

# Paper City

HOUSTON SEPTEMBER 2009

## ARTNOTES

**Asian Action:** The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, looks East. Investigate a show that was 20 years in the making: "Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea," curated by independent scholar **Nancy Tingley** and, in Houston, by the MFAH's **Christine Starkman** (September 13 – January 3, 2010). **Art Hearts**

**Fashion:** Blaffer Gallery's fall opener goes from white cube to the Galleria — **Neiman Marcus**, to be precise, when Whitney Biennial-exhibited

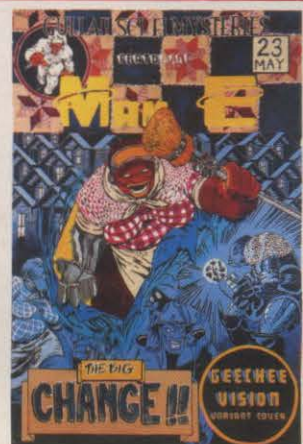
**Josephine Meckseper** transforms Neiman's display windows into an installment for her show, which opens September 11 (through November 14). This conceptual work is paired with contemporary fables by **Jon Pylypchuk** ... Catch **Wayne White** of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* renown, who takes over **Rice Gallery** with a 15-foot puppet head inspired by **George Jones** (September 10 – October 18) ... For something more intimate, consider the sketches, sculpture and watercolors of designer **Toni Whitaker** at **Mixed Emotions Fine Arts** (one night only, Wednesday, September 23) ... Houston sculptor **Omar Perez's** mythic wooden heels, platforms and stilettos rise to the occasion at **Houston Center for Contemporary Craft** (through October 25; reception September 3) ... It's the ultimate dinner party: **Mary Margaret Hansen's** "Second Seating" in the East End (20 North Chenevert, September 24 – November 1).

**Texas Nexus Plus NYC:** **Geri Hooks** celebrates her 40th anniversary with a "Masterpiece" show featuring works by all the artists in her stable, including significant Texans such as **Kermit Oliver** and **Leamon Green** (September 12 – October 17) ... **Two New York notables**, sculptor **Michael Rees** (September 19 – November 7) and painter **Jill Moser** (September 11 – October 24), are

highlighted at **Deborah Colton Gallery** and **Wade Wilson Art**, respectively. Flash: Top collector **Lester Marks** takes the helm as director of **Deborah Colton Gallery**; Colton remains as owner ... Native Houstonian (and UH grad) **Jason Villegas** presents his droll, fashion logo-inspired work at **McClain Gallery** (through September 19) and at **Contemporary Arts Museum Houston** (through November 1) ... **Barbara Davis Gallery** pairs hometown heroes **Paul Fleming** and **Joe Mancuso** in solos (September 11 – October 17).

New assistant director **Susanna Kise**, a grad of the Sotheby's arts course, relocated here from a post at MoMA ... At **Moody Gallery**, Venice Biennale talent **James Drake** rolls out "White" (September 12 – October 17) ... Whitney Biennial artist **Dawolu Jabari Anderson** is the season opener at **Joan Wich Gallery** with paintings that comment on the African-American experience (September 11 – October 10) ... **Darke Gallery** debuts **Marcelyn McNeil**, who's been touted in *New American Paintings* (September 12 – 30).

**M Street to Jazz:** **M2 Gallery** opens in new digs in the restored **Heights Theater** ... Houston's wild man of the sax, the late **Arnett Cobb** is showcased in a retrospective at the **Central Library – Julia Ideson Building** (through September 30) ... It's "Martini Madness" at **Houston Center for Contemporary Craft** Thursday, September 17 (tickets \$45) ... **Museum District Day** is Saturday, September 12. *Catherine D. Ansporn*



Dawolu Jabari Anderson's *The Big Change*, 2009, at Joan Wich Gallery

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# 'Model Behavior' sculpture, photography at Deborah Colton Gallery



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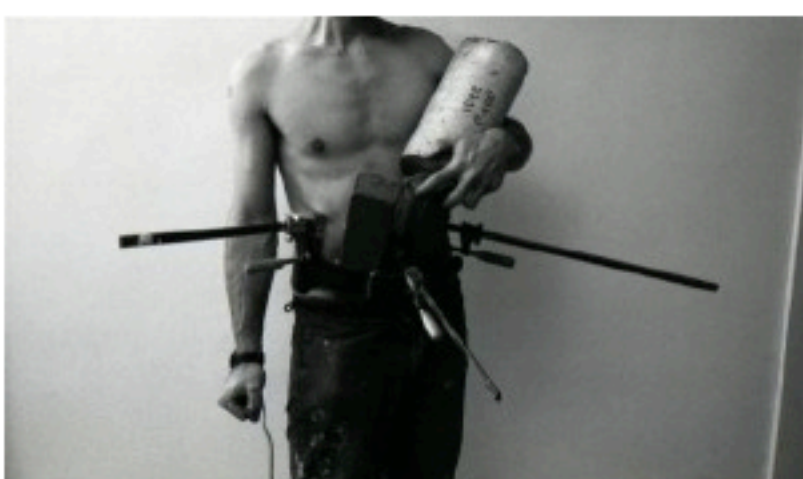
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Posted: Monday, October 5, 2009 12:00 am | Updated: 6:19 pm, Mon Nov 22, 2010.

By Virginia Billeaud Anderson

For fear of not "getting it" and feeling dumb, we non-artsy types approach postmodern sculpture reluctantly. Besides causing visual and psychic discomfort, confounding forms and gross materials can be intellectually intimidating. That said, such art when talented, is time worthy. Engage it earnestly, better put by his nibs Schjeldahl (New Yorker), "pay open-hearted attention," and there are treasures to be discovered.

This is most true with art that addresses our mortal predicament in which death rules. Weirdness granted, a sculpture shaped like genitalia, intestines or plumbing pipe and crowned with a foot, better probes existential concerns than a traditionally carved dolorosa Madonna with Child. The non-traditional piece, along with humor, packs affinities and contradictions.

## 'Model Behavior' sculpture, photography at Deborah Colton Gallery

Michael Rees in photo performance photographed in 1991-93. The art will be a part of an exhibit now on display at the Deborah Colton Gallery.

So don't be afraid to view Michael Rees' art at the Deborah Colton Gallery in the exhibition "Michael Rees: Model Behavior" through Nov. 7. Sculptural works are accompanied by a photographic series capturing a 1990s performance in which Rees clamped objects to his body. No need to worry though, his performance lacks the nudity and elimination references of friend Matthew Barney and teacher Vito Acconci. Cumulatively the works in "Model Behavior" reflect on bodies, consciousness and death.

The art is precisely like Barney's in its emphasis on transformation and evolution of form. Rees perceives his oeuvre as a mutating creativity in which one work incubates the next. Each sculpture exhibited has a source in past performance, photography or 3-D digital modeling. A plucky example is the bronze "Foot and Blob," an ankle high monster foot topped with a bulbous testicle-like form. That foot is a sculptural reincarnation of Big Foot costume props worn by Rees in a 2007 performance piece "Live Life."

"Live Life" included a narrating Greek chorus, a cornball but penetrating symbol of life's transience.

Rees assesses his art's fracturing generative quality as energy metaphysically transfigured by action, at the expense of conceptualization. This interpretation accords with the semi-mystical constructs of Joseph Beuys, with whom Rees studied in Europe. Beuys, who extended sculpture to shamanistic performance and materials such as animal fat and the invisible, theorized creativity, indeed consciousness, as action oriented.

The Menil's magnificent 2004 Beuys exhibition helped us to understand the action theory: meaning stems from action and experience, and art can be a conjuring tool to dissect death. "There's no way not to engage death," Rees said at the gallery.

But don't expect goon-like death-haunted content. Rees' work is fun, like early Surrealism, with the pungency of old-timey post-minimalism, that of Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse.

It also seems affiliated with Vendantic philosophy. According to Hindu scripture, transcendental understanding cannot be ascertained by imperfect speculation and contemplation. Enlightenment comes only through action. Being and consciousness are the essence of reality. In the way Shiva's cosmic dance patterns cycles of death and renewal, Rees' erotically charged mutations signal incomparable search.

Make sure to see Jason Villegas's garment sculptures at Contemporary Arts Museum, goofy objects mocking designer label luxury goods. Villegas was a student of Rees.

Visit [www.deborahcoltongallery.com](http://www.deborahcoltongallery.com) for more information.

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