

NEW ART examiner

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FEATURES

SPEAKEASY: Artists showing outside museums have more of a hold on reality. **JOHN LINK**

The founding principles of the Penwith Society need to be reestablished. **DEREK GUTHRIE**

Newspeak in post-modernism. **DANIEL NANAVATI**

Henry Darger & Art Spiegelman. **MICHAEL BONESTEEL**

A modern masterpiece of sculpture which he finds anything but a masterpiece. **DAVID LEE**

INSIDE

Reviews:

The Edlis/Neeson Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago

Kenneth Josephson

The Rolling Stones at the Saatchi Gallery

Ben Beaumont at the Royal Cornwall Museum

Derek Guthrie's Facebook Discussion

NEWS and LETTERS



With Extracts from



THE

JACKDAW

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading her independent journal of art criticism.

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

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

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CONTENTS

3 LETTERS.

4 SPEAKEASY

JOHN LINK on how artists showing outside museums have more of a hold on reality.

7 REVITALIZING THE NEW

DEREK GUTHRIE talks about the founding principles of the Penwith Society and why they need to be re-established if the Society is to thrive.

10 NEWSPEAK

DANIEL NANAVATI discusses Newspeak, as found in Orwell's brilliant novel 1984, in terms of disparate post-modern art worlds.

15 WAR ORPHANS

MICHAEL BONESTEEL writes about HENRY DARGER and ART SPIEGELMAN and how their separate life experience links their writing.

22 HYPE IS NOT ENOUGH

In our first extract from The Jackdaw, DAVID LEE on a modern masterpiece of sculpture which he finds anything but a masterpiece.

Quote: Dr. Idel Dreimer.

" Art is man's challenge to time, his rebuke to chaos; the protest will survive neither the triumph of fire, nor the finality of ice — but it is better than the silence of consent. "

CONTENTS

24 THE NEW CONTEMPORARY

KATE HADLEY TOFTNESS on the Edlis/Neeson Collection at The Art Institute of Chicago.

27 A PHOTOGRAPHER OF COINCIDENCE

STEVE HARP on KENNETH JOSEPHSON: An Exhibition and Book Review.

29 FACEBOOK

An occasional extract from DEREK GUTHRIE'S Facebook page of discussions.
www.facebook.com/derekguthrie

33 A REVEALING SENSITIVITY

TINA VARCOE reviews BOO BEAUMONT's exhibition in the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro, Cornwall.

34 EXHIBITIONISM

CARINTHIA WEST on the Rolling Stones Exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery, London.

Quote: Michelangelo Buonarroti

" The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark."

Dear Derek Guthrie,

I have "unfollowed" your posts on Facebook. It has nothing to do with you or what you are posting, but rather everything to do with the odd people who are drawn to "comment" or complain or whatever. FB, and its environment of fugitive dots-on-the-screen, is the perfect medium for them to enshrine their emptiness. But responding is like tilting at windmills.

I lack the self-discipline necessary to ignore them and get drawn into some of the weirdest wasting of time I can remember. That seems to be typical of many internet discussions. I don't give a hoot about beating them anyway. Most of them are worthless as opponents, even if they hold a majority of screen space.

I wonder if many of these people even read the NAE, given that one of your critics seems proud that he does not read much at all, and gains support for such a position. You will undoubtedly be spared any time in purgatory, thanks to their "interest" in your postings, and your unusually gentle responses to their proclamations.

John Link

Ed,

There have been some ridiculous misprints and errors in all the recent Examiners 'plight' for polite comes to mind, but the reduction in the cover of issue 4 so as to cut off the entire lower line so niftily crafted as not to fit seems a step too far.

I wonder who designs these for you because I suggest you change to someone who actually knows what they are doing.

JC

(JC, Thank you for noticing what we know.

You will be aware, as we are, that we have worked solidly with volunteers on all four issues so far and have also had to work hard gaining partnerships and upping our game. Something which is now happening and as you suggest, we hope proofing and design errors will become a thing of the past.

UK Ed.)

News Briefs

II PARTNERSHIPS

We are delighted that in recent talks with Charles Thomson of the Stuckists and David Lee, editor of The Jackdaw, we have agreed to work together. This means that in this issue you can read the first of the extracts we are republishing from The Jackdaw and the news sections will be far more informed in future. Added to the partnership in place with Plymouth College of Art, the Examiner is building strong foundations in the UK.

2 NAE at The Penwith

On Friday 8th April Toni Carver (St Ives Times & Echo), Michael Gaca (Belgrave Gallery), Daniel Nanavati and Derek Guthrie spoke at The Penwith about the need for art criticism, the waning of St Ives as an international centre of modern art, and how writing for the New Art Examiner could invigorate the community. 26 people engaged with the speakers with a variety of questions which spilled out to more talks over a long weekend. We are delighted to say more such discussions are being planned each quarter the next being on May 19th..

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.

SPEAKEASY



In early February, Gloria Steinem commented to Bill Maher about Hillary Clinton's problem getting support from younger women. Young women, she said, ask, "Where are the boys?" Of course, Steinem took a big hit for saying that but, if Maher had asked about Clinton's problem getting support from younger men, it would have been equally relevant to answer the same way, except with "girls" substituted for "boys". The point: people gravitate to situations that provide them with what they want.

When I read "Art Galleries Face Pressure to Fund Museum Shows" in the March 7, 2016 edition of the "New York Times", my first thoughts were moralistic. What a detestable conflict of interest. Surely there are horrible consequences ahead.

I wrote on Facebook: "I think it is more than business because the role of museums is to declare where the consensus of taste has finally settled, more or less. True, you could say now that museums have conjoined their interests with those who sell art. They are no longer a valid source of such judgments. But perception trumps facts, especially when it comes to art."

Museums are perceived as something much more than "just another part of commerce". They are now leveraging that perception into the commercial sphere in a new manner and I have no idea where that will take us. Perhaps just the same place we are now. They may even have a positive effect by insisting on a higher level of quality. But difference of opinion will probably be even harder to come by than it is now.

NAE's Chicago editor then suggested I write a SPEAKEASY on the subject. So I read the article again. Wise people say everyone is entitled to their own opinion but not their own facts. The most important fact cited in the article is expressed in a single sentence: "Nearly a third of the major solo exhibitions at museums in the United States between 2007 and 2013 featured artists represented by just five galleries--Gagosian, Pace, Marian Goodman, David

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.

Zwirner and Hauser & Wirth--according to a recent survey by The Art Newspaper.

This is astonishing. Turns out there is no conflict of interest whatsoever. Instead, it is a confluence of interest, a profound confluence, probably without precedent in museum history.

So, I changed my mind. It is not a moral problem, it is a reality problem. It is not even a problem if you like what the museum-gallery trust is serving up for your cultural enlightenment. You are in luck, as the thing is likely to continue along the current monolithic path for quite some time. It is "where the boys and girls are" if indeed these boys and girls are the ones that interest you. As for myself, I took great amusement that the galleries are being made to pay for the service the museums are providing. It is, in a perverse way, a relief to see them somewhat annoyed, and complaining, in the ever so polite way the powerful complain.

Freeloaders hate it when they must pay at least something for what they formerly claimed as a right, even when they do not pay the actual costs or value. It is especially gratifying to see the light of day cast so publicly on this particular episode of gallery welfare for those who hardly need it. Their misery is my joy. I fervently hope they are charged much more in the future. What they are getting is too much of a bargain, given the figures quoted in the article. Museums are pumping millions of dollars into the value of their inventories. The galleries are paying pennies on the dollar for this service.

But what if the museum-gallery system's particular boys and girls aren't the ones you seek? One of the common myths about Clement Greenberg is that he visited artists' studios in order to tell them what to paint. It is true that he visited a lot of studios and made many comments. With the exception of his first visit to Pollock's studio (he could not say anything after 45 minutes of looking and trying), he was a man with a lot to say. When he told me of his difficulty during his first visit with Pollock, he said

that is when he learned the worst thing he could say after looking at an artist's work was nothing

After that difficult experience, he always made it a point to say something, whether the artist explicitly asked for it or not. While he liked artists very much, probably more than any other type of person, he did not visit studios because of his affection for them. After all, he had plenty of social interactions with artists in other venues. Instead, he went to studios because that is where art begins and, in many instances, is the only place it can be found. It is a long and complicated path that takes new art from the studio into any gallery or museum.

Contemporary museums may package their art into an easy-to-digest

configuration, reeking of authority and significance but, by their nature, they are not where emerging art is likely to be found. Emerging art is what interested Clem most. Most, if not all, readers of the NAE have good access to artists and their studios. If you are not inspired by what the system is pushing on us, visit some studios. Follow Greenberg's example. That's where the real art is. ■

Painter, Emeritus Professor of Art, Western Michigan University, Professor of Art and Department Head, Virginia Tech, Michigan Editor, the original New Art Examiner, one time member of the New Art Association Board.

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Force Feeding in Guantanamo'

Derek Guthrie 2015



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awarded an Andy Warhol Grant to
research the history of the New
Art Examiner.**

**She is looking for original material
dealing with the Examiner -
letters, journal / diary entries,
photographs and the like from
1973 to 2002.**

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Revitalising The New

Editorial by Derek Guthrie

The public discussion on April 12th in St Ives Cornwall UK, was jointly organized by the Penwith Society of Artists, the Belgrave Gallery, the Newlyn Society of Artists and the New Art Examiner.

The theme was the perennial question of how to recognize, encourage and preserve vitality in an organization that presents art to the public and avoids stagnation.

Modern Art emerged in mid 19th century in Paris, where class interest played out in both the politics and the visual arts. They still do today though they are socially more muted.

Conceptual art, installation and or video, are not tuned into the wider public as society is more fractured. Modern media identifies with the new and in so doing erects boundaries of convenience. Taste can be an affirmation of the brave or an affirmation of a coward, or the death of both. In so doing it can, and does, provide a retreat into a comfort zone - a withdrawal from the troublesome areas of distaste. Taste is an affirmation of the individual.

Painters, sculptors other graphic artists in Paris in the mid-19th century birthed a modern urban order that had not yet become displaced by the technologies' of reproduction that have taken over our visual landscape.

Class conscientious is not an exclusive activity of visual art. Art will assimilate and embrace all issues of human concern and vanity. The complexity and options of modern creativity is more than well endowed with a superstructure - an extended cottage industry of critical theorists, curators, educators, grant writers art historians and other wordsmiths within public relations and management.

The attempt to professionalize the artist into the era of Post-Modernism led to

Conceptual art, installation and or video, are not tuned into the wider public as society is more fractured

many seeing painting as a Luddite activity, inherently obsolete.

The Penwith Society Located in St Ives was born into a unique context. Probably the last Bohemia in which artists alone decided on how and where to focus their practice and individually make their own decisions in which pertinent issues of art as recognized in painting an sculpture, should or could be explored. A smaller world than the turbo charged globalized art world of today. The option of that period, in simplistic terms, was to abstract or not to abstract. Those that chose the former may have received and invitation to have tea with Barbra Hepworth.

St Ives was blessed as some of the great pioneers of the then avant-garde took up residence in this gloriously beautiful seaside town to escape the World War 2 bombing of London. Ben Nicholson, Barbra Hepworth Bernard Leech and Naum Gabo. They brought an international avant-garde sophistication which rooted into the provincial community that had been adopted and recharged by this post war generation of artists.

The St Ives Society of Artists was, and still is, a community artists group that identifies with a traditional commitment, which essentially means a respect and recycling of the old forms usually with a modernist makeover.

The second generation of avant-garde painters followed on after World War 2 now known as the St Ives School. The Penwith Society in its hey day affirmed and displayed

the new thinking, Today the Society rests on an inherited past history with little evidence of new thinking, resolution or resolution to inform or reform.

History does not stand still. New generations inherit the genes of respective parents but are not their clones. They have to evolve their own language and ascetic philosophy, their cultural personality, from living engagement with the living world.

The Penwith morphed into a lack luster organization, with the previous director acquiring a public simulacrum of Miss Haversham. Cultural politics, which echo self-interest, will have to be confronted in its revival.

... the once renegade group has lost its purpose of wrestling with the issue of seeking a new practice suitable for their time.

The Penwith presents mixed exhibitions only through the mechanism of a jury responding to submissions. This is a repeat of the practice of the Academies, which were pushed aside by avant-garde that developed other methodologies of exhibiting just as the Penwith Society did when seeking reform inside the St Ives Society of Artists.

A casual observance of the current exhibitions on display today will not uncover any significant difference between the two organizations. Suggesting the once renegade group has lost its purpose of wrestling with the issue of seeking a new practice suitable for their time.

The Salon des Refusés launched the idea of outsider artists causing upset and incomprehension of the 19th century French bourgeoisie. The tradition of the new was launched. As the late Robert Hughes made clear in his ground breaking TV series "The Shock of the New". The shock of the new is no longer possible as hip bourgeoisie refuse to be shocked or admit to cultural anxiety. Is no longer fashionable. The bourgeoisie have adopted manners that once resided exclusively in Bohemia. Camp followers

Without question that art jargon of recent years has over used and blunted the well worn expression of the 60s "the cutting edge".

both in real estate and fashion retailing, once the rear guard, have taken over the "exotic image" of the bohemian artist.

Given the large population of artists in Cornwall and the establishment of the Tate, St Ives, expectations simmer on the back burner, including this writer's, hoping to see a revitalized art community. Whether it is a lost hope, built upon nostalgia or the sand of sentimental aspiration, remains to be seen. Unless some serious criticism comes into play it does not seem if any possible resolution is in the offering. Knowing things aint what they used to be could be a starting point.

The programme of discussion mentioned at the beginning of this text "Can the past of the Penwith Society be its Future" Has sparked Chris English, from the informal Crypt Group, with the New Art Examiner to organize another public discussion on a similar theme on 20th May at the Borlase Smart Room in Porthmeor Studios, St Ives from 7.30 pm. 'Is there a future for art and artists in St Ives?' It is hoped that more than one member of the Penwith Society will find time and interest to attend. If so it could indicate that the shroud of lethargy and self-contentment in the mutual admiration club is wearing a little thin.

To acknowledge the history, nature and purpose of the Penwith Society of Art, it is necessary to examine the time and culture of its founders and also to redraw the modus operandi for tomorrow. The purpose of the founders of the Penwith was not only to find a venue to present work to the public.

The previous arrangement offered by the St Ives Society of Artists had become unacceptable (usually they were to be hung in the crypt/lower gallery) as it suggested an inferior status. Shunted away from the traditional forms of pictorial paintings which occupied premier ground floor

location.

The clash between modernism and tradition was heating up. The domestic accord broke down. What happened in St Ives in the 50s was a repeat of the negotiations that Marcel Duchamp and his brothers previously engaged with with the French Academy half a century before. Cohabitation of the old and the new was not possible in either Paris or St Ives.

Issues of patronage and money naturally intertwine with cultural politics and are defining forms for the power of fashion. Without question that art jargon of recent years has over used and blunted the well worn expression of the 60s "the cutting edge". Nobody is sure what the cutting edge is and who should be cut. Today the Penwith Society in its magnificent space presents exhibitions of its members juried in artists seeking acceptance and exposure. But the Penwith Society is moribund as well asserted By Ken Turner veteran Performance artist, who in 2006 Reenacted a funeral in which a coffin was brought from the St Ives Society of Artists, a short distance to the Penwith Society. He and the coffin where not admitted. Demonstrating that the ossified has no interest in the new.

Given the plight of St Ives, a beautiful seaside town of indigenous vernacular granite built cottages, confronts with startling contrast the expansive forces of nature of the mighty Atlantic that the Cornish coast provides. But St Ives has lost its soul, sanitized by the toxic force of modern mass tourism. The town is near emptied of fishermen and artists are replaced by a thriving high street trade of kitsch.

The ghosts of the past linger. The Penwith Society as such, is a community run society. Fulfilling its own historic mandate to exhibit art from the region. The previously drawn line between the avant-garde and banality. Bourgeoisie culture has virtually evaporated. Proving that the present day marketing of popular consumerist culture can and will absorb any form of appearance or style. The catwalk is the branding of taste for the future consumer. St Ives has

The previously drawn line between the avant-garde and banality. Bourgeoisie culture has virtually evaporated. Proving that the present day marketing of popular consumerist culture can and will absorb any form of appearance or style.

its own catwalk, Main Street, which now is an extension of the trading in all the usual banalities that can be found, like fish and chips and Hamburgers, Junk food for mind and body.

There are many art worlds swimming in the art universe, either with vibrant, faded or near dead pulse. Whether the Penwith Society can survive or evolve to rekindle its original self-defined purpose remains to be seen. At least the green shoots of discussion are activated for some and not held exclusively in the back room.

The unofficial embargo of a muffling silence is now a little thawed. Many artists still have fear of exclusion. Discussion can be punished. So the hanging committee is no longer the last word or gatekeeper of significant art in Cornwall. The status of membership in The Penwith Society is now questioned. The Penwith Society can no longer claim the role to be the flag bearer for avant-garde. This has passed to the Exchange Gallery in Penzance and the Newlyn Orion gallery across the Peninsula on the South Coast. Beneficiaries of much support from the Arts Council and interest from Mrs. Serota, hitching in Falmouth School of Art. Certainly 'Things ain't what they used to be', but that is another story to be continued later. ■

Derek Guthrie

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Podcast [link](#) below

NEWSPEAK

The Emergence of Orwellian NewSpeak in Art

"In the new speculative market, it is often the quality of patronage, not the quality of the art, that determines its initial success."

Daniel Nanavati

Words have a history and a definition. Control the definition and you control meaning and by controlling meaning you control what people understand by what you are saying. Control what people understand, and you control those people.

This is not to do with the sway of oratory but the mundane language of the everyday dedicated to the single purpose of controlling definition.

The richness of language flows from an admixture of time, place, associations, idiom and derivation. Harold Pinter found these gave a subtext which informed all his work.

"Language ... is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. (Writing for the Theatre" (From a speech made by Harold Pinter at the National Student Drama Festival in Bristol in 1962)

Personal subtext, a way in which the same word carries subtly different meaning to different people, exists because we all learn words slightly differently. We will find them at different stages in our lives,

the connections in our brains will associate them with slightly different experiences, we come from differing cultural roots. So though we can all speak to each other with broad comprehension, we can never share exact understanding of each other without long conversations, without going over things many times, and answering many questions. This deeper level of understanding is what Socratic method aims to create, and, indeed, most teaching in the European and Indian history of debate and argument.

NewSpeak is all about short circuiting any such long conversations.

NewSpeak is about deleting the subtext. It aims to create an immediate, programmed response that is not questioned by the hearer. Most interesting to the student of Orwell is his appendix in which he states that the development of NewSpeak in his book is in its infancy and that the fullest control of language and by extension what people understand, will not be completed until 2050. In saying this Orwell has placed us in an historical context that is still unfolding.

NewSpeak doesn't want to have a

Politically correct speech has long understood the value we apportion to words, and how negative values have to be challenged if we are to change people's perceptions.



conversation about changed meaning, and demands, indeed, that emphasis be controlled.

NewSpeak is breaking words down to short, precise meanings the definitions of which have been so perfectly associated with the words that they mean the same thing to all of us.

Politically correct speech has long understood the value we apportion to words, and how negative values have to be challenged if we are to change people's perceptions. It is however a valueless exercise because changing the words is cosmetic. It may make the individuals concerned feel better than when highly emotive words are no longer acceptable they are no longer used, but in wider society it changes nothing but the words. Cultural norms take much longer to change and depend upon the themes of our education from the start of our schooling.

NewSpeak wants to destroy history. NewSpeak needs to destroy history otherwise it cannot perform its function which is to control understanding.

Definition gives us a measure of understanding but we all have to be aware of who is in charge of definition. Language develops organically and derivations are vitally important because like glazes on a painting they work behind modern definitions to give a rounded view of the history of a word. NewSpeak wants to destroy history. NewSpeak needs to destroy history otherwise it cannot perform its function, which is to control understanding.

"How do you change the way people think? You start by changing the words they use" (The Emergence of Orwellian Newspeak and the Death of Free Speech, John W. Whitehead | Rutherford Institute.)

But you can fool some of the people all the time and the art world has used NewSpeak to brilliant effect. Mostly because once it

was agreed that everything is art, art itself loses a definition and without a definition a word has no meaning and therefore cannot be understood. Duchamp's Fountain, at its simplest, to its aficionados said 'if a human being makes it, it is art.' In one stroke every person was made an artist and the culture of a country, indeed of all countries, was not an agreed summation of works taken from history, but everything produced by everyone. (Indeed artists as a classification comes to mean no more than saying 's/he is a human-being', yet we still all feel it has an additional meaning.)

Supported by this revelation the art world, which still defines itself and still feels distinct from the rest of the population, like children in a toy factory, began to play.

I have no argument that the Academies tightly defined art and Modernism needed to break down their definition. Their definitions were written down and restrictive and the need for them to be challenged goes without saying, as does my appreciation for the skills and excellence across a broad spectrum of the avant-garde. But the players have become Orwellian.

Orwell knew, as a political theorist and commentator, that to control definition you need to have enough control of the news outlets to make them conform to your definition and use the words you want them to use. Today we have a catch-all name for such control: marketing.

Chief amongst the culprits in the art world are the art colleges who teach their students that they have to be controversial. If you can make a headline it does not matter what level of skill you display, you can get some traction in the minds of the art world and that traction may grow to be appreciated by collectors. Controversy, being the bad child, gains media attention, which in turn incorporates celebrity. The relationship between publicity and success is key to understanding how the A-list art world governs itself.

"...art colleges" typically teach that the "avant-garde" is against traditional, historical art. They even imply that it originally formed as opposition to traditional art. But the

fact is, the Impressionists were against contemporary art, not historical art, and resurrected earlier, i.e., "historical" forms to mount their opposition, Goya for one. NewSpeak, as practiced in the prevailing art system, has indeed "destroyed history" as it proclaims the point of advanced avant-garde art is to subvert old art, in the name of progress. The Impressionists - as the "avant-garde" - indeed went forward, but they did it by insisting on historical values. Thus, they did not deny historical art but

The art world, through its training from the PR and Marketing world, attempts to control language.

rather affirmed it as more valuable than what "contemporary" art was producing. Controversy was the side effect, not the point, and in the case of Cezanne, at least, he wanted to be accepted by the Academy, not rejected." (John Link, letter 5.04.2016.)

In tandem with the academics always comes the control of language. Much has been written about how cadres of people get together and invent their own language, their own 'word order', that excludes those who have not learned their vocabulary. Academia proliferates in such words. These are not the words of teaching the visual arts like 'visual metaphor' to describe an object or 'middle ground' to describe a place on a canvas.

Remember, as Orwell explains in his appendix,

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc [English Socialism], but to make all other modes of thought impossible."

The art world, through its training from the PR and Marketing world, attempts to control art language. Marketing specialist spend hours talking about the 'appropriate' word to use in a campaign. They are masters of knowing how the public receives certain

words.

But what they misunderstand is that NewSpeak was and is a description of the attempt to control language. Being organic and ever changing using a particular word to describe an art movement or coin a phrase adds the new definition to the layers of meaning of those words. They can come back to bite the hand that first wrote them down. (It is little known that both Duchamp's brothers applied to and were rejected by the Academy in Paris. They wanted to belong.)

Take the word 'new'. Primarily this is supposed to suggest the first time something has happened. But in the International arena 'new' may just mean an artist who is showing for the first time in a country other than their own. So we always have to ask, 'new to whom?'

If you don't question the words used by those trying to sell you work and you take the words at face-value, then the world today is filled with the greatest artists who ever lived. But since we are all artists and since everything we do is art, all we are entitled to say is today there are more artists alive than have ever lived. But saying this doesn't get any media juices flowing. The media needs news, needs a tag. It is insatiable for the immediate. A-List art jargon is designed to fit the needs of the media. The end result of this process is that 'selling' the art and the artist to the 'media' becomes the name of the game.



The art market itself is a self serving, money making, investment business. Way back in 1985 when it was really getting going Jane Addams Allen wrote:

"In the new speculative market, it is often

the quality of patronage, not the quality of the art, that determines its initial success. If a young painter, fresh from art school, gets picked up by the right collector, his or her prices can zoom ..." (Speculating: A Fine Art. Jane Addams Allen 1986)

And to give a rounded example of how language is used to promote 'difference' and 'new' and even 'modern' we need look no further than the highly successful Kassel Documenta, in particular Documenta 8 when Manfred Schnackenburg said to Jane Addams Allen that the exhibitions were demonstrating the idea that art was making a move from 'form' to 'iconography', from 'analysis' to 'narrative and drama', from 'structure' to 'metaphor'.

The Saatchi Gallery show Newspeak in 2010-2011 was a promotion of those artists they thought would be the new a-list but the irony of the title should not be lost in any judgment of the way in which the art elite crucifies language. The apparent freedom given to the post-modern artist by the liberation from all definition is in fact as great a straight jacket in its way as the one the Academies introduced which created the avant-garde. With the 'found' object now worthy of inclusion in a gallery artists can suborn the entirety of the brilliance of nature, caste-offs from our throw-away culture, rubbish and others pre-manufactured works to their name.

*This beautifully elastic PR machine
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clothes his pay masters wore ...*

Their singular skill is to have the chance encounter with the object, nothing else is needed not even the pretence to wanting to be an artist or be shown in a gallery. These latter have become merely the ways



Art by the Quarter Mile ©Wolf Schram

in which collectors are found for galleries, too, are only as good as their buyers list.

But note the works have to fit into a gallery. A roadway is also a found object and art by the post-modern definition but no one can actually place a quarter mile of road into a gallery so they make do with photographs, suggestive sculpture and broken pieces et al. Since everything on the planet is art perhaps we are meant to assume the Earth is actually a museum and we are all on display. Conceptually rewarding as that may be, where does it leave us in the discussion of art?

There has always been a mechanics to all art, for where would we be without the ability to make a pen or a brush, create from organic and inorganic chemicals the colours and hues we need. The singular skills developed in using all the artistic manufactured products once defined art. Quite rightly the avant-garde began to chip away at what 'skill' actually meant. Now we have gone to the extreme that the skill is in the idea behind the artwork more than in the object created and on display. The skill of the wider crafts isn't even thought of highly as there are apparently few collectors of crafts, so why teach them? Craft faculties in the UK have shrunk in recent years. Skill is a word that is now rarely used. It was one of the go-to words of critics, and we all know about their demise. NewSpeak is as much about the words forged for a purpose as those discarded as not serving the purpose.

Whose purpose?



Every Way But Up

There are many art worlds. From community galleries, clubs through auction houses, right up to national galleries and museums and private collectors. They all have their own purposes but they will not all use the same words the same way. There is not yet full control of the entirety of art worlds but that is not from the lack of trying.

What has happened with 'post-modern' demonstrates the nature of art NewSpeak. While Orwell envisioned words closely defined, in the art world we have a word so loosely defined it is impossible to tie down, even for academics whose life is close definition. It is so under-defined that it is impossible to flaw. Now the 'everything is art' brigade have deskilled and deprofessionalized the artist, but given them a title in the history of art, the flood gates are open. As long as what is produced by the artist resonates within a display space, it can get away with being called art without fear of contradiction. You can, and they do, go anywhere with this definition of art.

But it isn't a definition of art, anymore than saying God is in everything is a definition of God. You have to have a definition of God to have the slightest understanding of what that means and you have to have a definition of art to understand what 'everything is art' means. A definition many are reluctant to propose. Artists used to have the bravery to write manifestos but in recent years those have been in short supply.

This beautifully elastic PR machine owes a debt to the instinctive ability of the self-

confessed neophyte, Charles Saatchi to take the cultural pulse of the United Kingdom and sell it back to the population, dressed in whatever clothes his pay masters wore – most notably redesigning Margaret Thatcher from the opinionated wife of a multi millionaire to Margaret I, in the 1980s. That he then refashioned the art world is a matter of recent history.

Post-Modernism as a title is the creation of itinerant salesmen going around the world making fortunes for collectors by claiming a slice of art history. By creating a culture in which anything can be art and then defining what makes headlines as art, they have left a wake in which community art and much of the population is disconnected and discontented with what is portrayed as significant culture. The thing they lack, which is the very thing Charles Saatchi lacked, is good taste. Taste doesn't matter when you are not selling art but investments dressed as art. Though wouldn't it be ironic to find that in some corner of Saatchi's homes there is a Degas sweetly lighted reminding him of what controversy and social conscience really mean?

At some stage Modern Art and Post Modern Art will be given new names, they have to as the new generations will also be modern yet different and they will not think painting is dead like many Post-Modern 'deadists'. Before that happens there will have to be a conversation on what has been done to art by these movements. That re-assessment is the vital readjustment needed to lift the entire art world out of PR and PC and place it back into the living, spatial and visual metaphors of the human condition and away from the artificiality of celebrity.

It also depends upon a critical understanding of how words are being used to force a certain understanding in us and to have the knowledge to confront simplifying art to the point of meaning less to cultural thinkers than it once did. ■

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WAR ORPHANS:

HENRY DARGER & ART SPIEGELMAN

Michael Bonesteel

It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. — Joseph Campbell



Henry Darger, Are almost murdered themselves though they fight for their lives. Typhoon saves them, first of three-panels, carbon, pencil and watercolor on paper, 22x89 inches, c. 1930-1940

The fields of self-taught art/art brut (i.e., Outsider art) and sequential art (i.e., comic books/graphic novels) are areas that have been historically considered marginal to the academic canon of Western art. However, their enthusiastic acceptance and celebration in contemporary art's post-postmodern world makes them especially fruitful areas of intellectual and aesthetic exploration within the context of emerging, cutting-edge artistic media.

Two of the foremost names in their respective fields are reclusive Chicago artist/novelist Henry Darger (1892-1973) —arguably the leading figure in America today in the self-taught realm — and graphic novelist Art Spiegelman (b. 1948) who, more than any other practitioner has ushered

in today's renaissance in the medium of comics/sequential art.

Each of these artist-writers is recognized almost exclusively for one unsurpassed masterwork. With Darger, it is his unpublished 15,000-page, 14-volume epic novel, and accompanying collection of hundreds of monumental-sized, carbon-traced, pencil and watercolor drawings, collectively known as *In the Realms of the Unreal*. With Spiegelman, it is his semi-autobiographical graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, a groundbreaking Holocaust saga of unprecedented expression that he wrote from 1973 to 1991, which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

At the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I teach both the history of self-taught art and comic books/graphic novels, I've noticed profound similarities and correspondences between the *Realms* and *Maus* despite the fact that they are expressed through very different, yet related, mediums. Given their depth and scope, it is hardly surprising that they should have touched upon so many common elements.

An overriding interest in the connection between words and images, art and narrative, is the most obvious connection. But, perhaps more than anything, the passionate intensity of Darger's and Spiegelman's storytelling abilities, bolstered by strong autobiographical elements, are the crucial frameworks upon which they have built their visual edifices. Deep in the heart of both stories lie trauma and tragedy, lending them a gravitas aspiring to mythic proportions.

Darger brings a background history of physical, emotional and, almost certainly, sexual abuse within the institutional hellholes where he came of age. His mother

died giving birth to his baby sister when he was four years old and he never saw his sister, who was put up for adoption. Four years later, his father became lame, could no longer care for his son, and placed him in a Catholic boys' home.

When he was 12, he was sent to a large, isolated institution for "feeble-minded" children, ostensibly because of "self-abuse" (i.e., excessive masturbation). Far from being feeble-minded, but emerging from the experience as an emotionally arrested and psychically shattered young man, Darger found solace throughout the rest of his reclusive life by creating his own private, all-consuming world in words and images. His vast body of work was not discovered until shortly before his death in 1973.

Spiegelman, the only living son of two Holocaust survivors, was haunted by the deaths of his relatives, particularly an older

Maus: A Survivor's Tale, is an unprecedented documentation, through the unlikely vehicle of comics, of one family's descent into the abyss of Hitler's Final Solution

brother, Richieu, who was put to death as a young boy in a Polish ghetto, as well as the suicide of his mother many years after she and his father were marched from the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps.

Spiegelman later sought to come to terms with the unutterable horror that his parents could never bring themselves to reveal to him while he was growing up. He relentlessly interrogated his father about what he, his mother and brother experienced. The result, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, is an unprecedented documentation, through the unlikely vehicle of comics, of one family's descent into the abyss of Hitler's Final Solution.

War and Genocide

Both Spiegelman and Darger set their novels against the backdrop of a moral war against enemies perpetrating organized mass murder. Additionally, *Maus* and the

In a veiled reference to his institutional upbringing, Realms' primary theme is the enslavement and torture of children by depraved adults.

Realms are both stories contained within stories.

As Spiegelman interviews his father, he hears how Vladek, his wife Anja and their child, Richieu, struggled to survive relocations to ever more restricting environments in 1930s and '40s Poland. Vladek's story is about a family within a Jewish society living within a Polish culture occupied by an invading German army bent on the inexorable extermination of the Jewish race. Spiegelman's attempt to learn the details of his family's journey into darkness is a story in itself, for Vladek is always resistant to revisit those memories. The reader also learns about the author's guilt over his mother's self-inflicted death and his father's various psychological complexes resulting from his horrific past.

Although Darger's story is fictional and takes place on an imaginary planet, it was directly inspired by his childhood experiences. When the 17-year-old author returned to Chicago after escaping from the downstate Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children in 1909, he almost immediately began writing — and soon thereafter illustrating — the saga that would preoccupy him, in one medium or another, for the rest of his life. In a veiled reference to his institutional upbringing, *Realms'* primary theme is the enslavement and torture of children by depraved adults.

The American Civil War had fascinated Darger since early childhood, and one of his favorite books was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Borrowing aspects from Stowe's novel for his *Realms*, he transformed African-American slaves into children enslaved by a sadistic, and newly formed, satanic empire called Glandelinia that seceded from the Christian nation of



Abbieannia--echoing the American Confederacy's secession from the Union.

When the child slaves disobey their masters and try to run away, they are placed into detention camps that unnervingly anticipate the Jewish concentration camps established by the German Reich during World War II. There, they are punished, and often killed, in a variety of ways: whipping, strangulation, crucifixion, and evisceration. When Glandelinia invades another country called Calverinia and enslaves its young people, the victims form a children's army to fight their oppressors.

The first leader of the child slave rebellion is a young girl by the name of Annie Aronburg, a Joan of Arc figure who is assassinated early on. Adults, as well as youngsters, in the adjacent Christian kingdoms of Abbieannia and Angelinia aid the child rebels. In their attempt to free the child slaves, they declare all-out war upon Glandelinia. World War I, which was being waged at the time of Darger's writing, served as another template of sorts for the so-called Glandco-Abbieannian War, with Glandelinia standing in for Germany, Calverinia for Belgium, Angelinia for France and Abbieannia for England.

Human/Animal Hybrids

The comics medium has had a long history of populating its stories with anthropomorphized animals but Spiegelman's approach was closer to that of George Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*. Just as Orwell found it more effective to write about the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Stalinist era by portraying his characters as barnyard animals, Spiegelman found it more liberating to write about the Holocaust by giving his characters human bodies with the heads of mice (Jews), cats (Germans), pigs (Polish), frogs (French), dogs (Americans) and, in one curious case, a gypsy moth (as fortune-telling Romani).

The device produces a distancing effect that prohibits the reader from falling into what have by now become desensitized or clichéd responses to the all-too-familiar history of Jewish genocide. We approach it with fresh eyes — and our response is all the

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more eye-opening.

Discrepancies occur when a realistic German Shepherd, as opposed to the hybridized American "dog" character, appears in *Maus*. At another point, a realistic rat scurries through one of his cartoon panels, but Spiegelman takes these anomalies in stride by simply ignoring them — and perhaps hoping the reader will do the same. Sometimes Vladek or other Jews "disguise" themselves as Poles by wearing pig masks over their mouse faces.

Darger's transformation of the human figure into human/animal hybrids is very different and more selective. He invents a creature called Blengiglomenian Serpents — Blengins for short. Their purpose in the novel is to act as guardians of children, protectors against the heinous Glandelinians who want to exploit them. In the first volume of *Realms of the Unreal*, there is a very long chapter titled "What Are Blengiglomenian Serpents" that describes, in encyclopedic detail, the many species and varieties of Blengins.

Basically, they are flying dragon-like beings with gigantic butterfly wings. Some species have the heads of dragons, while others have the bodies of dragons and heads of cats, dogs, eagles or humans. The human-headed Blengins can talk. Certain species have a special organ hidden in their mouths that can pierce the skin of humans, endow them with supernatural powers and, depending upon the amount of elixir injected, even prolong their lives.

As Darger began illustrating the Blengins in his artwork, the human-headed species predominated. They gradually evolved, shed

their dragon-like bodies and scales, and became more humanoid. Over a period of some three or four decades, and long after he had finished writing his Realms saga, the Blengins, in his watercolor drawings, became beautiful young women. The only vestiges of their bestial past were colorfully patterned butterfly wings, long serpent tails, and a pair of ram's horns protruding from their heads.

An infamous aspect of figural depiction in Darger's artwork, that is not represented in the novel, is the curious profusion of prepubescent nude girls with penises. Space does not permit a full analysis of this controversial aspect of Darger's work, but it is worth mentioning that several persuasive theories have been trotted out over the years, from gender confusion (resulting from Darger's identification with girls as a result of his early sexual molestation) to homosexuality (not girls with penises, but boys in drag). Unfortunately, no hard evidence has ever been produced to verify these theories.

The Search for the Grail I

The heart and soul of Maus and Realms is the unending quest by both of the authors for a lost treasure or Holy Grail.

In Spiegelman's case, it is the missing diaries kept by his late mother, Anja. The original diaries were lost at some point during the war but she later rewrote them with the express purpose that Spiegelman should read them. Through much of Part I of Maus, Vladek tells Spiegelman that he somehow misplaced the diaries and cannot find them.

But the author is relentless in urging his father to locate the precious documents. Finally, Vladek confesses in broken English: "After Anja died, I had to make an order with everything. ... These papers had too many memories. So I burned them."

"You burned them? Christ, you save tons of worthless shit, and you ..."

"Yes, it's a shame. For years they were laying there and nobody even looked in."

"Did you ever read any of them? Can you remember what she wrote?"

"No, I looked in, but I don't remember ... only I know that she said, 'I wish my son, when he grows up, he will be interested by this.'"

"God damn you! You — you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing!"

"Ach. To your father you yell in this way? Even to your friends you should never yell this way! But I'm telling you, after the tragedy with mother, I was so depressed then, I didn't know if I'm coming or I'm going."

An infamous aspect of figural depiction in Darger's artwork, that is not represented in the novel, is the curious profusion of prepubescent nude girls with penises.

Spiegelman apologizes for his harsh words, but mutters as he walks away from his father's house, "... murderer." This is how Part I of Maus ends, with the realization that his mother's half of the story will never be told, that her memories are buried with her in the family plot and lost as effectively as his many other relatives who never survived the Holocaust.

Next to the loss of his mother, the most significant relative Spiegelman lost was his brother, Richieu. For safekeeping, Richieu had been sent to stay with Anja's older sister and her children, but then it was discovered that the ghetto was to be evacuated and its inhabitants sent to Auschwitz. Rather than see Richieu and her children die in the gas chambers, she poisoned herself and the three children.

By forcing his father to reveal the story of his journey through the Holocaust, Spiegelman relives it through his father's eyes. When he calls his father a "murderer," it is not only a condemnation of his father's destruction of his mother's memories but, perhaps unconsciously, a condemnation of himself as well.

In Part I of Maus, he reprints a 4-page autobiographical strip titled "Prisoner on

the Hell Planet, A Case History,” published some years earlier in an Underground comic book. In it, he relates how in 1968, when he was 20 years old, his mother’s suicide caused him deep despair because of his offhand rejection of her love just before she killed herself.

At the end of Maus Part II, Vladek finishes his tale. He and Anja became separated after they were marched out of Auschwitz-Birkenau to different camps that were eventually liberated. After many months, they finally found each other and reunited.

The Search for the Grail II

Darger was much younger when he lost his mother but, in many respects, both he and Spiegelman felt abandoned by their mothers and betrayed by their fathers. Although his father actually died when Darger was 15, he was technically an orphan when he was sent to live at the Catholic orphanage at age 8.

Vladek suffered a mental breakdown from which he never fully recovered when his wife died, so Spiegelman was in a sense emotionally orphaned before he reached 21. One might even argue that the damage suffered by Spiegelman’s mother and father was so great that, in many ways, they were psychologically absentee parents to their son throughout much of his childhood.

Although not transformed into a mouse/human hybrid like Spiegelman, Darger enters into the Realms as a fictitious version of himself in a manner not entirely unlike the author of Maus. He morphs from Henry Joseph Darger, a rather frail and diminutive hospital maintenance worker in real life, into a heroic Captain Henry Darger, the tall and turbaned leader of a group of spies called “The Gemini”.

In the first volume of the Realms, he is summoned from Chicago to the Abbieannia in order to help aid the seven Vivian girls in their struggle against the Godless Glandelinians. From then on, activities transpiring in his real life and those within his fictional Realms begin to merge, figuratively and literally.

The most significant event to occur in this regard is the loss of a photograph of

Darger was much younger when he lost his mother but, in many respects, both he and Spiegelman felt abandoned by their mothers and betrayed by their fathers.

a little girl that Darger had cut out from a newspaper. He planned to trace the photo — like so many other images he cut from newspapers, magazines coloring books and comics— for use as a portrait of Annie Aronburg, the slain child slave leader.

He claimed that a roommate stole the clipping when he was living at the hospital where he worked. Regardless of how the photo disappeared, Darger became so inexplicably distraught over its loss that it was as if he had lost his actual mother, father and sister all over again. A devout Catholic, he prayed incessantly for its return and became convinced that if God could perform miracles, it should be easy for Him to manifest the lost photo.

A picture of Annie Aronburg disappears in his Realms too, so his pleading for its return takes place as a parallel event in the novel as well. Darger dubbed it “the Aronburg mystery.” As the years go by, his anger toward God escalates and for a period of time he stops attending Mass. He threatens to increase the child slave carnage and creates a second General Henry Darger alter ego who joins the Glandelinian forces. Pledging that Glandelinia will win the war if the picture is not recovered, Darger writes two different endings: one describes the surrender of Glandelinia and a Christian victory; the other is more arbitrary, in which the Christians sustain terrific losses and the final outcome is unknown.

Driven by his rage against God for not producing the lost picture, Darger prolongs the writing of the Realms for almost 30 years. He finally relents around 1938 or ’39, presumably overwhelmed by guilt, and concludes his saga with a Christian victory. He then moves on to writing a less violent, less ambitious sequel of sorts: Further

Adventures of the Vivian Girls in Chicago. Meanwhile, his visual art departs more and more from the typical Realms scenarios with the gradual disappearance of the Vivian sisters and Glandelinian soldiers. His panoramic 10-to-11-foot-long compositions become highly mannered landscapes overpopulated by repetitious numbers of generic girls, Blengins and flowers.

To all outward appearances, neither Darger nor Spiegelman found the Grails that they were seeking. Still, in their quests to obtain the lost diary and missing picture, they created astonishing, groundbreaking works of art, unsurpassed in their individual fields. Maybe their visions of the Grail

was just a ruse, a carrot to lure them into inadvertently discovering something more important. It's possible that the true Grail was actually their ability to recreate and relive the perceived terrors of their youth and, in so doing, conquer their fears and heal themselves. Perhaps, in the end, they did indeed find their true heart's desire by becoming whole human beings. ■

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Hype Is Not Enough

David Lee



Dad's Halo Effect' by Ryan Gander

A year ago (2014) some public art, 'Dad's Halo Effect' by Ryan Gander, was bolted to the pavement in Beswick, a mile east of Manchester centre in an area formerly the blackest in the city but now home to a football stadium, a cleaned up canal and some ad hoc metal warehousing. 'Regeneration' is the long word repeated about these parts by suits who wouldn't be caught dead living anywhere near the place.

As is customary with works imposed on the rest of us by State Art's (the Art's Council. ed.) usual suspects, the price of £341,000 induces disbelief that so little materially and visually, could cost quite so much. It was paid for by the Corporation using £1.7 million refunded when this hapless locality's previous 'sculpture', Thomas Heatherwick's 'B of the Bang', was demolished due to a combination of design failure and cowboy fabrication. Conditions of European grants the council received in order to buy 'B of the Bang' in the first place determined that the money couldn't be spent for any other purpose (something more useful perhaps) than public art.

Beswick was a place familiar to me in the 1950s, though now unrecognisable. I loved the sounds, smells, bare flames and shunters of its poisonous industries, and on many weekends was forced to endure its world famous (round here at least) Beswick

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Prize Band. Since those times roads have been widened, street plans re-jigged and railways ripped up. Unused expanses of nowhere now gape where once big things were made and myriads were housed nip-and-tuck around infernal workshops. All the Victorian heavy industry, gasworks, colliery, BICC and assorted aero, loco and engineering works have gone. As with the rest of Britain, they make nothing here any longer, excepting flannel. The very place that moved an angry Engels to demand decency for all, now inspires only the municipal rhetoric that 'things' are on the way up – when clearly they are not.

I could stand alongside 'Dad's Halo Effect', look south along the route of the old 53 bus, and, if it hadn't been slum-cleared in 1969, have seen the house where I was born. Every surface soot black, no one would have then chosen to live here. It was a dangerous, noxious place where industries were labour intensive and most men enjoyed job security of a sort that can only be dreamed of by workers now. It was, nevertheless, also a place where people in full employment for life died poor, often when still young. My great grandfather was killed in the Beyer Peacock coach works just over Ashton Old Road.

Within two hundred yards of Gander's shiny sculpture a few 'Coronation Street' style houses of Victorian vintage still remain from that era. Adjacent, are other streets of more recent jerry-built construction which are already down-at-heel and visibly approaching premature obsolescence. Here live people whose lives, it is claimed, are to be given hope and "a source of inspiration" by a sculpture whose reason for existing most recipients of this council largesse couldn't begin to explain or understand. To

Reflective surfaces, whether they belong to corporate headquarters or sculptures by ephemerally fashionable operators, always signify inner emptiness. They look uncritically outwards because nothing substantial lives inside.

claim that such a work will cause optimism in those with no knowledge, interest or appreciation of conceptual art is the sort of arrogant insult only a self-absorbed, iron-clad establishment thoroughly indoctrinated by the likes of Serota could get away with.

Gander's work is said to represent three chess pieces in a checkmate position, but even those with a kid's knowledge of the game will realise this analogy is a desperate clawing for an explanation. They more resemble salt and pepper pots from a designer bistro in Brobdingnag.

The form it takes, they say, is to do with Gander's father fitting steering mechanisms to Bedford vans in a Merseyside car factory. This was apparently an important symbolic episode in the artist's childhood, though why anyone else should be interested in this quaint autobiography remains a mystery. This alleged connection, however, allowed the sculpture's commissioners to relate the work's inspiration to Beswick's past, claiming that it "*honours Manchester's industrial heritage*". Such tenuous associations become crucial justifications in pieces where, visually at least, there is no apparent relationship to the past or future of anywhere or anybody. As in other areas of State Art, far-fetched claims are repeated until those lectured are bludgeoned into accepting such nonsense as fact.

Formally the work is stillborn, dead from the neck up, and can't even boast the redeeming advantage of being admirable solely for its visual qualities. There is nothing about it in any way to suggest it is the work of "a world-renowned sculptor".

In State Art bold assertions are considered incontestable yet never survive close independent scrutiny.

Reflective surfaces, whether they belong to corporate headquarters or sculptures by ephemerally fashionable operators, always signify inner emptiness. They look uncritically outwards because nothing substantial lives inside. Reflective is the chosen finish of any ethos terrified of having its patination of respectability investigatively probed.

Considerable fanfare accompanied the sculpture's unveiling at which State Art's B-team of panjandruns obsequiously congratulated one another, no doubt in the hope that few would notice they were uttering outrageous falsehoods about something so obviously unexceptional. Some of these lies were risibly self-defeating, not least the one about the work being "*a globally admired sculpture*" even before anyone had actually seen it. This species of presumption is also common in State Art, where everything is a masterpiece even before it's hit the drawing board. I won't cite here all the repeated exaggerations of assembled councillors and cultural fixers at the unveiling. They were ridiculous then and sound even more ridiculous now, especially when the work has so quickly lost its lustre and dissolved into the soulless anonymity of daily life.

As chief State Art gauleiter in these bleak parts, Maria Balshaw, a former lecturer in 'cultural studies' at Northampton University and now director of Manchester City Art Gallery and the Whitworth, is chief cheerleader and apologist for this sort of crap. She declared the piece "a fantastic addition" and pronounced Gander not only the aforementioned "*artist of world renown*" but "*the most important sculptor working in Britain today*". If there is a visual basis for these preposterous assertions it is not apparent in 'Dad's Halo Effect'.

What everyone listening to such bilge needs to remember is that ex cathedra declamations like Balshaw's are not statements of fact but utterances of creed. These people are blind believers. For those sold on the religion that is State

Art, everything has to be superb beyond criticism. No room exists for even modified dissent, or doubt, or the whole edifice of faith upon which State Art is built collapses to the ground. The unquestioning commitment of the State Art congregation is the only thing keeping the structure upright. State Art's main function must always be to encourage seeing more than the uninspired reality that is presented to your eyes. It's job is, therefore, to confuse and bewilder the unversed in order that an unexceptional stunt of superfluous street furniture might be presented as though it were the modern equivalent of the Rondanini Pieta.

But look at it. Just look at this piece abandoned in no-mans-land by a pelican crossing on the dual-carriageway drag between Ashton Old Road and Rochdale

Road. It doesn't look as though it's by the best sculptor in Droylsden let alone Manchester, or even Britain. It doesn't even look like the work of a sculptor at all, for there's nothing discernibly sculptural about it.

Outside the protective blanket of the gallery and its support system of public cash, State Art is vulnerable for all to see. Abandoned there in the open air it is stark naked and meaningless, dangerously susceptible to objective truth, it's failings blatant.

So how come they get away with it so often?

David Lee trained as an art historian. He was the editor of *Art Review* and now runs *The Jackdaw*, a polemical art paper, which he founded in 2000. He has contributed to newspapers and magazines and has made popular television series for ITV and BBC2

The New Contemporary:

Sanctuary for the Edlis/Neeson Collection
The Art Institute of Chicago

Kate Hadley Toftness



Andy Warhol Liz3 1963

While record crowds make themselves at home in the Art Institute of Chicago's exhibition of Van Gogh's *Bedrooms*—

examining three versions of this iconic painting—other visitors looking for a more recent avant-garde may be drawn to the museum's reopened contemporary galleries, now billed as The New Contemporary.

The title refers to a total reinstallation of those galleries on the second floor of the Modern Wing. Highlighted in the central galleries is the donation of 44 major contemporary works by prominent Chicago collectors, Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson.. Unlike the Van Gogh exhibition which ends May 10, you will have 25 years to view the core of this new installation.

The Edlis/Neeson donation of \$400 million is unprecedented in value, though museum leadership is quick to place the donation within a long history of transformative gifts by patrons over the museum's 136-year history. Part of the exhibit's implicit message is the reliance of museums upon



Rauschenberg Untitled 1955

the extraordinary generosity of wealthy “guardians of our culture”, to quote artist Eric Fischl’s tribute to Edlis in the celebratory catalogue.

Patronage and education are tandem themes. A cute faux-Kodachrome slideshow of the exhibit on the museum’s webpage, complete with the whir of the projector fan and click of the slide carousel, sets up a mini-lecture titled “Contemporary Art 101”. When the slide show ends with the slogan, “Icons of the 21st Century,” I wondered if those icons were the artists or the collectors.

The Art Institute claims their newly expanded collection of contemporary works represents “the strongest of any encyclopedic art museum in the world.” If some artists’ names on the Edlis/Neeson roster are less familiar household brands, most visitors will instantly recognize Andy Warhol’s neon Elizabeth Taylor. She acts as the face of the collection on new finding aids throughout the museum.

Works by eminent New York artists are especially notable. Several bear an intertwined provenance. A Robert Rauschenberg painting in which a sock and a parachute are embedded, was previously



Sherman Untitled-92 1981

owned by Jasper Johns. The influence of this painting can be seen in Johns’ own work in a nearby gallery, where strings suspended across the canvas echo the dangling parachute strings.

The Warhols command an entire room. Exuding glamour, they set the stage for the pop culture references on parade across the Edlis/Neeson galleries. For the museum to acquire the Warhols alone, including two self-portraits, would be inconceivable by any other means.

For a collection seemingly compiled as a portfolio of infallible investments—Johns, Rauschenberg, Richter, Twombly—Edlis and Neeson have cultivated a narrative of Pop Art that is distinctly personal. Their catalogue interview talks about their learning process and acknowledges the limits of a collector’s attention. Edlis explains that their strategy limits their focus to 40 artists and 200 artworks at a time. If something new came in, something else went out. Edlis explains, “We would sell some to pay for the others.”

A Marilyn can be sold for a Jackie or a Liz. Or so Edlis claims in his account of selling works he collected early on to raise funds for the next conquest. By entrenching their new contemporary galleries around this mode of collecting, the Art Institute perpetuates the patriarchal halo bestowed on works by a system of pure exchange value.

Edlis’ frank definition of a collector’s parameters is admirable. However, a major concern within the reinstallation is the museum’s lack of attention to situating this new donation into a broader art historical frame. Explicit connections between the new works and the permanent collection are limited and unremarkable. The surrounding galleries are arrayed as vivid,



Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson

but disconnected, appendages.

It is dangerous to sequester this major donation apart from other important objects in the museum, as if to sanctify the Edlis/Neeson touch. As one of the greatest teaching collections in the world, the Art Institute risks aggrandizing a form of value creation left solely to the good taste and deep pockets of the collecting elite.

There are leanings in this collection that need to be addressed by the curators. The representation of women in particular (as subjects, as artists) reflects a troubling history of commodification and biased market valuation of art made about and by women. To travel across the Edlis/Neeson galleries--from Warhol's glamazons to Koon's absurd bather by way of Prince's and Sherman's Centerfolds--tells a complicated story of women, but it is too subtle in this context. Vulnerable, powerful, sexualized, innocent, violated, even grotesque--there is no getting around the focus on the selling of women's bodies.

In this setting, John Currin's *Stamford After Brunch* (2000) is an interesting addition. A wall label points out the three women depicted were Currin's gallerists at the time it was painted. As influential

art world mavens, the women stand in for the usual cigar-smoking boys club. Our eye is trained to judge such cartoonish cronies, but moral evaluation is roiled by the slumber party-like atmosphere of the scene. Perhaps not coincidentally, Warhol's diptych of Pat Hearn (1985), one of the most striking pictures in the installation, also depicts a gallery owner. These are women who wield power by way of selling art--a skill recognized as quite different from making art.

Cindy Sherman is the pivotal feminist on view. The decision to intersperse Richard Prince's work with Sherman's stages them as willing or unwilling bedfellows. Whereas Sherman serves as director, designer, makeup artist, model and photographer in her "archetypes", Prince is known as an appropriation artist. He crops and enlarges found images, as if to prove the simplicity of success available to the exploitation of stereotypes.

In the exhibit catalogue's forward, then museum director, Douglas Druick (since replaced by the curator of The New Contemporary, James Rondeau) reminds us of Bertha Palmer's famed donation of Impressionist art. Championing these artists, Druick notes, was, at the time, "radical, even controversial."

By contrast, the Edlis/Neeson artists have already etched their names into the canon. Perhaps this fact is a defining difference between the Pop Art and Impressionist movements, or perhaps it reveals more about contemporary art's role in advancing one's reputation for spending money on beautiful things. ■

Bio: Kate Hadley Toftness investigates collection-based programs at museums and alternative spaces with permanent archives. She holds a B.A. from Yale University and an M.A. from the University of Chicago.

A Photographer of Coincidence

Kenneth Josephson: An Exhibition and Book Review

Steve Harp



Stockholm, 1967.

Gelatin silver photograph. c. 1967 print. Signed, titled, dated and annotated '67-35-10-41' in pencil by artist on print verso.

In an earlier lifetime, I collected postcards, mostly reproductions of pictures I liked: favorite artworks or photographs by favorite photographers. Sometimes, they were simply images that drew me. One such image was “Acropolis, 1972” by Kenneth Josephson.

I clearly remember what drew me. This was a photograph and a photograph about photography. In the foreground, seemingly abandoned, was some type of vintage view camera, used I assume, to make professional site photographs for tourists. In the mid-ground, three sailors take photographs while, in the background, the ruins of the Acropolis.

It was a mix of incongruous and contradictory elements in a single image – eras, activities, objects, presence and absence. Even the tonalities – the darkness of the sailors’ uniforms and the abandoned camera, the lightness of the landscape itself – made the image seem collaged, constructed, rather than seen and “taken.”

“Acropolis, 1972” is included among

the nearly 250 images reproduced in the newly-published monograph, *The Light of Coincidence: The Photographs of Kenneth Josephson* (University of Texas Press). The book accompanies a retrospective of Josephson’s career on view at the Stephen Daiter Gallery in Chicago.

The volume itself is an imposing 11” x 12” object of more than 300 pages, a “coffee table” book. It’s certainly an extensive archive of Josephson’s career but, as a rhetorical vehicle, it’s less coherent. The title itself raises an immediate question: What, exactly, is coinciding? Given the usual terms of discussion of Josephson’s work, one assumes the coincidence is of photograph-as-view and photograph-as-idea.

Yet, the idea of coincidence is not explicitly explored in either of the accompanying texts, either in the forward by Gerry Badger or an introductory essay by MCA curator, Lynne Warren, which traces the parallels between Josephson’s career and the evolution of photography itself from documentary and Modernist practices to more postmodern or “conceptual” experimentation in the 1970s.

Warren’s piece is useful in providing these parallel overviews, and indeed hints at the coincidences in their corresponding arcs but that’s as close as the book gets to offering a conceptual framework through which to appreciate this conceptual work. Rather, the work is grouped into starkly-titled sections: “Self-Portrait,” “Family,” “Women,” “Cityscape,” “Landscape” and “Object.” The categories are both concrete and unclear, without the supporting curation that could make an irony of that combination of qualities. For example, the above mentioned “Acropolis, 1972”, is in the “Cityscape” section.

Josephson's work, of course, is considered as an exemplar of "conceptual" photography, photography more concerned with ideas than the aesthetics or visual pleasure of the image.

Perhaps I'm asking for something the book is not trying to give, some companion to my early appreciation of his images as captured moments of suggestive bricolage. As a collection or archive of Josephson's work, the monograph is a valuable reference volume containing beautifully reproduced images. As a narrative, conceptual argument or exploration of coincidence in Josephson's work, it's an opportunity unfulfilled.

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition (also titled *The Light of Coincidence*) is a more manageable 49 images, the majority from the 1950s and 1960s, though a few are as recent as the 1980s. The works are given a conventional photographic presentation: modestly sized prints (with few exceptions, the images are smaller than 8"x10") in white mats with uniform thin, black frames.

The sequencing of the images is open to greater interpretation here (the book's categories are thankfully omitted), and what emerges is a more provocative exploration of his work – its complexity and richness and engagement with the photographic process – simultaneously traditional in its concerns with the formal and material aspects of the medium and engaged in a playful questioning with the medium's claims to faithful representation.

Josephson's work, of course, is considered as an exemplar of "conceptual" photography, photography more concerned with ideas than the aesthetics or visual pleasure of the image. In them, the act of thinking assumes prominence over the act of looking.

Josephson has said, as quoted in the Warren essay, "The idea is most important. I 'make,' not take photographs." He employs



Front St., Rochester, NY, c. 1956-57
Gelatin silver photograph. c. 1956-57 print. Signed, titled and dated with printing annotations in pencil by artist on print verso

a range of interventions – photos within photos, insertion of frames within frames, collaged or combined images – in order to call attention to the artifice of the medium.

We also become aware of the ability of the photograph, through visual jokes or juxtapositions created through framing, to exploit the visual environment, such as in "Honolulu, 1968," in which a painted pavement arrow extends down the frame to impale the photographer's shadow at the bottom, or "Illinois, 1958," in which birds flying over a factory cast their shadows on the building façade. Or so we think. On closer viewing, we realize we're not seeing cast shadows but, instead, the darkness behind broken panes of glass. This is carefully constructed coincidence, the creation of serendipity right before our eyes.

I was struck, in considering Josephson's prints at the Daiter Gallery, by the emergence of the "something more" to which Josephson alludes, and which somehow gets lost, in the monograph. As he says, "The photograph describes very little, actually. Photography can only describe surfaces." Clearly, there is always something that arises in the spaces that open up between the aspects of any surface and this work invites that opening up not simply through coincidence but through its careful orchestration of disciplined form.

Coincidence by itself is unremarkable. But coincidence that is co-created by the artist

and the fates stands to offer us additional possibilities for discovery. In looking at his work, I'm struck by its photographic beauty but also by the evocation of that "something more" arising out of the "very little" to which he refers. Photography as not exactly documentary, not exactly formal, not exactly "conceptual" (in the conventional sense) but "new and strange", as photography should be, according to what Walter Benjamin wrote in "A Small History of Photography," photography that strives to fill the viewer with an "unruly desire to know."

How do you see an idea? We return to "Acropolis, 1972" - the sailors, the ruins, the vintage camera, the photographs within the photograph - and what we see are things coinciding with each other, ideas coinciding, colliding, with things. In short, we see an invitation to think. ■



New York State, 1970

Gelatin silver photograph. c. 1970 print. Signed, titled, dated and annotated '70-35-38-41' in pencil by artist on print verso.

Steve Harp is an Associate Professor and Media Art Area Director in the Department of Art, Media and Design at DePaul University.

An occasional selection from the Facebook conversations of Derek Guthrie

The article written by Jason Frombergh is more than useful article as it reports that Failure has become an Institutionalised topic in Chicago art departments. Could be a Post Modernist tactical retreat from the emerging disenchantment in the Art World with Museums and the Market. Ignoring the fact that Art academia has played the role of handmaiden, posing as a Mandarin to the needs of the major overlords. The guise of Mandarin adopts a disinterested interest in the brutality of political and cultural warfare, Both Politics and culture are vicious one with sword and the other with the pen inside a protected sanctuaries.

Samuel Beckett penned one of the most important plays in Modern Times. An existential drama "Waiting for Godot" a lesson in delusion, or a self delusion of hope..

In recent months museums, and the market are now receiving great moral

pressure. As cynicism is spreading into the grass roots of the US, hoping for political change and reform. Art Academia is the handmaiden of power in the UK and USA. This new teaching of failure is probably indicates a retreat from the cultural / political disenchantment that is becoming dangerous. Talk of revolution in the streets appears on the news. The occupy movement whether occupying Wall street or Museum, even at times art departments, is a growing tendency. Art Departments are in line for resentment as art degrees have been handed out or sold with the abundance of confetti at a wedding, selling shoddy goods for those who hope a degree in Art is a passport to status or a job.

I am not sure what the new teaching of failure really means, I suspect it is a liberal reaction to the emerging brutality in thought word and deed of Republican extreme ideology. Chicago is a strange place in that it is brutal and also historically liberal

democratic. It can not in the future have this both ways as the nation is becoming polarised and the papering over cracks in society is losing agreement, and is seen as not to be in place indefinitely. Sympathy to failure as the new political strategy is a repeat of the self delusion which like the emperors are hard to see. I talk of the Chicago Art world and by default other art cities.

Jason raises the question of Failure which is very important. The New Art Examiner founded by Jane Addams and myself in Oct 1973 with no money, and volunteer support from Community , eventually achieved national status and challenged the art publishing power of New York. It is now reeving after a disastrous entanglement with collectors, art educationalists and self serving people who attempted a take over. These events are the highlights of the history in progress but the more damaging and insidious was the failure of art academia in Chicago and elsewhere to even recognise the great contribution of the NAE. This would be seen by most as a state of failure. Failure depends on who is giving the prizes , and who does not get them and Why. That idea could be and should be the business of Art Criticism. Which the NAE with support from leading Art Critics and then emerging professional writers provide.

Franz Schultz the well loved and respected senior art writer in Chicago , also Hon Ph D from SAIC once wrote . The new art Examiner is the most important thing to have happened in Chicago in Half a Centenary. (My recollection ?) If so and as the NAE fulfilled all the nominal American requirements, of boots straps. Independent thinking and open door Policy, I have to ask the question to Jason and other interested parties Was the NAE a failure? According to professional and social behaviour it was, and is ignored by the power brokers in the Chicago Art World, including all art departments in Chicago, who now play the community game. Failure being the new and last chapter in using the community as an excuse to provide an occasion of progressive caring. I suggest patronisation and self serving narcissism wrapped inside

a barrage of PC policy. Is in full swing as the new form o of PC is essential in the Chicago tenure track and is culturally strangling the city by small degrees. Though the South side real estate developers have great expectations.

I make this response after years of frustration suffering social and professional social discrimination. I took heart in Resistance lesson well learnt from Chicago's most famous citizen. Jane Addams Now lost to most citizens memory, In conclusion I look forward to receiving any response so the dialogue can continue. I mean Dialogue and no PR as PR is dead language as it closes off the others view. PR used to be called propaganda before Goebbels got cracking

Comments

Bill Roseberry

<http://www.chicagomag.com/.../Why-Failure-Is-Being.../>

John Link

The willingness (and openness) to the possibility of making a bad painting, print, sculpture, etc. has always been a good studio attitude to have as one pursues the good stuff. But institutionalizing it? Seems like word-smithing to me. But it is harmless enough, as long as it does not become a fetish to be worshiped. It makes for an interesting lede.

Bill Roseberry

Failure was never a problem when I was in art school, it happened all the time.

Derek Guthrie

Word-smithing seems to me and essential element in post modernist art talk and also Duchamp's contribution after he transplanted to American soil..

Bill Willis

Derek said, "I am not sure what the new teaching of failure really means,"

Let me offer a clue Derek on teaching

about failure in art and life. I don't know if it's "new" as you say, but as someone who for over 35 years taught art (the process and act of creating, not the commodity thing or the art world game), I taught students to realize that success and failure are inseparable - the opposite side of the same coin. Failure, I taught, was essential to learning, and success was essential because it gave confidence to continue. Success and failure are the key ingredients of the only technique I taught: trial and error. From my syllabus: "The arrow that hits the bulls' eye is the result of a hundred misses." Buddhist saying.

Derek Guthrie

Bill I am aware of your teaching it is informed. I think this article is a pointer to a new Fashion sweeping through art departments. Fashion tells a story. I think students should also be taught how to read fashion it might help them to escape the cultural propaganda that is pumped into the system. With respect Bill I could offer you a few clues on art and life. No offence.

Bill Willis

While we're at it let me, not suggest it, but give you a clue on art and life . Things change. Change has/is happening in the academia, in art schools, in the art world and art business, in writing and art criticism. Change is inevitable. You often seem oblivious to this. Things are not as they were in the heydays of NAE, and they are not going to be. One can't live in the past without becoming delusional. No one can "make America Great again." It never was

John Link

Derek, delusional? A denier of change? The masthead of the NAE explains as part of it mission today, as it always has, consideration of the process by which culture is transmitted. That is almost purely about change. I suppose it would be a change in mission to elect to ignore it, but that would be a one-time change, one that denied what has been an ongoing process that is of great

relevance to how art functions. I would not want to see it go myself. As far as "change" in art per se goes, change is not all it is cracked up to be, when it is considered as part of art's essential matter. The image making in the French caves has never been bettered, for instance, nor do I expect it to be. Once a certain level of quality is achieved, the only possible "change" is to get worse. Not really a worthy goal, though one could make the argument that much of what is worshiped as change is in fact a decline from what those artists did - not to mention a decline from the equally successful masters who have followed them, generation after generation, persisting through the centuries. It is true, however, that what inspires the best art, and the practices used to make it, do change. Continuity is basically restricted to the level of satisfaction the best provides and thankfully that still works out - but it is, as it has always been, rare. Art is for everybody to have but not for everybody to make. Anything can be art but not everything is. It is still important to sort through all that and if doing that is what you are accusing Derek of, then you are correct, he is guilty enough.

Bill Willis

I go back to what I said, change is inevitable. That is not an opinion, it's life's condition. Academic institutions have their mission statements as well. I've yet to see an institution that followed their mission. How does one adapt to change? That was and is my question to Derek. What was possible in the 1970s has changed. For something useful and of the same spirit as what NAE was able to accomplish back then to happen today, is unlikely, if not impossible. My definition of delusional is when someone thinks something will happen that, in all likelihood, will not.

John Link

Imperfect following of a mission is still following it. Most academic institutions follow their missions, for whatever importance that might have. What is delusional is for us to think we are so

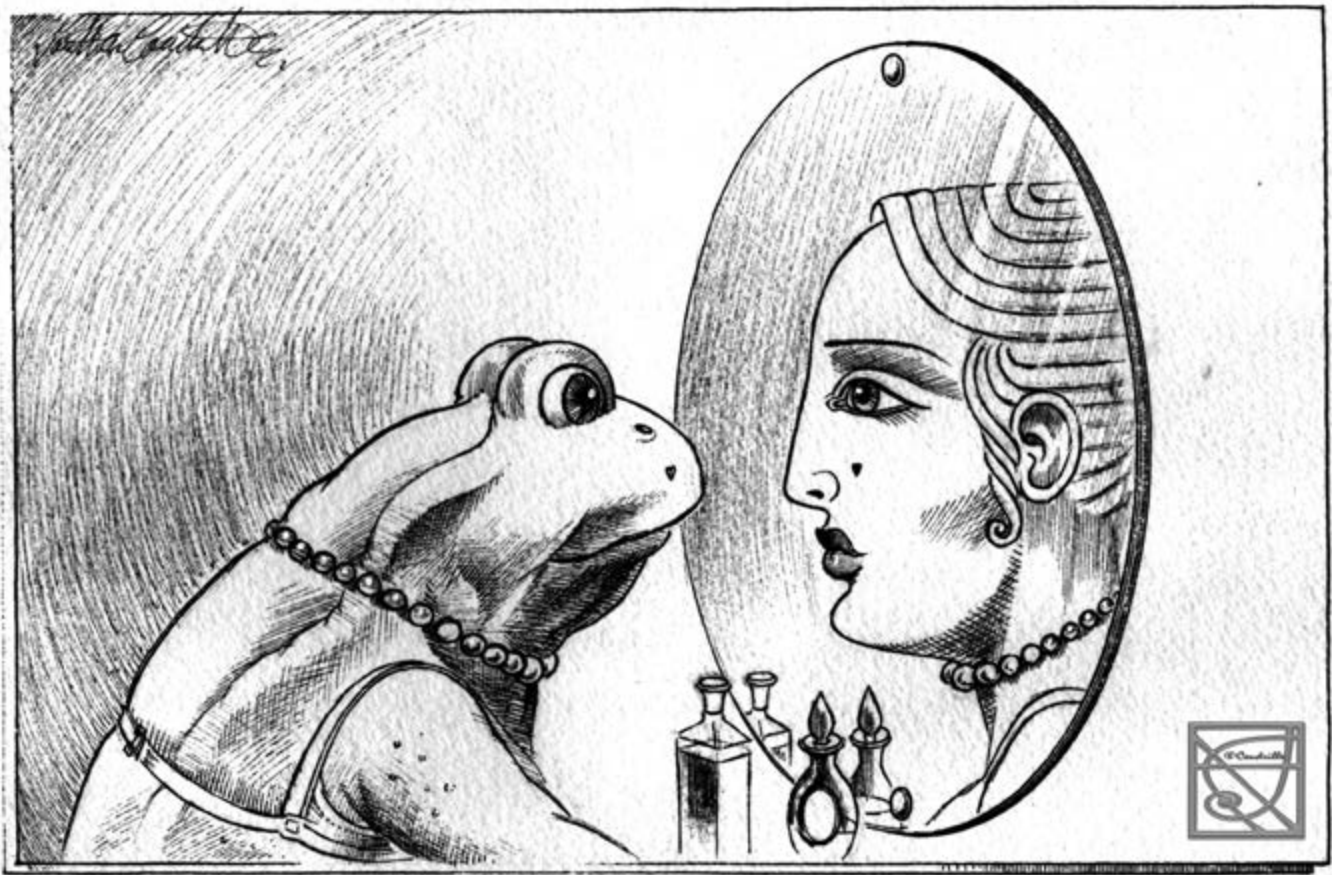
*The hardest thing for anyone living
in the fog of cultural development is
to get a hold of the present.*

different, so special, that no other time was or will be like our own. Art has been around for 20,000 years and it has not changed much. What was good then is still good today. That is why those caves are under such strict protection today. But, and I certainly grant you this, decadence is not just possible but tends to multiply like rabbits when it gets institutionalized, as it has under the great mantra of change as the explanation for why, when things get worse, they are to be accepted as better, if one becomes enlightened enough to accept the decline as an illustration of the supreme importance of our little blip in the timeline of the universe. That said, there may in fact

be more resistance to the NAE and what it stands for than even there was previously - we can't know that unless it is tried and the trial is not over yet. Plato was the first in Western Culture to examine resistance in depth, and he found that indeed it does ebb and flow. That is how some periods ultimately get to be regarded as golden and others become associated with barbarism. The hardest thing for anyone living in the fog of cultural development is to get a hold of the present. Yet, that is no excuse for giving up on the endeavor. Predicting that something good will not happen is one thing, acting as if that is the truth is another, often called cynicism. It is easy to fiddle with the future because it does not yet exist, and because it does not exist, there are no facts to interfere with whatever conclusion one is biased to favor ...■

see more at

<https://www.facebook.com/derekaguthrie>



'Eye of the Beholder'

*Reprinted from The Vulgar Frog (etc) by kind permission of
Jonathon Xavier Coudrille & Footsteps Press*

A Revealing Sensitivity in Portraits and Video.

Tina Varcoe



Much of Boo Beaumont's photographic work in *Metamorph*, at the Royal Cornwall Museum 22 February to 30 June 2016, seems to be about the interior essence of things.

Her series of black and white portraits of remarkable women – twelve of which are exhibited in The National Gallery – have an intimate feel about them. The tight framing and low-key lighting positions the viewer as a reasonably welcome intruder on a contemplative moment and genuinely manages to capture something of what she describes as her subjects' "inner spirit"

Beaumont's series of X-Ray images of flowers which are currently on display at the Royal Cornwall Museum add a surprising dimension to her preoccupation with the interior essence of things and still manage to maintain that sense of contemplation that comes from the portraits. The images are hung in balanced, symmetrical blocks of white on black and black on white that have the same harmonious effect as lines of effortlessly rhyming poetry, and her flowers are elegant and strangely compelling. The black on white 'inverts', printed on Hanhнемuhle etching paper, could be mistaken for delicate graphite drawings, but it is the luminous white-on-black images that really haunt the eye; the firework head of the chrysanthemum, the smoky petals

of the tulip, the diaphanous swirls of the zantedeschia and the translucent layers of the rose – oddly reminiscent of nineteenth-century experiments in photographing movement.

The exhibition also features, tucked away behind makeshift walls, a showing of Beaumont's film *Metamorph*. The film uses medical imaging technology to travel through the interior of a flower and is accompanied by Orlando Kimber's ambient soundtrack, the music from which bleeds out into the main room of the exhibition. Kimber's soundtrack washes away the shuffling and coughing sounds that usually accompany gallery visits and eases the brain into the kind of meditative, observant state where contemplation can flourish. The luminous images on the screen undulate sedately to their accompaniment as if we are witnessing a glorious space odyssey, but with a different soundtrack the slow roll and swirl of light could also suggest the horrific majesty of a mushroom cloud, and indeed death is present in the mind even as we look at Beaumont's representations of living things."

Beaumont's white on black X-rays are ghost-like, as if she has captured the departed souls of once-living flowers, and are more captivating and meaningful than any photograph of their gaudy outer surfaces could have been. Watching them swirl on screen, we are reminded that the smallest flower in essence is a microcosm of a universe that contains both great beauty and great darkness. Perhaps these are the things that the exhibition is telling us about the "inner spirit" of living things. ■

Tina is an escaped college lecturer turned jack-of-all-trades, currently scraping a living in an art shop trying to enthuse the young. In her spare time she photographs things, writes things, drinks copious amounts of tea and makes pictures with whatever materials she can get her hands on.

EXHIBITIONISM

THE ROLLING STONES

CARINTHIA WEST



*Carinthia and Kari Ann Jagger
Taken by Chris Jagger, Stones Private View*

As I write this, the world is waking up to the news of the singer and songwriter, Prince's untimely death at the age of 57.

Prince was at the top of his game, so if we are to look dispassionately at the statistics of early deaths amongst rock stars, he has bowed out at a time when it could be said that most of his brilliant work and performances are behind him.

It is of course, extremely tragic that he has died at an age where he could start to wind down and reflect on his past triumphs, and like David Bowie before him, perhaps collate an exhibition of his work, songwriting notes, MTV edits and stage clothes.

The Rolling Stones have done this brilliantly, in 'Exhibitionism' which opened on April 5th at the Saatchi Gallery in London and runs until September 4th and then will tour to major cities. For bands or solo artists who have reached the pinnacle of their careers and yet are seeing ever dwindling recorded music profits, touring has been one of the few antidotes to a declining bank balance, until, that is, the blockbuster exhibition came along. If Monet and Manet, or even Alexander McQueen can do it, why not Bowie or the Stones? After all, they

have a built-in audience of people still alive and kicking and yet ready to nostalgically look back to a 'golden age'. We will no doubt see a plethora of such shows in the future, as Pink Floyd and other major bands are all planning major touring exhibitions, but right now, for the price of a ticket you can get a terrific slice of the Stones.

I must confess, that I went to the private view, hanging out with the band (whom I have known for years) in their private Winnebagos or downing cocktails at the bar (swank swank - sorry!) so I went back the other day to see the show properly.

It is meticulously and beautifully curated, dating from their early days when they shared a flat in Edith Grove. The show starts with a recreation of these rooms, a fascinating glimpse of the '60's in itself (think stacks of dirty dishes, unmade beds, overflowing ashtrays and dubious underclothes).

Following in chronological order come the benchmark moments in the bands life told through video clips and photographs; the Andy Warhol 'Sticky Fingers' album cover, the filmed horrors of Altamont in 1969, the rare guitars in glass cases, stage props, film footage by Martin Scorsese, and interactive multimedia in the following nine rooms.

The highlights for me were the clothes (Michael Rainey and Michael Fish' frilled shirts, Moroccan velvets, embroidered jackets, Chelsea Antique Market flares, all of which I am old enough (young enough?) to have lived through and remember well. There was a recreation of the white 'dress' which Mick wore at the 1969 Hyde Park concert just after Brian Jones died. Mick read a poem by Shelley and released thousands of white butterflies. But actually seeing the reproduced costume brought a little tear to

Even royalty behaves badly around true stardom.

my eye.

Another highlight was the darkened room in which, armed with a pair of 3D glasses, the audience watches a video film of 'Satisfaction' which renders you (quite literally) stage struck at being so close to the action. It is as if Mick and Keith are jamming in your own front room and this recreation is every bit as exciting. I watched young kids who have never seen the Stones live, leave the room open mouthed in admiration is every bit as exciting.

And that may be the point of these exhibitions. Mick himself is openly non-nostalgic, a healthy sign in my view, as there is nothing more depressing than a Mrs Haversham reclusive rock star, (a part he once played to brilliant effect in Nic Roeg's film 'Performance') but as we lean more and more in to the snake pit of invasion of privacy with ever more interest and fascination in the lives of (to use that awful word) 'celebrities', making an exhibition of yourself is the obvious way to control any retrospective of your career.

As a photographer myself, (I named a recent exhibition of my vintage photographs 'Looking Back is the New Forward') I can recognize that it is a great way for a major artists to be making some money while not having to put themselves through yet another gruelling tour and endless meet and greet with sponsors and VIP's who feel entitled to a piece of you. I'm always amazed by this level of entitlement in otherwise reasonably intelligent and well behaved guests when around the Stones.

Recently, Mick invited me to one of their European concerts, and I was asked to look after a minor member of royalty and bring her backstage after the show. As she was being "papped" relentlessly by her own country's press, she asked to come back stage sooner, a roadie was sent out to get us. The young man led us through several barred gates, but then looked at me



Rolling Stones Archive



Rolling Stones Archive



Rolling Stones Archive

beseechingly “I was only asked to bring you and her” he said, pointing. I looked round and to my horror there were six others with us, two of them carrying large pieces of video equipment “This is my camera team” she said “we are making a documentary. I’ve got two of them already, but I want the other two”. By the ‘other two’ she meant Mick and Keith. I found myself literally jumping up and down in protective fury, (barely restraining myself from clubbing her over the head!) “Do you realize how privileged we are to go backstage five minutes before the concert starts when they are warming up their voices and guitars?! They are artists, not performing monkeys you know?”

Even royalty behaves badly around true stardom.

The Stones exhibition, like every blockbuster, ends at the gift shop, and on the day I visited some very young Japanese were snapping up mugs and t-shirts and jackets emblazoned with the lips logo. The cognoscenti of rock may sneer at this perceived “sell out”, but as we now live in a product placement world,

who can blame the Stones for stamping their logo on anything fans are prepared to pay for.

On the night of the private view as we left the Winnebago and Mick was swallowed up in an adoring crowd of fishnets and flashbulbs, I hung out with Mick’s talented brother, musician Chris Jagger, and his beautiful wife Kari-Ann, when - an hour later - we asked a wide eyed pretty young Asian usherette which room Mick was in intending to catch up with him. She looked confused as to who Chris was enquiring about, so Chris mentioned the colour of the jacket his brother was wearing, whereupon she brightened visibly and pointed to the shop. ‘Mick jacket in there’, she said ‘very good price. Buy now before gone’... ■

Carinthia West is a photographer and journalist. Muse magazine wrote “Carinthia was a free spirit, blissfully unaware that she was candidly recording icons and iconic moments of the times.” and has exhibited internationally her theatrical and rock’n’roll photographic archive

In the July issue of the New Art Examiner

We will have notice of further partnerships with the New Art Examiner.

Further news on the partnership with Plymouth College of Art.

Articles: Post-Modernism and pessimism in the arts by Roland Gurney, how to think like an artist by Ken Turner, the modern dilemma of the Penwith Society by Chris Smith, Speakeasy by the US artist, now resident in the UK, Raymond Salvatore Harmon, Why do we need Modernism? by Charles Thomson, a letter from Phil Booth explaining how the Newlyn Society of Artists were disposed of from their historic home by the trustees of the Newlyn Orion Gallery, extracts from The Jackdaw, reviews and much more....

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DEREK GUTHRIE considers The Penwith Society founding principles.

DAVID LEE wonders at a supposed masterpiece of modern sculpture

We review:

Kenneth Josephson, The Edlis/Neeson Collection Art Institute, the Rolling Stones at the Saatchi Gallery and Boo Beaumont at the Royal Cornwall Museum.