

OPTIONS

2007

In the last few years, contemporary art news has more often than not meant headlines about an astronomical sales record set at auction—"highest sale price ever for work created by a living artist," "highest price paid for a photograph," "highest price set for an art installation." We are at a point in history when society appears to have attributed new levels of economic importance and relevance to contemporary art. Is this exuberance toward contemporary artworks sustainable, or is it like the frenzied Dutch tulip market of the 1600s, a 21st-century "Tulipmania"? Has the collecting community, with its seemingly ever-increasing amounts of capital, relinquished its aesthetic senses to the mania of the market, the auction houses, and art fairs? What will the arts landscape look like after the inevitable correction occurs?

While I do not have answers to these questions, I can report that the recent economic impact of the contemporary art market has initiated a fierce quest for artistic talent at all levels of artists' careers. Curators, collectors, and gallerists have traditionally sought exceptional artistic ability at what is generally considered the formal starting point of an artist's career, the MFA thesis show. Today, however, driven by the spectacular success of the market and the desire to find undiscovered talent, the savviest arts aficionados seek emergent talent at undergraduate shows, including senior thesis exhibitions. This recalibration of exposure

begs the question, does under recognized talent exist any longer? The answer is yes, it does, although one must know where to look and have the drive, patience, and insight to discover it.

The Washington Project for the Arts/Corcoran has had the good fortune to engage Paul Brewer, Director of the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, to serve as the curator for OPTIONS 2007. He has brought a keen eye and tireless approach to reviewing over 300 entries and making dozens of studio visits in the local area. His efforts and insight yielded ten artists, ten undiscovered talents who range in age from 23 to 70, and whose works include unorthodox musical instruments and a magnum opus, a painting created over 20 years. OPTIONS 2007 proves that talent exists at various ages and stages of an artist's career and, looking beyond the usual sources, may garner rich rewards.

As always, thanks are due to many people who contributed to the success of OPTIONS 2007: WPAC staff members Frank Adams, Ding Ren, and David William; WPAC interns Emily Hunt and Addie Johnson; graphic designers Henri Siblesz and Maria Habib; Brenda Hanning, copy editor; and Norma Davis, Manager of Market Planning, PEPCO.

Kim Ward
Executive Director
August 2007

CURATOR'S NOTE

Any narration of the history of cultural production in the Mid-Atlantic region will always reflect the particular preoccupations and biases of the one attempting to articulate it. And while I certainly do not consider it my task as curator of OPTIONS 2007 to deliver a cohesive reflection of my own relationship to the network of individuals and institutions contributing to this history, my experience growing up and participating socially, politically, and professionally in the region's various scenes provided me with an expanded frame of reference as I struggled to construct a multifaceted portrait of its emergent activity. The art schools, and in particular the various graduate programs that have gained national profiles in recent years, have always been laboratories of experimentation and dialogue, dispersing a fresh flock of young artists each year whose work reflects the expertise and critical knowledge imparted by dedicated faculty.

Many of the artists included in this selection are products of these academic systems that have come to define the artistic identity of a region lacking the type of advanced commercial markets of cultural citadels such as New York or Los Angeles. While this fact may be the lament of many artists trying to sustain a studio practice, it has helped institute one of the area's prevailing and perhaps most vital characteristics: a D-I-Y attitude and aesthetic promulgated by a healthy system of nonprofit and underground venues and collectives. With most of the larger cultural institutions firmly directed toward the production of an image befitting the nation's capital, the local artistic communities can play with the conservatism inherent in these agendas to produce critically

engaged work outside of the transactional trendiness of collector-driven galleries.

OPTIONS 2007 is an abbreviated sampling of artists currently working in the Mid-Atlantic region. The overwhelming plurality of ideas and practices I saw, heard, and experienced in my visits to studios throughout the urban centers and peripheral zones of Baltimore, DC, and Richmond made the construction of a packaged exhibition adhering to a particular theme near-impossible because of the various elisions such a process would inevitably entail. Rather, celebrating the eclectic diversity of the area's producers became a guiding principle. In addition to technical virtuosity, intellectual rigor, and even idiosyncratic eccentricity, I was pleased to discover an overall sense of indulgence in individual identity as a source of political ideology, social activism, and institutional critique. Some of the artists respond directly to the exhibition site and the surrounding environment of downtown Washington, while others articulate a highly personal vision based on anxieties and obsessions.

For the privilege of allowing me to assemble this group of creative people, I must thank WPAC's Executive Director Kim Ward and the staff and volunteers who enable this vital organization to continue providing alternative arts programming to the region. And to all of the participating artists, I am intensely grateful for the time you have shared with me and the dedication you have demonstrated to realize OPTIONS 2007.

Paul Brewer
Curator

THE ARTWORK

Page Artist

04	Taylor Baldwin
08	Anne Chan
12	Neil Feather
16	Eli Kessler
20	Cory Oberndorfer
24	Pat O'Malley
28	Siobhan Rigg
32	Kathleen Shafer
36	Sayaka Suzuki
40	René Treviño

Sayaka Suzuki

As someone who is deeply engaged in the sustainable living movement, Sayaka Suzuki integrates her concerns about consumption into her artistic practice. She says that she seeks to “capture the processes of remembering, celebrating, and acknowledging, while simultaneously imagining our capacity to function as philanthropists.” This intention often takes the form of projects designed to provoke an empathic response from viewers about their own relationships with the environment and the industries that allow individuals to shield themselves from the violence and suffering which consumption generates. Her installation for *OPTIONS* is composed of stuffed animal figures constructed from dyed recycled fabrics hanging from the ceiling. The overall project’s title, *907*, references the approximate number of animals the average meat-eater consumes in a lifetime. Hung in the same manner as freshly slaughtered farm animals, these crude effigies serve as a vivid reminder of the aggregate space and weight of the living things that particular diets demand. Installed in the windows of the gallery, Suzuki’s project also references the practices of surrounding restaurants in the district of Chinatown, who entice potential diners with roasted fowl casually on display in their front windows.

Originally from Yokohama, Japan, Sayaka Suzuki has been residing in the US for the past twenty years. In 2000, she received her BFA degree from Tulane University, and in 2005, her MFA degree from The Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Her work has been exhibited at The Pensacola Museum of Art in Florida, William King Regional Art Center in Virginia, as well as galleries in Canada and throughout the East Coast. She is an adjunct professor at The Virginia Commonwealth University teaching Art Foundation and Glass Casting.

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, filament

Variable

