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2010 Master of Fine Arts Exhibition, UC Davis

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et al.

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CHU

MFA 2010 EXHIBITION



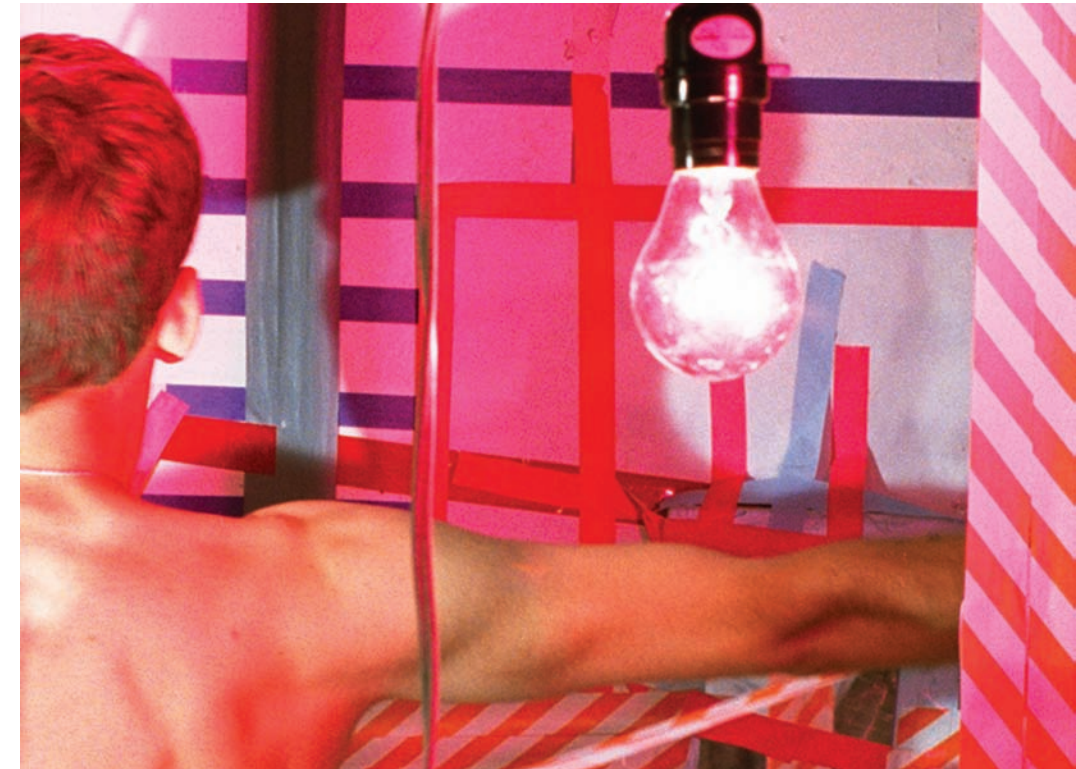
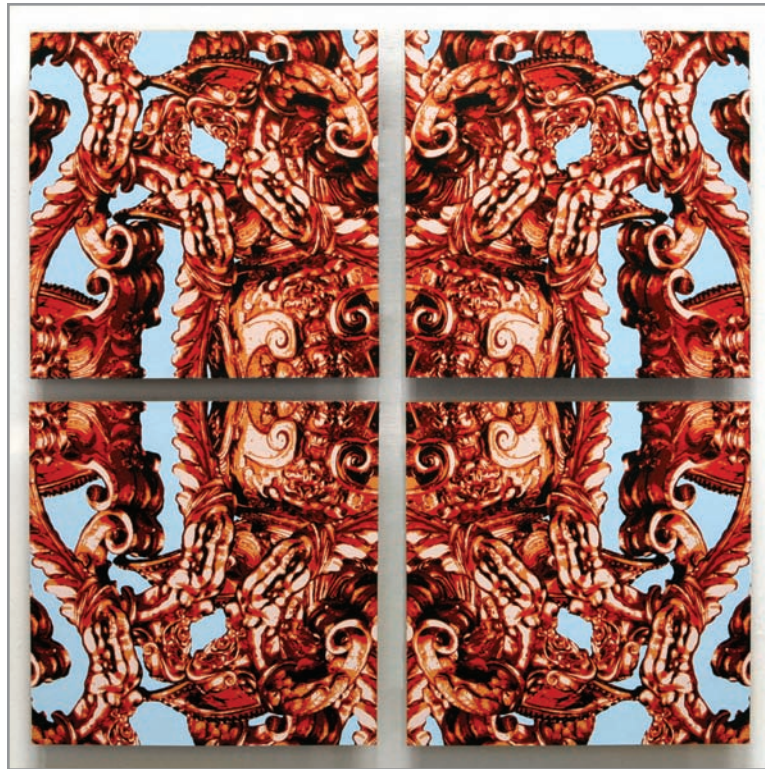
*Dance, You Monster, to My Soft Song:*  
**2010 MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
EXHIBITION, UC DAVIS**

June 4 – 25, 2010

HORGEN

BARRON

BOHNAK



**At the Nelson**

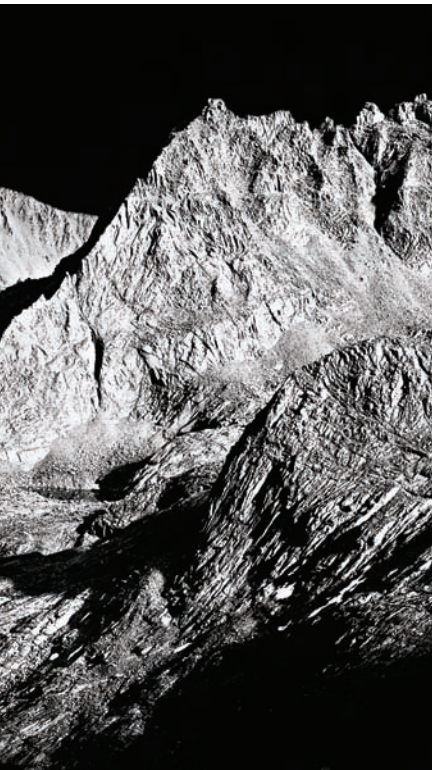
**JOHANNA BARRON** | **ALEKSANDER BOHNAK** | **JINGJING GONG**  
**TRACI HORGEN** | **ROBERT MACHOIAN** | **LINDA MILLER**

**At the Pence**

**HYUNG-MO CHU** | **JOSHUA PELLETIER** | **CHRISTOPHER WOODCOCK**

**Studio Art Faculty**

**TOM BILLS** (sculpture) | **MATTHIAS GEIGER** (photography)  
**MIKE HENDERSON** (painting) | **DAVE HOLLOWELL** (painting)  
**ROBIN HILL** (sculpture) | **DARRIN MARTIN** (video, media) | **HEARNE PARDEE** (painting)  
**LUCY PULS** (sculpture) | **ANNABETH ROSEN** (ceramic sculpture)  
**YOUNGSUK SUH** (photography) | **GINA WERFEL** (painting)



The 2010 MFA Exhibition, provocatively titled by the artists themselves, presents the final degree work for our second-year class of graduate students. The first-years open a show on 7 June 2010 at the University Club; just behind them a new class of eight students, selected from a very large pool of the most talented college graduates in the country, readies itself to matriculate in the fall.

This cycle has been repeated now for some four decades, always culminating in the annual MFA Exhibition. The graduate program in Studio Art maintains a curriculum of diverse and cross-disciplinary study, emphasizing creative and independent studio practice and advanced intellectual inquiry. Studio Art at UC Davis enjoys an illustrious history—the confluence between 1959 and 1962, for example, of Robert Arneson, Roy De Forest, Manuel Neri, Wayne Thiebaud, and William T. Wiley. This exhibition catalogue, we believe, documents the continued flourishing of young artists and their mentors on the Davis campus.

The essays here introducing the work of each artist are by Renny Pritikin, director of the Nelson Gallery, to whom the students, faculty, and I express our ongoing collegial thanks. Professor Annabeth Rosen served as director of graduate studies for this class.

The catalogue design is by Rudy Garibay of the Arts Administrative Group, veteran designer for campus publications in Music and Theatre and more recently the California Lighting Technology Center at UCD.

I am especially pleased that the electronic version of the catalogue will represent our inaugural deposition to the University of California's eScholarship project at the California Digital Library. Visit [www.escholarship.org/uc/aah](http://www.escholarship.org/uc/aah).

Additionally we are very grateful to the entire staff of the Nelson Gallery: Renny Pritikin, director; Katrina Wong, assistant to the director and designer of the promotional materials; Robin Bernhard, collection manager; and Kyle Monhollen, senior preparator; to the staff of the Pence Gallery: Natalie Nelson, director; Eileen Hendren, office manager; to the musicians for Robert Machoian's work, led by Richard Chowenhill of the Department of Music; and, always, to the donors whose generosity to the Department of Art and Art History has resulted in the endowments that enable our program to attract and support artists of the caliber presented here: family of Robert Arneson, Marcia Cary, Freemon Gadberry, Richard and Fay Nelson, Mary Lou Osborne, Wayne Thiebaud and family, and Nettie Weber.

D. Kern Holoman, interim chair



**JOHANNA BARRON**

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It was a maxim of modernism that the more theatrical a work of art became, the more inferior it would be. The first crack in this veneer came with minimalism, when the viewer's body orientation in relation to the work became central to the experience. However, with the birth of performance and installation art in the seventies, artists flew from restrictions on their freedom to include aspects of the real world and spectacle as part of, or constituent of, an entire work.

Johanna Barron's MFA exhibition plunks itself down right in the middle of that intersection where sculpture, theater, performance art, spectacle, and interior design have a fearsome collision. In 1999 the Italian sculptor Maurizio Cattelan made an infamous sculpture that depicted the Pope having been struck down by a meteorite. Barron offers us the second act of that play, in which a much larger comet has landed and split apart, revealing a host of odd furniture and flora.

In her fantasia, the crashed rock contains a banal hotel room set of furniture. There's a piece of rock with flowers on its surface turning, some extremely slowly, some rapidly. Another shard has a peephole into an internal architectural space. Everything is covered with funky, diy-crafted sci-fi references. If Cattelan's piece is photorealistic and pseudo-documentary, Barron's is inspired by a marriage of surrealism and slapstick. It is the opposite of journalism: sheer imagination, seriously nonsensical, at war with the ponderous, in love with life.



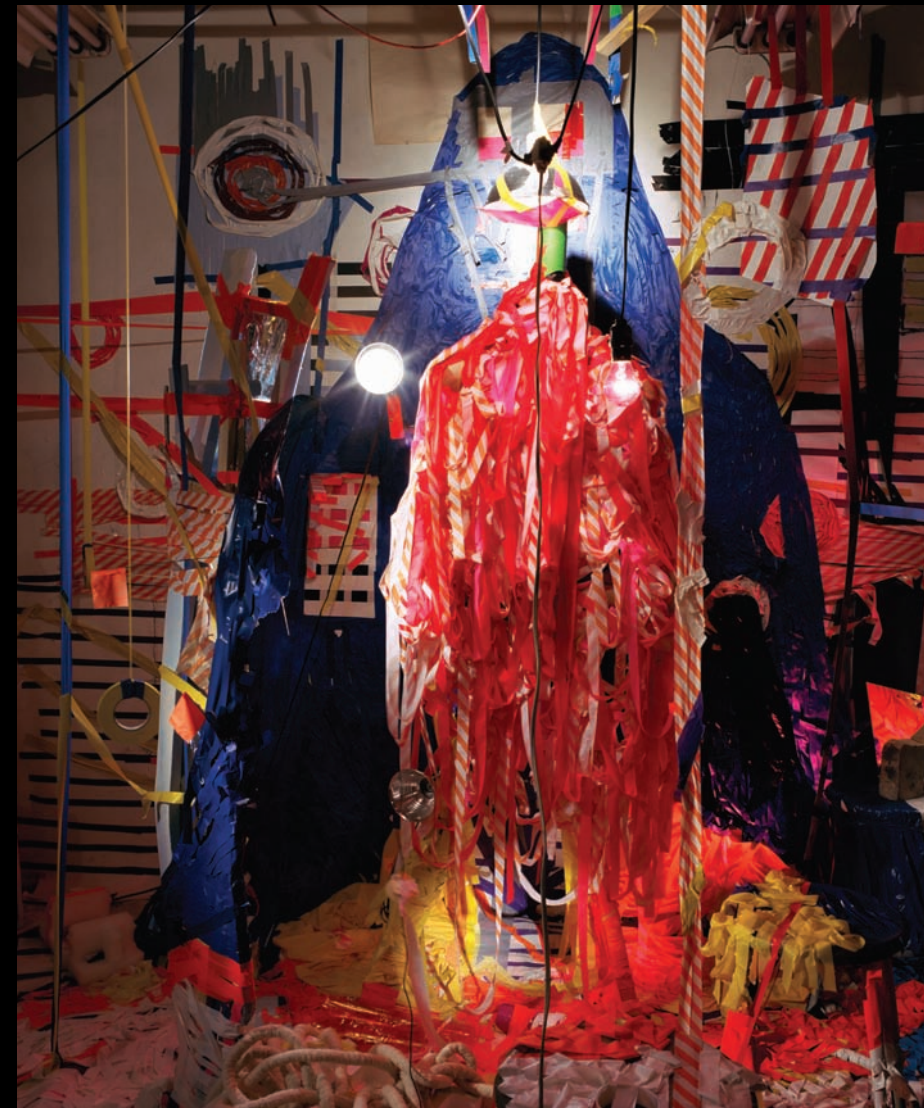




Several traditional artistic threads wend their way through the photo suites of Aleksander Bohnak. Most prominently is the history of artists who create elaborate installation works that are meant only for the camera, and never exhibited as work in and of itself. Other genres with which Bohnak engages include work that documents public performance art, like Harry Shunk, work that documents private performance, the long tradition of self-portraiture, and work about the body in space.

Bohnak creates painterly installation works using a saturated palette he describes as high key. At a quick glance some of his images can be mistaken for abstract acrylic canvases. However, they are in fact three-dimensional studio constructions for the camera, utilizing modest materials such as colored paper and other cheap and disposable stuff, without large-scale computer manipulation. Judy Pfaff's early 80s installations are a forerunner, as are Sandy Skoglund's even earlier studio-built environments for the camera.

More recently Gregory Crewdson and Jeff Wall have created highly elaborate sets with actors for photographic works that implied narrative, almost like film stills. Bohnak takes their sophisticated and expensive process and crosses it with his generation's more abject do-it-yourself style, and captures *events* that often include appearances of his body in the picture frame. Whether fleeting and ghostly, or firmly in place, Bohnak's body is simultaneously just another abstracted element and a jarringly vulnerable and human presence wrestling to make peace with its environment while maintaining its subjective individuality in the world.







●  
HYUNG-MO CHU

Unlike distinctions without differences, this one has always been useful to me: *childish* has to do with the behaviors that adults dislike: tantrums, egomania, impulsiveness. *Childlike* embodies all the traits that we admire in the young: imagination, energy, delight in the world. Hyung-Mo Chu's work is childlike, boy variety. Mo (as he is known) has melded a love of toys and miniaturized, kid-scale urban stuff and the training of a skilled visual artist to create a highly affecting cardboard cityscape.

Scale is the element that particularly distinguishes this work. It is huge, some 20 feet square. The late untrained artist James Castle has become an art world sensation with his cardboard creations of people, houses, domestic objects, and books, all on a small, hand-sized scale. Chu has exploded this practice with his enormous outpouring of skyscrapers, freeways, and other elements of an enormous, walk-in closet of a city.

This kind of project is often traced back to the artist Red Grooms, who created uproarious large sculptures of specific cities in the 60s and 70s, particularly *Ruckus Manhattan*. What distinguishes Chu's work is that it is deadpan and almost formal, less of a Grooms burlesque and more of a meditation, less about color and energy than about a kind of all-white, unmeasured precision. Chu's town is the ghost of the city of his childhood, reinvented with his eyes closed, like the British artist Emma Kay who wrote out the Bible, sketchily, from memory.





Whether in film or fine art, the continual message that comes to us from contemporary China is that change there is overwhelming and in large part out of control. Jingjing Gong's subject matter in her photography is the disjunction between the experiences of her parent's generation and that of her own. It is about the tensions that arise in veritably overnight going from a highly restricted existence in which one's internal reality must not be publically revealed, to an ostensibly freer one. This is further complicated because the trappings of repression are still there, both internalized and real, if more successfully hidden by the state.

Gong's models wear Red Guard uniforms of the 60s but find themselves transported from the political turmoil of that time into the serene bourgeois comforts of contemporary America. Their faces, their posture, their behavior all reflect the internal conflict between their individuality and the symbolic, highly regimented clothing they are required to wear.

The late Chinese artist Tseng Kwong Chi is remembered for his Mao-suited self-portraits taken in front of American icons such as the Statue of Liberty. He was going for laughs, juxtaposing the ludicrously buttoned-up, rigid iconoclasm of communist style with an American laissez-faire hipster attitude. Gong's transpositions are not so much about culture clash, or geography, but time. The writer Constance Penley once observed that all time-travel stories revolve around the presence of a crucially placed photograph that complicates the plot. Gong's photographs are clues in her country's time travel narrative, revealing its contradictions and paradoxes. Jet lag is the state of our body not being able to keep up with abrupt changes in its physical location; Gong's photographs are about the opposite: our minds not being able to keep up with rapid changes in situ.



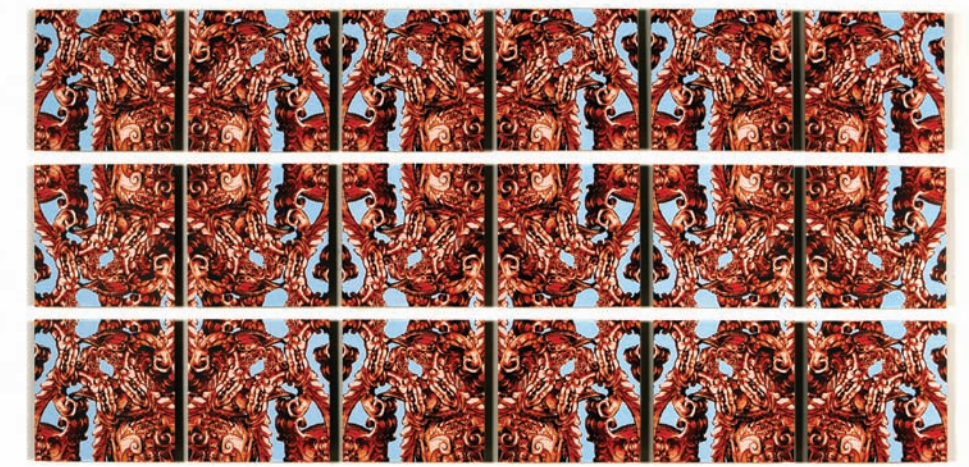


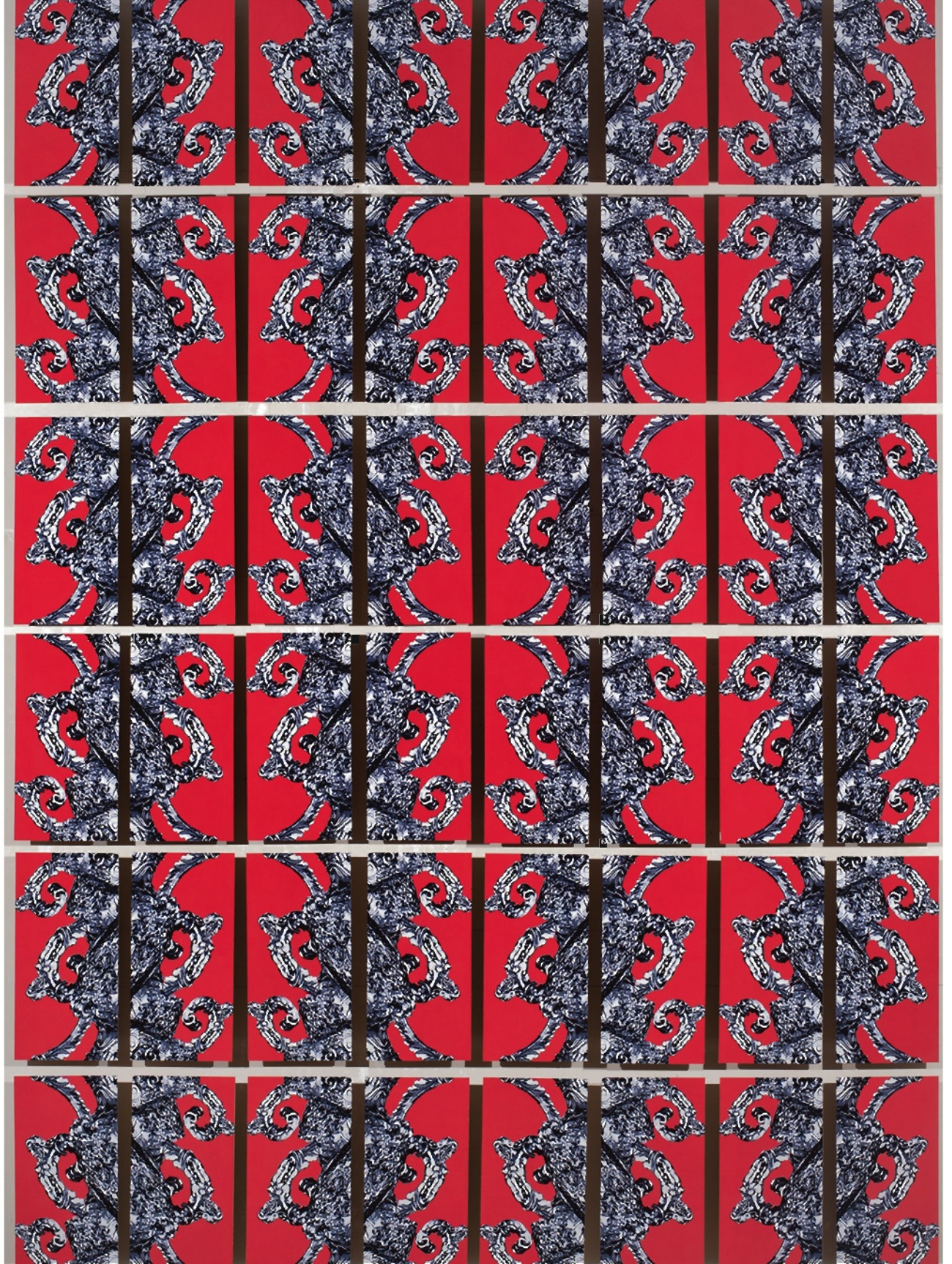
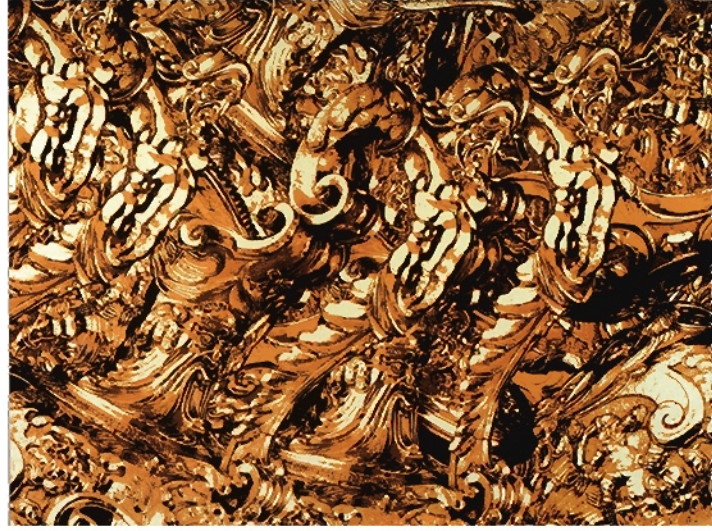


The blogger Maureen Mullarkey wrote recently that pattern painting was a 70s phenomenon in which “young hedonists ransacked decorative traditions” for source material for their new work. The most celebrated work and long-lived career from this tradition has been that of Robert Kushner. Kushner’s, according to Kim Bennett, in a Crown Point Press publication, is “the story of a career that is stubbornly original in its rejection of the idea that originality, or newness, is the main ingredient of good art.” “I really believe the public deserves something beautiful,” Kushner has said.

Traci Horgen is working in this pattern and decoration movement tradition, but dragging it into the twenty-first century by reconciling it with conceptual practices and using contemporary digital techniques to prepare her silk-screened print objects. Horgen has an unusually coherent body of work based on iterations of a found image: a Northern Italian gold-plated water ewer from approximately 1600. She scans the image, then works it for just the right tonality in Photoshop; what follows is an arcane and enormously time-consuming process involving multiple prints of half a dozen transparencies, five for the ewer and one for the background colors (a brick red, a sky blue). She arranges the prints in a grid with one-inch gaps, whether verticle or horizontal. The individual elements range from approximately 8x16 inches to 16x16 and 18x14. The ewer is abstracted, turned and reversed, but usually recognizable as fine metalwork.

Horgen is out to borrow the awe that master craft can inspire, undercut by the irony of mechanical reproduction. Four hundred years after it was commissioned internationally by an English aristocrat, Horgen is using this ewer as free-trade goods in the contemporary marketplace of ideas.



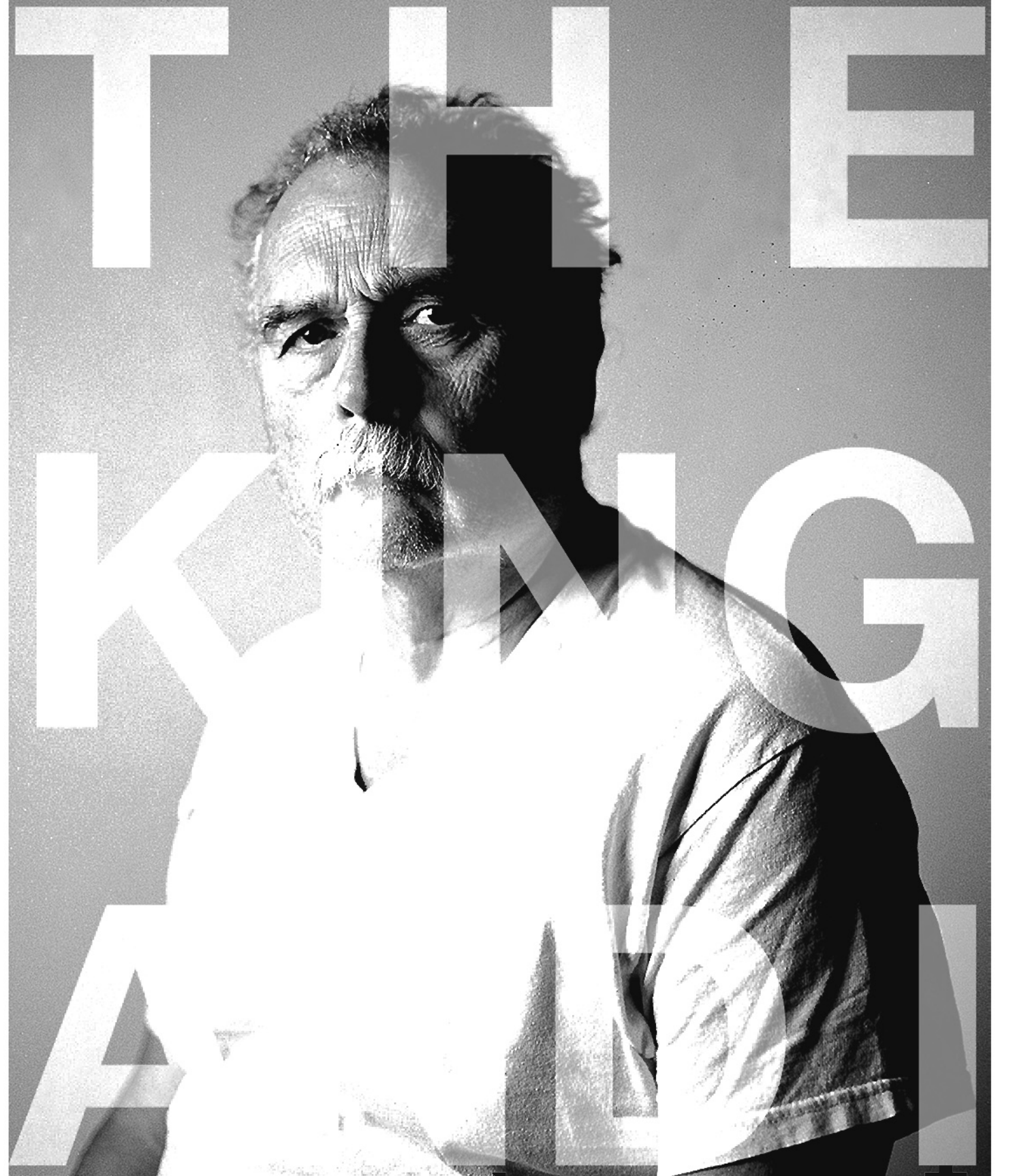




Since at least the runaway success of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* in 1996, memoir has been a dominant literary form. This has led to a predictable backlash that indicts memoir for being just another form of fiction, and the counter backlash against that, that has seen the development of experimental memoir forms with no pretense at objectivity and linearity. This development is mirrored in the world of documentary film, where those who make traditional talking-head-and-voiceover work are at odds with makers willing to shoot in real time with no narration, in the tradition of Frederick Wiseman, and those who make more fractured, abstracted work in the art film tradition of Stan Brakhage.

Robert Machoian is a documentary filmmaker who is coming to maturity at the moment of this three-sided conflict in his field, and his work embraces all the complexity and contradictions being debated. For his MFA show Machoian screens a selection of recent short works (most done in collaboration with Rodrigo Ojeda-Beck). Included is a trilogy: *Charlie and the Rabbit* (selected by Sundance this year), *Ella and the Astronaut*, and *Helen*. In these a steady cam follows small children (Machoian's) at their level as they take long treks through the suburbs to the woods, where their behavior slips between kid fantasy and real life. Also to be screened are *Symphony No. 1 in Four Parts*, with score by his brother, Ian Martin Graham; a work titled *The King and I*, which is a portrait of the artist's father; and a work in twin screens, titled *Dance of Days*.

Photographic work is also on view: an essay portraying children whose parents are of different racial backgrounds, and *American Nobodies*, portraits of everyday folks with interesting stories to tell. Whether in moving or still images, Machoian's work is a deeply humanistic investigation of family relations that endlessly trolls the real world for its quirks.







LINDA MILLER

A recent *New York Times* review of the ceramic artist Ken Price's work noted that it "can look like a stack of soft internal organs, a gorgeous extracted tumor or a glittering lump of dung." Like Price, Linda Miller is working in a tradition of highly organic sculptural form, traceable at least to Henry Moore's mid-twentieth century work, where objects never-before-seen outside of a lava lamp emerge at human-body scale and larger. Miller's MFA exhibition includes two such floor-standing works, spray-painted lime green and magenta, respectively.

Miller's family is in the automobile upholstery business, and she spent a lot of growing-up time absorbing the visual environment of that industry. The way piles of fabric fall and drape, and the look of odds and ends, suffuses her ceramic work. A series of spiky anemone-like panels hang from the ceiling, and are made by dipping and firing remnant fabric strings. The fourth element is a large wall installation consisting of two wall-mounted ceramic forms that are interpenetrated by sensual, snaky fabric creations (halfway between eels and boas) with broken ceramic-pebble heads.

Miller's work embodies the evolution of her field, from exclusively discrete and discreet functional objects as late as the 60s, into one that can be particularly persuasive for installation work. Her ceramics occupy space unashamedly and assertively, *just right*, like Goldilocks's papa bear filling his chair.







JOSHUA PELLETIER

Josh Pelletier's drawings participate in what is an unexpectedly long tradition of graduate student interest at UC Davis. One of the most acclaimed figures in American comix art, Charles Burns, was an MFA grad all the way back in 1979, and the tradition continued through just a couple of years ago with renowned cartoonist and writer Chris Lanier's graduate work. Pelletier's ambition is not so much to go into the comix or graphic novel tradition as to extend those stylistic innovations into the fine art drawing tradition.

Pelletier works large, in diptychs. And he works fast, and quick. His surfaces are not carefully controlled and planned narratives as we are used to reading in comix; rather his images are stream-of-consciousness records of the artist's dream life and pop culture images as they elbow their way into his line of sight and out through his fingers onto the paper. For his MFA exhibition the artist is offering the most colorful work he has produced while at Davis: the familiar graphite and black drawings are now augmented by large swatches of monochromatic backgrounds in scarlet, mustardy orange, and purple and green in one case. Imagery that floats through includes crocodiles, tough girls, monsters, text, jokes, lizards, horses, and dragons. His work is a kind of autobiographical document, drawings and books of drawings that are a time capsule of what he is dreaming, thinking, reading, and seeing in the Spring of 2010.







CHRISTOPHER WOODCOCK

Christopher Woodcock's black and white photography brings to mind, among others, Michael Light's photographs of the moon that he re-photographed from the original astronaut's images. In those infamous, large-scale prints, stark lunar mountains and harshly lit hillsides destroy our ability to judge distance. What appear to be nearby hills are in fact distant, titanic peaks.

Woodcock makes extremely long exposures high in the Sierras late at night. The resulting effect is that the ambient (moon and star) light accumulates to mimic day, but with an underlying unease because we sense that something is not right with what are essentially negatives. Thus the artist cleverly stands the conservative Ansel Adams tradition of zone system printing on its head, making perfectly exquisite prints while at the same time conceptually mocking the tradition. Another Bay Area artist, Todd Hido, made wonderful night photography in the 90s. Hido's work, however, documented suburban houses deep in the dead of night. These pieces also manifested a certain *offness* due to the congealed mystery of fog-shrouded, one-window-internally-illuminated homes. Woodcock's technique also offers visual disjuncture when the timelessness of these rocky and colorless, landscapes is upset by the sudden appearance of manmade equipment: two khaki tents, or a fugitive, blue-parka clad figure.

Still another layer for the artist is that of historical research. Woodcock is interested in the reality that the mapping and surveying of the Sierras was the beginning of the end of the unknown American wilderness. The late poet Lew Welch wrote one of his most powerful works about the Bay Area's Mount Tamalpais being the end point of thousands of years of westward wandering by human beings. Like Welch, Woodcock touches on the historic import and essential melancholy of such lost innocence.



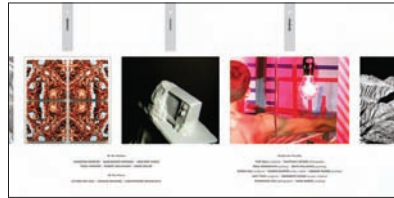




COVER

Hyung-Mo Chu  
*Welcome to Cockasia*

Linda Miller  
*Untitled*



INSIDE COVER

PAGE 1

Traci Horgen  
*Untitled (detail)*

Aleksander Bohnak  
*#6 2010 (sequence) (detail)*

Johanna Barron  
*Being and Nothingness (detail)*



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Joshua Pelletier  
*Say It with Flowers (detail)*



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PAGE 5

Johanna Barron  
*Being and Nothingness (detail)*

Johanna Barron  
*Apartment*  
mixed media  
68" x 46" x 36"



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PAGE 7

Johanna Barron  
*Being and Nothingness*  
mixed media  
12' x 8' x 4'



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Aleksander Bohnak  
*#6 2010 (sequence)*



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Aleksander Bohnak  
*#6 2010 (sequence)*



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Hyung-Mo Chu  
*Welcome to Cockasia (detail)*  
mixed media  
20' x 15' x 12'



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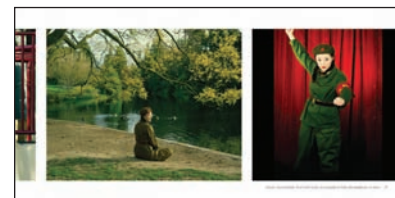
Hyung-Mo Chu  
*Welcome to Cockasia (detail)*



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Jingjing Gong  
*Untitled (detail)*



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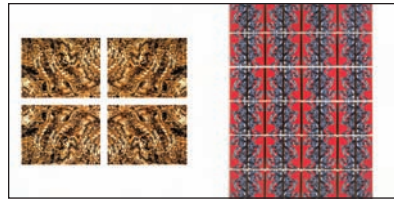
Jingjing Gong  
*Untitled*  
inkjet print of photograph



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PAGE 21

Traci Horgen  
*Untitled (detail)*  
24 screen prints mounted on wood panels  
69" x 102"



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Traci Horgen  
*Untitled*

Traci Horgen  
*Untitled (detail)*



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Robert Machoian  
*American Nobodies*  
51:00 min  
HD

Robert Machoian  
from *American Others*  
photographs



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Robert Machoian  
*Outside the Hospital Window*  
14:34 min  
HD

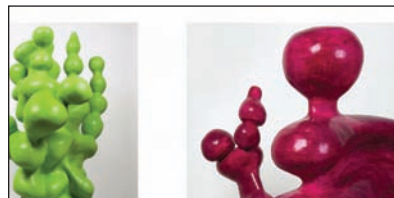
Robert Machoian  
*The King and I*  
8:40 min  
HD



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Linda Miller  
*Untitled (detail)*  
porcelain



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Linda Miller  
*Untitled (detail)*  
porcelain



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Joshua Pelletier  
*The Last Voyage of Odysseus*  
graphite, charcoal, colored ink and collage  
on paper, diptych  
80" x 50"



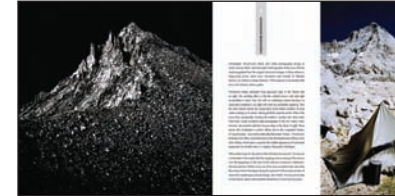
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Joshua Pelletier  
*The Fiery Furnace*  
graphite, compressed charcoal, and  
colored ink on paper, diptych  
80" x 50"

Joshua Pelletier  
*Say It with Flowers*  
graphite, ink, charcoal on paper  
38" x 50"

Joshua Pelletier  
*On The Slitted Sheet I Sit*  
graphite and charcoal on paper  
38" x 50"



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Christopher Woodcock  
*The Great Western Divide*  
c-print  
48" x 60"



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Christopher Woodcock  
*The Great Western Divide*



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INSIDE BACK COVER

Christopher Woodcock  
*The Great Western Divide*

Joshua Pelletier  
*The Last Voyage of Odysseus*

Robert Machoian  
*American Nobodies*

Linda Miller  
*Untitled*



BACK COVER

Jingjing Gong  
*Untitled (detail)*

THE NELSON

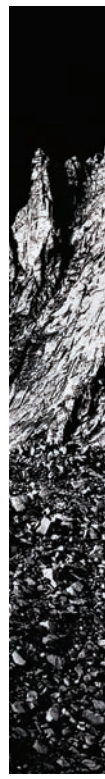
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WOODCOCK



PELLETIER



MACHOIAN



MILLER



JINGJING GONG



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DEPARTMENT OF ART

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