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A^{to}Z

The Art and Culture iZine.



2.1



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For comments, questions, complaints, submissions, contributions, or any other needs go to www.AtoZine.net.

Dear Reader:

Thank you for taking the time to view our 2nd issue of A to Z!
Of course, you may contribute by just forwarding this link to
everyone you know!

Thank you for your time.
Sarrita

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Hardin to Canmore

by Caleb Carter



Day Four: Hardin to Swift Current

We got up early to get to the Bighorn Monument when it opened. The battle took place along a ridge overlooking the Little Bighorn Valley. The only trees around are growing right along the banks of the river, the ground otherwise is covered with prairie-grass, sage, and tombstones, scattered here and there.

It was a very odd experience to walk around this place. It was almost impossible to imagine a battle waged between U.S. soldiers and a large gathering of stone-age tribes, out in the middle of nowhere, only 124 years ago. And now here I was in the same place with a 93 year-old man. Before me in the valley below was the interstate, a casino, and the Crow Agency, which is the center of activity within the poverty-stricken Crow Indian Reservation.

On a lighter note, the valley was green and beautiful. The weather couldn't have been better. I left the battlefield with high hopes of Canada and a hand full of sage.

Billings was brief. We ate lunch and then departed north into Big-Sky country. It was mid-day and we had about 300 miles between us and the border. The immensity of the sky, as well as the land, can be credited to the gradual ascent and descent of the surface elevation. Whether a person is on top of a rise or in the bottom of a depression, they are given an incredible view of the land, in every direction, stretching to the horizon. There were places along that leg of the journey where I swear I could see land some 50 to 70 miles ahead of me, if not more.

We crossed the Missouri into northern Montana and arrived at the town of Malta for dinner, some 55 miles from Saskatchewan. JB and I met a man in the diner who had once played music in Branson. We talked with him for a while and then departed. I discovered that it was a small world in Big Sky.

JB was an incredibly calm and agreeable companion. A well traveled man; Jack Blond "Mack" McCroskey has visited every state in the Union as well as gracing with his presence over 50 countries around the globe. The majority of his traveling has been endeavored upon after his

retirement from the milk-industry as an inspector. A week prior of our departure to the Northwest, JB had attended a reunion of co-workers in Kentucky. The anticipation of our trip to Canada was on his mind before he had even arrived home.

JB has been to Banff several times, the last of which occurred in 1992. JB drove his wife, Dorothy, and her sister, Pansy, there and back. He was 86. Now at 93, JB is anxious for the completion of this journal, which I appreciate, because without his encouragement I doubt this would have ever been written.

Highway 242 took us north out of Malta to the U.S.-Canadian border. The checkpoint was quite isolated, surrounded by miles of grasslands. I imagine that the customs official was surprised to see two travelers from Missouri entering his country along this stretch of road, which stretched through Montana with the elasticity of a gymnast. This elasticity, however, appeared to weaken at the border. As a result our LeSabre was provided gaping cracks and potholes to dodge and occasionally fall into. It was beginning to get dark, and we were still 95 miles from Swift Current, our intended destination for the evening. The road was in such a state of disrepair that I could scarcely drive over 40mph. It was exciting to be driving on the high-plains of a foreign land, and strangely exotic, but I'll admit that I was a bit worried that we might not make it to Swift Current. And then where would we sleep; out on the prairie? I wasn't sure if that sounded appealing or not. I plodded North, excited yet uneasy. JB couldn't have been more at ease, telling me of his army experiences in Alaska.

The road improved at Cadillac. We encountered a number of the legendary Canadian wheat-fields, which still had quite a lot of maturing to do before harvest. The winter storms this far north are strong and harsh. Therefore, unlike Kansas, the wheat-fields of Canada are completely surrounded by windbreakers consisting of tightly packed and very large trees. It is bizarre to see an entire wheat-field surrounded by such a massive collection of foliage. Entering one is like entering the private grounds of a royal palace, except that the palace has been removed to provide space for the necessity of crops. The farms, as well



with my presence. It was nice. The booths were cushioned, the plants were watered, and the employees seriously cared about the place. As a matter of fact, I noticed that nearly all Canadians approach and handle their jobs with a greater pride and appearance.

In the U.S., I saw old farm equipment and buildings left in the field to decay. In Canada, where there is significantly more

undeveloped space than in the U.S., I saw none of that. Junk is disposed of properly. The farms, filling stations, and restaurants are all cleaner. I had the same reaction upon returning from Poland to Germany, with the exception that Poland can blame it's cluttered appearance on a weaker economy and a millennia of occupations and invasions from every direction on the face of a compass. What can we blame our clutter upon? Our right to do so?

as many other things, are nourished and cared for with a consistency that I have yet to find in the U.S. It had been a very long day. It was around 10:00PM when JB and I finally pulled into the Super 8 at Swift Current. Super 8's in Canada are very nice, appearing to be more on the level of a Ramada or Holiday Inn. JB and I both drank a beer, after which I took advantage of the indoor pool and Jacuzzi. I reflected upon the day and thought about tomorrow. Tomorrow I would finally get out of the plains and see the mountains.

Day Five: Swift Current to Canmore

On the positive side for any U.S. citizens that reads this, I draw the line at pride somewhere. After walking around Arby's I noticed that it wasn't an Arby's at all. It was called Arby's, a Canadian hybrid, and Arby's wasn't alone. There was McDonald's, Long John Silver's, and I suspected a Steak n Shake around there somewhere. It was eerie. In an attempt to distinguish their cultural identity from their neighbors to the south, the Canadians had inserted their national icon, a maple leaf, into every franchise possible, all of which were created in the U.S. JB and I were not simply eating in an Arby's, but more so a Canadian Arby's, where the Canadian sense of pride and cleanliness would be reflected in your Jamocha shake. It seemed rather pathetic to me. Here was a country that had an inferiority complex because it was better at initiating foreign ideas and methods, yet couldn't come up with any good ideas of their own.

We headed west that morning into a rainstorm. It wasn't long until we crossed over into Alberta. As JB and I journeyed northwest, the LeSabre had more and more frequently been making a noise that resembled the sound of a loose belt. By the time we had entered Canada, the noise had become almost constant. Heading west into Alberta, we decided that it would be wise to find a Buick dealership. The first one that we came across was in the town of Medicine Hat. It turned out that the sound was more than just a loose belt. The compressor-pulley bearing for the air-conditioner had broken, causing a good amount of stress and heat on the belt. It was a wise decision to check the car out before we hit any major amount of altitude, and thank God we didn't break down in the wilds of southern Saskatchewan, which would give us little choice but to hitchhike to a repair-shop. **My imagination tortured me with scenarios and profiles of the kind of people who might work at repair-shops in towns with names like Radville, Climax, and Assiniboia.**

We left Arby's, took a quick trip over to the credit union to exchange currency, and then headed back to the dealership to find the LeSabre repaired, purring like a kitten and ready to face the mountains ahead.

It took about four hours to fix the car. That gave me and JB some time to eat lunch. We drove the "complimentary dealership van" over to Arby's. After eating my value-meal, I noticed that JB had another 10 minutes or so to finish his sandwich, so I took a chance to look around the restaurant. I normally wouldn't write about an Arby's in an account of a trip, but this was by far the cleanest and most upscale Arby's I had ever graced

We reached Calgary within a couple of hours. It reminded me of Denver (My apologies to any Calgarians who might be disgusted by this comparison. An equivalent apology goes out to any disgusted residents of Denver). The town sat snug against the foot of the Rockies, allowing it to expand at a rapid pace out onto the plains. In what appeared to be some sort of post-Olympic boom, development was spreading like wildfire. Gated communities were being constructed on a grand scale, miles upon miles of them. JB said that he didn't recognize the city at all. He couldn't recognize Calgary because most of it wasn't here the last time he traveled through it.

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Faux • Real

by Sarrita Hunn



In a world where Thomas Kinkade is the most collected painter, how can one paint and yet differentiate themselves from this mass commodification?



Images from the Deljou Art Group website

And, if one positions them self in opposition to this mass commodification, how can one also claim to be trying to break down the hierarchies that were put in place by the western tradition of art practice? In order to try and answer these questions I would like to examine a phenomenon even more dubious than that of Thomas Kinkade's enterprise, the Deljou Art Group.

The Deljou Art Group is an Atlanta based company that mass-produces paintings for galleries, interior design firms, and individuals. Deljou describes themselves as a, "community of artists produce[ing] a cutting-edge, eclectic and comprehensive flow of artwork that secures [their] position as a trendsetter and pioneer of fine art today." The most interesting aspect of this company is the fact that it creates fake artists with detailed identities to sell those works under. The main 'artists'/employees produce series of works on canvas and then a team of 'artisans' mass-produce copies by hand. These paintings are created on paper with acrylic and then shellacked with oil so that they can be sold as 'original oil paintings'. There are formulas for 'good paintings' that the 'artists' follow. These formulas involve research into interior design fashion trends

(right down to matching colors to sofa fabrics) and formal issues like off center grid-like compositions that designate each quadrant with a different style and/or technique. For example, the upper right quadrant could contain a minimal gestural/expressive brushstroke while the lower right quadrant makes use of patterning and/or stencils. **The work is then most likely sold under a fake artist with a 'foreign sounding name', because those works sell better.**

Where do these ideals of art come from? In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger argues that the West's tradition of art has emphasized the uniqueness of the art object. Art's uniqueness began as the representation of things or ideas and was only relatively recently cast in an aura of 'bogus religiosity' after the invention of the camera flooded us with a sea of reproductions. John Berger states, "The meaning of the original work of art no longer lies in what it uniquely says but in what it uniquely is. ...It is defined as an object whose value depends upon its rarity. This value is affirmed and gauged by the price it fetches on the market." (21) This idea is clearly enforced by the prices Deljou charges for its



paintings. Works are sold as one-of-a-kind but are produced exactly the same for orders and only minute differences for the rest. The paintings on paper run from \$200-\$500 and the 'original oil' on canvas paintings can go for as much as \$30,000. The importance

placed on oil paintings speaks to that tradition. As Berger states, "oil painting belongs to the cultural heritage; it is a reminder of what it means to be a cultivated European." (135)

Deljou controls/owns the paintings and the reproduction rights to the artwork created on 'their time' and sells them from their gallery and at trade shows. Keeping reproduction right makes money and competition is quite high. The Deljou Art Group has a team of lawyers that make sure their illusion of the artist-gallery-collector is maintained. On Deljou's website you can only view the works that they have to sell (and review the prices) if you have a login and password that you can only obtain from them.

This well kept illusion is what differentiates Deljou from purely commercial artists like Thomas Kinkade. Kinkade is very open and blatant about how his 'paintings' are created and marketed. There was even a *60 Minutes* special about Kinkade's seeming empire of nostalgic commodities, right down to the Kinkade Village subdivision. The Deljou Art Group on the other hand masks the commercial side of the business in a shroud of modern art rhetoric, naming their artists as 'talented' and 'cutting-edge trendsetting pioneers'.

One can answer the first posed question, how can one differentiate himself or herself as an artist, by realizing there are four (very oversimplified) positions that one can take toward art (and specifically painting) production. The first, epitomized by Kinkade, is the blatant commercialization of the art object, not only through reproductions but calendars, La-Z-Boys, and whole subdivisions. The second position is held by companies like the Deljou Art Group that commercializes the artwork while maintaining the illusion of the traditional structure of artist-gallery-collec-

tor. The third position is against commercialization with the embrace of the actual artist-gallery-collector structure seen the established Art World. And the forth position would be a rejection of both commercialization and the Art World, as seen in anti-art movements and alternative gallery spaces (like the Dadaist and Womanhouse to name a few).

With these four possible positions available, systems based on traditional hierarchies and the rejection of those exact hierarchies can coexist. In *The Transparency of Evil*, Jean Baudrillard describes this state as 'after the orgy'. He states, "The orgy in question was the moment when modernity exploded upon us, the moment of liberation in every sphere...We have pursued every avenue in the production and the effective over production of objects, signs, messages, ideologies, and satisfactions." (3) In the second chapter he specifically relates this idea to issues of art and coins the idea of a transaesthetics where,

"Works' of art are indeed no longer exchanged, whether for each other or against a referential value. They no longer have that secret collusiveness which is the strength of a culture...The only benefit of a Campbell's soup can by Andy Warhol (and it is an immense benefit) is that it releases us from the need to decided between beautiful and ugly, between real and unreal, between transcendence and immanence...This is indeed the miraculous thing. Our images are like icons; they allow us to go on believing in art while eluding the question of its existence." (15-17)

In this state of transaesthetics we can no longer rely on finding a cultural 'Truth'. Art can be simultaneously commodified, worshiped, despised, and loved. We no longer have to decide between those four possible positions for art production because they are all available to us. Or more exactly, not one of those positions is more 'truthful', 'real', or 'good'. For Baudrillard, "There is nothing immoral here. Just as present-day art is beyond beautiful and ugly, the market, for it's part, is beyond good and evil." Hence, any position we take is ultimately our own to make. All opportunities are available and none really 'true'. To decide a stance on the subject of art practice is one of the most defining investigations artists undertake today. In fact, to make art (what ever that might mean) is to take a stance, and either follow or question it always.

←.....→

Real is the New Fake★

Notes from New York by Ben Bunch & Sarrita Hunn

**Not gentrified is the new gentrified.
Grey hair is the new blond.
Thursday is the new Friday.
Wallpaper is the new installation.
Hobo is the new shiek.
Fischerspooner is the new Yes.
Easter is the new Halloween.***

Bling! Bling!

It's so true!

*actually heard in line at Long's, downtown Oakland

*props to *Readymade* Winter Issue #5



thrift store 

*Available in most cities.

CUPID'S IN MY PSYCHE VENUS IN URANUS

a vignette by Tamara Staser

I had woken up at 3:33 a.m. still wearing the navy blue Atari titty t-shirt I'd had on while working that night and grabbed the notebook next to my bed. It made a crackle sound, amplified in the dark, as I hit it against other things on the table; its bead fringed edges and handle were designed to look more like a boxy handbag than a journal. I wondered if I should open it, seeing as this would wake me up entirely, though only into the documentation of a world inside my own mind. Groggy, I fumbled to thumb a pencil and indigo night light clock off the top of my bedside cabinet. I pressed the neon snooze button to illuminate the page and wrote:

"I am outside for a smoke at the end of my shift and see Sarrita standing on the stoop outside a nearby building where some neighborhood gangsters occasionally hold raves. Tamara! I forgot you were working tonight. It's almost time for you to get off, right? Why don't you come in and join the party? She yells with a smile, waving her cigaretted hand in a flail of excited surprise, as if to sprinkle seeds over soil. I nod toward her to focus for a second in nearsighted delight and peer to my left to check for cars before crossing over."

While writing, I wished I had actually taken the shower I was hoping to have before bed, since the night stories in my head had made the back of my neck hot, as if its plot had been a product of a fever or its breakthrough. I stretch and picture the id, ego and super-ego of my subconscious as little pizza slice triangle people, labeled with plastic nametags that say "hello my name is". They had been waving at me from the bar graph of my own psyche, as if drawn on a childhood chalkboard at school, now animated on the wall behind my headboard. I imagined they had been waiting to be erased. I rubbed my eyes with a smirk, sharpened my pencil and continued to scrawl into my journal:

"I walk in behind her and come to the gym of my old elementary school, remembering we had been called the 'Wardcliff Wizards' when doing team sports. The place is miniscule in comparison to how it had been when I was a kid, as if someone had thrown the whole building into the dryer for too long. People are lining the walls to watch a show. I hear my ex-boyfriend behind the stage giving last minute advice to the group about to storm in and perform, so I edge myself as close as possible to the side entrance of the stage. I recognize his voice whispering: No, that's not the way it goes! Organize this line! Now chorus, this is your big entrance and the story is already in motion. She has just gotten the box and opened it, finding a deadly slumber inside instead of the beauty her curiosity had hoped for. Please annunciate and don't forget to pick up your robes when shuttling across the stage in the dark. This is the moment Cupid

comes to her at night for the first time. Make sure all of you are off the staircase before Cupid needs to enter on stage left. Psyche, you should be with the costume department people, at this point, preparing for the ballroom scene. Take it from the chorus' entrance in the end of scene one. Concentrate on your annunciation, people!"

Kris has always been sharp and outspoken, but with enough care in his voice to forgive him for being presumptuous and demanding, I thought, while taking the pencil's tip into my mouth pensively. I guess he would make a pretty good director for the stage. I lunged the pencil down into the page again, curious of the dream's meaning. The lead snapped upon impact like a broken arrow, but I continued to write with one half:

"The group enters the gym like an army row of ants. At first they look like glittery little girls, but when they start flying around in the middle of the skit I realize they are more like cherubs. I am impressed. They break into a 'Hair' medly; they rip off their clothes and start belting out 'Age of Aquarius'..."

Amazed that I had actually mustered the energy to fully wake up and make detailed notes, I decided to reward myself by putting on my new purple pajamas with clouds on them. They were clean and I knew it would make me feel better than being in the same dingy t-shirt I'd had on in for the last zillion hours, for wear during both my sleep and my dream, apparently. The writing always works better when I have on something fun. I stripped off the t-shirt and



replaced it with the button up shirt and slid on the matching pants. I jabbed the glow in the dark plastic star hanging from my lamp, accidentally, when picking up the notebook again and went back to my pencil and paper:

“After their song, I angle toward the hallway on the right side of the gym, anxious to see the rest of the place. It has been renovated into a television set styled opulent mansion, like “Gone With The Wind” before the war. The hallway fans like the edge of a narrow gorge into a grandiose staircase and lower main floor laden with lesbians playing poker. The scene is like some kind of glam casino. I wonder how long it will be until Cher hits the stage and starts singing a customized version of an old Elvis favorite. ‘Viva Dyke Vegas!’ She’d belt into the microphone. Instantly I am ashamed of my filthy and bar-be-que casual attire, but figure I’ll fit in with a few of the more butch types in attendance. The soiree is in full swing and a little daunting, being so lavish. I find a seat as quickly as possible next to a short haired woman in her early 40’s dressed in a sateen brocaded jogging suit; metallic cording on all the seams. She pats me on the knee with her right hand and smirks knowingly as she lays down her cards with her other hand, loaded with too much New Jersey style bling bling gold jewelry. Her Technicolor separates look is reminiscent of Mike Myer’s costumes when he used to play his ‘vah-klemp’ Jewish mother-in-law on SNL. As the woman leans forward to collect the chips she’d won, I notice a rack of shimmery garments on hangers underneath a sign signifying guests to ‘help themselves’. I stealth over, still feeling like I’d invaded someone’s closet. I page through the rack to stop at a carnation pink fortuné pleated robe top with lots of fringe and bell sleeves so big they look like wings. The garment looks like it was made to fit a Barbie doll version of Stevie Nicks, but big enough in size to fit the dreamtime me. Witchcraft Rockstar Barbie. Now wouldn’t that be so post-millennium trendy? I thought to myself. I slip it over my head like a little girl playing in a cedar closet, and looking in the mirror at herself bejeweled in her mother’s vintage rhinestones. The instant I finish with the covered fabric pearl buttons, all the way up to the top of the turtleneck, the room sets into a hush like fog rolling over a pond. People start to whisper. Shocked, I wonder if I did the wrong thing by indulging, but before I can reverse the process a spotlight hits the entryway at the top of the stairs. People are saying the word ‘Eros’ over and over. Our host has just entered the room. She looks fabulous tonight. I swear, she’s the most glam Ambassador of all of us tall girls. I overhear a drag queen say to the woman next to me, slipping the words into her ear delicately, as if to put icing dot finishing touches on the rose tips of a wedding cake.”

I decided that if I were going to write the dream down completely, I’d do so with a mug of warm vanilla soymilk and a few bites of uncooked sugar cookie tube dough, after getting some more of the dream written down in my cube of paper that looked more like a fabric covered jewelry box than a book. I grabbed my mint green fluttery robe off the bedpost, lit the candle in the plaster pot with the cherub sculpted to hang over the rim and continued:

“The figure floats down the stairs like the bombshell alien in the movie ‘Mars Attacks’, as if on rollers or an angel on an escalader cloud. Cutting through the crowd she slowly and methodically makes a line directly toward me. Her red and white long sleeved sequined gown scintillates all the way to the floor, glistening entropically the closer she gets to me. I see that the sequins form two dragon shapes, their heads sewn over the double shoulder padding of her dress. She reminds me of Tim Curry’s campy character in the movie ‘The Rocky Horror Picture Show; very diva in karaoke competition. When she gets about a foot away from me she looks into my eyes, as if the two spheres in their sockets are aiming their quarter cup fists to punch out, into and through my retinas. Her look is ominous like a really randy silent come-on. To my surprise she flutters her fake water droplet tipped eyelashes and straightens my borrowed garment, then takes me by the arm softly. She, apparently, is the good drag queen of the east. She hands me a martini.”

I grabbed my mug with the dragons on it and opened the mini-fridge to pour the soymilk into it for microwaving, wishing I had enough whiskey left for a nightcap. As I opened the door to my room to go down the hall I heard something coming from the kitchen and wondered who could be up so late. Maybe it’s the ghost of the building again. I’d better do a coin toss as to whether or not to go in, just to be sure. I pulled open the top drawer of my desk to grab a penny and flipped it, calling heads in the air. It gave me the green light for clear passage. I stood at my desk to ink the last image I could muster into my journal, almost imploding from late night hunger:

“Eros pulls us both arm-in-arm through a side door off the main ballroom. I hear Kris barking out stage direction again as we are leaving the room. Ok people, in this next scene I want you to really make me feel it. I want to be able to see the scene through the facial gesture reaction of the audience members. Places! He trails off, snapping his fingers. A second group of performers is in place as Eros and I enter the next room, where the cherubs had been before, but this crew is a bunch of drunken jokers in white tux coats trying to do some Monty Python British comedy bit. I see a guy I used to have a crush on in both middle and high school named Jon Sink step up to the microphone. When the skit ends, the tuxed clan storms the doorway where I am standing and I realize Eros has vanished. Jon Sink is the last one out and he bumps into me, pulling back at first, but then edging forward again when he realizes who I am. We are about two feet apart and each of us is on either side of the doorway just staring at each other, noticing what time has done to us, compare and contrast essays check marking things in our minds. A friend of his from the audience comes up to complement his performance and recognizes me, as well, though we have never met. Jon Sink and I have yet to speak to one another aloud. Tamara, how are you? Jon’s friend says. I don’t think you know me, but a friend of yours said if I ever saw you, to give you this back. The friend then



lifts his fingers to his ear on one side, dislodging a diamond stud earring and handing it to me in an open palm. You gave this to a friend of mine a long time ago. It is my honor to have the opportunity. I smile and pop it into my left ear, making sure the back is secure. I can't remember whom I'd given the earring to in the first place, but I appreciate the gift. It's obviously quite expensive. Jon Sink is watching the whole thing with a furrowed brow that turns into the flirtation of a smile, like this single act compacted the last eleven plus years lost between us into a priceless gem. How are ya, Tam? Me, I'm separated. He says. Not from myself, you know, from my wife. He coughs. She turned into my mom or something. How did things turn out for you? How's the family? He crossed his eyes earnestly at me, slurred. My sister just got married to Brad Pitt in a civil ceremony. I reply. Someone in the corner of the performance gym area has their head out the window and brings it back into the room, screaming: GAS ATTACK! GAS ATTACK!!! Jon Sink and his friend and I look at each other in a reflex moment of fear and head toward the door. We link arms, both of them on either side of me, and they pull me down the hallway toward the main exit. Maybe it's nothing. I think to myself through the chaos, both the impending doom sensation and human pile up damage control next to the door skyrocketing my body temperature. My heart starts to double time in its beat as I wonder if people will get trampled on their way out of the door."

After setting down all writing implements, save the mug, I opened the door to my bedroom, heart racing to see what I would find in the kitchen. Things had been moving around the building quantifiably several times the week prior, but no ghost's ass was going to keep me from my clichéd warm milk in the middle of the night, especially after writing. Maybe it's nothing. I assured myself, reaching for the door's handle. I walked slowly down the hall remembering

how the Iroquois used to put a big black stripe across their faces like a bandana around the eyes with grease to signify a warrior's decent into immanent death; war paint for battle. This is still INDIAN land, goddamn it, I mantra-ed to myself, to calm down and gear up. Upon opening the kitchen door, I saw my friend Peaches, real name Sam, who was the nineteen-year-old resident trench coat mafia Satanist in the building, sleeping on the kitchen couch. A long time ago



I thought he was an idiot asshole, but after a while I realized he was just a funny freak and I'd grown to love him, so it was a relief. I slammed my mug of soymilk into the nuke box and juiced it up, giddy and lubed to divulge the tidbits of my astral travel to him without hesitation, as a real-time reward for universal humanness, whatever the form. I could still hear the voices of my dream, too; they beacons me to continue. I could hear Kris yelling into the mass of cast members clamboring for the fire exits of the theater: I want to see this danger as goosebumps on the audiences forearms, people! Remember your blocking!

When I went downstairs with the crowd to get a HAZ-MAT suit, it was so fucked up. Ryan was there and

Ian too, actually, I told Peaches. No way! He said. There was a line for the suits that looked ridiculously flimsy, like a white plastic bag from the corner store. I scanned the room, questioning the line, when I find the two of them in the corner already suited up, like they had come down an hour ago to smoke a blunt and gotten the universal nudge to pull fashion show debutant with the space age gear from this box on a dusty pool table. He started to laugh. Then what happened? Peaches asked, brushing back a few strands of his long and greasy black hair, making his upside-down pentagram necklace jump in the enthusiasm of his question. I decided to go into lavishly detailed description. He was impressed and interjected commentary into my story. I lost myself in the narrative of the dream. So, I look over and Ryan and her bad ass New York City bling bling self was all cone headed from her pseudo Afro puff peaking

the top of the white all encompassing garment. When she saw me she started doing the break dancing move for the robot, twitching her limbs like a little action figure, front and back, as if she were having a finger tip chalk stick chaos theory whack attack. Ian followed suit, standing there like the terminal sideman, grinning like a graph of exponential population growth the curvature roots of long lost space shuttle flight paths; his page boy haircut peeping out both corners from the underside of the unattached suit's clear plastic helmet. I put on the more sleeping bag of the two versions of suit, shook the hands of both my friends in thanks and watched as a white tuxed boy stumbled down the stairs, practically breaking his neck. False alarm. He managed, to add, swaying. Move along now. Everybody go home. Nothing to see here. Please step away from the vehicle. That's a lovely tie you are wearing officer. I took a very deep breath.

I thought it might be Jon Sink mumbling for the crowd, since I'd lost him and his friend at the doorway, but it was just one of his thespian cronies. I climbed the stairs like it was any other day, ready to bitch slap anyone that stood in my way to get outside for a cigarette. Nobody was in the hallway to the front door, as they were coagulating in the back yard after so much of a scare, except for a lumpy fallen lad who was either passed out or was reading the sports page super close to his eyes. His indigent impression was as legendary as the depression itself. I took a few footsteps closer, straddling the stranger for ease, since he wasn't going to see me anyway. I peeled up the newspaper over his eyes to find out it was none other than my now personally infamous Jon Sink.

His twin sister Beth barreled out of the bedroom door two feet to my left. Looks like the party is really starting now, since none of us are going to die. Then she belched.

But Beth, we are all going to die, eventually. I retorted, in an unrequited attempt at irony. Her shudder became a chagrin.

I went outside for my long awaited smoke. The front door step was actually clear of the riff raff and I savored the quiet as I lit up with a match included in the survival pocket of my HAZ-MAT suit. Someone followed me out.

Aren't you that girl that knows Candice, the girl that nannies for my son? He asked, palming the back of his semi-shaved head. If you want a ride I can take you. I'm about spent after the last hour and I've got papers to grade for a seminar tomorrow at Berkeley. I nodded and gave him the peace sign with my non-cigarette hand and then jutted it out for a shake. Before he had time to clasp my hand the door rustled. Someone was trying to get out and having difficulties. I re-directed the hand and opened the door to see it was a conscious version of Jon Sink, as if he had just been feigning narcolepsy. I smiled silently. It left my face blank again afterward like a wax board awaiting a stylus. Jon Sink disjointedly thrust his hand into a pocket to retrieve a cell

phone. He speed dialed a number.

Hello? Tanya? I'm sorry it's so late – I just got freaked out about what happened tonight. Where are you? Pause. Wow, I know. Pause. I just wanted to make sure you were O.K., I guess, and to say that I'm really looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. I kicked out my cigarette, still listening to his conversation covertly. My friend Kathy comes out of the lawn crowd brandishing a camera and starts to snap off the flashes, in a strobe of sporadic light the timing of a disco DJ on Quaaludes.

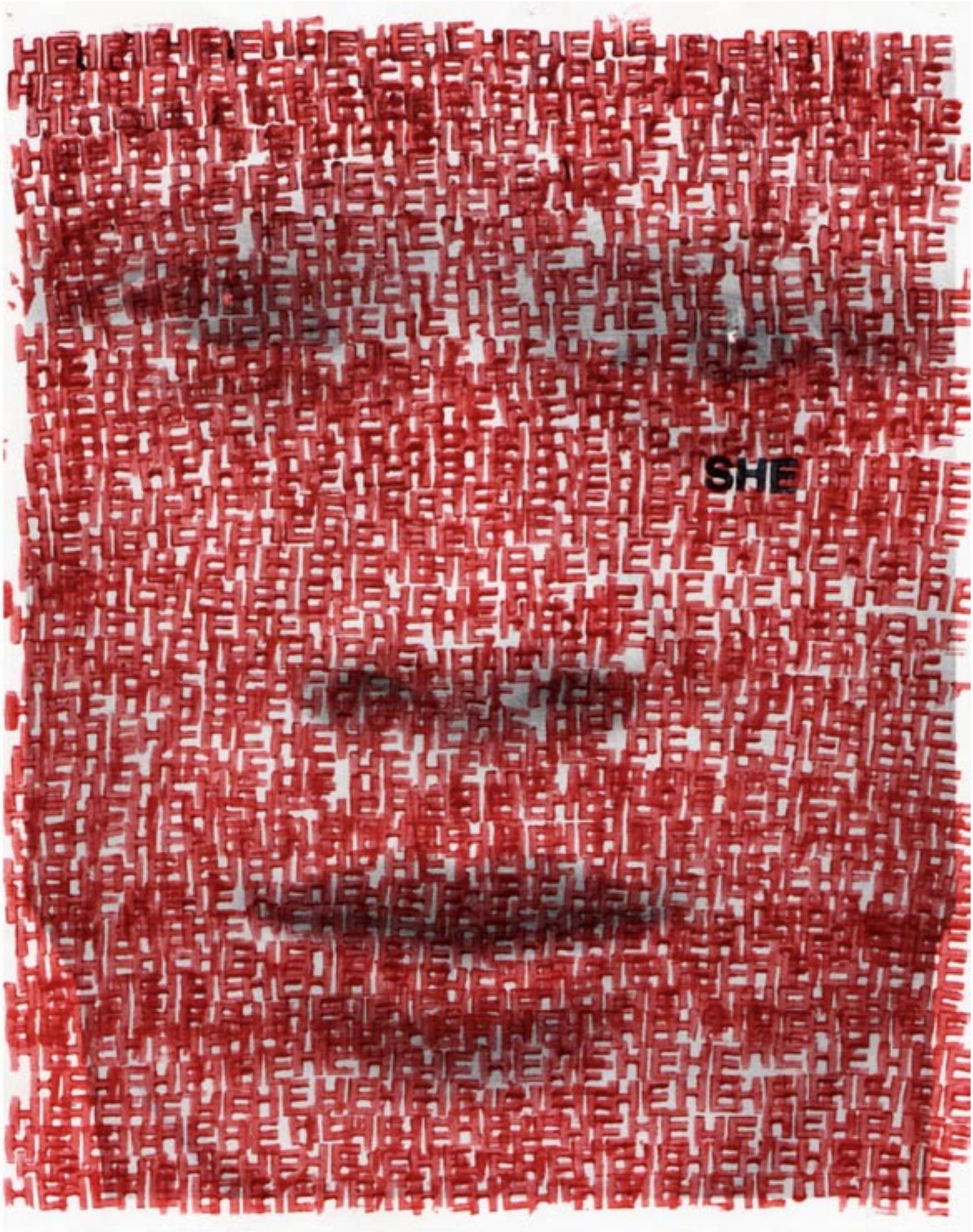
I want copies! I yell in her direction as she speeds toward the street and away from the scene, waving goodbye. I look back over to Jon Sink, still strapped on to the cell. It makes his arm push the jacket to one side so I can read his t-shirt that states 'Chicago's Shedd Aquarium' in green shadowboxed lettering. I pull the helmet part from the HAZ-MAT suit by it's Velcro and also at the sternum, looking for the point of least resistance, to get it off of me. I am then ready to dance.

Beth hadn't been kidding about the party really starting once universal collapse was given a snow day. Inside the door to the yard the dance room is spilling out into the hall. Just what the doctor ordered. I said out loud while ripping of the last of the plastic suit around my ankles and dropping it to the floor.

The lights are off save the backlighting on the mostly naked cage dancer in the center of the room and a fire-eater sectioned off on a platform stage. While scanning the room I put my hand to my forehead, whipping off the remnants of plastic body bag induced sweat. The guy next to me hands me a vial, motioning for me to inhale, and I do. Consequently, I pass out. I can't tell if it's the heat, anxiety or drugs as I'm going down, unable to stop anything regardless of analytical thoughts knitting and pearling themselves into the last traces of my ashed out mind.

I feel a hand on my right cheek and see Eros crouching above me with a look of bemused mothering. She props me up by directing two of her beefy ring collared minions to push my shoulders into a 45 and progressively 90 degree angle from behind until I am fully upright. Dazed but still smiling I realize I'd had a vision, while I was out cold, of my twin self in China lacquering up a scroll with calligraphed character's through the instruction of a master not in her specific room; the master barking out from just around the corner of doppleganger's space as she excitedly nods herself into a yawn. I try to tell Eros about the image but the music is too loud and she fakes sign language to illustrate the lack of audibility on the dance floor. She puts her arm into mine again, like a square dance partner and pulls me into the fray. The music is so loud it becomes static and I happily wonder if I am asleep or awake.





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New York November 2002 to February 2003: Three Reviews

by Ben Bunch



The Quickness of Slickness

Recently with critical attention given to painting in books like Phaidon's Vitamin P and the Walker Art Center's "Painting at the Edge of the World", there are many exhibitions in New York that celebrate the practice's seemingly inexhaustible approaches. There is a lot of attention about the medium's so called resurgence. An example of a show focusing on current curatorial trends of painting was Artist Space's "Painting as Paradox". The theme was meant to address the plethora of practices loosely falling under painting. Instead of representing the diversity of approaches most of the work remained safely categorical under photo-based painting and tight semi abstract geometric/architectural images. The computer's heavy hand was evident in a majority of the work. I have no problem with computers and painting in tandem, but when it's represented so heavily in this show it talks more about marketability than critical inquiry. It represents the practice of packaging. The majority of tidy and ordered surfaces are a commonality that made the show fall short of representing multiple viewpoints. I also had the same issue with the use of photographically derived source images in this context. While I fully embrace the history, role, and use of photographic sources and optics in painting. In this show it displays the manicuring of the figurative so that it becomes safe and defaults to references of video, cinema, unscrambled television, snapshots and the like. The ready-made photo collage as a technical source material was an over represented strategy of the many artists in the show. The figurative seemed more of an exercise of filling in the projector lines.

Consideration about texture is a prime way of entering into a painting visually. Slick or rough, a painting has a surface to be negotiated. "Everything matters from the skin in", a professor in the matters of painting told me. As I said before, the idea of multiplicity in the show was deflected away by the Teflon smoothness of almost all the work. Only a handful of pieces turn a blind eye to this. Mark Bradford's crisp burnt curling iron wrappers almost disintegrate as you look at them. Feeble and gross, they are



film still from *Superman II of the Phantom Zone Villans Trapped by Their Own Slickness*

not hermitically sealed. He gets his materials directly swept up from salon floors and waste bins.

Jose Leon Cerrillo's "Eden Eden", a curved ramp gravestone with oil spills of paint, was a combination of visual quirkiness and retrograde tackiness. Sitting on the floor about two feet high the paint is dried and held in motion as it slides away into a puddle from the makeshift head stone that is just a tilted canvas off the top of the ramp. You can even see the tongue in cheek humor through

the bony jaws, but his piece is still a strange combination that keeps me from completely reading it just as an ironic commentary on a dated painting criticisms (i.e. painting is dead and buried). During his open studio visit I saw the skulls were an icon repeated like 70's wallpaper with a heavy graphic style and pastel neon color. The curve of the ramp was the surface to bend and shape them on either free standing coming away from the wall. All of the elements were interchangeable. The use of pattern, image, and shaped surfaces made it hard to pin down a singular thematic approach other than the most enjoyable one of pure play. The gravestone form and mortal symbols may be poking fun at death of painting rhetoric but the visual impact is much more playful and keeps me second guessing its meaning from being so serious. It is a much stranger sculptural object.

The curator supports the ad hoc nature of the show as a way of illustrating the confusing and paradoxical approaches to painting. However the salon style hanging is only to their detriment. Though arrangement is partially correct in intent, it feels bewildering because they are throwing as much work as possible in your direction to create the appearance of variety. Nevertheless it's effect is a poorly hung show illustrating two dominate trends in some painters today; photo based and abstract work that points to trendy theory and slick material packaging. It is a quality reflective of the market than about consideration of painters' dilemmas and celebrations.



Jose Leon Cerrillo, "Eden Eden", acrylic on MDF panel Formica on wood, 24x36x35 inches, 2002

"Painting as Paradox" was at Artists Space, 38 Greene Street, between November 7th to December 21st 2002.

A group show that considered painting, as a collection of idiosyncratic practices rather than trendy surfaces and images was “Zen Roxy” at Von Lintel gallery. The approaches were all abstract in pedigree but the range of process and materials spoke of carefully devised strategies and experimentation developed over long periods of time. Drawing from a range of artists both living and dead, Zen Roxy’s curator had focused on painting from the mid 20th century to today covering a wide history of modern painting. Although modern abstract painting clearly started out with a dominate paradigm of thought in High Modernism, this show pointed out the mutations of philosophies and aesthetic views painting has gone through since then. Individually in each artist you can discern a distinct group of concerns for how and what they use. Paul Freely and Joan Mitchell’s works of 1960’s point at the roots of modern abstraction. Showing their work along side the contemporary shows that it has a strong apposite with painters today. While all painting is an abstraction in one form or another the focus of this show still lies with past generations considerations of the material’s presence, language, and it’s ability to take on spatial and atmospheric qualities, flattened or otherwise.

Freely’s “Minoa” with brightly colored blue and orange peanut shapes opens the show as you enter the space. The vividness of the stained pigment makes the shapes hover like disembodied jigsaw pieces. Next to Freely is Prudencio Irazabal’s hazy acrylic field that obscures light as a gel in a lamp. The thickly layered surface melts areas of neon acrylic over a white field. Bernard Frize’s veins of paint are enlarged chromatic track marks. Observing up close reveals their unphotogenic quality with bubbled surfaces only detectable though inspection in person. There are also the usual suspects of painting’s doubts and mourning. There is a small Gerhard Richter photographic smear and a Robert Ryman white on plastic. Both pieces are indictative of painting’s base as a confrontation with materials. Ryman endlessly reconfigures his white paintings. Although this one is simpler than most of his being only a flat plastic square with the paint in the corners masked and removed. It is unlike his work today but reveals his reworking of white painting in the past. Richter uses obliteration to make a point about painting’s limitations through the covering of a snapshot with smearing paint. He simultaneously denies and accepts the image. Covering it with an abstract blur shows how the photo can be just as abstract as the paint while the paint can never physically be the space in which the photo refers. David Row’s lucid

geometry and lines shift and check each other. The shapes make you recall things from logical organizations to natural patterns. He prefers the work to point outside rather than inside, like connecting the dots after you have made them to see what is there. The associations of the outside world come to him after or during the process of making a work. This positions the reference as an afterthought. It is protean soup of thought that can emerge from working with a basic formal vocabulary of color, shape and texture.

While size is not always an indicator of seriousness or frivolity, it seems the scale of most of the artists’ work here is smaller than usual. This is not a sign of triviality but rather different stages of experimentation. Valerie Jaudon, Pat Steir, and Ross Bleckner’s work of this show is more along the lines of studies for larger pieces. Even the titles point to this. Pat Steir’s waterfall works are her signature style, but at this show a smaller piece, “Teeny Black”, seemed a detour. It is a black field with hazy blue and green dots. These are washed over by black drips and smears. It only has a smaller section for a waterfall. Jaudon’s “Test Pilot” has crisp tattoo like forms over a alkyd surface stripes and Bleckner’s smaller work is just a couple of fuzzy spotlights in a dark field but both have components from their larger paintings. The point is these works are trials. Reduced in size, they are evident of painters putting materials together to find out what they will do. It is a note taking exercise in process.



David Row, “untitled (RD01N)”, oil and alkyd on birch, 32x40 inches, 2002, work not featured in “Zen Roxy” exhibition.

I went back to see Zen Roxy many times. On one of these occasions as I was entering the gallery I overheard two people leaving complaining that they thought the show was one of those where, “you really have to look at those paintings”. This seemed so indicative of the flippant favor for easy to package work at the moment. Where if you can’t get it in the first five seconds and it isn’t part of a pre-digested concept or critique then it’s not really worth looking. Something about the paintings that stick with me is the need to go back and reassess what experience I have with them because I’m not sure what is was to begin with that got me. Constantly looking, re-examining, trying to understand through osmosis. It is a slow but gradual seepage of the works into my experience and eventually my self-conscious. The best part of a good painting is that while it’s there in front of you it won’t always give itself up.

“Zen Roxy” was on view at Von Lintel gallery, 555 West 25th Street, between November 26th 2002, to February 1st 2003.

Giving Up



Mick O'Shea talked about his dealings with the art world and why, in his words, "painting failed me". However he approached the practice, for him painting fell short of providing the experience for his vision. Stubbornly he stuck with it until the very end of graduate school. On the occasion of his thesis exhibition he displayed a kind of installation made up of brightly colored bombs horizontally

arranged on the wall. His work was still taking place with the sides of the walls but gradually he began to adopt bits of other environments and expanded his materials. In a funny progression he went from a house painter (quitting to go back to school), to painting houses (the image kind) to making houses out of paper and other materials like origami. He created simcities with all the necessary resources to power and motivate their infrastructure. His items refer to the things that supply power, resources, and transportation in the real world. They have extension cords for electricity, paint cans and tubes (basic art materials), toy trains for getting around, and fountains for water supply. Dwellings were made from folded gallery opening cards. It was this shift that turned him completely around. He created suburbs out of the materials that made them. Garden hoses, potted plants, and picket fences became his appropriations. These themed mini utopias took on metaphorical content from the objects used. The organization, power, and control in his careful consideration for creating these worlds satirize the constructs of our worlds. Single numbers and letters are boldly enamel painted on the sides of houses giving some idea of how language fits into this place. When put together they read like a sentence or section out the flow of points over the fields of objects. Everything hums along in its proper order. Sometimes like our own views of the world he candy coats it to hide the blemishes but since it is a mini-utopia it has to be perfect in every way.

"(of) Field and Fyce" at Roger Smith gallery was the latest of O'Shea's installations. His worlds now are battlefields. The neighborhoods have been taken over by swan lawn ornaments and toy tanks. Giant neon arrows point the flow of battle for disco camouflaged tanks. This

war is a saccharine model. I am not sure this is a satirical take on American views military confrontation or a complacent acceptance of looking at the world through rose colored glasses. Walking down Lexington Ave, one of New York's prominent shopping districts, I almost passed it up as another opulent window display. Not that it looked like the wares of Bloomingdale's but given the context a political statement is diffused if not completely buried under all the window dressing. These are the influences O'Shea embraces from being a TV junkie. Admittedly he really loves working because he can also catch up on his shows leaving the television on at his studio to pass the time of folding and building his components. It's easy to understand how the idyllic presentations and pop-appropriated materials work their influence over him. Or maybe he has drawn them in? O'Shea's influences fall in the realm of the American home, sub-division, and country. Either for or against this subtext, his installations are squeezed out from this rhetoric.

Since adopting these new materials and making mini environments painting fell to the wayside. Or did it? Sculpture developed into installation and painting too has taken on a nether region of locations. It can surround you on all sides growing off the wall. Mathew Richte and Jim Lambie are artists whose work has focused on the environment

painting can create with site-specific creeping color vinyl, images and objects. All aspects of O'Shea's work creep up and around every surface possible. Wall sections are built in the installations with pieces missing but filled entirely with color and patterning. The patterns of dots and color fields are found continued on

the floor where the tiles are planned with alternate hues and grids. I think O'Shea hasn't left painting completely behind him. I could swear he knows the Pantone book visually by heart. I don't doubt this because he confessed to habitually collecting sample color strips from hardware stores. The sheer breadth of color in his more recent installations covers everything from Easter eggs to bike helmets. Critic Jerry Saltz believed there was probably not one color of the spectra that hadn't been represented in O'Shea's schemes. O'Shea felt because of this he had kept some of his painting roots. Aesthetically speaking O'Shea still has one foot in his past by using such vivid combinations.

Mick O'Shea's "(of) Field and Fyce" was on view at Robert Smith Gallery, 501 Lexington Ave, between December 10th, 2002 to January 18th, 2003.



Mick O'Shea, "(of) Field and Fyce", installation view at Roger Smith Gallery, 2002



The Significance of Ursa Major in Establishing the Concept of Eternal Law

by Fredrick P. Loomis



It's often said that we look at the world through filters. We, who live in the present, see the same celestial phenomena as those who lived thousands of years ago in prehistoric times but, because our knowledge, customs and ways of life are so vastly different, these taint what we see. Because we look at the sky with certain expectations, these ultimately define our interpretations and, perhaps also, prohibit us from seeing things that once were obvious. In our age, this

problem is more serious. Light pollution and smog in many urban areas literally filter out over 99% of the visible stars. More serious still is the filter of political correctness that potentially censors what we are willing to examine and articulate. My consciousness was raised a few years ago in reading a hard-to-find, out-of-print book, *The Ancient Wisdom*, by Geoffery Ashe, who suggested Ursa Major, commonly known as the Big Dipper, illustrated above, was the first recognizable icon of eternal law because, in the Northern hemisphere, it's the only constellation that doesn't sink below the horizon. The smoking gun is the number seven, which appears significant in early religious traditions in the Northern hemisphere, and is the sum total of the number of stars in the Ursa Major constellation. It seemed like a logical argument but, because the city lights prohibited me from seeing the Big Dipper from my home in downtown Dallas, Texas, I felt I needed to do more research. I shopped for an inexpensive book that could provide me information on the characteristics of this constellation. Terrence Dickenson, in his booklet, *Exploring the Night Sky*, presents a diagram of the Big Dipper, showing its position around the Pole star, Polaris, at each of the four seasons. The visual impact on me was immediate. I realized I was looking at a swastika. It pointed in the opposite direction as the one dreadfully depicted in National Socialist Germany, and it rotated counter-clockwise around the Pole star. Each leg represented the constellation's position in each of the four seasons. I was aware that the leftward pointing swastika was the defining icon of Yungdrung Bön (www.ligmincha.org), illustrated below, which predated Buddhism in Tibet ('yungdrung' translates as 'eternal' in the language of Tibet, and is interchangeably translated with the word 'swastika'). It was a beautiful, clear night on 20 April 2001 in the mountains of Virginia, 50 miles south of Charlottesville. Every star in the sky was visible. I looked for the Big Dipper, but couldn't find it. Closer scrutiny determined it was upside down. Until I read Dickenson's book, I wouldn't have known the change of its position in the Spring. I concluded during this starry night that the swastika is, in its origin, a star sign, not a solar sign, and that Ursa Major is its primal source. Yungdrung Bön traces its teaching lineage back 18,000 years. I sensed I was looking at an image that, in human mythological memory, is very, very old.



How the Visual Image of Ursa Major Established the Concept of Eternal Law



In his book, *Ancient Wisdom*, Geoffery Ashe attempts to determine if there's any credence to the "deep-rooted myths of a Golden Age . . . an earlier, superior world-epoch when humanity was illuminated by semi-divine Rishis or sages," and that, "ever since then, darkness has been gradually closing in, though . . . exalted beings have partly rekindled the light at [various] intervals." These legends are notably predominant in Hindu and derivative Buddhist cultures, as well as, according to Ashe, contemporary New Age thought, which turns to ancient Central Asia as its source. The knowledge of this ancient era, commonly referred to as the "Ancient Wisdom," is typically the domain of "Masters" who, as especially learned human beings – or, as the legends proclaim, exalted beings who incarnate as humans – transmit this ancient, forgotten knowledge to human disciples. Ashe suggests that Helena Petrovna Blavatski, the founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875, headquartered in Adyar, India, and "originator of modern occultism," is perhaps the most appropriate expression of the Ancient Wisdom in contemporary culture.³ Although Blavatski's three volume magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, proposes a contemporary encounter with a number of these Masters, Ashe selects Blavatski primarily for the purpose of immediately introducing readers directly to the most prominent common thread that appears to unify literally all the ancient religions in the West and Central Asia, and that is the predominance of the heptad – "the magical and sacred character of the number seven." Ashe has good reason to dismiss China in this mix, based on the absence of use of the heptad. While this may be the case, relative to the heptad, I suggest his dismissal of China from the argument might be in error. Ashe bases his argument on the significance of the number seven specifically, rather than the predominant visual object that overwhelmingly suggests its significance. As we will see, there are other significant combinations of numbers that can be associated specifically to this object.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatski identifies the image as the heptad's primal source of meaning: "The first form of the mystical SEVEN was seen to be figured in heaven by the Seven large stars of the great Bear." Ashe states she is citing one Gerald Massey, who suggested the probable association of Ursa Major as "the primordial figure of Seven." This may or may not have been the case. Massey was first to publish; however, Blavatski proved far influential and was wider read. Neither, unfortunately, are credited by the standards of approved scholarship, as Ashe duly notes in his book so, consequently, responsible scholars, who continue to address the issue of the origin of the heptad and its

role in establishing the concept of invariably, unchanging eternal law in terms of "planets . . . lunar phases" – and sun signs, I might add – perpetually miss the mark.

Ashe identifies the Big Dipper as a constellation that "has always been familiar to people in general," without the prerequisite of a literary or mythological background in order to properly identify it or understand it. He also notes that "in most of the northern hemisphere Ursa Major never dips below the horizon." The ancient Egyptians referred to Ursa Major as *ikhemu-sek*, literally 'the ones not knowing destruction . . .' Significantly, the entrances to the pyramids at Giza were each positioned northward and their corridors sloped downwards at an angle so that these stars could be easily seen, and the significant diagonal positioning of the pyramids themselves, each by one full width away from the river, enabled each of them to have a fully unrestricted view of this constellation. Ashe further elaborates on a most significant point: "more important still, the portion of the sky which it dominates is more than a mere vague area. It is centripetal. The constellation sweeps round it. Ursa Major's two pointer-stars guide the eye inward to the celestial center; some northern folklore speaks of the constellation as tied to Polaris." But in ancient times, "it was even more consciously seen as central when no single star defined the pole." Anciently, the northern circumpolar stars revolved around a void. A central star around which the entire heavens revolved is a fairly recent phenomenon and was never mentioned in ancient references to Ursa Major. Homer, in the *Iliad*, refers to the Great Bear as "the only constellation which never bathes in the Ocean Stream, but always wheels round in the same place . . ." In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the so-called Hermetic texts, the primeval Egyptian sage, Hermes Trismegistus, the Thrice-Great Hermes, says of Ursa Major, "Its energy is as it were an axle's setting nowhere and nowhere rising but stopping [ever] in the self-same space, and turning round the same, giving its proper motion to the Life producing Circle [the Zodiac], and handing over this whole universe from night to day, from day to night." And he asks, "The Bear up there that turneth round itself, and carries round the whole cosmos with it – Who is the owner of this instrument?" Ashe concludes that the primal significance of this celestial circumambulating constellation was that it was humanity's first visible exposure to something that was "perpetually there, eternal, unchanging . . . a guide, relevant to human needs, and as Helice, 'that which turns,' rotating around the fixed polar center."

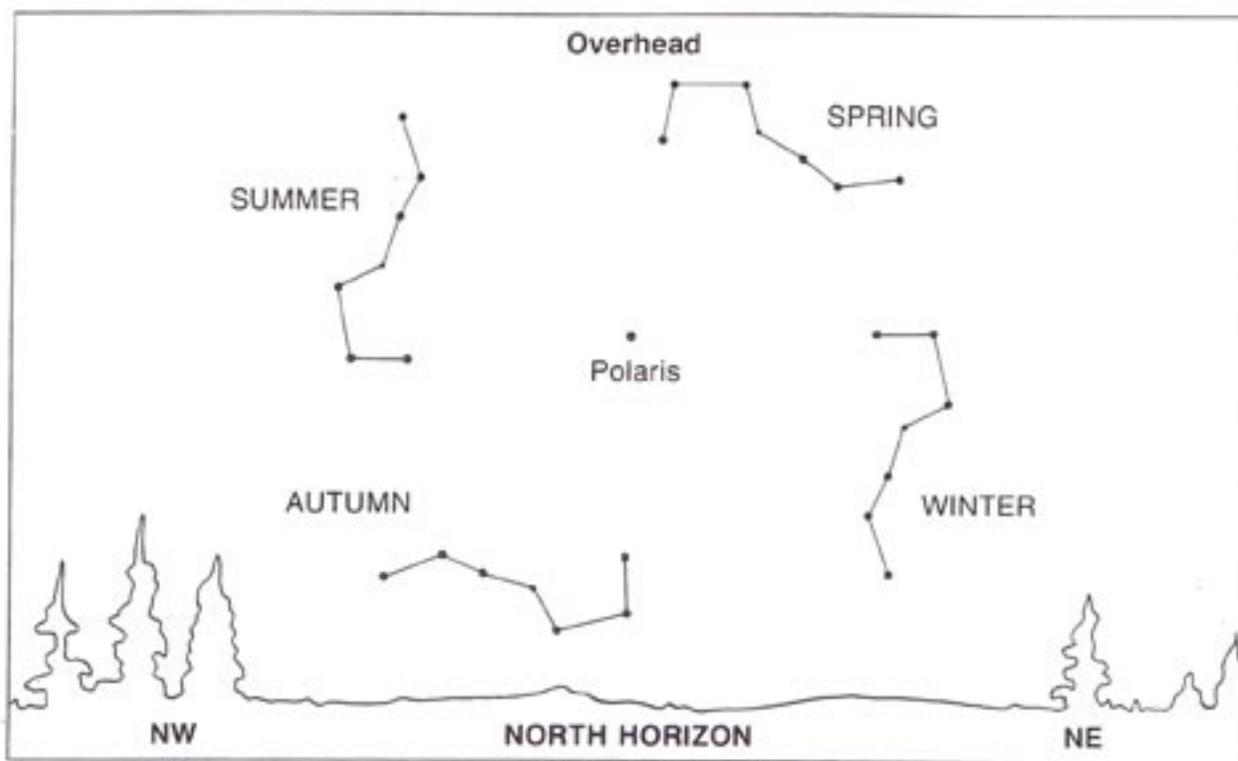
After Geoffery Ashe's exquisite introduction to the long-since forgotten importance of this famil-

iar constellation, I wanted to observe the rotation of the Big Dipper myself. Encumbered by my inability to see any of the stars through the urban light pollution of Dallas, I thought it best to search for a simple guide to backyard stargazing that would provide further information about its astronomical characteristics, hopefully illustrating its seasonal positions. Most of the sophisticated books on this subject focused on observing the planets and the more exotic celestial destinations. A simple children's book provided me exactly with what I was looking for. The diagram of the seasonal positions of Ursa Major, found in Terrence Dickenson's, *Exploring the Night Sky*, is presented in Exhibit 1 of the Attachments. The counter-clockwise rotation around the pole star is immediately apparent, as well as the perpendicular position of the constellation relative to the seasons. Using the seven stars to build the swastika image was relatively easy, as depicted in Exhibit 2. I simply put the autumn position of the Big Dipper on the top, resting upon the naturally upside-down image of the constellation in the spring-time position on the bottom. One could also rest the winter-time position of constellation on the left along side its summer-time position on the right. It's important to note that, no matter how one positions

the image, the leftward-pointing handle of the Dipper defines a leftward pointing swastika, suggesting a counter-clockwise pointing rotation. It's impossible to define a rightward pointing swastika without altering Ursa Major as the defining image. The natural configuration of the stars in the sky doesn't allow it. About the same time I was reading Geoffery Ashe's book, I was also being introduced to a relatively obscure sect of Tibetan Buddhism. While Tibetan Buddhists have been visiting and teaching in the United States for over 30 years, the Bön religion of Tibet, which long predated Buddhism in that country, had only been in the United States for five years when I was introduced to it in 1996. In 1988, the Dalai Lama proclaimed Bön, which had for centuries competed and contended against Buddhism in Tibet, as the fifth school of Tibetan Buddhism,16 in order to establish a unified front to confront the continued Chinese occupation of their homeland. The four schools of traditional Tibetan Buddhism trace their origin of their teaching lineages back to Sakyamuni – the traditional Buddha, Siddhartha Guatamma. Tibetan Bön, however, traces its teaching lineage back through an entirely different line of Buddhas to a master teacher that is said to have existed some 18,000 years ago. That Tibetan Bön and Tibetan Buddhism are both Tibetan and both revere similar, albeit differ-

Exhibit 1

The perpendicular seasonal positions of Ursa Major and its counter-clockwise rotation around Polaris.



ent, Buddhas provide the logic behind the Dalai Lama’s decree. In Tibetan culture, it was the equivalent to the Pope proclaiming Christianity and Judaism as one, common tradition. At the time I studied the

illustration of the seasonal positions of Ursa Major in Terrence Dickenson’s booklet, I was well aware that the left-ward pointing, counter-clockwise rotating swastika is the signature emblem of the older Bön religion of Tibet, and that the right-

ward pointing swastika is the sigil commonly associated with traditional Buddhism. Per Kværne, in his book,

The Bön Religion of Tibet, elaborates on this relationship: “Bön regards itself as a universal religion in the sense that its doctrines are true and valid for all humanity . . . For this reason, it is called ‘Eternal Bön,’ yungdrung bon (g.yung drung bon). The importance of the term yungdrung, ‘eternal, unchanging,’ which for Tibetan Buddhists, but not for the Bönpos, translates the Sanskrit term svastika, explains the frequent appearance in Bönpo iconography of the swastika, which is its symbol [Bönpo scholars do not use Sanskrit terms as they trace their academic lineage not to India but to the ancient, prehistoric kingdom of Zhang Zhung, located to the north and west of contemporary Tibet] . . . The Bönpo swastika, however, turns to the left, i.e. counter-clockwise, while the Buddhist version turns to the right. This is but one of the innumerable examples of a characteristic (although superficial) difference between Bön and Buddhism; in Bön the sacred

movement is always counter-clockwise.” I suggest the difference anything but superficial. The leftward pointing swastika and counter-clockwise circum-ambulation characteristic of the Bönpos would indicate that the Bön tradition is by far the more ancient and that it more authentically mirrors the motion of the grand celestial instrument in nature that silently and consistently turns above our heads, which is most likely the origin of these older traditions. The Buddhist iconography possibly was directed in the opposite direction in order to either set itself as distinct from the Bönpos, or to reflect the deosil, or clockwise, motion of the sun (from the perspective of people in the Northern Hemisphere who would naturally face the south to observe the Sun) – the Sun being possibly propagated as a stronger, life-enforcing image. This might explain why, to this day, the swastika is defined as a sun-sign, and why its earliest origin in Ursa Major as a leftward pointing device has long since been forgotten, even among Bönpo scholars. The image in Exhibit 3, which depicts the swastika of Yungdrung Bön, is described as a sun-sign, depicting the leftward movement of the sun across the sky when facing north. It’s worthy to note that, in her designing the emblem of the Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatski chose the leftward pointing swastika, which might suggest her alleged exposure to Tibetan culture was through the older of the two traditions (see Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 3 possibly also presents to us a glimpse of just how deep the imagery associated with Ursa Major might have been in ancient times if it’s accept-

Exhibit 4

The emblem of the Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatski, depicting the leftward pointing swastika.



able to scholarship that the leftward-pointing swastika can be considered a bona fide image of this constellation. Describing the swastika image of Yungdrung Bön, Per Kværne continues: “[the image] is painted in five colors representing the five elements . . .” This suggests that the Chinese obsession with the number five might be equally as relevant to Ursa Major as the Western heptad.

Exhibit 5 depicts the same imagery as Exhibit 3, but with minor variations according to recently published teachings. These are arrayed more akin to the characteristics of the constellation, illustrated in Exhibit 1 and are equally suggestive of an element mandala in which a practitioner can enter and internalize. The color white symbolizes Space, represented by the seed syllable ‘AH,’ and is characteristic of the central void around which Ursa Major revolved anciently; the color green symbolizes Air, represented by the seed syllable YAM; the color red symbolizes Fire, represented by the seed syllable RAM; the color blue symbolizes Water, represented by the seed syllable MAM; and the color yellow represents Earth, represented by the seed syllable KHAM.

Exhibit 6 presents a Bonpo thanka painting, dating possibly to the 17th century, that depicts the five

elements, their association with various parts of the human body, behavior and demeanor, and presents an exhaustive matrix of all the elemental correspondences. Executed long before the age of art for art’s sake, the image in Exhibit 6 was most likely a visual aid and reference manual to specific healing rituals and practices. If so, it’s also possible that there may have been seasonal and possibly directional associations as well that might have been displayed by the seasonal position of Ursa Major in the sky. If indeed the constellation was anciently viewed as an element mandala that’s subsequently mirrored within the human anatomy, the possibilities are vast.

The Five Elements

	RAM		
	fire		
MAM	A	YAM	
water	space	air	
	KHAM		
	earth		

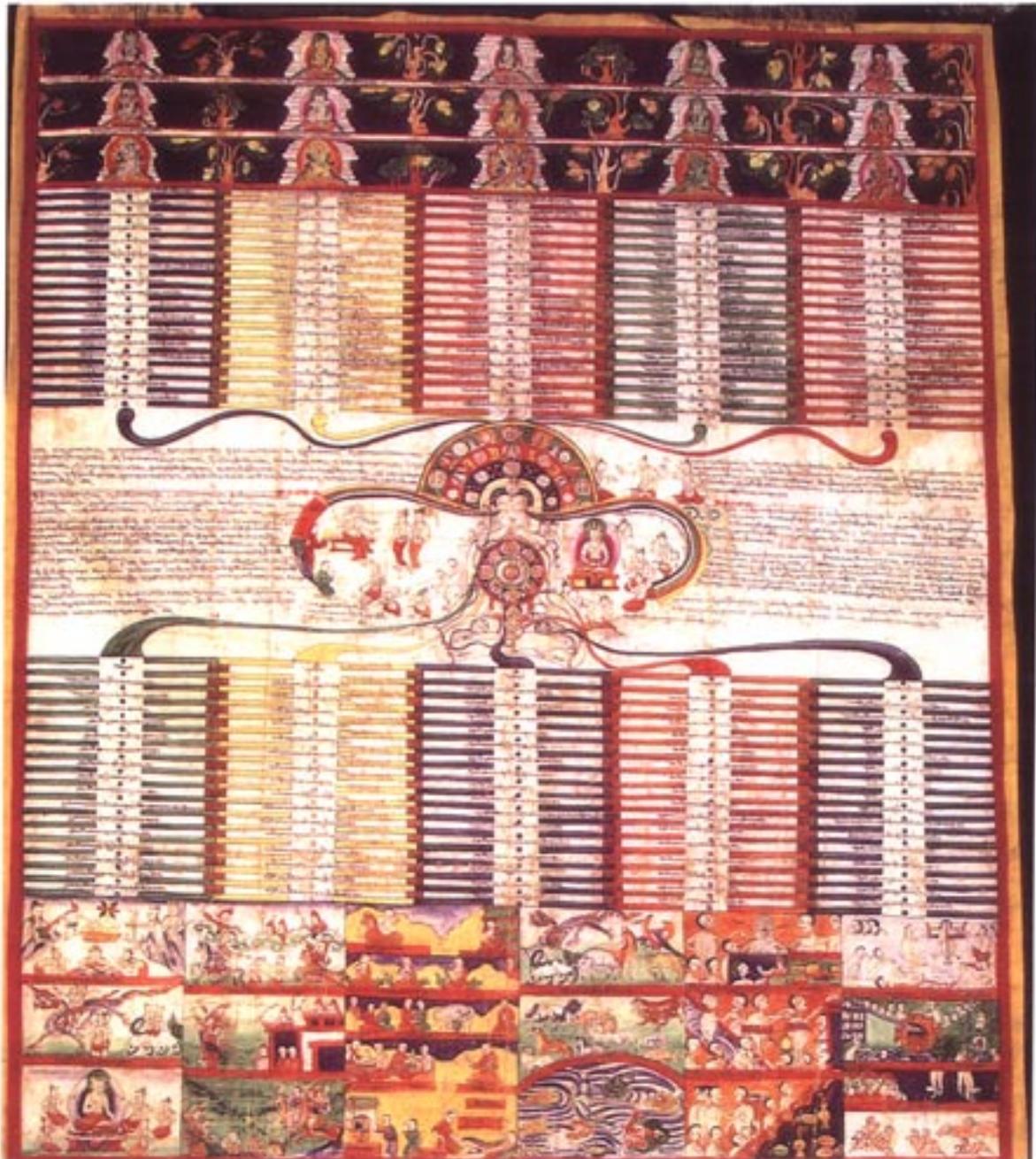
Exhibit 5

The Five Elements, arrayed more akin to the characteristics of the four perpendicular seasonal positions of Ursa Major around the Pole Star, as illustrated in Exhibit 1.



Exhibit 6

An antique Bonpo thanka painting depicting the five elements, their association with various parts of the human body, behavior and demeanor, and an exhaustive matrix of all the elemental correspondences.



Samten G. Karmay, *The Luminous Little Boy*

Exhibit 6, continued

Eighty correspondences to enlightenment listed on the antique Bonpo thanka painting depicting the five elements.

TABLE I

THE EIGHTY ELEMENTS OF THE "QUALITATIVE STATE OF ENLIGHTENMENT"
(MYA NGAN LAS 'DAS PA'I YON TAN)

	1	2	3	4	5
1 <i>zhing-khams lnga,</i> five heavens	<i>dbang-ldan bkod-pa,</i> south	<i>mngon-pa dga'-ba,</i> east	<i>lhun-gyis grab-pa,</i> centre	<i>rnam-par dag-pa,</i> north	<i>bde-ba can,</i> west
2 <i>dkyil-'khor lnga,</i> five mandalas	<i>chu'ikhyil-'khor,</i> of water	<i>sa'ikhyil-'khor,</i> of earth	<i>nam-mkha'i dkyil-'khor,</i> of space	<i>rlung-gi dkyil-'khor,</i> of wind	<i>me'ikhyil-'khor,</i> of fire
3 <i>'bras-bu lnga,</i> five results	<i>yon-tan,</i> quality	<i>sku,</i> body	<i>thugs,</i> mind	<i>'phrin-las,</i> action	<i>gsung,</i> speech
4 <i>ye-shes lnga,</i> five wisdoms	<i>bya-grab ye-shes</i> -	<i>me-long ye-shes</i> -	<i>stong-nyid ye-shes</i> -	<i>mnyam-nyid ye-shes</i> -	<i>sar-rtogs ye-shes</i> -
5 <i>stobs lnga,</i> five powers	<i>yangs-pa chen-po,</i> equanimity	<i>ye-shes chen-po,</i> wisdom	<i>byams-pa chen-po,</i> love	<i>zhi-ba chen-po,</i> tranquility	<i>sbyin-pa chen-po,</i> generosity
6 <i>rigs lnga,</i> five families	<i>rin-chen rigs,</i> jewel	<i>g.yung-drung-rigs,</i> swastika	<i>de-bahin-rigs,</i> ?	<i>'khor-lo'i-rigs,</i> wheel	<i>padma'i-rigs,</i> lotus
7 <i>sku lnga,</i> five bodies	<i>mngon-byang-sku</i> -	<i>rdzogs-sku</i> -	<i>bon-sku</i> -	<i>ngo-bo nyid-sku</i> -	<i>sprul-sku</i> -
8 <i>lha lnga,</i> five divinities	<i>rgod-gsas</i> -	<i>gsas-rje</i> -	<i>gshen-lha</i> -	<i>gar-gsas</i> -	<i>gnam-gsas</i> -
9 <i>yul lnga,</i> five objects	<i>sgra,</i> sound	<i>reg-bya,</i> touch	<i>gzugs,</i> form	<i>dri,</i> smell	<i>ro,</i> taste
10 <i>dbang-shes lnga,</i> five faculties	<i>mnyan-kyi shes-pa,</i> of ears	<i>sku'i shes-pa,</i> of body	<i>spyen-kyi shes-pa,</i> of eyes	<i>shangs-kyi shes-pa,</i> of nose	<i>ljags-kyi shes-pa,</i> of tongue
11 <i>dbang-po lnga,</i> five organs	<i>rna'i dbang-po,</i> ears	<i>sku'i dbang-po,</i> body	<i>spyen-gyi dbang-po,</i> eyes	<i>shangs-kyi dbang-po,</i> nose	<i>ljags-kyi dbang-po,</i> tongue
12 <i>māzod lnga,</i> five types of vessels	<i>khrag-'dzin,</i> of blood	<i>sha-'dzin,</i> of flesh	<i>yi'd-'dzin,</i> of spirit	<i>dbugs-'dzin,</i> of breath	<i>sreg-'dzin,</i> of life
13 <i>yan-lag lnga,</i> five limbs	<i>zhabs-g.yon,</i> left foot	<i>phyag-g.yon,</i> left arm	<i>dbu,</i> head	<i>zhabs-g.yas,</i> right foot	<i>phyag-g.yas,</i> right arm
14 <i>gzhi lnga,</i> five "arteries"	<i>rka-thur khrag-'dzin,</i> for blood	<i>kog-tse sha-'dzin,</i> for flesh	<i>she-thun rtsa-'dzin,</i> for heart	<i>rlung-thun seg-'dzin,</i> for pneuma	<i>she-thun drod-'dzin,</i> for heat
15 <i>klong lnga,</i> five spheres	<i>chu'i lha-mo'i, klong,</i> of the water goddess	<i>sa'i lha-mo'i klong,</i> of the earth goddess	<i>nam-mkha'i lha-mo'i klong,</i> of the sky goddess	<i>rlung-gi lha-mo'i klong,</i> of the wind goddess	<i>me'ilha-mo'i klong,</i> of the fire goddess
16 <i>dbyings lnga,</i> five spaces	<i>chu'i dbyings,</i> of water	<i>sa'i dbyings,</i> of earth	<i>nam-mkha'i dbyings,</i> of sky	<i>rlung-gi dbyings,</i> of air	<i>me'i dbyings,</i> of fire

Samten G. Karmay, *The Luminous Little Boy*

one of the **GREATEST** HK filmmakers
Directed by **TSUI HARK!!** in history

Nicholas Tse is
the **HOTTEST** rising
HK star today. If you
say you like HK
films and don't
know him,
YOU ARE A FOSEUR!

順流 TIME and TIDE HONG KONG

I'm Sure you have heard before that Hong Kong movies are somewhat crazy. And this movie is a **CRAZY** exciting well-done **ACTION** flick! It's got a

kinda slow beginning, but once it picks up, it blows your mind! Who cares about Joel Silver? All we need is

→ **TSUI HARK!**

... Okay, he's made some bad ones but this movie can erase all of them!

Do you like riot gear? They look so cool

POISON GAS

Gives you that AKIRA feeling.

Taiwanese star **WU BAI**



Came out in 2000

HONG KONG

STORY

A young guy enters the bodyguard business to save money for his unborn child + its mother. He becomes a friend of a guy who is also soon to be a father, but he's an ex-member of a big crime group in South America. When the group comes to HK, things get complicated.

Unless you master the amazing floor sliding skills, you cannot be called a "BADASS"

He wears a suit through most of this movie





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* Available in most cities.

A to Z

The Art and Culture iZine.

A large white rectangular area with a red border, containing four horizontal lines for writing.