



WEEKEND UPDATE July 3, 2008
by Walter Robinson

If things feel a little droopy in New York, it ain't just the heat -- it's the Surrealists! The Guggenheim Museum is filled with symbolic phalluses, all castrated, deflated or stacked on skewers by Louise Bourgeois. Never has the spiral concrete womb so resembled a vast beehive, with queen Louise in its center.

Down at the Museum of Modern Art are Salvador Dali's famous melting clocks and oystery self-portraits, well-known emblems of his own impotency, in "Dali: Painting and Film." It's a great show, with the galleries converted into a series of spacious theater spaces for Dali's movies: *Un Chien andalou* (1929), *L'Âge d'or* (1930), the dream-sequence clip from Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1944), Andy Warhol's 1966 screen test.

Especially bizarre is the cartoon *Destino* (1946), a seven-minute-long Disney-Dali mashup that Dali did some fabulous drawings for, but that was only finished by the cartoon giant in 2003. Imagine Snow White dancing around a Dali landscape to an atonal symphony, and you pretty much got it. (As for press stills, there are none; no doubt Disney, famous for suing kindergartens for painting Mickey Mouse on their walls without permission, has some corporate policy against it.)

Best of all is Dali's *Chaos and Creation* (1960), a 17-minute-long black-and-white video made with Philippe Halsman as a televised greeting to an avant-garde conference. Like a demented Ed Sullivan, Dali presents an easel holding a Piet Mondrian painting, which dissolves into an actual pigsty, with real pigs in one square, a model in an evening gown in another and a motorcycle in a third. Paging Aaron Young!

At the press preview, the Dali scholar Frédérique Camille Joseph-Lowery, who is organizing a show of Dali's theater works for the Godwin-Ternbach Museum at Queens College in Flushing, pointed out that Dali himself didn't use the Catalanian acute accent over the "i" in his name -- and so neither will we. What a relief.

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The hot show in New York last month was "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns," the exhibition at Tony Shafrazi Gallery that features works by Francis Bacon, Mike Bidlo, John Chamberlain, Malcolm Morley, Robert Morris, Francis Picabia, Rob Pruitt, Cindy Sherman and others installed right on top of tromp l'oeil photographic wallpaper of the gallery's previous show, titled "Four Friends" and featuring works by Shafrazi's core early stable: Donald Baechler, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf.

This wacky idea -- installing art on top of other art -- essentially produces a lot of visual noise. But as an avant-garde gesture it's priceless, playing upon and amplifying Shafrazi's notorious 1974 art action, when he spray painted "Kill Lies All" onto Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), then hanging a the Museum of Modern Art awaiting the end of fascist rule in Spain. You thought it was some kind of overheated psychosis, like the guy who hit Michelangelo's *Pieta* with a hammer ("Pieta? I thought it said 'pinata,'" said a cartoon in the *National Lampoon*)? No, it was an extreme avant-garde

performance, now illuminated by two of our best avant-gardists, artist Urs Fischer and dealer Gavin Brown, co-curators of the show.

As a portrait of Shafrazi, "Who's Afraid" telescopes time, creating a whimsical inventory of one individual's history and concentrating it in a single installation. It's a "box in a valise," to borrow the term for Marcel Duchamp's celebrated briefcase full of miniature replicas of his own famous artworks.

Duchamp's Boîte-en-valise (1935-41) is a central exhibit in this month's hot show, "Retrospective" at Gagolian Gallery on West 21st Street in Chelsea. Organized by Andisheh Avini, an artist (he shows at I-20), curator and longtime Gagolian employee, the exhibition spreads works by 13 artists through the warehouse-sized gallery space. Jasper Johns is there, with a suite of The Seasons (1987), as is Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, both with works that assemble all their motifs into a single image.

A darkened room holds Douglas Gordon's collection of several dozen videos, each on its own monitor ("we took all the tvs from Larry's apartment while he was out of town," joked one Gagolianian), and Chris Burden's book of 50 Body Art photos from 1974 stretches along one long wall. In a corner is a long spill of colorful detritus that purports to be leftover bits of every eccentric sculpture made by Tom Friedman. And Italian artist Piero Golia's model on sawhorses of a classical museum filled with a retrospective of his own work is billed as an example of "wishful thinking." One mini-exhibit shows a photograph of a young woman's back bearing a large tattoo of Golia's own portrait -- a bit of "work for hire," apparently.

Both "Who's Afraid" and "Retrospective" push us further along what seems like a strange and contradictory postmodernist trajectory, presenting nihilistic gestures of avant-garde provocation within a context of artistic egotism and institutional affirmation.

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Wandering around the Lower East Side, it's clear that the storefront-gallery movement is alive and well. At Never Work way downtown at 191 Henry Street, proprietor Siobhan Lowe proves her mettle by having the gallery name prominently tattooed on her arm in elaborate script.

A little bit north on Essex Street, Cindy Rucker opened Number 35 back in October, and is now featuring an inventive wall drawing by the German artist Hannes Kater, who gets his subjects from an open call solicited through www.hanneskater.de. How can a small operation like Number 35 mount a show of an artist from Europe? "Oh, artists definitely want to show in New York," Rucker says. Prices are relatively low, starting at \$450.

Somewhat more established is Museum 52, which has a branch in London as well as at 95 Rivington Street (former home of Participant). Currently on view are Sarah Braman's romantically formalist "Love Songs," tightly assembled sculptures of cheap DIY furniture and construction odds and ends, all tipped at a 45-degree angle, a little like a curbside collection preparing to spin out into another dimension. A member of the team behind Canada gallery, Braman has showed her work there and at Dicksmith in London and Michael Kohn in L.A. Several of the sculptures here are sold, at prices up to \$10,000.

Around the corner at 143 Ludlow Street is 31 Grand, which was opened in Williamsburg in 1999 but moved across the river last year. "We were losing artists!" said gallery co-owner Heather Stephens. "That's why we moved to Manhattan." The gallery is currently filled with "Picnic," an enthusiastic collection of small cut-paper silhouettes, large landscape paintings teeming with doll-like girls, and a teepee made of a patchwork quilt, all the work of the self-taught Swedish-born artist Fanny Bostrom.

Things seem to be moving briskly, at prices from \$800 to \$10,000, despite warnings in the newspapers that the art market is getting soft at its lower end.

Nearby, Smith-Stewart and Luxe Gallery sit side-by-side on Stanton Street by Eldridge Street, one of the last Lower East Side corners to have a regular drug trade. "A 17-year-old got shot last week just down the street," said Amy Smith-Stewart, whose current group show, dubbed "Warlord," seems to take its theme from just such an event. On a low pedestal sits a gold-plated bikini by Jen de Nike, attached to the wall by an ominous galvanized steel chain, a sculpture that seems straight out of Michele Pfeiffer's wardrobe in Scarface. It's \$4,000. And cut into the wall is Suburban Dorada (2008), a stash of taped-up bricks of (plaster) dope by New York-based Puerto Rican artist Ignacio Gonzalez-Lang. A "narcos corridas" tune plays faintly from behind the wall. It's \$5,000.

Next door at Luxe is a five-channel digital video projection by Brooklyn artist Cliff Evans, an Australian-born grad of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Titled Empyrean, the six-and-a-half-minute loop is a floating montage of all kinds of images downloaded from the internet, from Brangelina to scenes of the Iraq war. "It's a portrait of the U.S.," said dealer Stephan Stoyanov, who has already sold one from the edition of five for \$18,000.

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The summer show at David Zwirner is a 15th-anniversary exhibition of work by 36 artists, titled "The Gallery," July 3-Aug. 8, 2008, and spreading through the 30,000-square-feet of all three Zwirner buildings on West 19th Street in Chelsea. . . . Opening at Canada on Christie Street on the Lower East Side is a group show titled "Journey to the Center of Uranus," July 11-Aug. 10, 2008. I've always liked Uranus!

Speaking of which, new at Art 39 Basel earlier this summer was an edition produced by Two Palms here in New York, a custom tray holding 11 faux "nurse" paperbacks by Richard Prince, all on the theme of strap-ons and ass play. It was a small edition of two, priced at \$425,000 each.

Critics and other early visitors seemed rather indisposed to the spectacularly proto-Impressionistic battle scenes and history paintings of "J.M.W. Turner" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. If the show seems "off" somehow, maybe that means that the pictures require some added attention.

Word is that the Museum of Modern Art, which already has design stores in SoHo and Tokyo, plans to open a chain of as many as 30 museum stores around the globe, including one in Moscow.

New Art in America editor Marcia Vetrocq hastened to inform me that whatever changes might be in store for the magazine, the articles certainly won't be "shorter," as Artnet News had reported. Good luck on the 4th!

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