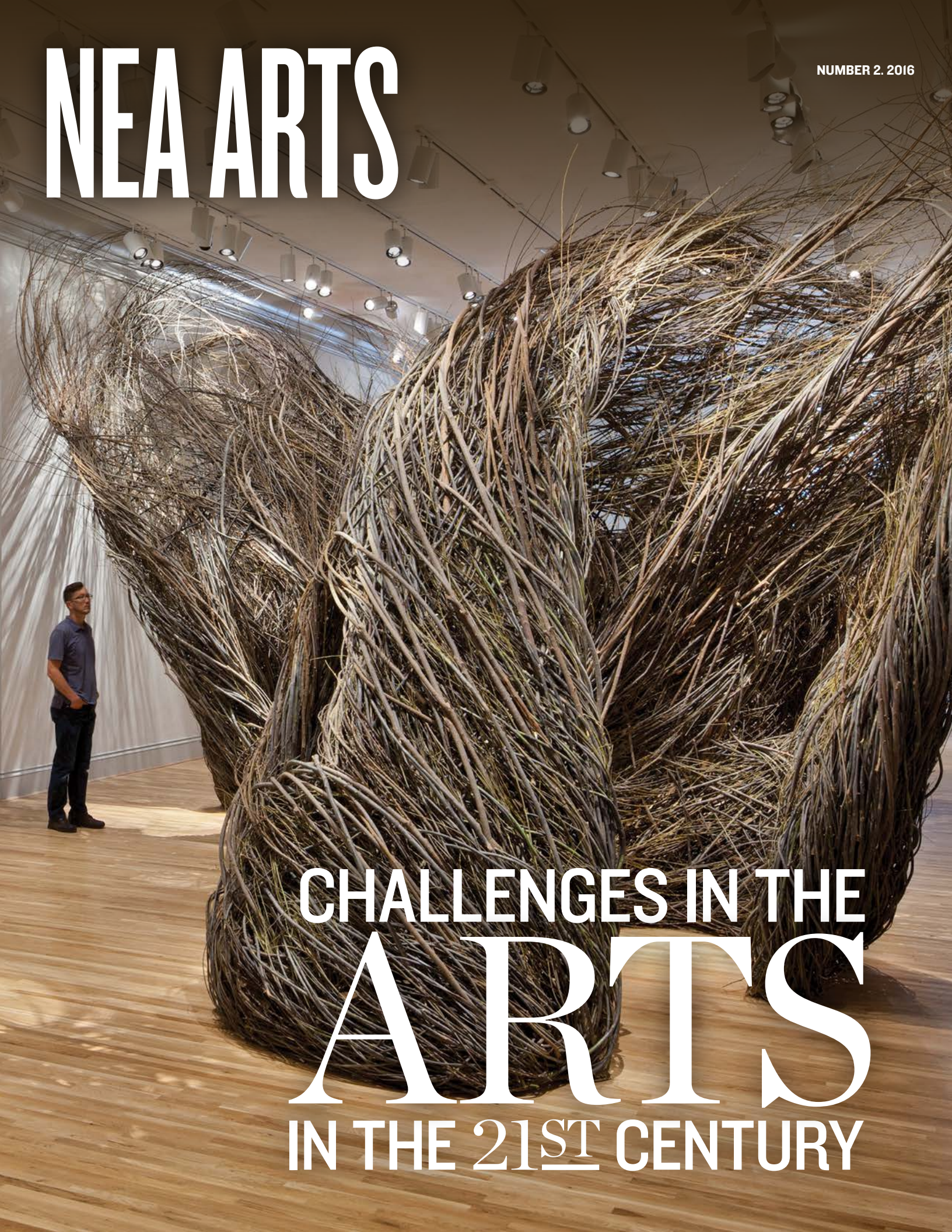


NEA ARTS

NUMBER 2. 2016



CHALLENGES IN THE
ARTS
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THIS ISSUE

The 21st century has been a time of rapid change across nearly every dimension, from science and healthcare to technology and communication. Art, of course, is no exception. With massive changes in how we consume art to how we create it, from how artists make a living to how we even categorize art in the first place, we are left to contend with issues that at one time did not exist, or at least existed differently.

In this issue, we attempt to look at a few issues facing various artistic disciplines. For instance, how do conservators preserve art that's increasingly made from unconventional materials? What does it mean to be a Native-American artist in a country still plagued by old stereotypes? How do television critics do their job in an age of streaming media? How do we measure the value of art in an increasingly data-driven world, and how do teaching artists make a living within the old confines of academia?

None of these challenges have black-and-white answers, and none of these articles are meant to propose any solutions. Rather, we hope these pieces will capture a moment in time, and shed light on just some of the complexities that exist within the art world today.



01

The Idea or the Physicality?

The Question of Conserving Ephemeral Artworks

BY REBECCA GROSS

07

Finding Time for Art

The Challenges of Being a Teaching Artist

BY PAULETTE BEETE

10

Outside the Box

Finding a Place for Contemporary Native-American Art

BY VICTORIA HUTTER

14

Traversing the Wasteland

Television Criticism in the 21st Century

BY DON BALL

17

On (Not) Measuring Arts and Culture

An Interview with Leon Wieseltier

BY SUNIL IYENGAR

NEA ARTS

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

Jane Chu
Chairman

Bruce Carter
Aaron Dworkin
Lee Greenwood
Deepa Gupta
Paul W. Hodes
María Rosario Jackson
Emil Kang
Charlotte Kessler
María López De León
Rick Lowe
David "Mas" Masumoto
Irvin Mayfield
Barbara Ernst Prey
Ranee Ramaswamy
Diane Rodriguez
Tom Rothman
Olga Viso

EX-OFFICIO

Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)
Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-OH)

Appointment by Congressional leadership of the remaining ex-officio members to the council is pending.

NEA ARTS STAFF

Don Ball, Executive Editor
Rebecca Gross, Editor
Paulette Beete
Victoria Hutter
Sunil Iyengar
Adam Kampe
Josephine Reed

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Fuszion



CELEBRATING **50** YEARS

the idea

OR THE PHYSICALITY?

THE QUESTION OF CONSERVING EPHEMERAL ARTWORKS

BY REBECCA GROSS



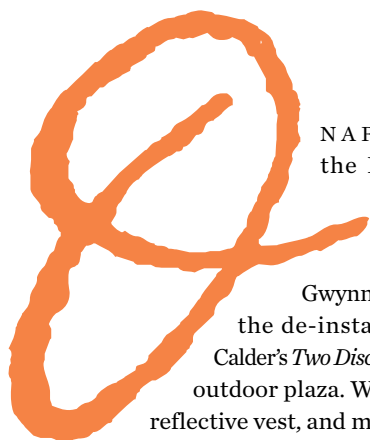
Ann Hamilton's *palimpsest*, 1989, at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City—the floors are beeswax, the walls pinned by aged newsprint, with a glass cabinet containing snails eating cabbage in the middle of the room.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN CLARK, COURTESY OF ANN HAMILTON STUDIO

Detail of Ann Hamilton's *palimpsest*.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN CLARK, COURTESY
OF ANN HAMILTON STUDIO





IN A RECENT MORNING AT the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, Chief Conservator

Gwynne Ryan was overseeing the de-installation of Alexander Calder's *Two Discs* (1965) in the museum's outdoor plaza. Wearing a hard hat and reflective vest, and monitoring a crane and crew of riggers, Ryan looked more like a construction foreman than a conservator. But considering other pieces have required her to learn how to preserve soap, chocolate, a floor made of beeswax, and to learn about the mating process of snails, perhaps a turn as a foreman is one of the less challenging roles Ryan has had to play. As Ryan put it, when it comes to conserving contemporary art, "You don't get bored."

In the past century or so, artists have increasingly moved beyond the canvas, exploring natural materials, industrial materials, and daily ephemera—none of which were necessarily designed with durability in mind. While this has expanded our collective notion of what art can be, it presents a continuous challenge for conservators, and calls into question what, exactly, should be preserved.

"Sometimes there are conceptual aspects or immaterial considerations that might supersede that of the material," said Ryan. For instance, what was the artistic intent? What is the artwork's life cycle? What is more appropriate: rehabilitation of a piece to preserve the original, or replication, so that its overall aesthetic and meaning can be better maintained?

To address these complexities, artist interviews have become increasingly popular within contemporary art conservation. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Melva Bucksbaum Associate Director for Conservation and Research at the Whitney Museum of American Art, is a pioneer in artist documentation and began the Artist Documentation Program at Houston's Menil Collection in 1990. Described as "living wills" in a recent *New Yorker* article, these interviews allow conservators to document the process, approach, and intent behind the piece, and help them determine the most appropriate way to conserve the artwork moving forward. "It's really key to work with the artist and understand what one is preserving," she said. "Is it the idea or the physicality?"

Throughout the conservation process, every decision, action, and notable conversation is documented. This will hopefully prevent future conservators from having to guess what was original and what was the work of

▼ Alexander Calder's *Two Discs* at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC is one of the easier artworks with which the museum's chief conservator, Gwynne Ryan, has to deal.

PHOTO BY FLICKR USER JOE LOONG



... to get and the
eggs, where the
new, hurt. I hear
and a v... asks
cold. I...
chair and led...
am. I was brought
lost to prison...
central federal police
in the city of
I later learned
son, who son in a
mission to the farm...

... a marriage of the rich
and the poor. She cooked, cleaned,
made our clothes and her own,
rarely had the money to pay for
a girl to help her and went
about a lot of the day with a
waist apron on, her blouse undone
and her hair down her back.
Patently genius was lacking in
her. For it was he who came home
in the evenings or at weekends from
places like Glasgow, Bournemouth
or Torquay.

... was taken for granted that his
work "must come before anything
else. He was both a European
bourgeois in upbringing and a
man of the nineteenth century,
so my mother didn't have a
prayer. The conflict - and it
was acute - came from her deep
belief in what he wanted her to
do and resentment of his total
lack of understanding.

... chessee
that y
glared
all the
She wa
nurse
and d
what
fatigue
the la
in the
that a
bo

... must come
from Teruel and
microscope in the
so that everyone
the parasites,
is was useless; the
still refused to
any other vines.
on Luis set the
tearing out his
aid; as a result
a number of death
never went out
is new plants
rifle.

I remember the battle, the
troops going into action. We
heard the General's pu-
liminary address before the
battle, urging the men "to
do or to die," and the prayer of
the chaplain, after which there
was a long silence, punctuated
with very faint noises - pre-
sumably the sounds of battle
- which emerged from out the
noise the gramophone itself was
making, at long intervals. Then at
last the General's address of
congratulations to the winning
battle - scarcely a word and that
was all. I recollect being much
impressed by the truly delightful
way in which all the difficulties
disappeared from the taking of such records
and I was so easily contented.

I didn't have no education, but
I had the chance of one. I might
have been a woman of letters and
used my head instead of my hands,
but I had to do what was before
me to do. My uncle lived down
the road on the next farm and
they were real well off. One day
when I was calling there, I remem-
ber just as plain. I sat there
and uncle said he would pay
for my schooling if I would
come and live with them. I
looked at him and said, "Uncle,
I can't, I've got to stay with
my mother. She needs me." That
was all that was ever said about
it when I went out to work, no one ever
found fault with what I did. I
helped the ministers folks clean
house one spring, and we did
up the curtains. They looked sweet.

Now,
so scary
by, we
thought
we do
account
one day
of the m
or a rela
gone; u
In vain
ly to
place w

... hills
of about thirty
some the muddy bank
of the lope go by.
here is us like to sad
ride high and dry.
he on the rear of
with log with you
out into the m...
where they are com
ah, Yaw each
h enter in flood
paper but you'd
stream at you'd
work to log all
wally if you have
that holds you
shape, when you
with that one.

We sat up very quietly, so as not
to disturb the old man, and he
did not notice that we were
listening... When at last he was
silent, there was exaltation among
us, an exaltation which men
can experience only when they
have fallen as low as we had
fallen and then, through the
mystic power of a deathless
prayer, have awakened once
more to the world of the
spirit.

past was intensely alive.
Although my glimpses of the
inhabitants of these deeper
waters of the mind were rather
disquieting, suggesting creatures
whose way I did not know, I
found the act of writing curious-
ly calming, so that I gradually
came to use it whenever I was
over-burdened with worry.
... I seemed to have two quite
different selves, one which
answered when I thought de-
liberately, another which
answered when I let my
thought be automatic. I
decided to investigate further
the opinions of the automatic
one, to ask it questions and

His head
his eyes
I quickly
after
"amen" or
filled w
and a sh
was ho
was a f
as soo
finished
table, t
very larg
the que
I studie
the tabl
listening
a smi

and if anyone asks
you are "so good" or something
Today I thought it
decided that I am
badly off. Naturally
things are
that things are
that

After the midday meal
he resumed his planting.
I suppose I must have
been fairly insistent on
my questions for he answered
me for three years he had
been planting trees in this
wilderness. I had all the

She was not good at hiding her
herself and usually followed
her sister; she'd hide in the
same place. I stopped
abruptly in front of the seats
and she came running toward

before
b. g. o
cloth
The n
Ond c
wom

“As much as we want to try and keep everything in perfect condition as long as we can, ultimately chemistry takes over and physics happens.”

restorers, and why any changes were made. “There are huge records of what is done, and the thinking behind what is done,” said Mancusi-Ungaro. “With modern art, you have the responsibility of being the first hands on [to conserve a piece]. So you’re much more cautious with that.”

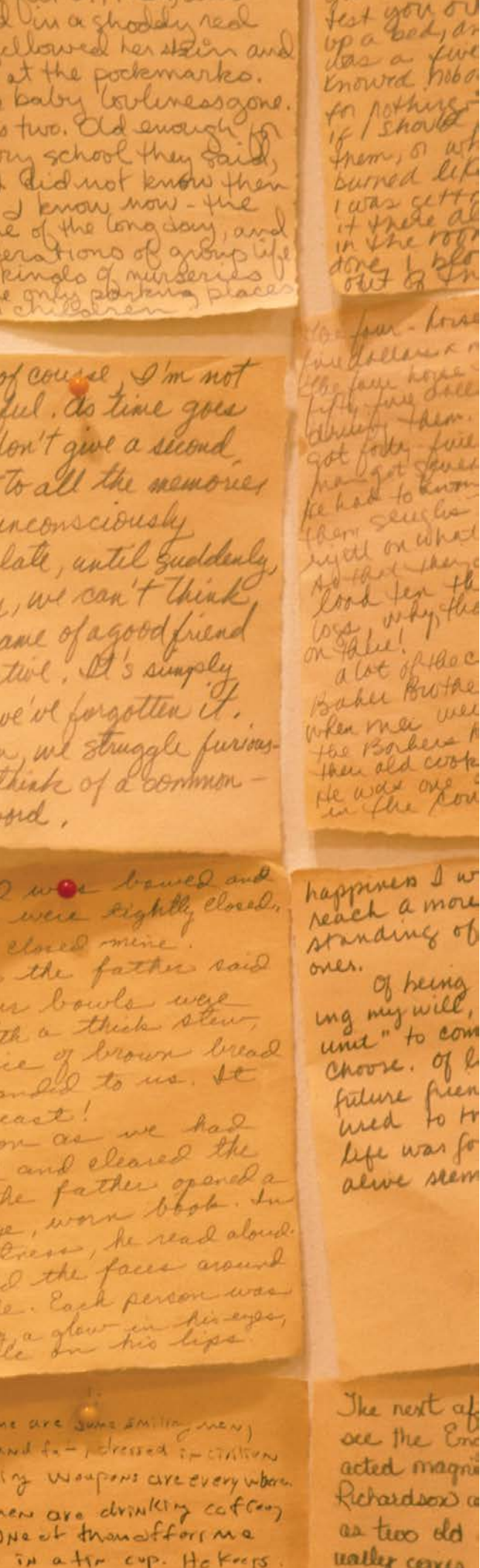
Rather than wait until a piece suffers damage, the work of conserving contemporary art begins at acquisition. The challenge, Ryan said, is to map out how to preserve a piece 50, 100, 500 years down the road when the artwork itself is still in its infancy. “Sometimes the artist is still making [a piece], and figuring out what it is they’re even making,” she said. “For us to be trying to understand what it is going to mean to own this, or what elements can degrade, what elements can be replaced—I find it fascinating. Even when an artwork is coming into the collection, it is still becoming.”

Sometimes, she said, conversations with an artist lead to an approach that “we absolutely never would have thought of on our own,” and might even be considered improper had it not been personally sanctioned by the artist. For instance, the Hirshhorn acquired in 2004 the room-sized installation *palimpsest* (1989) by Ann Hamilton, 1993 NEA Visual Arts Fellow and 2014 National Medal of Arts recipient. A meditation on the loss and preservation of memory, the work consists of floor tiles hand-cast from beeswax, and walls pinned with squares of aged newsprint scrawled with handwritten memories, which flutter in the breeze of an oscillating fan. In the center of the room is a vitrine full of snails munching on heads of cabbage.

“Almost all of the components are utilized in a way that is not going to help their preservation,” Ryan laughed. Nor were they necessarily meant to be preserved. In a recent interview, Hamilton noted that the newsprint was meant to disappear with time, and the snails, obviously, had a shelf life. “When a piece is saved, and it needs to be stabilized, what problems does the intention of ultimate disappearance come to have?” Hamilton mused. “How is work that’s about change and without firm edges considered within a museum collection? Those are things I’m still trying to figure out.”

◀ Some of the handwritten memories on the walls of the artwork *palimpsest* by Ann Hamilton.

PHOTO BY KATHRYN CLARK, COURTESY OF ANN HAMILTON STUDIO





▲
Sculptor Patrick Dougherty in one of his works.

PHOTO BY BRIANNA
BROUGH/CHAPEL HILL
MAGAZINE

After a series of conversations between Ryan and Hamilton, the Hirshhorn ultimately decided to host a multigenerational workshop for docents and teens where they wrote their own fragments of memories on newsprint squares. These will then be used to replace the original newsprint once it becomes too brittle or faded to display. It was an unconventional approach to conservation that both Hamilton and Ryan feel will keep the piece alive, rather than “freezing it in time and treating those elements as if they’re precious,” said Ryan.

It’s a sentiment artist Patrick Dougherty shares. Dougherty, who received an NEA Visual Arts Fellowship in 1990, constructs large-scale, architectural installations made entirely of found sticks, which look at once entirely fantastical and somewhat primitive. The works aren’t

designed with posterity in mind, and typically degrade within two or three years. For Dougherty, this impermanence “turns the attention of an artwork back to what I think it should be—not something that’s permanent or that you can buy and sell and gain a return on your investment. It refocuses on the ‘now’ experience of looking at a work and just being compelled by it.”

While it’s an idea that might trouble art historians, Dougherty isn’t concerned about the future. The associations that people have with sticks, which often stem from childhood or the natural world, are what make his sculptures resonate, and he isn’t certain the emotional impact would be the same—today or for future generations—if the same sculptures were made from different, more durable materials. Because his works are almost exclusively outdoors, and seen by thousands of intentional visitors and happenstance passersby, Dougherty reasons that the emotional impact of his work is compressed “into a few weeks” instead of what would take centuries in a museum.

Currently however, he does have two museum works on view, one at the North Carolina Museum of Art and the second at the Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC. The latter, titled *Shindig* and made of willow branches, was commissioned by the Renwick as part of its exhibition *WONDER*, which celebrated the museum’s reopening after a two-year renovation. Dougherty said the Renwick is choosing not to keep and conserve the piece long-term, partly due to concerns over beetle infestations and fire dangers. It’s an issue that illuminates not just the vulnerability of certain unconventional materials, but their potential effect on other pieces in a collection.

And yet, we live in an age where even ephemeral work will likely endure far longer than was once possible, at least in some form. “I think many of the materials that we see as being ‘unconventional’ probably have been art-making materials for a lot of people through the generations,” Ryan said. “We just don’t have it around to see.” But with camera photos, blogs, videos, and criticism all online, temporary work has been given seemingly infinite ways to live on. Since *WONDER* opened in November, the Renwick had been tagged approximately 60,000 times on Instagram, giving the nine larger-than-life works on display—Dougherty’s included—a way to survive digitally if not physically.

And perhaps one day that is how all artwork will survive. Despite the artist’s wishes, a conservator’s efforts, the documentation process, or a museum board’s concerns, “Things have a life,” said Ryan. “As much as we want to try and keep everything in perfect condition as long as we can, ultimately chemistry takes over and physics happens.”

Dougherty agrees. As he put it, “I’ve always thought that everybody does temporary work.” ▲

Dan Crane leading
a theater class.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH
MCCARTHY

FINDING TIME FOR ART

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A TEACHING ARTIST

BY PAULETTE BEETE

W

HAT IF THE COST of having a creatively fulfilling job that allowed you to have a measurable impact on your community meant a seven-day work week, no health insurance, and no guarantee that any of the several jobs you were juggling to keep financially afloat were going to exist year to year? That doesn't sound like a price worth paying for most of us. For teaching artists across the country, however, those are exactly the conditions they accept to pursue the work that they love.

Teaching artist positions come in all shapes and sizes: instructors at local arts organizations like youth ballet schools; artists working alongside classroom teachers in local school systems; college adjuncts in fine arts departments; educators who bring arts workshops inside prison walls; and those who work with corporations to help

“I think [we need] to bring people together, to talk about and listen to what those experienced teaching artists who have made a career of this, what they consider important in the field.”

C-suite employees hone their storytelling and speaking skills. For some teaching artists, arts education is their full-time profession while, for others, teaching is just part of or complementary to their own art practice.

Deb Norton, a dance instructor based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, knows firsthand the many challenges of pursuing a career as a teaching artist. Despite the fact that she teaches at an area university, a local dance school, and in the local public school system, one of Norton's most worrying concerns is still a lack of job security. She has been, for example, bumped from a promised teaching job at the university because that class had to be given to a full-time faculty member whose class didn't fill. In

addition, her work in the school system is primarily grant-funded, which means if the school doesn't get a grant, she won't have work. As she described, “Every year I don't really know if I'm going to have my job there, and that's where I get my biggest source of income because I can clock the most hours there.”

One year, a former principal at a local school even pulled her into his office to warn her that the funds for her position had been zeroed out. Thankfully, on that particular occasion funding was ultimately secured, but that's not always the case. “I wish there was some way to have some kind of guarantee that the program [I work on] could continue on and the funding would continue on and my part-time jobs would be available, but that's not the reality of it,” said Norton.

Because she works as a teaching artist, Norton also doesn't have a single worksite that she reports to every day, or a regular schedule. “I might be at two schools in one day. You could be at three maybe, and then do your nighttime work. So it can be a lot of running around, too.” Many days Norton works from nine a.m. to nine p.m., after which she heads home to do prep work, many times until the early hours of the morning. Sometimes, Norton said, she checks her schedule and thinks, “Oh, I get six hours of sleep. That's pretty good.”

Despite juggling these multiple positions, which add up to far more than a 40-hour work week, Norton has none of the benefits of a full-time staffer, such as insurance or paid vacation. Still, Norton noted that she's lucky because, until recently, her husband's job provided insurance for them, and she and her husband have no kids. They also both tend to be workaholics. “I have the luxury of working as much as I want because my husband's a grown man and he can take care of himself, for the most part,” she said.

Dan Crane, a theater instructor and working actor in Washington, DC, has his own stories about the precariousness of funding for teaching artists. For example, Crane taught for several years in a theater-affiliated program that was inexplicably cut from the organization's budget. “The program was fantastic...and even though it was self-sustaining and had its own donors, it ended up on the wrong side of the spreadsheet,” he said. “That was not up to me and that was not a decision that I could make. I was heartbroken.” Crane has also experienced losing a long-time contract simply because the theater he worked with wanted to bring in a new slate of teaching artists.

Crane acknowledged that in his line of work, there are simply no guarantees, regardless of your reputation as a teacher or what might be on your résumé. “I have a reputation for showing up and coming in prepared and doing my job and being porous and getting a strong response from my clients and students,” he said. And yet, “I'm not guaranteed a job. I am not guaranteed to get that contract next time.”



The financial instability inherent in his career has also had an impact on Crane's plans for a family. "Because of the choices that I've made in my life, my wife and I have decided not to have children," he disclosed. "If we did have a child, we would have to reconsider. We would have to look at the work that I do and say, 'Is this going to be viable time-wise or financially viable for us to do?'"

Crane advised that anyone thinking about becoming a teaching artist consider the financial aspect carefully before joining the field. "Make sure you can afford it," he cautioned. "My wife is the breadwinner for our family and when I go through a dry patch, we suffer, we feel that in our bank account."

Given the laundry list of frustrations that come with the job, Norton, who's been teaching since the 1990s, feels grateful to have lasted in the profession as long as she has. Along the way, she has seen many teaching artists change jobs despite their demonstrable talent as educators. "We have lost really great teaching artists. In a way, it's kind of heartbreaking because for a long time they do the job, and you know their heart is in it. You know it's what they love to do. You know it's what they're very good at. But in the end we all have to survive. If pay can't sustain a moderate lifestyle, you're going to quit and go find something else to do," she said.

Crane, too, acknowledged the real risk of burnout in his chosen profession. "That lack of control is difficult. [You have to ask yourself,] 'When does it get to be too

much? When do those things become too much?' Then that's my responsibility to say, 'All right, I'm not in a position to be able or willing to do this anymore. I need to make a different choice for myself.'"

Dale Davis, executive director of the New York-based Association of Teaching Artists, takes a broader view of the issues involved in being a teaching artist. "The challenge is we don't really examine the challenges," she opined. "There's no infrastructure solidly in place to support this work, to publicly acknowledge the contributions to education and communities." She further explained that there is no standard set of credentials a teaching artist should have and no pay scale that would give practitioners a sense of what type of salary they should expect given their level of training and experience.

Davis wants teaching artists to talk to each other more so they can find support and strategies for weathering the vagaries of the field. She'd like the community to develop standards amongst themselves that they can disseminate to employers and even parents. "I think [we need] to bring people together, to talk about and listen to what those experienced teaching artists who have made a career of this, what they consider important in the field," she said. Davis allowed, however, that given the financial situation of most teaching artists—and their unrelenting schedules—even trying to have an annual professional conference is yet another Herculean challenge to face. ▲

▲
Deb Norton leads first-grade students in a dance exercise at Woods Lake Elementary in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

PHOTO BY JUNFU HAN,
COURTESY OF ENCORE
MAGAZINE

FINDING A PLACE
FOR CONTEMPORARY
NATIVE-AMERICAN ART

BY VICTORIA HUTTER



Cannupa Hanska Luger's *Reliquary*, 2016,
made of ceramic, yarn, fabric, and foam.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

NEA ARTS

ARTS BOX

AT FIRST GLANCE, GAIL TREMBLAY'S baskets resemble traditional Native-American baskets, with rhythmic undulations and graceful protrusions. But peer a little closer, and Tremblay's work is woven from celluloid film stock, a reference to insensitive depictions of Native Americans in movies. And here's where things get tricky for Tremblay, a writer and artist of Mi'kmaq and Onondaga heritage. "They are baskets, but where does one put that in the contemporary art world?" she asked. "It's not a traditional craft object. You could not use it to put your sewing things in."

It's one of the questions that continues to puzzle the art world as Native-American artists address the value of their indigenous history and seek to define their place as contemporary artists. Fundamental to these questions is the deeply troubled history of indigenous peoples and the Euro-Americans who colonized the continent, took away their lands, and pursued assimilation policies to make them disappear. The original clash of cultures between Euro-Americans and Native Americans continues to feed situations of appropriation, misrepresentation, and alienation.

For example, non-Native audiences can struggle to understand work that incorporates tribal stories and symbols, which has led to a ghettoization of Native artwork to venues dedicated solely to indigenous art. On the other hand, the work may confuse or disappoint audiences who wrongly consider Native Americans as "people of the past," especially work that may look insufficiently traditional when familiar art forms such as pottery, rugs, or beading are used in dramatically different and potentially discomforting ways. This discomfort has also led to perceptions that Native-American artwork is political, or too steeped in identity.

FINE ART, CRAFT, AND ETHNOGRAPHY

To fully examine these issues means looking back several centuries. Western European culture has a long history of distinguishing between "fine art"—appreciated solely for its aesthetics—and art that has a functional role or history, with the former typically valued more highly than the latter. Euro-Americans' adherence to these two definitions has led to centuries of Native art viewed as craft and ethnographic objects; beautiful, but not of the same caliber as an oil painting or sculpture. As Tremblay noted, the art/craft divide can lead to confusion among non-Native audiences about "the artistic importance of historical and contemporary functional objects in the art production of Native peoples."

For indigenous peoples, art was inseparable from a tribe's particular philosophy, spirituality, and flow of daily life. But these particularities were lost in Western eyes, which tended to view all tribes as indistinguishable. Large museums incorporated their Native-American

collections with other indigenous traditions into sprawling departments such as Africa, the Americas, and Oceania because all indigenous objects were seen as primitive from an anthropological perspective.

Merritt Johnson is a contemporary artist of mixed heritage, including Mohawk and Blackfoot. She noted, "The institutional framing of who we are, where we come from, and how we fit into programming is entrenched in museum structures built without indigenous input." She adds that Native Americans' place within these structures become either "amalgamations in the interest of collecting otherness together; or fractured, because they're separating out what doesn't fit a linear Western Art historical classification."

This has only served to hinder an artwork's full appreciation by non-Native audiences, who are likely unfamiliar with various Native-American tribes' particular history, stories, and symbols. Tremblay noted, "For outsiders, there's a whole bunch of things to learn to really understand the depth of the work and what somebody is saying." She feels it is up to the viewer to learn the different Native visual languages. "Just like it's up to them to figure out the stories in Renaissance Italian art. You need to learn history. You need to learn content. You need to study stuff."

HOLLYWOOD MYTHS

Euro-Americans also created the markets and mechanisms for purchasing art, markets that defined what was sellable and therefore what should be made. Heather

▼
Gail Tremblay's *On the Rez, What is Picture Perfect?*, 2016, a basket whose material includes recycled 35mm footage from the trailer for the film *Picture Perfect*.

PHOTO BY KEVIN MCCONNELL, COURTESY OF FROELICK GALLERY





(No)stalgia, 2014, by
Cannupa Hanska Luger,
made of ceramic and
thrift store clothing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
CENTER FOR VISUAL ART,
METROPOLITAN STATE
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

“WHEN YOU’RE ASKING WHETHER THIS ART IS NATIVE-AMERICAN OR NOT, I CAN TELL YOU RIGHT NOW THAT IT IS NOT, THAT THERE IS NO NATIVE-AMERICAN ART AS FAR AS A CULTURE GROUP. THERE’S NO REAL CONTEXT TO WHAT NATIVE ART IS.”

Ahtone is of Chickasaw and Choctaw descent, and is the curator of Native-American and Non-Western Art at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. She said, “You have a box: ‘This is what Indian art looks like.’ For Native communities, the boxes are irrelevant. The challenge is that the art world has held on to these boxes and these categories for much longer than they had a valid application.”

Those boxes also serve to reinforce a romantic stereotype of Native Americans that millions of people are familiar with from Hollywood films. Cannupa Hanska Luger, a contemporary artist of Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, Austrian, and Norwegian descent, noted, “The market has dictated what people are interested in and created several generations of makers to pigeonhole themselves into that industry. That hunger for the Hollywood version is exactly what the market dictates we sell.”

He continued, “When you’re asking whether this art is Native-American or not, I can tell you right now that it is not, that there is no Native-American art as far as a culture group. There’s no real context to what Native art is.”

It is a delicate situation for artists like Luger, who refuse to be pigeonholed. One of his series, for example, features a constructed deer skeleton collapsed on its side with red and pink yarn from deconstructed thrift store clothes gushing from an imagined wound. Luger said, “The deer represents a life destroyed by empty nostalgia. Nothing is harvested, all is waste.”

It is a unique spin on the traditional concepts of harvest and waste—which was precisely the problem. “This market up until recent years was not interested in allowing adaptation,” he said. “It was really interested in sustaining a frozen historical culture.” He emphasized that for him, traditional art is less about materials and forms and more about adaptation, using what is currently available—whether that’s clay and horsehair or video and film—to express ideas.

In Luger’s work, as in Tremblay’s, the traditional and contemporary are not oppositional forces but coexist organically within a work. As Ahtone questioned, “If you are making contemporary art that retains the traditional coded visual language of your tribe, isn’t that both still traditional and contemporary?”

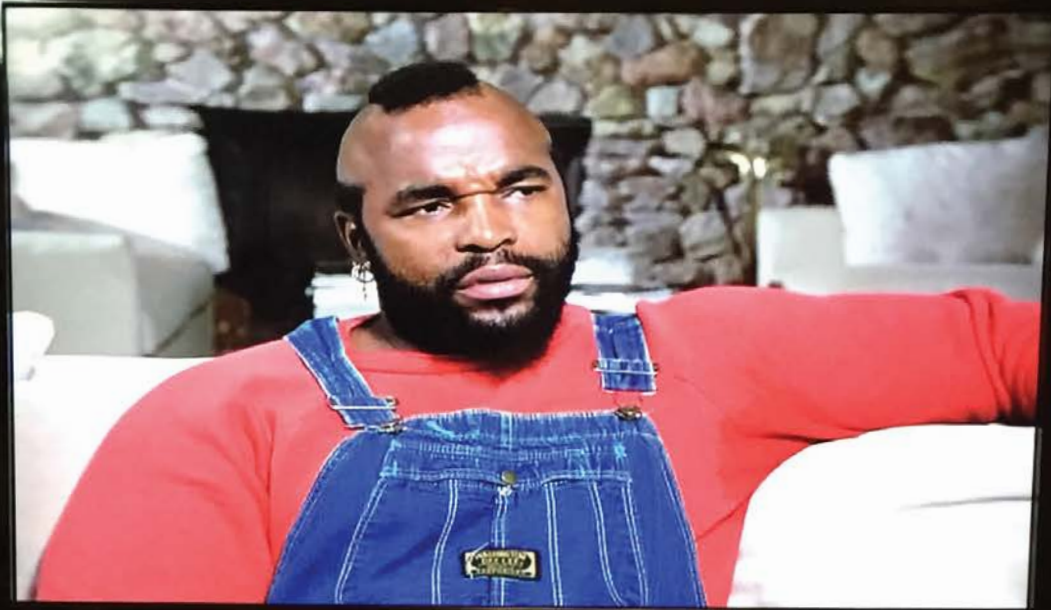
THE FUTURE

Given the challenges and limitations faced by contemporary Native artists, what are the mechanisms for change to open the doors so that more people can see, understand, and enjoy their work?

One example is taking place in several of the larger museums with significant Native-American collections. These are the Heard Museum in Phoenix; the Denver Art Museum; and Ahtone’s institution, the Fred Jones, Jr. Museum of Art, where curators are seeking to create a template that other institutions can use to imagine “not just what the future is, but what we are doing now to reframe the dialogue around contemporary Native arts,” said Ahtone.

Part of that reframing involves how objects are displayed. For example, because tribes use designs and colors deliberately and differently, grouping objects by those attributes can create misunderstanding about the diversity of traditions. Additionally, placing contemporary Native artwork with other, non-Native contemporary pieces, allows the objects to inform each other but can also obscure their cultural significance. “I think that people are interested and hungry for trying to find the place where art and creative expression provide meaning for them,” Ahtone noted. “I think in some ways, contemporary art has been struggling against what it means in a post-modern age to express something that is more collective.”

Johnson added, “I feel responsible for speaking to the way things are, and to envision a possibility for the future with ourselves in it, as we are and as we can be, in positive ways—as Octavia Butler said of ‘writing ourselves into the future.’” 🐾

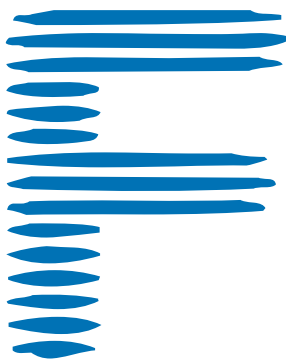


TRAVERSING
THE
WASTELAND

03

TELEVISION CRITICISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BY DON BALL



FORMER FEDERAL Communications Commission Chairman Newton N. Minow once called television a “vast wasteland” (which was the equivalent to “Hey you kids, get off my lawn!” to those of us who rushed home after school to see *Gilligan’s Island* reruns in the 1970s),

but in the past 15 or so years, it has been anything but. First, the premium cable channels began producing high-quality programming that bypassed the limitations of the traditional four television networks. As scripted dramatic series like *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Six Feet Under*, and *Deadwood* began getting critical (and popular) acclaim, basic cable channels like FX and AMC began making their own original material, such as *The Shield*, *Mad Men*, and *Breaking Bad*.

It was just a matter of time before the streaming companies got into the action. Arguably, television has been

opinions on the television shows they were watching (and pretty much everything else) through websites, blogs, social media, e-mail, and texting.

With so many shows out there and so many opinions, how does one know what is good? In the arts, that’s usually where critics come in. They can provide a pathway to understanding what is good and what is not, and why, with their opinions rooted in deep knowledge of an art form’s history. But with the Internet, ordinary people gained a platform for their own opinions, and became part of the discussion about what makes a television show good or not. It has led to an overhaul of traditional television criticism, starting with a mass migration from traditional media to online publications.

Being an online critic requires a different mindset from the traditional newspaper critics. “When you’re writing for the paper, you’re writing for the sort of mythical general audience,” said Alan Sepinwall, author of *The Revolution Was Televised* and television critic for Newark’s *Star Ledger* for 14 years before starting his own blog *What’s Alan Watching?* “You’re writing for the person who maybe doesn’t know the show. And you really need

“What I think is happening is that it changes what kind of conversation the public wants to have about a show—which will change how a lot of TV critics cover it.”

one of most impacted art forms over the last ten years by the proliferation of streaming options. Companies that were once depositories of old movies suddenly were creating new content, mostly in the television mode of half-hour to hour-long series. And they were using a new format for distributing them. Instead of dropping an episode every week, they made an entire season available all at once, creating a new phenomenon: binge-watching. According to Deloitte’s Digital Democracy Survey, 10th edition (March 2016), 70 percent of U.S. consumers watch an average of five episodes at a time, with 31 percent binge-watching on a weekly basis.

The combination of higher quality and quantity of programming coincided with the expansion of the Internet. Since the beginning of the millennium, Internet users have risen from roughly 400 million to more than 3.3 billion estimated for 2016 (perusing more than one billion websites). As the Internet became more and more ubiquitous in daily life, more people took to sharing their

to explain everything to them.” Online, however, the audience is different. The people who are searching out the blogs and e-zine reviews already know the shows, “so I can dive into it more deeply than I would’ve been able to at the paper,” Sepinwall said.

“I feel like I get the fans, I understand where they are coming from,” said Sonia Saraiya, the e-zine *Salon’s* television critic since 2014. “There’s so much passion in that community that translates to actual business decisions. I feel like I’m in conversation with the people who make TV, the people who watch TV casually, and the fans. For example, when I used to write about *Downton Abbey*, I would sometimes have a sense that as I was writing a paragraph, ‘I think the fandom’s going to like this one.’ Then sometimes you’d see the paragraph taken out and quoted on different fan sites. To me that’s awesome, because that’s the conversation.”

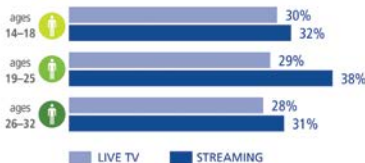
With all the material out there, it’s a matter of picking which conversations you want to have. Joel Waldfoegel, an

STREAM ON

Nearly half of US consumers subscribe to a streaming video service (you're likely one of them), and accessibility is easier than ever. This content convenience is the basis for quite a few shifts.

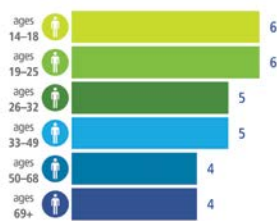
Millennials are spending more time streaming video content than watching live TV.

Live TV Programming vs. Streaming TV Content, Among Millennials



Binge watching is a routine part of our lifestyles, even for the older generations.

Average Episodes Watched Per Binge Session



Millennials are taking the lead when it comes to content consumption, and the remaining generations are following quickly behind.

SOURCE: DELOITTE DIGITAL DEMOCRACY SURVEY, 10TH EDITION. © 2016 DELOITTE DEVELOPMENT LLC

economics professor at the University of Minnesota, found that the number of new shows premiering has gone up from roughly 25 in the 1960s to more than 200 per year since 2010. Certainly too many for a critic to watch on a daily basis, write about, and still have time to, say, eat and sleep. So they have to pick and choose, and determine what works best for their audiences. Eric Deggans, who started as NPR's first full-time television critic in 2013 after nearly 20 years at the *Tampa Bay News*, noted, "NPR is all about choosing shots wisely. We don't try and cover the waterfront. The idea is to figure out interesting stories that we can dig into and that the NPR audience would be interested in, or potentially would be interested in."

The plethora of content from various television outlets, however, offers an environment where shows that might not have made it through the traditional gatekeepers can get made. "A show like *Transparent* would never have existed five years ago," Sepinwall said. "A show like *Orange is the New Black*, with such a diverse cast of women across different races and sexual orientations and gender identities—that never would've happened.

When you look at some of those ABC comedies, like *Black-ish* or *Fresh Off the Boat*, even in a very traditional format like family sitcom, if you do something as simple as tell a story about a slightly different family, all these clichés that have become so tired suddenly become new. It becomes a show that even if you're not black or Asian American you're going to enjoy and watch. So it starts to make good business sense."

This has led to online conversations becoming more diverse as well. Saraiya suggested that conversations have become more elevated on the Internet and "lead in directions that we haven't had before. For example, on *The 100* on the CW, one of their lesbian characters that they had just introduced was killed off by a stray bullet by the one openly homophobic character. This was a show that had really reached out to its fans and was proud of its inclusivity, and the fact that this character got killed led to what I thought was a very interesting fan-driven and critic-participation conversation about what kind of characters get killed and why they get killed."

Television's reputation since the beginning of the millennium has risen because, well, it has gotten better. That has created a stronger, more dedicated fan base that now has the Internet at their disposal. "What I think is happening," said Deggans, "is that it changes what kind of conversation the public wants to have about a show—which will change how I cover that and how a lot of TV critics cover it."

The fact that you can watch TV whenever and wherever you want nowadays, and if you are willing to pay, can choose whatever you want to watch as well, makes viewers more invested. While, according to previous Deloitte surveys, only 11 percent of consumers owned a smartphone in 2006 and just 15 percent watched television from the Internet in 2007, nearly half of all U.S. consumers now subscribe to a streaming video service, with more than half watching movies and TV shows via streaming on at least a monthly basis.

Now that the traditional networks are getting into the streaming game, with NBC launching Seeso with original content and the other networks discussing the same to reach more viewers opting out of the old distribution model, maybe television is not the vast wasteland it was one purported to be. Vast? Certainly. Wasteland? Not so much.

"TV is as good as it has ever been, and for the last 15 or so years, really extraordinary," Sepinwall said. "And it's become sort of hard to ignore at this point. When I started out and people would say, 'What are you doing?' I'd say, 'I'm a TV critic.' They'd, a) be surprised that was a job, and b) feel sorry for me that I had to watch so much TV. Nowadays, as soon as I mention [I am a TV critic] all they want to do is talk about their favorite show." 🐘

Leon Wieseltier.
PHOTO BY JILL KREMENTZ

ON (NOT) MEASURING ARTS AND CULTURE

AN INTERVIEW
WITH LEON
WIESELTIER

BY SUNIL IYENGAR



ESTHETICS IS THE MOTHER OF ETHICS,” WROTE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN POET AND Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky. The slogan is hard to dismiss when confronting the speech and writings of Leon Wieseltier, currently Isaiah Berlin Senior Fellow of Culture and Policy at the Brookings Institution. Prior to landing there, he reigned for more than 30 years as literary editor of The New Republic. Also known for his book-length meditation Kaddish—the fruit of a journal he kept while mourning his father’s death—Wieseltier has been fearless, as writer and editor, in making moral and ethical statements in the form of literary essays, book reviews, and cultural commentary.

On January 7, 2015, Wieseltier published an essay, “Among the Disrupted,” in The New York Times’ Sunday Book Review. His essay complained that “the discussion of culture is being steadily absorbed into the discussion of business.” The essay faulted the “overwhelming influence” of quantification and “the idolatry of data.” For the rest of the month, reader reactions thronged the review’s “Letters” section, and more than 3,200 Twitter users had responded to the piece by the end of the month. But how

would Wieseltier regard the enterprise of conducting social sciences-based research into the arts? Do his criticisms afford leeway for organizations tasked with bringing empirical data to bear on cultural policy and practice? More than a year later, Sunil Iyengar, NEA director of Research & Analysis, resolved to ask him.

SUNIL IYENGAR: When I first read your article, I thought, “Here you’ve hurled a big challenge to all of us who toil in the field of measuring culture, to those of us who seek to quantify culture to justify policy decisions.”

LEON WIESELTIER: I hope so! We use all kinds of phrases and words that, if you look at them for a minute—at least when I look at them for a minute—I find grotesque. For example, to refer to the potential of individuals to create and produce as “human capital”—there’s something wrong with that. It regards human capabilities from the standpoint of owners and managers.

There is a great deal that numbers cannot capture, if one is interested in the tones and textures of things, which sometimes are what is most important about a particular subject or discussion. Numbers give people a sense of certainty, which in certain realms is specious. People like to believe they have attained clarity, but there are realms where a mathematical kind of clarity is not possible.

We all live in many realms. Each of these realms has a temper and temporality of its own. Whereas importing categories from one realm to another may say something interesting—it can be enlightening to see the cultural dimensions of a political phenomenon, or the economic dimensions of a cultural phenomenon—the fact is that most often the importation of categories from one realm into another is a kind of imperialism.

The realms can shed light on each other. What they cannot and should not do is conquer and occupy and colonize and control each other.

The field that practices this imperialism most regularly and most successfully is economics, which our country believes is a source of life wisdom. We now live in a society in which our authorities on the subject of happiness are economists. By my humble lights, there is almost no subject imaginable that is less a subject for economists than happiness.

IYENGAR: To measure the value of arts and culture in society: is this a fool’s errand, then, or do you think there are probably legitimate ways within the social sciences?

WIESELTIER: I think the question of what the value of art is in society is not a scientific question. By the way, I think that the question of what the value of science is in society is not a scientific question either.

Science cannot tell us what the place of science in our lives should be. That’s a philosophical question. Philosophy is even grander and greater than science. Similarly, the question of what the arts mean in a society, what place they should have in our lives, is not a question for science to answer. It’s a category mistake. It’s another misapplication of the terms of one field aggressively against another field.

IYENGAR: But in a policy arena, where one constantly has to justify public spending, for example, or build public will for these kinds of initiatives, whether in the arts or humanities—without relying on performance measures or evidence, how would we do that?

WIESELTIER: There are many, many realms of social policy in which numbers are entirely appropriate. When you aggregate individuals, and make generalizations about them, for the sake of understanding certain social behaviors, it may not be germane to wonder about the specificity of those individuals or their feelings or their worldviews because you're not asking that sort of question. So of course, without numbers, without generalizations, there would be no social policy.

This is not to say that one can make social policy for happiness or for love. What bill are we going to put through Congress to maximize love in our society? It can't be done. It *must* be done in the sense that we need more love in our society, but it's not going to be done by means of social policy. And it's not going to be done by means of numbers.

I'll tell you a little story. [At *The New Republic*], I was once walking to my office and I passed by a few young people. One said to the other, "You know, she ran into my friend yesterday and she told him that she loves me, which is an important data point." So I stopped and said, "Excuse me, I promise I'm not prying, but I just want to say that the fact that she loves you is not a [expletive] data point. If you'd like to talk more about this, you can come into my office and we can talk about it. If you don't want to talk about it, I apologize for the intrusion."

So he came and we talked about it. I said to him, "If I ask you to express how she loves you on a scale of one to ten and you give me a nine, all that tells me is that she loves you a lot. It doesn't tell me anything about the quality of her love, the texture of her love, the intensity of her love." None of those attributes can be captured in a number.

When you come to cultural institutions, it all depends. I don't believe museums should decide whether to have a Rembrandt or Titian retrospective on the basis of what the dollar cost per visitor would be, because I think such a show would be a service to the culture and a public good. And I think so—I know so—not on the basis of numbers but on the basis of a knowledge of Rembrandt and Titian and of previous generations' responses to this kind of art.

Cultural policy has got to live with a greater degree of uncertainty and a greater degree of risk than social policy, because in the realm of culture we cannot have a completely lucid, arithmetically clarified environment with perfectly confident predictions about the outcome of the actions we take based on various types of data. We just can't have it.

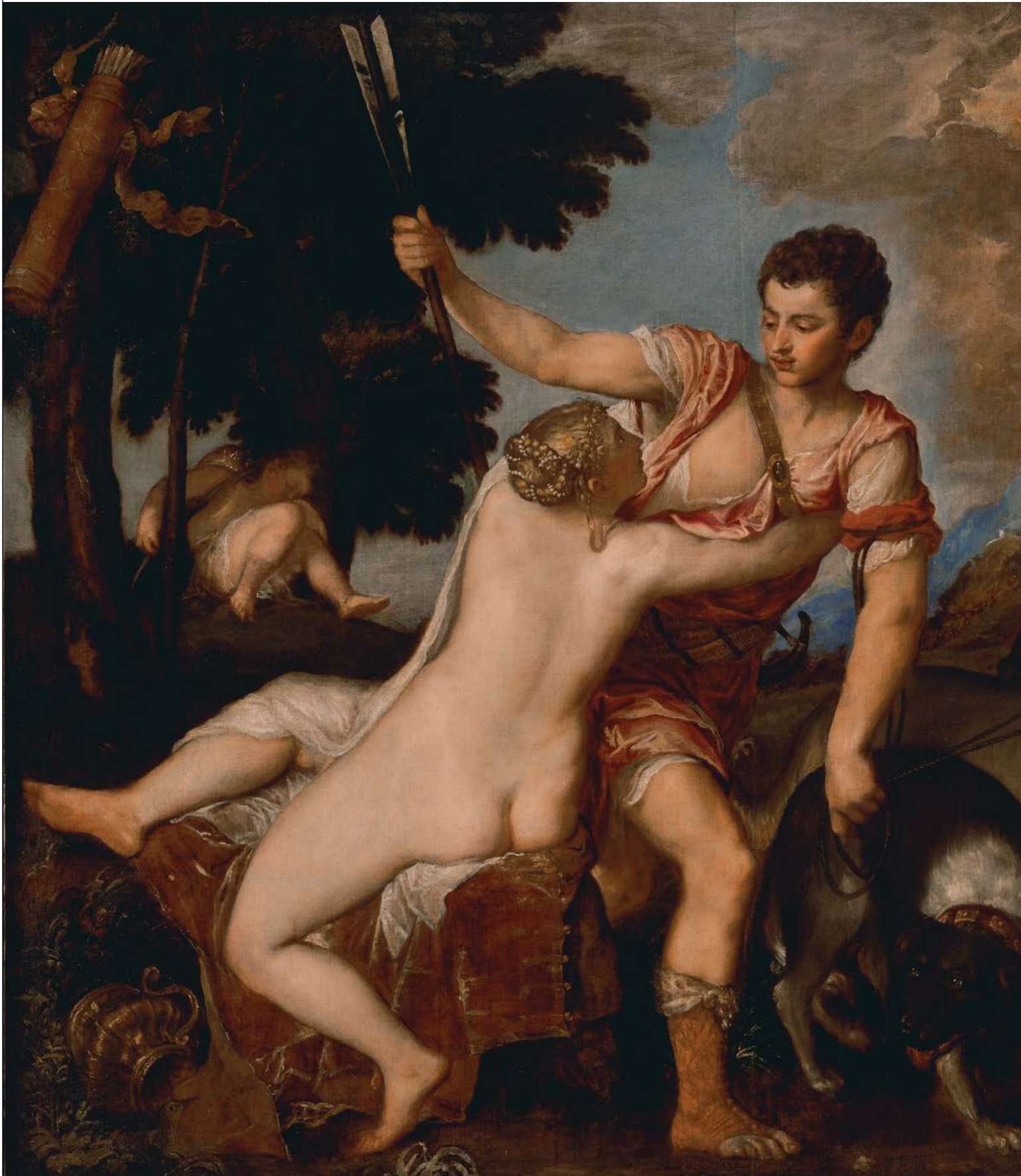


IYENGAR: One of the things you're suggesting, with the museums example, is that you hope for enlightened leaders—and that it's part of the general public's education, I assume, to know what these great works are. But what about innovation in the arts? It comes back to risk, right? Do we just have to believe enough in the concept of arts and culture to support experimentation and the creation of new works?

WIESELTIER: Of course we do. One has to have a realistic understanding of how the rewards of such experimentation and creation will manifest themselves. A spiritual experience, an emotional experience, an aesthetic experience, is not like a stock. You "invest" in these experiences, and they take time to sink deep into the minds and hearts and souls of the people who experience them. We don't know what they will produce as a consequence of what they saw, or when, or how. A person can be transformed by something he or she sees in a museum. But that doesn't mean we're going to know about that transformation immediately or maybe at all.

▲
**Self-Portrait, 1660,
by Rembrandt.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
OF ART, BEQUEST OF
BENJAMIN ALTMAN, 1913





“The question of what the arts mean in a society, what place they should have in our lives, is not a question for science to answer.”

We certainly cannot predict it or quantify it or translate it into an action plan. Maybe all the museum will have produced is a more sensitive human being and therefore a better citizen.

Cultural education is an essential part of the formation of a good citizen. We're not just talking about the cultivation of the self for the self's own ends, which is also one of life's objectives, we are talking about the cultivation of the self in society. We want citizens who have developed imagination and developed powers of empathy, and who know about patience, and listening and looking, and who are open to the full range of human experiences that only art can provide. These people are not only better thinkers and artists, and not only better friends, lovers, and spouses—they are also better voters.

I've come to realize over the years just how important imagination is to morality, not just to art. The reason is that we cannot undertake ethical action to relieve suffering that we have not ourselves experienced unless in some way we can imagine it. Otherwise our ethical action would be limited by the accidental circumstances of our existence, and by our narcissism. Our hearts would never break for any predicaments but our own. The imagination is what carries one beyond the confinements of one's own experience to a larger understanding of all the pains and the pleasures that are available in the human world, and that is one of the foundations of moral action, of social action.

The more we educate ourselves by means of the arts, and expose our citizens and our children to the full range of the human heart, the more decent and wise we become, individually and collectively. ▲

◀
**Venus and Adonis,
1555-60, by Titian.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE
J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM,
LOS ANGELES



(Above) Arctic Summer, 2013, a basket by Gail Tremblay that uses recycled 16mm film from the 1967 movie, Fishing at the Stone Weir.

PHOTO BY REBEKAH JOHNSON, COURTESY OF FROELICK GALLERY

Read the story about Tremblay and other Native-American artists on page 10.

