

art on paper

July–August 2007

William Anastasi + Tony Feher + Kota Ezawa + Jo Jackson
and Chris Johanson + Mary Josephson + Shaun O'Dell

Writing criticism is not something most artists do. Sure, some moonlight as critics; Fairfield Porter wrote regularly for *ArtNews* throughout the 1950s, and Donald Judd's criticism from the 1960s is among the best (and certainly the most entertaining) of that era. But most artists don't, and if they do, their writing is often an extension of their art, taking the form of a magazine piece, a hagiographic musing on another artist's work, or an artist statement for a gallery handout or exhibition catalog.

For this issue, we invited artists to take up the mantle of the critic, but with a twist: We asked them to review one of their own recent exhibitions. We wanted to hear from them—not critics. We also wanted to provide artists an opportunity to creatively toy with a prevailing art world construct—the review—with all its inherent limitations, histories, and methodologies.

In approaching people, we received varied responses, ranging from enthusiastic to lukewarm, and one emphatic “no.” An artist whose own writings and criticism from the 1960s are legendary responded with an email that said simply, “It's not something I am able to do”, meaning, we assume, that it was not something he could justify doing. For some, the idea of writing a meview was as enticing as self-mutilation. One questioned why we were asking artists to be journalists. And a few, so accustomed to having total control over their output, were unwilling to embrace the collaborative nature of the editorial process.





Nevertheless, seven artists were bold (or foolish) enough to take this on. For William Anastasi, the meview provided an opportunity to reflect publicly on work made four decades ago and currently on view at The Drawing Center in New York. Mary Josephson, a critic who is one of Brian O'Doherty's alter-egos and whose writing appeared in O'Doherty's retrospective at New York University's Grey Art Gallery, used the occasion to speculate on the possible death of "Patrick Ireland," the name O'Doherty has used to sign his work since 1972. Tony Feher, a visual poet of the found object, reconsidered his installation earlier this summer at ACME in Los Angeles. Portland-based artists Chris Johanson and Jo Jackson addressed the social underpinnings of a recent public art project at Le Meridien Hotel in San Francisco. Kota Ezawa, who works in San Francisco and Berlin, mused on the notion of time, following a survey of his work at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. And finally, San Francisco-based Shaun O'Dell dug deep into the soil of history to elucidate some of the narrative threads in his latest exhibition at Jack Hanley Gallery in Los Angeles.

The notion of the meview—even its name—risks being misinterpreted as nothing more than a gimmick. We think that it has the potential to be revealing, entertaining, and even slightly subversive.

—*The Editors*

Kota Ezawa: The History of History at Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver

The copy precedes the original.

Baudrillard's thought masquerades as an intellectual prank until you accidentally happen upon it in your own backyard—or your own exhibition.

Curated by Cate Rimmer and titled "The History of History," the show consisted of a collection of drawings, prints, and animations that simulate films, videos, and photographs from 1865 to the present. Among the images I re-created were a Civil War photograph by Mathew Brady, a videotaped lecture by Susan Sontag, and a photo I took of myself in 2005. My process of drawing and animation erases almost all references to time, but I find it noticeable that my aquatint etching Kota looks older than the digital photograph that it is derived from. Only the year next to my signature keeps the illusion alive that a copy follows the original.

That seeming reversal of time also manifested itself in the diverse media used to



Above and below: Kota Ezawa, details from *Lennon, Sontag, Beuys*, video projection, 2004. Courtesy the artist; Murray Guy, New York; and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

make the works. The earliest pieces on view were three digital animations. The next newer piece incorporated a 35mm slide projector (a recently discontinued technological format), followed by a more recent set of paper cutout collages. The

newest project was a set of aquatint etchings, made using a method developed in the sixteenth century.

It's not an accident that my work is progressing backward. It is the way we move today. My experience of "The History of History" and of the time we live in is like walking slowly downstairs on an upward-moving escalator. It makes me optimistic, especially with regard to exhibitions. If before and after are interchangeable, an exhibition need not reflect the end of a process; it can show the beginning. Ideas don't have to be buried in the artworks; they can emerge from them. History no longer points at us straight from the past. We encounter it as we back up into the future. In the self-conscious act of writing a review of my own show, I realize that it is now, one month after it has closed, that I have the idea for this exhibition.

—*Kota Ezawa*

