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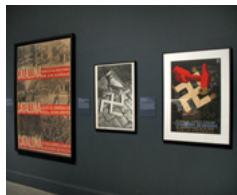
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**Pablo Picasso**  
*Le Moulin de la Galette*  
1900  
Guggenheim Museum



Anonymous anti-Fascist posters from the Spanish Civil War, 1936-37, in "Barcelona and Modernity" at the Metropolitan Museum



**Salvador Dalí**  
*Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)*  
1936  
Philadelphia Museum of Art



**Julio González**  
*Raised Left Hand No. 2*  
ca. 1942  
IVAM, Valencia



Gillian Laub's *Guy and Ranit, Arad, Israel* (2003) in "Dateline Israel" at the Jewish Museum

## WEEKEND UPDATE by Walter Robinson

Art and barbarism, is that a theme? Up at the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, the new esthetic blockbuster "Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí," Mar. 7-June 3, 2007, begins with Belle Epoque café society and ends with Fascism, literally moving from **Pablo Picasso's** *Le Moulin de la Galette* (made in 1890, when the artist was 19) to a large final gallery containing studies for *Guernica* (1937), a model of **Josep Lluís Sert's** *Pavilion of the Spanish Republic* at the **1937 Paris International Exposition** -- mounted during the tragic Spanish Civil War -- and several red-and-black anti-Fascist posters featuring huge swastikas.

It's like an art-world version of *Cabaret*. The show includes lots of fancy decorative arts, for those who like that sort of thing, but most impressive is its demonstration of the power of the big three of Catalan painting -- Picasso, **Joan Miró** and **Salvador Dalí** -- especially when their painterly fires were fanned by the winds of war. Installed side by side, Miró's *Still Life with Old Shoe* (1937) and Dalí's *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)* (1936) positively glow with historical passions that are political as well as esthetic. Nearby is a bronze *Raised Left Hand* (ca. 1942) by **Julio González**, a classic modernist image of supplication.

A more contemporary barbarism is the subtext of "Dateline Israel: New Photography and Video Art," Mar. 10-Aug. 5, 2007, a show at the **Jewish Museum** of works by 23 artists -- including a single Palestinian -- that address issues of "contested land" and "religious ideology" in Israel since 2000. Very little overt propaganda is on hand; rather, the works take a pensive, even mournful tone, with sympathy overwhelmingly shown for the ordinary people whose lives are upturned by forces -- government and military forces -- beyond their control.

The sense of inevitability, even though it's of the human-engineered sort, is provided by *Wall* by London-based artist **Catherine Yass**. The 30-minute-long looped video simply follows the tall, concrete barrier constructed after the 2000 intifada, sometimes up close, other times from a distance.

Another striking work in the show is *Guy and Ranit, Israel, 2003*, a photograph by the New York photojournalist **Gillian Laub** of a young Israeli whose legs were blown off by a roadside bomb. "I am happy, strong and healthy," says Guy, via the wall label. "I believe that we all have an extreme internal power that is released only in these situations." This kind of image -- young men with missing lower limbs -- is rare in the U.S. but promises to become commonplace, thanks to the Iraq war.

Barbarism is the ostensible subject of **Eve Sussman's** *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, the much-anticipated second film from the maker of the stunning *89 Seconds at Alcazar* that, in the end, has not exactly garnered stellar reviews. As a formal exercise, the work has a certain style -- if you remove dialogue from a film, you are essentially left with the "blocking," or a dance. The grand finale, a bacchanalian orgy that is reminiscent of **Carolee Schneemann's** *Meat Joy* of 1964, is worth the 80-minute wait, which includes choreographed scenes of men in suits reading newspapers in a station waiting room, women in 1960s dress lounging about an art moderne home, and women being snatched from the frame, cartoon-style, in a crowded Greek market.

But as a meditation on a classic tale of duplicity and murder, the work is less satisfying. The original *Sabine Women* is a horrible story -- the Romans slit the throats of their male hosts and kidnap their wives and daughters -- the kind of fable that civilized people tell themselves to place horror in the myth-shrouded past and prove just how far they have come. But (as ever?), the barbarism behind *The Sabine Women* is all too close today, whether at Guantanamo Bay or in Baghdad. What is to be done?

\* \* \*

Better press followed the opening of the **Museum of Modern Art** survey of photographs by **Jeff Wall**, the Vancouver-born artist who is celebrated for carefully constructing his apparently everyday snapshots like a film director. The critics love his light boxes, which I think are

obnoxious, and say his photos are beautiful, when I think they look like big snapshots -- but I guess that's the point of their being so laboriously constructed.



Still from Eve Sussman and the Rufus Corporation's *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (2006)



**Jeff Wall**  
*Picture for Women*  
1979  
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



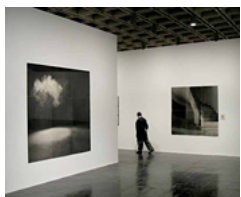
**Edouard Manet**  
*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*  
1882  
Courtauld Institute of Art, London



**Jeff Wall**  
*The Crooked Path*  
1991  
Jeff Wall: *Photographs* (Steidl)



**Lorna Simpson**  
*The Waterbearer*  
1986  
Collection Sean and Mary Kelly, New York



"Lorna Simpson" at the Whitney Museum, installation view

At any rate, Wall's cryptic images become much more interesting once you realize that he is toying with pictorial conventions in the manner of Manet, Tintoretto and Velazquez. Many of his photographs are in fact photostiches of famous artworks past. For instance, Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979), a pared-down scene of a young man (Wall himself) and a woman looking out at the viewer, refers to **Edouard Manet's** famous *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-82).

I seem to remember one of the critics complaining that Manet's barmaid has downcast eyes -- she actually gazes askance at the invisible customer with perfectly pitched anomie -- and that the customer isn't in the painting -- he's to the right, visible in the mirror. Amusingly, Manet's picture contains brown bottles with the still-recognizable **Bass Ale** logo, which is just one bit of the kind of clutter that is absent in Wall's version of the picture. Wall seems to posit the photographic "picture plane" as congruent with the mirror that he presumably used to photograph the scene, though who knows, it could all be a ruse.

Many of his images, much reproduced, are less than thrilling. *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (after Hokusai) (1993) is a yawn, as is his illustration of a scene from **Ralph Ellison's** *Invisible Man*, a set piece showing a shabby apartment with hundreds of light bulbs on the ceiling. *Dead Troops Talk* (1992), which confounds a scene of fallen soldiers in Afghanistan with a comic "Living Dead" horror movie, is in poor taste, to say the least.

Other photographs snap into place. His still-lives, which usually use low-rent settings, are richly textured. *A Donkey in Blackpool* (1999), a photo of a sleepy animal in an airless stall, invokes a contemporary nativity (though it is said, less interestingly, to be a citation of **George Stubbs** as well), while *The Crooked Path* (1991), an edge-of-the-city field with a footpath snaking through the grass, suggests the viewer's gaze zigzagging deep into the picture. Neither work is in the show, but *The Storyteller* (1986) is, and it's a great channeling of both **Henri Matisse's** *The Music* (1910) and Manet's *Le Dejeuner* (1862-63) by a scene of immigrants posed under a highway overpass.

Wall enlists a naturalistic vocabulary to make -- what? -- cryptic conceptual art? -- and so does **Lorna Simpson**, a latter-day story artist whose captioned photographs, sculptures and videos are currently on view at the **Whitney Museum**. The emblematic image for the show is poetically multivalent, featuring a woman in a white shift, seen from the back, pouring water from a gallon plastic jug in one hand (like a refugee) and from a silver pitcher in the other (like a servant). An allegory of the African diaspora? The caption added beneath the picture further complicates the reading.

Simpson has a strong feel for seductive textures, as is shown by the photographic images printed on large sheets of pale felt, and a pronounced interest in social melodrama, often with erotic or ribald overtones. Typically, a long-distance image of an urban building or park scene is paired with a short caption that alludes to a secret rendezvous. A couple of the film installations are almost entertaining, as young women complain about how foolish their suitors are, or suggest that their male friends are less than completely masculine. Simpson's men don't come off that well.

But the majority of the works involve emblems of blackness, like African hair and hairstyles; a couple of them involve jazz. Overall, the work is highly refined, and the exhibition is striking in the way that it takes over the museum space and opens up a new world of people of color. It's a very stylish world, esthetic and educated and utterly bourgeois -- dare we say "white bread?" -- it's just that none of its inhabitants are white. It's different, needless to say, and very interesting.

Another show that was greeted with a certain amount of enthusiasm was "Not for Sale," which opened in February at **P.S.1**, a show of two dozen or so artworks that the artists who made them have decided to keep. My hopes for insight into the art market were dashed -- artists keep works back for obvious and mundane reasons. And, come to think of it, art shown at nonprofit space like P.S.1 is not typically "for sale," whatever the title of the show.

Instead, "Not for Sale" demonstrates something about curating. It is an example of the kind of old-school alternative-space exhibitionism that P.S.1 was founded on and that you'd think might fall by the wayside now that the place has become part of a real museum. That is, this show doesn't pursue an art-historical or theoretical premise, but rather results from the curator -- P.S.1 chief **Alanna Heiss** -- calling up people whose names are in her Rolodex. As we all know too well, that's how all too many contemporary shows are organized, anyway.



Works by Mark di Suvero and David Salle in "Not for Sale" at P.S.1



A painting by Alex Katz and a sculpture by Richard Nonas in "Not for Sale" at P.S.1



Stefan Eins in his "Museum of One" installation at P.S.1



Elisabeth Kley at Momena Art



Elisabeth Kley  
Jack Smith, Ethyl Eichelberger  
and Candy Darling  
2006  
Momena Art

In any case, the show's pretext gives every work a social subtext. **David Salle** presumably kept his classic painting from the '80s because it includes a portrait of his one-time wife and muse, **Karole Armitage**, while it's fun to imagine that **Mark di Suvero** retained his sculptural chair because it was, well, just a little too "applied art" to let it out there with all his fabulously cosmic abstractions.

Also good to see are works by longtime downtown Manhattan residents who were on the scene when Heiss was just beginning to forge her empire of cast-off industrial spaces, including the now all-but-forgotten **Idea Warehouse** on Reade Street and the **Clocktower** on lower Broadway. One such old-timer is Minimalist sculptor **Richard Nonas**, who contributes a strangely muscular rusted steel donut. "*Salome's Bell / Babilo's Well* is not for sale," Nonas writes in the caption accompanying his sculpture, "because it is the first rough single-part steel chunk-piece I could hold an empty room with, and the only sculpture that has threatened me every day for 20 years in ways I still do not understand."

Also out at P.S.1, in one of the classrooms devoted to solo shows, is an installation of works by **Stefan Eins** from his new, global museum-without-walls, the **Museum of One**. I first met the guy in 1975, when he operated the **3 Mercer Street** store, a tiny storefront near Canal in SoHo, where he showed a pair of shoes by **Sherrie Levine** as well as a rubber-band-powered mechanical bird imported from China, among many other things. Later, in the 1980s, he opened **Fashion Moda** in the South Bronx, in a storefront that wasn't 100 percent habitable.

More recently, Eins has been chronicling his own kind of pataphysics, capturing primordially biomorphic images in accidental applications of paint that are akin to Surrealist frottage. At P.S.1 he has several new photographic exhibits, including one depicting an irregular composite patch in a Greenwich Village sidewalk that glitters with an otherworldly purplish hue, and another that documents the discovery of a purple paint stain that replicates the profile of **President Bill Clinton** -- miraculously found at a location not far from his office on 125th Street.

Also out in Brooklyn, though at a considerably smaller alternative space located in Williamsburg -- **Momena Art**, at 359 Bedford Avenue by South 4th Street -- was a show of ink drawings, gouaches and brightly colored ceramics by **Elisabeth Kley**, an artist who sometimes writes art criticism (including for this magazine, occasionally). Kley is fascinated with divas, people like **Jack Smith**, **Ethyl Eichelberger** and **Candy Darling**, subjects who are perfect for our celebrity-addled time, in which identity becomes real only when it is a media construction.

With drag-queen divas like these, the subject is twice removed from any pretense of authenticity. These characters -- peacocks, really, another one of Kley's subjects -- are rendered in a hyper-stylized line that is reminiscent of the lesser modes of 1950s décor. It's as if Kley has turned to a manner of illustration as patently artificial and exotic as her subjects.

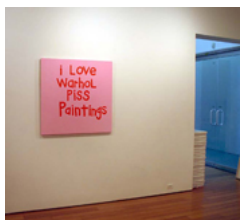
The exhibition also features Kley's ceramics, decorated vases and tabletop fountains made in the form of Eastern palazzos. Here, art is like a vase, a container for flowers -- in other words, a way to make nature into a stylish and artificial objet d'art.

Back over in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood is an exhibition of new works by **Cary Leibowitz** at **Alexander Gray Associates**, located in the big gallery building at 526 West 26th Street. For more than 20 years, sometimes under the name **Candyass**, Leibowitz has pursued his uniquely homoerotic muse, happily playing the role of the sole male "object" artist. His is a flaming, typographically fey version of the sans-serif texts of hard-core Conceptual Art. That in itself should be rationale enough.

This time around, Leibowitz has several paintings in enamel on sturdy sheets of plywood -- a pink painting with the words "I Love Warhol Piss Paintings," a round painting ringed by geeky knit caps and titled *Tondo Schmondo Fran Drescher Fan Club*, and a pair of Gay Pride rainbows, called *Sad Rainbow, Happy Rainbow*. Also on hand are some oversized buttons, scarves and cushions, printed with the same sentiments. Prices range from \$36 for a button to \$14,000 for a painting. A scarf reading "I Love Warhol Piss Paintings" is \$135.

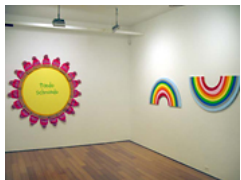
Across the street at **Lombard-Freid Projects**, the Iranian-born U.S. artist **Tala Madani** is having her first solo show of paintings, and it seems rather successful. A recent Yale grad who is soon to take a residency at the **Rijksakademie** in Amsterdam, Madani makes mocking, cartoonish-but-precise images of Iranian men engaged in argument, homoerotic encounters and, most provocative of all, religious ritual. God's beneficence, for instance, which is typically depicted as a shower of gold, here resembles a shower of piss. Many of the paintings are sold, with the smallest works starting at \$2,000 and the large paintings going for \$18,000.

Further downtown, on West 13th Street, the **Bohen Foundation** is presenting new work by the British artist **Rachel Howard**, who recently had a sold-out exhibition of her works at **Gagosian Gallery** in Los Angeles. The present series of paintings and works on paper is based on images of hanged women that she found on the internet. Some of the figures are shown hanging from the rafters. Others have hung themselves simply by bending their knees (what is called, in a term of art, the "short drop").



Cary Leibowitz's *I Love Warhol Piss Paintings* (2006) at Alexander Gray Associates

Many of the figures are nude, which suggests a whole new kind of relation of the artist to his or her model. But suicidal women, Howard explains, often do the deed undressed, as if to enter the afterworld cleansed of earthly accoutrements. Her paintings of these images are slick and impressionistic, and look as if they had been uniformly wiped with a squeegee. In fact, Howard has tipped the paintings up and allowed gravity to pull the image down. The accompanying drawings of the subjects, by contrast, are brutal in their linear economy.

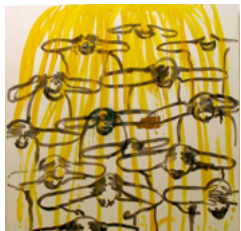


Cary Leibowitz's *Tondo Schmondo Fran Drescher Fan Club and Sad Rainbow, Happy Rainbow* at Alexander Gray Associates

One might expect a British artist to pursue such a sensational subject, but Howard takes a somber view of the whole business. "To see these tragic moments plastered on the web is shocking -- I feel a responsibility to these people, I want to move them to a different space." The drawings are \$1,000, someone said, though you would have to contact Howard's gallery in London, **Haunch of Venison**.

\* \* \*

Reminiscing recently, **Richard Serra** recalled that back in 1969, after he and his assistants had come up with his signature sculpture, *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)*, he asked himself, "Is that enough to do?" It's the bottom-line avant-garde question.



Tala Madani, "Smoke and Mirrors" at Lombard-Freid Projects

Megadealer **Larry Gagosian**, who currently operates galleries in New York, Los Angeles and London, is opening a new branch in Rome, in a building midway between the Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain. The space may debut in June, they say, with a show of **Richard Prince**.

**Kaikai Kiki**, the artists' agency set up by **Takashi Murakami**, has added a new artist to its roster -- **Akane Koide**, who showed her precise, dreamy images of young women at **Geisai #10** and who recently collaborated with the **Tokyo Girls** fashion group.

Coming out soon, *Real Life Magazine: Selected Writings and Projects, 1979-1994*, a compilation of articles from the underground art mag co-edited by **Thomas Lawson**, now dean of **California Institute of the Arts**, and including a seminal text by yours truly, titled "The Quest for Failure." Co-editor of the new imprint is **Miriam Katzeff**.



Works on paper by Rachel Howard at the Bohem Foundation

Painter **Joanne Greenbaum** is off to the art colony in Marfa, Texas, as painter-in-residence for two months at either the **Judd Foundation** or the **Chinati Foundation** (or both, who can tell which).

Video artist **Brody Condon**, who shows with **Virgil de Voldere Gallery** here in New York, is slated to have a project room exhibition at the **Santa Monica Museum of Art** next January.

Even though the *New York Times* gave **Marc Handelman's** show of giant abstractions at **Sikkema Jenkins & Co.** one of those bad reviews that takes your breath away -- how about "essentially academic pastiches of known motifs executed with unimaginative diligence"? -- it was too late. The pictures had already sold out at prices approaching \$50,000.



The future site of Gagosian Gallery Rome

The new blog for art-world insiders is **Artworld Salon**, overseen by art-journalist **Mark Spiegler**. . . . To keep up with author **Michael Gross**, who is working on a book about **Philippe de Montebello** and the Metropolitan Museum, check his **Gripebox blog**. . . . For art news up Boston way, see **Charles Giuliano's Berkshire Fine Arts blog**. . . . Fans of toilet humor can check out artist **Gavin Turd** in the online **Saatchi Gallery**, where he has a series of "Last Supper" photos -- can you guess what's in the pictures?

Spotted together at the **International Center of Photography**, the tweed brothers -- artist **Duncan Hannah** and critic **Adrian Dannatt**. Who says style is dead?

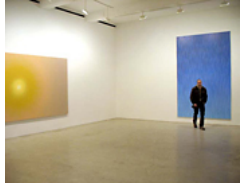
**WALTER ROBINSON** is editor of *Artnet Magazine*.



Akane Koide  
*Lonely Queen*

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2007  
Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.



Marc Handelman at Sikkema  
Jenkins & Co.



Adrian Dannatt (left) and Duncan  
Hannah at the International  
Center of Photography

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