February 23 through April 12, 2008
Opening reception Saturday, February 23, 4 to 6 PM
Discover with Anne Beffel and the students at the University of Memphis and Syracuse University what can be seen when you stop, sit still, and observe the world around you.

www.memphis.edu
Just as I had composed a snaring, stingy, indelicate portrait of the Memphis preservationists who brought the Beale Street Landing to yet another scoop-and-shovel project in a row. Again. And for the moment, it appears that the architecture will resemble the original design more than the frontiersman and the Mississippi, but not too indelicate for the residents of Memphis who believe that visual culture cowered in the 19th century. So let me make one serious misadventure into Memphis, I was told that the State of Tennessee ranked below all the other states and Guam in spending on the arts. That was a distinction jealously claimed by residents of other states, so it may not have been true, but the facts recently published by the Tennessee Arts Commission on the occasion of its 40th birthday are daunting and reliable. In 1967, the state of Tennessee spent one cent per capita on the arts, and half of that came from Washington. Today, the state spends $1.36 per capita, and about three fourths is raised in the state through the sale of specialty license plates. The program is an amazing success story and one that has ruffled admittance and simulation across the country. Every Tennessean loves a car, a license plate—all cars participate. In addition to the "Plantation" design, which provides the biggest benefit to TAC, there are dozens of options that support other charitable causes and interests while still contributing to TAC. The latest model, on this plate will support the MED, the Memphis' region's highly regarded and chronically under-funded trauma hospital. Speciality plates can be bought or ordered at your local County Clerk's office. It is nice to be able to support a small fraction of the worthy art efforts in its growing region, thus reissuing something of note, though unfortunately, cannot be a source of chest-thumping glory. Still, editors have some privileges, and I'm invoking mine to pay a small tribute to one of the best exhibitions I've seen in quite a while, Taking Possession organized by the Art Galleries of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock as part of the 50th anniversary of the Little Rock Nine and the integration of Central High School. Brad Cushman, director and curator, and Noah Lamos, assistant curator, carefully selected works by 26 black artists working in conceptual and conceptual styles. It was a knock-out show and it should have traveled far and wide. But it didn’t, so the rest of this editorial is devoted to appreciating you with a little of Bishop’s powerhouses.

Leslie Sandbach
Director, Art Galleries of the University of Arkansas
Beth Edwards: Inside Out
David Lusk Gallery
September
Memphis
Beth Edwards’ recent show Inside Out at the David Lusk Gallery demonstrates emphatically that intelligent, engaging painting need not resort to overwrought mannerisms of eye, mind or hand. The work is wryly sophisticated, artistically learned and formally gripping without pretension or duplicity and, in seeming so, effects a resonance that lingers, satisfying even more with repeat viewings and mental ruminations.

Split almost equally between domestically-scaled oils on canvas and sketchbook-page watercolors, Edwards’ exhibition cultivates the curious, enchanting discomfort offered by garden gnomes, children’s figurines and Bob’s Big Boy. It also meditates on the history of still-lives and interiors, asking somewhat forgotten questions about the act of looking, particularly at the spaces of home and life. “Heaven,” which offers a top-hatted turtle neck-deep in a purple convertible, relegates Brancusi’s bronze “Torso of a Young Man” to the role of lawn jockey. It is a scene as much out of Richard Scarry as from a mid-American sprawling suburban city. It broke my heart a little to find that it wasn’t an image of Memphis. Remarkable in its good-natured inversion of how we think about our native landscape, what is so playfully disruptive about this painting isn’t that the turtle is driving the car, or even that his house might be better appointed than any of ours (it does, after all, keep a Brancusi on the lawn): it’s that seeing a turtle driving a car doesn’t seem too unusual. Everything is so innocuous and lighthearted that we cannot help but stare.

This invocation to prolonged looking is Edwards’ most brilliant tact. Her surfaces are suavely rendered, colored with Skittles and Sweet Tarts, and possessed of that same slickness of surface that makes new cars, Bakelite and good painting so irresistibly attractive. It’s almost too bad that they aren’t edible. Almost, because the longer one looks the more one gains. In the background, against the walls of these rooms, beyond their Modernist furniture plucked from the Sims, Edwards has inserted works by Matisse, Picasso and Guston. They hang in these rooms as they would in most any other suburban living room, but, because we’re in a painting, they act as talismans, reminding us of the interior/still-life/pop culture matrix that animated early Modernism as much as it does Edwards’ own painting. Her foxes, bears and children stare at these icons, at us, and at something beyond the frame, reminding us to do so, to look always and everywhere, longer and harder. Their gaze is a proxy for ours, for Edwards’ and for that of the paintings themselves, which look simultaneously at their own histories and the one being written by our candy-colored pop culture.

The watercolors are even more indulgent. The fluidity of this medium allows Edwards to attain a greater subtlety of palette and rendering. Her color bleeds are nothing less than extraordinary. In “Dollface #8: Pinocchio,” beneath his chin, there is a merger of blues that somehow manages to reach the peaked crispness of an electrocardiogram or the LED readout of a graphic equalizer. Absolutely electric and spellbinding, and it is but a single small passage in one of six equally remarkable watercolors.

These are perfect works for anyone who likes anything—cars, candy, animals, childhood, homes, endearment, discomfort and, especially, painting. Edwards’ paintings are wildly successful on grounds both aesthetic and intellectual. Best is that they improve with every look, with every thought. Only the antiseptic and humorless will find otherwise.

Adrian R. Duran
Duran is an assistant professor of art history at Memphis College of Art


Benchmarks. “Dollface #4,” watercolor on paper, 10 1/2 x 8,” courtesy of David Lusk Gallery.
Fragile Visions: Art and Politics in the New China

Whispering Wind: Recent Chinese Photography

Mark Scala, Chief Curator of the Frist Center, has arranged an exhibition of recent Chinese photography that gives gallery-goers a glimpse inside the borders of the still-secretive nation.

The Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 was a power play within the Communist Party to establish itself in New York, just as Western galleries have hung their own shows in Beijing. However, regardless of the artist's domicile, his or her work presents a progressive image to the rest of the world, China has not yet come to know a history of media and Internet censorship, repressive and illegal independence to this day.

Early Chinese painting was heavily influenced by Daoism, an Anglicized word ascribed to a variety of Westerners ascribe to a variety of Chinese philosophical, religious and ethical concepts. Traditionally, philosophies, Daoism emphasizes the link between humans and nature, in the belief that the connection creates a deeper understanding of existence. This idea can be seen in Han Fung's fighting styles that are modeled after wild animals, as well as in Daoist symbols like the Azure Dragon. 


In the first photo, the landscape, painted faintly of the artist staring defiantly at the camera, a number of Chinese characters describe the artist'shood and content of the film. In this same vein, the artist has joined a number of shoes filled with yak butter transformed into lanterns, alluding to hopeful flames. With "Free Element," Dodo Jin Ming has created a poetic statement about the cost of the loss of China's ancient cultural traditions. Each of Lei's gorgeous images—some of the most striking in the show—contain both pathos and justti. Every poem borne in her name from a single dyuanyan masterpiece, the titillating allusions equal parts heartache and send-up. In such a work, surrealism is an essential tool in a contemporary vein. But don't think Lei is heavy-handed. The shen's unique power depicts a beautiful white lotus with a small frog floating on a perfect petal. With this subtle metaphor we approach and revulsion and makes a point about what happens when a country denies its ancient heritage:

"There are not a lot of people who still think about the inner world of Chinese people and the blood running in our veins. We know but we use it now." Yang Lei said. Lei was inspired to put the shoe together after seeing a number of Chinese photos and videos showing how much he was tlukking in a flowerpot in Beijing and fled the country, leaving a part of himself behind in a home he could not fully abandon. The artist has since returned to his native land. Much has changed in The Land of the Dragon in the last fifteen years. In addition to all of China's economic growth, art has become a major export, and Chinese galleries have begun to establish themselves in New York, just as Western galleries have hung their shows in Berlin. However, regardless of the artist's domicile, his or her work presents a progressive image to the rest of the world, China has not yet come to know a history of media and Internet censorship, repressive and illegal independence to this day.

In a progression of nine self portraits entitled "Family Tree," Sheng Qi hacked off the finger on the past, as well as a way of commenting on the present, "I grew out of the barrel of a gun," stands for Chinese and make art. In a flowerpot in Beijing and fled the country, leaving a part of himself behind in a home he could not fully abandon. The artist has since returned to his native land. Much has changed in The Land of the Dragon in the last fifteen years. In addition to all of China's economic growth, art has become a major export, and Chinese galleries have begun to establish themselves in New York, just as Western galleries have hung their shows in Berlin. However, regardless of the artist's domicile, his or her work presents a progressive image to the rest of the world, China has not yet come to know a history of media and Internet censorship, repressive and illegal independence to this day.

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Unspoken Dialogues
Swing Gallery, EPC Arts and Architecture Building, Knoxville, TN
August 8 – September 5, 2007
Knoxville
Unspoken Dialogues was the latest in a continuing series of themed invitational exhibits at the Swing Gallery. The eight artists in this exhibit produce work in a wide variety of media, including large-scale drawing, video installation, wood sculpture, photography, painting, and two and three-dimensional mixed media. Participating artists were Cip Contreras, Vickie Kallies, Heather Lewis, Andrew Saftel and Martha Shepp, all East Tennessee artists.

Visual dialogue can involve many methods. It can be an integral process involving artists documenting their own divergent thoughts or communication that flows between the artists’ work and either the viewer or the source material. The dialogue may also simply consist of experimental methods used in the creation of a work of art. The subjects in this exhibit ranged from history to contemporary culture, advertising and current events.

Avigail Mannenberg’s dialogue is with her paternal grandmother. Mannenberg effectively used her grand- mother’s photo album, letters, diary and postcard stamps from old letters that document her immigration from Poland to the United States, prior to World War II. The snapshots of family, both at home and in city settings, are transformed into eloquent line drawings that are machine-stitched with various colored threads onto canvas or poly- ester. The end threads are cut and left dangling over the image, giving the finished piece the casual effect of a fast, rough sketch. One canvas series was installed down an entire wall in unframed, sized reproductions, creating a panoply narrative. A large, third grid of 20 separate pieces, titled “Philipkites,” utilized two layers of polyethylene sandwiched between thin, unframed frames. One layer had the stitched outlines of figures, the other layer was screen prints, in black and white ink, of old photos. The artist’s passion for recreating the look and feel of vintage linen tiles is so profound that she created an entire painting of just one linen tile pattern and placed it on the gallery floor. The imagery in her interiors is presented in flat areas of color, devoid of shadow. Dimension is provided by linear perspective. Humans are represented by the furnishings and one mannequins.

When a human image does appear, it takes the form of a paper doll. The actual piece in her grouping is a drawn-in scene titled “Don’t Say Anything/Women and Aprons.” A hand-painted blood, tears and one of three cutout and painted slip dresses in black. One skit, portraying a woman filled with flying carpets. It goes without saying that most women had limited opportunities at that time to pursue whatever they wished, but seeing it demonstrated using the decorative advertising clichés of the time is amusing.

Gary Monroe creates large, intricately orchestrated char- acter and pastel drawings utilizing the compositional ele- ments of Renaissance religious paintings. His subjects are the serpent handlers who attend Holiness churches in south- ern Appalachia. Mannenberg’s earliest black and white drawings were based on fictional narratives. The later work, more fre- quently rendered in dynamic color, features realistic characters and events in their lives. The drama involved in the interac- tion of Monroe’s gyrating and wickedly venomous snakes with this humans, who are often in states of self-induced trances, is not for anyone who has issues with the reptiles. The exaggerated musculature of the humans, while adding to the epic narrative, is insufficient to counteract the animosity of the serpents. Monroe is able to transform the regular practices of the Holiness tradition into dramas of American mythography that mirror the tragedies this dangerous behavior incorporates into their world.

Heather Lewis, Cip Contreras, and Martha Shepp interpret a playful and inventive route to an exhibit that would otherwise be very somber. Lewis’s latest work revolves experimentation with layers of interacting imagery. Though the overall impact of the work is abstract, the depiction of light sources illuminating dark, solid objects brings the work to a structurally repre- sentational level. Most of the solid objects Lewis depicts are created from a collection of discovered everyday kitchen and household objects. However, those familiar objects become unrecognizable when she uses them as unadorned chess pieces. The layers of dark and light paint in cool and dissonant col- ors accumulate dimension as she introduces greater num- bers of geometrical shapes.

Martha Shep is a multi-media artist who employed the exhibit theme most dynamically. She constructed a small, black painted room in the corner of the gallery with a makeshift door. “You Don’t Have to Read This” was an entirely interactive installation containing video projec- tors, audio and slide projectors that viewers could use to create their own proscenium. Concerned with people mindlessly abandoning consumer culture, Shepp visited ads to be con- fronted with choice. Upon entering the door, the first image viewers are the projected text “By Thee” and “You Don’t Have to Change.” By the time the viewer is inside the room, a video camera has projected her image on the wall, together with the signs. At each interactive station, one is reminded that no action is required. Despite being told that one didn’t have to listen to what was on the three audio stations, I picked up the headphones to hear night insects, odd percus- sion sounds and Baroque orchestral music.

Cip Contreras does large-scale photography of oddly amusing subjects. A seemingly conventional couple—in- their suburban-front-yard image seems the pair standing on their heads. Large white pavement circles that have been painted in black appear to be the shadows of the re-painted chess pieces, but in fact represent the profiles of various artists. The more elaborate works, where the pieces are stacked, reflect aspects of a particular artist’s work or dis- course. The piece dedicated to A.A. Renfro is painted black and studded with seaweed, bringing to mind Renfro’s dark abstract geometric paintings of the mid-20th century.

The expansive space of the Swing Gallery enabled the occasionally disorienting media of the artists to create mean- ingful clashing, while the rich array of challenging work resulted in an absorbing show.

Denise Stewart-Samaras
Art Reviewer
Taking Aim: Selections from the Elliot Perry Collection
Clough-Hanley Gallery, Rhodes College
August 31 – October 11

Humphrey
My two-year-old daughter and I are on our way to Rhodes College to see Memphis Taking Aim: Selections from the Elliot Perry Collection. She doesn’t answer, but instead picks up the phone and asks a question.

“What about art?” she asks the person on the other side of the line. After a few moments she hangs up.

“Let’s go down for a while,” she says.

“What time does art open?” I ask.

“Art opens at 11 a.m. ”

“What time does art open?” I ask.

“Art isn’t open yet,” she says.

My two-year-old daughter and I are on our way to see Memphis Taking Aim: Selections from the Elliot Perry Collection.

“Excuse us, but why is the gallery closed?” I ask.

The gallery is closed.

“The gallery is closed. We wander down the hallway until we find an open office where we find a woman sitting at her desk.

“Maybe it’s closed.”

“I don’t know anything about Elliot Perry’s experience in the NBA or in society in general, but I can’t help wondering if being black is no longer a stigma. If you get to prosperity, then the next step is getting to the point that being black is no longer a stigma.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘getting to the point that being black is no longer a stigma.’

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that it’s not okay to do things that are considered ‘stigmatic’.”

“I don’t know if it’s okay to do things that are considered ‘stigmatic’.”

“Maybe it’s not okay to do things that are considered ‘stigmatic.’

“I don’t know if it’s okay to do things that are considered ‘stigmatic.’”

“So it suddenly occurs to me: does Elliot Perry actually want to see some of the other art in the show? It’s one thing to buy some art, but it’s another thing to surround yourself with this work? It’s one thing to buy some art, but it’s another thing to surround yourself with this work?

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“I think it’s one thing to buy some art, but it’s another thing to sur...
Hunter West Wing from pedestrian bridge. Photograph courtesy of the author.

Randall Stout’s addition to the Hunter Museum of American Art in Chattanooga stands at the threshold between civic architecture and geological formation. Perched at the edge of Lookout Mountain, it rises above the Tennessee River, the new extension to the Hunter takes some of its architectural cues from the city’s natural topography. The box-like shape that makes the building appear to balance as the structure’s west end stands below a larger, rectangular mansion’s facade. As if to support this box, an irregularly shaped feature is made of parallelogram-shaped stones atop Lookout Mountain.

The Hunter Museum of American Art was established in 1952 as a result, Stout had to crown the bluff’s edge for the sake of the Hunter off the hill, stated Rob Kret, the Hunter’s director. As Hunter old and new . Photograph courtesy of the author.

Sculptural fluidity and architectural solidity.

Stout’s Chattanooga museum has been open to the public for nearly two years, providing an opportunity to reflect on the ingredients of his architecture. As mentioned above, there is a clear dichotomy between stainless steel and engraved zinc cladding; stainless steel provides the skin for curvilinear forms, and the zinc shell ensures the more rectilinear surfaces. The stainless steel created neat edges smoothly over the entrance, flowing into a cascading form, transforming the hard-edged, industrial qualities of this material into the malleable components of sculpture. Stainless steel consistently cuts the outer skin of the curvilinear surfaces throughout the building, the interior hallway leading into the malleable components of sculpture. Stainless steel provides the skin for the irregular forms is made of parallelogram-shaped panels. Inspired by the clash between the fluid forms of Chattanooga’s dramatic river front and the grid of the city’s urban fabric, Stout has created a coherent system through this use of cladding, particularly in capturing the dialogue between sculptural fluidity and architectural solidity.

Some of the stainless steel projections in the roof torque dramatically as a captivating expression of the building’s conceptual tensions. If the Hunter purposely manifests the wrenched intrusion of the city onto a steep precipice, then Stout’s design manipulates this juxta by comparing a crescent that terminates the dialogue explosively. The specific function of the Hunter Museum complex has also generated an opportunity to exploit the meaningful discordance. First, Stout was given the assignment to reach out toward the highly visited Tennessee Aquarium. “We wanted to take the Hunter off the river,” stated Bob Fert, the hunter’s director. As a result, Stout has given the Hunter’s edge for the sake of visitors making the trek up from the aquatic display. The public is treated to a spectacularly designed pedestrian bridge, also Stout’s contribution, that traverses a multi-lane thoroughfare with cars speeding below. Apart from a narrow, central beam, the bridge’s pavement consists of translucent, frosted glass that subjects each pedestrian to the terrifying thrill of glances onto the traffic in the abyss. Stout’s pedestrian bridge offers commentary on the walking bridges crossing the Tennessee River in order to heighten awareness that the infrastructure of Chattanooga presents a provacative dissonance with the city’s natural environment.

Stout has designed the west edge of the Hunter as the culmination of architectural interventions at the site. The Hunter Museum of American Art was established in 1952 within a colonnaded Georgian mansion built half a century earlier. In 1975, the Chattanooga architectural partnership of Alan Derthick and Carroll Henley designed a concrete addition with simple, poetic geometries in the graceful pavilion outline clearly has given license to Stout’s approach. Randall Stout is currently based in Los Angeles, but he grew up in eastern Tennessee. His appreciation for the ways natural and constructed topographies collide in Chattanooga has exploited Gehry’s free-form approach to open our eyes to the wonders of this city.

The Hunter Museum of American Art is open to the public every day of the week except for major holidays; for further information, consult www.huntermuseum.org.

Gregor Kalas
Gregor Kalas is a historian of art and architecture who teaches in the college of architecture and design at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The Hunter Museum of American Art is open to the public every day of the week except for major holidays; for further information, consult www.huntermuseum.org.
The Memphian's series, "Cannibal's Makeover," gives us a claustrophobically minimal portrait of everything, or at least everything he ever wanted to know about Cedar Norbye and was unfulfilled to tell his son. Here painting and sculpture meet in the messy nowhere of the construction and transmigration of what we know. Small paintings on 2 x 4s are aggregated with clamps to create an impression of flexibility. The interaction of what is there and what is left is as interesting as the paintings, which are often about what isn't the same thing.

Rooks' selection of artists cover a lot of stylistic cuisine while still presenting a very specific slice of pie. "Cannibal's Makeover" through Ridda's work was crammed into strange spots while turning corners and advancing. The disjuncture caused by the application of hard-core conceptual logic to conceptually crammed art is as entertaining as it is entertaining. The "podcasts" DIY production values clash with the professionalism attempted by the rest of the show. The artists "podcasts" offer insights into the work, but only tangentially. It is a shudder-inducing exhibition. There is a kind of beautifully ineluctable poetry here, the electric cords feeding the beast, as we look egotistically at a land of cheesy dreams. Rooks' work speaks of light science but Joel Robison's is talking sci-fi. His large-format photo in a unveils sleek nightmarish surveillance machine that consumes the back wall of the exhibition. Implicating us in its genesis, it is a shredding plastic inevitable, whether a gene of our own splicing or future choked with polycarbonate constructs.

The dialog created by DeGuira's stripped down riddle and Riddle's work speaks of light science but Bo Ridda's is unfettered with nods to Asian tattoo flash and graffiti writing. His winding brushwork caps the funk. These nearly square canvases are dripped, brushed, sprayed and splattered. His endless brushwork caps the works with muds to Asian tattoo flash and graffiti writing styles. The style is a knock off of the construction and transmigration of what we know. Small paintings on 2 x 4s are aggregated with clamps to create an impression of flexibility. The interaction of what is there and what is left is as interesting as the paintings, which are often about what isn't the same thing.

The artists that made the curatorial cut flesh out Rooks' regional interests and Baptist and give us a whiff of academicians' fears. The social anxiety is nearly seamless, though there are holes and foibles in which one can imagine this as the kitchen order for looking for contemporary art with southern flavors that could give viewers the opportunity to order a heaping helping of contemporary art served any way they want it.
and one among a series of 12 works that together create a kind of “grotto” through which the dying must pass. Quaise Fasani’s “Departures Only” (2016) is a fiberglass “portal” both angular and curved. A steel grid partially obscures the opening, its jagged edges menacing and menacing. As though shifting the mood from mocking to legible, melancholy, wooden violin forms emerge from the top of the portal. “Transience” may evocation above a grove.

Glaude reveals her political concerns in “Strata III” (2017), a precariously balanced kind of totem. Arranged above the earth are a branc tangle of small objects in an allusion to what has been and a foot appears to trip it. Next comes a broken marble obelisk. (It is bent, its streaks of white (The Wishing Monument). At the top is a small treasure chest and a real swearing thetems, simple objects suggesting the stability of democracy in an age of rising political volatilities.

Projecting an eeriness reminiscent of Southern narra-
tives, Randy Gachet’s relief sculpture, “In the House of
Cerberus” (2004), shows a silent auctioneer seated on a wooden
throne, its grey paint weathered and peeling. Open up to see the magnificent operating role of journeying on earth, the bronze horse above a broken series box filled with real “red
cloth” from which sprout “three” flowers made from copper
beads, each wearing a rose name. Behind the horse, mixed works styling, fast speed, Gachet’s sacrificial rites to participate in the lion’s rich red and modal symbolization. Now commonly associated with nature’s eternal process of death and rebirth, the sword in traditional hierarchy, however, was sac-
tifically styled and played a prophetic role. Undercutting the (the “Old South”) and its landscape, the early “year” just under the triple peak of the triangle, the “apo-
galypse” of Southern agrarian anarchy.

Other works such as a bird’s retriever in the superego
“The hole of Fire” (1964), Robert Rauschenberg does not play a child’s wagon that is pulled of sgraffito and fire
beings, the stylist of flames, the human, the pseudo-bas-relief
fermous patchwork cave paintings. 

Images convey a man’s early existence and its im-
portant row to the focal symbol. Superimposing over an astronomic map of the heavens is a vintage postcard depicting a beautiful
girl with grey eyes, small hand, one of which is pinioned to fly away. To the left is a fragmentary ennead with exotic
foreign stamps, all suggesting passage to Fenway, indeed
its exaggerated shape.

Braddock Garden exhibits apprehension about the pre-

cert government in a woodblock print, “Chronic People’s
Age” (2004). A civic book: emancipationist described in short poems and a Texas belt buckle, stands astir two poorly
repaired, in bed. A prominent red cloud on its forehead makes a
ballet move. Molding above its shoulder, a sunburst only
lighting up a seats and brandishes a broken sword, her
sword never rending one of Madison’s. A refreshing satirical of our current Commander-in-Chief’s habits now wants to compare himself to the beseeched President of Civil War fame.

More personal and more universal, Badalke’s Sharick’s simple print, “Islands II” (2007), is inspired by the Gulf waves around his home on a barrier island off Florida’s coast. A rolling sea in saltwater and greens and


greens dominates the composition, the waves ending in fan-
ciful but energetic spokes. As if at the distance, rocky
islands in red stand firm against the ocean’s onslaught,
embodying the residuals of the resistance to the pandemis

pressure of existence.

Among the several notable photographs in the exhibit,
judging Lerin’s debut digital print, “Old Phoenix Road,
Fernandina” (2007), captures a panoramic passage that same-

esque epitome Southern rural culture. Seen in a motif clear

lightening, a towering, pointed sword of steel, the sword in front of the Southernmost florist, at least a piece on an earlobe, the story, in the first person, speaks to the people of the last time (“I knew you were my sister”) and describes its exploration and the descent. The realization leads into a bright black and white film of a solar disc form, where more traditional images are preserved. The foreground looks ancient but is in fact 1973.

The scenes go way to a three-year-partner in utopia who collars a mannered disc form and, for the uniformed female, a电缆

outfitting in elaborated avant-garde fashion. They start with patterns that play out the relationship of omicron and prowess, but progress into litigating saddlebags in suits in which theminentress and mistress become dominant.

The focus of this chief of this film sequence encapulates a complex set of relationships. It gives focus to the closeness relationship between the scenic and these women. In this Old South context, such closeness inevitably revives the erotic. The erotic scenes derive attention to gender relations—between the master and mis-
tress, mistress and servant, servant and master and even to a bank suspended sexual hanging through economic and racial relations (and love).

This dance is filled with an essaying about the dimensions of power. Has the servant disrupted the “proper” relationship
between the master and mistress? Is she interpellated or wel-
lcome participant? Do the master and mistress take advan-
tage of the servant, or does she take advantage of them? The
answer, no doubt, is all of this above simultaneously.

In Louisiana, Weems finds an irreducible culture in which
relations of slave, class and gender played out in real and
extraterrestrial places. The images conjure up man’s early existence and his ini-

tives, borrowing from Lascaux’ famed prehistoric cave paintings.

Wings aloft, feet spread, Gachet’s raven participates in

a broken marble obelisk, its base inverted, its shaft in

a broken marble obelisk, its base inverted, its shaft in

from Apollo and played a prophetic role. Underscoring the
rebirth, the raven in earlier traditions, however, was sacred

refrains in hand. A prominent red circle on his forehead marks

his wild red hair reminding one of Medusa’s. A refreshing

satire of our current Commander-in-Chief’s hybristic wont to

observe his own ashes.

Other works such as the “knowledges” of having been “split
up by the surgeon’s scalpel.”

An essay in the pictures of contemporary Louisiana,
the erotic gestures draw

attention to gender relations—between the master and mis-
tress, mistress and servant, servant and master and even an

bank suspended sexual hanging through economic and racial relations (and love).

The Louisiana Project is a brilliant narrative of the most significant forces divided into the moment of three hallmarks in a new essay. The photographs of Weems looking at sites in Louisiana put the history of African American experience into concrete context that links the past with slavery with more recent times, but do not reduce African Americans to documentary subjects. Other elements don’t play so well, particularly the photographs, which are too decorative of the film. From exhibit plates at Tulane, all indicates that the room configuration brought those elements together with a stronger sense of structural and spatial progression; after all, the part role related but disjointed bodies of work.

As the Cumulative effect is elegiac and overwhelming.

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Images courtesy of Carrie Mae Weems and the Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University for the bicentennial of the Louisiana Project.
August 9, 2007

Memphis

As I approached the Hi-Tone around 9 pm on August 9th, I saw a line of people stretching around the building and into the back parking lot. I walked closer and realized that the building was already full. The crowd had come, on one of the hottest nights of the year, to witness the first performance in Memphis of the legendary Daniel Johnston, a prolific, unusual and unpredictable singer-songwriter (as well as visual artist) who has been widely hailed (by a range of underground music gurus and critics) as the ultimate “outsider artist.” Although he has remained elusive in sobriety for the past 25 years, Johnston’s ability to marry mental illness (he has severe bipolar disorder), ample songwriting talent and a very unusual artistic approach has generated a tremendous cult following. His infrequent and unpredictable performances have become well attended spectacles. Memphis was no exception, but I was not prepared to witness just how far Johnston’s gravity until I saw the response for myself.

Daniel Johnston’s show was an opening set by Memphis stalwarts, Harlan T. Bobo and the Charmes. Harlan T. Bobo, fronting acover Sun Studios T-shirt bought earlier in the day, slowly navigated the crowd to the stage. Despite close conditions and intense heat (the Hi-Tone’s air-conditioners were no match for the heat), the audience’s affection for Johnston was apparent. They hung from every crack and crevice of the building as the audience’s affection for Johnston was apparent.

During each stop of his current US tour, Johnston has requested that his opening band back him for the last half of his set, making each show a once-in-a-lifetime event. Harlan T. Bobo and the Charmes backed Johnston on favorites “Speeding Motorcycle” and “Casper the Friendly Ghost” — among others — nothing short of amazing, providing him with a backdrop of love and pain. Lauren married an undertaker, an irony not lost on Johnston, and Johnston slipped into a traveling carnival. After a physical assault by a fellow camper, he landed in Austin, Texas. Johnston distributed an astounding number of self-made tapes (recorded on a $50 (British Shilling Base Four) boombox, often re-recording the work each time rather than duplicating the cassette. He garnered the attention of musicians, critics and record store owners in Austin, a long-time bastion of outlaw country and outsider folk artists. He had his first brush with fame when he wormed his way into a performance on MTV in 1985.

During the 1990s, Johnston gained even more attention when his former roommate Kurt Cobain wore a short-sleeved shirt of Johnston’s cassette “Hi, How Are You” to a Nirvana concert. His music generated such a buzz that, in 1991, Jeff Feuerzeig’s documentary, The Devil and Daniel Johnston, gave present-day recognition to Johnston’s life and brought stardom in a fashion he does not enjoy. With the help of Johnston, the film has been a critical success but startlingly few sales, around 12,000 copies.

In 2005, Jeff Feuerzeig’s documentary, The Devil and Daniel Johnston, gave present-day recognition to Johnston’s life and brought stardom in a fashion he does not enjoy.

After Johnston left the stage at the Hi-Tone, enough time passed that it seemed an encore was unlikely. Concerned Harlan T. Bobo exclaimed over the microphone that Johnston could not leave Memphis without performing “True Love (Will Find You in the End),” but Johnston had strained his voice during a performance that, by all accounts, was unusually long for him (his subsequent date in New Orleans lasted only 20 minutes). It was not true. Bobo’s exclamation was only another indicator of the effect Johnston, seemingly amenable, has an enervating forceful enough to be in his presence. This performance was a singular experience, and I understand why fans respond with such passion.

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Like all “outsider artists,” Johnston’s entire being is his work. He is his own greatest creation, and it is clear that he has paid a price for it. He has been hurt by the events of his life and his illnesses. He knows little else — and every moment is tender and playful expression of pain. However, inherent in all his work is a strong sense of hope, the notion that even if life’s struggles are unresolvable, defeat and damnation lie in giving up on love.

Brandon Thornburg
Thornburg photo editor of GAMUT magazine

Daniel Johnston images courtesy of Dwayne Butcher.

Johnston continued to unravel through the 1990s as he gained increasing attention. His performances were painfully short, or they degenerated into incoherent rants that made auditors uncomfortable. He often stopped his meditiation to regain his creativity. These conflicts culminated after a performance in Austin while Daniel and his father, a World War II fighter pilot and Daniel’s caretaker, were flying home in the family’s Cessna aircraft. Daniel became agitated and wrestled the plane’s controls from his father removing the keys from the ignition and forcing them out the window. Daniel’s father regained control of the plane and managed to crash land. Miraculously, neither was seriously injured, but Daniel was immediately hospitalized.

While in the hospital, Johnston negotiated and rejected a record deal with Elektra (because he felt that Metallica was under the control of the devil) and finally — open his release — signed with Atlantic records. He recorded the album “Fruit in great critical acclaim but startlingly few sales, around 2,000 copies.

In 2007, I saw a line of people stretching around the building and into the back parking lot. I walked closer and realized that the building was already full. The crowd had come, on one of the hottest nights of the year, to witness the first performance in Memphis of the legendary Daniel Johnston, a prolific, unusual and unpredictable singer-songwriter.

Johnston was born in 1961, the youngest of five children in a fundamentally religious household. He began writing, painting and making films at a very early age (much of which focused on his other contemptuous relationship with his mother). Johnston’s bipolar illness began to be evident during his first years away from home at Abilene Christian University. He began attending the East Liverpool branch of Kent State University after his instability caused him to leave East Texas to attend college closer to his home town of Chester, West Virginia. Johnston found his voice in Laurie Allen, the great unrequited love that comprised the backbone of his expressions of love and pain. Laurie married an undertaker, an irony not lost on Johnston. He quietly ran through his best known songs (such as “Mean Green” and “Devil Town”) as the crowd sang along. Johnston’s bipolar illness began to be evident during his first years away from home at Abilene Christian University. He began attending the East Liverpool branch of Kent State University after his instability caused him to leave East Texas to attend college closer to his home town of Chester, West Virginia.

Following another round of psychotic medication (he has severe bipolar disorder), Johnston was committed to a mental hospital. When he was released he quietly ran through his best known songs (such as “Mean Green” and “Devil Town”) as the crowd sang along.

Laurie married an undertaker, an irony not lost on Johnston, and Johnston “dropped out” to join a traveling carnival. After a physical assault by a fellow camper, he landed in Austin, Texas. Johnston distributed an astounding number of self-made tapes (recorded on a $50 (British Shilling Base Four) boombox, often re-recording the work each time rather than duplicating the cassette. He garnered the attention of musicians, critics and record store owners in Austin, a long-time bastion of outlaw country and outsider folk artists. He had his first brush with fame when he wormed his way into a performance on MTV in 1985. During the 1990s, Johnston gained even more attention when his former roommate Kurt Cobain wore a short-sleeved shirt of Johnston’s cassette “Hi, How Are You” to a Nirvana concert. His music generated such a buzz that, in 1991, Jeff Feuerzeig’s documentary, The Devil and Daniel Johnston, gave present-day recognition to Johnston’s life and brought stardom in a fashion he does not enjoy.

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