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A STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART, CULTURE AND POLITICS

MARCH 2009

NEWSMAGAZINE

the **MOVING IMAGE** *issue*

Somaliwood: Ohio's unlikely
film industry

The Chicago Olympics:
a financial quandary

AIC's blockbuster: Munch

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

the SCHOOL of the ART INSTITUTE of CHICAGO
presents

F Newsmagazine March 2009

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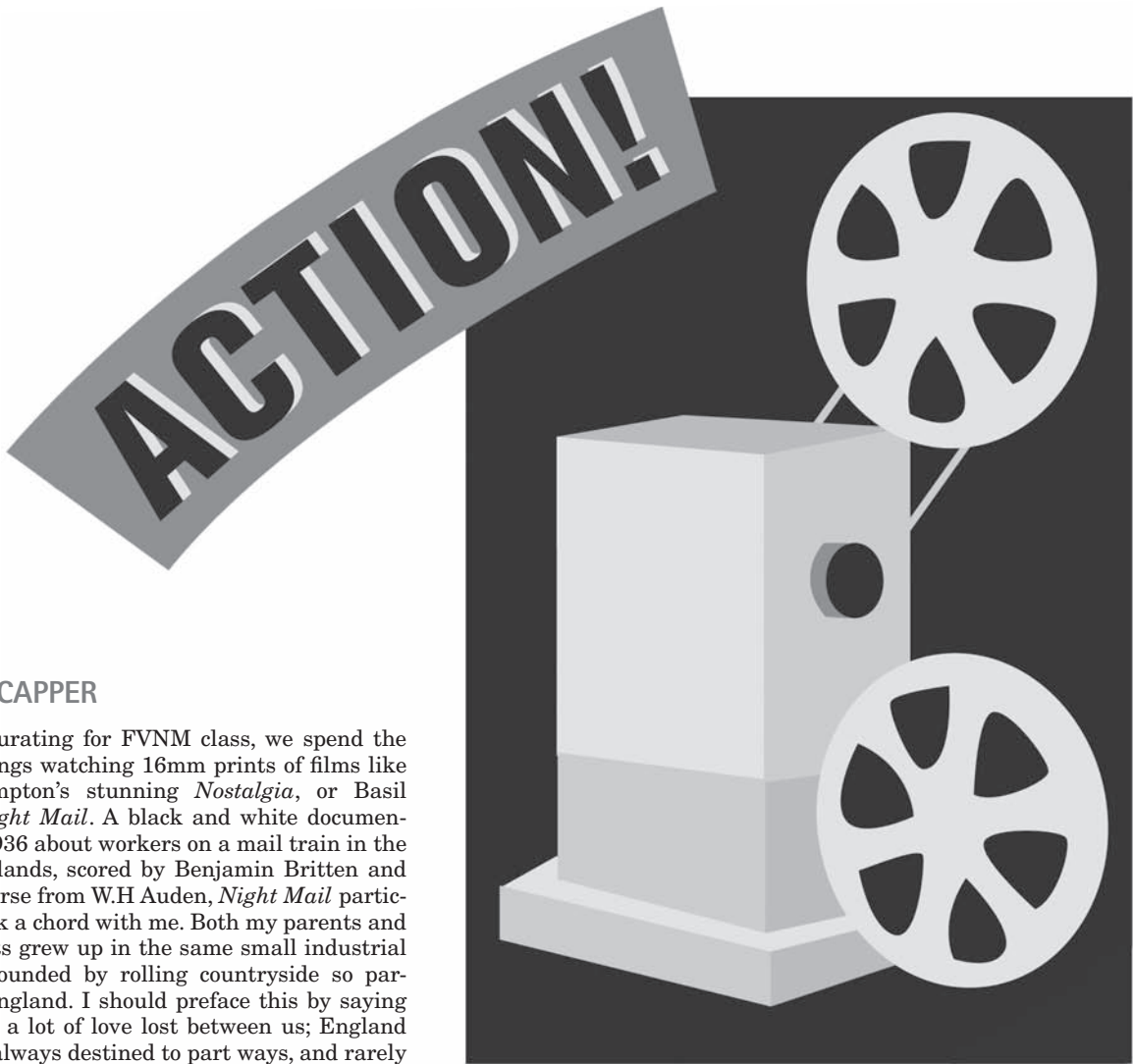
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MAY BE TOO INTENSE FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

The Art of Cinema



Staff Illustration by Kirstin Makela

BY BETH CAPPER

In my Curating for FVNM class, we spend the early mornings watching 16mm prints of films like Hollis Frampton’s stunning *Nostalgia*, or Basil Wright’s *Night Mail*. A black and white documentary from 1936 about workers on a mail train in the British midlands, scored by Benjamin Britten and featuring verse from W.H Auden, *Night Mail* particularly struck a chord with me. Both my parents and their parents grew up in the same small industrial towns, surrounded by rolling countryside so particular to England. I should preface this by saying there is not a lot of love lost between us; England and I were always destined to part ways, and rarely do I look back with nostalgia. But this document—perhaps exotic for Americans with no intimate experience of this locale—felt like like a slice of my personal history. These were the dialects I heard when growing up, and that I still hear today when I talk to my mother over distant phone lines. These monochrome images bring to life all but forgotten memories of my grandparents, of old terraced houses and cobbled streets framed against grey skies. For an instant, my childhood returned to me in ways that I haven’t thought about in years. This is the revelatory power of cinema—one of the 20th Century’s most important art forms.

Yet Cinema has still not found its place among the other visual arts in the art historical canon. Last week, in the same class, we had a visitor, Will Schmenner, who programs for the Block Cinema at Northwestern and who also occasionally contributes to *CINE-FILE*, a web guide for which I also write (see the moving image section). He came to talk about an exhibition he curated in 2007, for the Block Museum, “Casting a Shadow: Creating the Alfred Hitchcock Film.” Rather than being the kind of show art critics might term “memorabilia,” the exhibition was instead intended to put forth a new argument for cinema to be given the same due as any other visual art form, but one that eschewed the popular director-as-auteur angle. Instead, the exhibition relates Hitchcock’s pre-production drawings to the

Renaissance process drawings that are posited as master works, making a case for these sketches as singular works of art. The exhibition included not only Hitchcock’s working drawings, but also clips from his films, exhibited as pieces in their own right. Contrary to the popular notion of Hitchcock as the sole creator of his works, the exhibition highlights how collaborative skills and workshop practices can be central aspects in the making of an art work. This idea is still quite revolutionary.

The suggestion that cinema—not video art—has no place in the white cube is also unfathomable to me. Moreover, while there is no other place I love more than the darkened cinémathèque, the insistence that there is one way, and one way only, to view cinema, irks me greatly. It is this kind of inflexibility that takes the beauty, joy and excitement out of an art work, and reduces it to something studied and pored over in dusty academic tomes. It is a sad state of affairs that many art historians and cineastes are often unable to see

beyond such restrictions—to pool their collective love of art and work together. This kind of attitude was confirmed when Schmenner tried to tour the exhibition; no art museum or gallery would have it, and it had its run instead in cinema and moving image museums.

This brings me to the battle currently raging between PS.1 Contemporary Art Center and the New American Cinema Group/Film-Makers’ Cooperative in New York. The Cooperative, which occupies the 13th floor of the 108 Leonard Street studios building owned by P.S.1, is being threatened with eviction so that Alanna Heiss, ex-executive director of the museum, can use it as the base for a new internet radio station. The Cooperative, founded by a group of experimental filmmakers including Jonas Mekas, a powerhouse for the promotion and preservation of avant-garde cinema, has a collection of some 5,000 films. Given the current economic climate, and the fact that the Cooperative runs as a not-for-profit, such a move could not have come at a worse time. Mekas told the *New York Times* on February 10, “We can’t understand why they are giving her so much space for a project that is just

being formed and has not proved itself of any service to the arts community, and at the same time throwing out the only organization that independent filmmakers have to distribute their work.”

If such a move isn’t a debasement of cinema as an art, I’m not sure what constitutes one. The Co-operative has distributed, safeguarded and relentlessly promoted avant-garde cinema. Among its collection are works by Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren and Hollis Frampton.

Cinema is art—magical, life-affirming art. It is high time it was given its due. ■

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cinema, irks me greatly.

Letters to the editor

Dear Editors: Re: Assessing the Assessment: Grades at SAIC and the sidebar, What System Should SAIC Use to Assess Students?

I am glad to see assessment addressed in *F News*. It’s a central issue in higher education, and one students should give serious consideration; assessment can encourage or hinder their development as autonomous learners. The article and sidebar, however, don’t clearly link a rationale and related goal for assessment (say, to develop students as self-directed learners), to an evaluation of how various assessment models—letter, numeric, or other ranked grading systems, CR/NC, narrative evaluation, and so on—support that goal. In fact, there is no evidence that letter grade systems support student learning over time, while there is evidence that assessment systems that sort and rank, as letter grade, high/low pass and honors systems do, actually degrade the development of intrinsic motivation—learning for the joy of learning—in students.

That’s not to say we couldn’t do assessment better at SAIC. One form that has been shown to support student learning is narrative evaluation, which wasn’t mentioned in *F News*. I think SAIC should move toward instituting some form of narrative assessment, but that would require attention, and possible changes, to school structures. For example, “grades” couldn’t be turned in 24 hours after the last class—faculty would need plenty of time and some professional development to write useful narratives for students. Also, contrary to suggestions aimed at addressing budget shortfalls, class sizes and advising loads would have to remain low for professors to be able to thoughtfully and thoroughly assess each student in writing.



Check out how some of the many other colleges and universities, including CalArts, MIT, Reed, SFAI, Brown, Bennington, Hampshire, UC Santa Cruz, Sarah Lawrence and St. John’s, that, like SAIC, do not use letter grade assessment systems (and some of which use written narratives) assess student learning here: Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning (www.cielearn.org)

Finally, students shouldn’t fear that lack of grades will prevent them from getting into grad school. For example, many well-respected grad programs, like Yale, Stanford, Harvard and UC Berkeley Law, Virginia U Medicine have abandoned letter grade systems, and adopted simple pass/fail systems.

To read more about why grades aren’t good for learning, check out the article, “From Degrading to De-Grading,” by Alfie Kohn, at: www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/fdtd-g.htm

Sincerely,
Therese Quinn
Associate Professor of Art Education

Dear F Newsmagazine:

Just read *F* from 9/08. The “Neighborhood Guide?” All the bitchy comments about gentrification? Not qualified. Guess who gentrified them. The long-time residents are the ones who can have an attitude, not the brand-new city transplants. Also, the south side goes way beyond the galleries in Pilsen in case you didn’t know. They couldn’t sound more naïve about city life but I guess they mean well.

—Steve Kline

Dear Steve,

While we appreciate your belated response to our September 2008 issue, you are incorrect to assume that the comments on gentrification were all written by “brand-new city transplants;” a number of the sections were actually written by “long-time residents.” Admittedly, the south side got short-shrifted due to space constraints.

Either way though, the truth is that no matter what city you are from, gentrification is an issue that you must contend with. It is a pure fact of city living—whether it is your home city or your adopted one. And, everyone has a right to complain.

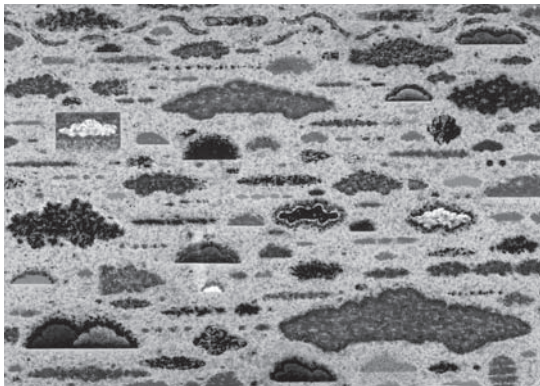
All the best,
Emily Bauman
Editor

(SCHOOL NEWS) SHORTS

BY NATALIE EDWARDS AND CAITLIN SCHRINER

SAIC Faculty Member Opens Community Darkroom/Studio Space

The photography department's big switch in '07 threw film photographers at SAIC a curveball when it converted most of the facilities at the school to suit digital work. Dropping a large amount of their darkroom space, the school began to dispose of their old enlargers and darkroom equipment. Like many, Eleftheria Lialios, an SAIC alum and faculty member since '88, as well as a practicing photographer, suffered from the loss of developing facilities at the school. When offered the enlargers and darkroom equipment that was being disposed, Lialios jumped at the opportunity. Taking over a darkroom facility on Milwaukee Ave., Lialios has opened a large not-for-profit studio printing facility for artists to continue the practice of darkroom photography. The Midwestern Academy of Modern Art Darkroom (MAMAD), located at 1000 N. Milwaukee Ave. (4th floor), provides a space that pushes education and continues dialogues concerning a process near the brink of disappearing. The 24-hour facility includes three Beseler 4x5 colorhead enlargers, three Omega universal 4x5 enlargers, a sink and chemical set up, film processing for negatives up to 4x5, a light table, multi-color toners and other re-touching processes, grain magnifiers and a rotating photo gallery. A monthly fee of \$100 goes toward rent and chemicals, and supports an amazing studio work facility that SAIC does not provide for all students. While there has been much excitement over the project, unfortunately MAMAD is understaffed, and managed and maintained by Lialios alone. Students interested in becoming a part of the MAMAD community, or working on a volunteer or for-credit basis should contact Eleftheria Lialios at elialios@gmail.com or 312-607-5211. —CS



Ray Yoshida, *Scamper*, 1997, oil on canvas. Promotional exhibition image.

Longtime teacher Ray Yoshida dies (1930–2009)

Ray Yoshida, former SAIC teacher and member of the influential Chicago Imagists, died of cancer on January 10. Yoshida was a much-loved painting and drawing professor, who worked at the school for over 40 years. Known for his blunt but incredibly helpful comments on student work, Yoshida is remembered as an enigmatic and ironic man of few words. As Rob Jillson wrote in a comment on the chronicle.com, "The memory that solidifies 'Ray' for me is of an off day that I was spending in my studio. That day of the week, Ray taught another class but had the habit of walking through our studios whenever he took a break. That time, I didn't even see Ray go by—as I hear the door start to shut I hear, 'Jillson—too much yellow.' Well, I liked that yellow. Instead of cutting the yellow, I added and changed other things. A while later, I hear Ray yell, 'Better!' It wasn't the yellow per se but rather the balance of everything; that was what Ray meant. He was one of those people who knew what he meant." After years of living in Chicago, Yoshida spent the last three years of his life in his native Hawaii, where he passed away at the age of 78.—NE

School News Ticker

Faculty and Alumni, such as **Stephanie Nadeau**, **Sarah Krepp**, and **Marty Burns**, received heaps of cash and street cred when they were picked this year to receive the Illinois Art Council's 2009 Artists Fellowship. Twenty of the forty-nine recipients of the awards came right out of the Art Institute. If SAIC had a mascot, this is when we would say, "GO MASCOTS!"... The SAIC's own **Ice Box Press** showed up to the AWP (the Association of Writers and Writing Programs) conference with several chapbooks for sale. The Ice Box Press is an enigma, loyal to everyone and no one. A maverick press, if you will. They shared a table with the Poetry Center, and are supported by the SAIC's writing and printmedia departments. Buy chapbooks from your favorite poetry peeps at their website: iceboxpress.blogspot.com.... Even though it ain't quite spring, that don't mean the **Spring Art Sale** ain't around the corner. Get your applications in by March 6, or look like a doofus selling your wares out in front of the school. We know you've been wanting to sell knick-knacks out of your trench coat for years, but this is not the time to start. Wait until you graduate... Curious as to how that whole **Modern Wing** thing is going? Got some questions? In three months you can get all up in it, but until then, if you don't have time to personally stalk AIC President **Eloise W. Martin** or Director **James Cuno**, check out their answers to questions posed by friends and members of the AIC online in the new **Director's Forum**. Not sure if you're a friend or a member? If the lions don't high-five you on your way in, then you probably aren't... If you're in the market for impractical, intricately constructed garments made by people who never get to leave their studios, the **75th annual SAIC Fashion Show** is right around the corner: April 23 and 24, held in the School's Sullivan Galleries. The show will feature "specially commissioned works by students and faculty from the School's Performance department." Not sure what that means? Show up and pay the student price to find out. —NE

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(HIRST IS) DEAD

Eugenio Merino, a Spanish artist, has sold a sculpture of Damien Hirst blowing his brains out for over \$41,000 to a Floridian. The artist built a life-size silicone version of Hirst with real human hair and realistic glass eyes. Hirst is depicted on his knees pointing a Colt 45 at his temple while blood pours out of his head. The silicone Hirst wears a skull T-shirt.

The statue is called *For the Love of Gold*, after Hirst's *For the Love of God* (2007), a skull made of human teeth, diamonds and platinum. Merino argues that if Hirst killed himself, then his art would go up in value.

For the Love of Gold was unveiled at the 28th Madrid International Contemporary Art Fair, known as ARCO. —NE

(WAR IS) OVER

In what could be called the most boring, insular, snippy art war of all time, the National Gallery and Tate Museums have called a truce to the long-waged war over where the cut-off date between their collections lies.

The deal, as if it is a treaty between feuding countries, comes just mere days before a Picasso exhibit opens at the National Gallery. Many very boring pretentious people believe the exhibit should be housed at the Tate.

According to the *Guardian*, the Tate Modern is home to international art from 1900 and British art from 1500 to the present day. The National Gallery displays international art up to 1900.

My suggestion is that those who believe the Picassos should not be in the National Gallery should exact revenge by forming an alliance, tentatively called Let's Poop Inside the National Gallery (el Ping), which, I assume, would quickly come under the watchful eye of Interpol. (The band, not the organization.) —NE

(ART NEWS)
SHORTS

BY NATALIE EDWARDS
AND CAITLIN SCHRINER

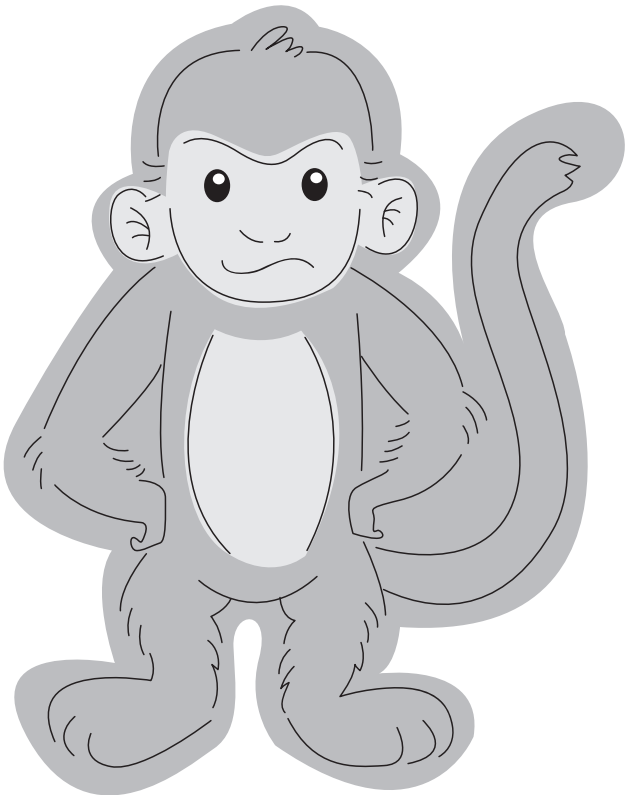
No "HOPE" for Simple Settlement
over Obama Image

The one-man Obama-promoting machine Shepard Fairey has gotten himself into a bit of a legal stew once again. No stranger to controversy, or the pushing of city ordinances, the guerrilla artist's latest legal struggles revolve around the use of the found image of our now-President Barack Obama in his infamous "HOPE" posters. While the image was never adopted by the Obama campaign, Fairey's prints were everywhere during the 2008 election season.

The original photograph, which Fairey says he found on the Internet, was recently identified as an image taken at the National Press Club in April 2006 by Mannie Garcia, an Associated Press freelance photographer. AP approached Fairey last month demanding that he pay not only for the use of the original photo, but also pay a portion of future profits from the image. Fairey filed a lawsuit against the Associated Press arguing that the image was only used as a reference and that he is protected under the fair-use exception to the copyright law.

To make things even more complicated and convoluted (legal issues and complication, who would have guessed?), it appears that Garcia and AP are not agreeing on who owns the rights to the image. Garcia stated that he generally doesn't condone people taking images off the Internet, but insists that this is a "unique situation." In this case, he is proud of the effect that the image has had.

As if Fairey doesn't have enough on his plate, he was arrested in Boston and accused of illegally tagging his artwork around the city. Guerilla art has always met its share of opposition, so this is not a unique case, but to see an image that was so widely embraced at a time when the nation called out for change become a center of litigation and greed is disappointing, to say the least. —CS



(CARTOON IS) CONTROVERSY

The *New York Post*, known for its trashy coverage of almost anything, published a cartoon likening the author of the economic stimulus bill to a dead and bloodied chimpanzee, shot by two aloof cops.

This cartoon, by Sean Delonas, came days after a 200 lb. chimpanzee hopped-up on valium attacked and mauled his Connecticut owner's face. However, it is clear to most critics that the cartoon is a reference to President Obama.

The Rev. Al Sharpton released a statement saying: "One has to question whether the cartoonist is making a less than casual reference to [Obama] when in the cartoon they have police saying after shooting a chimpanzee that 'Now they will have to find someone else to write the stimulus bill.'" And, "Being that the stimulus bill has been the first legislative victory of President Barack Obama (the first African American president) and has become synonymous with him, it is not a reach to wonder, are they inferring that a monkey wrote the last bill?"

The *Post* released a statement defending their cartoon, but some employees of the *New York Post* have tried to distance themselves from the editorial decision to run the cartoon, according to the *Huffington Post*. —NE

E V E N T S

Art and the Right to Believe Lecture Series (Parts I & II)

BY F NEWSMAGAZINE STAFF

February 12: The lecture by **Andrea Fraser** was quite an evening—it lasted until 8! Our own **David Raskin** did the introductions. He did a nice job at it too (despite his funny t-shirt and blazer combo). It was pretty interesting, albeit confusing: her current work seems incongruous (and frankly shitty), as compared to the more irreverent—yet serious—stuff she was doing previously. But what is tricky about her is whether she cares about the work she's doing now or if she is duping the hell out of all of us. The most recent piece she talked about was one derived from hours of videotaping her own psychoanalysis sessions. She transcribed all of the dialogue and then memorized bits of it, making a two screen projection both of her—sitting in a modernist swivel chair where she recapitulates segments of the psychoanalytic dialogues with all the crying and shit but without the analyst's words. BORING: SELF-ABSORBED STUPID BORING—All I could do was turn to my lecture companion with a look as if to say, "Really, Andrea Fraser, *really?*" This was the follow-up piece to the one where she has sex with a collector who was willing to advance purchase her work and then let her sell the 5 DVD set... But it could be that she is messing with us. But, then again, it's hard to say. Also, during Q&A someone asked what she did with all the money she made from the critical work—a stupid question, frankly. Her response was something else! She began jovially talking about how she bought a house, blah blah, just surviving. Then she got emotional—choking up on talking about how it's really hard to navigate the commercial art world and maintain a critical voice (tears and everything!). It was difficult to discern if this was sincere or not—she is a skilled actress, and after this display she asked if she could call it a night... I'm still sorting through my thoughts about the whole thing—but that is the full report.

February 18: Ms. Fraser's appearance was shortly followed up by that of **Terry Eagleton**, whose bumbling British ways, self-deprecating manner and near-obsession with

small furry animals (aardvarks and badgers in particular), did nothing to hide the fact that he is an absolutely brilliant dialectician. Let's surmise the complex entirety of what he said into: everything is good *and* bad, and Marx was right that market capitalism will go to the shitter... um, OK. At the end of his lecture, **Mary Patten** vociferously protested his "disparagement" of the body and the sanctity of identity politics. To this—which made half of the audience hide their eyes behind their hands thinking that it was a complete mischaracterization of everything he had said, while the other half of the lecture hall nodded enthusiastically in agreement with her assessment of Eagleton's remarks—Eagleton forcefully, but charmingly replied, that his point was that *everything* is good *and* bad: the body and identity politics included in this everything. It was nice to hear him acknowledge that the two shrines of SAIC are important, but not nearly the be-all, end-all that many here take them to be. As Eagleton said, "Always be suspicious of the things that most people agree with." So, while I generally tend to side with the cynics anyway, but am often touched by a little silliness, I couldn't help but be convinced by this lovely man—especially since he followed up this comment with a tangent on how the badger is a complete mystery to us: "What it is to be badger-like is an enigma," he said. And, as a side note to add to his own enigma: apparently he has slept in Madonna's bed (the details of this occurrence were confided to me off the record, but I'm sure he will be happy to share them with you as well... for a nominal fee). ■

The remaining lectures in this series are Mark Bauerlein (March 3) and Gareth James (March 18). Both will be held at 6pm in the SAIC Auditorium, 280 S. Columbus Drive.

The Guardian declares March 2009
"Rock Urine Freedom Month,"
encourages us to wee in our concert seats.

MARCH 1: Poland on the Pier (Day-long celebration on Navy Pier celebrating Polish Heritage)

MARCH 2: Paul Chan lecture at Renaissance Society

MARCH 5: Dan Graham lecture at the Block Museum

MARCH 6: The Times of Robert Mapplethorpe film series (Double Feature)—*Still Moving* and *Black, White + Grey* at the Block Cinema, Northwestern University

MARCH 6 – APRIL 2: European Union Film Festival at The Gene Siskel Film Center

MARCH 6 – 7: Mystery and More book fair at the Newberry Library

MARCH 7, 21: Green City market (RSVP for tasting to admin@chicagogreen-citymarket.org)

MARCH 8: "You are entering a gay and lesbian free zone: On the radical dissents of Justice Scalia and other (post) queers"—Bernard E. Hercourt at University of Chicago (Cobb Hall)

MARCH 10: "Fashion Forward" (part of Inside Chicago Fashion) at the Chicago History Museum

MARCH 11: The Times of Robert Mapplethorpe film series: *I Am Curious (Yellow)* at the Block Cinema, Northwestern University

MARCH 14: "Growing Up: Buckminster Fuller" lecture at the MCA (and exhibition opening: "Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe")

MARCH 14: Chicago River Dyeing (green) and St. Patty's Day parade

MARCH 18: Cut Copy at Vic Theater

MARCH 21: BFA show opening at the Sullivan Galleries

MARCH 27 – 29: Chicago International Vintage Poster Fair at the Cultural Center

MARCH 28: Chicago is flagship city for Earth Hour 2009, turn off your lights from 8:30 to 9:30 pm and save a handful of baby seals from almost certain destruction.

MARCH 29: Shamrock Shuffle marathon

MARCH 31: Leon Fleisher piano, performing works by J.S. Bach at Mandel Hall



Staff Illustration by Aaron Hoffman

Ending the STIGMA

Learning Disabilities at SAIC

BY JULIE RODRIGUEZ

If you have looked closely at a course syllabus this year, you have probably noticed the fine print regarding learning disabilities, sandwiched between the attendance policy and the plagiarism statement. In an effort to encourage students to come forward who may be reluctant, or who simply may not be aware, the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) now requires that teachers inform students at the beginning of the semester that they may seek reasonable accommodations for disabilities that may impede their ability to fulfill the requirements of the course.

This is important, says Terri Thrower, Director of the DLRC, because “often we’ll have students come in at the end of the semester trying to avoid failing a course. They may not have been aware we were here, or they might have been too embarrassed to come in. Some of them intend to, but never get around to it.” By that point, there is little the DLRC can do. “These are students who really struggle with academics who don’t realize that the school is required to accommodate them.”

“We can’t ask teachers to alter the requirements of the course for a student who can’t meet them,” explains Valerie St. Germain, the DLRC’s Assistant Director. “What we can do is provide reasonable accommodations. If someone is dyslexic, we can provide audio books as MP3s. Students with reading or writing difficulties or anxiety disorders can request extra time for tests. We can help provide accommodations without unfairly altering the expectations for an individual student.”

Those accommodation efforts extend beyond the classroom. The DLRC has negotiated with the Financial Aid office to ensure that students taking reduced course loads due to disability are not penalized and denied grants, and has collaborated with the U-Pass office to help those students keep their transportation benefits. For students with physical disabilities, they have coordinated with Residence Life, Counseling Services and Health Services to provide accessible dorm rooms, and have worked with security staff to plan effective emergency assistance for students with disabilities. Even International Affairs has worked with the DLRC to find accessible accommodations for study abroad trips.

“We’ve definitely seen more new people come in since we started putting information in class syllabi,” reports Thrower. “This is important because we don’t go out into the classrooms to recruit. Students have to learn we’re here, and come to us.”

The vast majority of students served by the DLRC—about 90%—have learning or psychological disabilities rather than physical impairments. It can be difficult for students with invisible disabilities to be comfortable advocating for their needs or speaking directly to teachers. They may be ashamed of their difficulties in the classroom, or afraid that others will accuse them of making up their symptoms or of not trying hard enough to overcome them. “There is still very much a stigma against students with LDs [learning disabilities]. I don’t think it’s changed much in the last 20 years,” says St. Germain. “It wasn’t until 1975 that schools were legally required to accommodate students with special needs at all. It wasn’t very long ago. Before that, you weren’t put in a special ed class—you were just kicked out.”

“There’s a lot of shame associated with having these problems. Some students come into college convinced it will be different from high school; that they will suddenly be better and won’t need any help. They don’t want to come to us because they want to think they’ve moved beyond their LD. But you don’t just grow out of having an LD, and these students still struggle. Going through the education system feeling like you are different leaves a lasting impact—I’ve seen a grown man burst into tears because he was ‘the dumb kid’ in first grade who couldn’t read.”

Between 2004 and 2008, the number of students with disabilities registered with the DLRC increased by 66% (from 149 to 225), and this year, the numbers are even higher. Students with LDs make up approximately 10% of the student population at SAIC and, St. Germain notes, “It’s important to remember that as many students self-report LDs as those who don’t. We have no way of knowing the exact number. Some students don’t want to ask for accommodations because they see it as special treatment rather than a legal right they are entitled to, and some of them have figured out how to get by on their own, and for them ‘just getting by’ is good enough.”

Thrower believes that an art education offers a unique alternative for students who struggle in more traditional academic environments. “It’s not the studio classes these students have problems with. Art classes really accommodate different learning styles very well—they’re very tactile, they help students focus.”

And it is not just the students which benefit from an art education. Thrower believes that they have a unique perspective to offer: “Students with LDs have a different way of seeing the world. They have a different way of thinking. An arts education allows them to express that.” ■

The DLRC is located at 116 S. Michigan Ave, on the 13th flr. Hours: Mon.–Fri. 9a.m.–5p.m. (312)499-4278.

The office of Student Affairs is pleased to announce the

SAIC Excellence in Leadership Award:

Service, Advocacy, Innovation, Community

Nominate your peers for one of sixteen \$500 awards and two \$1000 awards!

Nominations are due on Friday, March 20, 2009 at 4:30pm.

Nomination and Application Process

Students have the opportunity to nominate their peers. All nominated students will be asked to complete an application for the award.

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Bankrupted by Student Loans

The quagmire of student debt

BY MORGAN GLIEDMAN

One year ago, when I saw the big envelope from SAIC in my mailbox, the farthest thing from my mind was the \$35,400 a year tuition. A few months later, on the lawn in Central Park and in less time than it takes to drink a latte, I e-signed my way into dizzying debt. Following Congress's Friday the Thirteenth passage of the \$787 billion economic stimulus bill (the second of its kind in four months), and President Obama's February 18 announcement of a \$75 billion foreclosure prevention program, many overburdened Americans are now calling for a bailout of a different kind, one that would cancel student loan debt and allow students like us to graduate without six-figure bounties on our futures.

While initially it might seem like student debt is less of a problem than our other economic emergencies, this is fast becoming a situation our society can no longer afford to ignore. In 2007 more than 27% of Americans held at least a bachelor's degree, with an additional 54% attending or having attended some college, and the average college graduate in 2007 left school \$20,098 in debt (up a staggering \$10,848 from 1993). And then there is the fact that according to Nellie Mae, a subsidiary of student loan giant Sallie Mae, the average graduate student has more than \$5,800 in credit card debt.

We are entering the job market in what top economists are calling the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression; *MSN Money's* recommendation to limit your total borrowing to less than two-thirds of your expected annual salary your first year out of school seems impossible in theory and simply ridiculous when talking about BFA and MFA students at an elite, tuition-based art school.

With tuition continuing to rise each year as endowments decline due to the economic crisis, it has remained relatively easy for a student with nonexistent credit and a limited understanding of a basic checking account to commit him or herself to tens of thousands of dollars in Federal Stafford Loans, PLUS loans and private loans. Though there is a six-month grace period after graduation before you must begin repaying your Stafford Loans, your loans accrue interest each and every day (outstanding principal balance times interest rate and divided by 365).

The feds pay the interest on your subsidized loans while you are in school, during the grace period, and during any authorized deferments. However, with an unsubsidized loan you've got to pay up, and if at first your principal balance seemed somewhat fathomable, the interest is what will screw you in the end. Though it is possible to receive an economic hardship forbearance if you are say, unemployed when your grace period runs out, the months march on as your debt grows exponentially, and it is easier than you think to find yourself in default—which is when a federal loan has been delinquent for 270 days (for private loans, it is a much shorter time frame).

According to the New York-based debt collection agency ConServe, as of 2008 there was about \$60 billion in defaulted student loan debt. For a student who took out \$40,000 at a 6.8% interest rate and plans to repay her loan in a term of ten years, her monthly payments would be about \$460. Of course, there are also extended payment plans and graduated payment plans, but for a recent grad who can barely pay the ComEd bill, four hundred dollars a month might as well be four thousand.

When I graduated from NYU in 2006 I was fortunate enough to stumble upon a well-paying cash job, and I had relatively few expenses; however, even with my obsessive online banking and my constant, acute awareness of how much money I had in my checking and savings accounts, it was not long before the Citibank Student Loan department was harassing my answering machine and my mailbox was overflowing with threatening letters. The U.S. Department of Education has turned to private collections agencies, and in 2004 Sallie Mae became the nation's largest debt collector. Private companies receive a percentage of the debts they collect and are therefore significantly more motivated to track them down.

Now, the Department of Education, like the IRS and Department of Health and Human Services, has the terrifying ability to garnish wages and seize tax refunds without a court order (methods formerly reserved for pursuing tax debt or unpaid child support). Furthermore, there is no statute of limitations on student loan debt and collections companies have high-tech databases to hunt down defaulted borrowers and analyze who is most likely to be in the position to repay.

I don't think I'm alone in not having thoroughly read the terms and conditions of my loans before I acquired them. But even if I had, unless you have got mega-rich parents

Unless you have mega-rich parents, it is impossible to avoid accruing loans in college or graduate school.

willing to shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars for your education, it is nearly impossible to avoid taking out any loans in the course of your college or graduate career.

Unlike in cases of credit card or other unsecured debt (an unsecured loan is one not backed by collateral), bankruptcy is not an option to escape student loan debt. Part of the theory behind this is that your education will lead to a high-paying job that will enable you to pay back the cost of your education (and then some), and that this debt is a contract the borrower knowingly and intentionally entered into. Under the United States Bankruptcy Code, there are six types of bankruptcy, with Chapter 7 (basic liquidation) and Chapter 13 (rehabilitation with a payment plan) being the most popular for individual consumers. Bankruptcy is a complicated, pricey process involving lots of paperwork and court appearances, and a Chapter 7 bankruptcy tarnishes one's credit report for ten years. In 2008, however, more than 1.1 million Americans filed for bankruptcy (up 32% from the previous year), and the stigma surrounding personal bankruptcy is lessening as bankruptcy filings become more prevalent.

In 2005 our new Vice President, Joe Biden (then the senior senator from Delaware), voted for the The Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005—a Republican-sponsored bill which gave privately-funded student loans the same legal standing as federally-funded loans guaranteed by the federal government. Under Section 523 of the amended Bankruptcy Code, it is only possible to discharge student loan debt when a failure to discharge would impose undue hardship on the debtor. This involves filing an adversary proceeding petition to get a determination on the undue hardship matter, and it is difficult if not impossible to win. Under the Brunner Test, the debtor must prove that she cannot maintain a minimal standard of living if forced to repay student loans, that the exigent circumstances are likely to be permanent, and that she has made good faith efforts



Staff illustration by Aurelie Beatley

to repay the loan (such as negotiating with the loan-holder and applying to well-paying jobs). As a partner from a local Chicago bankruptcy firm told me, "It's not impossible to get your student loans cancelled, but the standards are such that you would have to have such extreme mental or physical handicaps that you would never want to be in that category."

While consolidating all your loans into one big loan with a longer repayment term is one option, there are also opportunities for full or partial federal loan forgiveness. This can be done by performing volunteer work for organizations like AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and VISTA. The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 is a program that will discharge remaining student loans after ten years of full-time public service employment—in concurrence with the borrower making 120 payments through the Direct Loan program—though the IRS does currently treat any discharged debt as taxable income.

Considering the crappy job market and lack of viable solutions for paying back student loans in a timely manner before they balloon uncontrollably, it is no surprise that the Facebook group "Cancel Student Loan Debt to Stimulate the Economy" already has 70,836 members since New York attorney Robert Applebaum started it a few weeks ago. "Some of us have taken advantage of Federal Stafford Loans and other programs to finance higher education, presumably with the understanding that an advanced degree equates with higher earning power in the future... the debt we've accrued to obtain such degrees have crippled our ability to reap the benefits of our educations," Applebaum states in the group's mission statement. To get on this bandwagon and urge President Obama to forgive student loans, visit www.thepetitionsite.com/1/Real-Economic-Stimulus-For-give-Student-Loans.

At times, it seems like the best option would be to jump ship, escape to Europe, or perhaps go down the gloomy road of paying for my education on a credit card and then attempt bankruptcy in the future. For now, all students like me can do is hope that our new President will address our generation's student loan crisis before it is too late. ■

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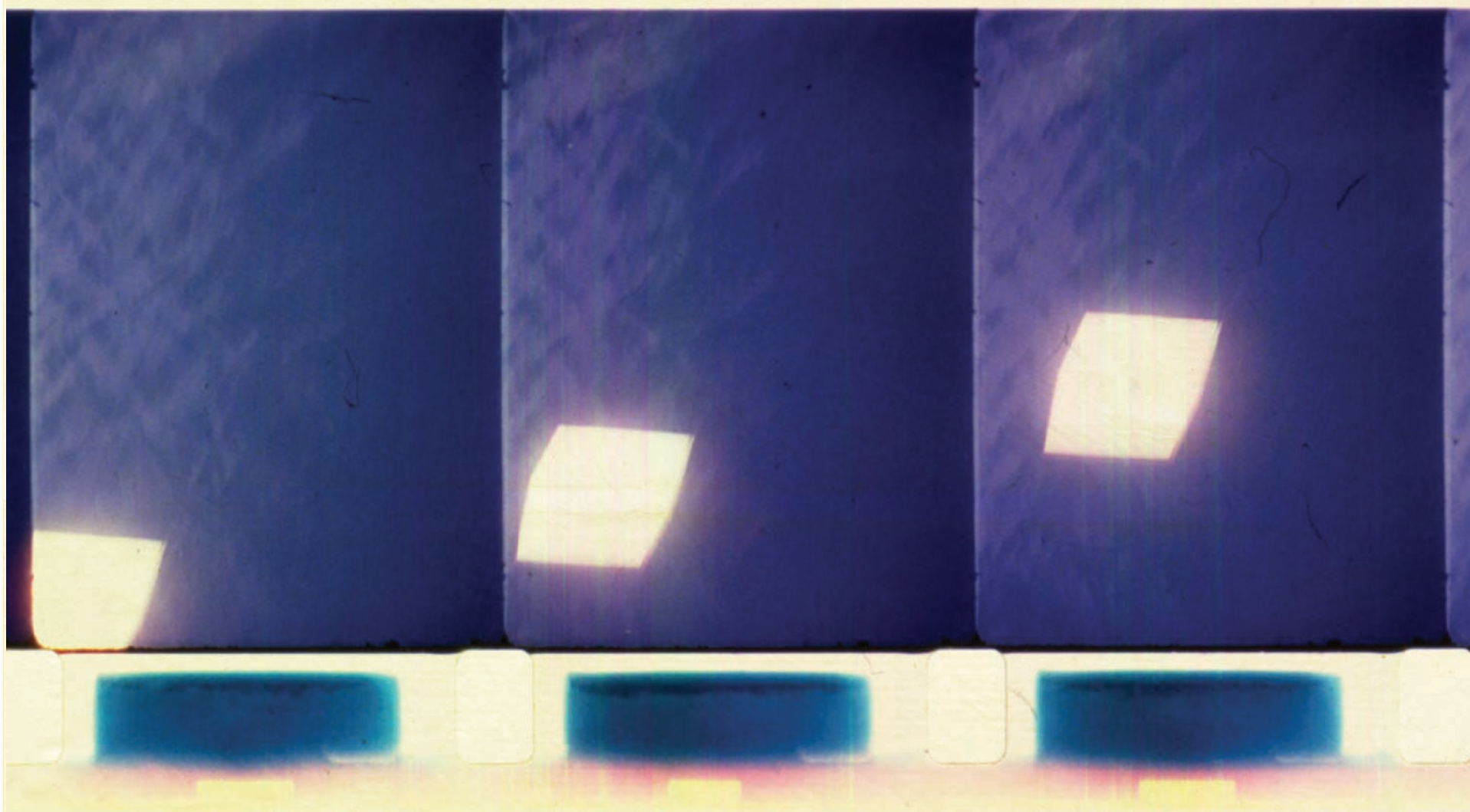
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SPECIAL PULL-OUT SECTION

f NEWSMAGAZINE

THE MOVING IMAGE



• Interviews with MICROCINEMA INTERNATIONAL, LLOYD KAUFMAN, HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS • Articles on SOMALIWOOD, Chicago MEDIA ACTIVISM, the STILLED MOVING IMAGE, DISNEY'S controversial new film, VCU FRENCH FILM FESTIVAL, CHICAGO'S CINEMA UNDERGROUND, loving JOHN HUGHES and hating romantic COMEDIES • Plus Top 10 SIN-EPHILES and a moving image PHOTO ESSAY

Staff photo by Adam Neese



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Dog Rolls, 2004/ Video Still from *89 seconds at Alcázar*
Eve Sussman & The Rufus Corporation

The Stilled Moving Image

The story the excerpted cinematic instant tells

BY EMILY BAUMAN

The stilled moving image is the moment that the video is paused or the filmic instant is excerpted. It is the moment removed from narrative and cinematic flow. However, the excerpted image remains caught in what Laura Mulvey described in *Death 24x a Second* (2006) as the central paradox of cinema: “the co-presence of movement and stillness, continuity and discontinuity.” So, while the stilled moving image is the image that deconstructs itself by halting the illusion of action—laying bare the constructed nature of cinema—it is also the immobile image that refuses to stay still.

Cinema developed out of an investment in fantasy, illusion and fiction, and its effects are entwined with them as well. The social anthropologist Alfred Gell argued that from the creation of the magic lantern and camera obscura to the photograph, the moving picture and special effects, the development of technology has been inextricably tied to our playful instincts and pursuit of amazement (as opposed to tools that fulfill the necessities of survival). In other words, technology is symbiotically linked to enchantment, so that our imagination is permanently at work in relation to the images that technological advancement produces. This link explains the human ability to see movement and action—a story—where none has been explicitly provided. This potentiality exists in a second or two of video, the movie still, the photograph and even the painted picture.

For example, without completely stopping the video’s movement, Candace Breitz’s *Babel Series* (1999) deconstructs narrative by taking clips out of context: syllables out of music videos that constitute the fundamentals of speech, repeating them over and over again in a chorus. She breaks these fully formed moving images apart and reconstitutes a moving image of her own that focuses on the construction of language rather than the construction of a visual vocabulary. However, most of these images—like 1980s Madonna saying “pa” like a skipping record—are immediately recognizable to us anyway, betraying their origins and (depending on how well you remember “Papa Don’t Preach”) the rest of the song, or even the video they have been excerpted from.

Broken down to the iconic movie image—a still of the shower scene in *Psycho* or a frozen Tony Montana in *Scarface* unable to utter “Say hello to my little friend!”—images that are popular culture lingua franca tell their story independent of their story, because we have seen them so many times that the image, soundtrack and sequence transcribe themselves over our eyelids; narratives and scenes are automatically keyed by the image as stimulus. Kristan Horton’s *Dr. Strangelove Dr. Strangelove* (2007), whose reconstructed



Empty Set, 2004 /Production Still from *89 seconds at Alcázar*
Photo by Benedikt Partenheimer for The Rufus Corporation

film stills from the infamous 1964 Kubrick film act as immediately recognizable iconography exemplifies this process of imaginative recreation.

So, why is it that we never seem to see the stilled moving image as an actually still image? When we look at an Eadweard Muybridge series, do we see a succession of individual images, or do we see a moving image stilled to its component parts? Do we imagine the milliseconds in between each frame that he was unable to capture and that make the horse’s gallop into the smooth and graceful movement

that we know it was? I would argue that, even if we were only given one of the images alone, it is impossible for us not to imagine the sequence as moving (Richard Prince’s *Untitled (cowboy)* (1989), for example). Think of even the most unsuccessful flip-book: our minds will fill in the gaps in its jerky movements in attempts to make the flimsy imitation of motion coalesce.

However, this inclination moves beyond a fantastic recreation based in the promise of a filmic narrative or process of movement that an image has been separated from. Even paintings offer themselves up to our imaginary extension. Eve Sussman’s *89 Seconds at Alcázar* (2004)—a video tableau of Diego Velazquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656)—exemplifies the way we experience the durational life of a painting. Reenacting the events taking place in and around the painter during the time that it took to make the painting, Sussman’s 360° staging of the scene in the room swirling around Velazquez brings to life an image whose form has been alive in the imagination of art historians and viewers for centuries, attesting to this flight of fancy that had formerly been the property of the mind.

Similarly, the photograph can gain life, also taking on a narrative structure. Projected as part of a slide show, stumbled upon in a scrapbook, framed on a mantle, the photograph promises a before and after the moment it was captured. This is the aspect of photography that fascinated Roland Barthes: the imprint of the past-presence of the what has been (the subject and/or event that is now gone). Our minds reawaken this once-presence. The details, be them Barthes’ dry and universal studium or his piercing and enlivening punctum, extend stories. In Barthes’ case, a James Van Der Zee image of a family in Harlem is taken across time and space to give the young woman at its far right the life and characteristics of his aunt, whose memory is triggered by his misrecognition of a belt buckle, then a shoe and finally a necklace in this image.

And yet there is a lot of truth to the assertion that we live in a disenchanted world; one in which superstition and magic have been abandoned for secular rationality. While the history of cinema and moving images somewhat deny this assertion, and to a certain extent we are still aware of our own quest for greater realms of outer-body experience based in amazement and whimsy, we certainly do not lead lives in which a desire for or experience of enchantment is daily present. The pervasiveness of technology in our everyday lives and the literalness with which it presents itself decreases its wonder.

However, despite the fact that these forms of imagery and entertainment have become pedestrian, perhaps we can recover some of their wonder and begin to acknowledge that things like the insistent movement imagined in the stilled moving image offers us a glimpse back into the world of enchantment which technology sprang out of. Perhaps we just do not notice it because it is so mundane, and technological jargon has taken its supernatural claims away. **f**

Schadenfreude Celluloid

Take pleasure in the pain
of other artists' love lives

Pain drives the creative process,
right? And what can cause more
pain than that of love gone wrong?
Here are mostly sensationalized
and fictionalized film accounts of
famous visual artists' relationships.

BY MONICA LABELLE

chilled



Fur

2006, Nicole Kidman

A completely fictitious and flirty friendship with her freakish neighbor leads Diane Arbus to her career-making subject matter. Her marriage falls apart and she gains fame.



Girl With a Pearl Earring

2003, Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson

A house cleaner captures the romantic attention of Johannes Vermeer, an exceptional artist whose barrier to riches is his time-consuming perfection. She inspires him and they have a dangerous affair right under his wife's nose.

lukewarm



Crumb

1994 (documentary), Robert Crumb

Perhaps it's Robert Crumb's unceasing ass and leg fetish that prompts the tagline: "Weird sex. Obsession. Comic books." Crumb ultimately comes off as sympathetic and deeply individualistic in this documentary, which features interviews with his exes.



Love is the Devil

1998, Daniel Craig and Tilda Swinton

An unlikely meeting leads to an unlikely romance in this story of Francis Bacon and his tumultuous relationship with boxer and thief George Dyer. In the end, their insecurities destroy their relationship.



Klimt

2006, John Malkovich

John Malkovich (go-to man for moody villains) plays the Austrian artist whose lusty paintings now decorate dorm rooms everywhere in poster form. In this movie, women swoon and submit to him left and right.



Black White + Gray

2007, Robert Mapplethorpe

This is an actual documentary featuring actual people who actually interacted with the artist when he was alive. It focuses on the relationship between Robert Mapplethorpe and Sam Wagstaff, a curator.

hot mess



Surviving Picasso

1996, Anthony Hopkins

This movie follows Pablo Picasso's decade-long affair with a woman 40 years his junior. He bullies, cheats on and manipulates poor Francoise Gilot, a gorgeous aspiring artist.



Lust for Life

1956, Kirk Douglas

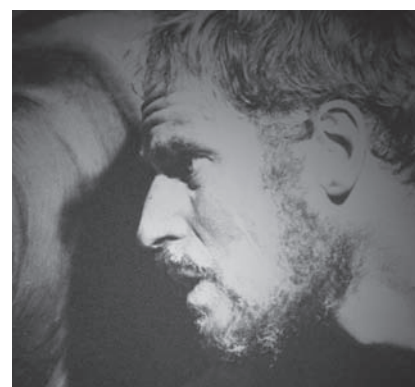
Vincent VanGogh meets failure everywhere he turns, including in his relationships. The take-away lesson? If you can't get love during life, there's still hope for super-fame after death.



I Shot Andy Warhol

1996, Lily Taylor

OK, so this movie isn't so much about love as it is about being pissed off. Lily Taylor plays Valerie Solanas, a woman fed up with a misogynistic—but glamorous!—art world.



The Agony and the Ecstasy

1965, Charlton Heston and Rex Harrison

This is the sexy story of Michelangelo's troubles while painting the Sistine Chapel for Pope Julius II. Harrison, as the pontiff, essentially reprises his *My Fair Lady* role as Professor Henry Higgins (Heston plays Eliza).

1 Screen Therefore 1 Am

Film Defining National Identity

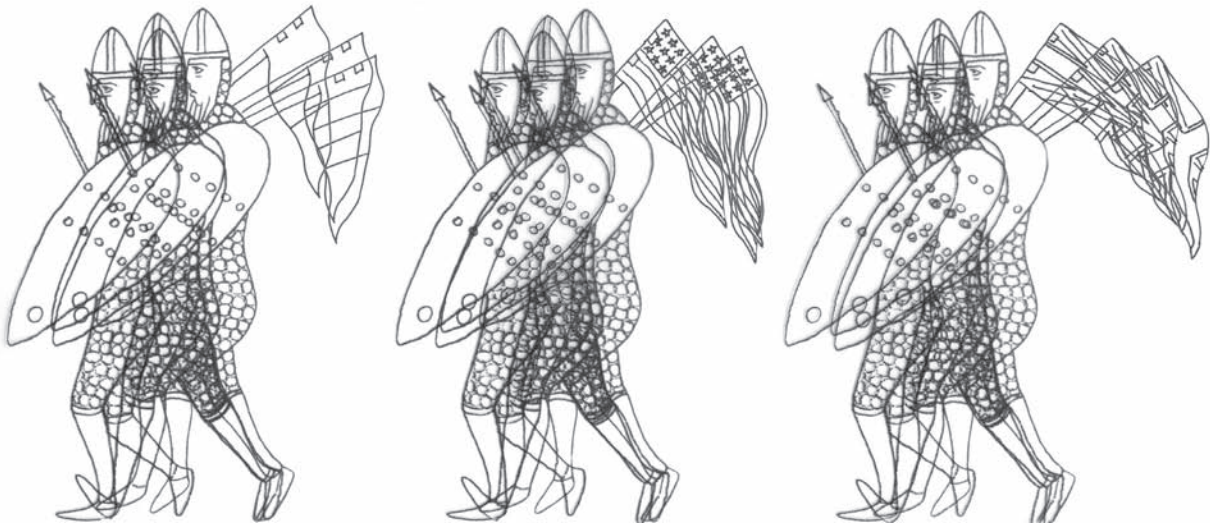
BY AURÉLIE BEATLEY

So, in the words of Lester Bangs, here's a theory for you to disregard completely: film is one of the few mediums that can effectively describe and recreate an audience's identity.

It has broad scale appeal, it is a simple juncture between art and entertainment and, most of all, it opens up new possibilities. It suggests information about our nature, about who we are and what makes us emote—I was watching this awful chick flick yesterday, for example, and while I couldn't quite bring myself to take it seriously (it was *PS: I Love You*), I also couldn't quite keep myself from sobbing uncontrollably. So when this power of suggestion and definition is used in a serious fashion, to articulate history or a certain people's cultural identity, the impact is enormous.

There are many examples of films used as defining points for an ideology, a culture, or an event that can form a national consciousness. The early propagandist films are still taught in modern editing classes as the pinnacle of masterful suggestion. Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* or Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* for instance, are extraordinarily adroit and shameless exploitations of historical events used to suggest a particular political creed to their audiences. These are films that helped define nations.

In more recent history films have also been used to digest history and make sense of events that traumatize us and redefine our identities as a communal whole. Films like Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* processed the war in Vietnam. *The Battle of Algiers*, a controversial faux-documentary on the terrorist beginnings of the Algerian freedom initiative filmed four years after the end of the Algerian war, helped France understand the events that led to the rupture with the old North African colonies. These films, and their ilk (there are too many to list), form a body of work that functions as art, entertainment, and a cultural therapy session for their audiences. They work because people walk into movie theatres seeking entertainment, and because they aren't girding their loins for an encounter with Important Stuff or Art or History; they are simply looking forward to a night out and some puffed, seasoned corn. This keeps them open to suggestion it's a bit like tricking your audience into caring by blindsiding them with Things That Matter cloaked as fun.



Staff Illustration by Aurélie Beatley

There are also the films that recreate or reinterpret our history and give voice to a pre-existing identity in times of crisis. Films like *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, or *Braveheart*, or even *Pan's Labyrinth*, which present a certain version of the past that tugs at our heartstrings and confronts us with, if not the facts, then a least a feeling for the times and their (now-mythical) importance. These are films that you come out of proud to be Irish, or Scottish, or Spanish. Films that you come out of ashamed, sometimes, like *Joyeux Noël* or *Indigènes*. These are irrational reactions to a piece of celluloid that may or may not be actively lying to us. But they are powerful enough that they suggest an identity, they force us to identify with the past and with a particular group of people.

Collecting these films together are nationally-themed film festivals, which exist as collective gatherings for films that define a particular national identity, and as such help promote this identity in areas foreign to it. A good example of this is the immensely popular French film festival at Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, VA. Created in 1993 by Drs Peter and Françoise Kirkpatrick as a scheme to promote the French language department at VCU, the festival has grown and spread into an internationally hailed event which has won plaudits by the French government, with forty-some-odd French actors and directors attending every year. It also offers a series of master classes, and holds a defining role in the promotion of French culture in the States.

This year's festival will take place on March 27-29, and the turnout is expected to be great. When I discussed the festival with Dr. Kirkpatrick, I asked him why he and his wife had felt compelled to start it. He mentioned the will to stimulate the French department, but the larger idea was to help further French culture and Anglo-French relations. This is, in many ways, a nationalistic experiment. "It just keeps growing and growing," said Dr. Fitzpatrick, pointing out that the will to experience foreign culture and the need to revisit your own when expatriated is easily catered to by the cinema. Much of the French expat community in DC has attended the festival and, in the words of Marianne Hill, a friend of mine, "it feels a bit like going home." We all come together for a few days to speak French, watch French movies, listen to French personalities talk about French cinematic developments and culture, and in a sense to update our Frenchness. Or, for the Americans, witness Frenchness in action.

I would argue that this is the lasting achievement of film; that film is the best and most expedient way of suggesting and maintaining identity, national or otherwise. It aids us in understanding our history, digesting events, and creating the next leg of culture as we know it. It gives us definition. ■

To learn more about the VCU French Film Festival, go to www.frenchfilm.vcu.edu



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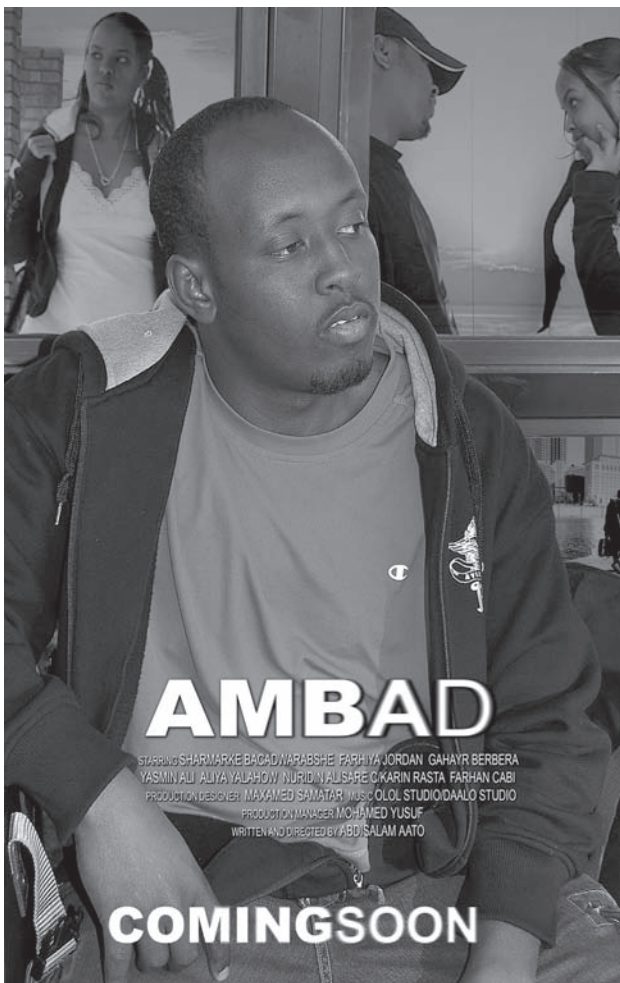
BY ANIA SZREMSKI

For many Americans, the nation of Somalia is a virtually unknown entity whose name conjures up little more than vague notions of piracy, Islamist militants and grave famine. The 33-year old Somali refugee Abdisalam Aato is trying to change all that, one movie at a time. Aato has been giving voice to an entire generation of Somalis since 2003, creating a veritable capital of Somali filmmaking on the way. Located in the unlikely town of Columbus, Ohio, Aato's Olol Films has become the center of an industry that some have dubbed Somaliwood. Capitalizing on cheap digital formats and underground bootleg distribution, Olol Films has become a leader in the increasingly active realm of third world filmmaking.

A small city in the middle of the Midwest, Columbus may not seem like an obvious choice for a refugee filmmaker to set up shop. However, Columbus is home to the one of the largest communities of Somali refugees in the nation, with at least 45,000 Somali residents and around 500 Somali-owned businesses in the city, according to the Somali Community Association of Ohio. Columbus was Aato's final stop in a journey that took him from watching movies as a kid in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, to running the world's first Somali-owned and operated film company.

It was in Mogadishu that the filmmaker developed a passion for cinema. He describes his older brother taking him to the movie theater for the first time when he was five years old, an experience which impressed Aato so much, he would soon be spending five to seven days a week in the theaters. Since the movies were dubbed in Italian (the southern half of Somalia was once an Italian colony), Aato learned the language at a local cultural institute in order to understand the films by his cinematic idols, including Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Quentin Tarantino.

When civil war broke out in 1991, Aato and his family were among the hundreds of thousands of Somalis who fled Mogadishu. After spending four years in various refugee camps in Kenya, Aato and his siblings obtained U.S. visas and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1996. Here, the 20-year old worked in a warehouse, volunteering for the local community access TV and radio station in his free time.



Photo, Abdisalam Aato

Although he had never used a computer or video camera before arriving in the U.S., Aato quickly picked up the new skills. He bought his own home video camera, learned how to edit the film at the TV station, and began to contemplate opening his own film company.

Aato and his brother moved to Columbus in 2001 and founded a film company whose name reflected their experience as refugees (Olol is said to be the sound that lonely camels make when separated from their partners and children). Significantly, they chose to write their scripts in the Somali language, an even more radical move considering the fact that even in Somalia films aren't screened in Somali. Their first feature film, *Raajo* (or Hope), was shot in the summer of 2003. Aato wrote, directed and produced the

film, employing friends as actors and technicians, using local Somali musicians to create a soundtrack, and financing the entire project through the generous donations of friends and family: "We do a lot of begging to finance our films," Aato says.

The movie, which focuses on the troubles and travails of young Somali refugees, was an enormous success in the Somali community. And though movie theatres are only intermittently safe to attend in Mogadishu, Aato claims that his movies are widely available throughout Somalia within three days of being released, thanks to a thriving bootleg industry. Through similarly illegal routes of distribution, Aato's movies have reached Somali communities all over the world, attracting a huge following as far away as New Zealand and Australia.

Although he doesn't stand to earn any profits from these unusual distribution methods, Aato embraces them. "I don't do it for the money," he says. "I want to write and preserve the history of this generation, and educate the generation to come." The filmmaker says that the lack of Somali movies or other media from the past has doomed the stories of former generations to oblivion. Aato's goal is to help future generations of Somalis remember what came before them.

Aato's movies aren't just for Somalis, though. He also hopes to introduce Somali culture to the rest of the world, and lend some dimensionality to Westerners' largely negative understanding of his nation. To this end, Aato has also joined the Somali refugee community's strong online presence with the creation of a website (bartamaha.com), which features political commentary, video clips of musical events and poetry readings, and short films, with content in both Somali and English.

Today, Olol Films has produced several shorts and music videos, five feature-length films and two documentaries, with several more projects planned for the future. Aato's films have been shown in film festivals on the East Coast, in Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The growing success of Olol Films is testament to the digital image's empowering potential for those who have long been denied access to traditional media outlets.

The popularity of Somaliwood is on par with the success of Third Cinema film industries, like Nollywood (the Nigerian film industry, now the third largest in the world, which also capitalizes on digital production and bootleg distribution techniques). Through these means, the peoples of economically depressed or war-torn nations are able to tell their own stories, write their own histories, and lay claim to an all-important agency to determine how they are represented—an agency that is long overdue. ■

To learn more about Olol Films, visit www.ololfilm.com

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Microcinema International

A company that strives to spread independent/experimental works

BY BRANDON KOSTERS

Microcinema International is a company that was founded in 1996 by Joel S. Bachar and Patrick Kwiatkowski. Bachar had started curatorial work for screenings of small independent works in Seattle in the early 1990s. Kwiatkowski said that they "joined forces [in 1996] to turn this into a professional activity." Presently, Bachar is serving as President of the company from his office in San Francisco, California, and Kwiatkowski as the CEO in Houston, Texas.

The term "microcinema" was coined in the early 1990s. It can denote both low budget/unconventional film production, as well as low budget/unconventional film exhibition. Bachar said, "I had an affinity with the coining of the term. I learned it when we were doing our screenings in Seattle. It seemed fitting."

Bachar and Kwiatkowski began by hosting screenings in Seattle, Houston and San Francisco. Many of the early shows were coordinated through U.S. mail exchanges of VHS cassettes between the two. "Back then, not that many people were doing this," said Kwiatkowski. "Microcinemas started popping up. We started to see them at places like university campuses." Many microcinemas have high turnover rates, Kwiatkowski explained: "A lot of young people do it for free, and then they move on to other things. There is a constant renewal for these kinds of venues."

Today, Microcinema International hosts screenings domestically and internationally; their programs have been seen in 50 countries. Every year, the company coordinates between four and six programs, including their Independent Exposure series. Kwiatkowski says that while Microcinema receives between

700 and 1,000 submissions annually, only 50 a year are selected to show in Independent Exposure. He admits that there is clearly, "still a need for curatorial activity."

The phenomenon of YouTube and video streaming on the web has certainly had an impact on Microcinema. "It's been a double-edged sword," said Kwiatkowski. "It helped us in the beginning," but now the company is "at a crossroads because of the internet. Fewer people go out to see showings now. We used to say 'we show things you can't see anywhere else.' You can now."

"The next phase," Kwiatkowski says, "is more focused on atmosphere and trying to rebuild a community." As a result, they regularly host screenings at school auditoriums, bars and restaurants, multi-purpose arts organizations, and music venues. Among the more peculiar places that Microcinema has shown are an old gunpowder factory in Belgrade during the Kosovo war; a research center in Antarctica; and a base camp on Mount Everest.

Microcinema has a surprising alumni roster to brag about, including several high profile artists, like Louise Bourgeois, Maya Deren, Kasumi, Bill Plympton and Chel White. Plympton is serving as a juror this year and will be helping to select the films that will be shown at Independent Exposure. "We are expecting a lot of animation this year," says Kwiatkowski. "Hopefully it will be edgy."

What kind of work does Microcinema typically accept? "It really does vary," says Bachar. One universal rule is that the piece has to be 15

minute or less in duration. In terms of content? "It [can be] a feeling, an original way of telling a story, the use of sound and music. We shy away from typical film school narratives."

Kwiatkowski says, "When you see a highly polished short film, for us it's not that interesting. We've always opted for people who are experimenting."

A high degree of professionalism when submitting works is also helpful. Bachar says, "I think it's just always good to think of intention. What is your intention as a filmmaker?" He says



Staff Illustration by Matt Lane

it is always a good practice to "look and research the criteria for each festival. If the festival asks for a 15 minutes film, don't send a 16-minute film. Sometimes we'll send out a call for comedies and we'll receive a horror movie from somebody. These are obvious mistakes."

Bachar says it's also a good practice to write a good synopsis for your film, provide good still images, and have a good promotional kit.

Both founders of Microcinema seem pleased with the fruit of their labors? Kwiatkowski says, "I get a real kick out of people who show with us, and stay with it. We've seen artists sticking with their craft." The other reward, he says, "is seeing people in the crowd react."

Bachar says, "Our impetus and passion has always been to give a voice to little guys and gals. Our motivation is getting small works out there." ■

For more information visit www.microcinema.com, Microcinema International's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/microcinema or the Microcinema International Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/pages/Microcinema-International/27977309710

Microcinema has shown
in an old gun powder factory,
Antarctica, and on Mt. Everest.

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Staff Illustration by Matt Lane

Disney's most recent attempt to "get it right" with 2009's *The Princess and the Frog*

Sometimes you have to kiss a lot of frogs...

BY MARGARET DI GIULIO

In 2006, directly after their acquisition of Pixar, Disney's animation department declared their intentions to return to traditional 2D animation. Set to release Christmas Day, 2009, *The Princess and the Frog* will be Disney's first feature-length animated production since 2004's *Home on the Range*, as well as its first Broadway-style musical since *Mulan* in 1998. Additionally, this will be the first time Disney has made a film that has taken place in a specific US city. And last, but certainly not least, this will be the first time Disney has presented its audience with an African-American princess.

Needless to say, the hype and hysteria surrounding this film began the second Disney announced in 2007 that it was planning to make a new animated classic, called *The Frog Princess*, about a black chambermaid in New Orleans, circa 1920 (the Jazz Age). A slew of negative press and unhappy Mouseketeers expressed their concerns that the title established a linguistic relationship between the first black princess and a frog, leading Disney to re-title the film *The Princess and the Frog* in order to deflect the negative connotations.

But the controversy did not stop there. Just Google "the princess and the frog" and you will get thousands of blogs either praising Disney for finally creating a princess for black girls, or vehemently accusing Disney for overt racist and sexist content in the new film. Well, Disney... it seems to me that you are damned if you do, damned if you don't.

But let's really think about this... If we are going to appraise the value of this new film, perhaps we should do it within the context of all other Disney animated "classics," starting with the very first: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. We have young Snow White, banished from the castle to become the maid to seven men... exactly. Like Cinderella and Princess Aurora (Sleeping Beauty), her beauty is both the source of her disenfranchisement as well as the cause of her "Happily Ever After."

Take into account the premise of almost any fairy tale you've ever heard and the fact that many of these stories are derived from sources ranging from Mother Goose to the Brothers Grimm to Aesop's Fables, Disney

didn't come up with this beautiful-naive-girl-made-to-live-in-squalor-only-until-she-can-be-rescued-by-a-prince trope out of thin air. However, pay close heed to the word "derived": their editing and pairing down of these originally complex tales (Disneyfication, I believe it is called), have bought into a particularly simplified portrayal of female (non)protagonists.

Then of course, there is the issue of political correctness regarding race. I think it is safe to say that when it comes to Disney we are dealing with stereotypical representations for the masses. (Do we even need to give you examples here?)

So, if we all know and can attest to Disney's ceaseless onslaught of racist, sexist, classist and elitist assumptions played out in magical colors with a "Happily Ever After" tagline, why are we so shocked at Mama Odie, the good voodoo priestess of the Bayou, or that the princess was originally named Maddy (short for

It would be great to see a Disney film where the princess found "Happily Ever After" through a satisfying job and a close social network of friends and family.

the French Madeleine)? Actually, the outrage seems to have only been over the princess's "slave name," which led Disney to change it to Tiana. Is this fixated outrage because, unlike the voodoo priestess (or the hyenas and "Injun" faces of past movies), she will become the next iconic Disney Princess: Halloween 2010's most sought after costume?

Personally, I think, it would be great to see a Disney film where the princess found "Happily Ever After" in a satisfying job and a close social network of friends and family instead of in the ever elusive Prince Charming who, in the end, probably divorces her for her younger version. But—despite *Mulan*'s heroic attempt—*The Princess and the Frog* makes it seem as though we aren't ready to give up the "dream" quite yet (although,

to be fair, Princess Tiana does encounter her own transformation into a frog and a perilous journey with her prince before she gets her rags to riches, magical kiss, and happy ending). I guess I'll just have to get over Disney's failure to deliver the full experience after the age of 12.

But let's not ignore that they've at least made an effort: kudos to Disney for its recent committed attempt to extricate itself from the Eurocentric fairy tales of old, and embrace sources such as *Arabian Nights* and Chinese legend in order to create international princesses. However, this one seems like a reversion: adapted from "The Frog Prince," a German-Romanticist fairy tale, *The Princess and the Frog* attempts multiculturalism by arbitrarily relocating the action to a New Orleans Creole community for reasons that are entirely outside of the narrative's needs. While the geographical flexibility is laudable, the seemingly random choice of location makes Disney look vaguely disingenuous, in a demagogic, pandering sort of way.

Interestingly, the comments posted online by parents of young African American girls have been, for the most part, positive. They feel that, finally—after years of watching their daughter's dress up as "white" princesses—they will be offered a real chance to connect with this new heroine. It seems that these parents have come to expect the stereotype-laden, consumer-ready Disney films that cater to an audience less socially aware than many would like to admit. But hey, the movie does have Oprah's stamp of approval (she is so gung-ho about the first African American Disney Princess that she's playing Tiana's mother).

Perhaps this begs the question: when do children see race? At what age do they connect their skin color with the skin color of their favorite cartoons? Will young African American girls truly relate on a deeper level to this black princess, or will it simply alert them to the fact that their past heroines weren't truly "theirs"? But really, were there fewer Jasmynes on Halloween of 1993 than Ariel's in 1990?

So, Mickey... hooray... good for you. Way to give the black girls a doll their mothers can identify with, and that they must settle for. 🍌

CHICAGO CINEMA UNDERGROUND 101

A GUIDE TO CHICAGO'S INDEPENDENT CINEMAS, ARCHIVES, AND VIDEO STORES

BY ANIA SZREMSKI & BETH CAPPER

THE NIGHTINGALE

Chicago is a city with a constant ebb and flow of independent and alternative spaces for art—when one closes down, another springs up, phoenix-like, in its place. But rarer than the multiple apartment galleries and show spaces is an alternative venue for cinema. Over the past two years, this has been gradually changing. Recent exhibition projects have ranged from the staunchly academic Chicago Cinema Forum to mobile screening projects like Bike-in Cinema. Curated by local cinephiles, Chicago Cinema Forum features screenings of foreign rarities and lost films in 16mm, such as Roberto Rossellini's pseudo-ethnography *India: Matri Bhumi*, and Patrick Deval's *Acéphale* from the Zanzibar film movement. In turn, Bike-in Cinema, organized by Wesley Stokes, also the editor of local underground newspaper *The Skeleton News*, offers double features of well known cult classics and independent works on DVD—in backyards and on rooftops during the summer months—for the more modest film fan.

The Nightingale, a new microcinema which opened April 4 2008, offers the best of both worlds. Started by Christy Lemaster, who has programmed for Chicago Cinema Forum and Onion City, along with roommate Josh Mabe, The Nightingale screens a range of film, video and new media works. Screening works on the film or video-maker's preferred format is important to Lemaster, and when possible she tries screen films on celluloid. "I believe it is a better viewing experience for the audience," she says. "The analog whir of the projector places the experiential reality of light and image front and center. The physicality of film is really seductive to me. I love it because I can comprehend how it works; I can see that light from the bulb is shining through the passing celluloid creating the shuttered illusion that my eye reads as continuous motion."

Making The Nightingale happen was a collaborative effort. The space's 16mm projector is on long-term loan from projectionist and filmmaker Jennifer Fieber, and the P.A. belongs to filmmaker Ben Russell, whose films have also screened at The Nightingale. Lemaster enrolled friends and family to help design the mural and website, and she financed a lot of it herself. "At the time [The Nightingale started] I was working a corporate job and I just poured my entire tax return in buying all the other stuff we needed—like a video projector, folding chairs, a ladder, cables, screening rights etc. I fund most of what The Nightingale



16mm film stills from Nightingale promotional trailer shot by Lori Felker. Courtesy of The Nightingale.

needs by taking donations at the door and the rest I pay for out of pocket."

The films and videos are brought in from U.S. and international distributors and local filmmakers, and there is a strong emphasis on supporting local curators and programmers, such as White Light Cinema, an independent curatorial project of longtime Chicago Filmmakers programmer Patrick Friel. The programming itself is audience centric—more Amos Vogel (Cinema 16) than Jonas Mekas (Anthology Film Archives). "I think my personal sense of programming values accessibility to multiple audiences and is firmly grounded in the healthy fear of not having an audience," Lemaster says. "When I search out stuff to show, I am often impressed by work that has both the artistic chops and a way for people outside of the experimental media world to feel engaged. And I believe strongly that it is a curator's job to help their audience build the vocabulary within the medium to be engaged by work outside of their comfort zone."

As a result, The Nightingale shows an eclectic mixture of current and vintage works of challenging and more accessible experimental film, video and new media alongside documentaries and independent features. Past screenings have included Michelle Citron's feminist essay film *Daughter Rite*, short films by Ben Rivers, a selection of short moving image works by Asian-American women at SAIC, and Kim Longinotto's documentary about Japanese female pro-wrestlers *Gaea Girls*. It can be difficult to cultivate an interest in experimental cinema, particularly in those who aren't well versed in its dense history, and who feel alienated when faced with the often attendant snobbery of film experts. For this reason, Lemaster strives to have filmmakers present to talk about their films afterwards. "This is exactly the way I am growing to have a better understanding and appreciation of experimental film," Lemaster says. "Before four or five years ago, experimental film wasn't even on my radar, and now I am a bit bewitched by it. But I needed a space where I could watch a lot of it and feel comfortable asking questions—I needed a few foothold pieces that interested me and helped me



Film still courtesy of The Nightingale

to feel included, and feel that the whole field wasn't just some big exclusive scene I didn't need to care about. I think building audiences outside of the academic world for experimental film is really important. I think there are a lot of regular movie watchers that long for something more complicated than the quirky narratives that now fill Landmark cinemas across the country. And they'll probably be tempted to Netflix that stuff at home in their pj's anyway."—BC

1084 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago, IL 60622

For upcoming screenings at the Nightingale check out www.nightingaletheatre.org. For Chicago Cinema Forum, see www.chicagocinemaforum.org, and for Bike-in Cinema see myspace.com/bikeincinema.



Film still courtesy of The Nightingale

CONVERSATIONS AT THE EDGE

(Gene Siskel Film Center)

It was Jon Moritsugu and Jacques Boyreau’s nihilistic post-punk document *Hippy Porn* that first got Amy Beste, curator of “Conversations at the Edge” at the Gene Siskel, into experimental cinema. “I had always gone to see art house stuff when I was in high school, but I remember during the first week of classes in my freshman year, I saw *Hippy Porn*, and it blew my mind!” Beste says. “I started going to Starlight Cinema, which was showing this crazy indie stuff coming out of the New York underground scene with this punk rock aesthetic, and then I slowly got acquainted with the more classical avant-garde.”

After graduating she committed herself to a career of film programming, working with the Chicago Underground Film Festival before arriving at the Siskel. For Beste, CATE is meant to push the boundaries of traditional cinema exhibition. “My personal interests are in artists who push the limits of theatrical space, the very limits of film, like by doing live film performances—people who hand manipulate their film, who use overhead projectors, who create an expanded sense of cinema,” she says. “This is one of the only places in the city where people can see this.” So far, this semester’s series seems to be more than accomplishing this goal: featured films cross into other artistic genres, with film meeting music (as in *Sight and Sound: Flingco Sound System*), dance (*The Dance Camera: Locked and Loaded*), literature (*David Gatten*) and even video games (*Cory Arcangel*). “We’re trying to showcase audio-visual multimedia—this kind of thing might play in a rock club and look really poor, but the Gene Siskel is a totally different space,” Beste continues. “We’re trying to show work that’s vital and important to culture, and art at large.”

The series was instituted in 2001 by filmmaker and professor Daniel Eisenberg in partnership with the SAIC’s De-

partment of Film, Video and New Media Studies, and the Video Data Bank. The series was originally intended as a visiting artist screening series held at the school, which would provide SAIC’s film students with exposure to different approaches in the field, and eventually showcase the work of the department’s prestigious alumni. The event soon outgrew its academic confines, however, and found a new home at the Gene Siskel, where its mission has broadened to address the public at large. Since the fall of 2005, the series’ limits have been pushed even farther with Beste’s arrival on the scene.

Beste holds that, right now, the city is experiencing a high point in terms of experimental cinema. With programs like “Conversations at the Edge,” as well as programming at The Nightingale, Roots and Culture, the University of Chicago’s Experimental Film Club and Chicago Filmmakers, the alternative cinema scene has been reenergized.

Capitalizing on that revived energy, Beste says that she would like to continue to build a larger audience for the underground film scene. “I’d like to branch out a little from the series. I’m also trying to expose more people—people in the underground have this kind of punk-rock sensibility and they’re always trying to capture attention that way—but I’d like to take the model of the Lux in London, or the Frieze Art Fair, and commission and film short experimental films to show in front of features, which builds on an old tradition of A and B movies. I’m also thinking of ways to do even more ambitious expanded cinema performances, which wouldn’t necessarily fit in a cinema.” Fans of experimental film should look forward to more exciting innovations in semesters to come.—AS

164 N. State Street. Chicago IL 60601
www.siskelfilmcenter.org



Photo by Jen Mosier

DOC FILMS & FILM STUDIES CENTER

Dating back to 1932, the University of Chicago’s Doc Films claims to be the oldest student-run film society in the country. Doc prides itself on its fully equipped cinema (pretty rare for a student-owned organization), avant-garde programming, and an illustrious history of film critics and filmmakers who got their start as members of the film society. Doc also boasts an impressive record of screening Chicago premieres (including the premiere of *Brokeback Mountain*) and visits from famous directors like Woody Allen and Alfred Hitchcock. Best of all, given the fact the film society is completely volunteer-run and operated, costs are minimal and ticket prices are an unbeatable five bucks (or even cheaper if you buy a membership). At least one night of the week’s programming is dedicated to a particular theme, and the public is encouraged to propose topics and programming ideas; the only stipulation is that none of the proposed films have been screened at Doc in the past four years. The Film Studies Center is also located at the university, and is the home of U of C’s Experimental Film Club. The FSC screens mostly experimental and avant-garde works along similar lines to Gene Siskel’s “Conversations at the Edge.”—AS

Doc Films, University of Chicago, Ida Noyes Hall 1212 E. 59 Street Chicago, IL 60637 and Film Studies Center, Cobb Hall 306, 5811 S. Ellis Ave, Chicago, IL 60637
www.docfilms.uchicago.edu
www.filmstudiescenter.uchicago.edu

BLOCK CINEMA

For northerners who are loath to travel all the way to Lakeview (much less Hyde Park), Block Cinema at Northwestern University in Evanston is well-equipped to serve your independent film needs. Run by the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art and the university’s School of Communica-

tions, Block is the best place in the northern suburbs for independent films, foreign films and documentaries. In the summer, films are occasionally screened on the lawn (for those who like their viewing experience to be punctuated by sounds of overhead planes and attacks from hungry mosquitoes). In addition to publishing a student-authored film criticism magazine, Block also sponsors the Reeltime Film Series, which presents films that incite discussion about

current social issues and innovation in alternative media. This May, Block, Reeltime and Percolator Films will join forces to launch the first-ever Talking Pictures Film Festival, an exciting coup given the cinema’s blandly suburban setting.—AS

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art 40 Arts Circle Drive Evanston, IL 60208
www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/block-cinema



Photo by Jen Mosier

MUSIC BOX THEATRE

The Music Box may not have spotlessly clean (let’s face it: even semi-clean) floors, and its patrons may include the occasional belligerent junkie, but over the past twenty years it has become a staple in Chicago’s alternative cinema scene. Housed in a theatre dating back to 1929 and one of the few historic movie theatres in the country that hasn’t been torn down or converted into something else). The history of the theatre is as variegated as its programming. According to its website, the Music Box was originally built as an intimate theatre for only 800, as opposed to the 3,000 plus occupancy mega theatres that were taking Chicago by storm. As the popularity of the cinema waned, starting in the late ’70s the vision of the Music Box’s owners changed several times; it even spent an infamous stint as a seedy porn theatre. A slightly less ribald repertoire was reinstated in the mid ’80s, when the decision was made to show more foreign and art-house type films, and a second screening room was opened in the early ’90s. Today, some patrons grumble that the main screening room is too often dedicated to money-making mainstream films while the art-house crowd gets stuffed into the small theatre, but the Music Box is still one of the only theatres where you can go and hear live organ on a Sunday morning.—AS

3733 N. Southport Ave. Chicago, IL 60613
www.musicboxtheatre.com



Photo by Jen Mosier

FACETS

For hard-core cinephiles, Facets is cinematic paradise. Famous throughout Chicagoland for the regular blow-out sales in its Vidiothèque, the less cine-savvy amongst us may be surprised to learn that this North Side institution has much more to offer than cheap and obscure videos and DVDs. In fact, this is probably the closest thing Chicago has to Paris’ Forum des Images. Founded in 1975, the two-screen Cinémathèque boasts varied programs of independent, experimental, foreign and art films that are accompanied by a range of events, like director talks and the Cinechat film discussion series. Like the above-mentioned Forum des Images, Facets stresses education with its popular Film School, where die-hard film lovers can enroll to view a series of films grouped around a particular topic (like “The Czech New Wave,” or “Transitory Identities in Cinema”) then discuss them under the guidance of a local expert.—AS >>

1517 W. Fullerton Ave. Chicago, IL 60614
www.facets.org

4 REASONS NOT TO GET NETFLICKS

A GUIDE TO CHICAGO'S MOST AWESOME INDEPENDENT VIDEO STORES

ODD OBSESSION

Any time you ever wanna know more than you could ever possibly want to about a given film, genre of film, era of film, director, etc., etc., stop by Odd Obsession. They have a Godard fanatic, an expert in classic and rare porn, and many other employees with both particular and extensive knowledge about rare, independent, foreign, art-house, cult, experimental, avant-garde and obscure cinema (divided by genre and country of origin,) if there's a film you can't find elsewhere its likely you'll be able to excavate it here.—BC

1822 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago IL 60647
www.myspace.com/oddobsessionmovies

NORTHCOAST VIDEO

A visit to Northcoast is always an experience. To begin with there's the video store shelf stacker, always ready to offer nuggets of wisdom as to what you should rent (his comments on titles are encapsulated by either the words "beautiful" or "great" in a fairly difficult to distinguish accent). Then, there's the awesome music always playing—an eclectic mixture of Slayer, ambient noise, death metal, Albert Ayler, Iraqi pop and M.I.A—depending on which of the idiosyncratic employees is working. Northcoast offers a broad range of art-house and Hollywood, offbeat and mainstream TV, documentaries, classics, and foreign films, arranged "by letter of the alphabet but not alphabetically." If you can't find the film you went there for, you'll find something else you didn't even know you wanted to see, and at \$3.25 a rental, its a bargain!—BC

2014 W. Division St. Chicago IL 60622



Northcoast Video



Brainstorm

Staff Photos by Christian Branch

FACETS

The Facets Videothèque is just one part of the Facets empire, which also includes a Cinémathèque, distribution company and kids film festival. The video store boasts an archive of over 65,000 titles for rent or purchase, many of which are unavailable anywhere else in the city, and the collection is also extensively archived on the Facets website.—BC

1517 W. Fullerton Ave. Chicago, IL 60614 www.facets.org

BRAINSTORM

Brainstorm is a video, comic and gaming store for your inner-geek, or perhaps, your outer geek, as the store's Myspace says: "If you're a comic geek and you want to debate the long term effects of the DC Crisis or the Marvel Civil War or the Wildstorm relaunch of WildCATS and Gen13... great! If you're a film buff and you want to talk about the best of the '60's horror exploitation films, classic foreign films, the best zombie flick or which is better, *Doctor Who* or *Battlestar Galactica*...awesome! If you're a gamer and you get off on digging through boxes of loose HeroClix or flipping through Magic Cards looking for that one card that will make your deck unstoppable...welcome!"—BC

1648 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60622
www.myspace.com/brainstormmcg

GUIDES, DISTRIBUTIONS AND ARCHIVES

CHICAGO FILMMAKERS

If filmmaking classes at SAIC are proving too expensive in these tough economic times, you might wanna consider taking a co-op class at Chicago Filmmakers. Classes are often taught by prolific filmmakers (I took a class taught by Bill Siegal, who co-directed the *Weather Underground*), feature visiting speakers and are incredibly affordable. Any institution that take it upon themselves to offset the expense of movie-making should be religiously supported. Filmmakers also has a screening series (upcoming films include recent work by UIC alum, and Frederick Wiseman's 4-hour documentary *State Legislature*), sponsors both the Onion City Experimental Film and Video Festival and the Reeling Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and distributes a range of film and video works from Luis Buñuel to Lynn Sachs.—BC

1648 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60622
www.myspace.com/brainstormmcg

VIDEO DATA BANK

If you don't know about the rare gems available at The Video Data Bank then you need to start paying more attention. Located in the 112 S. Michigan Building at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on the 3rd Floor, The Video Data Bank has an extensive archive of experimental videotapes ranging from the '60s to present. They also interview, document and archive artists visiting Chicago, featuring, among many others, Vito Acconci, Adrian Piper and Joseph Beuys. The archives feature works by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Peggy Ahwesh, Yvonne Rainer and Sadie Benning, and many more.—BC

1648 W. North Ave. Chicago, IL 60622
www.myspace.com/brainstormmcg

CINE-FILE

CHICAGO GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT CINEMA

CINE-FILE was started by film curator and cineaste Darnell Witt, and is now in the very capable hands of Patrick Friel (White Light Cinema, Onion City) and Christy Lemaster (The Nightingale). "It is a weekly email that highlights the best underground and independent screenings in Chicago, and it has 20+ volunteer writers that keep it up," says Lemaster. "I have learned so much from the boys and girls on that list serve. And a lot of them are just film enthusiasts not makers or programmers, but they consistently provide clever and funny perspectives on some really tough cinema." CINE-FILE's various writers are often found working or volunteering at one of the spotlighted video stores or cinemas. To get the weekly email list go to: <http://cine-file.info/maillinglist/join.html>—BC

Through the Lens of Lived Experience

If a picture tells a thousand words,
a motion picture must tell an entire history

BY JENNIFER SWANN

Some of Chicago's first documentaries were made by its chapter of the Workers' Film and Photo League, which produced *Halsted Street*, a 1931 one-reel documentary about the various ethnic groups along Halsted, as well as 1934's *The Great Depression*. Both films are preserved as archival prints in the collection of the Film Center at SAIC. In 1936, The Film and Photo League shot *Chicago May Day*, a 7-minute, 16 mm newsreel, as well as *Peace Parade*, a 10-minute, 16 mm newsreel.

By the 1970s, documentaries in Chicago shifted from preserving labor union strikes, court trials, and city parades, to capturing political protest and personal struggle. *Conventions: The Land Around Us* is a 1970 documentary edited by Kaye Miller and Gerald Swatez at the Social Sciences Research Film Unit at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. The film is composed of 68 minutes of black and white footage of the '68 Democratic National Convention and related events, interviews, and narration. Howard Alk and Mike Gray's *American Revolution 2* also portrays the riots at the 1968 DNC, as well as the everyday lives of Chicago radical activists.

In the mid '60s, University of Chicago graduates Gordon Quinn and Jerry Temaner founded Kartemquin Films, a documentary production company with a focus on social change. Their first films, told through the eyes of children, teenagers, mothers, veterans, gangsters, and elderly people, told the stories of a couple entering a home for the aged, a maternity ward forced to close due to insufficient funding, and the gentrification of a Lincoln Park neighborhood. Kartemquin's 1984 film *Taylor Chain II* was the first film in the U.S. to document union negotiations, and 1988's *Golub*, a portrait of the Chicago painter Leon Golub, challenged artists, politicians, and the mass media.

Kartemquin co-founder Quinn said their films "are usually not simple crowd pleasers." However, their 1994 documentary *Hoop Dreams* won the audience award for best documentary at Sundance Film Festival and became one of the highest-rated documentaries broadcast on PBS. A decade later, their largest documentary project became a seven-hour PBS miniseries called *The New Americans*, which documented U.S. immigration. Kartemquin's most recent documentary, *Milking the Rhino*, premiered at the TriContinental Film Festival and will broadcast nationally on PBS in Spring 2009.

Filmmaker Justine Nagan distinctly remembers two films that led her to Kartemquin: *Refrigerator Mothers* and *Stevie*, which she saw the same day while working at the Wisconsin Film Festival in college. "I was absolutely floored," she said. "While listening to Gordon Quinn speak about *Refrigerator Mothers* that day, I had no idea that someday he would be my mentor."

Today, Nagan serves as Kartemquin Films' Interim Executive Director and Producer on staff. She was first drawn to filmmaking when she started to "see that it was a way to use creativity to achieve social change" and she is still experiencing the impact of film on public policy and opinion. "Through the creation and distribution of *In The Family*, director Joanna Rudnick has been able to raise awareness around the issue [of genetic testing], pass legislation, support women facing similar life-changing decisions, and give viewers a variety of insights to make informed decisions about their health," said Nagan.

Salome Chasnoff, a Chicago-based filmmaker and former teacher at SAIC, founded Beyondmedia in 1996 after the success of *Beyond Beijing*, a documentary about the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women. "We distributed a lot of tapes, and from there formed the basis of the organization as a way to use media to promote women's issues and give women and girls venues for sharing resources and getting their messages out," said Chasnoff.

A few years earlier in 1990, Chasnoff had organized a yearlong workshop with pregnant teens as part of her dissertation. When Chasnoff showed the workshop participants a video made by a group of teen moms in New York who expressed that being a teen mom was a bad thing, the girls in Chasnoff's workshop became enraged and decided to make their own movie. "It was a very successful project because when people saw their movie," said Chasnoff, "they listened to them for the first time, whereas teachers and parents had looked at them up until this point as renegades, kind of these misbehaving rebels. When they saw them speaking articulately and compassionately, from a television, all of a sudden, people listened to them and they had authority."

With all of the collaborative media projects at Beyondmedia, "it's not just about bringing the issue forward," insisted Chasnoff, "but it's very much through the filter of lived experience. It's not that the video-makers are picking these issues, but that these issues are emerging from their lives." Beyondmedia continues today as an educational organization that leads workshops and teaches media skills to young girls, many of whom don't have access to cameras or computers and have never used any form of media before.

Chasnoff, a fan of unconventional media, is pleased that "because moviemaking is so widespread, standards have less of a rule over it than they used to. Often what I thought to be beautiful broke all the rules. What I made broke all the rules. I would say in that way, people making movies on their cell phones and YouTube movies that are barely legible, I think that's kind of great. That's broken up the rule of standards."

Whether documentaries are made on cell phones, camcorders, or computers, they will continue to serve as a singular form of response to a given personal or political situation. ■

Illustration by Kira Mardikes

AN INTERVIEW WITH LLOYD KAUFMAN

The zany world of Troma's founder

BY BRANDON KOSTERS

Gregarious, good-natured, and with his characteristic bawdy sense of humor, Lloyd Kaufman behaves precisely as you'd expect him to, if you have seen any of his work. Troma Entertainment, the film production/distribution company that he founded in the 1970s with business partner Michael Herz, has been producing and distributing low budget, transgressive cinema for 35 years. Troma is responsible for *The Toxic Avenger* (1984), *Class of Nuke 'Em High* (1986), *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996) and, more recently, *Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead* (2006).

"I went to Yale University in the '60s and I was going to be a teacher, or a social worker, and make the world a better place. Teach people with hooks for hands how to finger-paint. Teach bums how to paint happy faces on beads and string the beads together. But God placed me in a room with the guy who ran the Yale film society during my freshman year. It fucked my life. I kept drifting into screenings, and getting my mind blown by John Ford, Howard Hawks, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Stan Brakhage (the greatest visual artist of my lifetime)."

It was at a screening of Ernst Lubitch's *To Be or Not to Be* that Kaufman decided to make movies: "I would give what I had to give to the movie going world."

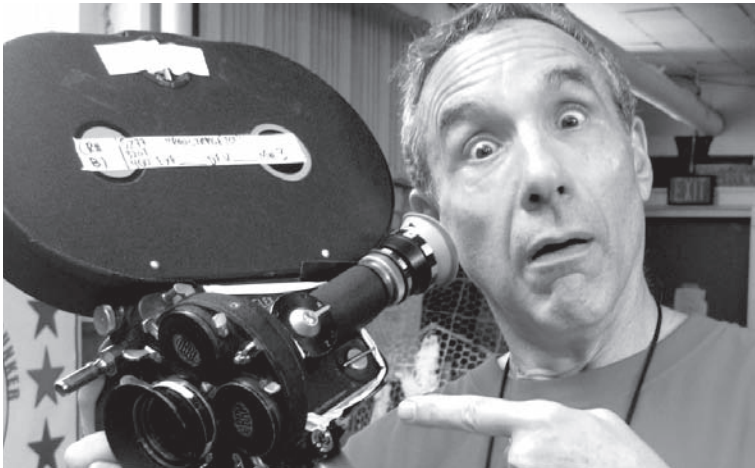
Kaufman worked on a few major productions in the 1970s, before becoming disenchanted by mainstream cinema. He founded Troma with Michael Herz in 1974.

"All of the major studios started to rip us off, so we had to switch to a different tack," Kaufman says. "We read one day in *Variety* that horror films were dead: they were no longer viable economically. So Michael Herz and I said, 'Aha!'"

Kaufman decided to fuse his love of comedy and satire with gore. While the work he went on to produce was unquestionably influenced by the horror genre, Kaufman insists that simply calling his films horror movies is "100% incorrect."

"My movies, at least the movies I write and direct, are satires. They are quinzart genres. They combine sex, horror, science fiction, Shakespeare, musical, and if you've seen *Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead*, nobody is horrified by that movie. Disgusted perhaps...but they are not terrified."

He says that Troma is a "genre bender," citing *The Toxic Avenger* as the prime example of what Troma strives to



Photos courtesy of Troma Entertainment

create. It has become so much a part of the American lexicon that it has been turned into an Off-Broadway musical, which opens in New York this April.

Kaufman went on to speak about the conception of the *The Toxic Avenger*. "I was at the Cannes Film Festival in 1982, and I had one of those sort of 'Eureka!' moments, when I realized, 'Aha! We'll make the monster the hero!' So we had the first hideously deformed creature of super-human strength from New Jersey (New Jersey, because I'm always in favor of the underdog)."

The fact that Troma is still in existence is something Kaufman attributes largely to the loyalty of their fan base. "I have felt that every movie that Michael Herz and I have directed has been a seminal piece," Kaufman said. "The problem is that we are an independent, small company and the major media ignores us because the media is controlled by five or six devil-worshipping international media conglomerates, and we don't exist."

In addition to working in the film industry, Kaufman has also published a number of books, including *Make Your Own Damn Movie!* and *All I Need to Know About Filmmaking I Learned from "The Toxic Avenger"* (with Troma alumnus James Gunn), as well as his most recent: *Direct Your Own Damn Movie!*

Kaufman was also recently elected chairman of the Independent Film and Television Alliance (IFTA). "The IFTA is a trade association for the independent film community... about 200 companies are members...we are fighting for net neutrality. As long as the internet remains a level playing field, I think we all have hope." Kaufman recently posted what he calls a "public service announcement about media consolidation." Kaufman says, "People have as much access to that as they do to Hannah Montana," and this, Kaufman asserts, is what he is fighting for.

"The bad guys want a situation where the internet becomes ABC, CBS and NBC... and you can see the internet being colonized as we speak. You've got Hulu [Hulu.com], which is a conspiracy of Fox and NBC and Sony. They're trying to get Congress and the FCC to give them the right to create a superhighway that only they, the elite, can traverse."

"The big guys...[should recognize]...that colonization has never worked. Just ask the French." ■

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AN INTERVIEW WITH H.G. LEWIS

Delving into the bloody mind of the Godfather of Gore

BY BRANDON KOSTERS

Herschell Gordon Lewis, affectionately known as the “Godfather of Gore”, has been repulsing movie audiences since the 1960s with exploitation gems such as *Blood Feast* (1963), *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1964), *Color Me Blood Red* (1965) and *The Wizard of Gore* (1970), to name just a few. Lewis redefined the drive-in movie experience, and helped to set the precedent for filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino and James Wan, who rely on eliciting a more vicious visceral response.

Today, Lewis is also well known in the world of direct marketing, having published 31 books on the subject. He is also a frequent contributor to magazines in the United States and England. In other words, Lewis’s career path has been anything but conventional. “I started my career as a school teacher,” Lewis said. “I taught English literature at Mississippi State. I went to Northwestern for about 150 years and, like most people who first get out of school, I felt that teaching was the only civilized profession, but it wasn’t one that resulted in worldly goods.”

This led Lewis to try his hand in radio and television, before a former classmate from Northwestern invited him to serve as television director for his advertising agency in Chicago. He began shooting television commercials for Alexander and Associates, a small studio on Wabash Avenue, which he eventually purchased a half interest in.

Lewis grew frustrated because all the big ad agencies went to California to shoot their ads. “We were getting very little business from the big advertising agencies,” he says, “So one day, I was complaining about the film business... I said, ‘the only way to make any money... is to shoot features.’ He said, ‘Well, why don’t you shoot features.’ And that planted the seed... the seed grew, and grew, and turned into a bunch of weeds, I guess.”

What propelled Lewis towards visually assaulting horror films? “The question was, what kind of motion picture might there be that feature film companies either wouldn’t make or couldn’t make... What might make one competitive? As it turns out, I was watching an old black and white movie... with Edward G. Robinson... and the police shot him full of bullet holes and he died peacefully with a little red splotch on his shirt, and I said ‘wait a minute... that’s not the way it is.’ And leaping out of the cosmos came that lovely four letter word: G-O-R-E.”

Shortly after this epiphany, Lewis began work on *Blood Feast*. As he tells the story: “We would go down to Miami to shoot when the weather got cold in Chicago. We were staying at a little place on the North Beach... called the Suez Motel. Outside [the motel] there was a statue of a sphinx.” The sphinx only stood between seven and eight feet high, but, as Lewis states, “against the sky, a sphinx is a sphinx, and this gave us the idea

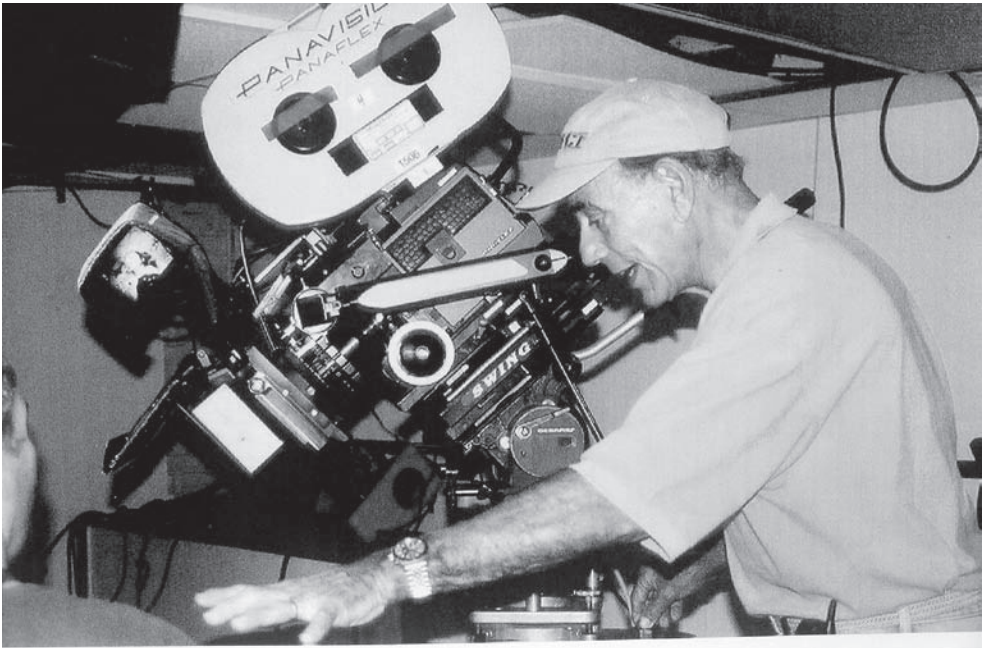


Photo courtesy of Iroma Entertainment

for this strange movie... I made up the most Egyptian sounding name I could think up: Fuad Ramseys, who would be a mad caterer, and that was *Blood Feast*.”

Blood Feast featured Playboy bunny/June 1963’s Playmate of the Month, Connie Mason, as its heroine. In one of its most infamous scenes, Fuad Ramseys, played by Mal Arnold, rips a semi-clad blonde woman’s tongue out of her head. (The tongue was an actual livestock tongue that had been purchased from a butcher shop.)

Lewis was a very savvy businessman, and understood how shocking audiences would generate favorable publicity. “The best reaction we could get was people coming out of the theatre saying ‘My God! Did you see that? That’s gore!’ Some of these comments were made, really, in disgust. But that they would make the comment at all meant that we weren’t being ignored.”

“Please remember,” says Lewis, “this was before VHS, let alone DVD. Either we made it in the theatre, or we didn’t make it at all.”

Regarding his stance on the film industry, Lewis said, “The movie business is a business. I detest these ‘auteurs’ that consider themselves misunderstood geniuses... If you want to compete in business, you compete in a business-like way.”

While Lewis acknowledges the advantages in working with a sophisticated film crew, his belief is that, ultimately, entertainment value takes precedence over everything else.

Lewis, who has worked in “35 mm color since day one”, is switching to digital for his next film *Grimm Fairy Tales*, which is set to go into production in March. “Even if *Grimm Fairy Tales* winds up without any theatrical distribution in the United States,” Lewis said, “I can get it in Japan. I know I can get it in France. In places like Japan and France, I’m a hero. In the United States, I’m a schmuck with a camera.” ■

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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly squints its way into your heart

BY ANNA KRYCZKA

Sergio Leone's 1966 *The Good, the Bad and Ugly* is the last installment of the epic *Dollars Trilogy*. Leone's final chapter is assuredly the most successful of the Spaghetti Western genre. Shot in Spain, this film treats with both reverence and a most potent sort of parody (or even caricature) the quintessential American Western. The film incorporates slap-stick humor, exaggerated—if not cartoon-like—violence, and some of the best one-word lines, delivered by the strapping young Squint Eastwood.

Eastwood stars as the Good (aka Blondie, aka The Man With No Name), alongside a shifty smooth-talking Lee Van Cleef as the Bad (aka Angel Eyes) and Eli Wallach as the Ugly (aka Tuco, aka Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez). Tuco and Blondie have established a mutually beneficial partnership, through which they come to depend on one another like the Wiley Coyote and the Road Runner. The consistency with which they maim, torture, and nearly murder one another, is the routine of their high desert matrimony. Anvils aside, the two become involved in a violent sort of brinksmanship, in which fortunes, luck, and the upper hand change possession as quickly as Blondie can light up his trademark cigar and squint into the oppressive sun—a move that says more than any line in the script, and can melt the heart of even the most hardened graduate student. (The squint heard cross the world, one might say.)

The Good and the Ugly form a camaraderie of mutual assured destruction and affection (despite being brazen, cocksure loners) in a hunt for hidden gold, of course. Blondie and



Tuco wind their way through a nightmarish vision of the Civil War era West and encounter the heartless mercenary Angel Eyes (the Bad), who proves to be a good match for the skilled, yet hapless pair. At one point they even inadvertently pledge allegiance to General Lee when they mistake an oncoming company of Union men in desert encrusted Union Blue, as Rebs. This misstep places them in the sadistic hands of the Bad who poses as a Union General in order to shake down POWs and generally beat the crap out of people.

The futility of lost causes, arbitrary justice in the western wilds, and scads of obviously Italian extras in uniform (the Union Army never looked so Italian!) punctuate their journey toward the treasure of colossal proportions. Speaking of colossal, the final duel is among the longest and, dare I say, *best* of the Western genre. This film is at once gorgeous, hilarious, silly, sincere, and poignant—as well as boasting the pinnacle of 60s pulp and pop in its score and opening credits. The poetics and jocularity of the homosocial bond struck by hardship, the desire for autonomy or wealth, and a constant race against one's own past and identity (and everything else I've mentioned) render this film a masterpiece.

The Room with a view to crazytown

BY JOEL KUENNEN

For those of you unfamiliar with the phenomenon *The Room*, by Tommy Wiseau, let me explain to you its cinematic importance. Wiseau, writer, producer, director, and star of his own great tome, opens his *chef-d'oeuvre* with looming epic '90s synth-rock, festooned with Baroque flourishes. The camera pans from a pale blue sky to the Golden Gate Bridge, coming in over San Francisco, majestically, insinuating that you are about to be privy to a story. More than a story, a fable. We see a flash of the hero as he rides by, dressed all in black, on a streetcar. In the next cut, we are in the living room of the hero. As he enters, he greets his fiancée, Lisa, with an obtuse, "Hi BABE." He gives her a newly purchased red dress. He tells her how "sexy she looks." Then, a young college boy comes into the room. Johnny (Wiseau) spurts an equally obtuse, "Oh, hey Denny" at him, and we are off into the world of *The Room*.

Wiseau is either the world's biggest fool, or a visionary—either way, he has produced something magnificent. This film, a romantic tragedy of friendship, betrayal and death, somehow manages to disrupt the normal sympathetic response of the viewer, thereby negating the expected, and producing hilarity. Wiseau's use of symbolism is cliché to the point of gaudy greatness: red dress, de-petaled roses, over-played soft-core porn scenes that showcase some globular silicone lumps and Wiseau's own pert butt cheeks. All these "tools" of various stylistic origins are brought together in an asinine but somehow endearing and confounding mash-up. Wiseau's character, Johnny, seems to be a *tabula rasa* himself, presented as a foreigner with no discernible roots, who seeks to mimic his surrounding culture. This is made explicit



in his dialogic style: parced phrases, spoken disjointedly as if they were remembered from some TV sit-com's colloquial banter. Johnny is a socially alienated individual, which echoes how the film feels: like it is painfully distant from the viewer.

Through the course of this film, Johnny's fiancée hooks up with his best friend, goes crazy, and fakes a pregnancy. His best friend deserts him, starts smoking pot and almost shoves a minor character off the roof of a building. The young college boy gets caught up with a drug dealer, and confesses his sexual love for the mother-like figure of Lisa. At the end of it all, Johnny blows his brains out the back of his skull due to Lisa's erratic, manipulative and abusive love. With so much action, it is hard to imagine not getting caught up in the story.

This reviewer cannot help but notice that all these tired themes seem to be placed next to each other like an assemblage. It almost seems that Wiseau substituted the representations of the representations of emotions, actions, etc. for primary portrayals of them. This is both what causes verisimilitude to fail, and what makes the film a visionary comedic masterpiece. Simply put, this is a horribly made film but a fantastic artifact.

M*A*S*H gives a D*A*M*N

BY AURÉLIE BEATLEY

Before anyone recoils in horror, let me remind you that Robert Altman's 1970 masterpiece has very little to do with the preachy wreck Alan Alda wrought later in the TV show's existence, which is the period most of us are familiar with.

The movie is insane. In the best possible way, but it is insane. In fact, it wasn't even directed—in true late sixties spirit, Robert Altman allegedly proceeded to confuse, bully, and alienate his lead actors (a particularly gorgeous and disaffected Donald Sutherland and Elliott Gould) until they were on the brink of mutiny. He then filmed it and sent that to his editor. I'm not certain that most of the film even had a script. The actors were encouraged to improvise and talk over each other, and do things like punch each other in the face without warning, which resulted in brilliant chaos—the sort that you couldn't direct if you tried. And that was perfect, apparently, because it was the best commentary anyone could make on the debacle that Vietnam had turned into by the time the movie was being shot.

*M*A*S*H*, is the story of an army mobile hospital unit during the Korean war, was deliberately made to feel like Vietnam, down to the cone-shaped hats worn by the passerbys in the one scene taking place in Seoul. The characters were closer in attitude to the kids being shipped off to 'Nam than to the older soldiers who had been in Korea. The film follows the exploits and cheeky high jinks of Captain Hawkeye Pierce (Sutherland), who doesn't care, and his fellow army surgeons, nurses, and radio operators, who similarly do not care because they can't



Staff illustration by Olivia Liendo

care without going insane. The one character who attempts to take himself seriously, Major Burns (Robert Duvall), is carted off midway through the film in a straightjacket; there is no respite from the constant aimless ridicule that angles all the way through the film and touches everyone from the harassed chaplain to the rigorously disciplined but ultimately defeated head nurse.

A series of bizarre and seemingly unrelated events happen over the course of Hawkeye's one-year tenure in Korea: he steals a jeep, he plays golf, he drives his tent-mate insane, he passes himself off as a heart specialist and gets airlifted to Japan, he saves a few lives and loses a few lives, and then he hops into another stolen jeep, leaving everyone behind. The only cohesive element in the film is a series

of preposterous loudspeaker announcements where a stuttering news operator reads out and mispronounces events, entertainment, news, high-pitched warbly Korean pop music, including a public service announcement about the dangers of marijuana, as well as a suggestion for army personnel to stop using it.

The film doesn't try to make a point of the general pointlessness of the conflict the denizens of MASH #4077 are involved in (despite the uplifting "Suicide Is Painless" theme song), it just *embodies* it. It does exactly what good filmmaking is supposed to do: it doesn't tell you something, it lives it. When asked how such a specimen as Hawkeye came to be in the army, the Sergeant in charge answers with a surprised, "He was drafted." There is no reason, just a blind lottery. And there's not much we can do to change that.



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WHY I LOVE...

John Hughes

BY JENNIFER SWANN

As a kid, everything I knew about Chicago I learned from John Hughes. My first glimpses of the Art Institute were seen in a montage of ditch-day activities in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*—long before I knew of Seurat or could identify *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. I never would have imagined that I would end up a student at the School of the Art Institute, passing through the momentous walls of the museum every week in art history courses, or while taking a short-cut to campus on a snowy day.

Hughes' Chicago was a land of teenagers, first crushes and family disasters, where a kid could live on his own and battle burglars, unpredictable Uncles were always standing by to flip pancakes with a snow shovel, and the strangers you meet at the airport would become your long-term traveling companions.

John Hughes makes films that invite every imaginable unpleasant situation to occur while trapped in a car with your parents all the way from Chicago to L.A. In *National Lampoon's Vacation*, the Griswolds travel 2,460 miles just to go to Wally World (the amusement park better known as Six Flags Magic Mountain), where I spent my youth and started my first job at the ripe age of 16 *Candles*. I took for granted that the Southern California weather permitted me to ride on roller coasters in shorts and t-shirts all year round, and ultimately dreamed of the white Christmas I saw in *Christmas Vacation*. My suburban neighborhood put on the best light display in town—complete with robotic swiveling Santa's and Vegas-like rooftop electronics—but still, I wanted my lips to turn freeze-colored blue like Audrey Griswold's did while her father uprooted the perfect Christmas tree from the ground.

I fantasized about getting invited to a detention *Breakfast Club* with Emilio Estevez, or being left *Home Alone* and swinging from trapezes in tree houses like Kevin McAllister. I even had my own Deluxe TalkGirl cassette recorder by the fourth grade. Hughes made adolescence attractive, and puberty awkward enough to aspire to.

John Hughes depicted Chicago as a city of eccentric crazies with good hearts and relentless ideas. No matter how many times your birthday was forgotten or your plane delayed, you'd always run into a sympathetic stranger played by John Candy, who happened to be the Polka King of the Midwest and would offer you a ride back home in a Budget van with his band. Hughes's Chicago was idealistic and innocent, kind-hearted and unconventional, a city that called for adventure whether you asked for it or not.

Though I've called myself a Chicago resident for almost two years, I've done fewer things than Ferris Bueller did in just one day. I have yet to stand at the top of the Sears tower, see a Cubs game, go to the Board of Trade, drive a Ferrari, or hijack a parade. Luckily, Bueller has given me a set of goals to aim for and Hughes has made them seem more than attainable.

If I'm not in class next week, look for me on a float in the St. Paddy's Day Parade! 🍀

WHY I HATE...

Rom-Coms

BY JOANIE HAIMOWITZ

When I was little, all my expectations about dating came from Hollywood romantic comedies. I looked forward to pubescent romances that included boys playing boomboxes outside my window, saving me from my boring family vacation in the Poconos with some *Dirty Dancing* and being serenaded with "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You" from the bleachers of my high school's football stadium. In other words, a dating life full of grand gestures and all-consuming crushes.

Love affairs, I thought, were supposed to be extravagant bi-coastal liaisons involving radio shows and consumating on top of the Empire State Building. My loves would be marked by chance encounters and fortuitous moments. But it turns out that there is no ice skating rink at the end of a lifetime of star-crossed *Serendipity*, just awkward moments, missed chances and guys from country clubs who actually deserve fish being dumped into their convertibles.

Now, don't get me wrong, My distaste doesn't run amuck: I do love *When Harry Met Sally* and some of the other classics. And, I will always idolize *Annie Hall*, hoping that some day some neurotic little man will look at me and say: "You, you, you're like New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, the socialist summer camps and the, the father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right, and the really, y'know, strike-oriented kind of, red diaper, stop me before I make a complete imbecile of myself." (I mean, it is all true... minus the Brandeis University part.) And, of course there is always the wonderfully fantastic black romantic comedy—who wouldn't want her boyfriend to kill all the popular *Heathers* and then drive her to suicide?

When I'm being totally honest, it's not the actual romantic comedy genre that I hate. It is the boiled-down version that results in *Must Love Dogs* and the aging and still alone John Cusack who built up our dreams only to have them come crashing down in a world where dating only happens on the internet (and is nothing like *You've Got Mail*). Romance does still exist—somewhere out in the ether. I have a box of love notes written to me over the years, boys still do write songs about the girls (and the boys) they are infatuated with, and I have heard tell of an instance in which a multimillionaire rescued a prostitute from her sad life.

But there was always a touch of reality to those films: the truth about dating that we chose to ignore in favor of the Molly Ringwald ending. There are lots of hopelessly single, in love with their best friend, Duckys out there, as well as anxiety-ridden Cameron-like sidekicks to the Buellers of the world. We do know that *Love, Actually* does include husbands that become infatuated with their secretaries, and that there are a ton of wanky Hugh Grant-like men who will treat you like *Bridget Jones* (after all, maybe it is the dry and boring Colin Firths that will fill our golden years with love and caring).

All this said though, when I am down in the dumps, sometimes the only thing that can perk me up is indulging in my favorite movie of all time: *An American President* (because it's not unrealistic *at all* to date and fall in love with the President of the United States). 🇺🇸



the Moving Image

BY ILWON YOON

Jumping off from the inspiration of Eadweard Muybridge's sequential images of movement, these images attempt to amalgamate the motions that go into various forms of art-making through multiple exposures.

moving |mü-vi | adjective

1 *a*: marked by or capable of movement *b*: of or relating to a change of residence *c*: used for transferring furnishings from one residence to another *d*: involving a motor vehicle that is in motion
2 *a*: producing or transferring motion or action *b*: stirring deeply in a way that evokes a strong emotional response

image |i-mij| noun

1 *a* reproduction or imitation of the form of a person or thing; especially: an imitation in solid form: statue
2 *a*: the optical counterpart of an object produced by an optical device (as a lens or mirror) or an electronic device *b*: a visual representation of something: as (1): a likeness of an object produced on a photographic material (2): a picture produced on an electronic display (as a television or computer screen)
3 *a*: exact likeness : semblance *b*: a person strikingly like another person
4 *a*: a tangible or visible representation : incarnation *b*: an illusory form : apparition
5 *a* (1): a mental picture or impression of something (2): a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation *b*: idea , concept
6 a vivid or graphic representation or description
7 figure of speech
8 a popular conception (as of a person, institution, or nation) projected especially through the mass media
9 a set of values given by a mathematical function (as a homomorphism) that corresponds to a particular subset of the domain

Deconstructing the MUNCH myth

“Becoming Edvard Munch”
at the Art Institute of Chicago



BY MARGARET DI GIULIO

“Becoming Edvard Munch: Influence, Anxiety and Myth,” currently on display at the Art Institute of Chicago, takes a radical new approach to the retrospective exhibition in its ingenious curation of artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944).

Munch’s *The Scream*—famously reprinted on coffee mugs, umbrellas and even blow-up dolls and finger puppets—garnered additional attention in 2004 when one of the three versions of this painting was stolen from the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway. It seems that while Edvard Munch may not be a household name, this painting most certainly is. While there are many reasons for its fame, perhaps this painting is particularly iconic because it seems to reaffirm notions of the creative genius as a tortured soul. Just as Vincent van Gogh is as famous for his insanity as he is for his paintings, so has Munch been slotted as the lone, desperate savant, forced to turn to artistic representation for release in an alienating world. However, with Munch, this may be equally a result of the ploys he used to self-promote, as it is our general fascination with the Bohemian Other.

But do not expect to see this mythical construction of Munch at AIC. As Jay Clarke, Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings and a leading Munch scholar, explained in the exhibition press release: throughout her research in Norway she “kept waiting for the ‘crazy Munch’ to reveal himself... but I never found him. Instead, the letters reveal a man very much in control of his career, even acting as his own dealer and organizing complex exhibitions and negotiations. Indeed, far from an independent, the artist was like a sponge, soaking up painting styles, motifs, and technical tricks from his contemporaries.”

Clarke’s presentation of Munch’s oeuvre is organized around popular themes that occur in his paintings, prints and drawings. Such themes include “Anxiety,” “Death and Dying,” “The Street” and “Bathing.” They serve to evaluate Munch’s work within the context his contemporaries—most notably, Paul Gauguin, Claude Monet, Max Klinger and Vincent van Gogh. This serves to present Munch as a shrewd artist responding to the images and themes of his contemporaries, engaged in the issues of his time.

Though you will not be able to see *The Scream*, paintings such as *Kiss By the Window* (1892), *Anxiety* (1894), and *Evening on Karl Johan* (1892) are some other well-known pieces on display. A small print entitled *Flower of Pain* (1897) visually represents the persona Munch would create for himself showing the artist’s blood as the source of a blooming lily. A representation that starkly contrasts with the numerous other self-portraits in the exhibition, including the debonair but murky *Self-Portrait with a Cigarette* (1895), in which the artist stares piercingly out of the canvas amidst a swirl of smoky liquefied paint.

What is most impressive is the number and diversity of images with which he worked, as well as the breadth of the work of others with which he was acquainted. 150 Munch prints and paintings are exhibited alongside 61 works by 43 other artists from whom he drew inspiration. What all of these images and comparisons demonstrate is Munch’s extraordinary ability to represent the intense emotions of men and women, whether in isolation or on a busy street.

Many of the prints exhibited come from the Institute’s own collection displayed in traditional “Munch style” wooden frames. In any given room one may see not only a large oil painting of a striking image, but the same image reproduced with varying colors and techniques in print. Most effective is the display of three prints of *The Sick Child* (1896) along a single wall. On the opposite wall is

hung the larger painting. While these images were responses to the illness and death of his beloved sister Sophie, rather than imply an obsessive reworking of a psychically inescapable image, we see Munch as a keen artist modifying colors and design choices in order to convey a powerful situation. Further, *The Sick Child* is juxtaposed with fellow

Norwegian painter Hans Heyerdahl’s *Dying Child* (1889), a painting and artist Munch both admired and emulated.

“Becoming Edvard Munch” questions the popular reliance of curatorial practices on the autobiographical and historical presentation of an artist’s persona, and asks what is gained when an artist creates a specific personality, as well as what is lost in our belief in that personality. By placing Munch within the context of his contemporaries, his localities, his conflicting statements and the statements of his peers, a multi-faceted artist reveals himself.

This exhibition should make us all question the singular ways in which we view artists, and recognize that a successful artist must be both creator and businessman, self-promoter and, at times, self-denigrator. Clarke’s refusal to take the Munch scholarship of old and Munch’s words themselves at face value is a bold move that questions established stereotypes and reminds us that identities are both self-asserted and publicly created. ■

On view through April 26 at the Art Institute of Chicago, 111 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60603-6404. Mon.–Wed. 10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Thurs. 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m., Fri. 10:30 a.m.–5:00p.m., Sat.–Sun. 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.



TOP TO BOTTOM: *Moonlight*, 1895, Oil on Canvas. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo; *Madonna*, 1895, Lithograph on heavyweight white wove paper. The Art Institute of Chicago, Print and Drawing Department Purchase Fund; *Anxiety*, 1894, Oil on canvas. Munch Museum, Oslo.

All images by Edvard Munch (1863-1944). Images courtesy and ©2008 The Munch Museum / The Munch-Ellingsen Group / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

A Glimmer of Fashionable Relief

“Chic Chicago” at the Chicago History Museum

BY QUINTIN XAVIER ROPER

There are days when I find the winters in Chicago to be absolutely unbearable. Everyone is sluggish and draped in warm layers of funeral black, boring brown, naïve navy and senior citizen grey. If you are like me, you are a creature of environment. I crave sunlight even if it is below zero outside, and when the sun fails to shine during Chicago’s typically grey winter, I rely on theaters and museums to get my fix. Typically, it takes a Hollywood blockbuster to get me out of my funk, but this year I have found something even better!



Charles James, 1954. Known as the “Butterfly” dress, this gown is made of 25 yards of peau de soie and nylon netting and weighs 17 pounds. Worn by Mrs. John V. Farwell III. All images courtesy Chicago History Museum.

The Chicago History Museum is exhibiting “Chic Chicago”: its one of a kind collection of historical costumes that date from 1861 to 2008, all worn by Chicago women.

Curated by Timothy Long, the exhibit displays the most breathtakingly beautiful garments you will ever get the opportunity to see in this city.

What first struck me about this show was Tracy Gerladez’s smart layout of mannequins in the calm gallery space, which immediately made me feel as though I had entered a safe place where my curiosities and need for inspiration were caringly fulfilled. The dresses are grouped by key eras of fashion, and the transitions between trends are cleverly placed along a runway. It is easy to navigate, with detailed literature provided about each garment, its creator and the person who wore it.

All of the costumes had interesting details, innovative shapes and illuminating textures. Roy Halston’s orange off-the-shoulder silk jersey evening gown (made in 1970) bestowed the most beautiful draping techniques I have ever seen: the energy of the gown spirals into the left hip as the fabric gracefully falls to the floor. Visually, Halston’s dress has a lot of movement while impressively maintaining a simple goddess silhouette.

Paul Poiret’s 1913 “Sorbet Dress”—probably the most famous dress in the entire collection—is a black and white satin masterpiece. Noted for being the first of the modern era, the Japanese inspired garment did away with the notion that women should be in corsets. Instead, Poiret offers a comfortable and cute alternative, complete with chiffon and glass beads.

Another piece that would cause anyone’s jaw to drop is Charles James’s “Butterfly” ball gown. Ironically, if you look hard enough at it, you can see that James literally created a wrapped cocoon body for the main piece and completed it with a lavish cape of wings. The bone and tan color used for the 17 pound piece is stunning, but you are left concerned about the comfort of the lucky woman wearing it.



Paul Poiret, 1913, Black and White silk satin with glass bead embroidery. Worn by Miss Anita Blair at the debut ball of Gladys High. This was the first couture dress designed for an uncorseted figure.

While you are not allowed to touch the garments, some exhibits offer miniature components so that you can see how the garment was technically crafted. The exhibition and catalogue designers managed to made everything look so... sexy. Overall, “Chic Chicago” displays an unusual level of elegance, and it was very pleasing to know that in a non-fashion capital, the city still has highly sophisticated fashion etiquette. 🍷

“Chic Chicago” is on view through July 26 at the Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street. Hours: Mon.–Wed. & Fri.–Sat. 9:30a.m.–4:30p.m., Thurs. 9:30a.m.–8p.m., Sun. 12–5p.m. General Admission is free on Mondays.

The Napoleon Effect

Rachel Mason’s “1 Rule with a Broken Heart” at Andrew Rafacz Gallery

BY RICARDO HARRIS-FUENTES

In a new political landscape that is at once brimming with excitement and, at the same time, choking on reality, now is a good time to head on down to your local art gallery and see how those wacky artists are dealing with politics. I braved the teasingly balmy weather on February 7 to attend a performance and exhibition of Rachel Mason’s recent work at the Andrew Rafacz Gallery. Unfortunately, if you are just hearing about this exhibition now, you will have missed an endearing moody-rock-a-thon performance by the artist. However, you still have plenty of time to view her accompanying porcelain figurines.

Mason has made a porcelain figurine for every head of state or political leader who has been involved in a violent conflict since the day she was born. Furthermore, she has sculpted herself as an ambassador of peace for each scenario, depicted at the age she would have been during the conflict. So, one of the first figurines we see of the artist is of a baby in ambiguous military garb, positioned between two foes. In effect, Mason is creating a semi-autobiographical-magical-realist narrative of the history of global conflict since the year 1978.

Once the viewer wraps their head around the concept and the intellectual endeavor of the work, the effect is humbling. What stands out about it is the sense of compassion the viewer is tricked into feeling for the subjects—some of whom are the most ruthless butchers of the twentieth century. The small size of the figures as well as their submissive glances upward at the viewer go a long way to humanize our perception of them.

The cumulative effect of the figurines is also arresting, leading to questions like: Is violence inherent in human nature? If not, then why can we find a figurine for almost

every nation and corner of the world? Speaking with the artist, I was happy to find that the work was not born out of any sense of irony—which would have diminished the complexity and depth of the work in my mind; anyone can make fun of “Dubya,” but who can offer a more nuanced and sympathetic perspective on what will surely be remembered as one of America’s bleakest presidential watches? (Note: I have not seen Oliver Stones’s recent attempt in *W* (2008).)

While (formally speaking) the craftsmanship of some of the figurines was a bit of a let down, leading to some difficulty in figuring out which one was Bill Clinton in the 90s line-up, this is a relatively minor complaint about a particularly satisfying show (especially considering that the frequency with which certain Republican Presidents popped up offered the artist ample opportunity to iron out kinks in their likenesses). 🇺🇸

On view through March 21 at Andrew Rafacz Gallery, 835 W. Washington Blvd. Hours: Tues.–Fri. 11a.m.–6p.m., Sun. 11a.m.–5p.m.

The Short List

University Museums and Galleries

BY CAITLIN SCHRINER

Chicago, as we all know, comes in like a lion and will, unfortunately, end like a lion as well. Cruel March will leave us as cold and pillaged as late February. Our excuses to stay inside grow exceedingly exhausted (really, how many times can you watch the YouTube video of that drugged-out kid after his dentist trip?). Luckily, for you “photophiles” out there, photography-fever has consumed the university museums and galleries around town. Five Chicago schools tackle photography in a spectrum of ways this month, ranging from solo shows focusing on early and unrefined works of renowned photographers, to exhibitions that use photography to contemplate space and location.

Aaron Siskind: The Thing Itself

Smart Museum of Art (University of Chicago)

One of the most renowned photographers of the past century, Aaron Siskind defined American photography in his 60-plus years behind the lens. The man who turned street cracks into ribbon dances is best known for his abstract work, although he began his career in social documentation. His interest manifested in his work that removes objects from their literal settings and re-frames them, opening the viewer to alternative interpretation. “The Thing Itself” presents Siskind’s early attempts at this approach, as well as writings from the artist that demonstrate the tension of representation.

On view through May 10 in the Joel and Carole Bernstein Gallery for Works on Paper. 5550 S. Greenwood Ave. (smartmuseum.uchicago.edu). Hours: Tues., Wed., & Fri. 10a.m.–4p.m., Thurs. 10a.m.–8p.m., Sat.–Sun. 11a.m.–5p.m. Admission Free.

Realism and Magic: Latin American Photography from the Collection of DePaul

DePaul University Museum

Taken from DePaul’s own photography collection, “Realism and Magic” presents photographs from Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Peru and the Caribbean. The exhibit features work spanning from nineteenth-century German photographer Hugo Brehme through the contemporary Cuban artist Sebastião Salgado. The photographs on display chart the artistic trajectory of photography in Latin America, as well as common socio-economic issues apparent in the artists’ works.

On view through April 4 in the Main and North Galleries. 2350 N. Kenmore Avenue. Hours: Mon.–Thurs. 11a.m.–5p.m., Fri. 11a.m.–7p.m., Sat.–Sun. 12–5p.m.

Polaroids: Mapplethorpe

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art (Northwestern University)

Before launching into his famous images of still-lives, sexual deviance and celebrity, Robert Mapplethorpe was an artist with a vision and an instant camera. “Polaroids: Mapplethorpe” is a collection of over 90 images taken between 1970 and 1975. These rough Polaroids, taken before he developed his iconic photographic style and techniques, explore the themes that will appear in Mapplethorpe’s later, mature work.

On view through April 5 in the Alsdorf Gallery. 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston. Hours: Tues. 10a.m.–5p.m., Wed.–Fri. 10a.m.–8p.m., Sat.–Sun. 12–5p.m. For a full review of this exhibition, please visit fnewsmagazine.com

Last Chance: Just Like Being There: A Collection of Stereo Photographs

Loyola University Museum of Art (LUMA)

Stereoscopy: a device by which two photographs of the same object taken at slightly different angles are viewed together, creating the impression of depth and solidity. The stereoscope has allowed viewers to experience the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China and the markets of Paris in a way that was considered “just like being there.” Loyola faculty member James Jensen presents a selection of images from his own collection that explore the portraits, exotic lands and local street scenes from early stereo photography.

On view through March 8. 820 North Michigan Avenue. Tues. 11a.m.–8p.m. Wed.–Sun. 11a.m.–8p.m. Admission Free on Tuesdays.

PhotoDimensional

Museum of Contemporary Photography (Columbia College)

An unfortunate quality of the photograph is that it removes a certain essential element of life: dimensionality. Though photographers play with perspective and space, true phenomenology is essentially impossible to recreate. “PhotoDimensional” explores the reinstatement of dimension in photography in the work of thirteen diverse artists, including John Coplans, Leslie Hewitt, Vik Muniz and Lorna Simpson. Works range from drawings of minimalist sculptures created from the dust in the gallery they sit in, to sculptures made of photographic materials, to the sagging stomach of an artist mimicking the pose of an ancient Greek sculpture, challenging viewers to push the boundaries of representation and opening dialogues concerning definitions of space.

On view through April 19. 600 S. Michigan. Hours: Mon.–Wed. & Sat. 10a.m.–5p.m., Thurs. 10a.m.–8p.m., Sun. 12–5p.m.



Florian Slotawa, *Hotel Europa, Prag, Room 402, Night of June 8, 1998*, Silver gelatin print. Courtesy of Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf.



Aaron Siskind, *Chicago*, 1949, Gelatin silver print, mounted. Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, Gift of the Illinois Arts Council. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Photography.



Mario Algaze, *Two Girls Kneeling, Barva, Costa Rica*, 1987/96, Silver gelatin print. Collection of DePaul University, Art Acquisition Endowment and the Religious Art Fund.

The Olympic Host: Divergent Visions for Chicago

BY DANA BOUTIN

Chicago's official Olympic Bid Committee, which calls itself Chicago 2016, derived its logo "Stir the Soul" from a quotation by the architect and urban planner Daniel Burnham: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood." But it may be that Burnham's use of the word "blood" actually better captures the anxiety of Chicagoans, thick in economic crisis and political scandal, envisioning the fate of their city seven years from now. Proponents of Chicago's 2016 Olympics bid assert that the games will bring great benefits to the city: economic stimulus, urban renewal and improvements in infrastructure. Opponents warn of exactly the opposite: large debts, displaced populations and useless stadiums.

So will the Chicago Summer Games be revitalizing or parasitic?

Chicago 2016 views the Olympics as an opportunity to revitalize the city—like a modern version of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which led to the City Beautiful Movement. Working with architects Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, they hope to emphasize green building and sustainability in the projected Olympics constructions.

Calling the bid "a responsible, conservative and feasible plan," Chicago 2016 proposes that 79 percent of the events would be held in existing and temporary venues (11 temporary venues would be built). "We have always looked at utilizing existing facilities and parkland, unlike a lot of Olympic bids in the past," said Patrick Sandusky, Vice President of Communications for Chicago 2016.

The projected cost for the Olympics, including the Olympic Village and venue construction, is \$4.8 billion. The bid anticipates netting \$1.2 billion from sponsorship and marketing, \$705 million in ticket sales, and \$85 million from the city to be spent on Michael Reese Hospital campus on the South Side. This leaves an estimated \$1.1 billion, projected to be paid by private funds—an amount whose future availability the International Olympic Committee must take on faith. Additionally, the bid does not include a full government guarantee, but rather a promised \$500 million in the event that the final cost exceeds the original budget.

Robert Baade, Professor of Economics at Lake Forest College, points out that the projected ticket sales, which assume 7.6 million tickets being sold, might not be reasonable, since the discretionary spending of potential visitors will most likely be heavily affected by a deep and prolonged recession. So, while Chicago 2016 officials say that no taxpayer dollars will be used on the Olympics itself, this does not seem to be viable. Tax Increment Financing (TIF)—which designates future property tax increases to finance current projects—will be used to finance infrastructure costs. Community watchdog groups are mobilizing to create a community advisory committee, in order to prevent misuse of these funds.

Dr. Christopher Shaw, a speaker for the No Games group, which opposes Chicago's 2016 candidacy, contrasted "the kittens and rainbows" plan of bid committees with the housing shifts he describes as "economic cleansing." What this means, is that the restructuring of the South Side to cater to the Olympics may result in unreasonable evictions and intentional displacement of economically depressed populations.

In response to this concern, Sandusky told me, "We will have no displacement of residents. Secondly, we will be looking at going into communities that could use new facilities." For example, he proposes that a multi-sport facility in Douglas Park and an amphitheatre in Washington Park "will be a long-term benefit to that community."

The most expensive venue proposed is the \$397.6 million Olympic Stadium in Washington Park. While this structure is described in the bid as permanent, Philip Hersh of the Chicago Tribune, called it "largely temporary." In other words, after the Olympics it would be "reconfigured" to accommodate community athletic competitions and activities. However, Baade worries that the current plan "is not sufficiently robust or visionary to remake the city in a way that will encourage those who come to the Olympic Games to come back and leave an economic legacy."

President Obama has come out in support of Chicago's bid, submitting a letter endorsing Chicago 2016 and stating that he hopes to announce the opening of the games during his second term in office. "I don't think Barack Obama can say the Olympics are a bad idea for Chicago without committing political suicide," said James Thindwa, Executive Director of Chicago Jobs with Justice, a labor-community coalition. "The Olym-

pics have a social and cultural appeal, and politicians don't want to be on record opposing them."

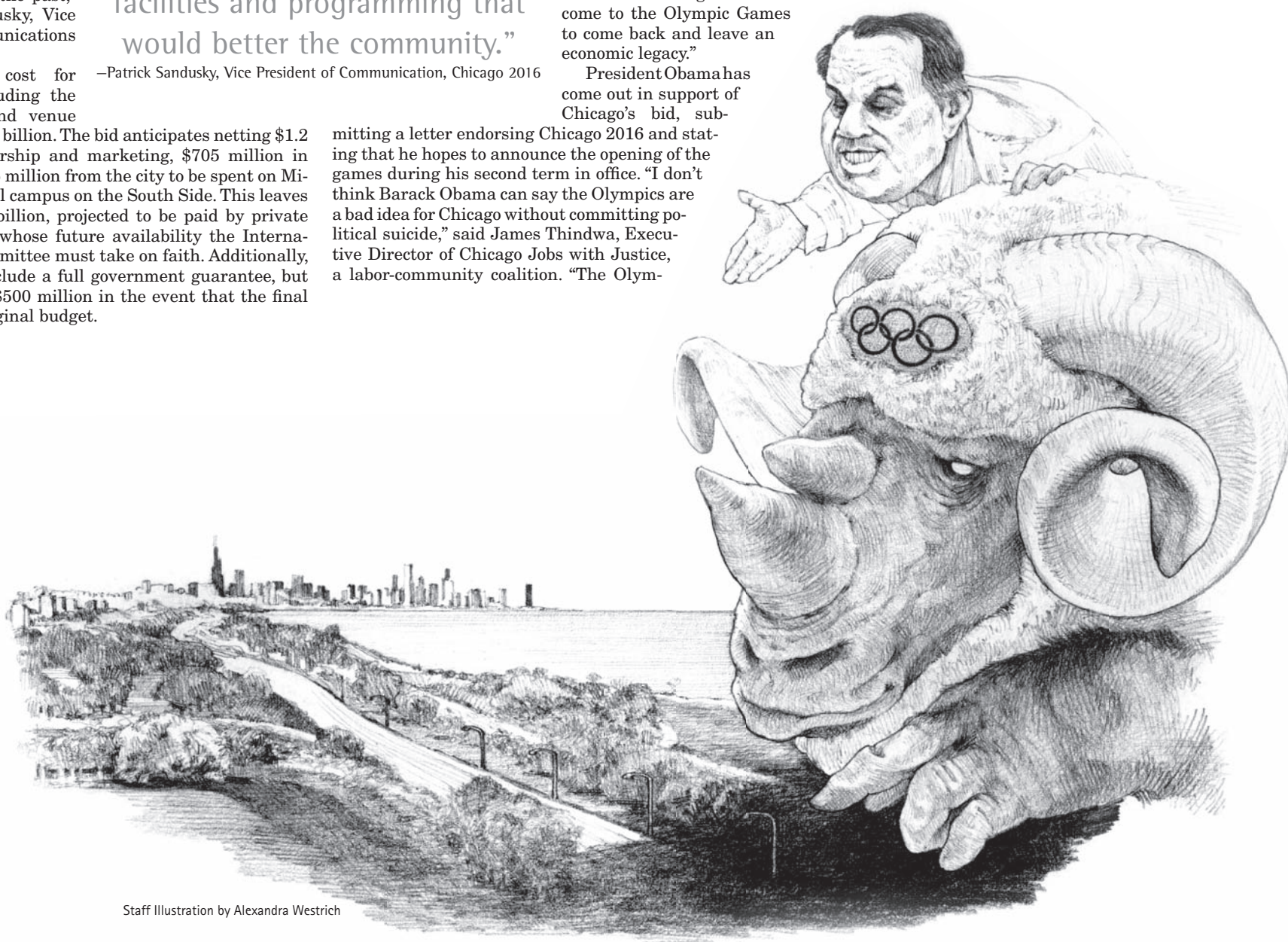
The good feeling for Illinois politics prompted by Obama's victorious election was cut short by the media blitz surrounding the Blagojevich scandal. Former Governor Blagojevich's impeachment prevented the inclusion of an additional state guarantee of \$150 million in the bid. When asked if this could put Chicago in an unfavorable light in the eyes of the International Olympic Committee, Professor Helen Lenskyj, a University of Toronto sociologist and author of three books on the Olympics, said she does not think the scandal "will show up on their radar because their own members have committed worse offenses than that."

Sandusky said much the opposite. "The IOC is a group of people that brings the world together in a festival of harmony, unity, and sport. It has more member-countries than the United Nations and has promoted peace more than any other organization in the history of the world."

Considering the diametrically opposed and contradictory assertions of the various factions entrenched in the debate over the possible impact of the Olympics on Chicago, it seems that Chicagoans will either be sky-rocketing to work on a solar-powered CTA or squatting in the abandoned and derelict buildings of Olympic Village. Of course, a middle ground is the realistic result, but neither Chicago 2016, nor No Games and other opponents to Chicago's bid, seem willing to offer rational suggestions. As Baade concluded, "There's always the possibility that Chicago would be victimized in the same way other cities have. But I don't know that we should throw out the baby with the bathwater on this and say well then we should never host these kinds of things." ■

"We're leaving a vision that would not have white elephants in the city, but would leave facilities and programming that would better the community."

—Patrick Sandusky, Vice President of Communication, Chicago 2016



Staff Illustration by Alexandra Westrich

U.S. continues war on art?

Mounting a defense against a stealth attack

BY EMILY BAUMAN

It is no secret that the arts in this country have been on the defensive for years. Across the board, the arts have been the first line on government spending budgets to be slashed. From arts education programs at elementary and high schools to its pathetic give-and-take policy of endowing-then-unendowing the NEA, government policy has shown that it (dis)regards the Arts as expendable.

The devaluation of the arts in the U.S. has forced arts professionals and organizations to rely on ingenuity and argument to survive, forcing the art world to develop into the commodified system that artists constantly bemoan (cultural Darwinism, can we say?). But now, as we find ourselves firmly entrenched in a financial crisis, the arts have found themselves under targeted, brutal and often stealthy attack.

On February 6, the U.S. Senate approved by overwhelming majority (73-24 votes) the Coburn Amendment to the economic recovery bill under its consideration, which states: “None of the amounts appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used for any casino or other gambling establishment, aquarium, zoo, golf course, swimming pool, stadium, community park, museum, theater, art center, and highway beautification project.”

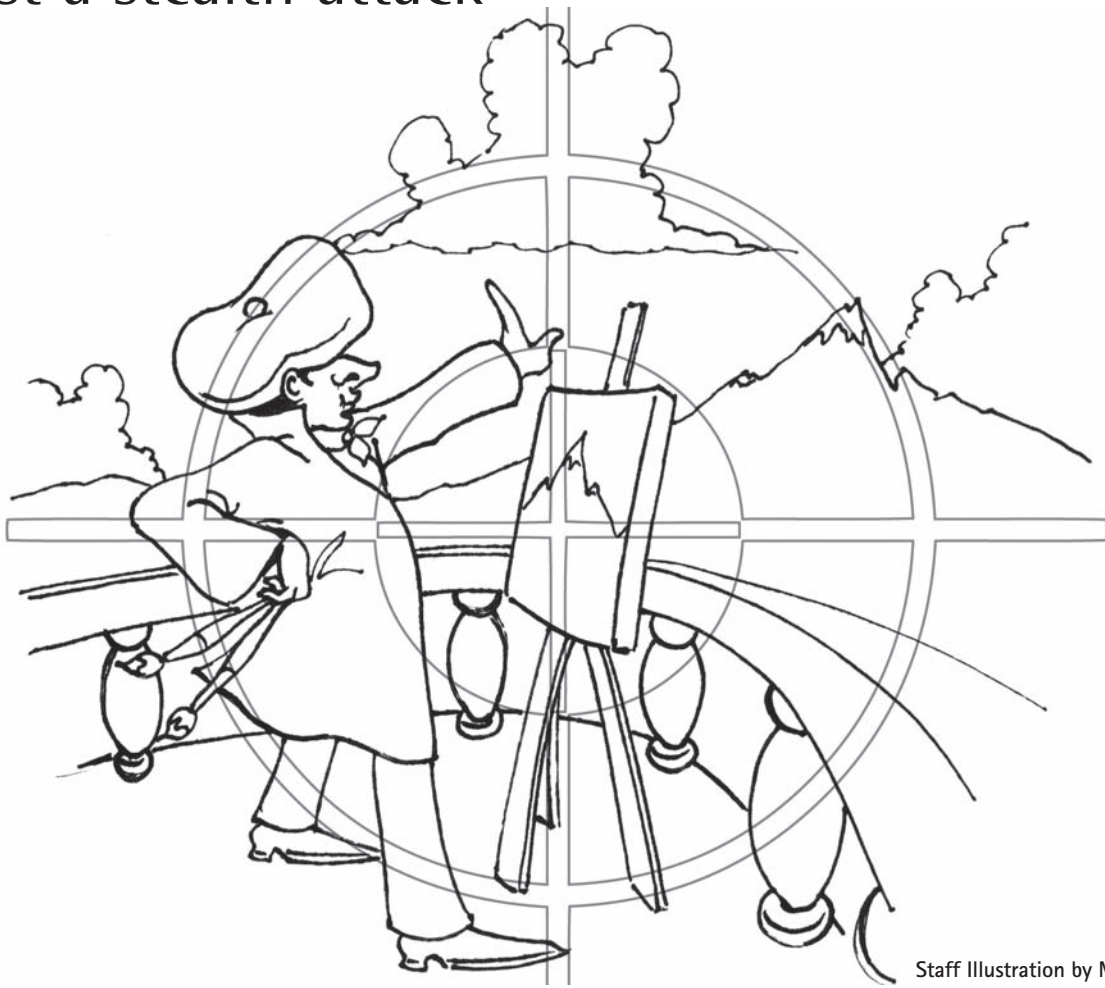
Besides the egregious correlation made in this amendment between gambling, highway beautification, golfing, art, theater, and animal refuges—i.e. the collapse of luxury entertainment and culture into one—this amendment assumes that bolstering the arts would do nothing to bolster the economy. It also displays an utter disregard for the well-being of these foundational institutions, myopically marking the arts with the stereotypical, regressive and ignorant stigma that they are superfluous and self-indulgent.

This amendment has since been amended, and the final version of the economic-stimulus bill approved by Congress on February 13 removed the arts organizations from the clause. However, the argument made to rescue the arts organizations from the grouping by Representative David R. Obey (Dem., Wisconsin): “There are five million people who work in the arts industry. And right now they have 12.5 percent unemployment—or are you suggesting that somehow if you work in that field, it isn’t real when you lose your job, your mortgage or your health insurance?” implies that the arts have no intrinsic value and does not explain why the poor zookeeper still doesn’t seem to matter.

In a separate but ideologically parallel move, during the last week of January Brandeis University—whose reputation is based on its expansive liberal arts offerings—betrayed its legacy, when its board of trustees voted unanimously to close the school’s Rose Art Museum and sell off the 6,000 works of art in its collection.

Treating its priceless and historic collection of art as disposable assets, Brandeis made a stark statement about its priorities and an astonishing value judgment about the place and worth of art.

There is a lot more to be said about this decision, the reactions of and effects on the students and museum employees, the legal issues regarding by-laws and the subsequent backpedaling of the administration, as well as the dire financial situation in which the university has found itself (due to the fallout of the Bernie Madoff scandal). However, the statement their actions made is clear, and it has forever changed the perception of



Staff Illustration by Matt Lane

Brandeis’s commitment to the arts. But more so, it reflects and supports the widely held, but rarely explicitly stated, belief that the arts are dispensable.

Now, I realize that to argue for the pure value of the arts, as an Art Historian for whom they are a life blood—inspirational, motivating, and, most of all, *essential*—I will never convince anyone of their merit who believes that they are superfluous and self-indulgent. That is just their loss, though. However, if we are entrenched in a battle that prizes money and economic stimulation as its holy grail, then I am more than happy to argue that arts organization are among the most important, immediate and mutable agents for kick starting our economy.

Public art projects, museum exhibitions, non-profits and many other arts institutions create jobs across all industries: they demand catering for events, various forms of fabrication (steel, paper, electronic, etc.), the assistance of technicians, designers, lawyers, printers, accountants and brokers, and provide steady employment and income for numerous individuals and families. Their needs are flexible and the events they generate are either cyclical or singular ones that can be quickly put into production.

Need historic proof that the arts can bolster the economy? Look no further than the WPA. In addition to creating numerous jobs during the Great Depression, the artists employed by the WPA shaped an ideology and imagery that gave voice to a disenfranchised and downtrodden generation. The iconography they created has become integral to our understanding of what it is to be American; a historical imagery that we cannot imagine ourselves without.

If the majority of Americans want to send culture to the waste basket, I say they are just quickening our clip towards an idiocracy. But, if we want a strong, intelligent, moral, critical and well-informed populace—a true land of the free and

the brave—then we must defend the arts with all our strength, because they are our backbone, our foundation. As Dana Gioia, the chairman of the NEA, recently said, “The purpose of arts education is not to produce more artists, though that is a by-product. The real purpose of arts education is to create complete human beings capable of leading successful and productive lives in a free society.”

When all else is taken away from you, all you have left is your education. Math and science just are not enough: who pursues happiness through them alone? What kind of heritage do we have without art? If burning books would give us some extra cash to throw around for the next couple of years, would you be willing light the bonfire? So why would you be willing to prevent their production—especially when the publishing companies increase circulation in the economy? **f**

Excerpt from Michael Chabon’s Statement for the Obama Arts Policy Committee:

Every grand American accomplishment, every innovation that has benefited and enriched our lives, every lasting social transformation, everything that has from the start made America the world capital of hope, has been the fruit of the creative imagination, of the ability to reach beyond received ideas and ready-made answers to some new place, some new way of moving through the world...



To see the full text of Chabon’s Statement, visit www.fnewsmagazine.com

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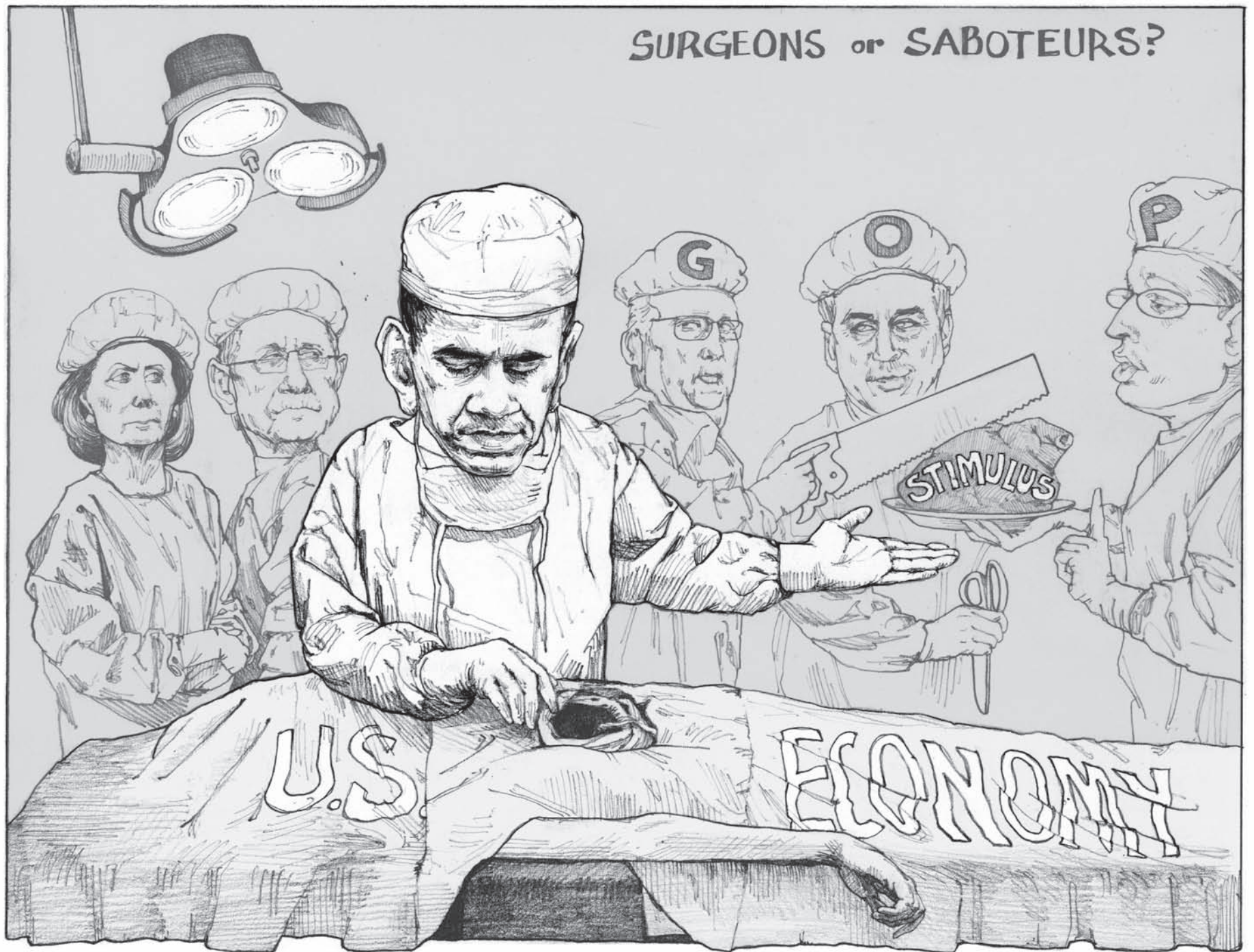
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BY ALEXANDRA WESTRICH



BY DAVID ESSMAN



A Day in the Sex Life of an SAIC Student

Creepy FVNM grad student in mid-20s crisis just wants to watch YouTube while getting head

BY ANONYMOUS

08:50 On my way to the undergrad film class I TA, can't find a place to store my bike. Have to get here earlier, but I stayed up too late watching obscure Korean animation online. Heaven.

10:20 In serious need of coffee. I hate sitting through lectures when I could teach the class myself, but at least I get to look at all the undergrads in a dimly-lit room and hope they can't see me. Honestly, I'm not *too* much older than them. I mean, some of them are probably more experienced in bed than me. I lived at home for my first two years of undergrad before going to state school and they've probably been having orgies in the dorms for at least that long.

12:05 In the elevator, blonde with huge 1980s frames, like Janine from the *Ghostbusters*, asks me a question about the mid-term paper. She looks stupid, especially since her frames don't have any lenses, but she probably is stupid anyways, considering that she wrote her first paper on *Einstein*, not *Eisenstein*. WTF! I accidentally brush up against her when the catering guy budes into the elevator with a food cart. She doesn't say anything and I take this as a positive sign. Decide that the next time I run into her I will also "accidentally" brush up against her.

15:47 Run into current advisor and start sweating because he thinks I'm gay. Just because we smoked together and I then made out with his friend doesn't mean that he gets to think I'm gay. I'm open to being gay, but I'm post-gay, so I decide to mention partying with the lady-persuasion whenever I run into him.

17:30 In my studio when I get a random text from a girl I hooked up with at a party like three months ago. I don't remember what she looks like and her Facebook photos are misleading, so why would I want to meet up with her for lunch? Whatever. I tell her to text me this weekend. Hopefully, after drinking I won't care too much about what she looks like.

17:31 Remember that random hook-ups are a good idea. Don't cross party girl off your list or you will have to resort to spending the night with your back-up plan: your gay friends. Anyways, you're too busy as a graduate student to be in any meaningful relationships.

Think about taking off undergrad's glasses while spanking her for not knowing the difference between Einstein and Eisenstein.

19:00 Going to see *Let the Right One In* at the Siskel. I've already seen it because I downloaded it and I'm totally post-cinema right now, but my ex wanted to see it. I feel bad about cheating on her even though I never told her about it, but that's not why I broke up with her. I just said I was just too busy for a relationship since I am seriously in my studio every day.

20:30 Said ex-girlfriend decides to lean in close to me. Later tonight, will I be getting head while watching Youtube or will I be jerking off to Youtube? Hopefully, head.

21:40 Ex politely hugs me before she scurries home. Something about her cat. Something lame.

22:45 Bored. Scanning Craigslist's Missed Connections, hoping my student posted something. Of course she didn't because she—of course—has some other artist bf with parents who still give him money, like money for drugs. I wouldn't even have time to do drugs if I wanted.

23:30 Hear roommate on the stairs, coming home from his night shift. Remember to ask him about that older woman in Fibers. Cougars—they're the new way to go. And they already know stuff, like stuff about art. ■



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