



Art

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## When Artists Choose Artists

by Joyce Beckenstein

From the late 1940s through the '60s, New York artists, restless and in pursuit of what they had yet to discover about themselves, headed for Long Island's East End. The titans who at the time had yet to learn they were titans—Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell—were among the visual artists who, when not sequestered in their hushed studios, hung out on the beach, smoking, drinking, cooking, canoeing, clamming, and coveting one another's lovers and spouses. The East End of Long Island wasn't an art colony so much as it was a place where like-minded free spirits stayed connected as they worked and played far from the psychic and physical heat of their cramped city digs.

But the East End is a different place today. As Terrie Sultan, executive director of the Parrish Art Museum in Watermill pointed out as we toured the current juried exhibition, *Artist Choose Artists*,

"[ . . . ] while the cost of living in Southampton, East Hampton or Shelter Island is today prohibitive for most, other areas in Hampton Bays, Westhampton, Quogue, Flanders and the North Fork are still within reach for many emerging and mid-career artists. This means that the artist community is far more spread out than it used to be. But one of the key aspects that today make this area so unique is that it is so diverse: multi-generational with a mix of artists from well-known to mid-career, underappreciated, and unknown. We feel a responsibility to these artists working around us. They no longer have many opportunities to get together [ . . . ] the museum must create these opportunities, and it's one of our core values to do so. That is why we started *Artists Choose Artists* about six years ago. By putting out a call to those living within this widened East End circle we now have a digital archive of artists who we would not have otherwise known about."

This is the museum's third iteration of an exhibition that features works by seven distinguished artists who serve as jurors, alongside works by fourteen local artists selected by the jurors. This year's roster of jurors includes Tina Barney, Lynda Benglis, Donald Lipski, Tony Oursler, Jorge Pardo, Cindy Sherman, and Leo Villareal, all of whom have strong connections to the East End. Each were asked to choose two mid-career and emerging artists by reviewing art slides, CVs, and artist statements submitted by nearly two hundred East



End responders to the museum's call for submissions. Once the selectees were confirmed, the final work selections were decided by Alicia Longwell, Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Chief Curator; and Corinne Erni, Curator of Special Projects, both of the Parrish Museum.

Donald Lipski, *New Seascape Porn*, 2016. Aluminum canoe with newspaper. Courtesy Terri Hyland. Photo by Gary Mamay. Installation view: *Artists Choose Artists*. Parrish Art Museum, October 30, 2016 – January 16, 2017.

Although the increasing population of artists strewn about an ever wider real estate circle makes the camaraderie of the past unwieldy, the museum does due diligence to build a sense of community through this twist on traditional juried exhibitions. Not only do jurors, curators, and the public become acquainted with nearby talent, but art audiences get to understand well-known artists a bit better through the sidelong glimpse of their personal tastes. The opportunity for the *Brooklyn Rail* to query them about their choices sheds light on how artists whose works are seen worldwide respond to art they are seeing for the first time.

"There's lots of talent out there that I didn't know about," said Donald Lipski, echoing the very goal set by Terri Sultan for this exhibition. "My hope was that the artists I chose—Suzanne Anker and Ben Butler—would have work that was very different from mine, but that somehow complimented what I do," Lipski explained. "I hoped we would be exhibited in the same room, in proximity, where those connections would emerge."

Lipski got his wish. A serial accumulator, his works consistently combine formalist and minimalist concerns with narrative, and an egalitarian love of the commonplace. *New Seascape Porn* (2016), created for this exhibition, consists of an aluminum canoe with equal-sized holes drilled throughout its hull, each hole stuffed with a rolled-up copy of the *New York Times*. "Cutting holes in a boat is provocative, then magic happened when I put the newspaper in them," he says. There is an obvious sexual visual pun to the work but, as Lipski points out, his sculpture triggers multiple associations: "My wife Terri thought of people fleeing North Africa on fragile boats [. . .] never my thought, but I love the metaphors that come to mind."

At first blush it's difficult to see the relationship between Lipski's canoe and the diminutive works of bio artist Suzanne Anker, and Ben Butler's architectonic sculpture. But seek and you'll find it in the way each artist combines disparate materials in unexpected ways. Lipski notes how "Suzanne Anker mines a unique field where biology and visual art intersect; the work takes lots of different directions, is visually rich and gives a jolt of color to the room. I thought her allusion to biology might add another layer on to how people would respond to both my work and Ben's."

Anker takes photographs of biomaterials and man-made objects set in Petri dishes, and then feeds those images to a 3D printer. The printer scans the images and prints them one layer at a time in a material consisting of plaster, resin, and pigment. The resulting mini-bio-sculptures are set in Petri dishes like fossilized biologic forms. For *Remote Sensing* (2016), twenty such sculptures are displayed alongside *Vanitas (in a Petri dish)* (2013), their twenty related inkjet prints.

"I liked the fact that Ben Butler is a young artist," says Lipski. "This show is an opportunity for him." Drawn to Butler's imposing sculpture *Elegy to the Disappearance of Objects* (2015) for its process, Lipski explains how this artist starts with a little squiggle of form and then generates hundreds of them from a template:

“From simple things—wood, concrete, foam block, a slender wood armature—and a fertile imagination and lots of courage, he does so many things.”

Tina Barney, a photographer known for her large-scale realist photographs, also chose artists whose works resonate with her own. *American Flag* (1988), typical of her seemingly benign portrayals of family and friends that, on closer look, belie more complicated relationships, share many characteristics with the paintings of RJT Haynes and Dinah Maxwell Smith, her two chosen artists. As she explained, “They both painted in a style I liked—loose and representational in a photographic sense.” Both Maxwell’s *Five Suits Redux* (2016), portraying five suited men huddled in conversation on a beach, and Haynes’s beach scene, *Diptych: East & West*, (2015), psychologically connect to Barney’s snapshot reality and the narratives, fictions, and memories they prompt viewers to associate with their works.

Cindy Sherman’s selections were, by contrast, based upon her “gut response to the work.” In a statement about her artist choices—Bill Komoski and Toni Ross—she declared, “Choosing Bill was a no-brainer since I’ve known his work for a long time and even own a few pieces of his. Toni’s work was completely new to me and I was just taken by the beauty of it.” In an email interview with the *Rail* she said that she found no aspects of her selectee’s work specifically or obliquely similar to her own art, though she did find synergies between some other jurors and the works of their selectees. Nevertheless, many viewers might find correspondences between Sherman’s large *Untitled* (2015) with its complex panoply of heads not that distant to Komoski’s large, multi-media abstract head, *2.14.15*, (2015). Toni Ross’s *April 13* (2016) bears no such kindred relationship to Sherman’s photographs; her series of ceramic and slip stoneware extending the length of a gallery wall form a rich, textured surface that suggests remnants of archaic architecture.

Cuban-born Jorge Pardo, who divides his time between Mexico, New York City, and East Marion on the North Fork, is an artist whose works defy categorization—they live somewhere between the worlds of painting, sculpture, furniture, and architecture. His *Untitled* (2007), a multi-media, dimensional silkscreen with strips of polyester shantung reflects the intricate material and abstract relationships that inform his fluid style. Pardo’s responses to questions about his own work and his artist choices were refreshingly direct. His selections, like Sherman’s, were based on a visceral response to what he saw. “Curators rely on a thematic idea when they choose works, while artists look for works that seem accomplished, and where you ‘get’ the image,” he said. “I thought most works in the show were large and arty, but the ones I chose were more intimate. Anne Bae’s paper works and Monica Banks’ ceramics are not like my work, but I thought they would work well together: The paper is soft, the ceramics hard [. . .] it’s really basic.” Bae’s *Of Human Bondage* (2016) consists of tendrils of paper shapes, nature-inspired forms, and fragile paper cages suspended from a white serpentine branch. What at first might engage the viewer because it looks like decorative craft requiring lots of time and patience to make, struck Pardo more as “craft perverted” because of the “extreme level to which Bae’s fragile constructs rise above craft.” Similarly, Monica Banks’ miniature ceramic “cakes,” suggesting yummy confections, turn toxic when porcelain dead black bees dot the “frosting,” as it does in *Parchment Layers on Black Plate* (2016). “These works appear to be made of food but they are not; they ‘work’ because they resolve figurative and formal problems through consistent scale,” Pardo observed.

Lynda Benglis has five of her own new works exhibited in this show, all of them from the same vibrant series of painted wall-hung sculptures that recently debuted at Cheim & Read. These beautiful, often decorative sculptures are made of handmade paper over chicken wire, some colored with a variety of materials including ground coal, watercolor, gold leaf and glitter. She describes the works as “Cubist mummies that I allowed to open up—to get out there.” Of her process, she says “they were like drawing sculptures, made from my own paper. Paper makes noises with color, so it was like doing music.” About her artist choices which she, like Sherman, considers unrelated to her own work, she said, “I’ve taught for many years and I didn’t choose works that I thought would be obvious choices to others. I did this purposefully. But I felt strongly about both Garrett Chingery’s figurative works (e.g. *The Builder*, [2013]) and Saskia Friedrich’s fabric works on canvas (e.g. *Stars*, [2016]).” Benglis described Chingery’s figurative paintings as “clean and decided in the way he approached his work.” She responded to Friedrich’s work because she found it to be “contemporary and expressive.”

Leo Villareal’s *Particle Universe* (2016) is literally and physically the most dazzling work in this exhibition. The work consists of LEDs set in stainless steel mirrored rods, the flashing lights controlled by custom-made software that Villareal uses to create sequences that will produce ever-changing random patterns. All of this extraordinary high-tech apparatus strangely weds contemporary abstraction and installation art to the works of classic masters who were intrigued and beguiled by the magic of light. As Villareal explains, “I’m connected to the history of art but use new materials: light is seductive and I try to preserve that by taking away the commercial elements of digital light to harvest multiple scales of things as we see them [. . .] in water [. . .] and in nature. For me it draws connections to Turner and to Whistler.”



Leo Villareal, *Particle Universe*, 2016. LEDs, custom software and electrical hardware, mirrored stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Sandra Gering Gallery, New York. Photo by Gary Mamay. Installation view: *Artists Choose Artists*. Parrish Art Museum, October 30, 2016 – January 16, 2017.

Randomness accounts for much of the wonder in Villareal’s constructs: “The patterns do not repeat, there is no loop, and although the technology uses only white light, the mirrored surfaces pick up random color surrounding the work so that the mirrors, in reflecting and emitting light, build chance into the work—you don’t know what will happen.”

“It was interesting to be on the other side of how things work,” Villareal noted as he explained why he chose works by Karin Waisman and Almond Zigmund for this juried exhibition. “The works are very different from mine, but I’m always thinking of systems, patterns, and growth, and these things drew me to Karin’s work.” He refers to Waisman’s *Tondo V* and *Tondo VI* (2015) a pair of large round forms that hover between lacy snowflakes and the kind of tracery found on Gothic cathedrals. Like Villareal’s works they simultaneously allude to architecture and nature. Almond Zigmund’s works, such as *Primaried Structures* (2016), interested Villareal because of their opticality and the way they alter visual perception. This particular free-standing work consists of open and closed forms that recall the language of minimalism, but says Villareal, “they engage color and geometry so they are not austere; you see the hand at work.”

But how do you organize this collection of forty-seven works by twenty-one artists—legendary and lesser known—to create a unified show as visually enticing as the sum of its parts? Here is where the consummate skill of Parrish curators Alicia Longwell and Corinne Erni holds sway. “Alicia and I visited all the studios of all the participating artists, most jurors included,” explained Erni<sup>1</sup>. She continued, “[...] because jurors chose the artists but not the specific works for the exhibition, we were always thinking about how all these artworks would work together. Eventually themes began to emerge. Leo Villareal’s spectacular work somewhat dictated the placement of other works in the large gallery—it was risky because each work had to stand on its own and hold its own.” Erni went on to compare the installation process to choreography and the way the room vibrates.

Villareal’s work reflects the colors of Pardo’s multi-media piece and Benglis’s painted sculptures. Placed at the opposite end of the gallery from Villareal’s light piece, Oursler’s freestanding head—*#ISO* (2015)—consists of video screens projecting blinking eyes and a talking mouth uttering nonsensical cyber-blabber. These weird elements hold a strange dialog with Sherman’s distorted faces and Komoski’s cardboard head. A series of abstract works—from Pardo to Benglis to Zigmund share another set of formal convergences that animate the asymmetrical balance in this large gallery space.

The works in the Spine Gallery, the museum’s main corridor, were similarly placed together according to their synergies. Here the focus is on figurative works by Smith, Chingerey, Haynes, and Barney, as well as a startling series of photographs by Jackie Black and abstract sculpture by Marianne Weil—both artists selected by Tony Oursler who was unavailable for an interview. Black’s still-life photographs—the genre here a macabre pun for her subject—are among the most arresting realist works in this exhibition. Her *Last Meal (Series)* (2001) includes twenty-four images of last meals ordered by death-row inmates. These mainly simple meals—one of them consisting of sunny-side-up eggs, sausage, pancakes, and toast with jam—amount to chilling final portraits of psychologically complex but violent souls about to meet their maker before they can digest their repast.

Mid-career artist Marianne Weil is known for creating enigmatic bronze vessels that, in form and process, summon ancient, often mythic worlds. She creates them using the ancient lost wax casting method, a process she has evolved and coaxed to include another, unlikely medium—blown glass. This combination of transparent and fragile glass with what we think of as the impenetrable strength of metal takes many an unexpected turn in works such as *Chiaro Curore* (2011). Here a twisted assemblage of copper and bronze churns like a gestating form within a clear glass vessel. Bronze and glass engage in a reverse conversation in *Cornucopia* (2011 – 15), a work featuring an elongated golden glob of glass that appears to slither through a cornucopia-shaped basket of netted metal.

For Alicia Longwell, who has served as a curator for the Parrish for many years, the flow of emerging and star-branded artists is as familiar as are the museum’s roots in a countrified community that has art tentacles stretching to the New York art world and globally beyond. Nevertheless, putting a show like this one together remains a challenge. “You start with the best, strongest works, but the idea has to cook and hopefully rise to a soufflé,” she says.

For curator Corinne Erni, a newcomer to the Parrish who previously led IDEAS CITY for The New Museum in New York City, where she focused on art and urbanism, this is a different experience. As she describes it, “You here have a strong local identity with different groups. There is repetition—you come across the same people over and over again, and you can connect to them in a larger context. The museum serves as a focus for this and I hope to activate and energize these connections.”

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#### Endnotes

A video of the selected artists in their studios with the curators is available at <https://vimeo.com/190123077>.

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