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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

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NEW ART examiner

Colin Fell on Wordsworth, David Carrier on Cultural Conflict, Stephen Luecking's insights on Malevich, Liviana Martin's Speakeasy on Italian Culture, Mary Fletcher on the Artists' Union, Scott Winfield Sublett celebrates The Kid centenary and much more ...

OHIO AND THE AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL ARTLAND

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.
If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.
The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.
You can participate directly by sending letters to the editor which are published unedited.
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The Attentive Artist

In 1918 George Smillie, an engraver with the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in the U.S. Treasury Department, copied Washington's face for the dollar bill from of the Gilbert Stuart portraits (or, more likely, from some reproduction of it). To make the translation, Smillie used reproductive conventions of an earlier era when engraving had been the mainstay of picture reproduction. Magnification makes this familiar image strange by shifting its customary relation to the threshold of vision, a critical point of reference in all reproductive media. At the usual arm's length at which one exchanges dollar bills for merchandise, Smillie's dots and lozenges, like half-tone dots, blur into slightly grainy tomes.
The effect of distance is duplicated here by reduction in size rather than defocussing.

The Counter-Arts Conspiracy, Art and Industry in the Age of Blake. Morris Eaves. Published by Cornell University Press 1992, p197

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

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DAVID CARRIER is a philosopher who writes art criticism. He has published books on world art history, and on Sean Scully. He is writing a book about the artist-philosopher Maria Boosmann.

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PENDERY WEEKES is the publisher of the *New Art Examiner*, together with an extraordinary worldwide team.

Due to the varied Covid restrictions around the world we have more articles than reviews in this issue, reflecting the fact that our writers have not been able to get out and about as much as usual.

We hope the balance will return in future issues.

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

contributor@newartexaminer.net

Letters

How Do You Taste? How the Value of Art is Decided and Defended

Editor,
Duchamp in a 1968 BBC interview with Joan Bakewell,available on YouTube, said that he had tried to discredit art, to get rid of art the way some people got rid of religion. His statement that "good taste is the enemy of art", while untrue, was part of that effort to discredit art. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's study of non-verbal language says that "every perceptual experience is accompanied by emotional coloration – an evaluation of subtle shades of good or bad, painful or pleasurable, a spectrum of cognitive and emotional memories, providing an instant valuation...taste is a cultural adaptation of great significance."
Miklos Legrady, 10/05/2021

Editor,
Well gosh! - what does this all mean ... have we created a new freedom to actually address what art may be if – IF we speak up?
Al Jirikowic, 13/04/2021

Sic Transit, English

Editor
Something often overlooked especially with all the abbreviations that come from cell phones usage, people seem to think that it's ok to use them in everyday writing, forgetting how beautiful our language is.
Ian Russo, 25/04/2021

The Presence of Painting

Editor,
"They are the products of care embedded in a surface through touch." Steve's writing teaches us by penetrating to the core of his subjects, so is always a joy to read.
Mimi LeBourgeois, 24/04/2021

Editor,
Concise and beautiful! As I have turned from painting to digital imagery I have gained in that I can create dozens of new ideas while friends create one or two paintings. But their paintings have a visual force that graphics created as light cannot achieve. Prior to Newton color to painters was not light but a property embedded in physical material. As such color theory back then comprised the element known as luster. Yellow white and black on coats of arms were originally gold silver and sable to yield a far more powerful visual effect.
Stephen Luecking, 16/01/2021

Steven,
Beautiful, sincere, & insightful, as always Steve!
Adam Fung, 29/11/2020

Editor,
There is simply no substitute for being "in person" to take in art. There is no real virtual art world. This is a very difficult idea "for many" to grasp. Everything, all the art, you see on line- is compromised. The exception may be "digital art itself" which may have to do with the aesthetic of "compromising itself". Keep painting!
Al Jirikowic, 24/11/2020

Editor,
A wonderful article. Thank you, Steven.
Unsigned, 22/11/2020

Editor,
Sending article to artist son in FK.
Mary Wade, 22/11/2020m

So Long As We Still Live – The 9th Young Triennale at Orońsko

Editor,
Sounds like an interesting show.
Alarming about exploitation of North Korean Labour – which I found more about by googling- it seems the North Korean government is involved. I could not find more about the artist Aleksandra Jagla and would like to know what her piece about this issue was like.
Mary Fletcher, 13/04/2021

Let the World Follow, Let Imagination Lead

Editor,
How has art or "art" ever changed the world? It certainly has wished to and perhaps aspired to but actually changing the world – no never. That is not to say it should not stop to either suggest whatever it has to perceive or interpret or organize whatever it means with in the realm of art. But art as a change agent of history? Never.
Al Jirikowic, 22/03/2021

Al,
Everything that happens is changing the world and art is part of that.
Mary Fletcher, 13/04/2021

We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say.

If you would like to start a conversation, or enter one please visit

www.newartexaminer.net

or write an email to

letters@newartexaminer.net

QUOTE of the Month:

"If I could say it in words there would be no reason to paint."

Edward Hopper

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We would like to take a moment to remember a friend and teacher John Link who was among the first to champion the New Art Examiner when we commenced republishing and supported the magazine with writing and ideas. We were happy to meet with him in his home and were always heartened by his warm welcome and insightful observations. Rest in Peace.

NEW ART examiner

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE VISUAL ARTS

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EDITORIAL

Daniel Nanavati

I am planting an orchard. I have been 'given' a field by a friend and have 13 trees in it from last year and now he has seen it doing so well we have extended the planting to another 40 or so trees. They will be a mixture of old varieties of fruits interspersed with berry bushes and a few roses. In five years there should be so much fruit we can help feed the village.

My uncle used to enjoy driving and would point to distant hills and tree lines and commend the aesthetics of God which humanity could never equal. I didn't like to tell him that the trees he was pointing towards were all planted by people as in England we have long ago cut down and replanted all our forests. Why burst his bubble? But his words come back to me now-and-again, especially after reading Spinoza whose thoughts on nature and the nature of God were the most advanced in the 17th century, and still resonate today. All we know is based on our senses and their interactions with nature. We cannot know anything else. We can reflect and we have; we can create a mathematics that extends insight, but everything flows from nature and the natural world.

So we invent. Human beings have been inventing for hundreds of thousands of years. From stone tools, song, music and hand imprints onwards. Evolving stories and fairy tales and creating 'the arts'. Our visual world is the birthplace of everything we are and everything we think. We have attempted, inside and outside the arts, to shape the world into something it is not, but now nature is hitting back because whatever we create, whatever we invent, we should never cease to care about the effects and outcomes we are producing. It is very easy to grind up insects and prepare the skins of animals and create something beautiful in the paint and canvas out of the death of something that is already beautiful. We honour ourselves but we never seem to want to honour the sacrifices of the natural world. That lack of honour is our vanity. Vanity kills the artist stone dead.

We would do well to remember that we can create nothing that physics does not allow to be created in our universe. That everything we create is a discovery of what is possible, and everything possible has a price in life. We are nothing more than children in a toy shop, finding new toys to play with to destruction. There is sacrifice in everything.

That price is the true value of our visual arts, the blood that has been sacrificed in the creative process. Many times that is the life of the artist themselves. Actual blood, and actual human suffering depicted in a thousand ways across the globe down the ages.

SPEAKEASY

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.
LIVIANA MARTIN was born in Northern Italy and lives in Milan. She has a degree in philosophy and she taught for many years. She is keen on ancient and contemporary art, because she is absolutely confident that "the beauty will save the world".

DISNEYFYING ITALIAN CULTURE

"You were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge."

The words that Ulysses, in the *Divine Comedy*, addresses to his companions challenging them to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules, beyond the known world, accompany my reflections on the Italian cultural heritage and the art market.

A few days ago, an article in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* reported the news that the mayor of Venice had ordered the closure of all civic museums, explaining that due to the pandemic, there were no more tourists in the city. Obviously, the valuable works exhibited do not belong to all citizens, but are a disposable enticement to visitors, to be consumed together with a drink and sandwich. Certainly, on city tours, visits to art institutions are generally hasty, an excuse to take a few selfies more than to gain knowledge of the artists and the context in which the work was made. But if we move to top exhibitions, things don't always get any better. As art historians such as Tomaso Montanari or Salvatore Settis point out, more and more often it is not museums that promote artistic events, but private companies that care more about marketing than artistic competence. Before the pandemic in Milan there were exhibitions that were not memorable but, thanks to clever advertising, attracted endless lines of customers. That is precisely what the consumers of these exhibitions are called by most critics. An exhibition should be curated to encourage the cultural enrichment of the spectators, promoting in them a desire for a profound, not just passive, experience. A personal example - some time ago, I very much enjoyed an exhibition on Bernardino Luini, a 16th-century Milanese artist who had also worked in many Lombard churches. I discovered his canvases and his frescoes, present in Milanese churches that I had never visited before, in front of which I had passed countless times without ever entering.

Exhibitions should be the result of research or some discovery that justifies their organization. And the strong reason that led to their realization should be clear. Instead, the exhibits are often blockbusters, a triumph of quantity over quality, or 3D experiences, where the emotions of the viewer, not their intellect, are involved, nothing more.

During a conference in Bilbao in 2011, Umberto Eco provocatively launched the idea of a monographic museum, centered on a single masterpiece, to document the different aspects, the relations of the society in which it was created (the historical/artistic/cultural references, and so on). He titled it 'The Museum of the Third Millennium'. It would be a great challenge to create something so radical and at the same time didactically useful. How many times have I left a museum after having seen hundreds of works, without remembering what I had seen, such was the curated confusion. One should, and many probably do, enter museums several times, to slowly savour only a few works. On the other hand, when we go to the library, we don't want to read all the books, but only what interests us.

Italy is rich in cultural heritage, protected by the Constitution: Article 9 states that "The Republic protects the landscape and the historical and artistic heritage of the nation". The tradition of protecting the artistic and environmental heritage in Italy goes back a long way and was advanced for the time when the Constitution was written in 1948.

In England, up until the 1970s, more than 1000 country houses were demolished by their owners to make them more modern. This is because the owners were free to do what they wanted without state control, while in Italy it would not have been possible. More: if while digging in my garden I find an antique artifact, which is very common in certain Italian areas, I must notify the superintendency because the statue is public property (this of course in theory, because theft of works of art is frequent). In the US, however, if I find the remains of an Indian village while digging, I can eliminate them to build a swimming pool. In fact the beautiful American art museums do not generally relate to the cities that host them; they arose, for the most part, from art collections by European artists, primarily the French Impressionists. In Italy, on the other hand, the model of the museum is to be rooted in the territory and its history, so as to create an uninterrupted link between the inside and the outside, between the objects on display and the cultural and civic fabric of the territory in which they originated.

If these are the lights of how Italian cultural heritage has been managed, many shadows over the last few years have thickened on what has been unhappily defined as Italy's petroleum, or

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Cleveland, Ohio, and the Industrial Artland

THE SECOND IN OUR EDITOR DARREN JONES' SERIES HIGHLIGHTING THE EXCELLENCE, BREADTH AND ENERGY OF ART SCENES ACROSS AMERICA

Darren Jones

Cleveland could trademark the metallic gray of its winter skies when the cloud deck merges with phreatic plumes from the fissures of growling steel mills. Such scenes exemplify what remains an extraordinary juncture of nature and human engineering in this city, despite the ravages of the rust belt's decline. When December casts its pall over Cleveland's indomitable skyline, and the Cuyahoga River's hunkered bridges, the molten grind that built it all is palpable.

That ingenuity is reflected across the the city's art sector today, anchored by the world-beating Cleveland Museum of Art (founded in 1913) and the nearby Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, or moCa (opened in 1968) which recently presented a comprehensive and exquisitely curated exhibition of Margaret Kilgallen's work. Of other large venues, SPACES is a storied organization that balances support for local artists with national and international range. Its initiatives include residencies for artists and critics, public outreach, exhibitions at its expansive Hingetown headquarters, and financial assistance to local creative workers. The Emergency Relief Program in response to the impact of Covid, and the Urgent Art Fund supporting work addressing issues at the cultural vanguard, are of particular resonance and help SPACES to retain its edge as an engine of nimble innovation. Across the street is Transformer Station which was originally a substation of the Cleveland Railway Company. Its 2013 repurposing has that instantly recognizable mid-scale gallery architecture—sleek glass and concrete—that asserts Cleveland's civic proficiency with the architectural language of contemporary art.

During the presidential election last year, Transformer Station hosted 'Nina Katchadourian: Monument to the Unelected'. The project featured a phalanx of clustered political campaign signs set up outside the gallery—another grouping was placed at moCa. The advertisements carried the names of the previous 58 failed presidential candidates from the leading parties, with plans to add 2020's runner-up. So by now Donald Trump should be where he belongs on the loser's roster. On a blustery day, the plastic banners swayed and rippled in the wind. The experience of reading them was not unlike wandering through a cemetery making out the epitaphs on tombstones. This too was a graveyard—for hopes, longing, fears, successes and failures that we'll never know. Even the signs for still living politicians had a funereal tone, as if after such crippling defeat their names have become the ghosts of spent ambition.

The Sculpture Center supports Ohioan makers (and artists from further afield) with exhibition opportunities, and its yearly SculptureX (SX) symposium. Recently TSC exhibited two sculptors and papermakers in "Aimee Lee and Sarah Rose Lejeune: A consolation of things." Lejeune's spectral, poignant rocking chairs lay buckled and skeletal on the floor of the subtly lit Main Gallery, while Lee's work—including towering, illuminated, but delicate paper-brick structures—occupied the Euclid Gallery. Housed in the same complex—although a separate non-profit—is the remarkable Artists Archive of the Western Reserve which collects and cares for the work of Ohioan artists through research and exhibitions in its AAWR Gallery, and off-site venues.

For all of this impressive enterprise there have also been some scheduling choices that seem counter to the great promise of these marvelous buildings. The timing and appropriateness of Martin Creed's neon text, *Work No. 3398 EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT* (2020) commissioned by moCA, is an example on two counts. It's been on view since July 2020 just after moCA canceled Shaun Leonardo's exhibition 'The Breath of Empty Space', due to the concerns of local activists that pictures of Black and Latino males (including 12-year-old Tamir Rice, from Cleveland) killed by police brutality, fetishized and decontextualized their subjects and risked re-traumatizing Black audiences. It was a difficult but instructive moment. Responsible stewardship of such imagery is a vital component of public remembrance, private permission, and cultural estimation. If it isn't handled sensitively by museums, working in care with invested constituents, they risk turning the murders of Black individuals into double killings—first bodily life is extinguished, followed by institutional annihilation of spirit and personhood.

Martin Creed's sentiment is an echo from the scriptures of the anchorite mystic Julian of Norwich, and her enduring 14th-century meme "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

The United States is currently roiling over the searing open wounds of racist legacies particularly in majority African American cities such as Cleveland. On moCa's website we read that "Creed's sculpture is at once a hopeful, familiar, and reassuring phrase, and a gentle nod to the challenges lying ahead amid the current uncertainties."

This anaemic attempt to align the work of a rich, white, European male artist—for whom everything probably is going to be alright—with today's profoundest structural disease exposes its irrelevance, and the museum's misstep. The problems that are splintering America are far beyond the reach of "gentle nods" and "hopeful phrases."

Secondly, why spend funds on Creed at all when Cleveland has so

FOCUS ON OHIO

Margaret Kilgallen: that's where the beauty is*, moCa, Cleveland*
(courtesy of Darren Jones)

much locally oriented activity to distinguish and assert its own appetites? His gas station art—when you're running low, fill up and leave without having to think about it—doesn't attempt to plumb Cleveland's potential as a hub of creative innovation capable of attracting widespread attention or fomenting vigorous new ideas. It's something that Fred Bidwell and the FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art that he established in 2018, proved is possible. Planning for the second iteration, postponed until 2022, is underway. With its very first edition it became one of the most impactful expositions in the country, and a powerful declarative statement of Cleveland's intentions.

Performing aesthetic CPR on Creed's moribund art could give the false impression that Cleveland (or any city) is a kow-towing backwater for artistic flotsam and jetsam. Rather than wearing London's 1990s Brit Art hand-me-downs, institutions ought to seize upon what is happening in the vicinity, and why it is happening. To this point, moCa's upcoming exhibition 'The Regional' (organized in conjunction with the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati) is a more symbiotic initiative. Deploying moCa's resources to advocate for over two dozen artists based in the Midwest is a fruitful move toward fulfilling the museum's role as artistic midwife to homegrown talent. That the exhibition's title sounds like an Amtrak service is a wonderful reclamation of a pejorative long-used to confer disdain on smaller cities and rural scenes.

Similarly, 'Laura Owens: Rerun' is currently at Transformer Station under the auspices of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Owens is one of the most prominent and underwhelming artists in America. Her work could be described as bilious confections of infantilized froth plastered with undead pop-cultural devices; bits of feral text scavenging around for some meaning, and smears of bright, diarrhetic ink that stagger about like drunk Rorschach tests. One suffers less motion sickness alighting a state fair ride than one did exiting her 2018 kitchen sink retrospective.

But, as Muriel Spark wrote, "if you like that sort of thing, then that is the sort of thing you like." Owens is neither deserving nor undeserving of her renown—she's just fortunate. But as her fame metastasizes it is increasingly difficult to answer the scrutiny that results from the critical superpowers that are projected onto her efforts. Like most successful artists Owens isn't at all

SPACES artist residency cottage, Cleveland

essential to art history, but it's too late to matter after so much investment.

However, perpetuating that process of institutional branding and forgoing more relevant opportunities for the tenuous scrap that Laura Owens lived in Ohio 30 years ago—as both venues promote—isn't going to cut it. If marquee artists are to be invited to town, whose practice would be synchronistic to the city and its predicaments and successes? How could Cleveland benefit from a visit, instead of being a notch on an artist's resume after they've already checked-off the Whitney?

If Cleveland's commercial gallery sector is relatively thin, that only means opportunity to establish untried approaches. Kaiser Gallery's first exhibition 'Switch' opened in December 2020, and featured artists who use technology to create mesmerizing effects with light. Here is Tanya Kaiser, owner, director and curator on the gallery's founding principles:

"It went beyond providing an accessible platform outside of New York because accessible galleries are vital in every city. The structure as a hybrid international gallery was solidified during the protests and political discourse of 2020. It became clear that art was needed as a catalyst to encourage those difficult conversations in a positive and supportive way. Kaiser Gallery is half for-profit and half non-profit. We do not charge submission fees, in order to reduce monetary restrictions on interested artists. We showcase a variety of voices on pertinent topics, and will publicize statistics of our exhibiting artists to ensure our accountability. Our exhibiting artists hail from around the world to help broaden the perspective and discourse that we offer."

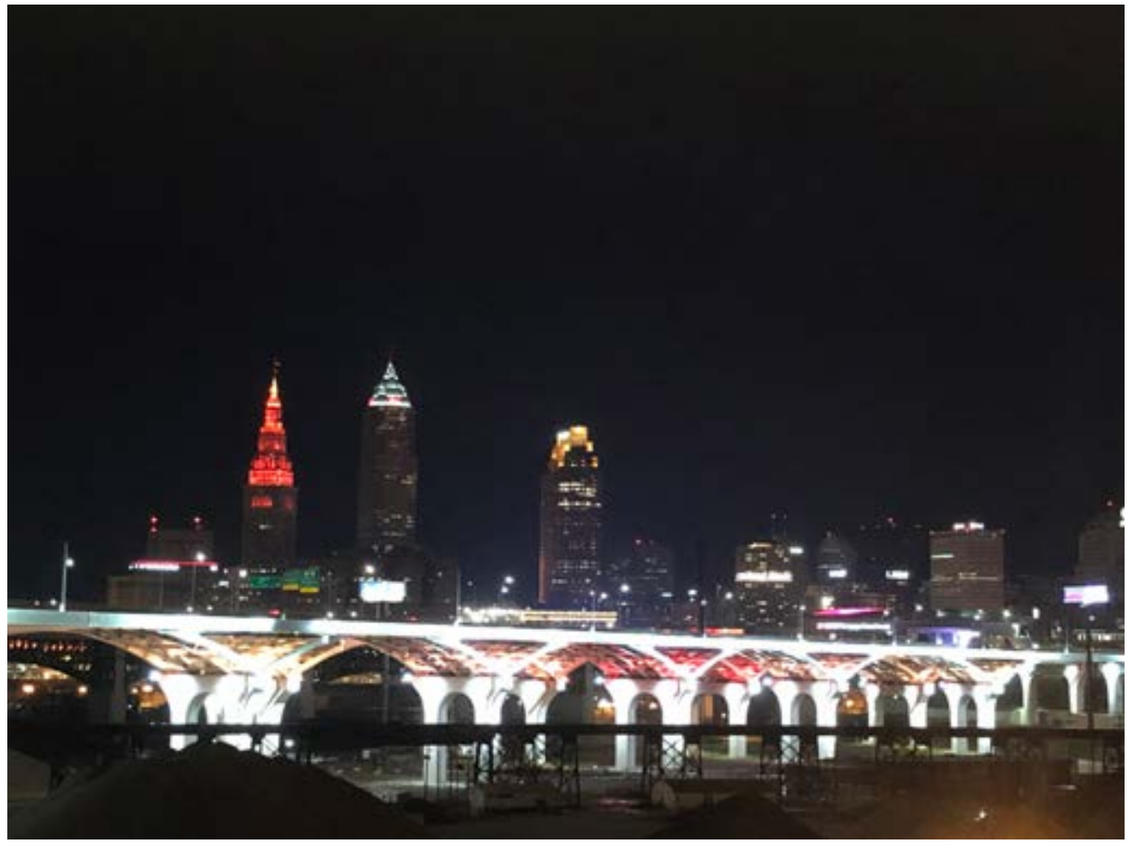
Abattoir has a fine balance between local and national practitioners, and makes connectivity between artists a central feature of its programming. The gallery is inviting and relaxed, yet its aims are lean and dynamic. Lisa Kurzner and Rose Burlingham are the founders.

"We decided to open the gallery to support great art in our region and to expand the relationships between Cleveland and the national art scene. Cleveland has great institutions, but a small and locally-focused gallery scene. We opened last June and began our program with two-person shows—artists who have a visual or conceptual connection—trying to create a dialogue between them. Hildur Jonsson, a notable artist here, was our opening show with Kaveri Raina—a younger artist from Columbus, now based in New York. In addition to highlighting emerging artists, we want to support the careers of great artists from the area and identify them for a new generation of collectors. Through our shows and additional programming, we hope to increase collecting activity in the region."

Intriguing concepts are to be found throughout Ohio. In Kent, Gazebo is (for now) an under-the-radar space run by Shawn Powell, artist and assistant professor at Kent State University; and Annie Wischmeyer, curatorial consultant at Curated Storefront and the 2022 Front International Triennial. It is a playful yet challenging space located on their bucolic property which could itself be the subject of a Michael Raedecker or Peter Doig painting. The project's name is literal, so artists must find ways to adapt to the little summer house by the lake. It is the kind of refreshing, unpretentious venture that's provocative for artists to consider, with the potential to cultivate critical investment. Wischmeyer and Powell describe the genesis of their space:

"A few months prior to the pandemic, a friend who was visiting from New York suggested that we should turn our gazebo into a gallery. We laughed off the idea at the time. But several months into lockdown, we missed visiting galleries, the community, and conversations about work, and suddenly the idea didn't sound so absurd. Our gazebo, situated in our backyard, was the perfect space to put on shows in a socially distanced manner and Gazebo Gallery was born. This project space has allowed us to share work we admire both regionally and nationally with our community and the university population, giving us the opportunity to continue conversations around art. Even with the pandemic slowing down and the prospect of returning to some sort of normalcy on the horizon, we have programming planned through next fall and expect Gazebo to continue."

Building momentum in, and about, a city may encourage its artists, critics and curators to stay and devote their energies to the region. In turn that can ignite the kind of curiosity that draws focus away from Los Angeles or New York, helping to devolve equity and criticism across the national art grid. For it is only with pride and insistence on the validity of art made by and for resident art workers and audiences that latent potential can be fulfilled. Many vibrant art scenes across the country are burdened by a sense of inferiority that they don't offer artists what New York does. But any concerns that Cleveland isn't New York ought to be buried without ceremony. After all, we mustn't hold that



Cleveland Cityscape at Night

against the Big Apple. If Cleveland has a European twin, it is Glasgow. The story of that city's rebirth—spearheaded by its artists—is well known, and if Glasgow can stand fast as an alternative to London, so Cleveland can to New York.

Cleveland, Ohio and the Midwest sit at the crossroads of our era's most pressing circumstances. These include the consequences of industrial output, manifested in contaminated aquifers, toxic landfills and the environmental racism that is so often synonymous; fair regeneration of urban landscapes without rampaging gentrification compounding the hurt; the civic and bodily harm inflicted on communities of color caused by white supremacist hierarchies; and a political schism between the Buckeye State's rural red and urban blue counties. What are the social and cultural tectonics widening that divide and how might they be bridged by cultural interventions? And within the art economy itself, decay-porn has become a cliche, but how do art and action contribute beyond the rotting prettiness of the Midwest's crumbling built heritage, towards practical discourse and progression? Furthermore, being Ohio-based provides benefits for the organization of viable and sustainable creative living that would be prohibitively expensive in the largest metropolitan centers.

Art and artists are integral to the development of solutions here that could become national blueprints. And when one considers the concentration of cities, each with their unbreakable commonalities, distinctive characteristics, populations of art workers, and intellectual reservoirs, all within a relatively compact area—Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Akron, Toledo, Findley (home of The Neon Heater) Detroit, Dayton, Cincinnati, and on to Lexington, Louisville and Indianapolis—the possibilities for a new constellation of integrated productivity in the art firmament are limitless.

The Midwest as a re-emergent global nexus of heavy manufacturing—the foremost in the United States—is a reasonable proposition. Perhaps it won't be based on iron or steel this time, but on art—a far more durable material with which to build resilient architectures and glittering futures.

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State of Art

Visual Arts Prosper in Ohio Cities Despite Conservative Political Climate

Steven Litt

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Viewed from a distance, the State of Ohio might seem hostile territory for the visual arts, or fine arts of any kind. It's a blood red conservative state where voters twice picked anti-cultural Donald Trump for president by an 8 percent margin, and put in place a Republican-dominated legislature with a deep antipathy to cities, where the arts cluster.

Yet a strong current of public and private support for arts and culture also runs through Ohio history. That's why it's one of America's richest states in its number of art museums and visual art schools, ranging from departments at private institutions, such as Oberlin College, to the free-standing Cleveland Institute of Art, the Columbus College of Art and Design, and programs at state university campuses in Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Kent, Akron, Youngstown, Toledo, and Bowling Green.

Across the "Big C" cities of Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, the visual arts and the arts in general have spurred creative economies and hastened a back-to-the-city migration after decades of population and job losses caused by globalization, white flight and sprawl. With young professionals and empty nesters now clustering around colleges, universities and medical centers, local visual arts scenes have spurred revitalization in once-struggling urban neighborhoods such as Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine, Cleveland's Ohio City and Tremont, Detroit's Shoreway and Little Italy, and the Short North in Columbus.

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In the Short North Arts District, galleries, boutiques, restaurants, and chic hotels line nearly two miles of North High Street

George Bellows, Stag at Sharkey's *(1909) - (Credit: Cleveland Museum of Art)*

from downtown Columbus to the Wexner Center for the Arts, a non-collecting institution at The Ohio State University named in honor of billionaire retailer Leslie Wexner's father that displays contemporary art, film, video, dance and performance. In 2011, Columbus real estate magnate Ron Pizzuti and his wife, Ann, established the Pizzuti Collection in a former 1920s office building a block west of North High Street to exhibit their 2,400 works of contemporary art. In 2018, the Pizzutis donated the building, 40 artworks, and access to their collection, to the Columbus Museum of Art.

The coronavirus pandemic has hit the arts hard and decimated local restaurants and retail districts, but a post-COVID rebound seems likely. That's true in part because the rise of remote working is encouraging workers in pricey coastal cities to relocate to mid-continent locales where it's affordable to live minutes from parks and bike trails, a big museum or theater district, and great restaurants.

Cleveland, for example, boasts the Cleveland Orchestra, routinely ranked one of the top five classical ensembles in the U.S., and among the best in the world. The Cleveland Museum of Art, with a collection of nearly 65,000 objects spanning 6,000 years of history, has long ranked as one of the 10 richest museums in terms of endowment wealth in America.

Cleveland leads the state in cultural institutions because of generous philanthropy and strong audience demand. Research conducted in 2015 for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland by the nonprofit Cultural Data Project, now DataArts, found that per capita participation in cultural activities in Cleveland, measured by individual visits to exhibits and performances, was 87 percent of New York's level. In other words, with a population of less than 400,000 and a Metropolitan Statistical Area of 2 million, Cleveland has a rate of audience participation close to that of a global tourism mecca with a population more than four times its size. Columbus came in at 54 percent of New York's level, and Cincinnati came in at 30 percent.

The Forest City's cultural appetite explains why Cuyahoga County voters in 2007 approved a 10-year, 30-cent-a-pack tax on cigarettes to create one of the most generous local government funds for the arts in the U.S., generating roughly $12 million a year for everything from big museums to start-up galleries and community theater companies. Voters renewed the tax in 2015 by a whopping 75 percent margin.

Cleveland is part of a larger story. Yes, Ohio is a largely rural state that votes red, but unlike most surrounding states, which are dominated by a single large city, Ohio has numerous urban areas. All gained cultural anchors in the 19th and early 20th-century thanks to industrial barons who wanted to educate and pacify immigrant masses from Europe, and to compete with older East Coast cities.

Art museums established across Ohio from the late 1870s and the 1910s are part of an archipelago that extends from Pittsburgh and Buffalo to Midwestern industrial cities such as Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, St Louis, Milwaukee, Kansas City, MO., and Minneapolis-St Paul. It's impossible to understand the visual arts in the U.S. without appreciating these treasures.

Cleveland Museum of Art's atrium. (Credit: Steven Litt)

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The Cleveland Museum of Art, for instance, boasts masterpieces such as J.M.W. Turner's *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, October 16, 1834*, of 1835; Nicolas Poussin's *The Holy Family on the Steps,* 1648, and *Stag at Sharkey's*, 1909, the most famous painting by Ashcan realist and Columbus, Ohio, native, George Bellows.

The Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown has an excellent collection from the 19th-century to the present, centered on one of two versions of Winslow Homer's *Snap the Whip*, the artist's 1872 paean to rough-housing boys at play. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York owns the other version.

The Toledo Museum of Art has a superb collection of European Old Master, Impressionist and contemporary American paintings, and the Columbus Museum of Art excels in holdings in early modern American and European paintings, and in works by self-trained Mississippi wood carver Elijah Pierce, and 2004 MacArthur Prize-winner Aminah Robinson, both of whom chronicled Black life in America.

Ohio's leading art museums participated fully in the global art

Akron Art Museum (Credit: Steven Litt)

museum building boom of the past few decades. The Wexner Center for the Arts kicked off the trend in the U.S. in 1989 when it debuted in a new building designed by architect Peter Eisenman with postmodern elements such as a partially deconstructed castle turret and a suite of galleries with sharply angled walls. In its insistence that an art museum could be a work of art in itself, the Wexner anticipated Frank Gehry's 1997 Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

The Guggenheim Bilbao owes an even more specific debt to Cleveland insurance tycoon and arts patron Peter B. Lewis, who in the mid-1980s commissioned Gehry to design a lavish house for him in one of the city's suburbs. Lewis abandoned the project after five years, but refining a dozen versions of the house enabled Gehry to master CATIA, the aerospace design software he used to design the custom-fabricated elements of the curvy, titanium-clad museum in Bilbao.

Other notable new museum structures in Ohio include Zaha Hadid's 2003 building for the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati; the 2006 Glass Pavilion at the Toledo Museum of Art, designed by SANAA of Japan; the 2007 expansion and renovation of the Akron Art Museum, designed by Coop Himmelb(l)au of Vienna; the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland's new building, designed by Farshid Moussavi and completed in 2012; and the Cleveland Museum of Art's 2013 expansion and renovation, designed by Rafael Vinoly.

Despite such investments, Ohio has been more of an exporter of talent than an importer. Bellows achieved fame in New York; Cincinnati native Frank Duveneck prospered in Boston and Munich, although he returned to his hometown to teach. Noted artists who left town after studying at the Cleveland Institute of Art include Charles Burchfield, Hughie Lee-Smith, Robert Mangold, Joseph Kosuth, Heidi Fasnacht, April Gornik, and Dana Schutz. Roy Lichtenstein earned his bachelor's degree in art at Ohio State before spending six years in Cleveland as a draftsman at Republic Steel, and as a window-decorator at Halle's Department Store. He left in 1957 to teach in upstate New York and at Rutgers

"I am numb," Stanczak said in 2009. "Once you get older, you look at it with a cat's smile. It's very pleasant, but where have you been all this time when I needed you?"

University before joining the Leo Castelli Gallery and inventing his Pop Art style.

Exceptions to the centrifugal pattern include mid-century Social Realists Clyde Singer and Clarence Carter, industrial designer Viktor Schreckengost, and Op artist Julian Stanczak. They all spent all or part of their careers in the state, getting far less attention from art historians and the art press than their East Coast peers in the process. Stanczak made a brief national splash for his eye-tingling abstractions in the 1965 Op Art show, *The Responsive Eye*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but continued working in near obscurity in Cleveland for decades before seeing an uptick in media interest and prices for his work before his death in 2017 at age 88.

Ohio's conservative governors and legislature have hamstrung cities for decades by allowing predatory mortgage lending, decimating the state's local government fund, limiting money for mass transit, and refusing to let localities toughen gun laws. But heavy backing for the arts from business leaders — the kind who support political campaigns — explains why the tobacco tax has a fighting chance, particularly amid the pandemic.

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A notable strain in the state's art history is based on close ties between design and industry. Joe Oros, a 1939 graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art who trained under Schreckengost at the Cleveland Institute of Art, led the team that created the iconic 1965 Ford Mustang. The Toledo Museum of Art, which owes its existence to glass manufacturer Edward Drummond Libbey, hosted a pivotal glass-blowing workshop in 1962, during which Harvey Littleton and Dominic Labino launched the modern American art glass movement. Outcomes include the museum's extensive collection of art glass, and the new pavilion devoted to the medium.

Today, Ohio arts leaders see opportunities to grow the arts as an economic sector and as a creative enterprise based on the state's history and extensive infrastructure. One such cultural entrepreneur is retired advertising executive and photography collector Fred Bidwell, who in 2018 inaugurated the FRONT International: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art, a $5 million, summer-long visual arts festival inspired by European models such as Documenta in Kassel, Germany. FRONT's inaugural edition, aimed at changing perceptions of Cleveland and attracting global attention, exhibited works by 129 artists from around the world at two-dozen venues. It drew 230,000 visitors, 30,000 of whom came from outside the region, generating $31.2 million in economic impact. The second edition of the festival has been delayed to 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic, but Bidwell hopes to surpass the 2018 benchmarks.

Bidwell is also helping to lead an effort to expand the Cuyahoga County cigarette tax to include all tobacco products, and to persuade the Ohio House and Senate to enable such a tax in 13 other urban counties.

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"They get it," Bidwell said of state legislators. "The argument is that this is a big, important legacy industry that you can't rebuild. You can't let it fall to pieces and think it's going to come back. You can't recreate the museums or orchestras."

Conservative legislators also understand the reputational value of the arts. "The Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Wexner Center: These are international brands," Bidwell said. "Corporations and talent thinking of moving into town — what are they going to respond to? They're going to respond to brands they know. These are powerful brands."

Of course, the arts are vulnerable to assaults from across the political spectrum. During the culture wars of the 1990s, Hamilton County's sheriff raided the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1990, charging it and director Dennis Barrie with violating obscenity statutes for exhibiting homoerotic photos by Robert Mapplethorpe. It was the first time an American museum faced such criminal charges. Barrie and the center were later acquitted on all counts.

More recently, Ohio art museums have had to adjust to the racial reckoning sparked by the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. That has been a challenge for largely white-run institutions located amid minority communities suffering from decades of systemic racism. Mark Masuoka, former director of the Akron Art Museum, resigned in May, 2020 amid allegations of racism, sexism and bullying of employees by managers, which he later denied. In June, Jill Snyder resigned from the directorship of the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland after New York artist Shaun Leonardo said he had been censored by the museum's decision to cancel an exhibition of his drawings of unarmed Black men and boys killed by police. The museum said activists had persuaded it that the exhibition would re-traumatize victims' families, a serious concern in a city where 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed by a patrolman in 2014. But Snyder later acknowledged that the museum had failed to seek more diverse views about how it could have proceeded with the show.

After Trump's election in 2016, national media outlets engaged in hand-wringing over how little they understood the heartland. As its cultural and artistic history shows, Ohio is far more than merely a bastion of Trumpism. It's a complex, contradictory, and fascinating place where the arts are strong, deeply rooted, and loved by people of all persuasions with the highest expectations for local institutions. That's one reason why it's a pretty terrific place, and well worth knowing.

Cultural Progress and the Aesthetics of the Black Experience

Darren Jones in Discussion With Amanda D. King

Amanda D. King is a creative strategist, artist, and activist pursuing justice and equity and envisioning possibilities for social transformation through arts and culture. Amanda serves as Creative Director and co-founder of Shooting Without Bullets – a nonprofit creative and social enterprise using cultural production and creative strategies to advance social movement for Black and Brown youth, artists, and communities.

I spoke with Amanda over Zoom in April, about her work, ideas and aims. This is part one of our conversation. The full transcript will be published in the May/June online edition of *New Art Examiner* at www.newartexaminer.net.

Amanda D. King, portrait by Robert Banks

DJ: You've talked of the profound impact that seeing images of lynching at the Andy Warhol Museum in 2001 had on you. In 2020 you questioned the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland's motivations concerning police violence and appropriation of Black bodies in art. During the 20 years between those events how has the conversation about artistic representation of trauma evolved, or indeed, has the conversation evolved?

ADK: I'm very aware of the harm that results in showing grotesque violence against Black and Brown folks in this country. I witness it daily through popular culture and social media. Society is so inundated with these images that they become a normalized part of daily life and they shouldn't be. This morning when I woke up and opened the NPR app, the first image on the landing page was of an officer pepper-spraying a Black lieutenant. As a Black person that is how I start my day.

You can too easily find images of Black people being brutalized by the state, and by other people. This violence is so accessible and frequently engaged with that its gravity weighs heavily on our cultural experience and our self-esteem; on young peoples' perceptions of life in this country, and how they navigate and move through it. I've witnessed it create an immense sense of fear and trepidation in our movement, because of the constant reminders that this could happen to me.

I've seen films like *Queen and Slim* that have tried to address police brutality but made it entertainment. Sometimes these representations are counter-productive to our movement if we engage with them at face value. While they might raise awareness, they fail to be truly activist in the fact that they're not advocating for the abolition of a system.

Likewise, when the media publishes images of Black death and suffering but doesn't use those images to push conversation towards abolition then it's not serving the movement, it's not serving the people, it's not continuing the fight for anything achievable, it's just taking up space.

But I've also seen the beauty of what Harvard professor, Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, termed "representational justice." Using art as this corrective tool or alternative form of justice to affirm the dignity and humanity of Black people. I see this specifically in my medium, photography. For every image of brutality there are equally persuasive images of Black beauty and Black resilience.

I am a part of a school of Black social thought that is committed to image-making for liberation. I do not believe in just replicating and duplicating pictures of Black trauma, death, and suffering, especially if it is not for abolition. That's my perspective and I do push back against other artists who are not being so intentional.

I'm not alone. I see people in the art world holding artists and institutions accountable for exhibiting images that are not

Installation photo: My Name is SWEET THING, *installation for A Color Removed, Front Triennial.*
Image credit: Amanda D. King

affirming or that harm our movement. The power of our voices, especially in arts and culture, have profound influence over what happens in these other spaces.

Regarding the impact of seeing lynching images as a youth, when I witnessed them, I was walking through a gallery with my parents. I knew that there was something very grave happening, when they straightened up in alignment with the work, in reverence, not to the violence; to the victim, to the Black body. They were demonstrating solidarity. This memory shapes my visual, ethic and moral responsibility as an artist.

My parents brought profound context to the work that allowed for deeper understanding. My mother is of the first generations to desegregate schools in Alabama. My grandmother was a sharecropper. Lynching is not an abstract concept to them. It was a part of Alabama culture. My father was a civil attorney, and he worked with traumatic images of accidents and death, as well as images of police brutality. He also witnessed the heinous murders of Black leaders in the 1960s and 70s. He brought that context with him.

They could engage with these traumatic images on a different level because they directly correlated to their lived experience. But there were other people in the gallery who needed to consume those images to gain context for their own lived experience. To see their privilege and develop empathy for someone's experience that wasn't like theirs.

This is a dangerous approach to consuming art. To look for validation or deeper understanding of your own life by witnessing the trauma of another. Black people can handle images of police brutality and engage in critical conversation around them because state violence is part of our everyday existence. But someone who does not have our skin color, or who does not have the power dynamics between citizen and police at play in their lives cannot deeply interrogate images of state sanctioned violence without education, and that cannot be acquired in a single gallery visit.

It's very dangerous for the artist to put that trauma out there and expect for people to take meaning away from it. I believe that if you show these images there must be intentionality, and there must be a critical framework from which you are working and from which you are educating, not from a place of empathy but from a place of abolition.

DJ: To think of the endless stream of media and images that are superficially addressing many of these issues, but actually deepening the wounds, I think of the opportunity we have in our work to push against that impulse, with the same tools of digital dissemination. I'm reminded of that moment last year, when the hashtag for the Proud Boys was commandeered by gay people, and the internet was flooded with images of love and kissing and a counter-narrative for that term. That was a moment of positive imagery and deep engagement, but there was also a dash of humor in the wordplay that turned something hateful into something beautiful.

ADK: I don't grapple with images of trauma outside of an activist context. It must be for the advocacy, dismantling, or the re-

Amanda D. King: What's Next, 2018

fusal of oppressive systems. Humor and joy are so innate in the Black experience, and in the experience of all oppressed people. It's important for us to also create and engage with artworks, or memes, or music about the Black quotidian or Black joy, absent references to white supremacy or suffering.

There is so much injustice in the arts and society that forces Black artists to be corrective. It's a disservice to us when we are obligated to push and propel society so far through our artwork and our practices that it becomes challenging to express the fullness of who we are outside of rage and pain. This is the burden of Black artists in this moment.

DJ: Yes, part of creativity and art-making is play, and pleasure, experiment and failure. And what you're describing doesn't allow for failure. Even that dynamic is set up by a system that needs to be dismantled and rebuilt. It becomes then another insidious layer of oppression even within the creative act.

ADK: Permission to play and experiment is something that I struggle with daily, and it's why I created a mechanism and platform like Shooting Without Bullets. I want to teach young people that they can make activist art, and still have the freedom to play and experiment. There's not a lot of room for experimentation within Cleveland's homogenous art market, but what I've learned from being in this art system are tools that allow me to cultivate a community where young Black and Brown artists are supported with the resources, with the time, with development, guidance, and partnership. Making space for young Black artists to hone their artistic talents while furthering social movement is profound and revolutionary.

DJ: The sensitivity and reverence that you apply toward encouraging responsible stewardship in portrayals of slain Black people makes dignity and humanity central aspects of cultural remembrance. What are your greatest concerns—what is lost—when those elements aren't considered in visual modes of expression.

ADK: What is lost is everyone's humanity. From the person who witnesses it, to the subject that it's about, to the artist who makes it, no one's humanity is present in that moment. If you cannot honor someone who deserves dignity and representation, especially in their death, then making the work does nothing for the dead, but it also does nothing for the living. To show a Black corpse is not to invoke empathy, it is to show an empty container, an empty body that has been defeated by racism, that's all it becomes.

And so then what are we looking at? Racism. Racism isn't a new notion. We're experiencing and navigating it every day; we see racism in art galleries, on the street, and on our smartphones. Racism isn't a novelty. So, what might our encounters with Black death look like if we visited EJ Hill's *University of Saint Tamir?* What would it be like imagining an education system that reveres Black boys? That is novel. Theaster Gates serving as a steward over the gazebo where Tamir was murdered and transforming it into a place of deep contemplation and respect for him. That's novel. To honor families directly impacted by state sanctioned violence in a manner that truly cares for them and refuses to fetishize the violence they experience is not happening in the art world as much as it should.

I value women and mothers like Ms Rice as leaders of our movement. When I was working with Ms Rice, I saw her persist against incredible grief. She is making society better through her fight, through her advocacy and her activism but I know it takes a toll on her.

As artists we can address state sanctioned violence with many tenets. What does it look like to represent a person's life outside of their final moments? What does it look like for us to use our talents to support the living, like Ms Rice, who continue to fight for justice for us all? Unless we do the deep work of care, and unless we are intentional about dismantling brutal systems, then we do a disservice to every single being who witnesses this work.

Hello Ohio!

A Hot Take From a Newbie who Arrived in Cleveland During a Pandemic

Tizziana Baldenebro

Ohio was, once upon a time, a swing state; a pendulum every four years that foretold the political outcome for the rest of the nation. As the state went, the country went. At least until 2020, when it missed the mark by eight points. But the power of the swing state mythos is undeniably formative in how Ohioans view themselves, in particular because it is a marker of national visibility. Other swing states in the vicinity include Pennsylvania and Michigan. The three states have interwoven narratives of labor, post-industrial decline, and rapid demographic changes. These themes have been at the crux of contemporary art in the United States. Ohio presents a concentration of the diverse ends of the political spectra, and, as a result, it offers particularly rich material for arts incubation.

Cleveland is a city that delights in how it can surprise visitors. World class private and public collections (driven by the remnants of Rockefeller wealth) and Cleveland Clinics dot the cityscape. Foundations pour generous funds into a variety of projects. Art spaces and other experimental organizations can appear overnight, due to the relatively low cost of living. Of course, even these seemingly positive changes have negative impacts, as relocation and displacement profoundly transform neighborhoods. As folk are forced from the core city, they are pushed into suburbs where the swinging of a swing state happens.

This is not unusual. In California the major cities are deep blue, but there are counties which voted red by over 50 points. The West Coast, and California specifically, differ from Ohio in the ideological proximity between those red and blue areas. In Los Angeles County an artist might operate completely removed from the alt-right. In Cleveland (or Pittsburgh, or Detroit) the membrane of the culture bubble is thin, and the ongoing pandemic has only stretched it thinner, bringing disparate political factions within sight of each other.

It is hard to imagine that artists, grappling with the challenges of 2021 and beyond, benefit from the neoliberal buffers of coastal cities. The intimacy of arts communities in cities well below the first and second tiers makes cultural reckoning and reconciliation seem possible. The pressure to change can be seriously and meaningfully applied in places like Cleveland, Columbus, Akron, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. These cities, already devastated by industrialism, (already rebuilding, already rebranding) are uniquely positioned (and poised) to imagine radical futurities. Long before the pandemic, they felt the violent tumult of capitalism as it stripped resources and left cities for dead. But they survived (in some cases, just barely) with Black, Latinx, Arab, and Asian refugees, immigrants, migrants, and long-term residents forming enclaves that steadily grew, while the white populations drastically and rapidly declined.

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This is, of course, an oversimplification of a wildly complex network of rust-belt, fourth, fifth and sixth tier cities. But the work — whatever that may mean — of dismantling these systems of white oppression must necessarily center these cities. Toni Cade Bambara posits that, "the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible." But exhibiting art in Ohio means producing work for audiences who are not always primed for the radicalism of artists. Or, conversely, artists are not prepared to accept valid critiques of their work that could push it to the limits. And there is a near-constant threat of infighting for resources, that while comparatively plentiful, fall woefully short. These challenges have been exacerbated by a pandemic which came with the perverse silver lining of shining a light on the gross inequities that permeate society. Those in the Cleveland arts communities, specifically, are acutely aware of the intimacy and acutely aware of who is doing what and where. The audiences are familiar, the funders and the opportunities are known, and the politics are right there on the table.

There are places in this region where artists have created ecosystems with effective, meaningful and confrontational conditions that demand more from audiences and artists alike.

To return to the bubble metaphor, there are places in this region where artists have created ecosystems with effective, meaningful and confrontational conditions that demand more from audiences and artists alike. Detroit springs to mind because the resilience of the city's arts community has always rested on interdependence. Columbus is also exemplary; as its many arts programs create variegated cohorts that are critically prepared to take each other to task. Similarly, Pittsburgh seems to have produced a vibrant arts community that produces critically necessary art.

And this is where the hot take comes in — Cleveland's arts communities have not formed coalitions. Instead, many artists are

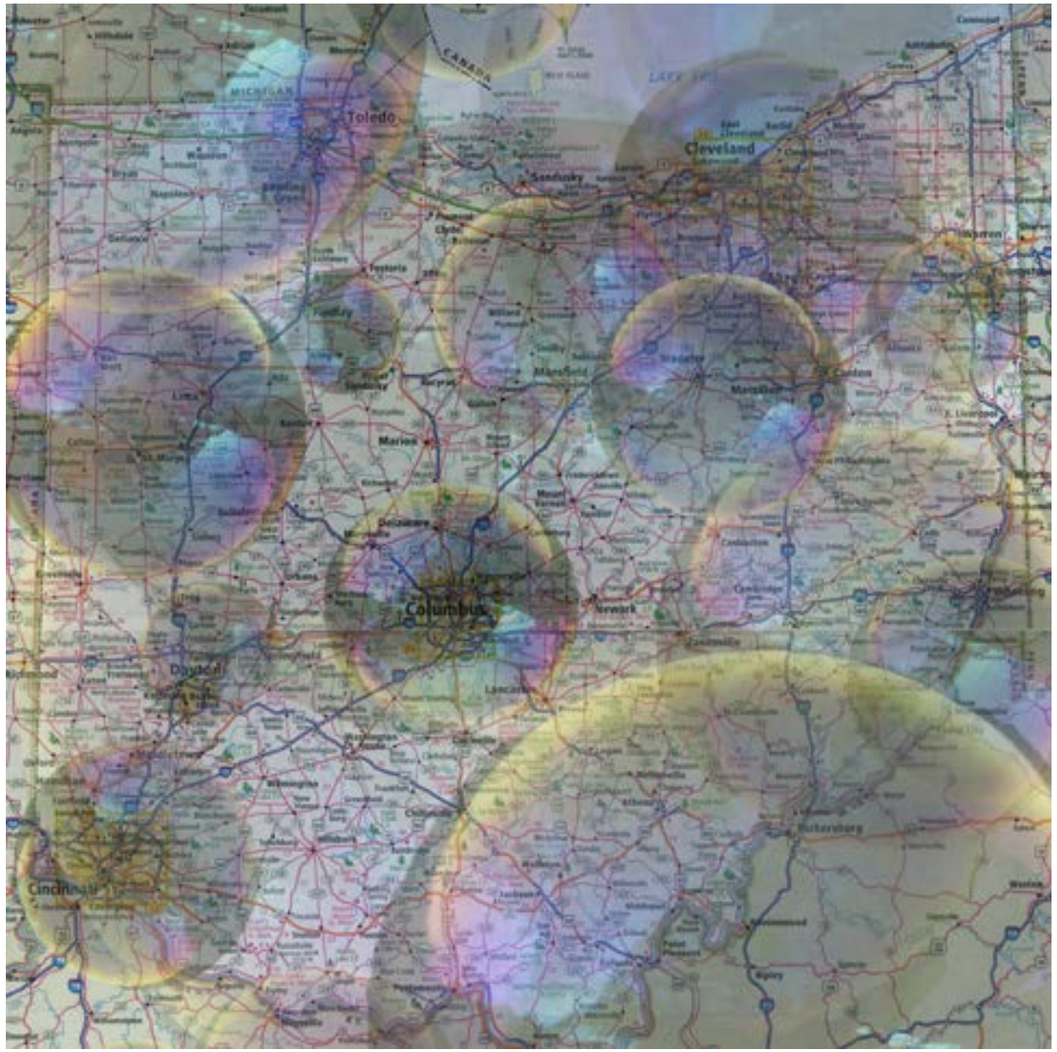


Image credit: Darren Jones/New Art Examiner

working in frustrated isolation. Divisions have been sown, and who is at fault, or what maintains them is unclear. Artists will cite the competitive nature of limited opportunities, but other cities with fewer resources have managed to co-opt the culture. Conversely, arts spaces and art workers are tied to their respective locales without engaging in the important work of connecting communities. The city itself also lacks effective public transportation solutions, so folks who have been moved to the urban periphery are cut off from events in the core city. Many of the newer conversations about forging networks are brought forth by recent transplants trying to understand the legacy of segregation and systemic oppression in this corner of Ohio. How can we move forward, if we are not moving forward together?

Ultimately, artist communities in the Midwest are not monolithic. They relish their unique and nuanced approaches to art. Amid urban ruin and disinvestment, barely visible to the international arts communities, the artists in this region can do some truly radical work. But progress cannot be accomplished individually. Reflexively, the impulse is to suggest European models of art network building; the salon, the Beaux-Arts curricula, the rigorous critical models of the Bauhaus. But operating beyond the specter of euro-centric arts culture requires innovative ways of understanding how we can relate to each other. It is a scary world for artists, but we should not conflate marketability with success. That is what inflated the cultural bubble in the first place. We should burst the bubble. To put it bluntly, fuck that bubble. The arts need to confront and truly reckon with the good, the bad, and the ugly. There are not many places where that is possible. Ohio is one of them.

Cultural Conflicts in the Visual Arts

David Carrier

What happens when previously separated cultures come in contact? Often, as happened when Europeans invaded the New World from the 16th century, or very recently in the American invasion of Iraq, the militarily stronger culture ruthlessly conquers the weaker one. But frequently, also, the results include international trade. When, starting in 1528, Europeans circumnavigated the globe, they brought back products from everywhere in an immensely profitable series of commercial endeavours. Sometimes such formerly distant cultures are too dissimilar to inspire sympathetic mutual understanding. But occasionally the result of these cultural collisions is a synthesis displayed in visual art.

In the Brera Museum in Milan is an extremely large, very puzzling painting by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, *St Mark Preaching* (1504-7). A strange, anachronistic exercise in time travel. It shows Muslim women and Venetians (and a giraffe) in a setting that has an uncanny resemblance to San Marco, with the patron saint of Venice preaching to both Christians and Muslims. The Venetian and Islamic worlds, united in Venetian trading, both appear very much on European terms. And a current Swiss-German exhibition *Rembrandt's Orient: West Meets East in Dutch Art of the Seventeenth Century* provides another pre-modern perspective on multicultural relationships. It shows exotic animals, fabrics and other artifacts gathered by the Dutch traders, as appropriated in European art. Since the Renaissance, Islamic carpets have been treasured by Europeans, who frequently depicted these luxurious decorative designs in their paintings. And after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the American response, refugees have created War Rugs, images of the Russian and, more recently, the American war planes and weaponry employed in their country. Here, in this very traditional art, you find powerful up-to-date imagery.

In pre-modern nations visual cultures remain too distant for any real artistic synthesis to be possible. Rembrandt imitated some Persian miniatures, but there was no room in his art for painting in an Islamic style. And, conversely, 17th-century Chinese or Indian painters were unlikely to abandon their own traditions and imitate European styles. When, however, we arrive at the 20th century, previously distant traditions were close enough for a real synthesis in which artists from different traditions learned from one another. This happened in 1912 when Henri Matisse visited Morocco and was inspired by its decorative fabrics. His great, all-over compositions made in that decade incorporate that direct experience of Islamic art, including what he also saw in European museums. It took place again in 1969 when Sean Scully also visited Morocco, and his art, too, was decisively influenced by that experience. Here, two previously distant artistic cultures were ready for imaginative artists to connect. The Western visual ways of thinking are transformed in response to non-Western art. Only then, I think, can a real cultural synthesis be achieved. Neither Matisse nor Scully wanted to become Muslim artists, but they found something of real use in a previously foreign visual culture. Many more such artists, who now work between cultures, could be cited.

What by contrast defines our contemporary multicultural ways of thinking is an acute awareness that alternative styles of art–making deserve attention, both because they are intrinsically interesting and because they reveal the inner lives of other peoples. We believe that we ought to seriously attend to art from other cultures because that's an essential act of cultural respect.

What's at stake here makes the seemingly parochial concerns of the art world of real political significance. The famous Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) developed a pioneering account of cultural relativism, arguing in his *New Science* that various cultures have distinct diverse values. The ancient Greeks and the Christians of his era understood the world differently, and so made different forms of art. Pre-modern cultures tended to make condescending judgments of unfamiliar art, judging it limited when evaluated by their standards. The Europeans were astonished by Aztec metalwork, but they did not respond to it in their art. And when Jesuit painters got to China, the artists there were puzzled. What by contrast defines our contemporary multicultural ways of thinking is an acute awareness that alternative styles of art making deserve attention, both because they are intrinsically interesting and because they reveal the inner lives of other peoples. We believe that we ought to seriously attend to art from other cultures because that's an essential act of cultural respect. It involves an acknowledgment that people who may think differently deserve serious attention, even if we don't accept their moral or social values.

I had a modest friendship with Oleg Grabar, the renowned French-American specialist in Islamic art. Were I young, and a good linguist, I would have been inspired to devote myself to his field, which - at least in his accounting - is morally challenging and intellectually inspiring. He was not, at least in his published writings, a political writer. I once asked him an obvious question, why after 9/11 and our numerous conflicts in the Middle East, did American scholars not devote more attention to this art, in order to better understand Muslim culture. "The problem", he told me, "is that we don't respect them as people". That very sad statement struck as a melancholy comment on our intellectual limits, which need revision.

The Inward Eye

Colin Fell

Daffodils have been much on my mind recently. This is natural enough - we're in the midst of a glorious Cornish spring, made more glorious by the easing of lockdown. And, with the promptness we're so privileged to enjoy here, the daffs have already been and gone, their moment of splendour in the grass already over, and where their gold has glimmered and glinted forth from gardens, fields, and road sides, the tired seed heads now nod peacefully, stoically resigned to their old age, and awaiting next year. Oh, and it's also natural because I teach English for a living, and you can't study English Literature without being fairly well tuned in to the charms of the daffodil. Yet like the poem which famously celebrates them, Wordsworth's, they're perhaps too often taken for granted, overlooked, as the showier, more ostentatious charms of the summer flowers take over, and the early Cornish spring recedes into the memory. So what better a subject could there be than Wordsworth's little poem?

Blake, whom Wordsworth considered mad, but interesting, wrote that if we could open the doors of perception, we would see nature as it really is, infinite; in the early 1960s the ageing Aldous Huxley took to mescaline to try to prove this for himself, but for the 32-year-old Wordsworth there was no need - he talks of ten thousand daffodils, but essentially they're a glimpse into the infinite

William Wordsworth, portrait by Henry Edridge, 1804; in Dove Cottage, Grasmere, England.

There's a wonderful scene in the BBC's semi improvised sitcom *Outnumbered* in which the teenage Jake struggles with his English homework - what does he mean he floats like a cloud, he demands in exasperation, confronted by Wordsworth's lyric poem. What does he mean, then? The poem, so often underestimated, and judged by the contexts in which it appears - National Trust tea towels, the nation's favourite poems (which usually means the ones that people of a certain age can remember from school, and quite possibly never really liked that much) - is really, I think, a little study in mystical experience, and badly in need of better PR.

The famous opening, in which the poet wanders, famously, "lonely as a cloud", is the beginning of the experience - imagine our narrator as detached, dreamily unengaged, and think of the key word lonely, which doesn't necessarily mean he was alone, of course. In fact, there's good reason to think he wasn't - his sister Dorothy recorded a walk illuminated by sights of daffodils on 15 April 1802, and her diary entry sounds uncannily like her brother's poem; I'm writing this, incidentally, on the 219th anniversary of that walk! History does not record, by the way, how Dorothy felt either about William's apparent loneliness on their walk, or his unacknowledged filching of some of his best lines from her diary entry.

Anyway, this detached mood vanishes, as William and/or Dorothy (I somehow imagine her going ahead first) round a corner, because there they are, those daffodils, "all at once", as he puts it, a "crowd, a host". I love the "all at once" - it means we can forget all those images we might have of tame, passive flowers and kindly poets bending down to admire them - this is a sudden, dramatic experience, live and in the moment, almost a shock. Suddenly he's not so lonely - notice how his perception changes in a moment from seeing them as a "crowd", suggesting he sees the flowers as alive, anthropomorphised, but still fairly anonymous, to the more welcoming "host". Wordsworth, unlike his friend Coleridge, was no Christian; nature was his religion, but it's tempting to think, in this Easter poem, that in the rising of the golden flower from the recently dead earth, he saw something almost like a sacrament, the raising of the host as symbol of rebirth - winter was long and harsh in the Lake District. Blake, whom Wordsworth considered mad, but interesting, wrote that if we could open the doors of perception, we would see nature as it really is, infinite; in the early 1960s the ageing Aldous Huxley took to mescaline to try to prove this for himself, but for the 32-year-old Wordsworth there was no need - he talks of ten thousand daffodils, but essentially they're a glimpse into the infinite - they "stretch in never ending line". It's the last stanza that proves that this poem is more than it might seem at first sight. Wordsworth fast forwards to another time, another place, a room where he lies on his couch "in vacant or in pensive mood", and the miracle happens - the flowers "flash upon his inward eye, that is the bliss of solitude". "Flash" is such a great verb here - demeaned in our time by connotations of exhibitionism and photography, here it has a sense of radiance, and, again, an almost violent theatricality. And they've been transformed - no longer flowers, but symbols of the divine in nature, as he sees them not with his eye, but with his "inward eye"; in a sort of secular transubstantiation, they've become a part of his soul. Notice "solitude", too - unlike his earlier loneliness, he's now on his own; but not, as the experience of the flowers, remembered, sustains him. And where before now he floated, now he dances, in a sort of ecstatic communion with the rhythms of the natural world he so loved. "And dances with the daffodils" has a wonderfully sturdy iambic pulse about it; I imagine a vigorous, pagan dance, earthy and energetic, certainly not a civilised waltz.

And so, in the end, the poem is about memory - and as those early promises of new life slip into obscurity all around us, and meekly give way to tempestuous tulips, rambling roses and proud peonies, spare a thought for them and for Wordsworth - allow them to flash upon your inward eye and look forward to next March!

The original handwritten text alongside the modern setting.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(William Wordsworth)

Scott Turri Talks With Artist John Sims

John Sims is like a modern-day quilt-maker who weaves together at times seemingly disparate threads of media and ideas: mathematics, performance, video, music, and text, among other things. His work is layered. Although he often approaches it through a personal lens, from his lived experience navigating the world as a black man, he adroitly addresses issues that emanate outward from this experience. Therefore, the scope of the work widens to encompass broader socio-political issues which embroil our culture. Sims courageously confronts these challenges with an acute sensitivity and awareness to expand the vital conversations needed to effect change.

ST: Okay. Well, here we go. I am interested in how you got involved in math and what led you to think about math in relation to your artistic practice. Some artists may think that the use of math in art was somehow antithetical to art-making. All of this ties into your lifelong investment in education, dating back to your days at Antioch. The work that exemplifies the confluence of these pursuits would be your Mathematical Art Project, which was made up of Square Roots: A Quilted Manifesto, Rhythm of Structure: Mathematics, Art and Poetic Reflection at the Bowery Poetry Club in NYC in 2009, which traveled later in 2011 on to Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, and Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio and Math Art/Math Art. Could you discuss how this came about?

JS: In grad school I got really interested in doing art and then I moved into studying math and then moving into art getting a position at Ringling College of Art and Design to actually teach or create a visual mathematics curriculum for art students. But I'd already been interested in doing art particularly from a design point of view. My very first show was to DFN Gallery in SoHo, right on Prince and Broadway. I was interested in making clocks and conceptual clocks. It was a natural movement to think about things more abstractly and think about math from a design context. So, I became very active in a lot of the math art conferences, Nate Freeman up at the University of New York at Albany and these various conferences where mathematicians, artists and writers would get together and conference and do work and show work. Whereas a lot of that was more visual mathematics, I became more interested in looking at the metaphysics of math and art as a metaphor to think about and guide strategies for conceptualizing and creating metaphors for the reality around us. So, I wrote a chapter in a book called, I think it was called the Metaphorical Foundation for Mathematical Art which centered around the relationship between math and art both as math supporting art and art supporting math, then this kind of more lateral equal brain left brain, right brain kind of dynamic. Conceptually this is what guided my work both as the educator, artist, writer, kind of a theorist in this kind of way, thinking about how do we move beyond visual mathematics? How do we move beyond the simple ideas of taking simple geometry and inserting them. You saw a lot of that in the geometry, in the art of the 60s with Frank Stella and all kinds of folks who were using geometric vocabulary and painting like the piece behind you, which is very interesting. But also, how do you take it to another level to be able to embrace the full scope and language and process of mathematical thinking? So, I became very interested in that, hence curating that first math art show with Kevin Dean, who is the friend of Derek, called 'Math Art',Art Math', and that show was based around a classification scheme that I developed for classifying mathematical art, thinking about the taxonomy, but also this landscape of math and art. What would be the different kinds as it relates to the classification of mathematics, the classification of art, where they intersect, where are the missing gaps? Which neighborhoods are being worked on which ones are not? So I started thinking of it in that way as this landscape of mathematical art possibilities. And then creating a show, and also creating a curriculum to inspire young artists or even old artists to move beyond the fright and alienation about mathematics that has persisted in the art community. And then I started to get involved in ethno-mathematics looking at how mathematics is encoded into the material culture. How do you encode/decode mathematical ideas also looking at mathematics in a cultural political context? How does this mathematical education or math in general connected to issues around intelligence, white supremacy, like it gets really political very quickly when you start looking at it very deeply and so in a lot of ways that kind of informed some of the work and so at some point I started looking at it as a curator, as an educator; I started build up ammunition

John Sims: Afro Confederate Flag
(photo: Gavin Bacon)

about creating my own mathematical art, hence the quilting Manifesto, which was to use Pi, the Pi quilts, the Pythagorean quilts using things that are accessible but are rich in terms of metaphorical possibilities to get people to think about these higher, higher relationships.

ST: Obviously there's a huge scope to what you just said, but one of the things that I thought was interesting was that you reached out to the Amish quilt-makers for the project.

JS: Absolutely. The idea was that I wanted to visualize Pi and I did that as a digital visualization first but then I saw the Gee's Bend quilt show at the Whitney. I think it was at the Whitney way back when, early 2000s. Like wow, I need to do this as a quilt, right? And so, I reached out to a quilt shop here in town just to help me put these squares together and it turned out that the owner of the Amish/Mennonite quilt shop had a strong science background and so she was excited about doing something different. So that shows you how math literacy, science literacy, could be very connected in terms of people having more to talk about and negotiate around. Had she been alienated by mathematics, hated her math teacher, it would just have been a very different kind of relationship and then we went on to do 13 quilts together.

ST: That's amazing

John Sims: Freedom Memorial at Gamble Plantation Design for a black obelisk honoring slaves. (photo illustration by John Sims, 2020)

JS: So, as part of that project with the Pi and the Pythagorean work I did dresses and Pi music, so I used that project as a way to show the expansiveness of mathematics and how it relates to design and how it could be very a fertile place for connecting these disciplines in very dynamic ways. Then I created that character Johannes Curtis Schwarzenstein, the AfroGermanJewish-MathArtPoet. So, this quilted character, right? Now quilting becomes an organizing principle process that allows me to stitch things together, remix it and kind of tiles the tessellation of some sort, right? It's a tiling process that has its inner geometry where symmetry is important, aperiodicity, all these kinds of things that I'm very interested in are very adaptable and interesting. So that project in itself is very expansive - you have text, you have fashion, you have music, you have the quilts, you have the installation work, the performance, so the idea was to create this work that in itself exhibits and exemplifies the kind of universality of mathematics as a language.

ST : In the Sorrento project, the work is very personal since it was based on returning home to the city of Detroit and, in particular, the neighborhood where you grew up and confronting the fact that many houses are now gone.

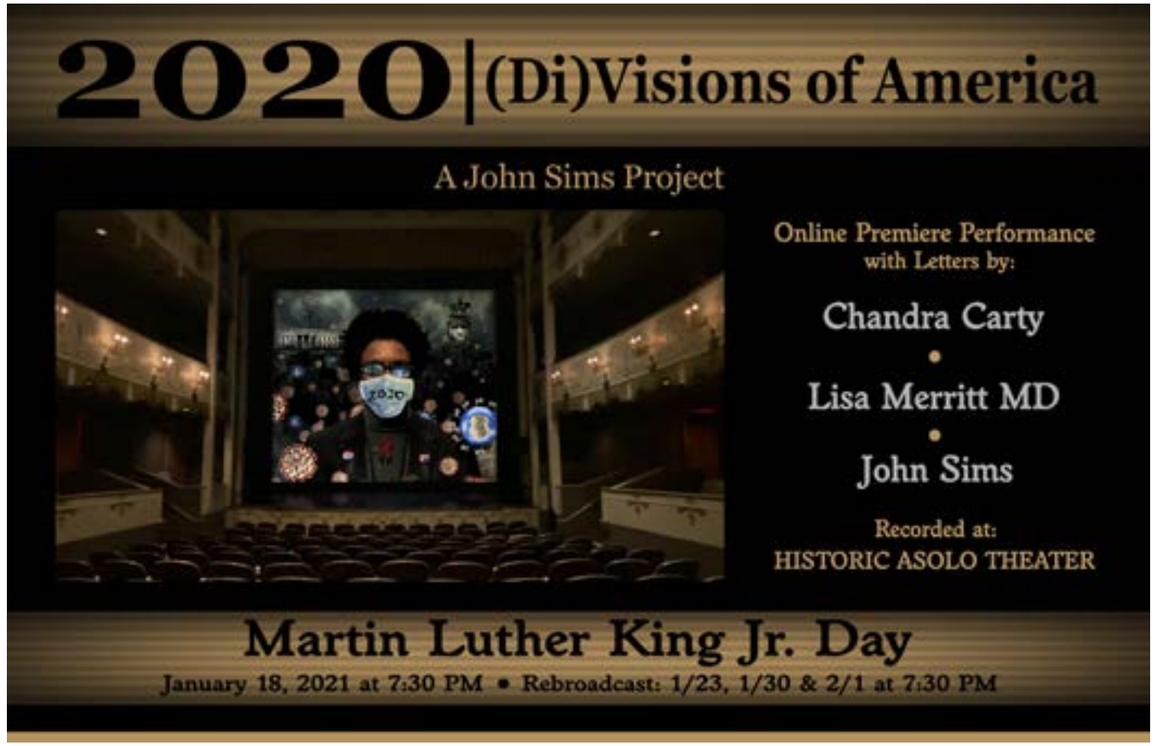
JS: Right, right.

ST: There is a sense of desolation. You are essentially coming to terms with urban decay and the economic collapse of Detroit and your home. As in many of your projects, you work with a variety of media to encapsulate your experience. Could you describe the process for this project and how you shape it?

JS: Yes, I'm glad you were able to check that project out. You know, I had returned home after being away for a while and Detroit for a while was going through a very tough time economically. I mean rebounding now, but when I returned it was horrible. I couldn't even recognize my own block. The houses were empty, gutted, vacant, dilapidating - but it wasn't just the houses. It was the corner stores, the pizza place I used to work at, the cleaners I used to work at. The elementary school completely gutted and emptied and vandalized. Another school torn down. So, then it became very clear to me how important the architecture, the houses and the buildings frame and shape your memories and shape your grounding to the neighborhood.

ST: Sure.

JS: I remember walking up and down the street and how I used to ride my bike and pop my wheelie over a particular bump in the sidewalk. You know what I mean? It's like you do this over. So, it's the periodicity of traveling these spaces to become ingrained in your nervous system in ways that you don't pay attention to until this loss. Gone - it's not there. And so, I was very moved and hurt in some ways by this loss. When people die you expect this. So, I go back to my block and the various people that I grew up with, I've been there since I was super young child first day of kindergarten walking that block to go to school which is three



2020 (Di)Visions of America, delegate's card

blocks away and most of the people that you know over time are going to die, but when you see the structures die it creates a different kind of paralysis. So, I decided I needed to do a project that will memorialize my block and we had a very special block too because we have a church, like one of those one-room churches on a nice lot of land that we used to play in the churchyard - baseball, football, frisbee. So, a lot of the kids were around the same age. It's a real neighborhood story. And so, to see the neighborhood begin to collapse, decay, and die and not even transition to something else is interesting, but just to really die.

ST: Yeah, that is rough.

JS: Yeah. What I wanted to do was to go back and do portraits of each of the houses and write little small stories about each of the houses and my relationship to the houses and what I remembered and the people who lived there. I went back and had a residency and within a week of coming back and you know, I'm going to interview people and then my mother dies.

ST: Oh man that is just piling on.

JS: So, my residency turned into organizing a funeral and memorial and so people came and showed up and it was also an opportunity to reflect about the block because my mom was one of the last elders standing, living in that space. So coming out of my more abstract space dealing with mathematical art and very political art to come back you realize there's a clock ticking. You got space, you got time and there is this relationship between two. I was glad I was there. My mom died. It was unexpected and that type of thing, but I'm glad I was there. Right before the pandemic hit, I was planning to spend 2020 working on that project.

ST: Oh, OK.

JS: But when the pandemic hit things moved in a different direction with the coronavirus, with George Floyd's death. Also, with this incredible pushback on the Confederate iconography and flags and monuments and statues that had been part of my work for a very long time. So, I definitely had to get in front of that.

ST: Yeah, definitely.

JS: So that's kind of what I focus on in 2020, but underneath that the plan was to finish up, so, I'm going to return to that project. The plan is to do copper plate etchings because they're stealing the copper out of the houses so bring that back into it and then also doing a book that would through illustration restore the houses back to their dignity. I have the photos as they are now and as they used to be. Yeah. Thanks for bringing that up because that's a very important project. So hopefully that could inspire other communities that are going through similar things.

ST: It is happening around Pittsburgh. I'll tell you what.

JS: Right

ST: Sometimes your work is funneled through the personal as in the one I just described, and, in a lot of ways, the most recent at Ringling. In *The Proper Way to Hang the Confederate Flag*, the work is much more overtly political without much there about you on a personal level. It is confrontational, and I am assuming you intended to provoke all of those who admire and embrace the confederate flag and its values. There seems to be a definite target audience, whereas with some of your other work it seems projected toward a wider audience. Can you talk about how you consider the audience when making your work and in particular, this piece?

JS: Well, here's the thing: that piece was designed and created for my exhibition 'Gettysburg' at Gettysburg College and before that I had a show in Harlem which was basically recolored Confederate flags.

ST: Okay.

JS: Black, red and green, black on black, bumper stickers that type of thing. So, there's an incident, and maybe you saw some of the videos, but there was an incident where there was a guy walking down and saw the works, saw one of the recolored flags outside the gallery and he was really upset. He didn't care that it was recolored. The structure was enough. And then I also remember being at a Klan rally where I had my Afro Confederate flag there passing out bumper stickers and there were some people there that were a little upset. They just still saw it as a Confederate flag and it wasn't very clear to them what my politics were. Like am I being pro-confederate?

ST: Hah, right?

JS: I am trying to mitigate and trying to arbitrate some sort of reconciliation. So that was one of the interpretations that I hadn't expected.

ST: Wow

JS: Yeah, but it was valuable right? So that made me really go backwards. Wait, maybe I rushed this too much by doing this. Because if you don't know what black red and green means and it doesn't affect you emotionally, you still just kind of see it as a Confederate flag. Or if you really like the colors black, red, and green, you're going to think that I'm bastardizing those colors by intersecting it with the structure of the Confederate flag. So, you have a problem there. Basically, what I needed to do was pull back and really create something that would express my position but also be much more direct about what am I trying to say? Not only interrogating the Confederate flag and playing with it and making it seem less hostile - I think what needed to happen, I needed to bring this flag to justice. And so, this idea of hanging

We've taken the n-word, taken the flag, the music, now we're moving into monuments and part of my work now is moving to plantations. It's this idea of moving into these spaces that have caused trauma and sort of remixing them and creating a complete reorientation, repurposing.

the Confederate flag and calling it the proper way to hang a Confederate flag, which is a nod to Dred Scott's piece, his famous piece out of Chicago. It's a title that you don't know what exactly I mean but when you see it, like I'm hanging this but it's not a lynching right? It's hanging with the idea that it's been brought to Justice and then after that you can resurrect, you can confiscate the corpse and resurrect it and it can be something else. So, I think doing that piece *The Proper Way to Hang the Confederate Flag* was inspired by the kind of response I was getting. So actually, I was moving back and, in that project, I also rewrote Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. I took the song Dixie and redid it in a very different way. So, this idea of re-transformation or righteous mutation, right? It's this idea of creating perturbations and processes and to create possibilities for new meaning and some level of process evolution. Right? So, this idea now, I'm not just recoloring the flag, but going back to the text like the Gettysburg Address, going also to the music and the Dixie stuff because in some ways that's already happened in the black community. We've taken the n-word, taken the flag, the music, now we're moving into monuments and part of my work now is moving to plantations. It's this idea of moving into these spaces that have caused trauma and sort of remixing them and creating a complete reorientation, repurposing. So that's part of the work which sets up for a transformation on some level.

ST: Well for me, it seems like there can be some underlying humor in your work.

JS: Yeah. Absolutely. Yes. Yes.

ST: For instance, there is a character Johannes Curtis Schwarzenstein, the AfroGermanJewishMathArtPoet - the artist's alter ego.

JS: Right

But the key is also that space of how something could have a terrible meaning but be very beautiful and something could have an incredibly important meaning and be very ugly. It's that kind of space. So, when people listen to one of my Afro Dixie remixes being sung like a Billie Holiday voicing or arrangement, you can hate the song but you're like damn it's beautiful.

John Sims: (Di)Visions of America

ST: Right. Even in the most recent piece, you used the game Space Invaders as a model for *Korona Killas*, a simulated video game about the coronavirus with a public service announcement featuring you wearing a mask and a kind of Darth Vader-like echo on your voice. Even *The Proper Way to Hang a Confederate Flag* has a sardonic wit to it. Could you comment on how and why you use humor if, in fact, this a strategy of yours? As a way to potentially break down barriers?

JS: But yeah, so I think any good comedy it's a collision - taking things that you don't expect and twisting it. It creates a surprise and the way you respond is by laughing. Because that's like a trance language response. It's sort of like you're surprised and now what happens is if you cross the line then the laughter can turn to horror. It could turn into something else and depending on how you come at the piece so some folks can look at that and laugh from a position of yeah, that's right, or someone else feels completely disrespected, right, and feels horrified, or somebody can come to that piece and feel like I feel disrespected but that was a good one.

ST: Hah yeah right – like you got me.

JS: It's like all right, you're talking about my mama, but that was a good mama joke. I think I might have to use that one.

ST: Well exactly, that can break down barriers for someone who may have never given that piece a chance.

JS: So, in some ways what you are really getting at is the target of my work which is the brilliance of the comic to be able to speak through you and talk to your core self. To permeate through your cultural guises, protections, all the armor that you have to prevent people being exposed to what you really think, what you really want and who you really are. So, there's a performance element of how we move through space. Good comedy pushes through that and then you're surprised that you know you shouldn't be laughing but you laugh because you can't help it because it reflects something that is speaking to you. So, it's in that space with that spirit I try to create work that pushes through even the most hardened intellectuals who cased into their practice and their theories and techniques. All the most completely emotional folks that don't even know what they think about anything but be able to do work that creates such a visceral response and reflects what's really there, taking some real temperature. Sometimes it comes across as being like oh, that's humorous and funny, but in some ways, it's usually not funny to some people and super funny to other people. But the key is also that space of how something could have a terrible meaning but be very beautiful and something could have an incredibly important meaning and be very ugly. It's that kind of space. So, when people listen to one of my Afro Dixie remixes being sung like a Billie Holiday voicing or arrangement, you can hate the song but you're like damn it's beautiful. The point you walk away with is that these images and this song should not have that kind of emotional stranglehold over you. So, it's really negotiating power, the power of symbols, the power of words and you being able to have some space to have control over how you wish to negotiate your landscape. And be able to see it in a way to invite your own creative inclusion into the discussion.

ST: Let's move on the most recent work. There has been a period of extreme upheaval recently pertaining to the intersection of politics, race relations, and the coronavirus placing the county in crisis mode. Your projects have been addressing these issues over your career. However, you confront the most recent developments during your Artist in Residency project at the Ringling Museum of Art 2020: *(Di)Visions of America*. For me, what made the work resonate is how it was funneled through the personal. Using the idea of a letter, which is often the most intimate of communications as the vehicle, was a perfect choice. The piece featured a black physician, Lisa Merritt, describing a black patient's experience after having contracted the virus and their struggles along the way to recovery. Next, you read some of your op-ed pieces regarding your feelings about the police. Lastly, Chandra Carly's account researched her lineage and her poignant letter to her enslaved relative, asking them how they felt in various situations that she had gained knowledge of through her research. And lastly, how all of this tied into the Gamble Plantation, a state park in Bradenton, FL. All of these things you were able to connect together and create that piece which was a super powerful piece. How did you figure out how to put that all together? Can you take us through the process of creating the work?

JS: Okay, so in some ways I'm like a quilt maker right. It is a quilting thing. I keep going back to that. On one level and if this particular quilt is based on these letters, more than that these op-ed pieces that I've written on three main categories: one the coronavirus, the George Floyd murder and police brutality issues, and the push back on the Confederacy. I wrote a couple of different op-eds in each of those areas. Then I responded with work. So, with the coronavirus I did this video game. That was my way of responding. I've already responded in text so now the next layer is responding through creating work. So, for the coronavirus it is the video game. But before that at the top you have these three different elements. But also, it really is this self-portrait. It's the self-portrait, me with the mask where you see the ele-

ments of the coronavirus, the police, the pushback. So that's the overall with all the elements mixed together. The self-portrait character shows up in the video game as the introduction explaining rules. Then we move to the idea of the video response to my dear police letter that I wrote as an op-ed piece. Then with the pushback on the Confederate iconography. The elements with the burning of the Confederate flag, but also the animation of re-imagining the slave plantation. So that's the second level. The third level was to have an in-person performance response. So really you have the op-eds, then you have my responses, and then now you're going to have these performance responses speaking to my responses. So, it's these elements of responses of iteration. Dr Lisa Merritt is responding to my video game. Remember she says this is not a game. She starts it off by saying dear John. She's almost talking to me like somebody who's playing games and not really paying attention to the real deal and this is what can happen. And then with the police brutality part the George Floyd element is that I perform my own letter.

ST: Right, sure.

JS: The third is we found a descendant of a one of the African slaves to write a letter to her great-great-great grandfather and with her questions as a young girl. She's in that space. Then we open up the whole performance and then you see this Confederate flag and then at the beginning I'm making this prayer to Mother Earth. And then at the end I come out as my character in my portrait and read this poem that I read at the very beginning. And so, it is very symmetrical in that way. It's a response to the main trauma triggers, parameters of 2020.

ST: Yeah. Oh, yeah, definitely. Again, your metaphor of quilting.

JS: If you think about it, it's a 3x3 quilt.

ST: Yeah, right. Yeah. I got ya.

JS: And then the border of it is the self-portrait.

ST: You have chosen to work within an arena that frankly has a very limited audience, the fine art world, or whatever you want to call it, reaches mainly people interested in art. You have a much better chance of reaching people through your op-ed pieces, but even there, fewer people read the newspaper.

JS: Yeah, people who would not necessarily go to a gallery, or go to a museum. Let me explain what happened, which is very important, a good kind of evidence of the success of why I do the op-ed stuff. I wrote that first *Tampa Bay Times* piece, and then there was an anthropologist from the University of South Florida who reached out to me. She actually worked on the Gamble Plantation, does research on the Plantation and has always felt weird about even her own place in that Plantation and the kind of work she did there and knew that there's something not right in terms of not telling the stories of the slaves who lived there and worked there, the missing stories and then her contribution of trying to

I wrote that first *Tampa Bay Times* piece, and then there was an anthropologist from the University of South Florida who reached out to me. She actually worked on the Gamble Plantation, does research on the Plantation and has always felt weird about even her own place in that Plantation and the kind of work she did there and knew that there's something not right in terms of not telling the stories of the slaves who lived there and worked there ...

change. But she also worked with the daughters of the Confederacy who basically run that space still today. But anyway, she reached out to me and she goes, look, see if I could be of help in any way, you know I really appreciate what you are doing. I ended up developing a colleagueship - friendship relationship around this work. We ended up saying maybe we need to have a symposium in connection with my residency at the Ringling. We ended up creating a four-part symposium where I ended up doing the keynote and in it. I make a national call that we should confiscate American plantations and put them into a National Trust. I set it up to think about where do we go in regard to the pushback about all these monuments and particularly dealing with these slave plantations. This is an opportunity to really redress some core trauma issues in this country and I think the plantations speak to that particularly in terms of black genealogy, also in terms of dealing with racialized capitalism. It's all these things that are right there so that's what I talked about in the keynote. But the op-ed was a way for me to reach someone like her who might not have gone to a show or might not have gone to whatever. Sometimes folks are suspicious of how relevant art can be. The op-eds position my work beyond the traditional boundaries of the visual arts or even the performance arts. And it also gives me a certain kind of access that, say, traditional writers also don't have. Also having this art thing that reaches people and so when you see *the Proper Way to Hang a Confederate Flag* that could be more powerful than a 20,000-word essay. You carry that with you forever. You'll never look at a Confederate flag again the same way. So, to be honest, the art and op-ed stuff is really an extension of my math art dynamic. The writing is kind of like mathematics. The art is more like the visual stuff and they work together. Part of my math art strategy of being able to bring the text and the logic, and the system stuff, and also bringing the expressiveness, the aesthetics, and being able to marry those things together and in the context of an activism addressing some issue. Not all problems have to be bad problems. Sometimes you can address something that's about honoring, like my Sorrento project is more of an immortalization. It's not just let's gentrify the community. I'm not saying that I'm saying look let us reflect and pay attention to the structures in our community and process it.

ST: yeah. Well last thing - would you ever consider running for political office?

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JS: Oh, that's interesting. Maybe, I mean or getting behind someone or somebody's strategy team. I like that. I like the idea of how to bring the art game to the legislative space. How to bring the art.

ST: That's a tricky one.

JS: Right, right, to bring the art game to the legislative writing process. How to inspire. So, if I was going to be a politician, I would definitely be very different about it and I would sort of connect to the constituents in a way that reflects me as an artist and being able to inspire additional ways of connecting and also showing how the importance and the agency of the creative process and negotiating the fruits of democracy. Very often when you are living in communities and I mean bigger communities, statewide, nationwide, and you have 20 different views and ideas. And so how do you come up with unifying things? So, me as a quiltmaker I learned how to create connections around these very diverse things. That means you have to pay attention to internal patterns and being able to see through lines and being able to see what things might not look connected, but they are connected, and being able to express that inspire that. Looking at that through the eyes of a mathematician/artist/activist/writer probably gives certain kinds of advantages. So, I guess I'm working and learning how to do that to be more effective around these very complicated ideas. Very often politicians end up just being polarizing or saying things they don't really mean to get support, or votes. I think there's an opportunity to be super, super creative. Through the magic of the creative stuff, I could get people on both sides. Let me give you an example of what I just did, my *Square Root of Love* event, that I do every year. Because I'm an artist in residence at a restaurant or we invited Republicans and Democrats, the mayor to sit down and read their favorite love poems in between courses.

ST: ha ha yeah

JS: So here we have Republicans on the spot negotiating and talking about love and then at the end of the day talking about what really, really matters. So sometimes you have to, like, do the reset. I think art does that in a very powerful way, poetry makes that argument, so what really, really matters?

ST: Plus, again it's a way to break down barriers.

JS: Someone can easily look at that like wow, that should be a skit on *Saturday Night Live*. No, really it could easily become a skit. Or it could be a really strong opportunity. We need to break bread a little bit more and have some stability.

ST: To our humanity.

JS: And respect around negotiating our policy differences and being open. So that's part of the work that I'm finding, in terms of community systems and also creating unsuspecting opportunities to connect.

ST: Yeah, that's great. Awesome. All right, John, that's about it for me.

JS: All right. All right, buddy, well thank you. I hope that's enough for you. (hearty laughing)

ST: hah yes that's plenty! (laughing)

JS: If you need anything, I gave you plenty of images so if you need anything else...

ST: I'll hit you up for sure.

JS: Yeah, hit me up, because you know the *New Art Examiner* is such an important art platform, and I appreciate the opportunity for you to write about this work. Yes.

ST: It's my pleasure, man. I really enjoyed talking to you. Enjoy the weekend.

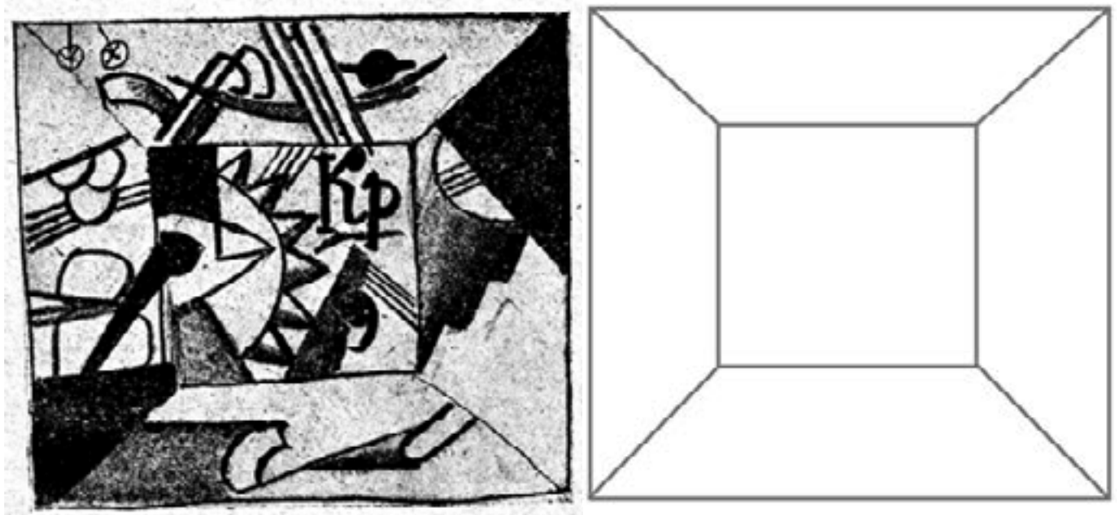
JS: You too. Bye.

Malevich's Windows to Eternity

Stephen Luecking

Popular ideas about the fourth dimension wielded significant influence from two directions on the earliest decades of modern abstraction. The first and most popular direction emerged from burgeoning esoteric beliefs where the fourth dimension served as the habitat for spiritual beings. The second direction resulted from extending spatial relationships in two-and three-dimensions of Euclidean geometry into analogous relationships in four dimensions. Depending on the nature of the artists, i.e. whether spiritually inclined or analytically inclined, the effects of both directions impinged on the forms of early abstraction.

In 1913 both directions shaped the Russian Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun*, created and produced in Saint Petersburg by three friends and leaders of the Russian avant-garde: Mikhail Matyushin, who wrote the music, Aleksei Kruchenykh, who penned the libretto, and Kazimir Malevich, who designed the sets. A fourth friend, the poet Velimir Khlebnikov, wrote the introduction.



Left: Act 1, Scene 4 of Victory Over the Sun, 1913. Right: Kasimir Malevich, sketch for backdrop in photograph

Matyushin admired Pyotr Ouspenskii, a popular proponent of the esoteric sciences who resided in St Petersburg at the time. These 'sciences' studied spiritual phenomena as subject to physical verification and not to supernatural justification. Key to the science was the existence of a physical fourth dimension containing our own three dimensions.

An actual fourth dimension would account for many of a spirit's abilities. Take the case of the penchant for suddenly appearing within a closed space. The esoteric scientists explained this phenomenon by relying on a geometric induction termed 'dimensional analogy'. This induction held that relationships of 3D entities to 2D objects shed light on parallel relationships of 4D entities to 3D objects. The analogy favored by the spiritualist follows from the ability of a 3D being to view and enter from above a closed 2D space such as a square or circle. This was equivalent, then, to a 4D being seeing inside a closed room, entering it from 'above' and seen by 3D beings as materializing out of empty space. To this 'spirit' the room appears to be wide open and easily accessed.

A corollary to the fourth dimension's housing of spirits was that it also housed the spiritual component of a human being, that is, one's consciousness. The physical body, this corollary implies, is simply the visible component of oneself residing in three dimensions with the invisible component extending into four dimensions. To theosophists such as Ouspenskii the supernatural was, by way of the fourth dimension, perfectly natural.

The aspect of the esoteric sciences most integral to *Victory over the Sun*, however, lay in Ouspenskii's view of time, which he believed to be an illusion. He propounded a variation on eternalism. Eternalism was a philosophy of time which regarded all future and past events as existing simultaneously by virtue of being bound up in the fabric of four dimensions. Time, as experienced in three dimensions, emerges from the progressive encounters by a reality of limited scope as it moves along its spatial extensions in a higher reality. In effect, we humans age by subsequently inhabiting the pre-existing extensions of our future selves. The plotline of *Victory* had humans of a future race entering the three-dimensional space of the stage.

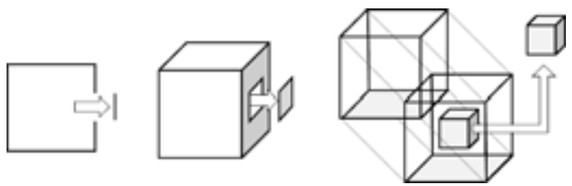
To provide these denizens of eternity with imagined access to the stage, Malevich depicted portals from a fourth dimension onto his set designs. Like the spiritualists Malevich drew on ideas of dimensional analogy to design his imagery.

Malevich's exposure to 4D visualizing most likely came from contact with a publication by American architect Claude Bragdon. Bragdon had won a contest held by *Scientific American* in 1910 to write the best rational exposition of the fourth dimension, which he later expanded into a book published in 1913. As a Russian speaker and noted theosophist, Bragdon shared the book, *A Primer of Higher Spaces*, with Ouspenskii and other Russian theosophists, some of Malevich's friends among them. Bragdon, who was nationally renowned as an architectural draftsman, had filled every page of the book with precise illustrations of various dimensional analogies.

Malevich's design drawings borrowed something of Bragdon's visual style, but curiously he used none of the dimensional analogies presented by Bragdon but developed his own. The result of Malevich's analogy invented for the opera might be labelled 'the window in the choron'.

Chorons are the three-dimensional forms that work as boundaries for four-dimensional objects. The reasoning behind the chorons goes something like this: lines of one dimension bound two-dimensional shapes while two-dimensional planes enclose three-dimensional volumes, leaving three-dimensional spaces, termed chorons, to border four-dimensional entities. This is perhaps the most basic of the dimensional analogies.

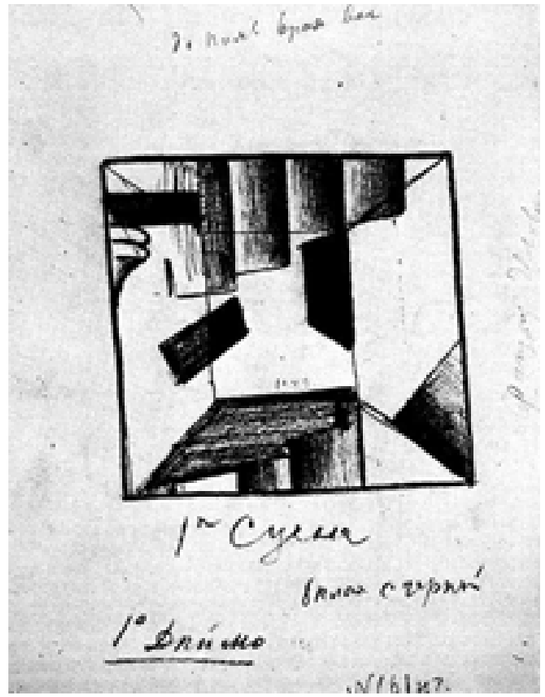
Malevich extended this analogy to include windows and doors by which future peoples can enter the stage from the higher space beyond the walls of the set. As seen in the first diagram, extracting a line segment from the middle of the side of a square creates the analog of a window in two dimensions. As shown in the second diagram, similarly extracting a planar segment from the middle of the face of a cube yields a window in three-dimensions. The third diagram denotes how, by extension, extracting a cube from the center of a cubic choron opens the analog of a window in four dimensions

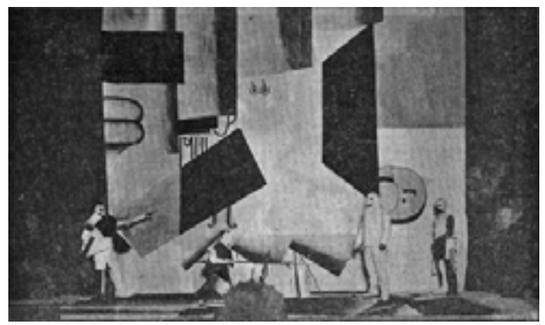


The third diagram is clearly counter-intuitive. How does a hollow inside a volume function as an aperture through that volume? First of all, 'through' in the fourth dimension is not the same 'through' in the third dimension. Second, the diagram is not the actual image of a choron but the image of its 3D projection. In 3D projections of 4D space the center of the depicted volume is actually the most distant portion of the drawing. When the 4D object rotates, this projection appears to be turning inside out, an illusion forming as the center of the image moves to the fore.

Malevich's 'windows' comprised the entire backdrop of the set opening the stage to the fourth dimension. In contrast to their large size on the stage, the artist executed his original designs as modest pencil drawings. He began each drawing by framing out the interior of a cube with a few lines defining its interior faces. He then treated each face as separate views into the fourth dimension.

Below: Template for Malevich's studies of the backdrops for *Victory over the Sun*; followed by *Study* published on the cover of the playbill for the opera





Despite the innovation and sophistication of this design in connecting dimensions, Matyushin regarded Malevich to be naïve regarding the fourth dimension. This was likely due to antipathy Malevich held toward Ouspenskii and which he held in common with the Russian constructivist artists as a whole. Ouspenskii did not share these artists' fervor for the revolution and he hung out in the St Petersburg café scene with established figures like Tolstoy, who shared his views. Ouspenskii returned this antipathy by dismissing Malevich's later Suprematist works that the

artist had titled 'Colored Masses in the Fourth Dimension'. Ouspenskii declared that, "Painting the fourth dimension was like making a sculpture of a sunset."

Malevich viewed geometry as coming in many different guises as hypothesized by Nikolai Lobachevsky, the Russian mathematician who developed the first system of Non-Euclidean geometry. In his book *Pangeometry*, Lobachevsky asserts that there could exist many other forms of non-Euclidean geometry other than his own. (There are at least 200 variations of geometry used today by scientists and engineers.) Although Lobachevsky's discovery occurred early in the 19th century, his star didn't rise until near the end of the century after his death. Improvement in astronomical instruments proved that, as Lobachevsky theorized, space at astronomical scales curved, inducing parallel lines to meet. In addition other mathematicians sanctioned his theories by developing their own geometries of curved space.

Malevich extended Lobachevsky's pangeometry to art, which he believed could entertain its own forms of geometry. By contrast Ouspenskii discounted Lobachevsky's geometry because it did not account for an actual fourth dimension.

Although Malevich never stated any belief in a physical fourth dimension, the geometric ideas it suggested were to influence his work on at least two more instances. In 1913 he devised Futurist lithographs appearing in the poetry book *Troe*, published by his friends Kruchenykh, Khlebnikov and Elena Guro, Matyushin's wife. Two years later he included allusions to the fourth dimension in the titling five of his Suprematist paintings.

Typically mum about his working methods and his influences, Malevich only wrote once on the fourth dimension and then only after Albert Einstein's theories had reached the public stage. By 1918 he believed that the fourth dimension existed as time and not space.

"Which gallery should we check out first: the one with the best works by the worst artists or the one with the worst works by the best artists?"

Come and See

Come And See
Come and see
Come and see
The roads are pushing our fields away -

Today
Today -
Come and see
The decay
Of the city.

Come and see
The social security see-saw -
Human-apes
Stupidity plus stupidity -

Come and see
Our broken down economy
Rather old policies
Balance of payments
Not achieved, cheer, cheer
And try to explain inflation -
Come and see
Come and hear!

The failed master plan -
The behaviour pattern
Of aged ministers of State -
Too late
Too late -

Sing the song of the out-of-work
The three day week
The endless rain -
A country going down the drain -

But tighten your seat-belts -
Switch on your colour TV

And to the hounds
With wages and prices -
All clap hands
For the 'Common-Market'
And pick your nose
When no-one is looking -
Come and see
The decay of a country -
Export the flag -
And try again -
More rain
More roads -

Surprise, surprise -
Academic exercise
Stretches the mind -
But recognise
In time
Sales for the home-market
Has to shake hands
With the people!

Shänne Sands (1974)

Street Art

Loretta Pettinato
(Translated by Laura Pettinato)

Born in New York in 1972 as a rebellious, provocative movement, street art became a fully-fledged artistic movement thanks to the work of Basquiat and Kit Haring, as well as becoming a worldwide phenomenon that can be found in every city.

Along with other cities, Milan recognized how much potential this form of art holds. Thanks to the establishment of the new office Art in Public Places, it locates and assigns areas in which artists can express themselves freely, without harming the rights of others. We are well past the point when walls were constantly tagged by vandals. Nowadays, the goal is to move beyond clandestinity to legality, from night-time joyrides to important projects, even though many of the artists criticize and object to this change, believing it to be a form of treason.

Today street art has invaded the city as a wave of vitality; it feels like visiting an open-air museum, which extends from the centre to the outskirts, with beautifully coloured murals, painted with different styles and techniques. One can find cheerful and imaginative graffiti, which add beauty to suburban areas; others recall important characters from Milan's cultural life, as well as ones that cover very large areas, the result of the collaboration between national artists and high-schoolers. Very important are the murals depicting current events and a commitment against racism and violence.

To complement this initiative, the Arcimboldi Theatre organized the *Unknown Street Art Exhibition*, dedicated, as the name suggests, to street artists. Visitors will find pieces from Banksy and other artists including Blu, 3D and Delta 2. Banksy, born in Bristol, can be considered the king of this artform and his pieces are found in prestigious art galleries. His work expresses compassion and delicacy while recognizing the fugacity of human feelings (*Girl with Balloon*), sardonic humour towards our overly-individualistic society (*Flying Ghetto Rat*), and non-violent resistance to all forms of oppression and abuse (*Rage, Flower Thrower*). Street art can be loved, hated or criticized, but people must recognize that it brought art closer to the people, offering a simple language whose messages and content inspire emotions and shake consciousness.

On a Milan Street. (photo: the author)

Women of Art

Loretta Pettinato
(Translated by Laura Pettinato)

An exhibition called 'Women of Art. Stories of women from the 1500s to the 1600s' was due to open on March 2nd 2021 in the Palazzo Reale in Milan, but its inauguration was delayed following the latest lockdown. The end of this exhibition has not been changed and it remains July 25th 2021. In-person visits have nevertheless been replaced by virtual ones, meaning that it is still possible to delve into this varied and catalogued exhibition, comprising 130 paintings. These canvases come both from Italian collections and foreign ones and were painted by 35 talented women who courageously and tenaciously took a stand against a world which was almost exclusively controlled by men, becoming the women of Baroque. These were either the painters' daughters, wives and sisters who learned the basics of the craft just by watching the male artists in their workshop, as they were precluded from any kind of artistic education, or women who had been secluded in convents, working in the service of the re-

ligious community. Almost every painting represents stories of different women, such as Judith, Penitent Magdalene, Eleonora Gonzaga, Galthea riding a sea monster, and two girls portrayed playing chess.

Some paintings were created by lesser-known artists; these include the Roman noblewoman Claudia del Bufalo's *Portrait of Faustina del Bufalo*, Rosalia Novelli's *Immaculate Virgin*, and Lucrezia Quistelli's *Saint Catherine's Mystic Wedding*. Others were famous at the time but later forgotten, like Lavinia Fontana from Bologna who was the family's breadwinner thanks to her art, or Giovanna Garzoni, painter of the only two male portraits in the exhibition: Emanuele I Duke of Savoia, and Emanuele Filiberto.

Mostly the artwork is exhibited without deep critical analysis, the analysis being inherently the fact that these women are not better known and more widely accepted for their skill even today when women have been 'liberated' from formal restrictive, positions in masculine defined societies.

One can also find paintings whose artists gained international recognition: Fede Galizia for instance, known for her Still Life paintings, and several by Artemisia Gentileschi, probably the most famous artist in the show, including *David with Goliath's Head*. Gentileschi is an emblem of courage and determination, overcoming the trauma of a sexual assault and opposing her father's dominion to become a wealthy entrepreneur in her own right. *Altarpiece of Itria's Madonna* and *Chess Game* are the work of another independent woman, Sofonisba Anguissola from Cremona, who, after living for 10 years in Philip II's court in Madrid, moved back to Sicily and married a younger man. Elisabetta Sirani's work, including *Porzia Wounding her Thigh,* and *Cleopatra*, depicts sensuality, courage and rebellion against the violence of men toward women.

The exhibition is organized into five sections. The first is dedicated to the artists Vasari wrote a biography about; the second to those who painted in convents; the third to paintings representing families, such as Marietta Robusti's (the daughter of Tintoretto); the fourth section celebrates academies, and the fifth is dedicated to Gentileschi. Apart from a few pieces, this isn't an exhibition of masterpieces, but a journey across art history and Renaissance society. The main goal is to reveal the lives of many women artists who were unfairly forgotten. These women were the light in this bigoted and misogynist society, they suffered and fought in order to gain their freedom and independence and were able to devote themselves entirely to art.

Artists' Union of England

Mary Fletcher

The AUE Union was started in 2014. It now has over 500 members and is aiming to be affiliated to the TUC - Trades Union Congress, whose headquarters are in London. It's therefore a very new and so far a very small trade union. I recently attended the online AGM (Annual General Meeting), participating in a discussion - there were only 27 people at the meeting. It costs £42 a year to join. So what's the point?

Living in Cornwall it seems unfortunate that it's specifically English, as many of us consider Cornwall a separate country. Scotland has had its own Artists' Union for longer. The AUE is eager to explain that it isn't interested in being preoccupied exclusively with the marketing of art as expensive wall decoration for the wealthy. It has a wider view. It gives advice on being employed and on rates of pay, and during the covid crisis it has had a scheme to give small grants to artists suffering hardship.

Personally, I have benefitted from belonging to this union. When a university returned some of my paintings that had been exhibited in a show, one of them was damaged. Somehow the stretcher had been pushed into the canvas, making an impression of the wooden structure that was quite obvious from the front. When I complained and asked for compensation, the university and carrier blamed one another and denied responsibility or recompense. I contacted the AUE, which has a legal department. They sent the university gallery a letter and I was quickly given the whole price of the picture.

A couple of years ago I was thrown out of my studio share and asked the union for help in understanding my rights. The telephone advice I was given was very helpful. I could have fought my corner, but in the end decided to leave, which saved me paying rent just as Covid-19 happened and the studios closed. So help with your personal work problems is one reason to join.

I think it's a great idea for more reasons - it means being an artist is recognised as a professional occupation. It recognises art as an essential part of our culture and artists as benefitting from democratic organisation. To join you have to satisfy a few criteria designed to keep out artists who are hobbyists with no serious commitment. It's not based on monetary success or having an art degree. I want to encourage more artists to join. I believe the Musicians' Union is far better known and numerous in membership and I am pleased to find AUE is combining with the MU in some campaigns. There are badges, but so far I have never seen anyone wearing one and I think AUE should help recruit members by giving out badges free. Maybe other artists' unions could report on what happens in their countries?

Chaplin's Comedy *The Kid* Turns 100

Scott Winfield Sublett

Screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz said of Charlie Chaplin, "If people don't sit at Chaplin's feet, he goes out and stands where they're sitting." Of course, Mankiewicz might have been a bit envious. He, after all, wrote only one masterpiece, and that one not entirely solo (despite the confabulations of Mank director David Fincher). Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin, meanwhile, wrote, directed, pantomimed, and often composed the poignant scores for a dozen masterpieces. *The Kid*, his first feature-length film as a director, was the second-biggest hit of 1921 — the same year Prince Philip was born. Those are just two of the reasons 1921 was a notable year, a third being that the not-really-Spanish Spanish Flu was *terminó*.

Chaplin was in his early thirties when he directed *The Kid*. The Little Tramp, with his penguin gait and big, kohl-rimmed eyes, was already the most famous figure in the world: a scrounger in tattered, ill-fitting, formal attire, with little gentlemanly affectations, like keeping his nasty, half-smoked stogies in a tin box that he handles like a silver cigar case from Dunhill. The Tramp's affectations seem not pretentious, but rather sublimely, touchingly human. He chooses to be civilized in an uncivil environment: the Little Tramp is a creature of the slums — like Charlie himself, with his loving-but-deranged mother, and childhood stints in Dickensian workhouses.

Mack Sennett of Keystone Kops fame, who discovered Chaplin and is acknowledged as the inventor of film comedy, was pretty much right when he said that there are only two gags in the world: mistaken identity and collapse of dignity. The latter concept requires little explication: haughty banker slips on banana peel and lands on keister. But mistaken identity covers a lot of ground — really, it means any misperception or misrepresentation of the self or others: pretending or being fooled or wearing a disguise. The Little Tramp's delicately refined demeanor is a case of mistaken identity — he's mistaken himself for a gentleman, or is trying to get others to do so; probably both. The irony is that the Little Tramp has, inside him, at least sometimes, the nobility of spirit of a true gentleman, which makes the joke softer and more beautiful.

Chaplin was famous for applying mistaken identity to objects — everyone knows the dinner: rolls 'mistaken' for dancing feet in *The Gold Rush*, and elsewhere in that picture is the old boot he takes for a gourmet meal. Picasso (a Chaplin fan), did the same sort of thing with his 1942 *Bull's Head* made from a bicycle seat and a handlebar. There's some of that comedy-of-objects stuff in *The Kid*, as when he uses a coffee pot as a baby bottle, but at this point in his career much of the comedy is still boisterous slapstick, which is fine because the slapstick is still funny today and comes out of sharply drawn character.

Almost everyone has seen clips from *The Kid*, but for those who haven't watched the whole movie, the plot is elegantly simple. A young woman whose sin is motherhood (unwed), walks out of a scruffy charity hospital carrying a newborn. Chaplin gives us a brief peek at the absent father — deliciously enough, he's a painter, showing a possible buyer one of his works. When the painter tosses a photo of the mother into the fireplace, we know he's out of the baby's picture — as was Chaplin's own long-gone father.

Publicity photo from Charlie Chaplin's 1921 movie The Kid, *featuring Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan. (Wiki Commons)*

Wandering the streets alone, the mother impulsively abandons her newborn in the back seat of a shiny limousine, with a crumpled note: "Please love and care for this orphan child." She quickly changes her mind, but too late: crooks have stolen the car and dumped the worthless little bundle of humanity in an alley. There, it falls into the possession of the Little Tramp, and after multiple (hilarious) attempts to dump it, the Tramp is forced to take it home.

Cut to the boy, now five, and his doting father sharing a contented domestic routine in their cozy hovel. Daddy heaps comically exaggerated mountains of food onto their plates and we know the boy will never be hungry, or unloved, and what else matters? (Notice how often the specter of starvation, which Chaplin certainly experienced as a boy, turns up in his movies.)

Also, they're grifters. The scamp (Jackie Coogan, natural and adorable in his first role — it made him an enormous child star) hurls rocks through windows, and Daddy shows up with his glaz-

ing kit to replace the glass. Just as the movie got us rooting for the unwed mother, we pull for the scamming father and son, and we're scared of that damned cop who seems to be around every corner.

Meanwhile, the mother (Chaplin's lover Edna Purviance, to whom his film company would pay a small stipend until her death in 1958) has suddenly become a famous actress. Call that improbable, but then, so was Chaplin's own recent, precipitous rise from rags to riches. In her charity work in the slums, the mother-turned-actress runs across the kid, but doesn't realize this boy is the one she gave up.

When the kid falls ill, a nosy, officious doctor calls the authorities and they come to get him. The shot of Jackie Coogan, in the back of an open truck like an animal being hauled to slaughter, sobbing for his papa, straining arms outstretched, is the film's highest pathos, and one of the best-known shots in film history. Fortunately, the note the mother tucked into the baby's swaddle falls into the right hands at the right moment and that's all we'll say about the denouement.

100 years after the release of *The Kid*, the thing that feels most urgently relevant is the relationship between the slum-dwellers and the law. *The Kid* would cement Chaplin's reputation for social consciousness, but you seldom catch it being didactic, except a little in the inter-titles. I'm not knocking didactic (and nowadays you'd *better* not if you know what's good for your career in the arts), but it's nice that the film isn't preachy in the way Chaplin would sometimes get later in his career, with the party-line Marxism of *Modern Times* (still not good enough for Stalin), or the moralizing curtain speech that ends *The Great Dictator*. Paulette Goddard, Chaplin's leading lady in *Modern Times* (and third wife) said that, "everyone over-intellectualized Charlie's work and consequently he became self-conscious. It harmed him, I think." Chaplin's friend and rival Buster Keaton said much the same thing. *The Kid*, though, retains a purity in which comedy, pathos and social commentary are integrated into a seemingly simple whole that's all story all the time. You never feel that the message is stepping on the story. It's an imitation of life, not a lecture. It dramatizes that underclass lives matter and does so from their point of view.

It's often said Chaplin was a great satirist, but that doesn't seem quite right in the case of *The Kid*. The tone is not satirical in the sense of Shaw, Molière, or Comedy of Manners — it's not cool headed, clever or arch. And of course, it's a silent movie, so there are no memorable aphorisms. In fact, what keeps it fresh 100 years on is that it isn't detached and superior. The artist doesn't feel outside or above the class system he tweaks. The ruined finery in which he's arrayed doesn't connote status so much as a hunger for even a cold, leftover piece of the economic pie. If satire often concentrates on the cruel antics of high-handed hoity-toities, the social consciousness of Chaplin's *The Kid* lives in the dirt with the victims. That doesn't make Chaplin better than the great satirists of the theatre, it doesn't even make him funnier, but it made him literally the most popular entertainer in the world, yet also a favorite of geniuses like Beckett and Brecht. He encompassed everything human, all the dichotomies — generosity and greed, kindness and revenge, the base and the noble. He was us.

Cont from Page 5

rather our artistic heritage. The definition allows some art to be exploited and sold, or in some cases undersold.

First of all, we are witnessing the sale of entire buildings in many Italian cities, especially in Venice, which is an emblematic case study. The Prada Foundation for fashion has bought a magnificent palace on the Grand Canal, Benetton (fashion) has rearranged the antique warehouse Fondaco dei Tedeschi, making it a temple of luxury, and the French magnate Pinault has transformed the Salt warehouses at the tip of the Customs House into a contemporary art gallery where his collections often are shown. Of course the renovation is magnificent, the architects called to do it respected the building structures without distorting their characteristics. But one wonders whether it is right to privatize public assets, which belong to all citizens?

And it could have been worse: in 2012 the designer Pierre Cardin (of Venetian origins) wanted to build a 250-meter tower in the Venetian hinterland, the 'Palais Lumière', which would have turned the Venetian skyline upside down. While the local authorities, the mayor among them, gave their permission, the project fortunately did not go through due to credit problems with the banks.

Another serious problem is the state of many public buildings: due to the neglect of the institutions, sinkholes open up in churches, as happened in Naples, while humidity, theft and vandalism ruin wonderful sites which should be protected as cultural assets.

The problem, in addition to a widespread cultural lack of interest, is the allocation of funds for conservation and restoration. In the three-year period 2012-2014, €1.5 billion was allocated for the management of cultural heritage, €25 billion for weapons, and €40 billion for the rescue of banks. Spending on culture amounts to 1.1% of public expenditure, while in France it reaches 2.5% and in Spain 3.3%.

I do not know if in the future this short-sighted attitude of our governments will change, given that during the pandemic the first to close were museums, theatres and schools, which are still closed, while all kinds of shops remain open. Does that not say it all?

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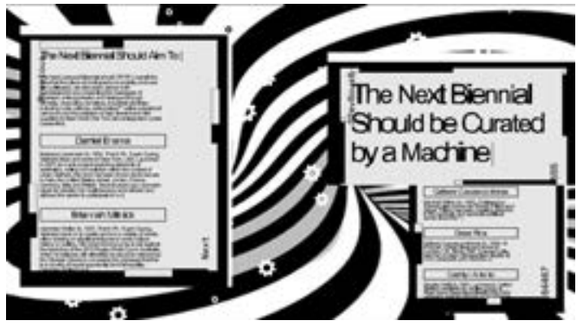
Not for us – Green Certificate Passes

The European Union has proposed a vaccine pass—the digital green certificate—to facilitate travel within the bloc. While Denmark is the first EU nation to launch a national pass, Sweden is also considering a format that would probably be limited to mass events, says Jeanette Gustafsdotter, the general secretary of the Swedish museums' association.

"The museums have already started to reopen, and they wouldn't be included" in vaccine pass requirements, she says.

Catherine Hickley
Art Newspaper 26th April 2021



Ubermorgen, Leonardo Impett, and Joasia Krysa, The Next Biennial Should Be Curated by a Machine (2021), screenshot. Image courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

How Artificial is Curating?

Could the next Whitney Biennial be curated by artificial intelligence? A new online art project based on data from the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Liverpool Biennial attempts to imagine 64 different curatorial statements and artist lists for future exhibitions, all "curated" by a robot.

"The Next Whitney Biennial," reads the description of biennial number 45, "should reflect the vacillation of New York right now—unable to connect both its manufacturing and financial back-rooms—and operate within the bureaucratized discourse of de-postcapitalization…"

Each alternate universe is characterized by art speak that straddles the line between high brow and utter incomprehensibility and is based on data drawn from actual Whitney and Liverpool Biennials past.

*Artnew*s 6th May 2021

NAE Continues to Grow

This month we passed 1,400,000 unique visitors since the website went live in 2017.
According to Google Analytics we are visited by readers from over 75 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 – 26,695 readers

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

No Art Superstars from Israel, Daniel Nanavati, volume 34 no 4 March – April 2020 – 17,582

A Brief History of Permanence, Liviana Martin, volume 34 no 4 March – April 2020 – 17,170

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, volume 34 no 1 September – October 2019 – 10,000 readers

She BAM! Interview with Laetitia Gorsy, Viktor Witkowski - volume 34 no 6 July - August 2020 – 8,793

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