



ACU

ARTS + CULTURE HOUSTON

MARCH 2012



Olga Tobreluts Oleg Dou Jay Rusovich

March 16 - April 28, 2012

Opening Reception
Saturday, March 24, 6 - 9 pm

FotoFest Exhibitions also featuring
artist Jean-Daniel Lориuex,
Contemporary Chinese artists, and
artist Suzanne Paul

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EDITOR'S REMARKS



March is coming in like a lion alright, and from Russia, with the opening of FotoFest 2012, the Fourteenth International Biennial of Photography. For the next two months, FotoFest takes over our city, with many exhibitions activities and events.

Sebastien Boncy visited with curators Irina Chmyreva and Evgeny Berezner to fill us in on some history of photography in Russia.

Also on the FotoFest front, Katia Zavistovski interviewed Yasufumi Nakamori, curator of "Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography and Collage," opening mid-month at the MFAH.

It's a huge month for choral music with Dominick DiOrio's premiere at Houston Chamber Choir and "Don't Ask Don't Tell" presented by Bayou City Performing Arts featuring the Gay Men's Chorus.

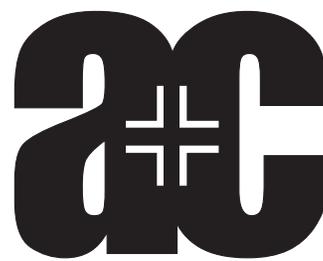
Competitions have become career builders for classical musicians. Chris Johnson covers the competition season with the upcoming 28th Annual Young Texas Artist Music Competition in Conroe, Texas, and more.

This month we take a look at what's happening outside of Houston's large art houses. Nancy Zastudil profiled alt goddess Emily Sloan, who has a flurry of activity going on. Also on the edges is Misha Penton, founder of Divergence Vocal Theater, on making art without organizations. Neil Ellis Orts updates us on Brazos Bookstore's ongoing championing of Houston writers.

If you mention Houston and dance in the same sentence on the international dance front, the next question is most often, "Do you know Nancy Henderik?" The Dance Salad Festival director is naturally our cultural warrior this month.

There's much to see, hear and be moved by. As it should be.

Nancy Wozny
editor
nancy@artsandculturetx.com



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ON THE COVER

ANNA SKLADMANN, "SONIA SITTING ON THE BEAR RUG," 2009, FROM THE SERIES
"LITTLE ADULTS," WHICH IS FEATURED DURING FOTOFEST'S 2012 BIENNIAL,
MARCH 16 - APRIL 29, PAGE 8.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

MARCH 2012

8

FotoFest Biennial

10

Cut & Paste

13

Artist Without Organizations

17

The Sweets Sounds of March

19

Emily Sloan Rocks



COURTESY DANCE SALAD



COURTESY MCCLAIN GALLERY



COURTESY DEREK ELLER GALLERY, NY

7

Artifacts:

News & Briefs

14

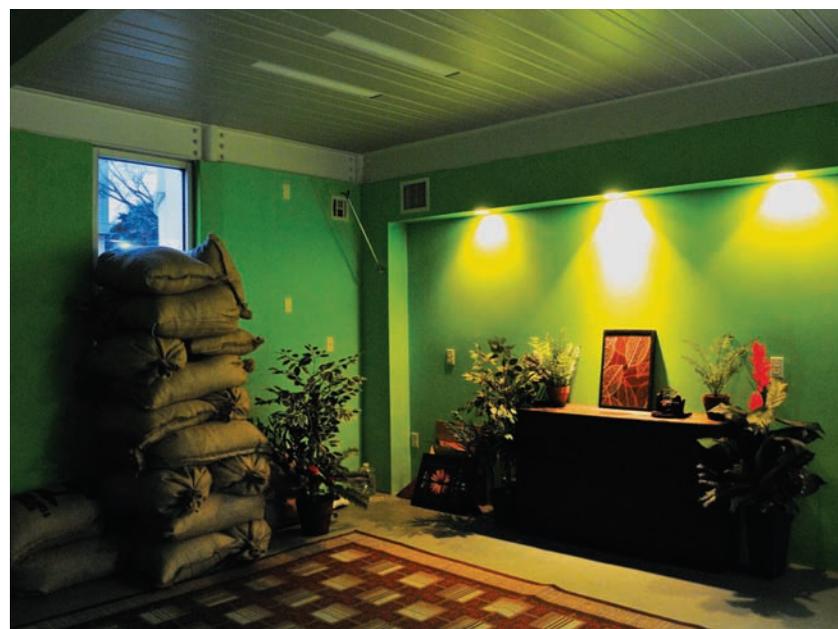
Brazos Bookstore

20

Music & Medals

25

Reviews



COURTESY HMAAC

(COUNTER CLOCKWISE) TOP: Alicia Amatriain and Jason Reilly of Stuttgart Ballet, Germany, performing Itzik Galili's "Mona Lisa," page 22; ABOVE: Brenden Cass, "Dripping Springs," 2011, Acrylic on Canvas, 24 x 36 inches, on exhibit at McClain Gallery through March 10th, page 26; BOTTOM LEFT: Tom Thayer, American, b. 1970, "Paper Puppets from Animations" (DETAIL), 2005-2009, Mixed Media Collage, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of the Francis L. Lederer Foundation, courtesy of Sharon Lederer© Tom Thayer, page 10; BOTTOM RIGHT: Otabenga Jones' Fort HMAAC installation for the Houston Museum of African American Culture, page 27.

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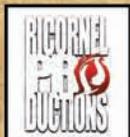


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ARTIFACTS

SPACETAKER ARTIST RESOURCE

Center is taking its physical programming online for artists to access a host of arts business resources at their own convenience. The online Artist Resource Center, launching this month, will serve as a clearing house for both local and national professional development resources, including online articles on best practices, downloadable documents, podcasts and video tutorials, and the presentation materials that Spacemaker has developed along with local experts through its ARC Workshop curriculum. Spacemaker continues its workshop series with “Speak My Language?: Press Release vs. Promotional writing styles,” with Joel Luks and Mandy Graessle on March 28.

www.spacemaker.org

THE HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

2012–13 season includes “La Boheme,” “The Italian Girl in Algiers,” “Show Boat,” “Don Giovanni,” “Tristan and Isolde,” “Il Trovatore” and “Cruzar La Cara de La Luna/To Cross the Face of the Moon.” HGO has issued an invitation to Houston-area composers and writers to submit creative proposals for “Houston Artists Respond,” a set of musical storytelling projects to be commissioned by HGOco that are inspired by, based on, and/or which incorporate stories, texts, and visual art created by HGOco’s “Song of Houston: Home and Place” participants. Proposals will be accepted through April 15, 2012.

www.houstongrandopera.org

JANA JACKSON HAS JOINED THE

University of Houston as director of marketing and communications for UH Arts, a new initiative to unite the diverse arts departments within UH and advance the creative process through

collaborations across the campus and throughout the city of Houston. Jana comes to Houston from San Francisco, where she was the Director of Marketing at the Legendary Yoshi’s Jazz and Performing Arts clubs in Oakland and San Francisco.

www.uh.edu/uh-arts

THE NEW MOVEMENT THEATER

presents Houston Harold Weekend for a weekend of improvisation from improvisation teachers and players from all over the country to focus exclusively on the Harold format of long form improvisation, on March 10 and 11 at Avante Garden.

www.tnmcomedy.com

HIGHLIGHTS OF HOUSTON BALLET’S

2012–13 season include world premieres by Aszure Barton and Edwaard Liang, and Stanton Welch stages a new production of “The Rite of Spring” to mark the centennial of this landmark work. Company premieres include George Balanchine’s “Ballet Imperial,” Mark Morris’ “Pacific” and Twyla Tharp’s “The Brahms-Haydn Variations.” Trey McIntyre’s “Peter Pan” returns to the repertoire. The Cullen Series returns with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal as well.

www.houstonballet.org

THEATRE UNDER THE STARS

2012–2013 season includes “Jekyll & Hyde,” “Peter Pan,” “Camelot,” “Man of La Mancha,” “Spamalot” and “Flashdance — The Musical.”

www.tuts.com

GEXA ENERGY BROADWAY AT

the Hobby Center’s 2012–13 season includes “Les Miserables,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Catch Me if You Can,” “Jersey



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

Nao Kusuzaki and Nozomi Iijima in Houston Ballet’s production of Stanton Welch’s “Madame Butterfly.”

Boys,” “Sister Act” and “Wicked.”
houston.broadway.com

AURORA PICTURE SHOW HAS

been selected to participate in the ExxonMobil Community Summer Jobs Program that Volunteer Houston manages. Aurora will be accepting applications and resumes soon for the Summer Filmmaking Program. Apprentices will be responsible for managing summer education programs for youth, specifically Boot Camps where youth learn about, create and discuss film and video. Aurora executive director Delicia Harvey and Curator Mary Magsamen will be presenting on a SXSW panel, Alternative Film Events: Site Specific and Beyond, on March 10.

www.aurorapictureshow.org

iMEE DANCE COMPANY ANNOUNCES

the appointment of Maurice Causey as the company’s first resident choreographer, effective immediately. Causey, an American-born European choreographer, began his relationship

with iMEE Directors in March 2011. The collaboration culminated in the creation of a new work set on the company in August 2011, performed in Houston, Texas.

www.infinitemoves.com

SOCIETY OF PERFORMING ARTS

announced their 2012–13 season. Highlights include Ravi Shankar, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano, Anthony Bourdain and Eric Ripert, Itzhak Perlman, violin, Philip Glass’ “Dracula: The Music and Film,” Béjart Ballet Lausanne, Stephen Petronio Company, and the Houston debuts of Companhia de Danca Deborah Colker, Benjamin Grosvenor, piano, Grupo Corpo, Cameron Carpenter, organ and Lila Downs.

www.spahouston.org



PHOTO: BILL COOPER

Welsh National Opera production of “Don Carlos.”

Strait To Houston

FotoFest Biennial Presents Sixty Years of Russian Photography

IRINA CHMYREVA AND EVGENY Berezner do not rush to answers. After each question, there is a moment when they allow themselves a glance, and perhaps a few words in Russian. They then launch into long, measured responses that consistently and generously exceed the scope of my questions. They are in Houston this year to ensure that the history of Russian photography becomes part of global memory and dialogue.

Joined by compatriot Natalia Tarasova and FotoFest founders Wendy Watriss and Fred Baldwin, they form the curatorial team responsible for this biennial's three centerpiece exhibitions, as part of "Contemporary Russian Photography," which includes, "After Stalin, 'The Thaw,' The Re-emergence of the Personal Voice -1950s-1970s;" "Perestroika, Liberalization and Experimentation — 1980s-2010" and "The Young Generation — 2009-2012."

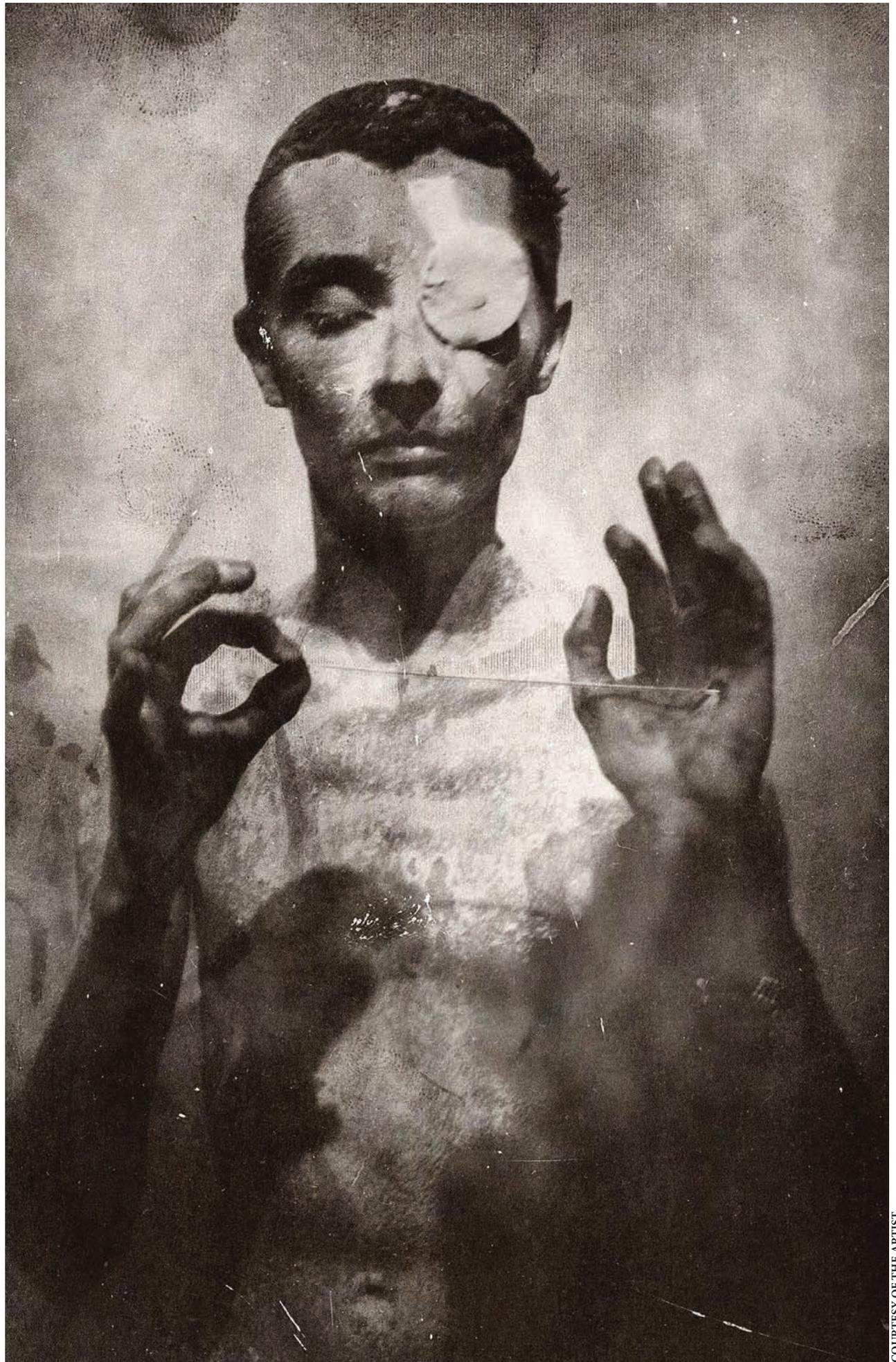
The three shows cover 60 years of Russian photography, and will feature the work of a 142 artists. We, in Houston, are about to witness something very rare.

Chmyreva and Berezner are part of a relatively new breed: experts on the local history of the medium. Chmyreva is the Senior Researcher at the Russian Academy of Fine Arts, and Berezner is the head of the "In Support of Photography in Russia" project at the Iris Foundation. In Russia, photography is just starting to be truly included into the official history of the Fine Arts institution. For decades, it was the province of private clubs, doggedly determined shutterbugs, and lone explorers. Photography had no official history, no official support structure.

Chmyreva provides an example from the drought: the Pushkin Museum in Moscow did not organize a single photography show from the mid-'30s to the mid-'90s, when they showed August Sander's work.

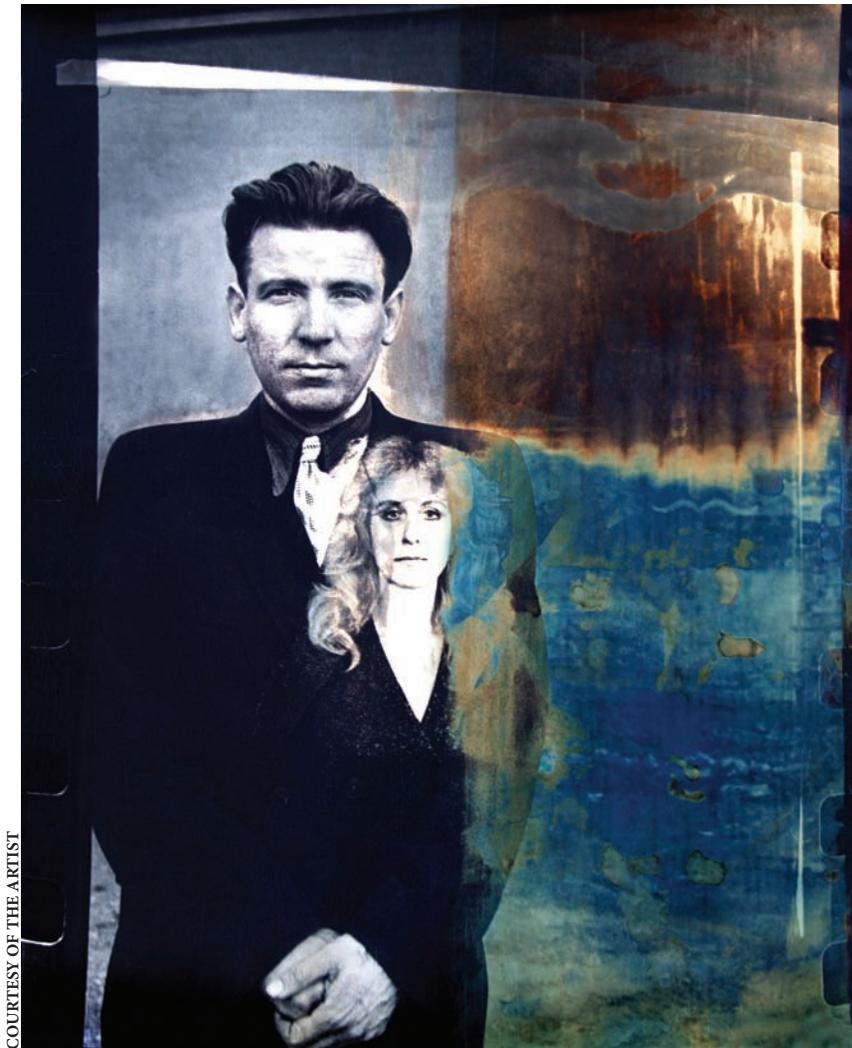
Another example: for two years, a theater photographer, based in Siberia, received visitors from hundreds of miles away, aficionados that wanted nothing more than to consult a French photography magazine in his possession. Because there was no official record or archive, there was no follow-through from generation to generation. Every couple of decades, a group of artists would emerge with a curiosity for the medium and a near complete ignorance of the previous generation's efforts.

By the '50s, the medium was regarded



Kir Esadov, *Untitled*, 2010. From the series "Private Diary of the Nerd."

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

with great suspicion by the Apparatchiks, and its dissemination suppressed. When Perestroika and Glasnost came about, the people were hungry for reportage, and so the art motive for photography took a backseat to this new flowering of information. The last 60 years have been all hurdles and no course.

To be clear, this expansive group of shows, this impressive number of artists, did not come from a void. Russia does have a strong tradition of pictorialist works produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Photography was treated seriously as a craft, and for a long time one could study this craft at the School of Photojournalism.

By the '80s, The Institute of Culture had an amateur studio department of movement, dancing, and photography. Don't be distracted by the "amateur" designation. Alexey Titarenko, whose work is well represented in major photographic institutions here and in Europe, is a graduate.

A strong relationship was formed with Czech photographers, and they occasionally showcased Russian work in their publications. The rare blockbuster show would be featured there. Remember, Russians got to see the August Sander archives years before his rediscovery in Germany, and Edward Steichen's "The Family of Man" was shown in Russia four years after its New York run. Each show provided validation for the directions that Russian artists had initiated or

new approaches that they took up with voracious enthusiasm. Some of the big names visited: Robert Capa in the forties, Henri Cartier-Bresson in the '50s and '70s, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams also in the '70s. Unfortunately, traffic in the other direction was more difficult for the reasons stated above.

We have been getting a piecemeal account of the last century's output of Russian art photography. Some of it has been beautiful, some of it disturbing, but most of it has been difficult to unpack. Boris Mikhailov's awe inspiring works sometimes feel uncomfortably ambiguous in their provocations, and we are not talking about the kind of ambiguity that strengthens work, that is built-in. There is a definite lack of context that hampers what work we've seen so far.

Chmyreva and Berezner promise that this show will provide that context; it's one of their principal goals for this biennial. The curatorial team wants to show us the through-lines of the Russian imagination and the general shape of their fears and hopes, the back and forth with Lithuania and Belarus. They hope that this work steps out of the realm of compelling curiosity and engages in full and dynamic dialogue with the other photographic practices and histories found on the rest of the globe.

To help optimize this great introduction, they've turned to Watriss and Baldwin, who have been tireless in their efforts to expand the dialogue of photography; in

the past three decades, FotoFest has featured artists and movements from every corner of the globe. They've introduced us to past masters and fresh new voices. To this day, they spend a significant portion of the year on foreign soil, forging new bonds and searching for new perspectives.

If Chmyreva, Berezner and Tarasova provide the deep understanding of source and expression of Russian concerns, it's Baldwin and Watriss who best understand how to intelligently approach global expectations for these exhibitions. This group has been collaborating since the nineties. They've brought exhibitions from Russia, including the work of the pictorialists, and they've taken FotoFest shows to Russia, including their harrowing 9-11 installation.

A few months ago, Baldwin and Watriss were part of an incredible initiative that, with the help of the Iris Foundation, brought 42 reviewers from 18 countries for an international portfolio review. They were welcomed by artists from the last three generations of Russian, Belarusian and Lithuanian photography. Chmyreva and Berezner are confident in this curatorial group and its methods; they expect nothing less than, in their words, "a phenomenon."

But what good are fireworks that fade into the night sky? Chmyreva and Berezner are looking at the biennial as a

of photography.

"Each person's imagination presents several dimensions relative to his relationships: the individual, the person as family member, as part of a village or city, as part of a state or government, as part of the global community," says Berezner. "All of these levels, can be captured and communicated by photography."

For long decades, Russia has existed as a symbol to be used in other states' narratives; Berezner sees the biennial as a chance to tell the story of Russia from the inside, to be known and understood finally.

We tell each other stories, the same stories over and over again. Because we know that memories fail. And bodies rot. We tell each other stories so that they stop being your story, or, my story or, her story, or even their story. We tell them because we need them to be our stories, those things we share that insure that we will be remembered and understood.

FotoFest welcomes Russia to the global campfire. If only to atone for decades of Stallone & Co. shooting celluloid bullets into a nightmare version of the Soviet spirit. Join the huddle.

— SEBASTIEN BONCY

Sebastien Boncy is an artist and educator living in Houston.



COURTESY OF GALLERY.PHOTOGRAPHER.RU, MOSCOW

TOP: Galina Moskaleva, *Untitled*, 1993, From the Series "Reminisces of Childhood." BOTTOM: Nikolay Bakharev, *Untitled*, 1991-1993. From the series "Sofa."

huge step, but they are keeping their eyes on the prize. There's still a need for infrastructure for Russian photography. The curators hope that the interests sparked here will lead to opportunities abroad for Russian artists, and for institutions and individuals to invest into the past and future of this particular strain

March 16-April 29, 2012
FotoFest 2012 Biennial
www.fotofest.org

Cut and Paste

Utopia and Dystopia at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



PHOTO: COURTESY MARC FOX GALLERY

Carter Mull, American, born 1977. "Apple, New York Times, February 8, 2011," 2011, Collage. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, promised gift of John A. MacMahon in honor of Candace Waddell MacMahon. © Carter Mull.

IN A 1929 PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSSIAN avant-garde artist El Lissitzky, an extreme close-up of an eye stares out at the viewer, one dark, bristling eyebrow hovering over the oculus. The subject's pupil has been cut out, and a three-quarter-view portrait of a man has been pasted in its place. The man's piercing gaze is focused on something outside of the photographic frame, perhaps suggesting an expanded field of vision.

As represented in this photograph, titled "Dziga Vertov — Kino Auge," the advent of photography in the mid-19th century exposed possibilities for new ways of seeing the world. While Lissitzky's "Kino Auge" (translated to "camera eye") alludes to developments in early 20th-century Soviet film, specifically filmmaker Dziga Vertov's experiments with montage, since the beginnings of photography nearly a century earlier,

artists have experimented with this new technology of vision, utilizing the medium to examine, confront, and interrogate the world around them.

Lissitzky's photograph is one of approximately one hundred works that comprise the exhibition "Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography and Collage," scheduled to open at the Museum of Fine Arts, Hous-

ton on March 11, 2012 in conjunction with the FotoFest Biennial. Organized by MFAH associate curator of photography, Yasufumi Nakamori, "Utopia/Dystopia" explores the many ways in which artists over the past 150 years have used photography to both confront the difficulties of their daily lives and to present their dreams of a better future. "Since the mid-19th century, early in the history of photography, numerous artists

have dealt with the conceptual matrix of utopia and dystopia as an inspiration or a subject for their art, utilizing photography's flexibility and elasticity to artistically and technically mold and express their visions of imagined worlds," says Nakamori.

The works in "Utopia/Dystopia" demonstrate a range of both analog and digital photographic processes, including photomontage, photocollage, photogram, and photographic manipulation using Photoshop, as well as drawings and sculptures that incorporate photographic elements in a multitude of ways.

"In breaking and reassembling found images to create a new vision, artists have found collage and montage ideal for expressing utopian dreams and dystopian anxieties," Nakamori states. "The early 20th-century avant-garde movements of Cubism, Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism all embraced these methods, and the approach remains compelling today."

The wide range of work exhibited in "Utopia/Dystopia" spans from the 1860s to the present day, made by such manifold artists as László Moholy-Nagy, Hannah Höch, Okanoue Toshiko, Vivan Sudaram and Matthew Buckingham, among others. In addition to the historical breadth of the exhibition, the works on view are also spatially expansive,

made by artists from Asia, the Americas, Africa and Europe. "One of my goals in organizing this exhibition was to bring together these artists' works in a global, transnational context," says Nakamori. "Utopia/Dystopia' presents viewers with a complex layering of ideas and images; an intellectual and visual constellation of the concepts of utopia and dystopia." Organized around three principle themes — Envisioning the City, Constructing the Figure and Searching for Utopia — collectively, the works in the exhibition respond to various social, political, and cultural crises.

The twinned concepts of utopia and dystopia have often been invoked in the context of war and revolution. Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield's photomontages express biting social and political commentary of Weimar-era Germany, which witnessed Hitler's rise to power. The subject of South African Sam Nhlengethwa's collages is another political transition — the end of apartheid. Lebanese artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige address the ongoing civil war in Beirut in their series "History of a Pyromaniac Photographer" (1997-2006); and Martha Rosler's work deals with the civil unrest on American soil during the Vietnam War and the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s.

Several artists in the exhibition focus on
Continued on Page 24



COURTESY THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS HOUSTON

Hannah Höch, German, 1889-1978, "Broken", 1925. Halftone Collage. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, museum purchase with funds provided by the Brown Foundation Accessions Endowment Fund. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Detail of "We Are Modern (Blue)" Acrylic & Silk Screen on Canvas 60" x 30" (2012)

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OF EVENTS FOR MARCH.

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Wild Children of the Arts

Artists Without Organizations

I have a special place in my heart for independent artists, and I'm proud to count myself as one of them. Individual artists enjoy an expansive creative freedom. We're the wild flowers of the arts garden, and we do things a bit differently, including exploring new business models for producing work.

Let's look back at funding for individual artists. In the early 1990s, because of controversial subject matter, the performing artists known as the NEA Four (Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck and Holly Hughes) lost their NEA grants. In litigation that spanned several years and advanced to the US Supreme Court, the artists recovered their funding, but the NEA individual performing artist grants collapsed in a fervor of controversy (the NEA's individual literary fellowships endure).

The Guggenheim Fellowships, Creative Capital and the Multi-Arts Project Fund are among several remaining national-level funding sources for individual performing artists, but there are scant few local and regional grants open to individual performing artists, particularly unclassifiable collaborative teams, and interpretive artists such as classical musicians and theater artists.

Many granting bodies prohibit funding to individuals, encouraging (often expecting) artists to form nonprofit organizations to further their creative endeavors. Birthing a nonprofit organization is admirable, hugely challenging, and may ultimately benefit the founding artists, however, a nascent organization's maintenance is an art itself, outside its mission.

The demands of building and tending to a board of directors and fostering the committee decision making process are substantial. Some organizations are blessed with engaged and experienced board members, others struggle with apathetic or over-involved members pressuring artistic decisions. For many artists who lead nonprofits, organizational obligations dominate their time and overshadow their creative work.

There are nimbler models for art-making and new options for funding creative work. Questioning the arts business status quo is essential, especially now when arts funding is precarious. As arts business practices continue to shift in favor of what works for artists, partnerships are emerging, like the union between Fractured Atlas, an arts service organization, and Indie Go-Go, an online fundraising tool. Their combined services offer artists the benefits of operating under the umbrella of a nonprofit, effectively reinventing the patron system for the 21st century. A re-birth of the passionate individual donor, one who directly funds artists, is proving to be a lifeline to the arts.

Commitment to an independent aesthetic, coupled with a rare freedom to reinvent oneself in an ever-morphing artistic process, is the hallmark of an artist operating outside the confines of an organization.

I started producing my own work by deconstructing obscure opera works and re-imagining art song theater. Now, I'm creating original, collaborative music-theater pieces, and producing recording and video projects. I may have been



PHOTO: KERRY BEYER

Misha Penton, soprano, opera renegade, and artistic director of Divergence Vocal Theater.

able to transform as quickly under a nonprofit, but as an independent artist, I simply remain true to my creative vision, and that's the artist's task. Kindred spirit, composer George Heathco, a Da Camera Houston Young Artist Program alum, also fuses his creative impulse with a unique freedom. His music is a bold synthesis of contemporary concert music, rock, jazz, and pop genres, and he asserts his indie business practices as unabashedly.

"As a young composer, I'm at a stage where I'm discovering just how okay it is to write music however I want, for whomever I want," says Heathco. "The biggest trick is learning to be crafty towards balancing artistic integrity with a shrewd business sense."

Many Houston performing artists choose to create work individually, or in small ensembles, without nonprofit designation. Their work tends to be project-driven, with all funds raised directly advancing the artistic work. Counted among these artists are classical musicians, Quartus Chamber Players, a string ensemble dedicated to sharing chamber music through concerts and educational programming; a bevy of composers including Chris Becker and Dominick DiOrio; and contemporary choreographers Becky Valls and Toni Valle.

"I'm able to spend 75 percent of my time in the creative process and 25 percent raising funds for the current project,

rather than 75 percent running a nonprofit and 25 percent in the creative process," says Valle. Her unwavering devotion to her craft dictates the business model best suited to the art, not the other way around.

Individual donors inherently embrace the nurturing personal relationship between artist and audience; many granting institutions, quite frankly, do not — perhaps the question is, do we value the creative work of individual performing artists or do we solely value established organizations? Why invest in artistic legacy over innovative project? A healthy cultural ecosystem calls for a myriad of strategies to cultivate artistic work.

Picture a culture in which established arts organizations exist alongside, perhaps even embrace individual artists and small, lithe, fast-to-respond-to-market-demands ensembles, each contributing to a rich, artistic spectrum.

— MISHA PENTON

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



COURTESY QUARTUS CHAMBER PLAYERS

Violinist Pei-Ju Wu and cellist Patrick Moore of the Quartus Chamber Players.

The Little Dog Laughs

Three Reasons Brazos Bookstore Remains a Houston Literary Center

THERE IS A LITTLE DOG IN THE Brazos Bookstore logo. But is it howling or laughing?

In the rapidly changing publishing world, you might expect the mascot of an independent bookstore that emphasizes the physical paper object to howl at the inexorable drift towards ebooks and reading gadgets.

Not this mascot. In fact, this little dog is going to be trying new tricks even as it keeps up the old ones that have made Brazos a center in the literary life of Houston for nearly 40 years.

But more about the dog later.

Jeremy Ellis came to Houston last September to take on the role of store manager at Brazos. There have been visible changes, like rearranged sections and less obstruction of the windows, but these are only enhancements to the substance of what makes Brazos special.

cutter set-up, dictated by corporate guidelines. Particular logistics are discussed so that what's best for everyone can be arranged.

Notably, Brazos always gets a few extra copies signed to sell in the store and through their website. So if you missed your favorite author at the last Inprint reading, check the Brazos website and click on "Signed Books." Most likely, you can still get that prized signed edition.

Reason Two: They draw in the community.

If meeting authors and collecting signed books is your thing, attending events out in the community isn't the only way Brazos can help you out. Every month, they have in-store author signings. March alone has 10 such events.

The authors you find at a Brazos signing might range from a nationally touring author with a book from a major publisher to a local, self-published author, but

you would probably do well to pay attention to the Brazos event calendar on their website.

There is one other program that draws especially on the University of Houston community. Every second Friday of the month, the best students from UH's highly ranked creative writing program read their work. The Gulf Coast Reading Series (named after the literary journal published at the school) is a long-standing tradition at Brazos and an excellent chance to hear accomplished writers before they hit the big time.

Reason Three: They meet you where you are.

If community involvement and in-store events aren't personal enough for you, well Brazos has you in mind, too. This is where we return to the little dog.

During March, for a limited time, for a limited number of customers, Brazos is offering a new program they're calling Inu-chan — a Japanese word which means "little dog." It's the name the staff have come to call the mascot in the logo.

In the Inu-chan program you visit with a bookstore staff person for a brief interview. Then for the next six months, for \$20 a month, you will be sent a new book, based upon that interview. It will most likely be something you never heard of, possibly from a small press, but selected expressly for you. It's likely that no one in the Inu-chan program but you will receive that title, a little personal surprise from Inu-chan.

"What makes a great independent bookstore," Ellis says, "is when you come in and discover the thing that you didn't know you needed, that you stumble upon something that is not of the mainstream. It's that thing that you didn't know was out there."

Between the community outreach, in-store events, and personal engagement with customers, it seems Ellis' philosophy has multiple opportunities to continue the decades-long tradition on Bissonnet, regardless of how the publishing industry changes.

What, Inu-chan worry?

The little dog laughs.

— NEIL ELLIS ORTS

Neil Ellis Orts is a writer and performer and Texas native. His byline appears irregularly in local and national publications.

www.brazosbookstore.com

Thursday, March 15 - 7 p.m.

"The Galveston Chronicles" by Audra Martin D'Aroma

Saturday, March 17 - 2 p.m.

"Lingering Tide" by Latha Viswanathan

Saturday, March 24 - 2 p.m.

"The Wineslinger Chronicles" by Russell D. Kane



COURTESY BRAZOS BOOKSTORE

Former Houston resident, Mark Long, signs his graphic novel, "The Silence of Our Friends," as store manager Jeremy Ellis readies the next copy.

After visiting with Ellis, I realized there were three main reasons why Brazos has been and remains a vital part of literary Houston.

Reason One: They reach into the community.

Brazos has long partnered with other organizations in the city. A large block of text on their website lists them all, but for our purposes it is enough to note that there are three universities, several museums, a broad range of lecture series, and professional and civic organizations on that list.

The main way Brazos partners with these entities is to be the bookseller at special events, especially when there is a speaker with a book to sell. Their strength in this area is their ability, as an independent bookstore, to individualize their events rather than bring a cookie-

all are carefully selected to appeal to the Brazos audience.

"The Brazos audience" is, admittedly, a broadly defined demographic. They tend to be more passionate about books than your average casual reader. They look for a certain quality to the writing and are adventurous and curious enough to explore beyond the current bestseller list. Highbrow? Maybe, but not without an occasional foray into the lowbrow. (I recently browsed their humor display — they have some lowbrow cred.)

To get slightly more specific, Brazos has always specialized in some key areas. Art and architecture. Literary fiction. Poetry. Biography. Carefully curated selections in other nonfiction categories.

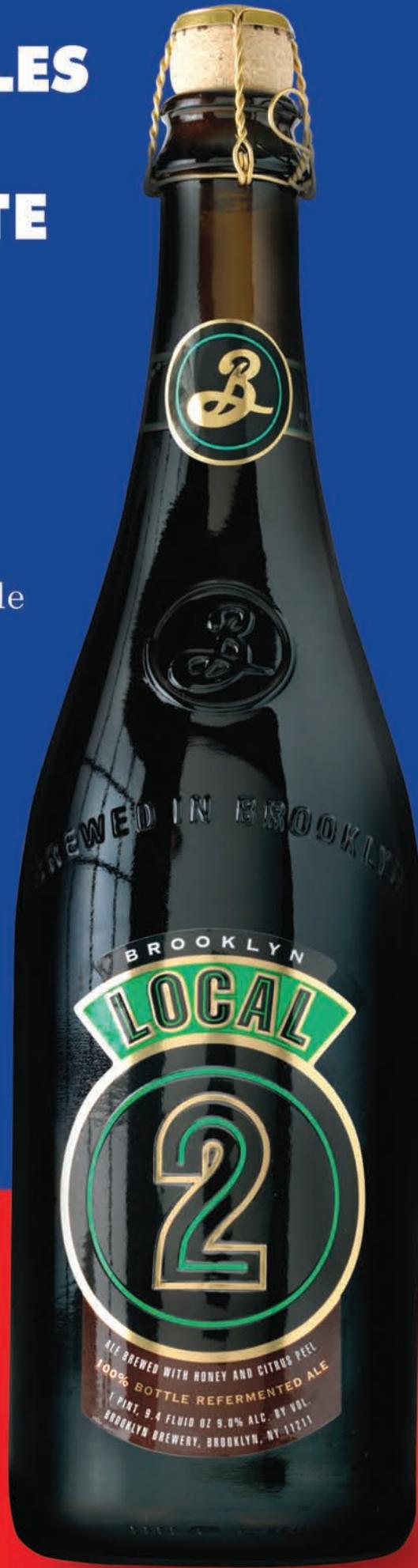
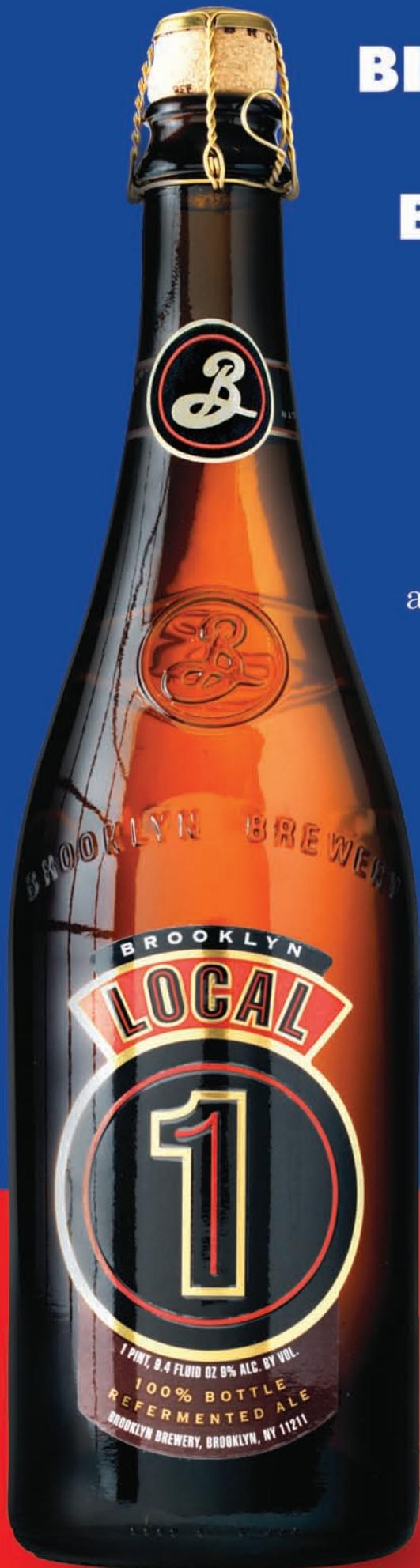
If the last two paragraphs felt like looking in a mirror,

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MARCH 15 - 25 @ 1703 HEIGHTS BLVD.

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*University of Houston
Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts*

AWREADY! HOUSTON HIP HOP CONFERENCE

Exhibition: DJ Screw and the Rise of Houston Hip Hop opens March 19. The Conference highlights Houston's unique hip hop culture and introduces the Houston Hip Hop Archives Network.

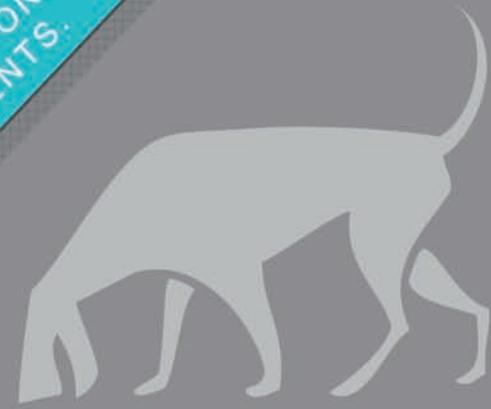


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The Sweet Sounds of March

Two Hot Choral Events This Month Hit the Same Day

CHORAL LOVERS ARE SINGING about two wonderful events this month, unfortunately they are both on the same night, so choices must be made.

On March 24, the Houston Chamber Choir premieres Dominick DiOrio's full-length composition "A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass." The work is influenced by the poems in the collection of the same name by lesbian poet Amy Lowell published in 1912. Even though she won a Pulitzer Prize posthumously, Lowell's works were largely forgotten after her death in 1925, but she made a comeback when gender studies took hold in the 1970s.

"Lowell's poetry comes from the Imagist school, characterized by an economy of language and a vibrancy of color," DiOrio says of "Dome." "Where some poets may take ten words to describe one image, Lowell can use six words for six images. The text is so inherently musical and practically sets itself to music."

DiOrio has been a tenor at HCC since 2009 and has a master of music in choral conducting from Yale University. He is set to finish his doctorate of musical arts from Yale this year and "Dome" will be presented by the Houston Chamber Choir there on April 15.

Scored for marimba, choir and soprano soloist, DiOrio says the idea for "Dome" came from his past. He played marimba in high school, which led to percussive compositions that led to attending Ithaca College as a composition major and his love of choral music and conducting.

"Beyond that," he adds, "the marimba is just so warm and lyrical, it's one of the few percussion instruments that can really sing. I wanted to bring out this natural lyricism and pair it with the sound of a solo voice."

"This is my first work composed for the Houston Chamber Choir and artistic director Robert Simpson," he says. "It's a major choral work, in four movements, just under twenty minutes, and I am so thrilled that Bob and these fabulous singers have been willing to follow me down the rabbit hole on this musical journey."

But wait, there's more. Also on March 24, Bayou City Performing Arts presents "Don't Ask Don't Tell: Coming Out Under Fire," a work of inspirational music and story exploring how gay and lesbian soldiers handled war while keeping clos-



PHOTO: MATTHEW FRIED

Houston Chamber Choir's Dominick DiOrio.

eted. It features the Gay Men's Chorus of Houston.

BCPA began life as the Montrose Singers in 1979 and is in its 33rd season of performing. The organization now includes the Gay Men's Chorus of Houston, Bayou City Women's Chorus, Bayou City Chorale, the Pride Band and Bayou Rhythms.

Artistic Director Dr. Linus Lerner describes the new work, the second of four

performances for the organization this year, as a beautiful, emotional and commemorative performance.

"I knew the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy would be overturned when I planned this for the season," Dr. Lerner says. (The policy was repealed September 20, 2011.) "But I didn't know it would happen before this show so I've had to re-vamp it, so now it's more of a celebration of that. When I started to compile the performance it was because I had talked



PHOTO: DALTON DEHART

Gay Men's Chorus.

to all of these veterans and they would say 'why can I kill for my country but I can't be myself?' I just couldn't see what the problem was about having gays and lesbians serve in the military."

BCPA's premiere of "Don't Ask Don't Tell: Coming Out Under Fire" will include musical selections from various composers including poignant protest songs like "Hope for Tomorrow" as well as stirring songs about change such as "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from "Les Misérables" and even a little light heartedness with the Village People's "In the Navy."

And as a tribute to the repeal of the policy, retired Staff Sergeant Eric Alva, a San Antonio native who was the first seriously injured Marine in the Iraq War, a Purple Heart recipient and a leading advocate of ending the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy in the military, will be the host of the evening.

Other guests include Houston's own civil rights advocate retired U.S. Air Force Col. Terrel Preston, Bayou City Women's Chorus, Sam Houston University Musical Theatre performers and dancers and a color guard provided by the U.S. Vets, the largest nonprofit support group for veterans transitioning to civilian life.

This will be the first choral celebration of the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy since its repeal last year, a major milestone for the nationally celebrated BCPA.

— MARENE GUSTIN

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

www.marenegustin.com

March 24 - 7:30 p.m.

"Don't Ask Don't Tell: Coming Out Under Fire"

Lillie and Roy Cullen Theater

www.bayoucityperformingarts.org

March 24 - 7:30 p.m.

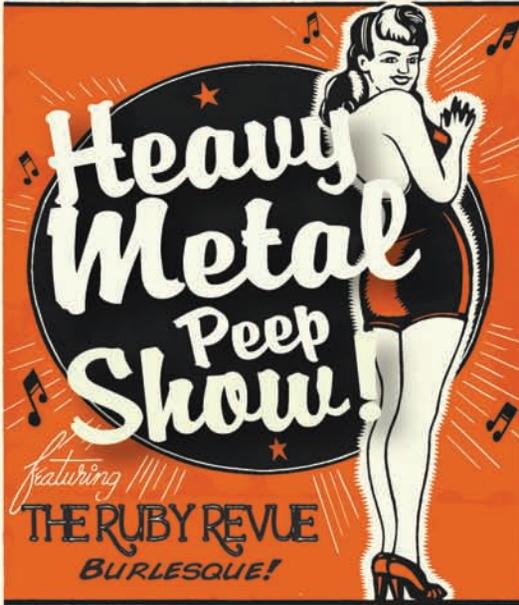
"A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass"

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Ruffling the Fringe

Emily Sloan Rocks the Alt Art Scene



PHOTO: JENNIFER ASH

“Shade Cloud,” 2011.

WOULD YOU ATTEND YOUR OWN funeral? Would you let a stranger wash your hair? Would you put your art in the fridge? Consider also four-hour artist mini-residencies that run ’round the clock, an annual event showcasing “rejected” artwork, and an explosive performance biennale.

Only in Houston.

The city’s alternative art scene allows for seemingly outrageous scenarios like these to take place while fostering consistent enthusiastic participation from diverse artists and audiences. Much of what makes this vibrant scene sustainable is the fact that it does not align itself strictly in opposition to more subdued mainstream art activity. Rather, the artists hold steady in their alternative approach to art and exhibition-making while often working in tandem with, or in response to, major museums and commercial galleries.

The imaginative self-proclaimed “internationally unknown artist” Emily Sloan is at the center of the operation. Included in her long list of current and upcoming activities is the Lone Star Performance Explosion, set to debut in Houston this March, during which she will do a performance inspired by the infamous hatchet-wielding abolition-supporting radical Carrie A. Nation. And this summer, Sloan will be artist-in-residence

at a not-so-alternative venue, Darke Gallery, explaining that she loves the idea of a commercial art venue creating an alternative use for their exhibition space. During her one-month residency, she will work on site, hold open-studio hours, and receive visitors.

Yet, as a University of Houston graduate art student studying sculpture, Sloan grew accustomed to operating on the fringes, explaining,

“My initial introduction to much of Houston was through my time at UH. My studio was in the sculpture building, located off the main campus — an alternative place in its own right where the graduate students basically had run of the place. I also became involved with the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, taking a participatory art class taught by artist and curator Andrea Grover.”

Sloan’s friendships and activities stemming from that environment taught her to “make what you have into something more. Or make something else.”

During her six years in Houston, she has produced numerous liminal site-specific projects such as the “Burning House,” on highway 59N in East Texas; “To Whom it May Concern,” on a vacant lot surface in Houston; “Sabine Street Bridge Lamp” on Buffalo Bayou; and “ShadeCloud” at

Art League Houston.

Her performance work includes “Funeral for the Living,” which took place in a rented church in the Houston Heights neighborhood and incorporated deaconess participants from her prior involvement with the School of Latitudes at labotanica; “Rebirth” at El Rincon Social where a truck bed filled with blessed fluid served as a burial/baptism site, allowing participants to be “reborn”; “Napping Affects Performance,” providing community naps in collaboration with various performances for six weeks at Art League Houston; and the “Southern Naptist Convention” at 14 Pews, appropriating Evangelical scare tactics with language such as “Don’t get left awake during the napture.”

“Houston’s alternative art activity is definitely a full-fledged scene,” says Sloan.

“You could attend only these events and visit only these places and still have a full calendar packed with rich experiences.”

Her list of worthwhile Houston alternative art projects — whether she is directly involved or simply guilty by association — includes Continuum, a provocative performance art group that took shape early Summer 2011; CounterCrawl, a bicycle art tour through Houston’s underground scene; Box 13 ArtSpace, where artists-in-residence have studio spaces

and host rotating exhibitions; TX BI, a biennial of Texas-based bisexual artists; and Houston’s Salon des Refusés, an annual event showcasing artwork rejected from Lawndale Art Center (Sloan is quick to emphasize that the Salon celebrates alternative roots while giving a nod to Lawndale, itself a very successful alternative project turned local institution).

Sloan’s ongoing mobile project, “The Kenmore,” is a small, self-run exhibition object with a mission to “keep ideas fresh” by inviting artists and curators to collaborate with a refrigerator (insert other clever descriptors: “it’s cool,” “not just another white cube,” etc.) The Kenmore will participate in FotoFest with “Refrigerator Art” curated by David McClain and on view at Skydive — yet another fringe art venue gem with its focus on bringing art projects outside of Texas to Houston.

Her additional FotoFest involvement includes curating a performance and exhibition of photos by Kristy Peet and Brit Ragsdale to be held at Gallery 1724, Contemporary Art Salon.

However, Sloan warns that this much creative activity can take its toll. For example, in the months following “Funeral for the Living,” she would wake up in the night with an acute awareness of her own mortal end. But with the tender connections she’s made with strangers while washing their hair during her performance project “Wash,” as well as a much needed retreat during her bathtub Many Mini residency, she finds a way to buoy herself.

— NANCY ZASTUDIL

Nancy Zastudil is an itinerant curator who now looks in her fridge with an enlightened perspective.



COURTESY OF GROOVE HOUSE

“Funeral Party,” casket view, 2011.

March 24 - 10 p.m.

The Kenmore presents “Refrigerator Art,” curated by David McClain
SKYDIVE
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www.theskydive.org

Music & Medals

Classical Competition Season in Houston



PHOTO: DAVE CLEMENTS

Born in Shanghai, China, violinist Ying Fu hypnotized the Crighton Theatre audience with a flawless performance of Henryk Wieniawski's Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 15, winning the Entergy Grand Prize and the Audience Choice Award at the 2011 Young Texas Artists Music Competition.

IT WAS THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE final round of the month-long 2010 Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland and pianist Daniil Trifonov was about to perform. Tickets were scarce, tensions ran high and I was lucky to get a seat. It was the stuff of legend.

After a stunning performance, Trifonov went home with a Bronze Medal. Not to be defeated, the young Russian pianist would go on to win the top award at the Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition in Tel Aviv. In Moscow, he not only won gold at the Tchaikovsky Competition, but the Grand Prix for best overall competitor. Since amassing his arsenal of medals he has been invited to play in many of the great concert halls of world and with many of the great orchestras.

"Competitions are great practice for a performance career," says Trifonov. "You learn how to concentrate in a very stressful situation and how to keep a lot of repertoire in your fingers for an extended period of time, but they are just preparation for a career."

Here in Houston, with the recent completion of Houston Grand Opera's (HGO) annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers, this month's Young Texas Artist Competition (YTA) and the recent presentation by Society for the Performing Arts of multi-prize winning pianist Trifonov, it's classical music competition season in the Lone Star State, and an ideal opportunity to take a look at what contests provide for musicians and audiences alike.

Having taken home prizes in some of the most prestigious vocal competitions in existence, former HGO Studio Artist baritone Joshua Hopkins is a veteran competitor who has also had a remarkable momentum to his career. Hopkins was a prize-winner at the prestigious ARD Musikwettbewerb in 2006, at the 2005 Plácido Domingo Operalia Competition held in Madrid, and, in 2002, José Carreras presented him with the first place prize in the Julián Gayarre International Singing Competition. In addition to those awards and several others, Hopkins also won the Grand Prize at YTA.

For Hopkins, it's not just the notoriety and prize money that make a difference while competing, it has everything to do with exposure one receives as well.

"When I was competing up in Conroe, one of the jurors was Richard Gaddis who, at the time, was the general director of the Santa Fe Opera. After hearing my performances at YTA, he invited me to New York for an audition, and immediately offered me the opportunity to sing the role of Papageno in Mozart's "The Magic Flute" the following season," reports Hopkins. "This was one of my first major exposures outside of my experience with the HGO Studio."

At 22, soprano Andrea Carroll is already a veteran competitor as well. In addition to winning a 2011 Sullivan Foundation award and taking Second Prize in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in the New England Region, Carroll recently won the first prize and the Audience Choice Award in HGO's Eleanor McCollum Competition.

"I love competitions and auditions," says Carroll. "They get your name out there

and get people talking about you. Every time I do it, it gets easier."

Competitions also provide financial support to cover some of the many expenses incurred by young musicians. In the case of Carroll, she was awarded over \$10,000 for her recent wins in Houston, and while it's not the case for every winner of the McCollum Competition, Carroll was offered a slot in the HGO Studio.

The final round of the Eleanor McCollum Competition is presented as the annual "Concert of Arias," which is a highlight of not only the Houston's opera season, but of the city's social season as well.

In Conroe, YTA is the single most anticipated event on the calendar of the Montgomery County Performing Arts Society. (Full-Disclosure: I was once a competitor myself, and have been the Master of Ceremonies of the final round concert for the last five years.)

"The idea is that this is not only for the benefit of every competitor in the competition, but we want to inspire excellence in the audience as well," says event chairperson Susie Pokorski. "This is a gift to our community and, as the official music competition of the State of Texas, a gift to our state as well."

Competitions aren't always as friendly as they are in Conroe. During the 1980 Chopin Competition, there was the memorable case of pianist Ivo Pogorelich where superstar judge Martha Argerich staged a walk-out saying she was "ashamed" that the jury she had been a member of had not advanced Pogorelich further, or the recent Tchaikovsky Competition that was plagued with accusations of racism and favoritism. Competitions are not all career makers either. During the 1955 Chopin Competition, Vladimir Ashkenazy was beat out for a gold medal by a now unknown musician. These events can also cost in terms of money and time.

Despite these dramatic events that call into question the usefulness of competitions, competitions are nevertheless here to stay. Trifonov sums it up, "It's the opinion of the audience and jurors that matter to me the most. Competitions are a matter of luck anyway."

— 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.

March 8-10, 2012
Young Texas Artists Music Competition
www.ytamc.com



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

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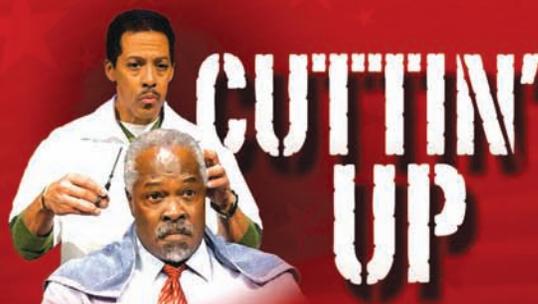


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Cultural Warrior

Nancy Henderek: Dance Salad Festival's Director

NOW ON HER 17TH SEASON, AND her 20th if you count the work she did in Brussels, Belgium, Dance Salad Festival director Nancy Henderek is a cultural ambassador on the international stage. Every Spring, Houston dance audiences look forward to the tremendous variety of companies, choreographers and dancers the Festival offers. Whether it's figuring out Visa snags or taking an hour long piece into a festival format, Henderek has been a doing it with her fearless passion for the art form. This year, Dance Salad Festival (DSF), on April 5-7, promises eight companies from around the globe, including several U. S. premieres. Henderek took a break from her busy dance day to visit with A+C editor Nancy Wozny.

A+C: After nearly two decades, what would you say you have learned about presenting international dance in Houston?

NANCY HENDEREK: We have a multicultural and multi-lingual arts community who enjoys opening up to new ideas for all kinds of art. DSF has been a part of that influence. There are over 80 different consuls representing different countries in the world in Houston. Mix these communities with our multi-ethnic, cultural, and local international

traditions, and we have a natural audience mix for international dance.

How has your curatorial eye changed over the years? Do you find yourself being drawn to a certain kind of work one year, and another for the next?

I'm always interested to see how choreographers translate their ideas into dance by reflecting what is unique in their own cultural references and how they touch universal concepts. Most of all, I want to feel that the choreographer has spoken directly to the dancers performing the piece and to the public watching it.

You actually shape the excerpt of the work we see. Is there one example in the program where you worked closely with the choreographer to excerpt a piece for this program. Can you talk about that process?

Sometimes, full evening works will be reduced to two or three sections to give the public the flavor of the full evening work. In essence, Houston sees dances that will never be presented this way again. With Pal Frenak's "Seven," I did what I normally do with the curation process: I write out notes of the piece, starting from the beginning and going to the end, making descriptive and



Nancy Henderek, director of Dance Salad.

PHOTO: MARK LIPCZYNSKI



PHOTO: ATTILA GLAZER

RIGHT: Members of Compagnie Pal Frenak, France, performing "Seven."

timing notes of each section. After that, I look for how to weave certain sections together to make a shorter version. Then, I send my curated notes and ideas of what I think will work, to the choreographer. This is basically a kind of temporary editing. Then, there follows a discussion whether it's possible to do the piece this way in DSF. At the end of the day, it's their work that is presented, even in a newly mixed form.

I saw Christian Spuck's hilarious "Le Grand Pas de Deux" on film at the Dance Salad opening event two years ago. A ballerina with a pocket book? Very funny. And we simply don't laugh enough in ballet, so I'm thrilled to see this piece on stage. This is a double coup for DSF, to bring the Stuttgart

Ballet here and this piece. How did that come about?

I saw "Le Grand Pas de Deux" in a Montreal Gala performance years ago. I knew I wanted it for DSF some day. Finally it worked out, and with the original dancers from Stuttgart Ballet this year. Christian says this is the best cast of this piece.

Quasar Compania de Danca was a break out hit when they were here in 2003 and 2004. We don't think about contemporary dance in Brazil until we see this company. Can you tell me how you discovered this troupe?

I first saw Quasar in Austin. I just loved them and choreographer/director Henrique Rodovalho's work, and knew they should come to DSF. The last time I saw



PHOTO: LU BARCELOS

Members of Quasar Cia de Danca, Brazil, performing Henrique Rodovalho's "So Close."



PHOTO: LU BARCELOS

Members of Quasar Cia de Danca, Brazil, performing Henrique Rodovalho's "Up In the Mouth."

them was in the final Pina Bausch Festival in Germany. She loved this group, too. They will be bringing in their hit "Mulheres/Women" with the Red Couch that I know many will remember and two other U.S. premiers, curated for our festival format.

There's also a reaching back in history in the program with Roland Petit Le Jeune Homme et la Mort ("The Young Man and Death"), performed by English National Ballet's Jia Zhang and Yonah Acosta (Carlos Acosta's nephew.) What made you want to include some vintage dance in the program? And do tell, Is Yonah as exciting as Carlos?

"Le Jeune Homme et la Mort" shows drama, conflict, and the human dilemma of the pangs of love by a young man intoxicated by a femme fatale. Historically, this piece was a rite of passage for the major artists of its time: Nureyev, Baryshnikov (seen in the beginning of the movie, "White Nights"), Paris Opera stars and also Ivan Vasiliev from the current Bolshoi. Last Fall, English National Ballet (ENB) presented a whole evening of Roland Petit, including this piece, in honor of this French choreog-

rapher; he picked the cast and two weeks before the premiere, he died. The performances became his memorial. For ENB, he didn't pick already proven stars, he picked Jia and Yonah, young stars in the making. Carlos never danced this part, and I'm sure he is having fun watching his nephew in this role.

How fluid is the program? Do you go down to the wire on who and what is coming?

The fluidity of the choices is part of what I must expect and be ready to quickly act on. I can't be caught in mourning for a piece. I always have to be reality oriented, even with the tension of change. Change is part of the universe.

Any advice for first time Festival goers?

If you want to see every piece, come Thursday and Friday, or Friday and Saturday. And, enjoy the show.

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CUT AND PASTE CONTINUED

urban environments — both real and imagined — as the sites in which such dystopian despair and utopian idealism is played out. “Re-Ruined Hiroshima” (1968), by Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, portrays the post-nuclear landscape of the city. A collage of found photographs and Isozaki’s own drawing, it is unclear whether the architectural structures depicted in the deserted cityscape are being constructed or destroyed. Unlike Isozaki’s barren terrain, John Sparagana’s “Untitled (Tahrir Square Crowd)” (2011) is teeming with people protesting against President Hosni Mubarak. Made from images that have been sliced out of magazines and then woven back together, Sparagana’s collage is both formally and thematically complex. The composition is only partially legible; the swirling vortex of the crowd is out of focus, blurred by Sparagana’s photographic mosaic. The aerial view of the Arab Spring resembles a surveillance photo, and the pixelated effect of the collage is indicative of the digital age in which we live.

As Nakamori observes, “Although these artists address the specific realities that they faced in their lives, their works are still relevant to the political and social conditions of the twenty-first century.”

The act of cutting and pasting that is so essential to the artistic practices of collage and montage has become ubiquitous in today’s technology-driven and media-saturated society.

Though “Utopia/Dystopia” pays considerable attention to the historical framework of early 20th-century avant-garde art practices with which many of the works in the exhibition are engaged, it nonetheless resonates deeply with our present age.

— KATIA ZAVISTOVSKI

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

March 11-June 30, 2012

“Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography and Collage”

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
www.mfah.org

RIGHT: Okanoue Toshiko, Japanese, born 1928. “Falling,” 1956, Collage. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, gift of Joan Morgenstern, an anonymous donor, and the Louisa Stude Sarofim Charitable Trust. © Okanoue Toshiko.



COURTESY MARY LAWRENCE PORTER



RICARDO PANIAGUA

p.972 804 1548

"Toro De Japon"
Lacquer on Olive Ash Burl
10.5 in x 8.5 in.
2012

RECENT + CURRENT WORKS OF NOTE



PHOTO: NASH BAKER / NASHBAKER.COM

Joel Shapiro, New Installation, 2012. Commission, Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, TX.

“Joel Shapiro: New Installation”

Rice Gallery

February 2 - March 18, 2012

www.ricegallery.org

Installation art can mean many things. Often it suggests the contiguity and continuity of stuff, the interconnection of materials and objects, found and made, in three-dimensional space. Boxy, craggy, scattered and thrown, installation art is space making par excellence. It is like architecture and sculpture, but it is neither one nor the other.

Bearing upon these qualities, Joel Shapiro’s “New Installation” offers a contradiction in terms. The Rice Gallery installation is spatial, its totality falling somewhere between architecture, sculpture and painting for that matter. One thing it is not, however, is contiguous. Bound, hung and strung-out across wires, its painted spruce components float in space defying the laws of gravity. In different lengths, shapes, sizes and colors, they seem to be blasted bits floating in an outer-space ether.

An evergreen plank hangs mid-room, seemingly floating in one direction as another in bright Pepto-Bismol pink almost cuts across its way. Opposite these two, a navy blue and tan plank almost meet at the floor, where wires strung from them connect at the same small anchor embedded in the floor. Like

minimalist space trash, a wide, dark red door-shaped piece of wood hangs taut, not quite touching the floor and far from the ceiling above.

Contiguity is absent here because this is not installation art; rather, as Shapiro is a consummate sculptor, this is sculpture — in disaggregated form. Instead of the weightiness of floor-bound, socle-topping classical works of sculpture — think here the “Boxer of Quirinal” (330 BCE) or Rodin’s “The Thinker” (1902) — this is sculpture that is seemingly weightless: sculpture for the age of information and digital bits. Shapiro extrudes the flows of nanotechnology into three-dimensional form. That they are built out of wood and then painted reconnects us, however, to the realm of sculpture.

With painting atop minimalist box, we might think of the work of Anne Truitt, a sculptor of the 1960s who Clement Greenberg famously described as the “Changer” for her use of paint on sculpture. Greenberg praised Truitt for moving away from the steel surfaces and “theatricality” of the predominantly male minimalism of Serra, Judd and Andre. While for Greenberg, Truitt’s painting of geometrical forms made them better, more feminine than the masculine work of male minimalists, Shapiro’s painting of wooden geometries has little to do with gender and

more with de-gendering. The stuff of tension and compression, the colliding forms in space that are Shapiro’s “New Installation” are constructions of wood that visually suggest blasted bits of stuff — garbage in outer space or information floating somewhere above your head. They are material while suggestive of the immaterial.

— CHARISSA N. TERRANOVA

Based in Dallas, Charissa Terranova is a freelance critic and curator working globally.

“Lia Cook: Bridge 11”

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

February 4 - May 13, 2012

www.crafthouston.org

The Houston’s Center for Contemporary Craft revealed their participating exhibition for FotoFest 2012 with giant photographs hanging in hazy glory. However, these photographs aren’t prints: they’re woven fabric. Trading pixels for thread, Lia Cook weaves photography and neuroscience to create objects of emotion and reflection.

The exhibition samples from three of series from 2003-2010, but the predominant subject matter is closely cropped faces. The calm, knowing faces haunt and allow contemplation on memory,

tactility, and time.

The qualities of weaving over regular photography grant a different viewing experience that is rewarding from many distances. From afar, the images appear as photographs. Close up, they dissolve into seemingly random stitches of light, dark, and occasional color. Cook utilizes pattern as value and creates a halftone by interpolating threads of different value or hue, which allows the work to blend optically like a pointillist painting. It’s easy to find oneself lost in the abstraction of pattern within the warps and wefts. Some works are displayed free-floating, and the curious observer will note the image in negative on the opposite side of the plane — an artifact of the weaving process.

Viewing the image as cloth seems to affect the emotional response as compared to photography. Cook collaborated with the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine in a residency to determine how we view cloth images differently. Using an array of EEG machines, eye-tracking apparatuses, and fMRI, the team confirmed that viewers respond differently to the fabric compared to photographs. The results beyond this confirmation are not immediately clear in the exhibition, but the study continues into the gallery space.

Relax! There are no cumbersome appa-



PHOTO: LIA COOK

Lia Cook, “Binary Traces: Young Girl.” Woven cotton, 2004. 68” x 48”.

ratures required here.

The three most recently made works on display are informed by this experience and achieve a charming, and honest level of self-awareness. The work “Tracts Remind” has a thoughtful take on memory

Reviews Continued on Page 27

REVIEWS CONTINUED



PHOTO: MICHAEL CULLEN

Jules Olitski, American, 1922-2007. "Purple Golubchik," 1962. Magna Acrylic on Canvas, Private Collection. Image © Estate of Jules Olitski/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

and youth through portraiture. Traces of yellow and red fibers branch through the image like roots — a representation of Cook's white matter — tangling and grasping a childhood image of the artist. We are presented not only with a fabric image for ourselves to reconcile, but overlaid is the cognitive process of viewing.

The nuances of this exhibition unfold as the viewer is beckoned to contemplate the images on a personal level, and then examine the work on functional and conceptual levels — revealing a new quandary to explore.

Geoff Smith is a 20-something arts enthusiast, occasional curator, and printmaker.

"Revelation: Major Paintings by Jules Olitski"

Museum of Fine Arts Houston
February 12 - May 16, 2012
www.mfah.org

"Revelation: Major Paintings by Jules Olitski" is a tight and quietly heroic retrospective of the work of Ukrainian-born American painter Jules Olitski (1922-2007). The crowding of the exhibition's 30 paintings is somewhat misleading, as the show can feel like a clipped account of Olitski's career when, in fact, it is closer to a full-fledged overview of almost five decades of the development of style and technique.

Dating from 1962 to the last years of Olitski's life, the monumental paintings on exhibition in the second floor of the Mies van der Roë-designed MFAH show the wending of a painter, from the watery paint and soaked surfaces of the early 1960s to paint wrought as magma in the early 2000s.

If not for the boxy, obfuscatory outlay of the "Tutankhamen" exhibition just across from "Revelation," Olitski's surfaces would communicate directly with the glass box sheath that is the skin of

the building. Modern painting and architecture would together strike a seamless play of flatnesses, from Olitski's evanescent mistiness to Mies's glass transparencies. As a study of painting in its last years of sincerity and medium-specificity, though, "Revelation" tells a hilly narrative of abstract form and painterly gesture over the second half of the last century.

The paintings are hung with little reference to history or context. Creating something of a chicken-and-egg conundrum, it is not so clear if they are actually bold and beautiful enough to transcend time or if curators have, in saying little about the sometime heady contexts in which they were created, framed the paintings as such. I will go with the former, and give little further energy to the latter.

While not the most famous paintings of his career, the spray-guns works "Patutzky in Paradise" (1966) and "High A Yellow" (1967) are inherently beautiful in their uncanny signification of painting as a mythical act. The colors in the giant "Patutzky in Paradise" spread across the surface of the canvas like a spectral mist, moving from yellow-green in the bottom right corner to pink-orange in the upper left. The shifts in color are far subtler in "High A Yellow," shifting right to left from dark, opaque to a lighter, transparent yellow. Playful and better-known, Olitski's soak-stain paintings from the early 1960s hang along an adjacent wall and behind the breathtaking "Patutzky in Paradise." Paintings such as "Prince Patutzky's Pleasures" (1962), "Purple Golubchik"

Let us be grateful that the paintings do have presence — that their beauty is strong enough to outlive the provocative though epoch-limited antiquarianism of unadulterated vision. Time has taught, as has the jam-packed installation of Olitski's paintings at the MFAH, there is little that is pure in art.

— CHARISSA N. TERRANOVA

"Brendan Cass: Texas"

McClain Gallery
February 16 - March 10, 2012
www.mcclaingallery.com

Brendan Cass' bright landscapes may seem crude, garish and generally unsettling at first, but the irresolvable images have a haunting quality that rewards extended viewing. His painting superficially resembles a style of figurative painting with fast application of clashing colors associated with Brooklyn and the Lower East Side and artists like Dana Schutz, Nicole Eisenman and Katherine Bernhardt. Cass enlists this sort of paint application to the traditional form of landscape painting, which points to certain tensions with our relationship to nature and its representation.

His paintings of sites in Texas such as Abilene, Beeville and Houston are as much about our idea of Texas as about the landscape itself. They are hung in the gallery in clusters at odd heights such that one cannot lose oneself in a single canvas. Instead, they present a conglomeration of visions of the land where vertical man-made structures such as windmills, radio towers, telephone poles, monuments and skyscrapers are overwhelmed by multicolored skies. The subject matter has a picture postcard feel at a distance that dissolves into clusters of dripping washes, thick



COURTESY MCCLAIN GALLERY

Brendan Cass, "Abilene," 2012, Acrylic on Canvas, 24 x 48 inches.

(1962), and "Monkey Woman" (1964) are examples of what seminal 20th-century art critic Clement Greenberg called "post-painterly abstraction." Part of an exhibition of the same title at LACMA curated by Greenberg in 1964, paintings of this style were considered by Greenberg, later followed by Michael Fried, to bear a "pure opticality" — a rarefied sense of vision singular to paintings of this type.

iconic strokes, flung drips, and trailing dry bristle marks.

Some of the paintings fall flat or stray too far into kitsch. The most successful group is to the right of the entrance. Each constituent canvas here is compelling in its own right, and they cohere together into a beautiful meditation on the sublime. The smallest example, "Dripping Springs" (2011), chases an elusive

resolution to its abstract and representational qualities. Bright yellow and red marks dance on top of a blue patch of sky peeking through dark purples and pinks; only the slightest hint of a rural farm is shown in black shadow across the bottom edge.

Jackson Pollock once reportedly claimed, “I am nature.” There is something of that in these paintings. They indicate what humans have done to nature, and in turn, how the natural world affects us. On top of that, the artist is his own force, conjuring an alchemical mix of texture and colors that evoke the big sky over Texas, even as it holds us in its concrete marks of paint on canvas.

— RACHEL HOOPER

Rachel Hooper is a Ph.D. student in art history at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

“Otabenga Jones: Fort HMAAC”

Houston Museum of African American Culture

February 25 - April 21, 2012

www.hmaac.org

“Fort HMAAC” is the latest offering from Houston-based collective Otabenga Jones. The inaugural exhibition marking the opening of the Houston Museum of African American Culture’s new space on Caroline Street, “Fort HMAAC” illustrates pedagogical and revolutionary ethos that girds the collective’s practice, as well as the curatorial approach that informs the groups’ museological interventionist installations.

Raising the issue of the precarious position of many African American cultural institutions Otabenga Jones has repurposed the HMAAC and posited the site as a type of safe haven. Approaching the HMAAC, one encounters a stack of sandbags that line the front entrance. Though the glass doors at the entrance, one can see further sandbags in the main foyer and lower gallery spaces that are ostensibly shoring up the walls of the museum.

The collective has transformed the main floor gallery space into a bunker/classroom. The walls of the gallery have been painted various shades of green and a glass door that leads into a back garden area is covered by a camouflage sheet and adhered with packing tape. Few objects are contained within the gallery space. Four tables in the center of the room enclose a still life comprised of plinths covered in black fabric, artificial palm leaves and flowers and a wrapped African mask on a stick that sports sunglasses.

Six empty easels are placed near the



Luminous 4: Annie Strader, Untitled, Chandelier, soil, salt, 2012.

north wall of the gallery, on the west wall hang three framed pieces: A Rolling Stone magazine with the late James Brown on the cover and two album covers, Elaine Brown’s “Seize the Time” which features the words Black Panther Party in white text beside an image of an individual holding a semi-automatic rifle and the back cover of Joni Mitchell’s album “Clouds” (perhaps included due to shared formal qualities with the Elaine Brown album cover).

Beside the framed pieces are a series of charcoal drawings on paper adhered to the wall with blue painter’s tape. The drawings document the still life in its various stages of inception. Included within the gallery is a library of sorts; a couch sits against the back wall beneath two posters of fictional Black Panthers. To the side of the couch is a bookshelf that contains titles of seminal works that have relevance to Black culture and aesthetics such as Ralph Ellison’s “Invisible Man” and Elvan Zabunyan’s “Black is a Color.”

The gallery’s sparse décor is intentional, for a series of classes in drawing, sculpture, design, performance and art his-

tory are planned to take place in the gallery and will produce works that will be added to the already existing pieces in the space guaranteeing an ongoing evolution over the course of the exhibition’s duration.

— 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.

“Luminous”

Box 13 ArtSpace

January 21 - February 25, 2012

www.box13artspace.com

As the name suggests, “Luminous” is a show meant to shine light on, well, light. The seven contributing artists explore our often paradoxical associations with light — as an immaterial medium, a massless energy, a natural technology, etc. — in unexpected and unexpectedly resonant ways. Co-curators/contributors Annie Strader and Matthew Weedman have done a stellar job in organizing the show as a chain of delightfully

connected experiences for the viewer to wander through.

Right from the get-go, the show disarms; rather than finding some object of overwhelming radiance at the entrance, the viewer is instead confronted with a large tub of water and a makeshift Loch Ness monster. Through security cameras and other artifacts, artist Christopher M. Lavery, further elaborates on this theme of the “hoax.” Rather than proffering the fundamental idea of light as clarity or purity, Lavery questions the ability of light, as medium of information and mediator of visual experience, to really even be trustworthy.

The image of Strader’s chandelier at the very center of the space is immediately a heavy one — the chandelier literally sunken too low, an inch-high square of top-soil reminiscent of a burial plot below it — but the true insights seem to arise from the interplay of analogs: painted plastic stands in for bronze, electric bulbs for candle flames, stenciled salt for wax drippings, the white of the salt for the black of the shadow, and the slow dissolution of the salt into the moist soil for light’s own dissolution of shadow.

Tobias Fike’s projection along the stairwell wall, which at first glance appears as chaotic static, reveals itself to be a recording of sunlight coming in through a window, filtered through the swaying branches of a tree, and illuminating a rectangular patch of textured wall. It’s a simple gesture, but one of such gentle harmony that it sticks in the mind, a statement also true of Kristen Beal’s “June,” a charming wall-mounted shadow-casting sculpture that captures the experience of a rural roadside at night. Weedman’s short film “Freeman” sits at the end of the tour. Again, a simple concept executed with sharpness and cunning: to create a narrative film not through the movement of objects but through the movement of light upon them.

Setting a high standard for the kind of engaging experience a curated group show in a small independent art space can be, “Luminous” is going to cast a long shadow.

— DAVID A. FEIL

Samuel Beckett’s “Endgame”

Catastrophic Theatre

February 17 - March 3, 2012

www.catastrophictheatre.com

You have to hand it to the Catastrophic Theatre and director Jason Nodler. First they decide to tackle Samuel Beckett, one of the most unorthodox and absurdist writers of the 20th century. On top of this challenge, they chose to take on one of his most complex works,

Reviews Continued on Page 28

REVIEWS CONTINUED

“Endgame.”

The majority of the play follows the scattered dialogue between Hamm, portrayed with an intense brilliance, by Greg Dean, and Clov, played perfectly by Troy Schulze. The world of “Endgame” is mostly unclear, purposefully. Hamm is both blind and unable to walk and relies on Clov, who is unable to sit, to do his bidding. The characters reside in a dank, bricked,

Nagg for laughs, with a squeaky, high-pitched voice that gives him a child-like persona, especially when lashing out against Hamm in a veritable temper tantrum. In contrast, Nell, played by Mikelle Johnson, speaks in a stark monotone, delivering her lines with a deadpan humor.

Nell mentions that, “nothing is funnier than unhappiness,” which, given the character’s dreadful existence, combined with laugh-out-loud dialogue, sums up much of the play. Catastrophic’s production of the very funny and terribly

horrors she endured so enraged the people, they revolted against the monarchy, becoming the Roman Republic.

The opera’s events unfold with both dangerous passion and elegant grace, carried along by Britten’s music, so powerful and evocative that it grabs you and sweeps you along in its wake. Anthony Dean Griffey’s ringing tenor is superbly used in the male chorus and his counterpart, soprano Leah Crocetto as the female chorus, is excellent as they both narrate the events on stage and question them, using the tenets of Christianity to uncover the events of pagan Rome. As Lucretia, mezzo-soprano Michelle De Young is sublime, her voice vibrant, strident as she fights for her virtue and ultimately makes her final sacrifice. Collatinus is infused with Ryan McKinney’s rich, deep bass-baritone and Jacques Imbrailo brings a finely toned and well-textured baritone, to his performance as bullying Tarquinius.

Conductor Rory Macdonald moves the orchestra across Britten’s score with incredible energy and pathos, the music a brilliant foundation to the opera’s passion play. Arin Arbus makes her opera directing debut here, proving that she’s a force to be reckoned with.

This chamber presentation asks more questions than it answers, and offers little solace when all is said and done. But its implications that one person may be the tipping point to great things demonstrates that humanity can rise above violence and evil.

— HOLLY BERETTO

Holly Beretto is a food and culture writer whose work has appeared in Change, Prime Living, Texas LIVE and Talk Story magazines.

“The Coast of Utopia: Part 2, Shipwreck”

Main Street Theater
February 10 - March 18, 2012
www.mainstreettheater.com

Tom Stoppard’s “The Coast of Utopia” might be a harbinger of a new Theater of the Impractical. Three plays, topping out at a total of nine hours (give or take), “The Coast of Utopia” is a head-spinning swirl of locations, characters, and heady philosophical discourse. This production at Main Street Theater marks only the second production of this epic in the United States – after the premiere production at the Lincoln Center. Main Street deserves accolades for taking this club-footed giant of a play cycle on, committing to not one, but three almost three-hour plays.

Part Two, “Shipwreck,” sticks us smack-dab in the middle of the real-life implications of the philosophical upheaval of the mid-19th century. Unfortunately,

throughout much of the play, we get far more of the philosophy and not as much of the upheaval. At times the equivalent of watching a bunch of well-read graduate students argue about philosophy and politics, to call the script clunky is putting it lightly; Stoppard’s kitchen-sink playwriting has gone over the top here, and he packs as much Russian and European history into the run of “Shipwreck” as he can. The audience is left sorting through a cast of 23 and their various intrigues, opinions, affairs, and falling-outs, all of them historical. Be prepared to whip out your phone and furiously search Wikipedia during intermission.

There are several standouts among the cast, including Joel Sandel, who is subtle and deliciously bitter, Seán Patrick Judge, who is charming as the feckless Ivan Turgenev, and Guy Roberts, who can only be described as magnetic. Kudos should also be given to Elissa Levitt, who fascinates, and Gregg Dailey, who is endearingly natural, despite their small roles. Joe Kirkendall, as Alexander Herzen, the focus of the play, is an able enough performer, although as he broods his way through the play I found myself more interested in his friends.

The benefit of Stoppard including so much material in his script is that there is truly something for everyone, and even if you are lost for much of it, at some point they are bound to expound on something you find familiar, even if you only vaguely remember reading about it in your sophomore political science class. The play is handily rooted in a compelling personal drama worthy of any soap opera, and even if you only hear static when the discussion of politics, utopianism and Russian literature kicks into gear, the politics of polyamory are bound to hold your attention.

Main Street ultimately deserves credit here. Long known for producing intelligent contemporary theater, this play seems a kind of culmination of their aesthetic, and represents a bold artistic step forward for the mid-sized theater. Despite Stoppard’s problematic script, the intimacy of the performance is gripping; I’m already looking forward to the next installment. If you are one of those that flock to the theater seeking a little magic, know that there is a little magic to be found here.

— ZACHARY DOSS

Zachary Doss is a freelance writer. He has his BA in creative writing and theater from the University of Houston.

River Oaks Chamber Orchestra

Church of St. John the Divine
February 18, 2012
www.rocohouston.org

It is a rare occasion when Houston music lovers have the opportunity to enjoy



PHOTO: ANTHONY RATHBUN

Greg Dean and Troy Schulze in Catastrophic Theatre’s production of Samuel Beckett’s “Endgame.”

cell-like space with nothing but two windows to give any appearance of an outside world. The other side of their confines is likened to hell; they live “down among the dead.” Or maybe it’s purgatory and their existence is then just a waiting game? Hamm repeatedly begs Clov to finish him, death being the only escape worth looking forward to.

If Hamm and Clov are in the bowels of Dante’s “Inferno” then their punishment is that of monotony and repetition. Their conversations consist of a series of starts and stops. At times, Hamm is fraught with emotion to a blank-faced Clov and then the characters about face and it is Clov who demands sympathy. The same questions are asked over and over, reaching a level of sheer insanity. Each day is identical to its predecessor; the same “farce, day after day,” as described by Clov.

For being blind and immobile, Hamm is a force to be reckoned with, and Dean plays him with a delightful, egotistical vigor. Schulze’s Clov is Hamm’s counter; he just seems terribly bored with it all. He shuffles around the room, sighing heavily out of annoyance, rather than despair.

Of course, as this is Beckett, there is absurd humor as well. Hamm’s parents, Nagg and Nell, pop out of oil barrels that they apparently live in. Joel Orr plays

unhappy “Endgame” is another masterpiece in the company’s ever-mounting stack of successes.

— ABBY KOENIG

Abby Koenig is a Mass Communications professor at Houston Community College, a creative writer and playwright. She writes about all things art and culture for the Houston Press’ Art Attack blog, www.blogs.houstonpress.com/artattack.

“The Rape of Lucretia”

Houston Grand Opera
February 3 - 11, 2012
www.houstongrandopera.org

Houston Grand Opera capped off its multi-year Britten Cycle with “The Rape of Lucretia,” a thought-provoking tour-de-force that showcased composer Benjamin Britten’s signature haunting style, brought to life by dynamic talents.

Britten wrote the opera as Great Britain was coping with the trauma of World War II: rationing, air raids, hundreds of thousands of soldiers dying, endless fear. It premiered in 1946, and it tells the story of how the virtuous Lucretia, wife of Roman general Collatinus, is raped by Tarquinius, son of the king. Following her violation, Lucretia takes her own life. In history, her body was paraded through the streets of Rome, and the

a world premiere on an orchestral program. However, with its most recent concert featuring a brand new work by Paul English, the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO) continues to prove why it's a crown jewel of musical life in the Bayou City.

Known largely for his impeccable skills as a jazz pianist, Paul English shows his consummate command of the orchestra with "Lumière Lunaire (reflétée) — A Fantasy for Orchestra" with text by conductor JoAnn Falletta. Commissioned by ROCO to celebrate 100 years of "Pierrot Lunaire," the notorious and seminal melodrama by Arnold Schoenberg, English's new work is a catalogue of 20th century tropes. With echoes of Schoenberg's original, Stravinsky, Copland and hints of Dizzy Gillespie, the piece is a promenade through the history of 20th century music.

Placed at the beginning of the evening, this delightful new work was a tough act to follow, but cellist Richard Belcher did so with chipper elegance and panache as he joined the orchestra for a performance of the "Cello Concerto in C-Major" by Joseph Haydn. Having heard Belcher many times with his Enso String Quartet, it was a thrilling departure to see him take center stage with this old friend of a concerto.

ROCO rounded out the evening with a crisp and articulate performance of Franz Schubert's "Tragic Symphony." It was anything but tragic and a grand finale to a spectacularly well-rounded evening of music which even included a nod to the late Whitney Houston on the day of her funeral as the ROCO horn section called the audience back from the break with an arrangement of "I Have Nothing" for four horns. Once again, ROCO lives up to its motto of "the most fun you can have with serious music."

— CHRIS JOHNSON

Gallim Dance

Jewish Community Center
February 12, 2012
www.gallimdance.com
www.jcchouston.org

Lush, fierce dancing punctuated with thrilling bouts of kinetic wit characterized Gallim Dance's performance as the highlight event of the Jewish Community Center's annual winter festival known as Dance Month.

Andrea Miller, the choreographic force behind Gallim Dance, is on a meteoric career rise. Thanks to Maxine Silberstein's forward-thinking vision, she was able to secure the company before they

became too famous.

The evening launched with "Mama Call," described as a collection of works that addresses Miller's Sephardic heritage, displacement, and recovering a sense of home.

It's here that Miller struts her highly textured phrasing, keen skill for syncopated rhythms, near-collision spacing, and breathtakingly risky partnering. There's so much to see and take in, it's hard to blink for fear you might miss something. Miller's style alternates between

contributed to one memorable evening of dance included Tal Adler Arieli and Caroline Fermin.

— NANCY WOZNY

"A Separation (Jodaeiye Nader az Simin)"

Sundance Cinemas
www.sundancecinemas.com

"A Separation," Asghar Farhadi's latest moral drama, is a painful, compassionate, and powerful film. Farhadi dissolves

confronts Razieh, the argument gets out of hand and he, in an attempt to remove her from his home, pushes her down the stairs, presumably leading to her miscarriage the following day.

Nader, on trial for the murder of Razieh's unborn child, pleads his case to the judge and to his family, fumbling through his story, struggling to protect himself while remaining honest. His real moral test is in confronting his daughter. Termeh's naive crumbles as she doubts her father's honesty, wondering why and if he is telling truth, half truth, or lies.



PHOTO: FRANZISKA STRAUS

Gallim Dance in "Pupil Suite 2" — Dancers (L to R): Francesca Romo, Dan Walczak, Troy Ogilvie, Caroline Fermin, Jonathan Royse Windham.

free-wheeling, space piercing movement to more intimate phrases that take unexpected swerves. Francesca Romo and Dan Walczak proved masters of nuance in their riveting duet. "Mama Call" concludes with a hauntingly delicate duet between Arika Yamada and Mario Bermudez Gil, as he spins Yamada hovering over "home."

The mood lightened considerably with "Pupil Suite," a selection of excerpts from Miller's "I Can See Myself in Your Pupil," set to the raucous music of Balkan Beat Box and Bellini. Troy Ogilvie showed off her comedic flare as she tied herself into knots.

Romo and Jonathan Royse Windham rocked the house in their athletic duet. Jammed full of zany movement invention, "Pupil Suite" never once fell into the generic quirky zone.

Both pieces packed ample punch, demonstrating Miller and her troupe's fearless command of space, quality and intention. The other fine dancers who

the traditional notions of good and evil, and dives into the complicated and messy subjectivity of truth and morality.

Simin wants to separate from Nader, her husband of 14 years, with whom she has an 11-year-old daughter, Termeh, in order to leave the country and start a better life. They're a textbook middle class family in modern Iran. When the judge denies her right to separate, Simin moves in with her mother, and Nader is left to care for his daughter and senile father. Nadar hires Razieh, a lower class woman with an out of work husband, to take care of his father.

Farhadi documents Razieh's brittle and precarious life with fluid, claustrophobic, and intimate camera movements that remind me of Cassavetes' best work. Despite her attempts to juggle her pregnancy, support her family and her religious life, cracks begin to emerge. One day, she has to leave the father at home, tied to the bed, to make a doctor's appointment. Nader discovers his father at home, nearly dead. When he

Nadar's inability to reconcile his self protection with his family leaves him broken, devoid of manhood.

Razieh, a deeply devout woman, has her own doubts about the cause of the miscarriage. She falls into despair, torn between her faith in God and her ability to protect her family. Her husband Houjat, alienated by his unemployed status in society, has nothing to lose and falls into a cycles of rage.

Simin tries to be compassionate with her family, but remains cold and detached — a coping mechanism for dealing with a hopeless society that I notice repeatedly in Iranian female protagonists.

None of the characters are good or bad, but most of them descend along parallel paths of dishonesty, completely incapable of dealing with the impending collapse of their lives, but still unable to reach out and redeem themselves to their loved ones. The story twists and

Reviews Continued on Page 30

REVIEWS CONTINUED

turns and the struggle to answer to the self, loved ones, and God. It digs like a screw turning slowly into the heart.

Perhaps the old myths of redemption aren't doing us any good any more. "A Separation" is a sort of non-myth, a demanding offering of all the irrational and heartbreaking intricacies of tragedy, love, and loss — which is, to me, a compassionate form of humanism. Which parent will Termeh choose to be with? It doesn't really matter. Where is the hope? Maybe in the connection with the actors on the screen, a reflection on the nature of our emotions, and a realization of honest compassion for others.

— JOSEPH WOZNY

Joseph Wozny is a Houston based writer, videographer and musician.

www.theshapeofjunkto.com

"Dinner With Friends"

Stark Naked Theatre Company - Studio 101

February 23 - March 11, 2012

www.starknakedtheatre.com

Is there a better way to make a new house feel like home than to invite some friends over and break bread? Not for Stark Naked Theatre Company. The company's latest production, Donald Margulies' 2000 Pulitzer-winning drama "Dinner With Friends," marks the inaugural show of the new Studio 101 collective theater space, which they are now proud permanent residents of. And while the night's conversations get a little unpleasant, to say the least, the



PHOTO: GABRIELLA NISSEN

Shelley Calene and Philip Lehl in Stark Naked Theatre Company's "Dinner With Friends."

Stark Naked group is obviously in their element.

The plot revolves around two couples, longtime friends, one whose marriage is falling apart (Tom and Beth) and the other whose marriage seems as stable as ever (Karen and Gabe). If watching couples and friends get into heated 'big picture' arguments is your thing, then you've probably already made reservations. If it's not, as this reviewer thought he was not, give Stark Naked a chance to prove you dead wrong.

From heated exchanges to hollow silences, the cast gets all those sudden psychic switches, those turn-on-a-dime wrenchings of the heart just right. More tellingly, they get it right from the very beginning. The first scenes of the play are among the most fun to watch, just for sheer amazement at the cast's ability

to conjure up the complexities of these characters at the very moment their lives are exploding. As Karen and Gabe, Shelley Calene-Black and Stark Naked's co-founder Philip Lehl spend the night in the kind of nuanced banter that feels like the coals of passion have long burned down to the still-warm ashes of companionship. As Gabe and Karen, Drake Simpson and Stark Naked's other co-founder Kim Tobin revel in volcanic mood swings. Simpson's entrance is one of the highlights of the night, as he dances between loving parent, chatty friend, coy betrayer, innocent victim, and screaming asshole. Tobin matches and counters him perfectly, and their loud, room-filling fight is as visceral as it gets.

The all-wood set, designed by director Kevin Holden, understatedly suits the needs of the different scenes and blends into the large former warehouse space

with its naked grain elegance. And the seating is just the right closeness for the audience to feel directly confronted by the actors. For a housewarming, "Dinner With Friends" shows off the new space to great satisfaction — so sit back, relax, and make yourself uncomfortable.

— DAVID A. FEIL

"Cinderella"

Houston Ballet

February 23 - March 4, 2012

www.houstonballet.org

You know right away you are in fresh take on a classic fairy tale when you find out that Cinderella's mother leads a group of zomberinas. Stanton Welch's "Cinderella" is a triumph on several levels. From the first few notes of Prokofiev's brooding score, it's evident we are in for an extravagant ride.

As much of a ghost story as it is a tale of finding true love, Welch's "Cinderella" takes some dramatic twists. The graveyard scene in the second act is a spooky stunner, straight out of "Midnight in the Garden of Evil." The story is also punctuated with a sassy wit, like the opening of the second act. The audience scrambles to their seats while the curtain opens with the cast whispering "Shhhh."

Welch's ash girl knows her own mind, has no trouble bossing around her clumsy step-sisters, in addition to having an excellent judge of character in a mate. This Cinder falls for the humble servant, Dandini, over the conceited prince. Danielle Rowe imbues the role with just enough tomboyness. Yet, it's in the third act pas de deux that she comes into full bloom. Rowe's expansive lyrical charm is always a joy to watch. James Gotesky's gentle portrayal of her shy sweetheart hits all the right notes. Charles-Louis Yoshiyama showed both technical and comedic flare as the all flash, no heart Prince. Rhodes Elliot and Peter Franc, as step-sisters Florinda and Grizabella, managed to dance on pointe and be hilarious.

Kristian Fredrikson's Victorian styled sets and costumes are deliciously sumptuous, while Lisa Pinkham's lighting casts a candlelit glow, sparkling, but slightly sinister.

Two audiences members summed up the experience perfectly. "It's not the "Cinderella" that I grew up with." Her friend replied, "Yes, it's way more fun."

— NANCY WOZNY



PHOTO: AMITAVA SARKAR

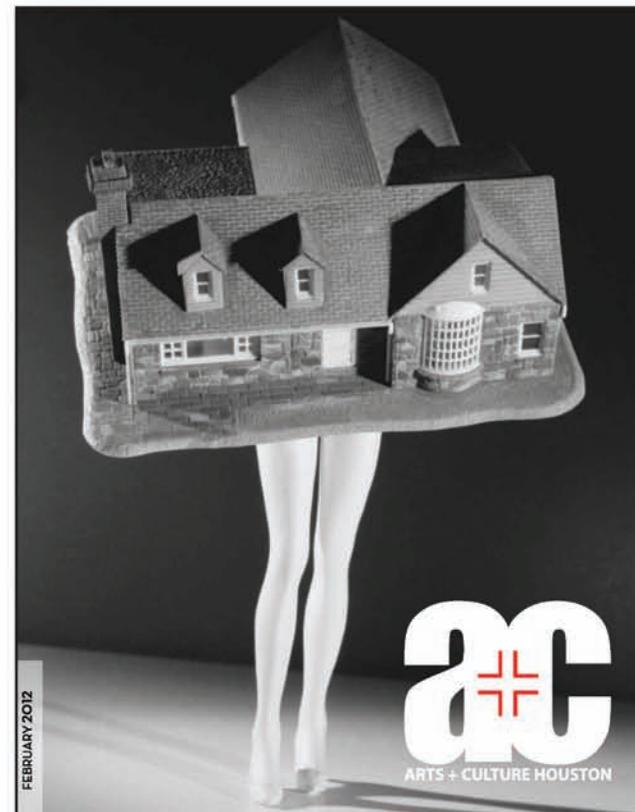
Dancer(s): Amy Fote, Artists of Houston Ballet in Stanton Welch's production of "Cinderella."



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CIRCLE OF
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THROUGH

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MCGOVERN LAKE
HERMANN PARK
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Internationally acclaimed Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei has recreated the 12 bronze animal heads that once adorned the fountain at Yuan Mingyuan (Old Summer Place) in Beijing. A major public sculpture installation that tells a story of looting and repatriation, the *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* is the centerpiece of a global, multi-year touring exhibition that will be presented in the United States, Europe and Asia.

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