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A STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART, CULTURE AND POLITICS

APRIL 2011

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EU Film Festival

Chicago Pro Psychics

Petition For Roxane Assaf

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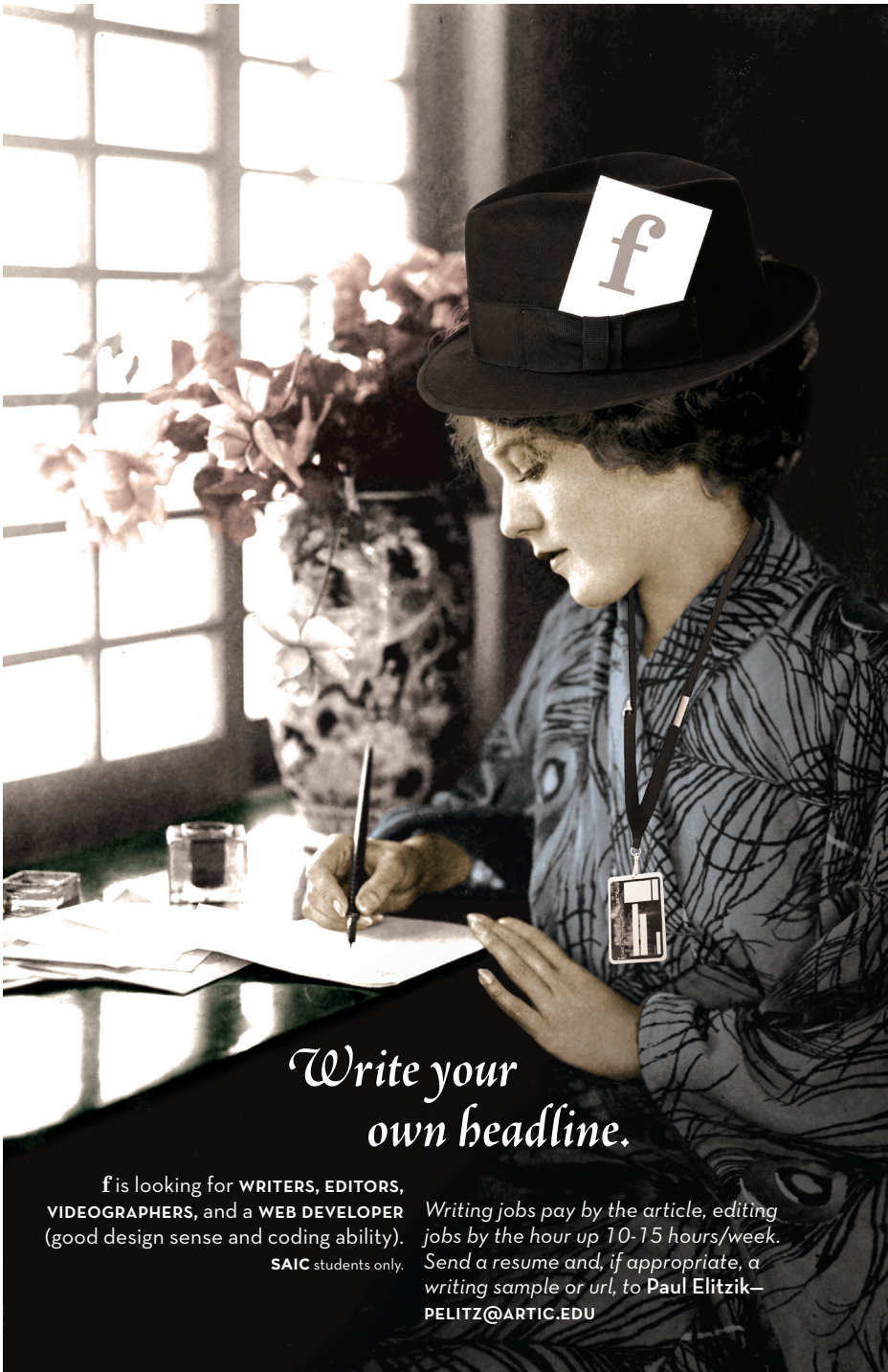
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A journal of art, culture and politics. A student publication of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
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Multimedia Artist Nick Briz, Casilda Sanchez
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SKEWL NEWZ TICKA...

While protests are being heard all around the country in support of teachers who are getting screwed, some recently fired CPS teachers are turning their rage into art. Lourdes Guerrero and Sunny Neater-DuBow, who have recently joined SAIC faculty, are two such teachers who contributed to a protest art show held at the Chicago Teachers Union headquarters last month. Ideas for an upcoming roaming exhibition are currently in the works.

SAIC alum Cameron Crawford’s sculpture and photography collages recently hooked the artist up with the \$30,000 Claire Rosen and Samuel Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists at Northwestern University. Mad bank for some awesome art. An SAIC artist will also be awarded this prize ... be on the lookout for an announcement next month.

Local filmmaker and SAIC professor Daniele Wilmouth is currently raising money to make a short film about Chicago’s 30-member circus punk marching band Mucca Pazza. Feel like helping out a fellow artist? Head on over to fundraising maven kickstarter.com and word search the project.

Lara Miller, SAIC alum and local fashion designer, was recently awarded one of Chicago Magazine’s Green Awards for her enviro-friendly clothing line. She’s also a key player in the Chicago Fashion Incubator, which is currently running a pop-up store at 900 N. Michigan. Head on over to check out some sweet new designers.

Weddings are pretty fun. Especially when they’re the theme of an alternative party, like About Face’s “Wonka Ball 2011: A Royal Wedding” — held in the SAIC ballroom on April 21. Cocktails, live entertainment, and an appearance by Queen Elizabeth? If this sounds amazing to you, go to www.aboutface theatre.com for the deets.

SAIC designers will present their work at Milan’s premier independent design showroom, Spazio Rossana Orlandi, during the Salone Internazionale del Mobile. The exhibition, LOADED, is comprised of original work exploiting iron and sugar. Sounds sweet. And metal-y.

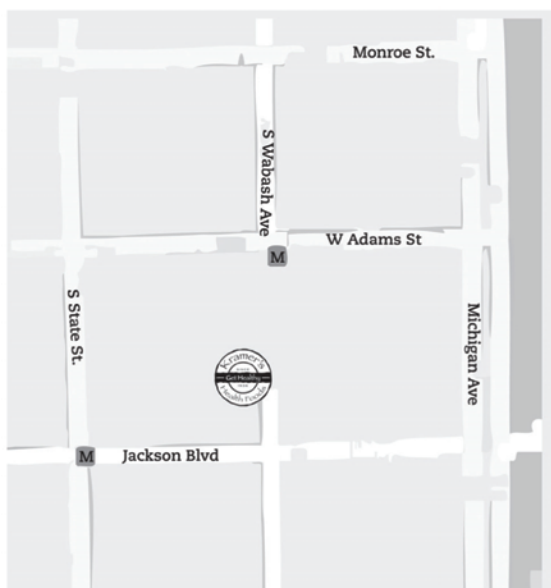
ART NEWZ TICKA...

Legendary art historian Leo Steinberg passed away in New York on March 13. Steinberg was part of the Greenberg/Rosenberg generation of powerful art historians and critics writing in the mid-20th century. His legacy will live on in the form of his seminal works on the Renaissance and Baroque, like the beloved “Sexuality of Christ,” and his important theoretical work on modern art of the ‘60s.

Nicolas Sarkozy has made yet another sensitive, enlightened move that is sure to win him even more popularity in the international arena. Each year, France celebrates the culture of another nation, and 2011 was proclaimed the “Year of Mexico.” Sarkozy decided to dedicate the celebrations to Florence Cassez, a French citizen who was convicted of kidnapping and other criminal charges in Mexico in 2008. The Mexican government has retaliated by withdrawing all support for the festivities, meaning that Mexican artists who have been preparing projects for a series of exhibitions in Paris will have invested thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours in vain.

The protests in the Middle East have embolded arts workers in Abu Dhabi, who caught the revolutionary spirit in March. Led by notable figures like Walid Raad, over 130 artists have declared that they will boycott the new Guggenheim Abu Dhabi if conditions for the laborers who are building the museum don’t improve.

Hans Ulrich Obrist (Director of the Serpentine Gallery, father of the marathon artist interview, and former “most powerful man in the art world”) is the featured interviewee in Louis Vuitton’s latest edition of “Manifest,” their annual magazine. Obrist joins the ranks of such renowned intellectuals as Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell and Christy Turlington, thus demonstrating his continued commitment to money, fame, and star power — and his increasing irrelevance to contemporary art.



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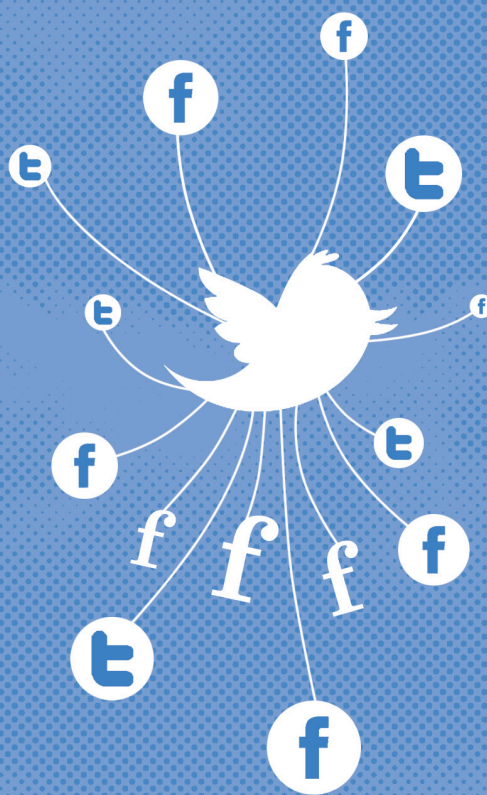
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Audiophiles

BY BRANDON GOEI

PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE FOLKS AT SAIC WHO PRODUCE VISUAL AND SONIC ART

This month, we talk to Eric Davis, a BA in the sound department.

On the 12th floor cafe of MacLean, a slender man dressed in black stands in front of the toaster — fluid but not loose, bowed but not hunched. He seems a fixture of his surroundings, so much so that I'm slightly startled when he calls out to me, "Hey, how's it going?" Never moving from his position, never looking up from the counter. It takes me a second to register his greeting, and I stammer back a throwaway response. That wasn't the first time I'd spoken to Eric Davis, but it was the first time I'd had a real conversation with him. He was taking a break from class. One of his classmates had produced a work so profound and moving that Eric needed a moment away — this piqued my interest.

A few days later I found myself at his studio, sampling some of his work. There were icons of the analog past strewn about — synthesizers, samplers, sequencers, and a turntable with a sizable stack of vinyl nearby. I had no idea what to expect when he pushed 'play' on the CD player, which made for a fantastic surprise when ear-splitting dissonance crammed a series of harmonic inquiries into my head. The second track was what sounded like someone drawing a knife, stabbing a small animal, and sheathing the blade, only to repeat the process for one minute straight. After that was a long hypnotic night drive through the Eastern Bloc. Then, the Pacman Army death march. And then others.

I came back to Eric's studio the next day and we talked about music and today's poser culture — we didn't talk about Lady Gaga.

BRANDON GOEI: What's your mindset when you start on a piece? Do you set aside a time, or is it random inspiration?

ERIC DAVIS: I wouldn't exactly say 'random'...

BG: Maybe 'chance' is a better term?

ED: Well, both of those terms make me think of John Cage and 'happenings' and I don't give those things too much credence in the context of my work, even though they do exist. For me, it starts with an idea or my desire to make something, and I come into the studio and start working. Sometimes I just keep working on beats and saving them — shelving them until I can come back with some sort of inspiration to add to them. I hit all of the different instruments at different times, so I guess it does sort of happen kind of ... randomly. In a matter of speaking.

BG: Does your musical taste factor into it at all?

ED: Oh absolutely. Well, no. Yes ... Indirectly, I suppose. All of those sounds are floating around in my head and sometimes I feel like I'm butting up against them and I do something different because I'm not terribly concerned about doing something terribly derivative. And then other times I'm playing something that sounds really good, until I realize that it actually sounds like this or that. So all of the music I listen to is continually cycling in my head, and sometimes things that are floating around in my long-term memory occasionally resurface.

BG: Let's change gears a bit. Complete this sentence: "When I hear Lady Gaga, I ____."

ED: Actually, I don't hear Lady Gaga.

BG: You've never heard a Lady Gaga song?

ED: Well, I guess I might have at some point, but I couldn't identify one.

BG: What about pop music in general?

ED: Today's pop music is something I'm very unfamiliar with. I think the last thing I actually heard in earnest was Madonna's "Confessions on a Dance Floor," which takes us back a few years.

BG: So you just don't follow popular music?

ED: Absolutely not.

BG: Do you have any stance on it either way? A lot of the things coming out these days are more dance-oriented, which I hear in some of your work.

ED: It depends. One doesn't need to stretch the truth to say that The Cure was a pop band, even prior to "Friday I'm In Love." The pop music that they made, though, was closer to my personal aesthetic. I'm not waving any banners saying that stuff should be wiped out. There are times, using The Cure as an example, when pop moved in a direction that agreed more with my aesthetic, but there hasn't been something like that recently.

BG: Are there any contemporary artists whose music you do enjoy?

ED: Sure, there are plenty of people making music these days that are worth listening to.

BG: Care to name a few?

ED: Hmm... [under his breath] I don't know if I really want to.

BG: How come?

ED: I feel like there's a certain sacredness to the music that they make. The people that listen to pop and "Pitchfork" bands — I hate to make a generalization, but it's been my experience that music

doesn't hold a great significance in their lives. And I come from a place, time and mindset in which music is extremely important and serves as a strong tie within individual groups. A foundational facet of identity. It shows the space between people — you had the punks and they listened to punk and they looked like punks, and you had hessians and they listened to heavy metal, etc. There were these really clear distinct boundaries between communities, and there were certain steps to take to make it into one. It always started with some kid who gets told to 'fuck off and go home' because he's not cool enough to hang out with a group. And then he matures a bit and opens his ears and his mind, and can start to really have something to say in that community, so he's accepted. You had to earn yourself the right to belong to a subculture, which was often musically-based. But those things don't really exist anymore.

BG: What happened?

ED: When I was in high school, all those communities and cultures got washed together into a muddy brown, and it was the beginning of the end of any sacred spaces or beautiful legacies that groups held. There's no sense of honing your identity or your values or your politics — they're fast-food lifestyles. I'm not saying this to limit peoples' exposure to other things. I listen to a wide array of musical styles, but I do so in a way that doesn't make me a tourist. I don't like the contemporary culture's mindset that music is just something disposable that you put into your iPod. You've got to earn your right to listen to these bands, because otherwise it cheapens them.

BG: What about someone who admires the Digital Age and the flow of information these days — the way that someone can go online and touch on so many cultural reference points? How would you respond to someone saying that it's a hallmark of a culture that's spreading, solidifying and hungry to learn?

ED: Posers are at the helm of the contemporary social landscape. In my early days, people that pretended to know what they were talking about but didn't were absolutely vilified. The idea of a 'poser' was one of the worse things that you could be accused of. At some point those people rose up to dictate one of the worse parts of today's culture, which is the cookie cutter "jeans and Uggs and iPod" look and the idea of listening to a lot of stuff, but not really knowing any of it. That just bores me; when people aren't into what they're into. And I think that it goes on way too much today. I just want people to really care about what they do.



Eric Davis. Photo courtesy of Eric Davis.

BG: Does this message translate into your work or your stance as an artist?

ED: As an artist, definitely. I usually only show my work to people who I trust — people to whom music is a sacred thing, who I can trust to be a worthwhile vessel for something I truly care about.

BG: How does that factor on the flipside? What makes another person's work equally as moving as you hope your work is to someone you trust?

ED: I look for things like sincerity, but it's hard to say I'm 100% sure when I find it. I guess I look for something genuine, personal, and evolved — by which I don't mean that it has to be high-minded or intellectualized. When I say evolved, I mean that someone has spent some time working on it and has put some real thought into it and is in tune with what they've created. It doesn't have to be extremely difficult or expertly pulled off, but I appreciate someone who knows their work intimately. I can draw comparison to early punk — sure the guitar parts are sloppy, but it's that pure intensity and vulnerability that moves me.

BG: Anything else to add?

ED: I feel like many people misunderstand the genre of my harsher works — the world can be a burden that cleansing the psychic space is often necessary to deal with it. Through volume, brevity, duration and dissonance, harsh noise does exactly this. Those who misunderstand noise music often fail to see it as the representation of anguish through reaction to it. Noise is an expression of what needs to be done to combat the awfulness of the world — not another expression of its brutality.

Hear Eric's work and more at www.fnewsmagazine.com



Telepathic Trio

Pro psychics in Chicago

By AMANDA ALDINGER and BRANDON KOSTERS

Read the word “psychic,” and crystal balls, giant hoop earrings, and fake Jamaican accents may be the first things to come to mind. When we reached out on behalf of F Newsmagazine to interview professional psychics, many were apprehensive for that very reason. Some (though not all) feared being mocked, and that our intention would be to perpetuate unflattering stereotypes about this profession.

This was not the case. We wanted to find out, first hand, who these people are, what the job entails, and how psychics cope with the stigma surrounding their chosen careers.

We spoke with a group of successful Chicago psychics. Whether their ability is indeed attributable to extrasensory perception (ESP), or simply an acute sensitivity and highly cultivated perceptiveness, everyone we spoke with has an established client base.

NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

Supposing that ESP does indeed exist, is it something that a select few are endowed with, or is it an ability that can be cultivated?

According to psychic Arturo Edan Munoz, ESP can be nurtured, much like the skills and technique of any creative. “It’s like artists,” says Arturo, who works out of a gem and crystal shop in Andersonville called On the Rocks. “Not everyone is going to be da Vinci, or Picasso, but there are still amazing artists in the world. I do think that people can learn to make this a part of themselves.”

Psychic Janet Wright, who operates out of her home in Old Irving Park, also compares her profession to that of an artist. “If you’re an artist, there’s no huge taboo about it like there is about being a psychic, but you still have to plug at it for years to make it work.”

Also like an artist, Janet believes that her abilities are natural gifts that must be nurtured to build strength and produce results. She describes herself at age 23, when she first felt her ability developing, as “just like your average 23 year old — a post-grad, working and playing.” She credits meditation as the catalyst in her decision to explore and nurture her psychic abilities. “Through trial and error, I realized that my life was a lot better when I was working my abilities and doing energy healing on myself. I had some level of psychic ability as a kid, but I didn’t really focus on it and it wasn’t encouraged in any way.”

Perhaps even you, dear reader, feel a little psychic from time to time. Sometimes you have a feeling that something’s going to happen, and it does? Experience something in a dream that comes true the next day? Don’t feel too special. You might just be like everyone else.

Arturo believes that “we’re all psychic, that we all have psychic experiences, and they’re so natural to the human experience that we don’t see it as anything beyond our capabilities. People experience intuition everyday. People experience subconscious messages in their dreams all the time. It’s really, I think, more of a personal experience.”

So maybe you have it, but it needs a little finessing. Wright believes that her job is to “help other people to turn their abilities off an on.” And furthermore, “it’s not just me who’s sensitive,” she says. “I think everyone has basic psychic abilities and they’re either really turned on, or they’re not. I don’t want to be reading everything and everyone all the time ... I can’t walk around super-psychic 24/7.”

Not all psychics believe that these abilities are so generously distributed. Psychic Claire, who works at Intuitions With Claire, believes “you either have the gift or you don’t.” In her family, psychic powers have been “passed from generation to generation,” with both her grandmother and mother possessing psychic abilities. So when Claire found herself seeing auras around people and predicting future events at a young age, her family was supportive. And like Janet, meditation became a powerful tool. “[My mom] wanted me to do a lot of meditation. She wanted me to do a lot of yoga, to be able to channel my abilities. Just to be around positive environments,” Claire explains.

THE SESSION

One thing’s for sure: psychics have been around for quite a while, with certain psychic practices going back centuries — such as the tarot and palmistry.

Scholars have argued about the precise origin of the tarot. Among the places frequently cited are China, India, Korea, Greece, pre-Columbian America, and even ancient Egypt. Although the deck’s original intent was for gaming purposes, it eventually developed into a practice adopted by mystics and the occult as a means of divination. Some believe the cards reveal information about an individual subject’s past, present and future. “The tarot cards are going to be more in-depth, they’re going to offer more accuracy, more detail,” explains Claire. “The tarot cards tell a story, and it’s my job to translate that story into verbal words that people will understand.”

And then there’s palmistry, or palm reading. The basic framework for classical palmistry is rooted in Greek mythology, with various fingers corresponding to notable Greek gods and goddesses. Chiromancy is a palm reading technique that evaluates a person’s character or future life by physically studying the hand, “reading” and interpreting various bumps, lines and textures as insights into one’s life.

“A palm reading is more of a characteristic reading,” explains Claire, who routinely performs both types of readings in her practice. “It lets you know about things like matters of the heart, what’s going on in current events, what’s happening in your life at this time. It’s more generated towards the present, and it’s not going to touch too much on the future.”

Claire said that even though they’re not as specific as tarot card readings, palm readings do provide projections of future events — this can produce anxiety, depending on what your psychic is able to see.

“Before every reading, I ask, ‘What it is I see for you, would you like me to tell you the good or bad?’ And usually people are very open about it — they tell me that what I see, good or bad, they want to know,” says Claire.

However, tarot cards and palmistry aren’t for every psychic.

“There are a lot of stereotypes, like the card readers who have a neon sign and a little storefront,” Janet said. “So I don’t have a storefront, I don’t have a neon sign.” Janet also doesn’t provide card readings. In fact, she makes a very clear distinction between the type of psychic she is, what she will and will not deal with, and how that differs from typical stereotypes.

Janet prefers the term “clairvoyant” (“clear seeing”) over psychic, to describe her practice. She begins each session by asking her client to state his or her full name, and then she meditates for a period of time, where she “reads the client’s energy,” and then relays what she discovered. This generates discussion, and is less about predicting the future, and more about assessing the

client’s emotional and mental state.

Although she prefers not to deal with the future, Janet doesn’t completely dismiss the potential value of the tarot or palmistry.

“Different people have different gifts,” Janet said. “If someone is really gifted in reading the future, and they feel like that’s their calling, then more power to them. I think there are tons of psychics out there that are complete fakes and highly unethical people and that sucks, but the rest of them mean well — they’re just trying to help people.”

Janet’s feeling is that it’s more productive to address issues in the present tense, rather than to cater to fears associated with the future. “Why not deal with your fears head on?” she asked. “Why don’t you work on your confidence? You can work on the bigger picture and that will get you a lot more mileage, I think.”

THE SKEPTICS

Although Janet, Arturo and Claire may differ in practice, there’s one thing they all agree on: as far as skepticism goes, don’t knock it until you’ve tried it.

“A lot of people think it’s mumbo-jumbo and they’ve never done a reading before, or they’ve never been to a psychic shop,” says Claire. “It’s hard to have that stereotype when you’ve never even visited a psychic center.”

Despite being aware of prominent stereotypes surrounding her profession, Janet admitted that in the end, there’s no such thing as bad publicity. “You know that expression that any advertising is good advertising?” she asked. “It’s crazy true! All of the hoopla about psychics actually helps, business-wise. It’s just getting a skin thick enough to actually put the shingle out there, put up the website, screen people, and deal with people.”

Find yourself feeling a little skeptical? Even some psychics will agree: having this ability will definitely challenge you. Arturo asserted that skeptics are afraid of discovering their own intuitive strength. “They’re afraid of ‘what would it mean if this was real for me? What would it mean about my person, or my origins or my spiritual being if these are real things that I can experience myself? I think that’s where a lot of people get disconnected, they don’t really know how to understand what’s happening.”

But perhaps the best way to find out how you really feel is to schedule a session for yourself.

“The only thing I can say to people who have skeptical energy is to go get a reading, to be open, and be honest about how you feel,” says Claire. “Keep your mind and energy open and you have nothing to lose, except maybe knowing what’s going to go on in your future.”

For the full interviews and video of a psychic reading, go to www.fnewsmagazine.com

“we’re all psychic ... we all have psychic experiences, and they’re so natural to the human experience that we don’t see it as anything beyond our capabilities. People experience intuition everyday. People experience subconscious messages in their dreams all the time. It’s really, I think, more of a personal experience.”

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Photograph by Eric Baskauskas. He bought a half pound.

The taste of nostalgia in Chicago's Polish grocery stores

Beers, Barszcz, and Babcias

By ANIA SZREMSKI, ARTS EDITOR

When you step inside, the first thing that hits you is the smell. That earthy, peppery, greasy smell of cured meats and sausages, mixed in with musty wood, flour and yeast — with some pickled herring thrown in for good measure. If you have Polish roots, that particular olfactory combination has a Proustian potency like no other. It immediately elicits childhood memories of being dragged to the butcher on the way home from kindergarten; bus rides with your face smashed into the grocery sack schlepped around by the old lady in front of you; and holidays at your grandmother's. A smell with the ability to console, and to aggravate, in equal measure.

This is what the Polish grocery stores that pepper Chicago's northwest side smell like. They aren't just purveyors of specialty sausages and thick, bitter beers that you can't find elsewhere; they are time capsules that contain the smells, tastes, and sounds of a former life.

Chicago became a world capital of the Polish diaspora around 1850. The first flood of immigrants arrived during a movement known as "Za Chlebem" (for bread), a desperate bid to escape the economic struggles engendered by the so-called Fourth Partition of Poland (when the fledgling nation state, finally back on its feet after disappearing from the map in the 18th century, was once again cut up and tossed to Russia and Austria in the 1830s and 1840s). Back then, the Polish communities in Chicago were organized around the major Polish parishes. But today, after the second major wave of immigration around World War II, and then yet another after 1989, the Polish community congregates around its grocery stores — the place where you can get your news, the stuff you need for Christmas

dinner, or a fancy box of chocolates for a child's first communion. Here, like most places, community is built around food. And booze.

Polish grocers proliferate in the city, but I recently visited two of the most popular, going from near to far in search of those familiar smells.

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857 N WESTERN
M – SU, 8 AM – 8 PM

Located in the Ukrainian Village, Rich's Deli is one of the more easily accessible Polish grocers for the average SAIC student; you can take the 66 practically to their doorstep. When I dropped by on a late March afternoon, women stood across from the deli's colorful (if tattered) storefront, chatting in Ukrainian as their kids rode bikes. Down the street, an elderly man stumbled after a Burger King employee in the parking lot, straining to explain that it was nice out ("Jest cieple! Jest cieple," he pleaded — It's warm, it's warm!) until he was red in the face. It was that strange, familiar contradiction of local and global, big business and small business, that confronts you on most city street corners.

Inside, the squat, cramped store is dimly lit with depressing fluorescents. A small stand of mealy fruits and vegetables is the first thing you see. But no one really comes here for produce, and the good stuff makes its appearance soon enough. Keep walking and you'll find a raucous assemblage of all the chocolates, sausage and cheese that your stomach can handle. There are shelves and shelves of the crinkly, shiny plastic packets that are synonymous with goodness (E. Wedel and Milka chocolates, Katarzynki gingerbreads), while the nearby vitrines protect knotty, knarled sausages and slabs of ham marbled with fat. Other must-have

items for any Polish meal (including fresh pierogis, soups, and lard) are in an adjacent room.

When I visited, the store was tense and bustling with middle-aged folks picking up last minute items for dinner on their way home from work. They chatted with each other in Polish and poked at loaves of rye bread, testing for freshness, as a lone hipster wandered in their midst. He unsuccessfully tried to ask for something in English, making the clerk's eyes go round in consternation.

I asked 29-year-old Bozewa Nagadowska, who works behind the deli counter, if Rich's is always this busy. "It's actually not too busy right now," she answered. "Because of the economy, we don't have as many customers. A lot of people are going back to Europe."

When I asked her if she ever thought about going back, she responded, "No, here I have more freedom, I can make more money, I have my friends here. I just need to learn English ... it's so hard." Nagadowska has been at Rich's since she arrived in Chicago about six years ago. She works here two days a week, supplementing her other job cleaning buildings downtown. I wondered if she feels that working at Rich's helps her keep ties with back home. She looked at me askance when I asked and curtly answered, "No," then turned to go help some customers.

KUROWSKI'S SAUSAGE SHOP
2976 N MILWAUKEE AVE
M – SU, 6 AM – 9 PM

If Rich's Deli is relatively accessible, it takes real fortitude to make the journey to Kurowski's Sausage Shop from downtown; you're not likely to find any hipsters ironically buying sausage and cheap beer here. The further west you go down Milwaukee, storefronts don't even bother putting up signs saying, "Mowimy

po polsku" (we speak Polish). It's just taken for granted.

In terms of selection, Kurowski's definitely trumps Rich's. The store is bigger and brighter, and you're rewarded with an entire aisle of sweets immediately upon entering. I was particularly taken by the plastic liquor bottles that were filled with alcohol-soaked chocolates. Further down, you'll find assorted coffees (like the divine Jacobs, or the amusing Peter the Great's), teas (my favorite is the spiced wine flavor), and things you need for baking, like huge jars of poppy-seeds. Around the corner there are barrels of assorted pickles;

And then, of course, there are the sausages.

herring (feel lucky that they're already dead — when I was a kid, the fish in those barrels were still alive when you bought them); and baskets of raw nuts. And then, of course, there are the sausages.

"Sausages are definitely our most popular item — and bread," 19-year-old Kathy told me. "That's what we're known for." She's a petite blonde who started working at Kurowski's about three years ago, and is the only staff member comfortable in English.

During my visit, the store was populated only by middle-aged men, many with shaved heads and wearing hoodies, leaning against the wall to read newspapers and talking to each other in the often indecipherable "Chicagowski," an Anglicized form of Polish. I asked Kathy if this was a pretty much Polish-customers only place. "No, we have all kinds of people coming

in here," she answered. "The community is changing. We have black, Mexican, Asian people coming. They come for the meats. And because the prices are low."

You wouldn't guess that by looking around the store, but statistically speaking, she's right; the community is changing. Polish stores in the area have started to close, due both to the poor economy and the fact that Poles are leaving Chicago: they're either returning to Poland, or moving out to the Western suburbs. For most of the 20th century, Chicago had the largest Polish population in the world, second only to Poland's capital, Warsaw. This is no longer the case. Thanks to the EU's opening up of national borders, London has become the new capital for Polish expats. And according to the latest Census, the Germans and Irish have recently edged Poles out as Chicago's largest European ethnic groups.

I can see these changes for myself. Some of the Milwaukee Avenue stores my family frequented when we came to Chicago in the early '90s aren't there anymore. The flower shop where we bought willow branches every Easter is gone, and so is the small corner store where we would buy cream-filled pastries and that Polish anomaly that is the cheese-less cheese puff. Visiting Milwaukee Avenue today is bittersweet in that regard.

But fortunately, even in these times of crisis, we can find comfort in the fact that the communal need for European chocolate and herb-flavored vodka will always stay the same.

*For a special Polish edition of Eric Baskauskas's food blog **Waste Not, Eat Lots**, head to www.fnewsmagazine.com.*

NOTEWORTHY



Tamalli Space Charros Collective

Multiple dates and locations
tamallispacecharros.blogspot.com

In January 2011, this group of artists/gourmets/activists took to the streets of Chicago with their “tamale food truck inspired by Mexico’s stridentist movement, and Mexican wrestling sci fi films.” Check their blog and Facebook page to find out where the truck will be stopping throughout the month of April, now that it’s finally getting warm enough to hang out on the corner and enjoy street food with a side of activist rhetoric.

Lorna Simpson

April 2, 3 p.m.
Museum of Contemporary Art
220 E Chicago Ave
www.mcachicago.org

Photographer/filmmaker/writer/archivist Lorna Simpson will discuss her multifaceted practice at the MCA this month. She’ll focus in particular on her recent series, where she replicates photographs taken from the 1950s, complicating historical constructions of gender, race, and cultural memory.

Chicago Latino Film Festival

April 1 – 14
www.chicagolatinofilmfestival.org

Spring is the season of the cultural film festival in Chicago (from March to April, the Siskel alone offered up festivals dedicated to films from the EU, Palestine, and by Asian-Americans). But my very favorite event of the season is the annual Latino Film Festival, organized by the Latino Cultural Center, which in just two short weeks screens over 100 films made in Latin American countries over the past year. Download the full schedule from the festival’s website, and prepare to be totally overwhelmed by the breadth of options.

Version 11: The Community

April 22 – May 1
versionfest.org

We all know that Art Chicago is back at the end of April, and we’ll all probably stop by the grey, depressing maze that is the Merchandise Mart to get lost in a sea of mediocre art, like everyone else. But don’t worry, there is an antidote to bad art fair depression: Version Fest, which comes back to Chicago on April 22. This year, the Public Media Institute’s event celebrates the Chicago communities that represent an optimistic alternative to “these years of recession, insolvency, uncertainty, and calamity.” Version will encompass the alternative MDW Fair (an independent fair organized by threewalls, Roots and Culture, and the Public Media Institute); workshops, presentations, and classes presented by the Free University; and much, much more.

My Heart is an Idiot

April 30, 7 p.m.
Intuit Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art
756 N Milwaukee
www.art.org

Close out the month with some Intuit-sponsored whimsy in the form of the film “My Heart is an Idiot.” The documentary “captures the manic road-tripping lifestyle of Davy Rothbart,” who takes to his van for two years and visits over a hundred cities. On the way, he promotes his magazine and seeks advice about his love life. The movie could serve as useful inspiration for those of us who are about to graduate, and may be contemplating some road-tripping of our own this May.

Controversial Class Canceled

Students petition SAIC to rehire Roxane Assaf

By ALEJANDRA MONSERRAT GONZÁLEZ ROMO, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In Fall 2010, SAIC’s Liberal Arts department announced that it would begin a restructuring process. As a result, some classes were cancelled in order to create room for new ones. During this structural shift, Roxane Assaf, who taught the “Communication Theory” and “Palestine/Israel: US Media Myths” courses in the department, was fired. Upset by this decision, many of Assaf’s ex-students wrote a petition directed to Lisa Wainright, SAIC Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, to have “Palestine/Israel: US Media Myths” reinstated. With over 150 signatures to date, the petition expresses a concern that classes discussing this conflict with a perspective critical of U.S. foreign policy are being subject to censorship.

Student evaluations for Assaf’s “Israel/Palestine: US Media Myths” class in Spring 2010 indicate that students responded well to Assaf and her teaching methods. Only one negative comment was found, alluding to a “lack of structure” in the course. The rest are positive responses to both the material and the teacher: “One of the more enlightening courses I’ve ever taken,” said one evaluation, while another stated, “She was great, a total badass who knew her stuff.”

Raja Halwani, former Chair of the Liberal Arts department, spoke with F Newsmagazine about Assaf’s dismissal. He explained the department is interested in offering more history and anthropology classes, and that, in consequence, they needed to sacrifice some classes that didn’t fit into these classifications.

“Roxane doesn’t have a

degree in history, and her class is related to media studies more than to social studies,” he said. As far as the influence student evaluations have on the department’s decision to continue offering a class, “they are just one tool the department uses to take this kind of decisions,” Halwani explained. “No one is saying she was a bad teacher.” So was Assaf fired for political reasons? “I don’t think so. I don’t think Paul Ashley would do that, but I don’t know. You should talk to him.”

F Newsmagazine requested an interview with Paul Ashley, current Chair of the Liberal Arts department. The request was denied.

Assaf talked with F about her firing. “Before I received word of my dismissal, I experienced a private meeting on September 29 with the new Liberal Arts chair, Paul Ashley, who wondered aloud if popular professors could exert undue influence on students. He asked me how I felt about being a rock star with the power to brainwash, and if I wasn’t, perhaps, running some sort of ‘Dead Poets Society’ at the school,” she said.

“They canceled both of my classes, the other being ‘Communication Theory’ — a course many students critique as one of the few academic courses offered at their prestigious art school,” she continued. “Paul Ashley noted that Noam Chomsky, Karl Marx and Robert McChesney were on my syllabus. He wanted to know if they all agreed with each other, and why I thought Marx was important to study,” she said. “I said that I offer criticism for each theory that I introduce, and encourage them [the students]



to formulate their own criticisms of everything I require that they learn. Furthermore, I introduce thinkers whose ideas contradict those three,” she concluded.

On December 3, Assaf had her part-time faculty review with Paul Ashley and members from the Liberal Arts and Visual and Critical Studies (VCS) departments. “After the previous meeting with Ashley, I already felt that I was not desirable anymore,” she said. “Nevertheless, I attended the part-timer interview ready to impress all the department heads. I wanted my job. The heads of Social Science and VCS, with whom I had met in previous semesters, had granted me scores of 9/10 and 10/10 respectively, based on their own judgments and student evaluations,” she stated.

As for the content of the interview, Assaf explained that “Ashley eventually took the meeting into a very specific line of questioning on why I thought European and Israeli media generally produced better coverage than the U.S. on the Israel/Palestine conflict. I said, because they offer more context, use more accurate language, and are more referential to international law.”

Two days after her part-time review on December 5, Assaf got a letter from Ashley informing her of the decision to dismiss her. “They said my classes didn’t fit into the new categories they defined for the department,” she said. Taking the suggestion of VCS Chair Jim Elkins, she tried to get hired by the Visual Communications Design (VCD) department. “After this, I was just trying to defend my Communication Theory class. I looked for an opportunity with VCD. They said that the description of the

class looked very valuable to our students, but unless it was cross-listed with another department, they could not take it.”

When Assaf was asked about recent trends of dismissing professors who imparted political ideas similar to hers, she said, “Well, a school will never say they fired someone for political reasons.”

THE TREND

In recent years, there has been a clear pattern of U.S. educational institutions dismissing teachers who, like Assaf, were critical of U.S. foreign policies towards the Palestine-Israel conflict.

An especially controversial case was that of political scientist Norman Finkelstein, whose primary fields of research are the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the politics of the Holocaust, and who was denied tenure at Chicago’s DePaul University in 2007. The decision came after a public battle with university officials and Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard law professor and fervent supporter of Israel. Despite consistently receiving the highest student evaluations in his department, publishing five critically acclaimed books from leading scholars that have been translated into 46 languages, and being an internationally-recognized scholar in his field, Finkelstein did not receive tenure. On September 5, 2007, Finkelstein announced his resignation.

An official statement from DePaul said that Finkelstein did not meet the requirements for tenure, and that outside influence played no role in the decision. Furthermore, DePaul praised Finkelstein “as a prolific scholar and outstanding

teacher.” Finkelstein, however, said the decision was based on “transparently political grounds” and was an “egregious violation” of intellectual freedom.

Donald Wagner, Middle Eastern studies professor at North Park University in Chicago, was fired last year after working in the school for 15 years. An activist for Palestinian human rights and director of North Park’s Center of Middle Eastern Studies (CMES), Wagner was popular with students, but controversial within the evangelical Christian university’s larger community. Student leaders and faculty members started a petition — which eventually had more than 500 signatures, including some from members of North Park’s board of trustees — to rehire Wagner as an adjunct professor. But on May 18, after negotiations with faculty members, North Park announced that it would not rehire Wagner. School administrators have cited financial pressures as the reason for Wagner’s departure.

In an email interview with F, Wagner said, “There are a number of pro-Israel organizations in the U.S. that monitor faculty who take up justice for the Palestinians, even when those faculty present a balanced and honest approach to this controversial topic. Faculty who do not have tenure are most vulnerable, but others are harassed and monitored as well.”

He continued, “Groups like ‘Campus Watch,’ and some Hillel organizations, have as their agenda the silencing of honest and open presentation of factual analysis that might be critical of Israel. In essence, it is an attempt to control the discourse on the topic, which is an infringement of academic freedom and free speech.”

This trend constitutes a major concern among experts on the subject. Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, told F that “there is a distinct unwillingness to hear points of view that differ from the dominant pro-Israeli narrative about the Middle East, which extends to efforts to censor any such views and to eliminate them from academic discourse.” When asked about how this trend affects students, he responded, “It is important that students have access to as broad a range as possible of sources of information and of points of view, and that they not be restricted in this regard.

“This requires vigilance,” Khalidi continued, “as there are those who are determined that only one version of what is happening in the Middle East be available to students. Given how important this region is, this does an enormous disservice to students and to citizens of this country, who deserve to know what is really happening in that vital part of the world.”

The Liberal Arts department’s decision to cancel the class “Palestine/Israel: US Media Myths,” and to dismiss Roxane Assaf as a teacher, leaves SAIC in a position similar to DePaul and North Park universities. All three universities have fired or denied tenure to extremely popular, and internationally recognized professors who taught about this conflict. And even if SAIC’s decision to do so wasn’t motivated by politics, students aren’t happy about the curricular changes — and they’re speaking out for what they believe are vital components of their academic experience.

LECTURE ROUNDUP

By TARA PLATH, STAFF WRITER

Throughout the year, SAIC invites seasoned professionals to come and lecture to students about their practice, upcoming projects, or broader issues in art criticism. Here's a look at some of the lectures that were delivered in March.

Conversations At the Edge: Yael Bartana

Video artist Yael Bartana stood in front of a nearly full house for her lecture on March 10 as part of SAIC's Conversations at the Edge (CATE) lecture series. SAIC Professor Gregg Bordowitz (head of the FVNM department) introduced the artist, describing her work as "at home in the cinema," though her videos are usually presented in a gallery setting.

Bartana was raised in Israel, where she got her BFA at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, after which she stopped making art for four years. She returned to art-making as a means for activism after receiving an MFA from the New York School of Visual Arts. Bartana explained that her return to art was an effort "to understand and analyze my perspective and what it means to grow up in [Israel]," and thus, her video work began to function as a catalyst for an anthropological investigation of identity and rituals.

Bartana's work creates a powerful tension between art and activism. It is playful and theatrical at times, eerie and intense at others. Her current project on the Jewish Renaissance isn't actually intended to inspire 3.3 million Jews to return to Poland, but she hopes it will "prompt conversation" about the current state of affairs in Israel, as well as abroad. Bartana searched for words as she spoke, bravely calling for the "citizens of Israel to wake up. How did we become so nationalistic and ignorant and racist?"

The last slide of Bartana's presentation was taken from a performance piece in which a woman dressed in black read the Jewish Renaissance of Poland Manifesto in German in front of an aggressive red background. It showed an image of what had become the movement's slogan. At that moment, "And Europe Will be Stunned" lit the theatre in dramatic red neon cursive — a striking visualization which powerfully highlighted the impact of Bartana's ideas.



Public Artworks and the Chicago Loop Alliance

A panel discussion investigating ways in which artists are using digital and social networking technologies to activate community outreach and engagement was held at the Sullivan Gallery conference room on Friday, March 11. The event, hosted by the Office of Exhibition Practices and the Sculpture Department, was moderated by Jon Cates (Professor, Film, Video, New Media and Animation). Cates introduced the panelists, which included visiting artist Torkwase Dyson, SAIC teacher and artist Jan Tichy, Chicago Loop Alliance programming coordinator Michael Perry and Sculpture graduate student Ben Stagl.

All four presenters were involved in individual projects that were closely related through their aim to connect to the community and activate physical spaces around Chicago and elsewhere. Jan Tichy's Cabrini-Green Project explored the lasting effects of the Cabrini-Green complex, which has all been demolished except for a church and one last building, the site of Tichy's project. Tichy ran workshops for young people with the help of an organization called Cabrini Connections, some of whose members had lived in the buildings. Together, they composed poems and texts that were processed through a software that translated the words into blinking LED lights. The lights will be installed into the vacant building a day before the 4-6 week demolition, with these silent voices slowly disappearing with the building.

It was clear that interaction with young people was a vital part of the experience, sentiments that Torkwase Dyson echoed.

Dyson described her current project, also a work in progress, titled "We Glow In the Dark." The "sustainable interactive sculpture" is a product of a collaboration with the youth of Philadelphia's Mural Arts' ArtWorks! Program. The mobile sculpture unfolds into three interactive platforms where people can gather and interact with each other as well as the object itself. Its design was driven by conversations with the young people in Philadelphia. Dyson was interested in creating a public artwork that wasn't a mural on the wall, but a stage: "It had to function," said Dyson, "Architectural sites are so fragile, so fleeting in this time of public attack."

"Architectural sites are so fragile, so fleeting in this time of public attack."

MFA Sculpture candidate Ben Stagl followed, presenting an unfinished proposal for a public square in front of Metropolitan Correctional Center, located in the Loop at Clark and Van Buren. The project, titled "Prison Without Bars," was part of a Public Light and Space class taught by Jan Tichy. Stagl wanted to activate the space and address the architecture it was connected to. He attempted to do so through three interactions with the space, which he described as stanzas. Looking to address the presence of the prison and those within it, he aimed to create an act of solidarity and recognition. One way he proposed to do so, by aiming light reflected off mirrors onto the building's façade, prompted critical conversation from some in the audience who questioned the gesture and validity of connection made between those outside and those inside the federal prison.

Last to speak was Michael Perry, the Program Project Coordinator of the Chicago Loop Alliance and Pop-Up Art Loop. Perry addresses the alternate side to community engagement through Pop-Up Art Loop, a program that installs art into vacant Loop storefronts. With 19 active spaces to date, the program allows for artists to interact with the public on a level that is not often accessible by placing art in highly trafficked downtown windows and spaces.

The evening produced many engaging ideas of how art can engage the community. The three artists and Perry expressed a genuine commitment to using technology to generate collaborations with the people who exist in the spaces being affected. Dyson articulated the groups' individual goals aptly when she stated, in terms of her own project, "It's really about this pluralistic way of exchanging and interacting on a public level."

A Public Interview With Robert Pippin

SAIC's chapter of Platypus, a national leftist group that describes its purpose as a "project for the self-criticism, self-education, and ultimately, the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left," hosted a public interview with Robert Pippin on March 14. Pippin is the Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor of Social Thought and Philosophy at the University of Chicago. Third-year sculpture student and SAIC Platypus leader Omair Hussain conducted the interview in front of a large audience (many of whom were not SAIC students), in the MacLean building ballroom.

Pippin's primary focus is, according to his page on University of Chicago's website, "the modern German philosophical tradition, with a concentration on Kant and Hegel."

But the interview immediately delved into the questions at hand: what is critical theory, and what should count as critical theory of society? Hussain soon steered the discussion toward art, drawing a parallel between the rationale of critical theory of society and the question, "What is a critical practice?" Pippin explored Hegel's stance on art, which includes four subcategories: Pre-art art, art-art, post-art art, and non-art.

The evening covered an immense range of theories and theorists, and Pippin and Hussain also waded through the subjects including freedom, bourgeois self-hatred, and human subjectivity. Supplementary texts were provided beforehand through a Facebook event page, which aided those not as familiar with the subject matter. Roughly one hour into the interview, the formal volley between Pippin and Hussain dissolved into a much more casual and challenging conversation, as Pippin challenged Hussain to defend his ideas while, in turn, rejecting some of them. Throughout the evening, Pippin wasn't shy to express his own opinions, calling installation "boring and played out," and claiming that the most exciting things in art today could be found in photography and video.

The evening ended with a question and answer session from the audience, prompting such demands as "Revolt or revolution!?" from one student.

Visiting Artists Program: Lisa Freiman

On February 28, the Visiting Artists Program invited Lisa Freiman to speak to an eager audience in the Columbus Building auditorium. Freiman is the senior curator and chair of the Department of Contemporary Art at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. She was introduced with a few heartfelt and grateful words from Lisa Dorin, the Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute, who praised the speaker for how she has "literally transformed the landscape of art" in Indianapolis throughout her eight-year tenure at the museum.

Freiman's conversational lecture, "What If," centered on the curatorial practice of imagining something and making it possible. In her honest, straightforward, and pleasantly colloquial talk, Freiman described the challenges she was faced when arriving at the IMA: "I cried when I made the decision to go to Indianapolis. It was not a joyful decision," she told an amused crowd. She said she arrived in Indianapolis with a "missionary zeal" with the naive goal of "putting IMA on the international art map."

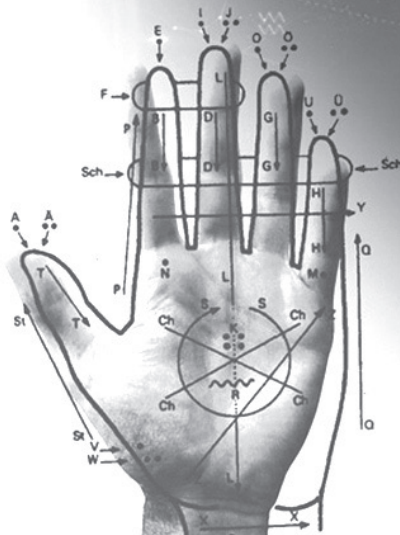
When she started at the IMA, Freiman tackled the challenge of creating a stronger relationship between exhibitions and acquisitions. Her job became about survival and the ethical responsibility of building a collection based on contemporary work, as well as showing local artists alongside national and international artists.

Another accomplishment Freiman proudly described was the 100 Acres ("96 acres," she divulged), a "different kind of sculpture garden," where Freiman currently has eight commissioned works in the park that respond to the location. She plans to continue inviting artists to come and install works in the space.

Freiman closed her talk with a discussion of the 54th Venice Biennale, for which she was selected as a commissioner. The night ended with several members of the audience giving their wholehearted appreciation and admiration for Freiman's work in Indianapolis and in the national arts community.

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IN////TENSIONS

BA Visual & Critical Studies / BFA with Liberal Arts Thesis Symposium

Reimagining Interaction // 11:00am

Ciara Taylor // Informed Designs: Materializing the Virtual

Marie Socha // Subjectifying Air Quality Through Images: Chicago Clean Power Ordinance

Haley Martin // Community Building in The Schoolyard: Trials and Tribulations in the "Creative Economy"

Martha Drouet // The Mall and the Megachurch: Ritualistic Shopping and Shopping for Ritual

Exceptional Spaces // 12:30pm

Bailey Romaine // On Finding The 'Worldfeeling': The Semiotics and Material(ity) of Kurt Schwitters' Merz Poems

Rhonda Lowry // Garbage: Material, Metaphor & Process

Emma James // Concrete

Hannah Manfredi // On Singing: Aqui/Allá

Bridging a Disconnect // 2:00pm

Tom Dryjanski // Eyes Straight Ahead: Portable Connective Devices and the Role of The Senses

Kelsey Witte // Fashion Film: An Emerging Genre

Emery Nuñez // Debunking Spunk: Representing Male Sexual Performances

Morgan Facemire // Power in Pleasure and Violence: A Sex Positive Study of Rape Fantasies and Female Perversion

Carisse Ramos // Fun with Dick and Little Susie: The Naming of Erogerous Zones

SAIC
School of the Art Institute
of Chicago

Thumb Wars

An SAIC couple’s combative collaborations

By ZIYUAN WANG, STAFF WRITER

Ever since they met at a pottery class at the University of Florida, artists Wesley Wilson (MFA 2011) and Nancy Tien (MFA 2011) have been inseparable. In spite of their differences in background, area of expertise and ethnicity, their bond has only grown stronger since they came to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to pursue graduate study. This relationship is at the core of their collaborative practice, and was the inspiration for their performance piece/video game “Thumb War,” featured at the Betty Rymer Gallery on March 17 as part of the “Simulationists” exhibition.

Wilson, a student in the Art and Technology department, specializes in making artist video games, while Tien works in the Performance department. Past collaborations have included the 2010 “Eating Contest” performed at SUGS, which featured Tien taking bites of food, chewing them, and spitting them back onto a plate for Wilson to eat. In their latest work, the combative impulse continues in an artist video game version of the thumb war, in which the two partners can duke out their problems in the virtual arena.

F Newsmagazine recently sat down with the artists in their shared studio at SAIC, where they regularly muse, debate and dine, to discuss the challenges and rewards inherent in artistic collaboration.

“When you come to the installation and experience it with your friend, partner or loved ones together, the feeling of competing with another person already starts to generate.”

ZIYUAN WANG: Let’s talk about “Thumb War” first. What is the concept behind this piece?

WESLEY WILSON: It kind of started as an argument. We both work very conceptually. While Nancy said that it’s very difficult to start a concept, I was arguing the opposite, which is that it’s very easy to start with any idea, but what’s hard is how you actually create the idea into a work of art with attention to the very small details.

One of the ideas we were bouncing around was that she wanted to arm-wrestle me for a performance, but it would be too one-sided because she’s smaller than me, so I would always win. Then she came up with the idea of thumb war, which she thinks is stupid. But I disagreed, and thought since I work with art games, it can turn out to be an interesting idea. It’s just a matter of how to do it exactly.

NANCY TIEN: At that time we were dealing with how to make our collaboration more truthful to both of us. Wesley works with art games and I’m a performance artist, and in the past our collaborations didn’t quite bring our practices together. So while Wesley was trying to rescue the idea of thumb war, it occurred to me that it would be way too boring for a performance; but as a video game, that would work. And I was interested in the mirroring of the live performance, where playing the one-button game controller mimics the same emotion of playing the thumb war for real. We were happy to find something that can mesh.

WW: I really like the idea of thumb war, because it’s a game two people can play without any equipment. But if you play it in the video game, you are still using a thumb to press the button. So there is no amplification of input, it’s just echoed on the screen. In the digital world, the characters move their thumbs too. It’s just the small thumb movements.



Wilson and Tien. Image courtesy of Wesley Wilson.

NT: The way we came up with the idea of “Thumb War” also fit into the nature of thumb war, which is about conflict, competition and argument within a relationship. This is how we began to think about using this children’s game as a metaphor of day-to-day conflict.

ZW: It sounds like the actual game-playing part is very realistic in your project.

WW: Yes, at least it’s as tiring as playing thumb war for real, because of the repetitive motion. In real thumb war, you can move fingers around in all directions. While in this art game, it’s even further paring down what is already a very simple game.

NT: And the viewing experience starts from figuring out the mechanics of the game, like the point system. If you win a round, you don’t get a point; the partner gets a point. And there are six different ways for a round of the game to complete, so it will be a puzzle to figure out the all six endings. Visually the endings look the same, but what we are doing toward the end each round is different.

WW: There actually is no “win”. There are in fact a lot of strategies, even though it’s just a button mashing game. And it’s questionable whether or not you want to win or what you want as a successful outcome.

ZW: How was the idea of the score system conceptualized?

WW: We were thinking about the way one subliminally keeps track of everything in a relationship. When one does something

annoying or positive, it’s probably easier to keep track of the annoying things. Even if the bad things you do are forgotten or forgiven, the other person still remembers.

NT: It’s an attempt to reflect the history of the relationship between two people through the rounds and bottom score. There is a buffer at the bottom of about 60 zeros, and every time you click it adds up a one. Then the round system keeps track of wins and losses.

ZW: What is to be revealed through this performance? What can viewers expect to get out of it?

NT: For the live piece, we will be performing an endurance piece, and the length of it will be about an hour and a half. So the viewers will see that our bodies begin to tire out, since we can only click our thumb as a result of assuming a performance stance. As time goes by it will be hard for us to press the button, or we will have to move or hold up our arms. It will end up having to do with life-time conflict.

ZW: What is the intended interaction like, as viewers are invited to play the game themselves?

NT: When you come to the installation and experience it with your friend, partner or loved ones together, the feeling of competing with another person already starts to generate. When two graduate students from Art and Technology department played the game, it’s intriguing to see [their interaction].

WW: They are hardcore gamers, and the game is inviting because I chose controllers with very nice arcade buttons. Also when you



Preparation for “Thumb Wars.” Image courtesy of Wesley Wilson.

start to press the buttons from the beginning of each round, the sound will increase more rapidly. So the two gamers immediately figured that out, then in the fastest way possible they started to roll on the floor and press the button as much as they could. These competitive audiences are the most interesting ones. In this case, they are performing as well.

ZW: How was this piece different from other things you’ve worked on collaboratively?

NT: This is the first time we ever produced work together, both conceptually and in the making of the artwork.

WW: Even though I’ve studied and done performance art before, it doesn’t feel very natural for me to perform as an art piece. But some people told me that my video games become performance themselves, either through the scene with the avatars on the screen, or more explicitly when I force the players to endure repetitive action.

ZW: In this video game, where your images are turned into avatars, you are standing still, emotionless and aloof to each other. What is that about?

NT: Things I’m interested in always involve distance and alienation, even with people you are supposedly close to, like my mom, or Wesley.

WW: She’s more interested in the relationship between people, while I’m more interested in the interaction between people, and the mundane nature of laborious tasks. I find the rhythm in mesmerizing

slow motions very interesting. But relationship itself is more her concept. We are very even in this way.

ZW: The way you two think things through is very much alike. But maybe you don’t realize that.

WW: No, we know that. Living as an art couple, our home lives and work become so enmeshed that we are constantly critiquing each other.

NT: To begin with, there are always a few things we both are interested in. For instance, the work of window cleaners is both about the mundane and about completing a task, which is what most of my work is about. So we can always find a middle ground.

ZW: In this video game the female avatar, which embodies Nancy, has much darker skin than the male avatar. Is it an intentional gesture to compel the audience to think about interracial relationships?

NT: In our other works, the racial element is more challenging, like viewing Wesley as normative and then questioning that. For this piece, we are trying to highlight it so that it’s not forgotten. That’s why you see my avatar’s skin color is two shades darker than Wesley’s.

WW: From where we come from in Florida, our difference in skin color is always talked about.

NT: I almost feel that in the Midwest, race is not talked about, or when it’s brought up as a topic, the discussion quickly goes into another direction. In this piece we want the inter-racial relationship to stand

out so that it’s not completely receded into the background.

Race is not the main subject of this piece, but our relationship has a lot to do with who we are and where we come from. My work primarily deals with the internalization of racism, about how racial ideology become part of your own identity. For me, performances like this are a recovery from that, or an effort to take racial ideology away from my own identity. In my hopes, my work would raise awareness of racism even for people who are not experiencing it in a post-racial society. In the U.S., the racial problem is more of a black-and-white dichotomy. Recently Latinos have been discussed more, but Asian-Americans are somehow neglected because of the detrimental “model minority” concept.

ZW: Is it easier to collaborate with each other, than with artists you don’t have a close or romantic relationship with?

WW: Not really. When you collaborate with other people you can discuss a problem and hopefully come to a conclusion. But to collaborate with someone you live with, there’s never an end. It’s easier to collaborate with each other since we think alike, but I wouldn’t say that it’s pleasurable.

ZW: Is there any kind of competition between you two, professionally?

NT: I don’t think there’s any competition between us, ever. We are in two very different areas: Wesley is in art games and I’m in performance art.

WW: We are interested in

drastically different things. However, conceptually they are similar, and there are ideas we want to explore or create together. Otherwise there are no overlapping areas of what we do. And we are really proud of each other too, because we have both seen a lot of development and growth in our collaborative works.

ZW: Where do you see your collaborations going in the future? Will you keep going this way?

NT: Wesley doesn’t want to collaborate again soon, because when we collaborate we tend to argue more. I’m actually really excited about future collaborations, because Wesley is interested in the idea of the connect, and I’m interested in the performance possibility of the connect, and how to mesh performance with technologies. I definitely see a future in the combination.

WW: I’ve started building methodologies where we can collaborate on a technological level. With 3-D scanning for motion capture, we can put our performance into a game or whatever we want. I’m excited about that because this can bridge the gap between performance art and technology. It’s the next thing on our list.

The 14th Annual EUROPEAN UNION FILM FESTIVAL

The Gene Siskel Film Center just concluded it's 14th Annual EU Film Festival. Representing 24 nations, the 64 films played to packed audiences this March. Here's a brief glimpse at what was shown.



Plastic Planet

Austria, 2009
Directed by Werner Boote

By AMANDA ALDINGER, SCHOOL NEWS EDITOR

In "Plastic Planet," filmmaker Werner Boote, enthralled by his grandfather's history as a plastics manufacturer, sets out across the globe to investigate the toxic nature of the world's most beloved, and pervasive, material. Although myths surrounding its inability to decompose reflect the most common stereotypes of why plastic is dangerous, Boote's international investigation quickly uncovers that this malleable material's greatest danger lies in the secret toxins used to produce it — which the general public rarely knows about. In an effort to decode plastic's ingredients, Boote visited major plastic manufacturers around the country, hoping to divine an honest answer from someone about why there's no regulation for plastic additives and just what those additives might be. In China, he speaks to the PR agent for a major plastic company who refuses to divulge how their blow-up toys are made. After retrieving a plastic globe for himself, tests on the product show high levels of mercury and Bisphenol A, a toxic ingredient. Boote doesn't just interrogate people. He supplements his research with ground-level investigations, traveling to the Atlantic ocean with Charles Moore, where they trolled the water in the middle of the ocean and uncovered hundreds of bits of little plastic shards and bottle caps after just a 30-minute troll. A visit with a water toxicologist in Italy reveals that toxins that have seeped from plastic materials into various water sources have produced a new breed of asexual fish, developed with mutated DNA. Despite its very serious subject matter, Boote balances the documentary's disturbing revelations with welcome moments of humor and a strong balance of content. He seeks out as many answers as possible, and despite those who prove evasive, Boote's point is resoundingly clear: something needs to change. If the producers won't be honest, then it's up to the consumers to mandate honest information about what's going into plastic materials before it's too late.



Two in the Wave

France, 2010
Directed by Emmanuel Laurent

By ZIYUAN WANG, STAFF WRITER

Set against grainy archival footage and a present-tense voice-over, "Two in the Wave" recounts the ups and downs of the two most prolific French New Wave filmmakers: Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. This touching black-and-white documentary is an amalgam of historical facts, newspaper excerpts, biographies and existing film footage, portraying the colorful comradeship between the two protagonists and the glittering golden days of France's cultural rebirth. Coming from disparate backgrounds, Godard and Truffaut were bound together by their fervent love of cinema, a salvation from their turbulent youth. Both set out as film critics, their critical eyes giving them enough confidence and power to reinvent French cinema. Despite their sensitive nature, their friendship was iron-clad, moving forward in times of censorship, condemnation and negligence. However, this rosy comradeship didn't end "happily-ever-after." Drastic differences in temperament and value tore them apart. As Jean-Luc Godard actively engaged political upheaval by producing films as political statements, François Truffaut eschewed the idea of siding with him as an activist, clinging firmly to the ideal that art is created to console. Godard accused Trauffaut of lacking critique, and their divergence became irreconcilable. The elegant narrative of "Two in the Wave" is a credible attempt at offering a comprehensive, if not entirely objective, account of this tumultuous history.



Kawasaki's Rose

Czech Republic, 2009
Directed by Jan Hřebejk

By AMANDA ALDINGER, SCHOOL NEWS EDITOR

A tempered tale with slow revelations and enduring tests of character, "Kawasaki's Rose" is a poignant drama that explores generations of love and betrayal during the Communist regime. Lucie (Lenka Vlasakova), the daughter of Pavel (Martin Huba) and Jana (Daniela Kolorova) is released from the hospital after undergoing extensive care for a mysterious disease. Meanwhile, her husband, Ludek (Milan Milkulchik) is part of a film crew making a documentary on Pavel regarding his legendary career as a renowned psychiatrist, and his recent acceptance of a prestigious award. In the beginning of the film, Ludek's jealousy of Pavel and hostility towards his wife generate a force field of seemingly unfounded negativity, for Pavel is beloved by his family, and an icon in his own community for the years of service work he has selflessly provided. But as new information arises, and the filmmakers expand their documentary to include an interview with an old Communist interrogator, a contentious past that has long been dead and buried resurfaces, casting a harsh light on truths that many had falsely stood by for years. Awash with remarkable performances, each of the characters experience monumental shifts in reality as the film progresses, and are eventually forced to reframe everything they thought to be true. Calm and methodical in its unraveling, "Kawasaki's Rose" is a testament to how things may not always be what they seem.



Illegal

Belgium, 2010
Directed by Olivier Massat-Depasse

By AMANDA ALDINGER, SCHOOL NEWS EDITOR

A story that rings all too true in contemporary times, Belgium's submission for this year's Oscars is a dramatic portrayal of one woman's devastating experience as an illegal Russian immigrant in France. Directed by Olivier Massat-Depasse, Anne Coesens delivers a triumphant performance as Thania, a quiet, timid woman living illegally in France with her teenage son. After being apprehended by French police, Thania is sent to a detention center for illegal immigrants, where she refuses to provide any information about herself, doing chores for a pittance in order to obtain phone cards so that she may call her son. Developing friends with the other detainees — including a strong-willed African woman (powerfully played by Esse Lawson) whose failed deportations result in her repeated return to the detention center, badly beaten and bruised — Thania develops immutable strength. This is what allows her to withstand her interminable days, shuffled back and forth from prison to the detention center as French authorities strive to deport her. The women develop a friendship with a female prison guard, asking her how she can stand to criminalize people who've done nothing wrong. Later on when the guard (Christelle Cornil) wonders if Thania has had enough, if this imprisonment is worth staying out of Russia, it is clear that life as an illegal immigrant is considerably more perilous than many realize. Featuring an incredible cast, with performances that are sure to move, "Illegal" is often difficult to watch, but stays true to its mission and portrayal of immigrant detention without hitting its audience over the head with aggressive political commentary. There are two sides to every story, and this is one that deserves to be told.



Desert Flower

UK, 2009
Directed by Sherry Hormann

By BRANDON KOSTERS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I'm not advocating for female genital mutilation for a second. Let's make that abundantly clear. But when the Waris Dirie character pulled off her burka to tread down the runway, I did feel a little uneasy. This biopic of Somali-born model and humanitarian activist Waris Dirie features Ethiopian born model-turned-actress Liya Kebede in the starring role. The story of Dirie's barefoot trek throughout Africa as a child, and serendipitous discovery in a European burger joint by a high-fashion photographer, is indeed harrowing. Tonally, the film handles many discomforting issues with a deft touch. However, the film takes a staunch stance on misogynistic practices in the third world, while failing to recognize any irony in the fact that Dirie ultimately achieves upward mobility by doing nude photo shoots in Western Europe, and marrying a gross guy she has no interest in to obtain UK citizenship. Of course, female circumcision and fashion photography are not entirely in the same realm. I just can't help but wonder if there wasn't a way to handle this with a little more cultural relativism. But whatever. It's a powerful story, and an issue that absolutely merits discussion. Hopefully, American audiences will embrace this film upon its upcoming theatrical release in mainstream theaters.

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Photo Credit: Carole Lung

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Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll, and a Scorpion

“NO GIRLS ALLOWED” at Peanut Gallery



Untitled, by Justin Nalley. Photo courtesy of the Peanut Gallery.

By MIA DIMEO

A black scorpion shares an aquarium with a couple of ill-fated crickets beneath a banner with the words “Peanut Gallery” inside of a pentagram. “That’s Peanut, the official gallery pet,” says Kelly Reeves (MA New Arts Journalism, 2011). She and Charlie Megna, co-directors and curators of the space located in Room 345 of the Flat Iron Building, talk about putting Peanut the Scorpion in a plastic ball and letting him roll around, hamster-style, during openings.

The absurdity of that image is exactly what’s so appealing about the Peanut Gallery. Good art and community are central to this co-op style space, run by artists/collaborators/volunteers who are intent on keeping up the “spiciness,” as Reeves describes it, without the pretensions and formalities frequently found in the art world. “I don’t want to see your resume when you submit work,” she told F Newsmagazine. “I don’t care if you’re a first year BFA student or you’ve had solo shows at Tony Wight, as long as you’ve got some spark. I think there are plenty of galleries in the city catering to the MA/MFA/PHD SAIC crowd, and I’d like to cater to everyone.”

The gallery held its first show, the cat-themed “Pussy Galore,” in June, 2010, followed by a string of exhibitions with similarly self-explanatory titles, including

“COLOR” “VACATION” and “GOD.” The title of the current show, “NO GIRLS ALLOWED,” is a bit of a misnomer; the exhibition does, in fact, welcome women, but it presents art about being a dude and all the complexities inherent in the contemporary idea of male identity. Artists Justin Nalley, Jack Edinger, Brandon Howe, and Megna, who also uses the space as his studio, are the “young, sassy, and sweaty” guys the exhibit is based around (and they’re all regular exhibitors at the Peanut Gallery). With masculine force, “NO GIRLS ALLOWED” delivers what it promises: blood, cars, and a whole lot of phalluses.

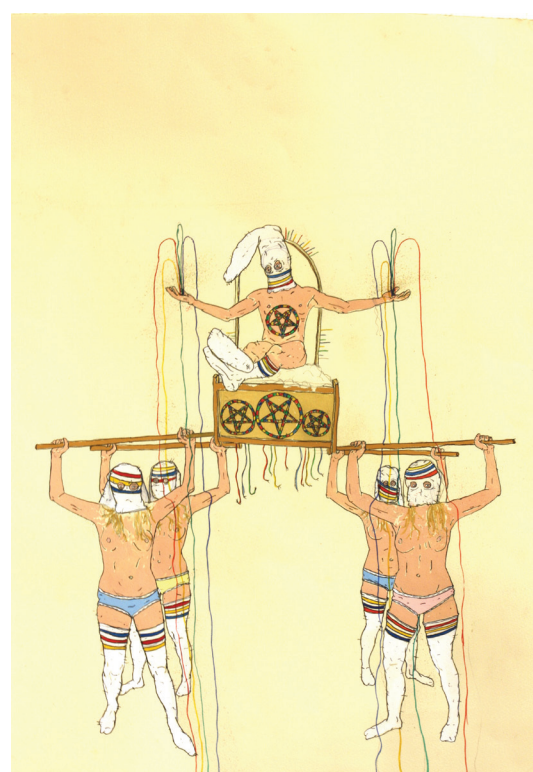
Edinger is a documentarian of wrestling culture, and his photos show the violence of the sport both inside and outside of the caged ring. A portrait of a shirtless guy stretched out on an ugly linoleum floor, holding his head next to the smashed table it clearly just met, is compositionally interesting, and kind of funny for a second in a Jackass sort of way — but then it suddenly isn’t. In another photo, the words on a wrestler’s briefs, “Made in Italy,” get lost in the crack of his well-tanned derriere, seeming to point to the very homoerotic aspects of what is considered in America today as a very hetero, masculine sport.

Nalley’s photos continue this observation of maleness in all its toughness, inflated all the more with the coming of age. Two boys

sit on the hood of a Dodge with arms crossed and legs splayed, symmetrically framing an AC/DC sticker that shows through the back window. Other photos of a smiling, nude girl at night and a forearm with a crude, self-given tattoo show exactly where the boys are headed.

Masked characters are captured in cultish, violently charged moments by both Megna and Howe. Clay figures by Howe are literally dick-headed monsters with polka dot war paint, posed catatonically on a landscape of rocks and severed limbs. Less threatening, but equally curious, Megna casts tube-socked warriors in his world of the bizarre and macho. In his four gouache and India ink works on paper, there is a loose narrative about a mysterious tribe’s worship and torture, never fully appropriating motifs from black metal, rock and roll, and East Indian religious art, but coyly suggesting them.

Megna’s work, and the rest of the art in “NO GIRLS ALLOWED,” can be difficult to decipher, especially for the female of the species. But the show as a whole can be conveniently wrapped up and ready for consumption with Reeve’s charming description of the space she and Megna operate: “Peanut Gallery is full of sex, drugs and rock and roll — doused in Old Style and stuck in a bright white cube. With a scorpion.”



Untitled, by Charlie Megna. Photo courtesy of the Peanut Gallery.



Untitled, by Brandon Howe. Photo courtesy of the Peanut Gallery.

NO GIRLS ALLOWED

Peanut Gallery
1579 N Milwaukee Room 345
peanutgallerychicago.wordpress.com

No Waste/Zero Waste

at Columbia College’s Averill and Bernard Leviton A + D Gallery



Derick Melander, “Drift,” 2011. Photo courtesy of A + D Gallery.



Maison Martin Margiela, “Artisanal Sock Sweater, AW,” 1991, and “A Magazine,” 2004. Photos courtesy of A + D Gallery.



Nick Cave, “Regurgitate Series,” 2007. Photo courtesy of A + D Gallery.



Padmaja Krishnan, Timo Rissanen and Refinity, and Berber Soepboer. Photo courtesy of A + D Gallery.

By MIA DIMEO

With fashion trends in constant flux and retailers producing clothes cheaper than ever before, sustainable fashion is not a concept ingrained in 21st century American culture. Demand for new clothes increases wasteful production, with approximately 15 percent of fabric discarded during the creation of the average garment. “No Waste/Zero Waste” at Columbia College’s Averill and Bernard Leviton A + D Gallery shows art and clothing that makes creative use of that excess, and strives to educate the viewer on the processes and design techniques that counteract fashion’s detrimental impact on the environment.

Curated by Arti Sandhu, Assistant Professor of Fashion Design at Columbia College, the exhibit places avant-garde styles alongside street-ready looks, along with projects that repurpose unwanted clothing as a sculptural medium. Derick Melander’s impressive “Drift” fills the street-facing windows of the gallery with a 500-pound rainbow of neatly stacked thrift store castoffs. A video shows a team of people installing the piece with wood supports, creating an effective visual demonstration of the exhibitor’s ideals.

Three dresses from the “Regurgitate” series by Nick Cave, SAIC’s Fashion Department Chair, are neutral compositions made from recycled men’s dress shirts, porch screens, plastic tags, and other materials. Pre-existing folds and buttons are emphasized rather than disguised, and used architecturally, resulting in feminine high-style looks with a conscience.

In a similar vein, Maison Martin Margiela’s Artisanal Line makes designs that celebrate the reused material. Handmade by fine ateliers in Paris, a puffy vest made from insulated ski gloves and a geometric sweater woven together from gray-toed socks are eloquent illustrations of Margiela’s whimsical aesthetic, and the possibilities of sustainable fashion. His sexy, strappy vest woven together from leather sandals is a highlight in the exhibit, demonstrating the deconstructionist fantasy for which the Artisanal Line has been famous since the late 1980s.

The rest of the exhibit looks at

sustainable fashion that features the construction process and DIY ethos front and center. Framed pages from the Belgian publication A Magazine show how to make your own Margiela sock sweater. Red gingham sheets that Timo Rissanen inherited from his grandmother’s dowry, repaired and sewn into a set of men’s pajamas are also on display, showing the transformation of sentimental, vintage fabrics into a new object, but one that still retains its sleep-oriented function.

Padmaja Krishnan’s intricate process of puzzling scraps together into “Boor” pieces borrows from traditional Indian quilting techniques and color palettes. Designs like the “Kali” jacket introduce the idea of no-waste patternmaking. Holly McQuillan’s zero-waste patterns are framed as colorful wall art, and the monochrome black ensembles that the patterns produced are the sleekest, most wearable designs in the exhibit, proving fashion that uses every bit of fabric can be practical and stylish. Sandu has been the head of a zero-waste project at Columbia for two years, and student reactions to the exhibit are currently featured in the windows of Columbia’s nearby 33 East Congress building.

In all the text and statistics about the environmental damage that mindful fashion production and re-use can prevent, there’s no mention in this exhibition of sweatshops and other human rights issues related to garment manufacturing in factories around the world. This was probably side-stepped to keep the focus on the optimism and creativity at work in sustainable fashion practices today. As a whole, “No Waste/Zero Waste” promotes awareness about the temporal nature of fashion, and helps to produce sustainable design opportunities that can bring some balance to the system.

Zero Waste: Fashion Re-patterned
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Final Sprint

SAIC students reflect on the BFA show



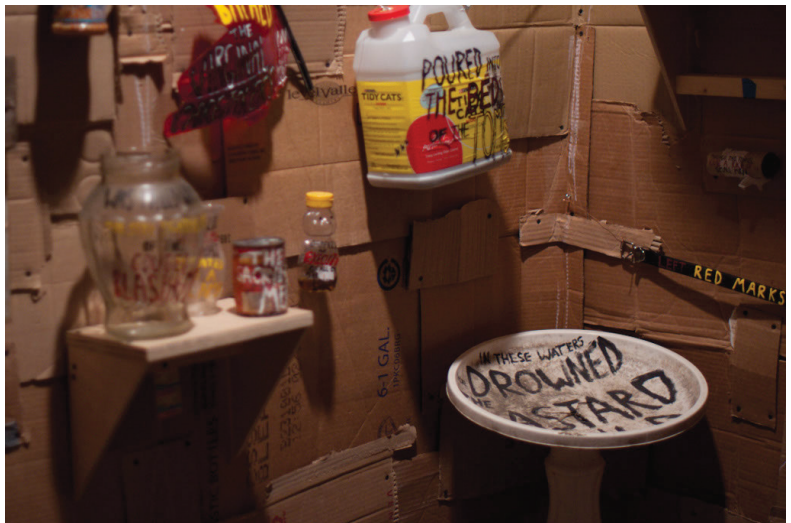
Mary Sea contributes to Thom Staton, "Pending the Conscious," 2011.



Noel Morical, "Time Doesn't Go Anywhere, It Only Adds Up," 2011.



Jaeuk Song, "Verse 8," 2011.



Nick Jackson, "Back-Alley Miracle Objects," 2011.

Photos by Allie Berry and Joe Carpenter

By JENNIFER SWANN, WEB EDITOR

Participating in the Spring Undergraduate Exhibition was kind of like training for the Olympics: it required massive amounts of strength, endurance, and a high level of perfectionism. Exhibiting artists weren't competing to receive gold medals or championship titles, but the work in the show made it obvious that we had all been training for this moment since our first-year classes at SAIC. And though the exhibition wasn't juried or even formally curated, it was still cohesive and consistently well-presented.

The weeks leading up to the March 18 opening reception of the Spring Undergraduate Exhibition, better known around campus as simply "the BFA show," were perhaps the most grueling and overwhelming for the participating artists (over 200 in all), myself included. The participation process began at a mandatory meeting during the last weeks of the Fall 2010 semester, during which the senior class from all undergraduate departments was bombarded with deadlines, instructions, and presentations about the exhibition that was still months away.

After submitting paperwork that indicated whether we wanted to claim a space on the floor, wall, or a combination of both, we

waited in anticipation of receiving a lottery number that would determine exactly where we'd install our work when the installation process began two weeks prior to the show.

The space claim that took place just a day before installation began felt like participating in some sort of game show. We waited in line for hours to hear our number called, and stepped up to the stage to claim our prize: the space that we hoped would perfectly complement our senior projects.

For most students and staff working in the Sullivan Gallery, the week-long installation period felt chaotic and stressful, like a noisy construction site that absolutely had to be vacated by 9 p.m. each night, and completely finished on a tight deadline. Michelle Wang, a graduating senior who participated in the exhibition, started installing her project after the initial installation period ended, because the glue she used to construct "Sheng Sheng" (an art work that contained shards of aluminum and fur) wasn't dry enough to be hung before the deadline.

"I got really stressed out, but then I got to install after the deadline, which was actually nice because there were less people, so I got to install faster," she told F. "The normal install hours were really crazy, people running around looking for tools and ladders, and it was really

overwhelming. The gallery was full of people. But after the deadline, it was really nice because there was more space to work on installation. It all worked out, and I'm really glad it did," said Wang.

Participating artists Hao Ni and Kazuki Guzman, who collaborated on a project called "Play. House," also faced the pressure of installation deadlines. Ni and Guzman took extra precautions in the installation of their piece to ensure that it would support the weight of the hundreds of visitors who would walk through it on opening night and throughout the exhibition, which ends April 6th.

Their piece — which was one of several full-scale, house-like structures in the gallery — was built not only to surprise viewers, but also to test their own limits as artists. "For a long time I have been dealing with exaggerated housing structures and the surrounding imaginary world," said Ni, "and Kazuki, on the other hand, collaborates with different artists on projects [that] he calls 'playing' with artists. In this case, with his help, I got a chance to create something I could never do on my own."

The weeks of preparation and installation finally paid off on the opening night of March 18, which felt victorious, even triumphant. The reception was incredibly well-attended, and the line to enter Sullivan Gallery

on State Street stretched an entire block along Monroe.

Emily Boksenbaum, an artist who exhibited a sculpture called "We Are Trying," said, "There were so many people there that I hadn't seen since freshman year, and it was nice to see everyone come out and come together. Everyone's pieces were really sophisticated and there was a real sense of what SAIC is about. I feel like the work was up to a really nice standard [opening] night. It was just really evident that everyone tried really hard and put the work in to make a good piece for the show."

Wang agreed that the work in the show was of a high standard of professionalism: "I really felt like people took it to a different level than a college graduation show; I think a lot of people took it to a professional level."

BFA Show

Sullivan Gallery
33 S State Street, 7th floor

Visit www.fnewsmagazine.com for photo galleries and videos from the opening night.

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“put some
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your life!”



Illustrations by Eric Baskauskas

By ERIC BASKAUSKAS AND BRANDON KOSTERS

Spring is upon us. Love is in the air, but you can't inhale any of it due to the seven months of grime that's accumulated on your ceiling fan.

Sure, living in abject filth has its small rewards. It can be nice to blindly plunge a hand into one of your bedside piles and retrieve a forgotten treat (an unwrapped Ho-Ho, perhaps, or a long-lost relative), but this is a time of re-birth. Regeneration. Flowers, and the like.

So! This month we've compiled a list of great ideas to help you out of the dusty winter blues. No problem if you've never undertaken such a daunting task; we're here to help with practical cleaning tips that even someone who's never seen a bar of soap can handle. What are you waiting for? Grab a broom and start riding it around like a horse!

WALK OF SHAM

If you live with a binge drinker, this one's for you. While the roommate is sleeping off a bender, spread German chocolate cake frosting all over the toilet seat. Cover the soles of your roommate's shoes in the frosting, and leave foot prints leading from the bathroom to his bedroom.

With the aid of a broom stick, or a really tall friend, put chocolatey footprints above his bed.

Demand that he clean the entire house and pay all of the utilities that month. Leave him to wonder how he trekked poo all over his ceiling. Bonus points if he finds Jesus and begins attending AA meetings.

BUSTING ASH

Here's one for the smokers: Why sweep when you and the housemates can plop on the floor to make ash angels? Little ash men with pipes? Meta. How about ash-ball fights, followed by laughter and cocoa?

CUTTING DOWN

Piles of laundry stacked to the ceiling? It's getting warmer and warmer each day; pretty soon you'll have completely forgotten what it's like to shiver yourself to sleep on a pile of hot embers after torching all of your previous semester's projects just to stay warm. The point is, you can literally cut your laundry load in half. Grab a pair of scissors and with a few snips turn all of your long pants into shorts, all of your jackets into vests. While you're at it, give yourself a haircut. You look like an idiot.

MEDIEVAL TIMES

Old pizza boxes are extremely handy if you ever need to make a shield for paper towel roll jousting.

YES, HORSES

And while you're at it, why not joust with actual horses in your living space? Put floor buffers on their hooves, pillows/feather dusters on their bodies, and amphetamines in their feedbag.

PUTTING UP

The easiest way to avoid having to clean is to never make a mess in the first place. The easiest way to never make a mess is to make all of your belongings really hard to reach.

GRAVITY

Clean all counter tops, tables, and shelves first (before moving on to floor mopping/vacuuming). That way, all dust and crumbs that fall to the ground can be swept up when you move on to the next phase of cleaning. ... Isn't that hilarious!?

JUST LIKE MOM

Comet, and good old fashioned elbow grease.

JUST MOM

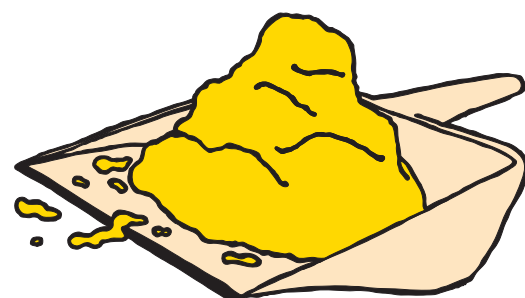
And ... a temporary mom for hire, who will be brought in for the day just to tidy up, fill you with marshmallow squares and cocoa, and reprimand you for making art. For those from the suburbs, substitute "temporary" with "actual."

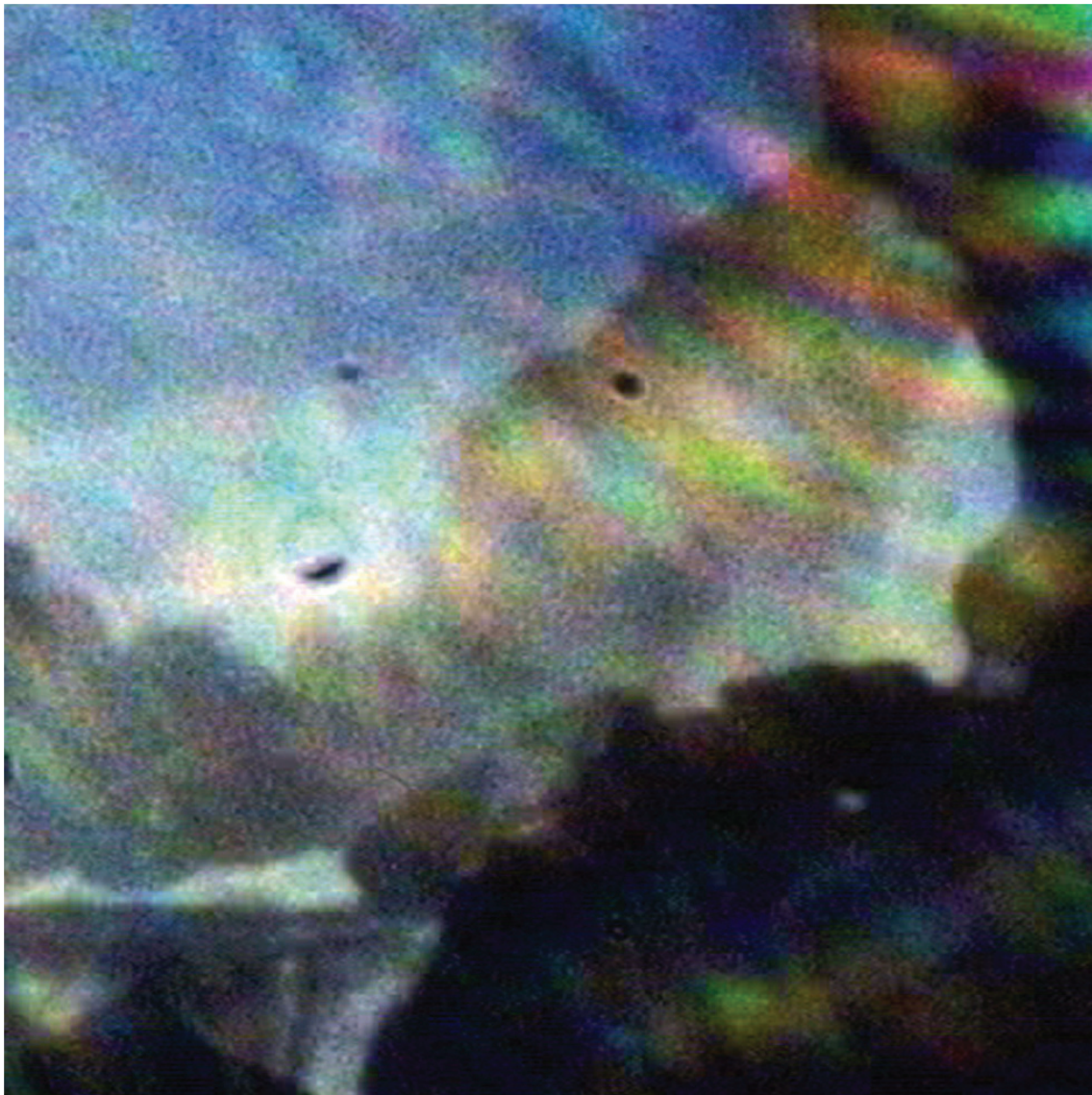
CRAP

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AUNTIE MATTER

Temporary (actual) aunt to entertain temporary (actual) mom, and help with cleaning.





Installation view of "An Incantation For Eternity (After Abbie Hoffman)", 2009. Photo courtesy of threewalls.

Uh-Oh It's Magic

The terrors and pleasures of Ben Russell at threewalls

BY WHITNEY STOEPEL STAFF WRITER

The floor was painted green, and as each visitor arrived, there was a sudden pause — followed by palpable awe. A few people even craned their heads back into the hallway to make sure they were in the right place.

They were. The green-screen gallery that made everyone do a double-take upon entering threewalls on March 13 was the perfect touch to the otherworldly opening of Ben Russell's solo show, "Uh-Oh It's Magic." On each green wall in the room hangs a blue frame, which contains a small black and white photograph of wuxia wire-fu aerialists (wuxia wire-fu is a form of Chinese martial arts, as seen in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"). In the center of the room, a record player garbles rhythmic noise from a custom-made 45", in which Russell looped a sample of the first ten seconds of The Cars' song "Magic" (the show's namesake).

Russell uses photography, film, and sound to radically adjust our sense of reality. In the same way that cinema can use green screens to simulate the impossible and transport people to other surroundings, these tiny photographs are like portals into the fantastic. They seem unreal, but are documentary in style at the same time. They hesitate at an ambivalent moment between the potential terror of the subject diving head first into the floorboards, and

the subject's everlasting and absurd ability to dangle in space.

Levitation is a frequent theme in Russell's self-described "psychedelic ethnography." Behind a curtain in the show's second room is "Incantation for Eternity (After Abbie Hoffman)." Abbie Hoffman was a famous political activist who attempted to levitate the Pentagon in 1967 in order to end the Vietnam War. In the dark room, four projectors whirl on the ground, pointed outward in four directions. They each hold spools of black film with a single white frame. Small prisms high in the corners of the room sparkle each time the white frame passes over the lens. The anticipation of that enchanting moment leaves one standing, waiting for a long time, listening to the hum of the projectors and watching the crystals. Wait long enough, and all four projectors will flash their white frames in sync, releasing a split-second rainbow.

If this installation thoroughly covers the "magic" portion, the "uh-oh" from the show's title also plays a significant role. The coupling of mystical bedazzlement and a funny feeling of trepidation is a constant in Russell's work. Like the LSD trip documented in his film "Trypps #7 (Badlands)," shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art's UBS 12x12 space last September, the exploration of alternate universes is tinged with a sense of fear. Magic can be fantastical, but it can also involve casting spells,

voodoo, séances, or a bad trip.

Each room takes the viewer a level deeper, farther away from everyday reality; and this uneasiness creeps in when entering the third and final room. A 16mm looped film titled "Pleasures and Terrors of Levitation: Knossos/Drekkingarhylur" projects in the darkened room, showing a figure walking on a wall, arms outstretched, sun glinting over the lens. The piece's double title hints at both excitement and foreboding, and refers to two locations where traveling too far from reality resulted in death. In Drekkingarhylur, women who were accused of witchcraft were murdered in a "drowning pool," while Knossos was the earthly site from which Icarus attempted to ascend to the heavens — only to fall to his death. This third room combines the excitement of making it to the end, and the fear that we won't find our way back.

In keeping with his other work, an interest in "ethnographic," global investigations is noticeable here. Specific locations are imperative to the experience of Russell's mythologies. This is why the multiple rooms work so well. The viewer has to follow the proscribed curatorial journey; the rooms have to be entered in order, and each doorway we pass through ushers in another risk we have to take in order to experience what we hope will be magic.

Each doorway we pass through ushers in another risk we have to take in order to experience what we hope will be magic.

Ben Russell: Uh Oh It's Magic
March 11 - April 23, 2011
threewalls gallery
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www.three-walls.org

Making the Political Personal

“The Gao Brothers: Grandeur and Catharsis” at Walsh Gallery

By NICOLE NELSON, STAFF WRITER

The Gao Brothers aren't afraid of expressing themselves with force. Whether taking hammers to a statue of Chairman Mao on stage at the 2008 Kandinsky Awards ceremony, staging mass-hugging performance events at the 101Tokyo Contemporary Art Fair, or holding underground exhibitions to avoid the wrath of the Chinese authorities, these artists are anything but subtle. Their current show at the Walsh Gallery, “Grandeur and Catharsis,” is in keeping with this vein, presenting a highly critical, often satirical look at the legacy of Communist Party leader Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution, and China's modern psyche.

The show presents a curated selection of works drawn from a larger exhibition that debuted earlier this year at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City. The Kemper show was the first solo exhibition in the U.S. for the Beijing-based artists Gao Qiang and Gao Zhen (born 1962 and 1956, respectively), who have been collaborating on projects in a variety of media since the mid-'80s.

The historical period that is the subject of many of these works not only witnessed the devastation Mao wrought on the entire country, but personal tragedy for the Gao Brothers, as well. In 1968, their father was apprehended by the Red Guard for being a “class enemy.” Within a month of his arrest, he was dead. The brothers' work thus not only addresses themes of violence, hypocrisy, and greed, but also alludes to the personal experience of lives irrevocably changed by these forces.

The most compelling example of this is “The Execution of Christ,” a life-sized sculptural installation of seven Mao figures with bayonets lined up to execute the pleading figure of Jesus Christ. Only one Mao stands off to the side, clutching his gun to his chest with a remorseful expression, unable to join his companions in the murderous act (this grouping is a direct formal quotation of Manet's painting, “The Execution of Emperor Maximilian”). The piece fits into a long lineage of Mao references in the Gao Brothers' sculptural work. One of the most famous instances is the “Miss Mao” figure, a baby-faced Mao with a Pinocchio-like nose and pendulous breasts, that satirizes his proclaimed desire to be seen as the “Mother Country.”

The grotesque “Miss Mao” figure is not included in the Walsh Gallery show, but “The Execution of Christ” packs a more powerful punch than the former work due to the fully dimensional humanness of the bronze figures. To examine the installation, you're forced to weave through the figures, becoming either an unwitting participant or an unwilling victim in the violent encounter,



depending on which side of bayonets you're on. The piece thus highlights the psychological tensions inherent in the Cultural Revolution in a subtle, somatic way, by forcing the viewer to choose sides in order to witness the work. “The Execution of Christ” still hasn't been shown in China, where artwork that presents satirical or critical depictions of Mao is still forbidden.

The Gao's overt political statements are tempered by the inclusion of more personal imagery in the show, thus bringing a human element into the drama. Several haunting family portraits speak of what was lost during the Mao period. “Our Parents no. 1” is a photograph of a young man and woman in traditional dress against a dark background, unaware of the hardship that awaits them in the years to come. Their figures are slightly blurry, as if seen through lines of static on a television set.

While these works have a powerful impact, other pieces in the show seem lost in translation. The exhibition includes two large photo-manipulations that populated by tiny figures, but they're so cluttered with references and symbols that they're difficult to read. For instance, the Gao Brothers attempt to make a commentary on the isolated nature of Chinese life in “Outer Space Project – Map of China,” in which China is depicted as a giant honeycomb with its citizens trapped in their individual cells. Unfortunately, the average viewer in the Walsh Gallery may feel just as isolated as those honeycomb prisoners, unable to find a point of entry into the piece and fully understand the implicit criticisms.

Despite these less successful pieces, the most compelling aspect of the Gao Brothers' practice is their ability to draw inspiration from personal and culturally specific themes, but still speak to humanity as a whole. And even more importantly, they never shy away from art with a message, regardless of the potentially dangerous themes of their work.



Top: Gao Brothers, “The Execution of Christ,” 2009. Bottom: Gao Brothers, “The Interview,” 2007. Photos courtesy of Walsh Gallery.

The most compelling aspect of the Gao Brothers' practice is their ability to draw inspiration from personal and culturally specific themes, but still speak to humanity as a whole.

Gao Brothers: Grandeur and Catharsis

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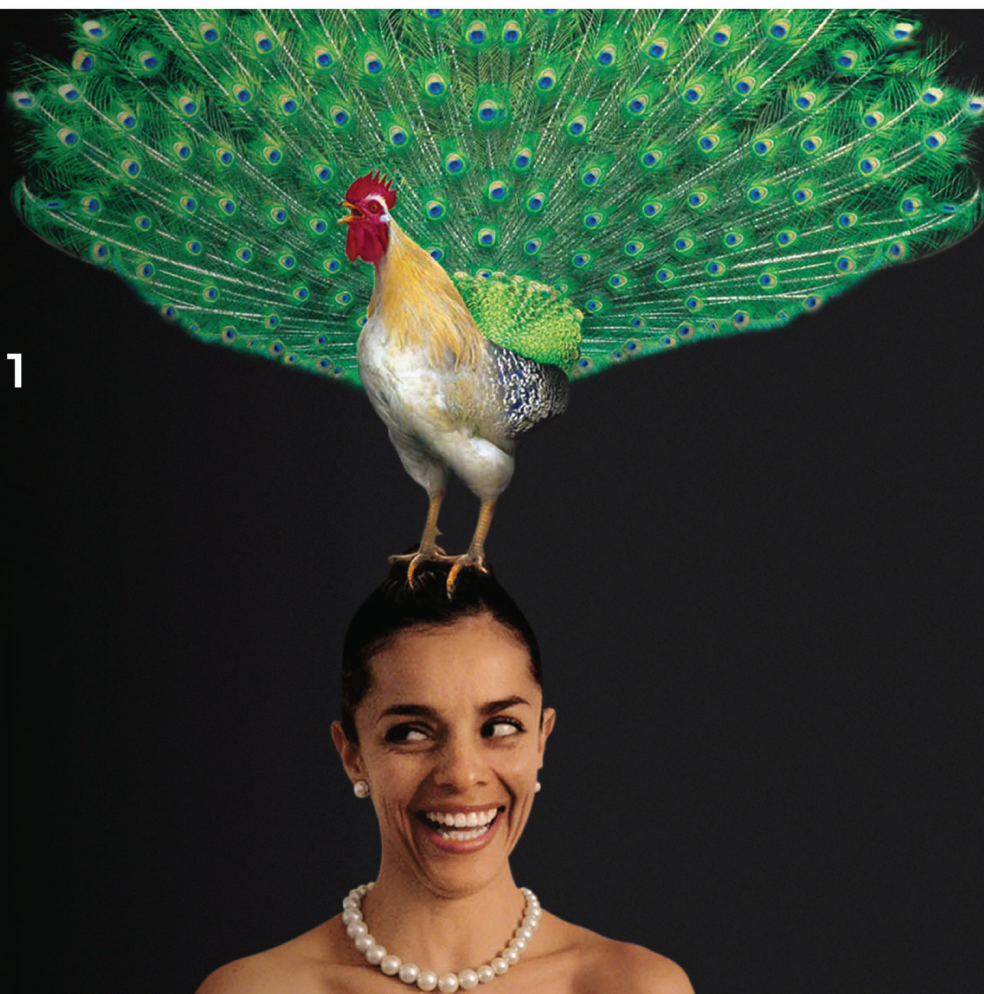


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EIS: Help or Hindrance?

Merits of the English for International Students classes debated, despite proven academic success

By **THANIA RIOS**, STAFF WRITER

SAIC has long prided itself upon its diverse student body. Administrators believe that the school's large international population exposes all of its pupils to the array of opinions, experiences, and artistic practices necessary for developing sharp critical thinking skills. As Felice Dublon, Vice President of Student Affairs, puts it, "Colleges are trying to diversify their body because it's the right educational move." But how does the administration integrate students of different backgrounds — and, more importantly, varying levels of English proficiency — into the mainstream student body?

Despite the fact that there are several different programs — the International Affairs office, the English for International Students classes, and Korean Student Advising, to name a few — dedicated solely to servicing international students, some members of the SAIC community are skeptical about how successful their efforts are.

In particular, Japanese-American undergraduate Kevin Suzuki questions the effectiveness of English for International Students (EIS) courses. "Prerequisite English for International Students classes eat up a substantial amount of credits and time," he told *F Newsmagazine*. "The administration attempts to create a smooth transition into regular classes; I'm not sure how successful their efforts have been."

Suzuki went on to wonder if the artistic process itself might not offer a better opportunity for fostering a sense of growth and community. "Art has the potential to connect people from all over the world without the use of verbal language. Perhaps the school is placing excessive emphasis on EIS, forcing people to talk, not make art," he said. After speaking with several international students, many of whom utilize the Writing Center, it seems that Suzuki's opinion reflects the general consensus.

In some ways, this critique of English for International Students courses embodies the most pressing concerns about the international experience at SAIC. Not all international students take English for International Students courses. As Saskia Hofman, Director of International Affairs, points out, many of SAIC's international students come from rather cosmopolitan backgrounds. She told *F* that "our international students tend to be extremely bi-cultural or multi-cultural within each person themselves ... in my office, I have a Ghanaian student who grew up in Vienna. I have a student who is half-Ghanaian, half-Canadian, who grew up in China and now lives in Hong Kong. I have an Indian who grew up in China."

Conceivably, students with

considerable international experience would have less trouble assimilating into the daily life of a foreign university. But students with limited English skills are more likely to fall prey to some of the worst fears people have about the international experience: being unable to understand what's being taught, being unable to keep up with the course of study, and becoming increasingly isolated; an isolation that a separate course of study — such as English for International Students — could arguably increase.

However, according to Sonia da Silva, head of the English for International Students department, the program originated out of a desire to draw international students closer to the school and its resources. "At first, we were getting complaints from First-Year Seminar professors that international students were not doing well in their classes and needed additional help," she said. "Then Art History professors began making similar comments. Then the Studio instructors complained that they weren't speaking up during critiques. We don't want to tell international students to go away and go work on their English somewhere else. We do want them to come. We want them to start their studio classes. They have the studio skills. We want them here. We want them in the United States. But we put them in these classes, they fail, and that's not fair. So we've got to provide them with extra help."

Furthermore, da Silva says that the department is well aware that "they come with strong skills already. Everyday English, they've got. But academic English is different. Most Americans don't have academic English. These courses are much, much higher than anything they've taken in an ESL class, which I think they sometimes don't understand. A lot of students also might not understand that, even though they came to an art school, they leave here with a college degree; they have to take academic classes. To do that, they're going to need better English." A TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score of 80 is the threshold for admission to SAIC, which da Silva says is standard for American universities. To test out of EIS courses, a score of 96 or higher is required.

If it's determined that an applicant needs help from the EIS department, they become part of a curriculum developed to address the concerns of professors and the needs of students. Fluency 3 (a reading and writing course) is taken in the first semester, alongside Critique (which sharpens studio critique and presentation skills). In the second semester, students then move onto Fluency 4. During their third semester, they begin taking Art History surveys and First Year seminars with the



Illustration by Albert Porto

rest of the student body, while continuing to attend Tutorials at the EIS department. After their fifth semester, these tutorials become optional, though many students elect to continue taking them.

While this may sound time-consuming, da Silva says that the program helps students avoid wasting time and money. For one thing, students have the option of taking Fluency 3 and Critique the summer before their first semester; for another, greater academic proficiency can be a time-saver itself. "We don't want them to take an Art History course and fail it, or take a First Year Seminar course, fail it, and have to take it again." Statistics bear this out. Former EIS students pass Art History surveys at a rate of 91% compared to 83% for all students, and they pass FYS I & II at a rate of 82% compared to 83% for all students.

There are, of course, drawbacks. Da Silva concedes that EIS classes "do pull students out and put them in a course with just other international students — 8 out of 10 will be Korean, 9.5 out of 10 will be Asian, so it feels like they're being pulled out, which is not ideal."

And if a diverse student body really is the right educational move, as Dublon claims, does being in a class that's 95% Asian run counter to that? "It's a problem," da Silva concedes, adding, "But they are in studio classes and in the dorms with everyone else, so I hope it would balance out."

Furthermore, success in an EIS course doesn't necessarily translate into success in a mainstream class. "Within the Critique class, we try to create a situation where things are less stressful; they're with their peers, and we bring in

Studio faculty to lead critiques," Silva says. "But we've heard that they speak more in that class than in their actual studio classes. The transfer of skills gets harder when you're in a group of 45 students, 40 of them being native English speakers who are used to jumping in — but hopefully it's one step closer to feeling comfortable and confident about participating. It's also individual," she adds. "Some people are just shy."

95% of EIS student evaluations are positive, so it seems that students feel that these sacrifices are worth the educational benefits. There are, and will probably always be, those who question its effectiveness. But in some ways, this debate goes beyond the issue of international students versus native speakers, and — as indicated by da Silva's reminder that "this isn't the Illinois Institute of Art down the street; this is a four-year degree program" — strikes at the heart of what it means to be an artist pursuing an academic degree. Does developing a strong academic acumen matter less than developing a strong artistic process?

Min A. Kim, a senior in Painting and VisCom who has taken EIS Tutorials, agrees with da Silva's claim that the classes are academically beneficial. "Most of the EIS classes were useful and informative. I was able to learn about artists, history, and different media through EIS classes — I guess in easier ways," she says. "I respect instructors and students who I met from EIS classes and I appreciate all the work I had to do in the classes." However, had Kim been given the opportunity to choose her first-year courses, she says she

wouldn't have taken the English courses. "I didn't find much difference between the regular academic session and EIS classes — for example, essay topics and readings were similar." But unlike the regular academic session, no credit hours were given for EIS. In Kim's opinion, this makes them a "waste of time and money." She believes that EIS Tutorials should be optional, not mandatory, and adds that "there should be a reasonable test before students are sent to EIS classes. TOEFL scores are not the best idea."

In response, da Silva would point out that TOEFL scores are not the only criteria for a student's placement in EIS Tutorials. SAT scores, ACT scores, academic achievement and a student's writing samples are all taken into consideration; furthermore, the EIS department administers its own test before requiring a student to take Fluency and Critique courses. Finally, even if all those criteria indicate that a student ought to be in EIS Tutorials, the requirement might still be waived if the student can produce a writing sample strong enough to persuade the administration that she can handle the First Year Seminar and Art History courses.

As long as EIS Tutorials continue to produce results — and as long as the professors who initially requested them continue to find them helpful — the policies will likely remain unchanged.

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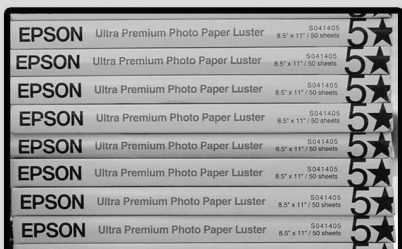
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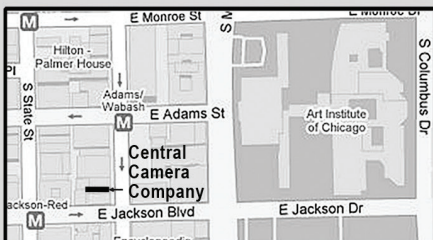
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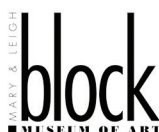
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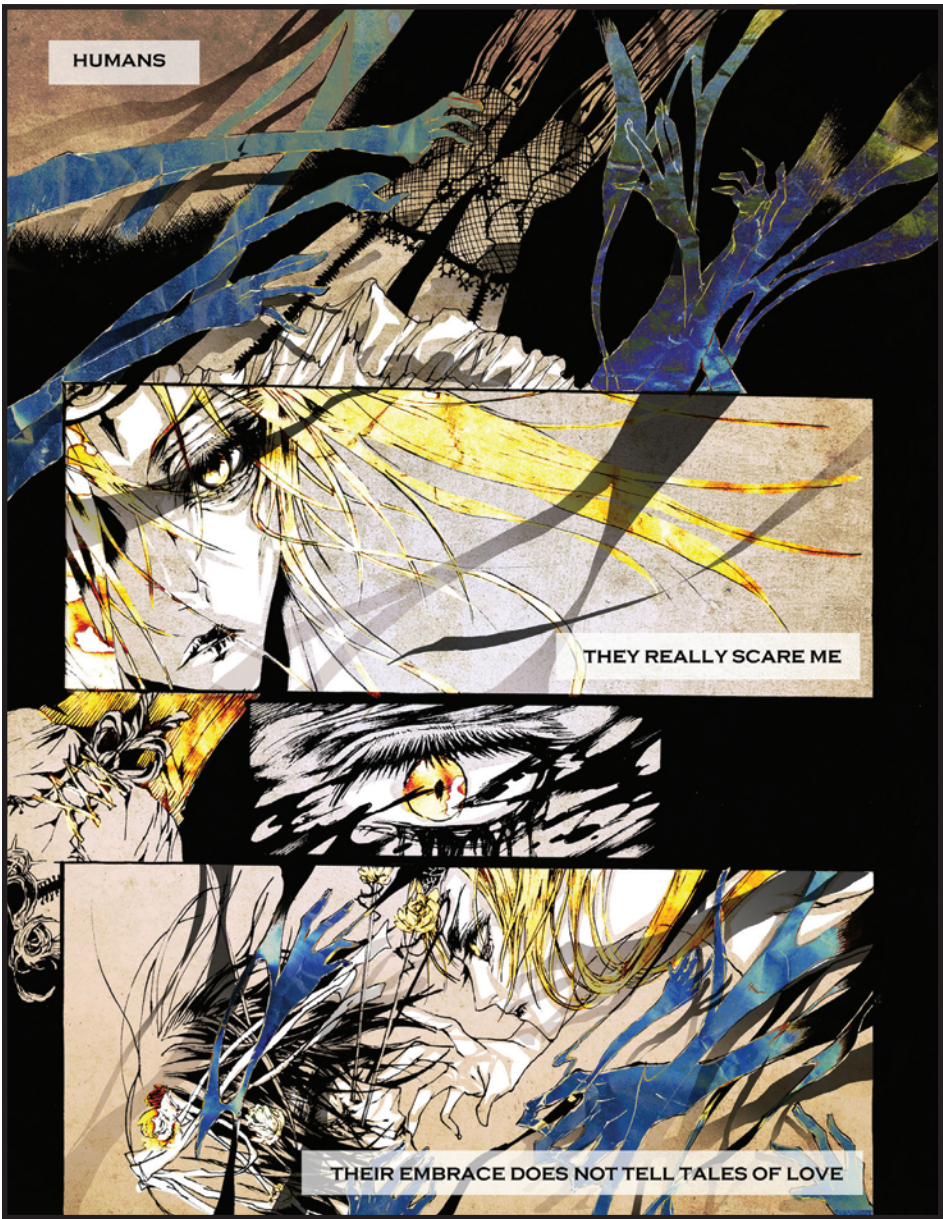
i myself have seen it: PHOTOGRAPHY & KIKI SMITH

april 8–august 14, 2011



I Myself Have Seen It: Photography and Kiki Smith was curated for the Henry Art Gallery by Chief Curator Elizabeth Brown with support from Steven Johnson and Walter Sudol, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and ArtsFund. Its exhibition at the Block Museum is supported by the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Myers Foundations, and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency. IMAGES: Kiki Smith, *Untitled (Head of Kuan Yin)*, 2002; *Untitled (Harpies)*, 2000. Both images are Chromogenic (Ektacolor) color prints. © Kiki Smith, courtesy The Pace Gallery.

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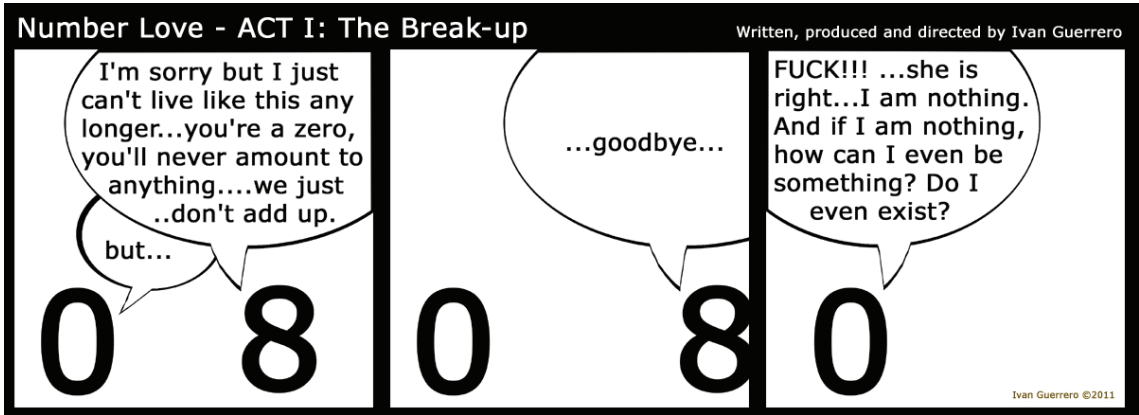
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Oddballs

by Brandon Kosters



Lamenting a life misspent, the fortune cookie writer lashes out.

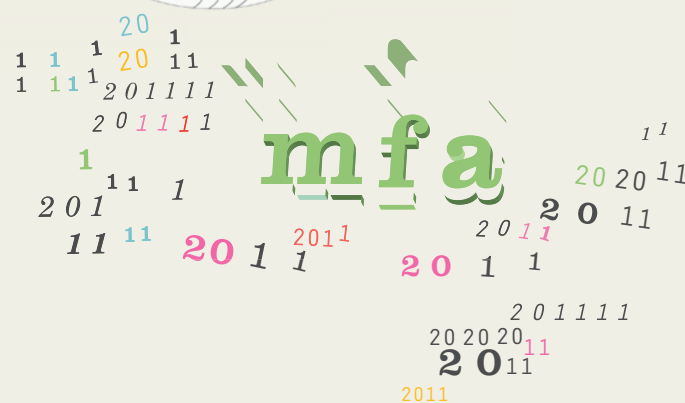
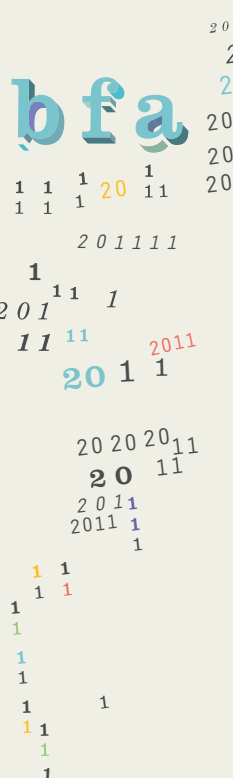
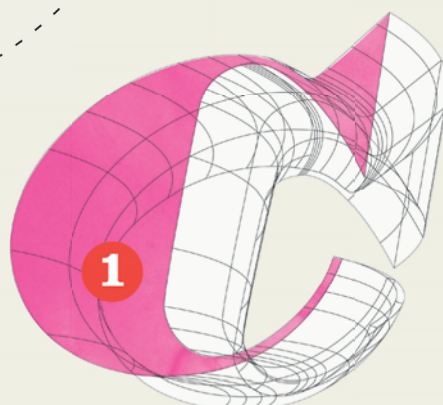
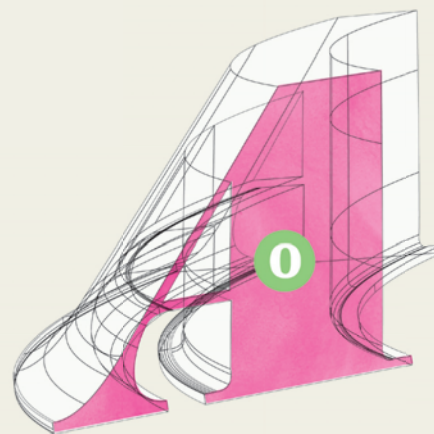


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