

Recent Posts

- Rhonda Lieberman on feminism at MoMA
- Andrew Berardini around Los Angeles
- William Pym on Philadelphia's biggest-ever art party
- David Velasco on Terence Koh at the Whitney
- Lillian Davies on Tim Gardner at the National Gallery
- Zach Baron at concerts by Patti Smith and Text of Light

Archives

- January 2007
- December 2006
- November 2006
- October 2006
- September 2006
- August 2006
- July 2006
- June 2006
- May 2006
- April 2006
- March 2006
- February 2006
- January 2006
- December 2005
- November 2005
- October 2005
- September 2005
- August 2005
- July 2005
- June 2005
- May 2005
- April 2005
- March 2005
- February 2005



Left: Coco Fusco and the Guerrilla Girls. (Photo: Brian Sholis) Right: Curator Catherine de Zegher and artist Martha Rosler. (Photo: David Velasco)

On Friday, I attended the first half of a two-day symposium at MoMA on “The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts.” The sold-out Roy and Niuta Titus Theater was packed with vintage women artists, as well as chroniclers, comrades, and frenemies, whether they identified with the “*f*-word” or not. Thankfully, not much time was wasted quibbling over that, as is customary in such situations, though one questioner did complain about the “*c*-word,” which she found as deeply offensive as the “*n*-word.” The lady next to me wondered, “What’s the N-word?” Oy. I helpfully wrote it on her program. She later crossed it out.

The day started with palpable excitement. It seemed a roomful of underacknowledged women artists were about to taste vindication at MoMA, the stern, withholding mothership. The venerable Lucy Lippard kicked things off with a minihistory of our struggles, contrasting early feminist ideals of community and revolution with the more cynical early-twenty-first-century careerism. To an art-history student who earnestly asked how to overcome her peers’ allergy to the “*f*-word,” the sage elder replied: “It hurts our feelings when people don’t want to use the word *feminist*.” See? Feminists can be funny! Lippard went on to marvel that this conference was the “biggest *sellout* the museum ever had for such an event”—then quickly chuckled at her own hilarious Freudian slip.

The morning’s panel was zippy. Coco Fusco, in character as a military drill instructor, gave a brilliant strategy lesson: “Following these tactics, everyone will forget there was supposed to *be* a feminist future.” For example: “Bitch your way to the bank: Rebellion for rebellion’s sake—bad girls, erratic behavior, erotic exhibitionism—is easily sold,” she advised. More pointers: “The Personal Is the Profitable” (a slide illustrated “The Tracey Emin School of Art: It’s All About Me!”), “Fair and Balanced: Give opponents to feminism a place at every table as if they are a disadvantaged minority,” and, of course, “Tokenism, Not Quotas.” If anyone asked, as many did at the end of the day, what any of the mostly historical talks had to do with the “feminist future,” I would refer them back to Fusco’s spot-on diagnosis.

It was gratifying and a bit weird to see the Guerrilla Girls do their shtick at this museum, whose paltry representation of women inspired their oeuvre. Alas, their material remains true, outrageous, and provocative despite the fact that they are now museum pieces themselves. And like the best vintage fashion, the black gorilla heads are still fab on the dais, transforming their copanelists—and the entire

room—into their “straight men”: “Keep Making Trouble,” the masked avengers advised. “Keep finding better ways to do it.”



Left: Artist Marina Abramovic with curator Okwui Enwezor. Right: Artist Orlan. (Photos: David Velasco)

Not making trouble, Carrie Lambert-Beatty was the delighted art educator with perfect diction, presenting the ingeniously subversive “Women on Waves” project, the floating clinic devised by Dutch Dr. Rebecca Gomperts, which provides abortions twelve miles offshore to women in countries such as Ireland, Poland, and Portugal, where the procedure is heavily restricted or largely illegal. The art historian, in a pixie haircut à la Mia Farrow in *Rosemary’s Baby*, pronounced the piece “activist assemblaaaahge” using art to “figure a space apart, an extralegal sphere [that] provides activism a safe harbor.” Completing the panel, Richard Meyer’s art-historical interest in cocks—that is, in censorship of gay male artists and in the Effeminists, the “flaming faggot” movement of the early ’70s—lead him to research art of that period in which “women were fighting to paint cocks, too—or photograph them.” Like a savvy vintage shopper, he served up three early-’70s finds that look great right now: Martha Rosler’s “Bringing the War Home” pieces, which collage *House Beautiful* glamour shots with militaristic horrors; Anita Steckel’s zesty phallic cityscapes, including what should be an iconic image of a giant woman straddling the Empire State building; and Joan Semmel’s not-glamorous naked couples experiencing “the reality of desire and aging.” He quoted Steckel, who philosophized, when her penis-filled tableaux provoked controversy in 1971, “If the erect penis is not wholesome enough to go into museums, it should not be considered wholesome enough to go into women. If the erect penis is wholesome enough to go into women, it should be considered wholesome enough to go into museums.” Right on.

The Q&A was like a *Gong Show* of pent-up sharing. Emerging from the woodwork, some of the questioners were in the collectives researched by Meyer. Several had to be “gonged” to let others have a turn. Sitting next to me, an MFA student from Hunter observed: “There’s all this talk about collectivity and the movement,” then she gestured at the mike and added, “but everyone gets up there and blows their own horn. It’s like this underdocumented moment, and everyone is searching for their own art historian.” Indeed, the “questions” were rambling reminiscences, promoting current projects and urging scholars to chronicle their work. The event had the uncanny tone of a High Holy Day when the heavenly accounts were to be reopened and Kafkaesque petitioners—hitherto neglected by the archive—might lobby the powers-that-be to inscribe them in the Book of Art-Historical Life.

After lunch, Marina Abramovic showed *Balkan Erotic Epic*. Posing as a

pedagogue, she introduced video vignettes featuring genital imagery and practice from a very “other,” pagan Balkan tradition: men masturbating into the earth, women baring their privates to “stop the rain.” Next, professor of architecture Beatriz Colomina delivered a lengthy analysis of Le Corbusier’s perverse violation of a woman’s villa by mural. With copious documentation, Colomina traced the modern master’s fetishistic mishmash of figuration and violation, from obsessively sketching *les femmes de la Casbah* in Algiers (in his words, “By drawing we enter the house of a stranger”) to literally violating a woman’s house by vandalism: “Defacing her [villa with his Picassoesque murals] gave him his identity.” The old-school feminist painter in front of me started to squirm as Colomina elaborated and elaborated upon the modern master’s perversity: “Why is she talking about *him*?” she poked the elder next to her. “Oy, she’s killing me!” The analysis went on . . . “She’s trying to kill us.” “Murder! Enough already,” she actually heckled.



Left: Curator Ute Meta Bauer. Right: Eva Einhorn, *LTRR*'s Ginger Brooks Takahashi, artist Carolee Schneemann, and *LTRR*'s K8 Hardy. (Photos: David Velasco)

Next, the stately Geeta Kapur of New Delhi presented a careful deconstruction of two woman artists working in “desecularized India” who demonstrated “a testing of identification rather than the claiming or embodying of identification.” Unfortunately, whether due to the postlunch slump, several hours of confinement in the packed hall, or the previous talk (which was delivered in a thick accent to boot), a little deconstruction went a long way. The feisty seniors in front of me were restive as bored teens. There was tension between the old-school feminists—who had long awaited their validation moment at MoMA—and the academics whose abstract musings seemed to perpetuate the status quo. Finally, Martha Rosler took the podium with a big white cast on her wrist and a black T-shirt that said WE WILL NOT BE SILENT. By then, the morning’s promise had seemed to fizzle into a poststructuralist fatigue, and we were sorely in need of refreshment.

—Rhonda Lieberman

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When the security gates finally clanked shut along Chung King Road, the assembled revelers moved en masse to the Mountain Bar. In the dim red light, Los Super Elegantes lounged on pillowed divans, San Francisco-based curators Kate Fowle and Dominic Willsdon tipped pints of lager, and, on the dance floor, half the students from the Mountain School of Art gyrated onstage to Higgs's DJ set. Although I still overheard comments perfectly resembling Woody Allen's depictions of a culturally vacuous LA ("Right now it's a notion, but I think I can get money to make it into a concept and later turn it into an idea"), I can't remember going to a better party, and many commented on how it felt like the old Chinatown—before the economic boom made everyone suspicious, rapacious, and mean. The mixture I experienced all night supported Allen's comment, though LA's schizophrenia is as much a charm as a detriment. As I was leaving the Mountain, I caught up with publisher Benedikt Taschen, stuck in line behind a group of twentysomethings at the bar's door. I asked him if he'd seen any good art, "Yes, I saw some good art," he enunciated in his clean German accent. "But I had better Chinese food."

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—Andrew Berardini

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01.24.07 **Free for All**

Philadelphia



Left: LURE's Aaron Iglar and ICA Philadelphia associate curator Jenelle Porter. Right: Space 1026's Andrew Jeffrey Wright. (All photos: William Pym)

ICA Philadelphia launched its 2007 program with thunderous and near-comical pomp on Friday night with "Locally Localized Gravity." It's a massive project that hopes to replicate the quotidian strategies of artists' collectives—presenting four from Philly, four from elsewhere, and a lone individual artist—in a mega-exhibition and two-month program of over seventy-five ICA-endorsed events, not only in the institution but in homes, bars, and libraries and on street corners. I say "thunderous" because the scene most resembled the hormonal chaos of a rock club, with smashed beer bottles, prowling youth (from hip-hop heads to burnouts to now-ubiquitous freak-folk folks), and frantic individuals on cell phones trying to find estranged friends or avoid ex-lovers. It was clubby, and, man, this club has gotten big. At

least a thousand people crossed the threshold over the course of two hours, more than I have ever witnessed here or indeed at any other art venue in five years in this city.

I say "near-comical" because while there was much of importance to discuss, both about the show and, broadly speaking, the local landscape into which it fits, there were no practical means of doing so. I cornered ever-poised ICA director Claudia Gould and asked her if she had any misgivings about approving the exhibition, which was arranged by staff curators Elyse Gonzales, Jenelle Porter, and Whitney Lauder Curatorial Fellow Naomi Beckwith. "None whatsoever," she replied, as we looked down from the balcony bar on a room so packed that the crowd had begun to whorl and eddy in that wonderful oceanlike way that indicates a critical mass. "Why would I?"



Left: Black Floor Gallery's Elsa Shadley. Left: LURE's Matt Suib.

I wondered whether these opening-night hysterics portended the challenge this show will face, whether discussions at this institution will have a hard time being as intimate and idiosyncratic as they should. During the ICA members' private walk-through, participating artist Matt Bakkom had treated the preppy young friends to an outpouring of jargon, suggesting they keep "modes of interaction" and "an activated museum space" at the forefront of their thoughts. "I was trying not to be overly prescriptive," Bakkom told me when we eventually met, "not frighten anybody, not confuse anybody."

I wasn't sure it worked. Looking after a blanket bazaar of hand-printed artists' books, publisher Max Lawrence bellowed to a fellow Space 1026 member, "I have never heard so much shit about 'commodifying' in my whole life. Are you telling me art's supposed to be free?" Perhaps the exhibition's wall text had led the baying, product-hungry masses swarming around him to look for a quick souvenir of the night's magic, speaking as it did of resourcefulness and cheap real estate. But cheap is not free. As I sat with Naomi Beckwith on top of the nearest piece of art, Black Floor Gallery's literal and snottily stark black floor on wheels, the curator opened up. "We wanted to circumvent the images of either starving bohemia or rank commerce that these groups attract, and focused on those artists who find a way for their ideas and themselves to survive." We had enough peace on our perch for a moment's reflection. "There's nothing harder than for creative individuals to occupy a space at the same time," she continued, without inflection. I wanted to point out that her words applied as much to the pros who organize and typically view museum shows as they did to self-sufficient collectives. Unfortunately, Beckwith had been snared for a crisis discussion about dinner, now thirty minutes overdue and looking like it might not even happen.

Wimpy student volunteers from Penn had not been sufficiently trained as name-takers, and streams of undesirables had found their way to the buffet in the back.

But it didn't really matter. For now, the fact that so many had come together was the thing to celebrate. It had been a truly amazing spectacle. At dinner's end, Gould made her way to a makeshift dais. Dim candlelight illuminated drained wine bottles, drunk youngsters, and smashed glass (littering the private dinner as much as anywhere else), and Gould told a ludicrous story about the dream she'd had on the plane back from her and senior curator Ingrid Schaffner's recent scouting trip to India. She'd dreamed that she had been floating on the surface of the moon, and her story went, endearingly, nowhere. I don't think she was drunk.

—William Pym



Left: Man Man's Sergei Sogay with Space 1026's Thom Lessner. Right: Whitney Lauder Curatorial Fellow Naomi Beckwith.

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01.22.07 **Flattering Light**

New York



Left: Artist Terence Koh with Whitney associate curator Shamim Momin. Right: Dealer Javier Peres and Terence Koh. (All photos: David Velasco)

Surely your friends who attended the Whitney's reception for Terence Koh's first solo US museum presentation last Thursday night told you that it was a glamorous affair. It brimmed with all the usual suspects

and more, from ubiquitous art-world intelligentsia like Thelma Golden (“Is this piece dangerous?”) and Adam Weinberg to icons like Bianca Jagger and twentysomething boys I didn’t even know existed outside their highly tailored Craigslist M4M postings and Manhunt.net profiles. (“Isn’t that LESbtm81?”)

And it was glamorous—especially if you were one of the sixty or so people standing in the path of the most conspicuous component of the piece, a four-thousand-watt ArriSun 40/25 movie light directed with laserlike precision from the museum’s first-floor project room toward a scrim on the museum’s front windows—a thin shield put up (against Koh’s wishes) to help keep the fulgent beam from interfering with traffic on Madison Avenue. Standing there in front of the elevators, within the corridor of palpable white light transecting the Whitney’s lobby, the (art) world seemed to slow to a magically lugubrious pace, liberated from the humdrum tempo of conventional, mortal time.

Koh already tackled something akin to Art Fair Art with his quixotic reproduction of The Cock’s back room—sans any of the lubricious activity that made the original worth reproducing—at the opening of Asia Song Society during last year’s Armory Show. Is he now auguring a genre of Opening Art? For if the Whitney’s press release speaks of Koh’s piece as “creating a psychological interaction that evokes desire and loss, pain and hope,” at the reception it mostly evoked an E! Oscar prep party. It’s like that episode of *Murphy Brown* in which a guest at an opening—ignorant of the “real art,” a mural on the ceiling—exclaims: “It’s brilliant! *We* are the art!” Silly, perhaps, but this “misrecognition” easily translates to Koh’s piece: It’s no longer Koh’s work that’s the spectacle, but the audience—a mixed bag of curators, dealers, museum directors, artists, writers, and unaffiliated scenesters who (like myself) took to the light like moths to a flame. (A return visit on Saturday showed a very different scene, with most visitors scuttling through the beam in a desperate bid for the stairwell—though a few apparently stuck around long enough to glimpse a mysterious large lead sphere placed furtively in the corner of the off-limits room that harbors the light.) I don’t envy the piece’s guards, but its rapturous reception on Thursday certainly speaks to the benefits of making everyone at an opening look fabulous, and Koh surely knows which side his bread is buttered on.



Left: Artist Ryan McGinley with Bianca Jagger. Right: Dealer Mary Boone.

Koh’s legerdemain works better on some than others. At a “White Party” at Deitch Projects following the reception, Mary Boone (who held a “gold-themed” dinner for Koh the night prior at Mr. Chow) told me to “tell Javier—tell Terence—that I would love to represent him in New York.” Later I mentioned this to Koh’s dealer, Javier Peres. He seemed

gracious but amused, answering: “Terence only works with me.” Can you blame Peres for not wanting to share? Especially considering that a recent *New York* magazine profile estimated that the artist raked in over one million bucks last year—necessary income, given the amount his dealer spends on his work. While the Whitney installation was, according to Peres, “one of the cheapest Koh projects to produce,” the follow-up fete and performance certainly weren’t, with Jeffrey Deitch rumored to have dropped a whopping \$130,000 on the White Party’s luscious setup.

It paid off . . . somewhat. Walking into Deitch was like entering a quiet, high-class, visually stunning rave. A fog machine had been pumped up to the legal limit (I didn’t even know there was one), and white shrouds were distributed at the door to those who failed to meet the party’s mandatory monochromatic dress code. Inside, young boys drenched in glaucous white powder wearing nothing but underwear and gossamer white veils circulated through the crowd, while a bar served vodka and white cranberry juice in plastic cups (you’d think you’d get glassware for the price). The performance consisted of Koh huddled on a stage banked by two giant Thomas Zipp—*cum*—Josiah McElheny Sputnik neon balls, mumbling gibberish in a voice reminiscent of Gollum from *Lord of the Rings*. One person in the front row was overheard whispering: “This is art history in the making. No one knows it now, but someday . . .” As if in response, another bird spurted: “What a sorry echo of the Fischerspooner show here five years ago, only with less sparkle and substance.”

Afterward, I made my way to 205 Club on the Lower East Side for *032c* magazine’s “official” after-after-party, but inside it was a mob scene, overflowing with what looked like stragglers from *Vice* magazine’s launch party held at the bar the night prior. On my way to Chinatown’s Good World Bar & Grill for the less official after-after-after-party (prior to the real after-hours, I hear, later that night at ASS), I spotted Bruce LaBruce on his cell phone at the edge of a crowd queuing up to get into 205: “Javier! It’s Bruce. Slava and I can’t get in. Javier? Javier?? Javier??? . . . Fuck.” Unable to help, my friends and I staggered off to the next destination, where artists Banks Violette, Bozidar Brazda, and Dan Colen were among those prepping to *really* kick off the night. There’s more, of course, but you can’t blame me for being circumspect: I want to keep getting invited to these things, after all.

—David Velasco



Left: Artist Todd Eberle. Right: Artist Leo Villareal with Yvonne Force Villareal.

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01.20.07 **Family Affair**

London



Left: Artist Tim Gardner and Veronica Schriber. Right: Dealer Stuart Shave with Tate curator Stuart Comer. (All photos: Lillian Davies)

Although we'd never met, Charles Saumarez Smith, director of the National Gallery, greeted me with kisses as I arrived through the grand portico entrance for the opening of "Tim Gardner: New Works." Clearly, love was in the air, and for this intimate gathering in room one of the Trafalgar Square institution, a charming space the size of a living room, friends and relatives were gathering to admire Gardner's landscapes and portraits. I met Gardner's father, Jim, who introduced me to his wife, sons, nieces, and nephews, all of whom had traveled from Canada to celebrate. Gardner himself graciously talked me through the works at the National Gallery that had inspired him during his three-month residency in the summer of 2005—Turner's cloud studies, Monet's landscapes, and Rubens's skies—and admitted that, upon arriving in London to work, he had wanted to "get away from portraiture." As if describing cabin fever, he recalled a desire to "get out of the studio . . . and out into the world."

Saumarez Smith called the room to attention to introduce the artist-in-residence program, emphasizing the transition that Gardner signals as the first non-British artist to participate since the scheme began in 1979. Saumarez Smith has tweaked the program in other ways, perhaps in an attempt to catch up with what Barbara Hopkins of the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation, a major patron of the arts in Britain, described as the precedent set by "the maverick down the road, Nick Serota." Things momentarily took a surreal turn as David Lammy, British minister of culture, addressing the growing crowd, endorsed the "virtues of the New World—sublime landscapes and masculinity"—that he saw in Gardner's paintings and drawings.



Left: Artist Nigel Cooke with Barbara Hopkins of the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.  
Right: British minister of culture David Lammy.

On my way to the nearby room where guests migrated for drinks, I ran into an ebullient Christopher Riopelle, curator of the exhibition, in front of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Riopelle described the way in which Gardner channeled works in the National Gallery's collections into his own practice as "osmosis"—a process realized through "oblique references to historic works, but always in modern terms." Surrounded by the sixteenth-century masterpieces of room nine, I found Stuart Shave, who claimed that this was his "first time to ever wear a tie"—an exceptional skinny Day-Glo number. A few months after seeing Gardner's work at Shave's London gallery, Riopelle asked him to bring over some of the artist's work to present to the residency-selection committee. "No JPEGs, no PowerPoint," Shave explained, as if describing the strange rituals of an ancient tribe.

In the National Gallery dining room, where we were soon escorted for dinner, I found Lonti Ebers, president of the Power Plant in Toronto, who lamented that it's close to impossible to get ahold of Gardner's work in his native country—it's "snapped up too quickly by international collectors." Painter Nigel Cooke explained that when he was in art school, Leon Kossoff, now enjoying the studio space and museum access Gardner did, was simply "not cool." Tom Windross, from the museum's publishing department, thought maybe it was a generational thing: Today, "the kids are after anything Kossoff." (I can't say I've heard the same.) During a round of teary-eyed toasts at meal's end, the Canadian high commissioner's wife proclaimed that Gardner's work made her "proud to be a Canadian," and I heard someone exclaim, "This is like a wedding!" Indeed.

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—Lillian Davies

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01.17.07 **Tone Poems**

New York



Left: Text of Light's Lee Ranaldo. Right: Patti Smith. (All photos: Brian Sholis)

For a Thursday-night program enigmatically promoted as “an evening of words and song,” Patti Smith took just the length of a poem to set the evening’s tone, letting us in on the joke: “Should I clap *quiet*, because it’s a poem?” she wondered along with the reverent audience in the well-lit confines of the Robert Miller Gallery. “What I usually do,” she finished, taking mercy, “is nothing.” She had arrived calm, breaking off one moment onstage to hug her late-arriving daughter, Jesse, another to applaud the inventor of the lens (she was sporting new glasses). Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame only a few days prior, Smith had packed the gallery beyond what it could reasonably hold, and we, who had done neither of those things, sought her guidance.

Smith wished for an evening “like those from the '50s I used to read about” and told stories about the past: Peggy Guggenheim and Brancusi and Sam Wagstaff, names that loomed large on such bygone nights. She lauded the Robert Miller Gallery for its “old-fashioned and generous gesture” to have printed booklets of her poetry and photographs to commemorate the event. But comparisons to distant days risked hagiography. Were we there because of who Smith had been or who she was now, for what evenings used to be or how they might be today?

By way of answer, Smith sang songs new and old alongside her longtime bandmate Lenny Kaye. They were interspersed with long passages of poetry, the most impressive of which—“The Sword of God,” prologue to her epic in progress *A Pythagorean Traveler*, also the title of her exhibition at the gallery—encompassed not just the greater share of the evening but also the show’s cool, desultory black-and-white photographs. Marble statues, found and shot in far-off countries, became “fellas”; her casual asides between poetry and song became the performance itself (“much longer than the poems,” she admitted). All was reduced to her vernacular. The genteel surroundings and her casual air cloaked only for so long the fact that we would not be let off the hook or allowed to dissent from her version of the story: The night would be exactly the kind of thing people remembered because she wouldn’t let it be otherwise.



Left: Text of Light's Alan Licht. Right: Jesse Smith.

Less momentous, although just as crowded, was the following evening's performance at the Whitney, where Text of Light—on Friday, a trio of Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo, New York-based musician and writer Alan Licht, and percussionist Tim Barnes, with Leah Singer as guest projectionist—performed alongside slides and film by László Moholy-Nagy. The around-the-block free-Friday-night queue had crashed what was clearly meant to have been an intimate occasion, and had ushers reassuring those to whom the fire code denied entry: "I've attended enough of these to know there'll be newcomers, and they don't usually stick around long."

Indeed, the contents of the second-floor gallery bordered on the ridiculous: elderly women plugging their ears, grown men in suits sitting cross-legged on the carpet, a wheelchair-bound couple in front of me eyeing the exits in vain for enough space to escape.

The performance began with Moholy-Nagy's *Light Play: Black-White-Grey*, 1930, a film inspired by his kinetic sculpture *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, 1928–30, present and on hand to rotate and spin variegated shadows. Out from a corner, drenched in echo, Text of Light's improv was not quite: The band's sound was composed, measured, emotionally coordinated with Singer's minimal slide manipulation. Licht, using a guitar and a chain of effects pedals, found patterns—then layered them or let them go as diffuse as blurry light. Ranaldo and Barnes bowed their instruments until Barnes's cymbals hummed alongside Ranaldo's trademark low-grade feedback.

In the tight space, bass rebounded off the walls. Text of Light's hypersensitive microphones brought the most incidental noise to bear, so that those streaming for the exits began to play their part, too, slamming doors that reverberated after they were gone. An hour after the band began it was over, leaving afterimages as vivid as the Josef Albers squares that hung down the hall.

—Zach Baron



Left: Text of Light's Tim Barnes. Right: Patti Smith bandmate Jay Dee Daugherty.

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