

THE SEMI-FINALIST

4/11/2024

THE SEMI-FINALIST IS: PAT BOAS



Untitled

2023, acrylic and flashe on canvas over panel, 24" x 22"

I have been a fan of Pat Boas' work for over a decade, and its evolution has been a source of both fascination and inspiration. As a longtime viewer, it's been interesting to note how the visual grammar in her recent paintings is related to her earlier conceptual and text based works. In *Script 1* (2023), for example, sweeping, fluid gestures paired with skittering, semi-transparent dry-brush strokes and geometric sharpness hint at numerals and the alphabet. And it's not out of the ordinary to find cartoonish profiles or the silhouette of a bottle tucked into some of her newer compositions, as in *SL3* (also from 2023).

It's in this new work, too, that another side of Boas's temperament starts to assert itself: overt signs and cryptic symbols regularly give way to unnameable forms and the allusion to language dissolves into planes of

color, shape and texture. Even here, however, one can see that she is hanging onto her past aesthetic temperament as much as she is letting go of it. A piece like *Saturday Painting #10* maintains the swooping cadence of a calligrapher even as the brushstrokes resist giving us a recognizable reference point. I get the sense that Boas is not so much saying goodbye to what has come before in her decades long career, but is instead greeting new interests with an open mind to what's possible.

In several of these charming and fresh "Saturday Paintings," the directness of Boas's hard-edged geometry is supplanted by lush atmospheres that skillfully retain their chromatic intensity. In these small works (often only 10" x 8") we see the artist's penchant for rigorous definition giving way to the joys of unapologetic ambiguity. It's as if a singer on stage has graciously and confidently stepped aside so the band can have a go at improvising without vocals; narration takes a well deserved break while the feeling carried through pure sound is given an opportunity to move the story forward. Under Boas's direction, this is never a complete rejection of the recognizable signs that illustrate, but rather an understanding that it's often the suggestive pull of what is unsaid that slips in under our skin and stays with us.

This month I'm happy to share a recent interview with Portland, Oregon based artist Pat Boas.

-David Schell



Saturday Painting #11 (float)
2023, flashe on panel, 10" x 8"

The Semi-Finalist: How did you get started as an artist?

Pat Boas: I had one of those hero art teachers in high school who opened a lot of things up for me. As a child of the '60s, though, there was no straight path. I graduated from high school a year early and was making my way through my first year at Kent State University, but that came to an abrupt end when, during a protest against the US invasion of Cambodia, the Ohio National Guard shot and killed 4 students and wounded 9 others. Though I didn't see the shooting, I was on campus that day and it shook my world. Naturally, the school shut down and I went to visit a friend in New York City for a two-week trip that stretched to a year. Coming from a small town in northeastern Ohio, it was pretty intoxicating. I took classes at the Art Students' League, worked at various jobs, and explored.

When I went back to Ohio, I made a serious attempt at finishing up my BFA. I'd say that Don Harvey, an artist who taught modern and contemporary art history at Akron University, filled the mentor role. Don organized frequent student trips to New York to look at shows and meet some of the working artists he knew. A handful of us rented a huge space for studios in a former dance school over a dive bar in downtown Akron (my rent for the year was \$130). There was a lot of good energy, good music, and a sense of community. Despite that, or maybe because of it, earning an art degree became to seem less educationally important than being out in the world. I had an invitation to join friends who were living in rural New Mexico, so I left for the west and lived for about a year in a small, reclaimed adobe house east of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. For the next couple of decades, I traveled and lived for spells in Berkeley, Paris, more NYC, Boulder, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Amsterdam. Many of the people I met and things I got involved in made an impact. In Paris, I stayed for some months at the storied Shakespeare & Company bookstore when George Whitman (who claimed to be a descendant of Walt) was still there. In Boulder I sat in on classes at Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics and did chapbook covers and broadsides for a small press. I worked at the Social Public Art Resource Center in LA, first as a studio assistant to an older Communist artist from Odesa, and later led one of the teams that worked on Judith F. Baca's "Great Wall of LA," a quarter-mile mural depicting the ethnic history of Southern California. I co-hosted "Poetry Readings in the Old Venice Jail" and worked with Political Art Documentation/Distribution (LA PAD/D). Then motherhood and family life took over.



Above: *Script 1*

2023, acrylic and flashe on canvas over panel, 30" x 24"

Below: SL2

2023, flashe on canvas over panel, 24" x 22"



S-F: I found so many of the things that we talked about in your studio to be relevant to your work, and I wanted to dig a little deeper into them here. Let's start off with your "Saturday Paintings" and how they fit into your overall approach to painting.

PB: These are small panels I keep hanging around alongside larger work. I call them "Saturday Paintings" because Saturday mornings in my studios are usually times when I feel very focused. There's no one else in the building, no trucks idling in the parking lot and somehow I seem to know what to do to with one or another of these little paintings that I keep brewing off to the side. Some finish quickly while others may go through multiple stages and redirections. I guess they serve as rehearsals, but their main importance is the way they help me think about what it means to resolve something. That keeps changing. It's something that I'm always looking to change.

I exhibited a few in a solo show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery this past fall and many more in a two-person exhibition with [Michelle Ross](#) last November at Ditch Projects in Springfield, Oregon. To show them at Ditch, which is a very large, beautiful white space, I had to bring them from the periphery to the center. And this meant I had to quickly finish (or declare finished) some that had been only lightly touched. I have some uncertainty about that but the shift has made a difference in the way I've been working since.



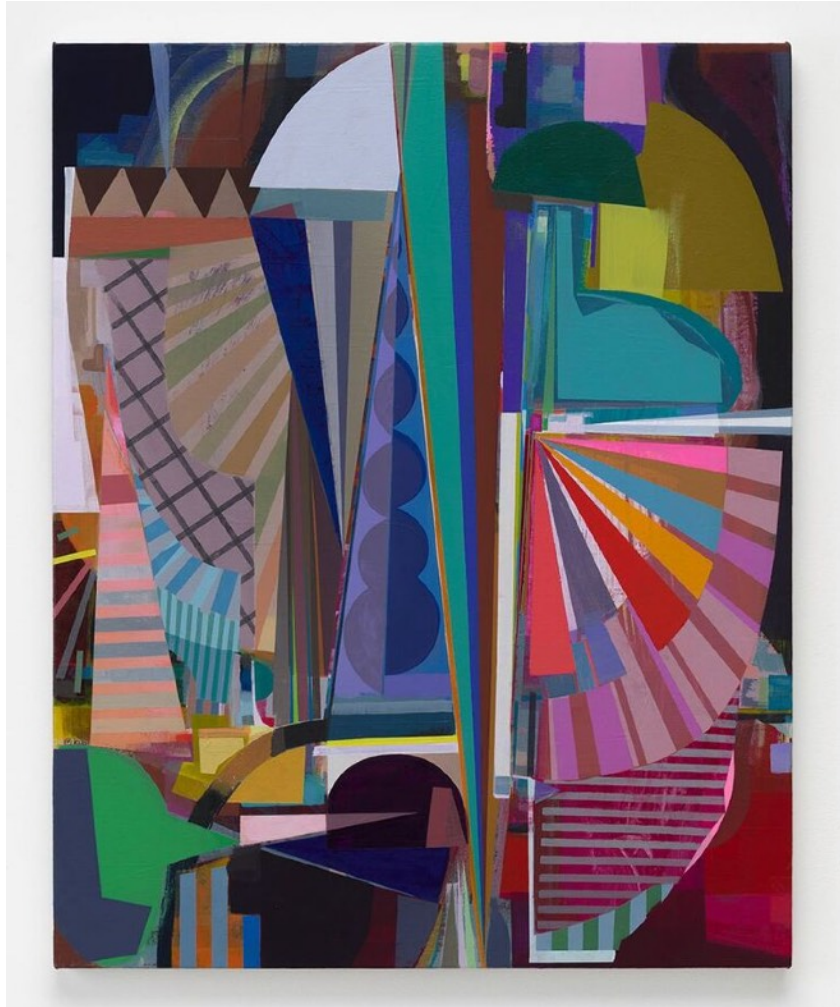
**Above: *Saturday Painting #4 (flame)*
2023, flashe and milk paint on panel, 13" x 9"**

Below: Saturday paintings (and other things) on the studio wall.



S-F: How do you cope with “the treachery of titles?”

PB: I used to think it was ungenerous for an artist to not take the opportunity to position a work with words. Earlier, my titles tended to be descriptive or referenced a source, sometimes with an element of word play. Now I try to think about what each piece needs and don't see a reason to be consistent. I like the idea of placing language alongside an image, like an echo, or finding something that anchors it. I collect words or phrases and look for a good match, but sometimes it takes a while to know what a painting has become. A title that earlier made sense may not stick once the painting is done. In some cases, any language can seem too heavy or limiting. I sometimes envy painters who simply number works sequentially because that tends to make me focus on what is in front of me, on what I'm really seeing.



Hat Trick

2022, acrylic and flashe on canvas over panel, 30" x 24"

S-F: When I was in your studio, you described the experience of a painting "looking back." Can you talk about that?

PB: This thought took hold during a discussion in my painters' group about one of Amy Bay's gorgeous paintings. I think of it as a particular place in a work where formal and material forces draw together and create a node, a sense of presence, some kind of "aliveness". Maybe it's related to Roland Barthes' idea of the punctum in photography: literally a sharp point or tip, something that pierces. We all know it's just inert material on a surface, but nonetheless I look for some point of tension, something that draws to it my own subjective looking and, crazy as it sounds, seems to return the gaze.



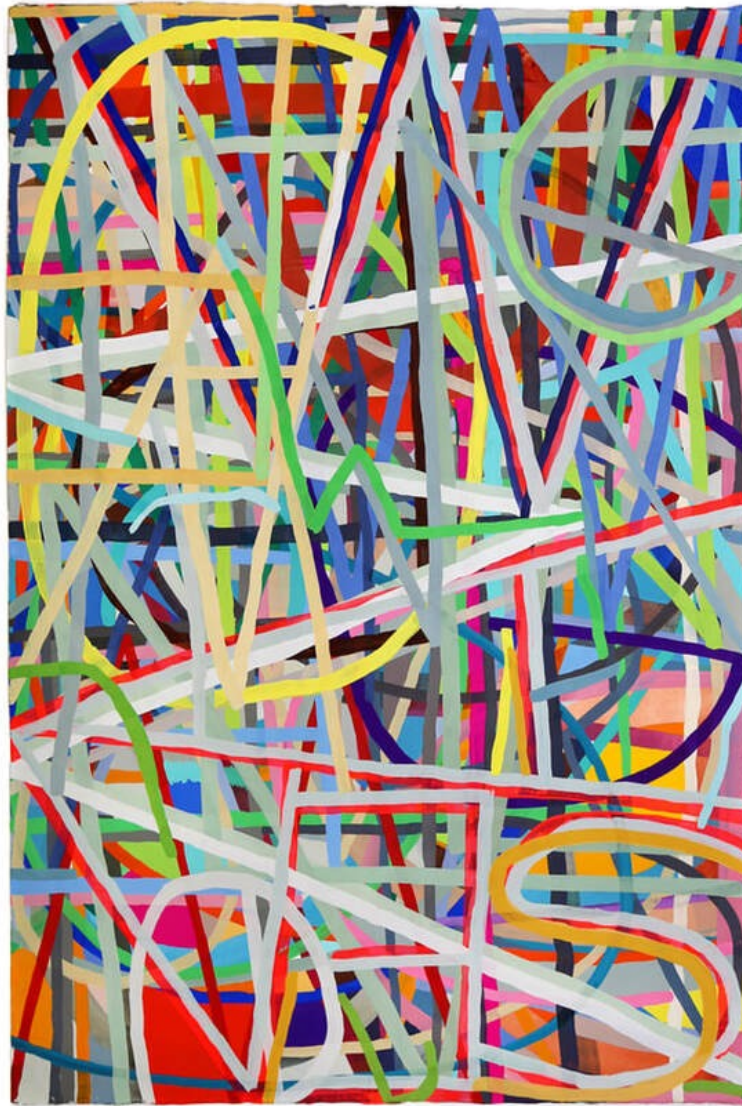
Good Listener

2021, acrylic and flashe on linen over panel, 19 1/2" x 15 1/2"
 (installed on *Bliksem*, artist-designed wallpaper at Oregon Contemporary,
 February - March, 2022)

S-F: Pat, your work over the last couple of decades has slowly inched away from overtly referencing its own conceptual foundations. Your current work - more than any other part of your career that I'm familiar with - appears to be painting that is about painting. Do you agree with that assessment? If so, can you talk about what is driving this transformation and where you see it going?

PB: On the whole I think this is true but it does give me pause to think I am making paintings about painting, for that's exactly the kind of thinking that drove me away from painting in the first place! Like many who had a 70s (or 80s) art education, my introduction to painting was that it was an indulgent and retrograde enterprise where ideas were not welcome. Harsh, right? (Amy Sillman has written about this in some of her essays.)

For many years, I was all about concept, scuttling back and forth between drawing projects and printmaking – the latter for its distancing quality and relationship to commercial media. It was important to me to start with material that existed widely in the everyday and devise operations that would uncover something that was already there. I concentrated on visual constructions of reading and writing because I regarded text and the activities that generated and deciphered it as an incredibly mysterious brain technology – quite miraculous, actually. This is still important to me and always hovers somewhere around my work.



...we, we, waves (LG)
2014, gouache on paper, 22" x 15"

Continued...

Eventually I became frustrated with the limitations I was setting for myself and was drawn back to painting. I first made small, very detailed renditions of ordinary people who appeared on the front pages of the New York Times and then began using handwriting-as-image in larger works. Handwriting gave me a roadmap with a loose set of rules and unpredictable destinations. It was a kind of halfway-house that allowed me to confront my love-hate relationship with subjective form and the gestural mark. It took some time but eventually the space of the page in my earlier work became a field with figure-to-ground and object-to-frame relationships.



Above: Untitled (purple-eye)
2019, acrylic and flashe on linen over panel, 19 1/2" x 14"

Below: *Saturday Painting #5*
2023, flashe and milk paint on panel, 13" x 9"



Continued...

For the past several years I've been working to find ways to step off the well-defined tracks I have to lay to keep myself moving without drowning in chaos. I do a lot of generative drawing, automatic drawing, trying not to "make a picture" but rather allow what filters in from years of attending to different visual vocabularies to come through. I look for ways to navigate the tension between structure and impulse and find myself asking "what kind of a thing is this?" It's a question I don't expect an answer to because it all lies beyond the threshold of language.

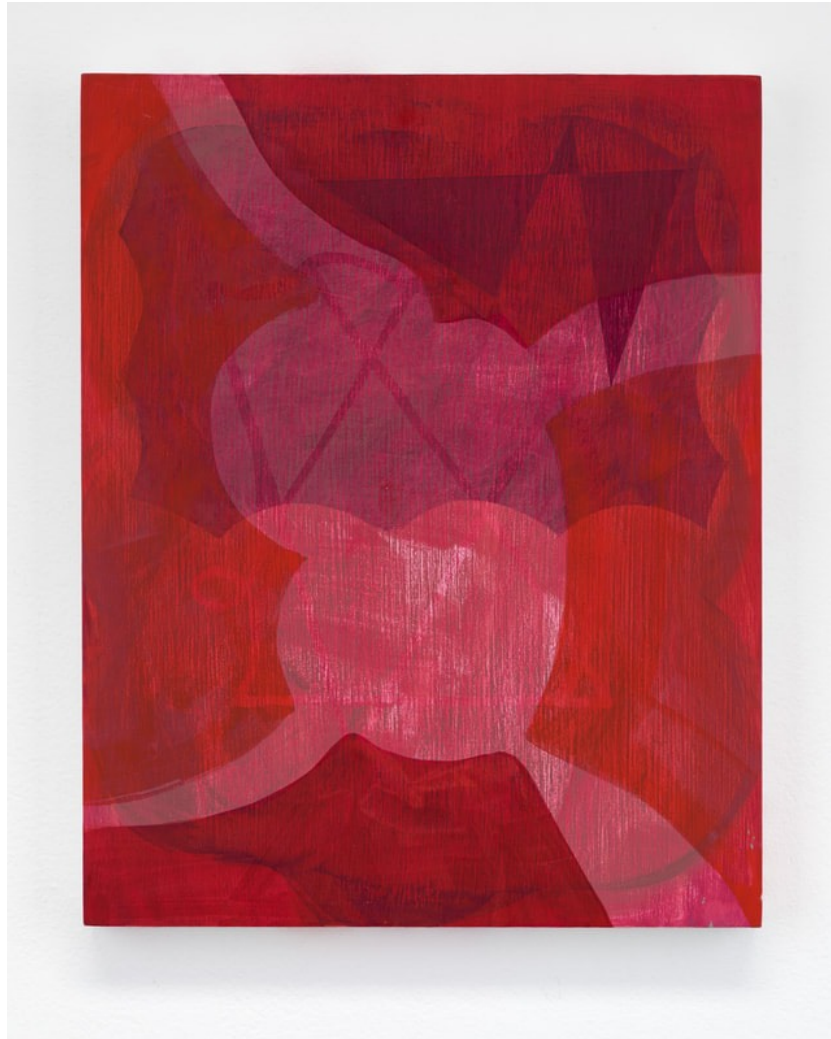
This does leave me without an easy way of talking about current work, for there is no longer a "something" that it's about. Unless it's about painting, as you suggest. I now feel that in itself is a tremendous charge, that painting is temporal and rich and deep. I recently came across a statement by the Belgian painter Ilse D'Hollander, who left a tremendous body of work during her short life (she died at the age of 29). D'Hollander wrote: "A painting comes into being when ideas and the act of painting coincide. When referring to ideas, it

implies that as a painter, I am not facing my canvas as a neutral being but as an acting being who is investing into the act of painting." I like this. It makes sense to me.



Above: Saturday Painting #10 (amber)
2023, flashe on panel, 10" x 8"

Below: Saturday Painting #8 (red T.N.)
2023, flashe on panel, 10" x 8"

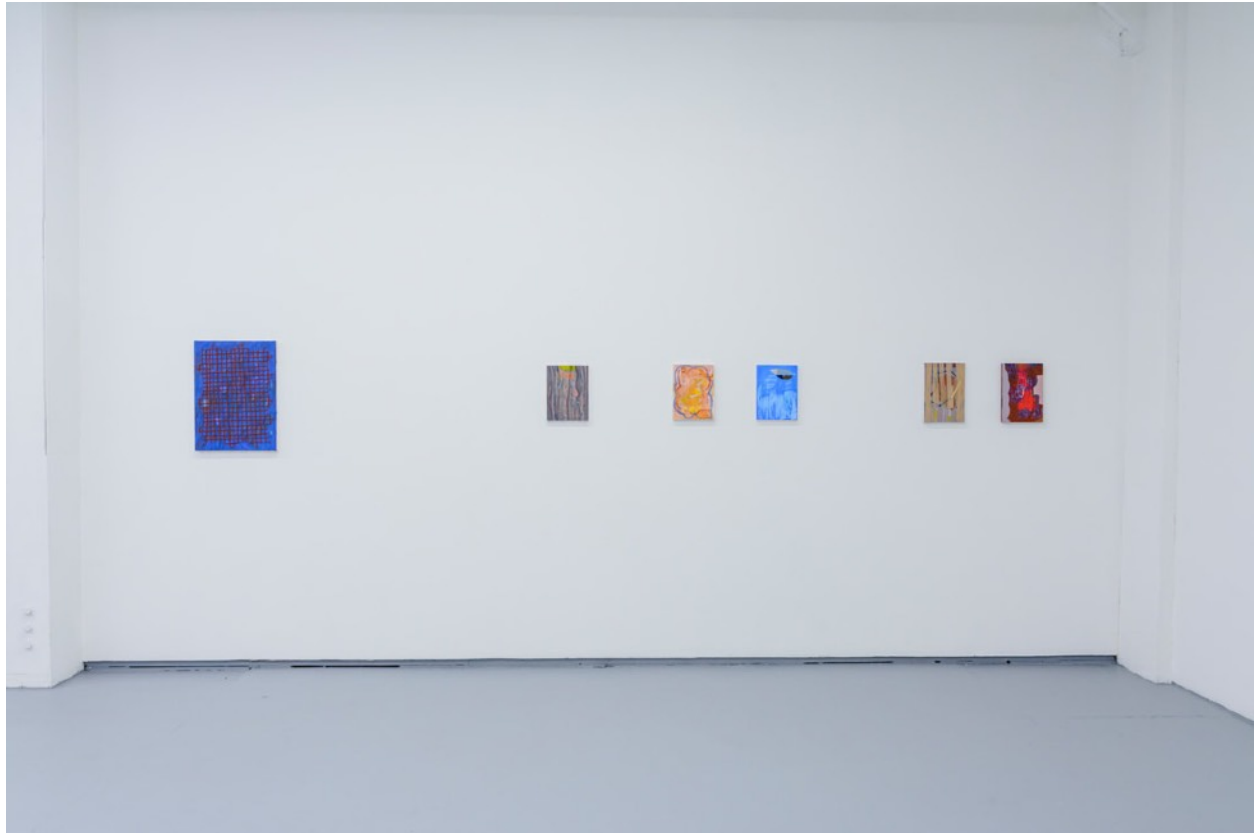


S-F: The surfaces in your recent work have become so richly varied, not just with color, but with texture and density as well. Talk about that.

PB: I've always been interested in the tactility of vision, so the surface quality of a painting is important. At some point – it may have been when I took another look at the Pattern and Decoration work of the 70s – a long-dormant part of my visual DNA was activated, reaching back to the Polish immigrant side of my family whose tastes in decorating ran toward weirdly clashing colors, patterns, and tacky textures. I realized that most of my childhood memories involve interiors that were not at all aligned with American or western European ideas of visual harmony. Maybe that attuned me to the visual force of putting together things that do not belong. Nabokov (Russian, right?) wrote: “I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip.”

I also think a lot about how sight and sound are connected. When I began painting letterforms, for instance, I thought a line bent to form a shape that might be recognized as a letter might also carry with it a sense of

that letter's sound or produce in the viewer the impulse to verbalize. Maybe it has more to do with rhythm and intervals, the patterning and textures of text, the spaces between and the act of visually deciphering. Contrast and color have a big job there. And much of it comes from figuring out how to negotiate shape, and especially, edge – the way the body senses and the brain responds.



Above: Installation view at Ditch Projects (November, 2023)

Below: *Blue Grid*

2023, acrylic and flashe on canvas over panel, 23 1/2" x 17 1/2"



S-F: I love the title of your current show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery - Idiom. Can you talk about where that comes from and how it relates to your recent work?

PB: The work I had been making for the show kept splitting off in different directions and I wanted to follow each one, not curtail anything just to make it fit, to make a show. Lately, as must be apparent by now, I've been working to see what happens rather than directing it. I don't have an interest in making it all cohere. Or maybe it's more accurate to say I want to see if I can make it cohere on its own.

When it was nearing time to deliver the work to the gallery, some of the paintings seemed to have organized themselves into pairs that each shared a loose sense of genre (still-life-ish, landscapes, grid-based "scripts") but there was no overarching theme. Idiom, which means a phrase whose meaning cannot be understood from the dictionary definitions of its component words, seemed to fit the situation. There's an idea there about "compositionality" that I like, where one should be able to understand the whole if one understands the

meanings of each of the parts. But with idioms, it doesn't add up. They make a new meaning only through time and use.



SL3

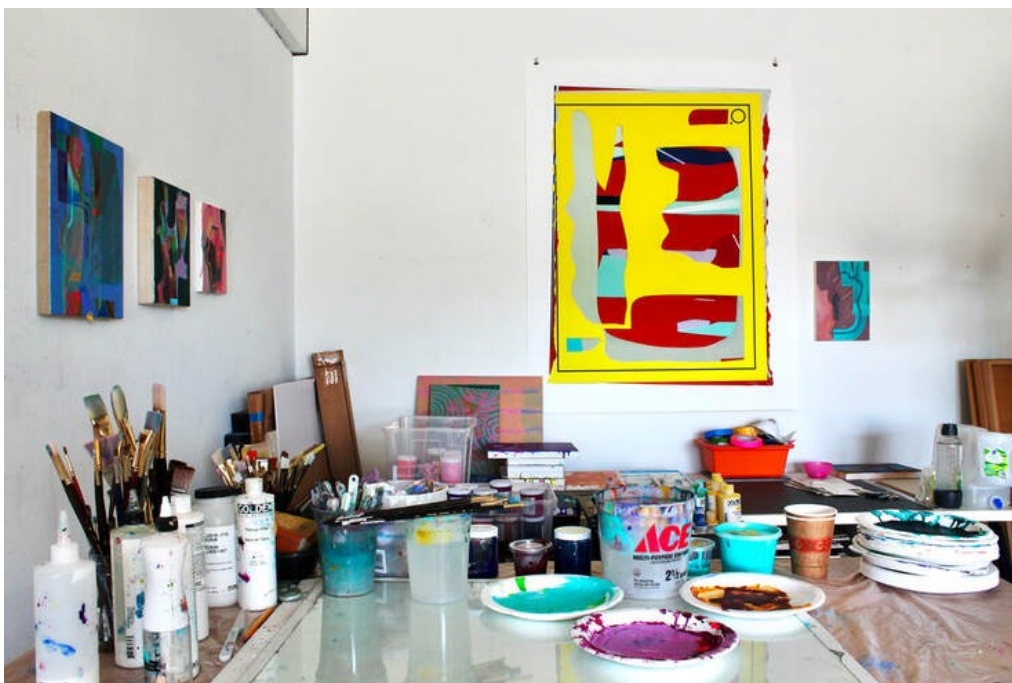
2023, flashe on canvas over panel, 24" x 22"

S-F: Who are you looking at (living or dead)?

PB: I just got back from a trip to the Netherlands where I saw many early Mondrian paintings at the Kunstmuseum den Haag, and there also was a beautiful and comprehensive exhibition that traced his development alongside his contemporary, Hilma af Klint. Earlier this year I saw Rebecca Morris at the MCA in Chicago. It feels so good to look at work in person again. I recently got my hands on the new big book on Miyoko Ito. And I'm always looking at Prunella Clough and Thomas Nozkowski for the way they made compositions that cannot not be taken apart. Historically, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Matisse, '80s de Kooning, Shirley Jaffe, Raoul de Keyser, Kimber Smith. I cycle through a long list of contemporary (mostly women) painters such as Victoria Morton, Patricia Treib, Jana Schroder, Marley Freeman, Elizabeth MacIntosh, Julia Dault, Jonathan Lasker, Tomory Dodge. And lately I've been looking at Sherman Sam, Ilse D'Hollander, Varda Caivano and Cora Cohen.



Above and below: on the studio walls.



S-F: What's next for you?

PB: After my two fall exhibitions in 2023, it feels good to be working without a looming deadline. I'm represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, Oregon, and will likely do another solo there in 2025. I enjoyed working with Ditch Projects and would like to build more connections with artist-run spaces: it's useful to see work in different contexts and I like working collaboratively with other artists.

Art Review: Pat Boas at Oregon Contemporary

Pat Boas' abstract wallpaper and painting installation for the "Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts 2017-2019" exhibition at Oregon Contemporary captures Patrick Collier's attention.

FEBRUARY 25, 2022

PATRICK COLLIER

NEWS, VISUAL ART

I can't remember which social media platform I was on when I first saw Pat Boas' installation of wallpaper and paintings. The work is at Oregon Contemporary as part of the exhibition "Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts 2017-2019." Still, the moment I saw the abstractly patterned wallpaper paired with the two small abstract paintings on my screen, I knew that I wanted to write about her contribution.

That said, I did hesitate.

First of all, group shows are notoriously difficult to write about because there is the implicit command to write about a prescribed overarching theme. Additionally, length constraints imposed by a publisher may necessitate that assessments of works by individual artists remain rather perfunctory, therefore reflecting poorly on both artist and writer. There is also the potential problem of writing about one particular artist's work to the exclusion of the others in a group exhibit. Should the writer decide to focus on a number of artists less than the total of those in the exhibit, there might be a perceived slight. (As I have previously written about several artists in the exhibit, rest assured, no slight is intended. It is merely that I was smitten by Boas' installation.)



Pat Boas, installation view of wallpaper, *Bliksem* (2021), with paintings *Sentinel (Window)* (left) and *Good Listener* (right). Photo courtesy of Mario Gallucci

Secondly, writing about abstract art can be intimidating, perhaps because references drawn from the work are fairly abstract in themselves. Descriptives arise out of oblique formal concerns or color theory, which can make for fairly pedantic reading, which can suck the life out of the piece of art. Yet, just as problematic is an attempt to describe a strong emotional response from said writer about the art. The former approach seems to be objective in the extreme, and the latter seems too subjective. Nevermind that abstract art often eludes meaning (as in a literal understanding).

Of course, these difficulties have not prevented writers from trying to relay their impressions, nor prevented viewers from appreciating such art. After all, abstraction has been around for over a century now. We should feel somewhat comfortable with it. Even so, it's nice when the artist herself gives us a work that is a joy to contemplate.

Pat Boas' installation covers a wall that is 11' high and 20' wide, and consists of wallpaper titled *Bliksem* (the Dutch word for lightning) that covers the entire wall, plus two 20" x 16" paintings that are spaced 92" apart. Standing well-back from the wall, the prominent color of the wallpaper seems to be a purple, or maybe a violet. Upon closer examination, there are also significant amounts of aquamarine and light green. Pink and yellow lines serve to outline much of the larger color blocking.

I am thrown back to my grandparents' house where I took pleasure in appreciating the symmetry and mirroring of repeated patterning in their 1950s fiberglass curtains. The effect here is similar, except Boas' wall vibrates, and like high voltage, crackles and hums. It crawls, slithers, and hypnotizes. That dynamism helps one enter into the "logic," or rather strategy, of the overall installation, so much so that I do not think of the wallpaper and paintings as separate from each other, but instead as parts of a cooperative whole.

While focusing on the wallpaper, purple or violet seems to dominate. Yet, in shifting focus to either (or both) of the paintings, purple recedes in favor of yellow. This "color bounce" certainly adds to the interest, for depending on how one focuses, the paintings either stand apart from or sink into the wall. Set like eyes on the face of the wall, they break up that busy plane, yet also have the potential to get lost within its patterning. The paintings are like the controls for a giant oscilloscope of some kind, yet instead of turning what would be the rectangular knobs to activate the patterns, all one needs to do is shift one's gaze from focusing on the paintings to taking in the whole wall, and then back to the paintings.



Pat Boas, *Sentinel (Window)* (2021). Acrylic and Flashe on linen over panel. Photo by Mario Gallucci.

One assumes that the painting on the left, *Sentinel (Window)*, gets the parenthetical part of its title from the rectangular frame that sits within the outer edges of the painting. Yet, the frame appears to sit upon the paint underneath, less a frame and more a painted border atop the rest of the painting. The run of humps on its outside edge call to mind the frame one would find around an older mirror, an impression perhaps aided by the yellow wavy lines that begins to suggest the outline of a head with a pinkish forehead down to a chalky-white neck. Is this the Sentinel? I ask because in the middle of this portrait one finds a vanishing point, thereby suggesting a landscape as well. Maybe a clue can be found in the harlequin patterning, which makes me wonder if Boas, like a jester, is having a bit of fun with the viewer. Also of note is the tension between the solid colors and the back painting, which is then ameliorated with watery yellows and darker greens. The gray, somewhat horizontal lines just below the midpoint provide a certain stability, like trusses against an implosion.

The other painting, *Good Listener*, is to my mind hilarious, as it seems more to represent just the opposite, meaning that the varied and busy portions of the painting give the impression of someone with a lot on their mind who might indeed require someone with a ready ear. The yellow, black, and tan gridded graph runs amok alongside the tumble of boulder-like shapes. Again, the harlequin pattern may suggest a jest is again at play here, or even the perception of a Shakespearean fool where the reality is quite the contrary. Curiously, however, rather than resting upon the harlequin pattern as a sort of commentary on the other elements, for respite, my eye retreats to the small green bar in the upper right corner.



Pat Boas, *Good Listener* (2021). Acrylic and Flashe on linen over panel. Photo by Mario Gallucci.

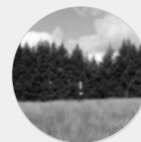
When I am ready, I step back a bit and let the whole piece do its thing again, which, when I come to think of it, has been my relationship with Pat Boas' work from when we first crossed paths some ten or twelve years back. There are interesting concepts behind her art, along with an execution that rewards time spent with her work, which may be why she is increasingly getting the attention she deserves.

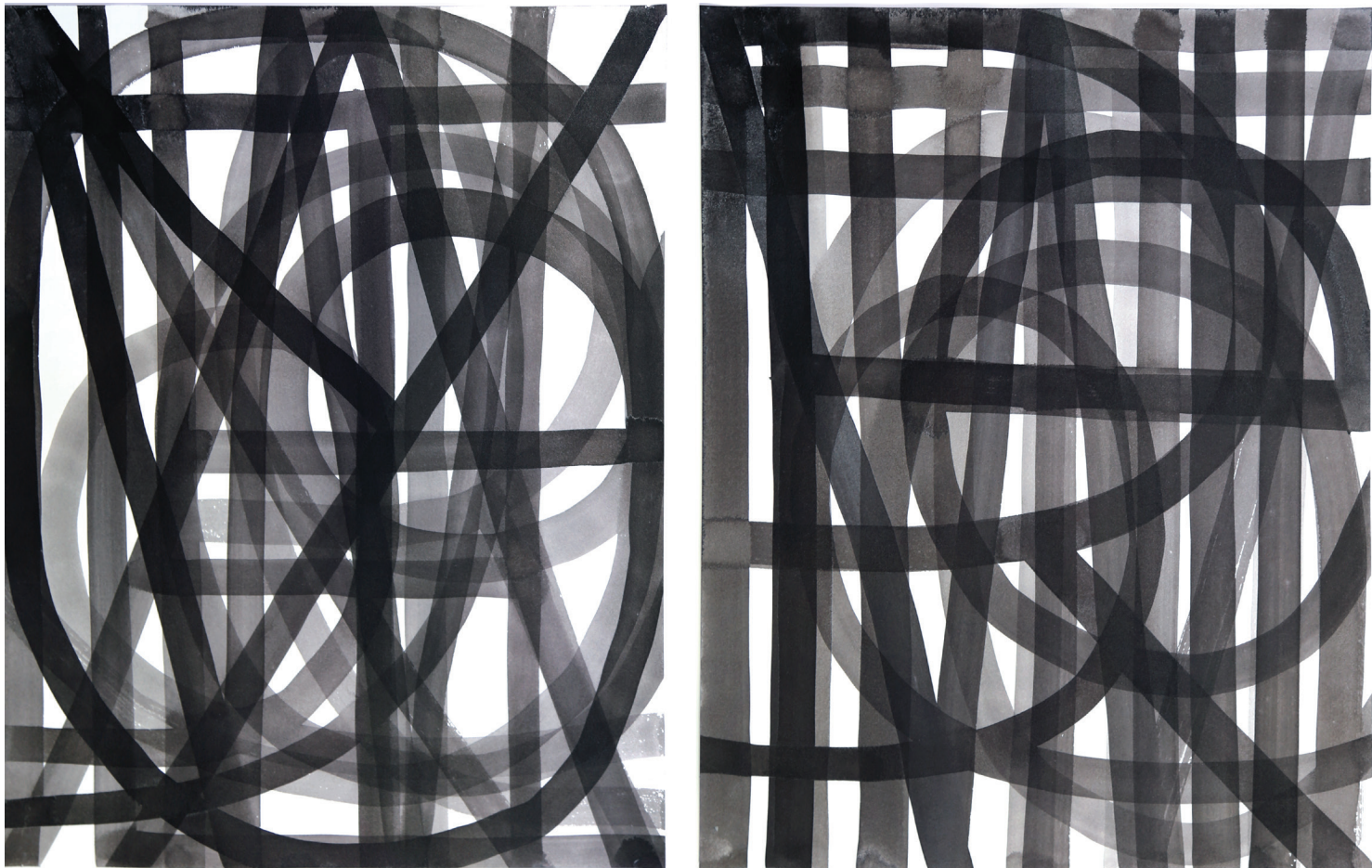
Note: The exhibit at Oregon Contemporary is the second iteration of this group show of these particular Hallie Ford fellows. The first exhibition was at the University of Oregon's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in Eugene, Oregon. Both were curated by Los Angeles curator and author, Jenelle Porter (who, curiously enough, was also a jurist for the Hallie Ford Family Foundation's 2020 award cycle). For the Schnitzer exhibit, Boas presented altogether different work (as did a number of the other artists), which did not involve wallpaper. However, this is the second time Boas has exhibited wallpaper as part of her installation, the first being in 2021 for *Deeds Not Words* at Sun Valley Museum of Art, Ketchum, ID.

Oregon Center for Contemporary Art is located at 8371 North Interstate Avenue and is open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from Noon-5 pm. The exhibition "Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts 2017-2019" is open through March 20th.

Patrick Collier

Patrick Collier is an artist who has written for the Midwest journal "The New Art Examiner," plus for the online journals UltraPDX and PORT. He holds a BA in Philosophy and an MA in English Literature from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, plus an MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Prior to moving to Oregon in 2003, Collier and his wife operated the Chicago gallery bona fide to critical but not financial success. They live in Corvallis.





Yellow Triangle . . . with Three Thicknesses (RT Page 39), 2013, cat. no. 7, detail (photo: T. Harrison)

Pictura/Poesis/Pictura

by Sue Taylor

IN 2012, PAT BOAS was honored with the Ford Family Foundation's Golden Spot Award, which includes a residency at the Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts on the Umatilla Reservation in eastern Oregon. There she had the opportunity to collaborate with master printer Frank Janzen, producing the three lithographs chosen for this exhibition of works on paper at the Arlington Club. Boas refers to these Crow's Shadow prints as the "Unalphabetic" series (see cover). Though colorful and boldly gestural, they maintain a certain reticence, yielding their secrets only to proactive viewers who mentally trace out superimposed letters to discover the works' respective subtitles: "unabashed," "unbeholden," "uncrushable." It is an effective strategy for inviting and rewarding sustained viewer engagement: one looks, deciphers, reads, and finally ponders the possible meaning of the untangled messages. The words, all adjectives, have in common the negative

prefix "un," yet they describe positive qualities. One can imagine the series continuing—"undeterred," "unembarrassed," "unfazed"—to suggest a steadfast character empowered and autonomous. What begins as an abstract linguistic exercise yields a set of personal aspirations for courageous living.

The subsequent series of sumi ink drawings (above) evacuates color and incorporates whole phrases rather than single words. Letterforms pile up densely, bordering on the illegible. The art of calligraphy, where drawing or painting produces a text, is a point of reference here: meditating on the act of making meaningful marks on paper, Boas asks when calligraphy's inverse might occur, when writing might produce a painting. Indeed, one of these works spells out "in memory of writing," suggesting the balance has tipped, and the reader becomes a viewer—of an abstract painting. If Horace once urged poets to take painting as a model, proclaiming

"ut pictura poesis" (as painting is, so poetry should be), Boas upsets the terms of his age-old analogy. Rather than richly imagistic poetry, we have pictures infused with text. The text that underpins each work and also serves as its title, including *In Memory of Writing*, is borrowed from the title of another work of art—by Richard Tuttle, known for his subtle and poetic abstract paintings.

In Boas's "Abstraction Machine," the letters of a word become pictures, and the viewer is challenged to crack the code. One example from the series, the six-part *Abstraction Machine (poison)*, is on view here (back cover). With the six little paintings on paper arranged laterally on the wall, we "read" them from left to right as we would scan text on a page. To generate the apparently unrelated subjects of these pictures, the artist devised an ingenious system. She began by typing "poison" in the font called "webdings," which codes each letter as a graphic symbol: police car, boat, information icon (a lower case "i" inside a circle), question mark, another boat, and a solid circle (see figure 1). Boas then searched the Web for the names of those symbols to yield a set of digital images taken from the real world. So for instance, the webding for the second letter in "poison," "o," is a boat. A Web search for "boat" brings up photographic images of, among other things such as a sauceboat and a DVD of *Das Boot*, an actual yacht at sea. Finally, Boas chose from the images on the Web six motifs to translate into paintings. The process zigzags from word ("poison") to images (webdings), to words (search terms), and back into images again.

At stake here is the interplay between the textual and the pictorial, to be sure, but also between the digital image and the handmade painting. The logic of the webding code is cerebral; the paintings are sensuous. From the endless, photographically reproduced and mediated glut of the Internet, Boas enlists images for the unalienated, artisanal labor of representational painting. She does this, not in a spirit of nostalgia, but critically, from a position of resistance to the inexorable, potentially totalizing force of digital technology. Manipulating computer software and search engines in her encryption process, she gives painting the last word.



Figure 1. Webdings spelling the word "poison."

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

- 1** *Abstraction Machine (poison)*, 2010–13
Gouache on paper
Six sheets, each 12 × 9 in.
- 2** *Unalphabetic #1 (Unabashed)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 3** *Unalphabetic #2 (Unbeholden)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 4** *Unalphabetic #3 (Uncrushable)*, 2012
Color lithograph on paper
30 × 22 ½ in.
Edition of 12, a.p. 1/2
Published by Crow's Shadow Press, Pendleton, Ore.
Printed by Frank Janzen
- 5** *In Memory of Writing (RT Page 231)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
14 × 11 in.
- 6** *Two With Any To (RT Page 59)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
14 × 11 in.
- 7** *Yellow Triangle . . . with Three Thicknesses (RT Page 39)*, 2013
Sumi ink on paper
Two sheets, each 14 × 11 in.

All works lent by the artist, courtesy of the School of Art and Design, Portland State University. Prices by request, contact artdept@pdx.edu.



Abstraction Machine (poison),
2010-13, cat. no. 1, detail, one of six (photo: T. Harrison)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The artist thanks Ethan Seltzer, Interim Director of the School of Art and Design, and Wm. Robert Buckner, Dean of the College of the Arts, for their support of this exhibition; Sue Taylor, Professor of Art History, for her thoughtful essay; Mary McVein and Travis Nikolai for their assistance with the installation; and April Ramirez, Arlington Clubhouse Manager, for facilitating all aspects of this project.

Design by Terry Fox, A+D Projects

COVER IMAGE *Unalphabetic #3 (Uncrushable),*
2012, cat. no. 4 (photo: T. Harrison)

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THE ARLINGTON CLUB
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30 JANUARY–19 JUNE 2015

Pat Boas
Encryption Machine

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Pat Boas

by Sue Taylor



An elegiac mood pervaded this exhibition of works in various mediums by Portland artist Pat Boas, a former critic for *Artweek*, *Art Papers* and *artUS*. Several of the serial projects use the *New York Times* as a source. Given the current twilight of newspapers, the artist's meditations on the publication's archive as communal memory stir feelings of nostalgic regret. For "Alphabet (NYT 01/01/01)," 2001-02, she created 26 transfer drawings from page one of the Jan. 1, 2001, issue of the *Times*, one for every letter from A to Z. Using solvent, she lifted individual letters onto silk tissue—all the A's on the page to the first drawing, all the B's to the second and so on—producing indecipherable echoes of a single day's major stories. For the dozen ink drawings that make up "All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times, 2001" (2001-02), Boas used each sheet, over and over, to trace contours of a whole month's worth of people pictured in the news. The resulting palimpsests document an entire year and render everyone, from world leaders to hapless victims, uniformly anonymous and spectral. Slightly crinkled from repeated applications of ink, these delicate works suggest the fragility of knowledge, as current events demand our attention then fade into inexact memories.

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Turning to the physical environment, Boas posits a forest of signs, and wills herself their receptive recorder. In the beautiful video *What Our Homes Can Tell Us* (2007-09), she offers a different kind of news: haunting messages formed by single words serendipitously encountered. Using product labels, book spines, prescription bottles and home appliances, Boas photographs ordinary words like “complete,” “time” and “free,” presenting them individually, one after another, as found poetry. The still images, appearing slowly in sequence, produce remarkable readings as the patient viewer mentally assembles the captured words into phrases: “Your / finest / moments / before / you / precious / normal / new.” André Breton would have called this an example of objective chance, in which an individual happens upon a communication from the external world informing him of his own (as yet unconscious) desire. Boas’s exhibition—aptly titled “Record/Record,” noun and verb—revealed not only a visual artist avidly reading the paper of record, but an inspired poet presenting herself as amanuensis of a quotidian reality replete with hidden meaning.

Photo: Pat Boas: Chance Watches Over You Safe Until Tomorrow's Past, 2009, from the series "What Our Homes Can Tell Us," digital inkjet print, 10 by 25 inches; at The Art Gym.



Isaac Layman's "Bookcase," 2006. Archival inkjet prints, 61.25 x 78.25."

Quite a group at Leach

By CHAS BOWIE
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Of the many wonderful and well-documented reasons to be grateful for the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, its occasional group exhibitions must be counted near the top of the list. While the gallery's one-person shows are formidable in their own right, its group shows offer particularly compelling dispatches from Leach's tireless schedule of international studio visits, art fairs, biennials and gallery hopping.

The current exhibition, "Re-Present," is smart and tasteful in the ways we have come to expect from Leach's group shows. Namely, the artists, who do not regularly show with the gallery, are not only strong talents with serious voices but their work also speaks a common language, albeit in diversely nuanced dialects.

"Re-Present" examines how five contemporary artists, including three from the Pacific Northwest, are investigating themes of visibility, cognition and optical psychology. With unwaveringly meticulous craftsmanship and unextraordinary subject matter, the artists analyze and occasionally subvert the complex men-

tal processes through which we decipher and decode visual information.

Isaac Layman's unnervingly banal color photographs of household items are astonishingly subtle in their perception-based tomfoolery. The Seattle artist's earliest work on view presents an almost-seamless image of a bookcase whose spines are turned away from the camera, so that the books become little more than nameless swathes of bound paper. The viewer's impulse to scan the shelves for familiar titles is doubly thwarted when they notice that the photograph almost seems to shift its perspective, depending on where the viewer looks. Almost imperceptibly, Layman has combined photographs taken from different vantage points in creating *Bookcase*, resulting in a deceptive network of impossible sightlines.

Our capacity to mentally reconstruct images is hypnotically envisioned by Adam Chapman's kinetic drawings. Framed somewhat awkwardly as traditional works on paper, two computer screens display a floating nebula of squiggly lines and atmospheric bursts of color. These scrappy elements drift about for a few minutes, screen saver-

style, eventually lining up to create momentary portraits of the artist's friends and family. Randomized by Chapman's computer program, the formless drawings never repeat themselves in precisely the same way and drift back into abstraction without so much as a pause.

In her "NYT Little People" drawings, which were included in her recent show at Marylhurst University's Art Gym, Pat Boas re-creates the front pages of *The New York Times*, omitting everything except for photographs of everyday citizens, which she impeccably copies in gouache. With broad chunks of "data" missing from her depictions of the front page, Boas demands the viewer supply their own content.

Paintings by Joe Park and Xiaozhe Xie round out the exhibition. Park's slick, quasi-Cubist panels look better here than they did a few months ago at the Portland Art Museum, thanks in no small part to their contextualization and relatively small dosage. Xie, a Chinese-born painter living in the Bay Area, made his Portland debut in a group show last year at Reed College, and the two photorealist canvases in "Re-Present" argue further

for a larger examination of the artist's work.

417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521, www.elizabethleach.com. Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Exhibition closes March 27. Free admission



Alice Shaw: *Phil + Me*, from the series "People Who Look Like Me," 1999-2004, color photograph, 20 by 24 inches; in "San Francisco Plays Itself," at SF Cameraworks.



Pat Boas: *Chance Watches Over You Safe Until Tomorrow's Past*, 2009, from the series "What Our Homes Can Tell Us," digital inkjet print, 10 by 25 inches; at The Art Gym.

ences of assimilation) as well as strangers (Alice Shaw's series of portraits of people with whom she shares a single physical characteristic).

Despite the exhibition's individual emphasis, it's hard not to look at the photographs through the larger lens of history. One sees in Jim Goldberg's stark portraits of the well-off and the destitute from the late '70s, as well as in Chauncey Hare's series of white-collar drones at work from the same time, early signs of the gentrification that San Francisco was to undergo in the '80s. Judy Dater's and Richard Misrach's photographs point to the city's continued struggles with its homeless population. The personal and the historical collide in Dan Nicoletta's work, represented by his 1977 portrait of Harvey Milk in front of Milk's camera store, hung next to Nicoletta's recent behind-the-scenes photographs shot during the filming of *Milk*, in which Sean Penn played the slain gay rights pioneer. But as "San Francisco Plays Itself" proves, Hollywood won't have the last word on our town.

—Matt Sussman

MARYLHURST, ORE.

PAT BOAS THE ART GYM

An elegiac mood pervaded this exhibition of works in various mediums by Portland artist Pat Boas, a former critic for *Artweek*, *Art Papers* and *artUS*. Several of the serial projects use the *New York Times* as a source. Given the current twilight of newspapers, the artist's meditations on the publication's archive as communal memory stir feelings of nostalgic regret. For "Alphabet (NYT 01/01/01)," 2001-02,

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—Sue Taylor

SEATTLE

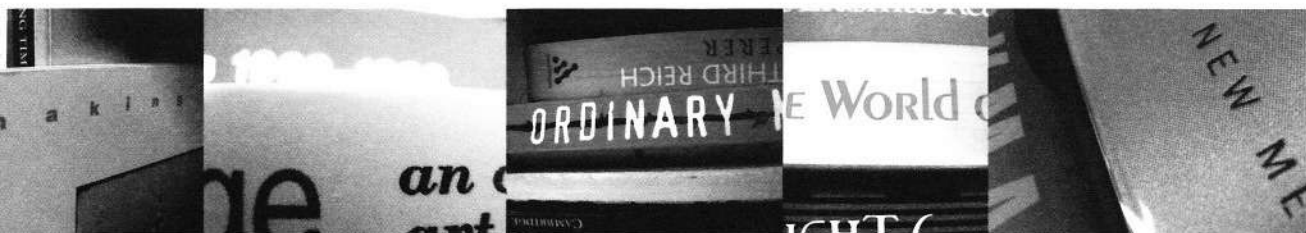
NATHAN DIPIETRO PUNCH

Just as Grant Wood's paintings of Americana have often been read as bitter and satirical, Nathan DiPietro's rural and suburban landscape imagery may be seen to convey a sense of dread and loss. In his third solo show in Seattle, DiPietro

Record Record

Stephanie Snyder

"Words die as they bring forth thought." –Lev Vygotsky



Pat Boas investigates official and unofficial sites of record and forms of information, expanding and contracting the legibility, velocity, and shape of images and texts. At times, Boas transforms pre-existing information systems — newspapers, for instance — into enigmatic serial works. Boas also creates original texts through the careful documentation of her surroundings, utilizing whatever materials seem most suited to the task (graphite, paint, and, more recently, digital technology) to carefully observe, interpret, and construct a poetics of everyday, though tightly edited, language and linguistic forms. Boas' exploration of language, whether conducted alongside images or in a more purely typographical fashion, captures and extends the viewer's mental image and memory of reading and writing (and printing) as an expanded time space — a space requiring considerable attention to absorb, a place of stories grand and mundane, simultaneously forgotten but potentially rediscovered in the act of rereading and remaking — language spaces so common that they disappear in plain sight and become newly *unfamiliar* in Boas' expansive installations. When the artist meticulously dismembers and expands the front page of one issue of *The New York Times* into twenty-six individual drawings, that same newspaper, its coherence dispersed, becomes titrated and distilled like a rare intoxicant or an ancient manuscript.

The origin of the word "record" lies in the concept of remembrance. Boas raises the question of whether one must rerecord experience in order to grasp and retain its meaning and symbolic potency. Within Boas' work the relationship between public and private experience (and space) looms large. How does one understand and mine the potential of the record to re-establish the boundary — the symbolic edge-space — of subjectivity, where poetry resists instrumentality? Space becomes place when it is constrained and organized. Space expands, place collapses. Boas is obsessed with studying both the orderly and indescribable spaces that emerge through the organization of cultural information. In Boas' hands, remembrance becomes an obscuring but universalizing transformative force. Whether penetrating *The New York Times* or exploring the language patterns of domestic and civic spaces, Boas channels place like a medium, filtering and synthesizing signals akin to a Shaker artist receiving and transcribing the wisdom of the divine spirit.

In the drawing series, *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times, 2001*, Boas traced the outline of every human head appearing on the front page of *The New York Times* from January through December. Boas completed this exercise using brush and ink each day in one-month increments: one delicate silken page, returned to daily for one month, one page per month, collecting the outlines of the living and the dead, the powerful and the impotent. Each month Boas began a new drawing and conducted the project, serially, for one year, completing twelve drawings. As viewers, we cannot easily place or contextualize the empty-faced bodies whose subtle contours and idiosyncratic layering suggest the unfolding of organic, abstracted human forms — like a field of poppies sprouting in an ephemeral eternity of whiteness, or a populous collective drifting within a reassuring yet tenuous emptiness of anonymity. Suddenly, reading *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times*, we realize that we are certainly studying the bodies of the dead. Boas reminds the viewer that the record of death is an assembly of outlines and letterforms — of ghosts.

The tracings of photographs that comprise *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times* recalls Roland Barthes' elucidation of meaning in his 1980 book *Camera Lucida*.¹ In this seminal work Barthes describes two primary, contrasting, and productively antagonistic types of significance within the photographic image: the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* denotes the cultural, linguistic, and political agency of the photograph; in contrast the *punctum* denotes the wounding, personally touching detail with which the photograph establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it. Boas' examination of the text/image field of *The New York Times* shapes and shifts the *studium* toward the material and emotional realm of the *punctum*. Boas abstracts the "objective" information on the front of the *Times*, revealing the shape of desire and transcribing an animistic consciousness that embraces the salience of each life, each story, and each set of circumstances while suspending life in the viewer's field of vision.

Alphabet (NYT 01/01/01), created from 2001 through 2002, began innocently enough at a breakfast table bathed in morning light. Boas was inspired to investigate the front page of the *Times* on January 1, 2001, the inception of the millennial year, and a seductively binary date — 010101 — time-encoded and time-enclosed in a perfect numerical sequence, an ideal conceptual framework for dismembering the space of the front page according to its own internal logic, while embracing it in the realm of the *punctum*. In *Alphabet (NYT 01/01/01)* Boas set about systematically creating twenty-six separate silk tissue "drawings" recording each letter of the English alphabet *in situ*. Boas created *Alphabet* by photocopying the *Times*' front page, and then, using solvents, transferring the powdery black printing toner onto silk tissue, separating and rubbing each letter onto the soft receptive silk. The twenty-six resultant drawings are installed unframed and hung in the configuration of a calendar, suggesting the slow reassembly of content through the act of reading. The work suggests an expanded palimpsest that has been laboriously deconstructed according to its unique, internal logic. Typographic hierarchies, from masthead to caption, rise and fall as we scan the sometimes fuzzy and pocked edges and contours of the letterforms. Time appears slowed and somewhat distended through Boas' extension of one day's news through months and months of labor and consideration. This is a work of poetic, phenomenological resonance. The viewer feels Boas' hand and body coursing through the work like

an electrical current. *Alphabet* hums with a psychological intensity resulting from the letterforms' repetitive and somewhat eccentric patterning. The idiosyncratic gestures and incidental marks that surround each hand-transferred letter solicit private, poetic reverie. The viewer is encouraged to read afresh, to become a decoder, a rereader, and a reconstructive poet seduced by the work's careful order.

In a series of highly detailed, nearly photo-realistic gouache paintings entitled *NYT Little People* (2008–09), Boas continues to explore hierarchies of information and meaning directly related to the representation of the human figure in the context of the newspaper. In *Little People*, Boas focused on images of ordinary individuals that she noticed appearing with greater regularity on the front page of the *Times*. Boas reproduced images of people in their original size and location, removing everything else on the page. Isolating these lush yet ordinary narrative moments within a stark white space, Boas raises questions about what is and isn't present on the original page, drawing our attention to the importance of the absence of language as a contextualizing force and a marker of time. In *NYT Little People*, dates and headlines have been shifted to the space of the exhibition label, clearing the artwork itself from the burden of textual description. For instance, one title reads: "June 17, 2008, BOOMING, CHINA FAULTS U.S. POLICY ON THE ECONOMY." Boas' titles (copied exactly from the newspaper) locate us in a time and place that is constantly shifting in relevance and familiarity. *Little People* focuses the viewer's attention on aesthetic information in the form of imagery, as opposed to the textual captions and stories that the reader usually relies upon for knowledge and contextualization. Here the viewer must study the painted human form as a primary source of identification.

Other artists who have used media publications, and specifically newspapers, to memorialize and critique culture, such as Andy Warhol and Nancy Spero, have also selectively reproduced and deconstructed its visual "voice." Warhol, for instance, created diverse photographic silk-screen prints based on advertising imagery, exploring the ephemera of spectacular events and people. Robert Rauschenberg also incorporated newspaper clippings in his combines and prints to ground them in the world of significant current events, where they act as distilled cultural chronicles. Typically, artists exploring such media retain and manipulate the image-text relationship in collage-based forms. Boas, in contrast, consistently separates image and text in her media-related work, prying apart the graphic terms of its construction to poetic ends, working serially over long periods of time, stretching the temporal and physical dimensions of the word-image relationship, and pushing the limits of formal legibility and meaning. Boas' approach differs radically from that of most modern and contemporary artists, who rip, tear, cut, glue, and cast newspapers in innumerable forms of bricolage.

In contrast to work that incorporates popular media as a form of object materiality, it is much more relevant and satisfying to consider Boas' careful formal explorations in relationship to artists such as Agnes Martin and Howardena Pindell (specifically Pindell's meditative geometric work from the 1970s). Both artists methodically explored the formal properties of the artwork as an abstract linguistic space to be distilled for the purposes of observation and revelation. Like Martin and Pindell,

Boas investigates the properties of geometric abstraction as a collection of related parts that elicit striking self-contained systems of representation, systems that catalyze awareness through rigorous and handmade order. Although they are not constructed using text-based forms, the shimmering geometry of Agnes Martin's paintings reminds the viewer of the orderly yet quivering letters in *Alphabet* or the carefully traced heads in *All the Heads on the Front Pages of The New York Times*. In Boas' work, newspapers and other ubiquitous language forms become the properties of a poetic code. Encountering and reading Boas' reconfigured images or texts, the viewer is seized by the impression that they are transmitting esoteric information from a place that is both within the world of the page and far away from the page itself. Hence, sometimes the world-space in Boas' work feels highly cryptic, recalling Martin's work in particular, or a work of poetry, such as that of the Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, who coded poetic language within a synaesthetic universe, as in his poem *Voyelles (Vowels)*, bringing forms of sensual perception into the space of the page and literally describing the letters of the alphabet according to color systems.

Canadian poet Lisa Robertson writes that poetry is experienced most acutely through resistance and dispersal. She writes, "I hold that for me at least poetry is an *unquantifiable* practice. Its *topos*, its place of agency, is invisible, and necessarily so."² Robertson goes on to posit that the closest correlative to this unquantifiable space is the space of friendship, a space inhabited by communal pain, pleasure, and misunderstanding, a space that records but evaporates under the pressure of overdefinition. Boas also addresses language as *topos*, as a place of meeting that hovers somewhere between the page and the reader. Robertson's reference to "friendship" may be interpreted as a space of trust and kinship. By embracing current events within her highly poetic and formal aesthetics, Boas turns our attention to the notion of community and social awareness. Boas asks the viewer to consider whether poetry and art have the capacity to create a symbolic *topos* where forms of communal and unquantifiable companionship and understanding are possible. *Alphabet* and *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times, 2001*, reauthor places of public record toward the qualities of space that Robertson describes as "unquantifiable." We see in Boas' work a circumscription of mental activity, but what we see is an edge-space of understanding, a diary of aesthetic priorities, a chronicle of a resistance to the velocity of place, and a critique of the relationship between human experience and different forms of economy.

Boas' acts of cultural subterfuge have occurred in other forms of visual exploration. In the series *A3*, Boas worked specifically with page A3 of the *Times*. Before the paper was reorganized, the international news brief was placed on page A3, and Boas noticed that it was consistently sited in close proximity to Tiffany jewelry advertisements bearing a striking formal relationship with characteristics of the international news images. A survey of Boas' *A3* pages is completely arresting and disturbing in its illustration of First World excess and complacency. In each of Boas' *A3* pairings, we are confronted with the uneasy marriage of radically different agendas, cultures, and capital: A poor boy in a derelict dwelling is set next to an advertisement for extravagant diamonds; another young boy lays his head in grief on the wall of a building adjacent to an advertisement for necklaces that mimic the boy's angular gestures. The image pairings are virtually impossible to rationalize or

describe. How was this visual critique created? From the collective consciousness of our shared trauma? Or by a subversive art director or designer at the *Times*?

In *What Our Homes Can Tell Us*, the most recent body of work in the exhibition, Boas turns her attention to the abundance of words and hidden messages lurking in the artist's domestic space and in other locations Boas considers "homelands" for a variety of personal reasons, places such as Krakow, Berlin, and Amsterdam. Photographing and cataloguing over a thousand images of such found words, Boas has begun using them as the raw material for both photographic prints and digital videos. The videos are synchronized to assemble and shift; phrases cohere and evaporate with a rhythm akin to the fluctuations of the mind and body while reading. Boas' visual language constructions feel strangely familiar, like notes on a refrigerator; but they remind us of the far more formal (and unconscious) ways that we are constantly reading the linguistic terrain of our homes, our cities, and the products we buy. The title of the work, *What Our Homes Can Tell Us*, implies that it is through repetition and re-encounter that we begin to notice and incorporate the language that surrounds us.

Regardless of their origins, Boas' words seep out of the world, evidencing the humor and substance of everyday life. A small sample of phrases from the artist's home reads as follows: "Time Pricks Us"; "Chance Watches Over You Safe Until Tomorrow's Past"; and "A Sense Of History And An Unconscious Longing For Beauty Reconfigured Discontent With The Present Making An Ordinary World New."

What *topos* is Boas describing? The artist lists a variety of her sources: "Junk mail, labels on food packages, products and medicines in my kitchen and bathroom, book titles and other printed matter, grocery lists and scribbled notes, the news crawler on the TV screen, labels on clothing, etc. The word-images retain a sense of the original location and context. For example, the word 'power' comes from the control panel of my microwave, the word 'deep' from the label on a bottle of Thai marinade in my refrigerator, the word 'forever' from the cover of a book of postage stamps on my desk." In one sense, *What Our Homes Can Tell Us* transforms the viewer into a voyeur. We witness, and are implicated in, mysterious acts of surveillance along with the artist as Boas tracks her ability to articulate the world.

Poetry is not public. Boas explores poetry as the ultimate space of empty return and of the whole world: of the caesura and the ellipse, of the eclipse. One can never truly remember, never truly record the poetic and the space of the page, as the recordable is a set of decisions established in the service of discourse. Is poetry a record? Poetry is not itself remembrance. Poetry is the space of the indistinguishable, the space of thought, of what is missing, of what dies to return. As Lisa Robertson argues, it is unquantifiable resistance that poetry affords the thinking mind, and Boas has chosen to antagonize both the public space of public opinion and the private space of the domestic in the remaking and removal of language toward the space of poetry, a poetry that flows through the body of the artist. Poetry, language, absence — information recorded becomes record, and the agency of record becomes power. In the age of reproduction, the age of the simulacrum, the recorded is

appropriated toward subversive goals: The already recorded, the mixed tape, the cover, the already re-recorded, and the barely understandable but locatable too become records of implication and hybridization. Considering the relationship between space and language, the French philosopher and novelist George Perec writes in "Species of Spaces":

This is how space begins, with words only, signs traced on the blank page. To describe space: to name it, to trace it, like those portolano-makers who saturated the coastlines with the names of harbors, the names of capes, the names of inlets, until in the end the land was only separated from the sea by a continuous ribbon of text. Is the aleph, that place in Borges from which the entire world is visible simultaneously, anything other than an alphabet?³

The paintings, drawings and prints that Boas has created by interpreting and remaking authoritative sites where image and text converge to define the cultural and emotional landscape (like Perec's ribbon of text defining the coastline) reimagine information and the experience of reading.

Boas' diverse bodies of work do not always resemble one another in conventional ways; they live unbounded by the pressures of coherence. One becomes witness to Boas' preoccupation with certain practices: formality, precision, separation, and isolation. If, as Borges posits, the aleph (alphabet) is a world, one locating us in an infinite present, then Boas has surely created a world with history hovering at the periphery. Pat Boas has spent the last twenty years immersed in comprehension and meaning: exploring, and recording, the fragile skin of subjectivity through the fleeting and ephemeral nature of language.

Stephanie Snyder is the Anne and John Hauberg Curator and Director of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College.

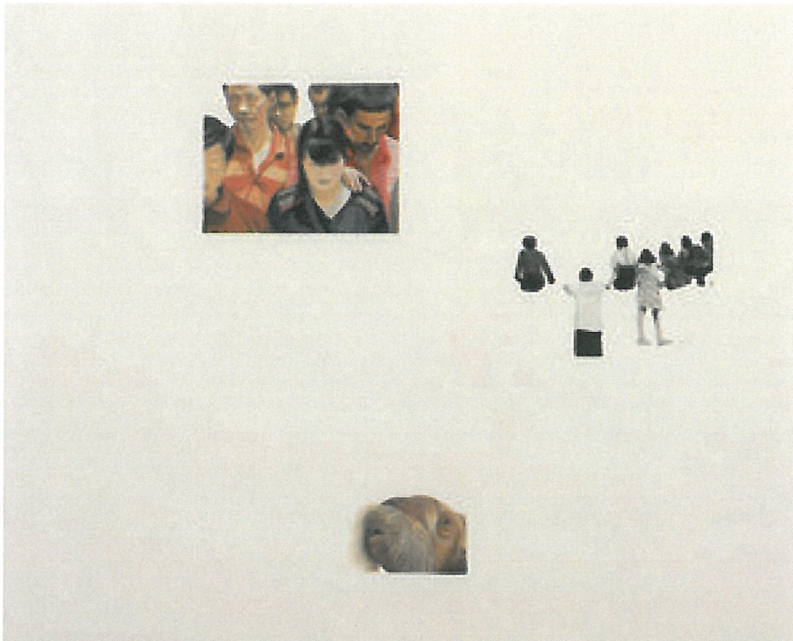
1 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, translator (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981).

2 These quotations were taken from a now deleted blog entry by Lisa Robertson, provided to the author by Matthew Stadler in 2009.

3 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, John Sturrock, translator (New York: Penguin, 1997).

Review: Pat Boas' *Record Record* exhibition at Marylhurst Art Gym

Posted by: Lisa Radon on Oct 25, 2009 at 06:00PM



Pat Boas, *May 20, 2008, Obama Expected to Hit Milestone in Today's Votes (detail)*, Gouache (from *Little People* series).

Portland artist Pat Boas takes selective readings of the world, processing received information such as front page news or signage through filters that result in, for example, some of the remarkable drawings in her current one-woman exhibition, *Record Record* at Marylhurst's Art Gym. Her readings are experiment, expose, illumination.

I'm partial to the work that is more procedural, in particular, her series here that uses as source material pages from the New York Times that become a critical editing of the edited, of, "all the news that's fit to print," when by "fit" we mean, what exactly? By isolating certain typographic or photographic elements, her drawings get at questions like this in very elegant ways.

For "All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times," Boas traces, on a single sheet of vellum the silhouette outline of all of the heads that appear on the front page of the Times for a month. These are ghost crowds of the news-makers, the victims, the heroes, the bystanders. Similarly, for her "NYT Little People" series, she does finely wrought gouache paintings of only the non-famous figures that appear on the cover of the Times. The figures float in isolation on a white ground, holding their places in the invisible layout on which the paintings are based. She titles these pieces with a headline from that day. Both of these series raise questions about who is newsworthy and what the structures are that determine their newsworthiness, and in fact the rules are that dictate what makes anything worth reporting for the Times.

"A3" jarringly isolates incidences of the ad for Tiffany's jewelry and the international news photos (of disaster, war, death) beside it that shared that page of the Times for many years. "If that's all there is my friend, then let's keep dancing," you can hear Peggy

Lee sing. This series is the best example of perfect-pitch political work that says what needs to be said sans sledgehammer.

In contrast to those works that foreground the people on the front page of the Times, "Alphabet (NYT 01/01/01)" isolates the letters of the alphabet that appear in the type on the page (one drawing per letter displayed in calendar form) via solvent transfer. The pieces are beautiful, as if letters were randomly shot through screen and stencil at the paper. It's as if the practice of recording these letters might reveal a secret and it does: the layout of the page foregrounded with the image areas left blank, and of course, the codebreaker's cheat, the letter frequencies in the English language: etaoins hrldu.

Boas' more current work, her 2007-2009 series "What Our Homes Can Tell Us" suffers in that its methods are more ad hoc. The artist tiles lyric phraselets from photos she's shot in her home and on her travels of words she finds on signs, packaging, book spines, &c. Because the artist subjectively shuffles the words, these are best seen as micro-poems rather than the mystical readings of a medium as Boas asserts. Higgledy-piggledy framing of the individual words might be deliberate, emphasizing their found nature, but it thwarts any visual rhythm that could create structure. So we're left with whether Boas' phrases resonate as phrases.

I'm glad curator Terri Hopkins honed in on this info-related work of Boas'. An exhilarating show overall.

Messing With the Message: Art as News

BY REGINA HACKETT

When Picasso and Braque flattened form to highlight the fluid intersections of Cubist collage, they liked to feature the commonplace, including newspapers, which are collages already.

Cubism flattened fragments of newsprint, musical instruments, bodies, wine bottles and furniture against the picture plane. Newspapers also flatten fragments: war and rumors of war, "found drowned" and "survived by a miracle" share shallow space with football scores, treatments for tulips, business successes and stupendous failures, the last getting good play if the economy is lagging and disgraced executives might be charged with a crime.

In a recession, any corporate crime will do. In a robust economy, celebratory tales prevail.

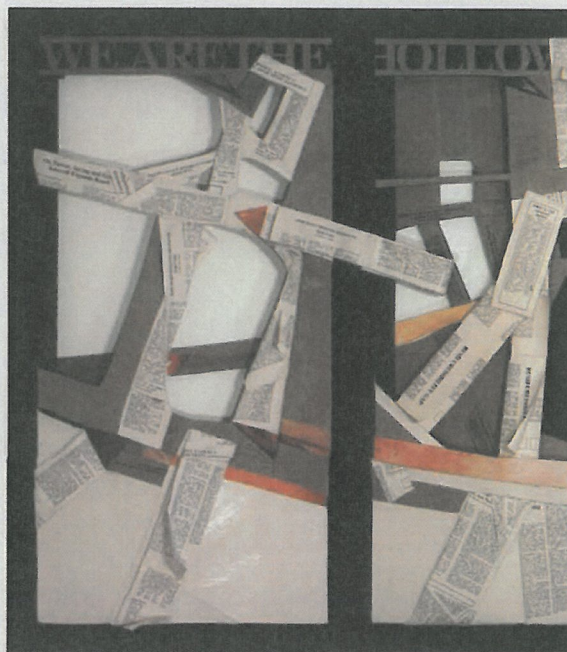
Milan Kundera once referred to history as a thin thread of memory stretched over an ocean of forgetting. Historians tend to agree, acknowledging the inadequacy of their efforts.

Newspapers are rarely as frank. They dip into the day, retrieving hints and flashes of what occurred and organizing the shreds into the illusion of a whole. Sometimes that whole is hard to swallow. For those who wonder whether they're reading a newspaper or dreaming, Paul Krassner proposed a simple test. They should flap their arms. If they don't fly, they're reading a newspaper.

All the artists in *The Daily News*, curated by Jim Edwards at the Salt Lake Art Center, are drawn to newspapers for different reasons than Picasso and Braque.

Early in the 20th century, newspapers were black and white and read all over. They were a given, ordinary as cafes and bookstores and people walking their dogs. Each newsprint fragment stood for a sustainable whole.

A century later, in Xiaozhe Xie's fluid oil paintings, news fragments are on their own, and newspapers are mute. In his



Jann Haworth, *The I*

depictions, texts are visible only along soft seam lines. His papers in stacks may be brimming with inside information, but it's hidden from the audience.

There's nothing cool about Bruce Campbell's pen on polyester drawings. In *A Black and White Day*, he embraces the illusion of volume that Cubists distained. The top of his page slumps into a curve, as if someone were reading on the inside, casting part of the page we see

into smeared shadow and inky dark. The text wavers in tiny, unreadable paragraphs topped by headlines and accompanied by ghostly ads for furniture. A newspaper caving in on itself: the fun's been had.

Pat Boas' *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times* is just that, drawings of those who appeared in the Times, now severed from their context and floating like victims of a nameless tragedy. What she gives them is material, a life after their photographic life, richer, stranger and singular, their faces remembered through the power of her hand.

Newspapers do not invite collaboration. There's a letters-to-the-editor section, but it's a small and highly regulated piece of real estate.

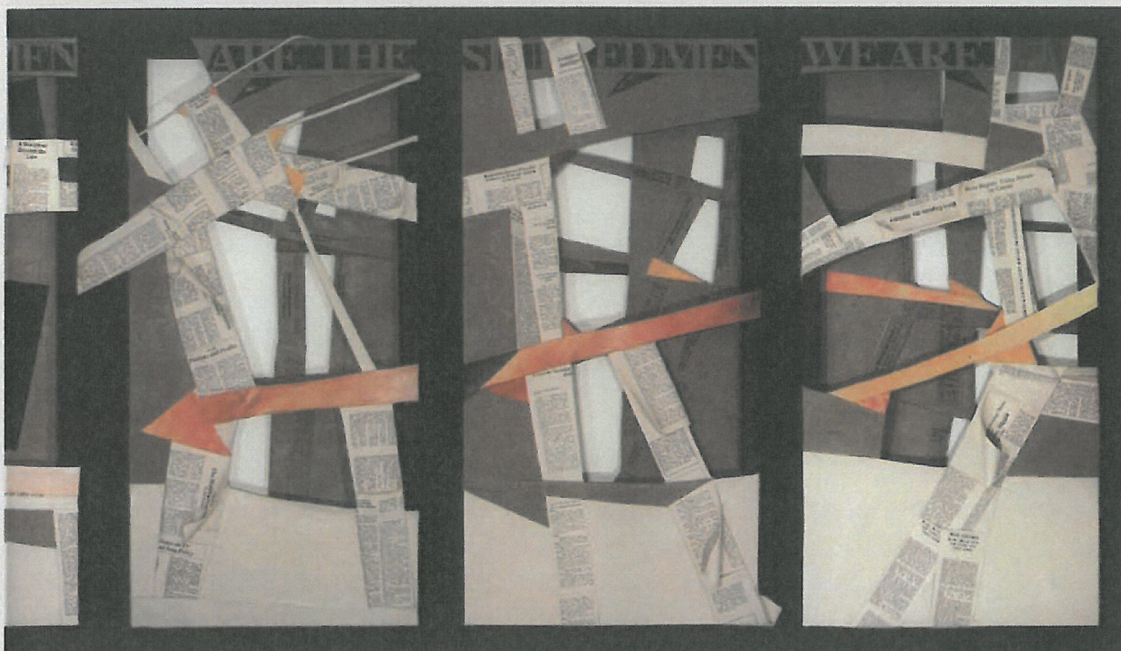
Nancy Chunn treats the *New York Times* as if she owns it. Beginning in 1996, she selected 366 of the Times' front pages as grounds for her experiments. She fogged the photographs and softened the hard edge of the news stream with diary entries. Against the control of a packaged form, she asserts personal freedom.

Newspapers take themselves seriously. As town criers, they have to. Who'll hear them out if they clown with the content?

Derek Boshier does the clowning for them. His acrylic paintings are fresh air in a stale room. When he zeroes in on newspapers, he does so at random.



Al Souza, *Car Ads*, 1995. Cut newspaper, 22 x 27. Courtesy of the Moody Gallery, Houston.



flow Men, 2004. Type and paint on canvas, 5 panels, each 48 x 24 – overall size 48 x 136. Courtesy of the artist.

The card shark asks you to pick a card, any card. Boshier picks the *Los Angeles Times*' front pages he paints without studying them first. It's all flat, funny color to him, text stacked in soft lines with tidy space breaks and room for the unreadable photo.

News hums for Conrad Atkinson, and the hum opens new possibilities for narrative. He likes to transpose cultural givens to set their premises in relief and stir discussion. When he rewrote the *Wall Street Journal*, he did so, he said, as if "artists were very important people and as if politicians were ethical creatures motivated by things like truth and beauty."

Al Souza is the kind of guy William Blake would like, somebody who can not only see eternity in sand but in cut-up puzzle pieces and newspaper collage. His color is dazzling, and he gives glue guns a good name.

Jann Haworth understands the underbelly of mass communications and knows how to tickle it into action. Her *The Hollow Men* made of type might be going out with whimper, but he's whimpering in style.

Paula Scher is a New York designer who treats typography as if it were were a living thing, trees maybe, creating their own urban underbrush. She's interested in tone and volume, how there's never negative space in the news. "The news always expands to fill its given format," she observed. "Stories repeat in

a background hum to fill dead air." After 9/11, she noticed that news "abruptly switched from a background of sex to a background of terror, without missing a beat."

She's interestd in the beat.

Donald Sheridan was Andy Warhol's silkscreener. Those flat smears of color defining the figures they ignore came from him.

In Christopher Finch's drawings, newspaper comic pages are born again. All that is grim and banal disappears. These aren't the comics that are, they are the comics that could be.

Artists care about newspapers, but newspapers rarely care for them in return. Most cover art in what used to be the women's section, which means articles about slimming your thighs run alongside reviews of concerts, galleries, movies and plays.

That placement is part of a formula that is falling apart, as is content coded by a narrative construct known as objectivity. The new slogan is "fair and accurate," fair being admittedly subjective.

Today, a quirky and entirely personal narrative can bump a grave account (famine, ambush, extinctions) off the front page. Sports can trump science in the A-section space race, and art can trump sports if the art involves a scandal, a death or an affair of state.

This change is not primarily driven by a struggle for excellence. It's a struggle for profit,

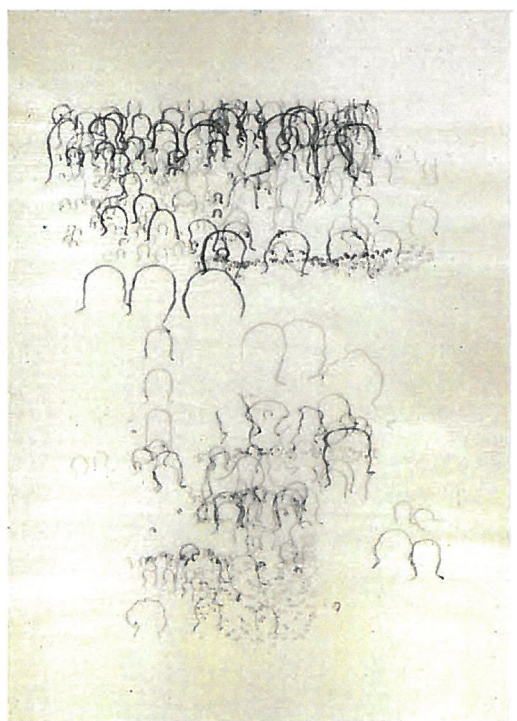
the determination to do what's necessary to increase circulation or staunch its decline.

At issue is what newspaper executives like to call the target audience. If you're not between the ages of 18 and 34, it doesn't include you. The target audience remains a target, because as a group these people haven't found

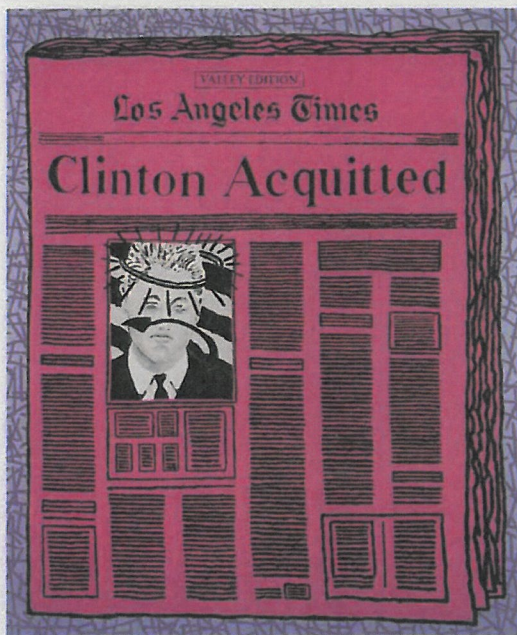
it vital or even useful to read a daily newspaper.

That's the theory, and it's questionable. How many 18 to 20-year-olds from any era would find a daily newspaper indispensable? The intense, nationwide push to attract the young is partly driven by genuine fear of los-

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 —



Pat Boas, *All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New York Times*, 2001. Ink on silk tissue, 12 works, each 24 x 18. Courtesy of the artist.



Derek Boshier, *Los Angeles Times: Clinton Acquitted*, 2001.
Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60. Courtesy of the artist.



Conrad Atkinson, *Wall Street Journal - Michaelangelo*, 1985.
Acrylic on canvas, 68 x 54. Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

SEPTEMBER



Nancy Chunn, *Front Pages (July)*, 1996. Ink and pastel on newspaper, 31 works, each 12 1/2 x 13 1/4.
Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

ing a generation and partly by a need to milk the product for immediate profits.

Publishers who used their papers as bully pulpits were replaced by publishers who at least attempted to serve some sort of public interest. Today, media conglomerates own most of the newspapers in this country.

At one time, each city had two or even three newspapers. Now cities with two are unusual. And newspapers that remain privately held (family owned) can be more ruthless and profit-driven than the chains.

Unlike the bullies of the tabloid era, today's press barons aren't motivated by politics. They don't want to sell you an issue or a candidate, they want to sell you the paper in order to attract advertisers.

If Ralph Nader demonstrated star power for the target audience, newspapers would feature him alongside 50 Cent and Brad Pitt. Whatever is thought to increase immediate profits is a good thing. Anything that puts profits at risk or delays their realization is stifled.

Three decades ago, Katherine Graham at the *Washington Post* risked everything to pursue the monumentally important yet buried story now known as Watergate. Could that happen now?

Russell Baker calls the contemporary moment "journalism's age of melancholy."

We who work at newspapers



Donald Sheridan, *Andy Warhol Dead*, 1987 (two of nine works). Silkscreen on canvas, each 15 x 13.
Courtesy of the artist.

realize we're stranded on the mudflats of an obsolete industry, but that's not what's getting us down.

The crises in confidence is internal, epitomized by the liars and plagiarists scandals. In their wake, the frenzy to unearth wrong-doing created the spectacle of the Miami Herald firing a critic for plagiarizing from himself. The courts have turned against us too. Record numbers of journalists are being jailed for not revealing their sources. Then of course there's Iraq. Remember Iraq? The U.S. is still there, laying waste to the population in order to save it. Press coverage is timid at best, partly because this war zone is uncommonly dangerous for reporters and partly because the press lacks the nerve and the motive to bring the war home. If the motive's no longer public service, it certainly isn't profits, because this war doesn't sell well.

The scramble to please, however, is alienating the audience. There are exceptions, but as a whole, newspapers around the country are carrying a consciousness of their own dead weight.

Unfortunately, arts coverage is part of the extra baggage.

Remember when *Time* and *Newsweek* ran art reviews in every issue? It's been years since art, dance, theater and classical music had space reserved for them in the news weeklies. The

Unlike the bullies of the tabloid era, today's press barons aren't motivated by politics. They don't want to sell you an issue or a candidate, they want to sell you the paper in order to attract advertisers.

big guns in newspaper arts sections are TV and movie critics. Rock critics get some respect, but everybody else is settling for space scraps.

This fall, Columbia University's National Arts Journalism Program produced a five-year study titled "Reporting the Arts II: News Coverage of Arts and

Culture in America." While more people participate in cultural activities now than five years ago, newspapers are cutting back coverage or remaining static.

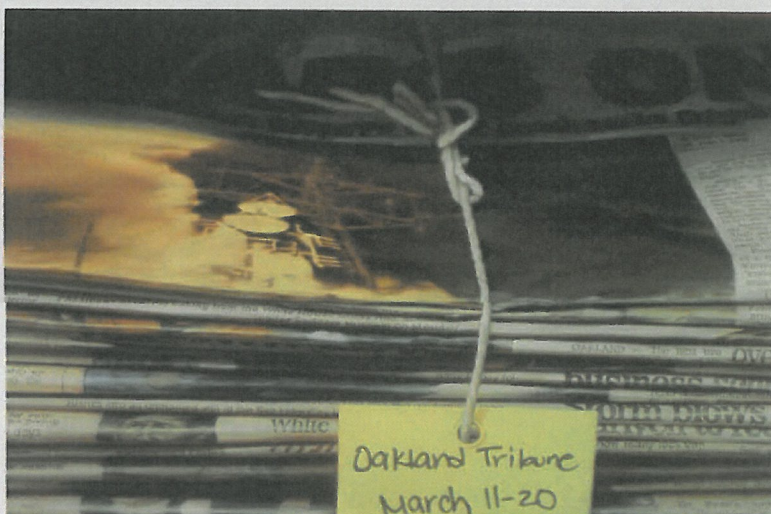
Newspapers are in a slump, but who's to say they're not going to rise again, repackaged, redesigned and possibly reinvigorated. Early in the previous century,

A.J. Liebling famously wrote that "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

As the artists in *The Daily News* prove, ownership can be a creative act of will.

♦ ♦ ♦

Regina Hackett is the art critic for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.



Xiaoze Xie, *March 2003, O.T., 2003*. Oil on canvas, 46 x 71. Private collection.

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"Love Letter (You're My Dream My Darling Superplus Quality Heaven Forever)" by Pat Boas, from the series "What Our Homes Can Tell Us"

All the faces fit to print

BY CHAS BOWIE
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

In a memorable group show five years ago, the Art Gym at Marylhurst University introduced a suite of strange and enchanting works on paper by Portland artist Pat Boas. Mimicking the meticulous detachment of zoological illustrations, Boas had crafted a queasy, speculative vision of goopy octopus tentacles, bristly leopard fur and exotic fish scales that swirled and mutated into impossible helixes of genetic tinkering.

According to the Art Gym's present survey of Boas' work, however, the sensual biomorphic drawings, and the popular series that followed, may have been aberrations themselves. "Record

Boas' viewer-friendly "Against Nature" and "Mutatis Mutandis" works in favor of a more cohesive narrative arc, tracking the artist's decade-spanning examination of language, communication and the printed word.

Of the five projects represented in "Record Record," four cast an analytical gaze on that grand dame of Yankee journalism, The New York Times. Reducing The Times to a series of distinct, graphic components, Boas draws our attention not so much to the information conveyed in the paper, but to how that information is packaged.

Boas maps the placement of front-page portraits and head shots in her series of 12 newspaper-sized drawings. "All the Heads on the Front Pages of the New

York Times, 2001." With each drawing containing an entire month of heads, the silk pages are crowded with hundreds of anonymous blue domes traced directly from the Times.

Boas tweaks this reductive, methodical approach in two related series, "Alphabet" and "NYT Little People." The former consists of 26 Times-sized drawings, each dedicated to a single letter of the alphabet. Using an ink transfer method on silk tissue, the artist records the placement of every appearance of each letter, so that the first word in the series is a dense forest of As, while the last is an almost blank page sparsely dotted with a few lonely Zs.

"NYT Little People" focuses on the everyday nonfamous citizens who wind

up gracing the cover of the venerable newspaper. Boas replicates their front-page appearances with highly detailed gouaches on paper, painted exactly to scale and original placement. With everything else removed from the front page, including the articles, masthead and even the background of the photographs, the human subjects of "NYT Little People" hover in paper-white expanse of disembodied isolation.

In Boas' most recent photographs and video projection, "What Our Homes Can Tell Us," the artist looks to texts outside The Times in an effort to uncover dormant koans from our everyday surroundings. Working with photographs of single words snapped from book covers,

Please turn to Page 32

Continued from Page 31

street signs, food cartons, graffiti and other mundane sources, Boas arranges the text-based photos to spell out artful phrases, such as "A sense of history and an unconscious longing for beauty."

While the series doesn't go far enough to fully transcend and mix-and-match the world of "Magnetic Poetry," it does serve as a reminder that every conversation we have and every novel we read is created along these lines. All the words are already out there, the images suggest. Our task is to figure out how to order them, and to be mindful of how they're delivered.

Pat Boas, "Record Record," The Art Gym at Marylhurst University, 17600 Pacific Highway (Oregon 43), 503-699-6243, www.marylhurst.edu/theartgym. Noon-4 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday; free. Through Oct. 28.

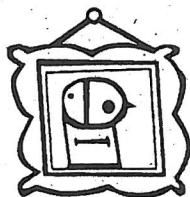
August 3, 2006 Portland Mercury

VISUAL ARTS BOOKS

When Jennifer Gately started work as the Portland Art Museum's Curator of Northwest Art in January, she inherited the task of putting together the next *Oregon Biennial*. That meant sifting through 768 submissions in a mere six weeks—a crash course in an arts community with which she was largely unfamiliar. It also meant contending with lingering criticisms of the previous *Biennial*, which was fraught with controversial omissions. To be sure, those are some formidable challenges, but this year's show, which opened last weekend, is an impressive survey of the state's art and a major victory for the museum, which seldom gets it as right as Gately has.

Like a true survey, the work by the selected 34 artists is sprawling and diverse. Rather than mapping trends or patterns among the region's artists, Gately has curated a show that simply attempts to gather the state's most compelling work. Still, a few thematic motifs inevitably crop up, particularly an identification with Northwest regionalism. This thread was most predictably typified in Michael Brophy's sumi ink drawings of a wading outdoorsman and pilings that peek above a river's waterline. While Brophy's drawings provide more documentary than commentary, Bill Will's sculpture, "Reconstitution," delivers its message more overtly. Reconstructing a felled log from scrap wood, Will contemplates issues of commerce and endangered natural resources. Elsewhere, artists' meditations on region are less obsessed with the great outdoors. In the four photographs from his gorgeous "Beaverton" series, Shawn Records attempts to excavate beauty buried in suburban sprawl, such as the demolished theater in "Regal Cinemas Westgate 5, Cedar Hills Blvd."

For those who have been trolling galleries over the past year or so, much of the art on display will be familiar; including previously exhibited works by Holly Andres, Amanda Wojick, and Ty Ennis. But there are also plenty of new works that help the show feel both fresh and vital. Summer is a notoriously lackluster season for visual arts, and the *Biennial* goes a long way to fill the void—it's by far the best group show of local art we'll see this year. JOHN MOTLEY



VISUAL ART

Here's the standard to which I hold the *Oregon Biennial*: Would I be proud to show this exhibition to out-of-state artists and curators who know nothing about the art being made here? As the *Biennial* is fundamentally a snapshot of what's happening right here, right now, will this snapshot haunt us years down the line when Mom shows it to our first dates? Or will it be the one flattering photo that we trot out at the drop of a hat? In short, will the *Oregon Biennial* make us proud, or will it embarrass us?

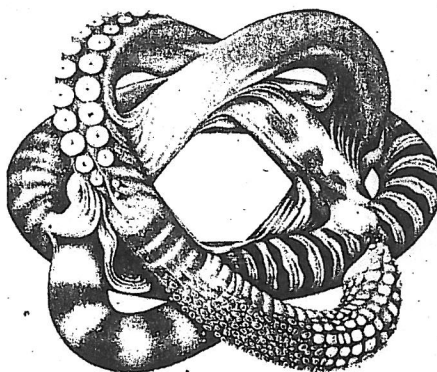
I approached the *Biennial* hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, buoyed by the knowledge that many of the area's best artists were lurking therein. Visitors to the exhibition are greeted by Pat Boas' beautifully uncanny drawings—pseudo-scientific, vaguely sexual interlocking rings of cougar tails and squid tentacles floating in space. Across the sculpture court sits Jesse Hayward's most realized work to date—in oozing tumors of acrylic, gesso, and foam, "Large Pod Project" is a shrine to abject chromatic grotesquery that exudes a Todd Solondz-ian jubilation in its goopy wretchedness. At the mere sight of these artists' works, trepidation vanished from my mind.

Things only got better in the main gallery, but two works

in particular were utter knockouts. The artist Houston, who bills himself as a "brand" or "logo" as much as an artist (barf, double barf) came out of nowhere with the preposterously titled "Rendition/Illuminati Multivariate." In part, a paneled office ceiling has been torn from the rafters by the weight of a few dozen kitschy "dream catchers." Across the gallery, Storm Tharp's ink drawing "Had Had" reminds us why Tharp is quite possibly the most exciting artist working in Portland today. Like the offspring of a Tim Burton understudy and a Japanese ukiyo-e brush master, the potted man in "Had Had" is both cartoony and sensual, beautiful and disfigured, patterned and pathological.

If I had space, I'd go on about my other favorites from the show: Marcy Adzich, Michael Brophy, Ty Ennis,

Kristan Kennedy, Brittany Powell, and David Rosenak—but there's no room. There's just enough space to make the sweeping but heartfelt pronouncement: The 2006 *Oregon Biennial* is the strongest exhibition of local art that I have seen in the four-plus years that I've lived here. CHAS BOWIE



PAT BOAS

Two Views on the 2006 Oregon Biennial

Portland Art Museum, 1219 SW Park, through Oct 8, \$6-10

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'2006 Oregon Biennial' at the Portland Art Museum

What do we expect of our biennials? Are they bellwethers of the moment?

Are they precise distillations of the now that is quickly passing us by? Or are they institutional back slaps that confirm the collector status quo? Most biennials are all of the above. But what do we expect of a regional biennial—one that doesn't travel beyond the borders of the province? In the case of the 2006 Oregon Biennial at the Portland Art Museum, it is an institutional reflection and a local validation. New curator Jennifer Gately has given the region a true distillation of the best of current Oregon art. Having no

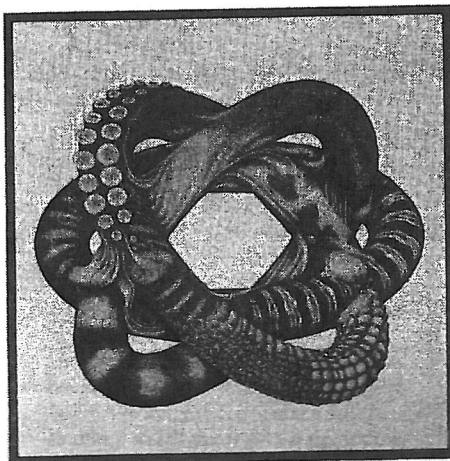
prior knowledge or cozy relationships with the art scene in Oregon, Gately chose thirty-four artists out of 784 applicants. The result is a biennial that accurately taps into the zeitgeist of the present scene in the region. So the question is: What does art in Oregon look like and is it distinct from national trends?

Based on Gately's choices, a few regional preoccupations come to light. Landscape looms large in the minds of artists here. The spirits of JB Jackson and Robert Smithson haunt this exhibition. Oregon is the end of the western trail and Portland is a western town. Its current veneer notwithstanding, Portland has been a slightly depressed working-class town for most of its history. The DIY impulse that permeates most of the current scene comes out of this scrappy past. There is also a heavy dose of nostalgia—nostalgia for a utopian past or future, generally in the guise of seventies fashion and color. And, finally, a crafty, pop abstraction permeates other works.

In one room, Mark Hooper's large-scale digital prints from his *Lewis and Clark* series are in conversation with Michael Brophy's wonderful ink drawings and Bill Will's *Reconstitution*—a huge fallen tree made of scrap lumber and millwork. The three pieces nicely illustrate much of the preoccupations of the region. A mania for fixing up old homes, a hyper awareness of the environmental history of the region and a sense of the human geography as played out by western explorers and settlers. Brophy has long mined the timber imagery of Oregon. His offerings for the Biennial—large-scale ink drawings—show a new maturity in his picture making. They are illustrative to be sure, but they also have a steady confidence to them. One image of a man in waders and backpack standing in a body of water, his back to us recalls Caspar David Friedrich's lone romantic traveler. However, other images such as *Superfund* lets the viewer in on the secret that the water is contaminated. Likewise, Hooper's photos of two Lewis

and Clark-like figures seem more befuddled by their discoveries than heroes on the verge of a continent. Some of this concern for landscape and nostalgia shows up throughout other works as well. Vanessa Renwick's incredibly moving short film, *Portrait # 2, Trojan* portrays the destruction of the Trojan nuclear reactor. With images that recall *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Renwick's film, like Brophy's project, exposes the contradiction at the heart of the Oregon landscape. A utopian sensibility grows out of the same ground as nuclear reactors, aluminum smelters and paper mills. *Portrait #2* lulls the viewer with serene scenes of saturated colors along the river that dissolve into fiery sunsets and finally the slow-motion demolition of the reactor.

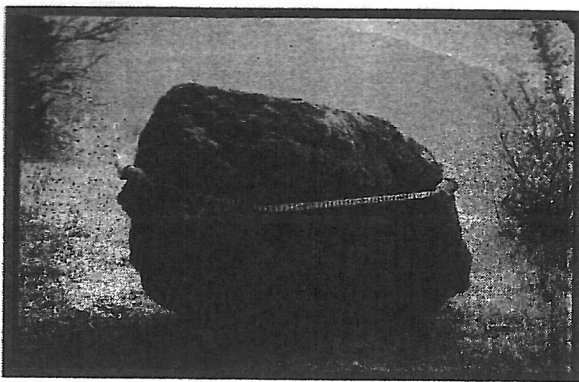
Pat Boas, *Mutatis Mutandis #9*, 2005, acrylic, acrylic ink on paper, 22" x 20", at the Portland Art Museum.
(Photo: Bill Bachuber.)



The stilled poetry of the vernacular landscape shows up in Shawn Records's photos of Beaverton, Oregon, a suburb of Portland. The photos showcase the banal and overlooked. In a similar vein, David Rosenak's monochromatic paintings of backyards hint at an almost mystic sense of the everyday. Matthew Picton uses the

cartographer's language with his cutout maps of alleyways in Medford, Oregon. The pieces hover between materiality and immateriality. Picton's work underscores the evocative nature of map lines. Emily Ginsburg's *Social Studies* also uses cartographic language to distill perceptions of social interaction. Ty Ennis's drawings elicit a soured nostalgia for the family backyard. The seventies back-to-the-land movement seems buried in his images, particularly *Happy Family Tree*, a watercolor of a bearded father surrounded by his family. There is a sense of the survivalist in the picture. Like Raymond Pettibon or Ray Johnson, Ennis's pictures are about the disquiet in the space between words and images. Federico Nessi's *Hero Series* shows attractive young people in various heroic poses that undermine the idea of heroics. Again, the green backyard or wood lot is the setting. Nessi's work mines the territory between Charles Burns in *Black Hole* and Justine Kurland's hippy utopians.

A kind of DIY pop abstraction is well represented by several works. Jesse Hayward's engaging sculpture/paintings are cloyingly rich—like too much frosting or sugar. But it is just that piled on quality that makes the pieces so satisfying. Marcy Adzich's objects embrace scale both as a single object and a model for a landscape. Again, the West as an idea is enmeshed in Adzich's objects. K. C. Madsen's constructions of encaustic and industrial paper recall John Chamberlain or Franz West. Chandra Bocci's *Gummi Big Bang II* is a thrilling installation of Gummi Bears caught in explosion. Bocci transforms the sickly sweet candy into an olfactory and visual experience. A similar visual sweetness is experienced in Holly Andres's *Consumables I and II*. Arranged in rows are pink consumer items associated with femininity and the constructed self. In painting, which the region is particularly strong in, Kristan Kennedy's *Balloon #3* forages between cartoons and abstract expressionism. The balloon is expelling fluids. The picture simultaneously utilizes the grotesque and the humorous. Storm Tharp also hovers between abstraction and representation, particu-



Mark Hooper, *Lewis & Clark, Untitled #1*, 2005, digital C-print, 50" x 60", at the Portland Art Museum.

ly in *Had Had*, an ink-on-paper drawing of a striped pod and head emerging from a vase. Anna Fidler's mystical cutout paper images delve into a Scandinavian surrealism. They look like a dream Odin might have.

Finally there are a few notable works that don't fit into a category. David Eckard's work has always occupied the interstitial zone between well-used tool, sculptural object and implied use. *Podium* is a prime example of his recent foray into public performance. The foldable podium is both artifact and sculpture—a stilled tool with civic potential. Benjamin Buswell's *that time i couldn't come back* is a wax and foam sculpture of two wheel-less cars on top of the other that suggests a kind of backroad mythology à la James Dean. Pat Boas's series of mutated forms combine scientific illustration with poetic biological speculation.

As with any large group show, it is difficult to find something more unifying than a mere sampler. Gately has succeeded by grouping works that have a shared sensibility. This is one of the best *Oregon Biennials* in years. But returning to my earlier question, if this is in fact a portrait of the current moment in Oregon art, is it distinctive from other national trends? I would say overall, no. There are corollaries with other contemporary artists. However, diverse as many of these artists are, there is still a distinctive flavor. Provincialism is generally seen as a shortcoming. The best work emerges from a worldly sense of the ground beneath.

—Daniel Duford

2006 Oregon Biennial closes October 8 at the Portland Art Museum, 1219 SW Park Ave., Portland. Other artists in the exhibition include Brad Adkins, Grace Carter, Andrew Ellmaker & Mark Brandau, Heidi Preuss Grew, Houston, Jo Jackson, Zack Kircher, Lucinda Parker, Brittany Powell, Mariana Tres, Laura Vandenberg and Amanda Wojick.

Daniel Duford is a freelance writer based in

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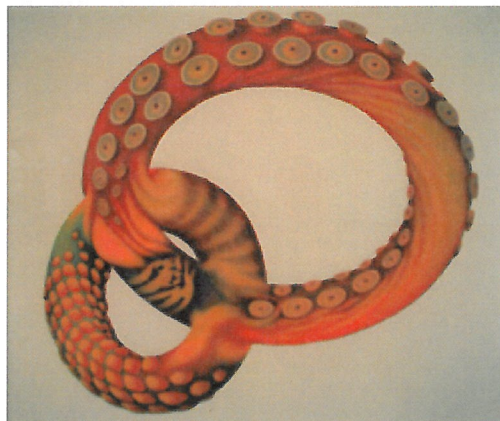
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Mutatis Mutandis: New Work by Pat Boas

The name of Pat Boas's new show, Mutatis Mutandis is a repetition of a single latin word in two different tenses. The Latin muto means change or transformation. The suffix atis identifies who witnesses the change, meaning essentially "you all see, or you all are seeing." The single word Mutatis has all the grammatical structure of an entire English sentence: You are all witnessing change.



Mutandis is another permutation of the root word muto, possibly referring to a singular subject as the witness of change. Unlike mutatis, I could find no legitimate Latin suffix that changes muto to mutandis. This suggests the word mutandis is simply an invented complement, a lyrical reiteration. The phrase Mutatis Mutandis functions as a spell or charm, its meaning welded to the musicality of its phrasing.

Substituting a spell for a show title is appropriate to Boas's new work. The acrylic and ink paintings on paper explore themes of alchemical recombination. Boas scrutinizes animal physiology with the discerning eye of a field biologist and then mutates and combines observed details into recombinant geometric objects. Not recombinant animals, objects.

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The objects have animal aspects that do not give them life. They appear animated, alive, and even sentient, but their inherent animal life force is redirected into semiotic resonance. The objects are not simply visual abstractions; they are phonemes. Perhaps they are the letters of the language of spells. They are sigils, components of a language of great semiotic power; a language that reveals the secrets of disrupting the coherence of biological life. They appear to convey a meaning so significant, that it causes the letters themselves to burst into sudden, disorganized, animal life and crawl over the page, serifs gone to tentacles. And the phonemes are not flat, they are round and exist in a shallow space on the blank backgrounds.



Alchemy itself, while laying the foundations of an organized study of chemistry and especially processes of refining minerals in the Middle Ages, was primarily a complex system of semiotic mysticism. Central to the discipline was the principle of sympathetic magic, a rejection of coincidental similarity. Sympathetic magic meant that all of nature was encoded with semiotic significance. If a certain tree's branches looked like the horns of an elk, the leaves of that tree in a tincture would imbue the essential properties of the animal to anyone who drank it. If an organ in the body also looked like an elk's horns, that organ could be restored to health by drinking the tincture. To the alchemist, all of reality was encoded as a language, which by degrees, through constant study, could be translated. Every object, every animal, every plant was a hieroglyph. Sympathetic magic created



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meaning by recombining and distilling the disparate forms of the natural world. Art theorist Jeanette Winterson's novel, *Sexing the Cherry*, explores alchemy as a process of semiotic encoding.

Some of the pieces are clearly calligraphic letter forms, while others seem to have devolved into writhing tentacular labyrinths. The two most dimensional pieces are composed of interlocking rings and seem more like dynamic, spatially imagined diagrams than letter forms. One piece in particular, composed of three interlocking rings symmetrically and radially arranged immediately brings to mind the simplified diagrammatic model of the atom. Diagrammatic pieces bring another level of complexity to the work as a whole. While the other pieces seem to represent incomprehensible phonemes, these two communicate meaning as pictographs. The difference between these two pieces and the rest of the show, while pronounced, is not schismatic. This work has all been culled from the same alchemical spell book, much of the text, some of the diagrams. One wonders what we're being instructed in.

The level of craft and scrutiny in this work are nothing short of astounding. Boas paints in acrylic ink with the precision of a scientific illustrator or a field biologist. Think of combining the sensibilities of John James Audubon and Nicholas Flammel. This work depends almost entirely on the illusion of texture and tactile response in the viewer; the rigidity of an alligator scale, the physical strangeness of an octopus tentacle emerging from striped ocelot fur. These textures are rich and detailed and luminous, Boas differentiates every hair from every other hair, allowing the viewer's eye to follow the detailed transitions from one animal type to another while tracing the arabesques of the larger forms.

It would be interesting to see this work generate a book of some kind. With more pieces it could grow into an alphabet, each object could be further developed as a component of a larger, magical grammar structure.

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visual arts

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You won't be finding kilts in England any too soon

In a contest sponsored by the Sky Television Artsworld channel to select England's best sculpture, work by Scottish artists were ruled out because they aren't considered good enough.



► Salute to the ready-made **ART FORM:** "I tend to like things that already exist" — artist Damien Hirst, maker of preserved sharks and such

A quarter-century of quality

By **VICTORIA BLAKE**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Every few months, it seems, one of Portland's many art institutions mounts a big-tent show. From the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art to Disjecta to the late Modern Zoo, the shows come like clockwork to celebrate an anniversary, to beat the money trees or to raise the battle cry for the next big thing. More art circus than art show, not always do the big-tent events impress, and rarely do they leave a mark that lasts beyond the sell-by date of the opening's hors d'oeuvres.

Not so with Marylhurst University's Art Gym's 25th anniversary show, which succeeds partly because it limits itself in scope. The show, called "drawing(s): 40+ artists/200 works," displays nearly 200 pieces by 40 artists, some of them newcomers to The Art Gym walls but most included in previous shows. All of the pieces are drawings of one sort or another, whether made by pencil, ink or hair on paper, postcards or Polaroids.

The limitation gives the show focus, but also depth. A work by Ty Ennis hangs next to one by Tad Savinar. Linda Hutchins shares space with Michael Brophy. One artist might be more accomplished with line, another more accomplished with color and shape.

The show crackles with the fusion and fission energy of the artistic chance encounter. Abstract pieces set off the figurative line, and realism casts a knowing nod to surrealism, all within the same gallery space.

Within such a rich context, highlights are chosen less by quality and more by taste. Four remarkable pieces by Pat Boas show a tail-like coil winding and twisting in on itself, a complicated, inscrutable Gordian knot that, despite the abstraction, seem to have a real-world weight. The



TORSTEN KJELLSTRAND/THE OREGONIAN

Artists Paul Sutinen (from left), Deborah Horrell, George Johanson and Kristan Kennedy participated in a public talk with Art Gym director Terri Hopkins (far right) in honor of the Gym's 25th anniversary show.

review

drawing(s):
40+ artists/200 works

Where: The Art Gym,
Marylhurst University, 17600
Pacific Highway

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesday-
Sunday

Closes: Dec. 11

twists of the knot are decorated in animal prints, from tabby cat to tropical bird, and the patterns blend into each other with an M.C. Escher fluidity. The pieces are a celebration of form for form's sake and, compared to other works hanging nearby — Henk Pander's eerily realistic ink drawings of airplane parts in a

mechanical graveyard, for instance — they seem playful and irreverent but not coy.

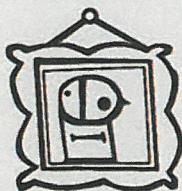
The coyness and humor is left to Stephen O'Donnell's meticulous representation of 19th-century fashion. His male models — hairy, flat chested, stiff legged — are placed in women's clothing, poured into them like soup into a plastic bag. He tides the pieces for effect. "1800 — Toilette necessitant des tetons peints (Attire necessitating rouged boobies)," for instance, showcases a model's apelike chest and small, man-sized nipples with a dress so low cut that most movie stars would be embarrassed to wear it. The figure acts surprised, a modern time-traveler transported into a compromising closet.

Perhaps the most telling piece in the show is the first the viewer

sees on walking into the gallery. Savinar's "All I Could Remember in Ten Minutes About 28 Years of the Portland Art Community" is a mental mind map using columns of names — of prominent galleries, art dealers, artists and art critics — connected with colored-pencil lines. The piece provides a good snapshot of the Portland art scene as experienced by Savinar in 2001, a Who's Who and what's what of the interconnected art world.

Like The Art Gym itself, the anniversary show makes no claims to be other than what it is. It will continue to do what it has become accomplished at doing: showing solid work from Northwest artists in a gallery space that does the work justice.

Twenty-five years of that is a pretty good start.



VISUAL ART

To my thinking, it was Mariko Mori's *Wave UFO* that signaled the demise of Productionism. Visitors boarded Mori's bazillion-dollar, space-age, submarine-sized pod, attached a set of electrodes to their noggins, and then watched their brainwaves projected on a screen above their head. All jokes about "checking your brain" aside, pieces like *Wave UFO* make me long for artists who work their visions out with a piece of paper and a pencil.

Apparently, I'm not the only one jonesing for a resurgence of directness, humanity, and humility in art, as drawing has been making a comeback as a vital medium. *Drawn Fictions* at the Art Gym showcases eight West Coast artists who draw in narrative or quasi-illustrative veins. Unfortunately, much of the work is forgettable despite a few standouts.

Best stuff first: Pat Boas' riveting, humorous, and masterfully drafted hybrid forms are pure wonder and joy to look at. Drawn in acrylic and ink, Boas creates tubular shapes



Drawn Fictions

at the Art Gym, Marylhurst University,
17600 Pacific Hwy., through February 13

that cross into themselves, make figure eights, and threaten to knot up. The shapes are reminiscent of that old screen saver where pipes fill your computer screen in an infinite disarray, but Boas' forms take the appearance of furry cattails that segue from tabby to Persian to tiger. David Eckard's similarly abstract forms based on animal organs, bones, vegetation, and bondage gear are always great to see, but related drawings were shown at the Art Gym just one year ago. Whimsy abounds in the sculptural drawings of Dan Webb, who creases and buckles his paper to create folds and seams that drawn-characters interact with. They peer over cliffs and put their ears to folded ridges with delightful simplicity.

ARTSRODEO

February 5, 2004 **Portland Mercury**

From there, the show goes downhill quickly. Joe Biel's line drawings of solitary figures in existential dramatics have never moved me and his lack of line variation makes my eyes cross. Tom Prochaska's drawings are composed of hundreds of quick, scratchy lines that look like the marks made when I shuffle papers with an uncapped pen in hand. Joseph Park's brushy scenes on Mylar are bland, and Jay Stuckey's political pieces in which mummies wage war look straight out of a school newspaper.

Despite good timing, a good idea, and several good artists, this show at the Art Gym is one of their most disappointing in recent memory. CHAS BOWIE

west coast

PORTLAND

In today's culture of fast, faster, instantaneous everything, who has time to stop and smell the roses? Five Portland artists, all young women intent on art careers, talked among themselves about the frenetic pace of their lives and came up with the idea of creating artworks that explore time, not in terms of speed, but from a relative perspective. Pat Boas, Emily Ginsberg, Tracy Harrison, Elizabeth Mead, and M.K. Watt all work within the framework of conceptualism, preferring abstraction and a minimalist aesthetic. Consequently, their collaborative exhibition proved more thought provoking than visually delectable. In fact, the show's title, **SLOWNESS** (*Art Gym, Marylhurst University, February 26–March 28, 2002*), applied to the visitors' pace of viewing as well as to the representations of passing time. There were rewards for time spent, but they varied according to the complexity of each presentation. The show lacked a thematic coherence so one had the feeling of visiting five separate shows. Fortunately, each artist had ample space in the Art Gym gallery for viewing her project and considering it apart from the others.

M.K. Watt's drawings had a mesmerizing effect displayed in a small, closed off and dimly lit space, barely larger than a closet. These representations of sleep and sleeplessness, created from tiny marks the size of dust specks, seemed to emerge and float on fields of rich, deep colors. The artist intended them as metaphors for the myriad nighttime thoughts and feelings occupying the mind during periods of sleeplessness. Without checking titles, such as *Counting Sheep*, or reading the artist's statement, however, one might easily associate the soft and misty images with cascading or spinning nebulae.

Connections with the cosmos set in motion an intriguing conundrum. Like dust on household furniture, luminous nebulae consist of specks of dust. Are they the same? Is this simultaneous existence a quantum mechanics phenomenon? In any case, from the cosmos or the bedroom Watt's images move the idea of slow time into timelessness.

Tracy Harrison, a graphic designer by day, works in color photography. For "Slowness," she photographed decaying plants, evaporating salt crystals, tree rings, and ice cores, all representing processes that occur over time, but at widely varying rates. The forms, which these processes take at a moment in time, are the subject of her large Cibachrome prints. The photographs' vivid colors and close perspectives create abstract images difficult to relate to their sources. Near the photographs a suspended sculpture consisting of two long slender cylinders, sectioned in white tonal gradations, more closely represented ice cores.

A career in set design accounts for the theatrical quality of Elizabeth Mead's installations. What appeared to be stones ranging in size from pebbles to small boulders were actually forms produced from plaster, delicately veined and colored to suggest marble. These stones covered the floor with the larger ones available for sitting. Mead explores how we know familiar objects, including their duration in memory. The aim of the "stones" and their configuration, rather difficult for visitors to deduce, was to encourage close observation of differences in similar objects.

Similar to her earlier work, Pat Boas' project derived meaning and materiality from printed text. Each day in 2001 she collected the first page of the *New York Times*, then extracted letters, words, photos, and spaces, which she re-traced onto vellum and reworked with graphite in four series of drawings. Her intention was to examine how we tell our stories by representing souvenirs of events that no one would remember. With September 11th, fate intervened, making the year unforgettable and the austere drawings, stark reminders of the tragedy. Still, the drawings for that day and the days that followed were abstracted in the same way as all others. Compositions were structured in some by scattering letters in various sizes and fonts over the surface. Others, of photographic illustrations, became blackened squares or rectangles bearing a close resemblance to the Malevich black paintings.

Boas used advertising in the *Times*, creating several large drawings from illustrations of jewelry, jumbling and entangling them in a pile, emphasizing their ostentation. Completely realistic, they are stylistic opposites of the text based drawings. The *Times'* representations of our culture's excesses interspersed with reportage of the world's woes suggests an even more dramatic opposition.

Emily Ginsberg, who initiated the collaboration, produced a video and sound installation, titled *Blink*, featuring close-up images of small gestures that usually are involuntary, like crossing legs, squinting, twitching, etc. Similarly the sound loop consisted of the meaningless interjections that break up our speech—"like," "y'know," "uh," "well," "and-uh." On a wall at right angles to the video, another projector flashed footage of white text on a black field with phrases that are used in giving a lost driver—or walker—directions.

Ginsberg's installation, although it was meant to "embrace the slow reverie of being present with the challenge involved in trying to see the whole picture," amusingly revealed how we unconsciously create body language and impressions of ourselves. In an otherwise serious exhibition it offered viewers the opportunity to relax in a darkened space and spend some "slow" time with an easily accessible work.

Lois Allan
Beaverton, Oregon

REVIEW

Slowness

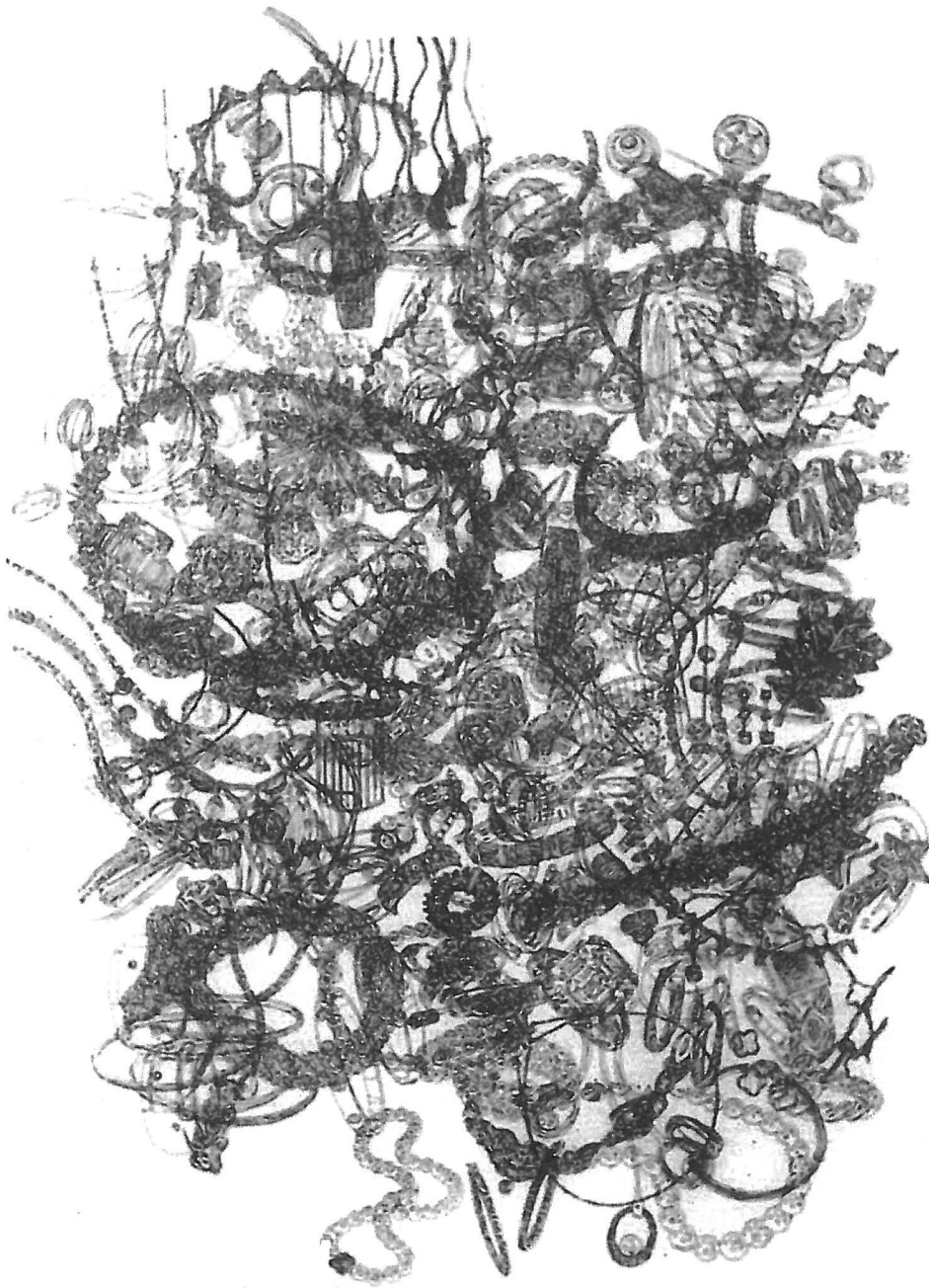
What: Display of works by Pat Boas, Emily Ginsburg, Tracy Harrison, Elizabeth Mead and M.K. Watt

Where: Art Gym at Marylhurst University, Oregon 43, one mile south of Lake Oswego

Hours: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Sundays

Closes: March 28

Admission: Free



Re-tracing images, including advertisements, from the pages of *The New York Times*: "Razzle Dazzle," by Pat Boas

In the blink of an eye

Five artists look behind the accelerating pace of life to capture the essence of ephemerality

By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

It's unclear why the artists in the Art Gym's latest show, "Slowness," have been gathered under one roof. The show, which opened Sunday afternoon and features the work of five highly talented artists — Pat Boas, Emily Ginsburg, Tracy Harrison, Elizabeth Mead and M.K.

Watt — is full of delicate and beautifully crafted work. These attributes are no less true even when the thoughtful exhibit meanders, becoming a series of exquisite sentiments without bringing the works, collectively or individually, to one pointed or substantial conclusion.

Like a lot of conceptually oriented exhibits, "Slowness" resulted

from discussions among the artists involved, each of whom was interested in addressing, in Ginsburg's words, "the overwhelming speed of contemporary experience." What they came up with was this utterly abstract, loosely conceived show, which Ginsburg describes as a "meditation on the need to put a brake on the constant acceleration

of everyday life, to reduce the speed of events so they can be opened up for examination."

One could say the essence of the show is to capture ephemerality itself — think of the space between sentences, the hesitation between words. Or the air in packaged goods. The show's conceit is so ele-

Please see "SLOWNESS," Page 59

'Slowness': Works require prolonged viewing to make their full effect

Continued from Page 57

vated but also so vague and transparent as Jell-O that it could mean everything and nothing at once.

That said, there's not another venue in town that would gather such a caliber of local talent and put them in a museum-style setting. Boas is a respected editor as well as a teacher at Portland State University; Mead is a sculptor who also teaches at PSU; Harrison was picked for the 2001 Oregon Biennial and works for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Watt is one of the best talents in the local art world and teaches at Portland Community College; and Ginsburg is chairwoman of the Intermedia Department at the Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Given the artists involved, then, the work demands of the viewer an investment beyond the moment — there's no such thing as quickly looking and leaving here.

Harrison's stark, Cibachrome close-ups of decaying plants, moss, fungi and evaporating salt crystals, for example, require prolonged viewing to gather their fullest effect. Indeed, you're likely to need a biology textbook to distinguish some of the unsavory elements in this chronicle of decay and disintegration. Photographed with the clarity of post-mortem documents — but with the heightened colors and fragmented perspective of someone who is surely an artist — the photographs' larger point becomes clear: The physical world moves at a pace we don't often notice — or at a pace that is clearly relative to our own sense of time. Yet, for all their delectation, are Harrison's photographs anything more than a beautifully executed exercise in capturing minutiae?

Perhaps that conceptual vagueness is never clearer in this exhibition than in Mead's sculptural installation. Arranging small to modestly sized plaster works along the floor like fallen petals, Mead has presented an environment where the viewer engages the objects by sitting next to them as a way of questioning how we can best "know" the concrete world. Do we know things only when they are gone and just our memories of them remain? Accompanied by graphite drawings that work as visual associations of particular words and states of mind — "Brief," "Solid" and "Another Quirk?" compose one series, for example — Mead's installation is yet another example of what some see as a trademark Northwest attention to craft but also a conceptual vagueness akin to — and as compelling as — the patter of falling rain.

Boas' four series of drawings based on one year's worth of front pages from *The New York Times* are perhaps a deeper matter. Although varying in specific technique for each series, Boas has essentially re-traced some of the newspapers' images onto another paper source — in one series blackening them out afterwards — to produce artworks that document the progress of history captured in print. Varying from barely visible specks and dots to a dizzying display of heads and figures to blackened shapes reminiscent of Kasmir Malevich's radical supremacist-style drawings, Boas' ghostly, haunting drawings accrue another level of gravity in the post-Sent. 11 era.

Long known for her pristine aesthetics — and at times reticently stated approach — Watt uses the

tiny speck of dust as the visual metaphor in this show. Applying dot-sized specks of ink and alabaster dust onto small squares of paper, Watt has created drawings that are so atmospheric they threaten to disappear from view. In some cases echoing the repetitive daubs of Northwest mystic Mark Tobey and in others the tense, roiling skies of a J.M.W. Turner landscape, Watt has created metaphors for the very thoughts that encumber us in our daily lives. And like most of the things we encounter in our daily lives, I'm not sure, ultimately, how much we are deepened by them. But these drawings are surely some of the prettiest things I've seen this year.

Like an intimate conversation caught in the street, Ginsburg's video and sound installation, "Blink," gives ennui a new poster-child of the moment. In a darkened room, the artist has programmed a video that shows, in slow motion, offhand physical gestures — hands touching, an ear-scratching, lip-biting — set against their audio equivalent — idle conversation, yawns, grunts, hesitations between sentences, non sequiturs. Together, audio and visual elements are meant to heighten the mundane — while, in Ginsburg's words, challenging us to see "the whole picture." Indeed, there's something thoughtful going on here, and if you go to that darkened room often enough and long enough, you'll find that whole picture. Blink, though, and you just might miss it.



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