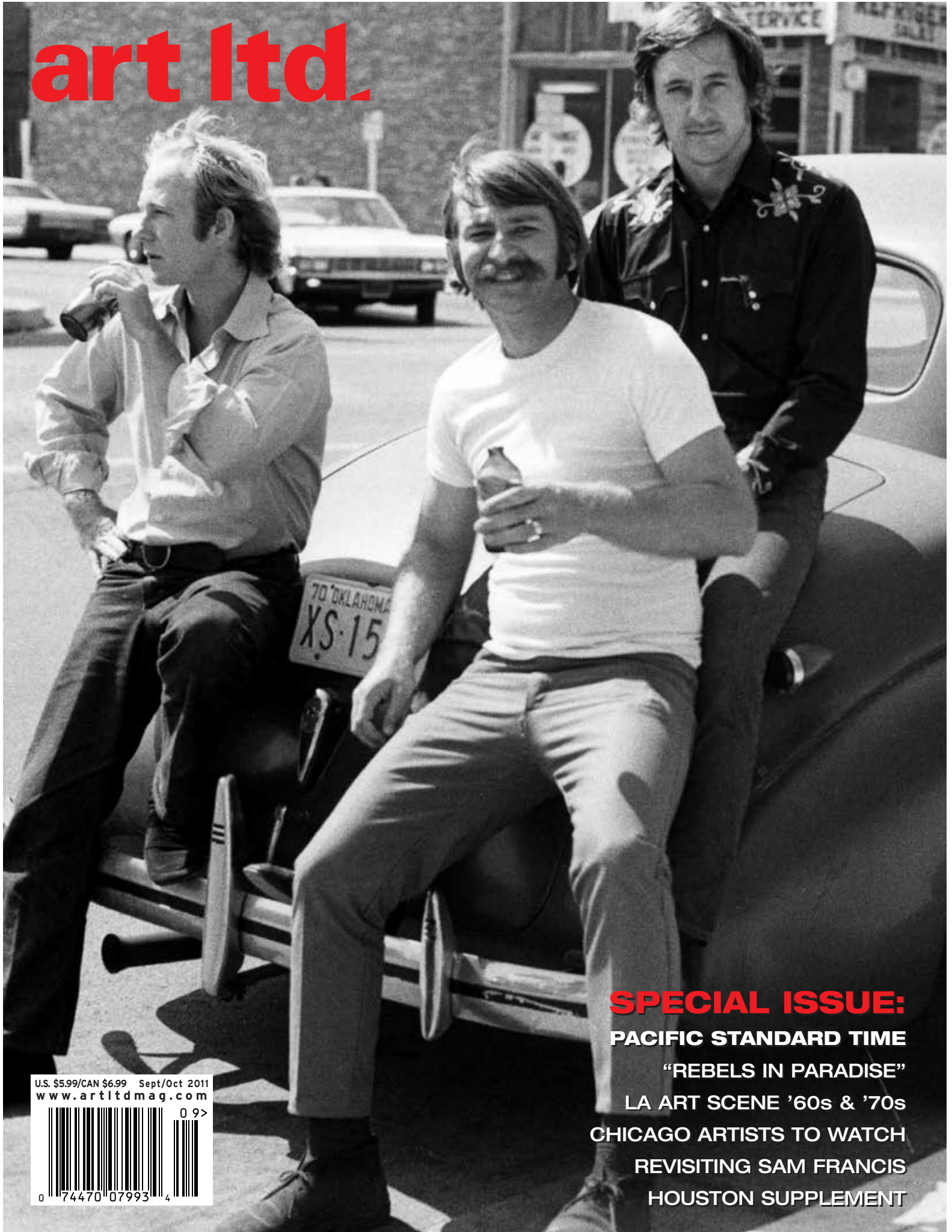


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"MONTE RIO BEACH, SUMMER," 2011
Mary Robertson
 OIL ON LINEN, 22" x 28"
 PHOTO: COURTESY GEORGE KREVSKY GALLERY

San Francisco's Ross M. Fink also eschews traditional illusionism, emphasizing the materiality of his mixed-media black and white paintings—acrylic, string and paper on canvas—despite their insistent but contradictory meanings as "atoms, molecules, platelets, monads, or planetary beings—expanding, contracting, vibrating—evoking the visceral experience of movement, transparency and interrelationship... [with] no beginning or end, no starting or ending point." *Hope* (2008) depicts a rayed solar disk, or an ovum fringed with spermatic flagella. The circle or sphere in *String Theory I* (2011) is equally ambiguous—a plan seen through a telescope or a cell culture examined through a microscope? The overlapping gray squares and triangles in *Kaleidoscope* (2001) suggest flagstone rubbings rather than tumbling bits of colored glass. The spheres in Fink's *Kindred Spirits* trilogy (2007) suggest the rotating optical jellies with which we take in phonetic symbols and 3D movies.

—DEWITT CHENG

SAN FRANCISCO

Mary Robertson: "Summer on the River" at George Krevsky Gallery

Summertime often brings out a different part of our psyche—regardless of our current age or occupation, a part of us connects with the lazy days of our youth, when school was out and long hot days stretched luxuriously ahead of us. Basking in a nostalgic glow of just that time and place, Guerneville-based painter Mary Robertson recently presented a show of small-scale works on canvas and paper exploring the scene of the nearby Russian River. Robertson's works are closely linked to the Bay

Area Figurative tradition, particularly to Gordon Cook, with whom she studied painting. Their roots sink deeper, however, in art history than the California of the '50s and '60s, having a close affinity for the work of American Realists, the Impressionists and the Pointillists, such as Seurat. They also owe considerable debt to still-life painter Giorgio Morandi, taking to heart his advice to painters to portray subjects that they know intimately.

Kids in Tubes (2011), with a nod in title to David Park's seminal *Kids on Bikes* (1950), shows two girls relaxing in inner tubes—a dark, Old Master-like palette of rich ochres and umbers is punctuated by yellow and white highlights and green ridges in the water. *Monte Rio Beach, Summer* (2011), brings vivid hues into play, water here interpreted as though reflecting the sky at sunset in hues of cobalt blue, grass-green and blue violet, shot through with rosy-hued washes. Brightly striped towels, umbrellas, buoys and inner tubes compete for our attention. *Two Kayakers* (2011) offers a canvas filled with green and gold. This work and others recall Thomas Eakins, without that artist's muscular investigation of human anatomy. The golden play of light off water is one of the most impressive aspects of Robertson's work, bathing us in a lazy warm glow; the insistent quality of boats and floats almost feels at times an intrusion. We may note that nearly all the figures are seen with their backs to us, or in profile, gazing in the distance, giving the scenes a feeling of placidity, and of being frozen in time, as well as an introspective sense of detachment.

"THE MANDRILL AND THE MANTIS," 2011
Cyrus Tilton

CONCRETE, STEEL, WIRE, MUSLIN, TWINE, WOOD
 30" x 17" x 19"

PHOTO: COURTESY VESSEL GALLERY

Robertson's work is a bit of an anomaly in its deliberate avoidance of dialogue with contemporary issues; these could easily have been done in a different century. Yet, perhaps that's not such a bad thing.

—BARBARA MORRIS

OAKLAND

"Portraits"

at Vessel Gallery

Portraits are often said to reveal the soul of the sitter. Taking various forms, they can flatter, caricature, abstract or depict with straight-on realism. Vessel Gallery director Lonnie Lee recently assembled a six-person exhibition exploring the notion of portraiture. Ranging from quirky and intimate works investigating gender and ornamentation to large-scale photo-based installations pondering issues of memory and loss, the airy multi-story space—once a stable for Oakland fire department horses—was packed with an engaging array of paintings and sculpture, as well as photo and video. The result was an unusual grouping of well-crafted works that spanned from whimsical to melancholy, sometimes, curiously, within the same piece.

Vivid and somewhat surreal, variations on the self-portrait by Tino Rodriguez and Virgo Paraiso are infused with prolific flora and fauna. Rodriguez' *Serenity* (2008), a small oil on panel, offers an attractive, androgynous figure with full, sensuous pink lips, eyes cast heavenward through a large green butterfly mask. Paraiso, adjacent, presents tropical imagery of bird-like young men. In *Love Poem* (2008), a figure with extravagant bird mask finds an avian amour, his up-thrust tongue meeting that of a cockatoo. Sohyung Choi and Sanjay Vora explore memory and identity. Choi's large-scale, quilt-like installation, *Notes on a Self-Portrait* (2011), hung in the lower gallery, presented viewers with a solemn, enigmatic grid of faces, ending with the artist's own—all flickering with the projected image of a passage of Korean text. Features of the artist, friends and family co-mingle,





"1997 - 2010 #3," 2010, James Lavadour
OIL ON PAPER, 13" X 20"

PHOTO: JAMES LAVADOUR, COURTESY GROVER/THURSTON

suggesting their shared heritage and connection. Vora's accomplished small works on paper, and large-scale oil and acrylic paintings, such as *In Her Element* (2010), recall the artist's upbringing in New Jersey, as the offspring of classical Indian musicians, through hazy memories and poignant musings. Cyrus Tilton's sculpture *The Mandrill and the Mantis* (2011) perhaps portrays our collective humanity. Its claw-like hands and feet reveal gnarled wires and clumps of string, while wrappings around the torso suggest evidence of mummification. Nearby, Walter James Mansfield's large heads for some reason speak to me of Buckminster Fuller. An appealing *Architectural Head* (2005), in hues of grey-green and salmon pink, features shapes and marks suggesting the morphing of a human head and a well-landscaped modern apartment building.

—BARBARA MORRIS

SEATTLE

James Lavadour at Grover/Thurston Gallery

For his 13th solo show in Seattle since his 1983 debut at Sacred Circle Gallery of American Indian Art, James Lavadour has progressed quietly beyond spearheading a movement once known as Indian Modernism in the Northwest. 28 years later, his recent Grover/Thurston survey underscored how he shows no sign of dropping his abstractions of mountain, sky, field and stream. Mostly small-to medium-scale (averaging 13 by 20 inches), the two main groupings presented in this show were worked on over nine and 13-year periods, respectively: one from 2001-2010 and the other series from 1997-2010.

Like the small-scale paintings of abstract expressionist Franz Kline, Lavadour's new work juxtaposes surprising color combinations; discovers concentrated gestures of brushwork; and intensifies effects that tend to be more muted in the larger compositions. Beginning

"YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE
WE ARE MAGIC (BARF BAG)," 2010

Debra Baxter

CERAMIC, MIRROR, LAB GROWN BISMUTH (GERMANY)
17" X 24" X 6"

PHOTO: RICHARD NICHOL
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND PLATFORM GALLERY

with #5 from the 1997-2010 series, the dusty yellow spatters and dribbles coagulate into a by-now signature mountain peak, horizon line, and clouds above land or riverbed. Others in the 1997-2010 series (#1, #3, #6, #8 and #9) are even more explicit in their references to rocky buttes, craggy mountain ranges, an orange-and-pink thunderstorm and, in #3, an entire salmon in profile beneath a body of blue water. Far more complicated, yet still grappling with a twilight realm of blurred abstraction and representation, the 2001-2010 series suggests the endless potential of the artist's approach. Blinding sheets of yellow sunlight are counterbalanced by dark slabs of brown cliff walls and cave entrances. Lifting textural effects from his early days of print-making virtuosity, Lavadour is combining the hot and cold climates and topography of eastern and western Oregon. In #4 and #6, parallel diagonal lines mark off territory as on a real estate developer's map. In the latter, a ragged, clear-cut timberline is exposed above a burnt-orange forest floor. It best celebrates the region's embattled landscape by drawing attention to its precarious state through the canceling lines that appear as overlaid white boundary lines.

Having distanced himself from his earliest multi-panel module-like landscape constructions (which had become stale), Lavadour is deepening his vision formally, leading to more complex encounters with Modernism, not to mention indirectly eulogizing lost Indian lands.

—MATTHEW KANGAS

SEATTLE

Debra Baxter: "Wanting is Easier Than Having" at Platform Gallery

Walking into Debra Baxter's show at Platform Gallery is a little like stepping into a natural history museum. But the lessons to be learned have less to do with geologic formations than with the complicated nature of human relationships. Baxter has been addressing human power plays, questions of vulnerability, and masculine and feminine stereotypes for years, using gorgeous (and oftentimes costly) stone materials to poke at the difficulties in forging—and in the case of the current show maintaining—human connections.



The vast majority of these small sculptural installations, made of ceramics, mirrors, borrowed objects and glittering gems, are exhibited scientifically on a long row of shelves that protrude starkly from white walls. The exception: *Untitled (open/end)*—a torso-sized piece of alabaster, cinched at the waist with a leather belt formerly owned by Baxter's grandfather—is placed directly upon the floor. Many of the works on display rely on contrasts in materials (concrete paired with alabaster for example) to underscore complexities inherent to human relationships such as strength and weakness, or safety and vulnerability. In *Lean on Me (Lean-to)* a pool-like blue mirror acts as the base for a chunk of mustard-colored citrine. Perched precariously atop a thin rod, the glittering stone seems to admire its glittering reflection, while simultaneously serving as makeshift shelter. In *You have to believe we are magic (barf bag)*, a gorgeous array of colored rocks spills from a ceramic sack. Baxter's gems might serve as a symbolic "spilling of guts" or the very real manifestation of a human body in distress. The reality of a relationship rarely fits the fantasy that precedes it (hence Baxter's exhibit title), and all the talking in the world won't necessarily right what's gone wrong. In *She won't shut up*, a tongue crafted of alabaster, amethyst, titanium, quartz, and Moroccan galena, has wagged its way to the very edge of the shelf on which it sits. What begins at the base as a glittering array of multihued stones (amethyst, titanium quartz and galena) ends in a colorless tip of alabaster; forever frozen in an attempt to communicate.

As for Baxter, she's rarely tongue-tied. Her works are often supported with titles that help tell a story of reaching out and holding on even when the going is rough—and much like the material itself, they sparkle even as they brave the rockiest of roads.

—SUZANNE BEAL

PORTLAND

Jesse Sugarmann: "Works and Days" at Fourteen30 Contemporary

Jesse Sugarmann's first solo exhibition at Fourteen30 Contemporary, "Works and Days," features sculpture and video that is as visually strong as it is thought-provoking. Beautiful circular reliefs with radial patterns in cement grays, pale rusts, and pools and veins of silver are recognizable as evoking car rims but appear to be recently unearthed archeological finds. From the series *Any Major Dude Will Tell You*, these kiln-slumped rims, with organic puckers and rivulets replacing sleek curves and straight lines, come as close as anything to summarizing both the celebration and critique of American car culture that runs throughout Sugarmann's work. As the object itself represents the ultimate fetishization of one aspect of the car, its melt-