

# NEW ART examiner

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**WHY CANADIAN ART MAGAZINE DIED** - Miklos Legrady

**THE END OF DIVERSITY IN ART HISTORICAL WRITING** - James Elkins

**TERRY ATKINSON IN CONVERSATION** - Stephen Lee

**ENVOI DEREK GUTHRIE** - Derek Guthrie

**SPEAKEASY - INDIGENOUS 'AMERICAN' ART IS NOT 'AMERICAN' ART!** - Tobias Mostel

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**FEDERICO FELLINI: PAINTING IN FILM, PAINTING ON FILM** - Giacomo Tagliani book review



**Money builds  
Societies but Lust  
for it Destroys  
Culture**

**Culture**

The New Art Examiner is the product of the thinking and life-long contribution of Jane Addams Allen. We thank you in her name for reading this independent journal of art criticism. If you have an interest in our venture, please consult Google, also Art Cornwall, for an interview with the publisher, Derek Guthrie, a painter who keeps his art practice private. The New Art Examiner has a long history of producing quality and independent art criticism. Any art scene, needs writers to keep a professional eye on art activity. Otherwise, insider trading will determine success in this troubled art world.

You can participate directly by sending letters to the editor which are published unedited.

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## The Attentive Artist



The decoration of each section of the Medici Chapel treats a conventional subject in an exceptional way. The Magi do not reach their destination; the shepherds in the fields do not hear the angels; the ox and ass are not at the crib; the Nativity is staged within a forest lit by the mystical Trinity and inhabited by saints Bernard and John the Baptist in penitential guise.

A clue to the theme that connects these disparate elements lies in an image that 15th-century visitors saw before entering the chapel. Above the outer side of the original doorway in the south wall is a fresco, which can no longer be seen, of the Mystic Lamb lying on an altar. The sacrificial lamb represents Christ's deliverance of all humankind; to Christians it replaced the Paschal Lamb of Passover, symbol

of the deliverance of the Jews. The altar in the fresco holds seven candlesticks and seven wax seals, which, like the symbol of the lamb, are taken from the Apocalypse. In the text, the Mystic Lamb represents Christ's ultimate dominion over the world, as we have also seen in the Ghent altarpiece. The seven candles stood for the seven churches in Asia Minor and, by extension, the church universal. The seven seals, to be opened only by Christ, predict the events that will befall the world before his final reign over heaven and earth.

*The New Art of the 15th Century: Faith in Art in Florence and the Netherlands by Shirley Neilsen Blum. Abbeville Press 2015, chapter 2 page 234.*

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The New Art Examiner is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to examine the definition and transmission of culture in our society; the decision-making processes within museums and schools and the agencies of patronage which determine the manner in which culture shall be transmitted; the value systems which presently influence the making of art as well as its study in exhibitions and books; and, in particular, the interaction of these factors with the visual art milieu.

## IN THIS ISSUE YOUR CONTRIBUTORS ARE:

DANIEL BENSHANA is the European editor of the *New Art Examiner*, author of many children's books and sometime poet. He runs [www.footstepsbooks.com](http://www.footstepsbooks.com).

JAMES ELKIN'S interests include microscopy (with a Zeiss Nomarski differential interference microscope and Anoptral phase contrast), stereo photography (with a Realist camera), playing piano (contemporary 'classical' music), and (whenever possible) winter ocean diving. His writing focuses on the history and theory of images in art, science, and nature. Some of his books are exclusively on fine art. Others include scientific and non-art images, writing systems, archaeology and natural history

DEREK GUTHRIE was born in 1936 and was the only figurative artist in St Ives when it was the avant garde. He had three sell-out shows in London before he was 25. After a scholarship to spend two years in India he arrived in Chicago in 1973 where he founded the *New Art Examiner* with Jane Addams Allen, later to be his wife. He restarted the *New Art Examiner* in 2015.

PABLO HALGUERA is an artist, performer, author, and educator. From 2007 to 2020 he was Director of Adult and Academic Programs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He currently is an Assistant Professor at the College of Performing Arts at the New School.

STEPHEN LEE is an artist and writer.

MIKLOS LEGRADY is a visual artist, writer, anti-hero and protagonist who's expecting trouble. He steps out of the art world's blind spot, uncovering myths and deconstruct-

ing fictions. He has a B.Sc. in visual studies workshop, Rochester, N.Y and an M.F.A from Concordia, Montreal. He is co-founder of N.Y. performance group The Collective Unconscious.

ANNIE MARKOVICH is an artist who received postgraduate training from *The New Art Examiner* in 1973. Working with Jane Addams Allen and Derek Guthrie, founders of the NAE, and the community of artists and writers continues as a source of dialogue, critical discourse and inclusion.

TOBIAS MOSTEL was born in NYC in 1948 of an entertainment family, Mostel started at the top: the Boys Chorus at the metropolitan opera. He received his BA in 1975 from the school for general studies at Columbia university and, after a thirty-five year pause, his master's degree in humanities from FSU. An independent scholar, artist and musician, he lives in central N.Y. state.

GIACOMO TAGLIANI (PhD in Visual Studies, Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane of Florence) is currently an adjunct member of the Center for Semiotics and Theory of Image at the University of Siena.

SAM VANGHELuwe is a Belgian painter, art historian (specialising in African arts), critic and translator. He questions preconceived notions in art theory and criticism, and what Samuel Beckett called 'academic dementia'.

**If you have ideas for articles or are a writer please get in touch:**

[contributor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:contributor@newartexaminer.net)

# LETTERS

## Self-Expression Through Abstraction

Editor,  
Great exhibition Audrey.  
Looking forward to seeing what comes next.  
*Sahra Beaupre 05/04/2022*

## A Forensic Autopsy of an Art Magazine

Editor,  
Right on. This article openly states things that many people in the Canadian art world have been whispering for a long while. *Canadian Art* magazine lost its direction several years ago, and editorial standards collapsed under the disingenuous pretext of a poorly-conceived social agenda that often seemed unconcerned with basic facts. I understand why the *Canadian Art* editors pinned their collapse upon the loss of ad revenue during the pandemic; covid was a convenient fig leaf covering many more serious problems which they haven't taken responsibility for. (I wonder why journalist Kate Taylor basically accepted and repeated the *Canadian Art* editors' convenient explanation when she covered the

closure in the *Globe and Mail*? But that's another matter.)  
In reality, it's been an open secret in the Canadian art world that the magazine's standards were sliding badly under their social agenda. But nobody could say anything lest they be pigeonholed as 'conservative', 'racist', etc. etc. Ironically, the magazine's apparent lack of fact checking, its too frequently banal application of theory, its parochial theme chasing, incessant presentism, and poorly informed articles only served to trivialize many of the social issues it purportedly wanted to address.  
Yeah, *Canadian Art* closed last year, but for many people in the Canadian art world, we lost the magazine several years earlier.  
*Missy 10/04/2022*

Dear Daniel  
By all means, print the essay. Your magazine site looks interesting. I've already read one essay, on Charlie Chaplin and *The Kid*. Chaplin was the greatest film-maker in history and has not received his due because of American

stupidity and fear. Chaplin heeded the words of C.H. Douglas and sold all his stocks a couple of days before the 1929 stock market crash. Many Americans chided Chaplin for not losing his wealth as good Americans were now plunged into poverty. I can go on and on about Chaplin, who I regard as the greatest filmmaker, and the greatest actor to have graced the screen: great in everything. My father introduced me to Chaplin when he returned to America in 1972. I shook his hand. What do you say to a genius? I took his hand and laughed and cried. But back to your magazine and your offer. Also a couple of copies in hard format would be great, too.  
Glad you wrote; I hope you are well  
*Tobias Mostel 01/04/2022*

We publish all letters unedited to give artists and readers a fair say. If you would like to start a conversation, or enter one please visit

[www.newartexaminer.net](http://www.newartexaminer.net)

or write an email to

[letters@newartexaminer.net](mailto:letters@newartexaminer.net)

## QUOTE of the MONTH:

"The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for the rest of your life. And the most important thing is, it must be something you cannot possibly do."  
**Henry Moore**



May 2022  
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Publisher: Annie Markovich  
Founder and Advisor: Derek  
Guthrie  
European Editor: Daniel Nanavati  
[ukeditor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:ukeditor@newartexaminer.net)  
London Editor: Stephen Lee  
[london@newartexaminer.net](mailto:london@newartexaminer.net)

**EDITORIAL OFFICES:**

**Assistant Editor**  
Josephine Gardiner

**Chicago, Founded 1973**  
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**Contributing Editors:**  
George Care, Cornwall

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Frances Oliver

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WEBSITE: [www.newartexaminer.net](http://www.newartexaminer.net)

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UK Office: Sunny Corner Lodge Panters Bridge,  
Mount Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 4DP

Washington Office: 2718, Ontario Road NW, Washington DC 20009  
Chicago Office: 7221 division#5, River Forest, IL 60305

Inquiries:  
[advert@newartexaminer.net](mailto:advert@newartexaminer.net)  
[contributor@newartexaminer.net](mailto:contributor@newartexaminer.net)  
[subscribe@newartexaminer.net](mailto:subscribe@newartexaminer.net)  
All Letters to the editor are printed without editing.  
[letters@newartexaminer.net](mailto:letters@newartexaminer.net)

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## EDITORIAL

A curator recently applied to run an exhibition at a major gallery in the UK. The exhibition was of interest to the Mayor's office of the city and the culture team at the City Council, which meant the show could have been part of a city wide series of allied events with the gallery at the centre of the plans. This curator approached the gallery with two other members of his team. They were two white men and one anglo-Indian. The plans were turned down for the main space in the gallery despite the power of the idea, because the curators were not diverse enough.

At the same time I met him, I had just read about Quentin Crisp and his antagonism to the Gay Rights movement. He said he didn't know what gay rights meant. All these movements around the world which give voice to minorities are actually all asking for human rights. As pressure groups they have a place, but what they are fighting for belongs to us all.

Galleries are forced to look at the criteria and objectives of funders, rather than at the art. This is artificial cultural engineering. We are at the point where artists are dealing with middle men to get their work exhibited and those middle men lack all imagination. It is a politically dangerous place for our culture to be.

If we are making decisions based on the ethnicity, gender, colour, orientation or disability of the curators and not of their humanity, shared by us all, and the strength of the idea they bring to exhibit that humanity, we are failing. We are subdividing the nation and by so doing making the whole idea of 'nation' meaningless.

And it doesn't make prejudice go away.

Because prejudice rests upon ideas of who we are and who they are. Nothing else. And you cannot turn people away because of what they are not. That is also prejudice. You can only ever turn artists down because they are not good artists. And you put on a show because they have achieved in their art the communication of their ideas that speaks to us all and transcends their individual experience.

We have allowed corporate and state funding that demands boxes be ticked as a matter of over-riding importance and by so doing we have given birth to generations of artists who are good at filling out funding applications. They have forgotten how to write detailed and vital manifestos and get them published – despite the existence of the Internet. They have been infantilised into believing making money makes you an artist. Ha!

Daniel Benshana



Each issue, the *New Art Examiner* invites a well-known, or not so well-known, art world personality to write a speakeasy essay on a topic of interest.

Born in NYC in 1948 of an entertainment family, Tobias Mostel started at the top: the Boys Chorus at the Metropolitan Opera. He received his BA in 1975 from the School for General Studies at Columbia University, and after a thirty-five year pause, his Master's Degree in Humanities from FSU. An independent scholar, artist and musician, he lives in central N.Y. state.

## Indigenous 'American' Art is not 'American' Art!

Recently, the Metropolitan Museum announced that it will add Native Art to its American Wing for the first time. This is a travesty, an insult to Indigenous artists, and a trivialization of the disgusting history of Americans toward the Indigenous ever since Europeans arrived on 'American' shores in the 15th-century.

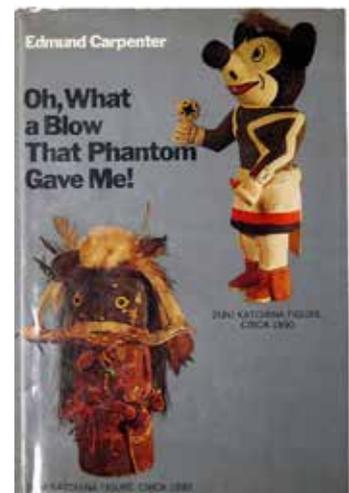
Let us not forget that it was the European colonizers who later became Americans, who ran roughshod over the Indigenous, and depending on what part of the country they settled in, they either embraced the Indigenous as trading partners, or sought, like the Massachusetts Calvinists, to exterminate them, due to their non-Christian and savage proclivities.

The Met Museum should not be the place where contemporary notions of nationhood are imposed on artefacts of a past that can have nothing to do with nationhood as established from the 18th century on. An Indigenous American piece is no more American than Stonehenge is English, or Angkor Wat is Cambodian. (Angkor Wat was built by the Khmer King Suryavarman II in the 1100s. During that time and up until the 20th century, the temple complex was in Siam, or Thailand. If history is to be the guide, then Angkor Wat should be on the Thai flag, not the Cambodian flag. But nationalism combined with nationhood knows no boundaries and recognizes no history other than the desired fictive history of the leaders). At the heart of the problem at The Met is the projection of contemporary nationhood, and na-

tionalism onto earlier cultures that are manifestly not part of the contemporary nation, and cannot be so, by any stretch of the imagination.

The Indigenous of the 'American' continent probably arrived by the Bering Sea land bridge about 15,000 years before the Europeans. But the Europeans got to name the land without regard to those who occupied it already. The Indigenous, over the thousands of years that they lived in the land, had brought their culture with them. They worked in their symbolic images for thousands of years before their culture was impacted, often with force, by the Europeans. After repeated contact with the European/Americans, the Indigenous found their old symbols to have less meaning.

So they incorporated new symbols taken from the culture that surrounded them: American culture of the 1950s, as in the doll on the right. The Katchina Doll of the 1890s shows the usual features of tribal sculpture, a non-realistic whole with a hairy head-piece, staring eyes, a wrapping painted on and deco-



rated with string or hide. The Katchina from the 1950s could conceivably be called an American object, fit for the American Wing, insofar as it shows Mickey Mouse, as American a symbol as possible (Disney). The Zuni Indian who coopted Mickey Mouse used this image because the traditional symbols used by his tribe no longer meant anything, and no one remembered how the symbolic system worked. The use of Mickey Mouse is a good example of assimilation of one group into an over-culture. In some quarters, assimilation is perceived as a variety of attack on the supposed pure constitution of a native. In other quarters, there's nothing warlike about assimilation, but just because assimilation is a possible end result doesn't mean that force cannot be used while assimilation takes place.

American attacks on the Indigenous continue: witness the Trump administration's plan to mine in Utah's Bears Ears Monument, the Dakota Access Pipeline débâcle, Wounded Knee (1973), and many other attempts to deny, degrade and destroy Indigenous sacred sites, homes and businesses. Not only have Americans committed genocide against the Indigenous, Americans have represented the Indigenous as shifty, drunken, violent, stupid, sex-crazed, and simple-minded. If Indigenous art were taken seriously, there would be distinctions among the sacred art of the tribes, the post-contact work and the stuff the tribes manufactured for tourist souvenirs. No such distinction is made in the Diker Collection, for example. In the collector's fatuous statement 'we always felt that what we were collecting was American art, and we always felt very strongly that it should be shown in that context' (artnet.com 3/10/17) lies the serious error of lumping all things into one thing. This is like saying that because Monet made some pictures in London, he was an English artist. Indigenous souvenir art is certainly American art, but sacred tribal art is not.

The Met, in the past, has made distinctions between serious art and kitsch of the European variety. In contemporary American art, such a distinction is meaningless, as most of it is kitsch, indeed it wallows in kitsch, and everywhere it is proclaimed that kitsch is as good as the Mona Lisa. Such problems of taste, aside Indigenous art isn't kitsch, except for the souvenir stuff. I would not object if the souvenir art of the American Indians were shown in the American Wing – indeed the Indigenous who make such stuff, are surely as American as the people who make little alligators or Donald Duck mugs for mass consumption. But there is a sacred art. This is not for

mass consumption; it is for contemplation. While the value of contemplative art is routinely denied by the post-modernists and their devotees, the fact is that contemplative art has been produced by humans for all of history; it has been valued for all of history, and it has been perceived as the highest achievement of humankind everywhere except, perhaps, in contemporary America.

Sarah Cascone of artnet.com says in a subheading of her article on the subject, 'Indigenous art finally takes its rightful place in American art history.' Its 'rightful place'? Indigenous sacred art has no place, rightful or otherwise in the largely derivative collections of the American Wing. It should be remembered that early American art is colonial art, dependent on what the mother country was doing: first Dutch, then English, ad nauseam. Later American art, from the early 20th century on, struggles for its identity for almost a half a century before that identity was forged by a batch of hard-drinking Yanks and some European transplants. If the context for the Indigenous art were pictures of genocidal horrors, disruptions of sacred landscapes and a trampled, often defeated people, perhaps I would not object to its presence, but in the American Wing, such representations of history would no doubt be ignored, because the superior position of paternalistic benevolence routinely ignores such context.

For shame, Met Museum! A museum like the Met is a repository for things that have been classified, separated, and stacked according to a theory of cultural continuity or historical importance. Putting Indigenous artefacts in the American Wing is like putting post-war German Jewish art in the Führermuseum in Linz, (had it been constructed). Now the Indigenous art will service the guilt and greed of the over-class that brought about the destruction of native culture, art and lives in the first place.

While I agree that Indigenous art should be in a museum, it shouldn't be in the American Wing. After all, the Met Museum is a monument to all things that Indigenous art isn't. Let the art breathe somewhere else and let the American Wing continue to wallow in its would-be cultural superiority and in its desire to claim equality with everything European. The American Wing is a celebration of the annihilation of Indigenous art. Indigenous art should not be a doormat for either European or American supremacy over Indigenous existence.

# Autopsy of *Canadian Art* Magazine

Miklos Legrady

*Canadian Art* magazine was 78 years old, born 1943, died 2021. The board of directors blamed Covid for a drop in readers and advertising, despite a newly energized editorial staff of postmodern, politically aware, and socially conscious writers and editors. That statement may hold a clue to why things went south, while rival magazine *MO-MUS* gained readers and advertising. Red flags appear as we explore this discrepancy. Two years prior, a call for submissions to the 'Undoing Painting' issue explained why painting's demise was called for, why painting must be undone. It didn't work out that way. The magazine died but painting lived on. *Canadian Art* magazine, summer 2019, call for submissions, 'Undoing Painting' issue.



“Another painting issue?! Here, we present painting as an issue. Still one of the most marketable art forms out there – and therefore one of the most canonized and institutionalized – painting is a flashpoint for how we think about power, commerce and class in the art world. But what does a painting-focused view of contemporary art leave out – and include? Equally relevant – whom does it leave out and include? Does the market-bound nature of painting restrict its ability to critique? How are painting practices gravitating towards the interdisciplinary and installation-based? Are material-specific practices still valid – and does asking this question elide, say, Indigenous art communities, who have been working with paint across generations? What are all the things that painting can do that remain under-discussed? And how have painting's histories been received and (mis)understood?”

“Does asking this question elide, say, Indigenous art communities, who have been working with paint across generations?” This cultural blind spot is a head scratcher: since prehistoric times, artists in Asia, Africa, and Europe had also worked with paint across generations. The word elide is used here to veil how a national policy of reconciliation with oppressed and despoiled indigenous communities should not but, obviously did, result in a *sacrificium intellectus* that eludes common sense.

A superficial attempt to signal virtue by jumping on the social justice platform actually trivializes real

social and racial inequalities faced by First Nations people. Do humanitarian principles then place Indigenous art above criticism? Does membership in a racial or cultural community raise one's work above judgment? Then how does that change the definition of art, whose etymology is judgmental?

Disclosure: the editors rejected my paper questioning their premise. And so we read *Canadian Art*'s misconception that painting is market driven, when most painters have no market for their work, which is typically done for love of the art. In fact, the medium is seen as old-fashioned, so it's discouraged in the current art ecosystem. We suspect the editorial staff didn't have a clue, and reaped the consequence of unrealistic optics on contemporary art.

This second failure of logic from Canada's foremost art magazine is rather disheartening, you know it won't end well. It didn't. So let's think logically for a moment. Painting is no more market-bound than other media, and if the market restricts art's ability to critique, then all media including writing would merit the same chastisement. Those painters whose motivation is sales are generally known as commercial artists. Or they've left art and turned to marketing, like Damien Hirst, who'd never touch a brush and is rarely seen in a studio, unless it's to meet a well-heeled client. Not an artist but.

'Are material-specific practices still valid...' Tom Wolfe satirized this pose in his novel *Back to Blood*; 'The artist ... had no hand at all in making the art. And if he touched drawings or photographs, it was

just to put them in an envelope and FedEx them to those hired to produce the work, although I'm sure he has an assistant to do things like that. No-Hands – that's an important concept now. It's not some artist using his so-called skills to deceive people. It's not a sleight of hand. It's no hands at all. That makes it conceptual, of course.'

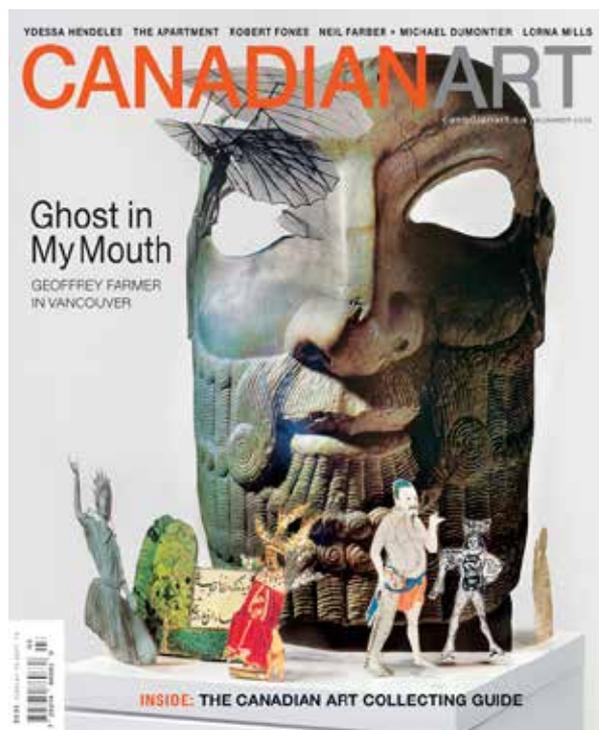
Roger Scruton adds: 'faking depends on a measure of complicity between the perpetrator and the victim, who together conspire to believe what they don't believe and to feel what they are incapable of feeling ... Anyone can lie. Faking, by contrast, is an achievement. To fake things you have to take people in, yourself included. The liar can pretend to be shocked when his lies are exposed, but the fake really is shocked when he is exposed, since he had created around himself a community of trust, of which he himself was a member. Understanding this phenomenon is, it seems to me, integral to understanding how a high culture works, and how it can become corrupted.'

When it's turtles all the way down, we have to speak truth to power. Art is not deceitful. It's those lacking skill who need to deceive, who need to claim that art is anything you can get away with. An artist does not use skill to deceive, any more than doctors use their skill to deceive patients, or chefs use skill to deceive diners or actors use skill to deceive their audience. Skill takes so long to learn, requires such deep commitment and dedication, that anyone able to make the grade will not waste their life deceiving anyone. Plato banned artists from his Republic because they cheat with mimesis, conveying imitations of a reality created by the Gods. Of course Plato used the mimesis of language to convey his ideas, but it's the thought that counts. Should Plato ban himself from his Republic? Would *Canadian Art* ban painting?

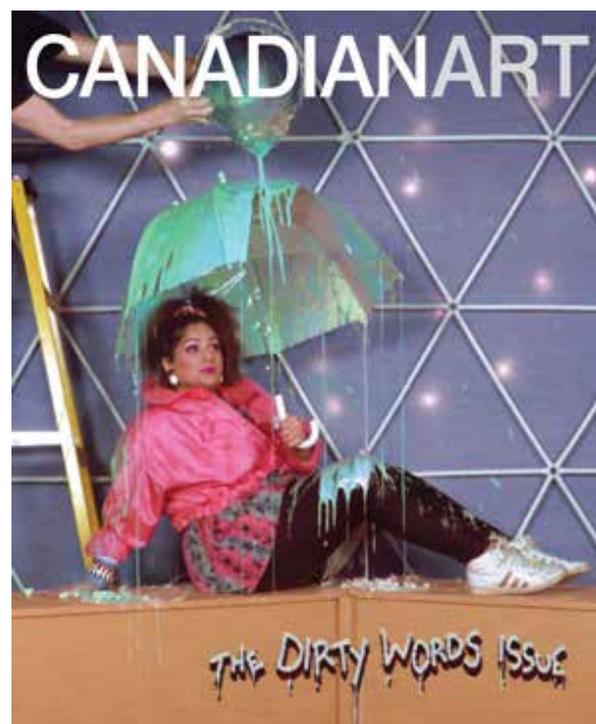
It's worrisome if that magazine represents the art community, if it's a canary in the mine. As the magazine's assumptions were made in a bubble, the feet on the street walked away. A similar dynamic occurred with Gillette's 'Toxic Masculinity' commercials, which lost them \$2 billion in sales that year. At times political enthusiasts go bat-shit crazy, what we call delusional, lose all sight of reality, forgetting how quickly the political gets personal; it's not just talk.

Following a talk between an editor and a local gallerist, I was informed the Canadian art world is too weak to bear criticism. I replied that it was not just weak but moribund, specifically from lack of my kind of criticism; then *Canadian Art* magazine collapsed to prove the point.

They might have survived had they published my ar-



Summer 2015



Spring 2018

ticles years ago, when I first wrote on the science of painting as a visual language, just as we find body language in dance. Those who don't know this shouldn't write about art; the 'Undoing Painting' issue was conceived by armchair golfers and it was

soggy.

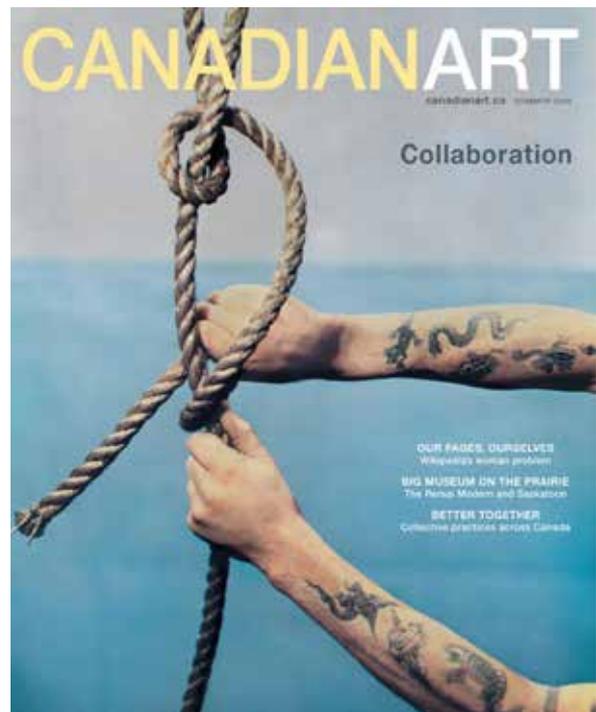
The story doesn't end there but gets worse. Many *Canadian Art* pages were vulnerable for lack of fact checking, since an ally does not doubt a victim's words. Fact checking can imply a lack of trust, so questionable articles went unquestioned. In every group there are people of integrity and high stature, while there are also weaker members not above stretching the truth. *Canadian Art*, for lack of judgment, sometimes associated with the wrong crowd. The result was a saccharine favoritism shredding any hope of accuracy or credibility.

When you crudely politicize art, it descends to propaganda. Art is specific. Science explains how art affects emotions and feelings, how the psychology of art contributes to the evolution of the human mind. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's study of nonverbal language, says that 'every perceptual experience is accompanied by emotional coloration – an evaluation of subtle shades of good or bad, painful or pleasurable, a spectrum of cognitive and emotional memories, providing an instant valuation... art is not mere 'cheesecake' for the mind. It is instead a cultural adaptation of great significance.'

Our postmodern creed aims to reject tradition as the key to wonderful new genres, just as shutting down Obamacare or the Canadian health system would spontaneously produce betters. The demise of this art magazine was at the intersection of well-meaning intellectuals and innocent activists under whose guidance the magazine lost relevance. They may be specialists in their field but can lack a sensitivity to the complex iteration of non-verbal languages. Some are scared to know the truth, to hear the truth, to speak the truth; scared of parrhesia. Everyone with an eye on culture saw that *Canadian Art* lost interest in art, in favor of virtue signalling.

Painting cannot die, anymore than literature.

Calls for the death of painting surface every few years, perhaps from jealousy on the part of those who can't. The pen, though mightier than the sword,



Summer 2016

won't draw by itself. It's hard to paint, just as it's hard to master a musical instrument. Having tried and failed, some may want to reset the goalpost to mitigate the pain.

Solomon Asch's 1950s experiments showed that anyone was liable to see the colour blue as green when influenced by peer pressure; we have a tendency to fall in line and a sophisticated grasp of reality is required to tell the difference between a bright idea and a brilliant mistake. The etymology of art is specifically value-descriptive. It describes an impressive quality of spiritual expression, achieved through an outstanding mastery of skills by extraordinary people.

Isn't that Canadian art?

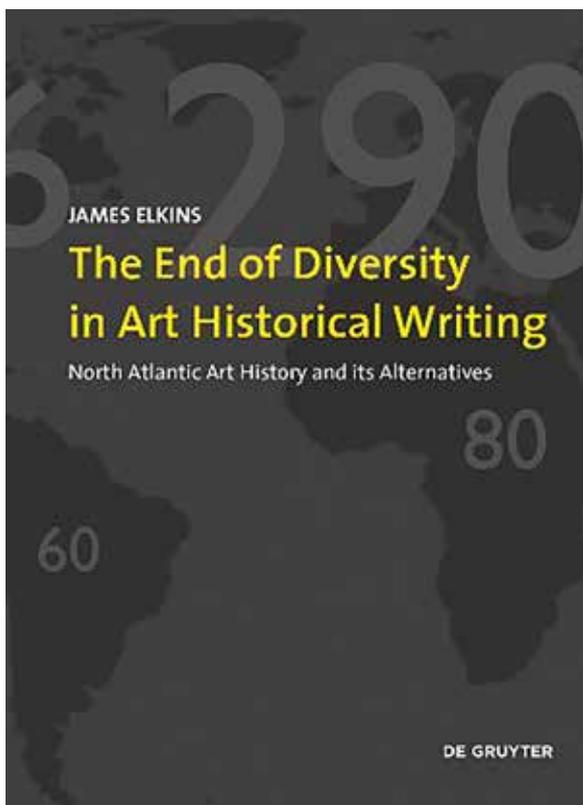
We would like to thank James Elkins for waiving his fee for reprinting his introduction to his book that follows:  
**THE END OF DIVERSITY IN ART HISTORICAL WRITING.**

# The End of Diversity in Art Historical Writing

## NORTH ATLANTIC ART HISTORY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

This is the introduction to James Elkins' new book of the same title. We will publish an extract in the next issue

James Elkins



This is an introduction about the ways people write about the history of modern and contemporary art in different parts of the world. From the vast art world and art market, I want to look just at the writing about art; and within art writing I want to consider only texts that are concerned with modern and contemporary art history; and within those texts, I am mainly interested not in what is said about art but how it is said. This may appear to be a specialized topic, but to adapt William Gass's phrase, 'I think it is the heart of the heart of the matter for understanding the impending globalization of art.' The subject variously called 'global art history' or 'world art history' has become a concern in art history departments worldwide. Sometimes global art history focuses on the practices of art around the world: how they differ from one region or nation to the next, whether they are becoming more uniform in the age of international curation, how cultural

practices disseminate and produce new combinations. But my title phrase does not refer to what is studied the master narratives of art history, freshman survey courses, and introductory textbooks – but how it is studied.

The dissolution of the introductory 'story of art,' as E. H. Gombrich called it, is impelled by interests in decolonization and identity, and by the ongoing introduction of unfamiliar art practices into the art world. But as the art world is becoming more diverse and inclusive, writing about art is becoming less diverse and more uniform. There is, I think, a single model for how art history and theory should be written, and it is spreading, largely unremarked, around the world: that is my subject in this introduction and my recent book.

The question of how to write art history is at a crucial point: it is recognized as a central part of the discipline of art history, but discussions of how art history is written around the world still rely on incomplete, local, and even anecdotal evidence. The study of the writing of world art history – again, in distinction to the study of how art has been practiced around the world – seems at once indispensable in an age of increasing globalization, and also optional, something that might be added to a student's curriculum or a scholar's itinerary.

I think that the increasing worldwide uniformity of scholarly and critical writing on art is the single most important problem in the field of art history, and I think we need to consider it first, even before we write on our various specializations. Paying attention to the how of writing – our theories, narratives, and points of reference – is crucial for judging whether or not our thinking about the history, theory, and criticism of modern and postmodern art are becoming uniform worldwide. There is a great deal of attention paid to global and national art, to competing accounts of modernism, and to the contemporary. All that, can obscure the fact that the talk itself – the way we use theories, the theories we choose, the ways we discuss modern and contemporary art, in short the how of art history – is widely taken as given, as an unproblematic lingua franca.



Saburo Murakami: Lacerating Paper.  
*The Gutai Group*

For example, there is a fair amount of scholarship on Gutai and other postwar practices in Japan, and in that scholarship there is ongoing discussion of which moments in Japanese postmodernism are the most important, which have been misrepresented, and which have yet to be adequately described. But the literature that debates those questions is itself written in a very uniform manner: the style of the writing, the theorists who are brought to bear, the scholarly apparatus, the forms of argument, the values accorded to what is taken as historical significance, and the places the work is published, are all in what I will be calling a standard North Atlantic idiom. Cultural difference, hybridity, translation, misrecognition, and the circulation of ideas are very much at issue, but the manner of the writing is remarkably uniform. Talk about modern and contemporary art is at risk of being flattened into a homogeneous world discourse, despite the fact that scholars continue to emphasize the importance of the local and the diversity provided by mixtures of national, transnational, and regional practices. It is a paradox that just as attention to identity becomes more intensive, and as the subjects art historians study become increasingly diverse, the writing that articulates those identities and subjects is itself losing the relatively small degree of variety that it still has. The impending *single history* of art will be very sensitive to difference, but unless it also reflects on its own lack of diversity, national and regional variations in art historical writing may become extinct. This introduction and recent book, is an attempt to slow that unfortunate tendency.

I have three purposes in mind:

First, to set out what I think are the principal conceptual issues in the worldwide practices of the writing of art history, theory, and criticism;

Second, to describe the dominant practice, which I will be calling North Atlantic art history; and  
 Third, to propose a new source of diversity in art writing, one I have not yet seen in the literature. (Here as everywhere in this introduction, diversity applies to the forms of writing, not its subjects, which are multiplying exponentially).

The field of writing on worldwide practices of art history, theory, and criticism is chaotic, full of incommensurable viewpoints. I begin with a practical look at the study of global art history, including questions of funding, access to books and artworks, and the crucial fact that English is the de facto language of art history. Global art history depends on unstable terms, including 'Western' 'non-Western,' 'Euramerican,' 'North American,' 'Eurocentric,' 'global,' 'local,' 'glocal,' 'international,' 'central,' 'marginal,' 'peripheral,' 'regional,' 'provincial,' and 'parochial'. I will present a case that certain habits and expectations of scholarship have effectively captured the world's major academic institutions, so that there are few alternatives to the canonical readings of artists and artworks, the expected forms of explanation, narrative, and scholarship. The sum total of those habits, theories, valuations, and narratives comprise the norm in art history departments in places like Princeton, Yale, Cornell, Harvard, the Courtauld, Leeds, Sussex, Berkeley, or the University of Chicago.

I call that set of practices, with many qualifications, North Atlantic art history. I do so because the usual ways of specifying the kind of art history I have in mind are either too biographical (this kind of art history could, for example, be associated with Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster, Michael Fried, Griselda Pollock, and several dozen others); too institutionally specific (it could be associated with the *Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, *October*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and a dozen major US and EU university presses); or too vague (it could just be called 'Eurocentric' or 'Western' art history). Of those unhelpful or treacherous definitions, the commonest is the identification of this kind of art history with the journal *October*. Among the many difficulties of that identification is the fact that, in my experience at least, it's common among art historians to deny the influence, the coherence, or the relevance of 'the *October* model.' Still, if the reductive identifications with *October*, the other journals and presses, the individual scholars, or the individual universities are unhelpful, it's not much better to think of art history as a single discipline, or to divide it into 'Eurocentric' and 'other.' We are left with the choice of multiplying art historical practices to the point where each art historian would embody their

own scholarly practice, or gathering practices to the point where regional or national differences can no longer be discerned. That is why I have opted, somewhat reluctantly, for the expression 'North Atlantic art history'. It is intended to be historically, politically, and geographically delimited, so that it can intervene between the *October* model, which is both overly precise and elusive, and the notion of a 'Eurocentric' or 'Western' art history, which is vague and not analytically useful. The principal reason to risk a neologism like 'North Atlantic art history' is to show that there is, in fact, an uncodified consensus about the way art history should be written. There is dwindling diversity in the writing of art history and related fields, because the North Atlantic model attracts concerted emulation in virtually every center of art history in the world. Like global capitalism, it is spreading everywhere, and attempts to keep minor practices alive have not usually been viable. I

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will explore analogous trends toward global homogeneity in the cases of art criticism, art theory, and art instruction: my sense of those fields is that they, too, are becoming less diverse.

I also want to be able to argue that there is no undiscovered continent of art historical writing that is outside this paradigm. It is often assumed that art history, theory, and criticism worldwide comprise a set of diverse, mutually intelligible languages. I do not think that is the case. There are no 'non-Western,' undiscovered, local, national, or regional ways of writing art history that can join their voices to North Atlantic practices and form a diverse community of ways of writing. In other words, it isn't likely that North Atlantic art history will be saved from homogeneity by the voices of other traditions. There is an idea, held by some scholars in Europe and the Americas who specialize in the art of those regions, that there are traditions or styles of art historical writing elsewhere in the world, and that Euramerican scholars need only acknowledge them in order to ensure art history's diversity. I do not think this is so: the age of discovery is over, and scholars who

identify themselves as art historians look –whether critically or in emulation – to a small number of institutions and scholars in western Europe and the US.

I don't know any art historians who identify themselves with *October*. I know some who deny that the circle around *October* was ever coherent, others who think the 'model' is long superseded, and many who do not recognize or acknowledge their indebtedness to *October*. In my experience most art historians and theorists in the major institutions in western Europe and North America say they are independent of the influence of *October* and the various scholars and concerns that were associated with it in its first two decades. I will be arguing that isn't the case. Even the most experimental contemporary art history, which appears least concerned with the interests of the previous generations of art historians, remains dependent on the model it ostensibly rejects. This dependence is ongoing and commonly unacknowledged, largely because the dependence is deeper and more general than it seems if *October* is associated only with a couple of scholars and a small number of generative papers.

What follows from this is that a relatively small number of scholars, universities, journals, publishers, and books continue to provide the model for the world's art history. The most important agent in the international spread of North Atlantic art history is not any individual person or institution but a textbook: *Art Since 1900*. Even in its expanded edition, this book has virtually no time for modernisms outside the North Atlantic, and even though its subtitle proclaims that its scope includes Modernism, Antimodernism, and Postmodernism, it gives little space to Soviet and National Socialist antimodernisms, and none to the many belated and provincial practices that are tacitly antimodern, and which comprise the majority of art produced worldwide.

It's likely that in the next couple of decades the number of art historians, theorists, and critics who engage with world art writing practices will increase, and the subject of global art history (under various names) will become more common in departments worldwide. At the same time I think the practices of art writing will become more homogeneous. As this happens it may be particularly tempting to identify local or national art practices with differences in art history, theory, or criticism. Yet as different as local and national practices can be, they do not produce or represent differences in the ways art history is written. That brings me to my book's third contribution, a problem I think has so far gone unnoticed. Some scholars hope that there are undiscovered or

lesser-known practices of art writing that comprise art history's real diversity. Others emphasize the necessity of being attentive to individual practices of art, to local languages and forms of production. Still others focus on hybrid and transnational art, or on postcolonial or decolonial contexts. There are a number of such strategies to increase art history's attention to the fine grain of individual practices. I do not think any of them have succeeded in working against art history's impending uniformity. From my point of view, art history's real diversity is hiding in an unexpected place: it can be found in the many small inequalities between art historical practices of writing in different places. By small inequalities I mean discrepancies between different authors' engagement with the literature, their uses of theory, their knowledge of translations, their differing styles of argument, their senses of proper reference, their writing tone, or their use of archives.

Each place art history is practiced varies slightly, in these small ways. What counts as a proper conversational opening to an essay in one place may seem too informal in another. What counts as a useful review of the critical literature in one place will seem overly contentious in another. What counts as an adequate engagement with the secondary literature in one country may seem insufficient in another. What seems to be an interesting use of a theorist in one institution may seem misinformed in another. These differences are the sorts of things that instructors correct in their students' papers, and that editors notice when they read submissions to journals. Correction of such differences comprise the everyday business of teaching and publishing art history everywhere. These small discrepancies, I believe, actually are the remaining diversity in worldwide practices of art history. They are the forms of cultural distance that we have left to us.

My last claim in my book is that we need to start paying attention to these apparently practical, minor, contextual deficiencies, absences, infelicities, solecisms, and awkwardnesses, because they are the precious remnants of cultural variety when it comes to art history, theory, and criticism. This argument

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is made in the final chapter. This is also my last contribution to the field of art history. Partly that is because this book says everything I want to say, and partly it is because I am moving into the wider study of writing itself, apart from its function in the description of art.

I started as an art historian, but I found myself less engaged in producing new interpretations or making new discoveries than in understanding what has counted as persuasive or compelling interpretation. At some point my practice moved from art history (the study of artworks) into the study of art history (historiography, or art theory). It became clear to me that art history is limited unless it considers its own medium of writing, because writing creates the conditions for sense and meaning.

And although it took me a long time to realize it, I am hardly the first to conclude that disciplines in the humanities are only tenuously aware of the writing that supposedly serves them so efficiently. My book's Envoi sets out the reasons why it might be fruitful for art history, theory, and criticism to turn their attention inward, to the writing itself. Without an entirely rethought sense of writing, there are limits to what an analysis of globalization in art writing can accomplish.

*On the Impending Single History of Art: North Atlantic Art History and its Alternatives* by James Elkins.  
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# Terry Atkinson in conversation with Art Historian T J Clark 3rd February 2022

Stephen Lee

The focus of two series of recent drawings by Terry Atkinson- *Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert, 2014-17* and *American Civil War 2018* is the Cold War, its residual effects on the present and its origins in the momentous events that precipitated it. The drawings are displayed over two rooms at Josey gallery, interspersed with his sculptural Grease works from the 1990s. This review is informed by a public talk between Atkinson and T J Clark.

As a founding member of the Conceptual Art group Art & Language (founded 1968) Atkinson initiated and contributed to an extensive critique of all aspects of entrenched definitions of art and its production. Notions such as 'visual language' and the avant-garde, were scrutinised as fallacy. His long-standing art practice as opposed to a career, in turn became critical of Conceptual Art. Considering its forms to have deteriorated into a corporate style and the group Art & Language into a caucus concerned with writing its own history, he re-established his individual practice in 1974. In this highly personal body of work Atkinson's paintings, drawings and constructions are deliberately and intrinsically rendered critical through the method by which they are made and by unusually extended titles or captions. Painting for Atkinson does not mean a return to old orders of painting convention, nor a 'new spirit in painting' but an investment of conceptual critique into visual work.

In this show the viewer is confronted with an array of interwoven historical fragments that combine real and fantastical triggers of meaning. The Berlin series depicts WW2 Russian and German soldiers drawn from archival photographs, in various states of engagement with war, including terror and bewilderment. Presented alongside this imagery there is a close-up portrait of E.T. entitled: *Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert: Study 4. After having watched Hitler's corpse burn, ET and a blue cousin await their ship, Berlin, April 1945.* What might be described as a number of Goyaesques also enter the fray of drawn imagery, a sinister floating figure from Goya's *Asmodea*, 1819, points towards what appears to be an Albert Speer Nazi monument. On the opposite wall of the gallery a still life displays military regalia as So-

viet trophy souvenirs, including a capsule of Pervitin, known as 'pilot salt'- crystal meth given to the Luftwaffe to allow them to remain awake during long flights.

When asked by Clark how he chose these images and subject matter for this WW2 history painting, Atkinson replied that he could remember the last three years of that war. Recalling the headlines in August 1945, after the two atomic bombs had been dropped on Japan, he said he realised 'this is something that cooked-up the Cold War but it was there long before WW2 in shroud form'. At 16/17 years old he understood that it was the Russians who destroyed the Wehrmacht and that the casualties in the East were astronomical. His parents' lives spanned two world wars, their histories are generational and the imagery therefore comes from life experiences. Atkinson produces drawings on his living room table, not in a studio. They are 'low tech', made with coloured pencils in a sketchbook. As a record of historical events they form a diaristic timeline:

'I was 13 when Stalin died.

I was 18 when the Cuban revolution was achieved.

I was 17 when I first heard and embraced Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly.

I was 50 when the wall came down.'



Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert: Study 4, After having watched Hitler's corpse burn, ET and a blue cousin await their ship, Berlin, April 1945

Atkinson's choice of imagery combines this family testimony and its confrontation with the extreme violence of war critically when conveyed as phantasmagoria.

In response to the suggestion that Goya is not contemporary with this particular past, Atkinson stated that the importance of Goya is that he deals with the reviled aspects of human experience. He continues, 'Goya's *Capricios*, (series of etchings) is the main feed into this work; they have absurdity and heavy caricature'. T J Clark also has an interest in mirroring contemporary events using art historical models. His recent book, *Heaven on Earth, Painting and the Life to Come*, 2018 considers medieval and early modern painters as a method of coming to terms with the bizarre politics of our era. He writes,

'We live in an age of revived and intensified religion, and of wars in which once again God's will is invoked to deadly effect'. Atkinson's use of Goyaesques recalls out-of-time references that expose a fragile and febrile European Modernism as capricious absurdity.

Time travel in Atkinson's drawings is further invoked through the recurring image of the fictional Hollywood character E.T. wandering in and out of the imagery of war zones. Clark observed that E.T. might be taken to represent Atkinson himself as an alien visitor observing the effects of European Modernism. A figure that is made both strange and familiar, this fantastical creature exudes suburban sentimentality. In *Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert: Study 4*, ... E.T. is swaddled in a towel, a close-up of his face taking up most of the drawing, he is faintly smiling and looking upwards. E.T. is as Clark said, 'a fully historically conscious baby'. Subtly in the landscape behind E.T. a tiny smouldering fire is visible which alludes to the burning bodies of Joseph and Magda Goebbels following their suicide. Atkinson reminds us that Magda Goebbels poisoned eight children in an act that was compliant with Hitler's suicide pact with his officers as WW2 came to an end. The moral dynamic of this juxtaposition of smiley-face E.T. with matter-of-fact murder of children amply displays a definition of the tragicomic as a relentless, hysterically fluctuating, limbo.

The process employed by Atkinson as a 'history recording artist' is to 'test and try' juxtapositions of his various accumulated images garnered from many sources: archival photographs, records of oral histo-



American Civil War Study 32, Lost part of his left ear at 2nd Bull Run, August 1862. Here, in this drawing, weary on a break from the front-line trenches at Petersburg, January 1865. Infantryman of the 97th New York

ry and testimony plus the 'celluloid heroes' of his grandchildren's era etc. He says 'WW2 had a big impact because it froze part of my childhood'.

As he works he thinks about historical junctures and what is being 'projected forward by these drawings'. The results reveal moments of historical import that function not as commemorative statues that may affirm existing contradictions of a culture, but as moments that focus contested events that remain vital. *The American Civil War* series of drawings has this sense of historical accumulation, akin to small museums of drawn images that exhibit the sensibility of a collector of Americana. The captions often use abbreviations that form lists of historical figures, items or events. "H.T". for example is Harriet Tubman, "R.P" is Rosa Parks. In *Study 69*, "J.C." and "T.S." refer to John Carlos and Tommie Smith drawn from a photograph, they are depicted with raised black-gloved hands in Black Power salutes on the podium, receiving their medals at the 1968 Mexican Olympic Games. The defiant gesture, made as the American National Anthem played, caused intense silence in the stadium.

*American Civil War Study 73*, combines the mutilated heads of soldiers from Atkinson's Trotsky postcard series from the early 1980s with various American Civil War drawn references, listed here from the caption: *Camp Wife 31st Pennsylvania Infantry; Prosthetic, Powder Black Infantryman*' etc. In this drawing Atkinson conjoins the stark effects of both Civil Wars, Russian and American, using diverse and satirical combinations that allude to the complexity of a Cold War 'time-traveller's' point of view. Atkinson



American Civil War: Study 84, Warhol's Chair – Warhol himself a fomentor of, and by now, the venerable and revered patriarch of American consumerism, now finds himself consumed by American consumerism

*Pencil on paper, 74.1 x 93.5 cm (2021)*

yet maintains, despite the overdetermined imagery a consistent, underlying political position.

Bart Simpson, E.T., the Jedi and the Goyaesques sometimes make for a poignant, jarring effect yet in other instances a single image is ample. The larger-scale portrait with full caption: *American Civil War: Study 32 Lost part of his left ear at 2nd Bull Run, August 1862. Here, in this drawing, weary on a break from the front-line trenches at Petersburg, January 1865. Infantryman of the 97th New York*, is a case in point. That this figure could also be imagined as a time-traveller across eras is evident in the context of this show and through our knowledge of the continued impact of this history. The half-length portrait of a uniformed soldier stands out against a dark background. His belt buckle identifies him as a Union soldier with pistol and holster across the tunic. The focus is on the face divided into two expressions. The left eye stares out at the viewer, a dilated stare, while the right eye reveals his determined attitude. Immediately his aim must have been to survive. Ultimately however, the contribution of this Union soldier, in terms of a battle of the history of ideas was to clarify and affirm an enlightened, anti-slavery stance. Drawn as mentioned, in coloured pencils in a sketch book on the dining room table, the mark-making, repetitive diagonal strokes to build up surface, is somewhat similar to a high school observational method of drawing. Early success with drawing and representation could be said to persist here as a personal enlightenment. Read in the context of Atkinson's oeuvre however, this method amusingly also derides and questions values re-

ceived through art education. By combining ideologically naive, untrained or proletarian drawing methods with ideologically sophisticated marks devolved from a significant knowledge of modern art Atkinson pushes a critical reading.

Many of the presuppositions of what an artist is and does, professed by British art school education in the 1960s against which Atkinson and Art & Language formed their ideas, are still in place. The notion of an artistic subjectivity critically described by Atkinson as a 'self-confirming centre of truth', 'engaged in a pure visual language', remains a hard nut to crack. More recently his critique, *Avant Garde Models of the Artistic Subject*, questions the efficacy of notions of artistic dissent which have been co-opted into a cyclical, contained and institutionalised mode of pseudo 'avant garde' practice in which novelty or gimmick substitute for the genuinely attained New. His recently-coined term, 'Exhibitionism', offered as one more art school 'pick and choose' style akin to Pointillism or Cubism, satirically emphasises the current primacy of career over serious aesthetic investigation through both theory and practice.

*The Grease works, 1987-1993*, which present the engineering material axle grease in three-dimensional troughs within abstract constructions are probably the most open-ended in terms of interpretation of all these works. Axle grease makes immediate reference to the greasing of machines such as tanks and cars. Displayed as art however, didacticism and ideology are also to be 'greased' as cultural production. Atkinson stated in the public talk with regard to the history of Ireland that 'the idea of being British was "greasy" '. Regarding the relationship between visual art and language he said, 'if grease were language it would be a proletarian grunt'.

The most memorable Greaser sculpture, though not displayed in the current show, is comprised of several troughs of axle grease placed on the floor in the shape of a Union Jack. The combination of emblem and fluid mass, precludes the complex absurdity of a private visual language, as its connotations provoke confrontation and questioning about meaning, all the more blatantly for being sculptural and prone to both physical and metaphorical spillage.

*Terry Atkinson, Josey Gallery, Norwich, 27th November to 27th February 2022*



Study 73 for a painting: American Civil War Mosaic.

*Left to Right, Top to Bottom: Postcard from Trotsky Head, Hailing Poussin, Postcard from Trotsky Head, Camp Wife, 31st Pennsylvanian Infantry, camped near Washington, Forage Cap, Prosthetic, Warrior Bust, West Tennessee hog, Confederate \$5 bill, Colfax 1873, Powder black infantryman, HT, Striving Union infantryman*

# Envoi Derek Guthrie

**Derek Guthrie, champion of artists and cultural thinking and co-founder of the New Art Examiner is retiring. Age and ill health mean he no longer takes an active role in the day-to-day struggles of editing and printing the magazine. He will keep reading it and we will continue to consult with Derek on matters of critical writing and analysis as his insights and awareness on the role of artists today are deep. In honour of his, and Jane's work, we reprint this Statement Originally published May 4, 2012 by Neoteric Art which still gauges the cultural process in which we are all caught.**

My following remarks are only an overview. They are suggested topics for debate. There may be conclusions embedded in this, but if so, they are spare and not well argued for that reason.

Criticism is only talking about art. It is the sharing of opinion. It may be philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, critical theory, cultural politics, literature, poetry, or polemic but it *is* a requirement of a civilised and thinking society.

The art world is in a mess. The mess is not different from the mess that our society is in. This is a political and social issue. It is a matter of the enfranchised and the disenfranchised. It is a matter of how money is distributed. The art distribution system has to be run on the same economic principles as the political system. Whether these systems in the UK and the USA are good for art is the question. The other question that is available – is art possible or has art died? The successful artists are superstars like Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons. Whether they are worthy or not is the simple question that is in all our minds. If we agree or disagree (and the reasons why we agree or do not) is our response not only to the individual pieces but also a response to the system and power which appoints them as the most significant artists of our time. The issue is complex as is the response to these approved artists. This places the respondent in a particular position – that he or she will naturally gravitate to others who share the same taste and ways of art is part of social definition. We may change our minds. That can be very interesting and could be art criticism.

Our media is dominated by political discussion. Our media is not dominated by cultural discussion and when it does respond it will be inside the tribe of choice – Democrats or Republicans. Somebody once said if you stand in the middle-of-the-road you are hit by traffic moving in both directions. I think it is reasonable to surmise that many of us, maybe nearly

all of us, had the hope – maybe naïvely – that involvement with art will take us into a world or a way of life that would be free from the venality of the class dominated society. The romance and discovery of art, we hope, will transport us into a mythical world of enlightened people. The 19th-century attempt to provide an environment for creative people was the salon. This idea became democratised and was extended into Parisien café society – and still today we dream of that dream that in our imagination lives. It won an Oscar in Hollywood (*Midnight in Paris* 2011). The museum and even art departments are the modern attempts to continue to keep alive this ideal, but they have betrayed it and are no longer open to people from all walks of life, just those with deep pockets and those who can afford to buy BFA or an MFA. However, it was the achievement of the *New Art Examiner* that we made a little community that loved art and shared enthusiasm with others by the time-honoured process of writing. We may have made mistakes but we made a contribution that now cannot be denied. The most gratifying thing to me resulting from the publishing of the anthology was that it documented how the *New Art Examiner* carried a variety of voices by different editors and writers and removed the demonisation of its founding editors. Liberal America emphasises the idea of pluralism but is sometimes slow to recognising it, particularly when it is not institutionalised.

The radicalism of the *New Art Examiner* is that it was not afraid of discourse and the ethic should not be considered radical. Maybe it is in present-day America but there are still some people who like to think that free speech is an American value. The *New Art Examiner* respected passion. Today the pressures of the recession are activating voices of protest, namely the occupy movement and a scattering of websites, finding a space for new voices and seeking a new status quo – and passions are increasing.

The art system is not transparent and while this is so

# THE NEW ART

# EXAMINER

## EDITORIAL

### Without Fear or Favor

The New Art Examiner is a new kind of art publication—a monthly tabloid which will cover without fear or favor news of the visual arts in Chicago and the mid-west. Besides reviews of exhibitions—the standard fare of an art publication—we will include behind-the-scenes stories such as the Sao Paolo article in this issue, newsbriefs, a regular review of criticism in the mass media, coverage of alternative galleries, analysis of various aspects of the art world, and critical coverage of today's agencies of patronage: the museums and the arts councils at both the state and the federal level. We hope to combine in one flexible instrument the qualities of depth of analysis which one occasionally finds in the glossy art publications, with the range of timely information that one now finds in the bi-monthly arts newsletters which have sprung up all over the country. The Examiner is also meant to be a forum for the artists of Chicago and a vehicle for their communication.

Why such a publication in Chicago? Coverage of the visual arts in our city suffers from both external neglect and internal indifference. The art publishing industry is in New York. Reviews of Chicago art events are few and far between in the nationally distributed arts magazines. In fact we lag behind Los Angeles, San Francisco and even Minneapolis in this respect. But far more devastating to a creative and lively art scene here than the scarcity of national reviews is the tendency on the part of our mass media to report arts news almost exclusively from an institutional viewpoint and, even worse, to equate art with entertainment. "Arts and Fun" with a heavy emphasis on the "fun" is the password here.

We believe that art is serious—that it has to do with ideas and values and that it is far more important to our society than the society is ready to admit. The artist is an undervalued man. On the one hand he is the goose that lays the golden eggs for a vast arts industry which rivals the stock market as a money making institution. On the other he is supposed to be a clown—a master of legerdemain—on an aesthetic trip that has nothing to do with anything else. We say with a bow to Picasso, "What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he's a painter, or ears if he's a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he's a poet, or even if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way. How would it be possible to feel no interest in other people and by virtue of an ivory indifference to detach yourself from the life which they so copiously bring you? No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy."

We believe that the same standards of journalism which apply to other areas can apply to the visual arts—a concern for covering the whole not just an aspect, and a respect for the truth—a vision of the artist as a whole man, not as a myth or a performing monkey.



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*plus all our regular features*

October 1973 and the NAE is born

artists will have to live in cuckoo land as they operate in the world of which they know little to nothing – yet they desperately search for approval within it. Artists, unless successful, live in a ghetto. The hope is that their own significance and originality will filter up. Status and respect will be achieved and then they will move into an upmarket ghetto. This system has been well defined for decades. New York and London have art magazines and a market with academic infrastructures that certify significant art and distribute it to the regions that usually follow the latest fashion of the avant-garde. Regional centres do not have the critical fire-power to establish a new development or wrinkle in the culture of the avant-garde, yet regional art in Chicago made a heroic effort to work inside their own values and culture even though eventually it was not enough. As Phyllis Kind once said to me, “There are 20 or 30 collectors of my art in Chicago. I have sold 7 or 10 pieces to all of the collectors. The market has reached its potential and I have to move to New York. I cannot mark up the prices any more.”

In the meantime the same collectors, naturally, also buy the big-name artists made in New York and attend the sales at Sotheby's. Buying and selling. When it is right to get in and out of the market is the trick of futures marketing. Wildenstein established a major international New York gallery in the 1940s and 1950s and had a branch in Chicago. It closed its doors in Chicago as the proprietor sold more art to Chicago collectors from the New York gallery than from Chicago.

So the game is like casino betting – maybe with love on loaded chips. The recent collapse of Wall Street is nominated as casino capitalism. That is when rich people – bankers and investment houses – are playing with little people's money; along with the failure of government to protect the average saver. The museum is the casino and/or investors club which embodies power and secret information available to social networks of trustee collectors and their helpers and curators. The museums are not regulated and insider trading is given a free license under the rules of not-for-profit status and tax law. There is always a power struggle around art, particularly today as we are not sure what art is. It is like



*Jane Addams Allen and Derek Guthrie  
In the office of the New Art Examiner,  
Ontario Road, Washington DC.(c 1987)  
(Photograph Shirley-True.)*

the dollar being removed from the gold standard and the market deciding its value. The market tells us that McDonald's is good for me and tasty. We all know it is junk food. The question remains: is Jeff Koons junk food for the mind? As Jeff Koons says, “the market is the critic.” Talking about hamburgers I cannot but recoil remembering when the Queen of England visited the USA a few years ago. The usual celebrations were put in place. To introduce the Queen to American cuisine the White House decided to provide her, in the Rose Garden, with the best cuisine America had to offer: the hamburger. Andy Warhol, with his genius for the social observation of



celebrity culture, pointed out that the hamburger was very democratic because it was enjoyed by everybody – even the Queen of England. The sharing of bad taste is democratic. We are all human but the reaching for something else is of interest, and the belief that there is something better is the dream of significant dreamers.

Jane Addams Allen wrote an authoritative article in November 1981 reprinted in the *Essential New Art Examiner*. She discussed the declining power of the art review well ahead of her time, stating that the independent critical review was obsolete. The forces of marketing and distribution were too strong. James Elkins wonders *Whatever Happened To Art Criticism?* – the title of his 2003 book. It is a pity that he did not read Jane’s article. Raphael Rubinstein edited a great book *Critical Mess* in which leading critics contributed essays pointing to the problems of critics. I quote

from Eleanor Heartney, incidentally a writer now in New York, who started her career at the *New Art Examiner*. Her essay *The Crisis In Art Criticism* is in the book *Critical Mess* (page 103):

“There are practical problems. The venues for art criticism are limited and impose restrictions on what may be discussed. Art magazines operating as trade journals and dependent on advertising for revenue tend to focus on reviews of artists or exhibitions that are in the public eye, while art coverage in general interest publications has a strong bias towards celebrity and entertainment. Academic journals, read by few, often unreadable, and operating largely as tenure generators, are more like private clubs and forums for genuine debate and discussion. As a result certain kinds of essays are never written simply because there is no place to publish them.”

There is always a power struggle around art. To pretend otherwise is folly. We simply believe that wealth does not guarantee discrimination and a greater ability to judge art.

We are here today to talk about the *New Art Examiner* in the past and whether it is possible that it could have a future. The odds do not look good. I would love to be talked out of that conclusion. It is not for me to say that the blood, sweat and tears that the *Examiner* cost can be repeated. In 1974 everybody thought it would not last more than a few issues. If it was to happen again the name and reputation of the magazine is not in doubt. I know it has meaning and is a proven entity. Does that mean it will get support? I do not know. I can guess it mainly means some support in the form of grants, and that’s complicated as the giving of grants have their own politics. Getting a grant is like getting an endorsement and that is a question of convincing the giver that one has the right social theology and the possibility of success. The overriding point is that Chicago is not a good place. It was not a good place in 1974. But somehow something happened and we survived. The story of the *New Art Examiner* is partly told in the anthology *The Essential New Art Examiner*. It is not a history but it has made a history possible as I wrote in the introduction. All of this is the result of community support. The *New Art Examiner* would have disappeared from history if it were not for the vision of one of the anthology’s editors Kathryn Born. Kathryn took the enormous commitment to create this book. What I’m moving towards, is the reluctance and hostility of the Chicago art hierarchy – museums and art departments which have a studied indifference towards the *New Art Examiner* or even the idea of criti-

cism outside their walls.

The second city as an empty city. It is also part of American culture and that is draining away. I do not think that an original and innovative voice can make its way through the labyrinth of procedures – of social networking and deal making, the demands of the market, the politics and academic trading of the tenure which in spirit is no different from the trading between Congress and lobbyists: money for votes. I'm not sure it is a manifest destiny. We all know that four governors of the state of Illinois as well as the chief of police have been indicted for corruption and torture in recent years. This always leaves the unanswered question – how does this affect the civic life of the citizens? I think it empties it out and makes the situation a vacuum. I believe this sets in place a destiny in which there is no filtering up, only filtering down. This is not good news for those outside the system. It is good for those that manage the system. As Sam Gilliam the Washington DC artist once said to me, “there are two kinds of artists – ones that move the system and ones that fit into the system.”

'Manifestation of human achievement' is the Oxford English dictionary's definition of culture. Chicago around the turn-of-the-century contributed remarkable architecture to American culture. Chicago is a living museum of early modern architecture. The urge to monumentality can be achieved inside the space of real estate. Heroic materialism in its glory adorns the city and the lake-shore with the exception of the Trump Tower. But what has happened in the alleyways behind the tall buildings, in the shadows? Gangsters, Nelson Algren, Mayor Daley, Ivan Albright, the Chicago Imagists and the Monster Roster. They all struggle with the dark or are dark. I leave that distinction to you

We are talking inside the context of Chicago. Chicago is, in part, my context but I have other contexts as did Jane Addams Alan. The plight of contemporary art as well discussed. Art supports a huge industry of education, trading and investment. This system has been captured by celebrity culture. The strains in our political system are the demands of celebrity culture superimposed upon the political system. Hollywood and the White House are interchangeable on and off the screen. Celebrity culture is a culture of mass media, something that Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons analysed very well and cashed in on. The difference between the mass market and the museum along with the educational system is that the museum and educational system are meant to respond to a different voice than the norm: those that seek something better than the banality or the

humdrum of the market. The authority given to those systems, with their tax-exempt status is not-for-profits, based on the idea that thinking and creative production are to be considered inside the idea of the humanities, which is not determined by the strategies of marketing successful products. Yet the market and the academic/museum coalition are in bed with each other. The Republican primary illustrates the process of making a product for a person to fit into the White House. Marketing is more important than the product. American democracy is degenerating and if that is so, then so will the culture. We will have to look to those who resist and art history provides many sterling examples of this to think about. Culture will degenerate unless the subtle tyranny of the media and PR is recognised. Orwell called it Big Brother and also pointed to the inevitable lust for power in his book *Animal Farm* with its famous invocation, “all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.”

**There are practical problems. The venues for art criticism are limited and impose restrictions on what may be discussed. Art magazines operating as trade journals and dependent on advertising for revenue tend to focus on reviews of artists or exhibitions that are in the public eye, while art coverage in general interest publications has a strong bias towards celebrity and entertainment. Academic journals, read by few, often unreadable, and operating largely as tenure generators, are more like private clubs and forums for genuine debate and discussion. As a result certain kinds of essays are never written simply because there is no place to publish them**

Patronage of art is hoped to have discrimination. It is fashionable, and has been since New York became the world centre of contemporary art – to recognise the artist as heroic resistor even if he or she is not. Jackson Pollock was a suitable icon during the Cold War as Harold Rosenberg pointed out with his words, “the tradition of the new” and “the herd of independent minds.” The new emerging culture may have had built in defects. I cannot miss this occasion to point out that it was the *Partisan Review*, a small left-leaning publication, that provided the platform and thinking which developed modern art criticism

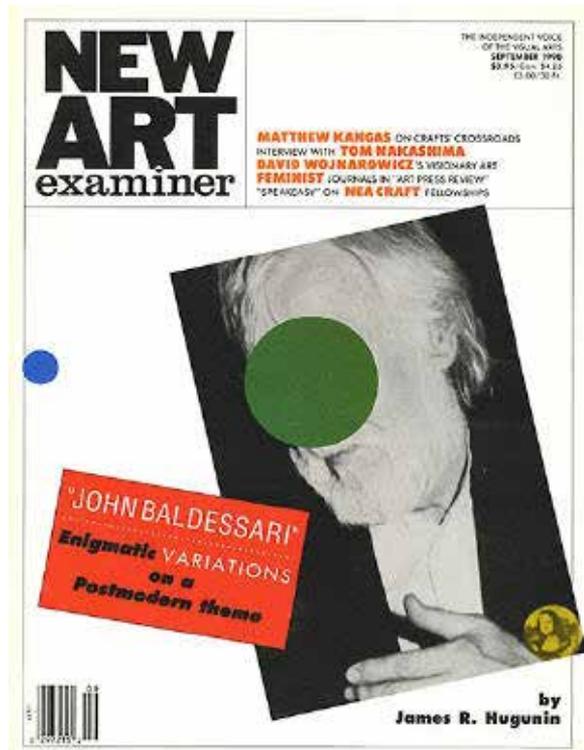
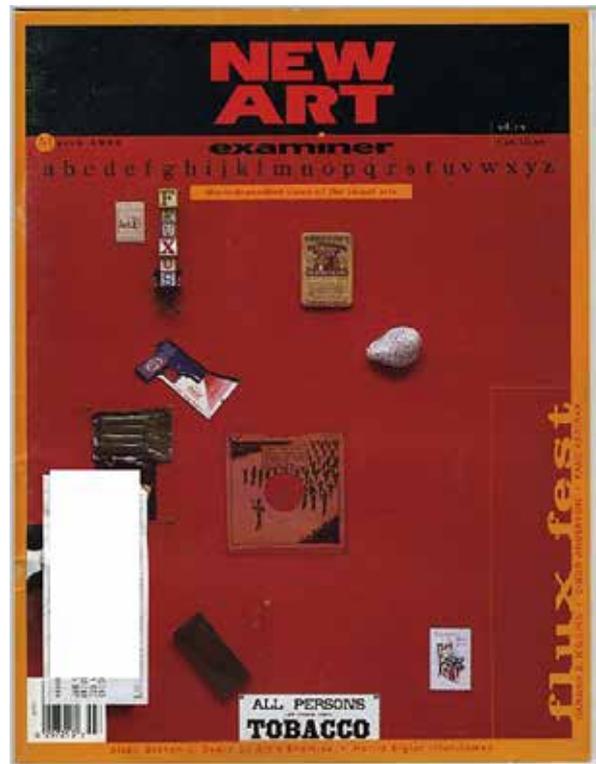
in the US.

Whatever sophisticated resources are mustered by the MCA and the Art Institute they completely missed out on the originality of thinking and the contribution of the *New Art Examiner* to Chicago culture and the long list of professional writers and academics to emerge from the publication. They responded with usual American or Chicago fear of originality or difference as it might be destructive or belong to the 'other side'; usually applied to intellectuals whose primary purpose is not love of money. As George Bush Junior said, "you're either for us or against us." I think this thinking is a form of fascism, as is water-boarding. The phrase originally came from Lenin.

Chicago is the same town that once carried a literature emanating from large feelings to all men in all tongues, for it was here that those arrangements more convenient to owners of property than to property-less were most persistently contested by the American conscience. The following words are courtesy of Nelson Algren:

"Chicago has progressed, culturally, from the second city to the second-hand city. The vital cog in our culture is not the artists but the middle man whose commercial status lends art the aura status when collected into a collection of originals. The word culture now means nothing more than approved. It is not what is exhibited that matters as much as where, that being where one meets the people who matter." The people who matter control money. The *New Art Examiner* survived on a shoestring. A fact of life once observed by Franz Schultz in the MCA catalogue *Art in Chicago* from 1996 was that "the *New Art Examiner* was the most important thing to happen in the Chicago scene in the 1970s and 1980s." He also wrote that, "Chicago is in an asshole but it is my asshole." I will agree with Franz except for this very last observation.

I do not know the details of the death of the *New Art Examiner*. It became compromised it moved in to the academic orbit – more to the point the art historians tenure club. I know that it gave up its original cover slogan The Independent Voice Of The Visual Arts to be replaced by The Voice Of Midwest Art. Jane Addams Allen and myself were elevated to the high sounding title of 'publishers emeritus'. But this was a ritual sacrifice in the same way that an animal which is to be slaughtered is adorned with flowers. It signalled our death in the *New Art Examiner* as we could no longer contribute as writers. Even with this caveat it remains true that many excellent and valuable articles were published, but the orbit became restricted. So the *New Art Examiner* was born as a



resistance to censorship and it died when it exercised censorship.

As a matter of interest aa 1975 article in *The Essential New Art Examiner* written by Jane Addams Allen and myself entitled *The Tradition* was the same article that was lifted three days before publishing by *Art News* and later accepted by *Studio International*. I do

not think the editors of *The Essential New Art Examiner* realised that this article was such a *cause célèbre*. Its content is sane and not destructive. Today it causes no anxiety.

I have to be careful here as I do not want to be seen as whining. The *New Art Examiner*, in spite of its hardships, gave us a dynamic life and a little footnote in history. Occasionally, I am invited to give lectures, even if sometimes for no money. I wish to avoid seeming to be the presence of an oldie trying to keep in the spotlight after his time has passed. I would like to quote from Nelson Algren again – his words are better than mine:

“Make the *Tribune* bestseller list and the friends of American writers the friends of literature, the friends of Shakespeare and the friends of Frank Harris will be tugging at your elbow, twittering down your collar, coyly slipping a little olive into your Martini, or drooling flatly into your beer with a droll sort of flattery and the cheaper sort of praise, the grade reserved strictly for proven winners. But God help if you are a loser and unproven to boot, bushy tails will stone your name.”

Victoria Waxman has made sure we have not made the *Tribune* list.

Times have changed and online culture as a new element in our lives. However personally, I do not think it will eliminate serious print culture. A book or a magazine is an object that has a physical presence. It is not fugitive. A magazine or book has an immediate presence when on the bookshelf.

If the *New Art Examiner* is to return it will have to have an online site. I may have a site donated in England. At the heart will be the community of the office working together to collect information, discuss information, share networks, and have a place for writers to visit and above all gossip. Even if the *New Art Examiner* produces only 4 to 6 issues a year it will be a start. Here, I would like to say with emphasis that the *New Art Examiner* did not claim authority other than a collective of writers of authority. It was also quite happy to give equal space to all. In this it was democratic. Not that many availed themselves of this opportunity to do so. Roger Brown did once. He called me ‘fat filth.’ We printed his letter.

Artists, even if not original, are more important than collectors. Artists make art, collectors arrive after the art is made, but I have met some collectors whose company is preferable to some artists.

The system correctly assumes there is a permanent supply of artists just like oil. Oil will run out but artists will not, therefore they have no value. BFAs and-

MFAs are an attempt to gain value. They are the inflow that is needed to feed the art machine to make sausages of cultural products – as Marcel Duchamp implied with readymades – which, if well package, adding a little spice of publicity will sell.

If there is to be a new *New Art Examiner* it will have to avoid xenophobia and not be afraid of the local provincial power base. I dream of a *New Art Examiner* in part like the old one – Without Fear Or Favour – that will have roots in Chicago but would deal with the wider world of contemporary art in which a new critical language can be found which will be able to review an artist showing anywhere and that will make sense to a reader living far from the exhibition. This is a tall order. Chicago is so retarded that there is not even a working archive of the *New Art Examiner* in place. Therefore future scholarship and research is denied

I want to conclude with the words of the only artist in Chicago who has had a street named after him.

“Where have all the people gone? Electronic shadows are former cells watching video screens, ignoring the right of refusal ... Perception, all that we experience through our sensory apparatus, is being affected by the rapid acceleration of media related technology. Our view of the world is changing as the global environment expands through media accessibility and the information reservoir gets deeper. My belief is that these elements (good or bad) have woven their way into the collective fabric of our lives. I also believe that any artist always works within the context and conditions that are indigenous to his or her own time and, in doing so, reflects the energy, temperament and attitudes of that climate. Paint may seem like an outmoded medium but the human imagination is endless. (Ed Paschke – Speakeasy February 1981.)

If the imagination can be fired again and if there is enough momentum I would like to help out. I still have a network of active art thinkers who respond to a call from the *New Art Examiner* is writing for the *New Art Examiner* is considered prestigious. I can help out with my experience and knowledge of publishing. I cannot lead it. It has to be driven by a new generation.



# Art and Taste in Kanaal

Sam Vangheluwe

“MORE LIGHT!”

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE’S LAST WORDS

Taste is just about the last category that comes to my mind when I think of art (beauty being the very last). And good taste, I abhor. When confronted with it off-guard, I cringe. I eschew it. Didn’t Fernando Pessoa say that there is nothing as distasteful as a tastefully decorated interior? However, like it or not, I reckon good taste is Axel Vervoordt’s very trademark. Exceedingly good taste.

Axel Vervoordt is internationally renowned as interior designer to the well-heeled. I gather that Sting, Kanye West (Ye) and Robert De Niro are among his clients. He runs galleries in Hong Kong and Wijnegem, Belgium. As the latter is only a stone’s throw away from my home – within easy cycling range – I decided to give Hong Kong a miss for now. And, incidentally, I would like to point out that no stones were thrown in this undertaking.

The Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation and the Axel Vervoordt Gallery are situated in Kanaal, a redeveloped industrial site along the Albert Canal, 15 min-

utes east from Antwerp. It comprises residential buildings, offices, gardens and galleries.

In this to Belgian standards, sparsely built-up area, the towering silos and apartment blocks loom from afar, like a rocky outcrop. Upon entering the site, one feels one is setting foot in a tiny city, or a futuristic hamlet. Contrasting with the concrete high-rise are undulating verdant alleys with rough, uneven concrete pathways meandering through them. Very beautiful, very tasteful, Japanese-like. Bura-bura.

A badge, to be obtained from reception, allows entry to the art rooms/buildings. I only discovered this after half an hour or so of straying aimlessly. This, combined with my constitutional resistance to museal instructions, made the whole experience a tad labyrinthine. Bura-bura.

The permanent exhibits are in the main accessed via light locks: using your badge, you open a door and are met with near complete darkness. Venture on, gingerly probe the murk, and eventually you reach a dimly lit space, where an artist has dramatically installed his/her work. I couldn’t help being reminded of the Haunted House in the fairgrounds of my



A view of the Kanaal site

*Photography: Jan Liégeois (courtesy: Axel Vervoordt Company)*



*Tsujimura Shiro: Pots in the Terrace Gallery,  
(courtesy: Axel Vervoordt Company)*

youth. Indeed, the gallery's brochure itself speaks of 'a dark labyrinth.' An entire building is dedicated to Anish Kapoor's ginormous steel dome ('At the Edge of the World', 1998), only moderately smaller than the building itself. A substantial merry-go-round would fit under it. I found it oppressive. As in a Haunted House ride, one feels physically and emotionally challenged, yet at the same time, somehow cheated.

More or less the same with James Turrell ('Red Shift,' 1995). In inky blackness, you grope your way around a few corners and you are finally met with an oblong of faint reddish light. This installation has the merit of inviting contemplation. However, I found the ambience so thoroughly oppressive – I was gasping for air and light – that I soon crept toward the exit at breakneck speed.

A similar sustained obscurity in the Henro/Ma-Ka halls. A few skylights bored through a thick concrete ceiling, in conjunction with walls painted black, make it impossible to, well, see what is exhibited. Which is all the more regrettable, since as the flyer mentions, a number of paintings were present, ap-

parently. Notably, some by the undervalued Jef Verheyen. A sepulchral atmosphere.

Into the light again. The grain silos. Walking in between them is a overwhelming experience, particularly when you look up: it is vertiginous (the sale price of the apartments on the top floors makes your eyes water as well). The ground floors of the silos have been refurbished into exhibition, or rather installation spaces. Here too, darkness rules. One proceeds from one metal door to the next, like a bank-robber opening a series of vaults. Once inside, the door closes behind you with a thud. What is inside I found underwhelming, on the whole. The objects/installations you encounter, once your gaze is accustomed to the relative obscurity, appear vacuous. The explanatory text you meet on your way out is trite. I mostly fail to see any organic relation between the physical installation and its purported significance. Especially if it claims to be of a social/political/ecological nature.

As interior designers, Axel Vervoordt & family cannot but be aware of the peril of subsuming works of art within the category of (tasteful) decorative ob-

jects (just as the latter are exhibited as objets d'art). A painting (for example), is not an adornment. Knowing this, many artists superimpose an intellectual cause on their work, attribute social/political meaning to it. Misguidedly, in my very personal and wayward opinion. The Vervoordts are experts in good taste. Are they trying to stave off accusations of superficiality, by exhibiting *art engagé* (art with a cause)?

Temporary exhibitions are shown in the Patio Gallery and the Terrace Gallery. The former being the most beautiful space of the whole site: white walls and zenithal light. That's it. No pot plant, no table with receptionist and ballpoint pen on a chain. The Terrace Gallery is a fine space, but the dark walls I do not like.

Of the previous exhibitions I saw, Michel Mouffe impressed me the least. His mainly monochrome paintings engage for a short while, and then you start wondering what the use is of the central bulge in each canvas. Must be missing something. Seems to me like the kind of painting that is easily welcomed into interiors such as the heart-rendingly tasteful Vervoordt spaces. They would effortlessly slot into the elaborated décor. Another kettle of fish were the paintings by Angel Vergara (*Les belles idées reçues* – The Beautiful Received Ideas). They engage. By themselves. However, the back-story does nothing for me. Socially/culturally woke as it may be, the fact they were initiated in children's workshops and on the streets of Marseilles, then 'finished' in his studio in Brussels, is, frankly, irrelevant. The accompanying flyer invites the attentive viewer to catch glimpses of the initial stages. Indeed, I witnessed visitors eagerly trying to detect the children's naïve doodles in the rich fabric of these predominantly non-figurative works, at close range. While this is not quite a capital sin, in my view it is not the way to contemplate paintings, especially when the dimensions of the works as well as the ample space, invite the visitor to contemplate from a distance.

Deserving nothing less than superlatives is the pottery of Tsujimura Shiro (°Nara, 1947). His pots instantly bring to mind the *shin-gyo-so* categories of Eastern aesthetics, expanded upon recently by Alex Kerr. Shin being formal, gyo semi-formal, and so informal. In Asian pottery this corresponds to: Chinese porcelain (shin); Korean ceramics (gyo); and Japanese earthenware (so). Or, identifying ceramics by the sound they emit when tapped: "ting" – "clink" – "clunk". Tsujimura's pots are every inch so – "clunk". They are simplicity embodied. Yet one never tires from contemplating them. When set up in a group (as some were in the Terrace Gallery), they be-



*Angel Vergara: Painting, in the Terrace Gallery  
(courtesy Axel Vervoordt Company)*

gin to interact, to acquire even more personality. One can perfectly imagine sharing one's life with them. They may be intensely relished by the champions of good taste, but they reach far beyond that. Tsujimura's pottery, as all true art, embraces its proper share of tragic. It may, and indeed sometimes does fail: see the pots that collapsed partly or totally during (or before?) the firing in the kiln. These vessels are simultaneously simple utensil, sculpture, painting (the potter started out as a painter), and, if you like, installation. As the curator of Japanese pottery Cora Würmell put it, Tsujimura's pots are "timeless, authentic works that draw their powerful charisma from the primal forces inherent in nature." In conclusion: despite my misgivings concerning taste, and my dislike of art (painting) being displayed in ceremonious darkness, ultimately, on the whole, I walk away from Kanaal with a positive sentiment. Was I overpowered by the architecture, the layout? Won over by vicarious gratitude for so much attention and space dedicated to art? Somehow, I cannot help looking forward to new exhibitions. If only there was a bit more light.

*Axel Vervoordt Antwerp,  
Kanaal, Stokerijstraat 19, 110 Wijnegem, Belgium*

*Axel Vervoordt Hong Kong,  
21F, Coda Designer Centre, 62, Wong Chuk Hang Road, Entrance via Yip Fat Street (next to Ovolo Hotel), Hong Kong*

*www.axel-vervoordt.com*

# Nothing is Destroyed Anymore, Merely Commodified

Pablo Halguera

There is a famous passage in Karl Marx's *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (Foundations of a Critique of Political Economy) – an unpublished manuscript of notes-to-self that Marx made over the course of writing *Das Kapital* – where the German philosopher uses piano makers and piano players to make a point about labor:

'Is it not crazy, asks Mr. Senior, that the piano maker is a productive worker, but not the piano player, although obviously the piano would be absurd without the piano player? But this is exactly the case. The piano maker reproduces capital, the pianist only ex-

changes his labour for revenue. But doesn't the pianist produce music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even, to a certain extent, produce the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces something; but that does not make it productive labour in the economic sense; no more than the labour of the madman who produces delusions is productive.'

With this little metaphor of political economy, Marx is illustrating the argument that the labor of art is in essence an unproductive activity (meaning in an economic, not aesthetic sense), and it only becomes productive when it is commodified by other forces



The Memorial to the sadistic Holocaust Destruction of millions of Our Ancient Arawak-Taino-Latinex Ancestors begun in 1492 by Columbus and his mission to, with the Conquistadores, Colonize and deliver to Spain the wealth of the New World no matter the human cost to the New World's less than human Aborigine inhabitants (2019-20) *Mixed media*  
Collection of El Museo del Barrio, New York. Gift of the artist



*Raphael Montañez Ortiz and accomplice destroying a piano during the Destruction In Art Symposium, London, 1966.*

(e.g., a gallery or a publishing house, etc.). According to Marx, ‘Labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite (that is, capital).’

I have often thought about this passage, and thought of it again last night while looking at the work of Raphael Montañez-Ortiz, who is being deservedly recognized at El Museo del Barrio in New York with a full-scale retrospective. Montañez-Ortiz, who is probably the only living artist who has founded a museum in New York City (namely, El Museo itself), is famous for his piano-destruction performances. Montañez-Ortiz was in dialogue with Fluxus and a leading proponent of the Destruction Art Movement. He gained international notoriety during the 1966 *Destruction in Art* symposium in London, organized by artist Gustav Metzger, which included Montañez-Ortiz’s piano-destruction concerts.

As someone who came from a family of classical musicians, I have long been fascinated myself by the fascination that Fluxus artists had with classical instruments, particularly violins and cellos (see Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman), their overall appropriation of the chamber music concert format (knowing that their ironic gestures were more of a form of critique of bourgeois culture and high art and the formality that comes with it), but most particularly with the practice of piano destruction (which probably is a legacy of John Cage’s various piano interventions).

All of which also makes me think that while celebrating the work of these Fluxus artists it becomes incumbent upon us to also assess the current state of destructivism in art.

Neo-destructivism is not doing so well these days. I

remember a few years ago an artist within the orbit of my acquaintances who, in true *enfant terrible* mode, decided to organize a book-burning performance. It mostly was met with amusement and perplexity. A few months afterward, while talking about it with a group of artist friends, a well-known artist in the group said, after a pause: “come to think of it, that piece is total bullshit.” The implication was that, at a time where post-conceptual work is fully enveloped by commodification and the market, even acts of destruction become quickly commodified in themselves and the misbehavior only serves to fulfil the expected requirements needed for the symbolic capital of the work to accumulate and eventually be repackaged as commodity – be it as a video, a photo, or a new work. If the act of destroying something is commodified, are we truly destroying something or are we helping to affirm the status quo?

Visiting Montañez Ortiz’s retrospective, I reflected on how, in some respects, the lesson of Destructivist Art was learned poorly by many of us, the subsequent generations of artists. Mainly, Destruction Art was not a nihilist act, but a post-war artistic position that saw the destruction not as an end in itself but as a strategy of transformation and even transcendence. As the artist himself writes in his Destructivist manifesto, “It is therefore not difficult to comprehend how as a mattress or other man-made object is released from and transcends its logically determined form through destruction, an artist, led by associations and experiences resulting from his destruction of the man-made objects, is also released from and transcends his logical self.”



Children of Treblinka (1962)

*Paper, earth, burnt shoes, nails, black paint on wood backing*

*Collection of El Museo del Barrio, New York. Gift of Dr. Robert Schwartz and Mrs. Diane Schwartz*

The full spirit and meaning of this sentence might only be fully understood by looking at the scope of Montañez's career. The destroyed objects did not disappear but instead became new, compelling artworks (the deconstructed furniture pieces on view in the exhibition are my personal favorite). And perhaps Montañez's greatest work of all was the foundation of El Museo del Barrio. Such endeavor, which certainly was motivated by upending the status quo, could not have come but from the desire to build, to create something new. His is a career full of hopefulness.

So, destruction does not always have to be a nihilist act, and the implicit irony of the gesture might even be generative. An example that comes to mind involved a group of artist friends who worked in the early 2000s as a curatorial/artist collective, Laboratorio 060.

Brazilian artist Ricardo Basbaum participated in Documenta 12 (2007) by presenting one of his now best-known works, *Would You Like to Participate in an Artistic Experience?* The project consists in sending groups of people a kind of strange-shaped, tin bathtub-like object with a hole in the middle and inviting them to do something with it. As Javier Toscano, one of the members of the collective told me, "We were very interested in the uselessness of the object, and instead of coming up with a use for it, we decided to embrace its uselessness." The collective thus decided to try to destroy the object, something that turned out more difficult than initially appeared. "We shot at it, we had a Flamenco dancer dance on top of it onstage, we threw it onto a ditch." Then the collective decided to bring the object to Tultepec, a small town in the outskirts of Mexico City known for its fireworks business, which as one can imagine is a rather unsafe occupation (I remember at the time Javier telling me about the family who they hired to explode the piece, and how some of them were eerily missing various eyes and fingers). Finally, Javier continues, "we took it to a scrap metal dealer so that he would compact the object. In the end it 'acquired' an unidentifiable form, equally useless, but that in its materiality carried all the register of these actions. In the end the artistic experience consisted in turning the object into an excuse of a destructive act, where we created something by nullifying the object."

By now you might have been wondering why I have not brought back Marx and the piano maker passage into this thread of thought.

In 2011 I had the opportunity to help organize a performance by the famous artist Ben Vautier at MoMA, where he presented a Fluxus concert. Many old Flux-

us artist friends arrived and in different moments were spontaneously invited onstage to perform alongside Ben. The program culminated in Ben Patterson's exhilarating *Paper Piece* (1960) consisting of having the audience unroll two giant rolls of paper while a very loud Tango was being played. Another key component of the concert consisted in bringing onstage an upright piano that was methodically "destroyed" by Ben and others, by nailing its keys (and thus rendering it useless) and painting it white. After the performance, the piano was left at the museum and thanks to it being donated by the artist it is now part of MoMA's collection (I also remember that at the end of the performance Ben instructed assistants to quickly take away all the other props he had used during the concert, ostensibly, I thought, to prevent the public from grabbing and keeping them as potential valuable souvenirs/works).

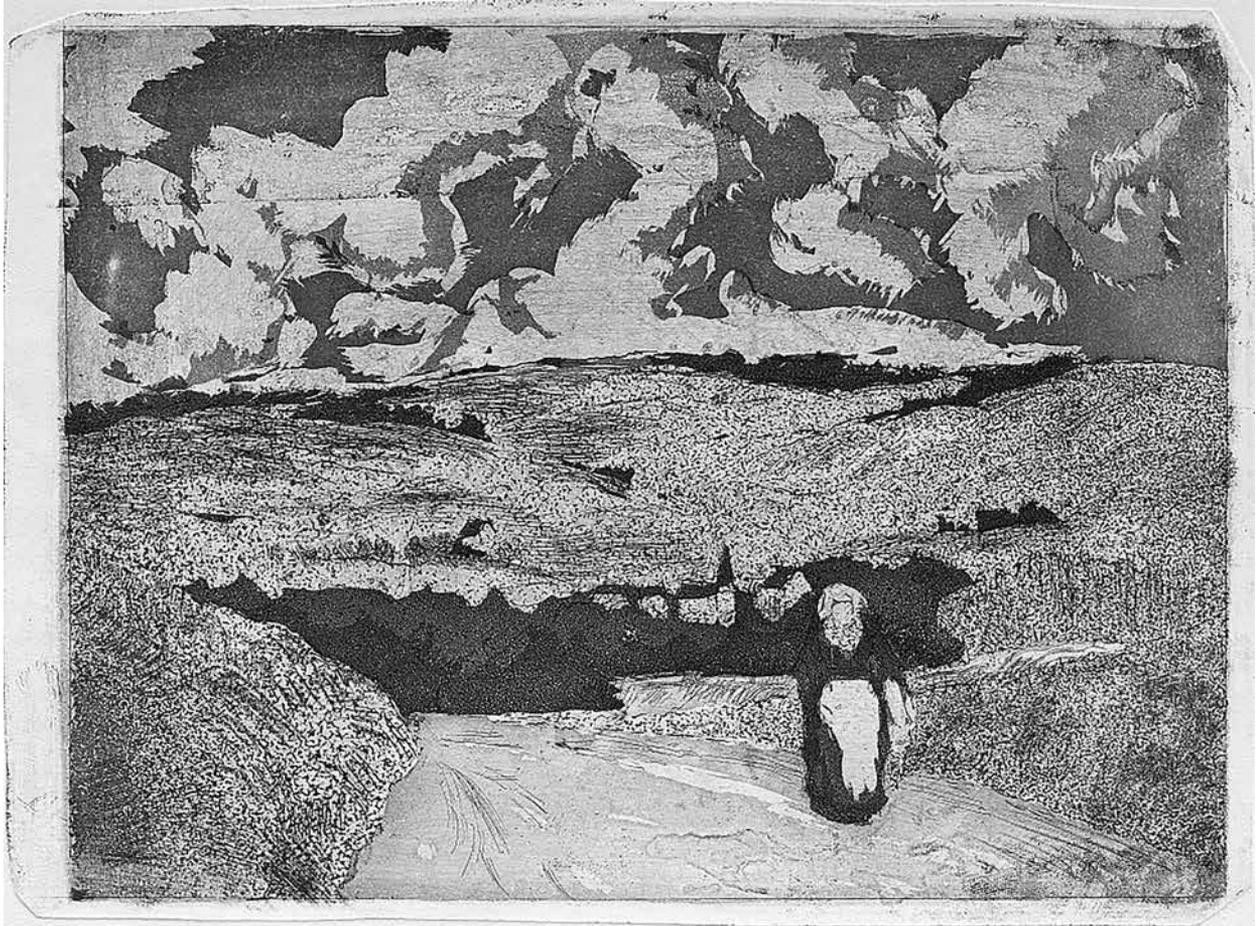
I wonder what Marx might have said about this performative action and subsequent transformation of the piano from instrument to artwork. Is the destruction of a piano an example of unproductive labor, or is the fact that an otherwise average and not too valuable object (an old upright piano) that is destroyed then becomes a valuable object (a Fluxus work in MoMA's collection) a refutation of the idea that it is the performer, and not the piano maker, the one who truly produces capital?

If Karl Marx, had lived in London not in the 1850s but in the 1960s, and had attended one of Raphael Montañez Ortiz's piano destruction concerts, I have to wonder if he might – just might – have for a moment reconsidered his ideas around artistic labor as unproductive. And he might have even approved of the artist's work: Marxist economist Joseph Schumpeter once wrote about 'Creative Destruction' (schöpferische Zerstörung), a concept partially derived from Marx's works including the *Gundrisse*. Schumpeter describes the concept as a "process of industrial mutation that continuously revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one."

I can't help but see this concept activated in the work of Montañez Ortiz, given that for all the wreckage he caused, he also yielded so much new, and significant, art.

# The Father of Impressionism

Annie Markovich



The Woman on the Road (1879)

*This is one of Pissarro's most painterly prints. Aquatint with etching and drypoint on paper 15.4 × 20.8 cm (plate); 24.6 × 34.5 cm (sheet) Presented by the Pissarro Family, 1952*

Thanks to the generosity of Esther Pissarro, the widow of Camille's eldest son, Lucien, and that of their daughter Orovida, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford is home for the Pissarro family archive of paintings, drawings and prints. The exhibition at the Ashmolean was filled with a large group of viewers eager to stand in front of a Pissarro.

Pissarro was called the Father of Impressionism by Cezanne because he nurtured painters and encouraged freedom of expression in which they could discover their own voice, no matter what. This is a valuable lesson for every artist. Despite petty criticism during the 19th-century in France, Pissarro fervently and faithfully stuck with painting as an honourable, worthy way of life.

Curators have added paintings and drawings of Pissarro's friends including Cezanne, Renoir, Manet, Sisley, Seurat and Degas. These relationships influenced each other and provided a creative stimulus. Before Pissarro's paintings I am speechless. I haven't changed my mind about Pissarro ever since I first met him looking at his paintings in the Art Institute of Chicago decades ago. I realised at the time he was not a star artist like his colleagues Monet, van Gogh, Degas or Cezanne. Perhaps he felt comfortable in the background without the fanfare and noise of fame. Maybe he knew the price of fame. At any rate he continued to paint all his life well into his 80s, not the bright brush pearlescent fluorescent colours of Monet but the subtle ever-changing hues of fall, win-



The Quarry (c.1875)  
Private collection, on long-term loan to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.  
Oil on canvas 58 × 72.5 cm Stamped C.P. Rudolph Staechelin.

ter, late summer and early spring when the tonality is less loud than coloratura.

In the *The Quarry*, every inch of the canvas is important. There is a story here and it is told with masterly attention to the visual language. One of the hardest challenges to tackle in painting is treating the entire picture at once, it's as if the artist would be painting everything on the canvas simultaneously and yet, if I look at works of art that have influenced generations of artists throughout space and time, it is just this simple feature that stands out.

Pissarro painted outdoors and indoors, preferring outdoor *plein air*. He experiments with Seurat in pointillism. Although the technique was created to allow greater luminosity, Pissarro discovered the technique limited his ability to express sensation felt in front of the subject as it is a painstakingly tedious technique. Pissarro taught and encouraged each of his six children, much to anxiety of their mother Julie, who hoped for income-producing careers for

the children. One of the most poignant paintings in the show is a portrait of his daughter Minette painted while she was terminally ill. The painting of Minette is left unfinished. The public prefers eye-catching demonstrative art, but in this work the still quiet voice of Pissarro preserves our understanding of what it means to be true to oneself in expression, whatever that may take in whatever form that may shape. A bouquet of pink peonies startles in its simplicity. This painting requires careful observation. The bold application of dark green paint for the leaves makes the definition look spontaneous, and so lovely it appears easy.

We are living in an unprecedentedly chaotic (at least for this generation), place in history when life feels, to say the least, out of balance and unpredictable and out of sync, without a natural rhythm. To enter a museum sans mask and look at these Pissarros feels like a visual, emotional and spiritual gift.

# Federico Fellini: Painting in Film, Painting on Film

Giacomo Tagliani

Is it still possible to say something new and thought-provoking about Federico Fellini? Some scholars have recently addressed this challenge by proposing new interpretations of the Italian director's work, looking at different aspects – in some cases, previously neglected – of his heterogeneous and vast universe.

Hava Aldouby is one of those who have undertaken and succeeded in this task; her book explores the relationship between cinema and painting in the so-called middle period of Fellini's career, roughly between 1965 and 1980, which is distinguished by a marked painterly slant. These works and their particular intermedial characterization, Aldouby argues, questions on the one hand the classical periodization of Fellini's entire oeuvre, and, on the other hand, a normative approach – by both theoreticians and directors – to the cinema/painting nexus.

The book opens with a dense introduction devoted to framing the theoretical and methodological ground and to pointing out the polemical targets of the inquiry. From the very beginning, the author states the inadequacy of contemporary theory in explaining 'Fellini's unique mode of transmedialization', concealed by the reputation as an untaught, child genius, and a lover of popular comic strips that he himself fostered during his entire life. On the contrary, as his private library proves, he was well aware of the cultural and intellectual trends in those years, in particular French structuralist and post-structuralist contexts: the rich intertextual layering of his films is evidence of his closeness to such theoretical issues.

Combining a post-structuralist foreground (Barthes, Kristeva) with a phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack), Aldouby proposes an idea of reading between the dialogue, which is almost political, blurring the limits between expressive forms and opening interpretation to of 'raw meaning' referenced by the concept of *sémiotique*, 'a non-verbal mode of communication postulated by Julia Kristeva as articulating instinctual drives and primal sen-



sations'. This conclusion leads to the third main axis (after cinema and painting) of the inquiry, that is, the role played by Jungian literature's rich visual imagery in inducing Fellini to consider pictures as an effective mode of communication, deeply rooted in the human being's unconscious, able to disclose the primordial structure of encounter with the world.

In Fellini's middle period, painting seems to discharge an anti-authoritarian function, according to his emphasis on plurality and complexity as forms of resistance, as well as to assume 'the role of origin, or core of realness whence the experience of meanings originates', preserving a balanced tension between postmodernist issues and a romantic-like global project.

The four chapters into which the book is divided cover four different films, showing from time to time



a specific aspect of this relationship. The first chapter is devoted to *Giulietta Degli Spiriti* (1965), in which, for the first time in Fellini's work, 'a new visual idiom emerges, revealing a nascent reliance on painting as potent catalyst of meaning, or rather of non-verbal experience'. Through a sophisticated film philology, Aldouby untangles the symbolist, inter-textual plot that infuses the dialogue, convincingly showing the connections between the embedded or concealed specific art-historical quotations and the anti-fascist discourse developed by narration.

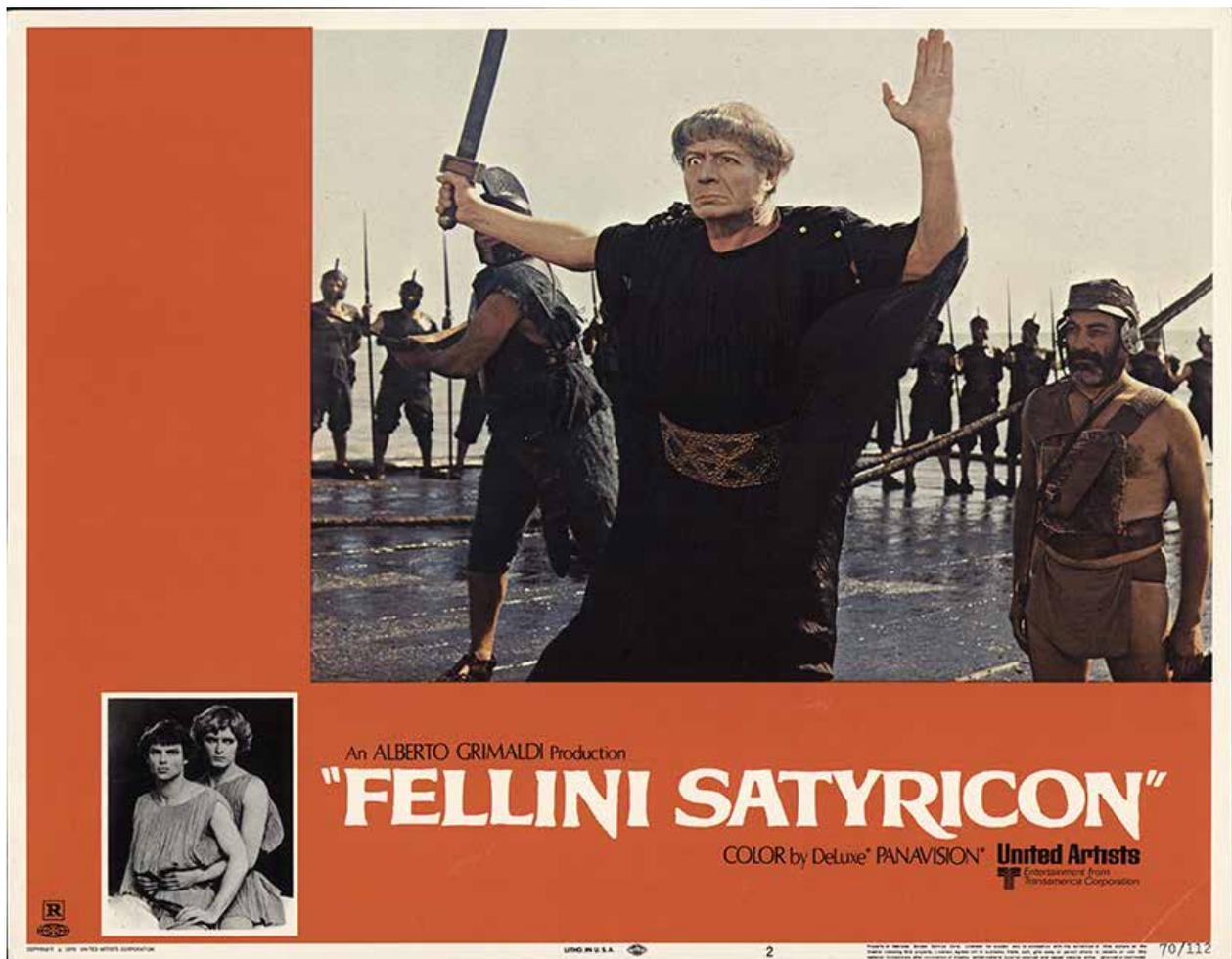
In chapter two, dedicated to *Toby Dammit* (1968), Fellini's 'inter-textual fabric' moves a step further. Here the reading between the dialogue dimension primarily serves to shape a declaration of poetics encompassing both the work of the Italian director and a broad global cultural dimension. Two converging lines emerge from the film: on the one hand, the motif of the 'butchered meat,' which creates a resonance between Rembrandt and Francis Bacon; on the other hand, the 'young girl's diabolical sneer,' which traces an axis connecting Velazquez, Picasso and Bacon again. In both cases, the comparison with Pasolini's work of the same period effectively shows the two different approaches to the cinema/painting nexus.

The third chapter – perhaps the least convincing of the entire book – is devoted to Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969). The grotesque tonality here assigned to Roman antiquity serves more as a critique of the ideal of *Romanità* pursued during the fascist period than as a reflection about late 1960s society. Once again, the analysis of the art-historical inter-text contributes to support this reading. Unfortunately, the dense plot created by the several and heterogeneous hidden quotations, which goes from Byzantine art to Klimt, from Bruegel to Picasso and Clerici, seems not to be reconstructed in a sufficiently organic scheme to allow an interpretation not limited to a superficial critique of a postmodernist aesthetics.

*Il Casanova di Federico Fellini* (1976) concludes the journey through Fellini's middle period. Aldouby's analysis casts a new light on the film, introducing an original interpretation that reconnects the subject to the reality, thus contrasting with the postmodernist hero inhabiting a world that has become image conscious. Even though at first glance the quotations from De Chirico seem to pursue this very direction, the interpolations with Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* and Clerici's *Latitude Böcklin* are the primary tool through which cinema succeeds in restating its 'deep and indissoluble link with the romantic'.

In her book, Aldouby proves the effectiveness of a

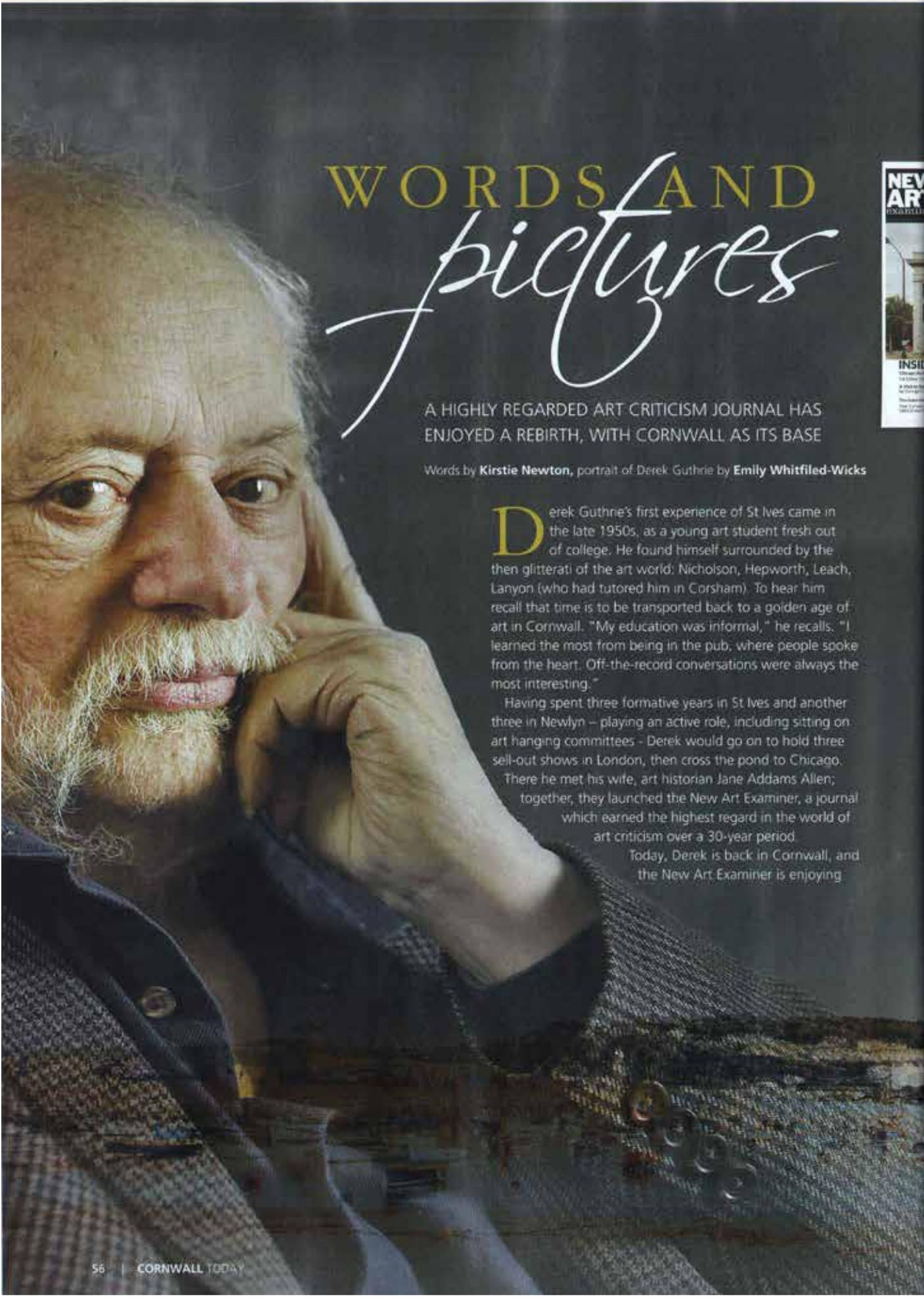




close textual analysis of cultural objects, an essential means to chart new territories even where nothing new looked possible; Fellini's work well represents such a case. In spite of this, a few suggestions could be proposed, mainly concerning Mitchell's notion of 'ekphrastic fear,' ascribed to those directors classically involved in a 'painted cinema,' such as Pasolini, Godard, Greenaway. Indeed, the alleged superiority of cinema over painting, according to Frederic Jameson's hypothesis which Aldouby refers to, that their films would state, becomes debatable. Furthermore, the opposition between a 'stiff structuralism' and a revolutionary poststructuralism may have seemed sound reasoning in the late 1960s, but it may have less legitimacy nowadays, at least after the works of the scholars of the so called 'school of Paris,' gathered around the Center of Research on the Arts and the Language at the EHESS during the 1980s. These scholars have, in addition, extensively worked on an 'analytical iconology' (Damisch, Marin Arasse), combining psychoanalytical instances and textual analysis, which could be of some interest for Aldouby's approach.

In conclusion, through this interdisciplinary methodological framework and thanks to the clarity of her discourse, Aldouby's work contributes to the revitalization of the classical field of inquiry about cinema and painting, addressing both scholars in the broad domain of visual studies, and cinephiles looking for a fresh gaze on Fellini's oeuvre. But most of all she also sketches a potential research ground for a challenging comparative analysis of one of the most important 'couple' in the history of cinema: Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini. In the near future someone may well choose to fulfil this task.

*Federico Fellini: Painting in Film, Painting on Film by Hava Aldouby. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. pp. 186. 651 Annali d'italianistica. Volume 32 (2014). Italian Bookshelf Twentieth And Twenty-First Centuries: Literature.*

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with a white beard and mustache, resting his chin on his hand. He is wearing a dark, textured jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

# WORDS AND *pictures*

A HIGHLY REGARDED ART CRITICISM JOURNAL HAS ENJOYED A REBIRTH, WITH CORNWALL AS ITS BASE

Words by **Kirstie Newton**, portrait of Derek Guthrie by **Emily Whitfield-Wicks**

**D**erek Guthrie's first experience of St Ives came in the late 1950s, as a young art student fresh out of college. He found himself surrounded by the then glitterati of the art world: Nicholson, Hepworth, Leach, Lanyon (who had tutored him in Corsham). To hear him recall that time is to be transported back to a golden age of art in Cornwall. "My education was informal," he recalls. "I learned the most from being in the pub, where people spoke from the heart. Off-the-record conversations were always the most interesting."

Having spent three formative years in St Ives and another three in Newlyn – playing an active role, including sitting on art hanging committees – Derek would go on to hold three sell-out shows in London, then cross the pond to Chicago.

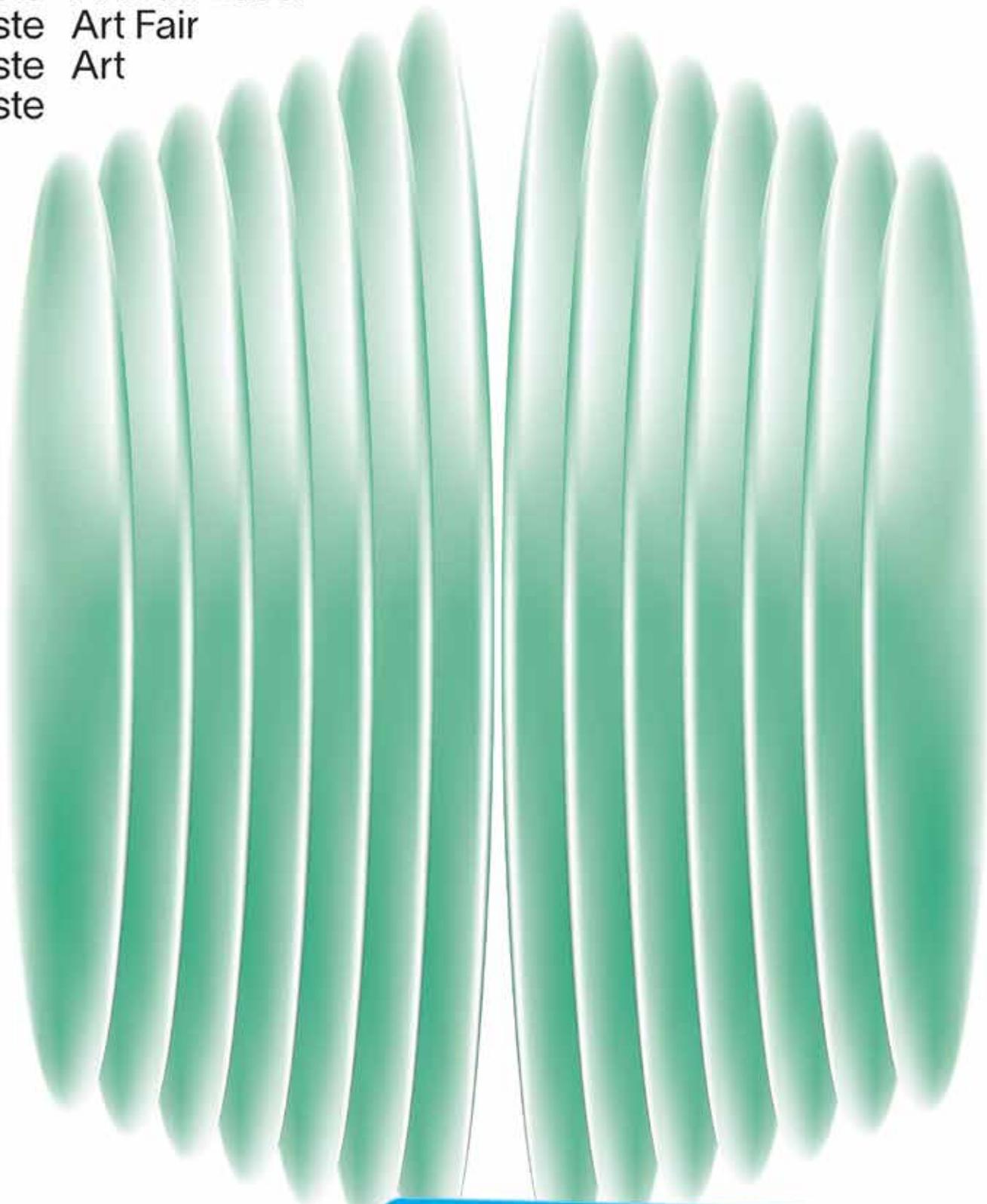
There he met his wife, art historian Jane Addams Allen; together, they launched the *New Art Examiner*, a journal which earned the highest regard in the world of art criticism over a 30-year period.

Today, Derek is back in Cornwall, and the *New Art Examiner* is enjoying



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