Art Trail/CT

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art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes it visible
“I had no clue—really, I just cannot imagine what I’ve been thinking all of these years.” If I collected a U.S. silver dollar every time I heard this confessional phrase, I would certainly now own a stack of currency in a glittering vault at Fort Knox. These ‘oh my God’ mini-epiphanies erupt while we are climbing back into my school’s van, usually used by tennis or debate team squads. Unexpected ‘aha!’ magic moment concludes the first class ‘road trip’ to one of Connecticut’s infinitely rewarding museums or heritage sites.

Just as I am turning the ignition key and adjusting the CD player/radio volume (“can you please turn down those scratchy Grateful Dead bootlegs Dr. E?”) the chorus from the back three rows begins. “I am so amazed,” says Amanda, a 19 year old junior Nutmegger. Raised somewhere in the suburban wilderness straddling the Post Road from Greenwich to Groton, her tunnel vision only saw sprawling retail chains relentlessly exploiting shopping weaknesses. Pulling her iPod plug from her ears, beaming with a youthful sense of self-awareness, her quizzical half smile comes out with: “this is everything opposite of the mall ... Then there’s Charlotte, a 43 year seeker at the crossroads. “It’s difficult for me to re-trace my steps realizing I just never made the time or had the motivation to venture out of my backyard. I’m determined to explore more of the masterpieces at our fingertips around Connecticut,” she admits.

She’s a ‘back to college’, housewife from Weston with two middle-school aged teenagers.

“Making a living, paying the bills and college tuitions, took priority – and I am going to do catching up now,” he declares in a perky manner. Another 5-8 students completes the road-art trail/CT
trip team, each anticipating stepping through the door’s of unknown cultural venues.

Sequenced into the cycle of semesters, I have the privilege on an annual basis to venture out of the classroom to Connecticut’s virtual “museum without walls.” Normally, my Art History students sit with digital projection amidst the gloomy window-shades down, lights out lecture hall, affectionately dubbed “Darkness at Noon” by legions of wistful undergraduates.

Instead of nodding off in this Stygian darkness, studying sharply focused simulations of paintings by John Trumbull, Winslow Homer, or Jasper Johns, we wander out onto Connecticut’s Art Trail, fifteen world-class museums and historic sites. [take a look at the Connecticut Commission for Culture & Tourism’s informative web site at: arttrail.org and other cultural activities: cultureandtourism.org]. This geographic thread allows each art pilgrim the pleasures of engagement, enlightenment, and ineffable pleasure.

And rather than listen to my droning voice at the lectern, students are enriched by the talented education curators, docents, and volunteers who are always willing to share their unrestrained passion and pride for their museums. It’s a win/win.

Along the road, up and down Connecticut’s interstates and country lanes, my student travelers come to individual moments of aesthetic revelation. Illumination comes with three credits on a transcript, but it’s so much more. This is not a miraculous transformation of water into wine, but it converts consumers into believers in our class motto: “Art Really Matters.”

In this odyssey, we swiftly encounter basic assumptions of all those ‘great ideas’ from dead white male patriarchs of knowledge. From the dog-eared pages from old ‘classic’ books, (too often discarded into heaps at library tag sales,) these hallowed voices have somehow lost their resonance. It’s an essential leap connecting students whose cultural icons are Snoop Dogg, Lady Gaga, or ‘Twilight’ saga, vampire heart-throb Robert Pattinson.

More at home dancing at an orgiastic rave, the value of art chiseled into the gleaming marble columns of western civilization is a daunting challenge. The story began with Aristotle’s recognition that as humans we take “delight...
in works of imitation.” And keeping an open mind, Aristotle would have included Andy Warhol’s faux painted Brillo and Del Monte boxes. Greek philosophy explained how “mimesis” is all about taking one image and making it into something else.

A good ‘how to’ instructional guide to prepare you for this road trip is Sarah Thornton’s sassy book, “Seven Days in the Art World.” In this hilariously written romp, she chronicles a motley network of bohemians, fashionistas, financial moguls, museum curators, vain collectors, and those truly inspired artists and collectors for whom aesthetic pleasure is the only reward. She holds a Ph.D. in cultural sociology and doesn’t pull any punches. In her uber-savvy voice, she launches into her critique of the gallery-museum-artist-dealer network. From her viewpoint, the “art world is a kind of alternative religion for atheists.”

Suddenly unplugged from their ubiquitously chirping social networking devices, weaned away from texting, tweeting, or googling, class members feel it’s a refreshing change of pace to visit a museum. A good place to start might be at the nation’s oldest continuously operating institution, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Horses and buggies were passing by its front door along Hartford’s Main Street in 1844 when Daniel Wadsworth pioneered the idea of a public art museum. New York’s Metropolitan Museum and Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts would not open their doors until 1872 and 1876 respectively.

“I’m embarrassed I never came here,” unties their tongues after our first hour of touring. Amongst its crown jewels, the Wadsworth displays the first Caravaggio painting ever purchased by a U.S. museum in 1943. It is an eerily lit meditation on St. Francis of Assisi experiencing a moment of ecstasy with a lovingly attentive male angel caressing his limp body, selected by the Wadsworth’s flamboyant director, “Chick” Austin. A waltz through the newly installed Hudson River School galleries in the Colt building is compelling evidence why art connoisseurs arrive daily from every continent to marvel at this unique collection of American treasures.

The effect is dumbfounding; how did Thomas Cole capture the aura of New England’s autumn? Where did Frederic Church learn to master atmospheric effects of sunlight and surf? What motivated Albert Bierstadt to ride on horse-back

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WILLIAM CHADWICK, Bathers at Griswold Beach, c. 1915, oil on artist board, 4 1/8 x 18 inches, Florence Griswold Museum, Gift of the Artist, X1972.207
Always a show stopper is Frederic Church’s breathtaking view of “West Rock” at New Haven of 1849. Time stands still at this geological formation well known to rushing commuters on the Merritt Parkway today before entering its blasted tunnel. But once upon a time, Church was able to use Connecticut’s pastoral setting for a visual pun. The painting was purchased by transatlantic cable entrepreneur Cyrus W. Field.

on a U.S. Calvary expedition out to the Wyoming territory to sketch Native American tribes in the Rockies before the Civil War? Talk about authenticity, here’s the real story of the West from an eyewitness.

Knowing how many really questionable Salvador Dali works are out there, [caveat emptor bargain hunters or Estate sale bloodhounds, the majority are pathetically inferior fakes], its wonderful to study a bona-fide Surrealist work of genius. The “apparition” plays with our cognitive abilities to sort out a torrent of pairs, faces, and a dog in a hallucinogenic dream along the sandy beaches of Dali’s native Catalonian village of Figueres.

Upstairs, Andrew Wyeth’s haunting egg tempera masterpieces captures his mother in law’s final breaths before eternity. Listen to the silence as she hears the wind through the curtains echoed through a chambered nautilus. Goosebumps will run up the small of your spine. Wyeth’s brushwork is unerring as poetry transits painting. With delicate restraint he plays each modulated white and grey brushstroke like YoYo Ma fingering a long sonorous chord into a whisper.

Enchantment continues at Old Lyme’s Florence Griswold Museum. The National Historic Landmark was the congenial boarding house of Miss Florence Griswold who hosted America’s Impressionist painters. As Connecticut’s ‘frozen in time’ version of Monet’s country estate at Giverny, we enter a living ‘en plein air’ canvas. The idyllic setting along the marshy paradise of the Lieutenant River has become a shrine where art and nature are preserved with an exquisite intelligence.

Its blossoming campus is truly “more than the sum of its parts,” according to its visionary Director, Jeffrey Andersen. Ironically, the roaring traffic on nearby I-95 carries millions of casino-bound gamblers and revelers, but only a handful care to make a short detour to discover the really priceless treasures by Childe Hassam, Theodore Robinson, or William Chadwick on view. Good taste can be taught to many a Liza Doolittle cruising the Clinton Crossing Outlets or the slot machines.

Another itinerary stop takes us to one of the most unlikely Meccas for fine art, the New Britain Museum of American Art. Looping off a tangle of interstates, there’s boarded up factories and empty storefronts bearing evidence of gritty

economic hardships. So the contrast of this stunning, newly renovated museum, is even more surprising. In 1903 the nation’s first museum dedicated entirely to American art opened in New Britain. That was a full generation before Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney even imagined her namesake museum in Manhattan. From doughty colonial portraits to modern masterworks by Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, Stuart Davis, Thomas Hart Benton, Robert Motherwell (Greenwich), and Robert Cottingham (Newtown), the NBMAA guarantees incredulous responses. With the backseat gang all nodding—“Who woulda’ thought this even existed?”—is their shared review. Always a showstopper is Frederic Church’s breathtaking view of “West Rock” at New Haven of 1849. Time stands still at this geological formation well known to rushing commuters...tunnel. But once upon a time, Church was able to use Connecticut’s pastoral setting for a visual pun. The painting was purchased by transatlantic cable entrepreneur Cyrus W. Field (note the prominence of a haywagon in the “field”) and in a self-referential note, a non-existing “church” steeple breaks the horizon beneath the massive rock formation. Concluding this peripatetic syllabus, we usually leave The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum as our last stop. With its stately whitewashed homes and colonial era churches, leafy Ridgefield is a perfect stage set for encountering the complexities and contradictions of post-modernism. Without fail, our experiences observing the art of the ‘Now’ are always thought-provoking and refreshing. As one of America’s premier showcases for launching the careers of next-generation artistic trend-setters, its imaginative curatorial programs robustly compete toe-to-toe against the major urban contemporary venues around the nation. For those who squint and...make any sense” is generally part of the back to campus drive down Route 33. “Sure,” I reply, “but look how poignantly all those ambiguities mirror issues conflicting our society.” One student shouts out—“you mean like all our wars?” while an older taxpayer says: “how did we end up with an $8 billion deficit in our state”? Another girl’s voice drops: “I can’t believe how deep in debt I will be by the time I graduate—why can’t education be supported more?” As the van pulls into the parking lot at the end of the day, with conviction our class mantra rises in unison: “Art Really Matters!”

The Aldrich is one of the few non-collecting contemporary art museums in the United States. Founded on Ridgefield’s historic Main Street in 1964, the Museum enjoys the curatorial independence of an alternative space while maintaining the registrarial and art-handling standards of a national institution. Exhibitions feature work by emerging and mid-career artists, and education programs help adults and children to connect with the Museum’s exhibitions. For more information call 203.438.4519.
crash

from the 4 train to fenders

a retrospective

by ANNA MATOS

2011, Art History Major, Department of Visual & Performing Arts, Daughter of CRASH, and Walsh Gallery Intern
Starting in his teen years, my dad spray-painted his first subway car. Fast-forward almost 30 years later, and he still spray paints, but now it is on a canvas, or even a Fender guitar. Evolution is inevitable in art, but it’s hard to find an artist who remains true to his roots in the face of success. My dad is one such artist.

“CRASH”—named after a computer glitch that happened after he turned on the computer in school—is known around the world by that name, but to me, he has always been “Dad.” As this feature is a retrospective of his artistic career, it’s also like a big photo album of my childhood. Some of my earliest memories have been of my dad taking me to his studio in the South Bronx, and being given pastels and a small canvas to entertain myself as he created monstrous works on his canvas with spray paint.

Drawing from other artists like James Rosenquist, Jasper Johns, and Robert Longo, he took graffiti from the subways and the streets and brought it to the forefront of the art world. You can call him “a street kid who got lucky,” but I have always seen my dad as someone who had a vision and went for it—regardless of where he came from or how he did it.

But don’t try to pigeonhole my dad either. He has always experimented with different media and techniques. Our house and his studio are filled with spray paint of course, but also oil paints, acrylics, pastels, watercolors, etc. His style can’t be called one thing—realistic, figurative, collage, or abstract—it all blends into one that is uniquely his. Colors of pop art, the immediacy of expressionism, almost cubist-like segmentation—all spill onto the canvas like pieces of a puzzle for you to look at and read.

His art has always been evolving and changing. From the old New York City trains to his most recent ventures—the Crashocasters, his evolution, according to him, has been deliberate. Like the graffiti itself, it was constantly new, changing, and anything but slow, Stuart Pivar, founder of the New York Academy of Art, has said, “His is a lavish gift to the eyes and a statement in time and space that celebrates the movements and change of an ever-changing world.” He jumps from one thing to the next, but it is always calculated. The Crashocast-

“a lavish gift to the eyes and a statement in time and space that celebrates the movements and change of an ever-changing world.”

—Stuart Pivar, founder of the New York Academy of Art
Eventually my dad’s career had to include music. I can’t remember a time when music wasn’t playing as he painted. Most of our conversations are about music. Designing clothes and bags is also now part of his career. It just goes to show how art is affected by and can affect other forms of expression.

John Leguizamo, a famous stage and film actor from movies such as Moulin Rouge, Summer of Sam, and Ice Age as well as a school friend of my dad’s, has said, “He could have gone elsewhere; but no, he stands up for, and defends, the graffiti artist in each and every one of his works. They have the power to uplift you, awe you, and even punch you! Is that not what art is? Graffiti is the art of the people. Maybe that is the reason my dad is still so down to earth—for him, art is for the people, so why act as if you are not one of them? I have always admired my dad for that, even if I don’t tell it to him that much. He can’t afford to get a big head; no one knows that like me). But no matter how popular his art ever gets, he is still that same teen from the South Bronx sneaking into the train yards at night to have fun. He may be in a studio now, and have as much time as he wants to create, and there may be no sirens and police chases, but there may always be that sense of danger. To me, he will always be my dad, dragging me along to his studio with pastels and a little canvas for me to draw on.

But now, this is my show as much as it is his. This is the atmosphere I grew up in, and it will always be a part of me. It has shaped, in some way, who I am. I will always be my father’s daughter. Sitting in the studio drawing while he painted. Only today, I am standing tall in a gallery, filled with my childhood memories. I am proud to be the daughter of CRASH, and always will be. So I welcome all of you here, and as John Leguizamo said, “I am the real victor, and all those who visit my abode (and) witness the Power of CRASH.” Enjoy, and get ready to be in awe.

**bronx bomber: crash**

Most people conjure up bronzed headstones with plaques out in Yankee Stadium’s centerfield when the fabled careers of Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, and Mickey Mantle come to mind. The legendary spirits of those pin-striped stars are eternally enshrined in that public space. But somewhere on another ‘field of dreams,’ out in a bizarre landscape where a razor-sharp boundary separates the barbed wire of the Metropolitan Transit Authority’s rail yards and the venues of major international museums and galleries, John (CRASH) Matos casts his long shadow. Fairfield University was honored to pay tribute to one of the graffiti-All Stars, the Bronx Bomber of the art world: CRASH.

A breakout ‘rookie season’ show for the 20-year-old artist was staged in 1981 at Real Art Ways, an alternative loft space in downtown Hartford, Conn. The next year he was invited to Fashion Moda, a collective arts space near The Hub at 147th St.
3803 Third Avenue where urban blight was being transformed with a flowering of street art. CRASH really ‘swung for the fences’ in 1984 being invited to show in one of Manhattan’s hottest art venues: the Sidney Janis Gallery. Janis was the birthplace of Pop art where superstars like Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist were shown in the landmark ‘New Realism’ show of 1962.

Along the way, CRASH painted backdrops and murals for the Twyla Tharp dance group (1981), the Casino de Ibiza (1992), the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo (1994), and the new Esplanade in Singapore (2005). The transit cops, the art collectors, and the museum curators have not stopped chasing him. His newest images are as explosively fresh and dynamic as works dating to his ‘breaking in’ phase 30 years ago.

Establishing a global visibility beyond his Puerto Rican heritage in the barrios of the South Bronx, his ‘tagging’—nom de spray—works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, and private galleries of Silvana and Enrico Coven in Milan and Florence; Giovanni Agnelli, Milan, and Dakis Jannous, Athens, Greece. With more vintaging and art historical perspective, he is now taking on the aura as one of graffiti art’s living “Old Masters.” But he still rocks like a kid, stays in a cool groove, and keeps bombing away in his jeans, sweatshirt, and sneakers!

“Growing up in my hood, you noticed what’s around you, and grafﬁt was the design,” he explained in The New York Times. “Graffiti” originates from the Greek word graphein (to write) and is commonly adapted from the plural of the Italian term graﬁto. We know that Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael included secret messages within their calligraphic flourishes. Some early inﬂuences were older kids in the neighborhood who were being “showcased” including KAZOO143, CEN2RIP,
and EASE707—this was his informal ‘art school training.’ CRASH was a child of the techno-age eponymously named after a computer breakdown. He adapted this tag because “in my first year of high school I was learning about business careers and chose computer programming as my major.” Claes Oldenburg nailed it: “You’re standing there in the station, everything is gray and gloomy and all of a sudden those graffiti trains slide in and brightens the place like a big bouquet from Latin America.”

Once upon a time, after Warhol and Rosenquist pioneered the Pop explosion of the 1960s, but before Takashi Murakami and Matthew Barney exploited a hyper-visuality in the 1990s, CRASH exploded onto the scene. His language was a visual mix of blended styles and rhythms not unlike the dual-audio mixing of the ‘godfather of hip-hop’ DJ Kool Herc (who also came from the Bronx creating neighborhood dance marathons at 1520 Sedwick Avenue).

“Pow” with that bubble, “top to bottom” that subway war, “freestyle” those wrap-arounds, “blast” that Krylon can and “zip those tags!” This was all the zeitgeist of a moment of America’s richly diversified cultures. A time and place now fading into memory. It was a hallucinatory, Afro-Latino-Caribbean-Blues-Acid-Rock style that made NYC subway graffiti a venerated “style” in the same distinctive manner as past movements, Cubism, Fauvism, or Abstract Expressionism. Tony and Maria lamented: “Somewhere there is a place for us,” beyond West Side Story. CRASH discovers that imaginary locus—now.

What was the South Bronx like in the mid-1970s when the juvenile Matos first grabbed a bag of wide-nozzled, multi-colored spray cans? New York City was at its Dante-like nadir in the lowest circle of urban Hell. Broke, demoralized, and invaded with ubiquitous cocaine and Superfly heroin flowing in from South America and Southeast Asia, no wonder President Ford was (misquoted) in the now famous New York Daily News headline of October 30, 1975. “FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD.”
The Big Apple felt abandoned, and felt rotten to the core. Who wouldn’t have fought back through art, creativity, and self-identifying tags? “Hey, Mr. Dudes out there—we are alive; the apocalypse hasn’t killed us yet; check out our street cred—Zap, Slash, Stroke—take that if you think we are invisible!”

Today, CRASH has taken graffiti’s ancient language of visual expression to a new plateau. His distinctive imagery and personal style reflect that indelibly etched lyric by Simon and Garfunkel in “The Sounds of Silence.” “The words of the prophets were written on the subway walls and tenement halls.” Exciting, inventive new artworks loom on the horizon. We are joyously confident in knowing CRASH is still a vibrant force—and has no sign of being “burned.”

by PHILIP ELIASOPH
Professor of Art History, Department of Visual & Performing Arts

“... At first, when my daughter had mentioned the possibility of doing something at Fairfield University, I was both surprised and honored. To do something at a university or any educational institution is great in that, the artwork is looked at rather differently than in a commercial gallery setting. The honor, because it would be looked at and dissected by a varied group of people. The surprise, because to be shown at such an institution such as Fairfield U., is serious business. We are talking about bringing something born out of the streets into an intellectual setting... 2 worlds colliding. I am very grateful for the opportunity to bring a survey of about 35 years of work, so varied, yet strong enough to tell a story.”

—John “CRASH” Matos

The installation complete, a quiet moment before the opening reception of the John “Crash” Matos exhibition at the Thomas J. Walsh Art Gallery on the campus of Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut.
MAJOR WORKS: John "CRASH" Matos

1980 Fashion Moda, Bronx, NY; Outdoor Mural installation through a grant from the Beards Fund; Bronx Graffiti Roller Rink, Outdoor and indoor facade, Bronx, NY


1982 "Messages to the Public," sponsored by the Public Art Fund for the Spectacular Billboard, NYC, "Wild Style," Charlie Ahearn, acting parts, backdrops and animation, NYC, Mural Installation, Halfwaik, Buffalo, NY

1984 "Figuration Urbaine," "SFS France U.S.A., Musée O'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France, Mural installation, Collaborative Mural Installation, Basel Art Fair, Basel, Switzerland Mural installations, Bilorgone, Italy

1985 Collaborative Mural installation, ARCO'85, Madrid, Spain

1986 "Mural Installations," Bronx Council on the Arts, Mural project, 4 sites, Bronx, NY

1988 Outdoor Mural, CITIBANK, Castle Hill Ave., Bronx, NY

1990 Outdoor Mural, Montpellier, France

1992 Outdoor Mural, Casino de Ibiza, Ibiza, Spain Body Painting performance, Martin Lawrence Modem, NYC

1993 Performance installation, Club Atmosphere, Zottegem, Belgium

1994 Outdoor Mural installation, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Wildlife Conservation Society, The Bronx Zoo, Bronx, NY

1995 Outdoor Mural, Gent, Belgium. Indoor Mural Installation, Antwerp, Indoor and Outdoor Mural Installation project, "Hartnake-New York Express," metro Station Sijan Strass/Liter Mekel, Hannover, Germany Absolut Vodka Advertising design, NYC

1996 Mural Installation, "Graffiti Hall of Fame," NYC, Design artwork for Miami Beach Transportation Management Assoc., New electric shuttle buses "Electrowave," for South Beach, Miami Beach, FL

1997 Mural Installation, Patterson, N.J. Directorial debut, animated video for T.D.F.'s song, "What She Wants." Painted Mural installation, with Daze, at Christo del Bramante, Rome, Italy

1998 Outdoor Mural Installation, New York City and The Bronx, NY


2001 Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY. Installation, with Daze and Judicoposition Arts, "Another one from the Lab," Minneapolis, MN Custom Automobile Installation, OPOP Gallery Detroit, MI

2002 Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY

2003 Installation, with SHE ONE, the Lab101, Los Angeles, CA. Installation, with Moe Ora, SHE ONE, Venice Beach, CA. Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY

2004 Installation, at CARRHART, Mural installation, Kyoto, Japan


2006 Mural Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY. Eco Jamming Up Block Party Installation, NYC

2007 Mural Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY

2008 Mural Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY

2009 Mural Installation, with TATS CRU and DAZE, Bronx, NY

To view or purchase original works, CRASH is exclusively represented in Connecticut at:
Southport Galleries, Pequot Avenue, Southport, CT 203.292.6142 www.southportgalleries.com