Hallie Ford Museum of Art
WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

June–Dec., 2019
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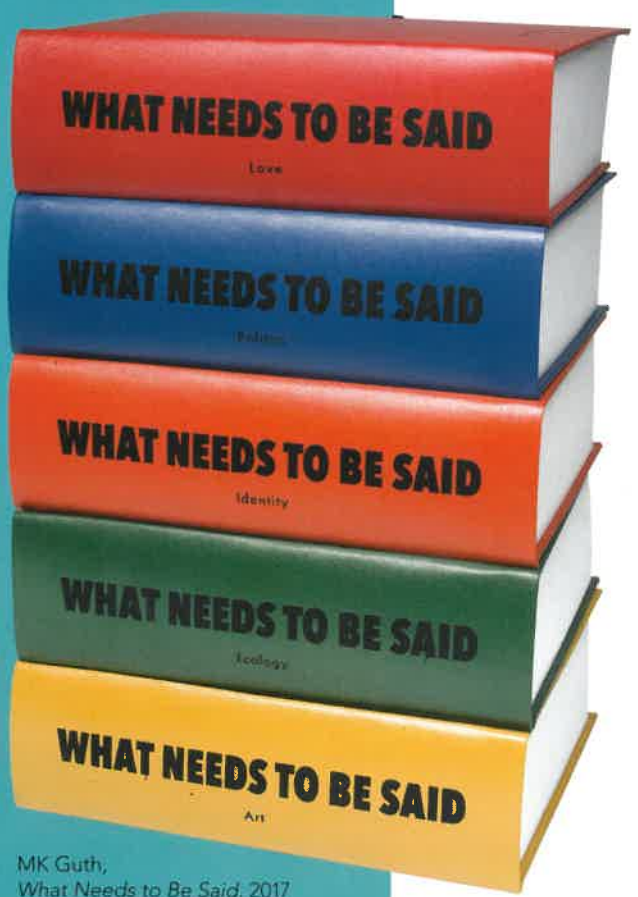
Brushstrokes

What Needs to Be Said:
Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts

SEPT. 14–DEC 20, 2019



MK Guth,
What Needs to Be Said, 2017

What Needs to Be Said: Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts brings together the thirteen artists who have received the Hallie Ford Fellowship in the Visual Arts between 2014 and 2016, an award given annually to artists living in Oregon based on accomplishment, depth of practice, and future potential. These artists — Karl Burkheimer, Ben Buswell, Tannaz Farsi, MK Guth, Anya Kivarkis, Geraldine Ondrizek, Tom Prochaska, Wendy Red Star, Jack Ryan, Blair Saxon-Hill, Storm Tharp, Samantha Wall, and Lynne Woods Turner — evidence the rich and nuanced field of visual and cultural production in this region. There is no single theme that unifies their diverse practices, but rather, seen together they illuminate the breadth of approaches that define our globalized art world. The exhibition opens September 14 and continues through December 20, 2019, in the Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery.

The exhibition attempts to relay the urgency and intimacy of what happens in the artist's studio. Its title, "What Needs to Be Said," is drawn from an artwork by MK Guth: a series of blank books in which the audience is invited to write down their responses to the prompt suggested by the title. Guth's books are objects that encourage, record, and contain critical expressions without fully revealing them—an apt metaphor for the possibilities of artistic practice. Art is something we do for ourselves, and something we undertake in the spirit of the collective, sharing our thoughts and investigations with others through exhibitions and conversations. It is, simply, the expression of what needs to be said. While for each artist this is understood and manifested differently, it is an idea that suggests the importance of artistic practice for the individual and society more broadly — something the Hallie Ford Fellowship unquestionably supports.

Organized by Los Angeles curator Diana Nawi for the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, the exhibition features work in a variety of media, including photography, drawing,

(continued on inside back cover)

(continued from front page)

Wendy Red Star, *Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven)* (detail), 2014

printmaking, installation, sculpture, sound, and public engagement. In addition to the works on display, the exhibition is accompanied by text panels that present an overview of the exhibition as well as who was Hallie Ford; chat panels that discuss each of the artists in the exhibition; individual object labels; and a full color, 112-page hardcover book with essays by Nawi and six other nationally-recognized art writers, including Amy Bernstein, Essence Harden, Sam Hopple, Nicolas Orozco-Valdivia, Nicole Smythe-Johnson, and Charlie Tatum. The exhibition opened at the Umpqua Valley Art Center and Umpqua Community College in Roseburg last spring and will travel to Disjecta in Portland in the winter of 2020 and the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University in Ashland in the winter of 2021.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a panel discussion, preview reception, two lectures, and free Tuesday gallery talks have been planned. On Saturday, September 14 beginning at 5 p.m. in the Paulus Lecture Hall in the Willamette University College of Law, Nawi will moderate a panel discussion in which four artists will talk about their art, studio practices, and respective careers; a preview reception will follow from 6-8 p.m. at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. In addition, Eugene artist Tannaz Farsi and Portland artist Geraldine Ondrizek will discuss their art and careers on September 26 and October 24, respectively, and HFMA's docents will lead Tuesday gallery talks about the exhibition from October 1 to December 17. Admission to the panel discussion, lectures, and Tuesday gallery talks is complimentary. For further information, see Calendar of Events.

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CULTURE

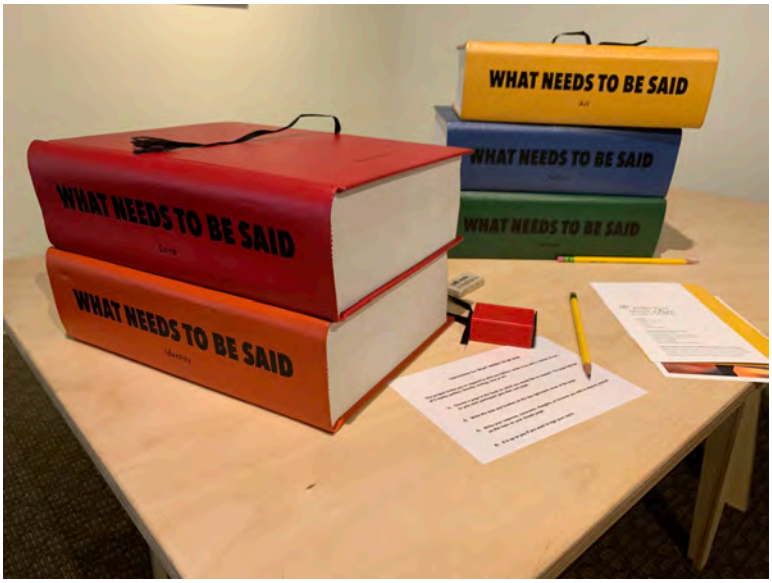
Show by Hallie Ford Fellows explores 'What Needs to Be Said'

The Salem museum features 13 artists in a traveling exhibit emphasizing the range of visual art

OCTOBER 30, 2019 // CULTURE, FEATURED, NW, OREGON, VISUAL ART // DAVID BATES

The poster for *What Needs to Be Said*, an exhibition at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art in Salem, features an image of a stack five thick hardbound volumes by artist MK Guth, who incorporates participatory engagement into work that includes printmaking.

These books, bearing the title of the show, are in fact part of the show. Each has a subtitle: *Love, Politics, Identity, Ecology*, and *Art*. When the exhibit opened mid-September, most of what must be thousands of pages were blank, but that's for the viewer to rectify. Those with something to say, something they deem must be said, may say it here (anonymously or not) and know that they've contributed to Guth's vision. She will seal the volumes once they are filled, making them, according to guest curator Diana Nawi, "repositories for inner thoughts, objects that index and contain critical expression without fully revealing it — an apt metaphor for the possibilities of artistic practice."



MK Guth's project "What Needs to Be Said" shares its title with the name of the show at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art. Photo by: David Bates

Guth is one of 13 artists whose artistic practice is featured in the show, which runs through Dec. 20 on the Willamette University campus, a few blocks east of downtown. What links them? All were recipients of the Hallie Ford Fellowship between 2014 and 2016, an award that goes to Oregon artists "based on accomplishment, depth of practice, and future potential."

A variety of work fills the sprawling ground-floor Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery: photography, drawings, installation, sculpture, a soundscape (which I initially thought was the building's air circulation system), as well as the public engagement invited by Guth's books. A handsome, 112-page hardcover catalog with short essays by Nawi and a half-dozen arts-and-culture critics can be purchased in the lobby.

What Needs to Be Said is touring Oregon. It opened in the Umpqua Valley Arts Center and Umpqua Community College in Roseburg earlier this year. Early in 2020, it arrives at Disjecta in Portland. The show heads south again in 2021 to the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

The diversity of media on display posed, for me, a chicken-egg question. Was the show's title selected and Guth's piece adopted it? Or was the piece submitted before the show was named? I asked Nawi, a Los Angeles-based curator. It turns out the book stacks came first; Nawi was already familiar with them.

"MK's books were already on the checklist when I decided to use their title as the overall title for the show," she said. "The show came together based around each individual artist's practice and strengths, and specific works and projects they were making or had recently completed."

Participating artists, she said, were not given any guidelines of what to submit. "There was no directive, overarching conceptual theme to the show," she added. "I think it is more generally a show that evidences the range of ways these artists work and puts an emphasis on the idea of artistic practice." The program notes expound on this: "There is

no single theme that unifies [the artists'] diverse practices, but rather, seen together, they illuminate the breadth of approaches that define our globalized art world."

Besides Guth, other artists whose work speaks in *What Needs to Be Said* include Karl Burkheimer, Ben Buswell, Tannaz Farsi, Anya Kivarkis, Geraldine Ondrizek, Tom Prochaska, Wendy Red Star, Jack Ryan, Blair Saxon-Hill, Storm Tharp, Samantha Wall, and Lynne Woods Turner.

Time and space prohibit a comprehensive, piece-by-piece review here. I was there opening day and have read some, but not all, of the essays, and haven't had a chance to return. But *What Needs to Be Said* is, at least in one sense, like any other show: Visitors who spend an hour or so taking it all in will find that some pieces have more to say to *them* than others.

In some cases, it is considerably easier to discern what the artist wanted to "say" than others. Wendy Red Star's use of historical images that she brilliantly annotates in a diptych is striking in this regard.

Red Star, who grew up on the Apsáalooke (Crow) reservation in Montana and now lives and works in Portland, uses her art to "explore the intersections of Native American ideologies and colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society," according to her biography. It is an essential and ongoing exercise, a reminder that all the social and political waves that buffet us daily are only ripples in the more powerful tide of history.

Each image in the series is an indigenous portrait. Originally made to document the 19th-century visit by an Apsáalooke delegation to Washington, the images were later slapped onto the labels for Honest Tea.

In an article on the work in the catalog, Nicole Smythe-Johnson takes up the story:

"Initially, Red Star found the images comforting reminders of home. But she soon began to wonder how the non-indigenous people around her received them. Did the

corporations mobilizing these images, or their audiences, understand the images' significance? Or was it just another representation of a static, exotic, homogenous 'Native American culture'?"

Red Star's response is the diptych in *What Needs to Be Said*. The images are annotated in red ink. A few speech bubbles are thrown in. It's a profound and occasionally witty way of reclaiming the iconography — not just from Honest Tea, but from the larger culture of imperialism.

At the far end of the exhibit, Ben Buswell's sprawling photo-sculpture, *All at Once*, is captivating, pleasing both from a distance and up close. It occupies the same physical space as the contraption devised by "sculptor of sound" Jack Ryan. The device modifies the Schumann resonances, an invisible phenomena we are all immersed in but oblivious of: the frequency of the Earth's electromagnetic field. Using objects such as a seashell and a coffee maker, Ryan makes that frequency audible as a faint but discernable drone. It's a perfect and calming soundscape in which to view the rest of the show.

Tannaz Farsi lays Iranian history bare in her multi-part wall installation, *Strata of Empire*. The accompanying catalog essay by Smythe-Johnson notes that the work's "primary concern … is the way in which the day-to-day objects of our own lives can become artifacts that speak to much broader narratives." The most poignant example is a photograph of a Persepolis ruin wrapped in the shirt her mother wore when they left Iran for the United States.

"Cadre," by Storm Tharp, fills a wall with 36 images on paper in a grid. Photo by: David Bates

The most spectacular piece is arguably *Cadre*, by Storm Tharp. Filling virtually an entire wall in the room with the highest ceiling are 36 images on paper in a grid, most of them portraits filled in with panels of color splashes. Knowing of Tharp's interest in masks (which, by the way, will be the subject of multiple exhibits next month at the Chehalem Cultural Center in Newberg) helps explain his approach, in which various moods are conveyed by distortion. According to the catalog essay by Charlie Tatum, "the works come across as an unlikely mix of Cubism and Color Field painting."

The collection of drawings by Tom Prochaska is fascinating and merits close study. Prochaska is known for painting and printmaking, but *What Needs to Be Said* features a collection of his drawings, which come across as visual tone poems. Landscapes, portraits, and even a few sexual encounters are among the subjects. One, *Usual Saint*, depicts a man riddled with arrows. It's a mix of unknowable stories and mysterious visions, rendered with a light touch. They look less like "finished" drawings than they do skeletal snapshots of an artist's thought processes.

There's enough in the show that virtually anyone who visits *What Needs to Be Said* will find something that speaks to them. And even if there's not, you can always visit the tables with Guth's books, open to a blank page, and get to work.

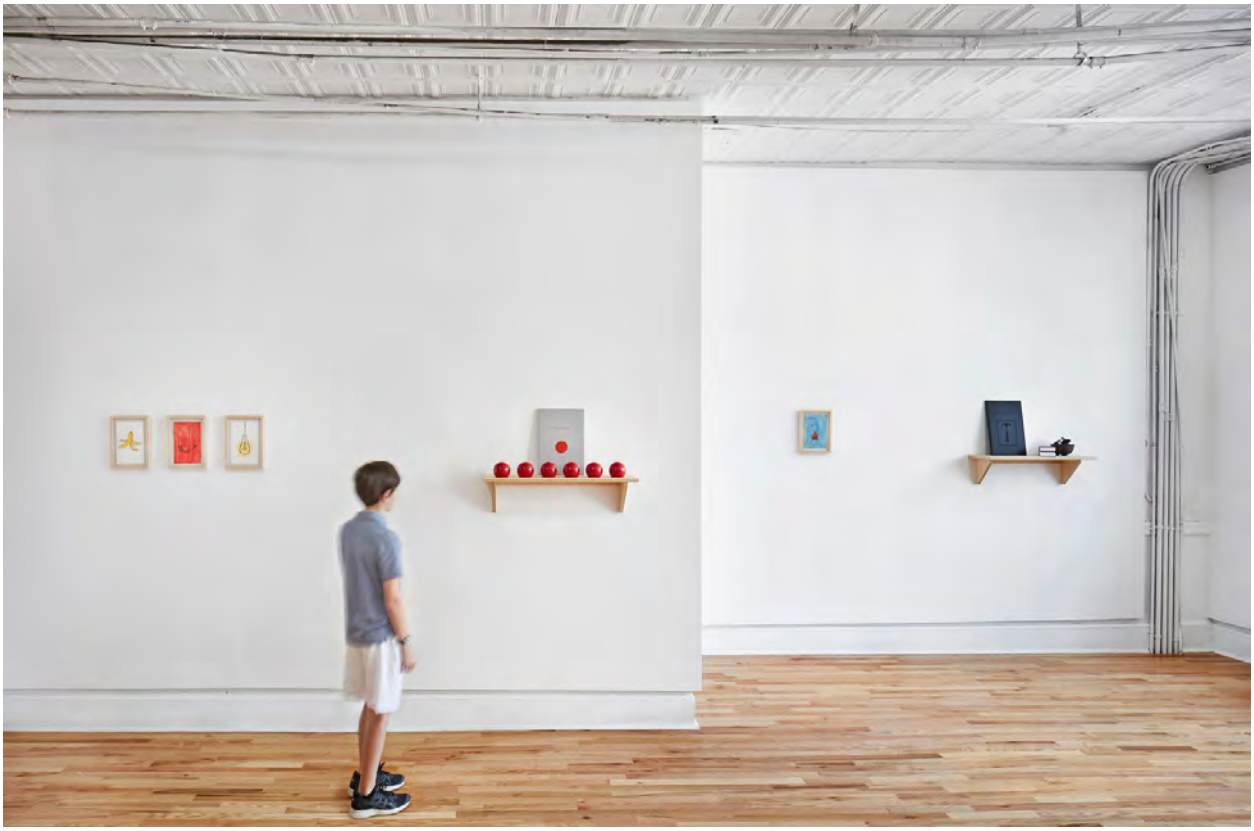
*

What Needs to Be Said: Hallie Ford Fellows in the Visual Arts *continues through Dec. 20 in the Hallie Ford Museum of Art on the Willamette University campus, 700 State St., Salem. General admission is $6; adults 55 and older, $4; children and students through 17, free; students 18+ with ID, $3. Museum docents will give gallery talks Nov. 5, 12, 19, 26, and Dec. 3, 10 and 17. For more information, call 503-370-6855 or visit the website.*

NOV 9
MK Guth: Menu | Cristin Tierney Gallery (NYC)
JOSEPHINE ZARKOVICH

MK Guth, *Dinner to Tell a Joke*, 2019. perfect bound book, 6 silver fall zero absorption porcelain cups with holding chips. book: 13 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches.

Language is often described in terms of consumption: to eat one's words, to digest a passage of text, to devour a novel. In these turns of phrase the body is always present, ready to absorb meaning through the stomach. MK Guth's exhibition *Menu* at Cristin Tierney Gallery takes up these themes through a series of handmade instructional books, meticulously crafted objects, and small, illustrative ink drawings. With titles such as *Dinner to Tell a Joke, Menu for Getting There, Menu for Getting What You Want, and Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Getting Through It,* the works run from how-to guides to metaphoric ponderings. One text offers practical advice on what to serve houseguests upon their arrival, another consists of a nonsensical series of knock-knock jokes arranged and bound to look like a tall restaurant menu. One passage from *Instructions for Engaging with Clouds* offers: "Add some cream to a cup of tea. Study the cloud formation."

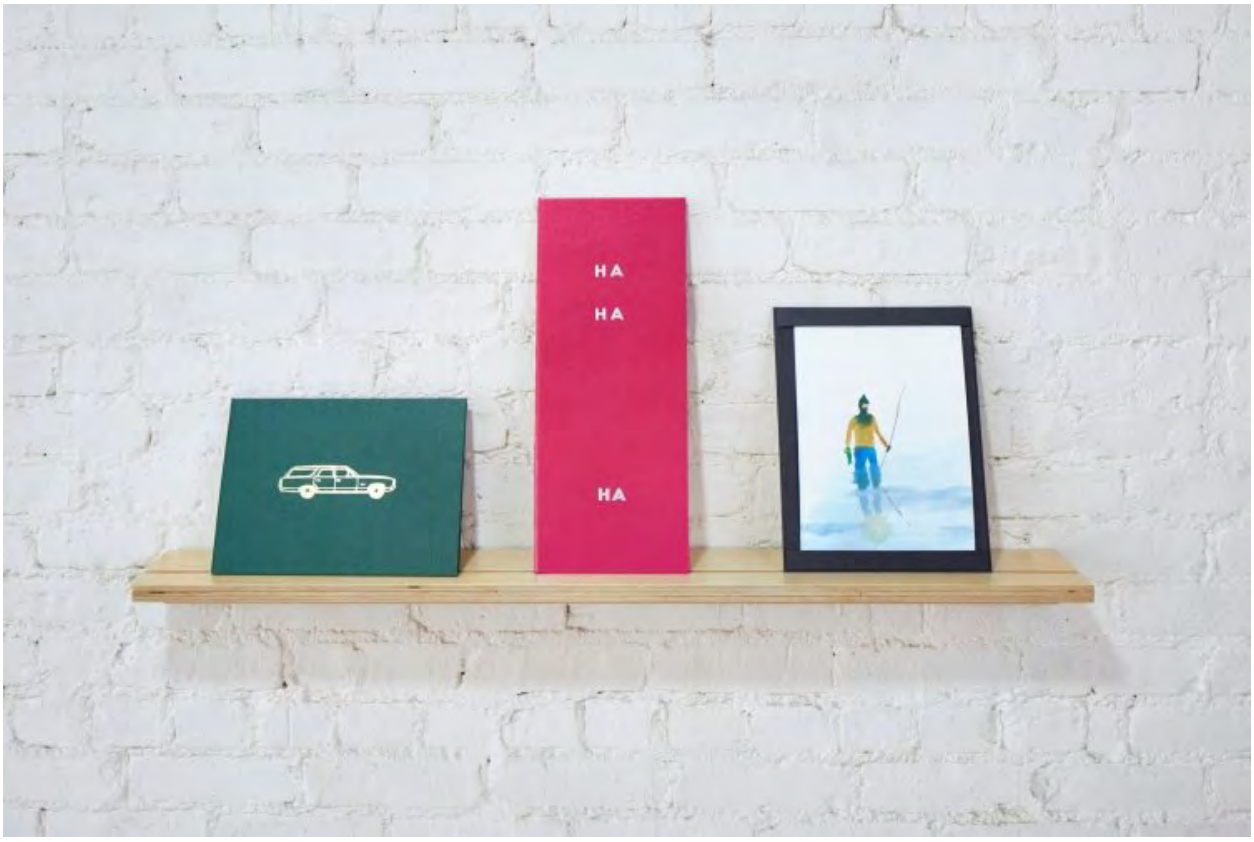


Installation view of *MK Guth: Menu.* Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. September 13 - October 26, 2019. Photo by John Muggenborg.

Despite the centrality of written text in the exhibition, Guth's work is explicitly physical and produced with a high level of craft. Set on unvarnished wooden plinths mounted around the room, the sculptural objects are arranged small groupings, with the books placed in conversation with paintings and everyday-use objects. These juxtapositions also drive much of the humor that permeates the exhibition. *Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Getting Through It* is a bound black book accompanied by a bowl of matches and a small booklet with gold cover text reading "burn me, let go." *Dinner to Tell a Joke* offers six shiny red clown-like noses that double as drinking glasses. To access the text within the books viewers must wear bright blue rubber gloves, a precaution that protects the paper but also ensures that the conceptual nature of the pieces remain firmly rooted in the bodily experience.

MK Guth, *Dinner for Getting Over It Or At Least Through It,* 2019. perfect bound book, ceramic bowl, bound burn pages, matches. book: 14 1/2 x 9 1/4 inches.

Menu is not Guth's first exploration of communal consumption and social interaction. The artist's 2012 exhibition, *When Nothing Else Subsists Smell and Taste Remain*, was built around a series of hosted dinner conversations inside the Art Gym at Marylhurst University. More recently, 2016's *Instructions for Drinking with a Friend* invited audience members to spend an hour inside Cristin Tierney Gallery drinking whiskey with a friend while discussing a topic they usually did not talk about. Compared to those two projects, *Menu* is a much more meditative series. The menus, in particular, are broken up into collections of passages containing a beginning, middle and end—starter, 2nd course, main course, dessert—suggesting a duration of time, though how that time should be spent is ambiguous. In *Menu for Getting There*, the starter consists of a quote from Mary Oliver, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Proust. Perhaps Guth has moved on from orchestrating experiences that explore relationships between people to a more intimate conversation between the artist and the viewer. While objects have been the core of Guth's practice, this exhibition still retains a sense of invitation and performance. The works are not simply instructions or commands: they are offerings, allowing space for viewers to set their own table.



Installation view of *MK Guth: Menu*, 2019. Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. Photo by John Muggenborg.

MK Guth's *Menu* at Cristin Tierney Gallery ran from September 13 - October 26, 2019.

Free Whiskey and Four Other Art Shows We're Excited To See This Week

During the month of January, you can get drunk with a friend at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

By Shannon Gormley | Published January 3 Updated January 3

In contemporary art, an artist's process is often just as important as the art itself. So seeing a work in progress can not only help you better understand the resulting work, but also experience a crucial part of it.

Several artists who have First Thursday and Friday openings this week are allowing you to do just that. Ben Hucke is going to create photorealistic drawings at his solo show, and Vance Feldman is displaying a segment of a constantly evolving illustrated scroll that's now longer than the Titanic.

Though it's not a part of First Friday or Thursday, we've also included Portia Munson's open studio in our monthly preview. Her new exhibit, *Flood*, will open at Disjecta at the end of the month, and will display found objects Munson has collected in the form of elaborate sculptural installations. Her open studio will provide a glimpse of Munson's collection process, which defines her work more than any predetermined concepts.

Here are the five gallery openings we're most excited to see this week.

Instructions for Drinking with a Friend

For Portland artist MK Guth's new exhibit, she's built a table, two chairs, a custom bottle of whiskey and two glass cups. You're encouraged to bring a friend, sit together in the gallery, drink some whiskey and have a conversation that's prompted by a book of rules provided by the artist. The exhibit is open during regular gallery hours, meaning there could be presumably sober strangers in the gallery, making your drunken conversation as much a part of the space as the canvases on the wall. *Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW 9th Ave., elizabethleach.com. Reception 6-8 pm. Through Jan. 27.*

ForeverScape

In the eight years that Portland illustrator Vance Feldman has been working on *ForeverScape*, it's grown from a single eight-and-a-half-inch sheet of paper, to a grid that's over 1,000 feet long. Every three days since 2009, Feldman added a new detailed sheet to the project, creating a series of surreal, interlocking scenes in a style that's somewhere between comic book and Boschian. Smaller segments of the work were displayed in Portland galleries earlier in the process, but the installation at Blackfish will be *ForeverScape*'s largest yet. Part of the illustration will cover the walls from floor to ceiling, and there will be a mechanical scroll on display that will wind through a smaller-scale copy of the complete work. *Blackfish Gallery, 420 NW 9th Ave., blackfish.com. Reception 6-9 pm. Through Jan. 27.*

Ben Hucke

Ben Hucke's exhibit at Gallery 903 avoids being static in a very literal way. The former BMX biker turned artist creates pen-and-ink replicas of whatever strikes him as meaningful—everything from worn Adidas sneakers, the Columbia River Gorge or a portrait of Kanye West. At the reception of his solo show at Gallery 903, Hucke will demonstrate his methodical process in real time, creating new works, which seems fitting for a style of art that's so much about technique. *Gallery 903, 903 NW Davis St., gallery903.com. Through Jan. 31.*

The Persistence of the Residuum

Eutectic's new show of ceramic sculptures is kind of terrifying. There's Richard W. James' weathered looking, off-kilter sculptures, like one of an old man with a wrinkled but smiling face and a zither, looking a little like a guillotine blade, jammed into his head. Then there's Russell Wrankle's wall-hanging sculptures that include a rubbery rabbit skin stretched over the edges of an iron skillet and a rust-colored hand with a bloated finger stuck in the artery of a blood-red heart. Not only are the sculptures deeply imaginative, but they're crafted with careful detail that implies a kind of strange, but attentive affection. *Eutectic Gallery, 1930 NE Oregon St., eutecticgallery.com. Reception 6 pm-9pm. Through Jan. 27.*

Open Studio with Portia Munson

New York artist Portia Munson creates found-object installations that are manically ornate. As part of her decades long obsession with the color pink, she's built a canopy of pink onesies over a hectic display of pink toys, and filled a coffin-sized glass case with discarded pink objects she found over the course of several years. To create her upcoming Portland exhibit, *Flood*, she embarked on a cross-country road trip, collecting items that will become her new show. The exhibit will open at Disjecta at the end of the month. While it's still in process, Munson is hosting an open studio at c3:initiative, where she's currently the resident artist. What's on display this Saturday could look totally different from the final product, but seeing Munson' process can only increase appreciation and understanding of what's sure to be a complicated exhibit. *C3:initiative, 7326 N Chicago Ave., c3initiative.org. 2 pm-7 pm.*

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Artists Reinterpret Classic Fairy Tales, from *Rapunzel* to *Snow White*

In *Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World*, 21 artists draw on age-old fantasy stories to explore contemporary social issues.

Amy Funderburk 5 days ago

MK Guth, "Ties of Protection and Safekeeping" (detail) (2008) Synthetic hair, flannel ribbon, and ink, 1,800 ft., configuration variable. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery, © MK Guth, photo by YoungDoo M. Carey, 2018.

Once upon a time, the original versions of fairy tales, as recorded by the likes of the Grimm brothers, were indeed, well, grim. In an early adaptation of *Cinderella*, the evil stepsisters, in a misguided attempt to fit into that famous glass slipper, cut off parts of their own feet. In more recent, Disney-fied revisions of classic fairy tales, however, such elements of horror have been censored — and in the process, strong heroines have also been diminished.

The 21 artists featured in *Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World*, on view at the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina, restore complexity to fairy tale narratives. Centuries-old stories take on new relevance in these multimedia works: artists explore contemporary social issues by deconstructing and reassembling imagery from tales like *Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, Cinderella,* and *Hansel and Gretel*. They go beyond dispelling the myth of a helpless princess waiting to be rescued from her tower;

racism, sexism, poverty, and LGBTQ inequality are among the cast of shadowy villains depicted here. While happy endings are certainly present, the exhibit reinstates the balance of dread and delight inherent to these classical stories — a duality at the core of why folklore and fairy tales are so enduring.

Setting a dramatic tone for the exhibition is a *Rapunzel*-inspired installation by multidisciplinary artist MK Guth, called "Ties of Protection and Safekeeping," originally created for the 2008 Whitney Biennial. To make this collaborative piece, Guth asked people to write answers to the question "What is worth protecting?" in black ink on strips of red flannel. Guth then wove these ribbons into a synthetic blonde braid almost 1,800 feet long, which is hung in swags from hooks on the ceiling.

The height of this powerful installation alludes to a tower. Red ribbons rain down from golden tresses like prayers from a Wishing Tree. The fabric is ripped and the edges left raw. Guth chose red, a primal color of blood, anger, and power, rather than maiden white. The participants' words are handwritten, not cleanly printed like a storybook. Free-hanging phrases such as "honey bees," "dreams," and "microbial diversity" can be easily read; interrupted sentences such as "My wife, her fragile…" and "A black girl's dream/…/nightmare" tease us with the mystery of how each phrase is completed, hidden as they pool onto the floor.

Xaviera Simmons, "If We Believe In Theory #1" (2009) Chromogenic color print; 40 x 50 in. (courtesy of the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami © Xaviera Simmons)

Just as Guth prompted her participants with a question, artist Xaviera Simmons created a dialogue with her subjects while creating her series of three large chromogenic color prints, inspired by *Little Red Riding Hood*. In each photograph, a different child poses in a field of grass before an arc of trees. Each wears the same red cloak and carries a wicker basket. While shooting the photographs, Simmons asked the children to show her "where the wolf was."

Their responses draw us in as witnesses to their playtime. While the boy pictured in "If We Believe in Theory #2" has his head thrown back dramatically in soft-focused fear, the girl in "If We Believe in Theory #3" points to her imagined wolf

with a sense of willpower and a look of determination, well-suited to overcome her challenger.

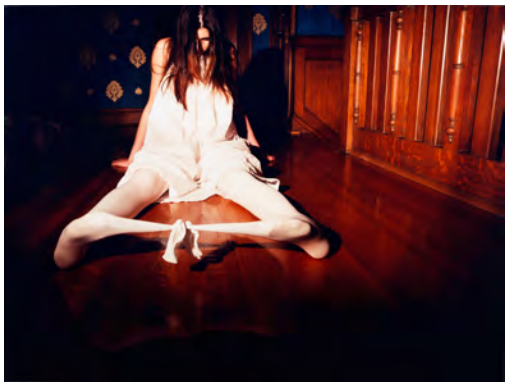
Like fairy tale illustrator Arthur Rackham did in 1909, Simmons makes each child appear diminutive in the context of their surroundings. However, this is no gnarled Forbidden Forest. Simmons chose to picture the children in manicured grass; the trees could be the backdrop of a suburban housing development. There is no obvious threat here, no literal "wolf" — it is either all psychological, or, darker still, implies more sinister societal dangers lurking.

Timothy Horn, "Mother-Load", (2008) Plywood, painted steel, aluminum foil, polystyrene foam, hot glue, acrylic medium, rock sugar, and shellac; 6 x 9 1/2 x 5 1/2 ft. (Courtesy of the artist © Timothy Horn, photo by Jason Schmidt)

In "Mother-Load" — an impressively executed, pumpkin-orange carriage sculpted from materials including aluminum foil, hot glue, and crystallized rock sugar — artist Timothy Horn alludes to issues of poverty, both in his use of unsophisticated materials and his inspiration beyond Cinderella. The piece draws from the real-life rags-to-riches tale of Alma Spreckels (1881-1968), a poor laundress who married into a sugar fortune. Despite her great wealth, which was used to found San Francisco's Legion of Honor museum in 1924, Spreckels was still ostracized by high society. At six feet tall, Spreckels, known as "Big Alma," would not have fit comfortably inside Horn's child-sized coach, echoing her exclusion.

"Les Flâneuses," a mixed-media work by Ghada Amer, juxtaposes the unyielding innocence of Disney's *Snow White* with sexually charged imagery. The eye goes immediately to an embroidered cartoon portrait of the familiar Disney character and her animal friends. Visible around her, though, are the outlines of provocative models, sourced from pornography. Like Herrera, Amer rewards the studious viewer as faintly painted faces rise out of the background, like an Old Master's ghostly *pentimenti*.

Works inspired by *Sleeping Beauty* and *Beauty and the Beast* are notably absent from the exhibition. Visitors are introduced instead to two largely unknown tales — *All Fur* and *Fitcher's Bird*. These stories not only provide enigmatic creative fodder, but also serve as grisly examples of the earliest versions of fairy tales.



Anna Gaskell, "Untitled, #35 (hide)" (1998) Chromogenic print; 36 7/8 x 49 in. The Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Paul and Anastasia Polydoran Collection © Anna Gaskell, photo by Rich Sanders.

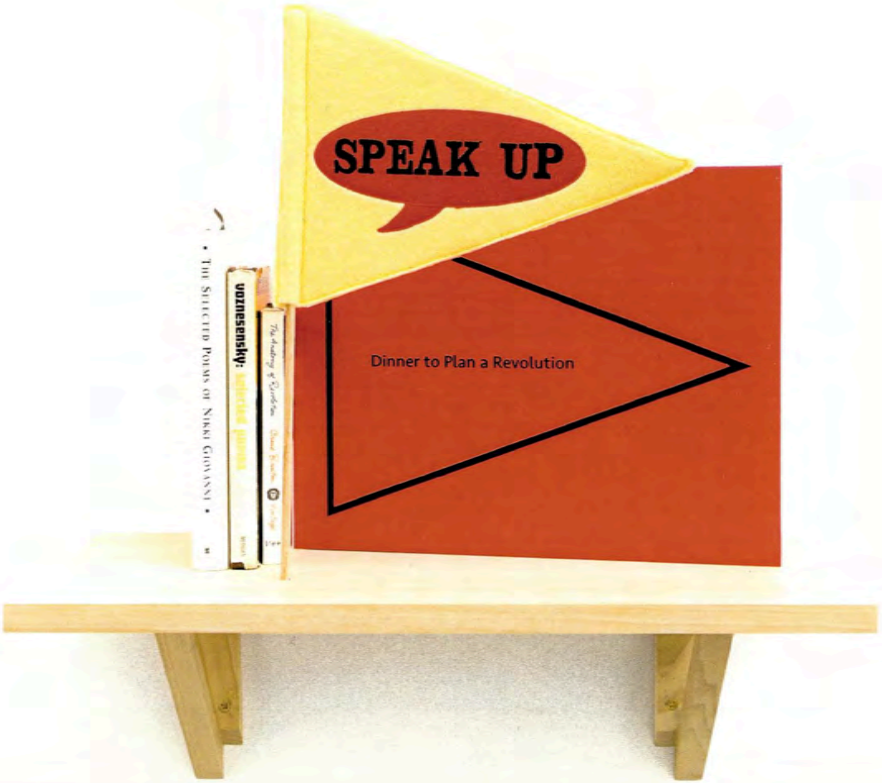
Photographer Anna Gaskell explores "All Fur," a more malevolent take on the classic *Cinderella* story. Her haunting yet elegant chromogenic color prints are touched by an unknown horror that is revealed only by reading the displayed text: there are overtones of incest in this censored fairy tale. In the shadowy, tense interior of Gaskell's "Untitled, #35 (hide)," a seated young woman is clad in a sleeveless white shift, looking through her dark hair. Her outstretched legs are bound by tights to create a yonic triangle.

In the exhibition catalog, curator Emily Stamey defines fairy tales as "wonder tales that originated in oral folk traditions," and notes that "many of the artists whose work is featured in *Dread & Delight* may not have been familiar with these early iterations, yet their work often resonates deeply with their more troublesome content and tone." These artists give a voice to the subconscious that insists on reinstating the role such wonder tales originally served.

Ana Teresa Fernández, "The Ice Queen" (2013) Studio performance (still). Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco © Ana Teresa Fernández

Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World *is on view through December 9, 2018, in the Bob and Lissa Shelley McDowell Gallery at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (corner of Spring Garden and Tate Streets, Greensboro, NC). The exhibit then travels to the Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College, Iowa, from February 2 through April 27, 2019, and to the Akron Art Museum, Ohio, from June 29 through September 22, 2019. Organized by the Weatherspoon Art Museum,* Dread & Delight *is curated by Dr. Emily Stamey, their Curator of Exhibitions.*

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC



MK GUTH

Paying Attention

The Hallie Ford Museum of Art cordially invites you to meet Portland conceptual artist MK Guth.

MK Guth: Paying Attention

January 20–April 1, 2018

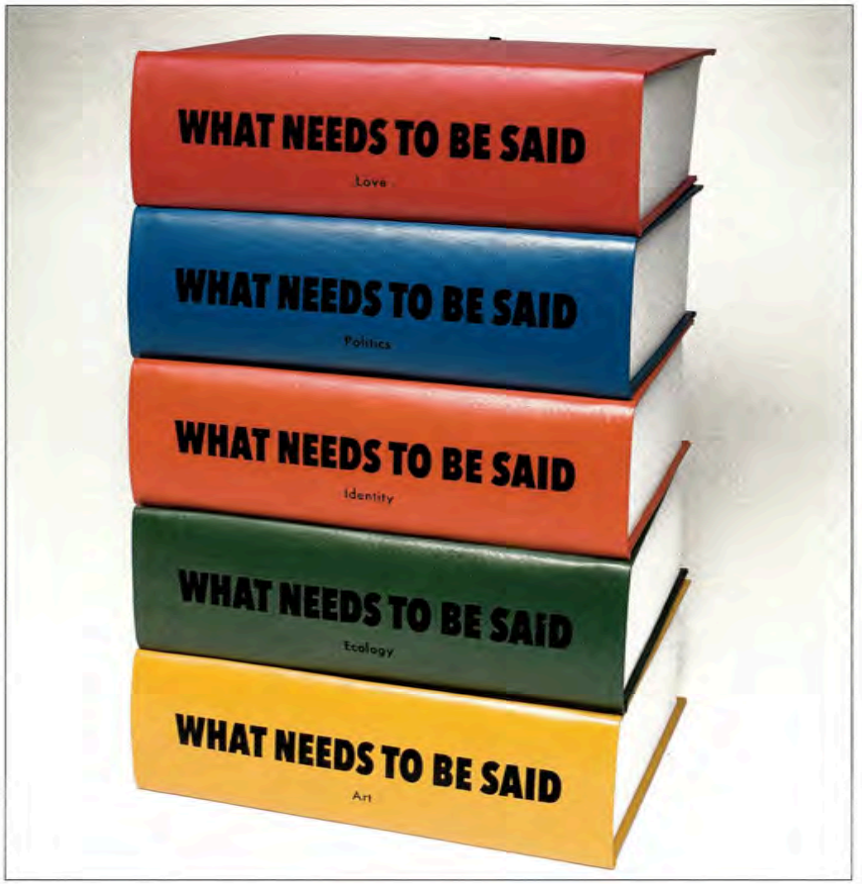
Members Reception and Reading Performance

Saturday, January 20
5–7 p.m.
Maribeth Collins Lobby
Hallie Ford Museum of Art
Refreshments

Join MK Guth and other performers as they read from *Choreography for Reading Aloud*, a mixed media installation comprised of books, manuscripts, letters, and diaries selected from Willamette University's Archives and Special Collections at the Mark O. Hatfield Library.

5:15–6 p.m.
Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery
Hallie Ford Museum of Art

Receptions are for members and invited guests only.
Please RSVP by January 16 (acceptances only)
at **willamette.edu/go/hfma_rsvp,**
503-370-6855 or museum-art@willamette.edu



Reading Performances

Tuesday, January 23,
February 20, March 20
Saturday, February 10,
March 10
12:30–12:45 p.m.
Atrium Gallery, Hallie Ford Museum of Art

See previous description.

Lecture

MK Guth
Thursday, January 25
7:30 p.m.
Paulus Lecture Hall, Willamette University College of Law

Join MK Guth as she discusses her art and career.

Hallie Ford *Museum of* Art

WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

Financial support for the exhibition was provided by general operating support grants from the City of Salem's Transient Occupancy Tax funds and the Oregon Arts Commission.

Hours
Tuesday–Saturday
10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sunday, 1–5 p.m.
Closed Monday

Street address: 700 State Street
Mailing address: 900 State Street
Salem, OR 97301
503-370-6855
willamette.edu/arts/hfma

Front: MK Guth (American, born 1963), *Dinner to Plan a Revolution*, 2016, 1 felt flag, 1 artist book, 3 selected books (*Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni, Selected Poems of Andrei Voznesensky*, and *The Anatomy of Revolution* by Crane Brinton), 1 poplar shelf, collection of Sara and Michelle Vance Waddell, through the courtesy of the Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

Photo: Etienne Frossard

Inside: MK Guth, *What Needs to be Said* (detail), 2017, 5 artist books, 1 birch table, 2 birch stools, courtesy of Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

Photo: Dan Kvitka

Hallie Ford
Museum of Art
WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

Jan.–June 2018
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Brushstrokes

MK Guth, *Dinner for a Funeral*, 2012

MK Guth: Paying Attention

JANUARY 20–APRIL 1, 2018

MK Guth (American, born 1963) is a nationally-recognized Portland, Oregon conceptual artist and associate professor at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. A major new exhibition of her work opens January 20 and continues through April 1, 2018, in the Melvin Henderson-Rubio Gallery. Organized by Director John Olbrantz, the exhibition features a range of still life installations from the past six years that are intended to illuminate how social interaction is shaped through rites and treasured objects. At least one of her most recent still life installations, *What Needs to Be Said*, encourages visitors to share their thoughts and feelings in five bound books on diverse topics such as art, ecology, identity, love, and politics.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is *Choreography for Reading Aloud*, a new mixed media installation that comprises books, manuscripts, letters, and diaries selected from Willamette University's Archives and Special Collections, housed at the Mark O. Hatfield Library. Visitors are invited to select transcripts from the texts to read aloud, either individually or as a group, creating a cacophony of sounds where stories collide and information overlaps. What happens when multiple platforms of knowledge overlap, intersect, and obscure each other? How does the transmission of meaning shift when books, manuscripts, letters, and diaries are read simultaneously by different readers and amplified by voice?

A members reception has been scheduled for Saturday, January 20 from 5–7 p.m., with a reading performance of *Choreography for Reading Aloud* scheduled for 5:15–6 p.m. Additional reading performances have been scheduled from 12:30–12:45 p.m. on Tuesdays, January 23, February 20, and March 20, and from 12:30–12:45 p.m. on Saturdays, February 10 and March 10. In addition, Guth will discuss her art and career in an illustrated lecture on Thursday, January 25, beginning at 7:30 p.m. in the Paulus Lecture Hall in the Willamette University College of Law. Admission to the Tuesday reading performances and the lecture is complimentary. For further information, see Calendar of Events.

HYPERALLERGIC

Galleries

The Art of Drinking with a Friend

by Jillian Steinhauer on July 5, 2016

The trappings of MK Guth's 'Instructions for Drinking with a Friend' (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic) (click to enlarge)

The first thing I did, after entering the gallery and introducing myself to the gallerist, was ask to use the bathroom. "I know this is usually forbidden," I said apologetically, "but I have to go, and I don't think I can sit and drink whiskey for an hour if I don't." No problem, he replied, and suddenly there I was, peeing in a Chelsea art gallery rather than trekking long blocks in desperate search of a toilet. Sign #1 that this was not a normal visit.

The second sign was probably the whiskey, which, when I entered, could be seen in a glass bottle on a small wooden table in the center of the gallery; at it sat two people, their faces flushed and their tones hushed as they spoke. That will be me in an hour, I told myself, but for the "hushed" part, because I'm not exactly a quiet drunk.

In Instructions for Drinking with a Friend, part of her recent solo show at Cristin Tierney Gallery, MK Guth curates an experience for two friends ("someone that you have spent time with on more than two occasions," as per the artist's instructions) to sit and drink whiskey. It starts with physical objects: the small table, two accompanying stools, a custom napkin, a handmade book, a custom engraved glass bottle filled with whiskey, and two hand-blown glasses (plus, mercifully, a carafe of water). It continues with instructions: put the napkin on the table, sit across from each other, choose a topic that's not something you normally talk about, and, before you begin your conversation, read aloud Charles Baudelaire's poem "Get Drunk," whose opening lines proclaim:

'One should always be drunk. That's all that matters;
that's our one imperative need. So as not to feel Time's
horrible burden, one which breaks your shoulders and bows
you down, you must get drunk without cease.'

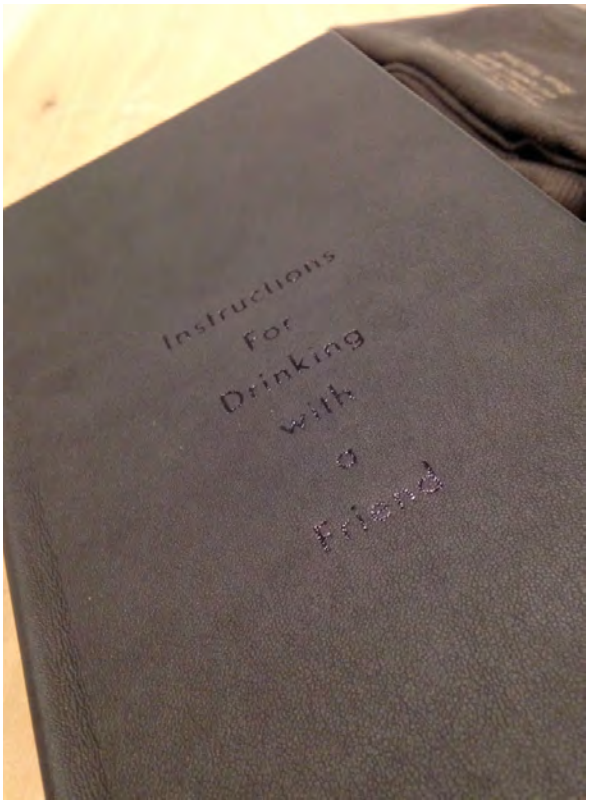
And so we did — we got drunk.

The drinking table, empty between pairs of participants

But first we sat down. My friend Julie and I, face to face at this table, me in my element, she decidedly not in hers. What exactly were we doing there? she had asked me when she arrived, and I had tried to explain it as best I could. Social practice, relational aesthetics … you know, art. But there was a moment of hesitation when we sat; it was palpable. What do we do now? How does our friendship work here?

And just as quickly as it appeared, it went. Because I've known Julie for 15 years; times at which we've gotten drunk are not in short supply. We've gotten drunk at a hostel in the Swiss Alps, by the side of a lake in Nicaragua, after trekking on a glacier in Iceland, on a golf course while underage in our hometown.

And so, for us at least, getting drunk in an art gallery in New York was not the most unusual thing we could do.



Sure, we talked about politics, which we don't normally. Yes, at times that meant we had to stop ourselves from veering into our perennial topic, our lives. But mostly we just talked like Julie and me, and I don't honestly remember the details all that well, and I forgot to take an artful photo of our glasses filled with the deliciously smooth, amber-brown liquid, because we were too busy getting drunk.

When we were done, we walked out into the gleaming sunlight, my head buzzing with the beginnings of a headache. We wanted food, we agreed, and to keep drinking. We walked for a while, found a restaurant, sat down across from one another once more and continued to talk and drink. "I felt like art!," Julie confessed as we finished our dinners. "That one woman walked in, and I wanted to do my normal thing and make eye contact and smile, but I realized I didn't have to, because I was art!"

I was happy to hear this, in part because I hadn't felt it myself. I'd felt mostly like a drunk person in an art space, which is maybe a person I've been too many times before. Surely there's a form to be made of getting drunk — a path one might follow, a way in which to become intoxicated and enlightened at the same time. I caught glimmers of it in the gallery, but in the end I just found myself partaking in an art that's already been perfected: drinking with an old friend.

MK Guth, "Instructions for Drinking with a Friend" (2016), mixed media (2 hand-blown glasses, artist book, etched bottle of whiskey, embroidered bar cloth, and carrying case), 8 x 4 3/4 in (20.3 x 12.1 cm)

View of M.K. Guth's performance/ installation *Best Wishes,* 2011; at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas.

LAS VEGAS

M.K. GUTH
THE COSMOPOLITAN OF LAS VEGAS

Among the megaresorts that line the Las Vegas strip, gambling is increasingly being recast as just one of a dozen forms of entertainment and culture. Now, slot machines and blackjack tables are something to navigate on the way to celebrity chef-branded restaurants and performances of Cirque du Soleil. Art has become a major tool in the rebranding of Vegas as a destination for the "creative class." And, taking cues from the biennials, triennials and fairs of the contemporary art world, some of the work offered is of a relational nature. Yet art that homes in on human relationships and prompts heightened awareness of place and community is, of course, a complicated proposition for what is still, in essence, a casino, whose business model is predicated on customers' losing touch with their everyday values.

M.K. Guth's 20-day interactive performance, *Best Wishes*, set in a glass-walled gallery amid throngs of pleasure-seekers at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas casino/resort, demonstrated the possibility of such a site as fertile territory for cultivating a "microtopia," in the parlance of theorist and curator Nicolas Bourriaud. The piece was Guth's third and final installment in a series of participatory works that involved braiding viewers' intimate written statements into skeins of synthetic hair. (The first such work was staged at A Gentil Carioca gallery in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, and the second at the Park Avenue Armory for the 2008 Whitney Biennial.) In each iteration, Guth became the custodian of hundreds of personal revelations.

In Las Vegas, Guth, playing part siren, part carnival barker and part sideshow freak, charismatically solicited passersby in the busy casino thoroughfare. Those entering the gallery were invited to write a wish on a white ribbon, which was then braided by young female attendants into a pair of blond hair extensions that were continually lengthened and worn by the artist day and night throughout the performance. After 20 days, the extensions were 300 feet long and contained a total of 750 wishes. The braided extensions were strung daily around the gallery, creating installations evocative of Duchamp's *Mile of String* (1942) or Eva Hesse's *Untitled (Rope Piece)*, 1970.

As visitors jotted down personal desires and watched their wishes become incorporated into the braids (and appended to the artist's body), they were drawn into conversation with Guth and her attendants as well as with other participants and hangers-on. An unlikely community was formed, defined by a moment of personal exposure and reprieve from the naked commerce outside. Bourriaud's famous description of the temporary communities engendered by relational art is an apt assessment of Guth's Las Vegas performance: "It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows."

—Kirsten Swenson

OREGONLIVE

MK Guth: Triggering emotions, memories with food

By **John Motley, Special to The Oregonian**

on November 17, 2012 at 6:00 AM, updated November 17, 2012 at 6:01 AM

Table for Twelve, MK Guth Walnut table with alder stumps and twelve chairs

Dan Kvitka

For the past several years, Portland artist MK Guth has focused on the figure of the braid, a formal reflection of how her practice weaves together installation, sculpture and viewer participation. Of course, it also symbolizes the bonds that form community, which in her work of the past decade have ranged from fairy tales to a desire to protect the people and things we love.

Those themes intersected in Guth's project for the 2008 Whitney Biennial, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," in which the artist asked participants to consider what is most worth protecting and record their responses on fabric scraps, which were woven into an evolving sculpture of synthetic hair braids. After stopping in several cities on its way to New York for the Biennial, it took shape as a collective portrait of what we, as Americans, hold most dear.

While Guth's new body of work, on view in "When Nothing Else Subsists, Smell and Taste Remain" at the Marylhurst Art Gym, leaves her signature braids behind, it remains trained on communal activity and shared experience. Here, the ties that bind are culinary and literary. Inspired by Marcel Proust's famous "madeleine" cake, which whisks away the narrator of "Swann's Way" to a vividly remembered childhood moment, Guth is interested in food as a vehicle for triggering memories, conjuring emotions and creating connections across generations.

In a pair of similar installations, both titled "Taste and Smell Remain," 2012, four tiny speakers dangle from the ceiling over a trio of low tree stumps, inviting visitors to sit and listen to recordings of people discussing their strongest memories of food and family. Nearby, a rustic dining table is surrounded by a dozen chairs and piled high with cookbooks, from "The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook" to "The Woman's Day Encyclopedia of Cookery, Vol. 1." This space allows Guth's meditations on the nourishment of reading and dining to come to life in the gallery, as she invites visitors, like dinner guests, to make themselves at home and stay awhile.

The remainder of the show is dedicated to a series of assemblages of books, utensils and flatware, and various sculptural embellishments, which appear on lacquered wood shelves. They operate like instructions for themed dinners, such as "Dinner for Getting Lost," which nestles beautifully irregular blown-glass cups and plates in a hollowed-out birch trunk, with titles of wayward exploration, such as "Robinson Crusoe" and "Through the Looking Glass," perched on top.

In these pieces, Guth offers a handful of uniform components and then arranges them in various permutations. Impressively, this modulation points equally to food and literature, as they function like ingredients in a recipe or the words in a single line of poetry.

*-- **John Motley** is a Portland freelance writer*

BAD AT SPORTS
art talk

Realigning our Sight: An Interview with MK Guth

December 19, 2012 ·

Written by Sarah Margolis-Pineo

Midway through our studio visit, MK Guth told me about a compass—her father's compass to be precise—that, throughout her childhood, was contained in the tackle box on her family's boat. After countless summers of relying on this particular compass to navigate the waterways of the Canadian Great Lakes, it became a talisman of sorts, and it was this heirloom that sent the artist running to Midwest following the sale of the entire rig a few years ago. Out of this experience, Guth began to reconsider objects: how they transition between function and fetish; how they shift and shape social interaction; and how their relation to us and to each other organizes our surroundings and appropriates our actions.

Despite her attachment to the compass, Guth never learned to read it. It wasn't until she was the sole owner of the object that she fulfilled its agency as a wayfinder, using it to navigate hikes through the Cascades. This notion of object lying in wait, anticipating the grasp of the human hand to become activated as an extension and mediation of human experience in the world, is a theme resonant throughout Guth's art practice. Her most recent project, *When Nothing Else Subsists, Smell and Taste Remain*, (2012), is a multi-sensory exploration of the meaning that can evolve from the intersection of subject, object, and context. The exhibition is composed of a series of vignettes—or still lives as the artist calls them—composed of everyday readymades interspersed with one-of-a-kind handcraft and modified found objects. Guth meticulously curated a range of texture in each display. The all too appealing interplay of lustrous forged bronze, hand-blown glass, and polished woodgrain cannot help being touched. Guth intentionally solicits this interaction from her audience, tempting visitors to sit at her handcrafted table, thumb through original artist books, and take various tools for dining in hand.

As a secondary, perhaps richer engagement, viewers are invited to enact dinners— elaborate rituals explicitly outlined in Guth's one-of-a-kind books: *Dinner for John Cage*, *Dinner for Crying, Dinner for the Woods, Dinner for a Funeral, Dinner for Getting Lost*, and others. In this iteration of *When Nothing Else Subsists,* the social becomes both medium and content of the project. Setting the stage upon familiar platform of table, flatware, and food, Guth subverts the everydayness of dining, directing attention to the ritual itself—its structure, its narrative, and its social interplay—as a subtle reminder of the small, ephemeral gestures that contribute to grand, long-lasting accumulations.

Guth's previous work similarly embraced participation as fodder for art practice. Her recent series of braid projects including: *Best Wishes,* (2011); *This Fable is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle*, (2010); *Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping*, (2008); solicited physical material—swatches of fiber—as well as text commenting on issues ranging from desire to security. The material was then woven into yards upon yards of braids to create a generative social work that, in the gallery, was translated into an equally compelling sculpture, installation, or lens-based project, that visitors uninvolved with the initial performance could engage and appreciate. Braids from these previous projects festoon the artist's studio currently. They are in the process of being woven into vessels—clever plays on the idea of a repository— where hopes and wishes are bound-up in the objectness of the container itself.

Guth is the maestra of the send-off. At the root of her work is a central line of inquiry—a rhizome-like thread that binds individual, to object, to universe—generating meaning from what is unacknowledged, unarticulated, or unknown. I spoke to Guth in her southeast Portland studio.

Sarah Margolis-Pineo: *I'd love to start with a quote that came up in a previous conversation with you: "Art is what makes life more interesting than art." (Robert Filliou, n.d.) Why did that statement resonate?*

MK Guth: What I find important about that quote is that it reminds us that art has a job to do. In the case of my work, I tend to use the concept of the everyday—reflecting on the everyday in the content, materials, and processes of art making—to refocus attention on analyzing and addressing everyday acts, rituals, and processes with new appreciation and understanding. My recent work at Marylhurst [University's Art Gym], *When Nothing Else Subsists, Smell and Taste Remain*, the project places the ritual of dining within the context of art to attune the viewer to an act that is so familiar that we take it for granted. For example, in the case of the *Dinner for John Cage*, you perform a composition at the dinner, but you are also enacting a ritual that we do all the time: eating. It's this combination of producing something collectively as part of a mundane action within the context of an art experience that forces us to reexamine what we already know.

SMP: *So, you're making the familiar strange, or the ordinary extraordinary…*

MKG: It's more about bringing our attention back to the ordinary so we look at it again. For example, when you walk the few blocks to work every day, you notice certain things, but then you take that walk with someone else and they point out a different building or some detail or whatever, all of a sudden, the walk becomes new again—you see it in a different way. So, I'm not even sure it's about making it special as much as it is about realigning our sight.

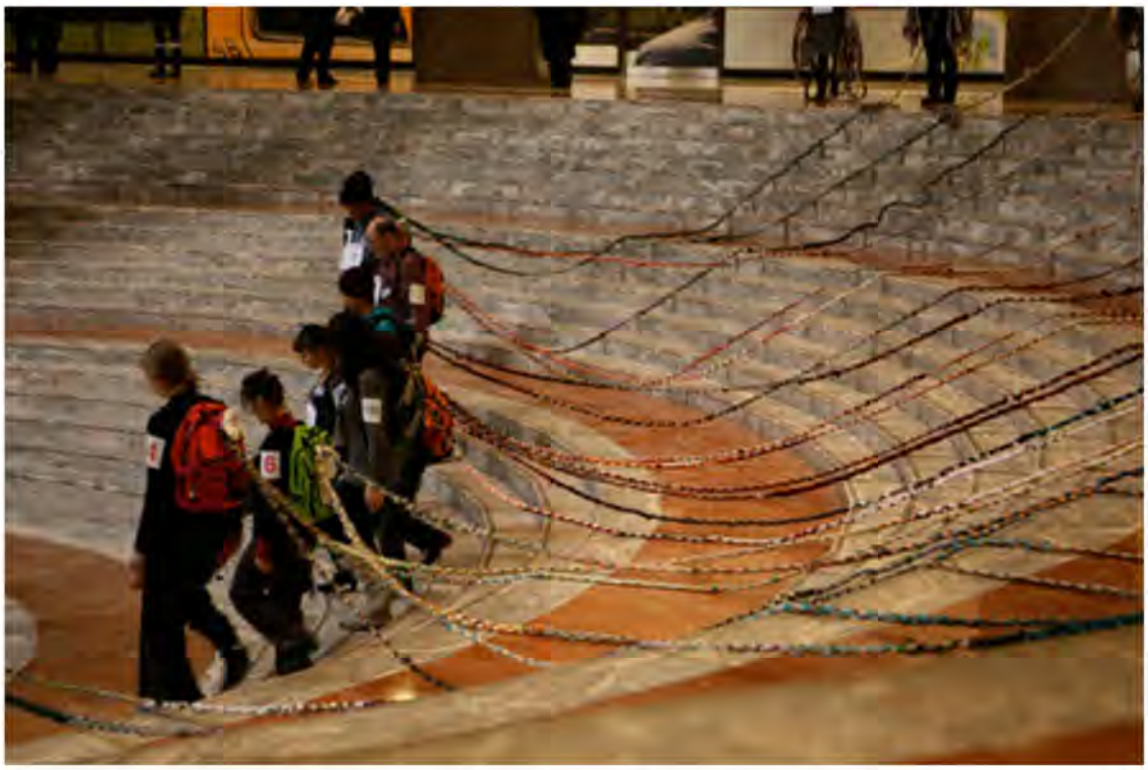
SMP: *Many of your previous projects including* Best Wishes *and* This Fable is Intended for You *are about engagement through the accumulation of matter—generating fiber and text—whereas your more recent work around food and dining is more about ritual—generative through discursive and performative engagement. What drew you away from one form of participation to another?*

MKG: In the 1970s, Gordon Matta-Clark coined the term "food theater." I actually began conceiving [*When Nothing Else Subsists*] several years ago when I was in the process of doing all the weaving and braiding projects, and that term—food theater—helped develop my most recent work by focusing my attention on what it meant when I was eating with friends and how it is this theatrical event. Everybody is a performer at the table and there are always expectations as the guest, as the server, as the person who's cooking the meal, or as the person who is directing the conversation. That notion of performance in relation to something that we do together everyday started to inform where I wanted this work, *When Nothing Else Subsists,* to go.

I suppose this project is the absolute opposite of my previous work in terms of process. These last several years, perhaps starting with *Red Shoe Delivery Service*, (2002-2006), and continuing through the woven works, the interaction with the public played out in one field, and the accumulated ephemera then went on to form works of art that could be then reflected on in an institutional setting—a gallery, museum, or what have you. In essence, the interactivity was one experience and the viewing of the object that came out of it was a different experience. What was important to me is that residual work wasn't functioning as a direct document; meaning, that the secondary object was created to offer up a wholly new viewing experience that has different meaning attached.

I know that my work could easily be defined as "social practice," but in part because I choose not to show direct documentation of the interactive elements of the work in a gallery context and because my work does not exist as documentation of an experience but instead as an object produced from that experience, I feel that my work is set apart. Honestly, I understand why social practice, or any sort of event-oriented project, relies on documentation—there's an art economy there, and a manner of communicating something that would be otherwise lost. However, I also feel that showing ephemera can be a fuck you to the audience. It's like saying: "here's the event that you all were not involved with.

It was great, but you weren't there." Also, a photograph or video can never accomplish translating what the original experience was—the related discomforts, smells, sounds, and all the many other things are absent from documentation. An important part of what I do is creating something else that might connect to that initial experience but it isn't trying to document it in a direct way. I am interested in creating work that offers up multiple experiences and, as a result, the whole project becomes generative.



When Nothing Else Subsists turns my earlier process on its side. The object is similarly the agent of activation, but the activity occurs through an inverse process: object precipitates event.

Certain things cause us to act in specific ways: a book tells us to read it; a table tells us to sit and use it as a surface. We understand that code and structural system, regardless of where the objects are located. It's universal. You can put something into a gallery—it doesn't matter what it is—it could be a clothespin and voila, and it's art. The thing that I like about the table is that people will go to sit at it because its meaning—its system and code—is stronger than that of the art context. For example, people are still willing to go sit at a table and eat despite its location in a university art gallery.

As far as the little vignettes that hold these one-of-a-kind dinners, those still lives have materials that I had hoped would encourage people to take materials off the shelves and engage with them; in particular, the books. For example, the *Dinner for Getting Lost* has a copy of Aristotle's "On Man in the Universe" and a book of Rebecca Solnit as well as the one-of-a-kind book that encompasses the dinner. I made the books to be hardcover sturdy objects that tell the viewer: "I'm not fragile, pick me up." I wanted these still lives to announce that they are meant to be engaged and, in this way, that body of work starts with the sculpture as a way to promote an action. Really, each piece has three different potential experiences that can be engaged: the initial entry to the project is through the still life and contemplative viewing, the second experience is through engaging with the material of the still life, and the third level is to activate the dinner itself.

SMP: *I'm interested in your ability to engage with the unique properties and etiquette for participation within different spaces, fluctuating seemingly easily between white cube and more public venues, as with your recent work in Las Vegas. How do you leverage the different qualities of different spaces for your projects?*

MKG: All spaces have a context—including galleries—and often, it can be difficult to fight against the associations brought on by site. For the Whitney Biennial, my piece, [*Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping,* (2008)], was installed in the library of the Park Avenue Armory, a space that has very specific meaning and embedded history. In my mind, simply putting an artwork in that space without considering the relationship to site means that both elements—the history of the space and the meaning of the artwork—are in this constant battle. In my work, it makes more sense for me to use history and meaning in the construction of the artwork so that the two could come together and create a unique, mutually supported experience for the audience. At Marylhurst, the Art Gym has a very particular feel with its exposed wooden beams and a huge expanse of windows—a very hallowed hall kind of feel that adds to the sense of ritual. And, of course, you can't fight Vegas, so it made sense to do a work that connected some of the aspects of the reasons people visit Vegas: the dream, desire, etc. To me, it seems to be a more successful strategy somehow to engage the site, leveraging it to create meaning for the rest of the work.

SMP: *The research-based element of your practice is so intensive. I'm wondering if you could continue this thread and speak to blending more empirical truth—particularly history—with mythmaking, which strikes me as being very present in many of your projects?*

MKG: I start often with mythic narratives and use them as a way to bring people in. Often with interactive work, people do not like to engage, (including me!), so there has to be another way to invite people into the piece. There are narratives that we all recognize, and these provide a way for people to come to the work that's familiar. It's the shifting that happens in that space—engaging audience with familiar narrative—that creates a new mythic site.

SMP: *How did you begin to do participatory work and how do you negotiate the unknowns that come with choreographing this type of performance?*

MKG: Late-summer 2002, *Red Shoe Delivery Service* made its debut in New York. This was a project with Molly Dilworth and, one year later, with Cris Moss. I had been working on a series of photos that were combining mythic representations into everyday scenarios, and one of them was Dorothy's Ruby Slippers. I had been doing this kind of work for three years and, at that point, I was frustrated with it. In my mind, I was redesigning these representations to make room for ordinary people in the way that you may not be a superhero but you could still have some sort of remarkable power. That series of work just kind of collapsed into the photograph, object, or video, and never really became an experience outside the realm of image or object; *Red Shoe* developed out of this point of frustration. I was sitting at the kitchen table with my then roommate Molly Dilworth, and I said: "What if I just rented a van, filled it with glittery shoes, and drove around giving people free rides? What would happen then?" And Molly said: "If you do that, I'll drive." That's how *Red Shoe* was born. We did our first three days in New York with a rented minivan and a bunch of red glittery shoes that I had made, and we literally gave rides to people to wherever they wanted to go. In exchange, they had to give us their shoes for the duration of the ride, and they had to choose a pair of red glittery shoes and click their heels saying: "there's no place like…" the Post Office, work, the neighborhood bar, or wherever they were going. We took video of our passengers at the beginning and end of each ride, and later edited those two moments together to create a video of people magically transported in a spiral of glitter and heart music to their desired location. As the project went on, we became more sophisticated. Molly started curating the van, so the ride itself became this entirely other experience for the riders. Then Chris Moss became involved when we realized we needed a third person. Chris began working on these interactive DVDs that involved recording the stories of our riders and partnering with writers and illustrators to translate them into texts and images. We began creating this multi-layered, almost rhizomatic project that spoked in all these different ways. We began doing virtual travel agencies, dispatch centers, shoe stores, so something that started out as a

mobile project—which we always kept—became all these different ways of communicating notions of risk taking, desire, transformation, and different ideas of home.

When *Red Shoe* was first developed, it took time for the three of us to understand and evolve the work in such a way that the loss of autonomy that comes with participation was not a problem to be resolved, but rather, something that offered up a range of new possibilities both for the viewers and for us as the artists that made the work more exciting. As time went on, and with the braid projects, I began to weave-in this loss of autonomy into the design of the work. When Sol Lewitt spoke about his instructions-based works, he had an understanding that no one person draws a line the same. So, those works, no matter how well the instructions are composed, will always vary a little bit, and that becomes part of the work. I think that if you pursue a practice that is exchange-based or participatory without that understanding that concept, you are going to be constantly frustrated. Understanding that active audience members will come in and shift the outcome of the work has to be taken into consideration in the design of the piece. This different system of meaning making doesn't change the authorship of the work however, because the design of that experience is still coming from me.

SMP: *So, given that transdiciplinary is the buzzword du jour, I'm curious if you can articulate a bit more about your approach to art making that draws from research, object making, image making, performance, and choreography. Moreover, artists today function in various roles ranging from sociologist, to journalist, to cabdriver. Given the expansion of the field, how would you define the role of an artist in this context and how do you address the anxiety that comes with pushing and crossing traditional boundaries?*

MKG: I'm not going to define the role of an artist—each artist is going to define that role differently. But I do feel that art has a job to do and, for me now, my job as an artist involves wearing a lot of different hats: choreography, directing, facilitating.

I come from an object making background, and I still believe in the power of the object to make people act or to change their understanding of an image or event. That being said, I would like to approach my practice as one that offers up a multi-level of experiences including more viewer activated experiences. At the end of the day, I feel that in order to communicate, I need to make use of many different skills: some that are very common and everyday ways of making; others are more cerebral, mining my education and research skills; and some that engage new technology, which in many ways is redefining the role of the artist today. What is an artist? Tough question! I guess I choose the job of cultivating an experience for an audience that communicates something about them back to them. This is the role I choose.

MK Guth is a multidisciplinary artist residing in Portland, Oregon. Her most recent project, When Nothing Else Subsists, Smell and Taste Remain, *was on view at Marylhurst University's Art Gym, Oct. 7 – Dec. 9, 2012. She received her MFA from New York University in 2002, and her work has been featured internationally at numerous museums, galleries, and festivals including: The Whitney Museum of American Art; The Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; The Melbourne International Arts Festival; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art; Swiss Institute; White Box Annex; White Columns; Frye Museum; Henry Art Gallery; and others. Guth is currently Chair of the MFA Program at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, (PNCA), and is represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland.*

sculpture

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commissions

Left: Aaron Young, *Greeting Card*, 2007. Stained plywood, acrylic, and burnt rubber, 16 x 20 ft. Above: MK Guth, *Best Wishes*, 2011. Mixed media and performance, dimensions variable. Below: Yoko Ono and T.J. Wilcox, *Pause* (detail), 2010. LED electronic billboard, 65 ft. high.

Art Production Fund

New York

Few arts organizations support public projects as diverse as a night of "channeled reading" from Sean Landers's memoir voiced by the people featured in the stories, a motorcycle performance in which skid marks coalesced in an abstract drawing, and Fischerspooner concerts in a decrepit Los Angeles bank. Art Production Fund (APF), in addition to producing these distinctive acts of public art, also runs an artist residency at a swanky Las Vegas hotel and an on-line store selling beach towels, plates, and other everyday items designed by artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jasper Johns.

APF originated in 2000 as the brainchild of Yvonne Force Villareal and Doreen Remen, longtime friends who met as BFA students at the Rhode Island School of Design in the '80s. APF describes its primary goal as "helping artists realize difficult projects." These projects often involve collaborations across art forms and disciplines, as well as public participation. The organization serves as a producer of these works, "with the aim of reaching wide audiences and reducing the physical as well as the psychic distance of cultural, class, linguistic, racial, and income barriers that may hinder participation in contemporary art." In other words, APF brings contemporary art to the general public.

The organization often achieves this goal through mass and popular culture outlets. Since the beginning, Force Villareal and Remen have shown a knack for collaboration with big names. One of APF's first projects was an exhibition of 20 years of Beastie Boys photographs, with profits donated to the Milarepa Fund, an organization co-founded by Adam Yauch to support the struggle for Tibetan independence. In 2008, APF collaborated with the 2008 Whitney Biennial and the Gap to create artist-designed T-shirts by Sarah Sze, Cai Guo-Qiang, Jeff Koons, and others. The organization has also been keeping up with the street art and graffiti movements, supporting mural and wheat paste projects by the likes of Shepard Fairey and Shinique Smith, which appeared on store shutters in the Bowery and in a Las Vegas hotel parking lot.

Many APF projects benefit from ongoing partnerships, most significantly, with The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas hotel and casino and the Soho Mews condominium in Manhattan. When The Cosmopolitan opened in 2010, APF invited Yoko Ono and T.J. Wilcox to transform its marquee. Since then, the hotel has hosted numerous projects, including graffiti and murals and the P3 Studio artist residency. APF has a similar relationship

TOP LEFT: KAI REGAN / ALL: COURTESY ART PRODUCTION FUND

with Soho Mews, which donated a storefront space, dubbed the APF Lab, for performances, happenings, pop-up shops, and installations. Both venues attract artists from all over the world to create site-specific, interactive projects. In one intriguing P3 Studio project, Portland-based MK Guth invited the public to write wishes on pieces of cloth and braid them into her masses of hair, which she later chopped off and hung in a gallery installation.

APF's most recent initiatives have appeared in an empty lot around the corner from Times Square. In cooperation with the Times Square Alliance and using space donated by the Shubert Organization, the Last Lot project invites artists to create temporary, site-specific installations, all striving to raise environmental awareness. In the inaugural installation (November 22, 2011–February 5, 2012), David Brooks's *Desert Rooftops* colonized the space with an array of roofs without houses. Described as "similar to [the roofs] on suburban developments, McMansions, and strip malls, conjoined to resemble a rolling, dune-like landscape," this surreal terrain issued a somber reminder of the desertification caused by urban sprawl. Brooks's subtle message took the idea of a wasteland in two directions. In an on-line interview with the *Epoch Times*, he cited the ironic fact of abandoned buildings in the midst of today's housing crisis and the environmental degradation caused by monoculture, "where we plant the entire Midwest with only corn."

The second Last Lot project was more overtly political and gained significantly more attention. In Josephine Meckseper's *Manhattan Oil Project* (March 5–May 6, 2012), two kinetic sculptures of full-sized pumpjacks seemed to indicate that an oil drilling venture was underway in downtown Manhattan. To build these behemoths, Meckseper hired Pabst Enterprises, a metal shop that, as she told the *New York Times*, has the capability to produce a working oil pump. "It was important to me to work with a company that makes industrial products, not art sculptures," Meckseper wrote in *Artforum*. "Fifty years ago, this plant built giant parts for the U.S. Navy. There are still old train tracks on the factory floor there…The similarly anachronistic look of the oil pumps echoes the more innocent beginnings of the industrial revolution, now escalated to a tenuous reality defined by dependency on oil." Reminiscent of large-scale outdoor works by

Above: David Brooks, *Desert Rooftops*, 2011. Wood with asphalt shingles, 5000 sq. ft. Below: Josephine Meckseper, *Manhattan Oil Project*, 2012. Steel, plastic, hardware, and paint, 2 elements, 25 ft. high each.

Mark di Suvero and Alexander Calder, the red and black *Manhattan Oil Project* had a mixed critical reception. On the one hand, it broached some very important and timely subjects; on the other, the sculptures might have been too elegant for their own good. As Roberta Smith concluded in a review for the *New York Times*, "They conjure up Surrealism and Pop Art and are much tamer than their real-life precedents: for example, the actual functioning oil pumps that you drive past in the middle of Los Angeles, fouling the air with dust and fumes…It's hard not to think that *Manhattan Oil Project* is just good, clean, public-art fun; pious and well-meaning, mildly entertaining, but nothing to get especially heavy, or ignited, about."

Inevitably, this is the dilemma of all politically minded public art: How can art with a message best be presented to the public without losing its accessibility factor? Art Production Fund has created some very successful public projects over the last 12 years. Through its use of popular culture and business collaborations, it will continue to achieve its goals of democratizing contemporary art and bringing it to a wider audience.

—Elena Goukassian

Juries are convened each month to select works for Commissions. Information on recently completed commissions, along with high-resolution digital images (300 dpi at 4 x 5 in. minimum), should be sent to: Commissions, Sculpture, *1633 Connecticut Avenue NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20009. E-mail <elena@sculpture.org>.*

BOTTOM: ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY / BOTH: JAMES EWING, COURTESY ART PRODUCTION FUND

ARTFORUM

M. K. Guth
01.05.10

Left: M. K. Guth, This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle, 2009 (work in progress), backpacks, cords of used clothing, dimensions variable. Right: View of M. K. Guth's residency at 1 New York Plaza, November 2009.

M. K. Guth is a Portland, Oregon–based multimedia artist and filmmaker who has exhibited widely and received critical praise for her work in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. Her exhibition at the World Financial Center in New York opens January 6.

THERE ARE DEEP CONNECTIONS between my current project, This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle, which is part of Mark Russell's 2010 Under the Radar Festival, and the installation I created for the 2008 Whitney Biennial, Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping—but there are a lot of departures as well. The similarities revolve around narrative structure and the amplification of collective voice and human presence, and also around the consideration of a particular site. But the two projects are significantly different.

The Whitney installation was truly interactive; however, in my new work, the public does not interact with the piece physically, but through acts of generosity. People who live and work in lower Manhattan have donated all the materials—used clothing and fabric—that compose the project. These materials have directly shaped the appearance and process of the work, but the public has not literally helped to construct the installation as they did at the Whitney. My new work is arguably more expansive, and it presents the process of the piece in three successive phases.

In November, during the first phase of the project, I conducted a residency at 1 New York Plaza in lower Manhattan. The residency space was an old retail store that is now used by artists. It has two large banks of windows, so the public could view me at work with my assistant, the New York–based artist Molly Dilworth. The space acted as a window onto the performance of our labor. People could witness materials undergo transformation for the exhibition. I took into account aspects of display and construction. So, for instance, as Molly and I processed donated materials, we worked in unison: cutting, folding, hanging, stacking, or sewing—using the same types of movements—and placing materials with a mind to the aesthetic qualities of place. Each week, the space changed to complement a different form of work, accumulating into an environment of diverse forms, colors, materials, and gestures.

The exhibition—the second phase of the project—takes place in the gallery at the World Financial Center. It features long lengths of cord braided from the used fabric and clothing. The cords are anchored to backpacks hung along the walls of the gallery. The backpacks are removed from the walls for the performances and then replaced. The gestures of the residency are also captured in the exhibition, but in other forms—filling vitrines, for instance. The show acts as a staging area for the performances, and the original labor of the project is still present there.

The January performances are the final phase and culmination of the project. They involve twenty-four volunteer performers from different backgrounds—some are people I met during the residency who work in lower Manhattan, some are artists, writers, performance artists, etc. Each of the twenty-four performers will wear a backpack with a sixty-six-foot braided cord attached to it—thirty-three feet on either side. As the performers walk throughout the Winter Garden, they follow a series of choreographed movements based on maps I created in response to the architecture and significance of the site. As the performers shift, they create shifting geometric shapes—temporary sculptures—that amplify the shape and character of the Winter Garden. The braided cords connect the performers. As the performers change formation, they must carefully negotiate and manage the cords.

The geometric shapes created during the performance resemble much of the reflective glasswork in the atrium and also some of the intricate stonework on the floors. I'm interested in how the performers will amplify the human presence of the people who work in lower Manhattan and the patterns they follow in their daily lives. The title of the piece, This Fable Is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle, is inspired by an 1836 Hans Christian Andersen story. In the story there is a mirror, and when someone looks in the mirror, it tells the person about his or her life. I like the idea that a work of art tells everyone a little bit about everybody else–-either through a reflection or a collective voice.
— As told to Stephanie Snyder

cityArts
new york's review of culture

Closet Case

November 3, 2009

By Jordan Galloway

Bags of donated clothing started filling MK Guth's apartment soon after the artist announced she needed clothing cast offs. As the opening date approached for her new exhibition, "This Fable is Intended for You: A Work-Energy Principle," she realized she'd have to take her search for clothing handouts public. So Guth is now inviting New Yorkers to clean out their closets and provide her material for the conceptual work.

"When people hand you a bag of materials, it tells you something about them," Guth said. "Maybe they have kids. Maybe they're into dyeing clothing. Maybe they work with fabric. Maybe they collect T-shirts. It tells you something about them, which is interesting."

Guth encourages people to bring unwanted materials—sweaters, socks, sheets, yarn, rags or any unusable fabrics—to her temporary studio at an empty, retail storefront at One New York Plaza—corner of Water and Whitehall streets, where donations will be accepted through early December. "It's an unusual place to make art," Guth said. "It's an old, retail space in Lower Manhattan. This isn't the hub of the art world in any way, and that's interesting to me that this place that's not known as a hub for art can become activated. And art can be a device to connect the narratives of the people in the neighborhood."

The Portland, Ore.-based artist will take apart the donated material and reconfigure it into braids, ropes and cords, which will become an integral part of her exhibition and performance art piece, which is sponsored by arts World Financial Center and will be presented as part of the Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival in January at the World Financial Center.

While the area's anemic environment is not often associated with artistry, Guth sees the potential for transformation in the space.

"It's in a very particular environment," Guth said. "I see that not as a deficit, but something that can add to the content of the work and what happens. It animates a retail space in a very different way than it would normally be about. It's not about commerce, it's about a barter system, and it's about being in a vitrine. Your work, your labor is in a vitrine in a sense. Where one works is suddenly on display."

Guth typically works in video, photography, sculpture and performance, and her last piece, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," was showcased at the 2008 Whitney Biennial. Guth explained public participation will largely influence the look of her latest project.

"If I only end up with the few bags I have right now, something could be made," Guth said. "If we get piles and piles of things, that will have a completely different persona. That's the nature of the work-energy principle."

She plans to donate unused materials from the project to organizations like Housing Works. Guth, who understands the "trash-to-treasure" element of the artwork, said she is also considering holding a clothing swap at the studio.

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Oregon

MK Guth at the Portland Art Museum

MK Guth, *Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping*, 2007-08, synthetic hair, flannel ribbons, at the Portland Art Museum. (Photo: Matthew Wilson.)

What is the political capital of art? In the eight years since the 9/11 attacks, the hand-wringing question dogging artists has been: What can art do in response to its times? As we leave the dark Bush era and enter the hoped for Golden Age of Obama, artists feel the ground once again shift beneath their feet. Many feel hopeful that the incoming president has a much more proactive and positive relationship to the arts. But the art world too certainly enjoyed the benefits of the recently burst bubble economy. Record prices, superstar status for some and an ever-growing list of international art fairs and biennials made the art world seem like one section of the entertainment industry. However, even as we clung to our slumber early in 2008, the Whitney Biennial exchanged much of the glitz for a more downbeat incarnation; rageddy materials, next generation relational aesthetics and humbler ambitions defined that exhibition. Portland artist MK Guth was one of the artists included. Aside from the "hometown girl makes good" aspect of her inclusion in the Biennial, Guth's *Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping* brought with it a zeitgeist that is particularly strong in the Northwest.

Building on her 2006 *Rapunzel* series, Guth invested the fairy-tale braids with a larger metaphor. An astute student of art history and contemporary theory, Guth mixes aspects of early feminist performance art and '90s installation/performance artists like Janine Antoni and Magdalena Abakanowicz, conceptually braiding folktale motifs together with social practice using humble materials. The braid is a charged image. It represents the tying together of disparate threads into a stronger whole, the vanity and opulence of long beautiful hair and an intimate ritual of trust and mutual grooming. The story of Rapunzel is a boilerplate Damsel in Distress. Rapunzel's beauty and vanity save her. The knight arrives as a protector. In Guth's gesture one must ask: Is the artist pulling the braid of the public to help save them or are we extending a collective braid to an unseen hero?

For *Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping*, Guth began a national tour of armories that started with the Gerding Theater in Portland, the site of Portland's Armory. Its final destination was the Seventh Regiment Armory Building in New York for the Whitney Biennial. The armories represent an instance of swords turned not into ploughshares, but into sites of artistic activity. A crew wearing embroidered jackets, designed by Guth, facilitated the braiding at each site. The public was asked, "What is worth protecting?" Answers were written on torn red strips of cloth and woven into a blonde braid of fake hair that grew with each city. The act of placing a prayer or wish onto a public site has a long and wide history from Buddhist temples to the Wailing Wall to wishing wells.

Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping has returned to its hometown in the Apex Gallery in the Portland Art Museum's Northwest Art wing in the form of an installation. The Apex Gallery is a site within the museum's Northwest Art wing dedicated to current work by local artists. Guth's installation includes the jackets worn by the Braiding Crew hanging outside of the space, while the braids fill the small gallery from floor to ceiling. As a mute object in a small space, the gesture is transformed. Art by definition is a formalizing of experience. Regardless if it is a painting, an installation or a performance, a gesture becomes art when it is transformed into the larger concerns and conversations of the art world. There is no more formal site than a museum. The impulse of so much social practice is to blur the lines between that formalized experience and the experience of the common and the everyday.

Visiting the installation is not unlike visiting the galleries housing Northwest Coast masks and dance costumes a few floors down. One receives only the afterglow of the living thing; its context is neutralized. In a similar way, Guth's work operates more as an artifact. To be sure, walking among the braids that read simultaneously as rope, hair and huge spider webs is a visceral experience. And the notes left on the braid invite a deeper look, the tenor of these ranging from the earnest to the knowingly ironic to the willfully absurd.

This is a work that wants to stay alive, meaning it becomes a site that is constantly expanded upon. The interesting aspect of this is that Guth was responding to the military threat, trying to turn that on itself. But looking at the work now, the question of what is worth protecting is even more prescient; we must ask it of the fundamentals of civic society, our politics and lifestyles. If we are to reflect President Obama's campaign slogan, "we are the change we've been waiting for," then we must climb down our own braids and save ourselves. Guth is in step with our times. These are no longer the numb years of complicity, but a time of painful awakening in which our art must also roll up its sleeves and get to work.

—Daniel Duford

APEX: MK Guth closes March 1 at the Portland Art Museum, 1219 SW Park Ave., Portland.

Daniel Duford is a freelance writer based in Portland.

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HOW WE LIVE

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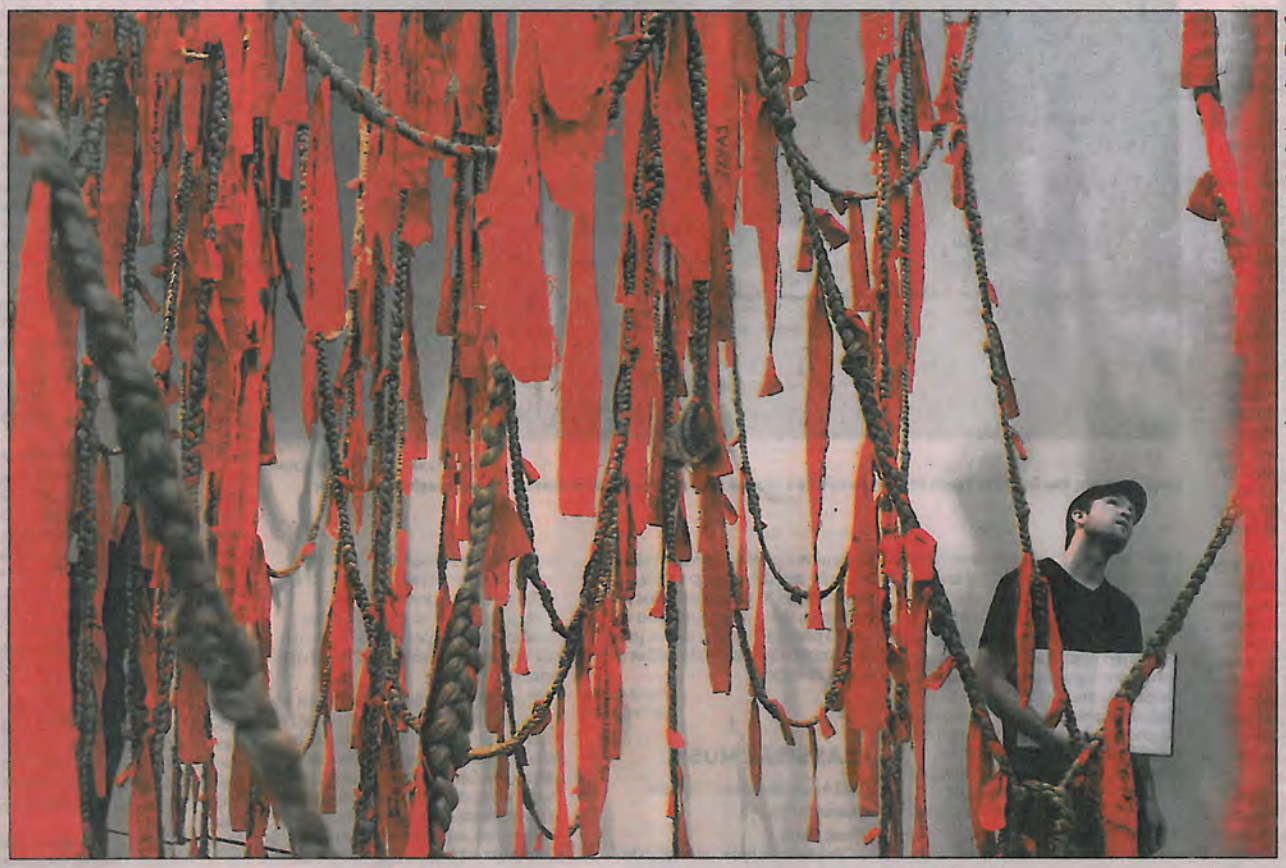


Visual arts review

M.K. Guth's "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping

When: Tuesday-Sunday, through March 1

Where: Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave.

Admission: $8-$10, members and under-17 are free; 503-226-2811 or www.pam.org

M.K. Guth's interactive installation, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," appeared in the Whitney Biennial and now can be seen at the Portland Art Museum, where art student Kylo Stever takes it in.

Photos by FREDRICK D. JOE/THE OREGONIAN

A braided 'river' flows back home

M.K. Guth's installation "Ties of Protection" is on view at the Portland Art Museum

By **BRIAN LIBBY**
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

M.K. Guth's installation at the Portland Art Museum, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," occupies a small, quiet, isolated corner room in the museum's Center for Northwest Art. Yet to experience this piece, which takes up every inch of its allotted space, is to be enveloped by an exuberant chorus of voices and ideas.

One doesn't merely walk past or around Guth's enthralling piece, which she calls an "interactive sculpture," but through it. "Ties of Protection," making its local debut at the museum after first showing earlier this spring at the prestigious 2008 Whitney Biennial in New York City, consists of one long braided rope made of synthetic human hair. The work is long enough to be draped from the ceiling in several segments like jungle vines. It's an incredible sight to behold from within the installation, with loops and lines of golden hair twisting and undulating everywhere.

Braided into the hair are hundreds of red felt ribbons, each hand-inscribed with a different person's answer to Guth's simple question: "What is worth protecting?" The artist traveled around the country seeking answers to be written down on the ribbons. So as you tiptoe under, over and through the braids, you're also reading individual expressions. In that way, "Ties of Protection" is like a Christmas tree: many individual treats and curiosities unified within a collective whole that, through its overriding spirit, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Some of the answers on the ribbons, which seemingly don't have specific titles or names, refer to simple joys or eclectic passions, like "Mac & cheese secret recipes," or "The planet named Mars." Others are more specific, like the ribbon referring to a prison in California, its anonymous writer explaining, "where my mother resides. I love her and worry about

Please see **GUTH,** Page C3

Artist M.K. Guth collected the answers to the question "What is worth protecting?" on red ribbons attached to a long braid of synthetic hair.

Guth: Rapunzel motif obvious but goes only so far

Continued from Page C1

her." Another ribbon gingerly asks for protection of "My integrity, I guess . . ." Still another answer seems to capture the essence of Guth's installation: "Art & free thinking, love & adventure (but mostly art)."

It's no accident that "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping" calls to mind the Brothers Grimm story of Rapunzel, whose long, braided hair acted as a ladder away from safety and into danger. Guth, a multidisciplinary artist who grew up in Wisconsin but has lived and worked in Portland for many years (she's now chairwoman of the Pacific Northwest College of Art's master of fine arts program in visual studies), has spent much of her career exploring fairy tales, comic books and other children's stories.

In addition to its Rapunzel motifs, the hair itself (particularly the kitsch of its being synthetic) also makes "Ties" feel like pop and performance art. This isn't a virtuoso embrace of beautiful materials or highfalutin symbolism. Instead, the broad, democratic nature of random individuals contributing makes the installation less an expression by Guth and more a case of the artist as an enabler. If the piece has a downside it's that lack of a personal voice. Yet "Ties" resonates with a quiet but unmistakable spiritual power. Perhaps it's because the artwork also resembles in its handwritten messages on ribbons the prayers written onto small tablets and hung outside at Shinto shrines in Japan, or Tibet's colorful prayer flags.

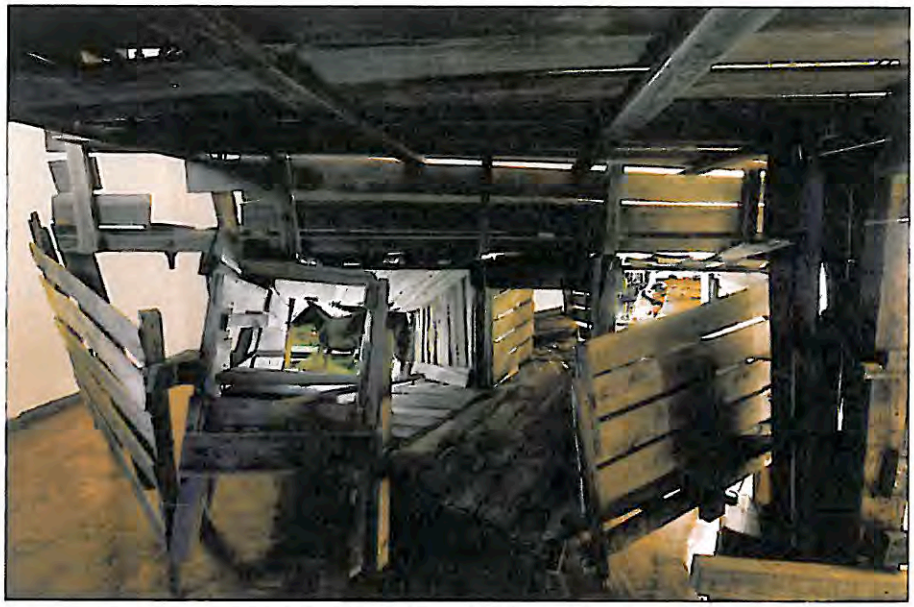
On a recent trip to see "Ties of Protection," I first visited the museum's exhibit of vintage Columbia River Gorge photography, "Wild Beauty: Photographs of the Columbia River Gorge, 1867-1957." Viewing these seemingly opposite shows consecutively helped emphasize, in Guth's piece, the notion of this long braided rope of hair as a kind of river unto itself, or at least comparable to a river in the sense of a long continuous narrative that twists and turns but endures.

Seeing Guth's interactive sculpture just after last week's historic election also furthered this feeling. A good work of art can adapt to changing times, fluid enough to engender diverse meanings. For all the spectacle of its volume and chorus of participants, Guth's installation — particularly in the quietude of this lesser-visited portion of the museum — acts as a kind of void to receive each of our own ideas about what matters most, be they superficial, profound or both.

Whitney Biennial

Whitney Museum

Through June 1



Mika Rottenberg, *Cheese*, 2007–8, mixed media, installation view.

MK Guth, *Ties of Protection and Safekeeping*, 2008, mixed-media installation with performance, installation view. Park Avenue Armory.

A bald eagle's nest by Fritz Haeg—big enough to hold a human being—perches outside on the Whitney's concrete awning, provocatively ecological and barely visible. Jason Rhoades's manic assembly line, *The Grand Machine/Theareola* (2002), sprawls through the lobby gallery, a fine homage to the artist as well as a comment on production, consumption, and instant gratification. In the elevator, Bert Rodriguez's *The End*, with vinyl lettering on the doors and speakers broadcasting the ultimate Hollywood Muzak, tips its hat to Ed Ruscha. "As time goes by," indeed.

But ultimately, this year's Whitney Biennial—with its barren Sheetrock and chain-link, its postindustrial strip-mall shells, faded bulletin-board photo walls, and glitter-edged broken cinder blocks—is a disappointment. It feels unfinished and incomplete. There's a void at its heart. In one way, this exhibition is a sequel to the New Museum's curatorial vision of art among the rubble, even including some of the same artists: Rachel Harrison, Carol Bove, Jedediah Caesar.

At the Whitney, however, much of the art isn't just "unmonumental," it's antispectacular: so insistently underwhelming, so deliberately inconsequential, so—as Trevor Smith puts it in his catalogue essay—"deskilled" and "desublimated" that the exhibition feels exhausted. These derelict works and their shattered narratives exude a sense of dread, a failure of communication, an inner desolation. They speak not only of the refusal of spectacle but also of the shrinking field, of twisted concepts (such as the relational esthetics of French theorist and curator Nicholas Bourriaud) played out to triteness. They take reductionism to the point of no return. It's as if almost everyone, including the curators, went to art school for far too long.

One could argue, as the curators do, that this biennial reflects the state of our society and the mood of the times, which it does. You could call it the wartime biennial, the recession biennial, the Facebook biennial, the Home Depot biennial, or, with its many black-box video rooms, the Whitney multiplex. Shamim Momin, a curator at the Whitney and cocurator of the biennial, dredges up Robert Smithson's notion of entropy to emphasize the temporal nature of recent art, and calls its strategies "fluid, fragmented, and unresolved." The title of cocurator Henriette Huldisch's catalogue essay, "Lessness: Samuel Beckett in Echo Park or an Art of Smaller, Slower, and Less," speaks for itself. The focus of the biennial, by the way, is on Los Angeles, where process, it seems, has

become part of the art object. There, as elsewhere, artists are sampling and remixing the final shreds of modernism. This tends to make the works opaque, diffuse, or incomprehensible, even when "tethered to social content" and especially when yoked to questions of perception and synesthesia.

The show does have some highspots among the 81 artists. Spike Lee's documentary on New Orleans; Harry (Harriet) Dodge and Stanya Kahn's *Can't Swallow It, Can't Spit It Out* (2008), which follows the wanderings of a disoriented Valkyrie; and Javier Téllez's 2007 film about the blind men and the elephant are three terrific screened works. Coco Fusco's *Operation Atropos* (2007), a harrowing video of women, including herself, subjected to capture and interrogation training, is both excruciating and spellbinding. Also in the realm of embedded politics, NPR's do-it-yourself guerrilla radio project is brilliant, as are the 121 gold-flake panels of Daniel Joseph Martinez's *Divine Violence* (2007), part of a continuing project to name all the groups in the world attempting to enforce their beliefs through violence.

Speaking of shattered narratives, Stephen Prina's pale sound installation, 1979–2006, with music and words from a monograph on Felix Gonzalez-Torres, has a certain hypnotic art-world appeal. Mika Rottenberg's *Cheese* (2007–8), a barnyard stockade containing a multichannel video fantasy involving goats and long-tressed milkmaids, is a fully realized winner. As for stylistic reductions, Caesar's blocks of trash in resin aspic go a long way toward demolishing their Minimalist antecedents, while Charles Long turns heron excrement into Giacometti-ish sculpture. Ellen Harvey's mirrored salon-style *Museum of Failure* (2008) wordlessly offers the perfect self-referential sardonic commentary.

Harvey also appeared live—the artist at her proverbial easel—at the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue, where the show continued, immortalizing 100 biennial visitors in 15-minute sketches (in exchange for their evaluation of the portrait's success or failure). Rodriguez conducted therapy sessions inside a big white cube in the Colonel's Room. In the Officers' Room Marina Rosenfeld managed to make sound sculptural in her live sound piece, *Teenage Lontano*, sung by teen vocalists. And in the Silver Room MK Guth braided artificial blond hair and red fabric strips (scribbled with visitors' comments about what they want to protect) into Rapunzel-like swags. The Armory itself, exposing its wood-paneled rooms and military decor to live performative art, may have been this biennial's best surprise. *—Kim Levin*

Ruben Ochoa, *If I had a rebar for every time someone tried to mold me*, 2007, rebar, annealed wire ties, and dobie blocks, 122" x 198" x 222".

arts

LEARN MORE ABOUT MK GUTH AND THIS PROJECT
IdahoStatesman.com/Entertainment

Artist MK Guth asks: What would you protect?

"I'm interested in how identity is shaped through collective experiences and storytelling," MK Guth says.

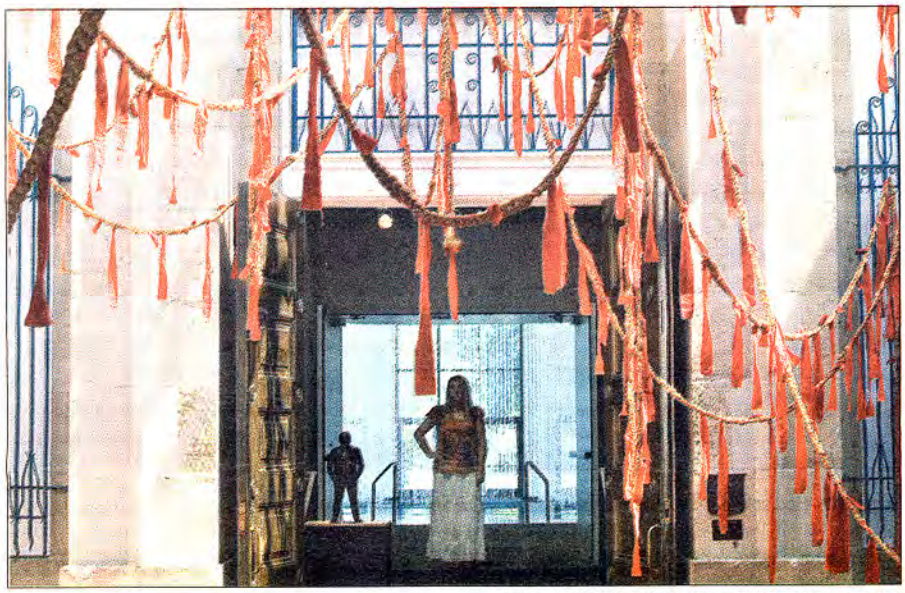
"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair, so that I may climb the golden hair."

Where the fairy tale leaves off, the art of MK Guth begins.

"We tell it over and over again, as a group, and we consume this information individually, even though it is held collectively," Guth said, on a stop over in Boise last week. "I'm interested in that in-between space. How we hold things in a collective manner and individualize them simultaneously."

That idea has fueled this Portland-based artist's work for a while now and has inspired her latest piece, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," that is taking over the atrium at the Boise Art Museum.

The piece, an 1,800-foot synthetic braid devours the space like vines in a jungle or Spanish moss in a swamp. Red felt ties rest on the ground or dangle in the air. Walking through it is an experience, because it creates an environment that surrounds the viewer.



Photos by **DARIN OSWALD** / doswald@IdahoStatesman.com

Artist MK Guth stands beneath her latest project, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping." The project traveled to six U.S. cities in three months. One was Boise, where people participated in the project by writing what they felt was worth protecting on a ribbon. The ribbons are woven into braids on display at the Boise Art Museum.

Guth was invited to create the piece for the Whitney Biennial, put on in June by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. It is one of the most anticipated and controversial contemporary art shows in the country.

She created the braid to fill the library space at the Park Avenue Armory, a former military installation that has become a cultural center.

"I wanted to create something that would consume that site," Guth said. "An armory means something to us and the library is the heart of it. I reduced that to the notion of protection, which is much more all-encompassing than discussing issues of war, which is very loaded right now. While I knew this piece would hold political concerns, I wanted it to be universal enough that everyone could address it without jumping immediately to the Iraq War."

So she asked people in Portland, Boise, Houston, Atlanta, Cleveland, Chicago and New York City: What is worth protecting?

Their answers, written on the small red banners that are woven into the braid and dangle from its form: little china tea cups, 35mm film, our children, neighborhoods, architecture, freedom of speech.

Her piece was well-received in the show, which is a feat in itself. The Whitney is one of those shows critics and artists love to hate.

Seeing her work in the armory had a particular resonance.

"In this space all the voices started to consume and take over a

See MK GUTH, PAGE 17

Now through Sunday, Sept. 14, Boise Art Museum, 670 S. Julia Davis Drive., 345-8330, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. Extended Thursday hours: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. $5 general, $3 college students and seniors, $1 grades 1-12. Free for children 5 and younger and members and current Boise State students with a valid student ID through Aug. 21. Free on First Thursdays.

MK GUTH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

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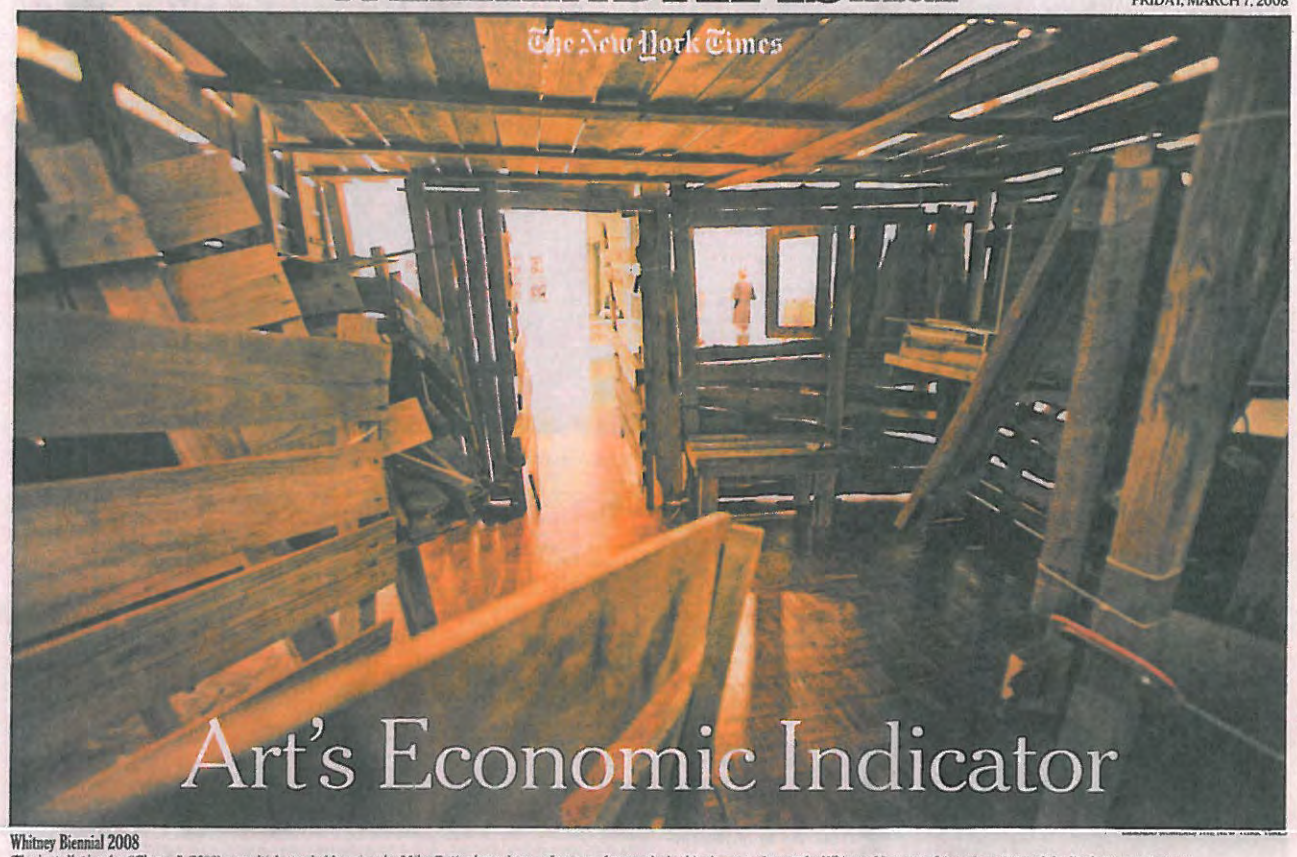
This showing launches a tour of the piece.

The New York Times

Art's Economic Indicator



Whitney Biennial 2008
The installation for "Cheese" (2008), a multichannel video piece by Mika Rottenberg, is one of scores of artworks in this show on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Park Avenue Armory.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY, FROM LEFT, RUBY WASHINGTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES; CENTER AND RIGHT, LIBRADO ROMERO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise from above, Olaf Breuning's "Army" (2008); Phoebe Washburn's "While Enhancing a Diminishing Deep Down Thirst, the Juice Broke Loose (the Birth of a Soda Shop)" (2008); Eduardo Sarabia's "Gift" (2008); and M K Guth's "Ties of Protection and Safekeeping" (2007-8).

HOLLAND COTTER
ART REVIEW

Advertisements for the 2008 Whitney Biennial promise a show that will tell us "where American art stands today," although we basically already know. A lot of new art stands in the booths of international art fairs, where styles change fast, and one high-polish item instantly replaces another. The turnover is great for business, but it has made time-lag surveys like the biennial irrelevant as news.

Maybe this is changing with the iffy economy. Several fairs, including Pulse in London, have recently suspended operation. And this year we have a Whitney show that takes lowered expectations — lessness, slowness, ephemerality, failure (in the words of its young curators, Henriette Huldisch and Shamim M. Momin) — as its theme.

A biennial for a recession-bound time? That's one impression it gives. With more than 80 artists, this is the smallest edition of the show in a while, and it feels that way, sparsely populated, even as it fills three floors and more of the museum and continues at the Park Avenue Armory, that moldering pile at 67th Street, with an ambitious program of performance art (through March 23).

Past biennials have had a festive, party-time air. The 2004 show was all bright, pop fizz; the one two years ago exuded a sexy, punk perfume. The 2008 edition is, by contrast, an unglamorous, even prosaic affair. The installation is plain and focused, with many artists given niches of their own. The catalog is modest in design, with a long, idea-filled essay by Ms. Momin, hard-working, but with hardly a stylistic grace note in sight. A lot of the art is like this too: uncharismatic surfaces, complicated back stories.

There are certainly dynamic elements. A saggy, elephantine black vinyl sculpture by the Los Angeles artist

Continued on Page 32

Biennial 2008: Art's Economic Indicator

From Weekend Page 29

Rodney McMillian is one. Phoebe Washburn's floral ecosystem is another. Spike Lee's enthralling, appalling HBO film about Katrina-wrecked New Orleans is a third. In addition, certain armory performances — a 40-part vocal performance organized by Marina Rosenfeld; Kembra Pfahler and her group, the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black commandeering the Drill Hall — should make a splash.

But again, the overall tenor of the show is low-key, with work that seems to be in a transitional, questioning mode, art as conversation rather than as statement, testing this, trying that. Assemblage and collage are popular. Collaboration is common. So are down-market materials — plastic, plywood, plexiglass — and all kinds of found and recycled ingredients, otherwise known as trash.

Jedediah Caesar, one of the show's 29 West Coast artists, encases studio refuse — wood scraps, disposable coffee cups, old socks — in blocks of resin for display. Charles Long makes spidery, Giacometti-esque sculptures — the shapes are based on traces of bird droppings — from plaster-covered debris. Cheyney Thompson cannibalizes his own gallery shows to make new work. With thread and a box of nails Ry Rocklen transforms an abandoned box spring into a bejeweled thing, iridescent if the light is right.

Devotees of painting will be on a near-starvation diet, with the work of only Joe Bradley, Mary Heilmann, Karen Kilimnik, Olivier Mosset and (maybe) Mr. Thompson to sustain them. Hard-line believers in art as visual pleasure will have, poor things, a bitter slog. But if the show is heedless of traditional beauty, it is also firm in its faith in artists as thinkers and makers rather than production-line workers meeting market demands.

Not so long ago, Whitney biennials were little more than edited recaps of gallery seasons. Much of the art in them had already been exhibited in galleries and commercially preapproved. By contrast, the Whitney commissioned the bulk of what appears in the 2008 biennial expressly for the occasion. If some artists failed to meet curatorial hopes, others seized the chance to push in new directions. Whatever the outcome, the demonstration of institutional faith was important. It means that, for better or worse, the new art in this show is genuinely new.

And new comes out of old. Almost every biennial includes a contingent of influential elders. This one does. Ms. Heilmann is one. Her pop-inflected, rigorously casual abstraction is a natural reference point for Ms. Kilimnik's brushy historical fantasies, for Frances Stark's free-associative collages, and for a very Heilmann-esque Rachel Harrison piece that includes a harlequin-patterned sculpture and the film "Pirates of the Caribbean" projected on the gallery wall. (Work by Ms. Harrison is also in the New Museum's "Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century," a show that overlaps the biennial's sensibility.)

The California Conceptualist John Baldessari — born in 1931 and deeply networked into the art world — generates another, even wider sphere of influence. His hybrid forms — not painting, not sculpture, not photography, but some of each — offer a permissive model for a lot of new art, from Mr. Bradley's figure-shaped abstract paintings to Patrick Hill's tie-dyed sculptures to a multimedia installation by Mika Tajima who, with Howie Chen, goes by the collaborative moniker New Humans.

Mr. Baldessari's use of fragmented Hollywood film stills in his work has opened new paths for artists exploring narrative. And there's a wealth of narrative in this biennial, much of it in film.

The video called "Can't Swallow It. Can't Spit It Out" by Harry (Harriet) Dodge and Stanya Kahn, is a kind of lunatic's tour of an abject and empty Los Angeles. Amy Granat and Drew Heitzler turn Goethe's "Sorrows of Young Werther" into an Earth Art road trip. In a multichannel video piece called "Cheese," with an elaborate, barnlike setting, Mika Rottenberg updates a 19th-century story of seven sisters who turned their freakishly long hair to enterprising ends.

And there's a beautiful new film by Javier Téllez, produced by Creative Time, that dramatizes an old Indian parable about the uncertainties of perception. In the film the artist introduces six blind New Yorkers to a live elephant and records their impressions, derived through touch. The encounters take place in what looks like the open, empty plaza in front of a temple or church, though the building is actually the vacant Depression-era bathhouse of the McCarren Park swimming pool in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Architecture and design form a subcategory of motifs in the biennial, partly as a sendup of the luxe environments that much new art is destined to inhabit, but also in line with the show's concern with transience and ruin. Alice Könitz's faux-modernist furniture sculpture, Matthew Brannon's wraparound graphics display, and Amanda Ross-Ho's fiercely busy domestic ensembles all mine this critical vein.

But William Cordova's "House That Frank Lloyd Wright Built 4 Fred Hampton and Mark Clark" makes a specific historical reference. An open-work maze of wood risers, it may look unfinished, but it's as complete as it needs to be: its basic outline replicates the footprint of the Chicago apartment where two Black Panthers were ambushed and killed in a predawn police raid in 1969. Here the scene of a stealth attack is open for the world to see.

The passing of baldly political art from market fashion has been much noted during the past decade. But the 2008 Biennial is a political show, at least if you define politics, as Ms. Huldisch and Ms. Momin do, in terms of indirection, ambiguity; questions asked, not answered; truth that is and is not true.

An assemblage by Adler Guerrier impressionistically documents an explosion of racial violence that scarred Miami Beach, near his home, in 1968. While Mr. Guerrier attributes the piece to a fictional collective of African-American artists active around Miami at the time, the collective, like the piece itself, is entirely his invention.

Omer Fast weaves together sex, lies, and a civilian shooting in Iraq in a film-within-a-film based on actor-improvised memories. William E. Jones takes a very personal tack on the subject of civilian surveillance by recycling an old police video of illicit homosexual activity shot in an Ohio men's room. The video dates from 1962, the year the artist, who is gay, was born, and the police sting triggered a wave of antigay sentiment in the town where he grew up.

There's more: videos by Natalia Almada and Robert Fenz dramatize, in utterly different ways, the border politics of Mexican-United States immigration. One of the show's largest pieces, "Divine Violence," by Daniel Joseph Martinez, fills a substantial room with hundreds of gilded plaques carrying the names of what Mr. Martinez labels terrorist organizations, from Al Qaeda to tiny nationalist and religious groups.

Mr. Martinez, an extremely interesting artist, is making a return biennial appearance. He contributed metal museum-admission tags reading "I Can't Imagine Ever Wanting to Be White" to the famously political biennial in 1993. (One of that show's curators, Thelma Golden, now director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, is an adviser to the current exhibition, along with Bill Horrigan of the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University and Linda Norden, an independent curator.)

For a total immersion in the political and the personal, there's nothing quite like Mr. Lee's television film "When the Levees Broke," which is on continuous view in the show, though for me Coco Fusco's hourlong video "Operation Atropos" is almost as powerful. For this exercise in creative nonfiction, Ms. Fusco and six other women submitted to a "prisoner-of-war interrogation-resistance program" conducted by former United States military personnel. Technically, the whole program is a species of docudrama performance, a highly specialized endurance challenge. Even knowing that, the sight of men making women gradually break down under pressure is hair-raising, as is a follow-up scene of the women being briefed on how they can do the same to others.

The growing presence of women as military interrogators will be the subject of a live performance by Ms. Fusco at the armory, the ideal setting for it. And under the auspices of the nonprofit Art Production Fund, several other biennial artists have made site-specific works in the building's outsize, baronial, wood-paneled halls.

In one Olaf Breuning has mustered a cute army of teapots with lava-lamp heads. Mario Ybarra Jr.'s "Scarface Museum," composed entirely of memorabilia related to Brian De Palma's 1983 remake of that 1932 gangster film, is in another. In a third M K Guth, an artist from Portland, Ore., invites visitors to participate in therapeutic hair-braiding sessions, the hair being fake, the psychological benefits presumably not.

Ms. Guth's project has a sweet, New Agey expansiveness that is atypical for this year's hermetic, uningratiating show. Ms. Pfahler and the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, with their teased wigs, low-budget props and friends-of-friends underground roots are firmly in the 2008 picture. Ms. Pfahler's Biennial stint will include a seminar on an art movement she recently founded. Based on the idea of the attraction of abjection, it is called "Beautalism," and a fair amount of what is in the Whitney show qualifies for inclusion.

BURT WASHINGTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, Olaf Breuning's installation, "The Army" (2008), is on view at the Park Avenue Armory. Below, a scene from a film by Javier Téllez being shown at the Whitney, in which six blind New Yorkers, like the man below, give their impressions after touching an elephant.

ONLINE: COMPLETE COVERAGE

An interactive tour of the Biennial, narrated by Holland Cotter, and information on the museum, including tips on where to eat in the neighborhood: **nytimes.com/design**

SAM HORINE, COURTESY OF CREATIVE TIME

THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Whitney Biennial 2008" runs through June 1 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, at 75th Street, and through March 23 at the Park Avenue Armory at 67th Street.

LIBRADO ROMERO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A 2007 sculpture by Charles Long based on traces of bird droppings.

BURT WASHINGTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mario Ybarra Jr.'s "Scarface Museum," at the Park Avenue Armory.

arts

LEARN MORE ABOUT MK GUTH AND THIS PROJECT
IdahoStatesman.com/Entertainment

Artist MK Guth asks: What would you protect?

"I'm interested in how identity is shaped through collective experiences and storytelling," MK Guth says.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair, so that I may climb the golden hair."

Where the fairy tale leaves off, the art of MK Guth begins.

"We tell it over and over again, as a group, and we consume this information individually, even though it is held collectively," Guth said, on a stop over in Boise last week. "I'm interested in that in-between space. How we hold things in a collective manner and individualize them simultaneously."

That idea has fueled this Portland-based artist's work for a while now and has inspired her latest piece, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," that is taking over the atrium at the Boise Art Museum.

The piece, an 1,800-foot synthetic braid devours the space like vines in a jungle or Spanish moss in a swamp. Red felt ties rest on the ground or dangle in the air. Walking through it is an experience, because it creates an environment that surrounds the viewer.

Photos by **DARIN OSWALD** / doswald@IdahoStatesman.com

Artist MK Guth stands beneath her latest project, "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping." The project traveled to six U.S. cities in three months. One was Boise, where people participated in the project by writing what they felt was worth protecting on a ribbon. The ribbons are woven into braids on display at the Boise Art Museum.

Guth was invited to create the piece for the Whitney Biennial, put on in June by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. It is one of the most anticipated and controversial contemporary art shows in the country.

She created the braid to fill the library space at the Park Avenue Armory, a former military installation that has become a cultural center.

"I wanted to create something that would consume that site," Guth said. "An armory means something to us and the library is the heart of it. I reduced that to the notion of protection, which is much more all-encompassing than discussing issues of war, which is very loaded right now. While I knew this piece would hold political concerns, I wanted it to be universal enough that everyone could address it without jumping immediately to the Iraq War."

So she asked people in Portland, Boise, Houston, Atlanta, Cleveland, Chicago and New York City: What is worth protecting?

Their answers, written on the small red banners that are woven into the braid and dangle from its form: little china tea cups, 35mm film, our children, neighborhoods, architecture, freedom of speech.

Her piece was well-received in the show, which is a feat in itself. The Whitney is one of those shows critics and artists love to hate.

Seeing her work in the armory had a particular resonance.

"In this space all the voices started to consume and take over a

See MK GUTH, PAGE 17

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MK GUTH

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The Oregonian
MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2008

MK Guth's 800 feet of braid

The Portland artist adds answers to "What is worth protecting?" to her Whitney Biennial work

By GRANT BUTLER
THE OREGONIAN

NEW YORK — The opening weekend of the Whitney Biennial, perhaps the most important survey of contemporary American art, found Portland artist MK Guth basking in a national spotlight.

Her work, a massive and ever-growing braid of artificial gold hair and red ribbons called "Ties of Protection and Safe Keeping," was featured prominently on the cover of The New York Times' Weekend Arts section. Throngs of art fans showed up to engage with the piece, writing on the ribbons their answers to the question "What is worth protecting?" Those answers were then incorporated into the braid.

And amid the hubbub, Guth found a most unusual admirer — film director John Waters, who approached her at a party and told her how much he liked her piece.

"I was completely reduced to a little girl," she said. "I wish I hadn't been so dorky."

For an artist used to toiling alone in a studio or attending small gallery exhibitions, the Biennial is a rare rock-star moment. The once-every-two-years exhibition by the Whitney Museum of American Art showcases the best works by this country's emerging artists and draws the sort of crowds typically reserved for retrospectives of French Impressionists.

In this crucible, artists whose work catches fire can be catapulted to the next stage in their careers. The Biennial has made stars out of such artists as Chuck Close and Kenny Scharf, and with each new show there's speculation about who might be the next Big Thing.

GRANT BUTLER/THE OREGONIAN

A steady stream of visitors saw MK Guth's installation at the Whitney Biennial. Many wrote their answer to the question "What is worth preserving?" on red ribbons, which Guth then added to the massive braid of fake hair that's at the center of her piece.

It's probably too soon to anoint Guth as one of this Biennial's standouts, even though The Times'

Please see MK GUTH, Page C3

MK Guth: What's written on the ribbons varies by city

Continued from Page C1

art critic Holland Carter said her work was emblematic of the entire exhibition. That's because Guth's braid isn't finished.

The braid was specifically created for its display space in the Seventh Regiment Park Avenue Armory, an off-site venue that the Whitney is using this year to display larger works that might not work in the cramped confines of the museum. The Armory's incredibly dark Silver Room is walled with glass display cases filled with antique silver platters, chalices and swords. Amid this militaristic booty, Guth's braid cascades from railings, creating a weblike effect.

When the Whitney show opened, the braid was 500 feet long from a tour of six cities (originating in Portland in December). In just a few days, the braid has grown by another 300 feet, as New Yorkers streamed in to see the work and shape its meaning with their own answers to the question it poses. By late Saturday, Guth and her team of braiding assistants were working double time to keep up with the pace of the crowds.

"Even though we've been double braiding, we're still way behind," she said. "I think it's astounding."

As she braids the ribbons into the long locks, Guth takes time to read the responses.

"Some of the statements are really touching and moving," Guth said. "And some of them are really snarky."

As the braid traveled the country, Guth noticed that different themes dominated the responses in different cities: Ribbons from Boise reflected concerns for the environment, while those from Houston and Portland took a political bent. Reflecting the fast pace of New York life, many of the new responses call for protection of unstructured or free time.

"There are definitely consistent themes," Guth said. "But there's always the odd one out. We just braided in a ribbon that said 'pigeons.' "

Grant Butler: 503-221-8566; gbutler@news.oregonian.com

WILLIAM CORDOVA & LESLIE HEWITT

ALL IN THE FAMILY

BY REX GARTENFELD

Breaking Down the 2008 Whitney Biennial

As *New York* magazine recently gushed, this year's Whitney Biennial, perhaps unwittingly, involves social networking. And with the ADAA just finished, and the Berlin Biennial and Armory just around the corner, it would have been foolish for curators Henriette Huldisch and Shamim Momin to avoid making some MySpace requests along the way. This year's Biennial roster is a testament to the art fair circuit, the Lower East Side, and social in-breeding of the art world -- but "social networking" is a curious and perhaps disappointing tag, as none of the artists included are under 30, and so came of age in a less technology-crazed time.

WILLIAM E. JONES

Criticism aside, the Biennial is a reflection of the dysfunctional family that is American art, and as with any family reunion, once you enter its airspace, you regress into archaic roles of age, gender, class and sexuality -- like the institutional critique guy, or the aged photorealist. There must be at least one male artist from the mythic downtown party set, a few brainy girls (also downtown, but they party less and collaborate more, or they wouldn't be taken seriously) and someone who makes recycling fun. It's not so much a fault of the Biennial as it is a fault with America. Anyway, families make for good entertainment.

RASHAWN GRIFFIN

Some highlights:

THE HISTORIC GAY WHITE MALE: William E. Jones

The Whitney Biennial always has room for one historic white gay male (see Kenneth Anger, 2006), and this year is no exception. Like Anger, Jones happens to be one of the best of his generation, splicing together vintage gay pornography in ways nostalgic and revelatory of their pervasiveness in contemporary pop culture -- put on Jones' rose colored glasses and everything begins to look like gay porn.

SHERRIE LEVINE

THE CRAFTERS: Amanda Ross-Ho, Agathe Snow, Rashawn Griffin, MK Guth

Admittedly a somewhat open category, particularly as the most-hyped entry comes from a crafter not exhibiting craft. In spite of the paper flowers, in spite of the kooky mumblings, Agathe Snow's performances are about pain -- primarily the pain of fame and the pain of being a girl. Snow's 96-hour dance marathon culminates in the huge barrel-vaulted hall on March 15. Prizes (we hear big, charity prizes) will reward endurance. Ross-Ho, from Chicago by way of Los Angeles, constructs beautiful childlike works from found images; Griffin's work is tactile and addictive; MK Guth makes craft political. I would generally put **Gang Gang Dance** in this category, because of Lizzi Bougatsos' typically stunning installations, but here they contribute a DVD -- not crafty.

THE CRYPTIC LOWER EAST SIDE COLLECTIVE: Dexter Sinister

Usurping Reena Spaulings' throne is the text-based partnership of Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt. Adored by book-art devotees, the pair, who opened shop on Ludlow St. last year, invited 25 other artists to write press releases, to be distributed at the Park Avenue Armory.

THE COLLABORATORS: Leslie Hewitt/William Cordova and Amy Granat/Drew Heitzler

Amy Granat and Drew Heitzler present *T.S.O.Y.W.*, the work I most anticipate for this Biennial. Conflating the works of Goethe and Genet (and with the input of Olivier Mosset and 2006 artist Steve Parrino), the piece is about impossible love, a motorcycle, and the freedom of the open road. Hewitt and Cordova (Yale students, another category -- too obvious!) look to a collection of bootleg political films.

THE GRANDES DAMES: Karen Kilimnik, Sherrie Levine, Coco Fusco, Louise Lawler

Sherrie Levine is a national treasure -- a natural treasure who would resent such an empty title and demand intellectual engagement. Wait, weren't each of these very prominent mid-career artists already featured in a million biennials? No --because they're women.

This story was published on March 4, 2008.

The Biennial Annex

Tequila. Dancing. Heavy-metal nuptials.

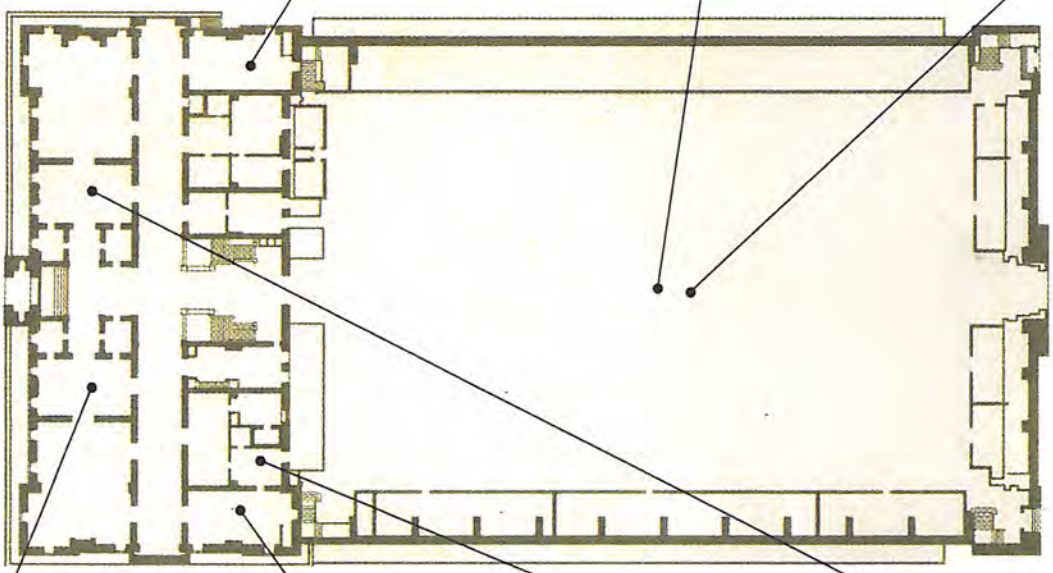
SAVE FOR SOME scattered programming in Central Park, this year marks the first time the Biennial runneth over from the Whitney. The museum has co-opted the Seventh Regiment Armory (a.k.a. the Park Avenue Armory) for free programming from March 6 through 23. Don't expect *faux* white-walled galleries in the expo-ready Drill Hall—more than a third of the 81 Biennial artists will activate much of the Armory's historic interior with site-specific performances and installations. RACHEL WOLFF

THROUGHOUT
Matthew Brannon's *The Last Page in a Very Long Novel* (2008). Tapes of creaky Armory noises inspire a film script, the only copy of which will be buried in the building forever.

FIELD AND STAFF BAR
Eduardo Sarabia's *Salon Aleman.* At the blue-and-white porcelain bar artists serve homemade (in Mexico) tequila. And beer. Some even make barware.

DRILL HALL
Kembra Pfahler/The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black's *Actressocracy* (2008). The always-evocative painted lady stages a rock-opera extravaganza/wedding.

DRILL HALL
Agathe Snow's *Stamina: Gloria et Patria* (2008). Snow's 96-hour dance marathon culminates in the huge barrel-vaulted hall on March 15. Prizes to be awarded for stamina.



SOUTH HALL AND RECEPTION ROOM
Ellen Harvey's *100 Biennial Visitors Immortalized* (2008). Free art! Harvey whips up fifteen-minute portraits of 100 visitors, and invites the subjects to give feedback on her work.

COLONEL'S ROOM
Bert Rodriguez's *In the Beginning...* (2008). Free therapy! Rodriguez holds daily office hours, broadcasting incomprehensible murmurs from each session throughout the space.

COMMANDER'S ROOM
Dexter Sinister's *True Mirror* (2008). Conceptual and traditional press briefings on Biennial happenings from the commander's old perch—now an in-house communications HQ.

LIBRARY/SILVER ROOM
MK Guth's *Ties of Protection and Safekeeping* (2007–8). Rapunzel! Guth weaves a giant braid of artificial hair flecked with strips of flannel bearing audience-composed phrases.

News: Whitney Biennial

MK Guth, *Ties of Protection and Safekeeping*

"Once I developed the question 'What is worth protecting?,' I realized it wasn't just relevant to New York but the whole U.S. So I've been traveling around the country asking people to write their answers on pieces of flannel that I braid into the piece. When I showed up it was 500 feet of artificial hair, and it expands every day. Consistently, there's a lot of patriotic stuff like 'the Constitution' and 'civil rights,' but there's also more absurd stuff like '35 mm film.' One guy handed me a piece of flannel with 'my ass' written on it."

Photo: Courtesy of the artist