



## Escape to Experimental Places

*A look back at the year in alternative art spaces and exhibitions*

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This year I've been almost fully immersed in Cincinnati's contemporary art scene, specifically the subculture of alternative art galleries. I've continued my own work with the nearly 18-year-old gallery semantics in Brighton, along with U-turn Art Space, a not-for-profit space I co-founded in fall 2009 that is just up the street from its venerable

neighbor. Writing about the alternative art scene is a delicate dance; in order to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest I've omitted exhibitions I've curated or exhibited in and focused instead on projects in which I was mostly uninvolved.

Were I to only list my favorite exhibitions I saw this year, half the list would be devoted to Tony Luensman and Pam Kravetz. They've both stayed extremely busy without sacrificing thoughtfulness and quality in their endeavors.

Luensman started the year with a solo project at Over-the-Rhine's **Clay Street Press** that interwove pale, sparse prints with meditative installations of sound and light. This was quickly followed by work in a great group exhibition at Oakley's **Country Club** called *Shape Shifter*. On June 3 he did a strange, one-night photography exhibition in **ArtWorks'** new space on Central Parkway. Among the self-portraits, a particularly amusing one showed a pile-up of toy cars down his belly, halted by his scrotum held up to a light, blazing caution red. This fall, he was in a bright two-person exhibition with Paul Coors at West End's **Aisle**. Through the year, his relentlessly curious investigation into the way subtle materials can perform reached new heights.

I couldn't list all of the projects Pam Kravetz has been involved in this year. As well as exhibiting constantly, she helped coordinate the ArtsWave-sponsored "Paint the Streets" project that ran down several blocks of 12th Street. Kravetz is tireless, and that same energy fills her dense, obsessive and outlandish fabric works. Life-sized figures and doll-sized ones mounted onto kitchen appliances are embroidered with gutsy (even risqué) confessional texts spiraling all over harlequin clothes and pained facial expressions. Most memorably, three of her clownish marionettes were featured at the **Carnegie Visual and Performing Art Center's** annual *Art of Food* exhibition, each inscribed with notes about the pleasures and struggles in her personal relationship to food. Alongside the sculptures was a table heavily laden with whimsically decorated cupcakes that mimicked the aesthetic of Kravetz's fiber art.

One of my favorite spaces to keep track of this year has been **Museum Gallery/Gallery Museum** on Sycamore Street in Over-the-Rhine. They are always ready to let the unexpected offer a new spin on the meaning of what they exhibit. Shows this year have looked at new interpretations of masculinity, viral Internet memes and other Web-based pastimes, America's troubled relationship with food and different ways to apologize. Their opening receptions are the times to visit, as there is

nearly always performance art, thematic food and interesting events, in addition to the art on the walls.

Several other of this year's exhibitions have stayed with me. Reflecting on them now, there was an underlying theme of escapism and invented worlds:

**Yamini Nayar, Pearlman Gallery, Art Academy (Sept. 10-Oct 8):** The constructed rooms that Nayar photographs are symbols of rupture, deconstruction and in-between states. The photos offered views into a fantasy world of transient spaces, where Nayar retells the development of Modernism while taking non-Western culture and feminism into account.

**Matt Haber, Little Voyagers, BLDG (June 25-Aug. 6):** The Covington gallery presented Haber's crisp, confectionary paintings populated by girl-next-door characters who turn out to be burlesque bandits, caught up in mysterious narratives where they are constantly escaping by train, canoe, hot-air balloon or tugboat. Haber's work is suggestive of a school of feminist thought in which a woman is powerful by playing into the desires that are projected onto her.

**World Domination, Thunder-Sky Inc. (June 29-Aug. 17):** The first show I saw at this year-old gallery in Northside featured the work of Antonio Adams and Tony Dotson. Both artists make use of pop cultural references (Lady Gaga, Batman, Kirstie Alley, King Kong) in wilder retellings than you can imagine. I had never seen anything like this exhibition.

**John Blanco Does America, 1305 Gallery (May 28-July 25):** Blanco's impromptu performance pieces during the run of his exhibition at this Main Street gallery added extra quirk to a set of works on paper that was already very enigmatic and bizarre. Painterly glyphs and glittering kitsch collages were likably off-the-cuff.

**Nature's Stain, Aisle, (July 15-Sept. 3):** Carmel Buckley and Joel Fisher's two-person exhibition remained empirically beautiful, while totally questioning the meaning and approach of drawing marks on pages. Buckley riffed on 19th-century illustrator Harry Clarke's fairytale drawings, while Fisher fused the act of drawing into the paper he makes by hand.

It's been a transitional year in the city's alternative spaces. Several are just beginning or have recently gone through major reinvention. **CS13's** new Over-the-Rhine space at

1420 Main St. is conducive to visual art as well as their ambitious schedule of music shows. The Northside craft boutique and gallery **Fabricate**'s new, turquoise-hued location has quickly become one of the premier outposts for handmade goods by mostly local artisans.

What happened this summer at the brand new Northside House remains a mystery to me. It closed almost as soon as it opened because of some dispute with the space's landlords. But to their credit, Jonathan Sears and Chris Hoeting quickly reinvented themselves and started **parProjects**, inaugurating the new venture with a multi-venue hot-glass exhibition.

Newest to the Cincinnati art scene is the gallery/shop **YES** at 1417 Main St. Having already hosted a poetry-journal release and a Print-It-Yourself event, their clean, playful aesthetic has me intrigued to see what they bring to the city.

**<https://www.citybeat.com/arts-culture/visual-arts/article/13012775/escape-to-experimental-places>**