

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago

SEPTEMBER 2013

fnewsmagazine

*A student journal of arts,
culture and politics*



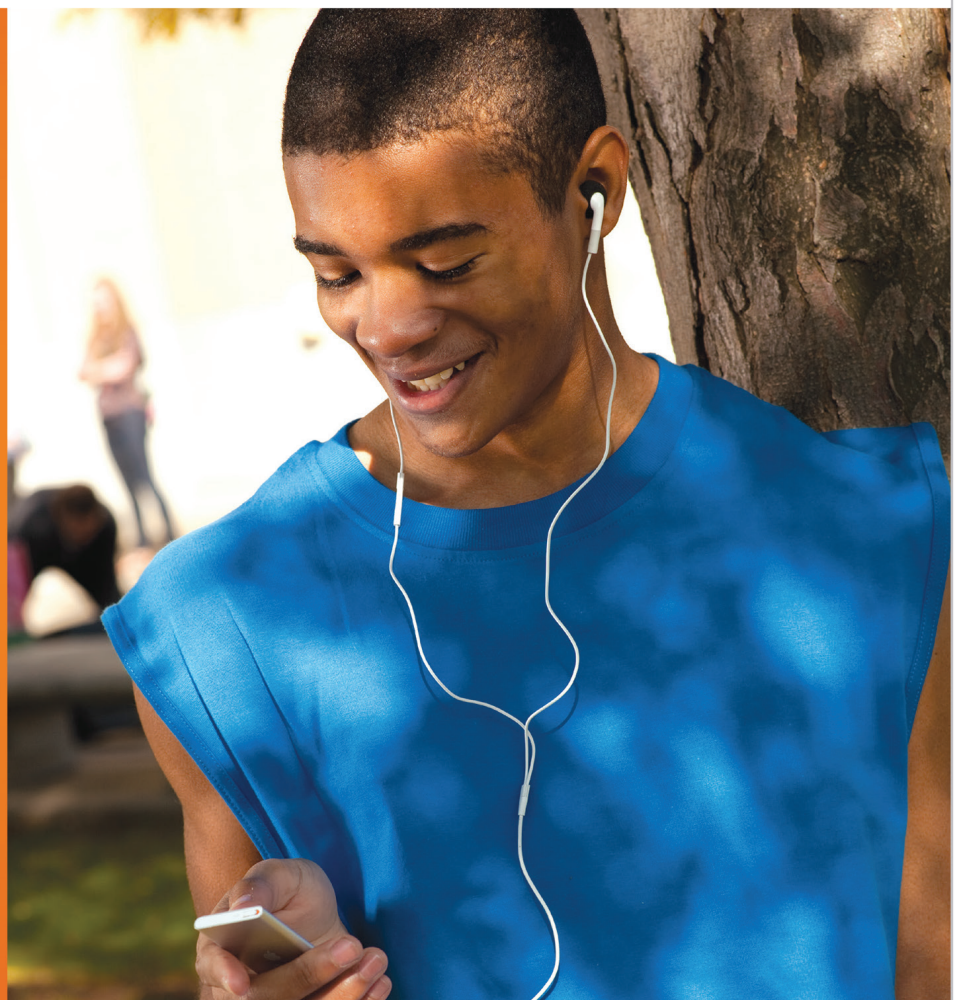
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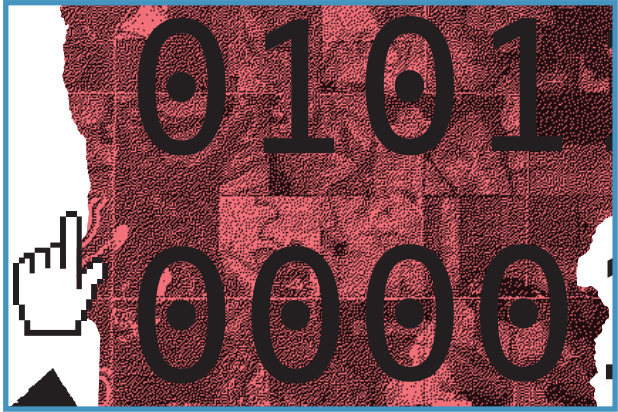
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WEB EXCLUSIVES fnewsmagazine.com



Alternative Art Spaces in Chicago — Patrick G. Putze explores Chicago's vibrant and innovative alternative art spaces — why they exist, what factors shape their agendas and how SAIC alumni help to fuel the scene — through extensive fieldwork and profiles with leading citizen-gallerists.

Interview with Kim Deitch — Comics Editor Sierra Nicole Rhoden talks with the underground comix veteran about his story, inspirations and what's next.

Contesting Authenticity — Alexander Wolff analyzes the work of Delhi-based artist's collective Sahmat in conjunction with their recent retrospective at The Smart Museum.

Riding Their Coattails: Bands with Stolen Names — Call it adoption, homage, plagiarism or appropriation. Music Editor Christopher Kareska exposes how some prominent groups had a little help arriving at their names.

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COVER: "beginning is the most important part" by Frederick Eschrich

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New SCHOOL Year NEWS

School Works to IMPROVE DIVERSITY

by michelle weidman

“Until it becomes a priority for everyone to start asking questions of themselves and others, all the talk about diversity in the world won’t change the community here or anywhere.”

This statement concluded a Letter to the Editor to F Newsmagazine, written in March 2013, by members of the student group Black at SAIC. The letter aimed to address perceived racial exploitation in certain student work, as well as to address the need for a more even and educated playing field for students. As the Fall 2013 semester begins, the school’s official dialogue on race and other forms of diversity is continuing and, hopefully, progressing.

A series of campus dialogues about issues of race in the arts followed the Black at SAIC letter, contributing to previous discussions within the school. A panel, “Controversy, Community and Curriculum” was convened in April 2013, bringing together four faculty members and moderated by Black at SAIC member Rashayla Brown. While a plethora of important ideas and suggestions were raised, many agreed that students and faculty needed more training on how to properly and effectively initiate conversations on race within the classroom and in critiques.

Since 2009 the school has had an official plan to accomplish a more effective discussion of difference. The Diversity Action Group, convened as part of the school’s Strategic Plan, has held three well-attended symposia bringing together staff, faculty and students to better understand what the school does well and what it needs to do better.

The research and dialogue phase of DAG is nearly complete. According to DAG Co-Chair and Assistant Professor Karyn Sandlos, “We hope to finalize recommendations [for the President and Provost] at our meeting on Sept 11. It will take a few more weeks to format the final document.”

In addition to these impending recommendations, the school has appointed Rashayla Brown, one of the members of Black at SAIC, as the new

Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs.

“We all have a lot of work and learning to do,” Brown told F Newsmagazine. “I think this is an amazing time to make history in our influential piece of the art world.”

Brown lead led many conversations on race during her time as a student. Her experience includes curating the Mythologies exhibition at the Sullivan Galleries and moderating the Controversy, Community and Curriculum panel, mentioned previously. “I hope to continue to spark interest in the ongoing diversity initiatives at the school,” Brown said when asked about how she plans to use her new appointment, “as well as build more connections between students and other institutions and neighborhoods throughout Chicago.”

Following through on the topics raised by the Controversy, Community and Curriculum panel, Brown is currently working with the Dean’s office to develop “a series of talks about identity and difference with faculty.” She is also “working on increasing the attention paid to queer artists of color and other constituencies that don’t often get as much publicity at our school.”

“I would love if those students [who are interested in being more informed and knowledgeable about issues of difference] would attend the wide range of programs that Multicultural Affairs, the Student Programming Board, and the Dean’s Office are planning this year.”

A schedule for these events has not yet been issued, but Brown encourages students to contact her directly for more information about this programming as well as if they “wish to receive some training on these issues or have topics they would like to see addressed moving forward.”

While it may be too early to know whether these changes will indeed meet Black at SAIC’s challenge to change the community at SAIC, the school is taking steps toward broadening the dialogue.

Housing OUTSOURCED

by christopher kareska

SAIC has had a record year for on-campus housing applications (2013-2014). To meet the needs of incoming students, Residence Life has partnered with a private residence hall, the Buckingham, at 59 E Van Buren. 108 SAIC students will live at the Buckingham this year, occupying six floors of the 1929 Art Deco National Landmark building. The apartments at the Buckingham house 2-5 students and feature both private and shared bedrooms, full kitchens, in-unit washers/dryers and furnished living rooms. Further amenities include an exercise room, bike room and lounge. The building also houses students from Columbia College, DePaul University, Roosevelt University and University of Illinois at Chicago.

Enrollment Increasing FOR 2013-2014

by michelle weidman

Despite an expected decline in national college enrollment, SAIC is seeing a slight increase in enrollment from the previous academic year.

SAIC enrollment exceeded the school’s goal with 1260 total new students, up from 1113 last year, according to enrollment analyst Megan Mason. There were around 4500 applications initially received this year. This figure is subject to change significantly between now and the end of add/drop in September.

According to a report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, national enrollment for the Spring of 2013 showed decreases across the board, except for in Private Nonprofit 4 Year schools, like SAIC, which saw a .5 percent increase. These decreases are expected to continue across the country.

Additionally, Chinese student enrollment has exceeded Korean student enrollment, which previously had the highest percentage of international enrollment. Mason explained that this may reflect the school’s interest in diversifying the international student enrollment.

The male to female ratio of students is remaining at 69 percent female and 31 percent male.



CHRIS JOHNSON: IN MEMORIAM

F Newsmagazine was lucky to have Chris Johnson as Staff Photographer during his time at SAIC. Month by month we were continually humbled by the quality of Chris's photos. An amazing portraitist, studio photographer and documentarian, Chris was easily our best photographer — our pages are vitally dimmed by his passing.

We dedicate this issue to Chris's life and work and to his family, who are in our thoughts. We have compiled some of his work to share with you, and we will have more of his images available on our website. We welcome all of you who knew Chris to join us and add your memories to the comments section of his slideshow at FNewsmagazine.com/chrisjohnson.



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MOVE IT SKIN IT STRETCH IT

SAIC renovates Flaxman Library



The shelves were moved to a different orientation, the lights skinned, and the library was in a sense stretched to take advantage of everything within the space. As a result, the library offers a more comprehensible system that incorporates the stacked books, DVDs, and digital media catalogue into one interdisciplinary space.



photographs by Sanglim Han

by kioto aoki

Since the Flaxman Library opened in 1989, it has tremendously expanded its resources to support research and leisure at SAIC. There is now a digital catalog with a growing collection of online articles, thousands of circulating books, and audiovisual material that includes DVDs, CDs, and even 16mm film. Many of these topics are outside the subject of art as well. But despite the important presence Flaxman has at SAIC, there were still a few problems with the visitor's experience inside the library.

The main problem was the appearance of the library interior. There is a whole wall of large windows, but the bookshelves blocked incoming light. Hence dimly lit aisles lined by the old, dusty carpet greeted you on the way in. The confusing organization of the shelves made it difficult to locate your desired book, as you find that the photography section wrapped down and around a corner instead of in consecutive rows. The DVDs and CDs were split in separate sections, and there were a limited number of outlets and plugin stations for frequent laptop users. In order to improve the visitor experience and eliminate these inconveniences, the Flaxman Library underwent a renovation this summer that changed the physical and visual layout to create a new, redesigned library space.

For this renovation, SAIC decided to work with Wheeler Kearns Architects (WKA), a firm based in the Loop just a few blocks south of the school. Ron Kirkpatrick, Executive Director of Design and Construction at SAIC, was very satisfied with the collaboration, praising the "focused, quick decisions" made to ensure success and fluidity of the project. One of the reasons SAIC chose to work with WKA was that they immediately addressed a major internal concern — rotating the bookshelves to open a view of the windows. The shelves were originally running east to west, parallel to the windows, blocking light; and the new plan placed them north to south.

According to Flaxman Director Claire Eike, the library was regularly getting complaints about the layouts of the stacks. There were recurring suggestions from the students to rotate the stacks. Additionally, some old walls were demolished so offices and rooms could be shuffled around to make to create more room for the arranged stacks.

The individual study desks that were previously up against the windows were removed to also help filter more sunlight. To replace the old study lineup, WKA incorporated new study niches by having "the end of the stacks... staggered, creating intermittent semi-private places for study areas," as written in their project proposal. These areas now sport newly designed furniture specifically made for use in the remodeled library.

Speed was essential for the Flaxman project. It was important the library would not have to be closed for long, a potential inconvenience for students and faculty. To meet this goal, most of construction took place during the two weeks between graduation and the start of the summer semester, which resulted in Flaxman closing down for only one week during summer school session. In the end, the whole library was demolished, constructed, and renovated in just three weeks.

Along with speed, budget was another important element in the Flaxman renovation. Kirkpatrick and SAIC Provost Elissa Tenny stressed that the renovation be completed as a low budget project not only for money's sake, but also in an effort to push "the idea of sustainability." As an art school that tends to lavishly use limited and sometimes harmful materials, it was important to try to reuse, recycle and modify equipment wherever possible.

There were some necessary upgrades such as increasing electrical outlets and offering more plugin stations with Ethernet cables to keep up with technological advances, as well as replacing the dusty carpet that has been on the floor since 1989. Otherwise, most of the bookshelves were reused, as well as the TVs and computers. One of the techniques to cut budget costs was what WKA called "skinning," in which surfaces are re-finished with a vinyl film, which results in a new, polished look without having to replace any of the existing components. This skinning technique was used for the light fixtures in the library, which were otherwise mostly left untouched.

The title of the Flaxman project proposal by WKA was "Move It, Skin It, Stretch It," and the renovation did just that. The shelves were moved to a different orientation, the lights skinned, and the library was in a sense stretched to take advantage of everything within the space. As a result, the library offers a more comprehensible system that incorporates the stacked books, DVDs, and digital media catalogue into one interdisciplinary space. As Eike said, "We can ease quietly back into the semester," now that Flaxman has a fresh, bright and inviting environment that will guarantee a better experience for students, staff and faculty at SAIC. There is talk of additional projects for the library as well, so keep your eyes open for more improvements. And don't forget to check out that bright green wall as you leave.



***Remembering SAIC Professor, Artist, Anthropologist, Haitian Vodou Expert
and Rumoured Witch Marilyn Houlberg***

ODIGBA!

by nicole rhoden

African drums echoed through the vast MacLean ballroom, which was bustling with hugs and chatter. Friends, family and colleagues gathered on July 17 to celebrate the life of Marilyn Houlberg — author, artist, art historian, anthropologist and renowned scholar of Nigerian and Haitian art, particularly the arts and culture of Haitian Vodou. Houlberg, who taught at SAIC for over two decades, passed away on June 29 of last year.

A slideshow was projected at the front of the room — black and white images of Houlberg as a child, later in a fluffy 1950s ball gown, and then displaying what seemed a sudden liberation — flowing cloaks, beads, skulls, aviator sunglasses and trips to Nigeria and Haiti. In one photo, she stood proudly in front of a sign that read “Mambo Marilyn’s Studio.” The progression of images made a clear assertion: Houlberg knew who she wanted to be, and that’s who she became.

Houlberg’s daughters Mia and Magda Houlberg mingled among the crowd. At times Magda referred to her mother in the present tense, a fitting sentiment in remembering someone who in life was so attuned to the realm of the dead. “She’s self-made. Her father died when she was young so her family didn’t have a lot of money,” said Magda, noting that her mother had worked through high school to support the family, and made straight A’s at a community college before enrolling at University of Chicago. Magda loved growing up among her mother’s eclectic interests. “She took me places and showed me things that I don’t think anybody has ever seen before,” she said. “She could handle any situation. [...] She was able to relate to people on a human level no matter where they came from.”

As an instructor, Houlberg was all about access. She welcomed students into her apartment studio, a loft space covered floor-to-ceiling with Haitian and African art, which artist John T. Unger fondly described in his blog as “Christmas in Hell.” “She was a scholar who was so totally immersed in her subject. She never hid behind books,” said Shay DeGrandis, SAIC Senior Administrative Director of Academic Programs and former student of Houlberg. “She was never afraid to get her hands dirty.” DeGrandis spoke these words from behind skull makeup, dark sunglasses, a top hat and a snappy suit. She was holding a wooden staff with a phallus tip. DeGrandis was dressed as Bawon Samdi (also known as Baron Samedi), one of Houlberg’s favorite Loa, or Haitian Vodou spirits. She was accompanied by friend Michelle Maynard disguised as the Baron’s wife, Maman Brigit. Samedi is the Haitian word for “Saturday,” DeGrandis explained. “Christ dies on Good Friday, Sunday he’s risen, and then you’ve got Saturday. Baron takes care of that realm between the living and the dead. He exists at all times in both. He’s a trickster.”

Muralist and sculptor Oscar Romero met Houlberg over twenty years ago while his wife was a student at SAIC. He and Houlberg shared a unique passion. “We studied the Patoli together — it’s like reading tarot cards from Pre-Columbian culture,” said Romero. He explained how Patoli was traditionally composed as a cross-shaped grid, but that he and Houlberg were designing a version that was a card deck of 52, a significant number in the Mayan calendar. “We were in the middle of the project when Marilyn died. But I will continue and finish it.”

SAIC alum Rowynn Dumont was Houlberg’s assistant for over six years. She first learned of the instructor while flipping through the course listings, excited to find offerings like Haitian Voodoo and Witchcraft. “When she would walk into a room, it was like a forgotten entity was walking in, like something you hear about in storybooks. It was like meeting someone who was the last of [her kind].” Under Houlberg’s influence, Dumont was the first at the school to pursue a BFA in Studies of Taboo Religions & Sexuality in Art.

Soon after Dumont met Houlberg, the roof collapsed in the professor’s studio. Much of her vast collection of Haitian and African Artifacts was damaged or destroyed. Hoping to gain Houlberg as a mentor, Dumont offered to clean the space and catalog the objects. The project, like Romero’s, is not yet complete; of 10,000 image slides being made for the Smithsonian 7,000 have been completed. Pieces from Houlberg’s collection made up a significant portion of the exhibit “In Extremis: Death and Life in 21st-Century Haitian Art” at Los Angeles’ Fowler Museum last year.

Dumont recalled when Houlberg travelled to Haiti and was delayed reentering the country for almost two months. “I finally got word from her that she got stuck in Haiti because she was bringing back a human head that was still decomposing,” laughed Dumont. “I’m assuming it was from one of the temples. Whether she ever got that head through customs, I am not sure.” Houlberg, a rumored witch, exuded a powerful mysticism among the people of Haiti; in the Southern plantation house where the pair stayed, Dumont says they spent two to three hours daily visiting with the lines of people who came to see Houlberg.

Conversation eventually quieted down to make way for speeches. Don Cosentino, Houlberg’s close friend and colleague since the 1970s, joked that Houlberg’s spirit had a hand in the misplacement of his glasses on his flight from Boston, forcing him to spend the event in his elusive prescription aviator shades. Cosentino, who worked with Houlberg on exhibits including “In Extremis” and her 1995 traveling exhibition “Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou,” fondly recalled Houlberg’s humongous Elvis altar, her love of miniature dogs, and her “utter contempt for bourgeois standards.” “Wherever Marilyn went there was drama,” he said, marvelling at the numerous natural disasters the scholar had survived in her travels.

Painter Tony Phillips affectionately remembered living downstairs from Houlberg — “I could hear the drum beats downstairs and smell exotic odors drifting up my floorboards.” He read from a letter from his wife Judith Raphael, who was unable to attend the event: “Marilyn had an original vision.” Diaby Diarra, a leading art dealer in Mali and friend of Houlberg, was overcome with emotion as he remembered her generous spirit — “Marilyn did so much for our community,” he said.

Artist Dayo Laoye, who fondly referred to Houlberg as

When she would walk into a room, it was like a forgotten entity was walking in, like something you hear about in storybooks. It was like meeting someone who was the last of her kind.

Iya, or “Mother,” finished his speech with a ritual pouring of whiskey and water, sipping the whiskey and spitting it into the air full force. “By collecting African spiritual art, [Marilyn] has preserved our culture,” Laoye later said of the display. “This is why I poured libation in her honor, with water (Omi) first, to calm her journey, followed by whiskey (Oti), for strength. I later sprayed the oti into the air, so the spirits and hers will partake.”

After the speeches, the crowd took part in a long, humid procession to Lake Michigan. Baron Samedi and Mama Brigit danced at the front of the line, and the drummer never strayed from his rhythm. A few carried wooden boats with brightly printed sails.

At the lake, Houlberg’s friends and family loaded the boats with a vivid assortment of white flowers, grapes, melon and peppers — offerings to their departed companion. Laoye sang a song called Yemoja Olodo (“Yemoja, the Goddess of the Sea”) as Magda climbed a ladder closer to the water and sent the boats and contents on their way. Then she and her wife Jenn Richards, to the group’s surprise, jumped in themselves, immersing themselves in Houlberg’s spirit and legacy. Laoye led the crowd in yelling “ODIGBA!,” a Yoruba bidding of goodbye.

Why Great THINKERS Learned to WALK

Steps Toward Unleashing Your Humanity

by alyssa moxley

Engaging one's humanity is an essential skill for an artist, and walking is one of the most easily accessible techniques for doing so. Last spring, SAIC offered four classes taught around the idea of walking: two in writing, one in art history and one in sculpture. Each was intended to remind students of the creative potential within such a fundamental activity.

In many places, walking is no longer necessary for the survival of the body and commerce. Economic growth or failure is evaluated by speed of production and information transfer. Walking to deliver or retrieve a message or object has been superseded by more efficient technologies. Faster and faster transportation devices, like planes and the Internet, carry both physical and intellectual materials to distant locations and communities, disjoining traditional ideas of time and space.

What elements of walking cannot be replaced by modern transportation? What about these contribute so much to our humanity? And how does this translate from prehistory into art practice?

Lori Waxman, who taught the art history class "Walk that Way," based her course on her Ph.D. thesis: "A Few Steps Toward a Revolution of Everyday Life: Walking with the Surrealists, the Situationist International and Flux-us." For her, "walking has become relevant as an artistic practice over the past 100 years because it has become less and less a part of daily life. Today most people drive most places; for the previous millennia of human existence, we have walked. So it's only very, very recently that walking has receded from daily life, and this massive change has freed it up to become an aesthetic and/or critical gesture."

Walter Benjamin's concept of the *flâneur* relates directly to the development of the arcade and is based on Baudelaire's passionate, strolling observations of city life and depictions of its inhabitants through physiognomies. The city as a shopping mall meant that crowds of consumers were ripe to be gazed upon by the eyes of hungry idlers, doing nothing but establishing a "dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite," as recorded in Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life." The state of attention that walks bring about is the primordial material that returns us to somewhere basic, no matter where we are.

Peter O'Leary taught the advanced writing workshop, "Walking a Poetics." He was inspired by one of the maxims of the Scottish poet Thomas A. Clarke: "Walking is the human way of getting about." For O'Leary, there are two kinds of walks. There are walks that are circumscribed by time, often on preplanned routes, which facilitate browsing through the mind's thoughts. This kind of walk can be accompanied and is good for mulling over problems alone or gaining emotional depth and truth in conversation. The other kind of walk O'Leary conducts is a foraging walk:

"In the springtime you can forage for morels. Go into the forest preserves on the western edge of town, and you start wandering and you're looking and looking and looking. And sometimes you see nothing for a long time and then finally you might see one or two, but what you're hoping for, what you're really looking for, is that moment. Because when you've really filtered everything out and you're foraging, your mind is like a shuttle on a loom; it's weaving back and forth across the ground for any sort of sight patterns and then you see it. You see the little conic head; you see the pitted mushroom. Ah there it is. And what happens at that point for me, you have to just quiet down. You have to settle your lines of sight down completely because there are more around. Because you saw this one, but if you stop and just turn around maybe, quiet yourself, and all of a sudden, you'll see a dozen. And then

you look along another line of sight and you'll see a dozen more. And then you'll see that they are everywhere. And then you have to really settle down because your mind is already expanding — like how am I going to get all of these mushrooms? And you have to just be a little bit more meticulous and start picking the ones that are good. Some of them are old, some of them are young. You want to leave those. That moment you're totally focused."

Walking serves as a kind of behavioral outreach for what is happening inwardly. For Peter, poetry, like walking, involves foraging, but for words rather than mushrooms.

The walk in a city allows for brief encounters with fellow humans — not usually enough time to know something, but rather to guess. It's half imagination, half direct observation, surmising what lies beyond the present moment. In his "Arcades Project," Benjamin equates the 19th century *flâneur*'s penetrating caricatures of modern city dwellers to "botanizing on the asphalt."

Jesse Ball's writing workshop focused on the *dérive*, the Situationist method to articulate the relationship of the constructed topography of the city and the minds that occupy and move through it. He feels that "prior to being an artist, a writer, a maker of any sort, one must remember what it is to be human. Thus, reclaiming basic human skills like seeing and walking — that should be the first step of a person who aspires to make things." Inspired by individual geographies from Chicago and beyond, the individual's perception of space is key. For him, "walking is perhaps even more important today than it was previously, as it can be one of the few times when we can be alone and have private thoughts."

(By walking) artists expand and contract their awareness, enlivening the imagination and focusing energy.

Guy Debord outlines a number of methods to ride the psychic currents of mood and human activity of the city through walking. In his "Internationale Situationniste #2" he writes: "The spatial field of a *dérive* (drift) may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself." This nexus creates a psycho-geography, a map that permeates from the observer through the observed. Rather than setting a route, the walker sets an amount of time to observe and follow impulses.

The bipedal heritage of homo sapiens lends itself to a gait that simultaneously falls and catches itself, in a rhythm of off and on. Our ancient ancestors balanced risk and discipline to expand their awareness of landscape while navigating terrain on two feet. Similarly, artists expand and contract their awareness, enlivening the imagination and focusing energy. Today, many see walkers as treading a fine line between wasting time or exercising. The excitement and appeal of walking is on more uncertain ground, of gaining knowledge of both interior and worldly space by traversing it.

WALKING LESSONS FROM THE EXPERTS

READING LIST FROM CLASS INSTRUCTORS:

- FRANCIS ALÿS**
early solo walking pieces, which are often called "urban fables"
- WILLIAM ANASTASI**
"Pocket Drawings"
- MATSUO BASHO**
"Narrow Road to the Deep North"
- CHARLES BAUDELAIRE**
"The Painter of Modern Life"
- STANLEY BROWN**
"This Way Brouwn"
- CHRISTINE HILL**
"Tour Guide?"
- W.G. SEBALD**
"Rings of Saturn"
- REBECCA SOLNIT**
"Wanderlust: A History of Walking"
- HENRY DAVID THOREAU**
"Walking: An Essay"
- RICHARD WENTWORTH**
"Making Do and Getting By," which isn't strictly a walking piece but which could only have been made by an artist who walks regularly
- WALT WHITMAN**
"Collected Poems"

SYMPATHETIC SURVIVAL GUIDE

How to cope with your first semester living away from home

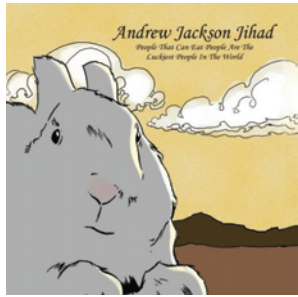
by becky frass

Living on your own can be tough – there will be weeks when you have to decide between food, alcohol or art supplies, because you sure as hell can’t afford it all. You may find yourself working your butt off at multiple jobs, struggling to pay rent and constantly worrying about one of the cockroaches in your shoddy apartment complex crawling into the bottom of your laundry basket. Through it all, you should know you are not alone. You can find some solace to your dejection in the following songs.



1. FIDLAR
“Cheap Beer”
FIDLAR (2013)

This song epitomizes the moment when you find yourself unselfconsciously paying for a 40 oz beer with pocket change. With the chorus of “I drink cheap beer / so what / fuck you,” FIDLAR (which stands for “Fuck It Dog, Life’s a Risk”) shouts what every 20-something is thinking during that particular sloshed and turbulent instance. The music video features FIDLAR running around parties, knocking fancy beers out of the hands of other party-goers and causing a general ruckus — a fundamental anthem for the crust punks, indeed.



2. Andrew Jackson Jihad
“Survival Song”
People Who Can Eat People Are the Luckiest People in the World (2007)

Andrew Jackson Jihad’s folk-punk hymn of bittersweet truth and human flaws is a quintessential listen for someone in a place of self-reflection. Trying to figure out where you are in the world and what any of this means can be tough, and this Andrew Jackson Jihad album is an earnest way to get through those introspective periods. “Survival Song” will guide you through your misshapen dreams towards honesty and acknowledgment; we all screw up and we can all get better.



3. Daniel Johnston
“The Story of An Artist”
The Story of An Artist (2010)

Johnston’s brutally realistic story of the struggle of being an artist while also surviving both financially and socially offers insight into the artist’s battle with his or her family, friends and, in Johnston’s case, his mental health. The sympathy that Johnston offers listeners with melancholy lyrics is so potent that in your sadness you will at least feel a little less alone.



4. The Mountain Goats
“This Year”
The Sunset Tree (2005)

“The Sunset Tree” was an album that helped me get through both high school and college. Throughout, frontman John Darnielle sings tales of optimism from a pessimist’s point of view, verbalizing the anguish and awkwardness of growing up. Singing about escaping reality, breaking free when you are still discovering who you are, and the occasional pointlessness of youthful relationships, “This Year” is one of the standout tracks on the album. Through his lyrics, Darnielle finds a way to relive and reevaluate his past from a very personal point of view that puts the listener in his position.



5. Built to Spill
“You Were Right”
Keep it Like a Secret (1999)

“You Were Right” tells a tale of the hypocrisy and the conflicts of interest in everything we’re told growing up. Built to Spill examines the messages of several classic rock songs: “You were right when you said all that glitters isn’t gold / You were right when you said all we are is dust in the wind / You were right when you said we’re all just bricks in the wall / And when you said manic depression is a frustrated mess,” referencing Neil Young, Kansas, Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix, respectively. The song then becomes an analysis of pop music in general, referencing the words that the bands were influenced by growing up and where these testaments fall into play today. Attesting to the bitterness of being disappointed and let down by your hopes and dreams, and both the disillusionments and honesty that rock songs feed us when we are growing up, “You Were Right” is about relating music to life.



6. Noah and the Whale
“L.I.F.E.G.O.E.S.O.N.”
Last Night on Earth (2011)

A sweet song about getting through rough times, Britpop band Noah and the Whale’s precious melody of “life goes on” will be stuck in your head for days. If you’re not into cutesy music, this may not be the song for you; but if you are, it’s poppy, catchy and adorable! Noah and the Whale vocalist Charlie Fink sounds like a toned down Ray Davies of The Kinks in this one. The riff is also pretty similar to that of the Kinks’ “Lola,” which is definitely a good thing.



7. Cloud Cult
“No One Said It Would Be Easy”
Feel Good Ghosts (Tea-Partying Through Tornadoes) (2008)

Cloud Cult has been one of the most influential bands in my life over the past decade — they’ve been releasing incredible music for years and I feel their brilliance has gone unnoticed by many. Their music is energetic and beautifully powerful, full of honesty and vigor. “No One Said It Would Be Easy” builds up from a light piano performance and blossoms into a strong, zealous track about life and love — “When it all comes crashing down / try to understand your meaning / no one said it would be easy.” The lyrics effectively hit the nail on the head, illustrating one of college’s tacit lessons.



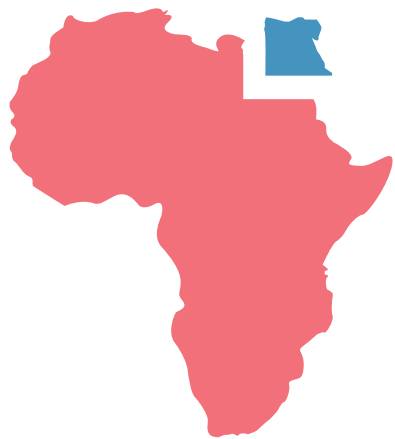
8. Yellow Ostrich
“Marathon Runner”
Strange Land (2012)

This song is about being stuck, about giving up on dreams, running to an unknown end, being trapped in the middle of it all and not knowing where you’re going. This is a place that we all find ourselves in when thinking about careers, the future, and where we currently stand. “I am a marathon runner / and my legs are sore / and I’m anxious to see what I’m running for,” is a metaphor that can relate to practically anything — when you do so much and aren’t quite sure what the results are going to be, anxiety runs thick. The indie-folk flexibility of Yellow Ostrich belts out this spectacle with diverse and poppy instrumentation, giving listeners something to sing along to as we continue to sprint away from responsibility.



9. The Polyphonic Spree
“Light and Day”
Light and Day (2003)

The Polyphonic Spree is a cultish orchestra of people cheering happy sentiments at their audiences and performing in a gospel-like manner. This song is similar to the Yellow Ostrich pick in that it’s a commentary about the crushing weight of life, but it ends on a much more positive note. During their first few years of touring, the band would enter stage in long white robes, performing as a choral group — it was a super weird, almost religious experience. They later switched from the robes into black military suits, offering a completely different type of theatricality. Their upbeat and symphonic choral pop is reliably uplifting, almost transformative in the way it can encompass the listener. “Light & Day” leaves listeners with the message to stay optimistic and to live in the present moment



Where Does Egypt Fit?

The lasting impact of 19th Century racism on museological categorization

by alexander wolff

It may seem untroubling or even natural to see Egyptian art displayed alongside Greek and Roman art in collections at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and countless other museums. While these displays usually include work related to Greece and Rome from the Ptolemaic period (332 BC – 30 BC) or Roman Egypt (30 BC – 4th Century AD), they also show works from other earlier periods of Egyptian history. These pieces from pre-Dynastic, Old, Middle and New periods bear no historical or aesthetic relationship with the Greek and Roman material they are displayed alongside. Though some may be wondering what makes this classification an issue, the more pressing question is what makes these types of classification seem so natural?

Display decisions like this are not unique to the AIC, or any other museums. As the art historian and curator Theodore Celenko states in the introduction to the art historical survey “Egypt in Africa,” (1996) there is a “tendency of universities, museums and popular media to view ancient Egypt from Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and European perspectives,” and “art and natural history museums in North America, Europe and Africa, with few exceptions, display ancient Egyptian objects in a location apart from other African material.” While this matter might seem like an exclusively conceptual issue, it is also a mind-state that Delinda Collier, SAIC professor and researcher of South African art, accurately describes as “so entrenched in the museum world that it’s a practical problem as well as a philosophical one.”

In the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, prejudiced social beliefs influenced the early display strategies of just about any Western museum. Since its founding in 1887 to the present day, the AIC has classified its entire collection of Egyptian work with Greek and Roman pieces. While the AIC has likely stuck with these traditional display practices because its large holding of African art is from the 19th and 20th centuries (making them unrelated to holdings of Ancient Egyptian work), ideology did play heavily in some of its first classificatory decisions.

As the AIC curator of African art, Kathleen Bickford Berzock notes in her text “Changing Place, Changing Face: A History of African Art at the Art Institute of Chicago,” (2010) while speaking about the social factors that went into the essentialized cultural exhibits at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, “this telling separation of the West from the rest, and of ‘civilization’ from ‘nature,’ was reflective of entrenched societal beliefs.” She notes, “The effect continued long after the fair closed in the collecting and display practices of the Art Institute.” When the AIC began collecting African work, it saw it as inferior and undeserving of its own place within the actual museum collection. The first African work that entered into the museum was housed at the 1920s to the 40s in the Children’s Museum department. Bickford observes that this decision was informed by the thought that “African art would appeal to less mature sensibilities and, perhaps more significantly, that the work of its artists was comparable to that of children.”

European scientific racism of the 18th and 19th and 20th centuries invented and contributed to many stereotypes associated with Africa—conceiving it as a single place, with a single homogenized ‘race,’ that was apparently a-historical, incapable of achieving progress and of having any kind of history. This Eurocentric racism created a dichotomy between Africa and Egypt, in an attempt to devalue the complexity of African societies and take away any sense of achievement from the developments of darker skinned people. The influential Victorian Hamitic Hypothesis believed that a race of Caucasian, or light skinned people, had infiltrated Africa and established many North and East African civilizations. To Eurocentrists, this explained how Egyptian and North and East African societies could be so bureaucratically and technologically ‘advanced.’

Recently, new video presentations, display texts and a timeline have been installed in the AIC’s African gallery as a part of its relocation from the smaller gallery space where the Prints & Drawings collection is now located. While now in a larger, but even more remote location (at the end of a long hallway of “Asian” and “Indian art of America”) these video and text pieces establish a more nuanced context for the collection and dismiss a number of stereotypes associated with African material culture. While this is true, it merely hints at the idea of Egypt as a part of Africa and African history. It disregards a prime opportunity to present the biological and historical relationship between Ancient Egypt and its African context in an art historical setting.



As Berzock states, “At their best, museums are sites where art historical scholarship can be disseminated and applied, and where stereotypes can be dispelled.” In many ways the added display material, succeeds at displacing many stereotypes, but does not substantively address the relationship between Egypt and the other African cultures. It incorporates three documentary-style videos depicting an Asante kingship ceremony in Ghana, Christian ceremonies being performed in Ethiopia, a Ci Wara masquerade in Mali above a comparative timeline called “When in Africa, When in the World.”

Attempting to show that some art objects in the collection, like the Ci Wara headdresses, are still used in traditional performances that are constantly changing across each decade, Berzock explains that these video pieces were meant to evoke “the settings for making and using works of art.” To further combat the persisting 18th and 19th century stereotypes once perpetuated by the AIC, that African societies were a-historical and unchanging, this video intersperses footage from everyday life in industrialized areas of Ghana, with people cleaning their mopeds and chatting on cell phones.

Though the wall text in the exhibition depicts a large map of Africa with Egypt clearly labeled on it, one stereotype that the display did not displace was the idea that Africa and Egypt are historically unrelated. After interviewing seven randomly selected visitors in the gallery, each did not consider the link between Africa and Egypt, believing that Egypt was unrelated to Africa. As Celenko notes, one of the largest factors playing into this separation in the fields of both popular culture, common knowledge and museological practice is the ignorance in both America and Europe regarding the diversity of Africa’s thousands of societies, ethnic groups and languages.

The timeline itself does not focus on the history of art and culture in Africa as much as it could have, especially in terms of artistic achievements. The few odd mentions of art throughout the 19th century onwards only include European and American art movements like Impressionism, Modernism, and Pop Art. The last mention of African art on the timeline is the Ethiopian Christian Renaissance (1632-1752). Though the only mention of Egyptian cultural production on the timeline is listed as an “African” event, one of the larger missed opportunities in the display material was to include various connections between Ancient Egyptians, Nubian, Sudanese and Ethiopian cultures.

Though the AIC does not have the same collection of art objects, it could have taken a page from the display practices of the British Museum and discussed the well-documented interactions between Ancient Egypt and Ancient Sudanese and Nubian cultures. Display texts from the British museum’s “Sudan, Egypt, and Nubia” room attempt to illustrate “indigenous pagan, Christian and Islamic cultures and the interaction between Nubia and Egypt” through works like papyrus fragments of an administrative document from a fort during the Egyptian rule of Nubia during the 12th dynasty and other related works. Its similarly structured “Ethiopia and Coptic Egypt” room features sculptures and paintings from the 4th and 8th century A.D. and a text stating that this exhibit displays the “history of cultural exchange and religious diversity” of “faiths and identities, which coexisted in Egypt and Ethiopia.” As the AIC video installation “Lalibela, Ethiopia, 13th Century St. George Church” depicts the enduring traditions of Christian Ethiopians, the timeline could have mentioned parallels between the establishment of Coptic (Christian) faith in Egypt and the establishment of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity in the 4th century A.D., as each had parallels through art and religious belief.

While this new display has some shortcomings, it is exciting to think about it as a potentially non-binary method of display, which can unpack ideological baggage using art-historical considerations. While being unable to bridge the artificial gap between Egypt and its African context, this problem should serve as an impetus for improvement. Though the AIC does not have considerable amounts of Ethiopian Christian African, Ancient Sudanese or Nubian work, these displays open opportunities for curators and to address practical problems within collections and museological practice. It is crucial that these display practices be extended to other collections in both the AIC and other museums. Without this, it will be disturbing to note how little some display practices have changed since the 19th and early 20th century — it will leave the original ideology informing them unaddressed.

While the AIC has likely stuck with these traditional display practices because its large holding of African art is from the 19th and 20th centuries (making them unrelated to holdings of Ancient Egyptian work), ideology did play heavily in some of its first classificatory decisions.

ART, DESIGN AND HAPPINESS

Stefan Sagmeister’s “The Happy Show” makes us smile

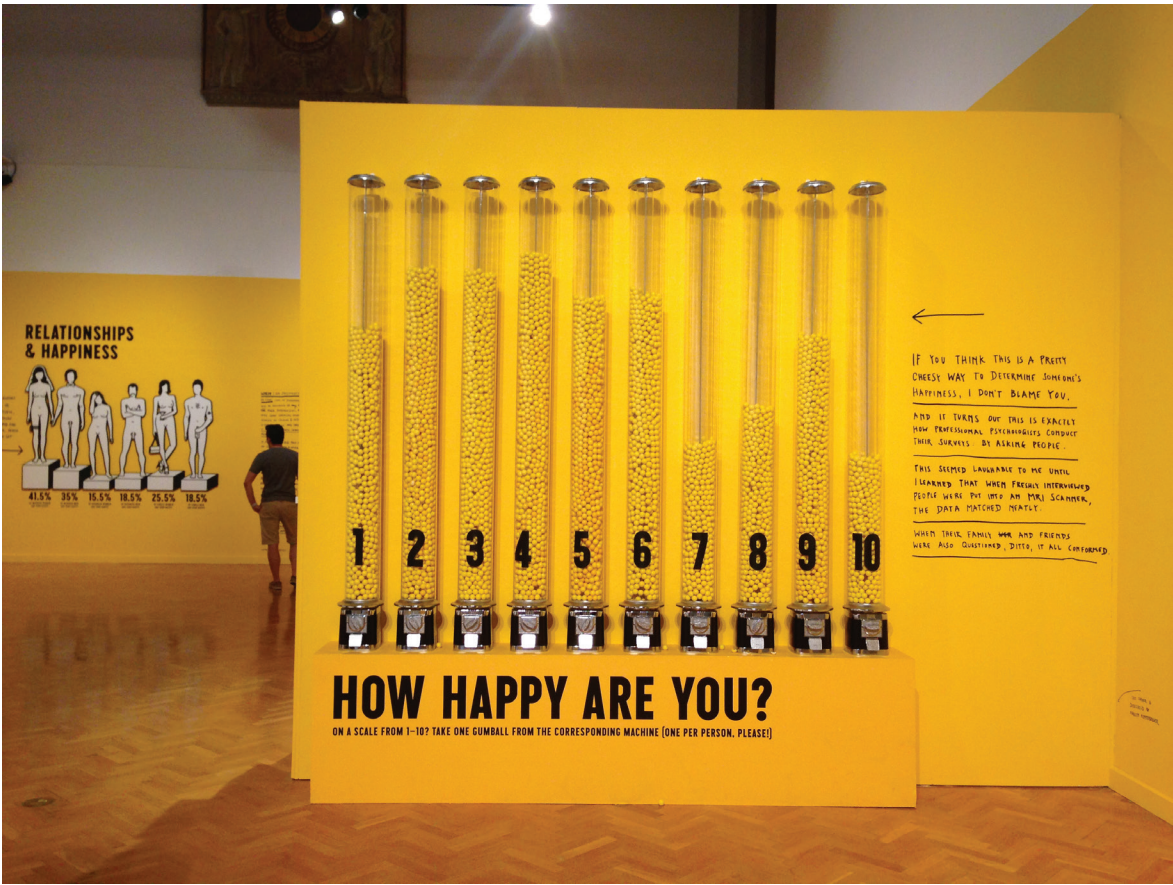
by ariel williams

Graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister’s “The Happy Show,” at the Cultural Center through September 23, is a sweet-humored investigation of a muddled question: what does it mean to be — and how can one achieve — happiness?

Sagmeister poses this question free of alternatives, and it is no fun bothering (yet) to tease out the negative — “why be happy?” or, “how to be not happy?” — when your tour guide is, himself, happy. No melancholic mind could have conjured the sun-colored walls and ergonomic and interactive forms of the show; a joy-powered bicycle, lit push-buttons that deposit firm aphoristic suggestions (“Do ten push-ups. Now.”), and a row of ten sky-high gumball machines (also yellow) that encourage visitors to record their level of happiness by extracting a (free! yellow!) gumball from the appropriate canister. Levels eight and ten were the most popular, with seven close behind. I chose level five (mostly because it was the least empty) and the security guard chose level one in a surreptitious stroll-by. Despite the miasma of strong health and charming idiosyncrasy, charisma and carefully calibrated playfulness, I fell right into Sagmeister’s work. I was invited to dine on hip infographics, and this wholesome food tasted good.

Thus, there is no weight to a critical assessment of the concept itself. Of course, anything is prey to a disemboweling critique. It all remains as tacit as the concept of happiness itself: take it apart, and this vibrancy crumbles. Doubtless Sagmeister realizes this: rather than treating the concept (or the feeling) of happiness as some ineffable mote of being, or as a transcendence of emotional strife, he takes happiness in a fully assumed form. It can be measurable, it can be explicable, and it can be investigated.

Though his work posits various influences on well-being (marital status, goal-setting, environment, community), there are glorious lapses in the logic. A piece of wall text, for instance, comments that the accompanying statistics show how married people are ‘happier’ — but then continues with a caveat: perhaps happier people are just more likely to wed, rendering the statistics (which are already specious) entirely null. (Happiness folds back into enigma.) In another place, Sagmeister speculates on the distinction between art and design: “To do something without any goal and without any function has its own beauty: the difference between a walk in the park and a commute. It’s the difference between art and design.” Sagmeister himself is straddling these definitions, approaching a “useless” project with a utilitarian bias. Art and design, if we wish to adhere with Sagmeister’s distinction, are pitted against each other here; their communicative functions are pushed to articulate an idea that is at once too presumptuous to be artful and too abstract to be designed. Yet, Sagmeister’s project circumvents the discursive terrain of emotion by being precisely that: presumptuous. Happiness-as-concept is predicated on belief: a universal set of faiths that allow for its existence. Happiness-as-emotion is no less numinous.



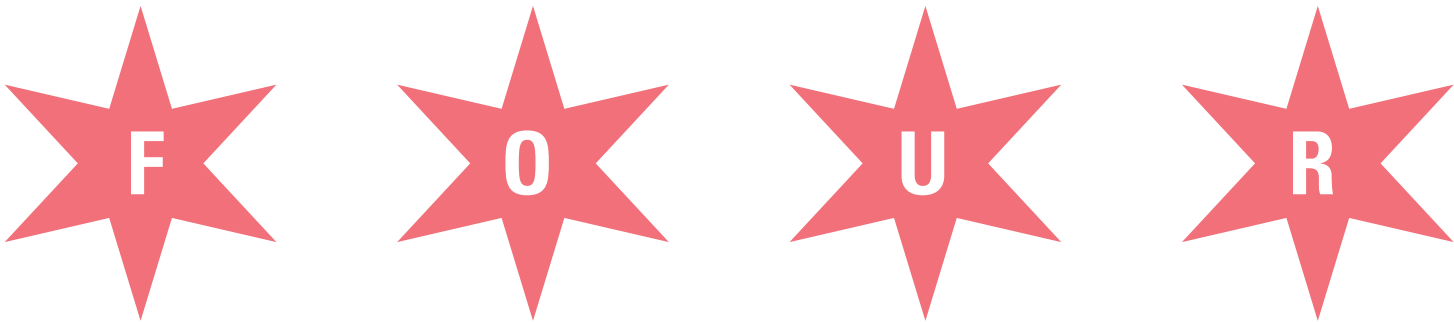
Sagmeister’s initial question — how can I be happy (or happier?) — gives way to another question (what does it mean to be happy?), which gives way to a final question, its negative reflex: how am I not happy? Because happiness is given the luster of transcendence (in the show and in our everyday lives), the valor of a “high level” or the result of hard work and wise decisions, we grant it positive value. We dwell in it’s converse (un-happiness), and likewise, allow melancholy, malaise or depression a similarly seductive value. The sense that our lives run linearly, that we can move through junctures that will eventually ricochet us into happiness (or drag ourselves ‘up’ from sadness), is heartily (if unwittingly) embraced. And even when we are able to regard happiness as a continually fleeing state, it is with a sense of irony: ‘that’s life’.

Contemporary art too shies further and further away from subjective or quixotic concepts, such as emotional states. The growing trend for art to be useful or applicable,

quotidian and democratic, seems to presuppose the elimination of these things. (My argument would be that ecstasy need not be transcendental.) While many people will still accept a concept like ‘happiness’ wholesale, there seems to be little space left for work that rests on a metaphysical framework, based on the conceptual credo of refuting “assumptions.” When left alone, wafty or romantic concepts are certainly in danger of accomplishing nothing: when we leave “happiness” alone, the artistic project cannot extend beyond itself, and “happiness” can only be explored as a representation of “happiness” rather than a subversion, alteration, or stuttering of a commonly held belief.

“The Happy Show” manages to keep the assumption intact while taking on another set of representations — a “good,” pleasing design to lull the senses. Sagmeister’s perception of art (opposed to design) is that it is goalless and functionless, and from a designer’s perspective, this may be true. The dichotomy he envisions is, however, a false one (art does just as much as design does), and it is here, in the “difference” between design and art, that “The Happy Show” fails — becomes too snug in its definitions. But it’s too late: we’ve already climbed aboard. Sagmeister’s work assumes happiness. And although it doesn’t carve out new territories of thought, there is an undeniable delight in being enclosed by those yellow walls, if only for an hour.

Haskell Wexler’s



DAYS IN CHICAGO

Gives Voice to NATO Protests

Revolutionary filmmaker’s latest follows the fiery protests of last May

by *bonnie coyle*

Two-time Academy Award-winner, Haskell Wexler is considered one of the most influential cinematographers in Hollywood, and, according to IMDb, one of the top ten greatest in movie history. Wexler worked on some of the most famous films in American cinema history including “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” and “In the Heat of the Night.”

However, Wexler always was, and still is, a fiercely political moviemaker. Before Wexler moved to Hollywood in 1956 to pursue a career in dramatic film, he was one of the leading cameramen in Chicago, known for his work on highly political movies circulated among leftists across the country. Even in Hollywood, Wexler produced films with political and social importance like “Medium Cool,” a powerful movie filmed in Chicago during the riots at the Democratic Convention and the only political film to receive an X rating.

“Four Days In Chicago” continues Wexler’s life-long exploration of social justice and political action as well as his dedication to collaborative filmmaking. Wexler himself is the cameraman for many parts of the film. He and his team of filmmakers attended the demonstrations and captured the energy, creativity and anti-war message of the protests. The film shows protesters dancing, chanting, and holding signs that read “NO TO NATO AND G8 WARMAKERS” and “NO TO AUSTERITY” as they marched to McCormick Place, where the summit was held. As one protester put it, “People are not scared, you see. If you look around here, you see people dressed as clowns, you see people walking around with hilarious signs. You see the entire Occupy dynamic. The Occupy dynamic is a dynamic without fear.”

The documentary includes footage filmed by Wexler and other contributors in addition to news footage that hyped the possibility of violence at the demonstrations. The inclusion of the Black Block “experts” from the mainstream media recalls the fearful climate of the time. This sensibility is also reflected in the number of police on the city streets during the days surrounding the summit. At one point in the documentary, Wexler himself stands

outside the Art Institute of Chicago and gestures to the police officers behind him. “That’s what we call, ‘security,’” Wexler says to the camera. “‘The other,’ that’s us, we’re the ones that make them insecure.”

The NATO protests were the largest demonstrations Chicago has experienced in recent years but, despite their magnitude, much of the city and the mainstream media largely ignored them. Standing outside CBS 2 Studios downtown during a rally in Daley Plaza, Wexler and his team noticed that the building, like many other buildings in the loop, was boarded up. “That’s where you usually have an open window where they look out and see the people in the square,” says Wexler. “But they decided for ‘security’ to close the window. I think it’s very symbolic that the people’s media have to close themselves off to what’s happening in this square. Very significant.”

When the film comes to the big march, it cuts between scenes that show both the goings on during the final march and the actual proceedings during the NATO summit. We see a poignant contrast between the NATO warmakers and the men and women who fought in the wars they had a hand in instigating. At one point the film cuts from President Obama addressing the other NATO members to chanting Iraq War veterans who were marching outside to discard their medals. The documentary jumps from footage of the NATO proceedings, to the protestors, to the riot police who lined the streets.

Wexler’s documentation of the NATO protests is done with great care. The film does not linger on the instances of police violence that occurred at the end of the protests that were hyped in the news media. Instead, Wexler focuses on the organizations and individuals that were involved in the days leading up the big march. The film includes interviews with well-known activists such as Medea Benjamin of Code Pink and Tom Hayden, former Students for a Democratic Society leader and longtime peace activist, as well as Chicago area activists such as Andy Thayer, and many others. Wexler highlights the work of organizations like National Nurses United that staged large rallies in

Daley Plaza against NATO, and discussions with Iraq war veterans planning to emulate their Vietnam predecessors by discarding their battle medals.

In addition to Wexler, the audience at the Film Center screening included several of the filmmakers who collaborated with Wexler on the film as well as participants in the actual NATO protests. The audience of filmmakers and activists responded with laughter, shouts and cheers at several points in the film and filled the Q&A that followed with anecdotes of their experiences.

Wexler’s film is a testament to what happened in Chicago in May 2012, and an act of courage and rebellion, of speaking the truth, and of storytelling. Wexler and the other filmmakers who participated in this project succeeded in their goal of “telling stories and making pictures that wouldn’t be out there if [they] didn’t do it.”

This documentary is particularly important to protesters who participated in the many actions during those four days. This film is the only record of all the demonstrations surrounding the NATO summit. As a participant in the NATO march from Grant Park to the McCormick Place, as a protester, I am thankful that there exists a record of our actions and effort. When we took to the streets during the march it felt as if we were marching only for ourselves because no one but the police who lined the route could hear our indictment of NATO, war, austerity, and greed. With no film crews, no reporters, no news vans, it seemed that Mayor Rahm Emanuel had silenced the demonstrators. Unbeknownst to us and to the Mayor, Haskell Wexler and his team of filmmakers were busy interviewing, filming and documenting the protests that the mainstream media and politicians ignored. “Four Days in Chicago” is the only film that captures so thoroughly the events during that time.

“Four Days In Chicago” can be ordered for \$15.00 from www.fourdaysinchicago.com, where you can also find details on the crew and production.



BLAXPLOITATION OR REVOLUTIONARY?

**1970s film (now available at
Flaxman) exceeds genre stereotypes**

by annette lepique

To the uninitiated and uninformed, the term “blaxploitation” may conjure up images of Pam Greer kicking ass in skin tight jumpsuits or Black Frankenstein’s unforgettable tagline, “To stop this mutha, takes one bad brutha!” However, Sam Greenlee’s film, “The Spook Who Sat By the Door,” once described by Jonathan Rosenbaum as the “most radical of the blaxploitation films of the 70s,” and a new addition to SAIC’s Flaxman Library, is instead seen by some as a powerful revolutionary film.

Because “Spook’s” radical style and polished political message distinguish it from other works in the blaxploitation genre, many find Rosenbaum’s categorization of the film as blaxploitation misleading. I posed the question to Dr. Novotny Lawrence, Associate Professor of Race, Media and Popular Culture at SIU Carbondale. “I don’t think that ‘Spook’ is a blaxploitation film,” Lawrence said. “I refer to it as a revolutionary film. Certainly, the popularity of blaxploitation cinema played a role in getting it made and into theaters; however, it is a gritty picture about gaining freedom by revolting against the U.S.’s racist hierarchy. While blaxploitation films include commentary about the African American experience, they were made more for entertainment value and rely much more upon sensationalism.”

The film’s complex rendering of the African American experience makes for an uneasy association with a canon of work haunted by the specter of sensationalism and stereotype. I asked Dr. Christopher Sieving, an Assistant Professor at Georgia University and specialist in film history and analysis, whether he thought that the association between “Spook” and blaxploitation’s use of racial stereotype could in any way limit discussion of the film. “I think the constructive and potentially subversive use of racial stereotype by black filmmakers is largely under-theorized, especially with regard to this era of film history,” he responded. “The very title of Greenlee/Dixon’s film, with its rich double entendre, already signals to the viewer a highly self-conscious strategy of irony with regard to stereotypes.”

As one may surmise, the federal and local governments of the late sixties and early seventies did not whole-

heartedly embrace Greenlee’s radical articulation of Black pride and empowerment. The film was targeted by the FBI and sporadically ran in theaters for less than a year. The city of Chicago effectively stonewalled the film’s production through red tape and permit denials. Due to various silencing attempts by authorities, the scenes that required imagery from the city’s South Side were shot in secret with handheld cameras — an amalgamation of guerrilla realism and aesthetics. The filmmakers overcame these obstacles, Dr. Sieving noted that “without ‘Spook’s’ technical polish and formal familiarity, United Artists would likely not have been interested, and the film would have never played in commercial theaters and thus never reached an audience that needed to be radicalized.” In addition to the issues faced during the film’s creation, Greenlee’s novel published earlier in 1969 was ignored by the literati of the age and only reached a broader audience through the efforts of an independent British publishing house.

Greenlee’s work earns its respect from film historians with an original and inventive plot. “Spook” begins with a senator attempting to bolster his popularity with African-American voters by targeting the CIA for racially discriminatory hiring, hoping to divert attention from his own shoddy record of decisions regarding civil rights. The senator’s political posturing effectively forces the CIA to implement an affirmative action program. Amongst the possible candidates is our protagonist, Dan Freeman. Greenlee gives Freeman an unobtrusive and quiet demeanor, masking a complex, intelligent man with a far-reaching agenda — Black empowerment through the revitalization of Afro-centric culture and heritage, with recognition and resistance to the racist white power structures of the day. In this case, recognition and resistance must be taken to mean the “defeat of through guerilla warfare and tactical urban combat.”

The CIA’s other Black recruits represent a danger to Freeman’s plans because they have become extensions of the white power structure he wishes to dismantle. As Greenlee wrote in his novel, they were “black bourgeoisie



to a man, black nepotism personified” — men who were concerned with no cause larger than themselves and whose materialistic lives could be compartmentalized into games of “who-do-you-know and who-have-you-screwed.”

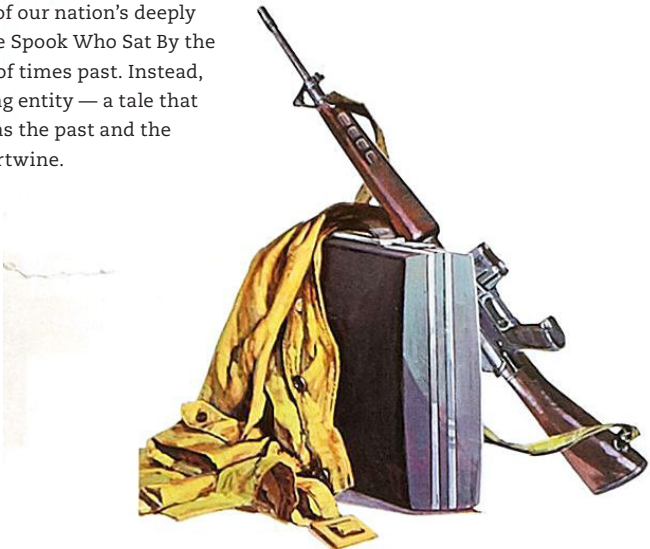
Freeman also faces scrutiny from racist CIA agents who are suspicious of his quiet manner. However, the powerful racism of both the white agents and African American recruits allows for the real Freeman to pass unnoticed beneath a mask created by false perceptions. Disguises and the process of manufacturing identity are major themes throughout the narrative. Freeman's survival depends on his ability to play on what others deem acceptable from an African American male raised in the ghetto. Such social performance is still a necessity for members of disenfranchised communities.

In the film and novel, Freeman earns a position within the Agency and is assigned no real work, but is rather put on display as the token minority hire. Freeman is consistently dismissed and overlooked, all the while noting the Agency's tactics, training exercises and weapons information, and intending to disseminate the same instruction to the black community. After several quiet years with the CIA, Freeman quits the Agency and returns home to the South Side of Chicago to carry out the first phase of his plan. He rejoins his former place of employment, a social work agency, where he begins to reach out to a local gang called the COBRAS. Freeman then sheds his unobtrusive and obsequious CIA persona in favor of the affects of an empty-headed bourgeois playboy. Freeman's false concern with status and material goods allows him to be ignored by white co-workers at the social work firm and to pass undiscovered among the black bourgeoisie.

Despite this continued subterfuge and masking, we glimpse the real Freeman in the friendship he forms with the COBRAS. Freeman's brand of outreach does not simply consist of mentoring and life lessons. Freeman is prepping the COBRAS for an impending battle. Under Freeman's tutelage, the COBRAS gain the tactical knowledge to successfully carry out a series of heists, which give them access to

funds and weapons. As the COBRAS become bolder, their maneuvers attract the attention of the police, CIA and National Guard. When the police kill a South Side African American youth, the already heightened tensions escalate. A riot erupts and confusion reigns, allowing Freeman and the COBRAS to successfully target weak factions of the National Guard. Yet as Freeman's successes mount, his plans for revolution are discovered in a climactic fight scene. As the film ends, he is finally able to openly devote himself to the cause, which affords him a modicum of peace at long last.

The film, as relevant as ever, is radical condemnation of a corrupt and deadly system, which subjugates large swathes of its own people. While Greenlee wrote “Spook” at the pinnacle of the African American civil rights movement, the vision of the persecuted “learning the lessons of the oppressed throughout history in striking back at their oppressors,” transcends ethnicity. “Spook's” ability to rebel “against a fixed historical placement and a rigid social significance to one time period over another,” in the words of author Samantha N. Sheppard, allows for the story to remain a dynamic element of our nation's deeply cut contradictions. The value of “The Spook Who Sat By the Door” is not felt as a tidy document of times past. Instead, the film remains is a living, breathing entity — a tale that deepens and widens with meaning as the past and the present continue to engage and intertwine.





City bankruptcy threatens Detroit Institute of the Arts' collection

by emily wardell

Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" is perhaps the most striking work in the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA). A twenty-seven-panel fresco cycle spanning the walls of the museum's sky-lit Rivera Court, the piece was commissioned by Edsel Ford in 1932 at the height of Detroit's industrial boom. The mural now stands as an ironic representation of an auto-manufacturing base that has all but disappeared from the city during a long economic decline, culminating in the filing of the largest municipal bankruptcy in United States history. One of the most publicly contested aspects of this collapse has been the repeated valuation of the city-owned art collection housed in the DIA, presumably for future sale. The institution's world-class collection includes treasures like Rivera's mural, works by Van Gogh, Picasso, as well as unique collections of African American and Native American art.

Despite a statement issued in early August that no art will be sold, a level of uncertainty remains as bankruptcy law might be used to override state laws banning the sale of assets held in charitable trust.

Despite a statement issued in early August by Emergency Manager Kevin Orr claiming that no art will be sold, a level of uncertainty remains as bankruptcy law might be used to override state laws banning the sale of assets held in charitable trust. Moreover, no doubt some Michigan residents remember their governor's placating assurances of several months ago that the appointment of a bankruptcy lawyer as an unelected city manager was with the hope that the city could avoid declaring bankruptcy. This statement reinforces the deep uncertainty surrounding the future of the city and its assets, and what kind of measures will be taken to appease its creditors.

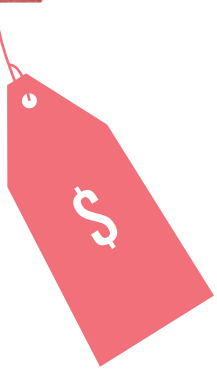
In addition to the appraisal by Christie's Art Auctions, legislation to redirect taxpayer funding of the museum should the art be sold has cast further doubt over the fate of its multi-billion dollar collection. The overturning of

a 2012 millage tax (a percentage of property taxes paid in Wayne and several surrounding counties by residents to directly fund the museum) threatens to remove a vast portion of funding for the DIA.

The seemingly astonishing potential measure of auctioning off the DIA's art is underscored only by the urgency of Detroit's financial situation. Without forthcoming aid from the federal or state governments to pay off its \$18 billion debt, substantial cuts to city workers' pensions and healthcare are expected, as well as the sale of numerous other assets, including city parks. Already spending cuts have hit the public safety sectors, street lighting and the public school system. However, a fire sale of art would surely prove an additional measure, and not an alternative to pension and other cuts.

In spite of Detroit's grim finances, public support for the museum has been strong and extremely vocal. On August 15, a "Day for Detroit" was held in which 20 popular art websites and blogs expressed support for the museum by displaying many of the works housed at the DIA. In addition, there have been public performances and petitions to keep the art in Detroit. The museum also has the support of Michigan's highest legal official, state Attorney General Bill Schuette, who has said in a statement, "The art collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts is held by the City of Detroit in charitable trust for the people of Michigan, and no piece in the collection may thus be sold, conveyed, or transferred to satisfy city debts or obligations." Should the art be put on the auction block, it seems a long and complex legal battle would immediately ensue. The Detroit Free Press has reported that the DIA has indeed hired legal counsel specializing in bankruptcy to advise it through the appraisal and onward.

If industry could be considered Detroit's indigenous culture, as the DIA claims it is represented in Rivera's frescos, then it is experiencing a turbulent transition that has been decades in the making. Only a single auto-manufacturing plant remains within the city limits, and more than a third of the population has relocated. It seems cultural treasures such as the DIA could be lost in the void of debt faced by the city and its people. However, the rightful owners of the collection — the people of Detroit and of Michigan — are unlikely to sit quietly and watch as one of the finest art museums in the country is gutted for the benefit of large financial institutions to which the city government is indebted.





sacred STYLE

Exploring the reappearance of Christian iconography in fashion

by alexia casanova

Imposing golden cross pendants, stained-glass prints depicting saints, aureole-inspired headpieces — these are just a few items spotted on the runways during the Autumn/Winter 2013 Fashion Week last February. Since 2010, there seems to have been a marked increase in fascination with Christian imagery on the part of the fashion industry. Whether it is in magazine spreads, among renowned designer's collections or on the high street, the multiplication of such references is now impossible to ignore. But why is Christian iconography so popular in fashion? Is it the spiritual dimension of these visuals that attract consumers or simply their aesthetic value? French sociologist Bruno Latour argues in his book "We Have Never Been Modern" that since 9/11 the widespread destruction of icons of all sorts — religious, economic, political — has triggered a paradoxical renewed empathy for sacred images that we had previously scorned. In a nutshell, for Latour, the creation and elimination of idols follows a cyclical progression;

therefore, Western civilizations constantly recreate or go back to images they had previously tried to destroy.

In "Painting and Experience in the Fifteenth Century," author Michael Baxandall explains that in the early Renaissance, when most of the population was illiterate, Christian imagery performed a threefold function. It was intended to instruct people, make the examples of the saints more active in their memory through daily representation, and finally, excite feelings of devotion through sight — proven to be more efficient than oration. Some parallels can easily be drawn between how Christian iconography was used back in the fifteenth century and how images relating to fashion are used today after their recent surge in popularity.

Repetitive visual representation is a marketing tool widely used by the fashion press in order to make certain images active in people's memory. Both Christian images of the fifteenth century and images of fashion today were and are constantly shown, displayed, known and recognized, but paradoxically untouchable. Even if most people would recognize Chanel's logo or the trademark grid pattern from Burberry, very few would have the opportunity to own a piece from either of these brands. This method, used to excite feelings of devotion in the case of fifteenth century art, has been adopted by the contemporary fashion industry to incite desire.

The reason we are drawn to these designs is because they belong to our practical experience. Because Christian iconography is part of our cultural history and traditions, we recognize it and accept almost instantly its indisputable aesthetic worth. The fact that a garment is visibly inspired by a familiar visual — paintings of the Madonna for instance — allows the viewer to understand it, recognize its aesthetic value and appreciate its likeness, artful distortion or original representation. All this happens despite how complicated and unusual a garment might appear at first, as is the case with Jean-Paul Gaultier's collections, in both 2007 and 2011. In 2007, the French designer's garments included many headpieces imitating aureoles and auras from Renaissance paintings, and the models' styling was clearly inspired by depictions of the Virgin Mary. In 2011, Gaultier's work appeared to focus more on clean lines and constructions inspired by stained-glass windows, but once again undeniably revolved around religious iconography.

Furthermore, let's not forget that provocation is — as Donald Kuspit puts it — "a constant" of modern art and by extension, a recurring element in fashion. Using symbols and a theme that is likely to draw passionate responses, positive or negative, is part of the artistic process of most contemporary artists and designers. It can be argued that some designers used references to Christian visuals with the sole aim to provoke. British designer Alexander McQueen, for instance, multiplied highly controversial collections illustrating strong political and religious claims. In many cases, designers' references to Christian iconography are an expression of a frustration or a contestation of what these visuals embody. But it must not be forgotten that fashion is an industry in which one needs to make sure his or her

work will be spoken of, and provocation is definitely a way to achieve this.

Since the designs in question are religious, it is only fair to ask whether the enthusiasm for Christian imagery could somehow be related to spirituality. Latour also famously argued that we have never been modern, and that we find ourselves in a state of anxiety that we believe "others" were in before liberation was achieved through modernization. People therefore try and find new idols, or fetishes, "factishes" as Latour calls them, objects to which they cling in a new way. Many people are emotionally attached to at least one fashion item they own. Whether it is because it has been passed on by a dear friend or relative, or because it was something they desired for a long time before being able to buy it, or even because they associate it with luck or feel that it gives them self-confidence. Such items have a priceless value in the eyes of their owners, and they can definitely be regarded as "sacred" to them.

By printing, sewing or referring in one way or another to sacred images, designers emphasize this fetishization of clothes and fashion in general. As previously mentioned, Latour argues that a renewed sympathy for things, concepts and images we used to hate is growing again. In secular societies, the idea of the sacred has been lost: icons have been destroyed and the devotion and respect toward images has vanished. As one buys, or simply beholds and appreciates a fashion item depicting a Christian icon, they certainly do not think that this specific item of clothing has a spiritual power, but they nevertheless recognize what it represents: sacrality. If we accept Latour's ideas that images are constantly recycled, we can explain this revived attraction for the depictions of idols in fashion.

The meaning and message of Christian symbols in fashion is problematic, if not entirely paradoxical. In this new era of 'pick and mix' religion, it seems that whether one believes or not, they can still wear items of religious connotation that will work as talismans. As a matter of fact, those Christian symbols tend to be mixed with elements from other spiritualities — mainly Buddhist or Hindu — to achieve this new look. Far from signifying a challenging and upfront provocation of the church and religious ideas, as might have been the case when used by "bikers" or "Goths," wearing a rosary has an entirely different meaning today.

Sporting a symbol of faith — in this case, a Christian one — does not necessarily signify belonging to a faith anymore, but could be seen as an appeal to spirituality as a more general concept or ideal. In the case of '80s fashion, cultural anthropologists such as de Monchaux identified the geometrical shape of accessories and the use of specific materials as an embodiment of the belief in scientific and technological progress. If we were to analyse today's fashion trends in anthropological or sociological terms, we could certainly say that they illustrate a 'pick and mix' approach to spirituality and lifestyle.

Music - Cosmology - Geography

How Sound Brought Art to Life at the 55th Venice Biennale

by kris lenz

Venice sounds like no other city. Absent are honking horns, ringing bicycles, the dull roar of motors. Instead, one hears the gentle lap of the tide brushing against the channel walls, the slow chug of vaporettoes wending along the grand canal and above all else, the murmuring glossolalia of countless voices ringing out at once. Venice is a city where visitors outnumber residents by a factor of 10, the native dialetto drowned out by the cascade of foreign tongues. Transpose this sense of language in multitude to the main sites of the 55th Venice Biennale — the hushed Napoleonic-park of Giardini, and the once bustling, now abandoned shipyard of Arsenale. Among another teeming multitude, that of the plastic arts arranged on seemingly every stable surface, it should be no surprise how works and installations involving experiments in sound distinguished themselves from the crowd. Across the expanses of the Giardini and Arsenale, much of the most impactful work found a way to sigh, sing or sob in the universal language of art.



ART IS THE LANGUAGE OF VENICE

Tino Sehgal has enjoyed an impressive run over the last 18 months. After earning rave reviews at dOCUMENTA (13) last fall, he took over Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall. This summer he crowned this string of accomplishments by winning the Golden Lion for best artist in the International Exhibition at the Venice Biennale. Sehgal’s untitled work occupied an open gallery floor at the center of Biennale director Massimiliano Gioni’s “Il Palazzo Enciclopedico (The Encyclopedic Palace)” at the Central Pavilion of the Giardini. In the center of the room, performers, whose ages ranged from the early teens up to middle age, sat, lay or writhed on the floor. They hummed or beat-boxed riffs that alternated between not-quite-identifiable pop melodies, guttural growls and quiet chants, all set to a fluctuating internal meter that set the sounds firmly in the realm of music. The performers took turns building sounds together as each also improvised movement to his or her partner’s tones.

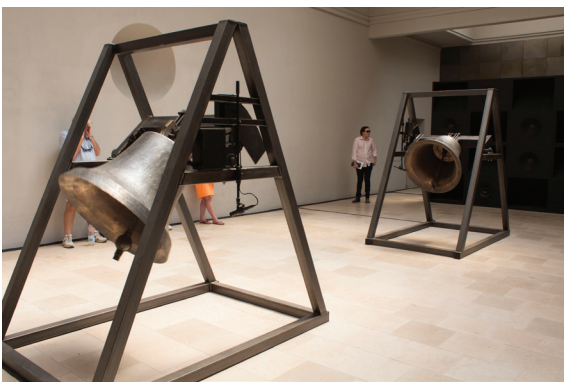
At the heart of Sehgal’s piece was a dissolution of boundaries about what is art, what is performance and what is proper in a museum space. The literal boundaries of the exhibition also dissolved, as observers and passers-by sat quietly watching, walked mindlessly through the space occupied by performers, or in the case of small children I observed, accompanied the performers with little dances and songs of their own. It was this last interaction that set the piece free: children who haven’t been indoctrinated by the bylaws and social stigmas of proper “white cube” behavior. For them, there was nothing peculiar about the game the performers played; I saw one child walk boldly up and join the performers for a moment, before his socially-aware parents literally pulled him away. Sehgal had created a museum experience that subverted traditional expectations. There was no art object to admire (though Sehgal does sell his work in a Lewit-tian fashion), there was no privileged boundary or vantage point from which one could experience it. One simply wandered in, out or around the work, in my case, both charmed and unsettled by this unique art viewing experience.

WHERE FRANCE BECAME SOMETHING ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT

Attributing the characteristics of a nation upon any work of art is a dangerous if not inherently misleading point of perspective. Yet the Biennale’s structure of national pavilions creates a perpetual siren call of mis-interpretation that is difficult to avoid. The best of the pavilions had a sense of humor, if not mischievous deception, about the idea of national identity. Perhaps most playfully misleading was the French exhibit, which was housed at the German Pavilion (France and Germany celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty by trading pavilions). The French then chose Albanian video artist Anri Sala’s “Ravel Ravel Unravel” as their representative work, further displacing the false sense of national character.

Sala’s video installation was based on a Ravel piece written solely for the left hand. Two film recordings were taken of concert pianists performing the piece and a third video was shot of a DJ doing her best to play the two recordings simultaneously. What should have been a simple proposition unraveled in the act of performance. On paper the Ravel composition is strictly metered and composed, leaving little room for interpretation. Yet in the hand(s) of the virtuosio pianists, creative élan led to subtly different products. The differences were then expounded by the attempts of the DJ to synch them. The pavilion itself was separated into three large rooms with each beautifully shot film displayed in a massive projection. The volume of each film approached deafening levels, which sent sound waves careening around the pavilion, blending the soundtracks of each projection.

All assumptions about the grandeur of virtuosity were simultaneously challenged and elevated. The overall effect was stupefying in that one’s sense of rhythm, sound and expectation were in a constant state of disruption. The senses were all at once treated to the exquisite beauty of the composition, its performances and the creative vision of the artist who so delicately blended them together.



THE BELLS THE BELLS THE BELLS

The boundaries of endurance are a fertile, if dangerous, field of play for an artist. The threshold for exultant transcendence is just steps away from a quick and decisive exit. The box of ear plugs — and stern warning that they should be used — served as an apt warning for those waiting to enter the Polish Pavilion.

The interior of the pavilion was inhabited by two masive bronze bells and a wall of speakers. The composition started as the bells began a slow transit through space, swinging to a mysterious meter. Their output: a deafening knell. At first the bells were in synch, but over time their logarithmic pattern pulled the resounding clangs farther and farther apart. The sound was broadcast through the loudspeakers and a delay effect, which created an all-encompassing drone. Between the increasingly chaotic clanging, at unendurable volume, an almost peaceful tone arose. If one imagines a sound wave and measures the distance between the peaks as a unit of time, the tone rose from the middle and provided analgesic solution to the towering sound. If one closed their eyes and bore the onslaught, it was easy to imagine time itself dissolving, “How much longer will I be able to listen to this!?!”

There is no doubt the composition — titled “Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More” — left an indelible effect on all visitors. Not only could one hear the bells long after they stopped ringing, but the sound itself spread across the Giardini, providing a musical accompaniment for visitors near and far. The unintentional coda of the piece appears to be its utter cessation. A recent note on the Biennale website states: “Due to the fact that palpable tremors, emitted by Konrad Smolenski’s installation presented in the Polish Pavilion in Venice, are felt by the inhabitants of Santa Elena island and at the request of La Biennale, Zacheta - National Gallery of Art, the artist and curators have decided for the time being to shut down the installation.” Smolenski is billed as “a punk rock minimalist,” so perhaps nothing could be more fitting than having your show shut down due to noise violations.

THE JOURNEY FROM HERE TO HERE

A popular favorite at the Giardini was Gilad Ratman’s “The Workshop” in the Israeli Pavilion. Ratman converted the intermediary space of the pavilion into a fantasy-land where narrative, fact and art blended indistinguishably. At the entrance was a hole in the floor surrounded by rubble, the first sign that a story was ending before it began. Behind the hole a screen displayed a DJ performance, presumably recorded in the same space. Those who ventured through the varying levels and rooms of the exhibition were treated to a mix of audio-visual and plastic forms that told the story of a group of people who tunneled from the cavern-filled mountain valleys of Israel, presumably under the Adriatic Sea, into Italy and up through the floor of the Pavilion. Upon their arrival in Venice, the travelers built the sculptural busts of themselves displayed in the exhibition.

While obviously no one tunneled between Israel and Italy, that seemingly simple assumption was constantly in question. Someone tunneled somewhere, videos detailing the journey covered every wall. Someone built these sculptures, but were they built here or elsewhere and by whom? Where the same people in the videos the ones whose sculptures filled the place? If it is all a fiction, then how does one reconcile the concrete facts in front of them?

All these questions swirled in my head as I explored the space. As soon as I felt I’d understood some fact of geography or intent, the next display subverted my conclusion. I finally stopped wrestling with myself and embraced the aesthetic whole of the exhibition. Loud techno music (from video of the party when everyone arrived in Venice, naturally) kept the tone of the work playful and fun. Heads nodded steadily as we all travelled a journey no less real than the one our hosts undertook.



THE HISTORY OF EVERYTHING

Massimiliano Gianni’s “Il Palazzo Enciclopedico” also occupied a large space at the Arsenale. Gianni’s inspiration for his exhibition was an Italian “outsider” artist who imagined a museum that would contain all the world’s knowledge. The building was never built, but the idea of a space that housed all knowledge was the curatorial principle guiding the exhibition. This seed of an idea was displayed in one of two primary ways. The first was the exhibiting of “outsider” artists alongside better known and established artists, further erasing the false boundaries between art world insiders and outsiders. The second manifestation were works that in some way attempted to encompass the history of knowledge within themselves. Into this second category falls Camille Henrot’s “Grosse Fatigue.”

Where the Giardini branch of “Il Palazzo Enciclopedico” felt staid and museological (except Sehgal’s work) the Arsenale was festooned with multi-media projects. The most remarkable, of a strong field, was Henrot’s piece, situated in one of the first rooms of the Arsenale. Her video and sound installation, which won the Silver Lion awarded to the best young artist, told the history of the universe via narration, Henrot’s video work and a series of images taken during her fellowship at the Smithsonian Institute (itself a veritable Palazzo Enciclopedico).

It opened on a static computer desktop screen and followed an unknown hand as it navigated a series of films, websites and static images. The narrator’s voice, gentle and unimpeachable, situated safely off-screen, followed the halted metric resonance of spoken-word performance or a stripped-down Last Poets verse. The story began like all stories do: with a half-chanted, half-sung invocation of creation myths from around the world. They detailed the birth of the beginning of the universe by cementing aspects of a multitude into one, from there into the history of natural history, the birth of religion, science and beyond. Viewers were led along the march of human progress — the march of existence itself. A light breath of playfulness wed imagery and narration. Videos referenced the text and vice-versus as insights both joyful and poignant emerged and were resolved within the boundaries of the piece. In its 10-plus minutes of airtime, it treated viewers to a wild, exultant history of the world. The narrator spoke English, but the true language was one of “music, cosmology, geography.” It is the very language of existence, a universal truth borne by the universe itself.

The assembly built toward a climactic invocation of the here and now, sung carefully over a delicate parade of imagery. Then as swiftly as it began, the unseen hand closed the presentation and it was over.



Artists Who Give a “Frack”

Artists Against Fracking Aims to Further Anti-Fracking Awareness

by: patrick reynolds

One year ago, Yoko Ono and her son Sean Lennon established Artists Against Fracking, an awareness organization designed to prevent oil companies from drilling for natural gas in New York State. The group served as a reaction to announcements that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was planning to consider the allowance of hydraulic fracturing in upstate New York, a process that has fueled a heated debate between environmental activists and lobbyists for America's energy companies. The current Artists Against Fracking roster includes a high-profile list of some two hundred artists including Marina Abramovic, Cindy Sherman and Jeff Koons, to name a few.

Artists Against Fracking's primary goal is the prevention of fracking in New York State specifically. However it also aims to spread awareness of the potential dangers of the hydraulic fracturing process. The group's website includes a lengthy infographic entitled “What is Fracking?” that outlines the basic technical procedure behind hydraulic fracturing as well as fracking's possible environmental pitfalls. The page specifically addresses the disruption of the aquifer (underground sedimentary material that is engorged with fresh water), the chemicals used in fracking fluid, and the creation of wastewater and air pollutants as primary ecological concerns raised by the fracking process.

Artists Against Fracking has engaged New York residents in several ways. In addition to listing contact information for Andrew Cuomo (including a preformatted email template for visitors addressed directly to the governor), the group created an online competition for the purpose of crowdsourcing anti-fracking videos. Called the #DontFrackNY Video Contest, the competition sought thirty-second homemade PSAs directed at Cuomo, as well as free-form videos of any length. The stated aim of the contest was to “Help us make the case in the most compelling and moving way.” The selected winners of the contest got to enjoy lunch with Ono and Lennon, and the winning PSA was shown as a paid TV advertisement in New York City and Albany.

Of all the artists listed on the Artists Against Fracking page, filmmaker Josh Fox is notable for his level of involvement with Artists Against Fracking, as well as his personal crusade against the practice. Fox was nominated for a Best Documentary Oscar at the 2011 Academy Awards for his film “Gasland,” which sought to expose many of the same environmental issues that Artists Against Fracking does.

In the years since, Fox has produced short films (primarily published on Vimeo) further exploring the environmental impacts of fossil fuel production, including a promotional documentary for Artists Against Fracking.

In the past year, both Artists Against Fracking and Fox have met a fair share of opposition to their movements. News sources began reporting in March 2013 that Artists Against Fracking may have been in violation of New York lobbying laws, which establish a \$5,000 spending threshold before all expense records are required to be reported to the government. In spite of a small \$200 registration fee and assurances from an Artists Against Fracking spokesperson that Sean and Yoko would willfully comply with any necessary lobbying legislation, the story still provided conservative news outlets with the means necessary to speak out against the group's intentions.

Artists Against Fracking establishes its primary goal as the prevention of fracking in New York State specifically, however it also aims to spread awareness of the potential dangers of the hydraulic fracturing process.

A Fox News report explains: “Dozens of celebrities may be running afoul of the law as they unite under the banner of one group that is seeking to prevent a method of gas drilling in New York state.” Similarly, a New York Post article published a few weeks later states: “The gaggle of celebs at Artists Against Fracking — from Yoko Ono on down — can surely boast more glitz and star power than members of the Independent Oil and Gas Association. But that doesn't make them any less subject to New York law.”

For Josh Fox, fracking has remained at the forefront of his filmmaking and activist careers. For this, he too has met increasing levels of criticism and scrutiny in the press. “Gasland Part II,” a sequel to his 2010 film, was the target of numerous negative reports in the aftermath of its premiere at the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival, which stemmed from an

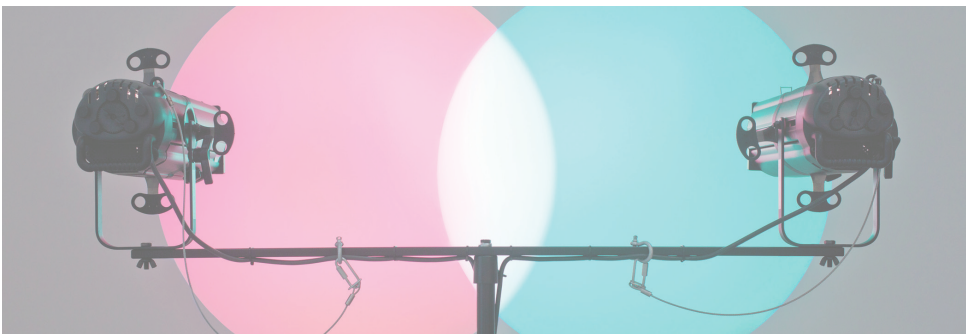
incident involving ticket-holding protesters being denied entry to the film's screening.

Phelim McAleer, a fellow documentarian whose body of work includes numerous films attempting to debunk high-profile environmentalist causes (including “FrackNation,” which aims to refute many of “Gasland's” claims), was turned away from the screening along with a protest group of Pennsylvania farmers and laborers, all of whom had purchased tickets prior to the screening. Despite conflicting reports of the reasoning behind their barred entry (festival organizers claim the group simply did not wait in line and the theater reached capacity), the story was picked up by a multitude of news outlets. The negative press was subsequently punctuated by a followup story of a Russian journalist being arrested for attempting to talk to the protesters.

On July 8, 2013, “Gasland Part II” premiered on HBO, where it was ultimately met with mixed reviews. Verne Gay from Newsday notes, “With ‘Gasland II,’ you get the sense [Fox] wants to top himself ... Plus, there's not a single word of rebuttal from the industry.” The weeks that followed saw further negative press surrounding Fox and “Gasland II,” including a Forbes article entitled “How The Energy Industry Should Respond To HBO's Thoroughly Refuted ‘Gasland II.’”

At its heart, both sides of the fracking debate concern themselves primarily with the issue of transparency. For Ono, Lennon, and Fox, the problem stems from a lack of research concerning the long-term effects of fracking pollution on both groundwater and air quality. On the other hand, the gas lobby insists that organizations such as Artists Against Fracking serve only to promote themselves and their celebrity status while simultaneously denying local economies potential jobs and sources of revenue.

This month, Reuters reported that Chesapeake Energy, one of the largest and most influential energy companies in the US, had decided to abandon attempts to renew leases on gas-rich stretches of land in upstate New York. As of now, fracking is barred in New York due to a 2008 moratorium passed to give the state more time to analyze its effect on environmental safety. The moratorium was extended until May 2015 this past March, but with 2014 quickly approaching, the future of fracking in New York still remains uncertain.



A THOUSAND WORDS

Amalia Pica’s art enunciates at the MCA

by michelle weidman

“A picture is worth...” This sentence should be easily completed; we should all know what comes next. But the work of Amalia Pica, exhibited at the MCA through August 11, puts this aphorism to test — finding it true in some instances, and horribly simple in others.

Engaging art and recent social history, Amalia Pica sets stages, literally in “Stage (as seen on Afghan Star)” and metaphorically, for a look at human behavior and varying forms of communication. Her subjects include conversation, listening, performing, reading and watching.

A thrift store menagerie of colorful glasses protruded butt-first from the gallery wall at the entrance of the exhibition, offered as hearing aids. The piece, “Eavesdropping (version #2),” isn’t as utilitarian as it sounds, unless you’re interested in hearing the soft whir of wires and pipes behind a freshly painted gallery wall, probably nothing scandalous.

Most of the pieces work in this way, as an impulse for communication, but not necessarily as operative. The work echoes post-minimalist and conceptualist forms, such as “Outside, inside and across,” which resembles Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ lightbulb installations, or the Post-It note imprint, “Post-It Note 2009-2010,” that points to Dennis Oppenheim’s “Reading Position for Second Degree Burn.” Pica’s work, however, is engaged in the discourse of civic

participation and how we, as citizen subjects, attach to these forms of communication.

Implicit in Pica’s work is a sense of fading festivities. “Outside, inside and across,” the aforementioned light bulb installation, “Stabile (with confetti) #2,” pieces of confetti scattered and then meticulously taped in place to the floor, and “Strangers, 2008,” a single string of rainbow bunting, are all the remnants of a celebration, one of the most engaging reasons to congregate.

Rather than discarding this debris, however, Pica secures these impermanent gestures, delaying their transitions into memory and curbing their mobility. She presents material traces of gestures of social attachment in order to mark the passage of time that so often leads to the dissolution of specific utterances. In all of her work, there is this focus on what we utilize, leave behind or overlook when forming bonds, always both intimate and political.

In this body of work, an image, a piece of debris or a stage replica is worth a lot to Pica. However, despite their ability to signal to moments of enunciation, one can’t help feeling that that moment and the attachments that it formed were worth just as much, if not more.

(left to right top to down)

Amalia Pica, Installation view, “Outside, inside and across,” Chisenhale Gallery, 2006/12. Collection of Andrew Ong and George Robertson.
Photo: Mark Blower, courtesy of the artist; Herald St, London; Marc Foxx, Los Angeles.

Amalia Pica, “Venn diagrams (under the spotlight),” 2011. Installation view, 54th Venice Biennale: ILLUMInations, 2011. Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.
Photo: Kiki Triantafyllou, courtesy of the artist; Herald St, London; Galerie Diana Stigter, Amsterdam; Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles.

Amalia Pica, “Strangers,” 2008. Installation view, 54th Venice Biennale: ILLUMInations, 2011.
Photo: Kiki Triantafyllou, courtesy of the artist; Herald St, London; Marc Foxx, Los Angeles; Diana Stigter, Amsterdam.

Inspiration in an Anthropologie

Crystal Tort Clutch with patent leather trim, embellished with crystals, and featuring a removable strap

perfect for hands-free mingling at gallery openings and galas... \$898

by jessica barrett sattell

When I interviewed for a sales position at Anthropologie, the retail paradise that caters to artsy, globetrotting people with deep pockets, I aced the first round with my response to the question, “Who is the Anthropologie woman?”

Me: “Well... I’d say that she’s artistically inclined, intellectually curious, and has a serious case of wanderlust. She’s probably an artist or designer with two houses and two dogs, and spends summers in France and Bali with her husband and kids. I think that I’d want to be her best friend...”

Hiring Manager: “Yes! But, forget about being her best friend. We want to BE her!”

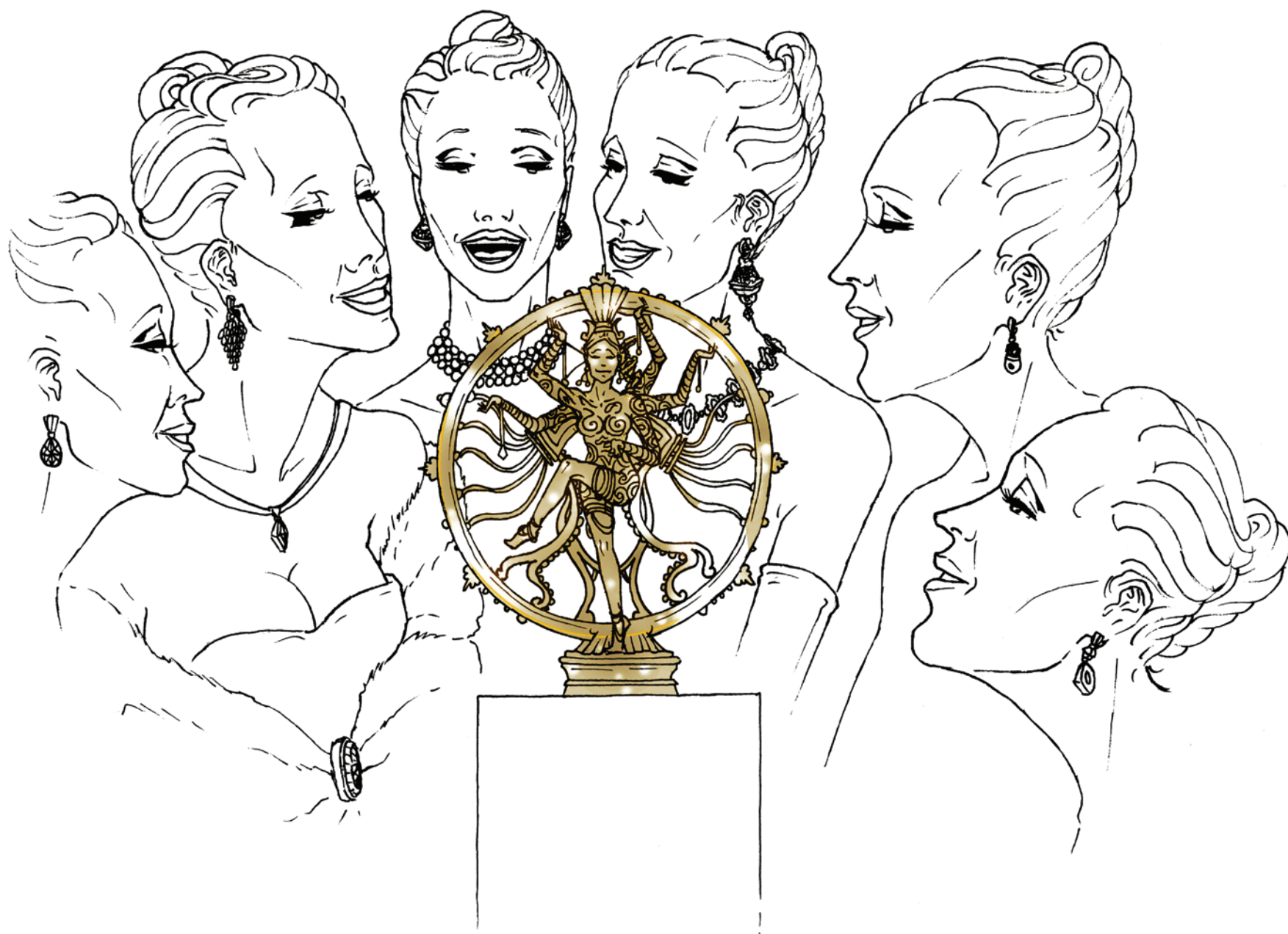
The Anthropologie lifestyle is both inspirational and aspirational. Now that I’ve left that land of impeccably quirky style, I realize that my true work there was to observe an anthropological phenomenon (not entirely surprising, considering that the name of the store is the French word for that discipline). I interacted and ingrained myself within a carefully constructed consumer culture. Every work day felt like fieldwork within what author Haruki Murakami would call a “town of cats” — a seductive, intriguing otherworld that begs us to stay but holds some quiet danger of forever keeping us captive.

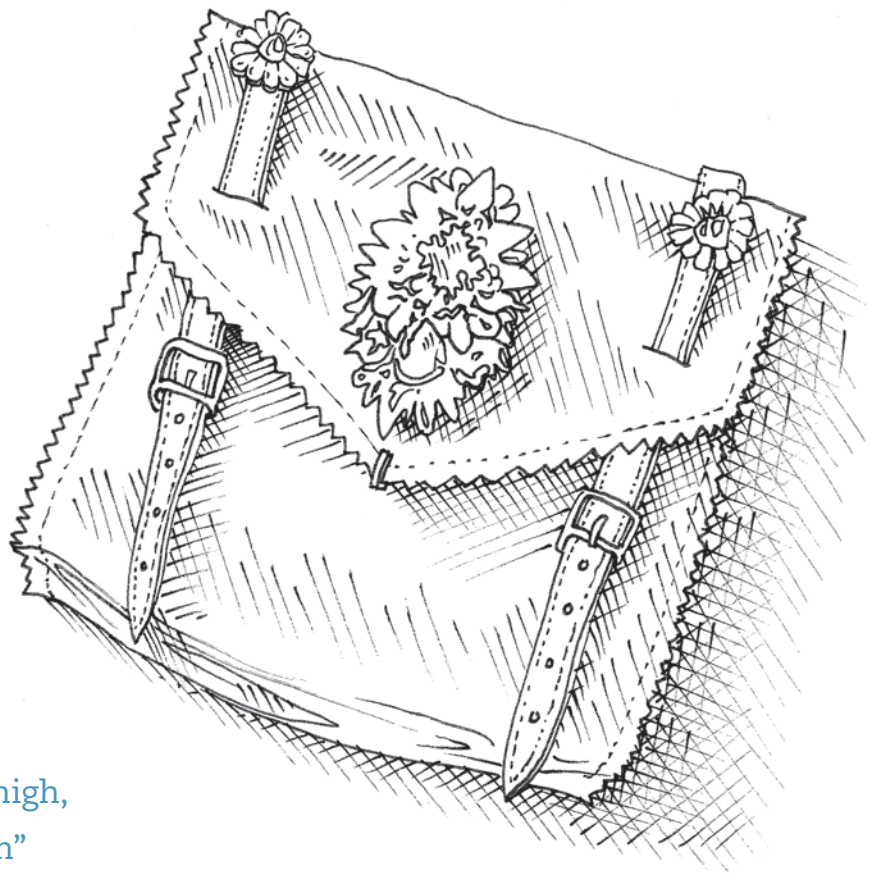
The Anthropologie-cal environment is far away from the “realness” of everyday life; working there was a way to enjoy rich escapism and dodge responsibility for trying harder for the career that I had really wanted. But, like a “cat town,” there is something quietly disconcerting about stepping into the Anthropologie realm. I felt this throughout my time there, and still feel it now: it is unsettling to place such a high, abstracted value on “inspiration” in the practice and pursuit of consumption.

I was a longtime aficionado and addict of the store before I worked in the sales floor trenches for two years and at two different stores. I reveled in a ritual of soaking up all of the sights of a faraway land of fashion meant for women who, like me, had an agenda in their sartorial choices. I met some of the most creative and innovative people I have ever known and I felt good being part of a greater aesthetic vision. I also had daily doubts about what I was doing there. During my hours upon hours folding clothes and merchandising displays of monogrammed coffee mugs, I pondered why I wasn’t actively taking more direction with my life.

I quickly saw past the we-are-the-world illusion of the woven wicker chairs and hand-dyed throw pillows ... but I wanted them to furnish my dream house in Helsinki. The pay may have been (laughably) low, but the “inspiration” I got from the things I saw and sold was immense. And that was precisely what I was promised from day one: “an inspirational work environment.” In company communications, the word “inspiration” comes up frequently; you work with “inspiring” people, employees are commended for dressing “inspired,” and everyone is encouraged to share what they are finding “inspiring.” The main goal is to foster “inspirational” experiences that are driven by a continuous search for “inspiration” in any and all forms. After a while, that word, concept and ideal transformed into my everyday practice.

People love “Anthro” because it is under the radar; advertising is kept to a minimum, many of the customers are word-of-mouth, and stores maintain a “boutique” feel. And, the carefree, eclectic image that they perpetuate sells big time. They craft a mishmash of vaguely multicultural visual cues executed with conservative style. Predictable, with just that element of the unexpected, like an exotic vacation with a preset itinerary in which one would engage with the locals but not really take part in the culture.





It is unsettling to place such a high, abstracted value on “inspiration” in the practice and pursuit of consumption.

Much of the “inspiration” behind Anthropologie’s designs and display comes from international adventures and encounters with cultural “others,” and that is the root of what is ultimately unsettling for me, as a customer and former employee. Sourcing directly from artists, artisans, places and cultures makes things murky. There is a risk, to the company and to their consumers, with the fine line that they straddle between “inspired” and “insensitive.”

If Anthropologie’s products are meant to play up the global-gatherer-nomad ideal, their mishmash of random objects comes across as underthought and irrelevant. Stuff is stuff, but it is the lack of context — be it through the physical presence of an “authentic” found object or the many modes of inspiration lifted from world cultures — that keeps Anthropologie’s products forever in a state of irresponsibility. Playing up the “artisan-ness” or “one-of-a-kind” nature of commercial wares acts as a way to remove accountability. Citing “inspiration,” be it found in any form, place, or collective cultural sphere, becomes an escape and an excuse.

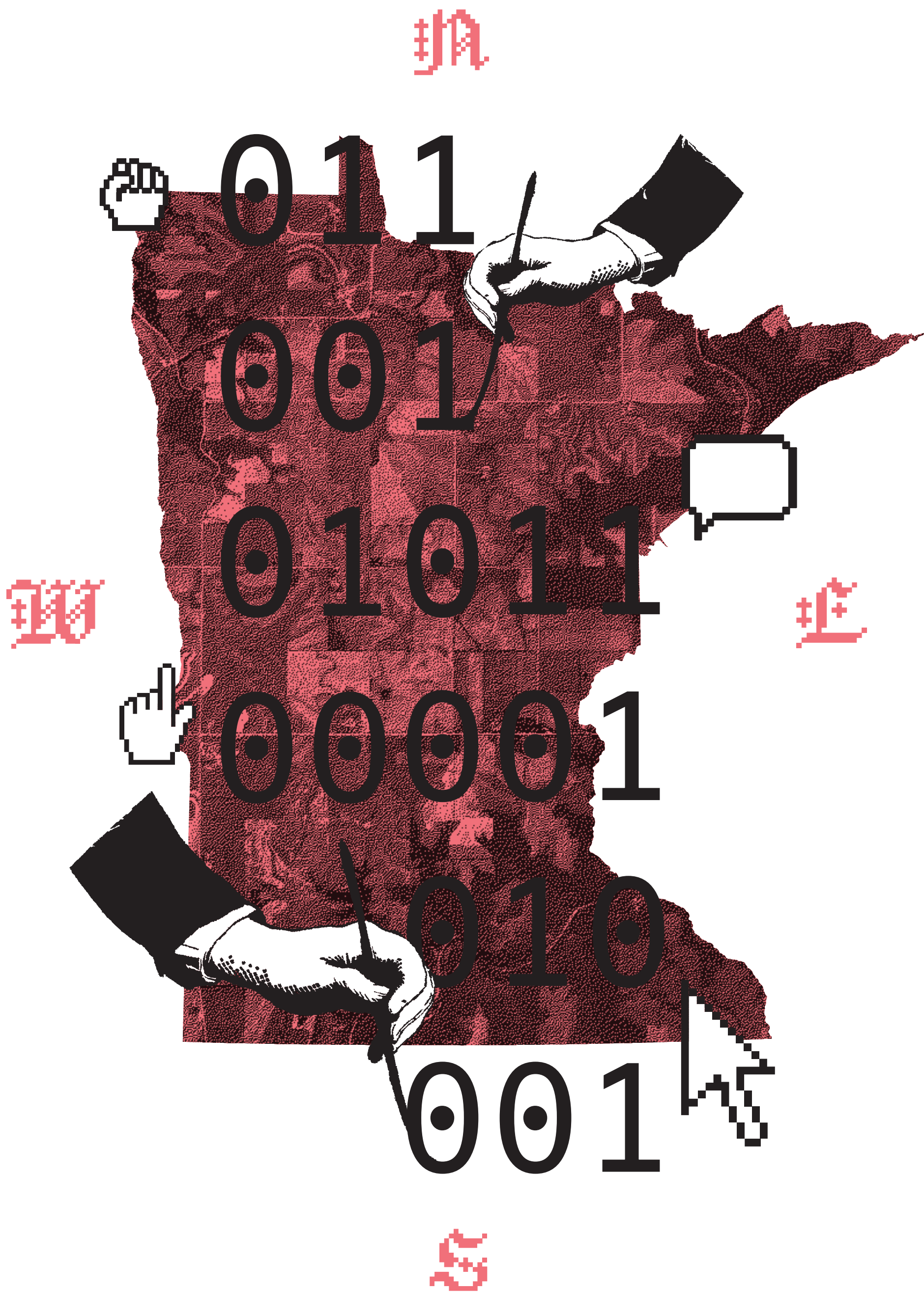
Inspiration or admiration can quickly blur into appropriation, as was the case in 2011, when Anthropologie designed and placed a number of “one of a kind” rickshaws in their retail and online stores. According to the product copy, members of the buying team “flagged a rickshaw down for a spur-of-the-moment tour of the town” on a trip to India and were so “inspired” and “exhilarated” that they came back to the states and designed their own. (“An instant conversation starter on the road or on display, we’ll bet you’re whisked away on the adventure of a lifetime once you hop on — or in — our quixotic carriage.”) Available for only \$2200, never mind the fact that many impoverished people in developing countries depend upon these vehicles as a way to make ends meet. By creating such a product “inspired” by the real thing, the company managed to dodge full accountability; if stores were to place authentic rickshaws imported straight off of the streets of India, there would be a much greater chance for uncomfortable conversations about contemporary cultural colonialism. The design team appropriated an icon seemingly without serious regard for the specific cultural implications and messages behind it, and somehow “inspiration” became the excuse for accountability.

Anthropologie has a division of “found objects” that a select group of buyers source from artists, craftspeople, dealers and markets from around the world and import back to be distributed in the retail outlets; each store carries a tailored selection of these one-of-a-kind items ranging from antique furniture in various states of decay to tchotchkes that can best be described as “twee.” Details borrowed from found items seem to be echoed at multiple price points and platforms across other product lines, furthering the design inspirational train-of-thought; for example, this past year, techniques and motifs from vintage hand-embroidered kantha quilts from India made their way into a kantha-patterned armchair and a clothing collection employing kantha fabrics. The “authenticity” value of such found objects and found object-inspired items alike ups their prices considerably, and makes them all that more desirable. The opportunity to buy such items with justifiable backstories satisfies an anxiety to vicariously get in on a far-off retail adventure, but it brings with it a false sense of accomplishment; many of these products are actually mass-produced but have a fake patina of uniqueness.

Even with all of the hype about the global arts bazaar and a marketplace of fabulous finds, Anthropologie (and much more frequently, parent company Urban Outfitters) often becomes a media punching bag for employing cultural insensitivity and questionable intentions in the sourcing and merchandising of their products. The most sensational of these instances was when, in late 2012/early 2013, they briefly carried a series of one-of-a-kind \$398 candlesticks from New York-based artist team Primitive Twig. These featured totem-like assemblages of vintage decorative objects and ceramic souvenirs, some portraying blatantly caricatured images of African-Americans and Asians. Consumers cried foul and the company removed the product, subsequently issuing a PR release reiterating that the “one-of-a-kind” character of the artisan-crafted objects was not intended to offend. As of this writing, Urban Outfitters is still involved in a federal lawsuit with the Navajo

Nation; the tribe sued the company in 2012 for trademark violations after they released products utilizing the Navajo name such as the “Navajo Hipster Panty” and the “Navajo Flask.” There have also been numerous reports over the past several years from independent creatives claiming that Anthropologie or Urban Outfitters either suspiciously incorporated key elements from their artistic visions or ripped off work with no promise of compensation. Again citing the power of “inspiration” as the modus operandi, both stores have partnered more and more with both up-and-coming and established designers, illustrators and artists in exclusive product collaborations, perhaps as both a way to counter past associations with plagiarism and to raise their imagined design profile. Anthropologie’s “Made In Kind” line helps indie labels get greater exposure, but the resulting products are copies of questionable quality.

I am wary of the culture (or is it a cult?) of Anthro’s decidedly “inspired” living, but somehow I still find myself buying into their story, season after season. Even though I have seen behind the patchwork-embellished curtain of the brand, I still aspire to have the artsy traveller life that they sell. When the logic of the unsettling gnawing that comes every time I step into one of the stores meets the emotion I feel when I envision myself decked out in their wares on a bicycle trip across southern Spain, it is confusing and complicated. I still come back to the Anthropologie “cat town” for small bursts of inspiration and leave feeling both better and worse, like I am in on some lavishly decorated lie.



CROSSING THE ZUMBRO RIVER



Vestigial layers of analog cartography bleed into digital-age mapping

by henry harris

The ground is purposefully sloped, not by any forces of nature, but by recent upheaval and reset. There is a new field, elevated above the foundations of old, new layers to the previous, new use. Walking across the newly paved cul-de-sac, I move beyond its edge and sink into the old land. There are two discernible stripes emanating from the knoll, indicating years of traffic, now permanently halted and redirected. The asphalt above has long forgotten its gravel ancestor beneath. Wild growth reclaims the old road, growing lush between the two stripes, and outside of them as well. The tire-wide lines, still with their rocky, permeable surface partially inhibit growth, appearing like a stereo version of Richard Long’s performative transits across various fields and slopes in Peru. The surface has a memory.

The memory is located in Rochester Township, not far from the red dotted lines of city limits for Rochester, Minnesota, a small city seventy miles south of Minneapolis. The vacant and rough pathway I traipse upon what was once part of a small route that crossed the south fork of the Zumbro River, a tributary of the Mississippi. Twenty-five years ago, a new road was built from the east, cutting through the field and hills and eventually making contact with the existing circuit and its two farms. In favor of the new roadway, the bridge over the Zumbro River was taken out, and much of the route through the woods abandoned.

I begin to walk the stripes, selecting one side as I do. I admire their scarce detectability like apparitions and wonder how much longer they will be visible. Tangible histories in the landscape are often things of finitude, objects that signify within the landscape gradually become disassociated from their narratives, faltering and impartial stories. The ground is evaporating, being overlooked, turning to translucent, dubious signs and surfaces, and much, much less. Ghosts are here.

For many years, maps drawn since the route’s change showed the street, known as Old Valley Road, as something that still crossed the Zumbro River. Other maps showed the new road leading from the other direction, called Meadow Crossing Road, and extending to the river’s edge. Until last year, many online maps such as Google and Bing showed the road in this way, terminating at the former bridge site. It had been many years since any cars could drive that far down the road.

Among the many means available to see this process, land changes are clearly made visible through the maps we have available to us, in both print and digital form. There are editions regularly published, yet rendered out-of-date due to the constantly evolving landscape of roads and highways. It is important to note that both types of media are subject to the same errors and speed of updating. Yet today we rely on digital data, which can be updated and made available to people much more easily than print.

Aside from its accompanying visual metabolism, the raw data of digital cartography (e.g., place-naming) is soft. It is subject to change with the whims and exploitations of the user of the land. More than anything, the text in any map is a system predicated upon recognition and significance. The way in which we identify a place changes over time. For example, all mail now requires an address number and zip plus four. Gone are the days of using a last

name and county road, town, and state, to mail something to a rural address. Gone too are the days of using an intersection as an address to mail to an urban location. Online ordering is where this change is more visible as many address entry systems for online order forms will “correct” your address by implementing abbreviations. In other cases, the name of your town, city, or populated place may be disregarded by location databases if a larger, more significant place is nearby. The very text of the system is being altered over time, a combination of functional efficiency and trends of the general populace.

One would like to depend on a map as a form of pure, relevant, and unencumbered data, culled through the precise instruments of government offices, corporations, and the cartographers themselves.

Despite its malleable possibilities, online maps and related mapping applications are also one of the most antiquated digital systems of our time. The nature of their upkeep is not as regular as one might imagine. Therefore, online maps can stand out rather easily among more frequently tended neighbors in the garden of digital media. In addition, the data itself can almost seem to be transcribed from other sources, comprising a teeming headcheese of cartographic material including topographic and highway maps, gazetteers, county plat maps, and records from the United States Department of Agriculture. Much of this information predates the contemporary web entirely. While a lot of it may remain accurate, much of what is translated into digital form has lost relevance, or may not be accurate at all. Still, this information is put into composite platform and can be accessed by users. Put into Google or Bing maps, a second phase of aggregation exists as Facebook and phone applications access location data for their users.

About a mile away from the Zumbro River site is a single-story structure used by the county as a day camp for students. At one time known as Dee School, the building and grounds were once used as a schoolhouse until it was assimilated into the larger central district decades ago. Entering “Dee School” in the Google Maps search bar yields an accurate location of the old school building. Without using

the search terms, the structure would remain unlabeled. Additionally, this search can be done without the use of an address. The location of the school has clearly been carried over through the transcription of presumably analog, pre-web documents. It is still possible to “Like” Dee School on Facebook and to check into it on Foursquare. It would even be possible to see the local weather for the schoolhouse and find out what time the sun will set for its approximate location. Vestiges of an old infrastructure have migrated to the internet.

One would like to depend on a map as a form of pure, relevant, and unencumbered data, culled through the precise instruments of government offices, corporations, and the cartographers themselves. Google, Nokia, Rand-McNally, Apple, and the United States Geological Survey are the figureheads largely responsible for map data we encounter on a day-to-day basis. Yet each source contains, much to the disoriented traveler’s chagrin, inaccurate data. More specifically, these odd pitfalls in map information technology can often be anachronistic. The cartographic data we encounter from yesteryear can be seen as a “reverse salient,” to use systems theorist Thomas P. Hughes’ terminology. It refers to a part of a larger system that disallows the forward progression of that system because it is outmoded or outdated. In this sense, old data could potentially inhibit users from getting a clear picture of the land and route.

The presence of reverse salients in online mapping technologies creates an unconventional archive put at the hands of the user. Out-of-date names for streets, places, structures and districts are, more often than not, unnecessary to the quest of how to get from point “A” to point “B,” but accuracy is not what is at stake. It is an active volume of data, constantly being added to, and allowed to exist undisturbed. There is a lack of intentionality toward creating this historical archive. It is an accidental library, a wealth of information waiting to be utilized. The alternative use for our digital maps offers an incredible amount of possibility for the digital environment, a medium in itself that struggles for adequate archiving and documentation methods. While GoogleEarth allows one to access a record of old aerial images, the system itself, particularly the textual database is a unique tool we have available to us. The archive also doesn’t just come from professional map-makers and corporations. GoogleMaps and GoogleEarth both have ample opportunities for user-generated content including labeling landmarks, posting images, even tying YouTube videos to a particular place. How these vast collections of data will be managed for the future remains to be seen.

Despite technological advances we are still caught in a realm of digitized forms of analog records. It seems that there will always be traces of our navigational predecessors. Maps, in any form, are living documents that pass their knowledge to the next stage. We have yet to find out how this digital historic archive will evolve for the digital map user, and what opportunities lie in being able to tap into this often overlooked universe, the old land beneath the new. The data we see is, in some senses flowing like sediment traveling through the Zumbro River, slowly picked up from the sides as the water cuts like a slow knife through the terrain. The presence of what has been moved continues on in an altered state. Swimming with time, floating in wait.



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HEAVY MEATAL

Interview with Kuma’s Director of Operations Luke Tobias

by georges toumayan

Chicago burger enthusiasts are well acquainted with Kuma’s — the bustling burger joint in Avondale. Kuma’s has earned a righteous reputation for serving mouthwatering meat in a unique death metal atmosphere. Buoyed by the success of their first location, this past spring Kuma’s opened “Kuma’s Too” in Lincoln Park (fittingly located at 666 W. Diversey). To find out more about the philosophy that led to such success, F Newsmagazine spoke with Director of Operations Luke Tobias about burgers, music and how nothing is more “metal” than supporting local businesses.

Georges Toumayan: *Meat and metal, how do they come together?*

Luke Tobias: There are a lot of details that I personally would correlate between them. Historically, barbarians and things like that. But we’ve found that playing metal at high volumes makes people hungry.

GT: *Are all of the staff involved in music in one way or another?*

LT: I’m the only one who plays in a band. The owner Mike [Cain] is an old metal fan — he’s into Judas Priest and Iron Maiden, and this whole thing was his idea. I’m certainly not alone in my love for that style of music but I’m the only one who plays in a band.

GT: *How do you go about deciding which band gets paired with what food?*

LT: Some of the things have direct correlations. The Pig Destroyer is a slow braised pulled pork sandwich — that makes sense. The Judas Priest is a tongue-in-cheek nod to the fact that Rob Halford is the preeminent gay metal icon. Arguably he’s one of the most well established and certainly longest running metal frontmen of all time, along with Ozzy Osbourne. Some of the burgers have correlations like that, sometimes they’re location-based.

GT: *Location-based?*

LT: The Earthride, for example — they’re a pretty long running doom band from Maryland and they’re very heavy, and slow and crushing. The burger that we did for them was a very rich and heavy burger, all bacon: bacon jam, pancetta and regular bacon.

GT: *And what about the decor?*

LT: Those drawings and paintings were done by Mike’s ex-wife. She’s a fairly established tattoo artist even outside of the tattoo world. We thought her art fit with what we were doing.

GT: *You’ve amassed quite a collection. Was it all done by her?*

LT: It was a culmination over the years of things given to us or things we saw out and about. The Diversey location is brand new and very clean by comparison. The scheme is the same; we’ll have records all over the place. We actually have some wicked, extremely rare Slayer skateboards. You can’t buy them anywhere but we have some friends who run a skateboard shop, and they’re on loan to us. All along the walls there are original concert posters and screen prints. We’ve got an original Priest, “Screaming for Vengeance” velvet black light poster from 1986.



GT: *Does your location in Chicago play into the dynamic?*

LT: I play in a touring band, we’ve toured the United States and Canada, and Chicago is by far the most diverse but also one of the strictest dining spaces.

GT: *Strict in what sense?*

LT: Think about any other major metropolitan area like New York or LA. You have a lot of big name chefs and guys you see on TV like Bobby Flay. Then you have Chicago. Chicago does not accept big name chefs on that basis alone. Laurent Tourondel tried to open a restaurant here and it closed in two months. Chicagoans have a very high standard as far as what they expect out of their restaurants. Places like Alinea and Schwa... you’re talking about extremely high level fine dining. It’s almost like: “I dare you to try to come in here and try to rival us.”

GT: *How did you get started in the culinary business?*

LT: I went to school but I dropped out because it was so expensive. I was renting an apartment from this lady who strangely enough played bass for Moby. It was awesome, but it was one of those situations where I was a lot younger than I am now and horrible with money. It didn’t work out so I ended up moving to Mishawaka doing retail for a few years working for Guitar Center. I transferred with the company to Chicago. After that I started playing with a death metal band here. We signed with a local label.

GT: *Things blew up after you got signed?*

LT: No, the label folded. I was unemployed for eight months just going apeshit in my house, vacuuming the freezer. It was really a bad deal. I ended up coming to Kuma’s one night. It was wicked. I was thinking, “I don’t care, I’m unemployed — I’m trying to start working here right now.” So I talked to the manager, came in the following Tuesday and started working on the fryer. I started at the bottom and just worked my way up.

GT: *After making it here, do you have loyalty to Chicago in that sense?*

LT: We support Chicago. That goes from the ground up, so we don’t carry any major label beers: Budweiser, Miller. We don’t buy product from any large food purveyor, it’s all local — even down to the soda that comes out of the bar — it’s not Coca Cola; it’s a small local company. We try to support Chicago brands as much as possible.

GT: *Without revealing any secrets, could you share any of Kuma’s culinary techniques?*

LT: There is no real secret ingredient. We don’t talk about the beef because it’s a proprietary blend — if there was a secret that’s the secret. We use quality products, we have quality employees, we know what to do with the products we have. As far as coming up with the recipes, we just do what we want to eat. There’s not really a whole lot to it other than that. As far as the kitchen goes and the ownership goes, we all love food, so we just make the food that we want eat.

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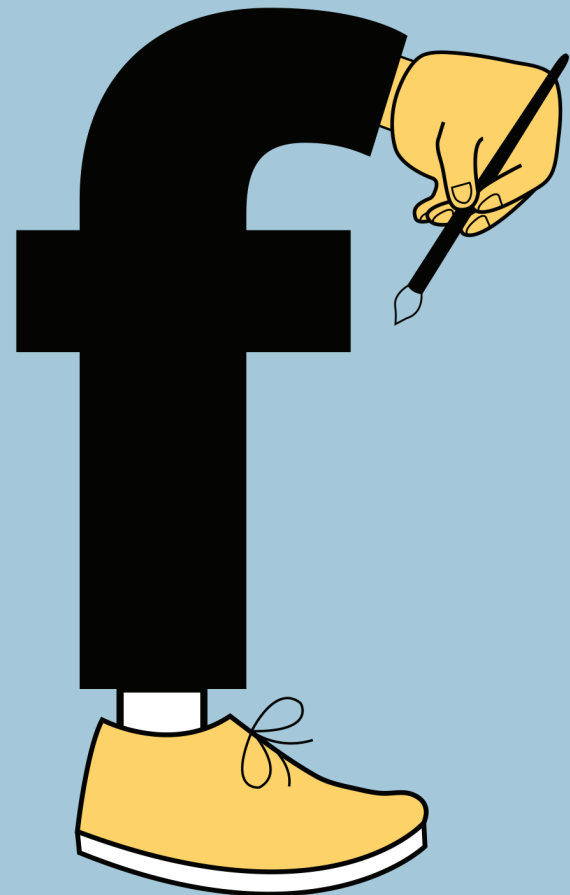


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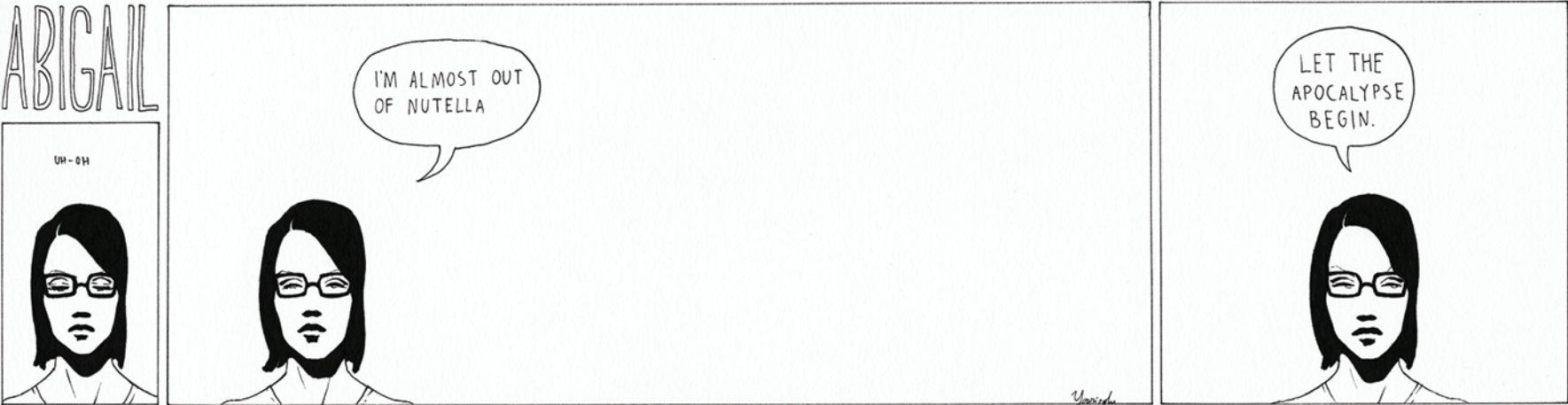
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