

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011 US \$7 CAN \$9 UK £6 EU €8

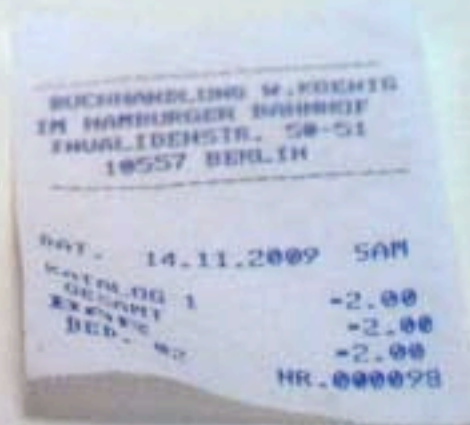


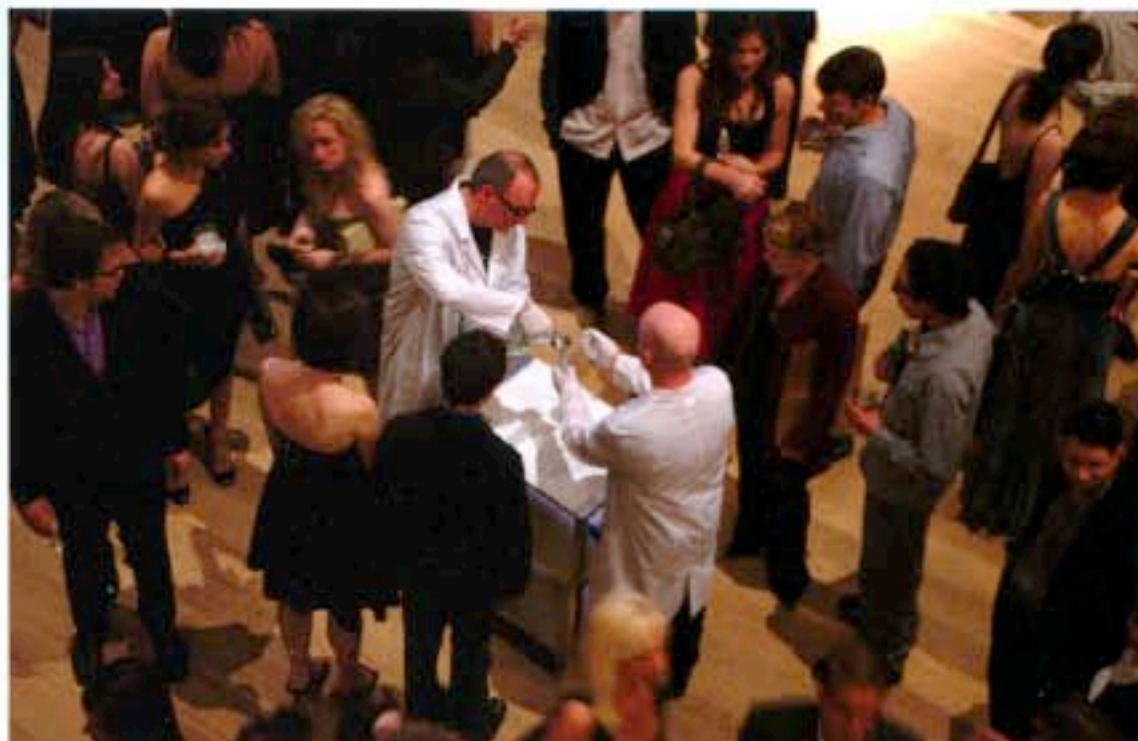
NEGENTROPY
AND PASTORALISM:
FERNANDO GARCÍA DORY

READYBOUGHT
JODI
IN CONVERSATION

CHARACTER
UNCATEGORIZED:
JIM NUTT

PORNO-POPULISM
THE PEOPLE'S BIENNIAL
+ WHATEVER IT TAKES





X-TREME STUDIO CHICAGO

presented less as easy signifiers than as symbolic objects in dialogue with a set of Chan's own works, which he adapts to their visual codes. The figurine's base is painted yellow, blue, black, and white, representing the four cardinal directions, and Chan arranges large monochromatic gouaches in these colors on the floor in corresponding positions. He makes these grid-like paintings, seemingly windblown rows of skewed rectangles, through a repetitive process that he has been developing this year, which he likens to a devotional practice. As such, Chan is sounding out new methods by way of reverberations with another, different tradition in which creativity is a spiritual act.

Chan's interests grow clearer in his book *Cries and Whispers from the Salt Song Trail*, 2010, seemingly the exhibition's lynchpin. The artist loosely sketches his observations in black ink while describing his journey a few sentences at a time. More notably, as Chan introduces the people he meets—including Benjamin Anagal, the Navajo man who created the carved figurine—their voices intermingle in the text. Fragments of conversation give way to comments on tribal traditions; longer passages describe moments in the tribes' histories of struggle and uprising.

A single large painting brings one of these accounts of political resistance into the gallery space explicitly. A semi-opaque rectangle of white paint echoes the pages in Chan's book and is layered on top of one of his skewed grids. Against this partial white backdrop, text and drawings narrate the 1969 Alcatraz Indian Occupation, when tribes seized the island to protest the original loss of their lands. Overwriting his personal style in this way, Chan is inviting this contested history to occupy his own work.

—Karsten Lund

X-Treme Studio is a complete departure from the popular mythology of the artist's studio as the hallowed and sequestered space of "genius at work" [Columbia College Chicago, A+D Gallery; June 24—July 21, 2010]. Curators Rael Jero Salley and Sabina Ott sunder this mythology by bringing together the inspired projects of fourteen artists and collaboratives. Sited in new, eccentric environments, these endeavors trigger a reconceptualization of art production and consumption.

Many artists construct a persona to investigate the meaning of art practice. Woolf's famous character Lily Briscoe is brought to life in a collaborative project by Alison Rhoades in which twenty women artists are at work in the window of the gallery. Shaun Leonardo's *Battle Royal*, 2009, a video document of his character "El Conquistador" fighting with Canada's top pro-wrestlers, enlists popular entertainment/sport to address the struggle with masculine identity and expectations.

Julie Lequin's *True Stories (Almost)*, 2010, a strangely-paced video of character studies in costume, invokes nagging voices telling her how to best manage her life.

A number of works blur the line between gallery, life, and art event. Nigerian-born D. Denenge Akpem's *The Dream (Gift #2): Meditation Metaphor, Illustrated*, 2010, offers a semiotic mash-up of race and gender identities through live performance and space-specific sculpture with materials as varied as silk and earth. EJ Hill and Tannar Veatch's *8 = D*, 2010, broadcasts exchanges between collaborators by way of an online blog interface prompting future artistic iterations.

Sara Velas' irresistible ongoing *The Velaslavasay Panorama*, in operation since 2001, conflates Hollywood set-like diorama and public spectacle. Started in the Tswuun-Tswuun Rotunda—a former Asian restaurant—it hosts artists' projects, poetry readings, and community events. In their signature happening *Epilation (slight return)*, 2006, Industry of the Ordinary shear a model in a fur coat as she struts the gallery vicinity—and is chased away from Chicago's Millennium Park. Barbadian artist Russell Watson takes household dust as stand-in portraits of individuals, and incorporates it into felted fiber objects.

The curators took a bold approach in highlighting both independent artworks and their production context in order to rethink studio practice as an active process that includes audiences, where social engagement is a legitimate avenue for artistic exploration.

Theaster Gates' utterly brilliant rehearsal and performance at the Milwaukee Art Museum, *Sella My Wares: A Choir for Dave the Slave Potter*, 2010, is a collaborative choral performance with LeRoy Bach. One hundred singers from Chicago and Milwaukee perform the astounding narrative of slave life inspired by inscriptions on Dave's pottery. Gates' latest work, *The Dorchester Project*, 2010, involves the renovation of an abandoned building on Chicago's south side into a library, image archive, and soul food kitchen. It is in part a reminder of the lamentable divide still active in Chicago's cultural scene.

Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam's *The Poor Farm*, 2009, is an authentic former poor farm turned modern-day kunsthalle. Poor farms were part of an early-1900s work-for-housing program, somewhat akin to recent morally-questionable welfare-to-work programs. It will be interesting to watch the dynamic between residents of the sprawling property in Manawa, Wisconsin, and the local community as it relates to the growing number of artistic initiatives that seek to expand to the exurbs of large U.S. cities and beyond.

Katarina Jerinic and Naomi Miller's *The Work Office*, 2010, turns another poverty program on its head. Here, the artists enlist the WPA's work formula to turn assignments for hire—at \$22.50, the weekly wage for an artist at the time of the WPA—into both art process and statement in our era of "jobless recovery."

X-Treme Studio gives a revealing snapshot of contemporary studio production in the Chicago vicinity and beyond, on the far edges of contemporary artistic practice. From panoramas to poor farms, *X-Treme Studio* suggests that art is an active and complex conversation with locations and audiences—a wonderfully moving target.

—Melissa Potter

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Julie Lequin, *True Stories (Almost)*, 2010, HD video, 10:34:09 minutes, ed. of 5 [courtesy of the artist]; *Industry of the Ordinary*, *Benefaction (for the Art Institute of Chicago)*, 2009, performance [courtesy of Industry of the Ordinary]