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[Finishing School Improves L.A. MOCA](#)

By coagula | October 3, 2008 - 1:39 am - Posted in

The artist collective *“Finishing School”* has [taken up a residency](#) at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (L.A. MOCA). What that means is that MOCA is too ossified and insular to know what the fuck is going on and finally realize that simply asking Paul McCarthy and Chris Burden for new ways to stroke Paul Schimmel’s ego by adding their friends, lovers and former students to the permanent collection isn’t getting the museum anywhere. If the piece of rat shit that is the Martin Kippenberger retrospective currently on view at their Grand Avenue building is any indicator, old curator Anne Goldstein is even more out of touch with anything that has a pulse in regards to art.

So to happily mix metaphors, the new blood is a breath of fresh air at the cathedral of those old farts. Finishing School’s first project was entitled [EXECUTIVE ORDER](#). The piece was to stage a participatory event outside in MOCA’s sculpture plaza. They set up a karaoke machine with familiar songs (*Like a Virgin, I Will Survive*) and had people sign up to sing on stage, where behind them was projected images of George W. Bush. The participants were then to sing along to the familiar tunes, but the “lyrics” were word-for-word Executive Orders of the Bush Administration. From topics as diverse as terrorism to Trout preservation, the participants tried to articulate the bureaucratic machinations of power in familiar melodies, to absolutely comical, pointed results. The members of the Finishing School Collective were dressed as referees and happily judged the efforts by the participating gallery-goers.

Art is charged to engage the public, the world is begging for meaningful political art that does not pander, preach or submit to illustrate the whims of a manipulative force. Art that is not fun is inevitably going to be ignored. Finishing School has solved so many problems embedded in contemporary art with one great night out on the town. It was absolutely shocking that MOCA would have such an event, vitality and current-ness being the last thing on the aging pink whale’s mind. ON a night with the political debates and a Dodger

playoff game, a huge crowd turned out to enjoy art that involved, critiqued, satirized and hit home. It seemed so simple, but it took 22 years of boring MOCA shows to arrive at the point where the light bulb finally went off over someone's head that nobody was buying the bullshit printed on the stupid wall labels rationalizing the egomania and insider status of assholes like Kippenberger as worthy of examination by the art audience.



A museum-goer participates in EXECUTIVE ORDER, the art experience produced at L.A. MOCA by the FINISHING SCHOOL art collective, singing the words of Executive Orders of President Bush to the tunes of popular songs. I think this guy was singing about terrorism to Bon Jovi.



The FINISHING SCHOOL Collective are dressed as referees because they were judging the EXECUTIVE ORDER karaoke contest they organized at the L.A. Museum of Contemporary Art



The ambience of a beer and karaoke art event sanctioned by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.



Ed Giardinna and Brian Boyer, co-founders of the FINISHING SCHOOL art collective.

Comments Off

[Massive FREE Art Event in Downtown Saturday](#)

By coagula | September 26, 2008 - 1:03 am - Posted in

Tarryn Teresa Gallery is previewing their new gallery space with a party honoring the ACLU and featuring artist team GRIFFIN MOSS.

It is a GIANT warehouse space and the party is supposed to be a massive blowout with all the trimmings.

[CLICK FOR DETAILS](#) ... just RSVP to them and you are in.

See you there.

Comments Off

[Ask Mat: Do Critics Have Any Power?](#)

By coagula | September 20, 2008 - 10:08 pm - Posted in [Ask Mat](#)

By Mat Gleason

From Issue #71 of *Coagula*, December 2004

Dear Mat:

Sometimes I read reviews and wonder what the critics are even talking about. I'm a college educated person. Should I be taking art criticism more seriously? Will a rave review by the right critic set up an artist

for life? Who would those critics be? Are bad reviews the kiss of death? Let me know.

WELL,

There are two types of art critics. Those who are desperate (despite all appearances to the contrary) to get invited to the right parties; and those who get invited to the right parties. How to tell who is who - if a critic is a teacher, a University lecturer, a professor of art history, especially if they say this about themselves in the little bio after each published essay - then this person is among the desperate group. If this person writes for an audience of more than 50,000 people whose income is above \$100,000 and has been doing so for over 5 years, then this person is among the latter group. These are not absolute qualifications, but I use them to gage the worthlessness of the party banter that masquerades as reviews. Many art world reviews are paid for, often under the table. You pay a critic to write a catalog essay for you. The next few shows get reviewed. You help get a critic hired at your art school, next year he is making fifty grand and you are getting reviews. The TRUE power of the critic is revealed in his or her readers. Since most art writing is nefariously interlinked to personal relationships, you should ignore all of it, but do pay attention to where the critical mass is rising. When Matthew Barney started making waves, his name was everywhere, instantly - nobody has that many friends, especially Matthew Mumblemouth. I am not defending Barney's status outside of his achievement of getting noticed.

There are two types of bad reviews. Those that pick on the powerless and those that pick on the powerful. Both work. One is merciless, the other is only practiced by those outside of both academia as well as the art establishment.

Oh, and bad reviews are not the kiss of death. Artists who get trashed by the same critic form a fraternity that can achieve strong bonds. Frankly, you can cut and paste a review to omit critical sentences. In fact, why not just paste up a fake review. A dingbat gallery would be impressed as all hell that you had a three hundred word review in the *New York Times*. a day of page layout tutorials could get you started. Who's gonna pay the \$11.95 fee to verify this with a Times internet search? Not your average cheapskate gallery dealer, that is for sure.

Comments Off

[Turning Pro \(Column - October, 2004\)](#)

By coagula | September 1, 2008 - 11:58 pm - Posted in

By Alan Bamberger

From *Coagula* Issue # 70 - October, 2004

Artists send out tons of random requests:

Could you please look at my art, and tell me what you think? Also, what do you think of my website? I'm looking for national and international representation and shows. Do you have a list of agents or artist reps? Can you represent my art?

They send them to art business professionals like myself, messages in bottles tossed onto the sea, believing that someone somewhere will ultimately respond—perhaps the Good Fairy, perhaps the White Knight, perhaps me—rescue them, and whoosh them away to fame, fortune, and scillions of dollars. I suppose this is possible, but don't count on it. While you're waiting, let's see what does and does not help you get your

art out there, seen and sold.

Emailing people you don't know and asking them to do a bunch of stuff for you for free does not help. How much time, for example, do you think I have to critique your art, critique your website, make suggestions about where to go with your career, send you a list of agents or reps, and for good measure, throw in some contact information for national and/or international galleries? Not only don't I have the time, but even if I did, I've never met you. I have no idea who you are, what you're like, what you're capable of producing, how easy you are to work with, how you handle deadlines, what your reputation is, and on and on and on. Regardless of what I think of your art, I can't jeopardize my existing business relationships by referring complete strangers.

You have no idea who I am either. What if I'm not qualified to critique your art? What if I know nothing about your local art scene? What if I sell sculpture and you paint? What if I have a reputation for not paying artists after I sell their art? You might as well throw darts at a dartboard blindfolded and hope you hit the bull's eye.

The belief that you can hawk your art, without qualification or recommendation, to galleries and agents all over the face of the earth until someone falls in love with it to the point where they take on all of your business affairs and leave you to toil happily away in the studio is a fantasy. If you had any idea how much art is out there, how much of it is good, and how much more of it there is than all the dealers in the universe could ever hope to sell in a hundred lifetimes, you'd agree that learning how to sell your art is way more important than asking people to look at it over and over and over again, and hoping for a miracle.

As for the galleries and agents you're asking, they only show art they think they can sell. If they don't think they can sell it, they don't show it because if they can't sell it, they go out of business. They're not in business to figure out how to sell your art. You have to figure that out yourself, and once you do, try to convince them that if they take you on, the two of you can sell more art and generate more capital than either of you can generate on your own. But even that's tough because dealers already have mechanisms in place for finding art they can sell. So (a) selling art is really hard and (b) making a living as an artist is even harder and © if you're going to make a living as an artist, you have to sell your art at least as well as you can make it.

I often wonder how so many artists know so little about how the art business works and what they have to do to sell art, and I always seem to end up at the same place—art school.

The main reason you go to art school is to learn to make art that's good enough to sell. You believe that with a quality art education, you can make a living as an artist, like a med students believe about med school and law students believe about law school. We all know how much money doctors and lawyers make, but we're less clear on how much money artists make, not to mention what they have to do in order to make it.

These days, a decent art education runs around \$100,000. Art schools need lots of \$100,000's in order to stay in business. If prospective students had any idea how tough making a living as an artist is, how good they have to be to make those livings, and how hard art is to sell, art schools would get fewer \$100,000's than they do now. So art schools don't talk about the survival aspects of being an artist, they offer precious little instruction in how to make enough money to survive, and worst of all, they appear to discourage their graduates from venturing outside the academic realm to learn survival techniques. Sure, they expose students to the formal gallery system and maybe show their art to local dealers and collectors, but that's not nearly enough ammo for confronting the realities of the marketplace.

Some art schools dismiss the art business altogether by intimating that making art is pure while making money is not, making art is a “calling” while other professions are not (oh really?), that selling art is not only irrelevant, but it debases the experience of being an artist. One fact the schools rarely seem to mention, however, is that if you can’t make money making art, you have to stop making art. That’s not something the art schools have to worry about, though. They already have your money.

Until art schools offer courses and ongoing assistance in how to sell art taught by qualified art business professionals, you’re going to have to get that education on your own. If you have trouble selling your art, you can learn how to sell it, you can find art business people to teach you, and most importantly, learning how to sell art does not diminish your credibility as an artist—it enhances it. Incidentally, if you have to pay a few bucks for an art business education, remember that it’s a drop in the bucket compared to what you paid for art school.

In the meantime, your day-by-day accomplishments are what advance you in your art career, not flogging your portfolio all over God’s Creation and asking for free advice. Focus your art-making and art-selling efforts right where you live (the national and international shows can wait). Make art, get it out there, listen to what people say, get a sense of who likes what and why, figure out how to price it so it sells, and show it whenever and wherever you get the chance. Along the way, you’ll meet plenty of people, make connections, and those you impress the most will eventually introduce you to others who can do more for you. That’s how you get galleries, reps, sales, and all kinds of other good stuff. It’s how the art business works.

Here’s more of what you have to learn to do in order to become successful as an artist:

- Talk and write about your art in ways people understand, regardless of how little or how much they know about art.
- Price your art and answer questions about your prices.
- Make people appreciate your art and feel like it’s worth owning.
- Respond when people criticize your art.
- Know when you have enough art and enough of a selection to start showing and selling.
- Show your art in ways that make it appealing to potential buyers.
- Document your art in ways that increase its appeal to potential buyers.
- How to make sure that anyone who’s interested in your art is able to buy something, regardless of how little or how much they have to spend.
- How to sell your art outside of the gallery system.
- How to sell your art if it’s not the kind of art that galleries sell.
- How to find markets for your art outside of the gallery system.
- How to barter or trade your art for goods or services.

- How to present yourself and your art in ways that don't sabotage your opportunities to make sales.

There are as many ways to sell art and become successful as an artist as there are artists. And each and every one of those ways is OK.

Never forget this. —**AB**

Comments Off

[The Word Was Charm](#)

By coagula | August 27, 2008 - 12:58 pm - Posted in

PROSE By Martin Gantmann

From *Coagula* Issue #70 - October, 2004

When I was in art school, I roomed with an ex-marine, English major, poet. Phil was intelligent, ornery and gruff and he had a way of doing things that, more often than not, caused the question 'why' to pop into my head. On one particular morning I awakened to the sound of a musical rhythm repeating persistently. I walked blearily up the stairs and found Phil hunched over the record changer. He was holding the cover of the Allman Brothers' *Eat a Peach* album in one hand and a yellow legal pad in the other. Intently he would listen to a few lines of lyrics and then replay them.

"Phil, what are you doing?" Phil, disgruntled: "I'm trying to get Gregg Allman's response to Prufrock and there's one word I can't make out." It was then I noticed that he had written all of the lyrics, save a blank space for one word, on his pad. Later that day, when I returned, I asked him if he had gotten the word. "Yeah," he sneered. "It was 'white.' Gregg Allman's answer to Prufrock was cocaine."

There is disagreement about whether the *Eat a Peach* album intended any reference to Prufrock, but what reminded me about that long ago incident was seeing another word recently used in that same singular way, similar to white. It was put forward in a magazine essay; lamenting what the author considers is missing from contemporary art. The word was "charm." Charm?! Of all things to be missing, the word bespeaks white, epitomizes it: the whiteness of charm. It's sound rolls off the tongue like the last white crumbs on a flat mirror, or the futile remembrance of a now distant society.

Where might it come from, that desire for the warmth and pleasantry of charm? It seems to get right back to that Karl Marx again, doesn't it? And Freud. They just had to go and yank the white veil of the refined world right off the backs of the common predicament and all those black little secrets. After that exposure, you could just not avoid seeing the dirt, and the weeds, and the shit on the ground. It was all around. Seeing the collective mess. It had never been pleasant to discuss – was never charming.

I never knew what side of Phil was so upset about "white" – whether it was the regimentation of the Marine Phil, who wanted society to fit to a narrow ideology; or the poet-philosopher Phil, who longed for the realization of an ideal, and beautiful, world. Obviously his chagrin was a mask on his deep disappointment from the recognition that a world he didn't want – hadn't foreseen – maybe none of us want – had become evident.

Phil's mistake, as is the *Charm* essay's author, was that the world we don't want has always been there to see... Beneath the purity of charm, the whimsy of pleasantry and the whiteness of cocaine... And he just

never saw it. *Charm*'s author's further error is that he pines for the art world, epitome of purity and charm that it is, to differentiate itself from that reality. He wants art to ignore what the rest of the world must face. He wants us, as artists, to stretch our blank canvas right back over that supposed ignoble truth; the truth that people's potential and manifest inhumanity toward other people – the anger, despair, the neediness that have always existed and will, for the foreseeable future - continues to reside among the many things we have that are historically beautiful. And he would have us paint. What he doesn't get is that no amount of smearing of that potentially charming medium is going to obscure the images and the issues that we have already seen, the ones that really do yearn to be faced and recognized.

After graduation Phil and I went separate directions. I returned to Los Angeles and Phil moved to San Francisco and continued writing. I visited him one holiday evening and rode shotgun in the cab he drove until four a.m. It was one of those fortunate times when one is presented with an alternative view of a familiar scene. I remember from my past, the exuberance of an evening's club prowling, feeding off the energy of a close crowd and music and the buzz of a few drinks; exiting a club into the intensity of the flashing lights and sounds of the city streets. From the cab I saw people frazzled and wasted and burnt, seemingly longing to hang onto their dissipating high until the first rays of the next day.

Phil, by that time having come to terms with Allman, could also see the two sides: the thin wafer-like purity of charm and the dense complexity of being. And, in spite of an insidious pressure to align with those who would have us focus on the flatulent aura of sentimentality, he felt eager to explore all the possibilities of imagery and creative initiative available to his art form in order to portray all that he saw.

Comments Off

[Site Santa Fe curated by Robert Storr](#)

By coagula | August 26, 2008 - 3:37 am - Posted in

From *Coagula* Issue #70, October 2004

Out of SITE, Out of My Mind

By Jenny Berg

Ok, what a freaking huge marketing coup for the organizers of Site Santa Fe's 2004 Biennial curated this year by Robert Storr. They managed to drag the majority of the 'caring' art world to their backward village for 4 (yes, FOUR!!) Days based on the promise of great things under the title "Disparities and Deformations: Our Grotesque". While the program was only 3 days, who could get a flight out of there quick enough after the final utterance of Storr's lecture on Sunday? Alas, we were all trapped until our available flights on Monday.

"Truly disappointing" is the phrase that comes to mind when describing the whole thing. The organizers apparently thought it would be a good idea to organize as many social events as possible connected to the opening ("*Patron's Preview & Cocktail Party*" and "*Club Grotesque preview*" on Friday, "*Members only Preview*", "*Gala Grotesque Dinner*" and "*Benefit Post-Party*" on Saturday, "*Public Opening*" and "*Robert Storr Lecture*" on Sunday), which ensured you would not run into ANYONE you would like to see as you would likely be at the 'wrong' event at the wrong time.

Which brings me to the exhibit. BORING. How a curator of Storr's stature could pick such abysmally safe work under the heading of "Grotesque" completely confounds me. It was a profound waste of a more

adventurous public space to put in work one could see in any New York or LA gallery. Where were the performances? Where was the “New Media”? Where were the site-specific installations? Where was Storr’s head when he put this thing together? Was he under the impression the work needed to sell? Perhaps it was the organizers’ fault for picking such a relatively conservative curator to pull forth work for such a potentially lush subject.

Storr’s lecture centered on the exegesis of the word “Grotesque”. Apparently he thought that a better understanding of the language would enlighten us as to why he chose what he did. It did not. His politics were perfect for the day, though, which sent Storr’s loyal subjects walking away from the lecture whispering things like “genius” and “profound”. Since when do one’s politics make one a genius? Hitler was likely a genius, but who could agree with his politics? Why should the reverse be true? Evidently in New Mexico your political orientation is directly relational to your I.Q.

Topping it all off was the dreadful art scene in Santa Fe itself. The “better” galleries (to remain unnamed) were large, sprawling spaces that offered anything and everything all at once. “Oh, you don’t like abstract paintings? How about mid-century landscapes? No? How about contemporary realism? No? Glass? Photography? Renaissance portraiture?” All of this under one roof on display at the same time! Of course if none of the 50 genres interested you there was always the jewelry, craft or books. I am all for diversity, but it pained me to see a group from LACMA come through such a clearly commercial gallery and have to treat it seriously when they clearly did not take art any more seriously than the next sale. They might as well be selling stereos.

The big award for the Site Fiasco (I mean Biennial) must go to the marketing department for getting us all there. They will really have their work cut out for them in 2006, however, when they try to convince us all to come back.

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