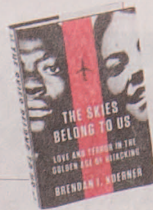
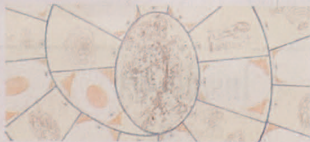


The drawings of Alice Aycock. BY KAREN ROSENBERG

At Grolier, the beauty of the botanical. BY KEN JOHNSON



The Bonnie and Clyde of skyjacking, back when it was trendy. BY DWIGHT GARNER

## Weekend Arts II

The New York Times

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2013 C23

### Still an Appetite For Buying

BASEL, Switzerland — Within a five-minute walk from Art Basel, the world's leading fair for contemporary art, is a small upstairs space frozen in the not-so-contemporary 1970s. Mirrors and imitation wood paneling line the walls. A patchwork of African textiles covers the furniture, and the floors are a mix of linoleum, wood and carpeting. There is a bar, too, with lava lamps and a fake copper ceiling. Hits by Aretha Franklin, Donna Summer and Diana Ross play every night at ear-piercing decibels.

CAROL VOGEL

INSIDE ART

On Wednesday morning, standing in the middle of it all dressed in baggy pants and a T-shirt was Mickalene Thomas, the 42-year-old Brooklyn artist who created the environment here. She calls it "Better Days" after a group of her

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COURTESY OF CLAES OLDENBURG AND PAULA COOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK

Art Basel Claes Oldenburg's "Scissors Monument Cut-Out."

### In the Same Boat, But Not Equals

When *The Last of Us* begins, it pretends to be a video game about a teenager in Texas named Sarah, the kind of girl who wears rock T-shirts and loves her daddy and is impossible to find as a playable character in nearly every game ever made.

CHRIS SUELLENTROP

VIDEO GAME REVIEW

This being a video game, we already know it's not really about Sarah. She's not pictured on the box, for one thing. And yet, for a few fleeting minutes, I really did think I was going to play something different, a game that would transport me into the life of someone very unlike me, using what Austin Grossman in his new novel, "You," calls the medium's "physical link into the world of the fictional."

Then, as so often happens in video games, Sarah was gone.

The *Last of Us*, a new post-apocalyptic zombie drama for the PlayStation 3, was hailed, with

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La Biennial 2013: Here Is Where We Jump A detail of "Wallscape," fashioned on site by the artist Pavel Acosta from paint scrapings, at El Museo del Barrio.

## A Constellation of Identities, Winking and Shifting

International art biennials can be lavish affairs, with big budgets, big art and participants flying in from hither and yon. But in the present lean times, even high-profile shows are feeling a pinch, and local ones like "La Biennial 2013," at El Museo del Barrio, survive simply as labors of love on the part of all concerned.

HOLLAND COTTER

ART REVIEW

Like many small public museums, El Museo has basically no money, or very little. How the place keeps its lights on, I don't know. But as the major museum devoted to Latino art and culture in this Latino city, it is indispensable, and knows that,

and does what it has to do to keep moving. And so the seventh edition of its biennial, this one with the proactive title "Here Is Where We Jump," has arrived.

It's a show with few long-distance travelers; although many of its 37 artists were born elsewhere, most live and work in New York. And most of that work is modest in its materials and size, scaled to small studios.

Despite, or maybe even because of, such limitations, the show is a good one, thoughtful and personal, uneven in parts, solid as a whole.

It's also a product of that old-fashioned thing, the ethnically specific museum. Even with

definitions of ethnicity stretched all kinds of ways — what does "Latino" really mean anymore, anyway? — the issue of identity remains at the core of such institutions, and informs much of the work in this show.

In a sense, this is another handicap. The New York art market, in thrall to fat-cat formalism, has long since turned its back on identity-as-content. Yet, as anyone aware of the storms surrounding immigration laws knows, who you are and where you came from continue to be matters of life-shaping importance, and the exhibition treats them that way.

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SUZANNE DeCHILLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

## A Vision That's Not Quite a Snap

It is best not to look too closely at Edvard Munch's screamer at the exhibition "The Art of the Brick," which

opened this week at Discovery Times Square. Because then you would see that the head is pieced together out of beige and white Lego blocks, their studs protruding. Leonardo's "Mona Lisa," on display nearby, has a smoother surface, composed of 4,573 "bricks" (as they are called by aficionados), but you'd never mistake

EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

EXHIBITION REVIEW

The Art of the Brick "Face Mask," a Nathan Sawaya sculpture in this show at Discovery Times Square.

it for the original — the overall effect is more allusion than illusion.

The portrait's creator, Nathan Sawaya, seems perfectly content with that. He has snapped together a Legoistic survey of art masterpieces, along with galleries of original constructions. In varied forms, this show of his work has appeared in other cities

and toured internationally but has never been shown in New York.

Everything is built from Lego blocks using only the colors that Danish company makes available. And mostly, it looks it. Mr. Sawaya proudly notes on the "Mona Lisa" label that "a blurred photo of the brick replica version could easily be mistaken for a blurred photo of the original."

Such a mistake is less likely with Vermeer's "Girl With a Pearl Earring"

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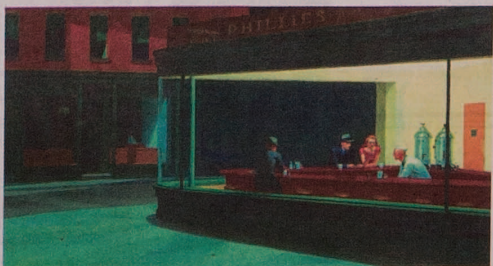
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Edvard Hopper (1892-1967), *Whisperers*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 47 1/2 in. (BAA 1952.67). The Art Institute of Chicago. Friends of American Art. Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.





PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINDA ROSIER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, "OBD," a painting by Alex Nuñez invoking that rapper; right, Ignacio González-Lang's "Guess Who," a photographic grouping of composite drawings of suspects.

## A Constellation of Identities, Winking and Shifting

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The approach can be subtle, oblique and wry, as in a tabletop installation of sculptures in the first gallery. The table is from Ikea; the sculptures — of human heads, a skull and a few animal forms — could be either home-decorator accessories or pre-Columbian grave finds. The piece, a witty little altar to middle-class chic and the dead, is by Miguel Cárdenas, born in 1985 in Bogotá, Colombia, and one of several 20-somethings here for whom ethnic identity is an outfit to be lightly worn, mixed and matched with other identities, and continually updated.

A nearby piece by Alex Nuñez, born in 1984 in Miami, mixes its messages in a similar way. A collage painting of a large, smiling face, it's based on a photograph of the rapper Russell Tyrone Jones, a.k.a. Ol' Dirty Bastard, or ODB, a founding member of the Wu-Tang Clan, who died of a drug overdose in 2004 at the age of 35. In Ms. Nuñez's portrait, he's both a clown and a king: his smile is goofy, but with his empty eyes and gold-leaf skin, he is as monumental as a Mesoamerican funerary mask.

It's interesting how young artists introduce darkness into their art, indirectly, with a slight delay.

In El Museo's lobby, a wall drawing by Ernest Concepción, born in 1977 in the Philippines, depicts El Museo and buildings farther east caught up in a kind of whirlwind. It's a fantastic image, out of a digital disaster film, but with a grain of factuality: the barrio really is being blown apart by gentrification.

Change, alternately viewed as progress or destruction, is the essence of El Museo's history. Virtually since it opened in 1969 as an artist-run space in an East Harlem storefront, debates have arisen over its mission. Was it to provide what was then a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood with a museum to call its own? Or to give Latino artists a platform from which to shout for recognition in the city's larger art world?

When the institution moved in 1977 to its current building, on Fifth Avenue at 104th Street, putting physical distance between itself and the barrio, proprietorial tensions increased. They've been a source of discord and splintering; at the same time, they've kept this institution off balance in a productive way, preventing it from settling into a fixed vision of what a "Latino" institution should be, keeping it both local and cosmopolitan. In a sense, not quite knowing what to do with identity, and using confusion creatively, is the institutional story here, and it's reflected in the biennial.

In any given gallery we find identity-intensive work in proximity with work that appears to be, in ethnic terms, identity-free. In one gallery a mask and headdress made from street finds by Sean Paul Gallegos addresses Native American heritage, while abstract sculptures by Gabriela Salazar seem to be about getting formally inventive with studio scraps.

Ignacio González-Lang's "Khinatown," a black fabric sculpture in the form of a Ku Klux Klansman, is shot through with histories of racial violence; knitted sculptures of human anatomical parts by Kathleen Granados also refer to histories, but different ones, including the history of feminism.

Three vivid sculptures by Alejandro Guzmán, assembled from plastic flowers, mirrors, feathers and cowrie shells and designed for street performances, evoke an Afro-Caribbean urban culture that once defined much barrio art. By contrast, a cool homage to Barnett Newman by G. T. Pellizzi, in the form of a reconstituted version of a once-vandalized Newman painting, seems to be primarily about museum-enshrined Modernism, and would read that way in any biennial anywhere.

Or would it? Does it really read that way here? Mr. Pellizzi's painting is made from plywood, the stuff of construction sites, not from canvas. His version of Newman's allover blue is the black-blue of police uniforms. In the context of El Museo, painting feels less like a vehicle for metaphysical contemplation than like a blank wall on which the smudgy diaristic drawings of



ONLINE: LA BIENAL 2013

More images from this show at El Museo del Barrio: [nytimes.com/design](http://nytimes.com/design)

Kenny Rivera might advantageously be arranged, or like a screen onto which the colonialist histories of Latin America referred to by other artists — Hector Arce-Espadas, Ramón Miranda Beltrán and Christopher Rivera — might be projected.

Some of this history-driven work is overly didactic or unresolved, but the institutional context does sharpen it, and further strengthens art that is already strong. The self-punishing performances of Elan Jurado, an artist born in 1982 in Texas, have clear sources in the earlier endurance art of Chris Burden and others, but Mr. Jurado's work, seen here in videos, adds new content to the genre. A piece called "Spew," in which the artist repeatedly drinks and violently spits out a black liquid until he is drenched, exhausted and choking, calls up many associations, including certain Abstract Expressionist paintings. But the racial implications of the work stand out in a show that takes race as one of its themes. (Mr. Jurado originally titled it "Black Spew" and paired it with a corresponding "White Spew.")

Similarly, work by Paula Garcia, one of four Brazilian artists in the biennial, assumes particular meanings here. In a video of a performance from a series called "Noise Body," the artist, dressed in a bulky, heavily magnetized body suit, stands encased in pieces of metal that adhere to her figure. She looks like a robotic conquistador, armored by the very weapons that assault her.

Organized by Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, a curator at El Museo, and Raúl Zamudio, an independent curator, the biennial concludes with work by two artists of different generations installed in the museum's permanent-collection gallery. Manny Vega, born in 1956 in the Bronx and renowned for his street murals and beaded sculptures based on Afro-Caribbean masks, has three wonderful drawings here, including one of the musician Tito Puente. Mr. Vega was part of El Museo in the early days and conveys and preserves its originating Nuyorican sensibility.

The second artist, Pavel Acosta, was born in 1980 in Havana. There, with art supplies hard to come by, he developed a method of composing paintings, collage-fashion, from chips of old paint flaking off city walls. He brings the same technique to a piece called "Wallscape" at El Museo. Its image is based on a terrific 1988 painting in the collection by the Dominican artist Manuel Macarrulla, ostensibly of a tropical carnival but really a commentary on colonialist intrusions into the Caribbean. Mr. Acosta stripped white paint from the gallery wall opposite the wall where Mr. Macarrulla's picture hangs, then painstakingly recreated its image from the scrapings, supplementing a dynamic existing art with a mirroring ghost that will haunt the gallery until the biennial is over, then disappear.

"Wallscape" is, in its exquisite way, an epic performance, a lesson in creative economy, a tribute to existing art, an acknowledgment of ethnicity and its politics, an exercise in personal mastery, and an expression of love for all of that.



Above left, Ernest Concepción working on his wall drawing "Doom Machine"; above right, Mr. González-Lang's "Khinatown," evoking a Ku Klux Klan outfit embroidered by a Mexican immigrant; left, Sean Paul Gallegos's "Ethnoprism" (left and center) and "Reserved Ancestry"; below, Alejandro Guzmán's "The Red-Tailed Hawk" in El Barrio," left, and "The Flirt."



"La Bienal 2013: Here Is Where We Jump" continues through Jan. 4 at El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue, at 104th Street, East Harlem; (212) 631-7272, [elmuseo.org](http://elmuseo.org).