By its very conditions, modernity is boring. boredom may be, at least from a psychological view, modernity itself. The material plentitude and sheer thickness of modernity, both online and off, have become ubiquitous in everyday life as well as the immaterial, temporary images they bear. Troubled but tempted by the prospect of viewing art through text messages and streaming services, Lisa Williamson questions the limits of interpretation in the age of analytics. Others pursue more uncommensurable methods. Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods, Determined to temporarily resist the allure of screens and the streams of information promising methods. In an essay from the Jan/Feb. 2015 issue of Art Papers, British writer and curator Shumon Basar writes about becoming bored with studying architecture: "I want you to know that by the end of this sentence, you may have lost interest. Why? Because I am about to write about losing interest." I could key something similar about Number: 94: I want you to know that by the end of this issue, you may become bored, because you are about to read about boredom. But the conversations, images, and ideas contained here are ultimately more expansive and engaging than that, since boredom is inevitably a space to wrestle with what Numm’s found-text essay describes as the “experience of time and problems of meaning that characterize human life. Or, as Basar poetically concludes, “Boredom is an invitation of the soul.”
Summer is the most perfect time to enjoy the art of the Atlanta area. Today in June 2, 2018, I am writing this for my SWIS Temporary Residents’ Update Nights Exhibition. The event will take place in a one-hour time slot at the University of Arkansas from 7pm to 9pm. The event will feature a collaborative multimedia installation created by Mirel Crumb and thehale. English writer, Steven Selig. Seven of the most recent installations are currently on display, including the "Progressive Sculpture" exhibition. The event will also feature live music, a performance, and a Q&A session with the artists. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, please visit their website or contact them via email.

Museum of Art

Midnight at the Oasis

at

Museum of Art

Regional Update: Nashville

Poem 88

MIECZNIKOWSKI

at

Poem 88

Museum. Due to construction blasting in the area, the show closed a month ahead of schedule on Wednesday, April 25, 2018. The show was curated by Karen Seapker and Vadis Turner and featured works by local artists Karen Seapker and Vadis Turner. The show included a series of paintings and sculptures curated by local artists Karen Seapker and Vadis Turner. The show featured a range of works by local and international artists. The show was open from March 25 to April 22, 2018. The event will feature a collaborative multimedia installation created by Mirel Crumb and thehale. English writer, Steven Selig. Seven of the most recent installations are currently on display, including the "Progressive Sculpture" exhibition. The event will also feature live music, a performance, and a Q&A session with the artists. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, please visit their website or contact them via email.

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the economy of means

held you and it felt good but what’s it for
kissed my stomach i kissed your cheek
and the reason i was there escaped me
Benjamin on Boredom

In a culture as predicated on rapid productivity and instantaneousness as ours, to pursue or admit boredom feels to many of us like a shameful sin—an affliction that must be hidden from ourselves and others. Despite the dearth of studies that link boredom to a full and creative life, and the medical profession’s championing of boredom as a new disease, boredom and ennui seem to be more widespread than ever. For Benjamin, boredom is a condition of total negation and exhaustion in the modern Western subject. For Benjamin, boredom as an experience to bloom and unfurl itself: of the sleeping/dreaming/liminal subject for the bored, we need to rediscover the useable articulation of the free, unconscious mind and adopt the mellow, open, relaxed body and mind of the sleeping/dreaming/liminal subject for the bored.

For Benjamin, frustration with this loss of stories (and thus, experience) is countered by his investment in the role of memory and boredom to switch the subject into a powerful state of internalized engagement and attention. For memory and boredom are both interior states that allow information and experiences to form impressions on the subject and integrate into the wider web of one’s personal history. Nestled close to his Freudian values, boredom poses boredom as a usable articulation of the free, unconscious mind and adopts the mellow, open, relaxed body and mind of the sleeping/dreaming/liminal subject for the bored, seeing in this state of interior tension an opportunity for experience to bloom and unfurl itself.

This process of accumulation, which takes place in depth, requires a stage of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation: Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the eggy of experience. A rustling of leaves drives him away…With this the gift of listening for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears.

For Benjamin, who spent an inordinate amount of time writing, thinking, and engaging with the experiential dynamism and idiosyncrasies of life, boredom is not a condition of disinterest, wasted time, or even unproductive, but a powerful reclamation of an energetic, heterogenous time within a world emptied of its shared forms of communication and social traditions.

Benjamin’s fruitful assessment of a dwindling social collectivity, and the effects of violence, technology, and geopolitics on modern societies presents a radical counter-assessment of boredom—one that sits markedly outside the Western (American) assessment of boredom as a “stressful obstacle” to finding “meaning” in our lives (i.e.: work), and in more extreme cases is marked outside the Western (American) assessment of boredom as a “stressful obstacle” to finding “meaning” in our lives (i.e.: work), and in more extreme cases is terrifyingly borne out in sensational media coverage of mass violence and senseless acts of terror where perpetrators of these horrible events are regularly described as “bored” or “boredom as a positive force, as a way in which to “leap out” of the overwhelming shaming of a life predicated on constant, unstoppable, partial-lot progress and into a life where experience has not been rendered flattened and collapsed but remains alive, in a state of permanent open-endedness, and therefore, open to its most radical potential. Thus it seems that in order to re-experience and reconnect with a stable social order, one must intermittently detach from it, rupture it with boredom, and enjoy the indeterminacy of its unfolding. While Benjamin’s reimagining of boredom poses a contradiction in terms, the phenomena of boredom as a threshold to possibilities that attention and productivity work to render invisible (if not completely invisible) asks us to re-engage with our surroundings and one another through disengagement—to nurture the fragmented, restless pulse of our world by relaxing “into” time.

“Thejointeffortsofmodernsociety,”writestheFrenchphilosopher,HannahArendt,“isnotanartbutanactivityinwhichpeopleacttogetherinorderoftheirownvolition.”Andsoitiswithboredom,asitappliesitselftootherformsofsufferingitcanbeusedasbothapotentialsolutionandaradicalcounter-force,oneinwewhichexperiencehasthepower.torestructureourselvesthroughproductivityasworthandboredom-as-stressfulobstacletofindingmeaninginhilives(i.e.:work),andinmoreextremecasesisseenastheconditionoftotalnegativecapacity.Forhard,unsubordinatedworkstandsfirmandprovidewithAmericancapitalistideology,andsometimesbywhatwepreviouslycalled뉴기:asahistory-book-investmentinanetnicwildnessanddemandsandso-calledproductivecapacity.1

Benjamin’s reimagining of boredom as a “positive force,” as a way in which to “leap out” of the overwhelming shaming of a life predicated on constant, unstoppable, partial-lot progress and into a life where experience has not been rendered flattened and collapsed but remains alive, in a state of permanent open-endedness, and therefore, open to its most radical potential. Thus it seems that in order to re-experience and reconnect with a stable social order, one must intermittently detach from it, rupture it with boredom, and enjoy the indeterminacy of its unfolding. While Benjamin’s reimagining of boredom poses a contradiction in terms, the phenomena of boredom as a threshold to possibilities that attention and productivity work to render invisible (if not completely invisible) asks us to re-engage with our surroundings and one another through disengagement—to nurture the fragmented, restless pulse of our world by relaxing “into” time.
Boredom and Capitalism

(According to Wikipedia)

In conventional usage, boredom is an emotional or psychological state experienced when an individual is left without anything in particular to do, is not interested in his or her surroundings, or feels that a day or period is dull or tedious. It is also understood by scholars as a modern phenomenon that has a cultural dimension.

“Boredom is [...] not just a response to the modern world but also a historically constituted modern phenomenon that has a cultural dimension.”

According to Karl Marx, boredom is a sign of alienation: “The proletariat is alienated from its labor, and this alienation is the foundation of capitalist production.” The term "boredom" was introduced by Karl Marx in his work "Das Kapital".

Boredom is known to be a common occurrence in modern society, and it has been defined in various ways by different scholars. Some view it as a lack of social interaction or a lack of interest in one's surroundings. Others see it as a lack of stimulation or a lack of meaningful activity. Still others view it as a lack of purpose or meaning in one's life.

The concept of boredom has been studied by many researchers and writers, and it has been linked to a variety of factors, including a lack of meaningful activity, a lack of social interaction, a lack of purpose or meaning in one's life, and a lack of stimulation.

In his work "Das Kapital," Karl Marx described the alienation of workers from their labor as a result of capitalist production. He argued that the proletariat is alienated from its labor, and this alienation is the foundation of capitalist production. This alienation is not only a result of the capitalist system, but also a product of the modern world.

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Interview: Sara Greenberger Rafferty

Tailored Content
University of Arkansas Fine Arts Center Gallery
Jan. 22 - Feb. 25, 2018
Curator: Marc Mitchell

There’s a visceral urgency in 40-year-old Sara Greenberger Rafferty’s work, a multimedia artist who channels our fragmented appetites who is, as she states at the end of her bio on her website, “heartbroken by the election of Donald Trump,” as it represents a turn away from progress, empathy, understanding, and iterate curiosity for her country and the world.

Her mostly 2-D pieces in Tailored Content are on display at the Fine Arts Center Gallery for a retrospective-ish show at the University of Arkan-
sas. These works involve layer upon layer of photos printed on slabs of plexiglass that then have as many sas. These works involve layer upon layer of photos on display at the Fine Arts Center Gallery for a tail of her bio on her website: “heartbroken by the election of Donald Trump.”

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scribes an artist mimicking David Letterman that he Whitman.


often behind the scenes the artist ends up writing take gender for granted. The way in which we accept a man telling jokes and acting foolishly but when someone other than a man does the same we see it as somewhat ridiculous.”

Mitchell continued following her trajectory and eventually reached out to her gallery, Rachel Uffner NYC, in hopes of pulling together a solo show. She agreed and immediately was struck by the way Mitch-
ell understood her work. Indeed both Mitchell and Rafferty describe each other as generous.

What follows is an edited phone conversation with Rafferty, which includes honoring in her use of plastic as a dominant medium, the enduring exploration of the compression of three dimensions into two dimensions and the ways in which government monitors citizens who is, as she states at the end of her bio on her website, “heartbroken by the election of Donald Trump,” as it represents a turn away from progress, empathy, understanding, and iterate curiosity for her country and the world.

Mitchell’s first glimpse into Rafferty’s art came six seven years ago, when he saw her included in the Whitney Biennial.

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Interview: Erica Scoggins

Erica Scoggins is a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts (MFA in Film Directing, 2016), and a current instructor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Her narrative, dark, and surreal short films have seen international acclaim. Her short, The Sacred Disease (2016), was shown at the 2016 Vienna International Film Festival, the 2017 Nashville Film Festival, and most recently at the 40th Clermont- Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

The film follows a woman who battles the evils of Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) and its medication, before being invited by a non-conformist, female lepore to confront the disease with a band of “weirdos” who live on the fringes of society. Through a suspension of time, flashes of imagery, and manipulation of sound, Scoggins provides a window into her recalled experience of the “sacred disease.”

Her soon-to-be-released production, The Boogeywoman, is a coming of age story “about the wonders and terrors of that fantasy, the place you have these experiences while you are only two or three years old, and the feeling of separateness from the society she grew up in, and the need for escape”.

Both of these films were shot in Eastern TN. Was the setting intentional and what is the significance of this being a small, [probable] rural setting?

Definitely. I always start with an atmosphere instead of a story. The South is an endlessly interesting but uncomfortable place to me. There’s something so haunting, beautiful, and magical in the South, but there is also antagonistic and oppressive thinking. I am always stuck in between those things. And you really can’t beat that wild, forested imagery that symbolically represents being in and out of control in Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) and the natural inclinations of the mind. Does anyone else film your work into the genre of southern gothic?

Yes, and I would be very proud to wear that badge. Both of those words resonate with me. The world of the South — there is always that emptiness — there’s this feeling that you want to go out there and be away from everything that makes you comfortable. But the same time, it can be dangerous. This is the place that fantasy, the place you have these experiences that can’t happen in the mundane world, where there is too much to occupy your mind. Only when you remove yourself do you feel what you need to feel as a human and animal. In researching your work, I found a review by producer Justin Megan, that said “The Sacred Disease” is “a deeply elegiac portrait of the space between madness and the mundane” I see that as an underlying theme in your work. There is definitely a thread in each film that touches on that dichotomy: what if the everyday was actually full of big experiences and it just depended on how you viewed them. An augmentation of the mundane is what I am interested in, and through that augmentation, how it becomes something different. The synopsis of a literary influence you gave me, “In the Dust of This Planet: Horror Philosophy” caused my eye to read. “...Eugene Thacker suggests that we look to the genre of horror as offering a way of thinking about the unthinkable world. To confront this idea is to confront the limit of our ability to understand the world in which we live.” In what ways was “The Sacred Disease” a confrontation of that wild, unthinkable world? I revel in the in-between; when that horror of the end of a sequence of thoughts is reached. You can’t go any further but then, despite its end, you cross over...as humans we aren’t entitled to know what we can’t know. His writing resonated with me because I had these experiences I couldn’t explain, and none of the worldly explanations felt truthful to me. That’s where I live a space of unknowing. That is how I structured this film too, that there is this society of people that go and cope with this issue unmedicated. And they have their space to make it happen and feel it. You have described the "disorder" as "a means tovelked knowledge or experience." Like a number of characters you have described, you have bodied this up with your condition, you have pointed to those experiences as formats in your filmmaking. Whereas Angie’s way of relating to the world was through the odd occurrences with TLE called “froze-thought.” I would have a weird sense of deja vu, coupled with a sense of isolation. That was the only thing I could do. I am not actively thinking in succession, but something was making me think; I knew what I was going to say, but I didn’t know when. I can’t stop it. But, I know medication protects your brain against these experiences, that after a seizure it helps you to return to your normal life. It sounds like a complex relationship with medication because you can no longer tap into those experiences. How did you try and simulate, depict, tap into or remember that for the imagery in this film? The medication was not really tough for me because it’s medication used for people with bipolar disorder, it is a mood stabilizer that made me feel like a shell of a person, and it often made me sick. It was a large recovery process from the thing that was supposed to “cure me.” I did keep a journal when I was having the seizures to record them.

You used the word “nostalgia” when talking about your feelings towards those episodes before they became regulated by medication. I think of the real red-haired woman, Nicole, who says explicitly in the film “A woman’s age should not be a taboos, but the Boogeywoman is a nostalgic vise. Can you speak about the role of nostalgia in your work? Nicole’s words are something I don’t always have the words for. It’s a feeling that you might have already had the most intense moments of your life. The Sacred Disease was about very specific events that took me out of the everyday — it was a violent, unpredictable thing that was also strangely cathartic. Those two things next to each other can help you come back to that place, but you can also lose yourself and think back and think “yeah when I was in that moment, I wanted to be in that moment,” but there was always this flicker of something greater, a comparison to those moments, the mundane seems scary. To think, this is how most people spend their lives washing dishes, doing laundry, paying taxes... it’s kind of de- vastating. So, I have to have these intense experiences in the past, and in a place where I know what didn’t happen to me. I don’t go back, it was scary, but there are also those moments when I don’t want the mundane that is your current existence. I think maybe that’s where the drive to make my art comes from. It’s an escape from a reality in this film? I noticed that in depicting these experiences, sound and imagery were heavily used. How much did you want to describe, but I think that’s all, you want to show a flicker of something, or a film, or a film, or hear music and think that’s it! That’s it! That’s what I think of in when my sky is so blue, when I am in this altered reality. The film itself is my best attempt to recreate it, but it still misses the mark. Going into the characters and symbolism of the film, how does the ambiguity of the sacred disease relate to the sacred disease? She seems like she understands the young girl’s pitch. She is inviting you to imagine, to be like, “oh no, I have never been there.” It’s an invitation of self-discovery?

That’s why I try and stay away from special effects, wherever possible. I don’t try to add the special effects or potential drug-fueled fodder — and instead try to use the materiality of the film and actually of the scene perform, hoping people accept that it’s real or maybe question it, but don’t arrive at these easy answers.

So going along with the “dream-like” same, both films were very surreal, as a style, and aspects reminded me of the 20th surrealists. The movement revealed in and tried to simulate cognitive disorders or conditions to achieve transcendence. In some cases, misogynistically, fetishizing women with cognitive ailments or mental instability in their work. Your work is surreal, but it is a sur- realism that possesses female agency. I used to study the surrealists and absurdism. I am interested in the metamorphosis the surrealists used to make, the point of view or arrive at subconscious connections. And I tried to do that after I stopped having seizures. Surrealism and magical realism are big influences. In works like like Gabríela García Marquez, the very strong is treated as normal. I am still learning how to bring that into cinematic space, and want to do that going forward. I am not making magic with the mundane and what would happen if magic became mundane. For me as a female director that is something I hope I am bringing differently to the genre of kind of style or making.

Do you have anything else to say about that spectrum of madness, mundanity, and boredom? I think it is really hard for people to be bored these days — it is hard for me — but I think that empty sprawling place is a great place, is the kind of magic that can happen. I am constantly terrified of sitting down, but at the same time, I need that routine in order to make art, that’s where my thoughts, and my brain, and my creativity function. You have to function, but you need your ways to supercede boredom. If you do the right thing, you give yourself the space to go a little mad, before you need the balance of the mundane.

In both films, you blur the lines between what is a reality and simulate that thing in the film. Are you influenced by popular culture movies like Fight Club or Black Swan where the movie takes place inside of the life of real people? Do you think perhaps that it is hard to realize it doesn’t matter what is real and what is not — it’s perhaps it all is or it isn’t. It’s unverifiable and unanswerable…or is it? And that is, in a way, that these experiences with TLE have been doing portrays reality matter?

It always bothers me when people see a film and think it must be a dream or the character must be crazy because they didn’t understand it. They assume there must be an easy answer, I like that better, you didn’t care anymore because we are seeing is a reality. For me it may be a reality for just one person — maybe it is never really real. That’s why I try to stay away from special effects, wherever possible. I don’t try to add the special effects or potential drug-fueled fodder — and instead try to use the materiality of the film and actually of the scene perform, hoping people accept that it’s real or maybe question it, but don’t arrive at these easy answers.

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From April 15 to the strike of midnight to April 17, I turned off my phone and computer and told myself, “I will not work for these three days, I will be bored, I will do nothing.”

I put myself through a voluntary hyperactivity detox. As an experiment of my own design, I set the controls and variables. I had doubts; it felt a little like Jennifer Sullivan’s video work “One Week Wales,” where the artist secluded herself in a camper in her father’s backyard in upstate New York for a week, going inside to check her email. What revelations could come from just three days of unplugging and experimenting in a work detox? Then I considered Miranda July’s film The Future, where a couple disconnects the Internet for a week to focus on their lives and goals only to see their relationship, lives, and everything around them unravel. It was disconnection (sex, fantasy) that was life-altering, and in only a month.

In the past hour, I’ve talked to two friends and rearranged my rental car plans for an upcoming visit with my mother. I ordered an email tan reading for guidance in areas of my life that feel uncertain and weigh me with anxiety. I’ve contacted the company I do freelance transcription work for to check in about my availability and assignments. I made and ate toast. I connected with a presence-based collective here where yoga classes I’ve been attending. I read half an article written by a lecturer at a satellite University of Michigan campus about walking away from a job I love because of the continual underpayment of lecturers and non-tenure track faculty. An hour and this is a sampling. I also drank coffee, breathed, thought probably a million things, and pet my cats.

Time is weird. An hour, three days, or a month. Each minute holds limitless potential for how we use it. This essay is my account of a three-day experiment: what I essayed, what I learned, or think I learned or am learning, about time, boredom, addiction, presence. I had doubts: it felt a little like Jennifer Sullivan’s video work “One Week Wales,” where the artist secluded herself in a camper in her father’s backyard in upstate New York for a week, going inside to check her email. What revelations could come from just three days of unplugging and experimenting in a work detox? Then I considered Miranda July’s film The Future, where a couple disconnects the Internet for a week to focus on their lives and goals only to see their relationship, lives, and everything around them unravel. It was disconnection (sex, fantasy) that was life-altering, and in only a month.

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Sunday Morning

I woke feeling anxious. Should I get out of bed? What will I do? Is it okay to rest, I tell myself, there is nothing you need to do. I have no idea what time it is. I close my eyes for a while. Imagine I am late at breakfast, but have no idea, it’s raining. There is room to be. Nothing to do. I am not letting anyone down by resting here, taking a breath, for a minute. I tell myself to release that wrenching in my gut. Pull myself from bed and make coffee.

Later

If (I thought ahead) I could have gotten addresses and written letters. That’s too much “DOMIC.” This desire to tell others is just a reminder to think about the differences between LIVING and BEING SEEN WHILE LIVING or perhaps CREATING AN IMPRESSION OF A LIFE aka KEEPING UP APPEARANCES. Success perhaps is a mirrage. Elusive glory that we despair desperately clinging for, and yet how entertained I am by my cat continuing to attack the string attached to the end of a stick. I admire her self-awareness.

Sunday 3:42 PM

I am sad. I do not know why I am sad.

I wander around my neighborhood and see a chirp parallel parked where a car should be.

Sunday PM

Misan to find a watch. Walking home from the hardware store, I feel uncomfortable and sad.

Every time I see my little notebook I think it is my phone and I get excited.

I wonder how I will be to see her tonight. I am thinking of cutting off my nail.

From falling asleep, I read in bed with my two cats. I do not know where I fell asleep. There are some strong paint fumes in my apartment, and I wonder if there was a dangerous leak or if I am having a stroke. I wonder what would happen if all three of us from the nighttime from some other world came together. Think. “Maybe this is how we die, that is okay, I am at peace,” I lay in the quiet and drift sleep without a guided meditation playing from my phone. The silence is wide and comfortable how it holds me.

Arriving home, I contemplate not going to yoga, but I do go, and it is healing. The instructors guide us through the chaos, one at a time, reminding us, “You do not have to do anything you do not want to do.” I bike in the rain, and I think about the Arias near now. I blush.

Bath thoughts: Celebrate the things you do show up for instead of grading the things you miss. The intention I set at yoga tonight was PRESENCE. I reflect on addictions as modes of escaping presence. Compulsive behaviors. Work addiction how I attempt to escape my feelings of inadequacy shaped by my experiences of trauma. Fears of never doing or being enough. Giving too much of myself to others or to work. Poor boundaries taking others’ needs, personally and professionally, before my own. Why did I wake up feeling anxious? Keep telling myself there is nothing you have to do.

Epiphany: Hyperactivity detox is not about doing nothing, but about rediscovering doing consciously.

Why do I never turn off my phone?

Monday 8:30 AM

So glad that I woke up at a decent time naturally. Made coffee and took a decongestant. Was a little bored! I felt a little sad.

Monday Evening

Went to yoga and maybe she doesn’t love me anymore. Had a difficult conversation. Came home and wrote her a letter. Didn’t know what else to do. No one to talk to, I am sad and hurting. Took allergy medicine and melodramatically hoping to fall asleep. It’s 10:30pm.

CONCLUSIONS

I am late submitting this essay, but matters of the heart, healing, and self took precedence this week. I am honoring needing more time to process than the deadline would allow. I am honoring my need—to dive deep into my heart, its murky mess, and to hold. After all I am learning: I am meaningful and enough regardless of this essay, my practice, relationships, all the things I have had to imbue life with beauty and meaning. I have lofty conclusions I could propose from this experiment. I am going to release the urge to package this up with a clear direct meaning so I feel validated, so I feel like I’ve contributed something.

For what it’s worth, I’m turning off my phone more, calling instead of texting, and thinking more consciously about boundaries, needs, time, and the Magickal potential of Life and Being.

You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do. Being is and has always been enough. I’m going to leave this essay raw. It is not perfect, yet it is enough.

I am on a bus to New York, and I am in love with everything.
Nearly a decade ago a masked man flipped the tables on Nashville’s art scene. Johnny Invective started appearing at random local openings wearing a modified motorcycle helmet and a gimp suit fitted with a megaphone. The strange visitor claimed to be a representative of something called the Invective Collective, and the fact that his height and body type seemed to change from sighting to sighting put fuel to the fire that there was more than just art here.

“I’ve proclaimed “art critic and vandal for hire,” Invective generally played the troll role in Nashville’s art scene, disrupting openings with his bizarre appearance and machine-reverberating voice, and challenging artists and audiences in a manner that lit the customs of polite gallery-going on fire. Johnny recorded a few videos that spoke to “the future,” but then he disappeared.

Now, Johnny’s back. Is he bored? Are we? Preparing for this interview I didn’t realize that it can be hard to talk about boredom. It’s almost like the kind of topic which undermines the topic, as the state also infects the mere conjecture of boredom as well. Is boredom primarily defined by ambivalence for you?

“Yawn. I’m bored already. All joking aside, I don’t find the topic to be inherently enervating inducing. Boredom has its place in addiction… perhaps even with the opioid epidemic. Because the drudgery of life becomes so devastating, new experiences have to be made and sometimes extreme ones at that. Life hands are the devil’s workshop, right? But, I wouldn’t equate boredom to ambivalence, though. To me, ambivalence means regret has been given but precedence is not placed.

But boredom is a complete disregard. Apathy, rather. On complacency. On complacency. Boredom definitely has its place in addiction. I was listening to a Duncan Trussell podcast today and he started rolling out all of these “anacondas” that can squeeze the life out of us if we can’t engage our wills to transcend them. He was talking to an author about occult magic, but I’ve learned that the spiritual path is also the creative path — art is magic. But if art is the boredom killer how can it fight back when the boredom anaconda has already wrapped its coils? Something that adorns some gallery wall, it may not serve the true function of art, an artifice to awaken the sensus.

To push the boundaries, to flick a reaction or reaction. Unfortunately, I see so much art, especially around here, that is downright boring. I walk by, I shrug my shoulders, and proceed to the next piece that inspire the same banality. When the bar is set so low, it makes the very act of producing art insipid. It takes very little imagination to steal those around you. It can get to the point of “why even bother?” But I know that any vain attempt on my end will still inspire more of a reaction than what I see around me. You make a good point about point of view when it comes to art. I always like feel like the excitement or emotion or ecstasy the artist felt when creating the work should somehow be stored in the work and translated to the viewer, but this assumes that every artist is inspired — literally “breathed into” by a supernatural power. So here we are back at a magical connection to disembodied entities. You’d think art would be exciting and maybe even terrifying with all these ghosts and gods in the mix. So why is it so often merely commercial production or merely intellectual noodling or merely brightly-colored hijinks? Where is the fire and blood that might pull an audience out of the anaconda’s coils? Is this lack of fire and blood a Nashville thing or a general contemporary art thing?

It is a specter that is haunting art in general, but there is a palpable lack of fire and blood in the Nashville art scene. I like how we’ve established an almost Zoroastrian dualeton. Spirits that imbue with fury and passion, and those that delude others into thinking that uninteresting “inauthentic” endeavors are not just satisfactory, but almost venerable. It’s a battle of light and dark. Haha. I’m not suggesting that people shouldn’t make art. Although, some certainly should not. But, what do they say, you have to make a hundred shitty paintings before you make anything good? Well you don’t have to show us those “100 paintings.” Like the poet laureate has said, “I know my song well before I start singing.” At some point, the acceptance of the “art” you described became a simulacrum, merely gaining importance by nothing more than a passage of time, buffoonery that somehow got itself into the mix. As a metaphor, the snake eating itself… time is a flat circle… eternal recurrence. Whatever image or phrase you need – they all mean the same thing about the same things always happening. Nashville in particular, but art more generally, looking for its white knight, and once again, I have heard the desperate cry. Here I am to be the conscious, to be the savior, to receive the proclamations of faith, and your masked voice, your truth-speaking fire and fury. What prompted this change of vector? When I told people I was interviewing Johnny Invective reactions varied from confused to almost a little offended, but everybody who remembered me, was surprised. What was the process behind this decision, and why now?

“I got bored. Ha. Actually, the state of art prompted it. I’m just the manifestation of the collective art’s wayward actions. When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. The fact that I would stick such a response shows that my reappearance is timely. It’s the aforementioned fire and fury. The arrival of a new Prometheus. Are you here to steal fire or to reveal it? I’m here to reveal it. If I were here to steal it, that would imply that I am in the presence of gods, and that is hardly the case. Tell me more. What does the return of Johnny Invective look like? As a specter haunting Nashville’s art scene. We haven’t heard from you in seven years — is that right? — but sometimes it feels like you never really left. Your voice was so distinctive — literally and creatively — and there’s no doubt that your appearance alone made the scene uneasy. But besides your mask and your masked voice, your truth-speaking about Nashville’s art scene has been frank. Are you reappearing now to challenge Nashville’s art scene in close quarters or just to criticize it from afar?

Seven years seems like it might be right, I haven’t been keeping count. But, I have returned. From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it. It feels like I’ve been away, I can feel a sense of success if I have left that incredible mark. However, I realize that I have unfinished business. More criticisms from afar would not be fair. I am reappearing to present the challenge. To send out the open call. The challenge to whom? The open call to what? I have reappeared to present the challenge. The challenge to all. It’s an open call, or an alter call, to repent from such ways.”

Here we are back at the alter! I think we are on to something with this magick/art/boredom Zoroastrianism we’re devising. Can you tell me anything about an upcoming project or vector or is this it? Is this interview already the beginning of the great work?

This interview is the beginning, but also a continuation. To keep up with the serpentine motif, the snake eating itself… time is a flat circle… eternal recurrence. Whatever image or phrase you need — they all mean the same thing about the same things always happening. Nashville in particular, but art more generally, looking for its white knight, and once again, I have heard the desperate cry. Here I am to be the conscious, to be the savior, to receive the proclamations of faith, and your masked voice, your truth-speaking fire and fury.

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In her paintings, Kelly Williams often explores the feminine personal space through the lens of textiles and domestic objects. An early series, for example, obsessively catalogued the private school uniform plaids of early 1990s Nashville in a hyper-realistic combination of adoration and anxiety. Williams’s recent solo exhibition at David Lusk Gallery Stars Align featuring a more visually expansive and culturally catholic Williams’s unique processes, illuminated by layered pat- terns and pop culture symbols that includes references to Will Oldham’s 1990s indie rock band Palace Brothers and the Nickelodeon game show Double Dare.

The works are created through one of two processes that both start with repetition that becomes almost ritualistic. To begin — and, to summarize here in a few sentences that can take days — Williams extensively-sands a wooden circle, first with a sander, then by hand. She vacuums it and covers it in as many layers of gesso as it takes until she achieves the exact velvety softness. The first painting process starts with an underpainting — say, a nearly photorealistic recreation of a fabric; she then paints over it, usually in black. At a recent gallery talk with Frist Art Museum curator, Katie Delmez, the discussion touched on the fact that Williams etches repeatedly into the black, revealing the work below through carefully controlled obstruction. In the second — the method used in Stars Collide, the tondo sculpture — she prepares the circle with the same attention to detail and paints a base layer. Then pin a actual textile to the surface and spray paints in sure-handed concentric circles, producing, in the case of Stars Collide, a pulsating riot of pink and blue with a dimensionality that makes the painting appear to be rocked.

Her color palette throughout the exhibition is disarming and out-there, which helps dust off the lace patterns, making them feel vibrant and contemporary. At a recent gallery talk with Frist Art Museum curator, Katie Delmez, the discussion touched on the fact that this process ultimately destroys these beloved remnants inherited from her grandmother. Williams allowed that this was part of claiming her own place within these memories and female lineage, adding, from a technical perspective, “I think painting is more interesting when it is pushing up against something like printmaking.”

This body of work — like many of Williams’s — is almost diary personal. The titles are often evocative and emotional — A Letter to Kate, Ambiguous Loss, A Picture of the Sky The Day We Met. There is an overt relationship with the word “woman’s work,” like mending and making a house, and its intersections with thrift and work ethic. In this exhibition specifically, the thrift and work ethic of her grandmother who was a seamstress in an extremely poor county in North Carolina. A feat of this exhibition is that Wil- liams reuses all manners of lace, flowered fabric and patterned china without having overly nostalgic, home-upon or kitschy. It is truly about thrift, not a thin-store aesthetics. It asks us to consider what we save, what we feel beautiful, and how future genera- tions will look at these scraps and remnants to find themselves somewhere within.

A disclaimer: Williams and I went to college to- gether and I have seen her work evolve over the past twenty some years. Despite a recent influx of new residents, Nashville is a small town and it is difficult to write about art without stepping in a friend’s yard, as it were. That said, it is in many ways still an insider’s game and we can do better about transparency. There is an overt conflict of interest here than a point of access, I can with surety tell you that she has been develop- ing these ideas about how to capture and catalogue the sense of feminine domestic archaeology since the late 1990s when she created a series of small works on canvas stretched within 6 inches of embroidered hoop featuring the three-dimensional touch of embroidered hairpins on the painting’s surface. I think some series have been more successful than others in allowing a viewer access to these small universes she creates. With this exhibition, Williams teeters in a space between representational and abstract, and has found a good balance. She has a specific personal story about each piece, but she’s managed to open the themes and references up enough to leave space for viewers to find their own narratives in the paintings. The tondos format is ideal for this. The canvas never begins or ends. Each circle has the intimacy of a portal and the expansiveness of a planet all at once. Williams’ exhibition comes at an interesting mo- ment for contemporary art in Nashville. The monthly art crowds and openings in galleries like Elephant or the spaces at 930 Gallatin Ave. are more and more crowded each month with engaged, interested, multi- generational crowds. Yet, the galleries struggle to keep pace commercially with the city’s real estate, or even its food scene. At the talk, Delmez mentioned the need to cultivate more collectors as being same- what of an Achilles heel for this thriving art scene. Lucky for the prospectors and the faithful, they have access at David Lusk Gallery and all over town to interesting and compelling work at what other cities would deem entry level prices.
I’ll Be Your Mirror
Mild Climate Gallery
Nashville, TN
March – April 2018

Mild Climate’s show I’ll Be Your Mirror is some-thing old and something new all at once; something familiar and something altogether mysterious. It is like an archeological dig, in the form of wall-hangings that include part rectangular wall hangings, but not perfect rectangles, and certainly not perfect squares. Artists Erin Lee Jones and Yevgeniya Baras exhibit two paintings each, both hung in a composition of balance and rhythmic swing, in an alternating dance between the two. Jones’ paintings are figurative while Baras’ reference the figure, but are more abstracted still lives or topographical maps. Map-like indeed and pervasive is the wall drawing by Nickola Pottinger.

Pottinger’s site-specific wall drawing occupies a corner of the small gallery inherently making the space feel expansive. If this whole world can fit inside of Mild Climate, what else? What next? Who knows! The drawing unfolds in nearly all directions of the back corner, trying to peek out the window. The pen drawing is a matrix and lattice of black and white on sheets of paper placed intentionally together but seemingly out of happenstance of a studio table sprawl on the gallery walls. The most lovely moments are those where paint clings to the pen marks and glitter sticks to the paint. The work is a zoological wonder, a marvel of materials that grow and morph like plant life and faces. There are parts that look like magazine pages, fungal hyphae, the moon, spilled nail polish, homemade and gessoed paper, tea-dyed paper, and pink gesso. Its cut-paper edges keep it low, clean, in that it is not-too-clean but believable, touchable, and tactile. It would be a tragedy to frame such a thing, a defacement of its cultivated surface; it is, after all, growing. Its position by the window is thus fortuitous.

The paintings, the paintings! The paintings by Jones and Baras answer Pottinger’s piece in a way that announces their presence, as strongholds, moments preserved in the archeological rubble. Baras’ paintings are both fresco inspired in tone and feel. Colors and various fibers are inlaid in chunks of chalky material to form the figure of the painting. “Magdalene, Magdalene” depicts the dancing feet of a female figure in contrapposto wearing a grass skirt. The movement is palpable, the lines of her legs are formed by inlaid tinfoil and the Christian allegory implied by the title is felt. Indeed, the texture of the tinfoil and the pink bottom of the heel that is formed out of a worn and fuzzy unraveling burlap texture. “New Little Lovers” by Baras, depicts a dance between a couple. At first glance it as a female-esque figure dancing with that of a minotaur. On further inspection however, it is perhaps a masculine-human form. The two figures are composed of whimsy and elegant pastel lines of painted tin foil. They are as sculptural as they are painterly and the gestural quality embraces and transcends myth by bringing it into the now.

Between the dance of figures, Baras’ “still” lifes hold their own by offering a setting and grounding the playmates. Baras’ untitled work from 2018 is oil paint on fringing burlap which is layered with glass and glitter mounted on canvas. This work looks to me, like a pair of shoe-soles, sneaker or athletic shoe soles, but stationary. Maybe it is their imprint or something else entirely, like an interstate map, or hot wheels track, marble tracks, or nets; a lace-up stick net, perhaps? However, I am fond of the shoe soles and embrace their bizarre situation and surface that protects – or fails to protect — feet from the embedded glass. Finally and saliently, Baras’ other untitled work from 2017 includes numbers, shapes, and paint that ring and wriggle around its wooden frame. It is a jovial painting that enters into real space, oscillating in and out, it wrings loose the picture plane. The background appears to be a mountain range or possibly the spine of a board, while a family of colors, shapes, objects, and numbers animate the foreground, which is dominated by pink. For me, the numbers seem to represent time. I’ll Be Your Mirror is a tremendously cheerful and musically rich show of drawings, paintings, and sculptures, myth, and narrative. The wonders of a small gallery world. From the hallway, peering in on the sprawling mystery of Pottinger’s wall drawing, one cannot help but walk inside — it is a National Geographic spread! What is it? And the paintings, the paintings are lick-able and pokey and wondrous. What a trio!

Nickola Pottinger, Untitled, 2018, 16” x 20”, oil, burlap, glass, glitter on canvas, photo by the author. Nickola Pottinger, Untitled, 2018, 16” x 20”, oil, burlap, glass, glitter on canvas. Photo by the author.

Bridget Bailey is an artist and educator in Nashville, TN.
Paul Collins  
Zeitgeist  
Nashville, TN  
March 3 – 31, 2018

Most of us move through the world like myopes without their glasses. What’s at arm’s length to us is clear (our lover’s face, The New York Times, our phone); the rest is a mercifully undemanding blur. The practice of drawing allows for another conversion: It allows artists to step outside themselves. A gas station, the Metro courts complex, an overpass, the parking lot of an empty storefront—these are not places I would think to linger, and I trust that doing so was a fresh experience for Collins. Setting into another ordinary place for two weeks, committing to drawing it, to seeing it, must have required letting go of his own natural preferences. Studio practice is often self-referential, but Collins declined to make the work about himself, about his presence in those places. Much of the history of landscape images might be summarized as “Here was here.” The works in Collins’s exhibition, rather, answer that convention with “Here was here.” The genial point, of course, is that we could be, too.

The nineteen works from Collins’s two weeks at Metro Court are a combination of intimate pencil drawings and large digital prints. “During my visits I was humbled by the solemnity of the proceedings, the palpable value of each outcome and professionalism of the public servants I witnessed,” Collins wrote in his statement for the project. You can see the generosity in these drawings, too: the subjects express boredom, ennui, weariness, earnestness, and he treats each expression with deference. In a nod to the tradition of courtroom sketch artists, the digital prints are on newsprint. Those works were all hanging on the walls of Zeitgeist and were a crucial part of the exhibition. On the night of the opening, though, they were also available in a full-size tabloid newspaper, a gift to gallery visitors. As with the exhibition as a whole, Collins made the tedious of his practice a gift for the rest of us to take with us.

Collins seems to have planned his survey with an eagerness and an aim toward variety. What made the exhibition seem encyclopedic, though, was the overwhelming number of works that filled the walls of the gallery. There were 755 drawings, mostly 18 x 24, arranged salon style, on every available wall. What’s more, the show included nearly the complete set of drawings Collins made in following this self-assignment, an encyclopedic record of a conscious, mindful, fixed attention with mostly inconsequential places made consequential by the generosity of his attention.

In October of last year, Collins made twenty-one drawings in his fortnight at the “Heritage Fuel station on Wedgewood” (all 18 x 24, ink on paper). We see the station as a whole in one work, like the opening shot of a documentary film used to establish a sense of place. Elsewhere, Collins turns his attention on the crux of the establishment: the gas pumps. We witness his democratic eye completely engaging the place, completely open to it and the people who haunt it. He shows us the garbage can by the entrance to the store, the underside of the canopy, a fragment of a delivery truck, a nearby billboard being replaced, the light from inside the station making it glow in the pre-dawn glooms. We meet Doug and Brenda, Sam and Hassan and Fideo—they are completing ordinary tasks like hosing off the sidewalk, changing a light bulb, and taking a smoke break.

Beauty is one kind of powerful force in artworks that makes the tedium of his practice a gift for the rest of us. The practice of drawing allows for another way of seeing; it is not just an activity of looking, it is a way of seeing. Drawing from life has the capacity to calibrate the artist’s experience in a number of ways, and we can see the effects of this calibration in Collins’s project. Observation-based drawing is a way of stepping outside of time, beyond the concerns of the contemporary moment. It is obvious from their particularity that the horses on the walls of the cave at Lascaux were not types but individuals. For 20,000 years or more artists have been doing exactly what Collins did at Rocky Glade Farm: intensely en-gaging the phenomena facing them. Also, with time being slippery, it’s possible to both deny it and slow it down, and drawing engages time uniquely. I suppose an argument could be made that you don’t really see something until you draw it, assessing every angle, how the work presences in and defines the object in space. This takes time, slows time, and careful respect. Most of the visitors to Heritage Fuel conducted their business in a matter of minutes, while Collins settled in to witness the life of that singular, discreet place for half a month.

The practice of drawing allows for another way of seeing. It’s common to assert that beauty can be found anywhere if you look hard enough, but looking for beauty requires a critical eye, the habit of evaluation. Collins seems motivated, instead, by a desire for honesty. His work expresses empathy for Brenda and Fideo, certainly, but also for the light fixtures and the chain-link security fence and the folding chair by the payphone.

He used brush and ink to look at the Heritage Fuel Station, but shifted his practice according to the location. The thirty-two works from “Granny’s Basement” are divided between digital drawings done on a tablet and drawings made with a paint pen on black paper. They range in size from 24 x 30 digital prints of the whole room to 10 x 12 paint pen portraits of band members. The largest piece in the show is one of the images from “Rocky Glade Farm,” a view of a strawberry patch on 40 x 60, a canvas blend of surpising scale and immediate gesture.

Paying attention in Rome is a pleasant task; it’s possible to get drunk on piazzas and gelaterias and Baroque doorways. As if on a twenty-first-century Grand Tour, Collins made plein-air drawings of the visual scenes: the Colosseum, the Pyramid of Cestius, the view of the massive dome of St. Peter’s across the street, the underside of the canopy, a fragment of a delivery truck, a nearby billboard being replaced, the light from inside the station making it glow in the pre-dawn glooms. We meet Doug and Brenda, Sam and Hassan and Fideo—they are completing ordinary tasks like hosing off the sidewalk, changing a light bulb, and taking a smoke break.

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Low Five

Walter Sutin

Sediment Gallery, Richmond, VA
February 2 – 25, 2018

Low Five is a queried evaluation of the violence and pleasure derived from a fetishized culture that has fostered postmodernism in an alienated society. Walter Sutin’s work is violent, but unbearably hopeful — highlighting broken institutions unnervingly hopeful — highlighting broken institutions and conflated identity, form, and object to compose a hellish interior that reflected modern female sexuality.

The compositions are pieced together on wide scales by an amalgamation of tiny brightly swirling strokes reflective of our current trend towards dystopia. The figures in these performances are, perhaps, excessive violence, the concession and eager complicating cathartically chaotic images. In the banality of their scenes endless scenes unfold on top of each other, but the fractures in one’s own comprehension of the work — suggesting a disassociated reality meant to sew together narratives that are readily identified by anyone who participated in consumer capitalism. In “The Red Telephone” two cops in assless chaps bend in opposing downward pates in consumer capitalism. In “The Red Telephone” two cops in assless chaps bend in opposing downward pates in consumer capitalism.

The individualized caricatures of Sutton’s work — featured in different stages of distress, subjugations, and ritualized violence — are depicted as aches to the chords around them. By obscuring the faces of his subjects, Sutin interrupts any presuppositions that could be made from expressions of ecstasy or horror. In “Goodbye Horses,” a blonde female nude stripped to a pair of blue thigh highs, assumes the position of Christ amongst a galactic orgy of horses. Her expression however, the most directly rendered in the series, betrays not a shred of emotion. She stares straight out to the audience as though she’s already performed the routine twelve times tonight, the bottle service girl is stealing her tips, she hasn’t had a cigarette in four hours, and she would rather be anywhere else.

The installation of the work in Richmond, Virginia’s Sediment Gallery pushes these concepts further: featuring Walter Sutin’s “The Red Telephone” on the battered walls of their exposed brick, interior storefront, over patches of unevenly applied paint in blue, white and yellow. From the quiet downtown street, one might be drawn in by the bright, seemingly cheerful scapes. Though upon entering, the installation reveals itself to be more of a shrine, where an entombed shaman has been buried, with a chain on the ground to reach a key lying in a puddle that has formed underneath. A key which, presumably, unlocks the golden door on a tree that entombs a full-figured female body in the distance. The result is an image that — through the propagandistic nationalism of “blue lives” in the face of the brutal murder of black children; the co-optation of the rainbow as an agent of neoliberalism to elide the acknowledgment of fluid identities; and the desperation to surpass all of this for the sake of prescriptive beauty — stirs nothing, is nothing, means nothing. The realization of which, Startles the viewer into an awareness of their own disengagement. This critically astute formulation is repeated throughout the series and is a crucial factor through which Sutin discloses the latency of empathy in a culture that lives and dies by stimulus.
