

Art Letter (9/11/09)

Here I am writing about the opening of the fall art season for the 6th time.

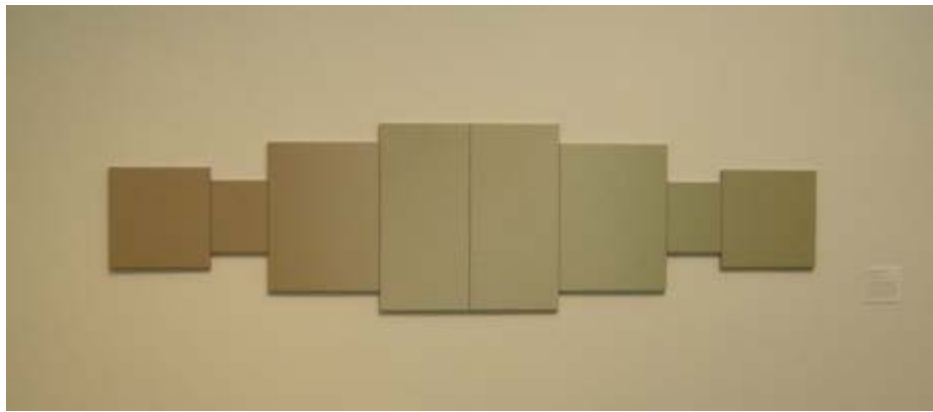
I think we're making progress. I'm seeing more art by Chicago artists at Chicago galleries. There's more art by Chicagoans in the [Modern Wing of the Art Institute](#) than they've been prone to including previously.

There's the powerful [Constellations](#) exhibit at the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#), curated by the sharp [Julie Rodrigues Widholm](#), that draws from the permanent collection and includes, I think, 18 Chicago artists. This generates a new and fresh dialog. It means the MCA is not a cookie cutter like most American / global institutions.



Keep an eye on the MCA. Director, [Madeleine Grynsztejn](#) is just the person to confront Chicago's pathetic desire to be a second city. We all know there's talent here, so why do we denigrate it and elevate mediocrity from somewhere else? Watch Grynsztejn uniquely size up the landscape and set the MCA on a course that will attract an international following- all stemming from an understanding of how a museum can tap into the local pulse and tweak the dialog to a new and different level.

Remember how we all worried about how the MCA would fare with the newer, bigger, grander AIC's new Modern Wing? And did you hear Grynsztejn boasted "that the Art Institute shows history - the MCA makes it."? She's serious. And brilliant in an unconventional way. Just listen to her current interview on [Bad at Sports](#). (And also the one with [Mary Jane Jacob](#).) This is going to be fun watching the MCA, the runt of Chicago's 'big' museums, come from behind to become a trendsetting, innovative role model for the 21st Century museum.



Okay. On to the galleries. [Monique Meloche](#) has moved. Off the beaten path. North side of Division, a block or so East of Western. I like her moxie. Establishing and following her own vision.



Before I forget I want to commend [Doug Fogelson](#) and [FrontForty Press](#) for their insightfully curated show, [Apocalypse/Rapture](#) at the [Hyde Park Art Center](#) and Doug's admirable restraint in not including his own worthy artwork in the exhibition.



[Dubhe Carreno](#) has reopened in River West. She emphasizes elegant ceramic art, while including works in other, sympathetic media. Dubhe has a tender, almost pure, respect for and love of art.

Invariably I feel better after speaking with her or or being around the art she exhibits.



Of all the shows I preview my favorite was the show of early [Tony Smith](#) paintings at [Valerie Carberry](#). Though the paintings are nice on their own merit; its being able to draw a line from them to his sculptures that delighted me. Most of the work is from the 1930's, when Smith was in his 20's. I saw a linearity and sense of space that was a prequel to the work we know - informative and fun.



Next door at [Gray](#) is a seductive and revealing show of paper work by [John Stezaker](#). who makes bold yet subtle moves in is pieces, from confident juxtapositions to striking editing - but all the moves are simple. There is plenty of room for us, the viewer, to 2nd guess the decision making and end up having massive respect for the choices Stezaker makes. The pieces are memorable and subtle which makes for a strong exhibit.



Also unusual, strong and simple are the textile pieces of [Frank Connet](#) at [Douglas Dawson](#). Connet is from here and has been doing Dawson's fabric restoration work for decades. It is obvious he understands fabric in a way we mere mortals do not. His work is so beautiful it approaches profound.



I don't know that it is indicative of anything at all, but more galleries are opening the fall season with group exhibitions than I'm accustomed to. Some are okay. Most are comprised of gallery artists and a couple are quite good. [Russell Bowman](#) often presents strong art creatively. His new show is aptly titled *Intense* and features some favorites we don't see here enough.



[Carl Hammer](#) is celebrating 30 years of dealing outsider art (and contemporary art of a similar vein) with a group show on both floors of his gallery. Seeing the spectrum of art he has and still works with is an impressive reminder of the significant contribution he has made here.



There are a ridiculous number of previews of shows available at [Art Talk Chicago](#). This has the potential to be a wonderful resource. Do check it out.



There's something wonderful and definitely gross about [Paul Nudd's](#) work at [Western Exhibitions](#). He's found a compelling and repulsive niche to mine and while the art still 'works' for me I wonder

if it's time to move on.



Speaking of which, [Phyllis Bramson](#) is now represented by [Carrie Secrist](#).



[Jae Ko](#) is a magician with rolls of paper and paint as we see again in her show at [Andrew Bae](#). Sometimes I wonder if it's time for Ko to find a new medium, but every time I encounter her work anew I'm impressed with how her work has matured.



[Rhona Hoffman](#) has a strong show of manipulated photographs by [Luis Gispert](#) which provide a tongue-in-cheek commentary on a portion of Americana.



[Melanie Schiff's](#) show, *The Mirror*, at [Kavi Gupta](#) extends her beautiful photographs of not so pretty places, mostly man made, but not peopled.



Having just looked through all the images I'm uploading I'm impressed with the quality of art on view right now. People keep asking me about the pulse. I think it's optimistic. And inconsistent. Many had poor summers. Some had great ones. On the whole we have lost very few galleries. Let's focus on what we like and lend our support as we go.

Thank you,

Paul Klein