Winter-Spring Double Issue:
Enrique Alferez - David Bates - José Bédia - Thornton Dial
Identity

Carlos Betancourt
Sharon Jacques
Carlos Villasante

June 2 - 30, 2012

Heriard-Cimino Gallery
440 Julia Street  New Orleans  LA
heriardcimino.com  /  heriardcimino@aol.com
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Sidelights on Thornton Dial</td>
<td>Terrington Calás</td>
<td>Thornton Dial at the New Orleans Museum of Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>A Quasi-Romance</td>
<td>Kathy Rodriguez</td>
<td>David Bates and Joseph Havel at Arthur Roger Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Combs at Jonathan Ferrara Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mitchell Lonas at Callan Contemporary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The World of Enrique Alférez</td>
<td>Judith H Bonner</td>
<td>Enrique Alférez at Ogden Museum of Southern Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Wonderfully Whimsical World of Bernard Mattox</td>
<td>Karl F Volkmar</td>
<td>Bernard Mattox at Carolyn Robinson Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>David Halliday at the Ogden</td>
<td>Thomasine Bartlett</td>
<td>David Halliday at Ogden Museum of Southern Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Jimmy Descant: The Shape of the State</td>
<td>Kate Bruce</td>
<td>Jimmy Descant at Ogden Museum of Southern Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>The Sea Links and Cools...</td>
<td>Kathy Rodriguez</td>
<td>Group Exhibition at University of New Orleans St. Claude Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Gods &amp; Monsters</td>
<td>Terrington Calás</td>
<td>José Bédia at Heriard-Cimino Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Surface &amp; Medium</td>
<td>Kathy Rodriguez</td>
<td>Rachel Jones at The Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>A New Realism</td>
<td>Kate Bruce</td>
<td>Group Exhibition at Arthur Roger Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>John Clemmer’s Modernist Enterprise</td>
<td>Judith H Bonner</td>
<td>John Clemmer at Louisiana Arts and Science Museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Two Realists</td>
<td>Kate Bruce</td>
<td>Masahiro Arai at Carol Robinson Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Readings</td>
<td>Stephen R Bachmann</td>
<td>On Super Sad True Love Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>Kathy Rodriguez</td>
<td>Local Exhibitions around Town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


---

NOAR
THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW
VOL. XXX NOS. 3-4
MARCH / APRIL / MAY 2012

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW is published bi-monthly during the art season (October, December, February, April, June) by the New Orleans Art Review, Inc., P.O. Box 51181, New Orleans, LA 70151, a non-profit organization funded in part by grants from the Louisiana State Arts Council and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, as administered by the Arts Council of New Orleans, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment of the Arts. Subscriptions: fifty dollars for five bi-monthly numbers. (noareview@netzero.com) Advisory Board: E. John Bullard (New Orleans Museum of Art), Mrs. Thomas Bernard, Mrs. M. M. Calas (Dubuisson Foundation), Mrs. James Coleman Sr., Mrs. Haydee LaFaye Ellis, William Fagaly (New Orleans Museum of Art), Mrs. Sandra Freeman, Mrs. Eugenie Jones Huger, Mr. Keith Marshall (Madewood Foundation), Mrs. Françoise Richardson, Mrs. Louise Reiss Rogas, Timothy Slater, Eugenie D. Vasser, Mrs. John Weinstock, W. Thomas Young. Editorial Board: Stephen R Bachmann, Marilyn Brown, Terrington de Martain Calas, Calvin Harlan, J. Towne Peabody. Editor-in-Chief: J. Towne Peabody. Managing Editor: Terrington Calas. Associate Editor: Stephen Bachmann. Contributing Editors: Thomasine Bartlett, Dale Betancourt, Judith Bonner, Marilyn Brown, Christopher Fischer, Simeon Hunter, John H. Lawrence, Carol Leake, Leah Levkowicz, Peggy McDowell, Marian McLellan, John Mosier, Natalie Rinehart, Kathy Rodriguez, Karl Volkmar. Original Graphic Design: T.M. Calas, Greg Leonard. Graphic Artists: Natalie Rinehart, Chris Lewis. Graphic Assistants: Michael Curry, Ha Ni Nguyen. All opinions printed herein are the opinions of the authors and do not reflect those of the New Orleans Art Review, Inc. or its board members. Communications can only be returned if accompanied by a SASE.
Sidelights on Thornton Dial

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

THORNTON DIAL

Hard Truths
New Orleans Museum of Art
New Orleans, LA

THERE IS A certain measure of fury in Thornton Dial’s art. A singular one. A fury tempered by injections of prospect, of longing, even of deliverance. He declares indignation, but also optimistic promise. Such core variance is rare in contemporary African-American art, especially when political themes are at issue. And such themes figure saliently in “Hard Truths,” his retrospective exhibition at the New Orleans Museum of Art. The enormous assemblage High and Wide (Carrying the Rats to the Man), at first glance, appears to seethe. It features a stuffed Mickey Mouse doll – in chains, affixed to a crude but convincingly symbolic slave ship. The work verges on old-line, conventional protest art – heated, complete with unsubtle reprimand. The chains, to be sure, approach over-kill. And there is barbed wire. But Dial’s Mickey grins broadly, and the face has been blackened, minstrel-like. Soon, we grasp a complex reality — the shame and the shrewdness — of black participation in the phenomenon of 19th century American minstrel shows. And, of course, their legacy. Here, we see that participation as utter degradation and, simultaneously, as a vehicle of escape. Dial situates this quandary up-front, up-center. Impossible to avoid. He submits it, arguably, as a sustained tenor in his oeuvre.

But there is something else, too. In High and Wide, the optimistic side of Dial’s approach has another, more timeless effect. The doll is presented with splayed arms, a posture suggesting martyrdom, suggesting hope via faith. A profound religiosity is implied; it overmasters the whole. And the ship, then, assumes a liberating dimension – and a spiritual one, too. So does the central figure. Despite its playful cartoon origins, this sacrificial Mickey Mouse is thoroughly persuasive. It’s startling how vividly he calls to mind Goya’s most indelible image, that Christ-like execution victim, deified by art. In Dial’s High and Wide, another martyr, in another context, wields the same shivery force.

DIAL IS AN octogenarian with very little education. From the evidence of his work, however, he is certainly a thoughtful one. Although the terms “outsider” and “self-taught” are inescapably cited, he is scarcely a naïf. And prudently, the organizers of this exhibition have presented him as a savvy assemblage artist in the tradition of Robert Rauschenberg and other neo-dadaists. This effort does well to focus on the merits of the work, and – this is a true benison – it serves to distance him, in some degree, from the lethal quaintness associated with most outsider art.

And yet, in spite of this, the man’s biography intrudes in-
ordinately on his reputation. Since a predictably callous segment on a national television program, several years ago, we have been led to think chiefly, and perhaps condescendingly, of his personal saga — the kind of saga adored by TV and much of the general public: born in poverty, black in the segregated Deep South; many years of hard physical work; coming very late to art, by happenstance, following a need simply to make things. “Hard Truths” makes it clear that Dial is unique among artists from such a background — and, more important, that his personal history tends to veil a remarkable achievement.

MOST OF HIS work is assemblage/collage, and, as I say, it has obvious parallels in neo-dadaism, in artists such as Joseph Cornell, Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns. This, of course, is something of which Dial was unaware until recently. The actual derivation of his art is probably the tradition of “yard shows,” scrap-heap constructions long displayed in the front yards of Southern towns. (In New Orleans, a variation of the tradition persists, as photographer William Greiner has documented, most notably in elements from his Homefront series.) It is true that “yard shows” can frequently amount to little more than makeshift ornamentation, sometimes with cryptic meanings, sometimes with no meaning at all. At best, however, they constitute a folk idiom that points to the preoccupations of men and women in a distinct segment of American society.

Dial’s art follows suit, but with startling ambition. He protracts the notion broadly. Don’t Matter How Raggly the Flag, It Still Got To Tie Us Together is an over ten-foot wide rough reinvention of the American flag. An abused flag. It registers as torn and possibly bloodied. Fashioned of old clothes, mattress coils, can lids and much more, this is Dial’s pronouncement of the perilousness and the necessity of patriotic unity.

He reaches broader still with The Beginning of Life in the Yellow Jungle, a golden, glowing, positively magical piece. With key elements like a turtle shell, a baby doll, and artificial flowers – all golden – it purports to signify human origins. In fact, it makes tangible one man’s dream of an idyllic sphere. You sense his rapture.

In another work, Stars of Everything, Dial reaffirms his social awareness, but insists, as I say, on prospect. The central image is a menacing, or perhaps menaced, cloaked figure, with a bird-like head. It’s surrounded by cut-metal stars – in the loveliest color harmony of the exhibition. At first, you miss the essential contrast. But the “bird,” finally, seems anomalous, a stranger here, not quite fitting in. And yet, he anchors the composition, and does
so in sweet blues and greyed greens. He assimilates chromatically. You might see this as an emblem of societal hope.

The positive tone here notwithstanding, Dial’s lasting message is about the dire realities he has witnessed and pondered. With this in mind, any relation to most neo-dadaists, especially to Rauschenberg, is superficial. The relation is a question only of method and materials. Rauschenberg was a quintessential modernist, with two modernist tenets held high: avant-gardist subversion and its attendant irony – a legacy from the original Dada. The consequence was an art for its complacent 1950s moment: shocking, bizarre, thematically self-referential.

Today, in Dial’s work, by contrast, the practice of found-object assemblage has to do with actual life-world meaning, not with the old avant-garde need to disrupt. His closest ally in the contemporary art world may be Anselm Kiefer, that neo-expressionist German who was hailed, only a short time ago, as the most important artist of the late 20th century. In the work of both artists, the detritus of our environment is gleaned and re-assigned for cultural inquiry. Both artists attempt the near-impossible task of aestheticizing the villainies within their nations’ histories.

I say “aestheticizing” willfully. In both instances, the strewn rubbish of art historical assemblage is, significantly, hardly strewn at all. Every splintered piece of wood, every painted-over plastic toy has an ordered design function. Each article fits into a patent structure. Both artists, the educated Kiefer and the self-taught Dial, feel no need to flout sound pictorial convention. One knows how laughable it would be; the other knows, quite simply, what is effective.

Somehow, Dial takes on American history with little apparent difficulty. I mean, of course, the history that has touched him most profoundly. And, as we study High and Wide or Don’t Matter How Raggly, there is no doubt that it touches all of us. This, perhaps, is because of the emotional aspect that pervades his art. You cannot get past it. In Stars of Everything, all that metal and plastic and cloth, glued and configured, render something that is, ultimately, bittersweet. And fairly breathtaking. You see a celestial Eden, about ten feet of it. Then Dial, with sly subtlety, elects to underscore isolation and yearning. He has made delicate beauty on an engulfing scale, but he mandates some painful reality too.
THREE EXHIBITS ALONG the Julia Street strip investigate quasi-Romantic relationships between man and nature. The works all describe the artists’ personal experiences with natural forces, from their most destructive to their quietest poetry. A fourth exhibit is arguably concerned with notions of the contemporary sublime – not the awful power symbolized by grand nature, but the gigantic power of human-made systems and their ability to strip us individually of identity and strength. Despite the diversity of the media and forms, the shows might be conceptually united in their investigations into the opposition of humankind and its surroundings.

At Jonathan Ferrara, Michael Combs’ installation creates a general statement about this antinomy from a bank of his personal memories. In his statement, Combs explicitly describes his familiarity with animal anatomy and the violence of the hunting act. The exquisite craft of his work is as meticulous as the detail in the Realist paintings of Rosa Bonheur, a clear sign of his intimate knowledge of the muscular and skeletal structures of the cattle, deer, and ducks he casts and carves – the trophies that would decorate the game room he alludes to in the title of his show. Heavy Bag and Stick and Jab, both punching bags made from alligator skin, play on the idea, suggesting functional appointments that, in such a room, would also symbolize brute strength. Though the animals have been “conquered” through the hunt, which was successful because of the cultivated strength of the hunter, their large physicality – even the quietest decoy has a somber presence – expresses their natural power.
Incised, painted aluminum panels by Mitchell Lonas at Callan Contemporary suggest the Romantic sense of the sublime. Though several pieces depict the nests and feathers common to his work, newer pieces trace glittering root structures through the familiar stark, flat, black and white surfaces of the panels. As always, the nests suggest intimacy, warmth, and home, but the additions of the roots as subject matter complicates the content. The root systems inevitably suggest human anatomy and intricately laced veins. The organs are missing; black voids fill the space where a heart would be. This emptiness passes into the nests, which become uterine or placental. The bowl of the nests cups other voids, empty and with uncertain potential. The weightless floating forms emphasize the negative space around them. The flat expanses of value behind the shimmering, sculptural lines suggest a sublime aloneness. The nests and roots, enclosing nothing, floating in something; unbound from gravity like feathers, they begin to disappear, consumed by the sublime darkness.

David Bates’s paintings at Arthur Roger reference a specific narrative – the ongoing damage incurred by the BP oil spill in 2010 – which has complexly united and divided man and nature. The title of the show, “Down Highway 23,” references the state highway that draws Bates and other fishers to rich coastal waters usually thick
with nourishing seafood. Instead, in that late spring, Bates found the waters teeming with resolute workers – both the local fishermen who live off the bounty of the gulf and clean up crews rushing to stifle the harmful oily flow. Bates’ dingy brown, impasto brushstrokes sweep across his canvases with bravado; this form parallels the palette of the disaster but also symbolizes the toughened skins of the men who work with this nature for their living. The alla prima approach also suggests the dire immediacy of the event and its consequences. Bates juxtaposes the fishermen’s attempts to balance their lifestyles with the forces of nature against man’s futile attempt to harness its power through the oil industry. When the balance is off, both men and nature suffer; Bates narrates this rediscovered reality.

Like Lonas, Joseph Havel – also at Arthur Roger - creates poetic associations with his subject matter. But, he destroys the representation inherent in his materials, transforming denim or canvas into organic, amorphous vessels. Still, it is difficult to fully separate the three-dimensional work from its source material – a buttonhole remains a buttonhole; a star from the flag maintains its patriotism despite its heretical removal from the original cloth. Havel’s poetry is more evident in several “paintings” made with shirt labels and plexiglass. Formally, they recall the imperfect, hu-
man lines of Agnes Martin’s minimalist works, and the repetitive patterning of Frank Stella. Conceptually, they link with notions of overproduction, commodity, and the importance of wearing a name. The words “desire” and “game” appear, suggesting the play between consumer and product. The stacked labels create shifting, hypnotizing patterns, drawing our eyes around their irregular borders. This is the power of the contemporary sublime. The labels symbolize overproduction, too much information. Technology and the information it generates are available in overabundance; mankind has created a new, terrible force that is gorgeous in its huge awfulness.

The conceptual link threading these diverse shows is arguable. But, it seems this thread could pull them together, much like the beeline of the sidewalk unites these galleries along one path. Whether through the delicacy of line carved into metal with a dremel, or the meticulous handling of thick hides with utmost care, the idea of balance seems also to unite these works. Balance requires opposition, and these artists investigate it in the conceptual relationship of man and nature, and careful handling of strong materials.
The presence of sculptor Enrique Alférez (1901-1999) has been evident in New Orleans throughout most of the 20th century and now into the 21st. The most prominent of his sculptures are the two heroic figures outside the old LL&E building on Poydras Street—Lute Player and David. The city’s young people have grown up in the shadow of more than 30 sculptures by Alférez in City Park and around the Tad Gormley Stadium. Some remember his monument to philanthropist Sophie B. Wright on Magazine Street, while still others are familiar with his Fountain of the Winds monument at New Orleans Lakefront Airport (formerly Shushan Airport) and sculptural reliefs for the old Charity Hospital, as well as the Louisiana State Capitol and Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

The son of an academically-trained sculptor, Alférez was born in 1901 in Zacatecas, Mexico. The extraordinary circumstances of his formative years had a lasting effect on his work throughout his life. A runaway at the age of twelve, the lad fell into the hands of Mexican revolutionary leader José Doroteo Arango Arámbula, best known as Pancho Villa (1878-1923). Given the choice of fighting with Villa's men or being executed, Alférez joined the revolutionary troops, and eventually became a mapmaker for their forces. Villa, who sought to overthrow the Mexican president, advocated for the country’s multitudinous poor and promoted agrarian reform as a way to improve the lives of the farmers. Alférez remained staunch in his support of the lower classes throughout his career, a passion that sustained him and inspired his art for more than seven decades.

After leaving Villa’s forces, Alférez made his way to El Paso and worked in the studio of artist Harry Wagoner, making frames and doing other menial assignments. Alférez met the American sculptor Lorado Taft, with whom he studied at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1924 to 1927. Taft, who had been trained in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts, decried abstraction and modernistic trends in sculpture. Alférez justifiably adhered to figural art, although his work exhibits the influence of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, another major proponent for the working class. While in Chicago, Alférez completed a commission for 24 wood-carved elevator doors for the Palmolive Building in that city.

Alférez lived most of the 20th century in New Orleans where he moved in 1929 to execute a commission for the façade of the Holy Name of Mary Church. He was active in the Vieux Carré with the Arts and Crafts Club and taught at its School of Art for seven years. Although Alférez built a studio in Mexico in the hills above Morelia, he remained active in New Orleans until his death in 1999. He is celebrated in the exhibition at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, on view at the museum through April 2nd. The exhibition is dense with artworks and other objects that were in Alférez’s studio at the time of his death. Approximately 80 artworks are on view, along with an anvil and a large number of mallets, chisels, and other shaping tools that were either forged by Alférez or adapted by him. Most of the sculptures are executed in bronze, terra cotta, or mahogany. The majority of the drawings are executed in graphite, charcoal, and Conté crayon on brown paper, with a few charcoal sketches on white paper. The artworks are on loan from the private collection of Tlaloc Alférez, daughter of the artist, with a number of these heretofore unseen by the public. A 1934 silver gelatin print portraying Alférez is on loan from the Mimi and Jack Davis Collection.

Declined for military service during World War II, Alférez later served briefly in the Mexican army as a captain. His contribution to his adopted country came when he sculpted the first monument in the United States to represent a woman in service uniform. The original sculpture, titled Molly Marine and completed in 1943, stands in the shade of Live Oak trees on the neutral ground at the corner of Elks Place and Canal Street. Copies of the monument are in Quantico and Parris Island. Because of wartime restrictions on bronze and other metals, Alférez used granite and marble chips to complete the commission. He would later be made an Honorary Leatherneck by the United States Marine Corps. After World War II, Alférez returned to El Paso. He traveled to New York where he designed furniture and women’s accessories.
In 1945, obviously reflecting on his period of fighting with Pancho Villa’s troops, Alférez made a sketch of the aging mustachioed Villa, his sombrero pushed back from his brown, ammunition belts worn crisscross around his shoulders, open mouth, wrinkled brow and chin, and furrowed cheeks. Alférez retained his objectivity in this drawing; Villa is not idealized, but he is portrayed empathetically.

As a rule, Alférez’s artworks are characterized by simplified geometric figural shapes, graceful contours, elegant lines, and excellence in craftsmanship. Although his work is consistent in these features, there is no sense of artistic stagnation. Alférez’s father, who was trained in Europe, was known for his religious sculptures in northern Mexico. Like his father, Alférez sculpted works with religious themes throughout his lifetime. A 1959 mahogany sculpture titled Christ Crucified is carved in the shape of colossal hand, held upright, with a spike wedged below the fingers, with the thumb closing inward like a bud. Typical of Alférez’s wooden sculptures in this exhibition, the marks of his chisel provide texture; the soft patina of time lends sheen to his work. His reduction of the figural subject in crucifixion scenes, usually depicted in full length, emphasizes the grim act of driving spikes through the hands and feet.

A welded steel sculpture, executed about thirty years later than Christ Crucified and simply titled Pod, shows the flower pod with spiky leaves. Like a number of sculptures in the exhibition, it is paired with a preparatory work, in this case a sensitively rendered drawing that captures the delicacy of the flower. Alférez’s Pod seems to float in space. The graceful arc of the stem and the folded sheet metal recall the elegant kinetic metal sculptures of Lin Emery, who also draws on themes of nature.
Alférez’s enormous maquettes for the head and hands of his colossal David, which he executed in 1986 for the LL&E Building, manifest Alférez’s passion for the underdog. He portrays David with an expression of fierce concentration as he contemplates his gargantuan enemy—with brow furrowed, eyes squinting, and mouth set taut in an arch—all implying his resolute determination. His striated hair seems to blow with the wind, creating the only sense of movement in this critical moment. The two hands are exhibited on either side of David’s sculptured head, with the right hand holding the fragments of a sling and the left hand holding a pod-like stone.

Other works are studies on a theme, particularly reclining nudes, dancers, bathers, athletes, or charros. The terra cotta reclining female nudes are paired with Alférez’s sketches, some of which date as early as 1948. The sloping contours of hips and shoulders of Dia de Enseñanza are reminiscent of a landscape. Dreaming Holding a Bird is a playful interpretation of a young female, with her legs bent at the knees, raised, and crossed at the ankles. Her upraised hands held in a wing-like formation, suggest the bird in her dream. A series of small figures of women bathers recalls the work of Edgar Degas in their various positions and general treatment.

The simple forms of Alférez’s 1986 bronze Lute Player (also called Woman with a Mandolin) recall the work of Diego Rivera. Her round open mouth causes her to appear in song or perhaps, like the storyteller of the Indians of the American Southwest. The seated Woman in a Huipil, her chin up, her hands at her waist, and her knees akimbo under her garment, appears ready to spring instantly to her feet.

One of the most memorable of Alférez’s works, La Soldadera, executed in 1970, and cast in 1989, exemplifies his passionate democratic ideals. This large statue pays tribute to the women soldiers who fought fiercely in the Mexican Revolution, but whose role in that struggle is often overlooked. Alférez portrays the woman in her double-role as mother and soldier. The over-life size sculpture of a muscular woman holds a child who nurses while clutching at fabric around her neck. The woman holds the child under the diaper with her powerful left hand, while behind her back she holds a rifle partially hidden by her long skirt. Her fierce concentration as she turns her head parallels Alférez’s David.

A plaster Piéta, dated 1962, portrays Christ across the lap of his mother, with his head tilted back and resting on the shoulder of the Magdalene; the exaggerated up-tilt of the chin emphasizes the linear quality of his long neck. The entirety of the group is compact, with all three figures close together and suggesting that the sculpture was commissioned to fit into an arched niche.

Several sensitive drawings portray his two daughters, Tlaloc and Chloe, as children and through adolescence. The earliest of portrait of Tlaloc, sketched in 1958, show her hair blowing in the breeze, a device Alférez uses often to suggest movement. This preparatory sketch finds its three-dimensional counterpart in mahogany. Another mahogany sculpture of Tlaloc (1960) is reminiscent a carved wood sculpture of a woman by Walter Inglis Anderson in its treatment. A circa-1954 terra cotta of a kneeling woman and child, which Alférez titled Madonna and Cupid, was fired in the kiln of the Anderson family’s Shearwater Pottery in Ocean Springs. As in Anderson’s work, the texture of the rows of hair contrast with the smooth contours. Another female nude, truncated at the raised arms and head and carved in mesquite circa 1972, is smooth in treatment yet retains a sense of texture and the chisel. The smooth upper torso is slender while the hips are full.

Two large carved mahogany panels of Adam and Eve (1988-89) are narrative, particularly with their references to biblical accounts and history. The panel depicting Eve shows vignettes of the story of Judith and Holofernes and Joan of Arc bound and surrounded by fire. A scene showing the figure of a kneeling queen is less decipherable in its content. The Adam panel shows the head of the mythological hero Ajax with his helmet pushed back above the forehead, a figure of Christ bearing a cross, a Roman centurion, a scribe with a lamb and wheel, and a man holding a sword and a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. Additionally, a coin with the profile image of a man bears the inscription, “Atila Flagelum Dei,” which is translated as “Atila, scourge of God.” Both figures of Adam and Eve appear to be set against a cloth or screen with its folds creating geometric angular folds that are characteristic of Cubism.

A number of smaller studies depict figures from the hill country of Morelia, including youngsters riding burros. Alférez presents the charros, Mexican horsemen, dismounted and standing and wrapped in their cloaks, as a solid cone. He does not depict them with their guns, but he often shows them holding a whip as representative of their cruelty to the lower classes.

The exhibition, curated by Bradley Sumrall, is rich in content and deserves more than a single viewing. Many of the works have a more complex meaning that that which is immediately perceived. A terra cotta figure of a monk titled Savannah Rolla, is a play on the Italian reformer Savonarola. A small terra cotta figure of a seated figure titled Widow, wrapped in a long cloak with her head lowered, holds her clasped hands in her lap as though in sorrow, supplication, or deep contemplation. This work in many ways typifies not only this exhibition, but the greater body of Alférez’s oeuvre. While many of Alférez’s subjects appear introspective and absorbed in deep thought, the suggestion of impending action permeates others. The viewer will have much to ponder, not only in the museum’s gallery, but while traveling through the city and encountering Alférez’s many contributions to the aesthetics of New Orleans.

The Wonderfully Whimsical World of Bernard Mattox

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

BERNARD MATTOX
Recent Work
Carolyn Robinson Gallery
New Orleans, LA

WELCOME TO THE WONDERFULLY whimsical world of Wimmee-Beelden, the Mapmaker, and Sans Souci Chronicles, created for your delight by Bernard Mattox! Leave your expectations at the door and allow the eyes of your imagination to wander into visual fantasies where elements collide and elide the rational tendencies of mind. Playful manipulations of lines and arrangements of colors and shapes may suggest real things in real spaces only to dissolve into labyrinthine alchemical polygamies of cubism and surrealism and graffiti and cartoons as illusive as cat’s paws in crepuscular calm.

The outstretched (okay, so they don’t stretch out that far) arms of your host, a thin, red-bodied funny little man sporting a conical hat, invite you to survey his reliquary of a home in the forty-eight by sixty inches scene in the Wimmee-Beelden series. Standing in the middle of the room, just to the left of center, between what appears to be a small television set on his right and an ornately decorated, multicolored lampshade on his left, his surreal presence, kin of kachinas and kamis and the like, seems to float amid a continuously shifting reordering of visual chaos.

Here and there the existence of recognizable things are suggested by a few lines and colors: a lavender cabinet of drawers with a backgammon board atop along the lower edge, an area of wooden floor, a small table with squat lamp and lampshade, curious flowers rising from various vase-like shapes, a small resin end table with black and white striped legs and a top that alternates between checkerboard and three quarters silhouette portrait at the lower right, seeming portraits hanging on the wall with the same three-quarters silhouette as that which appears on the television screen and the table top, perhaps a window in what might be a rear wall, and a large red table or secretary with rows of oddly filled or decorated pigeonhole compartments.
Yet these evocations of things are elusive. As soon as one thinks one has discerned a shape or isolated a mass, it dissolves into a non-representational arrangement as subtle as the shifts of design in the *Red Studio* by Matisse. What appears to be simulated wood grained floor becomes a table top becomes a board, its pattern iterated in the silhouettes of the busts in the television screen and the behind bars portrait, subverting its association with wood and shifting one’s awareness towards arrangements of complementary warm orange and cool bluish purple tones. Iterations of vertically oriented elements define contrapuntal rhythms: a row of black lines qua jail bars, the orange and black above the television set, the rows of gray and black beneath, the red-tipped cigar-like forms below, the reds and blues at bottom center, the row of triangular bundles in black rimmed red rectangles suspended from a long thin horizontal striped bar, the row of trapezoidal shapes enclosing different patterns and shapes on what could pass as a cabinet top, and the row of colored mounds from whose tops stream multicolored plumes.

Diverse shapes with their suggestive linear teasing are distributed throughout the composition, creatively interplaying between overlapping and suggestive hints of perspective, only to be subverted by ambiguous rivaling contour lines along another edge or other side as on the *lanzon* at Chavin de Huantar. The result is a phenomenon in which one is continually discovering coherence among the bricollage of visual elements that depends on, and may vary according to, the viewer’s willingness to follow the artist’s lead instead of insisting on her or his own way. One is rewarded with an experience of delightful alternations between pattern and representation in *Wimmee-Beelden*’s playful *horror vacui* world.

The lyrical character of the sixty by forty-eight inch *Wimmee-Beelden* work is as different the work just described as that between color field and expressionist action painting. The élan vital of looping lines and vortices and dynamic concentricities and rhythms represents energetic paths of movement that circumstantially define the patterns and shapes and forms of the artist’s repertoire of images and lines. Mattox’ scribblings and scratchings have the qualities of a graffiti-laden wall or a child’s drawings that are as curious as the endlessly varied doodlings of Cy Twombly.

Splayed looping lines express the essence of a palmetto palm, concentric drops a section view of an onion bulb, little critters pop out in the most unexpected places, a wingless airplane fuselage hovers in the air, a Quonset hut sits incongruously, an obelisk is punctuated with windows, various hydra and cephalopods appear here and there, a triangular tree of rows of interlaced looping
lines like practice drills for learning to write cursive script as we were made to do by my sixty five year old seventh grade teacher some fifty-five years ago, all having the elemental quality of an autochthonous primeval expressionist pictographic drawing a la Gorky’s Garden at Sochi or the likes of Klee’s Twittering Machine, set within an amorphous ochrish gray world.

The Mapmaker works, too, are represented by two different modes: one more linear and lyrical and the other employing a palimpsest of somber color and shapes. The linear mode with its discretely defined objects is closely related to the latter work from the Wimmee-Beelden series. In the sixty by forty-eight inches example, an amusing feline presence whom I imagine as holding a lorgnette and wearing a top hat and tails like a between the wars cabaret chanteuse character poses jauntily in the lower right. A mysterious form from which exudes a cloud and long thin-stemmed flower stands on what might pass as a table. A tall undulating obelisk visiting from Clyde Connell’s repertoire conjoints with a base for an elaborate lamp, building-like shapes iterating a phallic high rise above and to the left, and a funnel shaped tower spiritual kin to Bernd and Hilla Becher photo collage appears in the upper right. Complex structures of little houses, a ninja shuriken, strange flower shapes of the same species as man-in-the-moon marigolds, and other contraptions rise from the apices of various triangular based forms.

These distinctly drawn and outlined entities are as animated, sentient beings engaged in narcissistic dance. What straight lines there are have the supple quality of cytoplasm-constraining cellular membranes. The impression is one of standing before a wall of pictographs that have come alive and are responding to the rhythms of their aesthetic qi. One might imagine them as actors in an animated cartoon, a gathering of characters who have answered a casting call for a Calvin and Hobbes fantasy only to find that they are a bit too outré for any of the roles. One can imagine them as engaged in conversations with each other, expressing themselves, flirting with each other, showing off, like a fantastic hand puppet show, each dressed in their personal idea of finery as if they are the souls of Nick Cave sound suits waiting to be invented.

In the other Mapmaker mode, somber values move slowly in compressed spaces amongst low saturation colors with the elegiac, melancholy character of a nocturne. The forty-eight by sixty by four inches Mapmaker is structured with a grid created by interlocking low keyed rectilinear shapes with various identifiable shapes dispersed throughout: striped horses in upper right and upper left of center and two Picasso-esque goats, a formal cabinet des curiosities filled with phalluses, fantastic flora, star-topped towers, vases with flowers, horn-crowned hills, and pedestals and bases suggesting three-dimensional spaces. On the left, verticals are arranged along a horizontal axis like the composition of Gorky’s The Liver is a Cockcomb. Knowing that Gorky abstracted from nature suggests that Mattox might be working in this way too. On the right side of the composition, the character of the representations is similar to the fabulous studio of the earlier Wimmee-Beelden work, a Picasso seen through lens of Wojnarowicz and passed through the eyes of Mattox.

The forty-eight by ninety-six by four inches Mapmaker version contains hints of mid-twentieth century surrealist abstraction: Gottlieb’s pictograph displays, Dubuffet’s random horlages, the spatial suspensions of Gorky, and an overflowing Nevelson assemblage. The eye scans across multiple foci distributed over a dynamic cubist substructure. The gaze moves across the surface, following leads into expected depths only to find oneself unable to move any further, forced to return to surface scanning, pausing here and there, then moving on. The restless composition would be a suitable metaphor for the interconnectedness of social networking and the dynamic nature of continuously shifting, multifaceted interrelationships, an iteration of the western art history of discrete forms that had emerged from medieval matrices only to find form dissolving into luminous impressionist miasmas and deconstructed and displayed in the twentieth century as streams of visual or conceptual consciousness.

As a group the Sans Souci Chronicles anticipates the linear works of the Mapmaker series. Freely invented hieroglyphs are arranged above a luminous ground. Strange forms hang from tautly scribed lines rising through an ambiguous space like a fantastic fresco from a bizarre Egyptian New Kingdom tomb or illustrations from Mayan codices. A red stick-figure like a demon from Giselbertus’ tympanum relief in the narthex of Saint Lazare at Autun invites one’s gaze to explore the sixty by forty-seven by four inches scene where a whirling vortex dances atop a tree stump while a single rising line morphs through a series of transformations, becoming a floating rectangle, a line again, a squat lamp-like shape, a line again, only to top out as a flower headed duck-like figure as the crowning expression. The spindly-legged table behind the red stick-figure is iterated in vertically aligned rhythms in upper left corner, obelisks in the upper right, and a complex four-level tower near to stump. An oddly shaped triangle lies at the feet of figure, rising through a series of magical transformations to become droopy leaves to leaved stem to hut to leaved stem to rectangle from which grow three budded stems.

In one work are found portrait silhouettes and horses, plants and flowers, and miniature buildings, elements familiar from other works, in other series, compressed into dense condensations of grays. In another, figures like cornhusk dolls, Senufu rhythm pounders, and Ashanti figures arranged in rhythmic patterns. In the large forty-eight by ninety-six inches Chronicle, one recognizes a target with an arrow stuck in center, several horses, a baby carriage, a vine, two portraits, patterned areas like faded floral wallpaper, trapezoidal/conic shapes as bases or vases, and elongated biomorphic forms and towers. Unique is the forty-eight inches square Chronicle where the density of figures is packed into the surface like a Mexican milagro-covered devotional object or a graffiti covered coulee wall.

The juxtapositions of the inventive variety of images found in the Sans Souci Chronicles paintings and the artist’s other series continually attract and distract one’s gaze as it is redirected from one point of focus to another. The artist holds the viewer’s interest to the point of fascination through the phenomenon of persistence of vision in which it is the eyes of the viewer which move not the individual stills that make motion pictures work. The essential calculation lies in the rate at which the eyes moves from one point to another, shifting from one shape or color to another or following the path of a line, the eye drawn to one area, reluctantly leaving, yet teased away, remembering what has just been the focus of attention, feeling a sense of loss, delighting in the new experience and experiencing a lingering feeling of loss, only to have the process recur repeatedly, one becomes drawn a palimpsest of memories.
Based in New Orleans for the last twenty years, photographer David Halliday uses age-old techniques to create contemporary photographs that seem eternal. Displayed in three separate galleries at the Ogden, each room has its own character and shows a different side of Halliday's creativity.

Frequently printed in warm, sepia tones, the photographs are compared to the Photo-Secessionists of the 1920s in the wall text by the Ogden’s curator of photography, Richard McCabe. The Photo-Secessionists were a group of photographers, led by Alfred Stieglitz and including Gertrude Kasebier and Edward Steichen, who supported pictorialism in photography. The pictorialists felt that high-art photographs should look like paintings; they achieved their goals through manipulation of both the camera and the negative. In the darkroom, these manipulations included cropping, using a variety of paper for printing, coating the papers with gum bichromate, for a warm-toned print, or platinum salts for cooler images with a greater range of tone, and even using multiple negatives together. Soft focus, which rendered a slightly fuzzy, painterly image, was also standard. The resulting prints were atmospheric and dreamy, unlike the single-focus image of the hand-held, amateur Kodak camera, first marketed in 1888. This difference underscored the skill of the art photographers, both with the camera and in the darkroom, and delineated the difference between high-art photography and the crisp, more documentary style then popular.

Halliday’s work certainly is reminiscent of this pictorial style, while simultaneously bringing something contemporary to the images. The first of the three spaces dedicated to Halliday’s work is filled with portraits and still lifes. The first image facing the viewer upon entering the space is a large, horizontal, two-print image of a banana stalk. The two images, equal in size, are matted separately within one frame. The image on the right shows a bunch of bananas on a stalk that continues into the left image, where it terminates in a banana flower. Two other images in the space utilize a collage technique, coupled with multiple frames to create one image. Fishing Net utilizes multiple prints of a fish net handle and upper ring in one horizontal frame, above similarly collaged images of the net itself, framed vertically. Crab Net uses one larger, square frame over a long, narrower vertical frame, with a collaged image. Several of the portrait photographs are also collaged, as in Cynthia and Charles, while others are more straightforward. A series of nine portraits are hung in a grid formation; six of the nine depict volunteers at Common Ground post-Katrina, while the other three are local residents. All are sepia-toned, monochromatic images that evoke a romantic nostalgia while actually depicting contemporary subjects.

The second gallery is devoted to Halliday’s box series. This is a series of objects and tiny still life arrangements photographed in a box. The box itself is dark and crusty-looking, which photographs as a variegated black, whether the photographs are color or black and white. There is a circular hole in one side of the box that allows natural light to enter, illuminating the objects inside. Each of the twenty photographs in this space is identical in size and format, and they are hung in perfect, evenly spaced rows. Twelve are black and white photographs, while eight are color photographs. All of the box series depict food items. The color photographs are of fruit, vegetables and vegetable flowers, such as tomatoes, cherries, apricots, radishes, zucchini flowers,
and an oddly shaped, lumpy lemon, occasionally paired with a plate or other prop. The color in these images is dramatic, as the box itself remains a variegated black, which lends a hand-tinted or painterly quality to the finished work. The twelve black and white photographs, using the same format as the color images, depict less colorful food items, such as chestnuts, eggs, truffles and cheese, in spare, formally elegant arrangements. This series is reminiscent of Edward Weston’s series of bell peppers from the late 1920s and 1930. Weston was a California photographer, initially influenced by the pictorialists, to whom Halliday’s work has been compared.

The third gallery holds perhaps the most painterly of Halliday’s images. These photographs were inspired by a collection of artifacts left in a cabin at the death of an 85-year-old neighbor of Halliday’s mother in Nantucket. The neighbor, George Andrews, died about fifteen years ago, leaving behind the well cared for gear and tools of a dory fisherman. Halliday explains in his wall statement that these artifacts became haunting, and seemed to represent the vanishing, simple life of a bygone era, stating that for Andrews, the fisherman’s gear was not about leisure, but about the life of a dory fisherman. Halliday has preserved the artifacts, and the lifestyle, in a series of photographs of Andrews’ and other gear, taken over the last several years.

The series of fisherman’s gear are collectively titled Portal, and each image is round, within a square frame. These images are extremely delicate; it is only upon close inspection that one realizes they are photographs rather than softly tinted watercolor paintings. Each object is placed against a white tile ground that emphasizes the soft, faded colors of the objects, particularly in images such as Life Jacket, where the faded orange of the life jacket becomes a monochromatic wash of gentle color, and Life Preserver. Matted in white, against the white ground of the “portal,” each object gains the singular dignity of the vegetables and fruit in the Box Series. Hip Waders depicts a pair of ordinary, mundane black hip boots, elevated to the elegant formality of Mapplethorpe’s flower.
compositions. The effect of the Portal photographs, combined with the wall text, is the same respect for the dignity of simple human life found in Caravaggio’s religious paintings, or Velasquez’ *Water Carrier of Seville*.

Overall, this selection of Halliday’s photography at the Ogden is impressive. Drawing from both the history of photography, and art history in general, for technique, subject matter and style, Halliday transforms these classic elements into something his own, something contemporary. Serial imagery for the artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a vehicle to de-emphasize the subject; for Monet, while painting wheat stack after wheat stack, the paintings ceased to be about the wheat stack (or the façade of Rouen Cathedral, or water lilies) and became, instead, explorations of the formal aspects of painting, with the subject becoming inconsequential. For Weston, the series of photographs of peppers were about light and shadow, the camera’s focus and composition, rather than being about the pepper. Interestingly, Halliday’s use of a repetitive format, changing only the object being photographed, lends a greater significance to the subjects of his photography. In a very postmodern way, Halliday, has borrowed earlier techniques and forms, removed those forms from their original purpose, and created new meaning within an established format. He has reversed the terms of the classic serial subject.
THE OGDEN MUSEUM of Southern Art is unique for many reasons. For me, I enjoy the assortment of traveling exhibits, installations, and items within their permanent collection, and how all of these are integrated within their extensive gallery space.

On your next visit to the Ogden, be sure to visit Jimmy Descant’s exhibit The Shape of Louisiana Commenting on the Shape of Louisiana. Formerly of New Orleans, Descant now resides in Salida, Colorado, but his roots run deep in the state of Louisiana. When you first enter the gallery, Descant’s mission statement is to the left of the entrance. The artist explains “I am Louisiana, but I am an artist of the whole world, also.” The artist shows his passion for his state in this one-man show, and holds true to his mission statement by signing his pieces “Jimmy Descant Earth.” The artist’s often quirky approach to his work is apparent throughout the gallery space.

Descant’s show includes nineteen pieces, mostly medium-size in scale. All of his pieces are mounted to the wall. It is important to note that Descant has made free-standing sculptures, as noted on his website, but has refrained from including any in the show. The artist describes his work as “deluxe rocketships and severe re-constructivist assemblage sculpture.” The pieces are indeed severe-and masculine. The base layer in many of his works is wood, thick wood, with layers upon layers of found and created objects. Many of these materials have been recycled. Chrome rocketships factor into several of his pieces, as in Greeting from New Orleans—Building the Future from the Past, 2010. In this assemblage, Descant incorporates photographs taken by his father of John F. Kennedy on the campaign trail in Grand Rapids, Michigan in late 1960. The story behind this work is interesting—the artist is connected to both his father’s hometown New Orleans, and his mother’s hometown Grand Rapids, where the couple lived until after he was born. The photographic negatives survived Katrina, and are complimented by small items such as keys, and a postcard “Greetings from New Orleans, Louisiana.” The chrome rocketship could almost serve as a time capsule, where all of these pieces could go inside and be stored away until a time in the distant future. This juxtaposition of old and new is a common thread in Descant’s work.

Right in front of this particular construction and others was a non-descript bench. Not a work by Descant, but a welcomed prop from the Ogden. As I observed while walking through the space, the bench was used frequently. Visitors pondered Descant’s work, and the many layers, both literally and figuratively, that factor into his assemblages. To be sure, Descant is not afraid to confront the viewer with serious topics and issues.

As noted previously, there are several constructed layers to Descant’s assemblages. These layers of objects that form his pieces vary, from bulky metal pieces to tiny figurines and montaged photographs. There is nothing delicate in Descant’s art, nothing fragile, except for the themes themselves. At first glance, the pieces chosen by the artist might seem random, but they are not. This characteristic allows the viewer to really consider his creative process. For instance, in Descant’s I Missed My Chance To Be Beowulf And Became (As Always) Poe, the artist reflects upon his leaving New Orleans. In the center of the piece is an appropriated object, perhaps a small sign, that spells “Attachments,” an inclusion certainly appropriate for this work.

In LA-Zulu-Icious, 2010, Descant revels in the fun and good humor of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Tiny pieces of material, including parts of a scrabble game—the letter “z”—are juxtaposed with larger items, not all of them relating to carnival season. Some of the pieces seem mechanical. A quirky face appears in the top left corner of this construction, fashioned out of the end of a broom and a pair of cat-eye reading glasses. Below this constructed face is a smaller one, with found pieces of hardware forming the serious yet funny face. These faces remind me of masks, and fit in perfectly with Descant’s Mardi Gras-themed work.
It’s hard to miss his personal connection with Louisiana—from the imagery found on the assemblages, to the shape of the pieces themselves, which mirror the boot-like shape of our State on a map. This distinctive outline is used repeatedly in the show, and even factors into the title of the artist’s exhibit. One of the more compelling pieces in the show that incorporates the shape of the state is Descant’s *Ague de la Muerte*, 2010. Muerte, Spanish for death, certainly describes the mood of the work. Unlike many of Descant’s compositions, which are filled to the brim with found objects, this composition is barren. Descant uses black duct tape and trails of lead to cover the base of the composition. The lead that Descant maps out through the state represents Louisiana’s numerous waterways. A commentary on the destructiveness of chemicals and pollutants, this image is a powerful statement, especially given the recent events such as the B.P. Oil Spill. This piece allows the visitor to pause, and think about how Louisiana has rallied, time and time again.

I toured Descant’s exhibit during the Ogden’s monthly event held on Thursdays, Ogden After Hours. It was a lively time to be in the museum, with blues music, cocktails, and anticipation of the coming weekend. A steady stream of museum-goers perused Descant’s show, and the intimate space that the pieces were installed in allowed those of us inside to share thoughts on his assemblages and rocketships. I noticed that people were intrigued, thoughtful, humored, and most importantly, engaged with his work—everything Descant, aka “The Rocketman,” could want in a successful show. The show runs at the Ogden until April 8, 2012.
IN MARCH OF 2010, Rian Kerrane, Anastasia Pelias, and Melissa Borman collaborated in a three-person exhibition at the Edge Gallery in Denver. This was the first in what would be three exhibitions titled mara/thalassa/kai: the SEA, on the same theme: the artists’ relationships with water and the sea, and the narratives that link their careers and personal histories. Far from the dry climate of Denver, it is now at the University of New Orleans St. Claude Gallery in the water-bound city. The artists will later travel to Minneapolis, a city surrounded by lakes, for the third and final installation of the show. Though the work evolves in each showing, it is not necessarily site specific. Rather, it is a sign of mutability, much like each ocean wave, though made of the same matter, is unique. The title refers to this theme and to each artist's cultural, geographical, and personal link to the sea. Kerrane, Pelias, and Borman investigate their connections to the ocean and each other through the media of sculptural installation; painting, assemblage, and video; and photography.

Mara, a mythological sea goddess, is also the Gaelic word for the sea. Dun na Mara, or “Fort of the Sea,” is the physical address of the house of Kerrane’s grandmother in Ireland, where her family still resides. A cast-iron deck chair strung with a swathe of ruddy-colored knit hair symbolizes the matriarch. The iron is industrial, much like the plastic or wood that would frame any deck chair. But, the edges are ground and softened to suggest wear, lightening the gravity and roughness of the material. The hair is both comforting and discomfiting; it appears soft and familiar but it is dead and separate from the body, another play on material contradictions.
History is bound in the knots that link each loop of hair – the knitted form is a sign of the artist’s process as well as a symbol for the events that shape personal history. The model for this chair sat in the back garden of Kerrane’s family house. This “fort of the sea” was a mere distance from the ocean, which is suggested by soft waves of plastic undulated by table fans somewhat obscured beneath the surface. The fans change the landscape of the plastic, which has the rumpled and reflective surface quality of water. Kerrane elevates utilitarian materials to another plane – an unconscious kind of realm, which might be symbolized by the ocean itself.

Thalassa is the primordial Greek goddess who represents the Aegean Sea. Pelias, who met Kerrane during graduate studies in the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of New Orleans, is also bound to Skopelos, Greece, the island where her mother was born. Her video, titled Alati, meaning “salt,” is a collection of moments filmed on the island: a mouth delectating over ocean rocks, dappled water, an olive tree, a person in white appearing and disappearing behind a stone monument. Cicadas and the movements of the ocean form the soundtrack, which abruptly falls off and returns. Time is an inherent element of any video work, but the intimate views created with measured zooms towards the subject matter imply a conscious pacing and slowing, a savoring of these instants. The form of rocks beneath water from the video is repeated in a series of two-dimensional works created with found slate reclaimed after Katrina. The grayed, rusted, and smoothed tiles suggest the wear of a flood, and as two-dimensional works they mimic the aerial views of roofs that were so common after the flooding of the hurricane. Pelias is a native to New Orleans, a survivor of the storm, and so these pieces have a poignancy and heartbreak belied by their hard surfaces. The slate pieces are paired with large-scale, atmospheric paintings that recall the emotionally devastating works of Mark Rothko. Process is evident in the drips of paint that trace gravity down the sides of the works and the glazes of colors that peek through to the surface. The experience of viewing is like looking through the water to the bottom, but in these works there is no end. They are sublimely unbound.
Borman’s photographs are also sublime; though small in scale, her images of the water mounted on aluminum, taken as she swam through the ocean in Mexico, loom against the lens of her camera and so against the viewer. Much like a diver preparing an eye mask with spit, Borman licked the lens of the camera to maintain clarity in the images. In the title of the show, Borman is kai, the Hawaiian and Japanese term for the ocean. She lived in Hawaii until the age of eight, when her military family’s peripatetic existence brought her to other areas of the United States. This biography, and fact that water truly links all, abolishes the geographical boundaries of her photographs. In the show, the Mexico images are paired with larger photographs of Irish kelp. This is her link to Kerrane; the two artists collaborate in summer programs with art students in Ireland. The kelp images, like the Mexico photographs, picture surprising landscapes. Strings and clumps of kelp pile against clouded blue skies, becoming mountains rather than palm-sized mounds. As the artist says, it is “just a little disarming.” The images are meditations on the epic nature of the smallest moments, but they are also records of the artist’s examination of personal history and place. These documents of familiar things from unfamiliar standpoints suggest the delightful newness that can be found in a different vantage point of the mundane, as well as sameness among differences.

The sea links and cools the distant continents that delicately float on the hot crust of the earth - though separate, they are always touching. It is the symbol of the unconscious, ripe for exploration, both familiar and unknown. It is a fitting metaphor for the lives and work of these three women, who have found each other through chance, and who explore their individual memories and histories in the context of each other’s art in this series of exhibitions. Like the water, the ideas remain constant, though the way the work reveals itself will always change.
Gods & Monsters

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

JOSÉ BÉDIA
Recent Paintings
Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA

Without monsters and gods, art cannot enact our drama... — Mark Rothko

JOSÉ BÉDIA creates images in which the holy and the horrific collide. They are rooted, it would seem, in the “primitive” concept of terrifying deific power — the sort of power that suggests human frailty, and suggests, too, our obligation of worship. This sense pervaded his recent exhibition at Heriard-Cimino. In the painting Permanencia Idolatrias, a human-beast conflation sits like an ancient idol, monumental, formidable, confronting the spectator. It’s an umbered, colorless painting. And on the creature’s legs, two silhouetted figures rest — small human figures, out of scale in the extreme way of cinquecento mannerism. Significantly, the human presence feels merely ancillary, if indeed that. And Bédia’s assertion is clear: a whelming religious force is over us, surveys us. The image produces an effect tantamount to that of the nineteenth century sublime, but here, it is fiercely direct. No arcane metaphors — no endless expanses of mist and sea and sky. Bédia puts a face, as it were, on that holy might.

The intensity in Permanencia Idolatrias, and in most of Bédia’s work, is a consequence of his values — the undiminishable gravity of his values. He is devoted to a genuinely spiritual enterprise. Or, at least, to one bound by the possibility of true spiritual belief, the kind we associate with old, ritualistic cultures. There is little doubt that he possesses it. And his art is something of a declaration.

It seems also to be a chronicle of his drive to uncover vestiges of similar fervor in the contemporary world. In 1983, Bedia, Cuban-born Miami-based, was initiated into Palo Monte, the Afro-Cuban religion. He became deeply involved. Later, he became an inveterate traveler. Or, more precisely, a pilgrim. He began a sustained exploration of spiritual practices among various indigenous peoples — in Mexico, in Native North America, in the Peruvian Amazon, in Zambia. He met shamans and diviners.

In his art, perhaps, Bédia became one. A canvas like Ntoto Nfinda suggests a shamanistic gesture. The image could be the visual equivalent of some tribal shriek — jumbled, irrational, yet utterly compelling. And, in its otherness, credible. Here again, there is a fearless hybrid “monster,” this time robustly muscular, and with shoulders populated by diminutive elements of landscape and earthly life. A nature-wrapped god. You envision the artist as an absorbed creator-priest. His task? To relay the fact of divine presence and divine omnipotence. The work fairly quavers, redolent of agitated exaltation. This is an unabashedly religious art.

A few years ago, such a work — or such an idea, even — would have seemed quaint, perhaps anachronistic. After all, it conjures Romanticism’s “Great Church of Nature,” though it scarcely looks it. Nor does it look like the legendary American piety: those symbolic genuflections of Barnett Newman and Mark...
Jose Bedia: Permanencia Idolatrias, 2011. 73” high.

Rothko. Somehow, it resonates today. Possibly, this is because our inordinately mechanized era wants an antidote — maybe a magician in lieu of a tech.

Or possibly, we are persuaded by the timeless simplicity of Bedia’s method. He has an invincible gift for condensing narrative into forthright, graspable motifs. Despite its intricacy of detail, Ntoto Nfinda registers initially as an emblem, a categorical emblem. And yet, the numinous tone is what you take away. The weighty black figure, to be sure, has a clouting Sturm und Drang quality; it is turgid, hyperbolic. And yet, the total image is a kind of affirmation of human spirituality. This is a result, very likely, of Bedia’s jarring collocations — or, rather, clashes. His clashes — of scale, of sheer logic — establish a preternatural realm. You see yourself in it, you re-imagine your status, your purpose, your significance. This is the thrust of ageless faiths. And it is disarmingly convincing here.

In Bedia’s conception, there is no abstract Rothkovian art-as-substitute-religion. Rather, the art is religion’s vehicle.
Porbus, laying a hand on the old artist’s shoulder, turned to Poussin with a “Do you know that in him we see a very great painter?” “He is even more of a poet than a painter,” Poussin answered gravely. “There,” Porbus continued, as he touched the canvas, “Use the utmost limit of our art on earth.” “Beyond that point it loses itself in the skies,” said Poussin. “What joys lie there on this piece of canvas!” exclaimed Porbus. The old man, deep in his own musings, smiled at the woman he alone beheld, and did not hear. “But sooner or later he will find out that there is nothing there!” cried Poussin.

BALZAC’S SHORT STORY. “The Unknown Masterpiece,” raises questions about the nature of art. Through the toil of Frenhofer, the tragic hero of the tale, Balzac considers the content and construct of painting. At the end of the story, like Pygmalion, the aged Frenhofer is dazzled by the beat he perceives pulsing through his finished canvas; finally, after ten years, the painting breathed. However, Poussin is confounded by the artist’s reaction to the mass of color and brushstroke, punctuated by one perfect foot, confronting him. In actuality, the painting is a mess of stroke and pigment, which seems to conceal more than it reveals.

Balzac suggests that the beauty of painting is paint itself. This emphasis on medium became a focus of modern art criticism. But, in the context of Romanticism – the context in which the story was written – the ability of medium to generate content was something of a nascent idea.

The unctuous plasticity of oil paint has the capacity to immortalize the natural world. The flowers frozen in the brushstrokes of a vanitas have long since decayed and vanished. The sublime landscape captured in the luminous glazes and creamy impasto of a Turner has changed and, perhaps, disappeared. Paintings are relics of time and history, the permanent remnants of lost moments that represent mortal experiences. But, as Balzac insists, paint is paint, not the thing it represents.

Rachel Jones suggests that these concepts are still worth exploring. “Memento Mori,” literally “reminder of death” and the title of her most recent show at The Front gallery, specifically refers to ability of paint to preserve and remind. Jones has consistently dealt with issues of memory throughout her repertoire. In this installation, she turns directly to the iconography of loss and Romantic landscape, using a more art historical context to explore her content, but continues to look at paint in terms of its form.

Jones presents three works in a repeated format. In each, a shelf lined with candles is anchored below a window-sized oil painting on plastic fixed directly to the wall. During the opening, Jones illuminated the paintings with candlelight; since then, the melted, extinguished candles have served as a marker of the original context. But, their deeper iconographic significance, tied to the genre of still life and vanitas, suggests more than the lost context; they are reminders of ended life.

The title piece is a still life of golden chrysanthemums harmonized with pale violet, green, and pink floral sprays. The central imagery leeches into Baroque tenebrism at the edges of the picture plane. Combined with the close vantage point of the image and ritualistic and religious connotations of the presentation, the installation of this piece implies a direct spiritual appeal akin to that movement. But, it complexly approaches other contexts. Chrysanthemums, iconic in Chinese and Japanese art, are subject to plural interpretations including the opposition of “mortality and survival.” The gold color suggests the Egyptian use of gold as a symbol for immortality. But the context of the vanitas creates tension. In nature, the physical life of the snipped golden flower would be nearing its end. In painting, the flower exists forever.

Jones very deliberately renders the image in abstract strokes that coalesce into a representational image. With close inspection, the paint appears as a chaotic buzz of brushstrokes as confounding and mesmerizing as Frenhofer’s final masterpiece might have been. A few steps backwards bring the image into focus. Like the snipped chrysanthemums, the image is fleeting. But, the paint is present and persistent. Jones suggests that the form is immortal, using the iconography to make her point.

The depiction of landscape in This Will Go On Long After Us evokes the spirituality of German Romanticism and
Rachel Jones: We are Free, 2011.
the sublime paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. Rather than a solitary figure or architectural form, Jones strikes a single bolt of lightning through a tinted dioxazine sky warmed by the crackle of electricity. It penetrates and explodes a diminutive bush in the foreground.

Jones has experimented with this composition before. What Were We Thinking and We Never Forget, both from 2011, each incorporate a streak of light (as a translucent rainbow) and glowing foliage (the tops of trees filtering sunlight), respectively. In This Will Go On..., she unites the two to create a jarring image of the sublime. Jones frees the figure from the troubling, diminutive standpoint in proportion to nature symbolizing the divine found in Romantic landscapes. Instead, she represents divine power with the absence of paint, removing pigment to create the glowing arc of the lightning bolt. Light, the quintessential symbol of the presence of the divine, reflects directly off the pure white of the plastic substrate. Rather than intimating the divine with time-laden iconography, Jones lets absence represent the immaterial and immortal.

Jones most directly questions painting in two works. The first is an untitled three-dimensional piece that positions a six or eight inch square oil painting on plastic atop a pile of blackened, spray-painted silk flowers. On top of a clean white pedestal, the arrangement suggests a balance between the historical juxtaposition of painting and sculpture; obviously, Jones considers painting in terms of sculptural installation in the show’s three largest works. It also recalls funeral pyres and the adage that “painting is dead,” reaching back to Dada and Duchamp not only in terms of this proclamation, but with the ridiculous choice of presentation. The painting itself verges on non-objective. It might resemble a pattern of scales or animal skin, but overall it is simply a gloppy configuration of drab strokes. Here, Jones seems to be poking fun at historical conceptions of painting.

The second, titled We Are Free, formally approaches modernism. Jones cut a six-inch square painting into thirds and placed it in the recessed corner of a gallery wall. The painting is composed of speckled drops across a deep, black-blue, impasto ground. The thickness and dark value of the paint effectively conceals the seam, resulting in a mystery akin to that of the cosmos she seems to represent. Jones is conscious of surface and medium in all the paintings; by placing the thin plastic ground directly on the wall, she poses questions about the painting as window, flatness and depth, and two- versus three-dimensions. She goes one step further with this piece by creating physical space with painting while simultaneously emphasizing painting’s flatness with the wall and the corner.

Jones’ use of installation in general consistently emphasizes the flatness of two-dimensions. She considers the edge of the picture plane, the space of the wall, and the illusion of the image in comparison to the sculptural quality of the paint itself. Overall, her painting is really about painting. For Frenhofer, this was an insurmountable tragedy. But for Jones, it is a triumph of the medium and its content above all else. No matter what Balzac’s fictional Poussin might exclaim, a painting means that something is there.
A New Realism

BY KATE BRUCE

ASPECTS OF A NEW KIND OF REALISM
Group Exhibition
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

ASPECTS OF A New Kind of Realism, currently on display at the Arthur Roger Gallery, brings together a group of noted artists for this collective exhibit. Curated by Michael Klein, it showcases art by nine artists working from all over the United States. The exhibit includes twenty pieces, all notably different in style. As noted in the press release for the show, “realism continues to play a crucial part in painting today, but it is now augmented by an emphasis on the process with which the paintings are made.” In this exhibit, the viewer contemplates the contents of each composition, and more specifically, the approach of the artist and how he/she came about completing the work of art. There are no photographs or sculptures in the exhibit, only paintings, mostly large in scale. The application of paint becomes an important consideration for the viewer.

New York artist Kathryn Lynch ‘s Boat Called Rider is the first painting presented to the viewer when entering the gallery space. Completed in 2010, this multi-dimensional seascape has a smooth and luminescent surface. Known for her cityscapes of New York City, Lynch presents a much different scene for this show. Her wide brush strokes paint the canvas in blue and gray tones, and the scene itself shows a lone boat on quiet waters. In contrast, both in style and content, is fellow New York artist Joan Snyder’s abstract painting Brooklyn 2010. While Lynch’s application of paint is smooth, Snyder’s application of paint and various materials is irregular and animated. Completed with acrylic, pastel, fabric, herbs and rosebuds on linen, the artist has applied these materials with gusto. Most of her chosen materials, including the paint, are raised from the surface. The acrylic appears heavy, and the paint at the bottom edge of the canvas is applied like graffiti, and spells “Brooklyn 2010.” Snyder’s abstract depiction of Brooklyn conveys the energy and bustle of the borough.

In addition to these works and others by Lynch and Snyder, paintings by Squeak Carnwath, Xiaoze Xie, and John Hartman are shown in the front gallery space of Arthur Roger. Chinese-American artist Xiaoze Xie focuses on the theme the library and more specifically newspaper stacks from America and China, and his two paintings in the exhibit are fascinating. His oil on canvas, Chinese Library No. 42, 2009, shows a stack of newspapers that fill most of the composition. These layers of newspaper appear in the foreground on a table, each end frayed and worn with age. The background is blurred, and gives little indication of the setting. The colors reflect the gray hue of the printed material, except for an occasional band of vibrant red that is at the bottom of the stack. This painting raises many questions for the viewer, like which library in China does this represent,
and what kind of content is found within the pages. He peaks the viewer’s curiosity. This approach is intriguing both in theme and in style. I could almost feel the pages come alive under my fingertips. This work is complemented by Xie’s *July-August 2008 X.X.S.B.* The images in the composition look like photographs embedded within a newspaper, but they are not. The painted images allow the viewer to speculate on the events that appear to be depicted in the newspapers from 2008.

Squeak Carnwath’s *Thought and Pleasure*, 2010, is an eye-catching painting within the gallery’s open space. She includes text and imagery in her open composition, and the painting is divided into two parts. At the top part of the composition are two shapes, one similar to a mobile sculpture and the other a simple candelabra. Below these depictions is the caption painted by Carnwath, explaining “Regardless of whether there is an image or not, Painting is all Thought and Pleasure.” The surface of the oil and alkyd on canvas over panel is extremely distressed, and the imagery is reminiscent of work by artists like Joan Miró.

Canadian artist John Hartman’s aerial landscapes are active compositions depicting roads and motorways of various locations, such as *The Harlem River*, 2011. Here, a twisting overpass runs from the bottom left corner and leads the eye into the tightly painted scene. The wide river fills the center of the composition, and from this view we see the many bridges in addition to the occasional traffic below. Like so many other paintings in exhibit, the paint is heavily applied to the surface. The artist captures the realism of the city, with the energy and substantive buildings that comprise the ground below. I would like to see a New Orleans aerial view by Hartman, especially of the Crescent City Connection and its surrounding environs.

The next space, the center gallery, presents work by artists Richard Bosman and Thom Merrick. Richard Bosman, who currently lives in New York, invites the viewer to imagine with him the interior studios of artists like Paul Cézanne and Rembrandt. In *Cézanne’s Studio*, 2009, the artist incorporates several props included in actual paintings completed by Cézanne, such as an arrangement of fruit that rests on the table in the central part of the composition. One can almost picture a still-life by Cézanne, filled with shadows, similar to the shadows incorporated by Bosman. The flow of the composition is enticing, from the off-center table, with the chairs arranged around throughout, to the basket of fruit that rests on a chair in the bottom right corner. On a shelf are various pieces of china, arranged meticulously by Bosman. Like his other painting, *Rembrandt’s Collection*, 2002, the color palette is cooler. On the opposite wall from Bosman’s two interior scenes are three paintings by Thom Merrick, who resides in an artistic community in the Mojave Desert. The shapes and colors of the desert are evident in his three works, especially in *Tomorrow’s Place*, 2011. The canvas is colored with earth-toned oil paint, and the dripping paint found on this painting and his others shows his artistic process. Circular shapes painted by Merrick suggest trees, shrubs, and mountains. Figures are absent from this landscape painting. In fact, figures are absent from most of the works in the group exhibit.
Completing the exhibition are works by two artists, Glenn Goldberg and David Bates. Located just off of the center gallery, this nook is my favorite space in the Arthur Roger Gallery. Every time I visit, I find myself wandering back to this space, wondering what works of art will fill the walls. The arrangement for this show does not disappoint. Glenn Goldberg resides in New York, and his two paintings are whimsical and colorful depictions of large flowers. On the left wall is Spring, 2004. A curving flower fills the canvas, and tiny birds flutter around the bloom. At first glance, it appears as if the flower arrangement could be made of fabric, but upon closer inspection, it is actually made of acrylic, ink, and gesso. Each petal is in motion, and this animated composition is created by tiny pointillist dots. On the opposite wall is Goldberg’s Invented Tree 1, 2007. The artist again utilizes the approach of pointillism, and vibrant oranges and blues are found within each layer of the large flower.

Dallas artist David Bates’s painting, The Storm, 2005, is among the most compelling works in the show. Bates completed this painting following Hurricane Katrina. This oil on canvas is a complex portrait of a group of African-American New Orleanians. In the central part of the painting are two men, an older man wearing a Saints hat and a younger boy just below. These two figures, one older and the other young, are the focal point of the painting, and are indicative of the multi-generations of people affected by Hurricane Katrina and the events that followed. The forlorn expressions depicted by Bates, especially in that of the younger boy, capture the sadness associated with this storm. The color red is found throughout the composition, and connects each figure. This stylistic approach, along with Bates’s use of shading, also enhances the expressions found on each figure by drawing the viewer to their facial expressions—anger, sadness, anguish. A poignant painting, it serves as a grim reminder of the life-changing events that took place almost seven years ago.

Aspects of a New Kind of Realism was on view through late winter. When visiting the gallery or website, be sure to read the essay written by Michael Klein. The curator provides a comprehensive overview of each artist, and brief background on realism in art history. The group show combines various styles and themes, and the interplay between each of the artists and their works is appealing.
THE THEME OF landscape in art is heavy with historical content. From the Song dynasty onward in China, the landscape was an expression of the order of the culture and the inner selves of the artists. Created with economical value and brushstroke, they poetically visualize a meeting of the interior mind and soul and exterior world. Romantic landscapes moralized and warned of the vulnerability of human production against the persistence of nature, and were metaphors for the spiritual and divine. Modern landscapes picture the speed of industrial society and the populations of smoggy, dense cities. More recently, artists such as Julie Mehretu have pictured the constructs of communities and the motion within them. Rackstraw Downes and his disciples represent, in minute detail, the landscape as it appears in a post-industrial world, dotted with factories, smokestacks, and other engineered forms, emphasizing the oddness of these juxtapositions.

Regina Scully amalgamates all these references in large abstract paintings. Elements of urban living – namely the architecture and cramped space – fill her panels and canvases. She figuratively “cuts” into these spaces and rearranges the slices much like a cubist. Fractured bits of shaped color and brushstrokes that recall exposed wire, dilapidated shacks, washed fields, and broken concrete flow across the picture plane. The work immediately recalls images of apocalyptic kinds of destruction cause by tsunamis and hurricanes. Somehow, from this chaos, Scully creates a harmonious, Zen-like visual experience for the viewer. Like their Chinese predecessors, the paintings exude a steadiness matched by their captivating energy. In all, Scully achieves a miraculous kind of balance.

The title of Scully’s most recent solo show, “Elemental,” at Heriard-Cimino gallery, explains the abstract formal basis of each of the paintings in exhibit. Scully begins each work with a different but always direct and simple approach. One started with wide swaths of brushstrokes, another with charcoal washes. She says this invigorates her process and individualizes each painting.

From the initial marks, Scully builds up line and color until definite compositional areas emerge. Once she establishes

**A Land in Tumult**

**BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ**

**REGINA SCULLY**

*Elemental*

Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA

these formal “themes,” she unifies the compositions with color. In the end, her marks all seem so intentional that they beg for individual investigation, bringing the viewer nose-close to the surface. But in general, the process is far more intuitive than what is suggested by the perfection of the end result.

Color and line are the two most prevalent elements in most of her works. Lumeria is warm with lush oranges and reds that sweep diagonally and horizontally over the surface. Each shape references a plane, and in their accumulation, reveal an aerial view of a dense, fiery city. Marks from a range of brush tips accentuate and combine color and shape like tendons attached to muscles. The painting glows with color and breathes with the rhythm of her marks. Aurora is stained with sap- and olive-green dry brush marks punctuated with flat sky-blue negative shapes that read as lakes. The trace of Scully’s brush mimics the wash of water over fields now emerging from the deluge. Though the image is legible, the brush stroke persistently asserts its form; the composition vacillates between representation and abstraction before the viewer’s eyes.

Emotionally direct value dominates Lunar. Icy blue tints streak through gray and white visual texture that might be snow-covered, charred paper detritus. A charcoal wash to the right of the composition appears to be in recessed space, as though the whole mass of fractured value is floating above a smoky pit. A single drip from the wash emphasizes this illusionistic depth. Scully intentionally creates an anxious sensation with the temperature of the value and the density of her sharp, craggy marks. But the sense of floating evokes a wondrous awe that tempers the fear she creates in the forms. As she says in her statement, both death and romance coexist in this piece.

Scully also says she wants the viewer to feel as she does, that she is “inside” the work. The scale ultimately achieves this effect. No picture plane appears to measure under five feet in any direction. Though large, the minute detail brings the viewer even closer to the surface, resulting in complete enclosure by the composition.

There is so much delight in tracing the variety of marks with our eyes. But, there is tension between this joyful visual indulgence and the painfully, intensely cramped and violent imagery. It is easy to become ecstatically enwrapped in the viewing experience. Scully reminds us, by skillfully representing a land in tumult, that realism tempers the emotional reaction.

The harmony might lie in this balance. Scully paints the meeting place of chaos and order, entropy and growth, non-objectivity and representation. She visualizes the gray area between these oppositions, concretely establishing where it exists. This does not mean it is a limited space – the variety of ways Scully extrapolates this idea is evidence. Finding where those two ends meet is a calming experience, an assurance that there is no void between opposites. Scully masterfully reveals this truth.
“PRINTS ARE DOCUMENTS of everyday life,” states Jessie J. Poesch in the introduction to Printmaking in New Orleans. In New Orleans, everyday life is historically vivid, fantastic, and eclectic. According to Poesch, the first printing press arrived here in 1794, and by the mid 19th century, New Orleans had developed a “thinking, sophisticated community of printmakers.” Even before the region officially joined the Union, the practice was embedded in the culture.

At this point in art history, everyday life became the subject and content of art, particularly in Paris; Degas brought the trends himself to New Orleans in 1872. Pictures of daily life from this period often picture communities, particularly urban ones, and it is a sense and presence of community that dominates the field of printmaking. Designers, printers, and clients work together, providing technical and conceptual assistance, to produce multiple images with enormous and heavy machinery. It could be the least solitary field of art practice.

Poesch’s book is a collection of papers that were presented at the 19th annual North American Print Conference, held in New Orleans in 1987. This March, Southern Graphics Council
International congregates here for four days. The conference is met with citywide printmaking exhibitions; two, at Arthur Roger, address ideas of this community, its history, and its fantastic nature.

Francis X. Pavy’s exhibit in the main gallery, titled “200: Artwork Inspired by 200 Years of Statehood,” situates him as a local historical narrator. Taking from the naturalist engravings of Thomas Bewick and his own anecdotes describing Louisiana’s development, Pavy creates abstract print-paintings that formally, not chronologically, relay the timeline of the state’s history. Organized into grids, like the pages of a book laid out for review on the wall, the work illustrates key events in the state’s history with a rich and surprisingly varied iconography described by the artist in his blog. Here, he explains the odd placement of a toothy, smiling whale in the composition Carencro – legends suggest the bones of a massive animal found in this land-bound town belonged to a beached leviathan – and the origin of the name Shreveport, after Captain Shreve and his “snag-boat.” Printmaking is didactic like this – especially as it widely disseminates information, and many of the prints look encyclopedic and diagrammatic. But, the abstractness of Pavy’s work is akin to the looseness of his storytelling. He leaves room for imagination and mystery.

Though print informs his work, Pavy regards himself as a painter, and prints on canvas – preferring its comparatively unlimited proportions to paper. Painting is an intrinsic part of building the images. He builds up an impasto texture over atmospheric, stained backgrounds with a veritable library of linocuts (Pavy says he makes as many as twenty blocks a week, both by hand and with a digitized cutter).

To apply the heavily inked plates to the canvas, Pavy works on the floor, stepping on the matrices to make the impressions. He then reviews each mark from the wall to determine the next compositional decision. The performative aspect suggests his whole-body, whole-mind devotion to the subject, and to the process; it references action painting and the presence of the artist, but slower, and more methodical.

Pavy’s imagery originates in black and white illustrations, but the paintings are vibrant and polychromatic. His ink and paint seem to come straight out of the tube, and these saturated colors sharpen the graphic cleanliness of the printed icons. He balances this with the softness of the backgrounds and the diffusion created by multiple layers and airbrush techniques. Collectively, repeated palette and the direction of the imagery move one image into the next. Surprisingly, because these are prints and bound in the idea of multiples, they are less linked by the multiplicity of the imagery itself. Certain abstract, elemental forms like wave lines, spirals, or raindrops appear over and over again. But, each painting is completely unique – more akin to monotype – so, rarely does the same fish, or whale, or bird, or boat appear more than once. This specifies each work, as do their titles, which point to singular cities and events. The combination suggests both the vivacity and uniqueness of different points and places, key moments in the everyday life of Louisiana’s history.

Abstractness in Pavy’s work also speaks of fantasy and dreams – the images, weighted with symbolism, fleetingly move in and out of illusionistic space, merging and separating into cohesive units. Fantasies, and history, inform the large-scale monoprint collages of Keith Perelli. Fantasy is key to Louisiana culture; Mardi Gras completely abandons reality for illusion. But, it is also a time of death, specifically of gluttony and indulgence before the abstinence of lent.

Perelli addresses fantasy and death in his exhibit. Titled “Mosquito Muerto,” it conjures visions of malaria, the yellow specter that haunts the region’s past. But, the work less directly references Louisiana history than art history. For instance, Le Bain appropriates Manet’s Dejeuner sur l’Herbe, itself an appropriation of classically based, academic training exercises. Manet also appropriated the fantasy of Venetian painting of the Renaissance, known for capricious juxtapositions of nude women cavorting with clothed men, mythological allusions, and geographically odd settings of lush, green landscape. The patch of secluded landscape on which Perelli’s figures sit is swampy, brown, and fecund – until faces and hands begin to emerge from it, like bodies floating in the Styx. Half buried in the ground, they resemble newly discovered corpses; the figures are layered with impressions from ferns and other flora. The lower halves of their seated companions begin to sink into this spongy, fleshy mass. But, their three gazes seem introspectively resigned to their dissolution.

The subjects all bear a hint of Pre-Raphaelite mystery and realism. Something transformative is occurring to these figures; in Urn, a dual, mirror image of a male face suggests the moment just before Narcissus became a flower, or the transition between one half of Janus and the other. But beyond the subjects, the surface of the work talks about shifting states. Like Pavy’s works, Perelli’s forms are painting-prints, and he relies on monotype for much of his abstract markmaking. Unlike Pavy, these are actual collages; the low relief of the surfaces is the result of an armor-like layering of thousands of print fragments. The forms move from print to painting to sculpture, resulting in objects that seem like shields between the viewer and the imagery. Perelli asks us to approach these nude, vulnerable figures caught in his compositions, to relate to their bareness, but encases them in an invulnerable skin, and layers them back into the overall imagery. The results are psychological pushes and pulls that force the viewer to consider his or her mortal coil.

Both Pavy and Perelli use print to communicate about the essences of this state. Prints are direct, accessible forms that utilize icons to illustrate, with or without words, ideas. They are a perfect medium to narrate and describe. The layering inherent in the process used by these two artists speaks of the complexity and richness of the stories they have to tell. The work speaks to the interwoven and inextricable qualities of the fundamental elements of everyday life and culture here: its history, its penchant for anecdote, its fantasy and mystery, its danger. Newcomers and returnees during this period of print interest in the city are lucky to learn more about it through the vibrant layers and subtle mysteries of these two exhibits.
John Clemmer’s Modernist Enterprise

BY JUDITH H BONNER

JOHN CLEMMER
New and Selected Works
Louisiana Arts and Science Museum
Baton Rouge, LA

THE WORK OF New Orleans artist John Clemmer (b.1921) never ceases to amaze and delight viewers; one always looks forward to his exhibitions knowing that the work will be exceptional. Clemmer was celebrated recently in Baton Rouge at the Louisiana Arts and Science Museum (LASM) with an exhibition: John Clemmer: New and Selected Works. Clemmer’s long career as an artist spans more than seven decades. After a full career teaching in New Orleans, he co-resides in the city and in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where his studio-compound is nestled among the birch trees.

Clemmer’s work ranges from figural art to abstract and non-objectives. His artistic subjects frequently draw on the rural and forested areas of Wisconsin and his native Louisiana. Other works focus on places he has visited, particularly Greece and Italy, but his landscapes are totally unlike any images that are seen in brochures and travel guides—for he reinterprets and synthesizes the essence of a location, particularly its architectural structures. He works in various mediums, including oil, acrylic, colored pencil, and ink. While most people are familiar with Clemmer’s paintings, he has also executed a number of commissions for three-dimensional works, including a series of religious sculptures for synagogues in Evanston, Illinois, and New Orleans, as well as a group of fountains that incorporate bronze panels and sand castings or plaster castings. He has also produced a number of sculptures in metal, plexiglass, or wood. Two of his smaller
sculptures, both sand castings, are exhibited in this exhibition along with thirteen oil or acrylic paintings.

Entering the exhibition of Clemmer’s work in the museum gallery at the LASM is almost like entering a chapel with soft light reflecting from stained glass windows; there is a sense of quietness, peace, and inner reflection. These works parallel Clemmer’s personality and character, for most of his life he has quietly accepted very difficult, often traumatic, roles of responsibility and leadership. He is what author John Ed Bradley calls “a giant hiding in plain sight.” A program with Bradley and David Clemmer, son of the artist, was held at LASM in conjunction with the exhibition, in which they discussed the artist’s life and the range of his highly personal investigation of the modernist enterprise.

Clemmer’s roots are firmly entrenched in his native state. His father, a Wisconsin native, married Marie Landry, the daughter of a French-speaking family with its lineage tracing back to late 18th century Louisiana. After their marriage, the Clemmers lived on Crescent Plantation near Donaldsonville in southern Louisiana; it was here in this rural area that the artist was born. The family relocated to New Orleans in 1928 when the lad was seven years old. After he graduated from Fortier High School in 1939, Clemmer accepted a scholarship to the New Orleans Art School of the Arts and Crafts Club, at that time located at the corner of Royal Street and Pirates’ Alley.

After two decades of the establishment of the Arts and crafts Club, its School of Art was firmly entrenched in the city and had produced numerous artists who had gone on to earn reputations locally and nationally. There Clemmer studied with the eminent artists Paul Ninas, Xavier Gonzales, and Enrique Alferez and came to know the leading artists of the city, as well as writers and other notables. The city’s first contemporary art gallery, the annual exhibition schedule included national and international artists,
including such luminaries as Thomas Hart Benton, Edward Hopper, Alexander Calder, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Jacques Lipchitz, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Wassily Kandinsky, Aristide Maillol, Raoul Dufy, René Magritte, Max Ernst, Salvatore Dali, Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Frieda Kahlo, and Rufino Tamayo. It was this experience that formed Clemmer’s philosophies toward art, and especially his acceptance and exploration of modernism.

Although the intensity of his work subsided when Clemmer served in the Army Air Force in World War II, he produced numerous sketches from the outset of his induction. After his military service, he returned to the New Orleans School of Art and continued his studies. He held his first solo show there in 1948. He became executive secretary of the Arts and Crafts Club and director of its school of art. Clemmer continued to support contemporary artists of the period with exhibitions and lectures at the Arts and Crafts Gallery. It was at the Club that Clemmer met Dorothy Iker, a Chicago native whom he married in 1953, after which they began spending summers at her family’s summer home in Wisconsin.

Prior to 1952, there was no degree-granting program in art at Tulane University, but male students could enroll in art classes at Newcomb College. After the Arts and Crafts Gallery closed its doors in 1951, Clemmer joined the faculty of the Tulane School of Architecture, and later taught in the Newcomb art department. In 1978, after 27 years on the Tulane faculty, he became Chairman of the Newcomb Art Department, a position he held from 1978 until his retirement as professor emeritus in 1986. During his tenure at Newcomb, Clemmer was the first recipient of the Ford and Maxine Graham Chair in Fine Art. He also served as chairman of the Building Committee for the Myra Clare Rogers Memorial Chapel on the Newcomb campus. From 1956 to 1959 he was a member of the Board of Trustees at the Delgado Museum of Art. Throughout his academic career he exhibited his work regularly in local and regional galleries from the 1950s through the 1970s. He exhibited in group exhibitions locally, nationally, and internationally.

Clemmer’s has received statewide recognition with other Louisiana museum exhibitions. In 1999 the New Orleans Museum of Art celebrated his work with a retrospective exhibition, which then traveled to the Alexandria Museum of Art and the Meadows Museum of Art at Centenary College in Shreveport. In 2005, Clemmer held another solo show at the Academy Gallery, where he has exhibited his work through the years.

Through the years, Clemmer’s painting style and subjects have evolved, and many influences and inspirations have informed his work. Clemmer’s work of the 1940s continued to focus on the traditional figural subjects, still lifes, and landscapes, although these were influenced by modernism, particularly Cubism. In the 1950s, he produced large abstractions and works on paper, many of these retaining a focus on portraits and nude figure studies. In the 1960s he focused on abstract landscapes, a theme that persists to the present day. Afterward, he produced large canvases inspired by 5th- and 6th-century Byzantine illuminated manuscripts that were characterized by hard-edge geometric shapes. These evolved into a softer, more impressionistic feel that typifies work from the 1980s to the present.

The majority of the works in this exhibition were executed during the period between 1987 and 2010, with the exception of the two sand castings, which date to the 1960s. In keeping with the majority of works Clemmer produced throughout his career, these works have been also informed by the modernist movement, including his 2003 triptych Honey Island Swamp, with its subtle division in squares and seemingly fractured subject. A soft light emanates from the background; shapes appear to move and scintillate. Back Bay (1996), executed minimally in pastels with strokes of the pencil, is essentially a pure landscape with a single tree trunk in foreground and houses in the distance. Elliptical shapes in At the Beach III, a horizontal work completed in 2006, appear like glistening flower petals falling to earth as they may have been seen through a window looking into a garden.

In Floral Circle, a 2008 acrylic on canvas, the influence of Clemmer’s many years on Tulane’s architectural faculty and his interest in architecture is evident in the sharp lines and crisply delineated geometric shapes and compositional divisions. The inner square appears like a canvas resting on an easel; the subject of that canvas is a scattering of flowers contained in a circle, with some floating over the hard edge of the circle. This painting recalls some of his earlier canvases in its subject, but the treatment is fresh.

Clemmer was a friend of Mark Rothko, whose non-denominational chapel in Houston has become an ecumenical center for people of all religions; the chapel features fourteen large black canvases that are lit by a sky light. Despite the apparent absence of color, the canvases are color-hued and create a sense of tranquility and other-worldliness. Clemmer’s exhibition, however, evokes a sense of ethereal spiritual inner light that surpasses Rothko’s Chapel.

Within this quiet environment, the sand castings, simply named Square I and Square II, resemble the plaques marking the Stations of the Cross often seen in churches. The former features geometric shapes in high relief, made using toys as molds, and the latter is composed of squares, circles, and dashes, made in high relief, against a roughened surface.

The latter is reminiscent of Clemmer’s 1988 oil painting, Porto Colonia. In this work overlapping pastel colors, painted so that the mat disappears from at the bottom—primarily in the lower right, a means of minimizing the geometric dominance in the overall appearance. This contrasts with the crisp delineation of the rectangles and circles in Floral Circle, a 2008 oil painting, which is executed primarily in gold ochre, brownish gray, black, and white. Several of the works in this exhibition manifest Clemmer’s manner of revisiting earlier works and treating them entirely differently, for example Campanile / Cortona, a mixed-media painting completed in 1993. In this painting, seemingly a stereoscopic view, one seems to look through arches toward a fractured and reassembled architectural ruin. Homage, a June 2010 canvas, features the vertical “frame” at the left and right edges of the composition, the controlled drizzles of oil pigment are a tribute to the drip paintings of the 1960s. Even with Clemmer’s accomplishments in art over many years, canvases in progress sit on easels in his studio, signs that there is more work to come.
REALIST ARTISTS Shirley Rabe Masinter and Masahiro Arai each held noteworthy exhibits in New Orleans this spring. LeMieux Galleries’ Julia Street location featured Masinter’s “Made in Louisiana,” while the Carol Robinson Gallery Uptown showcased Arai’s exhibit, “Mind Scape.” Masinter, who studied with noted artist John McCrady in the 1950’s, includes over twenty pieces in her show. Arai is celebrating his 20th anniversary as a graduate from UNO with an MFA in graphics, and his current exhibit is a follow-up to his 2010 show at the Gallery, “Quiet Light.” Both Masinter and Arai illustrate proficient use of light and shadow in their refined works.

Masinter’s photo realist show, “Made in Louisiana” features skilled city-scenes, executed as watercolors, drawings, and oil paintings. Her work primarily shows exterior spaces familiar to residents of the city—colorful buildings in the French Quarter, brick facades of downtown structures, poignant tombstones found in our historical cemeteries. The artist has said that she is fascinated with, among other themes, the play of “southern light falling...
on older buildings.” The viewer sees this in her soft watercolor "Narrow Street. Masinter’s compositions incorporate her adept use of perspective and the juxtaposition of shadows and reflections, as seen in her "Standard Life" pencil study and final oil painting.

While Masinter focuses primarily on exterior spaces in the city, Masahiro Arai’s realist scenes in his show “Mind Scape” include both interior and exterior spaces, as seen in the oil painting "The End of Winter. His “interior landscapes,” or “landscapes of the mind,” as Arai calls them, are compelling and rich compositions. Like Masinter, Arai incorporates controlled brushstrokes of light and shadow, often in subtle hues, that play off of receding angles. His two porch scenes, "Swing, and The Porch, invite the viewer into a calm and comfortable Southern scene.
ANYONE WITH MORE than a passing familiarity with global cinema has heard of the great Polish director Andrzej Wajda, but outside of Poland, the extent of his moviemaking is little known. Born in 1926, he got a late start in directing films, since he had to take time out to fight in the Polish resistance during the Second World War. In consequence, he didn’t direct his first feature film (Pokolonie, or A Generation) until 1955. However, since then, he’s been one of the most prolific directors in the history of the cinema, with 51 feature films to his credit.

The over-fifty club is a highly select fraternity. Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), directed 53 feature films, not counting the television series and shorts. Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), directed 41. Like all such comparisons, this one is easily manipulated to pick a hypothetical winner. In point of fact, the director with the longest career is in all probability Manoel de Oliveira of Portugal. Born in 1908, he’s made 60 feature films, as well as numerous shorts and television features. Although hardly a household word, even among film buffs, he’s a formidable talent. His record is not likely to be surpassed.

On the other hand—and there’s always one of those waving about—Oliveira has favored short films (it’s a rare feature that runs for 90 minutes), and, like Buñuel, he’s never been interested either in complex special effects (like Hitchcock) or enormous sprawling epics.

The curious and impressive thing about Oliveira and Buñuel is that their later works hardly show any flagging.
Singularidades de uma rapariga, an adaptation of a novelle by Joaquim Maria Eça de Queiroz, one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century, was released in 2007. It’s a textbook example of literary adaptation: concise, ingenious, and to the point. Buñuel was cut from the same cloth: his last three films are marvels of complex story telling. By contrast, it would probably not be unfair to Hitchcock to observe that after Psycho, in 1960, his work fell off, if only by comparison to what had come before.

But the point of this comparison is that any way one looks at it, Wajda is a member of an exclusive club: world class directors whose careers span five or six decades of consistently important work. Apparently film making, like orchestral conducting, is an area where old geezers never retire; they just get sick—and die.

But Wajda is a special case, an artist all to himself. From 1955 to the collapse of Soviet controlled Poland, he was the leading voice of national resistance, constantly running afoul of the state. At one point, after the repressions of the later 1950s, he prudently went to Yugoslavia, where, under rather primitive conditions, he cocked his snook at both Moscow and Warsaw by making a film adaptation of the notorious novelle by Nikolai Leskov, Lady McBeth of the Mtsensk District.

Leskov, like Dostoevsky, saw early on where his revolutionary comrades were going, and he characterized them scathingly. What was worse, he got the main outlines right. Not surprisingly, the Bolsheviks threw both of them down the memory hole. So when Shostakovich used Leskov’s tale as the libretto for his opera of the same name, he was making a political statement. The Bolsheviks wanted Leskov forgotten, and this particular story, which raised profound questions as to what extent the serial killer heroine is as much a victim as her victims, was a bit much. Not to mention the fact that Stalin was appalled by the idea of some uppity buxom female enjoying sex. The very idea!

Stalin needed a few token artists around, and he particularly needed Shostakovich to write the music for the movies Stalin was interested in. Besides, it was more fun to keep the composer teetering on the brink of disappearance, and indeed the hapless Shostakovich spent the next few decades waiting for a late night knock on the door. Despite his anxiety, he got in a few elegant swipes. Instead of celebrating Stalin’s great victory over Hitler with a fittingly triumphant and dramatic work, he popped in with his Ninth Symphony. When, towards the end of his life, Stalin began preparing the groundwork for his own Holocaust, Shostakovich built the finale for his Piano Quintet, opus 57, around a Jewish folk tune.

Cocking your snook was a dangerous sport; no less so for largely passing unnoticed in the West, where a combination of genuine ignorance and what Lenin had aptly characterized as useful idiots ensured that the Marxist-Leninist mythos would be treated with respect.
There was a neat opposition: a good part of Shostakovich's justly deserved fame in the West was owing to Stalin's use of his music during the Second World War, most notably his Seventh "Leningrad" Symphony. Its real message went unnoticed, and Lenin's idiots continued to fethe the composer as the human face of Stalinism.

A decade later, Stalin was dead, and a more critical stance was possible. Possible but hardly appreciated by the gang, whose bland dismissals were vastly facilitated by the general public's lack of knowledge about Central Europe in general, and, in the case of Wajda, Poland in particular.

To appreciate Wajda at the level he should be appreciated requires a fair knowledge both of the history of Poland, and of Communism—areas usually in short supply.

Wajda pushed harder than anyone else to keep the fires of Polish resistance and national consciousness burning. Curiously, and really uniquely, he also managed to stay afloat after the collapse, so among his other claims to fame is that he's one of the very few directors who's been able to make films both under communism and then afterwards. The only other artist who comes to mind is Peter Bacso, and the Hungarian is one of those artists who makes very few films.

What's always been disconcerting about Wajda, is, that although he's always said that the man who influenced him the most was Buñuel, his films are steeped in the history of Poland; often to the point of being incomprehensible to outsiders. Indeed, given that one of Communism's more successful accomplishment was the erasure of historical memories from the consciousness of the surviving citizens, it can be said that Wajda seems to have singlehandedly embarked on a campaign to recall the major achievements of Polish literary culture to generations deprived of such memories.

*Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) his most important early work, was based on the short novel by Jerzy Andrejewski, and for the rest of his career Wajda continued to make movies based on important works of Polish literature: *Wesele (The Wedding)*, 1973, *The Promised Land* (1975), and *Panny z Wilka (The Young Ladies of Wilko)*, 1979, being some of the most significant.

Each literary source showcased an important moment in Polish history, from the failed revolution against the Russians in 1830 (*Wesele*) to the moment in 1945 when the Soviet Union installed its puppet government (*Ashes and Diamonds*). But in every film made prior to the collapse of the Soviet created state, the references were carefully veiled, clear only to the privileged few.

But as the communist state stumbled and staggered towards Gdansk, Solidarity, and then freedom, Wajda became more explicit. As is the case with any great artist, he had multiple interests; his more recent work shows him sharing the concerns of his much young Czech colleague, Jiri Menzel: the results of the systematic erasures of national consciousness that were the only known better. Not that we should be surprised: the Moscow对应者 for the *New York Times* denied that there was any famine in Ukraine at all, much less that it was deliberate Soviet policy (current scholarly estimates of the death toll: about eight million).

Now what makes Wajda’s film interesting and significant is that it is not simply a record of the atrocity, and hence the attempt to remind successive generations of Poles (and everyone who embodied the national consciousness: Dostoevsky, Leskov, Kafka. Books and films were produced, often at some risk, but then seized, only to be released decades after their creation—if at all. The result was to tear the fabric of memory asunder. The teenaged delinquent in Menzel's *I Served the King of England* is surprised that ethnic Germans once lived in Bohemia, asks the hero what happened to them.

Menzel likes small examples, Wajda prefers the big ones: *Katyn* (2007).

After the Soviets overran eastern Poland in September 1940, they took some 14,000 Polish officers and intellectuals out into the forest of Katyn and executed them. The Katyn Woods massacre was simply the tip of the iceberg. In the first half of 1940, Stalin had 275,000 Poles sent to his ever growing prison camps. "We must smash them into oblivion!" Stalin declared. He deserves an A for effort. As the author of one recent scholarly study of Katyn puts it: “The Polish government never recovered from the wound he inflicted.”

National memory, national culture, is transmitted in three ways: through written records, through artifacts, and through memory. Written records, like artifacts, can be destroyed, they can be forged, and they can be quarantined so no can get to them. Human beings are more difficult to manage. But, as Stalin once observed, “No body, no problem.”

Poland was a special case, as both Hitler and Stalin had a special desire to destroy it. Not simply the physical place, but its spiritual and moral existence, the memory of it. Had sheer greed not prevailed, the country would have been treated the way the Romans treated Carthage.

The history of Katyn is grimly ironic. The remains were discovered, largely by accident, when the Germans overran European Russia in June 1941. There were witnesses who knew what had happened, and Hitler’s propaganda machine went into action. The International Red Cross was called in, made the obvious connection, and the massacre was trumpeted to the world as evidence of Bolshevik barbarity. By that point unpleasant truths about Stalin were highly unwelcome in the West, but inside the Reich the propaganda value was very high, since it was, after all, the truth.

After 1945, Stalin, who often appears to have been engaged in a game to see just how much he could get his former partners to swallow, insisted that the deed had actually been done by the Hitlerites, and demanded that this crime be charged against them at Nuremberg.

That was too much even for the gullible Americans there, but Stalin's claim met with a good deal of success everywhere else. Right up until President Gorbachev admitted that the Soviets had done the deed, Western scholars were by and large accepting Stalin’s ludicrous claim that the killings were carried out by the Hitlerites. A sad exercise in waffling by people who should have known better. Not that we should be surprised: the Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times* denied that there was any famine in Ukraine at all, much less that it was deliberate Soviet policy (current scholarly estimates of the death toll: about eight million).

Now what makes Wajda’s film interesting and significant is that it is not simply a record of the atrocity, and hence the attempt to remind successive generations of Poles (and everyone
else) what was done. It also shows how the memory of the deed was distorted, suppressed, and corrupted. The successive waves of manipulation foisted on the Poles—first by the Germans, and then by the Soviets—left them numbed and bewildered, as well as abandoned to their fate.

Getting all of these things across requires some ambitious filmmaking, since not only is there the story of the event itself, but the tale of the aftermath, of how the Soviet attempt ultimately failed. So his approach is complex. It is one thing to know an event happened, another to give it a human face. In this case there are three human faces: three Polish officers were prisoners of war in 1940. The two senior ones are ultimately taken off and murdered.

Jerzy (Andrzej Chrya), younger and of a lower rank, is like everyone else: he has no idea this was done, is completely in the dark. He’s recruited by the Soviets, returns to Poland in 1945, believing what he was told: his commanders and colleagues were butchered by the Germans.

When he returns, his life begins to converge on the lives of the wives and daughters of the murdered officers, and to a great extent the film is centered not around the men, but around the women. We see the perpetual anguish of Andrzej’s wife, who is in suspension: she doesn’t know whether he was killed or not, only realizes the truth when Jerzy returns after the war.

The third officer was a general, and his wife knows what happened. She carries the memory with her, passes it on to her daughter. In addition to the complexity that derives from having multiple stories, there is the complexity that derives from time itself: Wajda shifts back and forth in time, forcing the viewer to follow multiple strands of narrative.

There have always been occasional touches of Buñuel in Wajda, oftentimes appearing in ways that are disconcerting. *Katyn* is the first of his films where you can see the clear connection. Wajda uses the same narrative strategy. He moves quickly from vignette to vignette, the continuity between them lying not in the relations of the characters involved, but in the action itself, as was the case most notably in Buñuel’s *The Phantom of Liberty*.

But as the film unfolds, it becomes increasingly a tale of mothers and daughters. The general’s wife carries the memory of the truth with her, and she’s not afraid to speak it. It is she who makes Jerzy understand what actually happened, how he was lied to and deceived. Then there is the wife who sacrifices her hair so as to purchase a grave marker for her aviator husband who was killed at Katyn. In the Poland of the mid 1950s, a daring political statement, and a suicidal one.

Wajda doesn’t romanticize these gestures. When Jerzy realizes the truth, he doesn’t lead a revolution, or escape to the west: he kills himself. The women are entirely alone: no one will help them. Their gestures are heroic. They do what the do so as to be true to the memory of the men they loved, yes, but also to nurture the truth of what actually happened. Someone must remain to tell the story. The story was eventually told, despite the best efforts of governments and historians, so the film is at one and the same time a memorial, a recreation, and a document.

This last is grimly fitting, since both the Germans and the Russians used film to trumpet their claims to the world. It’s nice to see the weapon turned back against them.
On Gary Shteyngart

BY STEPHEN R BACHMANN

SUPER SAD TRUE LOVE STORY
Gary Shteyngart

“Good criticism is composed of at most two elements: the critical gloss and the quotation. Very good criticism can be made from both glosses and quotations. What must be avoided like the plague is rehearsing the summary of the contents. In contrast, a criticism consisting entirely of quotations should be developed.” - Walter Benjamin, “Program for Literary Criticism” SELECTED WRITINGS, II, 1930, p. 290

SUPER SAD TRUE LOVE STORY by GARY SHTYEYNGARTLIFE, page 27: GLOBALTEENS SUPER HINT: Switch to Images today! Less words = more fun!!!

Ibid., p. 52: I thought about the terrible calumny of the new generation: that books SMELL.

Ibid., p.54: “America Celebrates Its Spenders!”

Ibid., p.144: ...I don’t mean scanning a test like we did in Euro Classics with that Chatterhouse of Parma I mean seriously READING

Ibid., p.145-6...Anyway, I went with Sally to this really pretty park in the East Village called Tompkins Square and there were all these Low Net Worth Individuals there and they’re camped out with all their dirty things and they don’t have food or clean water and they have all these really old computers...[One LNWI said] we’re all in this together. And I thought, I wish things were better for you, but we’re not all in this together.

Ibid., p.147: I’m sorry you saw some poor people in the park...

Ibid., p.201: This country is so stupid. Only spoiled white people could let something so good get so bad.

Ibid., p.234: Vishnu and I did the Nee-gro slap and hug. 
Ibid., p.237: CHINA INVESTMENT CORPORATION QUITS US TREASURIES.

Ibid., p.239: Residents MUST report to primary residence for further instruction/relocation. By reading this message you are denying its existence and implying consent.

Ibid., p.263 Free GlobalTeens Dating Tip: Don’t ever fold your arms in front of you date. That says that you don’t fully agree with what he’s saying or maybe you’re not into his data. Instead put your hands out in fronts of you, palms open, like you want to be cupping his balls! Get a degree in Body Language, girlfriend, and you’ll be giving head to the class.

Ibid., p.298: All I wanted to do was have my parents take complete responsibility for how fucked up I am.

Ibid., p.305: Life is Richer, Life is Brighter! Thank you, International Monetary Fund!

Ibid., p.328: I wanted to be in a place with less data, less youth, and where old people like myself were not despised simply for being old....
Calendar

COMPILED BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

A GALLERY FOR FINE PHOTOGRAPHY – 241 Chartres St. 568-1313. www.agallery.com -

ACADEMY GALLERY— 5256 Magazine Street. 899-8111. www.noafa.com Sarah Griffin Thibodeaux (painting) and Bobby Seago (painting), through May 12; Annual Student Group Show, June-July.

ARIODANTE GALLERY– 535 Julia St., 524-3233. www.ariodantegallery.com - The Surrealist Automat: A Show of Contemporary Surrealist Artwork, Mike Kilgore (craft and fashion), Chester Allen (jewelry), Louise Guidry (painting), April 7-30; Myra Williamson-Wirtz (painting), Laid Back Musicians: Annie Hendrix (sculpture), Sylvan Spirit (jewelry), Lagniappe Show: Frannie Kronenberg (mixed media painting), May 5 – 31; Bettina Miret (drawing), Kiki Huston (jewelry), Philip Lightweis-Goff (painting), June 2 – 30.


CAROL ROBINSON GALLERY – 840 Napoleon Ave. at Magazine. 895-6130. www.carolrobinsongallery.com - Artists of Faith: An Invitational Exhibition, March 3 – April 7; Virtual exhibition, ongoing


do.c.s. gallery – 709 Camp St. 524-3936. www.docsgallery.com - Jammin on Julia: Thor Carlson (sculpture), April 7 – May 3; Cheryl Fell Cabrera (digital/mixed media), May 5 – 31; Group Show, June 2 – August 2.


ISAAC DELGADO FINE ARTS GALLERY – 615 City Park Ave. 361-6620.


NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART – City Park. 606-4712. www.noma.org - Forever Mural: Odili Donald Odita (painting), through October 7, 2013; Making a Mark: The Herb and Dorothy Vogel Collection (drawing), through April 8; Hard Truths: The
Art of Thornton Dial (painting, mixed media), through May 20;
Mass Produced (design), through June 24; Self-Taught Artists
from NOMA’s Permanent Collection (mixed media), through June
10 The Prelives of the Blues: Dario Robleto (sculpture), through
September 16; What is a Photograph? (photography), April 20 –
August 19; Leah Chase: Paintings by Gustave Blache III (painting),
April 24 – September 9.

OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART – 925 Camp St.  539-
9600. www.ogdenmuseum.org - The Gilded Doors to Infinity
Project: William Adair (installation); Thirty Years of LSU
Printmaking (printmaking), through April 9; The Past Still Present:
David Halliday (photography), and The Shape of Louisiana:
Jimmy Descant (sculpture), through April 8; How to Build a
Forest: Shawn Hall and Peral Damour (installation), April 14-15,
21-22 (performances), on view April 16-20 and 23-27; Shifting:
Michel Varisco (photography), The Lost World: Sally Chandler
(painting), Maximalist and Naturalist: Mark Messersmith
(painting), Remedies: Alexa Kleinbard (painting), Photographs
from the Permanent Collection: CC Lockwood (photography),
Elysium: Colleen Mullins (mixed media), Field Work: Woody
Woodruff (cyanotype), Duck Blinds: Louisiana: Nell Campbell
(photography), Plastic Gulf: Lee Deigaard (video), April 19 – July
23.

SOREN CHRISTENSEN GALLERY – 400 Julia St.  569-9501.
www.sorencristensen.com - New Work: Ulises Toache (painting)
and In Print: Susanne Carmack (printmaking), through March 31;
Conversations: KOLLABS / Anke Schofield & Luis Garcia-Nery
(mixed media), April 7 – 30; Melissa Herrington (mixed media),
May; Gretchen Weller Howard (mixed media), June

TAYLOR BERCIER FINE ARTS – 233 Chartres St.  527-0072.
www.taylorbercier.com - Mark Hosford and Fred Stonehouse
(printmaking and painting), through April 30.

STELLA JONES GALLERY – Place St. Charles, 201 St. Charles
Queen of Gospel Music: Traveling Group Show (mixed media),
through June 17

www.stevemartinfineart.com - Contemporary paintings and
sculpture by Steve Martin and other Louisiana artists, ongoing

3 RING CIRCUS ARTS & EDUCATION CENTER – THE BIG
TOP – 1638 Clio St.  569-2700. www.3ringcircusproductions.
com - Jillian Gibson Presents: OUR WATERS with the Badeauxs
of the Bayou Gauche (mixed media), April 7 – May 5; Neo Neo
Neo Primitive: Nick Inman (paintings), May 12 – June 2; XXL
Fem Capsule: Heather Weathers (mixed media, installation,

UNO ST. CLAUDE GALLERY - 2429 St. Claude Ave. 280-6493.
MFA Thesis Exhibitions: Trouble Every Day: Nina Schwanse
(installation) and Far Away: Chen Gu (installation), April 14
– May 5; Maria Levitsky (photography) and Natalie Tobacyk
(installation/print), May 12 – June 2.
It's What We Do...

PRINTING
DIRECT MAIL
DIGITAL PRINT
eCOMMERCE
VARIABLE DATA
PACKAGING

504 524-8248
mpressnow.com
4100 Howard Avenue
BEAT THE HEAT with COOL ART at NOMA!

Dario Robleto: The Prelives of the Blues
Through September 16, 2012

Leah Chase: Paintings by Gustave Blache III
April 24 - September 9, 2012
sponsored by Richard C. Colton, Jr. and Liberty Bank and Trust

What is a Photograph?
April 20 - August 19, 2012

Ralston Crawford and Jazz
June 21 - October 14, 2012

New Orleans Museum of Art • 1 Collins Diboll Circle • New Orleans, LA
504.658.4100 • www.noma.org