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Jay Sanders



Jay Sanders is a New York-based curator and writer. This past April, he presented, in collaboration with Keith Connolly, NUMINA *lente*, a three-day music and performance festival at New York's Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center. He is currently co-organizing the 2012 Whitney Biennial. PHOTO: PAULA COURT



1

"UPSIDE DOWN: ARCTIC REALITIES"

(Menil Collection, Houston; curated by Edmund Carpenter) Organized by the late anthropologist, filmmaker, and media theorist Edmund Carpenter, this exhibition of ancient art and objects from the Arctic foregrounded the artifacts' original sensory and environmental contexts. With mostly very small amulets, funerary offerings, and hunting tools—often carved from walrus ivory and seeming to defy frontality or vertical orientation—Arctic cultures expressed the complexity of utilitarian and spiritual life in an unstable landscape that can fundamentally lose its horizon, merge ground with air, and fully disappear. Artist Doug Wheeler's surprisingly powerful exhibition design reconfigured the Menil's wide-open 6,400 square-foot gallery space into a vast, edgeless atmosphere, lit with hazy neon and enveloping the diminutive clusters of artifact-filled Plexiglas vitrines. This was shockingly good.

2

"WILLIAM LEAVITT: THEATER OBJECTS"

(Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; curated by Ann Goldstein and Bennett Simpson) Leavitt's work broadcasts at a special frequency, warmly amplifying the theatrics and science fiction of everyday life. An indispensable career-spanning survey of a previously impossible-to-see practice.

3

LUTZ BACHER (Cabinet Gallery, London)

My favorite gallery show of the year: Two perfectly decorated rooms that were somehow totally creepy, heartbreaking, and astonishing all at once. One was earthy and fashionable, with a column covered in red-

wood bark, a female mannequin in sniper camouflage, and walls lined with photos of a winding rural road shot through a car windshield. The second room, featuring a field of baseballs and a meditating painting, was outer space meets Jo Baer. Any overt formal ties to the readymade, the photo sequence, or the scatter work—the means of disruption here—were left behind for the stratosphere and the depths of the soul.

4

FRED LONIDIER (Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) Long associated with Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler, Lonidier received an extremely timely gallery survey of his forty-year project, an unwavering interrogation of labor practices, border issues, and the possibilities for photography and text to play a role in real social struggles. His direct engagement with his photographic subjects and his presentations of his works at labor organizations should signal to younger practitioners the need to further disturb the perceived wall between symbolic political conceptualism and activism. Never lacking a wry sense of humor, Lonidier made works in the 1970s from consumer-personalized products (clocks, T-shirts, or license-plate frames) that were like culture jamming *avant la lettre*—late-twentieth-century grotesques with odd, self-reflexive content that resonated with their own ugly tones.

1. Left: Bear Fetus amulet from Punuk or Thule culture, western Alaska, ca. 500, walrus ivory, 2 1/8 x 1 1/8 x 3/8". From "Upside Down: Arctic Realities."

2. Below: William Leavitt, *Manta Ray*, 1981, mixed-media installation with oil on canvas, 84 x 96".



3. Above: View of "Lutz Bacher," 2011, Cabinet Gallery, London. Foreground; *Redwood*, 2010–11. Background: *The Road*, 2009.

4. Below: Fred Lonidier, *GAF Snapshirts* (detail), 1976, thirty-two printed T-shirts, dimensions variable.



5. David Hammons, *Untitled*, 2010, mixed media, 92 x 72".





6. Above: View of the Daled Collection, 2011, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Left: Niele Toroni, *Imprints of a No. 50 Brush Repeated at Regular Intervals of 30cm*, 1968. Right: James Lee Byars, *Dress for Five Persons*, 1969. Background: Marcel Broodthaers, *Literary Paintings*, 1972. Photo: Jason Mandella.

8. Right: Josephine Pryde, *It's Not My Body, II*, 2011, color photograph, 35 1/2 x 23 3/4". From the series "It's Not My Body," 2011.



desert sky, simultaneously putting science fiction, personal agency, abstraction, portraiture, psychedelia, property relations, and the politics of the image and biology into play. A blunt counterpoint hung nearby: staged photos of teenage girls pretending to have just discovered they were pregnant.

9

YOHJI YAMAMOTO (Victoria and Albert Museum, London; curated by Ligaya Salazar) Entering this show was like wandering into a big studio party—one open space and no prescribed course of navigation. Yamamoto's signature silhouettes, blacks, incredible sensitivity to materials, intellectualism, and mastery of cultural codes were all here, and were plenty to keep you bouncing through the room—no other gimmicks were needed.



9. View of "Yohji Yamamoto," 2011, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

10

PETER FALK (1927–2011) He deserves special mention here for his life of exemplary work. □

5

DAVID HAMMONS (L&M Arts, New York) In a year when countless takes on painting began to feel like little more than a collective egg-drop contest, Hammons's two town-house floors of large painting-tarp concoctions left many momentarily stunned. With no press release and thus no rhetoric, a roaring silence ensued. What were these paintings up to? The rough-hewn appearance of the abstract canvases and their cat-/rat-gnawed plastic coverings gave way, on close examination, to revelations about the ways in which each piece uniquely resolved its hybrid nature. By the time you got upstairs, the works became downright majestic. That said, their "look" brought the gallery's context into strange play, actively disrupting the style boundary between the Lower East Side and the Upper East Side. But this, along with the sneaking possibility that these works might actually be "mean-spirited," was all part of the fun.

6

THE DALED COLLECTION (Museum of Modern Art, New York) While spending two weeks in MOMA's atrium as part of last summer's "Return of the Blogs" effort by Grand Openings, I made many trips upstairs to marvel at the first presentation of this major museum acquisition. Herman Daled is a fascinatingly astute, mischievous, and elusive Belgian Conceptual art collector whose habits of patronage changed the reality of the artists he embraced.

7

"WALTER DE MARIA: TRILOGIES" (Menil Collection, Houston; curated by Josef Helfenstein) Walter De Maria's first major US museum show features two big surprises. First, paintings: two brand-new large-scale monochromes, one red and one blue, that, with *Yellow Painting/The Color Men Choose When They Attack the Earth*, 1968, complete a cycle of primary-colored canvases more than forty years in the making. Second, cars: his "Bel Air Trilogy," 2000–11, of three identical 1955 Chevy coupes, each pierced with a twelve-foot stainless-steel rod (an extruded circle, triangle, or square) that runs from the front windshield through to the rear on the passenger side. The uncanniest use of the readymade this year, and I'm not even pretending to understand it all now.

8

JOSEPHINE PRYDE (Chisenhale Gallery, London; curated by Polly Staple) Josephine Pryde's exhibitions can be so quick-witted, sardonic, nuanced, and seamlessly articulated that one can miss all the chips she puts on the table. Like David Hammons's painting/tarps and Walter De Maria's metal-rod-pierced automobiles, Pryde's recent photo "sets" suture two distinct elements into workable wholes. Featuring photos of arid outdoor landscapes artfully overlaid with MRI images of fetuses, "It's Not My Body," 2011, at times looks like a 1960s liquid-light show projected onto a colorful



7. Above: Walter De Maria, *Bel Air Trilogy: Circle Rod*, 2000–11, one of three 1955 Chevrolet Bel Airs with stainless steel rod, each 5 x 6 x 16". Photo: Robert McKeever.

10. Right: Peter Falk, ca. 1970. Photo: Time & Life/Getty Pictures.

