

# NEW ART examiner

'The Independent Voice of the Visual Arts'

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The Independent Voice of the Visual Arts



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**The New Art Examiner is and life-long contribution thank you in her name for journal of art criticism.**

**the product of the thinking of Jane Addams Allen. We reading her independent**

**If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private.**

**The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Chicago and Cornwall, as any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.**

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## LETTERS

Dear Editor,

Although I found the content of NAE of June 1st serious and weighty, it was mainly depressing in terms of the present state of our culture; based as it was on yesterday's well worn philosophies and art practices, most of which are already much written about and known. It focused on presenting us with a rear view mirror on history, which is now questionably of little use to us, since that door was effectively closed in 2012, that is if one is facing forward.

Three years on from the close of the time cycle known as history, we already have one foot in tomorrow, although not yet fully in past history.

Just as all the rules of art were changed from Impressionism onwards, we now stand on a similar transitional time bridge, that will lead to the new post historic situation in 2032.

Only those with imagination and vision can sense the hints on how we are to proceed; maybe by that time we will have become simplified.

**John Charles Clark**

*Why did the art world collapse in 2012? (ed)*

Editor,

A talk to discuss the question of: 'The Future of the Arts in Cornwall' at Redwing Gallery, Penzance.

The panel introduced themselves but failed to answer their own question! Instead the talk was opened to the floor too soon and the audience were left to try and define who or what exactly the panel were talking about.

Vaughan Warren (PAINT) asked 'Who is Art for'? The Rich or the Poor? This was an important stance as the discussion led mainly by DG was a tirade against Nick Serota (Tate) retiring to Cornwall and cohorts of manufactured artists following him to flood the tourist art market. He accused the people of not reading criticism and that people only saw with their ears, yet Patrick Heron stated that the English ask what does Art mean, and when he (PH) says this or that they say of course, but nothing could be further from the truth!

DG should also be aware of 'visual language' in this Cultural Political argument. The people may not read but they see and some think and

act! The global community has come from bathing in the light of stained glass to wonder at the message, to consider 'the medium as the message' in the cyber world of social media and the mobile tablet.

Two weeks previously VW had given a talk entitled 'The Art Business or the 'business; of Art' exploring the conflict in Art between interpretations of its use by the 'State' and the cost to the individual. From Courbet being politically exiled from France to Greenberg and Rothko visiting St Ives to the more recent phenomena of approved and disapproved artists from the regime in China. The talk highlighted the work of Robert Hughes and his 'Mona Lisa curse' and the Kennedy dynasty – very appropriate! An image of the Mona Lisa in a veil was one of beauty and potency, demonstrating how art is absorbed by all the people.

So If Art is for the Rich then it did produce an interesting statement from a representative of Falmouth University who did not wish to give his name: "Falmouth and the system produce 'Fake Professionals'" for the new production values of flooding world markets with 'bulk werk' rather than works of spontaneous individuality on a smaller scale

If there is an Art for the Poor then as one artist put it; it is "... instinctive and magical, akin to a primitive experience".

To conclude; the question was never answered but it is good to talk, listen, hear, meet and see with Redwing on the rise as a free space for discussion, exhibition and debate whether the message is understood or misunderstood, either way leads to new meaning.

Vaughan Warren (PAINT: Painters Against Negative Institutionalised Thinking) from notes taken during the NAE talk.

**Vaughan Warren**

*Thank you for response. Pleased to hear of your previous meeting in Redwing. One small correction if I may suggest. I spoke of the structure of the art World the nature and distribution of Patronage, I did not tirade against Sir Nicholas Serota. I attempted to point out that London will define the Cornish Art scene in the future. We all know how and why. Hopefully without beating a dead horse of neglect which is true and painful to watch. We can pay attention and with a creative focus. Also I did say a number of times Art is for everybody, maybe you did not hear. (Publisher)*

Editor,

It was a rare pleasure indeed for me to attend

the gathering at Redwing Gallery on the evening 13th to introduce us to The NAE and to listen to you and Daniel speak and to buy the 2 issues available.

I briefly mentioned to you that between 2007-09 I co-edited with Lisa Stewart, and wrote some articles for Artichoke magazine. Our mission was to help marginalised and unknown artists/creatives in Cornwall to find a voice.

In 2013 I worked as a volunteer at Redwing Gallery but gradually became disillusioned with the dictates and inclusion in every exhibition of work by one of the directors, who seemed intent on their own self-promotion rather than that of 'outsiders'. Since then I have moved on from promoting marginalised artists/creatives through the magazine and by curating exhibitions, to concentrate on my own work. To make 'proper' art (Cornish use of proper).

Briefly: I have been living in West Cornwall since 1987 and returned to painting in 1990 whilst working for Lyn le Grice (the doyenne of decorative stencilling) whose reputation helped me to find decorating work for among others Rose Hilton and Monica Wynter, it was whilst working for Rose in her home at Botallack that I was shown Roger Hilton's 'Night Letters' and saw some of his paintings in situ, including a rare mural which I photographed before covering it in tongue & grooved panelling. Inspired I sought out his whole body of work in books catalogues and exhibitions. At that time I had little awareness of the burgeoning creative community in Cornwall and in particular the so called St.Ives School, so it was with great pleasure that I 'discovered' Peter Lanyon, Bryan Wynter et al.

These past 25 years I have painted in exclusion in Mousehole, exhibiting occasionally and have some work in private collections but have never received any constructive criticism at all, other than from Frank Ruhrmund who rather than reproduce the notes handed to him prior to a show as he usually does, once wrote that "Roger Davison's use of line to delineate a space is striking." brief but flattering and not very helpful really.

**Roger Davidson**

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

# Hans Ulrich Obrist in Conversation with the Hairy Who

Annie Markovich

Managing Editor, Chicago

In 2014 Art Review named Hans Ulrich Obrist the most powerful figure in the field, but Obrist, a forty-six-year-old Swiss, seems less to stand atop the art world than to race around, up, over, and through it.”

During EXPO Chicago, Obrist was “in conversation with the Hairy Who” who were anticipating the fifty-year anniversary of their first exhibition at the Hyde Park Art Center in 1966. Obrist engaged in examining the group’s importance to art history in Chicago and beyond.

The standing-room-only space at Navy Pier was packed with eager young artists who sat on the floor in their effort to catch every word of the conversation. Obrist began by reflecting on Studs Terkel, Chicago’s most eminent writer and mentor in oral history, asking if the participants would join in making a portrait of the movement, emphasizing the importance of memory.

Obrist asked Gladys Nilsson, a leading member of the Hairy Who, “How did art come to you?” She began by relating childhood memories of always drawing on a card table. Nilsson studied engineering in college. Without a penchant for math, she pursued graphic design, an important aspect of her watercolor paintings. Chicago was the base for Nilsson’s painterly career, in particular the School of the Art Institute, where she encountered Whitney Halstead, artist, critic, educator, art historian and author.

Karl Wirsum spoke about his experience at the Field Museum of Chicago, the role of comic strips, mezzo-American and Japanese prints effecting his graphic style. Obrist asked who were the Hair Who and what was the movement about?

The story of how they got their name goes something like this. While talking about Harry Bouras, host of a weekly radio show

on WFMT on art criticism, one of the artists joked, “Harry Who?”

The Hairy Who artists’, Karl Wirsum, Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Art Green, Suellen Rocca, Jim Falconer, work is characterized by riffs on muscle-building magazines, raw, aggressive, brutish caricatures of humans and surrealism. Chicago collectors embraced the Hairy Who, hook, line and sinker. They had already amassed significant collections of Surrealism.

While the Hairy Who artists were describing their experiences, Hans Ulrich jotted notes and intermittently fired away questions at the panelists. The last question Ulrich asked was how digital communication has affected their work.

Nilsson said her work can now grow in size as enlargement is possible as well, as she works on paper. Green referred to the Surrealists and how we accept things that are not what they seem. Wirsum said digital is Art to the n<sup>th</sup> degree.

Ulrich ended the conversation with a few words from Rainer Maria Rilke’s, “Advice to a Young Poet” on the importance of ascertaining the depth of one’s commitment: *“Withdraw into yourself. Explore the reason that bids you write, find out if it has spread out its roots in the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die, if writing should be denied to you. Above all, ask yourself in the stillest hour of the night, “Must I write?” Dig deep into yourself for an answer.”*

Following Ulrich, Nilsson suggested artists should really listen to their inner core and just work. Green offered these words, *“Have the courage to follow one’s own inner self.”* Echoing the same sentiment, Wirsum said to go with your enthusiasm and follow no tempting formulas. ■

# In Teaching We Cannot Trust

Daniel Nanavati

UK Editor

It is nothing new to say that human beings are pattern makers nor that patterns help us to create the structures within which we build society. The art world is such a structure. It relies upon two very important pillars. I am not going to say one of them is money. There is nothing that doesn't rely upon money in our nations. Even our politics long ago gave way to being nothing more than arguments over money management.

The first pillar is one of command and control. In this issue you will read about Falmouth Art School that has pretensions to be a university, who have closed courses so as to manage the money making elements of their teaching better. The fact that they have closed their contemporary crafts course which has a long illustrious history, seems, and is, an invidious, corrupting decision.

If you teach art you should want your students to understand the entirety of their subject. But the roundness of the art education in the UK of the 1960s has long gone. It might be that crafts are not as sought after by collectors as other art forms and it might be there is not so much money to be made in crafts ... I don't know. What I do know is there will be no student graduating from Falmouth who might make the leap (if it is truly needed) with their crafts to make them worth more, to elevate them in the public consciousness into the art market. That an inspired, creative student will make significant what their teachers consider insignificant today. That possibility is now dead.

The second pillar leads from this but is the one that matters more. The artists themselves are no more than commodities

*If a new Picasso were exhibiting on the streets of Montmartre they wouldn't notice.*

of teachers trying to recreate the YBA for a new generation, as they were made through Goldsmith College. They are being taught to tilt at windmills and think they are controversial. But they have been made into no more than money makers. Artists used to fight and die in revolutions or, at the very least on occasion, cause them. The corporate control of the modern art scene is as restrictive in who it considers to be artists and who it does not as the old Academies. Students are, to take Professor Henri Giroux's phrase, winners of zombie degrees churned out on a Brave New World conveyor belt.

Part of this control is the fact, as Toni Carver mentioned in my conversation with him, that curators no longer go out and look at what is being created. Now curators of major institutions only deal with their trustees, donors and collectors. If a new Picasso were exhibiting on the streets of Montmartre they wouldn't notice.

\*

The discussion of Creativity & Art: Three Roads to Surprise by Professor Boden in this issue fascinatingly suggests that with all our philosophising on art, what will stop artificial intelligence being creative in the way human beings are is the simpler fact that artificial life does not have a metabolism. ■

# CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE BIENNIAL

## BIENNIAL EXPO IS JUST FOR ARCHITECTS; ARTISTS SUPPLY THE PUBLIC'S VOICE

Tom Mullaney

US Editor

"The Architects are Coming!", "The Architects are Coming!" is the rallying cry for the citywide exposition Chicago is hosting now through January 3, 2016. For 96 days, Chicago is the architectural center of the world.

It is fitting that this city, the birthplace of the skyscraper and bold urban designs by architecture icons-- Burnham, Wright, Sullivan and Mies van der Rohe--should host the Chicago Architectural Biennial. Chicago was also a key birthplace of The City Beautiful movement following the 1893 World's Fair.

Chicago thus holds a special place in architects' imagination and the call to participate drew visionary ideas from hundreds of architects. The result is an exhibition featuring more than 100 chosen architects spread across five continents. Unlike previous gatherings, fewer than a third of the installations are from the United States.

As an ambitious organizational feat, kudos must be given to the co-curators, Sarah Herda, head of the Graham Foundation (dubbed "the CIA of Architecture") and Joseph Grima, founder of Space Caviar and director of Ideas City. Herda said that, with no defining architectural "ism" in the world today, they chose to give free rein to a wide diversity of current architectural ideas.

Since the expo helps boost Chicago's stature worldwide, it has been embraced by City Hall, a boatload of corporate sponsors and local media. The coverage

*For 96 days, Chicago is the architectural center of the world.*

has been glowingly positive with no attempts, to my knowledge, to critique the installations or the roughly two dozen expressions (both modular and textual) of transgressive ideas against past and contemporary practices.

The scale of the Biennial is impressive. It is taking place at seven sites throughout the city, with the Chicago Cultural Center as its headquarters. Walking throughout the city's former main library, one's impression is of total transformation. Never in my memory has the building been so alive. Installations fill its four floors of galleries and public spaces, including one striking installation on a ramp between floors. There is even a private garden outside the library's front entrance consisting of tree leaf "walls" and sawed-off barks as sitting stools.

The Biennial is a smorgasbord of events beyond the installations. There's a series of Tuesday Talks with panels of architects, designers, curators and scholars, a film series, lectures by prominent architects from around the world and late-night performances.

This inaugural event draws its name from a famous 1977 gathering of architects at the Graham Foundation, convened by Stanley Tigerman, designed to free architecture from the stranglehold of Miesian dogma at the time. It too called its gathering "The



*Studio Albori 'Makeshift': Photo Tom Harris*

*Most of the models will never be realized since they are too speculative or idealistic and of no interest to developers*

State of the Art of Architecture”.

Among the rebels (who have since achieved international success) who were part of that so-called architectural “mosh pit” were Robert Stern, Richard Meier, Helmut Jahn, Peter Eisenman, James Sterling, Ben Weese and Tigerman.

After several days of touring the Cultural Center, along with a visit to artist Theaster Gates enterprising and provocative Art Bank on the South Side at 68th St. and Stony Island Ave., I emerged with a number of impressions.

As I entered one gallery, I heard a voice emanating from inside a lighted white column hanging from the ceiling. The woman asked “What is the relation of architecture to reality?”. Based on my tour of the Cultural Center, my answer is “Not much”.

The expo is promoted as a gesture of civic engagement that allows the public to see the building ideas of today's global architects. However, the building contains too many models, drawings and installations that fail to engage that audience. Most are highly conceptual, speculative visions and, unless one reads the detailed wall texts, the ideas get lost.

This seems an architecture show for architects with little input from the public. My reaction was echoed by another writer, Nick Cecchi, writing in New City. “Much of the programming ignores the city's own inhabitants”.

Two projects that buck this trend deserve praise. The fourth floor's Sidney Yates Gallery contains scale models of three modular, low-cost homes. One, by Tatiana Bilbao of Mexico City, is a five-room house, designed after obtaining input from potential residents as to their preferences in the home's features. Bilbao's firm designs modular homes costing between \$5-8,000, thus filling a pressing need in Mexico City which has a housing deficit of nine million units.

Another on the main floor is a project from Jeanne Gang's Studio Gang. It offers a detailed plan for situating a police station in the midst of a neighborhood, surrounded by a park and community activities, counter to the current model of isolating police stations away from communities they serve. The project name, “Polis Station”, borrows from the Greek term for community

Architecture is a humanistic discipline and architects, according to one exhibitor, should be considered “public intellectuals”. Among contemporary architects, Tigerman, Gang, Martin Felsen of Chicago's Urban Lab and British architect, David Adjaye (featured in an exhibit at the Art Institute) deserve that label. Their designs take a site's full social and economic context into account.

Architecture's public are its clients—mainly real estate developers and government bodies. Nothing gets built without financing. Thus architects too often are beholden to the dreams and dollars of developers whose notion of public space usually consists of “how high can I build” and “what's the sq. ft. return”. Some exhibits expose architecture's enabling role in urban renewal and community displacement

Two more promising, publicly-minded, projects by visual artists relate to the art part of architecture. Amanda



*Ultramoderne BP Winner 2015*

Williams' project, titled "Fields of Color" embraces the interstices between art, architecture and design.

Williams, a trained architect, chose eight houses on the South Side of Chicago and painted them different colors—red, purple, yellow, black, pink--according to what she terms a "culturally-coded color palette". Besides giving abandoned houses a fresh coat of paint, Williams wonders what color signifies gentrification and what color suggests poverty. She seeks to generate a conversation around the inequality of the two Chicagos — the black South Side and predominantly white North Side and suburbs.

The exhibit that has generated the most media attention is artist Theaster Gates' Stony Island Arts Bank. Gates, who has catapulted to fame in less than a decade, purchased an abandoned, deteriorating bank from the city and remodeled it, at a cost of millions, to serve as a culture lab for its south-side residents.

The bank is 17,000 square feet and contains the archives of Johnson Publishing, the publishers of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. It also houses the vinyl collection of 6,000 records of Frankie Knuckles, the "Godfather of House Music" which originated in Chicago in the 1980s.

Gates is explicit about the bank's purpose. "Who has the right to amazing culture?" The highest culture, he notes, becomes the domain of the wealthy

elite. Much rarer is that which honors the makers of black culture (jazz and the blues) and the fruits of their creative expression.

Building on this premise, Gates quotes the words of rapper Jay-Z, "Build the space you want to rock in". Tell that to Skidmore, Owings.

A final exhibit relates to the host city, titled "Bold Scenarios for the City of Chicago". It contains a number of proposals by local firms but two, in particular, epitomize opposing viewpoints on building for the future.

"The Alternate City", by David Brown, notes that the city owns 15,000 vacant lots. The city could put those properties to much better use by offering them to residents, the neighborhood, developers so that they can revitalize the city and add to the tax rolls.

The other is the standard model by Port Urbanism--build higher and make another bold addition to the skyline. In an era of global housing inequality, this plan proposes adding a two-mile strip west of Lake Shore Drive (since building east of the Drive is prohibited), pushing the Drive into Lake Michigan.

This strip would be filled, block after block, with an uninterrupted span of what appear to be 50-70 story high-rise towers. The selling point is the added revenue our city desperately needs. No mention of any despoiling of the lakefront. The model makes Chicago look like one of those instant megacities in China. Port Urbanism's proposal proves the observation that architecture is often something done to people.

Guess which one stands the greater chance of ever being built? Most likely the one oblivious to public space. That highlights a major problem affecting American architecture today: the loss of the public realm and its capture by venture capitalists. ■

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Tom Mullaney is the New Art Examiner's Chicago editor. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Art and Antiques*, *Chicago Magazine* and *The Chicago Tribune*.

# Outside the Architecture Biennial

## A TALE—AND THOUGHTS--OF TWO HOUSES

Alex Cornacchia

“A wall pitted by a single air rifle shot.” That was the sentence the Museum of Modern Art received from artist Lawrence Weiner. The interpretation was up to them. They could write it as is, fake the scene it described, or, most straightforward, just shoot the wall.

Encountering the works of Sarah FitzSimons and Amanda Williams, two artists featured in the 2015 Chicago Architecture Biennial, is like witnessing two people who have read the same Weiner sentence turn around to construct the distinct worlds each envisioned. Given the same prompt, obvious connections would arise. But the revelations would be in the divergence of details.

On Oak Street Beach, where sand and water meet, there’s a two-story house, entirely empty. That’s FitzSimons’s “House.” It’s a typical Midwestern home, if typical means having sand for floors, air for walls, and a roof of open sky. In terms of physical material, “House” consists only of aluminum poles and joints that outline a three-dimensional structure. Not all that useful for living, but great for dreaming.



It’s a good place to dream. On a sunny weekend day, wedding parties aren’t an unusual sight, strolling through nearby Milton Lee Olive Park on their way to take pictures. They smile in front of the Chicago skyline with Lake

*Sarah Fitzsimons' installation 'House'.*



*Color(ed) Theory,” the last house in a series of eight by Amanda Williams*

Michigan, an endless stretch of blue, in the background.

In this context, “House” becomes a vessel to fill with plans, hopes and grand ideas. After all, this city on a lake began with people who dreamed of building something new as well.

About nine miles to the south, where South Lafayette meets West 57th Street in Washington Park, there’s another house. It’s two stories, with a small front porch and four clapboard walls. In a city of nearly three million residents, it somehow stands isolated from the buildings around it. Like “House,” it’s entirely empty. It’s also Flamin’ Hot Cheetos Red.

This is part of “Color(ed) Theory,” the last house in a series of eight that artist Amanda Williams painted in colors that reflect the black urban experience on Chicago’s South side, colors like Pink Oil Moisturizer Pink and Currency Exchange Yellow. Collectively, the colors form a cultural code, markers of

poverty immediately recognizable only to those who've lived or seen it.

As in "House," they're reduced to their outer frames, what remains when you paint something all one color. But these aren't places to fantasize about. Vacant and slated for demolition, their emptiness begs questions: Who lived here? What did they mean to this community? What stories are going untold? Williams uses color to stimulate a conversation about what color denotes poverty and which speaks of gentrification.

Though only tenuously connected by the Biennial, "House" and "Color(ed) Theory" feel, in many ways, like they're in dialogue with each other across the city of Chicago. It's a conversation about the fact that, between 2000 and 2010, downtown saw 79% population growth, while Washington Park lost 17% of its residents.

They call attention to how an empty building on a beach at Oak Street signifies someone moving in, or something bigger being built while, in the latter location, it will probably be left to fall apart, torn down, or become the next candidate for redevelopment. They question who gets to decide what has value and what that value even means.

In this conversation, the more compelling voice emerges. Williams has hit on a critical cultural moment, when the Black Lives Matter movement is reminding us, yet again, how little this country values its citizens of color. Her houses' vibrant palette shouts to a nation that is violently trying to maintain silence. They refuse to fade from view.

This might make some people uncomfortable. I'd say that's a good thing. It's also where "Color(ed) Theory" and "House" diverge most. "House" has initial appeal but lacks the power of necessity as "Color(ed) Theory" does. It's art, far from a center of wealth, for the people who are living there now. It forces those of privilege to reckon with how they can build their American Dreams while, for others, that promise started out broken. Williams' houses are provocative, grounded and art we need more of.

Williams fired Weiner's bullet, so to speak, into the wall. I hope the shot rings long after the Biennial ends. ■

BA graduate of Vassar College in psychology and art history, Alex Cornacchia lives and writes in Chicago, her newly-adopted city.

## Coming in the January issue Volume 30 no.3

**John Stepling** Art of Identity

**John Link**, contributing Editor, Art and Identity

**Richard Shapland** Three Royal Academy exhibitions, Anselm Kiefer, Richard Diebenkorn and Ai Weiwei and what they teach curators about the visual experience.

New regular Features:

**TranArtlantic Diary.** **Jonathon Xavier Coudrille**, **Helston UK** and **David Black**, **New York, USA** in conversation about the art world.

**CinemArt.** Introducing youtube and film reviews with **Tanya Lee Rennick** of the Pearl Clubs, London

**VerbiArt** debunking art-speak with **Sarah-Jane Marsden**, tutor Helston Art College, Cornwall, UK.

Book review of Hannah Rothschild *The Improbability of Love* by **Dr Angeline Morrisson**

# Memory, Melancholy and Dreams: The Poetic Art of Bert Menco

Diane Thodos

*I still know those cries of the soul. They lie at the breast and in the throat. The mouth wants to open wide and let them out, but all these are antiquities, yes, Jewish antiquities originated in the Bible in a biblical sense of personal experience and destiny. I remember. I must.*

-Herzog by Saul Bellow

*Because I remember I despair. Because I remember I have a duty to reject despair.*

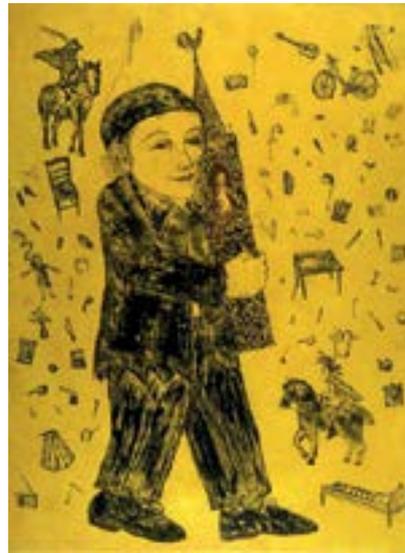
-Elie Wiesel

*Humor is one of the best ingredients of survival.*

-Aung San Suu Kyi

The faces are sweet and bitter, charming and grotesque, with expressions inoculated by a dreamy calmness. Enigmatic characters dwell in realms of fractured fables, mixed up myths, and bizarre fairy tales that scramble religious imagery, symbols and cultures with more than a little alluring grace for all their strangeness. The Dutch artist Bert Menco makes images that are elaborate theaters staged by his subconscious, filled with the illogical and surreal associations his mind invents. His work is related as much to particular 20th century traditions of Jewish narrative art as it is to the medieval imagery of Northern Europe. Two different exhibits present the range of Menco's art and its deepest preoccupations. His show at Temple Solel in Highland Park reflects themes related to the artist's Jewish identity and the tragedy of the Holocaust, while the Re-invent Gallery in Lake Forest displays a dazzling array of works that continue aspects of this theme while addressing the complexity of human and sexual relationships.

One of Menco's influential precursors is Marc Chagall who was born in 1887 in the Eastern European city of Vitebsk, part of Belarus.



*Suitors*

Chagall's early modernist works were filled with flights of fantasy and illogical transpositions that were rich with symbolic meaning. They expressed the precarious lives of the Jewish Diaspora, often relating the difficulties of their everyday existence

with poetic humor and mystery. Many of his characters take to flying in the skies in an unstable and dislocated world that becomes a springboard to mystical fantasy. A tradition of fantastic and surreal art can be found in Jewish authors like Isaac Bashevis Singer, Bruno Schulz and Franz Kafka, for whom the individualistic "universe" of the artist-poet becomes its own introspective "truth" with its own "logic", its own surreality. The "universe" has become dislocated and seeks to find deep purpose and meaning again, but through non-logical esoteric "truth." Menco's visual narratives owe much to this literary background, bridging past and present through subconscious fantasy and attempting to bind them, with all their lyrically absurd as well as rich implications, into his own poetic dream world. The face of Kafka in Menco's *The Golem* is superimposed on the old Jewish cemetery in Prague. A chain of dancing figures in *Rondo*, beginning with life and ending with death, are overlaid on Menco's enlarged self-portrait. Both compress meanings and symbols with a mingled



*Madonna-of-the-Prairie-2008-copy.jpg*

simplicity and complexity. Fantastic scores of flying figures in Messengers, Fireflies, Suspended and The Origin of the World are attracted, like moths to a flame, around a central large female figure with whom they are trying to make contact. Each has a story to tell that is filled with emotional ambiguities, secrets, and spatial contradictions.

Menco's work is also deeply influenced by the art of Northern Europe, particularly Flemish art. He was inspired to become an artist after seeing the prints of Rembrandt (1606-69) in his native Holland. Menco's work absorbs much iconography from Christian medieval art, focusing a particular interest in the style of illuminated manuscript drawing and paintings. This medieval mood is reinforced by the "antique" look of the etching medium. His elaborate mezzotints, which work from a velvety dark surface through greys and into white, emphasize this medieval Gothic aura most effectively. Menco also admires work of the Belgian artist James Ensor (1860 - 1949) who is well known for his portrayals of bizarre masks that come to life as wildly grotesque caricatures. These peculiar beings are featured in humorous and excoriating satires: allegories about human stupidity, venality and

folly. Menco's imaginatively conceived menu of "tarot card" characters presents a parade of humorous allegorical subjects featuring Madonnas, harlequins, angels, devils, jesters and zoological hybrids. Like Ensor, Menco enjoys filling up every space in his painting and prints. The multiplication of faces, decorations, and symbols in backgrounds or borders lends a whimsical sense of mystery through their sheer obsessive repetition.

Prints shown at the community house of Temple Solel explicitly deal with the artist's personal consciousness of his Dutch-European and Jewish family background regarding the Holocaust and WWII.

*I was born just after the war that divided the century in half. My mother and her family survived the bombing of Rotterdam, though only she and my grandmother survived the Holocaust. My father's immediate family was completely annihilated, but my father survived the war, rescued by French communists. My parents met while they were refugees in Switzerland; they married on May Day 1945.*

(Contemporary Impressions: The Journal of the American Print Alliance A Self Portrait "Inside Out" By Bert Menco, Fall 1998 p.6)

Menco often uses collective historical, literary, or symbolic figures to confront disquieting and existential questions of loss and suffering perpetrated by the Holocaust. In the print Shylock, Acta Fabula Est (The Play is Over) the artist displaces the anti-Semitism inherent in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice onto the "Final Solution" of the 20th century. Shylock and his daughter Jessica are reunited in a concentration camp as they join a ghostly mass heading to the gas chambers.

Their plight is heightened by the commanding finger of a guard pointing to their doomed destination and by the intense blackness of the mezzotint print surface. Bathed in dark despair, this work powerfully exudes an aura of collective guilt upon the perpetrators of genocide. Rotterdam, May 14, 1940 dramatizes the destruction of the city's central church licked by feathery flames. Once again the elaborate burnishing method of the mezzotint technique adds an uncanny sense of haunting nostalgia and loss to the tragic scene. Arnhem, September 17, 1944 allegorizes the British air invasion of parachuting soldiers who took part in the tragic and failed Operation Market Garden.

Both prints are filled with refugees carrying bundles, bags, children, babies, suitcases, and rolling wheelchairs and buggies. They are also a reminder of the tragic dislocation and uprootedness that the Jewish Diaspora had to endure for centuries. There is an undeniable melancholic resignation in Menco's figures. Even the parachuting soldiers in the Arnhem print look like helpless puppets on strings. These figures have internalized a sense of being alienated, isolated, and dislocated. The work keeps alive both a personal and an historical consciousness not only about the disastrous events of WWII but also subliminally about the rejection and persecution of the Jews in Europe throughout history.

In another print God the enlarged profiles of a man and woman gaze into each others eyes from opposite sides. A bearded man in rabbinical garb, God, stands between them, bearing a crate of decapitated heads on his shoulders. The profiled man wears a face of placid resignation while the woman expresses deep despair. Through a remarkably simple staging Menco expresses the weight and burden of Jewish history, it's suffering, and the ultimate evil of genocide. In *The Golem* the enlarged head of the writer Franz Kafka is projected over an image of headstones, representing the old Jewish cemetery in Prague and where the historical figure of Rabbi Yehuda Loeb (1520-1609) stands with outstretched arms. It seems as though he has resurrected Kafka as the "Golem", the contemporary representative of a long Jewish history who is called upon to write about existential questions that continue to haunt our modern conscience.

References to Christian and Jewish art and church iconography from Christianity abound. In *Synagoga et Ecclesia* a woman holding a Menorah representing the Jewish faith wears an expression of open innocence. "Ecclesia," the Church, smiles slyly to herself while balancing a cross and sword under each hand, contemplating whether or not to use her inherent destructive power against her fellow sister. Surrounding them is a frame of fantastical faces: strange mascots from a gothic past. For all their elaborate and whimsical appearances, each face is cast in a shadow of gloom, with piercing expressions that seem to wordlessly ask if indeed real

religious equality and justice can ever be possible. *Behind Walls* depicts a young man and woman in motley dress running joyously on top of a wall. Below crouch several men resembling the artist in old age in what seem to be the striped uniforms of concentration camp inmates.

They cover their ears as if as if to block consciousness of an unimaginable horror that will be their destiny. Two opposite pathways appear: either the horror of genocide will repeat itself or the chain of life will continue. There is also a latent sent of guilt and fear which the darkness of the past projects on the next generation.

The Re-Invent Gallery show continues some of the same themes discussed, but with a lively breadth of wit and humor aimed at the complexity of human relationships and the instability of meaning in myth and religion. In *The Virgin Birth of Lucifer* a "Madonna" holds a cute devil baby on her lap. In *Adoration* another "Madonna" in a feathered headdress and a spiny blue costume embraces a small green horse. Even as he pays homage to the art of the Church, Menco plays with the idea that faith based "truth" can be turned upside down by the pretenses of its own "logic." The print *Shedding turns*

### *Bound*



anxiety into an absurdly comic phenomenon as four male characters are swamped by a whirlwind of hair flying off of their heads. Freckles presents the profiles of several sweetly becalmed faces defaced by a riot of spots. It seems as though a bad case of the measles has gone wild and decorated everything with a manic profusion of polka dots. Each image presents a way of comically and obsessively coping with disorder, uncertainty, and anxiety. A perceived world of absurd, unpredictable situations is confronted by humorous and fantastic twists of the imagination.

A great many works in the show emphasize complexities inherent in male/female relationships. Chagall's art often expresses the theme of happiness and fulfilment in sexual union: it is sincere, simple and sensuous. The painting *Annunciation* presents a similarly themed fantasy. But sometimes Menco's couples are frustrated from being able to find fulfilment. There is a strong desire for love and companionship, but somehow the possibility of intimacy and emotional contact is thwarted. In the astonishing print *Pairs* a gridded panel tells its story in a cartoon-like sequence. This kind of sequential storytelling is reminiscent of work of Charlotte Salomon, an artist who painted a "graphic novel" autobiography about her life hiding from the Nazis until she was captured and died in Auschwitz. In Menco's graphic "story" a brilliant theatrical array of male/female conflicts is presented along with other humorous "pairings."

Sometimes the body of one falls apart or exits the scene, sometimes one is upside down while the other is right side up. The dislocation of life has become too extreme for there to be peaceful resolution, but it does throw his actors into puzzling and fantastic situations. Women seem to be powerful figures that embody mystery in relationships. They have become both attractive idols and a source of anxiety for the male attendants trying to get her attention. Many of these small figures surround a single iconic women in works like *The Origin of the World*, *Suspended*, *Death and Dunces*, *Cats and Mice*, and *Holding Off*. The women are sometimes sly and designing but also wistful and sad. The men around her plead for attention, wishing to placate her melancholy,



*Drops*

but to no avail. Women seem to be the ones with transformative or mystic powers while men are the audience and attendants to her alluring but often strange presence.

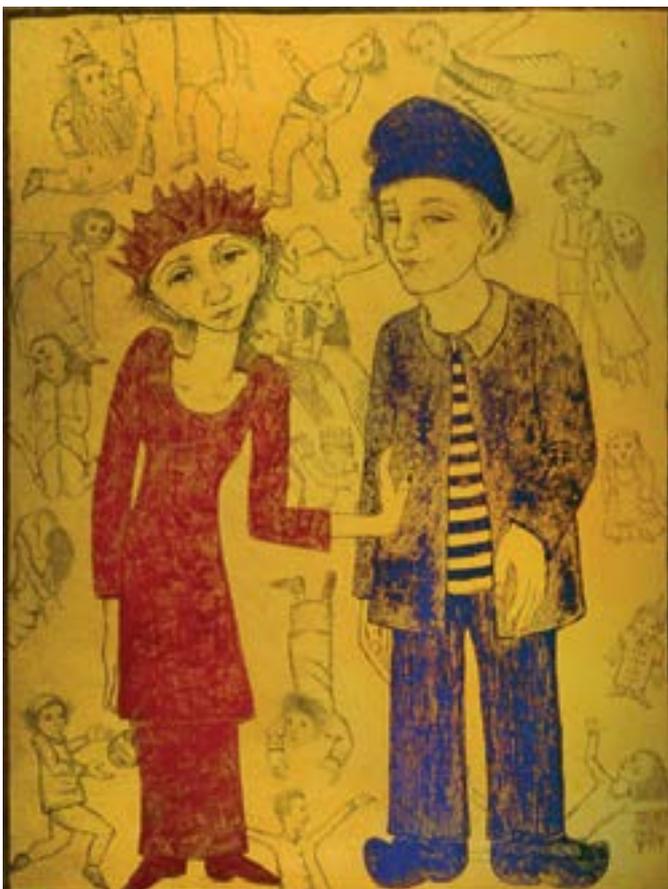
In the painting *Shaman* a bald woman tries to make some kind of desperate appeal to a kingly ruler in motley dress. Women with shaved heads often appear in Menco's work, bringing up multiple associations. The shaved head of Joan of Arc from the famous 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* by Carl Theodor Dreyer is one source, but the image of a bald woman undeniably brings to mind the shaved heads of women from concentration camps. Both become symbols of religious persecution and suffering. Is the shamanic woman a wish fulfilment to be able to alter history as she pleads before the king? Does she embody mystic power that has been bestowed by her suffering, giving her an unworldly strangeness and otherness?

*Utrecht-Chicago* is a work about leaving Holland, the old world, and seeking a new start in a new land. The two cities merge in a

divided landscape of buildings featuring two figures floating in the center. One is the artist as a young man with angelic wings, while the other depicts himself as an anxious old man in a wheel chair. They alternately symbolize the grief and depression of the past and the positive youthful energy of hope for the future.

Which path will be the artist's fate? Will tragedy or good fortune prevail? Manipulation comically extends the theme of conflict in relationships and the question of who holds power and control. A master puppeteer manipulates a hand puppet that in turn manipulates others, with the smallest and least powerful ones engaged in passionate argument. The puppet play comically presents a shrewd critique of power and its excesses, its desire to control others with the predictable results.

Some of the small prints present memorably compelling messages in their imagery. Fifty Balloons depicts the artist leaping into space with fifty small faces on balloons attached to his back. Because he holds a party horn the work seems to be about celebration. But the many faces behind him seem to subliminally tell another story symbolizing memories of



*Repulsion*

those from the past that he still carries with him. Musical Chairs symbolically presents questions about Christian religious history. A woman wearing what appears to be to be a nun's habit dangles five children's heads from strings that hover over four small bodies below. It is clear one child will lose – will not get a body for its head.

The “nun,” representing the church by symbolic implication, has the power over life and death in deciding the children's fate, and plays with their heads as though it were just a game. The Rue de la Morosité (Street of Morosity) is an unforgettable image filled with acerbic and depressive rancor. A cluster of people with hollowed eye sockets walk down the steep perspective of a narrow street. It seems to be a specific memory of the streets where Menco grew up in Holland, filled with claustrophobia and depression about the tragic past which memory will not hide.

Like the contemporary artists R.B Kitaj and Irving Petlin, Menco presents consciousness about Jewish identity and history as seen through his own life and percolated through the uniquely imaginative, surreal and esoteric configuration of his subconscious. Chagall's work became melancholic after WWII, unable to cope with the unspeakable murder of 6 million Jews and the loss of the rich culture they once spread throughout Europe. The melancholy in Menco's work is an attempt to confront and mourn this profound loss. At the same time the imaginative power of the Jewish narrative tradition and surrealist modernist influences in his work present a path that can express the absurdities of life through humorous contradictions. Poetic and irrational “daydreams” become a means of coping with the tragedy of history and a way to recreate the world again from within oneself. The flexibility of Menco's artistic identity comes from understanding his own personal history as a means of self-realization, a way forward that connects to life, survival and a way to endure. ■

*Originally published in Neoteric Art*

Diane Thodos is an artist and art critic who lives in Evanston, IL. She is a 2002 recipient of a Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant and is represented by the Thomas Masters Gallery in Chicago and the Traeger/Pinto Gallery in Mexico.

# SPEAKEASY

*Each issue the New Art Examiner will invite a well-known, or not-so-well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest – whatever it may be.*

Falmouth University, Cornwall Closes Historic Contemporary Crafts faculty because there is no money in crafts -

Rob Gawthrop

The closure of the degree course in contemporary crafts at Falmouth University was the highest profile closure since the demise of Dartington College of Arts. Crafts and Fine Art were the founding subjects of the Falmouth School of Art which became Falmouth University following the merger and relocation of Dartington.

The widespread protests against the closure demonstrated the course's high standing and international reputation. The reasons for closure were supposedly economic as reported in 'The Times Higher' on the 4th December 2014 and satirised there a week later in Laurie Taylor's Poppletonian quoting Falmouth University's senior deputy Vice Chancellor Geoff Smith who cited 'heavy space utilisation'. Contemporary Crafts was one of three undergraduate courses being closed, the others being Digital Media and Theatre. The message from the Vice-Chancellor's office explained that:

*"Each of our current courses was considered against a range of metrics such as enrollment trends, market share, financial profile, graduate employment statistics and National Student Survey scores. All of these factors - external and internal, quantitative and qualitative - were combined and carefully considered in order to deliver the project's conclusions."*

The conclusions do not consider their artistic and economic contribution to the region, the development of research for the University (which is also being restructured), their intrinsic educational, critical and artistic value or the impact of closure on staff or student well-being.

There have been other course closures (though these did not gain as much attention as contemporary crafts) but were as significant. Since 2010, Falmouth's Vice

Chancellor has closed or suspended ten undergraduate and twelve post-graduate courses, (not including the Dartington taught masters programme, which ended in 2010 with fifty students receiving MAs). The MA Fine Art: Contemporary Practice, for which I was the coordinator, was closed a year ago and the MFA which was meant to replace it has been recently 'suspended'. The 'range of metrics' was used selectively in order to give rationale and to keep within employment law and make particular staff redundant. Since 2009 the University has been restructured three times. Between 2010 and 2014 there have been twenty-three academic redundancies, including myself but excluding Dartington staff not relocating to Falmouth. A similar number is expected over the current academic year. Additionally the two deans, six associate deans, the director of research, four (of six) heads of department and a pro-vice-chancellor have left 'voluntarily' or been made redundant. This is during a period of increasing student numbers. Of staff who are losing or have lost their jobs, around two-thirds were over fifty-five and at least six were University and



*Original Building now in private hands.*



College Union branch officers. Although new academic staff have been appointed, these have mainly been young, on lower incomes or as 'associate lecturers' - hourly paid, zero-hours contract, but no guaranteed hours. When I stated that a University's purpose was the creation and dissemination of knowledge by way of education, research and practice for public, social and artistic benefit, the Vice Chancellor Anne Carlisle replied "You are working for the wrong University". In fact in a number of internal publications the Vice Chancellor has indicated a move to an academic portfolio "that is better able

*We will require all substantive teaching staff to evidence the maintenance of their professional currency and industrial connections on an annual basis.*

to advance our 'Top 50' ambitions and that speaks of our continuing journey from an 'Art School' to a globally-oriented Creative Innovation Hub". A hub doesn't sound much like a university either. The same document also proposed new Schools including 'The Real Business School' and 'The Games Academy' which gives an indication as to where the University is heading.

The main device at Falmouth University for ascertaining the continuance or cessation of courses is 'financial convergence'. Heads of department are given budgets based on the student fees for each individual course they are responsible for. From these budgets they are expected to pay for all teaching, technical and administrative staffing, technical facilities, space, materials and other on-costs for each separate course.

*"The need for convergence to be achieved over the period of the 2012-17 Strategic Plan. This means that in a 9k fixed fee environment those programmes that incur higher expenditure need to develop business plans to achieve the median (convergence) point in order that they are not indirectly being cross-subsidised by other programmes and other fee-paying students."*  
(Falmouth University Vice-Chancellor's

*Breakfast Briefing 21st November 2013)*

This 'convergence' point is 50%, if a course costs more than 60% it would then be at risk of cessation. If a course costs less than 50% it would produce 'profit' that could then be kept. The fact that different courses have different requirements is of no relevance. A 'chalk & talk' course needs no space, technical facilities or technicians (IT, student services and classrooms being provided centrally at Exeter Universities). A practical course requires studios, technical facilities etc. all of which are 'costed' and have to be budgeted for, such courses are therefore more expensive. Not only does 'financial convergence' give reason for course closures but is being used as a tool for central control and micro-management.

This financial model makes a major contribution to what has been described by Pacal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne in *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm* as "the catering regime [which] is in fact the carrying out of a political ideology, i.e. that of neoliberalism". Although universities in England are generally exempt charities and 'not for profit' the coalition government relaxed the rules to permit 'for profit' institutions to be able to apply for University status and to introduce 'competition'. This policy introduced a competitive business model where education is turned into a commodity and students into consumers; a model that many university managers see fit to attempt to imitate and for staff and students to conform to. This is however, an imaginary model that would not last in the 'real world' that the self-same managers frequently refer to. In another Falmouth University 'Breakfast Briefing', the assistant deputy vice chancellor made a presentation that included the following points:

- We will require every course at Falmouth to offer an Entrepreneurship Module developed in partnership with Falmouth Business School
- All academic departments should establish an Industry Advisory Board
- We will require all new course proposals to be developed in partnership with one or more high-level industrial partner
- We will ensure that every course at Falmouth graduate 70% of their students at least to 2.1

or 1st degree classification

- We will require all substantive teaching staff to evidence the maintenance of their professional currency and industrial connections on an annual basis.

(Alan Murray, Falmouth University Vice-Chancellor's Breakfast Briefing 29th April 2015)

'Requirements' such as these are counter to university principles of academic freedom. Course structures have meaning as much as their content and as such should be under the control of academic staff in partnership with students, technical and other support staff.

Falmouth University's Vice Chancellor is intent on changing both staff and courses (by closures, curriculum, structures and introducing new low cost courses) to create a different type of institution. Such instrumentalisation of education and managerialism undermines creativity

and critical discourse. The forthcoming government Green Paper as proposed by Jo Johnson The University Minister in Cameron's government will include the introduction of a 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) that will be directly aligned to course fees while at the same time rules will be relaxed for private providers to become Universities, validate their own degrees and charge whatever fees they want. The closure of highly respected and effective courses and the loss of experienced and committed staff demonstrates a cynical disregard by those responsible. Higher Education for public benefit is under threat and has to be fought politically. ■

*Rob Gawthrop was formally Director of Art at Dartington College of Arts and Coordinator of the MA Fine: Contemporary Practice at Falmouth University.*

## Ai Weiwei - Exhibition

### Royal Academy of Art

Derek Guthrie

Al Weiwei is the darling child and poster artist of the Western Art World. I am not passing comment on his art, just the system. He says, "Everything is Art and everything is political."

We, as sluggish, and self centred Westerners, are quite happy for Al Weiwei to cause trouble for the Chinese government. In so doing we use the activities of this artist to comfort ourselves with an inbuilt narcissism. We are more advanced and liberal than the Chinese government. So where do we look for our dissenting artists? Maybe Banksy? But is Banksy a good artist? I like to imagine a major show of Dismaland in

Beijing in which the Chinese pundits could illustrate the corruption of Western Culture.

Art is always political and even if one thinks, while in front of beautiful sunset, this is not so, one has not escaped the encoding embedded in our genes and culture. Education and class background inform the politics of the show place where we may exhibit. The definition, the forming of the idea of freedom, is the illusion and vanity of most of us.

Dear friends this is my struggle also, I am not exempt. The Chinese government, just as Western governments, moves its pieces around the chessboard of exhibitions. Finding the next square to

occupy ... for the moment. Yet, as before, we have to see the glass ceiling being controlled by the gatekeepers. There are always gatekeepers. As we are told, Al Weiwei deals with his gatekeepers with much support from the West. This reminds me of the 70s hit "Jesus Christ Super Star, with its refrain 'How we wonder what you are?'

In terms of Ai Weiwei we look for an answer.

The NAE will have a review of the Al Weiwei show, I may disagree with the writer. The only way I keep my sanity is to keep the conversation alive ... 'Without Fear or Favour'.

More later.

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# Berlin Art Fair

George Care

Berlin Art Fair actually lasts not a week but just five days. It is an event which stretches across the whole of central Berlin with, for instance more than 40 openings on just one evening. It comprises several separate art fairs; the ABC fair itself comprises works from a hundred separate galleries and from 17 different countries. Another complete section is the POSITIONS fair, a similarly large event spread across several large halls. Little wonder therefore that the brochure introduction by Christiane Meixner says, "Kunst kann schoen anstrengend sein"-art can certainly become stressful and hard on the feet too as there is such a wide variety of art on display and such a large quantity to see. There are, after all some 400 galleries in Berlin.

The significant fact that emerges from these crowded halls with a welter of visual display units and ingenious installations is the priority given to current social and political events. Much of the art on display concerned ecology, relationship issues, gender identity, media simulacra but, significantly, as the refugees were streaming into Bavaria there were installations that addressed designing buildings of safety. As I write this review today, I have just heard that the Berlinische Gallery will be making entry free to immigrants escaping from the Africa and the Middle East.



Collectors Room\_Cindy Sherman  
Photo Alexander Rentsch

*The significant fact that emerges from these crowded halls with a welter of visual display units and ingenious installations is the priority given to current social and political events.*

Perhaps, the artist that attracted the most attention was Cindy Sherman. Her show displayed more than 60 photographs from every stage of the renowned American artist's lengthy career. Sherman played both subject and artist by turns displaying herself as a magazine centrefold, film starlet, or unhappy housewife, uncannily mimicking cultural stereotypes. She also experiments in exciting ways with the tropes of art history within her conceptual portraiture. Famed for the quiet horror of some of her images, these were works throughout her career which have been collected by the octogenarian Berlin collector, Thomas Olbricht. The works shown included the remarkable black and white "untitled film stills".

US artist Paul McCarthy exhibited at the Schinkel Pavillon, a magical venue designed by the Bauhaus architect, Richard Paulick, once an official city guest house of the GDR. McCarthy worked with his son Damon for the Volksbühne a program of walk-in installation, film, performance, music and painting, "Rebel Dabble Babble Berlin"(described as a meditation on archetypes and Oedipal tensions within family dynamics) accompanied by concerts, performances and discussions on Viennese Actionism, was curated by Theo Altenberg under the motto "existence Palace". In the Schinkel Pavillon Paul McCarthy's work dealt with the human body and its transitions; going to sleep, life and death, presence and illusion.



*Alicja Kwade at Theoretisches Gebilde*

Many Berlin collectors grant the general public access to their spectacular collections, “Sammlungen”, during Berlin Art Week. Once the interest of writers like Walter Benjamin and Stefan Zweig, this tradition is continued by wealthy software developers and Parisian architects. They all experience pleasure (Zeigefreude) in showing their magnificent assemblies. Naturally, their interests vary from concept art to retro-charm. The venues are equally spectacular from the brick dominated Backsteinarchitektur of what was once a margarine factory with magnificent views over the Spree, to the claustrophobic walls of a former bunker now covered with works by Ai Weiwei ([here](#)) and Alicja Kwade. ([here](#))

One of the encouraging developments during the Berlin Art Week was the emphasis placed upon independent and non-conformist work. There are many happenings taking place throughout the week and some of these may be referenced on You-tube. When I left Berlin, after a two week stay, I had to pay something like an extra 50 Euros in city-tax. I feel a little better about this now having discovered that one of its uses is to support a diverse network of Free Berlin Project Spaces. Since 2009

there have been something like 200 spaces around the city which retain the oddness and originality of an era when William Reich was being read in communes. Two are worthy of special mention. A park wall in Görlitzer Strasse in Kreuzberg has designed an outside project called “Kleister” or wallpaper paste. A group of photographers have stuck posters of their pictures on a park wall. The result will be marked soon by sun, rain, graffiti and theft! Another exhibition of interest because of its connection between places and images was the work of Stefan Schneider at Kurt-Kurt in the district of Moabit. One of images taken of old wooden boats on the beach at Dungeness has a particular lyrical charm.

The whole art week is a tribute to the importance given to art in the capital city. The Art Week largely runs outside the exhibitions in the main galleries. However, the exhibition at the delightful Berlinische Galerie called “Radikal Modern” shows the incredible redevelopments of buildings and planning in general since 1960. The recovery of this city from the years of Nazi terror, bombing and Cold War division by The Wall is a tribute to the courage and imagination of its inhabitants that have recovered and built a new life from out of the rubble of the past. ■

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# Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism.

by Professor Henry A Giroux.

Daniel Nanavati

Professor Giroux's enlightening main points are present in the introduction, expanded in each chapter, revisited in each chapter's final paragraphs, in the conclusion and throughout the text. It is a little like being hit over the head with a hammer. I sense he thinks that is exactly what America needs.

I certainly wondered how George W Bush's fraudulent first election was allowed to pass without a single protest march. But though this book's words are filled with intelligent anger I think the writer's final call to 'let's get back to talking' is utterly liberal and will achieve nothing.

*There is a mode of terror ... that ... wipes out the creative faculties of imagination, memory and critical thought.*

Supreme Court Judge Lewis Powell's Memo of 1971 accompanied growth in powerful not-for-profit foundations, taking over liberal academia and promoted a money agenda. These foundations (and I suppose think-tanks) provided the power base for Regan to win the 1980 Presidential race. His emotional debate, describing monetarism as a true American principle and controlling the media, is all part of the ruling elite's descent into American style fascism. He doesn't say it but Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh are neoliberal neo-fascists.

I am not American. I recall Prime Minister Thatcher using unemployment to manage the workers, wide scale theft of public utilities and companies built up over generations, schooling being touted as the place for children to be taught to be what managers

wanted.

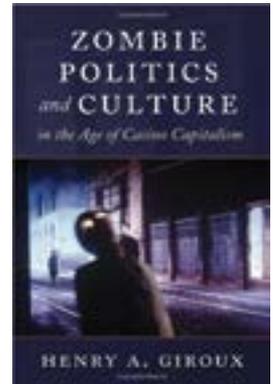
Money is a system and like all systems it has no ethics unless we put ethics into it. I was at university at the time of Thatcher, that most zombie of all zombies to use Professor Giroux's term, who believed the right of money to make money irrespective of human concerns was the purest form of society. The modern nation is to be run like a shop which gives life and meaning to everything else. My weblog accrued 100,000 unique readers per annum which proves there are infinite ways to say as much.

The problem with simple insights is that there are only so many ways one can say the same thing. Though many agree that Marx was right about the capitalist boom and bust cycle, his wider thoughts on political culture were wiped from history by the tyranny of Soviet Communism. But the search for a fairer way of dealing with money is still with us. That search has a dirty name in America, it is called socialism, but what America has today is a plutocracy not a democracy, and not even a plutocracy of individuals but one of corporations finding individuals in their own image and likeness and placing them into the House of Representatives through campaign contributions.

I can agree with Professor Giroux when he says:

*"... a pedagogy of social and political amnesia works through celebrity culture and its counterpart in corporate-driven news, television, radio, and entertainment to produce a culture of stupidity, censorship, and diversionary spectacles." (p9) and again*

*"There is a mode of terror rooted in a neoliberal*



*market-driven society that numbs many people just as it wipes out the creative faculties of imagination, memory and critical thought."* (p12)

What I have to point out to him is that money is a perfect extension of our natures. We can discuss these matters as we have been taught to discuss but the mass population do not discuss, they react. There is a '*social death*' (Giroux's brilliant phrase) that comes about when people know something is wrong, sensing they are demeaned and denied the gifts that their talents promise them. To find the answer and identity they resort to TV and supporting their local football team.

As money describes human beings we have to admit to the fact that the 'rich' are us with money, nothing less and nothing more. Money is the eternal zombie (not the people), the deathless, blood soaked vampire. Those who possess most of it derive their living-dead (what Professor Giroux calls hyper-dead) status from its virus like infection in the human brain. The result, as he points is that:

*"It is difficult to imagine that anyone looking at a society in which an ultra-rich financial elite and megacorporations have the power to control almost every aspect of politics- from who gets elected to how laws are enacted-could possibly mistake this social order and system of government for a democracy."* (p16)

The most important lesson from this book is his belief that:

*"Democracy is fragile and its fate is always uncertain."* (p46)

\*

The lies given by politicians in avoiding the torture issue probably has more to do with the money they lost after September 11th 2001 and exacting revenge. A loss that every affected corporation itemized and assessed. The support given to the banks but not the people is a scandal for Professor Giroux. The journalist Upton Sinclair pointed out in the 1929 Great Crash that the day after the first jolt, more money poured into the market in an attempt to stabilize it. When the prices were stable the richest investors sold out and extended their wealth. The same is happening today.

Professor Giroux's phrase the '*culture of cruelty*' evinced in almost all the social decisions taken by the Bush regime, in my

*Democracy is fragile and its fate is always uncertain.*

opinion, has seeped deeply into the art world. This casino art market abuses artists, misuses the esteem in which artists have historically held, buys effect and controversy, and uses art students as canon fodder in the illusion of non-existent professionalization.

Professor Giroux shows us how the screen image has become the post-modernist version of the Roman Colosseum in a discussion about the popular show 24:

*"Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan went to California to meet with the producers of the show. He told them that promoting illegal behavior in the series '... was having a damaging effect on young troops.'" (p61)*

Orwell's phrase in *Animal Farm* '*Four legs good, two legs bad*' is echoed by Henry Giroux when he says "*Consumers are in and citizens are out.*" (p68)

*"There is an undeniable pathological outcome when the issue of national security becomes more important than the survival of morality itself resulting in some cases in the deaths of thousands of children - and with little public outrage."* (p74)

There is no doubt since the beginning of history almost all regimes have carried this out but the vital fact throughout Professor Giroux's *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism* is the last phrase ... '*with little public outrage*'. His ambition is to bring debate back into the schoolroom and campus. Teaching criticism is part of his answer from which I disagree. To achieve a well educated citizenry by providing them with free education, money will remain a permanent seducer of the brain. There are many rich predators that still occupy the cultural landscape.

Christopher Hitchens idealistically once said we don't need leaders. They are the problem. We should govern ourselves within the rule of law.

Not being able to 'read' the world, not caring if Muslim children are tortured or bombed as collateral damage in the war with terrorism, not investing in helping citizens leave their tented homes are all acts, as Professor Giroux

points out, of disengagement. Professor Giroux argues that American kids on drugs are a result of casino capitalism.

Self-criticism is not an option as personal needs overwhelm the wider vision of the nation's social issues.

*"This is a politics in which the undead- or, more aptly, the living dead- rule and rail against any institution, set of values, and social relations that embrace the common good or exhibit compassion for the suffering of others."* (p32)

No matter how far back the reader goes into history, the reader will find they ignore the nation in favour of their personal needs. The essence of modern finances is that money makes money underpinned by land ownership and real estate.

\*

The incarceration of mostly minority children in America bears heavily on Giroux's soul.

*"How can we reconcile the rise of zero tolerance laws in schools with the presumption that schools should be places where young people can feel safe and receive an education that prepares them to be thoughtful, critical, and socially responsible citizens when such laws impose harsh penalties for often trivial infractions, increase rates of suspension and expulsion, disproportionately target African American youth, push poor young people out of school and often into the criminal justice system?"* (p114)

The idea that dropping out of high school is kicking the system is not working. Though it is a hard road it may be the route to becoming a free thinker. An idea cherished and pursued in Chicago by Studs Terkel, Nelson Algren and Jane Addams.

Informal social networks suggested to the paranoia of Joe McCarthy insurrection and revolution. Therefore a shadow has been permanently cast on free-thinkers.

America is the country that defeated Communism. Since that is the only other social system that can exist in the minds of those opposed to Professor Giroux's way of thinking about society; justice, history and the world must be on the side of capital. Dissent from this obvious conclusion must be punished. This is why so many people believe Obama to be a Muslim, why members of Congress can incite violence and why Fox Corporation's version of America is the only

*Among the industrialized nations in the world, the United States ranks first in billionaires and in defense expenditure and yet ranks an appalling twenty-ninth in infant mortality.*

true vision of America.

Professor Giroux shows us that:

*"Among the industrialized nations in the world, the United States ranks first in billionaires and in defense expenditure and yet ranks an appalling twenty-ninth in infant mortality."* (p115)

This is possibly the most vile and horrific statistic in the entire book and one which shows the Government's priorities are all skewed by the logic of money. He doesn't say but others do, that modern Government is no more than an exercise in banking.

Professor Giroux sees a way forward:

*"...it is up to those who are willing to assume a measure of civic courage and social responsibility to come together and say enough is enough, and then mobilize to force Obama to take seriously what it might mean to live up to the principles of both an aspiring democracy and, yes, the Nobel Peace Prize."* (p160)

He believes democracy itself is under attack and that teaching how to critically analyse what we are being told is the way forward. I disagree to a large extent.

Everyone of us has a serious of assumptions and prejudices that are not learned in school but at home and in our neighbourhoods. Many are taught to debate. They are taught how to strongly defend positions they don't believe in.

What we really need to teach is how and when to challenge our assumptions and prejudices and to be prepared to be self-critical. Professor Giroux's book can be read by any of those he mentions as being virulently opposed to the 'State' intervening to help the unemployed and homeless. Having read him they will reject everything he says despite the well researched and accurate statistics.

Fascism always comes with certainty, American or otherwise.

Education is a key to the future but it is a long term venture. Between the time envisaged by Professor Giroux and now we need other answers. More so when you consider high school debating chambers and university debating chambers will work in different time frames to produce the citizens the country needs. These self-critical thinkers would be the first population of ethical thinkers ever to have lived as a nation.

As I have been brought up by a writer and worked among artists all my adult life I would say this level of deep introspection already exists in creative people who live with a high

degree of intellectual uncertainty. Yet as casino capitalism has corrupted the whole of society it has corrupted the art world. What then can we say of the well known artists in this moment before Professor Giroux's more ideal democratic society? Is Koons no more than a celebrity? Are the Young British Artists false flags? ■

Professor Henry Giroux has the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest. *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism* is published by popular Culture and Everyday Life series in 2010.

# ARTHUR TRUEBRUSH

URNS INTO A SUPERBRUSH HERO



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TO BE CONTINUED...

# Toni Carver, Editor of St Ives Times & Echo in conversation with Daniel Nanavati

**DN:** I want to talk about the decline of St Ives in the art world but I suppose first we should talk about how it came to be a flowering of artists to begin with.

**TC:** What flowering are we talking about, there were several? They come in waves in St Ives.

**DN:** I suppose I am referring to the post Second World War period.

**TC:** Which is mine and Derek Guthrie's time, of course, the St Ives 'Modern School' period, but I don't think you can look at St Ives then without looking at its longer history. Cornwall saw Artists' Colonies founded here from the mid-1800s part of a major, but very poorly documented, international movement in art. With the arrival of the railway, Newlyn and St Ives had become very important from the 1880s. There's your first flowering.

**DN:** How did this come about?

**TC:** Post the Industrial Revolution art practice had become city oriented and studio based. Artists decided to get out and seek 'an academy of nature' and paint in the open 'en plein air'. They may have been inspired by the example of earlier painters like JMW Turner, who incidentally had visited St Ives.

**DN:** And this 'movement' was international?

**TC:** Yes. It links us to artists' colonies like: Woodstock, Yaddo and Provincetown in the States; Concarneau, Pont Aven and Barbizon in France and Scandinavian and German colonies like Skagen and Worpswede respectively. An artist might spend several years in several colonies. Major 'St Ives' artists during this flowering were people like Helene Schjerfbeck and Anders Zorn, Scandinavians: as well as Americans and the Brits.

**DN:** Coming from cities did these artists have a romantic view of what nature is actually like?

**TC:** In the 1960s this was a prevalent view of Newlyn School painting. What these painters found, though, was that life in Cornwall was hard, as was rural life elsewhere. Fisherman drowned, boats sank and miners died underground, wives were widowed and children orphaned. Frank Bramley's *Hopeless Dawn* and WHY Titcomb's *Primitive Methodists* are more a sort of Victorian social realism than romantic paintings but, of course nature can be idyllic too.

**DN:** Were these new arrivals welcome in St Ives.

**TC:** The Cornish have always been adaptable and welcoming. Local people modelled for the artists who became respected for their skill of 'head and hand'. A tradition of 'open studio' show days started so artists could let the local people see their work and this fostered a mutual respect. Persuaded by Whistler, James Lanham stocked artist's materials, opened studios and began picture framing for pictures transported to London for Royal Academy exhibitions.

**DN:** A regular cottage industry.

**TC:** Hardly 'cottage' when you think that later on St Ives firms transported Hepworth's sculptures to exhibitions around the world. It was one of the things about Hepworth that she always used local tradesmen and that was appreciated.

*Barbra Hepworth:  
'Dual Form'*





*Elizabeth  
Adela  
Forbes:  
'Louise  
Breton Girl'*

**DN:** So the 19th century history of St Ives made it the obvious choice for Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth?

**TC:** In that it paved the way for a 'second flowing' between the wars, perhaps. The St Ives Society of Artists (founded in 1927) and its Secretary Captain Borlase Smart re-established St Ives international reputation between the wars. Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and their triplets came to St Ives in 1939, ahead of the London blitz. They had friends here and were welcomed into the Society, despite the reservations of the traditional painters. Nicholson knew Cornwall well and had been down in St Ives in 1928 when with Kit Wood he 'discovered' the primitive local painter Alfred Wallis.

**DN:** I read somewhere in one of your articles that they read and admired D H Lawrence

**TC:** Lawrence is part of the history of artists and writers coming to live in Cornwall. I have a copy of a letter the military sent to Lawrence ordering him out of the County. Patrick Heron and Karl Weschke were minds of information on Lawrence, certainly.

**DN:** So the history and the creative energy was already here?

**TC:** Very much so and not just for painting. A Commando training unit was based in St Ives

during the war evolving techniques for covert coastal and cliff assault. It was very creative stuff and dangerous. They designed all sorts of kit, knocked up by a local blacksmith including the 'gripfast', a 'death-slide' [zip-wire] rigging anchor that works on sand and is still in use today. Night landings practised in the dark on St Ives beaches would leave a few soldiers suffering from hypothermia and they were taken into the Gas Works, which stood where Tate St Ives is now, to warm up. If Tate ever leaves St Ives the building would make a fine military museum. This town is rich in history.

**DN:** So this was going on around the artists here in the war. And how did their flowering happen?

**TC:** Nicholson was excellent at promotion. He gave 'marketing' a lot of attention. Art was his profession and believed the artist should be professional in his approach. Many artists don't understand this, they just want to paint and they really don't know how to sell their work. Ben & Barbara founded the Penwith Society of Arts, breaking away from the St Ives Society in 1949. The Penwith was the marketing vehicle for the St Ives Modern movement. They were also active in the community. Nicholson won the first Guggenheim International painting prize in 1956 and used this new found celebrity to try and persuade the council to build self-contained studio-flats for artists.

**DN:** Really? Who would have been in charge of them?

**TC:** Sadly, it never got that far. The council told him it was a nice idea but they would have to build their quota of council houses before his idea could be considered.

**DN:** So how did he proceed.

**TC:** Splitting from the St Ives Society, the Penwith attracted all the younger avant garde, abstract and modern artists all, generally, like minded. Collectives attract buyers, institutions and media.

**DN:** I have heard that caused trouble?

**TC:** Well it was patently elitist. Nicholson divided the Penwith into three classes: A for 'advanced artists', B for traditional painters and C for craftsmen. This was immediately divisive. For artists recently returned from the war: Peter Lanyon, Sven Berlin and

Hyman Segal - looking for a more egalitarian society - 'selection' had a different meaning and unpleasant overtones. Additionally, they realised they'd been manipulated away from 'the old society' which, despite traditionalists knocking the avant garde, had been generous to them, giving them their own space to exhibit in the crypt below the society's main gallery.

**DN:** To my way of thinking, groups forming is not a sign of weakness but of intellectual vigour.

**TC:** Very much so. The Penwith grew from strength to strength throughout the 1950s and early 60s and this is the 'flowing' Derek remembers. It was a terrific time but art was only one aspect. St Ives became the summer sojourn for British 'beatniks' experimenting with existentialism, reciting Ginsberg and quoting Kerouac. Jonathan Xavier Coudrille opened the first folk club in Cornwall in his father, Francis' St Ives studio ahead of a massive folk revival throughout Cornwall.

**DN:** When did it decline?

**TC:** Art? Slowly from the mid-sixties as the founding generation of the Penwith began to age and lose influence. Younger, newer members, took over the reigns who inherited the elitist attitude but little else. The Penwith began to treat Associate members quite badly which was noticeable to a wider public. Particularly as many associates were producing much more interesting work that full members were.

**DN:** Ego kills the artist?

**TC:** It certainly can. But if you want to look for a defining moment, then I would suggest 1975. In 1975 Barbara Hepworth, Bryan Wynter and Roger Hilton all died.

**DN:** But losing three artists in one year could not be the only reason for the demise?

**TC:** In the perception of the public, institutions like Tate and the media 'Art died in St Ives in 1975.'

**DN:** Yet you feel it didn't?

**TC:** No. The reality was there was a lot of good work being produced in St Ives, it was just that the focus was no longer on the Moderns or the Penwith. You could say 1975 represented a full stop to the end of the St Ives Modern period. Some would say



*Ben Nicholson by Mabel Pryde*

1964 with the death of Peter Lanyon. St Ives was in the doldrums, briefly. St Ives artists disappeared into their studios and kept themselves to themselves for a few years. But, this all changed circa 1980 when old 'modernist' hands like John Wells, Willie Barns-Graham, Patrick Heron and Terry Frost were still active and able to help recent arrivals create another 'flowering' in the mid-80s. It was a bit of a renaissance for the surviving 'moderns' which included artists like Sandra Blow and Trevor Bell returning to St Ives and a flowering for a generation able to put egotism aside and bring the Tate to St Ives to celebrate the 'Modern School.'

**DN:** Well you wrote somewhere St Ives is the only place in the world associated with an major avant garde art movement.

**TC:** That was a quote of Patrick Heron's. 'St Ives is only place that is not a capital city or great metropolis to lend its name to an internationally renowned movement in twentieth century art'.

**DN:** That is very interesting. So you are saying the art world changed.

**TC:** It did.

**DN:** Around St Ives?

**TC:** There was a moment in 1980 when St Ives artists began looking again at each other's work - of whatever genre - with interest and respect. Importantly, asking about and investigating the art colony's past and finding new roots. After the Tate Britain St Ives exhibition of 1985 the spotlight turned once more on St. Ives. People came to St Ives to find out 'what was happening now'. Exhibitions were mixed and St Ives had to explain this new 'pluralist' scene which also prompted the growth of the commercial galleries in the town.

**DN:** Another flowering?

**TC:** More of a Golden Age, really. Perhaps the new 'Arcadia' the 19th century 'colonists'

were looking for. A flowering, certainly, for the commercial galleries. I remember walking down Fore Street in the '80s with a gallery owner from Shoreham. Suddenly he stopped and said. "I've just realized, I've just walked past more galleries in five minutes than there are in the whole of East Sussex!" And, there are a hell of a lot more here today!

(laughter) ■

Toni Carver is the Proprietor of The St Ives Printing & Publishing Company and Editor of The St Ives Times & Echo. His St Ives newspaper archives, a major source of Tate's St Ives art chronology, date from 1889.





# Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

Frank Corrigan

*Lynette Yiadom-Boakye was born in London (1977) of Ghanaian parents. She attended St Martins School of Art & Design (1996/7) Falmouth Art College (1997-2000) and the Royal Academy Schools (2000-2003).*

*She is represented in several public collections including Tate UK, MoMA New York and Royal Academy UK*

This show seems to be an attempt to make art history uncanny - to offer us comfortable signifiers of academic portraiture and then to take away the reassurances that we might find in a national gallery. The effect is to disorient and disarm the viewer by placing us in a situation for which we have no confidence in our expectations. By playing the usual tropes against themselves the artist highlights our assumptions, and inhibits the complacency and lazy viewing that we might settle into in a ticketed museum.

A central thrust seems to be the unravelling of the unconscious. The compositions are distinguished by their shared ambiguity. While every figure is black, that is the only thing we can be sure of. Neither the backgrounds nor the figures' dress, features, or pose give any clear indication of time, place, social class, or any other demographic that is so often the crux in art history. This uncertainty infects the viewer - a few of the images had features that looked to me as though they were painted from white models, and I left not sure if this were true or if it reflected my own schemas and biases. Further, if this was something I brought to the painting - where did it come from? Was it my own, a contingency of my experience, or a component of a vast ideology shared by others? The experience of not having clear signs by which to prejudge is highlighted here by how unusual and uncomfortable it is.

The use of explicit academic references is

possibly first and foremost a critique of art history, yet one of the most compelling narratives of the show is the struggle to fully render black skin in Dutch oil pallets - taking the black figure from background exotic token to the central concern, and in doing so moving from the rough shod approximation of dark skin to a primary exhibit. The dearth of paintings of black people makes the task a challenge and while Rembrandt and Rubens both made at least one serious study of dark skin, the majority of depictions in academic figurative painting are a 'black magus' in a crowded scene that lack the devotion to the subject found in portraiture. It seems that Boakye is not only exploring the social history of art, but also searching for a pallet then, and her journey takes her from El Greco to Manet.

The references are usually ironic: The Casper David Friedrich pastiche gives 'the counter' an irony: the figure looks out on what might be a dramatic wasteland. 'Curses' looks like an El Greco in its brushwork but paints an ordinary scene in the style of his rapture. Manet's Olympia is swapped for an indeterminate figure lain topless with an arresting title: 'yes officer, no officer'. The reference point I found most engaging, though, is the nod to Goya in the paintings 'Hightower' and 'Confidences' - there is grace in using the ashen black tones of the great protest painter.

Other writers have seen Modernism in the anti-realism of her compositions, but I rather think there is something closer to Mannerism in these paintings. The same impasse - the sense that we have arrived at the end of art history - afflicts this work. The



Mannerists felt that all of the problems of painting had been solved and were therefore left with nothing to do but ghastly virtuosity copying the achievements of the recent past. And Yoadim-Boakye's painting has a similar problem.

The show reflects a crisis in artistic and aesthetic values that is well known yet poorly understood. 'Being an artist', having devolved into a lifestyle choice, has been undermined by rampant philistinism. YBA and chums/children have overseen the final stage of value entropy from visual arts. The contrivance that anything can be art was cute for a time, but is now just soul sapping. And where there is a value gap, other values will supplant. Money, the pushing of thin political agendas, and controversy have all had their day in the sun. And now artists, obsessed with the ridiculous question "what should I be making?", are like sprinters looking over their shoulder: self-conscious self-saboteurs. This is the problem that artists making work today face: how do I make original, thrilling, vibrant, even beautiful work in an art world 'liberated' of

values?

Yoadim-Boakye is grappling with this question and doesn't yet have the answer. Disdaining the sloppy art of 'expression' without structure and the cheapness of mixed media she has tried to find in painting a way to produce excellence. Her rejection of the myth of sui generis creativity is admirable, and the willingness to invest her work heavily with reference points is much to be preferred to 'spontaneous' art, but she does not seem to have yet found an original voice.

Yoadim-Boakye is a cut above many of her peers - painterly, knowledgeable, deft, and clever. Yet without the name-puzzles and the racial politics, the paintings on display - in themselves - don't have the boldness or impact to invigorate a viewer. Students who 'have got to live in London' will like it - because it's easy to talk about and the stories (enchanted verse allegories that accompany the paintings) are exciting - but the serious problem of how to make brilliant art today remains, and this is a good study, but it isn't the solution. ■

Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

2nd JUNE - 13th SEPTEMBER 2015

"VERSES AFTER DUSK"

SERPENTINE GALLERY,  
London UK

### Images

**Opposite page;**  
**Left: Highriser**

**This page:**  
**Top: Yes Officer, No Officer**

**Bottom :**  
**Curses**



# Creativity & Art: Three Roads to Surprise

by Dr. Margaret A. Boden C.B.E.

George Touche'

Professor Boden's threefold theory of 'creative surprise' provides a frame for understanding how surprise translates to creativity and how creativity relates to the visual arts. She elaborates on the forms of creativity and their cultural relations to traditional fine art, conceptual and computer art. Her discussions on creativity and computers raise questions regarding our knowledge of human creativity, while also considering how computers might have a creative life of their own. Though her chapter on metabolism stresses the limits to strong artificial life (what she terms A-Life), Professor Boden is open to the idea of computer creativity. She recognizes computers improve our understanding of the cognitive faculties and organizational complexities of the human mind that interact – sometimes with computers – in the creative process.

Professor Boden defines creativity and formulates the groundwork for her threefold theory. Formally, creativity is defined (p. 29):

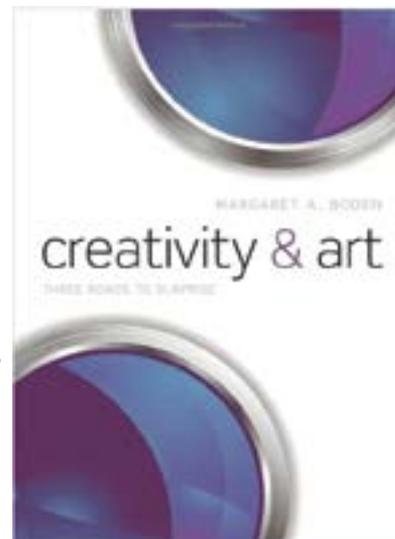
*“Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artifacts that are new, surprising, and valuable.”*

The connotation of all imaginable ideas and artifacts implies that creativity is open in capacity – encompassing great scale and scope, while entailing both breadth and depth. For Professor Boden, creativity is not a property of an elite faculty, but instead an aspect of human intelligence that enters all aspects of life. She addresses the novel or the new by distinguishing psychological creativity (P-creativity) from historical creativity (H-creativity): something new for a specific person or something new for all human history. A new discovery for a person (P-creativity) is most relevant for understanding the processes of creative surprise. As suggested by the subtitle of the book, she specifies 'three roads to

surprise' as three different forms of creativity. The first produces unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas. The other two forms of creativity explore and transform the conceptual spaces of the human mind and the categorical styles of aesthetic possibility. Respectively, she labels these forms of creativity as combinational, exploratory, and transformational. Finally a distinction on cultural values – also norms and beliefs – can affect aesthetic cognition and expression, while also leading to disagreement on whether an idea or artifact is valuable.

Professor Boden's theoretically concise second chapter “Creativity in a Nutshell” also addresses artificial intelligence with respect to the different forms of creativity. She recognizes that computers are relevant and that AI can map conceptual spaces of the mind to enable hypothesis testing on the structures and processes of thought. She then remains “open” as she fairly addresses the arguments for and against computer creativity. Her line of inquiry follows from a quote:

*“If and when I mention creativity in computers I am asking what aesthetically interesting results can computers generate, and how? and Just what might lead someone to suggest that a particular computer system is creative, or that its functioning is somehow similar to creativity in human beings? In that sense, I'm content to leave the question of “real” computer creativity open. And if art necessarily involves creativity – a reasonable, if not a*



*strictly provable, view – then (in that sense) I must leave the question of “real” computer art open too.”*

Most directly, she assesses generative art in terms of its origins in cybernetics and general systems theory and its reliance on digital computing and methods of A-Life, while distinguishing different types of generative art by technique and experience. In her distinction between computer-generated art and computer-assisted art she touches on philosophical and emotional concerns about the aesthetic value of art produced by a computer versus art produced by a human being who uses a computer as an aid. She evaluates autonomy, integrity, and authenticity in the contemporary art world – as artists, computers, and audience participants have come to interact. Arguably, the nature of the interactive event itself – mediated by computers – is a new, surprising, and potentially valuable expression of transformational creativity.

The chapter on metabolism are – as she suggests – the most challenging to integrate meaningfully with the book as a whole. It focuses on the concept of metabolism to address the question of whether strong A-Life is possible. Metabolism is a defining feature of life where higher levels of structural order emerge from origins of lesser degrees. She argues that metabolism is problematic for A-Life proponents who believe in a virtual existence. Evo-artists inspired by A-Life research on evolution believe that programmed computers can create a genuinely authentic virtual life in cyberspace. For Professor Boden, strong A-Life is impossible because virtual creatures displayed on monitor screens and existing in cyberspace lack the material embodiment and biochemical processes that necessitate metabolism. She does support digitally coded information processes that evolve and adapt, but do not metabolize. As nothing is intelligent if it is not alive prospects for an intelligently self-replicating but non-metabolizing cosmic computer life remain doubtful in her view.

Perhaps most interesting is the category of interaction art. Countless questions of computer autonomy and aesthetic authenticity emerge from observations on the computer-mediated interactions among

*As nothing is intelligent if it is not alive prospects for an intelligently self-replicating but non-metabolizing cosmic computer life remain doubtful*

artists and audience participants. Aside from the differing valuations of the actual art objects, the basic interaction is a creative experience. The sociology of values and the social psychology of mind are relevant for understanding the nature of the interaction event. They also hold the potential to explain how aesthetic valuations of computer art vary in the minds of different groups of artists and audiences.

Professor Boden references values with other concepts of cultural sociology throughout the book. Whereas ‘new’ has two meanings and ‘surprising’ has three, values vary between and within cultures over time. For Professor Boden, this openness is important to the contemporary disagreements on aesthetic quality and the potential changes in audience appreciation for computer art.

She highlights the traditional cultural distinction between the aesthetics of fine art and the affordances of craftwork, which are practical and grounded functionally in evolutionary biology. The standards observed in the crafts make them useful within a wide range of cultural contexts, but render them less surprising and arguably less creative minded in comparison to fine arts. She recognizes the cultural distinction in the professional and occupational boundaries that separate the fine arts from craftworks. Yet, she emphasizes that such boundaries lack conceptual clarity because the categories of reason are difficult to define. For example the Bernini fountain sculptures of Rome are symbolically valued illustrations of visual beauty that also had practical functionality in the history of the city. A more modern example of unclear categorization might be the Red House located in outer southeast London, England – an arts and crafts movement home designed by William Morris who with architect Philip Webb and art critic John Ruskin placed quality value on handmade craftworks, as opposed to those

mass produced by industrial machines of the modern age. She acknowledges a history of shifting identity in arts and crafts, while avoiding any imperative for static categorization.

The chapter on conceptual art addresses specifically the shocking challenge to the romantic view of art as an aesthetic expression by an elite few. A value-laden elitism forsaken by connoisseurs and artists alike when the culture of modernism reacted against romanticism and postmodernism eventually proclaimed death of the author, or artist. Professor Boden elaborates on the cultural and psychological tensions that underpin the unorthodox values suggested by several modern to contemporary conceptual artists who – for better or worse – have changed the nature of art itself. The fountain toilet sculpture and other ready made objects of modern social criticism by Marcel Duchamp are shocking in their exploit of disgust when compared to the Baroque beauty of a Bernini fountain or to the high renaissance and versatile mannerist aesthetics of say a Michelangelo. Claes Oldenburg’s “The Hole” that was quickly dug and refilled in Central Park of New York City challenges the conventional orthodoxy on the basic stuff of artwork – where the stuff of the hole seems to have been the philosophically absurd absence of stuff. Professor Boden draws on these examples to acknowledge that the combinational creativity of the unorthodox conceptual art has had a qualitative effect on changing societal evaluations and mental perceptions of art in general.

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Her discussion of autodidacts is meaningful because the self-educated are from separately identified subcultural groups, such as the unschooled or the defiant. These groups are similar in some standard regards (i.e., self-educated instead of formally educated), but differ culturally in terms of value



AI.

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orientations, normative expectations, and belief systems. She points out that there are complex interrelationships between auto-didacticism and creativity that make it hard to say in a clear cut manner whether autodidacts are more or less creative than he formally educated. She suggests further that creative capacity

is partially contingent on psychological processes and mental resources that may exist among members of some autodidact subcultures but not others. The factors of cognition inferred from observed behavior of the defiant autodidact reasonably differ from those of the unschooled autodidact who exhibits the determination to improve life chances through disciplined education of self. In all, the focus on autodidacts illustrates the complexity of creative thinking in general.

The book elaborates further on the creative topics involving the relational qualities of values and mind. However she does not scientifically explain or sufficiently model the interactive effects. While recognizing that science does study cultural values, she stresses their elusive quality and the difficulties encountered when explaining or justifying them. As for the human mind, she addresses computers in terms of machine mapping of cognition and suggests that AI has improved our knowledge of conceptual spaces and mental processes involved in thought. She even acknowledges that the images generated by the AARON software of abstract painter Harold Cohen has helped Cohen to model his own cognition in the creative process, while initiating aesthetic-minded changes in audience evaluations of the computer drawing and coloring program. Yet, the book does not focus primarily on science and modeling as such. Readers with social psychology backgrounds may appreciate deeper conversations using mental models to address the interactions of

cultural values and the human mind – and the contemporary effects that computers have in mediating those interactions.

Emile Durkheim argued for a science of society to observe functional institutions of value that represent norms and beliefs of the collectivity, which differ when comparing the solidarity and consciousness of a traditional community to that of a complex modern society. Durkheim observed social facts, such as marriage or suicide rates, as measured representations existing external to an individual, but exercising influence on an individual. Also in ‘functionalist’ tradition, Talcott Parsons later wrote on social systems and structures of action to emphasize cultural values and conditions of random wants and ends that distinguish voluntary action from the base utilitarian calculus.

Concerning the mind, George Herbert Mead – also before computers – had established grounds for symbolic interactionism in the study of meaningful communication. Mead’s social behaviorist inquiry in ‘Mind, Self, Society’ addresses questions of how and why respondents of differing values and status group backgrounds respond differently to a certain stimulus and how the mind reconciles those differences in the organization of the self within society. Accordingly, the mind is a process of imaginative rehearsal that connects the self to society through participatory role taking, which allows a person to converse in symbolic meaning with many others and to see the self as an object through the eyes of many others – in philosophical agreement with the “looking-glass self” of Charles Horton Cooley. Through the process of imaginative rehearsal, the mind can develop a stable conception of an organized self and a sense of a generalized other that relates the self to the full community of group attitudes that constitute society.

Professor Boden might have enriched several sections of her book with conversation on these sociologists and social psychologists. She could have elaborated on Durkheim and Parsons as she recognized values in her definition of creativity – where the patterned yet open-ended nature of value diffusion through distinct cultures and subcultures can breathe creative life into the imagining of ideas and artifacts. Her discussions of autodidacts then might have referenced

*Computers, however, do not have the strong AI capacity to sustain a life of their own – even though they do mimic and influence our cognitive reasoning capacities*

Durkheim and Parsons on deviance or convergence in values and norms – as those sociological arguments couple with Professor Boden’s psychology to distinguish by process the defiant autodidact from other autodidacts. Finally, a background conversation on Mead would perhaps inspire comparative inquiry on the effects of computer mediations between artists and audience participants in contemporary interactive art. How do predictability and unpredictability of roles and identities in computer interactive art today compare to the symbolic interactionism of Mead – where imaginative pre-computer minds had used symbols to designate objects, rehearse actions concerning objects, and select alternative decisions to make on objects while considering the roles of others that influence the organization of self in actively coordinated social environments?

Of course, other sociologists and psychologists have contributed to our understandings of culture and art. Pierre Bourdieu theoretically encapsulates the dynamic relations between social systems and social actions by focusing on the internalization of the system in the embodied person of practice who resourcefully uses forms of capital (cultural, social, symbolic, economic) in assorted fields of action. His “Rules of Art” is an exemplar on the genesis, structure, and change of production and preference in the literary field. Wendy Griswold in “Cultures and Societies of a Changing World” conceptualizes cultural objects as expressions of shared meaning that are audible, visible, or articulated. She illustrates a cultural diamond with representations of input and output boundaries that account for creation and reception of cultural objects and that enhance knowledge of links connecting cultural objects to the larger social world. Sherry Turkle at MIT focuses in psychoanalysis on

human-technology interactions to argue that computers change what we do and how we think about what we do. The point here is that these scholars have contributed to conversations on the relational quality of cultural values and the human mind, as experienced interactively by members of different groups and – as socially studied by Turkle – mediated by computers that are tools, but also more than tools in their effects on our personal cognitions, emotions, and interactive lives.

The deep conversations on cultural values and interactive mind breathe life into the definition of creativity established by Professor Boden where – philosophically in tune with the corroborating limits to the logic and epistemology of science itself – cultural values are the vital open factor and interactive mind is where discovery of the new takes place on the roads to surprise. Yes, advanced computer technologies indeed have mediated human communications in the contemporary world of culture and art. After all, computers have had interactive effects on our minds as we have reorganized ourselves to communicate free of spatial constraint through global social media. Computers, however, do not have the strong AI capacity to sustain a life of their own – even though they do mimic and influence our reasoning capacities, while expanding our social networks to interact with members of other cultures and subcultures.

In my read of 'Creativity & Art', the interactive computer art is the focal interest with the most potential to creatively transform our aesthetic cognitions and expressions. We must remember,

nevertheless, that the social psychology to the interactive event itself is the foundation of the creativity and that the mediating computers are the props that initiate the new forms of the basic human interaction. For art and creativity more generally, mediated or not by computers, an interactive mind that is open to distinct cultural values leads to a more pleasant aesthetic discovery than does the inordinate closure ensured by the absence of self-organizing metabolism in the strong A-life platform – as she concludes (p. 252):

*“Without independent grounds for doing so, we should not drop metabolism from the concept of life. Nor should we weaken our (third) interpretation of it. On the contrary, we should acknowledge it as a fundamental requisite of the sort of self-organization that is characteristic of life. In sum: metabolism is necessary, so strong A-Life is impossible.”* ■

George Touche' earned his sociology PhD at Texas A&M and worked full time as a research associate at George HW Bush Presidential institute.

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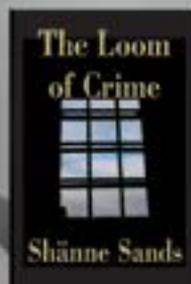


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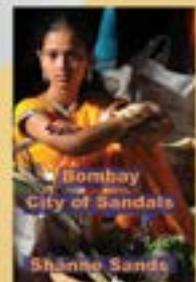
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