

NEW ART examiner

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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



A glimpse of stocking in 1926

These girls offer something more – no stockings at all. Instead they have drawn charcoal designs on their legs, apparently in homage to the grid-like pictures of the modern artist, Mondrian.

(An Independent eye, A Century of Photographs. From the Hutton Getty Photographic Collection published 1998)

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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KEN TURNER and his wife Mary Turner founded Action Space in 1968. Action Space used large inflatable sculptures to create interventions into public spaces. By bringing together artists, performers, dancers, painters and musicians, the movement sought to produce cultural democratic spaces for art, education and creative play outside of the restrictive space of the gallery system.

ANITA DI RIENZO lives in Venice, having just received her degree in Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Performing Arts Management at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She is working on her Master's Degree in Art History at the same university, while also writing and working on restoration projects.

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KATHRYN HIXSON was Chicago correspondent for *Arts* magazine from 1989 until the magazine's demise in 1992. She was editor of *New Art Examiner* from 1993–2002, and taught in the School of the Art Institute's department of art criticism, history & theory throughout her professional life.

If you have ideas for articles or are a writer
please get in touch:

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LETTERS

The Pandemic 2020

Editor,
The lockdown feels great for me! As an artist and writer I spend much of my time alone in the studio or typing at the keyboard. Now, for the first time, the rest of the world is sharing my lifestyle, for the first time in my life I feel normal! ROFL!
Miklos Legrandy, 01/10/2020

All Our Difficult Moments – or Finger Painting from the 1400s

Editor,
Thank you *New Art Examiner* for this review and all the other articles your magazine has given me here during these difficult months we have been living (call it living!). I find much solace in reading about the art world and in looking at paintings, though I have only the paintings from my small collection to look at. Perhaps it's a way to evade reality, a reality which is getting less pretty by the day.
Aveline Adams, 09/09/2020

Aveline,
Real art, the good stuff, is always a time out from life when it succeeds in doing only what art can do, what Greenberg called dancing three feet off the ground. Some depressing days I'm happy to just get one foot off.
John Link, 20/09/2020

The Great Exhibition of 2020

Editor
I buy flowers every week. They are not art, but they do quite nicely, as far as a living an aesthetic life goes. Sometimes they make me feel painting is beside the point. Just like the Rocky Mountains make me feel

sculpture is beside the point. Sounds like visiting a flower shop would do more for a serious aesthete than looking at this show. You do a good job of spinning this feeling. Joseph Conrad would approve of your essay, I am sure.
John Link, 20/09/2020

John,
"Beside the point" is exactly what we are feeling in these months of restrictions that many of us are enduring; we're getting tired of this situation and it's wearing us down. Nature has been one great comforter and soother for me since the lockdown began, which I doubt a painting or sculpture could ever have done. You write of flowers and mountains, both uplifting in their aesthetics, perhaps helping you to keep that fire alive which is necessary to create art. Thank you John for your comment; I really appreciated it.
Pendery Weekes, 20/09/2020

Pendery,
This review reads like some sort of horror story. Had I just woken up from a coma or come back from a six month stint in the wilderness, I would find all this hard to believe. I wake up in the morning and hope that once again, I have just had a bad dream and that none of this is true. The exhibition that Pendery describes is evolving, not just as a major exhibition, but appears to be becoming a permanent fixture. It's time to take down this shameful exhibition and put up other artwork. Artists, come out of the woodwork, take off your masks and put up your work, on the walls of our cities, inside the derelict shops, on the sides of the buses and trains, everywhere!
Maurice de Berkeley, 03/09/2020

Pendery,
Great artwork! I liked it very much, it holds psychological reflections and humorous notations. It looks like a reversed world, where the people are in a cage and the animals are free to take back their space (or is it a more natural world?). I hope that the "greatest show in the world" won't be repeated in the future.
Liviana Martin, 04/08/2020

Liviana,
Thank you for your comment. The exhibition you had in Milan must have been far greater than the one we had here in Penzance. I wonder if you were able to walk around and see it in all its colours. One positive note is that worldwide we were in this together and even though this massive exhibition united us, enough is enough now and we need new images to bring forth.
Pendery Weekes, 05/08/2020

A Proposal to Support Artists from Auctions

Jack,
Cool idea!
Winston Dalston, 16/07/2020

A Significant Fresh Start is Coming our Way

Ben,
Thanks for this breath of positivity in the climate of civil unrest and enduring pandemic we are having to currently live with.
Albert Robinson, 12/07/2020

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QUOTE of the Month:

"But whenever I came anywhere near to winning, he'd find a way of temporarily modifying the rules."

Eric Atkinson (on playing table-tennis with Ben Nicholson)
(The Incomplete Circle, Scholar Press, 2000)



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EDITORIAL

Finally, with the publication of our November/December issue we've nearly reached the end of 2020, an ill-fated and turbulent year. It's been a year that has kept us riveted to the news with its constant updates and restrictions being imposed, lifted and re-imposed in countries all over the world. It has been challenging to keep pace with the continuously evolving situation and the many changes that have taken place in our lives and society. Do we still have a society? The Merriam Webster dictionary defines society as "companionship or association with one's fellows: friendly or intimate intercourse: company." I believe the biggest shock of the year has been overcoming our companionships and associations with our fellows through the mandatory distancing, and basically living online.

These months for many have been very screen-based from dawn to dusk and on into the night and then all over again. It has been like living in a film, but one with no ending, just one long, ongoing story. One thing for sure, 2020 has never been boring. The year has also been one in which many of us will likely never forget the numerous films we watched in the evenings. Be it Netflix or other movie feeders of streaming services like Amazon Prime, Sky, YouTube, DVDs or even basic television, the films and TV series we were offered contributed to the endless hours lost in lockdown and also gave us solace from the relentless news we were fed of gloom and doom. The daily diet of the film watchers has been of at least one film a day, sometimes three or four, maybe more, depending on living conditions and work to do online and zoom meetings on the following day. In this case films have served their purpose, helping us to escape from the nightmare of the monster lurking out there. Therefore, our feature this issue is dedicated to film reviews, led by Scott Sublett, followed by Christian Hain, Gill Fickling, Mary Fletcher, Lynda Green and a video and review of Ken Turner's performance in *St Ives* by Patricia Wilson Smith.

Fortunately for some people, we have also read more books and magazines online and in print, according to numerous statistics. A May 2020 survey of 1000 people by *The Guardian* reports 'time spent with books has almost doubled, with thrillers and crime the favoured genres', not surprising as we need to evade reality. In this same period, the *New Art Examiner* increased its readership and reached 1 million readers in August 2020, months sooner than we had expected.

We can't cancel 2020 from our lives, but we can look towards the new year and support the arts. We hope we can rebuild our lives and reconnect with our friends and new friends without fear, and that the New Year will bring new initiatives for the creative sector and the fine arts. A heartfelt wish to all our readers for a Happy New Year 2021 from all of us at the *New Art Examiner*!

There is though a strange irony for artists when the general population complain about enforced solitude. That 'inward eye' is not a happy place for them and there is no 'bliss' in being cut off from people. Yet, loneliness is all around us, all the time. We hope our eyes are more open now.

Pendery Weekes, Derek Guthrie, Daniel Nanavati



Truism: art reflects a society that produces it - not the whole of society, but its prevalent morality, its leading ideas. And art - what previous ages called art as opposed to folk art - reflects the tastes, demands and foibles of that society's dominant class. In the Middle Ages, the age of faith, art centred on the church, reflecting not only the beliefs of the period but the power of the institution that paid for the art. With the Renaissance and the rediscovery of the classics came more realistic portraiture and landscape, a new sensuousness, worldliness, interest in the natural... Sorry, I continue to list truisms.

When art moved away from representation, from picturing likeness, whether faithful or idealised, partly through having lost that essential function to photography, it was in a time of new radical ideas and politics, economics, psychology, and sciences; a time of the dethroned gods. Some art moved away from representation altogether, into the abstract: realms of pure shape and colour or pictures of the fantastic, dreams, nightmares - here again reflecting society, its increasing scepticism, anxiety, and losses of faith. Another obvious truism. The point is that art remained, nonetheless, as did art objects. Statues and paintings, however bizarre, however seemingly unrelated to anything in the real world, were objects not only to be admired but owned and passed on. This new art reflected also the power of middlemen, of dealers, galleries and museums; for the paymaster was no longer the rich merchant who wanted his portrait, but the gallery - the place to spot talent and then push a trend or a brand.

And then came conceptual art, the death of the transmittable object itself. A half cow in formaldehyde is not a thing anyone wants in the living room, and will certainly be difficult to hand on to one's descendants. Installation art, performance art, is art as immediate experience, art as ephemera, opposed to all previous art with its striving for permanence and immortality.

An installation is transitory by definition. It is also frequently dependent on high-tech, and procedures transient and vulnerable in themselves; if the video breaks down, the sound isn't synchronised, if there is an electrical fault, the entire experience fails. Such concepts often require enormous space and are extremely wasteful (wrapping buildings in plastic, doing concrete casts of buildings, etc.) Individual artists may be concerned about the eco-

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. Frances Oliver has published seven works of fiction and self-published three memoirs. She was born in Vienna, grew up and married in the US, and has since lived and travelled in a number of countries. After her husband's death she and their daughter settled in Cornwall, where she devotes much time to environmental campaigns.

What Posterity?

logical crisis, art is not. When this new art does turn back to objects, those getting the most attention seem, interestingly, to be ones made from what dies or comes from neglect or decay (a head sculptured with the artist's blood, paintings done with elephant dung, an unmade bed, the half cow carcass etc.)* This new art then, whatever else it says or pretends to say, is a tribute to impermanence. Though it may here and there involve craft, its concept is what asks to be judged, so it is in essence divorced from craft, and there are no criteria. It depends wholly on the fleeting experience of the individual viewer.

But an art form that is wasteful and ephemeral by definition also says something more profound. Previous civilisations died but left artefacts, often of great beauty, behind them. This one has chosen to make a virtue of their absence ...

So does conceptual art reflect our society? Only too well. The throwaway society produces throwaway art. It speaks to and for a culture of instant gratification, rabid consumerism, the triumph of mass taste divorced from any roots, the glorification of technology and individual selfishness, the worship and power of big money. Our society, yes. But an art form that is wasteful and ephemeral by definition also says something more profound. Previous civilisations died but left artefacts, often of great beauty, behind them. This one has chosen to make a virtue of their absence; and here is the important message for all those unconcerned about the state of the world - about climate crisis, overpopulation, planet exhaustion. Your art is telling you we don't need anything to leave to posterity - because posterity may well not exist.

**A reversal of this is the making of interesting artefacts out of pure waste; I think of the brilliant work of David Kemp, where waste is turned into objects of possible lasting value. Our Friends of the Earth group did a beach clean with David Kemp contributing to his skull pyramid formed from plastic bottles; we had hoped to get the Newlyn Gallery to host a permanent sculpture in its garden. We were turned down.*

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes Who Kick Ass

By Scott Winfield Sublett

Something happened the other day that made me realize yet again how quickly and completely cinema's idea of the erotic has changed. A 30-ish science fiction writer of my acquaintance had just watched, on my recommendation because I felt he needed cheering up, Howard Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, in which Marilyn Monroe sings *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*. He was enchanted by the way her character, Lorelei Lee, as innocent as Tweety Bird and every bit as wisened-up, used what once were termed 'feminine wiles' to get her way. "I mean," he asked, "why should women have to kick ass to be sexy?"

Has it come to where it's surprising that a woman who isn't a kung fu master can be an object of desire? It has apparently come to that, and come to think of it, why does that surprise me? In my film classes, I started about five years ago noticing a trend among the male students: college men had begun thinking that the sexiest thing going was a girl who could beat you up. How this preference actually came about is anybody's guess, but I suspect it's because video game manufacturers figured out that if the protagonist doling out the punishment is a shapely girl, the typically straight, male player could experience two kinds of amatory excitement at once: sex and violence. Voila! The babe who kicks ass.

The shock is how fast this change has come this far. For those of you who are too young to remember, rest assured things were not always thus. My own mother, who was considered something of a beauty, once argued with dad about buying a new car. He was thrifty and wasn't going to be suckered into buying 'optional extras' like power steering. "But darling," Mother whined, "I'll get muscles!" I remember that so well because it struck me as so odd. I had no idea what she meant. Being five years old, I'd never had to parallel-park a car that lacked power steering. The point is that, once upon a time, muscles were exactly what men did not want on their women. There's a delicious line in Robert Aldrich's 1955 film noir *Kiss Me Deadly*, where the hardboiled private dick played by Ralph Meeke (an actor who could out-Bogart Bogart), grasps his secretary Velma's upper arms and murmurs, "You know, just to hold the soft part of your arm is a meal." These were meat-and-potatoes men and they liked their women well marbled. In 1959's *Some Like It Hot*, Jack Lemmon watches Marilyn Monroe's jiggle walk and observes approvingly, "Just like Jell-O on springs!"

Of course, the conflation of sex and violence on screen is almost as old as cinema itself, as in, for example, the silent film convention of tying women to railroad tracks, a quite dastardly activity that, happily, seldom if ever happened in real life. For most of film history, violence involving women was about males attacking helpless females, a phenomenon that reached its climax in 1960 when, in *Psycho*, Janet Leigh took that nice refreshing shower. Nowadays, Hitchcock's horror classic would have been finished at the 45-minute mark: Miss Leigh would have fought back and won.

Cut to today, and the blonde of the hour is Charlize Theron. She's a serious actress, as willing as Bette Davis to set aside personal



Marilyn Monroe and Jack Lemmon on the set of *Some Like It Hot* (1959)



Charlize Theron in *Atomic Blonde* (2017)

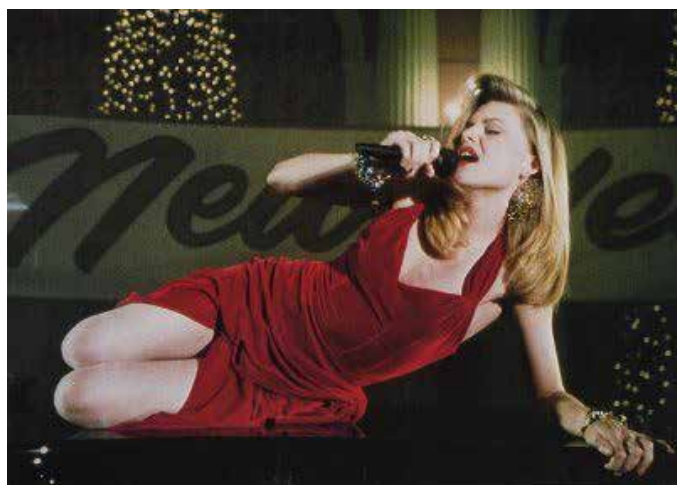


Scarlett Johansson as the Black Widow in *Avengers Endgame* (2019)

vanity in service of a performance, such as the slovenly serial killer in *Monster*. That was back in 2003. She still chooses smart, risky material, but the Charlize Theron pictures that take off at the box office are, like her recent hit *The Old Guard*, the ones where she's deadly. And it isn't just horny fanboys who swoon over them. A critic at no less than *The New York Times*, in an essay entitled *The Pleasure of Watching Charlize Theron Throw a Punch*, opines that her fight scenes are "as close as we're going to get to the endor-

phin rush of watching Gene Kelly dance, or Judy Garland sing, or Charlie Chaplin pantomime,” adding that “the ur-text of Charlize Theron fighting is 2017’s *Atomic Blonde*.” So that’s the ur-text. I was wondering. In that ur-text, Miss Theron is a CIA/MI6 agent who clearly has a license to kill and does it a lot. *The Times* writer catalogues her admirable resourcefulness in killing people with handy, everyday objects such as “a stiletto heel, a corkscrew, a ladder, a shelving unit, a handful of keys, a gun that’s run out of bullets, a strategically unhooked seatbelt, a water hose, a kitchen pot and a refrigerator door.” If she comes to my office, I’m hiding the pens. I think it’s safe to say that these Charlize Theron action vehicles are not very plausible, and how smart they are is open to debate, but hey, pass the popcorn. As Hitchcock said to one of his favorite actors, “It’s only a movie, Ingrid.”

The cultural shift from Marilyn Monroe singing about acquiring diamonds by shaking her ass to Charlize Theron getting her way by kicking the asses of everyone in sight seems, on its face, to be progress, but there might be trouble ahead. The young male action fans will be disappointed to learn that most women do not combine heroic bosoms, chiseled abs, and sick martial arts skills, and if they did, what would they want with you, a pathetic video game addict? Indeed, in *Atomic Blonde*, Miss Theron’s love interest is a beautiful girl. We live in a world where, increasingly, women less and less want or need men. I want to say to the fanboys, “OK, women have good jobs and sperm banks - once they’re physically stronger and can put up drywall, what earthly use are you?” Husbands seem to be going out of fashion (except among gays) and, alarmingly, as if males were starting to understand on a cellular level their superfluity, men’s sperm counts are plummeting throughout the so-called Western Democracies (Google “male fertility crisis” and see if I’m kidding). As for the women, isn’t this just a new impossible standard to meet? Once again, Hollywood is having its cake and keeping its figure. Under the virtuous banner of ‘empowering women,’ they’ve added another box to the long list of boxes modern gals are expected to check: bring home the bacon, check, fry it up in a pan, check, and look as hot as Charlize Theron as you repel home-invasion robbers - check and check. Life was, perhaps, easier back when all a girl had to do to look sexy was not grow muscles.



Michelle Pfeiffer in *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1989)

Jeremy Shaw Takes the Julia Stoschek Collection Back to the Future

Christian Hain, Berlin

It’s all very confusing indeed, and I don’t talk about that virus thing, no: even before that started, we were (mildly) shocked by Julia Stoschek’s decision to leave Berlin and take her collection to Düsseldorf, where she’s been operating another space for years. The ensuing media outcry was not limited to the German capital, as every other paper lamented the municipal authorities’ outrageous culture politics – certainly not without good cause, although this particular example has ultimately turned out to be fake news. Or maybe not, for all we know is that several weeks later another communiqué arrived in our inbox to announce the appointment of a new director for the very same, supposedly closing, Berlin space. It might have been just one of those cry-for-help things - would it be too far fetched to mention the media expertise in Ms Stoschek’s household? Her partner being the CEO of Springer AG – the German equivalent of NewsCorp.

The former director meanwhile is leaving her for another, a little bigger - and even a little bit richer than the heiress presumptive of an automotive parts empire – collector, Mr Hasso Plattner, who’s bound to open a second museum for his abundant collections next year, this one being reserved for GDR and contemporary art (a forward thinking combination indeed, considering the current Berlin state of mind). Add Mr Olbricht and his *me Collectors Room* leaving, too – for real! - and bequeathing his rooms next door to KW Institute to an obscure collection of Japanese folklore (potentially not for real, as this should have moved in weeks ago), and you realize it was an exciting spring for everyone interested in Berlin art gossip – before Chinese migration went viral (ugh, awful, and politically most incorrect, wordplay, I know!), and took our attention hostage.

Today, the *Julia Stoschek Collection* is still where it has been for years, and still appears not overly appreciated by the municipal authorities (private wealth is not what you’re supposed to connote with the new Berlin, after all), nor by the media who, despite that collective outcry in spring, once again largely ignored the new show’s preview. Regardless of the newly normal limits to attendance to every gathering, JSC even had to send out a friendly reminder two days prior to the event, motivating a certain irrelevant Berlin correspondent and blogger, who had forgotten all about the initial invite, to visit, and let me say this straight away: it was worth it; those who stayed away were wrong.

Canadian artist Jeremy Shaw shares a common passion with Ms Stoschek for one of the last branches of the entertainment industry that are still lockdowned (yeah, I know, it’s locked down, but seriously: wouldn’t it be time for a dedicated neologism?), even now, in Berlin, where life otherwise has (for now) mostly returned to nor-

mal, those rules limiting attendance at exhibition visits notwithstanding: clubbing. (The other exception being prostitution, and if you take the usual shortcut visiting some gallery on Potsdamer Straße, you sense the desperation in their increasingly aggressive customer acquisition, working illegally again). The hobby shows, or rather sounds, in the soundtrack to Shaw's films that we are served today.

With a combined runtime of well above 90 minutes, the artist might have considered a submittal to the Berlinale, too: they have a slot for everything, the Quantification Trilogy is shown for the first time in Berlin, where the artist has spent the past decade. At this point, I cannot help but mention that living in a foreign country for 10 years, and still not daring to pronounce a single word in the native tongue, makes it seem a bit weird when curators talk – and talk critically - about globalisation and power structures in the introduction to his show. Nevertheless, Jeremy Shaw's not your stereotypical 'murican abroad'!

His main interests appear old-fashioned, having been last in vogue during the 1960s and 1970s, and are all but forgotten nowadays, namely the struggle for spirituality in a technocratic world. Shaw probably wouldn't take offense at being labelled contemporary art's Aldous Huxley. Learning about his work, we note catchwords like transcendence, and altered consciousness - not somatic though, but by the means of dance and enthusiastic religious rites alone. These films referencing the 1960s/70s include found-footage home videos and B-movies, painting a possible future in a distorting mirror from the past. *The Stoschek Collection* describes their style as para-fictional, meaning a mix of SciFi and docu-fiction. The trilogy's individual parts, all shot between 2014 and 2018, run in an endless (at least until the collection closes for the day, and some intern makes her round) loop, and may - as is explicitly stated - be watched in no particular order. That said, they tell of mankind's linear progress towards a state of perfect rationality called 'quantification', when a movement among our immortal cyborg successors eventually promotes a conservative longing for spirituality, trying to revive what is/will have been lost in transformation, aiming at a new, spiritual, Renaissance. But I'm anticipating. In chronological order, yet filmed in the exact reverse:

1. *I Can See Forever* (2018), set at the brave beginnings of Shaw's new world, 40 years in the future - undoubtedly he is aware of the



Jeremy Shaw: *I Can See Forever* (2018)
 Film still courtesy of the artist and König Galerie, Berlin

biblical obsession with that number in a temporary context - portrays the sole survivor of a failed experiment to inject people with machine DNA. No, you're right, that doesn't make any sense at all, and is actually a *contradictio in adiecto*: only biological things have DNA, it's a common definition of organic (only when going further, everything's atoms, light, energy and stuff). Far from idolizing Robot Maria, the survivor chooses the dervishes of old for his role model.

The plot is told in very artistic takes and interviews, with much meticulously choreographed (and thus still on the robotic side) break-dancing, not only to electronic music but also Gospel – an interesting turn: it's living culture that matters, and the protagonist might be longing for a lost identity, too. *I Can See Forever* culminates in a passage through a 1980s video game vector tunnel (have you ever seen footage of the very first *Star Wars* game?), before focusing on a couple watching images of the sea on TV, and, ultimately, a crack in the Matrix: pixelated stop motion images as the system can no longer compute.



Still from *Liminals* (2017), *Strobophobes beware*.

2. *Liminals* (2017). Three generations from now - however that might convert to more familiar units - the ominous machine DNA makes a return in a new, updated, and (hopefully) less buggy version with fewer casualties, as a group seeks to take evolution in their hands, and attain paraspaces while reviving forgotten rituals and psychedelic dance-to-trance (weren't there injections and Rastafarians in *Neuromancer*, too?). This looks like recordings of a hippie community discovering electronic dance music, but contrary to what the grainy images suggest - a screenshot of their ecstatic faces has been used for the expo ads and could steer your expectations towards a drug fuelled love-in/golden era adult flic - these people have not ingested some special kool aid, as the soundtrack varies from ambient to deep trance.

The monochrome images climax is a stroboscopic assault on the audience; should you be susceptible to the odd epileptic attack, you'll discover a whole new use for that facemask (obligatory, of course), or simply close your eyes.

3. Finally, fast forward 500 years, installed behind an antechamber with digitally altered photos of praying faces (screaming 'I want to



Quickeners: courtesy of the artist and Konig Galerie

believe'), a pseudo-documentary takes us to Area 51 - no Area 23 - where a community of post-humans stricken with Human Atavism Syndrome (HAS) called *Quickeners* (the film's title) live, and we are certainly supposed to think of Quakers, Shakers, and other dissenters of times long past. Mind that acronym, and despite what we've said before, Jeremy Shaw does at least understand some words in German, among them potentially *hass* (well, in fact, it's *Haß*, but that cute 'ß' has already been streamlined away in the service of globalisation and optimized computer efficiency) which translates to 'hate'. One endemically human phenomenon that artificial intelligence lacks, and without hate, there can be no love, either. But is it worth it? Maybe in the end, everything boils down to that question.

Literally hearing the word logic, we watch 1960s-era cars and sheds that despite rotting away, have mysteriously survived into the year 2525 (but fine, dystopian filmmakers seldom bothered with such petty trifles, looking at you, J.L. Godard). Have you ever listened to that 1960s classic 'In the Year 2525' by a band called Zager & Evans, a song with a Nietzschean twist in the end, viz. "the eternal recurrence of ever the same"? Jeremy Shaw certainly did (and nope, that's not my generation either, but some historical interest can never be wrong).

Interesting detail: in all three films, the omnipresent subtitles don't match the spoken words, and yes, I am sure, that wasn't just some

clubbing-related issue with my hearing. All - supposedly English - dialogue appears more than merely mumble-rapped, but altogether inarticulate. As we've learned elsewhere, in one of the best films ever made: "The English language had deteriorated into a hybrid of hillbilly, valley girl, inner-city slang, and various grunts" (Mike Judd's comedic masterpiece *Idiocracy*). The only exception in the whole *Quantification Trilogy* we meet right here, right now (as cries the Myna bird on Huxley's island, a sample later used in a successful electropop track of the late 1990s), the voice from the off reporting on the *Quickeners* phenomenon is perfectly understandable, and lacks all subtitles.

The reigning power to be, we further learn, calls itself The Hive, and might be something like Star Trek's embodiment of the Socialist utopia in form of the Borg collective; it preserves a neutral point of view, not openly condemning or persecuting the *Quickeners*, but of course, every feeling of menace or concern would be unscientific.

Let's close with a quote from Shaw's namesake George Bernard, who, by the way, is rumoured to have been fascinated by another dystopia, Edward Bulger's controversial, i.e. interesting, *The Coming Race*, and the foreword to his play *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*: "...Religion is the mother of skepticism: Science is the mother of credulity. There is nothing that people will not believe nowadays if only it be presented to them as science, and nothing they will not disbelieve if it be presented to them as religion. I myself began like that; and I am ending by receiving every scientific statement with dour suspicion whilst giving very respectful consideration to the inspirations and revelations of the prophets and poets. For the shift of credulity from religious divination to scientific invention is very often a relapse from comparatively harmless romance to mischievous and even murderous quackery..."

We don't know whether Jeremy Shaw believes in a possible reconciliation, and advocates a dialectic synthesis in the form of some rationalist spiritualism, but you should never stop believing in art. And also trust me with this: Shaw's works and reasoning are fascinating beyond a doubt.

Jeremy Shaw, *The Quantification Trilogy*, 5 September-29 November 2020, Julia Stoschek Collection

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On Behalf of the Planet

Patricia Wilson Smith



On 12 September this year painter and performance artist Ken Turner took to the streets of St Ives in Cornwall to express his outrage and concern for the future of humanity and the planet.

At a healthy advanced age, Ken's crusading spirit is, if anything, stronger: his will to be heard more determined. In the past decade Ken's protest paintings have filled his large studio near St Ives, where he has lived and worked for over

30 years. His performances have addressed the inadequacies of mainstream art, the paucity of art education and critical discussion, and the absence of genuine, disinterested support for the grass-roots. More recently, his painting performance engaged with the impact of Covid-19.

We Can't Let This Go On featured the artist riding his electric tricycle through the winding streets, broadcasting an unequivocal mantra to passers-by:

WE CAN'T LET THIS GO ON
WE NEED TO CHANGE THE WORLD
WE NEED LESS GREED
WE NEED LESS CORRUPTION
WE NEED MORE EQUALITY
WE NEED MORE RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER
WE NEED TO RESTRAIN COMPETITION FOR PROFIT
WE CAN'T LET THIS GO ON
WE NEED LESS GREED AND MORE EQUALITY
WE NEED ARTISTS TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN THE ART WORLD
WE NEED THE VISUAL ARTS TO BE LESS ABOUT MONEY AND MORE ABOUT HUMANITY
WE CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS

Bystanders were in all likelihood bemused, amused, confused... but they are not likely to forget quickly the vision of the man in white who has the courage to share his anxieties and concern for humanity with a public that seems, largely, to ignore the warning signs writ large across the planet.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/kensqallp>

Adú, A Child Migrant's Harrowing Story, on Netflix

Gill Fickling



For the last months, with lockdown making cinemas out of bounds, the evenings have passed in a fog of mediocre films on *Netflix*. But one stands out – and continues to haunt me. *Adú*, a Spanish film directed by Salvador Calvo, left me in awe and in tears. Three parallel stories run in the film made for *Netflix* – each merits a film of its own – but the main story is of six-year-old *Adú*, forced to flee his native Cameroon when he and his sister find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Witnessing the brutal slaughter by poachers of an elephant, the siblings have to bolt from their home that night when the poachers come looking for them and murder their mother. The two set off on a tortuous journey to find their father in Spain.

Moustapha Oumarou is brilliant as *Adú*, displaying a gamut of emotions that makes you think you're watching documentary not fiction. The penultimate scene is heart-wrenching when the wonderful Massar, another migrant who befriends *Adú* and protects him on the journey, is torn from him in a cruel but sadly-so-true act by the authorities. Little *Adú*'s terror and despair is worthy of an Oscar. The film, a clear comment on the unfairness of European immigration policy, does not make for easy watching. But I hope this film is seen not only by us socially-distanced couch potatoes but also by policy makers responsible for European immigration law - it might make them respond differently to those who embark on these tragic journeys.

Bait

Mary Fletcher



Why does Mark Jenkin use black and white film which he develops himself? Is it because it looks old or suggests a shoestring budget or for aesthetic reasons?

This is a film set in Newlyn, Cornwall - a fishing town where tourism has grown. The Cornish characters have authentic accents and are local people, not professional actors. Mark Jenkin contrasts the visiting family who own the whole street with a fisherman and his brother whose mother's house the middle-class pair now own and visit for holidays with their children.

The adults are poles apart in class and wealth. There are many differences, one shown by shots of the shopping the visitors bring with them - champagne in their refrigerator.

The well-off visiting youths don't want to play pool with the pub landlady's daughter. When the fisherman, Martin, parks in the wrong place, his car is clamped. Other visitors complain of being woken by the early start of the fishermen.

All this is shown in a style reminiscent of early Soviet filmmakers using montages of still shots, cutting between parallel events. It's a poetic style, including beautiful shots of the sea. The soundtrack has a throbbing intensity, using low string sounds and other noises. There is a lovely shot of Martin seen through the ribbed glass of a door.

Martin's son is seeing the daughter of the couple from London, who bought the house that had been Martin's mother's. The wife feels sympathy for Martin, who is trying to save money to buy a boat.

I liked this film a lot, but not quite as much as I wanted to like it. The narrative is sometimes unclear and there are a few shots that seem out of place. I don't understand why a tragic event is just seen and then never alluded to again. It's as if having set all the plot wheels in motion, Mark Jenkin didn't know how to finish it.

Bait really impressed the film critic Mark Kermode and the film festival in Cannes, and has won several awards. It's unusual, it brings out current problems and it shows a range of characters. It's worth watching.

A Real Joy

Lynda Green



Take a break from the harsh realities of life as we now know it by treating yourself to two hours of pure escape in the form of the 2019 Italian film *Pinocchio*. Directed by Matteo Garrone, it is shot in beautiful Tuscany and stars Federico Ielapi as the most endearing puppet you will ever come across and Robert Benigni as his long-suffering creator and father, Gipetto. Lavish production, superb acting and flamboyant costumes served to enchant me when I watched it at Redruth cinema. There is humour, pathos, a little fear and dread, and heart-rending tenderness in this one film. The makeup is staggeringly clever: Pinocchio's wood-grained face, Snail's soft face with small horns which prove strangely suggestible (I won't say more), and the travelling puppets, all a feast for the eyes. Pinocchio, whose big heart brought a tear to my eye, (yes, I know it's not real) is joined by so many wonderful characters I am hard pressed to single any out for special mention, though Tuna and The Judge come to mind. So appealing, so funny. Released in December 2019 in Italy, it picked up awards for sets, costumes, and visual effects, and made it Garrone's biggest success to date.

Originally Italian, Matteo Garrone paid for the film to be dubbed in English using Italian voices to preserve the Italianness of it. Some actors dubbed themselves, including Ielapi. This certainly pays off in terms of ambience and charm.

In these dark times it is good to be entertained by a film which will appeal to grown-ups and children alike. It's an old story, and it's nice to know that some things don't change, even if it's only fairy stories. So, treat yourself and help support our cinemas who have had such a hard time of late. It's use them or lose them I think, and losing them is unthinkable.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles: 'Maintenance/Survival / and its Relation to Freedom'

YouTube. 14 Feb 2013, 2,558 views - 1 hour 32 minutes

Mary Fletcher



Mierle Laderman Ukeles mentions names familiar from the avant garde of the 1960s – Pollock, Duchamp and Rothko – pointing out that they didn't change diapers and that when she had a baby daughter she was suddenly in a world of maintenance, involving both mind-bending boredom and the rediscovery of the world as her baby did.

In October 1969 Ukeles wrote her manifesto, and she found her theme: connecting with the world's maintenance workers, making her art about them and their vital work.

Ukeles explains several projects including the 30-year making of *Fresh Kills*, a park on Staten Island, New York, constructed on top of 50 years of deposited garbage, where she is organising a million people's donations of valued objects, hand size, to be documented, archived, and incorporated into the walls and paths encased in glass blocks.

Ukeles met garbage-truck drivers to make a display in a Madison Avenue art parade. She describes holding on to get these drivers to come up with their own ideas because, "it can't be art if I tell you what to do"- in contrast to Anthony Gormley who used volunteer labour to carry out his instructions for the many terracotta figures made for his *Field for the British Isles*. She says in that work or in the studio it's the same process of waiting for the ideas "to rise up, in the vacuum of terror".

However, it is Ukeles' 11-month project in the 1970s, when she shook hands with every one of the 8,700 sanitation workers in New York City, thanking each one and rising early to walk all the garbage collection routes with them, that made her famous and which is so relevant now because the worth of all maintenance workers is so apparent in the coronavirus crisis.

Ukeles has earned her place in the contemporary canon of art

made from social co-operation. One can argue that she might have been more involved politically in the workers' union struggle, but it's certainly worth giving her projects your attention.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Hr-MWXpuvs

The book *Mierle Laderman Ukeles* is by Patricia C Phillips, (2016) with contributions by Tom Finkelppearl, Larissa Harris, Lucy Lip-pard and Laura Raicovich. *The Ceremonial Arch* was first made in 1988 - number 4 from her show at Queens Museum, February 2017 - photo Jillian Steinhauer.

I Kill Giants

Mary Fletcher



This film is about Barbara, a young secondary school attender, constructing an elaborate fantasy that helps her deal with an unbearable situation. We see people trying to help her and some girls being nasty to her in the general odious ways of school bullies.

I would have liked to have seen the narrative without having absorbed the inevitable clues picked up from the publicity. The ending could not be entirely a surprise although not completely obvious.

Also, the plot requires no one in the film mentioning facts in the school, which I would think is impossible.

The acting is fine, the special effects impressively Gothic. The details are imaginatively peculiar and the brooding landscape is dramatic. One scene moved me to tears, and then I felt the ending was unrealistic - the director's own escape.

It's an interesting foray into using imagery to convey emotions - film being so suited to indicating visions and craziness but so rarely used for this. I call it a brave attempt to tackle how the mind can invent in order to protect a person from unbearable pain. Maybe that's why we have religion persisting in a scientific era. Barbara makes her own mythology.

I Kill Giants, a film directed by Anders Walter (2018). Madison Wolfe, Zoe Saldana, Imogen Poots and Sydney Wade are actresses featured.

The *Maison* Wears the Renaissance

Anita Di Rienzo

Garments, from lingerie to overcoats, have always denoted the economic and social status of the wearer, no matter if the latter is tall or short, thin or fat, elegant or lacking in bearing because every dress is a message and every colour a choice. Spokeswoman for this modern truth is Amanda Presley, played by a stunning Meryl Streep in the *Devil wears Prada*, who, addressing her new secretary, and therefore anyone who does not believe in the value of fashion, recalls:

“You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select... I don’t know... that lumpy blue sweater, for instance because you’re trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back.”

Amanda Presley’s character is outspoken and tough in her judgment but at the same time she highlights the importance of colours and how people are often unconsciously led to choose them according to the message they want to give other people. Having said that, few people are aware of the ancient origin of the language of colours in fashion. It was precisely the Renaissance, with its new achievements in the cultural, human and scientific fields, that redesigned the fate of fashion. Indeed, the refinement of the human ability to apply different colours in places where they are not naturally found, led the Renaissance men to create new shades, which conveyed important social messages.

Black



Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassarre Castiglione* (1515)

Over the centuries black has been worn on a wide range of occasions, from funerals to elegant dinners. But if the use of black as the colour of mourning is intuitive, it is curious why black today is synonymous with elegance and refinement. In order to fully understand, it is necessary to take a step back in time, to the beginning of the 16th century when the Italian courtier, *arbitro elegantiae*, humanist, scholar and diplomat Baldassarre Castiglione published his *Book of the Courtier* (*Il Libro del Cortegiano*). The book described the ideal customs and habits of the perfect courtier and it highly recommended black as it gave the wearer gracefulness and authority. Besides, the clothing advice given by Baldassarre Castiglione goes hand in hand with the Counter-Reformation and the promulgation in those years of laws prohibiting excessively eccentric and expensive fabrics, regulations that have certainly promoted the use of darker colours in clothing.

From the very beginning paintings acted as visual documents and vehicles of this innovation in the fashion industry, so much so that in 1514 Baldassarre Castiglione himself was portrayed by Raphael wearing a black vest with fur sleeves and an elegant hat of the same colour, a masterpiece which perfectly rendered the exquisite craftsmanship of the dark fabrics through the artist’s brush. The remarkable talent of Italian painters in rendering black and its nuances was one of the main reasons that helped to make black fashionable among clergymen and princes during the Renaissance, a tradition which has persisted to the present day.

White

While the rules of male elegance required the use of black in formal circumstances, this was not the case for women who, especially from the reign of Queen Victoria onwards, wore it in mourning. Like a modern fashion icon, Queen Victoria also introduced the trend of white wedding dresses, with wide skirts and long bridal trains, known as Victorian Style. However,



Winterhalter, *Queen Victoria wedding portrait* (1847)

white has not always been the colour of wedding gowns; for centuries, brides from privileged backgrounds used to wear brightly



Mary Stuart wears a white wedding dress at her wedding to the Dauphin of France

coloured dresses which recalled the colours of the coats of arms pertaining to both bride and groom, evoking the alliance between their families. This raises the question of how and when it became appropriate for women to wear white, an issue that can be addressed through art history.

One of the first brides portrayed in a white richly embroidered wedding gown, embellished with fine jewellery, was Mary Stuart Queen of Scots who, in 1558 when she was barely fifteen, married Francis, the Dauphin of France. Back then, white was generally worn by young women as a symbol of purity and virginity, with the exception of France, where white gowns were also associated with the Queens' mourning. Therefore, when two years later King Francis died, many blamed Mary Stuart's wedding dress for bringing bad luck. There are no historically documented explanations of Mary's choice of white but, apart from symbolic meanings, wearing a white dress was an expression of the social standing of the maiden, since it was difficult to keep white garments spotless.

The year of the death of Mary Stuart's first husband Francis II, 1560, was the occasion for a second portrait, this time as a widow wearing a dark dress covered in white veils, symbolising the loss of three members of her family: her husband, her mother and her father-in-law.

From the time of Mary Stuart to the days of Queen Victoria, other brides have been portrayed wearing white dresses, usually embroidered in gold and silver threads, such as Marie Louise of Austria, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte. However, these were individual cases, not yet linked to a trend. It is only the advent of photography



François Clouet, Portrait of Mary Stuart with the white mourning of the Queens of France (1560)

and specifically, the wide diffusion among the public of different countries of the official wedding photo of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, that will turn the wedding white dress into part of the tradition.

Red



Raphael, Portrait of Pope Leo X (c.1519)



Tiziano: Amor Sacro y Amor Profano - Sacred and Profane Love (1514)
 Image: Galería Borghese, Roma

Red is the colour of extremes: of the blood flowing in the veins, of Christian rebirth, of anger, passion, violence, but also of royalty. It conveys strong and vital messages through its countless shades. The red with the brightest hues, also known as crimson, was perhaps the first to take on a well-defined meaning, it is the same red as blood, which was used in primitive rituals and therefore, associated with the officiant. With the advent of Christianity, crimson adapted to the new spirituality without losing its underlying symbolism, so that it became almost an exclusive privilege of cardinals. It is curious that during the Renaissance, crimson was also used for the highest government offices, generally held by nobles, the same offices held by cardinals in the Church. Thus, red began to represent high status, as demonstrated by several diplomats and monarchs portrayed wearing red, since it also was very difficult to obtain and preserve. This tradition may also derive from the Roman Empire, when senators used to indicate their office by decorating their tunic with a strip of purple red, a colour extremely expensive, that only a few privileged could afford.

In painting, the most famous shade of red is perhaps the Titian red, a warm and vibrant hue that appears in all the subjects of Titian's works: from diplomats to cardinals to allegories of Love. It is precisely in the *Sacred and Profane Love* of the Venetian artist that the red of the mantle partly covering the figure on the right mixes sacred and carnal values in a single shade, combining the sensuality of the female body as a representation of contempt for corruptible earthly things, with sacred love, symbolised by the vessel that the allegorical figure holds in her right hand. The red favoured by Titian then became fashionable among women as a hair dye, with its reddish highlights and blond shades, a fashion that never seems to have waned. The colour red has taken on a thousand other meanings, from dogal mourning to prostitution, to finally becoming high fashion for the general public in the of 20th century, in part due to the Italian clothing fashion house *Valentino*.

The language of colours is certainly not an exact science, it is never equal to itself, it is not immediate and it does not last over time, but in its fluidity it continues to amaze those who approach it because, just as fashion always comes back with new designers, so

colours come back with new masters and interpreters. We just have to wait for the next trend.



Titian, Sacred and Profane Love, (detail) 1514

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So Long As We Still Live

The 9th Young Triennale at Orońsko

Katie Zazenski

On a gigantic, anthropomorphized sun-like circle, made of peach satin and suspended on the back wall of the exhibition hall, is the declaration *Wierzę w Bezinteresowność Sztuki* (I believe in the selflessness of art). Shirts and pants arranged in the form of two angel-like figures are surrounded by hand-stitched text bubbles. Strongly reminiscent of the American radical theater group *Bread and Puppet*, this wall piece by Patryk Różycki, *The Greatest Sun Seen From the Earth Touches Our Relation*, feels like a greeting, an invitation, a confession even, and fills the entire exhibition space with a spirit of curiosity, experimentation, progressiveness, and hope. The energy courses through the 9th Young Triennale ‘So Long As We Still Live’, and is an offering in a time of unrelenting global stress, fear, pain, and frustration.

Curated by Marta Czyż, this exhibition at the Center of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (just over 100 km south of Warsaw), features the work of 32 artists who worked in conversation with five mentors. The curatorial statement asks if artists will save the world through their sensitivities. There’s a familiar reverence to this text, which can also be felt in several of the works, evoking a very 1960s Bruce Nauman idea of artists revealing mystic truths. Czyż says that she was searching for visionaries, finding them by creating an open call. The final selection was made after individual conversations with each applicant. It’s clear that this initial meeting helped forge the distinct sense of honest inquiry, self-awareness and critical awareness that each artist contributes to this whole. Working together, they (curator, mentors and artists) discussed shared concerns, such as reducing the use of toxic materials and creating a ‘best practices’ code of ethics.

The exhibition catalogue contains the resulting texts which range from reminders about proper recycling habits to more extensive manifestos, such as Patrycja Cichosz’s *Flexibility*: “The strategy should be modifiable and adaptable. More broadly – I adjust to the situation as far as possible and I learn new skills, etc ... Inner conviction: I do what is in accordance with my moral compass. Adequacy: My activity takes into consideration the current reality... I know I will not save the whole world at once ... While working with others, I respect their boundaries and listen to what they have to say.”

Her work in the exhibition, *Anti-Repressive Brochure* (2020), features the critical information one needs when being detained by police, a text which was originally issued as *I Refuse to Testify* by the organization Anarchist Black Cross. I was handed a similar leaflet during a protest against unprecedented police violence toward the LGBT community this past August in Warsaw.

As Czyż reminds us, art is and always has been a response to changing circumstances. Mentor Urszula Zajączkowska asks for the space for young artists to grow and the courage to break down and build anew our systems of thinking, making, living, and



Rhea Silvia, 2020, 88 × 150 × 70 cm, Ida Karkoszka: materials: cornmeal and fat. Photo: Szymon Rogiński

being. In fact, the piece that we are physically confronted with first is *Made in Chain* (2019), a ceramic floor piece by Aleksandra Jagła. It’s estimated that there are many hundreds of North Korean citizens engaged in a form of modern slavery here in Poland, a rather secret contingent of forced-laborers, only topically out of view, working in the shipyards and other easily managed sites, primarily in the north. The global crisis is not only climatological. It is social and it is ethical, our culpability is in our veiled consequence-less silence.

Katarzyna Malejka takes a more nuclear approach to powerlessness. *I have One Better Piece of Furniture* (2020) features a group of Play-Doh figures (borrowed from the artist’s son) enacting some form of us–vs–them, staged around an upturned couch. The pandemic inverted what felt like everything, and so became an amplifier for domestic violence. How do we rely on our human community when we are confined, when the fabric of social trust has been eroded like a deforested hillside? In her code, Maria Nova references the centenarian James Lovelock’s theories of the Novacene: “ecological crisis (and climate crisis connected with it) is a crisis in the functioning of the home: it is multidimensional, in essence it concerns social life. In the



VERY CONTROVERSIAL REGULATION CONCERNING DESTRUCTION OF YOUR WORKS: *Yuriy Biley*

Anthropocene, paradoxically, we have forgotten about ourselves, about home, the need to create networks, about interspecies equality: ecology towards the other, including the other in you.”

What we really see in *So Long As We Still Live* is this call to examine our patterns, habits, positions, systems and choices with full vulnerability and risk. Again I refer to Różycki, whose wall text closes with the sentiment that his work “...is my gift, my attempt to express love full of hope. The only thing I have is my faith in it.”

Faith is necessary because no matter how staunchly one rejects the notion of nostalgia, change is rarely easy, comfortable, nor a guarantor of something better. Kacper Szalecki combed through OLX (an online marketplace somewhere between Craigslist and eBay) to find cast Polish eagles made between 1947-1989 for his installation *WEAPONS/TRANSFORMATIONS* (Working Title) (2020). These national emblems were melted down and recast into riddled, clawed, finger-like objects, held together by pink toe separators (the little foam objects they stick on your feet at the nail salon when you’re in for a pedicure). A looped video documents the founding process and, despite the obvious metaphor, the work retains an air of hermetic magic. A talisman for 2020 that stretches beyond the borders of Poland.

Founding uses and produces any number of toxic particulates and gasses throughout the process, from silica dust to an array of heavy metals. Which leads us directly to this other primary concern of these artists: ecologically ethical materials and our need to confront the cycles of waste and toxicity (material and

psychological) that the art world is responsible for. Julia Łukasiak essentially asks us to confront this dilemma: do we compromise the concept for the sake of sustainability, at the risk of making a less-good work?

Rhea Silvia (2020) by Ida Karkoszka is an ouroboric monument to consumerism – materially engineered to be fully biodegradable, she is a sow version of the she-wolf complete with her own version of suckling Polish twins. Tomek Haładaj fills one of the sizable walls with his series of seven ‘paintings’: surrealist, folk-like compositions of found and recycled materials that are a quite direct proposition to the future of painting.

The collective works are somatic in scale and process, and it’s a relief to be able to measure something not in nanometers or degrees or minutes of a doomsday clock. In his code, painter Tomasz Paszkowicz writes, “I will risk a semantic shift that being an artist is an attitude, not a profession or character. A most critical attitude, affecting the performative nature of life.” And it is exactly this sentiment that the 9th Young Triennale embodies. We, as a species, are on a constant search which is now matched with a dire need to reconstruct just about every system we have ever devised. A task that could have overwhelmed a curator, it was both comforting and exciting to feel a sense of hope, to feel this beautiful welcoming into an alchemical mechanism of sorting out the next version of life. We can’t go back, and the 9th Triennial makes me feel really ok about that.

Let the World Follow, Let Imagination Lead

Ken Turner

“I want to change the world, I fail all the time”

Alfredo Jarr

It's funny when you create an image on a canvas and it looks back at you. Funny in the sense of being something other, a thing of difference and strangeness to one's own idea of life, how we see and think. It's an imaginative leap into the idea of life where we have never been before. And, it happens on canvas.

I have coined the word imaginativity as a means to differentiate between creativity and imagination. The reason for doing so is to stop using the word 'creativity', because it has become a politically motivated term which leads to stagnant thoughts. Being creative is comparatively easy. It's often just a slight shift in perception, and we define it to be an example of a raised level of interpretation, or as an expression of the feelings surrounding an insight or understanding attained about the human condition. It suggests a deeper, less normative way of thinking. But too often this is not so. As humans we are fallible creatures. We make mistakes. What humans have been doing recently is beyond comprehension. You could put it down to lack of imagination, but ordinarily it's a lack of foresight. And, through a lack of imagination but no lack of creativity. We hardly ever learn from mistakes.

Some years ago, a symposium, *Revisiting Black Mountain College: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments and Their Potential for Democratization (25–27 May 2018)*, was organized by Professor Dorothee Richter in conjunction with an exhibition and event programme initiated by the Zurich University of the Arts. Many professional thinkers and artists got together to re-examine the workings of the college in its cross-disciplinary experiments and conviviality in method and approach.

Between 1933 and 1957, Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, became this amazing cauldron in which new experiments and combinations of disciplines in arts, music, theatre and dance took place. Many now-illustrious names have been passed down into our confused minds as artists, and to my mind this newness was a playfulness coming out of conviviality, where the imagination could function in its true nature as 'imaginativity'. A partial list of artists includes Willem and Elaine de Kooning,

It has become a structured inequality, necessary to tax systems and nation state hierachy. Nothing more than a new 'slavery law' of our economics. Looking at the canvas again, the real question is where is the evidence of the artist's vision? Are hand-controlled expressions of images proposing new ways of thinking, anywhere on planet Earth?

Robert Rauschenberg, Josef and Anni Albers, Jacob Lawrence, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Cy Twombly, Kenneth Noland,



The same year that Black Mountain College was founded, the Nazis forced the closing of Germany's Bauhaus school, prompting many of its teachers and students to decamp for the United States. Several landed at Black Mountain, most prominently Josef Albers, shown here in 1944. He was chosen to lead the art program.

Credit: Barbara Morgan/Getty Images

Franz Kline, Arthur Penn, Buckminster Fuller, Charles Olson. There were many others. They all took part in everyday activities in gardening, cooking, building, and eating together as well as their own interdisciplinary work.

In imaginativity there are no boundaries either of action or thought. In a college like Black Mountain, ideas became action, became a way to enter new territories of image making, and had to happen because what mattered was the doing. Imaginative action. Play plus conviviality was an important element. A play within the play of the work and the play of the imagination; without play no imagination is possible. Play is the essential part of doing.

Along with the founder of Black Mountain College, John Andrew Rice, John Dewey's ideas on education were part of the college's philosophy; his ideas of doing and thinking were integral to the teaching environment. These methods have been handed down and were part of the upheaval of the 1960s in Europe, the UK and North America. But did they go anywhere? Of course not, we don't

learn from experience. The recent example of the closure of the humanities in universities is but one example. I'm a bit tired of hearing about, or expressions of horror at, the continuing deprivations in the destruction of equality and opportunity in the arts. Or to hear again the arguments around the heavy weight of commodity culture. As artists we require something more: not to reiterate the modern strictures time and time again. On the other hand, perhaps the artists of the art world are but a subculture of dealers and collectors. They then construct price mountains that only succeed by destroying any semblance of the ethical concerns that are essential to the arts. What a long way this is from Black Mountain College's ethos of self-defined responsibility, without authority or hierarchy, and its sense of community and value in the experimental. A while ago I played out an interesting series of protests against the destruction of sensibilities by the media, internet and the commonality of a 'status quo' in culture. I counteracted by establishing a performance art approach through 'Codswallop' (2017). A method stolen from Diogenes, the Greek philosopher living in 450 BC who dragged a codfish through the streets of Athens in answer to 'What is philosophy'? What was important at the time was to make clear how the majority of people weren't thinking hard enough about how the economic structuring of culture was coming from the institutionalisation of the establishment. To me it was a case of the blind leading the blind. Imaginativity is required from all sections of society, and, in particular, the understanding of how the internet mediates the art world.

We make mistakes. What humans have been doing recently is beyond comprehension. You could put it down to lack of imagination, but ordinarily it's a lack of foresight. And, through a lack of imagination but no lack of creativity. We hardly ever learn from mistakes.

The way the media and associated technologies are generally discussed as a global extension of knowledge is one of the blind spots in communication. Blind, that is, to the medium itself and its effects. We are back to Marshall McLuhan and 'the medium is the message'. A. N. Whitehead also said "the major advances in civilisation are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur". And that is the point: the way the internet runs through society, penetrating our nerve endings of existence, can be likened to any medium as a form of control. It has become an educational tool in the way strategic economies are engineered. Precisely, that is, the way by which people are kept in place. It has become a structured inequality, necessary to tax systems and nation state hierarchy. Nothing more than a new 'slavery law' of our economics. Looking at the canvas again, the real question is where is the evidence of the artist's vision? Are hand-controlled expressions of images proposing new ways of thinking, anywhere on planet Earth?

This question has obviously a deeply significant relation to how we

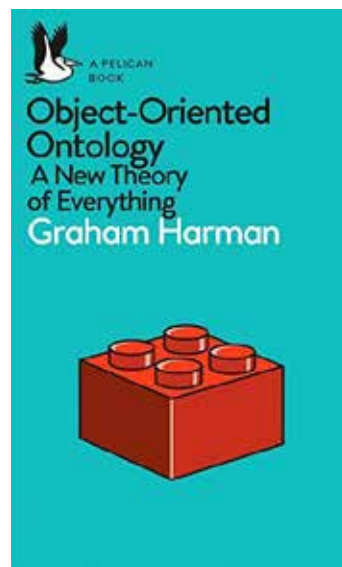


*Outdoor tutor-led discussion.
Photo: Mary Brett. Black Mountain College Museum Arts Center Collection*

think. As a world battling climate change, it moves us as humans to rethink humanity's purpose. It becomes fundamental to consider the future. However, I feel tired again, tired when I hear broadcasts through the BBC and other channels proposing changes to inequality by promoting wealth creation and equality of opportunity. I haven't seen or heard of artists being asked for their ideas on rethinking.

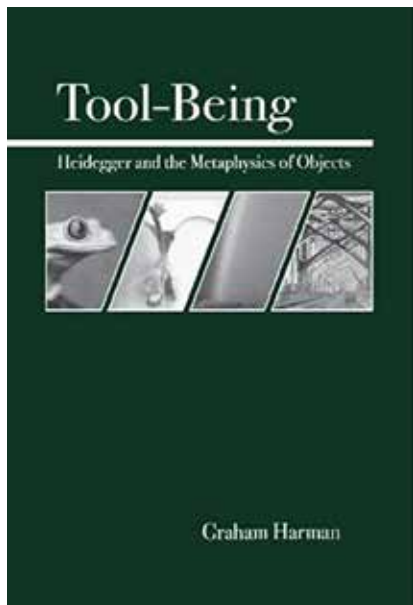
Should we not think of taking a new look at art schools? Put them back into autonomous organisations. Re-establish art schools as 'schools of imaginativity'. Subsuming art schools into universities was a deleterious move. Departments of art and cultures saw a turn to an unimaginative display of artefacts in place of art and a proliferation of media-type works of art without an understanding of the medium itself. It was only done for elevated access to more grants. And the rise of 'critical writing' brings further damage as a distortion of imaginative thinking. Distortion to such an extent that ideas of chaos and conscience in methods were subjected to pressures from stultifying thought processes of unforgivable, academic narrowness and peer review of what philosophy means. Committees cannot make art or think artists into being.

This to me is a dangerous situation. We can only hope that artists somewhere exist outside the institutions who can bring some sense of 'imaginativity' as a state of consciousness necessary to culture in general. Consciousness as part of imaginativity is in itself not an easy state of mind to examine (though consciousness itself is contained in the idea of imaginativity). Following our argument of rethinking, Kant held the idea that art was autonomous, that a painting continued to exist outside human audiences. If the aesthetic was only brought into action when a spectator was in evidence then what of an image in its imprisoned state outside human activi-



ties? Can we say that it doesn't exist? How absurd is that. Imagine a gallery of paintings, just hanging there, waiting for a spectator. If the spectator doesn't arrive, what then? The images need to compose themselves, adjust and in readjusting to speak across the space of the gallery, to communicate, together. If this happens, a format of sensual exchange will begin to fill the space, reaching fever pitch in desperation for an audience. In this condition of estrangement, something else happens. Through the excitement of an arts interchange, a certain sense of absurdity spreads over the scene. Painted images communicate across image to image in a state of imaginativity, gesturing wildly, asking each other, where are the spectators to this important exchange of feelings, they are missing something of importance concerning humanity and humanity is not here! "We are the symbols of life, we form the safeguard to distortions of culture. Our presence is more powerful than any other media". Poor humanity, these humans know not what they construct when they leave art to fend for itself. What happens then? Strange creatures move in to devour ideas of culture, obscuring visions and imaginative ideas. And, more importantly, voraciously working toward the death of any feeling and philosophical intervention; distortion within the painting's depths of sensuality, pulling them down to the level of their own greed, as they bargain and haggle; gloating their way through mangled perceptions. Is this just a fantasy? How can a gallery without an audience function vitally as a cultural experience for all peoples? Of course, my mistake, there is an audience after all, it's the 'culture industry'.

Let's move on to something more interesting than the status quo. Philosophy moves as slowly as art when it comes to sensing what reality means. For me reality is when a painting becomes more than it appears at first sight, even when the paint is still fresh. As I described at the outset, the strangeness of an image exists as if outside one's ordinariness. It is becoming part of the world as a new thing or object, just there, now existing, certain in its unassailability of composure. This is how imaginativity works. And my point now is to emphasise this by referring to Graham Harman and



his ideas on new realities, and recently his ideas on what art does, what happens when art and object are observed as coming together.

In the first place we live in a world composed of humans and objects. The objects under consideration here are paintings. In living with them we have to be able to 'understand' them, or should be able to do so. To know what they are 'about', or 'on about'- it's not a matter

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of knowing what we know but knowing what we don't know. In this quandary we ask, communicate or ponder on art as a sensual object. Not forgetting that we function as a 'sensual human object' also. Applying the sensualities of both human and painting as a mix of qualities thus becomes an equation of possibilities. Harman speaks of architecture as a living space that we occupy gradually as the space of the form reveals itself. Moving through it, experiencing the space and form dramatically. This is what Harman says of objects, that they are theatrical, and it's this nature of the object, being architecture, painting or glass bottle or whatever that we as humans conjoin with, theatrically. This amounts to us humans meeting the painting experience within a third object. As Harman indicates, there is this space above or in and around us, painting and human. To me, this is the emotional zone of feeling. Also, we encounter the painting at different times, morning, or at dusk and in different lights and environments. Humans also change moods, temperaments and digestive movements. So, the conjoining of us as objects changes, and we get to know one another in different moods, means and ways. Needless to say, it takes time and the world is not suited to such time realizations. Just witness any public art gallery and it becomes obvious that citizens are virtually out of step with the art of looking.

However, this is not all, we are not solving the problem of looking through the meeting of object and human in our different sensibilities. Heidegger steps in here with his analysis on tools. We only begin to know the tool when it's broken, and in knowing it, it retreats from us. When we encounter a painting and begin to sense its qualities through our own emotional state, even with the realization that we now may have, in a third theatrical space, we cannot begin to fully get to grips with the painting. The work is in constant retreat. And perhaps we can never know completely its meaning. We can experience the different nuances through textures, colours, tonal changes and compositional dynamics, but always something eludes us. But that is not a disadvantage, quite the reverse, it's exhilarating because we can never stop, never know the whole 'story', as it were. And, we can continue to 'live' with the painting in imaginativity.

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'Dissociative fugue' is a type of amnesia that is caused by an extreme psychological trauma instead of physical trauma, illness, or other medical condition. It's severe, and considered rare.

If we review a few articles of recent *Art News*, clearly the main theme revolves around activities that provide for the Covid19 closed down art world, substituted for the old normal. A virtual experience is this new normal. The only art world in which we can engage, as opposed to being locked out. We may now experience art as a virtual reality and therefore be somewhere other than an 'art space' to partake in the provided art. Via a digital device as opposed to risking our lives to see an exhibition in person. We are still invited to peruse or witness or observe the art from our own selected vantage point, but now it is through our personal digital device. We consent to accept the digitized 'trans-piction', viewing the electronic mode of what is photo-electronically, selectively, (we can only see what is transferred) 'shot' on to our eyes, on a screen of some sort. We have no angle of option to view the work, or stance or perspective, no partaking in gallery circumstance or light quality or speaking to a guard or some other stranger who stands next to us, gazing at the same work. We only see what the screen allows. Hence, our subjectivity of experience is determined not only by the technology involved but also by the application of the presenter-camera view-choice he or she chooses for us to see, for better or for worse.

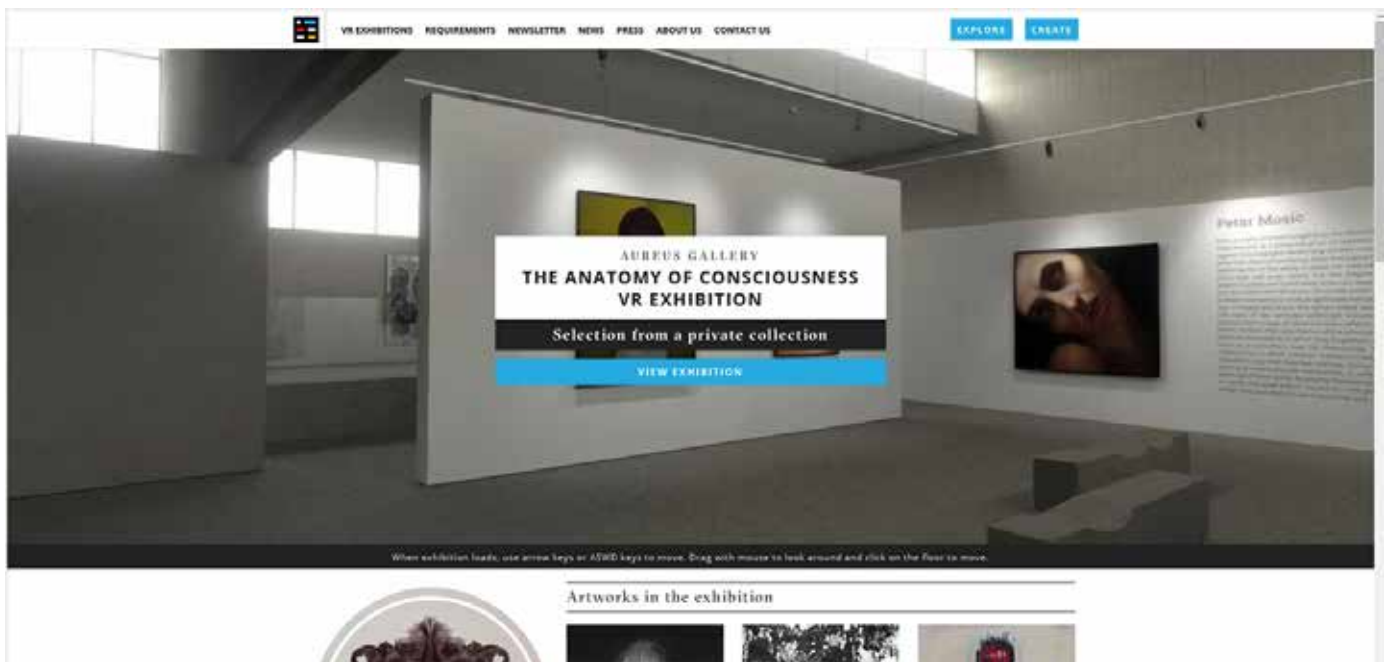
I would say 'for worse'. It is useless to deny it is otherwise. There is no substitute for actually standing in front of an object you chose to look at, and take it in over time. This is the critical interplay that is absolutely vital in the experience of art and we are kidding ourselves to think otherwise. Why is this such a problem for us to admit? Why are art magazines just talking about art sales or hot

Plainly stated there is no substitute for seeing and 'being with' art. We really cannot talk ourselves into that slog. If anything, we value the experience of art that is directly relational to ourselves partaking in an authentic encounter. Art by its nature, is in contradistinction to a virtual experience for it is direct, in person with no techno filters and, moreover, a felt experience.

'identitarian' quasi political issues, as opposed to the nature of art, especially in this seemingly culturally restricted social environment? We had an art world crisis before the pandemic, without forgetting the social and educational crises that the wider society contends with.

We are enraptured, our physicality embodied in technology. This ongoing notion of technology has been crucial to the history of art. But why would we ever deny the current vantage point of technology when it is absolutely omnipresent in practically everything we do on earth? There is no way to vanquish our dependence on electronic trans-communication or data collection interface with our techno-directed lives in any aspect of living let alone the back burner of art. The digitalization of art and it's selling did not skip a beat as suddenly we were able to partake in zoom art events or digital theatre or social media spelling out culture as Covid-19 swept the world. Yet there is something deeply wrong with this picture.

The irony of the coronavirus effect is the sunshine that plays over the condition of our depressed cultural behavior which existed be-



fore this plague. I would say we have been oblivious to our state of cultural disconnect and the banality of our art world for two generations. We just accepted whatever was presented to us. Our nameless cultural march was totally packaged, processed, commercialized and zoomed. We were full swing into techno-addiction, this mindless consumption, hollow blather imagery. Have you found anything important or with a sense of posterity displayed in the myriad of art on show in the last – oh I do not know how long. Too long. Of course this situation has evolved for many reasons. Covid-19 just pushed it over the top and onto the open ground of our very confused living. Are we waking up yet with egg on our faces? There is no such thing as a virtual art world or virtual art. The word ‘virtual’ itself means ‘simulated’ or ‘in place of’. Our new normal is in place of art.

Researchers with the European Space Agency in Darmstadt, Germany, equipped with a Virtual Reality headset and motion controllers, demonstrated how astronauts might use virtual reality in the future to train to extinguish a fire inside a lunar habitat. It trains them for some of the possibilities. But it remains unreal, fake or substitute. Plainly stated there is no substitute for seeing and ‘being with’ art. We really cannot talk ourselves into that slog. If anything, we value the experience of art that is directly relational to ourselves partaking in an authentic encounter before we forget what the real is. Art by its nature, is in contradistinction to a virtual experience for it is direct, in-person with no techno filters and, moreover, a felt experience. It is like real life theatre and before you. This is how we may come to know ourselves, gauge ourselves. One can post many works of art online (I do) but that is no substitute for experiencing a work of art in person and never will be. At the *New Art Examiner* we do not allow reviews of shows that have not been visited in person. The value of the digital pictures online only remind me of their real existence somewhere in the world, that I want to see for myself. I am happy the digital images exist but they long for my viewing in person.

The issue with our fugue state of amnias is very difficult and

imposing. We have largely forgotten art is a reality afore us. Our long-term social memory forgets language and art. We have been with this dissociation of art for a long time, it’s implications and effects are becoming known. Of course this issue is long and complicated but popular electrolyzed culture, fragmented: whether on the reservations (museums), in holding pens (galleries), as prisoners of home decor, art school or academic constraint, on screens and TVs, it is separated and all over the place.

This latest lock down on living culture is our latest abyss. We yearn to get on with living. But the fugue state will claim many casualties on many levels. We should not pretend this is not so, we should not be in denial or pretend the desertification of culture does not exist. It does on many levels. But we know artists are out there and their art shall emerge despite the imposing constraints of techno man.

Let us view this era as an opportunity to reclassify or clarify what and how we revere our relationship to art. I predict, as in any period of human strife, art will re-emerge, but until it does we will witness many show trials, witch hunts, spooks and jokers.... and re-evaluations of what cultural sanity may be. It is a very long road. Maybe art will thrive underground. Maybe art will continue a sort of interregnum or flat period that has to be content with mediocrity. Or, perhaps, we just do not know when art will revitalize itself as opposed to becoming a market slave, advertising whim or pushed agenda.

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The Subject is the Object, the Legacies of Minimalism

Kathryn Hixson

FROM THE ARCHIVES: THIS PIECE FIRST APPEARED IN THE *NEW ART EXAMINER* IN MAY 1991 WITH DEREK GUTHRIE AS PUBLISHER AND HOWARD YANA-SHAPIRO AS ACTING PUBLISHER. KATHRYN HIXSON WAS A FREELANCE WRITER LIVING IN CHICAGO CONTRIBUTING TO *ARTS* AND *THE JOURNAL OF ART*.

Though American art produced in the 1980s and early 1990s deliberately, and satisfactorily, distanced itself from its Minimalist forebears, in the form of critiques of that movement's hegemonic patriarchal rule and a grateful reinvestment in extra formal content and reference, many strategies and practices employed are based directly on suppositions inherited, wholesale, from the high Minimalist dictates of the mid-1960s. As has been noted elsewhere, several artists have actually used Minimalist practices to comment directly on its pitfalls, filling the seeming aridity of 'specific object' backup with possible reference. For instance, Felix Gonzalez-Torres's corner candy spills and stacks of blank pages refer easily to the assumed prowess of the Minimalist gesture and its forbidding object, while elegantly unravelling the pomposity of the heterosexual male stands, so that the work can carry the artist's more fragile homosexual eroticism. Tony Tasset also confronts the haughtiness of the Minimalist stance, making big, heavy rectilinear objects out of near invisible Plexiglas, or adding protective cardboard corners onto a bare white square, thereby asserting that the safeguarding of the Minimalist ideals is an essential to the legitimation of the object is art, as the object itself. However, beyond the straightforward quotes is an underlying current of Minimalist influence inextricable from current art making and the discourse surrounding it.

The influences of Minimalism throughout the 'Neo-Geo,' 'Neo conceptual,' 'Po Mo,' 'appropriationist,' 'deconstructionist' works of the last decade are rampant enough, in self-conscious positioning as well as assumed predilections, that a discursive examination of these influences may somehow illuminate how Minimalism, though doomed at its hopeful revolutionary inception, set forth strategies and structures that remain compelling and useful. I use 'Minimalism' to mean strictly the brief moment of heady idealism and discourse surrounding the works, from 1965-69, of Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, Tony Smith, and Sol

Choosing to connect contemporary work to this particular slice of history may seem a highly artificial presumption, yet it is just this slice of Minimalism that has been commodified most cleanly, and is generally what contemporary artists have reacted *against or in relation to.*



For the work at American Fine Arts, members of the gallery staff (disguised performers), performing a script crafted by Fraser, descended upon gallery visitors in a space hung with Allan McCollum's Plaster Surrogates (1991)

Lewitt, that privileged the phenomenological relationship between the sensate body of the viewer and the pared down barely aesthetic art object. Choosing to connect contemporary work to this particular slice of history may seem a highly artificial presumption, yet it is just this slice of Minimalism that has been commodified most cleanly, and is generally what contemporary artists have reacted against or in relation to. It is possible, though admittedly reductivist, to view much of the last decade of art making – in the midst of, and necessarily along with, the influences of French and German theory, feminism and sexuality, ethnicity, and critique of commodity fetishism – as a series of permutations on the more malleable Minimalist strategies and structures. And much of the discourse surrounding recent art – including my own – is rife with assumptions about ways to view and interpret work that are also structurally similar, if not identical, to Minimalist rhetoric.

The Body

The notion that the work of art is a coherent 'body' in space, with an inside and outside, having an anthropomorphic 'presence,' is the result of Greenburgian formalist dictates followed to logical ends by the Minimalists. In an effort to make the artwork totally non-referential, and completely self-referential, the Minimalist



*Aluminum siding, Haworth Office desk, laminated black and white photograph, oil and wax in tin pan.
Mitchell Kane, MOCA (1987)*

turn to sculpture because it purportedly has less tendency to carry illusion, making 'objects,' in contradistinction to the viewing 'subject.' In 1965 Barbara Rose described what she dubbed 'ABC art' as "elementary geometric forms that depend for their art quality on some sort of presence or concrete thereness, which in turn often seems no more than a literal emphatic assertion of their existence." Michael Fried complained that the "apparent hollowness of most literal work... Is almost blatantly anthropomorphic," and Robert Morris lorded it: "even in subtle morphological ways, object type art is tied to the body... Confined within symmetry of form and homogeneity of material." The formalist urge had, as Barbara Rose added, "no wish to transcend the physical for either the metaphysical or the metaphoric... (it is) not supposed to mean other than what it is..."

This fusion of form and content is still given high marks, though heaps of referential reality have been added onto the side of content. Illusionism is employed only when loaded with scepticism, and many times work is judged in terms of ability to fulfil the desire for strong 'presence.' From Koons's tchotchkes to Jenny Holzer's mesmerising LED displays, and even Cady Nolan's and

Jessica Stockholder's sprawling installation pieces, success is due in part to the cohesive 'literal' 'thereness.' The primacy placed by the Minimalists on immediacy of comprehension, as Rose says: "the all at once experience of the specific object," has been slowed somewhat, but is still operative, as in Wendy Jacob's breathing ceilings and walls, which, as their inflation and deflation is detected, clearly anthropomorphise the arid Minimalist presence in a succinct, direct physical manner.

Comment of the space

The primacy of the physical presence of the artwork in Minimalism was mirrored by the wish to make the viewer, the subject, aware of his/her own physicality in relation to the specific object in the specific space. As Fried noted, "the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder" (and therefore Fried, merely theatrical). Morris explained that "one is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he comprehends the object from various positions, and under varying conditions of light and spatial



Jenny Holzer (Facebook before there was Facebook)

context.” No doubt influenced in part by existential literature, the Minimalists privilege the phenomenological subject as a participant in the art, in effect creating a new relationship (foreshadowed in post-painterly abstraction/scale) between the art object and the “beholder.” In previous work “what is to be had from the work is located strictly within (it),” and the viewer contemplated its inner logical relationships. With Minimalism, since it vigorously rejected any hint of complex relational composition and the object, the focus became the relationship between the physicality of the viewer in respect of that of the art.

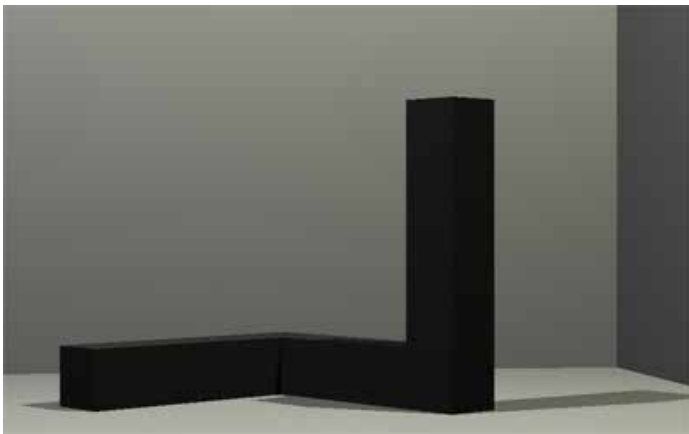
Though this new relationship, at the time, activated the viewer beyond an idealised, transcendental contemplation/meditation, the artwork had the physical upper hand. Morris again: “the concerns now offer more control of the entire situation.” The contemporary obsession with presentation, rigidly controlled by the artist galleries, which finesses every aspect of the gallery or museum situation to create the open ‘proper’ atmosphere for viewing work, has clear precedents in Minimalist practice. Exhibits, be they large group shows in museums or individual artist’s gallery shows, are fashioned as, and critiqued, no matter what the media, as sculptural installations. Recent examples of the raucous *ImageWorld* show at the Whitney, which bombarded the beholder with visual, conceptual and aural information, mimicking cable TV, and *The Body Show* at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, where the installation led the viewer through a maze of little hallways, a darkened room, and dead-end open spaces so that the awareness of the viewer’s body affected the way the work – about the body – was witnessed. The notion that the viewer, through bodily interaction, completes the work of art continues to be a crucial contemporary concern. The monumentalism of Minimalism’s dictates for the details of that completion, bound by the particular gender and class of those artists in the mid-1960s, have luckily been shattered by the literary

crises of intentionality and interpretation, the floating signifiers of French deconstruction, and the feminist and ethnic exposition of the impossibility of uncultured autonomy. The relationship between the viewer and the art object has become much more of a multivocal conversation than a mere submission to univocal subjecthood. Yet there still is a direct connection to Minimalism’s preoccupation with the necessity of the physical presence, and manipulation, of the viewer for manufacture of meaning. Any recent art graduate student worth his/her salt insists that that work relies on what the viewer brings to it. Much of the most interesting recent work concentrates on exactly what expectations, assumptions, and preconceptions – housed in the beholder – are offered up to the work, almost regardless of what the work offers to the beholder.

Aggression

The Minimalist urge “to control the entire situation” of art viewing was symptomatic of the wish for the artwork to have an aggressive presence which commanded the viewer as well as the space of exhibition. Fried suggested that “literalist works of art must somehow confront the beholder – they must, one might almost say, be placed not just in his space but in his way.” In 1965 Barbara Rose described the work as “difficult, remote, aloof, and (as) indigestible as possible,” and in 1969 claimed that Minimalism “reject(s) nos-

With Minimalism, since it vigorously rejected any hint of complex relational composition and the object, the focus became the relationship between the physicality of the viewer in respect of that of the art.



*Tony Smith; Free Ride, (1962),
Museum of Modern Art, New York City*

talgia, charm, grace and nuance for bolder, more brutal qualities like power, impact and concreteness ... The radicality of art is defined not in terms of its form, but in terms of its disruptive function...” This disruption of convention is the linear quest of the avant-garde, operable throughout the 20th century and fervently continued by the Minimalist, has been derailed as just another marketing strategy, but the aggressive desire to change, alter, shift, tamper with, or transform the viewer’s assumptions about a particular situation within the world and/or the art world, is a basic drive that informs contemporary art making, from the works of Richard Prince and Adrian Piper to those of Gretchen Faust and Judy Ledgerwood.

The overriding concern for control, to “allow no room for confusion or misrepresentation,” included a wish to control the critical discourse surrounding the work, and had Barbara Rose fishing around for a “relativist criticism which begins by determining context in which judgements can be made possible...” In contrast to “idealist absolutes and abstract standards” used to judge earlier work, e.g., Abstract Expressionism. Members of the post-war GI Bill boom, the college educated Minimalists, who were “intensely aware of what is happening in art and art criticism at this time,” spoke and wrote often about their work in the art periodicals, in a carefully controlled rhetoric that help to shape the experience of it. The current plethora of artists’ statements, artists writing criticism, and artists curating shows continues the Minimalist interest in participating in, not just reacting to, the critical discourse about their work. A clear, and rather ironic, example of this participation occurred in a recent collaboration between Andrea Fraser and Alan McCollum, wherein Fraser hired two actors to speak cogently and authoritatively about McCollum’s multiples, whenever a viewer strayed near, so that the criticism immediately influenced the interpretation of the work.

Truth to materials

Minimalists used the common materials of industry, rejecting the conventions of stone and chisel or paint on canvas, in order to ensure that their objects were not deceptions, were not delusions, but were ‘real.’ Minimalist truth to materials translated the Abstract Expressionist’s honesty towards paint into a spatial dimension,

brought the cubist practice of collage into the gritty industrial milieu of the mid-1960s America, and joined the ranks of Duchamp and the Pop artists to “deal with basically unaesthetic material aesthetically.” This prime directive for work to be “materialistic...” Because it’s made out of it so materials without pretension to other materials” has evolved into a similarly highly self-conscious choice of materials. Fine art media as well as found or manufactured objects are no longer chosen for their ability to be resistant to illusion, but rather for their capacity for evocative reference. A cabbage is a cabbage, a photograph must refer to its status as photograph, and a stuffed animal is just and only itself, but contemporary artists, just as the Minimalists chose steel and iron to reflect the techno-industrial landscape shaping their American terrain, exploit the extra aesthetic potential of their material to add meaning. Mike Kelly’s Minimal sculptures of blankets spread on the floor, topped with use stuffed animals, are explicitly true to their materials, where the ‘truth’ encompasses the nostalgic resonances of the materials’ history of use. Artists using living plants, or processes of decay of organic substances, are being quite true to their materials, and when illusionism is employed, such as in Vincent Shine’s finely crafted little neoprene plants, the artist is usually careful to clearly elucidate, on accompanying checklists, the exact chemical composition of the art object.

Permutations on a priori systems

To ensure that their sculptures be perceived ‘all at once,’ and reduce the possibility of authorial incident, the Minimalists employed a priori mathematical systems to dictate geometric shape, following Ad Reinhardt’s advice for “no accidents or automatism... Everything, where to begin and where to end should be worked out in the mind beforehand.” The emphasis on the conceptual aspects of the work seems to have evolved out of the post-painterly abstract artists’ formalist obsession with the givens of their medium – that the physical stretchers and canvases came to define ‘paintingness’ as and an a priori subject of painting. The Minimalists three-dimensionalized the systematic painting of Frank Stella or Barnett Newman into a serialism pursued most completely by Sol LeWitt. The ensuing two decades of conceptually based work is an obvious outcome of Judd’s and Andre’s precise geometries and the underlying scepticism towards ‘art’ systems quickly grew to encompass doubt towards every other system in a way that actually resuscitated art-making from the very death throes of Minimalist formalism.

The practice of setting up an a priori system is widely used today much in the same way that Lawrence Alloway distinguished systemic work from earlier art forms: “in style analysis we look for unity within variety; in One-Image art we look for variety with inconspicuous unity.” Sherrie Levine’s game boards, Richard Prince’s collections of motorcyclists and jokes, and Alan McCollum’s multiples are just a few examples of the new systemic approach. Artists have set up severely restrictive conditions for working, such as Gaylen Gerber, who continues to paint the same still life in the same hues on the same size canvas. Peter Halley has consistently sustained interest within a very narrow range of geometric forms and hues. Strict dependency on given systems has



Donald Judd Untitled, concrete sculpture (1991). Israel Museum, Jerusalem

loosened up to include the critique of the chosen systems, and less emphasis is placed on Rinehart's 'where to end,' than on the process leading up to it, as in Liz Larner's petri dish cultures, now carefully drilled for safety, which rely on on a priority selection of a given process, though the specific outcome is impossible to predict.

Illusionism is fiction

Central to the Minimal urge was the necessity to expunge all illusionism from the work of art, refusing to participate in the production of what the artists at the time believed to be morally reprehensible fictions. The resulting Minimalist 'truth' has been so resoundingly co-opted and exploited by so many manipulators that it's become more a ground that absorbs anyone's fiction, but the urge to expose fictions is still crucial to contemporary work. Distrust of illusion has permutated into a feminist discourse, which continually struggles to uncover the mechanisms that sustain the power of the status quo. Sherrie Levine's elegantly Minimal gesture of rephotographing works by male members of the art canon and presenting them as her own, severely shook up the monumental claims of originality and authenticity hypostatized in art history, leaving a few shards of hollow legitimation floundering around in search of an aura. Jeanne Dunning's untitled holes, backs of heads, and other isolated body parts conflate the truth value of the photographic representation with its pictorial ability to remain resonantly ambiguous. In her systematic recreation of a body as type or model, Cindy Sherman unapologetically continues to define

herself as an endless accumulation of fictions. Also following in the traditionally Minimalist hunt for lies, Hirsch Perlman recently took on one of the most honoured locations of truth – the law, unravelling it into nonsensical poetry in order merely to present the beholder's indefatigable desire to hunt down and arrest are given 'true' meaning.

Sociopolitical critique by materials of ascending power/systems of control

The Minimalists in the mid-1960s directly critique the privileged upper class status of previous forms – again joining with Pop to complete the Duchampian gesture – hoping to offer “a neutral pleasure of seeing known to everyone,” in “metaphor for ideally levelled non-stratified democratic society” that would be critical of “the commodity status of art in a materialist culture” in a way that “heralded reaction against the appropriation of art as an investment security.” Carl Andre claimed his work was “communistic, because the former is equally accessible to all men.” Fried noted that literalist art wishes to be taken 'seriously,' but parenthetically belittled that wish: “(certain modes of seriousness are close to the beholder by the work itself, i.e. those established by the finest painting and sculpture of the recent past. But, of course, those are hardly modes of seriousness in which most people feel at home, or that they even find tolerable).” The Minimalists use the middle-class materials of industrialism to reject fine art snobbery, and react directly to the sociopolitical situation at hand, where “Vietnam, technological development, sociology, and philosophy are all

subjects of immediate importance.”

Since then, of course, the cool ‘anonymous’ international style of the Minimalists has become synonymous with maintaining, not dislodging, the dominant power structure of a global industrial complex. But at the time, the artist embraced the materials which were being used by an ascending structure of control. Likewise, artists of the 1980s and 1990s, reacting to the changing sociopolitical situation, continue to employ materials and vocabularies of ascending power relationships. As the Minimalists felt that identification with the architectural industrial complex afforded them a new potency to widen the field and heighten the critical effectiveness of art, ensuing generations of artists have adopted the tools and strategies of those contemporary forces which wield power in public and private spheres. Appropriating the structures of mass communication and advanced technology to reveal the mechanisms by which they maintain control, artists focus on the collusions between advertising and entertainment, the news media and government/business, the political manipulation of opinion, and the coercion of architecture in order to comment on the requirement to constantly fuel/fill the endlessly emptied market of the post-capitalist economy.

Currently the ‘image’ reigns supreme over any actual commodity, and the image of a strategy is what contemporary artists have offered. By making visible those mediating structures which actually prop up the seemingly unified image, these artists expose the process of image maintenance in our culture, which operates by collapsing the complexities of the consumer. Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger employ sloganeering, mimicking the best trademarked ad bites; Mike Kelly plays on a nostalgia in a way similarly as perverse as the advertising recall of the better days of the *Good Housekeeping* mum; and Nayland Blake manipulates camp in a way that would make any record promoter proud. Jeff Koons has tried to tap directly into the personality cult of the American media star. Richard Prince’s Marlboro Man, the epitome of the conservative American male, has now been most effectively replaced in the popular culture with Michael Jordan, the new role model for a new generation of multiracial customers.

The most significant difference between contemporary borrowing from the wider dominant culture and the Minimalist use of architectural materials and forms is that artists and critics have learned, by watching what happened to Minimalist work, that appropriation is a very complex strategy. Artists now are critical of what is being appropriated, and the structures of its control, often including an auto-critique of the very act of appropriation. Another difference between the generations is that the systems of power are located in a wide array of existing structures – from the documentary photograph, the news media, gender definition, and racial stereotyping, as well as architecture, interior design, and politically correct posturing – and empowered by a much wider array of people. Artists wilfully adopt the vocabularies of a dominant culture that promotes stereotyping, but subvert and expose the structures in such a way as to fly their ideas into the face of that Dominion. There is a danger that the ‘marginal’ or ‘eroticised’ voice will in turn, like Minimalism, become the latest fashionable art form, and as with Minimalism, any possibility of political content will be eradicated. But conversely, perhaps these voices *are* the ascending

PROWLING FOR A VAMPIRE

**The day they found a bloodless corpse
At the back of the pub, if you will.
Word went round that a vampire was loose
A search party gathered on the hill.**

**Crosses and garlic were handed out
To all erstwhile vampire-slayers
We trooped down the town in single file
The mayor had promised to pay us.**

**Course, we’d have to produce a body
Of this mercurial creature from hell
It wouldn’t be easy, his speed, his strength
We prayed we’d live, the tale to tell.**

**We prowled through every churchyard
Each bat-ridden barn, each tower
Not a trace of the vampire did we find
We grew more nervous by the hour.**

**Something about the moonless night
And the yowls of a demented cat
Gave us the shivers, we huddled close
Which was when, oh God, the BAT**

**It landed on Arthur’s shoulders
We watched as it morphed to man,
No, not man, but monster, nightmare
And to our shame we ran.**

**There was nothing we could do for Arthur
He was prone, drained in a trice
The bastard vampire belched, then flew
And we, helpless as mice.**

**We put crosses all round the village
Garlands of garlic on every door
With a bit of luck, the bloodsucker’s gone
To the next village on the moor.**

We never did get on with that lot, anyway.

Lynda Green

power.

66th MOCA is a Mockery

Miklos Legrady

The Toronto Argonauts are a professional Canadian football team competing in the East Division of the Canadian Football League. In the coming years the team may play by sitting out the game and not engaging with a ball. It's a game strategy. The wind might nudge the ball here and there, and thus the Argonauts, taking a page from John Cage, will reveal the ambient environment in football. By sitting it out, the Argonauts will frame the football arena, bringing the thrill of contemporary art to Canadian sports. The current exhibition at MOCA Toronto does the same thing.

Carlos Bungas' *Occupy*, 2020, made of cardboard boxes, tape and paint, is a work you can absorb in under 15 seconds and still be bored. We should not underestimate the power of this philosophy. Bungas' work is such that no one would know that it was art unless they were told. Even then one would ask, 'what's the point?' What an ignorant question! The point is obvious. When the work is meaningless, we must enter deeper levels, read the semiotic. The content celebrates the artist's relationship with the curator; how both share similar goals. The point used to be to shock. Today that's a given, the new goal is to signal virtue. By presenting boring work lacking originality, both artist and curator are dancing the counter-aesthetic, flashing their savvy at knowing the code and belonging to the in-club. Boring work shows you are so beyond art that you're postmodern.

Disclosure: this review can be read as damning or as great praise depending on your orientation. The theory here starts with found objects. Duchamp said they were not art, had no reference to art, and could never be mistaken for art. Critics follow that with 'and



that's how found objects became art.' Uh... not according to Duchamp. Then Carlos Bungas' work owes a debt to Sol Lewitt's *Open Modular Cubes*. Since it's been done before, and better, Bungas is 'mining' art history.

Sarah Size's piece, *Images in Debris*, and work by others in this show, also reach postmodernity by not engaging our attention. If the work shown today was by high-school students applying to art school, I'd say, maybe. Which leads us to ask why, after 30 long years, some are still intent on the thrills of bad art, and why audiences are too frightened to object. I know, I know, some people will say it's great art, but a rebuttal would address their insensitivity. If the pictures here look interesting, that's my skill at photography and not the boxes on their own.

MILAN

Art Nouveau in Milan

Milan is still a city made of stone and iron, stucco and bronze, stained glass, mosaics and ceramics. It is the Milan of Liberty, the instantly recognisable Art Nouveau style, innovative in the use of materials, which became popular at the beginning of the 20th century. Milan is the result of the inspiration and creativity of architects, artists and craftsmen such as Giuseppe Sommaruga or Alessandro Mazzucotelli, who gave a new face to the city, promoting a stylistic evolution in step with historical, social and economic changes and with the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, who were eager to show off their wealth through new and striking building.

Many buildings scattered around the city deserve to be rediscovered. This can be done if you look up as you walk, looking out for

Graziella Colombo



Casa Galimberti - detail

decorations, floral and plant friezes made on glass or with wrought iron, painted ceramics on facades and imaginative, delicate shapes, sometimes a little repetitive but nonetheless showing extraordinary skill in execution. It is a distinctive style that had a short but fruitful life. Most of the Art Nouveau architecture and decorations are located in the central areas of Milan, where the buildings still bear the names of the first owners. One of the most representative is Casa Galimberti. Built between 1902 and 1905, it is a superb example of the use of decorative majolica and wrought iron. The external surface of the building is covered with painted tiles which, like a mosaic, outline male and female figures in an intertwining of flowering and luxuriant plants: a decorative set of great visual impact. Casa Campanini, designed in 1906, also combines polychrome glass, wrought iron, frescoes inside, and modelled concrete. The use of cement was frequent because it represented a continuation of the traditional use of stucco but in an innovative key. The Civic Aquarium, created for the 1906 Universal Exposition in Milan, deserves mentioning. It represents one of the major expressions of Art Nouveau with its depiction of the marine and underwater world through friezes, ceramics and sculptures. The city's Monumental Cemetery is a true open-air sculpture museum. Friezes, mosaics and polychrome marbles were often used in an imaginative way to decorate the tombs of the wealthy middle class, eager to show their prestige in their final resting place. By around 1915 the Liberty period was ending. As a final example, I would mention a 1910 Art Nouveau building, Casa Sartorio, which is in the shape of an iron. So Milan, like New York, has its own small 'Flatiron Building'! Liberty in Milan represents a curious



Casa Sartorio: our little Flatiron Building

and interesting artistic itinerary within a city in constant evolution, which today sees the rise of modern glass and steel skyscrapers. But that's another story.

The Wounds of History

Città di Castello, a town in the province of Perugia, has one of the largest collections of works by Alberto Burri (1915-1995). With its vast rooms, Palazzo Albizzini houses 129 works by this maestro of informal art and tireless experimenter who was capable of giving nobility and artistic form to the poorest materials. It was Burri himself who set up the Foundation in 1978 and displayed his works in this 15th-century Renaissance palace, which in its sobriety and architectural elegance makes his works stand out even more. In August 2020, with life in suspension due to Covid-19, I had the opportunity to visit the collection, fortunately open; it was a fascinating experience.

Burri, the one with the bags

During his long artistic career Burri used the most disparate materials, from jute bags to plastics, charred wood, iron and cellotex (a mixture of glue and sawdust used to insulate homes). For many years he was called the artist of the burlap bags, which when they were exhibited (around 1950) caused a real scandal. Burri repeated that the materials were of no importance, what mattered was the final result. Kafka said: "There is a destination but no way there; what we refer to as way is hesitation."

Liviana Martin



Rosso Plastica

His bags are torn, full of deep indents, enhanced by an unexpected red pigment, like a wound. A 'classic' interpretation of Burri links his choice of bags to his imprisonment in an internment camp in Texas during the Second World War. Burri also had a medical degree and the cuts, wounds and sutures relate to his profession as a surgeon. Burri, however, always rejected this interpretation of his work, which he considered too simplistic; his work had to have only an aesthetic value, without symbolic interference.

Fire painting

Even fire, which Burri used on his materials, was considered only a medium, like a brush, not a metaphor or a symbol. With fire he created *Legni* (Woods), or *Combustions* and *I Ferri* (Irons). *Il Grande Ferro* (The Great Iron, 1980) is a monolith similar to that in *2001-A Space Odyssey*. Almost two meters tall, this black monochromatic *Ferro* (Iron) towers over us, bearer of ancestral messages. In his paintings, the irons seem to want to come out of the canvas, or the canvases are torn, making us think of Fontana's cuts (he is said to be inspired by Burri). But there is also a reference to classical themes, as in *Il Viaggio* (The Journey, 1979), exhibited in the former Tobacco Drying Barns, another exhibition space of the collection, temporarily closed. The iron structure recalls the *Madonna del Parto* by Piero della Francesca, an artist whom Burri loved: instead of the figures of Mary and the two angels, who open a sort of curtain, there are iron sheets, but the design is the same.

Rembrandt's drapery

Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing in a Stream*, who slowly raises her

dress to enter the water, reminds us of the soft drapery that the plastic of Burri's paintings creates, playing with light, forming holes which look like caves, encrustations, craters. The bright colors, red and black, recall Rembrandt, in particular his *Slaughtered Ox*. But above all beauty, hidden in any material, is revealed here in an exhilarating triumph of colors.

The *Grande Cretto* (The Great Crack) of Gibellina

The disastrous earthquake of 1968 in the Belice Valley in Sicily destroyed the town of Gibellina. In the new town, rebuilt a few kilometers away, the mayor invited several artists to give a message of rebirth and hope through their artwork. Among the artists who took part, Burri created a work on the rubble of the earthquake area, so that the memory would remain imperishable. *The Grande Cretto* (1985), with nine hectares of white concrete, is one of the greatest contemporary land art creations. It looks like a vast casting of concrete blocks, about 1.60 meters high, crossed by cracks of 2-3 meters wide that you can walk through, corresponding to the old streets of the ancient town. The idea is to keep alive the memory of Gibellina and the history of the town, even for those who never knew it.

The Cretti exhibited in Palazzo Albizzini, made up of clay, kaolin and other materials, are in black or white, conveying the idea of the force of nature, of its destructive but also regenerating energy.

"My last painting is the same as the first," said Burri, to indicate how much all his works, regardless of the materials used, resembled each other in the formal search for absolute beauty and harmony.

WARSAW

An Elegant Stench

Aleksander Hudzik

Perhaps one of the most overused and detached from its original meaning is the philosophical adage that states: 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. Let's risk using this phrase to recapture its meaning in a way that its author, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, wouldn't be happy about.

Linguistic difficulties are the everyday struggle of people who live in two different worlds, like artist Joanna Piotrowska, who splits her time between England and Poland. Her works, mostly photography and video, have already been shown at the Tate Modern in London and she is now having her first major exhibition in Poland, at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw.

There are certain words that lose all power when translated. For example, the English word 'vulnerability' can be translated into Polish as *slabość*, which literally means weakness. These subtle differences can be found everywhere and can quite literally possess us. In Polish, *boazeria* could be translated to mean wooden panels or siding, but its true significance is much deeper than that. *Boazeria* is an essential design feature of most Polish houses, espe-

cially those of the past decades. It's a core element of what we call home. Some might find coziness in the repetitive rhythm of the yellowish-brown wooden panels covering cold plaster walls, or sprawled across concrete floors. But, as with any other trend, some people have taken it to the extreme, creating a *horror vacui* interior where there is no air to breathe and no room for escape. It is what soothes and suffocates us, this feeling which can be translated into Polish as *zaduch*, or colloquial British English as *Frowst*, the title of her show.

Boazeria is used as both a background and as a subject of many of Joanna Piotrowska's photos presented in *Frowst*, at the National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. The exhibition is a survey of the artist, who was born in 1985 and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and Royal College of Art in London.

At the center of her photographs there is always a being, either human or animal. The very first thing we see at the Zachęta is a mosaic of black and white photography arranged like a hieratic scale, from various projects that Piotrowska has created over the



Joanna Piotrowska. *Frowst*, exhibition view. Photo by Jakub Certowicz

years. Most of them present bodies inside an enclosed, room-like space, in peculiar relations to one another. In one there is a young adult woman sitting on the lap of an older man. Piotrowska tells me this is a father and daughter relationship. But what is most disturbing is the way that the man gazes at his child. In these works Piotrowska creatively reenacts the compositions of people who participated in psychotherapist Bert Hellinger's *Systemic Constellations* therapy. This highly controversial method requires some sort of performative action. According to Wikipedia, "The person presenting the issue (seeker or client) asks people from the group to stand in the constellation as representatives. He or she arranges the representatives according to what feels right in the moment. The seeker then sits down and observes." Piotrowska is fascinated by this performative aspect; the movements, the gazes of the still bodies are what defines her photographic style.

But the surrounding works reveal something more than just a tension between bodies. There is a certain place, a house, a domestic context for their relationship, and this context is significant. A girl, the artist's friend, is sleeping in her childhood bedroom. Her legs

dangle off the edge of the bed. The wooden railings cast their shadows across her delicate body and through this, the bed that was once safe now becomes a cage. These patterns and music-like rhythms are the pillars of Piotrowska's work.

Shelters is her most recent project. We see adults hiding in homemade shelters built of pillows, blankets, and chairs. Like childhood forts in a living room, but are they really this innocent? These structures are also deeply reminiscent of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicles* or Michael Rakowitz' *paraSITE* homeless shelters. Children's imaginary landscapes might be a real desire for people facing a crisis of shelter. This is the power of Piotrowska's work in full view. She grabs hold of a very specific aesthetic, masterfully employing local characteristics, what we might even call an eastern European zeitgeist, to send us a much more transgressive and universal message. The therapy she re-enacts is something most of us could use, at least to a certain extent. We need shelter and we need closeness, even if it means accepting the stench of (*zaduch*) *Frowst*.

LONDON

Ernest Griset

In July 1877 several obituary notices were published about Ernest Griset. *The Publishers Record* stated: "Griset was very happy in illustrating the Darwinian change of an animal into a man, and of combining men and animals, something after the manner of Grandville. He was quite French in his manner, though he had lived in England from early boyhood. He was very grotesque... His death should be a loss to real caricature and comic art..." *The*

Daniel Nanavati

Atheneum recorded "his first public appearance... Exhibiting pen and ink sketches in a little shop near Leicester Square, and which have so much wit, vivacity and humour that they will someday be of great value." *The Times* commented on the satirical nature of his work and the expressive quality of his line.

The use of animals to describe human life, from Aesop's fables to Walt Disney in our own era, was particularly attractive to the Vic-



Affecting farewell - the Crab pot. *Pen and Ink watercolour (V&A, London). This work was inspired by the obituary notices of his death that appeared in 1877.*

torian thinker. Grandville's insects form an orchestra, Doré's wolf tended sheep, Landseer sentimentalised the dignity of animals in his work and Griset's hippopotamuses danced. He was a man who loved animals, his naturalistic studies are observant and filled with life, but he also produced grotesque fantasies, some of which found their way into *Punch* magazine.

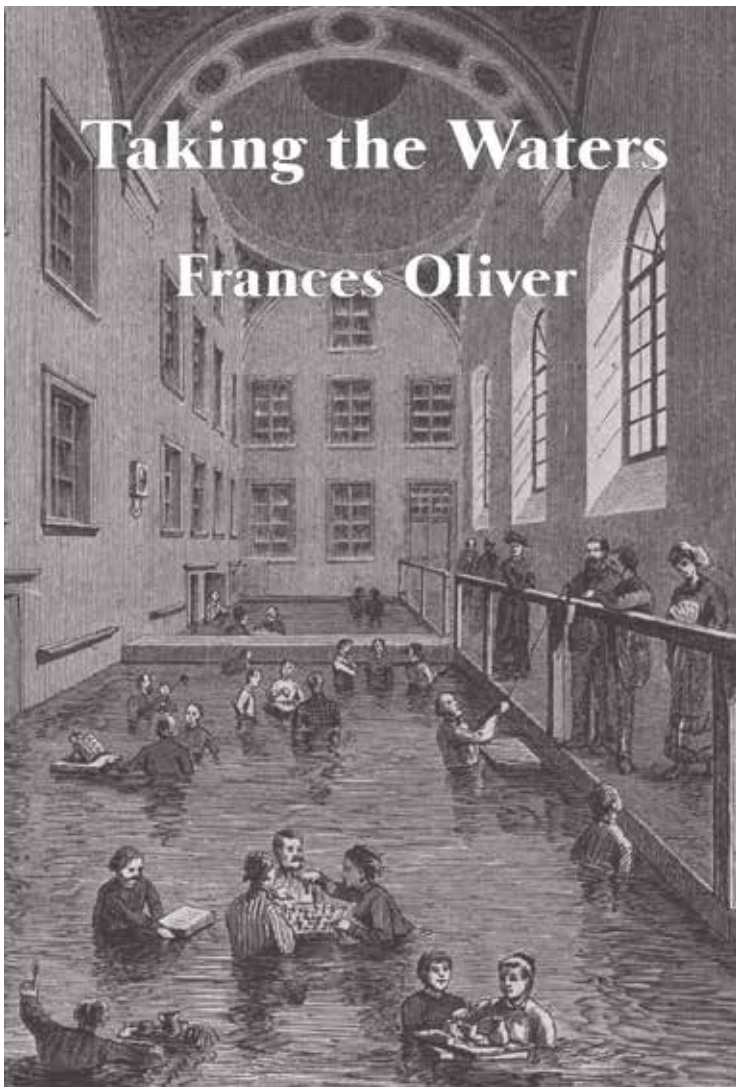
In the 1860s he established himself in a small bookshop near Leicester Square in Suffolk Street and sold watercolour sketches at very cheap rates. On the night of 16 October 1866, an old statue of George I on a horse, which stood in Leicester Square, was painted over with black spots; pointed horns were fixed over the horse's ears, a large pointed cap was fixed on the King's head, and a stave topped by a birch broom was placed against the King's left side, where the lower part of his arm and leg were already missing. The initials A. D. G. were highlighted on both sides of the plinth. He re-recorded the vandalism in one of his surviving watercolours. Wherever Victorians were investigating animals, he was capturing events from zoo to dissection table: he drew the arrival of a single Penguin from the Falkland Islands at the zoological gardens, the first live sea lion performing tricks, the stillbirth of a hippopotamus, the caricature of the palaeontologist Sir Richard Owen - and all were published.

This once famous artist is largely forgotten, superseded by Tenniel, Lear, and Beatrix Potter. And yet to see men dissecting a kangaroo, or a mother hippopotamus weeping at her stillborn baby or a group of men hard at work taking a cast of a beached whale

leaves us with an evocative view of one of the greatest efforts by a society to investigate the world of nature and strive to understand the challenge of Darwinian evolution. One of his most amusing ink drawings appeared in *Fun's Comical Creatures* in 1884, in which a photographer, his head covered by the black cloth of the early tripod cameras, looks out across an empty vista while behind him are literally thousands of animals, as he mutters to himself "Ah, very charming view! It only wants a few living objects in the foreground to give it interest."

There is however a lesson here for all of us in that sometimes, when capturing an essence of the relationship between animals and between human beings and animals and placing it in the sphere of art, we missed an essential lesson. We have all been birthed on the same planet and the animal that considers itself the most intelligent is the most utterly bloodthirsty and most completely brutal in all nature. And we miss, in anthropomorphising the animal kingdom, the very real feelings and sensibilities that other animals possess. His view of cab horses in heaven enjoying the life they could never have dreamed of when alive, is at one and the same time amusing, blissful, and tragic.

But then one of the skills of humanity is to miss so much. Ernest Griset did not care for the laudatory nature of the obituaries in 1887, as at the time he was very much alive. Thirty years later his actual death was barely noted.



WHAT IS BEING SAID ABOUT TAKING THE WATERS

This is a remarkable fiction work that brings back all my satisfying memories of reading the engrossing Frances Oliver. This new work is a poignant, idiosyncratic, yet traditional novel comprising four separate but interconnected stories all centred on a healing Swiss spa. The stories taking place over centuries, involve a compelling pattern of characters with tantalising ghostly auras, as well as rounded real personalities.

D F Lewis (Editor, Publisher
and reviewer at Real Time Reviews)

"I loved this book for many reasons: the fascination of the Swiss setting, the delineation of the social mores of each period, the subtle way in which the time shifts were accomplished, the descriptions of the natural world, the characters and their stories. I could not bear to put Taking the Waters down"

Gillian Bouras (author of Foreign Wife,
Aphrodite, A Fair Exchange and others)

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BOOK REVIEW – Ludwig Bemelmans

Frances Oliver

The Covid lockdown has sent me back to old favourite books, and I have just revisited two by Ludwig Bemelmans, one from my parents' art book collection, *My Life in Art*, and a battered autobiography, *Life Class*, from mine.

Ludwig Bemelmans (1898–1962), born Austro-Hungarian, later American, was a writer and painter renowned chiefly for his children's books. The most successful is the classic Madeline series, about a little girl at a convent school in Paris, with big colourful illustrations of famous Paris scenes. Bemelmans himself had a grim and dramatic childhood, his father abandoning the boy's mother and his governess after impregnating both. The governess – deeply loved by the boy, as he writes in *My Life in Art* – committed suicide; the mother had to raise the boy alone. Ludwig was quick-tempered and troublesome. Rather than continuing school he was sent in his early teens to work for a hotelier uncle. Tormented by a cruel waiter, his boss at the hotel, Ludwig threatened to shoot him, and finally did shoot him in the leg. Uncle Hans gave Ludwig a choice between reform school and emigration to America. Ludwig chose America, where his father was. Typically, his father did not meet him at the dock as planned. Sixteen-year-old Ludwig spent a lone Christmas on Ellis Island, but then managed to find hotel jobs, landing at the Ritz-Carlton, where he worked for 15 years until his success with children's books enabled him to live by his writing and his art. He also wrote fiction, essays on food and drink, and autobiography.

As a child I loved Madeline and the other books. Our Dachshund had to be Pretzel, named after one in Bemelmans' book, and when our parents first took my sister and me to (in our case, back to) Europe, what I most wanted was to go to Bruges and stay in the real hotel from *The Golden Basket*, another favourite Bemelmans. So I was delighted when my husband and I, many years later, found that second-hand paperback, which remains one of the funniest books I have ever read. *Life Class* is mainly about Bemelmans' experiences as a waiter at the Ritz. The staff, and the guests – of whom many were wealthy regulars – are totally and embarrassingly alive. No quirk of character, no unfortunate physical detail, escaped young Ludwig's pencil or pen – for there are of course little drawings as well.

Bemelmans' volatile temper remained. A fight with another worker who called him *Sale Boche* (dirty German) ended with Bemelmans responding with a missile of ice chips, lobbing a silver tray which cut his opponent's face and put him in hospital. However, at the end of it all Bemelmans paid the medical bills and the two shook hands. I myself have a testimonial to that explosiveness; an old Austrian who knew Bemelmans told us of a memorable dinner party at which Bemelmans threw a cooked trout at his then girlfriend. So it is not surprising that sometimes his humour is cruel, but it never spares himself, and some of the eccentric staff are described with affection and respect. Most notable is Bemelmans' friend Mr Sigsag, who has made his way up to a chef de rang from a piccolo in Europe years before. A piccolo was a little boy apprentice in a restaurant who worked from 6 am to 11 pm seven days a



Ludwig Bemelmans, *Madeline at the Paris Flower Market* 1955. Photo courtesy of the estate of Ludwig Bemelmans

week and had to spend his nights sleeping on the restaurant chairs. This book is a mine of fascinating and disturbing information about the workings of international hotels between the wars.

My Life in Art is a book of paintings and drawings with three chapters of text. The first, nostalgic and moving, is about Bemelmans' early childhood in the Austrian resort of Gmunden; the second about his bureaucracy-thwarted attempt to convert an old Paris building into a bistro and studio; the last about how Salinas, a fellow artist, taught him to paint in oils. The oils and gouache pictures were done between 1954 and 1958. The compositions are sometimes awkward, at least in reproduction; the colours are wonderful. These oils have the children's book immediacy and freshness of the Madeline illustrations. There are buildings, landscapes, people, including a few of women in cafés whose steadily drawn but distinctive features recall Steinberg or Toulouse-Lautrec. One painting of a naked, dead-white nightclub dancer trailing a purple scarf in one hand has a strange coloured background of watching faces. Another titled *Clochards* (tramps) shows a sad old man and a fascinated little girl gazing through a window at bottles of wine and a bowl of fruit; these were people Bemelmans knew and he painted them with haunting beauty and wistfulness.

Bemelmans spoke of impatience as a major trait of his and perhaps it is just that impatience that gives his paintings their vitality. They present a vivid, restless, fleeting world; they are like sketches, brilliantly simple sketches, in oil. I will end this review with the three perfectly apposite sentences Bemelmans used to end *My Life in Art*: "If a painting goes well, then it goes that way like a happy little train running through a landscape, whistling. And the picture is there forever: it looks back at you and thanks you. It has its own clear voice and says it day and night and forever."

Art and Vandals: ‘The Falling Angel’

Susana Gómez Laín

Lately, the coronavirus world pandemic and social riots of all kinds have been the excuse for too many vandals to behead, daub, overturn, vilify, revile, insult, degrade – I run out of words and synonyms - many statues and busts are erected to commemorate the glory of some historical characters of all ideologies and walks of life, as well as for the celebration of art and history. This is not new. It has happened before occasionally and has been as focused but never as widespread as is happening at present.

These acts are criminal, they are called vandalism and express a vile part of the human character: the intolerance, the ignorance, the violence, the indolence, in short, evil when compared to what art represents in its ability to liberate the spirit which can turn on history and re-evaluate its icons. As to all these broken monuments let us concentrate upon their artistic merits and drop any other connotations they may have. They don't have to represent anything other than art if we don't wish them to.

If we object to the past and the too many chapters of history that we should object to – which we all do – the way to protest is constructing, not destroying, and art is the very medium to help us achieve this, evolving the best not the bestial part of our characters.

Every nation and everyone has skeletons in the wardrobe. Who is going to throw the first stone? What are we teaching our kids and youngsters? The fake news that ‘barbarians never evolved or became civilized’? To learn from mistakes and overcome them is the only way not to repeat them. Ideologies, ways of thinking and what is wrong and right in a society changes constantly and may take a long or a short time. Behaviours that were criminalized or rejected in the past are now decriminalized or accepted as the best, and with other behaviours it is the other way round. There will always be dissidents and minorities with other opinions with whom we have to live and whom we have to respect in their own contexts.

If we follow the radicals everytime, we should change most of our monuments, names of streets and other icons every 20 years at least. That would be nonsense. Our past has been the foundation of our future and in that way we should respect it. And in almost everything there is good and bad in some proportion. Our achievements, born out of our wrongs.

Consequently those radicals would have us demolish marvellous things like the Pyramids, the Colosseum, Trajan's Column, the Tower of London, Versailles Palace, Toledo's Cathedral, the White House, the Kremlin and Courts of Justice all over the world, among a myriad of other examples of historic barbarism, social injustice and political misjudgements. We should censor and ban many works of art, books, films, writers, musicians, and an endless so on. Wouldn't it be better to explain the past and leave it there and look for a brighter more intellectual future and let art help along in this task?

Lucifer, the devil, the supposed epitome of evil, was an angel before his fall, and in 1885 in Spain, a totally Catholic country, a very popular black statue in the center of Madrid, in Retiro Park was erected, called *The Falling Angel*. A nice story for the grannies to explain to grandchildren while strolling. A story of forgiveness. A celebration of what we are here to overcome.



The sculpture of The Fallen Angel at Plaza del Ángel Caído, in the Retiro Park in Madrid (Spain). Created in 1877 and cast in bronze for Universal Exposition in Paris. Work by Ricardo Bellver (1845-1924), a Spanish sculptor. Photo by Thermos

Hannah Arendt - the voice of 2021

Richard Saltoun gallery in London is dedicating its entire 2021 exhibition programme to the German-born Jewish American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-75) because “her call for thoughtful reflection on difficult subjects remains impressively relevant today”, the gallery says.

“Launching in January 2021, On Hannah Arendt: Eight Proposals for Exhibition will be organised around eight exhibitions that seek to explore the questions put forth in the eight chapters of Arendt’s book *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1961)”, the gallery adds.

Art Newspaper, October 2020



Photo from Katy Grannan's series We the People (2020), named for Kara Hamilton's series of brass pins and accessories

A New Meaning for ‘We The People’

Looking at these pictures, I think back to the campaign buttons my parents brought out every four years. I think of the sense of urgency that once attached to them and eventually dissipated: words going in one ear of the body politic and out the other. In 2020, a year fired by protest, it can be hard to adopt that long view; to remember that most of our outrages will be another generation’s half-remembered trivia; that the truly important thing is civic culture itself. Hamilton’s pins will never be obsolete, because they are merit badges for democratic engagement itself. FUCK TRUMP? Absolutely. He has been uniquely destructive to America’s political system, which is based on reasonable and informed debate, in which we all have an equal voice. But even more important, TRUTH. US. And VOTE.

Glenn Adamson ArtNews October 2020

NAE’s GREAT SUCCESS

This month we passed 1.1 million unique visitors since the website went live in 2017.

According to Google Analytics we are visited by readers from over 70 countries. A selection 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 Zazanski, 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 – 10,000 readers

Aliens in Our Own World, Katie Zazanski, 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

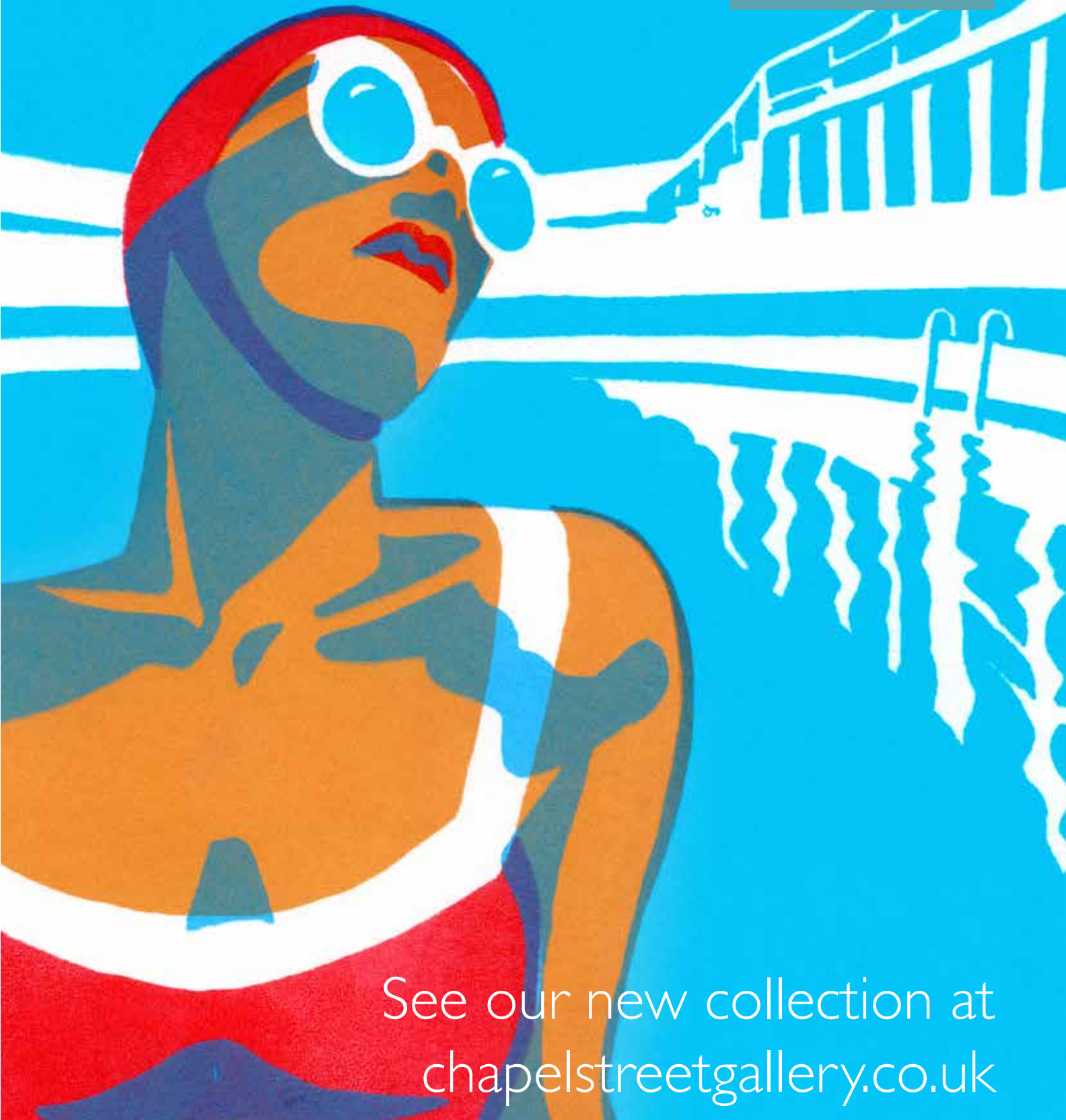
Art in America, the Critical Dustbowl, volume 33 no 5 May 2019, pp 7-11 – 5,700 readers

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