

Art Chicago Surveys (and Sells) Contemporary Visual Arts

Last weekend's Art Chicago, with about 150 international galleries displaying (mostly) contemporary art in their individual booths, is the best way for us Midwesterners to get a handle on what's new and important in the art world regionally and around the world.

It was held at the city's massive Merchandise Mart concurrently with NEXT: The Invitational Exhibition of Emerging Art, which offered another 90 galleries, alternative spaces, non-profit groups and others whose work seeks to have an edgier, more experimental and zeitgeistier quality. All told, it's a lot to see in a weekend, but my wife and I did it.

With so much available to see (and buy, which, of course, is the point of an art fair), you really do wonder how so many newer, younger artists are going to establish careers. After all, the giants in their field aren't exactly ceding territory — Art Chicago had work for sale by Chuck Close, Bill Viola, Elizabeth Murray and other established figures.

Some, I must report, resort to extremist gimmicks in their choice of material or intent, or create work so soaked in hip irony and intentional naughtiness that their impact is all novelty. Even some of the gallery names succumb to this problem — one was called Haunch of Venison, which showed Stuart Haygarth's chandelier composed of reading glasses (that was actually quite illuminating).

I suppose an art traditionalist would say it's time for a return to straightforwardly sincere painting, sculpture and photography. Except the reality is that the same old approach to the same old subject matter gets, well, samey.

In reality, many of the most unconventional approaches at the show worked when backed up with loving craftsmanship and free of smugness. And there are plenty of strong artists out there working that way.

For instance, New York's Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts displayed Michael Scoggins' lively, supersized "child's" drawings on ruled, loose-leaf paper, depicting "Super-awesome cootie man" and "my church." I suppose you could say he's making fun of parents who put kids' drawings on their refrigerator, but I think he's memorializing rather than trivializing that effort, down to the folds on the paper.

Similarly, San Francisco's Hespe Gallery displayed Tim Lid-dy's deadpan reconstructions of old board games like 1956's "Test Driver" and 1960's "Park & Shop." At first, it looks like tired-out post-Duchamp conceptualism, signing an existing object and making it your own. But these are new works, their covers carefully painted on copper. They present the objects to be appreciated for their intrinsic beauty, not sentimental value.

At NEXT, Oakland's Swarm Gallery had Taro Hattori's sweetly delicate, gentle, small paper-and-cotton wall sculptures of three airplanes and a blimp flying through fluffy clouds. With a twist. The planes are bombers, the blimp the Hindenburg and those aren't clouds but explosions.

While still photography was certainly well-represented, especially epic mural-size color images using digital technology and bold lighting, the work being done with video projections was most memorable at Art Chicago and NEXT.

Some was kitschy, like one artist's garish videos embedded into painting panels. But others took Tony Oursler's crowd-pleasing style of projecting moving images onto unusual surfaces further.

One piece that mesmerized me was Ben Whitehouse's "Revolution." He used new software to film 24 hours in Central Park in real time from a stationary digital camera. Perimeter Gallery of Chicago was only showing excerpts, but this seemed to have the same timeless classicism of 19th Century panoramic photos, while being totally 21st Century.



PHOTO COURTESY MANIFEST

Ivan Fortushniak's "Lone Ranger is a Dead Ranger" from Manifest's *TEMPO* show.

Allegory of Time

Manifest Gallery's exhibit *TEMPO* reflects on time

► REVIEW BY SELENA REDER

Time has no shape, color or texture. It is non-spatial, constantly changing and invisible. How on earth could an artist hope to capture it in a two-dimensional canvas or a three-dimensional sculpture?

Nevertheless, for as long as humans have made art, they have made art about time. Temporal subjects exist everywhere. They are in the decaying fruit of a Flemish still life and the ticking metronome of Man Ray's "Indestructible Object." Time takes its toll on peeling frescos and the leaky roof of Frank Lloyd Wright's

Fallingwater. Salvador Dalí challenges the very existence of time when, in his painting "The Persistence of Memory," melting pocket watches and sagging flesh suggest it is an illusion and a human construct.

Manifest Gallery explores this elusive medium with the works of 19 artists in *TEMPO*, curated by Jason Franz. The exhibit is on display at the East Walnut Hills gallery through May 14 and runs concurrently with another exhibit called *Rites of Passage*, curated by Tim Parsley and featuring work by students and recent col-

lege graduates.

Sarah Bliss, a Massachusetts artist, documents the passage of time through conceptual, process-based work. In "Time/Light," she photographs one of her sculptural paintings, made of black shrink-wrap over a wooden stretcher. In the shrink-wrap, you can make out the reflection of a room, with light flooding in from a window. The passage of time is literally reflected in eight different photos, as the quality of light changes in the shrink-wrap reflection.

Bliss writes on her Web site that the shrink-wrap is a "material considered valuable only in its ability to protect and contain objects of value." That plastic packing material, which entices us to purchase and consume, is ultimately discarded as trash. "I investigate the reversal that happens when these materials shed their role as wrappers and lay full claim to a role as the primary object of value," Bliss writes.

Where light cannot penetrate there are shadows, which change according to the time. The Athens, Ohio-based, single-named artist Ghosh photographs the hazy shadow cast by a plastic soda bottle. In "Work

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Wagner Blues

Despite cancellations by key players, Cincy Opera's 90th season debut is on track

▶ BY ANNIE ARENSTEIN

April has been the cruelest month as far as Cincinnati Opera is concerned. Within a two-week span, the highly anticipated production of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* lost three of its star performers: Celebrated conductor and Cincinnati native James Levine cancelled due to back surgery, followed by bass James Morris (for health reasons) and soprano Hei-Kyung Hong (for personal reasons).

Wagner's only comedy has not been seen in Cincinnati since 1983 and the new production was touted as the centerpiece of Cincinnati Opera's 90th anniversary celebration, featuring world-class performers conducted by Levine, artistic director of the Metropolitan Opera, who was also scheduled to conduct at the CO's gala concert on June 19. *Die Meistersinger* is an epic work, requiring huge forces, including an expanded orchestra and chorus and over a dozen leading roles. Planning began more than two years ago and now, with less than six weeks before rehearsals begin, the company's artistic staff has gone into operatic overdrive.

Artistic director Evans Mirageas is a perennial optimist with possibly the world's best rolodex, but even he couldn't hide a note of frustration when we spoke last week. Adding to his frustration was being stuck in London as volcanic ash grounded flights.

"The timing is lousy," he admitted, "but it is what it is."

Cancellations are an inherent risk factor in the opera world. Singers' bodies are their instruments, and a cold, a sore throat or allergies can take out even the healthiest performer.

But shit happens and companies deal with it. The stakes are considerably higher for this production, celebrating the CO's 90th anniversary, and even before the awful April announcements, there was already a major change.

As the economy tanked, the company scrapped its plans to set the production in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, with scenes in Music Hall, Old St. Mary's Church and on portions of Vine Street. Props go the production staff for finding an excellent alternative: Dusseldorf Opera's production set, which is set in 16th-century Nuremberg and designed by Otto Schenk and Günther



PHOTO COURTESY CINCINNATI OPERA

John Keenan

Schneider-Seimsen, who also designed the Metropolitan Opera's production. The price was right and included more than 70 costumes.

John Keenan, Levine's assistant music director for the Cincinnati *Meistersinger*, stepped in for Maestro Levine immediately. According to CO sources, Keenan was Levine's personal choice to take over.

Keenan might not have name recognition but he has the Wagner chops, having conducted *Meistersinger* at the Met and served on the music staff at Wagner's theater in

Bayreuth, Germany. Keenan will conduct CO's *La Bohème* later in the season.

On Wednesday, the company announced that James Johnson will sing Hans Sachs, a role he has performed at the Metropolitan Opera and in Berlin. He appeared in last year's May Festival performance of Mahler's "Eighth Symphony" and has sung Wagner roles at leading opera houses throughout the world. The role of Eva, the object of everyone's affections, goes to emerging American soprano Twyla Robinson, whose credits include performances with the New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera and the Cleveland and Atlanta Symphony Orchestras.

The big question is: Will audiences pay the same big bucks they would have for Levine, et al? That's what Cincinnati Opera is hoping. And since opera is equal parts art form and spectator sport, the potential for hearing performers on the verge of major careers is worth a shot — after all, they'll have as much at stake as the company itself.

Is there any possibility that Maestro Levine might return to Cincinnati once he's recovered? Mirageas won't speculate, but he tells me that Levine "was so devastated when he had to withdraw. You should have heard the disappointment in his voice."

So, as Cincinnati Opera heads into the ninth inning with more than adequate pinch hitters, the crowd's course of action seems clear: Root for the home team.

For more on CINCINNATI OPERA's 90th season productions, go to www.cincinnatiopera.com.

CLASSES

CLASSES

PARK + VINE — Park + Vine hosts Babywearing Bliss, a free workshop on safely and comfortably carrying a baby from birth through toddler years. 2 p.m. May 9. ... Representatives from Cincy Rain Barrels and Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati will outline easy ways to reduce storm water runoff, improve water quality and promote water conservation with rain gardens and rain barrels. \$5 suggested donation. 11 a.m.-noon May 8. Park + Vine, 1109 Vine St., Over-the-Rhine, 513-721-7275.

SALUTE! THE LANGUAGE OF ITALIAN WINE — The Mercantile Library is partnering with School Amici and Piazza Discepoli for a three-part series on Italian viticulture. Led by Marty Piazza, wine expert and co-owner of Piazza Discepoli, and Italian native Michele Alonzo, director of School Amici, learn "A Short History of Italian Wine." \$65 members; \$75 others (for series). 7-8:30 p.m. May 11. Mercantile Library, 414 Walnut St., Downtown, 513-621-0717.

LECTURES

WAGNER: THE MAN AND HIS ART — Composer Richard Wagner's personal life was as complex and controversial as his artistry; beyond the accolades, his work and philosophy are argued to have heavily influenced Nazi ideology. A panel of experts discusses the complicated man behind the music during this Opera Rap. Free. 7 p.m. May 5. Hebrew Union College, 3101 Clifton Ave., Clifton, 513-487-3238.

LITERARY

READINGS, SIGNINGS & EVENTS

JERRY GABRIEL AND PATRICK SOMERVILLE — Jerry Gabriel signs his first book of fiction, *Drowned Boy*, a collection of linked stories. Patrick Somerville, Wisconsin writer of *The Cradle*, will also be on hand. 7 p.m. May 10. Iris Bookcafe, 1331 Main St., Over-the-Rhine, 513-381-2665.

★ **JAMES GREER** — Discusses and signs *The Failure*. This is a picaresque novel set in Los Angeles about two guys who conceive and badly execute a plan to rob a Korean check-cashing store in order to finance the prototype for an impossibly ridiculous Internet application. Free. 7 p.m. May 5. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood, 513-396-8960. ... 7 p.m. May 6. Books & Co., 350 E. Stroop Road, Dayton, 937-298-6540.

LILLIAN LINCOLN LAMBERT — Discusses and signs *The Road to Someplace Better*, a moving memoir which captures the journey of a woman who came of age as America struggled to deliver on its vision of racial and gender equality. 1 p.m. May 10. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood,

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in Progress #1," Ghosh has divided the plastic bottle into three separate parts — the cap, the neck and the base of bottle. As light hits the three objects, it casts a shadow in the shape of a whole bottle. Like Bliss, Ghosh has resurrected the discarded plastic and immortalized it. There is something ominous and foreboding in photographing a shadow. It is as if we all live in the shadow of plastic.

Modern life encroaches upon the past in Ivan Fortushniak's "Lone Ranger is a Dead Ranger," an oil-and-collage painting. The Pennsylvania-based artist's pastoral landscape is reminiscent of the Old West. Fortushniak's palette is warm, almost sepia-toned in places. In the foreground stands the lone and lonely ranger, the only collaged element of this oil painting. Fortushniak's skill as a painter is demonstrated in delicately rendered tree branches and the play of light on water in the creek. He could easily have painted the figure, but instead cuts and pastes him onto the canvas.

This lone ranger seems to be a devise to express changing times and changing values. On close examination, urban sprawl is on the horizon. Miles off, the iconic McDonald's golden arches beckon weary travelers. What at first glance could be the steam from a locomotive is actually a smokestack belching a thick cloud from a factory. Just as Marcel Duchamp paints a beard and mustache on the Mona Lisa, this figure pasted into a traditional landscape becomes absurd. He is out of place in an oil

513-396-8960.

KARL MARLANTES — Discusses and signs *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War*. 7 p.m. May 11. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood, 513-396-8960.

★ **OHIO FESTIVAL OF THE SHORT STORY** — Authors Lee K. Abbott, one of most highly regarded short story writers and OSU professor; Nancy Zafris, novelist and short story writer, former fiction editor of the *Kenyon Review* and current series editor of the Flannery O'Connor Prize; Donald Ray Pollock, author of *Knockemstiff*; and Margaret Luongo, professor of English at Miami University and author of *If the Heart Was Lean*, will read and participate in panel discussions over the two days. In 427 ERC. 7 p.m. May 7; 10 a.m.-10 p.m. May 8. University of Cincinnati, 2624 Clifton Ave., Clifton Heights, 513-556-6000.

NATHANIEL PHILBRICK — Discusses and signs *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn*. 1 p.m. May 8. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood, 513-396-8960. ... 7-8 p.m. May 7. Books & Co. at The Greene, 4453 Walnut St., Beavercreek, 937-429-2169.

LEAH STEWART — Author of *The Myth of You and Me*, will introduce her new novel, *Husband and Wife*. 7 p.m. May 6. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood, 513-396-8960.

★ **UC POETS' HOMECOMING** — Former UC graduate poets Lesley Jenike, Amy Lemmon, Jim Murphy and Kristin Naca return for a panel discussion and reading from their new books. Panel at 2 p.m., readings at 3 in the George Elliston Poetry Room, 646 Langsam Library. 2 p.m. May 7. University of Cincinnati, 2624 Clifton Ave., Clifton Heights, 513-556-6000.

TAMMY YORK — Discusses and signs *60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Cincinnati: Including Southwest Ohio, Southeast Indiana, and Northern Kentucky*. 11 a.m. May 8. Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road, Norwood, 513-396-8960.

SPORTS

SPECTATOR

CINCINNATI ROLLERGIRLS — The Rollerjirls host Chicago on their flat track. \$10 (\$15 trackside; \$5 ages 7-12; Under 6 free). 7 p.m. May 8. Cincinnati Gardens, 2250 Seymour Ave., Roselawn, 513-631-7793.

CINCINNATI REDS — The Reds host the Cubs at Great American Ballpark for the second time since April. \$5-\$230. 7:10 p.m. May 7-9 ... The Reds host a contest with the Mets at Great American Ballpark. \$5-\$230. 7:10 p.m. May 3-5. Great American Ballpark, 100 Main St., Downtown, 513-765-7000.

RECREATIONAL

NAMIWALKS FOR THE MIND OF AMERICA — Run or walk the benefit area residents with mental illness and their families. The event will raise funds so everyone has access to the no-cost education, support and advocacy programs run by The National Alliance on Mental Illness. 9 a.m. May 8. Sawyer Point, 801 E. Pete Rose Way, Downtown, 513-352-3000.

painting and out of date against the post-industrial world of McDonald's.

In *TEMPO*, time can be punishing. It holds us hostage in Missouri-based artist Duat Vu's "Immigrants: Limbo Land." Vu's work draws from the danger and hardship he experienced escaping Vietnam by boat. In his ink drawing, ladders rise up from a placid ocean and houseboats levitate above the water. As the title suggests, immigrants may have found land but it is as if they still have one foot in the water. The houseboat represents the conflicted identity of the immigrant, trying to find a balance between eastern and western cultures. This is the state of Limbo, held up and frozen in time. The immigrant may also live in legal limbo, never able to truly feel at home until the government grants that legal status.

Ultimately, time seals our fate. Oklahoma-based artist Lance Hunter puts a modern spin on the three Fates in his oil painting "Atropos." The Fates — Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos — spin, measure and cut the thread of life, ending our time on earth. These are not the old hags that Francisco Goya portrays or the voluptuous, ethereal nudes of Peter Paul Rubens. Hunter's young women wear spiked heels and wield garden clippers and yard sticks. They let their dresses fall off of their shoulders. The Fates have crossed time and cultural barriers to deliver our destinies.

Thus with Hunter's work, Manifest's current exhibit confronts our greatest fear of time that for us, some day, it will come to an end. ©