



Helicon

Muses on the Mountain

Joel Carreiro

Claudia Fitch

Nicholas Kripal

Jeffrey Mongrain

John Rosis

Jackie Shatz



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Art Historical Influence in Contemporary Art

By Matthew Garrison

The exhibition *Helicon* takes its name from a mountain in Southern Greece where the mythological nine muses of the arts were said to have resided, bestowing inspiration upon artists. As the offspring of Zeus, ruler of the gods, and Mnemosyne, the Goddess of Memory, the muses were part of a hereditary equation where power and memory combined in the creation of art. It is an ongoing dynamic passed on from one generation of artists to the next that identifies art as an influential force shaping perceptions and ideologies. The six artists in the *Helicon* exhibition draw inspiration from past artists and re-examine art history through a contemporary lens. In the process, they become present day integers in an ancient equation.

The power of art stems from its ability to inspire ideas, emotions and actions by identifying new relationships between its subject matter and society. Artists are inherently aware of their surroundings and of each other as they perfect their visual languages and build their arsenals of observations and concepts. In fact, the 1913 conversion of New York City's National Guard's Armory into an exhibition space for modern art architecturally linked the concept of art to a munitions store and, although many critics derided the Armory Show, it changed the course of American art. The societal power of art becomes apparent whenever it is censored, ridiculed or destroyed. Conversely, art can also be celebrated for its reflection of the prevalent values and attitudes in society. In either case, artists connect to their audience by visualizing the most intangible aspects of life and fixing their emotional and conceptual observations in time and space.



Art always offers a real-time experience to its viewers. In fact, a work of art is a direct quote from its creator regardless of the change in perceptions over time. Artist and educator, Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, observed in his 1947 essay, *The Function of Art*, "Art represents the uncensored statement of its author." While the ideas, images and techniques of earlier artists speak to all of us, they especially resonate with contemporary artists examining the work of their historic colleagues. The exchange of ideas and observations from one generation of studios to the next gives form to memory.

The *Helicon* artists each approach the history of art differently in their work. Jackie Shatz and Joel Carreiro quote paintings from the past while Nicholas Kripal extracts his sculpture directly from religious architecture. Jeffrey Mongrain's interest is in the ephemeral effects of spiritual space on the psyche. Time-honored techniques influence John Rosi; and Claudia Fitch investigates the break down of cultural hierarchies in popular culture.

Helicon confirms that the creative process is cyclical in nature, and art is rooted in history even as it reflects the issues and ideas of its time. The *Helicon* artists all look respectfully back to the work of their colleagues in history as they expand the definition of art on their own terms. Inevitably, the next generation of artists will add their own observations, concepts and reactions to this ongoing discourse.

Jeffrey Mongrain
Blood and Plumb, 2006
plexiglass and hand blown glass
80 x 70 x 43 inches

Joel Carreiro

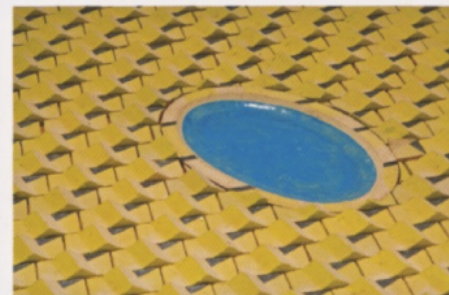


Portal, 2000
heat transfer on birch panel
96 x 82 inches

Joel Carreiro organizes fragments from numerous masterworks of the Western tradition into a single piece. Carreiro's work exemplifies his view that earlier art forms are capable of generating fresh concepts and new art. His studio practice begins by cutting reproductions of Renaissance and Baroque paintings into small squares, which he assembles into new compositions. Figurative and landscape painting become the infrastructure supporting passages of colors and patterns. From afar, Carreiro's work aligns itself with modernism through its immediate presentation of color and form, but notions of modernism are complicated by Carreiro's application of thousands of small classical images. Appropriation and accumulation propel Carreiro's work into the new millennium where history is re-examined through non-linear patterns of information, and pixels are organized into new images.

Not only are artists aware of their history, but popular culture, driven by consumption, is also in dialog with art history. Although this dialog may be exasperating to some and amusing to others, Claudia Fitch embraces it by turning the table on popular culture and incorporating its most audacious aesthetics into her sculpture. Her work examines the progression of stylistic tendencies through history and the assimilation of art into everyday life. Fitch explains that her investigation of art history in conjunction with present-day vernaculars is "the most honest way I can interpret or align myself or digest what I see in art history." Fitch's ceramic piece, *Kingdom*, was influenced by 17th century Dutch brickwork. She translates the Netherlands patterned urban landscapes into a ceramic field of geometric shapes. *Kingdom*'s yellow patterning also brings to mind unending comfort and opulence through its association to a present day suburban landscape, punctuated by cerulean swimming pools. Its seductive kitsch appeal stems from Fitch's unique relationship to popular culture coupled with five hundred years of aesthetic evolution.

Claudia Fitch



Kingdom, detail, 1997
glazed ceramic and paint
31.5 x 174 x 103 inches

Nicholas Kripal



Santo Spirito, Ghost, 2000
cast concrete
16 x 18 x 32 inches



Santo Spirito, 2000
cast concrete
14 x 16 x 30 inches each

Nicholas Kripal cites the work of architects in his sculpture as he examines architecture's indexing of history and the ideologies behind its creation. Kripal's creative process includes extensive research augmented by travel and frequent visits to Italy. *Santo Spirito* and *Ghost*, both reference Filippo Brunelleschi's 15th Century Church of Santo Spirito in Florence. Working from actual plans of the church, Kripal created moulds of the church's interior and exterior. He then cast the interior sixteen times in the creation of *Santo Spirito* and radiated the castings across the gallery floor. The architectural cross integral to *Santo Spirito* determined the castings' floor pattern. Kripal's repetition of *Santo Spirito* recalls the practice of reproducing sacred icons, and the configuration of the repeated churches brings to mind suburban design. The sister piece to *Santo Spirito* is *Ghost*. Kripal created *Ghost* by casting the church's exterior once in cement and then suspending it from the ceiling. Symbolic negative and positive space is the source of Kripal's investigation into the powerful ideas and beliefs conveyed by architecture.

Jeffrey Mongrain

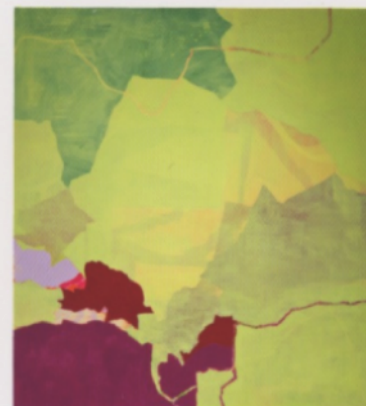


Habemas Papam
(*We Have a Pope*), 2005
sculpted soundwave, clay & black iron
45 x 3 inches

Jeffrey Mongrain's relationship to religious architecture stems from its spiritual objectives and the motivations behind ritualistic practices. His sculpture is in dialog with the emotional and psychic forces that have inspired artists and architects throughout time by intimating a hushed reverence for something outside of itself. He also portrays invisible sensations such as sound, touch and faith in his work. For example, in the piece, *Habemas Papam*, (*We Have a Pope*), Mongrain sculpted the actual sound waves of Cardinal Pericle Felici's voice announcing the election of Pope John Paul II. The piece is made out of undulating waves of clay and iron pigment. In this piece Mongrain transforms the historic connotations of iron from ancient weaponry and tools into an ephemeral threshold connecting our external and internal worlds to concepts of time and the hereafter.

Conceptually, John Rosis aligns himself with abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell whose abstractions are grounded in their encounter with the medium of painting. He also cites the form and color of Milton Avery and Henri Matisse as influences. Rosis paints on a variety of surfaces, including canvas and sheets of glass. His canvas paintings incorporate evidence of the paintings' own realization through a process of layering color and scraping it away. The vigorous lines in his work instinctively map the paintings' history, as well as its topography. Rosis also employs reverse glass painting in his work, a technique that can be traced back to ancient Rome and was especially popular in 14th and 15th century Italy. Reverse glass painting removes the paint's subtle relief quality and, in Rosis's work, it seems to reveal an unearthly terrain behind a reflective plane. Rosis's painting records aggressive and rhythmic patterns in nature while maintaining a contemporary perspective. He skillfully navigates expressionistic influences by utilizing current and ancient methodologies.

John Rosis



Palisade, 2003
paint on canvas
60.5 x 54 inches

Jackie Shatz



Lady With Chrysanthemums
2006, ceramic and paint
14 x 13 x 5.15 inches

Jackie Shatz is in direct dialog with past artists through her transformation of well-known paintings and the work of artisans into compact ceramic sculpture. Some of her sources include Florine Stettheimer, Edgar Degas and 18th century Sèvres porcelain. Shatz's piece, *Lady With Chrysanthemums*, is based on a bouquet of flowers from a Degas painting. In this piece Shatz represents the bouquet's negative space as swirling shades of blue punctuated by yellow, pink and orange flowers. The composition of the flowers also recalls a chromatic constellation in a night sky. Her unique vibrant palette is achieved through an appliqué process utilizing pigment and silk. The intimacy of the forms, color and subject matter in Shatz's work relates directly to our world today while referencing the observations of artists long ago.



Joel Carreiro
Portal, detail
 2000



Acknowledgements

We want to thank Joel Carreiro and Jackie Shatz who originally developed and proposed this curatorial concept and followed through with the essential organizational planning. Matthew Garrison was also extremely helpful in facilitating much of our discourse and in contributing an excellent essay for the publication. We want to thank all of the artists for sharing their artworks with us and for helping with so many of the logistical arrangements in bringing together this collection from six different sources.

We are also grateful to Joel and Matt for their video work outside the Gallery, *Spellbound I*, and for their collaboration with John Morton whose original musical composition was incorporated in the installation of *Spellbound II* in the Sylvan Chapel.

Our chief preparator, Nancy Sarangoulis, and her assistants, Danny Looker and Elizabeth Barrer, thoughtfully installed the work in concert with Jackie, Joel, and the other artists. Danny Looker and Craig Czury carefully transported the artworks. Suzanne Calvaresi, the curator of educational programs designed workshops and tours. Lisa Korecky, the secretary for the Center for the Arts, provided excellent support services. We are grateful to all of these collaborators.

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-Christopher Youngs, director

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Exhibition Dates

June 2 - September 17, 2006



Jackie Shatz
Niagara Falls, 1998
ceramic and paint
20 x 25 x 5 inches