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**artnet New York**

**WEEKEND UPDATE**

Walter Robinson

**6. February 2009**

Pierre Bonnard, Peter Doig, Erik van Lieshout, more.

**CRISIS AND CRITICISM**

Ben Davis

**29. January 2009**

The "crisis in criticism" meets the economic crisis.

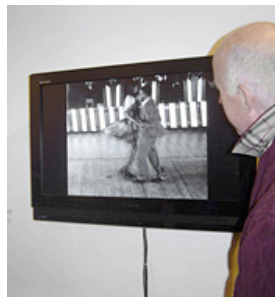
**Weitere Artikel**



Panda-garbed performance artist Kathryn Cornelius at the 14th Street Gallery openings in Washington, D.C.



**Lori Esposito**  
*Safe Keeping*  
2007  
Irvine Contemporary



Paul J. Miller (DJ Spooky)'s *New York Is Now* at Irvine Contemporary on opening night



**Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky)**  
still from *New York Is Now*  
2007  
Irvine Contemporary

## CAPITAL ROUNDUP Sidney Lawrence

**15. Februar 2008**

D.C.'s winter season kicked off on Jan. 12, 2008, with a handful of openings on the 14th Street gallery strip, though the modest numbers didn't mean the fete was dull. There was a person in a panda costume, for instance. More on that later.

**Irvine Contemporary's** "Reunion" show featured works by six local and nationally based gallery artists, ranging from elaborate, arguably Asian-inspired landscapes by **Lori Esposito** to some very obsessive abstractions by **Teo Gonzalez**. The magnet, however -- pulsating on the wall on a DVD screen -- was New Yorker **Paul D. Miller's** (aka **DJ Spooky**) *New York Is Now*, a crazy-quilt black-and-white montage of vintage city clips, early modern film experiments and special effects with an old-fashioned look. No color enhancements or skin pores here, just scratchy title cards, steam rising from a pre-Mies skyline, flappers and Eliot Nesses using the subway, and, for not nearly long enough, an African American couple doing a phenomenally athletic 1930's swing.

The music for Miller's 35-minute piece, composed by the artist himself (a Hip-Hop musician and scholar), has the same kind of orchestral flourish as a period adventure movie. Et voila! Not one but two King Kongs appear in a magnificently surreal, positive-turned-negative sequence scaling the Empire State Building in Rorschach-mirror symmetry. Miller's piece is so rife with such trips down memory lane it's a shot in the arm. The edition of six, with three artist's proofs, begins at \$5,000 and rises to \$15,000 as the edition sells out.

The Rorschach effect pops up again at **Hemphill Fine Arts** in the 1515 14th Street gallery building. A solo show by D.C. artist **Joseph Mills** (Jan. 12-Mar. 1) starts with tiny photo-montages of atomic test clouds mirror-morphing into very spooky single creatures not unlike the widely circulated Smoke-as-Satan photo of the WTC on 9-11. Mills calls the series "Shatterers of Death." Yikes!

Equally intense are the mostly small-scale, varnished collages on found-objects that follow. *Smoker* (2005), which uses the bottom of a footstool as a frame, shows a vintage photo of an old guy with exploding smoke-stacks collaged onto where his hands should be -- a forceful neo-Dada conceit with anti-war overtones. *Inflamed Monk* (1988/2007) is one of several appropriations, more **Wallace Berman**-esque than Warholian, of an iconic 1960s news photo of a Vietnamese holy man on fire, melded wackily into a leaping frog. Like fellow collagists **Bruce Conner**, **Llyn Foulkes** or **Joel-Peter Witkin**, Mills is pure maverick, and Europeans, in particular, love his work. Prices range from \$1,900 to \$10,000.

One flight down at **Adamson Editions**, an exhibition featuring photoworks by New Yorker **Lyle Ashton Harris** sets an entirely different tone. In a group of pigment prints, the artist variously poses or performs in Afro drag, jockstrap heat, slave-like chains or **Billie Holiday** mode, glistening like a skull in indigo blue makeup. This work is powerful and discomfiting, but Harris doesn't stop there. A huge, roughed-up photo on paper shows a bleacher full of well-heeled white people gazing in every direction but ours.



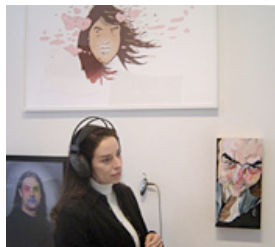
**Joseph Mills**  
*The Smoker*  
2005  
Hemphill Fine Arts



**Joseph Mills**  
*Untitled [Shatterer of Death]*  
2007  
Hemphill Fine Art



**Lyle Ashton Harris**  
*Blue Billie*  
2003  
Adamson Editions



Curator's Office director Andrea Pollan, listening to Alberto Gaitan's faux interview with collector and curator Philip Barlow, while flanked by portraits of Barlow by Linda Hesh, Nekisha Durrett and A. B. Miner

Nearby is a wallpaper swatch of nasty-looking cops in riot gear. It's double trouble being black and gay, the show shouts. Prices range from \$4,500 to \$18,000.

Down the hall, the pint-sized **Curator's Office** space offers a more lighthearted message as 15 artists pay their respects -- via portraits of various sorts -- to one of the nicest nice guys in D.C.'s art world, **Philip Barlow**. A tie-wearing numbers cruncher by day, the six-foot-four-inch tall longhair collects loyally (252 pieces at last count) and loves to look, look, look, even at the most arcane art openings. The show closes on Saturday, Feb. 16, 2008.

There's another reason why Barlow is a hometown hero. In 2005, he was hired by the **Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran** to curate that year's "Options" show but refused to consider any artist who had participated in two earlier, rather embarrassing (but extremely popular) city-wide sculpture festivals. He was canned.

One festival, comically dubbed "Pandamania," called for 150 artists to decorate cast-fiberglass pandas as plop-art for parks and street corners. The other, "Party Animals," featured casts of donkeys and elephants. Get it?

All this is by way of backstory for D.C. performance artist **Kathryn Cornelius**, who came to the 14th Street openings dressed in a panda costume. The creature -- as kitsch as the decorated sculptures that caused the row in the first place -- circulated through the galleries and occasionally ventured outdoors. "I brake for Philip Barlow," read its punning T-shirt.

Inside the tiny Curator's Office, Cornelius' *People Magazine*-type gossip spread on Barlow caused numerous chuckles. Also on view: **Alberto Gaitan's** faux phone interview and good-natured fantasy portraits by **Nekisha Durrett** and **A. B. Miner**. Sculptor **Jeff Spaulding's** Tom Thumb-sized Leggo man with Barlow-esque hair had dozens more hair units stacked on top of the little figure, up to the collector's height. Digital magician **James Huckenpahler** contributed a moiré image of a strange wavy object -- part landscape, part tooth, and all skull -- a reference to Barlow's routine dealings with death as a life insurance specialist for the D.C. government.

"Portraits," a group photo show selected by former **Hirshhorn Museum** curator **Phyllis Rosenzweig**, scrutinizes other individuals at **G Fine Art** (to Mar. 1). Black Africans from the 1970s pose proudly within bright, hand-decorated frames -- works from 2004 by Mali studio photographer **Malick Sidibé**. Bourgeois schoolgirls in Brooklyn and Liverpool parks are elegant but guarded in images by roaming Dutch photographer **Rineke Dijkstra**. A cross-section of ordinary people in Peru are the subjects of several rather bland, straight-on shots by D.C.-based photographer **Chan Chao**.

**Alec Soth's** young working-class couples from Niagara, N.Y., on the other hand, are frisson-loaded, exuding defiance, danger and innocence. Are they in love? Will it last? Or is this just about sex? The complex psychology of *Martha and Anthony* in particular -- he with the draping arm, she with the pout -- reminds me of couples **Diane Arbus** photographed in Central Park in the 1960s. Remember the shot of two strange beatniks resembling **Liz Taylor** and **Fabian**? Soth's pair, with similar T-shirts and tousled bangs, goes for \$9,500.

Rosenzweig's anthropologist's eye also embraces the work of stealth documentarian **Beat Streuli**. The always-on-the-move Swiss artist's three glimpses of Muslims in Brussels can be seen as politically charged, and his images of stressed-out New Yorkers say a lot about urban alienation. The scale of the photographs is heroic (huge color transparencies on a window bank) and seen inside, spectacularly backlit during the day. On opening night, the glowering faces peered out onto 14th Street like creatures



Jeff Spaulding's *Standing Tall* (2008), courtesy G Fine Art, at Curator's Office

from some twisted Times Square ad -- startling public art priced at \$25,000 -- while the panda added its own local color.

\* \* \*

D.C. winters can get pretty extreme, but an escape can be found in the new canopied courtyard by **Norman Foster** at the **Smithsonian American Art Museum / National Portrait Gallery** building downtown. The crisscrossing, glass-and-steel structure floats and undulates on steel poles above a 28,000-square-foot granite atrium -- the design of **Kathryn Gustafson** -- which boasts grey and black granite surfaces and rectangular reflecting pools. White granite planters hold several full grown olive and ficus trees.

Named for benefactors **Robert and Arlene Kogod**, the courtyard links the two museums and provides a gala-friendly space, a staging area for educational programs, a modest restaurant, a focus for an emerging culture district, and the promise of eternally good weather.

The space's wraparound backdrop -- typically known as the **U.S. Patent Office Building** -- is a gracious Classical Revival structure designed in the 1830s by **Robert Mills**, partially rebuilt after an 1877 fire, and used by the patent office until the Smithsonian took it over in the 1960s. Until 2000 it was, in essence, an open-air park with a huge old wineglass-shaped elm, a trickling Victorian fountain, and **Alexander Calder's** wavy lily pad stabile, *Nenuphar* (1968).

If you've been waiting for a critique, here goes. The Calder has gone indoors, where it is protected from the elements but loses its punch as a metaphor for nature. The courtyard's trees are imports, not natural, and the design finesse and temperature-controlled environment may bring physical and visual comfort, but they are disquietingly artificial.

Foster's crisscrossing glass-and-steel expanse above makes me particularly grumpy, particularly when the sun is out. In the old days, carved pediments created their own shadows, and if you were lucky, wavy lines or dapples from the big tree added to the magic, often hitting the Calder as well. Nowadays in the courtyard, the shadows are more likely to remind you of grilled swordfish. I'd rather freeze.

**SIDNEY LAWRENCE** is an artist and critic living in Washington, D.C. A traveling exhibition for which he is guest curator, "Roger Brown: Southern Exposure," recently opened at that city's American University Museum.



Kathryn Cornelius detail of *Eh...?!* 2008 Curator's Office



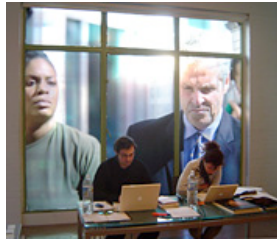
James Huckenpahler *Rental* (detail) 2008 Curator's Office courtesy Hemphill Fine Art



Chip Richardson, Phyllis Rosenzweig, J. W. Mahoney and Betsy Packard the opening for "Portraits" at G Fine Art



**Alec Soth**  
*Martha and Anthony*  
2005  
G Fine Art




Beat Streuli's lightbox photos at G Fine Art



The new Norman Foster-designed courtyard at the Smithsonian American Art Museum / National Portrait Gallery  
Photo by Steve Ainsworth



The courtyard of the Smithsonian American Art Museum / National Portrait Gallery in it's pre-renovation days, with Alexander Calder's Nenuphar (1968)  
Archival photo from SAAM

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