



Mystic Future: a collaboration by Janet Trierweiler & Matthew Schaefer

Wilmette *Arts*
Guild

Contemporary Art

March, 2014



When is Modern? When is Contemporary Art?

A frame of reference by Cassandra Philida Six



The Fifer
by Edouard Manet

Most people think of Modern Art as a slurry composed of Impressionism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Cubism and lots of other "isms" that Jansen's History of Art has condensed into three categories Expression, Abstraction and Fantasy to cover emotional statements, formal structure and the labyrinth of the mind, respectively. All of this falls under the heading of "Modernism" which gives the artist "a mission" to create something new and define, if not influence, the meaning of his time.

When is "Modern"? The Impressionists were confounding people in 1860s! Art Nouveau in the 1890s! More than a century ago! Matisse created the "Joy of Life" in 1905. Roualt, Nolde, Kokoshka's great works were created in the early 1900's, a century ago! Kandinsky died in

1944 before World War II had even ended. Picasso's Guernica was exhibited in 1937 capturing the Spanish Civil War. 1850s seem more than a century away from 1950s when Edward Hopper, Jasper Johns and Larry Rivers were "defining the meaning of their time." When Dubuffet and De Kooning were demonizing the female figure and the conven-



Les Nymphéas, Monet 1919

tional definition of grace, Dubuffet said for all who followed, "Look to my work as an enterprise for the rehabilitation of scorned values and a work of their ardent celebration." The violent "furious energy of process." of Jackson Pollock and abstract expressionism generally was a conscious rebuke to the Mom, apple pie and Peter Pan collars of the 1950s but THAT was the 1950s. Those most "modern" of sentiments and artistic configurations were created over sixty years ago!

In the 1960's the iconic work by Charles Demuth, I Saw

The Figure 5 In Gold (1928) was so familiar that Robert Indiana appropriated it in 1963 and made a sensation! So we arrive at the art created a "lifetime" ago...Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Kienholz . The Rothko Chapel in Houston, whose admirers associate it with "trance-like rapture" was built with Barnett Newman's Broken Obelisk (1963-



Broken Obelisk by Barnett Newman

1967) in the garden... over a half century ago. Ellsworth Kelly's edges were admired for being hard in Color Field paintings, the "patron saint" of Pop Art was Marcel Duchamp who doubles as the patron saint of 1970's Conceptual Art, which is still developing. Judy Pfaff's Dragons was installed in the 1981 Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. It seems so fresh and new but it was 32 years ago. We have Christos "Happenings", Nevelson and Oldenburg in the 1960s and so many more. The information explosion that the internet and computers brings all this to our attention with an immediacy that belies the decades.



Dragons by Judy Pfaff
an installation at The Whitney, 1981

Alexander Calder (1898-1976), Joan Miro, (1893-1983) and M.C Escher (1898-1972) had long and artistically productive lives, but their creative lives were finished thirty or forty years ago. We have to define them as "modern" because all these great artists and the many that were not mentioned radically changed the way we perceived our world and what we judged as ART.

They are not Contemporary.... That means NOW or VERY RECENTLY, perhaps no older than the viewer. The 21st Century has basketballs in fishtanks, stuffed zebras and sharks, plastics and more plastics, bare white rooms with huge black smudges on canvas. "less is more" "de-structure everything that was" or from WB Yeats expressing the weltschmerz of our times:

"Now that the ladders are gone, I must lie down where all the ladders start In the foul rag-and-bone shop of my heart."

Photography is the unsung hero of modern art. Having an accurate image of reality freed the artists to present their impressions, abstractions and fantasies from "that foul rag -and- bone shop." We know what our great, grandparents and their world looked like. We don't need, although we



Piet Mondrian: Tableau no. 2 / Composition no. V, 1914

may still desire, a realistic oil painting because we have a photograph. Actually we even know what their parents looked like, although it is very faded. Anyone who cares can know a great deal about history and facts of the past because someone took a picture of it. Photography established itself as an art rather than a tool in the 20th century. 21st century technologies have erased time and space and turned aesthetics, photography and all the arts upside down and expanded the parameters to infinity. Have you ever seen a halogram? Modern art is art since the 1860's. Contemporary reflects NOW. "Now" is expanding so rapidly that it is gone before we noticed.

*** Jansen's History of Art has an extensive Illustrated Time Chart. Literature, Politics, Science etc, as it relates to ART. It is fascinating!

A Few of the Wilmette Arts Guild's Contemporary Artists



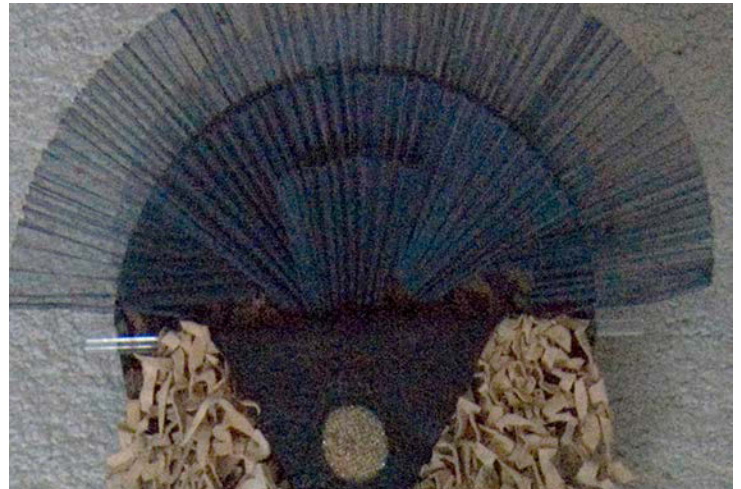
Force of a Thousand Hearts by Franco Muscarella



Blue Bird by Judith Edelman



Cocooning by Rita Price



"Air and Earth" by Shirley Engelstein



"Spring in Korean Mountains" by Hyang Sook Cho



"Corncobs of Chicago" by Howard Frank

For more information about the artists or articles in this issue go to www.wilmetteartsguild.org

Black Mountain College: The Womb of Twentieth Century American Arts

Gathered Bits by Julie Ressler

But between the vincible, who had surrendered to the public world, and the invincible, who would not, there were those who began to ask why they had given up, unable to take their submission as final, and yet not knowing how, or whether indeed, they might become artists once again...It was for these that Black Mountain was founded." John Andrew Rice, Founder Black Mountain College.

"The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning." Alfred North Whitehead *The Aims of Education*, 1929

If artists would dream a school, they would dream Black Mountain College in the North Carolina near Asheville which actually existed for two brief decades of utterly astounding productivity 1933-1957. All manner of experiments were brought forth and polished. Buckminster Fuller found intern Kenneth Snelson and his geodesic dome appeared. Anni Albers designed avant garde weavings and jewelry. Ruth Asawa came from being interned in US camp for the Japanese to produce incredible sculptures and went on to found many cultural organizations in San Francisco and serve on the California Arts Council. There are so many more! This shining interlude was the womb of Twentieth Century arts and poetry which came to explode onto the stage of the sixties and remains vital even until today.

Just a list of faculty and student names leaves us breathless at the tremendous number of cultural power sources who gathered there at that time. The Advisory Board was John Dewey, Walter Gropius, and Albert Einstein! Some of the collaborations were astounding. There was a theatrical of Eric Satie's *Ruse of the Medusa* (*La piége de Méduse*), arranged by John Cage: Buckminster Fuller as Baron Medusa, William Schrauger as Adolfo, Elaine de Kooning as Frisette, and Merce Cunningham as Jonas, "a costly mechanical monkey." Clemens Kalischer, photographer, recorded this. At this level who was the teacher and who was the student? There were poems published that were illustrated by Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly, just to mention two. There were fabulous photographs taken and collected by Hazel Larson Archer which is how we know the "who" and "when" of this, but photography was also coming into its own as an art form.

John Andrews Rice was its founder, beginning work in 1933. His new ideas included: the centrality of artistic experience to support learning in all disciplines and the value of experiential learning. He also enjoyed bringing in diverse visitors from other disciplines like May Sarton and Thornton Wilder. He criticized grades based on memorization, overreliance on *The Great Books*, and classroom attendance.

Josef and Anni Albers of the Bauhaus Movement followed him. They were refugees from Hitler's Germany "Let's begin from zero." Was the motto. The Buddhist call it "Beginners mind." This approach asks the artist to leave his "shoulds" and predictable results, be "new" be "what could be." Josef Albers, in particular, stressed the importance of a structured approach to experimentation. "His curriculum was founded around an understanding of the basics of form rather than precedent which enabled students to develop critical skills." 'Abstracting,' he wrote, 'is the essential foundation of the human spirit.'"

Albers successor was Charles Olson, a poet. In 1950 he published his seminal essay, "Projective Verse." He called for a poetry of "open field" composition to replace traditional closed poetic forms with an improvised form that "should reflect exactly the content of the poem." This form was to be based on the line, and each line was to be a unit of breath and of utterance. The content was to consist of "one perception immediately and directly (leading) to a fur-

ther perception". This essay was to become a primer for the Black Mountain poets. The unit of structure in the poem was reduced down to what could fit within an utterance. That became a distinctive style of poetic diction (e.g. "yr" for "your") The Black Mountain poets pursued the Beats and the Beats responded. Each made the other even more famous.

Thinkers, Artists and Scientists were looking for new paradigms, new expressions for their discontent with an increasingly structured and rigid world order. They needed the scope of using connections to new materials and ideas that science was bringing forth. WW I ("war to end all wars") and the Depression had sharply focused critical minds on the flaws inherent in our society. While the government passed laws and funded certain educational projects that "would be of use to the State," which lead to the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, John Dewey and others protested vehemently that education must be useful to the individual and that no one knew enough to predict what would be useful thirty or fifty years later... the life span of that individual. The changes were going to be too rapid and too profound. After WW II returning vets had quite enough of authoritarian living. They were disillusioned by and disgusted by what the Establishment had wrought. They wished to be free to experiment and learn as they chose. They needed to expand their approaches to art to encompass a world view that the war had foisted on them. They had seen the enemy and it was within us all.

The interdisciplinary aspect in which no form of creativity was superior to another, where weaving, painting, dance, music and invention were all encouraged led to lightning connections. Creatives in all fields could talk to each other! This led to an explosion of extraordinary work that we are still sifting through and enjoying. Why didn't the college continue? One answer is that it was no longer necessary. Its work was done. The fifties art and design scene had a vibrant life of its own and would carry the day into the 21 century. Another is that the extraordinary visionary leader which is essential did not step forward. Whatever the reason, it was enough. The extraordinary new Arts of the 20th Century were birthed.

**Please note that this essay is not meant to be original scholarship on my part. I was thrilled to find Black Mountain College and liberally lifted what I wanted to share it with the Guild. Please look online and use these resources to find out more about this incredible experience!

Harris, Mary Emma. *The Arts at Black Mountain College*. MIT Press, 2002. ISBN 0-262-58212-0
PBS American Experience: Black Mountain College Online search,
Google "Black Mountain College Images" Click on an image and it will tell you who it is.
Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: an Anthology of Personal Accounts, Marvin Lane



For more information about the artists or articles in this issue go to
www.wilmetteartsguild.org

Black Mountain College: 1933 - 1957

Students

Hazel Larson Archer
 Ruth Asawa
 Harrison Begay, painter
 Lyle Bongé
 Nicholas Cernovich
 John Chamberlain
 Robert Creeley
 Fielding Dawson
 Elaine de Kooning
 Stephen De Staebler
 Ed Dorn
 Jorge Fick
 Joseph Fiore
 James Leo Herlihy
 Ray Johnson
 Karen Karnes
 Basil King
 Gwendolyn Knight
 Ingeborg Lauterstein
 Jane Mayhall
 Peter Nemenyi
 Robert De Niro, Sr.
 Kenneth Noland
 Arthur Penn
 Charles Perrow
 Robert Rauschenberg
 Dorothea Rockburne
 Michael Rumaker
 Manvel Schauffler
 Oli Sihvonen
 Kenneth Snelson
 Claude Stoller
 Dody Weston Thompson
 Cy Twombly
 John Urbain
 Elaine Schmitt Urbain
 Stan VanDerBeek
 Cora Kelley Ward
 David Jacques Way
 Susan Weil
 John Wieners
 Jonathan Williams
 Vera B. Williams
 Judd Woldin

Faculty

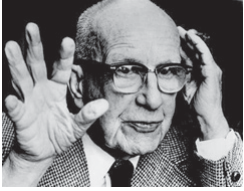
Josef and Anni Albers
 Eric Bentley
 Ilya Bolotowsky
 Josef Breitenbach
 John Cage
 Harry Callahan
 Mary Callery
 Robert Creeley
 Merce Cunningham
 Edward Dahlberg
 Max Dehn
 Willem de Kooning
 Robert Duncan
 Buckminster Fuller
 Walter Gropius
 Trude Guermonprez
 Lou Harrison
 Alfred Kazin
 Franz Kline
 Jacob Lawrence
 Richard Lippold
 Alvin Lustig
 Charles Olson
 M. C. Richards
 Albert William Levi
 Alexander Schawinsky
 Ben Shahn
 Arthur Siegel
 Aaron Siskind
 Theodoros Stamos
 Jack Tworokov
 Robert Motherwell
 Emerson Woelffer and
 William R. Wunsch
 Guest lecturers included
 Albert Einstein
 Clement Greenberg
 Bernard Rudofsky
 Richard Lippold
 William Carlos Williams
 Peter Voulkos
 Robert C. Turner

Summer Faculty & Visitors

Aldous Huxley
 Henry Miller
 May Sarton
 Thornton Wilder
 Robert Motherwell
 Fannie Hillsmith
 Amedea Ozenfant
 Lyonel Feininger



John Andrew Rice



Buckminster Fuller



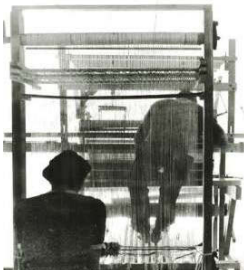
Fuller's Geodesic Dome



Merce Cunningham



Joseph Albers teaching at Black Mountain



Annie Albers at loom



Heinrich Jalowetz



Fresh air and long walks at B.M.C.



Eric Satie's *La Piège de Meduse*: Buckminster Fuller, Baron Medusa and Elaine de Kooning as *Frisette*



John Cage



Ruth Asawa



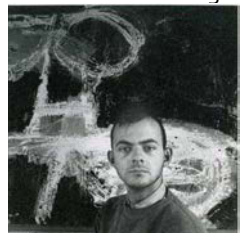
Isola di Rifuti



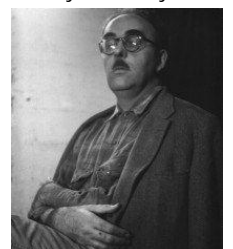
Svarc Lauterstein



Robert Rauschenberg



Cy Twombly



Charles Olson

For more information about the artists or articles in this issue go to www.wilmetteartsguild.org

The Elephant in the Room

By Ewan MacGregor

An amazing phenomenon has developed in the art world but no one has paid much attention. Namely the booming market



The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, by Damien Hirst

for contemporary artworks that no one would want for free. But they aren't free. No, people are spending millions of dollars for anything which has somehow b e c o m e established as a 'contemporary

masterpiece.' Such things as aluminum boxes (Donald Judd), basketballs in a fish tank (Jeff Koons), off the shelf 8' X 8' metal plates (Carl Andre), stuffed shark (Damien



Three Ball Tank by Jeff Koons

Hirst), even a used bed spread filled with detritus (Tracy Emin). The list goes on--the primary qualification for such artwork is that it is 'original', i.e. no one else is selling the same product and that it has been

branded by the art establishment as great art. The fact that such work sells for huge sums is like an elephant smack dab in the center of the room. No one seems surprised, it is just there.



When works go for millions at auction the curators feel obliged to have exhibitions and put some of these works in their museums. All of which leads to more frenzy on the part of the collectors. The dealers are always in attendance, keeping the machinery well oiled. In the last century art critics were an important part of this process. People like Greenberg, Rosenberg and Steinberg were power brokers; but now the market seems to have a mind of its own and the critics are more like cheerleaders than kingmakers. The Painted Word by Tom Wolfe claimed that modern art was only there to illustrate various theories about art and that such writing would become more important than the art itself. Although very amusing, this thesis has not borne out. Recently dealers have relied on the collectors and curators to establish value. A single multi-million dollar sale at auction is worth more than the opinion of even a widely read critic.

The news media does in fact report on all these sales, especially the annual auctions for contemporary art, but the general tone is that of awe and admiration for how much a given work will bring. They list the new high for a given artist much the way the weekly paper lists the amount of box office money each movie brought in the past week. Magazines often profile star artists and give them the kind of press one expects of a rock star. Little is said about the aesthetic accomplishments of the artist, rather they extoll their status (generally linked to sales) or how much the important curators and collectors have valued the work.

So how does this happen? How does the average wannabe artist break into the big time and sell stuff of nugatory aesthetic value for big bucks? How can stuff made with a minimum of technical skill or perhaps even made by someone else (a 'fabricator') s o m e h o w



My Bed by Tracy Emin

become worth millions of dollars on the art market?

The basis for that market is a three legged stool consisting of collectors, dealers and curators. Remove any leg and it collapses. There are many reasons for the success of that market which involves a combination of the fashion industry (everyone wants to be cool), potential for large profit (a thousand dollars' worth of materials and labor may become a million dollar item) and the eccentric taste of folks who will go to great lengths to create an original identity. It all begins with a given work of art being branded as a modern masterpiece. Often this starts with a dealer who believes in the genius of some unknown artist. Once that has been established the collectors vie for the right to own it. After the big collectors buy in, the curators are not far behind.

When works go for millions at auction the curators feel obliged to have exhibitions and put some of these works in their museums. All of which leads to more frenzy on the part of the collectors. The dealers are always in attendance, keeping the

The Stool: Collectors, Dealers and Curators

Collectors

There are many different kinds of collectors, people who buy rare coins, movie costumes, antiques, whatever. Recently the New Yorker wrote about the sale of a baseball card for two million dollars. So what is special about those who collect contemporary art? These are people who buy things which someone, usually a dealer, has told them is a great work. Inevitably this is something no one else would want in the first place, maybe a fabricated object (not actually made by the artist himself) such as Koon's Balloon Dog. Maybe it is something from an industrial supply house like the Andre fire bricks. Other examples include "found objects" which Richard Tuttle has presented as art. The crushed cars which Chamberlain got from the auto salvage yard fall into that category. Once these objects have been branded they can increase in value. One may well ask "if someone has the yen to collect, why not collect something he actually wants?" That is indeed a good question. The problem is that anything which other people want, such as a fancy car, a diamond ring, whatever... is something for which there is already a market. You can't jack up the value just by owning it. If you buy a Cadillac, anyone else can get the same car at the standard market value. However, if you buy a painting for which no market has been

The Elephant in the Room

established then it can appreciate just by being in your collection. You may sell it later for ten times the original price. That doesn't usually happen in the ordinary market unless a lot of time has gone by and there are other folks who want that type of painting. On top of that one can be seen as a brilliant connoisseur who bought in early



Chamberlain Crushed Car \$1.8 Million

before others realized that a stuffed shark could be worth twelve million dollars. This is an extension of the old story of the "Emperor's New Clothes": namely, that the collector can indeed see the new clothes, can well appreciate them. If the ordinary mortal doesn't get it.... well that is just evidence of their inability to

understand the nature of art. Finally, there are many people who are eager to create a new environment for themselves; to actually erase the past—to escape the hum-drum bourgeois world of their upbringing. They create a new world by having rooms dominated by contemporary art. Maybe a monochrome by Ellsworth Kelly or a painting of letters on a blue background like the Ruscha painting "OOF". Taken together these works create a brave, new environment. These are some of the motives which explain how contemporary art has found its way into major collections and become such a hot commodity in the auction market.

The Dealers

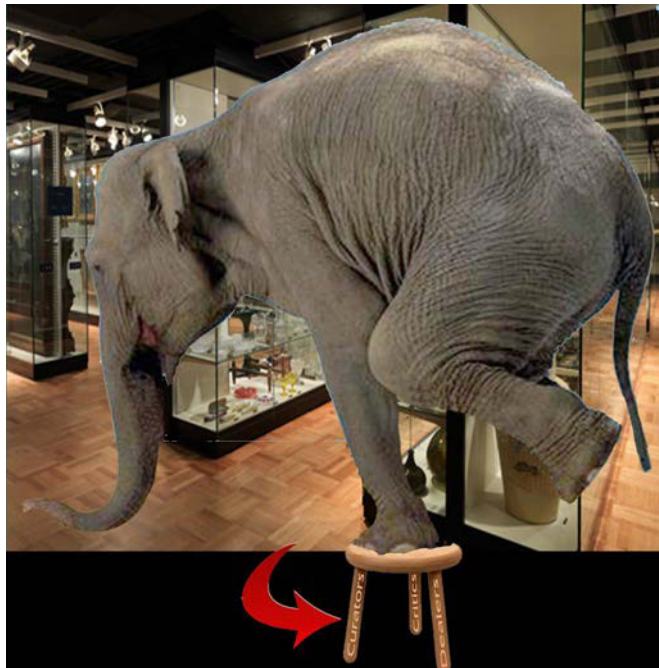
There are thousands of dealers all across the country. Most handle traditional forms such as landscape, portraits, still life or other decorative styles. These are not people promoting new art or anything which one would find in a contemporary art gallery. Although these forms can be expensive there is a fairly standard way of establishing value for them. A well done landscape by a known artist can bring several thousand dollars, perhaps more but will not be a million dollar painting within the lifetime of the artist. The pricing of such work is related to the level of comparable works by that artist or equivalent paintings by others. Since one is dealing with an established product it is easy to compare prices and have expert opinions about the level of value for any given work.

Things are different in the realm of contemporary art.

There each work is quite original compared to anything else one finds in galleries. Indeed that is the whole point of a lot of contemporary art—the work is more of an invention than a new example of some recognized art form. When Warhol makes a silk screen of a photo from a magazine, as in "Car Wreck", the artist hands may not even touch the canvas. A photo is transposed onto canvas and turned



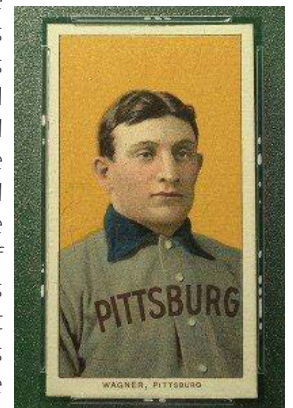
OOF by Ed Ruscha



into a silk screen by mechanical process. What the artist did was to create the idea of this photo as art—it was not necessarily created by him. And this kind of process can be done in multiples so that two or more collectors can actually have the same work, done by the same artist. What makes such a work valuable? First, this is an invention of a new art form –if another artist made the same photographic blow up and turned it into a silk screen that would only be a copy of Warhol's idea. Richard Prince made a photograph of a photograph of the Marlboro man that was originally a billboard advertisement. This sold at auction for over three million dollars. So why don't other photographers make such a copy? Because he successfully invented a new work - it was the idea of it, the concept of making the copy, which became valued as art. In the parlance of the art world, he "appropriated" this image and turned it into a work of art.

and turned it into a work of art.

This is where the dealer comes in. Anyone can invent a new style, a new form of art. What takes real talent is to market this, to create a brand for the new form. Not an easy thing for the artist alone. The new work needs exposure, to be seen in a gallery, to be written about, to reach a large audience. Once such work is in major collections, the museums feel it is time to have it also. Richard Serra made a lot of "drawings" that were large canvas works covered with black oil pencil. Some were all black, some left part of the canvas



Wagner Baseball Card

bare. The Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted a large exhibition of this work. It is hard to imagine that the curators at the Met would have decided to show this work on its own merits. At the same time as the show. These and similar works were being offered at a blue chip gallery in NY for hundreds of thousands of dollars each. The

art dealers have created a brand, sold millions of dollars of the product and even had it validated by one of the most prestigious museums in the country.

In a way it is like the old alchemist dream of turning base metal into gold. One wonders why the bright young stars at



Balloon Dog by Jeff Koons



Non-Chamberlain Crushed Car \$500. Forney Museum

The Elephant in the Room



A monochrome by Ellsworth Kelly

Wharton, Harvard Business School etc are not interning with the art dealers instead of those stuffy banks in Wall Street. How many B school courses teach students the way to turn a few hundred dollars' worth of material and labor into five hundred thousand dollars' worth of product in the course of a few

years? So how do dealers accomplish that? It is an impressive feat which many have tried but relatively few have pulled off in the big art markets. What it comes down to is finding a way to get enough rich people to accept something as great art so that the brand is established and then it can be marketed it like any other product.

The Curators

The third leg of the stool supporting the contemporary art market is the curator. These are the people who arrange for new work to be shown in museums or major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial. It would be unusual for a new work to find its way into that kind of venue without already being promoted by dealers and held in important collections. Once new art has been successfully branded it becomes collected; then it needs the imprimatur of museums such as MOMA to validate it as having lasting value. Theoretically, the curator has no financial or other ties to the artist or dealer. In fact there are often incentives which are not made public, such as having a dealer underwrite the costs of a catalog for a show or help the curator

acquire some other works which the museum wants for their permanent collection. Curators may be beholden to collectors as well. If someone like David Rockefeller (who gave MOMA ninety million dollars a few years ago) wants the "something" from a curator he will get undivided attention.

Overview

The question is: "Why do people spend huge sums for stuff nobody would want for free?" The short answer is because it has become accepted as a commodity. Robert Skull described his beginnings as a collector in

like: "How dare he make all that profit on my work?" What they didn't appreciate was the fact that Skull began the process of establishing the work as a viable investment. Anything else the artist did would be much more profitable because of Skull having bought their work at a time when most people would not have accepted it.

One problem with the three divisions (collector, dealer and curator) is that these lines are often blurred now - today's dealer may become tomorrow's curator. There was some dissension when Jeff Deitch (noted New York dealer who has represented Jeff Koons among other art stars) was named director of the LA Museum of Contemporary Art. He retained his status as a dealer as well. Some thought this represented a conflict of interest. His position was due in large part to the support of Eli Broad who is one of the premier collectors of contemporary art. So the various players in the contemporary art world may at times wear different hats. Another example of dealer turned curator is Massimiliano Gioni who is this year's curator of the Venice Biennial. That role will certainly enhance his position as a NY dealer in contemporary art. Among collectors the same changing of roles can occur. Emily Rales

was a former dealer and curator who has developed a museum for contemporary art called Glenstone in suburban Washington.

So all of this activity in the world of contemporary art generates interest and eventually acceptance for the product. Why don't

people ask more questions such as with all that money why can't the collectors get something of value? Mainly because what constitutes value now is different from the traditional ideas of beauty and craft. Now it's about being an original concept, about being branded as "important art". The public accepts anything that can be traded in the open market for cash. If museums have good attendance and the auction houses are making money, who can argue with that?

Meanwhile the elephant stands in the room as a symbol of how much the canons of aesthetic taste have changed over the past fifty years. It is a large animal which folks bump into, go around and yet never seem to wonder just how or why it is there.

Ewan MacGregor



Run Dog Run
Christopher Wool



"The U.S. Courts Are Partial to the Government,"
"No Mandatory Patriotism" (center)
"The United States Government Destroys Art."
in black oil paint stick, by Richard Serra



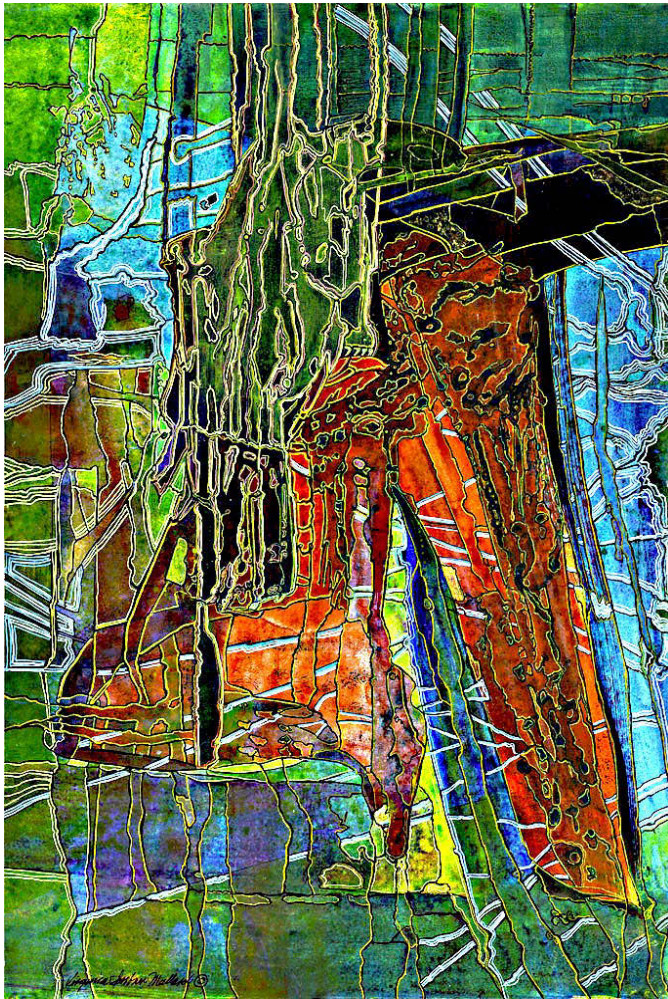
Untitled Cowboy by Richard Prince

the early '60's: "When I see a new work that I hate, I know it is maybe worth collecting." He was on target for the times, buying Pop art and virtually creating a market for it. Later in the '70's he sold a lot of it at auction for large profit. Some of the artists were outraged,

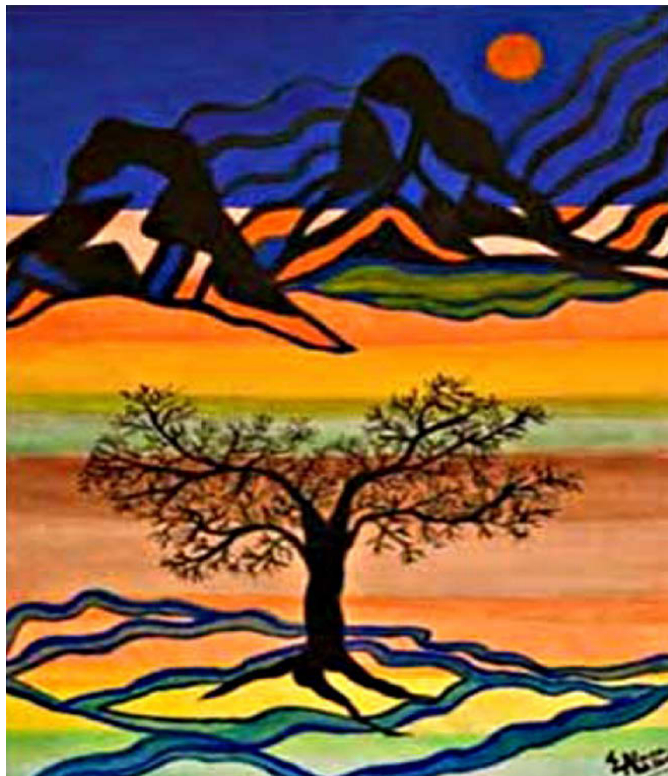


Glenstone Museum

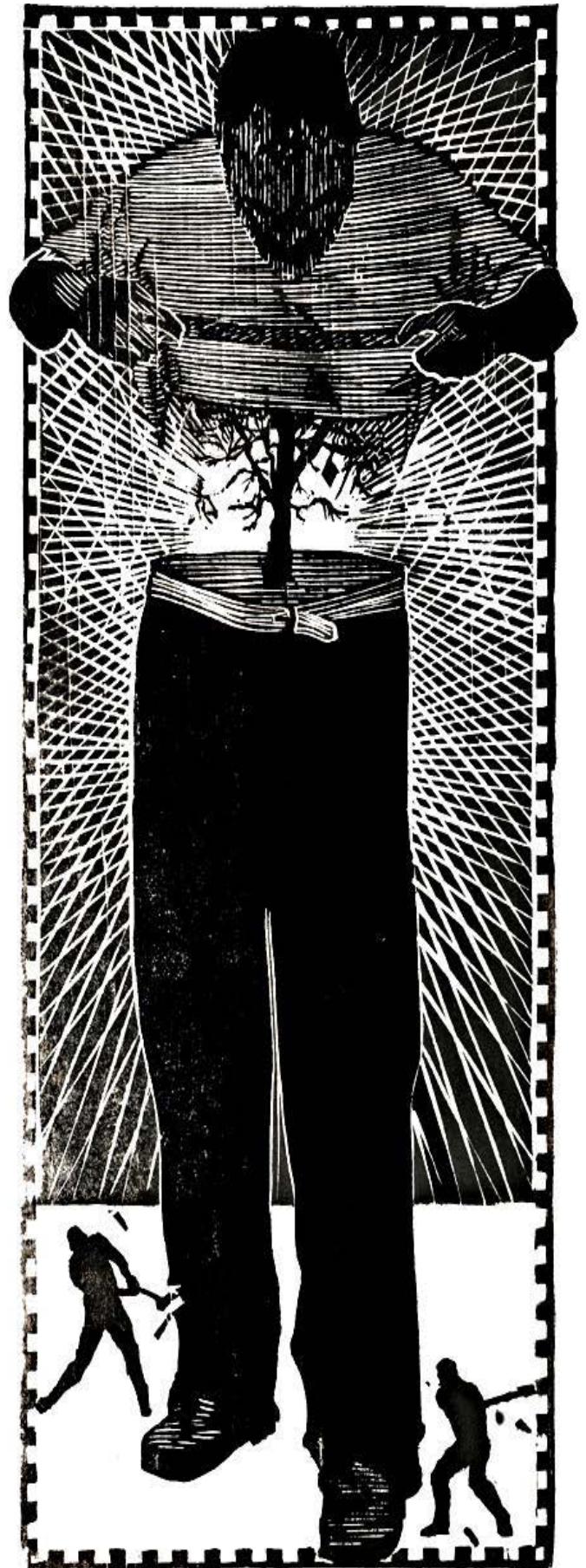
A Few of the Wilmette Arts Guild's Contemporary Artists



Cosmic Radiance by Virginia Mallard



After the Garden of Eden, by Elana Ashely



My Kite, by Joseph Taylor

A Few of the Wilmette Arts Guild's Contemporary Artists



All That Jazz by Keri Ippolito



On the Street Where I Live by Brigitte Wolf



Dancer by Kate Compennolle



by Suhad Turayhi



Learning to Read in the Valley of Expectations by Alyssa Weller



Search by Curt Frankenstein

The Beltracchi Paradox: Many think the greatest artist of our era is a forger!

by Julie Ressler

Recently on 60 Minutes one of the greatest art scams in history has been revealed to the general public. Many in the art world have known of Wolfgang Beltracchi since his exposure in 2010 when chemical analysis showed that he had mistakenly used the wrong titanium white for the period of the painting that was being examined. In the unraveling furor that followed experts from major museums and auction houses were made to look the fool and the millions and millions of dollars that Wolfgang Beltracchi had amassed would have to be redistributed in complicated legal settlements. What he had done was paint original canvasses of subjects that his chosen grand masters MIGHT have painted, then flawlessly recreating their style in paints from that period, he signed the canvasses in their names. That's where he made his millions and that's where he ran afoul of the law, he stole their BRAND by signing their names.

Copying is a well-accepted teaching technique and appropriating a work and using it in a new way or in a new size is fairly commonplace today. Copying was a necessity and an honorable profession before art could be easily duplicated. There have always been the reasonable debates whether this or that was an original Rembrandt/Michelangelo/Bellini or from the master's studio. These copies live in the great museums unscathed or at the least in respectable sub rosa. The art that Beltracchi created is absolutely beautiful and was sought after as undiscovered masterpieces. He created art that people craved. This fiction was helped along by his wife Helene whom he married in 1993 and took her name. She created an imaginary collection that had belonged to her grandfather, Werner Jägers who had supposedly hidden the collection of a well-known Jewish art dealer named Alfred Flechtheim from the Nazis. They had been neighbors and Helene even posed for pictures as her grandmother in front of some works to establish the provenance!

German police have only uncovered 60 fraudulent paintings of Wolfgang Beltracchi since the trial, with an undetermined quantity still in circulation, perhaps thousands.

His career began with two winter landscape paintings by an unheard of 18th century Dutch painter. He placed ice skaters into the scenes when he realized that paintings with figures sold for more than plain landscapes. Then, he resold the paintings, mak-



Wolfgang Beltracchi next to his forgery, Mann mit Blume by Campendonk
Courtesy of Vanity Fair, October 10, 2012

ing a sizeable profit. Beltracchi considered those two canvases as an important step. Even though his father tried to send him to art school after he created a perfect mother and child of Picasso's Blue Period as a teenager in a single afternoon, formal study was not to be. He visited museums and galleries all over Europe and played the hippie picking up experiences and learning to SEE the world. Art experts describe Beltracchi's near-perfect forgeries as "gold standard."

Value in ART has always been difficult to establish. If he had signed his own name the painting would have sold for a fraction of the price with no change in beauty. Julia Michalska in The Art Newspaper. "There is a general sense of schadenfreude about the art market." Some believe the Beltracchi has shown it up for the sham it is." Andis Kaulins on Artpundit.blogspot.com wrote, "At a time when "many imposters of no talent have laid claim to be artists" - only to be hugely rewarded by ignorant investors - Beltracchi stands out as a huge talent, possibly as the "greatest" painter of our era." Many around the world could not agree with him more.

[For a more complete article and further information, please go to the online newsletter at www.wilmetteartsguild.com]



Examples of faux Max Ernst and faux Heinrich Campendonk by Wolfgang Beltracchi

For more information about the artists or articles in this issue go to www.wilmetteartsguild.org



Reveal by William Oistad

The Wilmette Arts Guild encourages, supports and promotes the development of the visual arts in a welcoming spirit of creative community.

For more information about the artists or articles in this issue go to www.wilmetteartsguild.org