

# NEW ART examiner

Miklos Legrady - The Art of the Naked Ape  
Al Jirikowic - Joker  
Anna Maria Benedetti - Leonardo Museum  
Colin Fell - Celebrating Isaac Levitan  
Tragédie Française - Frances Oliver  
Hidden Within - Anita Di Rienzo  
Sandra Zalman - The Canonisation of Surrealism in the United States (pt1)  
Ivy Leung - Anonymous Society of Magick, Hong Kong



## JOKER MAN

The  
movie  
about  
us

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.

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## The Attentive Artist



Among the design motifs on Paekche Tiles (Korea 18BCE - 660 CE), landscapes such as this one of mountains, trees, rocks and clouds are common. Eight different kinds of decorative motif have been found on tiles from the Woeri Historical Site, including also ogres, phoenixes, dragons, lotus flowers and clouds.

On this virtually square tile a big rock rises steeply out of the calm water. On a three-peaked mountain we can also see a temple and a monk. Composition and depiction are both very simplified, but still convey the smoothness and stability that characterises the Paekche style.

*(Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan, Japan Society Edition, New York 2003)*

### 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.

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*LYNDA GREEN* is a short story writer who likes to play with reality. Occasionally published, always trying. She also loves films and art, and enjoys being given the opportunity to write reviews for the *New Art Examiner*. She works as a cab driver, a source of endless copy and amusement.

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

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## Speakeasy 34.3

Editor,

John Link hits the nail on the head. It is not possible to quantify Art. American culture is dominated by Wall Street, in which speculation with the help of artificial intelligence can play the market. The study of statistics is the bankers' and speculators' business; universities suffer, in particular art departments, as recruiting of students becomes more difficult. The PR becomes more suspect and unreliable, while we live in a frightening culture as dissent for the ambitious is a fool's game. Unless one has enough money, status or social position to join in the ranks of bourgeois culture, the individual is outside the box. Witness the deplorable conditions of adjunct faculty doomed to a life of the permanent outsider. Once upon a time in the past, art history tells us that artists lived in a culture that was very different from the American culture of today. To put it in a nutshell, the avant-garde is dead or has died. It died on campus. In conclusion, I suggest that any reader consult the comments of Dr Giovanni De Santis on the article, "If it Works, Don't Fix it". His timely comment arrived yesterday on the *New Art Examiner* website.

Derek Guthrie – 10/03/2020

Editor,

The university where I once worked changed out the word 'research' for 'recognition' during early negotiations with the faculty union decades ago. Thus the work an artist might do in the studio can easily be compared to the work a chemist does in the lab. In both cases, the intrinsic value of the outcome does not matter, rather it is the level of recognition it garners. That is fair enough, inasmuch as the university is the employer and the faculty the employees. Besides, it is unreasonable to expect

those who judge the quality of faculty work to know enough about every discipline to form a reasonable evaluation of it all. But it does create some undesirable side effects, namely, faculty in both disciplines will focus their efforts on what's popular, if they want to meet the standard set by their employer. But when the university is interested in originality, this does not seem the best way to achieve it, though originality does sometimes happen anyway, and then manages to get recognition. However, such originality seems easier to come by in the sciences than in art. Perhaps that's because the work of a scientist can be checked with the intellect and repeated by other scientists for validation, while that of the artist can be had only with direct experience which simply is, rather than demonstrated. Experiencing art is also somewhat different for everyone, and radically different some of the time. The satisfaction of joining a herd, er, popular movement, easily passes for the satisfaction that is specific to the direct experience of art. (I wonder how many bananas have now been duct-taped to the ground in the name of teaching advanced art in the university system? And how many found the result to be good?)

Since the work of the art herd often fails to satisfy as art, a fertile solution for universities would be to rehabilitate the popular, but defective, trends that abound. Performative art seems like an almost ideal candidate. Art students (and faculty) could join forces with colleagues in music, theatre, creative writing, and dance to create performances that are really good. All too often performances conducted exclusively by so called visual artists indulge in amateurish methods under the guide of 'originality'. And they are 'original' in so far as they are bad or worse. The race to the bottom paradigm. The worse it gets, the farther out it gets. But by including artists in other disciplines that know what they are doing, "originality" might morph into genuine originality.

Oops, I just woke up and don't know where this dream leads.

John Link –10/03/2020

Editor,

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 – 13/02/2020

## Imagined Emptiness

Editor,

I have yet to experience THIS!.....I always dreamed of seeing Every Earthwork. I do not feel it is too late for me. In all my travels I made happen. ... Never have I been to every Place I NEED and Want to see. To stand in. To smell. Closed eyes....Breath. Breath IN... to FEEL For those of you whom have had the pleasure and Spiritual Luxury of the Spiral Jetty!?! Please tell me why THIS is Not WORTH knowing? Thank you in advance for your thoughts.

Renee Gory 14/04/2020

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## QUOTE of the Month:

The English, no doubt, have a great deal of poverty and squalid misery among them. But it is kept surprisingly out of the ordinary view. Most of it, indeed, is to be found in the towns, and even in them it is concealed in out of the way places and streets seldom entered by the stranger.

**J Fenimore Cooper, 'American and European Scenery Compared'**



MAY 2020  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES:

- 7 **THE ART OF THE NAKED APE** Miklos Legrady, Toronto Editor
- 10 **LEONARDO DA VINCI MUSEUM, MILAN** Anna Maria Benedetti
- 12 **EVERY JOKE HIDES A TRUTH** Al Jirikowic on the movie *Joker*
- 13 **ISAAC LEVITAN, RUSSIAN MASTER** Colin Fell, our new writer in Penzance

DEPARTMENTS:

- 2 **LETTERS**
- 4 **EDITORIAL BY** Pendery Weekes
- 5 **SPEAKEASY BY** Jack Balas
- 36 **NEWSBRIEFS**

REVIEWS:

- 15 **TRAGÉDIE FRANÇAISE** Frances Oliver
- 17 **HIDDEN WITHIN** Anita Di Rienzo
- 18 **THE CANONISATION OF SURREALISM IN THE UNITED STATES** Sandra Zalman
- 20 **ART IN A VIRAL AGE** Katie Zazenski, Ben Russo, Alexander Stanfield, Frances Oliver  
A special SARS-Corvid-19 section
- 24 **INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST DONNA NADEAU** With Daniel Nanavati, European Editor
- 27 **ANONYMOUS SOCIETY OF MAGICK** Ivy Leung, Hong Kong
- 29 **A COUNTRY NO LONGER UNITED** Viktor Witkowski
- 29 **GEORGES DE LA TOUR 'BIDDEN TO THE LIGHT'** Liviana Martin
- 31 **A BRILLIANT MADNESS** Loretta Pettinato
- 34 **NAUM GARBO, DAVID HOCKING, CARLOS ZAPATA IN CORNWALL** Mary Fletcher  
and Lynda Green

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## EDITORIAL

This issue of the *New Art Examiner* is unique. Nearly all of us around the world have been under some form of lock-down. Some of us have been confined to our homes, others are allowed to go out for essential food shopping, to pick up medicines at the pharmacy, or to do exercise once a day, others cannot even take out their dogs for a walk, yet others still are free to go out to their hearts' content as long as they practice social distancing. Sadly, others are dying or are dead. We've lost our sense of freedom, which we endure, hoping to calm the contagion of the virus. Who knows what will work in the end? What's important is that we can come out of our cages, physical and mental, as they are becoming quite confining.

In any case, from Ivy in Hong Kong, to Liviana, Anna Maria, Maria Grazia, Loretta in Milan and Anita in Venice, Katie in Warsaw, Viktor in Vermont, Miklos in Toronto, Ben in Amsterdam, Margaret in Chicago, Al in Washington DC and all of us down here in 'sunny' Cornwall, somehow we have been able to focus and write, not just about the exhibitions we have seen or haven't seen yet, but also about our deepest thoughts on the art world. Time has stopped, or rather, like Magritte's painting, *Time Transfixed*, our time has changed to another dimension - the alone time of isolation and disconnection. We're getting mixed up on what day it is, as they're basically all the same, day runs into night, night runs into day, and then all over again. Only the well-disciplined are doing it right, getting up at the usual hour and going to bed before midnight. However, having time to reflect is a rare gift that we have now, in this world of always running on super busy. Busy has stopped and has been replaced with thought. Our artworld as we have known it will change; the standstill that the virus has given us, with thought necessarily replacing doing, gives us the impetus to make change and to become creative once again. Will there be geopolitical alignments that change the way our world is organized? Will we waste less and finally decide that it's time to fix this environmental mess we have made of our world as we know it? As alligators roam the Fort Myers' shopping mall in Florida (the new shopaholics) and wild boars wander the city streets of Bergamo, our world may take on another dimension. It could become better; let's hope that once this is over, we can focus on what's important to us most and not waste any more time on the superfluous. I agree with what Miklos Legrady said about wanting to start a new art movement of beauty. "Nobel physicist Paul Dirac said whenever he sees beauty in his equations, he knows he's on the right track. Einstein and numerous others concur." Miklos is "testing if the science behind beauty also applies to fine art." Something worth thinking about, even when we are released from our cages.

Pendery Weekes



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.

Jack Balas is an artist with work in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Denver Art Museum, among others, and is a 1995 recipient of a Visual Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

## A proposal to support artists from auctions

### NEWS FLASH:

**SOTHEBY'S AND CHRISTIE'S (ET AL.) ANNOUNCE IMMEDIATE WORLDWIDE PRICE CAP OF \$1M\* FOR ALL WORKS OF ART, FOR ALL ERAS AND FOR ALL TIME.**

(\*realized gain above original purchase price)

Ah, what if? Think about it: an absolute cap of one million dollars (US) in a seller's profit for any and all works of art, going back to pre-history right up until tomorrow. No work of art by Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Basquiat, Hockney, ever again to command more than one million dollars (US) in gain for the consignor over an original purchase price, for any sale or other economic concoction, worldwide. Gone the collector flippers seeking to get rich on the newest and latest young thing just minted or 'emerged' from the art-school-industrial complex. Gone the collectors with penis envy, anxious to spend millions to prove their members are bigger and longer lasting, eager to throw money into the wind (burn it, mulch it, 'activate' it, whatever) so that they can 'share' the latest piece of genius 'with the world.' Gone the auction houses as we know them, but not necessarily to the bonfires ('where collectors gather') to burn evening catalogs. And gone to the legions of artists of all ages playing the scheme of trying to make it to the careerist top, or those who have given up and toil on nonetheless, and those who have simply given up, Period.

### HOW WOULD THIS WORK?

For starters, let's say we actually keep the auction houses in business. And, significantly, the auctions could still go crazy. Bidders would still be able to battle it out with each other for the ultimate ownership of a work of art. BUT, everything over one million dollars above the consignor's original purchase price would be distributed to living, working artists, who would each receive fellowships of \$100,000. If you divide a million dollars by 10, you have

10 fellowships each worth \$100,000, going to 10 living artists. (And to be even more sane, let's give the original artist, if living, one of these 'shares' as well — a.k.a. a resale royalty). If David Hockney's painting *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* sells for \$90 million (as did recently) there would be 890 artist fellowships created out of the \$89 million paid above the purchase price gain capped at \$1 million — 890 artists receiving enough funds to work for two or maybe even three years, allowing them to quit their teaching or barista jobs and freeing up those sectors of the economy for newcomers just out of the art-school-industrial complex. And that's just for a single sale. These fellowships would be awarded by peers through some sincere and competent process (LOL) yet to be determined (let the collectors call them 'death committees') but it could be so much farther-reaching than the National Endowment ever was, and funded, obviously, by the private sector. Recipients could also include art museums, and the millions consignors might forego in appreciated values could be structured as tax deductions. (If a museum itself is the consignor, I would offer it an exemption to the above, i.e. it gets more or all of the profit from a sale, with the stipulation that the funds are used to enhance the institution itself and its collections).

### TELL ME ABOUT THOSE BILLIONAIRES AGAIN?

Again, the billionaire buyers out there would still get to have their fun paddling each other. They could still feel their egos and other private parts swell to engorged proportions, but think about how much goodwill they would be generating in this process. In May of 2017, when Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa bought at auction an untitled painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat for \$110M, he said "When I first encountered this painting, I was struck with so much excitement and gratitude for my love of art. I want to share that experience with as many people as possible." (1) The painting went on subsequent display at the Brooklyn Museum as the only

artwork in a chapel-like space, replete with rows of benches arranged in front of it for worshippers. While the BM website said the show ‘One Basquiat’ is made possible through the generous support of Yusaku Maezawa,” someone obviously determined that that support was not enough, so the museum offered a symposium in which “art experts led an afternoon of close looking and conversation to investigate Basquiat’s painting from multiple perspectives. The discussion continues over lunch at The Norm,” tickets were priced at \$85. (2) I could not help thinking, when reading this, how some art museums might have benefited from the \$109 million paid over the \$1M price gain cap — for example those museums like the Berkshire Museum in Massachusetts, in the news for selling works from its permanent collection in order to raise \$55M for operating and expansion expenses. My guess is that the people of Pittsfield, MA, would have generated much more gratitude toward Mr Maezawa had his money found its way to them, than those paying the \$85 lunch-and-lecture fee in Brooklyn.

#### WHAT ABOUT ART DEALERS AND THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MARKETS?


My proposal here is a rough-idea starting point that needs to be worked out by those more fiscally adept than I, and it only seeks to address the egregious gains reported at auction sales of artwork. There are certainly new artworks commanding millions of dollars on the primary market, but these sales benefit living artists, and I would say let them all have their fun. The secondary market is where, in my perception, the abuse can start, since they are a less competitive but still big-gain-oriented sales environment a step down from the auctions. Perhaps some of the ‘art experts’ gathering in Brooklyn, not to mention Wall Street activists, would be able to propose a system of transition between caps in secondary and auction sales that would bring about a needed fairness to artists and the world in which they work and live.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE— PAYING IT FORWARD

The bottom line, really, is to tug the focus of the art world, or of collectors at least, back onto the art of the art itself, and to rid ourselves of those who see art as an investment opportunity that can yield wild returns. This is to pay it forward — to help artists out there make a living as artists, and create a world of art that said collectors can get even more excited about. The consignor of a work still gets his original purchase price back plus a million dollars (along with aforementioned tax deductions), and the rest of the world is better off, artists and the institutions alike. Can this proposal be optional? Of course. A collector announces that such and such a sale at auction will be conducted with the profit cap, clearly marking him apart from those collectors who really only have greed in their lines of sight. And if you might be tempted to feel sorry for those collectors, losing out on such a grand scheme as is presented to them in our current capitalist, globalized market economy, you might counter that thought with the very real likelihood that said collectors are already wealthy enough to forego this otherwise enmity-inducing (on the part of artists) habit. Without resale royalties, I don’t know of one artist who doesn’t wince at the news of over-heated auction prices, even if they tend to raise their own prices overall. Is anyone surprised that David Hockney declined to comment when his work became the current record-holder for price paid at auction for a living artist (and of which he has no share)?

Consider what goes through some artists’ minds as they work. Do they only think, ‘wow, if I play my cards right, I might make some wealthy collector even wealthier down the line?’ As an artist myself, I know that I would much prefer to think ‘wow, if I play my cards right, this work I’m making today might, in the right hands, help pay the world forward.’ Making art is a joy in and of itself. But the art world that then takes over only manages to allot its own joys to a few. This proposal here can make that art world more joyful for quite a few more who deserve it, not to mention for those innocent bystanders who find their lives enriched thereby.

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**Culture and art are what keep people balanced.**  
*Chloe Windo, Cultivator, Cornwall*



# The Artwork of The Naked Ape

Miklos Legrady, Toronto Editor

Michel Foucault says that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and distributed” (*Michel Foucault, The Discourse on Language, Dec. 2, 1970*). American sociologist Herbert J. Gans writes of the “gatekeepers” of the art world. Repeated complaints from peers on Facebook tell us that over the last three decades, academics have censored the type of art shown, restricting it to intellectual values, and in doing so they may have throttled the muse, poor thing. Most fine arts producers graduate from similar schools and share the same values, which are reflected in their association, their production, and the systems created thereby – surely a cultural blindness results from such group judgments.

This homogeneity includes limiting participation to those sharing the same outlook and language, narrowing the game to believers in a common ideology, in effect creating a tautology – the urge to look knowledgeable defines what is permissible. Danielle S. McLaughlin of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said that we can no longer explore and express ideas that are troubling and even transgressive, we are limited to approved doses of information in community-sanctioned packets.

**Derrida’s method of deconstruction was to look past the irony and ambiguity to the layer that genuinely threatens to collapse that system. He would have loved the notion that to be successful today an artist must look right, talk the talk and walk the walk.**

Derrida’s method of deconstruction was to look past the irony and ambiguity to the layer that genuinely threatens to collapse that system. He would have loved the notion that to be successful today an artist must look right, talk the talk and walk the walk. It follows that where there’s a territory there must be a script, a model, a style; an orthodoxy that subverts, negates and contradicts the desired result.

What of the present? Blake Gopnik tells us that “We cherish everything in American art that is difficult, conceptual, anti-aesthetic, tough, and unsparing. Those were the neo-Dada values that began to win out in the early 1960s”. At a panel discussion on diminishing public interest in contemporary art, Robert Storr, then MOMA curator, said “in the 1960s the art world moved from the Cedar Tavern to the seminar room.” (*Invisible Ink: Art Criticism and a Vanishing Public, May 15, 1996*). We infer that academics

gamed the system and tenure track has stifled the arts, till the poor thing is nearly dead. Will art perish? Can we finally dispense with the art object and be just... you know... smart? Richard Shiff reminds us: “Clement Greenberg... warned of applying conceptual order to aesthetic judgment... when critics argue that any emotional or intellectual position must al-

ways derive from an existing cultural construct, they... dismiss the feeling of their own experiences...” (*Richard Shiff, Cliché and a lack of feeling, The Art Newspaper, 5 June 2015*)

So how can we check our attitude and speak a different language? We first scratch at the psychology of art. Carl Jung writes of four mental functions: sensation, feelings, intellect, and intuition. There are three modes of comprehension other than the intellectual one. Jung writes that shallow individuals rely on a primary function but the inclusion of other modalities gives that individual depth. We who rely on the intellect forget that it can only operate within the known and is limited by the extent of our knowledge, yet its greatest flaw is always to assume that what we know is all that is important.

I am under the impression that we not only can, but also need to answer the challenges of current art, overcoming our patterns and vested interests; we can see beyond our blind spot if we step outside what we’ve been led to believe and review the evidence with fresh eyes.

And yet I am reminded that Michel Foucault, in his lectures at the College de France in 1983-84 titled “The Courage of Truth”, warned us of the danger of parrhesia, of speaking openly and honestly against established and vested interests, reminding us of Socrates’ fate.

On the same cautionary note, statistician R.A. Fischer was invited in 1947 to give a series of talks on BBC radio about the nature of science and scientific investigation. His words are so relevant to the arts today; “A scientific career is peculiar in some ways. Its raison



*Blake Gopnik*

**We cherish everything in American art that is difficult, conceptual, anti-aesthetic, tough, and unsparing.**

d'être is the increase in natural knowledge and on occasion an increase in natural knowledge does occur. But this is tactless and feelings are hurt. For in some small degree it is inevitable that views previously expounded are shown to be either obsolete or false. Most people, I think, can recognize this and take it in good part if what they have been teaching for ten years or so needs a little revision but some will undoubtedly take it hard, as a blow to their amour propre, or even an invasion of the territory they have come to think of as exclusively their own, and they must react with the same ferocity as (animals whose territory is invaded). I do not think anything can be done about it... but a young scientist may be warned and even advised that when one has a jewel to offer for the enrichment of mankind some will certainly wish to turn and rend that person to shreds." (*David Salsburg, The Lady Tasting Tea – How Statistics Revolutionized Science. Holt, N.Y. 2001*)



Walter Benjamin

**Benjamin writes that talent is meaningless, individuals are worthless, the only worthwhile art is made by the collective; authenticity is archaic. “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.**

Margaret Heffernan, on the other hand, in her TED talk “Dare to disagree”, insists on the importance of speaking out. “The fact is that most of the biggest catastrophes that we’ve witnessed rarely come from information that is secret or hidden. It comes from information that is freely available and out there, but that we are willfully blind to, because we can’t handle, don’t want to handle, the conflict that it provokes. But when we dare to break that silence, or when we dare to see, and we create conflict, we enable

ourselves and the people around us to do our very best thinking.” And so with Margaret Heffernan in mind we look at three artists to change the way we think about art. These three artists are compromised, yet much of our thinking is based on them. By questioning our premises we can only improve our understanding. Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” is seen as pure research akin to today’s academic scholarship when it is actually a calculated political marketing tool denouncing individual creativity and promoting the dictatorship of the working class. Walter Benjamin was responsible to the Soviet Writer’s Committee and his work toes the party line; we cannot read Benjamin innocently knowing the political priorities. “Mechanical Reproduction” has no concern for accuracy or facts – woven with flawed assumptions, fact and fiction twisted to fit political theory, the reductions, contradictions, and leaps of faith are obvious; a reality check bounced.

Benjamin writes that talent is meaningless, individuals are worthless, the only worthwhile art is made by the collective; authenticity is archaic. “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.” Today, 80 years later, an authentic Ansel Adams or Edward Weston printed by the artist sells for over \$80,000 and the reality and worth of authorship have been validated beyond question. Benjamin writes that “The art of the proletariat... brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius”. He also tells us that aesthetics are a fascist illusion and the only worthwhile art is political propaganda.

Where we thought “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” was research similar to today’s academic scholarship, it is in fact Marxist propaganda. At the core of Benjamin’s argument is that what withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. He’s wrong in that books are made by mechanical reproduction yet stories and authors retain their aura as much as any work of art. Munch’s *The Scream* is known from reproduction yet remains haunting, as haunting as any Raven perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door. Walter Benjamin has been praised as an early Marshal McLuhan, a social scientist able to discern the cultural effects of media. Yet on reading the text we find a political message that strays from the truth and then ignores it. Walter Benjamin was mistaken. Though he writes in a beautiful language, he failed the reality test; we need to acknowledge this and update our history books, to question what we take for granted, in this case our devaluation of aesthetics. “Ideas alone can be works of art,” Sol Lewitt proposed in his epic “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” a primer on the ins and outs of postmodern art making. Ideas “need not be made physical,” he continued. “A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist’s mind to the viewer’s. There’s the possibility that the idea may never reach the viewer, or that the idea may never leave the artist’s mind. But all ideas are art if they are concerned with art



**“A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist’s mind to the viewer’s. There’s the possibility that the idea may never reach the viewer, or that the idea may never leave the artist’s mind. But all ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.”**

and fall within the conventions of art.” (*Sol Lewitt, Sentences on Conceptual Art*). The contradiction is obvious; if art is a conductor then any idea that remains in one’s mind and never reaches the viewer cannot by definition be art. From experience and history we know that art is content, not conductor; the medium is the conductor. Lewitt escapes criticism by claiming to be a mystic who overleaps logic, but nothing evades logic, not even the illogical. Do we believe that conceptual artists are mystics who overleap logic? In spite of this Sol Lewitt has been recast as the logician par excellence. He said that an idea was art, but he was wrong... an idea is science. Art is in the making, the reality check. If an idea were art, quality is moot as the work (as in work) cannot be judged; they dissolve in the boundless.

In a 1998 panel discussion titled “Vision and Visuality”, sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation, Rosalind Kraus mentioned that Duchamp despised optical, ocular art (except for Manet) and disliked artisanal work, hence the ready-made. Yet ocular, optical art takes years to achieve and artisanal work is done with loving patience, these are things to respect, not to despise. We would be surprised to read that Shakespeare despised grammar, or that Stravinsky loathed musical notes. In a 1986 BBC interview with Joan Bakewell, Duchamp claimed the conceptual mantle when he said that until his time painting was retinal, what you could see, that he would make it intellectual. Today we know that Duchamp made no more paintings after he made painting intellectual. Mar-

cel Duchamp needed to differentiate himself, to create his own brand as a Dadaist. He did this by rejecting the Impressionists. In Cabane’s interview we read that Duchamp wanted to destroy art. He actually destroyed his own ability to make art. “It was like a broken leg,” he said and retired to play chess. If you tell yourself art is not worth the making and say it long enough, eventually you believe yourself and lose interest in making art. Instead of being a

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cautionary tale, Duchamp is recommended practice today and the results are toxic.

We should no longer think of art as arbitrary but as biology. Denis Dutton described the role of art in a Darwinian theory of evolution in his book and in his Ted talk “The Art Instinct”, where he suggested that humans are hard-wired to seek beauty. “There is evidence that perceptions of beauty are evolutionarily determined... likely to enhance survival of the perceiving human’s genes.” Physicist Paul Dirac said that beauty in one’s equations, if the concept is valid, means a certainty of success. Neuroscientists in Great Britain discovered that the same part of the brain that is activated by art and music was activated in the brains of mathematicians when they looked at equations they regard as beautiful. Then in the 1970s Abraham Moles and Frieder Nake analyzed links between beauty, information processing, and information theory. We now know that beauty and its complex differentiations are crucial for mental health, while science and psychology show that aesthetics are vital to the evolution of consciousness.

We need to reconsider the values we have inherited from Duchamp. How many have a urinal in their living room? Cleverness and toilet humor get tiresome after a while and those who truly believe art is to piss in should leave the field to those with higher spiritual values. Dada has lived its time, has withered and faded, now past the shelf date. These cultural shifts rewriting our mission statement may in fact be the most likely change occurring in the near future; we can help shape that.

In the world of nature we find that a bee’s dance informs the hive of the location of a field of flowers with sun-oriented hourly-based data, including the caloric value of that patch. Such unconscious yet precise content in the dance of a bee leads to far reaching speculation on unconscious content in the artwork of the naked ape.

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# Leonardo da Vinci

Anna Maria Benedetti



*The Leonardo Museum of Science and Technology contains many creations of Leonardo built by artists over the decades.*

On the first floor of what was once the Convent of the Humiliated, there is a permanent exhibition dedicated to Leonardo da Vinci. The presentation of this new space has recently ended after numerous interventions by authorities from the cultural, artistic and political world. The galleries are in the Leonardo da Vinci National Museum of Science and Technology, one of the first science museums in Italy, opening with an exhibition on Leonardo in 1953. Many young artists of that period were using the term ‘technique’, which refers to the Greek *technikòs*, a complex of rules to be followed in practicing an art, a profession, a science. Technique, or *techne più logos*, is the science that deals with the practical rules of the various arts, the sciences, professions and their subsequent improvements. A change.

We are greeted by a backlit tabloid that describes the path to follow of the various rooms. Turning our gaze we see the studies on flight (perhaps the most fascinating), the study on birds, in which Leonardo designed and redesigned their detailed anatomy to understand the secret of flight. The models of a parachute with a man dangling from it, large skeletal wings made of wood and, at the back of the room, a panel on which the images of Leonardo’s pages are projected, sometimes furrowed by his ‘animated’ drawings, thanks to new technology. Florence acts as a backdrop on the walls of the room.

Leonardo was the lovechild of a Florentine notary who, recognizing

his talents, sent him to work in Verrocchio’s workshop, where a number of important painters of the time trained. An internationally recognized genius, he was a scholar who always showed commitment and dedication in all the work he was commissioned; he also had a lively curiosity, the desire to learn and to know.

From parties to defense of the city, from frescoes to architecture, from paintings to equestrian statues, he made drawing the starting point of every work because, perhaps, in the drawing the secret of knowledge is found.

Drawing comes from observation, but the hand that works with pencil, pen and brush is guided by the mind. The greatest danger is to restrict knowledge to its inner mental discourse, in which there is no experience, without which “nothing gives self-certainty”. Experience and mathematical rules enter, with equal importance, into the mental discourse that constitutes science.

Leonardo is a leading exponent of his time, a time in which God is said to have placed man at the centre of the universe and man tries to make use of all the skills he has to preserve and improve it.

We are between the end of the 1400s and the 1500s. In 1492 the New World was discovered by Europeans; it is a period in which individual initiative is affirmed against authoritarian discipline of tradition. The principle of authority is replaced by the principle of examination: it is a new way of looking at nature, man, and the universe. New social forces, enabled by a technical culture and



enterprise, are freed to take the initiative, a study of reality is delineated which maintains close links with techniques and undertakes a rigorous description and measurement of phenomena. Knowledge comes from sensation and experience, but to be “true science”, says Leonardo, it must pass through “mathematical demonstrations”.

“Everywhere, the soul turned to the difficult things” wrote Vasari, but “Do not desire the impossible” is the advice that Leonardo gave to an ideal interlocutor in his notebooks, an exhortation to the sense of measure and reality.

Boundless are his fields of interest. He studied the classics: in this period the dissemination of volumes was favored thanks to Gutenberg’s press. To cite a few books fundamental on classicism, let us remember *‘De prospectiva pigendi’* (On the Perspective of Painting) by Piero della Francesca, Vitruvius’ *‘De Architectura’*, and also still today, Luca Pacioli’s *‘De divina proportione’*, which Leonardo illustrated with his drawings. Pacioli believed that drawings were fundamental to making the entities described comprehensible, a neo-Platonic expression of a form of the universe in which mathematics, theology and philosophy are connected.

The work of the mathematician Euclid of Alexandria was published for the first time in Venice in 1482: this edition, nine years after the first, stands out for the many illustrations and a richly decorated frontispiece. The drawings represent the concepts expressed in the text.

We find his dedication in the study of the proportions of the face, he goes into infamous taverns to observe faces; he is not afraid to examine dead bodies, to enter the darkness to find a glimmer of truth. Everything for him is a reason for study, even that which differs from the standard model. He studies herbs, the basis of every medicine, which began in his childhood during the long walks he took with his father in the Florentine countryside.

His papers, which are preserved, are full of drawings, notes and observations. I cannot forget his indissoluble combination “kalòs kaì agazòs” (beautiful and good) that contains the essence of classicism, which he loved and studied. What is beautiful is also good and one cannot be separated from the other.

Science is a way of divulging and letting others participate in our discoveries; he does not write in Latin but in “Italian”. Only in the 1600s, with Galilei, people began to write in Italian: Latin was the language used by scholars. Nothing is complicated for those who know the subject well. Those who know can express themselves simply and Leonardo is a master.

Notwithstanding the lavish ladies of the century Mona Lisa is the portrait of simplicity (she has no jewels) but here she is not on display. Mathematics and paintings, everything comes from his orderly mind, nothing is by chance. He studied the universe and in his last studies he established the universal laws that govern it: even today there are those who claim that “God does not play dice with the world”. If we cannot prove it, this is only due to our imperfect

**Drawing comes from observation, but the hand that works with pencil, pen and brush is guided by the mind. The greatest danger is to restrict knowledge to its inner mental discourse, in which there is no experience, without which “nothing gives self-certainty”.**

knowledge. How many steps has science taken, how many more will it have to take. But not everything is serenity and joy, as told in the last paintings by Sandro Botticelli or the carnival songs of Lorenzo the Magnificent who, singing the love of Bacchus and Arianna, in the refrain recalls “Who wants to be happy, listen, there is no certainty in tomorrow”, but this is not mentioned in the exhibition.

I also love his ability to search beyond what is possible or is illicit to reach knowledge (the dark cavern is a moment in his life and I suggest you try and find this moment; it is part of his childhood and his life as an artist, and is important to the understanding of his work).

Leonardo was very skilful at escaping from the court ladies who fought over him and at entertaining with stories from nature. One in particular tells of the moth that flies close to the candlelight and, too close, burns its wings; the story was used as a means to reflect on the ignorance of natural laws. We can learn a lot from nature: all knowledge is before our eyes, all one needs to do is to be able to see and reflect. A great teaching also for our times. These are not in the exhibition.

The figure of the young artist is intriguing, also the big and spectacular machines. The visual aids and a search activity are enjoyed by children and adults alike. It’s a complete immersion, from the ceiling to the walls, in the world of Florence of the time, to ‘recreate’ the Renaissance. A huge icosahedron overlooks the entrance, designed by Leonardo and taken from the book by Luca Pacioli, which he illustrated. A dialogue with characters of the time that surprise the visitor, a young painter who talks about the rooms where he works. War machines, camps. Light is everywhere, because “immersing everything in light, is to immerse them in the infinite”. All this is Leonardo, a character out of touch with gossip; almost nothing is known of his private life – “my meditations are my life”

Among all these machines, do we find Leonardo’s soul? I invite readers to look for it, it is before their eyes.

*National Museum of Science and Technology Leonardo da Vinci, Via San Vittore 21, Milan - A few numbers: over 170 works, 39 multimedia installations, 500 images from 70 cultural institutions in over 1300 m<sup>2</sup>, many sponsors.*

# Every joke hides a truth



*Phillips's Joker is a morality tale on the state of American society.*

*Joker*, the latest film by Todd Phillips, is a work of art. All the characters carry modern American 'allegorical weight'. They are metaphorical constructs. I saw compounded layers of inherent mental-social problems, the deft compilation of 'mental glazes' layered, as a fine Renaissance painting presents itself, as the actors intimated — simultaneously building cross-referential thematic tracing up and through the movie itself. A dazzling web of complex, unfolding forms, each scene compelling. A wholly relational metaphor. *Joker* can be discussed as a form of a compacted-complete multi-imaged abstract. That, of course, is not to say the linear depiction of its plot is not important. It mirrors our society, a fragile, psychotic disturbed mess. Todd Phillips masterfully disguised *Joker* as a pop-cultural comic book, his conceit to get us to come to the theater, to lure us into a house of American mirrors.

The movie sets itself in 1970s Gotham, (i.e. New York) during a garbage strike. Piles of uncollected trash everywhere set the tone of discarded waste. Our tragic-hero, Arthur Fleck (as fleck of dandruff), exquisitely portrayed by Joaquin Phoenix, is the butt of humiliation, a trashed, discarded individual who as a 'clown' struggles to find a life. His first scene of pathos finds him advertising some store with a sign he twirls about in his full clown regalia, performing his clowning for the passer-by. A group of rowdy kids steal his sign from him, he gives chase, follows them into an alley and... WHAM he is knocked out by the kids, sign destroyed, lying flat on his back in the alley. He later reports his sign lost and he is charged for it. No chance of understanding from his heartless boss. This pattern of degradation builds throughout the movie.

Our exploration of Arthur leads us to discover that his mother,

## Al Jirikowic, Washington DC Editor

whom he takes care of, is not his mother as she claims. He, in fact, is an orphan. This discovery is gradually unearthed as he investigates the person his 'mother' claims to be his father. The man with whom she allegedly had an affair, Thomas Wayne is the rich plutocrat of Gotham. He believes his mother had disclosed, in a letter he intercepts, that the greatest humanitarian philanthropist leader of Gotham, is his father. Not only do we find out that Thomas Wayne is not his father but we also discover that he is in fact an over-stuffed ego maniac.

The people Arthur could count on are fake. We see a pathetic society devoid of trust or fellowship. Of course, one of his clown friends lays a gun on him, so he can protect himself. Arthur commits a capital crime of self-defense. He shoots three tormenting young suited-up drunk stockbrokers after they attack him. Of course he is in his clown makeup. Of course he is seen. All of Gotham is horror-struck by the subway clown shooter. He becomes an overnight clown sensation with the people. As Gotham becomes full of clown-dressed citizens celebrating and identifying with the clown murderer - we know Todd Phillips is presenting the 'people' as a clown — there is never a clown by himself — and Arthur is now their hero - he is the Gotham Joker.

The clown or fool is a complex and mixed metaphor throughout theatrical history. On a very simple level, the fool is entertaining. On a more dramatic level, the jester is a tool of disclosure and truth. Our fool Arthur, our Joker, our dispeller of social convention brings us what we all know and constantly avoid. One hard revelation after another and the Joker is characterized as being mentally ill.

On the Murray Franklin show, which he dreams of being on, he fails miserably. Arthur pronounces he has been humiliated and then promptly blows Murray's head off. Having been taken into custody, Arthur is again saved as roving rioting crowds of clowns pull him from the wrecked police car. The clowns, both pathetic and triumphant, sad and happy, victims and victimizers, are now looking at Arthur as their savior.

I would like to pay special attention to Joaquin Phoenix who brings a special mystery to the movie. One of the most captivating aspects of Joaquin's film performance is his dance of the Joker, a subjective featherlight jig he performs in the most trying of moments. I found this quite mysterious, as if he is telling us there is so much more going on. And then of course there is his special condition, one of laughing at situations that are indeed not humorous in the least, a forced laughter that is particularly effective in its dispelling and discomfiting performance; I found it utterly uncomfortable at any place it was used.

# Isaac Levitan, the Russian Master

Colin Fell

Before me on my desk as I write is a thin sheet of orange plastic. It is the outline of what was, to a child growing up in England at the height of the Cold War, the known world of Europe. In our geography lessons we would place this template on our paper, and with our pencils laboriously describe a geopolitical journey; I imagine my adolescent self, voyaging vicariously around Britain's intriguing yet familiar coastline, then along the North Sea coast, before arriving at the mysteriously named triad of Baltic republics of which we knew so little. Beyond Estonia, the map's own iron curtain descended, in the form of its plastic frame. Here Endeth Europe, was the message clearly implied to our young minds; beyond lay...what, precisely? The TV was little help to one attempting to imagine the unknowable, unmapped vastness we knew to exist - grainy, smudgy black and white newsreel of the occasional Russian dissident, or coverage of the May Day parades of military hardware in Red Square.

But I did know differently - my father, a Russophile, bought LPs of the Russian orchestral canon - Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich - and as was the wonderful fashion of the time, those tempting canvases, the record sleeves, were decorated with art work offering a visual key to the emotional content of the music etched into the shiny black vinyl within. And so it was that I came to discover a love, not only of the music, but of the art of someone still very little known in the West, Isaac Levitan. This was developed when my father, ever keen to encourage learning, managed somehow to obtain a gorgeously printed and bound book of Levitan's work, from the Aurora press in Leningrad.

Born into a lower middle class but educated Jewish family in a shtetl in Kybartai, in what is now Lithuania, Isaac Levitan suffered from the Anti-Semitism of the period, and was briefly banished from Moscow as a Jew in reaction to the assassination attempt on Tsar Alexander II. Interestingly, my Aurora press book makes only passing reference to Levitan's Jewishness, and none of his banishment. His later friendship with Chekhov, with whose sister he was rumoured to be in love, helped to secure his return to Moscow and his ability to continue working, until his untimely death at 40. His subject matter was unfathomable dark lakes and mill ponds, mysterious onion-domed churches rising from hayfields, and paths, lots of paths, and roads, winding mysteriously to who knew where. As a 16-year-old keen for any new artistic experience, I absorbed these hungrily, and when I came to read and love the stories of Anton Chekhov, which I preferred to my A-level English Literature set texts, there was formed for me a satisfying triptych in which the music of Rachmaninov, the stories of Chekhov and the



*Sokolniki Autumn, 1879* (Isaac Levitan)

paintings of Levitan were fused together, inseparable as the coloured glass panels in a church window.

Levitan's first success, in 1879, was *Autumn in Sokolniki Park*, bought by collector Tretyakov; the gallery he founded still has the largest collection of Levitan's work. It is both typical and untypical of Levitan's output. Characteristic is the autumnal setting, evoked here with his fondness for a palette of muted colours; the sky, brushed by the darkening firs and pines, seems heavy and indeterminate, non-committal, the only colour the fiery gold of the young saplings bordering the path where walks a woman in black, wispily evoked as she hurries along meditatively. Less typical is the interesting figure, as Levitan included them so rarely - his landscapes are largely unpopulated; he is in a sense the perfect artist for our current lockdown, imagining the world without us. Apparently it was Chekhov's brother who suggested the addition of the woman to what would have been one of Levitan's many images of winding paths and roads. Into this solitary, melancholy figure, Levitan seems to invite us to read a narrative, a silent mourning reverie. Is it coincidence that Tolstoy had published *Anna Karenina* the year



*Eternal Peace (1893)*

before? Where is she going, on what is she reflecting, this woman in black?

Knowing what we know about the trajectory of Russian history, it's difficult to look at the art of the end of the 19th century without imagining some kind of political agenda - yet Levitan was the least obviously political artist, his interests more in the timeless quality of landscapes in which human life is largely eclipsed. Of particular interest is his remarkable 1892 work, *The Vladimirka*, a study in landscape, but with obliquely political content. Again there is a road, and I'm always reminded of the novels of Thomas Hardy, which so often begin with a lone figure traversing a landscape; I wonder whether the common artistic preoccupation with roads in the second half of the 19th century was in part attributable to the transport revolution - as people travelled faster and faster across greater distances, artists increasingly reverted to slower, timeless forms of travel, exploring it as metaphysical metaphor. Here, Levitan suggests by the merest brush strokes a vaguely defined human figure, clearly diminished by the vastness of the great empty skies and the apparently interminable road stretching ahead; surely in the allegorical tradition, the road is life itself, hard and desolate. There's something of Hardy's Egdon Heath about it, but this is not Wessex. This road has a particular resonance for 19th-century Russia; the medieval route from Moscow to Vladimir, Nizhny Novgorod, it also led on to Siberia, and was traversed therefore by chained prisoners, many of them political. Did Levitan's Jewishness and his experience of exile from Moscow give a particular force to his imagination here? It is a landscape without any com-

fort, the small cross on the right hand side of the composition and the presence on the immense flat horizon of what appears to be a church serving only to emphasise the overwhelming, existential emptiness of the scene.

*Eternal Peace*, of 1893, to some extent complements *The Vladimirka*, apparently offering succour to life's traveller in its reassuring title. In the foreground, shaped by Levitan to resemble the prow of a ship, about to set out on its final voyage, is a green promontory; upon it, a wooden church. Yet what one notices above all is how small the church is, its modest cupola scarcely rising above the trees which grow beside it, the crosses scattered in its graveyard signalling its eschatological metaphysic. Before it lies the sea of eternal rest, stretched out in a curiously lifeless way, the paint applied flatly to suggest the texture and colour of bleached bone; an islet appears from its perspective to be sucked into the void of the painting's vanishing point, mirrored in the streak of a stratus cloud above it. And then, lowering over the whole, the great, vast skies, their towering cumulonimbus completing a palette dominated by greys. Here is rest indeed, but not, perhaps, a solution to life's mystery; Levitan is too subtle an artist for that.

His own death at 40 followed a few years later; he did not live to see the Revolution which systematised the countryside he so lovingly painted, and closed the monasteries and churches whose cupolas rise shimmeringly over his lakes and forests - it is impossible to know what he would have made of it. When I acquired my Aurora Press edition of his work as a teenager, I was unaware of the significance of the Aurora\* in Leningrad's history; but there must



surely be a painful irony in the work of this gentlest, most mystical and poetic of artists being celebrated in a publisher whose name is associated with violence, turbulence and bloodshed. It is time for Isaac Levitan to be better known.

\* On October 25, 1917, the gunshot from the Aurora sent the signal to storm the Winter Palace. The symbolism of the name 'Aurora' was its meaning as 'the dawn of a new era' in history.



March (1895) (Isaac Levitan)

## Tragédie Française



I wrote recently about a just republished book from my parents' art book collection, Saul Steinberg's *Labyrinth*. Another of their books I treasure, a very different book that some might find almost unbearable to look at, is Frans Masereel's *Danse Macabre*, the

Frances Oliver

drawings that are his own 20th-century version of the plague-inspired medieval Dance of Death. I had always assumed that Masereel was one of the group of European artists, like Kathe Kollwitz and George Grosz, whose sombre works were inspired by the First World War and the great influenza epidemic that followed it. I had missed a thin sheet of paper inside the cover of my parents' edition, which is all the text in or with the book. In a letter to his publisher, Masereel in his simple manner describes his personal share in the tragedy of our times: "We have lived through tragic days, having left Paris on foot! We have walked for nearly 300 miles, have been bombed and machine-gunned several times a day, and finally got stranded in an old mill, where we lived for a month on a litter of straw. Now we are with friends, which is somewhat more comfortable. I cannot paint, as there is nothing to paint with. So I am now working out in black and white the sketches which I made during the retreat, or rather the debacle!"

**Masereel was a pacifist who refused to serve in the Belgian army in World War I. It is not surprising that in his book there are no individuals, only nameless children, women and men, no allies of Death, only victims. A very different impression of the Paris exodus is what seems to have inspired Irene Nemirovsky's superb novel, part of a longer work she did not live to complete.**



This makes Masereel's grim book doubly fascinating, because a novel posthumously published and now hailed as one of the finest of the 20th century deals with precisely the same event, the exodus from Paris when the Germans invaded in 1940 – Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Française*.

Frans Masereel (1889-1972), a Belgian painter and graphic artist renowned chiefly for his Expressionist

woodcuts, lived and worked mostly in France. Often the woodcuts took a form he described as “novels in pictures”, wordless scenes depicting a narrative. Later he turned to doing variations on a theme instead. He also illustrated books by such literary masters as Zola, Stefan Zweig and Thomas Mann.

Masereel's *Death*, occasionally sly or pensive but mostly grinning and always triumphant, is shown in 25 varied scenes. *Death* smiles from a tank, *Death* whips a dying horse, *Death* leads a stream of refugees, *Death* rides a torpedo, *Death* lurks behinds a couple of lovers, *Death* with a tattered banner marches at an army's head... and lastly sits, bone elbows on counter, skull in hands, under a sign saying plus de pain. No more bread. Masereel has made his experience of the flight from Paris into a sweeping epic vision, using a Gothic tradition from the plague years for a modern work of art which “meets in intensity the tragic grandeur of world disaster, the whole disaster of the war.” I would not have said grandeur as his publisher did, but rather enormity – for grandeur is what *Death*, with all else, takes away.

Masereel was a pacifist who refused to serve in the Belgian army in World War I. It is not surprising that in his book there are no individuals, only nameless children, women and men, no allies of *Death*, only victims. A very different impression of the Paris exodus is what seems to have inspired Irene Nemirovsky's superb novel, part of a longer work she did not live to complete.

Nemirovsky does have villains, mostly among the protected, the celebrities, the rich, those who see themselves distinctly as an upper class. Her focus is on individuals; her precision and acuteness in delineating characters and single episodes is a direct counterpart to Masereel's epic sweep. One could give endless quotes showing Nemirovsky's skill in pin-pointing a character with a sentence; and the characters – their ignorance, selfishness, opportunism and greed are judged with a sardonic unblinking eye. Among the varied refugees whose fates Nemirovsky follows, there are only four whose decency is unflinching. Three are a couple of small-time bank employees and their soldier son. Jeanne and Maurice

Michaux, sustained by their love for each other, never lose their hope, their morality, their courage and initiative. When in the panic following a German bombing-raid children and mothers are separated, Jeanne takes it on herself to assemble the frightened children, then call the mothers to come and get their own, no doubt saving at least several lives – an act for which none of the mothers even thanks her.

The other selfless character is a naïve, deeply religious young priest, eldest son of a wealthy, supremely class-conscious and ambitious mother, Madame Pericand-Mâltete. Nemirovsky seems to take particular delight in exposing her hypocrisies and her fixation on the image she presents. In one of the book's best black comedy scenes, Madame Pericand is priding herself on having got her large family onto a train after a horrendous car journey, all children, pets, servants and not least family jewels intact – and realizes suddenly there is something she has left behind: her disabled senile father-in-law. In the book's most harrowing scene, her son, the young priest, is brutally killed – not by German guns or bombs but by the group of delinquent orphan boys he has been asked to evacuate from Paris. With ultimate irony, they are the boys from a charitable institution founded by his grandfather Pericand.

Irene Nemirovsky (1903-1942) was the daughter of a wealthy Russian Jewish banker. After the Revolution, the family fled, finally making their home in France where they continued to prosper. The young Irene led a happy social life with many balls and flirtations and had much literary success with her first novel, *David Golder*. She married another banker, Michel Epstein. Although the Epsteins, seeing dark days ahead, converted to Catholicism and fled again with their small daughters from Paris to a country village, they were eventually arrested and deported. Both died in Auschwitz in 1942. Their daughters were disguised and hidden for the rest of the war and managed to keep a suitcase that contained their mother's last manuscript, *Suite Française*, finally published in 2004.

I would have liked to write about yet another artistic take on the 1940 flight from Paris, a heart-breaking, unforgettable little French film called *Jeux Interdits*, Forbidden Games, but that will have to wait until I can see it again.

In the midst of the Coronavirus crisis, Nemirovsky's dark portrait of a corrupt society faced with debacle is more relevant than ever. We must hope that here the Michauxs will outnumber the Pericands, the queue-jumpers and hoarders and shelf-strippers. Meanwhile the virus has upstaged the greater crisis that awaits if our political and economic systems, our massive consumption, go back to being what they were. If world temperature increases by three degrees, in the massive exodus that will follow, who, for anyone left to peruse them, will be our Irene Nemirovsky, our Frans Masereel?

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# Hidden Within

Anita Di Rienzo



The vision of the Blessed Gabriele Ferretti,  
Carlo Crivelli c1489.

*The friar's name was Gabriele Ferretti. He died in 1456. This painting was made to accompany his tomb, which was rebuilt in 1489 after the Pope confirmed his venerable status.*

Ancient paintings are often referred to as 'pieces of history', a definition which explains how a work of art acquires greater meaning, showing how we are able to historicise and exchange information through paintings. What is a painting in the end if not the only language common to all, through which it is possible to communicate with generations that have long since disappeared?

Paintings are visual documents which hand down through the cen-

turies both events and their protagonists. However, this recognition can only partly reveal what lies behind the beauty of a masterpiece, and a greater familiarity with the time and place in which a work of art performed its function is important in order to grasp what could be defined as the 'subliminal message'.

The term is borrowed from the language of advertising, referring to information that the brain unconsciously assimilates. On a practical level, it has been an expedient used for centuries by painters and their clients to convey a meaning which could not otherwise be expressed. *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele Ferretti*, a painting by Carlo Crivelli, is a particularly appropriate example. The painting, now at the National Gallery of London, was originally in the church of the Franciscan monastery in Ancona, where the viewer, entering the semi-darkness of the church, was attracted by an apparently familiar figure - a Franciscan friar kneeling in prayer and captivated by a divine vision. This composition would have recalled the widespread iconography of the stigmatization of St Francis. The initial confusion in the identification of the subject was due to the need to catch the attention of the faithful and then, afterwards, to provide a contemporary and virtuous example of a local religious man while publicising the most influential surname in Ancona during the 15th century: Ferretti. Those who saw the painting were not necessarily aware of this ploy by the Ferretti family, but the name would have remained imprinted on their unconscious, just like the subliminal messages in today's commercials.

But why use Blessed Gabriel? Couldn't the Ferretti family assert the importance of their name without an intermediary? At the time Ancona was a maritime republic, based on an oligarchic system. Explicit celebration of a single family was not approved. Eye-catching iconography and a pious family member were the only gimmicks acceptable to the society of the time.

So perhaps there is nothing new under the sun when it comes to neuro-marketing and the involvement of the unconscious in marketing strategies, as Carlo Crivelli's painting teaches us, art, in all its forms, has always been and always will be a medium for the transmission of timeless teachings.

Visit the National Gallery of London when it reopens and linger in front of Carlo Crivelli's masterpiece because, in my opinion, no message has ever been conveyed with such grace.

# The canonisation of Surrealism in the United States

Sandra Zalman

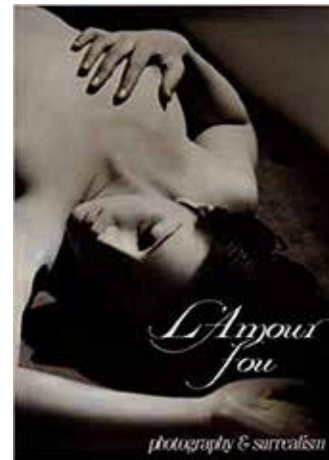
SANDRA ZALMAN IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF ART HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, WHERE SHE TEACHES CLASSES ON MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART, MUSEUMS, AND CURATORIAL ISSUES. HER BOOK *CONSUMING SURREALISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE: DISSIDENT MODERNISM*, WON THE 2016 SECAC AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION.

In a pointed assessment of the first show of Surrealism in New York, in 1932, the *New York Times* art critic asked, “How much of the material now on view shall we esteem ‘art,’ and how much should be enjoyed as laboratory roughage?” The question encompassed the problem Surrealism posed for art history because it essentially went unanswered. Even after the 1936 endorsement by the Museum of Modern Art in a show organized by its founding director Alfred Barr (1902-1981), Surrealism continued to have a vexed relationship with the canon of modern art. Above all, the enterprise of canonisation is ironic for Surrealism – the Surrealists were self-consciously aiming to overthrow the category of art, but simultaneously participating in a tradition of avant-gardism defined by such revolution. Framing his exhibition, Barr presented Surrealism as both the most recent avant-garde export, and also as a purposeful departure from the avant-garde’s experimentation in form. Instead, Barr stressed that Surrealism focused on an anti-rationalist approach to representation. Though Barr made a strong case to integrate Surrealism into the broader understanding of modernism in the 1930s, and Surrealism was generally accepted by American audiences as the next European avant-garde, by the 1950s formalist critics in the U.S. positioned Surrealism as a disorderly aberration in modernism’s quest for abstraction. Surrealism’s political goals and commercial manifestations (which Barr’s exhibition had implicitly sanctioned by including cartoons and advertisements) became more and more untenable for the movement’s acceptance into a modern art canon that was increasingly being formulated around an idea of the autonomous self-reflexive work of art.

**However, by the 1960s Surrealism’s exclusion from the modernist canon advocated by Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and younger scholars such as Michael Fried (b.1939) clashed with the increased relevancy of Surrealism’s fantastical and everyday vision of modern life.**

However, by the 1960s Surrealism’s exclusion from the modernist canon advocated by Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) and younger

scholars such as Michael Fried (b.1939) clashed with the increased relevancy of Surrealism’s fantastical and everyday vision of modern life. As Surrealism’s hybrid quality became a point of interest for artists in the 1960s thanks in part to Pop Art, MoMA’s new curator, William Rubin (1927-2006), presented Surrealism as a crucial forerunner for contemporary art. Rubin’s exhibition



‘Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage’ (1968) was an attempt to incorporate Dada and Surrealism into the modernist canon, but Rubin did not realize that the parameters of the canon itself were being actively re-evaluated in light of the expanded field of artistic production. Critics disdained Rubin’s didactic approach for draining the lifeblood from movements that were inherently unruly and subversive, yet Rubin’s exhibition allowed Surrealism to gain a foothold in the modern art canon. Then, in 1985, Jane Livingston’s (b.1944) and Rosalind Krauss’s (b.1941) exhibition ‘L’Amour Four: Surrealism and Photography’ challenged Rubin’s stylistic positioning of Surrealism by tackling Surrealism’s theoretical underpinnings. Though the exhibition’s scope was limited to Surrealist photography, by explicitly dispensing with the formalist understanding of modern art, it nonetheless opened up discourse on Surrealism in the USA; both from those scholars who sought to examine Surrealism beyond its formal qualities and perhaps particularly by those who challenged Krauss’s narrow focus. This article sketches a brief survey of a half-century of Surrealism’s reinterpretation in the United States by American curators to give a richer picture of the complications and contradictions that Surrealism presented to the formation of a canon for modern art.

## SURREALISM IN THE 1930s

The first time Surrealism received institutional recognition in the United States was in 1931, when the Wadsworth Athenaeum, an established museum in Hartford, Connecticut, hosted an exhibition of the then seven-year-old movement. The exhibition had been orchestrated in large part by Julien Levy (1906-1981), who had opened an art gallery that year. Instead of hosting the first U.S. exhibition of the new movement in his newly established space in New York, Levy recognized the value of having Surrealism’s ini-



tial presentation in a more official institution – a strategic way of lending the movement the endorsement of a recognized art museum before he presented it in his commercial gallery.

Despite these earlier exhibitions of Surrealism in the USA, the movement was still largely uncharted territory. Modern art in general was relatively new on U.S. shores. There were only a few major institutions where Americans could see the 20th-century avant-garde work that had emerged in Europe. One notorious example was the Armory Show of 1913, generally credited for waking American audiences from their parochial aesthetic habits. The exhibition of the Société Anonyme at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926, and the establishment of the Philips Collection in Washington DC in 1921 and the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 helped to bring increased attention to modern art in all its diversity, but nonetheless, the experimentation that educated audiences accepted in advanced art still tended toward abstraction.

When Alfred Barr, founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, began planning the exhibition ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism’ set to open in 1936, he conceived it in tandem with his now more famous exhibition of that year, ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’. Barr understood Cubism and Surrealism as representing interrelated though divergent aesthetic foundations for modern art. In the introduction to ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism’, Barr described



Giuseppe Arcimboldo. *Summer*, 1563

Cubism and Abstract Art as ‘diametrically opposed in both spirit and esthetic principles to the present [Dada and Surrealism] exhibition’. And yet, he included several of the same artists – at least 22 – in both shows. Barr even pulled a Picasso painting (*The Bather*, 1929) from the traveling version of ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’ so that he could include it in ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism’. Eventually, Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism was billed both in press releases and in the exhibition catalogue’s preface as the second in what was to be a series of five exhibitions designed to highlight important movements in modern art to the American public. The subsequent three exhibitions – which focussed on untrained American artists, realism and Magic Realism, and Romantic Art – demonstrate that under Barr’s leadership, MoMA’s presentation of modern art tended toward representation rather than abstraction. For Barr, abstraction was already an accepted tradition of the avant-garde and he openly acknowledged in the preface to ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’ that “[e]xcept in a few of its aspects this exhibition is in no sense a pioneer effort.” Instead, Barr considered his Surrealism exhibition experimental in a way that his previous exhibitions had not been. Reflecting on - and defending — his presentation of Surrealism, Barr wrote to the museum’s president: ... that the Museum has not in the past, except in architecture and industrial art, played the role of the pioneer in its exhibitions. It has rather shown things which have been generally accepted or which in any case are already fairly familiar to the interested public. The present exhibition is in most of its aspects an exception to this rule. Barr believed that the Surrealism exhibition was unique in charting new territory of a still unfolding movement. He was also conscious that the aesthetics of Surrealism ran counter to what had been accepted as modern art, and that was why he was being called upon to defend some of his choices to the trustees of the museum: “I think that the heart of the misunderstanding lies in the fact that the exhibition has been assembled upon a Fantastic-Surrealist aesthetic rather than the more usually accepted aesthetic of form and technique expressed through the conventional media of painting and sculpture. A good many people will always object to any new aesthetic .... The aesthetic of form and color and of distorted or disintegrated objects which so exasperated people in the Armory Show is now generally accepted but the aesthetic of Surrealist fantasy, incongruity, spontaneity and humor, though it is already a dozen or twenty years old, is still exasperating to some of our friends, who are likely to call it silly or absurd (the adjectives I think have not changed since 1913).”

Barr stresses that while the aesthetic of form had once been ridiculed, 20 years onward, art audiences were now more comfortable with formal experimentation. Yet Barr did not shy away from the elements of Surrealism that were ‘exasperating’ and Barr’s exhibition also differed dramatically from earlier iterations

cont page 35

Continued from page 19

# ART IN A VIRAL AGE

## Making Art, Negotiating Space, and Finding Comfort in the Age of Covid-19

Katie Zazenski

By the second week of March 2020, systems across the US began grinding to a halt, ushering in the great online migration. Much of the rest of the affected world had already begun this process, provoked by the coronavirus pandemic, which, alarming health concerns aside, has produced waves of logistical confusion and panic as we near-blindly face this novel frontier collectively. Within the art community we have been asking: how do we survive a gig economy with no gigs? How do we continue to make and show art, how do we teach the nuance and physicality to our students without physical proximity to either materials or each other? Like many others, I've been in a disoriented haze, blindly scrolling Instagram and Facebook, confined to my apartment for all but essential movement, sufficiently socially-distanced and trying to suss out some remainder of focus as the world as we know it somewhat briskly implodes. Faced with varying levels of quarantine, for the first time in too long we're experiencing 24/7 direct contact with our dark corners and need to source strength and hope from wherever it is that we can. Dutch artist Eva Van Ooijen agrees. Van Ooijen has been interested in the intersection of faith-based rituals and the internet for some time, but it wasn't until last summer that she made her first cyberpilgrimage to a home altar. Before Cov-

id-19 meant anything to anyone, Van Ooijen, feeling anxious about leaving her home for an upcoming trip, set up her first shrine—a few candles set into hand-squished aluminum foil holders, some oranges, a plastic bottle with water, a paper juice carton, draped bubble wrap—in front of a baby monitor, so that she could remain connected while away. Being able to check-in via phone soothed her sense of untetheredness and replaced it with a very palpable sense of connectedness.

The first radio sermons were broadcast about a century ago, the first image was uploaded to the internet in 1992. Fundamental aspects of life develop remote arms the moment technology makes it possible, extending outreach, obscuring geographical constraints, bypassing all sorts of obstacles and impediments unavoidable in the embodied world. While creating or viewing art or even making a pilgrimage online might not be groundbreaking, the criticality of such acts shifts dramatically in times of global stress, especially when we often find solace in things that are not new but rather familiar and known—no matter how faint the resemblance may be. I found Van Ooijen's work on the Digital Artist Residency platform during one of my quarantine-inspired Instagram spirals. The Digital Artist Residency, created by Tom Milnes in 2015, is an inter-



*House Residency*





net-based platform which hosts artists for typically month-long, you guessed it, digital residencies. Since creating the DAR, Milnes has witnessed a shift in how internet-based works and platforms are received by brick-and-mortar institutions, noting new-found recognition of digitally-native works and platforms as legitimate cultural output in a way that didn't much exist only a handful of years ago. Milnes is optimistic, seeing this current epoch as one filled with possibility, as an opportunity to really change the way we think about online spaces—not simply as parallels or stand-ins for physical reality but rather entirely new, unconfined spaces that don't play by the same biological or physical rules that we so often and unnecessarily apply.

Van Ooijen also recognizes the promise of this moment, and offers what little she can during such disorienting times. She is interested in hope; her work speaks to belief in miracles, in the supernatural, and the capacity of individually constructed realities to motivate transformation. She is interested in 'traveling' and experiencing the world via the internet, and the power of such expanded notions of what constitutes a 'real' experience. She has made a slightly modified version of her digital shrine available on YouTube. Within the first two minutes, the camera settles a bit, we hear a child as well as the artist's voice, a hand comes into the frame to set and light a candle. Otherwise, the only movement throughout the hour-and-a-half clip comes from the flicker of the candle flame and the shifting sunlight, an occasional shadow from a human form passing between the light source and the altar. She gives us an opportunity to be still, to be connected without contact. Van Ooijen will happily light a candle for you, all you have to do is ask.

What is involved here aside from resilience is a considerable amount of aspiration, trust, and of course, faith. In conversation with Van Ooijen, we kept circling back to this blurring and blend-

ing of digital and physical space, and how the notion of healing doesn't perhaps require the physical proximity to totems in the ways that we once might have been led to believe. Healing, transformation, it comes from within.

How do we perform rituals—both digitally and not—and is this perhaps unique for each experience? What are the objects and talismans that we carry with us, physically and spiritually? Can we make and show artwork in the physical world to live and breathe online? What are the losses, what are the gains, what negotiations are made between these realms? It is becoming increasingly critical to contemplate these types of questions because the truth is, this time is not a stand-in. It is the budding of a new reality. And while wildly unprecedented and unsettling, it's important to keep in mind that this is not entirely a bad thing, that this territory is not completely uncharted, and that it is, in fact, laden with possibility. Within these prospects of course there is some concern. One aspect of this for Milnes, who has spent considerable time shaping internet space, is that this time will produce a glut of poorly thought-out projects and digital relocations instead of a call to invent new ways of existence. While people and institutions scramble to maintain some semblance of normality, to preserve relevancy, to somehow re-perform physical reality and the hierarchies that such a theoretically democratic/decentralized space as the internet doesn't inherently perform (Google rankings and algorithms/tiered access is not inherent to the network structure), many are trying to simply migrate their events and replicate their normal systems online instead of acknowledging that the internet is not a duplicate of physical space but rather a gravity-less, rhizomatic network without linear time or geographic place. Łukasz Horbów and Magdalena Morawik of Self House Residency, an Instagram-based platform developed in response to the current pandemic, note another concern which warrants consideration, that the perception of architecture changes during self-isolation as we are performing public rituals in private and private rituals in this newly exposed, collective realm. This time of social distancing, of quarantine and lockdown will undoubtedly have a profound effect on our concept of proximity and space—architecturally, psychologically, and physiologically.

So how do we ease the transition? How do we account for shifting boundaries, the psychological affirmations that physical structure inspires? What happens to our value systems for art, art production, and art education? What happens to the art market? What about the biennales, the art fairs? David Quiles Guilló, creator of *The Wrong*, has been exploring much of this since 2013 and offers yet another example of not only how this can work, but how there is truly limitless potential here. *The Wrong* was conceptually initiated on Thursday, February 21, 2013 as the world's first international, digital art biennial. As a contract to himself, guaranteeing accountability by making the declaration via Facebook, Quiles Guilló set out to organize a three-month long art biennale from his

home. His goal from the beginning has been to support digital culture by engaging with a vast selection of curated artworks, embracing the artists, curators, and institutions of the global digital culture scene, with a focus on gathering and nurturing. The Wrong has since evolved into a platform featuring a daily feed, a program of online exhibitions, print publications, a TV platform (an 24/7 free live-stream dedicated to digital art, music & culture) and has engaged and created a space for thousands of artists and cultural producers to share work, exchange ideas, and explore a less-bound space.

For Van Ooijen, the physical shrine provides comfort—she notes the scale: the tactility of materials, the weight of the objects are a knowable scope while the internet in contrast is so massive, so incomprehensible in both its structure and scope. For her, the most critical aspect of these shrines is that they can be shared and live online, in a more public realm. It's an attempt to reach people, to provide access when there otherwise wouldn't be—whether it's due to a public health crisis or an economic, social, or geographical blockade. At the end of the day, these journeys are about an individual transformational experience, so why shouldn't we be able to take a cyber pilgrimage to Lourdes, or Graceland, or the Guggenheim? We are learning how to rethink our rituals, redefine our needs and edges and capabilities. These are the practices that will carry us through and into this new aeon, armed with sanitizer and a strong wireless signal, we can be anywhere, do anything, and see anyone—we can incite our own revolution from the confines of whatever physicality we occupy.

As Hito Steyerl notes in her essay 'In Free Fall: A Thought Exper-

iment on Vertical Perspective', we, as a global society, have been under constant renegotiation of space and perspective. Perhaps this reorientation to the digital is not as difficult as we might think, it might just be happening at a speed we hadn't prepared ourselves for just yet. As our conventional systems crumble, new rhizomatic networks arise. Within the art world, communities have reflexively sprung-up to provide support and alternatives for the professors who are now forced to teach sculpture online, for the thesis-shows that will now only be produced and witnessed via weblink, for the practicing artists with projects and exhibitions, years in the making, suspended indefinitely. Emergency grants are slowly being doled out, platforms are being built. We are all fumbling through these hours trying not to lose time and momentum while having no idea what the future will hold, so right now generosity, faith, and 4G go a long way, ample time for reflection is required. It is our duty to consciously maneuver through the increased mutability and limitless potential for how to organize time, space, and connection. It is essential to recognize that the rules and patterns are different but not entirely unknown. It's the time to sit in front of some altar, somewhere, to light a candle for one other, to mourn the loss of the world as we know it, and let these rituals give us the comfort and faith to know that while it's hard, it's not the end. It's the time to dream again, to build the worlds that couldn't possibly exist in the soils of this earth.

Eva Van Ooijen <https://evavanooijen.nl/>  
Digital Artist Residency <https://digitalartistresidency.org/>  
Self House Residency [https://www.instagram.com/self\\_house\\_residency/](https://www.instagram.com/self_house_residency/)  
The Wrong <https://thewrong.org/>

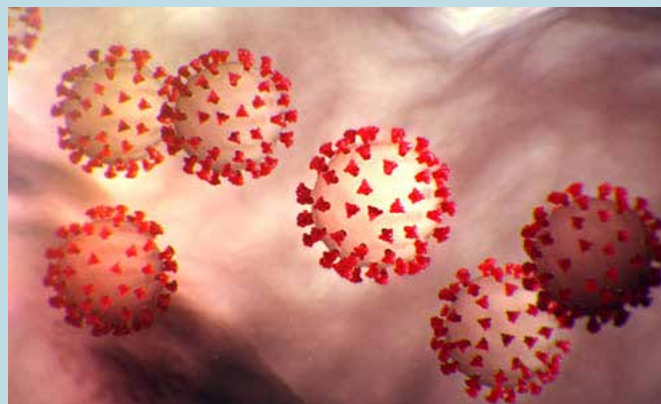
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## A Significant Fresh Start is Coming our Way

Ben Russo

*Infection, virus, asymptomatic, remote, and assembly* are continuously heard in official communications, by the media, and in our everyday dialogue, placing them among the most sought-after and fashionable words to be used at the moment. In a not so distant past, as heard in Europe and other parts of the world a century earlier, these words also play a significant role in the parallel universe of the arts. The big corporate players are out in the field, urging everything and everyone to move to an online platform, squeezing every little drop left behind by the current financial arrangement. Hiding behind and cashing in on the #stayathome trend, museums and cultural centers around the world claim to be once again open, but this time, in a new, different, structured, and thorough manner. They are trying to persuade the masses that physical institutions are simply replaceable by screens.

The fainéant, visionary, non-conformist, genius, hermit, and even the self-proclaimed local artist, run on the desire and passion for



*Change comes in many forms and guises*

expressing their emotions and messages through a tangible and most often lasting format. They convey their feelings using a precise form and dimension needed for their message to be carried on,



and sometimes understood entirely. Clearly, a screen or virtual experience will never be a replacement for some of those messages, even though the corporate art world would like us to think differently. An excellent tool for a writer or a graphic designer, but a bit flat and exceedingly modest for some of the other countless artists. The advertising dollars that once poured in the top museums from companies seeking exposure and an ethical way to launder their profits have dried up. The corporate art world is now pushing for an easy solution to this hiccup by embracing the trend of offering a museum experience from anyone's living room. The advantages are remarkable but unilateral, leaving some of the artists in the dark. Peter Saul recently noted that "there are just too many artists," and this is an excellent time to filter some out. Technology is leading the masses to believe that everything uploaded via the latest visual rendering app is an expression of original art, but the majority of them are just a mere algorithm of a preconfigured result.

The temporary closure of galleries, museums, and cultural centers does not imply that art, as we know it, is ending. Without any doubt, this will change some aspects of how we perceive art and those subtle emotions manifested by artists, only perceivable when physically present before a work of art. This is only temporary, but this crisis will trump several projects, put an end to a large number of careers, and halt the financial development of many prominent and grand institutions. Promoting the concept of a website as being similar to the grand halls of the top museums is just sinful. Rather than capitalizing on the current struggles and flooding the scene

**Promoting the concept of a website as being similar to the grand halls of the top museums is just sinful. Rather than capitalizing on the current struggles and flooding the scene with advertisements, those institutions have to take a peek at the educational component and try to resist the current mindset.**

with advertisements, those institutions have to take a peek at the educational component and try to resist the current mindset. Those institutions have to adapt their products to the scholarly world and not to the bored audience sitting behind a screen that eventually will not be able to contribute to them. The quick buck that made some companies shine in the past will be dimmed by the incredible and crucial potential that this new tool has for other purposes. Long-distance learning, to name one. A fresh breed of talent will emerge from these times, and just like intercontinental air travel and other industries affected by these hard times, will survive and advance. Trimming the fat and producing the much-needed change for a new generation of artists is what should be happening. The weak will fall off, innovation in every field will shine, and a new set of wealth will fund it all. Giants of the sector will live on, but new ones will emerge, making these times a possible modern renaissance.

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## The Role of A Post-COVID Museum

Alexander Stanfield

If I were to ask you, what is a museum, no matter what your answer is, the more pressing inquiry is what is the function of a museum? What role or responsibility does a museum have to the community it engages with mentally or emotionally?

The actual definition of 'museum' is more complicated than it may seem. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), a global collective of over 40,000 professionals and 20,000 institutions, the most recent proposed definition is as follows:

"Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partner-

ship with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." (Executive Board of ICOM July 2019).

The vote on what the new definition should be was postponed at ICOM's September, 2019 Tokyo assembly. The important takeaway from the proposed definition is that a museum has many functions and responsibilities that are dependent on its collection, staff, patrons, and guests. The issue with this most recent proposal is, while equal access is mentioned, accessibility is not. A museum

**... a museum has many functions and responsibilities that are dependent on its collection, staff, patrons, and guests.**

needs to make its collection accessible to those who can be physically present, and those who cannot. The current COVID pandemic has proven that when most museums are forced to close their doors, their collections are closed off too. Several prominent museums have adapted quickly to this drastic change. The National Gallery in London, The Smithsonian, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam are a few great examples of how an institution can utilize platforms like Instagram and Facebook and what an interactive, open platform website can achieve. As an avid museum goer, it is great to access these collections via a well-constructed and user friendly website until I can walk through their doors once again.

### Virus Song (to Homo Sapiens)

Frances Oliver

You strip the earth of its forest glades  
I thrive on the edge of your razor blades.

You kill the grass and explode the stones  
I hide securely inside your bones.

You reach for the stars and the ocean bed  
I travel on flakes of the skin you shed

You are the skies' and the prairies' master  
You breed in billions. I breed faster.

You harvest the whales and the redwoods tall  
You forget that nature is also small.

You make new weather, new storms and heat  
You devour the world. But you're still my meat

#### Author's note:

This poem was written during the 'Mad Cow Disease' scare in 1999 (will we ever forget that image of John Gummer feeding a hamburger to his daughter?) and published in the magazine *ORBIS* where it won third prize in a rhymed poetry contest - bumped up from 'honourable mention' as the third prize was found to be a plagiarism. It was then titled 'Bacteria Song' as I thought that title sounded better, though for that past and this present 'virus' is medically correct. With the combination of climate and pandemic crisis, the little verse seems even more relevant now.

What this pandemic has shown is how necessary an up-to-date and interactive digital collection is for would-be museum goers. To be a truly all-inclusive institution, a post-COVID museum should allow those who cannot physically be present access to their collections via virtual tours, high quality images, lecture and discussion videos, etc. There are so many ways to engage with a museum audience via a digital and online platform. Despite the turmoil and uncertainty right now, it is the perfect time to redefine what a museum can be, what defines it and what it can provide as an institution.

## Interview with the artist Donna Nadeau

(Daniel Nanavati, conducted over Skype)



*Donna Nadeau by Dewitt*

### *You obviously always wanted to be an artist?*

DN: Yes. When I was in high school, I graduated in the 70s, back then I was told that there wasn't very much money and we had one boy and three girls. So if someone was going to go to college it was going to be my brother because he would have to support a family. The girls would find someone to marry and be taken care of. That was the thinking. But I still wanted to go, so my mother went to the art school and talked to the art teacher and asked if I had any talent and she said no but she works very hard. So I didn't get to go to school. I still wanted to go, so I got the work-study program. I just

started the core classes for college, but modelling paid the most, so I nude-modelled for the art classes. And then I started modelling for Dewitt. He was like a pretty well-known artist in New England, he's in the Smithsonian, Library of Congress - he had a different style of watercolour and I would say show me how to do that, do that again. I would trade him modelling to teach me to paint. So I never had a formal education. The only thing I know how to do is watercolour in the way Dewitt taught me. I just know what he knows.

*So he was your mentor?*

DN: Yes. Even if I didn't live there, sometimes I would be working on something I would mail him and have him correct it or do something on a separate page if I had a problem. I have the book of my work that was put out by Gates Museum. When he first started watercolour he had no heavy shadows, which he didn't know how to do then. I did line and painting the flesh tones in '93. Then I first started doing the shiny hair. The dark shadows, the heavy scary part that goes on last after everything else. Watercolours are very many layers. I mix the paint with a very thick wash and then I lay it down, then I wash out the brush and I shake it over the floor, then I pick up the water around the edges, keep picking it up and shaking it and squeezing it out of the brush over and over until only the pigment that settled in the paper is left. Then I blow dry it. Then I put another layer. I do it over and over and over and over so it takes hours, many, many layers, but that's how I get that quality.

*So the shiny hair which is a feature of your work. Is that your own experimentation or did he teach you how to do that?*

DN: Oh, that's me with the hair. His hair, if you see his work, is not like this. When he saw this hair, which was probably when we started doing the stripper stuff, maybe in '98, he said 'you know what that looks like? That looks like Tamara De Lempicka. I wondered what would happen if I made the skin shiny because nobody has ever made shiny in watercolour that I knew of. I did a few like that but I kept doing the hair like that.

*Were you exhibiting?*

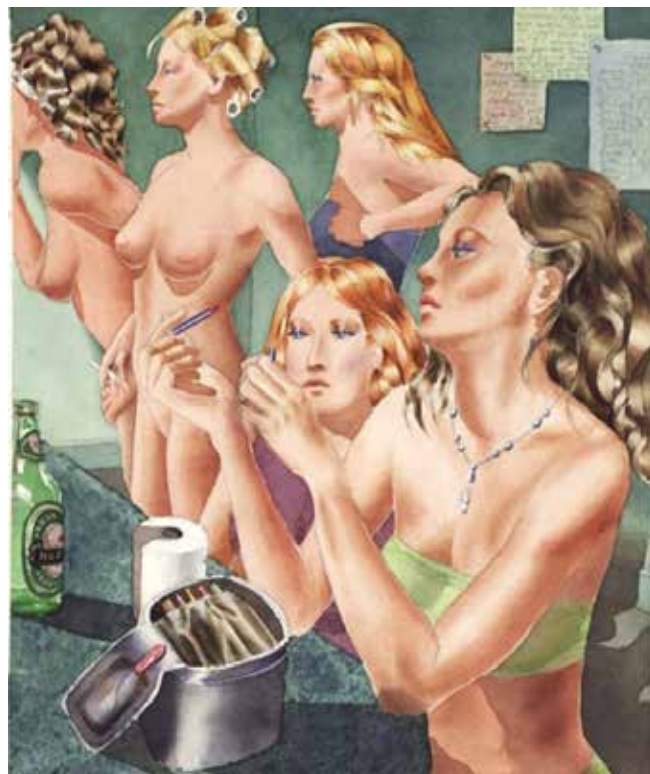
DN: I had a gallery in the back of an old beauty shop. I lived in at the back.

*In Florida?*

DN: No this was in Maine. I had this for summer before I moved to Key West. It was like a good summer. Dewitt put a lot of clutter in his paintings and I think that's why I do that. I would send the painting and he would send them back and I learned to do the shadows and used his colours.

*So more than just your teacher, he is your inspiration?*

DN: Yeah. With the stripper paintings. I was dancing, before I had



*Strippers*

the gallery, and I said to the girls, somebody has to tell people what this is about. This is a whole world and nobody knows our side; all they know is the men's side. When they come in here and they think we're sluts, they give us the money, it's a thing that everyone's ashamed of, and you don't admit that you did the job. You don't admit anything about it. You don't admit you go into those clubs. And all the guys are really trying to get over on their wife or whatever. They're the ones really being scummy but there's a whole life, there's a whole other side no one has ever talked about, So I was like, I'm gonna paint about this, somebody has to tell the world, so that is when I started doing stripper stuff.

*Has your painting changed?*

DN: Some since the ones I did with Dewitt. My flesh tones are not similar to his any more. My work is stronger since the ones I did with Dewitt. I still have some shiny hair but I have put shadow over it. So it has changed and evolved since then. I had the photographs but I wasn't thinking about lighting at the time. It was kinda dark in the dressing rooms so I would just take pictures of everybody while we are working. I had to make sure they didn't look repetitious. I sometimes had to relight my self portraits. I would pose in the mirror with another mirror and see where the shadows fell. I did have trouble with the hands and he would help me. So some of the things he drew on, some he did washes on. He made me do them over and over. I'm a mimic, I can run nothing out of my head. I pose myself in the mirror for whatever I need.

*How was the exhibition?*





*Donna Nadeau - painted from a photograph of her dancing*

DN: People at the show were just amazed and they said ‘you know. I never thought that there was another side’. I quit painting in 2003 because I was so discouraged with everybody’s rejection of these as pornography. It’s erotic art, it’s offensive. In Key West people run around naked but they wouldn’t show me in the galleries.

***What did you do?***

DN: I did some pottery. So, I had these customers over at the college. I worked for them and, you know, by making stuff for ... say I would make 60 of something that needed to be made for a convention of all the heads of the colleges. Whatever the little job was. I was there for like 15 years. These paintings take me so long. A smaller one takes 214 hours. The drawing takes a long time because once the line is down you can’t fix it later. So I made pots until Jeff saw the stripper stuff and saw the notes I made on the back, telling the stories. He said this is a documentary of your life, Darren Jones, your New York Editor, said, ‘I feel like I just discovered a hidden treasure’ and they got Studios Key West to come over and they offered me a show for the stripper stuff.

Usually people have low self-esteem that do it to start with. You can tell a girl that is brand-new because she thinks she’s a star. She’s so pretty and the guys like her. She has a great time for about a year/year and a half. By then she hates them all too. A lot of them were cheerleaders, or majorettes, or they worked at Hooters. It’s



*Lap-dancing*

the money that sucks you in to start with. All the strippers end up bisexual, into drugs. There were all kinds of drug guys with pockets full of hundred dollar bills. In my next show I am going to do a retrospective of how it used to be. Now they jump on the guys’ laps and go in the back and grind all over them. It wasn’t like that. Back in the day guys came in for someone to talk to because they talked to women better than with other men. They would come in for conversation more than anything else. I didn’t get into heavy, heavy drinking until I was busted by the cops who set us up because they knew we knew who the drug dealers were, and I lost my job. I needed to give up lap-dancing and that gives you the heebie-jeebies because for the first time they could touch me. I drank so I could put up with it.

***When did you begin to paint these scenes?***

DN: I had saved \$15,000 in 1980 and bought a little land which got zoned so I lost it. I went to Vegas, and worked for a year and half and I hated it there. Lots of girls there committed suicide. I took a year off and painted landscape, and I did a lot of food painting, so pastries and stuff and I would sell them for like \$75 in the coffee shop and to a little gallery. I would see Dewitt when I came home. I didn’t think about doing the painting, until I quit.

***Do the paintings have an element of fulfilment?***

DN: This is something that had to be done before I die. This is my mark that I’m leaving as far as I’m concerned, and hopefully it gets awareness for the what happens on the other side.

***When you exhibit do you have the stories on the back?***

DN: Yes. *The Rule* is about a girl who is very depressed. Something made her come back. We were all given fines. There were signs for things like do not hit the customers with beer bottles, call the bouncer! Do not bring drugs onto the property.

***Have you kept friendships with the girls?***

DN: Yes. We still see each other. Not all but some. I saw girls with tattoos on their back saying ‘Property of’ followed by the name of their boyfriend. They would give whoever he was all their money. A lot of the girls developed drug habits. Some were ruthless about



getting money to feed their habit. We got money for sitting topless on boats just to adorn the boat.

*I also see you paint people's houses.*

DN: Yes I've done a lot of those. But architecture is commissioned. Compared to these paintings, not a lot of people can paint figures in watercolours like this. The first people who helped me exhibit and sell didn't want me to tell anyone I did stripper stuff. Even my sister thinks writing about me puts the family in a bad light, while my mother helped me by posing in the mirror. My own

sister! It's amazing how conservative all these galleries are.

*But artists are the conscience of society.*

DN: People just paint what the galleries want. I can paint anything they want but it's not what I want to paint. People love the paintings but they don't want to put them in their house. But if you don't like nudes, my son who went with me to Paris, said in that case you really need to stay out of the Louvre.

*It's been lovely talking to you. Thank you.*

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## HONG KONG

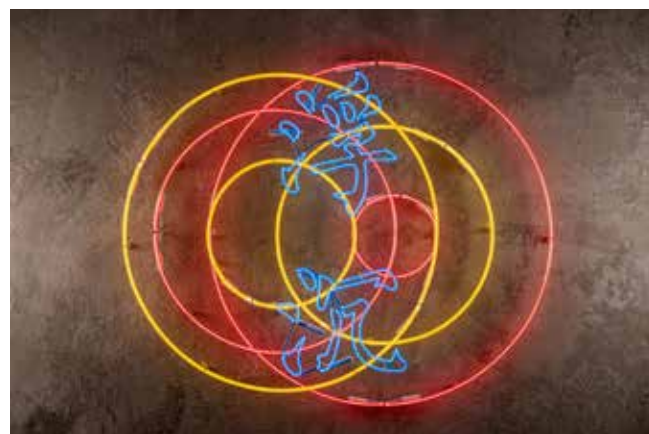
# Anonymous Society for Magick

Ivy Leung

'Anonymous Society', a special name, feels mysterious. 'Magick' refers to magic. Magic is the reflection of the individual's spirit and a psychological activity that transcends the real world. Aleister Crowley was an occultist and ceremonial magician in the early 19th-century. He believed that 'Magick' is the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with will, so magic can change the material world by an individual will without any physical movement. The belief attaches great importance to the individual's 'true will'.

The curator Ying Kwok borrowed Crowley's concept of 'Magick' and focused on the idea that 'Magick' "is the Science of understanding oneself and one's conditions." Exhibits created by five artists are on display and compare how they interpreted their 'understanding' of this concept in their creations.

Chen Wei focused on the changes in the appearance of Hong Kong and people's recent situation. Through meticulous arrangement, scenes are reproduced using photography and mixed media installations. Chen is an expert in using the effect created by light and space. He believes that light is like a tone of voice. It can be soft or hard. Just as in photography, the light can be handled very sharply or softly. The neon light installation *Drifting Along* (Hong Kong) (2020), mainly depicts the contemporary social situation in China and Hong Kong. Another appealing installation, *Curtain (Floating New Buildings / Hong Kong)*, is a newly commissioned site-specific installation. The image depicts a window view from the interior. The curtain is featured with fantasy colors printed on it. The glistening lights look like a reflection from the new buildings outside the window. It is beautiful but illusory.



*Chen Wei, Drifting Along (Hong Kong), 2020  
Neon light installation*

Hao Jingban's newest video, *Opus One* (2020), which won the Han Nefkens Foundation – ARCOMadrid video art award (2019), was first exhibited at the Matadero Madrid earlier this year. Hao used video and follow-up interviews to show how a young Chinese couple, who love Swing, obsessively pursued this jazz dance which was popular with Afro-Americans from the 1930s to the 1950s in Harlem, New York. In the dance clips every single detail of the dance is studied, along with the characters, scenes and related chronological cultural background. The couple practiced strenuously and even took a field trip to Harlem to experience the place where jazz began. They finally achieved a top performance, but also realized that the insurmountable distance between different races and cultures is not easy to breach.



*Hao Jingban, Opus One 2020*

in his childhood, like sitting in the cinema anxiously trying to flee from the moving images. He created a carousel lantern to display moving illusions that show his urge to flee into his ruminating images. At the same time, he projects his own desire to escape from the social turmoil and viral feverishness of his birthplace.

In Wang Tuo's latest work, *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting* (2020), he used video to show the complex relationship between the present and the historical past, natural and supernatural beings, and states of existence. In the video, time and space interweave non-linearly. During the Cultural Revolution, unhealable events happened. The un-relievable pressure created by the events are still experienced to date. Wang's video suggested an illusionary alternative reality for relieving this pressure. The moving image is like a magic show, providing a psychological escape for the audience. When researching and producing the video, Wang drew a series of sketches based on the pertinent themes. These drawings are sourced from archival images and classical mythological illustrations from the Cultural Revolution era.

Trevor Yeung is an artist who often uses living plants as a medium. *Mr. Butterflies at a waiting corridor* is an immersive site-specific kinetic installation, in which butterfly palms slowly rotate and iridescent shadows are cast onto the wall by LED light in selected colors. The space is like the entrance hall to a concert, the audience has to accommodate the proximity of others and navigate the corridor accordingly. They should always be on the lookout, waiting for someone who might not appear. In these anthropomorphic plants Yeung sees his personal anxiety in a place where he needs to see and to be seen. Another work, *Night Mushroom Colon* (2020) expresses that even though humans have transformed the ecology with their hegemony; other species could always find a way to survive. The stealthy bioluminescence is a metaphor for a secretive realm. These mushrooms can thrive in this unexpected setting, they reproduce through polyamorous converters and tempting colors. Their fertility and resilience provide a viable alternative for many species and show how to survive in our insecure generation.

Historically, magic has been conceived as an invisible power that can change the visible reality. This exhibition shows the intricate relationship between past and present, individual obsession and national culture, real world and otherworldly realm. Is there magic in the world where reality is visible? I can't answer this question, but what I can say for sure is that the artists have showcased their dreams and desires, revealing the immanent truth within our surroundings. Maybe all these works of art could inspire the audience to think about their own dreams and desires with their invisible, mysterious power, like magic.

*Hong Kong Blindspot Gallery, through to 30th May 2020, Featured Artists: Chen Wei, Hao Jingban, Lam Tung Pang, Wang Tuo, Trevor Yeung.*



*Trevor Yeung, Night Mushroom Colon (Six), 2016*

Lam Tung Pang was born and raised in Hong Kong. Living in a crowded and noisy city, many people long for a quiet and leisurely life. Lam is no exception. His large-scale kinetic video installation *The Great Escape* (2020) was specially commissioned for this exhibition. After referencing from an essay in Shuji Terayama's *Fantasy Library*, the author was mesmerized by the street magician, Harry Houdini, whose skilful daring escape acts threatened our belief and concept of reality. Lam recalled the feeling of "escape"

# Leon Golub: A Country No Longer United

Viktor Witkowski

Leon Golub would certainly find many reasons and occasions to make paintings of our current time. He would not feel elevated about that prospect in any way, but he would understand and accept the responsibility to find ways for painting to engage its viewers beyond pictorial references and formalist nodes to past as well as contemporary artists.

The clearly marked divide between the white man's space on the right of this painting and the bench with two seated black women on the left delineates racial segregation. Even though all three figures share the same ground, their assigned spaces seem impenetrable, made of lines, marks and contrasting colors that flesh out the realities of segregation. These are the kinds of walls that are imposed, with the sole purpose of exclusion.

Golub hints at painterly traditions found in Modernism by treating the background as a flat plane made up of three sections: a square, a rectangle and a narrow dark-blue horizontal element that serves as ground and horizon line. His application of paint matters too, because the canvas' rugged and highly textured appearance is misleading. Golub would often use a meat cleaver to scrape off excess paint instead of letting it build up on the canvas. Aside from his paintings' washed out, partly transparent although unifying look, the use of a meat cleaver (versus the more conventional palette knife) adds a tool to his repertoire that is usually associated with breaking down bones and meat into smaller, more manageable parts. This tool's violent potential is repurposed by Golub, yet his canvas surfaces remain marked by the cleaver and its potential to scrape, divide, shatter and kill.

In addition to the formal set-up of this scene in which each figure occupies a space of their own, there are attempts at communication between the two groups. While the bench ends exactly where the white man's space begins, the woman's left hand has crossed into



*Leon Golub, Two Black Women and a White Man, acrylic on linen*

his territory. Her hand is at ease, pointing downwards as if to assure her white counterpart that she means no harm. She is looking around her shoulder right at him, trying to meet his gaze, but to no avail. Sensing her attempt, the white man looks the other way. The third figure in this painting, an older black woman and potential companion of the other woman, is looking right at the viewer. If we assume that the white man is intentionally directing his gaze away from these two women, she seems to be asking us not to do the same. As viewers, we become witnesses who are given a choice: either to look the other way or to refuse to do so.

Violence comes in different forms and degrees. It is also experienced differently by respective individuals, groups and societies. And to the young painters who have been patient enough to finish reading: now is not the time to look the other way.

*Raw Nerve At The Met Breuer, February 6–May 27, 2018*

## Bidden to the light

Liviana Martin

*THE FIRST EXHIBITION IN ITALY DEDICATED TO GEORGES DE LA TOUR: 15 PAINTINGS OUT OF 40 OF CERTAIN ATTRIBUTION, COMPARED WITH MASTERS OF HIS TIME, SUCH AS GERRIT VAN HONTHORST, PAULUS BOR, TROPHIME BIGOT, FRANS HALS*

Let's imagine that a dark room is illuminated by a dim candlelight and that from the dark one can decipher, little by little, the details of a face, a hand, an everyday object. Our vision focuses on what it can perceive, our mind perhaps pushes us to go further, beyond the





Dice-players, c. 1651, probably de La Tour's last work. (Preston Hall Museum, Stockton-on-Tees)

visible, into the heart of darkness. This is what we are invited to do by the 17th-century French artist Georges de la Tour, renowned as a 'painter of light'. He was rediscovered by critics after a long silence only in the early 1900s.

Many questions still surround his life and works. Born in Lorraine in 1593 to a humble family of bakers, he acquired the noble title thanks to his marriage to Diane Le Nerf, heir of a rich Lorraine family, who introduced him to the high society of the time. Increasingly esteemed for his paintings by contemporaries, in 1639 he became Painter to the King of France, Louis XIII.

We know about his character from judicial documents of the time: arrogant, violent, he tyrannized like a provincial lord with his pack of dogs. He lived in Luneville and, from what the chronicles tell us, the villagers couldn't stand him: he was rich, owned lands and goods but, by ducal exemption, he didn't pay taxes, and would clobber anyone who dared to touch what he owned.

If we were to rely on these biographical notes, we would expect violent, vital paintings; instead, and especially in the later ones, they reveal an extraordinary tenderness in portraying infants, children, mothers, saints in meditation, with an almost metaphysical manner that transfigures human beings in symbols. As André Malraux noted, La Tour is the painter of silence, of enchantment, of

night that spreads out over the world; he interprets "the serene part of darkness". He takes themes and characters from Caravaggio (the cheat, the fortune teller), but as if they were a distant echo, and the immobility of his works brings to mind Paolo Uccello or Giotto. His is a theater of statue-like characters, inserted in a flat, undefined space.

The first works, the result of youthful experimentation, are set in daylight. In the *The Musicians' Brawl* the artist confronts us, using crude realism, with a violent altercation between musicians: while the two quarrellers fight, an old woman, with her silent scream, unloads all her unhappiness on us, forcing us to look at her.

It is a genre scene, widespread both in Italy (with Caravaggio) and in Flemish painting (Brueghel the Elder and Terbrugghen), but de La Tour interprets it in a particular way, showing detachment and a certain irony. Detachment, a subject that is also typical of French and Flemish art, is represented in the monumental *Hurdy-gurdy Player with a Dog*. Again the artist manifests his originality: the old man is painted full length, with a perspective from the bottom up. We do not feel particular involvement towards this elderly player who appears cold and unfriendly, while, perhaps, the only note of tenderness is given by the dog crouched at his feet, who looks at us with an imploring air. Note, in this as in other works, the hands



of the characters: old and wrinkled, or youthful and almost crossed by the light, in any case they are hands that speak. It is no coincidence that the artist was the son and relative of bakers, who made a living with their hands.

In de La Tour's later works his painting changes: the light becomes increasingly dim, the scenes, illuminated by a weak candle flame, become nocturnal. While illumination in Caravaggio's paintings is given by a chink of light, a luminous passage that allows us to glimpse the characters, detaching them from the dark background, the light of the French artist places the protagonists of the work in a timeless atmosphere. "The flame of a candle", says Gaston Bachelard, "forces us to imagine, it is itself an image of solitude, of calm, of peace". And its vertical momentum invites the soul to rise towards God.

One of the masterpieces on display is the *Repentant Magdalen* (National Gallery of Art, Washington), of which he painted at least four versions. In this, the saint, whose profile and part of the bust can be seen, meditates touching a skull (the *vanitas* of things), reflected in a mirror. The woman, having abandoned her previous dissolute life as a sinner, is represented here as a penitent, without jewels or other worldly ornaments. The material goods, the din of life, have disappeared: Magdalene is alone in front of herself.

Another surprising figure of a woman is found in *Job Mocked by*

*his Wife*. The picture refers to the biblical episode in which Job is scorned and mocked by his wife for having endured with infinite patience the trials to which God had subjected him. The contrast between the two could not be more evident, both in posture and in the color rendering: like a giantess, the woman looms over Job, depicted in his nakedness as a thin, old man covered by sores. The representation of the female figure is almost architectural, an arch that encloses the old man. The red color of her dress contrasts with the color palette of the tones of brown with which Job is painted. And finally, to mark the extreme rarefaction of the artist's painting, we observe *St. John the Baptist in the Desert*, a work where monochrome prevails, every idea of space and movement disappears with the image of a hermit bent over a lamb to which he offers a blade of grass.

The impression obtained from this exceptional exhibition, although unfortunately devoid of masterpieces such as *Joseph the Carpenter* or *The Newborn Child*, is that of a very modern artist, who has been compared to Cezanne or Picasso. However, unlike most contemporary art, his work speaks to us of universal values, morals and spirituality.

*Lights and Shadows of a Seventeenth-century Painter*

*Europe of Light - Georges de La Tour, Palazzo Reale, Milan*

*February 7 - June 7, 2020, admission € 14*

## A brilliant madness

The artist Emilio Vedova, born in 1919, was able to renovate the artistic language of his time thanks to his brilliant madness and extraordinary instincts.

Palazzo Reale celebrated the centenary of his birth by setting up a retrospective of his art which, through constant research and experimentation, morphed from an original realism to a geometric and abstract style consisting of lines, different levels and volumes through space.

The Sala delle Cariatidi, with its solemn and majestic atmosphere, enhanced Vedova's work, especially the dynamism and explosive energy that earned him the sobriquet 'the Venetian Pollock'. The display encouraged visitors to feel as if they were on stage; grand artworks surrounded the space, installed on the floor or on the walls, furrowed by frenetic yellow, black, gray and red brushstrokes. The impact was breath-taking. One could almost feel the artist's anger as he furiously painted on the canvases unravelling onto the floor.

A wall divides the room: one side focuses on the paintings and sculptures created in the 1940s and 1970s, such as the *Plurimi*, the other on the pieces created during the 1980s and 1990s, like the

Loretta Pettinato  
(Translated by Laura Pettinato)



*Plurimi*

*Dischi*. He started working on the *Plurimi* in 1963; using collages and graffiti, he created paintings on wooden structures of different sizes and shapes, connected by iron hinges, which allow the compositions to open like theater stages. In 1964 he brought to life the colorful *Plurimi* of the “Absurdes Berliner Tagebuch” cycle.

During the 1980s and 1990s he worked on the *Dischi*: large wooden pieces, painted on two sides with interweaving brushstrokes that almost look like black and gray spider webs, crossed by red lightning and various material inserts. In 1993 he created ‘Who burns a book burns a man’, a big ‘disco’ consisting of four wooden crescent moons on an iron base, connected by hinges and covered with a collage of burnt fabric, paper and ash.

The artwork was intended to be an outcry against the violence of the Serbian army which, during the civil war, burnt more than one million books in Sarajevo. Vedova considered art a privileged way to denounce social tensions and injustices, to shake people’s consciences and to stand up against every kind of abuse and oppression. The titles of his most famous creations are emblematic: *Clash of Situations*, *Cycle of Protest*, *Le Mani Addosso*. These do not represent objects, but rather concepts and conflicting situations.

Being an eclectic artist, he moved through different mediums, experimenting with metal and glass manufacturing and engaging in graphic design. Nevertheless, painting was his main interest. Vedova didn’t become a painter, he was born one. He wrote in his diary: “when I was a child (in grade two or three) I used to go to San Marco’s Square to scrape the paint from the palettes of the artists who worked with different materials, then I would go back home and paint with my fingers.”

A free spirit and a rebel, he passionately took part in the social conflict going on at the time in order to defend civil rights, always staying true to himself and his beliefs. He died in 2006.

## TRUTH

When most denied, most alive -  
When a castaway on overheated shores,  
Or left standing in an empty field -  
Where something more than peace  
Heals the damage or crime -  
When squeezed into overcrowded  
Streets or left to freeze -  
Or broken like tiny frail twigs  
From young bushes -  
Or like the palest wild rose -  
Just daring to be fragrant -  
Most holy, most sacred, most divine;  
Neglected, but a giant against  
The throng’s pale insincerity -  
There is only one shrine  
Where miracles change  
Water into wine -  
And that O torn deceivers -  
Is mine -

Shānne Sands

(from: *Shadows and Realities*)

*Emilio Vedova, Palazzo Reale - Milan, 6 December 2019 - 9 February 2020*

## DON'T MISS INDEPENDENT CULTURAL THINKING

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## Bodies and gods

Mary Fletcher

Evelyn Williams died in 2012, having completed a body of work said to be hard to categorise and having left a Trust to help women artists. I was told at *Anima Mundi* that the director, Joseph Clark, found a painting by her in a charity shop in Wadebridge and purchased it. It turned out to have been stolen from a show and he decided to organise this exhibition of her paintings. There were two books about her oeuvre to peruse.

Most of the works had two figures in them so the relationship between them seemed to be the subject. One had a naked woman emerging from the side of a naked man, recalling the biblical creation story. I didn't like the very pink fleshy tones of the bodies, a bit like Lucian Freud but not I think observed but imagined. The backgrounds contrasted with the bodies to emphasise them as the focus. They are striking works, but to me didn't embody clear feelings. Maybe they are worked on too long, which results in a certain heavy-handedness. One small picture of two heads in watercolour was much more spontaneous looking, so I thought the artist when making large works had found it difficult to maintain her freshness of approach or maybe didn't value that and wanted to make more deliberated images when working on a larger scale. The artist said her subject was 'inner thoughts, other worlds'.

Reading about her I am horrified to see Evelyn Williams was sent to board at Summerhill School before she was three and spoke of a remaining sadness from this. I would say she suffered abandonment by her parents. She also felt her whole generation were affected by the Holocaust and did a great picture of a huge bomb exploding over a mass of people - depicted naked to show their vulnerability and given a timeless quality.

*Anima Mundi* shows an interesting video on the website of an interview of the artist on BBC Wales 2007, and I am left pleased to learn about her.

Prices range from £2,800 to £13,000.

Carlos Zapata is from Colombia but lives in Falmouth. He uses a variety of materials for his sculptures of figures and works in different sizes. There are references to gods and to Celtic culture. The waxed steel 'sacred book' has ragged-looking pages with no discernible text as if it has been burnt.

I liked best *Celtic Mother*, in grey polyphant stone, smaller than life size and a gentle, tender image.

There was an expressive charcoal drawing *Bog Man* and a roughly textured textile version in 3D.

*Celt* was a painting of a man as if dead, with the head and genitals blocked out by added pieces of hessian - the reason not being apparent. I like his figures when they are whole, but the torsos and heads are more macabre.

I've preferred other works by Zapata, some with South American influences, but it's always interesting to see his sculptures because at their best they have a simple directness that is very appealing.

Prices range from £1,800 to £7,200.

*Evelyn Williams and Carlos Zapata at Anima Mundi Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall, UK. February 22nd to March 31st, 2020*

## A Realistic Manifesto at the Tate

Mary Fletcher

On the way in through Gallery One there is a beautiful golden coloured Gabo made of bronze, looking a bit too large for its corner, and apparently at one stage it was in the main show. It is simple – geometric metal formed into a curvilinear form, constructed using machinery to achieve a perfectly satisfying composition. Its presence in a room with Brian Wynter, Sandra Blow etc. claims him as one of our own in St Ives.

The entrance to the Gabo show, before the main gallery, holds a large female head made of planes of metal, feeling very oversized in the space. An additional small golden work sits high up in a

corner, placed like an icon in a home (for those who can find it).

It's a hundred years since Naum Gabo, after leaving Moscow to avoid being enlisted in World War I, returned to be an enthusiastic part of the early revolutionary excitement and was distributing his *Realistic Manifesto* in the streets of the city. One copy is in a display case with a translation below it, but I wonder why the show wasn't constructed around these glorious sentences which carry the flavour of a time we can hardly imagine, when a unifying vision of better times had swept Lenin and the Bolsheviks to power. Artists saw abstraction not as the chic accompaniment to a second

home it may be today, but as a rejection of clichés and a leap forward to an art that sought something essential and meaningful that would affect the whole of society.

‘Today is the deed.

We will account for it tomorrow.

The past we are leaving behind as carrion.

The future we leave to fortune tellers.

We take the present day.’

The exhibition is split in half by a curved grey hospital curtain, which even has instructions not to touch it inscribed on the floor, and I wondered why this was made such a dominating feature. I mentioned this to a woman who turned out to be Nina Williams, Gabo’s daughter, born in Carbis Bay in 1941. She said she was delighted with the whole display, but I would have preferred the curtain to be removed.

There are models for buildings, monuments, sculptures, mono prints, paintings, drawings and films, so you get a great idea of the wide scope of Gabo’s work. I loved the film of *La Chatte* ballet using dancers with circular and square frames wielded wittily. Gabo constructed work with new materials, aiming to work with space and kinetic possibilities.

The walls have been painted subtle green and dark turquoise and make an interesting change from the white austerity which has become routine for modernist galleries.

Gabo left Russia again. From my internet research, which I recommend as there are so many images of Gabo’s works available including film of him speaking, I find that he did not fit in with Tatlin and El Lissitzky’s views and was not admitted to the Central Sovi-

et of Artists which would have guaranteed him paid work. Gabo chose to leave and was not to be allowed back until 1962. The tide was already turning from the early revolutionary embrace of pure abstraction and Gabo left for Germany. Later, as Anti-Semitism grew, he moved on to Paris and London, and arrived in St Ives where he stayed for seven years.

Here Gabo influenced Barbara Hepworth, but felt she stole his ideas, becoming a valued member of the in crowd. He left for America in 1946, where he found fame and fortune.

Gabo was the son of a wealthy industrialist who owned metal works, and the father’s money enabled Naum to travel and pursue art. He said he was converted to the revolution at the age of 15 on seeing Cossack brutality in putting down the early protests in Russia. He had been expelled from primary school for writing subversive poetry about the headmaster. He had not been admitted to St Petersburg Art School and remained self taught.

Nowadays it’s difficult to think of any artist rising to prominence without the required education and a string of official awards and residences - as evidenced by the other artist featured at Tate St Ives at the moment - Emily Speed.

So, ironically, the revolutionary Gabo who left Russia, perhaps because his dedication to his art outweighed his political fervour, succeeded because of his capitalist father’s funding and made his own residences, moving from country to country. His influence on international art and design was considerable.

I would have liked some context about the Russian artists with whom Gabo parted company, but these one-person shows are devoted to the idea of one genius, so comparisons with these and with Hepworth are left to the visitor to make for themselves.

*Naum Gabo at Tate St Ives (1890-1977)*

## David Hosking

David Hosking, an old friend and artist based in Porthleven, died recently. I was deeply saddened and worried for his wife, they were a devoted couple.

His pictures were bright, cheerful, stylised scenes, many of them seascapes. Vaguely cubist, a little Paul Klee, but essentially true to his own self, they were not to everyone’s taste and occasionally evoked the response, ‘my eight year old could do that’, but we all know the answer to that one, don’t we?

I began to think about the *New Art Examiner’s* writers’ meeting we had just had, and the discussion about the purpose of art.

David’s pictures held no messages, hidden or otherwise. His pictures made no social comment, nor do they relate to world events, and to me, there’s nothing wrong with that. Art, in any form, may

## Lynda Green

sometimes have a deeper purpose than simple display, one can bring to mind Picasso’s *Guernica*, Solzhenitsky’s *Gulag Archipelago*, perhaps even Tracy Emin’s unmade bed, certainly Ai Weiwei’s installations, but occasionally it’s just good to enjoy, to look no further than what’s hanging on the wall. There has to be a place for the artists who, while driven to create, simply enjoy the execution of the talents they have.

David painted a picture just for me once. It’s called *Bouncing Boats*. Three boats, coming in at an angle, the farthest small, on the horizon, the other two in perspective coming closer, the sky going from red to orange to golden, the ocean horizontal stripes from aquamarine to cerulean blue to navy. I cannot look at it without smiling, isn’t that a successful picture?



David was a man full of humour and it comes across in so many of his pictures. He was never the starving artist, nor the tortured soul, he taught art until in his forties when he decided he should bite the bullet and follow his dream, and so he did.

Picasso said, “The chief enemy of creating is good sense.”

Neitzche said, “Art is the proper task of life.”

Chekhov said, “The role of the artist is to ask questions, not answer them.”

Take your pick.

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Continued from page 19

**Barr situated Surrealism in a 500-year-lineage of fantastic art. Thus the context for the exhibition was not exclusively modern art, following Barr’s understanding of modernism as both a revolt from and continuity of tradition.**

of Surrealism in that it placed Surrealism firmly within an art historical context. Barr accomplished this in two ways – first, he refused to let the Surrealists dictate the planning of the exhibition, instead creating an installation that was as straightforward and didactic as possible. Not only was the exhibition ‘not an official Surrealist manifestation’ (much to the disapproval of the movement’s leader André Breton), but secondly, Barr situated Surrealism in a 500-year-lineage of fantastic art. Thus the context for the exhibition was not exclusively modern art, following Barr’s understanding of modernism as both a revolt from and continuity of tradition. In letters, Barr bristled at the arrogance of Breton to think he could dictate what was included in the exhibition, asserting the integrity of the institution to frame Surrealism as the curator saw fit.

By the conclusion of the exhibition, Barr (thanks to Margaret Scollari Barr, and Duchamp) had resolved the disagreements with both the trustees and the artists involved in the show and was gratified that the exhibition had served to expose the public to Surrealism. Barr wrote to the Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston: “The exhibition was one of the most controversial ever held by the Museum, and we hope served its purpose in making a report to the public upon one of the most original and conspicuous of contemporary movements”. Even as he placed Surrealism within a long art historical tradition, Barr reveals that his primary hope for the show was merely reportage, rather than canonisation. Barr’s objective was successfully met not only by the 50,000 people who visited the exhibition, but by the scores of reviews of the show, which for the most part avoided the question of artistic merit, and instead commented on the variety and novelty of the works on display.

Barr had given Surrealism the museum’s institutional endorsement, but a double-edged one. He had underscored the uncertain legacy of Surrealism in his foreword to the exhibition catalogue when he, rather cavalierly, stated: Once Surrealism is “no longer a cockpit of controversy, it will doubtless be seen as having produced a mass of mediocre pictures ..., a fair number of excellent

and enduring works of art, and even a few masterpieces.” Perhaps the true sign of whether Barr considered Surrealist works to be valuable was if he urged the museum to purchase them for the collection. By 1936, he had already acquired Salvador Dali’s *Persistence of Memory* (1931), and from the exhibition he also was able to obtain Rene Magritte’s *False Mirror* (1929). Years later in 1946, after much lobbying, Meret Oppenheim’s *Object* (1936) also entered the collection.

In addition to providing Surrealism with an art historical lineage, Barr also recognised its commercial and vernacular associations. MoMA’s initial endorsement of Surrealism did not initially secure the place of Surrealism within the fine art canon, but opened the movement up to further pilfering in the realm of mass culture.

**In addition to providing Surrealism with an art historical lineage, Barr also recognised its commercial and vernacular associations. MoMA’s initial endorsement of Surrealism did not initially secure the place of Surrealism within the fine art canon, but opened the movement up to further pilfering in the realm of mass culture.**

These commercial manifestations were often facilitated by Surrealists themselves - or those artists associated with Surrealism in the minds of the public, even if, like Salvador Dali in 1939, they had been officially expelled from the movement by Breton. Thus, the immediate aftermath of Barr’s exhibition was public exposure to Surrealism not only in the museum, but also in the marketplace as Surrealist-inspired window displays, advertisements, and movie sequences circulated in American mass culture. As a writer for Scribner’s noted, while Surrealism was currently being used to promote luxury goods, “come a few more years, and we may be examining Surrealism in Macy’s bargain basement”. The writer warns that Surrealism’s power in advertising signalled an increasing danger of being further diluted, or perhaps more precisely, discounted. What Barr had termed Surrealism’s ‘conspicuous’ presence, one amplified by MoMA’s exhibition, meant that its fine art and commercial pursuits were increasingly intertwined in the public imagination.

**Part 2: Historicizing Dada and Surrealism and Challenging the Modern in the next issue.**

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**MARY BEARD BLOCKED BY NO 10 AS BRITISH MUSEUM TRUSTEE 'FOR PRO-EUROPE VIEWS'**

Under the current arrangement, Downing Street has a say over the appointment of most of the museum's 25 trustees, but the museum's constitution allows it to choose five for itself. "Good for the trustees," said one longstanding former board member, who did not want to be named. "The decision to reject her is more about political correctness than respected classical scholarship." The committee took no notice and appointed Professor Beard anyway. (*The Guardian*, March 2020)

**PAYMENT ISN'T VIRTUAL**

Introducing Sydenham Arts Virtual Artists Trail - keeping the Artists Trail going at this challenging time for us all. With social distancing and lockdown set to continue for the foreseeable future, clearly the Artists Trail will not be organised in the same way this year. We have been working hard to develop a brand new format for local, national and international artists to share their work and expand our artists community. ([artsjobs.org.uk](http://artsjobs.org.uk))

**ONE-THIRD OF FRANCE'S GALLERIES MAY PERMANENTLY CLOSE DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

One-third of French galleries may be forced to permanently close their doors before the end of the year because of the devastating impact the coronavirus has had on France's cultural sector. According to a study conducted by the Comité Professionnel des Galeries d'Art, a French trade organization that collected data from 168 of its 279 member galleries, dealerships expect to lose more than \$200 million in revenue by June. (*Artforum*, April 9th 2020)

## Festivals and Fringes

St Ives, Cornwall, UK, has a September festival. It's two weeks of enjoyable music, poetry, talks and art - none of it very challenging.

Recently Ken Turner put forward an event which was rejected - a discussion of democracy or lack of it in the arts. It seems his 'Codswallop' performance a few years back, where he went into the Penwith Gallery towing a smelly codfish, denounced the paintings in there as rubbish, swore and frightened the staff, has convinced the committee that his brand of attempting to upset the status quo cannot be encouraged.

In 1970 Monica Sjoö's painting of *God giving birth*, i.e. as a naked female figure, was seized by police at a festival, but no other controversial events have disturbed the genteel celebrations.

A fringe of experimental and more newsworthy innovative events could be a revitalising tonic in a town made famous by the artists' colony of Hepworth, Nicholson and co., with their abstract paintings during and after World War 2 but since rather cosily settling for a nostalgic time warp.

How do festivals fare around the world? Has art ceased to allow artists to upset the apple cart and fallen under the play-safe control of curators keen to please the market?

Please report to *New Art Examiner* about the possibilities or difficulties of staging fringe events in your own local festivals.

Mary Fletcher



If you're going to tell the nation there's a PPE shortage in the middle of a pandemic, you might as well do it in front of the most garish painting in the Government Art Collection. That's what health secretary Matt Hancock apparently thought when outlining his six-pronged "battle plan" for Covid-19 in front of Damien Hirst's spin painting of The Queen—the only portrait of HRH the British artist has ever made. Much like the cloying canvas in bubblegum pink and powder blue, which Hirst donated to the government in 2015 and has hung in the minister's office since 2018, Hancock's speech was (frankly) toe-curling.

*Art Newspaper*, 17th April 2020

**NEW ART EXAMINER NUMBERS**

The *New Art Examiner* passed 817,000 unique visitors in three years in 2020, with an average now of 51,000 a month.

**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING US**

We give our grateful thanks to James Cassell for waiving his fee for his contribution to this issue.

**AUSTRALIA**

For perennially hard-pressed cultural organisations, funding cuts would be difficult in any climate. Unfortunately for Australia's small cultural organisations, this is the very worst time of all. The coronavirus outbreak has heralded wrenching changes to all sectors of our economy. But with the possible exception of aviation, no sector has fared worse than culture. (*The Guardian*, April 6th 2020)

**EMERGENCY GRANTS**

£160 million of emergency funding is available for those organisations and individuals who will need it during this crisis, and they have also changed the funding requirements for individuals and organisations currently in receipt of our funding, to alleviate pressure on them.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

**ART MARKET**

Is the Art Market Headed for a Great Depression? – The art industry should brace for market conditions worse than those in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, according to one report. While collectors haven't deserted the market en masse yet, many buyers are expecting discounts of as much as 40 percent in exchange for their support. It's possible that the art market's recovery over the past ten years will be wiped clean. (*ARTnews*)

**FESTIVAL**

YouTube Is Launching a Digital Film Festival – Tribeca, Cannes, Sundance, and the Toronto Film Festival are among the major film festivals collaborating on the upcoming "We Are One: A Global Film Festival" via YouTube. The event is scheduled to run from May 29th through June 7th. (*Hyperallergic*)

**GRANTS**

The Willem de Kooning Foundation, the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, the Teiger Foundation, and the Cy Twombly Foundation have created an emergency grant program offering \$1.25 million to arts workers in the New York tristate area. The fund will offer arts workers who have sustained financial hardship due to the outbreak individual grants of up to \$2,000. (*ARTnews*)

**NAE's great success**

According to Google Analytics we are visited by readers from over 70 countries amongst which are: United States, China, Germany, France, Canada, Bulgaria, Great Britain, South Korea, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Poland, Netherlands, India, Italy, Seychelles, Czech Republic, Austria, Brazil, Greece etc. A section of our widely read articles:

Rebellion and Art in Hong Kong, Leung Suk Ching, Volume 34 no 3 January – February 2020 pp 10-11 – 26,400 readers

Museum of Modern Women, Katie Zazenski, volume 34 no 1 September – October 2019 pp 7-9 – 22,400 readers

Dutch avant-garde fashion designer brings a technological shock to Daxiliu Museum of Art, Li Liting – (online content only) 16,000 readers

Volume 32 no 6 July/August 2018 – 14,900 readers

Matthias Grünewald's Pain and Suffering, Dr. Sheng-Yu (David) Peng, Taiwan – (online content only) 10,800 readers

Living with Hopper, Lynda Green, Volume 34 no.2 November/December 2019 pp 7-9 – 10, 300 readers

If you're a recent MFA or PhD you're not an artist nor a curator, Miklos Legrady, If you're a recent MFA or PhD you're not an artist nor a curator – 10,000 readers

Aliens in our own World, Katie Zazenski, Volume 34 no.2 November/December 2019 pp 28-29 – 8,700 readers

The Legacy of Apathy–Derek Guthrie in DC, Volume 34 no.2 November/December 2019 pp 17-18 – 6,400 readers

Art in America, the Critical Dustbowl volume 33 no 5 May 2019 pp 7-11 – 5,700 readers





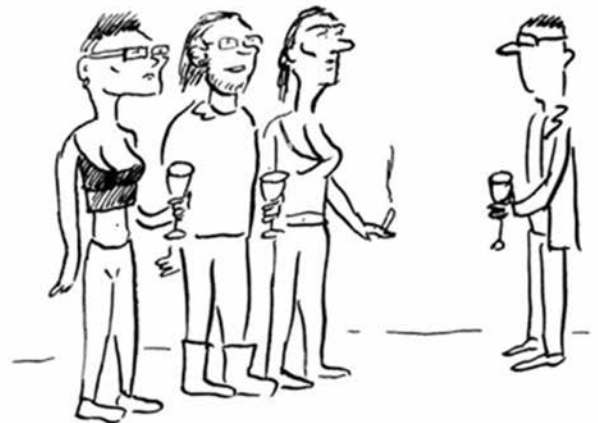
*"If you were being ironic it's a masterpiece,  
but if you were being serious it's a piece of junk."*



*"You are the perfect biennial artist: your  
themes are political, your work is collectable,  
and you are ethnically vague."*



*"Now I think I am getting a much better sense of your work."*



*"In Amsterdam we are a ménage à trois, but when  
we show in America we call ourselves a collective."*

# Pablo Helguera Artoons

<http://pablohelguera.net>