

Democrats and Dissidents in *Ten-Strong*

Ten-Strong
Fourth Floor Gallery
April 27-May 6

Marcus Cain

Four local artists and KCAI alumni began meeting in February as a curatorial cooperative, to organize themed exhibitions as an alternative to the more typically impromptu, block-party shows in their West Bottoms neighborhood. As a result, the collective of curators, now known as *KC-OAE*, developed their first project, *Ten-Strong*, a democratically themed, self-curated exhibition, consisting of multiple collaborative installations.

Three of the four artists, Neal Wilson, David Stokes, and Brian Steinmetz, maintained a large, shared studio loft at 1409 W 11th Street, in the West Bottoms (the site chosen for the exhibition), and asked their studio partner, Mike Erikson to join the group. Rachel Hayes, the fourth founding member, asked her roommate, Eric Sall, to participate as well, raising the number in the group to six. Eventually four more artists were selected: Leo Esquivel, Andrea Hickerson (the group's only student, a senior at KCAI), Nan Bagby (the group's only non-KCAI graduate, from KU), and David Sindelar. Thus *Ten-Strong* was born.

The rules for the show were simple: each artist was to be given one 24-hour period, over the course of ten days, to make and install a piece of artwork. To keep the whole exhibition space "fluid" and democratically available, each artist was also allowed to "edit" the exhibition to accommodate her or his installation. Moving/removing other artists' work, or altering and incorporating one or more pieces, were a few of many possible options, if one had ample time. A ten-day interim was then available for adjustments, discussions, documentation, and promotion of the exhibition. The whole endeavor was open to the public for a final ten-day period (April 27-May 6).

Though promising in theory, the format presented several problems, one being the subjectivity of the four artists occupying their professional studio spaces on a daily basis, giving them a distinct advantage of unlimited time over their comrades. Ultimately the rules were challenged in various ways.

Brian Steinmetz, the third artist to install his work, felt unhindered by the need to create a work of art specific to the 24-hour rule, and simply selected a previously completed painting from his studio. Although pre-existent, his large abstract painting responded well by dovetailing into a kind of 2-D diagram for David Sindelar's nearby installation.

David Stokes, the so-called second artist to be let into the space for installation, ignored the 24-hour problem in an altogether different, though beautiful way. Stokes decided to create a mural on the room's largest wall, made up of hundreds of small red, white, and blue cellular shapes. The piece kept him painting until the end of the show, and a good guess is that he is still working on it.

Neal Wilson, the seventh in line for the space, took up residence for his installation, using his bed and a selection from his wardrobe, to create his artwork. Wilson spent his 24 hours stitching together a collection of t-shirts with humorous slogans, to make a quilt, that was then hung in the air, tentlike, over his bed. The relationship between the two was more evocative and engaging than a separate wall-mounted piece, a wooden panel displaying snapshots of the artist wearing the same t-shirts used in the quilt, and two dissected dress shirts of a predictable white versus blue collar variety. One could enjoy reading each t-shirt statement, however, in reference to the less-readable though more successful tented bed.

Mike Erikson agreed to be the tenth to install in the gallery space, and chose to create an improvisational and collaborative piece, giving credit to the "Wings Foundation" (his other three studio partners). Together, the four dashed out an entire cardboard crowd of caricatures surrounding a functional ping-pong table (painted orange for the occasion). What you see is what you get in Erikson's recreation room turned sporting event. Created using mostly magic marker, spray paint, and acrylic, the installation appears to have left little time for craftsmanship. In cardboard cutout attendance is everyone from E.T. to Michael Jackson, cheering any would-be players as well as functioning to contain any stray ping-pong balls.

The six remaining artists kept their installations more or less localized in their approach to the space and the surrounding works:

Leo Esquivel, the first of the ten to install in the space, created perhaps the most psychologically contained entry in the show. Esquivel constructed a small room with four walls, a ceiling, and a floor, using wood, carpet, a mattress, crown molding, and clear plastic sheeting. His room makes for an intimate, though uneasy statement about childhood, with its disorienting upside-down appearance. A light bulb points upward from a ceiling covered with footprints to a baby-size mattress clinging to the room's floor, overhead. Delicate red and blue flowers are printed on its dark yellow stained surface. This mattress "sits" on a dingy brown carpet and draws you in and up; before you realize it you're leaning into the plastic lined room. The transparent walls help to avert a claustrophobic feel, while the plastic's utilitarian properties create a disjunction with the existing patina that leaves the viewer with a lasting sense of eerie isolation.

Andrea Hickerson's photo projection installation was the ninth piece to be installed, and occupies the smallest and least likely space in the exhibition, though integrated the most efficiently. A ceiling-mounted slide projector casts her body image lengthwise along the top of the room's heat register, and on a cloudy day I was told you could see her ghostly image. The scale of the projected metal in relationship to her horizontal pose makes for a most unusual bed metaphor, also with a bit of creep.

Rachel Hayes held to the 24-hour time limit, as the fourth artist allowed into the exhibition space.

Armed with swatches of stitched fabric and foam, Hayes created a composition of upholstered forms on one side of the room's only interior wall. Her stripes of opaque and translucent fabrics, sewn into eccentrically stuffed shapes, puzzle together into a larger more suggestive form appearing as a giant mask, or alternately as padded bumpers for some kind of strange wall-oriented sport.

As the fifth artist to install his work, Eric Sall remained true to his medium of paint on canvas, and claimed the only other two-dimensional real estate left in the space. Setting up a temporary studio, Sall mounted a blank canvas on the other side of the interior wall, and created a painting during his 24-hour session. As it hangs, the piece appears fully formed and manages a strong presence, with a painterly mind that negotiates around cautious zones of brighter color.

David Sindelar took advantage of space both inside and outside the exhibition as the sixth artist in line for installation, and introduced elements of performance as well as interaction. Sindelar turned a portion of the room's floor into a putting green, with mounds of artificial grass, while bobbing up and down across this landscape were the fruits of his labor. Chains of colorful helium-inflated condoms were tethered together in strands, hovering around the room, with counterweights in the form of green felt pads. Sindelar stationed himself in the elevator, enlisting passengers to add to his piece by putting their name and phone number into an inflated condom during opening night. When viewed later, however, most of these chains were deflated among the mounds of artificial grass, and the unused condoms, twist ties, and helium tank scattered about left the whole scene feeling like a bachelor party gone bad.

As the eighth artist to engage with the space, Nan Bagby introduced several far-flung ceramic vessels, staking out multiple zones, in an attempt to weave her work throughout the exhibition space. A forest of crosscut tree trunk sections, which appear to be stacked and glued with wax, creates pedestals for a body of ceramic work that ultimately feels lost. The nature of ceramics and the obvious length of process involved put her work at odds with the other artists' brisk assemblages, establishing few relationships with them. The best dialogue for her work was in its proximity to Sindelar's synthetic grassy knoll, where her tree trunk pedestal and floral covered vessel completely integrated with the artificial landscape, if just for a moment.

There are too few moments such as this, of serendipitous relativity, in an exhibition design that ultimately limits the potential for such accidental collaboration to occur. Left uncut, it underlines the group's contradictory efforts in retaining autonomy in the face of larger democratic opportunities, while further isolating the dissidents for whom such opportunities may never have been intended.

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While Slicing Potatoes for Soup

welcome to the ragball
Joseph Nease Gallery
April 20-May 19

Christopher Leitch

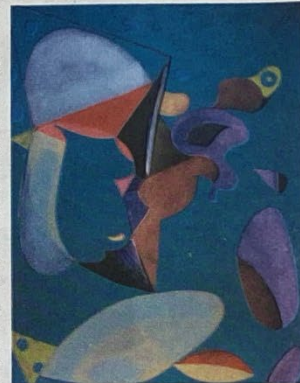
The latest show at Joseph Nease Gallery is a covey of current work by Lester

Goldman, and secures this gallery's role as the local conservatory of *tasty* exhibitions of *really* good painting. *welcome to the ragball* offers as lively and accomplished a group of paintings, sculptures, collages, and prints as one could wish for, and more. It's been a long time since one enjoyed oneself so much at, and came away so enlivened by, an exhibition, in this or any other city. Can't someone please build a Goldman Museum — like Rothko in Houston — so we can see and revel in them always?

The space at Nease is long and skinny, and exhibitions there tend to follow a sort of narrative line from front to back. Goldman's does, too. Starting with small brilliant collage drawings mounted in juicy lacquered metal frames, one proceeds to the main room teeming with large canvases, then to the back room where several quirky sculptures shuffle for visual space. What's nice about this set up is that one revisits work in the exhibition on the departure route, rather than beating a retreat without a second glance. In Goldman's case this is a delight. His works

are so intelligent and comprehensive, they contain all of painting without owing allegiance to any part of history.

The exhibition develops themes of form and composition he's been at over the past twenty years or more. Dense voluminous amoebas, graceful as a corseted Sergeant waist or needy as an acrid pulsing Neel scrotum, jostle with unplanned but definite scrawlings and other almost-geometric shapes in thickly textured Ukjo-e worlds of variable orientation and ambiguous dimension like a wall at Altamira, all richly col-



High Wire

ored in the arrant contrast and complement of a Moroccan breezeway. While never actually abandoning his own earliest mature themes — ungarish humanist narrative, scientific observation — Goldman has accomplished something really remarkable in image-saturated art-jaded post-everything now: he has invented and cultivated a new, organic, vibrant, expressive abstract painting. His composi-



Blue Belly Bulbs

tions, while knowledgeable, are not static; his drawing is experienced, never practiced. His paintings allow unhesitating mental intercourse with forms as nearly non-referent as a fiction of art can be; the fresh and unashamed joy of painting! of working! living! quivers midst the fevered urgency of each image.

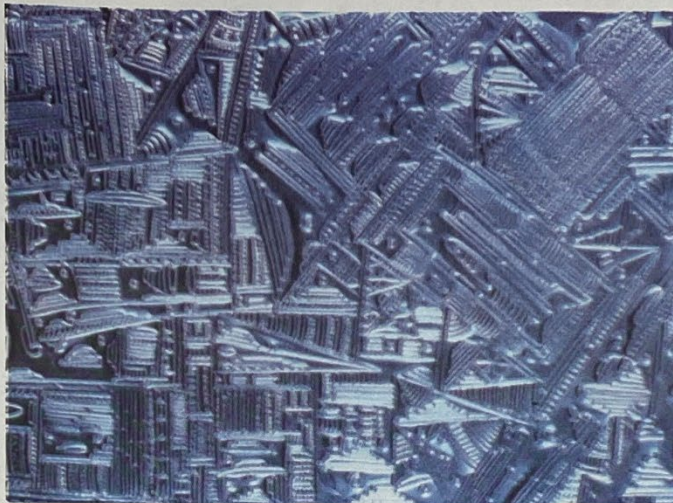
The effect from the smaller works is ecstatic and in the larger room, delirious. Goldman's color is exciting, in a stimulating not provocative way; he doesn't signify, there's no symbolic nonsense. Rods and cones and visual cortex vibrate in harmony, responding automatically to hue and intensity to give one the sensation of flying in a dream. One read a story, once, wherein the only feasible human translation of the swimming language of penguins was a ballet. With Goldman, it is the same. His pulsing biomorphs, audacious linearities and throbbing intensities of color can only possibly evoke a simultaneous creative comprehension. Any thoughtful viewer does not merely see a Lester Goldman painting; one is *with* it, pan-sensorially.

"welcome to the ragball" is accompanied by an eponymous publication designed and illustrated by Goldman (Hammerpress, Kansas City, \$40). The book offers a sly codex to engaging the immediacy of experience in Goldman's paintings. Homonyms and onomatopoeias, neologisms and linguistic morphs crowd densely onto a single page, the balance occupied with starkly silhouetted bio-forms and co-opted snippets from nostalgic cartoons. Information is communicated and actions are performed to no apparent climactic effect. Ignoring the sequencing of the experience imposed by the page-turning structure of the book, one surmises a Joycan simultaneity in the various pictographic re- and de-compositions of the few forms introduced as characters (in the narrative and alphabetic senses). So can the collages, paintings and sculptures be "read" — exercising a similar buoyant fearlessness of deconstruction and re-combination in a momentary infinity.

The sculptures in the back room, while a mixed bag, are largely as goofily self-confident as the paintings. Most of the pieces here are rather plain in the nature of their colors and surfaces; they appear to be just barely three-dimensional evocations of Goldman's drawn and painted forms. While sometimes impressive in scale (*She's So Lean*), these are not the *deus cum machina* accomplishments encountered at Grand Arts in 1996. Occasionally, as in *Base Fluidity* or *Copper Box* and some of the printed images from the book, there is a verging toward a kind of expressionism where amorphous ebullience is chilled by a brooding bioindustrial confluence — Rube Goldberg meets Georg Grosz, styling their lovechild after Tim Burton. These enterprises expand on the shadows playing through the other works yet hidden in their riotous densities.

So, Joseph Nease Gallery does it again. Proprietors Joseph and Karen Nease have managed, since September 1998, to present one excellent show after another, highlighting established and emerging artists who predominately work with non-representational abstract painting and sculpture. [editor's note: *Letich's works on paper have been exhibited twice at the gallery, although he is not represented there.*] With a decisive market niche in a city this size, one imagines such a well running dry pretty quickly; gladly, so gladly, one is in error. The quality of Nease's showings has oddly led to a lot of nattering about something called "Kansas City Abstraction" which is as annoying as any of the City-of-Fountains, Home-of-Barbecue, Birthplace-of-Jazz-type Chamber of Commerce colonial clap-trap cluttering the local consciousness. Painting, especially including Lester Goldman, is bigger than that.

Christopher Letich is an artist and designer working in Kansas City.



Soft Plate (detail)

A Map for Understanding the World

Heather Lustfeldt

The qualities and nuances of language, whether pictorial, written, or digital, are complex, mysterious, and ephemeral. The earliest known written language was developed by the Sumerians (cuneiform script on clay, 4th century b.c.), as a system of wedge-like signs used to record commercial and administrative activity. Egyptian hieroglyphs of these early centuries utilized written symbols as well, to articulate concepts, spiritual beliefs, and ideologies of their civilization. We glean meaning and appreciate the art of ancient language, but distance in space and

Marco Maggi:
Global Myopia
Kemper Museum of
Contemporary Art
April 13–July 8

time renders nuances of content and reason inaccessible to our eyes and intuitions. Marco Maggi creates meaning through mutations, exploring the beauty and transcendence of visual language in his first solo museum exhibition, *Global Myopia*, at the Kemper Museum.

Maggi's hybrid language references an intense, complex matrix of art, science and digital technology. In the exhibition essay, Curator Dana Self describes Maggi's work as

Spring Song

What will it take to break the pieced heart out of its careful Configuration?
What does love look like anyway?

What is it to wake at night not watered down in overdrawn voices from the day, to see the space and not the figure in the space, to fall backwards in a dream and realize it's a dream?
What waits, wet as fire, on the end of the line?
The rushing of wings, the billowing of thunderheads, the crashing of car into lamp post, the silencing of bark from tree, the waking suddenly with no reason?

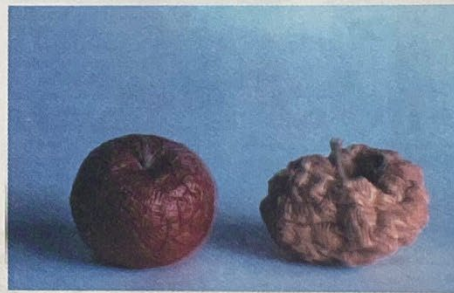
Meanwhile, insects reproduce themselves like breath,
Birds loosen the sky with flight, stratus clouds streak across the moon,
kisses stop, and stones break apart so easily that it's clear they've been cracked inside for a long time.
Each life a transference of water,
Each act just a way to move light around.

Even knowing this, why can't the heart stop asking?

"lyrical mapping" that "is an attempt to engineer our experience, to mediate between us and the larger world of signs and systems." Layered information upon computer chips composing densely patterned yet limitless space, DNA codes or aerial views of cities are a few ways one may read Maggi's renderings. His is a built language of suggestion and intuition. Featuring delicately incised lines on surfaces of clay, foil, paper, Plexiglas, apples or steel, Maggi's art evokes antiquity while reaching toward the future.

Maggi was born in Uruguay, and received an M.F.A. from the State University of New York, New Paltz. In a recent lecture at the Kemper Museum, he spoke of himself as a "foreigner" unable to read English and using drawing (he professes to draw 19 hours a day) as a means of understanding the world. As a "micro-artist," Maggi finds artistic inspiration in technology, while evincing trepidation, if not skepticism of it, through his work. He engages viewers through subtle intimacy, the often small scale and minute details of his works demanding a certain attentiveness and patience on the part of the observer.

Direct metaphor occurs in several works, including a row of shriveled McIntosh apples (*Micro & Soft on Macintosh Apples*, 1999) placed on a metal shelf and incised with regular, but varied patterns of meticulous lines. Overtly referencing Apple Macintosh computers, the piece morphs nature and science with altered and tattooed apples — emblems of the temptation and cost of technology. Nearby, a contemporary scroll on a roll of still-packaged aluminum foil (*Untitled Reynolds V*, 2000), with



Micro & Soft on Macintosh Apples

engraved patterns and motifs recalling stepped pyramids and machinery, evokes an aura of mystery and preciosity. Like a papyrus, the rolled foil could be imagined as bearer of secret recipes of rituals, but buried and rolled within a cheap, if indestructible industrial material. A framed work, *Stereo Foil* (2000), depicts similar codelike symbols on a 21-by-17-inch flat textured surface of micro on foil. Tiny, meticulously rendered patterns emit an opulence, as the intricate etchings on sheets of metal feed ready to be rolled with ink and pressed onto a paper surface to transfer an image.

Evoking transcendent qualities of light is *Exit Shadow*, revealing an elegant, curving, architectonic form scratched on a pane of Plexiglas. The form is transferred by light to an enclosed, clay board, reading as an homage to the earliest clay writing surfaces of the Sumerians and engaging light as conveyor, medium, and elemental natural force holding secrets to time and space travel — the traversing of dimensions.

Maggi works with series and repetition, duplicating motifs, shapes, and constructs within many grids and stacked forms. In the middle of the gallery floor are 49 stacks of white paper arranged in a grid (*Great White Dialogue*, 2000). Atop each stack are delicate, minimal gestures made from strips and shivers of paper, some coiled or curved, a few forming connective bridges between the piles. Small and understated, the tiny constructions are noticed in detail only by close observation, camouflaged by the sea of white blocks. Bringing to mind the floor pieces of minimalist Carl Andre, *Great White Dialogue* also references the abundance of paper manufactured, used, and

discarded. Complementary in concept are *Profiles*, a series of 12 vertically hung boxed frames enclosing reams of blank paper arranged as horizontal lines. These two pieces showcase volumes of blank paper, the individual sheets potentially used to digitally download information, news and literature, conceivably replacing bound books and the like at some point.

Referencing the use of slides as medium of image are lightbox constructs containing aluminum foil drawings within slide mounts, arranged in gridlike formations (*Soft Plates*, 2000). An occasional slide is missing, forming a shadowed blank space. Larger renderings on aluminum foil are grounded in technological language both in form and title (*Mother Board X*, *Mother Board II*, both 2001), reinforcing the new age use of metal as host for endless rhythms of information. Juxtaposing this new, futurist material are the many surfaces of clay and paper, creating a constant balance and flux between the traditional and the cutting edge.

Panoramic views suggesting cities and early Renaissance renderings of stacked, architectural forms are seen in works such as *Slow Clay* (2001), in which Maggi's signature iconographic symbols evoke levers, pulleys, bridges, and piles, richly layered within a dense, flat space. This sort of vista

view peaks in *Pencil Monologues* (2000), a series of four clay panels (25 by 19 inches each) depicting a cityscape narrative spanning across the four framed works.

Combining structural repetition, age-old engraving techniques, hieroglyphics, calligraphy, mathematical patterning, and the passage of time is *24 Empires* (2000), composed of 24 aluminum rulers depicting conjoined, linear designs in the manner of conjoined motifs rendered with dry point. The separate metal bars hang freely and move with the flow of air. The individual elements are self-contained, able to operate on their own as beautiful, if fractured components, but are not complete without being shown with one another. Like excavated pieces that have become separated from their original contexts, the bars imply their interdependence while also revealing vulnerability — easily dispersed, thus altered in meaning if seen away from the whole.

Myopic vision affects all cultures and peoples throughout the history of the world. Identifying a broad, inclusive world view at a global level is impossible to achieve in a completely non-objective form, as we are inundated within our ingrained cultural views despite empathetic notions. Maggi's vision articulates the prevalence of digital language as a vast, universal communicative and technological dialect, one in which personal, subjective vision becomes less relevant, if not obsolete.

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Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg