

It's Not Us, It's You

A Show About Rejection

It's Not Us, It's You
April 4 - June 20, 2009

Guest Curator, Ray Beldner
Artists: Michael Arcega, Orly Cogan, Anthony Discenza, Robert Eads, Kate Gilmore, Arthur Gonzalez, Jonn Herschend, Dee Hibbert-Jones/Nomi Talisman, Desiree Holmann, ~~Steve Lambert~~, Kara Maria, Stephanie Syjuco

Also at the ICA through June

April 9, 6-9 pm, Talking Art:
Printmaking Today

May 1, 8pm-late, SoFA First Friday
Art Walk

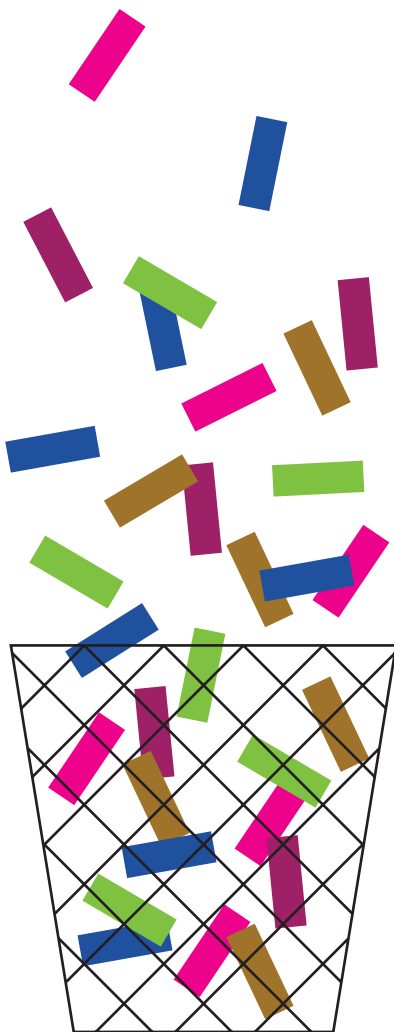
May 14, 7-9pm, Talking Art: Video
Art Show-and-tell with Exhibiting
Artist Jonn Herschend

May 15, Left Coast Live, evening
music in the gallery

Starting May 14 Sign-up for
Portfolio Review

May 22, *Lift Off* Artist Reception

Check out www.sjica.org for ICA
Printcenter classes and workshops



It's Not Us, It's You

This exhibition was originally conceived to explore a specific form of rejection that artists are all too familiar with: the “thin” envelope in response to a job application, the vapid and transparent “It was a hard decision, but...” letters, the dubious honor of achieving “runner-up” status for a grant, the “please re-apply in six months” and “we will keep your resume on file” responses along with a thousand other small cuts the artist is likely to bear.

Upon further reflection on this subject, however, I came to realize that no one escapes rejection. We are a discerning species, endlessly making choices: soup or salad, black or white, small, medium, or large, deal or no deal. Each affirmative choice implies a rejection of something else. Rejection is a fundamental part of navigating the world—in order to function, we are constantly “rejecting” an enormous amount of information.

The thirteen artists in this exhibition were not necessarily selected because they make work on this theme, although all are intimately familiar with rejection. I chose them because I admire the work of each. Some I have known a long time, some I’ve never met. Their work spoke to me in a fundamental way that gave me confidence they would take this assignment seriously and make work that was intelligent, funny, well-crafted, and heartfelt. I hope that you find this to be the case in the work exhibited here.

As I stated above, rejection is an unavoidable, but necessary and often instructive part of all of the human condition. How we deal with it is the “art” that is explored in this exhibition.

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I would like to thank ICA director Cathy Kimball for the confidence she placed in me during the organization of this show and Susan O’Malley for her hard work, good ideas, and overall pleasant demeanor in helping get this show off the ground. Thanks also to Fanny Retsek and the entire staff of the ICA, who are a smart and hardworking group of individuals.

Without David Pace and the rest of the ICA curatorial committee—especially Stan Welsh who first brought us the Arthur Gonzalez catalogue that was the catalyst for this exhibition—none of this would have happened.

Ray Beldner
Guest Curator

Michael Arcega

Conceptual artist Michael Arcega makes work that is often labor intensive, using unusual materials, puns and humor to deliver his message. That message is often about labor and globalization. The work here, *Weaving Dollies and Paul, be carePaul...* touches upon those issues and is typical in the use of Arcega's fine craftsmanship and humor. The beautifully woven dollies are made useless by the artist, implying job-loss or dislocation. The slapstick video, *Paul, be carePaul...* leaves us hanging as the artist literally hangs high in a tree. Not so much a rejection, the work presents us with something worse, a sort of limbo that thwarts our desire for completion or resolution.

Orly Cogan

New York artist Orly Cogan's embroidered artworks are inspired by personal relationships. Working with found and vintage fabrics, she creates tableaux that unflinchingly expose the eroticism and power dynamics inherent in many relationships. For the exhibition, Cogan made two new pieces, the first of which is *Fluffy F**k-offs*, hand embroidered pillows with some classic rejections, such as: *We'll keep your resume on file, We got a better offer, She's just not that into you, Thanks but no thanks, We can still be friends, I'm not attracted to you in 'that' way*

The blows inflicted by these trite and often hurtful sayings have been softened by the fact they are embroidered onto dainty, comfy pillow shams. The original meaning of rejection was "to throw or to throw back." Now they have new meaning as "throw pillows."

Rumors takes the form of a tapestry and depicts schoolyard type rumor-mongering - a scene of social rejection. Only in this case each of the girls depicted is the artist in various stages of undress. This piece is paradoxical; it is both intimate and unselfconscious in its portrayal of the artist and her body. Yet it represents a side of her that is clearly anxious, self-doubting and critical.

Anthony Disenza

Anthony Disenza works with video, computer generated sound, text, and more recently, guerilla-style street signs, a few of which he has made for this show and placed in the ICA's neighborhood.

The title of this exhibition is taken from the last line of his work, *The Way It Is*, which is a wry and brutally honest compendium of many of the phrases we are subjected to when we are rejected. In Disenza's broadside, these common phrases are slightly altered to reveal the true meanings that lie behind their unctuousness: *"We won't be in touch, there isn't going to be a next time, there is someone else, its not us, it's you...."* These are often the sentiments that underlie the kinder, gentler rejections we utter in an effort to spare another person's feelings.

The artist has also transferred this idea to street signs, attached to exterior light poles, for drivers and pedestrian alike to ponder as they navigate the urban landscape. Because of their scale, placement, and provenance, traffic signs hold a kind of authority to control, admonish and warn. In the case of Discenza's signage, he has temporarily usurped municipal power to inject more personal and discomfiting messages into the public realm, such as *Let's Stay in Touch* and *This Isn't Working Out*.

Robert Eads

Robert Eads is no stranger to rejection. Like most ambitious artists, he has received a fair number of rejection letters in the course of applying for grants, soliciting galleries, curators, and museums. But he has the fortitude that many artists don't: he kept most of his letters and used them to wallpaper the office space attached to his former studio. That act, while humorous and defiant, is supremely creative, taking the most discouraging and difficult material and turning it into a large-scale installation that he displayed as his personal badge of honor. For the ICA, he has re-created a portion of it, which physically expresses the amount and the scale of rejection a typical artist faces in his/her career.

Along with the rejection wall, Eads displays a re-creation of a returned slide packet he once sent to the well-known blue chip New York art dealer, Mary Boone. While his provocative paintings had always been known to elicit strong reactions from the press and others, he was astounded when his neat and professional packet of slides and biographical material was returned in the condition shown here. More than a rejection, Boone's response seems to be a visceral repudiation of his work. In a way, this type of reaction could be seen positively as a measure of how effective the work was in gaining her attention and moving her to respond!

Arthur Gonzales

Since finishing graduate school at UC Davis, Gonzalez has made a regular practice of applying for jobs, artist residencies, workshops, grants, and commissions, among other opportunities. That kind of practice inevitability produces large numbers of rejection letters. He notes that some of the rejections were necessary in order for other opportunities to become available to him. And some of the rejections he initially received became acceptances when he reapplied for those same positions. Eventually he decided, "I would need to change my reaction to the outcome of rejection...I needed to create a way that would encourage me to remain vigilant in my career and change cynicism into positivity."

For Gonzalez, like the artist Robert Eads, the resolution was to turn the letters themselves into art. For these pieces, Gonzalez sees the act of drawing on his rejection letters as one of collaboration with the sender. He uses the text as a jumping off point to critique or comment on the text. Sometimes he simply mocks the act of rejection itself, thus deflating the letters' content and, in the process, empowering himself as an artist.

Jonn Herschend

Jonn Herschend is an interdisciplinary artist and art organizer preoccupied with how emotional confusion, absurdity and personal crisis create truth. For this exhibition, Herschend created a piece that is in some ways a negation of the notion of rejection.

His artwork: *Why This Drawing Cannot Stand Alone* by Martin Thebes (in place of *A Drawing From the Happiest Time in My Life*, by Jonn Herschend) is a purposely deceptive narrative about the artists' failure to complete his drawing for the show and how we the curators had to enlist the help of another artist to salvage the piece.

Herschend's piece invites the viewer to become involved in the story as an active participant. One has to either accept or reject the explanation in order to attempt to discover the truth, if there is a truth to be known. Herschend feels that by throwing the viewers into confusion, one must rely less on rational thought and given information and to come to a resolution through their own unique and creative process. In a way, Herschend is giving us license to doubt, and in so doing, affirm our own perceptions and beliefs.

Dee Hibbert-Jones /Nomi Talisman

Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman are a collaborative team that works on cross-disciplinary art projects involving interaction with researchers, specialists and the general public. They use new media, video, real objects and individual conversations to explore relationships between personal feelings and public lives.

I-140 describes artists Talisman and Hibbert-Jones' five-year-long, \$35,000 struggle to keep Talisman legally in the US. Most recently Talisman applied to stay in the US under the I-140 Immigrant Petition "Artist of Extraordinary Ability" category. Despite legal assurances that the case was strong, a clerk in Nebraska rejected the application based on "insufficient evidence." Ironically, Talisman's own mother and grandmother are US citizens. If the couple were heterosexual, Talisman would immediately be granted US citizenship.

In their video, we see the couple holding up signs on the side of the freeway. Like another disenfranchised group, the homeless, they take their message to the street and the court of public opinion. They make their heartfelt pleas using humble cardboard signs, as traffic drives blindly by. Each sign describes a step in their struggle with the US Immigration Services. Many of their signs reference the "rejection" of Talisman's artistic merit and her sexual orientation. The work highlights a particularly poignant and pertinent issue of gay immigrants as it chronicles the emotional pain of being negatively judged as an artist and a spouse.

As of this writing, Talisman's US visa status is pending.

Desiree Holman

Desirée Holman is an interdisciplinary artist who fabricates figurative props which she manipulates in role-playing games. Holman explores how games of make-believe can tell us about our behaviors in the 'real' world.

For her video, *I Would Do Almost Anything That You Asked Me To Do...* Holman was inspired by a type of extreme cross-dressing in which a man puts on a full-body latex suit of a woman's body and face. The artist created four male characters made from flesh-like, stretchy suits that she could step into and wear. In the piece, Holman enacted the roles of four distinct male characters as well as the role of a female protagonist. In the narrative, the female character engages in romantic, yet failed, attempts to waltz with the various male suitors, elucidating the difficulty of human interaction and the inevitable facts of free choice and rejection.

Holman states, "It isn't easy to fit into other people's skin. You find it hard to breathe; your head feels squished and your butt and thighs get stuck. The skin doesn't want to come off. Plus, it's cold in there." While addressing issues of romantic desire, Holman also expresses the less appealing side of human relationships: the oppressiveness of physical connection. How does one retain one's individuality in a relationship that brings two together?

Steve Lambert

Raised in the Bay Area, Steve Lambert lives in New York and is currently a Senior Fellow at Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology. His work is multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary and collaborative. He has created projects for places as diverse as the Whitney Museum of American Art and in the streets with prankster group The Yes Men and their "Iraq War Ends" New York Times hoax. The main element in all his work is humor and a mischievous sense of play. Lambert writes, "For me, art is a bridge that connects uncommon, idealistic, or even radical ideas with everyday life."

For this exhibition, Lambert wanted to shed light on the economic imbalance that he perceives in the art world, where artists are asked to essentially make work for free in exchange for the "exposure" they are getting in a given exhibition. Even in a good economy, it is often difficult for art venues to fully fund the projects of artists, even for institutions seriously committed to helping young artists, such as the ICA.

Steve Lambert's overblown "donation" box is a sly poke at the position in which artists often find themselves—under-funded—and he attempts enlighten the public about this common problem. According to the artist, "I intend what I do to be funny, but at the core of each piece there is also a solemn critique. It's important to be able to laugh while actively questioning the various power structures at work in our daily lives."

Kara Maria

Kara Maria's brightly colored, pop-inspired paintings often explore the politics of war and its influence on popular culture.

Maria's work is inspired by current events—from environmental crisis to international politics and war. For this exhibition, she created a series of miniature paintings that focus on the public face of rejection.

For most of us, rejection is a private experience—finding that thin envelope in the mail, or having a relationship come to an end. But for those who live in the spotlight, rejection can become a newsworthy story. Maria's paintings show politicians experiencing different kinds of rejection or expressing rejection towards others. Although the images were appropriated from specific news stories, the facial expressions, postures, and gestures depicted seem to evoke something we can all relate to.

Stephanie Syjuco

Stephanie Syjuco's work often uses the tactics of bootlegging, appropriation, and fictional fabrications to address issues such as cultural biography, labor, and economic globalization.

For this exhibition, Syjuco created *Personal Protest (Catalyst for Change)*, a series of hand-held signs that are a form of public protest against the artist herself. Each sign uses slogans that points out Syjuco's real weaknesses and urge a change. Intensifying their psychological edge, Syjuco has arranged them almost like a stage set in which it appears something has happened or is about to happen.

For Syjuco, these works are, "a portrait of an individual by negation" in which many of us may see our own foibles reflected. This humorous method of addressing one's flaws allows us some amount of empathy and even catharsis. The signs act as a therapeutic device, an acknowledgment of imperfection and one's humanity.

Rejection Whinery

Rejection Never Tasted So Good!

Produced for the occasion of *It's Not Us, It's You* at the ICA, artist and vintner Ray Beldner invited 12 different artists to lend their artwork for limited edition wine labels for this very special wine. Each artist label is paired with a different varietal from a unique growing region in the San Jose Area. We have created some soon-to-be classics in reds and whites such as a Mineta Airport Creek Cabernay Sawvenyawn to a Guadalupe Parkway Cabernay Fronk.

Rejection wines are produced from grapes discarded from better wineries. We haven't the slightest idea what the soil or growing conditions were when this batch was thrown together, though we know the color is nice.

We would like to say that this wine is elegant and medium or light-bodied or that it offers aromas of cherry and tea or pears and apples. Furthermore, we would like to boast of the smooth palate and silky and/or crisp texture, but we don't know if that's the truth. This wine could potentially be mild in tannins and finish long and harmoniously.

Yes, indeed it could.

It could also be that this wine would pair well with lamb, veal, salmon, or fishsticks. I think it's safe to say that almost any food would wash down well with our swill.

Many thanks to the 12 artists who provided their wonderful artwork for this project: Heidi Cody, Josh Eads, Carrie Lederer, Charlie Milgrim, Joe O'Neill, Andrew Romanoff, Brion Nuda Rosch, Annie Seaton, Kris Shapiro, Inez Storer, Sieglinde van Damme and Arngunnur Yr

Night Moves: Night-time projections in the ICA's front windows.

Kate Gilmore

Kate Gilmore is a New York artist whose single channel videos combine time-based performance and sculpture while subverting sexual stereotypes and exploring feminine vulnerability.

Of her two videos in the front windows, *With Open Arms* is the more brutal and cringe-inducing vignette. Gilmore in a prom-type dress spreads her arms outward in a "ta-da!" gesture smiling broadly. Unseen participants hurl tomatoes at her as she tries to keep her composure and her smile intact. It goes on longer than one is comfortable watching, as she finally becomes drenched in red, acidic pulp. In the end, she is left wet and bruised, yet tragically still smiling and hoping for acceptance. It's painful and heartbreaking to watch the earnest effort she puts forth to such a futile end. Ultimately we see her ineffectual acts as expressions of defiance - Sisyphian efforts to overcome personal and romantic rejection.

Hours

Tues - Fri 10 - 5

Sat 12 - 5

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