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DETROIT



NGD

**NEW
GENERATION
DETROIT**

**EIGHT EMERGING
DETROIT ARTISTS**

MEADOW BROOK ART GALLERY

SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 7, 2001

In conjunction with the tercentennial celebration of Detroit

Hartmut
Matt
Adam
Matt
Kai
Christine
Senghor
Paul

Austen
Bandsuch
Duff
Gordon
Kim
McCauley
Reid
Snyder

NEW GENERATION DETROIT

In celebration of the
Detroit Tercentennial:
An Exhibition of New Art
from the Metropolitan Area

CURATOR & EDITOR

Dick Goody

Director, Meadow Brook Art Gallery

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&

THE ARTISTS OF
NEW
GENERATION DETROIT

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DETROIT @ 300: 1701-2001

2001, the true millennium, is etched into the collective psyche (the work of Messrs Clarke & Kubrick?). For us in Detroit, the most tangible reason to celebrate 2001 is that it is the three-hundredth anniversary of Antoine Loumet de La Mothe Cadillac's selection of some prodigious beachfront property for Louis XIV.

Meadow Brook Art Gallery is delighted to participate in the festivities. The visual arts are a major component of Detroit's heritage. Great works like the *Detroit Industry* frescos (1932-33), by Diego Rivera, inspire us, imprinting our view of Detroit's history and crystallizing our cultural identity. The tercentennial is an opportunity to check the cultural mirror, to take stock, and once again, recognize the cultural richness of the region.

The Detroit 300 Partner Program has provided generous guidance and funding for this exhibition. The art of New Generation Detroit is a decisive evocation of the life and times of this great city. Happy Birthday Detroit!

ART NOW: DETROIT

Art in Detroit at the beginning of the new millennium presents a global, cosmopolitan face that is highly finished and cerebral, exuding a powerful sense of absolute confidence in the control of theme, content and media. Little is left to chance.

A precocious lack of anti-intellectualism presents itself; the work is less concerned with formal abstraction, mark-making and thrown-away materials. The focus now emanates from a concern with narrative and psychological issues, made manifest in work, particularly paintings, which use an array of traditional as well as high-tech processes.

New Generation Detroit is comprised of eight new voices that reflect such tendencies. They also mirror the multiplicity of approaches available to contemporary artists, demonstrating a marked plurality and sense of aesthetic agnosticism or openness. This receptiveness is not only manifest in the art, it is also pervasive in the artists' conceptual proclivities. There is a decisive eagerness on the part of these artists to connect their ideas outwardly and make specific associations with other media, other ideologies and other entities; the work presents a charged eclecticism of loose and fused cultural connections.

From a curatorial perspective, this makes the prospect of exhibiting their work impossibly paradoxical, divergent and equivocal, but it is eminently exciting. This is the experience of galleries and museums the world over. Perhaps the experience of witnessing the audacious range in this work, and the revealing anxiety and psychological turbulence wrought in its creation, is becoming less jarring and fractious, perhaps we are developing an eye for this sort of inclusive experience.

The process of *seeing* is not, and never has been, merely visual - even if much of the purely retinal art of the twentieth century tended to undermine the notion. This exhibition reinforces it. It is incessantly about the experience of seeing, about the palpable presence of artist and the *experience* captured in the art.

Dick Goody
Director
Meadow Brook Art Gallery

300 YEARS OF ART IN DETROIT

Until the Art Loan exhibition in 1883, there appears to have been very little interest in the arts in Michigan. The early residents of Detroit, founded in 1701, were more interested in visual documentation than in aesthetics. Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton, British civil commandant of Detroit from 1775 to 1778, made pencil sketches of leading Native Americans in the Detroit area. Views of the river and fort at Detroit were also depicted in watercolor by a variety of officers who were stationed there.¹ Michigan provided little support for its early artists. Most were either itinerant portrait painters or local amateurs, and like most American self-taught painters they were often involved in related occupations, as decorators, carriage and sign painters, or as illustrators.² Most Michigan artists in the nineteenth century were content to represent familiar people and places within the context of Romanticism, the prevailing painting style.

Like other large communities, Detroit was occasionally on the tours for traveling exhibitions, including Benjamin West's *Christ Healing the Sick* in 1844 and Rembrandt Peale's *Court of Death* in 1847.³ Although, these paintings may have been admired for their monumental scale, academic style and moral message, no Michigan patron or artist followed their lead. In 1852 the Fire Department Society held the first loan exhibition of art in Detroit at Fireman's Hall, an event typical of American polite society at mid-century. Most of the works came from the city's private collections and many of the 419 paintings on display were works by local artists.⁴ However, it would take another 30 years before a similar event would be repeated in the Art Loan exhibition held in Detroit in 1883. The success of this second public exhibition convinced civic leaders that an art museum would be an appropriate venture. "An Act for the formation of corporations for the cultivation of art," to be known first as the Detroit Museum of Art and later as the Detroit Institute of Arts, was passed by the state senate in 1885.⁵ Opening in 1888, the museum would spend the next twenty years in random collecting—where European paintings were juxtaposed with strange curiosities jammed in glass-fronted cabinets.

In addition to the Art Loan exhibition and the establishment of the Detroit Museum of Art, new art organizations and commercial galleries also stimulated interest in painting in Detroit at the end of the century. In 1875 the city's artists formed the short-lived Detroit Art Association in the hope of establishing an art gallery. A year later they held their first exhibition. In 1879 the Detroit Art Club was formed. This organization was soon followed by the Detroit Sketching Club and in 1883 by the Detroit Watercolor Society, both under the leadership of Gari Melchers. Melchers had returned to Detroit after six years of study at the Royal Academy of Art in Düsseldorf and at the École des Beaux-Arts and Académie Julian in Paris. Such participation by a professional European-trained painter helped to invigorate art in Michigan. The period also saw the establishment of active commercial art galleries which helped to forge connections between local artists and collectors. Art establishments such as the Brow, Hanna & Ives Gallery (formerly the Hanna Gallery established in 1864) and the Dillaway &

Randall Gallery not only displayed European paintings, but supported the burgeoning art scene in Detroit by exhibiting the works of Michigan artists, such as the marine and landscape paintings of Robert Hopkin.⁶

While the Detroit Museum of Art struggled to define itself, the Detroit Club (established in 1882) drew huge crowds to its “stylish installations” of American art under the direction of the chair of the art exhibition committee, Charles Lang Freer. Michigan artists, such as Robert Hopkin, Gari Melchers and Julius Rolshoven found support for their works at the Detroit Club. Focused and professional, it exhibited contemporary American art from 1888 (seven months prior to the opening of the Detroit Museum of Art) until 1894. With the loss of the Detroit Club as a venue, the fledgling artist community in Detroit began to disintegrate. Some artists like Melchers and Rolshoven left the state. Others turned to men’s civic and social organizations for encouragement.⁷ These organizations, however, were not strongly focused on the visual arts, at least not enough to bolster a faltering group of artists.

In the first decade of the twentieth century Michigan painters began to establish new and dynamic art organizations which emphasized both fellowship and exhibition of works. In 1903 the Detroit Society of Women Painters was established under the leadership of Lillian Messer. In 1904 they held their first exhibition in the galleries at the Detroit Museum of Art, which they would continue to do for the next seven years. In 1907 the Scarab Club (originally Hopkin Club) was established and in 1911 the group also began to sponsor an annual exhibition of the works of their membership held at the Detroit Museum of Art. By the 1920’s this simple exhibition would become the well-respected, juried “Exhibition for Michigan Artists” sponsored by the Detroit Institute of Arts. In 1909 the Ann Arbor Art Association was founded and it too held an annual exhibition of the works of Michigan artists, which was broadened in the mid-1930’s to include the display of works by controversial European artists, such as Picasso, Matisse and Léger.⁸

Gari Melchers continued to have ties to Michigan in spite of his permanent residence in Holland. He, however, was not the only local artist to have been educated abroad. Joseph Gies, Percy Ives, Francis Petrus Paulus and Julius Rolshoven had also studied in Europe. Trained in the aesthetics and techniques of formal art academies, their naturalistic figure style would “bedazzle” their hometown audiences. Even though these artists worked in a manner well out of date by the turn of the century, it was they who would be awarded the most prestigious prizes and they who would lead the art community deep into the next century. Michigan was not ready for the European avant garde. Impressionism had few supporters. Post-Impressionism, Cubism and Expressionism had none at all. Modernism would not be introduced into Michigan until the 1920’s by a group of young artists led by Jay Boorsma, who painted abstract landscapes, Edgar Yaeger, who incorporated elements of Cubism to his still-lives, and Samuel Halpert, a New York artist influenced by the Surrealist works of De Chirico. When their works were accepted over those of the “old guard” for the annual “Exhibition for Michigan Artists” in 1928, the art community was outraged. In spite of this moment of triumph

for modernism, most Michigan painters remained representational, fully within the traditions of American art. This was reinforced during the Depression of the 1930's when the primary sponsor of art was the federal government. The Public Works of Art Project insisted upon a narrative art with a local theme. Thus Michigan artists dutifully represented Native Americans, lumberjacks and farmers as noble, virtuous state founders and pioneers.⁹

The Depression also gave rise to an important non-profit gallery in which artists could exhibit and sell their works. Established in 1932, the Young Artists Market eventually became the Detroit Artists Market. The period was also enlivened by new schools and organizations. In 1927 the Cranbrook Academy of Art was created. Its internationally celebrated faculty focused their attention upon textiles, ceramics, painting and sculpture. African-Americans also made their mark on the artist community at this time. The Pen & Palette Club was also formed in 1927 as an inevitable outcome of a segregated society. It was sponsored by the Detroit Urban League as part of an effort to showcase the works of blacks in Michigan. They too held an annual exhibition. Later the Arts Extended Groupe was established in the 1950's as a place where black artists could share studio space and equipment. The center maintained a gallery for African-American artists through the 1970's.¹⁰

Although World War II was a lean period for art, the post-war era brought new artists and new ideas to Michigan. Commercial galleries became important contributors, beginning with the highly successful Little Gallery, established in Birmingham in 1949. Such galleries not only provided a stable environment in which to exhibit and sell paintings, but also created a market for Michigan artists. Progressive artists introduced abstract expressionism during the early 1950's and even the more conservative artists incorporated abstract elements into their works. By the 1960's abstract art dominated the art scene. Michigan artists, like modern artists in general, now turned to New York City rather than to Europe for inspiration. Indeed, artists who did not derive their styles from the admired list of acceptable New York artists found it difficult to find a place within the Michigan art community. When in 1962 only works that fit the New York City model were accepted for the annual "Exhibition for Michigan Artists," held at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the art community once again protested. Because of its narrow focus, many artists complained that the exhibition no longer reflected the broad range of work being created by Michigan artists. Plagued in 1973 by a similar controversy over the selection of works to be displayed, as well as censorship by the jury and negative press, it was clear that a long cultural tradition in Michigan was at an end. The final exhibition would be held in 1976.¹¹

By the end of the 1960's Michigan painters began to develop their own identity, one less dependent upon the New York scene. The Cass Corridor neighborhood of Detroit became, in its own way, an artists' community and the artists living and working there developed a common style of expression grounded in their harsh urban environment. This was Michigan's "first indigenous art style." The paintings of Wayne State University professor John Egner, Robert Sestock, Bradley Jones and Brenda Goodman created

personal, tough, sometimes brutal canvases which reflected life in the city before and after the troubling riots of 1967. Connected to the Cass Corridor community was the Willis Gallery, a cooperative non-commercial space established in 1971. Here artists could display their works without the pressure to conform to popular taste or expectation. In the wake of the Willis Gallery's demise in 1977 (the Willis actually reopened in 1979), Detroit Focus became the city's most significant "alternative" artist-run space. Established in 1978, it sponsored a broad range of exhibitions and programs designed to encourage stimulating discourse within the art community.¹²

Art after the Cass Corridor has been more narrative and representational than abstract. In that too, Michigan painters have followed the national trends toward Post-Modern figural realism and even in some cases, surrealism. Such exacting realism can be seen in the current work of Carl Demeulenaere, Ed Fraga and Holly Brantsner, all of whom have experimented with the absurd intellectuality and vivacity of performance art, particularly in their work with *The Cartharctic Circle*. And prominent Detroit artist Peter Williams continues to excite us with his intense polemic narratives.

Is there now or was there ever a regional Michigan art, an expression uniquely our own? The Michigan art community was too insecure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to develop a unique art. Instead, there was a progression from Romantic portraits and landscapes, to a broadly painted representational style modeled after European art academies, followed by a manic devotion to the abstract art of post-war New York. The Cass Corridor artists, however, were part of a generation which challenged the established art scene and in so doing were able to find a strong, dynamic voice. In Post-Modern America there is no one style, or manner, or conceptual idea which drives art. Instead, what we have is a vital community of artists in southeast Michigan whose paintings both delight us and challenge our perception of the world in which we live. That is all we can ever ask of art, then or now.

Janice G. Schimmelman
Professor of Art History
Oakland University

¹. Brian Leigh Dunnigan, *Frontier Metropolis: Picturing Detroit, 1701-1838* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

². Sadayoshi Omoto, *Early Michigan Paintings: Kresge Art Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, November 21, 1976-January 2, 1977* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1976), 10.

³. William H. Peck, *The Detroit Institute of Arts: A Brief History* (Detroit: Founders Society Detroit Institute of Arts, 1991), 21.

⁴. Susan Hobbs, "Detroit and Its Development in the Arts, 1824-1924," in *Artists of Michigan from the Nineteenth Century: A Sesquicentennial Exhibition Commemorating Michigan Statehood, 1837-1987: The Muskegon Museum of Art, the Detroit Historical Museum* (Muskegon: Muskegon Museum of Art, 1987), 76-77.

⁵. Peck, 26, 31.

⁶. Hobbs, 77-78.

⁷. Hobbs, 79, 84, 86.

⁸. Dennis Barrie, "Introduction," in *Artists in Michigan, 1900-1976: A Biographical Dictionary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 28-29, 37, 41-42.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 18-21.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, 42, 51-52, 60.

¹¹. *Ibid.*, 23-24, 32-33, 61.

¹². *Ibid.*, 26, 63-64.

NEW GENERATION DETROIT

I think of art, at its most significant, as a DEW line, a Distant Early Warning system that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

The new electronic independence re-creates the world in the image of a global village.

Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*

New Generation Detroit reveals the work of eight fresh Detroit artists. It also discloses much about the international culture of contemporary art. It demonstrates that new art is a confessional public commodity and it speaks about the way artists are becoming indivisible entities from the work they produce. The public wants to bathe vicariously in the life experiences of the artist; they want anecdotal evidence and the staccato authenticity of the sound-byte. Simultaneously, on maximum volume, the artist has an irrepressible desire to transmit the experience. Such loquacious broadcasts may be local in origin but they are meant for a global audience. Artists crave universal celebrity. This contemporary phenomenon is responsible for the decline and fall of provincialism in all regional contemporary art.

In the past, in thinking about excellence in the visual arts, we tended to favor work that demonstrated a high degree of technical merit. Vanguard art, with few exceptions, especially that coming out of Britain in the last ten years, is far from technically adept. If anything, such scribbled, cobbled work is actually mocking the technical ideals of previous generations. Even artists like Damien Hirst, with his technically superb aquatic tanks (suspending repellent *dead* matter), and Ron Mueck, presenting his manneristically perfect *dead* sculpture, undermine and debunk the very realism they render so perfectly. Artists like Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas make work that is rude, caustic, impatient and ephemeral.

It's a bit like "escape from Alcatraz," you have to get a nail-file if you can get hold of one, saw the bars through. You have to use what you've got, and either it does the job or it doesn't. It's articulating your way out of something.¹

The work has a short shelf life and gives those wanting to uphold traditional values short shrift. The power of the work comes from its audacity; the artists live by their wits, relying purely on their vulgar acumen for dissidence. Very often the artist is inseparable from the art.

I really cannot carry on living with all that stuff stuck inside me.²

Tracey Emin's "tent:" *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (Saatchi Collection, 1995) is a confessional shrine containing the names of all the people she has slept with since birth (including her own aborted fetuses). A cultural mirror, it conveys mornings spent watching Gerry Springer's hubris heavy victims, publicly reveling in their guilt or schadenfreude; it is the artistic parallel of tabloid sensationalism and represents total exposure. Such bluntness indicates that confidentiality is no longer viable. Sarah Lucas' *Au Naturel* (Saatchi Collection, London, 1994) is comprised of a worn out mattress with two melons and a water bucket, and a cucumber with two oranges; it parodies the absurd, banal, anecdotal secrecy of the conjugal bed. *Young British Artists* (YBA), by their behavior, de facto, have declared that modesty is an anachronism. Moreover, artists cannot, as once they could, successfully hide behind their art. Not that they are under constant surveillance like Winston Smith in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but the threat is omnipresent. If for any reason the media desires total exposure, as it has with certain artists, there is no possibility of escape. Hence, the new package is a singular one containing both the art and artist. In New

York the tabloids were thrilled by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's incredulous outrage over the *Sensations* exhibition (art by YBA) at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Artists, awash in self-revelation and elephant manure, delighted in the attention. The cult of the artist has been secured, for better or worse, by the insatiability of the media. Artists can no longer be shy; they have become as media savvy as their investigative predators, forming an informal symbiotic alliance. Self-revelation marks what is crucial about recent art. The artist, inseparable from the art, having eschewed anonymity and achieved celebrity, or more accurately, notoriety, can no longer be aloof.

But America is different. America is more diffident. Modesty is still a virtue (not, albeit, on proletarian daytime TV). Even an artist as obtuse as Jeff Koons, with his airbrushed *adult* tableaux, still elects to hide modestly behind his preening role of Madison Avenue artist-tycoon. Disguising the art with antiseptic and saccharine slickness might make it less offensive and more palatable, but ultimately it muffles the impact and stifles the message. Recent American art has tended to be more packaged and decadent than intuitively dissident. Koon's work has the same decadent, indulgent aura as a Boucher courtesan. Such decadence has made much of the art from the eighties and nineties appear esoterically haughty; the field of art from this period is sown with row upon row of slick detached artifacts. On the other hand, the lauding of such conservative talents as those of John Currin and Lisa Yuskavitch indicates an alarmingly stagnant attitude towards experimentation. The figures painted by these artists, trawling the depths of caricature and appropriation, almost to the point of plagiarism, are so lacking in vitality that they are completely incapable of eliciting any sort of visceral response from the viewer, apart, that is, from mild titillation. That such tired retro revivalism can flourish when there are artists (across the river in Brooklyn) that are challenging the boundaries of aesthetics and perception is indicative of the degree of fragmentation and decay within the New York art scene.

It is now assumed that each successive generation of artists must debunk and undermine the previous generation. This role has become indivisible from traditional responsibilities of the artist. Consequently, the once refreshing painterly excesses of Julien Schnabel now seem awkward and contrived, and the explicitly disparate overtures of David Salle appear like the banal confessions of a sinister gynecologist. But for a time these artists created headlines. Perhaps they were permitted to do so as courtiers in the realm of Andy Warhol. Part of Warhol's legacy was his ability to excite and manipulate the media. What is the point of art if it cannot elicit a viable response from the general public? Today, ask the average person who is their favorite contemporary artist and their reply will probably be a blank stare. What is the point of perpetuating such public indifference?

London, with its historical pomp and complex of crusty museums, is the last place one would expect to find an avid, contemporary art-hungry public. These are not high-brow elitists; they are just average people in their twenties, thirties and forties whose curiosity has been piqued. They have heard about the goings on and have disembarked from their domestic bunkers in the hope that something might touch them – something other than the digital flatness of a television screen. Theirs is a longing for the visceral experience. They are responding to art that is candid, dissident and overt. The message is not sugar coated but raw and unpredictable, the experience of seeing, thought provoking and untried. The clientele, urbane yet sensitive, is not given to squeamishness. Provocation will be tolerated as long as the debate it fuels is consequential. Nevertheless the work is bewilderingly *unartistic* – not really fit to be hung on a gallery wall actually – neither is it apparently accomplished with brush and paint, clay or bronze – in fact it does not look remotely *accomplished*. Frankly it looks as if it were done by someone with a few emotional problems. As a sort of confessional, emotional graffiti, it speaks a language that painting and sculpture has never spoken before. Plump with innuendo, and an invigorating absence of shame, it tramples over

traditional ideas about taste and modesty. “*Don’t lie,*” it says, “*this is what humanity is really like; this is where we glean our strengths and weaknesses.*” It divulges elements of daily living that have thus far remained taboo. Perhaps the British have always had a penchant for this sort of lowbrow humor. But upon reflection, it is fairly universal; how could Benny Hill have been so popular in America otherwise? But apart from some *Seinfeld* experiments, the daily drudge of private life, bathroom ablutions and confidential rapture, are not a staple of American cultural commentary.

The cohesiveness and success of the London art scene of the last decade can be traced to the audacity of one artist and the curious tastes of a single patron. Nothing new here - patronage has invariably been the catalyst in the creation of new art. Damien Hirst’s decision to opt out of the gallery system (while still a student) by opening the alternative *Freeze* space in London’s Docklands in 1988 caught the eye of Charles Saatchi.

*The only thing which binds Hirst’s creations together is his own assertive personality, which has a great fascination for the media. It is symptomatic that when an article about him appeared in the Sunday Times colour supplement, it had six photographic portraits of the artist himself, most of them full-page, but contained no illustration of his sculpture or painting.*³

Such commentary strengthens the hypothesis that the contemporary artist is indivisible from his/her art and that the artist is as concerned with publicity as with the communication of an artistic idea. Hirst’s most notorious work, a tiger shark suspended within a sealed tank of formaldehyde is a statement that can only be construed as a highly public declaration to arouse sensation. But *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (Saatchi Collection, London, 1991) – the work’s title - also presents some compelling paradoxes: a shark is a metaphor for vitality, a dead shark is a senselessly awkward *memento mori*. The shark is a macabre torch song for all the victims/specimens in natural history collections; it is a powerfully contradictory statement about the preservation of wildlife. Above all, it intones Hirst’s obsession with death and dead things.

It also speaks about humanity’s universal gift: the knowledge of one’s own mortality.

Saatchi’s visionary patronage was instrumental in opening up the art world to young British artists. Before the *Saatchi Decade*⁴, the London art market was ruled by a cartel of galleries furnished by an aging elite school of workaholic expressionists; Bacon, Auerbach and Hodgkin (and the realist grandee, Lucian Freud) ruled supreme. A similar aristocracy prevailed in Germany with Neo-expressionists like Kiefer, Baselitz and Penck. Saatchi’s regime, instrumental though it may have been in transforming the international art scene, is, of course, a flawed monarchy. Should he choose to “drop” a once favored artist from his monopoly (as he has done on occasion), that artist’s career becomes toast. Visionary fascist or not, Charles Saatchi’s regime will wane, but in the meantime his appetite and eye for challenging, audacious, experimental art has irreversibly influenced the way art is exhibited and perceived. He has fostered a more egalitarian appreciation for contemporary art. What audiences are responding to is the exposed, raw thought process of making art. Artists like Emin and Lucas have dropped the refined art object in favor of showing the abrupt formation of the idea. It is conceptual but it is too uncooked to be called *conceptual art*. Their exhibitions are strewn with ideas and materials, but in most scenarios there is only a perfunctory fashioning of the art object. This approach, this simplification, has been criticized as the personification of a dumbed-down culture. Regardless of the veracity of this accusation, the YBA are undaunted; they feel secure in the knowledge that they have precipitated an unprecedented furor of interest in the culture of visual contemporary art.

Contemporary art has never been as much in the public domain as it is today. If Marshall McLuhan’s aphorism: *advertising is the greatest art form of the twentieth century*⁵, is to be believed, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, self-advertising has become the modus operandi of many new artists. If contemporary art is intrinsically concerned with dissidence, publicity and exposure then art galleries and museums that show new art must reflect and

embrace this development. The London connection is not as tenuous as one might think. Contemporary artists concentrate their interest on the particular cultural hub of the moment. Like their colleagues in Chicago, and other major regional conurbations, Detroit artists have always looked to the important artistic centers for guidance. In the nineteenth century it was Paris. Fifteen years ago it was New York; today it is London. The chief difference now is that the transfer of information is instantaneous. Art out of London is raw, ephemeral and uproarious. Some artists in *New Generation Detroit* share similar proclivities, particularly Senghor Reid, Hartmut Austen and Kai Kim. If, on the surface, the others appear not to be similarly inclined, this is not the case with their preparatory work. Unruly, incidental and rebellious, it reinforces the powerful contemporary link. In focusing on the contemporaneity of these artists it is appropriate to hone in on this affinity and examine it. The curatorial challenge of creating a contemporary art exhibition in Detroit that shares the same vigor and wit as those in London and New York is the central basis of this exhibition. The success of this exhibition hinges on the willingness of the artists to expose their entire corpus of work to such public scrutiny; this process of self-revelation is at the very center of the vital contemporaneity of new, vanguard art.

A vivid sense of unease and disquiet, rather than outright dissidence, permeates through the work of *New Generation Detroit*. The vigorous anxiety captured in their work is its most beguiling quality. It is accomplished, not through expressionist or abstract posturing, but by employing a powerful narrative apparatus - the work is not cobbled or thrown together, but instead is the result of an accrued series of considered procedures. The sense of technique in their work is refined and sophisticated. Here lies its chief connection to the academic canon of recent American painting and sculpture. Recent American art has lost interest in the palpable physicality of mark making and become insidiously engrossed in manufacturing of "plastic" objects; see the work of Ashley Bickerton, Mathew Barney, Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, Allan McCollum. Generalizations such as this are invariably specious.

(Slick art objects made with resins, polymers or stainless steel are being produced the world over.) However, the above statement alludes to certain tendencies that have presented themselves locally, especially in the more hallowed sanctums of contemporary art.

NGD's chief connection with international contemporary art lies in the conceptual realm. This powerful conceptual link, as stated already, is most evident in the barrage of art produced by these artists in preparation for their finished work. A primal, provocative corpus of work - the work that is seldom, if ever, seen or shown - is powerful and transforming. This exhibition strives to expose the abundant conceptual plunder, which these Detroit artists have amassed and ransacked, revealing the raw visceral energy they have channeled in the creation of their concrete vision. The process of transforming the conceptual into the concrete makes this body of work and the preoccupations of these artists, as we imagine them at work, so urgent and candid. By exposing this rich source, these artists acknowledge the significance of revealing their role in creating the art in this exhibition. *New Generation Detroit* is an exposition of both art and artist. Detroit art, in this three hundredth year of the city, has never been more cosmopolitan and global. This exhibition provides not so much the opportunity of revealing the regionalism of contemporary art in Detroit rather it shows the universal nature of art being produced both here and everywhere. However, this does not preclude the onlooker from speculating on the provenance of certain geographical influences. Some of these artists use city and suburb as a backdrop. In this aspect, Detroit can still establish an irrepressible presence - as is the case in the work of Matt Gordon.

Matt Gordon's idiosyncratic mania for the underworld of pathological adventure is at once morbidly melancholic, and at the same time, uproariously hilarious. His paintings are packed with characters, props, ventures; quests and exploits, all taking place a stone's throw from the farm or subdivision. His extraordinary apartment in Northville is a *Gordonland* theme park and the

characters in his paintings occupy every nook and cranny, resonating a powerfully unique sense of place. These characters he invents himself. He makes models of them (either from scratch or by morphing them with other found dolls or toys), bringing them to life. It is by rendering these three dimensional models from life that he achieves the sardonic accuracy of his paintings. His intensely worked paintings are reflections of his psyche. This is not the *media-world* of television and CNN, or the world of the suburbs, mall and freeway, rather it is the idiosyncratic life of Main Street and the hinterland between township and farmland, a land we perceive to have all but vanished, a place now consigned to myth. We might imagine it as America in the fifties, just before the dawn of rock and roll, but then, again, not quite, because in every painting there are signifiers pulling us back into real time, reminding us that at heart these richly painted tableaux are refineries of deeply ingrained American pathology. The core of this work is not downtown Detroit, it is on the periphery where most of us live.

Matt Bandsuch's equally earnest devotion to thematic content is manifested in his obsession with the diamond form. He makes three-dimensional models, some tiny, others massive. These compulsive (*compulsory*) diamond formations, cut in a myriad of permutations, are as fastidious as they are unexpectedly bizarre. *And it is all new!* says the look on his face. "Look at this one!" he will announce, pulling out another small precise paper maquette of a perfectly rendered diamond, placing it on the table next to a brood of similar formations. He then explains that in reality it will be the size of an armchair, probably in high gloss pink. Bandsuch has no interest in one single piece of work. His vision requires the breadth and weight of a corpus of work. The diamond forms on the worktable become transformed by his hyperbolic enthusiasm. Their future embodiment might also be congruent with art that mocks, mimics and mirrors advertising displays in Niemen-Marcus or Tiffany. Bandsuch has delved into the world of illustration. He studied illustration at Center for Creative Studies in Detroit. His work has always been larger than life and imposingly object-like as it juts out from the wall

basely hawking its message. "*These are like my other work*," he says, "*but they're purer – more intricate and formal.*" His curtained-off loft, which he shares with commercial photographers, is surrounded by expensive camera equipment and arc lights. Bandsuch's nascent diamond shapes, clustered on the table, while not reflecting light from their exquisitely cut and folded paper surfaces, resonate powerfully, offering a premonition of their future larger embodiment within the gallery.

Hartmut Austen is merely masquerading as a YDA (young Detroit artist); in truth he is a YGA (young German artist) who has been making art here for about two years. As one would expect the influence of Sigmar Polke, Kiefer and Baselitz hold a certain sway (the latter was a professor at the Hochschule der Künste Berlin, where Austen studied). What is interesting is the way in which this foreigner is amused, enchanted and captivated by American art in general and Detroit art in particular, or at least the politics of Detroit art – the whole anxiety about *Why am I here?* The normal neurosis about the *Detroit or New York thing*, mixed with nostalgia for the old country – all this permeates his work and conversations. His overall enchantment is thoroughly tempered by a somber northern European outlook; he will say something like: "I used to be fascinated, a little bit, by Jörg Immendorff - until he became bourgeois!" Austen will make a hundred and fifty drawings, paintings and water colors in a short time that are all different, and explain: "I refuse to limit what I am trying to say." The thought process is revealing. Austen's oeuvre is a work in progress; autobiographical, but never emotional or sentimental, its view is that of telephoto rendered, detached accuracy, somewhere between Berlin and the coast of Brittany. Photography plays a surreptitious role in Austen's work - not any particular photographer. He catches the photos here and there: on the front page of a newspaper, in a magazine, in an exhibition. He says of the half remembered photographic image: "You don't really know where it comes from, nor what it really means." Your imagination fills the gap. You make your own sense of it. Cinema also has an oblique influence. Of course, the influence of cinema on the visual arts and literature, especially

since the 1930s, is a widespread cultural phenomenon. The knowledge of cinema simmers quietly throughout the work of Hartmut Austen. It is not so much that his paintings resemble film stills (they certainly do not). It is more that one cannot look at his work without recalling a myriad of cinematic memories and associations: Jean Luc Goddard's *Weekend*, the *Odessa Steps* sequence from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, the exuberance in François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*. He never cites specific films, nothing as derivative as that – his work has nothing to do with cinema per se, but his staccato output is taut with subconscious references. Such narrative associations, and the curious surface formalistic filters he employs (a sort of curtain or grid device – a screen of marks and color separating the viewer from the body of his paintings) are the chief formal and thematic content of his work. This crucial relationship between theme and content makes his prolific drawings and paintings flicker and reverberate. Austen emanates a European sensibility, both literary and aesthetic. It is a polemic, urgent sensibility, awash in history, longing and melancholy (but without a scintilla of sentimentality). He has yet to fully impart his arsenal of subconscious thoughts and references on American life.

Kai Kim's preoccupation is with time and ritual. Her work is a depiction of opposites: good and evil, saints and sinners, etc. These polarizations are painted within a specific number of minutes: 60, 120, 240... over a specific number of days – the temporal determination is made and strictly adhered to in advance of creating each body of work. The ritualistic process or performance of making the image is as crucial as the finished product, indivisible from it in fact. Such discipline affects the work in two ways: first, it tends to make the individual paintings in each body of work stylistically analogous which translates into painting that is ritualistically prescribed, not unlike late Byzantium painting (which Kim has also appropriated in her work); the second effect is related to the first: the anxiety derived from the time restriction expresses itself in the wrought manner of the paintings as a sort of melancholic fretfulness. A resigned wretchedness permeates the faces she paints. Whether reflecting

goodness or evil, they emanate discomfort and stress; the saints have a martyred demeanor, the sinners appear guilty. There is nothing leisurely about their appearance because Kim has made them under duress. This makes their commemorative presence palpable and intense recalling art that has been made secretly as a subversive act. The manufactured materials Kim uses in her work such as: floor tiles, aluminum, spoons, etc., are transformed by the process, but retain their factory made mass-produced sense of relentless tedium, contributing to the existential deliberateness of the work. This element reinforces the gulag quality of the work, as if the only materials Kim has are those she can acquire from her self imposed prison hut.

The three chief formal preoccupations of Senghor Reid are the human image, the written word and the application of paint. Which comes first is impossible to say because any one of them could start or instigate something. Reid is something of an instigator. His work is definitely meant to provoke a reaction rather than encourage a purely meditative response. He uses a constructivist method of assembling his paintings, that is to say a process of addition – paint is applied and reapplied. Bravado, painterly mark making is controlled and held in check by the human form and by the secondary device of laid text. Superficially the human form exerts the primary influence on his compositions: the triangle of two hands and head mimicking the letter A - the traditional Renaissance portrait form. The figures appear as if captivated by our gaze. This is because they have been seduced by the lens of a camera. The prototypes for Reid's human images are snapshots. But if this sounds straightforward it is misleading because everything that happens to the sitter in a formal sense is an imposition – meaning the application of color and text – the mark making in general affect the outcome of the sitter's structure. Chief among these impositions is the text. "*SKILL DOES MATTER - A CUT ABOVE - The friendless, the forsaken, the misunderstood,*" are three such text fragments. These textural impositions sufficiently undermine the formal integrity of Reid's sitters. The text fragments contradict the presence of the sitter without actually signifying anything other than a deferred meaning.

This barrage of deconstruction gives Reid the permission he requires to employ vigorous, resonant stripes of color. Having suspended our disbelief, and perhaps his own, he can adjust his palette accordingly with a profusion of pastel pinks and lightened blues. Reid uses a triad of magenta, blue and yellow ochre, not unlike Matisse's Moroccan period paintings of 1912. The aphorisms and advertising clichés ("VERSACE, ROCKIN, DOLCE"), artfully drawn, appear and disappear like urban background noise at the mercy of Reid's articulate, painterly brush strokes – Reid is the most expressionist painter in NGD. The first time I saw his paintings I thought of James Ensor, the second, Pierre Bonnard. Now, at this very moment, I cannot recall any artist to whom I see an affinity – Diebenkorn? They are infuriatingly difficult to pin down and therein lay their vigor. Is his preoccupation with figure, text or paint? Hazarding a guess, we would probably settle for the paint.

The paradox of Christine McCauley's work is that the long hours spent achieving the sedimentary accumulations of pigment and wax (as scrupulous, inexorable and capricious as a metaphorically parallel geological era) result not in concrete formations, rather they spawn features which appear to be suspended, poised to commit, at some future point in time, a more permanent residency. Until then, their postponed presence augurs a more unnervingly fraught ambiguous manifestation. Such a ponderous analysis is aptly reflective of McCauley's glacial progress. Her long hours of labor, fixed in layers of encaustic, result in images that are curiously ephemeral. There is something disturbing about the *suety*, build-up of wax, something arcane, something anthological. It evokes the pressing of flowers, the collection of entomological samples for laboratory analysis – slabs of paraffin entombing mortal remains in scientific archives – associated reminiscences of stoic Victorian proclivities for documentation and the amassing of keepsakes. Disconcertingly alive one moment, her portraits, shift and morph addressing mortality, and with it, the theme of commemoration, because her subjects, encased forever in a mausoleum of cold, solidified wax, do not sit on the surface but are trapped within. These trapped images are born from the trapped

images of photographs. McCauley's work is unequivocally tied to photography. Photographs are permanent works, but the anonymity of the images in McCauley's work seem as transient as images lifted from a photo album. Her monumental paintings (they are actually tablets) resonate because they transform the banal into the exotic. Powerful works of transformation, they speak profoundly about commemoration, mortality and the pervasive culture of candid paper photography, a culture like that of the Victorians, which will soon be consigned to memory.

The quest for the right image, be it a photograph taken by the artist, shot with startling professional acumen (or one shamelessly lifted from a magazine and digitally altered) is at the core of Paul Synder's work. This amassed, relentless backlog of material is the source from which he procures the elements of his compositions. The task of accumulating and sifting through this material is one that Snyder must relish otherwise, why go through such anguish? It is not as if Snyder cannot draw. His anatomical sculpture clearly reveals his advanced proficiency as a draftsman. He could (and does) make scrupulous drawings to research his paintings, but he prefers the thrill of accruing and manipulating imagery. The point of a pencil simply does not offer enough possibilities and permutations. Snyder is interested, above all, in combining disparate images. Robert Rauschenberg and R.B. Kitaj immediately spring to mind, but Rauschenberg was less a manipulator of lifted imagery than a presenter of it, tending to arrange pulp material and screen-print it as it fell; Kitaj's work is manipulative but with a more cinematic bent. Snyder's work is not based on mere *objets trouvés*, and neither is it purely cinematic. Rather, he is interested in sorting and sifting to make complex, intimate, narrative scenarios, moreover, most of his imagery is developed from his own brood of original photographs. Exotic and fascinating, the subject of these photographs is reminiscent of children playing dress-up – plundering the dress-up box to play the over-acted roles of pirates and damsels. Except in Synder's photographs the subjects are usually adult models, digitally manipulated against a myriad of different backdrops. In this sense, Snyder belongs to the

artist and model tradition, that is, the model as muse. Interestingly, these images are severely edited in the finished paintings because there is little evidence of such frivolity in his paintings. Or to put it another way, the imagery in his exquisitely executed paintings is less frivolous than it is disturbing. The juxtapositions may be bizarre, but the final paintings have a curiously serene austerity, only offering an occasional glimpse of the layers of sedition and ostentation that lie beneath the surface. In his recent work, perhaps recognizing the visceral authenticity of childhood games, Snyder has incorporated children. Such images function as a metaphor for innocence, making the subjects, and us, in turn, as we regard the paintings, all the more vulnerable.

"My Paintings are large because I have to paint people life size." Which is a bit like saying: my paintings are big because people are big. Despite evidence to the contrary, Adam Duff is not a muralist (even if he has already received several commissions for wall paintings in public places). Despite the scale of his paintings, Duff does not feel the need to draw out his compositions on paper in advance. In this respect, his very large works are as much drawings as they are paintings. The whole process is born of stubbornness. Such inflexibility marks the work of all the artists (not just the ones in this exhibition), but in Duff's work, at such a scale, it is more obdurately obvious. Banality, scale, figure, drawing, color, religion, composition, architecture, and exoticism – all the elements of western painting – all here for perusal. It takes a certain dogged, naïve arrogance to do this sort of work. You have to believe you can get away with it. But then again, making art has always been an act of faith. Think of Jackson Pollock, another *big* painter. Adam Duff, the nascent painter of the group, is no J. P., but he has a tremendous faith in the fundamentals of creating pictorial space. Purists might advise Duff to draw more, to get acquainted with anatomy, rather than poured concrete, before attempting such *nonsense*, but what marks his work is its determined, surrealist absurdity. It is like looking at a Balthus painting – like looking at *The Street* (MOMA, New York, 1933), albeit without the grace. Balthus' highbrow, subversive, erotic, drawing-room fantasies, with their air of ennui and sophistication,

are almost the complete antithesis of Adam Duff's proletarian role call. Duff's characters (whether of the Pope or a witless pedestrian) are all played by uncouth, muscle-bound prizefighters, giving his paintings a sort of coarse ubiquity. It is refreshing to see the fundamentals, the meat and potatoes, of painting laid bare to remind us where all this fine art malarkey comes from. Art can pull and draw from many directions. Adam Duff's monumental paintings, drawing on the fundamentals of figurative painting: people, space and architecture, act as a foil to the other work in *New Generation Detroit*. Adam Duff is an American painter (not a Soviet social realist) who has not yet been touched by the cosmopolitanism of contemporary art, and who is still as enamored of Piero and Poussin as he might be of Paul Cadmus.

Finally, whether or not the artist is a willing conspirator in the intoxicating pursuit of artistic celebrity, existentially the cult of the artist is a fragile construct. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, etc. When the hoopla dies down – when the artist's bones are interred, only the work remains – the historical artifact and perhaps a few brittle sheaves of paper. Yet while the artist breathes life into the work, what makes contemporary art so vividly stimulating and engaging is the visceral experience – the palpable connection with the living artist.

Dick Goody
Director
Meadow Brook Art Gallery

¹ Sarah Lucas, *Art at the Turn of the Millennium*, Köln, Taschen, 1999, 326

² Tracy Emin, *ibid*, 146

³ Edward Lucie-Smith *Visual Arts in the Twentieth Century*, Harry N. Abrams, 1996, 377

⁴ From the title of the book: *The Saatchi Decade*, Booth-Clibborn Editions, London, 1999

⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Advertising Age* magazine, 3 Sept. 1976

Hartmut Austen

Nur wer sich ändert, bleibt sich treu.

(Only those who change, stay true to themselves.)

Wolf Biermann

For Lease. Artist studio. Pontiac. Russell Industrial, studio building near I-75, Hamtramck, but not so suitable for painters. Get a hotmail account.

Yesterday, a conversation with a gallery manager in Ferndale: he compares Detroit with L.A. rather than N.Y. or other East Coast cities with respect to urban sprawl and automotive dependency. I haven't thought about that. One has to be careful to remember where the car is parked before entering the mall.*

Schmacht for a cigarette.

Memo, Dec. 8th: Mr. H. visits studio. *Likes Lake Shore Drive, Mississippi*, generally the larger ones. Asks about etchings, prints. In Chicago, plan to see the Arts Club, Cultural Center, Ren. Society, Art Fair. There is a Woman, and her companion, looking towards the gallery sign: have we been here before?

David Schwimmer? Schwimmer, no - David Zwirner ...

G. Kuitcas *Coming Home*, based on house map, the walls illuminated, like a landing strip at night. Beautiful painting. Staple canvas directly at the wall again, like 1996. Use real canvas now. Meet M. from Berlin at his booth at the Art Fair. He invites me to come with him to the reception at the Art Institute that night. Free beer and snacks and a preview of the new 20th century department. A lot has been rearranged, some I recognize. Paint watercolor *Selbst* big, in oil.

Immature artists imitate, mature artists steal.

C. Scribner Jr.

Ten in One Gallery, next to Busy Bee, which doesn't exist anymore. As well as the diner at N. Milwaukee. Real estate companies seem to occupy everything. I don't know anyone anymore. But two of them I recognize right away: at Damen, a man who screams like mad and a Mexican table cleaner at Penny's. The cute waitress wasn't here anymore, unfortunately.

Think of Polke and Palermo. Simple sketches, drawings. Colorvision with closed eyes: red brown background, blue colorfield underpainting (dark), clear green islands, overpainted sketch, knots etc., everything in same lightness. Similar principle as *Big Abstract Painting*, 1996. Think of Mondrian. Toronto Film Festival. Do Germans need a visa?

In Bielefeld, Michael Buthe exhibition at the Kunsthalle. Then to Kassel, where M. picks me up to drive together to Fulda, furnishing his new apartment. While riding the train back through North Hessen, I compare the landscape with that of Michigan. The German landscape seems more cultivated, with greater diversity, one recognizes the centered, church-in-the-middle village structures. But as soon as I see those typical egg white houses, seventies or renovated, frustration and boredom takes place.

Interesting, today, in Berlin, visiting G. in her studio, what she mentioned about representation of objects which dissolve into



Hartmut Austen, *Montana*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 29"

abstraction. She wants to unsettle the viewer so that what seems like common sense suddenly appears less clear and uncertain. She had somehow combined two very painterly executed puppet heads with her balloon theme, and she wasn't quite sure, in how far she should allow herself to explore side trails of her main way. We both came to the same opinion that she should.

Baselitz paintings at the Guggenheim Berlin. The catalog reads: Lieber Georg, (...) Dein Rudi. One gets the impression that the ultimate base flattery begins now.

When I'm good, I'm goody? When I'm bad, I'm better.

The other day a conversation with A. about Polke. A common theme, besides irony. He shows me some of his books. In how far is heterogeneity homogeneous?

Visit Prinzenbad, Monday. Finally, swimming again after 4 months. My Prinzenbad.

Need health test and translated birth certificate. See a show about Lucien Bernhard, who worked in Berlin and later in the U.S. Like so many. Who do I know?

H. Ben Austen. Hart Austen. Art Austen. Hank Austen. Hal Austen.

To my surprise, I have discovered an Ackermann painting on view at Cranbrook Museum. I have no idea what to paint. Hopefully, no one will notice. Memo: It is important for me to return to Detroit, I want to make it to my homeplace, at least for now, at least mentally. Today I saw my mother placing some pillows on the couch, and lying down, putting up her feet in a way that none of us at home were ever allowed. I have never seen her doing that before. That astonished me, I liked it.

I have made a decision: if people keep asking me, how I like being in Detroit, I'll tell them to read what's written on the T-shirt of the Lester Bangs character in last year's movie *Almost Famous*. But there is always hope.

Hartmut Austen

*Based on notes taken during the first year in the U.S

Solo Exhibitions

- 2000 *Paintings*, Network Gallery, Pontiac, MI
- 1992 *Zwischenergebnis*, Kunstflur, Bielefeld, Germany

Selected Exhibitions

- 2000 *The German Show*, works on paper, Museum of New Art, Pontiac, MI
- Documenta U.S.A.*, Urban Center for Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, MI
- 1998 *Void*, Unfinished Gallery, New York, NY
- In The Soup*, Kesselhaus, Berlin, Germany
- 1997 *Meisterschüler*, Hochschule der Künste, Berlin, Germany
- 1994 *Malerei*, School of the Art Institute, Chicago, IL

Education

- 1991-97 Hochschule der Künste Berlin



Hartmut Austen, *Procession*, 2001, oil on canvas, 22" x 28"

circulating liquid. The blades are then tempered by reheating to the correct temperature to give them flexibility and toughness.

Grinding consists of applying the blades to the rapidly revolving periphery of an abrasive wheel, removing the steel until the desired tapers from the back to the cutting edge and from bolster to point are attained. The blades are kept cool with water or a cutting fluid to maintain their temper. After grinding, the surface of a blade is given a finer finish in successive operations known as glazing and buffing. This is followed, if desired, by mirror polishing, or 'satin' finishing.⁵

The idea of the razor, the mark that it makes as well as the material that it can delicately remove depending upon the force that is applied allow the razor to continue to be referred to as an ideal. Its history is relative to that of man's history and will continue to be even in the face of new technology.

Matt Bandsuch

¹ Britannica.com britannica.com/eb/article?eu=58131&tocid=5355

² britannica.com britannica.com/eb/article?eu=28789&tocid=1665

³ <http://homepage.dtn.ntl.com/paul.linnell/electricity/razors.html>

⁴ Britannica.combritannica.com/eb/article?idxref=57581

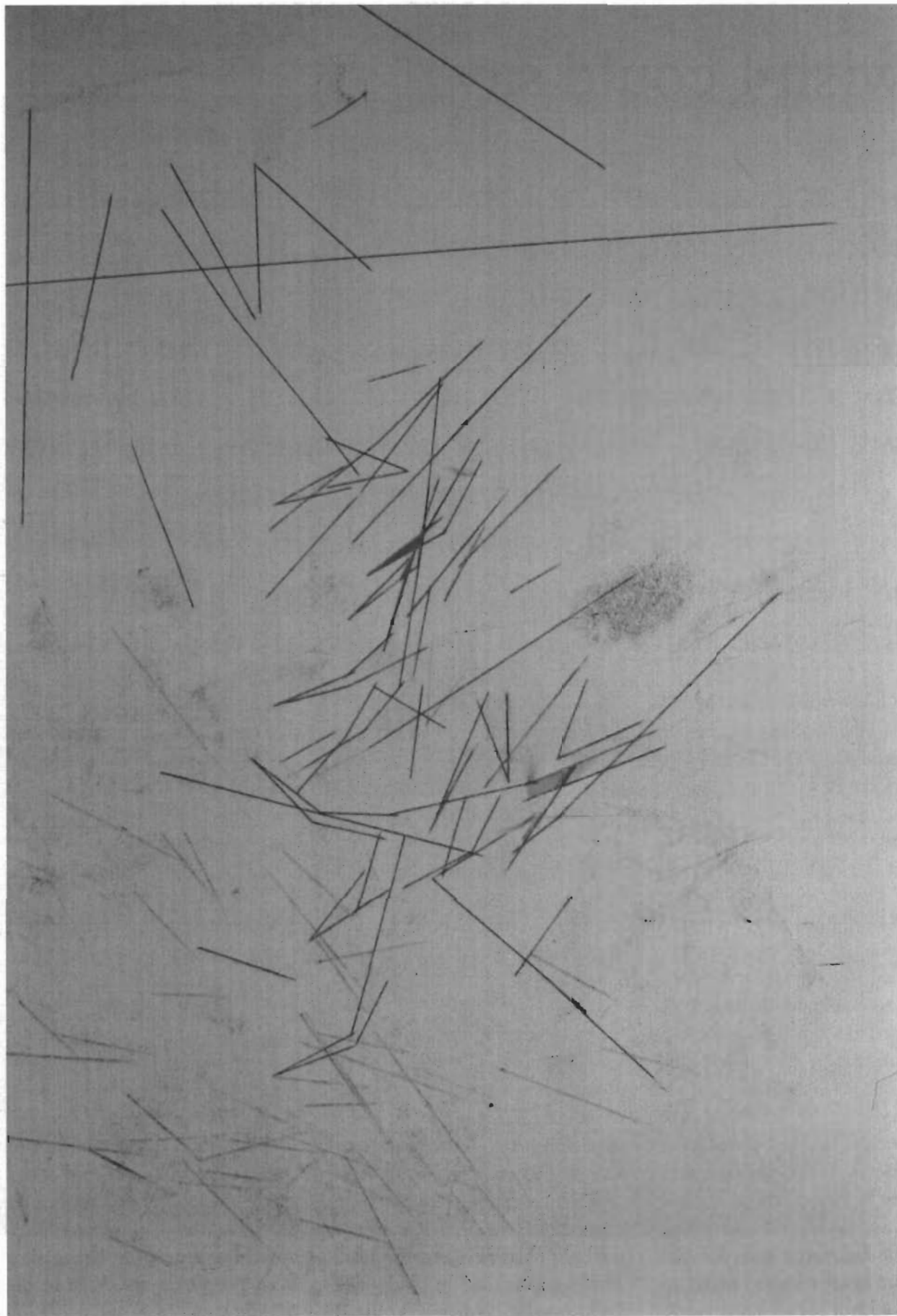
⁵ Britannica.combritannica.com/eb/article?eu=28789&tocid=1665

Selected Exhibitions:

- 2001 G Factor Studios, Chicago, IL
- 2000 Max Fish, New York, NY
- 2000 C Pop, Detroit, MI
- 1999 3+4, Detroit, MI
- 1999 Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI
- 1998 Big Biscuit Gallery, Detroit, MI
- 1997 3+4, Detroit, MI

Education:

- 1995 B.F.A., The Center for Creative Studies,
Detroit, MI



Matt Bandsuch, *Compression Drawing*, 2001, ink on paper, 8.5" x 11"

I wish I could say

that I became a painter because I was inspired to express myself or had something I wanted to communicate to the world, but the truth is that when I started making art back in junior high school it had more to do with getting the attention of girls than anything else. A lot of the cute girls in my school were in the art class. But, after a couple of art classes I decided I liked making art as much as being around the girls, and specifically took an interest in drawing. Those early drawings were often terrible renderings of my favorite band members, and the occasional tattoo design. I never realized while in grade school how lousy my drawings were.

In my hometown of Muskegon there is little art exposure other than annual arts and crafts shows in the City Park. I would go to these events with other pretentious adolescents and admire the realistic drawings of James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and W.C. Fields. I developed a deep-rooted appreciation for realist art that has taken me years to try to shake off. My parents managed to send me to art-camp one summer at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. The essential part of my summer art camp experience was that I realized my limitations. I was in classes with all these kids that had real, natural talent, something I've never had. It made me realize that, for me, to be an artist I had to make up for it with a lot of hard work.

This stands true today. As I've gone through the art program at Wayne State University, I've painted alongside superior draftsmen and kids that appeared to understand color better than I did. I soon figured out that I was never going to be a realist painter. I decided to let my imagination play a big role in my painting.

The paintings I did while I was in the Marine Corps were all about this sort of crazy crap out of my imagination. They were large scale, full of strange figures and objects in bright colors and a lot of fun to do. But, they were horrible paintings that won't see the light of day ever again. I did all those paintings in places like Jacksonville, North Carolina,

where the only person I could talk with about art was my tattoo artist. Who would have guessed that the most civilized person in the state of North Carolina would be a tattoo artist in the oldest, most run down shop - in a town with twenty tattoo shops? This guy made me realize that I was separating my paintings from all my other interests; I wasn't considering my interests in literature and movies, and especially pop-culture, as valid interests in my painting. I have a complicated relationship with pop-culture, at times I want to reject it entirely, at other times I want to embrace it wholeheartedly. I suppose I'll go on doing the same thing that most people do and keep in the middle area.



Adam Duff, *The Boxer Series #2* (diptych), 2001 oil on canvas, 96" x 144"



Adam Duff, *The Boxer Series #1*, 2001, oil on canvas, 66" x 138"*

All my interests, aside from painting, help me exercise my brain a little, and keep my imagination functioning. The hardest part of growing up for me has been keeping my imagination from shriveling up. I am trying to make my

paintings a venue for the viewer to use their imagination also. So my approach to a painting now is to take whatever small idea seems funny and build a large painting around it. One painting started from eating

lucky charms and watching kung-fu movies. It struck me as humorous to have a battle between ninjas and leprechauns. This sort of stuff piles up on a canvas along with architectural elements that I steal and ends up as a painting.



Selected Exhibitions

2001 *Student Exhibition*, Community Arts Gallery, Wayne State University

Education

2001 B.F.A., Painting, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

1994 M.C.A.S., Iwakuni, Japan – University of Maryland

*this painting is not featured in the exhibition

Matt Gordon

I was completely in love

with a girl, marriage love, but she had a powerful urge to move to Chicago. I had just made a bundle of money from the Ford Motor Company and did not need to work, yet, I wanted to paint. I was young and had fantastic and unrealistic visions. These visions were being worked out into drawings and paintings and they all had everything to do with my new found lost love and the pain, anger, and false sense of proving my love. I was a crappy boyfriend and didn't think with my head too much. Then again, I was young and well, a boy.

The girl ended up fueling all of my paintings and my ideas became more realistic and my vision became odd and masked - the combination worked well for me.

It's five years later now and I'm a man/boy and my paintings have a completely thorough code which is far removed from my initial uneasiness with dreaming about what life will be like. Life is what you make it. If you walk the straight path your life will be straight. Whatever - you know what I mean.

Studying Karma now, I work out my personality flaws and praise the highlights within my characters. I have something like forty-four characters so, basically, if I lost my left hand I'd go completely insane! Painting is my therapy, my diary. I do not understand how uncreative people can have a normal life. What I want is a normal life. I'll never have one. I married my paintings and have affairs with outside life. I like it this way. I do need to meet a girl as selfish as me though.

I haven't painted in a month and I have no real motivation to paint. I know I'm starting a new chapter of life. So, I've been lifting weights, riding my bike, and drinking beer. I really like writing nowadays. I'm a visual/mental time-bomb waiting to "Johnny Apple Seed" my unfinished painting and can not wait till this laziness leaves.



Matt Gordon, *Wax Museum*, 1999-2000, acrylic on panel, 27" x 17"

I wrote this the other day so I know it's near. "I'm searching for the absolute truth again." How many people are in line ahead of me? In little league they taught you that it doesn't matter if you win or lose. True, it doesn't, but God it feels good when you're on top of what you are focused on - I really like that.

I took a long vacation from my mind as any over-active thinker should. I know I'm going to be completely lost in thought and synchronicity when I start my final leg of preparing for my shows in September and November. When I'm completely devoted to painting and there's a purpose like a show - that's when I love painting cause you feel like a magician - lighting things with unlike ideas and creating a theory for everything.

Matt Gordon

Selected Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2000 | <i>D-POP</i> , Forbidden Gallery, Dallas, TX
<i>The Sweet Tooth Review</i> , C-POP, Detroit, MI |
| 1999 | <i>Grand Opening</i> , C-POP, Detroit, MI |

Education

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1994-1996 | Undergraduate studies, The Center For Creative Studies, Detroit, MI |
| 1992-1994 | Undergraduate studies, Columbus College of Art and Design, OH |



Matt Gordon, *Prime Time Nobel Prize*, 2001, acrylic on wooden table top, 26" x 20"

Kai Kim

Detroit was a distant place

mentioned in stories about hard-ass down and out people. I was a down and out girl from San Francisco, now I'm trying to live a decent midwestern life in Detroit.

I enjoy doing tedious, painstaking work - doing penance through art. This helps me to empty my ego, like a monk painting icons in a monastery. Painting is a spiritual and a physical experience. We are limited by our carnal state and our numbered days. I wanted to consciously work within that confinement of time and physical state. The acknowledgement of my impermanence is connected to the monastic aspect of my work.

The visual and the conceptual aspect of my work are connected to the "California Cuisine". It is the ingredients of many different tastes. Some people used to think my paintings were done by a Hispanic male artist whose alter ego may have been a Korean female painter.

This process or journey is what being an artist or a human being is all about. This process, where we fall, get up, and fall down again. This is the journey where we attain wisdom or finally "get" the joke.

Art making should be a part of an everyday act. Working, eating, painting, sleeping... Counting down, counting time in... Detroit.

I used to be categorized as one of the "Bay Area Artist" before I became a "Detroit Artist". In California, the fusion of many different cultures is very apparent. Waitressing for years in San Francisco restaurants, I've developed the taste of "California Cuisine", which is a fusion of Japanese, Italian, Mexican, Chinese... and whatever. I used to work with an Italian cook whose "secret" ingredient for his spaghetti sauce was soy sauce.

I research my subject matter for weeks or months and I prepare the materials for my projects. I am training for a marathon that lasts for 100 days or 14 days. I am practicing, praying, and preparing for the moment of salvation or judgement. This ritual is the driving force behind my paintings.

The Seven Deadly Sins in Seven Days and *The Seven Heavenly Virtues in Seven Days*, involved months of research and preparations for the 14 days. It is interesting to think



Kai Kim, *7 Heavenly Virtues in 7 Days, (Miss Humility)*, 2001, enamel on aluminum, 20" x 12"

that “Sloth” is considered one of the Deadly Sins. “Idle hands are the devil’s play things.”

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, I identify mostly with Gluttony. Excessiveness got me into a lot of trouble when I was a hippie in San Francisco. I was fascinated by the depth of the “lower levels” of man.

I remember hitchhiking in Portugal and a truck full of peasant laborers picked me up. I was invited to their home for lunch and it was the

most amazing three-course lunch. I’m not sure if those peasants were committing the sins of gluttony but they sure do know how to eat.

One day, in an outrage, I declared, “I will never paint again.” I burnt every painting and drawing I had ever done since I was a child. I then became a photographer for five years. Then I freaked again and burnt all my negatives and photos and vowed never to photograph. I started to paint on metal and have not had a pyromaniac attack since.

Painting is all about control.

I want to be in control.

*Then I want to be taken by,
intoxicated by, possessed by
something... maybe by my paintings.*

Kia Kim

Solo/Two Person Exhibitions

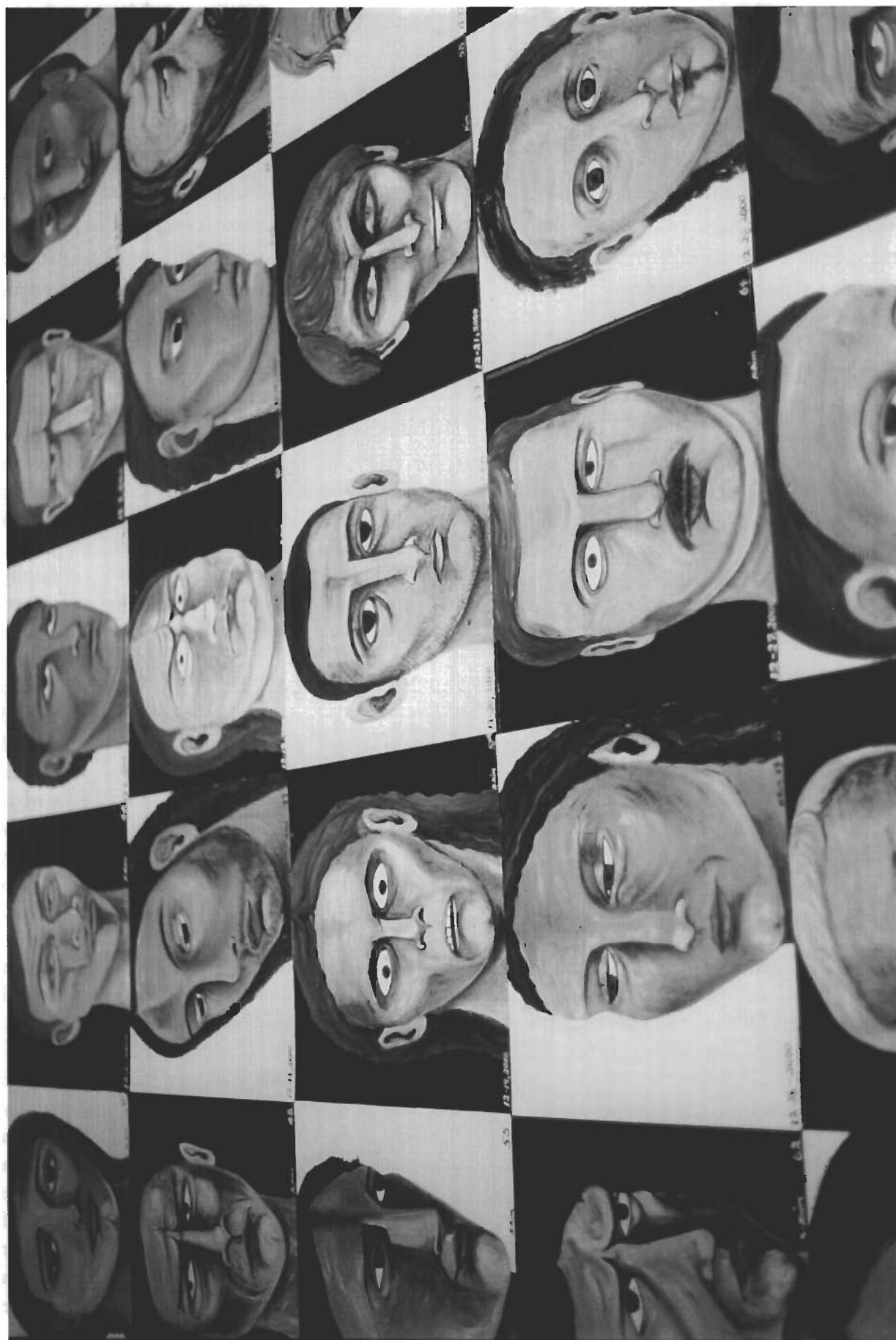
- 2001 *Knocking From the Inside*, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI
- 1999 *Redemption*, Institute for the Humanities, Ann Arbor, MI
- 1997 *Deposition*, Matrix Gallery, Ann Arbor, MI
- 1989 *The Feet, the Woman and the Sin*, Rackham Gallery, Ann Arbor, MI
- Red Paintings*, Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1988 *Meridian*, Still Lights Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2000 *Eight/OO*, Artseen, Windsor, Ontario, Canada,
- Anti-Auto Show*, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI,
- 1999 *Peace in the Millennium*, Peace Gallery, Detroit, MI
- 1998 *Body Memory*, Zsigmond H’az, Budapest, Hungary
- Anti-Pessimism*, Nador Gallery, Budapest, Hungary
- Common Ground*, Korean Cultural Center, Los Angeles, CA
- 1997 *San Francisco Art ’97*, Coins Gallery, London, England
- Cinema Inferno*, Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY
- 1996 *The National Dish*, Slusser Gallery, Ann Arbor, MI, ,
- 1993 *Arts For the Homeless*, Show & Tell Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1992 *Small Objects*, Three Muses Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1991 *Wheel of Fortune*, Lollapalooza, Nationwide Tour of Music and Arts
- 1990 *Emerging Artist 1990*, Show & Tell Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1989 *Fire Pitt*, Installation/Performance, SFAI, San Francisco, CA

Education

- 1997 M.F.A., Painting, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
- 1989 B.F.A., Painting & Photography, San Francisco Art Institute, CA



Kai Kim, *100 Faces of Good and Evil in 100 Days*, 2001, enamel on linoleum tiles, 10' x 10'

Christine McCauley

When I was six years old,

in Sister Mary Immaculata's first grade class at St. Katherine's School, I melted each and every one of my 64 Crayola Crayons on the hot water pipe next to my desk. It was, for some inexplicable reason, enormously gratifying. I had worked my way, in chromatic sequence, through the entire spectrum and was just finishing off the black one by the time the myopic little nun discovered what I was up to. Once the terror of having been found out was spent I found that cleaning up was just as exciting as the original experiment.

Now I use a better quality wax. I'm interested in how to use light and color to create Atmosphere and depth. I want to capture the air and the light that surrounds my subjects. I'm also obsessed with the physical subtleties of human expression. Does the curl of that lip suggest empathy or derision? If it's derision, then where is the counterbalancing element that prevents her from appearing to hold the entire world in utter contempt? If the lips almost sneer, then perhaps it's the suggestion of sorrow in the eyes that defuses the expression on her lips. But where is the sorrow located? The eyelids? The irises? My objective is to render one complex moment in the life of my subject; one moment during which they have striven to project themselves as they would be seen by the world and yet have revealed more than they intended. It is a moment for which I later invest months of my best effort; it is my image of their personification. When the viewer interprets the painting they do so without knowledge of the sitter's personality or my reading of it. This is not a bad thing. It is, however, an other thing from that which I intended to paint - and still a third from what my sitter intended.

I doubt the relevance of this information to anyone looking at the work; it cannot possibly convey the experience of painting a portrait. My mind is always engaged in the process of making art and there is nothing I'd rather be doing. Art is a small business fueled by my compulsion. And I do mean compulsion. Art making is both a constant desire and endless gratification wherein each piece

represents a momentary respite in the continuum. I spent the 80s donning insufferable little business suits trotting my company's wares out to corporations all across Chicagoland. But during those ten years, every spare minute I spent on making art - along with every spare cent. Eventually I began ditching work to paint. I avoided family and friends in order to spend more time on my art. I didn't seek help; I didn't want help. I wanted time to work.

Going back to school gave me the time to learn to paint and afforded me the opportunity to attend graduate school with a group of highly motivated people - none of whom had spent ten years in other careers. Their focus was complete. They knew what they wanted from life. Furthermore, they knew exactly where it was kept. It was in New York City, but a lot of it was going on in London. Chicago had run out of it in the 80's. There was the eternal debate about whether Detroit could ever have it. "It," of course, being the "scene" - the Petrie dish culture of artistic cool where what is hot is cultivated under the glaring lamps of the media.

I find myself at odds with the thesis that artists and their work are fused like a conceptually enmeshed entity, with the artist as much a commodity as the objects she creates. I'm concerned that given this set of circumstances the process of art becomes the performance of purveyance and that the artists become just another part of the entertainment industry. It rather misses the point of the existence of the art. Isn't it the



photo by Tim Thayer

Christine McCauley, *Lori in 1998*, 2001, encaustic, 32" x 48"

piece *itself* that carries the meaning? Otherwise why produce objects at all? The kind of media sophistication Hirst or Koons engages in mitigates the viewer's first hand experience of the work by foisting the associated connotations of The Artist's Name upon the pieces. This is neither a new nor particularly scintillating phenomenon. I work in Detroit specifically because that sort of scene isn't here. I don't use the media as an expressive medium. I don't have a public persona. I make paintings for a living.

Life is good.

Selected Exhibitions

2000 *Four Walls, Four Painters*, Glass Curtain Gallery,

Chicago, IL

Body and Soul, Paint Creek Center for the Arts,
Rochester, MI

1999 *Wacky Painting*, Detroit Artists Market, Detroit,
MI *Beyond the Surface*, Paint Creek Center for
the Arts,

Rochester, MI

1998 *Summer Show*, Lemberg Gallery, Birmingham, MI
New Works by Cranbrook Artists, Cranbrook
Museum of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI
Michigan Artists, Birmingham Bloomfield Art
Center, Birmingham, MI

Education

1998 M.F.A., Painting, Cranbrook Academy of Art,
Bloomfield Hills, MI

1995 Post Baccalaureate Certificate, Painting, School of
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

1994 B.A. in Fine Arts, Columbia College of Chicago,
Chicago, IL



photo by Tim Thayer

Christine McCauley, *Stewart in 1999*, 2001, encaustic 56" x 36"

Senghor Reid

Talking

There is no singular concrete reason as to why I have begun “The Talkies” series. In my imagery I have **ultimately** attempted to present a variety of statements **that will** optically captivate the viewer. I feel that my ideology should be interesting, but not necessarily enjoyable. Primarily I have sought to simply report and reinterpret the images that we see everyday in popular media.

However, there is a range of other notions that interest me. There is a certain type of comprehensive **packaging** that I mean to create that involves a **combination** of ideas. It isn't a fusion, but rather a **compilation** of signifying characteristics that feed **off of one** another, both conversing harmoniously and **contrasting** vehemently. They technically may or may not be related thoughts, but they do mirror one another conceptually when immersed into a collected vision. They become unbalanced themes forced to relate in a box of truth, fantasy, and speculation. Beyond this context lies the idea of these relationships interacting with the viewer.

With the advancement in technology the moving pictures shown in movie houses became talking pictures, loaded with sound, words and music. What has always been striking to me is that these so-called “silent films” were already talking. The director's manipulative possibilities were endless as provided by the motion picture camera and its accompanying lights, crew, etc. This enabled him to manufacture a reality using a projector and massive screen as primary tools of representation when shown to audiences. Although the format may usually be smaller, this notion of manipulation holds even truer for the photographer's still image. The viewer of a photograph evokes his/her own contextual framework for the frozen image, thus supplying an endless body of words and meaning may or may not be overtly stated in the media itself. Because of the loaded nature of this interaction pictures will and have always spoken.



Senghor Reid, *Bubblegum* (contains an interpolation from "The Adoration" as recorded by the Electric Prunes), 2001, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60"

The title of my series of paintings, "The Talkies," moves closest to the real problems involved with the inadequate presentation of the picture in popular media, and the reality and fiction related to the viewers interaction with the data within them. For myself these ideas parallel the structure and function of the American entertainment magazine and their primary contextual premise of public spectacle and astonishment. "The Talkies" is

a magazine that I have created with the immediate mission of revealing the truth within the American cultural establishment. Founded in January of 1999, "The Talkies" has printed 32 issues within one volume as of August 2001 (not including two preview issues from 1998). I have chosen to enlarge a select number of pages from the magazine that vary from cover pages to article photos to unprinted ads and photos. Thus far my primary focus has been hip hop culture,

but is constantly expanding.

"The Talkies" do contain text in the images, enabling them to "speak" with certain duality that exists tangibly and intangibly. The viewer reads, interprets and concludes, only to find him/herself questioning the true message being presented. It parallels the same essence of picking up any newsstand magazine and seeing Ronald Reagan on the cover with the heading "American Hero."

Questions should always ensue.

Senghor Reid

Solo Exhibitions

- 1999 *Icon of the Vanguard*, JRainey Gallery, Detroit, MI
- 1998 *James Tatum Foundation Invitational*, Charles H. Wright Museum

Selected Exhibitions

- 2001 *Essentials*, JRainey Gallery, Detroit, MI
National Conference of Artists National Exhibition, Skylight Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
NCA Invitational, CAAS Gallery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Arts and Letters Scholarship Exhibition, Marygrove College, Detroit, MI
- 2000 *Februarius*, Sisson Gallery, Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn, MI
NCA 2000, Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, MI
Art Party 9 Exhibition, Booker T. Washington Association HQ, Detroit, MI
- 1998 *Reflections/Self-Portrait*, National conference of Artists Gallery, Detroit, MI
Masks: Myths, Magic and Metaphor, CAAS Gallery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
- 1997 *Kwanzaa Exhibition*, Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI
- 1996 *Martin Luther King Day Exhibition*, Curator: Nick Cave, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Family Artists, Arts Extended Gallery, Detroit, MI

Education

- 1999 B.F.A. Drawing and Painting, School of Art and Design, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, MI



Senghor Reid, *Long Necked Betrayal*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 44" x 44"

Paul Snyder

I'm addicted to looking,

seeing, and comparing. And god knows how I got this way, given there was so little visual interest in my environment growing up. One would think, as the stereotype goes, a Sicilian-Catholic housewife-mother of six, although living in Detroit, would adorn her home with first order religious icon merchandise. I discovered that living in Brooklyn for four years. Yet our house had nothing on the order of plaster Madonna's on the front lawn, or painted porcelain saviors arranged around rococo furniture. The décor in our house was bereft of any aesthetic sensibilities beyond JCPenny coffee table clusters around the Magnavox, all the more problematized by the parental tendency to switch the TV station whenever a tantalizing bit of flesh or debauchery presented itself for my innocent but curious viewing. So does this early dearth of visual stimulation account for (as a compensatory mechanism) my current scopophilia?

Suburban Detroit is not a cultural Mecca, aside from shiny sheet metal anyway. So I had to dig for the stuff I was interested in or make it myself. When I was in second grade I got busted by the teacher for passing around a drawing I did of a naked woman. My classmates giggled too much when they saw it. But I think now, because it was an honest early attempt at getting it right, and in that it wasn't a particularly "dirty" depiction of a woman, she let the incident pass with a critique of all things. All she said was, "her legs are too short"! I must have taken that as a challenge.

My Dad on the other hand is a philosophical, scientific, dreamer, sort of guy. A volatile compliment to the otherwise heavy handed religious agenda coming from the direction of Mom. He always had books and magazines around which dealt with outer space, life in the ocean, and even evolution! The books I got from catechism always had sunbeams shooting through

clouds on the cover. I sometimes heard angels singing in my head when I looked at that. It was GOD I supposed, nebulous and un-shaped. The evolution book showed a procession of human species variations from Paleolithic ape-man to the upright guy with a spear; they even showed his penis, which I found particularly daring. Years later I came to understand that my parent's opposing characteristics were very much a part of my own conflicted psyche: secular, pragmatic, serious vs. spiritual, emotional, playful.

It wasn't for a long time, however, that I actually started making art in earnest. I was 27 and working in Japan as a car designer. After commuting to work in heavy stop-and-go-soul-sucking-traffic one time too many, it occurred to me that I was going to work to make more cars, which would ultimately end up in front of me preventing me from getting to work on time to make more cars. It was clearly a crazy viscous



Paul Snyder, *Terranean*, 2001, oil on canvas, 32" x 26"

circle. So I started in a very naïve way to paint pictures. That very early work was not altogether different from my first paintings in grad school. Basically bald guys trapped in various seemingly uncontrollable external circumstances; pretty much how I felt at the time.

I eventually moved to NYC and started graduate school. It was bliss and I loved it completely. However, after finishing school, and staying on for a few more years, to my not-so-naïve surprise, instant , “Art World” fame did not come, but poverty did. So I returned to Detroit in 1999 to collect my self and make some money. Back to designing cars, but this time with a lot more perspective. I refuse to get lazy and comfortable with the cushy job. I haven’t had a TV in ten years, which makes me sort of a freak to my friends and family. They’ve actually become subject matter for me lately and they’re a little concerned I think.

To a large degree my process now is an extension of my return to Detroit. The first thing I did

with my Ford salary was buy a computer. It’s saved me enormous amounts of time (which is in very short supply) in getting through, organizing, selecting, and combining images I want to pursue as paintings. Ultimately, as finished objects, the digital prints are not nearly as satisfying sensually as paint can be, although I do find the graphic collage quality compelling and fresh. The trick for me is to develop them into something that doesn’t appear too reactionary to contemporary culture, but rather maintains a timeless quality. That comes through in the paint and the inevitable alterations that occur iconographically once I get to the canvass. There is always something unexpected that occurs during a paintings development. One of the results of working in such a time consuming layered style is that the paintings become a record of my personal growth and evolving perspective toward the subject. And ultimately that’s what is important to me. These paintings are like a visual journal. It’s not so much that they need to be seen, as much as (for me) how much they need to be made.

Paul Snyder
Detroit, 2001

Selected Exhibitions

- 2000 *Sex*, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI
- Actual Size*, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI
- 1999 *Three Artists*, Detroit Contemporary, Detroit, MI
- 1998 *Canalogy*, site-specific installation on the Gowanus Canal, Brooklyn, NYC
- Franklin St. Gallery*, group show, curated by Phillip Pearlstein, NYC
- 1997 *Hunter College*, College Art Association, New York Chapter, NYC
- 1995 *Gallerie La Paix*, Odawara, Japan

Education

- 1997 M.F.A., Painting, cum laude, The Graduate School of Figurative Art of the New York Academy of Art, NYC
- 1987 B.F.A., Industrial Design, Painting, and Sculpture, Center for Creative Studies, College of Art and Design, Detroit, MI



Paul Snyder, *School*, 2001, oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

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