

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART

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ANTICIPATION
ICELANDIC ART +
STORYTELLING

ATTACHMENT
TO THINGS:
VISHAL JUGDEO

RESTRAINT
VICTOR MAN COMES
OUT OF THE COLD

BIENNALES
MERCURY
ISTANBUL



ART PAPERS

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Ólöf Nordal, detail of *Iceland Specimen Collection—Janus*, 2003, c-print, 80 x 120 cm (courtesy of the artist)

ART PAPERS is about contemporary art. That's all we've been about for thirty years: stubbornly, unpredictably, and reliably. We understand contemporary art as a constellation of practices variably wielding ideas, images, space, sound, material encounters, discourse, and text. We also define it as a permeable realm subjected to the multiple, changing, and incessant pressures of contemporary life. That explains our fierce and unruly curiosity.

Looking simultaneously at art communities across the USA and around the world, ART PAPERS scans the event horizon to challenge accepted notions, and articulates debates. We engage artists, critics, curators, scholars, collectors, and readers to provoke discussions. Recognized as the independent critical voice that best covers all regions of the USA, we undauntedly assert a unique global perspective on what shapes art now. Blame it on our non-profit status, and our worldly, southern accent. They just afford us a unique perspective, and a great deal of intellectual freedom.

Informed, assertive, authoritative, and accessible, ART PAPERS is the essential, independent guide to contemporary art.

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OPTIONS 2007 WASHINGTON

Not more than a stone's throw from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, dozens of carcasses fill a series of storefront windows. This throng—charred effigies of chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cows—suggests Chinese culinary practices somehow gone wrong. Rather than conjuring up visions of succulent barbecued flesh, Sayaka Suzuki's *Reflections I, II, and III*, 2005, evoke the grimness of a slaughterhouse. Referencing DC's nearby Chinatown in a way large museums rarely can, the work draws attention to the effects of consumption and the cruelty of segments of the food industry. It also comments on the ways in which different kinds of animals are valued. As the overture to *Options 2007*, the Washington Project for the Arts\Corcoran's latest survey of artistic activity in the mid-Atlantic region, this somber work leaves the viewer unprepared for an exhibition crackling with ideas and energy [Pepco's Edison Place Gallery; September 13–October 26, 2007].

Take Anne Chan's *Private Conversation*, 2007, an illuminating analysis of office culture. Here, the workplace becomes a battleground defined by flimsy partitions, surreptitious alliances, and personal agendas. Walking between two workstations constructed of interwoven business cards, one recognizes the place as a kind of no man's land over which a mock battle, in the form of office gossip and bursts of keyboard tapping, rages. The business cards bear the names of corporate officers such as Acen Hann, Ann Anche, and Enna Chan—scrambled variations of the artist's name. This mind-numbing stream of positions and personalities conflates identities and undermines the notion of hierarchical systems. Ultimately, it elucidates the contrived and fragile underpinnings of this organizational structure.

Neil Feather and Siobhan Rigg's viewer-participatory works impart a dose of humor to the show. Feather, who has long been involved in the experimental music community, recently turned his attention to the production of interactive sound sculptures. Visually arresting, the sculptures are finely crafted amalgamations of tradi-

tional and non-traditional materials. *Pony*, 2007, for example, features a bicycle wheel whose spokes have been replaced by tunable metal strings. *Slippage*, 2007, vaguely recalls a sewing machine, while the central pendulum structure of *Number Five*, 2007, includes a bowling ball with a clapper-like tail and two smaller stacks of drums and spring coils. Activated by viewers, motors swing into action to produce rhythms reminiscent of the gamelan, clicks that gradually progress to a mechanical whir, and sporadic clusters of dissimilar sounds as the clapper unexpectedly whirls to whack a drumhead, a spring, and a plank of wood. The playfulness of Feather's pieces makes us keenly aware of the physical basis of sounds, proposing that the potential for musical expression lies all around us.

The exercise bike at the center of Rigg's *People's Electrification Project*, 2007, lets viewers do a lot more than press a button. There's also more than personal health at stake here. Instead, energy expenditure is presented as a means to charge a battery for later use. In repurposing the apparatus, Rigg shows that anyone can be an energy producer. In this, she turns the tables on the notion that our communities are doomed to rely on large corporate entities for their power supply. As in most gyms, the bike is endowed with a media system that offers programming to distract users from the repetitiveness of the task. Here, an insightful video is available to riders. Often humorous, it features interviews that randomly explore individuals' direct experiences with electricity as well as their knowledge of alternative energy sources. It also reveals the pervasiveness of the confusion over energy production and its complicated supply structures. Given that Pepco, the metropolitan Washington area's power supplier, is the official sponsor of the gallery, Rigg's proposal for increased interest in alternative energy resources makes an eloquent bid for improving both public awareness and corporate flexibility.

Curator Paul Brewer's premise for *Options 2007* was the plurality of ideas and practices

among the region's artists. He also made it the organizational principle of the exhibition. Nevertheless, ideas do ricochet through the space, sometimes in reciprocal relationships. Ian Kessler's theatrical sculptures lack both context and script. Works such as *Lumber and Lust*, 2007, prosthetic legs capped with steel high heeled shoes, typify his preference for grotesque, oversized props and figures arousing highly awkward, if not painful, associations. Likewise, Cory Oberndorfer turns the fast-paced, violent sport of roller derby into a visual confection. In the painting *Neapolitan*, 2007, he depicts three skaters—one in each flavor of the tricolor ice cream.

With a mother and an uncle working in aviation, family history informs Kathleen Shafer's documentation of airports. Her photographs depict an exotic environment that, shaped by unique sets of rules and regulations, and by architecture and organizational structures, remains inaccessible to most passengers. Pat O'Malley's *O's World*, 2007, takes family history in an entirely different direction. Unfortunately, this dense cosmology—deeply personal imagery executed in a primitive /psychedelic style—virtually forestalls interpretation. Also challenging is René Treviño's *Propaganda Series*, 2005-ongoing, a group of drawings/paintings that foreground the gay Mexican-American artist's quest to develop a perspective on history by way of personal iconography. Unexpected if not contradictory juxtapositions such as Mount Rushmore, Mayan gods, and homoerotic imagery reflect the artist's attempt to reconcile personal desires, social standing, and multinational heritage. So does his pervasive reliance on a supercharged pink. As such, Treviño's practice appears to represent *Options 2007* itself. In this celebration of artistic diversity in the mid-Atlantic region, a tenuous concordance has also been achieved.

—John Gayer

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: René Treviño, detail of *Propaganda Series*, 2005-ongoing, acrylic and mixed media on mylar, 11 x 14 inches each; Anne Chan, *Private Conversation*, 2007, interlocking business cards, variable dimensions; MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Siobhan Rigg, *People's Electrification Project*, 2007, installation/performance, variable dimensions and duration; Sayaka Suzuki, *907: 780 Chickens, 5 Cows, 18 Ducks, 2 Geese, 20 Pigs, 7 Rabbits, 29 Sheep, 46 Turkeys*, 2005, dyed, recycled fabric, batting, sand, yarn, and filament, variable dimensions; BOTTOM: Cory Oberndorfer, *Neapolitan*, 2007, latex house paint on canvas, 72 x 102 x 2 inches [all images courtesy of the artists and Washington Project for the Arts\Corcoran, Washington]

