

Kolaj

a magazine about
contemporary
fine art collage

ISSUE SEVEN

Kolaj Magazine is
about all things related
to contemporary
art collage.

\$12.00

ISSN 1927-6893



9 771927 689005 >



The Exquisite Corpse

Drawn, Quartered, Remembered

by W. David Powell

EXQUISITE CORPSE. – Game of folded paper which consists of having several people compose a phrase or drawing collectively, none of the participants having any of the nature of the preceding contribution or contributions. The now classical example, which gave its name to the game, is the first phrase obtained in this manner: *The exquisite—corpse—shall drink—the young—wine.*

(Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme.)

Artwork by

Todd Bartel

Varujan Boghosian

Tom J. Byrne

Bo Joseph

Johanna Halford

Marcus Ratliff

Matthew Rose

Michael Oatman

James Scott

Peter Thomashow

As legend has it, the surrealist game *cadavre exquis* was first played in Paris in 1925 in the apartment of the eccentric Marcel Duhamel. Duhamel's apartment was in a hotel that he was running primarily to provide food and lodging for Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguay, and later, Benjamin Perét. At that time these artists and writers were at stages in their careers where their primary art was that of joyous living. It was in this atmosphere, ripe for creative expression and the abandonment of reason, that they first played *cadavre exquis*, a game of chance, not as a gamble, but as an experiment in random associations. Automatism, a fundamental principle of surrealism, was most definitely in play and the results of the game were unpredictable and fun. The game was a version of the parlor game *Consequences*,

a word game that is played in a similar manner as *Mad Libs*. Rather than being completely scripted, it is played on folded paper where the words are

written according to a series of instructions and hidden from the next participant. The story is revealed only when the game is complete. The game began as an exercise in random phrase generation, but soon became a game with images, both drawn and collaged.

The notoriously autocratic André Breton, known as the Pope of surrealism, was a regular at these evenings of fun and games where "absolute non-conformism and disrespect" were required and "the greatest good humor continually reigned."¹ Sound like fun? No doubt it was.

Breton felt the game put at their disposal, "at last—an infallible means of sending the mind on vacation and fully releasing its metaphorical potentialities."² The game provided the player with a means to engage as a group of "communicating vessels" in an exploration of accentuating "vividly the continuing relationship uniting the exterior world with the interior world."³

untitled

by Varujan Boghosian,
Peter Thomashow,
Marcus Ratliff

11" x 8.5"

cut found vintage paper and
a die cut dot

2013

(left)
Cadavre exquis
 by Tom J. Byrne,
 Matthew Rose,
 Jessica Halford
 vintage papers and
 pencil on paper
 2013



(right)
Cadavre exquis
 by Jessica Halford,
 Matthew Rose,
 Tom J. Byrne
 vintage papers and
 pencil on paper
 2013



Before the *cadavre exquis* there was a Dadaist game called Little Papers which involved the creation of randomly generated poems. Some of these Dadas became surrealists. Tristan Tsara, the proto-dada, was a proponent of this game. There were structural rules on how to proceed with the game, as there are with the drawing version. The rules did not preclude spontaneity and irrational creation, they simply allowed it to achieve a form. Other forms of these games, such as findings, or *trouvailles*, were made by looking in newspapers and magazines and cutting out expressions. The phrases were arranged in an order arrived at by being pulled from a hat. During this same time period, this technique was also used by Gertrude Stein in *Tiny Buttons*. Years later, it was used, in a modified form, by Brion Gysin and William Burroughs. Burroughs called them cut-ups, a method also used by David Byrne in his songwriting.

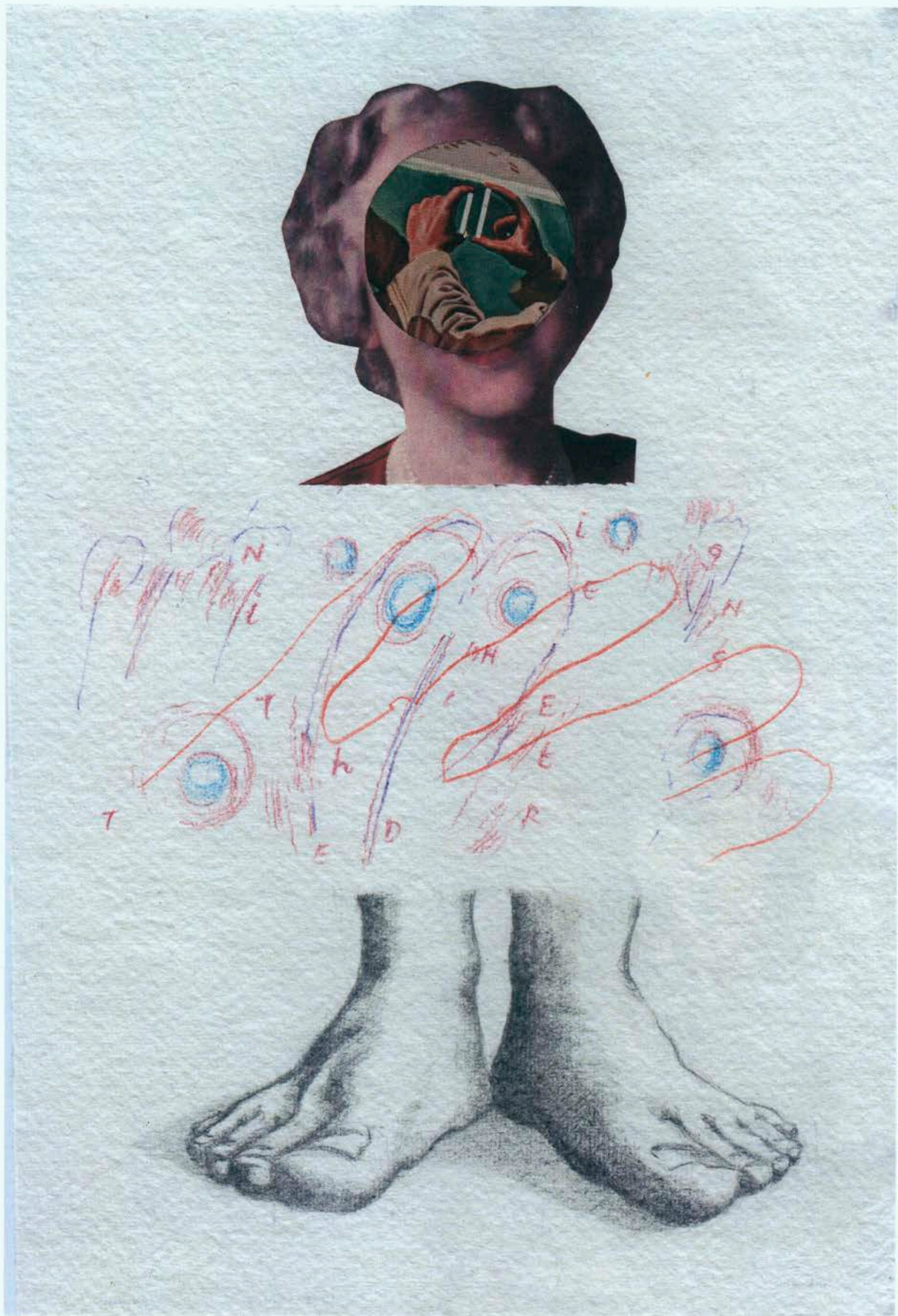
§

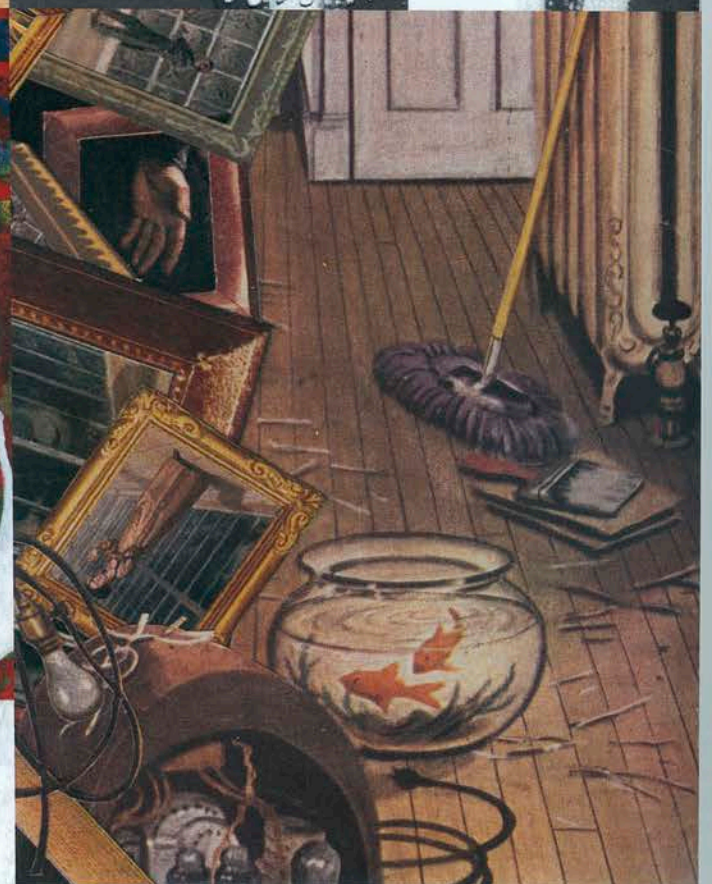
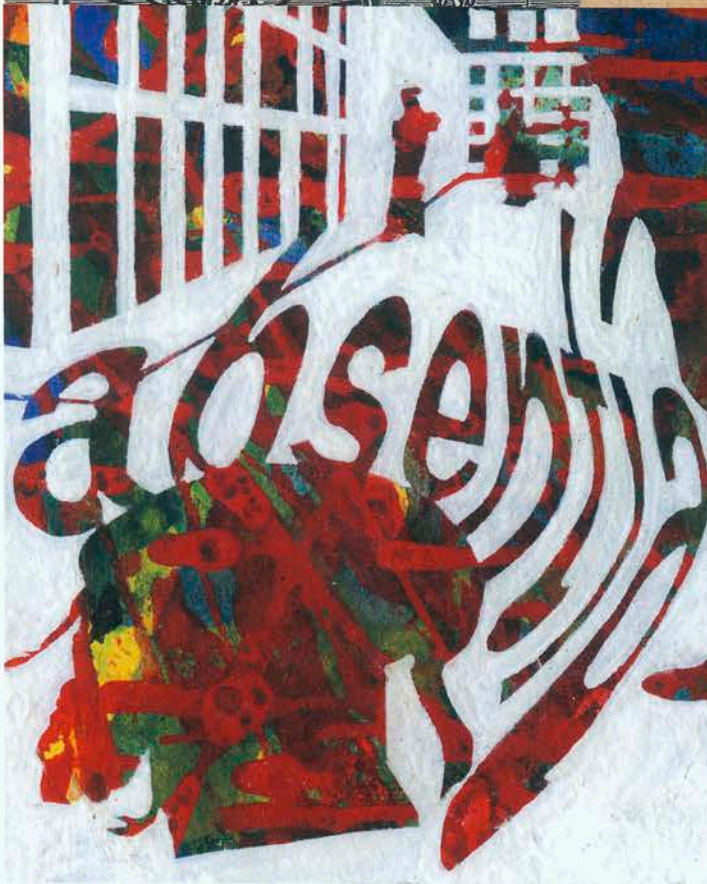
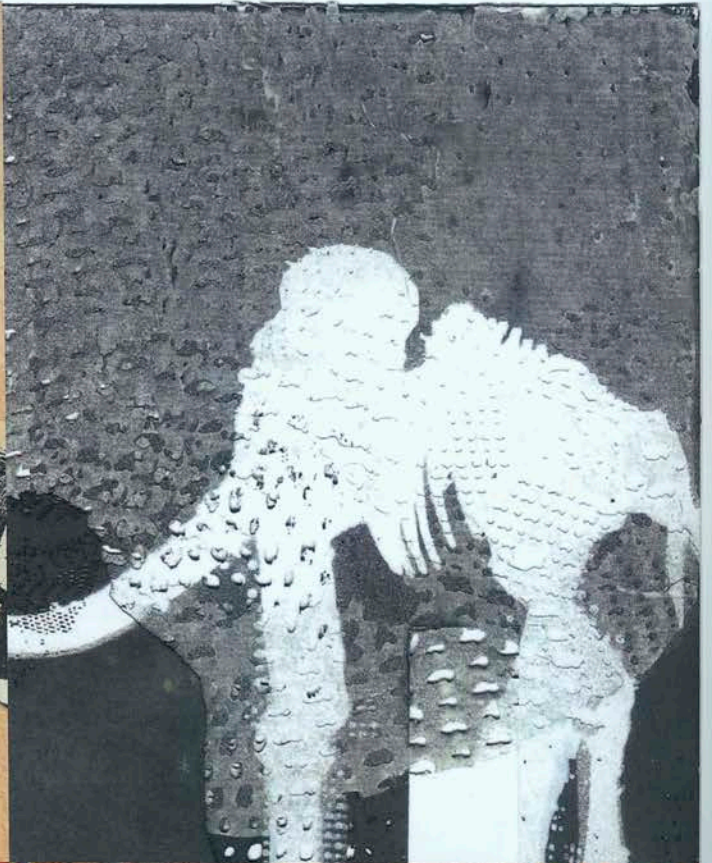
The original text generated by the earliest players,

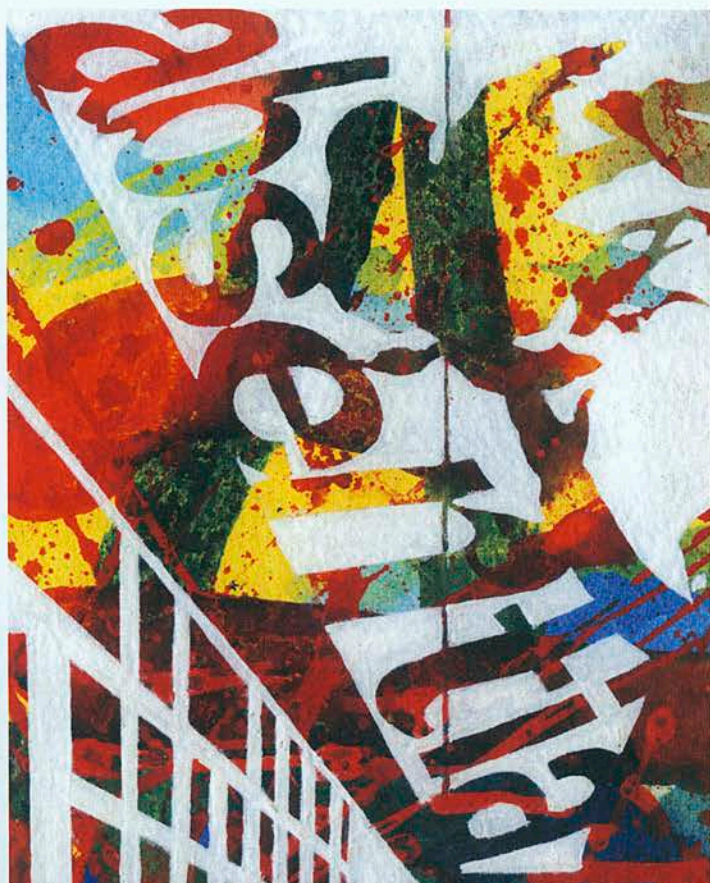
"the exquisite—corpse—shall drink—the young wine," was most likely one of many generated at that session. In spite of the notion of automatism, it was probably through a rational editing process that it became the one that stuck and became the name of the game. Indeed, Breton was called out on the authenticity of his own automatic writing by Octavio Paz. According to Charles Simic in an essay in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*,⁴ Paz was visiting the home of Breton in Paris and was asked to wait, as the poet was busy. Paz waited and could see the poet writing furiously in his study. On their walk to a restaurant for lunch, Breton told Paz that he was doing some automatic writing. When Paz retorted that he had seen Breton erasing many times, he said, "It wasn't automatic enough."

While the principles of automatism may be compromised in the process of editing a text, in the drawing game, they remain pure. It is a collective and automatic endeavor that contains

untitled
 by Matthew Rose,
 Jessica Halford, Tom J. Byrne
 vintage papers and
 pencil on paper
 2013







(previous page left)

Drawn, Quartered, Remembered 1/4

by Todd Bartel, James Scott, Michael Oatman, Bo Joseph

10" x 8"

2013

(previous page right)

Drawn, Quartered, Remembered 2/4

by Bo Joseph, Todd Bartel, James Scott, Michael Oatman

10" x 8"

2013

(left)

Drawn, Quartered, Remembered 3/4

by Michael Oatman, Bo Joseph, Todd Bartel, James Scott

10" x 8"

2013

(right)

Drawn, Quartered, Remembered 4/4

by James Scott, Michael Oatman, Bo Joseph, Todd Bartel

10" x 8"

2013



aspects of collective consciousness, personality and performance. The synergy of a group and the sheer joy of seeing a drawing when it is complete make it a source of great entertainment, as well as a way to loosen up and transcend the boundaries of rational thought.

§

I asked three groups of people to participate in this project. One group is a group of friends from Vermont who meet regularly for coffee and studio visits. This loose collective, known jokingly as the Rio Blanco Riders, all share collage and assemblage as their primary medium of artistic expression. Varujan Boghosian, Marcus Ratliff and Peter Thomashow met for this *cadavre exquis* session in Varujan's studio in White River

Junction, Vermont. They were the only crew who were physically in the same place for the game.

Matthew Rose, an American collage artist living in Paris, was very quick to get on board with the project. He asked two friends, Tom J. Byrne, an Irishman living in Italy, and Johanna Halford, an English woman living in the Netherlands, to participate. They worked through mail and sent their drawings around and worked directly on them.

The third group is a reunion of the Tontine originally formed by Todd Bartel, Bo Joseph, Michael Oatman, and James Scott. They were all students of Alfred DeCredico at Rhode Island School of Design, and they share similar processes, aesthetics, and a belief in the unfolding of an artwork over time. In an exhibition in



Tontine

Four individual works for this project were created. Each artist chose media consistent with their practice and made a collage which was then digitally quartered and reassembled. The sequencing of the parts was determined by a toss of a coin.

Two of the artists, Todd Bartel and Michael Oatman, chose to title their individual works, while Bo Joseph and James Scott's works remain untitled. Below are the titles and materials for each individual work.

Todd Bartel, *The Artist and Collage in the Field of Landscape*, 2013

burnished, puzzle-piece-fit collage, Xerographic prints on 20th & 19th century end papers, watercolor, pencil, archival repair tape

Bo Joseph, untitled, 2013

acrylic and transfer on paper

Michael Oatman, *Mausoleum*, 2013

collage, hand cut historic paper, USPS postage stamp, inkjet print, glue on paper

James Scott, untitled, 2013

nitrocellulose paint on laser cut watercolor paper, sandpaper, rice paper, matte medium

Brooklyn in 2000 called "Tontine" this group created a work in the form of a quadrant in which each artist made their own quarter of the work and then they were joined together to form one piece. This collaborative approach shares the chance association approach of the *cadavre exquis* drawing, but the structure differs. Bo and Todd suggested that their project be called "Drawn and Quartered: An Exquisite Corpse Re Memberment." Their project was all done from various locations and files were sent to Todd for digital assembly.

In the statement for their show they stated, "Merriam-Webster defines Tontine as 'a joint financial arrangement whereby the participants usually contribute equally to a prize that is awarded entirely to the participant who survives all the others.' Unlike the original definition would suggest, our pact is not so much

about financial gain as it is about ethical survival. As artists, we use the term to establish a richer prize for the Tontine: the promotion of collective artistic ideals beyond our individual subsistence. We believe that any ground laid to this point in history is ours to surmount, an artistic legacy to which we extend our pact. It exists so that its survivors may flourish."

...an admirable ambition for a collaborative endeavor.

Notes

1. Breton, André. *The Exquisite Corpse: Its Exaltation*. [1948] Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965), p. 288.
2. Ibid., p. 290.
3. Ibid.
4. Simic, Charles. "The Little Venus of the Eskimos" in *The Return of the Cadavre Exquis*. (New York, The Drawing Center, 1993). p. 26