

# M/E/A/N/I/N/G 25th Anniversary Edition

## 2011

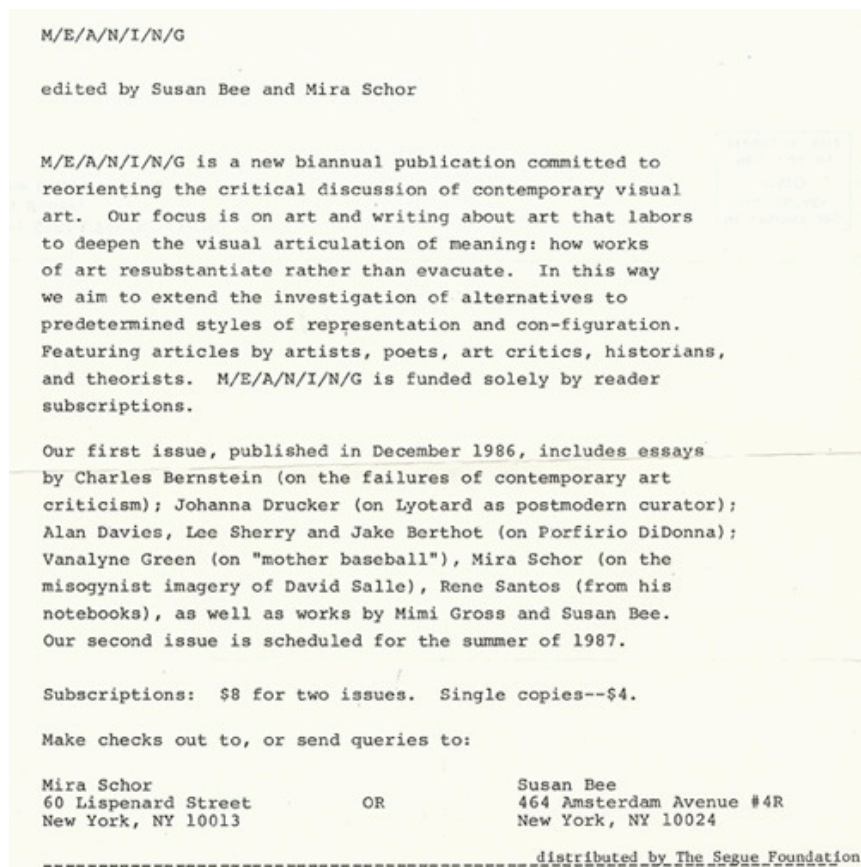
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# Introduction

We started *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in 1986 as an intervention into a particularly charged political and discursive moment when the accelerating hype of the 1980s art market marched in curious tandem with institutional and commodity critiques often announced in obdurate and obscure theory language. If “intervention” was one buzz word of the day — defining a limited political act distinct from the large utopian movements for social change of the 1960s and 1970s — “irony” was another, contributing to a moral equivalency and destabilizing humanistic concepts including that of meaning itself.

From the subscription flyer for issue No. 1:



*M/E/A/N/I/N/G* has been a collaboration between two artists, both painters with expanded interests in writing and politics, and an extended community of artists, art critics, historians, theorists, and poets, whom we sought to engage in discourse and to give a voice to. Over the years we created a community of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. It once existed in a red plastic index card file box, later in a primitive mailing list program, then an e-mail list, and now is also reconstituted in our online friendships.

The first issue of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: A Journal of Contemporary Art Issues*, was published in December 1986. We published 20 issues biannually over ten years. In 2000,

*M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism* was published by Duke University Press. In 2002 we began to publish *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online* and have published four previous online issues. The *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* archive from 1986 to 2002 is in the collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Our 25th anniversary comes at an unusual moment following upon a series of traumatic political events and a decade of war. It is a moment of global economic crisis, failure of capitalism and of progressive political movements, a moment of political impasse, and of generational shift. Methods of communication have changed since we began our project 25 years ago and concepts of privacy and individuality seem to be in a process of radical transformation.

We began planning this issue in the way we had planned other forums in the past: we discussed and tried to formulate our specific personal concerns and our sense of general contemporary concerns into questions and themes that we would invite a spectrum of artists to respond to. Our mutual and separate lines of thought and feeling merged into two themes:

### **Theme 1**

How do public traumas like 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise in income inequality in the U.S., and the current recession affect, or frame, the production of your art works and art criticism? What is the role of individual style or idiosyncrasy in these times and circumstances? What is the role of the art market/fashion/art history versus such public or individual/idiosyncratic motivations and frames?

### **Theme 2**

How do artistic intuition, creativity, community, production, and distribution function for you in the age of digital corporate conglomerates and the web 2.0? What is the nature of privacy for the artist or critic working in the age of social networking and global spectacle?

We were surprised and delighted by the enthusiastic response to our initial invitation sent out in mid-August to a wide spectrum of artists, critics, historians, theorists, and poets, some who had written for our journal before and many new artists and writers whose work we have encountered in recent years.

Many people, perceiving a fluid relation between the questions of trauma and of privacy that perhaps was inherent to our own thinking all along, addressed both of our suggested themes in their responses. Therefore we have organized the issue alphabetically rather by theme.

We are honored to publish the responses we have received. People wrote what they really thought and felt, each very individually, many clearly inspired and energized by the

Occupy Wall Street movement, which began September 17th in Lower Manhattan and has rapidly sent a wave of optimism around the world.

Susan Bee and Mira Schor  
New York City, November 2011

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**Suzanne Anker**

## **Cold Cases and Cultural Catharsis**

Making art in the 21st century is a fractured set of “isms” that range from marketing mayhem, to syndicated multicultural modernism, to art as a knowledge production system. Each of these subsets carry prescribed methods of investigation, reception and consensus. Specialized subcultural audiences complete with glamour-driven productions take their place on the consumption line, while aesthetic tourism generates art groupies who globetrot the international art fairs, biennials, and exhibitions.

On one hand these strategies are quite transparent and materialistic and at other times they neutralize art’s underlying capability of exposing political platforms or inventing experimental forms and formats. Even in faux-form, cultural products join the ranks of smoke-screening devices if they masquerade repressive human rights, gender inequalities and Enlightenment envy. Expedited by Internet access and digital diving, the rate at which staying in-tune creates conditions for multi-tasking and other diversionary tactics. Such approaches are taken at face value and reflect media sources in which very little real dialogue can take place, sometimes out of fear or even shame. At a time when discourse is indirect or even hidden, objects and images continue to be trophies of power positions.





Suzanne Anker, *Corpo Duplice (Self-Reflection)*, 2008, digital print on watercolor paper, 24" x 36".

This moment in time is one of mania in which distraction becomes a genre in itself. Making art under these conditions is wrought with dystopian dreams, putting into jeopardy historicity, authenticity, and subjectivity. Reality TV, extreme couponing, bonus points, and cash back lure the everyday dope into circadian reveries. In this zombie-like state, feeling is numbed, and actions are rote. At a time when self-promotion and celebrity status continue to further erode more introspective ideals, separating out the valor from the perverse is equally difficult. Adjusting to changing paradigms of turbo-capitalism the *poetica episteme* is subordinated to market shares. . . .

Simultaneously, my working methods rely more and more on research. My art practice has migrated towards methodologies incorporating other disciplines, looking at the ways in which archives and collections, materials and processes are comprised of back stories.

These narratives, not immediately obvious to the viewer are gleaned for historical content, symbol sets, and embedded metaphor. More than a singular or repetitive studio practice, my work is engaged with artifacts in the world and how they generate meaning. At this time of media overload, what image-schemas can be constructed which map subjective experience? From jihad to iPad, are we all angry birds now?

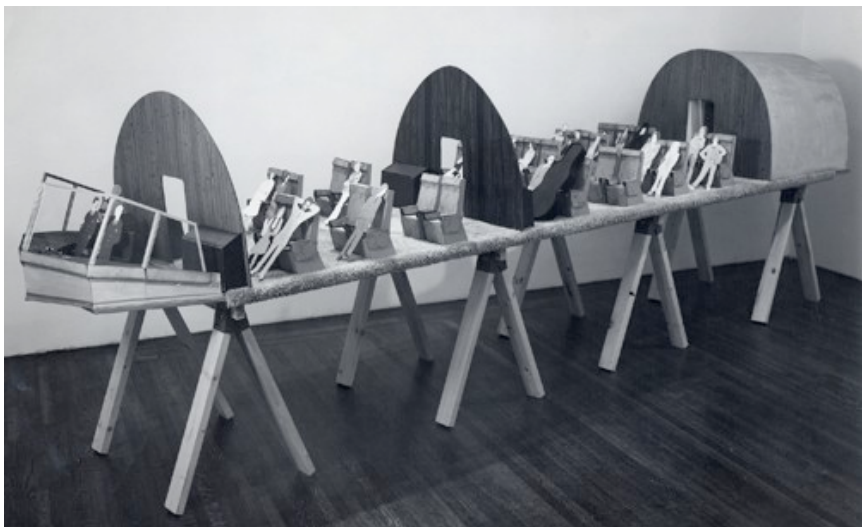
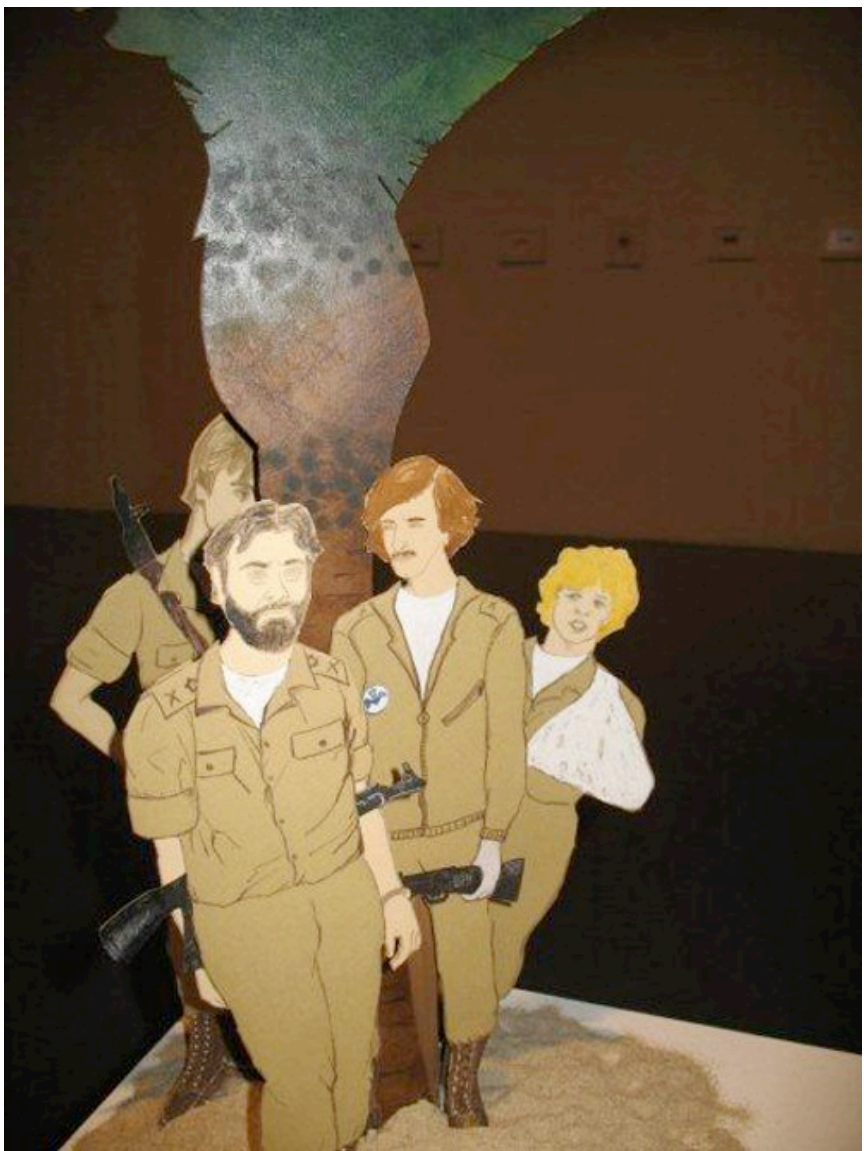
**Suzanne Anker** is a visual artist and theorist working at the intersection of art and the biological sciences. She works in mediums ranging from digital sculpture and installation to large-scale photography, and plants grown under LED lights. Her work has been shown in museums including the Walker Art Center, the Smithsonian Institute, the Phillips Collection, the Getty Museum, and the Mediznhistorisches Museum der Charite in Berlin. She is chair of the Fine Arts Department at the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

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## Eleanor Antin

### Then and Now

This fall, here in Southern California, we've been caught up in the Getty-backed extravaganza we call "PST" ("Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980"). For about 6 months, something like 60 museums, alternate venues, and galleries are each doing theme-related exhibitions to rediscover the rich history and inventiveness of the post-war period in the most southwestern part of the country. I mean you can't get further from New York without drowning in the Pacific Ocean. Many of us are in several exhibitions because of the variety of our interests and practices. The exhibition at MOCA in L.A., "Under the Big Black Sun," which is showing a 1976 work of mine, *The Nurse and the Hijackers*, gave me an opportunity to consider this political work of 35 years ago in the light of today's contemporary politics. It has amazed me to see how similar we were then to where we are now.





Eleanor Antin, Desert set from *The Nurse and the Hijackers*, 1976, dimensions variable.

*The Nurse and the Hijackers* employs the structure of a still popular movie genre, the disaster movie, as an armature to consider how in this age of alienated government and institutions, people find themselves more and more removed from the sources of power, even over their own lives, especially over their own lives. I began to see how hijacking was one of the ways that the powerless could reach the power centers quickly and cheaply through a media in love with disasters and death. Actually my hijackers are eco-terrorists, who fly their hijacked plane to the Middle East. They're hoping to convince the OPEC nations not to sell their oil to the imperialist West in order to avert the human and ecological disaster toward which they believe an amoral technology has been leading the world. They fail, of course. In fact, they're ecologically smart but politically stupid, since OPEC is short for Oil Producing and Exporting Country.

There's something of a paradox in this work. The hijackers' arguments about oil and the disintegrating environment makes even more sense today and they're certainly not out to kill anyone. They're aiming to cure the world of its petroleum disease. Only the Middle Eastern governments that they're trying to persuade to cure this oil disease are the people who benefit from it. But today, with the new terrorism, the paradox is lost. Today, it's impossible to make a hijacker look benevolent or sympathetic. Thinking about people who aren't out to argue about ideas of how to save the world but are out to destroy themselves and everybody else in their vicinity, is a whole other ball game. This is a dark irony that did not exist back in 1976.

Little nurse Eleanor happens to be aboard this plane along with a cast of stock characters . . . like an ex-jock turned sportscaster yearning to be an anchorman, an alcoholic movie star, a middle-aged couple on their way to a wedding in Israel, you name it. Then there are the idealistic hijackers and the Algerian bankers, Libyan colonel and several sheiks whom they fail to persuade. These stock characters form the material out of which the narrative is created. You might call it an Arte Povera work of sorts, since in

those days I certainly couldn't afford actors, and my means were those that were freely available to little girls everywhere . . . paper dolls and narrative invention.



Eleanor Antin, *The Tourists*, 2007, chromogenic print, 61" x 77 7/8".

I've been telling stories and playing with depraved genres to represent the political and cultural disasters of our contemporary world since I began making art back in the 1960s. And I've continued right up to the present with my large photographs of live actors in ancient Roman settings and dress enacting allegories of the fall of empires that bear a strong resemblance to our own disintegrating American empire.

**Eleanor Antin** works in a variety of media, including photography, video, film, performance, installation, drawing, and writing. An emeritus professor at UCSD, she was a featured artist on Art 21 on PBS and has had many solo exhibitions, including at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, and a retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Antin has just completed a memoir, *Conversations with Stalin*. Her other books include *Being Antinova* (Astro Artz, 1983) and *Eleanora Antinova Plays* (Sun & Moon, 1994).

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## Susan Bee

I've found, in making my art, solace from both private grief and public trauma. So our first question for this *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* forum has great resonance for me. Still, I find my motivation for making a painting or artist's book is not necessarily apparent to a viewer. I would say that my artworks are a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). This term has been used by postwar Germans to describe their attempt to confront their recent history, yet, perhaps oddly, I find it suits my search to find an emotional and intellectual balance through art.

My parents came out of the cauldron of Berlin and Nazi Germany and Palestine to find their way as Jewish artists in America. As the child of immigrants, I inherited their fears



and insecurities as well their pride and optimism in their new country. The sudden death of my father Sigmund Laufer in 2007 was followed by the unimaginable suicide of my 23-year-old daughter Emma Bee Bernstein in 2008. I found that I had to regain my footing in the world and that through the imaginary narrative of painting I was able to embody my pain and transform it. But transform it into what? Perhaps I can just say an altered world.



Susan Bee, *Woman Tormented by Demons*, 2009, oil on linen, 18" x 14". Collection: Regis Bonvicino.

As the late poet Akilah Oliver wrote in relation to the tragic death of her 20-year-old son: "In approaching the subject, the death of the beloved, I enter into an investigation of the ecstatic in the dual sites of rapture and rupture. For me, an absolute rupture occurred at the time of my son's death, so that the world broke open, in a sense, and I decided to follow the opening to wherever it led, rather than try to patch it and close it. . . . I think . . . for me, to write is a kind of difficult dance with rapture; it is a way to beckon the day as a beloved, a way to talk to the dead, a way to collapse the known world into the impossible."



Susan Bee, *Drive By*, 2009, oil on linen, 14" x 18". Collection: Rachel Levitsky.

Jews talk about *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. I have found overwhelming support in the past few years from the community of artists, poets, and friends that has surrounded my family. I am very grateful for having this continuing presence in my life.

Unfortunately, repairing the world is extremely difficult, as we see daily in the global strife of wars, recessions, and endless environmental damage. Greed, enmity, and the enormity of our current problems can seem to engulf the vision of an individual artist practicing a rather antique art form, such as oil painting, in a small studio. The studio can serve as an escape hatch or a meditation chamber or an experimental lab, where color, composition, dreams, and conscious and unconscious intentions meet. Often, I find that this space is a tiny resting space and holding action against the juggernaut of the commercial art world and the disturbances of contemporary life. I was downtown on September 11th, 2001, within a mile of the World Trade Center, on my way to my studio on Canal Street, when the buildings came down. Within days I returned to my studio to work. I found comfort in that as a healing process and it provided consolation and a way of continuing on with my projects.





Susan Bee, *Go Forth*, 2011, oil on linen, 20" x 16".

I am heartened by the new activism at Occupy Wall Street that is now taking place within blocks of Ground Zero. I do still believe in the importance of the communities we can create as activist artists, whether in cooperative galleries like A.I.R., publishing ventures like *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, or in the workplace, for instance in forming unions for adjunct professors, so that we have the job security and benefits that we deserve.

As to the second question that we framed for this 25th anniversary issue, I greatly appreciate the sharing and instantaneous communication that the web provides. When we started *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in 1985, there was no web and no personal computers. Our invitations were sent in the mail and our communications were made in person and on the telephone. News traveled more slowly and time seemed to pass in a different manner. I like that but now I also like the sense of community that social networking sites and the web and e-mail provide. I do think my privacy has probably been eroded, but I still feel my inner life is mine alone to share or not as I wish. It is strange to leave the world of our magazine with its printed issues, for this brave new space of instant communication. As Mira has noted elsewhere, we used to run into people on the street, and waited to hear back from people who had received the issue in the mail. We dragged each issue in heavy bags to the post office. Our publishing experience was as different in pace as the horse and buggy era is from the experience of car and airplane travel. Still we feel privileged to be able to continue our project.

I hope that this new sense of community will light sparks for a new vision to fan out into

this troubled and globalized 21st century.

**Susan Bee** is an artist, editor, writer, and teacher living in New York City. She has had six solo shows at A.I.R. Gallery in New York City and has published many artist's books, including collaborations with Susan Howe, Johanna Drucker, Charles Bernstein, Regis Bonvicino, and Jerome Rothenberg. She is currently teaching at the School of Visual Arts, NY, and the University of Pennsylvania. Bee is represented by Accola Griefen Gallery and A.I.R. Gallery in New York.

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**Bill Berkson**

## Variations on a Theme

*There is no love interest in these modern wars.*

— Gertrude Stein, 1943

It's said that the more examples you show of suffering the smaller the impact. One sad case is tops. The casualty list looks blank unless you're searching for a name. In Gertrude Stein's *Brewsie and Willie*, Willie says, *If you fight a war good enough everybody ought to get killed*. A little later Brewsie says, *Oh dear, I guess you boys better go away, I might just begin to cry and I better be alone. I am a G.I. and perhaps we better all cry, it might do us good crying sometimes does*.

Ted Berrigan said he heard a gunshot in the night in Korea, outside the base. Kenneth Koch lost his glasses in a foxhole somewhere in the Pacific, bullets whizzing. "Killer Kenneth." Frank O'Hara stood on the deck of the USS Nicholas, spotting enemy planes, horrified that he might be the cause of the next great Japanese composer's going down in flames. Robert Creeley drove an ambulance through Burma. What happens when poets go to war, as they will, but nowadays rarely? (Some mystery in that.) "War is shit," wrote Ted in one of his Vietnam-vintage poems. Some of us are just perpetual observers, like Tolstoy's Pierre threading through the dead and wounded at Borodino.

For those who were in it, varying degrees of persistent horror seem inexorable: "war torn," "battle fatigue," "shell shock," and the now clinically approved "PTSD." (A bellyful of scare quotes there.) O'Hara went on to Harvard and wrote an attempted exorcism, "Lament and Chastisement," its finale choir screeching like out of a bad dream.

Poets and painters have a high command. Few of my friends have ever been in any army, nor have I. Fat chance of that. Our love interests lie elsewhere. When in the midst of the Cold War I told my father I wouldn't join no matter what, he called me "a pigeon for the Reds." Nevertheless, we have rage, aggression, defense mechanisms, a taste for revenge, inordinate cruelty, appalling as all those may be, as well as resentment, pride and shame. I remember a poet friend in 1967 or so telling me he was going to join the army — because, he said, "I need to kill someone."

Is that a real soldier, fuck or fight? The professional — commander or hoplite — is one thing. My uncle Kent the career cavalryman, rode horses in WWI and tanks in WWII. In the latter, on George Patton's staff in North Africa, Sicily and onward — a disreputable association that left him shunted at war's end, his last years as colonel-commandant of the dress post Governor's Island. His daughter, my ninety-three-year-old cousin, says he was generally "naughty." Lean, elegant, persuasive, sporting a neatly trimmed mustache, a lightning-bolt Armored-Division patch on one sleeve of his uniform jacket, he was the closest I ever got to a military life.

Fuck or fight? Walter Reed is closing, the troops may well be pulling out, but the drones keep flying. John Keegan's *A History of Warfare* reads like a biosketch of collateral humankind. But strangely omitted is the sense of how soldiering fits with the everyday economy. At the Selective Service Induction Center in Lower Manhattan, 1960, I overheard people my age eager to get in, get the job. "Hope he doesn't spot my trick knee." Growing up absurd, with no higher prospect. I on the other hand wanted out; ambitious to avoid, certified 4F by a picture-perfect Viennese émigré camp psychiatrist, psyched, watching my hands shake when he told me to hold them out. The desk sergeant handed me a lunch ticket for the mess hall; an hour later I sat drinking vodka in Frank O'Hara's parlor, wondering if I had missed out on some crucial experience.

Note: The present text consists of excerpts and variants on "Soldier, Rest," an introduction to Anne Waldman and Noah Saterstrom's *Soldatesque / Soldiering: With Dreams of Wartime* (BlazeVox Books, 2011).

**Bill Berkson**'s most recent books include *Portrait and Dream: New & Selected Poems*; a collection of art writings, *For the Ordinary Artist*; *Not an Exit*, with drawings by Léonie Guyer; and *Repeat After Me*, with watercolors by John Zurier. He is Professor Emeritus at the San Francisco Art Institute, a contributing editor (poetry) for [artcritical.com](http://artcritical.com), and a corresponding editor for *Art in America*.

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**Charles Bernstein**

## **The Pataque(e)rical Wager**

In the sixties, we used to say, heighten the contradictions. And then, when the contradictions were so excruciatingly high that you'd think the political center was some kind homebrew of meth and glue, things just seemed to get worse. And that longed-for breakthrough in collective consciousness not only didn't happen but seemed, each day, that much further away. I know, Gramsci, pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will, I got that tattooed to my cerebellum, but some days the will's just not there any more. (You know you're old when the promises of youth become clues to a map of a lost world 20,000 leagues under the Edward I. Koch "Feelin' Groovy" 59th Street Bridge.) I always thought those who described George W. Bush as incompetent missed how successful he was in creating irreparable environmental damage and that how well he succeeded with his agenda, including massive redistribution of wealth (crude as this measure is, the flow of money from the many to the few is a fairly accurate guide to Republican Party

policies). So, perhaps more than ever before, I began to internalize the public events of the days. I felt I was being poisoned by them.

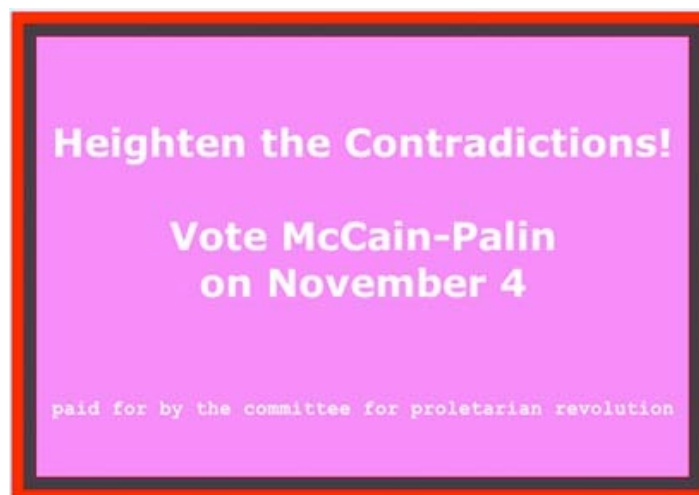
### **The Sixties, with Apologies**

I remember the future, how it was  
So much like the past, those days  
Rowing on the lake for the sake of  
Rowing itself, never looking out, never  
Any ducks lined up, only the fragrance  
Of fragrance, the similes on a smile  
Touched by an angle. As if our fund  
For hedges was any more effective than  
Duping, duking, doping, throwing  
Cold water on sizzling runes. Jesus  
Would have dug it, before he got hung  
Up in all that superstructure. Even  
The water withers in the mouth, like

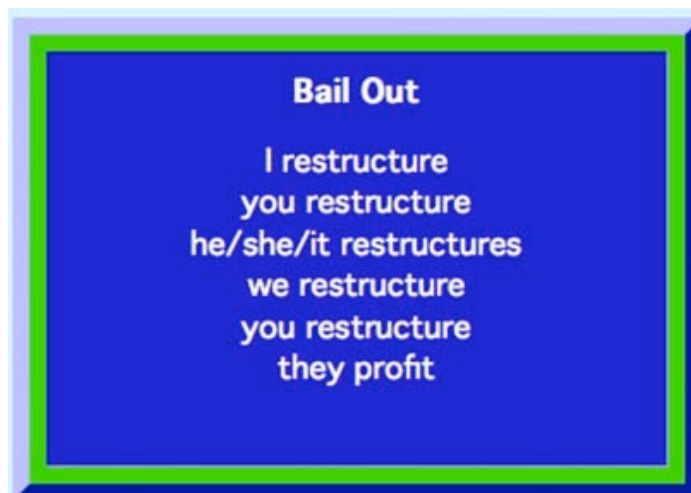
Hope evaporating in the words of the  
Town criers and motion sensors. Gale  
Winds diminish in the mind since  
Whatever is apparent and clear in  
My brain is so much Yukon flu.  
The utter white spaces of deception.  
*It's ok, but I did that 20 years ago.*  
Millions of miles beyond care, sobered  
Up on 12-year-old bourbon & lobster  
Rigamarole. The blood on George Bush's  
Hands keeps coming out in my stool.  
Night is never dark enough because  
Everything I see frightens me.

When the 2008 election came around, I wanted to see a public art that pushed back against the "fair and balanced" double-binds of the mediocracy (antiwar sentiment on Iraq was the equivalent of pro-war sentiment, the Bush lies were as valid as the questioning of the lies). How is that those of us in the streets demonstrating against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 knew the claims to WMDs were unverified while the massed media did not? Yes the answer is obvious: I am speaking here to my emotional reaction to, let's call it, the ideological terrorism of constant mendacity in the massed media. Symptoms: *Unproductive anger and frustration*, mixed in with a range of not apparently related frustrations and disappointment both personal and with developments in poetry and art. The left and liberal mainstream publications are so addicted to self-restraint that

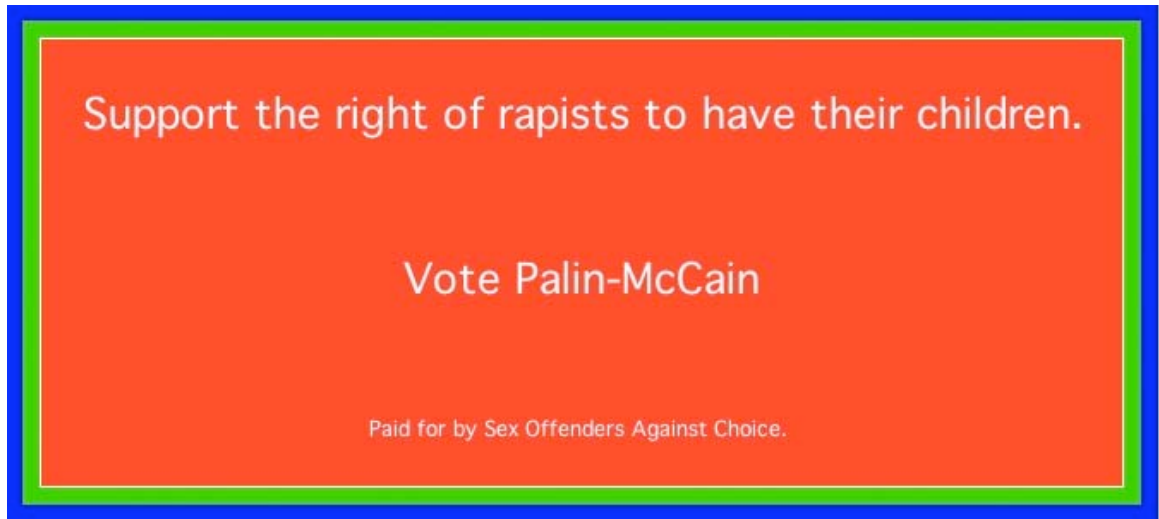
they don't allow much in the way of unruly political art; in any case, let's not let tainted/confused emotions get into it, surely that will undermine the legitimacy of our position which is grounded in rationality alone. I was seeing probity but I was wanting satire, sarcasm, irreverence, outrage, mocking. There is no wide-circulation public forum that would publish my idiosyncratic political placards. But I had my own web site and could — quicker than you can say Tom Paine three times backward — while walking over shards of discarded Dells (I love the smell of burning operating systems at midnight) — publish my own forays into common sense (or from the point of the mediocracy: eccentric musings, what I now call my pataque(e)rical wagers). When Ken Jacobs recently looked at a bunch of these works, he wrote me "I can envision the sleepless nights that produced these." And he added, "Isn't there a saying, 'irony closes out of town in two days'?" If there is, I sure never heard it. But I know what he means. This is my new quest: *unpopular public art*, with always the same joke that, by necessity, could never be funny. And that makes a point with which almost everyone in the audience already agrees (sort of). My private recurring nightmares were coming from what I read in the newspaper each morning. Here are a few:



Fall 2008



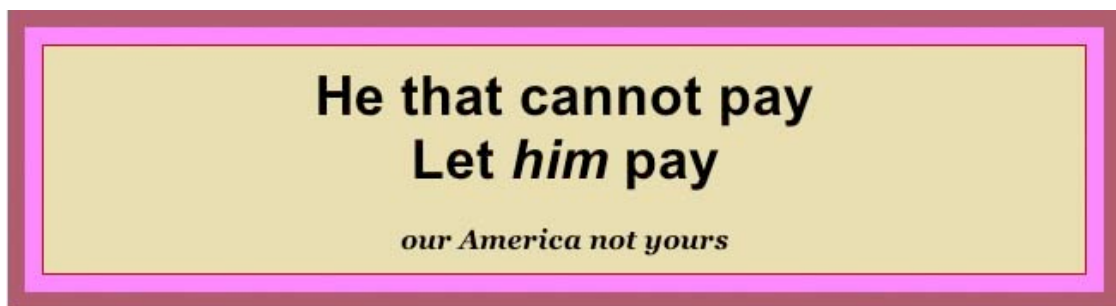
Fall 2008



Fall 2008



January 23, 2010



July 21, 2010

[Full set of placards here.](#)

P. S. What a difference a few months make. I wrote my essay for *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* in August 2011. By mid-October, with the Occupy Wall Street movement in full swing, the anger bordering on despair many of us have been feeling had found what looks to be an almost adequate public form of expression (I prefer adequate to perfect). Collective outrage has been growing for years and will continue to find its voices. The poetics of OWS are appealing partly because they are averse to the kind of policy declarations that the mediocracy craves. Similar to the criticism of Barack Obama, in campaign mode,



being too poetic (and who doesn't long for him to return to that?), the very ambiguity of the OWS protest opens it up to multiple, not doubt contradictory, affiliations. Slogans and aphorisms play a strong part in this, as with other populist protests, which use tactical framing to reorient attention. At OWS, we hear "This is what democracy looks like," "Banks got bailed out / we got sold out," and of the eponymous "We are the 99%." The spirit of the marches, calm and friendly (as of this writing), does have something of the spirit of the late 1960s, but more the be-ins in Central Park than the more confrontive Chicago '68 demonstrations or the student occupations of those years (and so far no police plants or weathermen to promote trashing store windows after hours, nor police forces going on rampages, at least to the extent we experienced it in Chicago). When OWS protestors say the whole world is watching, they mean that in a way that was not imaginable in Chicago in 1968 (where that chant was popularized). Those without signs have cameras: images are constantly being uploaded to the web, which surely has a welcome chilling effect on police response. But OWS wants something else: not the whole world watching but the whole world participating.

**Charles Bernstein** is the author of *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* and *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems*. He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, where he chairs the Program for Stand Up Poetry and Avant-Garde Comedy and heads the search committee for Chief Rabbi, First Church, Poetic License.

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## Nayland Blake

Let's talk about the sense of dislocation that accompanies so much online experience: the rootlessness, the sense that there is always something else over there beyond the horizon. Ideas and images arrive on my screen with the barest effort on my part. Sites like tumblr immerse me in a flow of pictures that tug at my attention for a moment or two before being quickly supplanted by still more pictures. If I really like something I may right click and save the image to peruse "later," although that later only rarely arrives. I use tumblr as a source for things I'd like to think about, and I can feel the sad way that this "future thinking" is taking the place of me actually thinking about things. When I meet with students for the first time I often ask them what do you "reread" or in the case of movies rewatch. Increasingly people tell me they don't do that. When it comes to information online, I don't do it. Images and words dissolve in my mind like a communion wafer on the palate of a skeptic: here for a second as a reminder and then gone. In this sense online culture turns treasure into something to be waded through, to get done with. The chores of communication, making us all into content pushers.

I was initially asked to contemplate the idea of global spectacle. I don't think we live in such an age. We no longer have the sustained attention that allows for spectacle to work as a unifying force. Instead we live in a time of flash attention mobs, where memes "go viral" in the twinkling of an eye and the dance of a finger on a button means that thousands of people have supposedly responded to the thing you made. This is the

tyranny of the Nielsen rating.

I've come to believe that art works are deeply contextual utterances, that much of their conception occurs when the artist is thinking about a specific act for a specific place in concert with a specific group of people. Once the work exists, it may or may not be taken up by all sorts of people in unanticipated ways, but the problem for the maker is not one of anticipating all possible responses, but rather how to understand the meanings that are fighting to the surface in that particular piece of contextual thinking that the artwork embodies. That's another way of saying I make art to find out what I am thinking about my place in the world at any particular time and as such, knowing that 50 or 5000 people "liked" it is a metric that is useless the next time I try to make something.

The logic that governs online value is the logic of mid-century advertising, where the assumption is that the more eyeballs that see an ad, the more effective it is likely to be. Why else have friend counters in Facebook, numbers of followers on twitter? The earliest personal web pages had visitor counters, as you may remember. The information about the number of people who have seen things is useful to advertisers, but useless for artists, because the quality of those encounters escapes measurement. Art's value lies in its ability to catalyse change, in the lives of those who make it and encounter it. It is a process that proceeds over time, with repetition and inflection. "Liking," "+1-ing," and "retweeting" are not responses, they are convulsions that stand in for an encounter we wish to have. The Me generation has given way to the "me-too" generation.

When the mechanisms of response are so rudimentary, when the metrics of momentary attention trump all other assignments of value, where does that leave us as makers? For many, the internalization of the advertising mindset is complete as they struggle to "manage personal brands" across multiple online forums, or try to drive their numbers up. In part this is because it's easier, less painful to talk about the amount of something than the often contradictory or ambiguous meanings that happen with each encounter.

The only future of art that I'm interested in lies in the cracks, the spaces between screens, or where our encounter with screens is made once again slow and strange.

[Nayland Blake](#) is an artist and educator who lives and works in Brooklyn.

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**Anney Bonney**

## **Disambiguate the Present**

*Disambiguate* is a word that always stops me. It's not an everyday word. I don't hear it in conversation but it lives within the collective screen of Wikipedia. So actually, it *is* an everyday word. I spend time with it during every visit.

**Disambiguate . . .** ‘Remove ambiguity from.’

. . . forming adjectives and nouns with the sense ‘both, on both sides, both ways.’

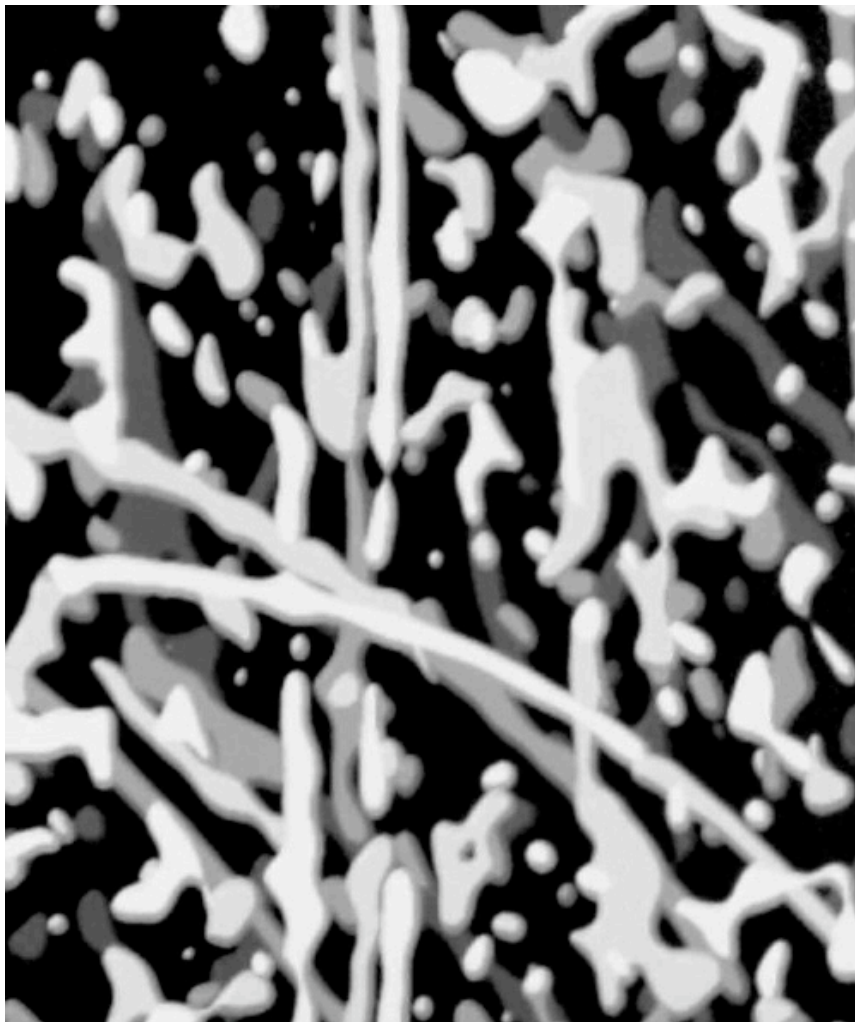
*Agiere*: Latin for ‘drive’<sup>1</sup>

Ambiguity carries the seeds of its undoing in its unfolding. When I read *disambiguate* I know it asks for more clarity but I feel alienation and dislocation — more confusion. My limited research suggests the word comes from nowhere, and has no specific date of origin, perhaps the sixties. How perfect. Extend its latent sense of drive to Freud’s concept of *Trieb*, life force, instinct and there’s a desire to know both sides tucked neatly inside its negative equation.

People walk with their cell phones in hand, like heat seeking magic carpets ready for transport. Look both ways to navigate the flood of hyperactivity, hyper image/text reality. This functional displacement has not made us hyper aware or more present. The needle pulls more toward accelerated relocation in denial/paranoia.

That shift is easy to date . . . 9/11/2001.

After the towers collapsed I found myself going to the site late at night like a video sleepwalker on call, spirits rising out of the gothic ruins. I talked to policemen drinking coffee. I thanked tired workmen who rode up high in cable cars. They sparked fire bright displays with their acetylene torches. Being thankful seemed important.



Anney Bonney, *In-Ra-In*, 2011, digital print on rag paper, 24" x 34".

I didn't know what else to do but document the mayhem aftermath in some skewed personal way. I lived with toasted cars and Pompeian dust. I smelled the rubber and refuse burning for a couple months. The towels that cased my inside windows turned acrid yellow.

One of my students recently wrote, "it's a great time to be alive because everyone can be an artist. Everyone has an iPhone." While I appreciated his optimism I wanted to blunt the argument and refer him to Jaron Lanier's *You are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, but he dropped the class.

It's a consequence of pronominal culture. iMovie, iPod, YouTube present a world of devices, apps and Internet services based on you and I (or me or my), the intimate Faceless interFace that promises uber creativity.

Watch people texting madly. It's serious business living in the social paradox network. We have never been so many, so connected, so informed: we have never been more alone. The ideology of privileged technology can give voice to dissent then lose it in ambient chatter.

There's only one Ai Weiwei.

What happens to artists whose work avoids Internet media spin? To make something with your hands that rejects the model of artist as entrepreneur is a step way outside consensus. Knowing that something you make might transcend its materiality insults the hive mind. It honors the life of the individual encountering his/her work as its own world. Does that experience have to be degraded as self-indulgence? At least there's a palpable *self* to indulge. Can't it be heroic — again — for reasons other than its past?

I have a friend who's been painting abstract inscapes for 30 years. He says life in New York has become a vortex, spitting out whatever it can't engorge in conformity. Certain poets and painters are ejected by the centrifugal force of its consuming whirlpool. They are the first wave to lose support. They are the first to go.

I empathize. Without independent spirits, art and artists die. I concede I need techno/web tools for video, printing, designing, writing, teaching. I am only free when I am light/water, painting and dreaming. My thought-forms on exponential change are neither U- or Dys-topic. I could leave the planet when it seems aimed at Kurzweil's singularity. I remain curious.

Ambiguity can inspire by double meaning "admitting more than one interpretation" or frustrate when it's leveled to "unreliability." I will hold a place for mystery, the unknown, listening, watching, looking both ways, living on and not forever.

1. The sixth edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* on historical principles.

**Anney Bonney** is an artist living and working in New York.

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## Jackie Brookner

There are acute traumas like 9/11 and the current American wars — acute in the medical sense, meaning very severe, but of relatively short duration. And then there are chronic traumas that persist over a long duration with a low background drone, occasionally punctuated by what seems to be an acute eruption. The deterioration of all of earth's natural systems, climate change, and mass extinctions of species on land and water are of this latter sort. (And they could, without too much difficulty, be considered a root cause of 9/11, the wars, and the recession, driven as these are by the hungers of the oil economy.)

I work with water, and people — trying to affect change at the practical level, by creating systems that clean water, mostly urban stormwater. Because I want to affect change at the level of causes rather than symptoms these systems are very intentionally art. But

how can art do anything about huge systemic problems like water pollution, rising sea levels or climate change? Ultimately it is what we care most about, what we understand to be in our own self-interest, our values, that fuel these problems. To get to them, you have to affect people at the levels where values are formed — a bit in the head, but mostly in the heart, and at the kinaesthetic and less than conscious levels. Ultimately it's a question of who we think we are. And who is "we" is much to the point.

Over the past several years, the need to push back against the docility and passivity of this culture has been pressing upon me. The work has been focusing more and more on creating processes and situations where people in communities can experience their creative agency, and experience their power to do something that directly affects what happens with areas of land and water in their own neighbourhoods. My interest in individual authorship has waned in direct proportion as this public focus has become more defined. I am much more compelled by working together with other people to budge our species in the direction of long-term survival — if that is possible.

I weaned myself from the art market and fashion and their fixation on individuality and idiosyncrasy long ago. Fortunately I have found opportunities to work in the public realm and with communities, where the work needs to be done.







Work by Jackie Brookner, in collaboration with Tuula Nikulainen, residents of Salo, Finland, Salo Parks Department, Salo Office of Environmental Protection, BioMatrix Water, and students and faculty of the Salo Polytechnic Institute.

*Veden Taika (The Magic of Water)*, 2007-2010. Three floating islands that provide safe habitat for nesting birds and plants to clean pollution in the water and sediment in a former sewage treatment lagoon in Salo, Finland. Dimensions: central island, 98.5 x 21 feet; 2 smaller islands: 39 x 20 feet each. Islands: plastic pipe, plastic mesh, gravel, geotextile, wetland plants. Sculpted rocks: styrofoam, lightweight concrete. Images show the islands from different views and the students working on the island structures.

**Jackie Brookner** is an ecological artist and writer who works collaboratively with ecologists, engineers, design professionals, communities, and policy makers on water remediation/public art projects for parks, wetlands, rivers, and urban stormwater runoff. Her current project, The Fargo Project, was awarded an inaugural "Our Town" grant from the NEA.

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Joyce Burstein

## Zombie esthetics or how to survive the trauma that has always been eating our brains

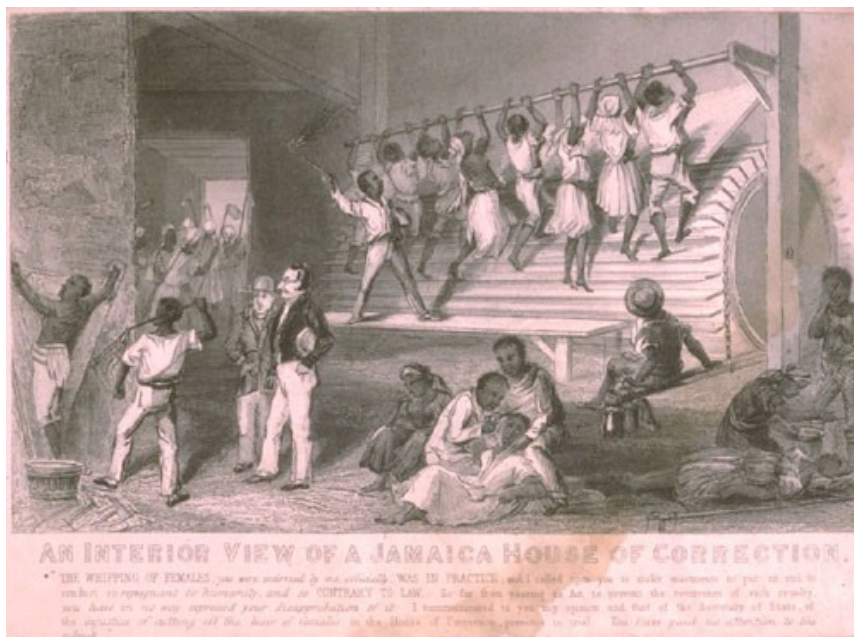
My first thought was that these traumas have always been there beside us. A childhood backgrounded by the nightly news with scrolling names of local soldiers perished in Vietnam, the terror of the draft numbers, my grandmother aghast at Israel's war on Palestine whimpering, "but that's what the Poles did to us," the first time I was old enough to vote, Reagan's acceptance speech, his speech at Bitburg, the hostages, one of whom I went to high school with, Zimbabwe, El Salvador. These traumas we stare at on the TV. There are those who curled up in a ball of fear after 9/11 and I understand that pain is relative, but I also see reaction relative to how politicized one may be — if one has "occupied" themselves with power structures, it sort of never leaves you completely passive again. I've been arrested a dozen times for civil disobedience, lobbied state legislatures, and laid down in front of bulldozers — for me when the planes hit I go into last girl mode.



Stretch, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, 1986, Tobe Hooper.

For those of you with something more refined than the cinematic esthetic of a 14 year old, Stretch is the one that survives in the horror movie, not just survives but somehow in between the running and the hiding and the killing transforms her fear into strength and then she doesn't even have to kill the monster — it's rendered irrelevant by her mere survival but she offs it anyway — or to be continued. I see this condition of public trauma being played out relentlessly, continuously, akin to the allegory of the zombie genre, some say the only new myth, born as an allegory of slavery and loss of identity in voodoo culture and delivered to ours as the slavery of consumerism and the only way it can frame my relationship to production is to not get bit. Everything about the art market is infected, it's part of our zombie economy — parasites that consume without

contributing. Didn't art die in the 80s? Post-death, the slouching corpse who proceeds as if the miracle of the '70s never happened. Don't get bit, don't even get a scratch. Make it too big to sell, use choice as a weapon, ethics over esthetics, viewers over self, mind over eye, community over competition, because as Columbus says from *Zombieland*, "without other people you may as well be a zombie." Cultural production? Who has time what with all the running and hiding (so much hiding) and the head shots. Born into a world alienated from its production, graduate with MFA debt rendered unemployable until recently. Try getting a teaching job with employers contacted by the attorney general to write 1/3 paycheck to the government. Stuck with under the table jobs like digging ditches out of the intricately banal traumas of living in a mindless society continuously buried alive under a mountain made of mole hills and digging out. How to defeat the inner zombie?



*An Interior View of a Jamaica House of Correction, c. 1835.*

My particular idiosyncrasy — fantasizing screenplays of who will survive a zombie attack at art events, like a gala I got taken to at the Guggenheim, a museum I can rarely afford to even enter. Because we know there is strength in numbers, who to follow? Amidst the carnage of the glitterati of the art world, bands of survivors form, one led by Carolee Schneemann who, like a feminist MacGyver, through resourcefulness and wits can escape structures that defy or define her, or Matthew Barney, who despite intimate experience with the territory must form a production crew and mediate the ideas of others, sadly money means nothing in situations like this or there is Marina Abramovic's endurance and the stealth of letting go of ego, empty the vessel and out zombie the zombie. I would follow Schneemann, of course, while scouting my own weapons — damn these museums with their outmoded focus on painting — a Renoir's no good for beheading a monster.

The art market's role is both fodder and cause of the outbreak, in my scenario it's the

artists who avoid complicity with the market that survive.

So we'll occupy Wall Street and we'll occupy museums right? Because we're not scared of death we're scared of slavery.

**Joyce Burstein** is an artist living in NY who saw her first zombie movie at MOMA in the early eighties. She is teaching Feminist Art and Culture at SUNY New Paltz, a recent job that feels like bathing in diamonds.

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**Sharon L. Butler**

## Free Love

Consumer advocate Martin Lindstrom [wrote in a New York Times op-ed](#) recently about a casual fMRI experiment he conducted with smart phones. Testing sixteen participants (eight male, eight female), Lindstrom expected the experiment to reveal that we are addicted to our smart phones — that when the phones buzz, ding, or ring, our brains respond as they do when stimulated by drugs and alcohol. Instead what he discovered was that phone activity led to movement in the brain's insular cortex — the realm of feeling, love, and compassion. Lindstrom concluded that we aren't addicted to our devices, but that we love our gadgets the way we love a romantic partner or family member. I would suggest that perhaps we don't love the gadgets per se, but that we love the feeling of *being loved* that their apparent attentiveness continually provides. Each ding or buzz indicates that someone is retweeting our tweets, sending us a note, or "liking" our status on Facebook. An iPhone doesn't actually give us the love, but it transmits it.

For artists, the majority of whom will never experience sustained critical attention or receive financial compensation from their art practice because the odds are stacked so overwhelmingly against their commercial success, social networking tools are invaluable positive reinforcement. They have enabled artists to build sustainable art communities with broad reach outside the traditional commercial gallery structure. It's not just the constant flow of Lindstrom's *love* that has driven artists into the arms of Web 2.0 and social networking media. Free tools like Wordpress, Blogger, Facebook, Google Plus, and Twitter that intensify our desire for smart phones are particularly important to unrepresented artists who have customarily been excluded from the critical dialogue. Artists armed with only social networking media are taking greater control, and this is changing the way the art world works.

In 2007, when I started [Two Coats of Paint](#), an art blog dedicated to painting and related subjects, I recognized that the availability of these free publishing tools was historically significant, but established writers and mainstream media, dismissive of blogs in general and especially unvetted bloggers, were slow to understand the immense impact blogs



and social networking media would ultimately have. As recently as last year, Malcolm Gladwell published [a piece in The New Yorker](#) arguing that the use of social networking media actually *inhibited* our ability to affect real political change. Shortly thereafter, the Arab Spring, which was [unequivocally facilitated](#) by the protesters' use of social networking media, proved his thesis completely off the mark.



Sharon L. Butler, *Cage-building*, 2011, silver Krylon on unprimed, unstretched linen, 72" x 60".

Interestingly, not all artists agree that social networking media constitute a positive development. I recently received [an email from an art PR firm](#) outlining a project that Danish artist Thierry Geoffroy has organized at the Sprengel Museum Hannover. In the exhibition statement, Geoffroy suggests that artists “should not let social media dominate the field of collecting the history, images, feelings and interactions of human activity. The museum should regain this stolen territory to prevent the world’s archives from ending up in the hand of companies with domination goals.”

At first glance, his argument seems compelling. After all, what do Google and Facebook know about art? And shouldn't we be dubious of mob rule, especially when it comes to our cultural legacy? On closer examination, however, most artists might be better off embracing social media, which place power in their hands, than they would be in maintaining fealty to museums and galleries whose exclusionary practices are wide ranging and well documented. As part of the existing art industrial complex, museums are funded by corporate interests and wealthy collectors, and will only give artists the love if the artists have a strong enough voice to demand it. Relatively few do. But creating an online soapbox is a good first step.

An artist and writer, **Sharon L. Butler** blogs at [Two Coats of Paint](#).

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**Tom Butter**

## Film Eats Everything

Film eats everything. Over and over film asserts itself as the dominant medium, it consumes and alters everything it touches. Art now aspires to the condition of film. Novels are increasingly cinematic. Performance art is a kind of "live" film, expressing all the structural distance film has — pushing the audience away, unlike the shared experience of theatre, where something is built with the audience's tacit approval. Sculptural installations in galleries and museums often feel like film sets, putting people in their own movies. This is thrilling. We assume auras of stardom walking through spaces built for temporary use. These constructions move us into the role of actor. Installation art isn't architecture, or sculpture, but makes a temporary space in which to perform, generating a need for our presence, seducing us.

The influence of TV and film on the broader culture is everywhere. Film is the 20th-century virus infecting all culture. Facebook allows us to become persons with public lives on display, lives full of minutiae and drama. We are our own publicists *and* paparazzi, we become movie stars! The shimmering world of public image and celebrity is available to everyone, and as a consequence our lives become more "real." They are part of an endless happening, the endless present that the Web brings right into our homes.

In 1953, in an appendix titled "A Note on the Film" in her landmark book *Feeling and Form* Suzanne Langer applies her analytical skills and intuition to what she calls *a new art*. She situates film in the spectrum of other media, coming up with its primary illusion — *virtual history* expressed in its own mode — the *dream mode*. And in this mode, film creates a *ubiquitous virtual present*, or as she puts it so well in the last three words of her book: *an endless Now*. In a very few pages Langer captures the pull and psychological power of the medium, the way it works and what it does for us.



What could be better than *an endless Now*? With kids, the immediate, locked-down fascination with television's moving image is palpable. They merge with it. My generation, composed of the first kids raised with TV, is fascinated with moving image media. TV has been the subject and the foundation for much of the art we have made. I think the pervasive irony found in much art made today comes from the sense, as kids, that as we watched these ½-hour comedies or 1-hour dramas we were made to feel and think things without directly being part of them, or having control over them. It was, following Langer, as if we were dreaming them. And these TV shows would resolve everything neatly in the given time frame. Because kids want to know how things work, we stepped back and looked at the mechanisms and machinery of these representations. We thought about *how* these moving images could get us feeling and thinking certain ways. Our deciphered understanding of the cheesy methods used in these shows created distrust of the notion of value in culture. We developed a need for distance and cool in our work. At the same time we felt a compulsion to repeat the methods absorbed so early. We learned that life is not to be felt and lived, it is to be decoded and thought about in terms of standard patterns of behavior, using quick, schematic, predetermined relations between people as the norm. What a climate! It isn't hard to imagine why we formed all sorts of cynical conclusions.

But there is another side to the development of film and TV as dominant media of our time. Film's ability to produce an "endless Now" has the potential to liberate us from our lives, to literally get us "dreaming" about things we don't know. The experience of watching film can distance, but it can also connect. We always have the choice with culture, even when it doesn't feel like it. Today, with social media seeming to move us in one direction, we can choose to move in the opposite way. Viewing early Herzog films we enter new worlds and leave the theatre changed by seeing people do what they do under duress, in strange circumstances. To watch Joe Morton play an alien in *Brother From Another Planet* is to review all the things we take for granted as humans — for example: not putting ice in beer! Seeing Michelle Pfeiffer playing a jazz singer devoted to her art in *The Fabulous Baker Brothers* is to understand what work and commitment can mean to an artist over the long haul. Michael K. Williams playing Omar in *The Wire* gets us thinking about what it means to live by a code. The brutal impingement of the physical world on the characters in *Runaway Train* is unbearable but oddly cleansing. Watching Jack Nicholson's character in *The Last Detail* try to give Randy Quaid a feel for how he lives life is a heartbreaker. These films open the world. The dreaming *adds* to our lives, we expand. . . .

**Tom Butter** has been showing his work in New York City, nationally, and internationally since 1981. He has published articles in *Whitehot Magazine*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and is currently teaching in the MFA Fine Arts program at Parsons the New School for Design.

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## Anna Chave

A day or so after 9/11 — when I witnessed the second tower's collapse and then stared at the phalanx of ghostly, shell-shocked Wall-Streeters streaming past my front window on the Bowery — I had to go as usual out to Queens College to teach. I was meant to lecture on landscape and nature imagery that day in my History of Photography course, including the surpassingly romantic work of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, who mostly photographed the Western U.S. during the Second World War as if they had never got the news. I did consider switching it up, jumping ahead to documentary work, zeroing in on war and crisis photography, but I finally decided against teaching material for which the students were unprepared. Yet it seemed an absurdity, if not an obscenity, to be discoursing on exquisite images of sand dunes and green peppers as the World Trade Center smoldered not far away and desperate people cased the city in vain hopes that their family members had eluded unthinkable horrible ends. So I halfway apologized to the class, when it convened, for proceeding with business as usual. But the class surprised me with a (unprecedented) round of applause at the beginning and again at the end of the lecture. And one of my most serious students — namely one of my “Greatest Generation” auditors — said to me afterwards that Weston and Adams had been, after all, just right for that dreadful moment: everyone had needed more than anything to be transported, and so they were.

When circulating outside the art world, among people who don't generally meet art historians, I find that their dominant notion about my peculiar vocation is that I must lead a fortunate life. And I acknowledge that I do. But going on four decades into this field, I sometimes add that, although the art world has become appreciably more global in recent decades, it can still seem a lamentably parochial or marginal place, especially at times when the larger world is coming conspicuously unglued. And the response I almost invariably get is this: What better times could there possibly be to have the job of bringing art to people and vice versa? — a response that always takes me back to the warm reception I got for my apparently, utterly irrelevant lecture following 9/11.

Much as I admire 20th-century and contemporary artists who find ways to do effective political work through their art, I seem to keep getting brought around to this reality: that the public doesn't tend to look to art, in the first place, for its political efficacy. Speaking generally (or through my proverbial hat), inasmuch as people feel that they need and want art in their lives, it often seems to be as an avenue to remove them from the world's more frustrating or galling realities, while returning them instead, in other ways, to their senses. Those of us who tend to view art through political lenses may lose sight of what else it is that art does or, I will venture to add, of how — precisely *by* returning people to their senses — the things that ostensibly non-political art does may have their political valences after all. Just so, those mesmerizingly sensual photographs of Oceano

Dunes turn out to look compellingly, hauntingly post-apocalyptic when viewed at an apocalyptic time.

**Anna Chave** is known for her revisionist readings of Minimalism and for her writings on issues of reception, interpretation, and identity, on subjects ranging from Brancusi, to the Gee's Bend quilters, to Hannah Wilke. Much of her work may be accessed at [annachave.com](http://annachave.com).

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## Daryl Chin

It seems obvious that events in the real world, especially in terms of cataclysmic occurrences, must affect the life and work of artists, yet it would be foolhardy to believe that the correlation is simple. Art must reflect the truth of an artist's life, but that does not mean art must merely mimic the outer conditions of the world. Without the impetus of imaginative transformation, the work is not art; it may be reportage, it may be documentation, but it's not art. Yet we live in a time in which the very terms of art have become so destabilized that there is no longer any idea of cultural tradition or aesthetic standards, which might have proven to be all to the good if the societal underpinnings of culture hadn't also eroded.

Critical practice has devolved into two distinct (and equally uninspiring) realms: there is the journalistic prattle of art as commerce, with an emphasis on auction prices, the art market, and commercial value; there is the theoretical blathering of academia as critique, with its equally desultory de-emphasis of art. But this situation has been going on for more than three decades, and does not look to be changing any time soon. Nevertheless, one can always find isolated moments of genuine aesthetic inquiry. But what one can't find is the sense of continuity which comes from a community of interest between artists, critics, and audience; it's far more fragmentary and individualized. Yet the interest in art remains intense, even if diverted through marketing, commercialism, and ideology. For all the external distractions, there remains an audience which continues to seek out the aesthetic experience. And no matter what form that experience takes, the indispensable aspect of art is its manifold demand on our attention, our consciousness, our emotions, which can sharpen our sense of our place in the world.

Getting personal: growing up in New York City in the 1950s and 1960s, I was very aware of the artistic community which seemed omnipresent, certainly in lower Manhattan. Perhaps because of the proximity of artistic practice, artistic endeavor didn't seem alien, it seemed an entirely appropriate choice. Soon, like many others before and after, I became a part of the artistic community of lower Manhattan, first as audience, going to galleries and performances and films, then as practitioner, initially as critic, then as artist. Since I worked in performance, and not as a solo performer, art became a form of communal activity. But the sense of community remained very strong. Gradually, there was a dispersal, as lower Manhattan was transformed, people were displaced, and the community was irretrievably shattered. Can the erosion of the downtown aesthetic be

pinpointed to a specific date? Was September 11, 2001, a turning point in the destruction of lower Manhattan? Does the incessant amalgamation of corporate greed located within the precincts of lower Manhattan affect the devolution of artistic practice? Suffice it to say that, all my life, I was confronted with an artistic community in constant permutation, then I became aware of the disintegration of that community.

As the 21st century began, so did the advances in media technology that brought the rise of social networking. When Facebook made its appearance a few years ago, I joined because the people who invited me to join were friends who had moved overseas, specifically to Hong Kong, and this seemed a way to maintain some sort of contact. And soon, I was back in contact with people I used to be close to, people I would see every day, people who had lived and worked near me, but were now in other parts of the country, or were in other countries. So the dispersed community seemed to reconfigure itself in a virtual reality, but this community seemed chimerical, even spurious. The various social networking platforms (first MySpace, then Facebook, plus sundry others such as LinkedIn) plus e-mails, Skype, iPads, iPhones, texting, et al, have all contributed to the virtual community, however nothing can quite take the place of the actual person-to-person communication which was crucial to the artistic community of lower Manhattan during the 20th century.

**Daryl Chin** is a writer and artist, now living in Brooklyn. He recently spent 10 months as a Fellow of the International Research Center: Interweaving Performance Cultures of the Freie Universitat Berlin (October 2009 – July 2010). He maintains the blog [Documents on Art & Cinema](#).

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## Jennifer Coates

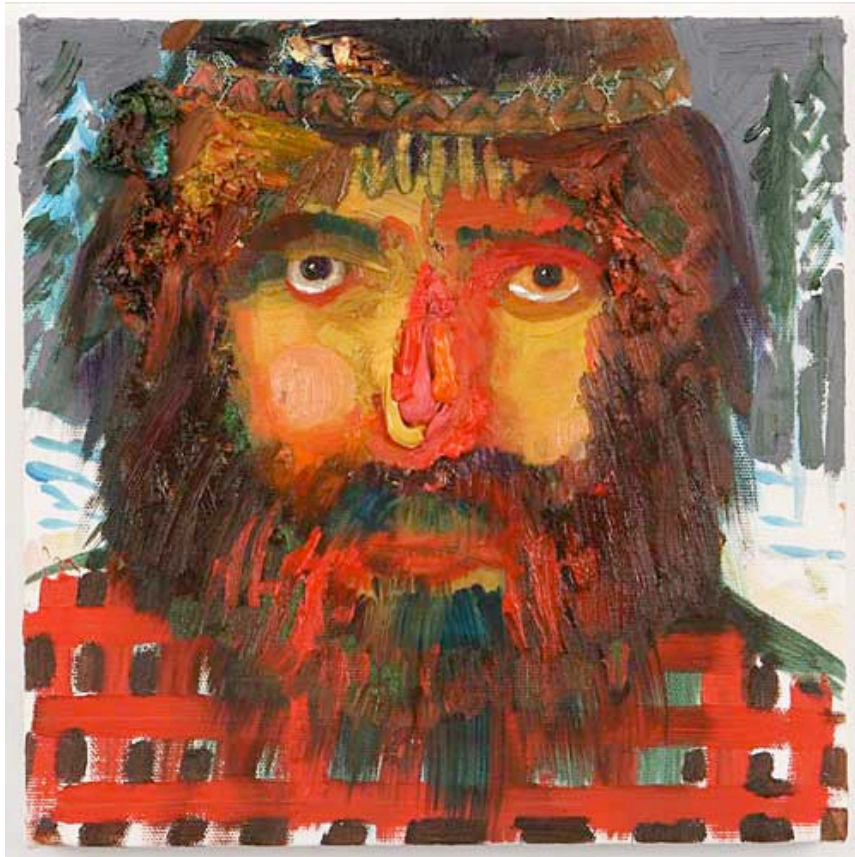
### Etherites

In thinking about the artworld from an artist's perspective, it's important to remember:

1. You are puny.
2. Your ideas are runny like soft-boiled eggs — also, like soft-boiled eggs, they have probably occurred before.
3. You will not ever succeed, but once in a while you may get a swelled head and think you are magical.
4. People will want to bite you.
5. You will want to bite them.

This is an excerpt from one of the first posts on my now-defunct blog, *Artistic Thoughts*, circa 2005. There was an all-consuming, unstoppable fantasy world that developed in the burgeoning blogosphere of that time. My involvement in it started one day when my friend, artist Sarah Peters, and I decided we needed stir up some mischief. We were reading Martin Bromirski's blog, *Anaba*, which at the time was based out of Richmond,

VA. Martin was dogged and thorough about posting other artists' work. His descriptions and observations were in the first person, there was no attempt at art jargon. He presented a readable, relatable personality. He discussed the unfairness of the artworld, the experience of being an artist working outside of New York, and he was honest in his resentments and irritations. His public declarations felt dangerous and contagious and so we decided to start a blog of our own. Except we immediately knew we needed a pseudonym. There is something freeing about an alter ego. We agreed on the moniker Mountain Man, which was the subject of a fake essay I had written a few years earlier entitled "Mountain Man: A Thing of the Past, Present or Future." (Don't ask.)



Nicole Eisenman, *Mountain Man*, 2006, oil on canvas, 12" x 12".

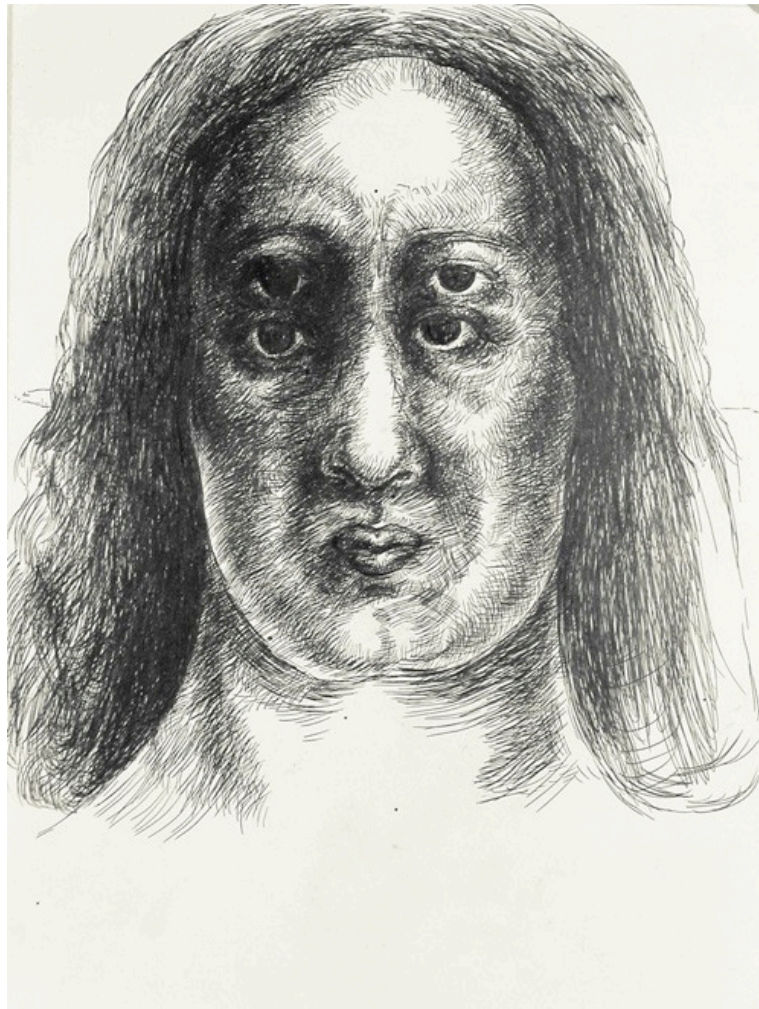
Mountain Man was disgruntled. He was tall, had long hair, and wore stained shirts. He was a pervert and a visionary. He had an office job where he made sculptures out of staples and pencils by day, constructed towers of toast in his living room by night. The blog started out being loosely about disappointing shows he saw in Chelsea, the competitiveness of the artworld, and various people who tormented his sense of self. As we began fleshing out Mountain Man's character, we gave him a girlfriend, an alcohol problem, an airstream, nudist tendencies, a propensity towards rubbing against inanimate objects, and a marked inability to discern imaginary from real.

After a few weeks, we shared the blog with some friends, just to see if it was funny to anyone else. Little by little, friends started to comment, sometimes anonymously, sometimes under their own pseudonyms. They started their own blogs and began



fleshing out their alter egos: Fairy Butler, Postmodern Debunker, Sloth. Sarah eventually split off from Mountain Man to develop the amazing character Ham Paw, a tender ecstatic who could spontaneously intone like a cult leader but with the cuddliness of a stuffed animal. Slowly but surely an imaginary realm evolved from conversations about art we saw, art we made, our existential traumas, and the banality of everyday life.

We would envision ourselves under the concrete slabs of the sidewalk, flying around on a magic deli meat slicer, wearing costumes, and sipping magical potions. We spoke in code, renaming our studios “shacks,” our artworks “relics,” and office jobs were “the beige.” Our interactions were dense with visions, dreads, complaints, and most importantly, words of support and encouragement for each other.



Sarah Peters, *The Seer*, 2005, pen on paper, 14" x 11".

We began commenting on other art blogs that looked interesting: Wendy White, *Militant Art Bitch*, Nicole Eisenman's *A Blog Called Nowhere*, *Painters NYC*, all the while collecting new acquaintances and a widening readership. There was something magical about connecting with other artists through disembodied comments that were delivered in veiled and absurd language. It was so compelling it sucked me in for hours a day, and there was an ever-expanding array of characters: Lupin, JD, Gree C. Hair, The Gaylord Rehabilitation Center, Sea Monkey, The Capt'n, Krixfort, Uncle Fritz, Heart as Arena,



Sushi Blameful. And many of us had other temporary identities, any number of characters to suit any mood.

I enjoyed the psychological metaphor that the blog post personified on *Artistic Thoughts*. It was like a super-condensed version of a self amongst others. I would assert an idea, a reverie, some ridiculous claim, often associated with an image or set of images, and then wait for responses. If none came fast enough, I would just invent characters and talk to myself. Sometimes I'd have conversations with characters I didn't recognize — they could have been friends or strangers and it didn't matter. The lack of clarity was pleasant; the confusion of identities was disorienting in the best way. It was basically extended make-believe play for adults.



Jennifer Coates, *Ruin*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30".

Unfortunately, the more readers we got, the more we were subject to nastiness. For me, this was a deal-breaker. Reality caused the experience to curdle as “trolls” and anonymous haters changed the ecosystem. Despite the fleeting nature of the blog arcadia, lasting relationships formed. The ether is an amazing place to come into contact with images, information, and people that you wouldn't normally encounter in everyday life. But I've come to see it as just a path on the way to so-called real experience: I am committed to seeking out the person behind the moniker or the object represented by the JPEG.

And anyway, somewhere outside the time/space continuum we Etherites remain hyper-dimensional objects permanently at play: wearing MC Hammer pants, growing horns, and communing around a hot dog totem.

[Jennifer Coates](#) is an artist, writer, and fiddler living in NYC.

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## Maureen Connor

Based on my sense that artists are uniquely positioned to gain trust and encourage positive change in organizations and institutions I have been 'embedding' myself within them (as a de facto artist in residence) for more than a decade. Most recently, together with the Institute for Wishful Thinking (IWT) a collaborative I cofounded in 2008, we've been working as Artists in Residence for the US Government (self-declared). The IWT believes that the community of artists and designers possesses untapped creative and conceptual resources that could be applied to solving social problems. With this in mind we are soliciting proposals from artists, architects, and designers for residencies at government organizations and agencies at all levels. Since last we issued the call last spring we've received more than 50 and still counting.

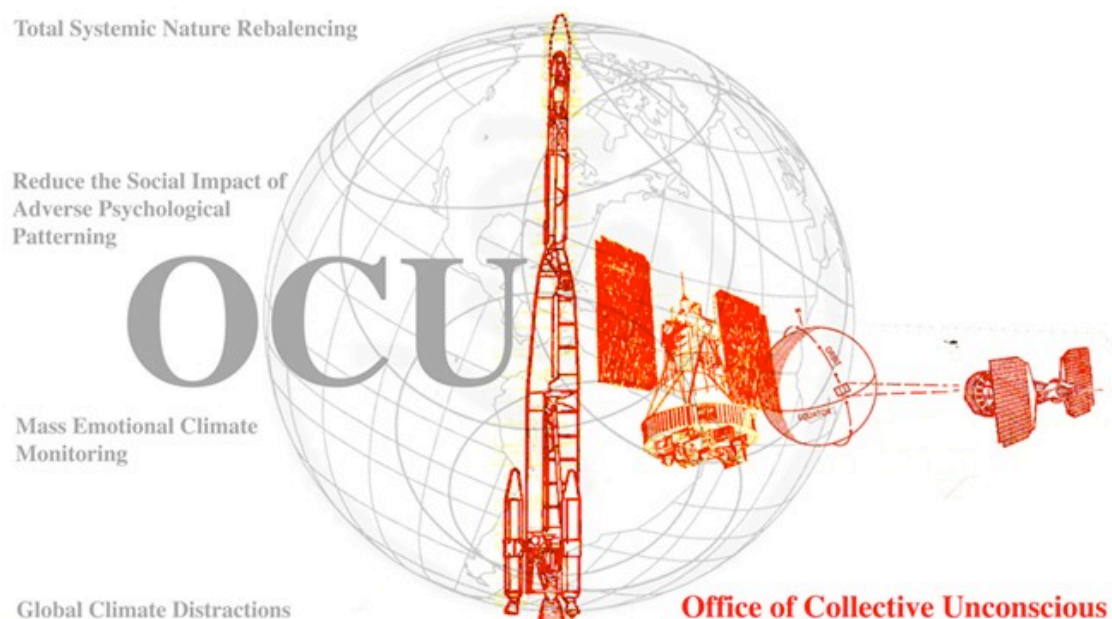


Kenneth Pietrobono, [Proposal for the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior National Mall & Memorial Parks](#), the creation of a 'National Rose Garden' within the National Mall. Given the power of the National Mall as a setting to "celebrate the US commitment to freedom and equality" all hybrid roses are given names that reflect the systems and policies we cultivate in this country in the name of and denial of 'freedom and equality.'

I'm certainly not the first to develop embedded work. The Artists Placement Group 'placed' artists in factories, offices, and other work sites beginning in the late 60s and since then a short but growing list of artists have worked with similar methods and goals. There need to be many more essays and books written about artists who have engaged with and continue to develop forms of direct institutional intervention from the inside (as opposed to using resistance and protest) with the goal of positive social change.

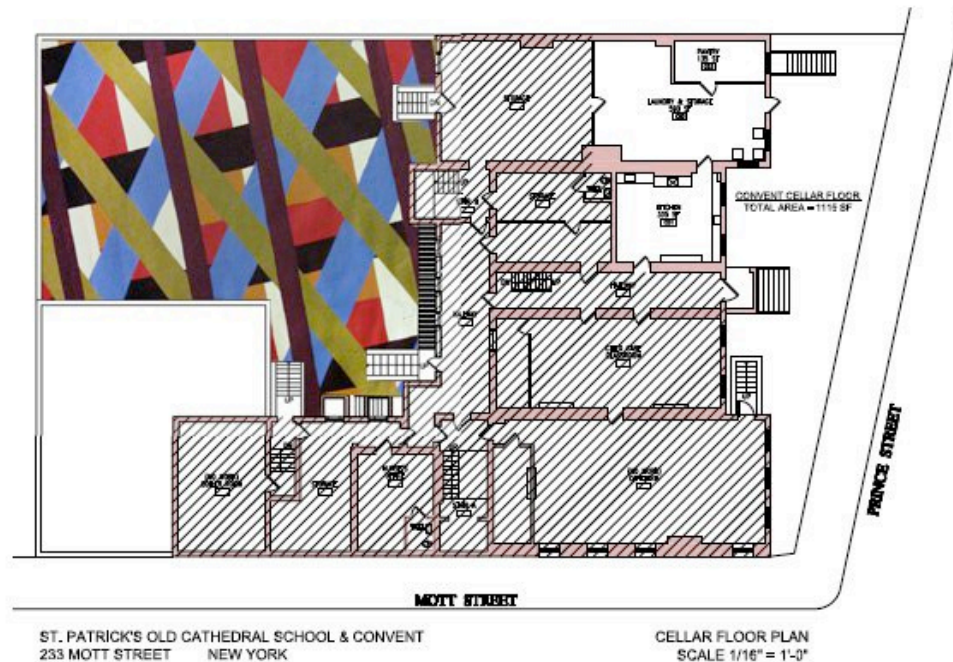
This work awaits new methods of interpretation. Up to now it has been mostly hidden away in appointment-only archives or written about by critics who expect it to conform to irrelevant criteria — and those are the well-known artists!

In his 2004 book *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Grant Kester lists embedded art practice as one of a number of forms he calls 'dialogical art,' which "share(s) a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange" while my colleague and collaborator Gregory Sholette labels such practices 'dark matter' in his 2010 book *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. However both concepts encompass a broad range of models for socially engaged art that extend far beyond embedded practice. Marisa Jahn's 2010 book *Byproduct: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practices* does focus specifically on the kind of work under discussion here.



Nsumi Collective, [Proposal for the Office of Collective Unconscious](#), a new office for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for mapping and processing the collective unconscious of the USA through the deployment of psychospheric instruments.





Molly Dilworth, [Proposal for the Department of Energy Weatherization and Intergovernmental Program & NYC Department of Buildings — Cool Roofs](#): A series of solar reflective rooftop paintings.

In an effort to contribute to the discourse that engages with these ‘fellow travelers’ I will presume to ascertain some common ground. Perhaps we should call them the five danger signs of impending embedded practice:

1. A shift in ambition: slowly (or suddenly) the white cube seems to demand conformity rather than offering autonomy.
2. The emptiness of market-based art discourse contrasts with increasingly dire social problems.
3. Artists look for sites in which their critical eye can be put to a more productive use.
4. Location, location; as artists we learn that context is everything. So how to reframe an art practice? Look for an audience that will have little to no understanding of your work.
5. Try to figure out a way to make what you do useful to that audience.

[Maureen Connor](#) is a visual artist whose work combines elements of installation, video, design, human resources, and social justice. As part of a collective, the [Institute for Wishful Thinking](#), she is currently the (self-appointed) artist in residence for the United States Government.

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Patricia Cronin

## Dante's Inferno: The Way of All Flesh

From 2000 to 2009, virtually the entire time George W. Bush was president of the United States, I worked on two main projects with strong social justice themes, specifically gay marriage and women's history. Since 2010, I've been working on a series titled *Dante's Inferno/The Way of All Flesh*. It is a cycle of oil and watercolor paintings inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, a timeless story of moral frailty.

This project uses the *Inferno* as a point of departure for an extended meditation on the human condition. For me, the *Inferno* is ripe for artistic re-interpretation in our post-modern world, where many of the same social issues — war, corrupt politicians, religious hypocrisy and strife, unstable economic markets, and natural disasters — still plague us.



Patricia Cronin, *The Lustful: Canto V, Circle Two*, 2010, watercolor and metallic watercolor on paper, 60" x 40".



Inspired by 14th- and 15th-century illuminated manuscripts of the *Inferno*, artistic interpretations from the 16th through 20th centuries, Italian fashion photography, and tracings of my own body, these life-size “shades” as Dante refers to sinners act out a classic cautionary tale that has largely gone unheeded.

Dante’s *Inferno/The Way of All Flesh* connects with my first decade of works that examined the erotic in the everyday (watercolors of intimate sexual acts as well as performance-based photographs) and extends my line of art historical examinations of the past decade (*Memorial To A Marriage*, my marble mortuary sculpture installed in Woodlawn Cemetery, and the watercolor meditation on the works of 19th-century sculptor Harriet Hosmer in the form of her catalogue raisonné).



Patricia Cronin, *Shade*, 2011, oil on linen, 64" x 46".

Oil paint has endured as a valued art medium since the 15th century and I’m drawn to the chromatic optical qualities unique to paint. Combining them with a timeless story from the same era, I’m re-imagining the rise of humanism. In this “winner take all” climate we live in, the spirit of generosity and the concept of good citizenship seem to be

all but lost. How do we think about our fellow citizens and our shared common humanity? And what will we do about it?

**Patricia Cronin** is a New York-based artist and Professor of Art at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York, whose work has been exhibited extensively in the U.S. and internationally including at: David Zwirner Gallery, Marlborough Gallery, Yale University Art Gallery, the Neuberger Museum, and other venues. She has had solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, Deitch Projects, and Brent Sikkema.

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**Jennifer Dalton**

## **Some Paradoxes that are Likely to Remain Unresolved\***

I want to overturn the system but in the meantime I want to succeed within it. I hate the art world, but I love my tiny corner of it. I should stop making art, or I should stop doing anything else. I want to sell my work but I don't want to part with it. I think of art as a gift but I don't want to work for free. Or, often I am willing to work for free but I don't want to be exploited. I think money corrupts except when I have some. I hate shopping but I like things. I want my work to be owned by people without tons of money, but I can't afford to sell it for cheap. I don't want art to be elitist, but I distrust mainstream tastes. I prize tolerance and acceptance of others unless you disagree with me politically. I want to succeed, but I'm terrified of success. I want to be noticed, but I don't like being the center of attention. I value feedback, but I hate criticism. I distrust anonymous blog comments except when they are saying that I suck. I think I should trust my instincts, but I'm afraid they will lead me to shoot myself in the foot. When I am afraid of something that usually means I should do it, except when it means I shouldn't do it. I am a loser and I am a pig.

\* Inspired by the conversations of #class, a month-long series of events and discussions at Winkleman Gallery presented collaboratively by William Powhida and me in February – March 2010.



Jennifer Dalton, *Only in America, or, I Can't Trust Myself*, 2011, vending machines, plastic capsules, temporary tattoos, on wood pedestal, 68" x 22" x 12" (overall).

**Jennifer Dalton** is a Brooklyn-based visual artist. Her most recent exhibition was *Cool Guys Like You* at Winkleman Gallery in New York.

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## G. Roger Denson

# Won Over? Or Winning the Community, Production and Distribution of Digital Corporate Conglomerates?

After taking a ten-year hiatus from art writing (1999 – 2009), one I'd intended to be permanent, I found myself unexpectedly returning in 2010. I did so for one reason only: the expanded opportunity that e-publishing presented for producing and disseminating writing more relevant and timely to the contemporary political and social landscape.

The art trade press I wrote for throughout the 1990s was, as it is still, dictated by market entities: the galleries that take out ads; the auction records set; the blue chip artists that make collectors salivate. There's always a measure of the market reducing art criticism to ad copy in the trade publications. Then, too, editors such as Betsy Baker at *Art in America*, Stuart Morgan and Michael Archer at *Artscribe International*, Bice Curiger and Louise Neri at *Parkett*, Helena Kontova and Giancarlo Politi at *Flash Art*, Thomas McEvelley at *Contemporanea*, Barry Schwabsky at *Arts*, and Eri Kawade at *Bijutsu Techo* imposed their formidable imprimaturs on all content, critical methodology, even reference notes, according to their magazine's relationship to the art market.

To write about larger cultural and political concerns outside the purview of these magazines, I turned to non-trade publications such as *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, in which I wrote on the relationship of identity politics in art and politically transgressive mythopoetics in the superhero, cyberpunk, sci-fi, and vampire genres. Similarly, in *Acme Journal* I could write about globalism, cross-culturalization, and nomadism. But as welcome as these publications are, my audience was even more restricted by the limited circulation of these journals, and to find platforms to support my wider cultural and political interests, I had to submit articles to unfamiliar editors and wait months for response that was as often negative as positive.

That all changed in 2010, when Arianna Huffington of *The Huffington Post* approved my submission of a six-part series, *The Beauty We Fear: The Great Mosques of the World*. Written in response to the overwhelming American sentiment against the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque," — whose Imam, Feisal Abdul Rauf, led the interfaith courses in Islam and Sufism I attended in the late 1990s — the series opened a portal for me to the kind of international arena that could digest the full array of issues stirring in me without losing a day's relevance.

Initially it seemed that writing without a content editor or peer review would bring with it a deficit of credibility. That is, until I was hit with the unrestrained commentary of the public, with its intolerance for poorly informed writing. Readers readily make themselves the e-writer's peer review and editorial staff, and when they are particularly expert in the issues covered, they can be merciless and humiliating in taking a writer publicly to task. But when they approve, they circulate an article's link indefinitely. Can there be a better consensus than a public educated in all walks of life?

Writing as I do on a variety of issues pertaining to global cross-culturalization and the expanding indigenous markets within emerging economies, some of my critics and supporters hail from Egypt, China, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Japan, Israel, India, Venezuela, Brazil, South Africa — nations in which new art markets are stimulating new generations of often indigenous art collectors. This is the kind of global and politically expansive audience that a Western art writer could only dream about five years ago. In the 1990s, even when I published cover features in widely distributed magazines, I hardly heard a peep from readers. Now, between the comments and contacts I receive on Twitter,

Facebook, and *Huffington Post*, I know the names (or at least the pseudonyms), and many of the faces, of some 6,000 people who have read at least one of my features or reviews. It's made that monster that is e-publishing the most stimulating and gratifying experience of my career.

Perhaps it's no more than the difference of choosing among fleeing the corporate tsunami, drowning in its tumultuous and dark waters of power, or riding the crest of its waves passing my way.

**G. Roger Denson** is a cultural critic who lives in New York and contributes regularly to *The Huffington Post*. Although he writes here about riding the free enterprise of e-publishing to disseminate ideas unavailable through the commercial media, he also believes that product boycotts are more effective than street demonstrations for commanding respect from the corporate sector.

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## Dubravka Djurić

Positioning myself as a relative outsider within Serbian culture, I find the following aspects of globalization positive:

- the possibility of forming virtual communities with people in the region and worldwide, which enable you to develop your work beyond the restrictions of local authorities
- the global need that all specific cultural contexts be available generally, makes it possible that your work could function despite severe local restriction in the field of culture
- to think consciously about the cultural exchanges between local and global cultural forms, the impacts and exchanges between centers and peripheries, between regional and/or local centers and peripheries
- the possibility of going beyond the boundaries of one's language, one's culture, out of dominant models of cultural production

The problem with this global trend is that the cultural capital of your culture makes restrictions on the extent to which you can participate in the global culture.

**Dubravka Djurić** is Assistant Professor at the Faculty for Media and Communication, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia. She has published these books: *Discourses of Popular Culture* (2011), *Politics of Poetry-Transition and Experiment in Poetry* (2010), *Poetry, Theory, Gender-Modern and Postmodern American Women Poets* (2009), *Speech of the Other* (2006), and *Language, Poetry, Postmodernism* (2002). She co-edited *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (MIT Press: 2003, 2006).



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**Bailey Doogan**

## **I Worry All The Time**

About my shrinking retirement fund,

Medicare,

My body's decline,

Arizona's Propositions 102, 202, 203

Car insurance rate hikes,

The Ebola virus.

My daughter's health,

The Donut hole,

My Congresswoman's near-assassination

My cognitive skills,

Termites in my studio,

Border-crossers dying in the desert,

My painting and drawing skills,

A dead tree in the front yard,

My art production,

Especially my art production.

The more I worry, the less art I produce.

Worry doesn't leave much room for anything else.



Bailey Doogan, *Four-Fingered Smile*, 2008, charcoal on primed paper, 67" x 52".

Worry has gone viral in the U.S. In Arizona, higher border walls were proposed, guns were allowed on campus, and there was a movement to establish “English Only” laws in schools. Vitriol was fed by desperation about jobs, money. Across the country, everyone blamed everyone else: it was the fault of old people living off social programs, it was the young not working hard enough, the middle class wanting too much stuff, the rich *having* too much stuff. Congress was fractious and divided, the administration’s hands were tied. There were droughts, floods, and fires. The infrastructure was crumbling and not getting fixed. Everything was grinding to a halt.

I needed to get away.

In July of 2007, I visited friends in Nova Scotia.

I went back in 2009 for another short visit, and I stayed for three months in 2010.

They were the happiest three months of my life. I worked in my studio almost every day. I spent time with friends — I experienced kindness and love.

I decided to buy land and build a house in Nova Scotia. Through the generosity of dear friends, I bought a small piece of land on East Berlin Road in West Berlin, NS. I got a mortgage loan on the Tucson house that I have lived in for thirty-four years to finance the purchase and construction. In late July, I sublet my house in Arizona, and drove

diagonally across the country to Nova Scotia, a trip of almost four thousand miles.

It was a crazy idea but artists need to make art and will do anything to be able to do one more drawing, one more painting.



Bailey Doogan, *Five-Fingered Smile*, 2010, charcoal on primed paper, 70" x 52".

I am now in Nova Scotia worrying about construction costs, money conversion, the weakness of the dollar, the 15% tax, getting running lights installed on my car from the States, having enough firewood, mosquitoes, mold, and rust. I did pack up all my cares and woe and brought my baggage with me.

My friends up here tell me to buck up, not to worry myself sick.

**Bailey Doogan** is a seventy-year-old artist who divides her time between Arizona and Nova Scotia.

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**Johanna Drucker**

## **Art and Politics After “Critique”**

The first piece I wrote for *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* no. 1 twenty-five years ago was in response to an exhibition held at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1985, *Les Immatériaux*. Its philosophically informed theoretical fascination with an emerging discourse of what would come to be branded as the “post-human,” was particularly French — the experience was like going to the Exploratorium with Jean Baudrillard. Hyperbolic, pretentious, it was also a milestone, marking critical distance from organic flesh and bone. The rapid uptake of syntho-simulacral everything was essential to theory’s claim for artworld status — as if mere painting, sculpture, any formal expression that resembled art had to be banished as too too material for serious discourse. That exhibit looks quaint at this distance, old fashioned, a Futurama built of plexiglass and mirrors when PacMan ruled the earth.

Theory staged a triumph inside the sacred precincts, conquering mere material expression in a calculated act of replacement (idea for art, theory for material) in a post-studio, post-human, set of moves. Other founding tenets of modernism were put aside, particularly those of the avant-garde, in a wave of new formulations that superceded oppositional rhetoric. The French philosophers had lived through the last wave of 1968 utopian revolutionary upheaval — and witnessed its momentary successes and ultimate failures. The gig was up. From spectacle to simulacrum, the defining terms shifted. The familiar binarisms — us/them, art/commerce, counter-culture/mainstream — that had been the underlying basis for “critique” since 19th-century romanticism’s spectrum of utopian, socialist, and anarchist movements and their legacy in the avant-gardes of the 20th, were no longer operative. The era of post-critique had arrived, even if it wasn’t acted on.

Old habits die hard, and the stance of the academy, always slow-moving, conservative in its replication of ideologies and communities of belief, has continued to crank out volumes of writing based on an us/them “critique” model in which the informed elite hold themselves aloof from mass media culture except — you guessed it — when they pose (as they do in classrooms and journals every day) a “critique” of its practices. Or when the critical apparatus of academic culture is used to support the supposedly “political” work of high art objects in elite contexts. The stance is accompanied by a posture of moral superiority that can easily be deciphered as a defensive enactment of differentiation or “other-ing” that marks any ideological divide in the socio-spheres divided into us/them binaries.

Critique is reactive. Its intellectual formations are patterned on what it beholds, imprinted by what it presumes to dismantle. But more profoundly, it is based on models of social

life in which individuals are conceived as autonomous agents working in accord with notions of rationality and free will. This legacy of Enlightenment thought, grafted onto a romantic ideology, continues to provide the image of the artist-activist protesting the conditions of the extant order. This model has been broadly disproved by events of the 20th and 21st century.

In its place we need a model of engagement based on ecological materialisms, social theories of complex systems. Instead of addressing symptoms, this analyzes systems of which the symptoms are an expression, not a cause (analyze “W” or Condoleezza as an effect whose own agency is produced by forces working through them of which they are an emergent effect). Look at forces and co-dependencies, rather than actions or agents. Not only are we within the systems that produce us, in the structuralist/post-structuralist sense, but we are part of larger complex formations whose non-linear behavior and adaptive dynamics unfold along counter-intuitive lines. Models of social behavior and formation of belief, the idea of the noosphere and emergent sentience, have come a long way since the early 20th century. Any practice grounded in critique is as anachronistic as *épater la bourgeoisie*, inadequate to the challenges at hand.

The position of inside-ness, of complicity, that I sketched in *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity* (University of Chicago: 2005), is based on a supercession of the notion of the binarisms that allowed us to imagine ourselves outside of or apart from the world in which we work. The issue is not with political projects — only an idiot would object to having artists introduce critical, political, or reflexive memes into circulation — but with the attachment to the mechanistic logic on which oppositional critique was believed to operate. Because we are part of dynamic social systems whose processes produce “critique” as an illusion. Agency has to come from within the system, from refamiliarizing us to the real relation to the imaginary conditions in which we live, to invert Louis Althusser’s famous formulation. The challenge? To grasp the systemic conditions in which these belief systems are produced to serve their own ends, not ours — and then change them, not “critique” them as if they are not ours, or *us*.

**Johanna Drucker** is the Breslauer Professor of Bibliographical Studies in the Department of Information Studies at UCLA. She is known for her work in the history of graphic design, typography, experimental poetry, fine art, and digital humanities. In addition, she is a book artist, and her works are in special collections and libraries worldwide. Her most recent titles include *SpecLab: Digital Aesthetics and Speculative Computing* (Chicago, 2009), and *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* (Pearson, 2008).

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**Noah Fischer**

## **Trauma, the Subway, and the Voice**

My friend, the artist Lucas Carlson, taught me how to use my voice. He was brave. He fought with real demons and took his own life in 2007. Those were dark times.



We were all traumatized and competitive and silent in the early 2000s when I attended Columbia for an MFA. We paid for access. The holy of holies of Chelsea was revealed to us as a magic pyramid that governed the art world, which was to be our hunting ground. We were taught that the real game, the real art, was money and celebrity. Free-thinking was frowned upon as earnest or naïve. We would use our intelligence strategically, to compete against each other and make it to the top. A few students became millionaires or jet setters soon after leaving school. Most did not but thought they might soon. We weren't very nice to each other and didn't challenge the obviously fucked-up system. Instead, we idolized it. The stakes were just too high.

As Kafka has shown, power is architectonic, but the walls are usually invisible. I have always noticed these walls. Lucas taught me how to break through them by speaking out loud spells. One day on the 1 train heading downtown, he spoke out, like those crazy homeless people or the kids selling candy for their basketball teams. This is shocking, repugnant, possibly breaking ancient New York class regulations, but Lucas did it. Annoyed by a subway ad, he ranted about the public education system to all who would listen. This started an underground conversation — an immediate unfreezing of the world, an herbal antidote to the poison of Late Capitalism and 9-11. Strangers were momentarily together. I learned from Lucas that honesty and bravery are an artist's occupation.



Noah Fischer performing with Jim Costanzo, Summer of Change project, 2011.

I wish that Lucas was here to be part of the Occupation of Wall Street — he would have loved it as I love it. Because from the first time that Lucas showed me how to perform the wall-breaking speak out, I've had this seed in the back of mind and it's been growing. That's how I arrived at Wall Street before the occupation. Three years after Obama's government had continued every war and defended every banker, The Aaron Burr

Society and I initiated the [“Summer of Change”](#) on Wall Street. On June 21st, 2011, we began offering \$700 in U.S. coins in a series of public numismatic rituals. Donning god-like coin masks, we showered coins and rhetoric upon the very stones of Wall Street across from the Stock Exchange. Tourists, workers, homeless people and children picked up the coins, never investment bankers. But the bankers and traders did stand in the back and listen as we loudly and publicly railed in presidential tones against the surreal economic crimes of our times. When the revolution really happened — a few days before the equinox, our voices were warmed up, we were ready!



Noah Fischer with Reverend Billy at OccupyWallStreet, 2011.

The first day of Occupywallstreet, I was there in my coin-mask, shouting fragments of FDR rhetoric at the lone Russian TV station that showed up to cover the protests. The next week, with the movement in full swing, the park fully occupied and more people coming all the time, it was time to begin occupying the subways. This meant talking out in car after car full of silent strangers. And sometimes, strangers began talking to each other, as Lucas had managed in the dark days of 2007. As I write this, many people are occupying subways from the outer corners of the megatropolis to the cores of Times Square and Union Square. We are spreading the message to wake up, speak out, and come together all over New York City, which has the same wealth disparity as Honduras.

This week we are going to occupy museums. We will read out statements written by consensus to the effect that we can see through the shabby pyramid schemes of the MoMA and the Guggenheim and, of course, the Frick — that ongoing PR campaign for the “Worst CEO in American History.” Museum board members inflate the value of their collections through the same kind of shady deals that Wall Street traders are known for. Their sense of ownership of the art historical canon is an affront to art itself — we know it’s all about money now, nothing about art. We’ll stand in front of so-called houses of

high culture and recount how hundreds of thousands of artists have been silenced by a system of economic injustice for way too long — just as the American public has been silenced and traumatized by the big banks. We artists are finally learning to use our voice, and when I say “artist” I mean everybody.

— October 17, 2011



Noah Fischer on subway, 2011.

**Noah Fischer** is a Brooklyn-based artist whose projects explore American mythologies. His first solo exhibition was *Rhetoric Machine* (2006) at the Oliver Kamm Gallery, NY. His work has appeared internationally at the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels and Steirischer Herbst Festival in Graz and the Transtrends Forum in Kerala, India. Fischer teaches at Rhode Island School of Design and Pratt Institute in New York City.

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## Hermine Ford

## MEANING?

External events, painful or otherwise, don't necessarily have a specific influence on my work, but as it turns out 9/11 did. For a long time I had been using shapes and textures from the natural world in my drawings and paintings. I included direct observation but also the imagery of maps, charts and graphs, so that there was a combination of what we call “nature” and “artifice,” the role of the human race in recording the natural world and also its impact on the natural world. Or are we, and our impact, “natural” as well?

In December 2011 my husband and I travelled to Rome where he was to be Resident at the American Academy in Rome for four months. I took some familiar beach pebbles



from my summer home to Rome to provide continuity for new drawings. We arrived deeply shaken by the events of 9/11 and almost immediately I began a deepening experience of the whole city of Rome as a pile of broken stones, a city that had collapsed on itself and been rebuilt from its own materials many times over. It became a metaphor not only for recent events, but also for the whole history of civilization. The oddly shaped, but water-smoothed forms that I had been making paintings on quickly became more jagged, the images less serene, a jumble of patterns and motifs. Ten years later I am still working with these themes, fitting together disparate patterns and broken shapes.



Hermine Ford, *There Were a Few Things Wrong*, 2011, oil paint, ink, graphite, colored pencil on linen on shaped panel, 93½" x 46".

Artists are not obligated to play a public political role, or express politics in their work though they may, and often do. However, as private citizens they have the same responsibilities as do all citizens of a democracy. I am a very political person, but I don't make political art. However, one can make the case that all art is political on some level. The best art comes from a place of deep freedom, freedom and the empowerment to explore oneself, and through that to find commonality as well as difference. One could say that in itself is a political act. I do not experience a conflict between public and private concerns. The work I do as an artist provides the opportunity to make those concerns one and the same. I make work for myself and for others. If, through my work I provide a life raft for myself, I also provide a life raft for a few others. The individual's responsibility, both in the public realm and in our own work, is to stay clean, "speak truth to power," keep all dictators, including dictators of taste, the market, the academy, at bay.

**Hermine Ford** is a painter who was born in New York City, and lives and works in New York City and Nova Scotia.

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## Joe Fyfe

I don't know if any aspects of our current situation referred to in the beginning of the first question have affected my work. I am aware that Bush II's program was given the most advantageous spur by the terrorist attacks in NYC and Washington. After that event I used to say, when asked, that the only terrorist that worried me was Bush II, that he was doing more damage to the US than any terrorist could. But I really see things changing with Reagan, or perhaps the fact that he was and is, so widely admired opened my eyes to the fundamental nature of the US: the majority of the citizenry want a government that is kind of the equivalent of having Roy Cohn for their lawyer.

The Bush II years seemed to compel me to spend more and more time out of the US. Enough time in some places to understand how totally messed up it is everywhere. What I still don't understand, and it probably has something to do with my work, is how impoverished an environment of affluence can feel and how rich in spirituality an underdeveloped urban or rural topography can feel. I am drawn to those places more and more. It's as if I need to go there regularly to be cleansed, or forgiven, for being American.



Joe Fyfe, *Phnom Penh*, Jan. 1, 2007.

As to the second part of the first question, idiosyncrasy and individual style sounds like they add up to "personality," which seems rampant in the market at present and not very interesting. I came to abstraction from figuration in the mid-'90s because I found that it could involve me in making art that had nothing to do with me at all. What is attractive to me about art now, in my maturity, is that it is made up of givens and that it has limited expressive possibilities. I tend to dislike art that costs a lot to make or is too ironic because it seems to devalue what it is. But I don't like to make general statements about art because artworks are specific things. But I will say that I think that nobody should



make another work of art that is a collection of lots and lots of the same thing for a long, long time.

The third part of the first question seems mostly about how art is marketed and written about, and I still think the best comment on it is rooted in Renata Adler's essay on Pauline Kael in the *New York Review of Books* back in 1980. Adler gave a close reading of Kael's metaphors, which was kind of devastating at the time, and was actually kind of a cheap shot, because she was just bringing out Kael's idiosyncrasies, in the best sense of the word, that it was an aspect of the character of her intelligence, but the important question in the essay, as I remember it, was, who spends their life as a movie critic? This was something that Adler had done for a while, but she argued that it is a severely truncated intellectual life. Adler understood, I think, that film criticism, at its best, is based on larger reserve of cultural awareness, and I think this applies to art criticism. Contemporary art criticism is mostly journalism and promotion and if you see it as an occupation as opposed to a place that you just pass through for a while you just become someone who tells you the best thing they saw this week, you become a kind of consumer guide. Actually that's what critics are these days, they are like pundits.

**Joe Fyfe**'s solo exhibition at Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne, opens on June 2, 2012. He recently curated *Le Tableau* for Cheim & Read Gallery in NY.

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**Joy Garnett**

## **Analogue Natives**

Analogue Natives are those who were born before the digital age. While many in this large but gradually dwindling group have embraced aspects of digital culture, we have remained attached to older technologies, many of which have already disappeared or are now at risk of vanishing. We worry about the future of the book, for instance, and we suffer the slow death of Ektachrome, even as we voraciously download e-books to our Kindles and upload jpegs to our flickr sets. This conflictedness is a boon, leading the way to unique insights into what is being lost and gained.

For many artists and creative people, the early efflorescence of online culture was not so much troubling as it was inspiring. A decade before the existence of blogging, before the ubiquitous smart phone with its myriad apps and the appearance of online social/sharing interfaces, there existed smaller, lively social networks that operated through a panoply of virtual spaces such as mailing lists and bulletin boards (bbs). They thrived ostensibly outside of, and in spite of the growing field of budding, commercially driven start-up enterprises. Early 1990s net culture, with its ethical and intellectual connection to the hacking community, tactical media, and the ideal of an information commons, was more than a conduit for sharing personal anecdotes or sparring over esoteric theories; artists

and geeks alike had embraced the Web as a de facto *medium*, a publicly accessible, uncarved block of creative potential that begged for tinkering, its form and scope as yet undetermined, and unpoliced. Artists began producing what they called “new media art,” much of which was to be experienced online in a way that was at once solitary and shared. This work was difficult to categorize, and it resisted commodification. Its practitioners were all Analogue Natives, and they reveled in this condition.

The reach and novelty of early net culture allowed people to transcend traditional barriers of class, culture and even language in an unprecedented way. By stepping away from the old hierarchies and norms of communication, net culture leveled the field, if only for a moment. For many Analogue Natives, this leveling was part of their motivation to engage the new. Those who were socially curious and sufficiently adept with computers, found themselves embroiled in conversations with strangers across the globe and from opposite ends of the academic and art world spectrum. Virtual meeting grounds such as nettime, Rhizome, and The Thing, provided decentralized spaces where a variety of creative communities could overlap. These included intellectuals and academics, hacktivists, programmers, curators, and artists. The relative ubiquity of communication technologies and personal computers allowed this to happen, and yet, due to varying time zones and the different ways in which people came to use the tools at hand to converse online, long gaps and pauses remained integral to the process. This new-found speed contained a built-in slowness.



Joy Garnett, *Vertigo*, 2010, oil on canvas, 48" x 60".

Despite my own personal and intellectual investment in digital culture, I continue to be a painter primarily. I deal in forms and surfaces, and I produce commodifiable objects that occupy space in the physical world. In the studio I toil with unwieldy, oily substances, as

I strategize and daydream into existence the ways in which this *matière* might connect us to meanings that lie elsewhere.

In a sense, the conceptual dimension to painting might be seen as one of the precursors to envisioning virtual spaces, and to new media art. But the environment for gazing and absorbing information, and for engaging works of art, has changed radically in the last two decades. What happens to one-on-one contemplation in the age of non-stop, up-to-the-minute connectivity? Is there room for slow seduction, the luxury of an extended encounter? Have we become slaves to realtime at the expense of the real? Analogue Natives bear the brunt of this dilemma; we are conscious of it as such, and the burden is ours to communicate. If anything, we stand enriched by the dissonance generated by analogue and digital memories, habits, and experiences.

I still hanker after that moment of promise expressed by early net culture. At times I feel resigned, more skeptical of digital culture than thankful. Like everyone else, I wax resentful with each obligatory, ill-timed upgrade, but I accept it and adjust, as I would rather do so than live without, say, *twitter*. As an Analogue Native, I know that it too will change and perhaps even disappear, a soon-to-be obsolete medium fallen between the cracks opened up by the next innovation.

**Joy Garnett** is an artist in Brooklyn, NY. Her paintings, based on the source images that she gathers from the Internet, examine the apocalyptic sublime at the intersections of media, politics, and culture. She is Arts Editor for [Cultural Politics](#).

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## Andrea Geyer

*You can rob me of the earth but you cannot rob me of the sky.<sup>1</sup>*

*We stand on a heap of rubble, economically, politically and culturally.<sup>2</sup> And the grounds on which we work, think and live are continuously threatened and contested. Many of us, especially teachers, civil servants and employees are getting rebellious and find ourselves swiped up into this current struggle. Comrades, we must take advantage of the ferment in our circles and fan their resigned hopelessness into a flame of indignation that will lead to consciousness and action.<sup>3</sup>*

The condition of migration brings with it interesting questions of identity, of uncertainty and of “not knowing.” There is an inherent distance to everything that informs this situation, within the country that one lives in and, after a while, towards the country that one originates from. I grew up in Germany and was raised with a specific consciousness that the history of that country requires. For the last 16 years I have been living in this country. This rupture, this uncertainty can bring with it a productive even if sometimes frustrating alienation. This experience combined with the events that have dominated New York City and this country during the time I have lived here, bring me to view these events through that form of inherent and productive alienation. These events called out a memory in me; a memory that frames my experience in direct and indirect ways. This

recognition has sharpened my interest, in a more abstract sense, to the state of the political as it unfolds around us and at the same time is fueled by the memory that makes us people. When I speak of memory here, I speak of three folds of memory: of the things that happened in one's lifetime, in one's presence; the memory of things that got transferred to someone, often nonverbally on a deeper emotional level from the people one grew up with; and then, institutional memory, of things we are taught in schools and other educational institutions, things that we need to remember as members of a community, a nation. These three forms of memory become one in the moment of one's action, within a given present moment.



Andrea Geyer, frame still from *Maggie*, segment of a seven-channel video installation entitled *Comrades of Time* (2011).

*If it would actually be true, that the war was in fact a fight for national existence, for freedom, and that these priceless possessions can only be defended by the iron tools of invasion and murder, then everything else would follow as a matter of course. Then we would need to take everything that the war may bring as a part of the bargain.<sup>4</sup> But that we know, we can not do. Not anymore, not after what we have experienced, not after what we have learned from war — again and again. Just see where we are now, in the midst of an economic crisis that shows us the true outcome of every war: The material bankruptcy, the struggle of the working class, the lack of social services and most of all the emotional disillusionment that most of us carry. This war and the crisis that follows it, have altered the conditions of our life now and forever. Comrades, a crisis like this one changes us — it changes everything.<sup>5</sup>*

In *Oversensitivity*, Jalal Toufic describes how often, over the course of time, and more often when events are marked by trauma, they tend to create boundaries or black holes in our imagination as they disappear and become clouded, contested by many complicated questions raised around them. He argues that an event horizon is a boundary in space-time; it is the area surrounding a black hole, inside which the events cannot affect an outside observer. Light emitted from inside the horizon can never reach the observer, and anything that passes through the horizon from the observer's side is never seen again.

*The recent years suggested that we all shall live based on a principle in which everything is driven by the fear of the one, for the other.<sup>6</sup> And if you think about it, this principle of fear has occupied the life of individuals and peoples for centuries. And we have been able to witness again and again, that it only leads to catastrophic and devastating expressions of power.<sup>7</sup> Comrades, we all are weakened materially and spiritually, but if we let those among us who champion this principle, take control again, we are robbing ourselves of our own freedom. If we let them act without encountering resistance, we allow ourselves to be let with bound hands and silenced into the next catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> We need to act at once, otherwise this fear of the one, for the other and its gripping force will threaten the dissolution of humanity.<sup>9</sup>*

Given the current political situation, the moment of the collapse of the market-driven systems, the bud of public resistance, I am interested in how we can activate and work in this moment with the knowledge that our memory can offer us. Yet given that some institutionalized memory generates boundaries and black holes in the sense that Toufic describes, some events in our past withdraw themselves from this contemporary imagination. I believe that artistic practice can be a site in which we can recover some of these events, through the collective experience of viewing art. I would like to suggest that artworks can produce forms of memory, or of critical affect towards history that allow for a narrative, a voice, a memory, that despite trauma, can be sustained on our side of the event horizon.

*I have to confess that I don't believe that we as individuals and as a people are simply innocent and only have the state and the military to blame for the crisis at our hand. A strong people must be able to follow consciously their own history. Because we did not do that, we cannot be innocent. Our naïveté, our narrow minded understanding of the political life and our wide-eyed enjoyment in the individual sphere, might tempt some of us to excuse many things. But a people must escape their one-sided, short-sided views of what they consider common, must go beyond their traditions, their particularities, and must have the will to imagine an inclusive community.<sup>10</sup>*

The texts quoted are excerpts from a script written for the protagonist Maggie of my seven-channel video installation entitled *Comrades of Time* (2011). In this installation seven young women each speak a monologue written / collaged by myself closely based on texts, poems and speeches from the time of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1916 – 1924). Maggie's script is specifically based on the words of Karl Liebknecht, Minna Cauer, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg and Lida Gustava Heymann. Other scripts work with texts from Magnus Hirschfeld and other members of his institute, Walter Benjamin, Anita Augsborg, Sigmund Freud, Gertrud Bäumer, Adolf Döblin, Ernst Töller, just to name a few. The work *Comrades of Time* creates what I call 'temporal translations' of particular past pronouncements/events, not to restage them, not to reenact them, but rather to offer a different possibility for memory: one that is not invested in representing and therefore packaging the past, but in memory that activates the experience of the past as it always already resides within ourselves and offers itself to us as agency in the present moment. I am interested in activating the way in which time and the events that carry it are always already embodied within us.



1. Karl Liebknecht, *Im Kerker*, December 1916.
2. Minna Cauer (1919): "Das Antlitz des Friedens." In: *Die Frauenbewegung : Revue für die Interessen der Frauen*, Nr. 3/4, S. 7 - 8
3. Clara Zetkin, "Organising Working Women," November 1922, from *International Socialism* (1st series), [No.96](#), March 1977, pp. 22-24.
4. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*, 1915.
5. Ibid.
6. Lida Gustava Heymann (1917): "Weiblicher Pazifismus." In: *Frauen Gegen den Krieg*. Gisela Brinker-Gabler [ed]. Frankfurt: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1980, pp. 65 – 70.
7. Ibid.
8. Heymann, *Pax International*, 1933.
9. Heymann, "Weiblicher Pazifismus."
10. Cauer, "Das Antlitz des Friedens."

[Andrea Geyer](#) is an artist and lives and works in New York. Recent exhibitions include 29th São Paulo Biennial (2010), Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012), Tate Modern, London (2008, 2011) and documenta12. Gallery Thomas Zander, Cologne, Germany, represents her work. She is a Professor of New Genres at Parsons The New School of Design, NY.

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## Vanalyne Green

### Weak Ties? Perhaps.

So many scholars and artists are addressing the relationship between art and technology that it's easy to get a bit jaded. It's as if the academic industry dedicated to Walter Benjamin got lost at the College Art Association conference and wound up at a Web 2.0 session. (And I write this as someone included in an anthology about teaching digital media.<sup>1</sup>) But what I find missing in most of the literature is a story that doesn't have a moral, an urgency, a pointed finger, hyperbole, or a determinism — the hallmark characteristics of the oracular. The one work I do return to when I think of artists and the web is Trebor Scholz's text about how to collaborate online.<sup>2</sup> It includes such easily forgotten bits of advice as to be humble every now and then. And so along those lines, here is a description of a project that I began as an artist but also as a curious person, immersed in web culture.



kathycalculates tweet, captured during the most recent Presidential debates.

During the last Presidential campaign, I started to follow people from the Twitter streams for the Obama-McCain debates. I had two criteria for whomever I decided to track: their 140-character tweet had to be funny and they couldn't be Republicans. If they ticked those boxes, I clicked 'follow,' and have until this very day. A few left Twitter, making it impossible for me to chart them — for example, a very sweet rehabilitated drug addict who had a young baby. All followed me, in return, for a while. And then some dropped me. Fair enough, though it hurt for reasons that are hard to explain, especially given that I never met them. This is part of the strange narcissism of the online world.

The question: would the instantiating moment of my contact, which was political, carry over in a meaningful way, politically? Could I trace it, know it? We were engaged enough in the Presidential debates to make comments in the public sphere: it was a political moment of discourse around the future of America. But the snippets of information people (tweeple) tweeted were often not 'political.' Tom tweeted pictures of his cats. Susan is a vegan. The other Susan knits sweaters. Craig lives in my former hometown and knows a lot about computers. Susan became a virtual gym buddy. Tom and I tweet 'reviews' of movies and I just bought a DVD he recommended. For a while, Charles ended all his tweets with 'and Obama is my president,' or #Obama, or 'Obama is the President.' I loved him for that. Charles had one deliriously funny thread updating his status while getting drunk at a club, and on to the next morning. Within this steady back-and-forth, I found that a few people mattered to me, though there is one person I follow because I kept my rule, based on that original moment, but I don't like her; she commits the egregious sin of being both self-absorbed and not funny about it.



A Twitter grid of people representing those chosen during the Presidential debates.

The connections, when they've occurred, have been fragile and tentative. I never know if I'm really helping my gym buddy when I cheer her on. One of the Kathys often responded to my tweets, but after she alluded to something ominous, I offered my actual e-dress, and she stopped mentioning me — the Twitter form of dialog. I feel bad — what did I do wrong? And it was a Kathy, a former Republican who voted for Obama, who wrote a few months ago about the political system: "But change is hopeless! I know that now." Heartbreaking! I want to tell her about demonstrations, about grassroots political movements. But should I? Would it be even more intrusive to her? Here, I needed a strong tie, and I didn't know how to make it happen. Is this not where the importance of simply being in the room with people makes all the difference?

A political moment emboldened me to connect. Yes, I can say that. And I can say the fragility of the contact — the occasional retweets or thank-yous or hash tags — is a gentle choreographed ritual to my day. Here I 'met' these people — here, in a great and funny and ironic chorus of responses to the debates. Those scenes of plucking identities from the stream of language flowing during the last American Presidential campaign continue to pose a question mysterious to me: What is a political moment? Feminists sought to find the political in the minutiae of the daily — the credo 'the personal is political' helped to ennoble the previously denigrated lives of 'ordinary' women. Perhaps that's enough every now and then — to observe with interest and respect. And that is political. Life goes on.

2. Scholz, Trebor. 'The Participatory Challenge.' *Curating Immateriality. The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*. Autonomedia: New York, 2006.

[Vanalyne Green](#)'s Twitter bio: Artist, writer, teacher, coffee fanatic, ponderer of things.

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## Mimi Gross

In addressing these two thematic questions I would like to emphasize that it is essential to “feel and know (quest) who you are” and to challenge oneself by asking “what do you want to give to . . . humanity?”

As an artist, I genuinely fall “between the cracks” of art world generations: stylistically, philosophically, physically, and above all, technologically. My goals for my work are to continue to observe what is around me, to hold onto my own motivations by working from life and imagination, and to continue to create portraits and pictures of places and situations, as well as doing anatomical research.

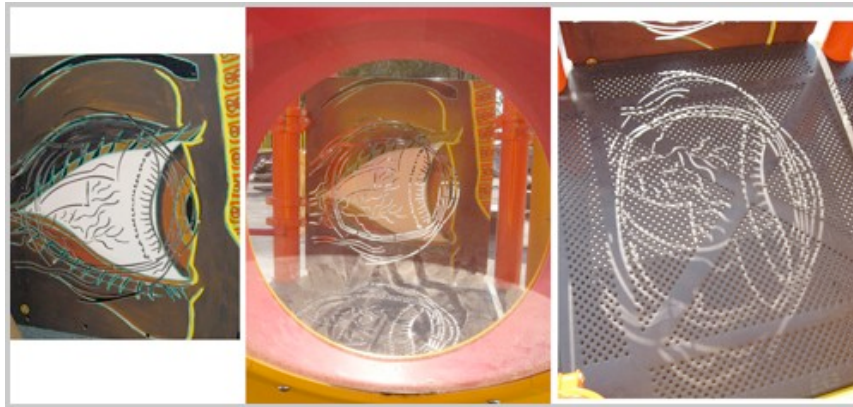


Mimi Gross, *Disaster Services*, 9/11/2001, ink on paper, 13" x 10".



In order to take breaks from the solitariness of the studio I have worked with choreographers designing sets and costumes. This work connects me with a community, and with groups of friends, a larger network, and brings more public exposure for my artwork.

Political aspects inevitably become integrated into my work. For example, at the time of 9/11, ten years ago, I went down to what's now called Ground Zero, the correspondents' area, and made drawings of workers, firemen, trucks, medics, visitors, the crowd, and the chaos. I did this as a person who likes to draw and document "real time" experiences. It was also a kind of therapy to be outside of my studio at a time when it was impossible to stay inside finishing other works. I also realized that that is who I am, and that I was participating in the events happening so near to my home in the only way I knew how. Now, 10 years later, seeing the drawings again, there is an eerie feeling of a time past. The drawings do not reflect a social commentary, or even a political one, but they definitely reflect the chaos of the moment that could not be captured with photographs.



Mimi Gross, *Eye Panel*, 2009, Robert Venable Park, NYC, baked enamel on steel, 46" x 32".

I have observed in portraying public events, public portraits, and public art, that there is a wider audience than with personal and personalized studio work. Generally, I am a very private artist (the act of painting is essentially private), but over the years I have participated in making "public art" works. It's always a long process, there is a lot of bureaucracy, but it is ultimately satisfying, especially when it is finally finished. One recent project is a playground in East New York, Brooklyn, designed by the New York Parks Department, which includes some of my artwork based on an anatomical theme. Budget restrictions made it impossible to do a whole figure, but I did make some sculptural pieces and 13 steel panels, images of various parts of the body, all integrated onto the play climbing equipment. The project took four years to complete. The playground is in an underprivileged neighborhood, and it took a long time to raise funds for it. This presented a rare opportunity for me. The project was challenging and informative, and through it I started working with new materials. In so doing I reconfirmed for myself all of the important terms of continuity and cohesiveness of my



art work, so that whatever the application, one can honestly ask: “How can we contribute to . . . humanity?”

**Mimi Gross** is a painter, and set and costume designer for dance, and has made interior and exterior installations. She lives and works in New York City. Gross was the McMillan/Stewart Endowed Chair in Painting, at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, from 2010 to 2011.

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## Julie Harrison

Shortly before the events of 9/11 my work took a narrative turn and became less abstract. Later on I started to think about what I was doing in grandiose metaphoric terms as a means of healing the world's ills, that by repurposing images from the news I was transforming something “ugly” into something “beautiful.” I wished this alchemy would levitate us from the earthly mess we were in. It was a coping mechanism born from the powerlessness to stop the spiraling fear and hatred. A decade after 9/11 we have seen the permanent gridlock of right and wrong, and many of us are numb to anything beyond the borders of our own self-interest. With dashed hopes of political change, I'm left with bottom feeding the news every day. My aesthetic interest is in blurring reality, perhaps alternating between recognition and hope, with an internal compass pointing to memory that lives within the margins of experience. But isn't that what artists try to do? The act of cooking up something from nothing is a magic that never ceases to amaze and excite me, to excerpt an idea and embellish it with my own DNA is like sprinkling salt on a piece of paper and eating it for dinner.



Julie Harrison, *Weather* (series): Boy, 2011, unaltered digital photograph, size variable.



Julie Harrison, *Global Portraits* (series): Gaza 1, 2010, unaltered digital photograph, size variable.



Julie Harrison, *Global Portraits* (series): United States 1, 2009, unaltered digital photograph, size variable.



Julie Harrison, *Global Portraits* (series): Indonesia 2, 2008, unaltered digital photograph, size variable.

**Julie Harrison** has been a “crossover” artist in New York City for more than twenty-five years, moving between video, photography, painting, performance, installation, books, and digital images. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards and has exhibited widely.

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## Eleanor Heartney

### Apocalyptic Musings

*M/E/A/N/I/N/G's* 25th anniversary is only slightly shorter than my own tenure in New York art world. I arrived in 1983 after a brief stint as a freelance art critic in Minneapolis. Looking back I'm struck by the remarkable similarities between the eighties and today. Then as now, politics was dominated by sharp divisions between right and left, a virulent culture war, and a no-tax ideology whose real aim was to starve the beast that is the social safety net for the poor and middle class. Then this philosophy went under the banner of Reaganomics, now it's the Tea Party. The two eras also share a feckless disregard for unpleasant realities, especially with regard to energy, the environment, the social consequences of the widening income gap, the implications of the failure to fund education, and the evaporation of good jobs. But one of the biggest differences has to do with tone. In the eighties, we were assured, it was Morning in America. Today, on both left and right we seem to have progressed to a sense of twilight.

These differences are brought home for me when I teach texts from those days that were once required reading to contemporary students. A few weeks ago, we read Thomas Lawson's *Last Exit Painting* from 1981 and chuckled over the suggestion that one solution to the crises of late capitalism was to place subversive painting at the

center of the marketplace “where it can cause the most trouble.” Similarly unconvincing were statements by artist/theorists like Peter Halley about the importance of addressing the managerial class through art, and Barbara Kruger’s justification for creating commodity art because “Outside of the market there is nothing — not a piece of lint, a cardigan, a coffee table, a human being.”

I am struck from today’s perspective by such oddly cheerful celebrations of complicity with the market and the almost messianic fervor with which artists turned to the deconstruction of the ideology of advertising. How again was that supposed to save us?

One of the biggest differences between then and now is that theory no longer shelters us with the promise that reality is just a matter of language. It no longer seems plausible that we can somehow change the policies by subverting the codes. The famous ’80s irony seems much subdued in a world in which art melds into entertainment and fashion as we drift toward the status of third world country. Art fairs, galas, and biennials all highlight the disconnect between the fashion side of art world and the real pain and outrage outside. And instead of even feigning rebellion, many of the most visible artists are simply dancing in the light reflected from gilded rich.

For all that, of course, much of the workaday art world (at least those sectors dominated by artists, curators, and critics) remains a bastion of progressivism. And for progressives, the sense of twilight is accentuated by The Great Disappointment symbolized by Obama. (The original Great Disappointment, of course, was the failure of the predicted end of the world in 1844. Today, the problem is not that the end didn’t come but that the beginning didn’t flower.) The result has been an enervating sense of impotence, as it seems increasingly clear that things can only be changed along one side of the continuum.

Hence the Apocalyptic sensibility. The future looks grim, no matter whether you look at it from the perspective of environment, the American economy, the breakdown of the Eurozone, the so-called Clash of Civilizations, or the rise of an anti-democratic China. As Yeats said during an earlier apocalyptic episode, “The Center cannot hold.” It has never seemed truer in our politics that “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.”

The language of apocalypse has seeped deeply into our discourses of politics, environment, economics, science, and popular culture. (One finds it as well in art, at least when artists attempt to address these situations.) But apocalypse has two sides — while it can encourage an acceptance of the inevitability of the end, it has also served historically as a call to arms. From its earliest days, the belief that the Messiah will return in glory and establish a reign of peace and justice has sustained the powerless, and offered hope that their grievances will ultimately be addressed. From this perspective, the promise of moral order at the heart of the Book of Revelations can be read in tandem with the social gospel of Christianity, providing reinforcement for revolutionary



social and political goals.

So I console myself — there have been darker times. And out of darkness can come light. Maybe our task now is to ask, not how does it all end, but what would it take to believe in the future again?

**Eleanor Heartney** is a New York-based art critic and author of numerous books and articles about contemporary art.

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## Susanna Heller

### Art Work / Studio Work

There is nothing more solitary than facing TIME when life itself is under threat. I recently had the experience of drawing my way through days/weeks of watching a loved one hover between life and death. During this hospital vigil I started to draw. At bedside, when I put the tip of the 9B graphite pencil to paper and felt its pressure melting into the paper, at that moment the intensity of my pain of awareness escalated, but my connection to the making of the mark, by **transforming** and **enlarging** my attention and focus, seemed to corral (though not lessen) the flooding emotions, which in turn at least allowed me to breathe.



Susanna Heller, untitled, 2010, graphite on paper, 14" x 6".

This whole scenario (sans hospital and drama of illness) plays out over and over again in an equally alone, isolated and urgent way in my studio life. Studio work necessitates a similar solitude and intensity. Especially when I am painting, moments in time are captured, covered over, destroyed, observed. Through laying on, watching, removing, and literally covering past actions with present ones soon to be caught in the past again, making a painting encapsulates a similar experience of time, time lost, loss, presence, on going. The process of slowing down and feeling the ground under the mark is an inefficient and immeasurable or incalculable one, and it is one that I find absolutely central to working. This process also, coincidentally, has little currency in the



bureaucratically driven art market where notoriety trumps 'boots on the ground,' or in this case, 'brushes on the ground' every time!

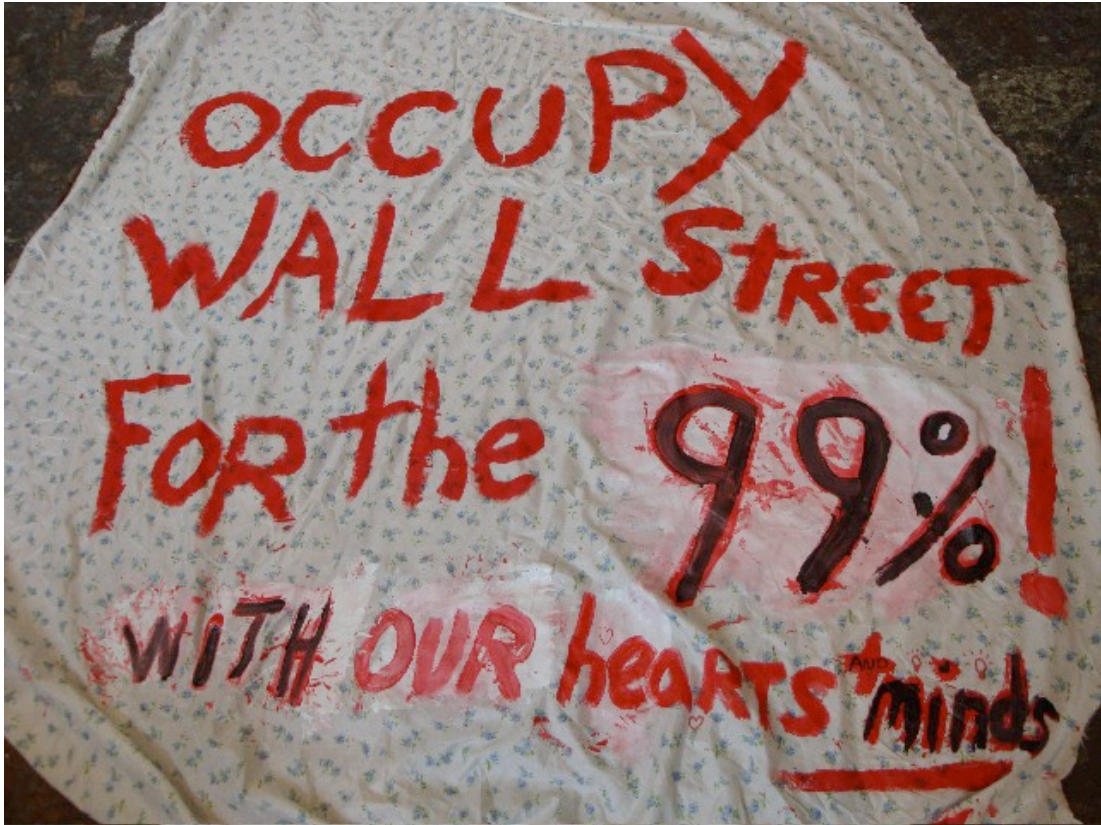


Susanna Heller, *Waiting to See the Dawn*, 2011, oil on canvas, 60" x 40".

### **Political Work Parallels Art Work**

As I've said, the actual activity of making art is for me intensely solitary. Even when drawing in the street, my experience of working is of total separation and a sort of "occupation" of the page to the exclusion of all else. In this isolated place/space, time slows down (disappears) and creative energy powers all action and reaction. Now, how this parallels what is happening with the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is very interesting and very important to me. In much the same way as is required for creative work, this non-hierarchical social resistance that is happening down at Liberty Place allows for and insists on the space and time that are essential for any truly participatory democratic process. The mostly calm, patient, intense, ongoing focus of their work is strikingly familiar to me. I could easily describe my own solitary working process the same way they describe theirs! Moving towards a true democracy takes time and space and constant creativity. Art work takes the same sort of commitment. A non-hierarchical

emphasis in the face of political power elite encapsulates the way the OWS movement is using non-violence and non-centered focus to disarm and look past those in power. For me, this political strategy for society in general happens to apply so seamlessly to my own working methods in the studio and to my view of the political elite in the art world as well.



Susanna Heller, banner on studio floor, 2011.

As much as I am strictly private when I work, I have always been a passionately political person, deeply engaged in the political community. I see involvement outside the studio in the political universe as necessary as eating and cleaning. That is: essential nourishment for the body and spirit. Yet aside from happily painting signs and banners, I have not felt the need to 'display' my personal working skills when marching or protesting, nor to apply them directly to 'pictures' of the event. That is not to say this might not still occur, as my subject matter is the life and space of the city itself. However the time and focus it really takes to make a painting is still, for me, as much outside of the hierarchical art world power battles as it is outside the societal political battles.

The OWS movement strikes many familiar studio notes (on a much grander scale of course) in its practice and ambition. With the occupiers' focus and deep commitment to staying in the 'moment,' they are confident and not burdened with narcissistic ambition; they are ready and able to respond to whatever happens with generosity and curiosity rather than in competitive mode. The validity and richness of this approach is as true for me in front of a painting as it is true for all of us in Zuccotti Park in New York.





Susanna's knapsack at Zuccotti Park, 2011.

How does the experience of working on art overlap the experience of political action?

You have to commit to what you don't know/haven't seen yet.

You have to respond to each change in the situation with heart and mind.

You have to reflect and analyze even as you create.

You have to embrace the inefficiency of this process.

You have tremendously deep-rooted private and communal demands.

You know that physically showing up is 90% of the work.

You know that for substantive work, patience, fortitude, and even stubbornness beat genius every time.

You 'fail again, fail better' and it really works. (Thanks Beckett!)

**Susanna Heller** is a painter who lives and works in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. She exhibits with MagnanMetz Gallery in New York City, with Olga Korper Gallery in Toronto, Canada, and with John Davis Gallery in Hudson, New York.

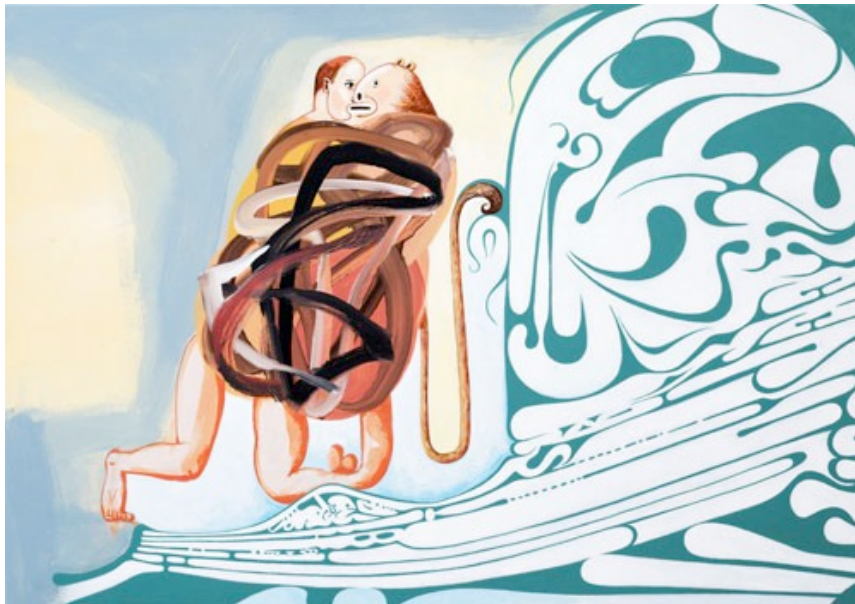
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David Humphrey

## Fragments

My prolonged sense of nausea and helpless disbelief at the political, economic, and humanitarian offenses of the Bush/Cheney years was lifted momentarily after the economic crash and the election of Obama. But destructive social forces don't melt away very quickly when power and money have purchased their security with such craft. I've sometimes argued that art can build strength from weakness, that its fragile autonomy makes a space to imagine freedom. But these arguments are challenged by the overwhelming force of the system (as they used to call it in the sixties.) Mockery, irreverence, and atheism have been good time-tested options for me to make (or imagine) small but crucial differences through art. Likewise, to describe, and shape, what it feels like to be a person in the world *now* hasn't stopped being an urgent labor for me. This daily emancipatory struggle, sustained paradoxically in the solitary asylum of the studio, is thankfully elaborated by teaching. I love the ongoing conversation with students and peers, committed to sorting out what matters within a tangle of perspectives.

*Symplegmata* is the ancient name for groups of figures interlocked in combat or love.



David Humphrey, *Joined*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 44" x 54".

It took me a long time to figure out that my cousin would tell lies for no apparent reason. It was impossible to know what she could possibly gain by not telling the truth about pointless daily occurrences. Maybe a conversation, for her, was so fraught with peculiar urgencies and hidden demands that a future of angry and disappointed friends had no reality.



An *apotropaic* representation (from the Greek, to turn away) anticipates danger. It wards off threats by means of ruse, simulation, and violence: the Medusa's head for instance. An apotropaic representation both attracts attention and deflects its threatening potential by incorporating elements of the despised or feared. The image performs a form of protective self-annihilation.



David Humphrey, *Leopard*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 60".

Georg Didi Huberman writes about Fra Angelico's use of dissemblance "we begin with the formless — on the near side of every 'figure' and transit toward the invisible proximity of mystery — every figure's 'beyond.'"

A snowman's sensitivity to temperature promises total dissolution. His valiant autonomy, crafted from sky-borne matter, must be surrendered as he inevitably melts into the ground.



David Humphrey, *Black and White*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 72".

Here are some titles for paintings:

*Dog Behind Bars*

*Geodesic Hand*

*Stepping over a Cleft*

*More Peanut Butter on Bread*

*Clown Party*

*Furniture Piled Up*

*A Letter Pinned to the Wall*

**David Humphrey** is a New York artist who has shown nationally and internationally. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Rome Prize, among other awards. An anthology of his art writing, *Blind Handshake*, was published by Periscope Publishing in 2010. He is a senior critic at the Yale School of Art.

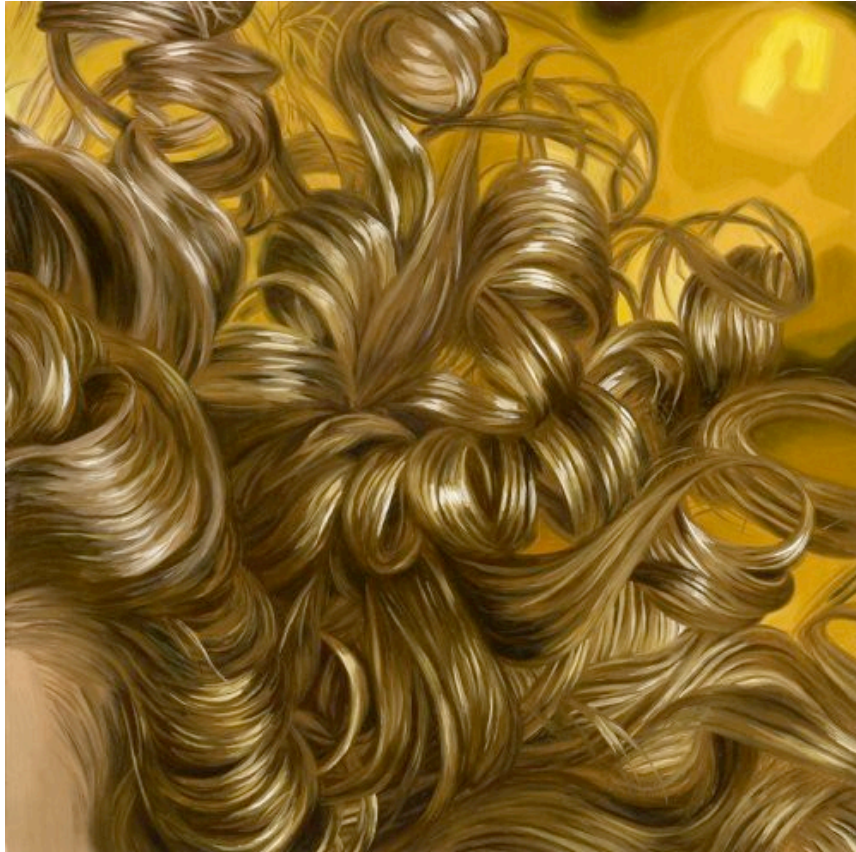
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## Julia Jacquette

On 9/11 I had the harrowing experience of watching the twin towers burn from the stoop of my East Village apartment building. 9/11 was horribly and undeniably real for me, yet so much of my experience of it is about dealing with the enormous, ever-expanding narrative about the event.

Sometimes I think that contemporary adulthood is all about making sense of the barrage of narratives/stories that are told to us. Every day of our life we're told a plethora of tales through countless media portals (from the moment we wake up and look at our computers or smart phones) — none of them unbiased or without agenda. This morning I saw online coverage of the Wall Street protesters (both negative and positive) and, on

the walk to my studio, an ad for Tiffany's on a bus shelter depicting a vision of bejeweled marital bliss. Very different narratives, subjects, and agendas, but both requiring healthy dollops of skepticism and awareness of the authors' possible intentions.



Julia Jacquette, *Blond, Curls I*, 2008, oil on wood panel, 12" x 12".

And yet some of the most harmful narratives are the ones we create and tell to ourselves. So many of us have a constant inner voice, one that's relentlessly critical of our own inadequacies and deficiencies, a monologue that's heavily influenced by *that* news story or *this* magazine spread or any of the barrage of advertisements speaking to us from our computers or televisions or the subway walls we see every day.

I've begun to realize that the wrangling with this constant onslaught of narratives from the media (and then the stories I consequently form myself) will likely be, for the rest of my life, the subject matter of my artwork. I'm trying to deal, specifically, with the narratives created by the onslaught of mediated visual images we receive, and I'm dealing with them by trying to quote, subvert, twist, ape, imitate, and — in a sense — bow before them in reverence of their unrelenting power.





Julia Jacquette, *Rum, Lime II*, 2010, oil on wood panel, 16" x 18".

I doubt I'll ever directly depict media images of the events of 9/11. Instead, my strategy is to quote much more mundane media imagery in order to make the general statement, "Regard this compelling thing! It's a complete fable, but you can't take your eyes off it, right? Even though you know that it's a lie. . . ."

**Julia Jacquette** is an artist living and working in New York, and is also an assistant professor of Fine Arts at Fashion Institute of Technology.

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## Amelia Jones

The world hurts. I doubt there are many people making art or writing about art who don't find ourselves wounded, affected, moved, upset, and in some, seemingly rare, cases joyous in response to the relentless stream of events and crises coming our way via the media. The major difference between today and 100 or 500 years ago is not that things are less safe or more crisis-ridden (one only has to be informed about the plague, the 100 years war, or the ravages of colonialism to know this is not the case), but that we know vastly more, and much more quickly, about what is going on. And the media thrives on creating a frisson of fear and instability — that's how they sell "papers" (or website advertisements, as the case may be). In this environment, "just saying no" to the fear-mongering is itself a serious political act.



Saying “no” raises the question of agency. The individual is both a starkly delineated island of thought, suffering, and potential creative energy and a completely interpellated node in a network of ideological pressures. The reference to Louis Althusser is intentional. While many despaired of Althusser’s brute latter-day Marxism, with its implication of denying individual autonomy, I think his model remains ruthlessly accurate in explaining how individuals (an idea we must retain, given our stubborn narcissism as people in the world, and the way our brains work to convince us we are discrete beings) become always already socialized, part of predetermined yet always changing flows of beliefs that are both social and self-motivated.

There is no simple cause and effect here — this is my mantra to students. We are thoroughly inculcated in broader belief systems and yet believe ourselves to be capable of producing enunciations (political slogans, art works, academic papers) that might just shift belief systems microscopically in the direction we propose to be more “progressive,” more “enlightened,” more “radical.” These latter are all terms linked to a particular legacy of European modern thought and to avant-gardism — for it is patently clear that the art world in particular, and the “left” in general, cannot let go of ideas of change linked to European Enlightenment and/or modernist conceptions of avant-garde radicality. What else do we have but the idea that making something might make a difference?

We must believe ourselves capable of having, and producing works, out of agency. Whether or how much this agency is willed is the key philosophical question. What “will” even *is*, is of course up to question. It certainly (returning to Althusser) isn’t “free.”

Just because will isn’t free will, just because we are ideologically sutured and formed — just because, as Jacques Derrida succinctly put it, “il n’y a pas de hors texte” — doesn’t mean there is “no point.” There is all the more of a point to negotiating the tension between the self and the social given the ambiguities and complexities of how we “are” in ideology.

I don’t know about you, but that’s the life force that keeps me going: imagining how to do this with every interaction with students, my children, my writing . . . fighting every day, every time I read the paper, hear a “tea party” pronouncement, read about racist white men in Montreal wearing black face at a frat party, hear Anglo-Canadians speak disrespectfully about francophones, reading about new laws being passed to protect large corporations from taxes. . . . Culture is best when it is on this cutting edge between hope and despair, when we (makers of culture) use our energy to open up the tiny gaps, the interstices in the status quo: viz., the protesters harassing Wall Street bankers and blocking the Brooklyn Bridge as I write this.

Giving up the fight produces cultural forms of bland acquiescence. Continuing the fight, albeit always already *within* the languages that we know, but perhaps shifting them infinitesimally, whether consciously “innovating” or (vastly more likely, I’d say)

unconsciously stumbling into slightly new forms of expression, keeps culture relevant.

**Amelia Jones** is Professor and Grierson Chair in Visual Culture at McGill University in Montréal. Her recent publications include major essays on Marina Abramovi (in *TDR*), and her books *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification in the Visual Arts* and, co-edited with Adrian Heathfield, *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art in History* are due out in 2012.

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## Shirley Kaneda

9/11 as the benchmark of how our political, economic, and social world has altered seems apt as it apparently has been a downward spiral since then. Certainly other factors could have been avoided such as the wars that needlessly contributed to the ensuing financial recession, but the rise of income inequality has been increasing since the 1980s. The 1980s was also when post-modernism dominated the discourse which has changed the course of art significantly. The resulting plethora of art today seems incongruent to the realities of the world and because all works directly engage in the production and exchange of capital, (more so than ever before) even work that has political content cannot escape the hegemony of the market.

Certain echelons of the art world are seemingly immune to the recession just as the banks and investment firms on Wall Street are, which is no surprise since the very investment bankers are the collectors who are involved in the speculation of the art market, driving up prices of young artists' works as well as the established and fashionable ones.

For most artists, I think it has become more difficult to sustain a practice in this environment. For myself, I see my practice more as a form of resistance (and a matter of choice) to the overarching manipulation of power and capital. Clement Greenberg wanted to believe that a manner of visual language can be established (formalist abstraction in his case) in which it could be immune to the vagaries of political, economic, and social concerns. The apparent inconsistency in his premise and because abstraction doesn't function like sign, it can never be established as such, but the main thing is to keep attempting at *something* even if it means not achieving it. I think abstraction is emblematic of this conundrum. If it represents anything, this is what it represents and broadly speaking it can encompass a variety of styles and approaches. Within this diversity, one can still find individual styles and idiosyncrasies and respond in a way that enables us to have the ability to imagine beyond what we see and what we know.

There is plenty of cynicism in the art world and artists that seem to be able to "play the market" well. This is nothing new, but art was largely historically determined by those who didn't make this a priority.

**Shirley Kaneda** is an abstract painter. She is Professor at Pratt Institute and a Contributing Editor at *Bomb Magazine*.

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Vincent Katz

## Style Injustice

In October, 2002, I gave a lecture to the incoming MFA students in Yale's studio art program. The lecture was on Black Mountain College, how that place, that required great sacrifice of its participants and was located in a remote part of the country with a small student and faculty body, could be a continual locus for so many groundbreaking and rule-breaking experiments. After discussing the college, I posed a question to the students: whether or not they thought their art should take on political topics, whether or not, at that particular point in history we had reached, there needed to be some kind of explicit engagement with existing power structures. Someone asked me if I was posing that question because of 9/11. It wasn't 9/11 but rather the stealing of the presidential election by George W. Bush that caused the realization that we were living in a would-be fascist state.

In terms of my own poetry and criticism, I had always been open to the airs of politics or social justice issues entering at will, but now it seemed imperative to claim that access. After that robbed election, I felt the whole world had been violated and that I had to participate in the resistance. But how? I always remember John Lennon saying, we knew how to make songs, so we'd do it with songs. That seemed sage advice, as jumping into an arena one knows little about often provides embarrassing and counter-productive results.

I found that I had to insert thoughts on the state of the world, and of the U.S. in particular, into introductions to my poetry readings (I remember referring to the "coup d'état" that had taken place in one). I helped organize "Versus," an anti-war reading at Paula Cooper Gallery, that took place on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I started publishing the poetry and arts journal *Vanitas*, partially as an effort to create a forum in which various voices could examine current situations and possible responses (the first issue was subtitled "The State" and the second "Anarchisms").

In July, 2005, when John Roberts was nominated by Bush to be a Supreme Court justice, I decided to write a poem, whose words would be culled entirely from *The New York Times*, but which words I would attack, recombining them, fracturing their syntax, isolating emotional nexuses, in an effort to turn that stultifying prose into poetry. I remember reading the poem, "Judge," at Norma Cole's apartment in San Francisco shortly after finishing it. Someone said, not disparagingly, "It's like re-reading everything I've been reading in the papers." At the time, I found the poem very uncooked, but with time it has settled and has on one level a documentary aspect. It is always shocking to see how the media presents the world.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of my critical writing, I found I needed to incorporate my senses of the violent and disturbing frames we were, and continue, to live within. Here is my opening paragraph to an essay on Beat Streuli's photos, taken during a period straddling 9/11:

Into a world in disarray, with its propensity to wide-scale war increasing daily, come Beat Streuli's photographs of people on the streets of New York City, taken over the last few years, people wandering aimlessly or pressing ahead, all seemingly oblivious to the disaster that surrounds them. Of course, as individuals they are not at all oblivious. They are the intelligent, normal people who make up the populace of any urban center, exhibiting the variety of cultural background and dress that defines their particular moment in time. Nor are the pictures entirely oblivious. We have been trained to take artists at their image, and Streuli's images make use of an impassioned play of light and darkness that seems capable of taking in the diversity of life's moments.<sup>2</sup>

Now, we go down to Zuccotti Park whenever we can and read poems or submit poems to the anthology. The times have made us what we are. We do what we can, where we can.

1. Vincent Katz and Wayne Gonzales. *Judge* (Milan and New York: Charta and Libellum, 2007).

2. Vincent Katz, "The New York Photographs of Beat Streuli" in *Beat Streuli: New York City 2000 – 02* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003).

**Vincent Katz** is a poet, critic, and teacher, who has published many essays and articles on contemporary art and who teaches in the Art Criticism and Writing Program of the School of Visual Arts, NY.

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## Joyce Kozloff

As soon as the towers were hit, we knew the Bush administration reprisals would be harsh and excessive. On September 11, 2001, I was at the Bogliasco Foundation in Liguria, a secular sanctuary of quiet and beauty. But even there, we were filled with dread. During this century, I have found myself once again working in the peace movement, as during my youth. Despite massive demonstrations all over the world, the process was set in motion for invading Afghanistan and Iraq — and for continuous aerial bombardment of those countries and others in the Middle East. Now ten years and hundreds of thousands of deaths later, there still is no end in sight.

I am in my late 60s and love staying home in my studio, a luxury and privilege, but have found myself more engaged with the world outside than ever before. I wish there were more outraged people in the streets. I wish that a younger generation would find new and effective forms of political activism. I wish that our voices were heard more clearly, that we could change the tired "war on terror" narrative effectively. For those of us who make art with political and social content, I wish we could communicate with a larger public. My own art has changed during these times: it is more direct. When my art was accused of being agit prop, I worried for a while and then decided to embrace the characterization. These days, I am drawn to art forms that are loud, angry, messy, and



strident, struggling to break through the carelessness and banality of our decadent, media-saturated society.

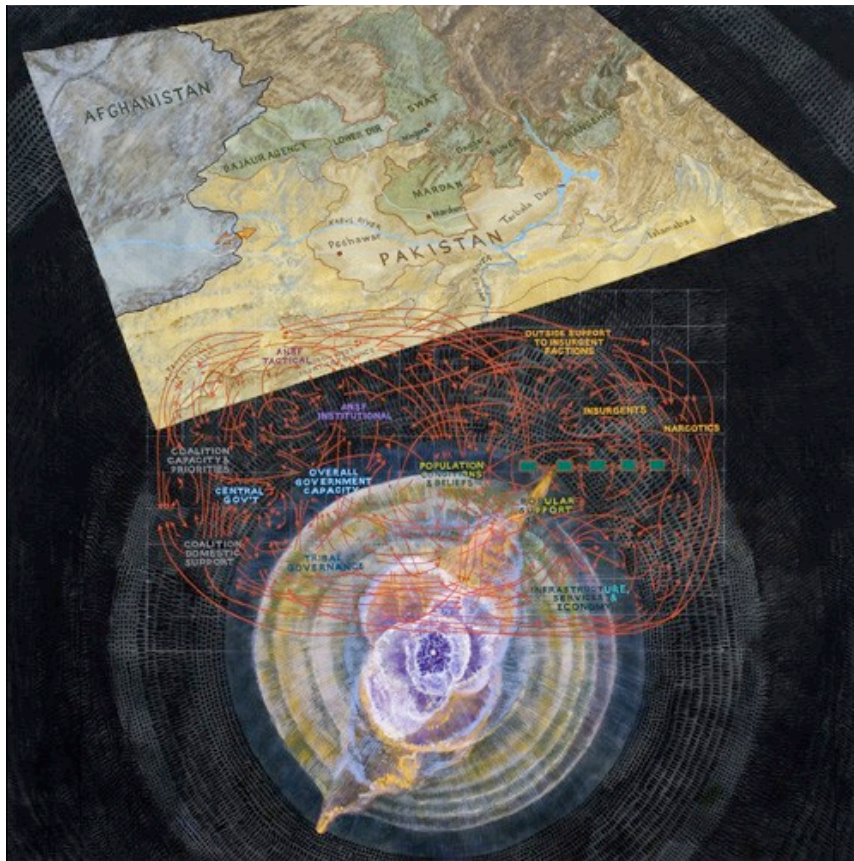


Joyce Kozloff, *The Middle East, 3 Views*, 3 panels: acrylic and collage on canvas, 72" x 216", 2010.

Terrestrial maps and renderings of galaxies are combined to imagine the escalating scale of future wars in space. This 18-foot triptych addresses the frightening possibility of unending violence by juxtaposing military charts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and other contested areas from the Ptolemaic, Cold War, and current times with imagery based on photographs taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope. The maps of these regions float in deep space among the stars, as if they had been dislodged from the earth.



Detail of triptych: *The Middle East, 3 Views II: as seen from Israel during the Cold War*, acrylic and collage on canvas, 72" x 72", 2010.



Detail of triptych: *The Middle East, 3 Views III: the Fight for Northern Pakistan*, acrylic and collage on canvas, 72" x 72", 2010.

[Joyce Kozloff](#) is an artist who lives in New York and is represented by the DC Moore Gallery.

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## Rachel Levitsky

Excerpt: *The Story of My Accident Is Ours*

And yet. We could not keep all the particulars of it, our suffering, within the confines of our chest and breath with which it, our suffering, battled for room to breathe. News of its terribly specific detail and generally monstrous scope arrives apace with its ever increasing, meaning more frequent and with shorter intervals in between, worsening situation, for, each message is given less time to settle, to make for itself a place whilst taking up more space due to its containing more information than the one which came gunning toward us such a short time before the one that barrels us down so immediately and directly after. Clamorous competing onslaughts knock the wind out of our only just budding not yet blossoming organs of considerate response. No matter.

Dear Susan and Mira,

I'm (sorrily) late here because I'm easily distracted by the chaos and importance of events in our times. My dentist says that even his calmest patients now grind. I finally bit down on the \$350.00 and fitted myself for a night guard. It doesn't do a thing for the wrist problem though. For that I must upgrade my Freelancers insurance from the less

expensive but mostly useless high deductible plan (but which I like to have in place, in case I get something very expensive, like cancer) to the more costly HMO3. The details are so mundane and are taking so much of my time, so it's hard to find the time to return to the novel, *The Story of My Accident Is Ours*. Our condition, the current material reality of our artistic and political lives ("total disorganization, harriedness, distraction, responsibility, and preoccupation [Preoccupy Wall Street?]" to quote Marcella Durand) must be the most effective hoax of the ailing U.S. capitalist conspiracy . . . FOR THEN we say to each other: *Are you taking care of yourself?* To which I want to scream THAT'S ALL I DO! . . . all we all do . . . it's so time-consuming it makes it improbable we can both do that and take care of another, or build systems of support, or play in the vast space of the not yet played out. It is the complaint lodged at protesters: a clearly unproductive group of parasites otherwise their life would be as compressed, regimented, incontestable, abject, sad, consumptive, and costly as life as we all now know it and expect it to be. To me this new 'life as we know it' is most evident in the children, young adults, college students, who are so pressured to get things right and work so hard, the situation they have been offered is one in which there is so little margin for play and the *dangerous* error that 'play' implies.

The following happened at the childcare training I attended at The Park Slope Food Coop. I learned about a popular system of charter schools called "Excellence Girls" (and "Excellence Boys") by way of encounter with a young idealistic kindergarten teacher—who told me that the average day was very stacked with reading, writing, and arithmetic because "Excellence" meant that the students would score at reading and math levels of the first grade and a half when they graduated kindergarten. I asked, "What happened to activity period?" She told me that there was "outside play for half an hour every other day." Then she told me that she was "doing this coop training so she would have the opportunity to be relaxed with young children on occasion." And then she seemed like she was about to cry.

I find this young generation, college age and after, incredibly sweet and expressive of an open desire to find meaningful connection, thrilled to find spaces like Belladonna\* and now Occupy Wall Street that are unenclosed and open to their input/to creative and collaborative idea-making, i.e., 'Activity Time.'

### **Making Things In The Middle of The Fire This Time**

Just exactly, I mean on the same day that the first group went to Wall Street, I had an epiphany on my way to participate in a reading organized by recently deceased poet Akilah Oliver's students at Lang College. On 13th Street I saw young people bearing large placards on poles and assumed they were staging a protest. Then I read the signs, which said "Shop Here and Not There." My heart dipped for a moment and rose back up again with this *irrational* thought, "It's okay, because I am writing my novel." And then, you see, it was . . . okay, because I am writing this novel, which is being written all of

over the place, in thousands and thousands of places where there is not one spark which lights the fire but millions of sparks and millions of fires.

I.e.: It's time (again) for activity time.

Love,  
Rachel

**Rachel Levitsky** is the author of two books of poetry, *Under the Sun* and *NEIGHBOR*, a forthcoming novel, *The Story of My Accident is Ours*, and eight chapbooks. She is a founding member of [Belladonna\\* Collaborative](#), an adjunct professor at Pratt Institute, and an official at the Office of Recuperative Strategies.

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**Ellen K. Levy**

## **Priorities, Constraints, and Attention**

Many public traumas are clearly beyond our control; for others we have more influence, like the war in Iraq, the housing bubble crisis, and inherited social inequalities in the US. We bear at least some collective responsibility to try to alter these patterns. Many of us in the arts agree with Paul Krugman (*The New York Times*, Oct. 6, 2011) that, "The protesters' indictment of Wall Street as a destructive force, economically and politically, is completely right." Nevertheless, as he also points out, we are often ineffective in changing the operative political climate.

Krugman's observations and our pervasive political and economic difficulties prompt me to reflect on how we perceive certain things and filter out others. Given the constraints on our perceptual apparatus, how might new approaches break through familiar responses and effect change? Our 'attentional systems' may need to be granted a more central role in these deliberations. In addition, artworks may be best positioned to bring about the reflection necessary to consider more productive alternatives. The question then might become "How can art initiate an attention-shift to force viewers to confront what is generally avoided?"

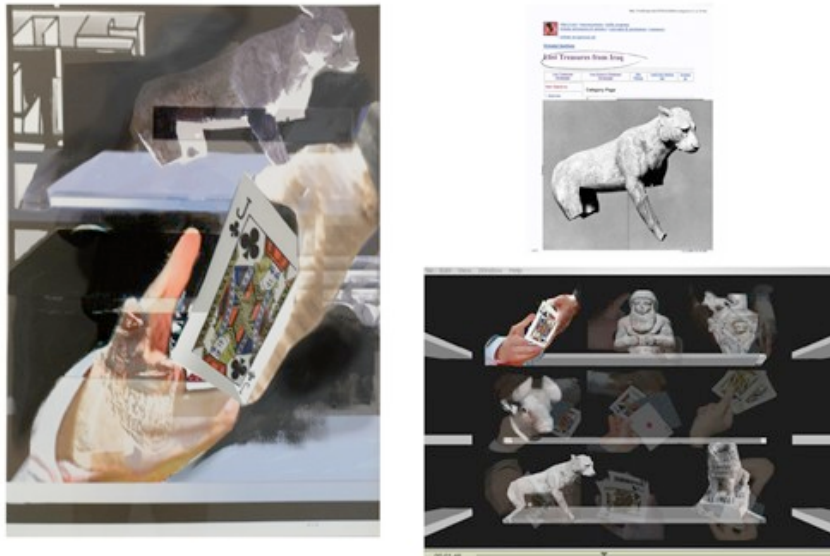




Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris (1999). A still from “Gorillas in our midst: sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events.” A movie sequence of a complex basketball scene was shown to observers who were directed to count the number of ball exchanges made in a ball game. During the movie, few viewers noticed that an actor dressed in a gorilla suit walked through the scene.

Inattention blindness is a phenomenon that reflects constraints on our attentional system that everyone experiences but of which few are consciously aware. It is related to other phenomena, such as the attentional blink and ‘change blindness’ (the inability of our visual system to detect alterations to details of our visual field that the brain has not yet stored). Philosophers have also addressed the subject. According to Alva Noë, failure to notice change is a pervasive feature of our visual lives.

I elected to make an artwork about this phenomenon in 2009, and I staged its two components in several exhibitions. The first part was to observe if viewers watching an animation in a gallery could be distracted from noticing the disappearance of stolen museum antiquities (the targets) by the overlaid flashing images of a card game. The second was to determine whether repetition of the depicted targets in other media (e.g., collages and print-outs from a database of missing Iraqi relics) could facilitate an ‘attention-switch’ that allowed viewers to perceive the background targets not initially noted in the animation when re-viewing it again. My reasoning was that contextual cueing might cause viewers to recognize the overlooked targets. The cues were far from neutral; they were emotionally salient as they referenced the war in Iraq and the destruction of a cultural heritage. In other words, the aim was to assess whether the repetition of images of looted objects in static displays could cause the targets to become more salient and result in viewers redirecting their vision from the foreground to the background of the animation. In fact I found that, after viewing the entire installation and then re-viewing the animation, most of the viewers who did not initially remark on the disappearing targets in the animation were subsequently able to see them.



Ellen K. Levy, *Stealing Attention*, 2008. This composite shows a still from a collaborative animation made with neurophysiologist, Michael E. Goldberg (lower right). It is juxtaposed with a collage showing a looted relic overlaid with hands playing the con game, Three-Card Monte, and with a print-out from a database of looted Iraqi antiquities.

Some have likened attention to a filter. The term ‘bottleneck’ is often associated with attention, emphasizing its physical limits. The first filter involved is considered by some to be a sensory conspicuity filter, which discards an object that is not physically salient enough to catch attention. As a result there is no conscious awareness of it. Even if the object is sufficiently salient and has many properties that matched the attentional set, it can still be discarded due to the capacity bottleneck.

My experience in staging this artwork was filled with constraints — not just the cognitive ones experienced by viewers but the limits of space and time during the various exhibitions. I was pleased and a little surprised that I had the opportunity to carry this out, given the fact that economic constraints within the commercial art world do not often allow for such experiments. Protesters operate with real constraints in the world of politics as well. The question of effecting political change is linked to understanding how attention works because what is often needed is to effect a change of mind-set. If we want to change the operative political climate, perhaps attention needs to be directed to the constraints caused by our ways of formulating these problems in the first place.

**Ellen K. Levy**, a New York-based artist and educator, is Past President of the College Art Association (2004-2006) and works in the interface between art and complex systems.

## Nothing Beside Remains

America has become a memorial culture, commemorating traumas, like 9/11 and the Oklahoma bombing with large architectural monuments. These monuments incorporate lists of names of people related to the tragedy and seem to move the visitor of the site into the role of being a witness to what happened there. Maybe this is part of a larger impulse to frame the memory of the event and implicate a sense of victimhood.

As the occasion of the first decade since 9/11 approached, and with a number of exhibitions announced around this time, we arranged an exhibition at Jim Kempner Fine Art in New York focusing on our ice sculptures (September 15 – October 20, 2011).

We call these pieces “temporary monuments.” They’re constructed from ice, which seems the perfect material for this immaterial age and for sculpting the impact of forces seemingly invisible, yet strongly felt, at the beginning of the 21st century. What we like about them is the familiarity and materiality of ice creates an open, accessible space for the public.

People approach the sculptures. They touch them with their fingers in the urge to sense the bodily shift from solid to liquid, as if the sculpture itself were succumbing to a fever’s heat. The public seem to know that the strong, beautiful, physical presence they witness is elusive and fragile, too. Within hours, the sculptures totally disappear.

We document this metamorphosis, creating still and time lapse videos of broken words and shards of letters as the sculptures disintegrate. It’s this sense of inevitability, of transformation that we seek and also the dematerialization of language. We post images and videos of the sculpture simultaneously as the event unfolds on the Internet and on [blogs](#) as a way to open the social space around the sculptures.

We began to work in this way, with ice, in Jim Kempner Fine Art’s garden in 2006, when we presented an ice sculpture of the word “democracy” on the anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Two years later, we staged public exhibitions of the same word in Denver, CO, at the MCA Denver and on the grounds of the state capital in St. Paul, MN, during the 2008 presidential conventions in both cities.

### *The State of Things*

Provisions Library commissioned us to be part of BrushFire, a series of public interventions in the heartland during the presidential campaign of 2008. In Denver, the work was installed in front of the contemporary art museum during the Democratic Convention there and lasted throughout the night.



Ligorano/Reese, *The State of Things*, Denver, CO, August 28, 2008.

Two days later, we unveiled *The State of Things* on the grounds of the state capital in St. Paul, during the Republican Convention. People consumed the work and the sculpture lasted just five hours. The dismantling of democracy — its actual consumption by the public — was disturbing. We felt it oddly emblematic of what had transpired in the country during the previous eight years under the Bush administration.

#### *Main Street Meltdown*

On the 79th anniversary of the Great Depression, coinciding with the last week of the 2008 election, we staged *Main Street Meltdown* at Foley Square on the fringes of Wall Street. The installation drew the public and a great deal of media attention to ponder the significance of melting the word “economy” as major banking institutions faltered and contributed to a financial crisis that still seems far from over.





Ligorano/Reese, *Main Street Meltdown*, Foley Sq., NY, Oct. 29, 2008.

### *Morning In America*

In June of this year, during the height of the budget debate, we presented an ice sculpture of the word “middle class,” again, in the Kempner gallery’s garden. The title is taken from Ronald Reagan’s 1984 presidential campaign, which ushered in a new era of conservatism and has to be seen as a turning point for the great inequality of living standards now in our country.



Ligorano/Reese, *Morning In America* (June 18, 2011).

Taken as a whole, we feel these monuments may be the perfect markers for the opening decade of this century — first, democracy is broken, then, the economy ruined, now, the middle class is being disappeared.



Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese collaborate as **Ligorano/Reese**. Their website is at [ligoranoreese.net](http://ligoranoreese.net).

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**Greg Lindquist**

## **A Lengthening Shadow of Art History**

Every imaginable style and media in art appears valid, thriving, and practiced right now, or so it seems. Is this an appearance, through the proliferation of social and electronic media, artist websites, and blogs, or a reality, as represented by the globalization of art and international art fairs? It's difficult to discern, or even speculate. There's no accurate research or definitive statistics, in part because this requires lines to be drawn regarding quality, audience, patronage, and success.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s New York, there were fewer than 100 galleries, of those roughly 20 showed contemporary, "vanguard" work. According to WNYC's Leonard Lopate, there are currently over 600 galleries in New York as of March 13, 2011. If each gallery represents 20 artists, then 12,000 artists are represented in New York. This is not to mention the multitude of artists without a gallery living in and outside of New York. Many say the paradigm that New York is the center of the art world has dissolved. With art fairs and websites — and now, virtual art fairs — this sounds reasonable. Are galleries now the connoisseur's new boutiques? If the artists of the 1960s and 70s emphatically said a reductive "no" to a European tradition of art and a nonrelational position to culture, then the artists of my generation are saying an expanding "yes" to the multivalence of our historical and cultural expressions.

Is our art world a lengthening shadow in the twilight of its past? Perhaps this explains why there has been no coherent assessment of the past ten to twenty years of contemporary art. Even though in the 1960s, terms such as New Image Realist, Neo-Dada, Cool Art were all early attempts to sort out the impulses that were later described as Pop Art and Minimalism. Now, the best we can do is link new art to its canonized ancestry, its niched peers, or attach it to our personal, institutional, or corporate agenda.



Greg Lindquist, *Thanatopsis Revisited (Island, Sanctuary, The Physical World)*, 2011, acrylic on sheetrock, dimensions variable.

Again, is this a question of quality, a result of unbridled speculation from a bubble-gone-bust world economy? Beyond a plurality of media and style, many artists are working in multiple directions, on multiple projects at once. Do these economic times encourage artists to take more or less risks? Or have those risks and freedoms simply shifted from economic to creative? Many artists who were forced to seek full-time jobs for the first time admitted new freedoms in the studio, unshackled by a market's demand for a specific style of their work. Other artists have justified using credit cards to help them survive, carry them through existing or future projects.

The reality television show *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist* confirmed that personality does contribute to the aura (and success) of an artist's work. For a show that aimed to attract a more populist audience, it drew an audience representative of the art world at large, suggesting that no matter how accessible we make art, it will still remain a cultural phenomena that will only appeal to, be participated in and supported by a relatively small niche group of the general public. That *Work of Art* has been developed and reached a considerable critical success demonstrates, however, how few cultural places art has left to expand.

**Greg Lindquist** is an artist, writer, and professor. He will have a solo exhibition at Elizabeth Harris Gallery, NYC in February 2012. Lindquist is contributing editor for *artcritical.com*, the Art Books in Review editor at *The Brooklyn Rail*, and contributing writer for *ARTnews*. He teaches at Bergen Community College, Parsons, Pratt Institute, and the Museum of Modern Art.

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## Judith Linhares

I am generally suspicious of ideas that arrive too quickly and reveal too shallow a vision. I think of art making as an investigation. My tools for investigation are the language of painting. To put color against color, brush stroke against brush stroke, until you arrive at a place you could not have thought of and does not need justifying. That does not preclude involvement with politics in the “real” world. I am keenly aware of the changing nature of our politics in this country and the demands made on both artist and art to pull their own weight economically. The business model seems to reign everywhere and the greatest failure is to be a failed capitalist.



Judith Linhares, *Protege*, 2010, gouache on paper, 15"x 15".

I consider myself very fortunate to have found my way as an artist. I think it is a good life with many opportunities to find satisfaction, community, and meaning without subscribing to the madness of a reality based on the market place alone. Teaching continues to be a great way to earn some steady income and be in touch with up and coming generations of artists. However, education is not immune to the pressures of leaner and meaner times. I think the majority of artists are working and earning income outside of the studio.





Judith Linhares, *Blaze*, 2006, oil on linen, 5' x 6'.

The way that art is assigned value is changing all the time. The ability to create your own website has been very helpful for me as I am able to show my history more easily and conveniently. This has created a bigger audience for my work. The Internet has enabled more individuals to participate in the dialogue about art and ideas without having a sponsor or worrying about whether or not your ideas will create profit. The Internet and social media provide an alternative environment that offers an opportunity for artists to be known and heard. This phenomena generates more opportunity to see other artists work (at least in this limited form of the Internet) and more opportunity for critics to respond outside of the for profit model.

**Judith Linhares** is an artist living in New York. She teaches at the School of Visual Arts and exhibits at the Edward Thorp Gallery. She has shown her paintings widely in the United States and abroad since the 1970s.

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## Mary Lucier

### CHILDHOOD, 1949

#### What rises to the top

In one of my first recollections of early childhood, my mother and father, uncle and aunt are sitting in the living room of our house at the corner of Spring and Warren Streets in the small Ohio town where I grew up, listening to music, enjoying a few highballs. As I recall it was late afternoon. Suddenly Mother bursts into the room where I am playing and says urgently, "Mary, come in here right away. I want you to hear this." Her plea could not have been more commanding if she had grabbed me by the collar and dragged me. They were listening to Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* at full blast. I was five years old and completely overwhelmed by the sound. It has always seemed that the pulsing power of that music set the bar for levels of excitement and anxiety, pleasure

and apprehension I experienced so intensely throughout my childhood and which accompany me to this day.

Another indelible memory from that same period — perhaps even the same day — is of lying in bed at night and hearing my parents fighting downstairs. As the angry sounds rose up to me on the second floor, I began to feel I had to go down to do something about it, but in a typical way I sought consensus. My brother was much too young to understand, although he was awake and standing up in his crib; my older sister's comment was, "I hope they kill each other," as she pulled the pillow over her head and rolled over to go back to sleep. I then remember appearing in the doorway to the kitchen, as if it were not me but a high camera view of me, and I remember screaming "stop, stop!" My father was pacing around angrily, stripped down to his "guinea" T-shirt, showing his big muscles formed from years of working in his father's steel foundry. A small stream of blood trickled from his forehead where Mother had struck him with one of her high heels. My 37-year-old mother was slumped against the back door where he had thrown her — the door to the very back porch where she would serve lunch to men who rode the rails in the 1940s and knew our place as a "marked" house where a man could get a hot meal. Her back was against the door, her legs splayed on the floor. She looked dazed.



Downtown Grand Forks, North Dakota, 1997, after floodwaters ruptured a gas line, igniting a fire that claimed eleven office buildings. Photo by Eric Hylden, *Grand Forks Herald*.

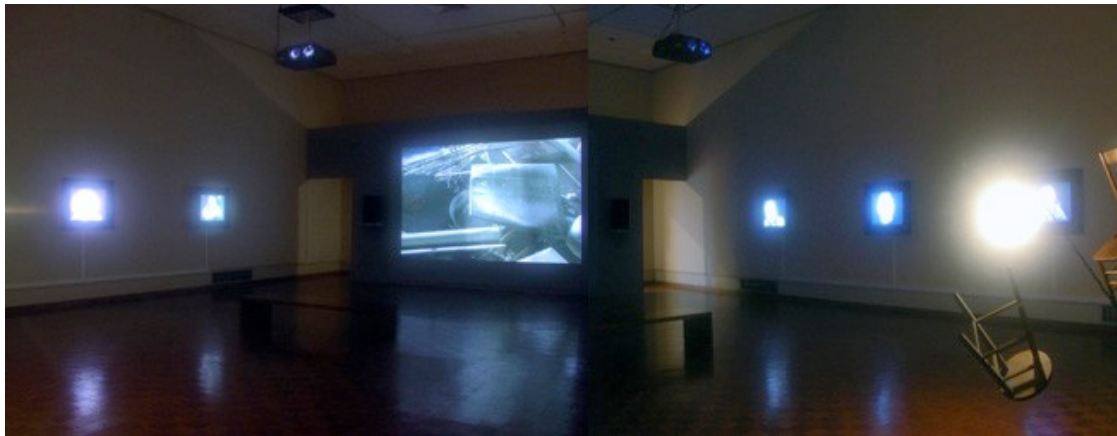
## **FLOODSONGS, 1997**

### **Inundated by the river**

In 1997, in Grand Forks, North Dakota, the Red River of the North crested at 54 feet — that's 26 feet above flood stage — following a winter of record blizzards and frigid cold.

Grand Forks is a city accustomed to hard weather and high water. It is ringed with 52-foot-high dikes and inhabited by a tough breed of Plains people who assiduously patrol their dikes in flood season and are willing to sandbag for days on end without rest until a “higher power” orders them to quit. When the National Guard did just that in April, thousands of citizens waded, paddled, or were carried/ferried through the muddy rising waters, leaving their homes and their life’s possessions to the river, not knowing what they might find when they were allowed to return. And just when they thought it couldn’t get any worse, it did. On April 19, fire broke out in the flooded downtown, destroying eleven city buildings.

A few months later a now-famous photograph of downtown Grand Forks ran in the Arts & Leisure section of the *New York Times* — an image that looked for all the world like Berlin or Dresden after the war. I was still pondering that image when Laurel Reuter from the North Dakota Museum of Art called asking if I might be interested in coming to Grand Forks to create a new piece there as part of a commemorative flood project in the museum (one of the few buildings not damaged by the flood). I’ve chased icebergs off Newfoundland, the burning rainforest in the Amazon, earthquakes and oil spills in Alaska, hurricanes in Charleston. Floods in the Great Plains? This I could do.



Panoramic view of *Floodsongs* at the Huntington Museum of Art, 11/3/07 – 1/14/08.

I traveled to Grand Forks numerous times to meet people, record their stories, and photograph their ravaged lives. I tracked around in what used to be people’s homes with my camera, intensely scrutinizing ruined interiors whose appalling damage and decay has severely altered how I look at any ordinary domestic scene. It’s the mud caked up to the second story. It’s the black mold coming back to life as spring advances. It’s the cherished objects and debris of everyday life thrown by the river from one room to another and heaped to the ceiling in great gooey piles. It’s shredded paint and wallpaper still peeling from walls that ooze. It’s family china and wine glasses in their cupboards and kids’ stuffed animals and sofas and TVs and photograph and books — all blackened and foul. It’s an evil stench of rotted food and mildew and sewer-soaked carpet. It’s warped floors and broken windows, appliances upended and twisted bicycles hanging off collapsed porches. This landscape of destruction has created a new template through

which I now view every living room, kitchen, bedroom, and bath. It's a sensation of total decay — like being inside a grave — and all of life becomes infected by it.



Mary Lucier, three participants in *Floodsongs: Marlene, Father Sherman, Shannon*, 1998, video/audio installation, dimensions variable.

The challenge here is not just to make art out of all this but to make a piece to be shown to the very people who experienced the disaster. What new insight or perspective or point of view can I bring to this place? What do I have to offer these resilient but exhausted inhabitants of a ruined city? What role does art play when confronted by life at the extreme edges of tolerance? Should the work be cathartic? palliative? commemorative? factual? transcendent? angry? optimistic? ugly? beautiful? spiritual? descriptive? immersive? objective? painful? reassuring? The challenge for me is no less than a complete reevaluation of the function of a work of art in the context of its intended audience who, after all, help to complete the piece and without whom it does not exist.

What do people talk about when they are encouraged to reflect on such an experience? After loss, anger, sadness, their thoughts inevitably begin to drift to death and illness and private sorrows that, like the old photographs in the flooded house, rise arbitrarily to the top of the murky waters.

**Mary Lucier** has been making video art and installations since the early 1970s. Her work has been shown in major museums including the Reina Sofia, Madrid, Whitney Museum, NY, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and Museum of Modern Art, NY. Lucier has been the recipient of many awards and fellowships. Current work includes a cycle of tapes and installations based in Japanese Buddhist Convents and a project scheduled for the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 2011 called "Genealogy: The Dutch Connection." Her work is represented by Lennon, Weinberg Gallery, NY, with video distribution by Electronic Arts Intermix.

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## Lenore Malen

privacy |prɪvəsēl|

noun

the state or condition of being free from being observed or disturbed by

Privacy always meant to me shutting the door to my studio. For years I even had a preference for windowless studios. Growing up in a small apartment in NYC I always considered my studios to be privileged spaces where I could be alone — free from being observed or disturbed by other human beings. But today we may be alone or together with other people, but the privilege of privacy is held by practically no one.



On the street I'm videotaped a half a dozen times a day and in my so-called private space — the studio — my browsing patterns are mined and my e-mail is analyzed for marketable data, and more. Communication on Facebook is short and collective and getting more so. It's alarming to think that I've come to accept such surveillance and new forms of sociability as necessary conditions of daily life. I know the political perils; the technological infrastructure is in place to implement them. So somehow I'm being duped. [In a recent essay](#) Griselda Pollock explains this a bit when she talks about "the abolition of a public sphere by commodified privacy that masquerades as expanding inclusion."

These are scary times and life seems qualitatively different from anything I remember in the recent past, even thinking back to 1960s and 1970s. It seems that everybody knows this. The shift from the public to the new private and the absence of personal privacy are as disturbing as anything else. In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt writes that "without that space or time of privacy, away from the implacable bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene, there could be no possibility of the nurturing of the singularity of the self, a self that could make a substantive contribution to exchanges about the common good."



Lenore Malen, *I Am The Animal*, 2010, 3-channel video installation, 6 min. 29 sec. (Total running time: 13 min. 22 sec.) Glyndnor Gallery, Wave Hill, NY, Sept. 21 – Dec. 1, 2011.



Lenore Malen, *I Am The Animal*, 2010, 3-channel video installation, 7 min. 9 sec. (Total running time: 13 min. 22 sec.) Glyndnor Gallery, Wave Hill, NY, Sept. 21 – Dec. 1, 2011.



Lenore Malen, *I Am The Animal*, 2010, 3-channel video installation, 5 min. 20 sec. (Total running time: 13 min. 22 sec.) Glyndnor Gallery, Wave Hill, NY, Sept. 21-Dec. 1, 2011.

I was raised in the liberal tradition to believe without question in what Arendt calls “the singularity of self.” But human beings are also a herd, a pack, and a hive. For two years (2008-2009) I kept bees until an allergy forced me to give them away. During summers I sat beside the hives observing them. When I watched them it made me think about our own blind animality, our hive mind. In my video installation, *I Am The Animal*, 2010, and in photography (both produced by The New Society for Universal Harmony) I’ve re-imagined human culture as a hive. For the video I intercut my own documentary footage of interviews with beekeepers (and shots I took of the Hudson River) with found footage. I trolled the web for clips that suggested the activity and the social organization in the hive — seemingly frantic, but actually purposeful and highly organized.

The installation itself wraps around the corner of a space so the viewer is not looking head on, but rather at an angle and is partially enveloped inside the space of the projection. You're aware of where you sit or stand in relation to the work and also in relation to other viewers. No privacy here either. And as I write this I wonder if maybe I'm engaging in the very practices that I also fear.

**Lenore Malen** uses photography, video, audio installation, and performance to examine extreme belief systems and the sciences and technologies that inform them. *I Am the Animal* will be featured in a solo exhibition at Tufts University from Jan. 19 – April 1, 2012.

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**Ann McCoy**

## **9/11 and Ghosts of an Atomic Childhood**

In first grade they taught us the bomb drill, to crawl under our desks when the alarm went off. When the big day came, Sister Imilda took the class to Becky's house to view the event on the tiny black and white TV in her living room. Many of us did not have television sets in the '50s so the novelty made the event even more memorable. The countdown came and we saw the mushroom shaped cloud of the A Bomb fill the tiny screen. The A Bomb in the Nevada desert was the first image I ever saw on a television and it remained burned in my retina for years.

My father was a chemical engineer who worked at Rocky Flats (a center for nerve gas), not Los Alamos. The scientific community was tiny and we knew most of the players. George Gamow the physicist created the Mister Tompkins series for the neighborhood children and Frank Oppenheimer (brother of J. Robert) taught high school science in New Mexico after he was blacklisted. My father worked on a tungsten bi-product for the nose cones of rockets and with something called the "rare earths." We lived between Boulder and Santa Fe due to my father's asthma. Our parent's ill health created a gypsy childhood marked by uncertainty. When I was fifteen, my father died of cancer, as did many of his co-workers and those who had been onsite for the A Bomb. We did not learn until they closed Rocky Flats years later that it was radioactive.

My childhood neighbor was Dr. Earl Morris who did the reconstruction of the great kiva at Aztec National Monument. By the sixth grade, I was obsessed with kivas and Indians. Around Christmas we went to Taos to see the buffalo dancers come off the top of the pueblo with torches in a night dance. At dusk the Shalako, eight-foot figures crossed the bridge into the Zuni pueblo. The kachina, the Shalako, and the mudheads, were real to me and danced in my dreams. The snake dance on the Hopi mesa was the best. A Hopi girl at the Sisters of Loretta school told me the elders slept in the kiva with the snakes the night before and lowered their vibration to match the snakes. They cradled the snakes in their arms all night before emerging from the kiva with them in their mouths and hands to dance.

My brother Mickey and I would hike to the old kivas at Bandalero below Los Alamos. We always took his Boy Scout canteen because we feared the radiation seeping into the streams below. Los Alamos was frightening, a radioactive city filled with crazy scientists out to destroy the world. Strange scientists came to dinner taking about things called “tensors and vectors,” to this day I have no idea what they are. C.P. Snow’s two cultures explained it all to me. The scientists were the opposing camp of unfeeling lunatics, and the Indians and the artists lived in the sane camp. I would flunk math so as not to have to join them. I avoided chemistry like the plague. My dad and the scientist were always off on bourbon-fueled rants about politics, the wire taps, the House on Un-American Activities, and more science; avoiding them was the best policy. My brother and I entered a parallel universe to preserve our sanity. With our dog Blackie, we lived in the hills and rode donkeys, and communicated with the hawks whose wings needed mending.

The Christian Brothers at my brother’s school were working on an excavation below the altar. When we helped them dig for Indian artifacts they would tell us stories of the miraculous staircase built to the choir loft by St. Joseph. The Catholic world of miracles, the world of the kiva, the dances, and the excavation merged. It is the sense of wonder, mystery, the numinous, that move me as an artist. Being a member of the Catholic left, notwithstanding Michael Moore, has never been easy. We have no Anti-Defamation League so I take a lot of heat especially from ex-Catholics. A creepy Pope and pederast priests make those of us who stick it out for Thérèse of Lisieux or the Black Madonna tough it out. Helping the poorest of the poor has stayed with me.



Ann McCoy, *Lunar Birth*, 2001, colored pencil and watercolor on paper on canvas, 9' x 14'.

Being a Jungian has been the second black mark on my record, dreams have no place in the art world. These views are very much out of fashion in a theoretical art world with a sociological bent. Personal spiritual narrative is left to an outsider artist like Henry Darger, and relegated to craft museums. Tibetan ethnographic collections stress the fact that spirit must be foreign.



Today's art world is a miserable place for an artist who can plainly see that celebrity and auction prices arouse more interest than what one has to say. Art as a commodity to be traded like shares is the new rule. After 9/11 it all seemed to get worse, not better. Around 9/11 the world and my world came apart in a major way, the falling building and the ash brought back the world of the A Bomb, the paranoia, and hard heartedness. A radiation spread through the art world. New York seemed to fall into the hands of the klepto-Capitalists. Everything got very tough. Rents went sky high. Many of us lost our studios, and our galleries if we were not selling. New York transformed from the easy Bohemian city into the Wall Street killer society where art was the "art market," parties with limos, celebrity, summers in the Hamptons. Journals catered to the market to a large degree by advertising for articles timed to coincide with art fairs and auctions.

I have always wanted to be an artist, I am just not so sure I want to be in this art world. A lot of my friends feel the same way and long for what is excluded in today's art world: feeling, magic, healing, spirit, animals, personal narrative and ritual. Art work about renewal is happening in New Orleans not at the Whitney. A few things encourage me: I teach art history in a class called "Visual Iconography" in the School of Drama at Yale. I can lecture on mythological structure like the hogan based on the Navajo creation myth where beaver builds the first house. My boss is a goddess worshiper and doesn't care what I say. The theater is a liminal realm with multi dimensions where feeling connections are primary. My students are interested in Beuys and AA Bronson's urban shamanism, not Adorno. They don't read *Artforum*. Discussions about the symbolism of water can fill an hour.

I long for a parallel art world where sacred animals like the bears in Herzog's cave of dreams lead the way once again. Oh to have a bear skull on an altar like the worshipers at Chauvet. Our connection to the bees, bears, and Beuys's coyote feel like the way forward to me. An artist named Rosemarie Padovano whose father was a priest and mother was a nun made a piece where she was bathing her father's feet in honey. I wept when I saw the video. Beuys's honey pumps are again flowing and hopefully we are seeing the "twilight of the bullies." Rosemarie told me she too feels at odds with the art world as do many younger artists. Would bathing the feet of those who have so corrupted it with honey help? What rituals for renewal do we possess? We have no Eleusinian mysteries only the Easter bunny. I called my brother tonight to arrange for a trip to the border where he works to save the desert Bighorn sheep as well as Indian tribes threatened by the border fence. I need to hear what my brother, the Indians, and the desert tortoise have to say. Like the A bomb, 9/11 has left a toxic environment in its wake. I long for a dance about agricultural renewal and the reverence for the earth I felt in the kiva.

**Ann McCoy** is a painter, sculptor, and installation artist. She worked with C.G. Jung's heir Dr. C.A. Meier in Zurich for twenty-five years doing research in alchemy and depth psychology. She teaches art history and Visual Iconography in the graduate Yale School of Drama design department.

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## Ann Messner

The questions that *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* has invited a response to echo like pop-rocks in my mind — sequenced one after another and another these questions dig into the more unsettling of subject matters that define this time. It is easy to find oneself overwhelmed . . . the obscenity of *justifiable* wars, the devastation experienced by so many from ongoing natural catastrophe, the increasing economic disparities worldwide, the jaw-dropping myopic self-interest of those in power . . . and in the studio one's quiet vision inevitably dwarfed amidst the swirl. At this crucial time of deep upheaval and crisis, whether challenged on an individual level as an artist or as any member of society, the pull to submit to the seductive diversion of mediated spectacle so easily interrupts, even crushes, the more subdued and thoughtful response. How can a creative thinker hope to produce a meaningful presence in the world that is not merely the production of a feel-good, look-good entertainment? This is at the heart of the inquiry — is it not?

This past year the decency clause turned 20. This signified a prescient marker along a timeline where the autonomy (and integrity) of artistic expression has been persistently challenged and undermined. The perception of the role of the artist as an active and meaningful participator in the development of society is marked as antagonistic — so often alleged that left to their own devices artists become simply purveyors of hedonistic values. In these 20 years we have witnessed the slow but determined whittling of public support for the arts and the entrenching of a corporate model of cultural production — a model based on capital intensity and reliance on the production of spectacle. Artists hedge the degree to which they are willing to put themselves on the line and challenge a system of co-option. After all who really wants to jeopardize any manner of success one has managed to accrue, even if it implies the compromising of an examined notion of truth.

I suspect these comments risk being a rhetorical answer to the questions posed, but nevertheless I believe they locate the heart of the challenge we, as artists, face. How might we reconsider and recognize the significance of the countless small (although each painstaking in itself) resistant decisions one makes in the studio that in themselves may seem of no consequence but when viewed through the telescoping of time take on larger proportion. The implications of how we as artists practice cannot be more underscored.

Not long ago I was standing in front of Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, a well-worn stop along the prescribed itinerary of a culture pilgrim's visit to Rome (for the secular viewer less an account of conversion but rather the capture of the moment at which something hitherto denied or unclarified becomes revealed). I realized as I pondered the narrative of the duplicitous hand pointing that in reality, standing in front of

me, was William Kentridge pointing as well (towards the painting) — a real time fracture within the mythical narrative of artistic divination. That instance, by chance, of my seeing this gesture was a gift and, as such, it has provided me generous space for reflection. We each hold the option to take our place in the procession of a great tradition, within which it is the task of the artist to point, to make visible what we do not want to see, at whatever the cost and at whatever the risk to each of us as individuals. We stand not alone but upon the shoulders of those who stood before along this long line of collective practice.



ann messner, *kentridge ponders caravaggio*, digital snapshot, 2011

[ann messner](#) is a visual artist. lives in ny

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## Robin Mitchell

In the earliest days of the first Mac computers in the 1980s I wondered how I, as an artist, could use, and would use a computer. I could see no need of it as I was a real *hands on* kind of person and not technically inclined. In the office at the university where I taught there was a first-generation Mac. Someone turned it on for me and I entered my syllabus and my resume. I was intrigued by the “spell check” and “print preview” capabilities. I had to have one immediately.

As an artist my use of the computer has expanded greatly over the years. Not only can I

use the computer to organize and edit images of my artwork, I have a website, [www.robinmitchell.net](http://www.robinmitchell.net), and an Internet presence. I create images, expand on images, and use the Internet to communicate and do research. Every day I look at images and research all kinds of images and reference materials related to my art making. I have been able to make high-quality, low-cost books about my artwork. I scanned some small abstract paintings of mine that were gouache on paper. In Photoshop I was able to manipulate and reconfigure those images to create some whole new images that became the foundation for a body of paintings that I am still investigating. I probably would not have been able to make these works otherwise.

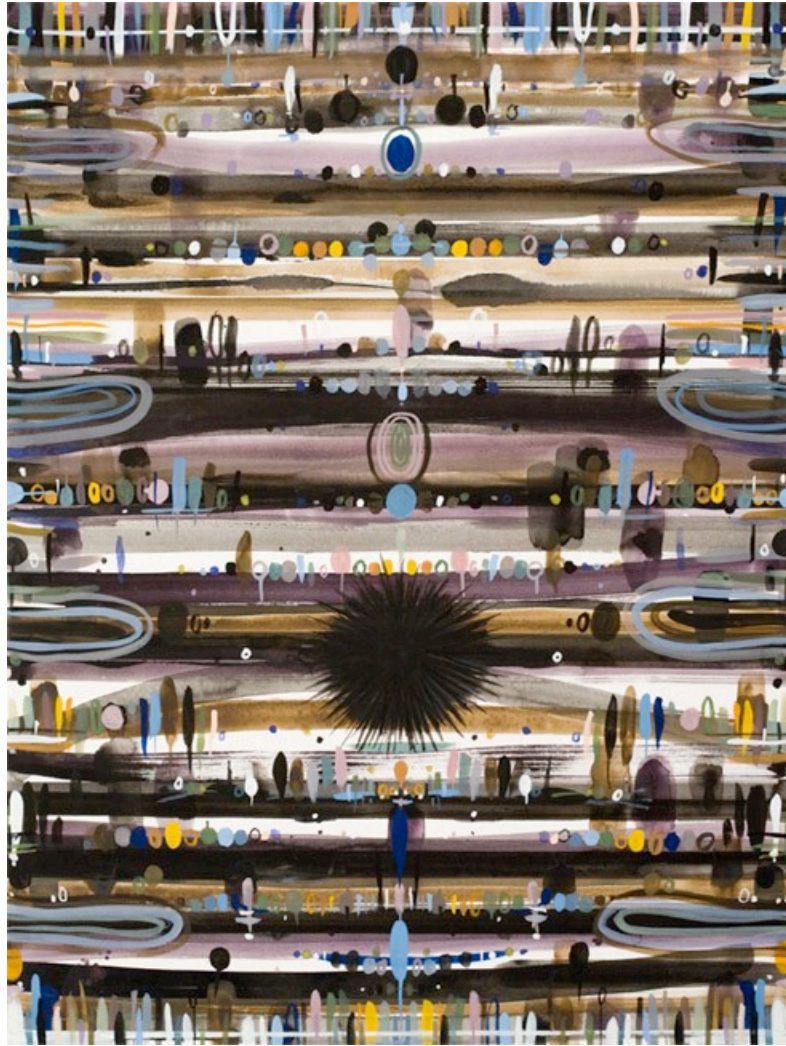


Robin Mitchell, *Mirror*, 2005, digital Iris print, 30" x 22".

It is difficult to separate what the computer affords me as an artist and an individual from how the Internet affects my usage of both. I am an artist who relies strongly on my intuition and I believe that we educate our intuition. The Internet becomes an additional resource for this. The ability to peruse gallery and museum sites to see current and past exhibitions is an asset. Experiencing art in person is fundamental to appreciating it, but if I cannot attend an exhibit in person it is an excellent tool. Many galleries and museums have taken great advantage of presenting exhibits and artwork on the Internet. It does change how we view much contemporary art in the context, content, and the scale. On



the positive side it makes for a smaller community in the best sense and I feel more connected to the art *world* in a larger sense.



Robin Mitchell, *RM 08 10*, 2008, gouache on paper, 24" x 18".

I do worry that images of my artwork can be used in ways I have no control over. I have seen others post work of mine on the Internet that was cropped, poorly lit, out of focus, and used in ways I could have never imagined or would approve. Images of my artwork can reach more people, but what will they do with it, is of concern to me.

My family recently gave my mother, who is also an artist, an iPad. She had no experience with computers and was resistant to even trying one. She railed against it. She ranted that it robbed one of their privacy, their creativity, and their individuality. She still feels this way but each day she forwards me images, videos, and articles she finds of interest on the Internet. She has become the search engine maven. I agree with her in many ways but I find the benefits far outweigh the negatives.

**Robin Mitchell** is an artist living and working in Santa Monica, CA. She has been a Mac enthusiast from the first day she used one.

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## Erik Moskowitz and Amanda Trager

A few years ago, we visited Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and walked amidst the stone ruins of the long-extinct Anasazi Indians. Steep mesa walls dwarf the network of intricate structures, everything the same pale color of sandstone. The bracketing of a specific civilization thus reverberates against the sweeping timeline of the location itself. It's unclear why the Anasazi didn't survive, though possibly it was on account of warfare over dwindling resources (drought, deforestation).

We arrived late in the day, off-season, just as the sun was beginning to set. Driving the very, very long dirt road into the supernatural stillness of the canyon was unnerving. No one at all was around. At least that's what we thought until we finally came to the visitor center to discover one other family. The parents were asking the usual questions before venturing out. Their two young children — like dogs in a storm — were huddled together beneath a table, seemingly terrified.

Vast, open spaces can have that kind of paralyzing effect. So can questions about one's work, delivered like nasty pellets of rain in innocuously titled paragraphs. A summation might go: Do one's times affect one's art work? Or, how eagerly does one embrace this relation? If moved by questions of a topical nature, which ideally includes an understanding of (art) history — how does one fashion a response in a form considered to be art? (Even if that form is understood as a byproduct in the overall schema of the work.)

The parents at Chaco were exhaustively thorough in their questioning of the sole ranger at the visitor center and this took some time. The kids relaxed a bit but stayed put in their spot under the table. They started to talk about television shows (*Lost*, *24*) and became engaged in various scenarios of make-believe. When the parents were at last ready to explore, the children offered some resistance but we watched as the whole family made their way out into the open canyon in the last hour of sunlight.

Incorporating current events and questions of contemporaneity into works of art????!! We rely on our day-to-day parsing of conditions as two people who, living and working together, tend to "go over things." The particular ways that our separate streams of thought and fancy become form is probably what's most essential about our project. Allegory — surprise! — is key. A piece, which is currently in production, traces the tale of a possibly-doomed love affair between two men: one a billionaire businessman who refuses to collect art; the other a performance artist for whom the art world no longer holds interest. The story spins through raffish parties in resplendent Manhattan pads but eventually slows down. *Way* down, to a halt. Improbably, the two lovers find themselves

alone together and naked in a cave. Will they be able to find their way out? Do they even want to?

**Erik Moskowitz and Amanda Trager** have been collaborating since 2006. Their narrative audio-visual work is presented cinematically and as installation.

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**Beverly Naidus**

## **We Have Only This Moment**

The other day I took the bus with my sixteen-year-old son from our home on the eastside of Capitol Hill to the site of Occupy Seattle in downtown. We carried a hastily-scrawled sign (not one of my finest works) that said, "WE CAN + ARE MAKING THE FUTURE WE WANT! DIRECT DEMOCRACY! We arrived at Westlake Plaza to a diverse crowd filled with people making eye contact, reading each other's signs, smiling and occasionally breaking into informal conversations. Some very skillful and persistent drumming made the event feel more like a party, and many people danced uninhibitedly, with their signs in hand, while others stood packed on the curbs, holding up their messages for the passing drivers. Wild honking and gesticulating from passengers brought cheers from the crowd. We were interviewed by a friendly local documentary filmmaker and casually spoke with some strangers about what had brought them there. In small groups, we talked about the dynamism and fragility of this moment, and how important it felt to us. We shared passing worries about infiltration of this nascent movement by outside agitators and then delighted each other with tales about the self-organizing collective.

When my son was much younger we went to many anti-war demonstrations, but the inability of those demonstrations to stop the invasions and ongoing wars had made him cynical and made me less interested in street protest as a form of activism. That day we both felt something very different; we could see that out of a place of deep desperation had come an excitement and a sense of possibility. At one point, my son asked me if I felt that all these "occupations" would amount to anything, and I said, "YES" with a conviction that startled both of us. He knows that I am cautious about making such pronouncements. So I talked about critical mass, a convergence of needs and concerns, and the potential for momentum. This teen's patience with his mother's rant was notable, and he soon wandered off to sit with the Tactical Committee who were discussing strategies for the upcoming days. The conversations about Direct Actions were not easy for him to understand, but he stuck it out. As the rally and march were about to begin, the fatigue that I'd been combating all week returned and I wanted to go home, but my son urged me on saying, "mom, this will give you the energy you need." He was right; we walked with the crowds, chanted and danced, and my energy revived.

I carried that energy into my classes at the university three days later. I am teaching two courses this quarter, “Eco-art: Art in Response to the Environmental Crisis” and “The Artist as Visionary and Dreamer.” “Occupying” is definitely a discussion relevant to both classes. My students had heard me speak about Occupy Wall Street during the first week of classes at the end of September, but this past week I was able to share some stories that were not based on YouTube clips, blogs, or Twitter feeds. They had been using their critical thinking skills to analyze the mainstream media’s coverage of the Occupy actions, but now I could tell them how it feels to walk in the space that is reclaimed and what it means to be around folks who feel a change in their bones. I asked my students if they feel that this is their moment, our moment. They want to believe it, but so much is holding them in the “wait and see” place.

In the coming weeks we will make art that explores the world they want to live in; reconstructive visions for the future. We will install whatever they create on campus with the hope of provoking a larger dialog about the issues that surround the occupations.

The Occupations will continue to ripple into everyday life and art making. Something has been turned on that has been sitting on the edge of being for several decades. All the tools for participatory democracy, non-violent communication, consensus building and collaborative, engaged art making have been practiced on the margins for decades. The fruit of this work has ripened, is being harvested and proliferating. It tastes really good right now.

As the chants of “a people united will never be defeated” and “we are the 99%” echo off the city streets, the memory of this moment is being embedded in the global consciousness. The poetry of slow speeches repeated in unison creates a magic that is hard to forget, as are the many buoyant and playful interventions that animate our screens. But when we actually occupy the public spaces, embodying the liberatory potential of this moment, we create what has to happen if we are to survive as a species on this planet.

**Beverly Naidus** has been using art to dream, question, stir things up, and find community for a few decades. She has been teaching others to do the same for almost as long. Naidus is the author of [\*Arts for Change: Teaching Outside the Frame\*](#) (New Village Press, 2009). She is part of the interdisciplinary faculty of the University of Washington, Tacoma, and lives in Seattle.

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**Joseph Nechvatal**

## **Viractuality in the Webbed Digital Age**

This essay will investigate the idea of the emergence of the *viractual* era in lieu of the age of digital corporate conglomerates and the web 2.0.<sup>1</sup> First, I will formulate an argument for what the *viractual* is and what *viractualism* is about.<sup>2</sup>



*Viractuality* is a theory that strives to see, understand, and create interfaces between the technological and the biological. The basis of the viractual conception is that virtual producing computer technology has become a noteworthy means for making and understanding contemporary life (and thus art). This virtual production<sup>3</sup> brings artists to a place of paradox where one finds increasingly the emerging of the computed (the virtual) with the uncomputed corporeal (the actual). This fusion motif<sup>4</sup> — which tends to contradict some central techno clichés of our time — is what I call the *viractual*. It is the poetic welding of fusion/paradox that accounts for much of the potency and transportative agency of the theory — and the art that it produces.



Joseph Nechvatal, *the birth Of the viractual*, 2001, computer-robotic assisted acrylic on canvas, 70" x 70".

Digitization is a key metaphor for viractuality in the sense that it is the elementary translating procedure today. But the viractual recognizes and uses the power of digitization while being culturally aware of the glamorous values of monumentality and permanency — qualities that can be found in some previous compelling analog art that grounded itself in the spiritual value of beauty.

For me, viractualism signals a new emerging sensibility respecting the integration of certain aspects of science, technology, myth, and consciousness — an aesthetic consciousness struggling to attend to the prevailing contemporary spirit of our age in which everything, everywhere, all at once is connected in a rhizomatic web of transmission. But the lurking viractual realm is also a political-spiritual *chaosmos* in the sense that new forms of order may emerge in such a way that any form of order is only

temporary and provisional. Within viractual creation and understanding, all signs are subject to boundlessly inverted semiosis — which is to say that they are translatable into other signs.<sup>5</sup>

Now, what it means for our webbed digital age.

The history of art and the history of technology are often marked by ruptures. Most histories overlook moments where deep fusion occurs, as I see happening now with viractuality. Perhaps another temporal model for cultural consciousness is needed. Something other than the majestic forward and upward thrusting model of evolution. Something more humbly folded<sup>6</sup> in on itself. Or perhaps something even more insinuatingly penetrating: as in a viral-host model. I choose the viral model — so let us now consider the activities of the viractual as a viral surge of emergent and embedded critical consciousness that offers us a formal clarity true to our webbed digital age.

After a long period of temporal disjunctions following the demise of the modernist project and the excessive abuses of the post-modernist non-project, I wish to now suggest that a new clarifying paradigm has emerged based not, however, on the ideals of the raw, the pure or the reduced — but rather on the internal tic-tic-tic bomb time of the embedded and patient viral attack.<sup>7</sup>

When looking at cultural production through the paradigm of the viral viractual, many former binary oppositions fail to function in a stable way — thus transfusing consciousness. Most basically, even the definitions of life and death are destroyed by this model; as a biological virus is precisely neither alive nor not-alive — as it depends for its existence totally on its host's viability. The seeing-power of the host/parasite model alone must not escape us. A virus cannot — and does not — exist alone. It exists solely by entering in and coupling. So when we add the once binary definitions of virtual and actual into the voluptuous viral model of existence — and observe how they interact — a form of both/and fusion difference appears dominant within the scope of the viractual lens.



Joseph Nechvatal, *scOpOphilia*, 2009, computer-robotic assisted acrylic on canvas & screen with viral attack animation, 20" x 20" & screen.

What I find exciting about this viral viractuality is the tendency here to discover and produce stuttering, nervous discrepancies between art's internal theoretical and external manufacturing mechanisms. For example, the instantaneous reading of reduced modernist form<sup>8</sup> is problematized by buried (often cryptic) fugitive qualities of informational de-materiality.<sup>9</sup>

So viral-viractuality means cultivating another form of sumptuousness more concerned with inter-related passage than avant-garde rupture. Its leitmotif is an interest in seductive infiltrations.<sup>10</sup> But it is revolutionary in a new non-ruptured sense (what a dreaded sense of stress waiting for a rupture that may or may never come) as it uses an inner-outer confusion (or double sense writ grand) that is not clearly obvious on first-take by design.

It is an idea of viral temporal interruption aligned with the haunting quality of the phantasmagorical — and that is what lends it its sense of authenticity in our age of de-materialized corporate informational codes.

1. Web 1 or Web 2: what is the real difference here? In 1999 I already sketched out a theory of a post-electronic art in which what matters is no longer clear identities, or logos, or distinctive characters but rather dense hidden phantasmagorical forces developed on the basis of inclusion: where things are represented only from the depth of an inclusive virtual density — perhaps adumbrated and darkened by its obscurity — but bound tightly together and inescapably grouped by the vigor that is hidden in its digital depths. Such dynamic, semi-abstract representational forms (with their rhizomatizing connections) and the non-blank space that never isolates them (but rather surrounds their outline with excess) — all these might be presented to our gaze in a post-corporate matrix where only an already vivacious virtual state is articulated in an insinuated nether darkness that is reprogramming our eyes towards a phantasmagorical

visual discourse which is both capricious and, paradoxically, informationally honest. See: *Henri Michaux's Mescaline Engendered Drawings (and their diagrammatic relevance to RHIZOME's "STARRYNIGHT" programming)* @ <http://www.eyewithwings.net/nechvatal/rhizo05.htm>

2. As I work on this idea in my own work, I will illustrate my argument with examples from my own art practice. But by no means is the concept of *viractualism* limited to my art activity alone. On the contrary, it is a widely used, perhaps dominant technique, even if it has not yet been fully recognized as being so, yet.

3. A digital production that has been going on for a long time now.

4. A key influence in the formation of my theory of viractuality was Gilles Deleuze's consideration of Spinoza, the 17th-century philosopher who merged mind and matter into one material. Moreover, it is a concept close to that of augmented reality, which is the use of transparent displays worn as see-through glasses on which computer data is projected and layered.

5. Here, of course, it is possible to find resonances and affinities between formal and conceptual opposites. Hence, I wish to suggest that the term and concept viractual (and *viractualism* or *viractuality*) maybe helpful in defining our now third-fused inter-spatiality reality — a reality forged from the meeting of the virtual and the actual.

6. As Deleuze suggests.

7. So I am suggesting here a seething project of critique within critique that re-energizes the broken gaps of temporal displacement that followed the demise of modernism and the appearance of now listless — super fragmented — irresponsible — glut of post-modern de-construction.

8. Also typical of photography and pop art form.

9. Unsustainable forms of opposition that are exploded by the viral viractual time bomb are: the mind-body dualism typical of the Western philosophical tradition, thus the once held opposition between the physical and the conceptual, reality and representation, nature and culture, presence and potentiality, and the (most central to my artistic production) still and the moving. A clear enthusiasm for post-humanist metamorphosis is evident here, where the interchange between one body and another dominates. Other now exploded ruptures include: the classical and romantic, repose and energy, carnality and spirituality, organization and vigor, simplicity and complexity, smooth and rough, clarity and chaos, restraint and effusion, sparseness and abundance, abstraction and specificity, stability and stress, composure and imbalance, plan and chance.

10. Yet I believe it still can be said that viral-viractuality is revolutionary in that it surfs the wake of the digital revolution while, in my case, participating in the aesthetics of glitch and the art of noise.

**Joseph Nechvatal** has worked with computer painting and computer animation since 1986. His book of essays *Towards an Immersive Intelligence* was published by Edgewise Press in 2009. In 2011 his book *Immersion Into Noise* was published by the University of Michigan Library's Scholarly Publishing Office in conjunction with Open Humanities Press.

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## Craig Olson

## MEANING?

In the (post)modern fear culture of global capital, wage slavery economics, and secular authoritarian financial entitlement, we move quietly forward like shadows before Babylon. The stability of civilization is questioned daily, from the collapse of world economies to the inexplicable disappearance of the world's honeybees to the rapid erosion of the polar ice caps (*can you hear the rumble of distant thunder?*). Moloch's toxic presence, with its petro-chemical geologic explorations and commodity futures, has



cut itself off from the spiritual sources of life, steadily exhausting Earth's energies, and disintegrating her into so many disconnected fragments of greed and power (from the oil fields to the universities).



Tamara Gonzalez, *Critical Edge*, 2011, spray paint on canvas, 58" x 60".

We search for an alternative locale, a psychospiritual state, an existential coalition of weird religions rooted in the tactile terrifying physical world. Our location? Amorphous. Our intentions? Change. We cultivate an atmosphere of the magical and perverse, so that every stick in the refuse emerges particular. Like W.C. Williams before us we wander, “drunk with goats or pavement.” It’s a quality of perception that defines our inebriation, it’s our sorcery that prolongs and expands itself to include others (THE Other). A painting or poem can create around itself a psychic/physical space that opens onto untrammelled expression, untold vistas of the imagination. We maintain that the manipulation of inert materials into fluid symbols can cause events to happen as well as private epiphanies. Archetypes and quotidian places, wine and ganja, basalt and the Blue Rose, fingers dipped in black ink — they lead us to a moment wholly saturated in its own limitless particular. Our tactics are rooted in this secret Art, our goals occulted in its luminous vapor. All one is, is a body.

The beginning of the new (deregulated) world order has brought us swift and improved free-dumb in the form of prison kulture at airport security checkpoints, where you can eat pure American shit for \$571 one-way, with a \$25 baggage fee. Digital corporate conglomerates and the web 2.0 assure us moment to moment, “No culture without mediation!” “Virtual communities” take the place of real human presence while so-called social networking effortlessly streamlines us deeper into the belly of the

commercial/surveillance demographics of isolated diversion. The wholesale disappearance of knowledge, of sexuality, and of all the subtle senses is only a click away. We, shifting in the shadows, embrace the contrary impulse — and know that it is the imagination on which reality rides.



Peter Acheson, *Door in Morocco*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 18".

Distrusted and feared, surveilled and censored, we are *still* called upon to answer, *what is its meaning?* As if it were another of their products, as if it were answering to a determined definition or a use not its own, as if they were so entitled. We hear this elusive imp in the most obvious way one listens, with all the physical reception that being human constitutes. What to say in the end? Robert Creeley wrote, “One knows too well that what’s to be said has only its own occasion.” But now he’s gone. Love or avarice? Memory or meaning? The Devil’s in the details, divinity in a dewdrop. Meaning can never amount to more than the sum of its determined intimacies. It is our Art that allows us to navigate this constellation of distances, to give it our human summary if nothing else. Did it matter? Who was there? We flutter like moths against the screen, that tenacious fabric of inexhaustible yearning. As for the meaning — we’ll keep ours till the last.

**Craig Olson** is an artist and writer living in New York City.

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## Our Literal Speed

*This event took place in the Old Bridge Room at the St. James Hotel in Selma, Alabama, 21 October 2011.*

*Two well-dressed actors enter the room. Abbey Shaine Dubin plays an art writer and John Spelman plays an artist. They stand, holding papers that one assumes are the scripts for the performance. They occasionally refer to them for guidance. They begin.*

Abbey Shaine Dubin: John, let me hit you with some rapidfire questions: how do artistic intuition and creativity function for you? Secondly, how is your work ideally distributed to

a public? Lastly, what does it mean for an artist to be working in the age of social networking?

John Spelman: Well, that's a lot to respond to, but I guess this, uh, mediated sociality means that your professional activity turns you into a cast of characters, you know, extravagant avatars, and now playing the role of the talkative schizophrenic just demonstrates that you are a well-adjusted, with-it kind of person.

ASD [*smiling*]: So, then, to be a successful artist you need to be a schizophrenic ?  
[*pause*] So are you?

JS [*smiling*]: Are I what?

ASD: A successful schizophrenic?

JS: No, I don't think so, not yet — on both counts — but you can be the judge of that. The key thing for me is to avoid being associated with any overly defined set of skills. As an artist, you need to float in the flow of events, be ready to become anonymous, and then abandon that anonymity at the right time.

ASD: That way you become a symbol of a supremely self-determined subjectivity. While the writer's role is, what? To provide an atmosphere of high-end humanistic quality? A kind of neo-traditional psychological décor for the ruling class? Is that it?

JS: That *sounds* right. I'm not sure. I mean, we're both working on the intellectual and creative side of the hospitality industry, which is a strange place to be. We serve as essentially decorative entities within the Mansion of Global Capitalism . . .

ASD [*cuts in*]: Hold it. Let me get this straight. You're saying that the higher you go in the socio-economic register, the more explicitly traditional your [*scare quotes*] "hospitality" activities should be?

JS: That's right. A maid on Park Avenue should act the way a maid on Park Avenue acted in 1911, but if you work as a service rep for a phone company, your responsibilities change every week. And since art is at the highest high end of the hospitality industry, it fetishizes the idea of the Artist-Visionary; although, functionally speaking, any random cat video on YouTube stands to have a lot more cultural impact than anything I'm doing here today. The distinctive creative idiom of our time is maturing somewhere else.

ASD: And where's that?

JS [*wistfully*]: That's the point. No one really knows. It's as if today, all confident statements made in *appropriate* places by *appropriate* people at *appropriate* times, all gestures that affirm: "*As an important communicator, I am communicating this important information to you . . .*"

ASD *nods*.

JS: those kinds of gestures seem empty . . . superfluous . . .

ASD [*cuts in*]: You're saying then that the future of art belongs to gestures that, for all intents and purposes, have *never been made*? [*looks questioningly*]

JS [*reflecting*]: Uh, well . . . basically, I guess, yes. Yes.

ASD: So, only if we are unsure *who* did it, *what* they did, *where* they did it, *why* they did it, and *how* they managed to do it, only then do our minds really become constructively engaged. We have so much information, so much cultural conditioning that only a deficit of information can now yield something, umm, compelling.

JS: You can make all kinds of half-baked analogies, but, yeah, it's kind of like the Impressionists ditching the proper academic rendering of the world to manifest their surroundings' more ephemeral qualities. You know, light, color. Something like that is happening with art and art writing today. We just get bombarded with so many opinions, so much data, so many facts, so fast, that only something that makes us think "what is a fact?"

ASD [*cuts in*]: What is an opinion?

JS [*nodding*]: Only that sort of stuff causes our interpretive and descriptive energies to kick in.

ASD: So, it's the instability, the . . . uh . . . inscrutability of the gesture, its lack of appropriateness.

JS: Yeah, I think so. Mixed with the gesture's seeming ambition to be completely appropriate. That's what grabs us.

ASD: Or maybe we can put it this way: if the twentieth century was defined by the Readymade, then maybe the twenty-first century belongs to the Nevermade.

JS: Maybe. Though I might express that sentiment this way . . .

[*John Spelman exits the room, then the hotel. He walks leisurely down Water Avenue, turns on Broad Street, then crosses the Edmund Pettus Bridge, eventually disappearing from view.*]





no photo credit necessary: nuestra velocidad literal, 2011.

[Our Literal Speed](#) is a series of events in the vicinity of art and history in Europe and North America.

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## Alix Pearlstein

On the morning of September 11th, I had the unusual (for me) impulse to bring my video camera outdoors. I went to my corner, the intersection of Canal Street and the West Side Highway, and stood on the island in the middle of the highway. I happened to film the second plane hitting the tower, and then I turned the camera off.

A week earlier I had been in upstate New York. I first had the impulse then, to bring the camera outdoors and *document*. The days were getting a little shorter and the golden hour was especially sultry. I shot stock of birds, squirrels, trees, grass, clouds, the sky, and finally flowers.

A few months later I rewound the tape and watched the footage. It goes directly from close-ups of flowers to the plane hitting the tower, the kind of juxtaposition only a really bad editor would make. Right in between the two shots there's a big glitch in the tape, the kind of glitch we don't see anymore in a post-tape digital world.

It took another two years to respond in any way in a work . . . and still processing. I haven't looked at the footage since.



Alix Pearlstein, *Forsaken*, video still, 2003.



Peter Acheson, Alix Pearlstein, *Goldrush*, production still, 2008.

[Alix Pearlstein](#)'s work in video, performance, and installation has been widely exhibited. She is a recipient of the Foundation for Contemporary Arts 2011 Grants to Artists Award, and is currently on the faculty of the MFA programs at The School of Visual Arts, NYC, and Bard College.

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## Sheila Pepe

I work as a college administrator four days a week, and a studio administrator whenever I am not making stuff. I write a lot for both jobs, all in service of earnest, transparent communication. E-mails are the most of it and average in the hundreds each day.

As the numbers of incoming e-mails has increased in the past few years, the word count of each missive has gone down. Brevity lends to clarity, in hopes for fewer missed

meanings, hurt feelings, and e-mails in return. I have learned to love the bullet point. I avoid humor of any kind. I have not e-mailed anyone for pleasure in years. To connect with close colleagues and loved ones, I often “text.” This is more pleasurable than e-mail, since I can depend on a close proximity to the body. Since the advent of wireless, it’s also better than the phone, unless of course I am using earphones and we have a good connection — in this case the pleasure is very different and unrelated to writing. On occasion I tweet. I use three social media venues that I dip into briefly on a daily basis. I have an iPhone; my typos are mind-bogglingly bad (but my photographs are better than ever, and that’s a totally different thread to this story).

Curiosity and a commitment to an open forum for art, craft, and cultural production motivate my interest in keeping current with various intergenerational platforms. I am interested in crossing all kinds of differences, most of which seem now to be persistent divides within the art and design world set into a greater political context. These are a mix of issues from arcane intellectual interests concerning the historical evolution of a form or a voice, to my long full embrace of populist values in terms of class, taste, and the politics of facture (craft).

For me, the largest platform outside of my studio practice is my role as college administrator. It is only partially digital, often corporate in form and extremely social. Despite long held taboos concerning the congruency of academic administration and a life as an artist, I can report that it is quite possible to do both simultaneously. It is precisely at this juncture that I work the hardest to translate what I know about making things — and things made — into two markets (art and academic). What I know at the juncture of my two worlds — the Dean’s office and the artist’s studio — is this: one job must be done as if my personal and professional reputation was in the balance at every turn with every decision, with no expectation for recognition or visibility in the final work product. In the other job I must work with no mind for my reputation or career and own the product of my labor in full view with want of public applause.



Sheila Pepe, *Common Sense*, Tbilisi, 2010. Installed for Artisterrium, Republic of Georgia. Crocheted yarn, shoelaces, rope, and participant deconstruction and repurposing; with the women of Ossetia: Diakonova, Nona, Venera Arbolishvili, Taliko Enipapashvili, and others.

Both the art and academic markets rely on social networks far greater than I can honestly know, in service of ideas much bigger than my own, for participants and students, none of whom will be “mine.” Unlike Facebook, academia will not orient all users and user comments into a constellation placing me at its center. When that happens with respect to any of the administrators it means the institution is broken, and requires a realignment of purpose. That we might think the art world will do this for us with the speed and reliability of Facebook only diminishes the nature of our work. When that happens the studio practice is broken and requires a realignment of purpose.

Social networking and various other kinds of art world branding and communication are about appearing to stay “present” while engaging in a behavior that defies the exact quality of sustained attention necessary to be present. It really doesn’t matter whether it’s digital or analogue. From what I have observed, here are a few ways to make networked, mediated communication (web-based or analogue) a primary and sustained endeavor as an artist: 1. Have a day-job you don’t care about so you can stay out all night and be online all day 2. Make socializing or social media your primary medium of work. 3. Don’t make stuff, have someone else make it for you. 4. Have someone else tweet, write, and FB for you so you can stay in the studio and have long face to face conversations with people. 7. Never follow through on anything.

**Sheila Pepe** is an artist and educator whose work includes a range of objects, drawings, and installations that she has shown publicly since 1995, many of which are archived at [SheilaPepe.com](http://SheilaPepe.com). She is represented by Sue Scott Gallery in NY, and serves as the acting Assistant Dean of the School of Art & Design at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY.



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**Dushko Petrovich**

## **Grandpa, What was Privacy?**

Well, it's strange. We had this idea, or really a general feeling, that it was good sometimes to be alone, or even alone together. Hard to describe it exactly, but maybe it was a kind of inwardness. Or just the possibility of inwardness? Some way of protecting that, is what it basically was.

Technically I guess private was the opposite of public, but that was only part of it. See, we used to have this kind of divide where to be social, you had to go be with people. So I guess privacy was like not being so social. Or not really, because even when you were with people, back then, you could just keep to yourself somehow — not anti-social, just private. It was different. People would have to talk to you or ask questions if they wanted to learn something about you. There was this whole way of doing it. And if you didn't want to reveal things, that was just part of it.

Anyways, something happened. I guess with the Internet, like a lot of other things, privacy became something that happened on the Internet. You wanted to keep your bank information secret, or maybe some photos were just for your friends, or you looked at pornography, and keeping that to yourself kind of became your privacy.



Dushko Petrovich, *Black Flower*, 2010, acrylic on paper, 10" x 7".

At that point, it seems weird saying it now, but at the time we got this idea that the important thing about privacy was keeping track of who knew specific things about you, factual details. It became about government, or people who might give you a job—you didn't want them snooping around finding out you smoked pot or whatever. Most of us weren't famous or criminal enough to warrant attention from newspapers or the FBI, but that was what we were concerned about, on principle. You know the Big Brother story and all that.

Weird thing was, it was kind of like Little Brother was really the important one. That was how it went away. We just had this feeling that we wanted to share things all the time,

when we started to get connected, and then the things you didn't share were more like secrets, because we were communicating all the time. And privacy kind of drifted out of view when we were looking at all these other things. I guess we associated it with the old loneliness, because it was kind of a middle-class holdover from when we had the suburbs and all of that, and what was the point of being private, but just talking about it with you like this makes me miss it.

**Dushko Petrovich** is a painter and writer who lives in New Haven. He teaches at Boston University and is a founding editor of *Paper Monument*.

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## Nick Piombino

Your question brings to mind that this is a sort of digital ten-year anniversary in my own work. My first true entrance to the world of digital publishing began with my response to the attacks of 9/11. Soon after that horrifying day I strongly felt the need to connect with other poets and because of the availability of the SUNY/Buffalo listserv I began to understand the powerful efficacy of an open digital community in such a situation. My earliest responses were angry and defensive and I was fortunate to gain the attention of Barrett Watten who quickly helped me to understand the gaping flaws in my political reasoning in an exchange we later published titled "The Flag as Transitional Object." I was off to an energetic start in writing on the poetics list but within a year or two when blogging began to appear on the scene I was encouraged by some poet friends (Ron Silliman and Gary Sullivan) to start one of my own.

The excitement I felt when I began my weblog *fait accompli* was electrifying. In 1980 I created a collage titled *Distribution Automatique* in which I imagined a world where thought and writing might be universally available at the moment of their physical expression. Within two decades this fantasy of mine had become a reality. My enthusiasm for the burgeoning world of digital publishing at that point was nearly uncontainable. I spent the years 2003 to 2005 putting well over 1,000 pages of my mostly unpublished journals on my blog. In 2007 part of that experience was transposed into a printed book published by Heretical Texts (Factory School) also titled *fait accompli*. The blog drew a popular following for a time and I made many new friends, some of whose work I published as a guest editor for two issues (#'s 14 and 21) of the print on demand magazine published by Didi Menendez titled *OCHO*.



Nick Piombino, *Distribution Automatique*, 1980, collage, 9 ½" x 7 ½".

I will offer one or two more examples of what to me were unexpected outcomes as a result of the world of digital publishing. I had noticed that some interesting books of visual art had been published by the Australian publisher Mark Young, editor of the online poetry and art magazine called *Otoliths*. I sent Mark an e-mail about some of my own art work (collages). I had created a book in 2001 (*Free Fall*) that I called a "collage novel." I had been told at that time it would cost at least \$10,000 to publish. By 2007 that cost had dropped to a point that it could be published as a print on-demand book costing the buyer \$40 a copy. Mark and I excitedly e-mailed each other over the course of a month and not long after the book was made available on Lulu. Mark and I had never been in touch before this e-mail exchange and have still never met in person. Nor had I or have I ever met the publisher of the magazine I had been guest editor for, *OCHO*, Didi Menendez.

For most people younger than me, these examples would not be so impressive, but for me these experiences in digital publishing have been transformative in an exceptional way. Another example of a book that grew out of my weblog is my recent collaboration with

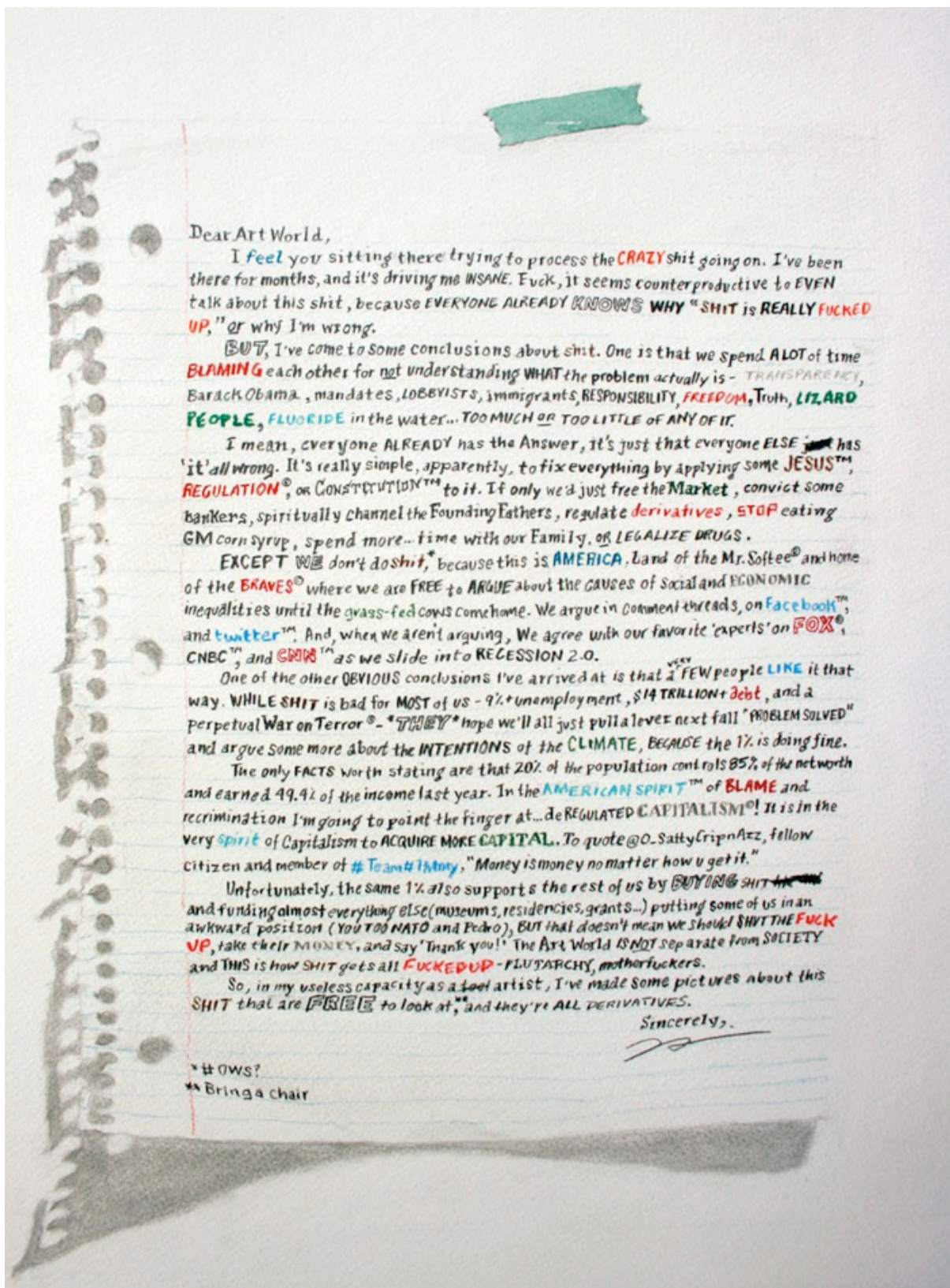


the artist Toni Simon titled [\*Contradicta: Aphorisms\*](#) (Green Integer), many of these pieces were first made available on my blog and now appear on Twitter.

For someone whose earliest experiences of publishing were within the relatively private circles of mimeograph publication, the world of digital communication retains an almost miraculous aura. My most recent example was also a great surprise. Like so many others I have become ever more concerned about the issue of world hunger. When I learned of the recent famine in Somalia I began to post links on my blog to online publications concerning this looming disaster where the possibility of a pandemic fatal starvation concerning 3/4 of a million people remains imminent. In the past few weeks I noticed that the editors of the *New York Times* have chosen to include many of my *fait accompli* links on the world news page by means of its online monitoring service called Blogrunner. Of course, I don't expect my modest endeavor could make much of a difference. But it is better than doing nothing. It is the realm of activism on all fronts from poetry to art to political expression that the powers of the digital age offer modes of connection that not long ago would have been virtually unimaginable.

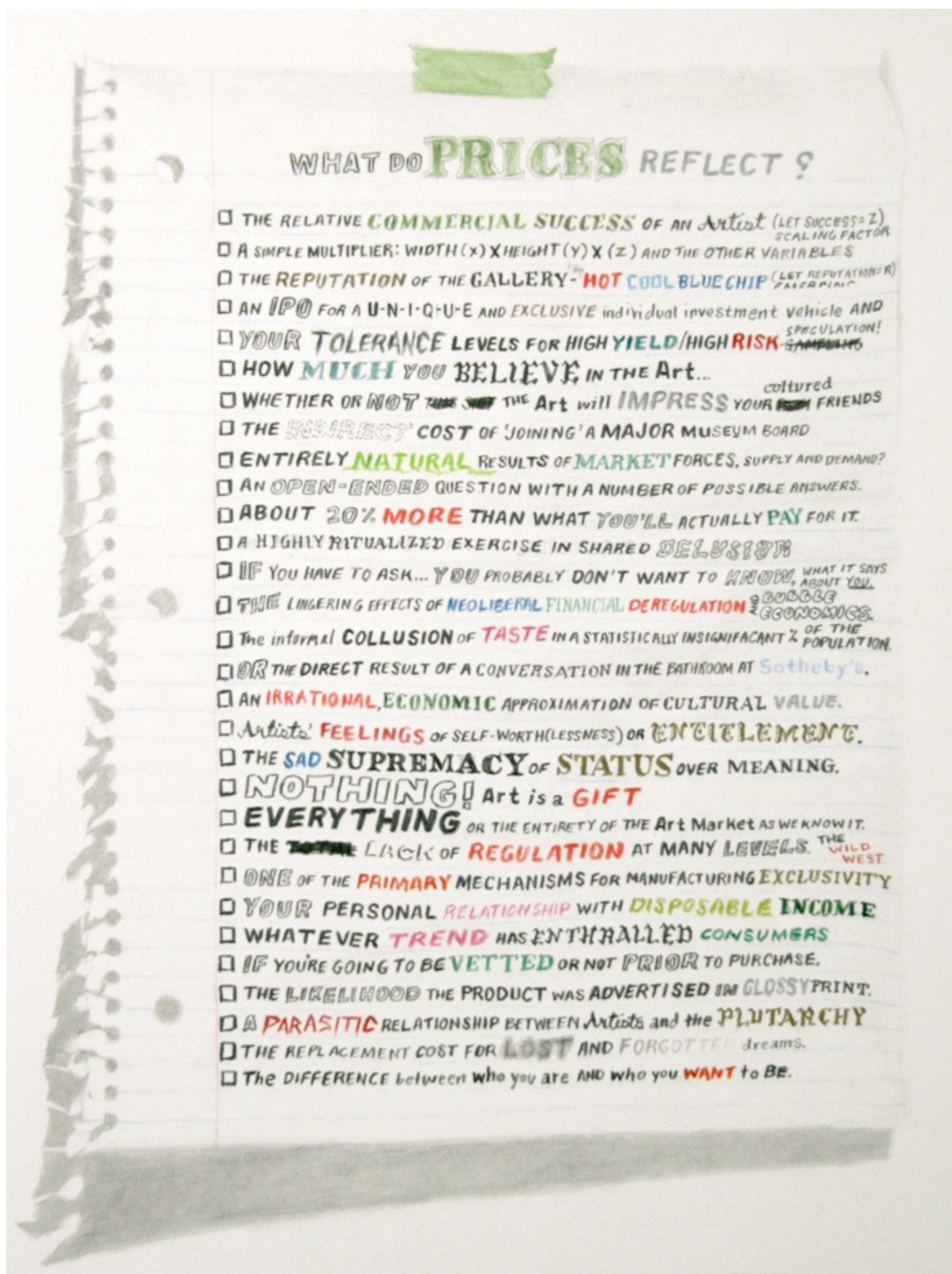
[\*\*Nick Piombino\*\*](#) is a poet and psychoanalyst living in Brooklyn. His blog *fait accompli* can be found at [nickpiombino.blogspot.com](http://nickpiombino.blogspot.com).

## William Powhida



William Powhida, *Dear Art World*, 2011, Graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor on paper, 20" x 16".





William Powhida, *What Do Prices Reflect?* 2011, Graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor, 14.5" x 17".

William Powhida is an artist who lives in Bushwick, has a studio in Williamsburg, and exhibits in Chelsea. He is represented by Postmasters Gallery where his show *Derivatives* opened October 22, 2011.

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## Nancy Princenthal

“Public Trauma” is a telling term, reflecting a profound psychologizing of public affairs. It has become a truism that wars are not fought between nations but among shifting aggregates of individuals, and that the targets of aggression are as likely to be civilian as military. Even economics has become both global and atomized. While international corporations transcend national boundaries to make use of workers laboring in unregulated conditions, the economic aid that seems most useful to developing countries is distributed in the form of microfinance (with the tiny loans mostly made to women, because they are more fiscally responsible). The political has long since become personal.

For many years I worked on an extended essay (never published) about sexual violence in visual representation, which came to focus on work made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I wanted to unravel the period’s culture and its distinctive forms of violence — violent protest, political assassinations, and especially (because not sufficiently integrated into discussions of this era) rampant urban crime. Landmark works by Suzanne Lacy, Yoko Ono and others attracted me, but left me dissatisfied. Their emphasis on the presence of violation in every act of sexism, in every interpersonal encounter, seemed to me to confuse the issue. I became very interested in the relationship between sexual violence and metaphor; I went down a semantic rabbit hole, trying to find the quiddity of rape, of what exactly it was, and did, and meant. It seemed to me that to speak of raping a culture or an environment was a misuse of language. Rape happened to human bodies, to individual selves.

Lately (this took me a while), I have begun to see that my argument was in most ways misguided. Rape (and the threat of it) is now an acknowledged weapon of war, as used in Bosnia, in Africa, at Abu Ghraib. Indeed, those who counsel asylum seekers hoping to attain citizenship in wealthy countries often advise that a single sexual assault is not enough. Several, maybe, will do the trick. This seems to be known by all sides — by lawyers, applicants and INS administrators (although that understanding didn’t help prosecute Dominique Strauss-Kahn). Sexual violence remains an exchange currency of fantastically slippery worth, and private experience is still lost in the effort to shape public meaning. Attempts to redeem it often result in further injury to victims. But the best chance of undermining the need for these horrible dissimulations would seem to be putting their tellers’ stories back into the real life, and political context, from which they spring.

It was hard for me to accept that I had been looking at the issue through the wrong end of the telescope. But it has finally become clear that the impulse toward possessiveness of painful experience — as a critic, the impulse to affirm rightful ownership — is a form of magical thinking. Whatever our relationship to acts of violence, we tend to hold onto our



histories as shields. The events of September 11, 2001 cut straight across my learning curve on this subject. On the one hand, they restored to the term “trauma” its origin in dreams. The timeless endlessness of that morning and afternoon, which involved not a single explosive event (or even a pair of them) but a cataclysm that seemed to have no end, is what for me most vitiated its reality. The buildings seemed to keep coming down, one after another, as smoke poured forth and information proliferated, the ash clouds and the coverage of the crisis and the surreal response — men in camouflage on the streets — billowing, spreading and thinning together.

On the other, the attack and its consequences helped me see past the insistence on personal experience. I wrote about the design competition for the 9/11 memorial in *Art in America*, a long article that was not even close to resolved. The contending concerns of victims’ families and others most directly affected, who struggled among themselves and with nearby residents and workers, public officials, urban designers and architects on the job — with anyone who felt they had something at stake, which was, essentially, everyone on earth — made it more or less impossible for the commissioning body (or me) to handle the process judiciously. There was way too much raw emotion afloat to feel cynical about this.

Now, of course, the emotion is pretty well cooked. In September, I visited the completed memorial. All that is left of the complicated original design are the pools in the footprints of the towers, and personal names. This reduction to information below the level of the communal meaning seems inevitable, but it is still a shame. The decade since 2001 has seen the breakdown of boundaries — not the first breach, and surely not the final collapse, since like the events of 9/11 this is a process that seems to go on way past the point that seems terminal — between personal and public life, and also between journalism, editorializing and diary-keeping. New technologies and preferences in popular entertainment have made discretion almost completely obsolete. It is another truism that the need to share everything instantly, and the dizzying instability of truth, are the two defining markers of current writing. So the need is now all the more urgent, I think, to find meaning that goes beyond the singular and first-person — not at the expense of that irreplaceable perspective, but as its (critical) goal.

**Nancy Princenthal** is a New York-based writer and former Senior Editor of *Art in America*; among other publications she has contributed to are *Artforum*, *Art News*, *Parkett*, the *Village Voice*, and the *New York Times*. Her monograph on Hannah Wilke was published by Prestel in 2010.

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Melissa Ragona and Abigail Child

## ME(me) Publicity and Production

The web is an ambiguous public sphere, as perhaps all publics are: a shape shifter, a projection, a hope, a virtual community, a dislocation, an audience, a commentator, an outside, a part of us.

*Many have argued that a new kind of publicity (Miwon Kwon, Fraser Ward) has just replaced what was formally known as the public sphere (Jürgen Habermas). Instead of bourgeois forms of congregation in places where citizens come together and approach a kind of "public" form [forum] of exchange in which opinions can be formed, mass culture has begun to develop its own mode of communication by controlling the apparatuses of information circulation*

Not so sure that *we control* any of this. The incidents you point to in your article are just that: incidents, exceptions to the apparatus that operates the web, makes money from the web, enjoins us to join. Though again, the exceptions are the starting point of a response, of some kind of attempt to wrest control.

*The most obvious form of publicity is promotion of a particular individual, a product, a group, or a corporation. Social networks like My Space, Friendster (now, both so quaint, so over), and most recently Facebook and Twitter have become hotbeds of self-promotion, indeed most people use their Facebook profiles like a storefront: announcing their latest achievements, i.e., their next show, their latest novel, their recent criticism, their expanded portfolio, their re-engineered website, their blast on Vimeo, their appearance on YouTube, their Kick-starter, their new Facebook Fan site, their other Facebook business profile. They want to sell their wares. Their softwares, their hardwares, their wearables, their Jerries.*

Jump to it!

Acknowledged, for circulation and PR, the web and Facebook work it. Even my 27-year-old assistant views Facebook that way. At least for artists, Facebook is not so much about personal connections as much as a career connect. My grad student insisted I join and then put me on it. But in regards to production, not publicity, the web can be, if not essential [after all I am shooting *quaint* celluloid], extremely helpful: an access space, a media library.

Productive Occasion: I am shooting in Rome 2009-2010 a feature film entitled *A SHAPE OF ERROR*, a two-screen rearrangement and derangement of the life of Mary and Percy Shelley. A colleague, Fiona Templeton, visits the American Academy in December '09; we go online to research *Frankenstein*, and find: a) a u-tube video of Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1986); b) Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* (1979) set in an Italian villa north of Rome; and c) *Lady Frankenstein*, Joseph Cottons' last film, shot in Italy: trash but the sound track intrigues me. In the first, poets on drugs caterwaul up and down staircases in a film that sees their lives as a Diodati acid trip: what not to do. In the second, I learn

how to make space 'full' with few people by bringing everything into the foreground, let the background be vista. With the last, I discover the soundtrack is by Alessandro Alessandrone who worked with Enrico Morricone and performed the whistling in the famous Sergio Leone films (!): he is a famous Italian musician and modern composer living near Rome. I meet him and get permission to use some of his music in the project.

Reflection: Web research enabled my study and created rare and wondrous personal connections. Such productive research would have been impossible in Italy otherwise; the new colleagues a distinctive plus. The web then as encyclopedic media archive and social whirlpool that can become actualized.

*Aside: one very important potent use of this digi storefront is as a political, critical meeting place, the kind we have seen blossom in Cairo, Alexandria, Tunis, Rome, New York, Toronto, Pittsburgh, Chicago, et al. But, rather than talk about particular instances, say of political uprising (the best use yet of new networks) or viral criticism. . . .*

WAIT!!! We do have to go here! I first hear of Occupy Wall Street through the newspaper, but I learn of the march I attend via the web. A friend organized like-minded friends to walk together. Last night on the Amtrak to Boston, I'm looking at the video shot two weeks ago from the Brooklyn Bridge, when the cops arrested hundreds. The cops were vicious, methodical, picking their victims almost randomly — cherries from a tree. Big men dragging slim young bodies. A selection, all too reminiscent of other historical and gruesome selections. To witness then, the web as WITNESS: a colossal communication megaphone, clattering with Vertovian crossed lines, multiplying exponentially, web as revolutionary Megaphone.

*[Rather....] I want to address the kind of inversion or — to borrow from Sianne Ngai — negative affect that has spread across this banner-carrying, advertisement-sickened social media.*

**4chan** — at least for a short time — presented the opposite aesthetic of Jerry Saltz's humanist Internet banter. Saltz would stroke his constituents: "You all do know, don't you, that you all created something very unusual, very special, and somewhat astounding in these threads, don't you?" (see "My Jerry Saltz Problem" by James Panero in *The New Criterion*, December 2010). Indeed, the founder of 4-Chan, eventually revealed as a 20-something year old, named MOOT (aka Christopher Poole), became kind of an Anti-Christ. Where Saltz would kick you off if you didn't: 1) participate enough (he "unfriended" 900 passive users in 2009) and 2) weren't upfront about your identity, 4-Chan embraced anonymity.

Users, many of them lurkers, did not have to log-in, register, or identify themselves. In fact, if they used trip-codes — hashed passwords that spit out cryptographic user names—they were scorned or hacked open by other 4channers. 4channers spit out criticism in nasty, in-your-face opinions that ranged across topics like anime, comics, video, film, fashion, literature, music, and pornography. Content was often dark. Advertisers didn't want their names attached to 4chan, even though it had, during its peak period, 18 million browsers, 730 million page views a month.

"Likes" became memes. "Fans" became trolls. Transparency became code. Democracy became the War Machine. The "Wall" became a random board or, simply, /b/: unstriated space. /a/ for animation and /b/ for everything else (a to b and back again).

*The sources were not Artforum, Chelsea, Williamsburg studios, or museum culture, but rather manga, Detroit, Tokyo brothels, comic book stores.*

Definitely enjoy this wildness, this unreserve. Yet manga and brothels, Detroit and comic books have long been not only gallery occasionals but also pop culture mainstays. I collect comic books; use as 'scripts' for my early films. It seems this drive too can be co-opted. Cool so cool while Moot becomes a millionaire.

So much of the web is people making crazy misogynist comments, swearing that so and so should be dead, staying anonymous. The logic of 4chan is succinct and absurd: the rules for the no rules. One can hide in this virtual palace—but I am not sure that this is a profound detournment. Perhaps that does not matter? Like Occupy Wall Street and innumerable anti-war marches, it is not what it accomplishes per se that is the point, but that without such resistance, there would be no change.

Occasion: 2-Circulation. My particular bio on *Wikipedia* has been a perfect exemplar for the worm like repeat of the web, the rhizomatic wrestle. So much is in error in my particular bio to make one wonder about other facts. It appears that someone in San Francisco (?) decided they knew me, collided outrageous deductions with personal, even intimate, assumptions. Her facts have now become web facts. I cannot change the information, have tried, paid people to the institution won't change if there is another fact up on the web supporting same. And of course there are since people copied the original errors! I am stunned and sometimes humored, otherwise hopeless, in front of error after error after error.

Reflection: it is Beckett-like or at least Orwellian or perhaps closer to Kafka. Which makes sense in that that we are in the heart of an electronic bureaucracy. They won't change because I am not allowed to change my own write-up. They won't change because it's already out somewhere on the web wrong. Somewhere. And soon to be multiplied in its error. They won't change because they have my number.

The kind of totality performed on the web assures us we live in a Technocracy. We hardly have a chance to denounce, or derange their suffocations. They feed us what they know we want. How to escape this Tantalonian trick?

Is Rickrolling an answer?<sup>1</sup>

*No. Rickrolling has become — like planking — an innocuous fad. Even the official editors of the White House on twitter feed (July 20, 2010) defended their boring governmental posts (accused so by one scrappy subscriber) by rolling a Rick. They said: "Here's something more fun" and posted a link to Never Gonna Give You Up.*

*4channers, despite their site's sell-out by Poole with Canvas, continue to roll out some originals. Their memes from Advice Dog to Project Chanology can range from lulz (lol jokes) to outright how-to-do-things-with-words activism.<sup>2</sup> When 4chan's super popular Rage Guy (FFFFFFFFUUUUUUUUUUUU) meme was*



*stolen by Hot Topic [a clothing line] to make T-shirts to sell in the mall last November, channers retaliated with a detournement that made Hot Topic look like racist salesmen. They did it by generating yet another meme that converted Rage Man into Race Man. They sent this new racially offensive construct to news organizations and Internet sites that they knew would storm Hot Topic and blow their racist T-shirts to the wind. Within hours, Hot Topic shut down their Rage Man production and removed their T-shirts from storefronts and web-shops.*

*Memes, in a sense, are the new chance operations of our time. They can provoke a revolution, sell a T-shirt, or shut-down a store.*

To utilize the rhizome as a virus, a poison. To carry out the implications in a series of un-obvious rearrangements. So a possible play with the web itself. A re-use/ruse/ a refusal.





Advice Dog, <http://memegenerator.net/Advice-Dog/>

1. Rickrolling is an Internet meme in which deceptive links have directed millions of unsuspecting Internet users to videos of Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up"). The meme began as 'duckrolling,' a bait-and-switch gif, and culminated in a surprise live performance of the song by Astley at the 2008 Macy Thanksgiving Parade. See Peter Farquhar, 2010. "Internet pranksters Rickroll entire Earth," *News.com.au* (20 October), at <http://www.news.com.au/technology/internet-pranksters-rickroll-entire-earth/story-e6frfro0-1225941034483>

2. In 2008, 4chan launched Project Chanology, an organized global action against Scientology after the Church attempted to suppress an "unauthorized" YouTube video of Tom Cruise accepting the Church's Freedom Medal of Valor. 4chan disrupted Scientology's main web page, as well as jamming up there phone and fax lines. See "Cult Friction," John Cook, *Radar Magazine*:

<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3665/3055>

**Abigail Child** is a media artist and writer whose original montage pushes the envelope of sound-image relations. Along with her kino-eye, Child is keen of ear, a focusing device, syncopated, mobile. She is currently completing two poetry manuscripts and editing her feature film *A Shape of Error* on the life of Percy and Mary Shelley. She is senior faculty at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and calls NYC home.

**Melissa Ragona**'s essays and reviews have appeared in *October*, *Frieze*, *Art Papers*, and in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*, eds. J. Beck and T. Grajeda (U of Illinois Press, 2008), *Women's Experimental Cinema*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Duke University Press, 2007), and *Andy Warhol Live* (Prestel, 2008), among others. She is completing a book on Andy Warhol's tape recordings, *Readymade Sound: Andy Warhol's Recording Aesthetics*, forthcoming from University of California Press, Berkeley. She is an Associate Professor of Critical Theory and Art History in the School of Art at Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.

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## Hilary Robinson

2008-2009. The financial crash happens in the first quarter of the academic year. It is my 4th year of a 5-year term as dean, College of Fine Arts, Carnegie Mellon University. CFA has five schools - Art, Design, Architecture, Music, Drama. I calculate that in 2013, the college's annual budget will be 13% less as a result of the crash, and work with the heads of schools to cut 2.5% from this year's budget and a further 5% from next year. The university says CFA is the jewel in its crown; but the gold in CMU is in Engineering and of Computer Science. Most of CFA's budget is tied up in salaries for tenured faculty.

There is not much room for me to maneuver outside the tenured salary budget, but somehow I have to. I am the only woman dean in the university.

2009-2010. Further work on cutting budgets. I seem never to talk about art any more. In September, the G20 is held in Pittsburgh; the city is in lock-down for four days. In the summer, aware that universities and corporations are preparing media strategies in expectation of 3000 reporters arriving to look for stories, and aware that no-one in the arts is doing the same, I convene a meeting of the directors of arts organizations. About 30 people turn up and the activist 'Pittsburgh Is Art' campaign is born. We get an informative website, a striking logo, an expanding membership. The arts organizations are fighting for life; some don't make it. 'Pittsburgh is Art' gives voice and focus, and come September, there is much media coverage about the significance of the arts and culture in this city. Increasingly I work with college donors, and some make beautiful gifts of fellowships for arts graduate students, knowing that without help many will be unable to attend. But, being dean is increasingly bureaucratic and decreasingly creative, and I wonder how to be most effective in creating a future for art. Deaning doesn't seem to be it. In February I decide I have two books to write, that I miss the teaching that used to keep my feet pointed in the right direction, and that both will have more impact on the future of art than being a functionary for another five years. I decide not to seek a second term.

2010-2011. Sabbatical. I permanently cut my personal budget by 30%. I read. I watch all four seasons of Mad Men in a three-week splurge. I travel to Spain, Italy, California, New York, London, Boston, Washington, Paris, to look at art and attend conferences. I take road trips to look at land art. I sleep. I make soup. I am humbled by the activism of women in the Arab countries and Iran. I think about what, and how, to teach students born in the 1990s, for whom the feminist art I hold dear is truly art history. I am glued to Al Jazeera, watching what happens in Egypt. I try to start writing. I don't miss being on campus. I watch the American political machine with dismay. I watch the politics back home with dismay. I think about the relationship between the political and the personal, and read Martha Rosler. My brother resigns from his long-held secondary school teaching and administrative job because of changes he is required to implement. I build my Feminism-Art-Theory Facebook page. The sabbatical ends with my publisher accepting my proposal for a new book. The way I spend money has changed.

2011-2012. The first semester of the year I teach two courses: Feminism-Art-Theory; and Practices of Art Criticism. The feminist course has a waiting list of 19. Amazed, I over-enroll it. The course teaches me to teach again and to think cross-generationally again. I become happy again. I think about the implications of the worldwide entry of woman-centered exhibitions into museums, of their seamlessness, their differences, and of fixity and canon-creation. In a conversation I wonder about the task of unfixing the certainties of students right at the moment they are searching for certainties. The students I teach are very different from the mainly working-class, age-diverse, street-smart students that I last taught in Belfast, against the background of 30 years of

immediate civil conflict. On a trip to NY I go to the Occupy Wall Street site, and am entranced by the energy, impressed by the diversity, and inspired by the thinking. On a trip to LA at a feminist symposium I wonder how to re-insert class politics in to my life in America and into my scholarship. Within two weeks I have conversations with Joyce Kozloff, Suzanne Lacy, Carolee Schneemann and Martha Wilson, all of which I learn from. I re-focus on students, and on writing, the activity and activism of both, and think about the future.

**Hilary Robinson** is Professor of Art Theory and Criticism at Carnegie Mellon University. She is the previous Dean of the College of Fine Arts there. Before that she was Professor of the Politics of Art and the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, and also Head of the School of Art and Design. She is the editor of *Feminism-Art-Theory 1968–2000* (Blackwell, 2001) and of *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art Today* (Camden Press, 1987) and author of *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (IB Tauris, 2006). She is presently working on a history of the feminist art movement.

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**Kara L. Rooney**

## **SUB SYSTEM DOWN**

THE DIALECTICAL DEATH CHARGE OF THE INTERNET AGE IS THAT IT PROMISES A SATIATING OF OUR PRIMAL HUMAN NEED FOR EXPRESSION/CONNECTION WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY DENYING ITS FULFILLMENT IN REALITY WE KNOW NO ONE CONNECTION TRUE CONNECTION IS OFF LIMITS AN ILLUSION AN ALBATROSS OUR ATTEMPTS AT ITS REALIZATION IS THE BECKETT IN US ALL WE FORAGE FOR MEANING SEEKING ITS COMPLETENESS IN THE FORMS OF OUR CREATIONS ALL THE WHILE AWARE THAT IT DOES NOT CANNOT RESIDE THERE THE JOKE IS ON US BUT WE LOOK ANYWAY AGAIN AND AGAIN ON BLOGS CHATBOARDS ONLINE SYMPOSIUMS INTERNET CAFES AND DIGITAL READERS AMONG THE WHITE CUBE SPACES OF CHELSEA AND THE LES THE CLAMORING CROWDS OF THE MUSEUM INSTITUTION AND ARTIST RUN SPACES WE WANDER BETWEEN THE PROLETARIAT OF VISION AND THE HAPPENSTANCE OF EXPERIENCE.

WE CONSISTENTLY FAIL.

THERE IS AN ECONOMY TO ART MAKING AN EXCHANGE VALUE SET BETWEEN THE SOLIPSISTIC ENDEAVOR OF CREATION AND PUBLIC CONSUMPTION ITS COST VARIES IT IS DEPENDENT ON YOUR WORLD VIEW SOCIAL CIRCLE MEDIUM ETC BUT THERE IS A COST THE PRICE OF EXPRESSION THE PRICE OF EXPOSURE HAS NEVER BEEN SET SO HIGH.

THIS IS NOT A NEW IDEA.

WE TRIFLE OURSELVES WITH SOCIAL NETWORKING NETWORKING IN



GENERAL WITH THE STROKE OF A KEY WE MOVE OUR CREATIONS THROUGH  
SPACE FLYING OBJECTS AND ARTIFACTS TRANSPORTED OVER VAST  
STRETCHES OF OCEAN LAND AND THOUGHT HURLED INTO PUBLIC  
CONSCIOUSNESS THE WORK IS CONSUMED PHOTOSHOPPED EDITED AND  
FILED.

THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR AN OASIS.

THAT ISLAND UNTO ITSELF WHERE NO THING CAN TOUCH YOU NO THOUGHT  
CAN ROB YOU NO ENERGY CAN DISTURB YOU EXCEPT THAT IS FOR YOUR  
MIND THAT AND RAW UNADULTERED EMOTION IT SEEPS INTO YOUR  
CONSCIOUSNESS LIKE A PLAGUE IT HAUNTS YOU INSPIRES YOU SHAKES YOU.

I AM OVERWHELMED. I RETREAT.

I SPEND DAYS HOURS MINUTES WALKING AMONGST THE ARTWORLD  
THRONGS THE MUSEUMS SOHO I ATTEND THE ART FAIRS THE OPENINGS THE  
PARTIES I AM AN OPEN BOOK I HAVE NO FILTER I NEED A FILTER I RETREAT TO  
MY WORKSPACE I MAKE I THINK I GO ONLINE I AM SAFE I AM SEQUESTERED.

I AM VISIBLE EVERYWHERE.

I AM SEEN AND UNSEEN I AM AN ARTIST I AM A CRITIC I DEAL IN THE TRADE OF  
DUALITY I AM UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THIS REALITY I RETREAT I FIDGET I  
PAINT I DESTROY I BEGIN AGAIN I AM COMFORTABLE WITH THIS REALITY I  
BUILD UP I BREAK DOWN I RESHIFT AND RESHUFFLE PAINT WORDS TEXT  
MATERIAL IT IS ALL THE SAME ALL MEANT FOR THAT SIMILAR PURPOSE OF  
EXPRESSION ALL INHERENTLY BLOCKED BY THE MATERIALS INABILITY TO  
EXPRESS THAT VERY ESSENCE A CULDESAC AWAITS ME I TRAVERSE ITS  
SEMICIRCULAR EDGE IT LEADS ME NOWHERE I DOUBLE BACK ON MYSELF I  
RETREAT I GO ONLINE VISIONS OF WAR VERSIONS OF POLITICS A RIVER OF  
IMAGES THAT NEVER RECEDE.

PRIVACY IS A DIRTY WORD.

I MAKE MY IDEAS PUBLIC I ATTEMPT TO GAIN CLARITY I RECEIVE NONE I AM  
ALONE I AM SURROUNDED BY A CACOPHONY OF VOICES I CONSISTENTLY  
SHED THESE LAYERS MENTAL PHYSICAL THEY PEEL AWAY FROM MY FLESH  
THE FORGOTTEN CORPSES OF AN IDEA OF WHAT WAS ONCE ALIVE LIVING  
THEY WHITHER ON SOMEONES WHITE WALLS THEY HAVE A NEW LIFE I  
RETREAT AND IN DOING SO I CONTINUE TO MAKE.

**Kara L. Rooney** is a New York-based artist, writer, and critic. She is currently a Managing Art Editor for the *Brooklyn Rail* and faculty member at the School of Visual Arts.

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## Bradley Rubenstein

We live in the age of meta. Meta-criticism, meta-literature, meta-art. Aesthetics in the digital age have made us first question the structure and order of things — the nature and shape of reality — allowing us to move into territory more fluid and amorphous. Reality, as we see it digitally, on television shows, or in the news, is a porous thing. Our lives and stories intertwine with others, creating an interesting moment in history where we share information more fluidly, though with less certainty as to what is “real.” As a visual artist this means that there is infinite access to images and information that was only vaguely imaginable twenty years ago. It also means that the images created are available to an expanded and expanding audience — social networking sites allow a virtual studio visit twenty-four hours a day. This has consequences, of course. It is possible to create and show work almost simultaneously; this is not necessarily good, as reflection and editing are inherently an important part of the creative process. Artists document and post every step of their work, recording their every stroke and breakfast menu, to the near exclusion of anything happening outside their own virtual artistic career. This leads us back to the artist garreted in some loft, unaware of anything but his or her own self-created sense of genius.

More interesting to me, however, is how this situation we find ourselves in has changed the discourse surrounding the making of artworks. On the one hand, art criticism, like other forms of criticism (movie, restaurant, etc.), has become more open to anyone who can type. Robert A. Heinlein once remarked, “Every ass wants to stand with the King’s horses . . . this may explain why there are critics.” A great deal of what currently passes for criticism can only be described as a hate-fuck, with both the creator and viewer locked into a mutual embrace, vying for some sort of validation or recognition. Where there used to be a winnowing process whereby writers had criteria on which to base their views and opinions, we now have something like open-season where everything becomes fair game for a paragraph or two. This fragmented, shotgun approach to aesthetic discourse opens up dialog (which is good) but also reduces to some extent the role of “critic” to something along the lines of Siskel and Ebert: “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” It is not terribly surprising that we rate things with Facebook “likes.” This may be the most salient change in recent criticism. Clement Greenberg probably would have liked this system a lot.



Bradley Rubenstein, *Calliope*, oil on canvas, 60" x 40", 2000. Collection: Giannina Braschi.

The aspect of our current situation that intrigues me the most, though, is criticism and its relationship to meta-writing and meta-literature. The fact that we have access to millions of images and bits of unconnected information presents wonderful possibilities for creating narratives of art that are both personal and culturally intertwined — narratives that include the story of the viewer as well as the artist. This is, to a large degree, the best way out of the cul-de-sac where writing about art now finds itself. Although a great deal of the material online is of questionable value, it is not necessarily the fault of the medium — nor, I would also argue, is it the writer's fault. We as readers should read as actively as we look at art, interrogating the ideas and opinions we are presented.

This is the primary reason that I write for an online magazine — it allows me to engage with the artworks that I view and record whatever ideas or impressions I might have. The fact that it is a public forum then allows a reading audience to respond to those ideas. The speed of the media makes all of this possible immediately, creating a virtual dialog between artist, viewer, writer, and reader that was unimaginable when I began writing about art twenty years ago. The fact that this is such an immediate process, of course, is no excuse for bad criticism. Editors still exist, even in the digital age.

Given the wide-open parameters that the Internet allows us now, we would be rather foolish and shortsighted to not take advantage of them while we still have the chance.

**Bradley Rubenstein** is a painter and writer who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. His writings may be found at [www.culturecatch.com](http://www.culturecatch.com), where he is a regular contributor.

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## Raphael Rubinstein

After 9/11, my wife Elena Berriolo and I left New York for six months because we lived with our two-year-old daughter not far from “Ground Zero” (I ring this name with quotes to reject the weird analogy it implies with the atomic bombing of Japan in WWII) and, as acrid smoke continued to seep from the smoldering rubble of the World Trade Center, we were skeptical of the Environmental Protection Agency’s reassurances about the air quality in lower Manhattan. I’m the first to admit that in the 10 years since my art criticism has rarely addressed the events of that day nor its political and cultural consequences. Yet, looking back now, I can see how my approach to criticism changed on or about Sept. 11, 2001. Returning to New York in the spring of 2002 with a new perspective, I embarked on a long, polemical article that sought to ask hard questions about the state of painting and art criticism [“A Quiet Crisis,” *Art in America*, March 2003]. In its urgent tone and impatience with the status quo, “A Quiet Crisis” was unlike anything I had published before, and I don’t think I would have felt impelled to undertake it without the shock of 9/11 (though I do remember feeling surrounded by an atmosphere of illegitimacy in the wake of the 2000 election). The number and intensity of the responses this article generated — from enthusiastic praise to considered disagreement to scathing rejection — led me to a further reevaluation of art criticism, which resulted in my 2006 anthology *Critical Mess: Art Critics on the State of Their Practice*, in which a dozen writers grappled with the contradictions of their field.



Gene Beery, *Free Art Work Tomorrow*, ca. 2002, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20".

One could argue that income inequality and financial speculation have been nearly as damaging to the contemporary art world as they have been to the country as a whole.



Lately, the autonomy and feedback that comes with blogging has allowed me to pursue my interests as a critic without being so dependent on the agendas of the art market. I certainly don't think having a vibrant art market is a bad thing — it's what ultimately makes all of our activities possible — but too much money passing back and forth among too few people over a prolonged period of time is a recipe for disaster (and lots of bad art).

Last week a writing class I teach for young art critics coincided with a march in support of the Occupy Wall Street protests. About 80 percent of the students left the classroom after the first hour to attend the march. A few days later, a lecture I gave (on the politics of postpunk) to a group of studio MFA students at a different school led to a lengthy discussion of politics, focused around Occupy Wall Street. What a relief these responses were from hearing endlessly about “new auction records,” opulent post-opening parties, and reality TV competitions that pit artists against one another in scenarios of desperate debasement.

A New York-based poet and art critic, [Raphael Rubinstein](#) teaches at the University of Houston and SVA's Art Criticism and Writing Program. His blog [The Silo](#) is a personal, revisionist dictionary of contemporary art.

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**Caitlin Rueter and Suzanne Stroebe**

## **The Tea Party, Feminism and A Feminist Tea Party**

Sarah Palin is a feminist!

Not one of those feminists “hanging out in the faculty lounge at some East Coast women's college,” of course, but she does feel a “connection to that tough, gun-toting, pioneer feminism of women like Annie Oakley.”

The Tea Party movement, which may be the defining political movement of the 2000s, allowed Sarah Palin to eclipse Hillary Clinton (long the conservatives' feminist boogeyman) as the most famous woman in contemporary American politics. And after the rise of Palin, the media — fueled by aggressive competition between television infotainment programs, reality television, the decline of print journalism and the aggressive anonymity of online discourse — seems to produce a new darling each week. Following Palin's entry into the spotlight, we've seen Michelle Bachmann, Nikki Haley, Sharron Angle, and Christine O'Donnell, among others, emerge as political actors.

Despite the misogynist agendas of these politicians, the media has come to equate the emergence of powerful women in American politics with feminism both in terms of women's empowerment and power as exercised by the political and economic elite. So,

by these terms, any woman who is *empowered* or *in power* — and Palin has been both — can claim to be a “feminist.”

This strange articulation of feminism has been startling and curious. The rise of the Tea Party was a backdrop as we began to make our way in the art world and a genesis of our serial collaborative project, *A Feminist Tea Party*. We began the project in part as a response to this right-wing brand of “feminism” and in part as a way to survey our peers — fellow emerging women artists based in New York — about their ambivalence toward the word “feminist.”



Caitlin Rueter and Suzanne Stroebe, *A Feminist Tea Party* on Governors Island, 2010.

*A Feminist Tea Party* is a response to a specific political phenomenon but pivots on feminism to engage in older and more important debates. Conceptually, we engage with

the history of the tea party (from Boston to Beck) and feminism (from the suffragist movement to Lady Gaga). The aesthetics of our site-specific installation, the faux-fifties tea parlor “set” — flowered wallpaper, frilly linens and cinched waist skirts — draws on imagery from 1950s television sitcoms and consumer goods advertisements.

At each event, we point to how sexualized this ostensibly prudish imagery initially was, bringing an element of humor and playfulness into the project. The aesthetic elements of the project have elicited different responses from participants. For some, revisiting these stereotypes is retrograde. To others, it is silly, frilly, and fun (or just harmless anachronism). We know that *real* women did not vacuum in high heels and cocktail dresses, or greet their husbands at the end of the workday with a martini and a smile; that June Cleaver and Donna Reed were fantasy. But these images, as they form the heritage of popular representations of women today — sex and service, the consumer and the consumed — remain relevant and are very much part of how the Tea Party movement engages with women.

*A Feminist Tea Party* takes its cue from 1970s consciousness-raising groups. So, while the aesthetics and performative aspects of our tea party provide a home — a forum — the heart of the project is discourse and participation. We want our tea party to be a place where vicious and sarcastic rancor does not substitute for actual debate. Our conversations have been unpredictable. They have engaged the personal and the political, the popular and the pedantic, the petty and the profound.

When we conceived our project, the Tea Party movement seemed a fleeting, albeit dangerous phenomenon. Since then, the Tea Party has surprisingly and frighteningly embedded itself in mainstream political culture. As the next election approaches and new personalities emerge, we wonder whether the Tea Party will continue to be a force and whether it will bring feminism, however conceived, along for the ride. If Michelle Bachmann’s presidential candidacy lasts longer than the next news cycle, we’re sure to find out, for better or worse.

**Caitlin Rueter** and **Suzanne Stroebe** make art, independently and together. Their collaborative project, *A Feminist Tea Party*, is a sculptural installation, a performance and a participatory event. They both live and work in New York City.

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**Carolee Schneemann**

## **Dancing in Confinement: Recent Work (2011)**

In 2002, I began research on the worldwide confinement and torture of animals captured for various conventions of display, entertainment, and food sources. A photo sequence in a Canadian journal depicted stolen cats shoved into cages in China to be eaten subsequently. Despite their miserable circumstances, they each and all

resembled the cared-for domestic cats familiar to me. The print series *Caged Cats I & II* (2005) was followed by studying the unending perversity of human cruelties in the unending rituals of tormenting animals.



Carolee Schneemann, *Caged Cats I*, 2005. Giclee print: photo-collage juxtaposing details of cats caged in China kept for slaughter before human consumption; details of herds of cows burnt in the UK in reaction to possible "Mad Cow Disease," 44" x 64".



Carolee Schneemann, *Caged Cats II*, 2005. Giclee print: fragments of caged cats in China and burning cow herds juxtaposed with rubble in Iraq and Palestinian settlements, 44" x 64".

As I began editing elements for a multi-channel video installation, the ambiguities of dancing within conditions of confinement shifted my intentions. I was very taken by Snowball the cockatoo whose remarkable response to various music rhythms has become a popular feature on YouTube. Snowball is among many rescued birds, but he leaves his cage to dance along the top of a couch. The dancing inmates of Phillipine Cebu prison in their orange uniforms entered my editing fragmentations. Found footage of a poignant young bear chained, costumed and playing the violin for a dismal



audience came from a Sergei Eisenstein film; finally fragmented sequences of myself dancing merged within the elements of *Precarious*. The capture of dancing seen on film and/or video I saw as a metaphoric “capture,” a formal constraint, containment, and a locking in of time, space, and motion.



Carolee Schneemann, *Precarious*, 2009. Multi-channel video installation: 3 LCD projectors, 3 DVD players, 2 motorized mirror assemblies. Filmed, edited, and sound by CS. (Photo courtesy of Tate Liverpool.) Installation dimensions vary.

This imagery began as a project for *Abandon Normal Devices* in England, 2009. I was offered the main gallery space of the Tate Liverpool. The curators phoned before the work was resolved needing a title. I hung up thinking, “I can’t be ready that soon . . . this is very precarious.” It seemed the word might signify some underlying creative dynamic! The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provided definitions of “precarious”; the first from Horace Walpole referred to “precarious happiness,” the second definition from V. Brome referred to “precarious authority,” but A. Kenney stated “the German night raids made life in Liverpool precarious.”

**Carolee Schneemann** is an interdisciplinary artist transforming the definition of art, especially discourse on the body, sexuality, and gender. She has published widely; her letters have just been collected in *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle*, edited by Kristine Stiles, from Duke University Press.

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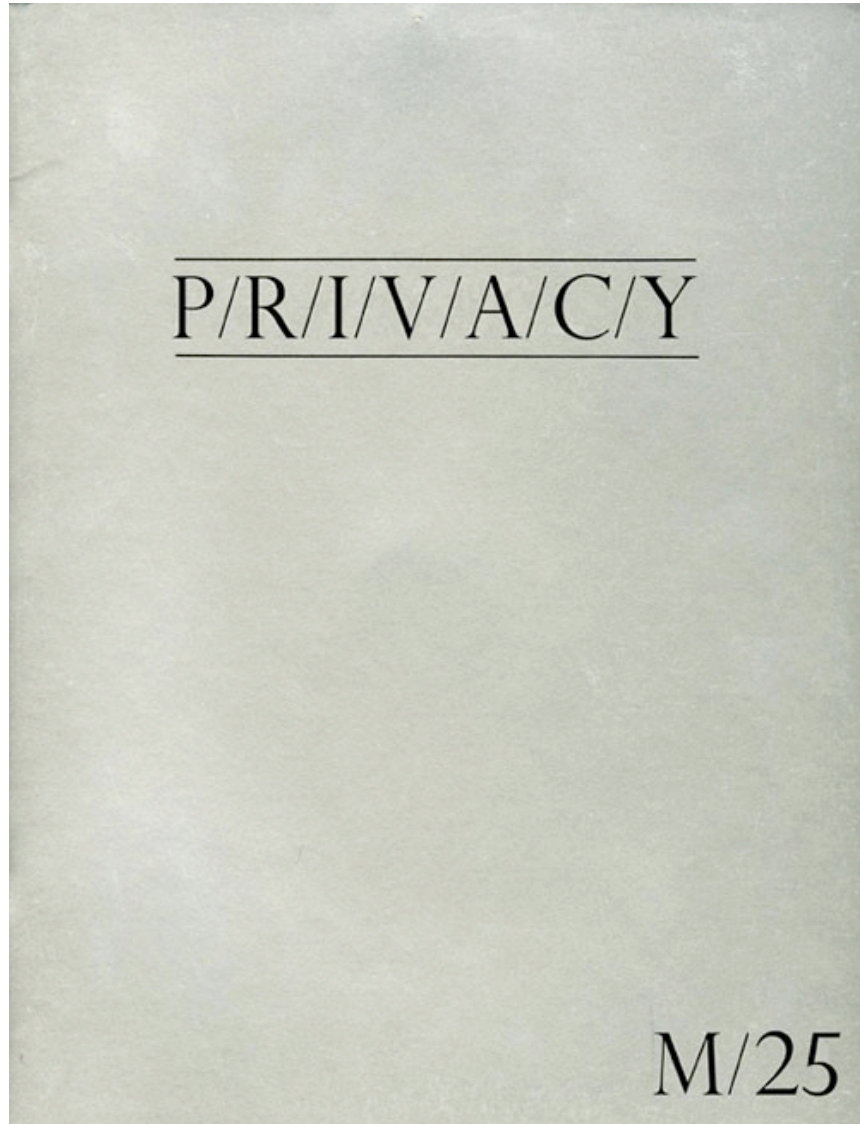
**Mira Schor**

## **P/R/I/V/A/C/Y**

This past summer, sitting alone under the tall pin oak tree in my garden in Provincetown — a spot where, listening to birds sing while I try to speed the flow between reading, thinking, writing, and painting, I am so happy that I can even bear to tear myself away

from my computer and the bell that announces new emails and the ripples of “likes” and comments that I create myself by throwing pebbles of text into the Facebook pond — I decided that the theme of the 25th anniversary issue of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* should be *Privacy*.

I didn’t even know exactly what I meant even as I envisioned the cover:



The word privacy troubled by forward slashes or “virgules” just like the title of our journal — privacy, like meaning, needs to be restored or reconstituted but the virgules “break up the possibility of an uninflected belief” (from the introduction Susan and I wrote to the *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* anthology about our original choice of name and logo design).

My relation to privacy *is* inflected. No, it is completely dual. I’m like the British comedian Pete Cook who once dressed up as Greta Garbo and had himself driven around in an open-top car yelling at the top of his lungs, “I want to be alone.” I have a drive for communication — I love to teach, I’m a politician, preacher, actress manqué, I love conversation, and I’m a huge consumer of news, information, gossip, a hard copy newspaper/TV&webholic, an email&Facebook addict — but I cannot function without

immense amounts of privacy (according to some of my friends, more privacy than most people). My home is the opposite of Kryptonite for me and it takes hours for me to recover a productive train of thought after I've been out of the house. I usually can't work if anyone is near me. I can't screen out other people. I have to be alone to sleep and even then the presence of my own body breathing and thinking can be an impediment. My mind comes alive late at night when the city lets go of me, although unfortunately the need for sleep so that I won't be a jet-lagged zombie the next day interferes with the sudden clarity of mind of that quiet moment within the urban noise and I struggle to fall sleep while scribbling notes into a notebook after I've already turned out the lights.

But aside from my personal need for privacy, what is the privacy I thought should be the subject of our issue? In the world of data mining, social networks, Wikileaks, eye in the sky, CCTV, and GPS, where my Metrocard knows more about my daily whereabouts than my closest friends, it would seem that we are living in what a button I've had on my bag since the Bush administration announces,



But when in May 2007 on my first trip back to our house in Provincetown since my mother had died, I stood outside during a break in the trip at the Bonanza bus station in Providence looking at an old cemetery to my left and the highway hidden behind an embankment of trees, I felt totally alone in the world. There was no one who knew or cared where I was or where I was going. Yes, the police could have pinpointed my location through my cell phone but for all intents and purposes as a human being I felt that there was no fixed point of reference in the universe.

That utter aloneness is an essential starting point for my work, which has always been an act of ventriloquism, communicating what I cannot speak and what erupts into visibility out of numerous suppressions from everyday life. I need to materialize the thought so I can see it for myself. My writing functions the same way, creating legible order out of threads of conversation and intuition. The work is the border between the private and the public that I must always maintain and always breach.

What I'm talking about here sounds pretty existential, and it is certain that I am describing private studio practice and please infer here also the deep pleasure, no, let me more utilitarian, the necessary *sustenance* as a human being that I get not just from the doing of my own work but from occasions of private individual experience of others'

artworks.

Private studio-based practice, private viewing experience with an individual art work — two modalities pretty much under accelerating attack the past three decades from two directions in the artworld.

Museums, like every other aspect of global capital currently finally being protested by Occupy Wall Street, have conceded to spectacle. I used to be able to go into a small and pretty empty room at MoMA and with little fanfare or spectacular trappings experience *The Demoiselles D'Avignon*. It's not that it's my favorite painting but every time I entered the smallish, semi-“private” room where it lived on its own modest sized wall and I turned to look at it, it reached out and punched me in the nose. Now *The Demoiselles* is effectively reduced to a postcard of itself on a long wall of other “postcards” of famous works in a large room whose true exhibition subject is the crowd who has come to be seen seeing art. Art that can dominate a huge atrium, art that provides the most attractive backdrop for pictures snapped on an iPhone of oneself in front of the art has erased the possibility and the value of such private art experience.

On the other side, a century-long process of critiquing traditional media such as painting and sculpture as technologically obsolete vehicles for discourse about contemporary society and because they are seen as particularly implicated in commodity culture, and the twenty-year direction of contemporary art towards social platforms and participatory social engagement — join forces and today take new form as people who espouse these new directions are captivated by the sudden eruption of political protest while at the same time educational institutions wishing for a more visibly useful role in the culture also promote such public directions away from private production or experience of individual artworks even though an orthodoxy of political art is oxymoronic.

Only in a few cases has an artwork had its intended political impact in its own time—the work of the Mexican muralists are an example. But many great artworks with political subject matter, including Goya's 1814 painting *The Third of May 1808* and Manet's 1868 paintings of *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico*, were for the most part unseen during the artists' lifetime. On the other hand contemporary works of social engagement on occasion do not use the full spectrum of art language and metaphor to engage the viewer enough to have any political impact, while elements of the “real” real (not the appropriated to art real) may have immense political power, and so who cares if they are “art.”

As a painter with a strong interest in political activism, who has worked with sometimes overt, always subtextual political content, I think painting and other traditional art objects can provide experience that is more than just a passive relation to commodity: a private engagement with an art work even if it's not illustrationally political can transmit a renewed sense of the value of interiority that too has political meaning. Painting has a material presence that can awaken the viewer to her own embodiment, bring her to her



senses. Painting is a time-based medium, not just in the doing but in the viewing and in the afterthought; it has a dimension of time that can slow the speed of commodified time. (That some painting operates at the speed and disposability of commodified time is another story for another day).



Mira Schor, *Time*, 2011, ink, rabbit skin glue, oil, and gesso on linen, 18" x 30".

My current work is often of a figure alone, holding a book, surrounded by thoughts and memories yet called back to the world. The relation of the self, the world, and the work is my subject, a necessary network of awakenings, communications, and interruptions.



Mira Schor, *The Interruption*, 2010, ink and gesso on linen, 14" x 18".

**Mira Schor** is a painter and writer living in New York City and Provincetown, MA. She is the author of *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life* (Duke University Press) and the blog

[A Year of Positive Thinking](#). She is an Associate Teaching Professor in MFA Fine Arts at Parsons The New School for Design. She is represented by CB1 Gallery in Los Angeles and Marvelli Gallery in New York City.

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## Francie Shaw

I am constantly thinking about and dealing with the situation of the larger social/political world in my work. This is a change from ten years ago. For a very long time my work was most concerned with power/gender relationships. Of course, that is an important part of the world but it is a more private oblique way of addressing social issues.

What happened? A lot of things have changed in ten years. There are three things in particular that have contributed to the change in my work.

To say the most obvious, I have gotten ten years older. (This does not always seem so obvious to me.) I look at the world with a wider lens as I get older; this is a process I think would happen in any situation. However, this wider lens allows me to see more social and economic inequality, more suffering and injustice.

The second factor is the scale at which disasters and economic change and all sorts of horrors are happening. These horrors appear to be multiplying so fast. My own government has done so many unbearable acts I feel changed by and charged to address these disturbing realities.

The third change is on a technical level. Photography and the press have changed by becoming digitalized. Great photojournalism existed before, but the amount, clarity, and speed with which we can all see images of what is happening half way around the globe, virtually as it happens, is deeply affecting. The work of contemporary photojournalists is truly amazing and inspiring. It is also so dangerous that the sacrifice they make for our education demands great attention. It is from this last influence I start my artist's biography, at least as far as your question goes.

I have been working from photographs in the newspaper for about six years. I felt compelled to draw what I saw of the world, as reflected there. I started with work that was a composite of my own drawings and sculpture placed together, lit and photographed. Some of the drawings were directly from images in the newspaper, some were portraits of reactions to these images. Some of the sculptures were body bits and other detritus from news images, much were creatures of my own imaginings. In the final work the images were pretty intense and certain ones now seem too horrible for me to want to look at. After this body of work I backed away from such literal horror to more metaphorical images for my next project.



Francie Shaw, *Gas Can*, 2010, digital print, 20" x 15".

I returned again to news photos for work in 2008 that was entirely based on images in the newspaper. I don't watch TV news, pretty much all my visual knowledge of what is happening around the world is from *The New York Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. I did a series of drawings of news photographs with brush and India ink. I have always loved this medium and the importance of gesture that is crucial to it. Doing these drawings felt very intimate to me. I felt like I was conversing with the child who was reaching out to feel the contours of the bust of her murdered brother, or the mother who caressed the forehead of her paraplegic veteran son. My drawings were, unsurprisingly, different from the actual photos, both because of my style and from the lack of context that was purposefully left out of the drawings. The figures are presented on a plain field of paper, information excluded, gesture and ambiguity emphasized.



Francie Shaw, *Paraplegic*, 2010, ink drawing, 11"x 8".

I made zillions of drawings, doing many versions of each image. Working in ink there is no erasing, it is all one fell swoop, something else I love about the medium, a kind of demand for total attention. After that period I wandered happily. I did whatever came to mind; it might be weird made-up creatures, or pages and pages of yellow circles. Then I started putting these things together. I have always wanted to equalize pure shape and color and impure content. So my very recent work includes the widest view of the world yet, for me. Abstract shapes, which might not be abstract but might be light motes or giant suns (is there any other kind) share space with the soldiers and mothers of earlier drawings. My invented, mostly threatening, creatures weave their way in and out of the space. This particular world has gotten more complicated. The work is mostly on the small side, the largest is 28" x 20". Maybe next I need to explode the space, but I shall see.





Francie Shaw, *Carrying Priest*, 2010, ink drawing, 9" x 7".

I do feel that the world I am portraying, though more expansive, is the most intimate yet, because it is the most present. For me, that is a reason to keep going.

Last weekend I had an interesting experience. There was a large graffiti work in a doorway on 11th Ave in Chelsea. The work is all black and white, paste paper style, all based on photographs from the newspaper, very intricate and skillful. I could recognize one photo we both used, of someone carrying an aged Zen priest through floodwaters. The graffiti artist and I may have very different audiences but our world is the same.



News mural, Chelsea, detail, 2011, paper on wall, approx. 7' x 4'.

I have been saddened by the demise of newspapers. This concern is another motivation for my news photo work. Iconic images have had such an enormous effect on us. What would Andy Warhol have done with no photo of Jackie Kennedy after the assassination? We share a public world through these photos. Any documentary about life in the 20th century is full of familiar news photos. Now, we click onto web sites where we can already predict the political view of the images we will see. What is going to be a commonly held image bank of the 21st century? How do we communicate?

**Francie Shaw** lives and works in Philadelphia with her husband, the poet Bob Perelman. She has been a member of A.I.R. Gallery since 2001.

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## Jeremy Sigler

### In Your Facebook

Facebook has not gone very well. The other day I deleted all 236 of my friends. Not sure why.

I guess I was starting to feel disgusted in myself for spending too much time looking through the albums of a few particularly attractive ex-students. Then my coworker told

me that people like me can be detected as we ravenously leaf through other people's albums. Ugh. Humiliation.

But I have to admit I did have one or two wholesome Facebook moments. There was a brief rekindling of a friendship that never was, with a mysterious guy named Pacey who sat near me in fourth grade, distracting me all class with his remarkable drawings of Peterbilt tractor trailers in profile (think *Smokey and the Bandit*). He'd get all the details, even the caps that flip up and down over the dual exhaust pipes.

At 16, when most of us were getting our driver's licenses, Pacey, who was still an enigma and a true nonconformist, had supposedly started his own trucking company. This was proven to be true one day out on the 495, when we passed him at the wheel of his rig in our team's yellow school bus, which was on its way to a game across town. We all jumped up, slid down our windows, and half mockingly made that childhood honking motion. He smiled over at us under the bent visor of his mesh trucker's cap, as he reached up and pulled down the chord, sounding his baritone truck horn three or four times.

When I reconnected with Pacey on Facebook, after admitting how much I longed to see his drawings of 18 wheelers again, I inquired as to what he'd been up to over the course of his adult life. A few hours later I received a reply telling me that he was writing me back from the middle of the deep blue sea. He explained that he'd eventually moved on from trucks to boats, and that he was now the captain of a transatlantic cargo tanker and spent 6 months at a time away from his wife and three kids shipping stuff across the ocean. So what was I gonna say next? "I need a job, and your life sounds ideal for writing poems, and can you maybe consider hiring me as a deck hand so that I can also disappear for 6 months?"

But Facebook is just Facebook. It's harmless and it's essentially useless. And yet, it has a way of building up one's hopes and then letting one down. It provides either too much intimacy after too long a time or not enough intimacy after too little time, or some combination in between.

Before I deleted everyone from my life, Facebook had revealed its ugly awkward nature to me. (Or had it allowed me to reveal my ugly awkward nature to myself and others?) Here's another prime example of Facebook's superficiality among people who know better, who have lived and loved and formed real personal alliances and "networks": I had gone into a friend's list and discovered an older poet I had met numerous times at readings and parties, but still didn't know so well. We were at the slow start of a nice relationship that was bound to grow, and I respected her very much. Then I "friended" her, which felt like taking a shortcut. The next time I saw her at St. Mark's Church, she looked at me and paused, as if to say "How do I know you?" And still unsure of what I had done, I blurted out "we're Facebook friends." "Oh," she said, "So, in other words,

you're a total stranger." And she just walked away.

So I went home that night and, with one click of a button (that took me about an hour to find), I somewhat reluctantly deactivated my Facebook account.

But within a few weeks, just as I was getting readjusted to life post-Facebook, a really strange thing happened. I was sent a formal email notification from Facebook's friendly "team" welcoming me back to the website. Hooray! It's a party. Where are the balloons? But I hadn't gone back! What the hell? And now, even more suspiciously, all the language on my site had been converted into Polish. Polish? I've never even been to Poland.

A friend pointed out that it was possible that someone in Poland had gotten my password and broken into my site, and browsed through my album, thus automatically activating it in Polish.

Okay, caper solved. But creepy, no?

So, seeing that there was no way out, I decided it was best to keep the site active, but to delete everything on it, and to thus diminish the exposure of my new Polish identity. This meant deleting all of my friends and all other traces. As I did this, I felt nothing, not a single emotion. I was a sociopath, I guess, or psychopath. I felt like a serial killer. When they were all gone, there was only a dull sense of satisfaction. My life was clean again.

Just as I was finishing this compulsive task, a new request for friendship arrived in my email in-box. It was from a very nice recent acquaintance named Rose. I decided to accept her friendship immediately. Weeks went by. I would go into my account and look down and see just her profile picture and the number 1 after the subheading on my profile home page labeled "friends," all the while resisting the erotic temptation to go into her album.

Over a drink with an actual friend one night, we got on the topic of Facebook, and I bragged that I had ONE friend, and that I could thus be thought of as monogamous. With Rose. And furthermore, that I'd set a new rule for myself: If I wanted a new one, I'd have to ditch the old one. (Like in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.)

Don't get the wrong idea, Rose and I weren't in any kind of flirtation, let alone communication, there was no messaging, tagging, or poking going on between us. But on the contrary, we were happily out of touch. But it was through this gesture that I had some sense of having found a way to make fun of Facebook's idea of social networking, which I had prematurely and idiotically bought into. Now I had this great feeling that I'd beaten them at their own game, that I'd shoved it back in their faces.

When I eventually ran into Rose at a party, months later, she came up to me and asked



me if I was aware how creepy it was that I had made her my one and only friend on Facebook, and had given her, only her, access to the three or four boring pictures in my album.

She was bewildered and so am I. Still.

**Jeremy Sigler's** third book of poems *Crackpot Poet* was recently published by Black Square/Brooklyn Rail. He is the Senior Editor of *Parkett* and lives in Brooklyn.

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**Alexandria Smith**

## **process, product, ponder**

I was hesitant and resistant at first to the recent fascination with technology in the art world. I found myself unable to embrace the benefits that others reaped because of my desire to rebel against those trends. I was annoyed and frustrated by the voices telling me to stop painting, make videos, do some performance. There is something moving and inspiring in the physical act of traditional art making. I personally revel in having my entire body involved in the process and I have yet to find anything that can replace that feeling.

It's been almost a year and a half since graduate school and I have finally found myself free to experiment. The studio is my laboratory and it needs to be treated as such. There is no place for the pressures of society in my studio. As much as I am aware of what is a necessary mindset to have, it is still quite difficult to filter out the outside world.



Alexandria Smith, *The Words Don't Fit In My Mouth*, 2011, acrylic on panel, 24" x 19½".

I have recently allowed the digital age to enter my practice for research and to find inspiration. A recent fellowship I was awarded has allowed me to learn camera field production and video editing techniques. These new techniques will allow my affinity towards being an interdisciplinary artist in contemporary society to be fully realized. My paintings, drawings, and performances are now provided a space in which they can work in tandem with and inform one another. I am embracing the positive impact the digital age can have on my practice without allowing the opinions of “others” to dictate what I do. As technology improves, so do the challenges artists face to make work that is engaging without being immediately gratifying and easy. Not only do we have the challenges of facing history, but also the challenges of a technologically advanced present.



Alexandria Smith, *Wayward Delight*, 2011, oil on panel, 48" x 50".



Alexandria Smith, *On the Rooftop*, 2009, pen and ink on kraft paper, 6½" x 12".



Alexandria Smith, *Untitled Histories*, 2011, charcoal/conté on kraft paper, 48" x 70".

**Alexandria Smith** is an interdisciplinary artist who creates paintings, drawings, and performances that explore racial and sexual identity development through the lens of childhood. She lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, while simultaneously educating the youth and young professionals of tomorrow.

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## Buzz Spector

Every time I open up my Facebook page, I find all sorts of charming information nuggets about the people in my social network. Notably, none of the 2,000 or so among them ever offer political views far to the right of mine, and I cannot help but wonder if all the political conservatives who are not my “friends” also find near unanimity of viewpoint within Facebook’s cushioning algorithms.



Do you still read *The New York Times* in print format? I do, for the most part, and I also read the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in ink on paper mode. However, this accounts for only a small portion of the total time I spend news gathering from a variety of websites online, and therein resides the source of my increasing anxiety about civic life here. Every website I visit offers screenfuls of reassurance that my political, social, and recreational interests are commonplace, sensible, and widely shared. I suspect this means that every other web user is being reassured in parallel terms, but who knows for sure? What I can believe is that the printed newspaper I read every day has the same information and editorials in all of the copies of that day's print run. Before the rise of the Internet, the other readers with whom I might have discussed the events of a given moment may or may not have shared my views, but they would have read the same words, scrutinized the same graphics, and recognized the same photographed faces, on those pages. The same can certainly not be said about the web.



Anselm Kiefer, *Everyone Stands Under His Own Dome of Heaven*, 1970, watercolor, gouache, and graphite pencil on joined paper, 15 3/4" x 18 7/8". Collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Denise and Andrew Saul Fund, 1995.

When Anselm Kiefer opened his first U.S. survey exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1987, I was particularly amused by a pencil and watercolor drawing, *Everyone Stands Under His Own Dome of Heaven*, 1970. The little painted figure in the middle of the picture's desolate field raises his right hand in a (Fascist?) salute from inside a vaguely geodesic dome of translucent pastel ultramarine blue. There's more blue sky above the horizon line, but that sky is, shall we say, dingier than the air of the blue dome. The drawing was funnier to me as a reflection on the delusions of artists than it is now as a parable of everyone's view of the world as mediated by through computer screens and performance-enhancing drugs.

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Buzz Spector, 2011.

**Buzz Spector**'s art has been the subject of exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago; Orange County Museum of Art; the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, DC; Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA; and many private galleries and alternative spaces. Spector was a co-founder and editor of *WhiteWalls*, the Chicago-based magazine of writings by artists, between 1978–87. He lives and works in St. Louis, Missouri.

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## Misko Šuvaković

My intuition in the age of a digital corporate world can/could be read from different positions of understanding, experiences, living, events and interpretations of contemporaneity, but there is one characteristic and visible platform from which it is expressed: this is the platform of permanent *state of emergency*. The writer of these lines could say, similar to those who have 'strongly' experienced differences and conflicts of the 20th century: my life unwound and is unwinding between public and

private — the depicted and the undepicted — in a permanent *state of emergency*: communist revolutions, self-governed freedoms from bureaucratic communism, crises of real socialism, transitional primary accumulations of capital, nationalistic hysterically-paranoid proscription, and the state of global neo-liberalism. This is something that cannot be overcome even with good intentions nor by a cheery disposition, it is something that is always played out with consequences. This is why there is a recurrence, in the lines of the *letter* which follows, with the only weapons which modern people have been able to build up in their resistance to a *permanent state of emergency*, that is a minimum of rationality, a critical approach, and radical analysis.





Misko Šuvaković, *Permanent State of Emergency*, color photographs, 2011.

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live in is the norm. We have to reach a concept of history which suits this state (Walter Benjamin).

I would like to get out of the bottle just like that fly who was taught this by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Research*, but I am afraid that by coming out of 'my' bottle I will find myself in some other bigger or smaller bottle which will once again be mine and for me, for us and for the other lives. If I am always caught in the space and time of supervision, control, and regulation — burnt ships behind me from adolescent pirate stories remain just a spectre of child fictions and commercial prose — then, carrying out minimum rationality, a critical approach, and radical analysis remains the means which 'keeps' a precarious hope in the place of broken class-based and ethnic utopias about God's graciousness, the Heavenly Kingdom, the island of humaneness, brotherhood, equality, and freedom, about socialism, about communism, about individual freedoms, and liberalism.

But, towards what are minimum rationality, a critical approach, and radical analysis oriented? Definitely towards that which is caught — metaphysically and existentially — between the undepicted, mute life and the depicted, enunciated life. What is in that trap? That which will maybe be recognized, i.e., named as 'life.' In other words, there will be word of a *state of emergency* in which 'life' is played out in all evasions and approaches within the events of contemporaneity. This is a desire for direct democracy.

**Misko Šuvaković** is Professor of Aesthetics and Theory of Art at the University of Arts, Belgrade, Serbia. He has published some books in English: *PAS TOUT* (Buffalo, 1994), *Impossible Histories* with Dubravka Djuric (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 2006), *Epistemology of Art* (Belgrade, Vienna, 2008), and *The Clandestine Histories of the OHO Group* (Ljubljana, 2010).



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**Anne Swartz**

## **Islamic Art, 9/11, and Me**

The events of 9/11, used as catalyst for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, figured into my scholarly and critical history in the past decade much more than I expected. In December of 2001, I traveled from my home in Georgia with my husband and son to NYC to complete some research on Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) for a book project on new media art. I was interviewing Billy Klüver and Julie Martin. It was magical to meet them and discuss their work. But in a NYC still filled with fire fighter memorials and flyers depicting the missing, devastation hung in every step, conversation, and corner. I began asking artists in their studios how 9/11 had influenced them. To a person, each welcomed the opportunity to discuss the impact, remarking that it seemed taboo. Remember the year was 2001, so the hundreds of exhibitions about the impact of 9/11 hadn't happened yet.

For my Fulbright year in Japan in 2002 to 2003, I gave my lecture "American Art after 9/11" eleven times. I could have given that lecture another twenty times if I had apportioned the time. The interest was intense. I returned from Japan and realized I had a great deal of material on the increased relevance of abstraction in memorializing the events of 9/11. I wrote it up into an article, which was published in *symploke* in 2006. That article gets more hits than almost anything else I have written.

I curated an exhibition on the Pattern and Decoration movement, or P&D, at the Hudson River Museum, NY, where it was shown from October 2007 to January 2008. It was a triumph for me; the key artists participated, the show was reviewed well in national publications, and a catalogue produced. It wasn't a perfect experience, because there is never enough money, energy, or time, but it was thrilling and the work looked amazing. In the run-up to the exhibition, I met Oleg Grabar, a highly regarded scholar of Islamic art and one of the small pantheon of immortals — impressive resident scholars at the Institute for Advanced Studies of Princeton. He hosted me for lunch at the Institute. All the visiting and resident scholars eat lunch together, so my presence alongside his greatness prompted much whispering. I was meeting with him to discuss art critic Amy Goldin, his former student at Harvard, who had befriended several of the P&D artists. Grabar figured into the P&D narrative directly, because he had supplied introduction letters to Goldin and artist Robert Kushner to visit sites in Iraq and Afghanistan on a trip in the early 1970s. He spoke freely with me about his adventures studying Islamic art, but said, "There are barriers you will experience, even in completing basic research." "Barriers?," I asked naively, thinking he meant me being a woman and expecting that he somehow thought I planned to do site research in the Middle Eastern countries. He explained it wouldn't be a popular notion to discuss the influence of Islamic art on American art now. I left that visit determined to do a great job on my paper and the

exhibition. But I had a persistent nagging feeling about my work as potentially unpopular. I began to think more about the reports of surveillance of scholarship by the U.S. government. I began to use Google exclusively since some of the other search engines were giving search data to the intelligence organizations in the government. I offered lectures on the impact of Islamic art on American art but Americans, unlike the Japanese, weren't biting. It was too early for public lectures. . . . I was doing unpopular work.

**Anne Swartz** is Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. In her writing, curating, and public lectures she focuses on contemporary art, especially feminist artists. She has supported the innovative and transgressive work of emerging and established artists, whose art has not been fully examined. Swartz is currently co-editing *The Question of the Girl* with Jillian St. Jacques and completing *Female Sexualities in Contemporary Art*, an essay collection, and *The History of New Media/New Genre: From John Cage to Now*, a survey of developments in recent art.

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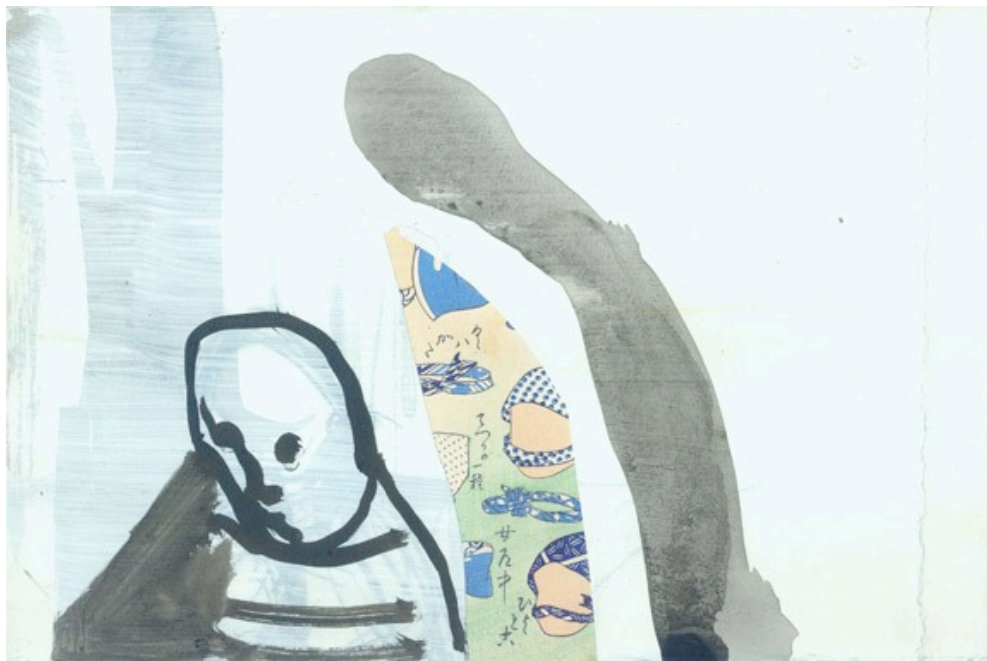
## Aldrin Valdez

Surf, scour, glean, cull, watch, look, be lulled by, link to, jump, connect, Wiki-answer, and share, share, share — the Web can be a monadic, magic apparatus. Access to information aplenty. Image-spheres and avatar selves. Revelations at a click.

When I think about the accumulated mass of digital information on the Internet, however, I can freeze up because the visual work I'm about to upload onto my website can potentially lose its agency for me. It will be lost in the heap of other pixelated images, links, and virtual stuff. It will no longer matter. In the real world, I will look at the physical work and think that there's something wrong with it. It's like the soul has been sucked out of the poor thing and placed, a homunculus, in the glowing glass vitrine.

Okay.

But then I upload images that fit the clean design of the web. If it's a painting or a drawing — something made with the hand — it can lose itself online, unless it's presented in a way that dispels or takes advantage of the flattening effect of the web. One time, I arranged my portfolio in chronological order, each link in the menu bar corresponding to a different year of work, and I felt, well this is really meaningless now. I just gave myself a retrospective and I haven't even started yet.



Aldrin Valdez, *Untitled* (from the series *Feeling Thought*), 2011, collage, ink, and gesso on paper, 7 ½" x 15".

I take the web very personally and maybe I shouldn't. Maybe this conflict points to something else that I want from the Internet — something perhaps we all want. Intimacy. Sociality. Community. Something physical and life-giving — skin and pulse, pits and hair, like and care.

Look at Facebook. Even the words it uses suggest physicality: poke, share, home, friend, etc.

I'm hesitant to upload my work, yes. I don't want you to see my process, no, and I don't want to predetermine where I'm going, never. But then I want you to see what I'm doing. On Facebook, I want you to *Comment* and *Like*. I want you to re-post and blog. I want you to see me. Facebook, and other networking sites, can be a great social space. There's a vivifying thrill in its ability to provide acknowledgement, visibility, and community with other people who are seeking similar interests — hopefully. Its current structure, however, is frightening. What the hell is this ticker doing on the side of my screen? And why is every puerile gesture or comment I made five years ago still streaming in recorded history?

**Aldrin Valdez** is an artist/writer living and working in New York City.

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**Marjorie Vecchio**

## **The Overwhelm**

A quote from Paul Virilio has haunted — and sometimes guided — me for years, both in my personal life and in the murky space that my body shares with the social body.

“When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck.” I think of the ships I passionately create as a curator, teacher, lover, friend, and colleague — all too willing to deal with whatever shipwrecks come along with the effort I deem crucial to being alive. And yet more often I also think of the ships I had nothing — or unknowingly nothing — to do with: 9/11, war and violence, and economic failure.

As our technologies for visual, written, and aural information develop, artists are stretched thinner and thinner over the content of global situations, of which numerous are negative and seemingly impossible not only to confront but to fix: poverty, cruelty, gender and race inequity, religious conservatism, and environmental destruction. What does an artist make work about? Where do they even begin? How do they connect outer turmoil to inner development and investigation? Where do young artists find themselves? The American students I teach were 8 to 13 years old when 9/11 happened. They are now in their early to mid-20s and almost every single artist’s statement they write is about their early childhood, unknowingly before 9/11. How can the mysterious content of life intrigue them when the known is overwhelming and heartbreaking? How do they imagine their futures, as individuals and as communities?

In Adrienne Rich’s poem *Diving into the Wreck* she describes a diver returning to a wreck; the poem’s message can encourage our futures and I will use it everyday in order to move forward. From the middle of the poem we find this:

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.  
I stroke the beam of my lamp  
slowly along the flank  
of something more permanent  
than fish or weed  
the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
the drowned face always staring  
toward the sun



the evidence of damage  
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty  
the ribs of the disaster  
curving their assertion  
among the tentative haunters.

And she finishes with:

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.

We have unknowingly assisted in the shipwrecks we now witness by not practicing what we preach. We have allowed money to divide us into ridiculous popular, intellectual, and academic hierarchies. Stolen from us is the desire to indulge in the enigmatic and to understand our power as a diverse group. And so in the face of being overwhelmed, and thus the threat of becoming mute because of it, I suggest it is time for us to dive into the wreck and let some things go. Artists as a boorish, arrogant snotty lot need to go. It's time for those of us involved in the arts to release that which has turned art into a so-called "world," which mimics a failed economic model that eats its own tail, spits out the scales and chokes on competitive stupidity. It's time to take money and misguided conceit out of the arts. We've talked about it for years, we've railed against it, we make fun of it, we talk to our students about it while we participate in it, but now there is an obvious opportunity to create ships and shipwreck of that which are no longer of any use.

But only after we are willing to return to the wreck can we learn how to aim higher.

**Marjorie Vecchio** was an artist for 12 years until she deemed it socially crucial to create positive opportunities for artists instead. She became a curator, considers herself an infiltrator, and works in academia, all for only now.

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## Roger White

Within the academy, political art generates a kind of angst about the validity of contemporary art as a whole. It provokes doubts, among which are the following: the institutions of art are too insular, and its audience too elite, to imagine that a work of art will ever function as a constructive tool for social or political change. The total

implication of the art industry in the financial system makes art's critical content a moot point. The strategies of advanced art can be mined as new and innovative forms of domination. The values we admire in contemporary art — its complexity, its openness to interpretation — actually make it a terrible vehicle for clear, effective communication. In short: if you make art to make a point, it probably won't reach enough people; and if it does, they probably won't get it.

With this in mind, it's interesting to see how politically-motivated art actually fares outside the academy — how its forms of basic research are applied in settings beyond the crit room or the gallery. In particular, the Occupy Wall Street movement has provided a clear chance to observe many different intersections of aesthetics and political action.

To begin with, OWS is full of undisputable works of art (posters, logos, street sculptures, performances, solidarity exhibitions); as well as economic connections to the art world (e.g., money from Wall Street flows through the art world into the legal defense fund of the protestors); and historical affiliations with various avant-garde practices (the contested role of Situationism in framing the occupation). There is also the banal but important fact that a lot of artists have shown up at Zuccotti Park: in no capacity other than that of warm bodies inhabiting a particular space, they have contributed greatly to the success of the occupation.

No one would deny that art has been a major part of the movement from the beginning. But people who have gone so far as to call the occupation *itself* a work of art generally intend it as an insult. In the early days of the occupation, mainstream media coverage described protestors as engaging in a form of "street theater," with vague or fantastical intentions. Their eccentric appearance, drum circles, and flash mobs were mercilessly mocked. The occupation was described as a pastiche of more authentic forms of activism — a white-hipster faux-Tahrir Square. Even sympathetic commentators scare-quoted seemingly neutral aspects of the occupation's organization (e.g., "working groups," "centers"), flagging the entire thing as an elaborate piece of performance art: not real, therefore not news.

This idea faltered almost immediately when faced with the undeniable reality of the situation in Zuccotti Park. The police, for example, certainly responded to the occupation as if it were really happening, not just a Happening, and everyone else followed suit. But the attempt to attack the movement through its aesthetics revealed a lot about how aesthetics was actually operating within it.

The core of this aesthetic critique was the occupier's counterintuitive relationship to language. What did they actually want, and why couldn't they just come out and say it? What was *the Ask*? Though the occupiers generated all manner of speeches, texts, and slogans, across a wide range of forms and styles, none of these were even remotely in line with the current conventions of political self-expression. Nothing the protestors said

satisfied the media's increasingly frenzied demand for demands.

This vagueness — studied or otherwise — turns out to have been a very eloquent way of communicating. It indicated quite well the extent of the occupiers' dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the United States, which far exceeds the capacity of policy speak to express. It dramatized the practice of consensus decision-making that has now entered the public consciousness: if they were slow to arrive at a unified statement of purpose, it was because everyone's opinion mattered. It created an open situation in which a wide spectrum of people could locate themselves and their desires.

Most importantly, the occupiers' unfamiliar use of language generated a tremendous amount of anxiety, which coursed through the many attempted dismissals of the movement like an electric current. The unsettling concept of a protest without demands was revolting to many (even those on the left), seductive to others, and made itself felt in a way that many recent, more conventional political actions haven't. These aesthetic responses were then translated into analyses, diatribes, encomia, proposals, and, eventually, the "specific policy demands" that everyone was clamoring for in the first place.

In this sense, and *only* in this sense, did the occupation function like a work of art: it didn't speak so much as it compelled its audience to speak — to translate an unfamiliar, sensible thing into familiar terms. By making themselves visible and audible but not quite legible, the occupiers created a temporary vacuum in the field of signification, so abhorrent to thought that millions of conflicting interpretations have now rushed in to fill it.

[Roger White](#) is a painter and an editor of the journal *Paper Monument*.

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## Daniel Wiener

### The Online Curmudgeon

Google wants all online content to be free, easily accessible, without barriers, (economic and otherwise), this make sense: every time we, the users, look for a particular form of content Google gets paid. The more we search, the more money Google makes. In fact, Google would be happy if we never reach the destination of our search. The more we travel on Google's apparently public roadway, the better it is for them.

This is a radical change in civil affairs, standing the relation between public and private on its head. In the past the roadways were public, owned and operated by the community, not for the profit of a privately held enterprise. And the destination was most often private. Our homes, workplaces, stores, etc., were the sites of private exchange.

No company owned a road or tunnel or bridge. But in the place-less landscape of the Internet, Google does. (If we were momentarily to picture Google as an apartment building, the tenants would pay for the use of the hallways, stairs, and elevators, but would not pay rent for their apartments, which could be entered and used by anyone.) In this reversal of public and private, content becomes ownerless, available to all without cost. But unlike the traditional public realm, it is not funded by the community but is self-funded by the creators of the content.

And what is content, really? It is music, words, and pictures. And who produces them? Musicians, composers, writers, poets, novelists, journalists, memoirists, critics, historians, scientists, artists, filmmakers, photographers, designers, programmers, cooks, etc. The people who are denigratingly called “content-providers” are the same people who are building our culture. And if I am right that there is enormous economic and social pressure for all content to be free, how will culture workers be able to materially survive? Most artists hold day jobs and they are used to it. But what happens if Google gets what it wants, and everyone is an artist — creative as an artist, but paid as little as an artist, too?



Daniel Wiener, Studio in the spring of 2011.





Daniel Wiener, Studio in the spring of 2011.

## The Open-Source Evangelist

For my day job, I am a web designer and developer who mostly uses the open source web platform, WordPress. The source code for WordPress is transparent. Anyone can take a look “under the hood” and modify it. WordPress, like all open-source projects is collaborative, with people contributing at any level of commitment from skilled programmers, upgrading the core software, to users, answering beginners’ questions on the forums. If you have a problem with Wordpress, you will be able to find someone to help you online. Not only is there a general attitude of generosity in this approach but also less of a distinction between users and creators. WordPress acknowledges and benefits from the fact it is created and maintained by the community using it.

Both of these notions, transparency and collaborative enterprise, taken from the open-source movement have invigorated my practice as an artist and altered my point of view about art. I decided to open up my workshop, my studio, showing what is “under the hood” by publishing online the methods I use to make my sculpture, in a small attempt to counter the stingy tenor of the artworld. And in contrast to the co-operative ethos of WordPress, art is often portrayed like the Olympics. If you do not win a Gold, Silver or Bronze medal, you do not exist — only the winners are manifest in the corpus of art.

But isn’t the open-source, collaborative nature of the WordPress project a more apt comparison to the production of art? Art does not exist without the contributions of all artists. My involvement with digital culture, has helped me realize how art is more like Wikipedia than the winner-take-all narrative of art historians.

As both the Online Curmudgeon and Open-Source Evangelist, I hold incommensurable views. On the one hand, I believe knowledge should be freely available to everyone. On the other hand, people who make things up need to be paid for their work. Being caught between these opposing outlooks arises, I believe, because the Internet is placeless.

The distinction between public (a plaza) and private (a home) is clearer in the physical world. So I revel in the physicality of sculpture where there is no copy, paste or Command-Z. In the private space of the studio I am one body making one sculpture, one step at a time. And when it is publicly on display, a small audience sees the sculpture in all its dimensions because they (the sculpture and the audience) are both present in the same place.

In different ways Google and Wordpress take advantage of the confusion of place on the Internet. You and I, however, are stuck in one place at one time. Thankfully.

**Daniel Wiener** is an artist living and working in Brooklyn, New York. Though he is known primarily for intense and viscerally arresting sculptures, Wiener also works on watercolors, 3-D animations, and website design. He recently had a show of sculpture at Lesley Heller Workspace on the Lower East Side.

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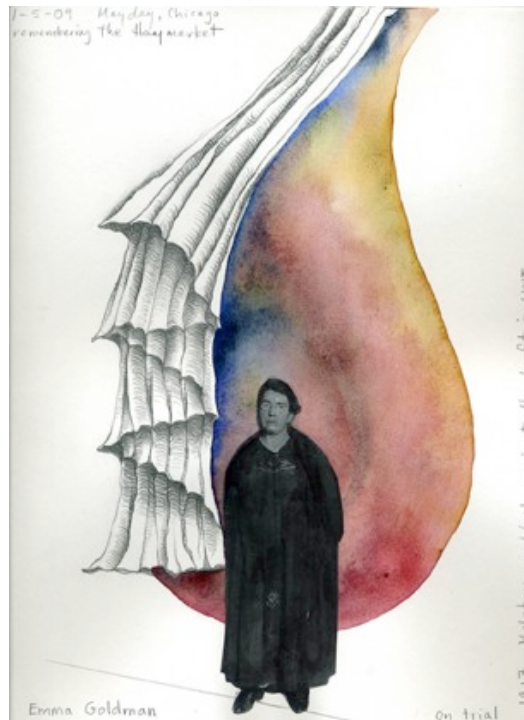
## Faith Wilding

### Sunt lacrimae rerum . . . There are Tears in Things

On the 10th anniversary of 9/11 I had to turn off my radio and television because I found the spectacular performance of public mourning — a toxic mix of nationalism, militarism, and patriotism, sprinkled with numerous references to God and the sanctity of American Freedom — too disturbing and infuriating. I remember that a few days after 9/11 many of my students were making art-work using flags (and not ironically, either); and one of them said to me tearfully that now her little daughter would grow up in a country in which she could never feel safe again. I heard this lament repeated over and over: “I/we can never feel safe again.” We can sing “Amazing Grace” in as many versions as we like, it won’t make the troops come home, it won’t end the war(s), and it won’t make us feel safe.

So instead, I put on 16th-century English composer Thomas Tallis’ unprecedented motet, *Spem in alium* (“I have had no hope in any but in thee, O God of Israel . . .”) scored for 40 independent vocal parts, deployed antiphonally in eight five-part choirs. The work was probably written for a dramatic pageant of the Apocryphal story of Judith, a rich and beautiful widow who is said to have delivered the Jews from the ravages of the Assyrians by a daring act of extreme violence: the beheading of the Assyrian enemy commander, Holofernes. (Who can forget Artemisia Gentileschi’s savage and explicit painting of Judith beheading Holofernes?) I first heard *Spem* performed live by the Pacifica Singers in Los Angeles, who sang it standing in a circle with the audience clustered around them. Listening to this sublime, yet tender and intimate call and response of human voices, I wept, thinking about the “tears in the nature of things” and the seeming impossibility of humans ever ending warfare and violence. I pondered the paradox of this amazing musical work that exalts hope and

faith in the God who delivers us from our enemies, and could be said to sanctify the violent and sacrificial patriotic act of an individual woman murdering to save her people. As a conscientious objector, I cannot but stick to my conviction that war cannot save a people. But then it is the very existence and beauty of this music that confirms my conviction.



Faith Wilding, *Emma Goldman, a Molotov cocktail against the draft, 1917* from “Tears” series, 2009-2010, watercolor and photocollage on paper, 11" x 9".

In 2010 I began work on a series of “tears,” intimate works on paper, for a collaborative exhibition, *The Long Loch: How do We Go On from Here?* with the British artist Kate Mary Davis. My small watercolors and photo collages were motivated by the desire to evoke sensations and feelings about personal histories, desire, sadness, longing, and tenderness; and of being connected through our tears to a collective grief with others both living and dead. I wanted the way the tears were painted to look bruised and juicy, and the colors to communicate the passionate attachments and memories, both personal and collective, that underlie my work. While making the paintings, I re-read Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, an incantatory contemplation of the exuberant life of the body and nature; loss, death, war and violence; memory and time passing, that represents a poetic breakthrough of how the consciousness of the artist expressed in lyrical prose is able to vanquish death and forgetting itself — “Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!”

At a symposium on “Disruptions: Art and the Political” (MCA, Chicago, 2009), the speakers explored questions like: Where is the political in art now? How can our work be contemplative and discursive, emotional and critical simultaneously? Gregg Bordowitz spoke about the importance of having a theory of emotions when doing political work, and that our political sadness commits us to embrace difficulty. He

challenged the audience to use our collective grief in our work, to in effect “see the world through our tears.” This resonated with what motivated me to make the “tears” — work that will never be finished.

At the risk of making this sound like a contribution to Desert Island Discs, I next played one of my favorite Leonard Cohen songs with the words “. . . there is a crack, a crack in everything, that’s where the light gets in, that’s where the light gets in . . .”

In the collage works for the Long Loch exhibition, I used scans of old photographs, and drawing, to experiment with ways of reading personal histories through contexts of collective histories, and of collaging and montaging the past with the present. I played with performative re-enactments that probe how the past underlies the present, and proposed reparative re-stagings of histories — a method suggested by Eve Sedgwick’s essay on “reparative reading.” How can the past be thought and represented differently in order to imagine new possibilities?

One of the dangers of living the over-examined life is that like so many other comrades and seekers, I am haunted by the unanswered global question: What is to be Done? I translate this into the personal political question: What is my work, and why am I doing it? I can think of no better instigation to do my work than this quote from a letter Emma Goldman, the anti-war anarchist, wrote to her comrade and lover Alexander Berkman when he was feeling particularly hopeless:

“To do our work lightly, or to be haunted by the thought that it does not matter because life does not matter, would mean that we could do no work at all, writing or otherwise. And without the work we care about, life itself would be impossible. It certainly would be to me.” (Quoted in *Love, Anarchy & Emma Goldman: A Biography* by Candace Falk)

\* “Sunt lacrimae rerum . . .” In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Aeneas weeps when shown Carthaginian murals depicting the Trojan battles and the deaths of so many friends.

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## Tom Winchester

Wandering around the city in coffee shops and free public spaces during this recession has given me a chance to meet people I used to think I had nothing in common with. A gentleman in his seventies named Hal started talking to my wife and I while we were pecking away at our iPads one summer mid-day, and we discussed the neighborhood and how bad things are now. Maybe it was insecurity on both our parts, but we talked a lot about the generational differences between us rather than how the economic situation has forced us to unite, or how similar our problems really are. Even though he’s not an artist or familiar with the art crowd, I know he identifies with me



because he sighs and refocuses his eyes, as if gazing toward the horizon, every time the subject of working comes up.

I'm a millennial, which could be defined as someone who stockpiled degrees during the recession in order to get ahead in the rat race. I see us as aligned with the turn-of-the-twentieth-century bohemians who exhibited in salons and debated ideas openly. And like them, we have a distaste for the bourgeoisie, who today consists of gallery owners dipping into trust funds to feature the latest flavors. One stylistic aspect of our generation's artwork is its inherent acceptance of the theory of relational aesthetics, which may serve as a reaction to an art market that relies on the sale of physical objects. An upbringing of using a mouse to click through metaphysical webspace has produced our artists who, even if we can't sometimes articulate it, don't need to make a sellable object in order to create art or be considered artists. Discourse has been our goal since we were kids adventuring through browsers in search of anyone we could "friend."

Our lives generally included college, graduate school and possibly some kind of Ph.D. program, as well as frequently publishing in print run out of some office uptown. As a result, everyone has a story about compromising with some editor who didn't want to risk advertising revenue for integrity, and has subsequently moved to blogging as his or her platform. Not the kind of blogging you see now on magazine sites whose money-making model echoes that of print's, with one or two people filtering the contributors' ideas, but all the tweets and Facebook posts we share on a daily basis are compiling our peer-edited collective journal outside of the established publication pipeline. We don't revere print; in fact we see it as inefficient. As educated working artists and writers, we'd much rather be paid for what we love and have it appear online than have the publication waste money on paper, ink, distribution, and whatever else. We know the stereotype of the starving artist exists because of capitalism, and having come of age during the recession, being insecure about the technology by which our ideas are distributed is the least of our concerns.

I plan to continue wandering. The past few years have been good. I'm happier now than I've ever been despite the recession, maybe because what I'd hoped would happen, did: that it would squeeze out all the fluff from the world, and the art world, specifically. It forced our generation to get a lot done in a short time. The millennials' ethics clashed with commercialism so quickly during the past few years that we're already changing careers and starting up businesses that treat workers fairly. We're showing in our apartments and discussing what we don't like. We're thinking for ourselves. We ran out of rungs, and now we're reconstructing the ladder. So in a way, I'm glad the recession happened.

[Tom Winchester](#) writes about photography and the art world for *Sovereign Nation* and *Hyperallergic*.