

the **contemporarymuseum** presents



Unlike most forms of performance art, “antic art” engages ordinary passersby, who become unwitting participants in humorous and surprising situations. Another angle entails riffing on “ordinary” situations, whose absurdity and predictability make them ripe for satirical jibes. Characteristically unstructured and open-ended, artist-conceived antics trigger future outcomes. Many “antic artists” prefer to remove art from the context of designated art spaces, such as galleries and museum, placing them instead in non-artworld contexts; thereby increasing the likelihood of unpredictable outcomes. No doubt, our exposing this genre in the context of a “museum survey” risks eliminating the volatility characteristic of this genre.

I originally coined the term “antic art” in 1997 to describe artists’ mischievous actions that eventually infiltrate and positively alter the course of “real” events. If the political art of the 1980s directly identified injustices, ‘90s political art exposed injustices by provoking situations that inevitably publicized particular injustices beyond the artworld. Mid-nineties artworld antics took

multiple forms. **Jens Haaning** broadcast Turkish jokes over loudspeakers in a Turkish neighborhood in Oslo (1994), which led paranoid policemen to dismantle his apparatus. When **Ole Jørgen Ness** exhibited only a giant, black glass window tagged with his artist-run space’s address at the Stockholm Smart Show (1995), visitors kept asking why his booth lacked art. As part of “Cod Piece” (1996), **Angie Bray** presented her essay “The Phallic Fallacy: Codpiece Errata,” excerpted from Chapter Three of her *European History as a Slip of the Wrist*. This essay, which provoked critical inquiry, led some, though not the curator, to recognize it as satire. **Gianni Motti** assumed the position of an Indonesian delegate to the 53<sup>rd</sup> session on Human Rights, convened in Geneva to discuss the rights of ethnic minorities. Having infiltrated the meeting, Motti delivered a speech defending ethnic minorities, as well as American Indians, eventually rallying other delegates to follow him as he walked out in protest (1997).

By the late 90s, dozens of artists were stirring up the artworld with their antics, though not all artworld “antics” count as “antic



Jennifer Levonian, *Buffalo-Milk Yogurt*, 2010, Single-channel video, stop-motion animation; Joey Versoza, *Greeting*, 2002/2011, paper; *Fuck Face*, 2011, Wood, mirror and paper. 13" x 12"; Jonathan Horowitz, *Hillary Clinton is a Person Too*, 2008, Bonded Bronze, 72" x 34" x 34", Courtesy Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York City.



Ryan Mulligan, *When The Shit Hits the Fan*, 2011, Acrylic  
Katie Kehoe, *One Year and Twenty-Four Days of Fishing*, 2010-11, Fishing pole, wood, Styrofoam, paint, nylon and Sylvania mini-tablet.

art." The art of **Oleg Kulik**, the human dog who attacks people and chewed up an artist's installation during Manifesta 1 (1996), is hardly exemplary of this genre, since his antics' outcomes are neither productive nor humorous. Similarly, Chilean-born artist **Marco Evaristti's** 2000 stunt that invited museum goers to crush gold fish inhabiting ten blenders seems too structured and predictable to count as antic art. However cunning and funny, **Maurizio Cattelan's** stunts, such as hanging three hyperreal sculptures of children from a tree, embedding a taxidermy horse in the museum's walls or exhibiting a triptych of arms posed in Nazi salute at the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art, seem staged for publicity, meant to alter his personal history more than another's. Finally, **Tino Seghal's** performances engage passersby and no doubt elicit surprise, but they hardly impact future events, except when people walk out of their way to avoid confronting his staged actors. Were **Sophie Calle's** infamous "break-up letter," which formed the basis for her 2007 Venice Biennale exhibition proven to be a *grand mystification* (French for hoax), then we would deem her intent mean.

Still, this genre is not without art historical precedents. Most notably, **Marcel Duchamp** entered R. Mutt's *Fountain* (1917) into the Independent Society's Annual Exhibition; Duchamp requested magazine subscribers to submit their response to his *Twin-Touch-Test* (1943) on the back cover of *VVV* magazine; **Yves Klein** served blue drinks while visitors experienced an empty Iris Clert Gallery (1958); **Jean Tinguely** built DIY drawing machines (1959); **Arman** printed invitations for his Iris Clert Gallery exhibition of garbage piled to the gallery's brim, on sardine cans (1960); Duchamp displayed three white chickens in a cupboard below a sign made from nickels that read "Dirty Coin" (Dirty Corner) (1962) and **David Hammons** sold varying sizes of snowballs and scores of doll-shoe pairs displayed on

the sidewalk (1984). **Chris Burden's** early performances, which include his: being shot (*Shoot* 1971), threatening an art critic's life with a knife during a "live" broadcast (*TV Hijack*, 1972), or being crucified to a Volkswagen beetle (*Trans-fixed* 1974) are antic-art precursors, but they're not really antic art since he performed for the camera not "live" audiences. Those present at his "shoots" were typically a handpicked crew of fellow artists, rather than innocent passersby. Since 1985, the Guerrilla Girls have plastered city walls with posters publicizing the artworld's inequitable treatment of women artists.

On T.V., Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* (1947-2005?) launched "prank T.V.," inspiring **Michael Moore's** outrageously clever *TV Nation* (1994) and Ashton Kutcher's MTV hit *Punk'd* (2003-2007). Most "LOL" artists were spirited pranksters and hoaxers long before celebrities got "punk'd." The most mind-blowing and infamous media hoaxer of all times is **Alan Abel**, who so believably staged his own death that the *New York Times* printed and later had to retract his erroneous obituary.<sup>1</sup>

Although "LOL: A Decade of Antic Art" is my inaugural exhibition for the Contemporary Museum, I've been finessing its checklist for over a decade. Several past exhibitions, such as "The Comestible Compost" (1998), an exhibition of grocery-store art and cooking demonstrations presented in West Hollywood's Pavilion's Grocery Store; "Worker's Opiate" (1999), a fashion-show of outfits crafted from hardware-store wares, carried out mid-day along a Tribeca street; "Cremolata Flotage" (1999), an exhibition featuring seaworthy actions and installations aboard a Staten Island Ferry; and "Proposed and Delivered" (2002), a show of proposed artworks and their botched/impressive outcomes, have laid the groundwork for this survey of "live" antics. This may be the most autobiographical exhibition I've ever curated, since I've

1. Jennifer Abel, *Abel Raising Cain*, 2008



Patrizia Giambi, *Millemiglia*, 1997/2011, Photographs

either facilitated or reviewed hoaxes and pranks by nearly all of the artists included here. Look for more antics this summer!

To ease the viewer's grasp of the various forms antic art takes, this exhibition is divided into four parts- **1) Everyday Hoaxes** in the Front Gallery, **2) Activist Antics** in the Side Gallery, **3) Artworld Pranks** in the Main Gallery, and **4) Theatrical Antics** in the L- and Video Galleries.

## EVERYDAY HOAXES

The conventional notion of a hoax is a deceptive action. Artists whose actions disseminate misinformation or propose alternative explanations incidentally challenge the validity of historical events. In tweaking the truth, artworks serving as "everyday hoaxes" subtly goad us to rethink commonplace perceptions of everyday events. Dismayed by Hillary Clinton's disparate personas during the 2008 Presidential Campaign, New York City-based **Jonathan Horowitz** found inspiration in those desk-top, plastic tsotchkes that award people's idiosyncratic attributes. Enticing camaraderie, Horowitz's *Hilary Clinton is a Person Too* (2008) upends the media's binary portrayals of her as either a "frigid, distant, vaguely masculine political animal" or "an overly feminine emotional basket case who is liable to break down into tears at any moment."<sup>2</sup>

From January 18, 2010 to February 11, 2011, Baltimore-based **Katie Kehoe** carried a fishing pole everywhere she went, provoking reactions ranging from admiration and honor to disgust and horror. Rather than correct people's presumptions, even when people believed she actually had fishing plans, she never let on that the pole served more as a prop meant to prompt engagement than a functional tool. Philadelphia-based **Jennifer Levonian's** stop-motion animated videos present satirical visions of Americans' obsession with having an infinite array of consumer goods

2. Liz Norris, "Cold as Ice, or Lonely Teardrops?: Hillary Clinton's Portrayal in the Media," March 28, 2008, <http://www.kutztown.edu/acad/english/prowrt/files/CompModeIS08-1.pdf>



Yes Men, *SurvivaBall*, 2006, Courtesy Yes Lab, NYC;

My Barbarian, *Time to Socialize*, 2011, Single-channel video, Courtesy Steve Turner Contemporary, LA

at their disposal. In *Buffalo-Milk Yogurt* (2010), a male protagonist ventures out to the super market to acquire provisions with hopes of overcoming boredom and melancholy. He rather encounters an endless stream of foodstuffs promising happy eaters and healthy outcomes, effectively driving him over the edge. In *You Starbucks* (2006), a woman attempts to break off her relationship amidst the banal, familiar environs of the local Starbuck's.

Soon after Cincinnati-based **Ryan Mulligan's** dad died in 2007, he began illustrating their relationship, his childhood home, as well as his dad's proclivities, possessions and activities. Last fall, Mulligan became a dad, shifting his art's focus from his relationship with his father to that of his son, Hobbs. Although his drawings are rooted in first-person tools of self-portrait and autobiography, they're hardly straight-forward accounts of his personal life. Not only are his stories filtered through the twin lenses of personal memory and drawing skills, but they're depicted in a way that provokes related thoughts concerning parental and childhood experiences. For *When the Shit Hits the Fan* (2010-2011), Mulligan explores all of the possible survival mechanisms Hobbs might require in life, in the event of his dad's untimely death.

Cincinnati-based **Joey Versoza's** *Fuck Face* (2011) pays tribute to 1989's famed Billy Ripken "error card," which captured Ripken swinging his "practice bat" and caused a flurry of white-out activity after published cards exposed an "expletive" written on his bat's end.<sup>3</sup> A hoax of sorts to begin with, Ripken now contends that the publisher actually enhanced the text's image with hopes of capitalizing on the trading-card scandal's publicity. Invited to participate in a small-works show, Versoza proposed *Greeting* (2002), a holiday card. Once a collector purchases this greeting card, Versoza has arranged for the oldest remaining relative of a Cincinnati Red, Carole Lannom, [great-great niece

3. [http://www.cnbc.com/id/28116692/Billy\\_Ripken\\_Obscenity\\_Bat\\_He\\_Finally\\_Talks\\_20\\_Years\\_Later](http://www.cnbc.com/id/28116692/Billy_Ripken_Obscenity_Bat_He_Finally_Talks_20_Years_Later)



William Powhida, Installation of Drawings, Prints and Internet Articles, 2009-10  
 Courtesy the artist and the *Brooklyn Rail* and Phong Bui

of Bid McPhee (ca. 1870)] to sign it; thereby transferring the artwork's value onto a hometown "celebrity's" signature.

## ACTIVIST ANTICS

Political activists increasingly infuse their professional practices with artistic practices (posters, puppets and manifestos), yet artists have been employing antics for political gains ever since Duchamp's *Fountain* stunt proved that "not all art is created equally." Eager to provide greater pedestrian rights and to draw attention to society's increasingly authoritarian governments, Italian **Patrizia Giambi** and her collaborators painted-in "zebra-crossings" over night in Italian cities such as Forlì, Ravenna, Bologna, Genoa, Milan and France's Nice during the month of May 1997. Later that year, she exhibited *Millemiglia*, a related poster project at Amsterdam's w139 and Los Angeles's Lasca Gallery. By exhibiting "how-to instructions," she transfers her desire to take back the streets, however temporarily. As illegal pedestrian crossings, her interventions are typically short-lived, yet mightily appreciated by those who experience them first hand. As Mauro Panzera notes, "A constant [theme in Giambi's work] is the attention paid towards the codes that we share -whether the alphabet, writing or measure. Now the zebra crossings represent the breaking of the code from inside the code itself. Whoever crosses it is committing an illegal act, but complying with the rules, the code."<sup>4</sup> *Wild Korea* (2005), Korean **Gimhongsok's** fictional, documentary-style narrative about Korea, is simultaneously an everyday hoax, riffing on absurd urban myths and "wishful thinking" and an activist tour-de-force, helping Koreans re-construct their national identity as a defiant, irreverent people. Wanting to draw people's attention to the hypocrisy of democracy, freedom and openness, Los-Angeles-based **My Barbarian's** video *Time to Socialize* (2011) features the trio dancing and singing a critique of American values with D.C.'s Washington Monument (and in) their midst.

4. Mauro Panzera, *Carta dei dieci anni*, Bologna: Edizioni Galleria Neon, 2001



Gimhongsok, *Bunny's Sofa*, 2007, Fabric, foam, rubber, wood, Edition 2/10 + 1AP

Although the global **Yes Men**, the most notorious activist artists, produce films, their hoaxes (their preferred term) impact the real world from the onset. For their first antic, they switched Talking Barbie® and GI Joe® voice boxes and returned the dolls to store shelves, so that shoppers would purchase gender-bending Barbie and GI Joe. In 2001, Andy Bichlbaum's presentation to World Trade Organization/GATT representatives was meant to convince factory managers to wear golden unitards with T.V. screens projected from their groins so that they could easily monitor their workers. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, Bichlbaum appeared on CNN as a Dow Chemical representative declaring Dow's desire to award Bhopal survivors massive reparations. Even though they immediately declared this a hoax, as they typically do, Bhopal survivors felt vindicated because of the increased media attention to their plight, as a result of this particular prank. The Yes Men's official-looking, fictitious Halliburton website, created by this "identity-correcting" duo, explains why fifteen U.S. corporations have conspired to create the *SurvivalBall* (2006), an inflatable spherical suit that allows humans to live comfortably, while corporations continue industrial practices that pollute water, exploit nonrenewable resources, engender algal blooms, facilitate global warming, etc.<sup>5</sup>

5. The Yes Men define "identity correction" as a "form of activity in which honest people impersonate big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them. Targets are people, institutions, and companies doing horrible things at everyone else's expense." "The Yes Men's Compleat Guide to Identity Correction," a bookmark-like bit of "takeaway art."



Joey Versoza, *Ballad of Toma*, 2003/2011, Keyboard and Stand, music stand (sans microphone, amp or acoustic guitar) & *Open*, 2002, C-prints



Dan Perjovschi/Nedko Solakov, *Back to Back(New York)*, 2006, Black and white ink, permanent marker, white paint on wood panels, Courtesy the artists and Lombard-Freid Projects; David Schafer, *Richard Serra: The Signature Collection*, 2011, Poster; Joey Versoza, *Open*, 2002

## ARTWORLD PRANKS

Artworld pranks take place within the context of the artworld and typically address artworld concerns. **Gimhongsok's** *Bunny's Sofa* (2007) tends to frighten museum visitors who immediately imagine a human being, supposedly an illegal immigrant, lying inside. Taking advantage of his mundane "day job" shooting celebrities for *Flaunt* magazine, Los Angeles-based **Larry Hammerness** suddenly realized a previously untapped wealth of "wardrobe malfunctions" – slip-ups and slip-offs – culminating in over 160 photographs of "celebrity boobs" (boob is synonymous with gaffe). A highly sought after "X-sports" photographer, Hammerness once exhibited dozens of large-scale photographs of celebrities without their make-up.

Unless there's someone out there who doesn't take New Yorker **Larry Krone's** "musical career" seriously, he himself is hardly prone to pranks or hoaxes. But then again, one just might consider his "campy" country-western crooner-persona an artworld prank in itself. Having never heard him perform, it's difficult to judge the impact of his "live acts." Either way, his wall works and theatrical props riff on the hoaxes (improbable premises and false promises) explicit in country-western lyrics and implicit with studly cowboy characters. Given the "studded" showmanship of country-western stars with their "big hair," bodacious lyrics and "bling bling" ("diamondized" rings, costumes and microphones), **Damien Hirst's** diamond skull seems superfluous. Because the Geneva-based Italian, **Gianni Motti** refuses to let his work lie "frozen" in art spaces, he declined to contribute video documentation of past antics for this exhibition. To celebrate this sardonic prankster's spirit, one finds instead *Gianni Motti IS INNOCENT* (1998), his poster juxtaposing Clinton's infamous claim regarding his relationship with Monica Lewinsky

and the recognizable and loveable Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist posing as "that woman."<sup>6</sup>

In 2009, the *New York Observer* dubbed Brooklyn-based **William Powhida** the "Art World's Prankster." When experienced *en masse*, his drawings: 1) confront the twisted relations and conflicts of interests prevalent among artworld power-brokers—critics, collectors, gallerists and artists alike, 2) discuss both the fictional William Powhida "character" and "himself" as the subject of his drawings, and either 3) push people away, given their over-the-top rants and shameless self-promotion, or 4) engender solidarity among readers who commiserate with his brusque criticism of blatant injustices that go under-reported. The *Brooklyn Rail* commissioned three covers [*How the New Museum Committed Suicide with Banality* (2009), *Institutional Celebration* (2010) and *Game* (2010)] and he's "leaked" three works (*The Odds*, *Why You Should Buy Art* and *You*) to the online digital-print store [www.20x200.com](http://www.20x200.com), affording hundreds of people the chance to collect his art (prices range from \$20 to \$200, depending on scale and edition size).

In addition to illustrating art articles, Powhida drawings have appeared as "illustrations" in underground magazines such as *Art Lies*, *Sleek*, *FUKT*, *Useless* and *BlingBling*. Not surprisingly, his drawings anticipated his becoming a much discussed artist. Drawings situating his "character" as the subject of articles in the *New York Times* or *New York* magazine precede his actual 2009 *Times* and *New York* debuts. For example, his drawing *The Bastard* (2007) depicts "The Genius," a story about Powhida's "character" in the January 2010 *New York* magazine article; exceeding his actual entrance into its pages by nine months, since *The Odds* (2009) accompanied "The Opportunist's Guide" in the April 26,

6. Even though Motti had expressed interest to be in "LOL" in earlier emails, his assistant Caroll justified his later reluctance: "to freeze [his works] in an art spaces as trophies takes out all conceptual and temporal aspect." Email dated May 26, 2011.



Larry Krone, Installation of paintings and sculpture

2009 issue.<sup>7</sup> Giving credence to the view that art collecting is tantamount to colonization/ownership/control, several collectors whom he's characterized in a bad light retaliate by purchasing his drawings. The infamous Greek art collector Dakis Joannou, a primary antagonist in Powhida's *New Museum* drawing, purchased this drawing's print version for \$1500, while Jerry Saltz, a regular Powhida target, told one reporter, "It's always fun to see bigwigs get bitch-slapped, including me!"<sup>8</sup>

For *Back to Back (New York)* (2006), two of the world's most hilarious and poignant renderers created a free-standing drawing bearing their comical antics. Romanian **Dan Perjovschi's** signature caricature commentaries appear outside, while Bulgarian **Nedko Solakov's** intimate notations occur inside. Good friends in real life, this drawing doubles as an exhibitional prank that facilitated a career "boost," when the one shared his New York City solo exhibition opportunity with the other who is unknown here, though renowned in Europe. Like Siamese twins, these unique drawings are forever sandwiched together, destined to survive as a double act. *Back to Back* incidentally suggests a capitalist prank, since this artwork entices investors to appraise it as 18 component panels, as they would real-estate properties, businesses and commodities.

For "Proposed and Delivered," Kentucky-based **Joey Versoza** proposed *Open* (2002), his scheme to "force open" the door separating the Cincinnati Art Museum from the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Timothy Rub, the then museum director, granted Versoza his way, if only on opening day. Confounding the many museum guards who had never even noticed the door before, passersby slipped instantaneously between the adjacent institutions, rather than walk around the buildings as they had for decades. For *The Ballad of Toma* (2003/2011), Versoza stumbled

7. To see how others weighed in, check out <http://nymag.com/guides/opportunists/56275/>  
8. Leon Neyfakh, "The Art World's Prankster," *The New York Observer*, March 16, 2010.



Larry Krone, Installation of paintings and sculpture

across an online text written by an anonymous blogger named Toma the Great Explorer. This text became the source material for Dana Ward's lyrics and musical composition, which Bob Kellison, the Contemporary Arts Center's piano-playing Development Director, transcribed into sheet music.

## THEATRICAL ANTICS

Artists included in this section are artists who routinely appropriate theatrical practices, running the gamut from musical spectacles and staged events in "public" spaces (theater typically entails staged events in private places) to hiring professional voices. For nearly a decade, the Chicago-based **Kendall Bruns** has organized events that amuse and bewilder participants. *The Haircut* (2006), his seminal prank, is a documentary featuring a team of five jurors engaged in a rather heated debate as they select his next haircut from over 70 proposed styles. Other antics include *Kendall Bruns: Artist-Therapist* (2003), for which scores of Cincinnatians told Bruns their problems, while he returned "on the spot" personal advice; his artworld *Spelling Bee* (2002), whose total seriousness seemed like a prank; and *Mild & Crazy Guy* (2001), a musical riff on Steve Martin's *Wild & Crazy Guy* album.<sup>9</sup> Inspired by Baltimore's American Visionary Art Museum's giant whoopee cushion currently on view in "Smile," Bruns created *Big Whoop*, his visionary version for the Contemporary Museum's very-own Ikea benches. His newest video *LOL* (2011) amasses countless LOL-like logos from online sources juxtaposed against speaking voices.

In the wake of 9/11, the Ashland-based **Kahty Chen Milstead** flew to London with literally one thing on her mind, the

9. It's worth noting, mostly because I had forgotten, that three of his performances were presented in conjunction with three shows I curated: *Mild and Crazy Guy* was part of "sprawl" (2002), *Spelling Bee* was part of "Proposed and Delivered" (2002) and *Artist Therapy* was part of "Nowhere Better than this Place" (2003). Stranger still, my proposed haircut came in second, giving *Haircut* its dramatic edge!



Larry Hammerness, *Whose Boobs?*, 2000-2004/2011, Digital print



Gianni Motti, *Gianni Motti is Innocent*, 1998, Poster;  
William Powhida, Installation of drawings, prints and internet articles, 2008-11;  
Gimhongsok, *Bunny's Sofa*, 2007

chance for two gals to cloak themselves in a glittery get-up and spy on guys through slits cut in front and back. Meant for a central-London milieu, this alluring disguise spoofs Islamic veiling. After the voyeur detected her desired prey through a peep hole in *Sue Spaid Boywatching Blind, London* (2001), her “wing-woman” could either “capture” that fellow on camera or videotape Londoners “ogling” these gals in dismay. For “Comestible Compost” (1998) Milstead (née Chenoweth) and her then collaborator **Lynne Berman** presented a cake-decorating demonstration adjacent the in-store sushi chef. After carving dozens of cakes into hundreds of spongy wedges, they proceeded to construct a cake mountain using tooth picks and blue frosting as glue. Stopping astonished shoppers dead in their tracks, this spectacle prompted one customer to phone friends to come see it, while blue trails eventually defiled store aisles. Back then, cell-phone owners and grocery-store sushi chefs were rare treats. During the 2003 Venice Biennale, she hung around Venice for a week or so, offering strangers hugs if they acquiesced.

Founded in St. Petersburg in 2003, **Chto Delat?** (What is to be Done?) is best known for their political activism. This Russian theater-based activist group mostly creates musical videos that humorously debate various political issues, such as “what is to be done” in light of perestroika’s societal impact, the remaining Communist sympathizers and the proposed Gazprom skyscraper. Included here is their most recent work *Tower: A Songspiel* (2010). As part of “InSite” (1994), the Brooklyn-based **Nina Katchadourian** worked with two fellow UCSD MFA students, **Mark Tribe** and **Steven Matheson**, and 50 volunteers, to hatch their scheme to get 3500 Southwestern College commuters to park their cars in fourteen parking lots designated for particular car colors (white, red, dark blue, light blue, purple, etc.). The vast majority of people acquiesced, but as the video *Car Park* (1994)

illustrates, a handful couldn’t be bothered. While on a 2001 artist retreat in Trinidad, Katchadourian noticed an uncanny resemblance between the warning calls of tropical birds and car alarms. *Natural Car Alarms* (2002) depicts three cars rigged by Katchadourian to emit 18 different bird calls whenever the alarms were tripped by timers.

**Pruitt-Early** were among the most “riotous” of the early nineties artists. Their exhibitions remain legendary- *Sculpture for Teenage Boys* (1990), *Artwork for Teenage Girls* (1991), stickers stuck on beer cans stacked like pyramids and a video of artworlders dancing to Snap’s I’ve got the “Power.” Even more legendary is the urban myth that *Cocaine Buffet* (1998), an extra-long cocaine line supposedly exhibited in Jennifer Bornstein’s loft, jump-started **Rob Pruitt**’s art career following Pruitt-Early’s earlier demise. Pruitt’s artworld caper, “101 Art Ideas You Can Do Yourself” (1999) took New York City, and then Cincinnati (2001), by storm, launching his career in multiple directions. A decade later, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art tapped him to organize their annual \$1000/plate fund-raiser entitled “Rob Pruitt’s Art Awards” for which he designs everything from the award trophy to decorations and selects the entertainment. Strangely unassuming, Pruitt’s *Kitlers* (2010) feature a wall of online cats “impersonating” Hitler (a type of cat-acting). The proliferation of such images via the internet exemplifies the internet’s role (the origin of “LOL”) in generating and dispersing antics *en masse* via [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), etc..<sup>10</sup> A theatrical project that is not an antic is **Jonathan Borofsky**’s *Johnny Hitler* (2007), which bizarrely juxtaposes pictures of the artist and his parents with those of Hitler and his parents.

As part of “Cremolata Flotage” (1999), **Alysse Stepanian** and her composer-husband **Philip Manton** launched an impromptu talent show aboard the Andrew J. Barberi Staten Island Ferry



**Kahty Chen Milstead**, *Sue Spaid Boywatching Blind*, London, 2001, Fabric, thread;  
**Rob Pruitt**, *Kitlers*, 2010/2011, Vinyl



**David Schafer**, *Untitled Expression: The Enunciation Lecture*, 2009, Welded and powder-coated steel, speakers, miscellaneous hardware, playback system, audio CD.

(bizarrely, the very same ferry that crashed twice). They asked people to do something “interesting” in exchange for a beer and a “Certificate of Interestingness.” Surprisingly, dozens of people, including Nina Katchadourian, performed live aboard the Staten Island Ferry. Although they edited *auditionherefreebeer* eleven years ago, this is the first time they’ve had the opportunity to present this video. **David Schafer’s** June New View installation, “Richard Serra: The Signature Series” featured a yellow neon autograph of Richard Serra, the world’s most famous sculptor, positioned over a black trapezoidal graphic spanning both windows. Schafer’s prank proved so successful that some serious Serra fans saw the signage as indicative of a Serra show, so they stopped their cars and actually stepped inside. In response to the 1950s’ record set *English Speech Instruction: A Condensed Course in the Correction of Frequent Mistakes in Enunciation*, Schafer added over 130 sound effects to the introductory lecture as well as layered the classroom exercises to create the soundtrack for *Untitled Expression: The Enunciation Lecture* (2009). This humorous and alarming “talking sculpture” is sure to cause listeners to reflect upon their diction and delivery. With *Choreography for Mime: Making a Sculpture* (2009), Schafer worked with a mime who acted out the associated motions and emotions that may be involved with the making of an abstract welded metal sculpture in

a studio. Although the artist has in a sense abstracted the labor of making a physical sculpture, the mime is still hard at work.

## A MODEST PROPOSAL

The greatest lesson I learned as a teen at summer camp was this: “once is funny: twice is obnoxious.” Similarly, pranks performed by outsiders are funny, while those done by insiders are obnoxious. Pranks prove authentic and interesting when they’re performed by outsiders endeavoring to raid exclusive clubs or destabilize gate-keepers. That’s why we tire of pranks by the likes of Damien Hirst or Maurizio Cattelan, schemes dreamed up to keep collectors attuned to their brand, but barely touching the lives of others. In contrast, we egg-on schemers who still have enough energy to challenge the status quo and are clever enough to puncture walls previously deemed insurmountable. As Angie Bray reminds me, “part of being an antic artist is spending time doing things that are wonderfully useless.” I would counter that actions done absent clear motives often trigger the greatest impact, so they are hardly useless.

## Sue Spaid

Baltimore, June 2011



From left to right: **AlysseStepanian (with Philip Mantione)**, *auditionherefreebeer*, 2000, Single-channel video; **Nina Katchadourian with Mark Tribe and Steven Matheson**, *Car Park*, 1994, Single-channel video; **Chito Delat?**, *The Tower: A Songspiel*, 2010, Single-channel video; **Kendall Bruns**, *LOL*, 2011, Single-channel video.

**THANK YOU – LOL: A Decade of Antic Art** is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council, Rockland Industries, Inc., the Baltimore Community Foundation and the Foundation for the Promotion of Individual Opportunity, Inc.