

# ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2011

INTERNATIONAL

## BEST OF 2011



# Scott Rothkopf



Scott Rothkopf is a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. His exhibition "Glenn Ligon: AMERICA" is now on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and he is currently organizing a survey of the work of Wade Guyton to appear at the Whitney in fall 2012.



2. Above: View of "September 11," 2011, MOMA PS1, New York. Background: George Segal, *Woman on a Park Bench*, 1998. On floor: Roger Hiorns, *Untitled*, 2008. Photo: Matthew Septimus.

3. Below: View of "Rirkrit Tiravanija: Fear Eats the Soul," 2011, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.



1  
**"PACIFIC STANDARD TIME"** (various venues, Southern California) For some, this Getty-sponsored initiative surveying Los Angeles art from 1945 to 1980 smacks of boosterism on behalf of an art capital hardly in need of special pleading. But for me, the coordinated cornucopia of exhibitions mounted by more than sixty California cultural institutions represents an unprecedented scholarly undertaking (and a salubrious twist on destination art-viewing in an age of overblown biennials and fairs). While the individual shows range widely in quality, taken together they offer a singularly fine-grained portrait of a vivid scene. The point isn't whether or not LA needs such cheer-leading but that we all need museums to collectively dig so deep and dream so big.

2  
**"SEPTEMBER 11"** (MOMA PS1, New York; curated by Peter Eleey) It takes guts to curate an exhibition reflecting on one of the most infamous days in recorded history—and even more guts to do so largely with artworks that make no direct reference to the event. But this is precisely the inspired challenge that Peter Eleey set himself in organizing his doleful yet spirited response to the legacy and prehistory of 9/11. Eschewing obvious topicality as a selection criterion, Eleey could easily have succumbed to the peril of arbitrariness, yet his great achievement was to orchestrate inspired juxtapositions—like Maureen



1. Julius Shulman, *Edgar J. Kaufmann House*, Palm Springs, California, 1947, black-and-white photograph, 30 x 40". From "Background Oasis: The Swimming Pool in Southern California Photography, 1945–1982," Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA.

Gallace's brushy domesticity with Cady Noland's tough trash—that feel improbable, pointed, and true.

3  
**"RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA: FEAR EATS THE SOUL"** (Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York) Speaking of moxie, Rirkrit Tiravanija demonstrated it in spades by removing all the doors and windows of his longtime New York dealer's emporium and leaving the storefront open to weather and visitors twenty-four hours a day. An adjacent soup kitchen offered sustenance and chance encounters, while the denuded main space housed a full-scale replica of Brown's first modest gallery and a workshop turning out T-shirts silk-screened with elliptical slogans. What might have been a rehash of Michael Asher's or Tiravanija's own ideas exceeded these precedents to become an ecumenical chapel at once hauntingly empty and emotionally replete.

4  
**LIZ TAYLOR, RIP** This legendary humanitarian's March passing unleashed an outpouring of memorial tributes and a lot of really great stuff. At Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea, we were treated to a crisp collection of Warhol's beatifying takes on a favorite muse. Yet Liz was not to be upstaged even in death, as proved by the irresistible self-portrait that emerges from Christie's ten-day winter sale of the icon's worldly

goods. Those who can't afford the Mike Todd tiara can settle for a minor Renoir, a pair of sunglasses, or a dress in which she married Richard Burton. Underbidders take heart: There are two.

5  
**"DANA SCHUTZ: IF THE FACE HAD WHEELS"** (Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York; curated by Helaine Posner) These days, any young artist knows that the trick to making a painting seem relevant is a pair of scare quotes in the form of digital effects, serial strategies, and any number of jokey conceits. While such approaches have certainly advanced the field, it's nonetheless refreshing to revisit the work of an artist like Dana Schutz, whose intrepid hand

4. The Mike Todd diamond tiara, from the collection of Elizabeth Taylor, to be auctioned at Christie's on December 13, 2011. Photo: Krista Kennell/AP.





5. Above: Dana Schutz, *Men's Retreat*, 2005, oil on canvas, 96 x 120".

6. Right: View of "Madame Grès, la couture à l'œuvre," 2011, Musée Bourdelle, Paris. Photo: Pierre Antoine.

restlessly wends its way from one canvas to the next. Her brief oeuvre brims with rough-hewn, socially pointed pictures, such as the eerily prescient *Autopsy of Michael Jackson*, 2005, or the equally farsighted *Men's Retreat* of the same year, which depicts a band of banker types lost in a forest. Ten years after her debut, Schutz remains that rare young painter whose technical daring and resources are matched by a capacity to conjure strangely indelible images.

6

**MADAME GRÈS** (Musée Bourdelle, Paris; curated by Olivier Saillard) While McQueen at the Met may have been the splashiest fashion show of 2011, this career survey of French couturier Madame Grès seduced with its quiet elegance. The setting made the show, with Grès's gowns and day wear gracing sculptor's stands and wood-framed vitrines throughout the luminous atelier and chambers of middling Neoclassical sculptor Antoine Bourdelle. Juxtaposed with Bourdelle's hectoring heroism, Grès's impeccably draped and pleated tunics and togas demonstrated all the more clearly how the best modern artists made the past new.

7

#### CARLO SCARPA'S OLIVETTI SHOWROOM

A chance encounter with artist Carol Bove in the Giardini tipped me off to what would become my purest aesthetic pleasure during the Venice Biennale: a visit to Carlo Scarpa's 1957-58 Olivetti showroom on the Piazza San Marco. Following an extensive restoration this year, the meticulously detailed jewel box of marble, glass, and African teak has metamorphosed from its former life as a novelty shop into one of Europe's most refined modernist interiors. Shelves that once displayed oversize bronze snails and other Venetian tchotchkes are



now restocked with vintage typewriters and adding machines, lending the boutique a perfect period patina.

8

**NEW YORK'S YOUNG TURKS** Opening a gallery in Manhattan is never easy, especially in the midst of an interminable recession, and even more so if your taste runs toward historical oddities and the conceptually abstruse. Yet the past year has yielded a bumper crop of smart, ambitious new galleries and the flowering of still more under the age of two. Uptown pioneer Alex Zachary has brought us overlooked elder stateswomen and offbeat up-and-comers, while West Villager Albus Greenspon has adroitly mixed the two in the same show. Farther east, there's Clifton Benevento, the buoyant scene makers at 47 Canal,



and the mandarin chic of Essex Street. Here's to keeping the flame alive and them in business through 2012.

9

**BJARNE MELGAARD ET AL., "BATON SINISTER"** (Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice) and **"AFTER SHELLEY DUVALL '72 (FROGS ON THE HIGH LINE)"** (Maccarone, New York; curated by Bjarne Melgaard) Bjarne Melgaard scares me. I mean this as a compliment. Few shows stuck in my mind more persistently this year than his dual exhibitions tracing the perturbing interrelations between pedagogy, collaboration, narcissism, violence, and sex. In Venice, Melgaard and his students turned a stately palazzo into a class project-cum-crime scene reflecting on gay sex (and every other kind) through the ever-distorting lens of AIDS. For his New York outing, he presented a manic multimedia installation of his own and others' work brimming with vitriol, self-loathing, and swagger. It's nearly impossible to assess Melgaard's cage-rattling project within the codified discourse on "art and identity," but this may be precisely its liberatory power.

10

#### JAY-Z'S THELMA GOLDEN SHOUT-OUT

Studio Museum in Harlem director Thelma Golden has broken another glass ceiling. The first black curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art has now scored what some believe is the first curatorial shout-out in a rap hit. The fact that the ditty is titled "That's My Bitch" may compromise Jay's admirable call for greater racial diversity in the museum world, but the arc of the moral universe is long indeed. □

7. Interior of Carlo Scarpa's Olivetti showroom, Venice, July 28, 2011. Photo: Timmar Shall/Flickr.



8. Above: Exterior of Essex Street gallery, New York, August 19, 2011.

9. Below: View of "After Shelley Duvall '72 (Frogs on the High Line)," 2011, Maccarone, New York. Foreground: Omar Harvey and Seth Shapiro, *Untitled*, 2011. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges.



10. Jay-Z performing at the MTV Video Music Awards, Los Angeles, August 28, 2011. Photo: Kevin Winter/Getty Images.



# Matthew Higgs



Matthew Higgs is the director of White Columns, New York, and a regular contributor to *Artforum*. His exhibition "I Am the Billy Childish" is on view at Lehmann Maupin in New York until January 21, 2012.

1

**"ANDY WARHOL: SHADOWS"** (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; curated by Yasmil Raymond) The 102 canvases that make up *Shadows*, 1978–79, had never been shown together in their entirety before this exhibition. Curated by Dia's Yasmil Raymond and coordinated at the Hirshhorn by Evelyn Hankins, the show—with its inspired staging of Warhol's late masterpiece as a near-continuous loop wrapping around the museum's notoriously challenging circular space—was a revelation, and one of the most extraordinary presentations of a single artwork I have ever seen.

Organized by Dia Art Foundation.

2

**HANS-PETER FELDMANN** (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; curated by Katherine Brinson) When, as winner of the 2010 Hugo Boss Prize, Feldmann received a slot on the Guggenheim's 2011 exhibition schedule along with a \$100,000 honorarium, he elected to combine the two parts

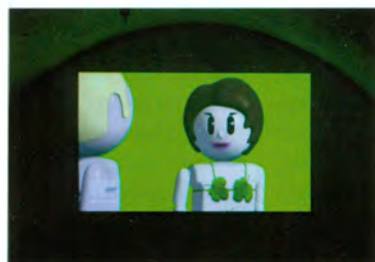
of the award, displaying his money in lieu of conventional artworks. One hundred thousand used one-dollar bills completely covered the gallery walls in neat, overlapping rows. What could have come across as an overly literal, even pedantic gesture turned out to be an unexpectedly melancholic and aesthetically seductive experience.

3

**FRANCES STARK, MY BEST THING** Stark's peculiar feature-length animated video was one of the few bona fide hits in an otherwise subdued Venice Biennale. Starring low-tech, fig leaf-clad avatars, one of which represents the artist, the film reenacts Stark's respective video chat room trysts with two anonymous men. The resultant vignettes—private conversations between strangers made uncomfortably public—are by turns embarrassing, awkward, laugh-out-loud funny, and deeply affecting.



2. View of "The Hugo Boss Prize 2010: Hans-Peter Feldmann," 2011, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: David Heald.



3. Above: Frances Stark, *My Best Thing*, 2011, color video, 100 minutes. Installation view, Arsenale, Venice. From the 54th Venice Biennale. Photo: Francesco Galli.

4. Below: Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010, still from a color video, 24 hours.



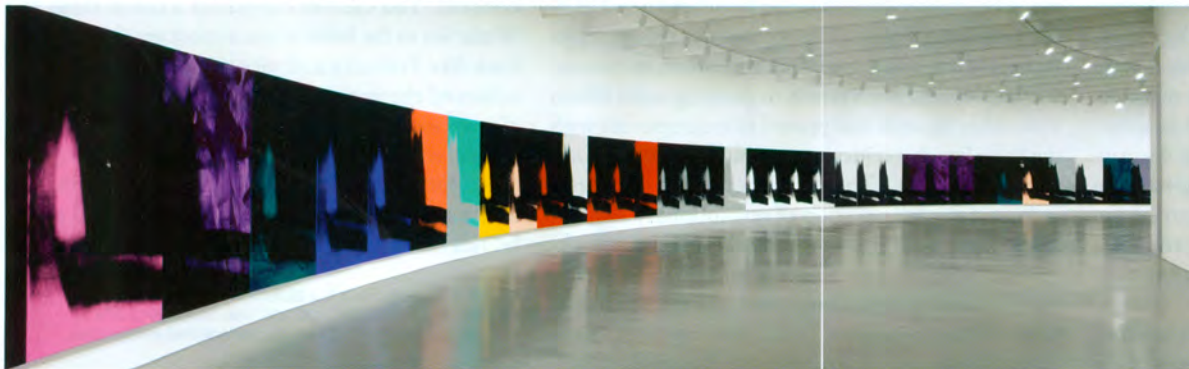
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**CHRISTIAN MARCLAY, THE CLOCK** Last fall at London's White Cube gallery, I watched part of Marclay's twenty-four-hour video with a gallery-owning friend, who declared that the hour we had spent semihypnotized by the work was the longest time he'd "ever spent in someone else's gallery." Subsequent viewings in New York and Venice suggest that Marclay's exquisitely edited montage of found film and television clips may well prove the first universally popular artwork of the twenty-first century.

5

**"THREE STONES IN THE CITY OF LADIES"** (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery, UK; curated by Elisa Kay) This idiosyncratic and quietly ambitious show was structured around a small group of paintings by little-known British Surrealist Marion Adnams. As counterpoints to Adnams's enigmatic imagery, works by Annette Kelm, Lee Miller, Eileen Quinlan, and Lucy Skaer explored, in subtly different ways, repetition as a form of abstraction.

1. Andy Warhol, *Shadows*, 1978–79, silk-screened and handpainted acrylic on canvas. Installation view, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, 2011. Photo: Cathy Carver.



5. Marion Adnams, *Three Stones*, 1968, oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 41 3/8".



6

**MERLIN JAMES** (Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York) Like his near contemporaries Peter Doig and Luc Tuymans, James takes painting's multiple and overlapping histories partly as his subject matter and partly as a point of departure. The paintings are stylistically promiscuous—it is hard to describe or even imagine a "typical James." Yet seen together they not only make perfect sense but also articulate something of the infinite freedom and the stubborn vitality of the medium.

7

**BJARNE MELGAARD ET AL., "BATON SINISTER"** (Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice) and **"AFTER SHELLEY DUVAL '72 (FROGS ON THE HIGH LINE)"** (Maccarone, New York; curated by Bjarne Melgaard) "Baton Sinister" emerged from Melgaard's workshop "Beyond Death: Viral Discontents and Contemporary Notions About AIDS," a project commissioned by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway as part of Norway's representation in this past summer's Venice Biennale. The show included works by Melgaard and his students, all orbiting around a filmed conversation between cultural theorist Leo Bersani and the artist. At Maccarone, in an exhibition that contained more ideas, provocations, and detours than any in recent memory, Melgaard installed works by a profoundly eclectic cast including Michael Alig, William N. Copley, Richard Kern, Marlon Mullen,

and Martin Wong alongside his own works and collaborations. Both exhibitions served as powerful exemplars of what Melgaard identified in the Maccarone press release as "artistic practice where the idea of curator, artist, writer, critic, or editor become new terminologies or even start to obliterate into new lines or modes of expression."

8

**TOM FAIRS** (KS Art, New York) *Modest* might be too strong a word to describe British artist Tom Fairs's intimately observed drawings of North London and its environs. Fairs (1925–2007) is largely unknown, so this exhibition at Kerry Schuss's TriBeCa gallery, itself one of the New York art world's better-kept secrets, felt like a discovery. For an artist who once declared, "I have no theories, no special techniques and no information to communicate," Fairs somehow, employing the most limited of means, managed to say a great deal.

9

**PICCADILLY COMMUNITY CENTRE** (Hauser & Wirth, London) A very different image of London was evoked in the Piccadilly Community Centre, an endeavor (not intended to be construed as an artwork or an exhibition, but a sort of living sculpture all the same) orchestrated and anonymously presented by Swiss artist Christoph Büchel. Transforming the gallery's central London space into a plausible and fully operational

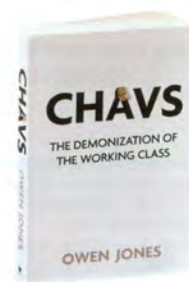


8. Tom Fairs, *untitled*, 2000, pencil on paper, 8 3/4 x 6".



9. Above: Tea Dance class at Christoph Büchel's Piccadilly Community Centre, London, 2001.

10. Below: Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (Verso, 2011). Photo: Kate Lacey.

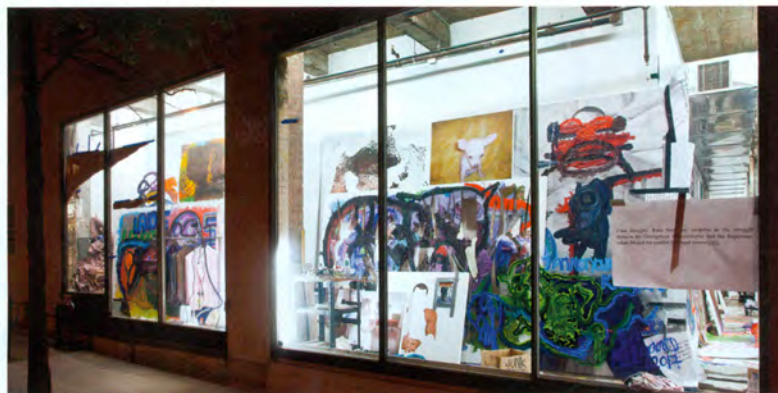


10

**OWEN JONES, CHAVS: THE DEMONIZATION OF THE WORKING CLASS** (Verso) Published just before riots broke out across Britain this past summer, the twenty-seven-year-old Jones's first book is a sobering account of the ongoing marginalization and, per his subtitle, demonization of the British working class. Jones identifies deepening social inequality as instrumental in the creation of the "feral underclass" (to use right-wing justice secretary Kenneth Clarke's tellingly dehumanizing phrase). Seen in the light of the riots and the worldwide Occupy protests, his lucid analysis of a divided society appears uncannily prescient. □

community center, albeit one with unexpected facilities such as a seedy basement bar and an anarchist-appropriate squat, Büchel created a phantasmagoria, a Frankenstein-monster simulacrum, of twenty-first-century Britain, mirroring and amplifying the contradictions at the heart of David Cameron's "big society."

7. Bjarne Melgaard with Omar Harvey, Big Fat Black Cock Inc., and Richie Rent, *Untitled*, 2011, mixed media. Installation view, Maccarone gallery window, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges.



6. Merlin James, *The Dunes*, 2011, acrylic and hair on canvas, 22 1/2 x 28 3/4".

