Helvetica 11

Interviews, Reviews, & Essays



Contents

Pencil Points, Light Bulbs, & a Slice of Time Passing By

by Guy Loraine

Time passes by at a constant rate no matter how fast or slow we live our lives, and there is no better measurement of our lives than time. We use it as a measure to determine a multitude of things, but most commonly we use it to mark the beginning or ending of mundane events in our lives that slip by with little notice. The alarm clock rings; we turn it off and wake up. The washing machine spins to a stop and we move our clothes to the dryer. Five o'clock arrives and we go home from work. We live through these seamless moments driven by habit and an unconscious certitude. For this very fact we limit ourselves to the past and future, rarely relying on the present to define our state of being or our relationship to the world around us.

In some fashion we're always confronted with time bound events or objects in our daily lives. The memorable ones aren't marked by some alarm clock. They arrive when we least expect them, pulling us out of our rote lives. We live through extended durations of time only to have our consciousness aroused by moment-to-moment slices of pleasure or disappointment. These time bound events necessitate a certain amount of attentiveness by the artist. A pencil is a perfect example of an object that reveals the passing of time. As a drawing is created, graphite is deposited on the surface of paper little by little until the page is filled with marks. But it's the very act of drawing with a pencil that brings both pleasure and disappointment.

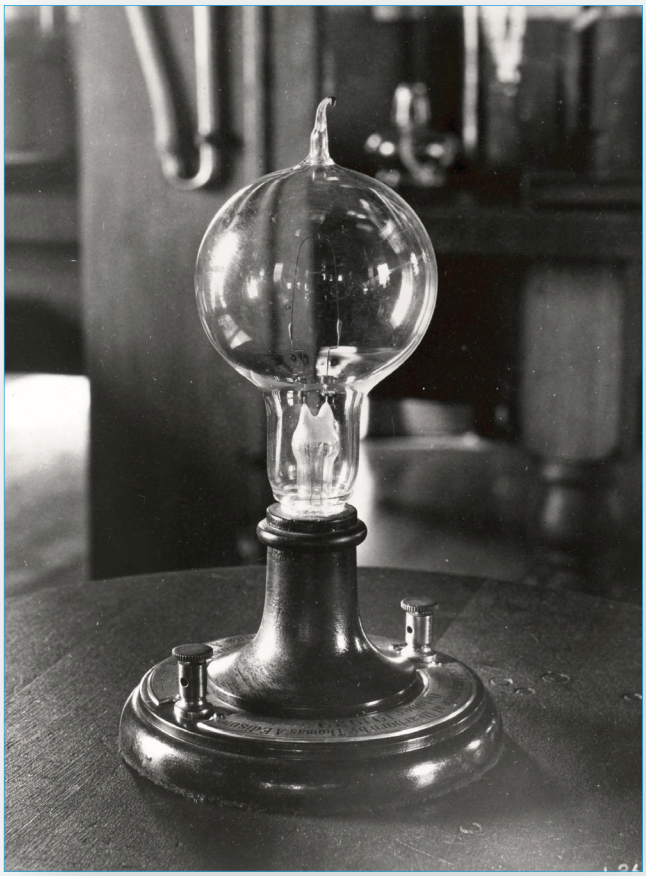
One of my most pleasurable events as an artist is starting a drawing with a Ticonderoga No.2 that is sharpened to nice fine point. One has the satisfaction of knowing that a crisp black line will follow the tip of the pencil as it slides across the surface of the paper. It's a sensation that only lasts for a few short minutes. As the pencil moves farther across the paper, its tip begins to wear down. Over the course of the drawing, an artist is continually forced to stop and re-sharpen the pencil. In some sense the artist's awareness of the need to stop and sharpen the tip of the pencil shows that he or she is conscious of the pencil just as much as of the drawing itself.

This recognition is something my high school students just don't have. I'm always dumfounded at the tips of their pencils. To call them a rounded little nub would be an understatement. A nub would imply that there is an identifiable amount of graphite extending from the end of the pencil. Some of these pencils don't even look like they have a tip. It's just a flat end burnished smooth from the contact with the paper. It boggles my mind how they can overlook such a sorry state of affairs. I always ask them, "How can you draw with that pencil?" and they just stare back at me with clueless looks on their faces. I just shake my head in disbelief and send them to the pencil sharpener with the suggestion that maybe they should be aware of how sharp the pencil is and the quality of mark that it makes as it becomes duller.

In essence it's an awareness of the process and the impact of time. My own working process involves a certain amount of time that most people

Greenfield's photos Girl Culture @ Arthur Ross Gallery UPenn. Saccharin sweet colors hide girls' struggle living up to pop culture demands.

Tweet by Guy Loraine



Thomas Edison light bulb

would consider obsessive. I like to call it "focused discipline." Over a three-month period I mapped, numbered and collected every acorn cap from an oak tree. From time to time, I became lost in the work and forgot about my surroundings and events taking place. It that brief moment of loosing myself in the work I would glance up to find white tailed deer foraging for acorns less than 50 yards away. It was always about the same time, right at dusk when the shadows begin to meld into the darkness of night. I'd stop and see them and they would stop to look at me. In that instant of mutual awareness I took great pleasure in knowing that somehow we were both involved in some sort of shared endeavor or task. We would have that moment of acknowledgement and then go back to our work, with me collecting and them grazing. Every time I looked up to see if the deer were still there, they were gone. If I intentionally looked for them they were never there. It was the realization that in order to see the deer I couldn't look for them, which gave me pleasure in the experience.

British artist Katie Paterson takes advantage of the relationship between pleasure and disappointment in something as simple as a light bulb. In her work Light bulb to Simulate Moonlight, Patterson collaborated with the lighting company OSRAM to create a light bulb that mimics the color of light reflected from the moon. Paterson produced a set of 289 bulbs with each bulb designed to last 2000 hours. One set of bulbs is the amount need to supply the average person for his or her life-span. In a darkened room Paterson suspends a single bulb waist high above the floor with its cool blue light illuminating the room. Placed in the same room are 288 identical bulbs on a rack, to be used in succession until the last bulb is used and burns out.

We've each experienced the frustration of a light bulb going out at an inopportune time. The irony is that it is always unexpected. We know they don't last forever, but we take them for granted anyway because they are always there. Paterson uses this to her advantage to emphasize the romantic pleasures we derive from the moon's glow. But the disappointment is revealed in the melancholy logic that at some point in time it will all come to and end no matter how much we try to avoid it.

Sol LeWitt inferred in his writing that conceptual art is intended to engage the mind rather than emotions. It could be said, though, that the objective nature of time can only truly be experienced or understood through the subjective nature of one's perception of it passing and our experiences that go along with it. The active mind is what conjures emotions forgotten or muted by

time. In that respect Le Witt may have been wrong to say in his essay "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" that, "...conceptual art is purposeless." The absence of a purpose invalidates the effort an artist puts into his or her work. That purpose, and the value that it implies, is never fully realized in the short term but requires a durational experience for the artist. It is at the end of the experience that the artist will fully realize the totality of the value in relationship to time. The viewer only gets a moment. ■

Dan Reidy

by Robert Libby

"I think it's really really clear to me why people build sandcastles. Only to watch them fall."

Dan Reidy has been my painting mentor for the past year. Joe Girandola introduced him to me last summer as a multi-disciplinary artist who was available for individual critiques. After our first meeting, I sat for a few minutes alone in my studio, collecting the notes I had scribbled down feverishly and thinking of new ideas. As a second year graduate student, I often experienced critiques that made me shut down. I would sit and rethink strategies, question my motives. But there were a few, and this was one of them, that made me actively engage myself right away. Reidy walked out of my studio and I started working. Late that semester, I approached Girandola about having Reidy as a mentor, Reidy following close behind us. Realizing that Reidy and I would be the perfect match, Reidy responded with, "Should we hug?"

Half of Bob Libby w/ the artist, Photo by Dan Reidy

This has been the case over the past year as Reidy has visited me several times in my home studio over the fall and spring. We've had so many meetings, discussion, critiques, that I found it kind of funny that I didn't know much about him, but he knew so much about me. This interview was a chance for me to find out a few things about him, and ultimately, a few things for me to think about for myself as well.

Now back for his second year at the University of the Arts, he is teaching Drawing I, an experimental and conceptual class that suits him perfectly. He was able to sit down with me for twenty-five minutes in what I later learned was his first interview ever.

Dan Reidy: It doesn't, um, are you sure it's picking you up?

Robert Libby: Yeah, it is.

DR: OK.

RL: You've worked with a whole bunch of different media, but mostly in painting, right?

DR: Yes I would say that's true.

RL: What is it about a painting that you think best states what you're trying to say?

DR: It doesn't, necessarily, and often it is the inappropriate material to use. I think that mostly I've used paint because I've always kept a painting studio. So I try to be responsible enough to use the appropriate mode or the appropriate material to convey the idea. Sometimes I'll be working with an idea that will be easily be answered in painting and because I keep a painting studio, it's the fast solution. I'll have a show or I'll have a year where I'm getting some attention and then I go right back into being a very very unsuccessful nobody of a painter and the solitude of a painting studio suits that. Like you can be a loser and keep a painting studio and not do anything with those paintings. But if I have an idea, I don't think I'm bound to using paint if it's not appropriate for the idea. I don't try to push the idea through painting necessarily. I don't know if that answered your question.

RL: Yeah that's good.

DR: Don't write that I was a loser.

(Both laugh)

RL: There's often humor or play in your work, so do you keep humor and fun present in your practice?

DR: I try to. You know it's funny, because sometimes the paintings have humor just by the choice of subject matter, and that's been something that people have always said. Often my paintings are tied to description and describing this thing, so the choices I make before the act of painting might come from a place of humor or playfulness or something, but the act of actually doing painting is kind of a boring, solitary thing that really isn't about humor or play or anything. A lot of the techniques I use are old boring techniques. Then I have this act of kind of marring the surfaces or destroying paintings or erasing things that has an immediacy that I would say is a little bit more fun, but I think that the playing inventiveness of the studio behavior is more present in my sculptural work and in my video and sound. Yeah, I think that the humor is more apparent in the other modes that I use that I wouldn't define as painting.

RL: Do you think then that painting is more serious?

DR: Painting is not fun. (Both laugh) Not funny. Yeah, I think painting is a more serious behavior. Incorporating description and trying to pictorially illustrate something doesn't lend itself to humor. That's not to say that what you choose to paint can't be playful and the way that you compose can't be playful. But when my work is in that realm where it's more descriptive, that is a slower process that doesn't lend itself to humor in the act of doing it. You know, the beforehand and after those traditional modes of painting, after that's done, sometimes there's playful things that happen to the paintings. In their amendments. The amendments can be fun.

I think that it's really really clear to me why people build sandcastles. Only to watch them fall. Or a house of cards. So you do this meditative thing for that act of watching them fall. And that amendment aspect of my painting, I get that out of it. I get that cathartic release of the house of cards falling. But it's better when it's a really good house of cards.

RL: The more it has to fall?

DR: Yeah.

RL: Do you work in series often? A series of paintings of one subject?

DR: Yeah, but I don't know if I'd say often. I have lately got stuck in an idea. I don't think that I approach a painting saying this is going to be my

Stereotypes illustrated and challenged in Lauren Greefield's Girl Culture with large photographic work of females from multiple backgrounds.

Tweet by Robert Libbby

such and such series. I think I approach a painting and I don't get it all done. I'm not done with the idea. I did a series of painting my two dogs. I took Polaroids of the dogs and painted the dogs. It was the dumbest idea ever. And I just ran through these. I just fully embraced the fact that this is a stupid idea of just painting my dogs. But because everything else was off the table, out of the scenario, they were more about painting than they were certainly about the sentimental act of immortalizing my dogs. But I feel like they were really really a great thing. But it ran its course. And I do a terrible painting where I feel like I'm recognizing the painting before it's done. But I definitely know when a series is done. It ran its course. I had no need to paint another dog. In hindsight, from that series, there are a ridiculously stupid amount, in my opinion, of dog paintings. I did 20 paintings in two months. There are four that are worthwhile and are still around. I know I'm not hitting a home run every time. But that's what closets are for. Unstretch the thing.

RL: A lot of times, if you're not working on series, it seems like there is an idea that you want to play with. Whether it was the portrait you did of me and Lindsey (Baker) where you were playing with that line. Or the one of your grandmother? The one that was turned to the side? With the big nose?

DR: Those were in the same series.

RL: Ok. Usually it seems like there is an aspect or playful idea that is in one of them, like the line or..

DR: The pink nose

RL: Yes. It seems like you just have one thing that you want to play with and that's what the painting is going to be about.

DR: That thing is often, well it's different for a lot of things. That series was for this show that I knew I was going to have a year in advance. And I had an idea of these weird things that didn't quite fit together that started with a high school photograph of my brother. So something about this portrait of a high school kid that has something to do with education but it also has something to do with this person's certain rite of passage. And I don't know if I have the fortune or the misfortune of being around college freshmen. So it's the summer after they had their senior picture taken. And these are people that are at this moment of flux in their life that is so crazy scary to witness. And I still want to be cool enough to recall my own experiences there. So education, and this crazy moment of flux, and identity, and the photograph as proxy for memory.

Photo by Dan Reidy

Like, go here to think about this person on their best day. So I collected these. And there's always a level of self-portrait that's in my work where there's this horrible scenario about my brother going to prison. And you just can't make paintings about your mother dying of cirrhosis of the liver and your brother going to prison because you don't give a fuck about that. And you shouldn't have to give a fuck about my stuff. I find it helpful for me to encrypt this day-to-day baggage that you would have into a painting. And maybe it's all for naught. So that family crap was in there as well. So the line down you and Lindsey, that was a stupid joke about a half completed masters degree, but it's also this thing about unfinished-ness and it's also about this barrier between people. I can't point to a direct meaning from any particular painting but I know that there is this reoccurring theme in those portraits about the invisible garbage between people. And that would be like this is a black and white photo that's not black and white, but it's a color depiction of a fading black and white photo. Then approximated flesh Caucasian nose color just plopped on it, like somebody threw this idea of color in there. Or one of those Photoshop things, filter, where you can make the nose be color correct. You know, just an awkward place. So those portraits were all part of, I suppose loosely part of a series, thematically more than pictorially.

RL: What happens when you get frustrated with a painting? How do you get over it? Or do you get over it?

DR: I um... These are really great questions because it's up to me to decide what you mean by "frustrated." My knee-jerk reaction is every single painting frustrates me. (Both laugh) And I don't trust a painting that felt easy. I will say that most of those dog paintings don't exist anymore. And those "portrait from photograph" paintings, a lot of them didn't make it to their conclusion. I'll rip the thing off the wall sometimes. I'll cut part of the painting out and then just glue raw canvas to the back. So this is like that amendment thing. This is just an awkward passage that is frustrating me pictorially. There's no real rubric that "this is right and this is wrong" in a painting so sometimes I really like a facet in a painting that's pictorially WRONG, because it's like this idea of speed or something. "Oh look how gross and dumpy that hand is next to this other hand that seems more elegantly done," or something for instance. So sometimes I like those frustrating, dumpy, wrong things. And sometimes I purposefully keep them frustrating. Other times I don't have the courage, will, whatever you want to say to let it continue to exist. I don't know if that answered your question.

RL: That was good! You mentioned students. Is working with students or young artists something that you find fulfilling?

DR: Yeah, I consider teaching part of my drawing behavior. I like to push at the parameters of what I call drawing. And what I call drawing is everything that feeds my studio behavior. Especially Drawing I. Some of the crap you that you teach in Drawing I is reiterating these core principles that are hundreds of years old. It's like conjugation, like Spanish I, where you begin to learn the structure of a language. So I think I call that drawing because I have to reiterate these core principles every semester. So twice a year I have to say stuff about observational drawing. I'll read a book, and I read a couple books over and over and over and over and it's always a different book. So when I say something about... and by now, if you teach several semesters of Drawing I, the thing for the most part teaches itself. You have to be fully present and excited about what they're doing and so on to be a "good" teacher I suppose, but I kind of approach it in a selfish way where it helps my studio behavior. And coming down here and working with you guys is great because you're at the totally opposite end of the spectrum as the Drawing I kids. The

beginning and the end of the academic art career. But if I won the lottery I would quit teaching.

RL: That's interesting. I'd probably do the same. (Both laugh)

DR: I don't know if that's true. I think it is true. I think I would quit teaching if I was independently wealthy. But I do really like to engage in ideas and I like coming into a studio raw where I never saw this person before, never saw their work before, and we have to, in a half an hour, figure out how to talk to each other about this incredibly complex thing. And it's just a really fun puzzle. So that gets me excited sometimes. So where I am so lazy that I would quit my job if I won the lottery, if you gotta have a job, it's a good one to have. I don't know what I'd do with myself if I won the lottery, like if I'd go to an island or something.

A lot of the times, I ask myself if it was the end of the world, if it was the last day on earth, would I go to my studio? I don't know if I would or not. I think I would. I think I'd go to my studio if it was the last day on earth.

Because I wouldn't want to drive to the beach. I wouldn't want to be caught in traffic. And I live right above my studio, and I like it down there. I wouldn't want to be on an airplane. Like maybe if you were in Fiji, I wouldn't want to fly back to my studio.

(long pause)

Do you have any more questions?

RL: No, that's a good place to end. (both laugh) ■

Interview with Robyn Farrell

by Veronica Bruce

Artist Veronica Bruce spoke with Chicago based assistant gallery director, curator and art writer Robyn Farrell. Robyn Farrell works for Donald Young Gallery, Jettison Quarterly, and ArtSlant. Robyn responded to questions regarding her experience and expertise in the contemporary art world in her multiple roles in an interview by email correspondence.

Veronica Bruce: Describe your role(s) in the contemporary art world. (Writer, curator, assistant gallery director)

Robyn Farrell: I play a few roles in the "contemporary art world." My position as Assistant Director at the Donald Young Gallery is a full time position that blends aspects of exhibition and arts administration. This role is the most comprehensive as I assist in the day-to-day responsibilities of running a gallery and small business, while having the unique opportunity to work with artists and the director to plan exhibitions and art fair booths. I feel lucky to have the opportunity to work on the "business" side of the art world, which compliments my other roles as an art writer and independent curator. As a writer, I try to seek out new and exciting things going on in Chicago. My work in the commercial sphere pairs well with my independent interests outside of the gallery. I take a more "educational" approach to my writings and less of a critique, because I see my job as a writer to relay what's up in the city and encourage readers to see it, rather than take a critical eye or harsh view on things I don't find interesting or exciting. As a curator, I try to introduce emerging work that holds a historical thread, then attempt to bridge concepts and medium informed by similar modes and thought.

VB: Which of these roles are you most passionate about?

RF: I would say I most passionate about writing and curating because I have more freedom to choose my focus and play a more creative role in executing each project. I am however, passionate in most of responsibilities at the gallery, but take exceptional interest in working with the gallery's artists and assisting them to realize important work.

VB: Where would you like to see yourself in 5 years?

RF: In five years I would like to be writing and curating, preferably in a non-profit organization or my own project space. Given the immense competition for such positions, I would be happy to be the director of a contemporary art gallery or private collection, and still pursue independent projects. There is also a part of me that wants a more academic future following my masters in a PhD that would allow me to teach, research, write and curate.

VB: What are your long-term goals in terms of art writing?

RF: I would like to expand my outlets for writing beyond Chicago into larger publications, essays and critical monographs, acting as a Chicago correspondent for a national or international publication or online magazine.

VB: How do you chose or are told which shows you get to review for ArtSlant Chicago (online resource for art reviews)?

RF: My writing for ArtSlant is a collaborative process with my editor, Abraham Ritchie. A majority of the pieces are suggested by staff writers, with his final review. In general, I try to cover emerging or alternative spaces and overlooked shows at institutions. I've also focused heavily on photography, film and Chicago-related exhibitions. Working at Donald Young rarely proves a conflict, but given my focus on institutional and alternative work, it never really becomes a problem.

VB: What are the technical limitations to your reviews (length, time to write after viewing show etc.)?

RF: The biggest challenge of covering alternative spaces and emerging artists is lack of response or organization by younger galleries or artist run collaboratives. A lot of times information isn't available about the work or artists and it is difficult to get images in time for deadlines.

VB: Do you strive to write "neutral" reviews that are more descriptive and information based or do you try to make your opinion evident?

RF: I touched on this a bit before in saying that I write in a more "educational" or informative" style. I would not describe it as neutral because I do inject my opinion, it's just that I usually choose to cover artists and work that I find inspiring or interesting and often avoid things that do not cause a similar effect...using a "silence speaks" method of criticism.

VB: Are you told to make the writing neutral or opinionated by your editor?

RF: My editor really doesn't dictate my writing style. Part of his job is to help me better articulate a point if I am having trouble, or applaud a point well expressed and encourage that kind of criticism or journalism for future pieces.

VB: Who is your favorite art writer/critic today?

RF: hmm...may have to get back to you on that one...there are too many!

VB: I see the act of curating as a form of art making in it's own right. Do you agree? Do you see yourself as an artist with your curatorial work?

RF: I agree, although I have never considered myself an artist. I think so many years of forced studio art as part of BFA curriculum forced me to dis-align myself completely with that term. However, as I curate more, I do see it as a certain art form, as I do with writing. I think I will become comfortable with that idea as I do more independent work, which is a departure from the "commercial" curating I have

done for years. For now, I feel more like a creative organizer, coming up with ideas, harnessing them and bringing visual examples out to the public.

VB: If so, what type of work would you like to do?

RF: I would like to continue in the trajectory of peregrine exhibitions that offer concept and context with historical and contemporary works of art. I am lucky that the art community in Chicago allows this type of independent work, it's just a matter of finding the free time to organize and open a show.

VB: Yes, artist run spaces and non-profit spaces such as Julius Caesar, threewalls, Peregrine Program, the Suburban, Roots and Culture and Alderman Exhibitions are all great examples of Chicago venues which allow for challenging comtemporary work by emerging artists and curators.

Do you have any curators whose work you really admire?

RF: Locally, I think Michael Darling is doing an amazing job at the MCA and Matthew Witkovsky, head of the Photography Department at the Art Institute. Internationally, I am interested in Lynne Cooke, curator at large for the Dia Art Foundation in New York, and chief curator at the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. I also like Jens Hoffmann, director of the CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco and Thomas Beard, founder and director of Light Industry.

VB: What do you find the most challenging about being an emerging curator?

RF: I think I pretty much answered this but could add constraints on funding and space to the lack of time to produce exhibitions that would be worth it.

VB: What are some of the roadblocks you deal with as you are building a portfolio of shows?

RF: I would say all of the above.

VB: Do you find that you have made connections with people in your commercial gallery experience that have or will help your art writing or curatorial experience?

RF: Yes, absolutely. Working at the caliber of a gallery that is Donald Young, I have made so many connections with artists, writers and curators. It's a happy incestuous environment.

VB: Do you have any input with the curating of shows at Donald Young Gallery? Does your role as curator filter into your role as assitant director?

RF: Not really. Donald Young and the director of the gallery pretty much handle the program. I am asked for my take from time to time and my opinion is appreciated, but I haven't been here long enough to have that much of hands on role.

VB: Name your top two favorite galleries in the US and your favorite current artist at the moment.

RF: Murray Guy in NYC and Whitechapel in London I don't have favorite artists, but I like what Moyra Davey and Gillian Wearing are doing right now in regards to their interdisciplinary nature to photography and film. ■

Connie Baker

by Lindsay Baker

I've used my mother in several projects over the years. I've impersonated her and had friends impersonate her. I've recorded her singing and reading poems, and have applied mustaches to pictures of her. She did not go to college and she still lives in the same town she was born in,

Lauren Greenfield's Girl Culture and Fashion Show tackles female culture image issue with traditional approach.UtubeDoveEvolutionCommericial

Tweet by Veronica Bruce

Altoona, Pennsylvania. I hate it there.

A few years ago, she started painting pictures on the kitchen floor. She painted our dead dog, Sassy, a sunflower, a fake rug under the sink, and a giant pumpkin with my old roommates and me sliding down the side. She painted her cat, Leo, who is named after both of my grandfathers. She painted some hummingbirds because she has five hummingbird feeders and names for every bird that stops by for a sip. She painted my sister Stephanie and me with our hair swirling around each other's faces. I find that one especially interesting because she painted me with dreadlocks, years after I had them shaved off. She said that's how she thinks of me, with some damn dreadlocks. She talks a lot about the floor paintings in this interview that at first was just supposed to be about how I use her in so many projects.

Photo by Lindsey Baker

Lindsey Baker: What's your favorite project that I've used you in?

Connie Baker: How far back are we saying?

LB: Any one you've liked, it doesn't matter.

CB: In high school?

LB: I didn't really use you in any in high school. You helped me with some, but I didn't use you.

CB: Oh! This pertains to me, Elvis, and Jim Morrison.

LB: I also used you in the Lindsey Baker Disease, and the emails.

CB: Also the one where everybody was me.

LB: Yeah, that one too. Is that one you like? You liked when I had other people do it not just me?

CB: Yeah, well I liked it when there was different people and you doing it. Ok, go on, next question.

LB: No, why did you like that one the best?

CB: I liked it because you were in your way honoring me. I didn't feel like you were mocking me at all. To me, it feels like something special for me to see you think of me and to have other people to be your mother or to try to be Connie for a little while with a wig on and maybe something I had said to you in the past. So that will be something that you'll always remember and think of something like that. 'Cause I remember coming to visit you in Philadelphia and we were sitting out back and you were with a girlfriend, the three of us sitting out back and I started to cry a little bit and you said what's wrong and I said my greatest fear is (I think so we were just talking about what our greatest fears were in life and I said my greatest fear) for you to forget me and your girlfriend said how could she do that when she talks about you all the time. That was very nice. It meant that it really touched me. Are we taping?

LB: We are taping.

CB: All right, number two?

LB: Why do you always say that I'll be famous?

CB: Well because I think you have a desire inside you that you want to be remembered in a different way. You've always been different in your ideas in showing yourself through your artwork and through your clothes, the clothes you created when you used to make your dresses (that by the way are everywhere now and very expensive) that you created yourself and sewed on your little sewing machine. So I think that growing and creating and growing rather as you get older and the more education you get that you want to be remembered in a very different and special way.

LB: Well I asked you that question because I wondered if you wanted me to be famous because when you were younger you wanted to be famous. I remember you told me you wanted to be a singer.

CB: Well, that was just a little dream; everybody has different dreams along the way. I think that my real dream was to be a fashion designer. So it had to do with art but it was one of those things where that being a twin and my father had his own private barbershop that wasn't making a lot of money so Carol and I didn't even ask to go to college. And although she has through the years continued her education in art where as I'm just doing it as a hobby. My real dream would have been to be a famous fashion designer.

LB: The way you treat it is more interesting than the way she treats it because she just uses the things that people expect an artist like her to use, but you painted the floor for example. You don't have the same opportunities that she does. It let's you try different things.

CB: Well, it's kind of like using what you have with limited, going out and not buying the most expensive frames and canvases and paint. I'll go out buy some latex house paint, wanting to remember you and Stephanie to be with me a lot of the times and you two are not here with me anymore and then I can look down and see both of your faces. The same with Sassy, Sassy was very special to me and I wanted her so close by so everyday I go through the dining room and I look down at those pictures and it's a wonderful feeling because I'm reminded of you and Stephanie and Sassy.

LB: Why do you agree to do shit like this for me? Besides that you just love me.

CB: Cause I kinda envy you for really stepping out of the box and doing some things that I know I don't really understand but I know that it is a form of art. I wouldn't know how to begin to do a lot of that stuff, mine's more conservative type of facial painting, portraits, making flowers, and that kind of stuff.

LB: Do you feel like when you participate in these things with me, like when I make you do this shit, you're able to be more creative, like you're more able to step out of that box?

CB: Yeah! Being sixty years old it's kinda neat to have my daughter call me up and have me recite a Jim Morrison poem that I have no idea what he was trying to say. I read it over a couple times and I still couldn't understand it. You would have to make me understand it with the words he was using and why. Also singing, which I can't sing, but singing an Elvis song that was also very special to me and I guess that's the few things.

LB: So if you could do a weird project what would you do, like if no one cared and you could just be really weird and you had a lot of money?

CB: If I had a lot of money and no one cared?

LB: Yeah.

CB: I would, this is just off the top of my head, I would probably have a picture of my face and somehow mix it up in the sky with my face is looking down but it would be all clouds but it would look somewhat like me.

L**B: Would it be very big?**

CB: It would be very big, yes. Very. When I look up at the sky now I think of the special people who are not with me today and like when I'm taking a walk I talk to Sassy and she comes to me as a bird, and I've already told you that before and she still does occasionally, not as much as before. I still look up at the sky a lot and someday maybe when I am not here that face is looking down on you and Stephanie.

LB: Would you show it or would you just keep it for Stephanie and me?

CB: Well, it would be so big that it would be just clouds, it couldn't be showed, you would only see it if you look up in the sky. It wouldn't be in a gallery.

LB: So you're saying the clouds would be in the shape of your face. This isn't a painting? You would actually make the clouds look like you for Stephanie and I?

CB: I would just imagine it and it would appear.

LB: Do you ever feel like I exploit you? Or maybe I'm being too goofy?

CB: No. No, I think that you're showing a form of love and you're honoring me in your artistic way.

LB: Sometimes people think I'm exploiting you. Why you think they believe that?

CB: Because they maybe they don't have a relationship with their parents and they don't see it as an artist because maybe they aren't an artist but, I always, I may not understand everything, but I do feel that it is a form of honoring me.

LB: Is there anything you want to tell me?

CB: Well maybe someday since I gave you the idea for the clouds, you may want to do it on a very big scale on the side of a building somewhere.

LB: What if you started doing that yourself right now?

CB: I think I might do something like that and then I'll just give it to you.

LB: I would like that more than that photo of Stephanie, Sassy and me that you had blown up to be a poster.

CB: Well, that's something that maybe you're not going to want right now, and that's ok. Its just gonna be here for you.

LB: I'm saying I would like the cloud painting more than the weird poster of Stephanie and me in the 90's.

CB: Well that's ok, you're going to have that too because I felt like I wanted to do that especially because Sassy was there too. So someday you might want to put that on a big board and you're in a big studio somewhere and you're just gonna have it up against the wall somewhere and you can put it in a different kind of a frame or hang it totally from the ceiling so when you look up you can see Stephanie and You and Sassy. I can maybe do something with the clouds, but I do want to do that painting of Stephanie and You on the floor and Sassy, when we do get new linoleum or new flooring or whatever we are going to do there. I'm going to have them very carefully take those two up and apply them to a board and I am going to give you the one of Sassy and Stephanie can have the one of you and her.

LB: Do you think you're ever going to get a new floor?

CB: Well not right now, but I'm just saying that when this happens I am going to try to cut around that and lift this very carefully. It will be two pieces, one of Sassy and one of you and Stephanie. I am hoping to put it on a board and laminate so you can keep it. So I will definitely do that.

LB: I'm not going to ask any more questions now.

CB: Ok, was that enough? ■

Joe Girandola Talks 9/11, Duct Tape & Hugs

by David Chatfield

The first time I met Joe Girandola, our newly hired MFA director, he immediately gave me a hug. And not one of those man-hugs — a hand shake and two pats on the back — but a full on embrace. I initially thought this an awkward thing. I soon discovered this would come to represent the man and his outlook on life and art, which according to Joe are the exact same thing. Recently I prepared some questions about his practice, being in academia, his friendships, and what is *really* going on with the duct tape. He talked about how opportunities throughout his life led to his role as an artist and mentor, how inevitable mentorship is when one is truly a dedicated artist, and how marble is like heroin to him. We began, as many interviews do, by talking about 9/11.

Space Man Spiff or Joe Girandola. You decide.

David Chatfield: We're recording

Joe Girandola: Okay, August 11th, 2011. It's one month before 9/11.

DC: One Month.

JG: One month, get ready, they were planning as we speak, 10 years ago. Where were you — I'll tell you where was on 9/11. I was in a Budget moving truck, in Baltimore Maryland, preparing to move my mother to a new house. Okay? My Father passed away in 1997, my Mother decided to move in 2001 to a new house, and, I remember going to the Budget Rental Truck place in Baltimore because it's always empty of trucks if you don't get there right when they open, so I got there at 8 in the morning. They open at 8:30. I was the third in line. I got my truck right away and I was driving and had the radio on when it was interrupted when the first plane hitting the building. NPR was interrupted with a special report, and, I remember *immediately* calling my brother in Manhattan —

DC: Your brother was in Manhattan?

JG: My brother lived in Manhattan, worked at Morgan Stanley at the time. I knew that at one point his office was in the World Trade Center, and... was very concerned because nothing was getting through, it kept going "call failed, call failed, call failed" because of the number of people trying to call. So I called my Mom — she was at home packing and told her to turn on the TV and told her I would be right there. We watched it from there, was able to get a phone call from our land line to my brother, and he was fine. His office is now located up on 42nd Street, but many of his friends did not make it —

DC: Wow — that's heavy. My cousin worked down there. Did the same thing. Tried to call him —

JG: — Yeah that's crazy, fail fail fail fail. Okay, lets' go to the questions, let's go to something a little more positive than Terrorism

DC: From 9/11 to...

They say "Those who can't, teach," but you clearly can. So how did you end up here? Was it your intention to end up in academia?

JG: I think that my nature — in my upbringing with my Father, who's Italian and was always teaching me, like how to cook, how to do these things, how to —

"Untitled" Joe Girandola

DC: Make pizza.

JG: make pizza, do all these things. He was taught because he went to Seminary. He became a Catholic priest. He went to Seminary when he was 13, he was ordained at 19, had his own church at 20. He basically lied about his birth certificate because his birth certificate from Italy only said Bambino Girandola, didn't have a date, didn't have shit. He was taught how to teach, as a priest. He was taught "this is how you give a sermon" and basically giving a sermon is delivering a message. So from early on my brothers and I were being given sermons, and we tried to imitate the person we looked as a respect figure in our household, which was our Father. And my Mother is a nurse, so that's also a teaching method "How do you take care of yourself" is also a philosophy of teaching, so that's how I ended up in this uhm...

DC: So was it the plan from the beginning?

JG: No never, never the plan, but it's inherent in those who — I think, whether you know it or not, especially in the visual arts you're teaching, because you're always explaining to people who could care less about what you do, of why you're doing it. It's an inherent nature of creative individuals to try to justify what they do. Because there is an inherent skepticism, like "Why would you do that." But it wasn't my intention at all. When I went to Italy, when I was 19 years old, it was on a year abroad program. I wanted to get to Italy, fortunately I was accepted into a program in Florence by mistake, I applied to get into a program through Pepperdine University which had a program in Florence, a program in Germany, a program in London. I wanted to go to Italy program but it was the most popular program. I could already speak Italian and when I applied they said "You're not accepted, but you could go to Germany" And I'm like "Okay, I'll go to Germany." Okay? A week before, I'm in Baltimore, and I get a call: "Guess what, two people have dropped out of the Florence program. Do you want to change your ticket from Germany to the Florence Program?" I'm like "Fuck yeah, I'm changing it, I'm changing it." And I couldn't believe

it. The other person who got in the same way, has become one of my life-long best friends. And he's a guy named Michael Young. He's 5 feet tall, tiny guy. But amazing, super intelligent, he speaks Chinese, Italian, English. He lived in China for two years. So that enabled me to go to Italy for my sophomore year of college. I bought a moped and, every morning, instead of hanging around this villa on the outskirts of Florence where all the American Students lived, I would go into town. I met a stone sculptor at a coffee-shop when our class was canceled in the morning, and was offered the chance to apply to be an apprentice at his studio. I became his apprentice and that's led to my life as a sculptor, as an artists.

DC: So during the program you were also an apprentice as well?

JG: Dropped out of the school, became and apprentice. I was offered this opportunity and that became my education. And I think understanding a Master/ Apprentice system informed my life. Artists who survive in that kind of format, eventually become the best kind of story tellers, which is a teacher, basically relating an experience to someone else. And I really enjoyed the balance of making your own work and telling the story of why you're doing those things. And that eventually led me to what I do now. I mean that's exactly what our program is about — that information about working with students, working with masters, working with other people, that has to inform every part of your work. Working in that studio led to working with duct tape. I was working with the most, considered classical of materials, carrara marble, granite and these things that, especially throughout early history and into the Renaissance, led to this religious aspect of what that material was. But all we were trying to do as apprentices was keep ourselves from getting hurt. So that took me calling my Father and saying "Send me a case of duct tape a month." And he's like, "What? Why?" and then he said "No forget it, I don't even want to know why."

DC: So that was for what?

JG: I used to tape my hands with Duct tape. Because it's the only thing — you weren't allowed to wear gloves in the apprentice shop, because gloves would prevent you from having a feeling. But duct tape, would prevent, and also resist, and act like a second skin in a way that gloves could never accomplish. Even the form-fitting gloves wouldn't do the same thing. So I would tape my hands to remind myself not to move my wrists when I was carving, hammer and chisel — first two years is just hammer and chisel, no pneumatic hammer — to train my muscles to work without moving my wrists when I hammer, and holding the chisel so I'm using my shoulder. It would wrap once around the thumb and back to the wrists, almost vices to grip my hands and resist the marble dust and last all day. I would cut those things off everyday and they would live as sculptures, on a mantle. They accumulated as a pile of things, that I was really interested — and the caked dust and this American material, that became something I would eventually use.

DC: The classic material and the modern —

JG: Right, right, that duality of things. When you're carving stone you were ordered to take a three-week to four-week, no-carving job. So you would sweep the studio, you have to do — no hammer and chisel, to recover. But as a maker when I get infatuated with materiality of things, and being like a super material geek of wanting to modify and take everything apart and make something, I would use that tape to create drawings. As a meditation. So I was investigating shadow and light and trying to draw shadows on the ground with duct tape. I loved looking at the ceilings in Italy that were hammered metal, or hammered tin, or the bronze work that was relief style. So I would try to recreate things like the doors of the Baptistry in Florence,

which are these Lorenzo Ghiberti, amazing relief sculptures. I tried to recreate them in Duct Tape because I liked how the material looked like hammered metal when it was caked with marble dust and the grime of the city. And just like those bronze doors, that detritus of leaded gasoline at the time, travailing around with the taxi cabs and the buses and the Mopeds all using leaded gas. So it's caking these amazing architectural monuments with the soot of technology. Much like this, the invention of duct tape *for me* has always been about repair. You know it was created as: how do we prevent the ammunition in these World War II boxes from getting wet when they go up in altitude and come down; the outside of the metal boxes would freeze and then cool and create condensation and the ammunition was getting wet so the huge M-1 machine guns were getting jammed because the ammunition was wet. How do you prevent that? Well, 3M said "Oh, we'll solve that. We'll make this super industrial tape to wrap all those boxes with." And then it becomes every household American material to repair anything. But for me that kind of "use it for everything" is what Renaissance painters did. "Well we'll make this oil paint and we'll paint everything," and it's become a statement of "oh you're and artist if you use oil paint." So for me as an American living in Italy I wanted to use a material that *I knew* was American. So I ripped it off and I still use it. Yeah, and I still use it and I still love using that material because I love how it can be translated into something else. Anything I want to make. Do I still love to carve marble and granite? Of course, I wish I could do that everyday. But has my life shifted that focus away? Of course because marble and granite take a commitment where many other things have to be eliminated — meaning family, meaning all these things that take time. But most importantly, what marble and granite *really do*, is a physical detriment to your body where you *cannot* recover in time for other things in your life. So whether that's teaching, family, mentoring, other things have to take a back seat. So my life has shifted that way.

Santa Maria Del Fiore Baptistry Doors, Lorenzo Gihiberti

DC: From Omaha to LA to Philadelphia, how has your practice changed over the years?

JG: My practice has become what this residency program is about. It's become learning that I have short periods of time to make a ton of work, and how to balance that with a life. And from Omaha to Los Angeles to Philadelphia there have always been residencies involved. The thing that got me to Omaha was a residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art. It was a four-month residency, and I made two years of work in four months. I probably slept two to three hours a night maybe, maybe, over four months. Was that detrimental to my health? Of course. But, like everything, there

has to be a recovery period. But in that amount of time I was able to work every single day, and that's excitement about being in the studio and having that freedom of time and space to exist. You know that led me to New Mexico where another residency led me to do the same thing, and then that commitment in Omaha and in New Mexico and then in Los Angeles led the directors of those programs to say "We really want you to work here, because we see your passion and focus, and your ability to balance life and studio." So why not balance life, studio *and* a commitment to having others achieve that same thing and explaining to them how to do that. So that led to working and the Bemis Center, working at the Santa Fe Art Institute, leading to my teaching job in California, Los Angeles, and then *ultimately* leading to this job. It's how I live my life anyway. It is this kind of residency experience leads me to intensely work with other people trying to achieve the same goals, to exist in the world as a creative individual. It also leads me to time at the University where I can just work in the studio. So my intense teaching is in the summer, and in the fall, leaves me in the Spring of every year, right after the American holiday season, to get in the studio. And for me it's perfect.

"And They're Off!" 2010. Joe Girandola

DC: So for you it's been an innate, inevitable evolution?

JG: For sure. One thing that has led to the next thing. Somehow it has worked. Many times it doesn't work, many times. I've applied for jobs and been interviewed for positions that I thought were the perfect position and didn't get the job. That's just the drive of being excited about the different potentialities and what will exist, and how it will inform my studio practice as well. Every individual you meet helps to lead to the next opportunity.

DC: You once mentioned that an artists must go to their studio *everyday* even if they don't actually work. Is this a rule you stick to? And do studio naps count?

JG: Yeah, I do. I go to my studio everyday. Studio naps do count. Yeah some days I'm so exhausted I go to the studio and fall asleep and my wife will call me the next morning and be like "what happened" and I'll say "I feel asleep" and she'll go "yeah that's what I thought." For sure.

DC: You're quite the hugger. Why? Is this why you seem to have a lot of friends?

JG: Yeah, that's from growing up in an Italian

family. I mean that's the nature of being, you know, a lover of life and lover of good things, of food, and things and all. It's all being in acceptance of what that means. When you meet people that are like-minded then it never goes away, So there's another example, one of my dearest, dearest friends is in California. He's 7 feet tall — I have a friend that's 5 feet tall and one that's 7 feet tall — his name is Mark Jorgsenn and he played basketball in Arizona and is an amazing individual. He was hit by a drunk driver, which ended his basketball career. He would have been one of the stars you read about in the papers in the NBA. One of the most amazing individuals you will ever meet and life just shattered in a second. What does that mean? I don't know. He now has a life, he's been able to use that somehow. We don't often speak to each other. A year will go by. But when we see each other it's like no time has passed. And that's the friends you need in your life. Where you understand each other enough to understand that crazy shit is happening every single day and when you see each other that stuff has to be erased in your mind. And understand that it's about the time you're going to be together and talking with each other. You know that shit is going on that prevents you from talking to each other everyday. That's just the nature of life. I tend to over-extend myself, I try to always be accommodating, but more and more it becomes difficult to do everything. I've been better at delegating things. I mean part of the nature of being who I am is wanting to do everything myself. But I've found in this program especially, that has been detrimental to things I'm trying to accomplish. So I've been trying to explain to the higher administration here at this university that more assistance is needed for this type of program because of the intensity. So then I can delegate to people that I have taught the way I want things to be done. So that's happening but it's a learning curve.

DC: A lot of the people you have brought in have been your friends. That being said, can I be your friend? I need a job.

JG: Yes, you are my friend, you are my friend, and if a job opens you can have a job.

DC: Sweet

JG: Yes they are my friends, that goes without saying because we've connected in a way that is artistically based.You can't help but be friends with the artists when you admire their work and admire their dedication, and in this program this semester we've learned that the key to existing in this most difficult of fields in life is connection. You know, it *has* to be, because how do you trust someone, that you don't understand, that you can't sit down and talk with. Like how do you do that? If they can say "This is a person that I really believe in." You know, and be honest with each other, about their work, about the direction that they're going, about they way they're living their life. You know, that's what critique is about, to be honest with the individual you admire and say "You know that really looks messed up: that is seriously not a direction I think you should go," and have a debate and not just say "Oh yeah, that's cool." Why would you do that? It's a waste of time.

DC: So you're able to bring those people in because you know they for sure —

JG: Because I know the things that they will say will resonate with every one of our students. Whether they like their work or not, it's not about that. It's about seeing what's led someone to have this idea, and lead it to the end, and say this is how I present this work, and they'll be the first to say, "You know when I did that it was a complete failure but I had to do it, I *had* — there was something telling me I had to do this."

DC: Are you sick of duct tape yet?

JG: No, not sick of it. I don't know, I don't think it's possible for me. I could change though. I think the experience when this company asked me to

do some advertising for them, and things like that — is that selling out or is that not? For me it was an opportunity to *really* connect with people who could care less about artwork. Really, truly, when you go to this Duct Tape Festival in Ohio every year, if you see, they don't care about art. They're real people, they're like people on the street. Everyday you meet these people and they're connected, somehow. That's super cool. That'd be like an oil paint festival, or some shit. Yeah you'd see horrible things like duct tape wallets, or oil paint wallets or some shit. But you'd see *amazing* things as well. Like look at the range of oil paintings throughout history, there's awful oil paintings and there's master works. It's the same, because it's based on creativity, and ingenuity, and translating ideas of form. But people have an inherent response to a material like duct tape. Because it's humorous, and I love that about it, I love that it can be funny. You know I look at Phillip Guston's oil paintings and they crack the shit out of me. I'm like that's fucking so sweet because it's funny, like he's making fun of alcoholism, he's making fun of this, he's making fun — that's funny to me, and sad. So — and it's weird. But it's the same exact material, like that fuchsia pink Pepto-Bismol pink he's using, the same mix of oil paint that, that's fucking Raphael, man! Same! Look at that! Caravaggio! Same materials, it's like wow, you can alter the color, alter the thing and that's the same material? You could do anything with that. So —

DC: So that's duct tape for you?

JG: For me, for right now. But last year, I mean, this past year I carved a marble piece to go along with these milk-crate arches. And I was close to being off the deep end. I would have quit my job. I was going to say to my wife, "You know I'm going to quit my job and this is what all going to do." For sure. Because once you get that feeling back, it takes over. It was difficult to say "Oh no, I just have to make this piece and then get back

Milk-Crate Arch, 2009,
Joe Girandola

to reality." Because the reality is I have two kids, I have a wife, I have an amazing family, I have an amazing job. It's almost like marble is heroin to me. I love it *that* much, I could live on it, just do that. Is that detrimental to my studio practice, and my life as a teacher? Yeah, I'd throw everything away but working in marble. But maybe my family has replaced that, because every day is a learning experience, like with marble and granite. So maybe my family has become my ultimate love that I didn't know. So maybe that's it, maybe that's the key. And then everything else has to inform that, and how you live your life.

DC: Yeah, because you've said in the past, your art and your life are the same

JG: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's all good. Yeah. It's been a good summer. ■

~~Painter Sculptor~~ / ARTIST CARPTENTER an Interview with H. John Thompson

by Guy Loraine

John Thompson is a multifaceted artist based in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. As a recent MFA graduate from the University of The Arts, Thompson now maintains a studio practice while also teaching Art Appreciation and Drawing classes at Penn State University at Abington and Burlington County College. Thompson's work uniquely straddles both painting and sculpture. He focuses his attention upon the personal connections forged around the objects and places men identify with. His approach is insightful yet sensitive, and tinged with humor informed by his work as a carpenter.

Guy Loraine: Growing up did you live in a town or suburb?

John Thompson: I lived in a couple places. There's Bustleton Pike that runs right out of Philadelphia. Technically it's not Philadelphia it's Northeast. That's where I lived when I lived with my grandparents. My mom, my sister and I lived with my grandparents for a little bit in the apartment next door. A lot of the businesses on Musselman's Pike have individual buildings that also have apartments up top. My grandfather and grandmother own the building and worked in his bakery underneath. But when you go right behind Musselman's Pike it's total suburb, a lot of split-level houses and that kind of thing. And then ten minutes from there was Levittown and all those places that were built up. Right around there too I also lived in Oakford and Trevose. And that's the kind of area I look at when making my work. So you have Levittown there that was the beginning of this American dream where you had people buying houses out of catalogs...that kind of thing. And then there was also Oakford and Trevos where I lived first when I was very young, but all those houses were actually bungalows from the late 1800's that were then converted by people who couldn't afford the houses in Levittown. So they're these hand made homes, but there is also a railroad track that runs through there, so there are quite a few Sears homes, too. People would buy would buy a house out of Sears & Roebuck catalog. The train would drop off all the lumber so naturally they don't want to take it too far away from the train tracks, so there are houses like that there. And then if you go north five minutes, it is all farms and now that's all developed by Toll Brothers. It was a real mix of everything.

GL: So how did your upbringing impact the path that you took to become an artist?

JT: I guess if you look back I was always an artist but I spent a long time trying not to be an artist. One of the things I was most proud of is I was really into that movie "Top Gun." I loved building models in my room. I remember I set up this zip line for my F-14 plane and that went into the closet. In the closet I had the catch line like how they would land on a real carrier...so I had that whole thing rigged up. I think that was one of the first real art pieces that I made. Everything else was just drawings of airplanes.

GL: But you didn't think about it as art?

JT: No I didn't. Now I look back on it - that was probably one of the most important things that I've made. I was always making stuff and my family was always making stuff. My mom's father was a

baker, so there's this aspect of production there. And my dad's dad was a pattern maker.

GL: What type of patterns?

JT: I forget exactly what company it was but basically he would carve (out of wood) cogs and stuff and they would cast them. This was before they had plastics. I remember he had a killer train set because he did some work for Lionel, too. And then my dad was always making new stuff. He got into stained glass for a while, but everybody always worked with wood. My dad had four brothers; each one of them was always making something. One made decoys...so I was always around people who made things. I guess I didn't realize that isn't normal.

H. John Thompson That Would Look Badass on a Gremlin 2008 Luan, OSB plywood, Bondo, dimensional lumber 60" x 50" x 50"

GL: Not everyone makes things?

JT: Yes, it's not that way anymore. I guess it used to be that way when people grew up around stuff, making stuff and fixing stuff. Most people I talk to didn't have that, because so much deals with information today. We aren't an industrial powerhouse like we used to be. So I was catching the tail end of that. To me it just made sense to make things, I guess. I got my bachelor of art degree and then I worked construction. And then for whatever reason I felt like I needed to get my master's degree, if for no other reason than to feel like I did it. You know it's funny, I didn't feel like I was an artist before graduate school and now I'm kind of thinking, ok, I'm an artist.

GL: But you worked with your dad in construction?

JT: Yes. That was only for a few years after I graduated from college. But I learned a lot -I think more than any studio class that I've ever had. I use that stuff for what I make.

GL: Sometimes you can look at art by women and there is a narrative about growing up as a young girl. When someone looks at your work, it seems to have a particularly male slant to the imagery. Was this a conscious decision to pursue or did it develop over time based on your interests and family's interests?

JT: I think it was a conscious decision to give myself permission to do that.

GL: So do you think that's risky? Not many male artists take on that subject matter I guess.

JT: I don't know. I feel the most important thing that I can do when I make something is make it with as much honesty as I can. I've found with different projects that I've done, that even if someone doesn't really understand what it's about, they can see that I've put work into it and I think that translates as some type of honesty. Really what it's about...is not what it's like to be macho.

GL: It's not macho.

JT: But it's masculine.

GL: It's a guy thing?

JT: I think it's about the sensitivity that men actually have. Especially around things like a dump truck or clunky wood, cars, stuff like that. There's something that happens between guys. One example I have is my friend's dad. Growing up I never related to him because I was always taking art classes. He's a welder. He fixes welding machines; he works on his house...I could never really relate to him until I became a carpenter. Then all the sudden that's something to talk about and he actually warmed up to me in a way that we could talk about sensitive things. He has two sons. One is doing really well, has a house and kid, wife and a good job, but the other son has problems with alcohol and other stuff. These aren't things this guy would want to talk about. I remember he had a bad roof on his shed and he wanted me to help him fix it. While we were working on that, came the conversation. Doing that opened up this deep sensitive private thing. So I think that is what the masculinity is about. I get so mad. I watch shows like "Every Body Loves Raymond" and "The Simpsons," and the father character is always a big doofuss. It's offensive to me. Especially on "Every Body Loves Raymond"...Raymond's wife is always yelling at him and calling him an idiot.

GL: Did you ever watch "All in the Family" growing up?

JT: Yes. That to me resonates much more as a family that I would know.

GL: But the show always ended with him being particularly sensitive to something that happened in the episode. It made him human.

JT: I guess at least there's a resolution at the end and he's not a complete...not what they portrayed him to be. But maybe that character is responsible for Homer Simpson. I can understand why the characters work in a comedic sense. I think that as men maybe we...we're expected to be sensitive but we're expected to be macho, too, and it's a hard balance. That balance is interesting to me.

GL: So is that your major theme or are there other themes that you've explored in your work? In the body of work that you've done there are distinct differences like the car models, parts of buildings, the shed. Were each of those about something particular or should it be seen as a whole?

JT: I think it's a whole. I think everything in the end is autobiographical. Another thing... you started out by asking what's it like where I live and that conversation is kind of what my work is about. What is it like to live in a place that's everything - because I watched farms get bought up and turned into McMansions. There's also this idea about quality. I don't really talk much about environmentalism but I do think about quality. Houses are built to be disposable now. It's completely ridiculous. So there is this idea about place, I think. Also I remember as an undergrad thinking I needed to be making work that was modern, urban and hip. I realized pretty early on in graduate school that isn't who I am.

GL: Why struggle with that...trying to be something different.

JT: Yes exactly. Then I realized I'm not a red-necked farmer, but there's a little bit of that there. My family used to race cars so there's a little bit of blue collar red-neck thing to me. I like NASCAR and I like building stuff. Just that act of making stuff, the way we make our place in the world, is interesting to me. The fundamental thing that I look for when I'm making my work is what I find in Trevos. That's: these people kind of build their own world. The houses are not traditionally beautiful but they are hand made. There's this thing that happens between the house or building as an object and as a place where you spend your life. I think about that a lot, and then the way the cars come

in. That's something that I haven't quite figured out...its something that I still want to get in there. But I think part of the reason why I have trouble with it is because my family used to race cars and I really wish I would have had the opportunity.

GL: Let's do a little shift here. You consider yourself a painter but many people would see you as a sculptor. Do you see yourself as one, the other, or both?

JT: That's the kind of an argument I used to have, I was always saying I'm a painter. Now I don't see myself as either necessarily. There are things that I make that are sculptural that I call paintings and I feel very strongly about. But to call myself one thing or the other I don't think it's really that important. I just make stuff. Maybe I'm just an artist. I mean if I'm going to call myself anything I would say carpenter; because the thing that ties everything together is...carpentry not woodworking but carpentry.

GL: As we talk, though, it's interesting because in the art world you describe things as an object or an object maker.

JT: But paintings are objects too.

GL: They are, but you've been saying, "I make stuff. You've been talking about it as stuff.

JT: Well...Tony Crag would be...I remember hearing him in an interview talking about how everybody would always say come see my stuff, look at my stuff. That always irritated him because it kind of devalues what we are doing.

GL: That seems to talk about...it's part of what you're talking about in your work in a way. That's how the macho guy would talk about his stuff. Come see my stuff.

JT: Yes. Or look at this thing. I like the idea of the thing. We talk about Heidegger, I love the way he talks about the thingliness of the thing! So maybe it's that. I guess I really feel very strongly that a painting is not just a two-dimensional thing, it's an object, it occupies space no matter where it's put, it's got a structure to it both visual and physical, so I like to play with that structure. There are times when something can occupy the sculptural and the painting space, but I'm always trying to figure out how far I can get painting out. I want painting to be everything whether its sculpture, architecture, installation, I want that all to be painting. That's part of what I'm trying to figure out. The fact of the matter is I only ever had one sculpture class, so I can talk about the way the thing occupies space using different terms. But really my language developed as a painter so that's the way I think of things, the way a painting is put together more than the way a sculpture is put together.

GL: Talk about the materials you use. The same types of wood and paint that you use carry over from one body of work to the next. How do you determine what materials to use? They aren't necessarily refined. And you talked about woodworking vs. construction work. Where do you put yourself? Your stuff is well made and is very purposeful but you don't view it as woodworking? Is it craftsmanship?

JT: That's craftsmanship. Woodworking I see as what my grandfather did with the pattern making. He had to be very precise because he had to make things that worked...moveable parts, cogs all that stuff. I think when you're around someone that is able make things that precisely... it's not that I decided I could never do that, I'm not going to do that, because there are times I like to do fine work, but that's more for me. I like the chunkiness of things. I like solid heavy bulky things. When you talk about craftsmanship, you talk about a builder. I'm not talking about an architect because they're completely different. Woodworking I think for lack of a better term is trinkets, really well made trinkets that have a polish and refinement.

GL: Is it craft in the sense of what a carpenter does, a certain skill set that they have?

JT: Yes. It's funny, you go to different jobs sites and people will call a really good trim guy a mechanic and say, "Oh, he's a really great mechanic." People call me a "mechanic" and I always argue with them and say, I don't work on cars. It's a different thing. It's a term that really bothers me, people are always looking for what is that thing that's not fine craftsmanship but...

GL: That's just good enough to do the job?

JT: No. It's not even that. It's a really developed skill set. Just being really good at what you do. I think that comes back to another thing I think about: we are supposed to be such great multi-taskers now. Why can't we just be good at something anymore? That's the kind of thing I like to be good at, the trim work...that kind of thing. I always say it's not dovetail joinery but it's a really nice butt joint. That's what I like better. There are so many different words for it. What's that book we talked about?

GL: Shop Class as Soulcraft?

JT: Yes. In the beginning he talks about like...I'm not talking about craft or craftsmanship as the guy in the garage with the nice warm light coming in the window planing down something to make a ship. There are two different types, there's labor and the craft that requires, and there's this personalized perfect craft. That's what I think I do.

GL: In your early work you seem to be creating assemblages that remove the skin of a building to reveal the interior structure. Are you interested in architecture or how things are constructed?

JT: I'm not interested in architecture! I'm interested in the place and the way that it's made. Architecture is all theoretical. I can't tell you how many times I've had to work on a building where the architect requires something that the materials can't do. So I have an animosity towards architects. It's more like the way the place is built - even to the point that can that mean something - and who did it. Was it the person who lived there that that did it or was it built anonymously? That's why I like the Sears homes because people have said they worried they wouldn't be built well because they were built by novices, but in fact they are some of the most well made homes in America because people were building them for their families to live in and they wanted to do it right. There's this idea of care giving. There's a lot to the way something is put together.

GL: What artists do you tend to look at for your work?

JT: There are artists that I look at that I really like, but I find the artists that are closest to what I feel like I'm doing...that's a little arrogant...I should say I'm closest to are H.C. Westermann, Sal Scarpitta...

GL: He raced sprint cars.

JT: Yes. He actually had a team that was sponsored by Leo Castelli Gallery! So I look at those and think that I have a lot to do with them. I'm excited for this James Hyde lecture because when I came into graduate school he was the first one to lecture and immediately my work totally changed from looking at his work - that was the thing that really kind of made me aware of what I was doing and wanted to do. So I think he's the most important artist that I've thought about. We were just talking about Vik Muniz before starting the interview and I love his work. I love that idea when you are far away and you are looking at the image and when you are close up you are looking at the materials. Now I'm making drawings out of copper pipe that come off the wall, so when you look at them from a different angle they're not what they were.

GL: So what is it about the garages, the new paintings and the copper?

JT: That actually came out of a drawing I did because I wanted to build a suburban obelisk. So I took chain-link fencing, did a six feet high fence that's four feet square and then built a house roof to sit on top. I did that drawing and liked just the drawing of the top because I was trying to figure

out how's this going to look before I build it. And I liked that, so I started doing more drawings like that and again this came out of me looking Vik Muniz's work a lot. I started thinking about the very traditional idea of a painting. If you look at a painting you can see which color was put on before another. I always like that I could look at an oil painting and the whites were always put on top. I like that the background could be the last thing painted, so maybe that's the highest. I wanted to take these drawings and make them in these different layers and make them more available or more perceptible.

GL: Are you creating a level playing field with no hierarchy between the elements?

JT: Yes, I guess so. I think part of it, too, is now that I'm teaching...the most important thing - apart from getting people to just incorporate enough black and white on the paper to balance it out but besides that - what are you going to do around this thing? What's going to hold this in? So I think just having that conversation over and over and over again probably informed that, too. So maybe with the roof just on blue or the split levels that are just on blue...by putting the object or the foreground element back further, it shows that there's...even though it's just blue, it's still space.

GL: So what's next from here? Do you enjoy teaching? Do you want to do that and keep doing studio work at the same time? It's a hard balance.

JT: Yes. It's a hard balance but in some ways I'm living the dream. I'm able to teach, which I actually wanted to do all along but I just didn't know it was something I could really do. I'm really happy doing it so my focus is little bit more on teaching the past year and a half...two years just because I'm trying to develop a career. I still have to supplement it with construction jobs. The hardest thing is making my own work, I try to do that and I schedule time for myself to do that and hopefully eventually I can spend more time on my own work and less time hustling. Lately I've been trying to be more intuitive about things. I spent a lot of time in grad school trying to figure out how I was going to defend it as I'm doing it, which was counter productive, so what I've tried to do is make myself more aware of my instincts and just make things and understand what they are about. So that's where the smaller paintings come from. I really like working with space and doing installations and building a big thing that can take over a space and be the space. I have different ideas for that but they're really ambitious, so I've decided to focus on this intuitive process and make sure I'm aware of what I'm doing and keep myself in that while I'm developing this teaching career further. I have faith that things will settle down and if I keep working it will all fit into place. I'll just keep looking for opportunities. Hopefully I'm young enough that I'll find it early on. ■

Crafting Contentment: An Interview with Kate Lydon

By: Erica Nickol

The corner Starbucks was alive and buzzing with the typical Monday crowd when I nervously settled in to make a phone call to Kate Lydon. Aside from being in a constant state of graduate school-over-caffeination, my nerves were heightened due to the fact that it is not an everyday occurrence for me to interview the Director of Exhibitions at the Society for Contemporary Craft (SCC) in Pittsburgh. My anxiety was put to rest

when Kate immediately demonstrated her sincere and amiable personality. Although Kate is a very busy woman who wears many hats throughout her day, she does not carry the frazzled tone of someone with a to do list a mile long. In fact, her voice bubbles with the enthusiasm of someone who truly loves what she does.

I asked Kate to start from the beginning and tell me about the experiences – education, interests, jobs – that led her to her current involvement in the art world and her position at SCC. "I attended Denison University in Granville, Ohio where I completed degrees in French and Art History. I was unsure of what career path to follow, and it was actually my father, a professor of history at Duquesne University, who suggested I look at a master's program there that would give me the opportunity to intern at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts." Kate went on to earn her Master of Public History: Archival, Museum, and Editing Studies and was given the chance to intern in several departments at some of Pittsburgh's best art institutions. These positions included Public Relations for the Carnegie Museum of Art, Archives at the Children's Museum and four years at the Center for the Arts. All of these connections eventually led her to a position as the registrar at SCC in 1987. "I remember walking into SCC in 1987," Kate recalled, "and just being wowed by the caliber of work shown there." She took on many positions at SCC before eventually settling in as the Director of Exhibitions. "We curate almost all of the shows here; only occasionally do we have a traveling exhibition in our space. We also take some of our shows on the road. I spend the majority of my time on administrative duties associated with management of the exhibitions program. It's a small place; we work within a tight budget. It's very hands on and I get to be very involved in all aspects of putting a show together." I asked Kate to speak more in depth about exhibitions at SCC. "In the mid-nineties, we were doing four shows a year in our main galleries and five to six smaller shows at our satellite gallery in downtown Pittsburgh. But then we had to ask, how many times are people visiting us annually? A significant percentage of our visitors are from out of town. We have been in business for 40 years and SCC has a strong national reputation. So we decided to move to three shows a year in our main building, and continue with the same number of shows at the satellite gallery. Last year we presented two major shows in the main galleries, DIY: A Revolution in Handicrafts and Bridge 11: Lia Cook, Mariko Kusumoto, Anne Drew Potter; the exhibition runs were longer and we planned a large amount of educational programming with artists and other community organizations in Pittsburgh to expand the audience and the reach of the shows. Our goal for FY12 is to be back to three major exhibitions." Despite budget constraints and hard economic times, SCC manages to put together interesting and unprecedented shows that display highly crafted fine art that is difficult to find elsewhere in the US, especially in Pittsburgh. Although their exhibitions are of museum quality, SCC has the opportunity to show work that art seekers cannot yet find in the museum. Kate explained more about the quality of work they are looking for, "Often, works by the artists we feature will be purchased by museums for their collections, five or ten years later. The size of the organization offers a flexibility that allows the exhibitions team to come up with new show ideas. It starts with a series of four key themes: Crossing Cultural Boundaries, Art and the Environment, Art in the Urban Experience, and Artists and Process. Within these themes, there are limitless possibilities under which they can identify artists to fit the ideas they are working towards. Sometimes, however, it works the other way. Kate gave an example of one such situation, "we were

visiting with an internationally renown metalsmith, Jan Yager, from the Spring Garden neighborhood of Philadelphia, and Jan was explaining how she came to use her materials. As part of her process, she decided to only use items within a two-block radius of her home. What she found was an enormous amount of crack vials, which she used to create her work. It made us think about the potential experience of a show called Nature/ Culture – Artists Respond to their Environment." That is only one example of how an artist's process informed an exhibition.

As it turns out, SCC is not the only place where Kate is involved in the art world, and specifically the craft community. She also sits on the board of Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and is occasionally asked to jury exhibitions outside of SCC. Given her experiences, I asked Kate whether or not she thought it was necessary for there to be a distinction in the contemporary art world between Art and Craft. "Early on, I might have said yes. Really, the Bridge Exhibition Series was created around the idea of bridging the divide between fine art and craft. I would say that our focus is on contemporary art, with strong concept or content, in craft media. We have occasionally had an artist that we've approached tell us, 'Oh, I'm not really a craft artist...' So that debate of craft verse art does still exist for some people." We both laughed at the absurdity behind such artists' missed opportunities.

Speaking with Kate, it is evident that she is very passionate about working in the contemporary art industry. I asked her why she chooses to continue working in the arts, and what she finds the most rewarding. Her answer would make most people envy the joy she feels on a daily basis. "I would say my favorite part is the fact that the feeling I had in 1987 when I first walked in here, of being in awe of the quality of work we exhibit, I still get that feeling when I walk in here today. The art that I get to look at and be engaged with, the people I get to meet and work with, it has all grown my life experiences. I've gone to dinner with some amazing people, these are once in a lifetime opportunities. I look at the world differently than I used to, I notice the collection of bottle caps on the street and think, 'That's really beautiful.' This might sound funny, but recently I had this experience where I was over at the Center for the Arts, and then came back into SCC that same day and it hit me; I've been part of the history of all this. I've helped bring this work to the place where it exists now. It feels nice to realize that."

My last question for Kate, albeit somewhat self-serving, was to ask for the advice she would give to someone entering into the art world for the first time. "Find a job that is engaging and that you think is the greatest thing since sliced bread. There is so much richness if you love your job. You don't have to have 48 masters' degrees. If you have a knowledge and understanding, but most importantly, flexibility, you can do well in this industry. Young people need to stick with their jobs longer; they jump too quickly onto the next thing. What happens when they do that is they don't stick around long enough to witness the cool magic." After hanging up with Kate, I finished the last of my neglected coffee and gathered my scattered papers of feverishly scrawled notes. I couldn't help but notice the positive energy I now felt as I began the long walk back to my studio. As I was reflecting on the joy and bubbling enthusiasm that Kate still maintains after 23 years of working at the same place I came to one definitive conclusion. Anyone would be a fool not to follow the advice that she has so clearly mastered. ■

Tiernan Alexander

by Marjorie A. Renno

Marjorie Renno sat down with UArts alum Tiernan Alexander (MFA '09) to discuss the disturbing side of domesticity, life beyond graduate school and the secret every artist is dying to know.

Marjorie Renno: Tiernan, you are part of a group show currently on view at Gallery 224 entitled "The Dishes are Done: Dispatches from Domesticity," which speaks to the idea that people are the curators of their own living spaces. When did you see this concept first emerge within your own work?

Tiernan Alexander: The truthful answer is that I first saw this coming along in my work while in grad school, and I really backed into it. I kept making these funny little things, these little objects because they made me happy. When I would show them to my mentor Paul Kotula, he would say: "Well where does this belong? Where does this live?" This was a really annoying question. Now, if you would say "I don't know where this belongs. What I'm really interested in is the feeling of crustiness that this piece has." He would say: "How will you get your viewer to experience this?" I started building little platforms for them, my objects, to sit on. This kept growing so that every time I made a little environment for them, my instructors would say: "You need to make a bigger environment." Then Paul, one semester, suggested I take a room of my house and completely make it an environment of my work. Other people shoved me into this corner, so while I was being sent to the corner I figured out how to amuse myself there. That was fun for a while, but now I have a love/hate thing with the idea of installation. I love the balance that "The Dishes are Done" has struck where it is not entirely an environment, yet it is not exclusively object based. To me, it's a really enjoyable blend so you can see all the objects in there as art, but there is something in the way it has been curated, so that room also creates a sense that it is an environment. This serves to make the work even better than it was on its own. I think that it's true of my work and other people's work in the show.

MR: Looking online at your portfolio, is your piece "Voodoo Living Room" the installation you just discussed where it was suggested you make over a room in your house as an environment?

TA: "Voodoo Living Room" was actually an installation at Grizzly Grizzly Gallery here in Philadelphia that I did last summer. It was my first big show and I had it with my fabulous husband Tim Eads.

MR: Was this the "Husband vs. Wife" show at Grizzly Grizzly or was this different?

TA: No, actually we did two shows at Grizzly Grizzly in a row. We created two installations where we each did a separate piece; I created "Voodoo Living Room" and Tim created "Pumping." Then we did "Husband vs. Wife," where we re-installed each other's work – it was like a remix.

MR: How did the two of you end up at Grizzly Grizzly with two back-to-back shows? How long after your thesis show did this come about?

TA: "Husband vs. Wife" was in August and the thesis show had been the previous December, so it was about eight months later. Grizzly Grizzly had put out a call for show proposals and we had been to every show they had and we really liked them a lot. We knew one of them and at the time it was a 5 person collective, so we wrote a proposal for both shows. They liked it and they gave us the shows and it was great.

MR: You are now a year and a half out from your thesis show. What do you see as the biggest change in your work from when you completed your MFA, and what is currently influencing your work?

TA: The funny thing is, like I said, I had this constant nudging to create an environment to best display or explain my work. I took my degree show to what I felt was a good place with "The Alexandrium," which was like a cabinet of curiosities that included four completed pieces within a curtained off area. However, there were a lot of flaws with it and I sensed that I could go further with creating an environment. Grizzly Grizzly was the all-the-way, the very far end of the road. It was a small enough gallery that I could paint the walls, create a print on the walls that I was sponge painting on and cut wall paper to layer over that; it was a very layered environment. I created all the light fixtures. We installed an air conditioning unit by cutting a hole in the wall to make it more living room-y. I modified all the furniture, the rugs – everything was part of the piece. I had that thing you were always craving in grad school – that total control of the piece. The lighting, the air, the mood, the smell, the whole thing and the whole point of it was to tell this short story of this space that was overwhelming and creepy, it was familiar and grandmother-y, yet disturbing. I felt like I really did it. I was really proud of it. I felt like it absolutely achieved its goals and yet, that's not what I wanted to do. When I was done with it I felt like "Yes, I had done it," but that it was not the mystery I was going for in my work, so I don't have to fool with that any more.

MR: Have you figured out what that mystery is?

TA: No, but I think I'm moving towards it.

MR: You were talking about the room being creepy, was that the space you were dealing with? Do you respond to the space you are dealing with or is it the theme of voodoo that seems to reoccur and you're the one bringing the creepy in?

TA: Definitely, the creepy was brought by me. During the show, the room was split in half and these two shows, mine and Tim's, were so wildly different. What I found was that I loved a lot of what I did in the "Voodoo Living Room," but it was too explicit and things were being completely spelled out. When we attended the opening, we were there all night. We didn't know that many people there, so we got to spend the night listening to people talking about the work. It was way better than a crit because they got it. They were saying to each other exactly what I wanted them to say about my work, so in a sense it was very successful, but I wanted to step back to leave room for multiple interpretations and bring back the ambiguity. There's nothing wrong with having made something clearly communicative of its goals, but I want to leave room for more. Right now I'm the artist in residence at the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington and I'm planning my solo show there in October, so that has become part of my considerations.

MR: The Winterthur Museum has roughly 170 rooms with some very interesting history; can you explain a little about what's so intriguing about this museum?

TA: Well, H.F. du Pont inherited an enormous amount of money and started collecting great home furnishings from the Pennsylvania area. Currently, the museum's big mandate is anything made or used in America between 1640 and 1820, which pretty much is all things. So it's a collection of all things, but its all house things and he curated all 175 rooms. He designed how he wanted everything to be. It's this extremely intense, controlled series of rooms. When you go on the tour you only get to see maybe 20 rooms, I've been given incredible freedom and have spent time in all 175 rooms. It is just this big old stuff mansion. It's like an episode of "Hoarders," but with all the money to spread it out.

MR: So, you're the artist in residence at, basically, a giant domestic palace...

TA: Yes! The giant domestic palace, exactly!

MR: ...so you are the artist in residence at the giant domestic palace and you're referencing "Hoarders." What is it about domesticity that is drawing you in each time? Is it this "Hoarders" idea of the secret freak-show of the family behind the scenes?

TA: I love the weirdness of it all. What I love the most is not the domestic; it is the obscure. It is things like du Pont would fall in love with a room in a very wealthy person's home and he would say "I want to buy this room from you, all of it; the walls, the ceiling, the moldings around the chandelier, everything. I will take this and I will pay artists to come and make you an exact replica." and he did that. He would pay someone for a room and he would then replace it with a room that was exactly the same – that right there is the best thing to imagine. To look through the archives to see what it takes to remove insane crown molding from a house and realize what he did to preserve something he was drawn to.

MR: When you were a student, could you see beyond your MFA program?

TA: I could not. I could not. I can barely see beyond the residency I am in now. It is through faith alone that I believe there will be a next thing. Let's skip to the good stuff. Through Tim and his connection to the Fabric Workshop [The Fabric Workshop and Museum (FWM) is the only non-profit arts organization in the United States devoted to creating new work in new materials and new media in collaboration with emerging, nationally, and internationally recognized artists.] I have been able to meet a number of mid-career artists, which means they are actually able to make a living off their work. I say: "Tell me the secret to a successful art career."

MR: What is the secret?

TA: Here's what I think it is. I think I know the secret. The secret is sticking it out. You need to stick around for ten years from the point where you really devote yourself to your art. For me, it will be from the time after grad school. After you start seriously applying regularly for lots of things, pursuing grants, pursuing residencies, getting into lots of little group shows, it seems to be about ten years. Don't give up. Stick it out. That seems to be what they did. For many years, it seemed like they would have to give up, but they didn't. They just kept living in this food stamp hell of starving artist as it was sold to us. Here's the thing, Tim and I are in our studio as often as we can. We are in there every night and it is our only vacation. We love it, so we are not unhappy. We cook there and we have dates there. I know a lot of people who don't, who say "I haven't gotten in my studio for weeks, for months." Well then you're already out. You just have to keep doing it. We've talked about these two things [Grizzly Grizzly and The Dishes are Done], but I had work in a show in Colorado, I was a finalist for the Fleisher Art Memorial Wind Challenge. I didn't get it and I was heart broken, but I keep putting myself out there. I have work in a traveling show in Finland, right now. I am always working and always putting it out there. I think it's that I have hope and I have faith and that's what keeps me pushing on. I know that in ten years we will succeed as long as we keep working. That's the secret. ■

Lauren Greenfield, "Girl Culture"

by David Chatfield

Lauren Greenfield's photographs attempt to portray the physical and sexual expectations laid upon women in large format colorful, and often provocative photographs in her show simply titled "Girl Culture," on display at the Arthur Ross Gallery at the University of Pennsylvania.

As you enter the gallery you are immediately presented with the image of a young girl, maybe 6 years in age, posing/prancing in a model-like manner, dressed in a pink leotard. Her pose occupies a strange middle-ground, between the abandon of a child dancing and the abstract movements of a super-model on the cover of a high-end fashion magazine. The girl is wearing minimal make-up which doesn't at all resemble the clown-like attempt of a child but of a woman with years of experience, which pushes the girl towards a strange maturity. The moment isn't quite that of a young girl acting out an innocent fantasy; Greenfield captures a moment where both a dancing child and a posing woman exist. This piece sets the tone for the show as a whole, placing the viewer in the gulf between two extremes, on one side the mundane life of everyday women and girls and the other the high expectations of sexuality and beauty, each existing simultaneously in each photograph.

Paired with the image of the child is one of a teenage girl caught in a moment where she is both innocently putting on a bra and squeezing her breasts. The moment is mundane but has the potential to be sexually charged. A teen is caught in a vulnerable moment, at an age when all are physically awkward, but with a somewhat aggressive and sneering look. The contrast is engaging as the privacy of the moment is interrupted by the young subject's confrontational look. Each piece seems to stand alone, but a narrative gradually becomes apparent piece by piece. A video of a fashion show precedes a series of images, some of young girls described as being in Fat-Camp, another of a women at Carnival in Brazil, scantily yet ornately dressed. The show continues, more teens in Fat-Camp, female body builders posing as a group, and porn stars. One image is of a college swim team, the group with their backs to the camera

Photo by Lauren Greenfield

LaurenGreenfield show Girl Culture @ ArthurRossGallery. Well organized show about cultural expectation of women: weight, beauty, sexuality.

Tweet by David Chatfield

facing the pool, as if about to dive in. The viewer is aware of their athletic physique and their femininity in equal measure, their curvy shape and their strong shoulders equally accentuated by their swimsuits. As one moves along each wall themes are repeated: Fat-Camp, Quinceaneras (a prom-like 15th birthday of Mexican girls), celebrity and porn. But these themes are mixed up. The larger message is apparent when the show is taken in as a whole and after several laps of the rectangular gallery. This, however, does not work against the show; it works to exaggerate the dichotomies found in each image which are also apparent in the show as a group. An image of celebrity Jennifer Lopez in a revealing dress is paired Porn stars and young girls. As one moves from image to image it is apparent that the expectation to be thin, pretty, athletic, sexy, permissive, seductive are placed on women of every age at every moment of their lives. Greenfield confronts the viewer with such issues with sensitivity, honesty and familiarity. We all understand the themes as they are not new, but the way in which Greenfield deals with these themes is unique, which gives issues often times clichéd by their quantity, a new life. ■

Photo by Lauren Greenfield

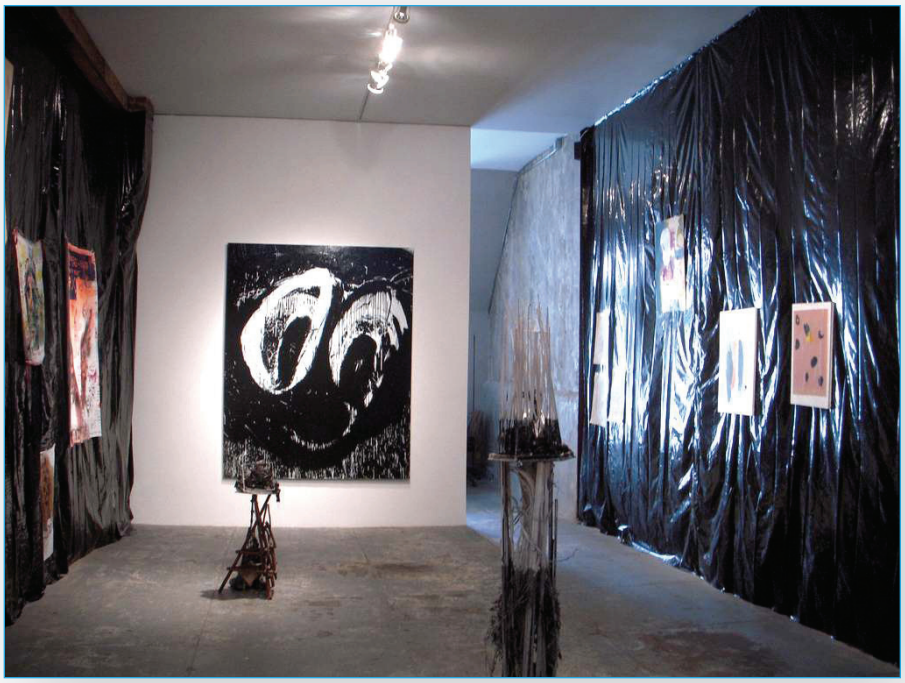
Trash Don't Translate

by Robert Libby

Upon seeing the walls of Jolie Laide Gallery, which were lined with black trash bags, cut open and taped together with clear packing tape to create the neutral backdrop, one would assume that it might be a little, pardon the pun, trashy. And it was. There was very little in the group exhibition entitled "Dirt Don't Hurt" that left a lasting impression.

As soon as you walk in, you will be greeted with Nathan Gwynne and Esther Klaes' "The Piano Lesson," that is, if it's on. When I walked in, it was off, presumably because it was completely obnoxious. Two planks of amber toned wood 7 feet tall and 6 inches wide, housed 2 miniature LCD screens, displaying 2 different angles of the same video; a male and female systematically destroying a piano. It starts off playful but ends in

annihilation. I can't imagine working there and having to listen to it all day either.



"Dirt Don't Hurt" Photo via The Artblog

After breezing past a few pieces of newsprint with some scribbles, taped to the bags with the same packing tape used to construct the walls, I did find one piece that intrigued me. Jeff Elrod's untitled raw canvas, propped up by 4 gray bricks, 2 on each side, screamed at me. The 6 1/2 foot tall, 4-foot wide canvas threw a few feelings right at me. First, the half stretched canvas spoke to the frustration I feel when I first attempt stretching a canvas. You have the clear idea of what you want to go on the canvas and sometimes it's just a chore to get it stretched, primed, and sanded. Secondly, I felt the complete unease and intimidation of the blank canvas. I wanted to look into the meaning of the sparse silk screening that peppered the canvas, but I couldn't get over the fact that it was mostly bare and only half stretched. It was daunting. The most endearing part of the work was the stray hairs that stuck to the raw canvas. A studio cat must have walked across before the work was delivered.

In totality, the works were cohesive, but cohesively weak. Each artist fit the bill when it came to the trashy manner in which it was displayed. The postcard boasts that it is a "low-fi (sic) gritty collection of paintings, drawings, video and sculpture by artist (sic) who convey an attitude playful experimentation in the pursuit of sophisticated objects." Low-fi and gritty yes, but sophisticated, no. ■

Investigating the Man-Made

By: Erica Nickol

A show consisting of an elaborate wooden structure, a multitude of glass jar terrariums, and several diminutive unfired clay pine trees is not what one would expect from an artist who teaches ceramics at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. Chad Curtis' "Speculative Landscapes," on display through August 21st at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, is indeed a show about more than just clay. Curtis says that his current body of work "examines the effects of high technology on the relationship between human beings and the natural environment." When entering the space for "Speculative Landscapes," one is first

drawn to the carefully arranged structure of presumably CNC cut wooden pieces that create a maze of open shelving on which lidded glass jars of various sizes are growing miniature forests of moss. Interspersed among these terrariums, seemingly placed at random, are pine trees that were molded from commercial ceramic molds, a strategy the artist often employs in his work. It is obvious that clay is not the primary material used for this installation, and it is refreshing to see a sculptor with a ceramic background who can step away from the constraints that working with clay generates. However, given Curtis' knowledge of the material, the very use of clay in this installation suggests an intentionality that is not completely clear to the viewer.

A lot of time and effort was put into the creation of this installation. The meticulous shape and design of each segment of the wooden structure is machine cut to have a factory-produced look and is joined together to appear as a highly designed, commercial grade structure. Hours upon hours must have been spent growing tiny landscapes in the collected jars, the terrariums clearly referencing human involvement in creating or impacting the natural environment. Energy was given in planning and perfecting the layout of this man-made environment. In stark contrast to the deliberate selection and construction of the setting is the haphazard placement of pine trees. The choice to use unfired clay and to leave the connection of seams from the two-part mold unfinished, suggests that a conscious statement is being made but it is unclear if this is the artist's intent. In contrast to the other pieces of the landscape, there is nothing original, special or permanent about the clay component's construction or placement, leading one to wonder what is the intended significance of their vulnerability?

Although the formal quality of the installation has a beauty with its life-filled glass jars that breathe within their contained environments, the premise behind the entire piece leaves the viewer questioning. Perhaps Curtis' statement is about the cycles of human relationships with nature. We see, we conquer, we re-create, and eventually, once we have utilized all that the land has to offer us, the land will regain control and return itself to nature. Is this the possible link to the unfired clay elements? This question might be exactly what makes this man-made landscape a success. It certainly leaves a lot of room for speculation. ■

Clay Studio Graduate Student Exhibition

by Kevin Lehman

I often wonder what judges are thinking when awarding prizes at an exhibition. Do they know the person they are giving the award to, do they like the color, do they like the piece the best or do they simply close their eyes and point to the winners? I ask these questions because there are some questionable winners at the Eighth Annual Marge Brown Kalodner Graduate Student Exhibition that is on display at the Clay Studio in Philadelphia.

Take for example the first place winner, Lauren Mabry's two pieces. I didn't call them Art because I don't believe she is trying to communicate any

Lauren Greenfield's exhibit at U Penn shows the provocative and disturbing reality of girl culture and image obsession in the United States

Tweet by Erica Nickol

message to the viewer through her unsophisticated and poorly crafted work. The cylinders are both approximately 10 inches in diameter and stand 7 and 11 inches tall. Even the titles, "Cylinder" and "Cylinder" are uninformative and convey only the obvious. The only possible positive aspect of the work is the brightly colored splattered glazed surfaces that are sanded through to the raw clay in seemingly random places. But that is no reason for a prize let alone a first place prize.

Second prize went to Benjamin Fless for two of his works of Art. And yes, I think he is trying to communicate a deeper meaning, I just don't know what it is. His piece titled "BL:DD:DO::FS" consists of a rectangular porcelain box with a thin warped piece of wood for a lid. On top of the wood sits a thin piece of yellow felt with a multi-colored jar on top. What does the title mean and how does it relate to the piece? I have no Idea. And it is unfortunate because the Clay Studio's website boasts this show as highlighting "the best work of artists from Graduate Schools across the United States." I certainly hope that is not true and if it is the Ceramic world and the Art world are in trouble. However, the show is not all bad.

The third prize went to Virginia McKinney, who easily should have been awarded first place. "Vertebrae" is an 8-foot long spine like structure that consists of a rusted steel armature covered with rust stained porcelain. The surface is cracked and ridged, at the same time soft and smooth. One can feel the tension of a worn spine supporting more than the weight of a body; the trials of life, yet bending with the flexibility necessary to do more then just cope; to adjust, persevere and overcome. Mckinney's "Vertebrae" captures a mood and communicates her emotions visually in a very successful work of art.

"Vertebrea" by Virginia McKinney
Photo by Kevin Lehman

All group shows are going to have some duds, as this one does, but I don't want to see the duds be the prizewinners. If you are interested in contemporary ceramics the Clay Studio's "Graduate Show" is a must see and is on display until July 24th. ■

Lauren Greenfield's "Girl Culture" explores topics of young female sexuality, body image and weight loss at the Arthur Ross Gallery.

Tweet by Kevin Lehman

Lauren Greenfield

by Veronica Bruce

Lauren Greenfield's "Girl Culture and Fashion Show" at Arthur Ross Gallery tackles the well known issue of female image perception due to our culture's incessant demands for perfection and still lingering lack of respect for the female. Although I walked into the show with the attitude of "oh come on, we've seen this issue dealt with a million times," I walked out with an appreciation for her work and a disgust for the way our culture affects the psyches of young women.

Entering the show you are greeted with a pink wall adorned with a few photographs with the title "Girl Culture and Fashion Show" above. The show consists of over fifty photographs along with a video presentation that seems less effective than the still photographs and didn't hold my attention. The photographs are displayed in groupings with adjacent labels giving the viewer more knowledge about the work.

Greenfield has photographed young women and girls from many different sociopolitical backgrounds: strippers, a woman exposing her breast to gawking biker guys with cameras, the porn star Cindy Margolis, women at eating disorder clinics, high school girls struggling to find an outfit, girls shopping, and slightly overweight girls at weight loss camp. The viewer would not know that last bit of information except for the fact that the show successfully pushes the imagery with adjacent labels. These short readings not only display the title of the piece but also include personal information about the people, sometimes in the first person.

"Allegra, 4, plays dress-up, Malibu, Calif."
Lauren Greenfield
Photograph
Photo courtesy of Greenfield/Evers LLC

One of the most striking and poignant images is of a frail, disheveled woman in a hospital gown, her back to the wall and a scale, her arms held by two doctors or workers. Her deposition- like figure holds so much sadness and gravity. The label explains that this woman is being weighed at a clinic that treats eating disorders and she is not allowed to see the scale. If that information enough doesn't make you wonder how excruciating this mental and physical disease must be for a person, you can go on to read a first person account. The woman says how she dreads the weigh in each day

and has nightmares about hearing the scale click over to the side, indicating that she has gained weight. The insanity of the situation is heart wrenching.

The photos of young women in the thralls of self destructive image issues evoke concern and sadness for how our culture treats and portrays women, but the photographs of girls under 5 years old in "dress up clothes" hold a power unlike the older women. One photograph presents a young girl in a leotard and "play" high heels, carrying a headband with a veil. The background shows tossed about accessories and clothing in a very girly bedroom of white. She stands "striking a pose" with her leg kicked up to the side and a look to kill on her face. The intensity of this girl's face, which mimics a "fierce Beyonce music video look," evokes the question, "holy shit, look how early she is learning how she is supposed to portray herself!" This phenomenon of psychological distortion is a self-imprisoning mental reality instilled in women mostly through learned behaviors. Greenfield's photographs impart this realization.

Her images have a punch and collectively this series of photographs and writings hold a lot of content in a clear, no-bullshit way. ■

Sheila Hicks: 50 Years

by Virginia McKinney

"Sheila Hicks: 50 Years," on exhibit at Penn's Institute of Contemporary Art, is the first major retrospective to honor this iconic American fiber artist and sculptor. It includes more than 100 of her most important works, including a giant, 20 foot tall installation of a work on loan from the Target Corporation entitled "Will you Dance with Me."

The immense space of the gallery is filled with woven, wrapped and knotted fibers of every hue. Over a dozen pieces are huge, impressive works, suspended from the ceiling, piled on the floor and hung from the walls. Linen, wool, silk and mercerized cottons dominate the show, displaying a massiveness and density that beautifully contrasts with the delicacy of its original material – thin thread and yarn. Renowned for this type of work, she broke new ground in contemporary fibers. By considering this inversion of scale· working with the minute, and multiplying it hundred, even thousand fold, she created an enormous amount powerful, visually compelling work.

The towering waterfall of wrapped purples, greens and blues in "Will You Dance with Me", is a major highlight of the show. Enormously long tubes wrapped in colorful stripes cascade from the corner of the ceiling and fall to the floor, extending out into the main area of the exhibition space. The sheer enormity of the piece is remarkable, and one feels dwarfed in its presence. The huge stack of cut and wrapped yellow fibers piled high, entitled "Banisteriopsis" is impressive as well.

Because of the retrospective nature of the exhibit, one is immediately confronted with a visual timeline of fiber art spanning from the late fifties to present day. The natural colored rya knots of the 70's, the bright color palette of the 80's and the metallics of the 90's are all classically represented.

Sheila Hicks "Gallery Image ICA" 2011

Spanning the right wall of the gallery are 62 smaller, framed works dating from the late 50's to last year. These diminutive works seem much more like studies, and do not present the significant impact that her larger pieces do. Neither do they display the evidence of progression or evolution that the other works exhibit. One might find it difficult to differentiate the difference between a work dated from the 50's to one created in 2008 or 2009 – making these pieces appear more dated and less "timeless" than her other larger works.

This retrospective is a remarkable collection of work from a prolific and influential artist. It is fitting and appropriate that Hicks exhibit her fifty years of creative work within the walls of the Institute of Contemporary Art. She, along with such other luminaries as Claire Zeisler and Lenore Tawney redefined fiber art, its potential and its possibilities. An internationally esteemed fiber artist, she was influential in bringing weaving and fiber work from the narrow relegation of craft into the greater world of Art. And what amazing Art it is. ■

Review of "Speculative Landscapes"

by AJ Bredensteiner

Chad Curtis made a sort of room installation called "Speculative Landscapes" at the Philadelphia Art Alliance. It involves CNC-milled MDO plywood arranged into a shelf type structure that has many levels and many angles. On top of these shelves are glass jars that are different shapes and sizes and little clay trees. Inside the glass jars is growing something like moss or grass. The first thing to come to mind was a play on the old landscape paintings people used to make. Each jar being the beginning of a potential landscape painting bringing about the title "Speculative Landscapes." Curtis could also be commenting on mans' control over nature by using a former-tree

Seen Girl culture by Lauren Greenfield...
Lotsa girls, lotsa clothes, and only a lil bit o nakedness...

Tweet by AJ Bredensteiner

structure supporting the remains of "real" nature in convenient little jars. This statement is all the more potent knowing Rittenhouse Square is right out the front door.

Then there is the whole global warming thing symbolized by tiny greenhouses and whatnot. It looks like the structure can be arranged fairly freely which would make it a technology aided customizable matrix of freedom that is bottled for personal use. It must have been deliberate to create this structure in the middle of the room and have people walk around it. The potential for the whole thing crashing down may be another comment on the fragility of man made nature, while mother nature is one of the strongest forces know. I liked the colors.

Curtis currently lives and works in Philadelphia and received a MFA from Alfred University in western New York. His work exists at the intersection between the latest technology and home made crafts. These usually contradictory elements are combined to create work that "remains playfully optimistic invoking the alluring possibilities of bright and glossy colors, flawless polished Plexiglas and curvaceous, tactilely inviting forms." as described on his website. Last month Curtis worked at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, MT as a artist in resident. There he was exploring the technology that allows him to digitally print porcelain. ■

"Speculative Landscapes"

Photo by AJ Bredensteiner

PAFA: Hiro Sakaguchi

by Carrice Chardin McKinstry

Bombs, anthills, ships, games, and golfers teeing off at volcanoes that swallow and regurgitate jets. This is a shortlist of the striking imagery that leaps out of Hiro Sakaguchi's series: *No Particular Place to Go,* which is on display through August 28th at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' (PAFA) Morris Gallery. Sakaguchi is a 1996 PAFA graduate and his classical training in painting is apparent in his work, despite the pop style and cartooning techniques he utilizes as vehicles for his expression. In this same vein,

Fetus Bingo & Emaciated models on view at Philadelphia's Arthur Ross Gallery in Lauren Greenfield's "Girl Culture and Fashion Show" 4/9-7/31

Tweet by Carrice Chardin McKinstry

Sakaguchi layers method, content, culture, style, tradition, technology, and the element of time to build the imagery and presentation of his message.

The initial feeling invoked in me was akin to being lost in imagination. The dreamlike renderings inspired exploration of content more than contemplation of meaning. Sakaguchi depicts his playful aesthetic narrative through the use of surreal proportions, fanciful pastel colors, minimized depth of field, and often the perspective of a seemingly childlike point of view. This narrative is coherent in this series of works beginning with a line of small prints hung end-to-end connecting the interworking of the tunnels in a classic plastic ant farm and the community of extraordinarily large insects, tiny canoes, houses with cars parked in their driveways, barbeques, planes, escalators, intricately drawn landforms, Dr. Seuss-like trees, and robots, that reside within conjoined with the occasional phallus, drawn or smeared on, in what would appear to be finger-paint. The show continues with very large paintings of bears fishing planes out of waterfalls, battles at castle gates, and the birds eye view of a house with a pink car and a swing-set visible through swirling clouds with lingering Care-Bear-like nostalgia.

Hiro Sakaguchi, Hibachi Engine Boat, at Morris Gallery, PAFA

The piece I find to be the most intriguing does not stray from the theme of childhood novelty toys, yet contains the highest level of elements and layers of execution. In the center of the room on a print of the ocean's wake sits a smaller than life fishing boat which bears no passenger but only the evidence of his presence; a single chair, a fishing rod, crushed beer cans and a cooler. On the corresponding wall is a larger than life, three-dimensional rendition of the well-recognized game, Battleship. The game-board, made of transparent acrylic, lies over top of a black and white drawing of masted ships and large splashes from bombs being dropped in the water. Next to the "Battleship" is the title-card for the piece as expected, but under that is a card with a QR code. When scanned with a Smartphone, the QR code reveals a link to a web url containing the painting referenced by the piece. This level of exploration or elementary research is rarely asked of a viewer. Its inclusion marks a definitive moment in the development of viewer involvement. This piece most clearly brings to light the commentary on the passage of time, shift in generations, development of technology, and its universal advances. ■

Social Transformation: Ai Weiwei

by Kevin Lehman

Many artists throughout history that have been on the forefront of social transformation, risking their careers, facing jail time and even being physically punished as they communicate the need for change. Ai Weiwei, an international artist from China, is no stranger to the oppressive nature of powerful governments that are interested in maintaining control over the population even if it means disregarding human rights. He was beaten by police and recently unlawfully detained for 80 days. He was release on June 22, 2011 but due to the terms of his probation must remain silent. By going full-bore into political art and using social media, Al Weiwei has made artwork that is affecting the world by informing and engaging the general populace, far beyond the art community, from urban youth to international leaders.

On May 12th, 2008 a major earthquake devastated the Sichuan providence in China killing 70,000 people. The local citizens wanted to know how many people where killed in the disaster, but the government refused to release the names of the dead. About a year after the devastating earthquake no names were published so Ai decided to take action.

He was so outraged at the lack of government responsibility he joined an investigation into the number of student deaths caused when government buildings collapsed due to poor construction. He established a "citizen's investigation" consisting of volunteers of all ages who collected information the government refused to release. They surveyed schools and recovered names, birth dates and the names of the schools of the children who were killed. The project was not kindly received by the national government because the investigation uncovered the widely reported fact that the school buildings' poor construction played a principal role in the disproportionately high mortality rate of schoolchildren, a fact that was strenuously covered up by government authorities.

Once the names were collected Ai posted every single name on his blog. Then he created works of art that spoke of the Chinese government's unwillingness to accept responsibility. With his blog posts, he reached out beyond the art community to those involved in the earthquake and those with compassion for human life. He

Ai Weiwei in Hospital, 2009

got a lot of attention domestically and not just in the art community but from waitresses, parents, schoolteachers and other common folk.

"She lived happily for seven years in this world," is a quote from a grieving mother whose daughter was killed in the Sichuan earthquake. The statement was presented on the facade of Haus der Kunst museum in Munich, Germany, written in Chinese with 9000 brightly colored backpacks. "Remembering" was on display for the world to see during his 2009 show "So Sorry." "Remembering" brought the Sichuan earthquake reality to the world. Unable to let the tragic event be forgotten, Ai continued to create work about it. This April, as Ai sat in jail, Harvard University Graduate School of Design displayed another piece of his that commented on the Sichuan earthquake victims. "Untitled" consists of five thousand three hundred thirty five children's' backpacks commemorating each child killed by inadequately constructed schools. The black and white backpacks were stacked in large cubes outside of the Northwest Labs, forcing college student to navigate them to enter the building. His work resonated with the students and can be understood by people in all society because it not only speaks to China but it relates to government and corporate cover-ups throughout the world.

Ai Weiwei continues to push the boundaries of what constitutes art, calling social media his greatest tool. Before his arrest, he spent many hours a day sharing his grievances on Twitter and on other social media. His posts were widely accessible, reaching all corners of the world, which made them very troublesome for the central government.

The government refused to let him testify in the case of Tan Zuoren, a fellow investigator of the inadequate school construction and student casualties from the earthquake. So he decided to appear in court to show his support for his fellow activist. As he slept in a hotel room, police barged into the room at 3am. During the altercation police beat Weiwei and prevented him from going to the court the following day. While in an elevator he snapped a photo of himself, a fellow activist and two of the police officers who detained him. The image was posted on the Internet for all to view. Again he raised questions about the government's willingness to suppress information and physically abuse the country's citizens in order to keep them silent to maintain "stability."

However, Ai refused to remain silent. A few weeks later, he was hospitalized with internal bleeding in his brain and needed emergency surgery. The cerebral hemorrhaging is believed to be linked to the police attack. While in recovery he took photos and posted his progress on the Internet. His use of social media became his art. He attracted individuals from all walks of life with tens of thousands of people reading his posts daily.

Art to me is more than self-expression. It is a form of communication, a dialog of ideas. And Art is more than just the piece in itself. It often comes with written statements and previous dialog from the artist's own history. Ai Weiwei has had a lifetime dialog of fighting back against oppression, starting in the year of his birth. The same year his artist father was banished by Chairman Mao for 20 years for writing subversive poetry. It could even be argued that Ai's life has become a work of art in its own right.

Ai is very clear about his intent with his work. He has said his role is to be an example that an individual can make a difference by triggering

changes in thinking and opening up new ideas and possibilities which bring about changes in behavior. He is interested in social transformation and has used social media to reach hundreds of thousands of people. He lit a spark for all generations to act. The question now is: because of his silence will that spark be extinguished or will it ignite a larger fire?

I think it will ignite an extremely large fire. Ai Weiwei is only one of dozens of other artists, activists and intellects to be arrested in China this year. But it is his case that has galvanized international outrage. Demonstrations were staged in front of Chinese consulates and embassies across the world. The Tate Museum in London had written in prominent black letters along its facade, "Release Ai Weiwei." An international petition sent out via the web collected over 100,000 signatures before cyber attacks, from inside China, slowed it down. Foreign ministers in several countries called for his release. Demonstrations continued in large cities throughout the world. And media probed the question until his release: Where is Ai Weiwei? He knew his actions were in opposition to the government and knew the history of the Chinese government detaining people and silencing any opposing views. Yet he remained living in China and refused to obey the authorities. When one person's detention creates such a reaction from the world, something needs to change. And that is exactly what Ai Weiwei's goal is with his art: to bring about changes in thoughts that inevitably lead to changes in actions. Therefore, his detention is the culmination of a lifetime of artistic practice and all that he stands for. His unwillingness to lie down and accept the oppression of people has led to his detention. And the world population is not willing to let his unlawful arrest be accepted.

His detention was powerful because it brought about a worldwide reaction for fundamental change, physical action by hundreds of thousands of people demanding that a voice that speaks for the voiceless be heard and a person that opposes oppression and supports free thought be free himself. It's not the government bureaucracy that causes change. It is the people that cause change to the bureaucracy. The odds are currently stacked against him, but while there is life there is hope, and Ai may yet see China and other parts of the world transformed for the better. ■

THIGHMASTER

by Lindsey Baker

"Great Legs. Some people were born with great legs but the rest of us have to work at it." Suzanne Somers' famous lines from the ThighMaster commercials have lingered in my mind for the last twenty years.

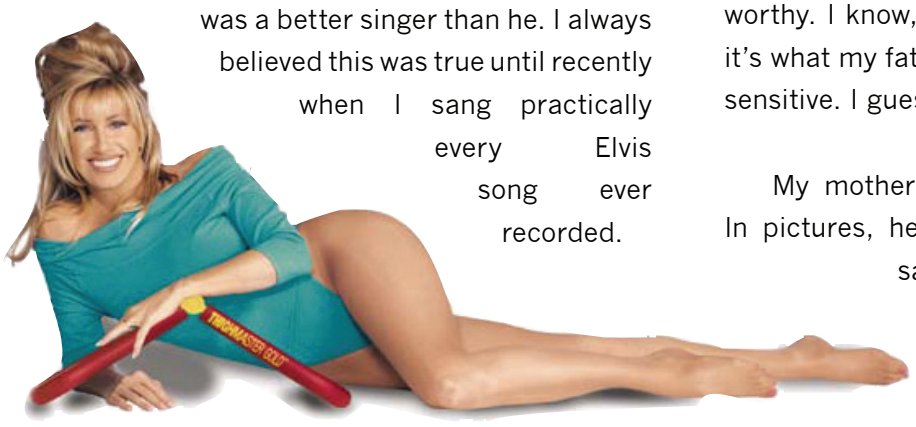
When the movie "What's Love Got to Do with It" was released in 1993, Tina Turner seemed to be on every TV interview show. America really wanted to know just how shitty Ike was. Each time she was on, my mother would walk up to the TV and explain that she and Tina had great legs; "runner's legs." I asked my mother to consider the ThighMaster as an alternative to the years of running that

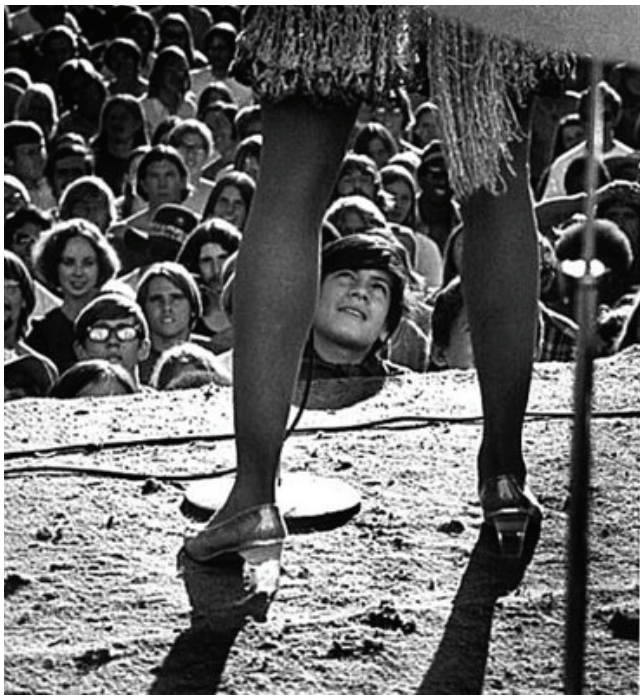
had started to wreck her hips. Mom was at the chiropractor every week. At some point she even had to stop running completely. But still my mother maintained great legs. I guess that's why it was so easy for her to suggest that my cellulite could benefit from the same type of exercise that she and Tina had endured.

The ThighMaster ads started showing up on TV in 1991, I was 9 years old. Tina Turner's biopic came out two years later and since then I've been completely incapable of disconnecting Suzanne, Tina, and my mother. I connect my parents to a lot of trivial pop culture anecdotes.

When I was a kid, every time James Brown came on the radio, my father would say, "he's just an asshole who ran over his wife with a car --a real wife-beater." Back then wife-beaters weren't t-shirts and my dad wasn't the gentlest guy himself. So all of those times he reminded me about James Brown's car/wife trouble, I imagined my mother under my father's car tires. Still anytime I hear the Godfather of Soul, I'm unable to appreciate his contribution to popular music because all I can think about is my mother as a damn pancake.

My father, a huge Roy Orbison fan, told me another important tidbit that luckily didn't ruin any music for me. Dad said that Elvis Presley supposedly admitted that Roy Orbison was a better singer than he. I always believed this was true until recently when I sang practically every Elvis song ever recorded.





In 1986 Priscilla Presley published "Elvis and Me," a memoir based on her life with the King of Rock 'n' Roll. In 1988 the book was adapted into a made for TV movie. I extracted most of the preexisting audio from "Elvis and Me" and replaced it with my friends, my mother and me performing Elvis songs. My father refused to sing any for me.

What Elvis really had said was that "Roy Orbison is the greatest singer in the world." I don't know if I agree with my father and Elvis. "Harbor Lights" and "It's Now or Never" are ridiculously goosebump worthy. I know, I sang them. "In Dreams" is epic; it's what my father would sing if he were somehow sensitive. I guess it's a tie between Roy and Elvis.

My mother's father died before I was born. In pictures, he looked like a mobster but Mom says that he was just a soft-spoken barber who thought the record player was broken the day she brought home "Crimson and

arthur ross gallery dir. lynn marsden-atlass calls some of the imagery in lauren greenfield's show "edgy." if anything, its commonplace.

Tweet by Lindsey Baker

Clover." Mom would lower her voice and squint her eyes like Mr. Magoo every time she reminded me that Pappy Leo thought the Tommy James song was recorded under water.

In 9th grade my choir teacher, Mrs. Horner, lent me an electric guitar with an amplifier that only worked on tremolo. I played "Crimson and Clover" six times in a row while my mother stood in my bedroom doorway sort of swaying with her arms crossed. She started to cry and asked me if I knew any other songs.

"After all, we may not have been born with great legs, but we can look like we were."

I wouldn't say I have terrible legs. Yeah, I've got a little cellulite, but I'm proud to say that I'm definitely cankle-free. Thanks, Mom. I'm also obsessed with the awkwardly homespun musicology classes I've taken when I maybe should have been running.

Works Cited

"1991 · Thighmaster" · YouTube." YouTube · Broadcast Yourself. Web. 25 July 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkxFWVGqUCg>.

Www.elvispresleybiography.com · Elvis Presley Quotes. Www.elvispresleybiography.com · The Elvis Presley Biography. Web. 25 July 2011. <http://www.elvispresleybiography.com/elvis_presley_quotes.html>.

"What's Love Got to Do with It (1993) · IMDb." The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). Web. 25 July 2011. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108551/>.

Peripatetic Investigations: Providing a Sense of Place in our Digital Age

by Marjorie A. Renno

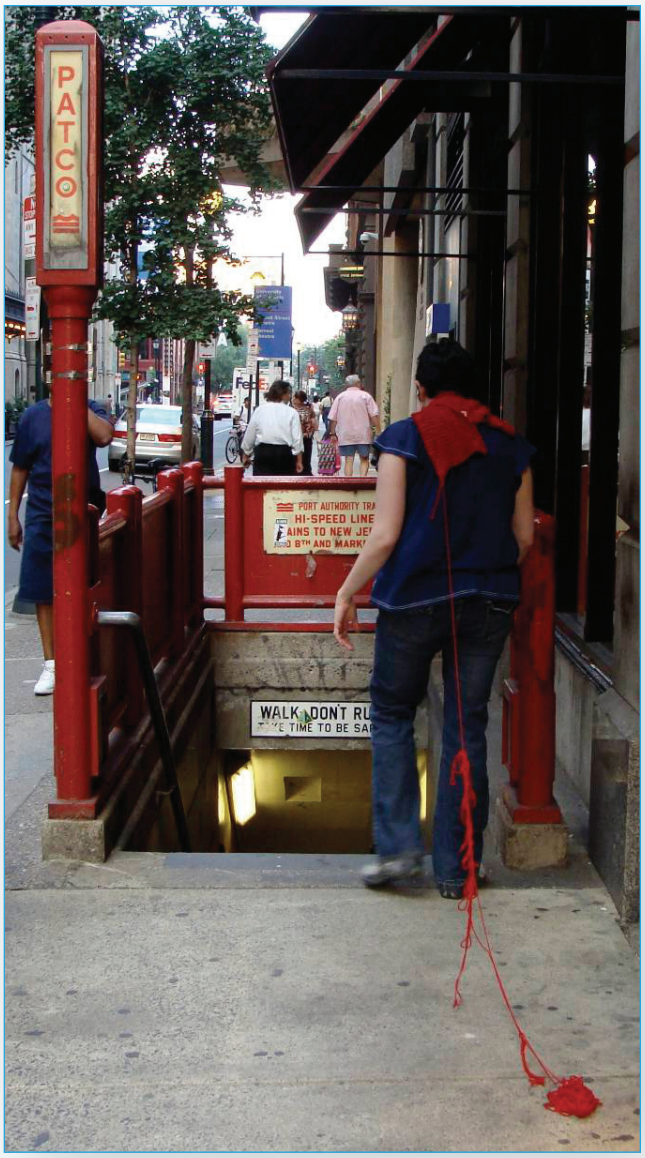
Since it has been too hot to walk outside, I have been visiting a local sporting club to walk their indoor track. The track sits above an enormous open area gym that is packed with people, though I seem to always be the only one on the track. Below me are dozens and dozens of people on treadmills, stair machines, and spinning cycles. Each one of them is plugged in to a large flat screen monitor attached to the front of their machine. Simultaneously, they are texting on their cell phones as they move to the beats playing in the earphones they are wearing. As I make my laps around the track, I am watching them and feeling perplexed. I can tell you about the feel of that artificial turf under my feet, about how the light hits the walls and where the sounds echo in this corridor, but I wonder what they could tell me about their surroundings while on those stationary machines plugged into technology in so many countless ways? The digital age has put the world at our fingertips, but from this point of view it has limited our horizons.

Legend has it, more than 2,000 years ago Aristotle gave lectures while walking about the Lyceum. Some say this is where his followers developed the name of the Peripatetic School, since the word in its Greek roots references the idea of wandering. More than a half century ago,

Richard Long was sidetracked while on a journey to St. Martin's from his home in Bristol and created "A Line Made by Walking," which began his lifelong dialogue surrounding transience, movement and relativity. The question I have today, as an artist who employs the practice of walking and who happens to be moving around this track in isolation, is "What value does peripatetic investigation in art hold in the digital age?"

To answer this question, I must first reveal the best kept secret in the art world: Richard Long is not the only "Walking Artist." His contributions to the use of wandering practices in art have been noted in history books, where his work is well documented. Please keep in mind that when he took that walk, music was stilled listened to on record players, the floppy disk was still under development and man was two years away from walking on the moon. Based on the context of my question, he holds little relevance to the digital age, as his walks are firmly rooted in the past. If we fast-forward more than fifty years, we can see what has grown from the tiny seedlings he planted in the world of art when he took that walk.

There are countless artists who employ the practice of walking today, many of whom were not yet born when Long took his first formal walk. These contemporary artists are located all over the world and many can be found through The Walking Artist Network. There is performance artist Mads Floor Andersen who did "Project 599" in 2009 which was a journey through six countries that resulted in a book documenting the traces of his encounters. His performance for "599" had him document his encounters with 598 individuals along his walk, each of those people now aware of their own place through the documentation that happened with them. You might also come across Daniel Belasco Rogers' "GPS Drawings"



Marjorie A. Renno

which are based on the constant GPS recordings of his movements since 2003, which he works with computer scientists to translate. Face to face with Rogers' drawings, viewers are forced to consider their own daily movements and the spaces they pass through.

There are collaborative teams such as Sorrel Muggridge and Laura Nanni whose projects deal with journeys, distance and translation of space. One such project, "Further Afield" (2009) connected participants despite an ocean between

them. In this series, the artists facilitated performance-walks for two participants at a time and simultaneously. One occurred in Aberystwyth, UK and one in Montreal, Canada. Connected by phone, the participants negotiated public space and mirrored walks nearly 4,000km apart in what appeared to be unconnected locations. The work poses the question of whether or not individuals can share an experience while in separate spaces? Muggridge and Nanni's projects invite viewers to consider their individual space within the wider global context.

In 2005, Janet Cardiff took participants on an audio tour through Central Park that stayed true to her narrative style. For this audio tour entitled "Her Long Black Hair," the public was invited to pick up an audio player, map and packet of photographs from a kiosk at 6th Avenue and Central Park South. From that point, listeners were taken on a site-specific walk through historic Central Park, under the illusion of following the path of a mysterious woman with long black hair.

The high quality recording created a sound experience that impacted the senses. It began with the artist's soft voice speaking in a familiar tone, as if the listeners were old friends whom the artist had known for years. Cardiff spoke in such a way that listeners could almost feel her pulling them along to the next stop. The sound of the artist's footsteps, which echoed on top of the listeners' own in reality, implied that she was walking with them. The tour wove in and out of real time, speaking to what was located in front of them and what may have been located there in the past.

Cardiff's voice guided listeners on this walk. Occasionally, she would instruct those listening to pull photographs out of the packet. The photographs would be taken from the point of view of the very spot they were now standing on. The picture often included what they were looking at with the back of the woman with dark hair walking away. This added a new layer to the sensory experience and created a connection between the listeners and the speaker in this specific place. Participants were guided through Central Park's historic pathways by Cardiff on a journey that was part mysterious adventure and part retracing the path of the "woman with long black hair." The tour was more about one side of a conversation than instructional steps. Sounds from the past experience on this path by the artist are layered with the sounds being experienced in the present by participants to create a new and complex reality for the listener. By deconstructing her own walk into its essential sounds and images, Cardiff invites viewers to investigate this place and come to know it through their own discovery.

I think that that must be the answer to "What value does peripatetic investigation in art hold in the digital age?" It provides participants with a sense of place during an age where the spaces we most occupy are virtual. Looking down on the people below me on the treadmills, who are plugged into multiple media outlets as they go through the motions of walking without actually traveling, I observe that the space they occupy here is entirely simulated. There can be no sense of place where there is no actual space. In our digital age, the value of artistic practices rooted in walking is that it provides for the potential of discovery of place on the part of the viewer. These practices instigate an awareness of the actual space a person occupies, breaking down the barriers cyberspace has created between people and reality. ■

L.Greenfield's GirlCulture @ RossGallery bring audiences face2face w/female body as canvas: explores both the glorified and the grotesque.

Tweet by Marjorie A. Renno

Examining the Vulnerable Physicality of the Body

by Virginia McKinney

Innumerable artists use the body as theme and subject to explore the idea of the human condition. Some particularly notable artists that have been considering this exploration are Kiki Smith, Sally Mann, Magdelena Abakanowicz, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. They reference the body to create powerful work that resonates with potent emotional significance that demands the viewers' attention. Their works address the body through various lenses of consideration – ambiguity, interpretation, presence, dichotomy, viscera, vulnerability, incongruity and materiality.

Frequently, the work of these artists involves examining the vulnerable physicality of the body. Often though, they also try to acknowledge and convey the powerful essence of the spirit. Ambiguity and contradiction infuses much of their work as the viewer is confronted with an array of incongruent impressions · virility and vulnerability, beauty and imperfection, potency and weakness, preciousness and the sinister. It is that special space – that ambiguous place – that can offer the viewer the most compelling, visceral experience.

For me, Felix Gonzalez-Torres' 1991 "Projects 34" is an excellent example of that kind of affective work. The artwork consisted of twenty-four billboards spread throughout New York City. The billboards presented a giant black and white photo of an empty bed, with no text or other information of any kind. It was a powerful example of an ambiguous, open ended, thoughtful consideration of loss. The photograph of the bed – normally a very personal and intimate space · showed the sheets rumpled, the pillows revealing the lingering impressions. At first viewing, it could have been construed as a lovely, inviting, soft bed. After carefully examining the hollows left in the recently vacated pillows though, one felt the profound emptiness of that bed. It was extremely gentle, yet very powerful. Torres' Projects 34 derives poignancy comes from what is not evident – it's absent presence – that makes the emotive content of the work all the more powerful.

Materiality also seems to be an extremely important consideration for many artists who refer to the corporal. They frequently appreciate and exploit the materiality of their chosen media as a way to further inform their work. For example, viscera is visually expressed and highly effective in much of Abakanowicz's work with her use of fibrous materials such as sisal and hemp, while Smith employs materials such as waxes, sinew, and hair to offer the organic and biologic qualities she seeks.

Like Smith, Abakanowicz uses the body as her theme and subject, alluding to the body as a biological organism in both form and content. Much lies hidden below the surface of both their bodies of work, as there is a disturbing, unsettling presence that is gently powerful. The work done by these two women is strikingly different in presentation, yet remarkably similar in how they use the body to convey their very emotive visual statements.

For over thirty years now, Kiki Smith has been sculpting, drawing, and printing images of the body. She fearlessly employs an extremely wide

variety of techniques and remarkable materials; colored microcrystalline and beeswax life size figures, etchings using human hair, teardrops of cast glass, and not surprisingly, cast paper dyed with her own blood. She has explored the body from the perspective of both the anatomical interior and exterior and presented it both in its figural entirety and in fragmented parts. It is her interest in investigating the dichotomy between the vitality of the life force and the frailty, or mortality, of the body that I find most persuasive in her work. In an interview published in the Journal of Contemporary Art (www.jca-online.com/ksmith) she states, "In making work that's about the body, playing with the indestructibility of life, where life is this ferocious force that keeps propelling us; at the same time, it's also about how you can just pierce it and it dies. I'm always playing between these two extremes about life."

Admittedly, with her flayed figures exposing raw muscle and her canisters neatly labeled "urine, semen, pus, diarrhea" etc, I sometimes feel her collected work seems more like a pathology lab or morgue than an art exhibition. She is an in-your-face artist, unafraid to be corporeally realistic, visceral and brutal. A few of her less overt, subtler pieces such as the multiple cast glass "Tailbone" and "Ribcage" though, absolutely amaze me with their quiet command. In "Ribcage" the bleached, calcined ribs hang tenuously from thread, imploring me to question who it was that once possessed them. The stunningly crystalline tailbones are at once precious and beautiful - macabre and sinister. They are rich with melancholy and carefully straddle the balance of the light and the grievous.

Subjective interpretation is encouraged by these artists and makes their work all the more effective and communicative. When an artwork

Sally Mann 'Hephaestus' 2008

offers all the answers, the work has little or no impact on me. When the photo is too didactic, the sculpture obvious and overt, and the painting either overly confrontational or not challenging enough, I don't feel compelled to invest myself in it and am not engaged. A successful artwork encourages me to study it further when it offers me small clues and slight insights that coax me to delve more deeply into it, feeding my curiosity. When I am allowed to bring my own experiences and perceptions into the work, the piece takes on even greater significance. I like to take leave from viewing a piece of art, with questions, uncertainties, and challenges that stay in my mind and keep the work with me, long afterward.

It was decades ago that I first saw the work of Sally Mann and Magdelena Abakanowicz, and that impactful experience has stayed with me since. It is that particular ephemeral quality – the implication of undefined uncertainty - that mystery, that helps animate and inform a successful piece of artwork.

"Girl Culture" Lots of sad skewed stories. Girls/women with issues of self worth & beauty, told with colorful photos and personal narrative.

Tweet by Virginia McKinney

It is that magical, yet often elusive, ambiguous quality, that I also strive for in my own work.

A consummate master of her craft, Sally Mann respects her chosen medium and the inherent providence of a demanding and finicky process – in this case black and white photography. In Mann's recent series, "Flesh and Spirit", she photographed her husband's naked body, revealing the decimated muscle and skin ravaged from Muscular Dystrophy. Yet, the photographs offer a sense of strength and virility as well. She has experimented and manipulated her photographic process in such a way that it has become an integral communicative component of her artwork.

She uses an ancient bellows view camera and employs a wet plate collodion process to create her ethereal, and stunningly evocative photographs. The resulting image is distressed and distorted, and is the perfect vehicle to express the flawed vulnerability of her current subject. The implication of that vulnerability is supported and strengthened by her choice of materials and her determination to allow and encourage the process to shape her work. In the exhibition notes of Mann's Gagosian show, author C. D. Wright wrote: "She grounds her images in the here and now of the visible world and human flesh. And then by her expressive use of traditional techniques and processes, she invites viewers to imagine the invisible forces working beneath the surface. Hers is a physical photography that draws attention to itself as an object and to its own process and materials and artifice. At the same time, it leaves us with a sense that by its exquisite union of the familiar and the strange we recover a means of contemplating deeper truth."

Felix Gonzalez-Torres "Untitled" 1991

Tomes have been written over the years on artists who use the body as subject, theme and form in their work, and this essay barely scratches the surface of how the human condition can be visually expressed. These particular artists and the few specific pieces I mentioned though, possess those qualities that I find amazingly potent, compelling and communicative.

I came across a very appropriate accolade directed toward Kiki Smith in the previously mentioned Journal of Contemporary Art. I think though, that it accurately pertains to Torres, Abakanowicz, and Mann as well. "Kiki Smith's art, ranging over a diverse array of creative (often craft-oriented) media and continuously shifting between the conceptual and literal, formal and idiomatic, scientific and spiritual, political and personal, as well as clinically precise and abstractly metaphorical in her attitudes and expressions, has remained dedicated ...to an unflinching, tireless, and obsessively demanding investigation of a singular yet vast territory of human experience: the body." ■

Showerwriter

by Carrice Chardin McKinstry

I am only a writer in the shower. I have nearly all my moments of clarity in the shower. It seems that this tends to happen in the car as well, which is my secondary think tank. I designed my entire Undergraduate Diploma Works installation in the shower. It may seem deranged, but there were even a couple of instances during the concept development stage where I took up to four showers in a day. I don't know what it is. I would imagine that it is akin to the feeling a horse might have in a starting gate. Shoved into a cramped box. No distractions. Only the thoughts of what is directly ahead and how to dominate it. Anxious for the gate to fly open and leave you to conquer. The difference is, when I get out the thoughts seem to remain in the shower. In trying to rescue them from their inevitable doom of flowing into the abyss of the sewer, I have concluded that I need to make some way to record my thoughts without leaving my watery idea incubator. Perhaps grease pencils could survive the duration, just until I was able to jump out and re-jot these thoughts onto actual paper, as it seems that just having a notebook directly outside isn't really all that conducive to writing things down with wet hands. Actually this parallels my automobile conundrum. I have decided the solution is dry-erase markers and the most vertical windshield you can find. Mine happens to be in a Subaru Forester. This was actually one of the larger selling points, a close runner-up to this vehicle allowing a proper hula girl to reside on the dash without cracking her head on the glass.

Previous to this plan, I downloaded a voice recorder app on my cell phone and tried to convince myself to actually use it. Honestly though, I knew

that this was never going to happen. Perhaps if I named it so I felt as if I were talking to some sort of mammal. I have been on sort of a David Lynch kick lately. I wouldn't consider myself a hardcore fan or anything, but I have a solid appreciation and affinity for his twisted thoughts, style and execution. As part of this, I have re-visited his 1990s Twin Peaks series. I find myself wondering whether Diane is truly FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper's secretary to whom he is dictating via voice recorder, or if he has simply named this machine that has become his companion. In any case, Diane is a good a name as any for a voice recorder and I believe I would like for that to be the name of mine as well.

So, I have established that the only true conduit I have found to being able to write is the shower. The shower has become my official place of solitude. When I take a shower I go into autopilot.

I go through the motions of my shampoo, rinse, etc. routine. This frees my mind from pent up anxiety and lets my thoughts out so my mind flows. I admire those who can write and am baffled by those who can make me laugh out loud about subjects that would seem to be completely dry. Take David Sedaris and Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, for instance. And then there's me. I do have the skills to butcher the life out of a thesaurus if it gets late enough, and I'm sure could sprinkle enough "big words" throughout my papers to easily slip from sounding smart into sounding pretentious during one of my late night writing marathons. This case however displays sound reasoning for writing in the bathroom, as that is where the "Word of the Day" toilet paper is generally kept. This is a vital commodity for me when trying to give my writing flavor. I have learned over time that virtually any experience I have deemed worthy enough to record verbally has merely been cheapened by my words. Due to this, along with one or two instances where keeping a journal has disrupted the placidity of my life by falling into the wrong hands, I burned all of them.

It has been suggested to me on multiple occasions that I should record the sagas of my life. They are pretty out there. I think a large part of what is stopping me is that I am afraid of making my experiences sound trite. Also the fact that when writing, the freedom to develop the language of the story gauged by a live audiences' response is forfeited. Not to mention the intimidating concreteness of the written word. John Baldessari has said, "I've often thought of myself as a frustrated writer. I consider a word and an image of equal weight, and a lot of my work comes out of that kind of thinking," (John Baldessari in Calvin Tompkin's article, "No More Boring Art: John Baldessari's crusade." *The New Yorker*, Oct. 18, 2010). I do not agree. I think that writing is often much more literal than visual art, at least conceptual art. Although both may hold the same weight in meaning, it seems to me (at least at this juncture of my educational voyage) visual art can be more vague or obscure and still communicate the intent successfully. When attempting this in writing, and sometimes even speaking, there is more of a risk of confusing and disengaging the reader/listeners. Baldessari also noted, "David Foster Wallace once said that the duty of the writer is to make the reader feel intelligent, and to let them fill in the gaps. I feel that way too," (John Baldessari). I'd need a lot more practice to get to this point.

I find it difficult to portray my thoughts in a way that reflects my mood or voice, and intended overtones. People often don't get me in person,

much less in writing. Texting and emailing can be real challenges. At times only the people closest to me, with a few exceptions who usually turn out to be weird themselves, can truly follow the connections to my tangent leaps, and the responses I usually get consist of amusement and the all too familiar, "You're weird" comment. I can ramble out loud, and though it took a while to learn to accomplish, come full circle to the initial thought where the point of conversation is realized. This is much more difficult in writing, especially if I have been contemplating these things in a place where writing implements are unavailable to jot down my thoughts as they come. This is especially frustrating as most often this occurs in my "think tank," the shower.

Not only is it vital to be able to record thoughts in some way or another, but I think it is helpful to understand why certain environments are more conducive to thinking as well as what actually triggers the initial thoughts. I have begun to explore these concepts first by formulating a material method with which I can document and archive the thoughts that I have within the environment itself, as I believe I will obtain the most accurate reasoning of why this has so far been the best environment to cogitate by actually being in it. If I can deduce what these factors are, maybe I can devise a way to fashion an environment in a more logical space, such as my studio.

I came up with a contraption to permit my modus operandi: The Showeriter...or Scrub 'n' Sketch...or whatever cleverly annoying name you decide to fabricate in your own mind. I don't know about you, but I, and quite a few others I have noticed, have the habit of combining words, forming a bastardization of something's proper name usually alluding to some dumb pun. I started out by conjuring up a list of items and materials I thought would survive the duration of a shower. Then purged through a process of elimination. Next I amassed the relevant materials, conjured up a way to attach them and stepped into my lab. I experimented with a variety of combinations of techniques and settled on the one I felt was the most successful, at least for now. If I were to actually pursue materializing this into a marketable product I would delve much further into the design aspects, but the farthest I ever see going with this is creating a tool for personal use. Who knows, if I come across enough valid findings pertaining to the aspects of this environment, maybe I can Feng-Shui my way into not having to utilize this method as an essential and necessary element in my creative process. The components of this functioning mechanism, however temporary; are acetate sheets clipped to a roll up cutting board, to provide stability as well as a white background to increase the visibility of the marks on the acetate, which are made using grease pencils (China Markers) and can be easily and effectively removed using a Magic Eraser. Once I am out of the shower, the text or drawing is transferred either by re-writing it by hand, or digitally documenting it through photos or scans. I chose to photograph each sheet because the random placement of my notes on the page as well as the different types of handwriting I tend to use are important to me as a visual thinker. I then copied them into more legible handwritten notes, making them easier to organize. The next step in this process involves organizing thoughts, eradicating the insignificant ones, then deducing and developing the final, overall meaning obtained from them.

I mentioned earlier that I developed my entire concept for my undergraduate *Diploma Works exhibition*, in the shower. I used the shower as a meditative tool while working on that project. My focus was based on my memory of spending hours

in the family pool as a child. During monsoon season in Arizona the rain comes in undulating sheets. The air is still hot. The pool water and rain are both still tepid. I would keep myself floating just below the surface and feel the drops break through just far enough to touch me and then be absorbed into each other, no longer their own entity. In that project, I was successful in organizing and portraying my thoughts on this blundering mess of ideas as a metaphor. The epilogue of the book I created as part of my piece states, “Even in the crucible of the mind it is impossible to hold thoughts and memories, keeping them separate and unchanged. Like drops of water fallen into a pool, one becomes indecipherable from another.”

Hard Work as the Enemy

by AJ Bredensteiner

Hard work is for suckers. Sure it can be a useful tool to get ahead in certain situations. But it becomes a gimmick to coax "art enthusiasts" to look around the room wide eyed mouthing "Oh, my." I am specifically referring to hard work as an element of artwork. Not so much hard work as a general principle of getting work done. I have my issues with that as well but will stay focused in this paper. There has been a slow trend in art history to adopt the most current technology in an attempt to ease the workload and in some cases up productivity. The time has come where materiality in art is a nonissue and everything is reduced to the photograph. As Ben Woodward, a local Philadelphia artist, pointed out in a recent panel discussion "Never do anything in art that doesn't show up good in photographs."

Its not necessary these days to work really hard and make giant room installations. Using materials for their different qualities and noting the reaction by viewers is useless. I have no real facts or figures, but from my own experiences the overwhelming majority of artwork I come in contact with is from pictures. Whether it is an installation of tedious drawings, or some large intricate sculpture or a textural abstract painting most people will experience the work as a digital image in some form or another. People see artwork online, in magazines or newspapers but rarely in the gallery. And this is especially true for applying to different things. When I applied to grad school I was required to submit images of my work, not the actual work of course. So my moving to Philadelphia was determined, to some extent, on digital images of my paintings. The same is true for applying for grants, art competitions, residencies and whatnot.

When Christina West gave a lecture at school recently she was hitting on a similar notion. West makes slightly smaller than life-size figures, usually in clay, and arranges them in situations around the gallery. She says she is able to work really fast which allows her to continue showing these days. Someone who works at a slower pace could probably not keep up with the demand a working artist is assumed to be able to produce. But her figures rarely sell or are made of different materials that are not made to last. She ends up giving a few away and destroying most. But in spite of this she has no problems. She explained during the question and answer part of her talk that really the

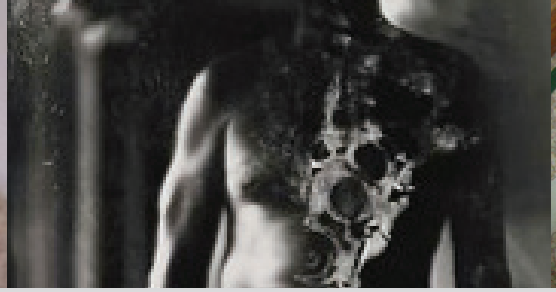
only thing she is concerned with is getting good photos of the installations. These are what she uses to get all her shows and grants anyway.

I don't believe hard work is really a virtue anymore. Hard work as a measure of value is more a communist mentality anyway, and I am a capitalist. It could just be a paradigm left over from the industrial revolution. When labor in factories was an important part of the economy. I am sure it still is important, but it seems like robots can do more work faster and cheaper than people. Pretty soon computers will be able to control our cars and, hopefully, eliminate traffic accidents. So now we won't even have to drive ourselves we will have robot chauffeurs.

Andy Warhol was attempting a similar path by eliminating painting and moving to silk-screening. At the time it was the easiest solution to creating the most number of works with the least amount of effort. Today artist like Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami and many others are creating digital work and then having assistants complete the paintings for them. They are still creating a painting as a finished piece but I believe that is just a remnant of another paradigm. That paintings are the true form of art. When we visited Vik Muniz's studio a few weeks ago he showed us around and a few of the newer pieces he was working on. Muniz makes drawings from different materials that range from the intimate to land art scale. But no matter the size of the drawing the work is photographed and exists as a digital print in the final form. Muniz said he would switch to digital prints once he could no longer tell the difference between that and traditional photography. One day his assistant brought in a piece and Muniz was surprised to find out it was in fact digital, now that is the only printing he uses because it is faster, cheaper and only going to get better.

Vik Muniz "Cloud Cloud"

There is not enough time in the day, or enough congratulations on a job well done to put in a lot of effort. Especially when the judgments of value are so subjective and varied. There are probably still people from the old guard that will scoff at someone not willing to work hard because of latent or unresolved issues dating back to eras gone by. But a quick look though a art history textbook will show a less biased story. The world has enough hard workers, enough to render it unnecessary. Artists are continually making use of methods to ease the workload. The majority of artwork is consumed digitally, or photographically, anyway. If that is the format of consumption then why not go with the flow. ■


Helvetica 11

Interviews, Reviews, & Essays

Editorial Poobahs ..... *Marjorie Albano Renno*
www.rennoartworks.com

Kevin Lehman
www.klpottery.com

Editorial Peons ..... *Veronica Bruce*
www.veronicabruceart.com

Robert Libby
www.robertlibbyart.com

Virginia McKinney
www.virginiamckinneystudios.com

Erica Nickol
www.ericanickol.com

Art Poobah ..... *David Chatfield*
www.riotbusart.com

Production Peons ..... *Guy Loraine*
www.guyloraine.com

Lindsey Baker
www.theofficialfancluboflindseybaker.com

AJ Bredensteiner
www.ajbredensteiner.com

Carrice Chardin McKinstry
www.c2quared3d.com

Almighty Overseer ..... *Janet Koplos*

The 2011 MFA Thesis Show

Thesis Exhibition Opening Reception
Friday December 2, 2011 6-9pm
First Friday Event
Philadelphia, PA
mfa2011.blogspot.com

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS