

Artist with Park Rapids connection featured at Nemeth

Sculptor Ryan Johnson lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., but spent his childhood summers in the Park Rapids area. His display is at the Nemeth in Park Rapids through Oct. 1.



By [Lorie Skarpness](#)

August 25, 2022 11:00 AM

“My parents, Bruce and Linda Johnson, live on Long Lake,” he said. “They took a year off from teaching to build their cabin on the lake in 1980, so I’ve spent summers there since I was 2 years old. They retired in 1996. My mom worked at Aunt Belle’s candy store for a little bit and my dad helped build houses and did a lot of work for the North Country Trail. He’s still heavily involved with that.”

Before that, the Johnsons taught in international schools. Johnson was born in Karachi, Pakistan and also lived in Djakarta, Indonesia where he graduated from high school.

“They had a really good art program there,” he said. “I was influenced by Oceanic art, Southeast Asian art. There was a lot of art in the culture including wood carving. I also had a really good art teacher in high school.”

Creative summers on Long Lake During their summers off from teaching, the family stayed at their place on Long Lake.

“Fishing, swimming, building tree forts, making stuff,” he said. “We were there for four months every summer. I nailed scrap 2x4s together to make space ships.

“I always liked making things and the garage was full of tools, because my dad was into making things too. He’s a pretty good woodworker and I was always interested in building, so it was nice having that available. It was a great place to escape and a nice contrast to the life we had in the city.”

Pursuing his dream Johnson said he wanted to be an artist since he was in high school. During his first day of college at the University of Minnesota Morris, he decided to make the move to New York and pursue his dream.

“I knew they had excellent museums, and if you want to be an artist it’s one of the places to be,” he said. “There are a lot of galleries here. I loved it right away. I grew up in a big metropolis and Brooklyn is a diverse metropolis so it felt comfortable. My parents supported my dream. I was so definitive when I told them, so they could see I was serious.”

He graduated from the Pratt Institute in 2000 and earned a graduate degree from Columbia University in 2003.

“I did both painting and sculpture and then after graduate school is when I realized sculpture was my thing, ” he said.

After graduation he started showing his art in group shows. “I also did some odd jobs like carpentry and art handling for different galleries for a few years.”

The first piece he sold was “Rendezvous,” a sculpture of a figure holding flowers behind his back. “It was a simple figure made of paper and wire of someone who was maybe waiting for his date,” he said.

Johnson describes his art as “surreal.” He creates sculptures from a variety of materials including wood, sheet metal and even medical casting tape.

He earns a living through selling his art at places like the Marinaro Gallery in New York and Nina Johnson Gallery in Miami, Fla.

Art at the Nemeth “Dog chasing tail” is one of Johnson’s sculptures on display at the Nemeth. “I don’t have a dog, but my friend said it looked like the dog from the Simpsons,” he said. “A lot of my sculptures have to do with movement or the potential for movement. I like to take simple ideas. You don’t know how they will turn out until you start making them.”

The first step in creating a sculpture is to jot down the idea. “With the dog one it was just a simple sketch, and then I started making it with wire and cardboard,” he said. “Then I put epoxy clay on the wire to make a mold and brought it to the foundry to make it bronze. That was the first piece I’ve ever conceived that from the beginning I wanted it to be bronze, because it is a very beautiful and strong material for fluid movement. It’s perfect for sculpture.”



Johnson's sculpture "Another Thought" is one of the pieces on display at the Nemeth in Park Rapids through Oct. 1.
Contributed / Ryan Johnson

Other sculptures by Johnson in the exhibit at the Nemeth are “Another Thought,” of a head with a frog sitting on top of it, “Large Wounded Bird” and “Adolescent,” featuring a naked boy without a head holding a baseball bat.

His wife, Dana Schutz, is also exhibiting sculpture and paintings at the show. The couple has three children ages 3, 5 and 8. They all came for a week to the Park Rapids area over the Fourth of July to visit and install the exhibit prior to the opening, and plan to return to the Park Rapids Area this fall to de-install and pack up everything after the show closes Oct. 1.

“The Nemeth has such a fantastic space, and they’re doing an excellent job with their programming,” he said. “We’re excited to be part of the show.”



ART

Ryan Johnson's Endless Silhouettes

The artist speaks about the influences and unlikely musical inspirations behind his latest body of work.

By [HALEY MELLIN](#) | Nov 13 2020, 8:45am

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Wounded Bird, 2020, Epoxy clay and steel. Photo by Matthew Placek. Courtesy of the artist and Nina Johnson

Ryan Johnson: *Dear Shadow*, at [Nina Johnson](#) in Miami, exhibits sculptures of striking silhouettes made from black epoxy clay in an interplay of light and shadow. Solemn and inward facing, the sculptures align with our moment in culture, possibly not on purpose, but fitting all the same. Together, the five works create a mobile group and culminate in an experience beyond their individual parts. No matter from which angle the viewer approaches the works, one exists in their peripheral view, catching them from a sideward glance, just passing by. As the viewer moves around the work, the light changes and one can see information that may or may not be there. A couple of weeks ago, the gallery arranged a conversation between [Ryan Johnson](#) and the writer [Jarrett Earnest](#). The artist mentioned things that I jotted down: “A sculpture is born by being paid attention to.” From his studio in Brooklyn, New York, Johnson mused, “sculpture is

to the viewer in some moments ... Brancusi learned how to catch and reflect light, and to shift between matte and reflective forms ... you can use light to reinforce your form.”

Fundamental sculptural interests of space and light are an active part of Johnson’s work. The polished sheen of the surfaces accentuates their curves and illustrates one of the key functions of sculpture: to catch and reflect light. As he pares down the elements, Johnson eliminates distraction and focuses on aspects that excite him. He begins his structures in various ways—at times through a cardboard cut-out held before a light source, casting a shadow, turning the silhouette to arrive at a desired shape, then using clay to build the shadow’s shape into three-dimensions. Shadows create abstract indices of the object, while remaining loyal to feeling and origin. Constantin Brancusi resonates as an apt reference. It is clear that Johnson loves and understands sculpture. Alchemic moments in this show reference the predecessors that he has learned from—Oceanic and Egyptian, Greek to modern—communing with thousands of years of history that filter into the work. In a studio visit in 2018, I noticed a bunch of historic sculptural images pasted to the wall for influence. They brought to mind Asger Jorn’s saying: painting is painting’s favorite food—the same being true of sculpture. Ryan discussed his exhibition with GARAGE.



"RYAN JOHNSON: DEAR SHADOW" AT NINA JOHNSON, INSTALLATION VIEW. PHOTO BY CHI LAM

In your show at Nina Johnson, you are exhibiting five sculptures. Did you prepare them this year?

Yes, they are all from this year. Two sculptures were started pre-Covid, but they pretty much all came into being since the pandemic reached New York in March.

Do you keep these cardboard maquettes?

The shadows are a way to begin a form, but not all of the sculptures start that way. Most sculptors I know start with some kind of profile in mind. I see sculpture as an infinite set of profiles. The cardboard shadow technique is just a way to exaggerate that starting silhouette and hopefully get to something unexpected. I do keep the maquettes, but I don't think about them as art. They are just a means to an end.



"LEFT LEG (AFTER A.G.)," 2020, EPOXY CLAY AND STEEL. PHOTO BY MATTHEW PLACEK. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND NINA JOHNSON

What artists and musicians were inspiring you while making this series? Most of my art books have been in storage since March, and I have been working in a temporary studio in Red Hook, so in a way it felt like this show was made in a bit of a vacuum. The one book I felt compelled to dig out and bring to the studio recently was a monograph on [Maria Martins](#), the incredible Brazilian sculptor. Also, I find myself scanning through [Noguchi's online Catalogue Raisonné](#) a lot which I find endlessly inspiring. In terms of music, my friend Josh, who helped me mix the epoxy clay for this work, got me into [Arthur Russell](#). We listened to him in

The epoxy clay works well with light and shadow.

The black epoxy clay that I use is extremely dense and heavy, and basically turns into stone when it sets. I feel like this group of sculptures was primarily led by the material. There is a weight or heaviness to the works, but once polished, the form also feels light and weightless somehow. The surfaces have a playful relationship with light which I love.

With the smooth turning surfaces of your forms, you seem both a sculptor of light and form.

A few years ago, I got really into Brancusi, and it dawned on me that one of the primary functions of sculpture is to catch and reflect light. After making matte sculptures for over a decade, I had a strong desire for a polished satin surface that would emphasize the forms through reflected light.



"ANOTHER THOUGHT," 2020, EPOXY CLAY AND STEEL EDITION OF 3 WITH 1 AP. PHOTO BY MATTHEW PLACEK. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND NINA JOHNSON

make. I have made a few sculptures of legs over the years, but this one is the most elemental, and it is a direct response to seeing Alberto Giacometti's *The Leg* a few years ago at the Guggenheim. It is such a lighting bolt of a piece, and it really stuck with me.

Is a frog on top of the human head in *Another Thought*, 2020?

It is a frog on the head. I always knew I wanted to use the head as a pedestal for something to sit or stand on, but it took a while to think of the frog. I like how compact of a form it is, combined with the feeling that it could leap off the head at any second. There are several ancient sculptures of frogs from Egypt and Mesopotamia that came to mind when I thought of the frog and I also liked the symbolism. Apparently, frogs have long been seen as signifiers of fertility and change, like the changing seasons with the coming floods.

What was your process to make *Tangled Figure*, 2020?

This piece went through the most transformation out of any in this show. It began very skeletal, almost like a dried-up insect or a figure that could have been in the New Images of Man show at MOMA back in the day, and then the sculpture slowly gained more and more volume over time. She has three legs and mountains of hair and ended up turning into an entire landscape which I was not anticipating.



Did you look at sculpture as a kid, and what was your experience of art during school?

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan but moved to Jakarta, Indonesia when I was 6, and my parents were international schoolteachers. Art in Indonesia is all around you, from the furniture and architectural wood carvings to Batik garments and the Wayang Kulit shadow puppets. Oceanic art in general is some of my favorite art. Later on, a lot of my time at art school was spent at the Pratt library in New York. I love art books. Looking and learning about new artists is still one of my favorite things to do.

It's an Art Gallery. No, a Living Room. O.K., Both.



Emily Weiner in her home art gallery in Brooklyn Heights. Hilary Swift for The New York Times

By **Robin Pogrebin**

July 3, 2016

There was wine in plastic cups and people milling around, but the similarity to any other art gallery opening ended there.

This was the painter Austin Eddy's one-bedroom walk-up apartment in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, on a Sunday afternoon. The entry to the multiple occupancy townhouse was redolent with cat litter. The centerpiece of the show was in his bedroom closet.

The work was Ryan Johnson's "[Life Study](#)," a colorful sculpture made of aluminum, medical casting tape and other materials. It was not for sale. The opening was merely an opportunity to help

Mr. Johnson, an artist between gallery shows, get his latest work in front of an audience, and for Mr. Eddy to do some networking.

Since the 2008 economic downturn, temporary do-it-yourself art galleries have proliferated in apartments, storefronts and other spaces all over the country. Call it a response to an art world in which dealer representation is increasingly hard to come by; exhibitions are costly; and formerly affordable areas like Bushwick have priced out artists, forcing them to seek out scrappier locations in which to show their work.

But these self-starting galleries also signify a growing effort by artists — both emerging and established — to find community in an increasingly stratified art world and to wrest control of their careers from the curators and dealers who determine which works are seen. They are taking matters into their own hands by promoting and connecting with one another.

“Artists are the tastemakers now,” said Emily Weiner, 34, who, with her fellow painter Sharona Eliassaf, 35, periodically mounts an exhibition series called [the Willows](#) in her Brooklyn Heights apartment (on Willow Street). “We don’t wait for galleries to pick us up.”

These home galleries are generally not moneymaking ventures. While a few might take a cut of the sales, most aim to just show the work and create ferment among artists and potential buyers. They bypass the commercial gallery system and its chic white-box formality.

“It’s tough to be an artist in New York City,” said Carole Server, a collector who attended Mr. Eddy’s show. “Studio space is incredibly expensive and difficult to find, and you face a lot of rejection. How many artists get some recognition?”



Austin Eddy with the Ryan Johnson work "Life Study." Dave Sanders for The New York Times

Given a high-powered, high-priced art market, in which it can be impossible to break in, "the opportunities come as much from your colleagues," Ms. Weiner said. In 2013, she featured the artist Sam Adams in a Willows show. Mr. Adams suggested to the artist Jay Davis that he look at Ms. Weiner's paintings. Then, last February, Mr. Davis included Ms. Weiner's work in a group show that he curated in the space between the [Ace Hotel](#)'s lobby and the John Dory Oyster Bar in the Flatiron district.

"A decade ago, collectors would buy works straight out of your graduate school studio and there was a feeling of cutthroat competitiveness," Ms. Weiner said. "It doesn't help to be competitive right now."

Most of these alternative galleries are open by appointment only and publicize their events through Instagram, Facebook and other social media. As a result, visiting these spaces can take effort. In an email to prospective attendees, Mr. Eddy explained that openings

at his place, called [Eddysroom](#), “are semi private events, so please refrain from passing out the address and phone number, but feel free to bring a plus one” — and to “call or text if you are having trouble finding the spot.”

Indeed, those involved in this gallery scene say the trouble it takes to see shows at odd times in out-of-the-way spaces are a testament to the hunger for art experiences that feel human and intimate. “People travel to the neighborhood, find parking, come to my front gate, call the number because there’s no buzzer,” said Paul Soto, a writer who runs [Park View gallery](#) out of his home in the MacArthur Park section of Los Angeles. “For me to come down and have this interaction with them — it’s really personal.”

Several of the artists featured in these unorthodox shows are already established professionals, like Mr. Johnson, for example, who had a solo show at Sikkema Jenkins & Co in New York in 2010 and has been featured in group exhibitions at Marlborough Chelsea and the Sculpture Center.

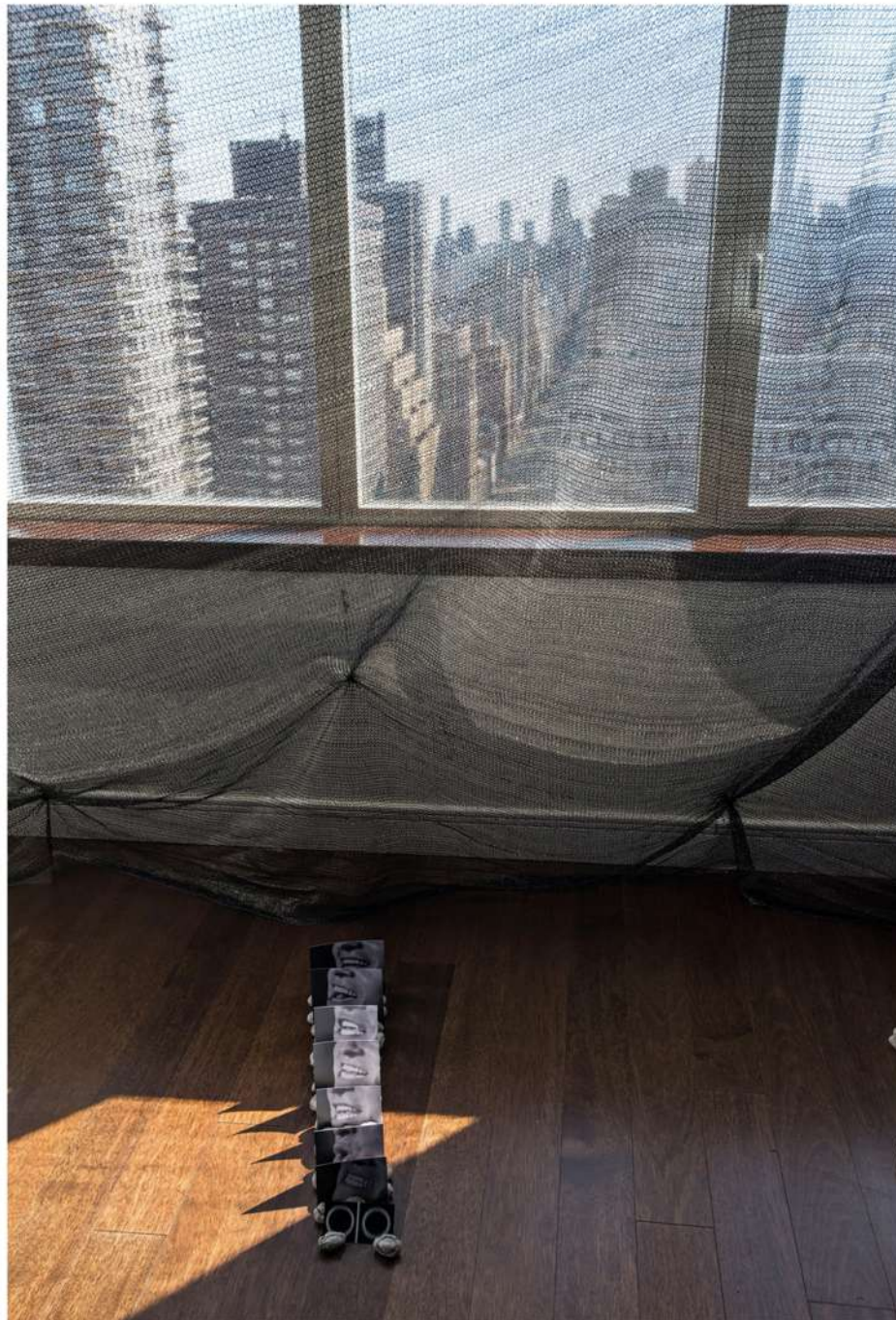
“The big thing is just having a show, no matter where it is,” Mr. Johnson said. “There isn’t always an opportunity to show someplace, so you just make your own opportunity.”

Once a novelty, artist-run spaces now abound. The artist David Prince runs Adjunct Positions [out of his garage](#) in the Highland Park section of Los Angeles. Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam, married artists, operate the [Suburban](#) gallery in two outbuildings in the yard of their home in the Oak Park neighborhood in Chicago.

Many, not surprisingly, can be found in Brooklyn, including Mountain, which the artist Michael Fleming started this year in his Bushwick apartment, and [Violet’s Cafe](#), which three artists started in 2013 in a former factory in Carroll Gardens.

The New York Times

Sarah Meyohas, an artist who recently received an M.F.A. from Yale, runs a gallery in the apartment she grew up in on the Upper East Side. “When we were in school, we had critiques,” she said. “I thought, ‘How can we have something that’s sort of like the next step?’ This is the way I could engage in a really direct way with other people’s work. It’s made me a better artist.”



Sarah Meyohas's Upper East Side apartment has featured “Future Remnants of a Missing Word.” Philip Greenberg for The New York Times

Some of these galleries aim to redress what many perceive as a market that favors artists who are white and male.

“In some ways, I was interested in doing it because I was angry about what I was seeing around me,” said Violet Dennison, 27, one of the artists who started Violet’s Cafe, which is currently on hiatus. “All the artists that were showing were men. I felt like I had nowhere to be; there was nothing that represented me.”

To be sure, sometimes showing art in your home can be inconvenient.

“The downside of it was having a lot of people in my apartment,” said Katie Geha, 36, a writer and art historian, who until recently ran a gallery in her Austin, Tex., apartment. “But the upside was that I really did become part of an art community.”

Sometimes visitors showed up at odd hours.

“People would knock on my door,” Ms. Geha said. “And then I’d answer in my pajamas.”

Ms. Geha went so far as to accommodate an artist in residence: Jeff DeGolier, who constructed a large installation in her living room out of trash he found around Austin during his week sleeping on Ms. Geha’s lime green sofa.

“Living with that piece was extremely difficult,” she said.

Like Ms. Geha — now director of [the Dodd Galleries](#) at the University of Georgia in Athens — these entrepreneurial gallerists occasionally go on to bigger and better things. Alex Gartenfeld, who was an artist when he started the West Street gallery in his West Village apartment with Matt Moravec, is now the deputy director and chief curator of the Institute for Contemporary Art in

Miami, and Mr. Moravec runs the Off Vendome gallery in Chelsea.

Some galleries that started below the radar have gradually earned greater attention from curators and critics, like Pierogi, Reena Spaulings and Regina Rex, all on the Lower East Side.

Still, artists say most galleries that operate on the margins these days are not meant to be steppingstones to the mainstream. They have become an important way for a greater number of artists to

Still, artists say most galleries that operate on the margins these days are not meant to be steppingstones to the mainstream. They have become an important way for a greater number of artists to have influence and to make their own art world.

“We’re doing it because we want to hang out with other artists,” said Ms. Weiner of the Willows. “Artists are the ones who are creating the buzz.”

A Gallery Goes Out in a Burst of Energy



The Guild & Greyshkul Gallery on Wooster Street in SoHo, which will close this month after five years.

Michael Appleton for The New York Times

By **Roberta Smith**

Feb. 6, 2009

New York's increasing gallery closings may be cause for distress, especially for artists who suddenly find themselves without dealers. But you might consider these closings not as a loss of energy but as energy transformed, moving from one dimension to another.

Cohan & Leslie, a Chelsea gallery that closed last month, implied as much in its farewell e-mail message: a post-election, pre-inauguration photograph of Barack Obama, casually dressed in a gray T-shirt and giving a smile and a wave from the back seat of a sleek automobile. Even more to the point is the current four-day show that is the final curtain for the SoHo gallery Guild & Greyshkul, which has filled the space to the brim with a whopping 120 artists. This constitutes going out with a very big bang.

The show's title, "On From Here," is a rallying cry, an optimistic and open-ended rearrangement of the title of the gallery's opening show five years ago ("From Here On"). The art on view is a crowded array of mediums, styles and worldviews. Almost all of the possibilities seem to be covered, from full-on paintings like Benjamin Degen's "Yellow Room" to austere film projections like Amy Granat's haunting "Spraypaint Film."

At the opening on Thursday, the tally of artworks was exceeded only by the number of people attending. Sculptures at the center of the room were occasionally at risk but escaped damage. Circulation at the doorway approached subway rush-hour conditions. On the sidewalk outside the overflow crowd smoked, talked and watched the artist Dennis Palazzolo, dressed as an octopus, perform in the window.

Anya Kielar is one of three artists who founded the gallery, along with Johannes VanDerBeek and his sister, Sara VanDerBeek. Last month she said their main goal had been to break even. "We've always put what we earned from sales toward the artists, the exhibitions, without getting into debt," she said.

But a few months ago the three realized that the art market slowdown had brought them to the brink. They decided to quit while still a bit ahead. She added that because they are, first and foremost, artists, the gallery's life had always been finite. "We knew it would end," she said. "We just didn't know when."

The New York Times

At Thursday's opening Mr. VanDerBeek said they had put together the show in about three weeks, which is hard to believe, considering that it is unusually free of duds. There are impressive works by artists whose names are nearly or completely unfamiliar, several of whom worked at Guild & Greyshkul as assistants or interns.

These include John Bianchi, who works in glazed plaster; Rebecca Shiffman, who contributes a rather nice portrait of Mr. VanDerBeek; the promising abstract painter Jonathan Roth; and the sculptor David Kennedy-Cutler, who has fashioned something quite mysterious out of plexiglass, shattered CDs and a torn-up photograph of an oil slick.

Better-known young artists like Ryan Johnson, Nicole Cherubini, Lansing-Dreiden and especially Chie Fueki signal interesting new directions with their inclusions. In one especially lively corner are paintings by Alison Fox, Dana Schutz, Patricia Treib and the veteran artist Marilyn Minter, whom Mr. VanDerBeek said they invited simply because "she signed the book at just about every show."

The Art Fair as Outlet Mall



By Ken Johnson

Dec. 5, 2008

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. The most trenchant comment on the dazzling and enervating spectacle that is Art Basel Miami Beach is written in bold black and white letters on the floor of the Mary Boone Gallery booth. A wall-to-wall text piece by Barbara Kruger, it spells out two quotations. One, from Goethe, observes, “We are the slaves of objects around us.” The other, from a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, reads, “He entered shop after shop, priced nothing, spoke no word, and looked at all objects with a wild and distracted stare.”

These lines truly sum up the experience of a frenetic fair that embraces more than 200 galleries and many ancillary exhibitions and events in other locations in the Miami area. To take in so much art in so short a time is by turns thrilling, numbing and totally mystifying. And that’s not to mention the schmooze storm of parties, business meetings, open houses and other private events orchestrated to charm the collector class.

The sense of art as merchandise is overpowering. A majority of what you see is portable and palatable. Most galleries offer variety-store-like mixes of works by different artists with the ambience of a sample sale.

Still, events like this do occasion collective soul-searching, especially now, as the art world grapples with recession. What is art for, after all, assuming that it is not just something for sale?

(By the way, the talk was not all gloom and doom. Dealers I spoke with said that collectors were buying, and that things were not turning out as disastrously as they had feared.)



Art Basel Miami Beach offers Goethe's words in Barbara Kruger's "Untitled."
Barbara P. Fernandez for The New York Times

A response to Ms. Kruger might point out that art objects are compelling because they embody nonobjective and nonmaterial meanings and values. A sculpture by John McCracken in David Zwirner's space is apposite. A bronze monolith standing eight and a half feet tall and polished to a golden mirror-bright finish, it is an object of Minimalist reticence. Yet it incarnates certain aesthetic and spiritual values—ideals of purity and unity, for example—the way that gold bars in Fort Knox embody abstract monetary values.

Still, art's social function is always ripe for renewed debate. The best work in Art Positions, a section of the fair in which galleries occupy shipping containers in an empty lot near the beach, is an installation at T293 by the French team that goes by the name Claire Fontaine. It consists of a crude sculpture of a blue horse, an obscure reference to a popular symbol of political liberation from the 1970s. The words "Is freedom therapeutic?" are spray-painted graffiti-style on the walls, while a poster poses the question, "Why is art the only space of expression for a luxurious and exclusive

principle of reality that makes abnormality into a source of wealth and a desirable condition?”

Why, in other words, must the kind of radical creative freedom and idiosyncrasy we celebrate in modern art remain a commodity that only people of means can really afford?

So much depends on belief. Back at the main fair, in Hetzler’s booth, there’s a large glossy photograph by Thomas Struth in which two people are seen from behind, sitting in rapt contemplation of a triptych in the Rothko Chapel in Houston. To a Postmodernist skeptic, such quasi-religious reverence seems an amusing historic artifact.

Maybe that is why so many contemporary artworks toy with illusions. Playing in the gap between the believable and the unbelievable, they test our faith in the transcendently transformative power of art. A sculpture by Frank Benson at Taxter & Spengemann that looks to be a working fountain of liquid chocolate turns out to be an object of solid, glossily painted stainless steel. The tension between appearance and reality is curiously delightful.



“Murray Variation 3,” a head-and-shoulder portrait by Evan Penny of a grizzled middle-aged man, is realistic in every detail.

Barbara P. Fernandez for The New York Times

At Sperone Westwater an oversize head-and-shoulder portrait of a grizzled middle-aged man in sculptural relief by Evan Penny is so realistic in every detail that you can't help feeling a part of your psyche responding as if it were in the presence of a supernaturally living being.

Recent paintings by Philip Taaffe at Jablonka, in which lattice patterns are layered over glowing colors, are like stained-glass windows for a psychedelic church. The spiritual in art may be contemplated with sophisticated criticality, but it doesn't go away, even if it comes bearing a vulgar price tag.

The fair by NADA, or New Art Dealers Alliance, abounds in works of imaginative metamorphosis. See, for example, the spooky confluences of abstraction and photographic distortion in sculptures by Ryan Johnson at Guild & Greyshkul. And at the Pulse fair, also brimming with lively work by mostly younger artists, there is a tondo studded with blinking colored lights by Leo Villareal at Conner Contemporary Art that will put you into a hallucinogenic trance.

Videos are not so plentiful at the fairs, but there is a terrific one in a building that the New York dealers Ronald Feldman and Joe Arnheim have filled with artworks by lots of artists. Two videos in which Kenneth Shorr tells stories that start out ordinary and become increasingly bizarre are riveting and frighteningly hilarious.

The most transporting single artwork on view in Miami, however, is not at any of the commercial fairs. It is an astounding installation in "The Station," an exhibition organized by Shamim Momin, a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and by the New York artist Nate Lowman. This lively, scruffy show occupies parts

of three floors in a building still under construction in the Miami Design District and presents works by a familiarly trendy cast of characters, including Sterling Ruby, Hanna Liden, Ryan McGinley, Tom Burr and many others.

The piece that makes everything else there pale by comparison is “Hello Meth Lab With a View,” by Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe. Mr. Freeman and Mr. Lowe have created a walk-in simulation of the grungy interior of a house whose occupants have been producing crystal meth. You enter what appears to be a photography gallery and then continue into dark rooms where you behold an extraordinarily messy kitchen full of cobbled-together laboratory equipment.

Like Alice in a scary Wonderland, you continue through a dining room where the table is heaped with trash and packages of Sudafed and then upstairs to a claustrophobic warren of rooms where shelves are stocked with old jars of murky liquid, and where a couple of stuffed dogs are sleeping. Antique diagrams pinned to the walls suggest an equation between the heretical arts of the medieval alchemists and those of modern outlaw drug makers. Like the installations of Christoph Büchel, the work creates an obviously artificial but magically evocative virtual reality.

Yet as a kind of high-brow funhouse, it also does little to allay Claire Fontaine’s argument that modern art remains a playground for people of privilege.

Our attention is called more urgently to social and political reality by “30 Americans,” an exhibition at the Rubell Family Collection. What the title of this sprawling show of more than 200 works pointedly doesn’t say is that all the artists in it are of African descent. By this it means to anticipate a time when the racial

identity of the United States president-elect will no longer be deemed remarkable.

The show includes several generations of artists who have come of age since the 1960s, including David Hammons, Robert Colescott, Barkley L. Hendricks, Kara Walker, Rashid Johnson and Kalup Linzy. No single style prevails: conceptualist photography, expressionist painting, comic video, abstract sculptures, flamboyant costumes and other modes engender a spirit of pluralistic freedom and open-ended possibility.

If any one piece in the show could be taken as emblematic, it would be a neon sign spelling "America" in large letters by Glenn Ligon. The glowing white tubing has been painted black on the front but not the back, so that the letters appear backlit by white light, a neat metaphorical reversal of our nation's historical racial landscape and an eloquent testimony to the poetic power of the well-formed object.

Artist Ryan Johnson Is Losing the War on Crime

Ryan Johnson's *Watchman* (2008). Courtesy of the artist and Guild & Greyshkul, New York

Ryan Johnson's broken watchmen, cobbled together from cloth and metal and brand-sparkling-new sporting gear, seem to offer a rather sinister interpretation of Salvador Dalí's melting, slithering clocks: If time is fluid, it can sometimes run slow, which is hazardous when it comes to heroism. Can you imagine waiting for campus security to arrive and hours later one of these geezers hobbles up? Johnson's sculptural narrative of failed security plays out in three airy rooms at Guild & Greyshkul, New York, through June 14. —*Emma Pearse*

TAGS: RYAN JOHNSON ART ART CANDY

KEN JOHNSON

'Four-Ply'

Andrea Rosen

525 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 20

"Four-Ply" features works made not on but of paper. The title puns on foreplay, but the show doesn't build to a climactic conclusion. Rather, it offers an engagingly random assortment of ways to be creative with paper, including an architectural model of a modernist dream house by Matthew Ronay; cartoon Cubist-style heads of a man and a woman with windblown hair by Ryan Johnson; a delicate, translucent blob of cast pink paper by Lynda Benglis; and, by Aric Obrosey, a lacy, white work glove made of perforated, knit-patterned paper.

It's not all whimsy. Witness Felix Gonzalez-Torres's stack of pages, each bearing a copy of an article in The New York Times with the headline "Germ Warfare Research Safe, Pentagon Says After a Study." Another endless stack of pages, pink ones by Bruce Nauman based on a 1974 concept, offers grim, typewritten instructions for an exercise that consists of pressing your body against a wall. And a headline on the topmost page of a simulated, string-tied bundle of newspapers from 1992 by Robert Gober reads, "Plan to tighten embargo on Iraq suggested by U.S."

ART IN REVIEW; 'Hung, Drawn and Quartered'



By **Roberta Smith**

July 23, 2004

Team Gallery

527 West 25th Street, Chelsea

Through next Friday

The conventional group drawing show is sidestepped here in favor of paper itself, as material, subject or both. In "Ramblin' Man," a life-size colored-paper sculpture by Ryan Johnson, a young man operates under the influence of his Walkman, pursued by three blurry afterimages of himself. (All eyes on the checked shirt.) The action is real in "What is Happy, Baby?," a video by Nurit Bar-Shai that meditates at various speeds on the joys of paper in bulk.

Showing a woman's hands busily working among stacks of envelopes, paper and stick-on labels (gallery mailings may come to mind), it creates a transitory collage that is interrupted by bouts of solitary dancing.

Paul Lee works small, splicing and bending tiny photographs of movie stars into distorted little collages and reliefs. Jeff Grant works tight and delicate, chiseling images of icebergs, three-masted schooners and houses shadowed by the dark silhouettes of fir trees into stinging contrasts: black and white, innocent and sinister, natural and man-made. Working big and loose on vellum, Saul Chernick paints giant images of luxurious but uninhabited moustaches and beards that have only size on their side. Elise Ferguson makes her own paper -- sturdy and brightly striped -- then constructs cheery but windowless, semi-abstract architectural models.

Fixated on layers, Matt Keegan slices through nine photographs to turn a construction site into a cave, and paints and incises drywall to resemble ornately Rymanesque wallpaper, while signaling vulnerability with a bowling-pin sculpture of a penguin. Similarly touching creatures populate Dasha Shishkin's Dargeresque etchings, works that celebrate the pleasures of traditional drawing that most of the other artists here seem determined to avoid.

ROBERTA SMITH

ART IN REVIEW; 'Pantone'



By Roberta Smith

Jan. 9, 2004

Massimo Audiello

526 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Jan. 24

The group shows organized by the critic David Hunt have focused increasingly on intense local color, which makes sense given its rising ubiquity in contemporary art. The show takes its name from an international producer of color swatches, many of them in colors that are new and don't exist in nature. The work here, by a dozen young New York artists, ranges through different styles and materials while sticking fairly firmly to conventional painting and sculpture.

An admiration for the Pop colors, Op patterns, shaped canvases and general glitz of the 1960's is frequently present, especially in the work of Ernest Jolicoeur, Jin Meyerson, Mackalene Thomas and, especially, Rory MacArthur, whose efforts, in acrylic and enamel on hand-carved Styrofoam reliefs, have something in common with the work of Frank Stella. Nicole Cherubini's ceramic vases outfitted with chains, rings and fur collars show promise, although fewer accessories would be better. Ryan Johnson's "Rendezvous" is a little too deep into Tom Friedman's exquisitely crafted territory, but this larger-than-life construction-paper sculpture, which depicts a reluctant adolescent suitor about to surprise someone with flowers pulled from a nearby garden, is impeccably done.

The three-dimensionalized movie poster of Will Smith by Ivan Witenstein, and Jesse Bercowetz and Matt Bua's enormous "Chandelier-Shanty Lair," make up for what they lack in color with scale and aggressive forms. They might steal the show if all the other artworks weren't putting up such a fight. ROBERTA SMITH

Smith, Roberta. "ART IN REVIEW; 'Pantone'". *New York Times*, January 2004