

# The New Criterion

Art May 2012

## Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

*On "The Brodmann Areas: A New Collaborative Ballet from Norte Maar," "Jorinde Voigt" at David Nolan Gallery, "William Bailey: New Paintings" at Betty Cuninghame Gallery, and "Tom Goldenberg: Recent Paintings and Works on Paper."*

**BALLET** by and photo by J. Panero or type unknown

Dancers Abbey Roesner, Morgan McEwen, Jace Coronado of "The Brodmann Areas: A New Collaborative Ballet from Norte Maar"

A year ago, the outer-borough impresario Jason Andrew first took his vision of the Ballets Russes to Bushwick. He brought several of the neighborhood's best artists together with the choreographer Julia K. Gleich for a run of dance performances called "In the Use of Others for the Change." The event felt like a high-water mark for the Bushwick scene, a modernist tide lapping up against the pcbs of a Superfund Site with a riot of strange colors spreading out across the surface in a rainbow film.

This year, Andrew and Gleich scrubbed down the parts to revive the Bushwick ballet as "The Brodmann Areas: A New Collaborative Ballet from Norte Maar."<sup>1</sup> With visual artists, sound artists, and dancers all coming together, last year was something of a celebratory free-for-all, a sprawling jam session with one guitar hero after the next compounding the awesomeness until your thoughts turned to the line at the Porta-John. "Brodmann," in contrast, took on the subject of cognition and didn't dance around the big thoughts. Tight, far more spare than a year before, the performance brought the dance up front while still collaborating with Bushwick artists such as Paul D'Agostino, who created rapid projections out of his triptych cardboard collages. This time Ryan Anthony Francis, as musical director, also arranged a score to link the various parts into a coherent theme.

Named after the fifty-two areas of the cerebral cortex, the ballet's chapters took on such subjects as hypnosis, taste and smell, and recognition. Dressed in costumes by the Bushwick artist Tamara Gonzales, the dancer Michelle Buckley gave form to memory and, with choreographed movement, recited Pi to 250 decimal places. In "Part II: accelerate. mitigation. toil. blizzard." the sister artists Audra and Margo Wolowiec used video and sound to compare a thrown piece of string with a

drawn line. The effect was meant to stimulate “Brodmann area six,” the center of coordinated movement.

Smart but also wise, the performance fortunately never took itself too seriously. In “Multi-Tasking,” the artist Lawrence (Lars) Swan gave the choreography of neuroscience a sardonic twist by rolling an unusable die and reading mind-bending aphorisms from notecards. One: “In 1909, a German anatomist named Korbinian Brodmann published a map of the brain to help anyone who lost his mind to find it again.” Another: “Where in my brain am I?”

Science and art have long had an under-acknowledged relationship. At their best, the two disciplines unlock the beauty of the other. In *Portraits of the Mind*, the neurobiologist Carl Schoonover recently created a coffee-table book out of the beauty of brain imagery. The complexities of the brain only become more mysterious the better we understand them.

The most stimulating part of “Brodmann” came out of a section called “Crowding.” Denis Pelli, a professor of psychology and neural science at New York University, worked with Gleich on the choreography and even distributed a special program supplement before the performance. He instructed us to fix our eyes on the fluttering hand of the dancer Jace Coronado “no matter what” in order to enjoy the “splendors achieved by the other dancers in [our] peripheral vision.” For his day job, Pelli studies “object recognition, especially sensitivity to crowding.” His segment felt like the most controlled experiment of the evening.

Out of the corner of my eye, I can attest that the peripheral dancers appeared to amplify the movement of the “magic hand.” I look forward to Professor Pelli’s return to Bushwick to explain exactly why. If “In the Use of Others” was a celebration of what Bushwick had become, “Brodmann” gave direction for the road ahead. Science now mixes with painting, performance, technology, and sound to contribute to this neighborhood’s particularly innovative culture.

Voigt\_Installation\_11

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Installation view of "Piece for Words and Views" by Jorinde Voigt

Drawing is often the art of arrangement. The fineness of pen or pencil on paper helps us order and analyze complex observations. It’s also experimental. On an inexpensive medium like paper, drawing can be worked over several times, discarded, flipped, rotated, and tried again. Finally, it’s open-ended. Unlike painting, which can look odd when not applied across the entire surface of a canvas, drawing is often at its best surrounded by open space, giving us something to work with as the composition continues to grow through our imagination.

The young German artist Jorinde Voigt takes full advantage of drawing by largely attending to nature’s unseen phenomena. Several series of her work filled three floors at David Nolan, the north Chelsea dynamo with a second outpost in Berlin, as the gallery brought Voigt to New York for the first time

Rather than order and arrange visual observation, Voigt takes on the direction of wind, flight patterns, the syncopation of music, time and temperature, and emotional attraction. The results could be a conceptual mess, but Voigt appears more interested in the connection of ideas than the ideas themselves. More importantly, she is a consummate draftsman. Her ink-on-paper compositions of arrows and swirling lines and tiny notations are astonishingly good. They are also a high-wire act. Unlike in a preparatory sketch, these drawings are a big reach and permanent on the first pass, with only one chance to get each line just right.

The Nolan show ran backwards, with Voigt's earlier work of drifting, connecting lines, *Staat Random I-XI* (2008), collected floor-to-ceiling in the upper gallery. While these drawings may claim to document the movement of eagles or the dynamics of a pop song, here the compositions themselves become their own animating force, and the results are a knockout.

I wish I could say the same for the middle galleries. Here a sculptural piece featured propellers painted with spinning phrases like "He loves me. He loves me not" (*Grammatik VII*, 2010). Another offered up a series of painted rods meant to record the colors of a garden (*Botanic Code*, 2010). Unlike the suppleness of her drawings, each of these sculptures seemed stiff, weighted down with Dada and minimalist references, transitional half-thoughts between the different series on paper.

On the gallery's first floor, Voigt's thirty-six-part *Pieces for Words and Views* (2012) was stacked three high, floor to ceiling. Employing her own version of Sortes Virgilianae, the artist picked words out from Roland Barthes's book "A Lover's Discourse: Fragments" and constructed her own signage and direction to lead her from thought to thought. The result probably gives Barthes's book a better treatment than it deserves, as Voigt takes up collage and color to give her work an extra compositional delight evolving from one panel to the next. In March, Voigt became the 2012 recipient of the Daniel & Florence Guerlain Contemporary Art Foundation's biennial drawing prize, and with good reason. This charming, talented artist can draw just about anything and make it look good.

William Bailey

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William Bailey, *Afternoon in Umbria III* (2012)

With his singular handling of paint, William Bailey can impose a deep emotional charge on something as simple as an egg. His still lifes—or more like mind-lives, since he paints from imagination—are compositions of jugs and tea cups that crackle with the same sensuality as his nudes. For his fourth exhibition at Betty Cuninghame, Bailey goes outdoors and introduces two new motives: an empty courtyard, and two young women resting in the shade of a tree.<sup>3</sup>

Cunningham presents these paintings with a few examples of Bailey's more familiar subjects. She also arranges the two new courtyard scenes next to each other on adjoining walls. As our eye moves from *Empty Stage I* (2011) to the larger *Empty Stage II* (2012), we notice the subtle adjustments Bailey makes from one composition to the next. By raising a roofline here, separating a corner there, adding sky here, and adjusting a figure there, Bailey alters the effect of each work. He understands the drama of little things. Even a simple shape can have emotional resonance. In the earlier iteration, the shadow of a roof comes over to the center of the foreground. In the later version, the sun spreads out, so that the position of the viewer is also in light, warming our overall sense of the image.

But Bailey is never obvious. While his nudes are not prurient, they are certainly strange. The two figures picnicking in his *Afternoon in Umbria* series are wonderfully odd. In each, the girl in a white dress isn't so much asleep as passed out, splayed across the grass, while the second girl looks on. For a painter who can turn a water pitcher into an object of desire, here he creates some of the more charged compositions of his career and among the most mysterious.

Tom Goldenberg

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Tom Goldenberg, *Hunter's Ice* (2011-2012)

In 2001, after Hilton Kramer wrote that Tom Goldenberg was "one of the most accomplished painters on the current scene," I became both a friend and admirer of this consummate painter of landscape. In April, Goldenberg opened up his Long Island City studio in one of the smartest self-showings of an artist's work I have seen, engaging the dealer William O'Reilly as his studio curator and publishing his own catalogue on his website.<sup>4</sup>

Goldenberg brings a background in abstraction to the hills, trees, fields, and streams of New York. He grinds his own pigments into supersaturated oils. He incorporates his own studies of classical draftsmanship, leading tours through the open stacks and special collections of the city's libraries and museums. He cultivates his own simple snapshots of Dutchess County and Central Park into a lush garden of paint and brushwork, in a process that could be problematic but which he seems to exploit to its fullest potential.

In a highlight of the current show, Goldenberg takes a series of his preparatory photographs, which would usually be splattered with studio paint, and deliberately goes back into them with oil, combining a painted and photographed landscape into one composition. A few years ago, Gerhard Richter made a similar attempt, adding a daub of paint to his photographs and allowing his collectors to bring the joy of German nihilism into their homes at a fraction of the price they thought possible. By comparison, Goldenberg's overpaintings are wondrous examinations of his own working process, where the final product rises above the cleverness of their manufacture.

In his paintings, Goldenberg can range from the very large, with canvases that are eight feet across, to landscapes a foot wide or less. Recently, he has been showing drawing as well, and several in both charcoal and ink are in the current show along with larger portraits of anthropomorphic cherry trees. I first saw Goldenberg's landscapes through his small gem-like paintings, and, along with his drawings, I still like them best. Both the color and energy of his brush strokes can overrun his largest compositions. When restrained by scale or materials, his work is a tour de force, and a delight now to see in the place it was created.

1 "The Brodmann Areas: A New Collaborative Ballet from Norte Maar" was on view at the Center for Performance Research, Brooklyn, from April 12 through April 15, 2012.

2 "Jorinde Voigt" was on view at David Nolan Gallery, New York, from March 8 through April 28, 2012.

3 "William Bailey: New Paintings" opened at Betty Cuninghame Gallery, New York, on March 29 and remains on view through May 12, 2012.

4 "Tom Goldenberg: Recent Paintings and Works on Paper" opened at 37-24 24th Street, Suite 213, Queens, on April 11 and remains on view by appointment at [TomGoldenberg.com](http://TomGoldenberg.com).

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**James Panero** is the Executive Editor of *The New Criterion*.

This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 30 Number 9 , on page 72

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