

NEW ART examiner

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OF THE VISUAL ARTS

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Daniel Nanavati in Tel Aviv
Ken Turner and Mary Fletcher on Naum Gabo
Frances Oliver reviews Saul Steinberg's THE LABYRINTH
Margaret Lanterman on Girl's World and Empathy Fatigue in Chicago
James Cassell on Grace Hartigan in Washington D.C.
Stephen Luecking on the Mathematics of Sculpture
Ben Russo in Harlem, Netherlands
Anna Maria Benedetti and Graziella Colombo from Lake Lugano and Milan



NO ART SUPERSTARS IN ISRAEL?

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.

If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.

The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.

You can participate directly by sending letters to the editor which are published unedited.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

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SUSANA GOMEZ LAIN Practicing artist and lawyer or vice versa, in her works she tries to conciliate both worlds using concepts and experiences extracted from her daily study and practice, using art as a legal language and weapon to subtly voice universal human concerns and dilemmas, trying to bring a ray of light wherever she finds darkness.

ANNA MARIA BENEDETTI loves the world of the Greeks and Latins very much but did a thesis in the philosophy of mathematics. Art has been a constant companion since childhood. She lives in Milan where she was born.

The New Art Examiner welcomes ideas for article and short reviews.

Please send a sample of your writing (250 words) and any pitch to contributor@newartexaminer.net

At present we pay £25 for a published contribution in any one issue. We are happy to accept articles in your native language as well as English. We will only publish in English but when we post the article online we will include the original language version. If you look at our website

www.newartexaminer.net you will see we have already published in Italian and Mandarin.

Our deadlines are as follows:

August 3rd October 3rd December 3rd February 3rd April 3rd June 3rd

Editorial 34.2

Dear Editor,

I decluttered to the extent of returning my Marie Kondo book to the charity shop.

Mary Fletcher 09/02/2020

Editor

a whole scale reprisal of cultural value, a new setting, a real look at where we are, but do we have the courage or are we all swept up? well I am not - more later...

Al in DC 24/01/2020

Al

Does this statement have any connection to the fact that Al attended a glittery opening of a new, prestigious gallery in DC last night?

Derek Guthrie 26/01/2020

Derek,

None whatsoever.....

Al in DC 29/01/2020

Editor,

Taking on Al in Washington DC's suggestion for "a whole scale reprisal of cultural values" is a good answer to the end of the editorial where the reader is asked what inspires them. Yes, we need a comeback to our cultural (and moral) values, which we have lost a great deal of in the last 10-15 years. We need a new Leonardo da Vinci to enlighten us, to make an impact on our world. Let's forget the clutter, the trillion tons of artwork being done today for the most part, mine included.

What inspires me? The answer is colors. I'm a traditionalist and still buy my colors at the art supplies store, not online, and when I go in I feel this enormous hunger for paints, like some people feel for food or clothes. My fix is color; that's what inspires me, though the colors come alive outside in nature when the spring arrives.

May Delmonico 02/02/2020

Editor,

The experience of a work of art may not be possible inside then norms of present society. In my opinion, social media has not helped. If the Medium is the Message, Art is Abandoned. Time for a reprisal of Cultural values.

Derek Guthrie 23/01/2020

Editor,

People have become human doings, no longer beings, too busy to really appreciate a work of art today. Only the elderly possibly have time to stop and look at a painting, a work of art. This, too, contributes to the apathy of our current lifestyles, where all we do is do.

Jason Johnson 23/01/2020

Editor,

You do write with passion, I quite feel it, I love it. It's obviously the answer to the problem of apathy.

Miklos Legrady 24/02/2020

4 into 1: The Turner Prize

Hi Mary,

I enjoyed reading what you wrote on the Turner Prize and completely agree with you. What do you suppose will happen at the next Turner Prize? Any suggestions?

David Chang 10/02/2020

David

I don't know - I would like it to become a celebration of the artists not a competition but maybe the terms of the prize do not allow that.

The end of my piece has been somehow garbled in the printing - it should say - 'What next? Could the Turner prize become something different?

Could we hear about the submissions, the jury, the discussions? Could it be four awards not one?

Mary Fletcher 10/02/2020

Fervid Art from life on the edge

Editor

I have an extraordinary etching from this period by Norbert Behrend (born 1939), depicting time stopped at Berlin's Friedrichstrasse railway station, also known as the "Palace of Tears". In the brown and white etching, the clock has no hands. It's eerie and quite beautiful at the same time. This little known artist outside Berlin merits being written about. He is one of the finest etchers of his time, while the images he made are a historic remembrance of this era, not to be forgotten.

Stanislao Davis 27/02/2020

Editor,

I do not think Berlin was ever on edge as much as the pressure in East Germany and now that has been lifted...are Berliner's nostalgic for the cold war?

Al Jirikowic, Washington DC
Editor 16/02/2020

Editor,

Nostalgia is possible for anything. place or time as long as the element of personal danger or pain is eliminated unless the person concerned extracts pleasure from a sense of danger or pain. Nostalgia is a powerful weapon for those creating propaganda.

Derek Guthrie, Consultant
Publisher 17/02/2020

Al,

There is the tortured psyche of the nation in these images though; I think that's a part of the edge.

Daniel Nanavati, European
Editor 18/02/2020

Leon Radegonde

Editor

As a long time reader of the New Art Examiner, I am pleased to see that there are also reviews from geographical areas not commonly covered by this magazine. I think there are many valid artists outside Europe and North America and look forward to reading more reviews like this one. It was also refreshing to see something, though not much, on the Cuban art scene.

Sam 18/08/2019

Hi Sam,

What's your criteria for a "valid" artist?

Mary Bennett 18/08/2019

Sam,

Thank you Sam. That is good to know. I believe New Art Examiner is consciously trying to extend its coverage. I shall certainly keep pushing!

Victoria Howard 18/08/2019

Revel with a cause

Editor

The New Art Examiner will take up the "untouchable" art issues of "who" is behind "what" and what it may "really be" better than any other art publication. For this reason the NAE has been kicked down the stairs, beaten up, slashed, burned and copied but it still stands tall. The fact the NAE survives is a testimonial to its integrity and vision. This is in part thanks to the guiding spirit of Derek Guthrie and his late wife Jane Adams Allen, who founded the magazine in 1973 after being censored in Chicago. The only option they had, if they chose to report the stories about art as they saw them, was to publish, and publish they did – hence the NAE. Now the historic ties

to the last century are kept alive with the storied experience Derek may tell, important as they are to the current turf of understanding the unfolding art world plays. With the advent of Pendery Weekes as Publisher and Daniel Nanavati as Editor holding down the European front and with our budding American team, the NAE is swimming into the present with all due confidence. We fight to say what is in our hearts, not what is "expected or projected to be said". This is why we publish and move forward. And this why we welcome all to participate and move forward with us.

Al Jirikowic, Editor Washington
D.C. 27/08/2019

Editor,

I met Derek when he visited Toronto in December 2018. I was impressed.

Miklos Legrady, Toronto Editor
19/08/2019

Hi Miklos,

I agree with you; Derek is impressive, as he has one of the finest minds I have ever known. He never forgets a name, a place or what was said at a particular event regarding the art world and holds a wealth of information from his over 40 years as publisher and co-founder of the New Art Examiner. He also has an ability to see and interpret art work that makes it come alive. I visited the Tate St Ives with him a few years ago, and suddenly the whole museum illuminated with his comments – it was fascinating and a visit I will never forget. I am also very fortunate to have a near daily dialogue with this great man, which I have grown to cherish.

What is unfortunate is that some of the "established" art world see him as a threat, instead of respecting him for his discerning mind and for being a master of art criticism.

Pendery Weekes, Publisher
19/08/2019

Speakeasy by Richard Siegesmund

Thank you Richard Siegesmund for your informed and brave article. Given today's climate of distress and turbulence resulting from the unsavory tactics of Trump, it is easier to be aware of the tribalism that structures American politics and art, as some point out this destructive undercurrent did not start with Trump.

Anti-intellectualism is the handmaiden of populism. The late Jane Addams Allen, co-founder of the NAE and art critic for the Washington Times, with dignity and modesty carried forward the better side of American humanistic culture. Her writing was crystal clear, a characteristic of her great aunt Jane Addams. It is more than interesting to pose the question on why Jane Addams was virtually ignored. Richard Siegesmund suggests some reasons.

Certainly, Professor Elkins missed the boat in his pertinent book "Whatever Happened to Art Criticism". The Spiral continues its downward trajectory.

Derek Guthrie, Consultant
Publisher 13/02/2020

Scouting the Blogs with Miklos Legrady

Miklos,

I think Francis Bacon is a great painter and produced images of the horror of our times.

Derek Guthrie, Consultant
Publisher 25/02/2020

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EDITORIAL

There are some paintings you look at and you wonder who the people were, you muse about the time and place, the fashion, the thinking of the characters and you inspect as far as you are able the skill of the artist. But you have to take another step in your mind to consider philosophical ideas. Then there are paintings you look at and you are in the heart of philosophy immediately. And there is no saying what kind of painting this will be because it is different for all of us. It may be abstract; it may also be a landscape or a figure that just strikes us as asking philosophical questions.

Everyone who stands in front of a painting asks themselves questions. Inspired by or surrounding the art work in front of them. I wish we would all share those questions because they are the heart of everything we do and write about here at the New Art Examiner and there are no stupid questions. There are, of course, many silly answers.

But sometimes even with the thousands of readers we are gaining online, we can feel we are not engaging enough with our audience in the modern world and not getting enough feedback, not being questioned enough, so that we can really move the culture out of the fascist gutter it has fallen into because of the lack of thinking about art and the preponderance of thinking and manoeuvring that is done for money.

So we have been thinking long about hosting an online radio show. We now have eight editors around the world and four of them teach at university level, as well as experts in radio technology and scheduling and writers' groups invested in creating content: podcasts, discussions groups, open forums... you name it they want to engage with you.

Examiner Radio will be hosted online and available on computers and phones around the world. It will be free and it will be a two hour show every day of the week with each show hosted by a different country, to enable listeners to tune in at sensible times. But as a part of the process we want to hear from you. Do you have a good reading voice; a wish to hear particular kinds of people talking about art and culture; ideas for shows; suggestions on interviews and podcasts people can record and send into us?

We welcome all your ideas and thoughts as we plan for this new and innovative project in the life of the magazine. Please email suggestions, brief or in depth, to:

letters@newartexaminer.net

We shall look forward to hearing from you and discussing your ideas.

Daniel Nanavati



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Each issue the *New Art Examiner* will invite a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest. Gill Fickling is a documentary film-maker of more than 30 years based in London, Spain, Geneva and New York. She spent the last 15 years working for the United Nations. Travelling the world, her films covered human rights, refugees, climate change and gender violence and have been shown widely internationally. She now lives in Cornwall, UK, where she paints.

I watched in horror as a nurse passed a wooden ladle full of food through the bars of Julio's cell. Naked, wild-haired and eyed, 21-year-old Julio pressed himself up to the other side of the bars and opened his mouth wide to accommodate the huge spoon. Having spent the last 14 years of his young life behind bars, Julio's only crime was to have been born with autism. We were in the psychiatric hospital in Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, to make a film on the rights of people with disabilities. As a producer/director with United Nations Television, it was my job to witness such misery, but the conditions inside the hospital shook me to the core and this was one of the stories that left a lasting impression on me.

For 15 years I worked as a film-maker with the United Nations, based in both Geneva and New York, travelling the world making short-format documentary films on themes of UN priority - human rights, refugees, violence against women, climate change - from the story of escapees from the brutal North Korean regime to that of refugees in Europe; from rape victims in the townships of South Africa to that of farmers in Bhutan facing dire consequences of climate change; from the story of the Bakoya pygmies of Gabon fighting for their democratic rights to that of a band of young disabled musicians from Australia who came to rock the aisles of the UN in New York.

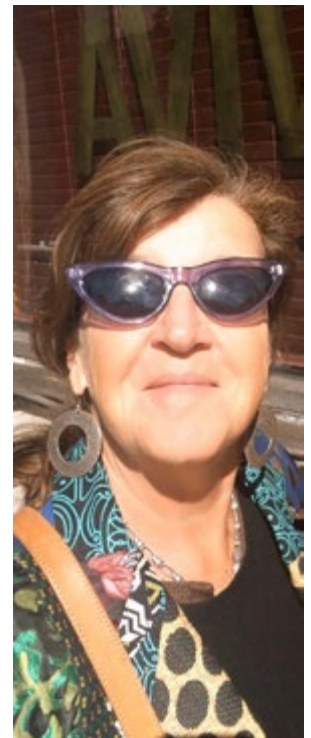
The film in Paraguay, called *Julio and Jorge*, told the story of the parallel lives of two autistic young men, both of whom had spent much of their young lives incarcerated in the government-run psychiatric institution. Both born to impoverished families, there was no state-support to help their relatives care for them. The only solution was to lock them away. When the boys were just eight years old, they were admitted to the psychiatric hospital and kept in solitary confinement, neighbours in their desolation. Naked, they picked food scraps from the filthy floor. Julio refused to wear clothes, tearing them and any bedding he was given to shreds, an indication of the frustrated torment in which he lived. He continued to do so when I met him in 2008 in Paraguay with my cameraman. He paced his dismal cell like a caged tiger,

avoiding eye contact and devoid of any human touch. We had been allowed into the psychiatric hospital by the then director who wanted to expose the appalling lack of support in his country for people with such disabilities, which went against all protocols contained in the UN declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

During the years I worked with the UN, I made more than 35 short films, and had the privilege of meeting many extraordinary people often living in the most wretched conditions. These people opened up their hearts and their lives for our camera; I hoped that sharing their stories and, for once, allowing their voices to be heard, helped them in some way. But I was often left feeling inadequate that instead of bringing practical help or aid, all I could do was bring their stories to the world.

One such person was Akhtar, an 18-year-old Afghan boy I met in 2008 in a dismal, muddy camp in Greece. His family had spent their savings for him to be trafficked across Iran and Turkey to escape the Taliban's death-threats. He and another 1,800 Afghan men and boys lived in cardboard boxes on the outskirts of Patras and were trapped in a dead end, prevented by the authorities from leaving the country but offered no help or rights if they stayed. They spent their days trying to smuggle themselves into the wheel-hubs of lorries, waiting to board ferries for Italy. Boys had been crushed to death when unwitting drivers lifted their rear wheels. But such was their desperation to find a country that would welcome them. Akhtar, a bright, gentle, softly-spoken boy (then the same age as my daughter) touched me deeply and we remained in touch by infrequent emails as he embarked on a hazardous four-year journey across Europe, eventually ending up in Luxembourg,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36



NO ART SUPERSTARS FROM ISRAEL

Daniel Nanavati

Given the chance to visit the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and to consider the work and place of contemporary Israeli artists, my mind was filled with expectation. Surely the people who had produced Camille Pissarro and Marc Chagall, rumours about Rembrandt's Jewish ancestry, Mark Rothko, Amedeo Modigliani, Leon Golub, Naum Gabo, Lucian Freud, Sonia Delaunay and so many others, would hold fascinating insights into western cultural development. Surely the energy with which they had built an entire country, and the exquisite and unique architecture they had created would spill over into sculpture, drawing and painting? I was wrong.

I wasn't surprised to see the galleries named after the families who had endowed the museum. Nor surprised at the impressive weight of the Impressionist and Post-impressionist exhibitions. There can be few museums in the world which can boast of having four new Picassos in their collection donated 'recently' – and what a joy to see an early Picasso from 1899-1900. There was one large Giacometti – a beautiful piece – but it showed the fundamental weakness of the museum; the reliance of a relatively poor country on the donations and taste of wealthy collectors from America. The links with America have had positive political dividends, but culturally the association has impoverished the country's artists. With New York on visual-arts life-support, copying it makes little sense if your aim is to lay down a new strata of culture.

Israel lost much in being disconnected from the land for thousands of years. The growth of an indigenous art practice has been lost and in its place they rely upon the wealthy collectors around the world to impart to them their taste (largely western, though Jewish people have lived in almost every country on Earth).

Israel lost much in being disconnected from the land for thousands of years. The growth of an indigenous art practice has been lost and in its place they rely upon the wealthy collectors around the world to impart to them their taste (largely western, though Jewish people have

The high end art world is not in the art business, they are in the marketing business. Israeli artists have to get away from such marketing.



Gabriel Klamser 'Ahabal' (2000).

lived in almost every country on Earth). They are also heavily influenced by the fashions of the West, as set in New York and London. That is the only reason the Chicagoan Theaster Gates with what that looked like a children's practice alphabet – was on show. Chicago also features in the climate change show on the ground floor with its design for a carbon neutral city of the future. It is also the reason why a whole gallery is given to the strange idea of sending descriptions of fruits and vegetables to illustrators around the world and asking them to draw what the words conjure, without being told what they are describing. The exercise results in a vegetable version of the kinds of bestiary produced in the late Middle Ages by artists who had never seen half the animals they were drawing. Interesting? Not very. Popular? Probably, but only for the bored. It also explains why the modern gallery of Israeli artists was a filtered down version of New



Ariel Schlesinger *Wool Burnt Carpet* (2014). This carpet covers a huge section of wall.

York, a disfigured reliquary of a generation of philosophy that led Donald Kuspit to comment that there are so many choices now everything is art, artists are lost. But the museum states that these works, shiny installations and carpets cut to pieces, reflect the contemporary art scene and even the history of Israeli art. Maybe they do but if this is so, you can see this stuff in any art fair (and art fairs have had their day) because it is all the same.

The observer in Tzfat knows immediately that there is an artists' colony there where Jewish people are talking to Jewish people. There is nothing wrong with that, it is a religious town with no pretensions to be putting the nation on show to other nations. The pre-occupations of the artists are the accoutrements of Judaism, and the centrality of family in the religion. Intermixed with portraits of kindly rabbis. The Museum of Art in Tel Aviv does not have their excuse. Gabriel Klasmer's gift from 2014 should be given back. Ariel Schlesinger's wood burnt carpet is a meaningless piece, as philosophically full of holes as the traditional carpet. The installations are worthy of being on the free exhibition floors of Tate

They will only be able to fill the hiatus of two thousand years with a bravura creativity and a bravura honesty. Some of which is found in the graffiti which is so prevalent in Tel Aviv they organise tours to visit the areas where they abound ...

Modern, London. You could interchange them without breaking an intellectual sweat. You cannot go from Monet and Renoir to artists looking like they are practising for the position of marketing director at the Saatchi Gallery, and argue you are in an equal tradition. Many years ago listening to the programme about the founding of the MacDonald's chain, I heard the story that the accountant who advised the founder told him his biggest problem was that he didn't know what business he was in. The founder thought he was in the food business but the accountant pointed out that, as a franchise, he was in the real estate business.

This is a vital lesson for artists to learn. The high end art world is not in the art business, they are in the marketing business. Israeli artists have to get away from such marketing. They will only be able to fill the hiatus of two thousand years with a bravura creativity and a bravura honesty. Some of which is found in the graffiti which is so prevalent in Tel Aviv they organise tours to visit the areas where they abound: Neve Tzedek and Florentin. Interspersed with small coffee shops and plenty of restaurants it has the feel of a cultural neighbourhood full of energy and appeal. But a lot of it is also messy and awkward. That said, it feels strange to be more visually drawn to street art than museum exhibitions. As if there is a cultural betrayal in progress.

THE REALITY OF GABO DOESN'T MATCH THE EXPECTATION

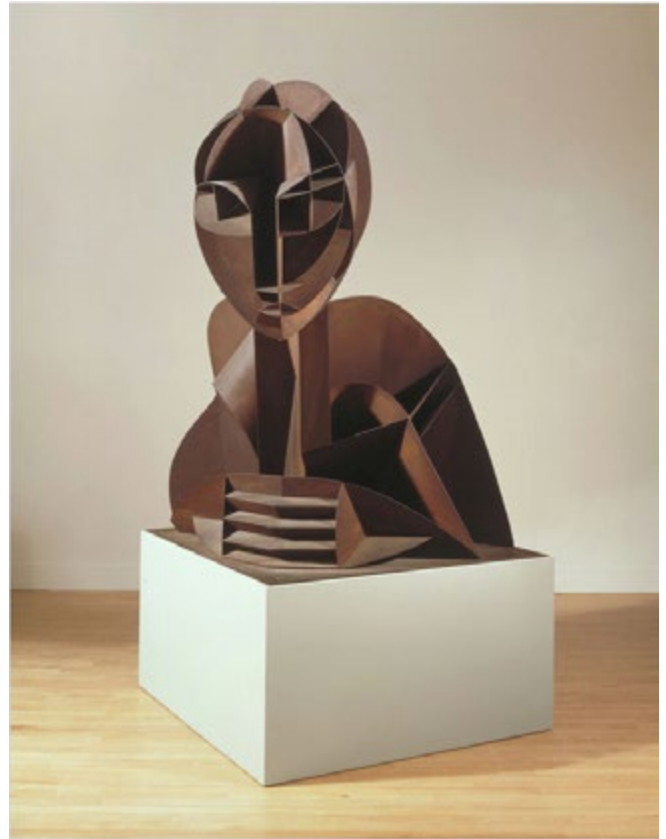
- Ken Turner

What I would see and hoped to see was the unexpected and unfathomable. I was on a journey. First to the grandeur and weight against the land of sand and rocks of the sea on Porthmeor. Then to the concrete face of the Tate gallery where I was to liberate my perceptions of life through sculpture. I pass through the rotunda with its cushions that add a dynamic expectancy of there being an audience. The ticket office like a train station of yesteryear, going somewhere unknown.

I climb the plastic-lined steps, as hopeful as if they are the seven steps to heaven, I pass the bookshop with its many lives and images from worlds set apart, one might say - even Greta Thunberg is there! To then look for an architecture of wonderment not found in the Tate's form as I climbed higher. Finally, through the modern galleries, halted by images from Braque and Lanyon of magical moments, endless in space and their tension of formalistic dialogue.

Entering the comparatively new St. Ives Tate extension, I am confronted by a steel structure in the shape of a woman's head, *Constructed Head No. 2*, an enlarged version of 1964 from the first version in 1916. Unhappily, I see this Head as literal in form. That is, the formal qualities, in the quest for a penetration into endless space is not fully achieved as in a cubist painting, but only a return to where I stood, going nowhere. The hope of being elsewhere is shattered by the sculpture's literalist form. In contrast to this disappointing experience I see another cubist-inspired figure of a small torso in virtual movement, more to my liking. That is, in accordance with Henri Bergson, the eminent French philosopher whom Gabo had read, and specifically concerning Bergson's views on intuition and ideas about motion, change and evolution. In order to grasp what is unique and ineffable whilst being infused with a sense of duration and shades of other directions: down into the

What is important, is the sensual tension between the real and the space revealed both by its known and unknown qualities. If this space constantly recedes from us, then here is its success.



Constructed Head 2

spirit of the sculpture and also into the materiality of the sculpture as an object. But it is here in the tension of found qualities where the requirement of more depth in experiencing the sensuality of formal configurations lies. We are aware of its material and layers of historical knowledge. But then to the underside, hidden, as it were, of the abstract nature of its form is something else. What is important is the sensual tension between the real and the space revealed both by its known and unknown qualities. If this space constantly recedes from us, then here is its success. And thus we have the drama or theatricality between the spectator as audience, and the work itself.

More insightfully, this is about the layers from the obvious to the unseen materiality in the object, (Gabo's sculpture), in contrast to the depth of the object, autonomous and out of reach. Thus, trying to get to grips with something other as an unknown in experiential terms. The spectator remains with the object but out of reach and stranded in that sensual experience between



Circular construction



Construction with collar

the real and the abstract tension in space. This is an abstraction beyond description, and importantly, the subjective sense of the unfathomable nature of the object itself. This I believe is where the true nature of art lies: something outside perception whilst having within our senses an experience of sensual perception, one that lies at the heart of the material, as a matter of space and form of works of art.

That is, seen as objects, as things in themselves, and entirely autonomous, but with a necessity of the viewer's presence to set up the drama of the work. Emanuel Kant saw this as a transcendental moment away from the object, not however in the object. My thought is toward

the qualities of the object in itself as a sensual experience of its qualities. A dynamic tension has to exist between the known and the unknown by the spectator. It should be a dramatic moment. And this is to be found in the abstracted nature of the sculpture itself. The formal sensual qualities however still remain unfathomable.

Perhaps the abstracted endless space I'm looking for here in this opening space of the large gallery split in two by an undulating curve will present itself further. My second encounter came. A very large graphite drawing, 1059 x 1575mm. A competition design for the Palace of the Soviets in 1933. Several structures of the Palace are placed within the central space, leaving an immense space surrounding the centred drawings. On the edge, arithmetical figures that seem to represent a multiplicity of human forms, the populace as a metaphor for life, an endless unfathomable and dynamic space for living. And a formal representation of tension in spatial terms.

I travel on, waiting for more exhilarating moments in time and space with a notion of an aesthetic future-harmonic tension. Gabo's manifesto states that that's possible. I move on to make that discovery. However, Utopias expressed through manifestos invariably lose their shine when read decades later.

The time is Russia 1917, the Bolshevick revolutionaries artists were on the move to a better culture, a new world where art is for the living in the streets and squares of a city. Art is to come out from the dead museums to a living factory of the human spirit. Lenin is making demanding speeches and the artists are grouping themselves into corporate systems while vying for positions of importance. Alexander Rodchenko takes a leading role in a commune of artists, argues with Gabo who resists a placing of his work, a *Head*, to the tiny village of Tsarevokshaisk in the depths of Siberia. After all, he was the founder of constructivism alongside Vladimir Tatlin, who designed a model of a monumental tower to be 1,300 feet high for the Third International Comintern. The Constructivists' artworks were part of a great visual program meant to awaken the masses and lead them towards awareness of class divisions, social inequalities, and revolution. The Constructivists believed that art had no place in the hermetic space of the artist's studio. Rather, they thought that art should reflect the industrial world and that it should be used as a tool in the Communist revolution. An exciting book on this period in Russia by Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment Russian Art 1863–1922*, published by Thames and Hudson 1962, reveals the story of conflicts and evidence of a possible new society until it was cancelled in a referendum by Lenin. The mass of peo-

ple voted wholeheartedly for social realism. In 1932 Social Realism was established as the official art of Soviet Russia. What was given up however was how the artist could be embodied in the make-up of common life as responsible members of society.

In 1920, Gabo held his first public exhibition, with his brother Antoine Pevzner: sculptures, paintings, manifesto, the lot, to meet the people at Moscow's Tverskoi boulevard on a bandstand. A site specifically chosen in the fervour of the revolution to put constructivist art directly before the public. I am reminded of 1968 in London when artists also took to the streets! In Moscow his manifesto did create differences from his fellow artists. Tatlin, in particular. From that time on Gabo took his constructions to Germany to participate in the 'First Russian Art Exhibition' in Berlin in 1922; which enhanced his reputation as a leading sculptor and announced his entry to the rest of the world.

Gabo progressed in the art world from Moscow to Oslo, Berlin, Paris, London, Cornwall's St. Ives, and finally to the USA. But what does it all mean now?

Before I answer, I first want to retrace my steps to the Column of 1921, version 1975. Front on, it's very impressive, But walk round its sides and back and it begins



Torso in cardboard

to fail in its depiction of tension in formal space. My slow walk then passes the projection of *La Chatte*, a Ballet reconstructed by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer from Sergei Diaghilev, and I stop for quite a while. Squares and circles with ballet dancers; intriguing but fragmentary. The dancers originally choreographed by George Balanchine are not exploring fully the nature of space and its movement within its darkened and shiny stage set. More particularly, the form of the figures with

squares and circles do not give a sense of evolving sensationally through a space that could be magical. The formal qualities of the dancer's costumes seem out of sync with the geometric shapes. My mind goes to the Bauhaus of 1922 and *Triadisches Ballett* by Oskar Schlemmer, with its integral geometric costume, dynamic movement through space; an avant-garde artistic dance indeed. When you move on in this exhibition you can have fun with the projection of Bronze Spherical Theme and wave your arms around!

Getting somewhat tired of oft-repeated designs, stringed works and others that produce tension but not extension, I found my favourite piece, one that is in the permanent Tate collection.

Herbert Read played a significant part in Naum Gabo's recognition in the UK. They became friends in Hampstead, London, when Ben Nicholson introduced them along with Marcus Brumwell who ran an advertising agency in Mayfair called Stuarts. Gabo was tempted to make ads for cash but resisted, though he did make designs for coat hangers and other utility objects. In like fashion Tatlin also finally made uniforms for factory workers. Gabo did however design a car conceived for the Design Research Unit c.1943.

Construction in Stone with a Collar, 1936. The written comments suggest the theatricality of lime stone, cellulose acetate and brass on a slate base, magnificently, as a drama in space. Because of the drama I stay a long time with this piece. It seems to have been organically structured, or rather placed, and in doing so the materials reveal an imaginative space beyond what is there, and the mind lingers in experience of its sensual qualities; a work of art indeed; perhaps showing the influence of Hepworth. Further on, the paintings are not paintings, just designs in paint. The monotypes are just more designs.

I think it's important to note that Herbert Read played a significant part in Naum Gabo's recognition in the UK. They became friends in Hampstead, London, when Ben Nicholson introduced them along with Marcus Brumwell who ran an advertising agency in Mayfair called Stuarts. Gabo was tempted to make ads for cash but resisted, though he did make designs for coat hangers and other

utility objects. In like fashion Tatlin also finally made uniforms for factory workers. Gabo did however design a car conceived for the Design Research Unit c.1943.

Conceived as a dramatically integrated form, the car appears more streamlined and aerodynamic than other British vehicles of that era; a curvilinear body with recessed door handles and headlights. Among the detail consistent with his sculpture from the period, Gabo employed a spiral motif in the grille and biomechanical forms such as a kidney-shaped steering wheel. His design incorporated a curved perspex windscreen and nylon upholstery – two new plastics he had begun to use elsewhere in his work.

Herbert Read in his book *Modern Sculpture* (Thames and Hudson 1983), says that "Constructivists 'construction', as evolved by Tatlin, Gabo and Rodchenko, was deliberately impersonal, and the spatial relations it created were as abstract as mathematical formula."

French Curves, for example, are to be seen hanging on the wall in his Carbis Bay studio 1940.

Wilhelm Worringer, who's book *Abstraction and Empathy* Gabo read, writes:

"Our investigations proceed from the presupposition that the work of art, as an autonomous organism, stands beside nature on equal terms and, in its deepest and innermost essence, devoid of any connection with it, in so far as by nature is understood the visible surface of things. Natural beauty is on no account to be regarded as a condition of the work of art, despite the fact that in the course of evolution it seems to have become a valuable element in the work of art, and to some extent indeed positively identical with it."

Along with Henri Bergson, Herbert Read and Worringer, Gabo was also influenced by other artists. Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky, Tatlin, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and many others in Russia, Europe, the UK and USA, as is noted in the Tate's publication on Gabo.

I wander out of the exhibition, having happily experienced some works of art. But musing on this brief look back to a bygone era of revolutionary ideas makes me think about today's problems in the art world. The question of how one deals with the fast-changing formal aspects thrust into the internet

I'll leave that to another day. On the way out to the beach, I notice that the cushions have gone, and the rotunda has lost a dimension

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SCULPTING MATHEMATICS

Stephen Luecking

Mathematics has had a profound effect in shaping modern art: not in its ability to generate attractive patterns but in exposing the artists to spatial possibilities not easily observed in their physical world. One such spatial possibility is the fourth dimension, which is, for the most part, inaccessible to human perception.

The question of whether or not this invisible extension of reality even exists was keen in the minds of many in the early decades of the 20th century. Fueling the question was the popularity of occultism, spiritualism and other esoteric sciences at the turn of the century. Since these belief systems posited the physical existence of spirits, they needed a physical space to locate them. Many early abstract artists subscribed to theosophy and believed in an expanded reality in order to house the occult.

Other more analytical artists were influenced by the growth of visual models of advanced mathematics that burgeoned during the late 19th century. Many of these models were predicated on geometries that required the invention of higher dimensions in order to be. Geometers discovered that many of these forms which seemed to be discrete were actually portions of the same four dimensional object. Einstein's ground-breaking theories further popularized interest in higher dimensions and alternate geometries. His theories assumed such geometries, which offered spaces very different from that offered by everyday experience.

One ... spatial possibility is the fourth dimension, which is, for the most part, inaccessible to human perception. The question of whether or not this invisible extension of reality even exists was keen in the minds of many in the early decades of the 20th century.

Barbara Hepworth's spherical sculptures appear to be an example of exposure to such visual models. They bear a remarkable resemblance to 3D visualizations of the hypersphere, the four dimensional analog of the sphere. Like most of her geometric knowledge these were likely introduced to her by her good friend J.D. Bernal, known to science as the founder of molecular biology.

Bernal's broad range of knowledge earned him the sobriquet 'Sage' and stretched from political activism to

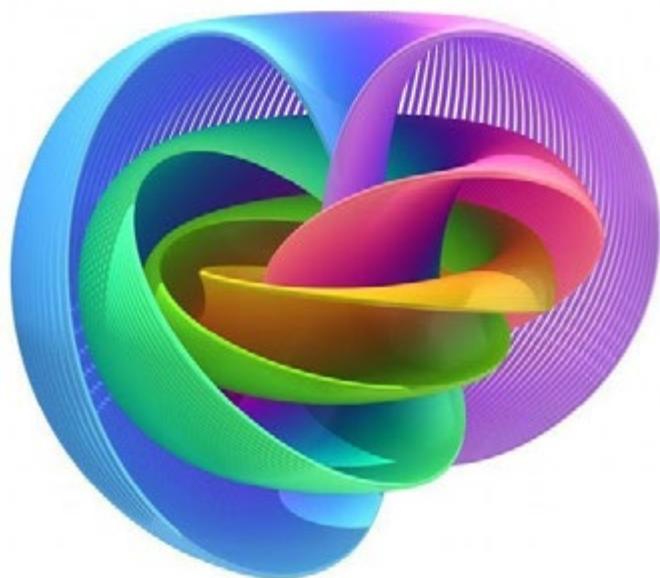


Barbara Hepworth, Spiral, alabaster (1959) (<https://www.artdependence.com>)

art. His friendship with artists such as Naum Gabo, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and others garnered him inclusion in the publication of "Circle", an exposition by and of the major constructivist artists in England and Europe. He regarded artistic enterprise as being in accord with science, especially since both strive for the 'best' form. Drawn to write about the arts and architecture, Bernal penned the introduction to Barbara Hepworth's first exhibition catalogue in 1937, where he referred to her introduction of a fourth dimension as "a closed curve in time." Coincidentally Hepworth began tentative explorations in plaster of spherical formats shortly after this exhibit, but she exhibited none until six years later.

The exhibit summarized a body of work begun after she gave birth to triplets. Following this hiatus her sculptures turned from concerns with the human figure and began embracing geometry. At this time Bernal met Hepworth through her friend and his paramour Margaret Gardiner, the artist and collector. This began a long series of visits to Hepworth's St.Ives studio where Bernal discussed her work from the lens of the geometer and brought sample images of his x-ray crystallography. These latter stimulated a set of remarkable drawings. The drawings were not depictions, but parallels of mathematics: they were to function only as art. Despite their avid interest in science, Hepworth and others of her artistic circle were inclined

to keep art and science on separate though parallel paths. Naum Gabo, perhaps the most scientifically sophisticated of the circle (he was thought to be knowledgeable of quantum physics), stated their position in a 1957 interview:



Hopf Fibration (<https://nilesjohnson.net/hopf.html>)

“Art and Science are two different streams which rise from the same creative force and flow into the same ocean of the common culture, but the currents of these two streams flow in different directions.”

Although Gabo’s statement agrees with Bernal’s view, Gabo himself shunned Bernal. Having lived in Soviet Russia, Gabo was put off by the scientist’s Communist activism.

Many artists of the early 20th century maintained an ambivalence toward mathematics and science even when inspired by contact with these fields. Kasimir Malevich, for example, created visualizations of four dimensions on at least two separate occasions using separate approaches. His visualizations were premised on classical geometry, but he never revealed just how he used that geometry. Inspired by Nikolai Lobachevsky’s notion of pangeometry, which held that an unknown multitude of geometries are possible, Malevich believed that one such geometry could be developed specifically for art. Other of Malevich’s Russian contemporaries openly expressed the importance of mathematics to the new art. Alexander Rodchenko, for example, averred that art was actually a field of mathematics.

The evidence that Hepworth’s exposure to geometry extended to the fourth dimension is circumstantial, although compelling. Such exposure would surely have

come from Bernal. Bernal well understood mathematical descriptions of the fourth dimension. As a student he introduced the use of quaternions, a system for computing in four dimensions, to calculate transformations of crystals. Consequently, when the noted mathematician Heinz Hopf used quaternions to construct his projections of the hypersphere, Bernal could well have understood Hopf’s method. Hopf’s 1931 discovery, known as the Hopf fibration, occurred just prior to Bernal’s contact with Hepworth.

It is doubtful that Hepworth’s goal was higher dimensional visualization or that she even comprehended the fourth dimension. Her intent was clearly sculptural: the conflation of interior and exterior spaces as presented in Hopf’s model.

One aspect of four dimensional objects is that inside and outside do not exist as we know it. In fact three dimensional projections of four dimensional objects when rotated within the fourth dimension appear to turn inside out when projected as a three dimensional object. This is likely what intrigued Hepworth: sculptures that interpreted the sphere by simultaneously displaying both the inside and outside and then linking both into one form.

Most of Hepworth’s spherical and oval sculptures from the early 40s to the early 70s often realized this link by relying to some degree on the inner space spiraling out to become the exterior. In this regard most depictions of the Hopf fibration also incorporate three dimensional spirals. Hopf calculated his model as a series of tightly packed circular fibers dispersed within a normal sphere by using quaternions. The close-packed series of circles coiled and expanded to become the enclosing sphere.

Just as with three-dimensional objects projected into two dimensions, the apparent configuration of a four dimensional object projected into three dimensions can vary greatly depending on one’s point of view and the position of the object in four dimensional space. Many of Hepworth’s spherical sculptures seem to replicate projections of the hypersphere from alternate views derived by subsequent mathematicians. Without seeing any of these alternate projections, Hepworth’s sculptural experiments had coincidentally integrated interior and exterior in manners similar to those arrived at mathematically.

It seems that Hepworth’s striving for optimum aesthetic forms paralleled, as Bernal believed, the mathematicians’ own efforts.

GIRLS' WORLD

Margaret Lanterman

Take a second look. The exhibit is a nuanced Janus presentation of girlhood well worth the visit.

Together, two artists break taboos and give us a revealing look at the state of contemporary girlhood. These friends have made a thorough study of childhood and undoubtedly remember their own as they show us some surprising interpretations of young girls metaphorically swimming upstream with determination towards adulthood.

Of the two, Melissa Pinney takes a more benevolent look at girl-interactions and the social implications revealed and captured on film. Simple tableaux are steeped in multi-faceted discourse of gesture and glance. Her own daughters, Pinney tells us, grew up with the camera clicking. In her glossy photos, girls are always engaging and engaged, either in their own world or that universe of the social group. In *Six Girls* (Archival Pigment Print, 36" x 44", \$5,000 framed) we see a lineup of confidence and love, uncertainty and guarded caution, all in one click of the camera. The fun is in the subtlety of the shot. The surprises are in the tender nuances of facial and body expressions. Hopeful projections highlight a potential leader, a caretaker, a dreamer, a game-changer. Despite clear individuality, the social group becomes a pulsing entity - and the future is uncertain.

Jump Rope (archival pigment Print, Ed. 1/10, 23" x 28", \$3,500 framed), shows us four girls who fly on bent knees away from their land bound shadows. The composition is riveting and the contrast of movement and stability is joyful. Here and in most of Pinney's photos, the girls seem to see themselves as a unified front facing the future with verve.

The paintings of Judith Raphael project another interpretation of girlhood. These paintings strip away the gloss and show us some undercurrents of grit and malice that are not usually associated with this gender group. These girls don't pull punches and they face what is out there bravely. We see strength and resolve that the girl-stereotype does not often acknowledge.

In *Conquest and Clemency*, (oil on linen, 26" x 52", \$4,500), one girl fearlessly rides a fierce pit bull dog with a menacing studded red harness into a group of three



girls who seem to have been doing typical girl activities with leotard, hula hoop and microphone. A sweetly benign looking child reaches for the dog's head, past its full set of unproportionally large and sharp teeth. The visual jolt is in the fiery expression of that innocent child who seems to bare her teeth fearlessly back at the beast, and in so doing, is safe.

The painting *Free Fall* (acrylic on panel, 26" x 42", \$3,600), depicts three girls free-float through a dangerous sky full of airplanes and parachutes, their own backpacks yet unopened. In this unusual environment the expressions on the girls' faces are riveting: serene, determined, wise, commanding, and in one case, joyful. ▶

Pinney's subdued color and dry painting style allow the unexpected and uncompromisingly unique subject matter to compel us around the exhibit with a sense of unease and contemplation.

Judith Raphael and Melissa Ann Pinney. ofheimer Gallery, 4823 N. Damen Ave., Chicago Il; Hofheimergallery.com.

EMPATHY FATIGUE

Margaret Lanterman

Our ex-governor just returned home to Chicago from prison where he served a partial sentence for odious crimes, commuted by our current president. There is little surprise in one thug having empathy for another, but the existence of yet one more moronic act in the world leaves the rest of us sputtering and exhausted.

Empathy Fatigue at Andrew Rafacz raises some interesting questions. There are so many things to be fatigued about. Our ex-governor just returned home to Chicago from prison where he served a partial sentence for odious crimes, commuted by our current president. There is little surprise in one thug having empathy for another, but the existence of yet one more moronic act in the world leaves the rest of us sputtering and exhausted. Everywhere we look we see examples of people morally, intellectually and ethically slumming. A small solace is that we still have our voices.

Now the Andrew Rafacz Gallery adds another voice of a sort not previously evident on this stretch of Chicago Avenue, nestled between some great restaurants and the world class Alcala's Western Wear store that has held the neighborhood together for decades.

Many a passersby will be able to appreciate what is visible from the window: a fifteen-foot-long painting reminiscent of cave art which presents a tranquil scene of horses, landscape and an unclothed man. It takes a moment to register that the man has no head. The artist, Dominique Knowles, states that horses can't be dominated, but are willing to work with us. Perhaps this thinking should be applied to people as well. (Vadhithana VAMm 2019, oil on canvas, 84 x 180", \$22,000)

Walk around the partial wall of the gallery and you will see a collaged piece that presents a man reading the newspaper. On the cover is the headline and an image about the very ex-governor previously mentioned.

The sculpture across the way by Mev Luna is neither



Mev Luna, detail Action Office was meant to be about movement II (2019) metal frame, privacy film, glass, sterling silver, Luna mothwings 80 x 70 x 44in. \$5,500

familiar nor self-explaining. A simple structure acts as both a frame and armature to hold some jewelry-like chains. Attached to the chains like jewels are various moth wings. Thinking of the piece within the context of

the exhibit title, one could consider that we are being directed to think about a crass disregard for nature, an indifference that allows us to indulge in trophy hunting and the plucking of wings off of flies. Conversely, one could consider that this is an opportunity to appreciate the beauty of nature even after it's death, and to see that there is a vital connection between our culture and the natural world that we need constant reminding of. A sound sculpture by Jason Lazarus provides ambient noise from small machines that originally were meant to mask the private human sounds of counseling and provide a soothing element to the waiting rooms of therapists. In this instance, it provides ambient noise that is omnipresent in the gallery and which becomes just the opposite of soothing. (2019-Present (26 Sound screens), 2020; Debranded sound screens, site specific installation with custom plinth, dimensions variable, \$10,000)

The topic of empathy fatigue is an important concept that deserves attention. The term was originally meant to designate the unfortunate and sometimes unavoidable exhaustion of medical workers who have been bombarded with devastating injuries or health situations and become unable to experience or express empathy to the patients they are treating. Polls show that many people in this country are now experiencing some level of a much broader empathy fatigue that extends to politics, morality, ethics and survival itself in the form of environmental concerns.

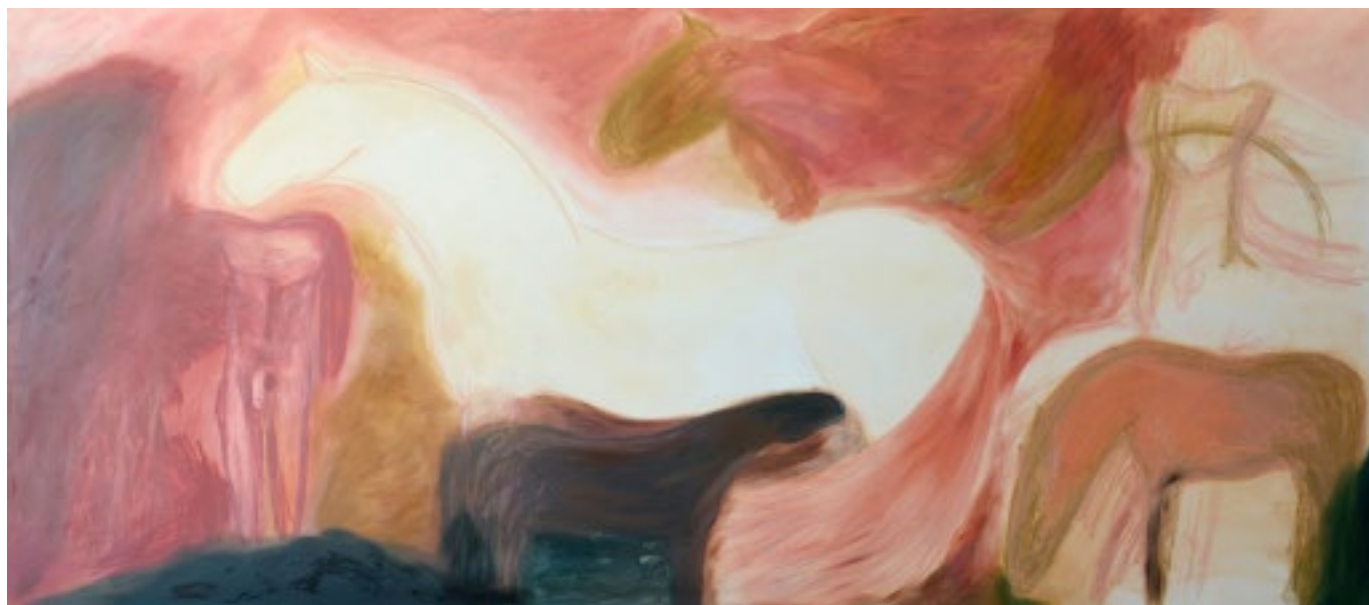
We certainly are in immediate need of a conversation about our personal situations relevant to various mental and emotional exhaustions, and a visual conversation via art is most welcome. It would be wonderful to see this



Siebren Versteeg, Today's Paper (with flies) (2019); custom software (color, silent), computer, screen, internet connection; Dimensions variable; edition 3 of 5, 2AP; \$42,500

topic extended in a larger, more direct and cohesive exhibit, and it is most gratifying to see the start of this discussion at the Andrew Rafacz Gallery.

Other artists included in the exhibit are Jeremy Wever, Rachel Schmidhofer and Liz Nielsen.



Dominique Knowles, Vadhsthana VAM (2019), oil on canvas, 84 x 180", \$22,000

SCOUTING THE BLOGS WITH MIKLOS LEGRADY

Information Theory



Miklos Legrady: acrylic on canvas

In 1948, Claude Shannon of Bell Telephone Laboratories published two papers on a system known as Information Theory. In his 1948 paper, Shannon proved that noise or haphazard disorder contained a message. Most interesting of all Shannon's math equations for information were identical to the equations devised in the Victorian era to explain entropy. The equation was a mathematical expression of the tendency of all things to become less orderly, suggesting that chaos is the destiny of all things¹.

There is something that exists in the middle of noise, that operates even in entropy, emits information, a universal formative pattern which directs how any process executes its function.

Information can be wrong, mistaken, faulty, and when this occurs it's illogical. As Jeremy Campbell wrote, "...since all things in the world have a tendency to become entropic, disorderly, their random deviations from order must be corrected continually."

We see this in art when Jerry Saltz says that "artists are de-skilling like crazy" and Benjamin Buchloh says that skill is not required in art. A reality check will answer Jerry Saltz that no amount of de-skilling will bring about the golden age of the simple mind, those lacking skill will never do better than a professional. Buchloh need to brush up his etymology because the word "art" itself means skill; the art of cuisine, the art of conversation. Information theory tells us that information can be wrong, right, or both, and needs constant reality checks. The art world seems to have neglected these lessons and it is now time that we verify our assumptions, instead of accepting the lazy thinking earlier generations passed down to us.

1-Jeremy Campbell, Grammatical Man, p18-19, Colin and Campbell (1982)

NEW YORK FEELS EMPTY NOW

It's 1995. I'm with my brother in Soho; I live five minutes away on Stanton St. he's on Wooster St. in the thick of it. Broome Street warehouses washed by winter sun, that cold yellow light on white painted brick. We visit one gallery after another. George says it feels like post-apocalyptic times. Money's gone, the markets crashed, art world's dead and we're sifting through the ashes. We talked of Baldessari, his followers. Of the patronage system. Some of these galleries are museums, temples, fragments, histories, bread crumbs.

Aesthetics has a bad name in our time. Treated like a distant uncle who embarrassingly plagues our family

Aesthetics has a bad name in our time.

Treated like a distant uncle who embarrassingly plagues our family gatherings, it's seen as a weakness, leftover from patriarchal times when wives dragged their husbands to the opera.

gatherings, it's seen as a weakness, leftover from patriarchal times when wives dragged their husbands to the opera. At present the problem's misunderstood, the players confused. In fact at a discussion presented by the



acrylic on cardboard

School of Visual Arts in New York, a panel of distinguished critics, learned art historians, and respected professors could not define the term. The lecture's theme (Crisis In Aesthetics) was referred to, drawn from, sketched lightly but never defined, as if unimportant. Aesthetics was unacceptable in 1995. One audience member suggested dispensing with aesthetics altogether, but that's like hanging first, trial after ...

I'd studied at Rochester's Visual Studies Workshop and apprenticed at Afterimage. There I met Charles Desmarais, a Cardinal Richelieu type upset by the chaos of sensual creation, one who finds order in concepts. Unfortunately Charles later occupied some influential posts. Enough to say that over three decades while on his watch, photography was deprecated, renamed as a lens-based practice that has very little to do with either beauty or fascination; photography transitioned into postmodernity and fell in status from art form to a simple document and tool.

Forward in time 22 years later, New York looks like a ship on waves of art history with crests and troughs. Still in conflict, New York has been an ongoing art disintegration that yet never loses mass because of its inner strength, continually refolding on itself, penetrating its own core then exploding to its perimeter to be drawn back like a solar flare. But California is now the solar core... because it's warmer down there, and... Hollywood. In the 1950s

postwar era, poor Europe, ravaged and beaten, was again battered and fell under the onslaught of CIA dollars promoting American art. Minerva, French art muse (that slut), followed the money landing in New York but moving to where the sun does shine, California. Which turned out to be surface and superficial.

Now SoCal is guilty of Conceptual art. Ideas belong to literature, to writing. Visual art is sensory, it's about seeing, not reading. California breathed renewed life into flawed European theory. New York and California ring empty because postmodernism bears the seeds of its own demise in the nihilism of its mandate. Alarm bells ring at Marshall McLuhan's famed 1960s observations, often mis-attributed to Warhol, that art is anything you can get away with. Such ethics say the arts pioneered a psychology of denial whose mature form finds expression in Trump's post-truth politics. Did postmodernism foster a cult of denial that now has taken presidential form? The canary in the mine is coughing.

The Book of Changes is one of the Five Classics of Confucianism. Of self-destruction it writes that nihilism is not destructive to the good alone but also destroys itself; that which lives solely by negation cannot continue on its own strength alone. We now reclaim the art dialectic, the etymological, to create a new art movement on postmodern ashes.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PERMANENCE

Liviana Martin

Antonio Canova and Bertel Thorvaldsen, the two sculptors currently on show in Milan, share the the desire - together with the ability - to capture ideals in marble, to make beauty permanent. When I left the gallery I found myself spontaneously comparing this search for infinity with various forms of contemporary art - its transience, preoccupation with the finite, and the typically perishable materials today's artists choose to work with. Bio art, edible art, land art are artistic proposals that are deliberately designed to disappear, communicating the awareness of human transience; every form of eternity has disappeared, testifying to our dark times. This exhibition therefore offers an escape from the contemporary - albeit a temporary one.

The unforgettable setting of the Gallerie d'Italia in Milan is also home to a bank designed by the early 20th-century architect Luca Beltrami. Its stained glass, marble and Art Nouveau decorations are outstanding, creating a worthy atmosphere for an equally outstanding exhibition: two neoclassical sculptors, Canova and Thorvaldsen, are compared through 160 works on loan from the Hermitage in St Petersburg, the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, and the Gypsotheca in Possagno in the province of Treviso.

Antonio Canova (1757-1822) was born in Possagno and moved to Rome in 1781. He was a small, thin man with thinning hair, but with incredible energy and talent: reports from the time always describe him covered in white marble dust and carrying his hammer and chisel in the large laboratory where he worked. Here his masterpieces were born, figures of perfection frozen forever in marble. The marble came from Carrara quarries and was was expensive and difficult to transport. Therefore, before sculpting it, Canova prepared a sketch on paper, followed by a clay draft, which was shown to the customer for approval. A true businessman, he also had a catalogue of works the buyer could choose from. From there he made a plaster model, which was covered with metal pins, the so-called reperes, or markers, which served as indicators for making the marble copy. At this



*Antonio Canova, Le Grazie, (1812–1816), marble, 182 x 103 x 46 cm, St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum
Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum 2019*

point his assistants rough-hewed the marble. The last phase, however, was always done by the artist, who filed and smoothed the marble, sometimes even passing a kind of wax over it to make it as polished as possible, as resplendent as human skin.

The idea of reproducibility arises from the possibility of making multiple sculptures from the same sketch: the seriality that characterizes pop art has distant roots.

Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), arrived in Rome from his native Copenhagen in 1797 and employed several artists



*Bertel Thorvaldsen, Ebe, (1819–1823), marble,
156,5 x 51,2 x 59,5 cm, Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum*

as assistants in his laboratory. For 20 years these two sculptors set the standard in the artistic field and challenged each other on similar themes, even if the realisation of their works was different. Both neoclassical artists, their favourite themes were from Greek mythology. While imitating the ancient Greeks, however, they reinterpreted the universal themes of mythology in a modern way. The cult of beauty, in a period devastated by wars, is considered a fundamental remedy for humanity, as a balm to heal wounds: religious ideals were replaced by the ideals of classicism and civil values.

The layout of the central exhibition hall is stunning: in the vast Art Nouveau setting the white marble of the statues contrasts with the black pedestals on which they are placed. If we look closely at Canova's *Three Graces*

(which represent the three virtues of women of the time, beauty, intelligence, or, according to another interpretation, the secular version of the Trinity), we see three girls perfect in form and sensuality, with elaborate hairstyles and serene faces. The girls dance to silent music, the same that, according to Plato, resounds in the Universe. It seems that human warmth is locked forever in the marble.

Thorvaldsen, who addressed the same subject, added the statue of Cupid, god of love, seated on the ground by the girls. The figures, although beautiful, are still and without any hint of dance; they are more chaste and less expressive, even if their bodies are just as perfect. The sensuality of Mediterranean art can also be compared with the greater coolness of Nordic art when looking at the two sculptors' interpretations of Venus. The goddess of love who comes out of the waters covering herself with a cloth is the picture of natural femininity for Canova, while Thorvaldsen portrays her in a more conventional manner and over posed.

We stop each in front of the two depictions of Cupid and Psyche, which in Apuleius' fable represent love and the soul. Canova's Psyche is holding a butterfly (the soul), which the two lovers observe intently; in Thorvaldsen's version, Psyche holds an amphora and appears more concrete, less dreamy.

As well as mythological subjects, the two artists created sculptures of powerful men. Canova was commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte to create a bust of the emperor, followed by a colossal statue that was to be housed in the Louvre. While the bust was enormously successful, so much so that 22 copies were made, the statue of Napoleon as a victorious Mars did not please the customer. After the defeat of Waterloo, it was donated to the winner of the battle, the Duke of Wellington, who knocked down a wall of his house to get it in: Wellington is said to have always wanted to have Napoleon prisoner in his house. Thorvaldsen in turn portrayed Napoleon with the insignia of command and power.

As evidence of the success that the two artists had in life, a series of portraits depicting them and sculptures made by their followers are also on display.

*Canova/Thorvaldsen - The Birth of Modern Sculpture
Gallerie d'Italia, Milan, until March 15, 2020, admission 10 euros*

IN SEARCH OF A VISUAL REWARD



Frank Stella: Damascus Gate (1970)

Writing about art is an art in itself. I join in with the cliché, 'I don't know much about art but I know what I like.'

For years I assumed that it's in the seeing that believing comes. Now I feel it's become the other way round, as in religion where believing affects the seeing, perhaps. The media critics are the priests of the arts and they have the power to turn art into an illustration for their text. Has modern art joined forces with the literary movement? To get the right understanding, must I first read about the artist and what it is I am staring at?

How dare I put forth the notion that modern art has trouble standing upright without an explanation next to it? Is it more complex than that? As the collective consciousness grows and evolves, we too develop and evolve and art plays a function in mirroring this.

While we drop what's unnecessary, release old, well-worn ideas, hone down the elaborate, streamline and smooth

off towards less-is-more imagery, is there a place still for the detailed and realistic art that does not require explanations? Even recording epic events in paintings is no longer vitally important, for we have the smart phone to capture this.

Then where are we heading? Like weather predictions, none of us really knows what to expect from the future. But because we aren't comfortable in the not knowing - we have allowed the rise of a myriad of 'experts' who inform and direct us to 'believe' in the latest trends and what is deemed worthy and unworthy. Are the beneficiaries of these predictions related to a financial set-up already agreed with an established gallery?

Looking at the newest, most innovative creations emerging from inside art college should be exciting, uplifting and thought provoking. Great Britain won its greatness not only for penetrating the globe with colonisation but also for its edgy artists, writers, designers

and musicians. Years of studying, exploring and experimenting in the colleges were meant to nurture the imagination to flourish in nourishing soil. But has the consensus become so loud and so influential that the art being produced today is a weak response from nervous students, many of whom have had to borrow heavily for financial support to study?

Degree shows often reflect this restriction in what should be the blossoming of new ideas. Instead, like badly grown seedlings struggling in weak soil, exhibitions show creations that are diluted forms from yesteryear, installations accompanied with scraps of paper explaining something that could resemble the contents of the artist's waste bin.

How difficult is it for the newly forming artists to puncture the accepted already-done art? And is it ever possible to do this? Consider Solomon's famous dictum: *"There's nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."*

This is often used as a world-weary complaint about life's monotony. When Solomon wrote the statement, he was emphasising the cyclic nature of human life on earth and the emptiness of living only for the 'rat race'.

Our ability to express something beyond what has already

been created is perhaps an impossible task. Instead, art must keep evolving in its repetition of what has already been, but with the creator's own signature to make it different. Maybe all that is lacking today is the confidence to go against the consensus by expressing the imagination without needing validation?

The struggling artist determined to reject commercial viability, despite not being able to afford this independence of expression, is obliged to continue the 'starving artist in the garret' cycle until they are 'discovered' and given recognition. But then, doesn't the neat packaging from the critics' acceptance appear?

When Miles Davis stopped mimicking his heroes and waiting for approval from the critics he said, "Man, sometimes it takes you a long time to sound like yourself. Don't play what's there; play what's not there."

Perhaps what needs to be addressed first, before any attempt to create, is how to gain confidence in the self's desire to express the imagination. Sadly, this often doesn't arise until becoming financially comfortable.

Sea Warrior

Sea Warrior is the preferred pseudonym of one of Penzance writers' group.

WE ALL SUFFER FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS

The Exchange's part of this show had a recording of Grace Pailthorpe explaining in detail one of Mednikoff's paintings, using Freudian and Kleinian ideas about everything relating to his experience as a baby, his earliest supposed feelings about his mother, his faeces etc. She speaks with a remarkable certainty about the meaning of each element of the picture - I suppose based on prolonged therapeutic discussions with the artist, 23 years her junior, with whom she shared her life.

Pailthorpe and Mednikoff had a long relationship and were unusual people and artists, seeking to understand themselves and the havoc of World War II and fascism and to use art to help people in general. Both artists' works have similarities and use figurative surreal imagery, either in black and white lino cuts, or rather delicately detailed paintings in which breasts and phallic symbols, mountains and animals make a whole narrative world on which they made detailed notes from their psychological perspective.

They had the large ambition to understand the roots of



Reuben Mednikoff's The Bengal Colonel (1947)

fascism, seeing it as stemming from an immature inability to share the good things in life, like a baby's incoherent unconscious jealousy and fear of losing its food. I know



Grace Pailthorpe's Wind (1935)

from reading Alice Miller that child-rearing practices in the early 20th century were often harsh and threatening - depriving children of warmth and affection. Historians suggest that Hitler was subjected to cruelty which resulted in him developing a self protecting armour and later unleashing his early repressed rage with terrible consequences.

Grace Pailthorpe also suffered a lot as a child in a bleak Plymouth Brethren household.

I enjoyed the show's two parts much more than I thought I would and was told many visitors said the same. There was quite a bit to read, but the liveliness and colour of the paintings and the attractive way they were displayed in blocks, sometimes on different strongly coloured wall

areas, made the experience enjoyable. It made me want to share a meal and talk with these two people.

The catalogue looked fascinating and had sold out.

The artist had some contact with the French surrealists and there was a Canadian radio broadcast which visitors could listen to in the gallery. Pailthorpe was described as the most important English Surrealist - but in reference books on surrealism Pailthorpe is rarely mentioned. The pair used surrealist methods such as spontaneous working to reach the unconscious.

At Newlyn the visitor was invited to try a two-minute doodle with materials provided or to add to a book of drawings with three interchangeable parts - one of the surrealists' games.

This show made me regard the two artists with respect, reconsider the benefits of surreal experimentation, remember the power of art therapy and enjoy interacting with these works.

Mary Fletcher

Grace Pailthorpe and Reuben Mednikoff: 'A tale of Mother's Bones'

Newlyn Gallery and The Exchange, Penzance

October 19, 2019 - January 4, 2020

This show toured from Camden Arts Centre and De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea.

(Mary Fletcher worked for a time as an art therapist with adults with mental health difficulties.)

Paintings by Sarah Bell
at Chapel Street
Art Penzance
chapelstreetart.co.uk

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The garden *meadow 87*

GRACE HARTIGAN: RELUCTANT FEMINIST

James Cassell

Critical reappraisals of women artists continue unabated, as they legitimately challenge historical omissions and, in some cases, neglect.

In this environment the American University Museum in Washington DC mounted, in fall 2019, an exhibit of so-called 'second generation' Abstract Expressionist artists, Grace Hartigan and Helene Herzbrun. (This review concerns Hartigan only.)

It would be hard to argue that Hartigan has suffered neglect. Nevertheless, past focus has been on her work from the 1950s. The AU show was a corrective, including mostly post-50s works that were done after Hartigan had left New York and settled in Baltimore. The show also attempted to bolster Hartigan's feminist credentials.

Hartigan is an ideal subject for a revisit. She emerged in the late 1940s and early 50s, among a mostly male peer group that included Pollock, deKooning and Newman, as an artist to be reckoned with. She defied Clement Greenberg's orthodoxy about pure abstraction versus representation (she eventually successfully fused the two in her work), and was stung by his belittling of female artists (Greenberg nevertheless included her in the significant New Talent exhibition at the Kootz Gallery in New York in 1950).



Grace Hartigan *Beware of the Gifts* (1971) Oil on canvas

It is understandable that Hartigan would be placed under the feminist umbrella, with such works as *Pallas Athena-*

Earth (1961), *Joan of Arc* (1973) and *Marilyn* (1962), all of which reference powerful female icons.

Writing in the catalog for the AU show, art historian Norma Broude points out that Hartigan saw *Marilyn* as embodying both the private and public sides of the actress, as well as suggesting the dangers of fame. Her *Marilyn* is a counterpoint to Warhol's silkscreens, which seemed novel at the time, but now look transparently empty. De Kooning's 1954



Grace Hartigan (1957)

painting of Monroe, stylistically akin to his other paintings of women, also falls short, giving the viewer no real insight into the subject. In contrast, Hartigan's *Marilyn* shows empathy, complexity, nuance and depth. Broude describes the ambivalence Hartigan felt about feminism, however. Hartigan was wary of the attention of feminists and refused to be categorized. But she is, Broude argues, an artist feminists can claim as one of their own. Broude goes further and suggests that Hartigan's continued importance in art history may very well depend on the role of feminists in championing her work. Maybe, maybe not. Hartigan's work measures up as well as any of the Big Boys of her generation. What's more, she was receiving a great deal of recognition even in the pre-feminist period.

It would be fair to say that Hartigan, a gutsy artist who followed her own path—not one laid down by critics or the New York art market—identified with historically important women of might, courage and grace because that's who she was. Labels won't suffice. Hartigan was one of a kind.

Grace Hartigan and Helene Herzbrun: Reframing Abstract Expressionism, September 3-October 20, 2019 American University Washington D.C.

THE NETHERLANDS

FISH FOR ART

Ben Russo

Haarlem, a small medieval Dutch city with more than seven and half centuries of history, can be found between Amsterdam and the sandy beaches of the North Sea. For most of its existence, Haarlem, like many similar municipalities scattered throughout the Netherlands, was a trading post for goods and services in its province. Haarlem was known for its textiles, spun with the assistance of strategically placed windmills along the Sparne river and the city's canal system. Flowers, especially tulips and daffodils, and fresh fish, were also significant and eventually took over the textile markets. Both were traded in the main square and still are today. From the mid-16th-century, Haarlem started to flourish, and the Dutch Golden Age was just about to ignite, bringing wealth to all the local markets, including the art market. The first Dutch art museum opened in Haarlem after artists such as Frans Hals, Jacob van Ruisdael, and Adriaen van Ostade called the city their home. From then on, art flourished in the homes of wealthy merchants and spilled out in the streets, earning it the nickname 'the city of the golden streets'.

For over 450 years a little glass and iron building called the Vishal has stood alongside the flower market and the north-east wall of the main square's cathedral. Purposely erected in the shadow of the cathedral's tall walls so as to shelter its contents during the day, the Vishal was Haarlem's enclosed fish market, run exclusively by women. The fish was initially supplied by fisherwomen from Zandvoort, a tiny town on the North Sea about nine kilometres from Haarlem, and subsequently from other nearby areas. Almost daily until the middle of the 19th century, these brave women would walk from the windy seashores of the North Sea to Haarlem with buckets full of fish. They would cross the land over odd footpaths dug through the sand dunes and over the flower fields to trade their product.

About 30 years ago, the local diet, which had been based on fish, changed, and the demand for fish decreased, ultimately forcing the market to close. With financial help from the municipality, the Frans Hals Museum was able to step in and create a new vision: De Vishal (Fish



*Interior, Vishal Gallery
(image: wiki commons)*

Market). As well as the name, the museum preserves the structure, beams, and cobbled stone floor of the old market, together with all the marks and signs of its previous life, but with new glass and air-conditioning comparable to any high-end gallery. Since 1993 the Vishal has been known as an exhibition space for contemporary, modern art. The Vishal Association is open (for a small fee) to every artist who lives in Haarlem, and is free to local art students. The space is open every day, special events are held just about every month, and the community of contributing professional artists has around 150 members and is always open to newcomers and ideas. The members organize about 10 free public exhibitions a year, and offer options to rent the space for private viewing and events. In recent years, under the direct supervision of Frans Hals museum director Ann Demeester, De Vishal has grown into a place where local art students can perform and display any type of art, including music, poetry, film, and theatre.

*The Vishal Gallery, Haarlem, The Netherlands
<https://www.devishal.nl/>*

RAPHAEL IN MILAN

Graziella Colombo



The School in Athens. *Cartton. Painted* (c 1508)

Five hundred years ago on Good Friday, 6 April 1520, Raffaello Sanzio, known as Raphael, died in Rome, leaving the world in sorrow. This year Italy celebrates this great painter and architect, master of beauty and perfection. Raphael, son of the court painter Giovanni Santi, was born and trained in Urbino, a small, picturesque town in central Italy. Italy then had many important noble families such as the Medici in Florence, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the Sforza in Milan, along with the power of the Popes in Rome. This country produced many artists and was considered the fulcrum of taste, creativity and beauty in all the arts. There was enormous cultural capacity, though it was constantly subject to foreign invasions and conquest.

Raphael travelled widely, like many other artists in those socially and politically stormy times. After completing his artistic education in Perugino's workshop in Perugia, he moved first to Siena, then to Florence and lastly to Rome, called by Pope Julius II. There he stayed until his premature death at the age of 37. He didn't live to see the political decline of Italy and remained the great star of Italian culture and art of the Renaissance with his ability to make reality appear as if it were supernatural or divine, shown through his use of colour and the lightness and perfection of his shapes and compositions. He left an immense and wonderful legacy to the world.

Milan holds two masterpieces by Raphael. One is the preparatory pasteboards for one of the frescoes in the

'Stanza della Segnatura' in the Papal apartments of the Vatican. The fresco, *The School of Athens*, was painted between 1509 and 1511 and is one of the most fascinating and symbolic frescoes of the 'Stanze'. It shows a large multitude of philosophers, thinkers and geometers of antiquity, including Socrates, Diogenes, Pythagoras, Ptolemy, Zoroaster. Plato and Aristotle are placed centrally in the composition. Plato points to the heavens, the world of ideas, Aristotle to the earth, the world of experience. In this work Raphael tried to represent the search for truth, following the classical spirit of the Renaissance. The recently restored pasteboard for the painting is in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan and presents the same scenes and almost all the characters depicted on the fresco. It lacks the imposing architecture that surrounds the figures. There must have been a preparatory pasteboard for the architectural background, but it was probably lost. The restored pasteboard is also important since it is the only remaining one of such a huge dimension and is well preserved.

The second work, in the Pinacoteca of Brera in Milan, is *The Marriage of the Virgin* (1504), one of Raphael's most famous paintings, created when he was 21. He was inspired by the altarpiece that Perugino had painted for the Cathedral of Perugia. This oil on panel, with perfect perspective, shows a landscape with a circular building that fills the space. In the foreground people are gathered to take part in Mary and Joseph's wedding; the figures are



The Marriage of the Virgin. The Pinacoteca of Brera in Milan

relaxed and harmonious. The whole composition is quite beautiful, as are the colours, gestures and the delicate faces.

These celebrations that Milan dedicates to Raphael are the right reward for a magnificent, admired and much copied artist, who was said to be 'divine'.

WORDS LEAD TO ART IN LAKE LUGANO

Anna Maria Benedetti

I was walking along Lake Lugano when two words on a sign caught my attention: Venice and Mušič. One reminds me of a magical city, the other intrigues me. I enter the doorway underneath these words and find myself in the rooms of a Foundation where a number of small paintings are on display: some portray stunning views of Venice, while others are synthetic works that recall the Byzantine tradition. The gouaches are bright, while the watercolours are in muted colours using few brush strokes.

Giacomo Guardi's gouaches of Venetian landscapes (Venice 1764 - Venice 1835) are compared with Zoran Mušič's watercolours (Gorizia 1909 - Venice 2005). Guardi's works strive to give those who return from the 'grand tour' a memory of the beautiful city, Venice; while Mušič's watercolours are in search of a moment of joy. Almost two centuries of history separate these works.

The exhibition gives us much more than the beauty of the paintings: it juxtaposes a time when the grand tour expressed the desire to get to know Italy, the bel paese, and the time when a man wants to return to life after his experience at Dachau concentration camp. Beauty becomes re-found joy found after profound pain.

Venice, a city that has known how to survive over the centuries, is a unique subject for artworks conveying totally different feelings. The gouaches of Guardi are the result of his search for a life, those of Mušič the recognition due to an artist of international standing, but little known in Italy. Born in Habsburg Gorizia, Mušič traveled extensively and experienced first-hand the geopolitical and cultural changes

in his land, the places of his childhood; Venice is one of them, and appears often in his works. As he said, "I capture" - not the landscape but the "deeply rooted origins", a sweet remedy for the traumas of existence. The theme of remembrance is perhaps the guiding thread of this exhibition. What would our lives be without memory?

Golden angels and cherubs peer out from the polygonal pillars of the room, joyful custodians, presences, messengers between the earthly and spiritual worlds, objects of the soul, an affectionate tribute to Anna Braglia. An oil by Bernardo Canal, a Madonna and child by Antonio Guardi and a very rare gouache by Joseph Baudin complete an exhibition that gives us serenity and hope in our innermost depths.

Angeli a Venezia. Guardi e Mušič nell'universo di Anna Braglia, Fondazione Braglia, Lugano, Switzerland, September 19 - December 21, 2019

We would like to wish all our Italian writers in Milan and elsewhere, well in these worrying times.



View of the Ponte di Rialto by Giacomo Guardi



Anna Maria Benedetti - Zoran Music, Chiesa di San Marco

BRUEGHAL THE ELDER: THE FAMILY MAN

Susana Gómez Laín

This exhibition is fortunate in its location: the 19th-century Italianate Palacio de Gaviria, which is at heart of the old Austrias neighbourhood in Madrid - the most historic part of the city, close to the famous Puerta del Sol and Plaza Mayor squares.

I'm mentioning these surroundings because I think in the visual experience of art they are as important as the premises for the exhibition itself, predisposing the public physically and mentally to what they will see and feel.

There is also an historical connection here between art and architecture: Pieter Brueghel the Elder and his family of painters and printers, born in Flanders between the 16th and 17th century, were ruled by the Spanish Habsburg kings and therefore linked to the site and the city, its culture and its history.

You will see two art events at the same time: first, around 100 paintings and drawings by the Brueghel family, together with 20 pieces by contemporaries such as Rubens, Bosch and David Teniers the Younger; second, the magnificent, luxurious, somewhat decadent and gothic Gaviria palace, built for the Marquis of Gaviria by architect Aníbal Álvarez Bouquel in the mid-19th century. With an Italian Renaissance aesthetic, this is a golden ghostly place, designed to host great feasts for aristocrats and royalty, then converted to a nightclub in the 1990s and finally rescued for art by the Italian company Arthemisa, which specialises in staging major art events. Don't miss the toilets on the first floor which are bizarre, and watch your step because you will be looking up at the ceilings without noticing the floor.

For me, the achievements of this dynasty of Flemish artists were not only artistic but also social and economic. Artistically, Pieter the Elder, the head of the family, gave new life to colours red, green and blue, so that his work is



Still life of fruits and exotic bird (1670)

recognisable by the hue of those colours. He also made original use of dull browns, greys and beige, making them a neutral background for the saturated colours. He mixed many techniques and materials - ink, chalk and charcoal on paper, oils, drawing, printing - in a way that was unusual at the time. His aesthetic, inspired by Hieronymus Bosch and Mannerism, is more suggestive of a modern comic illustrator than the then-dominant Italian fashion for idealised human bodies. I think he would have made a perfect illustrator for Swift's masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels*.

In his paintings he turned his back on aristocracy, nudes and portraits and made visible the village people (soldiers, peasants, drunks, hunters, craftsmen, etc.); people engaged in ordinary tasks, participating in everyday activities and feasts, revealing their emotions, sins and weaknesses. This was artistically unknown as subject matter at that time. In the same canvas, he describes many different scenes from daily life, each one telling a story, sometimes in an ironical, sarcastic and critical way (he was a very learned man, of stoic philosophy and follower of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas Moore). The work is often full of symbols and allegories, describing the spice of life and its shadows that the viewer must discover for him or herself, as if it were a puzzle to



El baile nupcial (1566)

unravel.

Economically, his family was to transform art practice into a big family business for the first time in history, making copies of the works for sale, producing substantial earnings that lasted for generations. His two sons followed in his artistic footsteps. The first-born, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, made copies of his father's paintings with commercial success. The second, Jan, dedicated himself to nature and developed his painting technique with such excellence that it is nicknamed 'Velvet Brueghel' for its tactile textures on oil. His son, Jan Brueghel the

Younger, inherited his workshop and joined the prestigious Guild of Saint Luke, finished his father's works and created a new style of his own, emphasising flowers. Finally, you will see beautiful still lifes of flowers and fruits signed by his descendants Ambrosius and Abraham. It is sometimes difficult to make out who is who, but the challenge is worthwhile.

'Brueghel: the Fascinating World of Flemish Art' at Palacio de Gáviria, Calle Arenal, Madrid – until April 12

QUOTE of the Month:

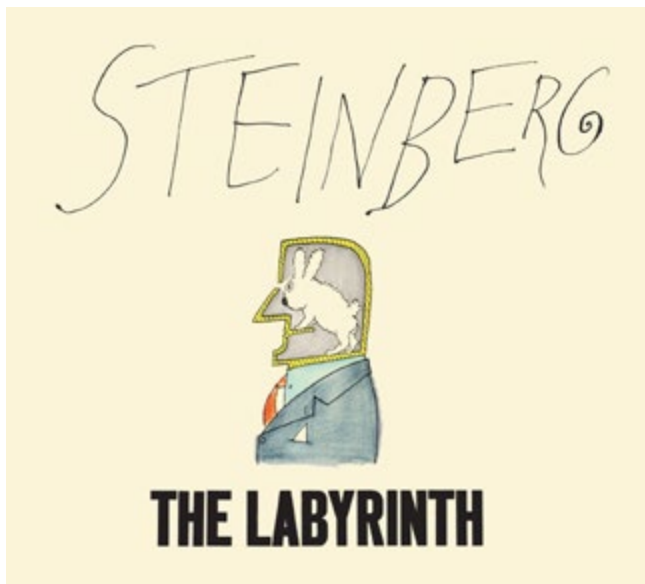
"It is a mistake to think of publicity supplanting the visual art of post-Renaissance Europe; it is the last moribund form of that art."

John Berger, Ways of Seeing

BOOK REVIEW:

SAUL STEINBERG'S *THE LABYRINTH*

Frances Oliver



The Labyrinth, introduction by Nicholson Baker, afterword by Harold Rosenberg

Among my parents' art books was a big book of drawings I loved as a child and now have and love still: Saul Steinberg's *The Labyrinth*. It has just been republished by the New York Review of Books.

Saul Steinberg (1914-1999) was from a Romanian Jewish family. He studied architecture in Milan and in 1958 fled Fascism to land eventually in the USA. Steinberg spoke of himself as a 'modernist without portfolio'. He worked in many media - did gallery exhibitions, ads, stage design and numerous covers for *The New Yorker* magazine, covers he continued to produce until the end of his life. Most of the drawings in *The Labyrinth* first appeared in that magazine.

The new edition of Steinberg's book has an introduction and an afterword. My original edition has no text except a short one on the flyleaf:

'The Labyrinth is a continuation of Steinberg's autobiography. As in his former books, he is discovering and inventing a great variety of events:

Illusion, talks, music, women, cats, dogs, birds, the cube, the crocodile, the museum. Moscow and Samarkand

THE LUMINOUS IVORIES
VIOLINS, HARP AND HORN
ALL CAUGHT IN A MOONLIGHT
WHICH WILL LAST UNTIL DAWN.

LYNDA GREEN

(winter, 1956), other Eastern countries, America, motels, baseball, horse racing, bullfights, art, frozen music, words, geometry, harpies, etc.'

And that is introduction enough. I remember an introduction from an elementary school art class: 'Take a line for a walk.' Sometimes this is all Steinberg does. But with genius. The line might even remain just a straight line across a page but begin as a clothesline with laundry, continue as a table top with objects on it, and end as the top of a railway aqueduct with scenery seen through the arches below. An unbroken line of narrow vertical curves becomes a very individual little dog. A family of four – and their dog – are pictured simply through connected rectangles. All Steinberg's individual figures are done with a minimum of lines; part of a body suggests the whole and a mouth-line and eye-dots the face. A hat, a triangle of arm with fingers holding a wineglass or a cigarette make a distinct, even archetypical, character. There are other figures with comic-strip speech balloons containing not words but intricate doodles, all again delineating a personality. Sometimes the balloon extends into a pedestal or a mound on which the speaker stands. Steinberg's landscapes, street scenes and crowd scenes are equally funny, imaginative and evocative. I especially liked his Russia and Samarkand with cupolas, heroic statues, stocky fur-hatted Muscovites. For me, under the amazing inventiveness, ingenuity, and often sardonic wit, there is also something deeper, a nameless nostalgia and wistfulness, a child-like wonder at the whole colour, drama and absurdity of the human condition. But that may be just the response of my own Central European soul. In any case, it's a marvellous book, and I hope that in its wake Steinberg's two earlier volumes of autobiographical drawings will be republished too. The one called *The Passport* might be particularly appropriate for our grim age of migration and refugees.

letters@newartexaminer.net

VITO, VIDEO, AND YOU

Alexander Stanfield

Vito Acconci is a name you should know. A pioneer of conceptual art, his career lasted over 50 years and encompassed poetry, video, performance, installation, design, and architecture. As a trailblazer of video art, during the 1960s and 1970s he used a new creative medium to produce unprecedented works. Acconci understood the one-on-one interaction of video, despite its impersonal connotation. This understanding is a key component to his piece *Theme Song* (1973).

Acconci created a unique - if somewhat uncomfortable - viewing experience with this single channel video/performance. Lying on the floor, Acconci situated the camera right in front of his face, bringing the viewer up close for this personal encounter. The structural aspect of the frame, created by this perspective, fits with the intimacy of the setting. There is an intense tone throughout the video and does not let the mood shift, showing that he is in control of the planned performance. Throughout the piece, Acconci speaks to the camera as if he was speaking to the viewer. The dialogue he develops revolves around the idea of the un-named and unspecified viewer creating a relationship together. A key aspect of his monologue, and the implied dialogue created by the work, is that Acconci never uses gender-specific terms. Using words like 'you,' in combination with the viewer's perspective makes this piece of video almost a face-to-face interaction. Even if this piece was viewed by 20 or 100 guests at a time, Acconci is able to maintain the one-on-one experience. He asks the viewer questions such as "Why won't you join me?" in an attempt to entice them to join him in the visible frame. Throughout the video he keeps himself on the left half of the frame as if we could actually join him. At several points Acconci smokes his cigarette and changes the music playing in the background. Both actions convey a sense of familiarity and informality to the conversation. The intimate and shifting tension he creates changes between themes of manipulation, allurement, and vulnerability.

While watching this video you should ask yourself, 'Do I want to join him?' Of course, you can't join him physically and maybe that's not the goal. Possibly Acconci wants you to join him mentally in his sphere of existence, connecting on a conceptual level. The climax of this piece has a sombre and sad, although effective, feeling as he admits and accepts that 'you' are not joining him after all.



Vito Acconci in 1973 (video still. wiki commons)

This concept of engaging with the viewer intimately and directly, even on an individual basis, using some spoken language, fits within his larger body of work. As an influential video, installation, and performance artist, Acconci seems to utilise all aspects of his practice in this piece. The back-and-forth between invitation and discomfort, wit and unwelcome advances presented by this piece is an example of his ability to display, and to an extent portray, exhibitionism that directly engages with the viewer.

In a pre-social media age Acconci mastered the art of seducing the camera. He recorded himself doing mundane acts by himself, to be shared with anyone who viewed his work. I would argue that he was not an experimental artist, but rather an artist experimenting with what art is. Ironically enough, he has said that he didn't consider what he was doing at the time to be art, more like activities he filmed. He also thought of himself as an art-doer or creator, not an artist. Watching works like *Theme Song* today prove that there is a nostalgia in a medium like single channel video. Certain media are more effective at certain times. A piece like this would not have nearly the same reception in a gallery space now compared to when it was created. Acconci utilised the new medium of video to create a conversation about what art can be and what can be placed in a gallery. By extension he is also creating a dialogue about how the artist and the audience can engage with each other.

FILM REVIEWS 'The Man from Laramie' (1955) directed by Anthony Mann



Which young woman wouldn't like James Stewart to stroll into her store with a delivery in a small town where there's no one to keep law and order and men have to be men in the archetypal glamorous fighting for honour and justice way that this hero embodies?

The wide open country is a dangerous place with Apache attacks and murderous lawless settlers. James Stewart is attacked, threatened, lassoed and dragged through the dust, his wagons burnt and his mules shot dead and that's in the first few minutes.

Distinctly untraumatised, he persists, having revenge in mind for his brother's death and that sort of instant love in his heart that we can't help wanting to work out well with the young woman he met at the store.

I've seen it before and I lie back to enjoy the confident hero's drawling laconic bravery.

When they say we need a winner to lead the Labour Party, and they generally mean by that not a woman and certainly not one who is only 40 years old, is this what

they want? A cowboy with a quick draw to command respect and save us all?

I was brought up with these strong brave heroes, and it didn't really help to make relationships with the opposite sex easy when they were all modelling themselves on men on horses who said very little, didn't commit or settle down and rode off into the sunset.

But haven't things changed?

Who has endless bullets in his six shooter and who's the traitor in the posse?

The mainstream media are the baddies in the black hats. Someone's selling arms to the Apache. The dramatic music is playing and we hope our hero can save the day. It turns out the traitor was the one pretending loyalty, James is galloping over the rocky terrain and the proud Apache are on the skyline. Selling them guns makes the bad one guilty as hell but James lets him go so an arrow finishes him off.

Maybe the girl might pass through Laramie, but James as ever rides away and Cathy O'Donnell has to be content with that. And the election for Labour leader in the UK, hoping to be elected to lead a future government, has one man and three women to choose between. Can a woman be the one although the hero in the stories is almost always male?

Mary Fletcher

JOKER IS NUMBER 9

András B. Vágvölgyi

SYNOPSIS: QUENTIN TARANTINO IS ONE OF MY PERSONAL IDOLS, BUT WITH HIS LATEST HE LET ME DOWN. THE COMIX GENRE ON THE BIG SCREEN WASN'T MY CUP OF TEA.

To begin with I studied filmmaking at Harvard in the academic year 1994-95 under the tutelage of the renowned Yugoslav (quite an anachronism at the time) director Dušan Makavejev. I saw *Pulp Fiction* in the opening weekend in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Great impact, no question. Ten years later in Budapest. I got an offer to write a book on Tarantino's then-oeuvre in six weeks, which I did (*Tarantino mozija*, Jonathan Miller Publishing, Bp 2004). *Kill Bill* was his last pic then and apart from being a female revenge film it was, unquestionably, a very well built East-Asia focused pop cultural encyclopedia.

When I first heard about his Hollywood pic, I became almost hysterical, wow, that will be something, on his home turf with his vast pop-cultural knowledge, this will be something really excellent! A cast with super-star value, an era with so much action, social tension, student uprising & war, good music and so on; a Tarantino film on that could be no less than welcome.

'With whom are with travelling' is a saying in Hungarian filmmaking regarding the protagonist(s). In *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* we're with Brad and to a lesser extent with Leo, and they are great for sure and it's interesting to

see the self-irony in the Eisenhower era TV-western star's downhill path before the New Hollywood had arrived, the western genre's journey to Italy, and the major theme that their antagonists are cast as the murderous Manson family. Which would not be painful, if the main characters were not over-generaic and dennishoppering, making the whole counterculture scene equal to the evil of Charles Manson's psychopathy. As someone who was privileged to know Allen Ginsberg and being a contributore to a portrait documentary on him (*Poet on the Lower East Side*, dir: Gyula Gazdag 1995), plus being the first Hungarian translator of Hunter S. Thompson – visiting twice at Owl Farm, Woody Creek – I just cannot support this. Of course I enjoyed the alternative historical ending, but thats no big news in the Tarantino films since *Inglorious Basterds*; shouldn't this be expected? Out of this musically rich era I would have wanted something more than Paul Revere and this was in sharp contrast to my experience recently of the “final cut” of *Apocalypse Now* where Jim Morrison's still unbeatable after 40 years.

This was Tarantino's first picture without Harvey Weinstein as his producer. And he had a terrible time with Uma Thurman on the set of *Kill Bill* filming her ride in a small convertible. When in the first third of the film Brad changes cars from Leo's Cadillac to a blue VW Karman Ghía, I hoped he had something to say. But no, he hasn't. I had the feeling Tarantino made concessions with this film to Trump's America and it saddened me. Tarantino said, he'll do ten features in his full oeuvre as director, not counting *My Best Friend's Birthday* and making *Kill Bill* one. *Once Upon a Time...* is his ninth. Strongly hope his tenth will be a much stronger farewell to the trade.

The Joker:

As I said earlier I'm no big fan of the Gotham myth. I agree with Martin Scorsese on his opinion regarding comic book pictures. But *Joker* was different, and not just for the genius of Joaquin Phoenix. From the beginning being an anti-American *Psycho*, with the killing of three abusive, girl molesting drunk Wall Street pricks on the subway, whom he shoots point blank, this is a kind of liberation from the world we actually live in. This Joker is a loser and not Heath Ledger's superhero villain of the *Dark Knight*, nor the manipulative, cruel and sexy Jack Nicholson in *Batman*. He's Dostoyevskian; mortified and saddened, exploited and unremembered: a true hero of our time. In a society which is fully against him, the sad white clown is the Travis Brickle of an age which seems to



The Joker official poster

be the 1980s in NYC, but it is as much of the twenty-tens, as ever. De Niro's show host is an Alex Jones-style asshole, “father” Thomas Wayne (Brett Cullen) is a Park Avenue-type character, ‘mom’ (Frances Conroy) is at least as sick as Arthur Fleck, the Joker, with whom we’re traveling. Yes, when there’s a masked revolt on the streets violence is unavoidable, looting is common, and insurance companies try to wheedle out of their contracts. Social tension is massive and a little spark is enough to start a fire in this atmosphere. Too much inequality, too much populist assholeism leads to uncontrollable and subconscious-driven anti-social acts, to revolutions. Brilliant film, brilliant Phoenix who lost more than 45 pounds for the part, which was both physically and mentally challenging, but this was essential for the role, a much more sensitized directing with regard to the zeitgeist compared to what we’ve seen in the Tarantino movie. Not nostalgic 60s with a bright LA sky from Spahn’s Movie Ranch to Cielo Drive, with the distant

sounds of the Vietnam war from the car radio, Todd Philips' movie is about a feasible future. In a world which is ruled by the Trumps, Xis, Putins, BoJos, Erdogans & Orbáns, we are in need of this kind of artistic, filmic liberation to cope with the hell of everyday life. The masterly art of director of Photography Lawrence Sher and composer Hildur Guðnadóttir completes the joy of watching this sometimes hardly watchable picture.

Quentin Tarantino by Gage Skidmore



CONTUNED FROM PAGE 3

where I went to film him again. His situation remained perilous but, despite having numerous asylum applications rejected, he had been granted a 'leave of stay' to remain in Luxembourg to complete his education. He is still there today, now completing a degree in economics, but still without legal residency, his future remains uncertain. "I have so much to offer - I just want to be given a chance," he said in one interview. I just hope he will be.

These stories, gathered by myself and a small team of other producers in all corners of the globe, were packaged into a monthly news-magazine series called *21st Century* which was distributed by the UN Department of Public Information to television stations around the world. At one time, we were reaching 80 global networks from Japan to South Africa; Australia to Italy, reaching an audience in the millions. We produced the series in-house in English, French and Chinese, with a version produced for Nigerian television. In addition, multi-language versions were produced by our partnering TV networks for their own audiences.

During my last years at the UN, I was also executive producer of the series, editing and overseeing other producers' pieces, as well as having responsibility for studio recordings with our on-screen presenters – TV journalist Daljit Dhaliwal hosted the English version for several years, and international musical performer Angelique Kidjo the French version.

Eight years after first shooting in Paraguay, I returned to

pick up the story of Julio and Jorge. Jorge had returned to live with his family, a dedicated and loving mother and siblings who, while facing daily economic struggle, had made Jorge the centre of their lives. Meanwhile, the psychiatric hospital no longer housed autistic patients, provision having been made to accommodate them in more community-based houses. It was with great trepidation that we drove one morning to such a house in the countryside where Julio was now living with other disabled people; what would we find, I wondered. As the car parked, I saw a young man watching us. He was wearing clean shorts and a t-shirt and running a soft fleece 'blankie' through his fingers. As I approached, he stared calmly and curiously into my eyes – a moment of profound contentment and gratitude for me that the tormented naked soul of just a few years previously seemed to have disappeared – until he was gently led away for a glass of water by his 'friend', another autistic house-mate who had 'adopted' Julio as his ward. I dared to hope that perhaps our films HAD had impact and perhaps had brought some relief to the people whose stories we had shared.

Gill Fickling

The production of *21st Century* ceased in 2018. The individual films for the series can be viewed on <https://videos.un.org/en/2016/11/28/julio-and-jorge-beyond-the-labyrinth/>
<https://videos.un.org/en/2013/02/07/afghan-migrant-akhtars-story/>

NEWS IN BRIEF

NEW ART EXAMINER NUMBERS

The New Art Examiner passed 757,000 unique visitors in three years in 2020, with an average now of 51,000 a month.

NEW YORK

Our New York Editor, Darren Jones, is now teaching in Baltimore and bringing his students to writers' meetings. The groups in Penzance, Milan, Chicago and New York are now sharing their thoughts and energy.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING US

We give our grateful thanks to Graziella Colombo for waiving her fee for her contribution to the last issue on Shilpa Gupta. Margaret Lanterman and Stephen Luecking and Scott Turri have also waived their fee in recent issues.

100 Years of Bauhaus on Google Arts & Culture

One hundred years after the movement began in Germany, we're still surrounded by Bauhaus ideas about art, technology and craftsmanship, which are reflected in Google Arts & Culture's newest collection—Bauhaus Everywhere.

<https://www.blog.google>

Bait - a win for Cornwall

Cornwall's most successful movie Bait has won a BAFTA.

The film, written and directed by Newlyn's Mark Jenkin, received the award for outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer tonight during the ceremony at the Royal Albert Hall in London, hosted by Graham Norton.

The movie missed out to 1917 in the Outstanding British Film category alongside Elton John biopic Rocketman, hard-hitting Syrian documentary For Sama, Netflix film The Two Popes and Ken Loach's Sorry We Missed You.

But Mr Jenkin picked up the award for outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer with Bait's producers Kate Byers and Linn Waite. (Cornwall Live)



Coronavirus: Russian museums hit as Chinese tourists stay away

Last year, Russian museums were grappling with too many Chinese tourists, but now they are facing a shortage due to Covid-19. The virus was already having an impact on Moscow and St Petersburg's main cultural institutions this month.

Cathedral Square at the Kremlin was empty on a grey afternoon in early February, apart from a tiny group of European visitors. There were none of the Chinese groups that had become a staple at Russian museums and a bane to some Russian tourists, who complained about the difficulty of getting in to the museum. In late January, China banned outbound tour groups, while in February, Russia banned entry for all Chinese citizens to the country in efforts to contain the spread of the virus.(ArtNews)

Naum Gabo at the Tate St Ives
until 3rd May 2020

Review by Ken Turner, pages 5-7

