

GENETIC MADNESS

e - m e r g e

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The Interview Issue:
Inside Art Chicago



School of the Art Institute
of Chicago

emerge:

v.: 1. to come forth into view or notice, as from concealment or obscurity. 2. to come up or arise, as a question or difficulty. 3. to come into existence; develop.

emergence:

n.: the process in which complex patterns develop from a simple set of relationships.

**e-merge:
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Editorial

Dorota Biczal Nelson & Ania Szremski

Professional degrees in arts administration are becoming staple fare in universities, but the field remains amorphous, lacking the conscious theorization of other academic disciplines. An acute need to verbalize exactly what arts administrators *do* and why it matters inspired the creation of ***e-merge: journal of arts administration and policy***, a peer-reviewed online journal produced by graduate students in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's Master of Arts Administration and Policy program. We hope that ***e-merge*** will become a platform on which the most pertinent questions in arts administration will be debated by students and professionals in the field.

This special print issue of ***e-merge*** features a series of interviews with the diverse professionals engaged in Art Chicago 2009. It presents an insider's perspective from the trenches of one of the most hotly discussed events in the city's cultural landscape. Interviews with the fair's key administrators and curators (including Tony Karman, Mark Falanga, Jessica Cochran, Christian Viveros-Faune, Lynne Warren, Mary Jane Jacobs, Susanne Ghez and Chris Kennedy) touch on a nexus of fundamental questions that have become more pressing than ever before. These questions concern the relationship of art to the market; the viability of traditional vehicles of distribution for art; art's political, social, and civic dimensions; and tensions between local and global, among others. Many of these questions will become through-lines in future issues of ***e-merge***.

Visit www.saic.edu/emerge for an enhanced, online version of this issue. New issues of ***e-merge*** will be released online biannually in May and December.

The History of Art Chicago

An Interview with Tony Karman

During the past three decades, Art Chicago has redefined its role in the city and in the international art fair circuit, an evolution that has spanned the fair's lucrative days as the Chicago International Art Exposition, the 2006 crisis that resulted in its acquisition by Merchandise Mart and its subsequent re-emergence in the past two years. Francesca Wilmott was granted a special glimpse into the history of the fair through the eyes of Tony Karman. Karman, who worked as a fair security guard in 1983, has since risen to the position of vice president of Art Chicago and is the reigning authority on the fair's history.

Francesca Wilmott: *Everybody says that you're an expert on Art Chicago due to your early involvement with the Chicago International Art Exposition. I was hoping you could shed light on how the fair has evolved over the years, and how you became its vice president.*

Tony Karman: John Wilson started The Chicago International Art Exposition in 1980, and by 1983 he had hired Thomas Blackman to be executive director. That was also the year when I moved to Chicago, with a degree in Fine Arts and Literature. I had always been a painter and an artist, but was not looking to practice as an artist. In college, I was into arts administration and I worked briefly in an art gallery. I saw that there was a position available to be a security guard for what I knew then as the Chicago International Art Exposition. As a security guard, I worked until all of the trucks had come in, and then I made myself indispensable during the fair. I had a production background putting together events and concerts in college, so I ended up being hired to work on Art Expo. Back then, John Wilson was doing a lot of events at Navy Pier, and my job was to produce the water sailboat show, which was really fun. Also, there was a whole crew that would work on Art Expo every year. At that point it was held in mid-May at Navy Pier.

Today, we all know about Art Basel and Art Basel Miami Beach. However, the important thing for everyone to remember is that in the 1980s and most of the 1990s, there were basically three art fairs in the world and only two that were really important. One was Art Basel in Switzerland, and the other one was in Chicago. All the collectors in the contemporary and modern world descended on Chicago every year, so there was a

deep tradition and historical love for our city from the top contemporary art dealers in the world, who had started as young dealers in the '80s and '90s. Many of the collectors who were buying at Chicago International Art Expo bought seminal works that are now in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art and other important collections.

All the way until 1993 the Chicago International Art Exposition was owned and run by John Wilson. In 1993 there was a shift known now as the Art Fair Wars. Tom Blackman spun off his own fair, John Wilson held a fair, and another out-of-town individual did a fair. In 1993 there were three events that took place on the same weekend. The winner, in a sense, because all three couldn't prevail, was Tom Blackman. He secured the exposition hall at Navy Pier after its renovation. John Wilson was out of the picture and Tom Blackman's fair took the name Art Chicago.

Until 2004 Art Chicago was at Navy Pier. Then in 2005, Tom Blackman moved the fair to a tent outside the Art Institute, to Butler Field, right where the Blues Fest goes on in Grant Park, and it was a pretty successful move. Strangely enough, there was yet another fair that tried to come in and take Navy Pier, but they didn't make it. So Tom again appeared to prevail with Art Chicago. In 2006, right before the fair was to open — galleries were already traveling to Chicago and their artwork was being shipped to the city — the site in the park was insufficiently prepared. There was no chance for the fair to take place. At that point, the Merchandise Mart stepped in and literally saved the fair. In 36 hours the Merchandise Mart mobilized to acquire the fair, to assume the responsibility to produce it, move all of the materials here, re-tag all of the ads that were already out, get all of the artwork in, build the show and then launch it, and it saved the day.

I had stopped working for the fair in the mid-80s. After that, I worked for several institutions as well as for the city government. I started to work for the Merchandise Mart on May 30, 2006 to sell and build the show. My responsibilities then were obviously to get the galleries back, working with the whole team to develop the fair again, now in the Merchandise Mart building. I should note that the Merchandise Mart stepped in to save the fair in 2006, but the credit really goes to the president of our company, Christopher Kennedy, who from a civic standpoint really stepped up to ensure that Chicago's visual arts community and cultural community didn't receive a black eye. I think that should be noted. Chris saw the need and saw an opportunity to save a lot of galleries that would have lost everything. Chicago's international reputation

would have been forever tarnished. Though the fair has gone through several incarnations, it's important to note that in its 29-year history it has always taken place.

FW: *That leads to my next question: how has Art Chicago's context changed since 1980?*

TK: I think that for a good deal of its history there were very few art fairs in the world. There was Art Basel, as I said; there was Art Cologne, which is 43 years old now; and there was Chicago, but the world was really split between Basel and Chicago. Then more fairs grew. The Armory Show, that we now own, really came into its own as a contemporary fair in 1999-2000. When Art Basel Miami Beach took off in 2002, it shifted the landscape, along with the gallery lists and the participation of individuals in Art Chicago. In 2007 and 2008 we were able to get many of those dealers. This is a wonderful place for us to be.

FW: *How would you say that your definition of success has evolved over time?*

TK: Our success in 2007 was to get many of the galleries that hadn't been here for many years. Our success was not only in the galleries that participated but also the kind of partnerships that we created through Artropolis, the kind of collector draw, the kind of alliances that we've created with great cultural partners like the MCA, the Art Institute, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smart, and the Ren [The Renaissance Society]. So success in the year 2007 and 2008 I would gage on gallery lists, renewed institutional partnerships, the re-engaged host committee of civic leaders and the increased number of collectors opening up their homes. I think we had an extraordinary show in 2008 with 52,000–54,000 individuals coming through the building. What I was going to say about changing times is that we're all going to need to adjust to a new paradigm, a new economy. We have planned to reduce the size of the show; it will be smaller this year. So our successes this year still fall under the category of great partnerships. We've aligned the fair with the MCA's opening of Olafur Eliasson. I think in the history of the fair there has never been an alignment with a major exhibition opening in Chicago, and that's an extraordinary achievement for this year. The other thing that we were able to achieve is a renewed relationship with the Women's Board of the MCA to have a First Focus benefit for the museum this year. That hasn't happened for probably seven to eight years. In hard times, we are still going to present dealers from around the world: from Germany to China, India, England, France. So we've kept the international scope.

We spent the summer doing regional dinners with two of our sponsors, AXA Art Insurance and the Chicago Conservation Center. We traveled to Detroit, Kansas City and Saint Louis. We met with the leaders of the cultural institutions and curators from those institutions, as well as some of the top collectors and galleries in those cities. We want to find new ways that Art Chicago will serve our greater region in the future. There's an extraordinary amount of work that's being done, you see it at your school, but there's also an extraordinary amount of work being done outside of Chicago, at Cranbrook, and other art schools. Sometimes it's hard for some of those institutions [outside of Chicago] to make noise. Art Chicago can foster greater opportunities for them to showcase works.

FW: *What do you think makes Art Chicago a uniquely Chicago art fair?*

TK: I think that deep tradition of many of the dealers who are still participating in the fair — Perimeter Gallery, Catherine Edelman, Roy Boyd, Rhona Hoffman. I can go on and on and on. Those dealers have been with this fair through its wonderful arc, and they're seminal to what Chicago is to the outside world. To see the kind of commitment that these dealers have made to the fair here, for the greater good of the city, for the greater good of the artists, and for the greater good of the institutions that will benefit from this activity is unique to Chicago. It's really an extraordinary thing that should not be overlooked. That commitment and passion for a city, that commitment for a presentation and a celebration of contemporary and modern art, the commitment to partner, these are roll-up-your sleeves Chicago ethics.

FW: *My last question: Can you offer any advice to emerging arts administrators who are coming into this rapidly changing cultural landscape?*

TK: I think that these are different times than when I started my career. The economy is different. These are times when the more active you are to volunteer or to commit yourself, the more opportunities will arise. Put yourself out there. Don't be afraid to either volunteer or take on available internships. Present yourself as open to going down a road that you may not have envisioned. I think one has to be able to adjust to that wonderful river, and be open professionally to lots of different roads that might come into sight, and not be afraid to take them.

I have never missed an Art Chicago, from 1983 until today. I have always been very active with the galleries, I was always involved with the producer of the fair, Tom Blackman. I had my own marketing and sponsorship company and I assisted with the fair. I have always been deeply connected to Art Chicago or the Chicago International Art Exposition. It's a wonderful opportunity for me to work for Chris Kennedy in the Merchandise Mart and be a part of this fair again. It's extraordinary, and I didn't plan when I started in Chicago in 1983 that 26 years later I would come all the way, full circle, to be in the lovely position of actually having a management role at this great institution. No one should run away from experience in life. The collective experience of my past — production, marketing, civic involvement, volunteering for arts organizations — all of that is a great foundation for any job.

Francesca Wilmott is currently enrolled in the dual-M.A. in Arts Administration and Policy and Modern Art History, Criticism, and Theory at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '10). Her research explores the dynamics of community art initiatives, with a particular focus on regional organizations that serve both local and global audiences. She will serve as the Interim Director of Exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center from July to October, 2009 and is curating an exhibition that will open at the Center in October.

The Business of Art Fairs

An Interview with Mark Falanga

Since acquiring Art Chicago and saving it from certain disaster in 2006, Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc. has gone on to acquire five other major art fairs: the Armory Show in New York, Toronto International Art Fair, VOLTA NY, VOLTA Basel and NEXT. The trade show giant has thus become America's largest producer of art fairs. Of course, when a large commercial enterprise that specializes in consumer events like furniture sales and architectural trade shows starts to involve itself in the art business, a host of questions are raised. For instance, how are issues such as attracting and engaging audiences or determining criteria for artistic quality framed and addressed? As Senior Vice President of Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc., Mark Falanga is uniquely poised to shed light on these and other managerial aspects of Art Chicago.

Falanga recently spoke with e-merge editors Dorota Biczel Nelson and Ania Szremski on the evolution of the Fair since its appropriation by the Mart in 2006, the impact of the economic downturn, and why Art Chicago is unique to the art fair landscape. Also present was Kasey Madden, director of public relations for Merchandise Mart Properties.

Dorota Biczel Nelson/Ania Szremski: *What is the definition of "success" for Art Chicago, and how have your criteria for success evolved since you started working with the fair? Will Art Chicago 2009 be different than the previous fairs?*

Mark Falanga: The show is evolving and the definition of success has changed from show to show. In 2006, our objective was simply to produce a show on the two-day notice we had to produce it. To move all the exhibitors who were over at Butler Field over here and get the traffic to come to the Merchandise Mart was a tremendous effort. I think we had 22,000–25,000 people at the show. I think by all accounts, if you were to ask any exhibitor or any attendee, everybody was astounded that the show occurred that year. And it was important for the show to occur that year because if it hadn't, it would probably have never been resurrected again.

In 2007 our goal was to get the support of the Chicago art community behind us. At the time, there was a question of who should produce the show. There was a movement to have the Nova Group produce it at Navy

Pier. We wanted to feel that the Chicago arts community looked to Merchandise Mart as a legitimate art show producer, so we worked closely with the Chicago Art Dealers' Association. They unanimously supported us, but that vote of confidence didn't come easy. We had to prove to them that we were going to stay behind the show, that we would stick with it through thick and thin, and that we were going to produce a show that they would feel proud of. They were very good about giving us a quick education in what we would need to be taken seriously within this community. In that regard our second show in 2007 was a success since we involved many cultural institutions within the fair, we had a lot more and better dealers come in, and we doubled the attendance of the show.

In 2008 the big challenge was to increase the quality of the dealers who participated, to bring in more collectors, and to add dimensionality to the show. We wanted to provide a range of art that would suit varied interests in the city. So, last year we added the show called NEXT, which focused on emerging dealers and emerging artists. We had a huge attendance and we had all of the city's cultural institutions participating. By that account the show was successful. However, the feedback we got was that we had to scale everything down, as it was too overwhelming.

So our main objective for 2009 was to make Art Chicago shows more manageable for the visitors. We eliminated the Artist Project and we involved Intuit* participants either in Art Chicago or NEXT. We also rearranged the floor a bit.

The criteria for success have changed, and I suspect they will continue to change. We have a large host committee of 40 or 50 collectors, curators and others entrenched in the art community, and we also work very closely with CADA to make sure that the show is relevant for our constituents.

DBN/AS: *We know it's a tricky question, but how would you define "quality"? What does "best artworks and best galleries" mean?*

MF: It's very subjective. I do not consider myself an art insider, and I find this issue very nebulous. I think quality in art is different than in other aspects of life. For instance, if you get into a really nice car and close the door, the car has a certain sound and feel when you steer it, and an average person who has no previous exposure to cars can

* Editors: In the past, Art Chicago was presented as one of several shows in a mega-event called Artropolis, which also included NEXT, the International Antiques Fair, The Artist Project and The Intuit Show of Folk and Outsider Art.

make a determination that this is a nice car. Or, if you sit in a really nice chair, you can feel the fabric or see the wood that has been used, and any person can discern quality. We could say the same things about a lot of other merchandise, a lot of other products. Most people could discern quality. I think with artwork it's different. It seems like you need some background and insight to fully understand and fully appreciate artistic quality.

I think that the quality is also defined by your audience. We want to make sure that the galleries that we're recruiting into our shows are the galleries that are bringing artwork that the community wants, that challenges them; the artwork that they want to acquire. I think when there's a good match between the so-called quality of art and the quality that the visitors will appreciate and buy, you have a good show.

DBN/AS: *What is your selection process for galleries to be involved in Art Chicago?*

MF: We have a selection committee. Galleries apply and then the determination is made on what galleries will be included. NEXT, on the other hand, happens by invitation.

DBN/AS: *Is there any particular mandate for local galleries?*

MF: We want to make sure that the show is reflective of the broad arts community in Chicago and also to maintain the support of CADA. In that regard, a good base of Chicago dealers is important, because many other dealers will rely on Chicago dealers to make their decision to participate, or not to participate, or what they should bring. So while there's no quota, in principle the show should show off the art community that exists here.

DBN/AS: *How has the current economic situation impacted the scope of participation within Art Chicago? Has the crisis impacted the galleries' ability to travel? Do you have any predictions concerning the buying habits of Art Chicago constituents?*

MF: This economic downturn has affected everyone. It has permeated our culture unlike a lot of other recessions we have gone through. The buying patterns for art have really shifted over the last several years. The sales used to be very gallery-focused and now they are very show-focused. There is no more cost efficient way for galleries to see 40,000 to 50,000 prospective customers than coming to an art fair. So I think the galleries who recognize and see that value will participate in the fair and

will benefit from it. I think it is more likely you'll get a more regionalized group of buyers, collectors and enthusiasts coming to Art Chicago, because it's easy for them to get here. Also, since we've been in the art business we've been reading article after article about how the art market has been inflated, with prices out of control, and that the entry point for the young collectors is hard to reach. What we see now are some great buying opportunities; it's a great time to start the collections. What might be a disadvantage for some presents advantages for others.

Kasey Madden: We put some programs in place to demystify the art experience. We have a docent program, and art advisory services too. Also, the new collector doesn't have to be a young collector. It may be somebody who's been investing in homes, furnishings, cars and lifestyles, but just doesn't know how to collect art. We want to give them an accessible way to start.

MF: I think this climate may make the art community a little more approachable. I think this economy has humbled everybody, and it's a good opportunity for the art community to be more receptive and welcoming of everyone, to be approachable to the people who were once intimidated to step into the booth spaces or to go to the galleries. It should change the way people behave, the way the business is conducted, and that's for the better.

DBN/AS: *The opening of the Art Institute's Modern Wing, President Obama's election, the 2016 Olympic bid, as well as certain Illinois scandals have recently brought Chicago into the international spotlight. How do you see Art Chicago capitalizing on and contributing to the increased international attention focused on Chicago? Have you taken additional steps this year to embrace this international attention?*

MF: Our outreach for the fair is truly international. We have a massive marketing program that reaches hundreds of thousands of people and we market to art enthusiasts and collectors all over the world. We also create a unique experience for people here who would not see this work in any other way.

DBN/AS: *How does Art Chicago fit into Merchandise Mart's organizational vision and activities at large? How much freedom is Art Chicago given in developing its program, and how much is mandated by Merchandise Mart?*

MF: For all our businesses we're long-term players. We've been through a lot of economic cycles as our company has been around for 75 years. For

each of our businesses there are people who have great sensitivities to those particular industries. We learned early on that what seemed common sense elsewhere didn't make sense in the art business. We know when not to insert ourselves, and when to leave decisions to people who know much better about this particular community. It is a great benefit for them to be in the framework of a financially stable company that can weather a financial storm like we're in now.

We have 15 marts and 81 trade shows, consumer shows and conferences, and all of those activities are really aimed at bringing buyers and sellers together. For the most part the sellers are people and companies that have merchandise that is at the very high end of the spectrum, be it furniture, giftware, casual furniture, apparel. The buyers who are coming in are the people who appreciate and can afford the best merchandise in those areas. There is a lot of overlap there with art business. In the end, if everyone has positive experiences, we gauge it as a success, and it transcends particular kinds of businesses. Our objectives are the same.

DBN/AS: *What makes Art Chicago unique among all the other art fairs in the world?*

MF: It's the mix of art dealers, seminars and programs, the combination of Art Chicago and NEXT. One of the truly unique things about Art Chicago is our involvement with the city. There is no other fair in the world that involves the city like we do. Since 2007, each year the city's cultural institutions have stepped up their level of commitment and the kinds of things they do in conjunction with the fair. It gives Chicago cachet not possible in any other city.

Ania Szremski is a writer, arts administrator and dual-M.A. candidate at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '11). She is pursuing degrees in Modern Art History, Theory and Criticism, and Arts Administration and Policy. Ania holds a B.A. in Art History and Comparative Literature from the American University of Paris.

Dorota Biczal Nelson is an artist, educator, writer and arts administrator. Her career to-date has traversed two continents, two countries, three cities and four institutions of higher learning. Dorota holds a master's degree in graphics from Warsaw Fine Arts Academy in Poland and is currently pursuing her interests in theorizing artists' work in the dual-MA program in Art History, Theory and Criticism & Arts Administration and Policy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '10).

Curators in Dialogue

An Interview with Jessica Cochran

The gray maze that is the heart of Merchandise Mart seems an unlikely setting for Chicago's largest art event of the year. But Art Chicago brings contemporary art from around the world to these monochrome halls. New to this year's program is CONVERGE, a forum for regional and national curators that promises dialogue on current issues facing curators and arts organizations. Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc. Art Group has initiated similar curatorial forums at the other art fairs it manages, including The Armory Show and VOLTA. Panel topics listed for Art Chicago include Current Challenges and Curatorial Innovation, Museums in the Green Economy, Art in a Post-Obama Climate and Programming and Collecting in the New Economy. The expectation in this unlikely pairing of the commercial art fair with institutional dialogue seems to be to raise the profile of Art Chicago by making the art fair relate more closely to to current challenges to the arts.

Danica Willard and Ariel Pittman talked to Jessica Cochran, marketing manager of Art Chicago. In their conversation, Cochran discussed her hopes for Art Chicago 2009 and this year's inaugural curatorial forum, CONVERGE. She has been intimately involved with the planning and marketing of this event. Willard and Pittman were curious to hear about her vision for the program.

Danica Willard/Ariel Pittman: *Would you describe how you came to be involved with Art Chicago?*

Jessica Cochran: I graduated from the Art Institute with a degree in Art History and was working for the nonprofit Around the Coyote during grad school. That's where I decided that I enjoyed working with programming. ATC's big push was to get new artists and new people from the community involved, and I really liked that. When I was offered a position with Art Chicago, it allowed me to build on that.

DW/AP: *In terms of CONVERGE, it seems that both Art Chicago and NEXT have a commitment to new artists, young artists. How do you envision the topics addressed at CONVERGE affecting young artists? How is this conversation particularly relevant to Chicago and the Midwest?*

JC: This is CONVERGE's inaugural year. The reason we decided to create

this event is because we work a lot with local curators in terms of programming and exhibitions, and in the course of our conversations with them, it kept coming up that there need to be more forums for curators to come together and talk about what has happened over the last year. It's been a pretty wild year with Obama, the election and how the financial crisis is affecting institutions on all fronts. There are academic conferences like CAA [College Art Association], but we wanted something a little more casual and conversational where curators could come and just hash things out through panels, roundtables, etc. We decided to do this because we are really committed to the art fair as a forum for exchange; not just in terms of buying artwork, but also as a critical mass of people. Chicago is a great place to do this because we're surrounded by important institutions. It just makes sense.

DW/AP: *When did the idea for CONVERGE come about? Is it a recent development or something that's been in the works for a long time?*

JC: I would say its pretty recent, late fall. We thought this might be a good way to focus our extensive programming. Hopefully next year, CONVERGE will become an even bigger part of our program. But we don't know yet.

DW/AP: *Do you think that CONVERGE will be as visible as the commercial side of Art Chicago? Will people talk about these conversations as much as the sales?*

JC: I hope so. Different press covers different aspects. With the economic climate, everybody wants to talk about sales, but regardless of how the dealers do and what really big pieces sell, I hope people come away thinking that this was a fantastic event, thinking about what comes out of the conversations and continuing those conversations.

DW/AP: *What are some of the topics that you anticipate being hotly debated at CONVERGE? What are some of the topics/panels you are most excited about?*

JC: Well, right now I'm most excited that Michael Rush is coming from the Rose Museum to lead a discussion on museum practices.* Michael has given interviews, but this will be his first public appearance. We're extremely excited to have him here to speak about these issues and

* Editors: Michael Rush has been the Director of the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University since 2005. His voice has been one of the loudest in the fight against the University's Fall 2008 decision to de-accession their collection in order to bolster the University's budget deficit.

his experience. Members of the Rose family will be here and Anthony Hirschel, the director of the Smart Museum, will be on that panel as well.

DW/AP: *It's interesting to have the conversation about when not to sell work in the context of an art fair. We were also curious about what the balance will be between local, regional and national curators at CONVERGE.*

JC: Well, I can fill you in a little bit more. Nationally, we have people coming in from the Whitney, the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art, The New Museum, LAX Art, The Power Plant in Toronto probably, the Blanton Museum in Austin. And we've made a big regional push — we have people coming from the Walker, the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis, the Albright-Knox, Cleveland MoCA. And we also have curators from almost all of the local institutions, including the MCA and Spertus.

DW/AP: *It will be really interesting to see if Michael Rush will engage with the representatives from the Albright-Knox, since they've had such a successful program of de-accessioning work in order to hone their mission. It's a major contrast to the de-accessioning scandal at the Rose.*

JC: Right. Hopefully, the curator, Heather Pesanti, will want to speak to their process of de-accessioning. I just read in ArtInfo that the AAM [American Association of Museums] is rewriting their guidelines on de-accessioning. So, that conversation will definitely be interesting.

DW/AP: *There has been a lot of talk about downsizing the fairs. Do you see this as an opportunity to increase visibility for noncommercial programming like CONVERGE?*

JC: Yes, absolutely. I really hope that will happen. The art fairs are about sales, they are a market place. But they are also places where a lot of people come together. I always think about the first time I was exposed to contemporary art, and it was here, at Art Chicago. We got on a bus, rode to Chicago and came to the fair. It's a place where people see a lot of art they might otherwise not get to see, and now they can also listen to these great curatorial conversations. Even from a market standpoint, programming like this only helps the dealers by bringing in another audience.

DW/AP: *This might be a tough question: Currently there is this conception, outside of Chicago, that Art Chicago is very provincial. We're curious*

how NEXT and CONVERGE counter this notion. A commercial showcase of emerging artists is great in this market. The work is often much more affordable, and with CONVERGE there is the addition of a higher level of discourse. Plus, the gallery list for NEXT is great — some really exciting international galleries! Do you think that the combination of Art Chicago, NEXT and CONVERGE will help to change the perception of Chicago and the Midwestern art scene?

JC: At one time Art Chicago was *the* art fair, and it was at the top. People now think that Chicago is a regional hub, and Art Chicago is perceived as a regional fair. In some ways, I think, we're trying to embrace these notions. There is a fine line between regional as provincial, and between regional as a counterpart to global, and I think we will be able to focus on both the regional and the global in relation. We're trying not only to be an internationally relevant fair, but also to embrace the fact that we are the center of the Midwest. We've traveled a lot over the last year, to places like St. Louis, Kansas City and Detroit, and there are institutions in those cities that, in spite of the economic turmoil, are doing wonderfully. There are collectors and artists there that are very active. They are excited and they want a fair that is a little more accessible than, say, the New York fairs. If we can be their fair and their resource, that's great. So many curators come here, to visit shows and meet artists! If we can facilitate that and be something of a regional hub, I think it'd be really great. And, in terms of NEXT, we have galleries coming from places as far as Latvia, so you can see all these different things that are happening in the periphery, and that is fantastic.

Danica Willard is a graduate student in Arts Administration and Policy and Art History, Theory and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '11). Her current research interests include analyzing the effects of neoliberal economic policies on third world art markets, and looking at the ways in which text and image interface in contemporary art.

Ariel L. Pittman is a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '11). She holds a bachelor's degree in Art History from Boston University and was the manager of Boston's Judi Rotenberg Gallery from 2006 to 2008.

The Contemporary Face of Art Chicago

An Interview with Christian Viveros-Faune

As Chicago's newest stage for emerging and "cutting-edge" artists, the inaugural NEXT Fair drew huge crowds in 2008. The masterminds behind the contemporary face of Art Chicago include local gallery owner Kavi Gupta and New York art critic and curator Christian Viveros-Faune. The team combines forces again this year for the 2009 installment of NEXT, which will include the launching of the CONVERGE curatorial arts forum and a full roster of other public events.

NEXT may be the most innovative aspect of Art Chicago. A curated, invitational exhibition, NEXT is meant to feature exciting individual artist projects and encourage participatory viewing. It's supposed to be smarter, more content-heavy and, in the words of its directors, "more fun." But given the tumultuous political and economic events of the past year, will NEXT continue to deliver on its ambitious promise?

To find out, e-merge met with curatorial advisor Christian Viveros-Faune, who expounded on the challenges of curating in Chicago, current trends in contemporary art and his views on the future of art fairs. Also present was Kasey Madden, the director of public relations for Merchandise Mart Properties.

Ania Szremksi: *You have worn many hats in the art world, including that of an art dealer, curator, art critic and curatorial advisor for two major art fairs (NEXT and Volta NY). How would you define your role as curatorial advisor for NEXT?*

Christian Viveros-Faune: We are trying to bring work and galleries to the fore, both in New York and Chicago, that are thought-provoking, or maybe even just provoking. My role is really that of a facilitator, making sure that good things get shown, and are contextualized in the right way. We're both, Kavi Gupta and myself, trying to figure out how to structure an art fair to fill it with more content, to smarten it up, to show work we're interested in, and bring new ideas and issues to the fore. It's not about price points or the function of art in relation to the market.

AS: *Yes, in relation to that, I was wondering about the overall thrust of NEXT as compared to Art Chicago as a whole. You've invited nonprofits and have a great program of pedagogic events. I was wondering if your aims are more pedagogical than commercial?*

CVF: No, because the dealers have to make money or they won't come back, but there are ways that the fair enterprise can be smart, oriented towards ideas, qualities and content. We're trying to build a fair for collectors, not buyers. I mean, buyers are important, they've been driving the art market up for the past several years, but we really have to appeal to the collectors. They're the ones who come to the fairs because it's in their blood; they really make the art world go around.

AS: *In your press release, you say that NEXT is meant to showcase "cutting-edge contemporary culture." How do you define cutting-edge?*

CVF: What we're after is a demonstration of exciting work that has been underdeveloped in terms of exposure, whether because it hasn't been on the radar for long, or maybe it has been around for a long time but just hasn't hit the radar yet. It's not an age-based concept. A 50-year-old artist can be just as cutting-edge as a 25-year-old artist.

AS: *Can you describe your curatorial process? Do you just choose the galleries, and they have carte blanche to show what they want, or...*

CVF: We invite galleries that show artists that we're interested in and suggest that they show those artists. Then sometimes they say, well, we don't have that work right now, or they'll say how about this or propose something different, and that's how the discussion begins. This is really what's unique about our process.

AS: *What's different about doing this in Chicago versus New York?*

CVF: I'm going to be perfectly honest here: New York is a magnet for all kinds of energies in a way that Chicago isn't. It's easier to talk people into doing things. This is something that's really obvious on a basic level. But in Chicago there are great opportunities for all industries, or at least cultural industries, to be a bigger fish in a smaller pond.

Chicago has the collectors, and it has a strong institutional base for contemporary art, probably the second strongest, after New York. But it's only been in the past three years that Chicago has a history of a fair connecting with galleries. Of course you have the same problems here, which are sharpened this year by the fact that the entire world is falling apart.

AS: *I was also wondering about your intended audience for NEXT. In your press release, you say that you're trying to "redefine the relationship between art and its public." Who is this public, and how are you trying to redefine that relationship?*

CVF: Well, this is all about Chicago. First, I would refer you back to your

earlier question — we're really trying to appeal to collectors, not buyers, in terms of how we define our audience. We're also trying to give buyers some pedagogical guidelines, some support to envision themselves as collectors. But in terms of the public vis-à-vis emerging art — Chicago doesn't have a relationship with art like they have in New York, or even in Miami. And we've only been around for a year.

AS: *Some people have said that an audience lacking a formal education or background in art can't immediately appreciate challenging, contemporary art. Do you think that's true, and if so, how do you mediate that?*

CVF: Everything takes education, even a rock 'n' roll song. Everything takes a little bit of work, and anyone who comes to a museum or an art fair is there to put in that work, or they won't have a meaningful engagement. By paying the price of the ticket, they're showing that they're willing to take on that work.

Kasey Madden: I think that you two are just too entrenched in the intellectual aspects of it. Last year, I saw people who were totally enraptured, not necessarily due to a background in art history or because they understood art historical references, but because the art was so shocking, so moving, so beautiful — it provokes an exceptionally emotional reaction, and you couldn't get people off the floor.

CVF: Yeah, and you had cars crashing into each other every forty seconds* ... [laughs] ... last year it was really like, I don't want to say a fun fair, but a lot of people were there for that.

AS: *So compared to last year, what will this year's fair be like? Are you making big changes to keep it fresh or relevant? Will you be showing work that's really shocking, exciting?*

CVF: I think it will still be shocking and exciting. Although, we're getting a lot of politically based work this year because of these times. Actually I think the show will be more serious this year.

And we've got people battling around ideas at CONVERGE. Not to say it will be dry by any means; there will be a lot of lively work from around the globe.

AS: *Yes, I wanted to ask you about CONVERGE. How did the idea for that come about? What was your role in developing that idea or making it happen?*

CVF: It was a huge team effort, but really Kavi Gupta and myself came up with this idea that we needed to get more content and context into the show, especially this year.

AS: *Why is it so important this year?*

CVF: Because this is a year to be asking questions of everyone, in every discipline — it's a year for stock-taking, a year for asking questions. And who better to ask than these top-notch international curators?

AS: *Since the topic of the economy keeps coming up, I wanted to ask about how you think it'll impact NEXT this year, especially in terms of sales projections?*

CVF: It's our responsibility to make sure that people who are going to buy are at that fair. We've tried hard to make sure that it'll happen, we're concerned about it too. I think that if we have the same sales as last year, then people will be doing really, really great. We hope that they don't go down too much this year.

AS: *Finally, I wanted to ask about the continued relevance of the art fair model in this economic context. Artists and arts administrators have been talking about a need to re-evaluate our models and systems for exhibiting and distributing art, about a need for a dramatic, systemic change. In light of these discussions, do you think that the art fair model is still relevant?*

CVF: That's a very interesting question, and I can give you half an answer, because the other half, no one knows yet. And that answer is that art fairs are necessary, because by hook or by crook, for good or evil, they have created great business for gallery districts all over the world — not just in Chicago, but in Miami, in New York, in London; collectors go to specific events to buy works there, to engage the art and the dealers, and it didn't used to be like that.

I don't think that there will be any reversal in that vehicle. If there is, it'll be like going backwards 15 to 20 years, and I don't think that's going to happen. There are definitely structural changes that are coming down the pipe, but that's not one of them.

* Editors: Christian is referring to a piece by Jonathan Schipper, *The Slow Inevitable Death of American Muscle*.

The Imagist Legacy at Art Chicago

An Interview with Lynne Warren

Scholarship and feeling drive Lynne Warren's curatorial practice. At a time when art world writing is more descriptive than critical, Warren's posts on the blog Sharkforum try "to reassure people that they can have their own opinions." Warren is a curator who has been long and intimately invested in the Chicago community. This May, she will curate "The Hairy Who and Imagist Legacy in Contemporary Art" for the art fair Art Chicago. As a curator for Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and author of thirty MCA catalogues on Chicago artists, history, and alternative spaces, Warren is an apt delegate for charting manifestations of Chicago's legacy in the contemporary art world. Dana Boutin spoke with Lynne Warren to discuss the "Hairy Who" exhibition and the relationship between Art Chicago and the MCA.

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Dana Boutin: How did this show come about and what are its parameters?

Lynne Warren: Art Chicago invited me to curate a show of artists that were, in my judgment, either influenced by or followed the heritage of the Hairy Who artists, the so-called Imagists. We have a rather unwieldy title for the show, but it refers to the Chicago-based artists who emerged in the mid-1960s and dubbed themselves the Hairy Who; other artists became associated with that group and later became more widely known as the Imagists. The Imagists work is the classic Chicago style, consisting of brightly colored imagery, mostly figurative in nature, with a hierarchical structure of how imagery is arranged on the canvas or paper. Their subject matter tended to be inspired by resources and sources that are vernacular: comic books, jukeboxes and popular culture materials like signs and folk art. I looked at currently working artists who are in that heritage, who look at the same source materials, or are formally following the Imagists. They had to be artists that were represented by dealers that were in Art Chicago. The dealers submitted one to six possible pieces by artists they felt fit the criteria. I selected fifteen different artists, each showing one piece, from ten galleries.

DB: What is the spectrum of media?

LW: There's a broad range of materials, including painting, prints, a sculp-

ture by the well-known international artist Susana Solano. I don't think she would say the Imagists influenced her, but the work fits within their formal ideas. There are two photographers from Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts in Miami; one of them, Carlos Betancourt, creates collages of flowers in a bilateral, almost mandala-like arrangement. That bilateral symmetry is a distinctive characteristic of Imagism, especially of Karl Wirsum's work. Bernard Williams is presenting a striking work of small, portrait-like heads in grids. They remind me of one of my favorite Imagists, Christina Ramberg. Unlike most Imagists, Christina Ramberg worked with dull colors. The work *Self Similarity Set #* by Williams is largely monochromatic.

DB: Is it the first time you worked with these artists?

LW: I was not familiar with some of the artists at all, which is generally not how I work. I feel strongly that the curator's familiarity with the work makes a big difference in how well the audience gets the work. The show isn't the same it would be if I knew each one of these artists and selected the work in person. Ineffable human qualities do get embedded in exhibitions. That's the difference between a slide jury and a one-person show on which the curator has worked for ten years. One of the shows that really knocked my socks off (and I don't even like this artist very much) was the show organized by the legendary Walter Hopps in the early 90s of work by Robert Rauschenberg. The way the show was put together, the curator made it look so good. It was this amazing effort of knowledge being put forth, so much so that I might not have gotten as much out of a show of another artist whose work I like better, if it were not curated in the same careful way. These things are really hard to quantify, but the craft of putting a show together is just as much a craft as that of an artist.

DB: How did the relationship between Art Chicago and the MCA develop?

LW: Historically, the MCA's relationship with the various art fairs over the years was that we ran the opening night gala party and were the beneficiary of the gala. When Merchandise Mart stepped in to revitalize Art Chicago, we were not involved for a couple of years. But we are again this year with the "First Focus" event.

DB: Do Chicago artists have a relatively warm or hands-on approach to their subjects?

LW: There is a definable style to almost any place. In Europe, art looks different from art here, even if the artists work with the same conceptual aesthetic or handmade aesthetic. Chicago follows its own vision rather

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than slavishly following the overriding mainstream. Craftsmanship is an important part of the Hairy Who. In the generation that emerged from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the late 1980s, their conceptual investigations are carefully handcrafted and personal, rather than merely theoretical, works. The show I curated last summer, "Everything's Here," in conjunction with the Jeff Koons exhibition exemplifies this point. Koons didn't copy visual styles here but rather found his own style by coming to Chicago. He modeled himself on the ideal of how Chicago artists operated: being independent, autonomous, and using their own personal iconography, which is a term that Jeff Koons uses a lot. Artists have to find their own style, personality, ilk, and veracity.

DB: *At a recent panel discussion at the Renaissance Society you talked about the distinctive art of a community, like that of New Orleans, versus the homogenization resulting from globalism.*

LW: I think people will increasingly seek emotional connectedness rather than esoteric or intellectualized art. It's difficult to come up with a consistent, personal vision when you travel all over the world to install work. The concerns addressed and emotions going into the work are different when you're alone in your studio.

DB: *How has the MCA's vision of its role in Chicago changed over the years?*

LW: Our mission has evolved and become better articulated, but it hasn't basically changed. The idea is to bring in the best art from elsewhere, to present the best art from here, to offer space where people could interact with the art of living artists, and to be a vital place to have engagement, both programmatically and educationally. In the early years, galleries showing all-white artworks or Dan Flavin with his fluorescent lights, for example, were so new to people that a very basic education effort, namely assuring that this indeed is art, was part and parcel of presenting the art. Now, people are savvier and our education efforts are more sophisticated and holistic.

DB: *Would you say it's important for you to organize exhibitions outside of the walls of your home institution?*

LW: It's good for curators to go beyond their comfort level and do new things because you always learn something from it. But curating at the MCA is such an all-encompassing job that it's very difficult to do much outside. I do some outside writing, like catalogue essays, for different artists. But timewise, it's very difficult to work at any large institution and do much outside curating.

DB: *What makes a large art exhibition a success?*

LW: Large exhibitions like art fairs or Documenta have to consider a different audience than those of the Art Institute of Chicago or the MCA. When you have an established institution, marketing surveys and the personal observations of the staff can help identify the interests of the audience. This information doesn't necessarily indicate exactly what shows to present but rather the mix of shows and how to present them in order to best appeal to the audience. Big international art fairs or even commercial art fairs can lack any sense of who the audience is. There's certainly nothing institutionally driving such organizations in terms of knowing an audience, and therefore structuring it in a certain way. At Documenta 12, I frankly found very little that interested me, either in 'discoveries' of artists I wasn't familiar with or in the presentations of the artists I knew well. I had gone with a German woman who was what I would call a pretty sophisticated follower of visual art. She was puzzled and didn't know what to look at, even though she was a very sophisticated woman. And my son, who was seventeen at the time and who knows a lot about art since his mom is a curator, absolutely hated it. He couldn't find anything to connect with. So if you have an example of these three different "audiences," and none could connect particularly, then I think there's failure on the part of an event. Commercial art fairs such as Art Chicago try to balance satisfying the most elite contemporary art audience as well as the more casual art viewer, which is a difficult task. Also, part of the problem is the spectacle aspect of these big, international fairs; absorbing it all is almost impossible.

DB: *How do you think the downturn in the global economy will affect these events?*

LW: There are fewer galleries involved this year at Art Chicago, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Large exhibitions can counterproductively exhaust viewers. The staff of Art Chicago is dedicated and committed. They're working under difficult circumstances in terms of assuming the problems of the previous fair organizers and the current economy. If it doesn't turn out to be the great success everyone hopes for, it's not because they haven't tried. We'll see.

Dana Boutin is an M.A. candidate in New Arts Journalism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Ever since she saw the poet, art critic, and MoMA curator Frank O'Hara's abstract descriptions in "Poem (The clouds go soft)" interacting with Jasper Johns' gently smeared handprints in the collaborative lithograph "Skin", she has studied words and images.

“Political Art” at Art Chicago? An Interview with Mary Jane Jacob

Beth Capper spoke to Mary Jane Jacob, Director of Exhibitions at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and guest curator of Partisan, one of the three special exhibitions held in conjunction with this year's Art Chicago. Presenting politically engaged work within a context of an art fair might be a highly contentious idea, so Capper probed Jacob's interest in engaging in the fair and pondered the efficacy of the work.

“I don't like art fairs,” says Mary Jane Jacob. This is a curious statement considering her role as curator of Partisan, a special exhibition in the upcoming Art Chicago that explores socially and politically oriented art. As our interview gets started, Jacob immediately seems uncomfortable with the tag “curator,” stating that she acts more as a “juror” of works that are “self-selected and self-imposed by galleries that are already participating in the fair.”

Jacob says she doesn't have any idea what artworks will be in Partisan, and is waiting for an email from the “organizers” to present her with the works.* This context could be challenging, in light of its apparent opposition to Jacob's general curatorial practice; she is best known for Culture in Action, a series of public art projects initiated as part of “Sculpture Chicago” in the summer of 1993, aimed at redefining the relationships among artists, art administrators and audiences. This project is demonstrative of her curatorial practice as a whole, which mostly consists of large-scale, participatory public art projects unbound by traditional gallery space. Her role in conceiving and selecting works for Partisan is decidedly more limited.

Yet, Jacob muses, “I thought it was exceptional for an art fair to decide that it is going to put on a political show, and it seemed to be a step in the right direction. The practice of curating is something that is in some ways a reactionary as well as a proactive practice, and I'm always dealing with opportunities and limitations and trying to shape them into something that is good. Many times this takes me somewhere that is better than if I was just sitting in my office with the door closed with no budget problems, with everyone saying yes to everything I want.”

Concerning the content of Partisan, Jacob points out: “A lot of things that

we think of as political art are not going to be there. So artists working in genres that are purposely not commodities, not salable or anti-systems will not be represented.” However, various incarnations of the “political” have historically played a vibrant role in challenging audiences within the gallery walls, as they have outside of them. Jacob agrees: “We could take a person like Hans Haacke, who certainly deals with [political] subjects and yet still chooses to put it back into institutionalized space, to put it back into the complicit space of the collector. While I do acknowledge that this exhibition is a limited one within this specific context, and although Haacke is unfortunately not in my pool of available artists, there are still interesting things that could come through here.”

Perhaps political art might even be more effective in reaching broad audiences in the context of an art fair. Some audience members may not otherwise contemplate the lives of inner-city housing project residents in Chicago (Paul D'Amato's *Be Free Now* photography series) or the abuses of detainees in Guantanamo Bay (Dinh Q Lee's video *The Penal Colony*). The fact that overtly “Political” art has lost some of its salience in our present art world has less to do with the institutionalization of dissent and more to do with the nuanced and complex ways in which artists now conceive of and express the political.

Is Partisan representative of a genuine interest in exploring and representing the “political,” or does it have more to do with the idea that the political fervor of the past year makes political art a more salable commodity? To see things in such a polarized manner, however, is overly simplistic, and assumes the two aspects are mutually exclusive. It will certainly be instructive to gauge the currency of the work by the responses the exhibition receives in the context of these uncertain times.

Beth Capper is an arts administrator and independent film curator from Brighton, England. She is an MA candidate in the Arts Administration and Policy and Modern Art History, Theory and Criticism program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (Dual '11). Alongside her partner Kelly Shindler, Beth is currently working on Refracted Lens, a new Chicago-based film series committed to exhibiting cutting-edge film, video, and new media work.

* Editors: This interview took place on March 18.

What are today's "New Insights"?

An Interview with Susanne Ghez

Susanne Ghez has directed The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago since 1974. She is widely credited for re-defining the museum's role as a site for the production of new works. Ghez was the recipient of the Award for Curatorial Excellence from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in 2002 and a recipient of an Honorary Doctorate from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2006. To the surprise of some of her colleagues, since 2007 she has also selected works for "New Insight", Art Chicago's special exhibition showcasing top graduate programs in the U.S.

Dorota Biczel Nelson spoke to Susanne Ghez about her involvement in the fair, her interest in curating graduate students' work, the place of young artists in the fair, and the challenges both curators and artists face in the contemporary art world.

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Dorota Biczel Nelson: *How did you first become involved in "New Insight"? How important is it for you to work with Art Chicago? Are there any mutual benefits that the fair and the Renaissance Society receive from this collaboration?*

Susanne Ghez: I didn't do it with any goals of mutual benefits, or benefits for the Renaissance Society, in all honesty. Painter Sarah Krepp initiated the idea.* She felt there was a good number of graduate programs in the U.S., and Art Chicago was ready to underwrite "New Insight" as a part of the fair. Because Sarah was teaching in one of the institutions, they wanted an outside curator. I agreed to do it because I wanted to be supportive of my community.

The art fair in its heyday was very important: to me, to the Renaissance Society, to the Chicago community. The fair brought great galleries from Europe, like Peter Pakesch from Vienna, and many others. They had some really interesting artists working with them, including Franz West, Günther Förg, Albert Oehlen; artists whose work I was not familiar with in the 1970s and early 1980s and whose works I eventually exhibited at the Renaissance Society. The Society was small, and I didn't have a budget to travel to Europe. And here, European galleries were coming to us, to Chicago. It was just wonderful, so I feel very strongly about continuing my support and the Society's support of the fair. Over

* Editors: Krepp is Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

the years the fair fell on some really hard times and it was very sad. Chris [Kennedy] picked it up, and I think his head is in the right place. If there is something I can do to be a supportive community member, I'll do it. It's very simple.

The work in "New Insight" is young, somewhat uncooked, I might say. But I think the exhibition gives a wonderful educational opportunity to the students, because they learn that they have to state what their work is about, present the work in such a way that it can be understood and juried. They learn that they have to put value on it, regardless of whether they see it as commercial or not. They have to think about packaging (and, quite literally, we had some disasters when the students did not ship works properly). They also get to see their work in the context of the international art exhibition and can see how it stands in comparison, and that might be enlightening to them. The first couple of years it was wonderful, because the fair paid for the students to fly in and spend two nights in a hotel. They got to meet each other, learn about various programs and intersections between programs. It was a very rich opportunity for the students.

Is this the work that I am going to show at the Ren? No, I haven't and I probably won't. Although we do try to identify artists early on, it is still the work that is further along in the career trajectory than a graduate student show at "New Insight." But even in your question I sense some skepticism...

DBN: *It's an interesting scenario. I am curious about the fact that you start with a number of pre-selected schools, and I understand that for all logistical purposes, it makes sense. However, I was wondering how the selection of the twelve schools was made.***

SG: It started with Sarah Krepp, and the large ones were fairly obvious. Many smaller schools we did not include were not happy, of course. There were times we thought about trying to change the process. The students are selected based on slides and statements submitted and it is really hard to jury from jpgs; ideally, you want to be in the studio. But there isn't a budget for that.

DBN: *So, what criteria do you use in the selection decisions? How are those criteria different than when dealing with the work of the artists*

** Schools represented in the show are: Yale University, California Institute of Art, Carnegie Mellon University, CUNY's Hunter College, Maryland Institute College of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, San Francisco Art Institute, UCLA, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana, and Cranbrook Academy.

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whose reputations are already established, if at all?

SG: It's always the same criteria: strong formal presentation and strong intellectual curiosity. Even if the work is not crystallized yet, sometimes you see a spark.

DBN: *Are there any particular challenges you encounter when looking at students' work, aside from the level of clarity more mature work might have?*

SG: You are always looking for the same things. Maybe the students haven't had enough life experience yet to talk about it, and to talk about it in an interesting way...

DBN: *Do you think you can pick up certain trends when you're looking at those young artists? Are you trying to set trends?*

SG: I'm struggling to get work that's solid. But art is a mirror we hold up to ourselves, it's a sign of the times and so people get an opportunity while looking at students' work to think about what young people are seeing today and reflecting back out. It could be interesting for the viewer. Have I seen that in the work I looked at? That's another question. Sometimes the schools are not doing such a good job, but sometimes you can see that somebody is making connections to the students. I think that's what it depends on, not so much on the trends. There certainly has been more media in the past decade, more moving-image media.

DBN: *I find the pre-selection of the schools problematic also because I feel there's a danger of establishing a kind of pedigree through a selection process set up like that.*

SG: I suggested at some point to mix it up a bit, but I also wouldn't do open calls.

DBN: *What would you say then, to a graduate student outside of those 12 schools trying to make work?*

SG: Focus on making good work. I doubt being in "New Insight" can be a goal for a serious young student.

DBN: *But with the amount of programs out there – to put it bluntly – the competition is really intense, so those things that you can grasp early on can either make or break your career. Is this not important?*

SG: It's not that important. We used to look at the covers of *Art in America* and *Artforum* ten, twenty years ago and whatever happened to the artists on those covers, nobody knows, nobody cares. One should never

take oneself too seriously in that respect. Just focus on communicating to another individual because you have something to say, something that drives you. That's why people write, that's why people make art. Perseverance, persistence, all those p-words are important for young artists. Even in terms of getting the work seen or getting the foot in the door.

It is not so easy to identify the work today because there are so many artists, so many galleries, so many magazines, journals, blogs, sites that weren't there in the early 1980s. It's easy to show the work of people who had been working for 10 years and had established reputations, but it's harder to take that risk now. So you just try to show the work that provokes, that talks about why we are in this universe, what it means to be in this universe, to find work that isn't purely formal.

Again, how does this go into "New Insight"? Chris was brave taking this risk. I think he believes in exposure to the humanities, to the art world; that if people saw more art, read more, thought more, we would not be in the mess we're in today. That's why he put his money on the line.

"New Insight" is not commercial. I was very clear about that and there are no prices in the show. I didn't want these young students entering into the marketplace, because there is a danger in bringing work at an early stage into a feverish environment. This is really an opportunity to engage in thoughtful art making and the students should not worry about what the work is going to sell for, or where it's going to sell. Otherwise, the situation might create confidence that might be premature.

DBN: *Chris Kennedy talks about attracting as broad a population as possible, and Art Chicago's educational programming is impressive. Who is attracted to "New Insight;" do you have a gauge on that?*

SG: I suspect there is a big student audience. There are a lot of artists who are training in Chicago. They are not buying, of course, but hopefully some collectors will come, too. I hope the fair continues, because over the last three decades it has been really good to the city. Maybe they can downscale and maintain a certain quality level, and then grow it again. There is always rise and fall. Perhaps Basel Miami will diminish and Chicago will rise again. One has to be optimistic. On the other hand, it's a challenging moment and maybe there will be shifts in scale. Maybe photographs won't be 10 by 12 feet, but smaller. People will get beyond the bombastic to actually see, not just look. And that would be a wonderful thing.

Art in the Civic Sphere An Interview with Chris Kennedy

Perhaps no figure is as significant as Chris Kennedy in Art Chicago's long and winding story. In an act that has become a veritable piece of Chicago lore, Kennedy swept in and saved the day when Art Chicago was about to crumble in 2006. As president of the Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc., Kennedy negotiated the purchase of the fair, moved it from its former site at Butler Field to its present-day home at Merchandise Mart and had the show operational within two days of being informed of its imminent demise.

This year's Art Chicago will be the third installment of the fair as completely planned and managed by Merchandise Mart Properties, which has since substantially branched out into the art fair business. Each year, anticipation of the fair is high as the public at large waits to see how Art Chicago will evolve. Although Kennedy has been much lauded as a civic hero who helped save a local cultural institution, critics of the Mart's involvement are just as vocal in their claims of a disengagement with local galleries, and a lack of sincere interest in art by the fair's planners. In 2009, the Mart has the added challenge of organizing a fair in the midst of severe economic downturn, which has seen many art fairs fold as galleries can no longer foot the bill to participate.

Kennedy shared his thoughts via e-mail with editors of e—merge, Dorota Biczal Nelson and Ania Szremski, on the importance of art fairs, the current economy and his own personal interest in the visual arts.

Dorota Biczal Nelson/Ania Szremski: *Has the involvement with the arts through art fair venues changed how you view the role(s) of art in U.S. society?*

Chris Kennedy: I would say that MMPI's involvement with the arts has underscored my belief in the importance of a civic commitment to the arts.

My family and I have always been heavily involved in art and culture (there's the Kennedy Center for performing arts; my sister Rory is a documentary film maker; I have seen artists as catalysts for change with their participation in political campaigns, including my Uncle Ted Kennedy's run for U.S. President), etc.

But it's important to recognize that the arts bring commerce to Chicago, which benefits everyone from the wait staff at restaurants to the local hotels, cab drivers, shops and more — not just the art galleries and cultural institutions. The cultural attractions of Chicago are an economic engine. The vibrancy of our cultural community generates not just income, but an advantage in attracting bright, creative professionals to Chicago's work force. When we embrace the arts, we set the stage for entrepreneurs who feed off of originality and innovation. They create jobs, expand the tax base and stimulate the economy.

Receptivity to new ideas is what has propelled and will continue to propel Chicago forward.

DBN/AS: *Merchandise Mart Properties now owns a number of large fairs. How does Art Chicago stand out from them, if at all? Do the audiences for those fairs overlap, and how do they differ?*

CK: Since I call Chicago home, maybe I have a little bias, but I truly think there is no city better equipped to host an art fair than ours. We have an unparalleled commitment to art and architecture, are home to world class museums and cultural institutions and know how to work together. Art Chicago is enjoying the participation of 85 cultural institutions around the city and has a particularly strong partnership with the MCA this year. It's terrific to see how this city can band together to celebrate art and architecture.

We first produced Art Chicago in 2006, and are now the largest producer of contemporary art fairs in the country. I've had the opportunity to meet so many incredible people — dealers, collectors, artists, museum professionals and business leaders with a passion and involvement in the arts. Our fairs are fueled by the creativity and expertise of the talented people on our staff, but also by the influence of these individuals.

Due to the might of our fair portfolio, we are able to reach out to an enormous number of collectors and galleries, which is certainly a strong advantage for each fair. The fairs retain their individuality, as they are still run by the people who developed them. The only thing uniform about them is that they can all depend upon the expertise of the Merchandise Mart in show production. Instead of worrying about walls, lights, load-in and load-out, the fair directors and staff can focus their energy on crafting the best experience for their unique fair audience.

DBN/AS: *Has the current economic crisis affected your view on the place of the arts and humanities?*

CK: Art, especially contemporary art, can be very challenging. An openness to new ideas allows people to be open to new and maybe unexpected means of problem solving. In times of crisis, we need creative problem solving. We can also benefit even more, perhaps, from how transporting the arts can be in our lives. They may challenge, soothe or even disturb, but the arts always involve us — and this involvement can offer a healthy temporary distraction from work-a-day problems, or they can highlight and draw clarity to some of the most pressing issues in our world. But it all begins with this openness.

DBN/AS: *Do you collect/own art? If so, what does your collection focus on?*

CK: My wife and I do not collect a specific genre or artist. We do have artwork in our home, and everything we own we've acquired because it has personal significance to us, reminds us of a special time, person or place. I guess we have an interest in art that is generated far more by passion than by an investment opportunity.

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