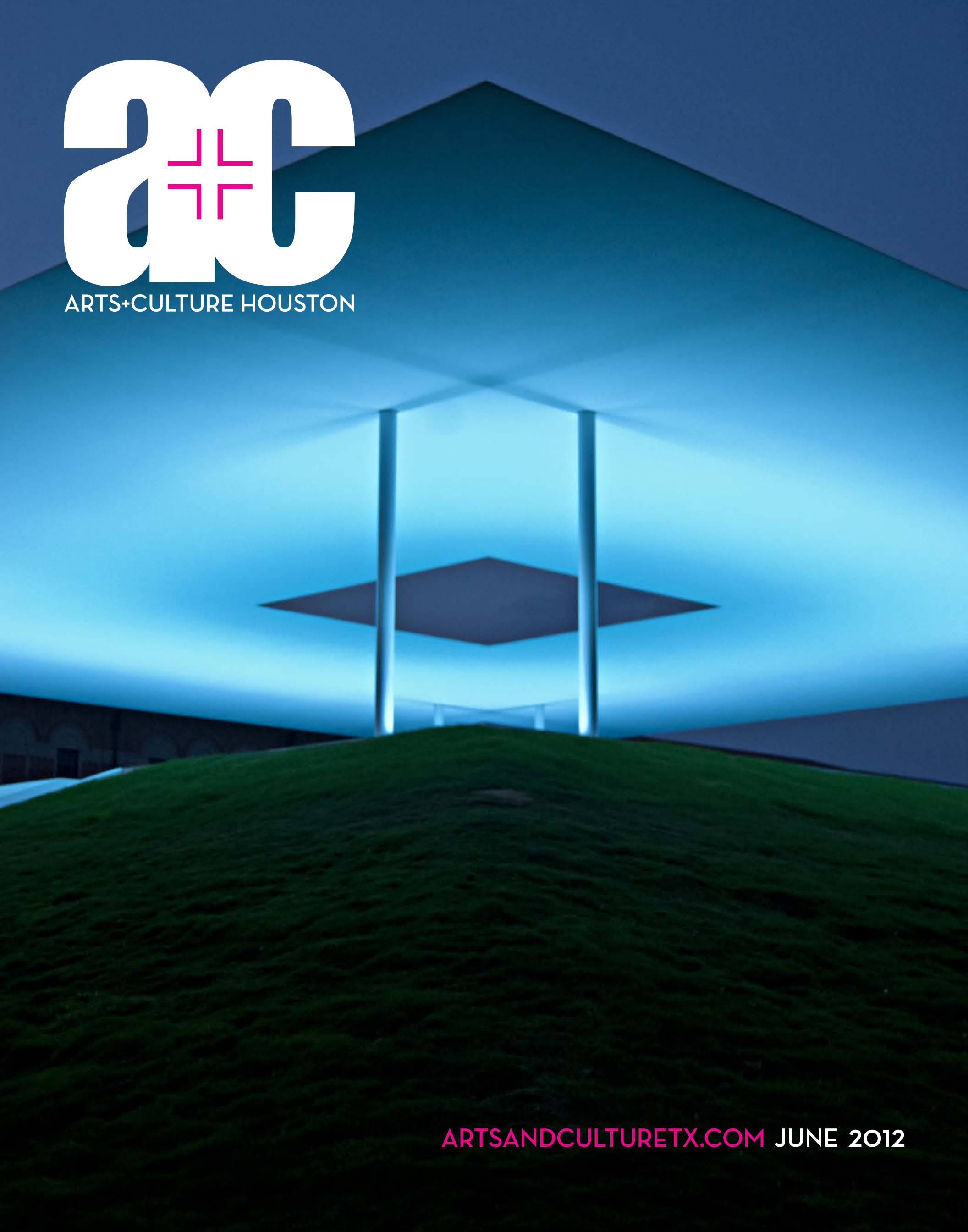




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Edward Schexnayder
Ruth Shouval
Troy Stanley

EDITOR'S REMARKS



James Turrell's *Twilight Epiphany* makes light a subject, but underneath is a lesson in change, juxtaposition, and perception.

What else do you need to look at art?

This month, we move into some changes of our own. We welcome Devon Britt-Darby as visual arts editor, bringing a strong eye and an informed voice to our coverage. I know you will enjoy his insights into Dean Daderko's first show at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, the reinstallation of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Long Sarofim Gallery, Danny Lyon at The Menil, and more. The art writing biz can be a lonely one, and it's great to have some company in shaping the A + C vision.

We've become more nimble web folk, posting stories sooner, so you can go out and see for yourself what all the hoopla is about.

And, there's no shortage of hoopla. *Fela* rocks the SPA stage while The Big Range Dance Festival features a look at the new crop of choreographers. Galleries explode with Print Houston. Big changes are in store for Aurora Picture Show, and the slow and steady growth of the Texas Music Festival demonstrates that if you commit to excellence, good things will happen.

Weathering change with grace and charm is James Nelson, Houston Ballet's new executive director and our cultural warrior.

As promised, we're hiding art in every issue of this art rag. David A. Brown curates this month's ad/art bomb, which features work by Rene Cruz (www.rennecruz.com).

Just like it says in the song, June is busting out all over, with art.

Go see some.

Nancy Wozny
Editor
nancy@artsandculturetx.com
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KEN VILLALOVOS

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MAILING ADDRESS
381 Casa Linda Plaza, Suite 363,
Dallas, Texas, 75218
Advertising 214-282-2845

EDITOR / ART DIRECTOR
SCOT C. HART

SENIOR EDITOR
MARK LOWRY

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER
BRYAN KLUGER

AD DESIGNER
JONATHON KIMBRELL

WEBMASTER
BLACK NEW MEDIA

COPY EDITOR
DAVID TAFFET

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
RICARDO PANIAGUA

CONTRIBUTORS
ANDY AMATO, M.M. ADJARIAN,
KENT BOYER, ANNA CAPLAN,
GREGORY SULLIVAN ISSACS,
PATRICIA MORA, DAN PRICHETT,
KASTEN SEARLES,
CHARISSA TERRANOVA,
RACHEL VAN HORN,
CHRISTOPHER SODEN

HOUSTON

MAILING ADDRESS
4820 Caroline Street,
Houston, Texas 77004
Advertising 214-282-2845

EDITOR
NANCY WOZNY

VISUAL ARTS EDITOR
DEVON BRITT-DARBY

ART DIRECTOR
JONATHON KIMBRELL

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER
CANDACE KIZER

AD DESIGNER
SCOT C. HART

WEBMASTER
BLACK NEW MEDIA

COPY EDITOR
BRYAN KLUGER

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER
BRYAN ROSS

CONTRIBUTORS
NED DODINGTON, NICOLE ZAZA
NANCY ZASTUDIL, DAVID A FEIL,
GEOFF SMITH, SALLY FRATER,
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ON THE COVER

JAMES TURRELL'S NEW SKYSPACE, *TWILIGHT EPIPHANY*,
FEATURE ON PAGE 8. PHOTO BY NED DODINGTON.



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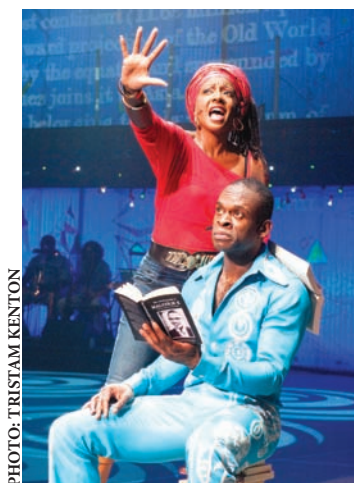


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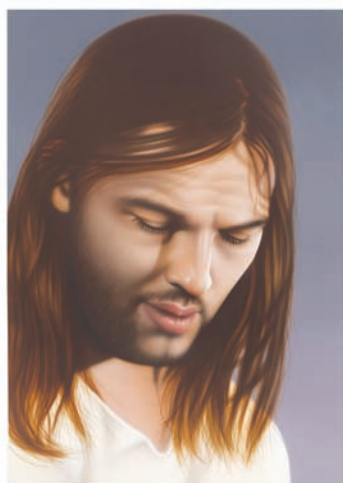


PHOTO: THOMAS DUBROCK



COURTESY THE MENIL COLLECTION



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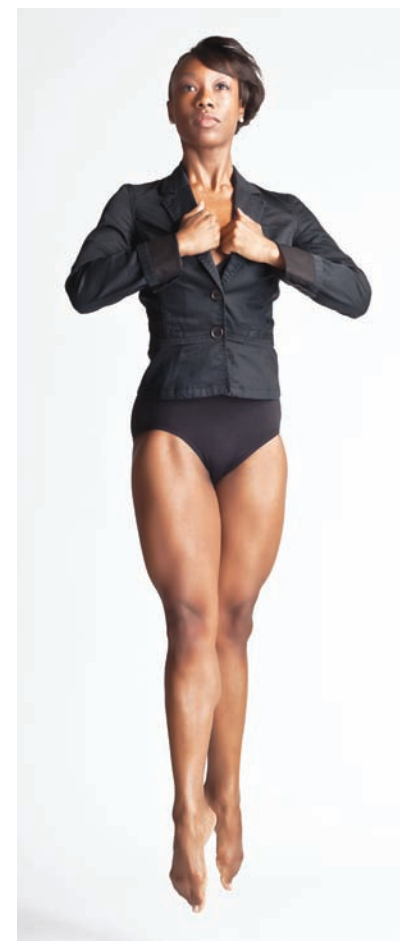


PHOTO: LYNN LANE

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Danny Lyon, *Shakedown, Ramsey Unit*, Photograph, 1968, Courtesy of The Menil Collection, Page 29; Olga Gerdjikov, *Nesting #2*, 2010, Monoprint, Lithograph, Chine Collé, on view June 2–26 in the PrintHouston exhibition NEXT, Page 17; Courtney Jones with the Urban Souls Dance Company, Page 13; Rachel Hecker, *Jesus #2 (David Gilmour/Pink Floyd)*, 2011, Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 34 inches, Courtesy the artist and Texas Gallery, Houston, Page 15; Paulette Ivory and Sahr Ngaujah star in *Fela*, Page 10.



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ARTIFACTS



PHOTO: ANTHONY RATHBUN

Ars Lyrica Ensemble.

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, Houston (MFAH) has given the 2012 Meredith J. Long Core Program Award to Gabriel Martinez. The \$10,000 prize, presented at the Glassell School of Art Benefit and Auction Friday, May 11, was inaugurated in 2008 and is given annually to a second-year Core artist-in-residence in recognition of exceptional artistic merit.

www.mfah.org

THE DOMINIC WALSH DANCE Theater is thrilled to announce that Dominic Walsh has been awarded Aspen Fringe Festival's 2012 Award for "Exceptional Choreographer", and the company will perform Walsh's *Camille Claudel* at the festival on June 20 & 21.

www.dwdt.org

BRAVE NEW WAVES HAS LAUNCHED a new monthly music series focusing on electronic, electro-acoustic, and other music forms. Performances are held the last Sunday of each month, featuring locals from Houston, and International artists and performers. Programs will include works by many of the field's electronic pioneers, as well as providing opportunities for composers to have their work performed and heard.

www.brightbluebeetle.com

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR KELLY ANN Vitacca and Artistic Advisor/Ballet Master Phillip Broomhead announced the launch of Vitacca Productions & Company. Vitacca P&C is a dance development organization that provides

advanced dance coaching, outreach and mentorship programs, professional performance, and production/creative management services, which bridge the gap between dance artists, career opportunities, and the community.

www.vitacca.org

THE LANDING THEATRE COMPANY announced its 2012 production of Rachel Axler's *Smudge*, directed by Artistic Director, David Rainey. Performances begin Friday, July 13, and open officially Saturday, July 14, and runs Friday-Saturday through July 28, at the O'Kane Theatre.

www.landingtheatre.org

ARS LYRICA HOUSTON ANNOUNCED its 2012-13 season, entitled *Anticipations*. Highlights for this season include the Bach Magnificat to a "fencing lesson" by Heinrich Schmelzer. Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, and Johann Strauss will ring in the New Year with *A Viennese New Year* and more.

www.arslyricahouston.org

HOUSTON BALLET PROMOTIONS include Melissa Hough to First Soloist, as well as Allison Miller, Nozomi Iijima, and Charles-Louis Yoshiyama to Demi Soloists. Jennifer Steiner joined Houston Ballet as the new general manager.

www.houstonballet.org

THE DEADLINE TO SUBMIT FOR The Big Show at Lawndale Art Center's annual open-call juried exhibition is June 27. Works in all media completed

during 2010-2012 will be accepted. The Big Show is open to all artists living within 100 miles of Lawndale and surrounding counties.

www.lawndaleartcenter.org

THE 2012-13 INPRINT MARGARETT Root Brown Reading Series includes readings by T. C. Boyle, Junot Diaz, Emma Donoghue, Terrance Hayes, Jonathan Lethem, James Salter, Zadie Smith, and Jesmyn Ward. The

2012-13 season of Cool Brains! Inprint Readings for Young People will include bestselling children's authors Lois Lowry on October 14th, Jon Scieszka in spring 2013, and more.

www.inprinthouston.org

THE TEAM OF LAKE+FLATO AND Studio Red Architects posted the schematic design for the Independent Arts Collaborative, a 59,000-square-foot community arts complex that will occupy a full block defined by Main, Holman, Travis, and Francis Street, near the Ensemble/HCC stop on the METRORail. The proposed facility consists of four dedicated theater spaces, two rehearsal spaces/classrooms, several gallery spaces, along with back-of-house, support and office space. A message on the IAC's Facebook page said, "While many elements of the design are still in flux... we would appreciate your feedback, so let us know what you think."

www.iachouston.org

BRYAN MILLER GALLERY, FORMERLY known as CTRL gallery, wrapped up its five-year run in Midtown's Isabella Court on May 19 with the closing of its group show, CTRL Group Two. In addition to presenting exhibitions by local artists such as Natasha Bowdoin, Jamal Cyrus, and John Sparagana, the gallery introduced a number of out-of-town artists to Houston audiences, including Heimur Björgúlfsson, Sarah Cain, Jackie Gendel, and Anders Oinonen.



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Melissa Hough and Connor Walsh in George Balanchine's Ballet, *Jewels*.

Inner Space Travel

Turrell's New Skyspace Lands in Houston



PHOTO: NED DODDINGTON

Thomas Phifer and Partners served as the architect for *Twilight Epiphany*, the new James Turrell skyspace at Rice University.

USING LIGHT AS HIS MAIN MATERIAL, James Turrell deftly carves, blends, molds, and manifests confounding spatial experiences seemingly out of thin air. On June 14, Rice University will open a new permanent installation by Turrell, his third in Houston, to the public. Titled *Twilight Epiphany*, the work is the largest of the 73 skyspaces – architectural light installations that open to the sky through an aperture in the roof – he has completed to date.

Houstonians unfamiliar with Turrell's work will find it unique, mind-bending, and maybe a little confusing. Those already indoctrinated will immediately recognize the skyspace as an unmistakably Turrellian, if uncharacteristically theatrical, portal into a colorfully sublime abyss.

Visitors walk into the heart of the small hill past the sloping, sod-covered berms and sit inside a perfectly square interior

space on pink granite benches. The benches are reclined at an angle so that viewers in the space can easily gaze at the sky without too much strain on the neck, and there are additional seats in the upper viewing area, which is just at the top of the hill, perfectly out of the line of sight from seated visitors below.

Above the hill is the elevated ceiling, or roof-plane, with a 14-by-14 foot square hole cut out of the center. The edges of the ceiling slope down to a thin, razor-sharp edge on all sides, and this "thinning" of the roof confuses your eye, flattening three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional surface. It's a supremely effective technique.

During 40-minute light shows at sunrise and sunset, Turrell projects a programmed LED display against this surface, essentially blending into one spatial experience the colors of both the natural sky and man-made LED's.

The result is variously confounding, disorienting, awe-inspiring, spiritually moving, and simply beautiful. (Visit www.publicart.rice.edu for scheduling and admission information.)

This is a space in which to lose yourself. There is something transportive about the experience, but rather than commuting us to a new world, I think Turrell, a Quaker, is asking us to look within ourselves for an inner truth. *Twilight Epiphany*, like the Rothko Chapel, requires viewers to bring their thoughts and emotions to Turrell's dimensionless space, which at times reads as flat, other times infinitely deep.

Siting adds another layer to *Twilight Epiphany*, which was placed directly in line with the central axis of the campus plan. It sits exactly astride the centrally planned axis of Rice University and conceptually connects viewers in the space with Alice Pratt Brown Hall

(the Shepherd School of Music), the Brochstein Pavilion, Fondren Library, W.M. Rice's Tomb, Lovett Hall, and the main gate. Not only does the placement of the skyspace align viewers with the history and plan of the campus, but the positioning of the opening in the ceiling, in effect, realigns the central axis according to a new cosmic (perhaps heavenly?) direction.

Turrell was born in 1943 in Pasadena, California to Quaker parents. He spent his early adulthood flying small planes and later received a BA from Pomona College in perceptual psychology, and conducted research into the Ganzfeld effect, a visual phenomenon caused by staring at an undifferentiated and uniform field of color.

The effect, often described as hallucinations or apparent blindness, results from the brain's amplification of neural noise. Basically, in the

absence of visual stimulation, the brain manufactures its own. The condition illustrates the physical and neural limits of perception but also suggests the culturally determined constraints about how we visually construct the world around us.

It's not too hard to imagine a young Quaker pilot hallucinating while soaring in a sea of cerulean blue sky. And it's equally tenable to imagine that same pilot searching for inner meaning in dreams and hallucinations. That same limitless, hallucinatory space is what makes *Twilight Epiphany* so powerful.

Turrell's work is often more about what you *don't* see than what you do. The experience of unbounded space in a bounded volume is tough to pull-off and depends on the artist's ability to hide edges, conceal structure, and reduce the architecture to nearly nothing. Generally, the mechanics of his manipulations of his works are artfully concealed out of sight and the viewer leaves with a "how does he do that?" expression and a regard for Turrell as minimalist magician. But this is not so much the case at Rice. The openness of *Twilight Epiphany*, the fact that it's outdoors and the separation of the roof from the base, reveal the magician's tricks to plain sight. We see the knife edge of the floating plane above us.

The LED lights, even while they're changing color, are revealed and visible to the casual observer. Now, one might



PHOTO: NED DODINGTON

The first Turrell skyspace to be engineered for acoustics, *Twilight Epiphany* will be used by Shepard School of Music students and faculty.

say that it doesn't really matter. The colors still change and the sky still morphs along with it. But somehow it does matter. Some of the magic, at least for this viewer, has been lost, replaced with an un-Turrellian showmanship that speaks more about 21st century dazzling

light-tricks than about introspection and inner truth.

The Rice skyspace has several characteristics – the disconnected roof; the externally visible light display, which can be seen from a considerable

distance; the large constructed berm – that may cause viewers to experience *Twilight Epiphany* more as a glowing object than as a contemplative space.

The result is that this work is not as quiet, private, or impactful as his more enclosed skyspaces – think of the Live Oak Friends Meeting House in the Heights, or *Meeting*, Turrell's long-term installation at the Museum of Modern Art's P.S. 1 – and there is something lost in that.

But as I sat in the skyspace on a partly cloudy Sunday night, tilting my head towards heaven, I can't deny that I was transported. If there's one thing I love about Turrell, it's the ability of his work to humble me – to overpower and overwhelm the senses in a way that reminds me of the fragility and specialness of human life in this world. We are just one among many, and in a Turrell I feel so very small. To say it's sublime is an understatement.

I get a similar sensation staring at a full starlit sky out in the deserts of West Texas, or losing myself in a Rothko. But there's nothing quite like the experience of getting lost in a Turrell skyspace, even one in which you can see behind the curtain. Turrell's art is big, Texas-big, and in this regard totally appropriate for its location. It fits Houston perfectly.

–NED DODINGTON

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

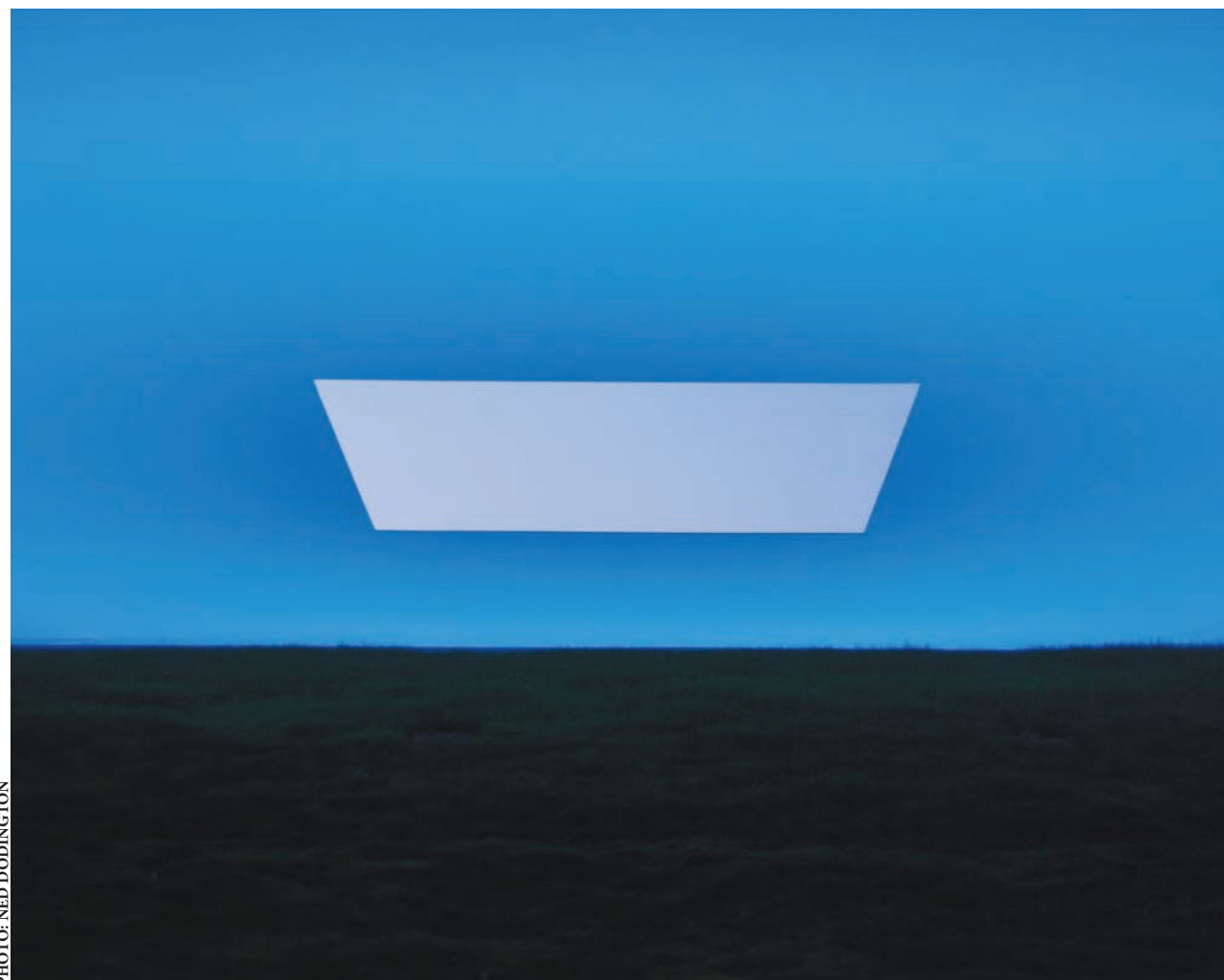


PHOTO: NED DODINGTON

Turrell says photographs can't capture the colors the human eye sees in the skyspace's opening.

Welcome na de Shrine

Fela Comes to Houston

PREPARE TO GYRATE. THE AFRO-beat is heading to Houston. *Fela*, the Tony-Award winning Broadway sensation based on the larger-than-life Nigerian musician and activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti, comes to the Society for the Performing Arts stage on June 5-10.

“Music is the weapon” proved the motto for Fela’s life and work. He used music to speak boldly against the corrupt and oppressive military dictatorships that ruled Nigeria. The musical, set in the late 1970s in Lagos, Nigeria, tells the story of a night at the Shrine, his notorious club adjacent to Kalakuta, his famous compound where he lived with his many wives or, “Queens,” and his personal army. It’s through his music that we learn of his life, family, cause, and the intoxicating Afrobeat.

The musical *Fela* has special meaning for dance folks. Not just because it’s about a fearless iconic artist who believed

that music and dance had the power to heal the world, but also because it was directed and choreographed by postmodern giant, Bill T. Jones, a seminal American choreographer known for his bold themes and daring dances. Jones also won the Tony for his choreography in *Spring Awakening*.

Fela also boasts a book by Jim Lewis and Jones, music and lyrics by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, arrangements by Aaron Johnson and Antibalas, additional lyrics by Lewis, and additional music by Johnson and Jordan McLean.

I had a chance to visit with cast member Melanie Marshall, who plays Fela’s mother Funmilayo, and dance captain and ensemble member, Jill Marie Vallery. Both testify to Jones’s deep connection to his subject and the performers.

“Jones is an unbelievable talent,” says Marshall, who joins the national tour



PHOTO: TRISTAM KENTON

ABOVE: Sahr Ngaujah and Paulette Ivory. LEFT: From the Broadway production of *Fela*, courtesy of Society for the Performing Arts.



COURTESY SOCIETY OF THE PERFORMING ARTS

from the London cast. “He makes you go beyond what you think you are capable of, and uses what you bring to the production. He added five notes to the top of my range.”

Marshall had not heard of Fela when a friend told her, “I’ve seen your next job.” After a few hours on Youtube, Marshall was hooked. “The show grabs you from the first second. Its concert feel gets you grooving straight away. Once Fela ignites, the flame just keeps getting brighter.”

A classically trained singer, Marshall soars as Fela’s inspirational mother, a feminist and human rights activist, who appears from the afterlife as a beacon of reason in Fela’s conflicted life. “It’s Funmilayo who introduces Fela to the works of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X,” says Marshall. “She instigates many of his beliefs.” Marshall’s two big anthems, “Trouble Sleep” and “Rain,” anchor the show.

Vallery’s connection to the show goes back to the beginning when the show was in its workshop phase in 2006. She’s traveled the distance from off-Broadway to Broadway, followed by a European tour, and then to Nigeria, where the cast was greeted with an overwhelming outpouring of love. “To bring this man

and his music back to Nigeria was an amazing experience,” she says. “When Fela would sing, the whole audience would respond.”

Vallery is now traveling the country performing and making sure all of Jones’s fabulous choreography stays intact. “It has evolved over the years though,” Vallery adds. She describes Jones’s choreography as a blend of African, post modern, and contemporary. “Dancing is 95% of the show. We compliment all of Fela’s songs,” says Vallery. “The audience gets to see a new form of dance.”

Because the show is so interactive, no two shows are the same. “Every night is a new experience. The energy of Fela’s music drives you to an out-of-body experience,” she says. “It’s been quite a ride.”

Marshall agrees, and has some advice for the audience. “Come open, be ready to dance, and soak it all in.”

—NANCY WOZNY

June 5–10
Fela
 Society for the Performing Arts
www.spahouston.org

Strung Points by Althea Murphy-Price, lithograph on waxed masa paper, 21 x16 inches, 2009. Courtesy Wade Wilson Art

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A Gallery with Gravitas

MFAH Reinstallation Gets Ab Ex Right



PHOTO: © 2012 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

Installation view of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Long Sarofim Gallery.

I USED TO HAVE TO DRAG MYSELF to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Long Sarofim Gallery, the room in the Beck Building presenting works from the MFAH's post-World War II American collection. Now, thanks to a few simple but profound changes – part of a broader planned reinstallation of the American galleries – it's become the room I have to force myself to leave.

Before, the gallery had long lacked cohesion, being composed overwhelmingly of abstract expressionist paintings, but with just enough individual works from other movements and periods to frustrate any attempt to make sense of it.

Even worse, the room's misfits – *Tango*, an Elie Nadelman sculpture of a dancing couple (c. 1918-1924), Claes Oldenburg's hanging sculpture *Giant Soft Fan – Ghost Version* (1967), and one of Frank Stella's most reductive stripe paintings (*Palmito Ranch*, 1961) – were installed as if for maximum distraction. The fragile Nadelman sat on an enormous pedestal in the middle of the room; the Oldenburg — the lone Pop work in the space — crowded out the best painting in the gallery, Jackson Pollock's pre-drip *The Blue Unconscious* (1946), on loan from a private collection; and the bright yellow hard-edge Stella, a significant recent acquisition, was inexplicably sandwiched between two black-and-white Franz Kline paintings, interrupting a potentially interesting conversation.

Presiding over – and aggravating – the

hodgepodge, *A Wooded Landscape in Three Panels* (c. 1905), a Louis Comfort Tiffany stained-glass window peered in from the adjacent decorative-arts alcove and was the first thing viewers saw as they approached the gallery.

Today, all those problems have been swept away, starting with clearing out all the sculpture and replacing it with Alexander Calder's soaring, monumental *International Mobile* (1949), the room's indisputable masterpiece. With its aluminum vertical and horizontal shapes painted off-white rather than the cheerful primary colors seen in much of his work, it has a statelier presence than most Calder's and casts terrific shadows as its moving parts catch air currents and slowly rotate.

Besides allowing the MFAH to showcase one of its true gems, removing the other sculptures opens up the room, which dramatically changes how you see the newly rotated paintings. The once-intrusive Tiffany window has been sectioned off with a temporary wall, and *Painting* (1961), a big, dark, brooding Mark Rothko canvas now commandeers the sightline into the gallery. (This also benefits the Tiffany, which thrives in its more enclosed space.)

By 1961, Rothko had moved away from his earlier, brighter palette, which he said distracted viewers from his work's tragic themes; a few years later, he would begin work on John and Dominique de Menil's Rothko Chapel commission. In *Painting*, the only remaining vestige of his past work's chromatic intensity

is the red band that pulses against the maroon background while floating above the closely hued brown and black rectangular fields.

The Rothko has hung in this room before, but it previously had to share wall space with several other paintings, which has tended to sap its power. Now *Painting*, even more than the Calder, sets the tone for the room long before viewers enter, being readily visible from the nearby antiquities gallery.

Fittingly so: The year before he made *Painting*, Rothko wrote, "...in the burst of splendor not only is all illumined but as it gains in intensity all is also wiped out. That is the secret which I use to contain the Dionysian in (an Apollonian) burst of light."

The gallery's mood overall is one of darkness contained by bursts of light, appropriately enough for a generation of artists emerging from both the Great Depression and World War II, many living in relative poverty when they made the works on view. Monochromes and near-monochromes prevail, with black-and-blue (two Clyfford Still paintings, one by Lee Krasner), blue-and-white (Hans Hofmann) and black-and-white (two Franz Klines, which sit alongside a black-white-and-red Adolph Gottlieb "Burst" painting) dominating.

Even the works with more diverse palettes are generally somber. Pollock's drip painting (*Number 6*, 1949) is dark; his pre-drip *The Blue Unconscious* is muted, as is Philip Guston's *Passage*

(1957), which was painted when he was already growing uneasy with pure abstraction and, working "in a tension provoked by the contradictions I find in painting," beginning to clump his elegant brushstrokes into areas of color against a graying field. Increasingly, those forms would assume the presence of actors on a stage.

Even the most colorful painting – *Red Brass* (1955), ironically by Kline, the abstract expressionist most associated with black and white – is more striking for its taut, bristling architecture than its palette. It and the Stella flank the exit; while the Stella is still the odd man out, now its placement positions it as an exit strategy out of the mannered, overblown self-indulgent dead end that abstract expressionism seemed to represent by the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The Long Sarofim Gallery, which has often included mediocre works that tended to reinforce that caricature of self-expressionism, no longer does. The works on view, if not quite masterpieces in most cases, are solid, mature examples of serious artists grappling seriously with their medium. The most exuberant gestural works – Kline's *Corinthian II* (1961), which seems to spring off his adjacent, extremely austere *Wotan* (1950); and Hofmann's *Blue Monolith* (1964) – are as notable for their stripped-down, disciplined qualities as for their sense of freedom.

The empty floor allows viewers to position themselves at the perfect viewing distance from each picture, which, in many cases, they'll see anew because the gallery's natural light has been cut off. As much as Renzo Piano's Menil Collection has conditioned us to love natural light, these paintings respond well to the new starkness; the Rothko's maroon and the outer bands of Gottlieb's hovering red orb assert themselves more than in previous installations. (I'd favor dimming the lights a bit further; Rothko rightly wanted his work shown in low light.)

Once a room with an identity crisis, the Long Sarofim Gallery now presents abstract expressionism the way an encyclopedic museum – not to mention one with hundreds of millions of dollars to spend on 20th and 21st century art – should: with gravitas, a strong selection that reflects the diversity of practices that made up the movement, and wide open space. As the MFAH proceeds with plans for a new building, it's heartening to see it rethinking – and improving on – how it's using what it already has.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

www.mfah.org

The New Crop

The Ecology of Houston's Emerging Choreographers

IN THE DECADE SINCE I FIRST came ashore on Houston's dance scene, I've experienced how rapidly this particular dance performance landscape and its inhabitants evolve and regenerate.

Where artists have pruned or redir-

ected their energies, new growth is consistently emerging and making room in the bed of Houston dance. To understand how dance is made here, is to study the city's dance ecosystem and the creative organisms currently emerging and thriving within it. With the Big Range Dance Festival running



PHOTO: SAM LI

Nick Muckleroy of Urban Souls Dance Company in Courtney D. Jones' *...and the bodies drop*.

June 1-16, this is a perfect month to examine the ecology of the new crop of choreographers.

Oh, What a Garden

In bloom at any given time in Houston are a variety of self-presenters and independent choreographers. Self-presenters build an organization around their own work or a collaborative. Independents are generally dancing for self-presenters, while pursuing festival-style opportunities to present their own choreography.

Stephanie Wong, a former dancer, is the executive director of Dance Source Houston (DSH), which offers vital publicity support to choreographers and companies in the city. From her vantage point, getting work presented is one of the primary challenges to new choreographers.

"For someone just starting out, being able to dip a toe in the water, rather than jumping in all at once can be advantageous," says Wong. "Building audience and interest in what you're doing also takes a lot of time and patience."

A rising independent choreographer who is currently building an interest in her work is dancer and University of Texas at Austin alumni, Kristen

Frankiewicz. She did some company time in San Francisco, but found a more appealing and exciting fit in Houston's dance sphere.

Choreography has come about naturally for Frankiewicz, who is showing her newest work, *Glass Scratch*, during "Program A" of The Big Range. Although she's presented frequently over the last few years in both Houston and Austin, she says she doesn't have the "hunter gene" for composing new work. Instead, the work has a way of finding her.

"If an idea moves me, then I get down to business and hunt it out," says Frankiewicz. "I like to keep my choreographic perspective fresh and informed, and really only present work when I feel it has the potential to add something to the table."

Likewise, since her return to the area from Broadway touring, native Houstonian Courtney D. Jones has found a home for her work with Urban Souls Dance Company. Her second work for Urban Souls, *...and the bodies fall*, premieres June 2 at the University of Houston's Cullen Hall. The Hope Stone dancer and triple threat (she'll appear in Houston Grand Opera's *Show Boat* next season) will join the faculty at University of Houston and serve as guest choreographer at Rice University this fall.

Continued on Page 25

HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE.

NO EXIT

WRITTEN BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE DIRECTED BY EMMA MARTINSEN

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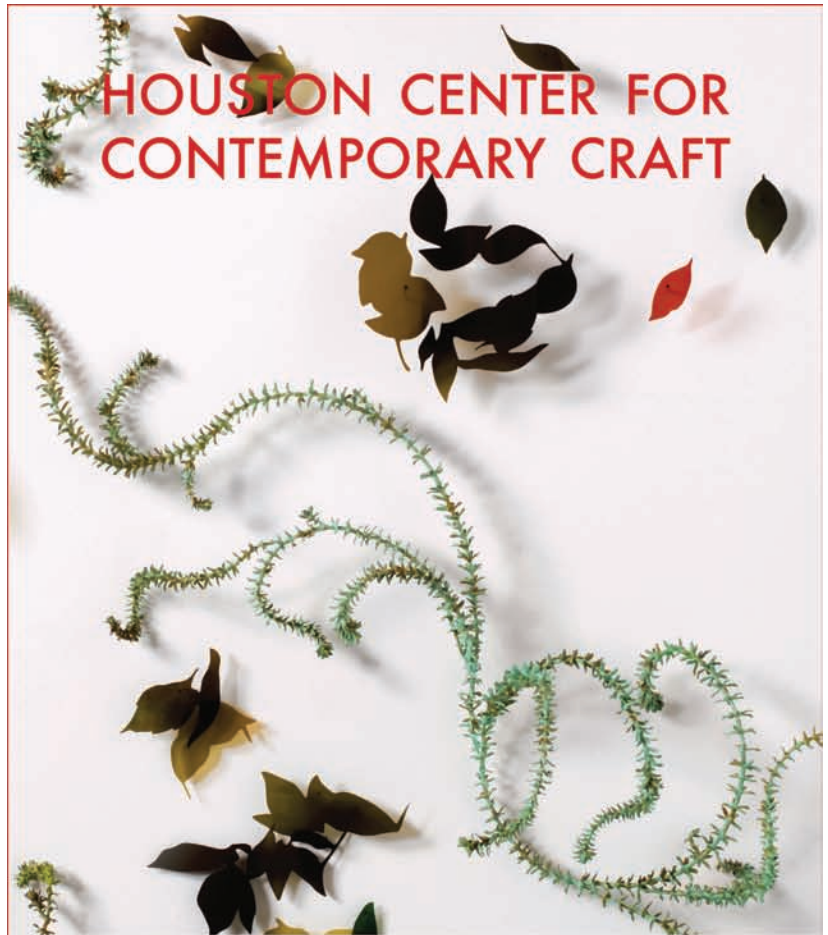


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Readymade or Not

New CAMH Curator Riffs on Duchamp's Legacy

MARKING THE 99th ANNIVERSARY of Marcel Duchamp's first readymade sculpture – a bicycle wheel mounted on a painted stool – the Contemporary Art Museum Houston's *It Is What It Is. Or Is It?* takes a look at how current artists are continuing to eke mileage out of what Duchamp called, "A form of denying the possibility of defining art."

Mounted by CAMH's new curator, Dean Daderko, just seven months after his arrival, the exhibition makes a great first impression, having been beautifully installed in CAMH's cavernous

to contain a readymade masturbator for men – the kind popularized by brands such as Fleshlight. The collective has placed a straw between its "lips," which would normally accommodate the body part used to activate the sex toy.

It's a poignantly hilarious, decidedly contemporary sight: an emerging icon of store-bought sexual self-sufficiency at once contained and penetrated by incompatible disposable products. (The coffee cup is designed for hot drinks; the straw is for cold ones.) The piece embodies the idea that, as Claire



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK

Claire Fontaine, *Untitled (Prière de toucher)*, 2011, Readymade masturbator, disposable coffee cup and straw. Dimensions variable.

Brown Foundation Gallery. On closer inspection, as is often true of thematic group shows, it sometimes casts too wide a net in trying to update the readymade while leaving out works by artists whose engagement with the form is clearer and more compelling.

That said, it's a fun show to drum up argument and debate, not least because Daderko is right about the stakes: The readymade and its legacies demand that we be active viewers, and undertaking the conceptual effort to consider what we can and what we can't see can teach us something about a contemporary state of being.

The show's standout is self-described "ready-made artist" Claire Fontaine, a Paris-based collective that lifted "her" name from a popular French brand of school notebooks. In *Untitled (Prière de Toucher)*, a disposable coffee cup is used

Fontaine once told artist and critic John Kelsey, "Consumption is no longer an activity in itself, it coincides with the unfolding of our lives, it is not a choice or a pleasure."

CAMH probably hopes viewers won't comply with the title's request, which is French for "please touch," especially given its ambiguity: Are visitors being invited to touch themselves or the artwork? Or both? And when an artist's instructions to viewers contradict those of the hosting institution, whose authority should prevail?

Claire Fontaine's other contribution raises the stakes on the latter question. Titled *Instructions for the sharing of private property* (2006), it's a 45-minute compilation of YouTube videos that demonstrate how to pick locks. While it won't likely lead to a CAMH break-in, Daderko's placement of the video by the

front door is apt: *Kunsthalles*, after all, are socially acceptable means of sharing other people's private property – often inflating its value in the process.

Touching on the relationship between appropriation and theft is William Cordova's *Labertinos (pa' octavio paz y gaspar yanga)*, a maze-like structure consisting of 200 vinyl records the Peruvian-born Cordova stole from an undisclosed Ivy League university. The thefts, we're told, were "in response to that institution's refusal to return 200 Inca artifacts from Peru after it originally borrowed them in 1914," though Cordova remains the lone Peruvian beneficiary of his tactic, which at any rate spares the offending institution from public scrutiny.

And for sheer pretentiousness, it's hard to beat the title's reference to Gaspar Yanga, who in 1617 became the governor of the first free settlement for Africans in the Americas after leading a decades-long series of slave rebellions. Does Cordova really mean to suggest some kind of equivalency between his tame gesture and Yanga's heroics? (If so, that idea seems to have occurred to him only recently; previous presentations of the piece have used the same title minus the Yanga mention.)

Its conceptual shortcomings notwithstanding, *Labertinos*, like works by Latifa Echakhch and Fayçal Baghriche, represents a globalization of the readymade coupled with a more politicized perspective than Duchamp brought to the form. For many artists, cultural baggage is itself a readymade. *Frame* (2010) by Echakhch, a Moroccan-born French artist, wrings the most complexity out of simplicity. It's a prayer rug she unraveled one strand at a time, leaving nothing but the frame and upsetting the presumed boundary between sacred and unholy ground while reinforcing contemporary viewers' tendency to associate minimalist compositions with spirituality.

Jamie Isenstein's *Smoking Pipe* (2006) stands out among sculptural works that combine found objects in performative or autobiographical ways. On a wooden table sits a dead ringer of the pipe pictured in René Magritte's painting, *The Treachery of Images* (which bears the message "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," or "This is not a pipe"). At first glance, it might appear static, but soon a humidifier hidden beneath the table begins spewing steam "smoke rings" through the pipe's chamber, as if to say, "This is not a pipe either" – even though it's right there, in the flesh.

Combining performance with documentation, Czech artist Jiří Kovanda is represented by seven black-and-white photos with text documenting simple actions he performed for the camera in 1976, such as sitting by the phone

waiting for someone to call. Daderko says the simplicity and universality of Kovanda's gestures – haven't we all sat waiting by the phone, at least before mobile devices came along? – qualify them as readymades.

This seems to stretch the meaning of the term past the breaking point – unnecessarily so, since other Kovanda actions, such as building and photographing a small, quasi-minimalist tower of sugar cubes at the foot of a wall in a Prague neighborhood in 1978, combined the use of readymades with the same sweetness and ephemerality Daderko admires in the photos on view here.

Even more far-fetched is the inclusion of two highly realistic, extremely detailed Ellen Altfest paintings – one of cacti in the woods and another of a detail of a male leg. This might make sense if Altfest worked from found photos instead of live observation or depicted common objects instead of plants and human body parts, but since she did neither, it's hard to imagine what representational painting *wouldn't* qualify as a readymade in Daderko's view.

Rachel Hecker's terrific airbrushed Jesus portraits, on the other hand, derive from both the readymade form of his iconic image with found images of celebrities such as Pink Floyd's David Gilmour and Lord of the Rings star Viggo Mortensen. I would love to have seen them joined by some very different Hecker works – her extraordinary large-scale paintings of Post-it notes, appointment cards, and other seemingly worthless scraps of readymade ephemera – complete with the notes she had scribbled to herself, giving them an often moving diaristic quality.

And the show's omission of abstract painters is curious, considering how many of them have used commercial paints as readymades. Think of Frank Stella's stated desire "to keep the paint as good as it was in the can," or Houston artist, Joseph Cohen's exclusive reliance on "oops' paints" that have been returned to home-improvement stores to make his abstractions.

All of which is to say that you should take Daderko up on his challenge to be an active viewer. Doing so won't leave you agreeing with all of his choices, but it might leave you rethinking the readymade and its ubiquity in contemporary art. Not to mention a newfound knack for picking locks.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

May 12–July 29, 2012
It Is What It Is. Or Is It?
Contemporary Art Museum Houston
www.camh.org

Seeing Both Ways

Lacy Johnson on *Trespasses: A Memoir*

ACCORDING TO LACY M. JOHNSON'S bio, she worked as "assistant-manager of a Wal-Mart Vision Center, sold steaks door-to-door, and puppeteered with a traveling children's museum before earning a PhD from the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program." The Houston-based author's first book, *Trespasses*, was published by the University of Iowa Press in March 2012.

The memoir is an outgrowth of an essay called "White trash Primer," which Johnson expanded through a series of interviews she conducted with her family in her childhood home in central Missouri. The book is written in short prose-poem vignettes, sending readers hopping across the rural landscape of her childhood. A + C writer, Nicole Zaza bring us into the territory of *Trespasses*.

A + C: You say in the introduction, "At a certain point the facts got in the way of truth." Tell me about how you see memoir functioning as a story telling device.

Lacy Johnson: When I say, "The facts got in the way of the truth," I mean only that this memoir is not strictly factual. It's not journalism, after all. I wasn't present, for example, the day electricity came about. Other details come from research I conducted about the Rural Electrification Administration. Memoir as a story telling device allows me to make meaning of my grandmother's experience--to understand the impact of that moment in her life, and on the lives of her future children, and my life, and the lives of my children. I'm talking about using memoir as a vehicle for processing collective memory.

I get the sense that you are taking up a portrait of whiteness. Did you feel any trepidation in writing about race?

I don't think it's accurate to say I am trying to take up "a portrait of whiteness." I wouldn't claim to know what being white means to all white people. Instead, I try to portray one particular group of white people living in a very particular, very isolated place. In doing so, yes, I am

taking up issues of race and class and gender. I am also taking issue with the way we talk and think about race and class and gender in general, and about "white trash" more specifically.

At one point the manuscript had an epigraph from an interview with John Waters in *New York Magazine*, in which he said that "white trash" "is the last racist thing you can say and get away with." I don't necessarily agree with him—people get away with saying racist things all the time—but it helped me to start thinking about how the relationship between whiteness and so-

called "white trash" illuminates at least a few of the problems with how race gets constructed in our culture.

So, no, I didn't feel any trepidation when it came to talking about that, but I did feel trepidation when it came to talking about racism, which is different. Racism—more than race itself—is an issue about which many people feel trepidation. I don't want to be a racist, or say racist things. But I also think it's not enough for me to not-be or not-say. That's the silence I'm talking about. By

Continued on Page 21

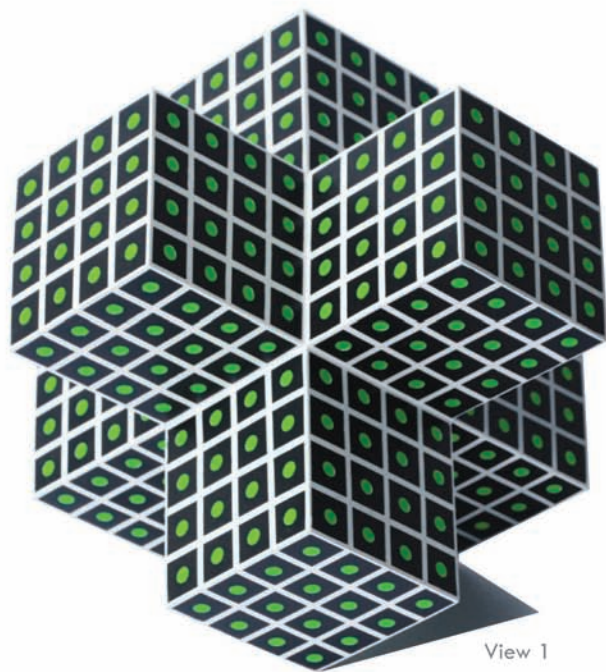


Lacy Johnson.

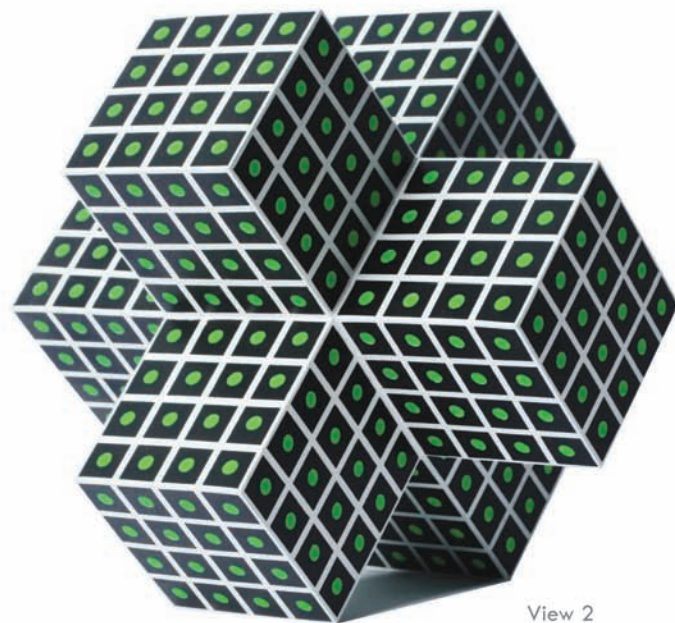
COURTESY LACY JOHNSON

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View 1



View 2

"Holodeck Epicycle" Lacquer on Douglas Fir 9.5 in. x 9.5 in. x 9.5 in. (2012)

Printmaking in Houston: Then and Now

PRINTMAKING IS GAINING ATTENTION in Houston again. June marks the celebration of PrintHouston, a summer-long festival exhibiting printmaking and print processes across the city. In its second year, PrintHouston has just under thirty galleries with participating exhibitions across the city and into Galveston, exhibiting artists from Houston and elsewhere alike.

What is responsible for this recent surge of print interest within the city? Younger artists are becoming attracted to printmaking partly due to the letterpress aesthetic championed by contemporary graphic design currents, and the gritty wheat-paste poster scene is garnering attention since the recent debut of Alex Luster's documentary, *Stick 'Em Up!* However, these trends only account for part of the interest in the plethora of sophisticated processes that are conveniently bundled as "printmaking."

Crucial to printmaking's revival in the city is an environment that has the right blend of general interest, collaboration between artist-printmakers and artists, accessible studio space, and a market of collectors to help sustain new work. So where is this all coming from, and why are we only hearing about it now?

First, a little history lesson. American printmaking as an art form came to the forefront in the 1960s and 70s with the new Tamarind Institute, (a lithography workshop now located in Albuquerque) churning out its first graduates of highly trained and often collaborative artist-lithographers. Universal Limited Art Editions in Long Island began attracting up-and-coming artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and others to work in a collaborative print environment -- all in the fallout of abstract expressionism.

Between these two institutions and others, printmaking became much more than a means of production and suddenly had a fresh generation of artist-printmakers ready to open their own studios across the country, collaborate with one another, and seduce artists from their primary disciplines into making prints.

The roots of printmaking in Houston as we see it now started with two key individuals: Suzanne Manns and David Folkman. Manns, arguably the godmother of printmaking in Houston, has taught at the Glassell School of Art since the 1970s. She is responsible for introducing a large swathe of Houston

artists to printmaking and curated *35 Years of Printmaking at Glassell*, on view June 21-July 3 at Tradition Bank Gallery.

Folkman, a Tamarind-trained printmaker, moved his studio, Little Egypt Enterprises, from southern Illinois to Houston in the early 1970s, shortly before Manns arrived in the city.

Houston was accruing that golden combination of skilled printmakers, experimental artists, and accommodating studio space that could edition prints for collectors. A poster child for this ecosystem is Penny

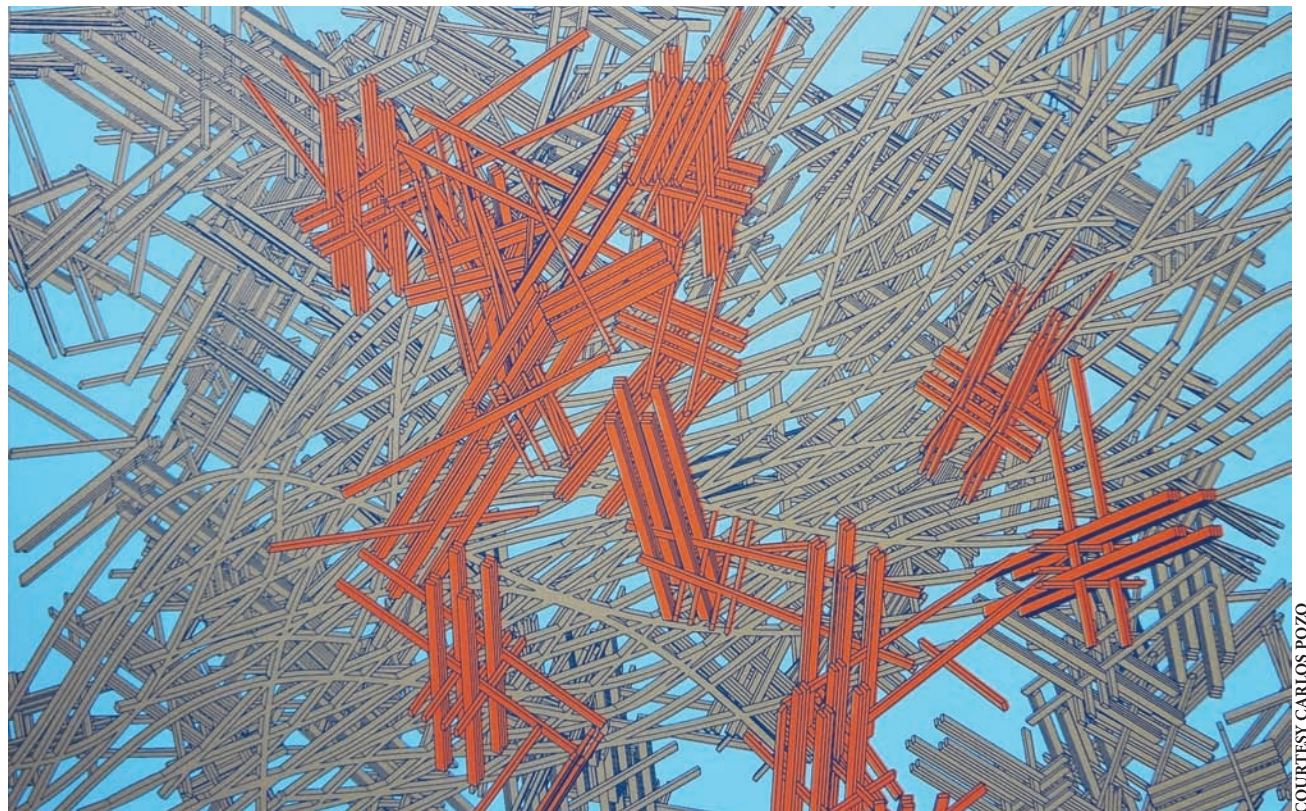
However, by the mid-1990s, the print scene in Houston appeared to be falling to its own inertia. Little Egypt dissolved in the early 90s, and printers generally gravitated to their own presses, yielding a more fractured, insular environment. Perhaps the average Houston art collector developed a predilection for "one of a kind" artworks, not fully recognizing the value retained in the presumed scarcity of a limited edition and the ability to represent a large amount of artists within a collection.

Over the last five years, the environment has become much more amenable

environment for many printmakers who find themselves orphaned when leaving the academic setting. BBP functions as a petri dish for printmakers in Houston -- many of them PrintMatters members -- but also editions prints or works in creative projects and serves as the current laboratory for the University of Houston's new print-editioning program.

Recently, BBP produced mono-prints for the Glassell in a week-long visit with the sculptor, Albert Paley, and produced an Art Car with Dennis McNett for the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, with more activity on the way.

The currents above just scratch the surface of Houston's network of private presses and studios. While it's impossible to fully glimpse the direction of the Houston arts scene, prospects are improving for printmaking.



COURTESY CARLOS POZO

Carlos Pozo, *Towers and Splines*, 2012, Serigraph. On view in the PrintHouston exhibition NEXT.

Cerling. She developed a penchant for intaglio processes under Manns at the Glassell and further developed Little Egypt's etching endeavors through the 1980s before starting her own independent studio.

Printmaking blew up in the 1980s with the firm establishment of the Museum of Printing History by a coterie of letterpress printers, effectively bridging the dialogue between the printed page, graphic design, and printmaking as an art form. Little Egypt continued to boom, creating works like the Art Against AIDS portfolio in 1988, the Glassell, and other endeavors, while universities continued to educate new printmakers. Even Southern Graphics Council, the international academic pillar of printmaking, had its traveling conference at Rice University in 1985.

for printmaking, thanks to the efforts of bootstrapping artists across the city. PrintMatters, the organization behind PrintHouston, formed as a collective-minded nonprofit composed of printmakers that promotes print processes and print collecting while working to further the professional careers of its members, who include transplants educated outside the region as well as artists trained at the Glassell and other local institutions.

Another key player in the new printmaking ecology is the fledgling studio, Burning Bones Press (BBP). Founded by former Flatbed Press master printer and current University of Houston print professor, Patrick Masterson and graphic designer turned outlaw printmaker, Carlos Hernandez, BBP exists as a cooperative studio

PrintMatters appears to be taking a more public direction and growing.

Other projects like the recently launched UNIT are broadening the perception of editioned works by including artist books, sculptures, and photography into the fold; all with a curatorial eye and an entrepreneurial spirit. Moving forward, the public will find printmaking hard to ignore, and perhaps the international printmaking community will find Houston harder to ignore as well.

—GEOFF SMITH

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

www.printmattershouston.org

Little Big Shot

The Micro-Cinemanía of Aurora Picture Show



COURTESY AURORA PICTURE SHOW

Light painting with filmmakers Matt Crawford and Che Rickman during the Teen Summer Filmmaking Boot Camp.

REWIND THE PAST 14 YEARS, AND you'll see Aurora Picture Show – the little micro-cinema-that-could – reel in some of the best moving image art and public programming in the Texas region.

Aurora is the oldest microcinema in the Southwest, augmented by a tenacious history of screening artist-made films in non-traditional spaces, including the original location – a church building on Aurora Street in Houston's Heights neighborhood.

This member-driven, non-profit organization has crafted its reputation as a champion of quality media art literacy and programming, bringing award-winning artists, curators, and scholars to Houston including: Laurie Anderson, Soham Mehta, Yasmine Gomez, Melissa Hung, Joan Jonas, Christian Marclay, and others too numerous to list here (including my personal favorite – Japanese-Canadian food-art-genius, Nobu Adilman, one of the three mechanics who build D-I-Y cooking equipment from junkyard parts, found objects, and locally-sourced ingredients on the television series, *Food Jammers*).

Several years ago, Aurora's attendance stagnated. Things were in pause mode. The microcinema's then director, Andrea Grover, decided to retire into the role of Founder, relocating to Sag Harbor, New York to pursue other artistic endeavors. The church building was sold and is now 14 Pews, another microcinema art space. It was time to hit reset. That reboot produced an impressive surge of energy.

In 2007, Aurora set up offices and

hosted the coveted video library and salons in a bungalow near the Menil Collection. Since then, curator Mary Magsamen, executive director Delicia Harvey, associate director Rachel Blackney Tepper, staff members Camilo Gonzalez and Guy Harrison, along with a host of cherished volunteers have been collaborating with organizational partners: St. Arnold's Brewery, Discovery Green, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, and DiverseWorks (Flicker Lounge) to name a few.

Together, they present inventive screenings, events, and programs throughout Houston as part of Aurora's strategic plan and in accordance with their mission. Add to that numerous grants and awards, including a Warhol Initiative. Hitting play never felt so good.

This month Aurora Picture Show lands in its new permanent location.

"The space is set-up to accommodate screenings and performances and delivers on nearly 100% of the items placed on a recent Facility Wish List created by the Aurora Facilities Committee during our strategic planning session," says Harvey. "With the move to the new space, we hope to grow our programs and shift our identity toward becoming a media arts center for Houston."

Located off Kirby Drive at 2442 Bartlett Street, the new location provides an accessible location in a flexible space with indoor and outdoor areas for film screenings, events, educational programs, offices, kitchen, bathrooms, storage, and security. The Rice University area is quickly becoming

an arts and culture destination spot. Aurora will sustain collaborations with Houston partners as well as foster new relationships with neighboring arts organizations and businesses.

The building is a former artist's studio space and comes courtesy of Molly Gochman, a long-time supporter of Aurora and former board member. It's a familiar space to both Aurora and its members – Gochman has allowed Aurora to use the space over recent years for the Extremely Shorts Film Festival. It was also the home of the 2009 Aurora Award gala honoring Christian Marclay.

In its new Bartlett home, Aurora will continue to "create meaningful community-oriented exchange between artists and audiences, increasing the variety and breadth of cinematic experiences available to the public."

Aurora's education programs have proven central to these experiences and the demand for its filmmaking and digital technology courses are high. Aurora is working to grow these programs for audience and community impact through partnerships with organizations such as Writers in the Schools, Project Row Houses, Young Audiences of Houston, Girls Rock Camp Houston, and others.

"We hope to continue to tour to neighboring cities in Texas to share films with more audiences, as well as develop relationships across the state that help increase our mission and programs," says Blackney Tepper.

If you want to be part of the Aurora audience, your most immediate opportunity is to snag an invite to the exclusive Bartlett housewarming event. This is a "members-only" party, so you'd better join – and soon. You can also donate to the Aurora Kickstarter campaign for membership rewards and other swanky perks.

Members and non-members alike can attend the first public event in the new space which is the 15th Annual Extremely Shorts Film Festival on June 29 and 30. Comprised of short films from around the country, each three minutes long or less and with cash prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners awarded by audience vote, Extremely Shorts is arguably the gateway event for your Aurora addiction. The festival is juried each year by an accomplished film/video expert. This year Aurora welcomes Andy Smith from Nickelodeon Theater in South Carolina.

Fast forwarding into Aurora's future, many of us moving-image-art-lovers see



COURTESY THE ARTIST & AURORA PICTURE SHOW

Media Archeology of artist Luke Savisky's E/x, a site-specific multi-projection performance.

"As arts education funding decreases and access to media increases, we want to help lead efforts for exposure to media arts for Houston youth as a way to encourage creative expression in positive, artistic ways," says Magsamen. "We realize that in addition to exhibitions, the best way to grow our audience and encourage future auteurs, is to help them understand the importance, history, and process behind these films."

Aurora has partnered with organizations such as the Austin Film Society, SXSW, Artpace, Fusebox, Austin Museum of Art, and Arthouse. This brings a curated series of films to these destinations and has its audience participating in talks specific to alternative programming.

the organization securing a worldwide reputation as the center for Houston media arts presentation and education.

All you have to do is sit back and watch.

–NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator and writer who enables Aurora addictions whenever and wherever possible.

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EIGHT-YEAR-OLD DYLAN-LUKE THOMAS FINISHES A DRAWING FOR AN UPCOMING SOLO EXHIBITION AT DEITCH PROJECTS. RECENTLY FEATURED IN ART NEWS' "TEN ARTISTS TO WATCH UNDER TEN-YEARS-OLD", THOMAS' WORK WILL ALSO BE FEATURED THIS FALL AT LONDON'S TATE MODERN.



IT'S ALL RELATIVE CURRENTLY SHOWING MAY 12 // JUNE 16
WORKS BY: EDDIE D STAFFORD, ERIN STAFFORD & ELISSA STAFFORD

Build It and They Will Come

Texas Music Festival Sets the Standard for Excellence

Never underestimate the power of a cowboy conductor. That very image served as the poster for the first Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival (TMF), now in its 22nd year.

“Actually, that poster is kind of iconic, and I still have people that call me looking for a copy of it,” says Alan Austin. Now in his 15th season as General Director of TMF, Austin, who was a violinist at the festival in its first season, has overseen the organization’s growth from a virtually unknown event to a hot bed of musical activity for some of the best and brightest musical minds from around the United States and beyond.

When I was accepted as a fellow at TMF during Austin’s inaugural year as General Director in 1997, I was mildly pleased. Now, an invitation to participate in the festival means something entirely different. Today, they attract the very best young talent from across the globe.

With a 95-piece orchestra as its crown jewel, TMF now also boasts a world-

class faculty with separate jazz, vocal, piano, and guitar institutes. It offers performances in its home locale of the Moores Opera House, in addition to run-outs to Texas A & M University and the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion throughout June.

“It’s been a little bit of a ‘if you build it they will come’ philosophy,” says Austin. The late Immanuel and Helen Olshan wanted to create a festival experience that was comparable to that of Tanglewood or Aspen, and upon their deaths, their foundation enabled Austin to offer full-tuition scholarships to each student.

“It also puts the musicians on an equal footing when they are at the festival,” Austin says. Once the musicians arrive in Houston they go straight to work on rehearsing, as opposed to wasting time establishing their rank and position in the festival based on the amount of scholarship they did or didn’t receive. Consequently, there is no warm-up concerning concert programming. This season, the orchestra dives right in with a performance of Beethoven’s



PHOTO: JEFF GRASS

Franz Krager, Music Director & Chief Conductor of the Immanuel and Helen Olshan Texas Music Festival, will conduct the Festival Orchestra in the Festival’s “Celebratory Opening” Saturday, June 9, 7:30 p.m. at the UH Moores Opera House.

grand *Symphony No.9*, alongside Paul Hindemith’s *Symphonic Metamorphosis of themes of Carl Maria von Weber*.

The festival boasts many notable alumni. In addition to at least 10 players who populate the various ensembles in Houston, former TMF participants include representatives in many major national orchestras. The current principal cellist of the Academy of Ancient Music and violinist Dan Zhu, who wowed festival participants and fans when he first attended the festival

in 2001, has since gone on to have an important career as a soloist.

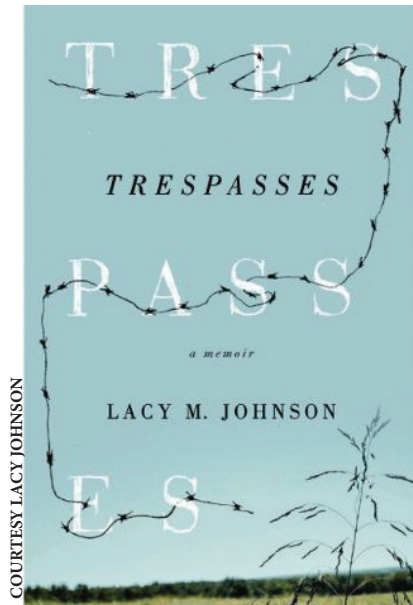
Championed by Christoph Eschenbach, Zhu recently performed a program of Mozart sonatas with the former Houston Symphony Music Director at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. After a stop at TMF for a performance of the *Violin Concerto* by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, he heads to the Tanglewood Music Center for a performance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Continued on Page 25



ART/AD BOMB BY HOUSTON ARTIST RENE CRUZ, WHO WAS INVITED BY GUEST CURATOR DAVID A. BROWN.

JOHNSON CONTINUED



COURTESY LACY JOHNSON

writing about racism, which does make me very nervous, I try to acknowledge the ways in which being white has allowed me to participate in, and benefit from, an unjust and oppressive system that privileges some and oppresses others. If I'm taking up a portrait of anything, it's a portrait of that system.

Tell me more about how these issues are playing out in chapters like Rural Route One, Jackson Street and Whitegate Drive.

As those chapters relate to these issues, I think they portray a few different versions of what it means to be marginalized as a poor white person—as “white trash.” You know, one of the things that people say a lot in relation to these chapters goes something like: “But these people don't sound like white trash!” Which I think is exactly my point. Growing up, I never really thought of myself as white trash, and certainly never felt like white trash, and I never thought of anyone in my family as being or acting trashy. But I also knew that what I thought about myself wasn't consistent with the way people treated me. I think these chapters in particular attempt to document the gap between the way a person sees herself, and the way others see her. Over time, I learned to see myself in both ways.

You have 37 footnotes at the back of the book, which has the effect of forcing the reader to choose between flipping back and forth while reading this book or closing an eye to a portion of the narrative. It creates kind of a constant movement in the reader, both physically and mentally. Was this your intention?

Yes, I was thinking about constant movement. But I was also thinking about layers. There are lots of ways of talking about people and places, and I didn't want to tell this story in just one way, in one voice. Instead, I wanted to

tell stories and at the same time call them into question. To relate an “official” story and at the same time undermine its claim to being official. One reviewer complained that this is a cumbersome construction. That might be a valid critique, but I had no interest in writing an *easy* book.

I want my readers to think while they're reading, to argue with me, and question me, and talk back. I want my reader to be engaged with the same issues I struggled with, and which I continue to struggle with. I think the footnotes help to create a certain mimesis in this regard: by either moving constantly or closing an eye to a portion of the narrative, the reader is faced with the same choices I make every day when it comes to engaging with the place I'm from.

I didn't see the epigraph until I was nearly at the end of the book. Reading the Lord's Prayer in the context of your book gave me the chills. But I still can't work out exactly why.

The Lord's Prayer always gives me the chills, but I'm guessing it's for a different reason. There's a certain way in which that epigraph ties the whole book together in a neat little bow. What it means to “trespass” evolves throughout the book: on the one hand, it's a synonym for entering a place you don't belong; on the other hand, it's a synonym for any wrong you might do to another person.

Prayer, spirituality, religion, faith (they are different things!) are an enormous part of the book—I was raised Southern Baptist—and in the book, I'm critical of the ways in which churches often ruin spirituality with organized religion. I was taught that you just don't question your faith, you don't question the leaders of your church, and you certainly don't question God. But the book does all of those things and more.

The epigraph begs forgiveness for these sins in advance: forgive me for questioning, for confessing, for betraying, for leaving, and for coming back. I'm sorry for writing the book, and I'm also not sorry. I certainly won't repent. Forgive me for that. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That's the line that does it. And look: here they come again: chills.

—NICOLE ZAZA

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

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Cultural Warrior

Houston Ballet's Executive Director James Nelson



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Houston Ballet executive director James Nelson.

IN FEBRUARY OF 2012, JAMES Nelson took over the reigns of the executive director job from C.C. Conner. Nelson, a former Houston Ballet dancer, was groomed for the job during his 12-year tenure as general manager. Even though his office has just moved down the hall, more than his view has changed.

He spoke with A + C editor Nancy Wozny to bring us into the thick of running the nation's fourth largest ballet company.

A + C: What's the one thing that is the most different about your new job?

JIM NELSON: Time. I spend more hours here, but I knew that. So much of this job is relationship building. That takes time. It's all good.

You have been involved in so many aspects of the organization already. What's new for you now?

The board development piece is really new to me. I was involved before, but not completely responsible. Now, I'm

learning how all of that works and am extremely involved with our board chair and president. It's been great, but new.

I saw *Joffrey: Mavericks of American Dance* recently and left thinking that being the executive director of a ballet company is one really hard job. Yet, you always have this beaming smile on your face. What's your secret?

It's about the team you cultivate. You are the architect, but not the sole person running the ship. I absolutely take a team approach. It's also about leveraging the great talents of people around me. That's what makes us successful.

Houston Ballet Center for Dance is a little over a year old. Has the company's reputation changed nationally?

Absolutely, yes, we have had fantastic coverage nationally and internationally. The building has won several awards, including an American Institute for Architects and a Houston Business Journal Landmark Award. So yes, we have raised the profile of the

organization, but a building does not make a ballet company. It's the fantastic artists who are the heart and soul of this company. Without that, we are nothing.

Still, it's super cool to have such fine, new digs.

The building has validated what we have been saying for years, that we are world class, and now we are packaged in a world-class building.

How does your former life as a ballet dancer inform you now?

I understand the crazy structure of ballet companies, which are led by two people, an artistic director and an executive director. I also have credibility with Stanton Welch (artistic director) and the artists because I'm from their world. We speak the same language.

Ben Stevenson's dramatic *Romeo & Juliet* ends the season. Any special thoughts on this ballet?

Well, I danced Tybalt and Lord Capulet in Ben's version. Prokofiev's score is one of the best ballet scores ever, and the music is simply beautiful. The pas de deux are great, you get drama, sword fighting, it's just a dream of a narrative ballet. The ballet stands the test of time. I believe Stanton will take it on during this next decade. It's on his shortlist.

It seems to me that more and more company dancers are Academy trained. True?

Recently, we have had several dancers rise through the Academy to the company. It doesn't happen every year. Right now, 49% of the company has spent some time at the Academy. The important thing is that the talent we are seeing coming out of the Academy is better than what we are finding at auditions. It's not that we are preferential, they *are* better.

What's your biggest challenge for the next decade?

We are half way through a \$95 million capital campaign. The building was the first milestone. We are just shy of raising all of the money for the building, but still have a ways to go on the endowment portion of the campaign. That has to take priority in my focus for the foreseeable future.

What do you do when you take a break from ballet?

I cook, garden, and travel, usually during the summers when there isn't any ballet going on. I'll make an exception this summer when I head to Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival to see Stanton's world premiere on the *Joffrey* Ballet. Will you be there?



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Joseph Walsh and Karina Gonzales in Ben Stevenson's Ballet *Romeo and Juliet*.

Nicolo Fonte just premiered a stunning new ballet. How do you see new work as key to Houston Ballet's mission?

It's always a priority for this company, and it will continue to be. We are committed to making a contribution to the art form. We want to have new work along with terrific contemporary work and the classics. That's how we attract the great artists who come here as well.

How is the Academy evolving?

Our enrollment has grown 20% since we opened the new building. We are built for growth, close to the Metro, and are much more accessible to a diverse community.

Of course I will be there. Don't forget it was at the Pillow that I first spied you in a bow tie and a seersucker (C.C.'s signature outfit) last summer. If you had to name one gift from your predecessor, what would it be?

I would say that C.C. has given me a prism for my toolkit that gives me a way of viewing the landscape of the business of dance.

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Worth the Trip

Texas Prize at AMOA-Arthouse



PHOTO: JEFF WILLIAMS

Jeff Williams, installation image of Texas Prize 2012, on view at the Jones Center through July 22.

ONLY TIME WILL TELL HOW November's merger between the Austin Museum of Art and Arthouse will play out. In the meantime, it's nice to see that the Texas Prize — a formerly biennial, now triennial \$30,000 award Arthouse launched in 2005 for emerging visual artists — has survived the wedding of two former rivals for Austin's philanthropic dollars.

Also encouraging: This year's winner, Austin artist Jeff Williams, and fellow finalists Jamal Cyrus and Will Henry of Houston all present strong bodies of work in the celebratory exhibition *Texas Prize*. Their offerings have room to breathe, thanks to the museum's decision to give fewer finalists more space to exhibit than in previous iterations.

The show confirms the impression that the jurors — an international panel that included museum directors, curators and artist Katrina Moorhead, the 2007 recipient — picked the right winner in Williams, while all three deserved to be in the running.

In the downstairs gallery, Henry presents a group of mostly nocturnal landscape paintings that take into account how

artists as different from one another as Frederic Remington and Ed Ruscha have influenced how we see the West, while Minimalists such as Donald Judd and Dan Flavin have transformed how visitors and locals experience it thanks to Marfa's Chinati Foundation, a pilgrimage site for international art tourists.

A campfire glows against a Remington-like night sky in *Installation*, but it's lit by the kind of fluorescent light tubes Flavin used. *Giant* calls to mind Ruscha's paintings of the iconic Hollywood sign, but in Henry's painting the letters spell out "Judd" instead. And there's a touch of Magritte in *Southwestern Landscape*, which features three tumbleweeds levitating over a flat, barren vista.

Upstairs, Cyrus presents an installation that revamps a musical stage with conceptual touches related to African-American consciousness and history. The set includes towers of animal-skin drums and a breaded saxophone next to a deep-fryer — a remnant of *Texas Fried Tenor*, Cyrus' opening-night performance in which he deep-fried a saxophone, nodding as much to John Cage as to the history of jazz.

The sax sizzles to perfection in the nearby video of *Texas Fried Tenor*, which must have been hoot to attend. In related public programs, Cyrus will also perform at the Eric Dolphy Memorial Barbecue at 5:30 p.m. June 29 at Houston's Project Row Houses and will present a free jazz performance, *Ancestors*, at 7 p.m. at The Jones Center.

Williams' installation, which jurors praised "for the way in which it addressed the complex geographical and architectural history of the exhibition site and used an inventive sculptural approach to mark intersecting and distinct measures of time," is hauntingly strange. Plexiglas sheets, each supported by wooden beams lying on the gallery floor, sag under Central Texas fossils sitting in puddles of a chemical solution. Suspended above, videos screen rotating pieces of the masonry from the old, pre-renovation Jones Center. Meanwhile, an interior wall dividing Williams' half of the gallery from Cyrus', has sacs that appear to be in a state of suspended flow. In fact, they're slowing dripping down the wall, reflecting Williams' interest in gravity and decay, and the installation will gradually change between repeat visits. Even if you only catch it once,

though, Williams' laboratory of post-Minimalist curiosities will heighten your awareness of how even seemingly static objects like buildings are constantly breaking down over time.

While you're in Austin, stop by the Blanton Museum of Art, whose collection of 17,000 artworks is the largest in Central Texas and is now searchable online thanks to a new database accessible at collection.blantonmuseum.org.

Upcoming Blanton exhibitions include *The Collecting Impulse: Fifty Works from Dorothy and Herbert Vogel* (June 10–Aug. 12), which celebrates a gift from the celebrated collectors of modest means made famous by the documentary *Herb & Dorothy*. The show includes works by such artists as Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Elizabeth Murray, Lynda Benglis, Ursula von Rydingsvard and Richard Tuttle.

— DEVON BRITT-DARBY

May 5–July 22, 2012
Texas Prize
AMOA-Arthouse at The Jones Center
www.amoa-arthouse.org

THE NEW CROP CONTINUED

"I was thrilled to see such diversity in options," says Jones. "It feels like almost every weekend there is a little something for everyone to buy a ticket and enjoy."

Among these 'somethings' are events like the Barnevelder Movement/Arts Complex Dance Gathering, Hope Stone's Hope Werks, and 12 Minutes Max, which is a combined effort of DSH, DiverseWorks, and CORE Dance. Each one of them offers a unique opportunity for emerging choreographers to present without the overhead expense of self-production.

Dance Film Takes Hold

Up-and-coming dance-for-camera artist, Lydia Hance, founded Frame Dance Productions in 2010. (Disclosure: You'll find me in recent films produced by Frame Dance, for which I've also served as a board member).

Hance's work often requires projectors and surfaces to project upon, but conventional dance venues and

producers are rarely prepared to meet these needs without compromise. As a result, she's concluded that, despite the extra legwork required, self-producing events is less challenging than the alternative.

"I don't want to pull myself out of these festival environments. I want to be part of the dialogue, even if it takes time," Hance asserts. "In the meantime, I will continue self-producing. I didn't look at the Houston dance community and think, I need to fill this niche. I looked at my work, looked at the Houston dance community and thought, there's room for me."

CONTEXT, her most recent installation at Winter Street Studios, proved a stunning success, and is evidence of her efforts to carve her own path, not only in terms of the spatial context in which dance is viewed, but in the trans-discipline definition of dance.

Wong (DSH) is struck by the amount of dance for film currently being presented, stating, "There seems to be a real interest

and momentum behind the exploration of video as a medium and the normal limitations that medium allows us to transcend."

Rosie Trump, Director of Dance at Rice University and a choreographer/filmmaker, has actively sought local dance filmmakers to feature in The Third Coast Dance Film Festival she founded in Houston. Though she could easily have filled the roster with imports, Trump wants to foster dance film production in this community.

It's the accumulating presence in Houston of dance for camera by individuals like Hance, Trump, and Ashley Horn that sets the city's current yield of dance-makers apart from its more established artists. Horn's Big Range offering is *Jazzland*, a dance film with an original score composed by improvisational pianist, Robert Pearson.

The Laboratory of Evolution

NobleMotion and Recked Productions, the creative conduits of Andy and Dionne Noble and Erin Reck, are generating fresh excitement in Houston. All three individuals on the dance faculty at Sam Houston State University have found a home on the Big Range. This year, they'll each present work on the first weekend of June on the festival's

Program A.

"Essentially, audiences will support good work," says Wong. The creation of new dance work is reinforced by an infrastructure of time, space, and money. It is fueled by a kind of mutual advocacy. No dancer is an island. Erin Reck asserts the need to work in support of oneself and one's art by staying active in the field and not living in a cardboard box, "Basquiat style."

"Artists need other artists to help them grow," Reck reflects. "We are inspired by each other, pushed and challenged by each other, pinched when we try to create something gimmicky or mediocre and applauded when we successfully step outside our box."

—NICHELLE STRZEPEK

Nichelle Strzepek is a dancer, writer, and the founder and editor of DanceAdvantage.net where she covers all things dance and dance training.

June 2, 2012
Urban Souls Dance Company
www.urbansoulsdancecompany.com

June 1-16, 2012
The Big Range Dance Festival
www.bigrange.com

TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL CONTINUED

Austin and TMF have also displayed an extraordinary commitment to living composers as well. Most notable was a recent co-commission with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra of the *Symphony No.1* by composer Christopher Theofanidis.

TMF gave the second performance of the piece, which has since been commercially recorded by the ASO. Austin also notes that the festival has commissioned at least five other major works for the orchestra, as well as a series of overtures and a large-scale chamber work by David Ashley White.

In 2016, TMF will combine forces with five other entities to commission a song cycle to feature Baritone Timothy Jones and will be written by the recent Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts.

As the years have gone on, the festival has also committed to developing its fellows as young orchestral players. Recent offerings include mock auditions and career seminars that focus on something other than playing an instrument. (Full disclosure: I organized one of them in 2008.) Austin is particularly pleased with offering Yoga For Musicians. He insists that his staff attend that class.

While it's difficult to imagine that there is anything other than an overabundance of heat and humidity happening in Houston in June, TMF sizzles with great music to the tune of nearly 50 concerts throughout the month. Whether it's chamber music performed by the world-class faculty or orchestral music by the elite young fellows, you will not want to miss out.

Austin says, "We've reached a point where the orchestra is so good, that we want to share with Houstonians."

—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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RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE



PHOTO: ANTHONY RATHBUN

Jessica Janes and Ricky Welch in The Catastrophic Theatre's production of Miki Johnson's *American Falls*.

Miki Johnson's *American Falls*

Catastrophic Theatre
May 24–June 9, 2012
www.catastrophictheatre.org

A century ago, armed with little more than secondary knowledge gleaned from travel guides and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Franz Kafka attempted to write an "American" novel. The manuscript shows its main character repeatedly and thoroughly abused and misled before suddenly jumping to its incomplete and enigmatic final section, "The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma." Kafka's friend and literary executor Max Brod explains that it is here, in the "almost limitless" theatre, that "his young hero was going to find again a profession, a stand-by, his freedom, even his old home and his parents, as if by some celestial witchery." It's a startling shift from the typical mythologizing of the American dream, a shift through which redemption and reconciliation result not from pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, mastering the landscape, but from being willingly and selflessly

consumed by it.

For better or worse, the characters of *American Falls* are similarly consumed by a place and by dreams, holding out hope for the redemption of parents and the regaining of freedom, by witchery celestial and otherwise. But the nondescript, midwest town of American Falls is not consumed in the vast verdure of nature as much as it is lost in the relative nowhere that is popular consumer culture. The original script by Catastrophic member Miki Johnson takes great delight in digging through the garbage bin of the American psyche, finding that combination of ephemeral trash that could tell a stranger so much about who we are and how we live without ever actually peaking in through the window.

Johnson's nonlinear script, a series of monologues, mixes and matches the flat metaphors, the touchstone archetypes, the cringe-inducing clichés that flood the media that flood our lives as if they were placeholders for our true selves.

Though this method can at times seem no more inspired than its uninspired sources, moments later it will have you question if that's not the crux of the matter itself — the insignificance of that tiny piece of plastic we throw away as compared with the incomprehensible vastness of the dump.

With a set that is divided up into five habitats, each specific to a given character, none of whom ever leave the stage, scenic designer Laura Fine Hawkes and lighting designer Kirk Markley have created a deeply rich and immersive visual experience that never ceases to give the impression of a tableau vivant, a pastiche of vanitas of Anytown, America. With disarming charm, Carolyn Houston Boone and Ricky Welch respectively fill out their parts as a selfish mother comfortable in her own haggard skin and a Native American spirit-guide to modern consumerism. They balance the shallowness of their stereotypes by sharing surprise when they have the fortune to hit upon something deeper.

The end of the play shows redemption stumbled upon rather than pointedly earned. The tide of forgiveness that releases the characters from their allotted fates seems to reside not in the people themselves so much as in the ether of the environment. Life's capacity for forgiveness attains a limitlessness in this way, like a TV with enough channels that, even without certain knowledge of what it might be, one has faith that there is indeed something good to watch, or like a country with a landscape so vast that there's always another chance to escape further inward.

—DAVID A. FEIL

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

August Wilson's *King Hedley II*

The Ensemble Theatre
May 5–June 3, 2012
www.ensemblehouston.com

We've probably all heard some version of Chekhov's maxim, that if a loaded gun is introduced on stage, it better be used before the play is through. In August, Wilson's *King Hedley II* seems to bring a new weapon in each scene — one of a half-dozen pistols, a machete, a straight razor, and a knife — almost all of which are never put to more use than suspenseful brandishing.

But it's not so much the piling of

weapons on stage that charges the action of the play, as it is the revelation of well-worn physical and emotional scars that simmer like undefused bombs and explosions that wreak havoc whether there is a weapon at hand or not. The question then becomes not how a man or woman can arm themselves and not be expected to make good on that threat, but how a person can carry the mark or memory of a wound and not want to wholly devote themselves to regaining that loss violently and vengefully.

When we meet the title character, a member of royalty, but merely a man named King as his father was before him, we see a long scar across the left side of his face. King has already served seven years in prison for the retributive act of killing the man who gave him that scar, an act that though it was committed at a later time than the initial cut, King can't see as being different from an act of self-defense, a comeuppance for what he sees not only as an act of violence but as a trespass on his person.

The other people in King's life — his estranged mother, his wife, his best friend, and his neighbor — each in their own way face the same predicament of how to go on making a life in this world where bodies and souls are marked only by injustice. King can only fantasize that there is a halo over his head as plain to see as his burdensome scar.

Set in 1985, *King Hedley II* is part of Wilson's award-winning ten-play Pittsburgh cycle, which charts the changing conditions and circumstances of life for African-American families in Pittsburgh's Hill district during each decade of the 20th-century. This production marks the Ensemble Theatre's completion of having produced every play in the cycle at least once, an admirable accomplishment in its own right, but also one from which the audience reaps the real reward of the company's confident and well-honed sense of execution.

The production of the performance plays out like a film, with a transportive row-house back alley set design by James V. Thomas, and considerable use of background music to fill in segues and underscore revelations. While the script often devolves into long monologic stretches, the writing is consistently crisp as it balances tragedy, humor, hope, and despair. Broderick "Brod J" Jones shows great range as Mister, King's partner in crime, cutting from boisterous laughter to a menacing snarl within the span of a few words. The entire cast also functions as a tight community of individuals who know how to get under each other's skin.

Chekhov is right. The play ends with a burst from a firearm, but the heart of the play ends not with the gunshot, but with a glimpse that wounds might close on their own, blood might no longer need to be shed, and scars might once again become the sign of something having been healed. In real life, King seems to finally realize that you can choose to put the gun down.

–DAVID A. FEIL

whether it's cool to get up and move to a better spot, because maybe that sort of thing isn't kosher in real classical music halls, or if the irony of doing so (this piece once incited a riot) would strike any of the concert goers.

Finally, I asked my date, "Can you hear the piano at all?" She agreed that it was quiet, but luckily there were six open seats to my right, so I moved over and the sound was a little bit better. If you

The Bad Plus conjure the same spirits Stravinsky was trying to years before, and that transcends any sort of formal and thematic differences that exist between the original and the reinterpretation. The band strives to be rebels in the way they take music from every corner of history and re-imagine it in their own unique and coherent vision. That spirit is in harmony with the rebellious modernist motivations that compelled Stravinsky to write the piece in 1912.

freaked me out, but after a few minutes, I became more philosophical about the recommendation. It was a sign from the universe. Based on what they had observed about me, Amazon thought I would enjoy this "mostly true" memoir. And as usual with Madam Amazon, she was mostly right.

This book, organized around the hijinks of Lawson's life, made me laugh out loud at least four times, maybe five. I believe my previous record was two, which was set in my late childhood. As a Texan who complains out of both sides of her mouth, this memoir touches all the right spots. Lawson writes "...[I]n rural Texas pretty much everyone has a gun cabinet. Unless they're gay. Then they have gun armoires."

I read this book hungrily to the end. It has a sordid lightness that is, if not delicious, highly edible. Lawson's relentless pursuit of the reader's collusion is endearing. Her stark honesty about her struggles with anxiety, anorexia, arthritis and other ailments, not all beginning with the letter A, build solid intimacy with her reader.

As of this moment, Lawson is sitting pretty in her fourth week on the New York Times Bestseller List. However, what we hope that memoirists have on their side, that most bloggers don't, besides time, is an editor. Strong editors make writers look like a million bucks. Jenny Lawson did not have a strong editor. This only occurred to me over the course of reading her many asides addressed to and directives issued by the editor.

Lawson employs the editor as her fictional foil when her usual straight man, her long-suffering, eye-rolling husband, is not a part of the story at hand. But all of these notes to the editor only made me wonder, where the hell was the editor? This book had the great challenge to maintain what people rightfully love about Lawson's blog: the honesty, the silliness, the cursing, and the panic attacks. It must have been quite a feat to preserve the sharp irreverence aimed in every direction, including back at herself, that gives the reader the sense that she's right there with you... on the other side of the screen with all her fancily dressed taxidermy.

But, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened* had real flickers of literary intuition in this mostly true memoir (starting with the soap-washing raccoon) that could have been exploited to make this go beyond a paper representation of the Bloggess's blog, and move us into a more powerful version of the cross-genre.

In the end, Lawson confesses that all these crazy and terrible experiences (accidentally running face-first into

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COURTESY OF THE BAD PLUS

The Bad Plus in On Sacred Ground.

The Bad Plus On Sacred Ground

Da Camera
May 5, 2012
www.dacamera.com

The Bad Plus' interpretation of Stravinsky's, *The Rite of Spring*, presented by Da Camera of Houston, begins with a hazy, ambient prerecorded auditory collage accompanied by foggy visual projections. It's the typical postmodern art rock concert opening. I wait, I wait, till finally the lights come up on the trio with Ethan Iverson's first notes reverberating from the piano through the hall.

The Bad Plus is known for the way they take, tangle, and drop the metrical markings, deconstructing a piece until the rhythmic free play climaxes and gives way to triumphant returns to original themes - see their interpretations of 70's rock themes for further explanation.

When the band starts to get louder, I realized that I could hardly hear Iverson. The piano sounds paper thin. It's about as loud as David King's ride, clearly no match to be heard over the thunderous crack of King's snare. I start to obsess over the piano and get neurotically locked out of the moment, fretting over

want to hear music at the Wortham, be careful of the "dead spots" that are rumored to exist. My tickets in Section AA happened to be in one of them.

Lucky for me, the overpowering drummer was King, a tried and true badass on the set. King effortlessly switches between moments of sensitivity by rapping his knuckles on the skin of the tom, to primal eruptions of violent expression, and by pounding his snare like it could move mountains. Watching him is a blast. He's a huge dude and his enthusiasm and focus is completely embodied as he comes up out of his stool to milk every last possible drop of musicality from his kit.

Reid Anderson, the upright bass player, has an amazing way of crawling up the instrument. He played the melody just as clearly and fluidly as a woodwind section in 1913 might have performed.

The performance is the furthest thing from a traditional rendering of the piece. There has to be a number of artistic liberties taken when rearranging a piece for orchestra for a jazz trio, but The Bad Plus managed to stay true to their jazz-rock-power-trio aesthetic without betraying Stravinsky's initial vision.

After the performance, they played an original composition. It was The Bad Plus I know and love. I could listen to ten more pieces, but the evening was over. The Bad Plus are a sort of living three man salon, but without the salon part. They brought music and composers, including themselves, from all corners of history and connected it all into new spaces of familiarity and artistic license. Whether it's in the club or the concert hall, their performances are ongoing and inspiring exhibitions of creative potential. Their performance of *The Rite of Spring* is just another fervent stop.

–JOE WOZNY

Joe Wozny is a Houston based writer and musician.

***Let's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson**
The Bloggess
Putnam

A few days after receiving my review copy of the revered blogger, Jenny Lawson's new book, *Let's Pretend This Never Happened*, Amazon recommended it to me. Initially, it

REVIEWS CONTINUED

a deer carcass, laxative overdose, and dog attack) made her realize that what she believed was tragic about her life is exhilarating and helped her become who she is today. Wow. That's very profound...is what I would have said to her if I were her editor, right before I cut that paragraph.

In the mean time, Lawson has millions of hard-earned fans who will stick with her. I think I may be one of them. I can't tell.

—NICOLE ZAZA

Prospectors

Lawndale Art Center

May 11–June 16, 2012

www.lawndaleartcenter.org

The Lawndale Art Center's, *Prospectors* show features the three latest residents to complete the Artist Studio Program. While the artists each work according to their independent visions, a common thread emerges in a human's relationship with the natural world.

David Politzer is a self-aware, contemporary landscape photographer who explores the duality of landscape imagery, which is sublime, yet often clichéd. Politzer's work recognizes this trouble with the landscape by examining the conflict with man's desire to live within the sublime, but in a safe, homogenized way.

In his video installation, *Surfside* shows a television set looking out on a crashing tide, which is broadcasting the same setting. Seagulls enter the frame of the video, and again the frame of the television within the video, and finally exit. The television commands the viewer's attention more than the nature in which it resides.

Anne J. Regan's objects explore music in the context of memory, idolatry, and macabre Americana. Regan created many of the objects over a pilgrimage across the South and West, visiting sites of spiritual and musical importance. In a nod to both music and hoodoo traditions, *Lightnin' Wand* is a conductor's baton that Regan had buried in the soil above Lightnin' Hopkin's grave for seven days, presumably imbued with spiritual power.

Most interesting was *Billie's Fridge*, a mini-fridge with a glass door stocked with everything, including a 1946 grocery list made by Billie Holiday. On opening day, the work acted as an invitation to live like a celebrity. The tone slowly changes to a meditation on the temporal, as the produce withers with time, but other foods are seemingly immortal – preserved by additives or packaging. While music is a difficult

subject to encapsulate completely in the visual arts, one is left wondering if Regan intended to expose how disquieting obsessive fandom can become, or if her rituals were entirely in earnest.

Exploring the plight of the Gulf Coast average Joe, Seth Mittag's medium is stop-motion animation and sculpture with a subtle jab of realism. Electing to exhibit models and stills from his animation work, Mittag parses and fractures two narratives focused on how a man deals with natural disaster and a predatory housing industry.

We're Still Here... introduces the viewer into this world with a model of a large, dilapidated trailer wrapped around a tree, as if demolished by a hurricane or tornado. The story continues through a series of printed stills that function as a storyboard. Coming full circle, Mittag's work culminates in *Hurricane*



Seth Mittag's installation *We're Still Here...* in *Prospectors*.

Allen Newscast, an understated model television. The tiny television impressively uses a hidden rear projector to play a stop motion video using audio from an actual 1980 San Antonio newscast.

However disparate the works may seem, the three artists appear to converge on the dilemma of our relationship with the natural order. Whether to control, cooperate, or live at the peril of the forces that be.

—GEOFF SMITH

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

Round 36

Project Row Houses

March 31–June 24, 2012

www.projectrowhouses.org

Round 36 is the latest series of artist projects at Houston's Project Row

Houses. As the first of recent rounds to feature installations that are not bound by a particular curatorial remit, one might expect the grouping of projects to feel uneven and disjointed. While it is true that there is not necessarily a unifying thread that runs through all the exhibitions, one experiences them as a series of individual installations that are individually engaging and compelling.

Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle's installation, *Kentifrican Museum*, positioned as an ethnographic museum, is concerned with the exploration of Kentifrica, an imagined and real space that was created through the confluence of Kentuckian and African diasporic culture. Kentifrican musical objects are displayed as are "found" drawings and photographs of Kentifrican hairstyles (which look suspiciously like contemporary African American hairstyles) and vessels fused together

a homeless man who lived in Houston's Second Ward. Flanked by six smaller glossy color photographs that document the subject's own sculptures fashioned from found objects and ephemera. Tepper asserts that they are a form of assemblage that allows Stackman to create order in his environment.

Beth Secor's *Blueprint for Heaven* incorporates the site as a key element of her installation. The walls of the row house function as a support for the mixed media diagrams that label and identify the cross-section drawings of a plane and serve as an homage to her recently deceased father and her own conception of heaven.

Manuel Acevedo's *The House that Alhacen Built* also serves as an homage, in this case to Ibn Al-Hacen. Perhaps the most abstract of all the projects in *Round 36*, it is presented as a meditation on "visual perception in cinematic visual forms and the ephemeral nature of light." The entry into the house features a grid of 33 close up images of eyes.

Inside the house are two separate installations of light. One is created through the incandescent light channeled through perforations in the back wall of the house and reflected on a backdrop. The other features shifting light patterns that emanate from a projector and refract against mirrors placed against the wall.

In a decidedly different installation, Philip Pyle II's *Value* questions the relationships between African Americans, commerce, and materialism. The piece carries a slightly irreverent and humorous tone. The window and door frames are painted gold, and in a digital print, the figure of Christ sports a gold chain that bears a jewel encrusted pendant shaped in his image. Christ's finger directs the gaze of the viewer towards the pendant so that there is no chance of it being missed.

The installations *The Cultural Portal: Reclaiming Our Image* (by the collective Our Image Film and Arts) and John Pluecker's *Antena Books: Pop-up Bookstore and Literary Experimentation Lab* rely on viewer engagement and participation to activate the installations. The former features posters and images of film that ask viewers to critically assess the ways in which black subjects are depicted in film and other forms of media. The latter transforms the row house into a veritable bookstore, displaying literary works printed at small and alternative presses by mainly African American and Latino authors aimed at facilitating intercultural exchange and dialogue.

Supplemented by a series of "read

and write” workshops, participants are encouraged to both read the titles on display and try their own hand at producing experimental literature, underscored by the presence of typewriters and a computer terminal within the space.

—SALLY FRATER

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

Gerhard Richter Painting

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Sundays: June 3, 10 & 17 at 2:00pm;
Thursday June 21 at 7:00pm
www.mfah.org/film

Paint and the moving image have a complicated relationship. Early cinema influenced how Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque saw the world, helping to usher in cubism, as shown in the 2008 film, *Picasso and Braque Go to the Movies*. A film or video camera’s zooms and pans can change how we look at paintings, bringing details to life that we might otherwise miss.

But the camera can play a misleading, even potentially destructive role. Willem de Kooning, whose whiplash lines and sweeping gestures defined “action painting” in the popular imagination nearly as much as Jackson Pollock’s drips, is said to have painted in a frenzy for a rolling camera, only to scrape it all out when the filming stopped, because the reality of how he worked – painting a stroke, then staring at it for a few hours – seemed too dull to film. Pollock relapsed into alcoholism moments after Hans Namuth’s camera stopped rolling. Six years later, he and a passenger died in a drunk driving accident.

Perhaps Gerhard Richter has these cautionary precedents in mind as he complains to filmmaker, Corinna Belz, that painting under observation is “the worst thing there is.” Even worse than going to the hospital.

“Painting is a secretive business anyway,” he says, looking like he could use some alone time.

Making its Bayou City premiere in June at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s Brown Auditorium Theater; *Gerhard Richter Painting* balances action-painting thrills with the actual painter’s angst while helping viewers see his work in new ways. Belz knows just when to give us, if not hours between brush strokes, enough anxious minutes to telegraph the thought and feeling that go into each decision.

At 79, Richter puts body, mind, and soul into the large abstract paintings he’s creating for the camera. The



COURTESY KONO LORBER PICTURES

Gerhard Richter working on Abstract Painting (910-1) in *Gerhard Richter Painting*, a Kono Lorber release.

sheer physicality that goes into them is staggering and feeds into the film’s psychological drama.

Working with a large brush, Richter quickly covers a blank canvas in discrete areas of yellow, blue, and red. It looks like a garish, amateurish mess – like any art student’s de Kooning knockoff – when he says he’ll leave it awhile and begins work on a second canvas. But no sooner has he laid down an expanse of yellow paint, then he veers back to the first canvas and starts violating each color’s territory by dragging the same brush through each area, yielding new linear, ribbon-like passages of muted colors.

After brushing more paint onto both canvases, Richter picks up a large squeegee and starts scraping it across both compositions, complicating their spaces and creating new blurry forms. As he steps back, he’s not satisfied, saying he needs to find a way to make them better while keeping their fast, fancy-free feeling. As they are now, he says, they won’t hold up. They’ll look good for two hours, maybe a day if he’s lucky.

As the paintings progress with occasional breaks in the action as Richter meets with gallery owners, and haggles with a museum curator over how to light an upcoming exhibition, the squeegees get bigger. They get large enough to cover the width of the canvas as he drags them down across the entire length. They shift back and forth between becoming more or less resolved. As he surveys their mottled surfaces that contain multiple colors, but are dominated by yellow, Richter loads up a squeegee with blue paint, only to declare the idea is an overblown one that could destroy the paintings.

Eventually, we see the completed paintings at a gallery opening that seems to go well. Belz gives viewers the climax they’ve been waiting for: a montage of Richter tackling a canvas from start to finish with the deliberations edited out.

Richter attacks a huge green painting

with one sweeping, decisive gesture after another. First, squeegeeing paint across the surface, then selectively scraping it off to reveal the reds, yellows, blues, and whites underneath. After he makes a few adjustments, he slowly drags huge squeegees fully loaded with white paint across the canvas vertically, then horizontally. It’s a process that grows slower and increasingly laborious as the layers accumulate.

Finally, as the camera pans the studio walls, filled with what may or may not be finished canvases, which are now an icy pale greenish-gray – he laughs, sounding happier than he has at any moment in the film, and says, “Man, this is fun.”

It’s fun for us too, and for us Houston painters, it should be required viewing.

—DEVON BRITT-DARBY

Heavy Hitters

Peveto
May 17–July 7, 2012
www.peveto.org

Peveto may be the new kid on the Colquitt Gallery Row, but there’s no kidding that *Heavy Hitters* packs a wallop. Featuring more than 60 artists including Bill Fick, Jenny Schmid, Kurt Kemp, and Tugboat Press (Paul Roden and Valerie Lueth), the exhibition is overwhelming in the breadth and quantity of prints represented -- from stone lithographs and intaglios to complex screens and relief prints. Hung salon style, the show strikes a rhythm between quiet, highly nuanced works with graphic in-your-face styles, forcing the viewer to stagger and stare.

Guest curator Ryan O’Malley is responsible for bringing together this view into contemporary printmaking. To say O’Malley has his finger on the pulse of American printmaking would be an understatement. He teaches print at Texas A&M Corpus Christi and is part of the nomadic print shop, Drive By Press. He orchestrated last April’s Oso Bay Print Biennial, having achieved national acclaim.

O’Malley’s curatorial approach is decidedly open, electing to include nontraditional or challenging processes alongside works with academic appeal. Major standouts include Jenny Hager-Vickery and Emily Arthur’s imposing installation, which features a chariot with a life-sized horse covered in prints, and *Sideshow*, a 20-foot-long woodcut banner from the Brooklyn-based Cannonball Press (Mike Houston and Martin Mazzora). The banner covers nearly the entire gallery wall and features a sultry carnival theme with sword swallows, thrill seekers, and other gritty novelties caricatured on a grand scale.

The sprawling hodgepodge of content, backgrounds, media, and creators opens a robust conversation on the nature of image making through print processes. *Heavy Hitters* is a promising start to the festival of ephemera we know as PrintHouston.

—GEOFF SMITH

This World Is Not My Home:

Danny Lyon Photographs
 Menil Collection
March 30–July 29, 2012
www.menil.org

A woman confronts and holds off a rabble of segregationists in Jim Crow-era Atlanta. A biker-gang member’s hair whips in the wind as he glances over his shoulder while racing across the Ohio River. A sweat-soaked prisoner writhes in the back of a pickup truck, having collapsed after hours of hard labor under the Texas sun.

Time and again, viewers are thrust into the center of the action in *This World Is Not My Home: Danny Lyon Photographs*, a mini-survey drawn from the artist’s studio and the Menil Collection’s 246 works by Lyon, an exemplar of the “new realism” movement in photography.

More celebratory than exploratory – the show marks Lyon’s 70th birthday and the 50th anniversary of the first civil rights-era photos that launched his career – the exhibit bears both the appeal and the limitations of what Menil curator Toby Kamps describes as its “lightning tour” approach.

Drawing most of its 54 works from the 1960s, the show spotlights Lyon’s civil-rights photos, which he took as the first staff photographer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; iconic images from his book *The Bikeriders*, which he captured while a member of the Outlaws motorcycle gang; and his sometimes shocking pictures of life inside the Texas prison system. (Believing it had a more humane system of punishment than the rest of

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the country, the Texas Department of Corrections gave Lyon an astonishing degree of access, leading to disturbing images like *Heat Exhaustion*, *Ramsey Unit*.)

It's wonderful to see Lyon maintain empathy and intimacy with people on the margins, be they transvestites in late 1960s Galveston; drug-hustling teens in 1980s Bushwick, Brooklyn; or, in recent years, the coal miners of Shanxi Province, which he has called "the Appalachia of China." Fittingly, the show's most recent pictures were taken at Occupy protests. Ever a 99-percenter, the closest Lyon comes to celebrity portraiture are montages of family and friends, who include such fellow artists as Robert Frank and the counterculture icon Wavy Gravy; and a photo of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who was in the jail cell next to Lyon's a week after the 20-year-old photographer arrived in Albany, Ga. to join SNCC.

But Lyon's photo-essay approach demands more depth than a lightning tour can provide. One yearns for more than a fleeting glimpse of those transvestites, teens and coal miners, or of the hero of the heartbreaking montage *What Hopes Have Perished with You My Son (In Memory of Johnnie Sanchez)*. Completed in 1983, the montage features black-and-white childhood and adolescent photos of Sanchez, who died in a car crash in his early 20s, surrounded by color photos of his and other snow-covered gravesites in the small town of Bernalillo, N.M., where Lyon has outlived perhaps too many of his neighbors.

In lieu of a full-blown – and well-deserved – retrospective, I would have preferred the show had sampled fewer series in greater depth and included some of Lyon's terrific writing, perhaps in an expanded gallery guide like the one that accompanied last year's *Upside Down: Arctic Realities*.

Perhaps the Menil, which often presents focused shows highlighting little-known aspects of an artist's career, will further explore some of Lyon's less familiar territory in future exhibits. Though its introduction to Lyon's career is a bit too cursory, *This World Is Not My Home* whets viewers' appetites for such a follow-up.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

David Aylsworth: *The Reverses Wiped Away*

Inman Gallery
May 25–July 7, 2012
www.inmangallery.com

Along with their own considerable merits and pleasures, the paintings of David Aylsworth's current exhibition



Danny Lyon, *What Hopes Have Perished with You My Son (In Memory of Johnnie Sanchez)*, 1973-1983, Type C and Gelatin Silver Print Montage, 18 x 16 inches board size.

at Inman Gallery provide a case study in how some artists can find seemingly infinite room to maneuver within a narrow register.

Each of the show's small-to-medium-size paintings answers to the gallery's description, "In nearly every work, Aylsworth applies white paint over layers of color paint to delimit compositions of angular shapes and bulbous forms.



David Aylsworth, *Spider Spinning Daydreams*, 2012, Oil on Canvas.

The surface of each painting evidences this process of additive erasure. White expanses cover, but also reveal the edges of previously painted forms."

Still, if you've seen one, you most emphatically haven't seen them all. In Aylsworth's hands, white is the color of surprise, yielding a John Singer Sargent-worthy range of off-whites that are notable, not only for their subtle chromatic variety, but for their spatial dexterity and functional versatility. Sometimes, white virtually annihilates,

wiping out huge swathes of a painting's history; elsewhere it's integral to a picture's architecture; in other cases, it achieves the decadent consistency of wedding-cake icing.

Most ravishing and mysterious of all are a handful of all-off-white paintings in which no colorful edges remain. Barely there, yet irresistibly seductive, they emanate both a jewel-like quality befitting their small size and an outsized presence that belies it. They embody an instant when painting's two contradictory imperatives – to paint and to forget everything you know – slip into a perfect, momentary stalemate.

–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

Briefly Noted...

Houston's in "so much art, so little time" mode as galleries wrap up their spring seasons with a flurry of strong shows. Make sure you include these stops on your June art-hopping itinerary.

Table Top. If this group show of diminutive sculptures had cheeks, you'd want to pinch them. Even the title is adorable. But the works here outperform their perceived cuteness. Nicholas Kersulis applies countless layers of black gesso to found stones, letting the shape of each rock's surface guide his brushstrokes. Adding to the works' obsessive quality, they're placed exactly where they were on the table when Kersulis made them and are oriented the same direction. He insists they be sold as a set.

Sharon Engelstein's organic, bulbous forms were created using an elaborate 3-D printing process. Like rings on a tree, they bear the evidence of their history. Darryl Lauster, Matt Messinger, and Kaneem Smith round out a solid mix of work, adding motorized motion, found-object assemblage, and a deep engagement with loaded materials, respectively to the range of approaches sampled. Through June 10 at Devin Borden Gallery.
www.devinborden.com

William Betts: Recognition. The Houston painter fills McClain Gallery's two back bays with a selection of paintings that use video surveillance screenshots as source material. A digital-age Seurat, Betts echoes the stills' pixelated quality using software that plots thousands of dots to each canvas, which from a distance looks black-and-white, but on closer examination turns out to be made up of pastel colors. Crowd scenes engage in testy dialogue with shots that zoom in on individuals, adding another layer of unease. Through June 23 at McClain Gallery.
www.mcclaingallery.com

Dirk Rathke: Endearing the Line. In his third solo show at Gallery Sonja Roesch, Rathke, a Berlin-based artist, wrings maximal eloquence from a minimal vocabulary. Whether creating shaped, monochromatic canvases or a mind-binding orange-tape room drawing of two folded, overlapping squares that extends from floor to wall to ceiling and back again, Rathke straddles dimensions and seeks the perfect fusion of line, color, and shape – and finds it. Through June 30 at Gallery Sonja Roesch.
www.gallerysonjaroesch.com

Ellen Phelan: Landscapes and a Still Life. Working from Kodachrome slide projections, Phelan, a New York painter, envelops landscapes in a hazy fog that may appear, at first glance, to express nostalgia. In fact, they're the result of risks the artist takes in order to keep surprising herself. "You know, it's sort of daring because you work-work-work to get the image and then you say, 'All right, goodbye image. Let's see what happens next,'" Phelan told *The Brooklyn Rail* in 2009. That may explain the sometimes radioactive turn her palette takes. Phelan's past as an abstractionist serves these paintings well: *Dark Woods* is what would happen if you crossed one of Whistler's best Nocturnes with one of the "multiforms" of the mid-to-late 1940s that preceded Rothko's breakthrough into his classic floating-rectangles format. Through June 30 at Texas Gallery.
www.texgal.com

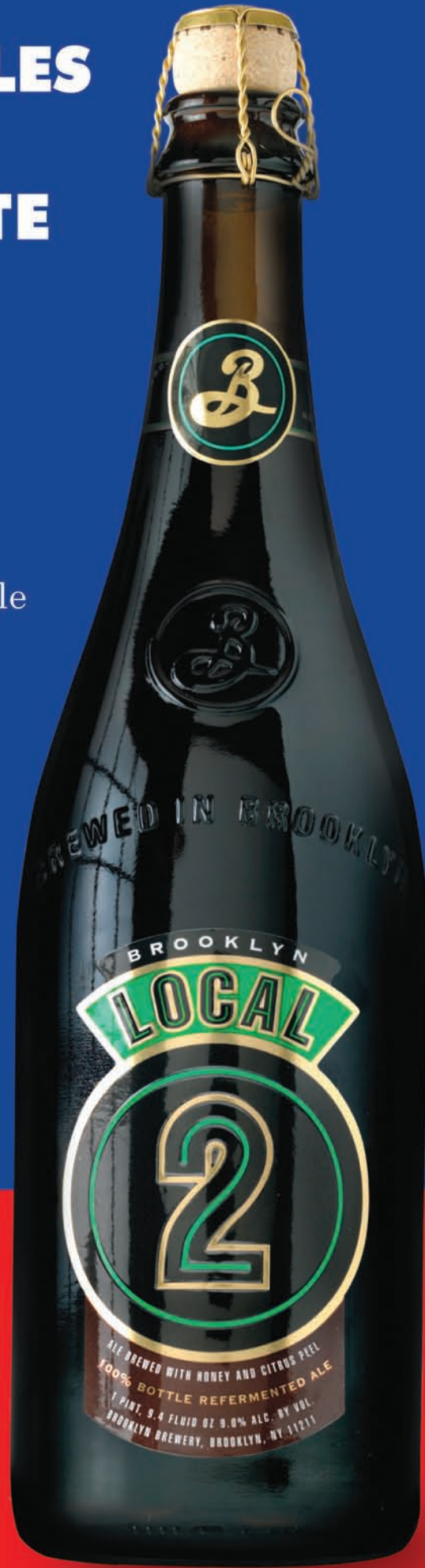
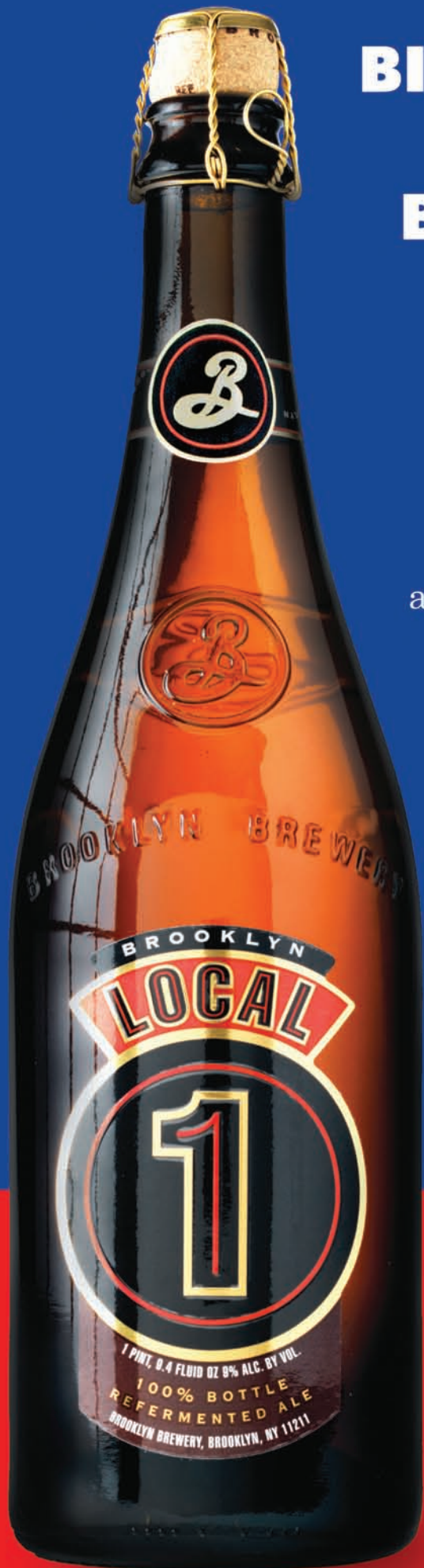
–DEVON BRITT-DARBY

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Weaving Home:

Textile Traditions From Houston's Karenni Community

Alliance Gallery
May 16 - July 6, 2012

Special Exhibition Programs
@ Alliance Gallery

Weaving & Micro-Enterprise
Panel Discussion
Thursday, May 31, 5:30 - 7 PM

Telling the Refugee Story
*With representatives from
Houston-based refugee
communities*
Thursday, June 21, 5:30 - 7 PM

Weaving Demonstration
Saturday, June 30, 2 - 4 PM

World Refugee Day Reception
Thursday, July 5, 5:30 - 7 PM



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