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## EDITOR'S REMARKS



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

Last month, A + C Houston celebrated its first birthday, but October marks a year that I've been at the helm, a position I coined "a work in progress," a favorite phrase from my dance-making days. The work and the progress continue, as I try to keep a nimble stance.

We like flux here.

And we are not alone. Abby Koenig reports on all the changes at Theatre Under the Stars, while John DeMers brings us into the expanding presence of Stark Naked Theatre, now in residence at Studio 101.

Don't expect any standing still in the classical music world either. Chris Johnson fills us in on new recordings from Houston Chamber Choir, Ars Lyrica and Mercury-the orchestra redefined.

Alecia Lawyer, founder of River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO), is a force to behold with or without her oboe. She brings us up to date on Planet ROCO in the Cultural Warrior interview.

The momentum continues with *CraftTexas* opening at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. Nancy Zastudil guides us through this show and the rise of craft consciousness throughout the nation.

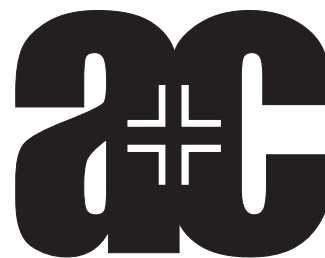
With one art fair down, and Texas Contemporary Art Fair to go, Devon Britt-Darby's candid chat with Max Fishko gets to the heart of how Houston can sustain two art fairs.

From the size of our review section, you can tell we've been a busy bunch.

October's Ad/Art Bomb is *San Francisco Climate Change 01* (2012) by Craig Poindexter, a San Francisco-based artist. You can find him at [www.craigpoindexter.com](http://www.craigpoindexter.com).

And so we continue, eyes open, in motion, riding the wave that is October in Houston's ever-evolving art scene.

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## ARTS+CULTURE MAGAZINE

THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN TEXAS

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DANNY KAMERATH, *JILL*, 2012, HICKORY, 32 X 16.5 X 22 INCHES, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.  
PART OF THE HOUSTON CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CRAFT'S "CRAFT TEXAS 2012" EXHIBIT  
THROUGH DECEMBER 30, 2012; PAGE 8.



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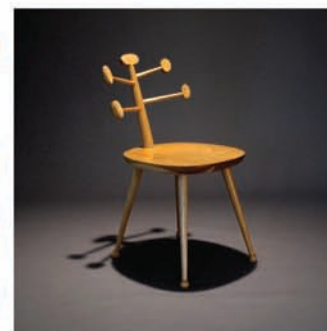
PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Connor Walsh and Melissa Hough in Houston Ballet's production of Aszure Barton's *Angular Momentum*; Page 28.

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in the south gallery **Dana Frankfort: For the Birds**

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# ARTIFACTS



PHOTO: LYNN LANE

ABOVE: Vault's Alicia Carlin and Amy Ell in *Thread*. BELOW: Melody Mennite and Ian Casady in Houston Ballet's production of Stanton Welch's *Marie*.

**GLEN BAILEY IS THE NEW DIRECTOR** for FotoFest's Student Education Program, an in-school student visual literacy program now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year in Houston's schools. Bailey came to Houston from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where he worked with the Center's outreach program in D. C. Schools. [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org)

**THE TEXAS COMMISSION ON THE ARTS** has designated the Midtown Management District an official Cultural Arts and Entertainment District for the State of Texas. Midtown is the first management district in the State of Texas to receive this honor, and joins a list of 18 other communities that benefit from the power of an art-focused community.

**VAULT DANCE COMPANY, UNDER** the director of Amy Ell, had a September residency at Wise Fool's Penasco Theater in New Mexico, where they premiered *Thread*, slated for a Houston performance on October 19 & 20. Ell travels to Iceland this month to teach aerial dance. [www.amyell.com/vault](http://www.amyell.com/vault)

**JENNIFER STEINER HAS BEEN** appointed the new General Manager at Houston Ballet. She was previously the company manager at Pacific Northwest

Ballet. This month, the company will be touring *Marie*, October 18-20, in Ottawa at the National Arts Centre. [www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org)

**THE IDEA FUND APPLICATION** deadline is October 19. The Idea Fund provides cash awards to up to 10 artists, associations of artists and/or curators that create and showcase new work that involves the public via process, production, or presentation. The Idea Fund will accept proposals from artists/curators focusing on the visual arts, performance, film, video, new media, social practice, and interdisciplinary projects. [www.theideafund.org](http://www.theideafund.org)

**DIVERSEWORKS LAUNCHED** A reinvigorated Artist Board, which will help set DiverseWorks' programmatic direction, develop policies, and curate specific programs. Comprising the 2012-13 Artist Board is a select group of Houston artists, performers, writers, architects, dancers, and creative thinkers from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines, many of whom are internationally known and respected, including Trenton Doyle Hancock, Katrina Moorhead, Robert Pruitt, Leslie Scates, and Damon Smith, among others. [www.diverseworks.org](http://www.diverseworks.org)

**HOUSTON ARTS ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES** the national initiative, Free Night of Theater from October 5-21. Participating organizations include Classical Theatre Company, The Ensemble Theatre, Houston Early Music, Houston Salsa Dancers, Main Street Theater, Mercury - The Orchestra Redefined, and Russian Cultural Center. HAA has also launched Power2Give, a crowd-funding program for nonprofits. [www.houstonartsalliance.com](http://www.houstonartsalliance.com)

**THE NEW MUSIC DOING GOOD** with Instruments program places gently used instruments in the hands of underserved students and economically challenged school districts. By partnering with individuals and other organizations, Music Doing Good with Instruments collects, refurbishes and redistributes instruments to the community, to those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to learn an instrument. [www.musicdoinggood.org](http://www.musicdoinggood.org)



PHOTO: PAM FRANCIS

# At Home in the World

## The Everyday Innovation of Craft



PHOTO: DANNY KAMERATH

Danny Kamerath, *Table for Two*, Yaupon Holly, 11.5 x 12.5 x 10.5 inches, 2011.

AS I WRITE, A LARGE-SCALE international art and technology symposium is taking place in the Southwest region: organizations in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas are hosting conferences, festivals, exhibitions, workshops, educational programs, and more.

All this technology has me thinking about craft.

Why? Because craft is the inherent quality of something made well with measurable skill – whether that something was created by writing a computer program or by wielding a chisel. It has the uncanny ability to be evidenced through its presence as well as its absence (making it all the more

appreciated). However, when talking about craft as an object-based art practice, materiality is inextricable from the conversation.

For more than a decade, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft has been advancing the education of the process, product and history of craft, which it defines in specific material terms as objects of art made with clay, fiber, glass, metal, wood and mixed media.

HCCC curator Anna Walker aims to highlight artists who use the aforementioned materials to usher innovation into the field of craft.

“While these artists are working with specific materials because of the

inherent history and properties of each one, how they make those materials fresh and relevant to our contemporary society is what I’m interested in as a curator,” she says.

One thing that sets HCCC apart from other national institutions focused on craft is the highly competitive Artist Residency Program, which offers awards of up to 12 months of studio space, modest financial support, and an introduction to and interaction with Houston’s arts community and other artists. In return, for 24 hours each week, resident artists open their studios to the public.

“This is where the visitor makes the connection from objects on view in the

galleries to the creative process. While materials and techniques define craft as a process- and material-based art, it’s the resident artists who bring it to life,” says Julie Farr, HCCC Executive Director.

And one of the main ways HCCC celebrates craft’s rich traditions and innovations happening throughout the state is through its signature biennial exhibition, *CraftTexas*. This month, *CraftTexas 2012* boasts its highest numbers yet: 500 submitted works with 49 selected for inclusion in the exhibition, including Houston-based artists Edward McCartney and Cindy Hickok.

McCartney has experimented with different ways of working over the years, carving a path for himself that led to jewelry-making and metal-smithing. Pairing non-precious materials with his need for greater expression, his jewelry pieces morphed into larger sculptural forms, as seen in his *Folio Chromatique* (2011) series, for which he has incorporated thousands of bright paper inserts and folds into a paperback book. The results are bead-like sculptures that employ reflection and motion to optically transform color.

The series was inspired by a meaningful encounter with Carlos Cruz-Diez, a Venezuelan artist whom McCartney recognizes as having “revolutionary concepts on the liberation of color from form, the complete denial of the sensuous, the figurative, and the narrative as influenced by the lineage of movements born of the Russian Constructivists.”

The symbolic and the literal are often at play in works identified as craft. For example, Hickok, a self-described “maker,” relies on craft’s ability to take a project beyond the ordinary. Her series *Mixed Bags* (2012) is a humorous look at the many bags that an individual uses throughout the day.

“Each is not a practical purse but a play on words and occasionally a parody on favorite figures in much-loved paintings, created by machine embroidery and mounted on purse frames,” Hickok says.

Laredo-based artist David Bogus is also interested in what people choose to carry with them, presenting his installation of ceramic suitcases *The Optimist Luggage*



(2011) as if it was for sale – a symptom of and a reflection upon what our society values. For the exterior of the suitcases, Bogus uses attractive, visually engaging principles of graphic design and color while the interior is purposely left a mystery, alluding to the contents in the minds of people we meet as we travel through our lives.

Several of the pieces in CraftTexas2012 take on more physically personal aspects for both the artist and the viewer.

“As I see it, the difference between art and craft is touch,” says furniture designer and maker Danny Kamerath. “Art is meant to be looked at and pondered – but don’t get too close to a work in a museum or you will be shooed away. Craft, on the other hand, is meant to be touched and used. The crafted object moves from the hand of the maker to the hand of the user. If that work of craft happens to be beautiful in appearance and elegantly proportioned and constructed, all the better.”

Wood is Kamerath’s material of choice, selected for its showiness or lack thereof, as seen in the complicated construction of *Ev*, a deconstructed chest of drawers; the welcoming simplicity of *Jill*, a minimalist yet playful chair, and the miniature arrangement *Table for Two*, a sculpture carved from a single piece of wood.

The artworks for each iteration of *CraftTexas* are selected by three invited professionals from national and regional institutions through an online jury process. During and after the opening reception of *CraftTexas* the jurors view the works in person, select their favorite piece and grant Awards of Merit – a cash prize of \$1000 each.

If Henry Ford was right and every object tells a story, then institutions like HCCC increase our listening opportunities. And, with arts institutions closing due to continued economic hard times (news broke last month that San Francisco Museum of Craft and Folk Art will be closing its doors in December), it becomes more and more important for places like HCCC to craft their own legacy – amplifying and broadcasting the stories of past, present, and future.

–NANCY ZASTUDIL

*Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator and coordinator of the art and technology event ISEA2012 “Taos Day.”*

September 29–December 30, 2012  
 CraftTexas 2012  
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Edward Lane McCartney, *Folio Chromatique #7, The Velocity of Color (detail)*. Paper-backed Books, Colored Paper, Acrylic Rods and Steel, 72 x 60 inches, 2011.

PHOTO: DAVID GOODING



David Bogus, *The Optimist Luggage (detail)*. Ceramic and Glass Shelving, 16 x 16 x 8 inches, 2011.

PHOTO: DAVID BOGUS

# Up a Wall

## SPA Brings Deborah Colker's *Mix* to Houston

**SOCIETY FOR PERFORMING ARTS** brings Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker performing their signature work, *Mix*, on October 12 at Jones Hall. In *Mix*, an enormous wall becomes a second floor as her über-strong dancer/athletes carry out Colker's imaginative movement on the vertical plane.

Houston audiences may know the Brazilian dance maverick from *OVO*, her insect-inspired Cirque du Soleil show. As the first Brazilian artist to win London's prestigious Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance, Colker has distinguished herself as an innovative pioneer in the use of set design and movement. Colker visits with A+C editor Nancy Wozny on *Mix* and more.

**A+C: Can you give us an idea of how the seeds for dancing on a wall came about?**

DEBORAH COLKER: I have a huge fascination for relating movement and space. A new space provides new movements; a new space demands the search for a new body. I wanted to subvert this order in which the space is horizontal and the dancers move vertically, to create a new physical order. From the conquest of verticality, we found a new path to dance.

**What can you do on a wall that you cannot do on the floor?**

The laws are different. The breathing is different, as well as the relationship between balance, weight and strength. Classical ballet helps a great deal. Yet, the wall also demands a different use of our attention, precision, a new look to the movement.

**How do the dancers use the wall differently than a floor?**

The concentration and the discipline necessary for the wall doesn't allow for a second of distraction. Any hesitation and you are on the floor. We need the strength, but at the same time we need the details of the movements. Nothing can be done in excess. The perfect measure is the quest. The wall demands a different kind of attitude as well. We also need to have arms as strong as the legs and an abdomen as strong as the buttocks.

**The dancers resemble insects in *Mix*, which is quite wonderful.**

We can think of many small creatures: crickets, lizards, fleas, ants, even spiders. And why not mention butterflies?

**What kind of strength are you looking for in dancers?**

I look for a dynamic strength, it means



PHOTO: FLAVIO COLKER

**ABOVE & BELOW: Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker in *Mix*.**

strength from the muscles, from the joints, the breathing, being really careful not to confuse strength with tension. We need an explosive strength, but we also need a controlled and concentrated strength.

**Can you describe the daily training regime?**

We work for about eight hours a day. We have ballet and contemporary class, and then we work with the movement repertory of the company, from the newer to the older pieces.

**OVO was a huge hit in Houston. Did *Mix* lay the groundwork for that piece?**

Actually Guy Laliberté, the owner of Cirque Du Soleil, was greatly delighted with my wall and came to me because of it. The theme for the piece was nature, and I chose the world of the insects. Other pieces of mine also served as inspiration for *OVO*. My movement concepts and the relation between space and movement are present in *OVO*. I started working on it in 2007, and it took over two years to complete. All my research and my artistic ideas had an influence on *OVO*.

**What intrigues you about using a set?**

A set for me is a place. It's never ornamental. It's a space to be conquered and, preferably, full of intentions and metaphors, besides physical achievements, which lead us to discover new paths.

**How do you keep the focus on the movement and not the set?**

Very often I keep the focus only on the movement, very often, on the relation between movement and space. The space has to be at the service of my ideas.

**Circus and dance are art forms that have been playing with each other since the early days of both. Do you see yourself more in the dance world, the circus world, or in between?**

I belong to the world of dance. I built this world, but I like to dialogue with other worlds and other techniques.



PHOTO: FLAVIO COLKER

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# Holding High the Musical Flame

## Theatre Under the Stars Strives Forward

There is a song in the musical *Jekyll & Hyde* that describes “The Moment” when Dr. Hyde’s hard work and perseverance finally come to fruition. Of course something goes amiss, and Hyde finds himself split between two competing personalities.

In a sense, it is fitting that Houston’s musical theater staple, Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS) will be staging this Broadway hit October 9-24, as they too have multiple “personalities” to contend with. On the one hand, their 2012-2013 season is replete with the old standards: *Peter Pan*, *Camelot* and *Man of La Mancha* will be revived. On the other hand, TUTS has mixed in newer Broadway titles such as *Monty Python’s SPAMALOT*, *Flashdance* and the aforementioned *Jekyll & Hyde*.

TUTS did not always blend the old with the new, though. Originating in 1968 by founder Frank M. Young, TUTS was envisioned as a company that would bring musical theater to the people. TUTS’s first productions were held at Miller Outdoor Theatre (hence, “Under the Stars”) offering theatergoers an outdoor, affordable venue (Miller performances are free). Despite TUTS’ move to the indoor Sarofim Hall at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, they still offer complimentary outdoor concerts at Miller once or twice a year, which they feel opens the door of musical theater to a greater audience.

“Since being at Miller is a part of our roots,” says John C. Breckenridge, President and CEO of TUTS, “it’s tremendously important to what we do.”

Breckenridge has been with TUTS since 1990 and has seen the organization broaden and expand; yet he stands firm that their “roots” remain securely planted. With the newly appointed artistic director Bruce Lumpkin, change is in the air.

When putting together their season, Breckenridge and Lumpkin take several factors into account; some are harder to grapple with than others. TUTS is a nonprofit with donors to appease, but it is also a theater company that needs to evolve and change and, undeniably, put bodies in seats. What they have found is that sometimes “nary the two shall meet.”

When TUTS established itself, it became known as a producer of revivals. Breckenridge recounts the multitude

of times that the company revived *Oklahoma*, until they finally decided enough was enough. “We knew that if we were to survive and remain relevant, we needed to do more than revivals.”

As Broadway’s tastes have changed, TUTS offerings have also been given a makeover, which has occasionally caused waves. TUTS has acquired a “family-friendly” brand, which is not necessarily a label they had been looking for. With Broadway’s move toward edgier, more rock-n-roll types of shows, TUTS has had to walk a fine line. “When we look at putting our season together,” Breckenridge notes, “we look at what’s current on Broadway and then also what revivals we can do.” It is a balancing act. There have been times when patrons objected that TUTS was straying too far from the family model expectation.

“We do struggle...internally. OK, is XYZ title going to be too much of a stretch for what our audiences think we should be doing?” Breckenridge mentions that there have been productions they have avoided because of this perception.

So how does a theater company entrenched in the world of song, delicately trying to balance the old musical with the new, forge ahead? The recent hiring of Lumpkin as Artistic Director is one step forward. Lumpkin brings to TUTS vast experience in Broadway and a history with the organization; Lumpkin’s first job in the theater was with TUTS in the 1970s. Lumpkin has plans to integrate more emerging theater into TUTS’ season, and expand its audience at the same time.

“Something John and I have been talking about for several months is utilizing an alternate space,” Lumpkin says. Having the ability to utilize their smaller space at Zilkha Hall for lesser-known productions would allow TUTS to expand its offerings to a younger demographic and bring productions that would play better in a more intimate setting. Both Breckenridge and Lumpkin agree that TUTS will continue to move forward, even if it means shaking up their family-friendly image a bit.

There’s more to TUTS than its season. In 1972, TUTS received a grant from the Humphreys Foundation of Liberty Texas and launched the Humphreys School of Musical Theatre (HSMT). “It has grown tremendously,” TUTS new Artistic Director, Bruce Lumpkin



COURTESY OF TUTS

**American Idol star and Tony Award nominee Constantine Maroulis joins with Grammy Award nominee and R&B superstar Deborah Cox to inject new life into the classic tale of good and evil, *Jekyll & Hyde*.**

says. Now, enrollment has increased to several hundred students.

TUTS also runs a summer program for teenagers called ACT @ TUTS, which culminates into a full-length musical at the end of each season. ACT gives aspiring actors the opportunity to learn from directors and coaches working professionally in the field. TUTS prides itself on this program, which has seen its graduates win coveted roles and awards; Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Bruce Norris is a graduate of the program.

In 2002, they established the Tommy Tune Awards, which recognizes excellence in high school musical theater. Now in its tenth year, the Tommy Tunes have become a celebrated event brimming with healthy teenage competition. “The Tommy Tunes are like the state football championships for the arts,” Breckenridge gushes.

TUTS is not the theater company it was all those years back when Frank Young

brought it to life. However, despite its new location, expanding outreach, new offerings and adventurous choices - at its core, musical theater will always reign as king. Breckenridge adds matter-of-factly, “We are and always will be about musical theater.”

—ABBY KOENIG

*Abby Koenig is a writer and playwright, occasional storyteller and has been known to tell a joke or two. She teaches Mass Communication at Houston Community College.*

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# Companhia de Dança DEBORAH COLKER

## MIX

Brazil's Deborah Colker, known for being the first female Cirque du Soleil choreographer with *Ovo*, redefines the rules of what can and can't be done. *Mix* is no exception with dancers performing on a stage-wide climbing wall.



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# Gallerists Who “Actually Like Each Other”

## Texas Contemporary Art Fair Touts Camaraderie Among Dealers

WITH THE SECOND ITERATION of the Houston Fine Art Fair in the rear-view mirror, it must be time for round two of Texas Contemporary, one of several fairs produced by New York-based artMRKT Productions. A+C visual arts editor **Devon Britt-Darby** caught up with artMRKT managing partner Max Fishko for his take on Houston as an art-fair market.

**A+C: You’re doing this fair for the second time. What did you learn from last year’s experience?**

**MAX FISHKO:** I remember when you and I spoke last year after the fair, and I said how surprised and happy I was to see that the local dealers were so incredibly warm and generous and welcoming with the out-of-town dealers coming in, in terms of making introductions for them and hooking them up with local collectors, local curators, press, whatever – they were all so nice about bringing these people in and showing them what was going on.

At the time, I had suspected that it was something special, and it’s actually turned out to be the case, because the network of dealers that have come in and joined the show – we’ve got Greg Kucera (Seattle) and Feature Inc. (New York), Angles Gallery and Daniel Weinberg (Los Angeles) – you know, all these fucking legends, who are kind of like my heroes, in a way, have come into the fair.

And they’re doing it, I think, in no small part, because when they talked to the other people that participated last year, that kind of welcome that they got resonated, and it resonated really strongly. I’m not going to say it was easy, but the network of people that have come to form the content of the fair – it’s kind of like this extended group of friends. It’s quite a special thing. It’s a great group of people who do great work who all see eye to eye and actually like each other.

**Last December, during the Miami art fairs, I talked to a number of gallerists who had shown with one of the two Houston fairs, and some of them favorably compared the service you’d given your galleries to the one they were showing with in Miami – the gist being that the Miami fair was guaranteed to have plenty of galleries lining up to rent booths, so the owner didn’t have to worry as much about keeping them happy. They said, “Max**



**Darren Waterson, *Mollusk*, 2011, Oil on Wood Panel, 36 x 36 inches.**

**knows he hasn’t got it made in Houston yet, so he has to try harder.”**

The art-fair business, at its very core, we are all selling essentially the same product. We have walls; we have lights; we have facilities; we have some capacity to market an event; and we have the kind of logistical infrastructure to set up these kinds of shows. The difference between us and everybody else is that we try and emphasize that we really give a shit, and that’s because we do.

I’m only as good as the dealers in the fair. And the only way that I can think of to get great art dealers to participate with you is to go out there and tell them that you care about what you’re doing and to actually come through with that.

Look at Pulse LA – it’s gone. Gone. Why does that occur? How come we can make two art fairs happen in Houston two years consecutively, but Los Angeles could not sustain both Art Platform and Pulse? It’s because the loyalty and the camaraderie isn’t there. There isn’t that sense of community, and I think it’s super cool because the Texas dealers and our fair in particular has created a little sense of community around it.

**You’re also doing a fair in Miami this December – Miami Project. Do you know yet if any Houston galleries are participating?**

Kerry Inman is going to come, which is really exciting, and we’re going to have Conduit Gallery and Marty Walker

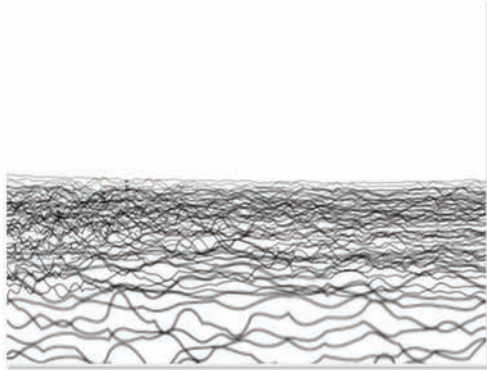
from Dallas. We’re hoping to get a couple more Texas dealers involved. One thing that’s also kind of cool is that we’re able to involve the institutions that we have worked with from those different cities (in which artMRKT Productions has already produced fairs). So I can do an event at Miami Project for (Contemporary Arts Museum Houston director) Bill Arning and his board members. That’s kind of exciting for me. And when was the last time you went to an art fair in Miami and you had three or five great galleries from Texas?

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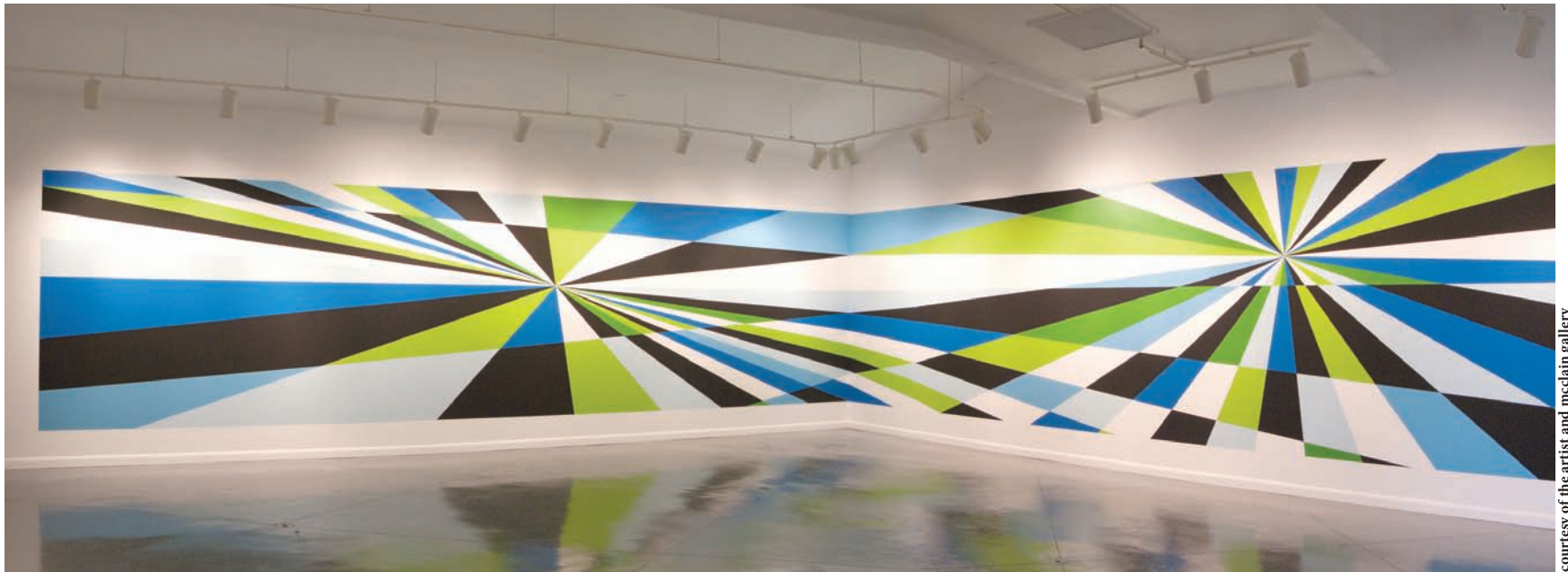
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MAGAZINE

# Taking a Bow and Sharing the Stage

## Artist of the Year Aaron Parazette Presents New Work – His and Others’



courtesy of the artist and mcclain gallery

Aaron Parazette, *FLYAWAY*, 2012.

A CONFLUENCE OF FORTUNE has brought together two related painting exhibitions this fall: the 2012 Texas Artist of the Year exhibition at Art League Houston, *FLYAWAY: New Work by Aaron Parazette*, and the Parazette-organized *In Plain Sight* at McClain Gallery. The Art League prize recognizes – and the McClain exhibition makes clear – what Bill Davenport, in his essay for the *FLYAWAY* catalogue, calls Parazette’s “centrality to the Texas art scene.”

With forty paintings, all by Houston-based artists, all but two made in the last two years, *In Plain Sight* presents a selection of the local painting scene. In his forward to the catalogue as well as in person, Parazette defines himself as the show’s organizer, rather than its curator: a distinction due to his role in choosing the artists to be exhibited but not the objects, a decision he left up to each participant. To further muzzle his curatorial voice, Parazette hung his contribution to the exhibition on the title wall, a painterly answer to the curator’s didactic panel. While eschewing a thematic installation and presenting a range of painterly practices, Parazette hewed to what he terms “conventional painting” as opposed to a more elastic idea of the medium.

Of course, *In Plain Sight* begs to be compared to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s major 1985 survey, *Fresh Paint: the Houston School*. With such a loose curatorial grip, Parazette sidesteps the criticisms engendered by *Fresh Paint*—namely the earlier exhibition’s claim of a specific Houston school, style,

or approach to painting. Any attempt to corral today’s practices under a certain brand would close the door on Parazette’s assertion that “the show’s implicit proposition [is] to cultivate an ongoing conversation.” Parazette does not endeavor to present an argument, but rather, the beginning of a sentence.

As such, there are works that take a distinct approach unmatched elsewhere in the exhibition: wily objects that I just cannot round up under a larger thematic umbrella. For instance, Mark Flood’s luscious lace painting *The Thing*, made by using lace as both a stencil and a stamp; while he shares Kent Dorn’s emphasis on tactility and Tierney Malone’s use of low materials as well as the high-keyed color palette found throughout the exhibition, Flood does not fit into a clean rubric. Likewise, Gail Stack’s cobalt palimpsest of gestural traces is a singular work; moreover, as a *Fresh Paint* veteran, Stack is an important inclusion and a testament to the stamina of the Houston scene.

At the same time, there are threads, whether aesthetic, social, or philosophical, which recur throughout the exhibition. While not spelled out in the installation, one comes away with a sense of certain commonalities. The majority of the works on view are not just abstract but highly reductive in nature, and can be broken down into canvases that are taped (HJ Bott, Jonathan Leach, Parazette, Susie Rosmarin) and shaped (Melanie Crader, Jeremy DePrez, Christian Eckart, Myke Venable). In contrast to the hard-edged painters, *In Plain Sight* features a number of gestural

(Brian Portman, Howard Sherman) and post-painterly abstractionists (Joseph Cohen, Alika Herreshoff).

Among the figurative canvases, the tendency tends to be more discursive, paintings about painting, language, representation, or communication (Davenport, Dorn, Francesca Fuchs, Malone). The portrait room also points to social connections; all artists are graduates of the University of Houston, where Parazette teaches: Seth Alverson, Emily McGrew, Cheyanne Ramos, and Hana Shoup. This room demonstrates Davenport statement from the Art League catalogue: “Aaron has a lot of points of contact with the art world beyond his work.”

Which brings us back to Parazette’s *FLYAWAY* at Art League, an exhibition of work made within the last eight months. The six shaped canvases—oblong, truncated, asymmetrical but never amorphous—chart Parazette’s latest developments in the Color Key series. As Parazette explains, the idea was to create “a painting support that was visually insistent because of its uncommon shape, and then to paint something on the support that was visually insistent in its own right.”

The centerpiece of *FLYAWAY* is a titular wall painting. And it is not to be missed. Bisected by a corner and spanning two walls, *FLYAWAY* measures fifty-six feet in length. It does not inhabit the full wall, stopping before the floor, ceiling, and lateral corners. Yet it is absolutely engulfing; the radiating forms pull the viewer into the painting’s perspectival

vortices. Conceived a week and a half before painted and executed in a cool palette of green, blue, white and black, it grows out of Parazette’s most recent suite of color key paintings (*Color Key 39*, on the opposite wall, is derived from the same working drawing). Just at eye level, a horizon line runs across the entire length of the wall painting. On the left side, the horizon line runs through the left vanishing point while on the right, the vanishing point converges a few inches higher, producing what Parazette calls “irrational geometry.”

Together, *FLYAWAY* and *In Plain Sight* speak to the robust vitality of artistic activity in Houston. For Parazette, *In Plain Sight* is intended as a wake-up call to what’s happening all around us every day. And it’s an important call to heed. Perhaps the next round-up will go beyond the canvas and include a multitude of artistic approaches.

–ELLIOTT ZOOEY MARTIN

*Elliott Zooley Martin is a Houston-based curator and writer. A+C visual arts editor Devon Britt-Darby served on the Art League panel that selected Parazette.*

**September 7–November 2, 2012**  
*FLYAWAY: New Work by*  
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 Art League Houston  
[www.artleaguehouston.org](http://www.artleaguehouston.org)

**September 8–October 20, 2012**  
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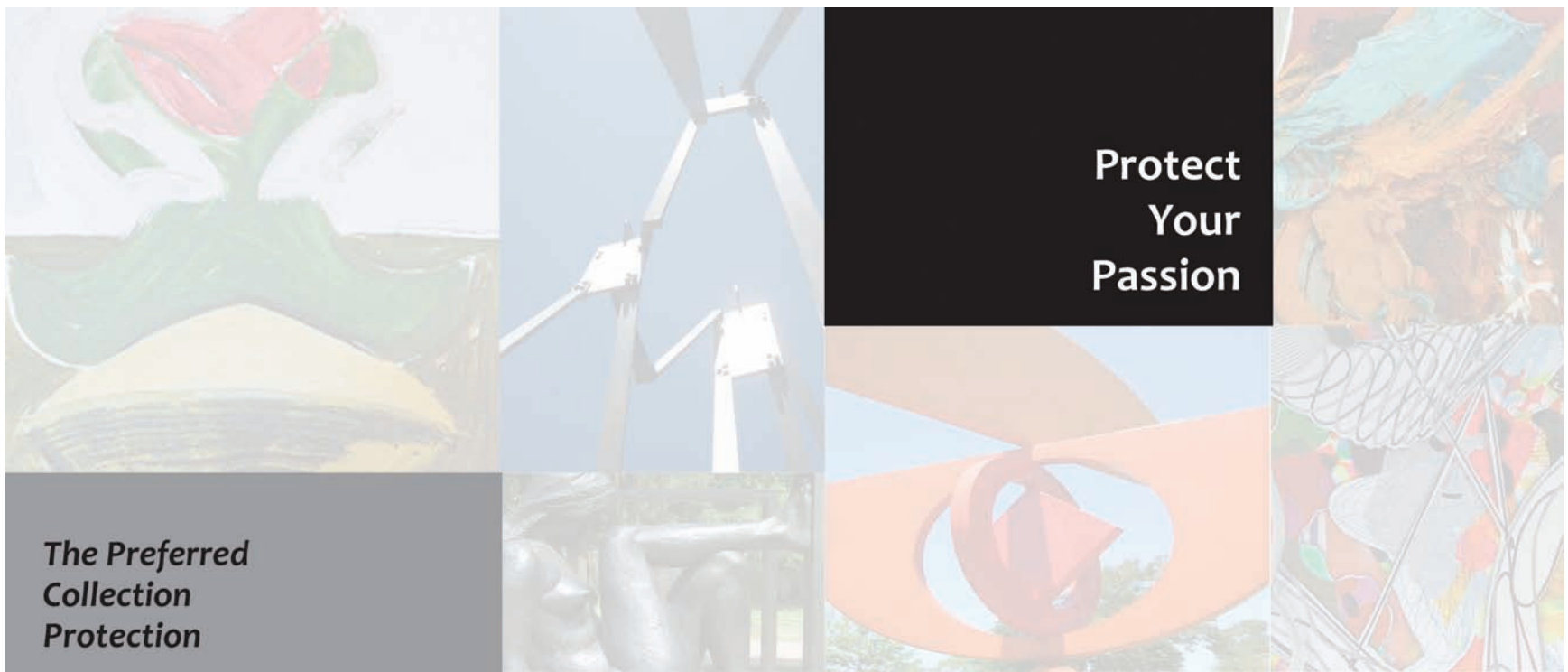
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# Theater in the Raw

## Strong Acting Defines Stark Naked Theatre

**WHEN I FIRST MET PHILIP LEHL** and Kim Tobin over a Chinese lunch in the early spring of 2006, while I was working on my musical *Deep in the Heart*, I had no idea how much the future held for them. Then again, neither did they.

I knew they'd never worked in a show together before, the way most actors *have* in the small world of Houston live theater. And I knew they'd never met, since I had to introduce them, a fact that made sense because Tobin had recently moved home after several years perfecting her craft in New York City. At the end of that getting-to-know-you lunch, the director casting my musical pulled me aside and said, "Hmm, I don't know..." Oddly for me, I answered, "That's okay, cuz I *do*."

For all my good feeling about the chemistry Lehl and Tobin displayed at their first meeting, I was no more aware than they were that they'd work extra-hard to make my awkward middle-aged love story seem believable, that they'd *really* fall in love and get married – yes, to each other – in the process, or that they'd start one and then another independent theater company in Houston to produce scripts no doubt better, and certainly more *avant-garde*, than the one I'd handed them over spring rolls and kung pao chicken.

"The aesthetic doesn't really limit our choice of plays," explains Lehl, as the couple's Stark Naked Theatre Co. steams toward its second season, its first full one in a performance space shared with two other respected troupes. "But we are into plays that seem challenging to us." Tobin adds a clause to Lehl's sentence: "Plays that are challenging in the way they depict relationships. It's about how deep emotionally you can take yourself to those places, how far we can reach into our own well of truth and understanding, and share it with an audience."

A play called *Body Awareness* by Annie Baker kicks things off Oct. 26, running through Nov. 10. A 1980s favorite called *Beyond Therapy* by Christopher Durang picks up after the busy holiday season (during which Lehl returns to his Alley Theatre roots for a turn in *A Christmas Carol*), running Feb. 22-March 9. Motives turn even darker and murkier after that, as Stark Naked closes the season with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, June 7-22. All performances will be given at Studio 101, a kind of location

collaboration with Mildred's Umbrella and Classical Theatre Co. at Spring Street Studios.

If you don't think all this sounds like another community-theater production of *Annie* or *Grease*, you are right. Stark Naked, the latest iteration of a mission that first produced a company called Brave Dog, is devoted to quality writing, quality design and, most of all, quality acting.

Lehl and Tobin want Stark Naked to be both a journey and a destination for its actors, beginning of course with themselves. To act in a Stark Naked production is, therefore, to arrive somewhere in your career. And yet, in the sense of the art and its related craft, it's always about the miles you still have to go before you sleep.

"We think there has not been a consistent focus on this kind of aesthetic," says Lehl, in his mind surveying the local scene he has been such a part of, at the Alley and elsewhere. "We feel it often gets lost in the set, or in something else people are paying attention to, instead of this."

Tobin, who also teaches her craft at the Kim Tobin Acting Studio, picks up the thread: "A lot of people are always throwing together theater companies just to put up a play – not with a clear mission or willingness to follow through over a period of time. We want to build what an audience can follow and learn from. We're all about the aesthetic of acting itself. I have to be willing to go the journey, and an audience can't learn about that from one event."

For Lehl and Tobin, a *journey* it has been. In 2010, they formed Brave Dog with friends Georgi and Rick Silverman, putting on a promising debut of the quirky romantic comedy *Almost, Maine* by John Cariani, with Lehl directing and Tobin one of the players. That production was given at Stages, with Brave Dog moving on to Wildfish Theater after that to offer *Reckless* by Craig Lucas.

By that point, however, personal differences had arisen that made the future of Brave Dog a question mark, inspiring Lehl and Tobin to strike out on their own. A naming contest with free tickets as the prize was held. Several good names came in. At the end of the process, "Stark Naked," suggested by Lehl's brother Benjamin (a rock and roll guitarist based in the family's hometown



PHOTO: GABRIELLA NISSEN

**Kim Tobin, Pamela Vogel and Matt Lents in the Stark Naked Theatre production of *Body Awareness*.**

of Des Moines), was judged the winner.

"And we didn't even have to give him free tickets," Lehl laughs, "because he lives in Iowa."

Stark Naked made an auspicious debut with *Debt Collectors*, an appropriately dark adaptation of *Creditors* by August Strindberg, followed by *Dinner with Friends* by Donald Margulies. Considered together, the two works make flesh what Stark Naked's emphasis on "relationships" is all about.

Both focused on marriages and infidelities large and small, and both featured way-too-candid candor and no small amount of men and women snarling and spitting at each other. In these plays, as in many of the more serious works across the ages, love means always having to say "I hate you!"

Stark Naked, with its passionate leadership, superb actors, directors and designers, and innovative approach

to performance space, seems well-positioned to face the future. And that future, of course, depends on funding.

While Lehl concedes that none of Stark Naked's shows has broken even after paying all involved what he calls "a living wage," some combination of ticket revenues, personal donations and corporate, government and foundation gifts is managing to keep the lights on. At least, this being Stark Naked, enough to gaze into the darkness within the human soul.

–JOHN DEMERS

*John DeMers is the author of 46 published books of fiction and nonfiction. He hosts the weekly Delicious Mischief food and wine radio show heard in Houston, Dallas and Austin.*

**October 25–November 10, 2012**  
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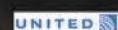
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# Fresh Tracks

## Three Houston Music Groups Offer New Recordings



PHOTO: SIMON GENTRY

### Mercury's Maria Lin.

IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY YOU REALLY can find everything on the internet. Thanks to the magic of digital technology, you can find a car, a house or, if you are the Houston Chamber Choir's artistic director, Robert Simpson, the manuscript of a monumental work of Italian vocal writing from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

After it had languished in the stacks of the archives of Westminster Abbey and the Central Library in Zurich for centuries, the enterprising Greek musicologist Pyrrhos Bamichas found and published the first critical edition of the Psalmi ad Vesperas from 1694, by the Bologna based composer Giovanni Paolo Colonna. Where did he publish it? The internet. And that is exactly where Simpson stumbled onto the piece.

"It really is like coming across letters in your grandmother's attic. This is music that hasn't been heard in 300 years, and yet it was highly valued in its own time," says Simpson. Colonna's music was heard throughout Europe during his lifetime, but this particular piece had not been performed in modern times until it was offered in Houston last season.

The Houston Chamber Choir has also made the world premiere recording of

the piece, which is available on the MSR Classics label, and is just one of three remarkable recordings from Houston area ensembles that are all being released this month.

While their recording is not a world premiere, Ars Lyrica Houston chose the rarely-performed opera *La Dirindina*, by Domenico Scarlatti, as the centerpiece of its latest CD for the Sono Luminus record label.

"Over a year ago, when I was contemplating another recording project, a Domenico Scarlatti disc had a certain appeal, and the record company was interested in putting out something that had *La Dirindina* on it because it's a piece for which there aren't any good recordings available," says artistic director Matthew Dirst, who also makes an appearance playing the organ on the Houston Chamber Choir's new CD.

The crossover of artists on each of these two discs points to the lively interest in early music and period instruments performances in Houston. In addition to the dual musical roles Matthew Dirst plays in both projects, the Houston Chamber Choir and Ars Lyrica Houston share many instrumentalists for these recordings.

The orchestra formerly known as Mercury Baroque, now Mercury, has taken a completely different approach to its new disc than either of its fellow Houston institutions. In addition to choosing repertoire like *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* by Mozart, which is anything but rare, the versatile and innovative ensemble has joined forces with Classical 91.7/Houston Public Media for the production of its latest recording, which features several of Mozart's best known and most loved works.

"It's great for us to do something familiar that our people can just go home and listen to this music really casually. That

is something that we want to do with our recordings," says artistic director Antoine Plante, who also suggests that the performances by his ensemble can hold their own among the many other available recordings of these venerable music pieces.

In addition to giving their local fans and patrons an opportunity to enjoy their artistry in the comfort of their own homes, and bringing rarely-heard masterpieces to light, recordings like these three also serve as a vehicle for some much deserved national and international recognition for the ensembles, and for the greater classical music community in Houston.

There was a time when ensembles like Mercury, Ars Lyrica Houston or Houston Chamber Choir might have relied on recordings as a substantial piece of their revenue. As the recording industry continues to change a dramatic pace, however, projects like these serve more as calling cards at national conferences, and in developing relationships with presenters and agents.

"In our history, this is starting to be crucial," says Plante. "We are starting to put more energy in our national and international presence. It's important for our growth and it's important so that we can promote the name of the city and its great art 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.*

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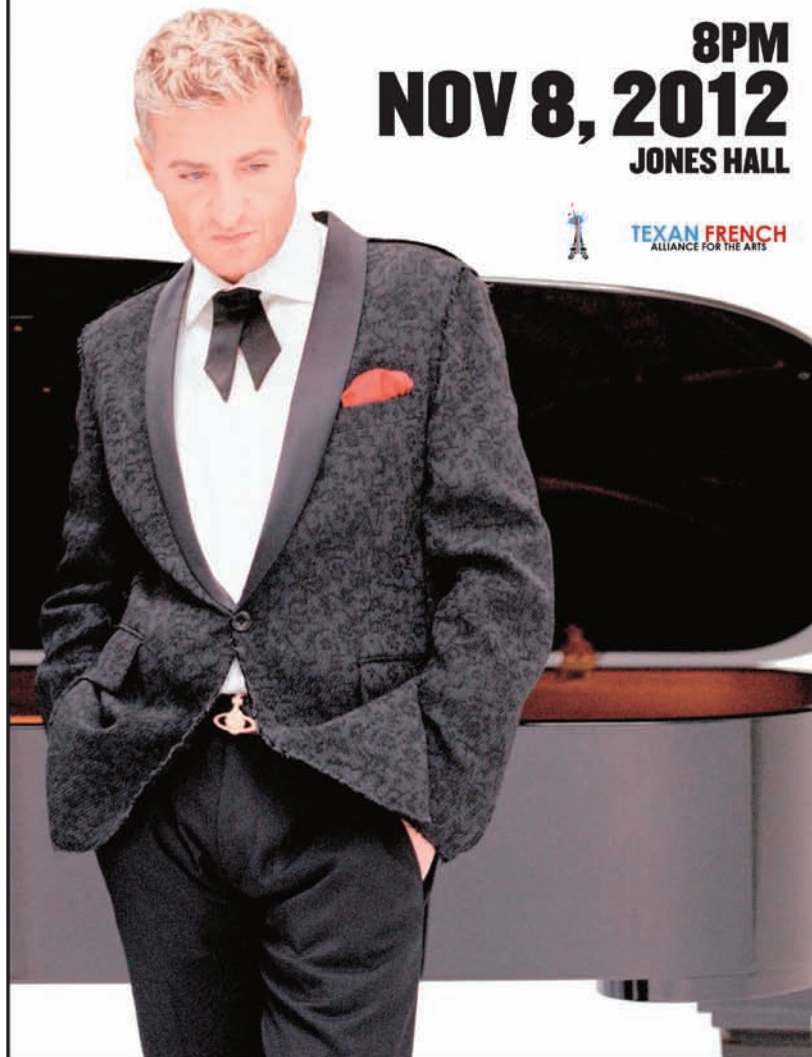
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# Cultural Warrior

## ROCO's Alecia Lawyer



PHOTO: DAVID A. BROWN

Alecia Lawyer and JoAnn Falletta.

Alecia L. Lawyer is the founder, executive and artistic director, and principal oboist of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO). With a tag line of “the Most Fun You Can Have with Serious Music,” Lawyer takes to heart the job of making classical music welcoming to all. Now entering their eighth season, ROCO has made its mark on Houston’s music scene. Lawyer visits with A+C editor **Nancy Wozny** on all things ROCO.

**A+C: Give us an idea of the early seeds for ROCO.**

Alecia Lawyer: The spark for ROCO came when I learned my church, St. John the Divine, was renovating. When I saw the renditions, I knew an orchestra should go there because the plans were to make the space as acoustically perfect as possible. It also felt like a European church.

**ROCO is magic. I can say that because I have sat in the orchestra and watched how you all connect to each other. It’s surreal from that seat. But what really blew me away was hearing my idol, Jo Ann Falletta, the conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, say**

**that. Bring us into the ROCO culture.**

The magic happens because of the relationships on the stage and the relationships that have been created with the audience members. The audience is not a thing. It is a group of independently-minded people who come together to share in a live conversation through ROCO’s language of music. Interestingly, the orchestra is also not a thing. We are as independent and unique as our patrons. ROCO musicians really do care about each and every person in the audience, and take great joy in connecting with them.

I also think that we offer multiple ways to enter classical music. We meet people where they are. If you are a newbie, we have pronunciation guides for composers’ names and timings for pieces (in case you don’t like one, you’ll know how long you have to wait until it changes!). If you are a connoisseur, we offer rarely-heard pieces and world premieres and commissions, as well as fresh takes on favorites. Kids can come to ROCOrooters and have a music education lesson, come into the concert for one piece and then stay for movies and pizza while the parents go to dinner.

**Every year ROCO goes conductorless. How is that possible? I thought orchestras needed those.**

Performing without a conductor requires collaboration, mutual respect, and radical trust. It empowers the individual musicians in a way that translates into an exciting experience for the audience.

Removing the “wall” between orchestra and audience exposes an intimate conversation among the musicians and invites the audience into conversation with the chamber orchestra. Few orchestras of ROCO’s size attempt to perform conductorless, especially on pieces as challenging as Beethoven’s well-loved Fifth Symphony or Haydn’s “Surprise” Symphony.

Sharing leadership among ROCO’s 40 musicians showcases the high level of artistry and strong spirit of musical *joie de vivre* that is ROCO’s signature.

**ROCO is culled from Houston’s best musicians along with out of town players. What are the three qualities you look for in a ROCO musician?**

ROCO definitely requires a unique musician with performance skills and speaking skills, but mostly getting-outside-yourself skills. Sometimes our classical world frowns upon the word “entertainment.” However, seeing a group perform is as important as hearing it. The look and appearance cannot be the priority nor the emphasis. It just has to be a part of the personality of the players who show their enjoyment on stage.

**You wear a lot of hats on planet ROCO. When you sit down to be principal oboist can you fully take the artistic director hat off?**

It’s important for all musicians to feel their part is not just playing their instruments and going home. We actually put on nametags and come out to meet the audience during the intermission. However, it does take me the first rehearsal in a set to get fully focused on performing, not worrying about ticket sales, donations, logistics, etc. Luckily now, we have an incredible staff that does a great job in all of these areas.

**How did you know that the oboe was your instrument? I learned (from you) at one of those intimate ROCO restaurant gatherings that reeds are not for the faint of heart.**

One of my teachers, Elaine Douvas, said, “Learn to make reeds fast or it will ruin your life.” I adhere to this philosophy and also enjoy all of the oboe’s idiosyncrasies. Yes, the reed is a little barometer, changing with the weather. And many people do not know

that we have to make our own reeds. Think lots of cool knives! I was always up for a challenge and besides, my dad was the band director and needed one in his band.

**Let’s get to the season. Josep Caballé-Domenech totally rocked the Texas Music Festival. Get us jazzed to see your opening program, Fiesta.**

With our Feast Your Ears Season, we have delectable guest artists, delicious main concerts, a tantalizing new chamber series, a bombastic percussion premiere, plus appetizing artistic and community collaborations. With our first concert we feature Latin composers and conductor, so it will be a Fiesta!

Josep is a fantastic Spanish conductor collaborating with us on music from Argentina and Spain. Our soloist, Anne Marie McDermott, presents Mozart and then the orchestra performs a rarely-heard composer, Arriaga, who is known as the Spanish Mozart. We will repeat this opening concert at the Crighton Theater in Conroe on Sunday.

Our season title “Feast Your Ears” is a culmination of our concept since inception of combining the senses. We have always paired wine and food with our music from Tasting Room “Music Tastings” to Kiran’s dinners. We also love to combine visual arts, like our receptions after concerts that host artists from Houston galleries and our cover art this year from the MFAH rich in color, texture and foods.

**As the mother of an orchestra and two growing sons, are you ever late for soccer practice?**

I do feel like I have multiple personalities, but that happened before kids! Many of my days change drastically at 3pm to go to carpool and then home for homework, volleyball, scouts, etc. If there is no concert that night, then I head on back to work (in my house) after they get to sleep. However, I frankly could not do this without my parents, who often help with pickups, feedings and homework, and Larry, who is such a wonderfully involved husband and father.

**October 6, 2012–5:00pm**  
*ROCO in Concert: Fiesta*  
 St. John the Divine  
 2450 River Oaks Blvd., Houston, TX

**October 7, 2012–7:00pm**  
*ROCO in Concert: Fiesta! Encore*  
 The Crighton Theatre  
 234 N. Main St. Conroe, TX  
[www.rocohouston.org](http://www.rocohouston.org)

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Kris Cox, *Curtain - Bone Dots*, Pigmented Wood Putty, Acrylic & Dorland's Wax Medium on Wood Panel, 60 x 40 inches.

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# RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BARBARA DAVIS GALLERY

Danny Rolph, *Enterprise 10*, 2012, Acrylic on Canvas.

## Danny Rolph: Duke of Burgundy

Barbara Davis Gallery  
September 7–October 5, 2012  
www.barbaradavisgallery.com

There's a classic look and feel to London artist Danny Rolph's new paintings. With shards of color that jostle alongside sinewy curves and biomorphic forms in a whirlwind of shattered rhythms, they look like something James Rosenquist might paint if he gave up popular-culture sources and went to study with Hans Hofmann.

Moving up in scale and further into abstraction from his earlier collages on Triple Wall, Rolph adds a quiet dialogue with the spaces at Barbara Davis Gallery by painting pale pink "whispers" – what he and Davis call the simple, hard-edge geometric shapes – directly onto the wall next to the canvases.

Seen individually, the whispers might seem like a gimmicky move, but together they have the effect of further uniting an already cohesive installation, particularly in the back gallery, where Rolph's paintings have just the right amount of breathing room. (Because

Rolph uses acrylic paint, one of the only downsides to looking at his highly pleasurable work is that in close quarters, you sometimes notice areas that suffer just enough from a lack of sensuousness that you wish they were painted in oil.)

The dozen paintings are drawn from three series: *Cardinal*, which generally has the most open but also structured compositions; *Return*, which tends to be darker and more congested; and *Enterprise*, which falls somewhere between the two. What the titles mean is anybody's guess, but Rolph continues to get ample mileage out of a pictorial language that evokes both personal memories and the rush of images in an amped-up culture.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

## 10 Decades: Rice School of Architecture Centennial

Architecture Center Houston  
September 20–November 2, 2012  
www.aiahouston.org

On the occasion of the centenary of the Rice School of Architecture, a fascinating exhibition documenting its history is

currently on display at the Architecture Center Houston downtown. It is rare to see an architectural exhibition in Houston that is open to the public, let alone one that considers the pedagogical methods used by one of the handful of schools that educates most of the future architects of this city.

The show consists of a long, white lacquered table specially constructed to hold ten accordion-like books that correspond to the ten decades the school has been in existence. The duo-tone images on the pages of the books are colored-coded by theme: blue for "people," purple for "operations," magenta for "extra-curricular," pink for "engagement," orange for "outreach," chartreuse for "space," black for "architecture," dark gray for "institutions," and dove gray for "communication."

Dawn Finley, an associate professor at the Rice School of Architecture, conceived of the unusual display concept. She and her husband, Mark Wamble, another Rice professor, are partners in Interloop—Architecture, one of Houston's most self-consciously avant-garde architectural offices. Their work, which is being built in greater amounts in recent years, tends towards a rigorous examination of fabrication methods coupled with a strong graphic sensibility to devise projects that somehow still manage to have an appealingly playful undercurrent.

Typically, architectural exhibitions make do with photos, drawings, models, and occasionally architectural fragments that must stand for the actual buildings, which can never be contained inside a gallery. The method of viewing is passive; one stands and gazes. Finley's flip-books invite the visitor to bend over and manipulate the object on display.



PHOTO: BEN KOUSH

Visitors examine *10 Decades: Rice School of Architecture Centennial* at the exhibition's opening.

(I wished the tables had been a bit taller.) During the exhibition opening it was amusing to watch the various generations of Rice grads and professors (and some U of H supporters) gravitate towards the years of their tenure shifting the pages back and forth to see what was included or left out.

Although the idea of ten decades has a captivating symmetry about it, it might have been more effective if the books had been organized by tenure of dean or some arrangement more closely aligned with events happening at the school. That would have helped to clarify shifts in pedagogical approaches over the years. Another option might have been to arrange the show according to the years that Rice adhered to a Beaux-Arts, Modern, and Postmodern agenda, respectively.

These organizational flaws aside, I hope this exhibition leads to some sort of permanent record of the school's history, a document that is sorely lacking for such a distinguished institution.

–BEN KOUSH

Ben Koush is a Houston-based architect and writer. He earned his master's degree in architecture from Rice in 2002.

## Eric Zimmerman: Endless Disharmony & Telltale Ashes

Art Palace  
September 7–October 27, 2012  
www.artpalacegallery.com

There's a lot going on in Eric Zimmerman's latest Art Palace exhibition, which is itself part of larger goings-on: a dialogue with another, now-closed Zimmerman exhibition at the Reading Room in Dallas and with the website [endlessdisharmony.tumblr.com](http://endlessdisharmony.tumblr.com). Mind you, the shows only overlapped



by a week, so few people have directly partaken of the entire conversation, but part of what Zimmerman is tapping is our thwarted desire to find our place in a vast, confusing universe and the accompanying, nagging sensation that we're always missing something.

Much of Zimmerman's work involves obsessively-rendered graphite drawings from what appear to be disparate photographic sources. A bison carcass, an icy landscape, a demolition site, and a hand preparing to perform a disappearing-coin trick are among the seemingly unrelated images on view. But words matter, too, and both of two limited-edition zines (available for \$1 each) are chock full of them – along with images from or related to the show – offering stream-of-consciousness clues into Zimmerman's thinking.

Other text-heavy pieces include a Steve Wolfe-style graphite replication of the cover of René Daumal's *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* and a graphite drawing of black space around the letters – their whiteness that of the remaining unmarked paper – that make up the word “ENDLESS.”

Endlessness's significance gets reinforced in *Endless (Disharmony)*, a drawing of an old-school “endless” audio cassette tape, the kind meant to play in a continuous loop. But the top half of this

one's plastic casing has been removed to reveal that part of the tape has slipped off its roller, poignantly signaling an end to this recording's endlessness.

On the wall opposite *Endless (Disharmony)*, Zimmerman has arranged segments of what's billed as an endless cassette tape containing audio of the Apollo 11 landing into rays emanating from an orb. That they're held with map pins to the wall is not merely expedient; map imagery pervades this show, as do Zimmerman's dazzling *Field* collages of cut-up and reassembled National Geographic-like photos, which are striking for the tension between their diminutive size and the terrifying grandeur of the natural world they evoke.

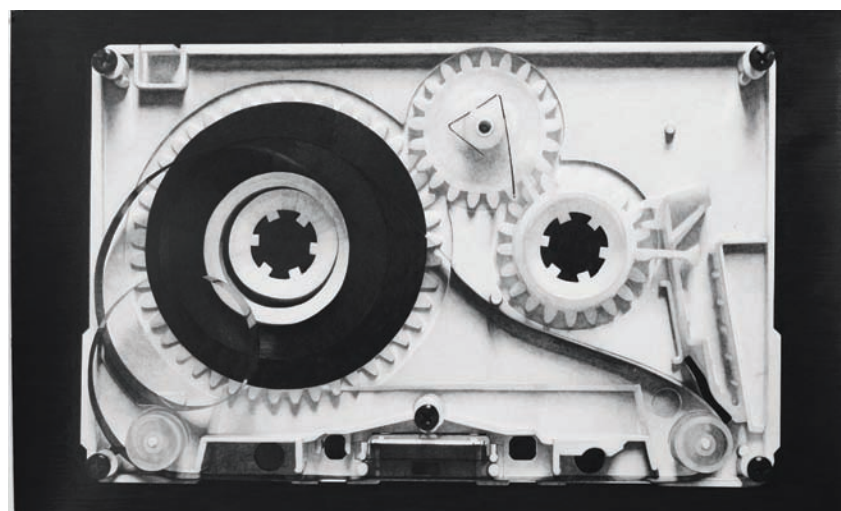
As the title of another drawing – *Black Cat, Dark Room, Not There*, a reference to an old quote comparing metaphysics to searching a dark room for an absent or non-existent black cat – suggests, Zimmerman isn't giving up the hunt anytime soon, even as he nods to its futility.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

**James Drake: Red Drawings & White Cutouts**

Moody Gallery  
September 8–October 6, 2012  
www.moodygallery.com

Now based in Santa Fe, James Drake is



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ART PALACE GALLERY

Eric Zimmerman, *Endless (Disharmony)*, 2012, Graphite on Paper.

perhaps best known for his dark, large-scale drawings and for his engagement with the politics of his former residence on the Juarez-El Paso border. That darkness has given way to an airy, ethereal lightness in *James Drake: Red Drawings & White Cut-Outs* now on view at Moody Gallery. (The exhibition consists of ten pieces, one glass sculpture and nine large-scale works on paper; all but one early example date to the last two years.)

Drake is a masterful draftsman as evidenced by the delicate tonal variations he achieves with simple red pastel. Two of the red drawings are extremely personal in nature: one, a portrait of his infant granddaughter, the other, a dual portrait of his mother and her mother.

Two other drawings from 2010, *Seated Man (Adam)* and *Seated Woman (Eve)* appear to be portraits as well. While the artist claims they are fictional, the sitters' highly individualized faces, intimately direct gazes, and emotionally expressive poses question this claim.

The white cut-out drawings evolved from his use of hand-cut stencils to imbue his massive charcoal drawings with crisp, precise edges. One day when laying the *pochoir* over a working sheet, Drake was struck by the play of shadows the negative spaces elicited. The subtraction drawings are negative images, absent of line, the tonal variation created by the chance of eclipsed light, yet they are also astoundingly intricate. In *Insects with*

*Continued Page 26*



## REVIEWS CONTINUED

*Mirror*, 2010, Drake sets up a modern *vanitas*: excising an ornate frame along the perimeter of the sheet and adding four graphite flies to the titular mirror's surface.

Moody has set up an affecting trio in the center of the gallery. Hung side by side, *Pink Chandelier* and *Red Chandelier*, both 2012, are an exercise in cause and effect. Drake first used *Pink Chandelier* sheet as a stencil, rubbing red pastel through the voids, to create *Red Chandelier*. He then reversed the stencil, now suffused with red pastel dust, and affixed it to a white backing sheet. The makings of *Pink Chandelier* are not immediately visible; the latent blush tones that run along the cut edges and are reflected off the backing sheet are soft, quiet, and incredibly sensuous. On the floor are the 35 pieces that make up *Glass Tongues*, 2012. Recalling Drake's 2010 retrospective at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, *A Thousand Tongues Burn and Sing*, the tongues are a product of Drake's second stint at Seattle's Pilchuck Glass School. At the foot of the pastels, the luminous *Glass Tongues* pick up on the dangling crystals of the rococo chandelier drawings. At the same time, they give a quiet edge to the deft handling and old-master panache of the surrounding pastels.

—ELLIOTT ZOOEY MARTIN

*Elliott Zooey Martin is a curator and writer living in Houston.*

### **Jane Alexander: Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)**

Contemporary Arts  
Museum Houston  
August 14–November 4, 2012  
www.camh.org

Jane Alexander's motley cast of characters alternately attracts and repels. Her figurative sculptures of near life-size human-animal hybrids are simultaneously grotesque and sympathetic, quietly aggressive and compellingly beautiful. They are also altogether human in their interactions.

Throughout the main gallery of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Alexander has choreographed at least four discrete tableaux, populated by her hyperrealistic fiberglass and plaster sculptures. Over the course of fifteen years Alexander has cultivated a number of human-animal hybrids – with such names as corporal, custodian, harbinger, and ghost.

They emerge here in different scenes and social interactions; that is to say in groupings that depart from the traveling show's earlier presentations. As with any social gathering, the venue dictates certain dynamics, but in Alexander's



COURTESY OF CAMH

**Jane Alexander, *Frontier with Ghost*, 2007.**

hermetic world, the creatures' social mutability riffs on the conceit of formal permutations. (Guest curated by Pep Subirós, the show was organized by the Museum for African Art.)

Upon entering the space, *Security* (2006-09) immediately confronts the viewer – a prison-quality, razor-wire double fenced perimeter enclosing a solitary bird-like figure. Lining the interior courtyard are thousands of rusty scythes, machete blades, and used worker gloves. Pacing the exterior are two upright lambs, one clothed (“ghost”), the other naked save an antelope mask and boots (“harbinger”).

Do not forget to look up: an omniscient imp gazes down from his perch on the back wall. With its high staff to inmate ratio, reinforced perimeter, and multiple forms of surveillance, *Security* speaks not only to the historical specifics of Alexander's native South Africa but also to the alienation and personal infringements in the policing of today's geopolitical boundaries.

Alexander also plays with the guile of innocence and its ability to disarm. In *Infantry* (2008-10), a troop of mongrels goosestep along a fascist red carpet, their empty, glassy eyes locked in concert at a forty-five degree angle; their movements regulated by a crouching toy dog (in Alexander's terms, a “beast”); their feet couched in tike-sized booties.

Nearby, a coterie of pint-sized boys stand silent and motionless, adorned in animal-themed masks and, according to the label, “found clothing.” There's a pathos to the idea of discarded children's clothes, one amplified by the alternately layered, alternately nude boys of *Bom Boys* (1998).

The other large installation, *African Adventure* (1999-2002), takes on a diorama-like effect in its scope and theatricality yet is no less disarming. A large rectangle of reddish dirt serves

as a stage for post-apocalyptic justice. The largest figure, “Pangaman,” is hooded and yoked to a trail of scythes, toy tractors, and blades (a reference to Phineas Tshitaundzi, who terrorized the Johannesburg area in the middle of the last century with a panga or machete). Both victim and victimizer, Pangaman is overseen by a miniature cabal of ape-like judges. Despite its foreboding nature, *African Adventure* speaks more of alienation and disconnect.

Perhaps due to the pure beauty of the images, the most enjoyable segment of Alexander's exhibition is her photographic essay *Survey: Cape of Good Hope* (2005-09). Black and white photographs of the city streets of Cape Town and the surrounding landscape are projected in a loop. Certain photographs are left unaltered, while in others Alexander has inserted different characters from her oeuvre, lending the seemingly banal images a haunting, psychic charge.

Alexander's work certainly owes its political bite to the unresolved legacy of apartheid and the indoctrination



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MOODY GALLERY

**James Drake, *Red Chandelier*, 2012, Red Pastel, Tape, Printed Text on Paper, 53 7/8 x 36 1/8 inches.**

of racism still alive in her homeland. As evidenced by the most recent labor unrest and its brutal crackdown by the police, Alexander's sources are far from historical. At the same time, her tableaux speak to transnational issues such as surveillance, border policing, alienation, and social violence. In particular, her hybrids question what it is to be human and what it means to be part of a social body.

—ELLIOTT ZOOEY MARTIN

### ***In Appropriation***

Houston Center for Photography  
September 7–October 28, 2012  
www.hcponline.org

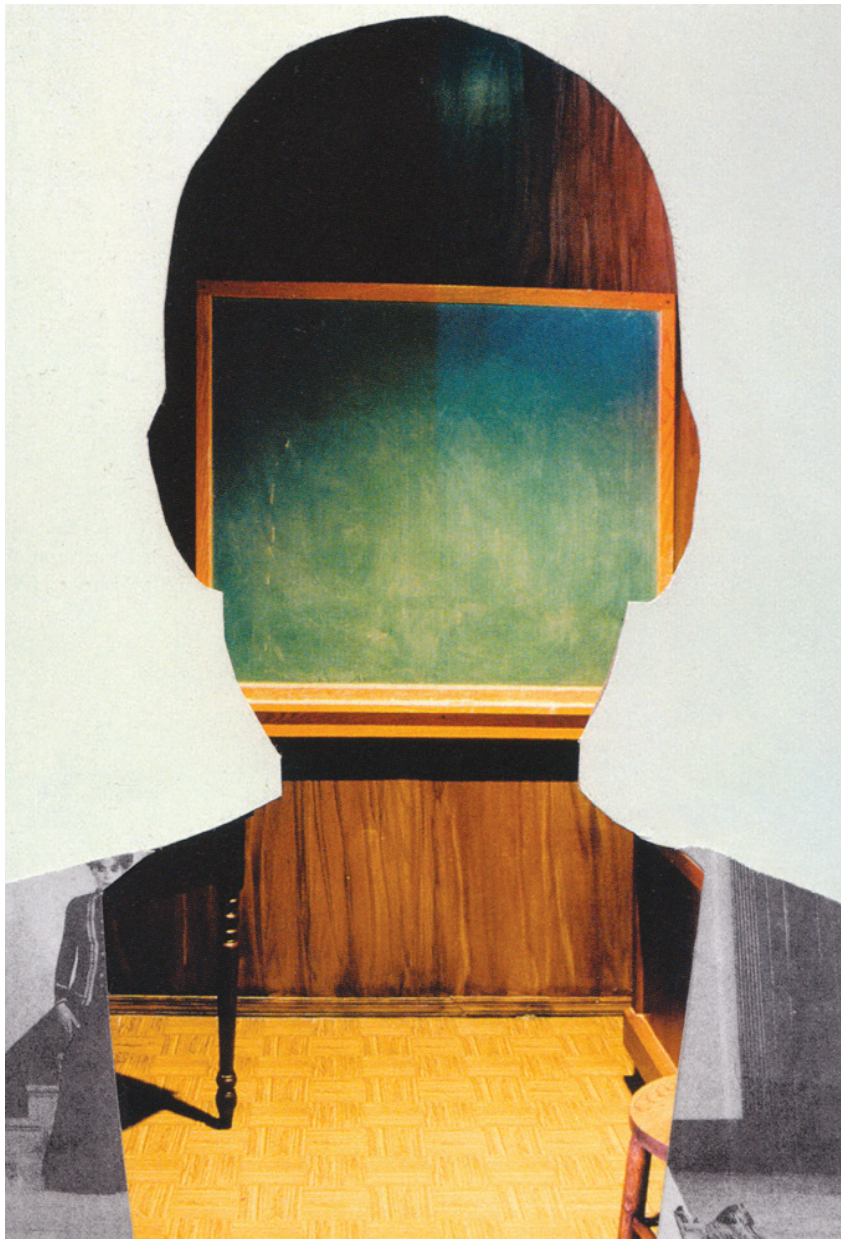
*In Appropriation* at the Houston Center for Photography is one of the strongest exhibitions currently showing in the city. Curated by SeeSaw Magazine founder and editor Aaron Schuman, it includes the work of seven artists who incorporate appropriation methodologies into their practices.

Figuring largely in academic discourse during the late 80s and 90s, discussions regarding the practice of appropriation have seemingly fallen by the wayside, and in choosing to frame the exhibition within this context Schulman runs the risk of having his curatorial endeavor written off as postmodernism redux. However, the dynamism contained within each artist's deployment of the appropriative gesture ensures that the exhibition avoids the pitfalls of cliché.

Michael Wolf contributes a series of diptychs that feature a painted reproduction of a well-known artwork paired with a portrait of the copy artist holding the reproduction. Wolf has arranged the photographs so that the composition underscores formal elements of the original work. The resulting images are exercises in self-referentiality that cleverly allude to the entanglement of painting and photography with the history of art, as well as issues of parody, originality and the division between high and low art.

Adam Bromberg and Oliver Chanarin's collaborative works raise issues of ethics as related to the appropriative act. Their series *Afterlife* (2009) is a reinterpretation of a photograph documenting the execution of 11 Kurdish prisoners by firing squad. Bromberg and Chanarin have deconstructed the original image by separating the figures of the individuals and placing their forms onto separate glass plates. Placed horizontally along a shelf, their linear presentation prolongs the moment of the depicted execution and simultaneously furthers our engagement with that moment, hopefully leading us to consider the implications of viewing such events.

Their other work in the exhibition, *People in Trouble Laughing Pushed*



Melinda Gibson, VII, 2009-2011, Mixed Media.

to the Ground (Dots) (2010), features images drawn from the Belfast Exposed Archive, a collection containing over 14,000 black-and-white contact sheets that document the Troubles in Northern Ireland. When images were selected they had either a red, yellow or blue dot placed upon them, resulting in a partially obscured image. Bloomberg and Chanarin have re-produced a selection of these images using a circular template, which references the inadvertent censoring caused by the dots and reveals (until recently) hidden imagery.

Esther Teichman and Melinda Gibson each employ collage into their respective works. Teichman's *Mythologies* features arrangements of images drawn from photographic, film and painted sources that come together in romantic, poetic musings that respond to notions of desire, despair and longing. Gibson's *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* draws its imagery from the Charlotte Cotton's eponymous text, which is regarded as a definitive work on the genre.

Gibson creates her pieces by selecting three images from the text (usually of an interior setting, a landscape and some

form of portraiture) and overlaps them after excising portions of the selected pictures. The resulting collages create new contexts for both the original works themselves and Gibson's work to be read while exploring notions of originality and reproduction.

Seba Kurtis's *Shoobox* is a highly personal and unique response to the curatorial premise. The work consists of a box of family photographs that were his family's sole possession after they were forced to leave Argentina as undocumented migrants following the economic crisis and political turmoil that plagued the country during the late seventies and early eighties. The photographs were damaged by a flood while in storage at his grandmother's house.

Kurtis has elected to frame and hang the works in an arrangement that mimics the manner in which family photographs are displayed in living room parlors. The pristine aesthetic of the white frames contrasts with the damaged backs and surfaces of the photographs yet also serves to highlight the installations' minimalism, delicacy and beauty while begging the question

of whether or not it is accurate to frame the work as appropriation when the work in question is in the artist's own possession.

—SALLY FRATER

*A Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Core Critic in Residence, Sally Frater's exhibition There is no archive in which nothing gets lost is on view through November 25 at the Glassell School of Art.*

**Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present**

MFAH

October 7, 13 & 14, 2012

[www.mfah.org/films](http://www.mfah.org/films)

*Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, the new HBO documentary by Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre, chronicles Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović's 2010 MoMA retrospective – the ultimate rite of passage into the canon for modern artists.

Like so many recently released independent documentaries, the film is geared more toward celebration than biography or critical inquiry. At times, I felt like I was watching a promotional video.

While there isn't much biographical information, there are quick blurbs of Abramović's closest colleagues discussing the broad concepts in her art, lots of Abramović getting dressed, her assistant answering phone calls, everyone getting in and out of cars, and so on. Sometimes I wonder if reality television is starting to leave its mark on documentary filmmaking.

The segment documenting the history and reunification of Abramović and her one time performance partner and lover, Uwe (or Olay) Laysiepen, is compassionate and touching. Laysiepen is candid and emotive when he discusses his bittersweet feelings towards Abramović, the immense shadow of her current career, and their working history. After a long period of estrangement,

they're finally meeting to talk.

There's a moment when Abramović is cooking zucchini that's wonderfully banal and "everyday", and provides a break from artist-and-curator-speak. I think it behooves all artists to make sure there's a shot in their documentary of them cooking dinner or digging through their purse for a water bottle.

The film primarily orbits around her 736-hour performance piece, *The Artist Is Present*, in which Abramović sits immobile in a chair six days a week for seven hours in the gallery. Museum-goers flock to sit across from her as they stare into each other's eyes. It becomes sensational and starts to catch on. People return time and time again to be in the presence of Abramović; some return 20 times or more.

Lots of people cry (the experience has already been meme-ified on a blog that posts the faces of everyone who cries at the exhibit), but the most touching moment is Laysiepen offering his hands to Abramović, which she takes, symbolically sealing their reconciliation and deliberately and heartrendingly breaking the immobility of the piece.

Marina Abramović is one of the most influential artists of the 20th century and *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present* is a sincere celebration of her work.

—JOSEPH WOZNY

*Joseph Wozny is a writer and musician.*

**Mike Beradino: Lode Runner**

Emergency Room

September 20–October 18, 2012

[www.studioart.rice.edu](http://www.studioart.rice.edu)

As sculpture physically occupying Emergency Room, a snack-sized exhibition space at Rice University, Mike Beradino's *Lode Runner* is more of a curiosity than a feast for the eyes. It looks like what it is: a DIY computer, assembled from salvaged parts,

*Continued Page 28*



Still from *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*.

## REVIEWS CONTINUED

whirring and humming atop a similarly homemade plywood stand while power cords run in three directions to feed its considerable thirst for electricity. Careful observers will notice a lump of raw gold sitting on a shelf just to the right and rear of the monitor.

The amount of raw gold will gradually increase during the exhibition, meaning that the physical form of *Lode Runner* will change ever so slightly. But most of the action is in cyberspace, notwithstanding the real demands Beradino's machine places on the power supply.

"Although Beradino engaged DIY methods, intentionally applying an unpolished aesthetic to construct *Lode Runner*, he scripted a precise computational system that solves complex algorithms in order to mint his own Bitcoins," writes Katia Zavistovski, a Rice doctoral student and the William A. Camfield Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, on the exhibition poster.

Bitcoin is the name of both a digital "crypto-currency" and the open-source software that runs it. It's billed on bitcoin.org as enabling "instant payments to anyone, anywhere in the world (by using) peer-to-peer technology to operate with no central authority: managing transactions and issuing money are carried out collectively by the network."

After accounting for how much power his computer uses, and based on the current economic exchange rate for Bitcoins, which like that of other currencies varies daily, Beradino expects his computer to earn about \$300 to \$400 during the show's run and to pay for itself in six months. He's tracking his earnings both with a computer graphic on the monitor that represents the growth of his Bitcoin account and with the slow, steady growth in the amount of raw gold next to the machine.

Doing so not only symbolizes the shift from one faith-based currency (gold) to another (Bitcoins) – all currencies, as Beradino noted in an opening-night lecture, are faith-based – but humorously refers to the fact that once computers become obsolete the most valuable thing about them is the gold that can be melted down from the circuit board and other parts.

Also reflecting an awareness of technology's perpetually impending obsolescence is the made-in-the-garage look of Beradino's sculpture. As with the imagery in his recently exhibited ASCII paintings that require a QR-code reader on a smartphone or notebook to view, Beradino's piece is designed look obsolete, or at least retro, from the start.

Make sure you download a copy of the poster at [studioart.rice.edu](http://studioart.rice.edu), because



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

**Amy Fote and artists of the Houston Ballet in Stanton Welch's *Madame Butterfly*.**

you'll get Zavistovski's accessible mini-essay as well as a free example of Beradino's QR-readable pictures. This is more generous than the standard artist giveaway in that the free poster works the same way as paintings Beradino was selling in *Freq Out*, his recent Art Palace show.

It's also the kind of artist giveaway you'd be wise to hang onto instead of accidentally-on-purpose sending to the recycle bin. A lot of ifs will need to line up to make this prediction come true, but here goes: if, years from now, people are talking about the Houston art scene circa the 2010s, Beradino will be one of the reasons why.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

### ***Madame Butterfly***

Houston Ballet

September 6–16, 2012

[www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org)

Amy Fote commands the stage as Cio-Cio San in Houston Ballet's season opener, *Madame Butterfly*. With Fote's imminent retirement later this fall, the radiant principal is cherishing every last arabesque, as demonstrated in her masterful performance. There is a completeness present, as if each corner of the choreography has been thought through and considered.

Stanton Welch's signature story ballet gives Fote plenty of opportunities to do exactly what audiences have grown to admire about this remarkable dancer, and she doesn't miss a beat with her flawless performance. It was hard to tell if the sobs coming from the audience were for Cio-Cio San's tragedy or the fact that this was their last time seeing Fote in this role. This is going to be a painful farewell.

James Gotesky's earthy Pinkerton emphasized the hard side of his character. Jessica Collado provided

the right combination of pathos and restraint as Suzuki, while Joseph Walsh made for a surprisingly good villain, Goro.

As the most spare of Welch's story ballets, *Butterfly* soars from a combination of revealing choreography, Puccini's lush score and Peter Farmer's elegant set design, which comes complete with a gigantic set of sweeping wings.

Fote wasn't the only one dancing with a renewed authority. Connor Walsh seems to be growing into his skills, judging from his stellar performance in Welch's minimalist ballet, *Clear*. Alternating between crisp attack and lyrical splendor, Connor was on his game big time, pushing his razor-sharp technique into the service of Welch's tricky dynamics. Joseph Walsh and Charles-Louis Yoshiyama followed in Connor's wake with strong performances. The elegant Mireille Hassenboehler softened the edges of Welch's seven-man powerhouse ballet. The season is off to a polished start.

–NANCY WOZNY

### ***Life Is a Dream***

Main Street Theater

September 20–October 21, 2012

[www.mainstreettheater.com](http://www.mainstreettheater.com)

Main Street Theater opened its 38<sup>th</sup> Season with Pedro Calderón de la Barca's poetic masterpiece, *Life Is a Dream*. Written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the work questions what it means to be fully awake and if it is only in our dreams that we are truly alive. Through the tortured tale of Segismundo, a prince banished to a life of solitude because of a misconstrued act of fate, the author has created a world where dreams are the place of true happiness.

Segismundo, portrayed by David Wald, has lived his life in isolation. His father, foreseeing that his son would be his

murderer, locks him away with only an elderly caretaker, Clotaldo, played by David Grant, as his companion.

Segismundo is violently angry, and with good reason: he has been raised in shackled seclusion. Wald plays the character on several levels. His temper takes control of him sending him to fits of loud rage and then, as if a switch is flipped, he reverts to a childlike state. He pouts and stomps when he doesn't get his way. These subtle nuances to his performance are cleverly done. There are moments, however, when Wald could take his anger down a few notches; yelling on stage loses its effect after a while.

Segismundo is discovered by the duo of Rosaura (Beth Lazarou) and Clarín (Philip Hays). Rosaura is on a mission to avenge the man who broke her heart. The character Rosaura demands a strong female actress and Lazarou delivers. She is a torn woman, whose complex feelings of betrayal and despair



PHOTO: RICORNELPRODUCTIONS.COM

**Justin O'Brien and Crystal O'Brien in MST's *Life is a Dream*.**

are heightened by the fact that she is still very much in love.

Clarín, her reluctant companion, is the "fool" and offers a much needed comic relief from the heavy tone of the play. Hays stole every scene he was in with perfectly-timed, sly remarks. He is a natural comedian and shines in this role. Taking cues from Shakespeare, Calderón de la Barca's work relies on many familiar stock characters and plot points. Rosaura's love interest Astolfo, played with an air of royal pompousness by Justin O'Brien, is the center of a stereotypical love triangle. His other lady-in-waiting is the duchess Estrella. The stunning and sophisticated Crystal O'Brien tackled the role and finds just right blend of humor and sadness; she too is a woman scorned by love.

This is a challenging play; as it is a work of poetry, it is dialogue-heavy, and the actors had some difficulties with their lines; however, each actor was fully committed to his or her role, and under



PHOTO: LYNN LANE

**Rachael Hutto and Sarah Peterson in NobleMotion Dance Company's *Spitting Ether*.**

the skillful direction of Pablo Bracho, this rare work that could have been difficult to digest was nothing less than an enjoyable evening of classical theater.

–ABBY KOENIG

***Spitting Ether***

NobleMotion Dance Company  
**August 31–September 8, 2012**  
[www.noblemotiondance.com](http://www.noblemotiondance.com)

Darkness and dancing prevailed in NobleMotion Dance's *Spitting Ether*, a collaboration with lighting designer - and dare I say, magician? - David J. Deveau. The tag line promised "a reality-bending dance" and it delivered big time. The first half dwelt in nightmarish fantasies, conjuring images of the murky underworlds from the other side of a coma or anesthesia, while the second half took us to more heavenly, ephemeral places.

Similar to Andy and Dionne Noble's earlier collaborations with the late Jeremy Choate (the concert was dedicated to him), the play of light and a velvety black void ruled the proceedings with all kinds of clever manipulations of light, from a miniature dancer projected on a skirt to hand held lights that contained their own choreography.

Dancers penetrating a curtain of light proved a spectacular effect. Throughout, light took on multiple properties, from a veil to a wall, creating inventive spaces for the Nobles' aggressive choreography. How often can you say that you heard audible gasps of wonder from the audience at a dance concert?

The dancing, in and out of the dark, was terrific throughout. Performances by Jesus Acosta, Brit Wallis and Shohei Iwahama stood out.

During the second half, too much action from the fog machine, along with some heavy-handed musical choices, threatened the glorious visuals at key points. Small quibbles for an otherwise outstanding event.

–NANCY WOZNY

***Women@Art***

Houston Ballet  
**September 20–30, 2012**  
[www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org)

The lady dance-makers rocked the Wortham during Houston Ballet's *Women@Art*, an evening of work by Julia Adam, Azure Barton and Twyla Tharp.

Barton's *Angular Momentum* proved to be the big news of the night. Barton, a rising star with an original choreographic voice, has made her mark across a great swath of the ballet and contemporary world in record time. Talk about momentum!

Set to Mason Bates' *The B-Sides: Five Pieces for Orchestra & Electronics* (which contains a smattering of astronaut banter), Barton's ballet conjures a Tron-ish, otherworldly place, with a retro feel: Think Disney's Tomorrowland. Burke Brown's grid-like set and Fritz Masten's space age costumes also lend a mid-century feel, fully supporting the spectacular nature of Barton's 27-dancer ballet. The ballet feels big, and Barton's horizontal spatial structures made it feel even bigger.

Rich with her heavily idiosyncratic vocabulary where a simple *plie* splinters into sharp shards of movement, the ballet's sheer density keeps our eyes glued to the stage. The company handled Barton's delightfully bizarre movement with gumption, diving into both her angular broken lines and the more sinewy passages with confidence. Athletic powerhouses Melissa Hough and Connor Walsh are simply built for Barton's ballet. *Angular Momentum* makes one terrific match between choreographer and company.

Tharp's masterwork, *The Brahms-Haydn Variations*, was the most classical offering of the night. With seven couples, Tharp's ballet is a perfect vehicle to showcase the strength among the company's principals and soloists. From Amy Fote and Simon Ball to Karina Gonzalez and Walsh, to newcomer Soo Youn Cho and James Gotesky, each couple exuded

their own brand of chemistry. The stage does seem to brighten when Fote enters, though. It's hard not to fixate on her mighty talents, knowing she retires in December.

*Ketubah*, Adam's tribute to a Jewish wedding, added the evening's solemn moments, and simply the best game of musical chairs in a ballet ever.

Hough and Ian Casady's tender portrayal of the bride and groom gave the ballet its center, and music performed live by The Best Little Klezmer Band in Texas, its punch.

–NANCY WOZNY

***2 Pianos 4 Hands***

Stages Repertory Theatre  
**September 5–October 28, 2012**  
[www.stages theatre.com](http://www.stages theatre.com)

Before I begin this review I should let it be known that my piano teacher fired me as a student, due to lack of skill and natural talent, as well as an inability to remember to practice. So it's no wonder that *2 Pianos 4 Hands* at Stages Repertory Theatre brought up some tender baggage. Richard Greenblatt and Ted Dykstra's hybrid concert/stand-up routine tells the story of two young pianists who make the trek from recreational lessons to serious

conservatory studies.

*Greater Tuna* style, they take turns playing each other's eccentric and sometimes cruel teachers, spicing up the proceedings with some excellent piano playing. Tom Frey and Jeffrey Rockwell are terrifically likeable actor/ musicians, who handle the jokes, the drama and the music with deft skill. Frey's whimsical physicality added to the giggle factor. Curiously, the music itself makes for the most playful comedy.

The play feels most authentic when the young musicians have to decide whether to go on or quit, a milestone for anyone who has ever dared to train in the arts. I could have done with fewer and less-obnoxious piano teachers; one was enough for a lifetime.

–NANCY WOZNY

***Worth the Trip: Ralston Crawford and Jazz***

New Orleans Museum of Art  
**June 22–October 14, 2012**  
[www.noma.org](http://www.noma.org)

Since the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston unveiled its acquisition of Ralston Crawford's 1942 painting *Red Barge, No. 1* - a fine example of the Precisionist

*Continued Page 30*



PHOTO: BRUCE BENNETT

**Tom Frey and Jeffrey Rockwell in Stages Repertory Theatre's production of *2 Pianos 4 Hands*.**

## REVIEWS CONTINUED



COURTESY OF THE NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART

depictions of the American industrial landscape for which he is known – I’ve been on the lookout for Crawford sightings in other museums.

I got more than an eyeful in New Orleans, where Crawford once taught and which, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, prompted what the traveling exhibition *Ralston Crawford and Jazz* reveals as an extensive, wonderfully cohesive body of photographs, paintings, drawings, lithographs and films inspired by his stays in the Crescent City. On view at the New Orleans Museum of Art, the show was curated by Olivia Lahs-Gonzales, director of the Sheldon Art Galleries in St. Louis, and feels both tightly focused and expansive.

While Crawford’s Precisionist paintings and drawings had already shown a tendency to geometrically simplify their subjects, after World War II his style became increasingly abstract and, yes, jazzy, bearing affinities with the late work of Stuart Davis. An outstanding photographer, Crawford’s pictures of the New Orleans jazz clubs he frequented and of the musicians and dancers he came to know well are fascinating both in their own right and for what

they reveal about how he approached the forms and visual rhythms in his paintings.

Crawford’s distinctive ways of seeing – particularly his spare, geometric compositions – cross media and subject matter. The same eye that shot *Joe Tillman, tenor saxophone, at the Dew Drop Inn* (1952) nimbly arranges the elements in the still-life painting – or is it a cityscape? – *New Orleans #8* (1957). His starkly abstract paintings and drawings of New Orleans cemeteries are paralleled in the photos, and in the 1950s he produced a group of lithographs inspired by a glass cemetery vase that offers fascinating insights into his process.

So do his short, silent films, in which Crawford’s unmistakable sense of composition abstracts his views of the Mississippi River as seen from a moving ferry, as well as scenes of curtains in window or water rippling across a pond. It’s a rare exhibition that can trigger feelings of infatuation with the city in which it’s held, but Ralston Crawford’s enthusiasm for New Orleans proves contagious.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

LEFT: Ralston Crawford, *New Orleans #8*, 1957.



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