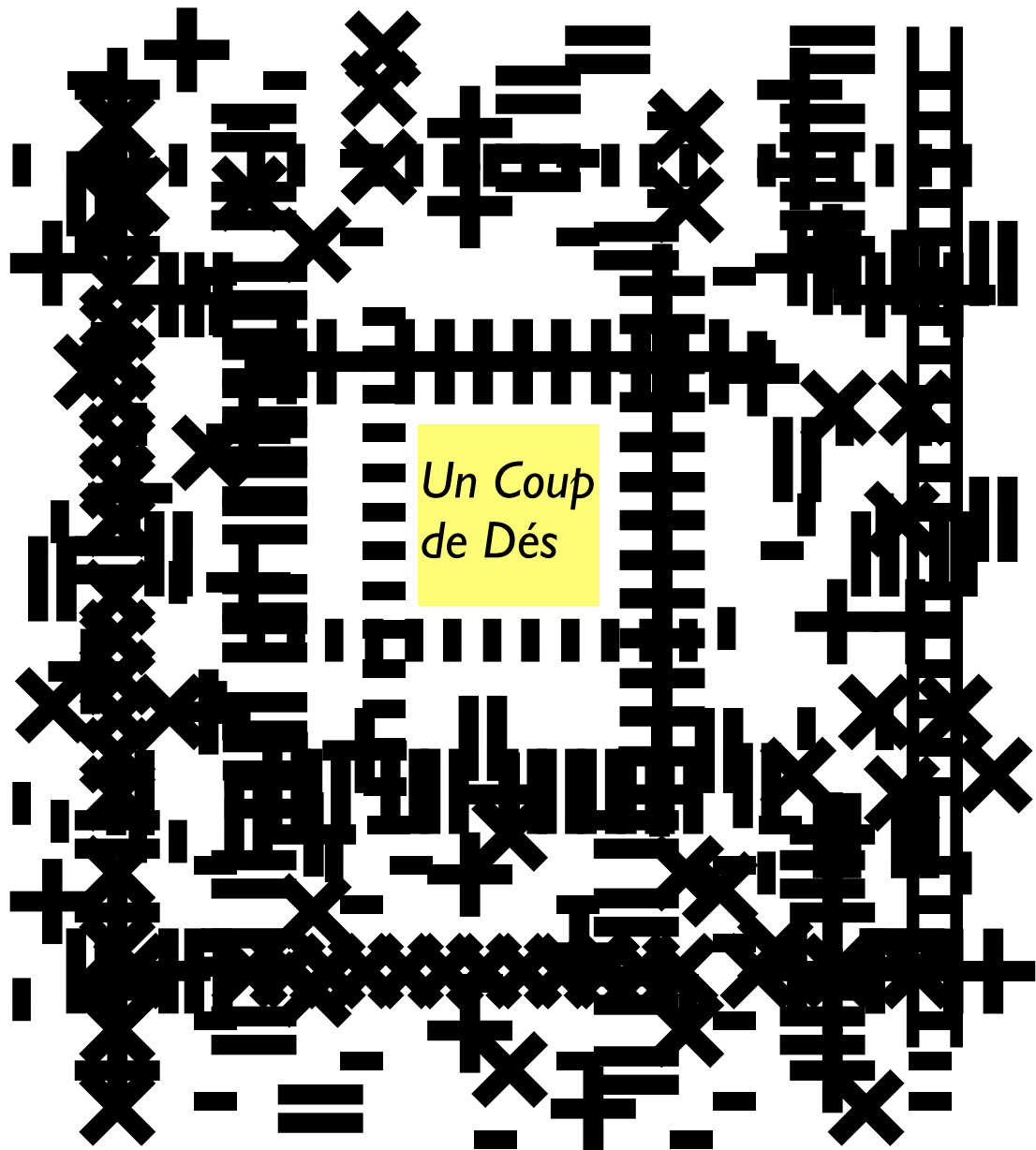
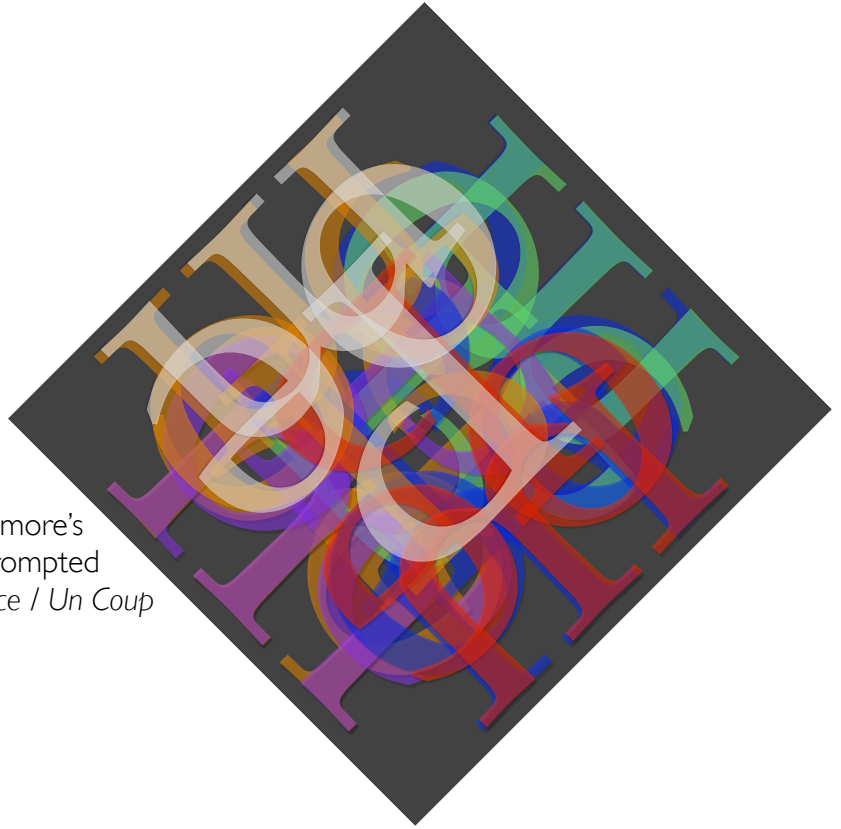


The
Mallarmé
Project



The Mallarmé Project



An Examination of *Has Art?*—Scott Lawrimore's Yearlong Exhibition of Art and Writing Prompted by Stéphane Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice / Un Coup de Dés*

Text & Accompanying Visuals
by Joseph F. Keppler

Introduction

Has Art? is the idea of Scott Lawrimore, a Seattle art dealer whose gallery is the Lawrimore Project. He intends *Has Art?* to identify those artists who may eventually shape 21st century art. For him, Mallarmé is a poet who by helping some 19th century artists become crucial to 20th century art may also be beneficial to 21st century artists.

For most months from 09/2010 to 08/2011, Lawrimore hosted exhibitions pairing an artist and a writer. He gave each pair a page of Mallarmé's poem, *Un Coup de Dés*, and asked them to make use of it however they wanted for their exhibition and explication. He produced ongoing catalogs during the year with a final catalog available for \$10 from his website.

Bringing visual and literary artists together and citing Mallarmé as a model make *Has Art?* a historic project for Seattle's visual and literary arts. Though it gives some artists and writers a chance to express themselves in the company of Mallarmé, it exposes a critical void as well as a break-up between the arts and vain indifference or ignorance toward what poetry does as art. Reproductions of many visual works from the *Has Art?* monthly exhibitions and their accompanying texts, discussed in this essay, can be found in the *Has Art?* catalogs and on the Lawrimore Project website: <http://www.lawrimoreproject.com/lp/Lawrimore_Project.html>.

Who is Scott Lawrimore? London's Saatchi Gallery's website has a link: *Dealers and Galleries around the World* <http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/dealers_galleries/Gallery/dg_id/922.html>, and this is their entry on Lawrimore:

Two years ago, Lawrimore Project didn't exist and Scott Lawrimore was just another assistant at somebody else's gallery. He has a nondescript background: grew up in a trailer park in northern California, once made a drawing of Scrooge that got him placed in art classes, ended up with a master's degree in art history, came to Seattle to work and moved up the gallery chain, ending at Greg Kucera Gallery.

Now, Lawrimore is historic.

Ken Allan, an art historian at Seattle University, compares Lawrimore to some-one like Walter Hopps, who schlepped slide projectors to collectors' L.A. homes in the 1950s to spread the gospel of abstract expressionism. Or to Richard Bellamy, the man who stood behind minimalism in its very early days, but quickly lost his Green Gallery in New York to bankruptcy.

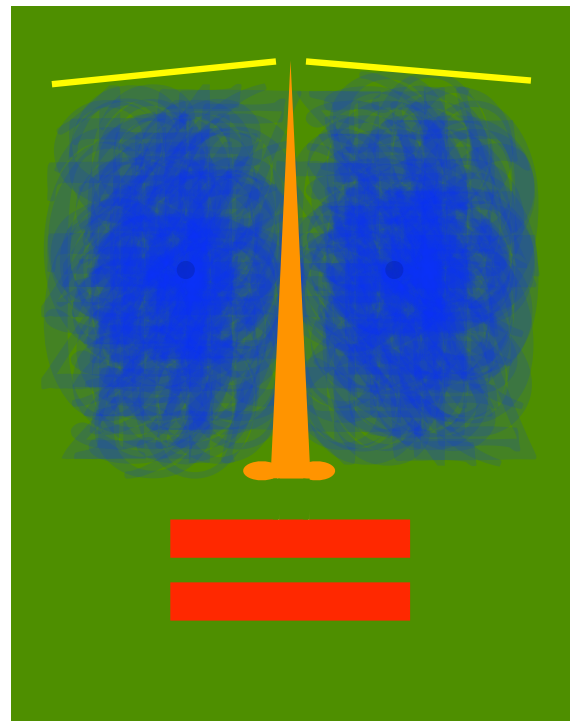
"I think that, in the end, Scott will have developed one of only two art spaces here in Seattle that were distinct from what everybody else did," Kucera said of his former protégé the other day.

The other gallery Kucera was referring to was run by Donald Young, who put everyone else to shame by importing world-famous artists to Seattle. (He moved to Chicago.) That's different from Lawrimore's gig, which is aptly described as a "project" instead of a "gallery." Lawrimore Project is a commercial gallery, but there are times when it seems an awful lot like a nonprofit, a theater, a school, a bar, a party, a brunch place, a think tank, a salon, or a community center.

During our April 4, 2011 lunchtime conversation, Lawrimore explains a little about his style of being a dealer. He wants to be different from other dealers who precisely design exhibits years in advance and leave little room for error. These dealers, he thinks, are more like engineers constructing events for their artists whereas he picks artists he admires and helps build their careers. He says he offers his artists the opportunity to sell their works because of their innovative art not just because of their potential earnings. He drops their names and talks about them over dinner with collectors. He does his own art research and makes himself very available. His artists keep in touch with him regularly.

Future Perfect

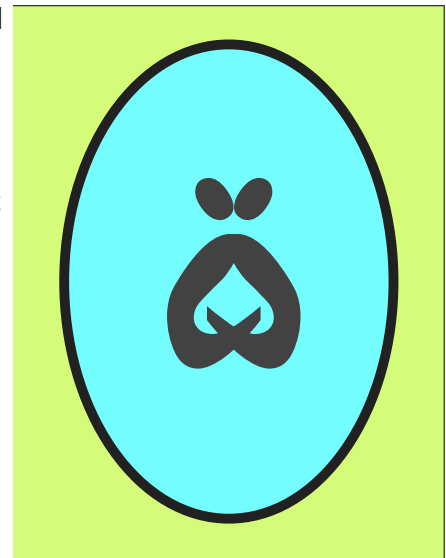
In the foreword to the *Has Art?* catalogs, he writes: "Artists will have been pitted against the lode-star—Stéphane Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*. Twelve individual pages for twelve individual artists, not in the service of one illustrating the other, but rather paired in **opposition** and contrast to expose their unique heavens. This **ultimate meeting with probability** will have been **consecrated** by writers whose own **sidereal** light was **emitted** in **accord with such obliquity**. The **chance—le hasard**—will have been a **stellar outcome. NOTHING**



WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE BUT THE PLACE, EXCEPT PERHAPS A CONSTELLATION.” [Emphasis is in the original.]

Lawrimore by expressing himself in the future perfect tense gives the uncertain future a certain past. This contemporary thought process is common but rarely noticed as the way the present imagines its steady connection to the future. Much activity and hope rely on the convention of future perfect idealism. By expressing this thinking with the verb forms appropriate for it, Lawrimore sounds boastful, and he unequivocally demonstrates this proud, forward-looking, postmodern way of imagining time. In contrast, one can consider that the dominant tense in the Renaissance, a time of reviving antiquity, was the past perfect tense. What had been in ancient Athens and Rome was then most important for new art. Classical sculpture and architecture, literary epics, mythology, and philosophy inspired the Renaissance. Today future perfect thinking, not past perfect, predominantly expresses what our era is like. Rather than an historical outlook, a look back, the future perfect is a progressive outlook, a look forward. It empowers people to assume the future has the past they can control in the present. It imaginatively sets into future history a now decided past. Historical time collapses into a present which makes up its own history as it goes along.

Future perfect is the implicit tense of commercials claiming you will have driven this fantastic car on a curvy country road; will have others envying your astonishing, new looks; will have a cold Corona and a gorgeous beach too. It is the tense of countless resumes with education, experience, and flattering articles, and of curriculum vitae presenting highly educated, eminent pasts leading to more compelling futures. Call this person immediately as even more will soon have been accomplished! It is the coming attractions, the terrific marvels from science, which extols itself for it will have provided a better future through its methodologies. It is the tense of journalism representing in images and reports all that must have occurred. Future perfect is the everyday ideology behind a functional way of living—of schedules, completions, and accomplishments. It goes on as unnoticed as our heartbeat.



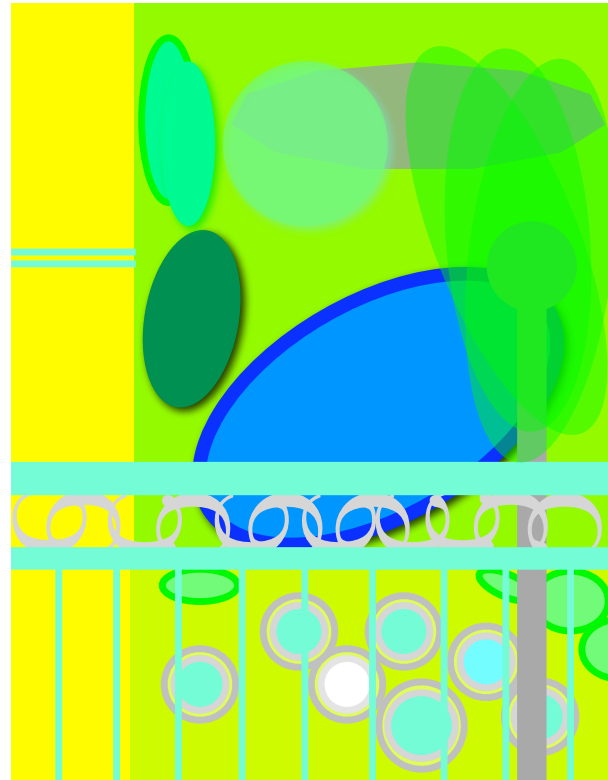
It is also the tense of contemporary art and of *Has Art?* Dice will have been tossed. Art will have been completed. Gambling will have emigrated from a casino to a gallery and its catalogs.

French

Mallarmé, who taught English for a living, would have known how French and English differ regarding some future perfect forms; for example, English *must have* is often *will have* in French: ‘he *must have had* a good time’ would be in French ‘he *will have had* a good time.’ It indicates a slight difference—accepting a consequence or accepting a future. Expectation is in one case a matter of rationalization and in the other a matter of course. To use Shakespeare as an example, ‘Must tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow have crept in their petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time?’ Or, ‘Will tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow have crept in

their petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time?’ Different ways of thinking about and expressing the persistence of duration must or will have different subjective effects. Languages express ideas differently without people always directing just how differently.

As if expertly with an orchestra, Mallarmé conducts French words and syntax for differences in understanding. Henry Weinfield points out an instance in Stéphane Mallarmé: *Collected Poems* (Univ. of California Press, 1994, p. 267) when Mallarmé reverses the normal, word-order rhythm of “n’abolira jamais” in his central theme: *Un Coup de Dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*: “‘Jamais’ can mean both ‘never’ and ‘ever,’ and thus, as the central phrase unfolds, a wavering effect is created that English is unable to capture, since it is obliged to indicate the negative immediately.”



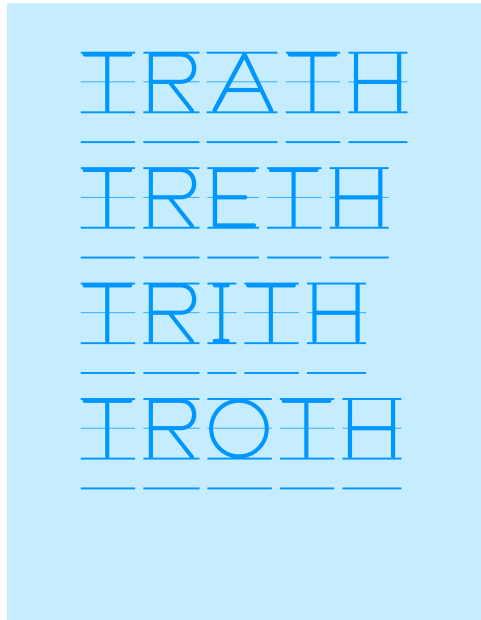
Confidence however solidly obtained from the past does not preclude present misunderstanding, ignorance, or luck. A throw of dice will have a numerical result but ultimately will have not made a difference to knowing chance. It is impossible. It is unknowable. Probability, the backbone of insurance and casinos, is not chance but predictability. Though he hoped that poetry could ultimately cure a conceited culture’s view of a constantly better future, how could Mallarmé ever have thought that he would have American artists and writers tested with *Un Coup de Dés* more than a hundred years after his death?

Lonely Champ Untouched for Twelve Rounds

With Mallarmé’s poem on the bill as a world champion, Lawrimore gives an artist and writer a chance to contend with greatness for a round. Anticipating an historic fight, Lawrimore’s confidence in *Has Art?* indicates faith that a potentially influential Seattle avant-garde is at hand. Will *Has Art?* participants lead the future too? They seem satisfied to be in the company of *Un Coup de Dés*, which they no doubt know is celebrated and central to *Has Art?* Their grasp of the poem though seems marginal and ultimately means little to the match-up for they rarely challenge it.

Lawrimore says that many mornings he used to gamble on his computer using the make-believe bank provided by gaming websites. Shadow boxing is always a safe bet, and there’s never a risk on any toss of dice when trying to play craps by oneself. Though Lawrimore’s innovative approach to *Un Coup de Dés* revisits Mallarmé’s desire for poetry to play the enigmatic music of the cosmos, in the end *Has Art?* will have been a promising gang of contenders. *Un Coup de Dés* remains great art, and *Has Art?* a great proposal.

Mallarmé famously told Degas, who in a moment of vainglory was complaining that he had all these ideas for poems but could not get them written down, that poems are made of words not ideas. Yet Mallarmé's words are full of ideas raising all sorts of poetic questions. To write the line "UN COUP DE DÉS JAMAIS N'ABOLIRA LE HAZARD" requires exacting thought to form



language and assertion, and then the philosophical issues begin. If a throw of dice will never abolish chance, what then does abolish chance? Does death abolish chance? Does the past by its being completed abolish chance? What does a throw of dice do exactly? Does it abolish anything? Does it decide anything? Does it ever not eliminate a chance?

Mallarmé ends his legendary poem with the line, *Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés*, which is generally translated as *Every Thought emits a Throw of Dice*. Yet *Pensée* is more than thought. It is thinking put into words. Moreover, *émet* is more than *emits*. It also expresses or *states*. Mallarmé perfectly finishes his poem by making thinking and language both risky. The end is beautiful, truthful, and active.

How technical the line becomes in future perfect form: 'Every Thought will have emitted a Throw of Dice.' Not

unpredictable, experiential activity, rather truth and beauty become textbook rhetoric. Does perhaps the incompatibility of contemporary thinking with Mallarmé's active primacy of poetry explain in part the absence of sustained engagement in the *Has Art?* series with the poetics of *Un Coup de Dés*?

The Enlightenment Strikes Back

Instead of putting their work to the test in a round with Mallarmé, some artists and writers in *Has Art?* simply and safely confirm faith in their art using an argument from design. Planned complexity supports the art as Art. When thoughtfully and nicely designed, it's Art. For example, Isaac Layman, a photographer and sculptor, and Kolya Rice, his avid commentator, are the first collaborative team. Rice presents a scholarly case that Layman's pictures matter because his experiments inform the public about the constructed nature of representation. Rice begins:

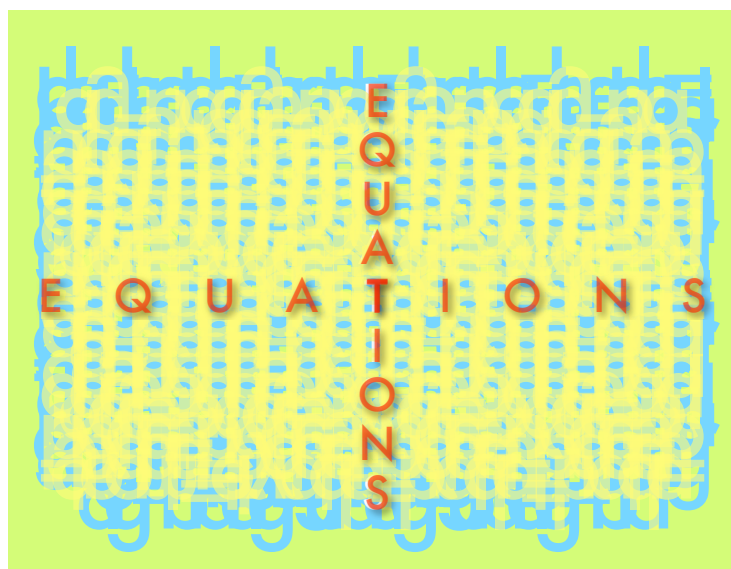
Frequently queried by students as to what art matters to me I feel caught in a bind, for in the offering of an answer, guidance from 'someone-in-the-know' do I not enact hidden transactions antithetical to the message I have in mind? A strange anxiety for a teacher to have, though weaned on critical theory questions about the veiled operations of power, multiple solicitations embedded in each utterance—questions, broadly put, concerning representation—are vitally important to me, in my life and in my pedagogy. Indeed, they are at the heart of the answer I offer in the end. 'The art that really matters to me,' I say, 'unmoors me, reveals to me an invisible given I had relied upon to frame my world, and renders it neither so natural nor inevitable as it once seemed. In such moments I feel simultaneously flooded by the possibility of recognizing the world afresh, and the weight of that challenge.' Isaac Layman's work matters to me in this way.

Layman photographs 'the world afresh' and poses the question, *What are his photographs representing?* Common household things appear unusually strange, and in the case of his sculptures, easy constructions appear deliberately enigmatic. Writers like Rice are thoroughly smitten.

Yet however deftly arranged, constructed, or extraordinarily, lavishly exposed, photographs hold only their future of being seen rather than having the activity of their being composed also present. It is the same with journalism, television, video, or film—photography's boon companions. In a sense they all live on borrowed time appropriating the past for the future. Events, nature, materials, poses, lights, speeds, manipulations . . . all convey a production for the future, beyond actual composition. This deferral inscribes the photograph with a time delay. Even when actually viewed, photographs project that they were not composed for right now, but later, always for a time to come. A composed past jumps over the present into the future. A picture can never express the present. It has none. Select past is all there for the future, perfectly. Photography prepares absolute evidence without appeal. It is lost time appearing as a found subject. It represents representation. It is art about a never before, never again, about instantaneous lost theatricality that Michael Fried surprisingly favors in *Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before* (Yale University Press, 2008). It is continuously only a replay, never the present, always but not now.

As illustrated in the *Has Art?* catalog, Layman's conceptual projects include old Polaroids or constructed picture frames in sculptural arrangements. His constructions may haunt his contemporaries' future perfect consciousness but cannot transform it. His fictionally temporal, sculptural compositions continue the photographic form. Photography is future perfect thinking on display. It is a photographer's nature, and its absolutism spreads to secure writers like Fried and Rice. Though Layman shifts from photography to sculpture, he retains photography's innate qualities.

Rice questions: "Can we conceive these objects, resolutely singular, as pictures? Or even as representation? If so, how, and to what end? Though the signature photographs may be gone, many of the questions Layman's work has raised persist, perhaps focused more tightly and broached from new perspectives that point forward to new avenues of inquiry, and backward, inflecting our understanding of his past practices." Forward and backward, it is as if Layman and Rice see time as a long commute between past and future, an effect of pervasive presentlessness.



Mallarmé uses words, and his poetry offers more actively present thinking and music than photographs or a photographer's sculptures. Poetic activity like Mallarmé's makes little difference to museums which want the best new thing in art. Wanting to appeal to broader audiences, these



institutions actively pursue artists like Layman who has a new show at the Frye Art Museum. Its website <fryemuseum.org/exhibition/4151/> states: "Isaac Layman (b. 1977) has, in a few short years, established himself as an exceptional talent and is today one of Seattle's most respected artists. This November the Frye Art Museum is proud to host his highly anticipated first solo museum exhibition. In *Paradise*, Layman expands his practice of constructing large-scale, psychologically charged, photographic-based visions of the spaces and objects found in his Seattle home. His new artworks explore the desire to fabricate escapes, destinations, and monuments and the role discontent plays in driving the need to create imagined perfection."

The self-absorbed desire to fabricate and need to create imagined perfection exemplify the problem of why make any more art. Why paint? Why sculpt? Why write? Why take a picture of this or that or anything at all? Layman's recent shows in Portland and Seattle suggest a spirit of *Just Do It* as they say at Nike's world headquarters near Portland. Maybe *Just Overdo It*. His home-spun contrariness, putative freedom, and visual appeal provide local art leaders with Seattle subject matter in a style not that different from global contemporary photographers like Thomas Demand, who photographs a reconstruction of the hallway outside Jeffrey Dahmer's infamous crime-scene apartment or of a friend's kitchen sink (See Thomas Demand, *Corridor*, 1995, and *Sink*, 1997). Steeped in Thoreau-like transcendentalism, Layman uses his Seattle residence as his *Walden Pond*. Not *Pond Sweet Pond* or *Home Sweet Home* but *Home Spectacular Home* is his approach. His reclusive photographs isolate household fantasies to suggest the Pacific Northwest *Paradise* is a New England homestead updated 160 years. There are those who believe in Layman's investigations, and there are those who are amused. His work offers a stare finished, a waiting puzzle, a fresh drama on everyday things for his Northwest admirers.

Writing Agrees to Agree

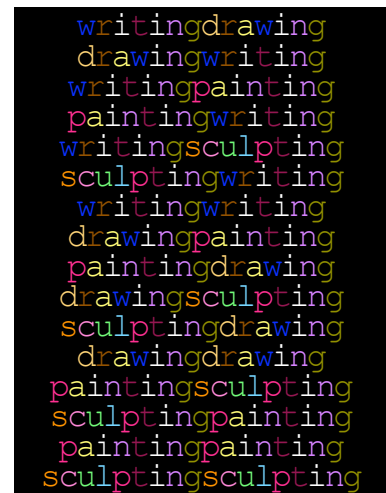
"For one year, artists will have been paired with a writer and a page from Stéphan Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*," Lawrimore explains when introducing the final team in *Has Art?* He continues, "The writer will have provided a critical response to the work as it relates to the poem as well as offered scholarship about the artist's practice as a whole." As Rice does with Layman's work, conscientious writers justify sculptural or video conundrums as art by evidence of their design. Thus, a weeping monolith or a TV-monitor-sporting-a-crafted-thong offer supportable aesthetic stratagems in *Has Art?* The visual art in *Has Art?* is admired more or less in principle by the writers as an original form of personal reasoning materially and singularly manifested. Writers almost ideologically recognize adequately designed art as Art.

Lawrimore includes writing in *Has Art?* mostly to provide critical promotion for visual artists. The dual reactions to Mallarmé reveal how similarly but separately visual and verbal artists operate today. Though primarily for the benefit of the visual arts, Lawrimore wants artists and writers to power this series according to their respective means. Writers take no issue with Lawrimore's

words in the foreword: “This **ultimate meeting with probability** will have been **consecrated** by writers whose own **sidereal** light was **emitted** in **accord with such obliquity**.” Writers dutifully orbit their appointed stars, and they too mostly leave Mallarmé another galaxy to himself. In contrast, Mallarmé writes poetry without obligation to an employer’s ideal of what his writing should be.

Selected as an artist and commentator, Carolina Silva has unique difficulty in the series. Matthew Offenbacher is her writer and in “Welcome,” a cordial letter beginning, “Dear Carolina”, addresses her but mostly neglects her art—ink drawings of hands, oven-baked clay hands, and video. He gives her tips on living in Seattle, and he ends, “Yours in admiration, / Matt” What exactly Matt admires is unclear for as an artist she seems slighted.

As a writer Silva cites Eva Hesse and Luce Irigaray to support her feminist reading of Elena del Rivero’s paper and embroidery works. She says that del Rivero “claims a capacity, a right that has long been neglected to woman, breaking with the patriarchal reading and asking for a disruptive form that, like *Écriture féminine*, brings forth the feminine body and female difference in language and emotion.” Entitled “The Coherence of Chance,” her article on del Rivero invokes gender, openness, and chance coherence that “allows for the incorporation of accidents, which is contingent upon experimentation, and in which the constant of becoming is always welcome.” Yet like Offenbacher’s delicate article about her own art, she says little about del Rivero’s art that isn’t true of many people everyday, thus slighting del Rivero in turn.



One Is Damned; One Is Saved

Jeremy Shaw is the only artist to refuse to accept the writer’s commentary to accompany his exhibit. Though Lawrimore considers the writing from Jessica Powers (a curator at the Hedreen Gallery of Seattle University) one of the best for “its trippy, sexual, LSD imagery,” Shaw censures her piece. His curriculum vitae <jeremyshaw.net/cv.html> lists under *Solo Exhibitions 2010*: “*Single Channel Higher States. The Lawrimore Project, Seattle, WA*” and under *Selected Group Exhibitions/ Screenings 2011*: “*Montreal Biennale, A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance*.” This means that Shaw will have participated in two recent shows regarding Mallarmé’s poem. Why seems debatable for he deals mainly with generational ephemera in works like “The Image of a Generation, 2011,” “Unseen Potentials, 2011,” or “Something’s Happening Here, 2009.” Shaw revisits the past <<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/music/2009-07-07/circlesquare-jeremy-shaw/>> like an unapologetic, visiting anthropologist.

An artist himself, Elias Hansen is also both curator and writer for “OPERATION: MADMAN presents THE READER.” Hansen says someone named Read has for as long as he has known him “produced museum quality work for public exhibition anonymously, with no intention of economically benefiting from his work. This is his first gallery show.” Hansen officially inaugurates Read’s collage-covered newspaper boxes, signs, and street graphics into the art world and as a bonus comes up with an evening appearance for him at the New Museum in New York City.

Lawrimore thinks this show was awesome. He says he really tossed the dice on this exhibition and did not know what to expect when he gave Hansen complete freedom to choose the artist and art and to write about it as well. Hansen, he feels, really came through for him with a stunning and popularly acclaimed exhibition. Read, I think, intuitively understands dismal everyday language. The work recapitulates how chaotic and decrepit public language is today. It is understandable why his art would be celebrated in a culture that has lost touch with words. Many of his works <http://www.lawrimoreproject.com/lp/Artists/Pages/THE_READER.html> are indicated "[sold]." Lawrimore credits *Un Coup de Dés* for enabling him to relinquish his own say and credits curator Hansen for his perfect control as both Read's agent and commentator.

All Shall Be Sell; All Shall Be Sell; And All Manner of Thing Shall Be Sell

Control of others seems important in art today as in politics and business. Kolya Rice's reluctance to answer his students about what art matters to him is not universally shared. Shows, publicity, and prices shout out answers all the time. The spin in art as in politics and business seeks to exaggerate someone's worthiness or metamorphosis. Spin experts are highly paid, coveted salespeople hired by, say, election campaigns or pharmaceutical corporations. Their playing with people's minds seems more explicit and pervasive than in Mallarmé's time. They are powerful commodities-and-people brokers. They help produce and then take advantage of systemic breakdowns in thinking and perception. They too fall victim to their own substitute persuasions.

Experts swirl their spin in art mentally and socially over publicity and positioning and indirectly over academies' and artists' praxis. What is written about art today has great capacity to award or deny aesthetic credibility and to influence thinking about who is doing the art that matters. Elias Hansen seems better at this than others in the *Has Art?* series. On one level politics, business, and art are all about selling a better future through position or possession. On another they are all about believing in the hard work and talent necessary for greatness. Hansen writes the story and markets the tie-ins too.



Though artwork will always be bought, sold, and collected, what is currently collected may not be worth collecting. Extraordinary faith in collectors and prices sets the standards for contemporary art compared to previous periods. Collectors are a new academy with wealth as their teaching. Their predictably ever higher setting of prices fascinates the public the way royalty usually does. Art is auctioned like star athletes to franchise owners.

Mallarmé's essay, *The Impressionists and Edouard Manet*, stands out in contrast to contemporary faith in collectors, rising prices, and regular writers. When Mallarmé was becoming better known because of his advocacy of Edgar Allan Poe, he was asked to write on the Impressionists, particularly on Manet.

Starting his essay <<http://rae.com.pt/mallarme%20on%20manet%20completo.pdf>> with a pinch of art history by citing Courbet and Realism, he also acknowledges how perceptive before his time was Charles Baudelaire who died “before his favourite painter [Manet] had won a public name.” Then Mallarmé impressively begins setting Manet into ongoing history and in conflict with his contemporary culture. He writes that Manet recognizing “the inanity of all he was taught” turned to Velasquez and to the Flemish school for their atmosphere and brilliant, glowing tones, “which he since made himself the master of, and can mingle as he pleases. It is precisely these two aspects which reveal the truth, and give the paintings based upon them living reality instead of rendering them the baseless fabric of abstracted and obscure dreams. These have been the tentatives of Manet, and curiously, it was to the foreigner and the past that he turned for friendly council in remedying the evils of his country and his time.”

Mallarmé’s essay advances art and culture through his deep knowledge of his artist friends and the problems of their own era. This deep knowledge of each other and of our era is not so much in evidence in *Has Art?* which expresses more a concern for being worth collecting.

Mortals & Immortals

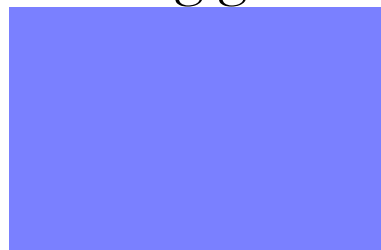
Mallarmé’s Manet has a history and a social conscience. Many artists in *Has Art?* lack much of a past. Their society seems composed of themselves. They emerge not born of women but as if cutely formed like golden gods and goddesses from Zeus’s cleaved head. Though Lawrimore gives all pairs of artists and writers specific lines of *Un Coup de Dés* to consider, they value their own work more than Mallarmé’s.

There is mention about layout and typeface or the impossibility of abolishing chance, but then the final *Has Art?* writer, William Owen, uses Mallarmé to acclaim Alex Hubbard’s video, *The Border, The Ship*. He misconstrues the poem and compares it to the video. He thinks of the poem and video as similar art with opposite plots. Owen’s simplistic reading of *Un Coup de Dés* describes it like a cartoon. Its special effects denouement resulting from a character flaw:

Mallarmé spends the final two pages of his poem on the cosmological outcome of the master’s inability to confront the abyss of chance: first, a place will have taken place where all results in view are null, and all reality dissolves in the reaches of the waves. Then a constellation appears in the pure and vacant beyond—the number of the unthrown dice in some ideal realm. Thus purity emerges from chaos. Exactly the opposite is true of what happens within the Border—where a clean sheet only exists before some thing decides to make its mark there. Hubbard’s is a world of ever increasing entropy, where even inanimate things take on the agitated persistence and stubborn individualism of sailors and border dwellers.



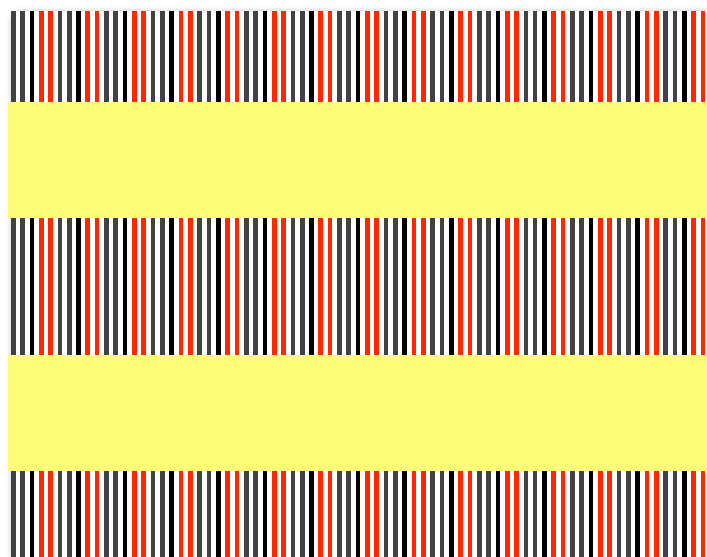
R ‘i’ g g e d



While Hubbard's art may be structured to appeal like a madcap video, *Un Coup de Dés* is structured not like a recording at all but poetically like thinking itself. For Owen to deal so unintelligently with *Un Coup de Dés* leaves Mallarmé spending his final two pages as a still, white star, eyed as much dimmer than Hubbard's video. Too bad. Too ignorant. Too symptomatic.

In *Faux Pas* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2001, pp. 107-111, trans. by Charlotte Mandell), Maurice Blanchot asks, "Is Mallarmé's Poetry Obscure?" He answers the question that it is obscure as language itself and that poetry is about how impossible it is to define or be defined, to create or feel created. For those who contemplate what it is to be a person, *Un Coup de Dés* offers all too human words about finding oneself a person in a lost contingent cosmos. What is specifically human experience? Not with sacrosanct neurological studies or short videos, Mallarmé writes about the phenomenology of being human with words:

Whereas rational signification implies an idea that can be detached from words, which even denies all importance to words and which, apart from them, assures intelligibility and understanding between beings, poetic signification is that which cannot be separated from words, that which makes each word important and that reveals itself in the fact or the illusion that language has an essential reality, a fundamental mission: to establish things by and in the word. That is what any reading of poetry like that of Mallarmé supposes. It imposes the momentary belief in the evident power of words, in their material value, and in the force they possess to attain the depths of reality. One instinctively believes that in poetry language reveals its true essence, which lies completely in the power to evoke, to call forth mysteries that it cannot express, to do what it cannot say, to create emotions or states that cannot be represented—in a word to be linked to profound existence by doing it rather than by saying it. And one understands a poem not when one grasps its thoughts nor even when one formulates its complex relationships but when one is led by it to the mode of existence that it signifies, provoked to a certain tension, exaltation, or destruction, led to a world whose logical content is only one element. One could say that poetic meaning has to do with existence itself, that it is the understanding of the situation of man, that it calls what he is into question.



Those passing on poetry risk not experiencing their incorporeal humanity and settling for a cartoon metaphysics of who they are. Poems like *Un Coup de Dés* are triumphs of the human mind and heart. They are historic events, which keep happening for people whose capacity for love and art expands with time lived. Great poetry is rare, and generally appreciation of it is rare. As if predicting the 20th and 21st centuries, Baudelaire presciently concludes his remarks about photography and the 1859 Salon by asking, “Are we to suppose that a people whose eyes are growing used to considering the results of a material science as though they were the products of the beautiful, will not in the course of time have singularly diminished its faculties of judging and of feeling what are among the most ethereal and immaterial aspects of creation?” (Baudelaire: *Art in Paris 1845-1862, Reviews of Salons & Other Exhibitions*. Jonathan Mayne, editor and translator. London: Phaidon Press, 1965, p. 155.) Today material science’s results have to include jets, cars, computers, phones, drugs, appliances . . . with human faculties of judging and feeling ever more diminished. Mallarmé’s poetry unveils these ethereal and immaterial aspects of our world that are so incommensurable with pragmatic aesthetics and ambitions.

Barbarians

Original in its approach, *Has Art?* is at least the third recent exhibition concerning Mallarmé and contemporary art. Besides the 2011 Montreal Biennale, another is the 2008 Generali Foundation’s *Un Coup de Dés: Writing Turned Image. An Alphabet of Pensive Language*. Its website <<http://foundation.generalifoundation.at/index.php?id=683&L=1>> shows an engagement with Mallarmé primarily through visual concepts—scale, layout, or pagination, for example. To understand poetry only on this visual level is to demonstrate a unidimensional human faculty for expression. When visual artists speak with their art, words are supplementary or absent—Ellsworth Kelly, for example, offering his signature colored shapes in response to Mallarmé.



A more dramatic example is Marcel Broodthaers who reproduces the complete layout of *Un Coup de Dés* with all the words extinguished. In another instance Broodthaers films an author, perhaps himself, writing in his backyard dipping a stylus pen into a bottle of ink during a downpour, which washes his text into fluid abstraction. His *La Pluie (Projet pour un texte)*,



1969, is part of the Generali Foundation’s *Un Coup de Dés* exhibition and can be viewed on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L6JO-U_ts8> along with several other films concerning Mallarmé.

Gean Moreno, based in Miami, cites *La Pluie* in “Weeping Monoliths,” his *Has Art?* commentary on the sculptor, Bert Rodriguez, also from Miami. Who is Gean Moreno? A popular artist and writer, Moreno is #25 in the Miami New Times list of 100 Creatives. Their website <http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/cultist/2011/01/gean_moreno.php> justifies his ranking: “His

art has shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, and around the world at Kunsthhaus Palais Thurn und Taxis in Bregenz, Institute of Visual Arts Milwaukee, Haifa Museum, Arndt & Partner Zurich, and Invisible-Exports. He's also published in *e-flux* journal, *Monu* magazine, *Flash Art*, *Art Nexus*, and *ArtUS*."

Moreno's art career like many appears set for better publicity and bigger projects. His writing for *Has Art?* presents himself as a scholarly tavern companion who knows what Mallarmé is like from having read books like Leo Bersani's *The Death of Stéphane Mallarmé*. Moreno imagines Mallarmé as a kind of ghost (dead author) stalking reality. He thinks of *La Pluie* as a slapstick allegory of "what Mallarmé called the Work—that magical and impossible and exorbitant text, forever to come, that finally reveals an 'intimate correlation of Poetry with the Universe,' a text, presumably identical with what there is, for which the channeling services of a writing subject will always be found wanting." Moreno continues: "The Work puts us all in remedial medium class; in spiritualist after-school tutoring sessions." His witty, flippant commentary demonstrates more personality than thinking about poetry or Broodthaers or Rodriguez. Writing from merged artistwriter contributors in *Has Art?* generally reveals less about the subject than the artistwriter.

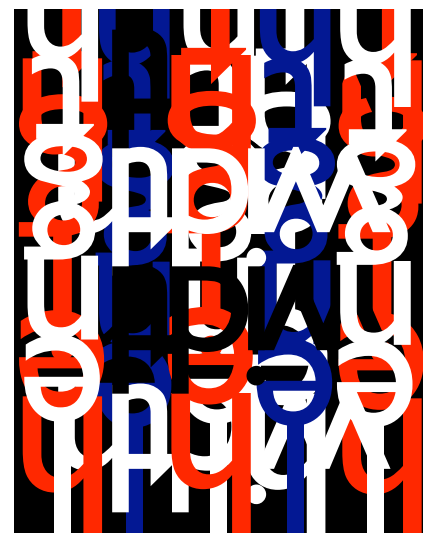
Peloponnesian Wars

As evidenced by Mallarmé-inspired art projects, the literary and visual arts are irreconcilably divorced. The former lovers see or read one another mostly on a weekend fling or when a freelance contract or salaried employment has been arranged. Inventiveness and complimentary ideas or tactful volubility are expected from writers. Conversations seem missing. Academics do well; the artistwriter children of the divorce not so well.

This divorce has alarming implications hardly noticed in the visual arts, which are foundering in arguments from design or on specious claims of advancing Art or from the presumption of catering to the public or of helping them along to a better future. Many rationales justifying artists' works are badly written, barely reasonable, and questionably relevant. Descriptions of artwork to justify awards and special exhibitions rely more and more on tautologies and circular reason-



ing. What is worse is the absence of fundamental literary learning in artists and curators. Proudly exhibited in major museums are photographs and objects that a thousand words from a good writer would shame into basement storage forever. Higher and basic education must accept some shared responsibility for this abysmal, shameless, lordly literary ignorance.



Though writers generally feel compelled to compliment, many artists feel free to disdain anybody except their set of art friends. The sculptor, Bert Rodriguez expresses this attitude in his current blog <<http://www.minegro.com/>>: "I was interviewed recently by Monica Uszerowicz for the online magazine *Idiom*. She mostly asks me about why I make what I make and what I think about it. I kind of shit on Miami a little bit but, it deserves it." Yet when writing about friends or those they look up to or fear, artists are solicitous or vacuous. Then it is polite to talk about something besides art when talking about art.

Matthew Offenbacher or D.W. Burnam writing about female artists for *Has Art?* hardly mention the art. Rather they write about the locale or about a personal theory. They presumably expect positive conclusions about the art though to conclude from their writing that it barely matters seems as reasonable. Using distraction the writers imply that the art though relative to or dependent on something else is Art.

Distracted or not, writers expressing warm or neutral feelings refrain from serious social and aesthetic concerns. Social sanctity trumps art criticism. Admiration and affection spread like soft butter and hot syrup over pancakes.

Then the city is sacked.

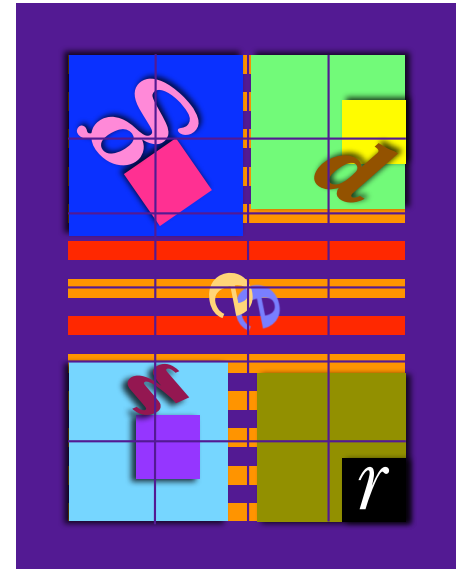
Herodotus & Thucydides & . . . Darwin

Administrators reign now. They finesse advocacy and budgets and their salaries and benefits. With art being served this way, it becomes necessary for the philosophically disposed reader to examine the art and the writing closely, but sometimes diligent consideration is hardly worth the time. It seems pointless. One is almost nothing in a democracy; it takes many to change the powers in place.

Thus it only gets worse. Someone wins major public compliments or cash grants. So what? To analyze acclaim and its rationalization makes the cultural situation more boring, bleak and depressing. Easier to move on to whatever else is being counted for the future, if that helps.

Today as he was in his own lifetime Mallarmé remains savored by those for whom art is close to perfection. Paul Valéry knew Mallarmé well, and Valéry's words about him and about a historical shift in aesthetics help explain why some artists in our age are so dogmatically honored (Collected Works of Paul Valéry, vol. 8, Leonardo Poe Mallarmé, trans. by Malcolm Crowley + James R. Lawler, Princeton Univ. Press, 1972, pp. 282-3.):

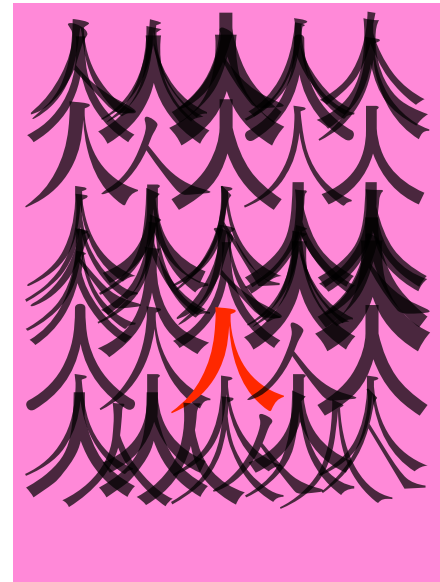
For thirty and some years he was a witness or martyr to the idea of the perfect. There are no longer many victims of that intellectual passion. An era ended with the renunciation of the lasting. Works that demand time without reckoning, works made to stand for centuries, are scarcely undertaken nowadays. We have entered the era of the provisional. No one has leisure to produce those objects of contemplation that the mind finds inexhaustible and on which it can subsist indefinitely. Time enough for a surprise is our present unit of time.



Valery simply detects how patience in artists like Mallarmé, da Vinci and Cézanne, for example, is absent in artists like Duchamp, Pollock, or Gabriel Orozco. What now differentiates artists from each other may be the power of their imaginative surprises not their appeal as makers of contemplative objects.

Because not all surprises are equal, *Has Art?* artists offer further surprise by being praised in other venues. Going national and global offers importance and exclusivity as fashion, clubs, fairs, and parties do.

A consummate dealer, Scott Lawrimore uses artists to create his surprises. He is in a way a gallery-owning curator whose conceptual gambit is the top surprise of *Has Art?* If there is someone in *Has Art?* who wants to be a real contender to Mallarmé, it is Lawrimore. More than any of the artists or writers, Lawrimore is competing with Mallarmé's legacy. Furthermore he has better odds than Mallarmé ever had. In an era of Boone, Castelli, Gagosian, and Saatchi, an art dealer today is much more of a star than any poet.



On October 12th and 13th, 2011, I went back to the Lawrimore Project to talk to him about the series and his post-*Has Art?* plans. The future perfect optimism expressed in his foreword was gone. The future perfect had become now.

What were his expectations for *Has Art?* He said he hoped it would be a new model for exhibition practice. He wanted the audience to extend their interest over the long term. That audiences and critics did not follow it the way he hoped was disappointing, and he thought it said something about the Seattle gallery scene: "People are not out looking at art." On the other hand, the artists were happy to have a chance for significant scholarship about their work and to exhibit a precise selection of objects. They liked having that kind of attention. He said he learned a lot: "It was super-edifying, a good time, and a constant challenge."

Progress must have happened.

Pyrrhic Victors

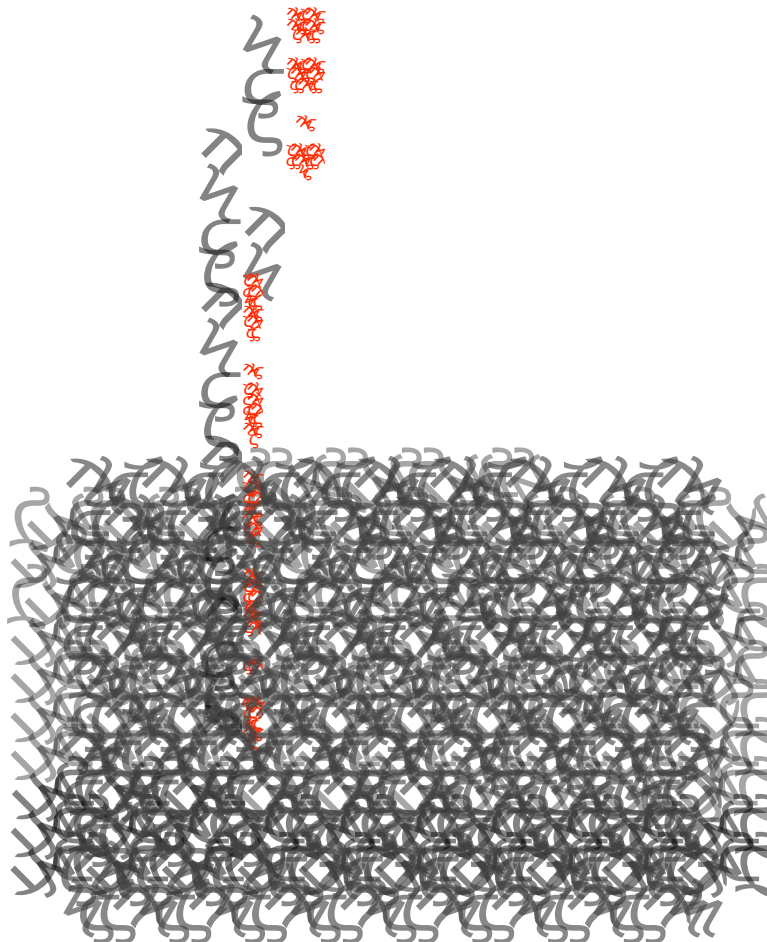
Lawrimore had great things to say about all his artists. He was finishing some news for his clientele in which he reported how well his artists were doing by their being included in other venues. For example, Chris Bruch and Leo Saul Berk had a show, *Top(o)graphy*, which opened in Los Angeles on July 9, 2011. THE READER was part of a May 7th evening accompanying the *Flash: Light* series at the New Museum in NYC. Seattle's art trio, SuttonBeresCuller created *Jigsaw Edition* for Creative Capital in NY. It is a "specially commissioned, hand-painted 150 piece puzzle for the 2011 Creative Capital Benefit & Auction."

Elias Hansen had his first solo show in London at Jonathan Viner's temporary space in Hoxton Square. His show's entitled *Elias Hansen: You Know We're Nowhere Near There, Right?* Jonathan Viner's website <www.jonathanvinergallery.com> describes:

The walls of the gallery are lined with small wooden shelves, which display Hansen's delicate blown-glass alongside deteriorating found objects - thus neutralising the contradictory status of the precious and the discarded. Hansen collected these relics on the beaches of Vashon, sifting through the sand whilst throwing glass bottles into the ocean. The bottles and the sand are recontextualised in these sculptures as the found objects and glass they have become over time.

Three new sculptural works occupy the centre of the gallery spaces. Plastic tubes and metal frames connect hand blown glass to broken found objects. These elaborate yet ultimately futile structures set atop worktables resemble a dysfunctional meth lab, emphasizing the mystery, secrecy and suspicion of this hidden market.

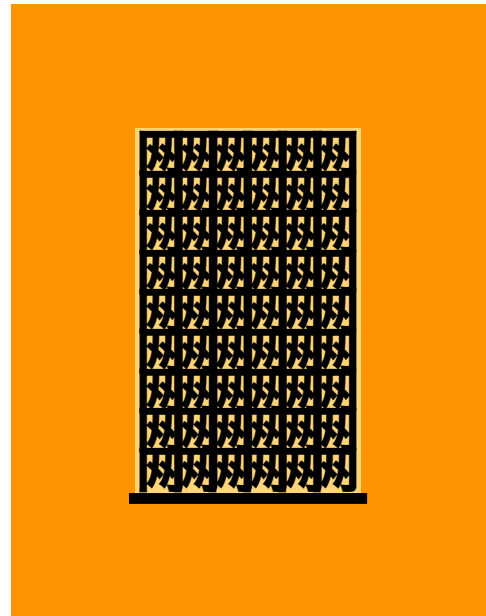
Titles like *I'd take you there, but it doesn't exist anymore, I haven't been back there since, I guess going back there made a difference* read like overheard fragments of conversation, revealing insight, if somewhat ambiguous, to Hansen's personal associations to each object.



Currently, Lead Pencil Studio (Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo), the design team behind the old Lawrimore space, has an installation at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Chris Bruch has won a 2011 GAP grant from Artist Trust to help with his upcoming exhibition in Heme, Germany <http://artisttrust.org/index.php/award-winners/artist-profile/cris_bruch>: “He has been invited to show at the Flottman Hallen art space as part of a two-person exhibition with his friend and colleague, the German artist Andreas Bee. Specifically, he will use funding for the purchase of materials, airfare from Seattle, and cost of additional travel while in Germany to promote the work.”

This past summer Marisa C. Sánchez, the Seattle Art Museum’s assistant curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, invited Carolina Silva and two others “to conceive of objects, often experimental in concept and execution” in response to the context of SAM’s new sculpture park <http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/getout/art_2011.asp>: “Their temporary interventions provide unexpected encounters with art, in turn encouraging fresh perspectives on sculpture and its making. Their diverse works cast a new lens on our experience with sculpture and with the landscape at the Olympic Sculpture Park.”

Thus, recent activities of these and other artists can be found on the Lawrimore Project website’s News link. These revelations are countable with whatever else is being counted for the future. Through such publicity, art dealers like Lawrimore, museum curators like Sánchez, gallery spaces like Viner’s, and any number of art, governmental, educational, non-profit, and commercial institutions share narratives about contemporary artists for their patrons and importantly among themselves. It seems stilted and stuffy but ultimately is successful.



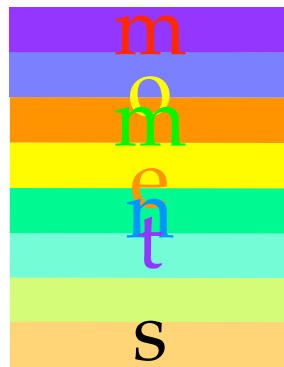
Writing and visual art, irreconcilably divorced, pretend to be getting along without any problem while administrators and advertising control the art marketplace more than the prodigious caretakers writing reviews. Writers and artists in *Has Art?* share promotional and scholarly aspirations similar to their gallery employer. Thinking for oneself is almost an impossible imposition when art and writing are on one hand a gallery effort and on the other a community activity overseen by the administrative class. Ironically, appropriately, the SAM publicist garbles, “Their diverse works cast a new lens on our experience.”

The Divine Comedy

Lawrimore says he likes the way the first three shows (Isaac Layman, Jeremy Shaw, and Bert Rodriguez) made a seamless transition from his giant, former gallery space to his present, small, window-front quarters. He speaks very highly of Layman who had the last show in the old space and the first show in the new, and whose works exponentially increased Lawrimore’s pool of collectors.

Lawrimore doesn't think there were any low points in *Has Art*? He regrets that he had to interrupt the yearlong series to present jewelry and glass exhibits, which he had committed to earlier when he still had his bigger space. He is also disappointed with Jeremy Shaw's decision to exclude Jessica Powers' writing. When someone threw a rock through the window during the exhibit, OPERATION: MADMAN presents THE READER, Lawrimore does not rush to any conclusions. Instead he wonders whether the culprit was a vagrant, a jealous, disgruntled street artist, or perhaps even the artist himself. Lawrimore says nothing really negative about his art.

When he was drastically downsizing his gallery space and changing aesthetics from public spectacle to discrete precision, Lawrimore says that reading *Un Coup de Dés* gave him a deeper appreciation for taking chances and for being the master of one's own fate. He claims that failure



was an anticipated aspect of the series so that new forms of enlightenment could happen. Acknowledging futile press releases and art commentary, he says he feels all emptiness comes back through Mallarmé to the object. Lawrimore could have been a poet.

Overall, he is delighted with the purity of the objects chosen for the shows and mentions Carolina Silva as the only artist to make specific objects for the exhibit. He is disappointed that many artists didn't run with the poem more. The artistic, non-traditional placement of the art within the small gallery he thinks of as indicative of Mallarmé's typographical originality in *Un Coup de Dés*. Few notice however.

He admits to playing a joke on his artists by giving them a specific part of *Un Coup de Dés* all the while he is complicating matters by relinquishing his normal expository control to others. Ordinarily he elevates his artists with enticing news, stories, and mini-sagas about their heroic work. Taking a chance with their art and writing and with his own gallery practice, he relates that he wants to live life as an art dealer somehow the same way the poem works: "opaque, legible, generous, precise, dogmatic, pretentious, dumb, confusing. . ."

Asked what periodicals and newspapers he reads, Lawrimore says he keeps up with the business end of things with *THE ART NEWSPAPER*, but to learn how other artists are being promoted he thoroughly examines each page of *ARTFORUM* down to the smallest advertisement.

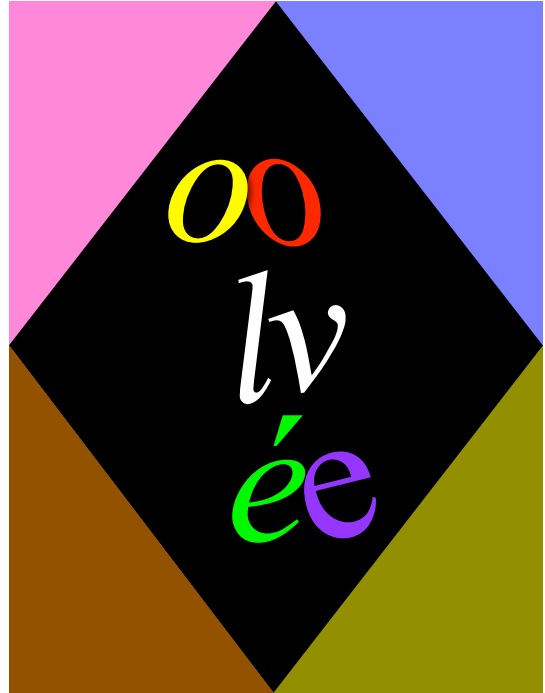
Lawrimore in Wonderland

With his representative artists all doing well, he now finds himself often working at many art fairs. Seattle is enough, but traveling is key. By reaching outside of Seattle, he says he is doing better in terms of art shown and sold than the other fifty or so Seattle galleries.

He likes Seattle's Do-It-Yourself projects like Klara Glosnova's NEPO house. She uses her house as a gallery, and though he says he isn't interested in 90% of what going on there, he thinks it is great that people like Glosnova and Robert Yoder use their homes as galleries. He also mentions Matthew Offenbacher's *La Norda Specialo*, <<http://thenorthernspecial.org/>>, a free paper of writings by artists. The latest issue is their seventh, dated October 15, 2010. It has a group discussion about masculinity that begins with the line: "Speaking of masculinity, what do you guys think of Picasso?" In this issue Offenbacher also presents Part One of his own piece, "Power in the Gift

Shop,” as well as articles from D.W. Burnam and Jo Baer. Lawrimore thinks these DIY exhibitions and publications are great. When asked whether he thought these projects are a group hug, he admits that there are few negatives in them and that these projects are meant to be casual, not critical. A gigantic hug, he agrees, lacks discernment, criticality, and meaningful feedback. It is supposed to make you feel good, make you feel you belong, in general.

Moreover, Lawrimore recognizes that Seattle does not have much public criticality in the print media. One of two critics is Michael Upchurch in the *Seattle Times*. After reviewing books for many years, Upchurch now occasionally offers his polite response on art shows for the supposedly genteel readers of the *Times*. There is also Jen Graves writing and blogging for *The Stranger*, a thickly advertised weekly aimed at Seattle’s streetwise sophisticates. That she mostly loves Lawrimore’s exhibits is fine by him. He appreciates her doting coverage and acknowledges that when there are only two people covering art in the city, he is glad Graves loves the Lawrimore Project and Upchurch fluffs other art stuff happening in the city.



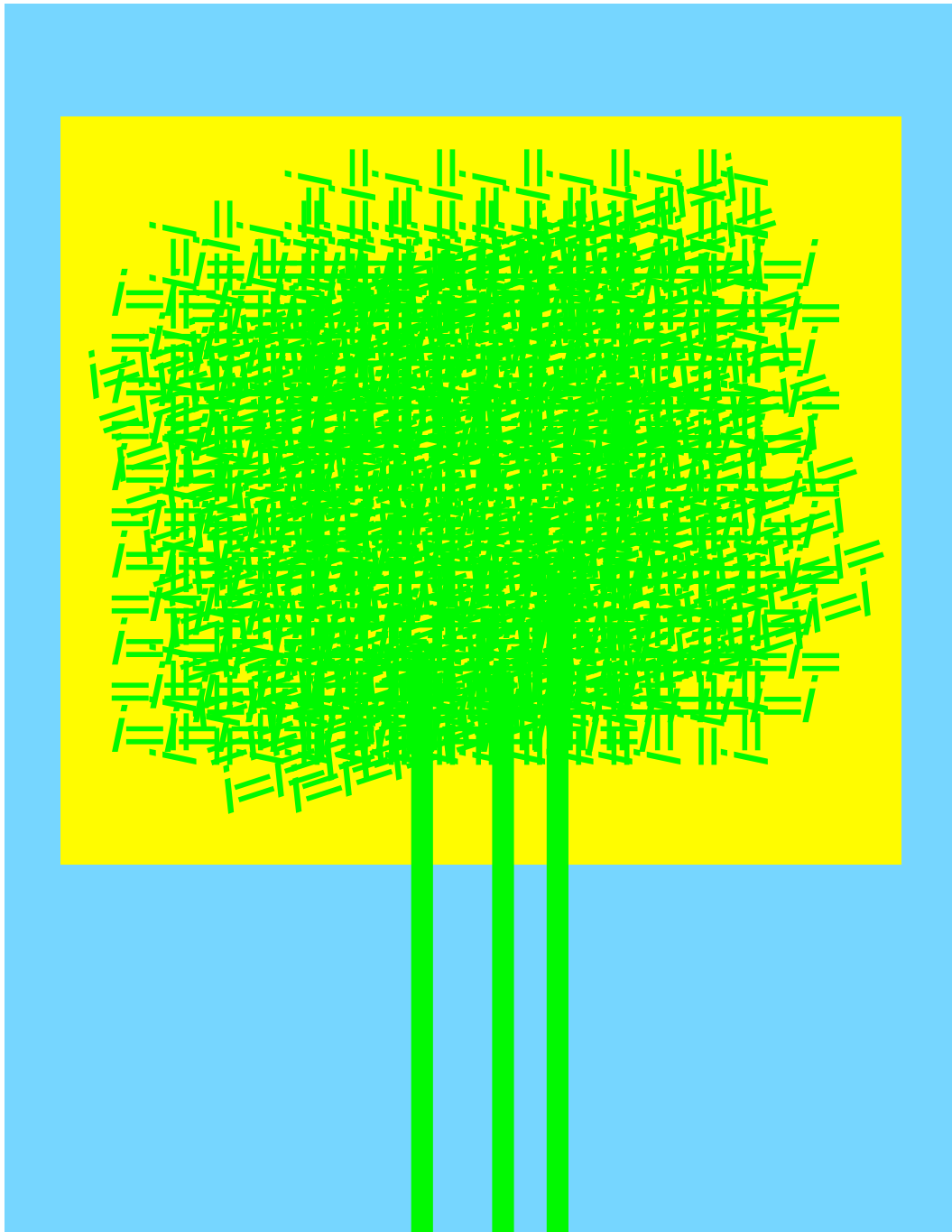
When we talk about the broad acceptance of this lack of criticism in Seattle, we agree that the issue here has steadfastly become artists’ support not criticality. He mentions that obviously museums need to have people come through the gate more than they need critical discussion about their choices of art. When he looks back on the best-selling artists from Seattle in the past 25 years, he remembers Faye Jones, Dale Chihuly, Akio Takamori, Gaylen Hansen, and Alden Mason. Though they have all sold well, there is no way to know if these locally revered artists will have long term credibility in major museums or if they represent a provincial period in local art history. Asked why there is no contemporary art institution in Seattle, he says the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington does okay, and there’s hope with a new curator at SAM. But when I ask why the city depends on these sometimes predictably disappointing curators rather than establishing a separate institution with solid critical credence, he says that “that’s Seattle.”

Find No Fault, Know No Truth, Purchase No Art

Why does it seem that Seattle collectors, curators, artists, and critics would rather keep Seattle from prioritizing art, writing, and civic aesthetic philosophy? If little of substance is being disseminated, then perhaps any collector’s works regardless of permanent, public merit can enjoy the compliments of local art enthusiasts. Collectors can think their art collections are above criticism. Curators can earn their salaries with the knowledge that no one is going to say their shows do not really justify either the compensation or the floor and wall space. Executives and administrators can form committees to support arts funding. Dealers can market Seattle artists

based on international selling points. Artists can compete for shows and sales and respect. Less a public heritage, art is more an organized deal.

In hindsight, Lawrimore's *Has Art?* challenge seems more to Seattle than to Mallarmé. His audacious idea of pitting *Un Coup de Dés* against artists and writers for an entire year with ongoing and final catalogs has hardly made a difference here. There has been little public notice or summation. Working intentionally outside the city more frequently now, he says his Lawrimore Project is like a "fuck you" to Seattle. Yet he has big plans for a new Seattle space after his current lease expires in 2012.



Mallarmé and Lawrimore are obviously different. One is interested in poetic perfection, the other in what works and sells as art. Of course, one is French, the other American. The surprise for me is the predictability of Lawrimore's rolls of dice during *Has Art?* When he drives his enterprise he personally loads art and sells his artists in the marketplace. When he lets a different crew cover for a year, the art misses his skills of nurturing, describing, marketing, and placement and relies more on association with his gallery status.

POWER ERROR

How to inquire, how to submit, and how to follow directions are necessary to learn for getting a grant, a job, or a dealer, and these lessons have consequences in aesthetics.

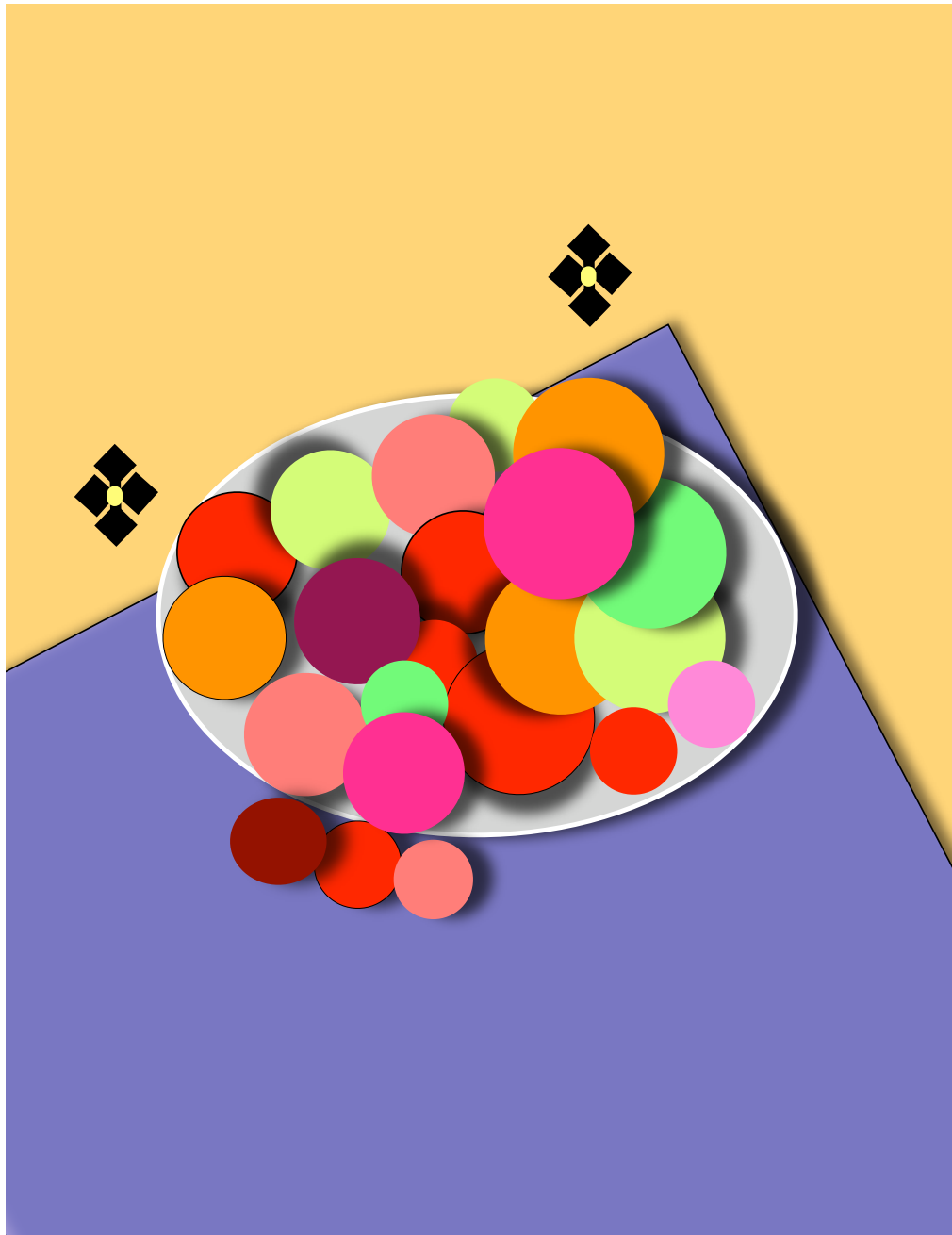
Artists audition themselves and their art to be acceptable as desirable and sellable. That art hardly sells without dealers or administrators indicates something about relative power and dependancy. Hansen knows this, markets his artist, Read, as an outlier accordingly, and sells his work abundantly.

Art that sells is different from art that doesn't in more subtle ways than its being sold. It achieves an elevation in status and a chosen particularity. Sold art will have continued to exist but the added qualities of status and choice particularity may not. Gallery representation and grants endow artists with actual and potential successfulness. "Sold" can result if the dealer is good regardless of the art. Some art will have lost these qualities it received when bought. It enters the secondary market at reduced prices when the owner wants to sell it. Other art of course becomes more desirable, and its price keeps going up at ambitious auctions.

Contemporary art history is now being lived not written. Many museums and galleries have crowds wandering around in them everyday. Interest in historic and sensational art remains passionate. Docents lead lines of students through galleries announcing the importance of *The Starry Night*, for example, and stop to have them sit together on the floor to answer questions like, *How does this painting make you feel?*

What new art will have made a human and not only an economic difference is yet unresolved. Most people today feel art is not something important about them or their everyday world and so they are not involved with it. Artists helped by dealers and grants do not necessarily have to deal with a headstrong, ignorant population who think little of new art or who invoke the equality of their own efforts at art. The art that enters art history having made at least a slight human

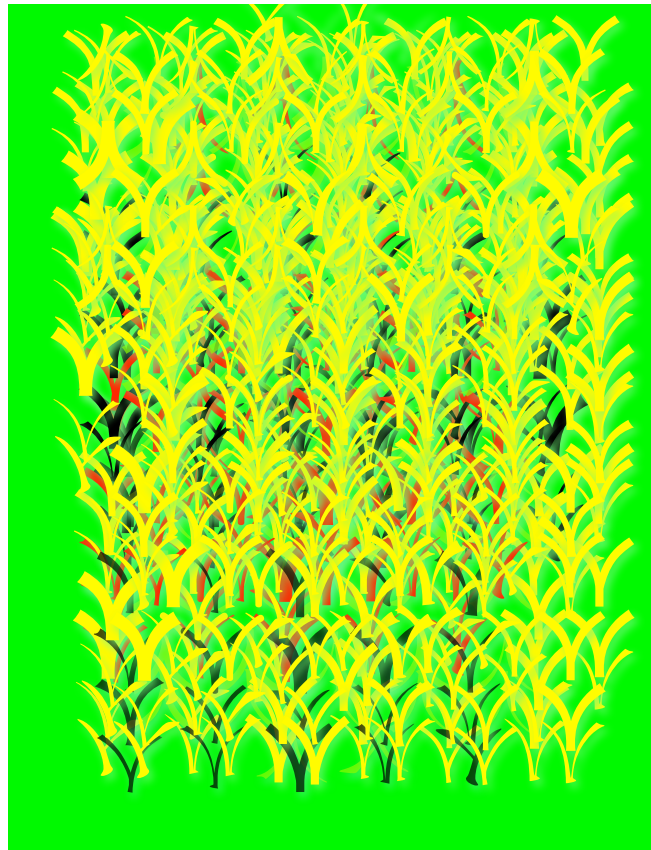
deference somehow has to change that population. It does not seem that supported art can do this at all, and unsupported art remains in the dark. It could be that new art collected today will be consigned to some category like the learned art of two hundred years ago. Some very talented, lucky people in provincial cities like Seattle become wealthy making airplanes, computer software, coffee bistros, retail warehouses, or whatever. Their wealth doesn't make them Leo or



Gertrude Stein, though, because they don't think of art and literature as important. It is easy to forget how important American judgments and purchases were to Picasso, Matisse, and Monet at the time. Likewise the gallery system that developed to sell their art had personal advocates like Theo Van Gogh, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, and Paul Durand-Ruel. Cities like Seattle need more people like the Steins and Kahnweilers to transform contemporary art history here.

Has Art? indicates that letting others frame the issues rather than the dealer can lead to unexpected problems as well as perhaps insights. Critical topics that *Has Art?* frames like representation or feminism are hardly unique to artists but are considered as if they were. Some writers are at a lost for words to explain what they or other artists are doing. Others are eager to display their wit and personality at the expense of expressing understanding. The art and writing in *Has Art?* seem to have idled somewhere like yesterday's news. The Lawrimore Project appears to have taken a year to go around the block. *Has Art?* and its message are in better hands when they are in the dealer's. People here who have the wealth and intelligence to purchase art more likely do so because of dealers like Lawrimore not because of what the artists and writers say about each other's art.

Lawrimore's *Has Art?* yearlong rolls of dice lost more credence with every throw. Letting others' ideas express the issues mainly conveyed that *Has Art?* artists cooperate with the waning era's progressive and specialized career ethos. They seem already academic by trying to be the avant-garde but do nothing outside of expectations. For their art and writing the zeitgeist is the impetus rather than the concern.



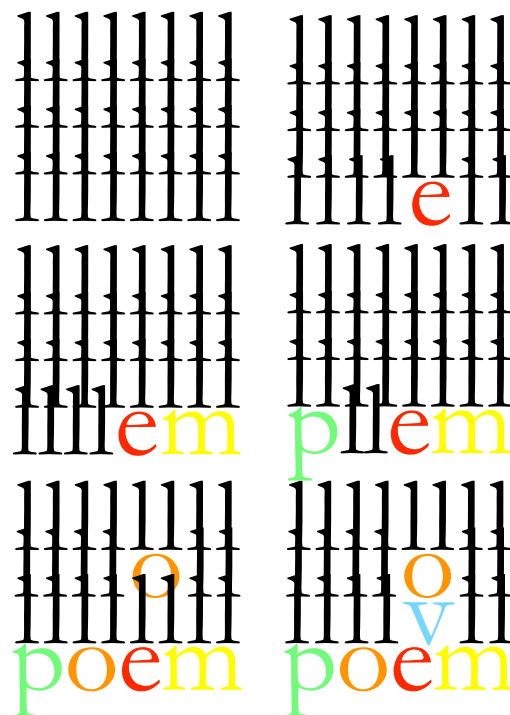
Has Art? artists and their art seem a success for awhile but not a triumph for long. Regardless, outside the art community few in personal-career-conscious Seattle seem that interested in noticing or supporting artists or in writing or reading about their art. That *Has Art?* people are approved by a gallery seems blessing enough for them. Criticism and all the writing and art not about the individual reading or seeing it settle into ruts along the cultural margins or into curriculum vitae. Enough institutions allegedly exist for everybody to succeed.

Probability works wonders in a representative democracy. It also works selling art as it does surveying opinions or questioning witnesses. The art, opinions, and answers administered by dealers, pollsters, and attorneys meet fabricated requirements. Frame the issue for the results you want in order to get the results you want. Police even write up incident reports this way.

In all probability Mallarmé must have known chance has everything to do with inevitability.

A yet more divisive issue arises in Seattle—a city without much critical thinking and without an interested population—between those who love art for its accepted suppositions and those who love art for its impossible quest. For the former, Lawrimore is revered as a prophet leading collectors and the public to their true Art. What art does he point to, singing his hymns of praise? New, strange, not easily explained or assimilated, it's special art. He makes it so. In contrast, those whose art is a personal, imperfect, reclusive quest for perfection are on their own. They have no prophets or kings or queens, only isolated friendships. Their art runs wild all over this place called Seattle—a city without much critical thinking and without an interested population. In effect, art writing matters little here except for those keeping a count for the future.

Does Lawrimore genuinely believe in the power of the art he represents? He constantly chants its greatness on his website and in conversation, and every month he redesigns his little chapel to hold special, precise objects. Thus, he champions it and certainly acts as if he believes in it. If he has doubts, he doesn't show them—unless of course the whole *Has Art?* series itself evidences his desire to pass for a year on being a true believer. Regardless, the Lawrimore Project and its art of course must have been successful. This is the way to be successful no matter what. It is true shadow boxing.



Thus the future perfect—for some place like this place art and dealing will both have succeeded. The dice will have been tossed and the constellation will have turned visible. Some stars will have continued to seek direction and instruction and representation. Some will have continued to seek perfection and self-understanding and freedom. The critical void will have fallen over everyone like a long winter night. The divorce will have become settled and normal. Great literature will have become good for nothing, a useless burden.

In all probability Mallarmé must have known chance has little to do with inevitability.

The final decision for *Has Art?*—it is continued obscure greatness for Mallarmé and continued repeat business for Seattle.

Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés.

Joseph F. Keppler,
Seattle, Winter 2011/2012

(Special thanks to Mark Tracy and the Seattle Group for their helpful comments during the preparation of this essay, and very special thanks to Scott Lawrimore for his generosity, candor, and commitment.)



*Coda—A Belated Homage to
Stéphane Mallarmé*

*She Has Beautiful Clothes**

I know I don't know a thing I know
I better not be anyone anymore including me.
I live my dying life lighting up midnight.
I'm my body awhile, my whomever, my cadaver.
I say. I see. I thought. I fought.
I weigh something. I equal someone.
What's going on is what I think the more I think.
We're good enough, and who cares who cares?
I don't care who cares.
Electricity cares the moment we want.
What do you mean: See, what I mean?
What do you see: See, I don't know?

When I think, I don't think, I think.
Contradiction contradicts reality, ideally.
I prepare my opinion. I agree with it.
I stare. I laugh. I eat ready-to-eat food.
I burp. I urinate. I nap.
No I in no mind is not there where I bite.
Not quite matter, to whom do you matter?
Alone love, love alone, alone I love.
We seem to love and to be loved.
Reality may be love.
Don't matters have to matter?
Or do we make it all up as we go along?
Remainders count and need to be made whole.
We're one another till you or I die—
My you or me silently discontinued,
Our mere matter what matter remains.
Then they were.
Then they were no more.
Then we were.
Then we were they.
Then we were they no more.
Then another they are.
They gamble. They throw dice.
You know the dice they throw:
Cube one, one. Cube two, one. Snake eyes.
We have had a very, very sad, unlucky week.
Them too.
I order a day off off the checkerboard calendar.
I think in order in order to think right.
I find the dark, clear, hollow sky a mirror tonight,
A poor, cold, deep, empty head overhead.
Impasse forever, death,
You follow all I do.
All you do you are, death.
Where do you go to be you in death?
Do you pray? Do you have a computer?
I'm going to go.
The moon's a long way away.

They'll gamble there one day.
Tomorrow tomorrow then tomorrow today,
Why a different day every dawn?
Why a different dawn every dawn?
Why check when we don't see what we see?
What happened today is what makes it today
Is what I think.
Today what happened is what I think.
I see. I see my body. Here I am, evidence.
There's their idea of me.
Can we be anytime but are now?
Look, hear, see, talk, smell, let's eat.
It'll add to you and me.
I add new me today, and we go out today.
We're looked at while looking back.
Today, my today, maybe not all day,
What I did today is not my today.
Itemize. Report. I want to count everything.
Take tomorrow away. Count today.
Do a good job.
That's all anybody can ask you to do anyway.
Tonight I am tonight all through the night.
To solve our problem,
Multiply my problem by her problem.
Don't do it. Don't do it. You do too much as it is.
I'll talk to them for you. All I care about is you.
What percent of you and me is flesh, sex, color?
You, you know, intimately and strangely.
Do you count even more when you're different?
I'd like to delight in delight together.
Our era, we're here. They're there.
What we see is no history.
If there's anything more I can do for you,
If you have any more questions,
You have my number,
And enough information about information
To be logical, to be a big deal
With so much stuff to do.

Everyone's in an uproar over you.
They know how you feel.
They know what you know.
Maybe they personally change you and me.
I wonder if time moves.
Time came. Time went. Time stayed.
My whole day is wrong.
I arrive. I arrive. I'm here.
I go. I go. I'm there.
Nothing else, I cough, cough, cough.
I cough up my problem.
I fit right in with no one.
You know what? I don't need you.
I'm comfortable letting you be you.
You were saying, *Don't mind me?*
I hate to sell you your own stuff,
But if you're not thinking about thinking about
Then I don't know what you're talking about.
You have no need for me, right?
No problem, can I have someone call you?
I find my sky a blue word,
My cloud a come-and-go word,
My rain a wet word,
My self a funny word,
Or a soul, a body I ride into the world.
What did I do? I didn't do anything wrong, man.
Is is is? Or is is a big IT?
You go and go and go, that kind of thing.
Then you drop dead.
We make up our mind, and we make up we.
I try to educate me so I can make money off me.
I like a good mouth declaring: *And that's that.*
Preposition-less we walk space time
Time space just fine.
We begin with and end alone.
We remember a memory
We forget day by day.
I keep a me here with me.

Allow me to be me for you.
People equal uniquely.
America, one. America, two. America, me.
We need to get the money we need.
Add time up from birth and down from death,
Now being zero.
So you had a good day then?
What's one wonderful thing we want?
A chair? A bowl? A home?
Joy? Justice? Love?
She's the who I care about more and more.
All dressed up, she does depression well now.
Why would the world change when we're apart?
Can a number, place, and time
Number, place, and time her and me?
They will check you out, beautiful.
Beautiful, you truly have beautiful clothes.

*(from Joseph F. Keppler: *All the While a Child Counting on Counting the Moon in Flight*. Winston, Oregon: nine muses books, 2003, pp. 48-52.)