

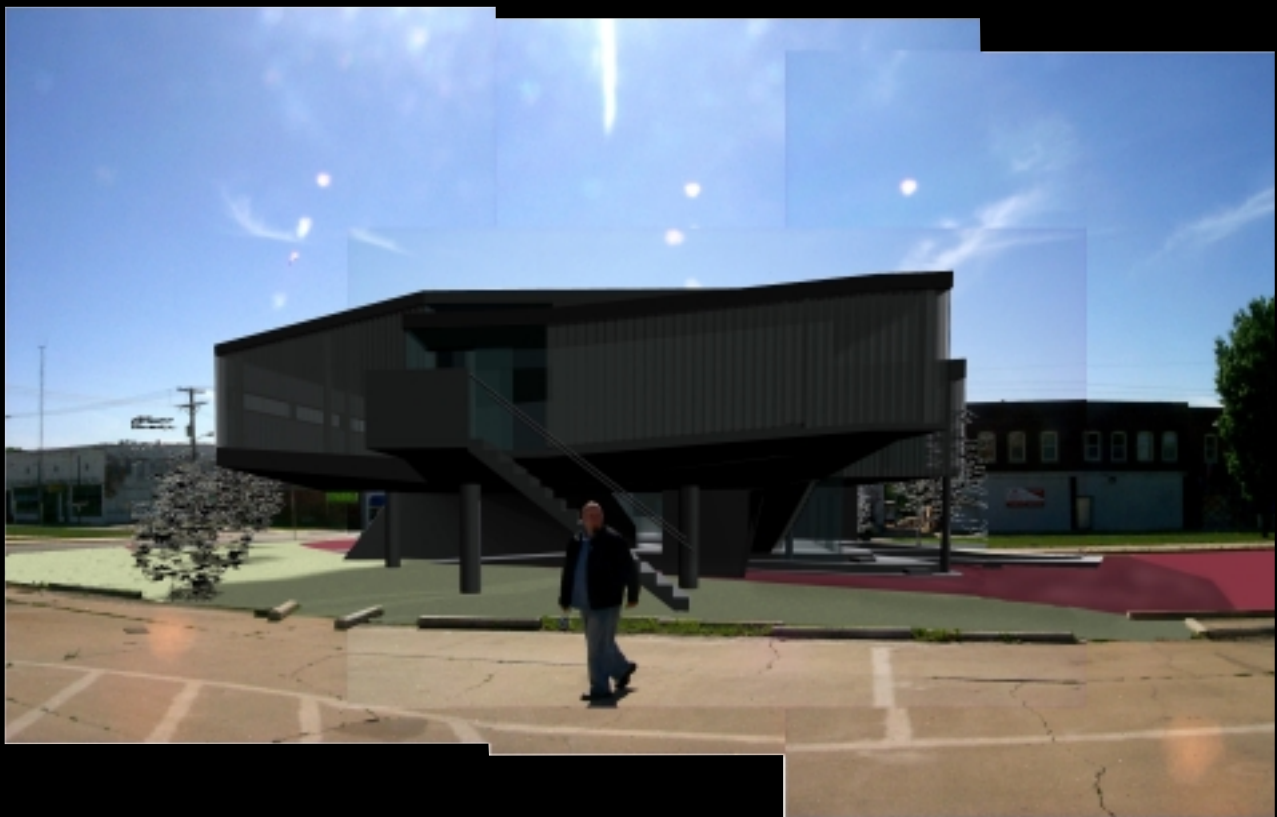
A^{to}Z

The Art and Culture iZine.

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DEAR READER:

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO VIEW OUR PREMIER ISSUE OF A TO Z! I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MINUTE TO EXPLAIN THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MADE THIS PUBLICATION POSSIBLE. FOLLOWING MANY MONTHS OF STUDIO TIME WORKING ON PIECES FOR THE ~TAUNT~ SHOW (DISCUSSED IN THIS ISSUE), I DECIDED I WANTED TO COMPLETELY SHIFT THE KIND OF WORK I WAS DOING. ORIGINALLY I HAD ASKED CALEB CARTER TO WORK ON SOME SORT OF NARRATIVE PIECE WITH ME. AS PLANS FOR THE FUTURE CONGEALED, I BECAME EVER MORE NOSTALGIC AND AWARE OF HOW LUCKY I WAS TO BE SURROUNDED BY SUCH AMAZINGLY ENERGETIC, CREATIVE, AND MOTIVATED PEOPLE....(I KNOW SOME OF YOU MAY BE MOANING AT THE WORD CREATIVE BUT, WHAT ELSE AM I SUPPOSE TO PUT THERE?) IN HOPES OF JOINING EFFORTS I BEGAN MAKING PLANS FOR THIS 'ZINE.

LIKE ALL PROJECTS, THE MANIFESTATION THAT YOU WILL READ HERE IS VERY DIFFERENT THAN THAT ORIGINAL PLAN. IN ORDER TO KEEP IN TOUCH DURING THIS MASS EXODUS I HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH DAX BEDELL TO SET UP BULLETIN BOARDS AND A CHAT ROOM ONLINE AT WWW.THE-CORPS.COM. THIS 'ZINE IS NOW GOING TO BE A SUBFEATURE OF OUR BULLETIN BOARD ARRANGEMENT. ISSUE 1. I WILL HOPEFULLY ACT AS A CATALYST, ENCOURAGING MORE PEOPLE TO SUBMIT WORKS TO THE BULLETIN BOARD. EVENTUALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO ORGANIZE THOSE SUBMISSIONS INTO FUTURE ISSUES OF A TO Z.

ALSO, WE HOPE TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE WHO RESPOND TO THE 'ZINE TO GIVE US LOTS OF FEED-BACK, INITIATING AN ONGOING DIALOGUE. BEING COMPLETELY AND TOTAL ONLINE MEANS THAT THE COST TO US AND EVERYONE INVOLVED IN ALMOST NIL. IT MEANS THAT THE ONLY THING REALLY BEING CONTRIBUTED IS TIME. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE FURTHER ISSUES OF A TO Z, WE ASK ONLY THAT YOU CONTRIBUTE SOME TIME INTO FEEDBACK AND/OR SUBMISSIONS.

OF COURSE, YOU MAY ALSO CONTRIBUTE BY JUST FORWARDING THIS LINK TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

SARRITA

FOR COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, COMPLAINTS, SUBMISSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, OR ANY OTHER NEEDS GO TO WWW.ATOZINE.NET.

CONTRIBUTORS



SARRITA HUNN graduated from Drury University, spring '01, with majors in Studio Art, Art History, and Philosophy. Currently she is preparing to move to San Francisco where she will be in the MFA program at California College of Arts and Crafts. She spends her time in the studio, on the computer (at home and work), reading, traveling, listening to many different kinds of music, chatting with friends, and hanging out with her boyfriend, Ryan, who is really cute. "I like Mac Powerbooks and electronic music." Contact at sarrita@the-corps.com; www.sarritamariehunn.net (Badly needing updating!).

BEN BUNCH graduated (00') from Drury University in Springfield, Missouri with a BA in Studio Art, Art History, Philosophy, and Global Studies. He has lived there on and off over the last 5 years moving between London, England for work and study. He interned at White Cube, Chapman Fine ARTS, and the Paton gallery. This coming fall he will be moving to Brooklyn, New York to attend the MFA program at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. During the last year he has worked with the Mossa Center in St. Louis to coordinate the exhibitions "taint" and "taunt". You can contact him at meenween3@hotmail.com




ERIC ANDERSON is currently finishing his millionth year at Drury University, located in the beautiful midwestern metropolis (read as horrid, horrid place, empty of all stimulating activity) of Springfield, Missouri. His areas of more concentrated study (majors) are the fine arts and graphic design. He is frequently made fun of by his petty and under-educated friends for his use of polysyllabic words in everyday conversation. This alleged character flaw is also evidenced in his writing, which is rife with what he thinks are clever allegories, colorful language and ridiculously-hard-to-wade-through run-on sentences. However, if you were ever to approach him in an attempt to discuss this annoying tendency to bombast the general public with his over-large knowledge of Webster's-style English, you would be surprised at his adept use of somewhat more common colloquialisms in reference to your lineage and the nature of your copulatory habits. Mr. Anderson plans to make pictures of some sort for money or food when he gets a bit older. He plans on attending the Portfolio Center in Atlanta, Georgia upon completion of his studies at Drury. He is as yet undecided as to the exact nature of his plans upon reaching this haven, er, school, but he is quite excited at the opportunity to hone his meager skills into something that at some point could actually be enjoyable and lucrative, preferably at the same time. If you would like to contact Mr. Anderson for any reason (perhaps you are a glutton for punishment), he may be reached at emcatalyst@hotmail.com.

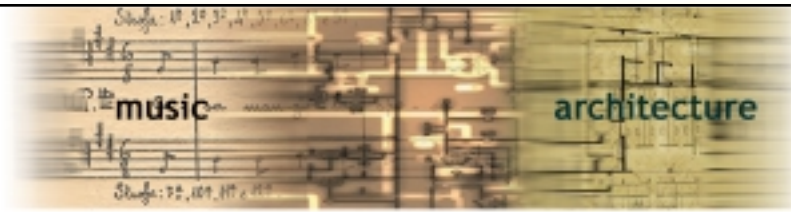
DOUG JOHNSTON, age 23, is an avid music fan from Tulsa, OK who plays both drums and bass; He also studies art and architecture at Drury University and is a staunch supporter of the National OHIO Alliance. Besides doing artwork and fantastical architectural designs, Doug is currently a vocalist in the metal band *Friends of the Apocalypse*.





thrift store 

*Available in most cities.



Musitecture

by Doug Johnston

Simply put, this article is a way to get you, the reader, to look at the work that has taken up the better part of my time and thought over the past year -- that work being in the realm of what I call "musitecture." **If you haven't guessed it already, musitecture (perhaps its not the best name) is work done that explores the relationships between music and architecture.** People with an architectural background primarily do this work, yet some work has also been done by musicians and artists, and in some cases people with backgrounds in all three areas. All of my explorations have been done in the context of academia, in an undergraduate architecture program, which I feel has determined to a large extent the nature of these explorations.

Music has always been an obsession for me and when I also became obsessed with architecture, I soon realized that the two had many similarities. When discussing my interest in the relationships between music and architecture with friends and professors, acoustics and acoustical engineering was often brought up, but I have never had an interest in exploring that area. **In fact, 'acoustics' was coming up so much in my critiques and advisory meetings that I was inspired to write a short declaration on the matter, which I hung on the wall just outside my studio space.** What I had been interested in was the possible spatial connotations of music and the temporal experience of architecture, and how these relate. There had been numerous studies in this area and many of these are discussed in my projects, yet few really explored what I was interested in, so I naturally wanted to explore the subject myself. I finally got the chance to do some exploring within the context of academia in the spring of 2001 while I was in an entirely digital studio led by professor Edward Fabian. I chose to work with Lee Morgan's jazz piece A Search For New Land simply because I always loved the song. The final product was a series of 2D and 3D diagrams that represented my interpretations of the music. In retrospect, these types of studies are much more interesting and affective to me than my more recent and in-depth research.

In the fall of 2001 I began research and writing for an undergraduate thesis dealing with music and architecture. As I researched the projects others had done in the realm of

musitecture I found that every project dealt with either traditional western symphonic music (a.k.a. classical music) or jazz. While I realized that generally speaking classical music and jazz are compositionally more complex than other musical styles, I felt that musitecture also needed to deal with other types of music, especially the music that I enjoy. Another observation I made of the existing studies was that none made an attempt to expand their studies to include the cultural and historical aspects of the music, which I felt were integral to any music. **As a result I decided to focus on punk music since it has always held a special place in my heart and is rich with its own complex culture and history.** In addition to my own theories on music, punk music, and architecture, the thesis document also included a brief history and explanation of punk music and culture.

The second half of the thesis project was to design a building based on my research. I soon realized that I had created a very complex design problem for myself by trying to incorporate punk music, history, and culture into the already multifarious process of designing a building. I decided early in the project that I wanted to use a hypothetical client for the project so I chose my friend Eric Titterud, founder/owner of Magister Ludi Records, a small independent record label that he runs from his house in Norman, Oklahoma. Thankfully, the client aspect didn't add to the complexity, but actually provided a somewhat objective source for criticism and simplification. **I asked Eric to chose a piece of music that he felt summarized his notions of both Magister Ludi Records and the punk scene in general (not an easy task).** He chose Drink Deep by Rites of Spring for its open-ended lyrical content and simple yet moving composition. Like my earlier work, the project became about the process employed just as much as it was about the final product. The design produced for the Magister Ludi facilities is a resolution between simplicity and complexity- it is left open ended and utilizes few materials in simple ways, yet the experience, program, and functioning of the building are complex. To view the thesis document and project click on the link below.

While I am proud of and satisfied with the results of my thesis work, I found myself frustrated throughout the entire project. Since the project became about the process I had

created, my work became so predetermined that it didn't allow enough room for real exploration. I often

found myself looking back over the diagrams produced for the Search For New Land project, wanting to explore diagramming of a similar nature for punk music. **The complexity of the project was overwhelming for me and in hindsight I understand that my desire to diagram was a desire to simplify- primarily to revert back to the singularity of the formal relationships between music and architecture.** I also see now that this tension between simplicity and complexity manifested itself in the design produced, as mentioned earlier. Musitecture is still an obsession for me, and now

punk music and architecture



that I have had two opportunities to study and explore it in academia, I am excited to resume exploration independently. I foresee more diagramming exercises and further exploration and study of the standards of musical composition, both of which I feel are more appropriately labeled as artistic explorations rather than musical or architectural endeavors. Hopefully these studies will result in increased musitectural dialog with others and motivate others to explore their own notions of "musicitecture".





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Localities and Geographics

"Taint" and "Taunt" were two exhibitions held at the Mossa Center in St. Louis, Missouri during 2001 and 2002. Each show contained multiple bodies of work that have been made by artists of Springfield, Missouri and the mid-west area over the last 2 years. The group is mostly comprised of faculty, students, and alumni from Drury University. While all the work itself cannot claim one singular overarching ideology, it is important to recognize that these artists are a small group that have shared ideas, school, homes, and friendships. Many factors have played into all of us meeting. Sometimes it seems that if our paths had been different none of these events would have ever happened. Timing was an important factor to forming this community. Whether or not we consciously searched each other out one thing became most important; making work. Making work to sort out meanings, become better artists, learn more about our materials and ideas, and push each other to keep sustaining our making of objects/ideas. "taint" and "taunt" display the idiosyncratic themes of our members and the places we discussed them.



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by **Ben Bunch**

The Where is the Who and the What

Knowing these people in combination with seeing their work together reminded me that artists' work are not too far removed from the influences of their everyday lives. One's location is the collective influence of landscape, interests, and conversation. In most cases, when people are given the chance, they build their lives around this environment if it suits their personality. Our collective effort to build our lives and friendships around our interests and work has become our location. Those that have remained a part of it have reaped the benefit of strengthening their ideas. These two shows are a culmination of what went on here during the past few years.



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In Sarrita's current paintings there are multiple examples of the medium's use corresponding with her daily life. Working at the Sweetheart Cup factory as a graphic designer she was part of industrial food container manufacturing. Her job was to arrange package designs to be printed for use on containers. The strongest influence from this can be seen in "Unexpected guest"(7). It's content comes from the forms she encountered at her day-job. Diminutive, it's utility as a vessel for libations is thwarted by its appearance as a fragile piece of marzipan or delectable pastry. Keeping with the materials used in her paintings it is made of acrylic paint with a canvas and wood base. Cutting, molding and sewing describe the ways that she works in painting. Cups, patterns, and pours are flattened together. She reveals the materials step-by-step, moving from the outside in.

Sarrita Hunn



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First the wall, then wood, then canvas (just stapled to the edge to expose the stretchers), gesso, and then the rich textures and colors of the molded squares that are held together with sewing cord. Each swatch is stitched to the next. The individual tiles appear both as industrial patterns, fields of color, and playful abstractions. She presents construction and completion simultaneously. She plays with the traditional ideas of abstraction expressionist technique by freezing and shifting the appearance of her patterns, all of which are diced and arranged like a non-objective comforter. The hand-made appears as machine ordered, and the prefab paisleys and polka dot stamps fall on drips and fields of color.

Ryan Thayer



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Ryan Thayer's installation work has dealt with the mundane and overlooked areas of modern commercial spaces. These investigations began through painting and the urban setting. This was originally spurred on by the influence of the skateboarding environment and imagery. Moving away from the mischievous side of that subject matter he focused on the way that overlooked settings can be reclaimed in new ways. Thayer reactivates their utility but emphasizes how these environments are manipulated to form systems and structures. Looking at light and materials, Thayer has experimented with the way fluorescent lighting change our perception of the contemporary environment. He combines neglected office materials and a spectrum of fluorescents. He has used photography in conjunction with installations to illustrate differences in color perception. Painting has also been a model for exploring constructed environments beside the installation work.



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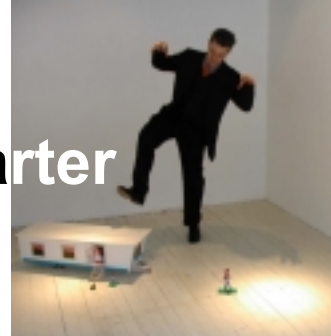
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"i-office" (17-22) was located in the former gallery office space at the Mossa Center. This minimal ghost-like arrangement of a desk with monitor and other typical business organizing materials was set up to appear askew. Most onlookers passed this piece up thinking it was the actual office, but to the careful observer one could notice that "i-office" was a very subversive setup. Disarrayed nests of extension cords powered the electronic components and an army of blinking "12:00" radio clocks kept the time whenever a visitor turned the installation on and off. The computer monitor clicked on and off with a faint grid appearing because of the lack of connection to a Central Processing Unit. All of these phenomena developed by diverting the objects original uses to new functions within the installation. With the exception of the power provided by the utilities, "i-office" was a closed system. All its parts fed off each other. They were either looped, like the switching of clocks and lamps on and off from the same power strip, or sealed, like the connection of phones and cords to fake outlets. Upon a deeper inspection you can recognize the subtle changes and see a deliberate manipulation of the objects meaning shift from usefulness to uselessness. Thayer panders to the viewer by employing these objects that are usually connected to other systems. He also finds their association with utility and business practices very rich. Thayer uses these office materials and environments because they are taken for granted in modern everyday life. These are the kinds of environments that support our economic, and political systems. Using these office materials for installation shows how these devices original uses can be misdirected to appear functional. Thayer's work points out this vulnerable area of business and communication technology.



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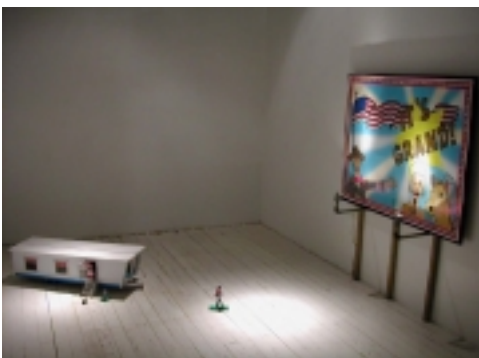
Caleb Carter



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Sarcasm is Caleb Carter's strongest theme. Over the years his work has explored a mixture of content but in some way always making fun of itself. Shown in 2000, "Salt Lathe" is a cumbersome iron table with a wheel and vice grip. The grip clutches a commercial salt lick and as the viewer cranks away at the wheel salt is sprinkled over a plate of plastic corn on the cob, potatoes, and pork chops. The lathe is an anachronistic regional device used in farming and industry. It grinds and sharpens tools. The food is also typical of a mid-western meal. The machine (and user) invests great concentration of materials and physicality into this somewhat futile task. This mix of the regional and humorous is clearly taking a shot at the traditional values that are associated with ideas such as the protestant work ethic of the 19th and early 20th century industrial laborer. Work and industry are still part of the American identity, but nowadays industrial objects are being replaced by computers and automatic systems. Thus eliminating the workers role. "Salt Lathe" puts the value of work 'making you better' in question by highlighting the antiqueness of such ideas. Carter focuses on the meaning between object and ideology. Looking at how they are tied together, he wants to reveal their humor and contradictions.

"It's Grand" (23-25) takes another punch at locality with its use of what is best termed as the Branson baroque. If you have driven through southwest Missouri you will no doubt encounter the infinite amount of billboards that saturate the area and advertise Branson (the capital of country music). They all share a common theme of down home cornball American entertainment. Carter has recreated this encounter on a smaller scale. He built a model sized version of a home trailer with figurines of a typical American white bred homestead family and arranged them in front of a Highway billboard. Using the visual vocabulary of these advertisements this bill board displays generic "hillbilly" country folk characters and lettering declaring "It's grand!". The male figure is solitarily walking towards this sign as his family pokes their head out of the trailer waving goodbye. The trailer and family represent the nostalgia for mobility and growth often found in rural American culture. The mini- sized road sign combines the patriotic and rural symbols to encode the value of the entertainment it attacks/attracts.



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Todd Lowery

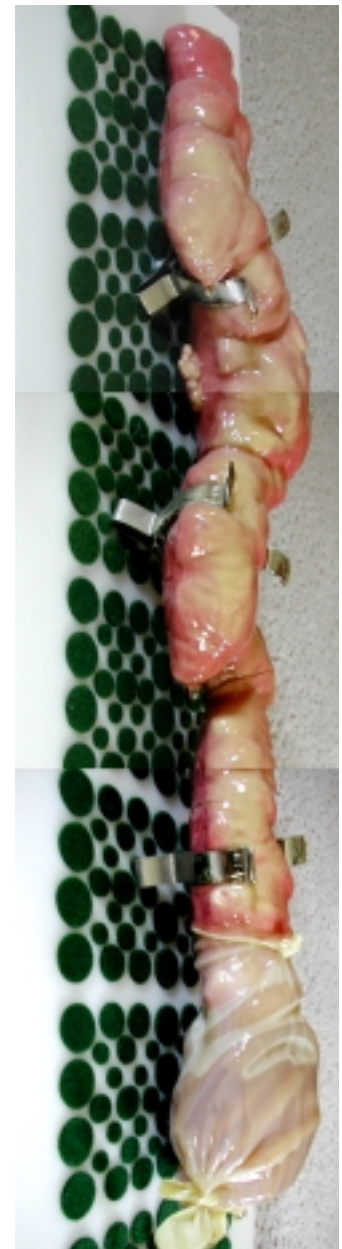


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Todd Lowery's work with the biomorphic has led him further into the realm of paradox by flirting with the line between luscious and repulsive. Among his sources are the microscopic world, the kitsch, and on more that one occasion friends or family members become his subject. He always surrounds himself with imagery and objects of personal interest so their elements weave themselves into the work. Everything from houseplants to diagrams of sea anemones are absorbed and referenced. His imagery and his sculpture feed into each other. In his earlier conceptualizations he examined painting as a site for a layered experience by looking at way the people flatten the stimuli of perception into a compressed occurrence. He began corresponding painting with this metaphysical structure. Layering forms of the macrobiotic with the geometric, each with an aesthetic look of the glossy pop world and the grossly natural. Drawing on the seductive appearances of commercial items, Lowery feels some of his imagery is akin to Stuart Davis' because it turns commercial visual influence into abstraction. Using these images on top of the grotesquely biological, he draws a parallel between attraction and repulsion. He plays with the viewer's curiosity by showing that once drawn into the experience they might find it hard to pull away.



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Lowery further abstracts from the shapes in his previous work, so the forms have a Freudian appearance suggesting that sometimes. "a cigar is just a cigar, and sometimes it is not." These forms float in a nonrepresentational-layered space morphing between orifices and penetrations. In the newest work he is taking these forms further from their figurative references and making an organic play without direct representation of the body, toggling the viewers' perspective between the macro and the microscopic. Some of the drawings that were shown in "taint" (33,35,36) are a prime example of this movement. They are large in scale to subsume the viewer's perspective on all sides. A jumble of floral and amoebic forms whirl in and out of focus.



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His largest use of the organic forms and non-traditional art materials (polyurethane resin, and expanding foam) is "Naytrys and Symphs (Oh monsieur Bouguereau...)" (37,39,40). Drawing a reference to 19th French academy painter Adolphe-William Bouguereau, who painted classical nudes floating and sweeping as pagan fairy-tale creatures, the forms point to the experience of bodies and the seductive without literally showing it. It's a kind of strategy used throughout his body of work. Indirectness to convey an essence of particular kinds of figurative aesthetic experiences. It talks about, not just the body, but also other natural bodies that hover, drip and sweep through our awareness. It is the corporal without the messy investigation. Lusciously aroused and invited, one will be disappointed to touch and see that the pieces are as cured and dry as bone. This sets up an opposition of the visual over the tactile. 'Look but don't touch' if you want to suspend gratification. This is a way Lowery enters back into painting and drawing from the sculptural. What he has created will eventually pop back into the painting and drawing by using the 3-D as work in itself and as the next step for the 2-D (and vice versa).

Flipping back and forth in processes Lowery is a painter who is open to using various methods and media for examination. He uses painting's process as a model, thinking of it not in essentialist terms of just paint and canvas, but as an unlimited arrangement of materials to explore a personal conceptual framework.



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Jon Oakland



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42

John Oakland's imagery revolves around the themes of vulnerability and indoctrination that children experience. His sources come from 1970's micro filmstrips educating youngsters on etiquette, behavior, and airplane safety, and his own childhood family photos. The filmstrips were collected from a friend's mother who had used them in her own classroom. The manuals were stolen during flights. Coalescing this material in painting he re-presents these themes from growing up. When it comes to education there is an enormous amount of trust allotted to adults by children in order to learn the things that will allow them to function better and safely. Kids are constantly looking out at the world absorbing all they encounter with or without supervision. This susceptibility is evident in the two pieces "Self Portrait with Oxygen Mask"(45,46). Oakland as child is looking out somewhat mischievously next to an instructive image of an adult putting on a safety-breathing mask in the case of a plane crash. Oakland shows himself as an impressionable youth, next to the representation of the power relationship an adult has to assist a child saving his life. Similarly, the "untitled" series (41-44) of smaller collaged box paintings are a primer for simple symbols and systems. Educational drills of shape and color direct the viewer over images of children being examined by doctors. These point to Oakland's interest in how children learn about discerning between the physical world and themselves. Humans at a young age are taught to interpret the world with language and systems even while not understanding their own body. They must remain complacent and believe that the care given to them is in their best interest.



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When they are complacent, children can be oblivious to their surroundings. John plays, in "Family Portrait"(47), with his toy plane as his parents are cropped off to the far right. His mother is a partial posterior, hips and torso. A hand making a pass at his mother's ass represents his father. This very subtle detail is the core of the relationship Oakland emphasizes with this body of work. Children are observant and ignorant of their surroundings at the same time. Their caretakers try to shield them and teach them what they feel is appropriate. Delving into his past and investigating these images he tries to uncover what situations he might have been unknowingly involved by contrasting the play of himself next to the play of his adult parents.



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List of Images

1. "taint", October 2001, group photo, from left to right: Garrett Burtner, Ben Bunch, Jon Oakland, Todd Lowery Jennifer Wrobleski
2. "taunt", March 2002, group photo, from left to right: Ben Bunch, Kevin Boyko, Sarrita Hunn, Dax Bedell, Doug Johnston, Kyle Jeffries, Caleb Carter, Matt Boyko, Ryan Thayer (Missing: Cozette Phillips, Jennifer Wrobleski, Mikel Rosenthal)
3. Lydy hall, art building, Drury University, Springfield, MO
4. Lydy Hall entrance
5. map of southwest Missouri between Springfield and St. Louis
6. Sweetheart Cup and package factory entrance, Springfield, MO
7. "Unexpected Guest", acrylic, wood and canvas, 5x3 inches
8. installation view of "taunt", works pictured, Sarrita Hunn's "Unexpected Guest", "Crazy Quilt Painting", Ryan Thayer's "Toilet Paper Dispenser"
9. "Breakfast Painting", acrylic, wood, and canvas, 48x64 inches
10. "Crazy Quilt Painting", acrylic, wood, and canvas, 48x64 inches
11. "Crazy Quilt Painting" (side detail)
12. untitled, acrylic on masonite, 36x62 inches
13. installation view of "FSC 108", dimensions variable
14. untitled, acrylic on ceiling tile, 24x48 inches
15. untitled, acrylic on masonite, 4x10 inches
16. Ryan Thayer recent work show, free association gallery, Findley Student Center, Drury University, Springfield, MO
- 17-22. "i-office" (installation view), dimensions variable
- 23-24. "It's Grand!" (detail)
25. "It's Grand!", wood, vinyl, lights, poster printout, and figurines, dimensions variable
26. "it's Grand!" (detail)
27. Streamline trailer on HWY 44 Memorial day weekend 2002
28. Winnebago trailer on HWY 65 memorial day weekend 2002
29. Dixie Stampede horse rider, Branson, MO
30. untitled, oil on wood, January 1997, 28x48 inches
31. "amputated", resin, foam, plastic glove, cutting board, clamps and felt dots, October 1997, 30x8.5 inches
32. untitled, charcoal and paper (detail)
33. untitled, charcoal and paper (detail)
34. "bluegreenburstorangesryangreenswirl", oil on canvas, 4x5 feet
35. untitled, charcoal and paper (detail)
36. untitled, charcoal and paper, 5x6 feet
37. "Naytrys and Symphs (Oh monsieur Bouguereau...)", polyurethane foam, resin color coating, steel rods and square platforms, dimensions variable
38. Adolphe-William Bouguereau, "Les Oreades", oil on canvas, 1865
39. "Naytrys and Symphs (Oh monsieur Bouguereau...)" (detail)
40. "Naytrys and Symphs (Oh monsieur Bouguereau...)" (detail)
41. untitled, acrylic and wood, 8x10 inches
42. untitled, acrylic and wood, 8x10 inches
43. untitled, acrylic and wood, 8x10 inches
44. untitled, acrylic and wood, 8x10 inches
45. "Selfportrait with Oxygen Mask", acrylic and canvas, 32x64 inches
46. "Selfportrait with Oxygen Mask", acrylic and canvas, 32x64 inches
47. "Family Portrait", acrylic and canvas, 33x20 inches

MOSSA CENTER has been owned and operated by the Reum family for over 20 years. It is a design arts and furniture retailer dealing with the cutting edge of high-end architectural and design products. Rosemarie, Phillip, and Felicia have generously donated their time and gallery space to help organize an exhibition space for artists in St. Louis. It is located in downtown St. Louis at 1214 Washington Ave. You can contact Mossa Center at mossa_1@email.msn.com

Tyranny of a Different Sort

BY: ERIC ANDERSON



Is the nation we live in truly a democracy, as defined by Plato in the *Republic*? Or is it rather, as many would argue, somewhere between pure democracy and oligarchy? Contingent upon the actual classification of the nation, is tyranny possible in the United States in the near future, or even more disturbing, inevitable?

Firstly, the definitions of the conditions of the states that Plato set forth should be outlined.

Oligarchy is the state second removed from Plato's ideal (the ideal state being a state ruled by philosopher/king figures). The oligarchy is a rule by those with property or other forms of physically quantifiable wealth. It is characterized by an honoring of riches and trade, and a consequent disgracing of poverty (*Republic*, sec. 550-552). The valuation of wealth over all other things leads to the devaluation of virtue, and also to a sharply defined break between the few ever-increasingly rich and the laboring poor class. This destitute class forms many criminals, as virtue is given less esteem than the attainment of wealth. It is also weakened by the fact that it is more susceptible to attack by enemy states because the rich ruling class is afraid to arm the often-felonious poor class, for fear of their wealth being wrested from them.

The second form of the state in the *Republic* that is of concern is that democracy, along with the way in which it differs from the oligarchic state, in order to form the beginning of a basis of comparison to the current condition of the United States. What is often designated by our use of the word today differs somewhat from the democracy Plato envisions. Plato's democracy is a state brought about by the revolution of the poor class against the oligarchic rulers. It is characterized by an acceptance and embracing of freedoms; especially of the sensual nature, which in previous states had been more controlled and subjugated to the higher or more intellectual) desires or freedoms (*Republic*, sec. 55-558). While presented as initially appealing, this love of freedom in its extreme, he argues, will lead to the higher virtues being sullied with the extravagancies of passion. Hence the democrat is pulled this way by his whims one moment, and that way by his reason and philosophical inclinations the next (*Republic*, sec. 559, 561). This leaves this state vulnerable to the next form

of the state in the hierarchy set up in Plato's system, the tyrannical state.

In the democratic state there still exists an uneven distribution of wealth, as in necessarily the case when a state has a subset of persons devoted to trade. These people are accused of oligarchy by the less-wealthy

classes, and are consequently forced into hoarding their money, becoming in

Plato's words, "oligarchy in reality" (*Republic*, sec. 565.) The cry for equality goes up from the poorer classes, and a "Robin Hood-like" figure arises, freeing debtors and re-distributing the wealth of these new oligarchs.

This protector of the peoples' rights is surrounded by various bodyguards and protectors of his own, lest the oligarchs seek to assassinate or remove him.

This situation benefits the commoners for a time, but the peoples' friend rapidly becomes the tyrant, as his rule would necessarily have to be relinquished were there ever a victory reached.

Therefore, he stirs trouble constantly, shifting his attacks from those oligarchs he formerly sought to remove from their seats of power to those who would in turn unseat him. In this way his power is constantly strengthened, for he will never lack an

enemy to draw attention from his own crooked ways (*Republic*, sec. 565-569.)

In order to contrast these models with the United States, it must first be given some sort of rough outline. By doing so, it can be hoped that that a realistic classification can ultimately be decided upon.

In common thinking, America is generally described as a democracy. However, this is not in agreement with Plato's model of democracy. In practice, his democracy quickly degenerates into a form of anarchy. The citizens of the United States are strictly regulated in many ways, as opposed to the citizen's of Plato's democracy, who are free to do as they would in all respects. These regulations are imposed by a government of elected "representatives," who in theory do all in their power to execute the will of their assigned sections of the populace. This is, in a strange twist



of language, a republic as defined by Webster's Dictionary. Is this truly the ideal republic that Plato constructs? It would hardly seem so.

Into what category or categories does America then fall in the Platonic system? To ascertain this, let us look at the concept of freedom as it is currently practiced in the nation. Freedom of the mind, in regards to educational opportunity, allowed opinion, etc., is a liberty which is allowed to the citizens of the United States in great measure, especially in comparison with the rest of the current world. Likewise, much is allowed in the way of sensual and appetitive gratification. However, various forms of restrictions and laws limit both of these categories. There are constraints placed upon the extent to which one can gratify one's appetitive desires, for instance, pedophilia is negatively sanctioned by this society, even though particular persons may perhaps be gratified through engaging in sexual activities with children. The same is true of the pursuit of knowledge. Only a privileged few are allowed access to some forms of knowledge, such as how to launch a nuclear missile attack against a perceived enemy or what is actually contained in the Air Force base at Area 51. In this regard, the United States is similar to the aristocracy of the *Republic*. The knowledge and appetites of the general populace are censored and controlled by the ruling class, ostensibly for the good of the whole. However, when the value of the wealth supercedes the desire for virtue in this ruling class, many dangers can arise. While in the *Republic* this leads to the oligarchic state, this may not be the case in the modern world. It may in fact lead to the tyranny of an as-yet-undescribed nature which the title of the essay purports to expose.

In capitalist societies in general, and in America most importantly, as it is the nation which is in consideration, the accumulation of wealth is valued above all else. This accumulation of wealth is viewed as the ultimate route to freedom, as it allows for the most mobility, greatest amount of buying power, greater educational opportunities, etc. While on a small individual scale this may hold true, it also leads to the formation of huge companies, corporations, and monopolies comprised of the super-rich. These entities are the natural and logical end product of the accumulation of wealth, and exist mainly to perpetuate and stockpile it. Inequalities very similar to those portrayed in the latter days of the Platonic democracy then arise, with those who do not possess the wealth ever enticed by it, but forever kept from reaching it by the super-wealthy entities. This is a useful system to these entities, because in most cases, it stimulates the productivity of the working-class "drones" as they are called in the *Republic*. These entities also institute themselves into the ruling class, either directly, or indirectly by exerting force over the elected officials through the use of campaign funding, lobbying, etc. The power of wealth then supercedes the power of the electorate, due to its supreme valuation in relation to all other concerns. This ultimately contradicts the notion of wealth being the source of freedom, for it becomes in fact a tool of power for the elite, and a chain of subservience to the lacking.

How then, are the masses of the "have-nots" kept from the revolt? How does not a tyrannical "people's friend" arise to wrest the power from these elite groups of politicians and capitalists? Within the answer to these questions lies the definition of the new sort of tyranny mentioned earlier.

There does in fact exist a tyrant of sorts in America today. This nature of this tyrant is made evident through the media. The media is the "people's friend" that ostensibly keeps them informed, up-to-date, and educated. But while this conglomerate of information purveyors purports to enlighten and empower, in has in fact been the primary tool of the power elites in the subjugation of the working masses. It is the method through which the pleasantries that should be worked for are displayed, and it is often the very commodities through which status is conveyed. Only the excellent producer/consumer can afford the latest computer system, magazine subscriptions, or television set. Often even the nightly news is used more for a propaganda device and selling platform than it is for the objective presentation of information. As in the Platonic democracy, the virtuous pursuits of the mind have been undermined and marginalized, allowing instead the blooming of coarse entertainments and sensual gratifications. While philosophy and humanities may still be accessible (albeit limited to those who work hard enough to have the necessary wealth, either before or after their education), they are most often made a mockery of in popular media. The elevation of the mind in downplayed and often downright discouraged in most films, shows, and publications that the average person ("have-not") is exposed to. They are encouraged instead toward crass humor, feel-good pseudo-psychology, and superficiality in general. The pursuit of an understanding of the gestalt of existence is portrayed as boring and stuffy, and instead the public is encouraged to fill their days with the cycle of work and consumption, and finding the meaning of life therein. Irony is put aside in favor of obscenity; satire gives way to the humor of flatulence.

Hence the construction of the new sort of tyrant, neither complete oligarch nor complete dictator. This is the World-Bank, Wall Street, AOL-Time-Warner tyrant, ruling not through complete withholding of wealth nor through constant publicized bloodshed, but rather quietly, maintaining the facade of elections and opportunities, pacifying with the latest "Dumb and Dumber," offering the latest cyber-toys. If one is perceptive enough, however, it is apparent that this tyrant is one that will allow no challenge of its power, no threat to its claim to the vast amounts of wealth it possesses. In fact, as one can see with the recent conflicts in the Middle East stemming from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it will allow even great disaster to befall its own people if it sees the chance to benefit in the possible boosting of the economy and the opportunity to spread its territorial grasp unquestioned under the guise of "prevention." This tyrant is insidious and deep-rooted. Perhaps so deeply rooted as to be forever plated irremovably in our social framework, and perhaps that of the entire world, if not now, then inevitably at some not-too-distant point in the future.



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