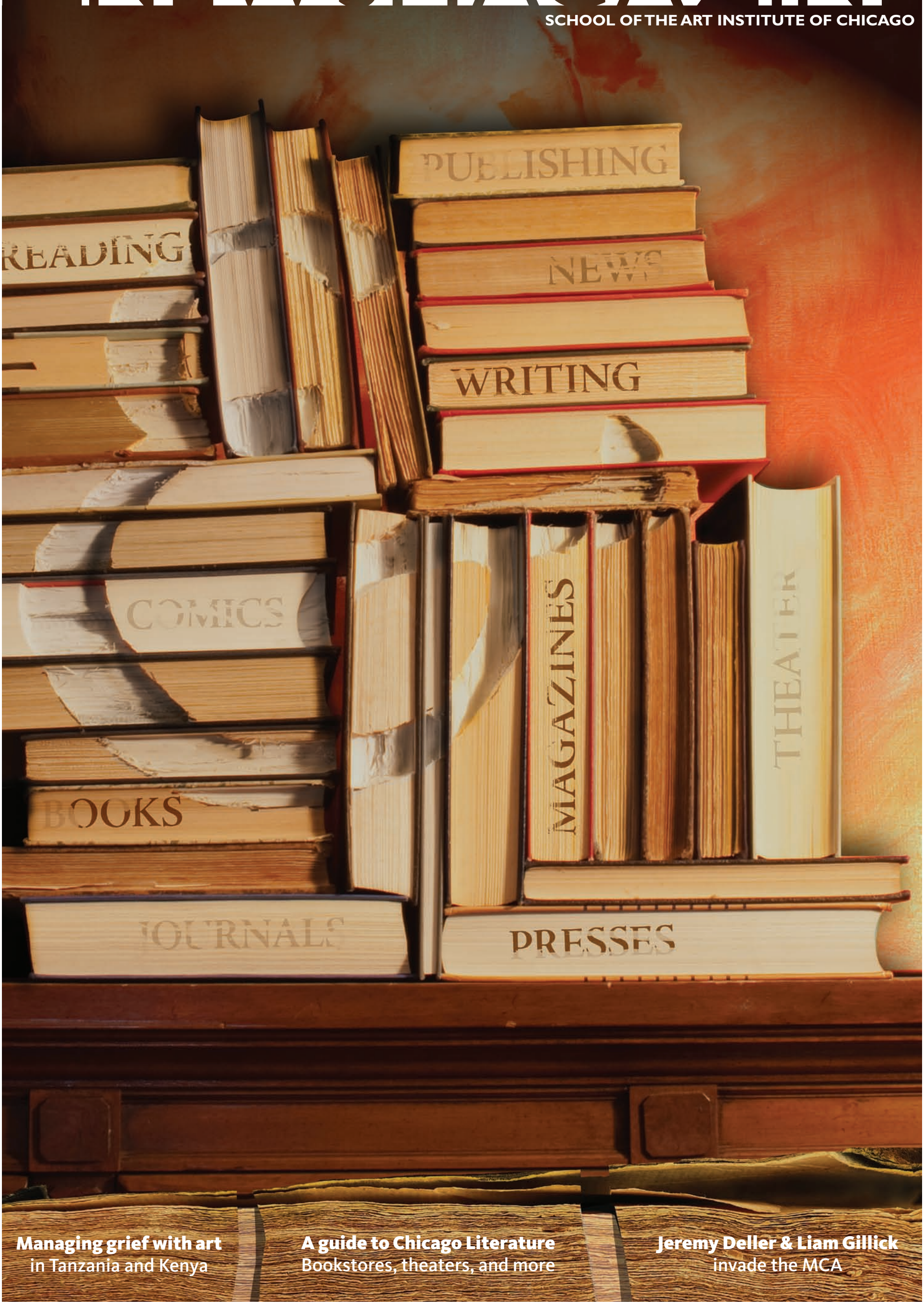
A STUDENT JOURNAL OF ART, CULTURE AND POLITICS

NOVEMBER 2009

fNEWSMAGAZINE

SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO



Managing grief with art
in Tanzania and Kenya

A guide to Chicago Literature
Bookstores, theaters, and more

Jeremy Deller & Liam Gillick
invade the MCA

F NEWS MAGAZINE

A Journal of Art, Culture and Politics

A Student Publication of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

F is a free monthly newsmagazine open to art and article submissions from any member of the SAIC community. We also welcome and publish letters from all of our readers. Please contact the editors at ***editors@fnewsmagazine.com*** or ***312.345.3840*** for information, comments, or observations.

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Reinventing the SAIC Community

Illustration by Kira Mardikes

Guest Lecturer Discusses Institutional and Academic Strength

BY KERRIANNE O'MALLEY

In the first of a series of conversations about the reinvention of SAIC, Dr. Tori Haring-Smith, President of Washington & Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) SAGE (Strategies for Achieving Greater Expectations) consultant, led a discussion with members of the SAIC community on October 8.

"As the school both adapts to new leadership and looks towards its reaccredition, the self-definition of SAIC becomes increasingly important."

The topics of the discussion centered around SAIC's sense of community and the goals of the institution, especially the mission and core values of SAIC. As the school both adapts to new leadership and looks towards its reaccreditation, the self-definition of SAIC becomes increasingly important.

SAIC's current status as an accredited school makes its students better candidates for financial aid and more competitive in the job market. Schools that are not accredited are often not recognized by federal aid programs and seen as second-rate by employers.

"As it affects financial aid, reaccreditation is an issue for both the students and the institution," said Wyatt Grant, a junior. "But at the same time, I think the quality of our education is the responsibility of the institution, whether or not we get accreditation."

Accreditation, which must be renewed every ten years, is granted to an institution that, among other things, has an acceptable level of student educational success and demonstrates an effort to improve itself.

To this end, Dr. Haring-Smith was brought in by SAIC staff to use her experience as a faculty member, administrator, and president to facilitate SAIC's growth and improvement.

To increase the school's effectiveness, Dr. Haring-Smith recommends creating a consolidated list of its core values. Policies and projections for the future should, she argued, spring from these common points. The lecture attendees each recorded a sentiment they valued at SAIC on note-cards. These note-card responses will soon be available on the web.

In addition to administrative strength, Dr. Haring-Smith stresses the importance of a common thread throughout a student's education, including experiences both inside and outside of the classroom setting. Recognizing that SAIC's student body has an affinity for self-direction, she describes her experience at Brown University, another strongly independent university that also operates on a pass-fail system.

"In that very free environment, we needed more than ever to direct the students," said Dr. Haring-Smith. Without a united administration, committed to providing its students with a unified college experience, "what you do in the classroom is undercut".

A second-year SAIC graduate student questioned Dr. Haring-Smith's emphasis on a unified educational experience in the discussion. "Within chaos, I see the potential for growth," he said. "To me, chaos is not to be avoided."

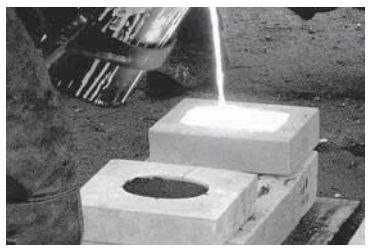
Although a large portion of Dr. Haring-Smith's address was directed at uniting disparate faculty and staff, the majority of the respondents in the Q-and-A were students, eager to have their voices heard.

"SAIC as an institution is often not considered by students," said Ingrid Olson, a senior, after the talk. "We experience the effects. That's why it was very illuminating to see the school discussed in this way."

Dr. Haring-Smith may not have provided answers to all of the conflicts and issues within the SAIC community, but she did encourage more open discussion and willingness to compromise. She encourages the entire community to think about what SAIC could and should be for future generations of students and faculty.

Future conversations have yet to be announced, but hopefully they will contribute to this atmosphere of openness and a gradual progress. f

To participate in this ongoing conversation, e-mail discovery@saic.edu.



the year of IRON

Forging a community

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JEN MOSIER

When you can't pour molten iron in downtown Chicago, SAIC still finds a way to call this "The Year of Iron."

Karly Spell, co-owner of Art Casting of Illinois, Inc., opened up her bronze-casting foundry to host an iron pour. Students ignited three cupola furnaces to melt cast iron on the original site of the old foundry in Oregon, Illinois.

"After the fire, it's exciting to see this empty lot being used, " Karly said.

The lot, located next to the new foundry, wasn't empty for long. Immediately, students suited up in safety gear and unpacked equipment for the pour.

"This event has been a great opportunity for students to visit the foundry and understand about the process," she said.

With sledgehammers in hand, students broke up recycled heating furnaces, sinks, radiators and bathtubs. Students shaped sand molds and melted the recycled iron into those molds.

Carolyn Ottmers, SAIC foundry supervisor, coordinated with Karly to create what they hope to be an annual event. Carolyn, along with Gabriel Akagawa, Assistant Adjunct Professor, and foundry manager Dan Matheson, gave students the opportunity to learn about iron. Stressing the need for safety as iron chunks flew through the air, Gabriel showed students how to break up the masses of metal. Dan oversaw students as they set up the furnaces that would later melt those pieces of metal.

Far from towering skyscrapers in the rural landscape west of Chicago, flames and sparks flew freely from the furnaces. Students and faculty say their road trip to create artwork ignited excitement in the craft. Currently SAIC offers bronze and aluminum casting, so if you want cast iron, plan on leaving the confines of the city limits.

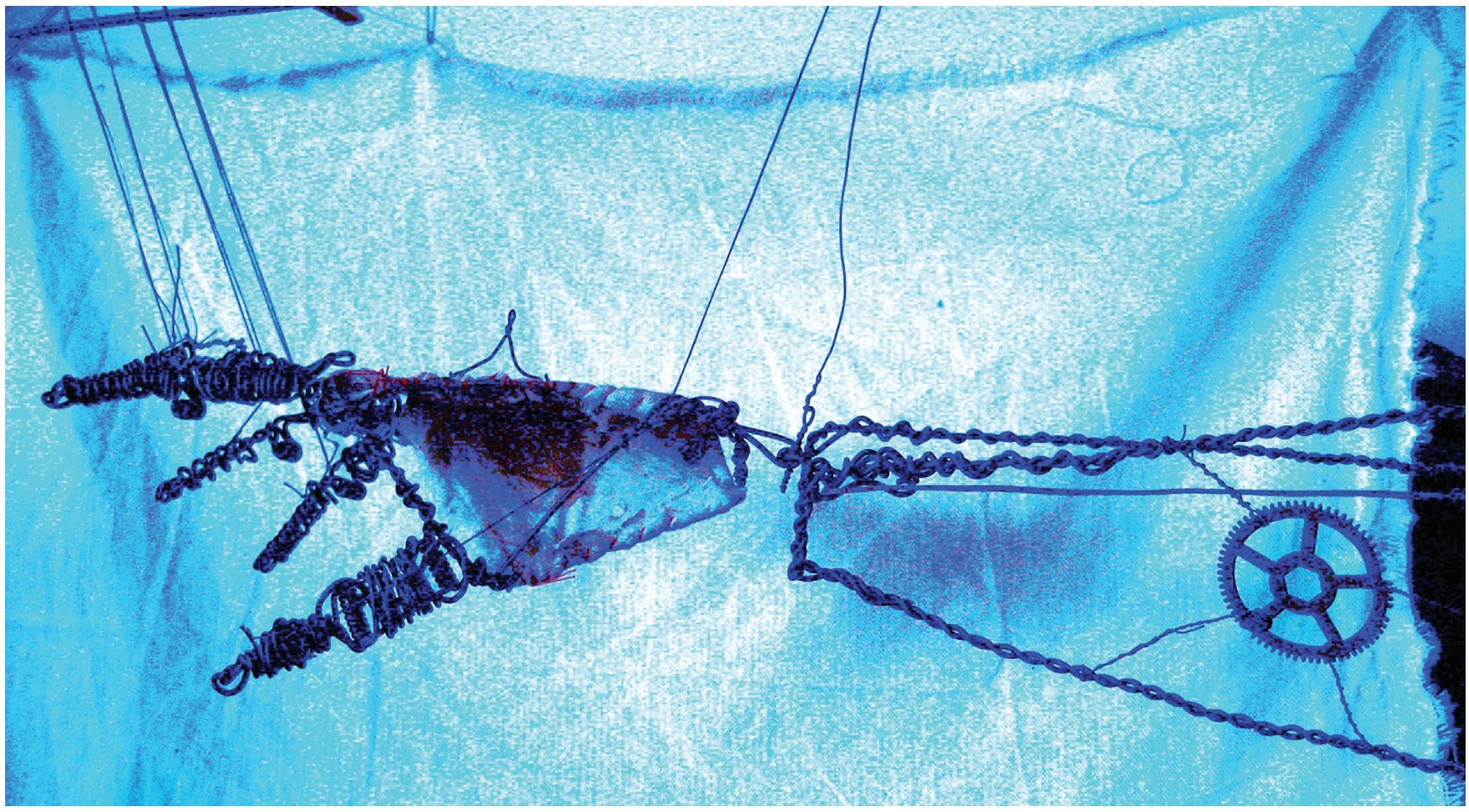
The iron casting process is labor intensive. And the payoff is that you become part of a community through the process. Nobody can pour molten iron alone. Everyone leaves with a shared experience. That allure brings experienced students back for more, as it has for 20 years under Carolyn's direction. Spring 2010 will mark that two-decade anniversary of Carolyn's annual iron pour at Crabtree Farm, where schools from the area including Grand Valley State University will join SAIC in the art of casting metal. It's a celebration that marks the transition of pouring industrial metal into what it has become: art.

SCHOOL NEWS TICKER

BY RITA DeANGELO

Even with only 7% admitted, SAIC graduate enrollment is still at its highest ever, making the future of this list of accomplishments look quite fruitful...rumor has it that the school has put dorm kids with the flu in a certain high class hotel, but don't worry, health services is organizing flu vaccinations for students... does anyone know what that random building being built within the Michigan Building is for?... as for personal accomplishments, **Edmund Sandoval** has been busy with two stories ("Meat and Blade" in Thieves Jargon and "Kimchi" in Dogzplot Flash Fiction Anthology 2009 Edition) soon to be released... **Judith Valente** (MFAW 2001) published a full-length collection of poems, "Discovering Moons" (Virtual Artists Collective, 2009)... Future reading: Art Education professors **Quinn** and **Ploof**, along with former colleague **Lisa Hochtritt**, will produce a volume about art education as social justice work scheduled for publication in 2011. And if you're sick of reading for yourself, don't miss the next Quickies! reading series by **Mary Hamilton** (MFAW 2007) and **Lindsay Hunter** (MFAW 2007) on Nov. 10... **Nancy Feldman** was at the Lima Film Fest for the screening of "El Pueblo Shipibo: Men of the Montana," a silent film using anthropological footage from 1952...

Unless you were in Peru in October, you missed it, but you can still catch **Shannon Benine's** "Means Without End," a photography piece visually examining how American families deal with a loved one's loss in Iraq and Afganistan... Even darker is **Stephanie Brooks'** "Because the Night," a show of 16 artists whose work evokes sensations that happen only "because the night."... Bright news for **Anne Harris** whose piece was selected from 3,300 to be part of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery's "Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition 2009" show, and **Peter Exley's** architecture firm, architectureisfun, is featured in the new book, "Details in Architecture, Creative Detailing by Leading Architects."... Meanwhile, **Sarah Ross** is investigating 99 actions that instigate positive change in contemporary cities around the world in "Actions: What You Can Do With The City."... **Jerry Bleem's** inspired by the various ways the war in Iraq has been reported in his exhibition, "Allegiance," and **Eduardo Kac's** piece, "Genesis," is on its 38th showing world-wide, this time in France... Slightly closer is **Tony Phillips'** piece, "The Weather Channel," at the Islip Art Museum in Long Island, and even closer is **Jason Lazarus'** photography piece at the Art Institute – no excuse to miss that one...go!



PUPPETRY
WITH A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

Theatre ZARKO unleashes it's premiere season

BY EMILE FERRIS

The puppet by very nature is a tough customer, a perpetrator, an instigator and a mocker. A liminal non-human status makes it a natural affront to the established order. Perhaps this is why puppetry has so often found itself relegated to the outer strata of the theatrical universe.

"I quietly mock the hubris of human beings attempting to replace a hand with a mechanical device."

Yet, as evidenced by the growing popularity and renown of such groups as Red Moon Theater, puppetry may be on the ascent. In step with such a renaissance, Evanston's fledgling Theatre Zarko challenges any assumptions regarding the marginality of puppetry.

"I dreamed that my sister found a toy in the grass and brought it to me. I played with it for a while until a cloud blackened out the sun. My hands turned into birds and flew into a tree..."

So begins Theatre Zarko's premiere production, "The Sublime Beauty of Hands," which confronts the devastation caused by land mines while also exploring the dualistic nature of the human creativity from which such horrors originate.

Puppeteer Michael Montenegro cites as his impetus for making "Sublime," an eight year "milieu of constant war." Denied any visual documentation of the terrors in Iraq and Afghanistan, and aware that our soldiers were coming back deeply traumatized, Montenegro found himself preoccupied by dream images. In response he created a symbolist performance that could address both the human cost of war as well as the profound visual deprivation of a nation kept in the dark regarding its actions.

"I am always struck by the voiceless nature of the real victims of any war," says Montenegro, "and that perhaps their only voice becomes the nightmares of the perpetrators." In "Sublime" it is this dark world of bad dreams that shrouds both victim and assailant.

As the performance initiates, masked female actors speak lines of poetry their identities obscured as if in a painting by Magritte, their sinuous hands moving like magnificent, vulnerable birds.

"Hands are at the center of creativity..." said Montenegro, "exquisitely beautiful in their ability to express everything that takes part within the heart." The human hand in this production is emblematic of both creativity and cruelty, as well as the complexity that results when these two uniquely human attributes combine.

Hence in "Sublime Beauty" a toy-maker designs explosives and employing Montenegro's stark and resonant choreography -the inevitable horror is realized in the loss of a child's hands.

In a post-performance discussion, troupe-members Jason Tucker and Laura Montenegro decried the heinous practice of making land mines that "are bright yellow and look attractive like toys."

Sites such as Unicef's "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" substantiate the performers' claims and reveal startling figures. Since May 1995 children have made up about half the victims of the 50,000 - 100,000 anti-personal mines laid in Rwanda. Naturally curious, children are likely to pick up strange objects, such as the infamous toy-like 'butterfly' mines that Soviet forces spread by the millions in Afghanistan.

Michael Montenegro says he's "intrigued by the neutrality of creativity. A creative person must choose how to use her/his gifts... DaVinci made this extraordinary painting, the Mona Lisa, and at the same time designed weapons... using his tremendous gifts towards opposite ends."

In the final and possibly most haunting movement of "The Sublime Beauty of Hands," Montenegro speaks to the effort to replace shattered limbs with prosthetics.

"I quietly mock the hubris of human beings attempting to replace a hand with a mechanical device." Although he says that he accepts that this is well-intentioned, he grieves "the lack of struggle to prevent the loss of those things that are irreplaceable."

Although Theatre Zarko's comedic second act, "Klown Kantos," comprised of a series of stand alone puppetry performances, is whimsical and engaging, it is not without social commentary.

Despite the fact that "Meat," an entirely puppet-acted piece, is set in a butcher shop and is comical, it could easily be understood as promotional of vegetarianism.

In another piece in the second act entitled "Calvin" Montenegro displays remarkable ability as he performs with a headless twin puppet that is attached to his body. According to the puppeteer, this piece illustrates the "trials and tribulations of dealing with other people."

Michael Montenegro's genius is not simply in his ability to organize his troupe or conceive an impressive production or craft and perform his puppets. His genius is squarely centered in his employment of the inherent symbolism of puppetry in order to examine difficult issues. When Montenegro is asked to call to mind a historic example of puppetry's social relevance, he says, "in the old circus, a clown would race terrified around the ring with a wire attached to his back. At the end of the wire was attached a skeleton. So what he was afraid of, what he was running away from was attached to him. This is on the surface a simple visual joke. But of course it is a very good nonverbal commentary on our lives."

The Sublime Beauty of Hands, performance, Michael Montenegro.
Images courtesy of the artist.

Scott Barsotti

Exploring the genre of FEAR

BY RITA DeANGELO

The Revenants, performance. Images courtesy of Scott Barsotti.

Scott Barsotti's forward and welcoming demeanor makes him feel like an old high school pal. When we met, his dress shirt was hidden by a cozy zip-up sweatshirt and his potentially presentable hair was hibernating underneath a stocking cap. If necessary, he could look professional. After learning of Barsotti's theatrical goals, it seems that the concept of the unknown–whether it be his ambiguous appearance or the situations he creates–is a theme he holds dear.

In September, Barsotti was named one of four new Resident Playwrights at Chicago Dramatists. (Among the other four is SAIC Writing faculty member Ruth Margraff.) Over a 3-year term, with the possibility of renewing for another, the Resident Playwright program provides its chosen playwrights with support in the form of dramaturgical feedback, access to their programs and resources, as well as the opportunity to extend their work to a wider network of theatres. In it's 30th year, the Resident Playwright program has become a nationally known honor.

Born in the blue-collar city of Pittsburgh, PA, Barsotti had no encounters with theatre pre-college. As a Writing major at Denison University, it was not until his friends convinced him to write a script for a One Act festival that Barsotti even considered writing for the stage. As he wrote, he realized that his tendency towards dialogue lent itself well to playwriting. The process of working with actors and a director appealed to him. Barsotti cites this as his most fulfilling writing experience. He was hooked.

In 2004, Barsotti entered SAIC for an MFA in Writing. He worked with Beau O'Reilly and Jenny Magnus, two people with whom he continues his professional relationships through their company, Curious Theatre Branch. In his final year at SAIC Barsotti recognized his interest in fear. In hindsight, it seems obvious to him now, and even as he explained it, the pieces fell into place. Barsotti writes from the subconscious, uninterested in an explanation for every character or exposition for every scenario. He leaves parts of his plays open to interpretation. Often, the production process reveals the intentions of Barsotti's work that he was unable to pinpoint. Other times, the unknown remains unexplained, requiring the audience members to use their imaginations to fill the gaps.For Barsotti, both options are part of the exploratory and collaborative process of theatre.

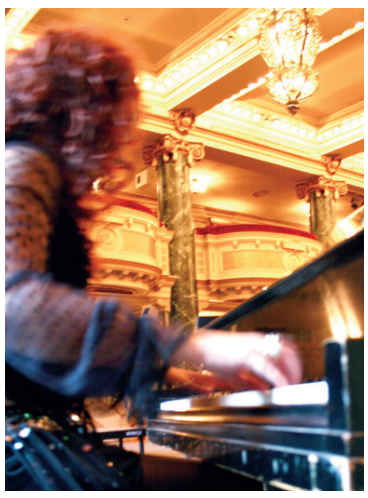
Barsotti's interest in the unexplained is not limited to what he does not describe in his scripts. Rather, it spans the subject matter of the pieces themselves. More than comedy or drama, Barsotti explained, the fear genre is transcultural. Everyone is afraid of the unknown, the supernatural, the Other. As he sees it, decent horror is viscerally frightening, good horror is psychologically frightening, and great horror is both. By creating relatable scenarios, Barsotti's horror is heightened. The audience members then can associate with it, recalling fears and projecting them onto what they are watching unfold. In this way, the viewers fill the unanswered with their own thoughts, inciting fear in a more personal way. With the unanswered stage action serving as a medium, the audience becomes vulnerable, manipulated by their own fears.

"The Revenants," opening at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company on October 16, illustrates Barsotti's skill to turn a horrific situation into a metaphor that the audience can relate to. In the piece, one representative from each of two couples becomes a zombie. Chained in the basement, the zombies await the next move from their still-living loved ones. As the loved ones deliberate over the unfortunate turn of events, the play turns into a terrifying description of the emotional turmoil and potential collapse of relationships when one partner undergoes an unexpected alteration of any kind: something almost everyone can relate to. Barsotti continues to examine

"Everyone is afraid of the unknown, the supernatural, the other. Decent horror is viscerally frightening, good horror is psychologically frightnening, and great horror is both."

the human psyche through his horror scripts, whether they be about zombies, grave robbers, witchcraft, or torture. "McMeekin Finds Out" is in development to be produced and Barsotti is currently adapting Robert Lewis Stevenson's short story, "The Body Snatchers." In addition to being a Resident Playwright at Chicago Dramatists, Barsotti works with other horror-theatre disciples at Wildclaw Theatre, is involved with the Curious Theatre Branch and EP Theater, where he is working on a December holiday show.

When asked what advice he has for aspiring playwrights, Barsotti's spark of determination shined through. "The most important is to always be writing. Read your own work. Get out and see theatre. Network with people. Chicago's a very unique theatre town and companies are constantly producing so playwrights have constant opportunities to get their work up. It's about just making the work. You can't please everybody so you have to write what you want to write and always be engaged in it."



Drama Queen

An interview with Ruth Margraff, SAIC Associate Professor, playwright, opera writer and singer-songwriter

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNE KNIGHT WEBER

Ruth Margraff considers herself a gypsy, not only because of her zest for traveling all over the world, but also because she plays Roma gypsy music. Margraff learned gypsy music when she lived with the Gourbeti tribe in Serbia for a summer, She used her experience to form Café Antarsia, a world folk music band.

She has red hair that cascades around her face and colorful clothes. She's young, too, but not so young she will tell you her age. "In the music industry, we have to pretend to be teenagers," she said. Margraff is a writer of plays, song lyrics and opera librettos as well as a performer and SAIC writing professor.

In addition to being the lead singer of Café Antarsia, Ruth Margraff is also a playwright. Her play "All those Violent Sweaters" a piece that takes female high school friendship to the bone, has been produced five times and is anthologized in a book of monologues for women.

Thirty-five of Margraff's plays have been produced, and her list of publications is long.

"I love and relate to the gypsy aesthetic so much, because I am a kind of gypsy. I had to move a lot and travel and had to be on my own and independent." Her parents divorced when she was seventeen, catapulting her out on her own, she said. "It was rough."

Her father was a Baptist preacher. "We lost all of our churches...my father, his ordination was revoked. It was a climactic time," she said.

Though she is no longer a Baptist, that tradition is important to her work. "I think that the language that I write with has been called 'neo-Biblical' because I was raised with the King James Version of the Bible. I'm comfortable reading very dense and poetic language, because of being versed in the Bible."

She grew up memorizing the Bible and played music in her church from the time she was five until she was seventeen.

"I think there is a lot of similarity between the theater and the church, and it's shocking to me sometimes how much similarity, because when I deviated from the church, I just went to another church, which is the church of the theater."

For a time in her life, she said she "tried to quench any reference to my background and lost almost everybody from that time period because they believed, I went, I backslid and am going to hell. So a lot of them don't want to talk to me anymore," she said.

Margraff's martial arts choreographed operas have been produced over fifty times. Fred Ho wrote the music for the martial arts operas that have appeared at the Guggenheim and PBS' show "Eye on Dance" produced by Celia Ipiotis in New York, and the Chicago Theater. One of the operas, "Night Vision: A First to Thirds World Vampyre Opera," is about a singer who is corrupted by commercial success.

Margraff wants to "push the form of opera into a more working-class direction and make it more non-western because opera is a European tradition." She believes that working class music is not about being slick or high-tech, but about "having almost no budget, playing acoustically, rather than digitally, and celebrating characters who are folk or marginal, they are not important… and celebrating them as though they were as important as someone in an opera. I think you have to celebrate characters that have been forgotten and I think you do that by treating them with an emotional scale that is operatic."

Margraff's mother was a United Nations peacekeeper for five years. Visiting her mother in Sarajevo changed her world view, Margraff said. "Its very disillusioning to be in a war torn country and see that at any moment people could start fighting again. Seeing that kind of violence and hatred is really alarming. That's why I feel strongly about the hatred speech that's happening right now in the Republican party... It's so frightening to see it happening in America, because this is what happened in Rwanda…The hate radio was what stirred up Rwandans to butcher each other with hand tools and farm tools…Language is very important. "

After their Sarajevo experience, Margraff and husband/bandmate/composer Nikos Brisco wrote a working class opera called "Wellspring" about a woman who looks for her United Nations Peace Keeping husband who is missing in Sarajevo.

"When I deviated from the church, I just went to another church, which is the church of the theater."

She and Brisco also collaborated on a folk operetta about her Aunt Pearl who died at the age of 45. "She basically drank herself to death," Margraff said. Aunt Pearl "taught [her] a lot from her grave" about the hard life in the coal-mining country of West Virginia. When performing Judges 19 Margraff paints with beer.

How does she manage to have done so much? She said, "I am not a particularly lucky person, so I have to work harder. Some people are lucky, just everything falls in their lap. It's not like that for me, so I have to work for everything," she said.

NEVER STOP SMILING

A Chicago magazine ventures into book publishing

INTERVIEW BY WHITNEY STOEPEL

Nestled among the rows of weathered neon furniture store signs on Milwaukee Avenue in Wicker Park is the Stop Smiling storefront. "Stop Smiling", a Chicago-based magazine and soon-to-become book publisher, touts itself as the magazine for "high-minded low-lifes." It panders to the intellectual set but also oozes with modest coolness, much like the subjects of their interviews with people like Steve McQueen, Oliver Stone, William S. Burroughs, and David Lynch. I asked J.C. Gabel, editor in chief, about expanding into book publishing.

What kind of books will you be publishing?

All creative nonfiction, in tune with the magazine's editorial mantra. Our first three original books are "How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The History of the Vocoder" by Dave Tompkins; "Listen to the Echoes: The Ray Bradbury Interviews" by Bradbury biographer, Sam Weller; and a book companion to Cal Arts film professor, Thom Andersen's brilliant video essay, "Los Angeles Plays Itself". In a nutshell, the books will run the gamut from subject to subject. We'll also be repackaging the classic, long-form Stop Smiling Interviews in three volumes, unabridged: filmmakers, authors and musicians respectively... one will be released each fall for the next three years.

Will the website and blog remain intact?

Yes, but it will be adapted to reflect the fact that we're a book publisher now.

How does being a book publisher or magazine editor in Chicago (as opposed to New York, L.A., London) have an impact on you and your product, as well as on the rest of the publishing industry?

Being in Chicago has its advantages and disadvantages.

We still have an office in New York, and our publishing partner, Melville House/Random House, are also based there; meaning, a portion of our business will always be run through New York, which is where the publishing industry is centered. So technically our books will be published out of New York, since they'll be printed on the East Coast and warehoused there. Our presence in Chicago as a publisher can only do us some good, seeing as how there are no publishers in the city that operate like our imprint will. I'm hoping this helps our impact throughout the city.

As far as being an editor, in Chicago, it's really easy to zone out and brood about our projects here without the distractions that exist in New York. It's also a lot more affordable to live and work here. But a great deal of our ability to gain access to story subjects requires us to go where the story is, and it's usually in New York or LA. Rarely do we get to interview subjects in Chicago, unless they are coming through town to promote something; and even then, we abhor press junkets, since we can't get the in-depth access we'd be looking for. I should note, however, that on a grassroots level we have a storefront in Wicker Park, which we've used to galvanize support around our publishing endeavors as well as other non-Stop Smiling related projects of the publishing variety. We're also going to start programming film events next year in conjunction with the Gene Siskel Film Center, too. Most of these will tie into our book projects on some level, as well.

(From top) **Issue 36: Expatriate, Issue 28: 20 Interviews, Issue 24: The Chicago Issue, Issue 27: Ode to the Midwest.**
Images courtesy of stopsmiling.com

Beau O'Reilly

Playwriting is a collaborative process

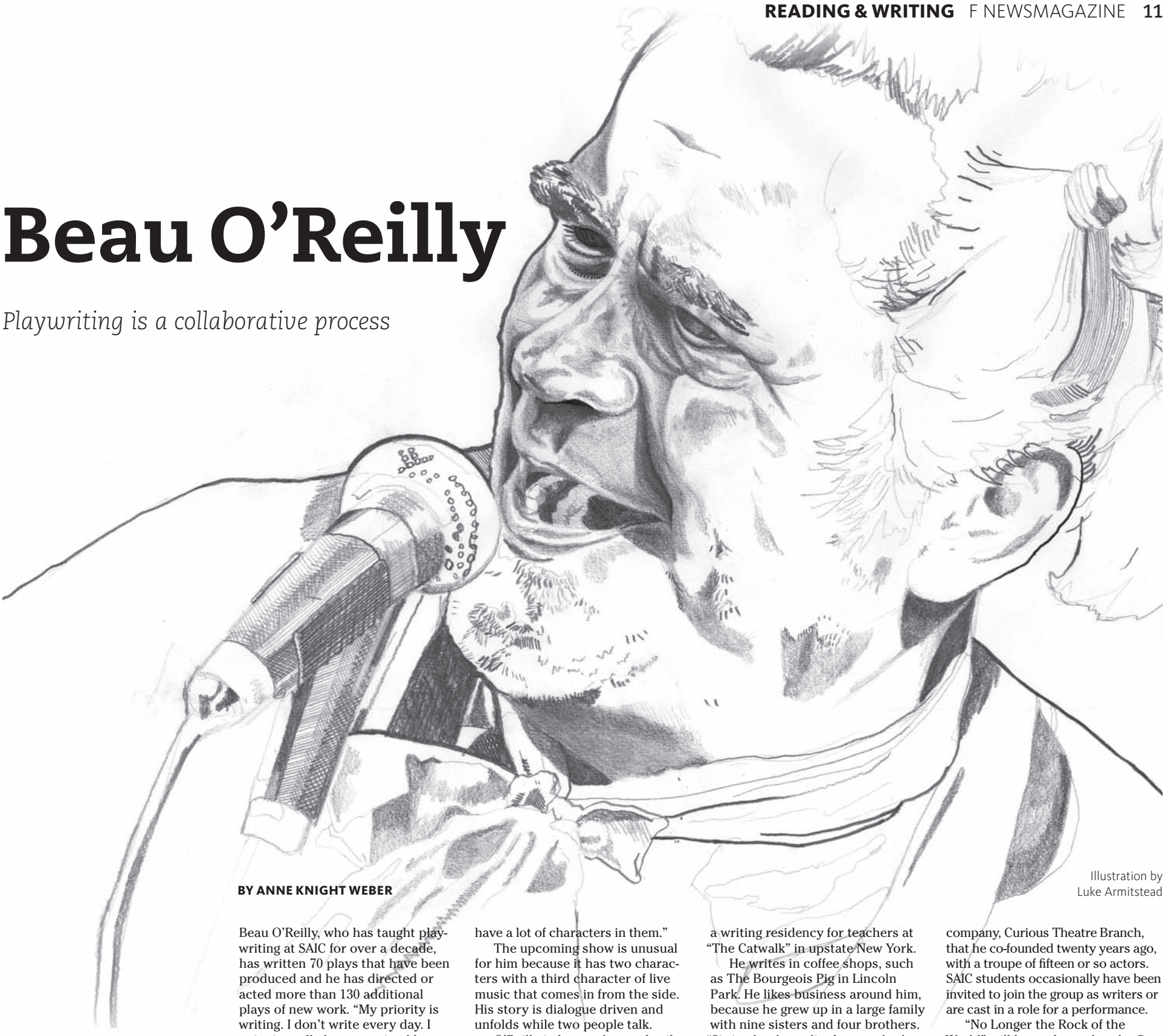


Illustration by Luke Armitstead

BY ANNE KNIGHT WEBER

Beau O'Reilly, who has taught playwriting at SAIC for over a decade, has written 70 plays that have been produced and he has directed or acted more than 130 additional plays of new work. "My priority is writing. I don't write every day. I write in really long sustained bursts. Sometimes I write for three or four days in a row."

His play "No longer the Rock of the World" is in production now, opening on November 29 at Center Portion Gallery in Logan Square. He said his plays are "story driven pieces about people in relationships, the ethics of relationships…there's often a theme of broken family, reconstituted family…my plays usually have a lot of characters in them."

The upcoming show is unusual for him because it has two characters with a third character of live music that comes in from the side. His story is dialogue driven and unfolds while two people talk.

O'Reilly is from a theatre family and both his sons act. "My father ran the Court Theater in Hyde Park and then he ran The Body Politic, which was in the Victory Gardens… He was a director, but he also acted. He was known as a Shakespearean actor, which I have never done." His mother produced variety shows and musicals.

O'Reilly wrote the play "No Longer the Rock of the World" while in a writing residency for teachers at "The Catwalk" in upstate New York.

He writes in coffee shops, such as The Bourgeois Pig in Lincoln Park. He likes business around him, because he grew up in a large family with nine sisters and four brothers. "Sitting by the radio, for me, that's quiet," he said.

At the end of his residency, when he'd finished his project, he had another idea. "I'd been thinking about this play for awhile in the back of my mind, so I sat down and I wrote it in three days, which for me is pretty fast."

Usually he has specific actors in mind as he writes his plays. He mostly works with actors in his company, Curious Theatre Branch, that he co-founded twenty years ago, with a troupe of fifteen or so actors. SAIC students occasionally have been invited to join the group as writers or are cast in a role for a performance.

"No Longer the Rock of the World" will be performed at the Center Portion Gallery for a six week run. The space is great for O'Reilly because it is set up for about thirty people with a cabaret stage, "very intimate and small" he said.

He likes writing for the fringe or storefront spaces. "Its economically accessible work, blue collar theater," inexpensive to see and to produce, O'Reilly said. f

Four Chicago Storefront theaters share these basic similarities

Each of these theaters are collaborative companies that write, produce and perform their own original work as inexpensively as possible. Three of the four have a twenty year history of working in Chicago.

Curious Theatre Branch (http://curioustheatrebranch.com) Curious works with an ensemble of artists in a non-hierarchical decision-making process, using an economy of means and production to make deeper and deeper, rather than larger and larger, work.

EP theatre (1820 S. Halsted in Pilsen, www.eptheater.com) is a non-profit that did outreach last year with a local elementary school and whose productions have included the Acro-Cats, Chicago's only feline show and dramatic musical shows.

Oobleck Theater (at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 West Division Street in Wicker Park http://www.theateroobleck.com) members of this ensemble work without an overseeing director to create idiosyncratic pieces. In 2008 Mickle Maher's The Strangerer moved to New York for a successful six-week Off-Broadway engagement at the Barrow Street Theatre.

Prop Thtr (3202 N. Elston in Logan Square, http://www.propthtr.org) whose focus is to create work around existing pieces of literature from such authors as Salinger and Doestyvsky. This space is also used as a location for Beau Reilly's Rhino fest and the recent "Alumni Bow" a collection of plays by SAIC alumni.

Upcoming Live Performances

Held over until Sunday, November 8, at Theater Oobleck (in the basement of The Chopin Theater in Wicker Park) "**An Apology for the course and outcome of certain events delivered by Doctor John Faustus on this his final evening,"** written by Mickle Maher, SAIC MFAW graduate. tickets are $12. More if you've got it, free if you're broke. For more information or reservations call 773-347-1041 or visit theateroobleck.com.

7:30 p.m. Thursday, October 29
Cabaret Oobleck
773.347.1041
Beau O'Reilly and the Crooked Mouth String Band play at at Cabaret Oobleck .

9 p.m. Saturday, January 30, 2010
Prop Theater
3502-4 Nl. Elston Ave.
773.539.7838
Ruth Margraff's Café Anastasia will perform new music for Rhinofest.

Online at fnewsmagazine.com:
See a video clip of Margraff's play"Stadium Devildare.
Hear songs from CD Songs at the Table from "Café Antrasia"
Read a review of a play by Mickle Maher.

Winter interim

January 4-January 17, 2010

two-week, three credit intensives for undergraduate and graduate students

REGISTRATION BEGINS NOVEMBER 16

The Courses

CER 623 001

Fast and Nasty: Actions on Clay

Anna Mayer (Cal Arts)

DRAWING 615 001

The Singular, The Multiple, and the In-Between

Jesse Bransford (NYU) & Jonah Groeneboer (NYU)

PAINTING 626 001

Encounters at the End of the World: Investigating Landscape

Claire Sherman (Knox College) & Carl Baratta (SAIC)

Scholarships and Financial Aid Available.
For more information, email ox-bow@saic.edu

Unchained

Illustration by Nicole Briant

With the increasing irrelevancy of giant chains like Borders, which is closing its store on Michigan Ave, now is the time to familiarize yourself with Chicago's indepdendent bookstores. In fact, you should have done that yesterday. A quick look at the city's best:

Quimby's
1854 W North Ave
Chicago, IL 60622
(773) 342-0910

Specializes in comic books, fun readings, local presses, zines and some literotica. Go to this store now. No cellphones inside the store please. Makes for a pleasant browsing experience. For their mascot, they adapted a cartoon character (whose name happened to be Quimby) created by SAIC alum Chris Ware.

Women & Children First Bookstore
5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299

Feminist bookstore that focuses on books for, well, women and children. They started a nonprofit: The Women's Voices Fund, which raises money to run feminist programming at the store. Go support them.

Bronzeville Gold
4655 South King, (773)924-3966

Afro-centric bookstore, creator of "Book It Black to Bronzeville," a book festival that celebrates literature and emphasizes 'the importance of literacy for all Chicagoans." Notable local figures have given readings/signings there, like Chris Gardner, the financial adviser whose life story was the inspiration for the film "Pursuit of Happyness."

Seminary Co-op Bookstore, 5757 South University, (773)752-4381; the co-op also owns 57th St. Books, 1301 East 57th, (773)684-1300

You're not walking into a religious trap. The bookstore is located in the basement of the Chicago Theological Seminary, but it's got a wide variety of reading matierals, influenced by the nearby University of Chicago. The consumer-owned Co-op also owns 57th St Books, which also tends to be scholarly but with a large general interest and childrens' section. Both of these book stores are for serious readers.

Bookworks
3444 N. Clark, (773)871-5318

Bookworks has normal books, but it also offers rare and out-of-print books, also super-old records and vintage photographs. They have a severe dedication to beat poets. Plus, they buy books and parking is always available behind the shop.

Chicago Comics
3244 N. Clark, (773)528-1983

This store has been around for fifteen years, and offers a comprehensive collection of main stream comics, local comics, zines, and some underground lit. Owned by the Quimbys' guy, Eric Kirsammer.

Unabridged Bookstore
3251 N. Broadway, (773)883-9119

The best source in the city for gay and lesbian literature. Open and thriving in its current location since 1980, they also offer a good mix of general fiction, kid's books, travel books.

The Book Cellar
4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665

Wine bar, cafe, and local author hangout and reading venue. They carry tons of Chicago authors and Chicago-related books. The late Studs Turkel read there a number of times, and you can catch Joe Meno there every now and again. They host readings typically once a month.

Prairie Avenue Books
418 S. Wabash, (800)474-2724

It's near the art schools for a reason: anything you could ever want about design and architecture in an inspiring space designed by co-owner and retired architect Wilbert R. Hasbrouck. If you have money to burn, you can pick up designy antiques and blueprints.

Barbara's Bookstore
1218 S. Halsted, (312)413-2665

This is the largest store of the independent Chicago chains. They've got a massive selection of books of every variety. Barbara's also has a built-in room for author appearances, so you know they're dedicated. They have four Chicago stores and one at O'Hare for when you forget to take something to read on the airplane.

After Words Books
23 E. Illinois, (312)464-1110

This place carries almost anything, with a pretty good used book selection at reasonable prices, even though it's right off Michigan Avenue. Also, they buy books for cash every Thursday starting at four p.m. Who doesn't dig cash?

Shake, Rattle, and Read
4812 N. Broadway,(773)334-5311

This place may carry a lot of porn, but it's also got some dusty vintage magazines at cheap prices. Some records and Star Trek stuff too. Disorganized and fascinating. Much like the people who frequent the store.

Myopic Books
1564 N. Milwaukee, (773)862-4882

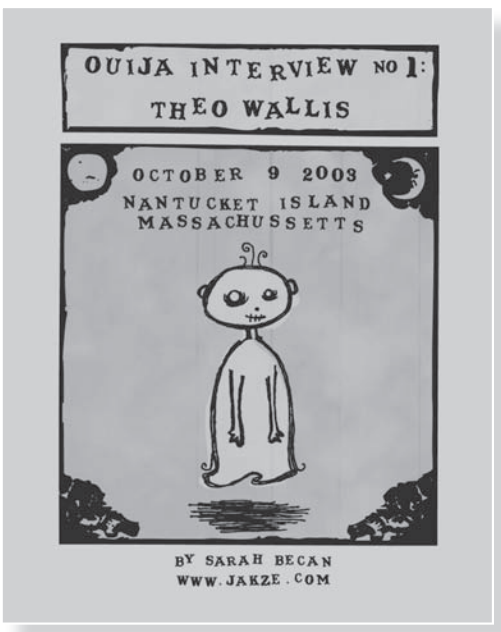
Staff of knowledgeable bibliophiles to help you find the right book from its inventory of more than 80,000 used top floor also plays host to local poets, while experimental musicians make use of the unique acoustics of the main floor. A visit here is a great follow up to a seitan reuben from Earwax.

Revolution Books
1103 N. Ashland, (773)489-0930

Forums are held while Marx, Mao, Lenin and Avakian fill the shelves. Around since the 1970s this store is frequented by those in the neighborhood, students, professors and activists. Probably wise to only pay in cash. No paper trail, no Gitmo.

An Interview with Shortpants Press Founder Sarah Becan

The skinny on Shortpants



All images courtesy of Shortpants Press

INTERVIEW BY EMILE FERRIS

Right up until 2004, Sarah Becan and M. Jason Robards were simply two artists who - as their website proclaims - liked making comics because it's "art that reaches tons of people who'd never set foot inside of a SoHo gallery."

But that year Becan and Robards became the founders of Shortpants Press, a boutique publishing venture that writer/reviewer Tom Spurgeon of the "Comics Reporter" has called "one of the half-dozen most reliable sources for quality mini-comics going right now."

In this interview with Sarah Becan, F Newsmagazine comics editor Emile Ferris attempts to garner information about the comics scene, as well as the joys and pitfalls of self-publishing.

Emile Ferris: Why did you become a publisher?

Sarah Becan: I actually didn't start out trying to be a publisher. When we came up with the name Shortpants Press, it was just a name for my friend Jason and I to exhibit under together. We were just a vanity press, putting out our own books. Then a friend approached us to see if we wanted to put out his book, and then another, and another. I realized there were a lot of artists out there who had lots of talent but maybe didn't have the time or inclination or resources to self-publish. I work as a creative director and graphic designer, so I have access to high quality scanners, I know how to use all the computer programs, I know how to set up a multi-page file in printers' spreads, and I have relationships with lots of print houses in the city. It made sense to use those resources to help out my fellow artists.

EF If you have seen an increase in the interest in comics and graphic novels, to what would you attribute this heightened attention?

SB Well, certainly more and more mainstream movies seem to be coming to the comics world for film ideas, which eventually brings more people into the comic book stores. I think, at least I hope, more and more people are slowly starting to realize that there can be a depth of powerful storytelling in the comic book format.

EF What books are you most proud of publishing?

SB The one I'm most proud of is probably the first issue of the Shortpants Observer. It's an anthology project, much like Blood Orange or Papercutter. We got four very talented comics artists – for this issue it was Corinne Mucha, Jeremy Tinder, Becca Taylor and Anya Davidson – and gave them free rein to do as many pages as they wanted. Each one turned out phenomenal work, and I had a great time putting the files together and laying them out in a book. It's probably our most ambitious project to date, but the end result is just lovely.

EF What kind of submissions are you seeking?

SB Since we all have day jobs outside of Shortpants Press, we do have the sort of luxury of only putting out books that we're really excited about. I'm very interested in anything different, unique, new; anything that tries to expand the definition of "comic book" and that wouldn't fit in with the mainstream publishers. I'm a big fan of the literary approach, the content-driven approach, and of course anything handmade. I like a comic book to be an art object in its own right.

We're not actively seeking out new things to publish right now, but I do always have my eye open for anything new and interesting. And I'm just as happy to talk someone through the process of self-publishing as I am to publish a new book.

EF Within the comics community whose critical attention/opinion do you most respect?

SB Oh, there are so many good people out there. I follow Joanna Draper Carlson at Comics Worth Reading, and of course Tom Spurgeon at the Comics Reporter. Douglas Wolk is an incredibly insightful comics reader. Although I don't think I've ever geeked out so much as when one of my books got a good review from Thurston Moore, in Arthur's Bull Tongue segment.

EF Do you go to comic conventions and if so, which do you find to be the best?

SB We do go to comic conventions. We've done Wizard World Chicago, SPX, APE—we're actually getting ready to fly out for that one right now—TCAF in Toronto, Stumptown in Portland Oregon, and the new Windy City Comicon that just started up. I don't know if I could tell you which one is best, they all have different nuances. Wizard World is its own animal, dominated by the mainstream companies and filled with people in costumes. SPX and APE, TCAF and Stumptown, they're much more indie-centric, people who go to those shows are looking for things that are interesting and different. Stumptown seems especially receptive to handmade, handprinted things. TCAF, oddly, doesn't seem nearly as interested in the DIY books, but they treat exhibitors extremely well. The Windy City Comicon is just getting its legs, but it's a great convention. It's up in Boystown, so it's incredibly easy to get to, and it's just a great mix of local talent.

EF Where do you see comics going in the future?

SB I'm afraid to even hazard a guess. I've heard people say that the graphic novel is going to supplant the prose novel as a popular form of storytelling, but I doubt that'll happen in our generation. I would love to see comics achieve that level of legitimacy and respect, but I'm afraid it's slow going. It's partly because most people don't think comics is capable of anything beyond superheroes and the funny pages, but it's also partly because the comics world itself hasn't done enough to undo that stereotype. Attitudes are shifting, on both sides, but change comes slowly.

EF What can you recommend in regards to self-publishing?

SB One of the best resources we've come across is "Whatcha Mean it's a Zine" by Esther Watson. A lot of great comics artists and zinesters contributed, and it's full of great information not just about the history of self-publishing, but also a lot of detailed information about how to physically print and assemble a book, information on silkscreening, binding, everything you could want to know.

EF What are the benefits of self-publishing and what are the pitfalls?

SB The pitfalls, of course, are that it's a lot more work, and you're using your own money to finance it. And it's harder to get recognition, but the field is opening up more to self-publishers every day. The benefits of self-publishing are myriad. You're your own boss, no one edits your work, no one tries to make it more "marketable", you can dictate every aspect of your piece. You can make it exactly how you want it to be, and every time one sells, you get all the money.

EF Is distribution of self-published materials a tough nut to crack? How is it best done?

SB Distribution is definitely tricky. Lots of stores, especially the local Chicago ones, will take books on consignment, giving you 50% or so of the cover price. Our books are at Chicago Comics and Quimby's, under deals like that. I know Graham Crackers and Comix Revolution do the same sort of deal too. So locally, distro is easy, but it requires some legwork.

Regionally or nationally, there really aren't many distro houses in the game, which is unfortunate. Diamond rules the roost for comics distribution, but they're hardly ever a viable option for the self-publisher. Bodega (http://www.bodegadistribution.com) does distribution for smaller runs, as does Last Gasp (http://www.lastgasp.com), but I know a lot of people who've had great luck with a guy named Tony Shenton. He's just this guy in New York, a comics fan, who used to work in the industry. Now he takes on clients who self publish, and for a percentage of sales, he'll take bulk orders for you from a bunch of comic book stores. He talks up your books to the stores, they place an order thru him, and suddenly you have 5 or 10 copies of your books selling at a handful of stores across the country. So there are definitely options for distribution, even if you're just hand-assembling 100 copies of your book.

The best resource for the self-publisher, though, is definitely the Internet. It's so easy these days, and almost free, to set up an online shop, take credit card info through Pay Pal, and ship things out yourself. It's the best way to make money doing what we do, because for once no one's taking a cut of the sales. And there are so many places to set up shop. You can go through Etsy, through eBay, Zen Cart, Cube Cart, Magento, there are tons of free and almost-free resources out there for setting up your own e-commerce. f

Photos by Jen Mosier

Life of the book

An interview with Kyle Beachy

BY NATALIE EDWARDS

Kyle Beachy answered his phone, "Kyle Beachy, published author." It's a joke. He isn't married to the idea of being an author, even though he has just published his first book, "The Slide," which was named "Best Book by a Chicago Author in the Last Year" by the Chicago Reader. Beachy graduated from the MFAW program at the School of the Art Institute in 2005. He says he went into the program with the goal of coming out with "The Slide," his coming-of-age saga about 22-year-old Potter Mays, working through a delayed adolescence. Potter moves in with his parents post-college, post-heartbreak, without a plan. He drives a water truck, is obsessed with baseball, befriends a fifth-grader, infiltrates a religious cult and watches his parents' relationship crumble.

Beachy's path to publication was, as he described it in a rush and without pathos, "just working very, very hard at SAIC the whole time I was there, the full two years." He finished his draft as planned, attended the Breadloaf Literary Conference on a waiter's scholarship (young authors are given a full scholarship but must wait tables for the big shots while they are there)–and compiled a bunch of references that didn't work out. "I wasn't able to get an agent, so I just continued to revise it, smacked it around and tried to get it into shape."

After he finished grad school, he taught at the Art Institute, Loyola, and did freelance work, while he shopped his book around. He sent out over 115 queries to literary agents. "I was very aggressive in my search for an agent, sending out e-mail queries daily, like 5 of them. Eventually a woman in San Diego who had done a lot of nonfiction but who was getting back into fiction picked it up and was able to sell it to Dial Press, a division of Random House." He then worked on revisions for another year with an editor. "It was cool to have someone whose whole job is to think about your book and how it could be made better. You have to justify yourself." From start to finish, getting his book out into the world took more than seven years.

The more Beachy put into his novel, the more invested he became, and the more confident he had to be. Though the process was long, he said, "It was a total mindfuck to have my book come out and have people reading it suddenly. It was an act of estrangement and alienation from something I had been working on for so long."

"It was a total mindfuck to have my book come out and have people reading it suddenly. It was an act of estrangement."

The life of the book could be distracting, but Beachy tries not to Google himself or read his amazon reviews often. He doesn't take hostile, Slide-related Facebook messages too seriously, either.

"You get in a habit of not caring as much as you did," he said. In the beginning, he says he cared about internet and book-world chatter, but ultimately, it wasn't helping his work. What does help, he says, is recalling the reasons he chooses to write.

"The first book you write is very much yourself. I suppose there are authors whose first novels aren't some minimal deviation from their own story," he said. "There's a certain reason the first book is the first, because these are the things you need to get out. You get them out."

He wants his books to be books you can sit down and get through. "The Slide came out of me as a slow meditation on adulthood, but if you're going to write a meditation you have to be really smart, have to justify a slow moving book, so at a certain point, I said, 'Screw it.' So I'm interested in the idea of speed, and interested in writing a book that can be read very quickly, but that doesn't sacrifice on some level of insight or relevance."

Beachy doesn't believe that novels should be impossible to get through. "I don't think that pacing and narrative movement have to come at the price of worth, validity, impact."

For now, Beachy has decided to be a writer, but he says that if he wanted to stop and get a Ph.D. in economics he would consider it. He seems to be preoccupied with assignation of arbitrary and artificial value. He wants to know how the price of his signed edition on amazon.com got set at $49.99. "Don't they know I'll sign anything for free?"

Children making art in new library (built by Global Alliance) in Kibera slum, Nairobi, Kenya Photo by Catherine Moon

A Manual for Relief

SAIC's Therapeutic Arts and the Global Alliance for Africa

BY M.J. VILLAMOR

Art Therapy Department Chair Catherine Moon did not know about Global Alliance for Africa (GAA) until she received a call from them in 2008. Shortly after, she was on a plane to Tanzania. In July 2006, GAA, a program helping communities provide sustainable care and support for orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS, created an art program in East Africa. GAA set up weekend art camps in Kenya and Tanzania, with hundreds of children participating and local artists serving as guides. The artists helped the children focus on visual art, vocational art, music, and dance. GAA wanted to add a therapeutic arts component to their program, and Moon was the person that GAA needed to make that happen.

Her goal for that first year was to get a sense of the cultural context, and understand GAA's needs. In order to visit more places in Tanzania, Moon stayed three and a half weeks, one more week than the length of the program. She observed that East Africa was a place of ethnic division, a place where she says there is still lots of tension.

"In general," Moon said, "the people in Kenya are very concerned about the tense political situation there and a recurrence of the violence that occurred after the last election. The people in both countries are concerned about poverty and government corruption."

She says that as a Mzungu (white person), she was hassled on the street, but when in people's homes or visiting their work site, she was treated like a queen. "They always wanted to feed me, even the poorest of the poor were generous. We also had a lot of fun with people—making jokes, singing, dancing, poking fun at each other." She was amazed by the hospitality and affection showed by both adults and children. "Men even hold hands in public."

Kibera slum, Nairobi, Kenya Photo by Catherine Moon

But Moon also observed the trauma the children experience. She describes it as "complex, compounding, and prolonged for these kids." She explains that "not only do they experience the often protracted and suffering-filled deaths of their parents, but they are parts of families and communities that have experienced multiple losses. Some have to become the caregivers for their younger siblings." These circumstances compound the financial hardships that the majority of people in East Africa already experience. Institutional care is rare, so children are taken in by relatives or become heads of households. Others are left homeless. "When they move in with relatives," Moon said, "they often contribute to an already overcrowded household and add to the financial burden, which can lead to a feeling of not belonging and a lack of emotional support. Because of financial worries, the child may be forced to drop out of school… so he or she can earn money for the family."

Add to this the stigma and bullying that go along with being an orphan and the trauma is compounded. Many children, are never told their parents have AIDS or have died of AIDS, so along with grief, they may experience confusion, reinforcing the sense of isolation. "In some cases, the kids also experience abuse, neglect, domestic violence, child labor exploitation, substance abuse by a caregiver, and their own medical issues due to being HIV positive," Moon said.

When she returned to Africa this summer, she wrote a training manual containing very basic counseling concepts and art therapy theory to help GAA's African therapeutic artists to address and understand the African children's trauma and grief. Moon says that it was great for her to write. She just said what she knew at the most basic level.

Moon doesn't think that the African artists needed help understanding the children's grief. "What happened was that we shared ideas about how to not only help children express and manage their grief, but also build skills, a sense of agency, and resilience," she said.

Besides writing the training manual. Moon worked with kids. Moon says, "Our art making with the kids while we are there is either for enrichment, or connected to these trainings" and that working with the kids together with the African artists is part of the training.

Two artists, Sane and Eunice, had already opened up their own studios to local kids. "For them," she said, "the trainings affirmed their intuitive ways of working, added to their theoretical knowledge, and gave them legitimacy within their communities. It was important for them to have a certificate of completion because people in their community have been suspicious of their work with kids, thinking they were just doing it to gain access to humanitarian aid." In their collaboration with GAA, Sane and Eunice will start a weekly therapeutic arts program in Kibera, a slum in Nairobi. They will travel there once a week while still working with the kids where they live in Tanzania.

Maeda, another trainee on faculty at Bagamoyo College of Arts, already had a sports and arts program in Kenya. Maeda had been doing drama, music, and dance with children, but "he used it purely as a diversion from their troubles." Moon worked with the kids from Maeda's program in training him. According to Moon, Maeda believes in the "arts to distract" from the turmoil existing in these kid's lives. Moon states, "It was a new perspective for him to think that art could also be a way for children to address and possibly resolve their troubled feelings. In countries where death, particularly death from AIDS, is seldom discussed with kids, we had to have some discussions about how to open up these avenues of expression for children while still respecting the beliefs and practices of families and communities. On the other hand, we talked about how art expression can occur in a coded form, so that no one needs to know its meaning other than those people the child chooses to tell. So the role of the therapeutic artist is to create a safe space where kids can express whatever needs to be expressed, without necessarily having to speak about difficult or taboo topics."

To have Africans teaching Africans is Moon's goal for GAA's arts therapy program, as well as financial sustainability, which is why there is also a vocational component to the program. Art forms are to be sold to fund the program. A woman's weaving co-op exists, and these women are emissaries for GAA's mission.

Andrea Koch, Art Therapy Alumni (2009), joined Moon for the 2009 trip. Koch was moved by Moon's experience, and spent $4500 on an airline ticket. She helped Moon train the African artists in basic counseling techniques to weave that into what they were already doing.

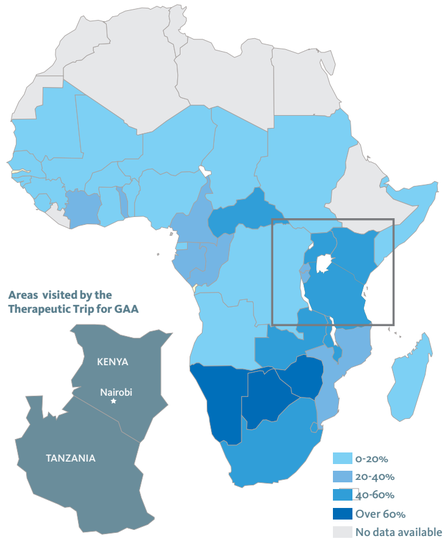
"What happened was that we shared ideas about how to not only help children express and manage their grief, but also build skills, a sense of agency, and resilience."

Koch said "the experience was really cool because it really strengthens my belief in the usefulness of art therapy, expands my belief of what art therapy can be, and what it can do." Koch was able to "really focus on art making and working with people that are in need." Originally an art major in college, it was those things that interested her in the field of art therapy. Koch states, "I learned so much. I learned more, a ton more, than I ever can teach these people." When asked whether it was worth it, considering the cost of graduate school, she said, "I don't regret it at all. If I could come up with the money to go back every year, I would do it."

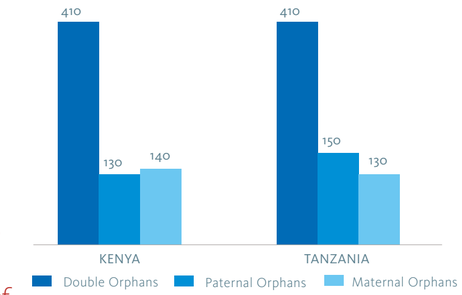
Group picture of SAIC faculty and therapeutic arts trainees (l to r): Angela Lyonsmith, Sane Wadu (Kenyan painter), Cathy Moon, Eunice Wadu, and in front is Haui Ahmad Maeda Photo by Linda Stolz

Orphans and HIV/AIDS in Africa

Children Orphaned by AIDS as % of all orphans in Africa



Amount of orphans by type *Amounts in thousands*



50%
of the households that include one or more children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV in Tanzania, receive some form of assistance, such as medical care, school assistance, financial support, or psychosocial services

Orphans are **4%** less likely to be in school than non-orphans

40-60% of orphaned children in Africa are cared for by grandmothers

Amount of orphans due to AIDS

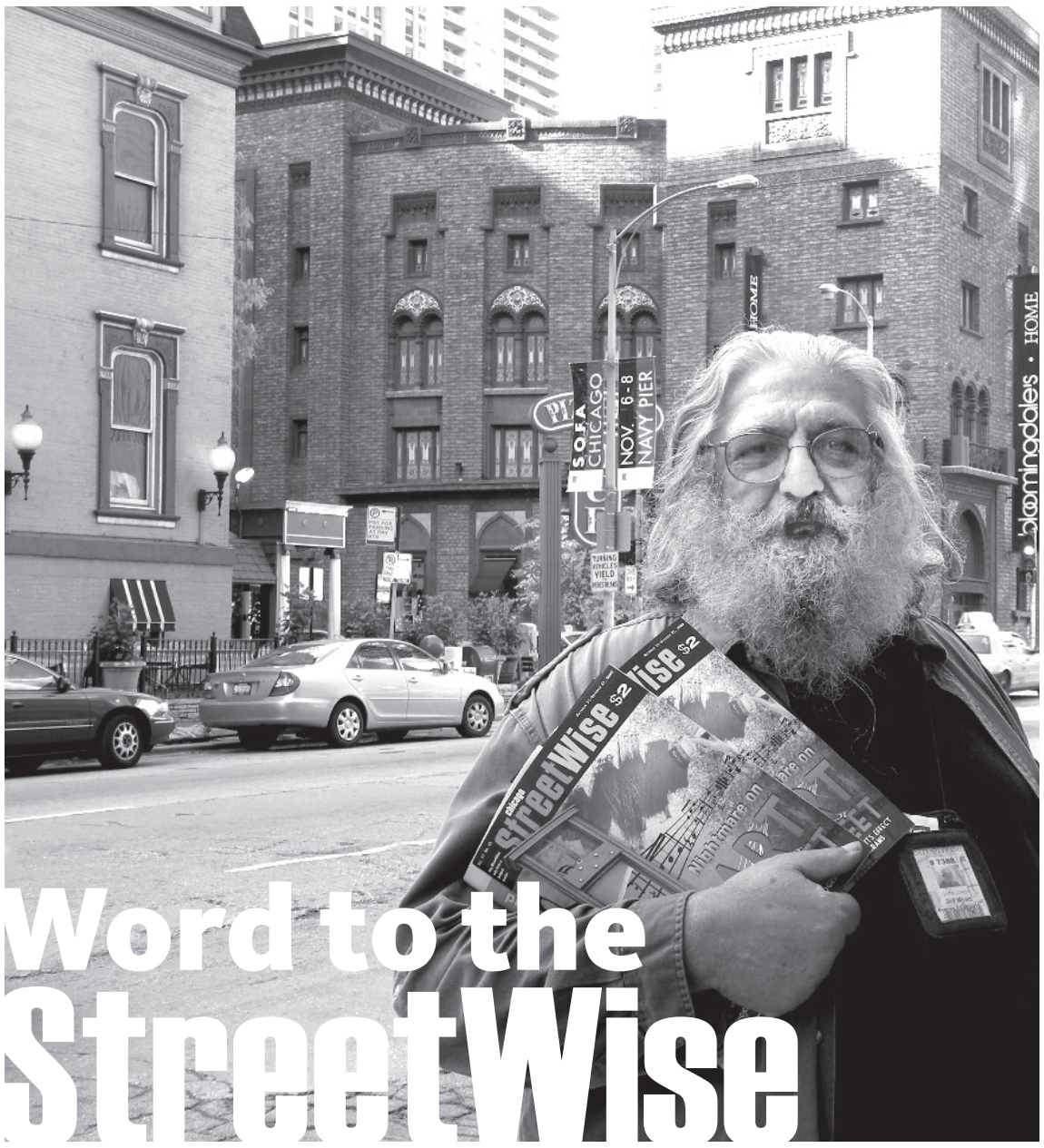
KENYA	TANZANIA
46%	44%

Estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS

	KENYA	TANZANIA
Adults	1,200,000	1,300,000
Children	150,000	110,000

Infographic by Javier López

Data compiled from "Children affected by AIDS, Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations" published by UNICEF, 2005



Meet Jack Moretti. He has lived in Chicago all of his life and has been a StreetWise vendor for about 5 years. Photo by Laura Schell

How it works

BY LAURA SCHELL

StreetWise vendor Robert Nelson has lived in Chicago for about forty years and started selling StreetWise magazines in 1993 or 1994. He has always sold the magazine in the same location, on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Superior in front of Saks Fifth Avenue. He sells the magazine every day and said, "otherwise [he] doesn't think [he] would stay afloat." He says selling magazines is hard work; he remembers one Saturday when he only made three dollars after selling for five hours. "Rain is the only thing that shuts me down," said Nelson, who has many repeat customers. One of Nelson's repeat customers was an elderly woman who once gave him $200 before she passed away. He said that was his best sales day.

StreetWise is published by an organization by the same name that tries to keep people off the streets and get those who are on the streets back on their feet. Started in 1993, Chicago's StreetWise has helped over 8000 vendors become more self-sufficient by providing them with something to sell to make a profit. The vendors sell the magazine for a profit on many corners in Chicago.

According to Ben Cook, the StreetWise production manager, the organization's goal for its content is to "Give a voice to the under-served." The organization has two editorial staff members, and quite a few interns and freelancers. The vendors go to the StreetWise office in the Loop at 1201 West Lake Street and pick-up the new issues, which come out on Wednesdays.

A new vendor must purchase a minimum of thirty magazines. StreetWise vendors purchase the magazines for seventy-five cents and sell them for $2, making a $1.25 profit on each magazine they sell. Cook stated that the beginner vendors sell about forty to sixty magazines a week and average vendors sell $60 - $130 worth of magazines a week. StreetWise's super sellers collect up to $375 a week.

Jack Moretti is another StreetWise vendor who has lived in Chicago all his life. However, unlike Nelson, he is a relatively new vendor, having sold the magazine for only about five years. Moretti said his best sales day was, "during Christmas and I made over 125 dollars." Like Nelson, Moretti has many returning customers. He said he usually starts between 9 and 10 a.m. and his post is outside the door of Trader Joe's on Ontario and Wabash on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. On the other days of the weeks he goes where there aren't very many StreetWise vendors, usually on the west side and the south suburbs.

Nelson said that he was very concerned a while back that, "we were close to shutting down." Since selling StreetWise is Nelson's only means of supporting himself, the impact of a magazine shutdown would have been devastating.

A 40-year resident of Chicago, Robert Nelson has been a StreetWise vendor for 15 years. Photo by Laura Schell

The Do Gooder List
literacy volunteer opportunities

BY WHITNEY STOEPEL

Volunteering is a great way to meet people who share your interests. Not-for-profits are perfect for letters of reference and networking as well. There are a lot of advantages, but the feeling of helping others can't be beat. Half a million people in Chicago are illiterate. Here are some literacy groups that always need help.

Open Books, Ltd.

"Open Books is a nonprofit social venture that operates an extraordinary bookstore, provides community programs, and mobilizes passionate volunteers to promote literacy in Chicago and beyond. Their mission is to enrich lives through reading, writing, and the power of used books."

What's cool about Open Books: There is a huge variety of ways to help. You can volunteer at events (like Pitchfork, the Printer's Row Book Fair or the Logan Square Farmer's Market), you can work at their bookstore, and you can tutor, or just simply donate some used books. They will even pick them up from you.

The orientation process: It is well-organized, informative and fun. They have so many orientation sessions; you'll be able to find time to make it to one.

Contact info: 230 W. Institute Place, Suite 305
Everything you need can be found on their website,
http://www.open-books.org/index.php

826 Chicago (The Boring Store)

Started by author Dave Eggers and disguised behind a Spy Storefront in Wicker Park, The Boring is awesome. "826CHI is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students ages 6 to 18 with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write."

What's Cool About 826: Its sense of humor. They have Scrabble Tournaments where players can pay to cheat, robot proms, and mustache parties. Volunteers can teach a class on anything to the kids, go on field trips, work in the store, or contribute to after-school tutoring, among other things. You can also get early, cheap tickets to Dave Eggers-related events like the premiere of one of his movies, like "Away We Go" or "Where the Wild Things Are."

The orientation process: An hour long group meeting with Patrick Shaffner, 826's hilarious Outreach Coordinator. Volunteers are given a manual and sign up for email lists that correspond to their interests.

Contact Info: 1331 North Milwaukee Ave.
Phone: 773.772.8108
http://www.826chi.org/

Chicago Hopes

"Aims to provide services for all homeless students in Chicago. The mission of the CPS Educational Support for Students in Temporary Living Situations is to provide an educational environment that treats all students with dignity and respect. Every CPS homeless student shall have equal access to the same free and appropriate educational opportunities as students who are not homeless."

What's Cool About Chicago Hopes: It is little known that during the 2008-2009 school year, over 12,000 Chicago Public School students self-identified as homeless. One volunteer said, "It changed my idea of what it means to be homeless in America. It shattered any stereotypes I might have had about the 'typical homeless person.'"

The Orientation Process: If you want to volunteer, just fill out the form online. They need tutors and only ask for a minimum of one session a week and there is a multitude of locations to choose from. There is a two-hour orientation process and you can choose the location that works best for you.

Contact Info: 125 S. Clark St. 9th Floor Chicago, IL 60603
Phone: 773.553.2242
Email at ChicagoHOPES@cps.k12.il.us.

Literacy Works

"Literacy Works' mission is to fulfill the promise of a basic human right: to read, write, and interpret the world. To accomplish its mission, Literacy Works promotes adult literacy and family literacy in Chicago providing training to volunteer tutors, unique workshops for adult literacy students, and an array of services that strengthen community-based adult and family literacy programs."

What's Cool About Literacy Works: This is a perfect opportunity if you are bilingual. Literacy Works specializes in English As A Second Language tutoring for adults to help them get better jobs and schooling. They also host events with authors and musicians at venues like the Hopleaf in Andersonville.

The Orientation Process: Literacy Works will train volunteers to be become a tutor in an English as a Second Language (ESL) or Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. They also host many supplemental training events with some interesting topics that include Immigrant Connect: Help Your Learners Tell Their Stories. These are all listed on the website.

Contact Info: 6216 N. Clark Street
Phone: 773-334-8255
Email at info@litworks.org

Surprised by Libraries

Your library has much more than just books

BY NATALIE EDWARDS

If you believe that books should be worn and used, and if you like being part of a community, even if that community includes some people that smell like pee, the Chicago Public Library system might be for you.

The CPL has over 10,745,600 volumes, and if they don't have what you want, they'll get it for you from anywhere in the world. They offer a zillion programs like computer classes, genealogy classes and other stuff retired people like, but they also have classes for first time home-buyers, people who want to green up their homes, and those who want to learn to cook Polish food. The main library, Harold Washington, hosts the Poetry Festival and the Chicago Book Festival, and they bring in big names for readings like Michael Chabon, Sherman Alexie, and Audrey Niffenegger.

You can check out audio books online and movies and CDs, and even free passes to any Chicago museum. Most CPL libraries have permanent art collections or local history information. Your libraries just give and give, so get yourself a library card and take advantage of them.

Harold Washington
400 South State Street
(312) 747-4396

Some complain about the patrons of this particular library, what with it being downtown and open to any person that wants to go inside–that being the mission and purpose of public libraries and all–but if you're afraid of interacting with Chicagoans, you should probably just stay at home. Also, you probably need to reevaluate your classist ways. Anyway, the Harold Washington is the hub for CPL activities. The library was once in The Guinness Book of Records as the largest public library building in the world.

Chinatown
2353 S. Wentworth Avenue,
60616 (312) 747-8013

Next time you're nursing a hangover with some Dim Sum, drop in for a dose of culture by checking out the Chinese Heritage Collection at the Chinatown branch. They have the largest concentration of Chinese Language Materials, so if you speak Chinese, you're in luck.

Albany Park
5150 N. Kimball Avenue, 60625
(312) 744-1933

They've got a great collection of Arabic Korean and Spanish language materials, but you can also check out a fishing pole at this library. That's right. Take your pole on over to River Park and catch something. It's clean enough.

Bucktown-Wicker Park
1701 N. Milwaukee Avenue, 60647
(312) 744-6022

It's an environmentally sustainable, new building, like many newer CPL buildings, built under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. It's also a place where you can pick up hot chicks and dudes.

Hall
4801 S. Michigan Avenue, 60615
(312) 747-2541

This branch was birthed by the first CPL African-American Librarian, Vivian Gordon Harsh. She toured the world building the collection of African-American literature and promoting her library. The library is rich in community history and has served as a meeting place for authors such as Arna Bontemps, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and Richard Wright. Hall Branch features a reading garden and is a staple of the Bronzeville community.

Humboldt Park
1605 N. Troy Street, 60647
(312) 744-2244

You can also get fishing poles here and skip on over to Humboldt Park, where the Park District stocks the pond with actual fish. Water is pumped in from Lake Michigan. Eat at your own risk.

Lozano
1805 S. Loomis Street, 60608
(312) 746-4329

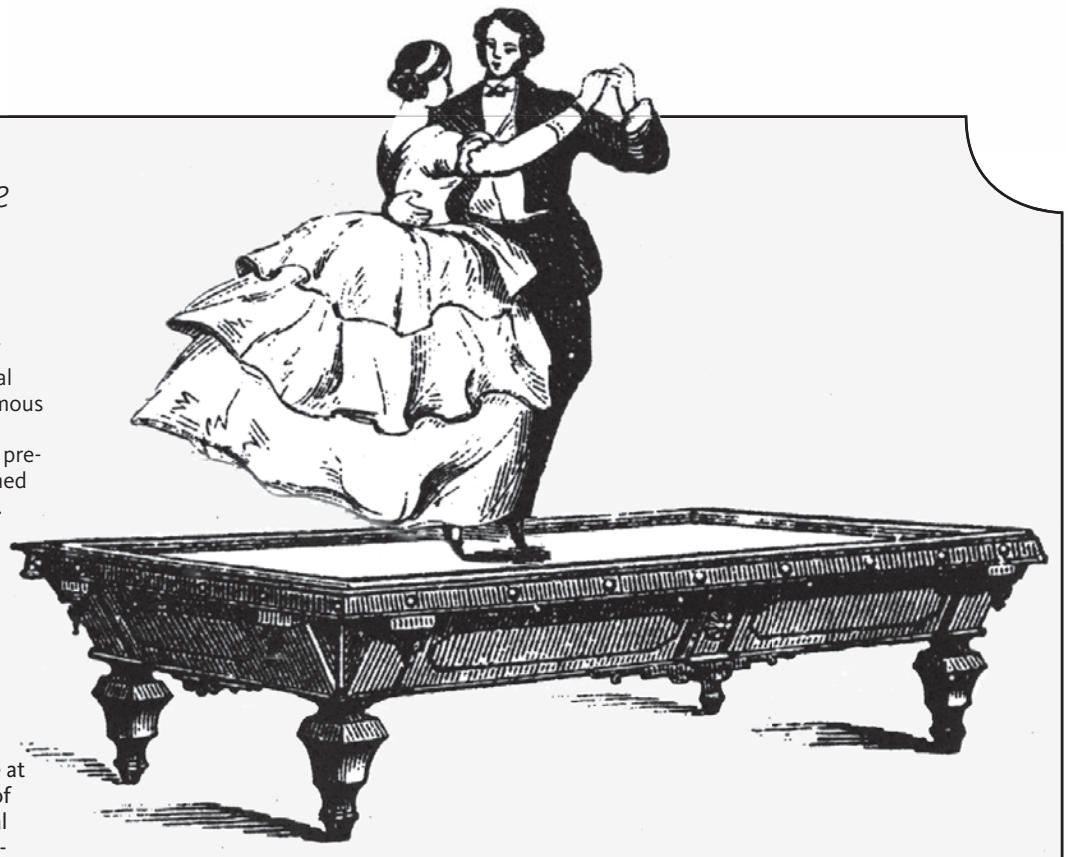
One of the awesomest-looking libraries in Chicago. The building has a pre-Columbian Olmec design, which surrounds the interior as well as the exterior. There are three public art pieces, and the branch is named in honor of Rudy Lozano, community activist and union organizer. They have a giant Mexican Heritage Collection.

Sulzer
4455 N. Lincoln Avenue, 60625
(312) 744-7616

The Conrad Sulzer Regional Library is giant and has a great movie collection. They house the Chicago History Collection, and a retrospective and bound magazine and periodical collection, so you can check out that 1976 issue of Beading Quarterly you've been after.

Get your Lit on

A guide to ongoing literary events in Chicago



Dollar $tore

the Hideout
1354 W. Wabanasia
(773) 227-4433
dollarstoreshow.com
The premise is simple enough. A writer is given an item that was purchased from a dollar store. The writer then has a month to construct a story that incorporates the item somehow. Maybe it's on display, maybe it's a character in the performance. Abusive drinking is enthusiastically encouraged.

Quickies

Innertown Pub
1935 W Thomas St.
(773) 235 9795
quickieschicago.blogspot.com
Each reader is given five minutes to read a complete work of prose. Must be a self-contained work of prose. Poetry and excerpts not welcome. They host two contests throughout the year. The top 5-7 entries will be invited to read at a contest winners night.

Reading Under the Influence

Sheffield's
3258 N. Sheffield Ave
(773) 281-4989
readingundertheinfluence.com/
The writers fuse original material with excerpts from works by famous authors that revolve around a particular theme. Themes from previous shows have included banned books, sex, and Chicago writers. There is also an interactive trivia game, with prizes!

Rec Room

Black Rock Bar
3614 n. Damen
(773) 348-4044
recroomers.com
Art, literature and performance at 8:00 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month. Zany, experimental performance. They strive to create a community of artists that is conducive to experimentation, and encourage altering familiar performance modes and methods.

THE SHORT LIST

Student-run Art journals

BY JENNIFER SWANN

Motherwell

Distributed by Pilsen concept shop Golden Age, Motherwell is devoted to critically investigating contemporary art and culture through themed literary and critical essays. The first leather-bound and hand-branded volume includes contributions by poet Zachary James Johnston and Los Angeles-based artist Karthik Pandian. On the Golden Age blog, Motherwell editor Paige K. Johnston names the journal's goals: "one, to create a conversation-in-print between the works of emerging writers, and two, to triumph the book (as a form) in its glorious tangibility." The journal is not only available at Golden Age, but also in LA's Ooga Booga Gallery and the New York Art Book Fair. http://motherwelljournal.org/

The Point

The bi-annual student journal from University of Chicago features essays on contemporary life. Named after Promontory Point, a popular hang-out in Hyde Park, "The Point locates us geographically but also defines our mission," says U of C grad student Jon Baskin in an interview with the Chicago Tribune. So what's the point? "Writing for anyone who is interested in ideas," says Baskin in the Tribune. "Someone who's interested in examining their life" is the ideal reader. http://www.thepointmag.com/

Creative Writing Guide

Started by SAIC BFAW student Jeni Crone in the fall of 2008, Creative Writing Guild has since published a themed literary journal twice a semester. Formed as an on-campus writers' group and a way to share literature and literary events outside of class, The Guild publication organically developed as a collection of writing from students and faculty from all departments. The Writing Guild is currently planning the release party of the November issue to coincide with a text-based exhibition at Siragusa Gallery in the State Street dorms. Copies are widely available on the SAIC campus. CWGshare.blogspot.com

Xerox Candy Bar

A monthly art and comics zine started by SAIC students in 2007, Xerox Candy Bar is also a student group whose initiatives have included the Flaxicart zine cart in the Flaxman library, neighborhood rooftop concerts, and a compilation CD. Copies are available around the SAIC campus and around Chicago.

In Preparation

Created in the spring of 2008 by three SAIC BFAW students, In Preparation began as a publication featuring the poetry and prose of the authors, and evolved into a literary and art zine accepting submissions from both SAIC students and non-students. Currently co-edited by A. Martinez and Mark Schettler, In Preparation publishes all genres, including criticism and art, and is available at SAIC, Quimby's, and other Chicago locations. http://inpreparationzine.blogspot.com/

Art Habitat

Chicago's Concertina Gallery

BY BETH CAPPER AND RICARDO HARRIS-FUENTES

Katherine Pill is the kind of person that will blow her lunch money on the paintings of a hitherto unacknowledged artist, or live in an apartment without furniture so that she can create an exhibition space with a snappy name like the Concertina Gallery. She eats, works, and lives in art. As well as being the Administrative Director of SAIC's SUGs Gallery, this summer Pill and two fellow students, Corinna Kirsch and Francesca Wilmott, conspired to open an apartment space named Concertina Gallery in which they could explore a more personalized curatorial practice. Concertina combines professional presentation and high quality work, while taking advantage of the more relaxed atmosphere of the apartment gallery. The result is an artist-oriented and curator-run space, with an emphasis on generating new scholarship about the art showcased.

F Newsmagazine: I heard that you are pushing to exhibit bigger artists to combine with the smaller local artists you are exhibiting, and that this is a move to establish good relationships with commercial gallerists, and heighten the profile of apartment galleries.

Katherine Pill: First off, we should say that building relationships with commercial galleries is not a main goal of Concertina. We are interested in establishing all kinds of connections, and we are happy to work with different organizations in order to bring in the artists we want. Having said that, yes, we want to portray ourselves as a responsible space that can exhibit bigger-name artists. Working with commercial galleries, we have an opportunity to show artists we admire, and money never enters the equation. We get to contextualize their art in potentially new ways, and the artist and dealer get to reach a different demographic.

F what do you think about the idea that apartment galleries are an attempt to counter established ideas about professionalism?

KP Certainly apartment galleries have the capacity to stand in opposition to the commercial art world, and for some that might be a main goal. The DIY component of apartment galleries is what makes them so exciting, I think, as usually the only person you need to answer to is your landlord. This freedom allows for some very creative things to happen, and for a more playful atmosphere. For us, however, challenging the commercial art world is just not our aim. We embrace the freedom to do whatever we want in our space. We really see it as our curatorial playground, and it gives us the opportunity to work with a variety of artists we admire.

I don't know about apartment galleries as a challenge to established ideas of professionalism. For us, I think we consider "professionalism" to be closely linked to respect. Respect for artworks should be a part of any exhibiting space. We don't necessarily want to create a formal exhibition atmosphere, but we want to be respectful to the artists we show, and we hope that visitors similarly respect our home.

F What do you see as being the problems of apartment galleries? Do you find that they create insular, cliquey audiences? Is bringing in bigger artists a good way to bring more diverse publics?

KP Apartment galleries do have a reputation for being cliquey and only showing the works of friends. I've actually never really seen this as a major problem, as it's a supportive gesture to exhibit the work of a friend and those exhibitions still have the potential to foster new relationships.

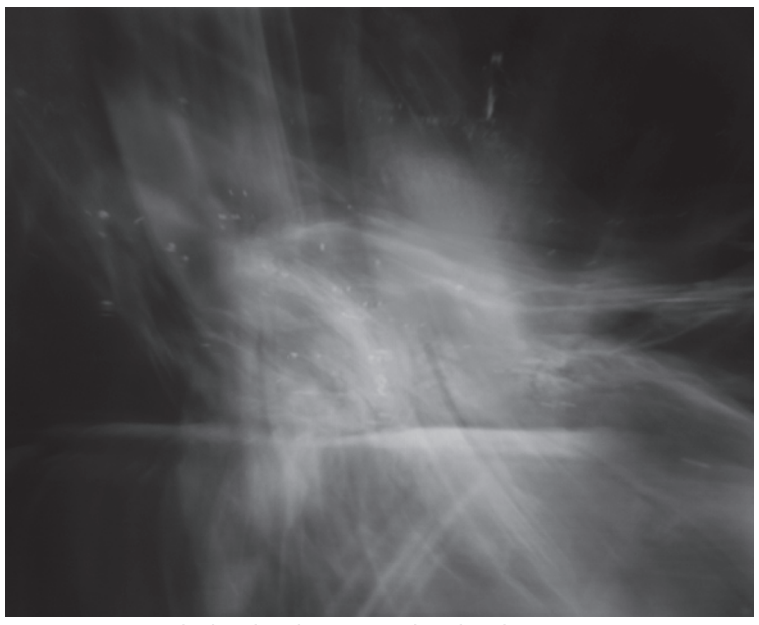
We do, however, strive to bring in diverse audiences. The School provides a strong, important audience, and looking around it seems that most apartment galleries in the city have strong ties to SAIC. As important and supportive as this audience is, we hope to maintain a diverse draw, and exhibiting artists from a variety of backgrounds really helps with that.

F Can you tell me a little about the upcoming "Australia" show. How did it come about? Why do you think someone should see it?

KP It was a pretty organic process. "Australia" came about during a late-night brainstorming session for our October exhibition. Francesca and I were discussing some recent studio visits we'd done, and we realized that two artists we were interested in had both used Baz Luhrmann's movie as source material. The relationship was too interesting to pass over, so we began to discuss how looking at their different approaches to the movie allowed for a unique entry-point to each of their practices. For instance, we really liked the contrast between Anthea Behm's stripping away of Hollywood illusion, and Aron Gent's amplification of it. The exhibition is fairly challenging, as Behm's work especially asks a lot from the viewer. We couldn't be happier with how it turned out —both artists really engaged with the gallery space, and their work complements one another in really interesting ways. We are currently working on an essay that will be on our website that gives more detail to the concept, as the content is extremely loaded.

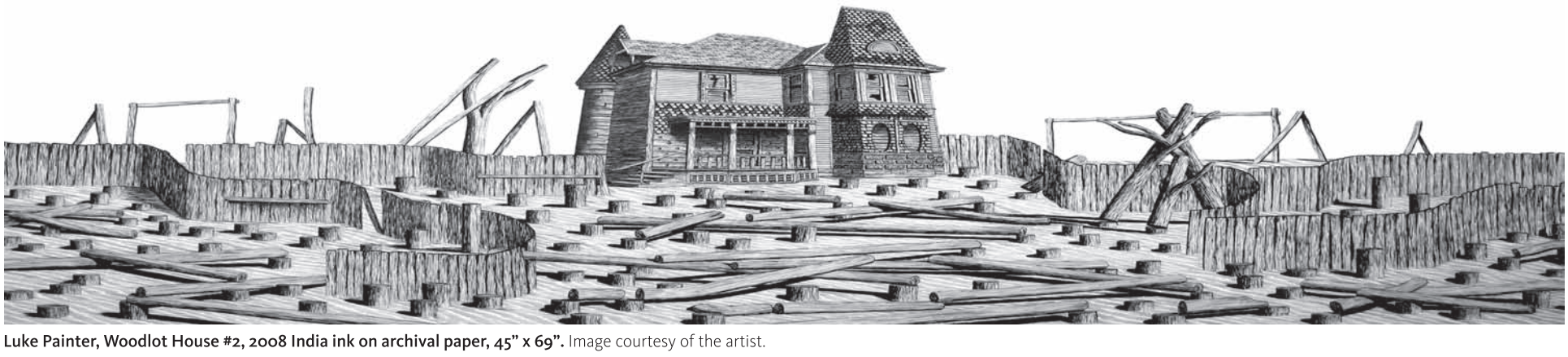
F What makes your curatorial vision unique?

KP We stress the fact that we are "curator-run", which for us means an emphasis on written materials. We have an essay for each exhibition, and hope to solicit more as the year goes on. It's also important to us to show artists at different points in their career, and from different parts of North America. Finally, the space itself is very unique, and we try to work with artists who are interested in engaging with its architectural details and history.

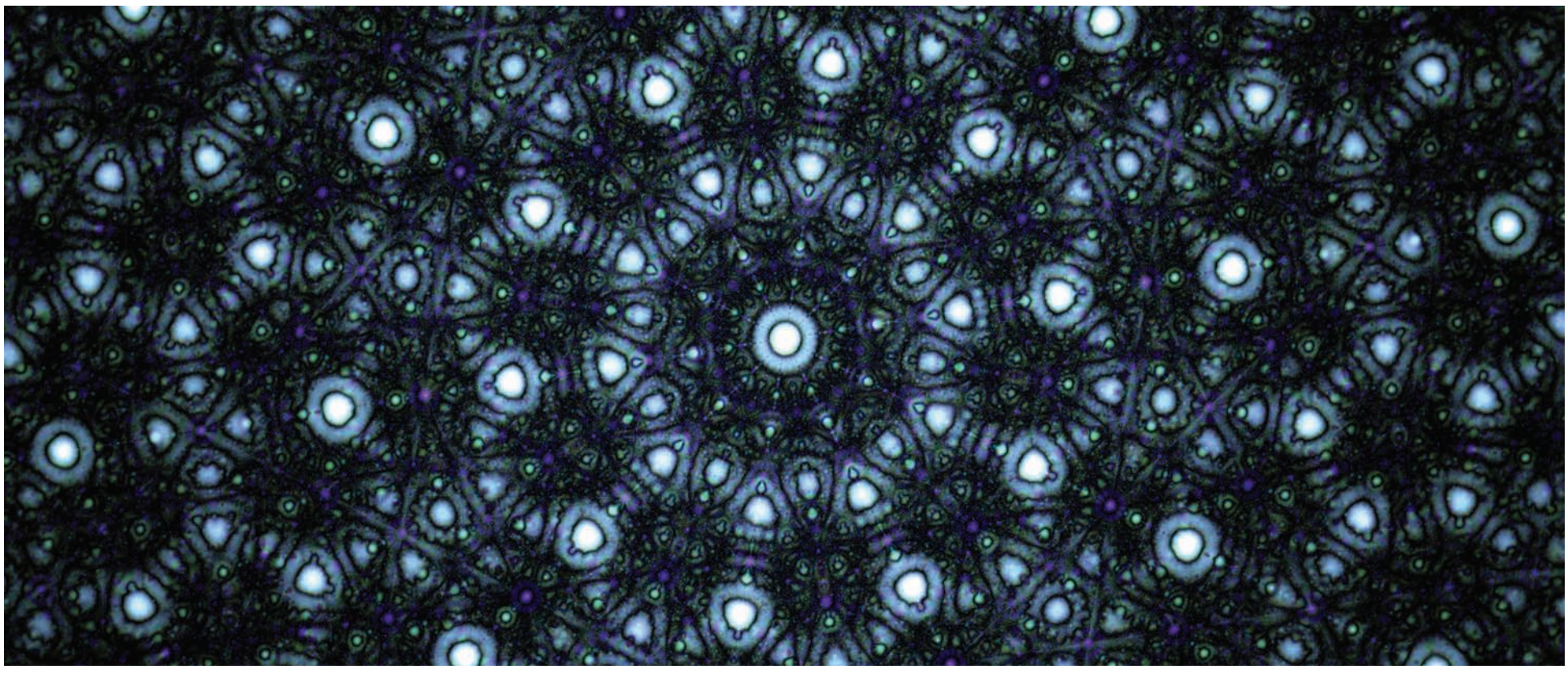


Aront Gent, Australia (Hugh Jackman & Nicole Kidman), Pigment print, 32"x 40", 2009. Image courtesy of the artist.

Aron Gent, Mountainside, Pigment print, 32" x 40", 2009. Image courtesy of the artist.



Luke Painter, Woodlot House #2, 2008 India ink on archival paper, 45" x 69". Image courtesy of the artist.



Still image from "#37." Image courtesy of Joost Rekveld.

Electronic Evocations

BY BRANDON KOSTERS

An interview with multimedia artist Joost Rekveld

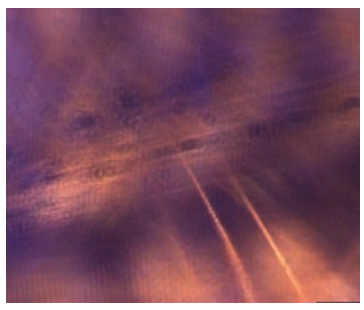
Drawing inspiration from Euclid's writings about optics, electronic music, and abstract animation from the United States from the 1950s, the work of Dutch multimedia artist Joost Rekveld is hard to describe. Rekveld's rigorous academic research and preliminary structures result in an ambient visual music, integrating kinetic sculpture, soundscapes, and abstract film. They can be appreciated even if the pieces themselves show little evidence of what informed their creation.

On Thursday, October 8, 2009, Conversations at the Edge hosted "Book Of Mirrors: Films by Joost Rekveld" at the Gene Siskel Film Center, with Rekveld appearing in person. The Amsterdam-based artist studied at the Hague, where he currently serves as the head of the Interfaculty ArtSciences department. Among the numerous issues addressed by the work shown at the Gene Siskel are visual representations of sound, historical explorations of perspective, and the role of technology in modern society, particularly in the context of art.

His film "#23.2, Book of Mirrors" was, says Rekveld, "very inspired by the history of optics, perspective, and medieval approaches and explorations. It was determined at the beginning of the 17th Century that if light goes through a very small hole you get interference patterns produced by the light waves."

To apply this principle to a film, Rekveld constructed a kaleidoscopic box with rails and slits that he could manipulate, with film on one side and a hole for light to enter the box on the other. "This allowed me to work with light oozing through [the box] directly onto the emulsion. I was interested in what kind of images it would produce [and whether or not] you'd get a sense of space that is different to the standard perspective space that is inherent in standard optics." Faint streaks of light pulsate with accompanying sound that textures the film.

Rekveld builds kinetic sculptures for other works too. Some of these devices have been exhibited as works of art in themselves. For the past six years, he has also been working with computer software to generate imagery. His most recent film "#37" is a computer-driven inquiry into the formation of crystals, made using the computer program Jitter, which Rekveld then transferred to 35mm Cinemascope.



Still image from "23.2, Book of Mirrors." Image courtesy of Joost Rekveld.

"Often, technology is seen as this strange alien thing invading our lives, and yet it is also what defines us as human. Part of what I'm trying to do is humanize this thing, make the principles behind some of it accessible to our senses and show its poetic quality."

"I was triggered to make abstract films by Oskar Fischinger. Also, post-war American abstract filmmakers like James Whitney, Jordan Belson, and Stan Brahkage. The whole tradition of visual music was very important to me."

Explaining how he came to visual music, Rekveld says, "My focus was initially very much electronic music. ...My dream was to make my own films and my own electronic music. At some point I realized that I like electronic music, but I didn't necessarily want to make it."

Rekveld now typically commissions other composers to provide the score for his films. "The composer gets involved at a very late stage … in the sound, they address the same concepts which inform the images."

Rekveld's approach to working with composers is based upon "finding a common approach." Rekveld chooses composers who he can identify with so that he can relinquish control over the sound. Rekveld is resistant to having his work codified by meaning. Indeed, when asked by one audience member at Conversations at the Edge what analogies he is making between music and images, Rekveld dismissed such analogies as "totalitarian."

His film "#23.2, Book of Mirrors" is the only piece with a "score" in the most traditional sense. It has been played three times with accompaniment from a live ensemble. Rekveld has collaborated in the past with theater and dance companies, producing images in real time using computer software such as Jitter and Max MXP.

"Before, I made mechanical machines to show images. I never really worked to make something sturdy and versatile enough to perform in a live setting."

While Rekveld's films are lyrical and captivating by themselves, there is seldom a clear connection to whatever academic research was conducted during the conceptual development of the piece. This is fine with Rekveld.

"It's very easy to talk about in technical terms, in terms of research and concepts that inform it," Rekveld says. "In the end [though], what's most important is the sensual experience."

As a scholar, and an artist, Rekveld is continually dealing with the correlation between art and science. While he has worked directly with analog equipment and media, he has not shied away from digital formats. "All of these technological or scientific developments … they are … a product of human culture. The first human is a monkey who discovers a tool. Often, technology is seen as this strange alien thing invading our lives, and yet it is also what defines us as human. Part of what I'm trying to do is humanize this thing, make the principles behind some of it accessible to our senses and show its poetic quality."

Through his work Rekveld boldly challenges the idea that "perception is a passive process. That you can sit still on you armchair and just make sense of the world." He references René Descartes. "He (Descartes) had this one analogy of a blind person with a walking stick. The world does not just stream in for this person. He is forced to reach into it."

"This," asserts Rekveld, "is important when thinking about perception."

(above) Installation view of Liam Gillick: Three perspectives and a short scenario, 2009. Photography © Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photographer, Nathan Keay. **(left) Liam Gillick, Rescinded Production, 2008. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Gift of Mary and Earle Ludgin by exchange.** Photo courtesy of Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York. **(right) Liam Gillick.** Photo courtesy of Steffen Jagenburg.

A Very Short Scenario

Liam Gillick at the MCA

BY BRYCE DWYER

A skateboard deck sits upside down in a waist-level display case with its wheels and trucks removed. A brief message is written on the wood in aloof Helvetica lettering, "Southbank Skatepark 1987. A perfectly good skatepark improved by the addition of an art collection…"
It's doubtful that Southbank Skate Park—the cavernous space beneath London's Queen Elizabeth Hall that has been used and transformed by skateboarders since the 1970s—ever had an art collection. Even if it had, the statement still begs the question: How could an art collection improve upon the vibrant and creative atmosphere of one of the world's most renowned skate parks? To most people, the proposition likely seems ridiculous when considered in the same sense that the proposal is phrased in. Why put art in a place where it runs an elevated risk of damage or, perhaps even worse, of being ignored?

This skateboard deck is "Southbank Skatepark 1987" (2007), made by Liam Gillick for New York City's Printed Matter. The work is a part of the exhibition "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," an unconvenionally organized mid-career retrospective of the British artist's work, on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art until January 10. It sits in a display case along with other ephemera related to Gillick's various projects, all of them sharing a similarly slick design aesthetic, the visual equivalent of French vanilla.

Looking over the materials inside, one might be frustrated by the colorful glare produced by colored panels of plexi that have, for the course of the retrospective, temporarily replaced the standard opaque white panels that typically diffuse light through the gallery. These panels stand out as the most visually striking element of this installation without walls, filling one of the MCA's sizeable first floor galleries. The display case is made from a matte black plastic material of which a number of slatted, cubicle-height walls that slice up and parcel out the exhibition space are also constructed. One division encloses a space around the exhibition wall text, another frames the display case.

Another set of these slatted walls, which bear superficial resemblance to both office furniture and Minimalist sculpture, marks out a space near a projection of images and text culled from Gillick's past work in much the same way as the display case. The final set of walls frames the activity of the people within it as a speaker above blares a drum loop claimed to resemble the beat of Joy Division's "She's Lost Control."

A number of classes here at the School of the Art Institute have been contacted by the MCA to assemble within this space and hold forth. Just how often these invited groups will be using the sub-space is unclear. When they do, their activities will unavoidably be on display, because while the slatted walls may delineate space, they provide only a modicum of privacy.

The question raised by Gillick's "Southbank Skatepark 1987" can be boiled down, stated more simply, and used as a sort of guiding criteria for experiencing the entire show. How does the introduction of art to life improve the quality of either? The ironic statement on the skateboard seems at odds with some comments Gillick recently made during a public discussion with curator Dominic Molon and artist Jeremy Deller—whose "It Is What It Is" is across the hallway from Gillick's show.

Often artists' commentaries on their own work should be taken with a grain of salt. If artists were the final authority on what they produce, the viewer wouldn't spend as much time looking at and thinking about their art to reach their own conclusions. Gillick, however, is a special case. An integral facet of his practice is the production of large quantities of text. Additionally, from time to time he steps forward to defend his work in print. So while another artist's reflections on his or her own work might get dismissed as a flight of fancy, Gillick's are fair game. During the talk, he stated clearly that his work "is not an ironic recognition of the failure of modernism." Even if the sentiment expressed on the skateboard deck is ironic, Gillick has actually abandoned irony in favor of something equally frustrating: opacity. This issue was also touched on during the talk, regarding ways that relational work like Gillick and Deller's attempt to avoid what is characterized as boorish didacticism. But in addition to the mere boredom didactic work is assumed to cause, Gillick harbors, in his words, "a kind of distrust of transparency." In the talk he went on to say that transparency is too often carted out as an empty signifier, and because those who invoke it, like national governments, so routinely disabuse it, the concept is apparently emptied of all value.

"What incentive is there to give of oneself to a work that resolutely refuses to meet the audience halfway?"

For a work of art that, as Gillick has also said, depends upon the audience to complete it, the "distrust of transparency" it manifests is especially disheartening. What incentive is there to give of oneself to a work that resolutely refuses to meet the audience halfway? Because of its willful opacity, Gillick's introduction of art to life—the handing over of a small parcel of museum space to certain groups—fails to produce anything more than a banal and benign art experience.

During another part of the artist talk, Gillick drew a distinction between the motivation of earlier generations of the avant-garde and what he presumes to be that of his own generation. For the historical avant-garde, the task was to find ways to keep making things "new" each time. For his own generation, Gillick stated that the question is not who can keep making new things, but who will actually stop making things first.

This statement reminded me of a figure from one of the historical avant-gardes for whom novelty and the end of producing art objects were not necessarily mutually exclusive. This person, Allan Kaprow, ended his essay "Education of the Un-Artist, Part I" (1971) with a phrase, curiously enough, borrowed and reworked from "The Communist Manifesto." He writes, "Artists of the world drop out! You have nothing to lose but your professions!" For Kaprow, dropping out means allowing the work one makes to resonate in ways beyond art, to enter into a closer relationship with the practice of life. A relatively small number of artists, that might not even include Kaprow himself, have heeded this call. Even as Gillick sets this up as the structuring concept of his generation, we should not expect him to drop out either. Just as we cannot expect an art collection to improve Southbank Skate Park, we cannot expect Gillick's art to improve our lives so long as it obstinately withholds its ambitions from us at the same time it employs us to achieve them.

Installation view of Jeremy Deller: "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2009. Photography © MCA, Chicago. Photographer, Nathan Keay

War Talk

Jeremy Deller at the MCA

BY BETH CAPPER

This is the scene: A coffee table is laden with "Middle Eastern" cookies and an ornate silver teapot. Paper plates and polystyrene cups are provided. Flanking the table on all sides are armchairs and sofas to sit upon. The setting is supposed to be as casual as a friend's living room; the only minor difference being that we're in the Museum of Contemporary Art.

A small crowd gathers; some sit down, others stand. All eyes are fixed upon an Iraqi man with a name tag and a long ponytail. Some onlookers ask questions, but most don't. One woman dominates the conversation for a time with questions about the Iran-Iraq War. The man calmly and earnestly answers her questions, going to great lengths to disclose as much as possible.

Just as the seated audience awkwardly pour themselves lukewarm tea and nibble on the snacks provided, the Iraqi man sinks his teeth into a large chocolate chip Brownie from the MCA's Pucks cafeteria. The cultural commentary inscribed in this particular moment is priceless.

The man's name is Esam Pasha, and he is part of "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq"; the new blockbuster Jeremy Deller exhibition at the MCA through November 15. Pasha is one of a rotating cast of scholars, activists, journalists and Iraqi nationals Deller has enlisted to act as "experts" about the war for the sake of the exhibition. To call Deller the artist of the work is a stretch. He's more of a community organizer, or perhaps a facilitator of engagement.

These experts sit in the gallery, in three hour-long shifts, ready and willing to have unscripted conversations with members of the American public about their experiences of the war. Objects and didactic materials meant to spark discussion are located around the gallery, including the remnants of a car destroyed in an explosion in Bagdad that killed thirty eight people in 2007.

There is something troubling about the way in which this engagement is set up. From the positioning of his participants as experts right down to the snacks on the table—a gesture that, while ostensibly naïve, can also be read as a troubling emblem of the West's commodification of "other" cultures.

As far as experts go, Pasha has the right credentials. He worked as a translator for the armed forces and press in Iraq, and he also painted over the first and largest mural portrait of Saddam Hussein when the leader was deposed in 2003, covering it with his own interpretation of the country's history. But when I ask him during the exhibition how he feels about being deemed an expert, he appears a little uncomfortable with it.

The exhibition raises the question as to who is at risk in the engagement Deller initiates. There are participatory art projects that place the artist in the precarious position; for example, Joseph Beuys arguing about direct democracy with crowds at Documenta 5, Yoko Ono asking audience members to decide whether or not to remove small squares of material from her body in "Cut Piece," or even Rirkrit Tiravanija cooking Thai food for hungry New Yorkers out for a free lunch. However, in Deller's work it is often his participants who undertake the risk, demonstrated poignantly in his most famous work, "The Battle of Orgreave," where miners and police involved in a violent clash during the 1984 Miners Strike in England were asked to reenact their experiences.

> *"In Deller's work it is often his participants who undertake the risk."*

Deller, Pasha and Iraq War veteran Jonathan Harvey undertook a three-week road trip with the remnants of the car in tow, stopping at cultural institutions and community centers in an attempt to incite dialogue about the war. "It Is What It Is" is a continuation of conversations from this tour, but instead of going to the public, Deller is asking the public to come to them.

His decision to situate this conversation in the white cube opens him up to criticism from the outset. Many artists working in similar ways have forgone this context because it produces a kind of forced or false engagement. The hope is that by placing it in this context, the conversation will provoke greater reflection from those involved. Deller not only humanizes the situation in Iraq for Americans who are assumed to have only a tangential and mediated connection to a war waged on their behalf, but he does so in the context of the transcendent art experience. However, does this strategy naïvely put faith in the effectiveness of mere exposure? As theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote in her essay, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," "trust in exposure seemingly depends ... on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. ...What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent?" Maybe, though, "It Is What It Is" doesn't have such lofty goals, and instead is simply about saying, as the title goes, that the situation in Iraq *is* what it is, and *what it is* has to be dealt with.

The exhibition creates a situation that individuals can orchestrate to their advantage. The MCA advertises which participants speak each day, and the responsible citizen is thus able to do research in preparation. The engagement lags if you ponder not the conversation you are there to have, but whether this conversation can be considered good art, or even art at all. In the end, perhaps Deller is telling us that when it comes to having a meaningful conversation about the war in Iraq, what *It Is* is ultimately up to us. f

ART NEWS TICKER

BY NATALIE EDWARDS

Anne Liebovitz's loan lenders, Art Capital Group, are on her to pay back the $24 million loan they gave her. They recently gave her a reprieve from bankruptcy, but if negotiations fall apart, she may be faced with the choice to either file bankruptcy or lose the rights to her photographs and her homes. Homes? and who borrows that kind of money? Oh. She does... Some wack-jobs keep buying up **Hitler's paintings**. Recently, three paintings sold for a total of $60,000 at Weidler's auction house in Nuremberg, Germany. The deranged collectors purchased Hitler's watercolor depictions of cottages, mills and churches shoved into rural landscapes—picture less-imaginative **Normal Rockwell** with a Viennese bent. The paintings are from around 1910 when Hitler was a struggling artist in Vienna at the—wait, WHAT?... A portion of **Polaroid's collection** of photographs is headed to the auction block this spring, angering many of the photographers responsible for their existence. Whether the company bought the photos or just the right to use them is unclear, but the bankruptcy judge overseeing the case says the artists have missed their chance to board the get-your-rights-back boat as it sails off into the slowly developing sunset. They should have spoken up before another company bought Polaroid's assets in 2002... Someone out there in East L.A. jacked **Richard Weisman**'s collection of Andy Warhol's paintings, which he commissioned himself in the '70s. The collection includes ten silk-screened portraits of athletes and one of Weisman, who, I can only suppose, wishes he was an athlete. According to the "Art Loss Register," **Andy Warhol** is one of the top ten stolen artists in the country, with over 200 Warhol works reportedly missing. Maybe Annie Liebovitz stole them to pay back her lenders. **Nancy Spero**, SAIC alum, prominent feminist artist, and outspoken anti-Vietnam and Iraqi War activist, passed away at the age of 83. She will be missed.

(above) Installation view of Jeremy Deller: "It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2009. Photography © MCA, Chicago. Photographer, Nathan Keay. (below) Digital photograph of Shabandar Café, Baghdad, ND. Courtesy Salon.com.

An Interview with Esam Pasha

Continued from "War Talk" p. 25

The idea of being at risk didn't resonate with Esam Pasha when I interviewed him a week later. On the contrary, he was earnest and positive about his involvement in Deller's exhibition. On a side note, while my recorded interview with him is fascinating, it never quite materialized into a fully fluid conversation. The constructed situation of an interview seemed to create the same barriers for engagement as the physical space of the gallery had for me a week prior. However, once the tape was off, my questions about the war started flowing. In the end, perhaps I had the kind of engagement Deller had intended after all.

—Beth Capper

BC What has been the difference between doing this in the context of the gallery and that of more public space?

EP In the museum people came here to listen. They don't usually ask and argue as much as people outside. Of course there are a lot of interesting questions and stories inside the museum, but people expect more to follow the pattern of a conference. Out on the street it was more of a back and forth discussion, though in the museum they really created a nice and friendly setting with a couch and seats. Just as though you are sitting in the cafeteria of the museum.

BC Why is it important for you to be a part of this exhibition?

EP It's my chance to talk to people, many many people, and see and find out what they are thinking and what questions are on their minds. It helps me to advertise and talk about my country—the place where I was born, grew up and lived all my life—and correct some misconceptions for people about it, and satisfy people's curiosity for knowledge.

BC Have you found that there are common misconceptions or questions?

EP Yes. There are some common thoughts about Iraq that aren't true. Many people believe that women are oppressed in Iraq, and this is not the case. More than that, there are a lot of things that people don't know about Iraq. For example, they don't know or haven't thought really that Iraq is a tax-free country. Free education and free healthcare is a right in Iraq. It's one of the freedoms that you don't find in many places.

BC In Iraq you worked as a translator. I understand this is a very precarious position to be in.

EP More dangerous than working as a translator for the army was working as a translator for the press, and also as a freelance journalist. That was really dangerous, to be out in the street and talk to so many people with no one to protect you. To work with the American forces, that is an interesting experience. I also wanted to see how people received the soldiers and what questions people had for the soldiers; but the problem is that you are the one talking to people, and their requests or whatever they are asking for, if they don't get it, they blame you. You're the good guy if you get them what they want, and the bad guy if what they want doesn't happen. This work made me see from the inside and very closely how the Americans dealt with people and how people dealt with the Americans. That has really enhanced my understanding of the situation.

BC You have spoken, in relation to painting over the Saddam Hussein mural, about the need to use art to build a more positive future for Iraq.

EP With the mural I tried not to focus on a particular political agenda, but instead I wanted people to pay attention and to remember how beautiful our country is and that the important thing is to rebuild it, and not to argue which view or agenda is right. Whoever gives people electricity right now is the one that I am going to work with. That's what I wanted to convey to people, and I think that's what most Iraqis right now are thinking about. They think about their basic needs, which haven't been met actually since the first Gulf War.

BC Do you see yourself returning to live in Iraq?

EP If there is a need for me to be there in any useful way. America is my home now absolutely: Right now it's better for me to stay here but if I could make a real difference in Iraq, then I would definitely be there.

BC How has taking part in this exhibition affected you?

EP It has made me more patient. There are points that when I used to talk before I understood my audience as though they were Iraqis. I have learned that I have to explain in a better way so that the Americans can understand. Now I don't expect them to know that much about Iraq so I try to explain almost everything in detail. I feel happy that there are many people that want to know about the Iraqi war and most of them are neutral and open to listening.

BC Do you think they should come with knowledge?

EP For myself, I want to give the experience of an average Iraqi who lived there. How did I manage to live, what I thought about, what the people that I was talking to in Iraq—what issues concerned us the most. I find that most people who come here—that is what they really want to know about. You can read a book with specific statistics, numbers and everything, but what people are more interested in is the human factor and the human experience, and what people felt. That is easy for me to convey. If it makes sense to me then it will make sense to other people who are average like myself. f

FILMS FOR ALL SEASONS

Chicago revisits Hollis Frampton's lesser-known works

BY TOM MCCORMACK

Untitled portrait of Hollis Frampton, 1977. Photo by Marion Faller © 2007 Estate of Hollis Frampton

The multi-venue retrospective of Hollis Frampton coming to Chicago offers a chance to take another look at a body of work too often reduced to a couple of films. Frampton is known mainly for his lapidary works "Zorns Lemma" and "(nostalgia)." The first is a dizzyingly dense meditation on the process of aging and the relationship between language and experience. The second appears to be a charming remembrance of a photographer's youth, but through a sleight of hand on the soundtrack turns into a maddening brainteaser that challenges the viewer's own ability to remember. The two films are Frampton's most approachable, and also his two works that most readily fit into the critical histories of avant-garde film. Yet, they are by no means his only works, and perhaps not even his best.

Frampton began his artistic life as a poet, but by his own account was not a very good one. After flirting with painting, he turned to photography. His early photographs were often imitations of and elaborations upon the still life work of Edward Weston. His films got him tagged by P. Adams Sitney, as a "structural filmmaker"—that is, a filmmaker whose work moved away from the lyrical abstraction of people like Stan Brakhage, and towards a more minimalist aesthetic that drew attention to the internal logic and formal properties of the work; the materiality of the film strip; the extreme formal possibilities of editing; and the experience of a film's duration.

While Sitney never limits his own readings of Frampton's work to the structural guidelines he laid out, his labeling has nonetheless limited subsequent readings of Frampton's films by others, and is perhaps partly responsible for the lack of interest in Frampton's early and later periods, both of which will be showcased in the upcoming screenings in Chicago.

In addition to being a filmmaker, Frampton was also a very singular writer. The very definition of a polymath, he was also an archironist, and his playful criticism manages to be both recondite and good-naturedly humorous. Frampton shed a lucid light on his subjects, while at the same time pushing art criticism into the realm of Borgesian play and speculative fiction. One essay narrates a series of photographs from the point of view of the photographic apparatus itself. Another imagines a group of early photographs emerging from the lost continent of Atlantis.

"Frampton's Magellan project is based on a belief that we live within, and are surrounded by images, that they compose our cultural memories and construct our daily lives."

In one essay Frampton defines the term "x" as "suffering" and attempts to write equations that express the account of suffering by various writers. Gertrude Stein is "x=x," while Rudyard Kipling is "x=c-b/a." Frampton notes, though, that Stein could also be expressed as "x-x=0," that is, "anything diminished by something of its own magnitude amounts to nothing."

Before his premature death in 1984, Frampton was working on a series of films called "Magellan." The plan was to have a cycle of shorts (approximately 1000) that would play on every day of the year (or, more precisely, within a 365-day cycle), and would chart, metaphorically and symbolically, the journey of the explorer Ferdinand Magellan. Rarely screened, the completed sections the "Magellan" cycle will be the focus of the Chicago retrospective. "SOLARIUMAGELANI," a program of three of the longer films from the cycle, played at Conversations at the Edge on October 15. Upcoming is a program entitled "Birth of Magellan" at Chicago Filmmakers on December 12; and "Fragments from Magellan" at Doc Films at the University of Chicago on January 23.

From a curatorial perspective, the most interesting series in the program is "Frampton and Friends," playing at Block Cinema on November 13. The show groups together a series of Frampton's early films, and one later one, based not on their formal properties, but on the fact that all of them deal in some way with issues of collaboration and friendship. "Manual of Arms" and "Artificial Light" are both portraits of Frampton's friends; while "A and B in Ontario" is a collaboration with fellow filmmaker Joyce Wieland. Similarly, "Snowblind" enters into a dialog with Wieland's ex-husband and Frampton's close friend Michael Snow, who is also featured prominently in "(nostalgia)."

Both "SOLARIUMAGELANI" and "Frampton and Friends" were organized by, and will be introduced by, SAIC professor Bruce Jenkins. I talked with Jenkins about Frampton's life and legacy, and why there's renewed interest in his work (in addition to the forthcoming Chicago screenings, Anthology Film Archives recently restored his crypto-autobiographical series "Hapax Legomena," which will screen at Doc Films on January 22, and MIT Press recently released a book of his critical writings, "On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters," edited by Bruce Jenkins.

Jenkins said that for a long time there was so little writing about Frampton that "notes people had scribbled on the back of napkins became canonical texts that would appear in catalogs." Because he worked in film in an era when the art-world had only a tentative relationship to the medium, "Frampton felt the sting of being a sort of second-class citizen." And while his middle period of work gathered some acclaim, when he began work on "Magellan," "even those close to him were left lukewarm by what they saw."

Some of Frampton's frustration can be felt in a letter he wrote to Donald Richie, who proposed to Frampton an uncompensated retrospective of his work at MoMA. After needling Richie about his inability to work without money, Frampton jumps on the suggestion that he come to New York for a Q&A.

"Are you suggesting that I drive down? The distance is well over four hundred miles, and March weather upstate is uncertain. Shall I fly, at my own expense, to face an audience that I know, from personal experience, to be, at best, largely unengaging, and at worst grossly provincial and rude?"

If Frampton found his audiences to be, at times, grossly provincial and rude, Jenkins makes a compelling argument that this disconnect was due to Frampton being too ahead of his time. Jenkins sees "Magellan" in particular as "imagining forward, and exceeding current technologies." To start with, the idea of a cycle of very short films that would play on every day of the year is unwieldy, to say the least, within the bounds of the classic theater-going experience. But in the age of the Internet the idea begins to seem prescient. In fact, the "Magellan" project is based on a belief that we live within and are surrounded by images, that they compose our cultural memories and construct our daily lives, and as an artistic project it is an attempt to orchestrate for an audience member a daily environment of images, as much as construct a regular film. "Who would have thought that we'd live in an age when we are literally surrounded by moving images?" Jenkins said as he pointed to his desktop, where he believes that one day the completed sections of the "Magellan" cycle will be available for viewing on their appropriate days of the year.

Bizot

Birds of a feather

Illustration by April Behnke

BY KATIE FAHEY

"Bizot is composed of museums that hail solely from the Western world, a fact often masked by the group's enigmatic profile but one that has made itself apparent in the past."

With the Olympic hope extinguished, Chicago's cultural elites may have sustained a blow to their egos, but they have another reason to be humming this October: Bizot, a gathering of directors and presidents from the most prestigious art museums and galleries of the Western world.

Bizot, the insiders' moniker for the International Group of Organizers of Large-scale Exhibitions, is a exclusive institution which takes its name from founder Irène Bizot, a French Countess and the former head of the Réunion des Musées Nationaux. Among this session's attendees were: the Metropolitan Museum of Art's director Thomas Campbell; the Victoria and Albert Museum's director Mark Jones; the Centre Pompidou's director Alfred Pacquement; and the Tate's director Sir Nicholas Serota.

Discussions at the session ranged from the practical and local to the lofty and global. Some issues on the agenda were the the financial crisis, cost-effectiveness and streamlining of loan agreements, and even the museums' role in U.S-Arab and Iranian relations. Certainly, the scope of discussion at Bizot conferences (which includes 60 museums) is far broader than it once was. At its foundation it included a small number of select members, their mission only to discuss exhibitions and loans.

Asked if Bizot had any plans to diversify its membership, AIC President Jim Cuno responded, "Bizot is very interested in adding Asian museums to its membership. The trouble is most Asian (Japanese, Korean, and Chinese) [have] non-museum professional, political appointees without the same sets of responsibilities we have. Finding comparable museum directors is the challenge."

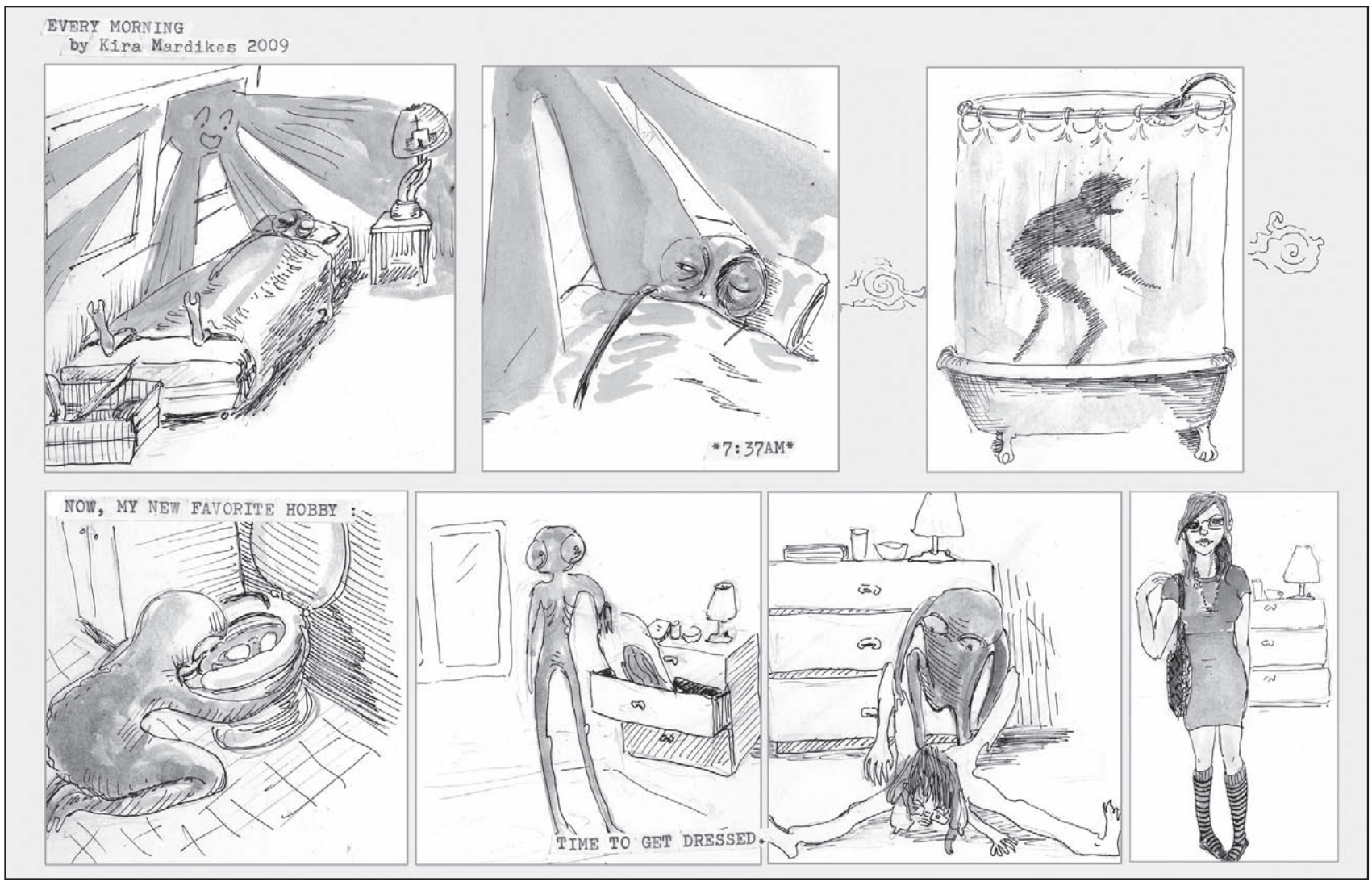
However, this diversity in conversation is yet to be reflected with regard to Bizot membership. Of primary concern in the planning for this Bizot was the procurement of two French-English interpreters, a testament to the group's immutable French foundations. In addition, Bizot is composed of museums that hail solely from the Western world, a fact often masked by the group's enigmatic profile but one that has made itself apparent in the past. Specifically, implications of Bizot's make-up emerged during the height of the repatriation controversy between Greece and the British Museum over the Parthenon Marbles.

British Museum President Neil MacGregor, who has been Chairman of Bizot in recent years, has admitted that a declaration issued by the group just following this period of intense debate over the Marbles was a direct reaction to the dispute. The declaration was neatly non-committal, arguing for the ideal of the "universal museum," supportive of non-ownership and sharing among nations over repatriation or deaccession. Signed by at least 30 members of Bizot, it served to support MacGregor without explicitly denying Greece's demands, marking "the significance of Greek sculpture for mankind as a whole and its enduring value for the contemporary world." Former Metropolitan Museum of Art President Phillippe de Montebello reflected that the declaration issued had been a "European initiative" which he was happy to support.

On more pragmatic matters, Bizot remained true to its roots this October, deliberating over the intricacies of standardizing loan processes. When asked what the most important topic discussed at this session was, Mr. Cuno, who has written passionately on the subject of international trade in antiquities, responded by lamenting the requirements of some museums for additional insurance and couriers "who fly business class when it's not necessary," a practice which he says pushes further costs onto the borrower.

He continued, "Different museums require different environmental conditions for their loans...[i.e.] humidity and temperature. Given utility costs and the impact of energy usage on the environment, we'd like to find a consistently applicable, more responsible agreement on environmental conditions."

Also discussed was what museums can do to work toward being greener in their operations. Just prior to this October's conference Bizot formally accepted several "Guiding Principles to Reduce Museums' Carbon Footprints" which were established by the National Museums Directors' Conference (NMDC) at their most recent meeting. One such guideline included the goal of finding low energy solutions to preserving collections, mentioning that museums need not necessarily utilize air conditioners to do so.



Nolan MacGregor

CHICAGO'S NEW LITERARY COMMUNITY

Join Fnewsmagazine and the School of the Art Institute's MFA Writing Dept for a roundtable discussion about Chicago's burgeoning new literary community, featuring novelist Kyle Beachy, playwright Chris Bower, blogger Jac Jemc, Associate editor of the Journal of Ordinary Thought and Assistant Director of the Neighborhood Writing Alliance Mairead Case, Quickies! founder Lindsay Hunter and Featherproof books founder Zach Dodson, and moderated by MFAW Department head Sara Levine.

The Sullivan Gallery, 33 S. State, 7th Floor, November 11 from 4:30-6 pm FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Photo by Nidhi Isaac