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WEEKEND UPDATE

by Walter Robinson



Sue Williams, *War of the Testicles*, 2010, at 303 Gallery

Want to see the patriarchal social unconscious laid bare by a brand new artwork? Check out *War of the Testicles* by Sue Williams, now on view in "Al-Qaeda Is the CIA," a mini-retrospective at her gallery, 303. In this abstracted image of testosterone stress, Williams' invention could be called the "scrotal line," a kind of ragged arabesque that is peculiarly familiar but never before committed to canvas. And that would be, of course, decrepit old-man scrotum, not fresh new baby scrotum. It's a wow.

Speaking of sociopsychodynamics, it turns out that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Williams share the view that 9/11 was a CIA plot. Whatever we might think of this notion -- and U.S. foreign policy is sinister enough without evil conspiracies -- it raises one interesting if tangential question: What kind of artworks about his family dynamics would the president of Iran make?

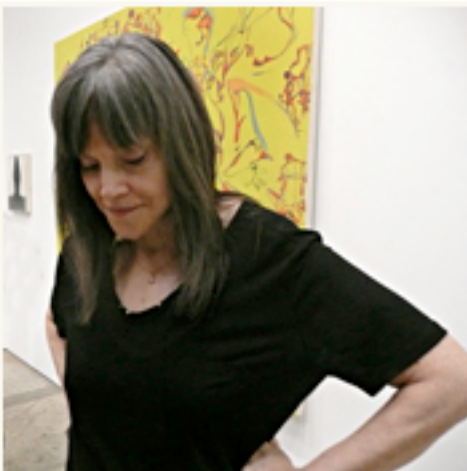


Sue Williams, *911 Truth*, 2010, at 303 Gallery

I imagine something like Williams' celebrated *Dessert* from 1990, in which a husband is shown smacking his pony-tailed bimbo wife as she presents him with a dinner that looks like poop on a plate. I've just got to see the Ahmadinejad version.

The exhibition is filled with desirable, colorful works from all of the artist's major periods, most for sale. *War of the Testicles* is \$170,000, while a series of collaged drawings spelling out the show's title conceit, *911 Truth*, is \$18,000.

Around the corner at Anna Kustera Gallery, in "The Raw and the Cooked," a three-person show organized with art advisors Gregory Linn and Clayton Press, are several works by Dominic Nurre, whose *Objection Room* in "Greater New York" at MoMA PS1 drew a certain amount of attention, perhaps because of the sexual roots of its Minimalist forms -- notably, in his implied definition of the perfect circle as a waist-high glory hole.



Sue Williams, 2010

At Kustera are some slim pieces of lumber leaning against the wall, 1x2s that have had their edges irregularly whittled down (in the manner of a pseudo-rustication) and that have been painted beige and waxed, so they now seem to be made of plastic. At the opening Nurre said he was interested in this kind of metamorphosis, though in the press release the ribald dealer refers to the "masturbatory gesture" that produces the effect.

Coincidentally, I was listening on my iPod to the audiobook of *Zero History*, William Gibson's latest, which has a minor character nicknamed Fuckstick. If Minimalism was about sexual repression, Nurre would be shepherding a return of the repressed. He's made



Sculptures by Dominic Nurre at Anna Kustera Gallery

seven sticks so far, from 48 to 61 inches long, ranging in price from \$750 to \$950. And yes, he's a fan of the works of Andre Cadere.

That's probably enough of that, though when I visited galleries on Orchard and Ludlow Streets a couple of weekends ago, I did note mention of a crystal penis on the checklist for sculptor Judith Page's show at Lesley Heller Workspace, and that Invisible-Exports has on view a toy-chest sculpture by the late, great Bob Flanagan, who died of cystic fibrosis in 1996. The open lid of Bob's chest is memorably inscribed: "Mine is the bittersweet tale of a sick little boy who found solace in his penis"

Stephan Stoyanov Gallery has the hottest show in the neighborhood, at least heterosexually speaking, with his display of Polaroids by Heather Bennett that are inspired by erotic fashion photography – though replacing the female model with Bennett herself.



Dominic Nurre, 2010

To the extent that Bennett's photography is reminiscent of work by Cindy Sherman, it points up how Sherman, for all her accomplishments, never does get very steamy -- and with that argument, Bennett reminds us that feminism, for all its accomplishments, has done little to change the erotic dance that permeates social relations.

Though her large photographs and videos can sell in the low five figures, Bennett's small photos, like sexy jewels, are only \$300.

Elsewhere in the neighborhood, the subject is more abstract. At Rachel Uffner Gallery, long-time Cooper Union art professor Pam Lins has a group of sophisticated hybrid works that could be said to be paintings put on pedestals, usually articulated with sculptural touches, in a kind of reversal of Brancusi.

Photography is involved, too, since the paintings are based on things like a photo of the Lincoln Memorial or Margaret Bourke-White's photo of Joseph Stalin from *Time* magazine. The mind ties itself into knots. At \$6,000-\$9,000, they're a sweet buy.



Bob Flanagan's toy chest at Invisible-Exports

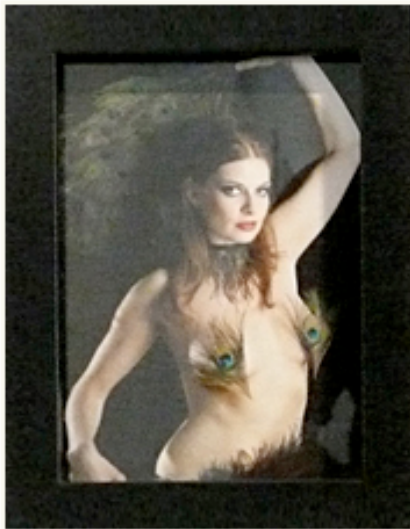
At the estimable Miguel Abreu Gallery, one of the last redoubts of hard-core Minimalist art of a structuralist persuasion, are monochrome paintings by the Toronto-born artist Scott Lyall. The storefront space looks impeccably designed, with its gridded tile floor and Lyall's pale beige rectangles gripping the walls, some very closely, since they are vinyl decals put up with adhesive.

A kind of formalist rapture can be found in the contemplation of how this technique differs from plain paint on canvas. All of Lyall's works in the show are of the same hue and tone, which is derived, or so I gather, from a single pixel. Works mounted, rather neatly, on a canvas-like support are \$16,000, while the more elemental decals are \$8,000. "He's in all the big collections," Abreu said.

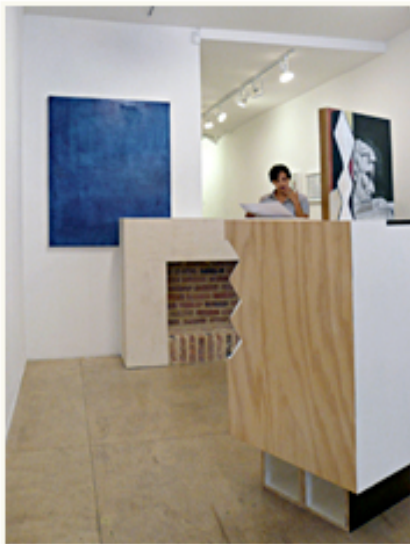
At Ludlow 38, the narrow storefront space operated by Goethe-Institut, is an interactive installation by Tobias Putrih of what first looks to be



Polaroids by Heather Bennett at Stephan Stoyanov Gallery



Polaroid by Heather Bennett at Stephan Stoyanov Gallery



Pam Lins at Rachel Uffner Gallery

biomorphic wire sculptures hanging from the ceiling. It turns out that the viewer is allowed to dip the things into a big vat of soapy water, producing strange and wonderful architectonic structures out of soap bubbles. These *Soap Film Models*, as they are called, are based on earlier researches by the well-known German architect and authority on tensile structures, Frei Otto (b. 1925).

Other notable shows on the Lower East Side include Justin Aidan's shaped-canvas abstractions at Blackston (priced at \$2,400-\$4,200), Louise Despont's elaborately patterned pencil drawings at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery (drawing interest from institutions, at \$3,000-\$16,000), and JJ Peet's intimate, allusive paintings on panel at On Stellar Rays, some of them containing ground-up ceramics and minerals, physical traces of things beyond the limits of the picture plane.

Orchard Street's own design specialist, Bridge Gallery, is featuring this month a large topological structure -- a kind of Anish Kapoor-like shape that rises from the floor and stretches to the picture window, and contains a couple of portholes as well -- by the New York studio SOFTlab. The thing is made of over 4,000 colored panels of ink-jet paper, which are all folded at the edges and held together by binder clips.

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Coming up: "Visual Sensations: The Paintings of Robert Swain: 1967-2010," Oct. 7-Nov. 13, 2010, at the Hunter College Times Square Gallery (450 West 41st Street). The longtime Tribeca resident and Hunter art professor is an overlooked star of the "color-as-structure" movement, whose brief lifespan was confirmed by an eponymous exhibition at the Whitney Museum in the early '70s, including artists like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland. The show should be a knockout, so don't miss it.

One last thing -- next time you're in Chelsea, visit Printed Matter and check out the assortment of German-language Warhol film ephemera that's on display on the back wall. A large poster featuring Joe Dallesandro and comic genius Sylvia Miles -- in the nude -- can be yours for a mere \$250. Lend me your credit card, will you?

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