

# bootprint



a publication dedicated to contemporary art

Volume 3 Issue 1

Ernest Trova & Tom Friedman  
& Larry Krone & The Guerrilla  
Girls & What, How and for  
Whom & Raqs Media Collective  
& Temporary Services &  
Young-Hae  
Chang Heavy  
Industries &  
Pablo Helguera  
& much more...



# Contributors

**Brandon Anschultz** was born in Judsonia, AR and currently lives and works in St. Louis, MO. His most recent exhibitions are *Amass* at Monte Vista Projects in Los Angeles, CA and the solo exhibition *Transmission/Destination* at Center for Creative Arts in St. Louis, MO. He has additionally had solo exhibitions at @Space Contemporary in Santa Ana, CA, White Flag Projects, St. Louis, MO, Philip Slein Gallery, St. Louis, MO and Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY. He has been in group exhibitions at the Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN; the Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, MO; The Dolphin Gallery and Urban Culture Projects, La Esquina, both in Kansas City. Other group exhibitions include shows at White Flag Projects; Boots Contemporary Art Space, Philip Slein Gallery, Fort Gondo Compound for the Arts, all in St. Louis and Sun Yat Sen Memorial Hall, Taipei, Taiwan. Anschultz received his BFA from Louisiana Tech University and his MFA from Washington University in St. Louis.

**Virginia MacKenny** is a practising artist and Senior Lecturer in Painting at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She has received a number of awards including the Volkskas Atelier Award (1991) and the Ampersand Fellowship in New York (2004). She is an independent critic and curator. In 2006 she co-curated with *Error! Contact not defined. Second to None* an exhibition celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March on Pretoria to protest the pass laws, for Iziko South African National Gallery. A previous KZN editor for [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za), she also supports contemporary visual arts discourse in SA by writing for *Art South Africa* and was an invited writer for Sophie Perryer's *10 Years 100 Artists – Art in a Democratic South Africa* (2004). In 2006 she presented papers at conferences in Mumbai and Paris on aspects of South African contemporary art production. She was a national selector for Spier Contemporary 2007 and last year she had a solo exhibition of paintings, *Foam Along the Waterline*, at UCT's Irma Stern Museum.

**Ashok Mathur** is a writer and cultural organizer based in western Canada. He currently holds the Canada Research Chair in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, British Columbia where he directs the Centre for innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada, an artist-research think-tank. His latest work is the transmogrification of his novel into an interdisciplinary art installation, *A Little Distillery in Nowgong*.

**Kelly Shindler** is a curator and writer who is currently pursuing a double Master's in Art History and Arts Administration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Since 2003, she has worked for the contemporary art organization Art21. Elsewhere, Shindler has curated film and video programs for Australia Cinematheque, the Sequences Festival in Reykjavik, Scandinavia House, and others. She is the co-founder/curator of the Package Deals film series, whose programs have been seen in museums, cinemas, and film festivals in over thirty cities around the world. In late 2008, she co-founded a second film series, Refracted Lens, with Beth Capper. [www.packagedeals.org](http://www.packagedeals.org) [www.refractedlens.org](http://www.refractedlens.org)

**Robert Sloon** is an artist and writer based in Cape Town, South Africa. He is founding editor of South Africa's best contemporary art gossip blog *ArtHeat*, <http://artheat.net/>

**Matthew Strauss** founded White Flag Projects in 2006, where has organized over 30 exhibitions of contemporary art. In addition to his work at White Flag Strauss has been a guest curator at The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and in the Front Room at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

Before establishing White Flag Projects Strauss was primarily a practicing artist, exhibiting frequently and being selected by Elizabeth Dunbar, Gary Garrels, and Helen Molesworth as a winner of the Great Rivers Biennial at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, where his exhibition *Dead Language* opened in 2006.

# Boot Print

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## Georgia Kotretos

Athens, Greece  
Founder / Editor-in-chief

## Timothy Ridlen

Brooklyn, NY, United States  
Editor

## Jual William Chávez

St. Louis, MO, United States  
Creative Advisor

## Danyel M. Ferrari

Brooklyn, NY, United States  
Researcher

## Elizabeth Wolfson

St. Louis, MO, United States  
Editorial Assistant

## Juozas Cernius

Brooklyn, NY, United States  
Proof-reading

## Mark Jeffery

London, United Kingdom  
Layout/Design

## Publisher

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For submissions and ad opportunities  
contact Georgia Kotretos at:  
[georgia@bootsart.com](mailto:georgia@bootsart.com)

## Boots Contemporary Art Space

2307 Cherokee St.  
St. Louis, MO 63118  
United States

## Juan William Chávez

St. Louis, MO, United States  
Director

## Georgia Kotretos

Athens, Greece  
Agent

## Bryan Reckamp

On a bicycle somewhere...  
Agent

[www.bootsart.com](http://www.bootsart.com)

[boots@bootsart.com](mailto:boots@bootsart.com)

314.772.BOOT (2668)

[www.bootsartnews.blogspot.com](http://www.bootsartnews.blogspot.com)

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Boots Contemporary Art Space.

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## Note from Georgia Kotretsos

Founder / Editor-in-Chief

Dear Boot Print friends, readers, and benefactors,

Boot Print Volume 3 Issue 1 is the fifth issue of the journal we are sharing with you. It marks the completion of half the issues initially planned to be put out and with your help we can keep the promise I made to you, our readers and to myself.

The truth is, you've been the driving force behind this effort. Your testimonials are remarkably encouraging and motivating. Every so often, art educators contact me to inform me that they will be incorporating Boot Print in their course or seminar class and a number of readers who operate outside the art world, have been following Boot Print since the very beginning and anticipate each issue. It is deeply satisfying to know that those who support us are as proud to be doing so as we are to be supported by them.

Anyone involved in this kind of project will very well know the behind-the-scenes – Boot Print is printed and distributed because of the St. Louis community, Juan William Chávez, our grant writer, Bridget Flynn, myself and many others. I edit Boot Print, from Athens, Greece and it was essential to travel to St. Louis twice to help fund-raise, to meet and to thank, in person, the people who are standing by us. Yet times are rapidly changing – print media is facing new challenges and we are all adjusting to the new conditions of the economy - hoping better days of printing and distribution are ahead of us. We at Boot Print would like to take this opportunity to invite you all to alleviate some of the weight, which has been on the St. Louis community by offering support from wherever you are. Boot Print won't be forever, so for as long as it will be, we would like you to stand by our side and contribute to our future. Right now, there have been delays due to insufficient funds but I am confident things will turn around. I am asking you to be patient and Boot Print will reach you. *Dues ex machina* have always taken care of Boot Print.

Behind all this, there is a Boot Print team that has been slowly growing. All its members volunteer their time and offer whatever they can to this project. I thank them for sticking by me through military deadlines, and loads of work. One thing, I've learned though from my experience in Boot Print is that working with ladies is like running on diesel. And I'm saying this cause I'd like to introduce you to Danyel M. Ferrari who joins us all the way from Brooklyn, New York to assist primarily with research but she is a force to be reckoned with and I wouldn't be surprised if her BP position title rapidly evolved in the near future. Danyel is an artist and a writer, who is currently a graduate at the Visual Culture department at New York University.

You'll also notice that Mark Jeffery from London, United Kingdom is designing this issue, offering his fresh perspective on our minimal look. Bryan Reckamp our loyal designer since 2006 has been on a fifty-five day bike-ride this summer from New York to Los Angeles, in conjunction with the Bicycle Film Festival. He has been covering thirty to a hundred miles a day with another forty or so committed bikers. Ouch!

Boot Print Volume 3 Issue 1 begins as usual with the Boots shows. First comes Turkish artist, Serkan Ozkaya with his breath taking installation entitled *A Sudden Gust of Wind* by Liz Wolfson; followed by *Slinger II* curated by Cole Root and discussed by Juan William Chávez. Showcasing the local creative force is a major part of our mission at Boots, which leads me to the section where Boot Print pays tribute to Ernest Trova, Tom Friedman and Larry Krone - St. Louis' finest established artists who are interviewed by three emerging artists based in the city: Matt Strauss, Juan William Chávez and Brandon Anschultz.

First comes artist, Ernest Trova who months before his passing on March 8th of this year, honored Boot Print by sharing his life's art story with us. He has been an indispensable part of the city's culture where he has left his monumental mark in more than one way to be re-thought after his passing. I wish to extend my deepest condolences to his family as well as to his friends and colleagues for their loss. Then comes Tom Friedman, the artist who reached my generation of artist's instantly. Haven't we all at some point locked ourselves at our studio with one of his books trying to figure him out? And last but not least, Larry Krone the exuberant and flamboyant performer who has turned museums and galleries into his stages.

This issue's Study Section focuses on groups, collectives and collaboratives, that are space-free. The key notion here is the camaraderie among a creative group of individuals working under an umbrella name. Whether artists, curators or activists, they make it happen. For this reason the GG ladies (Guerrilla Girls) rule this section with a great interview by Ms Virginia MacKenny, who is the lady who first taught me about feminism. I had to bring these ladies together. Tim Ridlen who insisted I pursue this topic, and I thank him for this, talks to *Temporary Services*. The memory of Brett Bloom talking in Gregory Sholette's class has been stamped on my brain all these years. Simply reminiscing – an effective speaker can do so much in forty minutes. *What, How and for Whom* an all female quartette has drawn the art world attention with their much anticipated curatorial of the 11th Istanbul Biennial opening this coming September. Danyel M. Ferrari asks it all and the ladies respond with grace. Ashok Mathur has a heart to heart with *Raqqs Media Collective*, I thank both sides for this result. *Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries* a duo that flashes prose online, on TV monitors, and large-scale projections talk to Kelly Shindler. This section closes with three emerging South African groups because South Africa it might seem geographically isolated from the known art centers, yet is so well attuned to contemporary art. To some cynical minds it may seem that South African artists have had their fifteen minutes of fame and ever fickle art world has already moved on, but the truth is that *Avant Garde*, *Doing It For Daddy* and *Galerie Puta* are making quite a scene – an art scene that is. They bring some excitement, wit and attitude to this damn art world. Robert Sloon talks to all of them and he does it in great BP style.

And finally, I talk to the creators of *Magazine Forté*, who will release the inaugural issue in September 2009 out of New York City. A sound magazine – an initiative of three young creative and innovative ladies.

The book section is all about *Artoons* by Pablo Helguera. This book is the kind of material that has been missing from our art book collections.

In this issue, I took advantage of all thirty pages at my disposal, no ads, no special pages – I gave this material the room it deserved.

As for now, I'd like to tell you that the next issue will be available in 2010. I will give my team and myself some much needed time off, to rest. For the next five issues, Boot Print will come back with a fresh look, a new structure, a rejuvenated team, new advertisers, with a face lift of sorts.

So, dear Boot Print readers we look forward to returning to you in the new year with the NEW and ever better **BP!**

## Note from Juan William Chávez

Director

Kicking off the fall 2008 exhibitions were great examples of the diversity and varying degrees of exhibitions that Boots organizes as part of our mission to stimulate a creative dialogue between the Saint Louis art community and the contemporary art world. The first show was an installation by Serkan Ozkaya, an internationally recognized artist from Istanbul who premiered his installation *A Sudden Gust of Wind* at the gallery. He later recreated this piece at Cabinet in Brooklyn, NY as part of a group show curated by Regine Basha titled *A Series of Coincidences*. On the other side of the scale, Boots has embraced local artists and provided opportunities for emerging curators, such as Cole Root who curated the second incarnation of our *Slinger* series. The purpose of the *Slinger* show is to highlight St. Louis-based artists and celebrate the strength of the local arts community. Once again, "*Slinger II*" was the most highly attended exhibition of the year, showing St. Louis' abundant enthusiasm for our local artists, and serving as evidence of the necessity of Boots' mission.

In addition, Boot Print has similarly worked to build a bridge between St. Louis and the international arts community, specifically through its inclusion in the *Heartland* exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (4 Oct. 2008 – 8 Feb. 2009), Netherlands. The publication was included in an exhibit of various printed materials that were meant to represent the most intriguing endeavors taking place in the Midwest. We were proud that Boot Print was the only publication chosen to represent St. Louis.

Our recently awarded non-profit status has allowed us to build on these successes by taking advantage of grant opportunities through the Regional Arts Council and the Missouri Arts Council. From MAC, we received a capacity building grant, which has allowed us to purchase two new computers, which will allow us to improve our bookkeeping, membership, archival tasks, as well as strengthening our publicity and communications efforts so that we can bypass the mainframe and hack into the system (just kidding). But in all seriousness, money remains a pressing concern for the Boots organization, and we hope you will consider becoming a friend of Boots through a financial contribution; directions as to how to donate to boots can be found on the back page of this issue. I'd like to thank MaryJo Maliekel, a student from Boston College, and Katherine Jolliff from Tulane University, Boots' super summer intern posse who have rocked the Boots universe by jumping into the deep of space by helping out with exhibitions, fundraising events, and maintaining the daily operations. They are two very talented young ladies that will be for hire upon their graduation. I would also like to thank Tom Friedman, whom I interviewed for this issue, for being generous with his time.

In closing, I would like to recognize the passing of a local and national art icon, futurist artist Ernest Trova. Having met him just months before his passing, I was struck by his youthful and playful demeanor, and felt that I was in the presence of someone who had lived their entire life as an artist. **BP**



Above: Boot Print readers during the *Heartland* exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 2008.

# Serkan Ozkaya: A Sudden Gust of Wind

by Elizabeth Wolfson



Above: *A Sudden Gust of Wind*, Installation view, Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO, 2008.

Serkan Ozkaya is a conceptual artist based in Istanbul, Turkey and we're here to talk about his installation entitled *A Sudden Gust of Wind*, which was shown at Boots Contemporary Art Space from October 3-31, 2008. Ozkaya's work, which addresses issues of appropriation and reproduction, has been featured in group shows such as PERFORMA07 and the 9th International Istanbul Biennial. His most recent solo exhibition, *Dear Sir or Madam*, was held at Slag Gallery in New York. He holds an M.F.A. from Bard College, New York, and a Ph.D. degree in German Language and Literature from Istanbul University, where he also earned his B.A. and M.A. Beyond his career as a visual artist, Ozkaya is also a prolific author. His published texts include *Genius and Creativity in the Arts: Schoenberg, Adorno and Thomas Mann* (Pan Publications, Istanbul, Turkey 2000), *It's Not What it Looks Like! I can Explain* (Baglam Publications, Istanbul, Turkey 2003), and *No, No, It's Not Working, I Can't Do It* (Art-ist Publications, Istanbul, Turkey 2006). He also co-authored *Have you ever done anything right? Willoughby Sharp interviews Serkan Ozkaya* (Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany 2006). In 1999, Ozkaya founded a chain of storefront art spaces called SlideShow Galleries in Copenhagen, Istanbul, and Hudson, NY.

Speaking via Skype, Ozkaya sheds light on his process, the ideas behind the piece's conception, and its connection to his past work.



**Serkan Ozkaya:** Maybe I should tell you more about the sort of history or the story of how I came up with this idea.

**Elizabeth Wolfson:** That would be great.

**SO:** In fact, I was looking for a sculpture which was easy to reproduce. My initial aim was to actually make a sculpture, which could be mass produced easily and cheaply and then, if possible sold at supermarkets or something like that. The trick is that the viewer or the buyer, if you wish, or the customer or the art lover should actually recognize the quality of the sculpture in the first instance. You would know that this sculpture, that this is sort of "high art", not just a worthless object, but something which could also be at a museum.

**EW:** So, a step above a ready-made, basically?

**SO:** Yes. So what I came up with was this idea of these sort of flying papers and I made it in one piece, actually, and then I realized that it was almost impossible, that was very hard to do. So how I made it was I attached all those strings from the ceiling to the floor. A couple hundred of them or maybe less.

**EW:** It was quite extensive.

**SO:** Yeah, and after that, you know, I made a grid with all those sort of invisible threads or whatever you call them. They enabled me to work sort of three dimensionally with all those papers. So it wasn't like hanging the papers, but it was more like working in the grid with those and arranging those papers – I didn't cut the strings after I glued the paper in it. My idea was to sort of work in the space with some very cheap material and create something gorgeous or something, which would appear as large and somehow priceless. You know, on the one hand it's very cheap – the material is almost worthless. And on another, it creates sort of a spectacle that is more or less big and interesting and mesmerizing in some ways.

**EW:** I think that's absolutely accurate, it was really a gorgeous piece. Besides the inherent aesthetic beauty, it was enhanced, in my mind at least, by the fact that, as you say, it was completely created out of this cheap and readily available and just sort of every day material.

**SO:** Yeah, and so then I started to think about the title, you know what to call the work and then every time I come up with a new idea I am a little bit paranoid in that matter because at least in Istanbul, whenever you come up with some kind of work of art there are a lot of people waiting to say that this particular work had been done before by some other artist. I guess there are people like that everywhere.

**EW:** Absolutely.

**SO:** Yeah. So, I started to sort of look into other people's

works like who have come up with similar ideas and then of course, I knew of Jeff Wall's photograph<sup>1</sup>. I think my mind operates like that. Always keep referencing to some other ready titles, works, materials, whatever. I keep quoting things. I keep referring to already existing things instead of creating something totally unique. I guess I am not really interested in that much.

So, anyway, I decided to call it *A Sudden Gust of Wind* because I think it's a really cool title. I also admire Jeff Wall's picture. I also admire Hokusai's engraving and I think they really make sense, but to be honest my work wasn't... Well, maybe it was, but consciously it wasn't really derived from those pictures, but you know, it doesn't really matter. It's just... it's just another move in that kind of space, I think.

**EW:** That almost makes it more fascinating somehow, that it wasn't a conscious move, perhaps mostly because--I don't want to say it imitates, but it engages with a work that's engaging with a preexisting work. It adds another layer.

**SO:** Yeah, yeah, you are right, and probably I had that in mind as well, but you know, it was more like a play with whatever I had handy, like white sheets of paper and some strings. And that's how it came up, but then of course, I picked at it and then I started to think in terms of the discourse, the conceptual context.

**EW:** This is one aspect I was interested in, because researching your previous work, I came across all the pieces that have been written about your *David*<sup>2</sup> sculpture in Istanbul, and then reading the interview that you did with [Willoughby] Sharp, talking about Duchamp and the Ready-mades. And I thought to myself, okay, this is following in sort of this previous line where there was a conscious engagement with previous works, previous artists, maybe commentary on art history a little bit—

**SO:** Definitely, 100%, yes.

**EW:** So I just assumed that that was what was going on in this work.

**SO:** Yeah, maybe it is. I don't know.

**EW:** It was interesting with Wall, because it seemed like he was the first artist that was still alive that you were engaging with.

**SO:** I actually did, um, remake some other works by Christo, for instance.

**EW:** Oh, I wasn't aware. When did you—what piece was that?

**SO:** I did wrap a few things after Christo, like a car in '96 and '97. Then the next year I think I applied to the German parliament to wrap the Reichstag, wrap the parliament building after.

**EW:** You do a lot of applying. You do a lot of letter writing and applying.

**SO:** It was only for fifteen days or something, and I wasn't there in Berlin to see it, when Christo and Jeanne-Claude did it.

**EW:** Right.

**SO:** So I wanted to see it in fact.

**EW:** Hey, look, you don't make 100% of the shots you don't take, you know.

**SO:** Exactly.

**EW:** I was interested in your installation process because, on the one hand, the piece seemed so effortless. It seemed so like perfect and effortless and very Zen. I'm curious if the installation process was actually like that. Or was it like really difficult and complex? What was it like for you to actually string up all like 300 pieces of paper?

**SO:** I think it's in between. It wasn't really effortless and it wasn't really that difficult, I guess, but I kind of like that kind

of tension and this kind of double impact on the viewer, let's say, when you feel it, you're like, oh my god, how did he do that? And then at the same time, oh my god, it looks so easy or looks so simple or in some ways. But you know, if I should talk like technically, I should say that's precisely the impact I'm aiming for. Because on the one hand there is this visibility of the effort, of the labor, let's say. And although I did that in two days or three days, which is a fairly short amount of time, given what goes into some paintings, artists who work on their paintings for years.

**EW:** Oh yeah.

**SO:** You look at the painting and you never say, how could he work so many years on this? But you just see this one painting because you don't see the labor, but in this work, for instance, I'm trying to make it apparent that there is some kind of labor behind it, although that labor is not much, in its own ways obsessive, and it creates this painstakingly elaborate kind of effort that somebody has given to that structure. And then on the other, it all should look so effortless and all sort of normal or natural, as if... And I think that's one of the reasons that why people keep attaching the situation of imitation there, as if it is a 100% correct replica of Jeff Wall's picture or Hokusai or a real... as if I made one picture of the actual event, like all those papers flying in the air and then I imitated that so that this looks so, sort of real and effortless and simple and natural. But I think it's a cartoon at the same time. It's not... I don't think it's real. I don't think it would be the same thing in reality anyhow.

**EW:** If there was an actual gust of wind that disturbed 300 sheets of paper.

**SO:** Yeah. It would probably look very dull, you know, the actual thing. **BP**

<sup>1</sup> Willoughby Sharp, *Have You Ever Done Anything Right?*, Kunst-Blog, [http://kunst-blog.com/2006/08/have\\_you\\_ever\\_d.php](http://kunst-blog.com/2006/08/have_you_ever_d.php)

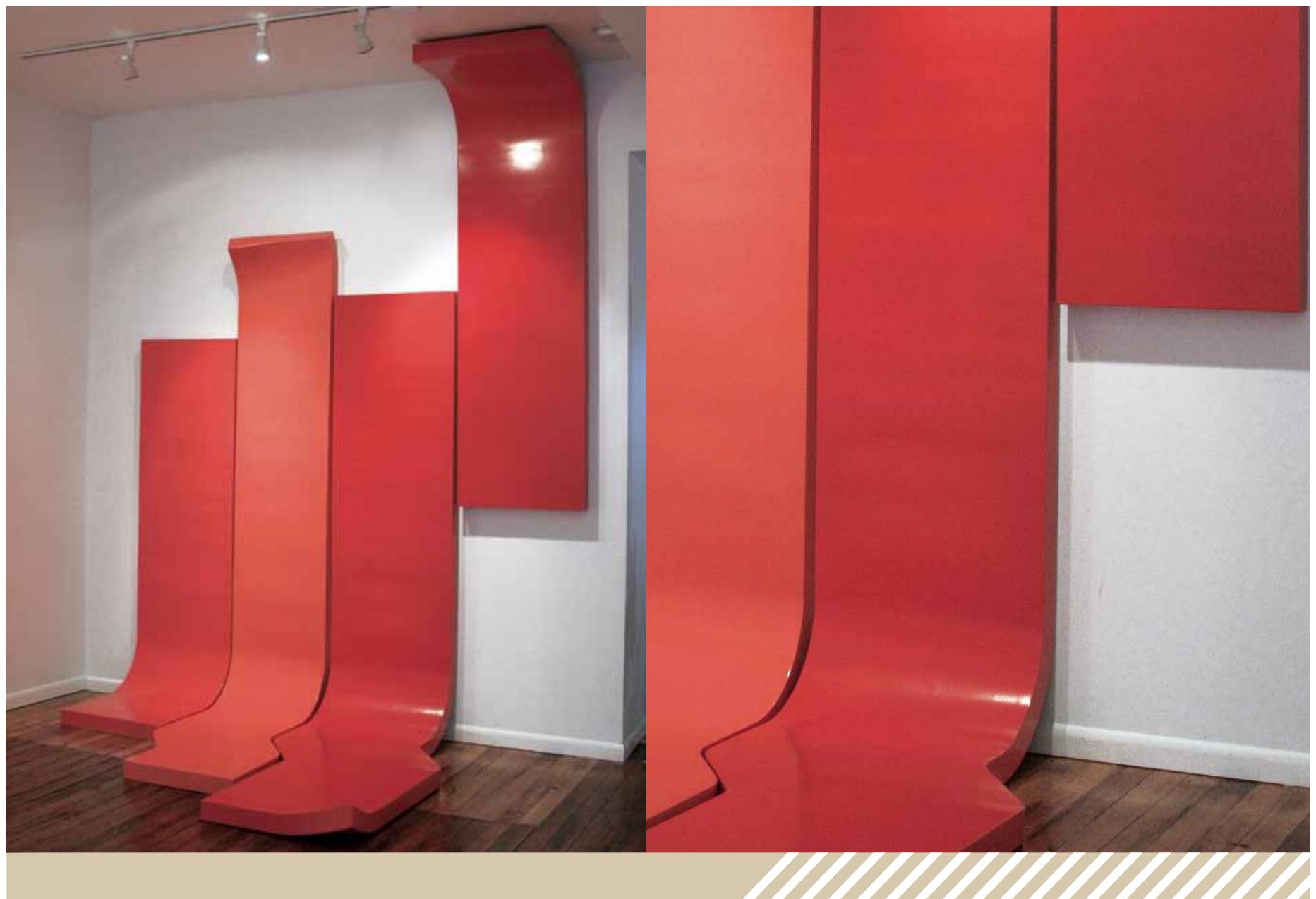
<sup>2</sup> The piece referenced here, a larger than life 3D facsimile replica of Michelangelo's *David* was created for the 9th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun in 2005.



Above: Serkan Ozkaya, Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO, 2008.

# Slinger II

by Juan William Chávez



Above: Jorge Calvo, Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO, 2008.

This year's *Slinger* show was the second exhibition in this annual series that celebrates St. Louis artists. The name *Slinger* is taken from the local late night diner delicacy of the same name, a combination of eggs, hash browns, onions, and cheese that is then smothered in chili. At Boots we were inspired to name the series after this dish because the *Slinger* has the unique ability to either cure whatever ails you, or kill you outright. Usually consumed in the company of friends after a late night of heavy drinking, it is a metaphor for the camaraderie experienced by those invested in the St. Louis arts community. Pulling up a chair to the table to partake in this year's *Slinger* was emerging curator Cole Root, who is currently the Exhibitions Manager at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Having talked with Cole in the past about his interest in curating, and having witnessed his success with a recent show at a local commercial gallery, I felt *Slinger* could provide a useful opportunity for someone looking to expand their professional experience. Doing so is in keeping with Boots' commitment to developing the quality of arts professionals in the St. Louis region, by providing

opportunities and support that might not otherwise be readily available.

Root comments, "Slinger gave me the opportunity to work with a gallery whose art-lab philosophy freed me from the pressures associated with a commercial space, allowing me to choose artists without interference. It's been a great springboard into being a more active participant in the St. Louis art scene." For example, Root just opened a show at Snowflake/City Stock, a gallery neighbor to Boots, just a few blocks west on Cherokee Street. Titled *A New Currency*, this show was organized in conjunction with the graduating MFA class of the School of Visual Arts in New York, whose concept was developed by *Prospect. I* curator Dan Cameron. The show is a great success, and we trust that Root has a bright future as a curator ahead of him.

The artists chosen to participate in this year's *Slinger* show included Elizabeth Ferry, Chris Vogt, Gina Alvarez, Shane Simmons, Michael Behle, Jorge Calvo, and Brian De Pauli. Elizabeth Ferry's installation of plastic, paper,

Plexiglas, reflective material, lights, fabric, and string filled the front gallery space, along with a painting of a biomorphic volcano. In the rear of the gallery, Jorge Calvo's Minimalist wall structure called to mind an Ellsworth Kelly piece melting off of the wall. Brian De Pauli's panel paintings of imaginary animals complemented the psychedelic notebook doodles on exposed wooden panels by Shane Simmons. Gina Alvarez showed collages of organic shapes (reminiscent of dongs and vaginas) suspended in space. Michael Behle's portrait of local phenomenon Clownvis (a persona that combines Elvis impersonation with clown magic) was the centerpiece of the rear space, commanding attention with its magnetic stare and giant red nose (honk honk).

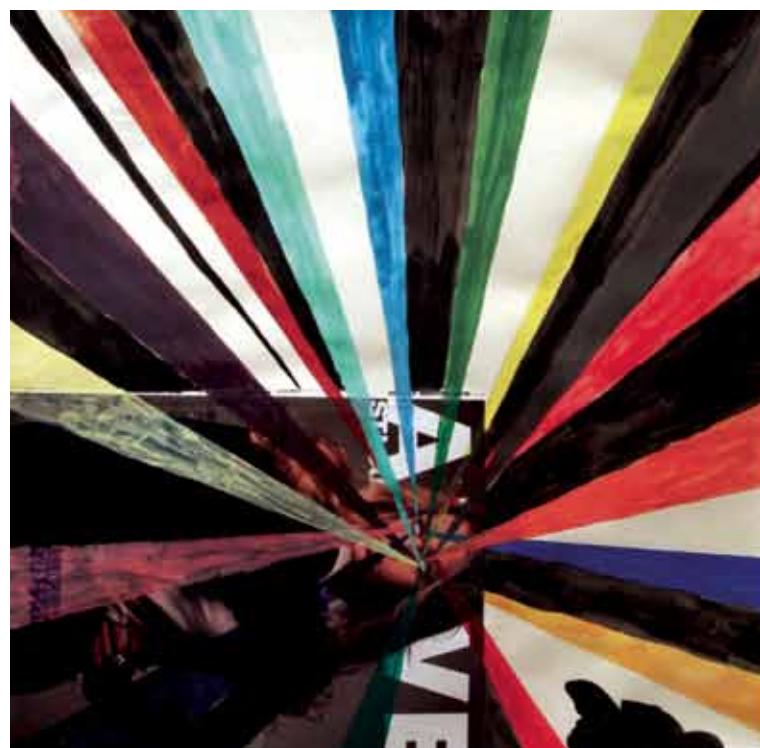
Root is to be commended on his ability to bring together such a strong group of artists, and demonstrating how much we have to gain by collaborating with other local curators. Due to the success of this show, which was the most highly attended of the year, we plan to continue this new tradition of inviting outside curators to take on future *Slinger* incarnations. **BP**



Above: Slinger opening at Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO, 2008.



Above: Curator of Slinger II, Cole Root with artist Elizabeth Ferry during the opening reception at Boots Contemporary Art Space, 2008.



From left to right: Michael Behle, Gina Alvarez, and Chris Vogt, Boots Contemporary Art Space, St. Louis, MO, 2008.

# Falling Man: Ernest Trova in Descent

by Matthew Strauss

A life-size bronze by the late American artist Ernest Trova once stood just outside of the Guggenheim's 5th Avenue entrance.

For more than twenty years Trova was represented by The Pace Gallery (now Pace Wildenstein), which inaugurated its first New York space with an exhibition of his work. In 1969 Ernest Trova was heralded by the New York Times as "among the best of contemporary American sculptors." Through the 1960s and 70s significant examples of his work were prominently displayed in The Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Walker Art Center and a dozen other major museums, and he was invited to participate in Documenta, three Whitney Annuals and three Venice Biennales.<sup>1</sup>

Despite that success, for the current generation of collectors, critics, and curators the eccentric art of Ernest Trova is almost completely unknown. Those who experienced the art world of the 1960s and 1970s firsthand probably recall Trova's once-famous *Falling Man* series, which used an armless, pot-bellied male figure as a standardized representation of modern humanity at its most fallible. When employed in paintings and prints Trova's anti-heroic *Falling Man* was depicted as a flattened silhouette repeated and repositioned within and around geometric environments. In three-dimensions *Falling Man* was typically realized in plated bronze or stainless steel and polished to mirrored perfection. Trova's *Falling Man* was for a time an ubiquitous icon of post-industrial distopia that could be seen everywhere from Philip Johnson's private gallery at his Glass House to the cover of Time Magazine. Today however, Trova's work is neglected in even the broadest art historical narratives of his time.

On its own there is nothing remarkable about one artist or another being relegated to the dustbin. Art history is littered with forgotten art and forgotten artists. Art has a long past and a selective memory, and it's not hard to imagine the pages of this month's *Artforum* being tomorrow's catalog of the obscure. Of course it's natural for careers to rise and to fall and settle somewhere distant from the peak, and an artist's reputation that enjoys anything other is the exception. The extent to which these stories are interesting is a matter of degrees; the higher the artist rises and the further he or she falls the more compelling their stories tend to be.

If that's to be used as any measure of interest it is hard to come up with too many career's that fell further, from higher up than Ernest Trova's, who went from the history books one day to shopping mall art galleries the next.

Born in 1927 in St. Louis, Missouri, Ernest Trova achieved his first small success at the age of twenty when Max Beckmann selected one of his paintings as the winner of the local museum's annual exhibition. When the president of the city's Artists' Guild publicly declared Trova's work fit only to "hang in an outhouse" the row that resulted landed the young artist on a full page in *LIFE Magazine*-- -- Trova and his partially dripped painting being featured in that mainstream publication almost two years before Jackson Pollock's star-making turn on the same pages. In the early 1950s he had personally sought out both Willem de Kooning and poet Ezra Pound, whose influences would heavily impact the young artist's developing philosophy. By 1959 Trova had identified what would become the central impulse of his mature work-- the serial use of invented abbreviations of the human figure, which developed for several years until he arrived at the perfectly elegant collection of human curves that would become his breakthrough construct, *Falling Man*.

Trova never lived outside his native St. Louis, and he had very little access to the social networks that determine so much of an artist's career trajectory. In spite of that his art was still finding a foothold in the New York art world, and by the early 1960s his paintings were being promoted by Ivan Karp, then the Director at Leo Castelli Gallery (and the same man who would be widely credited with discovering Andy Warhol at about the same time.) Karp introduced Trova's paintings to Arnold Glimcher, a young dealer whose small Pace Gallery in Boston was already exhibiting artists as diverse as John Chamberlain, Jean Arp, and Josef Albers.



Image courtesy Studio of Ernest Trova

**BARNET NEWMAN · A. KAPROW · D. FLAVIN  
D. JUDD · EARNEST TROVA.... discuss**

**ART·NON ART·ANTI ART**

**PANEL DISCUSSION MARCH 25, 8:15 PM  
RPI GYMNASIUM: IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
RPI SPRING ARTS FESTIVAL, MARCH 21-25**



Above: Poster for a 1965 panel discussion with Allan Kaprow, Barnett Newman, Donald Judd, Ernest Trova and Dan Flavin at the Richmond Professional Institute, Richmond, Virginia.

Synthesizing the manners of post-painterly abstraction with his figurative, almost ancient brand of classicism, Trova had come to a result in his initial *Falling Man* work that found considerable interest among both critics and collectors. An exhibition of Trova's paintings at the Pace Gallery in 1963 was successful, but his path to international significance would be set two years later, when Trova translated his *Falling Man* motif from painting into sculpture.

Realized in three dimensions and fabricated to an uncommonly high standard, *Falling Man* sculpture assumed an immediacy barely prefigured by the same image represented simply in profile. In both its walking and standing versions, early *Falling Man* sculpture most often used the variously scaled figures as starting points to be amended with repurposed and out of scale medical instruments, spoked wheels, and other castoffs of modern industry. Sculptures of a single *Falling Man* could very often project playful gravity, and when multiple *Falling Man* figures were configured around curious landscapes Trova's nostalgic Futurism seemed to gel into singular amalgams of Giacometti and de Chirico filtered through a memory of Art Deco.

The early sculptural work received strong notices and the exhibition sold out, with Alfred H. Barr, founding Director of the Museum of Modern Art, purchasing three Trova sculptures

from the show for MoMA. The most important private collectors in the country followed suit, including Larry Aldrich, Thomas Hirshorn, and Nelson Rockefeller among many others.

Udo Kulterman, who wrote the text for a large Abrams monograph on Trova's work, suggested that

*Falling Man* was to Ernest Trova what Mickey Mouse had been to Trova's idol Walt Disney;

a character capable of infinite physical and narrative flexibility, undergoing constant displacement and redefinition without losing its essence. Trova himself additionally described the *Falling Man* series as a single work-in-progress, with each work of art existing as if a single frame in a longer film. By the late 1960s, having established an adequate backstory for the image, Trova moved away from the assignment of *Falling Man* into ambiguous narratives toward single figures segmented and hinged into inventive new forms. With the new "hinged figures" the series' emphasis went from what could be described as a "*Falling Man* as Character" phase to a "*Falling Man* as Object" phase, although Trova's all-purpose everyman would never be fully absolved of either role (still always a character- still always an object.) Not unlike Morandi's jars, from

phase to phase *Falling Man* was less an end to itself than a stepping off point for Trova to address his increasingly refined formal and philosophical concerns.

Trova's reputation grew quickly once he arrived at his mature medium of sculpture. He remained represented by The Pace Gallery, exhibiting new work every couple of years within a roster of artists that came to include Jean Dubuffet, Louise Nevelson, Agnes Martin, Chuck Close, and the estate of Mark Rothko. But while Trova's art was highly popular it was also highly polarizing, and even as he became recognized as a leading figurative sculptor of his day he was an artist whose work some segments of the art establishment loved to hate.

Trova's art was not propelled by any critical theory as much as by his personal philosophy, and although it was often placed within the confines of Pop Art it was never a good fit within any movement. By the early 1960s Trova had mastered a brand of figuration that was anathema to the prevailing tendencies that had directly preceded and would follow it. Like much of what was viewed through the lens of Pop Art at the time, adherents of New York School abstraction would find as much fault with Trova's work as would the champions of post-painterly abstraction and minimalist sculpture that followed.

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While his advocates believed he had invented an extraordinary icon of dystopian humanity, his detractors often complained of the smaller sculpture's toy-like qualities and of fatigue with Trova's seemingly endless variations on the *Falling Man* theme. Not inclined to accept that whimsy and endlessness were both central to Trova's point and process, his harshest critics found Trova's studied classicism regressive, confused his fundamental seriality for a lack of progress, and viewed his chosen materials as too slick or a cheap thrill, rather than a dead-on expression of contemporary man's inseparability from his own time and technology.

Trova continued to refine his invented emblem, and by the early 1970s his work was as widely known as almost any contemporary art being made. Throughout the 70s his emphasis moved away from *Falling Man* to several new series of large-scale outdoor steel sculptures. Only occasionally incorporating identifiable *Falling Man* imagery, the new Profile Cantos, Abstract Variations and GOX series were distinguished, but in subtle ways, and were superficially similar to much of the sculpture being made at the time in the manner of David Smith and Anthony Caro. Of all of Trova's monumental sculpture only the partially figurative *Profile Cantos*, in which the artist bent and splayed the *Falling Man* silhouette over and around elemental steel shapes, effectively resonated with the philosophical strength and formal purpose that were central to Trova's most effective art.

"The left turn that the career took was with the flat fabricated pieces. It was too much like the lexicon of contemporary sculpture—it lost its identity. Those sheet metal pieces may have kept the image in some way, but it was so diluted they became Modernist exercises that were really the vocabulary of sculpture that already existed and that was really what happened to the work," founder and chairman of the Pace Gallery Arnold Glimcher remembered.<sup>ii</sup>

While the frequency of his output and exhibitions slowed through the early 1980s, Trova's reputation for his most well known work seemed secure, even if it was the kind of security generally assigned to an artist whose time had largely passed. He was still being included in good museum shows, his work was still in the standard contemporary art texts, and was still represented by Pace, which by that time had become one of the leading art galleries in the world. A 1980 show of Trova's newest work there prompted Grace Gleuck to write in the New York Times that his small series of sheet metal Poets were "at once subtle and compelling, they are easily the most interesting work of his entire oeuvre."

In 1985, at the age of 58, Ernest Trova's career seemed to have settled on the same plateau that so many artists do once the zeitgeist that brings them their initial acclaim subsides. In the few preceding years Trova's work

had been in shows at the Whitney and the Guggenheim, and while the time of his greatest relevance had clearly passed, he was an established artist with financial security and regular exhibition opportunities in New York and elsewhere. It would have been very easy for him to leave well enough alone, so when he abruptly announced that he was leaving Pace to enter an exclusive relationship with a novice dealer operating out of an industrial park in the St. Louis suburbs it shocked close associates and casual observers alike. Immediately there was speculation that Trova had been forced out of Pace, however both Trova and Pace's Glimcher dismissed that idea, each insisting that it was Trova's decision to end the relationship.

"Ernest Trova left Pace," Glimcher said emphatically.

"I had a personal conversation with Glimcher, and he said 'You don't have to do this, we'll just go on and on,'" I think he was very hurt by it," Trova said.<sup>iii</sup>

But in the wake of Julian Schnabel and other art stars of the 1980s arriving at Pace, Ernest Trova was far from a top priority and the idea that an artist in his position might switch galleries would have been unremarkable on its own. Artists frequently move from one gallery to another, and their careers and reputations more or less tend to travel along with them. But Trova's announcement was unusual, not only due to his new dealer's total inexperience and location far from the art centers of the world, but also the sweeping scope of the agreement Trova had entered into, which essentially granted total control of his work past, present and future to a man whose sum total of professional art experience had been publishing one limited edition print by Judaica artist Yankel Ginzberg.

The man that Trova had signed on with was Philip Samuels, a local sewing machine heir with no background in art but plenty of money and enthusiasm. In the highly irregular arrangement the two men concocted, Trova sold his new dealer virtually the entire contents of his studio in addition to extending Samuels the sole rights to all of his future output, for which the artist would receive a commission of ten percent. For his part, Samuels promised to produce anything the artist wanted to fabricate, funding the extensive production costs. Trova had been responsible for under his informal arrangement with Pace, as well as opening an exhibition space to display his work in St. Louis.

While the contract was unconventional it was not initially unproductive. With all of the new resources now at his disposal Ernest Trova returned in full to *Falling Man* sculpture, and unrestrained by the prohibitive costs of production that had very often been his de facto editor Trova produced some of his most complex meditations on his major theme. It was in many ways a second coming for the artist,

who took full advantage of Samuels's financing to produce more than twenty major works, arguably even overindulging in his sudden freedom to create, allowing a significant amount of sculpture to be produced in relatively large editions. Unchecked by the more savvy voices at Pace Gallery that had once guarded Trova's output, under Samuels's guidance any given sculpture would usually be issued in editions of eight plus two artist's proofs, and then in three different sizes, creating big inventories and a lot of pressure to sell work quickly.

"One of the things we were really worried about, [Falling Man] had so much recognition and appeal that we were really very protective of it and tried to make sure that it was not used commercially in a way that would denigrate it," said Richard Solomon, President of Pace Prints, the publishing arm of PaceWildenstein.<sup>iv</sup>

The artist's new representation did not demonstrate any similar restraint, and with Trova's endorsement additionally produced over 30 small table-top sculptures in editions of 99, releasing more than twice as many small-scale multiples in two short years than Pace had in the past twenty. Even though most of the editions were never completed, the perception of a huge supply had been cemented through an aggressive advertising campaign and a network of bottom-feeding galleries Samuels had cultivated to market the less expensive artworks.

However, tasteless advertising and over-production were the least of Philip Samuels's shortcomings as an art dealer, and stories of his ineptitude are well documented. One comical practice that Trova's new representative reportedly insisted on was collecting absurdly small cash deposits from collectors, having employees attach a single ten or twenty-dollar bill to an invoice for tens of thousands of dollars, immediately impressing many clients and colleagues with a deep sense of his uncouth. In another embarrassment to Trova, Samuels proved unable to secure a legitimate New York gallery willing to cooperate with him, and failing that arranged for a humiliating vanity show in a rented SoHo storefront against the artist's strong objections. At one point Samuels's own employees even accused him of tapping their phones.<sup>v</sup>

"I didn't take long to realize he wasn't the right guy," Trova said. "He didn't make a good impression with anybody that I ever heard of, and he didn't find somebody to take over the jobs he wasn't capable of doing... He was a buffoon. Within four months I was disenchanted with everything about him."

Pace's Richard Solomon met with Trova's new dealer in the wake of the transition, and agreed that Samuels made a lot of bad impressions in the art world, "...the general opinion of Mr. Samuels was he was in some other kind of industry, flogging art like a commodity. That he really had no knowledge of how to handle an important artist, that he himself was a little bit different, sort of strange, had very unformed ideas... it basically was unpleasant. People just basically really didn't want to do business with him..." Solomon said.

The bad news kept rolling in for Ernest Trova, and it always seemed to come back to his association with his new dealer. When an old associate of Trova's found himself directing a decent New York gallery, he arranged for a Trova exhibition, only to have the relationship fall apart when Samuels began writing nasty letters and consigning artwork at deep discounts to nearby competitors. Longtime gallery affiliations elsewhere dried up, citing the inability to work with Samuels. Most consequentially, Philip Samuels was also providing huge discounts on unscrupulously large volumes of Trova's art to third parties, losing significant control over what remained of the market for Trova's artwork to peculiar investors intending to resell it. Now, when Trova's name was still mentioned in legitimate art circles at all it was being dragged through the mud. The New York Times Magazine called Trova a "flop," and Jerry Saltz went out of his way to castigate Trova as being as bad as Mark Kostabi and Peter Max, two artists whose work Trova personally deplored.<sup>vi</sup>

Ernest Trova became deeply distressed by what he recognized as his rapidly deteriorating reputation. However, by that time even if he refused to authorize the production of another solitary sculpture, Samuels already had enough of his art in fabrication and from the purchase of Trova's studio contents that he could go on

marketing the work for years (if not decades) without the artist's cooperation. At the same time, Trova was contractually not allowed to make more than four artworks per year that wouldn't be the property of Philip Samuels's art operation.

Within a few short months of signing their deal Ernest Trova and Philip Samuels were barely on speaking terms, communicating almost exclusively through intermediaries, yet somehow their misbegotten arrangement was still able to continue for several years. The final straw didn't come until Samuels's refusal in 1992 to authorize the casting of a new group of bronzes left the artist trapped. Denied access to his fabrication facilities and contractually disallowed from producing the work on his own, Trova finally sued to be released from what had become an irreconcilably oppressive partnership.

What had been a remarkably bad arrangement was coming to a predictable end in court, and still no reasonable person could have predicted how much worse it would get. Unbelievably, the facts that would come to light in the course of the legal proceedings made all of the damage to Trova's reputation and career seem relatively minor.

As Trova's suit and Samuels's countersuit progressed, the discovery phase exposed what could be the among the greatest misdeeds ever perpetrated on an artist of any significance by those they had entrusted with their work.

Meticulous spreadsheets and hundreds of photographs revealed that Philip Samuels had been engaged in the surreptitious mass destruction of Trova's artwork over the course of several years. In all Samuels had ordered over 1,300 pieces of Trova's art to be destroyed, more than half of which were unique sculptures and paintings, all along paying the artist his commission on the decimated works as if they had been sold.

The photographs Samuels's gallery staff maintained to record their handiwork more closely resemble crime scene photographs than fine art documentation: early works sledge-hammered apart, bronze figures sawed into a dozen pieces, piles of trashed sculptures littering a concrete floor—substantial parts of a life's work literally rendered scrap.

Just as troubling as the destruction itself were the methods used to determine whether any given work of art would be allowed to survive. Samuels, with no art expertise of his own, would stage impromptu line-ups where he could solicit the opinions of his staff of warehouse workers and assistants.

"We would literally line the pieces up by groups, comparing them to other pieces, [putting] out sometimes a small group, sometimes larger groups... trying to figure out if there was a way to market the work, any commercial purpose, um, and also judging the aesthetics of the pieces individually," Samuels testified when deposed in the case.<sup>vii</sup> Trova himself was never present at any of these culls.

At other times, Philip Samuels offered different rationales for destroying Trova's art, citing his own inexpert opinions about the quality and significance of the objects he had determined to "edit," as well as stating that some of the works had been damaged. He also made claims that Trova had given him permission to destroy the works (a suggestion that Trova strongly rejected) but was unable to produce any documents or corroborating testimony to that effect.<sup>viii</sup>

The fact that the restoration of supposedly damaged works was never undertaken, and that any unwanted works were never returned to the artist or simply stored away might indicate other motivations to eliminate Trova's artwork.

"I really didn't do anything intentionally with the idea I was going to be writing things off on taxes, or I was going to be getting even with Mr. Trova or anything like that," Samuels said under oath.

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Above: *Study/Falling Man (Six Figures on a Cube/Jackman)*, 1968. Nickel-plated bronze. 11 feet in height. Collection Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York.



Above: Profile Canto II, 1973. Cor-Ten steel. 8'9" x 6'8" x 3'10".

However the circumstances suggest that the motivation to destroy Trova's less marketable art may have had a lot to do with the Federal tax code: Samuels had invested millions of dollars in the promotion and production of work by an artist who now refused to speak with him. At the same time the art market was in a severe downturn, hurting prices and demand, and leaving Samuels with significant tax liabilities. As the longtime operator of a large manufacturing business, it is difficult to imagine Mr. Samuels would not have been aware that Federal tax law allows for a hefty deduction on the value of "excess or obsolete inventory" that is destroyed, donated to charity, or sold to liquidators. Of those write-offs only the destruction of the art would remove their value from the books while at the same time assuring the unwanted artworks didn't ever come to market to compete with Samuels's ongoing financial interests. While

documents show that 1,371 artworks valued at \$3,545,350 (more than \$5,000,000 in 2009

dollars) were recorded to have been destroyed,

one is left to assume that it would have been unlikely for anyone not have written off these millions of dollars in "losses" when they were legally allowed to. If this were the case it would also explain the existence of the before-and-after photographs taken of each artwork's demise, which would potentially be needed to prove the destruction to the Internal Revenue Service. Unfortunately conclusive documents are not available, as Samuels's legal team was careful to have a protective order from the court preventing disclosure of the related tax records.

In 1994 the lawsuits were finally settled, Trova was released from the contract, and Phillip Samuels Fine Art sold the majority of its remaining inventory to a South African investor, who for the

past 15 years has trafficked Trova artwork through a number of the tawdriest kind of kitsch-art hustlers.

Embarrassing exhibitions were regularly organized in the artist's name, against his will and without his participation. Trova himself would not have meaningful gallery representation again in his lifetime.

"When Ernie left here he didn't go with another good gallery, which he should have. He should have gone with another New York establishment, but when you take yourself out of that you become a local figure," Arnold Glimcher said.

Perhaps, but even in his native St. Louis his reputation had been diminished to the degree that it went unnoticed when throughout the 1990s the local sculpture park, which Trova had been instrumental in founding, allowed many of his outdoor works to rot, and damaged many others with modifications and careless attempts at restoration. In 2005 a local critic singled out a Trova sculpture as "worst in show" when reviewing a group exhibition that notably included the artwork of several near-amateurs. A one point the St. Louis Post-Dispatch had to print a correction when it prematurely referred to him as "the late" Ernest Trova, and the city's free weekly felt inclined to publicly wonder if Trova had been a "hack" within days of his actual death. But in places other than St. Louis Ernest Trova was less abused and more simply just forgotten.

Late in his life Trova didn't complain about his dwindled stature in the art world as much as he lamented the destruction of particular pieces of his work that had fallen prey to the whims of his ex-dealer. Trova still painted, and he still made sculpture, but after the settlement of his contact dispute he never again made much effort to have his art exhibited, and except for a few small local shows allowed his new work to stack up around him.

For all the indignities heaped on his art, Ernest Trova was not perceptibly unhappy. He still dined out nightly with his wife Teddy, and he still relished in old blues recordings and his tenor saxophone.

Out of either a sense of resignation or some degree of gentility, Trova never publicly disclosed the details of the decision that effectively ended his career, allowing speculation and innuendo to even further shade his prospects. It was only in the last year of his life that he consented to an article detailing the debacle

and its consequences.

When asked about leaving Pace Trova was always quick to admit he had made a mistake, but would also point out that the sculptures he completed while under contract with Philip Samuels are in many ways among his strongest work, benefiting from the long distillation of his formal vocabulary and the improved fabrication techniques Samuels's financing afforded him.

"I thought I was doing the right thing at the time. The money up front was an incentive, and 'I'll make all the stuff you want to make.' I thought it could work..." Trova said.

Whether or not Trova's actions amounted to "selling out" is something that people have occasionally cared to debate, but there is no questioning the Faustian bargain he struck gave him the tools to make art he could not have made otherwise. It seems fair to say that no one would have imagined the scale of the fiasco that would result from his misjudgment.

And while Trova appears to have been victimized in many regards, it is important not to cast him as purely as a victim.

A significant amount of the blame for the folly that consumed his career must be ascribed to Trova himself, who for all his talent as an artist was somehow naive or reckless enough to entrust his life's work to a crass amateur.

It's equally important to remember that while Trova's public career imploded, his artistic output went on uninterrupted, and never ceased to reflect his incredibly refined inventiveness. Regardless, as it stands today Ernest Trova's art is in something akin to purgatory—the judgments of past art world generations losing currency with every day that goes by, and today's tastemakers unaware he ever existed.

For more than twenty years the marketing of Trova's art has been an impediment to the appreciation of the philosophical acuity that informed his most significant paintings and sculptures. As with most artists as prolific as Trova, his total body of work is uneven, full of fits and starts, but while his least interesting work may seem too casually conceived or too deeply connected to the years in which it was made, his best works are timeless, morose and uniquely comic expressions of the human condition.

Whether or not Trova's art will ever reemerge is anyone's guess.

"It doesn't mean that those early works won't come around again— I think they certainly will. They're wonderful works. But in the contemporary face of what's happened to the work there's less interest... As time continues I think those early works will become isolated as major works," Glimcher said in closing.

Maybe someday, after the witless peddlers who still hold so much of his art exhaust their hoards, the legitimate art world might rediscover Ernest Trova. No one will be surprised if that doesn't happen—but if it does people will certainly marvel at the circumstances under which it went so far away.

<sup>i</sup> While Trova was initially selected to represent the United States as part of three Venice Biennales (1966, 1968, and 1970) he never took part.

<sup>ii</sup> This and all other Arnold Glimcher quotes are taken from a recorded telephone interview in December 2003.

<sup>iii</sup> This and all other Ernest Trova quotes are taken from a recorded interview in late 2008, except where noted.

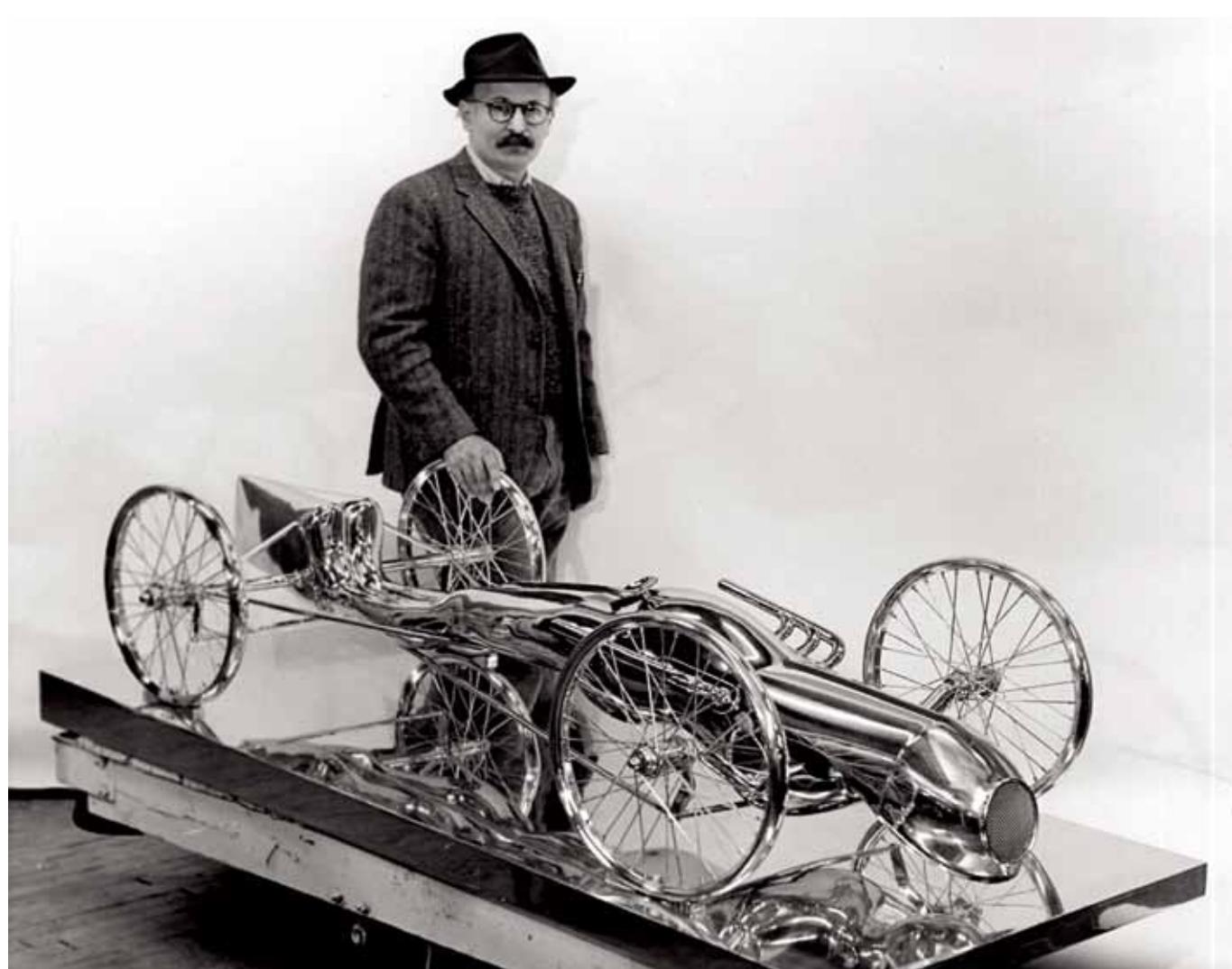
<sup>iv</sup> This and all other Richard Solomon quotes are taken from deposition transcripts recorded in 1993.

<sup>v</sup> These accusations are made in a letter dated July 11, 1991 to Trova from the then Director of Creative Affairs at Philip Samuels Fine Art.

<sup>vi</sup> "Arnold Glimcher and His Art World All Stars," The New York Times Magazine, October 1993, and "The Ten Commandments of Taste," Art & Auction, November 1992.

<sup>vii</sup> This and all other Philip Samuels quotes are taken from deposition transcripts recorded in 1993.

<sup>viii</sup> In 1986 and 1987 Trova had agreed to "donate or dispose of" 111 models and pieces of sculpture, and to the elimination of 182 prints that had been improperly signed. There is an important distinction to be drawn that signed documents were produced to authorize the destruction, and that the artist was not paid a commission. **BP**



Above: Ernest Trova in the late 1960s with Study/Falling Man (Carman).

# Talking with Tom Friedman

by Juan William Chávez

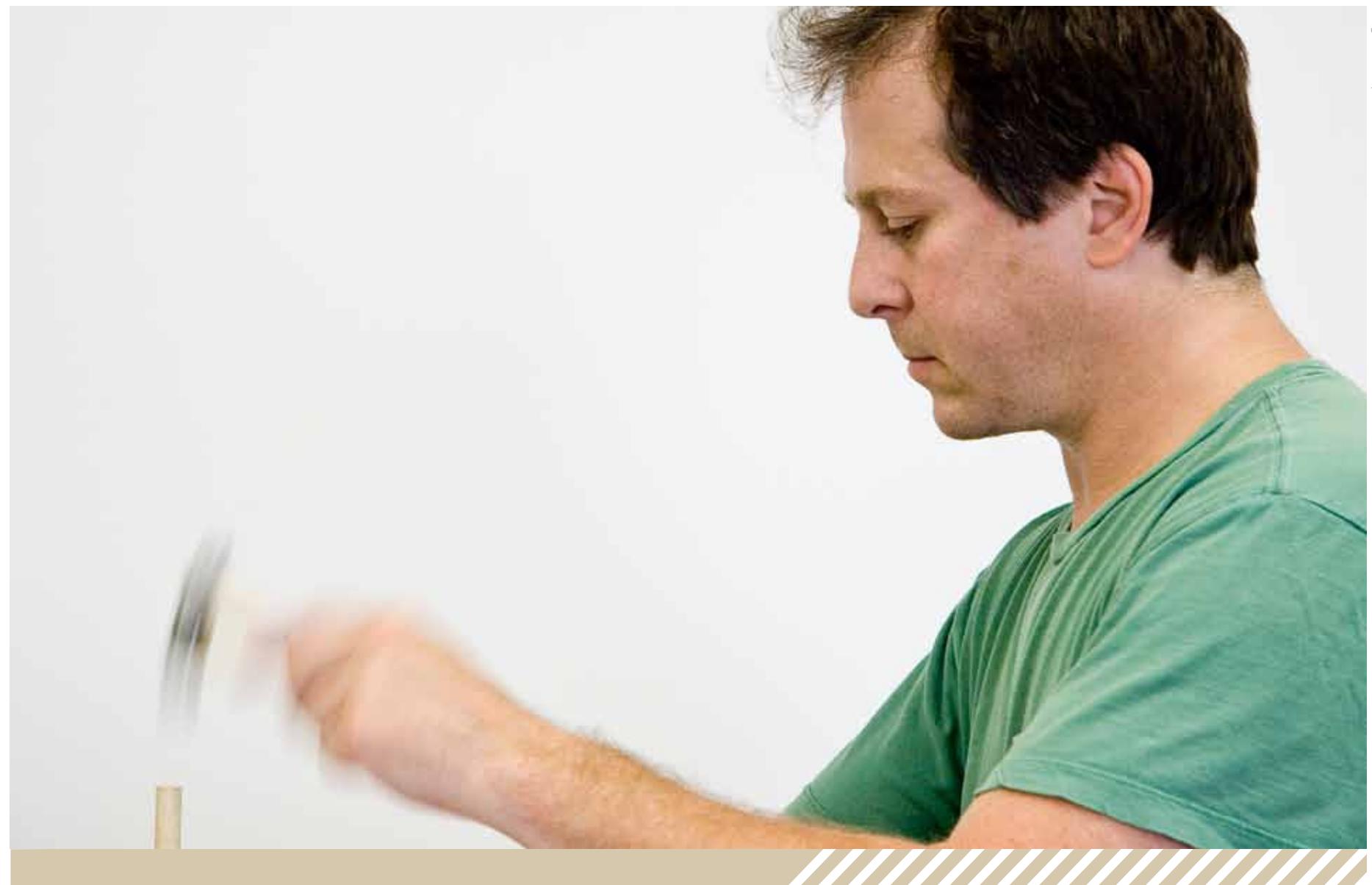


Image courtesy of Tom Friedman

Above: Tom Friedman at his studio, 2009.

Tom Friedman was born in St. Louis, MO in 1965 and received his B.F.A. at Washington University, St. Louis, MO (1988) and his M.F.A. at the University of Illinois at Chicago (1990). He has exhibited extensively in major museums and galleries throughout the world and has exhibited in London, UK, Rome, Italy, Geneva, Switzerland and Tokyo, Japan just to name a few cities. Friedman currently lives in Leverett, Massachusetts. 2009.

Tom Friedman's art can be connected to 1960s conceptualism, Arte Povera and minimalism but his vision and process goes beyond these art historical references and is more about the subtle systems that we encounter in our daily lives. Bypassing the art supply store and finding his inspiration in drugstores, candy shops, the human body, and the supermarket. Friedman zooms in on the everyday by selecting styrofoam, masking tape, pencils, toilet paper, spaghetti, toothpicks, aluminum foil, plastic trash bags and bubble gum to make his work. Changing nothing into something in a beautiful, Zen like, grotesque and playful manner is the name of the game. A game that Friedman has dominated since he stepped into the studio.

The featured conversation was taken from a recorded phone interview that took place in early February

**JWC:** This notion of white space: in 2001, I saw your retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. That was the only time I've really seen a lot of your work together and the work kind of bouncing off each other and having this dialogue. Have you ever exhibited in a non-white space? Does your work tend to function better in a blank environment?

**TF:** Yeah. At the Prada Foundation, which is much more of a kind of concrete type. Is that what you're thinking?

**JWC:** Or less institution and maybe if a place had a plaster crumbly wall or if the floor was...

**TF:** Yeah. At the Prada Foundation in Milan, I did a show and the space they had there was, all though it was immense, it was 15,000 square feet it was just all rough concrete with cracks in the floor. It looked like a truck depot and they way I installed my work was in a similar way, things would be on the wall, things would be on the floor so that when you went into the space initially you were confronted by the vastness of the space and the objects began to appear when you walked around and discovered them. The way someone would experience is by adventuring around aimlessly and discovering

something, the range in size was very small in comparison to the space, in contrast to Richard Serra, sculpture would sort of accompany the space in a way. I found that really interesting because it allowed the space to be how it was without any work and it just becomes like an adventure.

**JWC:** Early on as a young artist I encountered your work, learned about your work, and then discovered that you're from St. Louis. I've always kept you on my radar and followed your career. I am particularly interested in about the beginning of your career. For example: I found your early work to be almost intimate. I could almost imagine you being very close to the work, being very patient and putting it together and at that particular time I also saw that you were the type of artist who brought talent and skill back into the picture. It seems like a couple of artists at that time were doing that. I know you went to Washington University, now you went there for design, is that correct?

**TF:** For graphic illustration.

**JWC:** Where did this patience and talent stem from?

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**Juan William Chávez:** It seems like in every interview I look at there's this kind of epic decision when you're in grad school how you cleared out your studio and emptied it out and kind of contemplated different objects on a daily basis. I was wondering how does that differ from how you work now? Do you have an empty space on site or is that something you had to get you through that time?

**Tom Friedman:** Yeah! It was something that was like a point of departure and in my studios, I do have what I call a "viewing space", which is empty. It's not the kind of pristine space that I needed in the beginning but it was just a space where as I start to resolve my work I can bring them into the space and see how they play off each other. I still like to have a place where as I build up a body of work, I can see how my ideas progress in the work and how they work off each other. I kind of need that. I can't just make something and it not be placed in the kind of situation where it will ultimately be placed, in a sort of gallery setting on the wall. I have to see how it's finally going to live. In the beginning the wide studio space was more a way of creating a conceptual empty space in my mind to think about my work and to think about things. I don't need that anymore but that is how it functioned. In the beginning with that studio space, like I said before, it was a point of departure beginning from nothing. Obviously as I started to make more work, there becomes more and more stuff. Kind of like as you accumulate stuff in a house and you start placing things in the attic or the garage and storage and there is a point at which you have to go in and sort of purge things and clean things up, re-organize. It's kind of like that. That is sort of how it's changed, an accumulation of stuff, whether it's ideas or things.



Image courtesy of Tom Friedman

Above : Untitled, 1990, Marker pen on wall, 106.5 cm.

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**TF:** I guess I had always had that, even in undergrad when I was studying graphic illustration, I was studying more classical drawings and that was interesting to me. Also at the time I was involved in eastern philosophy and Zen Buddhism and meditation. In graduate school my meditation and artwork sort of fused together in that way for a while and that intimacy and craft seemed to grow out of ideas of precision and patience, repetition. I guess with that, that idea of meditation, focus, it was about conveying a focus. The craft and the precision weren't just for the sake of that, they grew out of trying to have these objects convey this sort of sense of a focal point. For some reason, I could approach something and develop craft out of it that grew out of these ideas, so I could approach a very new material and see where it wanted to go and think about its materiality and how to manipulate it and direct it to this sort of focal point.

**JWC:** Your one piece, *1995 Everything*, all the English words from the dictionary on a piece of paper and the 1990 piece, the artist signature repeated on a spiral on the wall—is this the type of activity that came out of your interest in Buddhism?

**TF:** Yeah, definitely. More specifically the spiral, which was about self and identity and one of the tenants of Buddhism is looking at what this sense of your self is and when you look at it more and more it sort of dissolves away and you have a deeper understanding of what constructs your ego and your identity, you have a different relation to it. *The Everything*, grew out of that as well but it started to become, especially at that time, kind of the information age was taking off and the inundation of information and I became in how that accumulation of information sort of derails you in a way. You have to look at meaning in a different way. You know how in MTV a barrage of information happens, because of the pace of the images you don't develop meaning or construct meaning for each of those pieces of images. You construct a meaning by stepping back and just looking at the barrage. Which also had stuff to do and ideas about Buddhism and emptiness and form and all of that.

**JWC:** In some of your recent work, it seems that there is a sort of faith theme, questioning faith maybe, with your *Gods and Wads of Paper* and *Gods 2*, maybe *The Lollipop Man*, your writing "humans suck". Could you talk a little bit more about that.

**TF:** I've dealt with belief systems in different ways. Like with *The Curse Above the Pedestal*, also having to do with the way I don't document certain pieces and so there is this sense of where did this come from? Wherever you establish your belief that sort of constructs your reality of what you're looking at. If you believe in the curse, it exists, if you don't it doesn't, or does it? What is that about? There is also the political climate. I think there was a lot of that, the more recent work grew out of the political climate and dealing with my frustrations with that and also with dealing with the environment that the works were being presented in. Working with Gagosian, it's a very different type of environment and the way people read work and that environment is different than in a more intimate space. I was playing with the way the space for this show functioned; it was a monstrous space. The show was called *Monsters and Stuff*. It's always about allowing myself to be sort of opened ended, so "monsters" and "stuff" are both sort of excuses for an open ended-ness. Monsters are figures but they have no form so it can be anything, and stuff is more things and like "yadda yadda yadda". I think as an artist, as one progresses as an artist there is this desire to be pigeonholed and to be stuck doing the same thing and sort of evolving within that. You accept it, you have sort of put yourself in a prison and I've always been aware of what that is, and for me art is about growing, learning and possibilities. I always look for ways to sort of allow myself to do many different things that interest me and I'm trying to have it become part of an evolving progression. As an artist you accumulate a history of what you do and if you do something completely different, people might be confused by it or it might work. It's sort of questions that as well.

**JWC:** In previous interviews you've talked about the concept of no rules and I guess this is where your creatures and monsters come out of. Like your 2007, *King Aluminum Foil and Box* and *Yarn Dog*. When I discovered Goya's prints and his kind of haunted-ness by monsters and things like that. Can you tell me about your relationship between monsters?

**TF:** Like you said, Goya was at a really horrible time in history and I just felt like that really paralleled where we are right now. There are many similarities. I think that in a way having that ugliness or monstrosity... I mean a monster is in a sense a mutation or the extreme of something. If you look at all of the monsters, they're just an extreme of something, whether it's hunger or a physical extreme manifestation and so it's interesting in such an extreme time to then do that but turn it back in on itself so that it's a way of looking at where we are right now.

**JWC:** You've talked about 'the bug in the system.' You kind of have a fly, dragonfly, grasshopper, bee and spider. What does each insect mean to you or if they have meaning or if they're all part of the same system?

**TF:** It started with the ball of feces on the pedestal and the curator sent me a photograph of a cup they had to place over the feces because flies were buzzing around and they sent me a picture of a fly on the pedestal. That gave me the idea of trying to sculpt the fly and that made sense because I've been dealing with these sort of logical progressions, playing around with logic. Like what do you do with a pencil? You shave it. What do you do with erasers? You erase with them. Toilet paper? You

roll it. I was playing upon the logic that the materials and the object created around itself.

Thinking about the bug, the fly, the house fly made sense with its household materials and its common-ness but it was also interesting for me, this idea of a computer program where you have to construct the code to follow this logic and if you get a bug in that computer program it disrupts the logic. That was also a thought that was going through my head. It started with the fly and it moved. Because it grew out of this mutation of the feces to the fly, which made sense that grew then turned into the dragonfly, which was introducing fantasy, because I started to think about fantasy. The idea of the dragonfly and the colors and fantasy that it's associated with, the fantasy then grew more dichromatic with the connection between the pieces, which is where the spider came from and thinking about spinning a web of connection. The bees. That was in the context of thinking about the idea of being, like the bugs, a being. The show that it was in had two figures, one was kind of a ghostly figure suspended made out of sticks, wooden sticks and the other was this horrendously mutilated figure on the floor, all the walls were covered with a swarm of 100 bees that I made. You go in and it was very jarring because you're like...did this artist put all these bees here? It put you right back to yourself, kind of like this adrenaline. The grasshopper was a commission and commissions for me are very faux, and so there was something about Pinocchio, the grasshopper sits on a faux piece of wood so there's something about Pinocchio and Gepetto and whatever the grasshopper's name is. They all have some sort of meaning in context.

**JWC:** You've been a family man for quite sometime and I know you have a little boy, how does being a father and being in a family affect your work? Especially the one in 2002-2006, *Mary Piece*, a magazine of portraits and *Care Package*, which I'm guessing is you and your little boy on a bike.

**TF:** Yeah, I was teaching him how to ride a bike.

**JWC:** What is your relationship with the family and then your studio practice and your family being involved in actual pieces of work?

**TF:** Initially my son and I were, my wife right now is my second wife. My previous wife whom I had my son with, my studio practice was very different then it is now, we were both artists and a lot of conflict arose. I would say she wasn't the most supportive person in the world, so I sort of fought for my time, which was difficult. Now, I'm in a relationship with Mary, who is sort of the quintessential sole mate and she is very supportive and an amazing person. Having a family and being with kids is really amazing. You get to sort of review your life a lot through that. You remember things and the situations that they're in when you were their age or about their age. It is an intense experience, this idea of reviewing and kind of re-thinking things and being able to convey that to them to help them is really amazing. Do you have kids?

**JWC:** Well, no. One reason why I moved back to St. Louis from Chicago is because my sister just had two kids. One is 2 and the other is 1. Especially when looking at your work when it came to Monsters, because right now my nephew Mate is obsessed with monsters and he is really intrigued by fear. He'll say stuff like, "I'm scared of this but, it's ok" and he will want to be next to it.

**TF:** Yeah. Yeah. My son was obsessed with monsters and drawing and that's where a lot of it came from as well. I think that's a way of dealing with your fears. You know? My son used to say, "draw something scary for me," it was his way of being in control and pushing out and figuring out what you're afraid of and trying to work that out.

**JWC:** It was really interesting to see, this is the first time I've ever been close to an infant and watching it closely and slowly become aware of the world and seeing in the beginning that they don't know what fear is.

In Gagosian's book Tom Friedman; Arthur C. Danto said that you didn't mind telling people how things were made.

**TF:** No. Not at all.

**JWC:** This is the end of the interview and it's going to be called "How's it Made Tom?" There are three pieces and I want to know how they were made. *The Three Wads of Paper on a Paper Shelf*.



Above: *Three identically crushed pieces of paper set on a paper shelf*. Private Collection, London, UK.

**TF:** That was actually made by taking three wads of paper, pieces of paper and put them together and wadded them. Then I had to open them up slowly. I separated them then I had to label them. I started to wad one of them and I noticed where one piece would go so it was very systematic. You can just un-wad it and re-wad it and it will look like what it was. So I had to be very systematic so with inside that piece are all these a,b,c,d, you know this systematic kinds of tension, which you can't see because they're meant to be on the inside so I would do it to one, start folding the first one gently and figure out where the lines of tension were and where it became tangent to itself and then I would duplicate that on the other ones. I would locate those points and do that and I would continue the process until it had that sort of feel that it was wadded tightly.

**JWC:** How long did it take you to do that?

**TF:** Let me think. Probably a couple of weeks on and off.

**JWC:** The next piece is *Vomit, Styrofoam and Paint*.



Above: *Vomit*, 2006, 29 X 79 X 48 inches. Glued Styrofoam balls and paint. Collection of Steve and Alexandra Cohen.

Image courtesy of Tom Friedman

**TF:** What I found that I could mix Styrofoam balls with paint and then I could mold them into a form and let it dry and add more of it to it and build the form up that way. The white of the figure is made with Styrofoam balls and white paint and then the vomit coming is an accumulation of Styrofoam balls that I painted in different colors that I then glued together.

**JWC:** Is it kind of like your kind of making a mush?

**TF:** Yeah. You just take a jar of white acrylic paint and you pour it in a bucket and then you pour the Styrofoam balls in and you mix it up and you can use it like spackle and build something up.

**JWC:** So that's all Styrofoam? There is no metal armature or anything? Do you use metal armature for your pieces?

**FT:** No. Some of them I do. I usually use like a wooden armature or Styrofoam armature.

**JWC:** Like your *Aluminum Guitar Player*?

**TF:** Yeah that needed an armature.

**JWC:** Ok, this is the last piece that I want to know how was made. *The Untitled Thread Eye with Hair*.



Above: *Untitled* 2003, 4 X 22 X 14 inches. Wrapped cotton thread of varying colors. Collection of Susan Hancock, New York and California.

Image courtesy of Tom Friedman

**TF:** It's just a ball of thread that I made. You make a ball of thread then I embroidered the eye into it using different color threads and then the hair is sewn through. If you have a ball it creates Xs so you can just sew in to it and come out. That's how it was made. It's all completely thread all the way through.

**JWC:** Do you construct most of your work or do you have assistants helping you on your work?

**TF:** Assistants who help me with the ingredients and with things that I feel that I don't need to do. More of the kind of grunt work. It's good because it allows me to then step back and think about it in a different way. It's very helpful for me.

**JWC:** Very good! Tom, It's been a pleasure. Thank you for taking the time to talk with Boot Print. **BP**

# Larry Krone

by Brandon Anschultz



Larry Krone is an artist and performer who grew up in St. Louis and is currently based in New York. I first met with Krone during the production of his 2006 exhibition *Artist/Entertainer* at the Contemporary Art Museum-St. Louis. We became fast friends during the run-up to and production of the exhibition and subsequent performances around that exhibition. In addition to the Contemporary STL exhibition, Krone has also participated in group exhibitions at the Portland Art Museum, The Whitney, and at the New Museum of Contemporary Art. Krone's work blends elements of performance with handcrafted costuming and props.

From an early point in his career, Krone has drawn inspiration from both the aesthetic and lyrical content of country music, the form of his homage varying from work to work; sometimes he is the lonesome balladeer, sometimes he is the leader of a family band. A quintessential Larry Krone prop/object are his *Underpants of Many Colors*, a reference to the Dolly Parton song *Coat of Many Colors*. For this interview, we had several conversations via Facebook chat, which are synthesized below for you.

**Brandon Anschultz:** Good morning!

**Larry Krone:** Well good morning Ms. Anschultz!

**BA:** Are you ready to dive in? I have my Barbara Walters style soft focus lighting.

**LK:** I'm promising myself I won't let you make me cry!

**LK:** But if you do I'll look in the mirror and describe it to you

**BA:** Perfect

**BA:** Tell our readers about your background.

**LK:** My parents are both from Chicago, and I was born there, but I moved to St. Louis when I was about one. I went to school all the way through the university public school system. In high school I took one studio art class and one really good art history class, but I was much more involved in the music program there. I did write and draw cartoons and illustrations for the school paper, though. Outside of school, I was playing tenor and baritone saxophone in a band called first The Fuzzy Pumpers (my choice of name) and then Blank Space. We played out a lot and sometimes opened for big name bands. The best as far as I remember was the Red Hot Chili Peppers. When we parted ways, I sat in with other bands here and there.

I was also active in visual art stuff outside of school. When I was little, my mother started taking drawing classes from Leslie Laskey, and he became a family friend. In high school years I started tagging along on Laskey's summer "art camp" retreats in Manistee, Michigan. Also, in my last couple of years of high school I started dating an older girl who was a really good artist and active in the St. Louis art scene. That scene was exciting to me. It was fun, and people made big events out of art openings. I remember following searchlights to find the galleries!!! The kind of work I was seeing then—big paintings, mostly—became my model at the time for what I considered legitimate art to be.

Anyway... after high school I stayed in St Louis and shared a small basement studio with two friends where I tried to get into painting. I did produce some paintings that I'm not completely ashamed of, but what I mostly did there was drink and waste time, procrastinate and avoid working on my paintings, and instead made joke projects like a mobile made from a Barbie Activity Book, clothes hangers, and magic markers.

**BA:** It sounds like you were already finding your voice, even then...

**LK:** Yes, I really was, but I wasn't aware of it. At that age and with no real sense of having an audience or anyone interested in my work, the little projects were completely just silly diversions. Totally unselfconscious but very entertaining to me.

**LK:** At my parents' insistence, I did apply to colleges, and I ended up going to NYU after having one year in St. Louis after high school.

**BA:** Did you go there to study art? Music?

**LK:** Art. I brought my saxophone, and tried playing with a ska band when I first moved here, but it was too hard to practice in New York apartments, and plus I hated the band.

I hate ska and I will go on record as saying that.

**BA:** I do as well; I was disappointed in you for a second... What was your focus in studying art?

**LK:** I really did not want to be in school and had no agenda or career aspirations, so my attitude about the art classes was pretty loose. The slant at NYU then was very 1960's/1970's non-object, conceptual, performance, and minimal type art. Happenings, Fluxus, etc. Joseph Beuys was everyone's hero.

**BA:** Was that when you first began performing?

**LK:** Since I had no agenda, I saw my advisor a lot and got him to substitute some of my required core classes for graduate seminars and phony "photography" classes, which were actually freeform discussion/reading groups with loose art assignments.

I was into performing, and interested in pushing my own boundaries... doing things that embarrassed me just to see if I could do it. Also I love to dress up and I always kept a supply of wigs and crazy things to wear just for going out. But the costumes also made their way into some art-type performances. There is a particular pair of gold sequined underpants that have been with me since high school days. They predated my *Underpants of Many Colors* for the inevitable strip down portion of my show.

I wore those gold underpants for Halloween that first year in New York, then in an art performance at school based on Milli Vanilli's *Blame it on the Rain*, then I think that same year in my *Changing Clothes* video. Then later in all of my stage shows... sorry just reminiscing

I saw a place for myself in that realm.

But I still had it in my head that art had to look like something specific in order to be considered for discussion. I was resisting showing my true self in my work... the funny stuff and silly projects like the Barbie Activity book.

**BA:** The first piece of yours that I saw was in the stairwell at the Forum for Contemporary Art in St. Louis, probably in 2002. It was the phrase I will always love you written over and over up the three flights. That song is also prominently featured in other pieces of yours. What's so special about that song?

**LK:** There is a lot wrapped up in that song for me, and in a way, those lyrics written over and over has become my mark. I first noticed that song when I was really confused about the appeal of country music to me. It was in a really rowdy bar in New York called the Village Idiot where the whole jukebox was country music...

**BA:** It's also a drag standard, right?

**LK:** Maybe now because of Whitney Houston's version. The song used to seem to me like a country oldie that only real Dolly Parton devotees loved. That's probably one of the reasons the drag performance I saw of it at a bar called Gabriel's in St. Louis was so powerful.

I wasn't writing songs at all at the time, but I was interested in the structure of the song. I was really confused by the chorus being just the phrase AND I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU over and over again. That kind of repetition really appealed to me and was already evident in a lot of the artwork I was making.

**BA:** That song is a good one. Really straightforward - simple message. Kind of a perfect song about what? Loss and love? Hope?

**LK:** It's really a goodbye song.

The sincerity of it ultimately comes through, but there is plenty of opportunity to doubt it,



Above: One of Krone's first live performances was in a hotel bathroom. Larry Krone's Bathroom Jamboree May 2, 1997 at Gramercy Park Hotel, New York.

which is one of the things I love about it.

**BA:** You mention confusion about liking country music, which is interesting considering what a large role it plays in both your performances and in the objects that you make. When did you first start listening to it?

**LK:** When I was in high school, my girlfriend at the time and her circle of friends were really into classic country. I didn't get it at all. But when I moved to New York to go to NYU, I started going to the Village Idiot and it kind of reminded me of home because of her but also in a totally imaginary way. I also started to associate it with good times at the bar (GREAT times, really, involving way too much Pabst). I looked for country on the radio and started listening to it. But the music on the radio wasn't rowdy, drinking music. It was contemporary country, which was a lot

of ballads and sentimental songs. I loved it and that totally confused me.

**BA:** Is it the sincerity? The deviance?

**LK:** I think so. I think giving into it was the beginning of a theme for me... if something is easy to like, why not let yourself like it? Just because it seems unsophisticated and obvious doesn't make it bad. (Country music is not actually unsophisticated, but it seemed that way compared to all the hi-falutin art theory I was immersed in at school.)

It also was the beginning of me looking into my own masculine identity. I related to the male country singers and admired their confidence in being so showy about their emotions... especially emotions like sadness and regret. The most typical masculine traits like aggression, love of sports, etc. always left me

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Above: Krone's most revealing (and most popular) costume Underpants of Many Colors 2003. Fabric, embroidery floss, elastic, rhinestones, label 12 1/2 x 17".

feeling very separate from other men, but these brooding sentimental sides made me feel included.

**BA:** Your performances have this earnest sincwabout them, which I like, but I find the same qualities in country music to be suspect. I don't know if that's a question or just a bias on my part.

**LK:** I think true character comes through even in the most hoaky shicks onstage. And in music, especially country/folk/singer/songwriter-type music, it seems very important to be honest and authentic.

To me the phoniest routines are of people completely convinced that they are being authentic. Gillian Welch comes to mind. Don't get me started on her! I was shooshed during her concert once for ordering a beer. If nothing else, that ruined her for me. Tanya Tucker's big rule is to never even smile while you're singing a sad song. KT Oslin and I disagree.

**BA:** So you should smile?

**LK:** Well, I can't help it sometimes. And KT does this sort of creepy, wistful smile that I try to recreate. Sort of a distant stare with a half smile like she's being really brave

**BA:** Insincere?

**LK:** Sometimes I even really cry, which breaks Kathy Mattea's rule. Anyway, I think I am drawn to performance for just this reason. I'm completely distracted and absorbed by the character of performers and their desire to present themselves in some way. When I love a performer, I want them to be my friend. I get totally lost in fantasies of hanging out and expressing our mutual adoration of each other. Dolly Parton comes to mind as one of my main subjects of such fantasies.

**BA:** Aah! Dolly. I saw her live for the first time last year. I texted you right after the show, and you asked me some specific questions about her set list, obviously you had seen the tour at least once. How many times have you seen her?

**LK:** I think 5 times.

**BA:** She's like the ultimate in performance. Sincerity and artifice, where does it begin and end with her?

**LK:** Is that a rhetorical question? Because I don't think there is a beginning and end to it for her. Sure she puts on a blown up persona onstage and for interviews, etc., but I think she is always sincere. Or at least she's not pretending to be more sincere than she really is. It's hard to figure out why I trust her character so much. I think it's partially because she has so much confidence in it, that she's not afraid to risk seeming inauthentic because of her hair, makeup, and body.

**BA:** I think that's one reason she crosses so many types of fans, her audiences are really diverse.

**LK:** She makes me insane, she is so good. And I have gotten to the point where I stop trying not to cry like a baby during her shows. I get so overwhelmed by her.

The time that took me over the edge was at Madison Square Gardens... I had a pretty bad seat and she was so far away- this tiny little sparkly dot on the stage introducing Coat of Many Colors like it was the first time and she was with a small group of friends. Then singing that song. Whew! That's what it's all about!

**BA:** The last work of yours that I saw was your show at the Contemporary in St. Louis in the fall of 2006. That was basically a 10-year survey of performance, ephemera and objects. Can you talk about that exhibition?

**LK:** It's hard to express what that show meant to me. It seems wrong, because so many people are involved in achieving a show like that, not to mention all of the people who ultimately saw it, but the biggest result of an experience like that for me is an intensely personal, wonderful feeling of satisfaction and connection to the world. The planning and all of the collaborative efforts of Shannon Fitzgerald, you, Mike Schuh, Bruce Burton, and all of the staff and interns there... that experience is what I really walked away with. Plus



Image courtesy of Larry Krone

Above: Krone sings "When we Grow Up" with sister Janet Kennedy. Larry Krone and Family: Something Beautiful October 5, 2006 at Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Photo by Sarah Carmody.



Image courtesy of Larry Krone

Above: Krone leads a public singalong in front of one of his famous Mylar curtains. Larry Krone's Campfire Exposition (singalong) September 16, 2007 Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland. Photo by Jörg Jakoby.

the opportunity to really see my body of work. The whole thing was very emotional. It's hard to describe it without getting melodramatic.

**BA:** I guess, specifically, what did it mean to see so much of your work together? Did anything change in your view of your practice?

**LK:** It was shocking to see my work like that. It really came together to create this character that was me. But mostly just the crazy and sad parts. I didn't realize how totally exposing my work really was until I saw it like that.

**BA:** Really? Did you think your work was exposing you?

**LK:** Making that work felt like I feel onstage, like I am at least mostly in control of how much of myself I am revealing. But I wasn't really in control at all.

**BA:** You're talking about the objects in the show?

**LK:** Yes. I think it's good that the work comes out like that. I guess it means that I really tap into unconscious stuff. So I'm proud of the work. But also kind of embarrassed.

The problem I had, though, was that it was so all about me. It made me feel isolated. Since then, I've been consciously trying to work with that feeling of connection and collaboration and try to incorporate it in my actual work and objects.

**BA:** You're making objects collaboratively or trying to take the focus off yourself?

**LK:** A little of both, but I can't help that always want to put myself in stuff. I'm trying to really think about the participation of viewers of my objects. I made a lot of things in the past year with eyes on them... a corny and fast way to create a connection between the viewer and the piece. I'm also taking found objects and putting them together so it's as if their original owners/makers are collaborating with each other and me. Last year I did a project in Portland where the whole theme was getting together around a campfire. I needed the help of volunteers to make a big Mylar curtain, but their participation became part of the piece. Our time together was part of it. We had special coffee cups for breaks, a fake fire to sit around, music, and periodic sing-alongs. Viewers were invited to participate in the sing-alongs and contribute to the Old West campsite environment by making

tumbleweeds out of the Mylar scraps and clothes hangers.

**BA:** How long did the performance last?

**LK:** I think it was 10 days.

**BK:** That's a pretty big departure from the performances I've seen of yours, which were really straightforward, hour long "shows."

**LK:** It was different definitely. And not that easy to share the spotlight during the sing-alongs (though I still was kind of at the center of it). The sing-alongs really did achieve that feeling of togetherness and connectedness for me, though. I couldn't believe how many people wanted to sing and for how long! The sing-alongs would end when we couldn't think of a single other thing to sing. So many songs we sang were just the beginnings of songs we thought we knew but realized we didn't. The idea for the performance approach to making the curtain came from my experience at the Contemporary making Where You'll Find Me.

**BA:** I really like the idea of starting to sing these songs you think you know, and then the singing just trails off...

**LK:** Me too. I couldn't believe all those people wanted to sit there and do that with me! It was so fun.

**BK:** One question I had prepared was about collaboration, whether or not you were directing the performances, calling all the shots with your friends and family you perform with. It sounds like that's changing?

**LK:** With the performances, I do direct, but I really try to make my decisions based on what people are best at and want to do. I had wanted to make a huge sing-along songbook, but I ran out of time. I did get a lot of the lyrics to my own songs down and used those. One of the most touching moments for me during the sing-along was when I sang my song It's Hard to Live with the gang working out spontaneous backup oohs and aahhs & trying to follow along.

**BA:** That's one of my favorite songs of yours! That's the Buffy [the Vampire Slayer] song, right?

**LK:** Yes the Buffy one. I love that it is so specifically about Buffy (season 6), but it seems like it could apply to anything.

**BA:** My favorite season, I think.

**LK:** Me too! So dark! And with the musical episode.

**BA:** Oh, I could gush about that...

**BK:** Back on track...I know you've performed several times at Blueberry Hill, which is mostly a straightforward music, rock and roll venue, and mainstay in St. Louis. How / when did this start? How does it change the performance as opposed to playing in an art context?

**LK:** I don't really let that affect my performance too much in that I don't leave out anything that I think will be too artsy or challenging. If anything, playing at a place like Blueberry Hill gives me a chance to do more, because they--unlike many galleries and art venues--are equipped for all kinds of things. Lighting, good sound, backstage areas, etc. (although nothing could have been better than the setup at the Contemporary!) I really do lean on the costumes and onstage changes, Mylar backdrops, etc. to distract from my weak voice, though I have gained a little more confidence over the past couple of years. Not in the quality of my voice, but in my ability to sing a song to people who really just want to enjoy the music.

I do find that just because an audience is there to get entertained, does not mean that they won't appreciate the artistic elements of a performance.

In a lot of my work, including the performance, I like for there to be a surprise meaning/artistic content hiding in something that seems just cute, entertaining, or beautiful.

**BA:** I'm going to pop back to something you said before about your early experience in St. Louis, where you were talking about all the work you saw here being painting driven. You've been back a lot and shown and performed several times, how have you seen the art scene change?

**LK:** Well, I think it's a lot less insular. I was always proud of St. Louis, and I never wanted to leave. But when I first started coming back after living in New York, I was shocked at how conservative it was there. It felt like there was a deliberate mission to avoid influence from New York and the larger international contemporary art world. I had the feeling that people here thought I was crazy for what I was doing in my work.

Now, the galleries, and certainly the museums and not-for-profits like White Flag, Boots, The Contemporary and The Pulitzer are deeply involved in the bigger dialogue.

And young artists are aware of what is going on around them. It certainly wasn't the case when I was in St. Louis.

**BA:** Is there anything additional you would like to say about future projects, plans, etc?

**LK:** I just got the NYFA grant. Hallelujah! My immediate future plan is to quit my job at the Phoenix and finish this goddam latch-hook hay bale I've been working on.

**BA:** Congrats! That's awesome. Tell me about the latch-hook hay bale.

**LK:** I love using hay bales in my performances and installations... they create a scene immediately. But they are such a hassle to deal with every time I travel. Sometimes they have bugs in them, so museums are afraid to have them inside. Often they are hard to find in urban environments. Anyway, this is a project along the lines of my Hobby Horse of Many Colors... taking matters into my own hands and making my own hay bale. Of course it is barely recognizable as a hay bale. It's made from latch hooking green and yellow yarn remnants I find on eBay or at thrift shops. And it's taking a ridiculous amount of time and labor. In the end it's going to be too heavy to be practical as a traveling stage prop. It's just becoming its own thing, and I think a pretty weird & beautiful object.

**BA:** I can't wait to see it!

**LK:** It is really ridiculous! **BP**

# What, How, and For Whom

by Danyel M. Ferrari



Image courtesy of WHW

Above: Press Conference, SES Theatre, Istanbul, November 2008, 11th Istanbul Biennial.  
Directed by: Oliver Frlić. From left to right curators: Sabina Sabolovic, Natasa Ilic, Ivet Curić, Ana Dević.

The 11th Istanbul Biennial, opening in September, will be curated by the Zagreb based Croatian curatorial collective WHW; *What, How, and For Whom*. The group of four women; Iveta Curić, Ana Dević, Natasa Ilic and Sabina Sabolovic, and Dejan Krsic began working together for their first exhibition mounted on the occasion of the anniversary of the Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in 2000 in Zagreb, entitled, *What, How and for Whom?* In the time since, they have become internationally known for exhibitions devoted to engaging questions pertinent not only to contemporary art practice but to the broader social landscape, with a decidedly feminist, "red thread."

**Danyel M. Ferrari:** As you know this issue of *Boot Print* is focused on "umbrella" identities and the work that takes place under, or through them. Thank you so much for contributing your valuable insights to this discussion. I have been trying to decide if I ought to begin by asking about the working title, and guiding motto of your collective, the three questions, "what, how and for whom?" or how it was that you began to work together; but I think they might be inseparable questions.

**What, How and for Whom:** Let's start with *Communist Manifesto!* The exhibition *What, How and for Whom?*, on the occasion of 152nd anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* established most of the aspects of our future curatorial approach: a collective way of working, close partnership of different organizations, establishing links between different generations of artists as well as building the exhibition around social and political issues which we feel are being swept under the carpet... Actually, the impetus for the exhibition came about when Arkzin publishing (who during the nineties was publishing a magazine of the same name that was one of the rare left critical voices during that time) reprinted Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* with an introduction by Slavoj Žižek on its 150th anniversary. It went by completely unnoticed, we were curious to see if we could trigger a discussion through an exhibition.

From the curatorial point of view, one of our main concerns was how to deal with the anniversary of a book of such powerful ideological and political connotations; we decided to problematize it in the existing local context. The *Manifesto* functioned as a strong trigger to initiate a public debate on the issues of recent history, and the exhibition in the end questioned a wide range of social issues; focusing on the complex relation between art and economy.

The need to question our 'communist' past is the result of dominant cultural politics in Croatia in the 90s, whose insufficient intellectual contextualization disabled any serious reflection on either the immediate communist past or the present 'transitional' moment.

At the time we started to work on the exhibition we were still mostly in our twenties. Working together was a great and formative experience. From the beginning, we were aware that collaboration enabled us to do things that none of us would be able to do individually; create and influence new spaces and modalities of art production, and thus challenge the environment of ossified and closed art institutions in Croatia.

**DMF:** You studied art history and comparative literature in college; do you think that there was something in that cross-disciplinary study that has informed your way of working as curators?

**WHW:** We are all art historians who also graduated in comparative literature, which is a nice coincidence because at the University of Philosophy in Zagreb you have to choose a combination of two humanities and it happened that all four of us have this combination of art history and literature. The Comparative Literature Department was in many ways more liberal than Art History. Art History is thought and taught in very positivist and linear ways, while the curriculum of Comparative Literature was organized in a way that allowed different study paths, depending on one's affinities. It allowed explorations that combined, for example, theatre and film studies along with theory or popular culture. Obviously, we are all very passionate readers, and taking all of this into account, it does seem that literature and cross-disciplinarity are indeed significant "red threads" that continue in our way of working and understanding of art. On the other hand, many other influences arrived in totally unofficial ways, bypassing all institutional and educational channels. What was really crucial for our collective model of work and methodologies was the specific social context of the late 1990s in Croatia of heavy nationalism and conservative ideas about culture, which we have been constantly opposing.

WHW belongs to a group of "younger" organizations that appeared on the Zagreb scene in the late-nineties, and our key influences have come from two sources. The first, is a number of independent organizations with a feminist, environmental, antinationalist and anarchic orientation that were active in the beginning of 90's for instance, pop-political magazine *Arkin*, was one of those key influences. *Arkin*, editor and chief, Dejan Krsic, for example, a colleague with whom we've been working since the beginning, edited the 150th anniversary edition of *Communist Manifesto* with Žižek's preface, that served as the impetus for that exhibition. A second source of influence was the activities of the generation of artists from the '70s with whom we have been working since the first exhibition. Although internationally recognized artists, such as Sanja Iveković or Mladen Stilinović, are by no means dissidents within their own milieu, the fact remains that the local cultural institutions do not construct their identity, or build their programs, on critical experiences. In a way the experiences of these previous generations have been intensified through the phenomenon of the self-organized and extra-institutional scene to which we also belong. The influence is first and foremost concerned with a notion of political engagement in culture; the progressive potentials are, by and large, focused on cooperation and social engagement.

**DMF:** Often we hear political and dissident art discussed in terms of specifically the content of work, can you talk about what it means to be a curatorial group committed to politically active work in your structure as well as in the content of the work you select?

**WHW:** The investigation of social relations and art has been constantly shaping our work. For our curatorial work, articulating sensitive social issues, especially in relation to the local context, is of key importance. As cultural producers we have tried to remain in touch or in dialogue with various social debates and contemporary art movements. We are interested in both what is on the surface of everyday life and what seems totally repressed or neglected in it. We have been very open to various forms of collaboration, creating new modes of operation as cultural workers and advocating for new directions of culture as a productive site within society for new cultural policies. We have also been very much involved in collaboration with other organizations, not necessarily coming from the visual arts field but different fields of research determining the role of culture in society.

While working on the exhibition projects we are very much interested in addressing a range of locally unsolved questions such as national identity and nationalism, collective relationship to the past and the construct of history, problematic relations towards legacy of socialist decades, economic transition, a status of "socialist modernism," and relating these local questions to broader contexts.

**DMF:** You have said that your working together "grew organically," but there are often groups that work together just briefly. What work is required to maintain a collective? What in your development do you think fostered your commitment?

**WHW:** As artist Mladen Stilinović, who worked within the informal *Group of Six Authors* from 1975 to 1979 in Zagreb, once pointed out; the foundational difference between the collectives and groups of the '70s and contemporary ones is a different "economy of joy" of collective work and a different level of bureaucratization. The former place of enjoyment is today replaced by the attempts to construct effective administration for it. Whilst the collective bodies of the past naturally dissolved as the joy of collaboration declined, the challenge we face today as collectives is the lure of their own institutionalization. Since the beginning we have tried to develop a non-hierarchical collective model of work without strict divisions of labor.

It is important to stress that at the time when we started working we were just a group of friends, young curators, who were trying to establish a structure that would be lasting and that would create not only new platforms for debates that were missing, especially in the 1990s, but also an infrastructure. In that sense it is important to acknowledge that we were actually starting from scratch. We have managed in the course of 10 years to establish ourselves as a kind of institution that operates beyond a strictly pragmatic level. The group work involves a lot of energy, flexibility, tolerance, understanding, commitment and negotiation; a balance between professional and friendship etc, but there is no "secret ingredient."

**DMF:** Are there "rules?"

**WHW:** We don't believe in "rules", but sometimes they are necessary, they help you to bridge some difficult situations. More than rules we believe in principles. One of the basic principles of the work is that all the decisions are made through consensus, we invest a great deal of energy into this, and we find it very important that we don't make decisions with which anyone in the collective would strongly disagree. That is not to say that there are no conflicts and disagreements, but we tend to understand them as signals that the communication is still vital. Conflicts are unavoidable, but more than conflict, we like to stress the solidarity, mutual support, wider knowledge, constant process of discussion and negotiation that brings about new ideas and methodologies.

**DMF:** You mentioned that you work to avoid strict division of labor; can you talk a little about working counter to the common practice specialization?

**WHW:** Yes, we try to resist the compartmentalization of activities and responsibilities as much as possible, but very often there are practical reasons that make things more pragmatic too. We would not say that as a collective we stand as an example for some consistent counter strategy. We would not idealize the result of some of our "experiments" in that direction. Even some very "effective methodologies" are temporal; they can easily create saturation. We don't have ready-made answers, it is a constant struggle in a way.

Cooptation of the critical potentials into the dominant economic discourse of neo-management is one of the most prominent signs of exhaustion of critical practices.

The problem we are facing now on a more general level is how to critically examine social, temporal and spatial limitations of representative 'event' culture, in the field of contemporary art, paradigmatically exemplified by phenomenon of biennale exhibitions; how to rethink the questions of production, definition, and presentation of the work and of artists' identity in globalized (art)world.

**DMF:** You are currently working on the 11th Istanbul Biennial, your first biennial. You've spoken of in past interviews of the biennial as "process," can you talk about how you have worked to produce a process rather than an "event" based Biennial? What is unique to your structure as a collective that enables a difference?

**WHW:** We don't deny that Biennials are necessarily intrinsically based on the idea of "event culture." Today, biennial exhibitions are elements of cultural tourism through which cities attempt to use their benign and internationally communicative regional specificities to position themselves on the map of the globalized world. They are manifestations tending to 'cultural shopping' in which art is often presented as cool, fun and entertaining. Although this holds true, it would not be productive simply to dismiss the idea that within Biennial format one cannot achieve a critical standpoint. After all, Biennials are exhibitions and they are imbued with contradictions and limitations as exhibitions always are, but it seems that in Biennials all these contradictions are more highlighted and somehow pushed to the edge.

Biennials do create basic conditions for viewing and contextualizing art, but we don't see these relations necessarily fixed, but rather as a more flexible structure opened to different approaches and contestations.

In our exhibitions we are often making references and dedications, as in the case of our first exhibition; *What, How and for Whom*, which was dedicated to the anniversary of Communist Manifesto, the *Manifesto* was not the subject of the exhibition, but, a trigger to initiate a public debate on the issues of recent history. For the Istanbul Biennial, titled *What Keeps Mankind Alive?* after the protest song from *The Three Penny Opera* written by Bertolt Brecht in 1928, we will not directly thematicize Brecht's heritage. Brecht's assertion that "a criminal is a bourgeois and a bourgeois is a criminal" from *The Three Penny Opera* is as true as ever. The correlatives between the effects of rapid developments of liberal economy on disintegration of hitherto existing social consensus in 1928, a year before the Great Depression, and the contemporary global crisis are striking. Thus "what keeps mankind alive" also links us back to the economic concerns of 'what, how and for whom'. In that sense, the three basic questions of every economic organization - what, how & for whom - that have continuously and repeatedly been shaping our work, remain constant concerns.

Looking at our curatorial work from the perspective of ten years of collective work, we see the engagement with the Biennial as a continuation of our attempts at method or even a strategy, and we try to apply the same beliefs that have been shaping our curatorial work since the beginning.

**DMF:** Rather than in the traditional press conference, you chose to announce the theme of the 11th biennial in a performance, inspired by the *Three Penny Opera* can you talk about your utilization, as a collective, of modernist work, as seen here and in, for example, your past curatorial work on the sculptor Vojin Bakic, as a methodology to re-evaluate current social and political questions.

**WHW:** Brecht in a way invites us to rethink our position again and again, to see the world as amateur actors. Four of us curators tried to take this position in a short performance during the first press conference for the Biennial. Instead of releasing the concept in the conventional press release format, we performed our concept. The performance took place in the Ses Theatre in Istanbul and it was done in collaboration with Croatian theatre director Oliver Frjli... We tried to express 'the truth of our situation', as Brecht would call it, by making the curatorial promise that never fails to fail visibly, by performing our decision and contesting the relationship between the curator, artist and the audience, as well as structure of the biennial exhibitions. Reference to Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt – estrangement effect - is of course obvious. The appearance of four reciting curators on stage questions and mocks the need for "glamour" in an art event and the stereotypes about the power position of a curator, in this case an all-female collective.

Complex relations between "marginal" modernisms with socialist backgrounds and the supposedly ideologically free and neutral modernism of the West - have become the subject of more extensive research in our curatorial practice. The ideological battle over modernism in socialist Yugoslavia and its legacy and importance today is exactly that which can not be left to institutions, but needs to be taken over and invested with new meanings. The case of Yugoslavia is especially interesting, not only as the only socialist country that cut off relations to the Eastern Bloc, as well as relaxing ideological barriers and opening up to the West culturally, but also as a cultural space in which parts of the communist political and cultural elite recognized cor-



Above: "What, how and for whom, on the occasion on 152nd anniversary of Communist Manifesto", a cover of a reader, edited by WHW, design by: Dejan Krsic.



Above: Vojin Bakic, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, 2008.

Image courtesy of WHW

respondences between the universalism of modernist art and the universalism of socialist emancipation. Our position is not to neutralize or reconcile contrasted views on modernism, but to understand them within dynamics of their relations, to see contradictions as inherent to modernism itself, and to explore their specifics in given cultural space.

**DMF:** You've stated that the primary objective for the Biennial will be to look "to find a way out from the double deadlock of global neo-liberalism and local ethnic nationalism" while examining questions of economic and social urgency. You also have been quoted as saying that contemporary art is understood not only in Turkey but in many other countries, including Croatia, as "a tool of global imperialism" and there is a "widely accepted dichotomy between the supposedly two different approaches to art." This split seems to be even more pronounced in the current economic environment as questions of its influence on art production, dissemination and audience have lead to reactions from malaise at the one side to a hope of more politically engaged work returning to the fore at the other end. As I understand it, this polarized way of understanding and situating art is precisely what you oppose in the contemporary art scene. Can you talk about your practice within this perceived dichotomous situation? What do you feel is a better way of situating art in the contemporary moment? In your view what is it that you feel art is for, what does it do, and how it can be utilized to encounter social and economic questions, not only in content but in structures as well?

**WHW:** The critical art practice, especially in the "marginal" or "ghost" geographies of European modernism such as the Balkans or the Middle East, whose dynamics and specifics we are trying to reflect on within the Istanbul Biennial, often finds itself today as if "between a rock and a hard place." It is a claustrophobic and problematic situation to be in, in the sense that new openings have to be formulated around the fringes of the system, within its narrow cracks.

In the context of the Biennial our wish is also to try to reflect on the position that the Biennial occupies in the concrete ideological and economic landscapes, as these dictate the world of art too.

The search to "exit the impasse of double-bind discourses of global neo-liberalism and local ethno-nationalism" reflects our foremost wish and need to formulate this question in relation to the Biennial, and specifically the political situation in Turkey.

It is about keeping up with, and deepening, the already existing intellectual and political discussions on the local scene and beyond. We don't have a ready-made tool as to how to get out of the deadlock, but we feel we should not ignore its hold.

On a general level we believe that cultural and artistic practice is capable of articulating these conflicts from a specific perspective and of offering insights that can make us think about them in a different way. The real question is, is it enough, should we accept these limitations and how can we oppose them? What else could we wish art to be for? We have to try to use discursive, analytical, and explicative possibilities of art to re-examine old, and open new, relationships between social activism and aesthetic gesture; constructing intrinsic conditions under which knowledge is possible, detoxifying and de-programming hegemonic understanding of culture, in which not only art as material but its promotion become marketing tools and ideologically lucrative products. For example, Brian Holmes suggests, artistic practice can be understood as an experimental agency of perceptions, that can make us think something we could not have thought otherwise and change the way we see the world and our social environment; characterized by systematic blindness for everything outside of economic circulation. Some of these questions and discussions, we shall include in the Biennial reader for example, as we have no illusion that they can be straightforwardly answered within Biennial exhibition.

What is it that we feel art is for? what does it do? and how it can be utilized to confront social and economic questions? are the crucial questions to be clearly articulated. Due to the specific perspective generated by our curatorial position, the fact that we are curators who do exhibitions, we examine the question of the role of art in society as closely tied to the exhibition format. Of course, this does not imply that the fundamental questions about art should be exclusively formulated in relation to the exhibition format, though we consider exhibitions to be specific sites where art is critically presented and knowledge produced and disseminated.

How can we use the exhibitions for rethinking of, not only the questions of production, definition, and presentation of art, but of socialized action in globalized world, remains open to different approaches. It seems that regardless of the difficulties and possible traps one can easily fall into while investigating these directions, we feel a strong desire to attempt to create a platform for relevant discussions to take place. The position we adopt does not take an a priori positive or negative outlook, but merely tries to be as faithful as possible to the field of investigation and to take it to its feasible limits. We see our engagement with Istanbul Biennial as a continuation of the previously developed methodologies, though we are aware that the biennial format and context around it might present them with a radical challenge.

Since the beginning of our work we have been intensively working to develop models based on a collective way of working, articulation of sensitive social issues through artistic practice and collaboration between partners of different backgrounds. We still find these models viable for further exploration, but they are not fixed entities or "safe paths".

The question "What keeps mankind alive" as well as possible answers and models that might come out of this interrogative, is as with all our previous exhibitions, governed by a genuine passion to put the ideas and artworks in the most intriguing juxtaposition with the problem, so that the relations they engender can suggest a possible answer with a difference. This difference is the fragile and transient, but powerful, stuff that the exhibitions are made of. **BP**

# Raqs Media Collective

by Ashok Mathur

The Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective is comprised of Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, and its interdisciplinary practice intersects art, theory, philosophy, research, and various forms of inquiry and engagement. The collective's name is derived from the word for "dance" in Persian, Urdu, and Arabic, specifically referencing the state entered into by 'whirling dervishes,' but as is stated somewhat puckishly on the Raqs website, the name can also be read as an acronym for 'rarely asked questions.' As such, the mandate of Raqs well-suits the theme of this section of Boot Print, to engage groups/organizations defined not so much by physical space but by the spirit of collaboration and collective activity. This interview took place as a series of email queries and responses in April and May, 2009, a teasing out of ideas and articulation of concepts that follow the trajectory of the Raqs media collective.

**Ashok Mathur:** As a collective, Raqs operates in opposition to easy definition, or perhaps, is subject to mercurial definition. That is, as soon as one defining quality is applied, it slips away into, and gives way to, another. Artists, yes, but also cultural organizers; curators, but also researchers; "Indian" by passport designation, but insistent on self-defining outside the limitations or assumed collective values of national identity. Steve Dietz, through his readings of Andreas Broeckmann and Tetsuo Kogawa, suggests Raqs and others work within the rubric of the "translocal," in their mandates and activities, and your collective response (at the time) was that those connections from the urban-local to the global is indeed reflected in your practices. That interview was seven years ago, and since then we have seen significant changes, affecting the local/global, in myriad fashions. So my initial question to Monica, Jeebesh, and Shuddhabrata, is this: given current eco-political conditions on a global front, evinced on local levels world-wide, how do you see Raqs role shifting, and what possibilities, translocal and otherwise, might this afford?

**Raqs Media Collective:** Let us think with an account of an encounter two years ago. A few thousand people were evicted from a riverfront squatter settlement called Nangla Maachi in Delhi. Some of them could manage small plots of land in a resettlement locality – Ghevra – created at the northern edge of the city. The landscape in Ghevra was of recently flattened agricultural land with almost no infrastructure. The new inhabitants started making provisional houses with bamboo mats. A friend of ours, Shamsher Ali, whose father has been working in a recycling warehouse for the last couple of decades, while walking with us in Ghevra said that his father, after hearing stories of this new emerging neighborhood observed, with a celebratory voice, that this place is in *nishastgah*. Broadly, *nishastgah* would mean a space where the gaze is not yet fixed and time has not yet been disciplined. Nobody – as yet – has been described as a 'vagabond'. The force of the making of this place comes from its state of suspension and unfixatedness.



Above: Raqs Media Collective by Rana Dasgupta. From left to right: Shuddhabrata Sengupta Jeebesh Bagchi and Monica Narula.

To us, this evokes a profound question around the latent force of a place; its ways of construction and making, its internal withdrawals and its emerging articulations. This cannot easily be captured in words that we have for describing places, especially the "local".

To us the words "local" and "global" are simply for describing a cognitive relationship to a framework of location and its connectivity. If we must have them around, then we could learn to say them devoid of an ideological tang. There is nothing intrinsically good either in staying in one place, or in being an unanchored traveler.

**When we say "global" we emphasize proliferation, dispersal and connectedness; when we say "local" we stress being anchored to a place and its history.**

Where we stand, it is impossible for us not to see the entanglement of locality and the world. This was so when the conversation you refer to was conducted, it is so now; perhaps even more acutely.

In today's climate, there are a few calls to return to a "protectionism" of the imagination. Perhaps this takes some of its new-found strength from the renewed appeal for some sort of mercantile and financial protection-

ism as a response to the current recessionary crisis. This massive 'sulk' can mislead us into another xenophobic fog.

We have always maintained that the free movement of capital across the world needs to be confronted with the free movement of labor, of people, of ideas, dispositions and affects (in more than one direction at once).

**The liberty of capital cannot arise out of the forfeiture of all other liberties.**

We would insist on seeing the world in ways that cannot be exhausted by the trope of location alone. We think, for instance, that an "I" in a temporal sense is as important a locational attachment. Do we feel within or without the times that we inhabit? Are we guests, hosts or transient passengers in our times? These questions can never be answered in either local or global terms. It is towards these questions that we are attracted in a much more fundamental way.

**AM:** Let me pick up on three elements you touched upon, and see how you might either suture them together or reconfigure them altogether... These points triangulate or dismiss, as you will, are: "xenophobic fog," imperfect balances of "free movement(s)," and the spatio-temporal complexity of the autonomous self. Let me try to clarify my intentions.

Recent xenophobic violence in South Africa, resurgent tensions in Northern Ireland, and resistance to official government apologies in Canada vis-à-vis Indian Residential Schools (to name but three examples), seem to point to a type of irreconcilability built into, and perhaps in response to, "official" reconciliation (and concomitant Truth and Reconciliation commissions). Within this environment, as governments of industrialized nations move toward regulation of the flow (free movement) of capital, there seems to be an even further clamping down on the free movement of labor and people, to the point of unfortunate and terrifying parallels -- the same voices decrying government salvation of corporate entities (let them collapse) are echoed in the lack of compassion for peoples subjected to crises of pandemic, famine, and war (let them die). Finally, the question of the "I" on spatial and temporal axes: it's true that it's not only the 3D-space we'll inhabit, but when and through what conditional temporal narratives this occurs, such that the importance of location is wholly dependent on the so-called fourth dimension of time. Okay, so given this rambling preamble, how might Raqs and other like-minded entities take these elements -- let's shorthand them as fear/aggression to the Other, inability to share wealth even at the massive cost of human life, and a separation of the Cartesian/Western-subject from the 'eternal lines of time' -- into effective, interventionist and/or integrationist practice? That is, what might you see as the current responsibility of artistic engagement and, if you choose to consider this, how might said engagement shift realities for the world around us?

**RMC:** The triangulation you propose is suggestive. Fear/Aggression towards others – linked to an inability to share wealth and resources – embedded in a subject/object separation that erodes the possibility of cohabiting a simultaneity of diverse spatial and temporal anchors and flows.

Lets take this step-by-step. We feel that a key component without which none of the arms of your triangle will hinge on to each other is a notion of scarcity. The anxiety of scarcity, the notion that in order not to have less we must have more, seems to us to be central in any understanding we seek of the present world.

**The anxiety of scarcity produces a mania of measurement.**

We are constantly beset by acts of measuring quantities of how much things are, in order to know by how much we fall short. The opposite of scarcity is plenitude (not, we might emphasize, abundance, which is merely a measure of relatively 'less' scarcity).

*continued on page 17*



Image from the work. Courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

Above: THEY CALLED IT THE XXTH CENTURY. Three screen video projections 2005.

continued from page 16



Above: SLEEPWALKER'S CARAVAN (PROLOGUE) Single Screen Video. 11 mins 2008.

Image from the work. Courtesy of Raqs Media Collective

That is why insisting on making art and making room for art is more than about affect, ideas and sensation alone; it is a way of guaranteeing a space for life.

And yet, in the end, artists are free to not be useful, and we think this freedom needs to be taken seriously. This freedom from utility makes it possible for them to enter realms of pure conjecture, or of looking at reality freed from the constraints of the real and the extant. By no means should this freedom be bargained away. We think that this freedom needs to be understood as a kind of uncountable plenitude.

In this freedom lies the constantly renewable possibility of posing different modes of relationships between selves and others, between the relative significance of different ways of sharing things, and different attitudes to space and time.

We need more than a mere measure of things as the building blocks of universal language. The vocabulary of measurement attempts to say way too much by means of way too little. We need more than just the sayable and the unsayable.

We need to ask; What are the signs of life? What visions can make us see signs of living? What remains to be brought out from our quagmire? Not a bad challenge.

**AM:** Again, you've broached a number of topics, each of which could lead on a very distinct trajectory, so I am going to try to end this conversation by collecting some of these thoughts and springboarding (I hope) into a possible conclusion even if inconclusivity may indeed be a desired 'product' of art. Everything you mention in the last round - plenitude versus scarcity, seeing life afresh, working outside the constraints of utility - all resonate with a refusal to allow art (or, by extension, life) to be regulated and bound by set parameters. I love the double-edge of the freedom not to be useful (again, by extension, not to be a number of things asked/demanded of us) and the concomitant responsibility of that not-ness. It poses, for me, a final question, one that I will throw back at you to comment upon, dispute, or leave alone! You end your last section by querying the signs of life and how we might envision such signs of living. To me, this rings of hope in a time when we are actively discouraged from hopefulness or at the very least encouraged to temper hope with reality, whether its about economic strife, environmental crunches, ascending global violence. So, if I have this right, my question is, why hope, why now, and where might this attitude of hope take us (or not take us, as the case may be)?

**RMC:** To live without giving undue importance to the mere fact of hope (for it may fail us in the end) and at the same time without being imprisoned by disenchantments (for there may always be surprises, and may there always be surprises!)...

If there was a stable, predictable and cyclical world, the duration of life would have neither hope nor despair; nothing that was not already known and we would not be faced with sharp turns. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we do not live in such stable times. And attempts to produce stable times have had their wretched consequences. We have to accept that we live in a world of uncertain futures. This is something that coming generations, too, will have to accept and think with. When faced with uncertainty humans have always invented ways to not turn their back to the future. This *not-turning-away* is not often given due attention. The shorthand word – hope – does not capture this spirit. It merely gestures to it. Looking towards the future, and acting with that knowledge, is a stance that comes with attendant perils and ambiguities, but is clear in the way it looks upon the world. The challenging task of philosophy and art would be to build a vocabulary to recognize, describe and etch this stance. Millions already live today with this stance, without much aid from "risk" calculating institutional machines. **BP**



Above: Sarai Reader covers. Sarai Reader 01: The Public Domain (Edited with Geert Lovink). Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life (Edited with Ravi Vasudevan, Ravi Sundaram and Geert Lovink). Sarai Reader 03: Shaping Technologies (Edited with Ravi Vasudevan, Ravi Sundaram and Geert Lovink). Sarai Reader 04: Crisis/Media (Edited with Ravi Sundaram, Awadhendra Sharan and Geert Lovink). Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts (Edited with Ravi Sundaram, Awadhendra Sharan, Geert Lovink and Lawrence Liang).

The feeling of plenitude, of knowing that that the quantum of a thing does not necessarily exhaust all available aspects of our experience of it, is an attempt to come to terms with the idea of the uncountable. We could say that a possibly valid way of looking at today's world is to render it in terms of the tussle between obsessive measurement and the random but radical realization of plenitude. This is a combat between numbers and the uncountable.

The disposition of fear/aggression towards others is not unrelated to an inability to conceive of resources except in proprietary terms. Crucially, this views our experience of resources in terms of finitude, in terms of thinking that we will "run out of them". It also privileges the present, the time left, before "we run out", "while stocks last" as the time of the utmost importance.

The times of the past, and the possibility of the future are both mortgaged and held hostage to the urgency of the unyielding present.

The siege of the self by notions of property and exclusive usage only makes sense in a model where any attempt to open out the custodianship and usage of a resource will inevitably end in a hostile bid to dispossess one's claim to that said resource.

If you do not fear that others can only relate to you by taking away what you think is yours, or what nourishes or delights you, then, it does not make sense to cultivate and maintain a posture of aggression towards them.

If you are not forever "present tense" you can enjoy reminiscence, you can play at scanning the unknown horizon of the future.

All these attitudes, of letting ourselves be open to the uncountable, to plenitude, to others not only as hostile competitors, to a variegated sense of time, require us to consider the quality, rather than the quantity of an experience.

Perhaps, this is where art & artists come in, as people attuned to qualities. Not necessarily making their evaluations solely in terms of what can be counted in or around an experience, process or object. It makes little sense to talk of a piece of music in terms of the number of notes it had.

Rather, our evaluation has to take into account the relationships between the notes, including the silences (the non-notes) that lie scattered through the piece.

A sense of that relationship cannot be computed, even though music is probably the most mathematical of the arts. It has to be expressed in a non-quantitative language.

What we are left with, if we accept these bald facts, is the possibility that artists might repeatedly venture into the territory of imagination in order to point to forgotten, or as-yet unconceived ways of thinking non-quantitatively about issues such as scarcity and value, about essence and identity and about our experience of dispersal and duration, about space and time.

What has art got to do with this? Simple. Art enables us to ask questions about life afresh. Today, this possibility exists alongside the very real fear of an accelerated drift into genocidal wars and lethal acts of random violence. The renewed importance of asking fundamental questions about what life is or what it

# The Guerrilla Girls; Fake Fur and other 'F' Words

by Virginia MacKenny



Above: The Birth of Feminism Movie Poster, installed at the Witte de With, Rotterdam, Holland, 2008.

The Guerrilla Girls are one of the oldest and most well known collaborative feminist groups in the art world. Established in 1985 they quickly developed a profile with their wickedly humorous attacks on issues that affected women artists. Starting with one event in 1985, two in 1987 and three in 1988 the number of their performances gradually increased and now they regularly have over 10 events across the world in a year. They are currently exhibiting at the Pompidou in Paris and the Tate in London.

Not identified with any particular place, they remain anonymous, sporting their signature guerrilla masks and utilizing the names of dead female artists -- Lee Krasner, Eva Hesse, Georgia O'Keefe, Paula Modersohn-Becker amongst many others have been resurrected -- to highlight their cause.

Continuing their work as agent provocateurs of the art world and beyond they are gutsy and forthright. Their pithy statements continue to entertain and discomfort. Interestingly most of the information the Guerrilla Girls gather is gleaned from the public realm.

Despite almost becoming an establishment in their own right they continue to ruffle feathers utilising an arsenal of stickers, posters, bus ads, magazine spreads, letter-writing campaigns and billboards. Their 2006 billboard depicting a female King Kong clutching an Oscar and noting that no female director had ever won an Oscar (a fact true to this day), demanded that the film world Unchain the Women Directors. This would, no doubt, have struck a chord with director Jane Campion, who was nominated for one with *The Piano* (1982), but failed to win it and this year is the only woman to have won the prized Palme d'Or in the 62-year history of the Cannes Film Festival.

Only two of the founding members remain: Kathe Kollwitz and Frida Kahlo. They are both highly active and travel frequently, effectively disrupting the complacency of museum directors around the world who are not attending to the production of women artists as well as tackling injustices wherever they see them.

In conversation with Kathe Kollwitz, founding member of the Guerrilla Girls.

**Virginia MacKenny** On your official site you have the statement: "reinventing the 'F' word: feminism!" This is succinct in its encapsulation of your imperatives and attitude. Its upfront engagement with the implication that feminism is a dirty word, an 'F' word, embraces both the history of feminism and its contemporary status as an awkward topic of conversation. Ironically, however, the reticence I often encounter amongst my students to engage feminism, or even use the term, is not so much the disruptive or radical element of feminism that is a problem, but the "yawn factor" attached to it -- a sense of "been there, done that." Given the tendency of many people to assign feminism to the annals of history what strategies do you engage in to "reinvent" and enliven the arena?

**Kathe Kollwitz:** One of our goals is to change people's minds about the "F" word -- feminism. We believe that feminism is a way of looking at the world. We think it's ridiculous that feminism has been demonized in society -- especially in the media -- for so long that many people who believe in the tenets of feminism (equal pay for equal work, human rights for women worldwide including the right to an education) do not consider themselves feminists. We've been fighting this for years. Our strategy: showing that everyone can invent his or her own way of being a feminist, just like we did. Society wants to believe feminism is over, but 150 years of feminism has not overcome centuries of misogyny. There's plenty to do.

**VM:** Yes, I absolutely agree, but what interests me here is that feminism is no longer this frightening thing but a boring thing for many people. Has this affected the way you approach your targets? How does one reinvent feminism so it can grab people's attention and not merely seem like a repetition of well-trod ground?

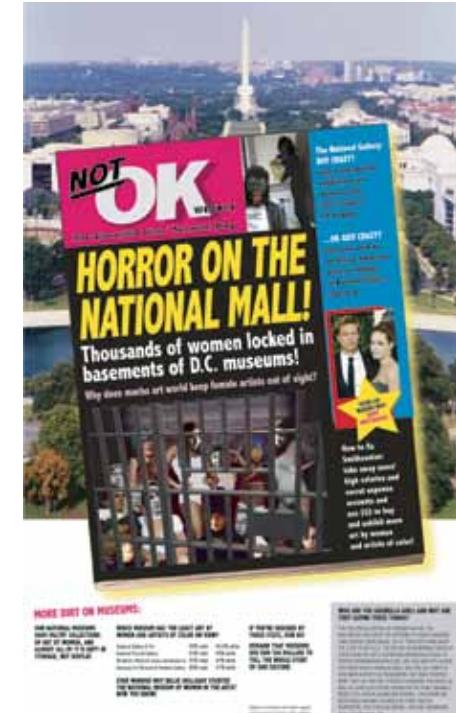
**KK:** The best way to get through to people is with facts and humour

For those who think it's all done... (interview interrupted by Frida Kahlo, another founding member of GG, phoning from N.Y. -- Kollwitz and Kahlo are currently working on a project as yet to be revealed)...knowing what is going on usually changes people's minds. The media has led many women, and men, to believe that feminism is no longer necessary, but that's not true. In the States there are so many young women who are feminists. But you can't type feminists, you can't generalise, there are so many different sorts, of all ages.

**VM:** Do you use approaches today that are different from when you started in the 1980s and had the advantage of surprise/shock on your side?

**KK:** We hope to get deeper into the issues now and while we do use the same techniques as when we started, we continue to refine them. For instance there is a format change. In a poster or a sticker it is a quick hit -- we have to narrow down a huge issue into one key statement. So, more recently we have gone deeper with books. We have done five books among them *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998) and *Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers - The Guerrilla Girls' Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes* (2003). In the books we can talk of the underlying causes. Different formats often talk to different audiences. We switch from talking to the art world and then to the public and back. We deal with the public in billboards and books and in a museum it might be a poster.

**VM:** In talking to different audiences the GGs seem to have also extended their content beyond the art world, which was the original focus. When the GGs was first initiated it was known for work supporting women artists. You have since also struck out at the film industry, which might be seen to parallel the art world in some way. Working more widely you have also dealt with abortion and you are now part of Amnesty International's Stop Violence Against Women Campaign and you are engaging the environmental activist group Greenpeace.



Above: Horror on the National Mall, project for the Washington Post newspaper, 2007.

One of the historical strengths of the GGs seemed to be your dedication to an area that no one else had highlighted and it was this specialization that gave the group its specific identity. Are you not spreading yourselves too wide into the generic concerns of feminism and into areas where, given the groups that you are working with, there are already people working? While of course it can be argued that all such areas are interlinked in their concerns, are you not in danger of losing your identity and special interest focus?

**KK:** We have always been activists exploring whatever issues we choose to take on. We did our first work about the environment back in 1996. We've also done anti-war posters, works about the homeless, politics, social issues, Hollywood, female stereotypes, etc.

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# Temporary Services

by Tim Ridlen

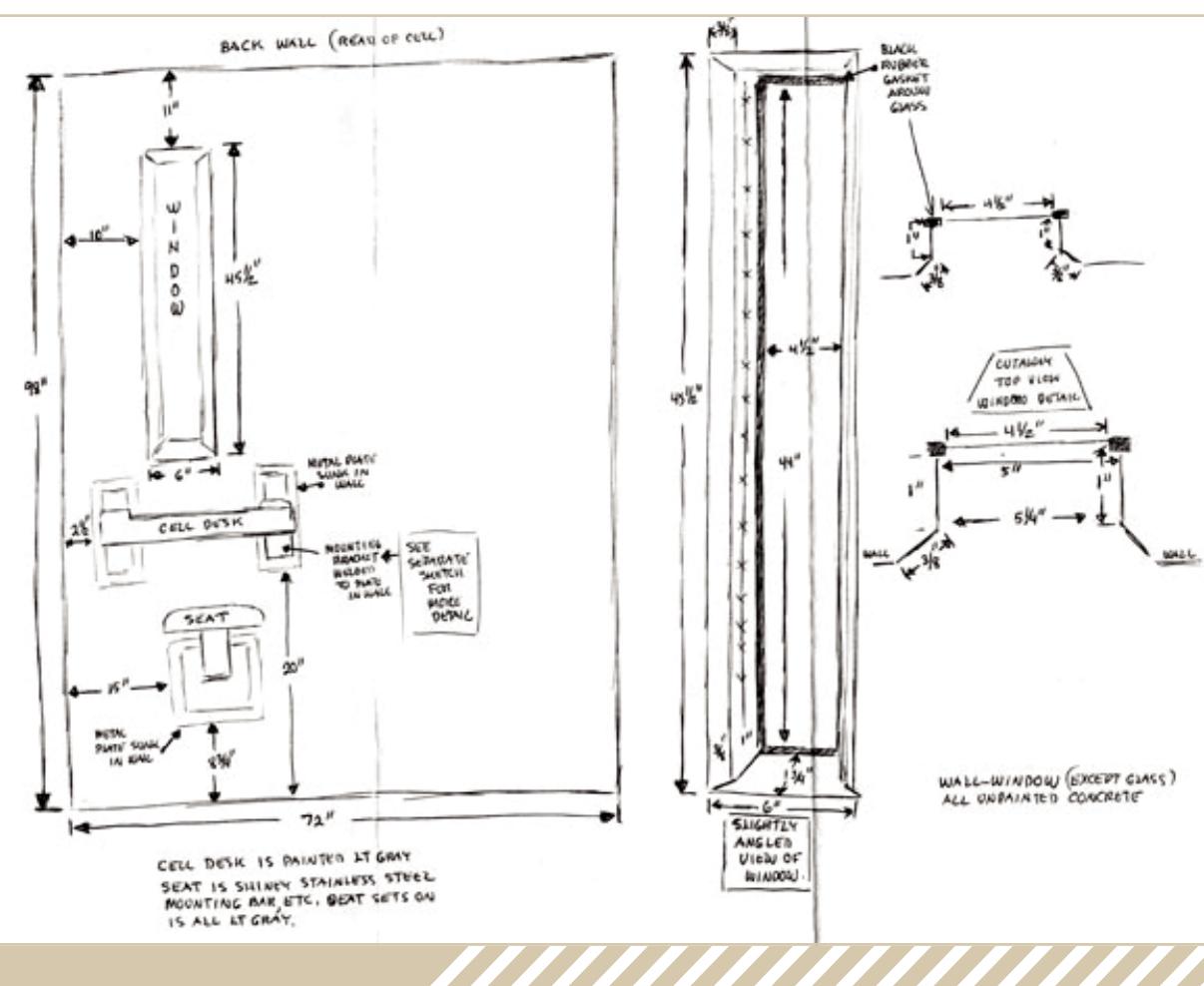


Image courtesy of Temporary Services

Temporary Services is Brett Bloom, Salem Collo-Julin and Marc Fischer. Since 1998 they have worked as a group adapting to various situations in print, in public space, and online. Their collaboration extends often to include others on a project-by-project basis, including several collaborations with prisoners. Based in Illinois, Temporary Services began as a space in Chicago and the name offered a way to blur the distinction between art and any other service rendered in a community, bluntly, "The distinction between art practice and other creative human endeavors is irrelevant to us." Temporary Services have produced many booklets; their insight on working together and working with others in *Group Work*, published as a book by Printed Matter in 2007, was the inspiration behind the extended study section for this issue of *Boot Print*. Online information and resources on people working in groups are available at their website, [www.temporaryservices.org](http://www.temporaryservices.org).

**Tim Ridlen:** The collaborative practice of Temporary Services appears to focus on a decentralized conversation, a flowing, flexible one, rather than the traditional collaborative model of call and response or even two parts adding up to one thing. What role does the individual play in the collective? How is the individual affected by the collective?

**Salem Collon-Julin:** First off, we don't use the word "collective" to describe ourselves. We prefer "group". This may seem like an unimportant distinction, but we shy away from "collective" for several reasons:

For many people, "collective" connotes a collaboration where all of the individuals involved are always in sync, say the same things, do the same things. We present our work to a wide variety of people, both those familiar with art historical models and those who don't care about such things, and we've run into the sentiment that collective = some sort of groupthink-commune over and over again.

We prefer "group". We have our own thoughts about the projects we do. Each of us is free to work however s/he wants outside of the group. Marc, Brett, and I are similar in many ways -- none of us are interested in having a commercial gallery practice, we like a lot of the same music, we all live in Illinois -- but we don't always do Temporary Services projects for exactly the same reasons. We think "group" is a more apt description of who we are -- individuals that work together. "Group" is a word that can travel in multiple audiences without the connotations that we don't identify with.

All of that said -- Temporary Services is the primary concern for each of us. We spend a tremendous amount of time working on projects together. We plan on working together in our group of three for conceivably the rest of our lives. Each of us has made sacrifices in economy, living situations, and even emotional landscapes for the benefit of our shared projects. We're dedicated to the work, and we've grown closer to each other as friends as our work has grown. We started with many moments of shared thought and practice, but now we make decisions keeping each other's lives and loved ones in mind as well.

**TR:** After looking at your booklet titled "Group Work," I noticed a fair share of quotes from bands and musicians -- which might explain the preference for the term "group" rather than "collective." While that model of group work is

compelling, would you have the visual arts follow in the steps of the struggling underground music scene?

**MF:** Is the underground music scene struggling? We can debate, if after the Internet, it's actually "underground" at this point; but whatever we want to call it, the culture of people starting bands, releasing their own music and organizing shows looks pretty hyperactive to me. Is it always hugely profitable? No, but neither is art.

In any case, speaking only for our own practice, we study whatever group models might be interesting or instructive. In the case of bands, there are simply many more bands than there are artist groups. We interviewed multiple artist groups in our later book *Group Work* that Printed Matter published in 2007, but we always return to talking to bands; in part because there is so much we can learn from them and also because all of us are passionate music lovers. Most recently we interviewed members of The Dicks, Tim Kerr of the Big Boys and many other bands, and Makoto Kawabata of Acid Mothers Temple for an ongoing series of interview booklets called "*Temporary Conversations*". We also interviewed artist Jean Toche of Guerrilla Art Action Group.

In some of the bands that are important to us, for example the Dutch band *The Ex*, we find many qualities that we can relate to. The band members run record labels and much of their music is self-released. We recently created our own publishing imprint, *Half Letter Press* toward this same end, as well as to release works by other authors. *The Ex* do a lot of the day to day band work themselves, which can include: booking tours, maintaining a website, album cover layout, taking care of mail orders, correspondence, driving the van to shows, and everything else that is necessary to maintain their practice. Additionally, *The Ex* has a highly flexible creative model that allows the members to go off and do other things outside of the band, something everyone in Temporary Services does as needed, while maintaining a core group of members over a longer period of time. *The Ex* also adds guests for albums, concerts or tours. This way of including others on a per project basis, without making them join the group for the long haul, is also relevant to our way of working.

**In general, the challenges of making a living in a band seem even less glamorous than working as an artist so there are many things not to emulate.**

I'm continually amazed by how poorly most bands are paid by clubs, if they are paid at all, and the overhead to maintain a touring vehicle and musical equipment just to have a mobile practice can be very expensive. There does seem to be some consistency in that most American bands report that they are paid better in Europe than their own country, which is often our own experience as well -- though it doesn't stop us from visiting any part of the U.S. that wants us-- and probably some parts that don't! Many bands also help each other out and operate in a non-competitive way, which is something we promote in the arts and often benefit from in the ways we work with other artists and groups.

**TR:** I'm interested in the way artistic collaboration can function as a learning tool. For TS, does a collaborative model overlap with a pedagogical model? How?

**SCJ:** It does -- in many ways. Like our habit of making free booklets and low-cost publications in conjunction with each project we undertake. We can leave a record of what we did, what worked, what didn't work, and our suggestions for how to accomplish this stuff on your own, through these publications. We are open about our process and about talking about both success and failure, which is still surprisingly a big deal for a lot of people in the arts! We're not deluded enough to think that we have all the answers, and we're not competitive enough to pretend that we aren't inspired by other people's work, by other fields and disciplines.

It helps that all three of us have experience as both teachers and students -- Marc and Brett have formal teaching assignments at the moment, Marc at an art school and Brett at a prison. We also allow ourselves to take simple questions seriously -- I'm often amazed that people's response to "why is this art?" or similar questions is to deride the questioner. I think if you can't explain what you're doing to anyone, you haven't thought hard enough about why you're doing it. We're not necessarily creating projects with the idea of making instructional models, but we're happy to share what we do with others, which I believe is the basis of any pedagogy.

**MF:** Learning from each other, as well as learning about and sharing the work of others outside of the group, is a big part of our collaborative practice. Also, because most collaborative groups are the main contact for information about their work, we often exchange materials and information with others. It's natural that we'll include this material in our teaching, just as they sometimes find our material useful for their own pedagogical practices.

**TR:** Temporary Services has done a couple of projects working with prisoners, namely the Prisoner's Inventions and the Supermax Subscriptions. Did this come out of Brett's teaching position, or vice versa?

**MF:** Our interest in prison issues, and our collaboration with Angelo goes back further than Brett's teaching -- though the work he does now contributes to our thinking, as does our ongoing collective interest in prison issues and the ways in which the prison system impacts our lives.

I've known our collaborator Angelo, from the project "Prisoner's Inventions," since around 1990 when he wrote in response to a small underground fanzine I published. His cellmate had seen a free copy that I mailed him and he encouraged Angelo to write and share his drawings with me. This started a correspondence that has continued nineteen years on. He remains in prison in California. Shortly after that I became a volunteer visiting artist at the State Correctional Institution at Pittsburgh from 1991-93. That prison, a Maximum Security facility, has since been torn down. Much later, when we began working as Temporary Services, it was natural for us to introduce each other to personal friends that we felt might make interesting people to organize projects with or work with as collaborators. We organized an exhibit of Angelo's personal drawings in 2000 and began working with him more collaboratively soon after with Prisoner's Inventions. Angelo remains in prison and we continue to have to negotiate this in order to work with him.

**TR:** As you pointed out, there is a noted rise in group practice, why do you think that is?

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**SCJ:** Groups have always been around. People in and out of art can't get anything done without the input of other people.

In order to paint a canvas, someone had to make the paint, make the canvas, grow the cotton that made the canvas, grow the food that fed the painter, and so on. I think what we're seeing is more of a shared awareness at the number of people who choose to collaborate, and a commitment on the part of some to be upfront about giving credit to others, rather than a real rise in the amount of people working this way. Scientists, chefs, parents, teachers, athletes -- all collaborators. Artists too. There's just a nagging nudge for people to name it as a "movement". Which to us is fine -- as long as it all results in continued good work and challenging new ideas.

**MF:** There does seem to be a rise in artists collaborating in groups and authoring their works under group names. This trend comes and goes in waves. It remains the fairly unusual artist group that can stick it out for many years. Too often groups will split and the members will return to individual art practices -- perhaps because the commercial art establishment is so minimally supportive of artist groups.

**TR:** You've made a point that the three of you don't work within the gallery system. Where else does your work intersect with the market, (Biennials, artist grants, or museum commissions for instance), and what of it? What makes the gallery system something from which to abstain for your work?

**MF:** The commercial gallery system just about never expresses any interest in what we do, nor have we felt that we need to pursue a commercial gallery to represent our ideas, help us find opportunities, get us into shows, handle our day to day affairs, or whatever else it is that galleries do for the artists they show.

We enjoy the administrative aspects of representing ourselves and like knowing our audience as much as is possible.

We feel we have been able to accomplish just as much, if not far more, than many artists with gallery representation without having to go that route. We also have a general distaste for the cultural climate fostered by many commercial galleries. We have no desire to bend over backwards to appeal to or please collectors, nor to deliberately and self-consciously favor one audience over another. Very few commercial galleries display any interest in works that are authored by groups or in supporting the activities of artist groups so for the most part, this just isn't our problem.

It is increasingly a problem that major museums -- which generally attract slightly broader audiences than commercial galleries --- are displaying a decreasing interest in accommodating anyone who can't afford the rising admission costs to enter them. We are responding to your questions in the wake of the Art Institute of Chicago voting to raise their general admission ticket price to \$18.00 for adults -- this will narrow their audience more than anything else and is tremendously disappointing.

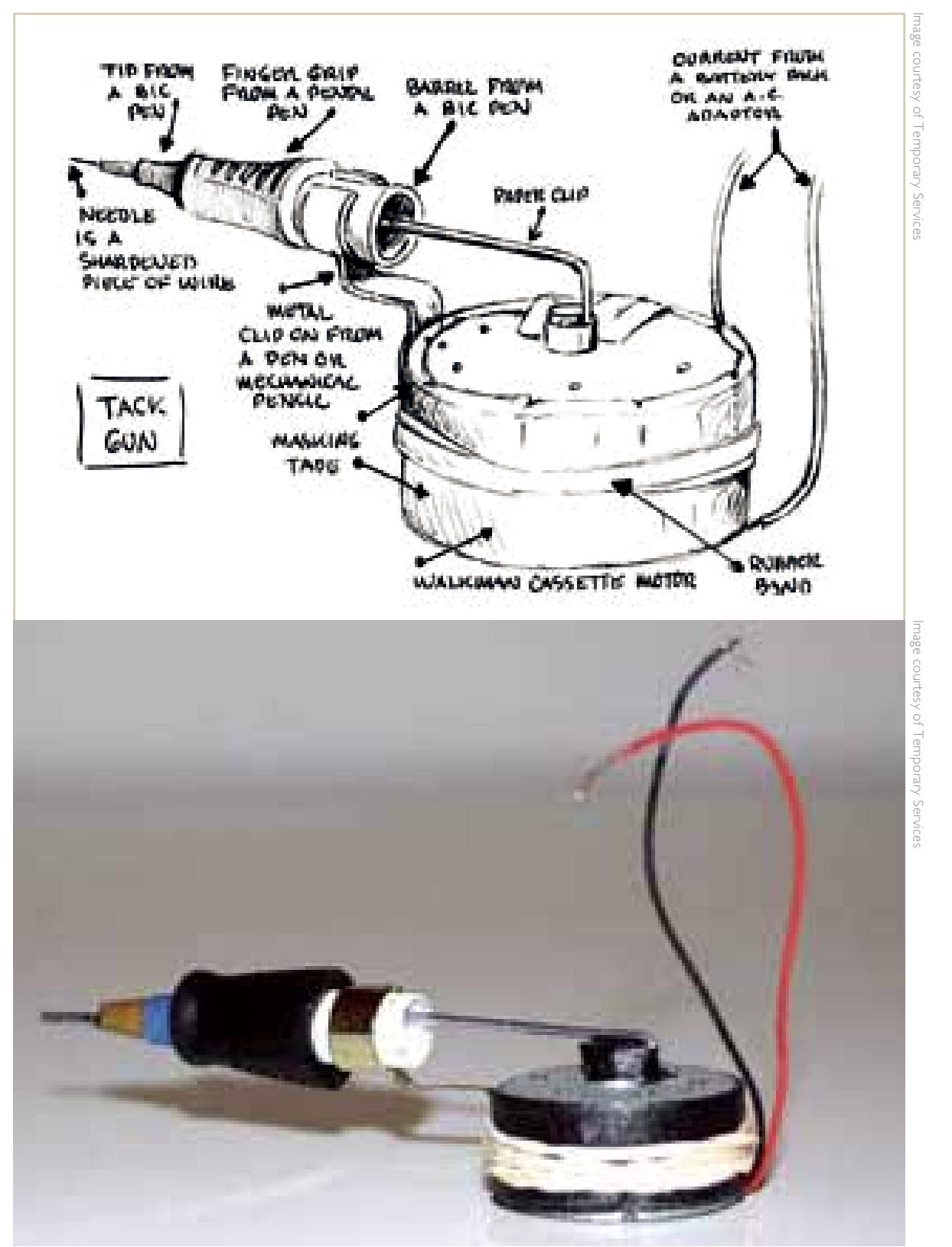
We discuss every invitation we get -- its merits and disadvantages -- and say No to anything that we feel is compromising to our values, unethical, exploitative, or otherwise counter to our desires. We have said No to working with some museums based on these factors and Yes to working with others. We don't have a firm set of rules and we assess opportunities individually as they come along. We have done projects with large budgets and projects with no budget. There is no hierarchy for us; a museum can do things that a guerrilla public project can't, and vice versa. We are open to all sorts of invitations and have enjoyed a highly flexible and varied practice over the past ten years.

We have sold a handful of larger things -- only to people we know and respect and trust with our work -- and a larger number of smaller things, like individual copies of books and booklets that we have published and sell for cheap. We have also given away thousands of free publications, usually printed with part of an exhibition budget when we have one. We sometimes seek out and receive grants but are often excluded from them because we are a group and not an individual artist or a not-for-profit organization. We have received some awards.

Our preference is to make and present our work with the greatest possible freedom to the most diverse possible audiences. Choosing to present work in the form of publications has been one way of reaching new audiences -- after all, a collaborator like Angelo has never even seen our website because he has no internet access in prison, but he has seen many of our booklets. Dozens of those publications are downloadable for free as PDFs on our website -- another way we build an audience for our ideas. Executing some projects on the streets has helped us reach thousands of people that would never actively look for art in museums or galleries -- commercial or otherwise. Each kind of venue presents different possibilities and allows for different experiences and exchanges to take place. **BP**



Above and right: Temporary Services, prisoners' Inventions, 2002-ongoing.



Above: Temporary Services, prisoners' Inventions, 2002-ongoing.

Image courtesy of Temporary Services

Image courtesy of Temporary Services

Image courtesy of Temporary Services

# Interview with Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries

by Kelly Shindler



Image courtesy of YHCHI

Above: Excerpt HONEYMOON IN BEPPU, 2009 "Mixed Bathing World," Beppu Contemporary Art Festival, Japan. Two-channel video installation with original music soundtrack.

Based in Seoul, the elusive yet friendly duo better known as Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries is comprised of Young-hae Chang and her American cohort Marc Voge. As new media artists, their work primarily assumes the form of Monaco font-inflected Flash animations covering a rotating arsenal of stories. These are then set to a catchy blend of easy listening and jazz, and all underscored with a frenetic digital and narrative energy.

Instantly recognizable yet never predictable, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' work has been shown in museums and public spaces the world over and, of course, online—in fifteen different languages.

Yet their appeal transcends the new media camp, touching a nerve in the realms of literature, contemporary art and even, to their ambivalence, adult entertainment.

Their Flash piece *The Art of Silence* (2006), purportedly an interview with Tate Modern curator Jemima Rellie on the occasion of their Tate commission *The Art of Sleep* (2006), transforms the artist interview trope into a work of art itself. Yet the conversation between artists and curator quickly devolves into a humorous and antagonistic portrait of the two at their bickering worst. Originating with Rellie's question regarding their creative process, Chang and Voge launch on an extended tangent spanning everything from their own quarrels to questions of intention (artist's versus curator's), creative blocks, claims of art historical ignorance, aligning Internet art with painting, hate mail, their hero Duchamp, and the benefits of holding a PhD in Art. The nonsensical nature of the interview, if we can even call it one, reaches new heights when Chang and Voge, after slinging endless profanities at each other, segue from questions-and-answers to implore Rellie to sing a bebop tune. After she kicks it off, *The Art of Sleep* concludes as a sing-along, Chang and Voge chiming in with Rellie. The interview is finally over, impotent babble having taken the place of conventional pontification.

For this issue on collaboratives and collectives, BootPrint tracked Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries down between their jaunts to Japan for an animated email exchange spanning their thoughts on television, poetry, process (yes, we went there), and what it takes to sustain their relationship and practice ten years after "incorporation." While much about their practice remains difficult to pin down (as you'll see, they have clearly mastered the art of the charming/squirrely response), we were pleasantly surprised by what they were nonetheless willing to divulge. For more information on Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries and hours of Internet entertainment, spend some quality time on their website, [www.yhchang.com](http://www.yhchang.com).

What are you working on in Japan at the moment? Are you focused solely on this or what other concurrent projects are you working on?

**Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries:** We finished last month a project for the Yebisu Festival in Tokyo (<http://www.yebizo.com/>) called LAST TANGO IN TOKYO. The following link is for one part of the project shown on six jumbotron in the Shibuya neighborhood of Tokyo: [http://www.yhchang.com/LAST\\_TANGO\\_IN\\_TOKYO\\_.html](http://www.yhchang.com/LAST_TANGO_IN_TOKYO_.html)

English version:  
[http://www.yhchang.com/LAST\\_TANGO\\_IN\\_TOKYO.html](http://www.yhchang.com/LAST_TANGO_IN_TOKYO.html)

The project we're doing now is called HONEYMOON IN BEPPU. We should have a link up on our site for that piece shortly after the show, called Mixed-Bathing World ([http://www.mixedbathingworld.com/en\\_index.html](http://www.mixedbathingworld.com/en_index.html)), opens, tomorrow (April 10). The work is a two-channel Flash piece about a couple who come to Beppu for an affair. Beppu is celebrated in Japan for its hot springs, and throughout the '70s, if we're not mistaken, was a popular place to go on your honeymoon. Out of these two images -- hot springs and honeymoon -- we made a story.

We're also in a show that opens on May 3 called "Take the Money and Run" at De Appel, in Amsterdam (<http://www.deappel.nl/exhibitions/e/664/>).

The poetry world is (or is not, according to your critical view) also interested in our work, and we're going to be in a show at the Center for Book Arts in New York (<http://www.centerforbookarts.org/exhibits/archive/showdetail.asp?showID=182>). We'll also be featured any day now in the 10th anniversary issue of the online poetry review Drunken Boat (<http://www.drunkenboat.com/>).

**Kelly Shindler** Sounds like you guys have been busy. I am wondering about your process and how language enters into your work. Surely it must vary by project, but what is your relationship to text and how do you approach it? In other words, how do the stories you tell get come into being? How are they inspired and how does your visual style liberate—or perhaps bind—the text to offer a different sort of experience - aural, legible, etc?

**YHCHI:** We've never analyzed closely how we come up with our texts. It's actually not our job -it's more like yours- and we prefer not to dwell on process for fear of finding out something about ourselves or our style that we don't like. Probably like a lot of writers, we're on the lookout for images, ideas, anecdotes, events that might lead to something usable. The major difference is that there are two of us, so we spend a lot of time hashing things out.

Unlike a lot of writers, however, we're part of the art world, which, in its simplest terms, means dealing with space and money -- not sure what the order of importance is here. Probably money is the most important factor in determining the offline work we do these days. So that's a constraint. Anyone can set out to write "War and Peace" or "The Cantos," but not everyone gets a chance to do it on someone else's nickel. Which may sound cynical, because, after all, if you really want to do something in art or writing, well, just go out and do it, dammit. But we've found that in many cases it's better for us to bind, as you put it, our work to the space and budget offered us. Artists get into trouble when they go over budget, we've witnessed.

Now you might be thinking- Where's the poetry in that? For us there's poetry in anything, not least of all working with constraints, and not unlike fixed forms in poetry. We can get excited, believe it or not, when an online poetry review invites us to create a one-hundred-second work that pays a dollar a second. Every second we churn out equals one dollar. Exciting.

**KS:** \$1/second is a pretty good deal. Did you know that in broadcast television you can earn like \$30-50/second? Even better. In fact, has your work ever been on TV? It is fitting medium for you, if we tie the history of television in with that of video and the Internet, and think about the way your work unfolds in real time (but without the commercials)...

**YHCHI:** Yeah, we've been on TV -- Sweden and Germany come to mind -- and although we're not sure if it's suited to our work, when we first started out we had it in mind to emulate the entertainment value of the small screen. This was a period (mid-90s) when an image file took a couple of minutes to download on a 56K modem and a 30-second thumbnailish video downloaded while you made and ate lunch. We decided that was baloney, and came up with a formula that presented a full-browser streaming animation of up to 20 minutes duration that downloaded and started playing in less than 20 seconds. We did this with the idea that the Web would never pick up steam if it couldn't compete with TV.

We also were invited by an ad agency last year to do a Nokia cell phone TV commercial campaign. It never panned out because we couldn't abide by their copywriting and tried to convince them to use our own: <http://www.yhchang.com/ZENPHONE.html>

**KS:** In all of these projects you cite, the work was or will be presented differently - on a public screen, in a gallery, on the internet, and so on. And in this vein, they also are experienced/viewed by very different audiences - whether public, art-going, book arts/literary-friendly/etc, and in several different countries, to boot. How do you take context into account in your work and how does the space of reception matter for you? What do you think accounts for a crossover interest in such variable contexts?

**KS:** Ok, so let's provide a little context for the interview.

**YHCHI:** You're right, there is a lot of crossover interest in our work -- it's fascinating and gratifying to us. For instance, adult Web sites link to some of our works. That's fascinating and grati ...actually, that's annoying, but what can you do? That's art and that's the Internet and that's taste and that's interpretation. And that's also not our fault, as we try to explain to our parents. At least we don't think it is. After all, we really don't know what we're doing, as we mentioned above. We didn't create the context -- the Internet -- we just decided to move there. Nor did we pretend to push the boundaries of art and literature. We left that to the smart guys. From what we can tell, the sky is the limit here. We don't think we've actually flown very high.

We think the interest in our work from literary, artistic, design, intellectual, academic, sexual, political, and social contexts (did we forget any?) is the result of our clever mix of text, music, and animation -- not that we set out to be that clever. It just happened. Poetry is inherently for the happy few. We seem to have revitalized a certain type of poetry for the unhappy masses. People seem to like the way this poetry goes along with the music we first chose and now make. Animators notice that we only animate text. Designers ask us why we only use the Monaco font and rarely use any colors but black and white. To them that's really minimal. To us that's not design. Intellectuals think it's intellectually funny that we turned Derrida into a Korean cleaning lady. Academics set out to see if one of our works is, as we once claimed, a pastiche of an Ezra Pound poem or two. Sexologists (yes) would like to interview us (no). Political causes would like to co-opt us, and don't believe us when we say that we're not making political work.

We take into account the needs of the different publics we create for. We've presented work in 15 languages, for instance. We've also taken into account these publics' different sensibilities -- as brought to our attention by the interested parties in these publics. In other words, we've rewritten certain texts so as not to provoke or offend. This may alarm those who believe in absolute artistic freedom, but it offers us a glimpse into some of the workings in the real world. We've found that you can write anything you want on your own Web site -- you're only hurting yourself. But when you write something that's presented in someone else's institution, you're collaborating, and you're no longer hurting just yourself if you write something deemed offensive. Artists are essentially irresponsible people -- we know we are -- so we're intrigued by the professional (read: responsible) context into which we're shoehorning our work.

**KS:** Your work clearly touches an international and multidisciplinary nerve. Does this sort of popularity and attention frighten or concern you? Or is it welcome considering, as I read in a past interview, that you claim to have received little to no recognition in Korea? What are the implications as your practice - and your budget, as you point out - evolve?

**YHCHI:** - The only guys who may be watching their backs are traditional poets, who are very territorial, it seems, maybe since, once they get tenure, there's little else to fight for in their business. As for us, if we're popular, we take it for what it is, which is online popularity and museum shows. We don't have to wear sunglasses and dodge motor-scooter photo-shooters on the street. As for South Korea, well, it too is what it is -- a country that wants to make a lot of global noise, including on the cultural scene. This explains why there's relatively less interest in our work here than elsewhere. There's a virtue to being small elsewhere.

In Korea small is for, well, little people. Korea is a great people looking to do great things. Internet art doesn't quite cut it.

**KS:** The discussion of writing here, and process, which remains, as you note, up to us to consider, dovetails with the core of this issue: the notion of collaboratives and collectives. Now, surely you can imagine how curious it is to be emailing with both of you - sending one email off to two people in Korea, or wherever you are at any point during this exchange, and getting one in return. And I don't know if you're actually writing out these responses together or if you take turns, or whatever...

**YHCHI:** We're in Seoul right now. Whichever one of us is free responds to your thoughtful questions.

**KS:** But this brings up compelling questions about collaboration itself. It's been about 10 years now...why did you choose to work together and how does the partnership manifest itself?

**YHCHI:** We wanted to spend all of our time together -- big mistake, of course, but you live and learn. The partnership is first of all there in our name, YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES. Then, in the first year or so of the partnership, when you scrolled down the list of works on our home page (<http://www.yhchang.com>), you saw works in both Korean and English. We also made an effort in our works to address both Korean and American issues. No longer. Yet we're still together; and we get the job done more or less, although mostly in English and other languages, and every so often in Korean.

**KS:** Is there a technical division of labor (writing/music/programming/etc) or are things 50/50?

**YHCHI:** More like a logical division of labor. Young-hae does the Korean stuff, Marc the English. We each have the same software on our computers. If you ask us individually who does the most work, you get different answers. Logical.

**KS:** Do you agree to disagree or are things generally harmonious?

**YHCHI:** We rarely agree on anything, from the concept to the execution to the postproduction to the installation to the place where a new work should be on the list of works on our Web site. After five years we still haven't decided if we should upload to our site the Korean version of CUNNINGLINGUS IN NORTH KOREA ([http://www.yhchang.com/CUNNINGLINGUS\\_IN\\_NORTH\\_KOREA.html](http://www.yhchang.com/CUNNINGLINGUS_IN_NORTH_KOREA.html)). Not that it matters, which may be why we disagree a lot. If any of this mattered, we'd make expeditious decisions.

**KS:** And what are the benefits, as well as the challenges, of working as part of a team?

**YHCHI:** We get to travel together and share entrees, we get to blame each other when things don't work out.

In theory the work gets done twice as quickly (but it doesn't). One big challenge is believing after all that the work is better

for having been done together.

**KS:** Do you ever think about dissolving YHCHI or is the corporation rock-solid? How do you interpret, the idea of camaraderie with a collaborative?

**YHCHI:** Although nothing lasts forever, look at Wall Street and Main Street these days; unlike these big and small enterprises, we're making art, which is supposed to last forever, even if the art makers aren't doing so good. From what we've seen, artists don't pull the plug so much as they get their plugs pulled -- their popularity wanes to a point where their output doesn't matter any longer; except that, again, unlike other professionals who get fired or close up shop or retire, artists keep going, because in art, you never know who might come along sooner or later to proclaim that you're a genius.

As for camaraderie, if we understand the meaning, yes, we prop each other up in emergencies, sort of like paddling with a defibrillator.

**KS:** Does the process of adaptation, translation, reconfiguration, self-editing, etc. slow you down or inhibit you? How important is accessibility to you, and at what cost (if any)?

**YHCHI:** It's all good. "SHE YELPED LIKE A PUP WHEN SHE CAME" -- that's a line from the aforementioned HONEYMOON IN BEPPU. Our Japanese translator interpreted that as yelping for joy when she met her boyfriend. We meant she had an orgasm. Her translation is in the completed work.

**KS:** Are there any stories at the moment, fact or fiction, that you can't stop obsessing about?

**YHCHI:** There are a few story lines that pop up here and there in our work and will pop up again. One in particular begins like this: You're walking in the street or the subway, and a group of police confronts you and asks to see your papers. **BP**

## HEY, WAKE UP. I DON'T LIKE YOU. GET IT?

Above: Excerpt LAST TANGO IN TOKYO, 2009  
"Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions,"  
Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography  
Four-channel video installation with original music soundtrack.

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ORIENT ENGLISH KOREAN JAPANESE  
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SAUL

Above: [www.yhchang.com](http://www.yhchang.com), homepage.

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YOU'RE MINDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS, WHEN SOME GUY IN A UNIFORM --  
MAYBE JUST A WHITE SHIRT WITH A BADGE ON IT -- SNEAKS UP FROM BEHIND  
AND INVITES YOU TO STEP OUT OF THE LINE AND FOLLOW HIM INTO WHAT  
TURNS OUT TO BE A WINDOWLESS BACKROOM. AND HE'S ONLY DOING HIS JOB.

Above: Excerpt from CLOSE YOUR EYES, 2008-2009 National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (EMST)  
Three-channel video installation with original music soundtrack.

Image courtesy of YHCHI

Image courtesy of YHCHI

# Avant Car Guard

by Robert Sloon



Image courtesy of Avant Car Guard.

Above: Avant Car Guard Bury Kendall Geers, 2007. From left to right: Jan-Henri Booyens, Zander Blom, Michael McGarry.

Avant Car Guard<sup>1</sup> is an all-male collective comprised of young South African artists Zander Blom, Jan-Henri Booyens and Michael McGarry. Their incisive wit and potent satire has gained them a reputation as hilarious but virulent critics of the local art pond. Joining together in 2006, their work mostly consists of photographs documenting rock and roll-spirited performances and ironic stabs at the patrician South African art world. For their recent show, *Volume III* they have moved on to produce collaborative paintings.

**Robert Sloon:** Could you describe how Avant Car Guard started? What was the moment?

**Zander Blom:** We started with doing a group show, which we were going to call Avant Car Guard.

**Michael McGarry:** At Dirt Contemporary.

**ZB:** What happened was the dude who ran the gallery got arrested or something.

**Jan-Henri Booyens:** And evicted.

**ZB:** And the gallery got closed down. It was going to be just solo vibes, the three of us; a typical group show. And then we were thinking, "Why are we doing this? Why don't we just work as one thing? Like a band would." Make stuff that's one work. We were tired of that whole group show with your solo stuff, trying to find a space to do stuff.

**RS:** Had you all known each other from before? Studied together?

**ZB:** They studied together, and me and Jan went to school together. And then we all met in Joburg (Johannesburg) later.

**RS:** And put together that first show at Bell-Roberts?

**MM:** It was like a book, and there were a lot of ideas. Shit that kinda irritated us or just funny stuff or whatever. And it got into the book. The idea was to pretend like we were already a fully functioning entity, and have a book launch and a book signing. Do that really sort of Modernist/Rock Star sort of bullshit. Not a rock star... more of a nerd star.

**ZB:** It was the three of us in a room, coming up with ideas. And then it was natural to translate that into a photograph.

**MM:** And the modernist idea of the single genius working alone in the studio. So the studio was the nexus point for where things get

manifest from- and then (we) took the piss out of that by having the Michael McGarry Studio, The Zander Blom Studio, The Jan Henri studio in Paris. Paris? Or Pretoria?

**ZB:** We weren't thinking of it as works. We were just thinking of making something, like that isn't that artwork. And it has taken a long route, to get from that, working together and coming up with things to painting, which we are doing now.

**JHB:** Initially, it was more about having fun.

**MM:** It still is.

**JHB:** I don't want to say it's not serious...but it's not serious, but we take it seriously.

**ZB:** We couldn't imagine, then working on an image, cause that's what we were doing in our own vibes

**JHB:** I really don't think three years ago we would have imagined doing paintings.

**ZB:** And doing a proper show. This is our first proper show.

**MM:** Ja, we've never had a solo show before.

**ZB:** We've done a publication and launched them.

**MM:** Or a performance and you can buy shit.

**RS:** Essentially you have reversed engineered your collective?

**MM:** We've kind of gone full circle, and Avant Car Guard is now an artist, its not like Michael, Zander and Jan, it is Avant Car Guard.

**ZB:** In Volume I it was still like our solo weird vibes, but know its one soup of shit.

**MM:** Now we have two solos in one year...

**ZB:** We more developing a visual language for the group in term of everything we are doing.

**MM:** Like any artist.

**RS:** Have you felt that working in Avant Car Guard, which has such a strong aesthetic, has affected your personal production? Has there been a sea change?

**MM:** In my stuff, totally.

**RS:** Did you have solo careers before?

**MM:** Not really. Zander did, we didn't. We kinda did, but not really.

**RS:** Avant Car Guard essentially launched your careers?

**ZB:** No. But it propelled a bunch of other shit

**MM:** And also we learned how to take photos. We learned how to do that whole production side. Also the three of us can manifest shit quite quickly.

**JHB:** A lot faster than we could alone.

**ZB:** I think it's definitely shaped what we do now, in terms of what we're actually doing.

**MM:** The two feed each other.

**ZB:** And strengthen each other.

**MM:** And also we were in shows where Avant Car Guard is a separate artist, to us. But we are in the same show. It's fucking weird.

**ZB:** But that's where we wanted to go.

**MM:** It wasn't supposed be like "quirky" and "rabble-rouser" and all the other words attached to us. We're just an artist and it's not going to stop. It's also not a hobby; it's commercially viable.

**ZB:** Plus, the way we think about it is we are working on a thing, as opposed to Jan's visual shorthand plus Mike's ideas makes Avant Car Guard. It's more like we are all working towards an idea, which is what Avant Car Guard is.

**MM:** Like the way a band works.

**ZB:** Or working with a brand. It's that thing, and you put ideas into that, that would work in that context.

**MM:** It's not the sum of its parts.

**ZB:** And then you don't get caught up in, "This is my solo shit," or, "This is mine." And we're not like precious about it. It's very democratic, in a weird way, because it takes two votes.

**RS:** Do you work democratically? What is your working process?

**ZB:** We come up with an idea. One of us will be, "That's rad," and the other two will be, "That sucks." Or it will go the other way.

**RS:** Just a discussion?

**MM:** It's like any artist, you're sitting in traffic and you come up with an idea, or in Pick and Pay. But the difference is it goes into this soup.

**ZB:** It grows very fast.

**RS:** How do you decide what ideas go into your collective and what ideas you use yourself?

**ZB:** I think some ideas just work. Your brain is just split, "That's rad for solo," "That's rad for Avant Car Guard."

**MM:** Avant Car Guard is so different. It's seldom that you keep an idea for yourself. You definitely think in terms of what works for what.

**ZB:** It changes the way we do our solo vibes, we learn not to take ourselves as seriously. But they definitely help each other on rather than eat at each other.

**RS:** I was talking to Doing It For Daddy, and they said that one of the advantages to working in a collective is that it allows you to criticize the system more than in your solo career.

**JHB:** It gives you more power definitely.

**MM:** If each of us did, "This sucks," then it would be really lame. Not that Avant Car Guard isn't lame, but there are three of you; you can't go, "You said that." It just diffuses the whole thing. Avant Car Guard is like a holding brand device that you can author shit from.

**ZB:** Its something we do, but its not that whole precious thing, it's just work. I don't ever feel this is something I did. It makes it easier just to say shit, because you don't necessarily feel that connected to it.

**RS:** Like a corporation that represents.

**MM:** It's just an abstract thing. The whole project is abstract.

**JHB:** We are actually a corporation. We got a CC.

**ZB:** It's easier if we get sued.

**RS:** Equal ownership?

**ZB:** Well, Jan's the drummer. I write the songs and Michael does the website. No, we're all equal, and we all bring different soups to the table. You can't measure it.

**RS:** You guys always play on the rock band thing?

**MM:** Not so much anymore, now we're playing on being an artist.

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**ZB:** Its been there from the beginning, in Volume I it was very much there. But it's more of a punk sensibility than a rock band sensibility.

**MM:** Like an angry-young-man kinda vibe.

**ZB:** I think we've kept that punk sensibility, but we're more like an artist with a punk sensibility than a band.

**JHB:** We used the ideology of the rock group as a starting point, to not confuse our independent situations. You never go like, "Oh, wow! Eddy Vedder is amazing." You go, "Pearl Jam."

**MM:** I hate Pearl Jam.

**JHB:** [laughs] I don't know where that came from.

**MM:** A lot of interviewers go like, "Who's responsible?" But it's not like that.

**JHB:** We all come from different environments, and it works really well when we get together.

**ZB:** And we were friends to begin with.

**RS:** And working together hasn't affected that? It's not like you got married and suddenly hate your partner?

**MM:** No cross swords.

**JHB:** We haven't met Yoko Ono yet.

**RS:** How do you end up moving from the performative stuff to painting?

**ZB:** It was looking at another way to manifest similar ideas we had in another way. Some things you can do as a painting.

**JHB:** We also wanted to make "real" work.

**MM:** Really become one artist. And the way to do that is to make really hand authored things; like paintings.

**RS:** Do you work on the paintings collaboratively? Do you sit the three of you and work together?

**MM:** We work on two at the same time.

**JHB:** And then one will swap.

**ZB:** Its like paint by numbers. We work it out.

**RS:** Its definitely something quite unique.

**ZB:** Its very high school.

**MM:** Its a fucking bizarre process.

**ZB:** "Don't use that color...what the fuck."

**MM:** Painting as a process is quite a bizarre, and when there are three of you, it's like... Jesus Christ.

**RS:** By moving into real objects are you trying to establish yourself more? Trying not to be the guys questioning the art world, trying to move back into the centre?

**MM:** I don't think it's that strategic. We wanted to make things that would be very authored and confuse the issue further.

**ZB:** I think 80 percent of that was, "Fuck, Let's try this." A big part of it is trying new stuff.

**JHB:** Someone gets an idea and we execute it. Someone says, "Hey lets build a raft," then we build a raft.

**MM:** Because there's three of you, you can.

**ZB:** Its a thing of hanging out, getting drunk and coming up with ideas. It's not sitting down and this is our fucking manifesto, this is what we work with, this is our brand.

**MM:** Its just being in the same room together, it doesn't matter where the room is.

**RS:** And working together accelerates the processes?

**MM:** And because there's an expanding glossary, like any artist has, Avant Car Guard has its own series of languages. It generates its own bullshit, basically, by itself almost. I mean fuck it, I don't know where the ideas come from.

**JHB:** Some of the ideas we keep them for ages. We have one idea on this show that we had two years ago. It's about getting that idea and then finding ways to manifest that. It's like, "Oh rad, that's a good idea," and then we log it, and then we work from there: What is our capability to manifest that?

**MM:** And the graveyard for ideas is pretty big.

**ZB:** Things get shot down pretty fast. A lame idea comes up and almost instantly disappears.

**JHB:** Sometimes we go on a shoot and it doesn't work at all. And we scrap it. And we just spent four trekking through a jungle to a river

**MM:** that sucked and we didn't even use it.

**MM:** But we've recycled a lot of shit recently.

**JHB:** Shhhh.

**RS:** Do you ever feel you are oversaturating the market? You are working really fast, and in a bigger pond it might not be so noticeable.

**MM:** To begin with one of the ways we structured it was to do so much stuff we couldn't be ignored. But, dude, we haven't done shit really since Joburg Art Fair last year. We've been on a couple of group shows. This is our first proper solo show.

**RS:** I guess you have a strong brand.

**MM:** We didn't want to do the solo show every two years sort of thing. We wanted to work as much as possible. Undo that solo bullshit that we wanted to undo in the first place. Undo all the normative processes.

**RS:** How has getting some success affected the original punk ideal?

**ZB:** It makes more things possible. We are able to phone Justin<sup>2</sup>, "We need some props, give us some cash vibes." Its not like we have massive success vibes, and are living in mansions. We are little more able. It really helps in terms of ...

**JHB:** ...picking up chicks.

**ZB:** Not really [sigh]...

**MM:** ...And putting them down again.

**ZB:** It helps in terms of motivation for the project.

**MM:** Its such a tiny little swamp we're working in, that success is really sort of easy. What is success? We're just making shit anyway.

I A car guard is a uniquely South African form of informal employment. Almost all public parking has a guard who 'protects' your car from thieves and helps you park in exchange for tips.

2 Justin Rhodes, owner of Whatiftheworld Gallery.

## Doing It For Daddy

by Robert Sloon ②

Doing It For Daddy is a South African collective of three emerging artists; Renee Holleman, Bettina Malcolmess and Linda Stupart. The all-women group has been actively, since its inception in 2006, poking holes in the structures of South African art. Their witty but highly considered approach to art making has garnered plenty of critical praise, including the prestigious Spier Contemporary Award. Their practice often takes performative forms such as fictionalized tours for the above mentioned competition, live music in Sweet Virginia, political canvassing in We have a plan... and playful shop stalls in *Fifteen Minutes of Frame*.

ed. Who initiated it? Where did you come from?

**Linda Stupart:** It's quite a well-established mythology, I suppose. We read an article in *Art South Africa*<sup>1</sup> called *Doing it for Daddy* (a bell hooks quotation) by Sharlene Kahn, which implied that there were all these evil white women that were continuing the hegemony of white maleness in the South African art world and they named all these people; some of whom we really like. And seemed a bit ridiculous and very confrontational. And quite offensive.

**Renee Holleman:** And a little simplistic.

**LS:** And very simplistic. Especially when you look at the way that quotation was taken very much out of the context in which bell hooks wrote it. And so we thought of writing an

article, and then we thought of shouting, and then we thought it would be better to maybe just work together and make work.

**RH:** I think the important thing is we didn't feel what was being said was overtly incorrect, but the way it was being articulated was overly simplistic. Essentially it was setting up a whole load of stereotypes around this idea of what white South African women were doing in the art world; as artists, as curators and in various different positions. Part of what we thought of doing was to take on those stereotypes with a degree of irony, but also seriousness, and explore and expose another way of talking about the kinds of issues that had been brought up.

**RS:** Where did 'we' come from, though? Did you read the article together?

**Bettina Malcolmess:** It was at Michaelis School of Fine Art, where we all were working and studying at the time. Linda, Renee and me.

**RH:** Sitting having a coffee one morning.

**BM:** Linda suggested the name. She said, "Well. Let's start a collective called Doing It For Daddy." Which was a really good name and seemed to hit the right tone, in terms of people not taking themselves too seriously in the South Africa art world, not talking about identity too much. It seemed the right time to play against those discourses.

**LS:** It was before Cape 06<sup>2</sup>, which never happened, and it seemed like a good time to be working towards proposals because there was this big event.

**BM:** Which then set up our method as a working group; we work together within, and against, a bigger structure. It was the same for Spier Contemporary<sup>3</sup> when we did that. It was a big art competition.

**RH:** It largely has informed the work subsequently, we've tended to maintain that working methodology.

**LS:** It's site and event specific. We wouldn't go and make a work and then look for somewhere to show it. It's always been in reaction to a system that already exists.

**RH:** Which has made it end up largely performative.

**RS:** Does that differ from your working methodologies, generally, as individuals? Or does a collective lend itself to working in that way?

**RH:** Definitely, our individual praxes are within degrees similar, but also quite different. Obviously there are things that overlap. With the work Bettina is doing at the moment it is more explicit.

**BM:** My work is more within that framework; interventionist, site-specific performance.



Above: Doing It For Daddy during their 2007 performance *15 Minutes of Frame* at the South African National Gallery. From left to right: Renee Holleman, Linda Stupart, Bettina Malcolmess.

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**LS:** I've always liked that with the collective I can make the kind of work I would never make on my own. In terms of playing with the art world, I've always enjoyed the kind of work that is political on some level, but never felt capable of making it myself. With the collective I can go into that.

**RS:** Why do you think a collective lends itself more to that though? Other South African collectives as well, like Avant Car Guard and Gugulective, find it easier to challenge, or play within the systems as a collective.

**LS:** You always have people backing you up.

**BM:** What do you mean?

**BM:** [laughs] Safety in numbers.

**RH:** It is safety in numbers, but it also taking on issues bigger than one's self... not that one doesn't take on issues that are larger than oneself in one's own work all the time anyway.

**LS:** I think between us we also have a lot more experience in theory and literature and all these things. I wouldn't know enough to make the kind of work on my own. Bettina brings those things, Renee brings different things; so together you feel more comfortable doing it.

**BM:** It's an interesting mix of, I guess, my theoretical background and then Renee's really meticulous attention to materiality, which is great, and then Linda's offbeat, very critical point of view on everything.

**RS:** Do you think you can identify those styles in the work?

**LS:** I think you can always see bits of us in each work that we make.

**BM:** I think sometimes what we've done is to play off each other. So what we did for a work at the AVA [Association of Visual Arts] was to curate these three bands to perform a song, Sweet Virginia, for the curator, Virginia McKenny, who chose us. We each chose a performance group, and there were three different identities around those performances. You got a sense of each of our separate identities within the collective.

**RH:** I also think it is an enormously generative space. You bring three different people's energy into a collaboration.

**LS:** I think that the work for the AVA was really nice because you could have these three different performances, and it was very obvious how I had my boyfriend, like a cute boy in this band, and then this person speaking, which was like Bettina.

**RS:** Do you find there is tension working together because you have three very different personalities? Is there a leadership structure?

**RH:** [laughs] They all listen to me.

**RS:** I mean how does the collaborative work on an effective level?

**LS:** We decided we should start driving more places, so we're stuck in a small, enclosed environment.

**BM:** We've driven a lot to Stellenbosch. Our time on the N2.

**RS:** Ideas just come out of conversation?

**RH:** It is very conversational; very much working through something, critiquing it, and then going away and thinking about it. What works and what doesn't work.

**LS:** Our standard thing is we'd have a meeting and then we'd come up with all these ideas and be really excited. And then two days later someone would phone up say, "Well, that idea. It was kind of silly." And I'd be, "I've been thinking that too," and then we'd come back and do it again.

**BM:** It's very democratic, I think. I think we're all good at different things, we bring different things to the process. It does sometimes take a while to agree.

**RH:** Some projects are easier than others.

**BM:** And we all do other work so we're often busy doing other things at the same time.

**RH:** They invariably require more time and

effort than one thinks.

**LS:** We're not very good at making easy works.

**BM:** [laughs] No.

**RH:** No.

**RS:** With the success of Doing it for Daddy, winning the Spier Contemporary competition and now, the Goodman Gallery invite onto shows, how are your careers effected, individually?

**RH:** I think we don't know yet.

**LS:** I find it tricky, personally. I've been a critic and a writer, and an artist with Doing It For Daddy. No one knows that I've made work on my own ever, which is depressing. It can be a bit difficult, especially when the work is so different from the Doing it for Daddy stuff. It's like, "Hi, I also make this really angsty stuff about me." It can be tricky. But it's also nice because people do care sometimes.

**RS:** Has it been a bit of a launching pad?

**BM:** For me I have developed this mode of collaborative practice. I collaborate with a lot of people now.

**RS:** Doing it for Daddy was the first?

**BM:** Yes, I don't think I would have done that otherwise. Renee and Linda finished their Masters degrees from the prize money and I've been working on another project because of it. It's enabling.

**LS:** I couldn't have made any of my Masters work without that prize money from Spier. Ever.

**RH:** I think for me I've realized I'd like to carry on working collaboratively; in different scenarios perhaps as well. I enjoy the process. I suppose it's a question I ask myself quite frequently, what is the relation between the two? What does it enable and what does it speak to? Where does the investment lie in terms of a practice that is different to the processes that we go through, which have been largely studio-based. I think there's a recursive feedback, in some kind of way, engaging in a terrain that you are a part of, on some other level. I make a particular kind of work that I'm engaged in by virtue of being a practitioner within this country and this environment. There are other things that I'm engaged with that are outside of my own individual practice. There's a kind of feedback between those two by virtue of the fact that I think some of the things we work with are pertinent to me as a practitioner; as a female practitioner; as a white practitioner. It's something that challenges and re-establishes that position more broadly than my own practice does. It's indirect but there's definitely a conversation. I think it's been interesting, and this is something Linda and I have been speaking about recently, being engaged in dealing with a political forum, essentially. Looking at the dynamics and politics of institutions that I wouldn't have felt comfortable doing alone, because it's not the predominant thrust of my interests. But, I am interested in it, and it's an opportunity for me to investigate those things.

**LS:** I've always separated practice and theory, in a very big kind of way. I write politically and critically, and then I make work that is completely different. It's quite nice to have this collective that bridges those things. It allows me to engage with those other interests.

**RS:** You say it's a more direct relationship between theory and practice; what do you see as Doing It For Daddy's theoretical standing?

**BM:** I think it's a critical practice. It's a praxis in the sense that it is a practice that applies critique to whatever structure it's working within. At Spier; when we did the tour of the Spier Estate, instead of making work that worked in the gallery space, we took people outside of the gallery into the context of the estate, and we tried to evoke invisible histories and narratives within that space; which were actually fictional. Essentially, what we do is disturb a particular point of view and the idea of a contained gallery space and edge outside and bring the outside inside. It's about exposing the structure within which we work, whatever that may be: social, political or an art structure. It's the same thing as writing a critique or writing an article that is critical. It's a practice, which is critical. That's very much the way I have been working generally and it pretty much is born out of Doing It For Daddy, in many ways. Instead of just being a writer and a teacher, I suddenly found a space in which I

could be something else.

**LS:** A way of applying it.

**BM:** For me, I've worked more and more in performance because of it. But it's kind of by mistake. When Linda says she writes, sees herself as a writer, that's separate from her own practice. You can see why that can come together in a practice like Doing It For Daddy's.

**RS:** Doing it for Daddy also implies, not a certain amount feminism, but that it is a all female collective. How important is that? The collective started off as a reaction to this article, which was about femaleness, but now the work is not necessarily following those lines. The critical part of it isn't a feminist critique?

**RH:** I think it's an interesting thing, because it is implicit in a sense. We're constantly reassessing and reforming that idea and distancing ourselves from it in some way. What is maintained, from that original idea, is a continual re-engagement. We were having conversations at the time around post-feminist artists.

**LS:** I'm always having conversations about post-feminist artists. I think we had that exact conversation. What you have to realize is that being actors in the art world, in this art world, as female artists in the Cape Town art world you are taking a feminist stand point if you want to or not.

**BM:** You think so?

**LS:** Totally, look at everyone else. Look at the people who engage with this kind of work, like the critical stance, like Avant Car Guard, they're all these boys that engage with it in a particular kind of way. I think just being this collective, that is visible, that is all women and acting in a way that isn't scared, without being confrontational; I think that takes quite a standpoint in itself.

**BM:** Why is that a feminist standpoint?

**LS:** No, I just mean a standpoint of being women, and being noticeably women. Because we are and there aren't that many about. Look at the Bright Young Things<sup>4</sup>, how many of them are boys, and they are all the same: these cool boys. And just existing I think people will notice we are women and how women-like we are, because we are there. I think the art world here is very male still.

**RH:** I wouldn't think that's a particularly South African thing.

**BM:** But I don't think we have taken a feminist stand explicitly.

**RH:** But I think that was exactly the point.

**BM:** It implies a certain complicity when you call yourself Doing it For Daddy.

**RS:** That you get more attention as well, being all female?

**BM:** What was funny, at the end of our Spier tour, I overheard the judges; Jay Pather speaking to the judges, and I overheard him saying, "Yes they're all lesbians." Which is obviously in our favor, that you are the sub-group of the sub-group, that they declare us that.

**RH:** Which is not entirely true, for the record.

**BM:** It's not that we are entirely anti-feminist, or feminist but we are under-feminist.

**LS:** We're sub-feminists. We don't feel the need to take a feminist stance with every work that we are doing. You can make meaningful work that deals with identity without having to push specific stereotypes, prescribed ideals of what your identity should be. Instead of saying, "Yes we are three women and we're going to bleed a lot, and be angry."

**BM:** And work with water.

**LS:** And work with water.

**RH:** Not that we don't want to.

**LS:** Not that there is anything wrong with angry feminists who bleed...that we can make that kind of work without resorting to the stereotypes.

**RH:** It's an engaged but occasional practice too. We are so involved in doing other things, but we do come together and find these interesting spaces, that enable us to explore things. It's a new thing every time, we don't, like Avant Car

Guard, have this clear identity; this post-punk...

**LS:** ...hot boys.

**BM:** We don't have a brand.

**RH:** We are a bit more low-key' looser. Bettina described it as "rugged conceptualism." It's a very distinct conceptual and theoretical framework, which is applied loosely. Not that it's unfocused, but it doesn't have that clear identity to it.

**LS:** It follows site and event specific models.

**BM:** And it has a very specific materiality to it.

**LS:** We like things.

**BM:** We like objects, and building things. And scaffolding.

**LS:** We love scaffolding.

**BM:** And we're very fond of high trees.

**RH:** And water. You forgot to mention water.

**LS:** Just like the elements really.

**RS:** Do you feel like have a loose membership?

**BM:** We're looking for a man.

**LS:** We need a daddy.

**RS:** I'll be your daddy

**BM:** Virginia McKenny is our daddy. Sorry.

**LS:** I think when we started working we surprised ourselves with our capacity for making things. These things just worked and it was quite amazing.

**RH:** They don't "just work!"

**LS:** I don't know...I mean that people were so ready to engage. Just is a bad word. Would we take new members?

**BM:** Yes. We were actually thinking of working a bit with Marilyn Martin , who is now clearly dispossessed and wander around Cape Town aimlessly.

**LS:** Wandering the streets.

**RH:** I think we should just drink tea a lot.

**BM:** We should drink tea with Marilyn.

**LS:** We're nice white women; that's what we do.

**BM:** Making cutouts

**LS:** Scrapbooking, we could totally scrapbook with Marilyn Martin.

**RH:** "My happy days at the National Gallery," with the little scissors with the zig zags.

**RS:** What's up ahead, what works are you making, where are you going?

**LS:** Well, we're on this show at Goodman. A group show, called Nation State.

**RH:** But we don't really know after that.

**LS:** It's not like we wait around, but we do a little. There has to be an event for us to work with.

**BM:** In that sense that is why it is a critical practice. Not a practice that perpetuates itself, one that can be commodified. We're not going to make any money out of Doing It For Daddy. It works to undo the structures which it works within.

**LS:** We need a context always.

**RH:** Not that we couldn't do it without it; we've never really tried.

<sup>1</sup> Art South Africa is South Africa's only glossy contemporary art print publication. The specific article they talk about can be found online at: <http://artsouthafrica.com/?article=402>

<sup>2</sup> Cape 06 was supposed to be major biennale of African art. It fell through twice because of funding.

<sup>3</sup> Spier Contemporary is a major competition of contemporary South African art. With the lack of a regular biennale, this event has taken on major significance as a showcase.

<sup>4</sup> A section in Art South Africa magazine, celebrating new talent.

# Galerie Puta

by Robert Sloon 3



Image courtesy of Galerie Puta

Above: Galerie Puta playing 24 hour Risk during the 24/7 residency at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2003. Left to right: Matt Hindley, Andrew Lamprecht, Cameron Platter, Ed Young.

Galerie Puta, literally the gallery of prostitutes, is a collective/nonsite-specific gallery loosely consisting of bitter mid-career South African artists Andrew Lamprecht, Cameron Platter and Ed Young. In semi-permanent operation since 2003, the collective has sowed distrust and ruin amongst respectable galleries, watercolour societies and institutions, using mostly techniques of performative disrespect, drunkenness, abuses of power and idleness. Whether working from the outside in, or the inside out, like true satirists they leave no one untouched. Except their cronies.

had worked previously, so we invited them together; and did this show. Which was a bit of a joke, really. The works were a bit strange and off-beat. We wanted it to be a dirty show, like works about sex, alcohol. It was quite an opening.

We didn't even have a title, we didn't even think of having a title. Sean O' Toole, when he was publicizing it, gave it this title "Art in the Water Closet." And that was the title, the critic has given us a title. To cut a long story short, we did this show, and lots of people came and had a good time. And it was like it really perked up the interest of what we then saw as the art mafia. The critics came; there were some reviews. And then we went to Johannesburg, which Ed can talk about, because he had been invited personally to take part in Christian Nerf's 24/7 residency.<sup>2</sup>

**EY:** In the beginning we tried to do this thing: to put nice work, good work, good names, young names onto a show. I think we grew a little tired of it, after all the Sunday meeting that we had, which ended up in car crashes, ho's...terrible, bad...lots of wine. I think we realized that we couldn't be a curatorial team. We became a facilitation process, or a performance based collective rather than a curatorial one. Which was interesting, because I wanted to go to Jo'burg and then these guys jumped on the bandwagon and took all my limelight. And destroyed my career by going with me. Basically we went there and did the 24/7 project, which was a bit of a lame project. You got 24 hours over seven days to spend in the gallery, and we thought, "Fuck it." And did the 24 hours straight. I spent all the money I got from my UCT scholarship and bought all the alcohol in the whole world and we finished it at about four in the morning, we got the organizers to buy us more. We got trashed, we insulted Hentie Van Der Merwe. And we had a theme song, on loop; and they kept turning it off, "In the Club," by 50 cent. Eventually we left, and there was a lot of trouble in the gallery, because we made a mess. They cleaned up after us, which was supposed to be Christian's

evidence, the residue he wanted from the projects; came home.

**AL:** Then Cameron negotiated a show at the Durban Art Gallery, with the curator Storm Janse Van Rensburg. By this time we were fighting badly, because Ed insisted he had bought all the alcohol, which wasn't true. We decided the best solution was to do three solo shows. Simultaneously. In the Durban art gallery.

**EY:** 'Cause they were riding my fame.

**AI:** Yes. Yes. Coincidentally we named all three shows Storm. They were too cheap at the DAG... oh by the way Brenton Maart<sup>3</sup> saw me at the Joburg Art Fair this year and said we still haven't paid our bills. Which I pointed out was a very Puta thing to do. Then he said he has a lot of my work; in storage. And he's going to hold it ransom till the bills are paid. So I did point out to him that the work was really worthless.

So we did these three solo shows coincidentally named Storm, and outraged the Durban art community, they were quite curious about these CT collectives... Durban people were very nice. Invited us to braais<sup>4</sup>, looked after us, but then we did various things. We had walkabouts with Andrew Verster and Carol Brown. Carol Brown was the director of the Durban Art Gallery at the time and Andrew Verster is the old master of the Durban art scene, and they both willingly agreed to this. Andrew's was very sweet and nice, and Carol's was not so sweet and not so nice, she ended up destroying most of the work with Peter Machen the leading critic in Durban at the time.

**EY:** I threatened to sue, but I couldn't find a pro bono lawyer.

**AL:** Ed was on the phone after the thing, "[makes wookie noises]". But we did this question and answer session, which we are still getting emails of complaint about. We insulted all the people that asked us question, and behaved in a very Puta way.

**RS:** What is the ethos of Puta?

**AL:** Hard Living. Hard living people.

EY: But it started off quite civil. We used to have these lunches where we would plan all the projects. Every Sunday we'd have a lunch and Andrew would cook a braised steak according to his mother's recipe. I'd take a few bottles left over from previous exhibitions. Actually, a lot of bottles. Eventually, we'd end up beating each other up.

**AL:** Crashing cars.

**EY:** It didn't really work out, the civil environment that we had Puta meetings. So we realized this is probably something we should work with. And then we tried to work with it and that didn't work either.

**AL:** After that, things either fell apart, or didn't. We started doing more self-motivated projects. It's a problem with a lot of collectives; they seem to always end up fighting quite badly. I don't know how all collectives work, but from my experience of collectives, vicariously or what I've been involved in, people tend to fight terribly. We actually came up with what I think was quite a good solution, which was that people would do almost self-motivated projects which they would then ask the other members of the collective to contribute as much or as little as they wanted to. Ed, for example ran a project; the International Association of Happy Artists.

**EY:** It's still going, but I can't find anyone that's actually happy.

**AL:** And we launched that at a braai at Sue Williamson's.

**EY:** It was raining and everyone was miserable.

**AL:** You'll notice that we are always trying to get people who are players in the art world. We latch onto them somehow. Or we exploit them someway.

**RS:** Isn't that what you did with Ed in the first place.

**AL:** Exactly, I have just exploited his career the whole time. I still am. I did a show; a three-night thing around Tretchikoff<sup>5</sup> and a lap-dancing extravaganza. And people contributed to that.

**RS:** Why would you, as an individual artist choose to work in a collective if you are basically doing all the work alone? Why would you use the umbrella name?

**AL:** The point is, it is a collective but it is also a gallery, the gallery of the prostitutes. I think there is space. Its something a lot of collectives don't realize. They feel that they must always be completely collaborative; they must always take complete ownership, which is not really the only way. We also have a thing of veto, if there's something that one member of the collective really didn't like. I proposed a project about Brenda Fassie, and there wasn't interest in that. Which is fine. That was shelved.

**EY:** But also Cameron's idea for swimming to Robben Island never happened because I wanted to do the Happy Artists thing.

**RS:** Cameron wanted to swim to Robben Island<sup>6</sup>

**AL:** Interestingly enough, we are often quite drunk, and talking about these ideas quite freely. You may notice some of these ideas that were abandoned have strangely surfaced with other people. Nkul'i's []with Cape 09, oddly enough is doing a show at Langa High with the pupils about Brenda Fassie. Which is virtually identical to the project I mentioned to her, which Puta didn't do.

**EY:** There was one work, which I really enjoyed. Unfortunately we don't have the originals anymore. We were asked onto some stupid show curated at JAG, and it was curated by a couple of young artists and they didn't know what they were doing. And they headlined us for the last show.

**AL:** It was called Emergence. They wanted us to do a panel discussion, remember?

**EY:** No. They wanted us to do a performance; so we did a performance. So I spoke to them on the phone, and said obviously we need flights. So they sent us three grand.

**AL:** Which was their entire budget.

**EY:** Apparently, their entire budget, that's excluding their salaries. To help us with air tickets not the project. We gave the money to Bruce Gordon, a well-known bar owner in Cape Town, and we apologized. We listed all the apologies like random beatings, stealing drinks.

**AL:** Insulting his wife.

**RS:** Repeatedly.

**AL:** Disabusing his space.

**EY:** Constantly talking about Hegel. Anyway, we gave him the cash, and he gave us a letter back saying, thank you very much, but this will not be enough, but that he would use it on his gambling habit. Which increased over the years and almost ruined him. We couriered the letters over to the curators, and asked them to be put up on the walls. And they still insult Andrew to this day whenever they see him.

**AL:** At places like KKNK<sup>7</sup>, at Oudtshoorn, where they have moved onto now. They've really moved on in terms of their level of engagement with the art world. And insist on me buying them endless amounts of tequila to make up for this. Probably more than three thousand Rands worth by now. And then write nasty things on their blog about how I made them so drunk that they ended up vomiting in some sweet Afrikaans ladies house. As if that's my fault. And we did other things. Part of what we do is outreach. There is a serious part to our work. I was invited to do a guest lecture at WITS<sup>8</sup>, and coincidentally everyone else from Puta was there. And we all came together, and I did my lecture. It became an almost cathartic experience for the students at WITS, because there was a chap there who clearly hated Colin Richards the head theorist, kept on arguing with him at the question time. I insisted that they hugged and made up, which they did. Apparently Colin doesn't really like touching people that much but he did. Little did we know, that a few weeks later that student would end up trying to stab somebody at a grand opening. I'm not sure if that had anything to do with it. And there were other things; various lectures and presentation. We went to the South African Association of Artist; a watercolorists society, mostly 70+ old people and we presented the work of Galerie Puta to these people that paint very careful watercolors and we felt that was a very important moment in their lives. It was a major outreach and I like to think we educated them a little about contemporary art.

**EY:** We also tried to something with school kids. Primary school kids but the funding never came through.

**AL:** We'd still do a project on or with school kids if we got funding. That was a problem, funding was a problem. We often looked at those National Arts Council applications, but those things are hard. They're not really suited to a gallery like us. That's why I think we do have some bitchiness with the art world, they just don't understand our mode of production.

**EY:** Our last triumph was basically when we had a wrestling match. Before we died.

**RS:** Do you consider the collective dead?

**EY:** We're resting, on sabbatical.

**AL:** I met with Cameron at the Art Fair, and he's very keen to start up again. I spoke to Storm and he's maybe prepared to guest curate a Puta show, which would be very nice. Given the enormous amount of productivity pushed into a short amount of time, I don't think it's a problem to rest occasionally. We've had to focus on our individual careers.

**RS:** Has Puta done anything for your individual careers?

**EY:** No. It's pretty much ruined all our careers.

**AL:** I think it has ruined all our careers, which is why we maybe want to start doing project again. I feel there's an enormous space for ruin still.

**EY:** We can only go down. Harder.

**RS:** Didn't Cameron get thrown out recently?

**AL:** There was talk about it.

**EY:** Cameron resigned in a weird way. He was basically getting married and sent a resignation letter. Dan got thrown out. When he tried to murder us.

**AL:** There have been many people at various stages who have been instrumental in Puta. We are very happy to collaborate. We are a gallery after all, people come and go. Even core curatorial members. I don't think there is a single one of us that hasn't resigned, thrown a hissy fit, stormed out at some stage. There have been various people who have been important, like Vuyisa Nyamende in the early stages, Bruce Gordon have all been instrumental members. Even Cameron's Spanish girlfriend at one stage.

**EY:** Reggie.

**AL:** We even considered making her a full member to access funds which required us to have a woman member.

**RS:** Do you think that drinking and fighting is more important than making the work?

**AL:** But drinking and fighting is work.

**EY:** Some of the work was much stronger, some of it led to drinking and fighting. The work was just a catalyst. What's interesting is to see how Puta operated in that kind of climate and how it will fair with new projects in a new climate.

**RS:** Do you not think your mode of working is a little dated?

**EY:** I don't think dated; it was very specific to a specific context. I think if you look at other collectives such as Avant Garde Guard and Daddy Buy Me a Bitch... what're they called?

**AL:** I'm Not Your Pony.

**EY:** The lesbian collective, that tries to operate very specifically within the market today.

What Puta tried to do at that time was walk away from the market.

**AL:** I don't want to sound like sour grapes. Actually, it's not sour grapes, it's a blatant fact. These collectives have clearly stolen our model. And done a really bad job with it. I think it's time the big boys stepped back in and show them a thing or two. Do you agree?

**EY:** Remember what happened when they tried to arm-wrestle us?

**AL:** Yes, the only one who lost was... you? But she was a big, rough lesbian.

**EY:** Huge

**AL:** We've always been an organic collective which responds to the spirit of the time. And we don't, I hope, get stuck in a particular modality of production that was set up at the beginning. The fact that we do fight so much, that we do hate each other, and there is an incredible amount of tension, means that only strong ideas can come through that filter. Hence the long rest. Now the filter is demanding something new.

**EY:** And we can't even steal the ideas from the other collectives because they are so lame. I was so desperate for this interview I even waxed my shoulders.

**RS:** Do you think it is easier to take a position of dissent from within a collective?

**AL:** Clearly. But, we've never taken a position of dissent. What we do is massage the art world, massage the whole world. We love the art world. We embrace it and celebrate all that is good and true and pure in it.

**EY:** The only problem is like certain members getting married and stuff. When you get older and can't really shag editors of magazines anymore...

**AL:** That's just because you are not that attractive.

**EY:** I am. I shaved. Aren't you supposed to be asking questions?

**AL:** Isn't this an interview?

**EY:** Ask an interesting question. **BP**

<sup>1</sup> A major art competition, slightly conservative.

<sup>2</sup> At the Johannesburg Art Gallery. A formal government space.

<sup>3</sup> The current director of Durban Art Gallery.

<sup>4</sup> Barbeque.

<sup>5</sup> Famous South African grand master of kitsch.

<sup>6</sup> I'm surprised here because another South African collaborative team did almost the same thing later.

<sup>7</sup> Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, a small town arts festival.

<sup>8</sup> University of the Witwatersrand.



# Magazine Forté: The Sound Magazine

by Georgia Kotretsos



Above: www.magazineForté.com, homepage.

*Words fly, writings remain:* so goes the Latin proverb *verba volent, scripta manent* – first attributed to the Roman Senator, Gaius Titus. When first said it communicated that words were effective in communicating their content by mouth when writing failed due to the illiteracy of the average Roman. Also in West Africa the *griots* – known as repositories of oral tradition managed just fine to pass on to subsequent generations their knowledge, culture and history without writing a word. And in recent years Jacques Derrida came along to sign his name to the official denigration of the written word and the valorization of speech.

At a time when we had put all this behind us and finally made peace with printed matter, Magazine Forté is about to storm into our lives to disturb calm waters. This sound magazine will commence this fall from New York City. At the helm are artists Georgia Sagri, Catherine Czacki and writer Jacqueline Carpenter. The online magazine's home-screen welcomes you with Sagri's voice announcing the project in a minute and half audio stream. Every three months an issue of selected audio tracks covering fashion, politics, culture and science will be made available through podcast subscription.

Tapping into podcasting is a tech-savvy move by these three innovative ladies. Potcatchers most likely will be paying attention. Nearly 200,000,000 iPod users are already in existence – a growing market that might benefit their efforts. I haven't been this excited about a project for the longest time. They won me over at the exclamation "We are here....", as Sagri voiced emphatically online. It is all about the voice, the individual, the personality behind the stream, the luxury of co-existing with a narrator; a podcaster. It is an open invitation to imagine and to visualize. Wouldn't you consider it a luxury hearing the author of an article read his piece to you? I certainly would.

It is not Radio-like – it is a magazine, one of its kind.

Thus we shall all tune in to Magazine Forté this fall.

**Georgia Kotretsos:** Is Forté following the latest modes of communication in order to meet the needs of a new audience - those on the go, who listen? Or did other factors determine the format of the magazine?

**Forté:** Magazine Forté was born out of a hunger for deeper and more digressive exploration of subject matter and a rigid curiosity about the effect of this exploration if it were routed entirely through sound. Forté is not a critique, or response to advances in personal electronics and technology. On the other hand podcasting and the does web give us flexibility, creating ease of distribution, ease of existence, making it inexpensive and accessible. We imagine our listeners copying issues and distributing them in their own manner.

Forté is an open plan for how information can be independent from an image identity,

they are, controversially, worn by Orthodox Jewish women; and we have explored the dilemmas of copyrighting genes. These and other pieces expand our initial idea for the magazine, as articulated on our website, [www.magazineForté.com], which was to explore dynamic couplings of subjects; survival and fashion, politics and travel, culture and science.

**GK:** It sounds open-ended to a degree; what are your criteria for the selection of the sound pieces and who is your target audience?

**MF:** We want to hear something we haven't heard before, that introduces us to the sights and sounds of somewhere we have not been.

This place can be another country or simply a unique perspective. Ultimately, we want our contributors to play with the medium and not be constrained by categories of art, journalism or even academic inquiry. Like life, a good piece should bleed across all of these categories but be anchored by good narration and purpose. We do not want pieces that are opaque in their intentions, but which approach their subjects with clarity as well as imagination.

Our concept is different, it is distinctly global and neither the voice nor the audience of Forté will be the educated, upper class, urban set.

It will also be youth of limited means who at the same time have some access to technology, as well as internationally-minded folk who want deeper readings of life in other countries than the skeletal sound-bites provided by the rapidly diminishing news media.

**GK:** Over the initial conversation we had on the phone, you clearly stated that Forté wasn't an art project. In your own conception how far is it from a radio show; a curation of sound works or a compilation of sound experiments?

**MF:** Forté has the same format a magazine would, though without the images and narrated instead of read as text. Radio shows tend to lean on sound effects and a certain dynamic of the "personality" that we avoid. This is a place for narrative to unfold, a place for the voice to be heard and focused upon that distinctly differs from contemporary radio, which often uses theatrics to accompany its message. We are offering the subjects a magazine would; reportage / travel / horoscopes / etc. Each release will have a theme that provides an anchor for the pieces to attach themselves to, thus making the publication a cohesive whole in each of its installments.

**GK:** What are your hopes for Forté?

**MF:** We believe that Forté exists for those people who expect something more from a magazine. An experience, which brings perspectives of the world, a subject in constant movement experiences a magazine through sound, various translations, deeper readings outside of normal abilities. Our listeners are first of all travelers of time. Open borders; this is our first wish. **BP**



Above: Magazine Forté founders. From left to right: Georgia Sagri, Jacqueline Carpenter, Catherine Czacki.

this being our primary frustration with printed forms of publications.

We are witnessing the control of advertisement over the critical aspect of writers, transforming the positions of certain magazines - this is exactly what we want to avoid. We are pro accents and translations; dynamic groups of diverse opinions is our goal.

**GK:** Forté's philosophy on visual aid leaves a lot to the listener's imagination. There is a very austere tradition in publishing regarding the information communicated - with Forté you topple that school of thought by turning the spotlight back on oral communication and its limitations and flaws. Is the possibility of intimate knowledge as "information," communication, a parameter you wish to explore?

**MF:** What you will hear in Forté, if you are willing to invest a little of your time and attention, is reality; we are leaving in the sights, pauses, breaths and uncomfortable silences that occur in communication. We are allowing contributors to develop their pieces in exploratory ways that rarely conform to structures accepted for interviews, features, reviews, etc.

What we aim to deliver is a few minutes of reality, in all its chaotic beauty, while also allowing our listeners to create their own image of the cosmos.

Sound is intimate and vulnerable, it can be easily dismissed but it does not apologize for that.

**GK:** I'd like you to tell me a bit about the structure and content of Forté.

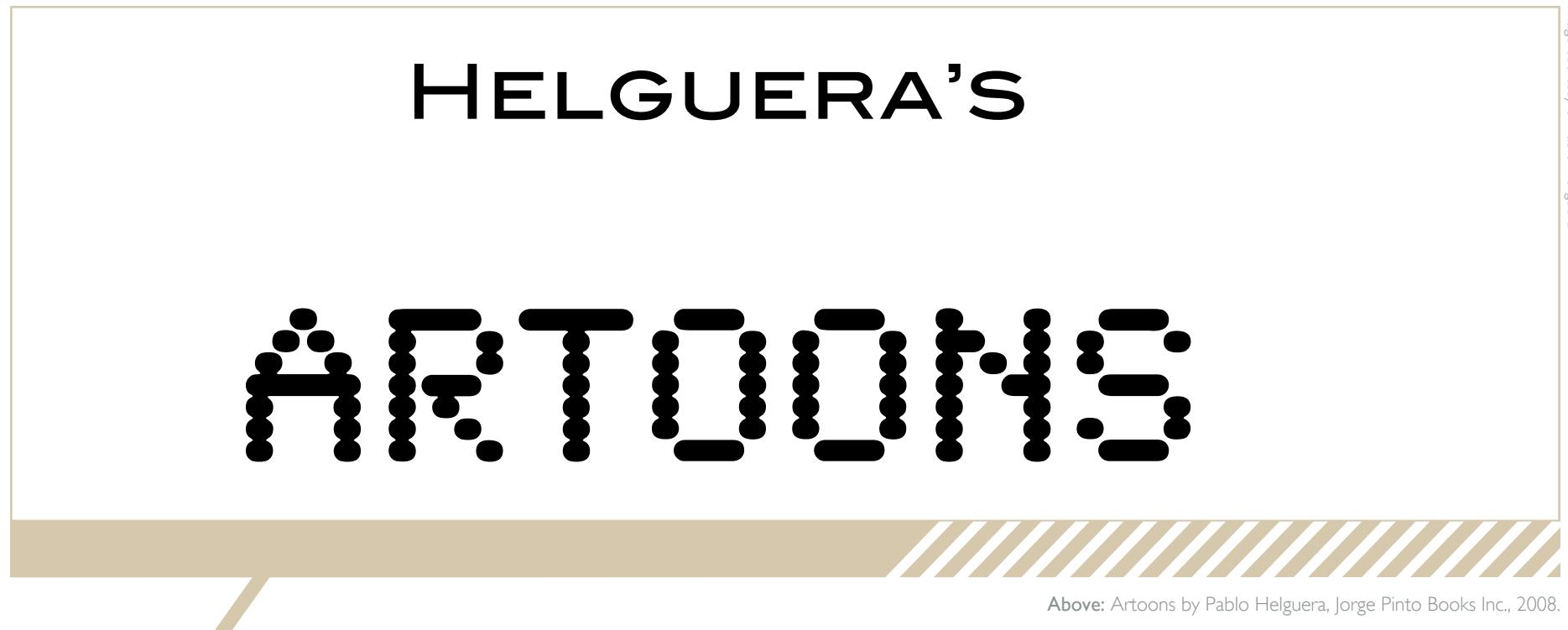
The meaning of 'reality' is highly emphasized and stretched in your last response; as what you describe about sound and Forté's contributor voices – pauses, breaths and uncomfortable silences – could be rehearsed and acted out. It's not a bad thing at all, it's certainly a parameter that could come into play when listening, but it is through your selections that Forté could introduce a fresh finesse for that kind of communication. The content will determine the end result of its piece, can you tell us a little about that.

**MF:** We are still working out as we develop the details of the magazine's structure. What we can say is as that we are currently looking for writers and collecting pieces, what captures our attention, we find, is an unexpected perspective on issues and a talent for a deeper reading of subject matter. We will create a structure that preserves the integrity of this content, not the other way around. Right now our core objective is the recruitment of writers and sound reporters who produce such pieces, and developing a core list of regular contributors. To give you a sense of some promising submissions so far; we have heard New York City cab conversations recorded during the last deep recession, twenty-five years ago; we have followed wigs woven from human hair from India to Brooklyn, where

Image courtesy of Magazine Forté.

# Artoons by Pablo Helguera: The Art World Anthropologist

By Georgia Kotretsos



Above: Artoons by Pablo Helguera, Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2008.

In Boot Print Volume 2 / Issue 1 I talked to Pablo Helguera about his book *Pablo Helguera's Manual of Contemporary Art Style*, which had taken the art world by storm. A guide for artists, curators and critics - with over 100 etiquette tips that told on the art world. Our second conversation is on the occasion of his latest book, Artoons. And, yes! you are correct, it is what the title of the book implies; a book of cartoons about art and the art world.

Allow me to refresh your memory: Pablo Helguera is a New York-based artist working in installation, sculpture, photography, drawing and performance. His work considers the relationships between history, cultural production and language. Helguera fictionalizes the real, generating commentary and discussion about our surrounding cultural reality and its relationship to time. His work often adopts the form of lectures, museum display strategies, musical performances, fiction and most recently cartoons.

Artoons is the book we've all been missing - an essential read. It is the quintessential art gift – you may begin by offering it to yourself and then to your dearest ones. While it is a deft and witty commentary, it is not simply a book of inside art jokes; it's smart and the drawings and writing are executed with superb style; Artoons highlights Helguera's *finest* qualities as an artist. I suspect him to be a meticulous observer, who reads and edits the information he collects like a skilled and experienced monteur.

In the spirit of entertainment, let me close in the tradition of Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert; with two thumbs up. Way up!

But in response of you saying “has it come down to this?” I do want to point out that while the *Artoons* of the work of Perjovschi and Lia may critique the excesses of the AW, the fact that we can create insider humor in the art world today is to me a positive sign, one that indicates that we in the AW are less insecure now than we were, say, ten years ago. Self-mockery is part of every field of human activity, and many times it is a key component to help develop our critical understanding of a particular reality. Think about politics and satire, which have gone hand-in-hand for as long as we can remember. In the past election, late-night comedy and other types of satire played a crucial role and most would agree that it influenced opinions and attitudes toward certain politicians (See: Sarah Palin), aside to the fact that they gave us some of the most memorable videos in recent history (check out “The Vet who did not Vet” on YouTube).

**GK:** Oh! For sure, the self-mockery aspect is what I enjoy about Artoon's, Dan Perjovschi's and Simone Lia's work. With the "coming down to" part I was poking at art criticism. You brought something interesting up thought and that is political satire cause: a. It is accessible to/by the general in this case, art public, b. it is not always meant to be funny, and c. fundamentally the author publicly positions himself on subjects he disapproves of. Could this be what we have here?

**Pablo Helguera:** More or less: let me modulate those statements a bit. Political satire, and satire in general is indeed a form accessible to the general public (as long as they have some general information about the topics being addressed, otherwise it doesn't work) and it does reveal the position of the author in an inverse way (which means that usually if you are, for example, over-praising the intelligence of George W. Bush you are clearly

predictable and ignorant (we are always depicted as insane or depraved) that we needed to have a book seen from our perspective, where we can make fun of ourselves but also make fun of the annoying museum visitor or the mediocre artist or the wannabe collector or theorist without feeling condescending. I am not sure if it worked, but that was a good part of my motivation.

**GK:** We're having this conversation because Artoons has worked. I passed the book to several dear friends outside the AW, who unfortunately didn't get the joke because they weren't confronted with predictable scenarios, like you are talking about.

Do you know, what I thought was particularly funny in that sense - *Vicky Christina Barcelona* of course. Not that I haven't watched films where the artists' characters were being stereotypically caricatured before, but this one fell in all the known traps: female hysteria/anxiety/neurosis; the male artist fuckerman model; the artist's life style; art wealth; unrestrained will, passion, desire; art production; Latin clichés... what else could've gone wrong? So, let's talk for a minute about those who operate outside the known AW and caricature its characters when the information that constitutes their experience is shockingly shortsighted or seemingly so.

**PH:** I wouldn't want to blame AW outsiders for not understanding the AW or being sensitive to it; we have earned it ourselves. It has been part of an evolving process of mythologizing that I think dates all the way back to Romanticism. What's more important: it is essential for us to remain somewhat misunderstood, because the alternative, which is to blend in, is too scary. So it is an everlasting love/hate relationship with the outside world: we crave for its recognition but we don't want to be too close to it. And I believe this is also intuitively felt by those who exist outside of the AW. Given that state of hermetism it is not surprising that the typical stereotypes of the artist that you describe persist in the mass media. The problem is that those stereotypes are so caricaturesque and extreme that it ultimately becomes very damaging - as people who buy into those stereotypes are led to conclude that art is little more than an obscure and eccentric cult.

Actually, despite the fact I am aware that an outsider may miss most of the insider jokes, I do humbly regard the *Artoons* as a subtle education mechanism about the inner workings of the AW for the mainstream. I remember as a kid I used to read *Mafalda*, an Argentinian comic strip by Quino, which was really a cartoon for adults, and still, I loved it. *Mafalda* is a girl who is always making adult comments about Fidel Castro, the Cold War and Vietnam (remember, this is a cartoon from the 70s). I think that was my first introduction into global politics, and while I had no idea what napalm was, for example, it later made sense. My hope is that *Artoons* could do a bit of that work by letting people know that contemporary art is about something more than just alcoholic artists and well-coiffed collectors.

**GK:** I also read that Saul Steinberg's work caught your eye at an early age. Take us through your early reading of his work and your thoughts when *Artoons* was in the works.

**PH:** I firmly believe Steinberg was the greatest cartoonist of the 20th century, aside from being, then and still now, an under-recognized artist. This is primarily because I think he was much more than a cartoonist: he was a philosopher of language and an early deconstructivist, providing through his cartoons a kind of commentary that was not much different from Duchampian language.



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Above: Automa - 81, Largo Pinto Braga, 2008

suggesting the opposite). And it is true that satire can point to serious truths, but that happens insofar as it continues to be funny. Or said in other terms: satire in general is funny because there is an element of truth hidden within it – if it was all fiction we wouldn't find it funny. And this is what can make satire a powerful and fearsome tool as well. To me a joke that doesn't

In the case of Artoons, I faced a similar quandary to when I wrote the *Manual of Contemporary Art Style* you have to walk a fine line between addressing both the insiders and the outsiders of art, who manage very different kind of information and codes. In the end, I see Artoons as more of a book by and for the AW, partially in response to my feeling that the way that

But at the same time I am aware that this giant statement that I have just made may be emotionally biased because I was first exposed to cartooning through Steinberg. My grandfather had a book, titled *The Passport* and I remember spending long times looking at it as a kid in his library. The kind of urban typologies he depicted are still with us, and he is the only artist that I can think of from his generation whose cartoons can still appear in the *The New Yorker* and feel contemporary. Steinberg's elegance of combining the immediacy of humor with an aftertaste of philosophy is just wonderful and I have always admired his work for that reason. And of course he is the perfect cartoonist for a conceptual artist to look at right now, because of his ease to move between lightness and heaviness of thought.

**GK:** Biased? Not, at all, most level-headed artists would positively nod with your encomium to Steinberg. His work undeniably serves as an elevated canon of cartoons and I have to admit that I detect some of his sharpness in *Artoons*, too. When I first found out about the book, I feared the drawings would be arty, knowing you're an artist and not a professional cartoonist... but then again when I finally saw *Artoons*, the drawings on their own weren't really impressive as artworks or cartoons but they worked great with the captions. Did the drawings come naturally, or were creatively planned to hold 50% of each page?

**PH:** You have to think of both image and text simultaneously; otherwise it doesn't work. In the cartoon world this format is known as "single-panels" and usually they do carry the 50/50 text-image equation. So when I set to make these I specifically thought of that format, both to imitate the *The New Yorker* cartoons as closely as possible. And regarding your expectation that they would be "arty": interestingly, many people think that I didn't draw them but that I had a professional cartoonist do them (or that I appropriated the images) precisely because people associate me closer to performance and conceptualism, and not to drawing. In fact I always have drawn cartoons but had never shared them in public until now, mainly because since I was a teenager I decided that cartooning was not a "serious" art practice. But now I think I am old enough to not care or at least I have redefined my understanding of what 'serious' means.

**GK:** Speaking of serious; in a "single-panel" sense, last summer Patrick House, who has been a winner of *The New Yorker* caption contest wrote a piece on *Slate* where he supposedly lets out the secret formula to victory; (<http://www.slate.com/>

[id/2192564/](http://2192564/)). What's your take on the contest, his formula and have you ever considered submitting one too?

**PH:** Thanks for pointing out that article, which you just made me read...I think House makes two good general points: one is that captioning for cartoons needs to contain a somewhat restrained humor, and not go overboard in its internal logic, and the other is that "single-panel" type cartoons tend to be funnier when you help readers figure out what just came before that scene, or, in other words, imagine the back-story on their own, departing from a familiar situation, phrase or characters where there is an anomalous development or twist. But other than that, the possibilities are just too wide to use it as a real recipe. The truth is that it is really hard to make something really funny in every genre, and sometimes it is a mystery why certain things are funnier than others. As to participating in a contest, no thank you — I have too much fun making my own.

**GK:** Somehow in between all this fun, you manage, in very few words and couple of lines, to say a lot. I back your economy of artistic means because as an artwork, *Artoons* communicates to its readers every single character of its pages. At this point, all it comes to mind is *Trickster makes this world: Mischief, Myth and Art* by Lewis Hyde — does it ring a bell...? He talks about the kind of trickster you are in great detail. On that note, tell me why you crossed over to cartoons from performance for the sake of *Artoons*?

**PH:** You know, people often do describe me as a trickster, and while I appreciate it and I agree that I tend to gravitate toward humor, the reason why I do what I do is not to trick people, but to try to make a point in the most efficient way. What most interests me in humor is its informal immediacy, and how I think it fits in today's day and age. The main reason I felt compelled to pursue this format has to do with how I see art viewership and attention span has been eroding everywhere due to the over-saturation of images in the real and online

world. At the museum where I work people don't spend more than a few seconds, on average, in front of a single artwork. This in my case is a particularly important fact to think about because I am primarily a performance artist who does things that are usually not documented and can only be experienced by being physically there in a determined time and space. I wanted to work in a format that would work on mediums like blogs and Facebook, which is where I usually post my *Artoons* (I think in the art world we spend more time now in Facebook than in museums or galleries). And I wanted this format to provide an almost instant commentary that hopefully, at least every once in a while, won't be just regarded as a one-liner.

**GK:** What's next on your plate?

**PH:** The second volume of *Artoons* will be coming out in September. Additionally, I have been very much involved in theater. A play I wrote and directed, entitled *The Juvenile Players*, recently premiered at Grand Arts in Kansas City and will be presented at the Kitchen next year. A new book with a compilation of my performance lectures is also out, and it is entitled "*Theatrum Anatomicum* (and other performance lectures)". Other than that, I am doing a lot of "social archaeology" research for a project in Philadelphia and launching the first department of sociology in a museum—more on that later; hopefully.... **BP**



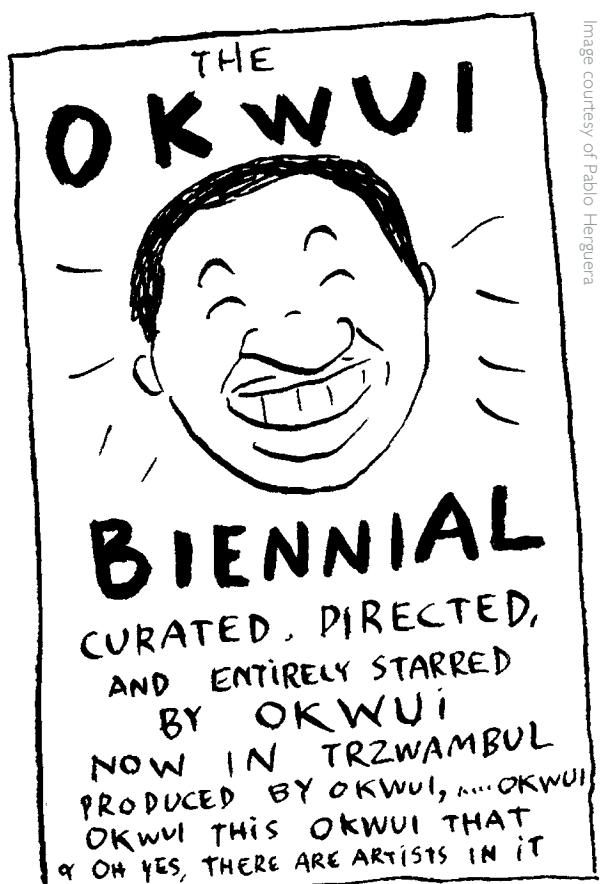
Above: *Artoons*, p. 59, Jorge Pinto Books, 2008.



Above: *Artoons*, p. 137, Jorge Pinto Books, 2008.



Above: *Artoons*, p. 123, Jorge Pinto Books, 2008.

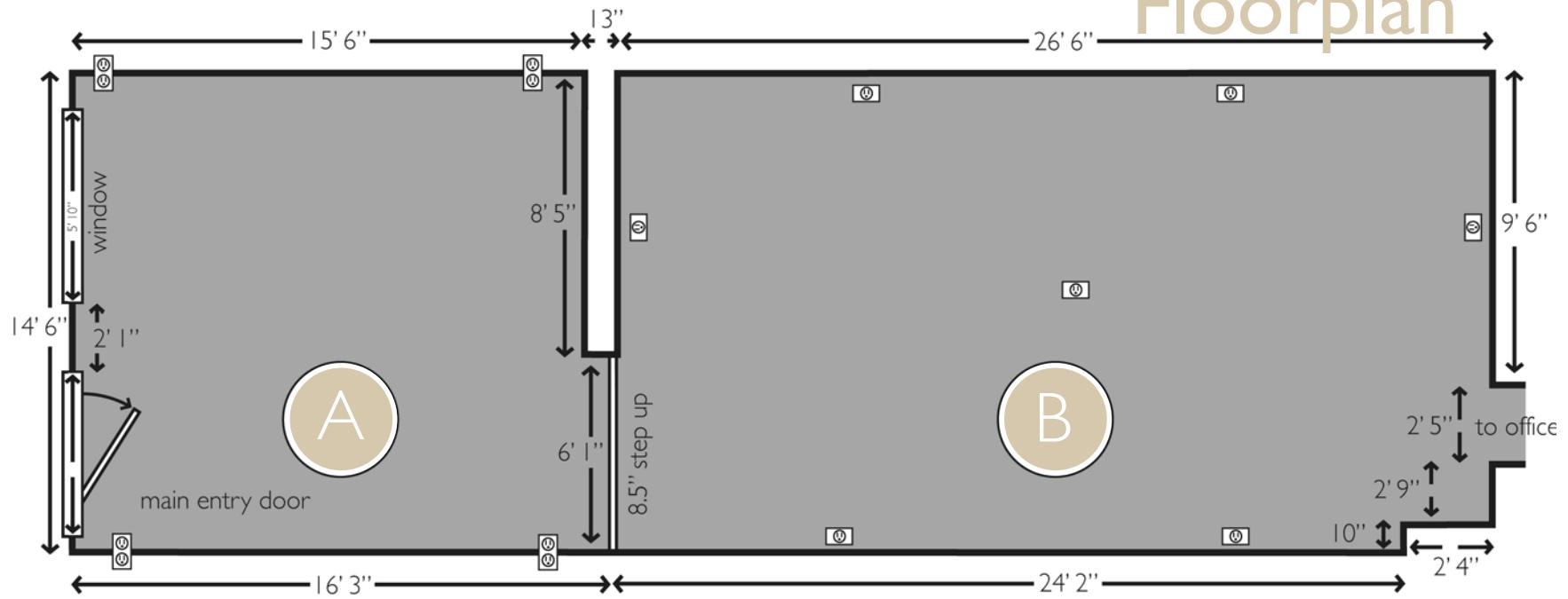


Above: *Artoons*, p. 127, Jorge Pinto Books, 2008.



Above: *Artoons*, p. 37, Jorge Pinto Books, 2008.

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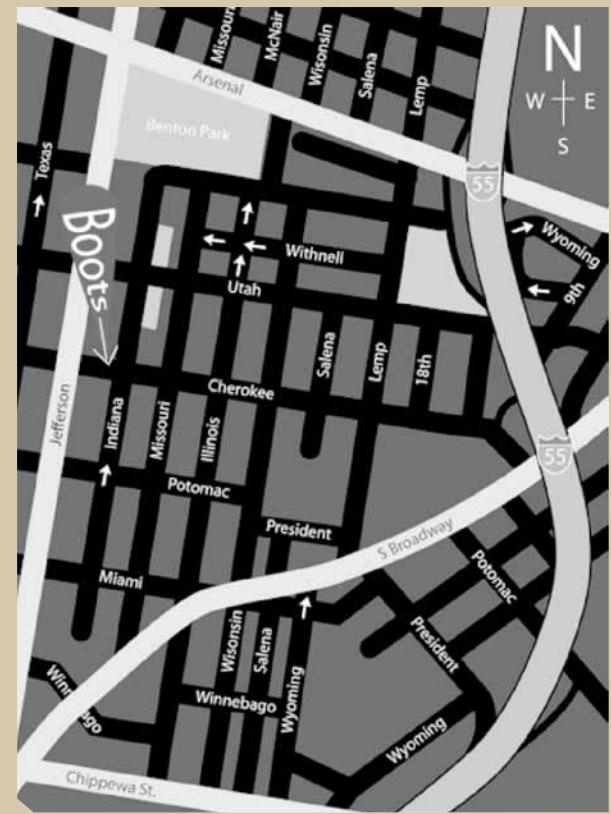
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