



out front

by Brian Sands
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Roger and Over ...to the New Orleans Museum of Art

Before Miranda Lash, the New Orleans Museum of Art's first curator of contemporary art, departed NOLA to take a position with the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, she was talking with renowned Julia Street gallery owner Arthur Roger about his personal art collection.

She asked him, "Would you ever consider donating it?"

Roger replied, "Would you want it?"

Lash answered, "Of course!"

Thus began the process that culminated on June 23 with the opening at NOMA of ***Pride of Place: The Making of Contemporary Art in New Orleans*** which explores the rise of modern and contemporary art in New Orleans. The exhibit features more than seventy works from Roger's transformational gift of his entire personal art collection, one of the most groundbreaking in the city, and runs through September 3.

Asked why he did this now, Roger

responded, "I didn't like this idea of waiting till you die to give [the collection] away. Seems strange to me." He added, "So I did something without thinking about it. It's really 'Do now, think about later.'"

Roger's collection includes such important artists as Ida Kohlmeyer, Lin Emery, Gordon Parks, Willie Birch, Douglas Bourgeois, Robert Colescott, George Dureau, Simon Gunning, Deborah Kass, Robert Polidori, and John Waters.

Susan Taylor, Director of NOMA, commented, "It is a privilege to welcome into the museum's collection a

dynamic group of artworks that reflect Arthur's lifelong commitment to contemporary art, and invaluable contributions to the art and culture of New Orleans."

The collection, said Roger, "speaks to New Orleans culture, the gumbo philosophy of not being a purist and discovering in many different areas. But it still holds together. [From the glass creations of] Dale Chihuly, who appeals to people who just enjoy looking at art, to Willie Birch's provocative pieces about race to John Scott's 4x8 foot woodblock of Louis Armstrong's mother who was a Storyville madam, a work created with a chainsaw but the end product looks as though it was gracefully done."

When Roger first started planning to open a gallery in the 1970s, he admits that he "didn't know what I was doing. I had worked in the Quarter, but my mother had to mortgage her home in Chalmette to help me start the gallery on Magazine Street in the Garden District."

That was in 1978. "The first few years starting up the business were rough," Roger observed, "but what really turned it around was the development of Poydras Street with contemporary buildings for the first time." Roger was selected to assist in installing public art in some of them including the Hotel Inter-Continental and the Pan-American Life Insurance Company.

By the 1980s, "Julia Street was being developed and the location was very popular with young professionals who were moving there. We [i.e., gallery owners] took on spaces that nobody else was interested in at the time," Roger said. In 1988, he moved to Julia Street in the Warehouse District in a space designed specifically for his gallery. "With its wide windows, it was much more conducive to showing art."

Roger has long been involved with and a supporter of LGBT causes, particularly the NO/AIDS Task Force, both through hosting its Art Against AIDS benefit at his gallery in the late 1980s and his involvement with Halloween New Orleans for which he chaired the Saturday night costume dance party for many years. (I also covered him in Amsterdam when he won medals in Gay Games V's body-building competition, but that's another story.)

Not surprisingly, many LGBT artists will be represented in ***Pride of Place*** including Catherine Opie, Anderson & Low, Robert Gordy, and Robert Mapplethorpe as well as Dureau and Waters, five of whose iconic films will be screened in NOMA's auditorium throughout the summer. Roger proudly states, "Most of my artwork is pretty extroverted and definitely pulls you in like the works by Mapplethorpe and Opie, two of the most iconic self-portraits by LGBT



Self Portrait/Cutting (1993) by Catherine Opie

artists." Yet, Roger continues, "the reaction to the gay perspective in some of these works, such as Opie's or Mapplethorpe's, is no longer as shocked as it once was and that's a great thing."

In fact, sometimes viewers don't know a "gay" thing when they see it. Roger chuckled as he said that when the ***Pride of Place*** curators positioned John Waters' ***Rush*** (2009), which depicts an oversized bottle of poppers, at the exhibit entrance, "they didn't know what *Rush* was." He seemed very satisfied that some (many?) visitors to the exhibit won't know what it represents either.

Asked if he might start collecting again, Roger said with some resignation that there's "no way that that opportunity still exists in the same way. Many of these works are no longer available or I couldn't afford them." (Yes, gallery owners have to buy works for their own personal collections, though artists may sometimes gift them with art.) "I don't want to try to replicate [the

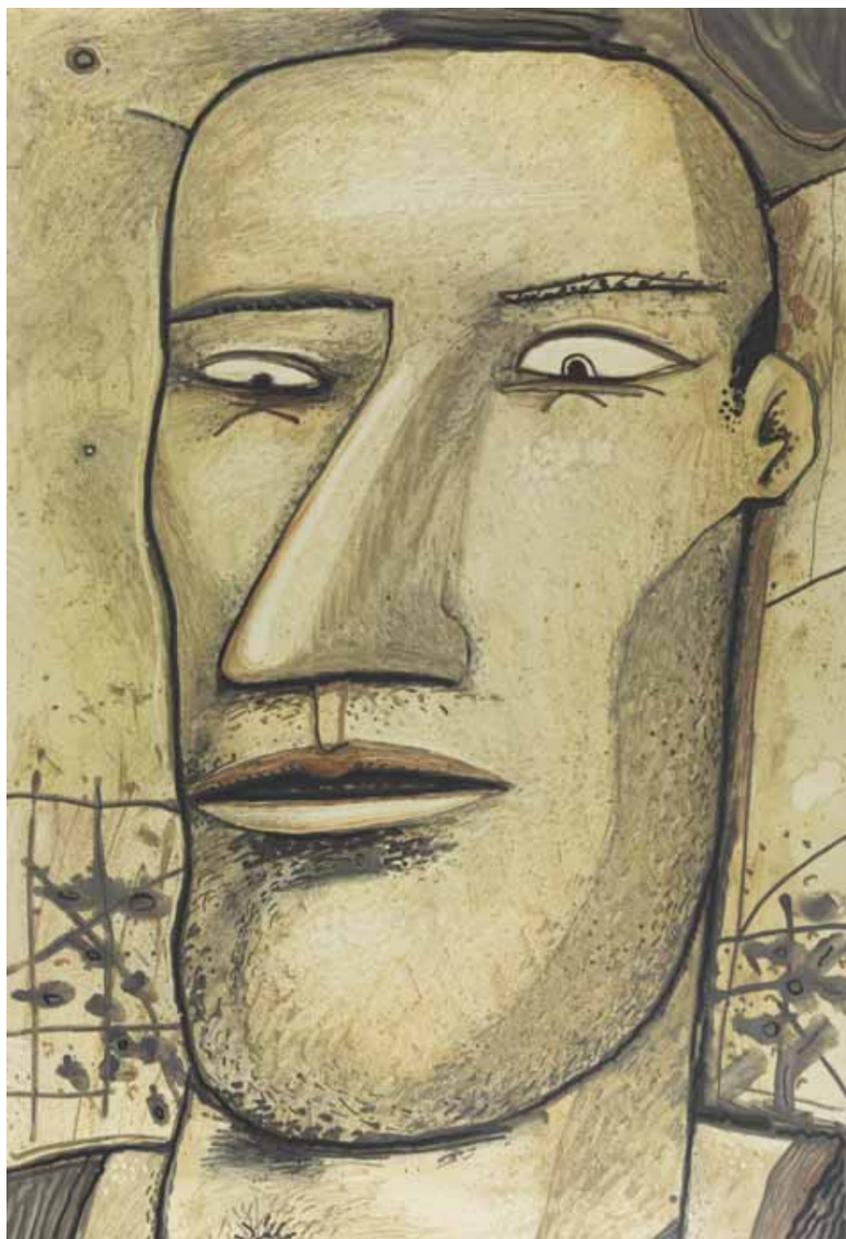


Rush (2009) by John Waters

collection] because I could never do it again."

Roger summed up his approach to art this way, "What draws me the most are the artists who challenge me whether about politics or sexuality or anything topical. That's what artists do the best and that's what I respond to the most."

Hopefully the viewers who will enjoy Roger's collection at NOMA's ***Pride of Place*** exhibition, as well as individual pieces from it when they appear on display in the future, will feel the same way for many years to come.



Male Head (1983) by Robert Gordy



commentary

by Frank Perez
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Photo by: Larry Graham, GrahamStudioOne.COM

Trump's Budget to People Living With HIV: "Bye, Felicia!"

President Trump recently released his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018 and it's filled with bad news for a lot of people. The proposed \$4.1 trillion budget includes massive funding cuts to Medicaid, student loans, food stamps, disability benefits and other programs primarily geared to assist poor and middle-class people.

Among those Americans hardest hit will be those living with HIV. According to the Treatment Action Group, an independent research and policy think-tank on healthcare issues related to HIV, tuberculosis, and viral hepatitis, Trump's budget calls for:

- A 20% reduction in research funding at National Institutes of Health
- Elimination of the Fogarty International Center (which trains HIV researchers)
- A 20% cut in funding CDC (Centers for Disease Control) HIV prevention programs
- \$59 million in cuts to the Ryan White Program
- Elimination of the Secretary of Health and Human Services Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative
- Cutting \$700 million from PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief)
- Cutting \$225 million from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS
- Eliminating funding for global health commitments to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative and microbicides research

The *New York Times* estimates these budget cuts will result in one million preventable deaths. Stated more bluntly, Trump's proposed budget will literally kill a million people. And that number only refers to people living with HIV; it does not include the millions more who will be adversely affected by the virtual elimination of Medicaid.

In addition to its utter disregard for human life, Trump's proposed budget also exemplifies a contemptuous disdain for scientific research. "Another way of continuing to blatantly undercut the value of science is to defund science and programs that implement the fruits of our investments," says Mark Harrington, Executive Director of TAG.

GLAAD CEO Sarah Kate Ellis observes, "This budget would pull the rug from under some of America's most marginalized communities, including transgender women of color, at a time

when they need our help the most." She goes on to call the budget "heartless and the latest example of the administration working to systematically erase LGBTQ Americans from the fabric of this nation."

Stated another way, Trump's budget is a big "Fuck You" to the working poor and a very specific "Bye, Felicia" to those living with HIV.

And, true to republican values, the bill calls for tax breaks for the wealthiest among us, as well as for an increase in military spending. In other words, make war, not love.

Let Your Voice Be Heard

The republican plan to repeal and replace Obamacare will effectively take away health insurance from over 22 million Americans in order to give a massive tax cut to the wealthy. If you oppose this draconian legislation, call your senators and let your voice be heard. Senator Cassidy: 202-224-5824; Senator Kennedy: 202-224-4623.

**NEXT
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Tues., July 11
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trodding the boards ...from 16

pointed; he also played the piano & accordion and never overshadowed his fellow actors.

Best of all is Lucas Steele as the aristocratic, seductive Anatole; not only does he look like the porn star his name conjures up, but, more importantly, he precisely gives off that ineffable alpha male quality, even when playing the violin, that the swaggering Anatole demands.

Paloma Young's costumes are sumptuous. Bradley King's Tony-winning lighting's superb. Sam Pinkleton's high-spirited choreography delights. The only thing I could've done without was a duel scene which seemed to take place in a disco circa 1990; it just seemed to

needlessly break the carefully created *mise-en-scène* of the rest of the piece.

Otherwise, in this neo-Cold War era, unlike most other things Russian, *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* justifiably triumphs.

Over at the **Lyceum Theatre**, chaos triumphs over order and madness triumphs over sense in *The Play That Goes Wrong*. This award-winning comedy from London shows, with acrobatic precision, what happens when everything conspires against an amateur theatrical troupe attempting to put on creaky murder mystery.

The fun here starts even before the play proper commences as the actors roam the theater interacting with audience members, one of whom will have a semi-significant part to play onstage.

Once the plot tumbles into action, *Play* sends up every possible theatrical bugaboo—doors that don't open, lines written on hands, missed cues, warring egos, misplaced props, etc. etc.

The acting (of the play within the play) may be classically bad but *Play* pays tribute to the fortitude of those applause-hungry actors who persevere at all costs no matter what's occurring around them.

Everything, including the faux programme within the Playbill, may be over-the-top but in the world of *Play*, a perfect logic justifies the shenanigans as mishap builds upon mishap. Its philosophy seems to be "Do. Then Overdo." I say that with admiration.

Perfect also is the timing of the tremendously talented Mischief Theatre krewe that began *Play*'s life in a London fringe theater before moving to the West End in 2014 where it subsequently won the Olivier Award for Best New Comedy.

Don't expect Shakespeare or Noel Coward here, though; *Play* emanates a spirit more in keeping with Monty Python or *Mad Magazine*. It's that rare show—*Starlight Express* was another—where you actually fear for the performers' safety as one technical glitch, in the play itself not the titanic disaster-prone play within, could lead to an accident that would make Andy Karl's look mild.

On Nigel Hook's ingenious, yet seemingly gimcrack, Tony-winning set, Director Mark Bell squeezes out every bit of slapstick and knowing humor. So many hysterical moments abound that your face is likely, as mine did, to hurt from laughing.

The entire Mischief-making cast is crackerjack. My favorites were Dave Hearn as an airheaded leading man and Nancy Zamit as the stage manager turned leading lady diva. You may have others such as the dim-witted sound guy (Rob Falconer) or pompous director (Henry Shields one of the writers along with Henry Lewis and Jonathan Sayer who are also in the show).

Just one caveat. As sublimely silly as *Play* is, it exists in a rather narrow

universe of a fantastically done version of a fiasco; though the variations are nearly as many as in *Groundhog Day*, once you get the basic premise, that's it. Do see it, but be aware that Mischief's follow-up *The Comedy About a Bank Robbery*, currently running in the West End where I saw it last September, presents the more expansive story of the titular robbery which goes horribly wrong with even wilder results than *Play*.

What's next for Mischief? *The Farce About the American President*? Not sure if that would qualify as comedy...or tragedy.

Wine Lovers at Teatro Wego! through July 16

[Jefferson Performing Arts Society is presenting *Wine Lovers* for six performances at its theater in Westwego. Below is an edited version of my June 2010 review when it played at Le Petit.]

A one act musical in which the audience samples six wines throughout the show. Sounds gimmicky, yes? Well, it is. But it's well done and enjoyable, so who cares? And there are those six glasses of wine.

Wine Lovers serves up Charles Thompson, an oenologist and host of a wine seminar which Brian and Katherine are attending. Though their immediate pairing is like red wine and fish, by the time they get together at the end, you're left feeling as bubbly as the Poema Cava (Brut) that's being poured.

The book by Travis Kramer, Gary Negbaur & Michael Green gets the job done and if some parts are silly, such as a detour into game show territory, Holly-Anne Palmer's smooth direction gives off a pleasing bouquet.

Negbaur & Green's songs feature lyrics that are witty without being especially deep and tunes that are appealing if not particularly memorable. But neither deep nor memorable is called for here. The only significant problem is that, especially at the start, despite the cast's fine diction, the lyrics often come too fast to sink in and so whole chunks of the songwriters' efforts do not make the impression they should.

On Joshua Palmer's authentic-looking wine bar set, into which animation is well-integrated, Holly Cruz choreographed simply and effectively eschewing any need for Broadway-esque razzmatazz.

As for the wines, I thought three were very good, one was good, and two I didn't care for. But, hey, I'm a theater critic not a wine critic, so go and decide for yourself.

[This production is choreographed by Lauren Lim Jackson, and features Alex Martinez Wallace (Charles Thompson), Eli Timm (Brian), Hannah Rachal (Katherine, first weekend), and Bailey Purvis (Katherine, second weekend).]

Wieners, Meat, and Buns

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what's a good winner



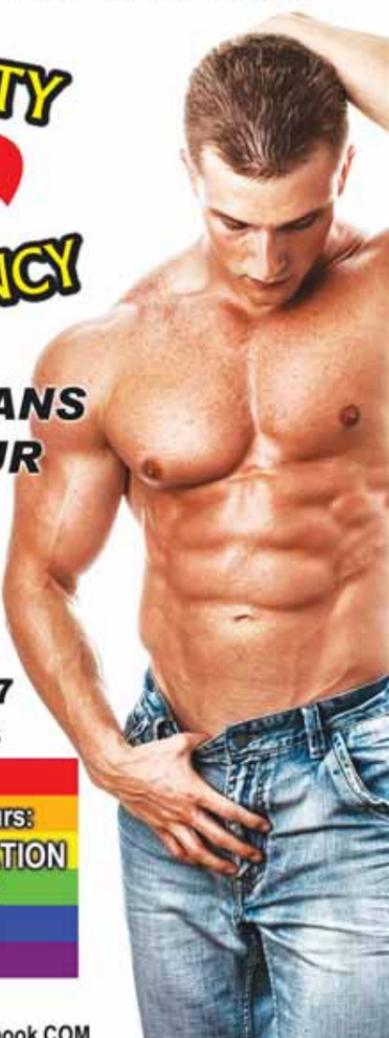
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