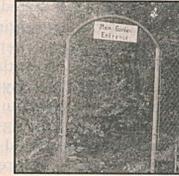


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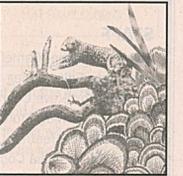
REVIEW OF ARTS

No. 9 JANUARY FEBRUARY 2004 FREE *The Team Issue*

PDX GRID PROJECT
After more than eight years, a group of Portland photographers has almost finished documenting the city, one square mile at a time.
page 4



FREE POSTER!
Broadside debuts with the first in a series of mass-edited art.
Details inside.
page 4



Our other chronic hunger problem

WHEN THE ARTS PASS THE HAT, OREGONIANS PASS THE BUCK

By Cielo Lutino

When Michael Graves does a line of housewares for Target or local rockers the Shins ink a deal with McDonald's, tongues wag, raising the old debate between art and commerce. But when the legislature significantly cut funding for the Oregon Cultural Trust last year, nary a peep was heard. Funding for arts organizations seems to elicit nothing but a big yawn from Portlanders.

That disinterest endangers the arts scene in the City of Roses. From underage rock club Meow Meow to the Regional Arts and Culture Council, music venues and arts organizations provide needed structure to the creative community. They dole out money to artists, support arts education programs, secure arts funding at the legislative level, facilitate public dialogue about art and bring art to the public. But, according to George Thorn of ARTS Action Research, a national arts consulting firm, Portland is "pretty much a cheap date" when it comes to springing for the arts.

"There's not an understanding in the community that organizations need to be sustained," Thorn says. "And there's not the mix of incomes, not as broad a range of foundations. Arts organi-

"According to the Oregon Community Foundation, contributions from Oregon businesses declined by almost 37 percent between 1990 and 2001, despite the state's strong economic growth during that period."

zations have to start from scratch each year."

Perhaps no other organization understands that conundrum better than the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art for whom contributions make up approximately 70 percent of their budget annually. "Each year it starts over," says Kristy Edmunds, PICA's executive director. "You're very dependent on the subjectivity and the economies of others."

Carrie Hoops, executive director of Literary

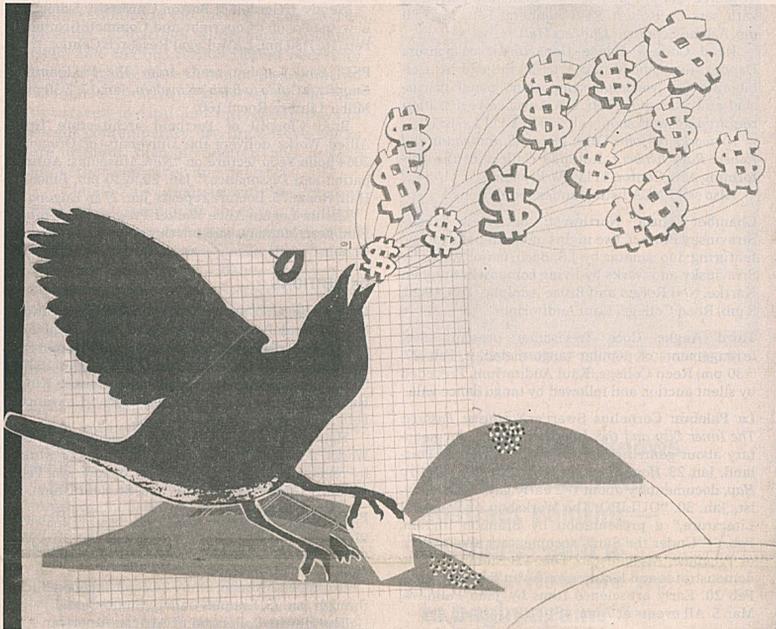


ILLUSTRATION BY PAIGE SÁEZ

Arts, agrees, "Foundations and corporations are fickle depending on the market. When the market tanks, foundations have less to give, corporations have less to give." While that truism would seem to apply anywhere, Thorn describes Portland's situation as unique. In other cities like Philadelphia, New York and Chicago, organizations can depend on contributions to float 50 percent of their annual budget. Here, nonprofit organizations can't predict what percentage, if any, of their annual income will come from charitable contributions. And that can't be blamed on differences among Eastern, Midwestern and Western cities—Portland compares just as unfavorably to West Coast counterparts Seattle and San Francisco.

Portland's tendency to let the arts wither goes beyond the arena of nonprofit organizations. Last year's closing of the Blackbird, a small commercial music venue, was a prime example. Featuring lesser known local and national bands, the Blackbird nursed a reputation for booking shows of new and emerging talent but closed after only two years, despite its popularity with the independent music set. While there are many reasons for its demise, the bottom line can be traced to, well, the bottom line. In last summer's issue of Portland music rag *The Music Liberation Project*, Chantelle Hylton, former booking agent for the Blackbird, said, "It's not a hard thing to under-

FUNDING / continued on page 2

Batteries included

MIXING MOVEMENT, TEXT AND ELECTRONIC TOYS IN HER NEW PERFORMANCE, **BIG REAL**, CHOREOGRAPHER LINDA AUSTIN IS STILL GOING...

by Merridawn Duckler

Who's facing the biggest identity crisis in modern art right now? Modern dance. Hedged in on three sides by the growing encroachment of installation, performance art and conceptual art, modern dance is sharing a mighty big tent. As the lines defining visual art and performing art grow ever more blurry, modern dancers find themselves up against new challenges to traditional notions of nontraditional dance. Some turn a blind eye, clinging to the old ways and some rush precipitously to embrace the new. Locally there isn't a dancer better equipped to meet the issue head-on than Linda Austin, a performer who, from her earliest days, has been interested in integrating nondancing elements into her text-driven, genre-crossing work. She's especially known for her use of props, some of which come to life mechanically or electronically to create what she calls a "mosaic of high and low technology." In her works she is as likely to dodge a remote-control toy as fall and roll modern-dance style across the stage. From January 30 to February 15, Austin will unleash her own personal pantheon of hoaxes, alter egos and what she calls "the permeable membrane of identity" in her newest piece, *Big Real*, to be performed at her home base, Performance Works NorthWest.

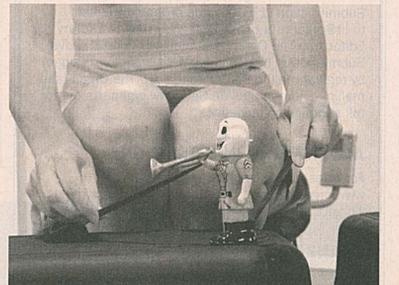
Big Real is a solo venture for Austin, though a phalanx of commissioned artisans are helping to realize her vision by way of video, original songs and Austin's signature props. One of these, a stand festooned with roses and bearing a life-sized, masklike head shot of a serious but sweet looking Austin in a short '80s 'do, suggests this work is autobiographical. But Austin is more interested in the notion of identity in the abstract sense. A section of *Big Real* premiered at PICA's TBA Festival in September, but the work has grown into a full-length exploration, an elaborate meditation that includes an homage to the painting of the poet Thomas Chatterton, gifted poseur and Pre-Raphaelite hero. Without being exactly narrative or precisely filmic, sections are linked by ersatz chapter headings, like those in silent films. Austin created the movement first and then added the text—she's fascinated by how they make a united, if unintended, meaning. This way of "attacking the idea from different angles," as Austin says, also describes the aesthetic territory she has consistently mined since returning to Portland five years ago.

In the summer of 2000, Austin and lighting designer Jeff Forbes opened Performance Works NorthWest, renovating the former St. Mary's Romanian Orthodox Church as a place to create and perform Austin's own work as well as provide performing and rehearsing space for other dance and theater companies. They present an ongoing cabaret, Boris & Natasha, named after the couple's pets. Originally a theater major at Lewis and Clark College, Austin left Portland for New York City intending to be a writer. She arrived at a time when using untrained bodies was all the rage in modern dance (think Judson Dance Theater) and soon found herself making dances of her own. This background helps explain Austin's continued interest in experimental forms, offbeat and nonlinear structure. "I didn't have the typical dancer's childhood of tap lessons and such," says Austin, "I work more from an improvisational background. I use nondancerly movement. It's not lyrical; it's idiosyncratic. I switch moods and I am very interested in awkwardness."

Though she wrote the lyrics for several songs that will be performed in *Big Real*—and even describes them as "cute"—she says she prefers a soundscape to a formal composition and texture to melody. As she mimes all the buttons she'll have to push and knobs she'll have to control to bring her artistic enterprise to life, she just can't help but sigh, "What I really want is to do a piece

where I don't have to use batteries."

Modern dances are hard on the audience because of an irony of the form: the more the dancers draw on their training, the more the untrained bodies in the audience feel emotionally close to them. Dance is a vicarious pleasure and a communal one. It's supremely intellectual when it's at its most physical. In a big venue, audience members who arrive with expectations of transcendence and instead get handed a handbill



FROM LINDA AUSTIN'S *BIG REAL*. PHOTOS BY JEFF FORBES

and a concept will walk out. With smaller, local work the audience is more forgiving, and this provides artists with an opportunity (if not an obligation) to expand definitions and encourage a sense of adventure. But it places a heavy burden on the creator. Austin's claim that she likes the abstraction of dance because "you don't have to be pinned down to meaning," sums up one problem of process-oriented work: The process may be fascinating to the dancer, but will the audience join in the fun?

Austin doesn't discount the struggle. She's performed for friends and family who ended the night with as many shrugs as hugs, but alienating audiences is not her goal. Actually, Austin says she's interested in just the opposite, albeit on her terms. It's why she left theater and writing for a complete commitment to dance. "I long for that connection to the audience. I do want people to relate to me on some level. That's why I'm often funny. I use humor as a way to connect. They want virtuosity, well, I'm against virtuosity. Sometimes I think I'm just now learning how to be in front of people. I want to show my presence. It's just that I come at my presence from a lot of different angles." If *Big Real* succeeds as modern dance uniquely and identifiably can, in connecting a mobile body of arms and legs with a seated body of eyes, Austin and the audience could see so far into each other they just might not need those batteries after all.

Merridawn Duckler writes poetry and fiction. Her Portland Building installation *Poetland* was featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*. She currently teaches fiction at The Attic in Portland.

A critic makes amends

IT'S TIME TO FORGIVE AND FORGET FELLOW WRITERS' FOIBLES—AND MAYBE EVEN HAVE A CONVERSATION

by Regina Hackett

Nothing gets said at openings, at least, not by me. A little praise, a dash of chat, possibly an anecdote if there's time. If not, a friendly rub of the feelers will do, as if we're insects exchanging quick greetings at the hive. Openings honor artists, like birthday parties honor aging. While others are singing the happy song, would you be muttering "Go to hell" behind your hands? No. The same rule applies at openings, which is part of their suppressed appeal. What's not said is as important as what is. Not everyone agrees with this decorum, including fellow Seattle critic Matthew Kangas. Openings are a kind of rodeo for him. Like a bull, he paws the ground, signaling his readiness to toss and gore.

Because we've known each other nearly two decades, I like to think I've perfected my response. He wants to get an aggressive conversation going, and I won't do it. Each time he attempts that kind of encounter, I parry with my now silky swerve-and-dodge skills, which hadn't failed me until the opening of *Three Degrees of Cool* at the Wright Exhibition Space in September. Picture this: I'm in a cozy corner talking to painter Mark Takamichi Miller. Because he's a

bagged and tagged, true-blue nice guy as well as a thoughtful artist, I've relaxed enough to slip into a fairly animated discussion of David Hammon's 1999 sculpture *High Level of Cat*, on view across the room. An actual cat (thoroughly dead) is resting on top of a drum as high as a basketball hoop, and we are talking about Hammon's deft use of the literal when Matthew strides up and says, "Mark, I hated your last show." In the interest of civility, I couldn't let that pass. Plus, I liked his last show, as Matthew was aware.

I said, "Do you mean the oil paintings based on anonymous snapshots?"

"Yes," he said, and shuddered.

"I thought they were an inventive update of Bay Area Figurative," I ventured.

"Wouldn't you say that, Regina," he said. "It sounds good, but it means absolutely nothing."

At this point, Mark stepped in.

"Is this critical discourse?" he asked. "I've always wanted that."

Presumably, he's still waiting. Critical discourse is in short supply in Seattle.

I could be wrong. Maybe there's discourse I don't know about. Are the other critics sharing

deep thoughts without me? Am I isolated from them because I don't know how to connect? Would connecting be a good thing? Matthew and I at least have a relationship. If we ran into each other in a coffee shop in South Dakota, we'd say hello.

"A thin-skinned critic is an absurdity. We're in the response business, and it can get messy. So, new policy. All the outs are in free."

The two art critics who work for me as freelancers at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*—Judy Wagonfeld and Victoria Josslin—are friendlier than that, even. They say hello in Seattle. But don't they have to? We have some measure of discourse, but don't we have to indulge one another?

AMENDS / continued on page 6

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THANK YOU

Robert Guiron, Curtis Knapp, Midori Hirose, Tom Blood, Beth Dean and everyone else at the Oak Street Building who assisted with the flood calamity, Cynthia Lahti, the Aalto Lounge book club, Jason Loeffler, Regina Hackett, Brad Adkins, Chris Rauschenberg, Michelle Ross, Sophie Ragsdale, Penny Broadway, Ann Amato, Andrew Blubaugh

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

It is probably too late to respond to Rob Spillman's reaction to Matthew Stadler's reaction to the first *Tin House* writer's conference ("Evidence In," *Organ* #7 and "Manufacturing Contact," *Organ* #6). But just in case, I'd like to weigh in as someone who agrees with them both.

I believe most conferences, like most writing programs, are cash cows for their hosts. I also believe they're degrading literature in this country. But I traveled from the Midwest to attend *Tin House's* conference because it was the first roster I'd seen that made me giddy. I've applied to other conferences with mixed motivations and been accepted, then felt stared at by my own insincerity. I'm not the networking sort. I'm the shabby word-addict sort. So I'd yet to attend one.

But I arrived in Portland with a joy that was sustained throughout my week there. A portion of that magic belonged to Reed's blue herons and pond muck and roaming neighborhood dogs, as well as sharing meals and mornings with the other bunkers. To locals with regular access to Charles D'Ambrosio and Miranda July, as well as Powell's, let me say that I'm envious. Though it was a fiscal luxury for me to attend, I was honored to contribute toward their rent. And I didn't begrudge *Tin House* a cent. The magazine is still operating at a deficit, and the *Tin House* family struck me as talented, sincere and blessedly real.

This comes from probably the only person who didn't sign up for face-time with white-hot agent Amy Williams. Yes, I did sit with Chris Offutt, Jim Shepard, Percival Everett, Pete Rock, Helen Schulman and others when waved to their picnic tables. Yes, I did shamelessly hand Denis Johnson my beloved noir edition of *Angels* for an autograph. But I didn't ask them for their e-mail addresses and home phone numbers, as one daft woman did. Nor did I shove manuscripts at them, like the Iowa kids. One of the Iowa posse—all of whom exude entitlement—told me that this was "the most democratic conference" she'd ever attended. How so, democratic? I asked. "Well, the successful people are sitting with unsuccessful people." I took us to be a case in point.

I didn't go with the intention of renting proximity to literati or indulging delusions about myself, though I savored all those picnic table moments. I've since been rejected again by *Tin House*, the journal, but I got more than I'd hoped for by going. I got a sense that there are still people involved in publishing—like Sallie Tisdale and D'Ambrosio and Spillman—who operate with Kierkegaardian purity of heart. That's enough to keep my shoulder to my own particular boulder for now. D'Ambrosio is right that writing is "based on failure. Or accident," but it's also based on irrational persistence. The conference gave me a gift of all three.

Thank you for giving Spillman and Stadler a place to dialogue publicly.

Sincerely,
Carol Keeley

NEWS

The International Art Critics Association awarded PICA second place for "Best Show in an Alternative or Public Space" for last summer's exhibition *William Pope L: eRacism*. Meantime, PICA has announced plans to shutter its visual exhibition program due to money woes. A proposal for a new, streamlined visual art program is in the works.

The Modern Zoo announced that it has postponed its summer 2004 juried exhibition until it finds a permanent space to house its art center.

As reported in *The Oregonian*, Portland's most prominent art dealers have banded together to form the Portland Art Dealers Association to market themselves regionally and nationally.

Rumor has it that Savage Art Resources, the new east side incarnation of the defunct Savage gallery, is already handing out pink slips to its staff.

EVENTS

Stephen Petronio Company: *City of Twist*, a dance performance inspired by life in post-9/11 NYC. Presented by White Bird, Jan. 28, 7:30 pm, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Contemporary Crafts Museum & Gallery: Sound/Craft, a new last-Wednesday music series, begins Jan. 28 with classical Zen meditation music by Joel Taylor, Jonathan Sielaff and friends, followed by improvised music and dance by Bryan Eubanks, John Krausbauer, Caryl Kients and Kathleen Keogh, Feb. 25. All shows 8 pm, 3934 SW Corbett Ave.

Merce Cunningham: White Bird presents a city-wide celebration of the 50th anniversary of the legendary dance company.

Merce Cunningham Dance Company performs, with sets by Robert Rauschenberg, Feb. 11, 7:30 pm, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall.

Reed College Dance Department cosponsors Dance, Music and Visual Arts: Merce and his Collaborators, a weekend symposium, panel discussion and workshop, Feb. 6-8. Advance registration required for workshop: call 503-771-1112 x7631.

Artworks by John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Robert Rauschenberg, Rotunda Gallery of the Performing Arts Center, 1111 SW Broadway. Also see PNCA listing under Exhibitions.

Chamber Music Northwest: Bach-New Music-Stravinsky Project, two nights of violin-piano music featuring duo sonatas by J.S. Bach, major works by Stravinsky and works by living composers Stephen Kartke, Ned Rorem and Bruce Adolph. Feb. 19-20, 8 pm, Reed College, Kaul Auditorium.

Third Angle: Coco Trevisonno presents new arrangements of popular tango melodies, Feb. 27, 7:30 pm, Reed College, Kaul Auditorium. Preceded by silent auction and followed by tango dance gala.

La Palabra: Cornelius Swart's *Northeast Passage: The Inner City and the American Dream*, documentary about gentrification in North/Northeast Portland, Jan. 23. *Hope Along the Wind: The Life of Harry Hay*, documentary about the early gay rights activist, Jan. 30. "OULIPO: The Workshop of Potential Literature," a presentation by Brannon Ingram, Feb. 6. "Under the Sun," documentary about Ghazni Province, Afghanistan, Feb. 13. Strefah Kamöla demonstrates and lectures on Tuvan throat singing, Feb. 20. Early art/science films by Jean Painlevé, Mar. 5. All events at 7 pm, 4810 NE Garfield Ave.

Lighthouse Cinema: An evening with Bill Brown. See preview on page 5.

Reed College: Jane Hill, Regents' Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Arizona, lectures on "Linguistic Ideologies, White Racism and the Agony of Trent Lott," Jan. 27, 4:15 pm, Vollum Lounge.

Roundtable discussion on the 2004 presidential election with Robert Eisinger, Paul Gronke, and Regina Lawrence, associate professors of political science at Lewis & Clark College, Reed College and Portland State University, Feb. 5, 7 pm, Vollum Lounge.

Aimee Bender, author of *The Girl in the Flammable Skirt* and *An Invisible Sign of My Own*, reads on Feb. 5, 8 pm, Psychology Auditorium.

Black History Month: Lectures and book signings by Lani Guinier (Feb. 9) and sociologist Elijah Anderson, author of *Violence and the Inner-City Poor* (Feb. 18). Poetry reading and book signing by

A Little Bird Said...

Lucille Clifton, author of *Next and Good Woman*, both nominated for the Pulitzer in 1987, Feb. 25. All events 8 pm, Kaul Auditorium.

Gina Ochsner reads from *The Necessary Grace to Fall*, winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction and the 2002 Oregon Book Award, Feb. 26, 8 pm, Psychology Auditorium.

Persian Prose, Past and Present, a conference focusing on Rumi, sponsored by the Andisheh Center, Feb. 28-29, time and location TBA.

Lecture by Robert D. Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Feb. 27, 4:30 pm, Vollum Lecture Hall.

Lewis & Clark College: Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer of Bombay lectures on "The Role of Islam in the Modern World," Jan. 23, 12:30 pm, Smith Hall, Albany Quadrangle.

110 Years of Oregon Poetry, 1850s-1960s, books from Brian Booth's collection, Watzek Library, Feb. 1-Mar. 15.

Thomas Patterson of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government speaks on "The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty," Feb. 4, 6 pm, Templeton Student Center.

Randall L. Kennedy, professor of law at Harvard University and author of *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, speaks on "The Race Line in America," Feb. 9, 7:30 pm, location TBA.

Wendy J. Gordon of Boston University School of Law speaks on "Copyright and Commodification," Feb. 16, 7:30 pm, LAW: Legal Research Center.

PSU: Saul Landau reads from *The Pre-Emptive Empire: A Guide to Bush's Kingdom*, Jan. 17, 7:30 pm, Millar Library, Room 160.

Brad Cloepfil of Portland architecture firm Allied Works delivers the University of Oregon's 2004 John Yeon lecture on "New Museums: Anticipation and Dissonance," Jan. 26, 6:30 pm, Lincoln Hall, Room 75. Lecture repeats Jan. 27 in Eugene.

Ursula Leguin-Alice Walker Progressive Winter Film Fest, Mondays at 6 pm through Mar. 15, Smith Center.

EXHIBITIONS

Reed College: *Whispers from the Walls*, installation by Whitfield Lovell mixing found objects, photographs, wall drawings and sound to create a sensory experience of African-American life in the 1920s South, Jan. 28-Mar. 3, Cooley Gallery. Leslie King-Hammond lectures on Lovell and Jacob Lawrence, Feb. 12, 7 pm, Vollum Lecture Hall.

Hauser Memorial Library inaugurates Case Works, a series of small-scale exhibitions of works by regional artists, with works by damali ayo, Feb. 1-Mar. 14. Artist talk, Mar. 3, 7 pm, Student Union.

PSU: Works by Lauren Mantecon and Pat Hanson produced at the Jentel Artist Residency in Wyoming, through Jan. 30, Autzen Gallery, Neuberger Hall.

Rochelle Koivunen, Emily Lux and Shannon Buck, through Jan. 23, Littman Gallery, Smith Center.

The Hewitt Collection of African-American Art includes work by Romare Bearden, Hale Woodruff, Ernest Crichlow and other giants of the past century, Feb. 2-Mar. 27.

Prints by Koichi Yamamoto, visiting professor of art from Utah State University, opens Feb. 5, Autzen Gallery.

PNCA: *Honoring Merce Cunningham*, a video by Paul Kaiser. Presented in collaboration with White Bird, through Feb. 28, Philip Feldman Gallery and Project Space. PNCA Staff Exhibition, Feb. 5-27, Swigert Commons.

Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art: Gerry Snyder's *Far from Here*, multi-panel oil paintings exploring themes from the Biblical story of Lot. Through Mar. 14, Lewis and Clark College, 0615 SW Palatine Hill Rd.

Marylhurst Art Gym: *Drawn Fictions* features the work of West Coast artists Pat Boas, Tom Prochaska, Dan Webb, Joe Biel, Joseph Park, Joe

Stuckey, Ed Coolidge and David Eckard. Also on display is *Reiterations*, a textile installation by Linda Hutchins. Through Feb. 13, 17600 Pacific Hwy. Hutchins' *Waiting for Rumpelstiltskin* can be viewed 24/7 through Feb. 3 at the PDX Window Project, 612 NW 12th Ave.

Northview Gallery: *In Her Images*, works by local artist and activist, Kate Bronwyn, and works for which she served as a model or inspiration. Through Feb. 5, PCC, 12000 SW 49th Ave.

Archer Gallery: *Selections from the Elwood Collection* features prints by regional artists including Fay Jones, Cris Bruch, Jeffrey Mitchell and Claudia Fitch, as well as Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Beuys. Through Feb. 6, Clark College, Gaiser Hall, Ft. Vancouver Way, Vancouver, WA.

Mark Woolley Gallery: *10 Years: One Foot After Another* presents 12-inch-square works by 170 artists in celebration of the gallery's 10th anniversary. Through Jan. 31, 120 NW 9th Ave., #210.

Standard Arts Window: Dave Corboy's *Glow Works: Halo Series*, an installation of phosphorescent paper cutouts. Through Feb. 15, 1715 NW Lovejoy St.

The Art Nucleus: Greg Pond's *Frontier Romance*, an installation exploring the theme of "the death of poets and the rise of nations," through Jan. 26. *The 52 Show* features work by 70 artists on the theme of the card deck, with sales benefiting p:ear, Feb. 5-Mar. 26, 1905 NW 26th Ave.

Haze Gallery: Nic Walker's *Bargain Basement Used Cars*, a new series of paintings inspired by photographs from used car magazines. Through Feb. 2, 6635 N. Baltimore St.

Gallery 500: Laudir Michael Piro's *Dirty Laundry*, photographs and a phylogenic-based installation. Through Jan. 30, 420 SW Washington St., Suite 500.

Astoria Visual Arts: *Roger Hayes and Friends*, a retrospective of outsider art from Clatsop County, Oregon. 160 10th St., Astoria.

Elizabeth Leach Gallery: M.K. Guth's *Warriors*, featuring new video work and photographs. *Shift*, a group exhibition of artists investigating what "photos reveal about the passing of time." Both shows through Jan. 31, 207 SW Pine St.

Contemporary Crafts Museum and Gallery: Rebekah Diamantopoulos' porcelain vessels and Jason Mouer's mixed media sculptures. Through Mar. 7, 3934 SW Corbett Ave.

Portland Art Museum: 95 paintings from the collection of Dr. Gustav Rau, including work by El Greco, Monet, Courbet, Renoir and Degas, Jan. 24-Aug. 22. Opening lecture by Robert Clémentz, Jan. 25, 2 pm. Also, *Frankenthaler: The Woodcuts* continues through Feb. 15, 1219 SW Park Ave.

Newspace: Dan Mikesell's *Signal to Noise* is the first in a new monthly series of sound installations coinciding with the gallery's First Friday openings, Jan. 16, 7-10 pm. Kick-off of traveling series Independent Exposure's new season of new short films, Jan. 28, 8 pm, 1632 SE 10th Ave.

Pacific Switchboard: Drawings by Raul Mendez, abstract paintings and installation by Paige Sáez, through Feb. 8. *AV: Alice presents Body snatchers!*, an evening of "visceral" film and video, Jan. 22-23, 7:30 pm, 4637 N. Albina Ave.

The Bullseye Connection Gallery: *Found in Translation* exhibits new works in glass by artists known for work in painting and printmaking. Featuring Judy Cooke, Martha Planschmidt, Eric Stotik and Mark Zirpel. Feb. 5-Mar. 20, 300 NW 13th Ave.

ARTIST OPPORTUNITIES

defunkt theatre: During the first week of Feb., the group will be recruiting actors of color for its spring show. Check www.defunkttheatre.com for audition information.

Portland Open Studios: Artists working in all media are invited to open their studios to the public "to show the tools, techniques, and know-how of making art." Applications at www.portlandopenstudios.com.

RACC: Deadline for 2004 applications for Professional Development Cycle 1 grants is Feb. 23, 5 pm. Deadline for 2004 General Support grants is Mar. 15, 5 pm.

RESCHEDULED NEW WRITERS AND ARTISTS MEETING

Tuesday, January 27, 7-9 p.m., Pacific Switchboard, 4637 N Albina Ave

Bring your clips and samples. Meet your questions. Meet the Organ editorial staff. Meet each other. Go home satisfied

Office Report:

ON ORGANIZING A COMMUNITY ART EVENT

Sonya Masinovsky, a senior psychology major, and **Becky Weisman**, a senior studio art major at Reed College, are co-coordinating *Reed Arts Week* (March 3-7, 2004). Here they reflect on the opportunities and challenges involved.

of video to alter a person's thoughts or opinions. Neither a single artist's book nor an individual's musical recordings were meant to stand alone on a pedestal. Although many pieces were comparable to those we had recently seen in Portland galleries, they did not seem quite as alien as they had when isolated on blank walls. We wondered why this was the case.

The work at Dim Sum had a down-to-earth quality, which came from the viewer's ability to access and challenge each piece. Usually, you walk into a gallery or museum wanting to touch, hold, exchange and loudly discuss every piece you see. Generally, this behavior is considered inappropriate, and security devices are carefully installed to keep you at a guarded distance. So we suppress our urges, and whisper and glance from afar at objects on walls and pedestals. From Community Jukebox, to Bits and Pieces, to Dim Sum, Red76 has granted access to its audience by allowing it to develop a rapport with not only other viewers but with the art itself. We feel that this is where the meat of the artistic experience exists. The discussions regarding the art, the ability to handle the objects, and the connectedness between objects and audience, producers and waiters makes the event itself a work of art. Which raises the questions: How can

art become an experience, and how can an experience become art? The work of art that Red76 created at Dim Sum was participatory and direct. It defines what we have been searching for in the art world: a truly artistic collaborative experience.

Collaborative work, such as Red76's, has much to do with what we perceive to be the breakdown of boundaries between organizer and creator, spectator and performer. This convergence of artistic roles has become particularly interesting to us on another level. As the student coordinators of Reed Arts Week, one of us has more experience as an artist, and one of us has more experience as an administrator. Developing this artistic feast has required us to bridge the gap between our different skills, attempting to find the median where the event becomes not just a period of time filled with art, but an event that is art.

It seems clear to us that the roles of artist and arts administrator are intimately intertwined; the success of either depends upon a laborious process that relies upon the cohesion of many complimentary parts. Not only must one have the administrative skills of fundraising, installation and publicity, but one must also have a vision of how the experience will interface with people from different areas, in this case Reed College and the broader Portland community. Events like Red76's Dim Sum and student initiated and produced Reed Arts Week offer an interactive way of making art part of one's community, and the community a part of one's art.

Fellows! Let us congregate! Together you can...

BUILD YOUR OWN CITY

A pictorial instructional program courtesy of the comic, "City of Roses"
Presented by Khris Soden - proprietor, researcher, artist

- 1. Don't try it by yourself.**
I'll place the Main Street here. Yes, yes...
Hall J. Kelley - 1834
- 2. Do get your friends involved.**
I think we have a good deal of work, Asa.
Pettigrove & Lovejoy - 1844
- 3. Do choose your site carefully.**
St. Helens - 1845
- 4. Do give your town a name.**
I still believe that New Boston would have been a better name, Francis.
Pettigrove & Lovejoy - 1845
- 5. Do get an expert's endorsement.**
The site that they are calling Portland is the highest I can safely bring my ship on the Willamette!
Captain John Couch - 1845
- 6. Don't rest on your laurels.**
Robin's Nest is destined to become the metropolis of the Willamette!
Robin's Nest - 1843

7. Do establish a weekly paper.
Have you seen that new Whig paper, John?
Seen it, but I can't read.
The Oregonian - 1850

8. Don't forget a fire department.
After mastering these basics, feel free to try some Advanced Techniques:
• Discouraging racial diversity. (1880's - 1950's)
• Destroying ethnic neighborhoods. (1950's - 1970's)
• Displacing the impoverished. (2000's)
Enjoy!

Notes: 1. Couch's statements about the safety of water passage were considered to settle a hotly contested issue at the time. The "head of navigation," or how far a ship could safely sail up the Willamette, could mean the life or death of a fledgling city's hope for a shipping port. 2. "Willamette" was one of the more common 19th century names for the Willamette River. 3. Robin's Nest would later become West Linn. 4. Portland actually did have a fire department during its first major fire. However, it was only a volunteer force.

Corrections: Last issue's installment, "Resident," erroneously listed the date as 1884, rather than 1844. Please send questions, comments, etc. to khrrisoden@comcast.net.

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stand that for a club to stay in business a lot of people have to either drink or pay a cover."

That's easier said than done in today's fiscal climate, but groups in Portland have gone begging even in flush times. According to the Oregon Community Foundation's 2002 report on giving, contributions from Oregon businesses declined by almost 37 percent between 1990 and 2001, despite the state's strong economic growth during that period.

Fortunately, the "deep pockets, short arms" syndrome afflicting businesses in the state has yet to claim individuals, with more of us giving slightly larger amounts of our income than in previous years. So, while Oregon may be first in the nation in unemployment, its citizens rank 18th in the country in the percentage of income they donate. That's good news, but it comes with bad: The percentage of Oregonians who are 21 and older and who consistently volunteer posted at a decade low of 23 percent. That's 7 percent lower than the national average, reports the OCF. It indicates individual Oregonians giving more of their money but less of their time to nonprofits.

That trend may prove harmful to arts groups who lean heavily on volunteers to accomplish their work. According to a study of the economic impacts of the state's nonprofit arts sector authored by the Western States Arts Federation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting arts networks in the West, volunteers logged 498,801 hours for nonprofit arts groups in 2000. Valued at approximately \$10.75 per hour, that represented \$5,367,833 of sweat equity injected into Oregon's nonprofit arts sector. Combine that statistic with OCF's findings and arts organizations have a rocky financial mountain to climb.

To stabilize their resources, many nonprofits here and elsewhere are relying more on earned income to support their budgets. Speaking on NPR's *Studio 360*, Nick Dargahi, a cellist with the San Jose Symphony, discussed the growing trend of luring audiences with big names: "American symphonies, without exception, are all facing financial trouble, but the mid-range orchestras do not have endowments they can tap into. Mid-range orchestras absolutely need to bring in superstars like Yo-Yo Ma, Itzak Perlman, Hilary Hahn. These artists do not come cheap. Their fees far outstrip the ability of the smaller orchestras to pay."

Landing an artist with name recognition has only become more expensive in recent years. "When we started the Portland Arts & Lectures series," says Hoops, "no one was coming to Portland, so you could go direct a lot of times. Now a lot of these authors have agents, and fees have gone up tremendously. It can range from \$2,000 to 20 grand. It just depends on who they are. It's become a business, which impacts our ticket prices and raises the cost of administering the program."

The result is a \$25 price tag for one evening of the Arts & Lectures series—50 percent more than the \$16 average admission for an arts event in 2000, as documented by WESTAF's report. While that's less than the cost of attending a professional sports event, audiences don't equate writer Alice Walker with well paid shortstop Alex Rodriguez, so the ticket price may seem unjustifiable to all but the wealthy. It certainly appears that way when Hoops counts women between 45 and 65 years of age with annual incomes over \$100,000 as the primary attendees of the series.

But high ticket prices are only one result of organizations looking to include guaranteed moneymakers in their programs. Such a strategy also eggs greater competition among smaller arts groups, causes the arts scene to offer fewer new works and creates homogenous audiences as events and admission prices target a smaller, richer demographic. But for Hoops, serving her

mission and staying solvent is a careful balancing act. The Arts & Lectures series subsidizes other Literary Arts programs, such as Writers in the Schools and the Oregon Book Awards, which do not produce revenue—and, in fact, lose money for the organization—but reach a more diverse audience. The tug of war between competing interests is familiar to many arts leaders.

"We resist a lot of pressure to raise ticket prices," says Edmunds. "Annual donors of \$1,000 a year, \$5,000 a year—they can afford to spend \$50 for a ticket and are like, 'God, if you raise your ticket prices, I wouldn't personally have to give so much of my income, so what are you doing?' And I have to say, 'Yeah, but then these people couldn't come.'"

For smaller arts groups, who are not typically at the point of having to respond to the concerns of wealthy patrons, earned income pads the bulk of their budgets, but inexperience often bests their efforts to invigorate admission sales. Just setting prices is something of a mystery.

Linda Austin, co-organizer of performing arts nonprofit Performance Works NorthWest, admits confusion, "I sometimes wonder if you charge more money, would people think it was better? I just want people to come and pay some money, and I don't know what's going to encourage them. Charge more? Okay!"

Pablo de Ocampo of the Cinema Project, a microcinema that screens avant-garde films, says, "We wanted to have an open admission policy. We don't want to turn anyone away for lack of funds, and we want to encourage people to come even if they can't afford \$6."

Austin echoes de Ocampo, "I'm totally sympathetic with people wanting things to be affordable because then you can see more stuff. If I set a price, usually if somebody says, 'I can only pay this much,' we let them come."

Such generosity marks the day-to-day management of small to mid-sized arts organizations, which tend to include working artists not far removed from the art they showcase or the audience they attract. As a result, they often end up subsidizing the work they present and acting as granting agencies to their peers, none of which is necessarily recognized as such by themselves, the artists they support or the audience.

"We have \$700 in debt that's not covered from admissions because we paid to make it happen and now we're eating it," de Ocampo divulges.

Adds Austin, "I'm committed to artists getting a pittance, no matter what. That often means that Performance Works, as an organization, goes under a little."

Remembering the early days of running the music venue Meow Meow, manager Todd Fadel says, "My first couple of years, I couldn't come up with a guarantee, and I would have \$200 from a job that I was doing somewhere else and I would give that money for the band." Like many of those in small arts organizations, Fadel doesn't like to call attention to the times he draws from his own pocket to cover expenses, but such reticence exacts a price. Unaware of the economic struggles faced by such organizations, artists and their supporters can undermine the very groups that champion their cause. Says Austin, "The same people who grudge their seven bucks will go and see a Hollywood movie, whereas the money they're paying at Performance Works is possibly going to pay one of their friends, and they're still grudging it. Then they go send it to Hollywood or buy a CD where their money goes to corporations."

Her example points to the economic connections that weave arts groups, artists and the audiences who consume their product together, but those ties are largely invisible, which is why it's so difficult to identify when they've been severed or need repairing. *Black Thorn*, a local publication addressing radical DIY culture, should be com-

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Farewell to hell

by Tim Brooks

My sister called from Tacoma to tell me Elliott Smith had died; she heard the news on the radio. She told me she had been riding in the car with her eight-year-old daughter, whom I know she tries to protect from some of the harshness of the world. My niece asked her mom with an urgency in her voice, "What does that mean, 'took his own life'?" My sister explained as gently as possible, "I think he gave himself a bad cut and didn't ask for any help with it." According to news reports, Elliott had stabbed himself in the heart, although his death is still under investigation.

As most of you know, Elliott Smith was a talented musician and songwriter from Portland. He was known here for intimate performances where he held crowds large and small in rapt attention. His songs have the quality of personal portraits, snapshots almost, of life, love, disappointment and disillusionment, sometimes

small triumphs, subtle joy. They always seem personal, without affect, guile or pretension. They connect to the listener easily and directly. The songs are often tinged with sadness, but they are not necessarily sad songs; their beauty lifts them up, affirming life and the human spirit. I know that's a lot of crap to lay at the feet of a dead songwriter, but I believe Elliott was an important artist. He was someone who made my life better. He moved me, took me inside his head and let me look out with his eyes, and doing so left me less alone. You can ask no more of art.

Camus put it succinctly at the beginning of "The Myth of Sisyphus": "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." It's hard to listen to much of Elliott's music without thinking he grappled with this question. Lines like "I wanted her to tell me that she would never wake me," "Home to Oblivion," "I think I'm all done you can switch me off safely" certainly seem to deal with the topic. I don't really want to deconstruct the songs or to imply they are all about death; they are not. They are little stories, picked up at a critical moment and drawn briefly out. They remind me of the short stories of Raymond Carver, unsentimental, evoking strong feelings. Like all good art there is plenty of room for the listener to bring their own bag of goods to the table. I think that is what people connect to most, there is always room to tap in, to say, "Yeah, that happened to me" or "I feel that way."

It would be a mistake to underestimate Elliott, to think he didn't know what he was doing, or that the references he dropped were accidental. He was smart, well-educated and well-read. When we had occasion to talk for any length of time, he often asked me what I was reading. Often he had read the book, or if not, was familiar enough with it to carry his share of the conversation. His knowledge of music was extensive if not encyclopedic. These are all traits he downplayed in his life but they are there in his music. You couldn't talk to him for long without seeing his

bright intellect.

Elliott was shy about a lot of things; you could easily embarrass him with praise. I remember one time he was sitting at the bar writing on a cocktail napkin and I joked to a friend of his, another songwriter, that he better get busy 'cause Elliott was cranking out songs at the bar. Elliott's face turned red and he quietly explained that he'd had a few ideas on the walk over and wanted to get them down before he forgot.

It's hard to talk about the dead, especially the suicide. Elliott made a choice that neither I nor you have. I have no desire to second-guess him. It's likely, in my view, that Elliott suffered from serious depression, a disease whose debilitating and sometimes fatal effects are little understood by most people. In 1990 the writer William Styron published a fascinating chronicle of his own

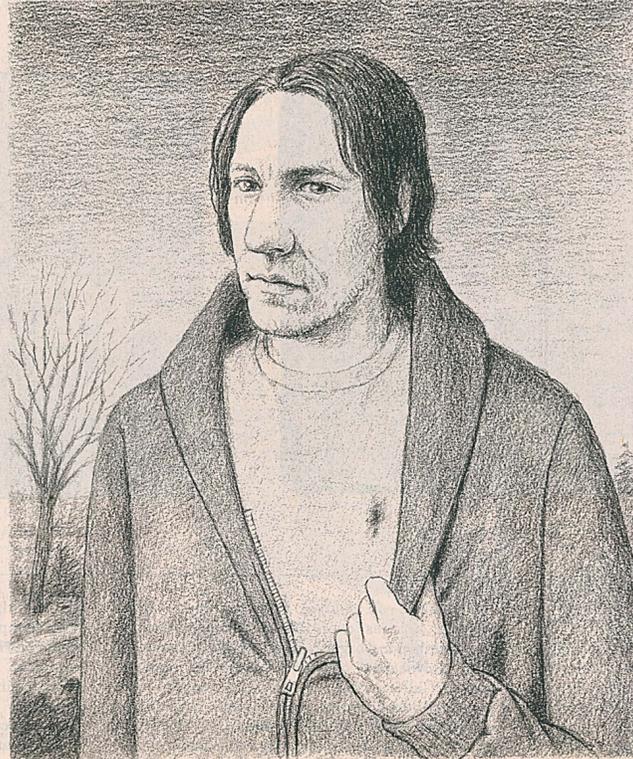


ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL GREEN

struggle with depression titled *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*. In it he describes pain so great that suicide seems the only reasonable way to end it. "The pain is unrelenting, and what makes the condition intolerable is the foreknowledge that no remedy will come—not in a day, an hour, a month, or a minute. If there is mild relief, one knows that it is only temporary; more pain will follow. It is the hopelessness even more than the pain that crushes the soul." Yet many people still view suicide as a moral failing or lack of strength, and feel that they could have saved the victim, given the chance.

One theory has it that Elliott was destroyed by moving away from Portland, that his life in New York City and Los Angeles was destructive, that, had he stayed here with his old friends he would have been okay. This idea is a version of

the chewed-up-by-Hollywood myth and I don't buy it. Elliott Smith was not a coward or a weakling; he undoubtedly killed himself because he could no longer bear the pain. While depression is a disease that can strike anyone, it brings down artists, especially poets, more often than others. The list of the dead is long and well-known, there is no need to repeat it here. Perhaps it was the songwriting itself that helped keep Elliott alive for a time. As if the creative act of getting the songs out and into the world was able to take some of the pain away. The idea that mental illness and creative expression are somehow linked is indeed an old one in Western culture. Socrates writes, "Madness, provided it comes as a gift from heaven, is the channel by which we receive the greatest blessings." More recent and methodical evidence tends to agree. K.R. Jamison's research on poets born in England and Ireland between 1705 and 1805 found them thirty times more likely to suffer from manic depression and five times more likely to commit suicide than the general population. The meaning of this link is not entirely clear to me. I believe that many artists create their art as a salve for their mental pain. The poet Antonin Artaud is more definite. He wrote, "No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modelled, built or invented except literally to get out of hell." I realize this may be just another romantic idea. At any rate it was not, for Elliott, ultimately enough.

While I was working on this essay, my grandmother died. She was an old woman loved dearly by her family, including me. Her life impacted her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and a few others. She left the world her progeny and little else. I am sad she's gone, but I realize her time was over. I have some pictures of her, and some memories; they comfort me. It always seems more tragic when a young person dies. We use phrases like "in the prime of life," "cut short," "untimely death." In truth, people die every day and it is a tragedy only to those who knew and loved them, to the people whose lives they affected. The death of an artist like Elliott leaves a bigger hole. We miss the person if we knew him, or thought we did. But really we miss the artist and his work, that is what we connected with. He owed us nothing. Still, we feel cheated.

I'm sad he's gone, but I have the feeling the sadness is a selfish one. While I knew Elliott and talked with him many times, our relationship was not a close one. I knew him best through the music. That's what we lose, the songs unwritten, the photos never taken, developed or put in the album. We are left with what there is, and perhaps what has been recorded, but we will get no more. And while Elliott answered Camus' question in the negative, perhaps his work, the songs and recordings he has left behind can, in a small way, help some of us give a different answer. While Elliott found no cure for his pain in life, his music is a comfort to me and to others, band-aids, perhaps, for the thousands of small wounds of everyday existence. For a really bad cut, you have to ask for help.

Tim Brooks is a Portland writer.

Antheon, Well of Flowers

because a flowering from the depths
was thought to take place there
Throws his lance into the soil
from whence springs, a well a portal to Hades
Takes the entire pomegranate into his mouth
spits out seeds one at a time
A honey sweet seed grazes her lips
keeps her starving
Flashes his blue eyes at her
frozen corn flowers
Breathes into her mouth
his tongue over her tongue grain
A clarity of startled light
Branches extending down into the axils
Of the leafy stem
Black seeds spilling

—Jeanne Heuving

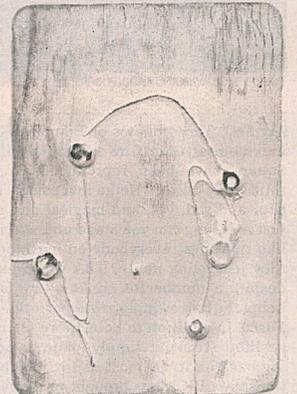
Jeanne Heuving is the author of *Offering* (bcc press). Her critical work on modernist and contemporary innovative women writers includes the book *Omissions Are Not Accidents: Gender in the Art of Marianne Moore*. She lives in Seattle where she is an associate professor at the University of Washington and a member of the Subtext Collective.

Correspondence Course

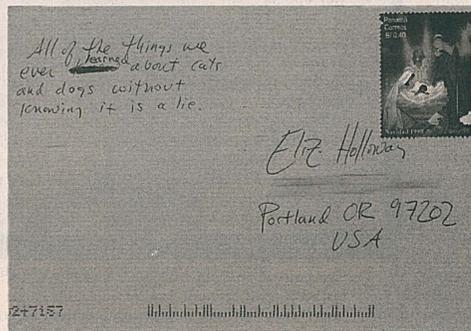
Carla Klinker, Elizabeth Holloway, Rachel Wiecking and Michelle Ross first met in Ross' classroom at the Oregon College of Art and Craft. Noting the way the institutional setting limited interactions among students and teachers, in the spring of 2001 the four decided to break the rules, taking their communication outside the space and time of the classroom. The results were 60 postcards, "bits of intimacy, odd fragmented moments of hope, love and fear. Things we would never show or tell each other at school."



CARLA KLINKER



ELIZABETH HOLLOWAY



MICHELLE ROSS



RACHEL WIECKING

Going off the grid

In 1995, Portland photographer and Blue Sky Gallery founder Chris Rauschenberg noticed that he had been doing a lot of travel photography in Paris, Berlin, Mexico City and elsewhere; but he had stopped paying much attention to Portland, his home for 28 years. So he changed that in a big way. Using the grid system on a AAA map as a guide, he invited 11 other photographers to join him in photographing Portland, one square mile at a time.

They met once a month at one of the members' homes to share work prints of images caught on everything from plastic Holgas to panoramic cameras. The only rule was to have one foot in the appropriate grid section at the moment of exposure. Then they would randomly select the next month's plot.

As participant Tom Champion wrote in 1999, "the point of all this energy and expense for us is to see, really see, the city with all its neighborhoods and photograph them as they are." And soon, Portlanders will have the chance to see what they saw. Eight-and-a-half years later, the project is nearly complete. The last meeting will be in May, and an exhibition is being planned within the next year.

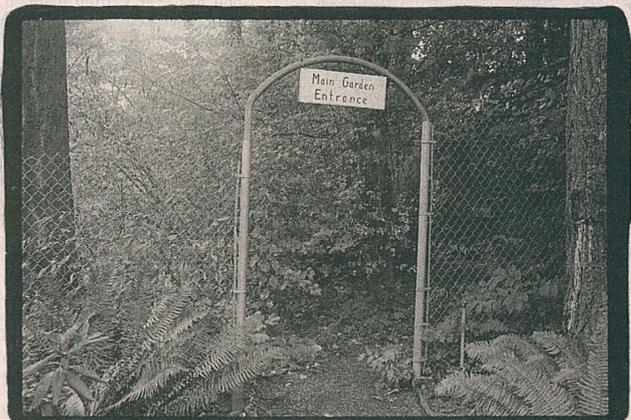
Over time, some members have left and new ones have joined. Besides Rauschenberg and Champion, the current Portland Grid Project photographers are Barbara Gilson, Ann Hughes, Ann Kendellen, David Potter, Doug Prior, Rich Rollins, Patrick Stearns, Paul Sutinen and Bill Washburn.



CHRISTOPHER RAUSCHENBERG



ANN KENDELLEN



DAVID POTTER



WILLIAM WASHBURN



RICH ROLLINS

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movement that spilled into the street, chased by a remotely broadcasting video camera. Mike Barber and Cydney Wilkes, so wonderful at moving together, performed a pushing and pulling dance that expressed the powerful inner dynamism of what we less lyrically refer to as "codependency." (I'm totally making that up from a vague memory. I wonder if it bears any resemblance to what actually happened.) Young, talented, Amazonian, New York-based performance artist Allison Farrow snaked and squirmed over the laps of audience members, pausing to deep kiss one gentleman, on the way to her arresting monologue.

September was all about PICA's Time Based



JERRY MOUAWAD AND CAROL TRIFFLE IN THE RICHARD FOREMAN MINI-FEST. PHOTO, JEFF FORBES

Art Fest. Those photos of Eiko and Koma beaching themselves in the wading pool in Jamison Square have been reproduced ad nauseum. I think they meant "Keiko in a coma." It was beautiful and sad, yes, and magical and strange, but just how long can you stand and watch something like that? Was everybody on mushrooms or were they just being polite? TBA was pretty fabulous, despite a number of stinkers—by far the worst being the harrowing awful performance by Coco Fusco. In addition to being pure torture on every aesthetic front, it simply made no sense. Thinking back on it, I almost like it. Actually, many of the shows PICA has brought in the last couple of years (Japan's dumbtype, John Moran and Eva Muller in 2002 or the recent *Secreto y Malibu*, to name just a few) struck me as more interesting than most of the performances I saw at TBA. Many were either a little overcooked, such as the undeniably masterful but too sentimental choreography of Akram Khan, or worthwhile but stale, such as the '80s-New York-female-performance art vocal work of Shelley Hirsch, or kitschy, such as Susan Vitucci's asinine Chicken Little opera, an audience favorite. I missed what I heard were some great dance performances by Ros Warby and Donna Uchizono, but I saw the House of Cunt do the best-ever season of *Saturday Night Live* at MachineWorks and Burkina Faso's Salia ni Seydou do some simply sick dance moves. Nor do I think most things can beat the deep deadpan of Miranda July's *How I Learned to Draw*. But the reason TBA was fabulous had more to do with energy than quality. The crowded rooms and late night parties with outrageous lounge acts made Portland feel almost like it was a real city for a week. Too bad it was an unmitigated financial disaster. If PICA's still around next year, all power to the next fest.

October, of course, was all about Core Sample: 12 sites, over 100 local artists, and 25 plus exhibitions organized by as many curators, from provocative curator-at-large Jeff Jahn to Cooley Gallery Director Stephanie Snyder and painter Andrea Borsuk. I can't speak objectively about this since I'm too friendly with the chief organizers, nor do I really want to, except to say that stocks rose for young interdisciplinary artist Melody Owen and underappreciated kiddie-noir sculptor Cynthia Lahti. Owen came close to stealing two of the most curiously anticipated shows, the film-and-video dungeon at the Belmont Factory and Snyder's *Second Cycle*, with her hand-drawn animation on a clip of Brigitte Bardot in *Viva Maria*, and her piercingly quiet installation comprised of a chandelier made of broken windshield glass, a sort of mandala of pennies on the floor, and, placed casually in the window sills of the temporary gallery (a north-facing vacant retail space in the River District), her own slide photographs of the view before the development spree of the last several years. Lahti's relief sculptures, into which youthful figures in anachronistic clothing seem poised to escape, as into a book or narcotic substance, willingly and melancholically, have never been shown to such advantage.

I wonder what less invested people thought about Core Sample. Among participating artists, the general attitude was glee, although if you've ever looked at a Newport cigarette ad, you know this can bear a striking similarity to deep social anxiety. For those with already strong credentials, the thrill was showing their work in a meaningful context and without restrictions on format; for those with less exposure, it was showing alongside artists they admired. But what was the impact on the public, the gallerists, the critics, the institutions? There was much prior publicity, but almost no critical response (it ran for only 10 days, after which it wasn't news to the local papers). The hope among participants, as Emily Hall wrote for the *Organ*, was that Portland would unveil itself to the world as a center of artistic culture to be reckoned with. Of course, that didn't happen. But it sort of did happen, too, in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Clear Cut Press, publishers of the catalog, flew out the likes of Larry Rinder and Lynne Tillman to write about it, and they chartered a train to bring down Seattle curators and visitors who attended the just opened *Baja to Vancouver* at the Seattle Art Museum. A dialogue was broached, appetites were whetted. It would have been a more marketable package if there was a dominant movement here, but there isn't, as Rinder gets right in his essay for the meaty catalog, due out in late spring.

Perhaps a little light was shed on the matter of regional perspectives in contemporary art in the panel discussion organized and moderated on the heels of Core Sample and B2V by Stuart Horodner of PICA. From Here to There featured Michael Darling of Los Angeles' MOCA, Elizabeth Brown of the Henry Gallery at UW in Seattle, Jane Beebe of Portland's PDX gal-

lery, the ubiquitous Jeff Jahn and Randy Gragg, Core Sample organizer, writer and former art critic for *The Oregonian*. A few interesting things were said, despite Horodner's apparent winging of it. Darling remarked that for curators the contemporary art world doesn't reward specialization, especially regionally: "You're supposed to be an expert on everything, everywhere." Though a valuable countertrend in the age of globalism, the impulse can become provincialist, with Christopher Knight's blind loyalty to Los Angeles art as an example. Gragg argued that Vancouver, B.C., is a model for an interesting art scene, with its combination of schools, collectors, money and intellectual capital. By contrast, Los Angeles and Seattle have some of these ingredients and Portland almost none of them, nor has Portland had strong art writing or a curator with a critical perspective on regionalism since John Weber ran the contemporary art program at the Portland Art Museum.

The discussion turned to that unavoidable shibboleth, DIY, and Jahn argued that art of the last 40 years has become too reliant on institutions. "The avant-garde is back," he said. People come to Portland because they can "write their own book." Said Darling, "When a young architect named Frank Gehry came by and turned our warehouse into a museum, that was 'DIY.'" The term, he said, has little useful meaning. Gragg begged to differ slightly. In Portland, he said, DIY is an ethic that came out of necessity, because the economy is so crappy. It's an expression of a regional culture that isn't provincial, but is very specific.

At this point, Horodner turned to the audience for questions, as he seemed to have run out. One audience member complained that Portland's public art is uninteresting and would perhaps benefit from more funding. Darling disputed this,



CYNTHIA LAHTI, ARCHER, 2000, GLASS. PHOTO BY BASIL CHILDERS

asserting that lack of funding is what makes art in the U.S. so vital. Brown offered the bon mot that "one characteristic of provincial places is their sense of entitlement." She urged Portland artists to make work because they needed to, without foolishly expecting to make a living on sales or

charging high prices before developing a track record. Gragg expressed a wish for arts patrons who collect "lines of thought" and an exhibition program that was so rigorous that the art community would feel compelled to see everything there. Darling pointed out that in Los Angeles out-of-town collectors are more important than locals, and Gragg took another jab at the art museum, calling the last two biennials "jokes."



MELODY OWEN, STOP THE WORLD, 2003, TWO-MONITOR VIDEO INSTALLATION IN VAULT. PHOTO BY BASIL CHILDERS

The curators were asked, "What do you want to see?" Darling, sounding a lot like Jahn and very male, replied, "work that recognizes everything that's come before it and throws down the gauntlet." Brown took the yin side and said she'd ante up for art that has "a sense of particular urgency, that engages with all the factors that make you a human being." Towards the end, someone asked about Portland's newest DIY arts group, and Horodner requested anyone in the house from PCAC to stand up. Someone did, assistant curator Paul Middendorf, I think, to falteringly explain that their hope was "to keep it going and keep showing as many people as possible," at which point the faces of various audience members reddened.

In November and December, I simply gave up. I was tired of everything. I planned the "Team" issue of the *Organ*, this issue, in which I would cede control to guest editors. That didn't work for the most part, but I did succeed in staying away from events for two months. I even read a book or two and wrote some really crappy fiction. On a trip to Seattle, I made an exception and visited the Henry Art Gallery. The James Turrell Skyspace was the perfect and really only possible antidote to the phone call I had just received informing me that, the night before, the fire sprinkler in the *Organ's* office had malfunctioned, filling the office with 3 inches of water. Of course, the sprinkler was suspended directly above the newly delivered stacks of *Organ* #8 and a couple of feet from my desk, and, of course, I had no insurance. I came back and felt very tragic for a day. Fortunately, the amazing tenants in the building had cleaned up all the water and spread the wet papers out to dry. Incredibly, the computers were OK. Unfortunately, the contents of my desk were soggy and my personal book collection, which I stored at the office, was mostly damp pulp. My boyfriend helped me write down all the titles for memory's sake. Friends were organized to give me books, which they did, wonderful books.—C.R.

Broadside No. 1

Inside this issue you will find the first edition of Broadside, a series of free, mass-editioned prints featuring commissioned and recent work by artists we like. Broadside No. 1 is a collaborative drawing by Adam Sorenson and Corey Lunn.

About the artists:

Portland, Oregon artists Adam Sorenson and Corey Lunn occasionally collaborate on drawings, collages, paintings and conversations. Sorenson's paintings have shown at the 2003 Oregon Biennial, Core Sample: Portland Art Now and *New American Paintings*. He is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Lunn's drawings, paintings and sculptures have been exhibited at the Art Gym, Core Sample and Beulahland; his illustrations have appeared on T-shirts and greeting cards.

Broadside submissions:

Broadside is managed by interdisciplinary artist and curator Brad Adkins. Those interested in submitting work or offering a curatorial proposal for Broadside can send a note of intent to broadside@organarts.org.

What about make do?

To make time for this new endeavor, Brad has shuttered make do, the 5-by-7-inch gallery that appeared in *Organ* issues 1 through 8.

Broadside No. 1 is generously sponsored by Elizabeth Leach Gallery, located at 207 SW Pine St. in Portland or on the Web at www.elizabethleach.com.

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FICTION
Two Stories

by Kevin Sampsell

Not a Mermaid

It was some lake up in Washington. Some boat just big enough for the both of us. Some green water smell. Some time apart from your family. I put your hand in that private spot and you responded by doing the same with my hand. The water underneath us rocked just slightly, so we didn't have to move our bodies to enjoy the contact. Your mother and father were inside a cabin somewhere, preparing lunch. They would never know we did such things in the boat. Look, you said, and pointed to a huge fish swimming underneath us, just discernible enough for us to see. It looked blue and silver and strong.

It looks like a shark, you said.
It's not a shark, I replied. But still I was scared just because of the thing's size.

Do you think it's a piranha?
Don't be silly.
It's something big.

We watched it move below us, gleaming in the sun and coming more into focus as we watched.

When we arrived back at the cabin there was something unsettling between us. We sat on the couch but didn't hold hands. You had that faraway look, as if you were still thinking about the fish. I hope we don't have fish for dinner, you said.

In our sleeping bags later, you insisted on sleeping with your head pointing away from the water. I wanted to sleep the other way so I could look at the stars through the unzipped sky flap of our tent. Go ahead, you said. Tell me what you see.

I scanned the stars for shapes. Look, I said, there's a bunch over here shaped like a Christmas tree.

You're just saying that, you mumbled.

That night I had the dream about the fish. He came out of the water and walked up to the tent. In this dream, I watched his shadow walking with a limp and I wanted to scream. When he leaned down to talk to me he said, Don't get your hopes up. I'm not a mermaid.

He held out a part of his body that looked almost like a hand. That's when I felt that wetness, not in real life of course, but in dream life.

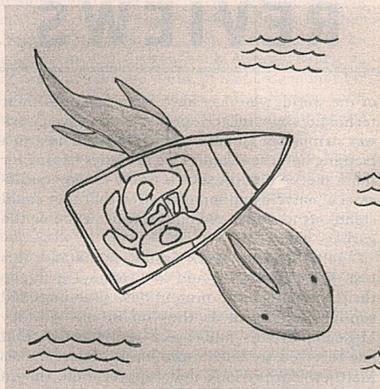


ILLUSTRATION BY SCAMPER FRANKLIN

I shook his "hand" and we talked for what felt to be a long time. He said he knew what I was doing in the boat and I had better watch it. When he saw the sun starting to emerge he said he had to leave. He tried to embrace me and I felt some other kind of wetness from him as we touched. Maybe tears.

Did I do something wrong, you said as I woke up. You were out of your sleeping bag and pressing against mine, your arm across my chest. You were crying. You always cried in the morning for some reason.

You look so mad, you said.
What do you mean, I asked.

Your brow is all scrunched up, like you're troubled. You rubbed your palm on my forehead as if to smooth it out.

I was asleep, I said. I can't control what I do when I'm sleeping.

Inside the cabin, your parents seemed uneasy to see us so early. I thought they were going to ask us to go back to sleep. It was 7:00. It was their time to be alone and sweet to each other. Your mom with the fresh-squeezed juice, your dad with the apron and the eggs. We took a piece of bacon each and decided to walk to the docks.

The walk took ten minutes, our mood changing and softening with each passing one. We eventually held hands. I told you about the dream and you laughed. We decided to look for seaweed that day. We were going to wrap up your legs. You were going to lie down on your side. I was going to get the camera. You were going to smile.

What She Can Do

He was a short man. That was the first thing I noticed. He looked me directly in the shoulder.

My hand shook from too much coffee. I had scone crumbs on my jacket. Poppy seeds.

"This is where the antenna is hidden," he said, caressing the side of his laptop like a lover. He was drinking tea, with a stale biscotti on the side. There was something wrong with his diction, the cluck of his consonants.

I looked at the wedding ring on his finger and wondered how short his wife was. If she was pretty or ugly, perhaps fat, nervous, or deeply sad in some unexplainable way. I wondered if she had a hidden antenna that he stroked lovingly.

"Watch what she can do," he said. He pressed a couple of buttons. "Now, be so kind as to look behind you."

Part of the wall had turned into a doorway, arched St. Louis style, sweating with fog. There was a sound in the air too, something spacial in the key of G. I looked around at the other people in the café and saw a middle-aged gym teacher trying to hum discreetly.

"Knock it off," I said.

Once inside the doorway, the air cleared and I witnessed another entire room. In it was an army of male dancers entertaining a throng of well-dressed females. The women sat in chairs as the men crushed against their ironed clothes. Some of the dancers wore horse masks and huge prosthetic penises. Disco music played from somewhere, but it was soft; you could still hear all the people breathing or struggling to voice their pleasure or displeasure.

"Do you have a woman in here, Stretch?" asked a fellow standing behind me. He wore a gold lamé vest and a canister of pepper spray on his belt. His shoes were also made of gold.

"No, I was just checking it out," I told him.

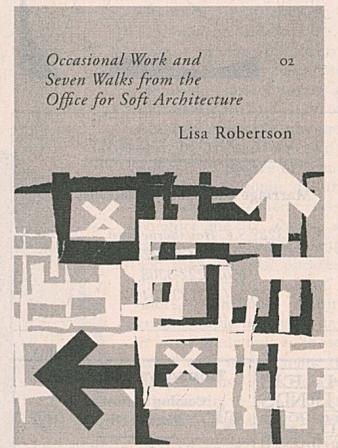
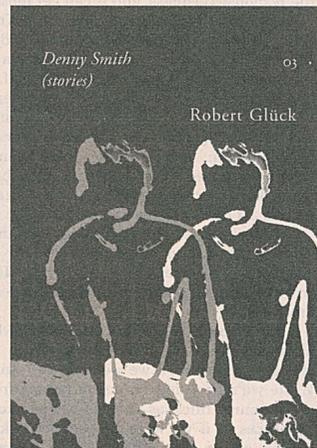
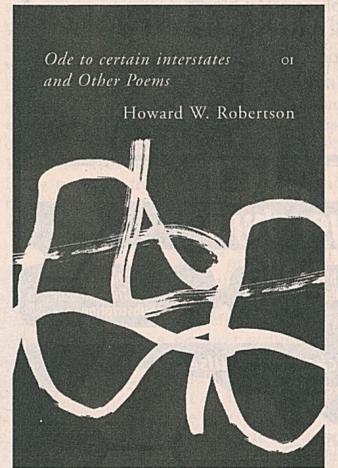
"You're not allowed to be in here then," he said. He pointed to the wall from where I had emerged.

I started toward the wall but stopped halfway. I looked back at the man. His hand lingered near his chemical weapon. "Go on," he said above the music. "It's not going to kill you."

Several of the women turned to look at me. One of the dancers pulled his mask off furiously and snarled in my direction. I took a quick step toward the wall but I wasn't sure if it was going to open for me or not.

Kevin Sampsell is a writer and the publisher of Future Tense Books in Portland, Oregon.

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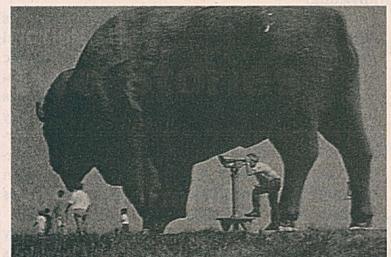
PREVIEWS

American Eye

Bill Brown's recently completed film *Mountain State* will make its West Coast premiere in January at the newly christened Lighthouse Cinema, along with *Buffalo Common* (2001)—a portrait of the prairies of North Dakota as the state loses its Cold War arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles—and *Confederation Park* (1999), a travel diary from Canada. Just because Brown makes his way through town every year doesn't mean it's not worth catching him this time. He'll also be reading from the latest issue of his zine, *Dream Whip*.

I've been an avid reader of Bill Brown's *Dream Whip* since first picking it up at a punk-rock record store in San Francisco in the mid '90s. I remember sharing it with a friend in college, one of the few classmates of mine who shared an interest in both zines and avant-garde film, because I was entranced by its ability to embody those two seemingly disparate worlds. *Dream Whip* combined the honesty and simplicity of Bay Area punk-zine writer Aaron Cometus with a keen ability to craft tangential, yet seamless, philosophical musings that recalled Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*. It wasn't until a few years later, upon moving to Portland, that I discovered that Bill Brown, zine maker, was also a filmmaker.

At the zine library where I work, you can find



STILL FROM BILL BROWN'S BUFFALO COMMON

Dream Whip in the travel section. Whenever I go to pull one off the shelves, I always have to double-check the card catalog; Brown's zines could easily fit in almost any of our 43 zine classifications. The narrative trajectories in his work, written and cinematographic, take you from anecdotes about past roommates, to ghost stories in rural West Virginia, to the decommissioning of nuclear missile silos in North Dakota. His beautifully photographed and carefully edited film landscapes call to mind the work of James Benning or Peter Hutton. His reference to the austere work of these avant-garde forefathers is offset by Brown's self-reflexive, humorous voice-overs. Through these he explores both the personal and cultural history of place in a style that always makes me think of Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (ostensibly a film about General Sherman and the Civil War that spends an equal amount of time following McElwee's troubled love life and family relationships).

So, any attempt at trying to classify Brown's films inevitably leads to the same conclusion

reached in the zine library: Bill Brown makes road movies. While the specific stories and subjects of his work are always shifting, the narrative force behind it is the road. Brown is a traveler, crossing the vast expanses of Canada from coast to coast, or the desert surrounding Roswell, New Mexico. Hopping from town to town in a pickup with a 16 mm camera, he seeks out overlooked and forgotten landscapes. Aiming his camera towards the dilapidated barns, the empty spaces beneath freeway bridges and the roadside attractions that

**TRUCK STOP STILL LIVES:
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7:30 p.m., \$7 (total running time 75 minutes)
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most of us never stop for, he tells the stories of places that most of us only ever see through a window, traveling at 65 mph.

Mountain State lives up to this tradition—it's a story told through 25 roadside markers in West Virginia. In each short scene, Brown beautifully photographs historic forts, open fields and highway oddities, while his narration bounces from a wry and witty account of a young Hare Krishna kid he met along the way, to what seems like a mere recitation of signage at a cemetery. We learn about a ghost who appeared to her mother to reveal her murderer, an abandoned nuclear war bunker constructed under the mountains and the countless sites at which white European settlers killed American Indians. But while focused on these rather mundane locales in West Virginia, *Mountain State* finds a way to speak to a much broader American experience. Like all of Brown's work, watching *Mountain State* is like reading a secret diary about the places you'll probably never go.—Pablo de Ocampo

Pablo de Ocampo is a visual artist who makes films and installations. He also works at the Independent Publishing Resource Center and Cinema Project.

From Russia with Love

The *Wreck of the St. Nikolai*, an operatic collaboration among Kyle Hanson and Lori Goldston of Seattle's *Black Cat Orchestra*, librettist Stacey Levine and artists Eve Cohen and Curtis Taylor, is the story of a 19th century Russian shipwreck off the Washington coast. The opera relates the calamitous encounters of the Russian sailors with native Quileutes from their very different perspectives. The performance includes elaborate sets, puppets, video and the studios *Turko-Latin-Asian* eclecticism of Hanson (accordion) and Goldston (cello). The opera, an earlier version of which premiered at PICA's TBA Fest last September, will be performed at Seattle's *On the Boards* later in January. Mark Hansen spoke to Lori Goldston about the show.

The *Black Cat Orchestra* has a vast and international repertoire; how do you find the music and

decide what to adapt/cover/appropriate? That's a very intuitive thing for us. Our instrumentation has shifted over the years so that's one deciding factor, along with the tastes, strengths and weaknesses of the individuals. Serendipity has always been a big factor since we're constantly digging around in libraries, thrift stores and record shops.

You've worked with a pretty amazing spectrum of Northwest artists, and this piece is specifically about events in Washington's history. Would you characterize the sound of what you're doing as specific to this region in any way? Could you characterize any sort of tradition in the history of sound for the Pacific Northwest?

I've always thought of the band as having a very Northwest sound in that it has a dark dreaminess that comes in part from living under all that cloud cover. I doubt we would have hit on that in just the same way if we'd been living in, say, California. There's also an obtuse sense of mischief in our work that's part of the culture here.

The main thing that put the Northwest on the map musically is rock, first the Sonics, Wailers and Ventures, and then later on Nirvana, Mudhoney, Soundgarden and those guys. It's a great tradition, very textural and emotional, with a lot of dark humor.

Who is involved in *The Wreck of the St. Nikolai* and what are their roles?

Kyle Hanson, Curtis Taylor, Eve Cohen and I wanted to make a piece that looked at the nature of where we live. After several months' worth of leisurely, free-associative meetings we eventually decided on this story, which I had stumbled upon at Powell's. It contained several themes we'd come back to over and over, mostly having to do with disasters and misunderstandings.

We asked Stacey Levine to write the libretto.

HINTERLAND THEATER ASSOCIATION
The Wreck of the St. Nikolai
January 22-February 1, 2004
8:00 p.m., \$18
ON THE BOARDS
100 W Roy Street, Seattle
206-217-9888, www.ontheboards.org

We're all old friends, and it's been a lot of fun to work together. Jessika Kenney returned from many months of traveling and agreed to sing all the parts for the Portland version, and has been a huge help writing and shaping the show. You worked with Stacey Levine before on a previous opera, *The Post Office*. How did you first start collaborating?

Stacey was one of the first people that I met when I moved to Seattle in 1985. I've always loved her writing, but this is the first time I've worked with her to create a new piece. She and Kyle have collaborated on songs now and then.

Any recommendations on what people should be listening to right now?

I would recommend going to the library and checking out something that you've never heard of.

Mark Hansen is a writer and teaches third grade.

are these lines curved or straight?

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AMENDS / continued from page 1

Outside the *P-I* and aside from Matthew, the temperature drops dramatically. Those critics cut me dead, and I them.

All this cutting dead has to stop, I decided, especially because I'm the original source of the chill.

For some reason, Matthew has a pass with me. There's that party I went to at his apartment last summer. He greeted me at the door exclaiming, "Regina, how nice of you to come! And I have a present for you!"

I was the only one getting a present, which set the tone. He disappeared into the bedroom and came back with a small mound, cheerfully wrapped. Inside was a coffee mug encased in clichés. (Sharp as a tack. Kick a dead horse. Cute as a button. Hot as hell, and so forth.)

He said, "As soon as I saw it, I thought of you."

Here's my move: I pretended it was a present. I thanked him profusely and promised to use it, which I do, every morning.

Matthew's kidding. And when he's not kidding, he's a voice crying in the wilderness, which appeals to me. I grew up on the crazy edge of Catholic. Plus, he has never attacked me in print.

That last part is key. Talk's fine, but print matters. The critics I tend to loathe have gone after me in print. I respond by morphing into Ms. Freeze. Maybe I should wear a T-shirt with the warning, "Can dish it out, but can't take it."

A thin-skinned critic is an absurdity. We're in the response business, and it can get messy.

So, new policy. All the outs are in free. Last time I was in Portland, I greeted Randy Gragg warmly. This is after shunning him for a decade. He looked startled, but I continued as if no time had passed since we discussed whether or not he'd submit to the indignity of peeing into a cup to get the *Oregonian* job. I assume we had some intimacy then, or he wouldn't have been talking to me about pee. Those were the days before he wrote that neither the *P-I* nor the *Seattle Times* had an art critic worthy of the title. (See how I've forgotten it, Randy? You can stop looking at me as if I'm armed and dangerous.)

Next, I've been nice to Emily Hall, who writes about herself writing about herself at the *Stranger*.

In response to the ice treatment (which she earned, believe me), she had taken to flushing and glowering when we were in the same room. While we're not now (to use a phrase from Matthew's mug) thick as thieves, we're exchanging sentences as if we were two people talking. The impersonation is a little stiff, but I have hopes for it.

My goodwill almost extended to defending her at a recent panel discussion at Salon Mudede. Charles Mudede is the brilliant cultural crime writer at the *Stranger*, and his salon is a red-light affair, in a basement of a Capitol Hill storefront.

The stage lights are blinding, but the perks for panelists are significant, including a massage while you talk, and even a haircut. Anyway, Charles asked Susan Robb, also on the panel, what she thought of Seattle critics, and since the theme was love and hate, she chose hate.

"Not much," she said. "They indulge in too much description." I was thinking, "Isn't she going to say, 'except for Emily'?" Emily is Boswell to her unworthy Johnson. Emily has written passionately and well about Susan's work.

I was going to point this out but got distracted by the nature of her complaint. For me, the judgment is in the description, and images carry more freight than explication.

In other words, I took the low road, defending myself as a describer, instead of defending Emily, which would have been gallant. But because I'd never defended myself on stage before, the experience was heady. We can all burrow into our point of view and toss our responses behind us, without looking back. Engagement with others is a commitment to community, to being part of the X marking the spot, evidence that we're all breathing here together.

People say there isn't enough of that in Seattle. Who's fault is that? I'm like many others in the Northwest. We're living at the edge of the continent for a reason, but surely we can pop our heads up now and then, to give and get, to ebb and flow, to follow the elegant example of Allen Ginsberg and put our queer shoulders to the wheel.

Regina Hackett is the art critic of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

FUNDING / continued from page 3

mended for pulling back the curtain on this topic with its third issue. Explaining that the paper has produced "zero income" since it began, the issue then provides a detailed ledger of its accounts. Such public accounting has been mused over by other figures in the arts. Addressing the fall of the Blackbird, Hilton wryly suggests, "Maybe under the listing for every show, we should list all of the expenses: Here's what we have to pay; here are how many people have to come so that the band can make enough gas money to get home."

Certainly, the economics behind arts scenes could become more transparent, which would go a long way towards acknowledging the very real relationship between art and commerce. More transparency would, hopefully, allow us to see the ways in which members of the arts community are in service to one another—thus encouraging us to collaborate to sustain that network. As Fadel observes, "The only thing that really stays is service to the community. I'd love to see people have ownership in their community, outside of just what it can do for them."

Cielo Lutino is a member of the Portland arts collective, Pacific Switchboard. **Alyssa Isenstein**, who edited the article, likes to write and is a committee member of the Lecture Series.

UNFORESEEN: Four Painted Predictions
PICA, December 3, 2003 - January 24, 2004

In an odd lexical coincidence, PICA's most recent offering, *Unforeseen: Four Painted Predictions*, marks an unforeseen event, the demise of its visual arts program and Stuart Horodner's imminent departure from the institution. The knowledge that the exhibition marked such an ending—and an institution's partial surrender—suffused my experience of the show. Having recently returned to Portland from several years in the more artistically fecund cities of Chicago and New York, I was acutely aware of the opening's light attendance and the general lack of fanfare surrounding Horodner's elegant and timely exhibition (the resurgence of painting has been a major topic of late in contemporary arts journals and tomes such



HENK PANDER, *SONG OF THE WILD*, 2001, OIL ON CANVAS

as *Vitamin P*).

The canvases reflect a current trend toward conceptual figurative painting, a movement marked in part by the disavowal of objective realism, but also by the presence of diverse art historical influences and referents. *Unforeseen* includes three paintings each by four painters who span a generation. Dana Schutz and Hilary Harkness are young rising stars of the New York art world, while Steve DiBenedetto is a veteran artist whose work has been exhibited internationally for the past two decades. The eldest, Dutch-born Henk Pander, is a local artist of extraordinary vision, whose work deserves more exposure. Despite the generational differences of the artists, all of the works in *Unforeseen*, painted in the last four years, have a decidedly post-apocalyptic feel.

Hilary Harkness' paintings have a sexy, militaristic theme. Images of scantily clad women on submarines and battleships living out a sort of Bush-era military version of the *Reform School Girls* fantasy comprise her comic and disturbing, bleak and cynical paintings. The best of the three, *Rearguard Action*, depicts women in various states of undress massaging and having sex with each other, watching TV, smoking and dancing on tables in a cross-sectional view of an unidentified institutional complex.

Steve DiBenedetto's psychedelic paintings hold less intrigue, although intellectually they are an interesting foil to the more traditional references of Henk Pander's modern day *vanitas* paintings. DiBenedetto makes paintings that position figurative elements including helicopters and squid on abstracted, turbulent landscapes. These strange compositions trouble the traditional categories of representation and abstraction and undermine any distinction between figure and ground. Pander's work, like the *vanitas* still lifes of the 17th and 18th centuries, are complex compositions that include a variety of seemingly unrelated objects including the de rigueur reminder of death (some skeletal remains, an extinguished candle), foliage, edibles and, in one case, a bike messenger. Pander's paintings are eccentric natural histories of the postmodern, wired age, inflected by the melancholic subtext of morbidity and decay.

My favorite work in the exhibition, Dana Schutz's *Dead Zebra*, is an intensely beautiful and terrifically savvy painting. If anything can remedy/rescue the bad painting of the '80s, this is it. Composed of electric colors, abstracted and physical brushstrokes and a Rousseauian energy, *Dead Zebra* is a true tour de force, and from the underwhelming turnout at the press opening, my impression is that the Portland cognoscenti haven't yet tuned into the buzz about Schutz. Her current solo show in New York at LFL Gallery has met with high critical and popular praise. *Frank as a Probiscus Monkey*, also included in PICA's show, is from her most recent body of work. Schutz has created a fictional character, Frank, from "observation," positing that she and Frank are the last two people on earth, and that reality might simply be a relation between two people or "a world without anyone to check reality against."

In lieu of concluding with some elegiac prose about the sudden demise of PICA's visual arts program, I would like to briefly call attention to another painting in our midst, a painting that could easily have fit within the conceptual rubric of *Unforeseen*. Alexis Rockman's masterpiece *Evolution* is hanging quietly in Saucebox where it is likely an object of equal (though I suspect more) visibility as anything exhibited within PICA's walls, and this seems to be precisely Portland's current predicament. Cocktails, anyone?

—Laurel Gitlen

JOHN CURRIN
Whitney Museum of American Art,
November 20, 2003 - February 22, 2004

A good test for looking at art, sometimes, is to wonder what you might think of a given piece if you found it in a neighborhood thrift store. Like, how would the piece register robbed of all the authority that the museum or gallery confers on it? How would it function in democratic relation to all the images made by all the real amateurs

of the world, who may have stumbled onto their techniques by total accident? What if a given work was stripped of all authorship and stuck next to a frothing hotel seascape? One is always hoping for those pieces that hit such a finely tuned equilibrium of naiveté and sophistication that they could stand out in either realm, the white cube or the garbage can.

John Currin's work would not stand this test. His paintings would look annoying in the thrift store—gaudy, pretentious, preening and sentimental—much as they do in the Whitney Museum, in this mid-career retrospective that has received so much attention it almost makes Matthew Barney look underappreciated. Currin is well-versed in the iconology of the thrift store, no question about that. His paintings are full of Norman Rockwell-isms, Andrew Wyeth quotes and those teary Precious Moments kids, which can all be found poking out of the eyeballs and grassy hillocks, milled into the hair and bony postures of Currin's work. He knows of other, ostensibly forbidden imagery as well, the kind found in porn magazines, and fashion magazines, and barbarian posters, and which in some fantastical, preppie universe might be deemed too *déclassé* for a true, blue-chip painter to steal from. But Currin covers his bases, too; he doesn't only draw from the gutter.

He is careful to mingle his lumpen influences with plenty of A-list references as well—Botticelli, van Eyck, Sargent, you name it. He may go to the thrift store sometimes, it's true, but this is a man who has spent his share of time in major museums.

Jaunty and Mame (1997) is a pretty representative painting for Currin. It features two women burdened with huge balloon boobs and sickeningly mottled faces, set against a background of some rusted sherbet color, like something you might find on a rack of greeting cards in a bowling alley, complete with the water damage and mildew stains. As with many of Currin's pictures of women, the figures are so divorced from their own bodies that they seem at war with themselves, bobbing heads repressing their own indignity through a blithe and theatrical vapidity. Currin is fascinated by the grotesque, apparently. In paintings like *Minerva* (2000), featuring an elderly woman with a maple leaf in her hair, and *Park City Grill* (2000), showing a middle-aged woman seated beside a smarmy, toupeed Lothario, the laughing subjects are revealed at moments of unctuous, ugly facial contortion.

And yet, Currin forces us to say, look how "well-painted" they are. Look how knowing he must be, to lavish his talents on such abject material. Look at that patina of redoubtable Old Master-ish-ness.

Currin has been accused of misogyny, but that's not the worst problem here. More like extreme obviousness, and calculation, and an aversion to any kind of emotional risk. Who does this titillate, exactly, or move? It's hard to tell. Like fellow alpha-careerist, Lisa Yuskavage, who



JOHN CURRIN, *PARK CITY GRILL*, 2000, OIL ON CANVAS

has built an enviable market value on the minor epiphany that '70s soft-focus porn resembles Vermeers, Currin traffics in a gentrification of kitsch that is now the permanent strategy of young movers rising in the art world. It is a hallowed method that has taken everyone from Picasso to Koons to their fame, and which conveniently informs the interior decorating schemes of collectors the world over. "It's terrible! I love it!" Or even worse: "It's terrible! Until someone 'cool' makes it! Then I love it!"

Which is too bad, because on occasion Currin does manage a picture imbued with real mystery, like *The Cuddler* (2000), a portrait of a woman whose big teeth, wide-set eyes and unhealthy pallor fail to disguise her basic humanity, and whose pea-coat collar rises to an elegant flare. Or *The Berliner* (1994), whose cramped composition of a bearded man in an argyle sweater eating spaghetti has a feeling of true spontaneity and daring to it.

Who knows. Maybe Currin is working out some warts-and-all affection for his subjects, like some people claim, and not the toxic yuppie sarcasm he appears to be perpetrating. Even now, with this benchmark come and gone, it remains to be seen.—Jon Raymond

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VITO ACCONCI
99% for Architecture: a lecture
Presented by PICA at the First Congregational Church, November 12, 2003

If Vito Acconci has entered the art canon as "patron transgressor," it would be a mistake to believe he has become a static icon. Not only is he still breaking the rules, but his early works have proven to be part of an enduring exploration of a

"I'm not an artist, I'm a designer."

CHATTING WITH VITO ACCONCI

Given your enormous creative energy, what is it that keeps your focus on architecture? Use. And trying to liberate people's usage. What has architecture taught you about sculpture and/or artmaking?

It's taught me that I'm not an artist, I'm a designer. I'm interested in the materials and occasions of the everyday world; I'm interested not in fine art, pure art, but applied art.

What is your studio engaged in now? A skate park in San Juan, Puerto Rico, an entrance-passageway through an architecture school in Vienna, Austria, a portable/transformable gallery booth for an art fair.

What are you currently looking at for inspiration? We listen to music in the studio. Electronica: Vladislav Delay, Plasticman... Architecture's connected to music, not to sculpture. Architecture and music both make a surrounding, an ambience.

In art schools, you are sometimes treated as a rock star, especially when you give a lecture. Do you enjoy being a "patron transgressor"?

I'm gratified that I've had some influence. I hope my work influences not people's work but their attitude, their desire.

Interview by James Harrison

subject of universal importance—the meanings of public space.

Acconci walked the audience through his career from 1969 to the present day, each phrase delivered in his trademark staccato, explaining that even at the outset of his career, he didn't see himself as strictly an artist. "The way art activity began for me was to pick out a system that already exists in the world, and attach to it."

His first works aspired to action—moving, following, manipulating, changing, etc.—as exemplified by *Follow Piece* (1969), for which he followed people in public spaces until they entered a private space. In the gallery setting, he violated convention by setting up interactions with the audience, manipulating the gallery space and using his own body as an art object. All three strategies came together in the infamous *Seed Bed* (1972), in which he hid beneath a sloping gallery floor, masturbating to fantasies about the viewers who walked over him. Many of the recurring themes throughout Acconci's work can be traced back to these two early pieces.

By the mid-'70s, his pieces had become installations. The interaction between art and body was still necessary to complete the work, but by this time the emphasis was on the viewer's body, not the artist's. In the mid-'80s, he started a collaborative practice called Acconci Studios, with the intention of focusing on public art projects. "I had a nagging doubt about trying to turn a gallery into a public place," he explained. "Things in an art context affect an art context but not much else. I was not so interested in the art viewer as separate from humanity, but more interested in the casual passerby. Therefore the interest in public space arose, but I didn't know how to do it—luckily, if you use the words 'conceptual art,' you can do anything!"

Now that Acconci Studios is nearing its 20th anniversary, Acconci has some pointed and insightful observations about public art. Public art is not curated, he explained, but rather negotiated, and although it has created new territories for artists to work in, its restrictions make it very difficult to produce high-quality work. If 1 percent of the budget is for art, that leaves 99 percent for architecture. Clearly this is better than nothing, but the challenge for public artists lies in competing with architecture.

If initially public art was conceived as a way to bring art to civic space, then artists such as Acconci are using it as a way to challenge the architectural status quo. One line of thinking is that architecture, though a dominant cultural form in terms of capital and scale, has become a weak field conceptually—rendered incapable of holding meaning by the twin evils of building codes and legal liability. Accordingly, public art is reduced to a band-aid solution to cover architectural shortcomings. Yet another model is that public art is not nearly as weak as some think, that it may yet prove itself an important field in its own right, a hybrid of architecture and sculpture, a civic invention born of necessity.

—James Harrison

James Harrison works in the realms of sculpture and architecture. He worked for Acconci Studios as a graduate student.

HEIDI SCHWEGLER
Passing Resemblances
Pushdot Gallery, November 6-30, 2003

The lost and the last seen with. They always come



BROADSIDE NO. 1. Adam Sorenson and Corey Lunn, *Untitled*, ink and collage on paper, 2003. Edition of 7,000. Published by The Organ Review of Arts. Printing sponsored by Elizabeth Leach Gallery

REVIEWS

in pairs: a baby girl and a forlorn teenager, a second cousin with his girlfriend's mother, someone's neighbor and a trusted friend, an ostracized husband with someone altogether unknown. Thin smudges of fugitive ink on the cheapest paper, they are forgotten as quickly as they are seen, swaddled in the inexorable landslide of glossier advertisements for free beef, cheap pizza, discount carpet cleaning and obsolete electrical appliances.

Heidi Schwegler's latest exhibition, *Passing Resemblance*, was tautly structured around "the missing." For Schwegler, the missing and those searching for them form a discrete subculture with its own peculiar visual norms and fetishized objects. The core source material for the exhibition's central work, *Last seen with*, were images from direct-mail advertisements sponsored by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and photographs culled from the Doe Network's missing persons Web site. Schwegler cropped hundreds of these photographs and arranged them in a grid, effacing names, weights, heights and dates of birth. Alongside the monumental canvas Schwegler projected in rapid sequence single lines of text taken from the "distinguishing marks" field from each mailer: *she has an appendectomy scar on her abdomen; he has a steel pin in his right leg from the knee downward; he has a small tattoo of an airplane on his left hand; he is hyperactive; her nickname is "Fran"; she has a scar on her left knee and a hysterectomy scar on her abdomen; she has a pin in her right hip; there is no bone in the little toe of her right foot; her front teeth were replaced by temporary caps, which were slightly yellowed at the time of her disappearance.* These distinguishing marks—almost always physical frailties—are substitutes for the unique personal history of each of the lost. Each digitally projected sentence was quickly replaced by another, effecting an endless cataract of unreadable data.

While *Last seen with* explored the printed artifacts that document the missing at the blurry edge of the public sphere, other works in the exhibit addressed the objects collected around private tragedies. Schwegler admits a fascination with the "cult of the doll." Middle-aged and elderly women—often childless—collect, care for and display near lifesize and very lifelike dolls. Schwegler describes these dolls as "stuck in time, between the vulnerable moment of birth and the ever present fear of death—or worse: abduction," while their collectors are "distressingly aware of their own mortality and strangely haunted and alone." Probably out of empathy or solidarity, Schwegler preserved her own likeness as a silicon memento mori in the work *Doll*. The doll's head is a casting of the artist's own, while the body is only a slight diminution of Schwegler's 5-foot frame. Clothed in a soiled, Alice-in-Wonderland-blue frock plucked from the Goodwill bins, *Doll* was seated in a beat-up, plastic yellow chair, with arms cocked at aerobic angles. *Doll* gazed haplessly upon a suite of photographs of herself taken in the tacky mise-en-scènes of the Sears family portrait studio: playing with a ball at the beach, celebrating a birthday party, riding a toy pony. Assembled behind *Doll* was a small bestiary of stuffed animals—true fetishes of childhood—each entombed in white acrylic paint. Here, teddy bears, donkeys, seals and giraffes were powerful symbols of deferral, a token call to the presumed dead to return to the world of the living, and a meager message of defiant hope broadcast against loss.

Schwegler's 2001 exhibition, *The Pathological Record*, at the now defunct Savage gallery, associated hereditary birth defects with heirloom jewelry passed between generations. The objects in *The Pathological Record* avidly demonstrated her training as a fine jeweler and metalsmith, but more important, the show's conceptual breadth underlined the artist's intellectual ambition, which far exceeds the normal limits of contemporary American craft. With her newest work, Schwegler has further distanced herself from craft traditions by outsourcing production of the objects on display to artisans and specialists. Her recurring trope remains physical helplessness whether by genetic mutation or abduction. As

ULTERIOR MOTIVES: Contemporary Northwest Abstraction The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, November 10 - December 14, 2003

"Go on failing. Go on. Only next time, try to fail better."
—Samuel Beckett

Ulterior Motives promised a survey of contemporary trends in regional abstract painting at one of the Northwest's prized noncommercial venues, the Marylhurst Art Gym. Unfortunately, Terri Hopkins' selections amounted to a comely but muddled montage. A few exceptional works exceeded the otherwise fatally hesitant curatorial gambit. However, the exhibition's thin premise undermined these works' attempt to complicate the already staid genealogies of abstract painting.

Rae Mahaffey, Todd Ros and Claude Zervas each attempted fresh takes on a moribund tactic—the stripe—by teasing out painterly conceits rooted in extra-painterly systems. For a while now, Ros has rehashed color-field painting by ordering the identifying marks of World War II aircraft in a dull, predictable rhythm. Ros points to a potentially salient association between these graphic systems and the vulgar terminus of Greenbergian formalism—the paradigmatic masculine art form of heroic high modernism. But engagement with the symbolic language of warfare is fraught with politics, and Ros eschews such complexities, his canvases instead appearing nostalgic and very butch one-dimensional encomiums.

Rae Mahaffey builds transparent glazes upon the striated patterns of plywood and punctuates her compositions with prim, sharp geometric forms. Self-consciously pleasing, Mahaffey's works lack the inner rigor and anxious formal drama necessary to be anything more than merely decorative. Though decorative abstraction has in fact resurfaced in vital and interesting ways in recent contemporary art, Mahaffey's works are without such distinction and appear altogether mannered and generic.

Claude Zervas messes with the optics of the flatbed scanner. By shining a flashlight into the scanner and making digital prints of the results, Zervas records the spectral separation of light into bands of color. At best, the prints are unspectacular one-liners masquerading as technical discovery. Zervas' works retreat entirely into "pure" abstraction: pretty but affectless digital mark making.

Hopkins organized another group of artists around the referents of topography: contours, gradients and relief. Casey Keeler's assembly of miniature and repetitive pagodalike forms somehow, Hopkins explains, "embody a response to the proliferation of suburban housing developments." With all the manifold conceptual systems that shape suburban spaces—geography, geology, climate, economics, statistics, race—Keeler's abstractions appear neither critical nor affirmative, only superficial.

Leo Saul Berk's works are color-coordinated lacquered plywood panels cut and stacked to conform to the outlines of specific wilderness contour maps. The reliefs are meticulously executed and presented, but to what end? Berk overstates the link between the product of the managed forest and the forest survey maps (all the while inexplicably shaking down Clyfford Still's most compressed works), and the work shares Keeler's limitations. With all that turns around the real and imaginary Northwest forests, an engagement with this loaded conceptual currency might have resulted in something more compelling than "line, form and color."

The exhibition notes remark on Jacqueline Ehli's affinity with the paintings of first-generation minimalist painter, Jo Baer. Baer and her contemporaries (Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, et al.) famously tested the limits of painting's compositional bonds, deranging the distinctions between sculpture and painting. Though Ehli's gigantic wall pieces are distantly related to that lineage, they are anachronistic

without irony. With polished and near-perfect surface treatments, Ehli attempts to suffuse a kind of cheap glamour into minimalism. Stridently restating what has already been worked out, there are no new claims for abstract painting here.

Each of these artists is beholden to the look and feel he or she has developed; they appear stuck with whatever sticks, to varying degrees amnesiacally reliving color-field painting, geometric abstraction, cool minimalism, hot minimalism, etc. again and again. However, several works included in *Ulterior Motives* managed to evade such monotony. Hildur Bjarnadottir's disassembled canvases, rewoven and re-presented as tapestry-objects, both update and subvert the essential materiality of painting. Craft is so tightly embedded into technique that Bjarnadottir can take for granted the struggles with painting's objecthood. There's plenty of material left over for play, a sense notably lacking from the exhibition overall.

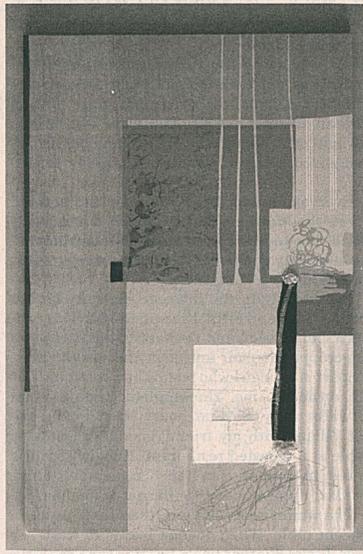
If there's one painter left on earth who cares how paint lays on a canvas and what a brushstroke looks like, it's Molly Vidor. It's what's going on beneath the surface of a Vidor canvas that is most compelling. Conservative and gothic, Vidor's medium-sized landscape canvases stack layers of dense complementary colors, resulting in an almost all-over monochromatism. Never pure abstraction, Vidor paints the shades of real things. Over the last few years, it's been a pleasure to watch her quiet oscillation from negation to still life and back again.

Similarly, Michelle Ross' recent work digresses on the act of painting, thinking through the language of brushwork. Ross performs a kind of notational archaeology of the brushstroke: cryptic patches of color organized into grids, sketchy hatchwork remotely tethered to representational forms, a jagged horizon line ambivalently rocking between foreground and background. Ross knows where we are with abstract painting—nowhere—and is asking, "How are we to begin again?" With that, she seems to me the recipient of the ambivalent Beckett quotation above.

Contemporary art is dominated by polymorphous, telegenic forms—time-based media, hybridized photography, smooth and seamless postindustrial objects that are now indistinguishable from the assets of everyday material culture. Hence, a survey of abstract painting poses a unique problem. Since the turn of the last century, the function and power of abstraction's multivalent systems have fluctuated widely along the craggy fault lines of autonomy and tendentiousness. In its heroic past, abstraction has tarried with its own normative limits and indulged in its own perpetual demise. Abstraction has consumed itself and gorged upon its own irrelevance in the face of ever-new technically driven art forms. To make matters worse, the term "abstraction" itself is so woefully abused in critical, art historical as well as popular milieus, that it is drained of immediate, practical application.

This presents the opportunity to carefully and deliberately reframe our understanding of what abstraction—and abstract painting particularly—might mean. The task of any survey of abstraction—whether local or global—is to advocate its enduring relevance amidst the metaphysical carnage of contemporary art. Absent of such a concentrated "motive"—ulterior or otherwise—this exhibition came off as somehow perfunctory. Hopkins' accompanying exhibition notes listlessly attempted to house the condition of abstract painting within her own reading of stylistic plurality as the defining moment of postmodernism. A more thoroughgoing effort at periodizing abstract painting was warranted given the diverse complications of its uncertain present.

For us, here in the Pacific Northwest, it appears that abstract painting is stranded on a lonely shore—"the best coast"—and I confidently await the inevitable tide that will drag it to the bottom.—Jason Loeffler



MICHELLE ROSS, *FARTHER TENDER*, 2002, MIXED MEDIA

"Michelle Ross knows where we are with abstract painting—nowhere—and is asking, 'How are we to begin again?'"

such, Schwegler has an uncanny knack for transforming bruising, traumatic events into chilly, emotionless artifacts.—Jason Loeffler

URBAN BUSH WOMEN Presented by White Bird Portland State University, December 11, 2003

Pouring rain made for a damp crowd at the Urban Bush Women's performance (part of White

Bird's PSU Dance Series), but the enthusiasm of the (very youthful) audience shone red-hot. They cheered and stamped and generally showed a much greater level of energy than anything that was happening on stage.

In collaboration with the National Song and Dance Company of Mozambique, the New York-based company Urban Bush Women presented an evening-length program entitled *Shadow's Child*,

a modern-day folk tale about cultural identity. The program synopsis said this was the story of the friendship between two youngsters, an African girl named Xiomara and an American girl named Blue who suffers from porphyria, a disease which makes her sensitive to sunlight. Xiomara and her family leave Africa and land in Tallahassee, Florida. The costume changes alone let us know she isn't likely to fit in—the African women dress in a brilliant clangor but their American counterparts are all monochrome red and blue. Or, as one of the American girls says to Xiomara, fingering her skirt scornfully, "Why you wearing so many colors?"

It's a great moment, but it doesn't last. Instead we're launched into a story where oceans are crossed, dolls are lost and some puppets that seemed to be from some other show altogether crisscross the stage to hoots from the delighted audience. Despite terrific drumming and a fascinating little dance essay that gave insight on the links between African dance and hip-hop, the performance seemed to be having a major identity crisis of its own. Poor porphyria-ridden Blue expresses herself in arabesque before being snatched by some seaweed. Why? I have no idea. Although Xiomara jumps like a champ in Africa, in America she fumbles. What's it mean? It's anyone's guess. It certainly involved a lot of transportation though that's not quite the same thing as being transported, something we have come to expect from the ordinarily fervent Urban Bush Women.

Despite moments of charm (Xiomara meets American culture to Al Green's "Love and Happiness") and standout individual performances, the troupe seemed drained by trying to express this confused plot. African dance is capable of unalloyed joy, boundless reach and expressiveness unavailable to Western dance forms. But such pleasures were in short supply this go-round by the usually admirable troupe—you had to look into the audience for any sign of that.

—Merridawn Duckler

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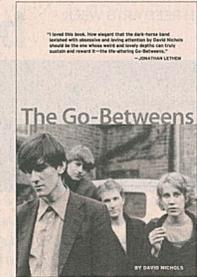
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HEIDI SCHWEGLER, *LAST SEEN WITH*. COURTESY PUSHDOT GALLERY



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This is the fourth installment of "My Art Diary." Since the last one was published in last year's January/February issue, my attempts to complete another have been unsuccessful (see below), but I've taken notes and made stabs, which I started compiling in October. I could call this "Best of 2003," but that's so last week.

October. I gave away \$11 today, 10 to Steve MacDougall for the video installation he and Chris Rhodes made for Core Sample, baseballs being fast-pitched into frosted cakes, and one to a well-kempt, sweet old woman panhandling on a corner in the Pearl District. I say she's sweet because she complimented my new sweater. I have been turning down a lot of worse-off panhandlers lately. There is no justice to kindness, and often no reason.

So now I have \$50, but Brad Adkins is flat broke. He stopped by, wondering if I knew about any parties with food. Our offices are in the same building and he comes by at least once a week, but sometimes several times a day, usually to complain about art and other artists. He knows a lot of gossip, especially about who is jealous of whom. He tells about his fights: "Fuck your 'relationship to paint!'" I'm not entirely sure he's telling the truth. Why? For one thing, I know he has spread the false rumor that I once dated painter Brenden Clenaghan. I hardly even know Brenden. I met him once at Pulliam Deffenbaugh and we probably wouldn't recognize each other on the street. We talked about how he was a friend of fellow painter Joe Macca, on whom I had a huge crush when he was a senior and I was a freshman at Lake Oswego High School. I wrote Joey a letter after he went away to college, and I guess the pretense of it was that I needed material for my underground literary magazine, *Sub Rosa*. I gather this because he referred to it in his response, which I still have in an old scrapbook. I read it recently, but there was nothing juicy in it. When his younger sister ran for class office, her slogan was "Macca my day."

I haven't completed an art diary entry since February, but I keep promising to bring it back. My art consumption isn't manic the way it was before. Mostly, I just sit in my office and worry about whether we're going to sell any more ads. Also, I chat with the interns and try to come up with reasons not to walk in front of a car.

I found something I wrote in March, after returning from New York, where the art seeing was, actually, manic. There was Matisse Picasso at the MoMA (Queens), Manet/Velasquez and Leonardo da Vinci at the Met, Matthew Barney at the Guggenheim, the quilts of Gee's Bend and the architectural art of Diller + Scofidio at the Whitney, and the Armory Show. Plus I browsed Chelsea and caught a performance by the Wooster Group.

It seems absurd to go back and talk about all of this now, especially since most of these shows were covered extensively in national press by writers much more qualified than I, but there's a compulsive logic to this diary that I'll obey.

MP: No matter what a cliché of pretty dorm room poster art he's become, Matisse came out throwing knockout punches. The cool thing was seeing how both he and Picasso were such hardcore experimenters throughout their careers and how the one's fascination with color and the other's with structure bore deeply into both's work. No, really. The Manet/Velasquez show looked at the ways that Spanish Golden Age painters influenced 19th century French painters following Napoleon's Spanish campaigns (in particular,

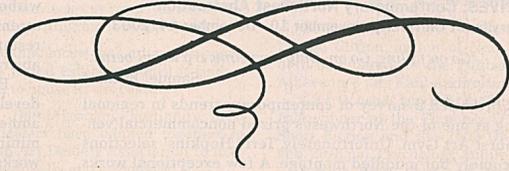


EDOUARD MANET, MLE V... IN THE COSTUME OF AN ESPADA, 1862, OIL ON CANVAS

the looting part) and included works by Murillo, Ribera, El Greco, Zurbarán, Goya, Delacroix, Courbet, Millet and Degas, as well as Americans Sargent, Whistler and Eakins. Paintings like Velasquez's *Infante Don Carlos* and Manet's *The Balcony* and *Dead Toreador* were actually dizzying, the way they combine psychological and social portraiture with stupendously luscious, frisky painting. (Okay, this isn't working.) The interesting thing was that Sargent actually stole the show; his 1882 *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*—four girls in pinafores gazing out boredly from a lavishly appointed room in their father's house—took what came before and wrapped it up with a bow (a chill casualness that sensed the passing moment as photography would later learn to do) and a cherry (Vermeer's window-streaming light).

I bought tickets to the Wooster Group hoping for a life-changing experience, a theater performance that didn't make me cringe by being too stazy or just plain shitty. But *Brace Up!*, a Kabuki-inflected interpretation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* that used much of the original cast from its 1991 premiere, mocked me by giving me exactly what I asked for. The impeccable production felt

My Art Diary



(unfairly) too practiced and the highly restrained acting style robbed me of what I really wanted—a deep, emotionally cathartic communion with Willem Defoe.

Anyway, this is what I wrote when I got back:

Here's how Portland looked through the windows of the Hillsboro-bound Red Line MAX after four nights in New York: dreamy, spacey, boxy, its structures clinging tentatively to the rangy shoulders of a body mostly submerged in water. The climate was mild, the people pudgy, the streets quiet. The palette was green and gray, glowing under an overcast sky. The landscape was boring, even narcotic, penetrated by a numinous vapor, a long-lived spirit of place that vaguely threatened.

Everyone asked, "How was your trip and did you see the Matthew Barney show?" I must have fielded this question five times the following evening at a party and five more times the next week. Yes, and here's a funny story:

On the way to the museum, let's say on the corner of 86th and Fifth, I see a cute skirt. It's calf-length, beige wool, and the fabric graduates to a close-cropped mohair knit as it reaches the hem. The skirt is on a girl who stands at a stoplight, her back turned to me. The stoplight changes, and she walks away. Several hours later, I'm in the West Village with my friend Joanna, waiting for a table at a crowded restaurant. The girl stands a few feet in front of us in line. "I remember seeing that skirt uptown today," I whisper to Joanna.

The waiter seats the girl, then seats us at an adjacent table. When Joanna leaves to wash her hands, I take another peek, but this time the girl's looking back, asking me a question, brightly.

"Were you at the Guggenheim today?"

"Yes," I answer, surprised.

"The reason I ask," she says, "is that I remember your pants."

(Strange things always happen to me when Joanna leaves. When she left me in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Rashneeshes tried to brainwash me.) My pants are a patchwork of various brown corduroys, pretty flamboyant. I tell the girl about the full extent of the coincidence, and we share a laugh. "Did you like the show?" I ask. "Loved it!" she says, nodding and smiling. "Oh," I say, nodding and smiling back, shrugging and laughing again, and finally wishing her a good meal and turning back to my menu.

I guess this could be an allegory about a number of different things—the negation of the uncanny under the subjective regime of ironic detachment, how things are only beautiful when they're at bay, missed romantic opportunities, but actually it's all to say that the Matthew Barney show wasn't very good. I think his work is pretty astounding, despite his status as golden boy whom everybody loves to hate, but the Guggenheim show had all the glory of what I imagine the Epcot Center's Spaceship Earth might be like, and no guts. Actually, it would have been better if the designers, who must have come off the trade show circuit, had at least gone all the way, darkening the cavernous space and putting the relics of Barney's career—which seemed to have been hurriedly strewn along the spiral ramp like toys someone forgot to put away—under dramatic spotlighting instead of diffuse fluorescents. It seemed the height of cynical self-parody, and too much money was spent for such superficial results. Even NASA could do better with that budget.

Late April and early May were spent in the Netherlands and Germany. I figured I would see a lot of Rembrandts and Vermeers at the Rijksmuseum, the big state museum in Amsterdam, but it had been hurriedly shut down for asbestos abatement the day before our planned visit. We did, however, get our fill of Queen's Day, a 24-hour period in which the city turns into a giant flea market and all the suburbanites come in, get wasted and don orange inflatable crowns. Probably would have been better off staying in rangier but quieter Rotterdam and gazing from a removed vantage at Brueghel the Elder's "Little" *Tower of Babel* at the Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen. But okay, I'll leave the art history to the experts and just say that it was well worth the trip to the Storm Surge Barrier in Zeeland to stand on the lip of this giant hydro-engineering project, built after the terrible flood of 1953 that wiped out dozens of towns, and contemplate what it meant to look over one side and see the open sea, then turn your head the other way to an inlet where the level of the water was about 30 feet lower. To the naked eye, the Dutch are madmen. But the most fascinating part of the trip was driving through the *Industriekultur* route in the Ruhr Valley of western Germany and visiting the enormous tracts of industrial ruins that had been redeveloped into public cultural and recreational centers. A brick ironworks became a museum with an adjoining beer garden, a giant liquid storage tank is now a scuba diving facility, the walls of ruined brick sheds were transformed into climbing walls, and gardens and bike paths lay claim to grassy mounds and depressions that once supported the muscular exertions of tens of thousands of waged and, I suppose, slave laborers.

Late in the month of May, I wrote this: On a fine morning returning from Astoria, I stopped at

ORLO to see Chandra Bocci's *This Would Suck a Lot Less* (*Hearts vs. Flowers*). A multi-stage battle was in progress over the backs of three mountains made from torn and crumpled cardboard. Plastic soldiers were engaged in hand-to-hand combat with pillows the size of Chicklets for weapons,



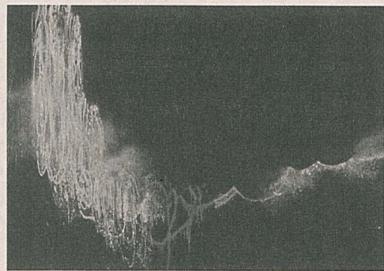
CHANDRA BOCCI, DETAIL OF THIS WOULD SUCK A LOT LESS (HEARTS VS. FLOWERS), MIXED MEDIA, 2003. PHOTO COURTESY ORLO

half of them imprinted with a floral motif, the other with hearts. Soldiers clambered up and rappelled down rock faces, ducked behind cardboard fir trees and mounted sieges of cardboard fortresses. I agree; it would.

I got real busy, so I didn't get out to see any of the other May shows until the last day of the month. I followed Brad's advice on what was good—including Paul Ramirez Jonas' installations at PNCA, Susan Seubert's tintype photos at Froelick Gallery, Ryan Boyle's drawing installation at Basil Hallward Gallery and Molly Vidor's paintings at PDX. Vidor's *Pool of Mermaids* paintings were knockouts, misty splatters and drips on fields of effulgent color and light-sucking blacks, at once ethereal and earthy. Ramirez Jonas' mechanical sculpture commented ironically on the state of the capitalist enterprise, intermittently emitting sounds and music and displaying lyrics to a hybrid song, "Arise ye workers from your small world after all." Seubert's work doesn't do much for me; it seems heavy on patina and light on content, but I've only seen smatterings of it.

Boyle's drawings of his "Chode" characters, blobby creatures performing grotesque labors, were incredible and soon reprised at Elizabeth Leach for lots more money. Of course, May also brought Jeff Jahn's much hyped *Best Coast* show, a selection of works by artists from Vancouver, B.C., Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Las Vegas and Los Angeles, staged in a borrowed warehouse on SE Water Street. Jahn is a self-styled maven of the Portland art scene, and he waves his freak flag like his long shock of white-blond hair, proudly. A student of the Dave Hickey Beauty School, among others, Jahn showed here, as elsewhere, a liking for "finish" (Jacqueline Ehli's sculptural paintings, Tim Bavington's airbrushed paintings) as well as a more gritty-surfaced conceptualism (Felipe Zalduzades' video of objects being blown by his breath) and some things in between (Matthew Picton's crack-shaped hanging sculptures made of fused plastic beads, which I would like better if they managed to be either prettier or much uglier). Much of the work was strong, and some of it wasn't, but the main problem was that there didn't seem to be any clear conceptual through-line, and the room was overcrowded and shabbily assembled.

At the *Tin House Summer Writers Workshop* in July, editor Rob Spillman did a charming job interviewing Rick Moody, who responded yes, he sets himself "empathetic challenges" in his writing, as when he wrote a story from the perspective of a girl attending a pro-Bush rally during the Florida election brouhaha. (I know exactly what he means; that's why I write about artists.) Sure Moody is overexposed, and some of his stories aren't that good, and he's flip, but mostly he's a good writer. And you're probably a fan, so: Yes, he always listens to music while he works. Yes, when he reads Hawthorne, he consumes the entire body of work, everything but "some of



MOLLY VIDOR, THE NECKLACE, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS

the uncompleted manuscripts." No, in response to an audience member, he is not willing to say that postmodernism is all dried up, nor that it exists. He doesn't see himself as a postmodernist, although he has often been called a post-postmodernist; he thinks of himself as an old-fashioned modernist, believing in the possibility of the con-

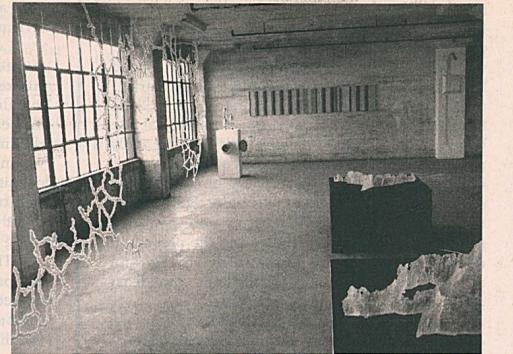
tinual reinvention of the form. He called the story he had read "shamelessly normal," which is sort of was, despite being pretty good (it was about a couple driven from sleep by the noise of their neighbors fucking, only it turns out to be an old woman dying). Does poetry ever get in the way of true emotion? Sort of, but there's no such thing as degree zero writing, and even Hemingway was a product of Gertrude Stein's stylistic innovations [a point my editor calls patently false]. Style is good, "more is more." You can have it all.

I didn't take as many notes for Denis Johnson, although he was also entertaining, looking and sort of talking like a tall Danny DeVito. "Write naked, write in exile, write with blood," he said. ("As if the blood is going to run out.") "I cherish the world by remembering its details." He was a motivational speaker; but it was Chris Offutt who stole the show in the staged reading of Johnson's new play with his performance of a drunk psychopath who wasn't a redneck but belonged to some other sunburnt, Californian demographic.

I have these other notes, I think they're from the second opening at the *Modern Zoo*. "My little pedos sticker album. Get them today! Make it easy on your children! Here you can draw your own neighborhood map so you'll always know where to find your local pedo!" Quotes from a made-up children's game, a booklet with every page printed with the same map icon; not sure if the target of the acid joke was pedophiles or the addictive consumer collectibles we sell our children under the guise of edutainment or both, and if the latter, how the two relate, but OK. I didn't write down the name of the artist. Jack Marshall Shimko's room of deconstructed skateboard ramps was another highlight in the crush of art. Shimko has since opened Haze Gallery in the same sprawling St. John's warehouse space, opening with a show I could not bring myself to begin to want to see. But Melody Owen was the big hit of Zoo summer. Not just her glowing hummingbird feeder sculpture, but the show she curated with Jack Dingo Ryan and Greg Pond that included Ryan's miniature island on wheels that fit snugly in the corner of the room, which I liked.

Meanwhile, on the Eastside Esplanade, someone discovered that the size of the little metal tabs spaced evenly along the top outer edge of the low concrete retaining wall is identical to an adhesive label bearing the UPS logo. This person (people, probably) came into possession of a large number of such labels, tagged them in black marker and smoothed them over every tab, of which there are scores, making the edges meet precisely. Maybe it was the same person who wrote "UFO" and "Alien" in alternating order below every number marking a pier on the balustrade that runs along Waterfront Park, directly across the river. Was this an effort to communicate with alien life, or repel it with magic? A comment on the transient meanings of industrial forms? "Concrete" poetry? Anyway, that's my jogging loop.

Thank God for jogging. I'd probably have



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: WORK BY MATTHEW PICTON, CURTIS FAIRMAN, TIM BAVINGTON, JACQUELINE EHLS AND MORE PICTON IN THE BEST COAST

called someone by now without it. Brad, for example.

Bruce Guenther. His Sunday afternoon slide talk on the Biennial was hilarious, the question and answer portion in particular. The presentation glossed postwar art history as a progression towards ever greater formalism and emotional introspection, culminating in Scott Sonnicksen, I guess. Then Guenther, who seemed crabby, answered questions. Finally, just before closing the session, he pointed at Peggy Kendellen of RACC with a supercilious "You," sort of swallowed like an aperitif on a queasy stomach. Kendellen asked whether he was wedded to the "cattle call" selection process in which artists nominate themselves, which has been criticized for years. "No," Guenther replied in a strengthened, sadist baritone. "I'm wedded to the idea of stopping the Biennial." A state "with the population of Fresno," he continued, is "probably indulgent" to conduct a talent survey every two years—and probably, we suppose, generally flabby, impotent and not worth serving. I guess it's kind of like when I used to make really bad coffee for board meetings at the nonprofit where I worked so that, eventually, no one asked for coffee anymore. The point being, Bruce, in my experience, it works. I also recommend stealing postage stamps. And who knows, maybe you could even get away with a Rothko or something.

One of the best nights of theater I have ever seen—and I haven't seen much, having conditioned myself to "never do this again"—was the Richard Foreman Mini-Festival at Performance Works Northwest on August 8 and 9. PWN impresario Linda Austin invited a couple dozen actors, poets, dancers and other performers to reinterpret Foreman's text, *Roly Poly in China*. They were given a week to create their pieces, the only requirements being to include the line "I don't know what kind of movements to make" and to make mention of the character Roly Poly. On the second night, Carol Triffle and Jerry Mouawad of Imago Theater offered a frantic relay race of cell phone calls, megaphone announcements and

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