

November 1–19, 2005

***The Alliance of  
Pentaphilic Curators***  
*Experiment 400/5*

**Artists' Bio** The Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators is a little-known yet complicated institution whose origins are terribly important. Where other secretive curatorial enclaves might arrange one gallery experience, the Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators offers five. And then they aim to multiply that five by five. This radical union of ideas and action make the partners of the Alliance a cadre of highly sought, but carefully disguised imposters.

**Writers** Elsie Dunda, Jason's Mom  
Pete Fagundo, Modest Contemporary Art Projects (MCAP) alum  
Annette Ferrara, freelance writer and web editor of *Flavorpill*  
Judy McClelland, Teena's Mom  
David M. Sokol, Director of Museum Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago

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*At the Edge: Innovative Art in Chicago* series showcases new works by Chicago artists that push the boundaries of art experimentation and that are notably difficult to show in commercial spaces. Six artists or artist collaborations have been selected to present projects expressly made for *At the Edge* exhibition that include curated exhibitions/projects, solo gallery exhibitions and, new to the program last year, public projects. An essay commissioned from a local critic, writer or historian accompanies all *At the Edge* projects.



***at  
the edge***

*innovative art in chicago*

University of Illinois at Chicago  
**GALLERY 400**  
College of Architecture and the Arts  
School of Art and Design

## Pentaphilics Run Roughshod Over University Gallery's Curatorial Conventions

CHICAGO, IL – A renegade group of provocateurs going by the name of the Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators has overtaken the University of Illinois at Chicago's Gallery 400 this November, shattering long-held curatorial mores and imploding hard-and-fast exhibition standards in an aesthetic free-for-all known as Experiment 400/5. While no one suffered bodily harm during the 20-day siege, gallery director Lorelei Stewart complained of "disorientation and a sneaking suspicion of being duped" by the actions of Jason Dunda and Teena McClelland, co-founders of the Alliance.

Dunda and McClelland started fomenting plans for the disruptive and yet very humorous Alliance during a class they co-taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a prestigious art degree-granting institution of higher learning. The premise of *Experiment 400/5* is simple at the same time it is complex: utter curatorial chaos caused by putting out an open call to artists of the emerging to established varieties to display whatever the hell they want in one of five rooms, or on one of five tables, five shelves, five walls, or five television sets, over the course of 125 blocks of three exhibition days each. Whew.

McClelland, outfitted in an important-looking lab coat and hard hat and grasping a clipboard in an officious yet precocious manner, recalls the inspiration thusly: "It just kinda came to us after

finally arrived and made short work of my questions and confusions. It was perfect... a reflection of how things are. I thought of activity. I thought of ants, ants alone, ants together. I thought of what we do and why. "... the ladder stays..." Jason said. The ladder stays to signal the truth of the project: that we see in this experiment the cumulative work of many making objects. We see that showing in the end is just that. We see that sometimes some of us work hard to find meaning and that sometimes some of us just don't show up. Modesty here is replaced by our accumulation. Our practices, our beliefs, our meanings do change; yet we remain active in concert with galleries and shows, as well as in spite of them.

—Pete Fagundo

work's "strengths." I learned a great deal thanks to this opportunity.

Fast-forward four years. Jason has teamed up with Teena McClelland to form the Alliance of Pentaphilic



Curators. I walked into Gallery 400 to find yellow hard hats, white lab coats and a very tall aluminum ladder spiking the interior of cubicles, monitors, shelves and plinths. I felt as though I caught the show in an embarrassing, pre-opening, pants-down condition. No one seemed to be around, so I decided to have a look.

Hearts, souls, minds, hands... emails? There was art, to be sure, but I couldn't get my bearings. There was a gigantic hand-scrawled calendar on one wall with slots holding dates and names. The wide range of names and the objects visible in the space spoke of democracy. The printed emails, politely berating the makers of the promised (but absent) work, and the empty slots in the calendar were the missing bricks in the walls of this conceptual structure. Punched holes in the community, as it were. Jason

a few beers. I never thought Lorelei [Stewart] would go for it. I'm really shocked, to tell you the truth." Her more nonplussed yet similarly garbed collaborator, Dunda, agreed, adding, "We still have some slots to fill. You have anything you'd like to show?"



According to American Dental Association President, Richard Haught, DDS, pentaphilia, or an unholy love of the number five, is "often mistaken for pedophilia, or an unholy love of five-year-olds, a more serious neurosis that typically manifests itself mainly in Men of the Cloth." Symptoms of pentaphilia include a marked tendency toward multiplying five by five ad nauseum and ad infinitum. Pentaphilics with artistic leanings additionally manifest a startling lack of respect for the ways and means of connoisseurship.

Highly respected curators, such as an unnamed James W. Alsdorf, Senior Curator at the Museum

of Contemporary Art, Chicago, are fuming at the blatant disregard Dunda and McClelland have shown for the curatorial process. “Where are their themes? What about concerns over quality and meaning? What are their credentials?” “Their open-ended methodologies and casual, tongue-in-cheek attitudes are appalling,” adds the Frances and Thomas Ditmer Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, who requested anonymity. The illustrious Dean of the College of Architecture and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago, would not comment.

As of press time, neither Dunda or McClelland have shown remorse, although McClelland did confide that she “could use some sleep” and Dunda remarked that it was “kinda cool that our lab coats have slits so you can put your hands in your jeans’ pockets.” Stewart, reportedly, is writing and rewriting her resignation on Gallery 400’s bathroom walls.

—Annette Ferrara

## Imitation is the Highest Form of Praise

When I was a third grade teacher the art projects were few and far between. The ones I remember led to one enthused student zooming away at a wonderfully creative project. After a few minutes of working the artist would show the teacher, classmates, and the world (with satisfaction) what they had come up with—by the end of the 50 minute class period you would see 15 more “wantabees” that were obvious copies of the inspired work. The

small works by fellow MFAs were shown tongue in cheek, sort of. The space, Modest Contemporary Art Projects (MCAP), had Jason’s nervous, serious underneath, laugh-in-the-end fervor and a satisfying easiness. I remember thinking how clever the idea was... Bazooka Joe Curatorial with rigor. MCAP eventually found a new home in a grander venue, a storage closet in Jason’s beautifully stuffed Pilsen apartment. I was flattered to make the inaugural show in this comparatively vast and complicated space. My MCAP was not completely successful. Jason being supportive and kind focused on the



could not help but feel some bonding. The themes of Jason's paintings are common to us all, and I think that they would promote a sense of unity by reminding us of the backgrounds that we all share: comic books, cartoons, toys and the mice that inhabit our dwellings.

Briefly returning to Jason's youth, I remember at age three, every day he would bring home a painting from school. Recently, his paintings have evolved and his productivity has declined, but I suppose this happens to us all as we get older. Jason's artistic inspiration was enhanced, at an early age, by his comic book collection, which also led to his love of the written word.

I greatly admire the tremendous effort Jason puts forth in his art, whether it is setting up this most recent project or finishing his paintings for an upcoming show. Jason's brother James and I always look forward to the opening night of Jason's shows. One could not find a mother in attendance more proud than I. I regret that I have been unable to visit and see *Experiment 400/5*. I look forward to hearing about it, and reading positive reviews. I am sure that Teena and Jason will be rewarded for their hard work.

—Elsie Dunda

## Hearts, Souls, Minds, Hands... Emails?

Jason had the nicest studio in the Painting department, and in a corner of the entryway was a thigh high podium, a short breath of a space, where

original artist would be irate, and reasonably so... the only comfort I could give was to say, "It is a compliment for others to like your work so much that they copy it."

I have noticed several outcomes of this early elementary school artistic experience: The artist goes underground, never letting others see their work for fear of a "knockoff" of their piece being created. Where is the fun in that?? If you have created it, you want to share it and you are letting the "copycatters" keep you from your glee.

Another result is that the artist will go for the edge. So far to the edge of art that no one wants to follow? No one is sure if this new work will be accepted. Those "edgy" artists do their thing to such an extreme that people say, "Is that ART?"

Third is the problem of the artist's boredom, creating nothing new or different. Then you become your own worst enemy—whether you are creating nothing for fear of being copied or because you do not like being criticized. Boring—that is really the only thing that art should never be—artists shouldn't stagnate.

One goal of *Experiment 400/5* is to see and represent as many artists and their visionary works as possible. What an impetus for creating a new edge... what fun, what inspiration, what enchantment! I believe each of us can be an inspiration to help others to grow. There is room for all because there are so many different types of beauty and resourcefulness.

Even if you are no longer 9 years old, many of your habits may be rooted in your childhood. I hope this project and those like it will continue to flourish, because as we assist each other we enrich our own talent and our own lives.

—*Judy McClelland*

## Artist, Market, Society

I am greatly honored to be asked to participate in the very first *Experiment 400/5* by the distinguished founders of the Alliance of Pentaphilic Curators, and to have the privilege of seeing the work of those artists who chose to exhibit and wondering why others did not.

So, the big questions are:

1. Why would an artist exhibit in a non-juried (or semi-juried show)?
2. What kind of art is most suitable for the limitations of the space, time, and process?
3. What do artists want for their professional reputation?
4. Given the number of well-trained and talented artists, how does any given person make a mark?
5. Whither the arts?

The research provoked by the idea of this exhibit and the review of that which was submitted (or not) produces the following answers, which the reader can apply to the above questions as appropriate:

1. According to a recently published report by the Rand Foundation, the world of artists can be divided into those who produce “original work intended for viewing and purchasing,” and those whose

turn into a social experiment. I encourage all the participants to heed the famous words of Rodney King: “Can’t we all just get along?” All kidding aside, the pictures I have seen of Jason



and Teena in their lab coats and safety equipment reflect the experimental side of the show they have assembled. The gallery spaces within the gallery, in my understanding, are truly a unique concept. I look forward to hearing about how this concept was received by the 125 artists who participated in the show.

I expect that if Jason were displaying some of his own paintings, the other artists in his group

to earn a living.

7. In my course on American Artists and Their Identities, this semester, painter Kerry James Marshall noted, “artists study the art of the past, not only to develop their tools, but also so they can understand what made the great ones those we remember today.” He opined that artists want to be the ones in the history books of the future.

8. Artists can paint, sculpt, photograph, use their bodies, talk, read, write: this exhibition is proof of that.

9. The artists who submitted their art, in whatever medium, and those who came and performed, and those who chose not to participate, are all trying to find their identity and make their mark: to be the artists we will remember.

The viewer and the reader must decide whether or not they have succeeded....

—David M. Sokol

## I’m Very Proud of My Son: Some Thoughts From Jason’s Mom

Jason was such a precocious child. Why, I remember once when he was very young he got his head stuck behind a... Oh, I don’t suppose I have the space to discuss this here—I will cut to the chase.

I understand the art scene is spirited and includes other forms of treachery. Will randomly putting five artists together promote a greater sense of creativity, understanding and acceptance? Or will it create a scene akin to a 50 Cent rap video? I fear (or is it hope?) that this artistic experiment may

“ultimate goal for their work is a live performance.”

2. The 2000 Census Bureau estimated that there were close to 250,000 painters, sculptors, printmakers, and craft artists in 2000. If we add in photographers, and others whose work transcends the areas, the number jumps by over 100,000 additional people.

3. The artist who is immediate past-president of the College Art Association, Michael Auerbach, notes that about 1,500 people come to the CAA meetings looking for positions teaching art or art history, with the vast majority of them being artists.

4. The CAA reports that there are about 200 MFA programs in the United States, with some having over 100 students enrolled at any one time.

5. It seems probable that if every person teaching art in a college, university or art school suddenly retired at one time, new M.F.A. holders could fill all the positions and still leave many of them unemployed.

6. Artists need to exhibit to get and maintain teaching positions and/or gallery representation, and

