

1. Curated by Stephen Maine

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Artists Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections
Curated by Stephen Maine
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Artists Quarantine
With Their Art Collections

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Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections provides a snapshot of the intimate relationship between artist-collectors and their prized works of art. Much like any remote workers, these individuals have been forced to contend with the challenges of isolation from not only their friends and colleagues, but from much of the nourishing cultural richness that museums and galleries provide. With the absence of an ability to connect with new works, or to return to familiar pieces in public collections, artists were afforded the opportunity to reconsider their relationship and appreciation of works in their own collections – and through this exhibition, to share these works with a wider public.

Shows of artist collections have a long and storied history, but what makes this exhibition special is the broader cultural and political context. In early days of 2021 when the plans for this exhibition were laid out, we imagined the end of the pandemic was in sight. Vaccines were being rolled out, museums were beginning to open, and a sense of optimism gripped the country. Following the summer preceding the exhibition, several new and more dangerous variants of the corona virus have emerged, and lockdowns have been reintroduced in many countries – affecting countless lives, as well as our ability to enjoy public life worry-free. As the exhibition approaches its close, the US is steadily marching toward the grim milestone of one million deaths attributed to COVID-19.

With this backdrop front of mind, many of us are still working remotely. Missing our colleagues, we find it difficult to engage in many aspects of civil life. While it has been a pleasure enjoying these many treasured works, I find myself looking forward to the close of the exhibition in a matter of days, when I can return the works to the homes of their owners so that they may again provide solace - whatever may come in the days ahead.

Paul M. Nicholson
Director Martin Art Gallery



Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections

This exhibition developed out of a year-long series of articles I produced for Hyperallergic.com beginning in May 2020. In March of that year, as the enormity of the COVID-19 pandemic was becoming clear, it occurred to me that I was reading new, disease-related meanings into artworks that had been in my life for years. One morning, looking up from a news story I was reading about the overburdened funeral services industry in New York City, my glance happened upon a painting featuring a trio of shadowy figures standing next to an enormous automobile. In that instant, I saw the men not as the lolling gangsters I'd always taken them for, but as undertakers respectfully pausing between interments.

I was startled to realize that, conditioned by incessant awareness of the pandemic, I had spontaneously assigned entirely novel content to the work. The painting's meaning had shifted to meet the present moment. A kind of situational significance had crept in — the involuntary projection of this reshaped, perceptually and cognitively rewired beholder.

We know that much of what a work means to a given viewer is subjective. "Every good work should have at least ten meanings," according to Walter De Maria. Clearly, some meanings might be latent — revealed by the course of events, shaped by the pressure of circumstance.

Were others experiencing the same thing? I asked around, focusing my polling on fellow artists who live with the work of others. Some of these artists I know well; some only slightly; many, not at all. I asked them: *In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, do you look at your personal collection differently now, and which works in particular? Is there one that especially resonates with you in this weird, frightening time? And does it take on new meaning?*

The responses were published serially in Hyperallergic.com over the course of a year. (They are archived at <https://hyperallergic.com/tag/artists-quarantine-with-their-art-collections/>). This exhibition is derived from that project. These are case studies in the instability (and inexhaustibility) of meaning in works of art, attesting that such fluidity may be a source of distress, or of delight.

Many I asked told me that their perceptions were essentially unchanged — that the works they live with seemed "timeless," untouched by the historical context. Fair enough. . . . But in the oppressive tedium of that first quarantined year, works that surprised, delighted, or otherwise engaged the viewer in unfamiliar ways interested me more.

The project's premise emerged from conversations with my wife, Gelah Penn. I thank Thomas Micchelli at Hyperallergic.com for his many valuable editorial suggestions and enthusiastic support of the project. Paul Nicholson, the Martin Art Gallery's curator, warmly received my proposal to translate the online project into a physical exhibition and was instrumental in organizing it, and this catalogue. I'm deeply grateful to the approximately 150 artists whose texts and images constitute the series, from which this selection of artworks and statements is derived.

Stephen Maine



Anagard
untitled
pen and ink on paper (2017)

Antonius Wiriadjaja (New York City): This sketch of a man with an Indonesian drum for a head has been in the background of every video call I've made during the pandemic. Feathers sprout out of his buttoned-up suit as he sits on a swing made from a gamelan. His feet are winged, like Javanese shadow puppets. A crowned *naga* (dragon) peeks out from behind his seat, and leaves and flowers in the shape of a *garuda* (eagle) wrap around his shoulders.

I got this sketch from street artist Andres Busrianto, better known as Anagard. His stencils pepper Yogyakarta, the arts capital of Central Java, as well as a small farming village just outside of it called Geneng. That village was badly hit by a devastating earthquake in 2006. A young Anagard revitalized Geneng by painting newly built buildings' bare walls with murals. He persuaded artists such as Swoon (Caledonia Curry) to add their own street art over the years and soon the area gained international fame. The murals brought in tourism and revitalized the village.

I was supposed to return to Indonesia for research in the summer of 2020, but the day I was to pick up my visa from the consulate, New York went into full lockdown. A year ago, when I first walked through Geneng, hopping from mural to mural between rice paddies, I couldn't believe that this marriage between traditional life and street art could exist. It was born out of a catastrophe that killed thousands and left a quarter-million people homeless. The two cultures still have occasional quarrels. Once in a while, a farmer paints over one of the murals without permission. And sometimes a street artist tags a wall that wasn't meant for tagging. But looking at this illustration—a study for a large mural in Geneng—in my tiny New York City apartment, I have faith that despite how hard this virus will divide us, we can become more united through art and compassion.



Anonymous
untitled crazy quilt
unspecified fabric (nd)

Jodi Hays (Nashville, Tennessee): I collect fabrics and textiles. My interest is in rural culture and handiwork, and their associations with the body. Over 20 years ago, I bought this "crazy quilt." It was in rough shape, so the dealer practically gave it to me. In grad school I pinned it to my apartment wall. Here in Tennessee, I slung it over a sofa.

The "crazy quilt" style blends improvisational piecework and grid-based composition. This particular quilt is less improv, more grid. The ecru top dominates the overall effect, silk threads dangling loose. I have always envisioned the maker a tight-lipped Victorian New England Protestant. There is no fabric in the quilt that I associate with the American South, such as cotton in the form of gingham and seersucker. The outside border is made of pieced cigar ribbons (so my Mom says) laid together to form diagonally striped patterns on not-quite-square fabric supports. The interior pieces are jeweled tones of corduroy and silks punctuated with colorfully embroidered dogs, crosses, moons, stars, flora, wheels, and arrows.

In early quarantine, grateful to be safe and healthy, I answered the collective call to stay home and to make use of the long days. Organizing the studio, I folded stacks of fabrics, lacework, crocheted doilies, towels, letter jackets, and quilts. My working and living spaces benefited from this anxious process.

In May, I became curious about the quilt's structure, seams, and batting. I carefully separated the quilt top from the paper-bag-tinted backing. The corroded threads disintegrated with the slightest force, revealing my favorite feature: floral linen edging, two inches wide around a cruddy and stunning linen-colored flannel batting with printed pink stripes.

Sometimes paintings are discovered. Object becomes material. Rosie Lee Tompkins said of her patchworks, "I hope they spread a lot of love." In the slow days of unease, the quilt was a giver. I feel the love.



Andrea Belag
Cello
oil on wood panel (2018)

Judith Linhares (Brooklyn, New York): In these long indoor days, the tendency toward reflection is pretty much endless. I'm fortunate to have friends to talk to on the phone, paintings to make, and a big, light place to inhabit. My walls are stacked high with works by artist friends. I really like showing my collection to visitors — it is almost like sharing a family album. The works have been acquired over a lifetime and represent so many different time periods, ways of making things, ways of thinking about things, and the comradeship that is the artist-to-artist world.

I sometimes wonder: what is art for? Lately I've been drawn to a small oil painting on wood panel by Andrea Belag. When I chose the painting, I said to Andrea, "It looks like cello music," meaning it has low tones and they arrive in a minor key. The values are close in range with the exception of a cold pink swath running at a slight diagonal. The reds, greens, and blues are on the dark side. I have been looking at this painting and receiving relief like a cool drink on a hot day.

The way I see this painting hasn't changed from my spontaneous first reaction, but in our new reality my need to see it has changed. The painting seems to hold and express the feelings I have but can't fully experience because my vigilant survival mode stands in the way. This painting is not designed or premeditated; it has the sense of arriving in one spontaneous act, the strokes of paint drifting down in slow motion, transparent over the somewhat visible wood support. I see what I crave in this painting: timelessness, and connection to a lyrical but somber range of feeling.



Merwin Belin
Love #3
collage (2015)

Vincent Ramos (Venice, California): Until recently, Merwin Belin's "Love #3" was lying flat on an old stereo receiver in the living room, perched on top of a sturdy pile of art catalogs. It had been there since late last year when he gave it to me. Merwin's a generous guy and a close colleague. We bond through a shared passion for collecting. His piece is a reflection of that impulse: a collage consisting of just two found objects from the same time, yet from another time — from a period, like today, of social, cultural and political upheaval.

I've looked at it a lot lately, always asking myself the same questions. Does its message still resonate 50-plus years later? Did it really, even then? It has yet to be decided, in our contemporary America, whether love still actually conquers all. It isn't lost on me either that even Sonny and Cher ultimately parted ways.

As I write this we are in the throes of deep change. A vaccine is coming. Governmental power is shifting. Many more Americans are dying. My continued attraction and embrace of Merwin's gesture seems simplistic, naïve, and altogether quaint under these difficult circumstances. Two pieces of dime-store ephemera meant for the trash heap of history, here juxtaposed and displayed in a handsome box frame, can't possibly be the map out of this chaos. Or can it? To me, the message of the work is clear. And ultimately that clarity reveals its deep complexity, in both action and meaning. I continue to imagine a space where our individual and collective decision-making, as they relate to the current moment, are driven by acts of compassion — not only towards our own (and that could mean many things at the moment), but towards everyone. We are all now intimately familiar with what happens when it is not.

A few months ago, I finally hung "Love #3." It's placed near the spot where my wife now works. Like many educators, of course, she finds herself teaching from home. I don't think her second grade students can see it from their vantage points, but it's there. And the beat goes on.



Todd Bienvenue
Stop
oil on canvas (2014)

Helen O'Leary (State College, Pennsylvania): I saw Todd Bienvenue's painting, "Stop," on Instagram early in 2016 and reached out to trade. I read it as vulnerability under attack and knew I needed to own it. It spoke to my younger self, this shot-up stop sign with its broken language, riddled with bullet holes and malignant harm. Rusty, perforated, yet still articulate, it summed up both brutality and resilience for me.

The painting moved with us from room to room and it became our visual thermometer for the political, economic and personal emotions of the moment.

Now "Stop" sits propped up on the medicine cabinet in the bedroom. It has been many things these last few months — a postcard to our plague, a plea for calm. Lately, my reading of the work has flipped, like a camera obscura image, and leads me to think that the brutality is not in the bullet holes but rather the signage, and in the erasure of this word is a moment of hope.



Angela Dufresne
Tree House Dwellings with Couple in the Snow
oil on panel (2008)

Christopher Kuhn (Los Angeles, California): This painting by Angela Dufresne has always been a mystery to me. I live in the sunshine of LA, and the snowy scene conjures a glimpse into another world. The treehouse structures seem fantastical. The violet blue tones of the landscape seem unreal. And of course, what's that naked lady doing there?

The naked women in Titian's (or Giorgione/Titian's) "Pastoral Concert" and Manet's "Luncheon on the Grass" may be equally enigmatic, but at least I'm not left worrying about whether they're going to get frostbite.

This implied vulnerability has only been amplified in our current age of social isolation. The nude's reaction to the presence of the figure approaching from the right now reads as more urgent. Her hand seems to command the other figure to stop. Is this some unwanted visitor? A threat?

Just as every passerby and chance encounter in our daily lives has become a risk to be mitigated if not avoided completely, so I imagine her telling the interloper to keep a proper distance.

And where's her mask?

This painting is a respite. In the heat of summer, I escape into the wintery cool. As a painter, I rejoice in its painterly bravado.

But our new reality is inescapable. She has retreated from society in perfect solitude, and yet the threat of an asymptomatic other has found her — well dressed in wintery gear, prepared to weather the storm. What's left but to escape up the spiral staircase to the interior of the cabin?

There's a fire. She'll be safe and warm. She can wash her hands (again!).

Hopefully the intruder won't come following after. Maybe just drop the yellow package at the door and leave. Contactless delivery. Now that's soothing.



James Elaine
Bloodlines #4
ballpoint pen ink and
bleach on cardboard (nd)

Howard Schwartzberg (Brooklyn, New York): While in quarantine, as I look at the artworks in my house, I am discovering that the pleasure of living with them, and the importance of the personal connections many represent, have only strengthened. As I spend more time with these pieces, mostly created by artists friends of mine, their honesty and restorative power has been further validated. This is especially the case with the drawing "Bloodlines (#4)" by artist and curator James Elaine, which hangs in a corner of my living room.

In this small work, red lines are drawn in a repetitive, meditative manner. James's efforts to correct what he perceived as uncontrollable ink flow from a tip-less ballpoint pen resulted in the ink creating a serum resembling various tones of blood. The orderly, vertical direction of the lines always helps to calm my focus.

Much of James's work alludes to life, death, decay, and renewal. During this stressful and unpredictable time, the lines in this drawing have become more vital than ever. They are the lifelines or connections we have with others, whether through heredity (blood), or through the relationships we develop with friends, lovers, colleagues, and associates that we at times take for granted, but when in need depend and rely upon. They represent everyone's struggle with identity and survival in the face of life's challenges.

While the drawing's meaning has not changed, its purpose and my needs have. As we navigate through the current volatile social and political environment, its poignancy reveals to me, even more, the fragility of our existence.



Danny Ferrell
After the Game
oil on canvas on panel (2016)

Mark Joshua Epstein (Ann Arbor, Michigan): Danny Ferrell's painting "After the Game" was the first piece I bought after moving into our place in Michigan, in the fall of 2017. The apartment was new to us and I was wildly homesick for people, for art, for everything. I had never met Danny but had followed his work closely and I found the combination of the forlorn and the erotic in this piece to be irresistible. This painting is so many feelings wrapped up in one lusciously painted pair of gym shorts, left — or flung, or dropped — either on purpose or by accident in a field at sunset. Where is the owner of these rumpled mesh shorts? Are they with someone else who is also shorts-less, rolling around in the grass? Being a rapturously unsporty kid, it felt good to own this image, and to hang it in the bedroom I share with my husband.

I see Danny's painting when I wake up each morning. It hangs directly in my line of sight when I open my eyes, but maybe now it feels different. Now the shorts have become a stand-in for me, or for us — alone, discarded, exposed — but it remains such a beautiful scene. If I have to be discarded, let it be in the beautiful green space of this painting. I notice the sky more now than I used to — that last light fading, the slippage of time caught for a moment and forever.



Seth Michael Forman
Asleep Near Litchfield
oil on panel (2013)

Steve Greene (Collinsville, Connecticut): My wife and I bought "Asleep Near Litchfield" by our good friend Seth Forman in 2015. I love this little painting. It is a little more whimsical than usual for Seth, and not as disturbing. A black bear, his eyes squinting in ecstasy like a happy pet, spies on a Rip Van Winkle-like character. If not for the hirsute hermit's Crocs and running shorts, this might be a lost painting from the Renaissance, with its stylized boulders straight from Giotto, the distant idyllic farm, the careful layers of glazes. The figures, rocks, trees and sky interlock in a very satisfying way.

When you live with an artwork, you enter into a relationship. The artwork stays the same, but you grow, you change, and you view it differently. Can a work of art also evolve over time? Something in this painting seemed to change over the course of 2020. It's as if Seth made a new painting about living under lockdown sometime after the pandemic started, in which he cleverly mimicked "Asleep Near Litchfield"—subject matter, style, composition—then sneaked into our home and switched the two paintings. Now it seems I am living with a coded version of my old painting.

This new version is a portrait of me, even though it's not a very good likeness. I've fallen asleep and I'm vulnerable and I'm isolated and I can't wake up. I dream that everything is fine. I dream of the farm where I grew up. (This doesn't look like my childhood farm, but that's okay, Seth has never seen it.) I dream that we are at peace with nature, that it's not something to fear, that a bear creeping up this close is perfectly natural. I sleep and dream for a long, long time. Time stands still, and the days and weeks come and go.

What I want to know is, after the pandemic is over and I can get together with my friend Seth, can I have my old painting back? Somehow I don't think I'll ever see it again.



Suzan Frecon
untitled
Drawing (2004)

Dan Devening (Chicago, Illinois): Around 2004, I was directing the visiting artist lecture series for the Department of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where I have been a faculty member since 1988. During the fall semester, the renowned New York painter Suzan Frecon accepted my invitation to come speak to our students and faculty. Suzan's work demonstrates that abstraction in painting can communicate fully, free of external subjects while still assertively creating meaning, sensation and experience. Her deep roots in the history of her medium, the extensive knowledge of pigments, materials and processes, and her ever-developing research into space and light place her at the forefront of contemporary painting.

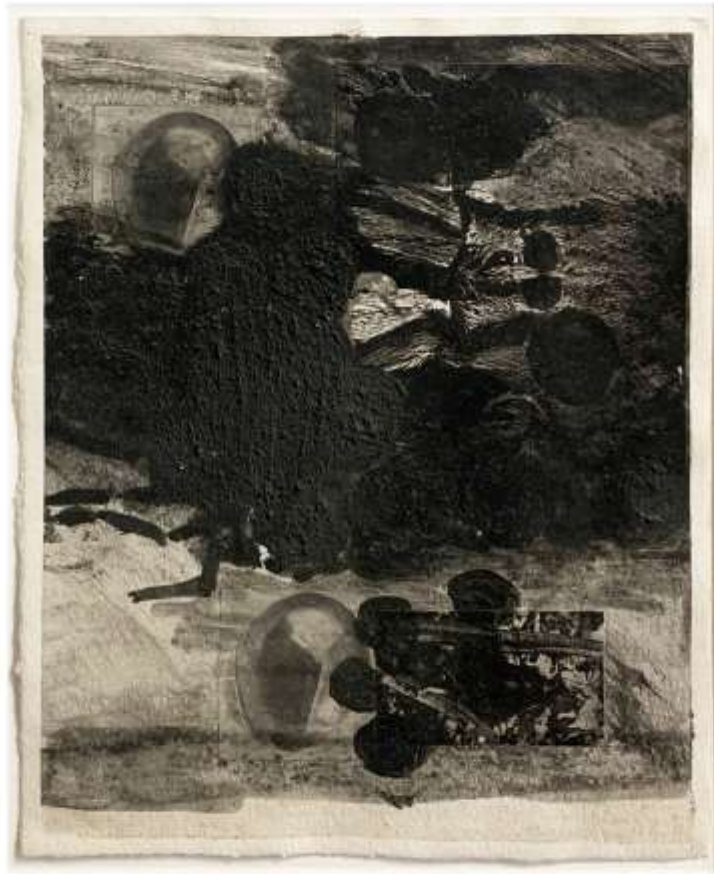
Many weeks after her visit and the outstanding talk she gave to our community of artists, I was surprised and delighted to receive a package in the mail from Suzan. The envelope contained a small watercolor, sent with a note of thanks for the time she spent in Chicago and the dinner I hosted in her honor. This beautiful little piece, like many of her works on paper, holds delightful evocative power. Slightly mute, but animated nonetheless, the shape suggests both a thing and a place. Simple and efficient, it is a perfect example of the weight Suzan's work can hold even when scale is reduced and the image simplified. The story of how this piece came into my life *and its incredible beauty*, makes it an important part of my collection.

I received the work more than 15 years ago; what and how it communicates changed dramatically during the height of the COVID pandemic. Like most people, I was in lockdown for several months during 2020. Making work, teaching and living entirely within the confines of my home radically altered the way I saw many of the works in my collection. This small piece by Suzan Frecon began to look less like an exuberant character ambling freely along, and more like an anxious beast, pushing against the tight space of the picture plane. Claustrophobic and constrained, the negative space lived up to its name by closing in on and shutting out any possibility of release. The drawing began to mirror my sense of how this crisis affected all of us psychologically and emotionally. Despite this slightly darker read, this work never lost any of its evocative power; it only became more nuanced and mysterious.



Pauline Halper
Head
oil on canvas (2007)

Courtney Puckett (Holmes, New York): Pauline Halper's painting, "Head," is as weird and frightening as the moment. I have lived with this painting since 2007, just before Pauline moved from Brooklyn to Northern California. In her Brooklyn studio, there was an assortment of skeleton paintings to choose from. This one was the most confrontational, painted at human-scale. At the time, it seemed benevolent and benign — playful. It was a cartoon of a cliché of our insides. I love the three layers: bone, flesh, and aura. Right now, I see the skull as more sinister, staring straight at me with a giant grin, unmasked. It's unsettling, a contemporary vanitas without all the fuss of symbols of consumption, wealth, and greed. The rawness of Pauline's work is its strength and is what draws me to it over and over again through the years. She continues to paint things, people, and landscapes from the inside out.



Donald Locke
One Hundred Years of Brer Nancy
Mixed media on paper (1994)

Carl E. Hazlewood (Brooklyn, New York): This mixed-media work on paper, "One Hundred Years of Brer Nancy," is by the late sculptor, painter, and innovative ceramicist Donald Locke (1930-2010). Locke was born in the former British colony of Guyana, as I was. His education and international career took him to London and then to the US on a Guggenheim fellowship. He is one of those Black artists (whose lineage is decidedly mixed-race) being retrieved from the edges of colonial empire and the international art world. His neglected life's work is finally being acknowledged as essential to the dissemination of a local-accented modernism before and after mid-20th-century. Aside from my bedroom, Locke's sculpture can be found in institutions such as the Tate and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

I had plans for my time in isolation. I'd assumed life wouldn't be too much different from my normal quiet routine. But the weeks flew by from one Friday to the next in numbing succession with nothing done. Each day I sat and stared at this painting. The abstracted subject matter concerns the West African trickster god, Anancy. He presents himself as a spider, and the Atlantic slave trade spread his influence and his edifying stories throughout the Caribbean archipelago. I discovered in the painting's dark matrix collaged images of an actual spider, a tropical forest, and gleaming Brancusi-like heads.

I'd been worrying about the oppressive cloud of our Covid-19 situation, and my place as a Black abstract artist in troubled political and social times. This small painting however, reminded me that Anancy's symbolic web of Afro-influence is all-pervasive, from Africa to Europe to America. Locke's black-and-white painting has let me see that a work may or may not be directly social or political in an activist way to have cultural value; it is always necessary and affective for its humanistic and aesthetic potential. Providing this subtle spirit-poetry via music, dance, fiction, drama, and literature is a thing only WE can do. Expanding from the here and now, art is forever — or can be. Realizing this has helped me begin working again.



Gordon Moore
Division
latex and potassium ferrocyanide
on photo emulsion paper (2016)

Lauren Henkin (Rockland, Maine): I first saw Gordon Moore's work in an exhibition at Betty Cuninghame Gallery in 2014. The show included paintings and photo emulsion drawings. Both were compelling, but the drawings struck a chord. There is a lushness to the grounds — beautifully printed photographs toned in warm yellows and grays — which, combined with marks of ink and gouache, suggest a velvet canvas scorched by electricity. It was as if the artist had formed a wire sculpture and then tracked its slow progress of shadow-making across a concrete surface, his hand creating furcated markings of time passing.

Quarantine has forced on me a strange relationship to time. One moment is filled with reflection and pause; the next, a casual glint of thought tossed into the wind. Mon-day, Tues-day, Wednes-day are no more. All that remain are *day* and *night*.

One of Gordon's drawings hangs on the wall beside my desk. I see it whenever I look up from my computer. Throughout the day, I can see how light engages the work. In the morning, the sun buoys the light areas of the drawing. At night, the dark tones recede deeper into space.

The drawing has replaced my clock. It's a beautiful and needed reminder that time can be measured not by seconds, hours, or days but by marks, tone, and depth.



Stephen Mueller
untitled
acrylic on canvas (2004)

Mary Jones (New York City): Stephen Mueller (1947-2011) is in my bubble. He was there before COVID-19 and will be there long after. I keep his work close to me IRL and in reproduction at the studio. This painting is from 2004 and I bought it about four years later from his studio on Little West 12th Street. I consider it both a trophy and a muse and it would certainly be in my arms if this place were suddenly ablaze.

The painting has two parallel objects — a silhouette of a Buddhist torso, flattened with a diamond pattern, and a striped oval. Both float serenely forward from slightly diagonal washes of an unfolding spectrum of pure colors. Deep space, deep consciousness, geometry, and a light touch. How he keeps it breathing still has me hypnotized, and I intend to stay camped in its spell.

As this stifling stretch of quarantine time extends indefinitely, my relationships take on new dimensions — mandatory boundaries necessitate new ways to keep us communicating and vibrant to one another. I want my relationships to survive the pandemic. Although techno connections can be a necessary effort for the pleasure of staying involved, I often have nothing to say, but nevertheless unleash the onscreen chat that is, in its essence, a ritualization of longing, a refusal to let go. There are people that I miss so much, and since I can't see or touch so many of them, the boundaries between those who have left us and those who are lodged in a Zoom screen begins to dissolve, and in that space I've remembered visits to Stephen's studio with renewed clarity.

The end of Little West 12th was still surprisingly undeveloped when he was there, and it was exciting just to encounter this small relic of the old city of the 1970s. The building seemed shuttered and uninhabited; I'd always check his address a few times before pounding on the door, and never failed to be surprised when he opened it. The entrance was dark and small, with a glimpse of his bedroom on the right, where a meditation rug lay on the floor, then into the kitchen and his table. Incense, tea, and great music were always part of the experience. Sitting with him over tea, he would smoke and I'd use the time to overcome, to the best of my ability, my overwrought fandom and my needlessly total intimidation of Stephen. Then came the work. The room was square with high ceilings and a central skylight. Extra paintings were always stored out of sight. Everything visible was new, in progress, in the light. These were paintings beaming their magic as if they'd just landed from outer space, with codes and trace memories for psychic survival.

Or at least that's what my painting of his seems to be emitting to me, as I watch it from my couch.



Mike Olin
Chinati, Spider 2
oil on canvas (2012)

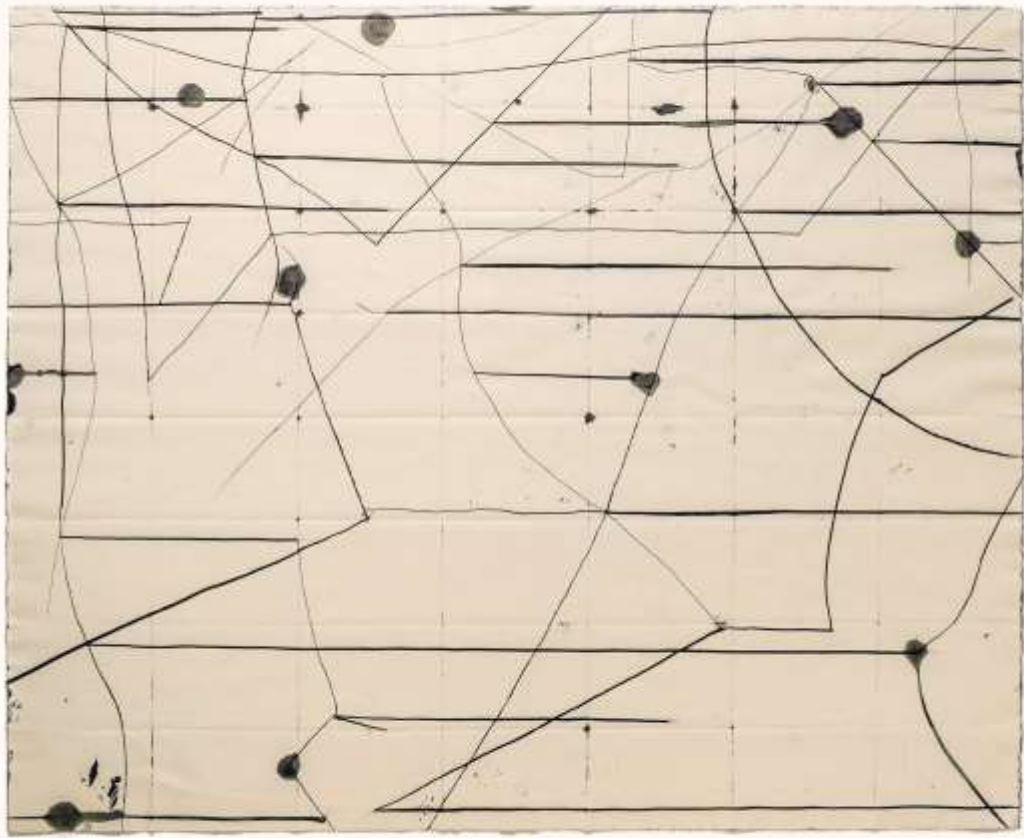
Elisa Lendvay (Poughkeepsie, New York): At the beginning of the pandemic and quarantine, I moved Mike Olin's painting, "Chinati, Spider 2," to a new spot in our entryway where we could see it better. The vintage wallpaper's dashed crimson zigzag patterns almost resemble the motions of a heart monitor and highlight some of the subtle details in the painting, such as the striped patterns in the spider's legs. It is kind of funny there, and somehow the spider is at home — a pattern maker in a landscape of fading patterns.

This full-frame, rough-hewn arachnid is a totemic force of strength in a time of disorder. With its archaic associations — creator, destroyer, weaver of illusion, weaver of healing power — the spider is a guide to enduring one's present reality.

The spider's form fills the space. The legs reach out to the edges and corners and structure the composition. Wispy brushstrokes with bits of brown, orange, and yellow imply motion and texture. Muted washes of deep blues laced with almost glowing lighter shades surround the core and left legs. Floating ephemera and a few mica sparkles catch the light like dewdrops. Two thin sticks emerge, leg-like — they are glass shards, part of an enameled costume jewelry butterfly. There are layers of fabric and a playing card, peeling but sealed with paint.

The spider is melding into the background while emerging out of it, as if it is coming out of the wallpaper and in and out of the painting. Is it headed to a horizon beyond, or is it sitting on a rock or precipice, looking onto a subterranean landscape?

In this quarantine, we too are embedded within these walls, emerging in and out of the background. "Chinati, Spider 2," hung in its entryway nook, protects us. Interestingly, real spiders seem to be more drawn to this spot than anywhere else in the house. We have to escort them out the front door to new horizons.



Hanns Schimansky
untitled
ink on paper (2013)

Power Boothe (Harwinton, Connecticut): Of the artworks I live with, this drawing by Hanns Schimansky stands out because of how it engages me in thinking about the complexities of freedom. I acquired it from the 2013 exhibition, *Lines + Spaces*, curated by John Yau at the Joseloff Gallery (at the Hartford Art School, University of Hartford). Hanns flew in from Germany to speak about his work at the opening. He reflected on his experience of living in East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. He said the East German police would periodically arrive unannounced to search for the subversive artworks they were sure they were going to find in his studio. Of course, they were surrounded by subversive drawings but they did not have the eyes to see them. They walked away — “No subversive drawings here.”

For this work, Hanns performed an act of freedom when he first folded the approximately 15" x 18" paper into smaller and smaller rectangles. When he opened it back up, the perfect symmetry of the original surface was broken. This is not unlike what happens when life begins: the symmetry of the egg is broken at the moment of fertilization and the zygote is formed – an asymmetrical entity that will morph into a living, self-determining creature. Hanns painted the back of this paper with black ink, which then seeps through the tears in the cracks of the folds to reveal the grid. At the same time, it creates random blotches of ink on the front side of the drawing.

Now the illusive grid becomes the arena for the free act of play and invention; the drawing becomes a dance between wildness and structure. The initial broken symmetry invites a drawn response, and each line invites another. I never tire of watching this drawing come to life. Hanns makes decisions that make me laugh. I see the human spirit unbound. This drawing is thrilling. The space of freedom that it opens up speaks to a core sense of imaginative possibility that, of course, no secret police could fathom.



Roman Signer
untitled
photograph(1996)

Odili Donald Odita (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania): My wife, Emanuelle, and I got this print by Roman Signer as a gift from Emanuelle's late mother, Manuela, who acquired it from the artist's studio in the mid-1990s. Apparently, it is an image of the aftermath of an avalanche in the Appenzell region of Switzerland. I always thought it was an awkward gift to receive. Since Roman Signer was a friend of my wife's family, and Emanuelle had known him since she was little, I would have thought that her mother might have gotten us something more iconic from Roman. In any case, his print has traveled with us on every move we've made – from Brooklyn to Tallahassee, to where we live now in Philadelphia.

Initially, I felt this gift was a tongue-in-cheek commentary on our marriage as a potential disaster zone, but over time it has become fixed in my mind as a survivalist piece. It gives me the feeling that no matter what storm happens within that space, those two posts will always be standing together.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, this imperative certainly rings true. I never thought I would experience something as historically significant as this in my lifetime. The pandemic has forced in me a heightened sense of responsibility – simply, that of the survival of myself and my family.

I believe that coronavirus is real. I believe it kills people, all people, yet 50% more black and brown than others. I do not believe that it is an infringement on my rights to be told to wear a mask; on the contrary, I believe that wearing a mask is giving common courtesy to other people. It is out of respect for others that I will follow through on my civic duty as a citizen and a human being to wear one. Plain and simple, it's about survival, and ultimately, it's about surviving together.



Paul Torres
3rd St. Promenade, Santa Monica
oil on wood (2018)

Gina Beavers (Newark, New Jersey): A piece by Paul Torres hangs on the wall above my desk, salon-style with a bunch of other works. I found Paul's piece on his Instagram page. I'd been following his account for a while, loving his paintings, his style reminiscent of Outsider Americana and Tom of Finland. His characters and scenes always appear burnished and highlighted, glowing in the dark. His figures are often hustlers, pimps, bikers — streetwise figures almost always depicted outside, in broad Western landscapes.

The piece I bought from Paul is called "3rd St. Promenade, Santa Monica" from 2018 and shows four people going about their day on a busy street, with a strip of ocean, the sun and a palm tree in the distance. It reminded me of the day I had gone to Santa Monica as a tourist, where it felt like a St. Marks Place on the ocean. This was like 10 years ago. We spent our time walking around the beach and trying on novelty sunglasses and ended up at a local vegan place (I was vegan at the time) and then a fancy hotel down the beach for a drink (I used to drink).

The vibe of that strip of Santa Monica we visited was undeniably marginal: people who were homeless, people who were strung out on drugs and many people selling odd goods just to get by. The bright California sun and the sound of the waves did its best to soften the scene, but it was a place where many vulnerable people made their home right next to fancy hotels and high rents. Not unlike New York, where the divide between its wealthy and its poorest is just as great, and highlighted during the pandemic.

Quarantined, I found myself looking at Paul's painting and its figures with a concern I hadn't felt before. What had happened to them? How had they fared during California's multiple waves of the virus? I think before all this I looked at the people in his painting and thought they were independent and making their way, they had dignity and purpose. I still feel that but an even greater force has overtaken that understanding: how to survive in the face of an Administration that cares about its people even less than we thought, and a broken healthcare system incapable of providing equal care to the most vulnerable among us?



Jim, if you choose to accept, the mission is to land on your own two feet.

Carrie Mae Weems
*Jim, if you choose to accept, the mission
is to land on your own two feet*
Gelatin silver print (1989)

Letha Wilson (Craryville, New York): This Carrie Mae Weems gelatin silver print is from an edition to benefit Artists Space, dated 1988-89, a year or two before she finalized her renowned Kitchen Table Series. I remember so clearly the first time I saw this piece back in 1998, and immediately was in love with it. I find it beautiful, poignant, touching, filled with layers of meaning and information, historically important, culturally and personally rich. I worked at Artists Space for seven years, and as my going-away present in 2005, I chose this print.

During COVID-19 quarantine we began some home renovations, so I temporarily took it off the wall and placed it on the mantle above the fireplace where it has remained since. I quite love it in this location at the center of our home, above the warmth of the fire, and surrounded by sentimental and random objects I have collected and kept.

The work speaks to struggles – political upheaval, personal tragedy, systemic racism, a global pandemic, financial strains, an unclear future. The mission is there, even if impossible: to get through this experience intact, to persevere in spite of what the world throws at you. To have the stamina to continue following one's convictions, working toward goals. And it is so clear how ahead of her time Ms. Weems was in creating this work.

However, I can't help but find it hopeful. As if the person is on the precipice, summing up the courage, through sips of wine and the haze of cigarette smoke, to take the next step, though it may be a tough road ahead. The white glowing orb of the kitchen lamp is so engrossing to me. It provides the way out, perhaps? Centering the scene, soothing, inviting, steady.

It's funny how art can contain so much on its own, and also be wrapped up in how it arrived in our lives, or when it first awoke us to its meanings. I have appreciated this exercise to reflect on my own relationship with this particular piece, and how art can be a part of your life in so many ways, and change over time with you.





Artists Quarantine With Their Art Collections
Curated by Stephen Maine
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