Genesis Laboratory

Juice drips;  
   jelly from a glutton.  
Hark, the gates flood open  
and we drown in blood.  
I close my eyes-  
rushed with wine.

   Through the purple haze  
two  
piercing eyes.

I shrug but the bench  
is too much.

Table for two?  

A phoenix rises to  

A  

sigh    giggle
Hi All,

So Volume was the surprise winner in yesterday’s vote for our magazine’s title. For those of you who were absent yesterday a quick recap. It came down to three names: Theory + Practice, Like, and Volume. We conducted a round of voting where your classmates could vote twice to narrow the field down to two choices. “Like” came in a distant third. We then convened an open forum where everyone made their cases for the names “Theory and Practice” and “Volume.” Many excellent points were made on each side and then we took another vote. This time a tie. 12 votes for T&P and 12 for Volume. As you all reminded me in the case of a tie I was “The President of the Senate” and had to cast the deciding vote which went to Volume.

A few words on my vote. First as you might guess I was very reluctant to cast the deciding vote. It is after all your magazine!

After the rounds of discussion though I do think Volume is the best choice and here is the rationale for my vote. As many of you argued yesterday T&P gives us a ready-made solution to the format ala The Reader. But beyond the utilitarian aspect of matching up with the layout I didn’t get the sense that anybody really loved the name in and of itself. Where as Volume struck me as more ambiguous. From the punning on the “Volume vol. 1” idea to the implication of depth to the colloquial “turn up the volume” the title seemed to offer a lot of creative potential. Not as punk rock rock as say “Black Urine” but actually maybe more so, while allowing for all sorts of other interesting associations. But my vote was also based on the challenge that struck me as quite interesting of having to grapple with your format proposal and the title...it is not an easy challenge but as they say anything worth doing never is [easy].
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volume
n.
1. fig.

a. A collection of written or printed sheets bound together; a book.
b. One of the books of a work printed and bound in more than one book.
c. A series of issues of a periodical, usually covering one calendar year.
d. A unit of written material assembled together and cataloged in a library.
Volume is not found in loudness or in largeness or in quantity alone. It is found in the declaration of space. Volume contains.

What is more full: the white room with white walls, white ceiling, and white floor, or the bookshelf that bends under the weight of leather bound pages lined neatly in a row?

The question of where a work can be contained is central to this magazine. Where do my words live? Do you hold them in your hand right now? Did they live only in my mouth when I wrote them some time ago—before the pages were printed, the bindings punched together, and the covers placed neatly on display?

Who owns these words and who lives in this space? These words are not unique; this page is not one of a kind. There are fifty of me out there. And soon that will no longer be true. Today I will stand tall on bookshelves as an equal next to volumes of my peers. And I will lay flat, turned sideways under papers and a coffee mug. Tomorrow more of me will be in waste cans and boxed away and forgotten. Someday I will be no more, words and images lost forever, a noble casualty of the zine. But I will have been a volume and nothing can take that away from me.

During the 1960's and 1970's magazines became an important new participant in the art world, functioning as an alternative exhibition space for the dematerializing practices of conceptual art. As the tools of reproduction became more widely available, artists began creating their own vehicles to disseminate their artwork and avoid the bureaucracy of galleries and critics that were often antithetical to the ethos of their artwork. From this the ZINE emerged, and artists flocked to the novel forms and dimensions afforded by the periodical and the ephemeral nature of magazines. The ZINE allowed artists to circumvent the institutional modes of communication tied to the art industry at the time, and engage in a more direct dialogue with subscribers wanting to get closer to artists’ works. The disposable nature of the magazine promoted a less rigid interpretation of the final product. Zines were marked by spelling errors and publication schedules were rarely followed. All this contributed to the cult of the zine, which lives on among art communities today.

In groups of two and three, students collaborated to create their very own low-fi, black and white, photocopy derived zine. Their personalities vary from the whimsical to the algorithmic, but contained in all is the essential feeling of a work in progress, an emphasis on objecthood as a part of content, and an emphasis on enjoyment over assignment.
1 Walrus Chronicles [pg. 07] Pedro Alfonso-Diaz
   Alison Roberts

2 Childhood Humorz &
   The Mario Story [pg. 08-09] Amanda Morales
   Alyssa Pappas

3 KYou! [pg. 10-11] Adam Dunlavy
   Anna Fixsen

4 Almanac [pg. 12-13] Michelle Bentsman
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   Chet Lubarsky


6 Lascivious Ball [pg. 16-17] Anita To
   JD Whitman

7 Obscura Grls [pg. 18-19] Francisca Sondjaja
   Adrienne Swan

8 Street Lights [pg. 20-21] Tsung Ming Hung
   Leo Zhu

9 Expanded Field [pg. 22-23] Amanda Gallegos
   Davis Nasca
Genesis Laboratory

Juice drips;
    jelly from a glutton.
Hark, the gates flood open
and we drown in blood.
I close my eyes-
rushed with wine.

    Through the purple haze
    two
    piercing eyes.

I shrug but the bench
is too much.

Table for two?

A phoenix rises to

A
sigh    giggle
my childhood romance with super mario bros. 3

As a kid, my sister, nine years older and totally awesome, was my idol. I wanted nothing more out of life than to be as awesome as she was. The quality of hers that I envied most was how totally freaking badass she was at Super Mario Bros. 3. I mean, what more to life was there than kicking ass in Nintendo? In my seven-year-old mind, I knew if I could just play as well as her then I’d be totally awesome too. All of my friends would be so impressed by my gaming skills and, more importantly, so would my sister. Luckily, I only had to worry about impressing her since our little brother was only a toddler at the time. My determination was unwavering. I played for hours upon hours. I played alone. I played with friends. When I was lucky, I played with my sister while secretly hoping some of her awesomeness would rub off on me. I also drank pickle juice. Also, my sister’s influence. I always felt so discouraged when my sister would choose to go out with her friends on the weekends. I knew that meant there wouldn’t be time to learn from her vast knowledge of Nintendo. How could I save the princess without her? How could I get the P-wing? There was no way I could get every coin in world one level three in order to be rewarded with the sacred P-wing. Yet I still tried. To relieve my frustrations I’d sometimes curse the goombas and paratroopas, “You jerk-off!” I’d shout. Taking pleasure in using the word, “jerk-off.” It seemed like a bad word and something I shouldn’t say. However, it felt appropriately inappropriate. If ever there was a time to use a naughty word it had to be when I got game over. Weeks of training paid off and I was finally able to pass a couple worlds, but that idiot king was always being turned into some kind of animal leaving me to save his ass and his kingdom. The princess, always grateful, would at least send me a nice letter and gift for my troubles.

Despite my progress as a gamer I still couldn’t beat the game or match my sister’s abilities.
She was just so much older and more capable. I began to lose faith in ever being as cool as her. One night, though, everything changed. It was a Saturday night and my sister decided to stay home. I was ecstatic. She would be home all night. She wouldn’t have to leave, wishing me luck, in the middle of a world (after getting me 45 free lives and a number of whistles, feathers, and fire-flowers, of course). This was the night. We could beat the game together. I could finally be awesome too. It was like she had seen my determination and hard work over the past few weeks and decided to reward me. Yes, tonight was the night.

Once my little brother was in bed, we grabbed two glasses, the pickle jar and some paper towels then made our way to the family room and, in my mind, to our destiny. As usual, my sister let me go first on the condition that I would let her play level three and her other favorites. I was ready. Ready to show my sister that I was a worthy teammate. Yes, it was only world one, level one, but I beat it like a pro.

My performance was flawless up to my perfectly timed running jump at the end of the level necessary to get a star card and not a mediocre flower or mushroom card. My performance set the tone for the entire game. We championed through and destroyed Bowser and his Koopalings. My life-goal had been achieved. Finally. I beat the game. I beat Super Mario Bros. 3. I was finally awesome.

Thirteen years later I still play Super Mario Bros. 3. Sometimes I play by myself, sometimes with friends and on very special occasions I play with my older sister. Rarely do I beat the game, but that’s not really the point anymore.
the personal authority crisis

or

the multilevel crisis

Tough to tell from the case.

"Oh, golly, golly, golly!" says he.

a pure moral philosophy which is completely freed from everything which may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology. That there must be such a philosophy is self-evident from the common idea of duty and moral laws. Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally (i.e., as a ground of obligation), must imply absolute necessity; he must admit that the command: Thou shalt not lie,
FESTIVALS OF ASCENDANCE

In this year, the 677th of the Great God Alumbrado, we shall have the pleasure of celebrating three Festivals of Ascendance. In accordance with tradition, each will be presented with a posthumous crest to mark their new holiness.

On the seventh sun cycle of the fourth moon cycle of this year, Frederick of Swampass, janitor of the great community septic tank, will ascend to the bosom of the Great God Alumbrado. He has chosen his favorite bucket to take with him into the Great Immolation. May he clean many toilets while with the Great One.

On the fourth sun cycle of the tenth moon cycle of this year, Tania the Nymphomaniac, pre-school teacher of three decades, will ascend with her pair of reading glasses. The Great God Alumbrado awaits the tender bedtime stories with which she shall regale Him.

On the eleventh sun cycle of the fifteenth moon cycle of this year, Lucas the Burly, the last of the pastry chefs, shall ascend with his favorite whisk. The Great God Alumbrado will surely enjoy his confectionary delights in the Great Gig in the Sky. We await patiently for the Great One to send another of the pastry clan down to the physical realm.
MORISIS ANGUIS
The Worm Holes

This plague struck the people early in the 677th year of our Great God Alumbrado. It consists of an emergence of finger sized worms from the soil and through the cracks of household walls. These little serpents come stealthily in the pre-dawn hours and bite the victim in oft overlooked areas of the body such as below the heel, beneath the knee, and behind the ear, but truly any area of exposed skin is a potential contact point. The bite of the Morsis worm leaves a small hole in the skin, no larger than a pin prick, which rapidly enlarges over the course of one and half moon cycles. It enlarges at a steady linear pace, until the entire body is overtaken to the point of complete deterioration and non-existence. Victims have shown that an initial terror and disgust with the invading bite quickly dissipates as the body is rapidly overtaken by the worm hole. The early symptoms of Morsis Anguis include dizziness and giddiness, often accompanied by a sense of great adventure. Many victims report a sense of bodily weightlessness upon encountering what they call "staring the sublime void straight in the face" or "the confrontation with the innate abyss." Many have compared this to "l'appel du vide" in which height is replaced by the body itself. An uncanny sense of self-possession is evident in the final stages of communication capacity. Morsis Anguis has left indelible scars on family and friends surrounding the victims. There is no known cure for Morsis Anguis. Avoid Morsis Anguis by caulking the cracks in your walls regularly and vigilantly -- our existence depends on it.

OLD WISE CROWN,
Saint of the AGES

It is said that when Old Wise Crown was born, his mother abandoned him beneath the trees of the Southern Seed Forest to conceal an illegitimate affair. The squirrels beneath the trees gathered upon witnessing this act, and carried him into a hollow trunk, where he flourished as they deposited nuts and berries directly into his tiny mouth. After his return to society, he grew to be a wise sage of a man, becoming a master of astronomy, medicine, botany, zoology, and philosophy. Men came far and wide to hear his orations. His reputation unsurpassed, he married the prized jewel of the land. But this jewel of a lady did not love this wise, gentle man, and so she spent her nights away from him, tucking herself away in corners unknown. As the years went by, each day lonelier than the last, a horn emerged from the middle of his forehead, a bit more every night his wife was away from him. "Twas the mark of her infidelity. His horn could not be removed, and a shame befell their name. She fled, and Old Wise Crown returned to the forest and crawled into a hollow trunk. He claimed the branches as horns to match his own -- a crown of horns that would never cease to grow.
On the next few pages are pictures of some of the places I've been to. If you have a photo that you'd like to be put in the zine, send it to the address below.

Hitchhiker Zine
5514 S. University Ave.
#809
Chicago, IL 60637
Knots

1. Slip or Sliding knot
2. Pull the end to tighten
3. Tie a knot

Fisherman’s knot
used to tie two pieces of string together

Note: Adjust size as needed.
I WOKE UP, STILL D

[Image of a figure with a blurred effect]
UT A PATCH ON IT, BUT THE FABRIC
reacting chowout
iswhalesmeat
blow her plate
cut-fishnets
with action
chewed out of
his plants-
manered licks
and fingerducks
ing quim tunnel
missil’sssights
histling kludge-
box in heady
lowfibifurcate
her butt cheeks
in flow of filth
flows once three
around you fall
in love
FORT GALLUS
FEAST 9AM
ALL AGES
DAY XXV. MONTH XI.
YEAR MMCCCXXVII

Guest DJ:
MOTET OF DRAGONS

IT WILL MAKE YOU BLIND!!
Minimal Perception
volume

n.

2. fig.

The amount of space occupied by a three-dimensional object or region of space, expressed in cubic units.
Next, we invite the readers of this magazine to explore “volume” as a three dimensional space, which, in the art world, occurs in the form of sculpture. However, as contemporary art evolves, we see a marriage of painting and sculpture, a blurring of the lines and limitations, which might have restricted these two art forms in the past.

Rauschenberg’s Bed (1955; Combined painting; 6’2” x 31 1/2” x 6 1/2”) provides a perfect example of what this abstract idea may look like in materialized form. For those not familiar with this piece, it is a life-sized, three-dimensional pseudo-bed (it does not retain as much height as an actual bed might), which is mounted on a wall in MoMA like a painting, but which has a very sculptural aesthetic, i.e. the way the artist carefully layers the weathered sheets, pillow, quilt, etc. Yet, it is the way the colors of the oil paint are in conversation with the colors of the sculptural aspects of the piece that really bring the work to life. Bed would be something entirely different if it were just a bed mounted on a wall or a painting of a bed with the same colors dripping down the sheets in a surreal way. The piece is a marriage of sculpture and painting, and it is this unique quality that enables it to achieve the effects it has; I will leave it up to the reader to decide what, exactly, those effects may be.

When we aim to dissect the sculptural decisions of a piece, certain elements may come into consideration: use of the material, engagement of the space, and engagement of the viewer. In contemporary art, understanding how the artists use different materials to convey a feeling is crucial in discussing the artwork. For instance, in Margrit Brehm’s essay “… it comes from art,” Richard Tuttle, in defense of his Wire Pieces, states, “In a sense having the three elements, the pencil, the wire, and the shadow is like, step by step, getting out of the work.” In this sense, the material alludes to a sense of nothingness, the lack of a grandiose artistic gesture, which in itself means something. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you have someone like Richard Serra, whose enormous metal structures envelop the viewer and sit in a space like an elephant: benign, yet commanding, and almost formidable. While material and weight certainly play a major role in creating this effect, so does the way in which the sculpture is situated in space: Serra’s taking up a vast area, while Tuttle’s almost shrinking into the corner or base-board of a wall. Yet, both have the ability to captivate the viewer, inviting him deeper into the world and atmosphere that the piece constructs.

Finally, we see the line between painting and sculpture really beginning to blur in the works of artists such as Jessica Stockholder, whose installations involve many sculptural objects, yet exhibit an obvious sense of intentionality regarding color. She employs the use of very saturated, vibrant colors, which gives the sense that these objects are unorthodox canvases made to display a playful color palette. Moving across the continuum, towards pure painting, I would like to bring some of Jon Yau’s thoughts into the discussion. In his press release for the New York-based exhibition Broken/Window/Plane, Yau speaks of the idea of “applying pressure to the picture plane,” asking, “Couldn’t the picture plane be both solid and transparent, layered and punctuated, there and not there, something we see when it is invisible?” Even two-dimensional paintings in this show prove to be anything but traditional, embodying the issues Yau alludes to, addressing, in themselves, the question (which I will adapt from one posed by Yau): Why would you want to confine sculpture and painting’s identities to a narrow set of conventions? In the end, just call it: Art.
JD Whitman

Tarot, 2012

Fabric, Illustrationboard, Paper collage, Acrylic paint, India Ink, and Gel Medium
Adam Dunlavy

Ice, Held (2012)

Ice, Body Heat
Amanda Morales

Heatwave, 2012
oil on canvas 16x20
Leo Zhu

Red Solo

Photographed at 4:30pm (2012)
Nicole Reyna
24, 2012
Oil on Canvases
8”x8”, 10”x10”, 12”x12”, 18”x18”
Amanda Gallegos

Use Me Now

Spray Paint and Ink on Toilet paper; toilet paper roll mounted in Midway Studios bathroom after it was cleaned.
Miriam Stevens

*Paper Collage, 2012*

15" X 20"

Construction Paper, Acrylic Paint
Alyssa Pappas

Preach, 2012

Clay, ink, religious booklets
Chet Lubarsky

*Flag, in Process, 2012*
Junli Song
Still Life, 2012
Fruit
Tsung Ming Hung

Are You Amazed?, 2012
2-12"x16" & 1-26"x36"
Acrylic on canvases
Francisca Sondjaja

Horny amateur free,
2012
Fabric, polyfill, and pillow
Adrienne Swan

dream between sentences, its beginning
Sculpture
Mixed media
vol·ume

n.
3. fig.

a. the fullness or intensity of tone or sound
b. the control on a radio, etc, for adjusting the intensity of sound
Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics

By: Adam Dunlavy

Relational Aesthetics, as Nicolas Bourriaud defines and theorizes in his 1998 text, *Relational Aesthetics*, is first and foremost relational. And it is relational not between shapes or colors, but between people. A work of relational aesthetics creates an interaction between human beings, and that interaction is the artwork. For Bourriaud, this social practice can both be located within a specific trajectory of art history and has a revolutionary potential.

Bourriaud sets up a dichotomy within Modernism: the rationalist tradition and the Dadaist tradition. Simply put, the rationalist seeks to find problems, essences, trajectories and endpoints. For, say, Marx, this would translate to locating the problems of capitalism within a broader history, providing an alternative trajectory to bring society closer to its essence: the social situations of communism. History would thereby reach its endpoint; its perfection. In art, this leads to avant-gardism and medium specificity. The role of an artist is to discover a new problem within his medium (for example, illusionism or dependency on the canvas for painting). He then works through the problem, creating new problems for future generations of artists, who all work towards discovering the essence of their medium. This Modernism comes with a pre-packaged view of history and path forward.

Both Modernist traditions seek to eliminate subjugation and increase equality and freedom. But rational Modernism, claims Bourriaud, equates newness with inevitable progress towards this end. We will reach our perfection if we just trust Modernism and the avant-garde to its endpoint. For Bourriaud, however, this belief in progress only leads to more complex systems of subjugation. Rather than technological progress leading to free and fluid social interactions, it defines them and narrows them into specifically defined rubrics. Rather than two autonomous individuals in unique interaction, we are two types, with a pre-determined set of exchanges.

New technology promises to open new fields of interaction, but actually narrows possible exchanges. The subjugation produced by rational Modernism is all the more insidious because it comes with the illusion of progress towards increased freedom.

Dadaist Modernism, Relational Aesthetics’ modernism, is instead interested in opening up indeterminate spaces, with unknown outcomes. Bourriaud calls these spaces “interstices.” Rejecting the possibility of laying out a stepping stone path to utopia, Relational Aesthetics seeks to “model possible universes” within the reality inherited from Modernism. Rather than forcing a total break with the past, an interstice provides a what-if scenario. It is a temporary world within, but separate, from the current social reality, in which no interaction is pre-determined or pre-determined. The role of a Relational Aesthetics artist is to create such an interstice, to provide a moment, in which the viewer is in an alternative world with unfamiliar and fluid laws. He communicates with other participants about the experience while simultaneously creating the experience through the interaction. This definition is an over-simplification on my part, as what the participant interacts with is more fluid than that, but Relational Aesthetics is always about opening up that space of possibility. What makes revolution possible within this model is formal aesthetic judgment. By equating the art and the interactions the art creates, the interactions and the interstitial universe itself are opened up to aesthetic judgment. Whatever the participant likes about the experience, whatever sticks with him, whatever he thinks is a valid point, is the validity of the art and the world it creates. Every participant is the critic of the piece, determining the success of the micro-utopia. A good work of relational aesthetics will plant the seed of an alternative way of doing things, which the participant can implement however she wishes. This makes a unifying and coherent view of past and future trajectory unnecessary. Whatever seems valid, even if a seemingly valid idea contradicts another one, has its place. Human history becomes the average of every viewer’s beliefs up to the moment. History can be flexible and self-contradictory: simply the process of learning to live better in the moment.

Faced with this daunting theory, and the incredible importance it places on the role of the artist in society, we went out into the world to create our own micro-utopias, our interstitial what-if scenarios. What if a group of people took the initiative to start games of Mad Libs on University of Chicago shuttles? What if there was a swing at the botany pond? What if someone served free pie at the Regenstein Library? What would it mean? Would the world be a better place?
Parlour Game sought to achieve social interaction through material objects, and sought to explore authority and artist/subject relationships.

We invited guests to our apartment on a Sunday afternoon and instructed them to sit down in a blank room. Through a series of activities, we focused on the creation of an environment. We, the artists, did not interact with the guests except to bring material objects to fill the empty room. We began with essential items for a living room space, including chairs, sofas, and shelves. As the event unfolded, we began to fill the room constantly with a plethora of objects, creating a chaotic environment.

The spectators’ involvement were meant to achieve the purpose of the artwork—inter-subject interactively created the meaning of the art. We brought the guests candy, pizza (sausage, spinach and goat cheese) in order to explore the critical amount of “stuff” needed for a social interaction. We also instructed participants to play word games, handed to them in envelopes. These games included Mad Libs, and a group Exquisite Corpse.

At the end of the event, the interaction became organic and self-sustaining. People even began participating in the stead of the artists by pinning artwork on the wall and using strange media (chocolate for instance) to decorate the blank sheets of paper. Perhaps the most pleasing for us, people stayed beyond the two-hour duration of the piece signifying that a social space had been achieved.
Book IV, Chapter 4 of St. Augustine's *City of God*

Without NOUN1, what are kingdoms but great

NOUNS1, What are NOUNS1 but small NOUNS2, 

The NOUN1 is itself made up of NOUN2, is ruled by the command of a NOUN2, and is held together by NOUNS3, NOUNS4 is divided in accordance with agreed-upon law. If this evil increases by the inclusion of ADJ1, men to the extent that it takes over territory, establishes NOUN4, occupies NOUN5, and subdues NOUNS6, it publicly assumes the title of NOUNS7.

### Rushmore

You guys have it real easy. I never had it like this when I grew up. But I send my kids here because the fact is you go to one of the ADJ1, NOUN1, and that's it. Rushmore. Now, for some of you it doesn't matter. You were born ADJ2, and you're going to stay ADJ2. But here's my advice to the rest of you: Take dead aim on the ADJ3, NOUNS1, and take them down. Just remember, they can buy anything but they can't buy NOUNS2. Don't let them VERB1 it. Thank you.
Before
In the phrase to speak (also express, tell) volumes, to be highly expressive or significant.


1810  Shelley Zastrozzi iv. 46  A pause ensued, during which the eyes of Zastrozzi and Matilda spoke volumes to each guilty soul.

1833  J. G. Whittier Abolitionists in Prose Wks. (1889) Ill. 86  The late noble example of the eloquent statesman speaks volumes to his political friends.

1867  E. A. Freeman Hist. Norman Conquest (1877) I. vi. 444  Something which speaks volumes in favour of the King.

Our tastes speak volumes about who we are. But should we still speak? And if we do, what shall we say?

Herein lies the problem of the critic. Perhaps, a critic should err on the side of caution, lest he or she reveal too much. As German art critic Jan Verwoert writes, “Critics reveal as much, if not more, about themselves (their fixations, complexes and grudges), as they do about the object of their judgement.”

And yet, there is an allure to criticism. Criticism spurs us to create, and creates intimacy through only words. Verwoert likens the most brilliant and painful criticism to a coin “spinning back and forth between head and tail, truth and untruth, justice and injustice, projection and analysis, self and other, self as other, other as self.”

The social dimension of art criticism is not incidental. Criticism is the machine through which standards of taste are built. Hume would have us believe that there are “true judges” nestled amongst us, if only we could align with their standard, while Bourdieu points out that taste is but a euphemism for inequality and competition, a tool used to assert status and distinction. So the critic is the one standing on the edge of the playground, letting us know who the cool kids are.

Although criticism may be sparked by impulse, analysis ultimately shapes it into being. This is the vehicle through which the discourses within art are made explicit. And if contemporary art is a meta-discourse on the very nature of art, criticism is its translation. At the very least, art criticism is the continuation of a worthwhile conversation.

After exploring art galleries throughout the city of Chicago and beyond, students added their voices to this conversation.

By: Michelle Bentsman
Laura Letinsky’s exhibition Ill Form and Void Full at the Museum of Contemporary Art debuts her latest body of work and marks a new development in her photography. Letinsky has already developed a distinctively simple and elegant style in which her photographic still lifes speak on desire, pleasure, and death. In this series of photographs, Letinsky uses two-dimensional reproductions in conjunction with three-dimensional objects to complicate the perception of the work.

Her work, both old and new, is populated with domestic objects: partially eaten pieces of fruit, dirty dishes and utensils, and old food containers - all remnants of a pleasure inducing meal. These remnants become objects of desire, for the viewer cannot help but imagine the actualized scenario presented in the photographs. Yet, the photographs have been composed with mostly rotting fruit and rubbish, a constant reminder that the passage of time can only be experienced in one direction.

The use of reproductions in this new series of work creates another level of complexity that is deeply connected with the nature of photography. A transformation occurs every time a subject, animate or not, is photographed and printed. There is often a conflation of the object, the photograph, and the subject. This complicates the role of the viewer, who gazes upon the object and easily forgets. Letinsky draws awareness to this confusion through the juxtaposition of two-dimensional and three-dimensional pieces in this latest work. When re-photographed, the two-dimensional reproductions are read, or desire to be read, as the objects themselves instead of replications.

The reproductions are cut-outs from art or commercial work found in home décor and cooking magazines. The connection to domesticity and the home is obvious, representing the gender role imposed upon women in patriarchal society. Letinsky’s work has long been considered feminist – she does not deny her desire to be a wife and mother, but rather relishes these roles while understanding the hollowness of those expectations of her. She flaunts her constructed femininity in the face of male-dominated photography.

Moving away from primarily using dining tables, Letinsky arranges broad sheets of white paper in layers to create the background for her new still lifes. There is no distinction between wall and table, and the shadows that are formed through the layers of white paper disorient the viewer even more. This stark white contrasts the subject of the still lifes, which add a palette of color that can easily be described as delectable. Since there is no visible ground, the objects feel as if they are floating in space, succeeding in the fight against gravity.

The overall effect is a complete disorientation of the visual space; the eye and the mind are in conflict. Tension arises out of the discrepancy between what is being seen and what the viewer wants to see. The viewer will seek reality, an acceptable scenario in which the still life can exist, but he or she will be denied every time. This work creates a constant cycle of desire and denial.

Laura Letinsky
Untitled #3 (from the series Ill Form and Void Full), 2010
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
As I entered Hyde Park Art Center’s Gallery 1, surrounded by 108 23.5” by 23.5” squares, I was immediately implicated into the piece. The enormity of the gallery space prevents the work from being too visually overwhelming; however, the amount of content in the piece is striking.

Bibiana Suárez’s Memoria (Memory) invites spectators to “play” a memory game in which players aim to match pairs of overturned cards placed in a grid. In the game, each turn, one player flips over two cards to try and match a pair. The player that can recall the location of revealed cards has a better chance of winning. In the installation there are 71 revealed cards out of 108, and each of the 108 cards has a match. However, these matches are not all identical.

The differences between the card pairs cause for provoking associations, like the irony in the pair We Speak Spanish (Se habla español) and Se Habla Ingles (We speak English). Suárez’s work is full of such dualities, let they be negrito and blanquita (black and white), gringo and spic, yo (me) and other. These juxtapositions confuse artificial borders drawn between the U.S. and the rest of the Americas.

Yet, other panels are much more serious, like Migrant Labor Camp after fire and Bracero workers being fumigated. And others bridge a gap between humor and despair, like I Went to Leev een Amayreeka (West Side Story). And there are the pairs, like Cruiseship and Mariel (1980) that have both aspects of levity and gravity. The Mariel Boatlift was a mass emigration of Cubans in 1980, where crowded boats carried as many as 125,000 Cubans to Florida, not exactly the picture of a getaway cruise.

There is also a mystery in the 37 unturned cards, whose backs contain 39 complimentary and derogatory words Latinos use to call themselves as well as names others have called them. Suárez invites the viewers to imagine possible matches for the exposed cards.

By highlighting Latino presence in American culture, Suárez dispels misconceptions of identity within the Latino community as well as motivates Americans of all communities to become agents of change.

December 11th, 2011 – March 25th, 2012
Hyde Park Art Center
5020 S. Cornell Avenue Chicago, IL 60615
Darren Bader: Images
Review By: Anna Fixen

The sterile hallways of MoMA PS1, by nature, make you feel like you are in an insane asylum. This sentiment was not diminished by Darren Bader’s latest exhibition, Images. The work is a multi-sensory mosey through post-post Relational Aesthetics work. In all, the show—featuring fruit, food, and felines—proves to be a muddled head scratcher.

The exhibition fills four consecutives rooms on PS1’s second floor. The first of the series is a work titled “Cat Made of Crab Meat, Cat Made of Human Flesh.” The room contains one couch supporting one slumped over gallery attendant, two chairs, two art books, two litter boxes, one pooper-scooper, and two live, mewing felines. “Cat Made of Crab Meat” is a calico creature with coin colored eyes. I try to pet Cat made of Human Flesh—a grey, skinny thing; it flinched and scuttled away into a nearby cat box. Signage says these “works of art” are up for adoption.

Allergies activated, I trapse into the following room.

In the subsequent work, “Iguana and Croissant,” a bored Iguana lounges in a glass vitrine along with several tree branches, wood shavings, and a lizard litter box. At the base of the vitrine is a single, puffy croissant.

“Pet Iguanas are illegal within the five Burroughs of New York,” an accompanying sign blares. This is a criminal Iguana; its glass cage serves as a white-trimmed penitentiary. The Iguana, however, seems ambivalent about his/her/its predicament. Belly down, chubby limbs sprawled beneath him enjoying the heat of his sunlamp on his scales, its mouth is slightly agape in a blissful smirk. The back wall of the space has a white statue of a ceramic Buddha grinning madly and holding an avocado, an amorphous white ceramic blob, and a garbage can made of stoneware and blue glaze.

Room number three—identified by nothing other than a plaque stating “Fruit and vegetable salad is served on Saturdays starting at 3:00 PM and on Mondays started at 2:25 PM”—features 20 raised wooden pedestals four feet in height each supporting a single fruit or vegetable. A pear, a pineapple, a floret of broccoli, a squash, a cantaloupe, a bok choy, a potato, a yellow pepper, and a lemon all seemingly faced like their likes of Pierre Hugye and Rikrit Tiravanija and is riddled with problematic, physical barriers to access: The cat room has two wire mesh doors the viewer must pass through in order to gain entry. Although constructed, perhaps, to keep the felines contained, it also serves to keep the guests out.

The final work in the series—“Chicken Burrito, Beef Burrito”—is a 20-foot square room at the end of the hall consisting of gray carpeting, white walls, and a drab view of Queens. Two burritos (ostensibly filled with chicken or beef) precariously rest on the windowsill plunked on top of one another in a self-satisfied position mimicking the Iguana. Bob Dylan’s Like A Rolling Stone blares on continuous loop, cut at the crescendo of the song when you want to burst into “awwww how does it FEEEEEL?”

Well, how does it feel? Mr. Bader seems to be asking as the now aesthetically and gustatorily hungered visitor gazes longingly at the burrito pile. Good Question, the viewer would respond.

Like the croissant leaning next to the Iguana cage, Images is stale at most.

Mr. Bader, in his vague artist statement says, “There’s this stuff called art. I’m really into it, or at least I was, and I think I still am.” A similar ambivalence is present throughout Images. The work doesn’t possess the dynamism of classic relational aesthetics (as seamlessly performed by the likes of Pierre Hugye and Rikrit Tiravanija) and is riddled with problematic, physical barriers to access: The cat room has two wire mesh doors the viewer must pass through in order to gain entry. Although constructed, perhaps, to keep the felines contained, it also serves to keep the guests out.

“Time and touch are the beginnings of all encounters,” says Mr. Bader. In Images many of these “beginnings” were made manifest in half-hearted gestures: the burritos, croissant, fruit, and even Iguana beg to be interacted with and tease the viewer with their salience. But the viewer is rudely denied. In the fruit salad room, I was invited to look at the market fresh fruit and imagine what the salad tasted like on Saturday afternoons; I was there on a Friday.

However, out of the works, “Cat Made of Crab Meat, Cat Made of Human Flesh” is the most successful—viewer can interact with the bored gallery attendant on a sofa, sit on a sofa, pet Cat made of Human flesh, adopt Cat made of Human flesh, read a book, empty the litter box.

Whimsical? Yes. Cute? Perhaps. But these Images prove to be blurry ones.

Photo by Matthew Septimus

Jan. 29, 2012—May 14, 2012 MoMA PS1
22-25 Jackson Ave.
Long Island City, NY 11101
Betsy Odom: Gentlewoman

Review By: David Nasca

Betsy Odom’s latest solo exhibition, Gentlewoman at Woman Made Gallery (685 North Milwaukee Avenue, 20 January-23 February 2012) continues Odom’s material exploration that was present in her last show Sis Boom Bah (March 13- June 19th 2011) at the Hyde Park Art Center. Gentlewoman however presents a departure from, rather than a continuation of, Sis Boom Bah—Gentlewoman is a much quieter collection of work and meaning arises much more slowly. At the risk of being reductionist, Sis Boom Bah was in your face in all the best ways possible. Everything immediately cohered. Sis Boom Bah consisted primarily of sports paraphernalia reworked using traditional craft processes. Leather was especially present: Odom fashioned football shoulder pads, a field hockey stick, doc marten boots, a life vest, wrestling headgear, and a softball glove all out of intricately tooled leather. Leatherwork, with all its similarities to the traditionally female fiber arts, its associations to macho biker and cowboy culture, and its erotic overtones, is a medium in-between the masculine and the feminine. By constructing sports paraphernalia out of leather, the show immediately focused on Odom’s position as a queer female artist. Other pieces in the show served to bolster this reading: a “Double Whistle” out of cast silver became a double sided penetrative object, or an erotic link between coach and athlete; a flaccid, gently curving “Softball Bat” (emphasis added) undermined the patriarchy of the sports world, and “Un-titled (for Caster)” was a tribute to, or commentary on, Caster Semenya, a South African runner stripped of her world championship standing and subjected to “gender testing.” If Sis Boom Bah presented itself as the perky cheerleader celebrating queer culture, Gentlewoman is the elder stateswoman seeking to argue against heteronormativity.

The pieces in Gentlewoman are much more disparate. For this show, Odom has largely chosen to abandon traditional craft processes in favor more restrained material connotations. A lead “Bridal Boutonniere” speaks to the way that marriage might act as an anchor, weighing one down. A cast lead fork with three inwardly curving tines says “fuck you” to domesticity—it is not only useless to eat with a one-tined lead fork, but poisonous. A set of three sculptural graphite knives continue this theme of subverting domesticity; they posit that a woman’s (pro)creative role might not be in domestic sphere, but rather in making art. Brittle graphite knives would be entirely ineffective in the kitchen, yet with their dull sheen, they beg to be picked up and used for mark making.

Of particular interest in Gentlewoman are a pair of neckties made out of cork. One is a regular tie standing erect, with a vacant loop for a neck, and its last few inches folded atop the pedestal forming a base. The other is a diminutive bowtie stuck to the wall. The material connections here are even subtler—what does it mean to fashion symbols so imbued with masculinity out of cork? One potential reading is of the ties as a type of corkboard. Perhaps she is positing that gender is something that can be added to and removed from at will, or perhaps she is implying that masculinity is something can be pinned on at a moment’s notice. Odom certainly has a talent for drawing out the content that is contained within material choices, whether she does so in an upfront manner of “Sis Boom Bah” or via the quietness of “Gentlewoman.” Her most recent work on her website (http://web.me.com/betsyodom/www.betsyodom.com/Betsy_Odom.html) as of yet undisplayed, to my knowledge, incorporates found objects and deals with tropes of queer culture with a tremendous sense of humor: a “Turkey Baster” with the rubber bulb in the literal shape of a turkey implicates the male reproductive capacity as a tongue in cheek joke. Two U-Haul promotional pens strung together with pipe cleaners as if holding hands (titled “Second Date”) references the long standing inside joke of “U-Haul lesbians” who show up at the second date with furniture (and their cat) ready to move in.

In the opinion of this critic, it will certainly be fascinating to see where Odom leads us next and what materials as methods she will use to lend her wit and insight into queer life and art.

Betsy Odom: GENTLEWOMAN
January 20- February 23, 2012
Womanmade Gallery
685 North Milwaukee Avenue
Chicago, IL
http://www.womanmade.org/show.html?type=solo&gallery=odom2012&pic=1
Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art
February 16 to June 10 at the Smart Museum
Review By: Sean Clemmer

Flying Feast, Sonja Alhäuser, sourced from Flickr
Feast, currently unfolding at the Smart Museum, does its best to lure the audience in and convince them the old saying really is true: You are what you eat. Through a series of displays, performances, happenings and initiatives, Feast turns the museum into a platform for critical reassessment of cuisine, culture and creation. As soon as you walk in (if you don’t count Michael Rakowitz’s food truck currently on display outside), you’re put ill at odds: Letinsky’s meticulous, unsettling still life walks that thin line between object reality and perception, while across the room Felix Gonzalez-Torres asks us to share in and complete his work by taking a few candies. And the candies get you thinking as you walk through labyrinthine gallery. Much of the exhibit examines the history of food and drink from the Italian Futurists to Rirkrit Tiravanija, and the tour “ends” with contemporary pieces from the likes of Rirkrit, Rakowitz, and Robins. But the Feast experience hardly “ends” with the gallery. Most of Feast is more ephemeral, as the museum uses its “Join the Feast” initiative to ask everyone to participate in this culture of informed eating. The exhibit itself is merely a part of the more all-encompassing Feast Project, as it were, which frames questions about consumption, togetherness, and taste around concrete, relatable activities like eating and imbibing. These activities are so widespread that you’re almost left wondering if this is better than art. There is certainly a consistent reinforcement of food’s ability to transcend typical boundaries of society and politics and art itself; at the end of the day, we’ve all got to eat.

Feast features a diverse collection of pieces and performances, many of which require close collaboration with the museum and local residents and will continue even after the exhibit closes. All this makes for a unique transition from inside the Smart’s walls out into the “real world” where the audience will do most of the eating. Feast not only recognizes this power but also seeks to wield it wisely, engaging the local community by highlighting the work of UChicago’s own Theaster Gates in addition to curating various events with Join the Feast. Gates uses soul food to cultivate conversation and cultural awareness, using soul as a motif to connect people and performers in Chicago and at large (he’s bringing in some friends from Japan). This emphasis on hospitality and interconnectedness runs throughout the exhibit; there’s always room for one more at the table, especially if he’s got something to talk about. In fact, there’s a definite sense that we’re all familiar with this food-art realm, experts in our own right, but the exhibit rather convincingly asks us to examine our own taste, both literally and figuratively. The gallery recognizes its situation within the community and invites the whole world to recreate and influence the gallery experience as a reflection of and upon everyday life. Feast reveals the subtlety, complexity and power of our interactions with food and with each other in a way that makes art, like food, appear approachable and necessary. There’s a lot to like with Feast, and with the exhibit lasting until early June, there’s time enough to dig in.
I came a little too early for the opening of Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art at the Smart Museum, accidentally stumbling into the invite-only pre-reception. Luckily, the exhibition lived up to its title. Instead of asking if I was on the list, Ana Prvacki’s The Greeting Committee offered me a spoonful of too sweet Serbian jam, and wished me a sweet visit. A lovely gesture, I thought as I gulped down water to wash the cloying taste away.

Meanwhile, girls in silver sequined dresses and white wigs floated through the foyer with trays showcasing the edible pieces of Sonja Alhauser’s Flying Feast. In the center of the room, a table was laid out with her massive butter sculptures and endless mini-loaves of pretzel bread. A creamy chives and watercress. It was a very good evening to be hungry.

I grabbed a fruit kebab with a tiny marzipan figure impaled on the top. The female marzipans were buxom with long hair, and the male marzipans had tiny marzipan genitalia. A friend that had assisted in sculpting these marzipan beauties told me that Sonja Alhauser had insisted that they be sexy. I considered this directive as I chopped their heads off.

With wine in my right hand and a newly acquired doughnut in my left, I moved off to a corner, happily sipping and chewing, chewing and sipping. My sensorium thus overwhelmed, I surveyed the scene. The entire spread called forth images of Dionysian revelry. Feast was as apt a title as any. Here I was, faced with the literalization of art’s pleasure. It was here for me, as one of its audience members, to consume. A hedonist among hedonists, I gobbled the art away, taken aback by my own strange sense of entitlement.

Without a doubt this was relational art, but was this the sort of thing Nicholas Bourriard had in mind when he coined the term relational aesthetics? Could I, in good faith, call this a micro-utopia, in the vein of Bourriard and Felix Guattari? I stood disheveled among what appeared mostly to be board members and established artists. I was not mingling with these new “neighbors” – as Bourriard might call them – and they were not mingling with me. Still, there were many smiles to be had; everyone looked delighted to be there. And why not? We were at a party! —Erm, a reception. A very fancy reception, steeped in the imagery of Greco-Roman Imperialism. Certainly, no one would call this the realization of Bourriard’s Marxist interstice. But it was fun! It was yum! No need to whine, let’s have another drink! I snaked my way back through the buzzing crowd for another taste of this or that.

The rest of the exhibit includes gems such as Gonzales-Torres’s renowned candy pile, the Italian Futurists’ cookbook, Abramovic and Ullay’s unsettling Communist Body/Fascist Body, Knowles’s Journal of the Identical Lunch, and Laura Letinsky’s delicate still lifes. Nevertheless, it was Lee Mingwei’s The Dining Project that ultimately caught my attention, standing in stark contrast to Sonja Alhauser’s Flying Feast. Responding to the isolation Mingwei felt during his first year as an MFA student, he put out ads for anyone “interested in sharing foods and introspective conversation” to contact him. Thus: The Dining Project. Mingwei prepares a traditional Taiwanese meal in accordance with his guest’s dietary restrictions and provides company and conversation. In the exhibition, we see a large, empty bamboo table. Projected on top is a muted video of two people sharing a meal at this very table. Only their torsos are visible. The Dining Project tackles issues of societal isolation and cultural segregation by creating a space for human connection, intimacy, and cultural exchange. This is what a micro-utopia looks like, however small it may be.

Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art
February 16 – June 10, 2012
The Smart Museum
5550 S. Greenwood Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637