

That Christmas Fire in Stamford: An epic tragedy, one year later. By Dan P. Lee, p.32

+ **Chris Hughes, the Oldest Youngest Media Tycoon**, p.38 / **The Mayoral Race Is On**, p.26

DECEMBER 10, 2012

NEW YORK

The

Year

in

culture

The BEST, the WORST, and CHANNING TATUM



51

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Art

By JERRY SALTZ

TOP
10

1 Clint and the Chair

A NEW GENRE of performance art—call it “Neo-Verity”—became shockingly vivid and visible in front of tens of millions

this year. The first manifestation appeared the evening of August 30, when Clint Eastwood staged his infamous empty-chair performance at the Republican National Convention. Instead of playing out a highly scripted, rehearsed scene of political pseudo-reality, Eastwood seemed to split reality in two onstage: As Republican stalwarts willed themselves to see an American icon elevating irony to new heights and sticking it to the president, everyone else saw a party marooned in a self-replicating, self-fortifying private reality.

That distinction exploded wide at around 10:30 P.M. on November 6. In one

of the most unforgettable political performances of all time, Karl Rove tried to create his own topography of truth while annulling mathematical fact in actual time. Neo-Verity was established.

Robert Rauschenberg famously said he wanted to work in the “gap between art and life.” Rove and Eastwood mark the disappearance of that gap. Life became art, fictionalized truth and made-up narrative transmuted into form. As with real art, time expanded, slowed down; viewers became aware of complex interplays between realities; logic was bypassed, multiple patterns of meaning formed. Unlike art, however, this live-performance genre lacks the flexibility gene. It is unable to sustain any reading of itself except the one intended; it cannot tolerate paradox. This, oddly, is one reason it can exist only in real time. (Also interesting: It’s critic-

proof. No commentary can keep up.)

I’ve seen Neo-Verity in more conventional art settings as well. For example—and though it didn’t contain the same degree of public meltdown or disconnection with reality—Bjarne Melgaard’s placing two live tiger cubs in his gallery show at Ramiken Crucible let reality come crashing through, throwing animal-lovers into hysterics. Was this an act? Spectacle for its own sake? Or something so real it shocked? The *faux* meth labs and sculptural tableaux by Jonah Freedman and Justin Lowe are almost real in their absolute fakeness. In her street performances, Sharon Hayes reads love letters and political statements to passersby who never know whether what she’s doing is real or feigned. Neo-Verity might be the performance equivalent of the visible money shot in porn: something real and unreal at the same time.

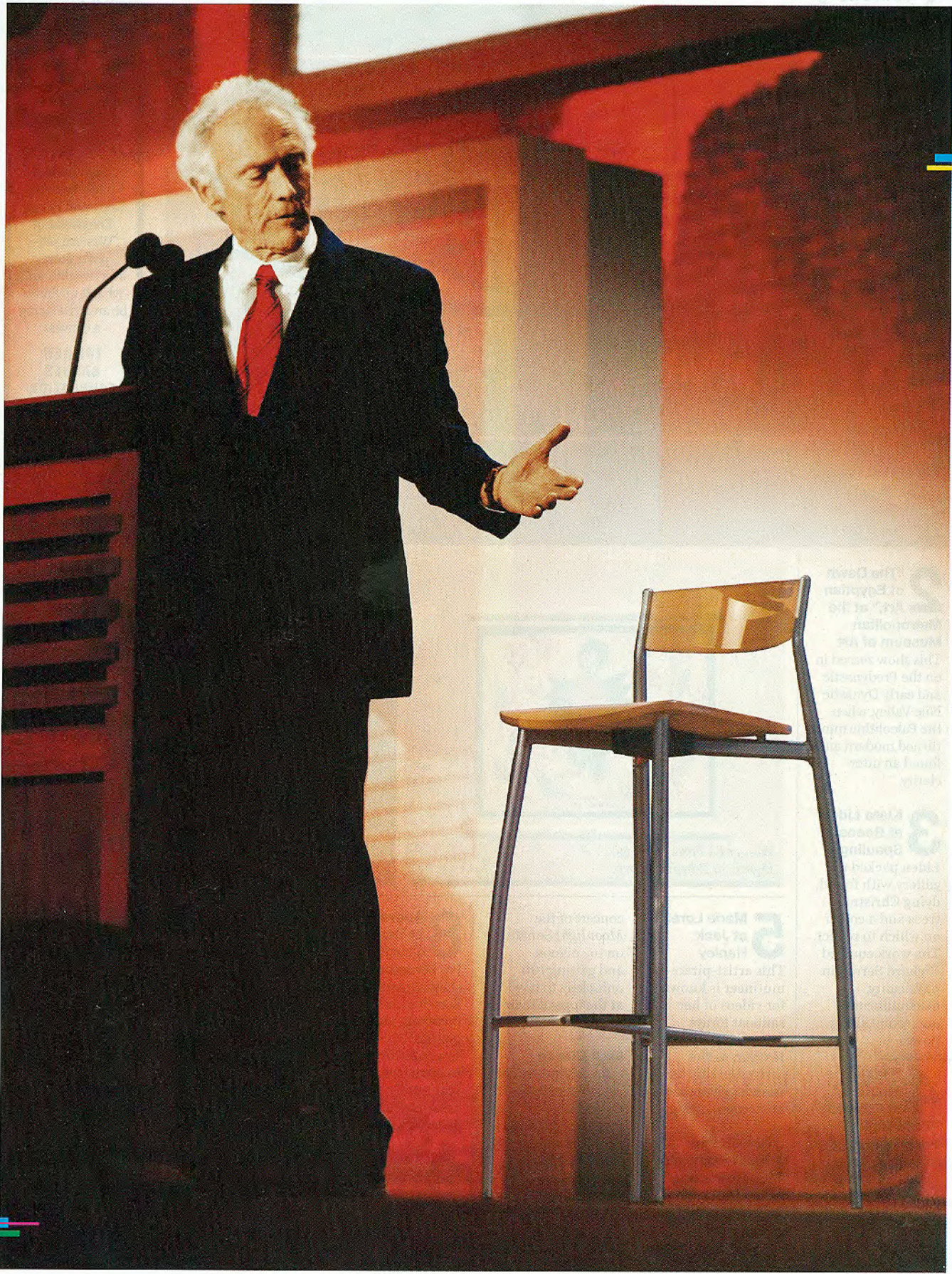


Photo: © 2012 American Museum of Natural History. All rights reserved. Photo: © 2012 American Museum of Natural History. All rights reserved.



Bjarne Melgaard

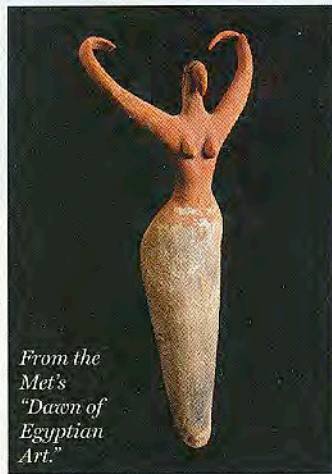
2 **"The Dawn of Egyptian Art,"** at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
This show zeroed in on the Predynastic and early Dynastic Nile Valley, when the Paleolithic mind turned modern and found an utter clarity.

3 **Klara Liden, at Reena Spaulings**
Liden packed a gallery with found, dying Christmas trees and a couch on which to reflect. The work equaled Richard Serra's in physicality, disequilibrium, and room-filling power.

4 **"Haitian Masters,"** at Edward Thorp Gallery
For his shows of masterworks by Haitian depictees of Edenic beauty and nightmarish colonialism, this gallerist deserves a MacArthur.



Wesner La Forest's Winged Figure, at Edward Thorp.



From the Met's "Dawn of Egyptian Art."

5 **Marie Lorenz, at Jack Hanley**
This artist-pirate-mutineer is known for videos of her sailboat forays around New York Harbor, as she arrives on tiny secret islands, giving tours of strange settings.

6 **"Joanna Malinowska: Fieldwork,"** at the Whitney
At the Biennial, Malinowska channeled enormous power, staging a

concert of the *Moonlight Sonata* on toy pianos and getting 100 onlookers to howl at the tops of their lungs.

7 **Bjarne Melgaard, at Ramiken Crucible**
Melgaard followed up a triumphant 2011 group show with a fantastic array of outsider and insider artists, as well as those caged tigers. Jaws dropped. Insult ensued.

8 **Andra Ursuta, at Ramiken Crucible**
For her second solo show, Ursuta showed herself a master of materials, craft, form, political commentary, recent history, magical insight, and sculptural power—and smashed the gallery's window.

9 **Kerstin Brätsch, at Gavin Brown's Enterprise**
For her first New York solo, this artist installed intricate

glass-and-steel display grids around the gallery. Viewers felt the presence of a master of materials and space.

10 **EAI and Dia's tribute to Mike Kelley**
All day on April 14, on my gallery rounds, I kept going back to this twelve-hour, one-day-only video tribute. Each time I was staggered anew at Kelley's imaginative power and the loss his death brings.

PLUS!

THE GOOD

REMBRANDT, 'PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'
Metropolitan Museum of Art/
Kenwood House

The height of Western self-portraiture, everyday life, and what it means to be an artist facing a canvas.

THE NEW BARNES FOUNDATION

Like it or hate it—and I love it—this collection looks better than it ever has. Forget the owner's wishes. Honor the art.

KELTIE FERRIS
Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Ferris's kickass electric abstract magic-carpet paintings are alive with color and bursting with nerve.

"FREE AS AIR AND WATER"
Cooper Union

Bravo to the graduating Cooper Union students who decided to give their B.F.A. work away to visitors for free.

JACKIE SACCOCCIO
Eleven Rivington

Vivid abstractions of wobbling, hallucinogenic force and beauty.

THE BAD

"REGARDING WARHOL"
The

Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Met gets five millennia of art perfect. It'd better stop sucking at the second half of the twentieth century.