he terms a “non-judgmental way.”

Like the marbles, Feher finds the microcosm inside a bottle endlessly fascinating. He draws a line with water in *Until Tomorrow* (2003), a succession of bottles arranged on a shelf and filled with an undulating level of dyed water. With the installation of (*pink*s) from 2007, he maximizes the main boon of the renovation: a windowed entrance façade oriented towards the street and a staircase freed from the gallery space.

At the top of the staircase, a mobile of wire clothes hangers dances in a windowed corner. Suspended in the hangers' various nooks are tiny water bottles filled with fuchsia liquid. From a distance, at the foot of the staircase or in the opposite gallery, the wire hangers disappear, as do the plastic water bottles, leaving a playful configuration of floating pink shapes.

The work in Blaffer's main upstairs gallery – formerly bisected by a staircase, now a windowless cube – presents a more melancholy tone than the childlike wonder exhibited downstairs. Beginning with *Le Roi de Baton*, 1991, the works gathered here show Feher coming to terms with the AIDS crisis and mortality. (In 1989 Feher was diagnosed with a rare genetic disease. Its treatment involved blood transfusions, from which he contracted HIV.)

Inspired by Renaissance reliquaries in Florence and functioning as Feher's personal relic repository, *Le Roi de Baton* presents a tableau of glass jars housing tarot

Sonia Boyce in collaboration with Ain Bailey
Oh Adelaide, 2010
Video still



PHOTO: SONIA BOYCE & AIN BAILEY

image, as it halts and spurts, is blown out and replaced with bright white light, embodying a soundtrack of distorted, beast-like, melodic repetitions.

Lorna Simpson's *Corridor* is a split screen of two videos portraying 13 minutes of two female lives taking place side by side but at least a century apart: one on the brink of the Civil War and the other at the beginning of the Civil Rights era. Both women drift through quiet domestic interiors, communicating in their own ways with an outside world and alluding to the social tensions and uncertainties of their times.

Cutting, by Wangechi Mutu, shows a woman, with a large knife in hand, approaching an object on the

Civil War and Civil Rights eras through generalized aesthetics and references to historical settings rather than specific architecture. *Cutting* presents a landscape void of particular geographic references, an open physical environment that stages physical labor and perseverance.

Frater challenges the conduct of representation in *There is no archive in which nothing gets lost*. The exhibition's strength lies in its own negation, in its depiction of the places where “nothing” takes on an identity of its own through its absence. It posits the impossibility of a story that does not draw attention to its missing parts.

– NANCY ZASTUDIL

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE



PHOTO: ADAM REICH

cards, medicinal syringes, chicken bones, and marbles, stacked atop a found table. Feher came across it outside Food, the restaurant-cum-performance site founded by Gordon Matta-Clark, Caroline Gooden, Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris, and Rachel Lew.

Nearby, *Long Term Pillow*, 1997, a pathetically limp cast-concrete floor piece covered in plastic flowers, approximates a roadside shrine. Across the gallery, *Suture*, 1997, a hanging assemblage of plastic bottles filled with orange liquid, references the color of Feher's surgical scars.

Despite this rumination on loss, Feher's work as a whole is optimistic. From the generous embrace of everyday materials to a childlike fascination with the simple processes of stacking and hanging, he finds potential in the unlikeliest of places.

— ELLIOTT ZOOEY MARTIN

Elliott Zooney Martin is a Houston-based curator and writer.

Jekyll & Hyde
Theatre Under the Stars
October 10-21, 2012
www.tuts.com



PHOTO: CHRIS BENNION

Guys can be so moody. Just in time for Halloween, Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS) returns to *Jekyll & Hyde*, with a newly-conceived production, and the beginning of a long national tour that will end on Broadway.

Houston's most famous homegrown musical premiered at the Alley Theatre in 1990, and went on to Broadway for a four-year run. Conceived by Steve Cuden and Frank Wildhorn, who also wrote the music, *Jekyll & Hyde* is based on Robert Louis

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Gory stories make good musicals; think *Sweeney Todd*. But it's the combination of an iconic story with plenty of pretty tunes that gives *Jekyll & Hyde* its staying power. Although this is Wildhorn's greatest hit, it does seem to be missing that one killer good song that we all leave the theater humming.

Constantine Maroulis, last seen in another double role in *The Toxic Avenger* at the Alley Theatre, has the stage presence to pull off the dual roles. As Jekyll, he's all meek, mild, and science focused. As Hyde, he's all swagger and dagger, with enough vocal chops to power his diabolical doppelganger. The matinee – I mean American – Idol is a charismatic performer, and gives much of this production its punch. (You can get your picture taken with a cardboard version of the brooding, handsome hunk in the lobby.)

R & B sensation Deborah Cox is perfect as Lucy, while Teal Wick's sweet soprano imbues Emma with innocence. Director/choreographer Jeff Calhoun plays up the gloom and doom: Just about every scene begins with an ominous sense that this is not going to end well.

Tobin Ost's mostly black and white sets/costumes, along with Daniel Brodie's projections, frame the proceedings as a surreal parable, with a ghostly glow and lots of flashy moving parts. Jeff Croiter's spooky, stark lighting adds to the macabre mix. Just about everyone looks like they have recently recovered from the influenza.

It all went down a bit like a Victorian rock concert: On the edge of camp, but with enough heart to drive the dark drama.

—NANCY WOZNY

Strange Eggs
The Menil Collection
September 20 - February 3
www.menil.org

What lies inside of an egg? The shape of a chicken's egg does not itself give us a hint as to the shape of a chicken, nor upon cracking the smooth and featureless shell does the color or consistency of the yolk clue us in to the complex organism that might have gestated within.

These immediate and familiar understandings of the egg do not further our understanding of such a future creature. Scientific inquiry aside, the connection between present egg and future being is left to our everyday sense of wonder, while at the same time the sense of potential life and animation lends the egg a meaning beyond its visible, experiential parts.

The Menil Collection's new exhibit of Claes Oldenburg's collage series *Strange Eggs* similarly causes one to ask: How do I encounter a strange egg? What does it

contain?
What does it conceal?
What will it become?

Occupying its own room in the Surrealism gallery, the exhibit is comprised of eighteen individually hung collages, each composed of black-and-white newsprint clippings glued to otherwise



PHOTO: PAUL HESTER

plain white paper. With a few subtle exceptions, the images created are self-contained forms, solid objects of gray-scale matter defined within the white space. In the first piece of the series, *Strange Egg I*, the two clippings, one of which looks like rough stone, the other like rippled water, constitute a single oblong shape, this type of self-contained unity visually echoes that of the familiar egg.

CONTINUE ON PAGE 28

Clockwise, from top:
Tony Feher, *Long Term Pillow*, 1997
Sand mix, plastic flowers
Collection of Christopher D'Amelio, New York

Claes Oldenburg, *Strange Eggs XVIII*, 1957-58
Collage, mounted on cardboard 14-1/4 x 11"
Collection of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen

Deborah Cox and the *Jekyll & Hyde* company in
"Bring on the Men"

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

Right:
Drake Simpson and Kim Tobin in
Stark Naked Theatre's production of *Body Awareness*

Opposite, left:
Jennifer Dean and David Matranga in
Classical Theatre Company's *Miss Julie*

Opposite, right:
James Brown, *Planets: the Distinct Connection IV*, 2011
Oil and pencil on linen
Courtesy of the artist and Texas Gallery



PHOTO: GABRIELLA NISSEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

As the series progresses, however, the shapes of the collaged images begin to ooze and jut out in shapes more similar, at first, to the shattered shells and splattered yolks of an egg cracked open. But reading the images at the level of their being visually similar to eggs gives Oldenburg little credit, and the last few pieces bear nothing of this original resemblance anyway. More compellingly, one might read the collages as eggs at the level of conceptual structure, as cryptic containers of gestation, combinations of disparate elements that we must accept will lead somewhere beyond our ability to predict or wonder.

At the time Oldenburg was creating these collages (1957-1958), he was also creating collage-like poems based on his sensory experiences walking through New York City. In her accompanying text for the exhibit, curator Michelle White quotes one such poem from 1956: "knocking moonhorns / fast dancing in a gas dream / red spelling in the strange egg." In the final line, Oldenburg appears to be reading the city itself as "the strange egg" rather than "the big apple."

The insight of this idea of the city, which can similarly be seen to be composed out of the stark juxtaposition and odd accumulation of elements (social, architectural, zoological), is that the parts may be understandable at the level of experience, as with the egg, as with collage, but that the meaning, the future, the creature, that the city contains is inaccessible. The critical intersection where such generative powers of art, of life, and of cities meet becomes an interesting vantage point from which to more closely examine the collages and pick apart their construction.

The sort of clinical sterility of their gray-on-white presentation gives way to humor, absurdity, visual lyricism, and, always, further mystery. By housing this exhibit in the Surrealism gallery, White has created a type of — appropriately enough — incubation chamber. After spending some time among the *Strange Eggs*, I found all sorts of new and wondrous thoughts hatching from the Ernsts and Magrittes and Tanguys.

—DAVID A. FEIL
David A. Feil is a writer and educator in Houston.
www.davidafeil.com

Body Awareness
Stark Naked Theatre Company
October 25-November 10
www.starknakedtheatre.com

It might sound a bit risqué when you first hear that a theatre company called Stark Naked is putting on a play called *Body Awareness*. But despite its title, Annie Baker's 2008 one-act play has much more to do with the mind and with psychological evasiveness than with either the body or awareness. And if all this sounds a little more liberal-artsy than burlesque, it should. Set in the fictional college town of Shirley, Vermont, the play is a satire probing the values of modern-day political correctness by offering flawed characterizations of what might otherwise be considered hands-off material for a light-hearted comedy, including sexual abuse and mental illness.

The premise of the play is quickly set out in the first few scenes. Without the lights dimming, actress Pamela Vogel enters as Phyllis, a psychology professor at Shirley State, as she welcomes everyone to the school's week of programming celebrating the body. Meanwhile at home, Phyllis's partner Joyce talks with her son Jared, a twenty-something McDonald's employee resistant to the idea that he might have Asperger's syndrome, about the arrival of visiting artist Frank, a photographer whose nude female portraits are to be included in the school's programming. The stranger-comes-to-town plot follows its normal course, as Frank's masculine swagger disrupts the family's already tense balance, attracting Joyce, repelling Phyllis, and leading Jared toward a dangerous end.

Stark Naked's production succeeds in bringing the humor to the situation and keeps a steady stream of laughs amid the discomfort. As Phyllis, Vogel shows a

sweet vulnerability beneath her often brusque and condescending demeanor. Matt Lents gets the most laughs as Jared, mixing deft comedic timing with the role's affectations of social inability. As Frank, Drake Simpson is both a soothing and aggressive presence, exuding comfort and charm alongside the character's mostly boorish nature. Joyce, on the other hand, is the only of the four characters in the script who is free from having a more-or-less one-dimensional definition, and Kim Tobin wrangles out of this a great amount of empathy, making Joyce the most relatable character by the play's finish. Nonetheless, the chemistry between the two female leads pales in comparison to the emotional range they exhibit when interacting with Lents and Simpson.

In the small details of the production, director Phillip Lehl adds a breath of realism to the script, which often seems driven primarily on formal devices. For each morning of the week, we are given a dimly-lit and quiet scene showing Phyllis putting on her clothes, revealing a level of emotion in these simple acts that her lines often don't. The set design by Jody Bobrovsky, with a backdrop entirely painted over in chalkboard gray, is a clever mixture of three-dimensional forms and white-line representations of homely interior design. The lack of color in the set is mirrored in the drab palette of the costumes by Macy Perrone, which allows for a dramatic use of color at the end, but altogether becomes a bit too numbing on the eyes.

While the production provides many enjoyable moments, Baker's script itself comes across as a pastiche of devices and tokenized characters that crowd out much hope for an honest, realistic understanding of the issues at hand.

—DAVID A. FEIL

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

Miss Julie
Classical Theatre Company
September 26-October 14, 2012
www.classicaltheatre.org

Swedish playwright August Strindberg, who dies 100 years ago in 1912, is remembered both for his hand in shepherding drama away from overelaborate plotting towards a pared down naturalism, as well as for the psychotic breaks that sent his life spiraling into the dark realms of alchemy and the occult. Classical Theatre Company's production of his early groundbreaking play *Miss Julie* commemorates the important role Strindberg played as one of the forebears of modern drama.



PHOTO: PIN LIM

Set during a single night in the life of a servant couple and their titular mistress, the play tears into the volatile psychological underpinnings of class and gender power relationships, revealing its characters to be desperately sputtering, like the limes and fumes in an alchemist's crucible, trying but failing to change into anything greater.

Originally set on a Swedish estate, Classical Theatre Company has transported the action to an upper-class house in antebellum New Orleans — on Mardi Gras night no less. As the audience takes its seats, the lights are already up as actress Michelle Ogletree, playing Christine the house cook, nonchalantly works at chopping okra. It is a gentle touch by director Julia Traber, but one that immediately asks the viewer to understand the circumstances of the servant, invisibly at work, away from the festivities.

Later on, similarly quiet moments of Christine humming to herself or fixing her hair occasionally arise amidst the other goings-on of the play, and each time it has the effect of recasting the dramatic world as reality itself. Ogletree's presence as Christine, the pragmatic

voice that more or less bookends the play, lends the character an easy but unbeholden charm, providing a necessary foothold in day-to-day reality, against the heated, anything-goes back-and-forth of the main characters.

Played by David Matranga and Jennifer Dean, Jean and Miss Julie might not be equal by any socioeconomic measure, but they match each other toe to toe in their penchants for bull-headed argument, dangerous flirtation, and selfishly-motivated manipulation. As soon as their coy banter turns to doomed romance, the play reaches its high point, simultaneously blurring and sharpening the character's true natures and their desires to be anything but what they are.

I had a strong disinclination for the decision to transplant the play to New Orleans. I was left wondering if, as an audience member, having had to abstract the social circumstances of old Sweden might not have been an easier way to reach common ground with the characters precisely because its distance would function as an explanation for the less contemporary social mores. The new setting did allow, however, for an exquisitely homey set design by Matthew Schlieff, who has created a well-stocked and finely-detailed Southern kitchen inside of Studio 101.

At the end of the show, watching Miss Julie walk solemnly off stage, straight razor in hand, and reflecting on the modernity and relevance of Strindberg's work more than a century after its creation, I was struck by the grim severity of it all. The story of Strindberg's near-fatal obsession with mystical science, a story which always looms in my mind, took on an inkling sense. Considering how drawn Strindberg was to mining the internal, elemental aspects of human behavior, his characters so helpless against circumstance, it seems hopeful for him to believe that the right mixture, the right heat, could give birth to something new, stronger and more valuable.

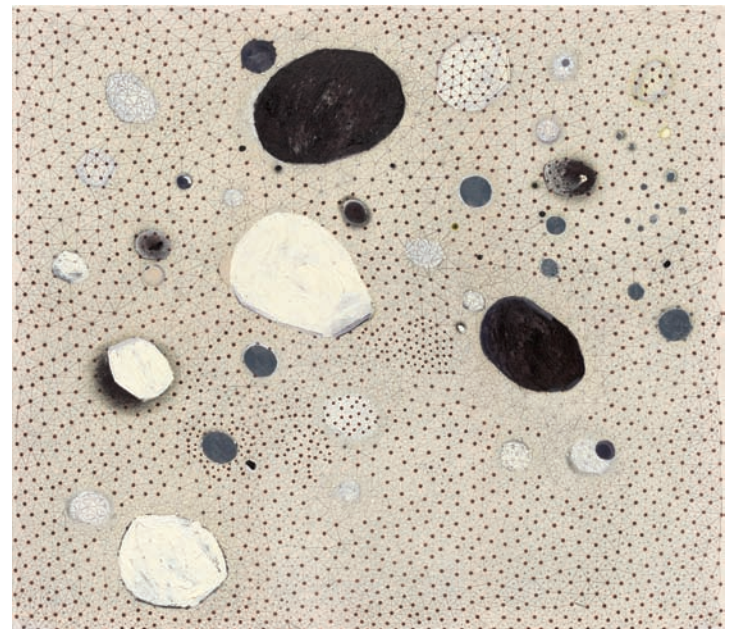
-DAVID A. FEIL

James Brown: The Distinct Connection
Texas Gallery
September 20-November 3
www.texgal.com

Ivory and dense-black forms dance across the walls at Texas Gallery. Vibrating with stillness, James Brown's painting series *Planets: The Distinct Connection* offers us a meditation on the cosmic and metaphysical.

Brown creates a rhythm of hundreds of spots that are interconnected by pencil lines, forming a matrix that grounds and reacts to the larger shapes on the picture plane. Like a cartographer of the extraterrestrial, Brown drafts the relation of planets, asteroids, and yawning black holes.

While the artist elects to use a limited palette and nearly all of the shapes could be described as round, he creates ample variety by emphasizing the asymmetry of the larger forms and their placement in the composition. Brown uses untreated linen to support his imagery, achieving an organic physicality that



complements his biomorphic shapes.

The larger planetary forms allow the artist's spontaneity to show; areas caked with impasto freeze Brown's gesture, while some areas have a thin glaze of paint that creates ghost-like sensations. Passages that appear stain-like up close give the larger forms substance when viewed from afar.

The series *Planets: The Distinct Connection* is actually the ninth group of a larger series of 81 paintings. Brown was inspired to respond to early 20th century English composer Gustav Holst's composition *The Planets*, which was derived from the astrological qualities of the extraterrestrial planets in our solar system.

The inclusion of Brown's earlier studies at the front of the exhibition space brings a welcome look into his process but also raises more questions. The studies are comparatively small, with the same untreated linen, which is occasionally folded — forming a different sort of network. We can see intimations of the planetary bodies seen throughout the space, but the presence of collaged images of snakes and hands prompts us to ponder his meaning further.

The progression of image size through the exhibition implies a sense of hierarchy. While the studies inform the *Planets* series, they are actually the preparation for a grand culmination in a tenth painting: *The Realm of Chaos and Light: The Soul's Distinct Connection*. With the same vocabulary as the *Planets* paintings, this piece allows Brown a stunning eight-by-23 feet to show larger relationships between systems of forms. However, the title of this dominating piece suggests the previous nine paintings are part of a larger, heavenly system.

While it could be easy to retreat into formalism when viewing the exhibition, Brown implores us to consider the grander *pleroma* of what is simultaneously empty and infinite.

-GEOFF SMITH

Geoff Smith is a twenty-something arts enthusiast, print-maker, and occasional curator

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE

The Italian Girl in Algiers
Houston Grand Opera
October 26 - November 11
www.houstongrandopera.org

Giant hats, a suspended cage, growing sand castles and balloons in the shape of Italy are just a few of the comic objects blown wonderfully out of proportion in Houston Grand Opera's production of *The Italian Girl in Algiers* by Gioacchino Rossini. A delight of objects, this opera shows one of these things is not like the other, but all of these things do belong.

This staging is entirely new to HGO and calls for an encore. Joan Font, who returns to HGO and Rossini from the last season's production of *The Barber of Seville*, proved a marvelous director with uncanny attention to visual satisfaction. There was not one thing out of place. The set and costumes, designed by Joan Guillén, finished the bouquet. Conductor Carlo Rizzi directed with animation and expression, though occasionally with a bit too much zeal, as the racing orchestra rushed past the singers at times.

As a merry tale of a woman who knows the power of her wiles, and the buffoons who fall under her spell, *The Italian Girl in Algiers* is naturally a funny plot. But HGO took it to the next level. Imagine a rainbow of colors akin to CandyLand and inventions from Willy Wonka's factory, add outlandishly large or abundant objects, and finish with pure artistry.

Soprano Daniela Barcellona, singing the part of Isabella, embodied the confidently erotic part with an impressive range of bright high and low notes. As if channeling Queen Elizabeth, Barcellona reached the height of her singing inspiring an army of men to think of love, duty, and honor with the flag of Italy in one hand and a massive champagne bottle resting beneath the other. Lawrence Brownlee, signing the tenor part Lindoro, awed with his technical abilities, handling Rossini's difficult passages with ease. But the unique timbre of his voice was out-done by the robust voice of Mustafà, sung by charismatic bass-baritone Patrick Carfizzi.

With lines like "Wow, what a woman" and "Do I look like a baboon to you?" this opera was made to be delightful. Here, HGO does more than deliver—it dazzles.

—SYDNEY BOYD

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

Floyd Newsum
Wade Wilson Art
October 17-November 24
www.wadewilsonart.com

At Wade Wilson Art, Floyd Newsum presents his latest body of richly-hued, heavily-worked, densely-layered paintings. Many of the paintings are influenced by Newsum's ongoing interest in the arts of Sirigu, a village in northern Ghana.

Throughout the exhibition, collaged elements abound. He includes scraps of newspaper, found photographs, and magazine clippings. Working in oil, oil pastel, and acrylics, Newsum has affixed broken and used sticks of pastel crayons to many of the pieces. A literalization of

Thierry de Duve's argument that since the emergence of industrialized pigments all paintings are readymade aided ("The Readymade and the Tube of Paint")? Thankfully, no. But many works do incorporate art historical elements in interesting ways.

In particular, *Sirigu Remembering Winter in Chicago Day* recalls the interwoven webs of Jackson Pollock's paintings from the mid-forties, just before he unleashed skeins of paint in his classic drip paintings. Heavy with impasto, Newsum's orchestrated surfaces are divided as a vertical diptych, a white panel above, black below. Like Pollock's advance of "all-overness," an anti-compositional technique where no single part of the composition is privileged over another, Newsum introduces his own anti-compositional stance. Collaging additional resin-coated pictorial elements to the periphery of *Remembering Winter*, Newsum enlivens the margins of the composition.

Inspired by the view of the Great Lakes seen from his airplane window, Newsum created *Lake Michigan*. Structured like an opened Renaissance altarpiece—with the donor panels flanking the sides and a series of predella panels below—the central image is a panoramic triptych of pure cobalt blue. To animate the watery surface, Newsum has squeezed paint directly from the tube, pushing the media around with his thumb and leaving large globs to create a thick, encrusted surface.

The exhibition also includes a number of red and orange paintings, which allude to the artist's personal history, specifically his father's career as a fireman. Indeed, the palette recalls the varied hues of a raging fire. Ladders recur throughout these paintings, often as resin-coated paper constructions jutting out from the main canvas. In addition to ladders, Newsum favors other repeating motifs: roosters, dogs, and fish.

While Newsum is a strong painter, the exhibition is uneven. A number of the smaller works feature the near-



PHOTO: FELIX SANCHEZ



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND WADE WILSON ART

encaustic painted paper affixed to much larger, unstretched canvases stapled directly to the wall. The industrial staples don't do much to mitigate the preciousness of the atavistic raw canvas conceit. Newsum handles the paint with confidence, his colors are solid, and his surfaces nicely built up. But as a whole, the exhibition is neither lackluster nor particularly compelling.

-- ELLIOTT ZOOEY MARTIN

*Above, from top: The Italian Girl in Algiers
Courtesy of The Houston Grand Opera*

*Floyd Newsum,
Blue Dog at Sunrise
Oil and acrylic on paper, 45 x 68 "*

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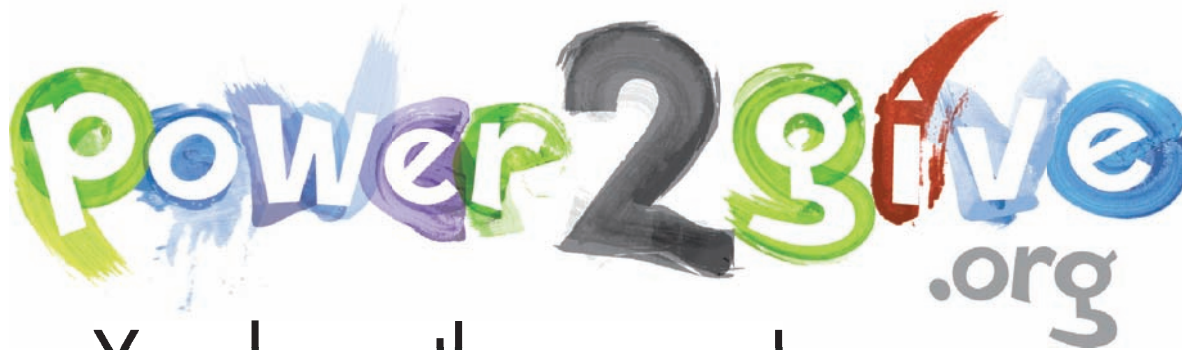


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