

Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White's Artistic Love Affair

DAVID EVERITT HOWE



The close working and romantic relationship between Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White always seemed like one of the greatest love stories. The two artists met each other in the mid 2000s and ended up living together in various apartments in the East Village. Collaborating on artworks while also making their own, the two tended to their backyard garden together and also ran a book stand on Hudson Street. They would often be seen going to openings at PARTICIPANT INC, where they both showed work. After White was diagnosed with lung cancer, Sánchez was her devoted caretaker until she died. After her passing, Sánchez would constantly evoke White, posting pictures of her and her work on social media. As primary caretaker of her estate, he's intimately involved in guaranteeing her artistic legacy, with great expense.



Kathleen White, *Bloodline 2*, 2005, oil on canvas, 25 × 20 cm.
Courtesy: © Rafael Sánchez, Estate of Kathleen White and
Martos Gallery, New York; photograph: Charles Benton

It's special, then, to see their work together in a two-person exhibition, a manifestation of their enduring partnership. With their respective works interspersed in salon-style groupings, their breadth is remarkable, a testament to their prolific art-making. It's also interesting to note the similarities and differences between the two. White's work tends to be more obviously painterly, with organic shapes hued in pinks, reds and browns, as if scooped up out of some primordial ooze and shaped into primitive forms. *Snake/Palette* (1989–90), for instance, sees a twisty rivulet of red set against a smudgy green background resembling a volcanic landscape, while in the sculptural tableaux *Hair Pod* (c.1990), the artist carved passageways out of a massive piece of extracted wall, lining each channel with matted hair that forms small balls in the corners. Other works by White use hair of a more familiar sort. In *Blonde Fall Spirit* (c.1990), a tied off strand of golden wig hair hangs from the ceiling, nodding to a time when drag queens – a scene in which White was intimately involved – died of AIDS en masse; their possessions, including wigs, left in piles on the street.



Kathleen White, *Blonde Fall Spirit*, 1990s, natural and synthetic wig hair suspended with invisible fishing wire, dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Rafael Sánchez, Estate of Kathleen White and Martos Gallery, New York; photograph: Charles Benton

Sánchez's contribution, meanwhile, makes great use of found materials and often has a playfully dadaist tone. A drag performer for most of his life, Sánchez often repurposed theatrical props in his sculptures. In *Performance Cane (Die Ballade Vom Ertrunkenen Mädchen)* (2019), for instance, the namesake object is inscribed with text from Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Die Ballade Vom Ertrunkenen Mädchen* (1918), which Sánchez read onstage as part of a performance at Dixon Place (XIV, 2019). *Corner Piece* (2022) is an angled, black platform jutting out from the corner of the gallery: the stage provides support for a pair of black shoes and two black balloons, the latter tied up tautly from floor to ceiling. Nevertheless, the balloons slightly bobble in place, as if their movements were an echo of the performance the work is based on, *The Three Voices* (2005).

MARTOS GALLERY



Rafael Sánchez, *Star*, 1997–98, ballpoint and gesso on board, 44 × 34 cm. Courtesy: © Rafael Sánchez, Estate of Kathleen White and Martos Gallery, New York; photograph: Charles Benton

The real spectacle for both artists, however, is the ordinary minutia of everyday life. White's trio of pencil-on-paper drawings of backyard plants, such as *Untitled (Rose Drawing)* (2005), are touchingly delicate, while Sánchez's *Pink Jar* (1990–2003) collects the artist's used, pink disposable razors into an old honey jar, codifying an everyday act of hygiene. Both artists are very attuned to how vulnerable our day-to-day existence is and, consequently, many works here recall something uncannily cosmic, finding wonder in phenomena that will long outlast us. A circular saw-like cut of brown Kraft paper, mounted on black velour, forms Sánchez's stunning *Sun* (1987). Right next to it is White's *Bunny Spirit* (1991), an almost buoyant portrait of famed drag queen Lady Bunny, comprised of wig hair fanned out from a yellow phone book page, onto which is drawn the faint outline of a face. Formally twinned, it's as if both could circle endlessly into eternity, a pair of stars burning bright.

Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White's 'Earth Work' is on view at Martos Gallery, New York, USA, until 19 March.

Main image: Rafael Sánchez, Sour Milk Sea, 1999–2001, ballpoint pen on paper, 58 × 74 cm. Courtesy: © Rafael Sánchez, Estate of Kathleen White and Martos Gallery, New York; photograph: Charles Benton

Feb. 24, 2022

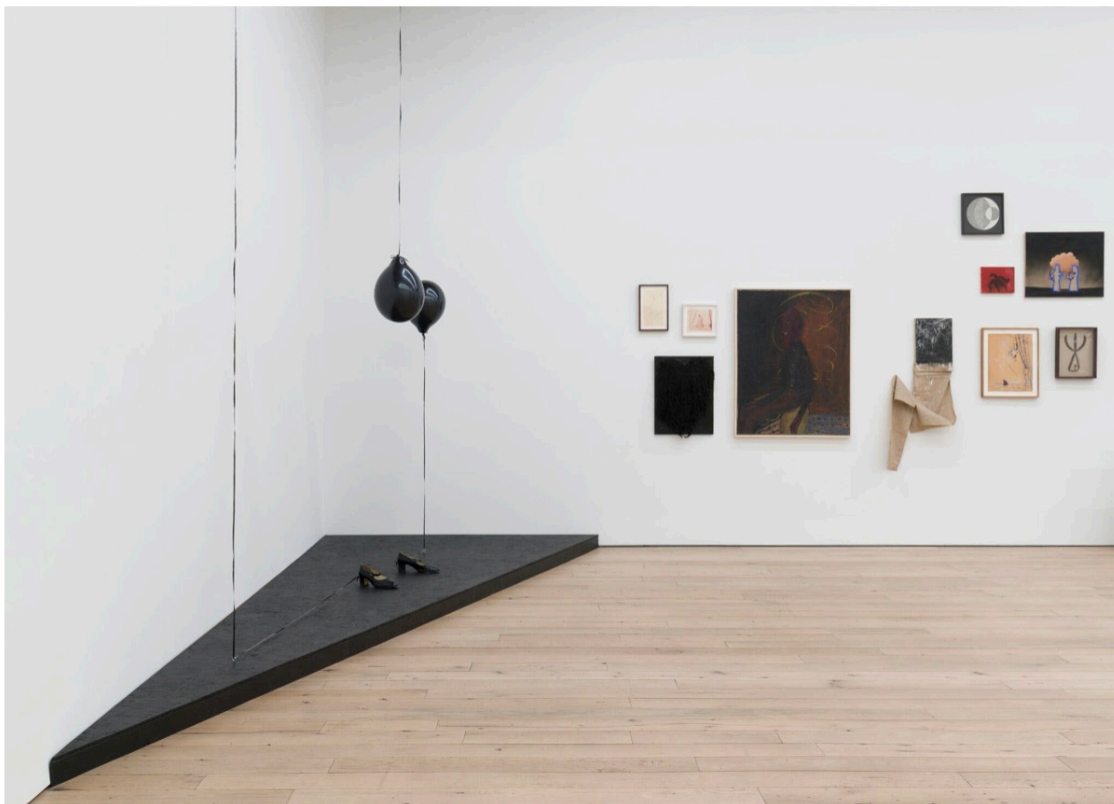
What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

Want to see new art this weekend? Start in Chinatown with Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White's found materials from the AIDS crisis to Sept. 11. Then head to Chelsea to check out the Kitchen's four-artist exhibition, which takes up its hallways, offices and exhibition spaces. And don't miss Stephanie Syjuco's haunting manipulations of archival photos.

CHINATOWN

'Rafael Sánchez, Kathleen White: Earth Work'

Through March 12. Martos Gallery, 41 Elizabeth Street, Manhattan. 212-560-0670; martosgallery.com.



From left, Rafael Sánchez's "Corner Piece" (2022), platform, balloons, shoes, ribbon, and hardware; and on the wall, works in various media (1985-2017) by Sánchez and Kathleen White. Photo by Charles Benton, Courtesy Rafael Sánchez, The Estate of Kathleen White, and Martos Gallery, New York

MARTOS GALLERY

Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White were both formed by New York City's underground scene of the 1980s and '90s. Sánchez, Cuban-born, was doing cross-gendered performances work in downtown drag clubs; and White, born in Fall River, Mass., was part of the Lower East Side art world when they met in 2004. They then lived together until White's death from cancer in 2014.

Along with cultural turf, they shared lived histories: the AIDS crisis, urban gentrification, Sept. 11. As is evident in this moving, intricately textured two-person show, both drew on a personal experience of those years in their art. At one point Sánchez made assemblages from light bulbs in memory of friends who had died of AIDS. (A single photograph here seems to refer to that work.) White made sculptures from the wigs of deceased drag queens whose possessions had been thrown out into the street.

Despite the thrum of mortality, their art pulses with joy, in part through their witty use of found materials: dust, makeup, cinder block, telephone-book pages. The installation intermingles work in ways that suggests how they were different as artists (simplistically put: Sánchez looks more conceptually oriented, White more hands-on expressive.) But we also sense how they were alike. Two small paintings hung side by side — Sánchez's "Onement in a Field" (2002) and White's "Moon" (2005-2006) — could be depictions of the same evening sky vista seen by two people with a shared vision and distinctive temperaments, sitting side by side. *HOLLAND COTTER*

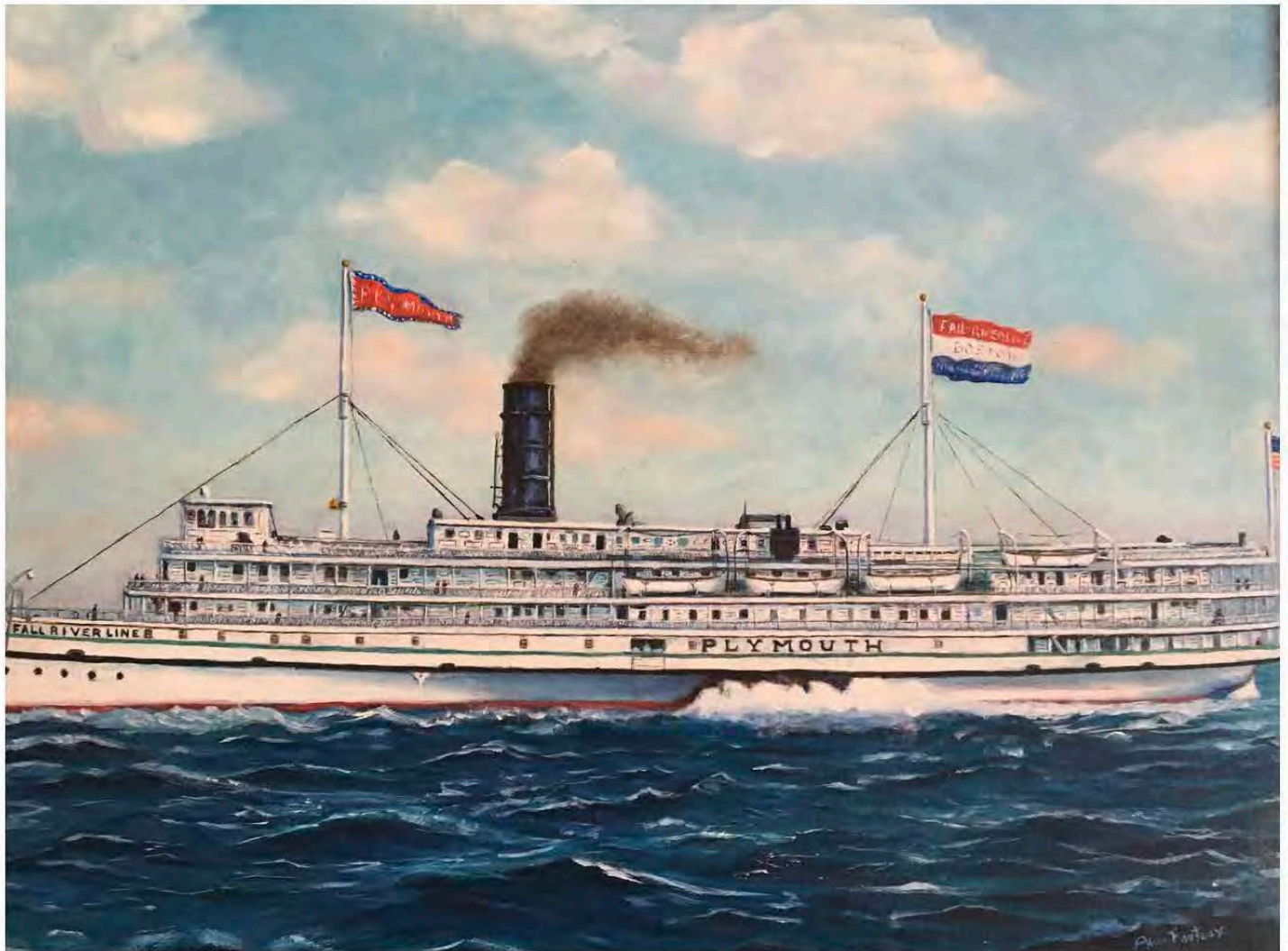
Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art exhibit explores ties with New York art scene

Don Wilkinson

“Group Exhibition III” at the Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art (FR MoCA) is an ambitious presentation that takes note of some of the connective threads between the cities of Fall River and New York. Those threads, some direct and others tangential, note deeper bonds that one might not initially expect between the Spindle City and the Big Apple.

The exhibition, curated by FR MoCA co-founders Brittni Ann Harvey and Harry Gould Harvey IV, is effectively three distinct displays that speak to each other in unanticipated ways.

The foyer of the museum is a gallery unto itself and presently displays artifacts and artwork from the collection of the Maritime Museum at Battleship Cove. There is a charming painting by Alice Fauteux of the steamboat Plymouth and nautical tools (brass telescope, oil squirt can, hammers, a number of gauges and the like) displayed in a vitrine, representing the history of the Fall River Line, a transportation route that connected Boston to New York City from 1847 to 1937.



Painting By Alice Fauteux From The Collection Of The Maritmtime Museum At Battleship Cove. *Provided Photo*

The inaugural collaboration between the two institutions suggests the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

The large pristine main gallery features paintings and three-dimensional works by Kathleen White, who was born in Fall River in 1960. White, an incredibly prolific artist that moved to New York City in 1987, died in 2014. Displayed alongside White within that space is Rafael Sanchez, her partner and frequent artistic collaborator.

MARTOS GALLERY

But what is the connection between the Fall River Line ephemera and White (and by extension, Sanchez)? White's grandfather was a Fall River Line steamboat captain.

There is something demanding and engaging about the obsessiveness of motif and approach in White's work, as if she were repeating a refrain over and over again, making sure she was being heard. A number of her "Love Letters" paintings are displayed and all feature similar markings and strokes: blunt vertical blocks, packed tightly against each other like passengers on a crowded subway train, one row over another.



A Painting From Kathleen White's Love Letters Series.
Provided Photo

Her palette is selectively limited, with pinks running from chalky Pepto-Bismol to deep coral, shifting to-and-from sweet lavenders and a maroon that nears the hue of dried blood.

Displayed on one wall of small shelves are 24 handmade tiny automobiles not much bigger than vintage Matchbox cars and created with Sculptamold and oil paint. White titled them all simply "Car" and they represent but a tiny fraction of the series, all created between 1999 and 2001.

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Sanchez has a bit of a Duchampian readymade sensibility in a few of his works. “La Pildora (The Pill)” is a bell jar tightly packed with lightbulbs of varying size, color and design. The cynical viewer might dismiss it as an art school joke but it is far more than that. The bulbs have changed over the years and Sanchez takes particular care of the bulbs both formally and conceptually. Many of the bulbs were taken from the homes of friends and colleagues who lost their lives to AIDS, and hence the objects take on a kind of sacredness, a physical embodiment of spirit.



La Pildora The Pill by Rafael Sanchez *Provided Photo*



All The Faces I Know by Bella Carlos *Provided Photo*

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His kinetic mixed-media sculpture “Weather Station” is an assemblage of all-black objects. An open umbrella, a balloon, and a walking cane are mounted to an old school phonograph, atop a tall table or stool. It’s a deceptively simple work, situated in a corner of the all-white gallery. The curators have made the most of positioning and lighting to make it a showcase piece for the exhibition.

In the adjacent display spaces is the third leg of the exhibition called “Flame of Love” featuring Bella Carlos, Dorothy Carlos, Tom Forkin, Christopher K. Ho, Brian Oakes, Tim Simonds and Marisa Takal.

Bella Carlos displays a series of wearable body adornments, with long black satiny straps tied to soldered forms that, at quick glance, look like bracelets or necklaces, adorned with decorative shapes, baubles and shimmery surfaces. But when one realizes that they are meant to be strapped to the face, they take on a kinky “Eyes Wide Shut” vibe that nudges one to a different kind of thought process. One of them is actually called “The Face I’m Afraid Of.”



La Pildora The Pill by Rafael Sanchez *Provided Photo*

MARTOS GALLERY

Carlos collaborated with fellow exhibitor Brian Oakes on “When You Touch Me You See Me,” a mixed media wall piece, with glowing cool blue lights, decorative flourishes, insectoid ornamentations, the suggestion of a flower, and the image of an entangled knot above the legend from which the work derives its title. It is a billet-doux of the new era.

“Group Exhibition III” is on display at Fall River Museum of Contemporary Art, 502 Bedford St., Fall River until April 14. FR MoCA is open Saturdays and Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m. and by appointment.

MARTOS GALLERY

BEDFORD + BOWERY

BACK IN THE DAY

'Downtown Was My Heaven': Generations of Performers Revisit Club 57

MARCH 27, 2018

BY CASSIDY DAWN GRAVES



L-R: Holly Hughes, Moe Angelos, Martha Wilson, Carmelita Tropicana (photo: Cassidy Dawn Graves)

Last Thursday, the theater at MoMA went back to the 20th century when **Performing Difference: Gender in the 1980s Downtown Scene**, a day of panel discussions presented in conjunction with the exhibit **"Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978-1983."**, took over one of the museum's spacious screening rooms.

The day consisted of a look at the feminist lesbian performance art, visual art, and drag scenes, and the current queer artists continuing the legacy of the amorphous world known as “downtown.” The title “Performing Difference” was fitting, as curator Ron Magliozzi explained at the *Club 57* exhibition’s **opening party**: “We saw that all the films, even the gore films, and the sleaze films, they’re all about gender. ... They’re all about body modification and identity and changing identity.”

Money

A sign of “making it” as a performer can be getting paid for your work. But money and performing didn’t intersect much for performers like panelists Holly Hughes, Moe Angelos, Carmelita Tropicana, and Martha Wilson, who frequented East Village spaces like Wow Café Theater, Pyramid Club, and Club 57. Due to their edgy, often sexual material, Hughes said Wow Café was one of the only “feminist spaces” that welcomed them, as feminism at the time was largely filled with “anti-sex, **anti-porn** feminists” who would likely balk at a thought of a lesbian “erotic night” or Hughes’s campy Sapphic play *The Well of Horniness*.

“I worked for years before I ever got paid, or even got a drink ticket,” Hughes said. “Which I don’t recommend!” At this stage in their career, the women of Wow do get paid, but like most artists, still have to spend exhausting amounts of time applying for grants.

Drag told a slightly different story. At the “Gender Play” panel, Pyramid Club co-founder Brian Butterick noted that once the venue was written up in the *New York Times*, they started making “a lot of money,” which allowed them to begin other queer performance initiatives like the drag festival Wigstock. It would be hard to ignore the gendered element here, as men doing drag and related performance were able to find some financial success in downtown’s heyday, while the lesbian performance artists of Wow Café largely did not.

Inclusivity

Panelists did not shy away from discussing “political correctness.” While this topic could result in a bitter monologue about the youth being too sensitive, what actually transpired was more nuanced, covering cultural norms then and now.

When Five Lesbian Brothers member Moe Angelos showed an image of a performance she did at one of Peggy Shaw’s shows, she noted what was then “performing butch” would now be “performing transmasculinity.” Back then, she said, “We didn’t have AFAB, AMAB, cis, genderqueer.” However, the terms they did have included “butch, femme, fag, dyke, and even tranny.”

“I was special because I was a woman of color,” stated Carmelita Tropicana, who presented in her charismatic stage persona. She noted that though the scene had diversity of gender and sexuality, it was largely white, and attributed this to the “segregation” present in the city at the time. Even when she mentioned a time Wow Café had more people of color, she was merely referring to a time she put on a play about a Cuban revolution and asked her fellow performers to play Latinas. Nowadays, Hughes said, the venue is “majority minority and trans-inclusive.”

Drag

Drag is entering the mainstream with the success of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, which has spurred discussions of what types of bodies and identities are **allowed to partake**. But it’s been around for far longer than that, and a photo of RuPaul outside Pyramid Club served as a reminder.

Club 57 was “for people sick of West Village gay culture,” said Butterick, who performs drag as Hattie Hathaway and is a current board member of Howl! Arts, a nonprofit focused on preserving East Village underground culture. “What we were doing was everything for everybody. Unlike gay male culture in the moment, we didn’t hate women.”

“Drag queens ran the Pyramid,” said performer Jack Waters, a former co-director of ABC No Rio with Peter Cramer. Rather than always attempting overt “female impersonation” like some of the other Manhattan drag scenes, downtown’s “deconstructionist drag” and gender performance was more fluid. Panelist Sur Rodney (Sur) said drag to him was an attempt to “feel different and be different,” and he didn’t realize “feminized men would be seen as women.” Others, like artist Rafael Sánchez, simply did drag “because it feels good.”

Documentation

One of the differences between the panels focused on performance in the 1980s and performance today was that the performers from the 1980s largely talked about their work, while the contemporary performers began by showing videos. Montreal-based performer Jordan Arseneault showed a video of him lip-syncing a monologue from the 1982 sci-fi cult film *Liquid Sky*, Erin Markey showed a clip of a song from her latest show *Boner Killer*, and Reina Gossett screened an excerpt of her latest short film *Atlantic Is a Sea of Bones*, featuring performer Egyptt LaBejia.

This illuminated the different role documentation has played in live performance; Moe Angelos described downtown performances as “not built to last,” valuing quantity over polished quality, while today’s performers are encouraged to document everything.

Conclusions

The final audience Q+A had one stipulation. With their questions, people also had to name at least one venue that wasn’t yet mentioned that day, and at least one person they wish was present. Talkbacks can be dreary or even painful at times, and *Performing Difference* was not free from some of those moments, but this final request and the nostalgia it inspired from both audience members (which included downtown icons Kembra Pfahler and John Kelly) and panelists made it feel more alive.

While the past was remarked upon, a slideshow of venue floor plans drawn from memory was shown. In addition to classic long-gone spaces like Club 57 and Danceteria, newer DIY relics like Glasslands, Death By Audio, and Galapagos also made appearances.

“Downtown isn’t a geographical location,” one audience member said, which feels ever truer now as more underground, DIY, and/or queer spaces are faced with closures and unsustainable rent increases. “It really is up to us to build our own downtown,” said curator and “Downtown Today” moderator Travis Chamberlain, a statement that really has always been true, and will continue to be true for years to come.



"Teatro de la Cabeza." Nijmegen, Holland, 1993. Photo Credit: Ania Rachat.

An Evening with Rafael Sánchez

The androgyne is not for sale, says artist and performer Rafael Sánchez. Spanning the AIDS crisis, the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan, and the aftermath of 9/11, his artistic archive intimately portrays the playfulness, loss, and hardship that paved the way for today's gender revolution.

Rafael Sánchez is from a New York you always wanted to move to – the New York you might've missed if you first saw it in the new millennium. Over the past year visiting his studio, moving through his archive, he unpacked four decades of artistic practice for us. His art work is made up of theater, filmmaking, publishing, sculpture, painting, costume, and performance. If you ask him, he'll explain these disparate endeavors are anchored by a core of experimentation. Though glamour and spectacle

move through his projects, their beauty can be misleading. He is a difficult artist to characterize quickly, one of the underground's best-kept secrets.

Rafael refers to time as a medium and “drawing” as the core of whatever is the final form of the work. In every sense he is deliberate. He takes his time; he’s not in a rush. Rafael’s archive narrates histories of our city which are vital to record and preserve – the AIDS crisis, the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan, the aftermath of 9/11 – though he’d probably refute preservation as besides the point. Instead he prioritizes human exchange. He makes sculpture from observations and interaction. He treats language as a vital surgical tool that requires patience and respect. Talking with him about his life and work fills in your mental timeline in explosions – mythic forays, tragic erasures, urgent celebrations of life, and countless experiments. This is another New York story.

How did you get started creating performances?

When I was around 10 I had a nickname. They started calling me *Chico*. I had a strong Spanish accent at the time and this – Parsippany, New Jersey (as Cuban-born transplant via Queens and New York City) – was very white America. Even a white kid with an accent was a foreigner. And so I would act out my “Latin-ness” I guess, as a way to get by. I started doing performances that were really bonkers for a small group of friends who seemed to accept me because I could be funny. I would sing popular songs that resonated for me. It’s not like I planned or rationalized it – it just came out of me! There was a band called War that I liked a lot and they had a song called “The Cisco Kid.” Obviously Latin outlaw, right? There was another song, “Brother Louie,” by a group called Stories – the lyric is: “She was black as the night, Louie was whiter than white.” It was a song about an interracial couple and brother Louie was singing the blues because he had to deal with all of this judgment for who he was dating.

Skateboard culture wasn’t really a thing yet in 1970–72, but if it was we would’ve been that. So we would meet at strange marginal locations and smoke cigarettes, start little fires as boys do. We would mix flammable liquids from around the house in a container and squirt it around and make these flash fires by these strange concrete tunnels that seemed to divert the local water table under the roadways. The kids would say “Hey Chico, do ‘Brother Louie’” and I would squirt the liquid and light a fire and sing “Brother Louie.” Then I would roll on the fire and put it out

with my body during the instrumental part. That was my act. Those were my earliest performances. I guess I was figuring out how to be myself amongst the culture at large.



"Rafael In New Jersey," 1991. Photo Credit: Gail Thacker

Who were your influences? What were your main interests or concerns that kept you coming back to performance and drag?

Drag didn't make sense to me; it just happened. A key factor was spending time with Mark Morrisroe. He would come home from shows in town and tell me about what others were doing. At the time I still had my studio in Newark and was studying at Rutgers, and I was living in an apartment in Jersey City that I shared with my sister Lourdes. She and I were very close. We were both artists born in Havana, and we went through a very bizarre first generation upbringing

together. Anyway, I had a giant 7 x 10 feet tarred and feathered canvas that I couldn't fit anywhere. Fortunately we lived on the top floor, and the canvas fit exactly on the landing up against the wall. I first met Mark with that painting. He came upstairs to borrow a cup of sugar.

Literally a cup of sugar?

Yes. I heard somebody out in the hallway before he even knocked and there he was, sniffing that painting. He had this strange squeaky voice and said, "Did you make this?" I said "Yeah" and he said, "I usually have to come around to other people's art but this is really fantastic." And I was like "Thank you." Then he said, "Can I borrow a cup of sugar?" And that was our friendship. That's what I mean by drag *happened* – there was no searching for motivations. Great things like this come as life's gifts.



HIV+ honey submersion photos, 2001-2002. Photograph, Rafael Sanchez

So who were some of your role models early on? Not just for drag but performance?

Jesus, that's so vast. Coming up through New Jersey, I guess at some point in my late teens and early twenties I found I was drawn to artists like Allan Kaprow, Robert Whitman, Robert Rauschenberg.... They all had roots in New Jersey and I was fascinated by the landscape, having been separated from my birthplace and never really knowing it. They were a generation of artist thinkers – to me, they were my beat poets. They worked outside conventional art systems and contexts. They helped me see that the landscape around us, no matter how banal, is part of us. To me, that is very spiritual. But I liked drawing most of all. In 1979, there was a retrospective of Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim. That was a game changer for me. That and discovering Ad Reinhardt's work. I read a lot. Also, there was so much great music that my generation grew up on. Much of it had gotten under my skin, and I always wondered how that could be worked in: The New York Dolls, David Bowie, even macho acts like Alice Cooper and Kiss. We went through puberty with that stuff in our veins. Butch bands like Led Zeppelin – when you see pictures of them, they're all hairy and sweating and swagging this incredible drag. Robert Plant with his golden locks, and he's got these blouses and they're low cut. That was all very gender-bending. After college, I lived in Paris and really liked Dalida. She sang standards; I liked her sad period. She had two or three husbands who all committed suicide, so by the mid-70s she was very dark. I remember Mark was still alive when I first went to Paris. He was obsessed with Connie Francis and Judy Garland, these women turned icons, but I never got into that.

How did you first get into drag?

Well, what motivated me most was the real-life street experience and moving through the world that way – sending alternative signals via what I was wearing and how I presented myself. The world reciprocated somehow. The first time I went “out” in full drag was just for fun. It was Halloween of '91. The children treated me like a lady. They came right up and said “You're beautiful” as I stepped out the door. As a guy that resonated in my core. Males are never told that, ever. We don't experience that and it blew me away I guess – it was a kind of affirmation, and it raised a lot of questions for me.

The next day I felt very sensitive. I picked up some paintings Mark had left me from Pat Hearn. I felt like I was reconnecting with him though he'd died two years before when there was a piece of cardboard I found in the back, between the stretchers, and it was a portrait of Divine...an

original print by the photographer Jason Gavin. With what I was going through, that felt like a sign from beyond.

But, in the drag community, a lot of my peers were working through women issues. A lot of that drag was even filled with women hate. It made me uncomfortable.



"Dolores", Cimetière Montmartre, 1990. Photo Credit: Emmanuel Gaffard

Wow, in what way?

A lot of the clown drag seemed disparaging at times, even Raspberry's (Mark's)...it's complex. I'm not going to name any other names, but a lot of queens actually don't like women. Things they would say were so misogynistic.

Where do you think that came from?

A world that creates identity conflict and thrives on power. A lot of power drag was about assertion –extremely competitive and vicious. This whole thing of “reading” even...I still find it to be very macho. Even the terminology of “queen.” What is that? What’s with all this hierarchy? I enjoy the camp and poetry of it, but then when I would go out with love in my heart, suddenly it would be all about these things...like passing and being on top...reading...competition....

It mirrors society in a lot of ways though. Queer communities feel like an oasis when you first find them, but then it is shattering to realize they can have other chains of command.

I understand competing to become a better artist, but I learned very quickly that drag is a dangerous game.

How so?

When you put yourself, your body, your being out there in a world loaded with constructions about identity, you’re fucking with it and it’s going to fuck back with you. And that’s a dangerous game. From the most perfect of strangers to the family you grew up with.

It’s very layered. I have so many friends who are navigating these things constantly, even as children. One of the things that inspired me at that time was meeting and making friends with people who lived on those margins. What motivated me was to create the best art I could, to elevate our perceptions and discover things, and to learn. Regardless of how I was being defined, my higher aim was to create work that was transcendent. Unquestionably beautiful. I was interested in the darkness of Artaud and Camus, but I never made performances that were mean-spirited. I would go back to the art I was doing before my drag, the sculpture and drawing, and try to bring it to *this* kind of theater.

As a queer person with a decades-long history of cross-dressing but who does not identify as trans or gay, your experience of and entrance into drag culture is intriguing and complex. Can you share a bit about your experience of gender, gender deviation, and gender fluidity in your life and work?

I've gotten a lot of shade in these performance circles because I'm not "gay." For me it doesn't have to do with being gay, straight, or any of those definitions. None of that comes remotely close to touching what motivates my art. It's much more than that. For me it's about a human ideal that has been subverted by the West – the androgyne, our ideal gender expression. Lately, it's been academized so it seems like a cliché, but it's not for sale. Having spaces where we feel comfortable to express ourselves is a sublime thing, and we all, especially as artists, need to give back to these communities that support us. And even the littlest show in the littlest space requires a team.

How do boys in skirts handle bravado? What would it look like when other performers sized you up or when you sized them up?

I don't know how to answer that. I was hit on a lot and I dealt with it. I was also aggressed a lot. If you mean competition, I guess a lot of that occurred in dressing rooms. Sadly, like High School lockers, I guess. Sometimes, backstage there could be a lot of reading going on, and I just tried to let it roll off of me as best I could when it would happen. There were specific times where shade was coming on pretty thick, and I would just turn and focus on what needed to be done...because some of the costumes I had were really hard to get into. If I was read, I knew I'd perform and deliver on stage and mouths would drop. That's all.

But didn't this banter kind of make drag culture what it was?

Some people are more into that showbiz toughness but it's not my world. I think I was coming at it more as a visual artist. The heart of what I was doing was quieter and a response to another kind of universal that is perhaps more spiritual and less competitive. But that does not mean that it is not ambitious. I enjoyed the showbiz and lifestyle, but I *loved* the experience of stage work. I wanted the work to be great, and I love the engine of a show. But to be fabulous for its own sake wasn't really my end game ever.



Post performance, Needle Exchange Benefit at Mother, 1997. Photo Credit: Claire Barnier

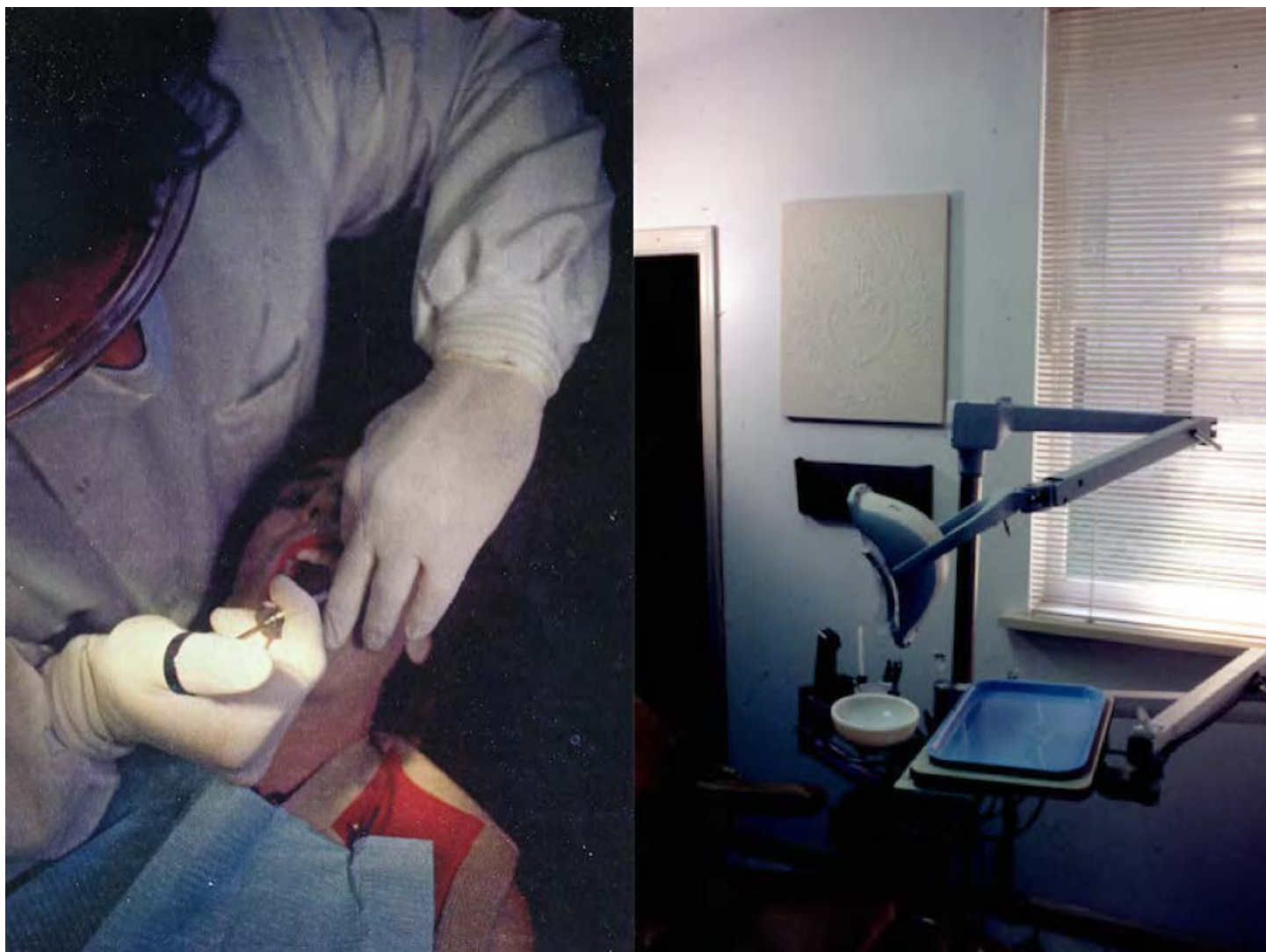
What rituals, if any, did you partake in on a night where you would get ready as your most famed drag character – Dolores de la Cabeza? Did those change over the years?

Dolores was performance art. The name literally translates to “pains of the head,” or in more general terms, headaches. (I suffered from migraine headaches often.) But, I learned a lot through Dolores. I would get decked out. I loved speed metal at the time, bands like Anthrax, Megadeth, and Slayer. One time, I knew I needed to stay close to my date at a Motorhead concert at The Ritz. I feared for my life when we were separated and was lucky to get out of there. But I would go to nightclubs where hair bands were playing, like L’Amour in Brooklyn, and I felt like that world was just filled with a very twisted kind of drag. I liked that music, but it was intensely heteronormative and misogynistic too, so I also knew I was going out there as Dolores to fuck with it. I was still young enough to be brave that way. I would get glammed out and get out on the PATH train to the middle of Brooklyn and that was part of it for me. It wasn’t about getting in

a cab – I wanted to take Dolores out for that ride. It got scary sometimes and I learned to fight as a lady, well sort of, but mostly the experiences were very positive and full of wonder and fed my art in many ways.

In what ways did Dolores refuse to be a persona? Was it her shapeshifting?

I just never wanted to create a character who was specific. I was expressing through wherever I might be at that moment in time and *that* would essentially *shift*. It was Situationist. I had other names I would use, Dolores was just the one that stuck. Probably because I wrote it down for a show, but at any given time it could have been different. Why didn't Pavonia Newport stick? I never purposefully tried to manifest any of it as an identity. In a way, Dolores de la Cabeza represented for me an experience.



Sugar Paintings, Installation and opening performance, Hoboken Dental Specialties, 1995 (w/ Roger Johansen, D.M.D.)

Ok, ok. So when did you decide to take Dolores into the streets?

Actually, she came out of the street. I went with my gay friends Bill Doherty and Bruce Greer. We took the PATH from Hoboken to New York and spent the night out – West Village, East Village, Meatpacking –and my sister Lourdes joined us. We went to Uncle Charlie's, where she won the contest prize as Liza! It was wonderful! Then we ended up at Dick's bar where we ran into Bitter Bob. She was an old friend of Bill's, and Bob was a transvestite [*this is a reference to Bob's identity at the time*] who lived on West 10th near the river. We later lost Bob to, I still don't know, if it was AIDS or liver cancer or both. But in those days Bob was always at Dick's Bar. She was probably the most bitter of all queens – or the most bitter person – I ever met. Chain smoking and always with a drink in her hand. Funny but bitter, like battery acid.

For some reason, Bob took to me and took me under her wing. Bob loved where I was coming from. She would give me drag she didn't want anymore, makeup tips, and was very kind with me. And sweet. And beautiful in her own way. I would visit her often but I never got too close. There was a bit too much booze – though at the same time there was also AIDS and people were coping and escaping. A lot of it was self-medicating, because times were so hard and difficult to comprehend.

So we met Bob that night and we were hanging around. I was among loving friends who were very encouraging with me...that's my point.

And that was that? You conjured your look and your lady and she appeared?

Interestingly enough, I went out as a blonde that night and I haven't done that since. I wasn't passing. I just threw it all together and it wasn't that good, but I felt embraced and that's what mattered. People called me Madonna and Marilyn that night – which was weird – I didn't want to mimic anyone. But I understood that drag as a practice could take me out of the studio, and that my studio practice and this experience were not mutually exclusive. Drag gave me a show life and a way to be in the landscape with new eyes. My studio practice brought something to it too.



Left: Untitled Performance, Bruce Labruce Book Release, Jackie 60, 1997. Photo credit: Claire Barnier. Right: Dolores at FIAC (pictured in front of John McCracken sculpture). Paris, 1991. Photo Credit: Emanuel Gaffard.

Who did you perform with? What was the geography, spaces, and scenes?

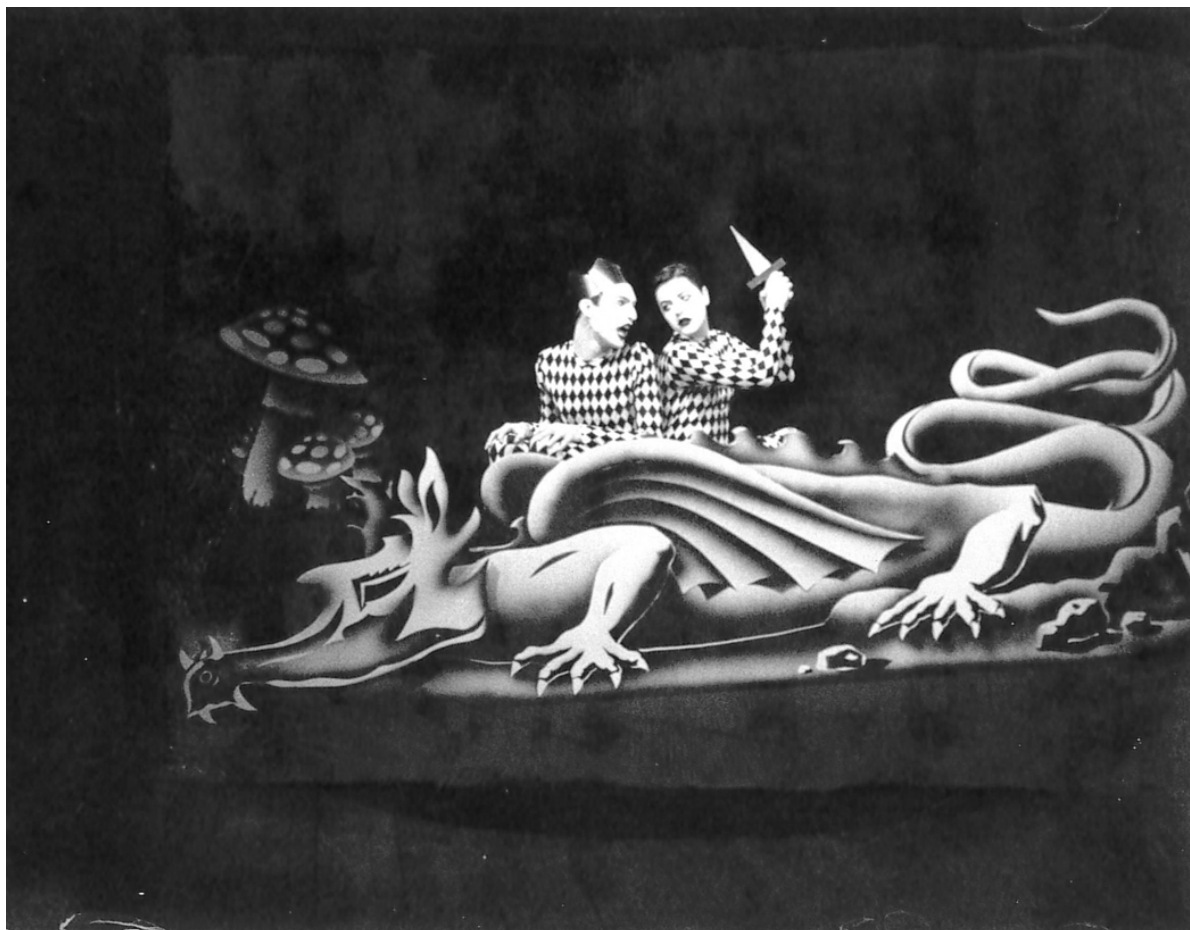
I went out, I guess, but I was really exploring. Places like Webster Hall, Limelight, etc. were not really my scene or destination, unless someone I knew was doing something special there. I mean, after all, after Mark died I moved back to Paris and fell in love with Claire Barnier and Dolores really bloomed there for me. Through Claire, I was acquainted with circles around Leigh Bowery, whom I met once as Dolores and found completely inspiring. I would come back frequently to New York and work and play with Gail Thacker, who always had her Polaroid camera, and that process with Gail informed my work immensely – possibly more than anything because it turned what I was doing into a kind of movie, a story that I could see. But when I moved back to Jersey City in 1992-93, I was also returning to Europe, often for residencies around my work. One day stateside, I ran into Tina Benez on the PATH train from Manhattan to Jersey. I remember I was wearing a satin cheerleader outfit that was an interpretation of the Cuban flag. I remember

clearly it was the middle of the day, sunny out. I qualify it because it wasn't always about going out to some night thing. It was a way of life and we were crossing over on many levels and often with all the other commuters! I had that dress made for me by a local seamstress that did lots of Puerto Rican flag versions out of her shop, and I had her do a Cuban version for me. Anyway, Tina asked me immediately if I would go-go dance at her night at Maxwell's on Sunday – *Vertigogo*. I ended up making a lot of the sets there, and I met Jersey girls, like Taxi, and Glamamore was a regular. She was a legend, and that raised the bar. I learned a lot from that experience with Tina, and especially from Glamamore as a performer. And of course, Times Square before Times Square closed, if that's what you mean. We started to lose Times Square around 1996, but really the loss was a casualty of the AIDS crisis. You wouldn't have recognized the city before all that disappeared. Regular bars had little stages. Giuliani wanted to clean everything up. The vitality of queers, drags, and sex workers bled out into the streets and that kept at bay the suburbs, the frat boys, the 7 Elevens, and all this mall culture that is so present nowadays in the city. The scene was so electric, really. Tina Benez, who lived in Hoboken, made a good try to bring some of that to Maxwell's, and I loved her for it because once you cross the river to New Jersey, it really is much more suburban in one way and absolutely less tolerant. In a big way what we were doing at Maxwell's was way more radical than say Pyramid or Boy Bar in that there was no safety net at all. We were out in the face of society. In those years, I met the German queer director Rosa von Praunheim, also through through Tina. Rosa had just released his film *I Am My Own Woman*, which I loved before even having met him. I was doing research for the artist Matt Mullican (so this must have been 1993-94) on the history of the computer, and Rosa asked if I would research for him the history of drag in cultures around the world. I was thrilled to do it and that's where I learned that the heart of it has nothing to do with sexual orientation. That gig was a revelation. A few years later Tina brought me into a night Hattie Hathaway was doing at a little bar called Nuts N' Bolts in the West Village. I was living in the Village by then. Those little places were my favorite. After a few shows there, Hattie invited me to do some Jackie 60. I loved it, and by then the characters I embodied were way beyond Dolores, and I would just use my given name. I blossomed into a whole other cosmology as my studio practice infused my performance work. But most of those venues were disappearing as the Giuliani administration had its way. I was fortunate that I had other avenues to explore this work, which were emerging due to people like Lia Gangitano, with whom we basically figured out how to bring this theater into the art

world once and for all. We did *The Libation Bearers*, a full-on production at Thread Waxing Space on Lower Broadway – transforming the gallery into a theater in 1999.

So after everything closed where did the queers go? Where did you go?

Well, it didn't happen suddenly. All the cleanup took advantage of the community being so vulnerable. AIDS and 9/11 overlapped. Around 1997, the FDA approved the pills that kept people alive without killing you. The nation, the world, stopped hemorrhaging lives to AIDS. Then 9/11 happened and AIDS was swept under the rug in a way, though it was far from over. The stigma and the silence around it just got worse and more silent in a way, sadly. In this time between 1997 and 2001, while the city was being sanitized, we were still grappling with so many traumas. We took care of our friends who weren't being taken care of by the system. AIDS was not over. There was and still is a very real underground around the disease and its stigma, which is society's disease really. I was getting weary and succumbed to the trappings of a rock and roll lifestyle. I became HIV positive in 2002, a year after 9/11.



Libation Bearers, The Opera, Threadwaxing Space, 1999. Photo Credit: Gail Thacker

You'd been in art and queer communities and had to mourn for so long. What did it feel like to contract HIV and have to interpret those feelings within your own body?

Being HIV positive makes one very much aware of the body down to a microscopic and psychic level. Immediately we process how that relates to others and their bodies. This relationship is complex and we navigate it constantly. It's extremely personal. And it is extremely societal. Our bodies are very vulnerable and most people just get by. This has something to do with what I said earlier about drag being a dangerous game. When you step out into the world, no matter how strong you are, the world's response will always affect you. Here in New York City, most of us can surround ourselves with people who give us strength but it's still dangerous. Having HIV now is weird because it doesn't show on the outside but the stigma is there and many of us have been very sick and know that we have something that makes us different. Even though we can speak openly here, it is not that way 85 percent of the time. Ironically and sadly, a lot of silence about who we are is part of our reality. I am labeled "straight" by many of my friends because I love and prefer women openly, but I spend a lot of time at GMHC for services and rarely to never see anyone there from my art or performance communities.

When I became positive my thinking started to change. I was really adrift for about a year and a half. Then I fell in love with Kathleen White in 2004. Kathleen was part of the same world, in many ways more so. We met through Lia at Participant and we both had shows there in 2004. We were thinking of other ways to give back through our work outside of what was expected. We recognized a paradigm shift. We longed for another kind of exchange. We wanted to be citizens in a broader way.

When we were younger, part of Manhattan's allure was that you could get just about anything you needed without ordering it in some catalog from far away, like how we nowadays order things online. So much was at our disposal. You could get that obscure part for your projector with two phone calls. We are down to the bottom of the barrel when it comes to access to materials, and art has become a pay-to-play game. Everything's so expensive. Forty-five dollars for a small tube of cadmium red...it feels so precious. And, things have become *way* too serious. The disappearance of the clubs, of the stores we would go to for art supplies, of the mom-and-pop stores we cared about, the delis, bodegas, porn stores, bookstores, record stores.... Kathleen

and I wanted to put something back, at the very least activate those things somehow – to honor the essence of value through our work and create environments that spoke to us and addressed those concerns. Much of it seems very serious as I speak of it, but we had a lot of fun actually.



Double Bridge, Aljira Arts, Newark 1984. Photo by Rafael Sanchez

From 2004 to 2014, you and Kathleen White ran a stand with found books, records, and tapes outside of your apartment on Hudson Street between Bank and West 11th Streets. Though Kathleen passed away in 2014, you have continued to perform the bookstand as an act of spontaneous theater, meditation, and exchange. Can you talk more about this project in the context of your relationship to New York as a place?

As Kathleen and I watched the city transform, we questioned how we could continue to relate to it. How would we go about making work in this transformed environment? There was a sense of wondering: *Where do we go?* After 9/11, this question seemed increasingly urgent, if not

perplexing, living in Lower Manhattan only blocks from the towers. It was then that Kathleen and I elaborated on the bookstand that I was already running as a live artwork. It was an offering from our hearts to the city. The bookstand is a table where exchange happens. A forum for discussions to take place, like what *is* value, what *is* loss, what *is* forgiveness? What is an opening or a walking through? Is the exchange of an old used book an act of forgiveness? Something that's lost or used is acknowledged with an exchange of value. There is a beauty in that exchange.

Loss is a constant. My generation came to our practice at an incredibly beautiful moment but also at a time when our colleagues started to die and die and die. I'm not talking about elders. I mean young people, our friends. The issue of loss was huge. I guess everyone navigated that in many ways. People I was working closely with, developing my practice with: it had a big impact on us. Kathleen as well. So how do we navigate loss into something that's living? It was a point we had in common early on, as we fell in love and she accepted me completely. We understood each other in relation to loss. We were both dealing with it. We were able to come together in the projects we did – like the bookstand in the shadow of the fallen towers. That event loomed and still looms. It's not just a metaphor. It physically *occurred* – geographically, on the map. It wasn't just losing nightlife, or losing a place we could go to be safe with our *drag*. It was love among the ruins. And Kathleen was an eventual casualty. She was diagnosed by the 9/11 victims unit at Bellevue. So I don't even give fuck about that so-called "drag" or whatever it's called anymore. Whatever anybody wants to be, just be it. What we lost in 9/11 was even bigger. We have been in World War III since the towers came down. Nobody seems to really notice. We are losing hospitals to luxury condos every other day. We are living in a feudal society. I mean, look at who's in the White House presently! We have a fucking landlord for President!

So, how do we navigate loss? The bookstand was *one* way forward for us in a post 9/11 millennial decade. The stand has a specific location in relation to that event. It is an idea generator and as such is also nomadic. Much is harvested on the tables and set forth. It is also a proscenium for a series of random encounters initiated by the material placed upon it. The project is about potential. That's how we saw it, and I'm still in that practice. That experience informed us and still informs much of my work. Like the nomadic dolmen that Kathleen and I

made. The standing stones of the dolmen speak volumes. The work we did together continues to have a life. Is loss something that has a forward motion? That's a good question.

MARTOS GALLERY

HYPERALLERGIC

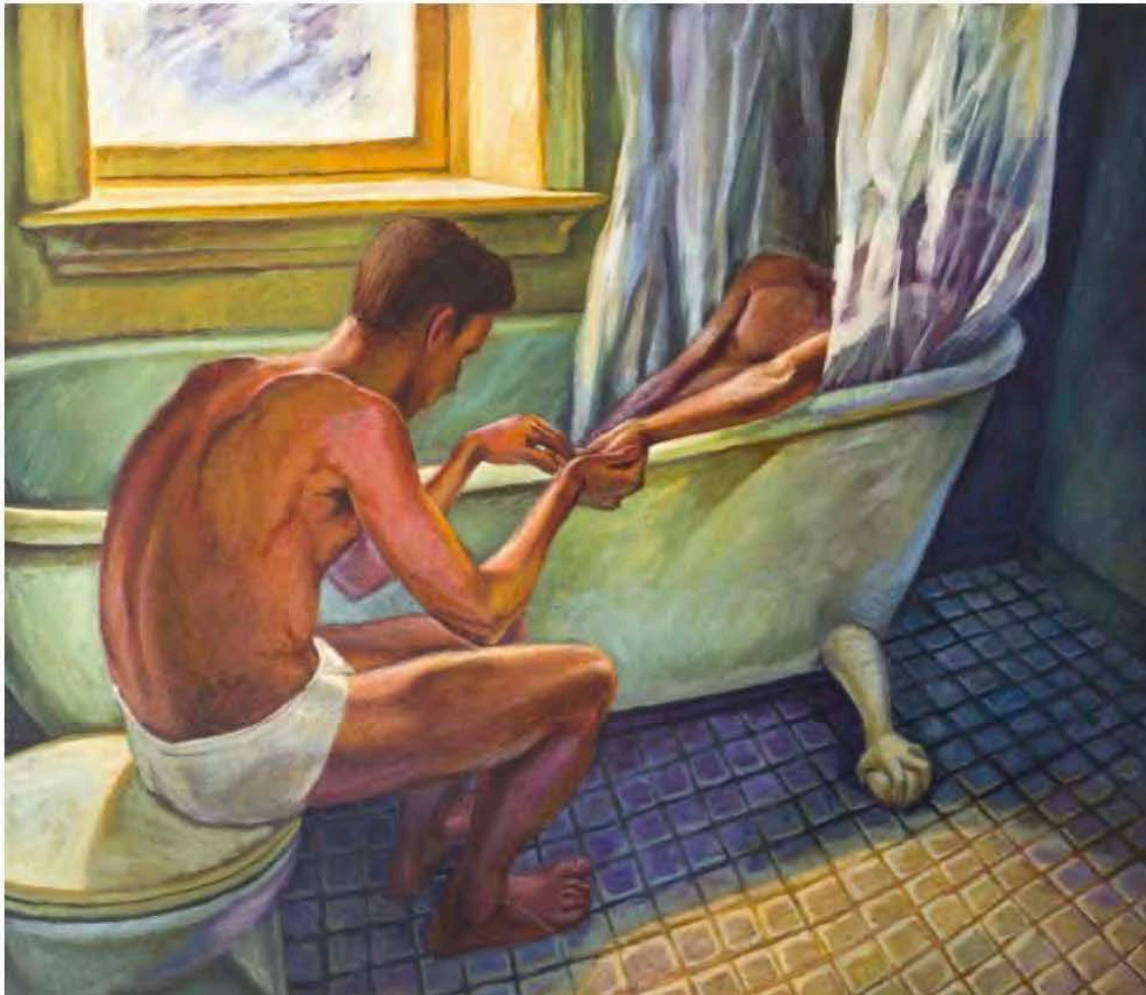
ART

The Tender Gravity of Domestic Spaces Haunted by AIDS

A multimedia exhibit at Museum of the City of New York looks back at the domesticity of the AIDS crisis.

Joseph Shaikewitz

July 17, 2017



Hugh Steers, "Bath Curtain" (1992) (all images courtesy of Museum of the City of New York, © 2017 Estate of Hugh Steers/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

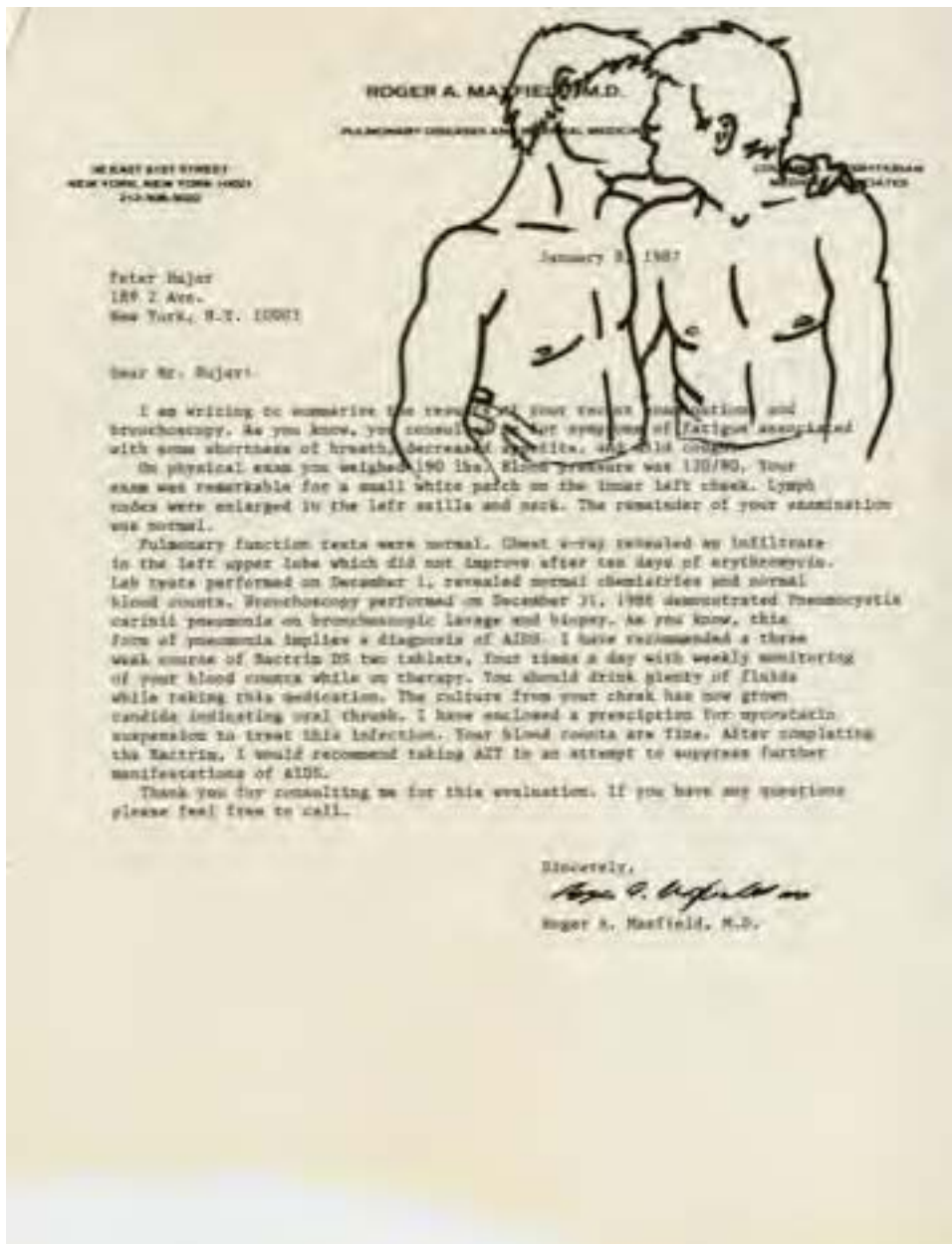
The Museum of the City of New York's exhibition *AIDS at Home: Art and Everyday Activism* depicts its titular setting as one fraught with anxiety. Here, "home" (or something like it) is not an end to a means. Instead, it embodies a place of decades-long and continued uncertainty around healthcare and housing policy, mourning and survival. During an artist panel co-organized by Visual AIDS, Avram Finkelstein, founding member of the activist group Gran Fury, softly disclosed "how haunted the streets of New York are" to him. Haunted too, as the exhibition makes clear, are the private interiors in which suffering played out among lovers and friends and efforts were made to secure housing for HIV+ individuals. Set against the fragile line between public outcry and personal anguish, the home emerged as a humble symbol for the inescapability of LGBTQ oppression.



Susan Kuklin, "Kachin and Michael at Michael's Apartment" (1987)

Select moments in the exhibition treat "home" as a sacred and stable site, most notably in the opening gallery, which is dedicated to caretaking and the quotidian terms of survival. Quiet photographs by Susan Kuklin from 1987 capture the Gay Men's Health Crisis' early efforts to garner volunteer-driven support for those living with HIV/AIDS. These images are offset by a far more evocative series from Nan Goldin (1994–95), in which the photographic gaze shifts from a woman in hospice to the dove-embroidered curtains that breathe strange life into her surroundings.

In the same room, Hugh Steers's arresting 1992 painting "Bath Curtain" weighs heavy as ever. A young couple — one man perched on the edge of a toilet seat, the other reclined in a claw-foot tub — tenderly cup hands. A plastic curtain obscures the latter figure's face, resting over it like a veil or a gilded funerary mask. It's a heartbreaking image, and one that underscores the urgent need for systemic medical attention at a time when, as the exhibition astutely points out, healthcare and traditional models of caregiving were rigged against queer communities.



David Wojnarowicz, Peter Hujar's diagnostic letter (1987)

An equal sense of gravity, though differently framed, electrifies a framed ink drawing by David Wojnarowicz. The surface itself is a doctor's letter to Peter Hujar, Wojnarowicz's partner and fellow artist, detailing his AIDS diagnosis in January of 1987. Wojnarowicz, in an act of quiet resistance, has overlain an image of two men, mouths locked, arms around each other in a deep embrace. This image is paired with an archival document from November of the same year, which details the home-care plan for Hujar, in hopes of sustaining his degenerative health. One is left to imagine what life was like during the mere handful of months separating diagnosis, instructions for home care, and Hujar's death just 10 days later. Perhaps the couple saw their vision of "home" slip gradually into a macabre backdrop for an unwelcome reality.

The remaining galleries deepen this wash of sorrow to explore themes of homelessness, housing discrimination, and the unrecognized legal status of queer families. The exhibition's curator Stephen Vider has again deployed archival ephemera alongside artistic interpretations to carry complex historical narratives. A [1994 blueprint](#), for example, describes plans for the nonprofit AIDS advocacy

organization Housing Works' space in the East Village, containing a mix of apartment units and a treatment center. Nearby, a series of drawings from 2008 by Chloe Dzubilo chronicle years of hardship in modest pursuit of stable housing as a transgender, HIV+ woman.

One prominent feature of the exhibition, which can at times feel a bit heavy-handed, is the inclusion of architectural and residential leitmotifs — curatorial interventions threaded throughout the space. Crown molding, curtains, and wallpaper serve as facile symbols of domesticity, though these latter two elements, interestingly, host a collection of decorative patterns by a relatively more international crop of artists. Examples by Americans Carl George and Avram Finkelstein, who caricatures the pharmaceutical industry's grip on self-care, are complemented by designs from Cuban-born Rafael Sánchez, Canadian-born Anthea Black, and South Korean-born Yeonjune Jung. Jung's printed wallpaper from 2014, for example, camouflages acts of anti-LGBTQ violence and policing within otherwise bucolic vignettes — an approach conceptually reminiscent of Robert Gober's "Hanging Man / Sleeping Man" (1989).



Avram Finkelstein, "Peace Through Chemistry" (2013), wallpaper adapted from Worker's Apartment



Lee Snider, ACT UP Rally at City Hall Park (1988)

One unfortunate shortcoming of *AIDS at Home* lies in its virtual omission of the intersection between sexual orientation and a national health epidemic on one hand, and race and non-normative gender identities on the other. The fact that people of color and both transgender and other queer-identified individuals experienced disproportionately greater prejudice in their fight against HIV/AIDS is largely overlooked here. As writer and activist Sarah Schulman reminded the audience during the aforementioned panel discussion, the HIV/AIDS crisis came to national attention at a time when a certain class of white gay men exhibited symptoms to be studied, supplanting a longer, preexistent history of the disease's spread throughout other communities. This point finds little momentum within the exhibition itself, yet the underlying inequity and its present-day dangers beg for more sustained attention.

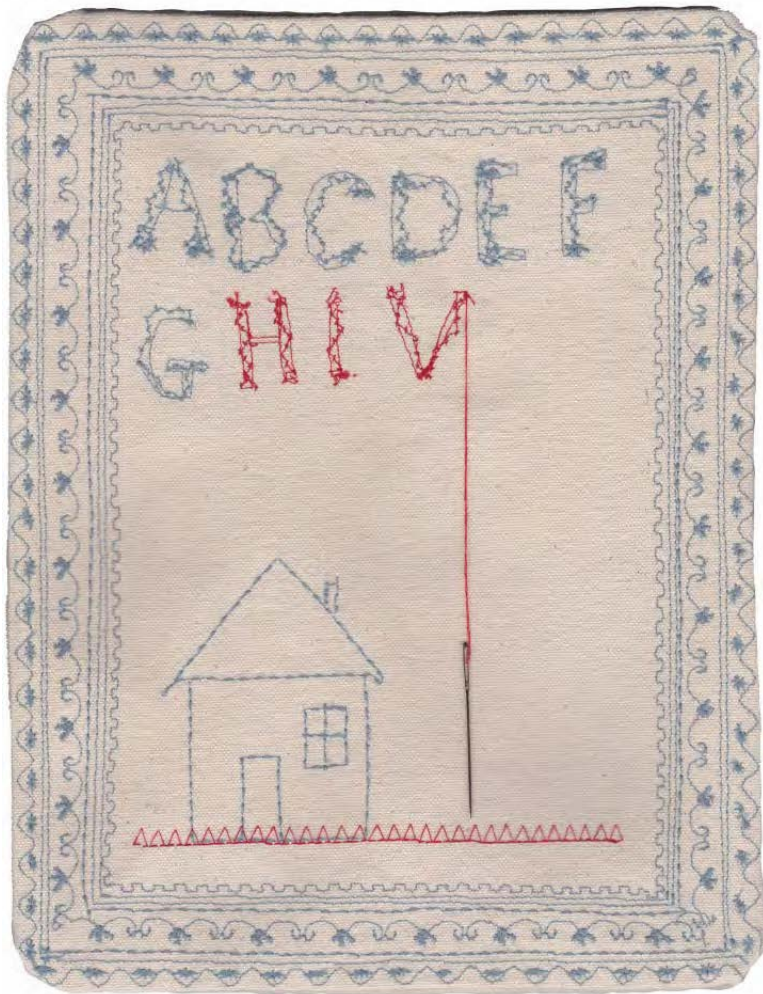


Luna Luis Ortiz, "Self-portrait (Reality Sets In)" (1996)

AIDS at Home concludes in its determination that, thanks to so much of the personal, political, and organizational activism archived in the galleries, the transmission and threat of HIV/AIDS today has been tempered by significant medical advances and wide-scale advocacy. And yet, the reality of HIV/AIDS persists. In the final gallery, Ben Cuevas riffs on both the primacy and (for many) unattainability of medication, Kia LaBeija unveils the emotional toll placed on those born HIV+, and Jeffrey Scott Wilson exposes how, to this day, the disease can immediately interrupt the course of one's livelihood. Perhaps these disjointed concluding narratives argue that HIV/AIDS will not leave a singular legacy — somewhat fitting for a disease that snakes its way into so many lives and calls for the dismantling of dominant power structures in the name of survival.



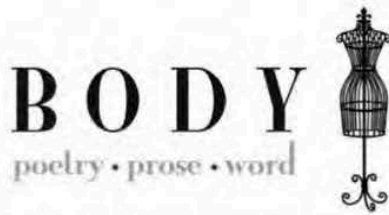
Kia Labeija, "The First Ten Years" (2014)



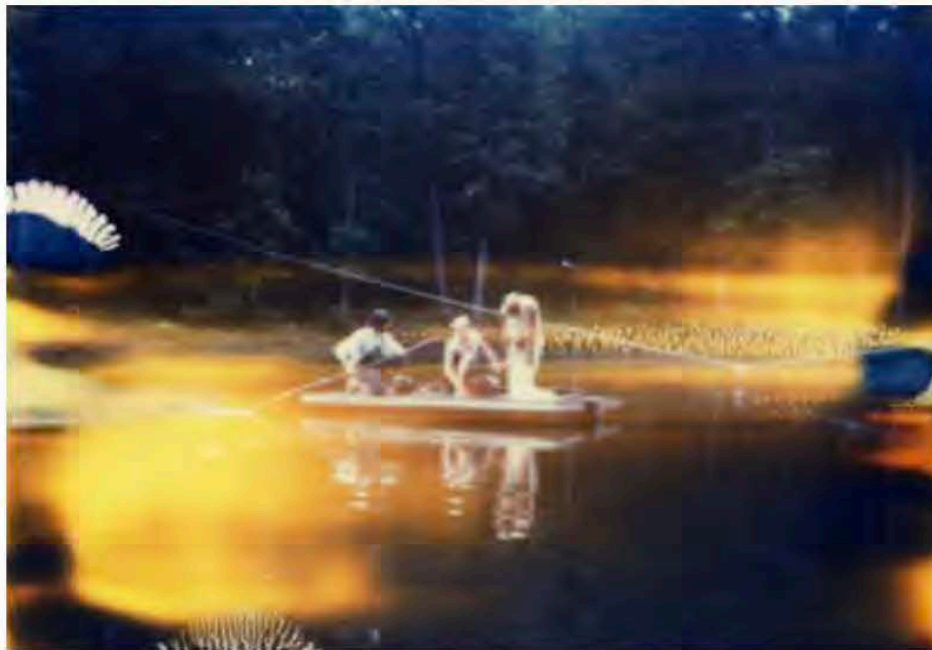
Jeffrey Scott Wilson, HIV Sampler (2013)

AIDS at Home: Art and Everyday Activism continues at Museum of the City of New York (1220 Fifth Avenue) through October 22, 2017.

MARTOS GALLERY



BALLOON(S) TALK: JIM FLETCHER INTERVIEWS RAFAEL SANCHEZ



Feature Image (above): Rafael Sánchez, Bedtime-story, 1993. Photo by Claire Barnier.

BESIDE THE BED

Someone has shut the shining eyes, straightened and folded
The wandering hands quietly covering the unquiet breast
So, smoothed and silenced you lie, like a child, not again to be questioned or scolded:
But, for you, not one of us believes that this is rest.

Not so to close the windows down can cloud and deaden
The blue beyond; or screen the wavering flame subdue its breath:
Why, if I lay my cheek to your cheek, your grey lips, like dawn, would quicken and redden,
Breaking into that old odd smile at this fraud of death.

Because all night you have not turned to us or spoken
It is time for you to wake; your dreams were never very deep:
I, for one, have seen the thin bright, twisted threads of them dimmed and suddenly broken.
This is only a most piteous pretense of sleep !

— *Charlotte Mew*
1869-1928

Balloon(s) Talk

(A conversation in NYC, from November 2004, on BEDTimestory / BOOG-A-LOO performed at the Rushmore Festival in NY, July 4, 1994, by Rafael Sánchez, Mike Grimes, Mark Neston, John Schachter)

Jim Fletcher: You performed *Boog-a-loo* twice?

Rafael Sánchez: No, once. We performed what we used as the intro to *Boog-a-loo* on the same site the previous summer, in 1993, as part of an outdoor sculpture project, *Outside Possibilities* that Bill Arning curated on the grounds of the Rushmore Festival. My invitation was to create a performance work for the opening event. I chose to utilize the lake, out back. The original piece was called *Bedtimestory*. Bill had asked me to make it memorable. I guessed that it was when the festival invited me back afterwards to elaborate on what I had done for Bill's show which then became *Bedtimestory* + *Boog-a-loo* the following year. So *Bedtimestory* was performed twice and *Boog-a-loo* only once, later. *Bedtimestory*, the first time, was performed with Matthew Benedict and Mark Neston. Mike Grimes worked with me on the soundtrack for both, but he replaced Matthew on the raft the following year.



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens

J: What was the virginal experience like? The 1993. I mean, I like that the raft also works as a stage...

R: Floating like on a bed into sleep. And I had come across the Charlotte Mew poem from the turn of the last century, "Beside the Bed," which, aside from the setting of the lake, was my point of departure. Mew wrote the poem in wake of the death of her sister.

J: I like looking at the landscape as I listen to the soundtrack you made with Mike Grimes.

R: Well, the first time around it was storming violently all day... and there was this gathering for the occasion... busses of people had come from New York City for the outdoor sculpture show and the stormy weather kept everyone inside. But we were the performance, so we proceeded as if we were going to go through with it, the show on the lake... We set it all up in total chaos. Extreme sound wiring, on the fly, never worked with these folks before... and through all kinds of rain and mud. So at the end of the day it was like, "How did you do that?" Well, you hear this sound from the lake, (we had the Black Sabbath storm with the bell built into the soundtrack), and you don't know if it's coming from the weather or not. It was coming out of the forest somewhere where we rigged everything. And here we are, these figures from the distant shore, slowly drifting towards the shore where the people assembled ... I remember very clearly. We were scheduled for 2pm. It was pouring rain. The first bus left at 3pm and another was about to leave at 3:30. We launched the piece at 3 just as the weather broke long enough for us to perform for those that stayed for the second bus.

J: Was the raft already there?

R: Yes, it existed as a floating dock which we detached from the shore and rigged. The cordless mike with us on the raft was live.

J: Your performances are like musicals, in a way. Among the songs you used here is the Melanie song, "Candles in the Rain"... it's very Woodstock.

R: Yes, New York state, and the Hudson River Valley are historical in that way and I guess I extended that feeling by using that song. The choice was intentionally blatant. It was the early nineties and the AIDS crisis had reached a critical tipping point and had become a significant force in most of our lives. The lyric of the song was pertinent and took on new meanings twenty five years after Melanie wrote it about Woodstock. "We bled inside each other's wounds... We all had caught the same disease"... and its about love and it refrains with themes of rain and fire which brings us back to the lake and the storm... the setting. Its also about being unbound... and together.

J: So you went from *Bedtimestory*... sleep into a dance, *Boog-a-loo*.

R: Yes. There were so many themes that were running through my mind as I assembled both pieces. After the first run with the raft I couldn't help thinking about the boat lifts from Cuba and the theme of personal exodus... and yes to make a dance of it at least in my mind, hence *Boog-a-loo*. And yes sleep into dance... so its kind of a soupy phrasing. Looking back now it all seems very raw, thematically, anyway. I think that's why now I like to refer to the singular images as perfect... they somehow strip the moment to its essentials.



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

J: It looks shrouded in the past.

R: Well, in a way we can't help going back. And the past is an ever-present resource. But ultimately as much as you go back, you ask yourself what does that mean to me now? Then there is no irony or nostalgia. It's an engagement with the present that is interesting.

J: Right, like playing a song that was made years ago now seen in a new light. It's like living backwards... what's going on now somehow changes the past.

R: At the risk of sounding grandiose, it's an *ancient* song, really. Sometimes I feel that I'm working within a template that's already been prescribed. What's great is working through it and actually living it and understanding what these things are made of inside of a life. And it has to be your life. That's the only real reference and that's where it has its power.

J: And conflict.

R: Yes. And the romanticism gets stripped away.

J: What do you mean?

R: Well you have to fight. The intricacies of life don't necessarily want to go there with you and accompany the things you've come to believe in, or for that matter the things you desire or envision.

So these intricacies have to somehow move *towards* the work. And you can't do it alone. You have to find your brethren. This is not romantic. This is real.

J: I like what you said once about going at it as if you're making something, and then you realize that you've placed yourself with it into an unpredictable situation. That's why I like the balloons so much. You never know what they are going to do.

R: You never know. You can structure the work as much as you want, but there is always that thing that will surprise you.

J: And there is nothing more surprising than a balloon. Even if you're just watching it get bigger and bigger and you know it's ready to pop... but, God damn when it pops. [... !!!]

R: They are enigmas. Almost sphinx-like. They have this life to them but you don't know what that life is at all.

J: And these balloons have something benevolent to them. There's something about their silence. Also the guys on the raft, they also have great spirit to them... they're not selfish at all. They're workers.

R: They've given themselves to it.

J: Right, and not only have the balloons given themselves... but they are up there in the sky taking it all up.

R: Well the whole thing is a machine really. And a machine has many parts that work together at once. But the balloons *are* ultimately benign. They're just doing their thing... going with the flow.

J: Yes. And they give themselves up at the first request...

R: Every thing about it is doing that. For example, the elements at play: air, water, earth, then the balloons explode and we have fire. These are the elements engaged within a gesture. And I wanted this experience that would reveal this somehow. And I wanted these things to maintain a continuity and a relationship to each other. It's an ancient engine, really. That's the power of it. But you don't even notice that this is what's making it work.



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

J: Yes, you don't want to bug out on the fact that the raft is floating on the water.

R: Well, it's an exaggerated gesture. A grotesque, if you will. You're floating and then that gesture is extended up. And in a way it's a symbol of the desire to break free of flesh and / or of gravity, or whatever is holding you. But ultimately we don't and that's what's interesting... how that gesture rubs up against reality. And the caress is unsettling... and the caress is also sweet.

J: Then the dress is pulled all the way up and that's a great moment... your flesh exposed. There's something very moving. It's like a love affair. You don't just want escape. The part that holds you is total hot love. With your dick out... with the dress up in the air, and the balloons popping. That's a hot time right there. And it's a love affair. And at times its like a fight. Especially at that moment when the gunpowder zippers ignite and pop the balloons. And your nakedness under all the white cloth is so... well, it's got something like the indignity of underwear.

R: Earthy.

J: Its juicy. And this thing about being free of your bounds is just half of it. That's just half of the love affair. I find that the matter, or what you describe as the circumstances of life, or what holds you... you could just as easily describe that as the unreal and the part that's ascending could be the real.

R: They flip-flop. They toggle and they're interwoven. That's where art exists.

J: And the past and the present do that too. Just like when the thunderstorm stopped and you guys had the thunderstorm sound tracked all-ready. It's as if you made the break in the weather, but actually you just got your asses in gear and went out and went for it when the weather broke. But everyone was flipped out because it looked like the weather broke for you. That was a flip-flop of circumstances. You guys were down and dirty, slogging in the mud, and you're asking yourselves, "are we even going to get a chance to do this?" And people were doubting you. But when it was done, the tables were reversed. It's like then everything broke for you, and it was divine, and everything else was like the earth and the mud. It just toggled on you. It's like living backwards. And the music did it too. It's as if that song was made for now, that's how precedence serves what's happening, it's as if this present thing actually preceded or caused the other. And that happens a lot with your work, because you launch yourself. You made a machine right there where you just set yourself into the elements. It's not like you knew how you were going to control everything, but you wanted to make a machine... like a Jules Verne machine... like the balloon in Mysterious Island. You set yourself into the elements, and then whatever's going to happen is going to happen, but you addressed it as completely as you could, with the dress and the music...

R: You know that you don't know what's going to happen. You create the machine and when the elements take over you see what it really is.

J: It's like building a ship.

R: And you want to go somewhere with this ship, but you don't know where you're going to go... really.

J: And you don't know what's going to happen with your canvases and things that are made to catch the elements and to float and to fly and to... go somewhere... and to be beautiful.

R: So it's like to be unbound is really to be bound, right? Is that the lesson of the balloon?

J: What do you mean to be unbound is to be bound?



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

R: Well, you actually go through with it and create this gesture that in a way is a desire to break free, and explore and to touch the cosmos, whatever. And then you realize that to feel the mud and to actually go through it in real time and a real physical place with real circumstances and people and what everything is actually made of... is that where we find meaning in the work?

J: I find that it's so much like lovers. The part that's bound is like somebody who doesn't want to let go of you, or when you toggle... –you want to say “you”– like always you have at least a couple of different entities going on so “you” the one that's down there as opposed to “you” the one that's up there... but it's a real love problem.

R: It is.

J: There's jealousy....

R: Very much so.... That's the rub. It's almost like we cannot be noble. Maybe that's what I mean – it's like *wanting* to be free of these things, these bounds, and expect to be noble.

J: You're trying to leave your lover!

R: But you cannot do that. Yeah, you can't leave your lover and be noble. It's a huge conflict. The conflict is the setting for it all. I think so. Real human feeling. We're very complex. You want your cake and eat it too constantly in life. These are the things we explore in art. With the paintings it's the same thing, it's that tension, really... that's the running theme.... because you love your lover.

J: Totally. Let *him* try to go away and see what you do, you know? Then it toggles.

R: It constantly turns.

J: It's funny that toggle, you have to be on the toggle. You have to understand the toggle.

R: That's the song. That's the song. That's constantly the song.

J: It's like that ship. And a lot of the instruments on this ship are symbolic instruments, they're symbols but they work as instruments. You know classically when you see a symbol, it strictly is the symbol standing for something. But when the symbol is actually like an instrument on a ship, like an astrolabe or something, or like the dress, it's a symbol that can toggle into a material item... anything could toggle back into that exalted position that the dress is in. Look at that dress at the end when you're dragging it through the woods. That's crazy! After all that, and then it's just bedraggled like underwear that's been tossed aside, and been rained on!

R: It always ends up there, in the end.



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

J: I love that you get there. What if you ended it in the middle, when the dress is up in all its glory...?

R: As nasty as that mud can be, it's full of life?

J: Yeah, it's scary how full of potency it is. It's not just placid fertility. It's frightening. That pool is active.

R: Yeah, we set up a situation and then you know, you start to see all the details. All the details that are in the funk. It's a machine unto itself. Like on that lake, you know, it was just filled, filled with balancing organisms, and tadpoles, and frogs, and nests. And in the woods there were rattlesnakes...

J: Really?

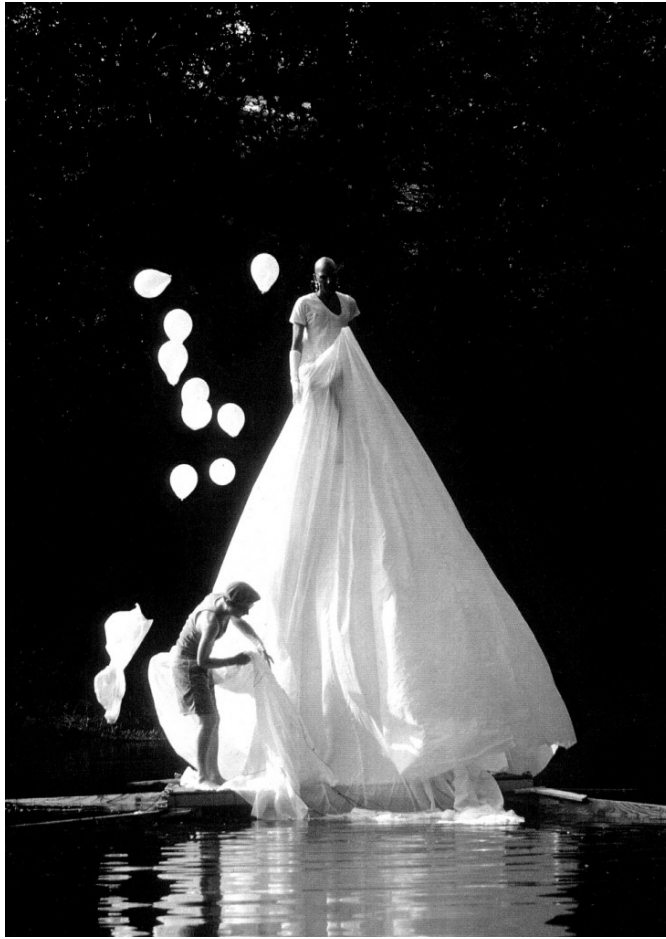
R: Yeah. And all kinds of creatures. It's all so very alive, and when you experience those things, you wonder about the minuteness of your own gestures... Like to all that life that was going on around us during that piece, all that life could really give a fuck about what we were up to and struggling to create. Somewhere though I imagine all the tadpoles and rattlesnakes cheering us on... because it's a life force thing, and in that way we're actually cheering them on too... right? It's just a moment in time really. If the photographer hadn't been there it would have been really like kind of nothing, you know? So the ethereality of it is powerful too.

J: Well you said that looking at the stills is almost the preferred way to see it.

R: The beauty of it for me now is that it exists that way as moments, and certainly for whomever happened to be there, with all its roughness. And running into people that did see it, on occasion, you realize that what does stand out is that image, the kind of singular image of the moment.... Sometimes I feel like I know I'm going to kind of walk into a dream, then I go into it, you know, in the way you go to sleep. There's going to be a newness to it because these are not common places or events as much as they may pretend to be and time becomes irrelevant. And I listen to that, the voice of the dream, the one that doesn't have any rules, and it's always surprising you.

J: I guess in some ancient models the masculine is the sky and the earth is the feminine, the fertile. But in this, it's not exactly like that, if anything the masculine lover is the one that comes from underneath.

R: It's all rolled into one, this is where the androgynous aspect is for sure. In this piece the masculine and feminine are together in fertility. And I don't mean fertility in the sense of generating human life. I mean within the cosmic realm: a fertile engagement with the whole universe, it is fertility and passion as a whole thing, and of ideas, and of engagement with the world on its own terms. When you do that you're engaging with beauty, no matter where you turn. And this is the androgynous quality we're striving for.



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

J: The fertility of a balloon which is a membrane that's holding a different kind of air on the inside from what's outside, that's a kind of fertile conflict. Because of the tension of that membrane.

R: And the membrane describes androgyny as in that it equally holds *and* reveals. When I first performed with a balloon on stage, per chance just doing a very small act, it blew my mind. Holding the balloon suspended in time and space in front of everybody... the power of it was so fantastic I wondered a lot about it. I wondered where that was coming from. It was a symbolic energy... of the way the balloon exists... it had a very singular, androgynous power.

J: I love symbolism that is like an instrument. It's not the end, it's not a terminal symbolism. But one thing I love also about balloons is that they give themselves up on the first encounter with some kind of objecting force... pop! okay, gone.

R: Remember when we were first trying to figure out how to get *inside* a balloon? You were the first person to help me try that: I said to myself, "I know I want to be in this balloon, how are we going to do this?" And we just kept fumbling through it. The balloons kept teaching us things with each try. It was the balloons telling us. They were speaking to us.... And I knew it would take time, because we needed to learn. And it was like, "We aren't going to teach this balloon tricks, it is going to teach us a few things." So we engineered around the balloon.

J: Right, and we only had but so many balloons we could use so we had to learn as much as we could each time. That was great. And still, it was all like, “I wonder if this is going to happen?” And it never worked! Until we did it in the performance. We had never had a successful dry run. Never. It only seemed to work with the audience.

R: Is that the lesson of the balloon? What’s that about? I’m always amazed by that. Everything is telling you No, no no, no no. Then suddenly, when the moment comes, when you have everything to lose and the audience has gathered, and somehow it gives itself up to you. Because ultimately you become equal with that force, in your will. Somewhere I feel that your will is being respected. Like the moment has come and everyone is in on it with you and there it is, shared... living and present.

J: It really reminds me of Jules Verne, he launches himself into the circumstances, the weather, the balloon falling, and not knowing exactly where he is geographically, but once you’ve made your vessel, to launch yourself, you’ve entered yourself into the circumstances, and you’ve built this thing like a ship, and whatever happens is what happens, that’s the lesson of the balloon.

R: There’s no model, and no script. And all you can do is build a machine, you know, the armature for it. And in a way it’s kind of like, you’re just playing because you don’t know, it’s all kind of like...



Rafael Sánchez. Photo by Rainer Behrens.

J: Like the Wright Brothers.

R: It's all mockery because you realize that you don't know anything, you just have this kind of... desire... but it's really... pretension.

J: It's like all those old films you see of airplanes when they were trying to make airplanes, trying to fly, they are amazing.

R: Yeah and the failures are so much more interesting than the Wright Brothers actually flying. It's almost like it's all over now. Once they finally figured out how to fly the fun was all over.

J: Right. You just can't fly that way anymore. When you become unbound you're actually bound. Because once they realized flight, now, you have to go to the airport and get on it, you know... it's like taking a bus.

R: It's not a feeling of freedom at all. The freedom was in the desire to fly... that was the love affair, and that was the freedom, and once you got what you wanted...

J: ... one of the lovers got dropped. And it's not there anymore.

R: No.

J: It's gone.

R: It's gone... flying is banal now... even tedious.

J: Right because one of the lovers got dropped!

R: You're not in it anymore

J: Right, it's not happening, it's not happening! But to be bound, which can mean to be held, also can mean to be bound for something or somewhere: *To be bound...*!

R: Yes!

RAFAEL SÁNCHEZ is a Cuban born artist practicing in New York City. He worked for Robert Whitman Projects (Dia Art Foundation) while studying at Rutgers University (1981-84), He was a founding member of Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, located then in Newark's Roseville neighborhood. *Look Don't Touch* (presented there in 1985), utilized a nearby highway underpass as an inter-zone of existential intimacy. He has since created works for rooftops, canals, barges, urban, suburban and rural contexts. It was at a work set in a garden in Brooklyn, performing as a flower, that Rafael and Jim Fletcher became friends. Other project venues have included Usine Ephemere (Paris, 1989), Foundation ELBA (Netherlands, 1993), X-Teresa Arte Actual (Mexico City, 1996), Braziers (UK, 1999 and 2004). In New York City projects have been presented at Participant Inc, as well as numerous presentations for Visual AIDS. In partnership with Kathleen White, works were

realized for Art in General, El Museo del Barrio, MoMA Library. *A Rake's Progress*, an installation by the collaborators was presented at Momenta Art, NY in August (2014). One of Rafael's paintings becomes a wallpaper and curtain in *AIDS at Home; Art and Everyday Activism*, currently on view at The Museum of the City of New York (through October 22).



Rafael Sánchez and Jim Fletcher in 2008. Photo by Shana Fletcher.

About the Interviewer:

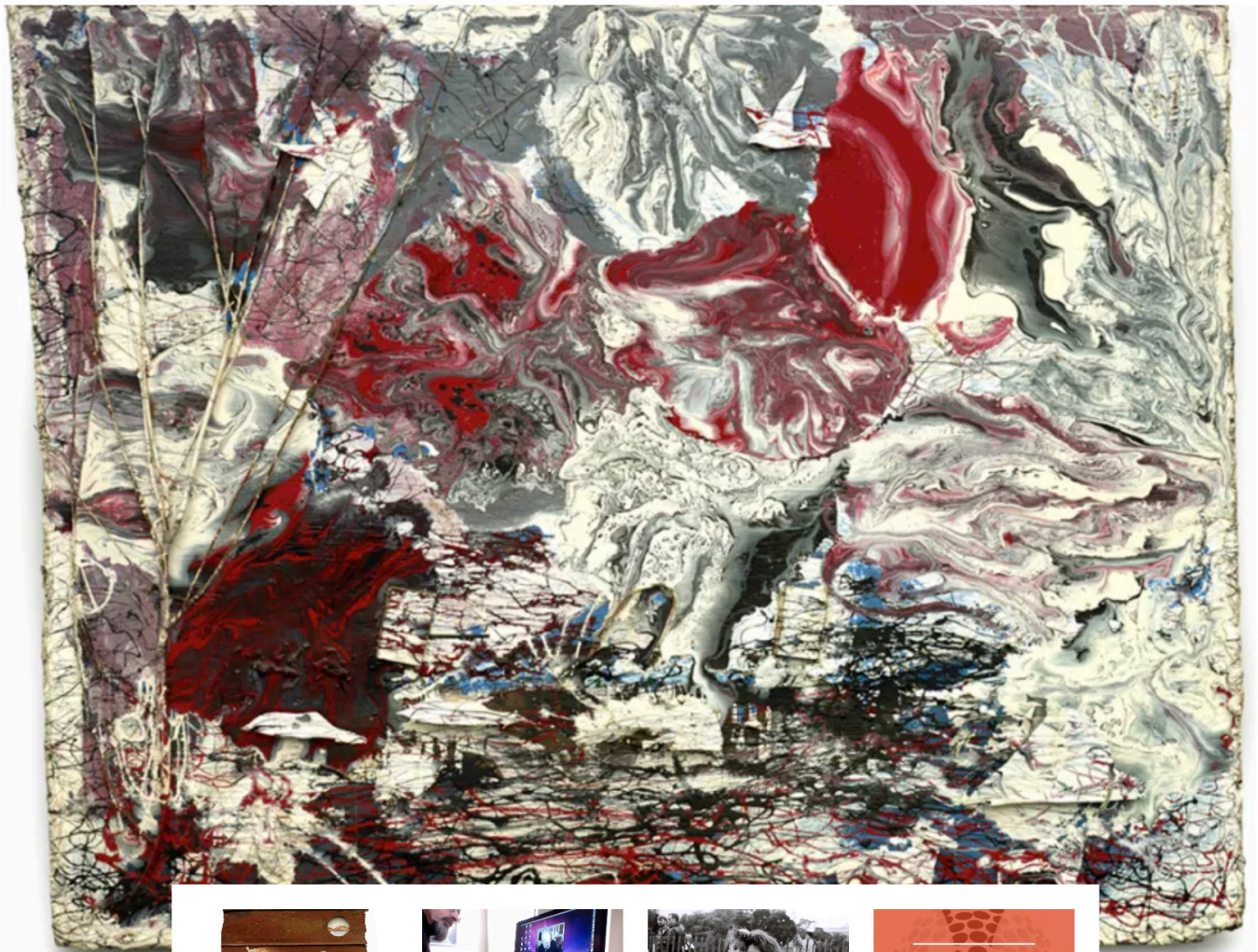
JIM FLETCHER's first professional theatrical performance was in Mr. Sánchez's *The Libation Bearers* (Thread Waxing Space, 1999), sparking an enduring collaborative friendship. A loose retelling of Aeschelus' tale, *The Libation Bearers* was re-scripted around a soundtrack of early catalogue (no synthesizers) Queen songs. Mr. Fletcher is a longtime member of the New York City Players, Elevator Repair Service, The Wooster Group, and the English theater company Forced Entertainment (*Sight is the Sense That Dying People Tend to Lose First* and *Quizoola!*), most recently in Cairo, Egypt. In 2011: Sarah Michelson's dance piece *Devotion* (The Kitchen, NYC, with text by Richard Maxwell). Film: *Utopians* (Zbigniew Bzymek, 2011); *Bass Ackwards* (Linas Phillips, 2010); *Raptorious* (Kamal Ahmed, 2007). He is also a participant in the writing projects of Bernadette Corporation. He won a 2012 Obie Award for Sustained Excellence.

MARTOS GALLERY

Art in America

Revisitation Phase: Looking at Art and AIDS

By [Eric Sutphin](#) July 20, 2016 10:48am



Since the apex of the AIDS crisis in the early 1990s, the prognoses of its survivors and people who are newly diagnosed with HIV have shifted dramatically, along with the art and artistic discourse around the disease. The traveling exhibition **“Art AIDS America,”** on view at [the Bronx Museum of the Arts](#) through September 25, features a varied selection of art from the earliest days of the crisis to the present. The exhibition coincides with other shows and events that can be seen as augmenting its perspective by giving additional visibility to AIDS-affected individuals and communities that have been neglected due to racial, gender, or institutional bias.

MARTOS GALLERY

“Fever Within: The Art of **Ronald Lockett**” at the **American Folk Art museum** is a sensitive and rich survey of the little-known vernacular artist, Ronald “Ronnie” Lockett (1965-1998). Though Lockett’s artistic career was brief, spanning just over ten years, he made over three hundred sculptures, paintings, and other objects in that period. He was born and raised in rural Alabama to parents who saw little value in their son’s interest in art. But his cousin, Thornton Dial, already an established artist, became his mentor and supplied him with materials when resources were short. In the early ’90s, Lockett made wall-mounted assemblages incorporating sheets of heavily rusted tin from a demolished outbuilding on his cousin Dial’s property. He hammered, cut and in some instances painted the battered tin surfaces, creating works reminiscent of Lee Bontecou’s metal assemblages or Rauschenberg’s Combines. Lockett made *Coming Out of the Haze* (1994) during a period of deep depression, shortly after he was diagnosed with HIV. An embossed image of a young buck appears amid furrows and folds of oxidized tin. The buck recurs throughout Lockett’s work as a corollary to the ideal black masculinity, which Lockett, slight and shy, failed to conform to. The artist feared that news of his HIV status would confirm his community’s suspicion that he was gay. Whether he was in denial about his illness or he willingly embraced a premature death, Lockett ignored the symptoms that led to the pneumonia that killed him in 1998.

Stories like Lockett’s are tragic examples of how fear and shame compounded with a lack of advocacy can prevent people with AIDS from receiving appropriate medical and emotional support, even to this day. Whether referring to the stewardship of artists’ archives or to the direct medical, spiritual, and emotional needs of people with AIDS, the notion of care has been a common topic of several programs this summer. During the crisis, artists often assumed the roles not only of activists and advocates but also of caregivers as their friends became sick and began to die. On July 14, **Visual AIDS**, a nonprofit that has used art to shape the discourse around AIDS since 1988, held a panel discussion at **The 8th Floor**, where the group exhibition “In the Power of Your Care” is on view through August 12. Titled “IV Embrace: On Caregiving and Creativity,” the discussion included Rafael Sánchez, an artist who acted as caregiver to Mark Morrisroe and others; **Joy Episalla**, an artist and ACT-UP member; **Lodz Joseph**, a healthcare worker who has worked extensively with HIV/AIDS patients; and **Ted Kerr**, a writer and organizer whose work and research focuses on HIV/AIDS. Both Joseph and Kerr are members of What Would an HIV Doula Do, a collective of artists, writers, activists, and chaplains who work with individuals recently diagnosed with HIV. Kerr moderated the discussion, during which Sanchez and Episalla relayed their personal stories of acting as caregivers to friends, while Joseph offered a more clinical presentation about the importance of “self care” as a necessary precondition to rendering service to others. Kerr described this renewed attention to AIDS and those affected as indicators that we have entered the “revisitation phase;” when issues including women’s health, senior care, poverty, and racial inequality are finally given their due after a long period when HIV had the image of a gay men’s disease.

One of the works in “In the Power of Your Care” was a video titled *Medication Reminder* (2015) by **Hunter Reynolds**, an artist-activist who gained recognition for his *Memorial Dress* performance (1993-2007), which involved donning an evening gown printed with the names of more than twenty thousand people who died of AIDS. For the recent video, Reynolds compiled a series of recorded voice messages of his friend, artist **Kathleen White**, who called him daily for a year and a half beginning in 2011 to remind him to take his antiviral medications. Her raspy, gentle voice accompanies animations of pills morphing into kaleidoscopic designs, and glitter-encrusted hands gesturing as pearls spill into containers overflowing with multicolored pills. White died of lung cancer in 2014, transforming *Medication Reminder* into a memorial.

MARTOS GALLERY

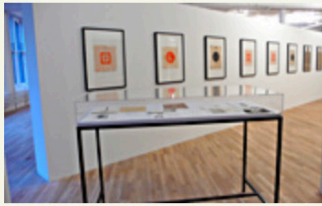
In June, Reynolds joined artist [Vincent Tiley](#) for a performance at the fledgling Christopher Stout Gallery in Brooklyn's Bushwick neighborhood. The two artists wore a neoprene suit that conjoined their bodies. The performance was titled *Knast*, after an iconic, defunct Berlin fetish club. Reynolds was given a leather sling salvaged from Knast by a lover who died shortly thereafter. Before the performance, Reynolds passed the relic to Tiley, a gesture that suggested a call to a younger generation of artists who will inherit the memory and object history of AIDS.

"A Deeper Dive," on view through September 25 at the [Leslie-Lohman Museum](#) of Gay and Lesbian Art in Soho, presents the work of nine artists who are included in "Art AIDS America." It is organized by Jonathan David Katz, one of the curators of the bigger show, in collaboration with Andrew Barron. As the title suggests, "A Deeper Dive" features a more comprehensive array of the selected artists' work. The first images one sees when entering the museum are [Ann P Meredith](#)'s black-and-white photographs of HIV positive women and children from the mid- to late 1980s. Most arresting was *Eleana y Rosa, the Ellipse at the White House, Washington, DC* (1988), which depicts a gaunt, exhausted-looking young girl in the embrace of her mother, who crouches beside her. Meredith said in an interview that when she visited women with AIDS in San Francisco in the early 1980s to take their portraits, she was "asked by a security guard at the apartment building to leave her ID in case they needed to identify her body."

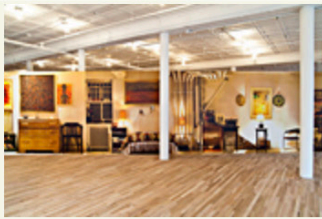
"A Deeper Dive" also includes two 1993 works from [Anthony Viti](#)'s "Elegies" series that include the German Iron Cross, an image taken from Marsden Hartley's *Portrait of a German Officer* (1914). Like Hartley, Viti used the image of the cross as a reference to his own grief and anger. But he raised the stakes by incorporating his own blood into the painted surface. *Corpse* (1986) by Brian Buczak comprises five panels with a combined width of 165 inches. The painting depicts a human skeleton festooned with various objects and symbols—a flaming human heart, an urn, a flayed snake, a tea kettle—that confront the horror of illness and death while also expressing an acceptance of it. In retrospect, *Corpse* looks like a harbinger of the artist's own death in 1987.

"Art AIDS America" has prompted institutions and younger artists to rethink the ways in which AIDS is represented in art. But other artists, activists, and institutions have taken the exhibition as an opportunity to call attention to *who* is represented. We need to see the images of HIV-positive women of color in Meredith's photographs. The supportive care work being carried out by What Would an HIV Doula Do is equally important. We need to know how to talk to a friend or relative who might have been recently diagnosed with HIV. But we can't do that without a diverse and inclusive frame of reference.

GOTHAM ART & THEATER by Elisabeth Kley



Installation view of "Rip It Up and Start Again" at Artists Space



Installation view of "Rip It Up and Start Again" at Artists Space
Panoramic view of William S. Burroughs' bedroom in "the Bunker" at 222 Bowery, New York City (2010)
Photo by Daniel Pérez



William S. Burroughs
Target
1997
Artists Space



Charles Henri Ford
Poem Posters
ca. 1964
Courtesy Mitchell Alagus Gallery
Artists Space

William S. Burroughs, the inimitable literary master of hard living and apocalyptic horror, was a heroin addict who cut off his own pinkie, worked as an exterminator, and accidentally killed his common-law wife in 1951 while attempting to shoot a cocktail off the top of her head as they were playing William Tell. Nevertheless, he retained a lifelong affection for firearms and continued target practice for the rest of his life.

What does this have to do with art? Find out at Artists Space, where "Rip it Up and Start Again" can be seen until Feb. 20, 2010. Curated by an impressive assortment of presenters, including poet John Giorno, gallerist Mitchell Alagus and fictional artist **Claire Fontaine**, this fascinating show brings together works by Burroughs, artist **Ray Johnson**, poet Charles Henri Ford, musician Arthur Russell and Philippe Thomas (who started a fictional public relations agency called readymades belong to everyone®). All of them shared an interest in collaboration, collage and breaking down the boundaries between visual, written and musical art.

In 1958, Burroughs's friend **Brion Gysin** accidentally sliced up some newspaper words and rediscovered the idea of scrambling text into writing. Burroughs began using the technique to disorient the reader in a full-length 1961 novel, *The Soft Machine*. Johnson, the father of mail art, founded his New York Correspondence School in 1962, sending cryptic combinations of images and words on far-flung peregrinations. Two years later, Ford began assembling phrases from ads and headlines into evocative poems packed with double entendres.

A long diagonal wall in the center of Artists Space's open gallery is adorned on one side with a row of practice targets peppered with bullet holes and signed by Burroughs. The other side features a life-sized panoramic photograph of Burroughs's New York loft, where he lived from 1974 to 1980, and kept until he died of a heart attack in 1997 at the age of 83. More used targets can be seen hanging on the walls, along with a piss-colored, bullet-holed painting, the famous hat, a manual typewriter and a Burroughs cash register (his father invented the adding machine).

MARTOS GALLERY



Works by Ray Johnson at Artists Space
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co.



Works by Ray Johnson at Artists Space
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co.



Works by Ray Johnson at Artists Space
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co.



Works by Ray Johnson at Artists Space
Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co.

While Burroughs was killing household insects in Chicago, Charles Henri Ford (1913-2009) was in New York publishing *View* (1940-47), an avant-garde magazine with contributions from luminaries including Duchamp, Picasso, Dali, Henry Miller and Jean Genet. He also wrote poetry, and in the '60s he made an eye-popping series of "poem posters," large-scale photo silk-screens of collages combining images and words that worked as visual art and poetry at the same time, resembling ornamental Andy Warhol ransom notes.

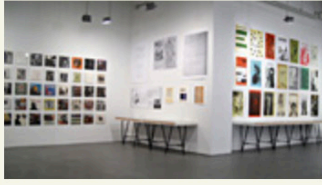
Photo-offset faces and figures are layered over and under collages of abstract shapes and words cut from magazines and newspapers. Plates appear in different combinations, with text hiding behind images, or image hiding behind text, depending on the colors of the ink -- ranging from hot reds and oranges to moody purples and browns.

Contrasting typefaces and aggressive cropping are vintage '60s pop, and Ford's contrary aphorisms and puns are equally subversive. *Fallen Woman*, for example, is an image of a female figure sprawling on her back with her arms stretched out. A hand holding a knife is poised above her body, and the words "Plan now" issue like a flower petal from a central circular image of an unplugged drain, perhaps a reference to the victim's life draining away. The word on another petal completes the phrase: "plan now for nowhere."

Ray Johnson (1927-1995), youngest of the three, was recognized as a genius only after he died, probably by suicide. A posthumous 1999 retrospective at the Whitney and a popular 2002 film have since appeared, along with regular exhibitions at Richard L. Feigen & Co. uptown, the gallery representing his estate. "Ray Johnson. . . Dali, Warhol and others: 'Main Ray, Ducham, Openheim, Pikabia,'" an in-depth collection of homages, parodies and dialogues with modernist artists and works of art, was on view there just last spring.

At Artists Space, six vitrines contain a more heterogeneous smattering of the letters, lists, drawings and collages Johnson tirelessly spewed out, weaving an impish web of interrelationships that turned 20th-century culture into a single extended personal salon filled with wacky encounters. Engineering an imaginary meeting between Jacques Derrida and Harpo Marx, for example, Johnson sent a letter to Derrida (really his friend Alan Bass) recounting an envelope's attempt to find Marx in "Jacquesonville" Florida.

MARTOS GALLERY



Installation view of "Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal, Issue #10" at White Columns



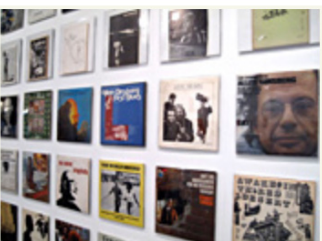
Installation view of "Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal, Issue #10" at White Columns



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Installation view of "Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal, Issue #10" at White Columns



Installation view of "Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal, Issue #10" at White Columns

Another vitrine is filled with a series of riffs on ships attacked by giant octopi, and the next is devoted to the poet Marianne Moore. A yellowed newspaper photograph features Moore in her signature hat sitting stiffly between two empty chairs. A heart has been cut from her upper torso, and "Marianne Moore's lapels" is scrawled below. Nearby is a photocopy of note cards from Moore refusing visits, showing that rejection never slowed down Johnson - the ultimate fan. "Thank you very much," one says, "but I am compressing myself rather than expanding."

Other highlights include a drawing called *256 Spanish Stuffed Queen Olives*, resembling a herd of goggling eyes, and a calligraphic invitation to send for a free copy of Ray Johnson's new book *Cannibal Piss*. Ray Johnson's history of Lucy Lippard (1966-71) includes "Lucy trips over Montgomery Clift's fingernails" and "Teeny Duchamp has damp shoes" -- wonderful bits of poetry showing that Johnson's genius was as literary as it was visual.

"Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal"

Clearly on a similar wavelength, Sonic Youth founder and publication collector Thurston Moore once asked, "Can you find someone to pay me to draft a script about the lives of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs and their intersecting relationship through the countercultural 20th century?" Although Moore is best known for ferociously atonal noise rock, he is also a major poetry fan and a cultural historian, having written histories of Grunge and '70s No-Wave rock.

"Ecstatic Peace Poetry Journal, Issue #10," an exhibition held in honor of the tenth edition of a magazine Moore began publishing yearly in 2001, is on view at White Columns. Inspired by the homemade mimeographed poetry magazines from the '60s, EPPJ is an eponymous publication (often co-edited by Byron Coley) that includes poetry and a few images from pioneers like Bill Berkson, Tuli Kupferberg, Gerard Malanga and Richard Hell, side by side with offerings from younger contributors including **Jutta Koether**, Jocko Weyland and Georganne Deen.

Blown up covers and pages from EPPJ can be seen on the entry walls, but the bulk of the show is a raucous gathering of vintage publications from Moore's collection displayed in vitrines. Reproduced posters of covers and inner pages hang on the walls, along with some poetry LPs. Most of the books and zines were mimeographed and given away or sold for a dollar or less.

MARTOS GALLERY



Sánchez and Kathleen White rearrange entire publications on tables. *BOOKS RECORDS TAPES*



Rafael Sánchez & Kathleen White
BOOKS RECORDS TAPES
Ongoing
Art in General



Rafael Sánchez & Kathleen White
BOOKS RECORDS TAPES (detail)
Ongoing
Art in General



Rafael Sánchez & Kathleen White
BOOKS RECORDS TAPES (detail)
Ongoing
Art in General



Rafael Sánchez & Kathleen White
BOOKS RECORDS TAPES (detail)
Ongoing
Art in General

Free love, drugs and marijuana are celebrated in a trip back to the psychedelic era, a time when uninhibited poetry sprouted as freely as weeds in an empty lot. Cover images range from vaguely Egyptian doodles to Warhol photos, sex scenes, nudes, and abstract stripes and dots. Wonderful titles include *Sick Fly*, *Suction*, *Drainage*, *Purr* and *Meatball*. The summer 1967 issue of *The Willie*, "promoting ACID in the Maggot Eye" was edited by "willie the snort gobbler w/football hair for earmuffs," and "dirty poems for your suicide lives" are by Neeli Cherry and Charles Bukowski. The exhibition closes on February 20.

"Double Bill"

Rather than juggling phrases and words, Rafael Sánchez and Kathleen White rearrange entire publications on tables. *BOOKS RECORDS TAPES*, a year-round situational art piece and street sale they've been curating on the sidewalk in front of his apartment for years, can now be seen indoors at Art in General in a show called "Double Bill," was curated by Redmond Entwistle.

The project by Sanchez and White at first resembles other motley collections of scavenged items often peddled on sidewalks, but closer inspection reveals that this arcane assemblage of books and magazines seems to be engaged in an animated silent dialogue.

A flyer from Mark Morrisroe's posthumous 1994 exhibition at Pat Hearn gallery is placed in front of a book about stain removal, bringing the scribbles and chemical blotches that often appeared on his photographs to mind, as well as their sexual content. Nearby is a collection of all five issues of *Dirt*, the Xeroxed magazine made by Morrisroe and Lynelle White from 1975-77, as reproduced by *aLLuPiNiT*, a non-profit organization founded by Sánchez and Kathleen White in 2007.

A pamphlet called "Bats need friends" sits by a vintage cross-dresser's newspaper called *The Transvestian*, conjuring Transylvanian drag. Magazines and music scores hang diagonally from the front of the tables, including a publication on doll collecting, a manual for "safety and security for older Americans" and the score for a song called Mitzi's Rendezvous, or "Pussy." And in the collection of maps and guidebooks below, "Journey into the Universe" is opposed by "One Big Prison: Freedom of Movement in Gaza."

MARTOS GALLERY



Text painting by Mary Billyou in "Double Bill" at Art in General



Still from *Monuments* by Redmond Entwistle in "Double Bill" at Art in General

Sánchez is also a visual and performing artist who starred (wearing diapers) in his 1999 full-length version of Aeschylus's *The Libation Bearers* (performed to lip-synced tunes from the rock band Queen's early catalogue). His stencils sometimes make stealth appearances on various publications. A pile of books on Che Guevara, Castro and revolutionary Cuba, for example, is near an elementary science textbook with a gold silhouette of Castro on the cover over a cloudy sky.

An edition of William Wordsworth poetry published in 1970 has a worn spine touched up with gold leaf. The slipcase is stenciled with a silhouette of Wordsworth, after a tracing from the Bewick engraving on the frontpiece inside -- turning the English Romantic's face into a jagged black mask. This artist's book is available for only \$80, and the rest of the items can also be bought during gallery hours at prices ranging from \$2 to \$2,225 for some very rare items.

The exhibition also features Suzanne Goldenberg's rickety sculptures made from fragile bits of cardboard balanced on a framework of scrap wood, some black and white text paintings by Mary Billyou and *Monuments*, a film by curator Redmond Entwistle that recreates a visit to New Jersey's industrial wasteland by **Dan Graham**, **Robert Smithson** and **Gordon Matta-Clark**. The show is up until Mar. 20, 2010.

ELISABETH KLEY is a New York artist and writer.

MARTOS GALLERY

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW; *Rafael Sánchez -- 'Balloons Umbrellas Turntables'*

By ROBERTA SMITH OCT. 1, 2004

Participant 95 Rivington Street, Lower East Side Through Oct. 10



Weather Station, 2004

Rafael Sánchez, a Cuban-born artist who lives in New York, is known primarily for surreal, shape-shifting performances, one of which recounted Aeschylus' "Libation Bearers" to the tunes (lip-synched) of the rock band Queen. Mr. Sánchez's first New York gallery exhibition confirms a sensibility both refined and antic whose heroes might include Jean Cocteau and George Brecht.

He migrates effortlessly among mediums and disciplines: from paintings, to drawings, to sculptures, to a small stage set that he will use for performances during the show's closing weekend. The props, effects and narratives of theater recur in images of curtains, balloons and umbrellas, while sculptures use revolving turntables to imbue some of these same objects with an eerie half-life.

Mr. Sánchez's paintings depict enigmatic encounters among figures, heads or objects, in a palette whose unusually saturated, tactile colors turn out to be foundation makeup, driveway sealer, chroma-key blue, gold leaf and nail polish masquerading as pigment. Again and again, Mr. Sánchez modestly but tellingly coaxes something magical out of almost nothing.

ROBERTA SMITH

ART;
Painting With Peanut Butter and Jelly

By William Zimmer

Dec. 29, 1991

RAFAEL SANCHEZ, who divides his time between Jersey City and Paris, is a master of ephemera. With him the term loses its connotation of slightness; instead it refers to a glittering apparition, but one concocted out of homespun material. In the small gallery of the Jersey City Museum, he has created an installation that evokes a trip to the Poconos.

The installation is humorous and slyly satirical as it comments on - and improves upon -- the pungent kitsch that has lured tourists to the Poconos for generations. It is respectful, and the proof of this is that Mr. Sanchez has fashioned some alluring objects out of "indigenous" materials, like the sculpture with the grand title "Faith and Reason," which is made out of large seashells, a straw cornucopia and a light bulb.

During a tour of this room, there is an occasion in which the viewer is sure he is witnessing the equivalent of one of the seven wonders of the world: a wall of abstract patterns based on the hex signs that adorn barns in Pennsylvania. But Mr. Sanchez's signs are painted with peanut butter and strawberry jelly, as in "Flat Jack." (The foods are laid thickly on the canvas and then varnished.) These paintings sound the primary note of enchantment that echoes throughout the installation.

The show also includes a floral pattern made with green vinyl stickers on fake wood paneling and two pedestals that have the force of shrines. One pedestal holds a jar of Vicks Vaporub, and the other a pile of cedar chips. These are contrasting odors that could summon up remembrances of things past.

Mr. Sanchez's French connection figures in through a photograph of an installation he created in the catacombs beneath Montparnasse Cemetery. The gilded human femur in this picture might have a Poconos relative in terms of archeology.

Mr. Sanchez's work is nostalgia of a high order. Along with slight items like a painted bandanna or a polyhedron made of wooden Q-Tips is a wood cabinet with glass shelves that are themselves strewn with broken glass. This is an emblematic work that declares that the installation commemorates broken dreams.

If time spent in Mr. Sanchez's installation is like sinking into a warm bath, the group show organized by Gwen Stokes that is the main offering at the Jersey City Museum requires that viewers have all their wits about them. It is called "Evidence," and this can be taken to signify that an artwork may have a deep message, more than what is on the surface.

MARTOS GALLERY

An umbrella idea like this means that a wide variety of art can be offered up, and the show includes painting, sculpture and photography. The photographic evidence is the clearest: the Irish photographer Paul Graham makes panoramic Cibachrome prints of his country, but they bear grim titles like "Army Helicopter and Observation Post" or "Army Stop and Search."

A close look reveals that the beauty of the scene is marred by incidents of war, including a soldier in camouflage, angry graffiti or what might mean something benign in another context, a Union Jack in a tree.

In large watercolors, Masami Teraoka, who lives in San Francisco, mimics the look of classic Japanese woodcuts. He is especially skilled at rendering lively water in the manner of Hokusai. But nothing is serene here. Mr. Teraoka's protagonists struggle with octopuses depicted in full detail. Wrapped condoms floating in the water alert us to the idea that the creature is a metaphor for AIDS.

Robert Younger makes sculpture out of wood and plaster primarily, and other materials adorn his constructions. Sometimes the materials fool us. Two beehive shapes painted yellow look as though they are meant to be hung up by the attached wire coat hangers, but experience cautions that the pieces are too heavy to lift.

Viewers are bidden to compose narratives. Is that large oval atop his life-size dresser a pill aimed at a giant headache? There is no doubt that viewers are to think of a sawmill in another sculpture; witness the plaster disk that is the blade and the bucket filled halfway up with rubber gloves.

Mr. Younger can also find clues in current events. One of his pieces is a jerry-built Scud missile.

Gerald Nichols's paintings resemble eye charts and provide something to decode. The letters of the alphabet themselves have their properties as abstract shapes exaggerated, so viewers have to interpret the letters before tackling the message.

The work is often rewarding, as in "Abracadabra (Incantation Against Calamity)." According to tradition, each time the incantation is recited, a syllable drops off. In a nice bit of visual poetry, Mr. Nichols depicts the disintegrating word as slipping through an hourglass.

Both exhibitions are on view through Feb. 1.

The Jersey City Museum is on the fourth floor of the Main Library on the corner of Jersey Avenue and Montgomery Street. It is open Tuesday through Saturday 10:30 A.M. to 5 P.M., with hours extended to 8 P.M. Wednesday.