

FEAR STRIKES BACK

“The image as shock and the image as cliché
are two aspects of the same presence.”

- Susan Sontag

FEAR STRIKES BACK

The theme of “Fear Strikes Back” is derived from James Elkins’s book *The Object Stares Back*, which supplies reasoning for how we see and how we don’t. Featuring the work of Baltimore—and Washington, D.C.–based artists, this exhibit explores how culturally we deal with our fears and anxieties—many of which are fed to us as distortions of information by media and social networking.

The show’s title also refers to how we too often “look back” in our concerns about social justice. One of the most urgent challenges today is figuring out how people who differ economically, racially, religiously, and ethnically can live together peacefully. All of the artists in this exhibit—whether they work in new media, sculpture, video, audio, or two-dimensional paper and canvas—are dedicated both to community work and to observing realities that affect their particular environments. Their unique positions in their communities allow them to voice their opinions without turning their backs.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag asserts that “the image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence.” She also declares that there is no collective memory but, rather, collective instruction. In photography, for example, “The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs...[this]eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering.” Sontag goes on: “At the beginning of modernity, it may have been easier to acknowledge that there exists an innate tropism toward the gruesome.”

When we apply these concepts to the information fed to us by contemporary media and social networks, it is apparent that subversive influences are part of our lives. The work in “Fear Strikes Back” allows us to observe how our 21st-century overexposure to violent, troubling, and sometimes staged images can lead us to mixed emotions: We enjoy the spectacle of a horrible situation even as we want it to end.

The artists selected for this exhibit were asked to present works that may transfigure suffering into other concepts.

Helen C. Frederick

SHAHLA ARBABI

Artist Statement

“The Triptych carries its meaning in itself.”
These works are about space, time, transition,
light, memory and loss, and universal pain.

About the Artist

Born in Shiraz, Iran, Shahla Arbabi has exhibited widely in the U.S. and abroad, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.; the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland; the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California; the Ludwig Forum Für Internationale in Kunst, Germany; and the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, Russia.

Her work—the subject of numerous studies of contemporary painting—can be found in more than two dozen private and public collections, including the permanent holdings of the Smithsonian Institution’s Sackler Gallery and the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies. Her work is currently on display at the Women’s National Democratic Club in Washington through May 31.

She lives and works in Washington, D.C.



Untitled, 2012
24 x 20"
Mixed media photo collage
Courtesy the artist

ED BISESE

Artist Statement

I look for images that help me understand the world. I paint and draw in the hope that my work can help explain the world to others.

The subject of my drawing is a character named Paladin from the TV series "Have Gun Will Travel," which aired from 1957 to 1963. Paladin's name is a reference to the knights of Charlemagne's court. In the Old West depicted on the television show, Paladin fights injustice. He is a cowboy and a knight in shining armor who lives by a strict code of conduct. Like every hero, his quest includes trials and failures. This drawing describes a narrative moment when Paladin is knocked unconscious and robbed of his horse and gun. Though frustrated by challenges along the way, he succeeds through determination, experience, and intelligence. Heroes give us an example to follow by overcoming obstacles that at first appear insurmountable. Their stories encourage us, telling us that great things can be achieved.

This work is composed of multiple drawings stacked and pinned to the wall. All of the sheets are similar with minor variations. The hero's journey requires him to face many trials. His numerous failures lead to his eventual success. The multiple drawings represent individual frames that created the moving image—and the journey toward success.

About the Artist

Ed Bisese paints in the spider-filled basement studio of a house in College Park, Maryland, where he lives with the woman he adores. The cool, dark, quiet basement is a perfect environment in which to spin evidence of a personal world composed of equal parts wonder and paranoia.

A registered landscape architect, Bisese has Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and an MFA from the University of Maryland, College Park. He recently completed the conceptual design of a new sculpture garden for D.C.'s Kreeger Museum. Bisese also teaches drawing, painting, and design at various Washington-area colleges. The experience of teaching reinforces his desire to facilitate a universal unlocking of creative potential.

Bisese is known for making large-scale painted portraits with oversized heads and imaginary faces, and walk-in sculptures composed of everyday materials. His work has been widely exhibited in the mid-Atlantic region.



Paladin Unconscious, 2013
53 x 72"
Chalk and tempera on builder's paper
Courtesy the artist

COLBY CALDWELL

Artist Statement

Over the past year, while finishing up the final photographs for my “small game” series, I began thinking about how the work was engaged with and informed by its connection to the landscape. Much of this project deals with either the seasonal changes that occurred over the span of five years or with the events that have transpired on the landscape for generations.

While photographing several abandoned duck blinds on my property, I noticed many spent shotgun shells on the ground. These shells, in various stages of decay, embodied both the formal and conceptual concerns that my work has investigated over the past few years.

I created a white box hood for a flatbed scanner and lay the shell directly on the glass. This resulted in high-resolution images with a film-based, camera-like depth of field. I decided to print them in various sizes, and in doing so, found that the shell inhabited various anamorphic guises.

About the Artist

Colby Caldwell was born in 1965 in Raleigh, North Carolina. He currently lives and works in St. Mary’s City, Maryland—where he is an associate professor of art at St. Mary’s College—and Asheville, North Carolina. Caldwell graduated from Washington, D.C.’s Corcoran College of Art and Design in 1990. From 1997 to 2001, he taught in the school’s fine art and photography departments. His work has been shown nationally and internationally since 1988.

In 2006, Caldwell was selected for the 48th Corcoran Biennial, “Closer to Home.” His last two solo shows, “gun shy” and “spent,” opened concurrently in March 2012 at Hemphill Gallery and Civilian Art Projects in Washington, D.C. Each was reviewed widely, including in *Artforum*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The Washington Post*.

Most recently, Caldwell collaborated with artist Elijah Gowin for a two-person show, “The Heaviest Flower,” at Paragraph Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri. He also has an exhibit, “rounds,” on view at Dickinson College’s Goodyear Gallery in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Caldwell is now working on his first monograph, tentatively titled “small game.”



Spent (99), 2012 (Edition 1/5)

53 x 39"

Archival pigment print mounted to dibond and waxed

Courtesy the artist

DAVID CARLSON

Artist Statement

Five Minute God is the second digital video in which I have incorporated slivers derived from Cubist space that merge the physiognomies of people from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. Conceptually the video embraces the ideas of cubism, race, speaking, and spirituality in a way that nullifies any sense of separation. I have incorporated images and statements by various young people from around the world, speaking in their native languages and sharing their own concept of God. The polyrhythmic visuals never let the viewer set foot on solid ground. The recognition of one individual is distracted by the new recognition of another face. The layered audio tracks meld together the multiple voices, which makes the act of listening almost impossible. Sometimes a viewer or the audience may recognize fragments of a dialect only to have it swallowed by the melodious garble of the chorus. Since everyone is talking (in the video) and no one is listening, the viewer becomes, in essence, the listener.

About the Artist

Artist, teacher, and activist, David Carlson has been a part of D.C.'s artistic community since 1984. His painting has continually evolved, from the figure to abstraction. As an abstract painter, he is considered, in the words of curator Kristen Hileman, "a painter's painter."

Carlson's paintings are included in numerous collections, both national and international, private and corporate. He has participated in artist exchanges with Central Asia, Europe, and West and North Africa. He has had more than 20 solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group shows. His works have been shown widely, including in South Africa's Pretoria Art Museum, Germany's Ludwig Forum, Italy's John Cabot University, Senegal's Yacine Art Gallery, Morocco's Asilah Arts Festival, France's Musée des Tapisseries, and, in the United States, Virginia's Arlington Arts Center and D.C.'s Washington Project for the Arts and Korean Embassy Cultural Service.

Since 2000, his digital video has explored and questioned social and political ideas at an individual level. His first video, *Transformer*, premiered in 2000 at the Léopold Senghor Pavilion at the Dakar Biennale in Senegal. Since then, in collaboration with composers, artists, and dancers, Carlson has created video work that explores core humanistic concepts that are international in scope. He has exhibited his digital videos in international venues, including ones in Egypt, South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium, Turkey, and France.



Five Minute God, 2007
NTSC digital video (5 min. 58 sec. running time)
Courtesy of Cohn Drennan Contemporary and the artist

MEI MEI CHANG

Artist Statement

Our perception of both internal and external symbols is rooted in conscious experience. The conscious mind flows from the subconscious and reflects back from the external environment. In this way, stimuli from socioeconomic outcomes, personal experience, changing landscapes, and the limitations of communication technologies can affect attitudes toward art. My work circumvents this process by referencing the common visual language of architecture and landscape, and by channeling commentary on social issues through layers of visual, tactile, and mental abstraction.

About the Artist

Mei Mei Chang received her MFA in photography from Ohio University in 2002. As an installation artist, she uses mixed media to bridge her internal and external worlds. She is a lifelong student of the human psyche and is fascinated by the mind's ability to focus on details great and small. She creates rich visual images that are both highly personal and universally accessible.

Chang has had numerous artist residencies, including ones at the Vermont Studio Center, the Great River Art Association in Minnesota, the Honfleur Gallery in Washington, D.C., and Montgomery College in Maryland. She has won various awards, including second place in the Visual Art Exchange's Contemporary South exhibit. Chang's work has been featured in Studio Visit magazine.

Upcoming shows include "Voyage in Tangible Space" at the Margaret W. and Joseph L. Fisher Art Gallery in Alexandria, Virginia; and an exhibit at The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center in Silver Spring, Maryland.



Untitled, 2012
51 1/2 x 42"
Mixed media
Courtesy the artist

MICHELE COLBURN

Artist Statement

I work with ready-mades and altered ready-mades, which I manipulate, mutilate, deconstruct, and reconstruct. My work owes a debt to Marcel Duchamp, who brought a ready-made into the gallery and transformed the object's context, thereby questioning the meaning of art. My current work follows in the long lineage of artists who have worked with readymades, and those who have found and altered objects and other diverse materials.

I am interested in the point at which commodity and fashion intersect with the military-industrial complex, and where indoctrination meets commodity. My work addresses commodity—sometimes with fake or mock products that seem, at first glance, nearly identical to the “real thing.” Two years ago, I began painting baby diapers with military-camouflage patterns to explore the notion of indoctrination—both of parents, and subliminally, of children. A year later, actual camouflaged baby diapers have been manufactured in limited editions.

A section of *Squads* is painted with patterns inspired by the camouflage being used in Afghanistan. When diapers—associated with waste—appear as enlarged pixels of the digital military-camouflage patterns and are presented as legions “marching” into a flag-like formation, the work becomes politically charged.

About the Artist

Michele Colburn is a visual, mixed-media artist living and working in Washington, D.C. She received a B.A. in art history from Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and an MFA in studio art from American University in Washington, D.C.

Colburn has worked as a graphic designer and, for 10 years, as a public-affairs specialist at D.C.'s Hirshhorn Museum. She also teaches art in an adjunct capacity. A native Washingtonian, she has always been interested in politics and sociopolitical trends. Growing up in D.C. influenced her pursuits and activities, which have included periods of political activism.

Her work has been shown in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York. She spoke in 2011 at “Under the Influence,” a presentation sponsored by Washington Project for the Arts and the Corcoran Gallery. *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Examiner* have reviewed her work.



Squads, 2012
72 x 48"
Acrylic and house paint on diapers
Courtesy the artist

NICK COLLIER

Artist Statement

VS. presents itself as a stage for an open, unbiased dialogue on comparing and contrasting intention, motive, and cultural background. Two objects of similar shape, structure, and materials are given parallel footing to explain their purpose and ultimate outcome. Side by side these objects, as a whole, assume a form that is equally harmonious and contentious.

About the Artist

Nick Collier is a student at George Mason University near Washington, D.C. He graduates in May with a BFA in sculpture and is a member of the Washington Sculptors Group and GMU's SOA Backspace Fellowship and Floating Lab Collective, respectively. He is also a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps who received combat distinction in Afghanistan.

His work aspires to make viewers aware of their social and political surroundings by gathering ideas from popular culture, the media, and social observation. The collected information is used to explore ideas for creating work and for making decisions about materials—the how and why processes of engineering an object, for instance—and to signify the importance of making artwork by hand. His recent work investigates America's disjunctive self-image versus its global image.

Collier has shown at many area galleries and museums, including D.C.'s Corcoran Gallery of Art and The Museum of the Americas, Maryland's Glyph and artdc, and Virginia's Adam Lister Gallery and the ArtWorks gallery at James Madison University. He will begin an MFA program this fall at Florida State University.



VS., 2012
36 x 20 x 18"
Welded steel, wood, mixed media
Courtesy the artist

ANNA U. DAVIS

Artist Statement

The Gun is / a persuader / a liberator /
a peacemaker / a dictator

The Gun is / a love taker / a heartbreaker /
a shift shaper / an orator

The Gun is / a pacifier / a slave driver /
an agitator / a navigator

The Gun is / a revolution / an absolutism /
a reformation / a rededication

The Gun is / a persuader / a liberator /
a peacemaker / a dictator

About the Artist

Anna U. Davis was born in Lund, Sweden, in 1975. She moved to the United States in 1998 and graduated with a BA in painting from the University of the District of Columbia in 2002. Her work can be found in public and private collections in the United States and in Europe, and has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including in Washington, D.C.'s Corcoran Gallery of Art, Long View Gallery, and Hillyer Art Space.

Davis is known for her bold, colorful, graphic mixed-media work, in which she explores her fascination with gender relations. She is a two-time recipient of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities Artist Fellowship. Davis lives and works in Washington, D.C.



Dead End, 2012
38 x 38"
Mixed media on canvas
Courtesy the artist

SAM CHRISTIAN HOLMES

Artist Statement

Memories is a series of clay figures, images, and words that tell a story. By creating a vision for the audience, I lead members into my concept of what the photographs represent. The tiny figures are an invitation to the viewer to participate in a captured moment in time—and to slow that time down so that he or she can participate.

About the Artist

Sam Christian Holmes is a Baltimore-based sculptor, printmaker, and multimedia artist. He creates work that responds to particular localities. His ability to relate his ideas to a community and create a sense of identity around that community's issues is noteworthy. In working with metal, Holmes attempts to access his cultural and personal history.

His early tin and copper work tells a personal narrative through the use of found materials. His later work examines the nature and form of iron gates, which suggest boundaries of symbolic communities and storytellers of folklore and communal memory. Recently Holmes has begun a series of sculptures and prints based on his book, *Tar Baby Yo*. His work is provocative and unsettling, akin to the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. Its narrative nature exposes viewers to artistic voices of diverse storytelling origin.

Holmes earned his MFA from the Mount Royal School of Art in Baltimore. He has taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and at Morgan State University and Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore.



Memories, 2006–present
24 x 60"
Clay and digital mixed media
Courtesy the artist

DAVID PAGE

Artist Statement

A late-night radio news story regarding English domestic accidents was most intriguing. According to the report, some 450 people are injured or killed annually in the United Kingdom in “tea cozy incidents.” It seemed that these largely useless objects—the teapot’s thermal mass dwarfs any gain provided by the cozy’s insulation—fall off the teapot and onto the floor, causing victims to slip and fall.

This led to thoughts about tea and the tea-drinking rituals appropriated by imperial Britain that became a symbol of empire, representing temperance, commonsense, and hospitality.

I thought of our contemporary sense of empire. Tea is one of the remaining vestiges of a power that colonized half the world less than a century ago. The notions that sustained such an empire—the divine rights of monarchs, ethnic superiority, and the reality of might—directly relate to ideas such as Manifest Destiny and exceptionalism, which still have a powerful influence on current policies and actions.

I am interested in the fragility of power. By exploiting a viewer’s expectations of scale, materials, and recognizable form, I explore the close and often comic proximity of comfort and protection to fear and perceived threat.

About the Artist

Born in Cape Town, South Africa, David Page earned a National Diploma in Fine Arts from South Africa’s Cape Technikon in 1986, and an MFA from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2002.

His recent solo shows include “God and Lunchmeat” at Old Dominion University in Virginia and “Staan Nader, Staan Terug!” (“Come closer, Get away!”) at Stevenson University in Maryland. Recent group shows include “Familiar/Peculiar” at Jordan Faye Contemporary in Baltimore; “Simultaneous Presence, Sculpture at Evergreen 6” at the Evergreen Museum & Library in Baltimore; and “Bad Ideas, Dead Ends, and Guilty Pleasures” at the Hamiltonian Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Page has received numerous awards, including the Maryland State Arts Council’s Individual Artist Award in 1996, 2007, 2009, and 2012; the Trawick Prize: Bethesda Contemporary Art Awards in 2004; and the University of Maryland’s Art for Peace Award in 2001, which included the commission of a small sculpture that was presented to Nelson Mandela.

Page teaches at American University and the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington. He lives in Baltimore.



Monstrous Comfort, 2004
36 x 36 x 36" / 18 x 36 x 36"
Steel, aluminum, felt, canvas
Courtesy the artist

ANNETTE POLAN

Artist Statement

I invited a group of veterans to participate in "Basically Trained." I cast plaster masks of their faces. The outsides of the masks are very similar, but the insides are unique.

My initial intention was to show how individuality remains intact even after the rigorous assimilation experience of military culture. For a period of their lives, these men and women dressed alike, talked alike, ate the same food, and slept in close quarters. They were expected to master an elaborate code of professional behavior and etiquette.

Creating the masks and spending time with the veterans forced me to confront my own stereotypes about the military. I discovered that the rigorous discipline and sacrifice of military training creates great strength and encourages personal growth.

The veterans represented here have nothing in common except their military service. They come from different parts of the country and served in different service branches. Since leaving the military they have chosen very different paths. Among the group there is a poet, a filmmaker, visual artists, security specialists, and defense analysts. As one project participant, a female Marine, articulated: "Although my face is unique, I'm connected to the other people represented here—even those I haven't met—because we share common experiences, have faced many of the same hardships, made similar sacrifices, and are joined by the bond of patriotism."

I want to acknowledge the contributions of Patrick Sargent and Jillian Randall, and veterans Dennis, Tim, Josh, Chuck H, George, Lona, Chuck K, Brandon, Jennifer, Miguel, and Sean.

About the Artist

Annette Polan is an internationally known portrait artist. She has photographed and painted the official portraits of various governmental, industrial, and judicial leaders, such as Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Polan is a professor emeritus at Washington, D.C.'s Corcoran College of Art and Design. She has taught and lectured on her work and contemporary American portraiture in Europe, Asia, and Australia, and has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and abroad. She has collaborated with the U.S. Department of State's Art in Embassies program. From 2005 to 2007, she was the chair of the art program she conceived, Faces of the Fallen, for which she was presented with the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Outstanding Public Service award. She lives in Washington, D.C.



Basically Trained, 2013
42 x 23 x 3"
Plaster castings, wooden shelving
Courtesy the artist

JOYCE J. SCOTT

Artist Statement

Millions of women disappear each year, lost to their loved ones, discarded. Others are rescued, but never the same. There is a tsunami of dream walkers wearing the skins of women.

About the Artist

Known as one of Baltimore's most important and influential artists, Joyce J. Scott is celebrated for her beadwork but also excels as a singer, performer, writer, and educator. She uses an unexpectedly heterogeneous array of materials—glass beads, hand-blown glass, prints and paintings, appropriated African sculptures and masks, found objects—and skillfully weaves them into narratives. The work is rich in color and texture, and powerful in its imagery.

Scott received a BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, and an MFA from the Instituto Allende in San Miguel Allende, Mexico. Her work, represented by Goya Contemporary in Baltimore, has been celebrated in museums, galleries, and institutions around the world. It includes her 2000 one-woman show, "Kickin' it with the Old Masters" in the Baltimore Museum of Art. Articles about and reviews of her work have appeared in various publications, including *Artforum*, *Art Matters*, *American Craft*, *Art Papers*, and *Fiber Arts*.

Scott will be part of Glasstress 2013, an official collateral exhibition of the Venice Biennale.



Slit, 2000

42 x 52"

Monoprint

Courtesy of Goya Contemporary and the artist

JULIA KIM SMITH

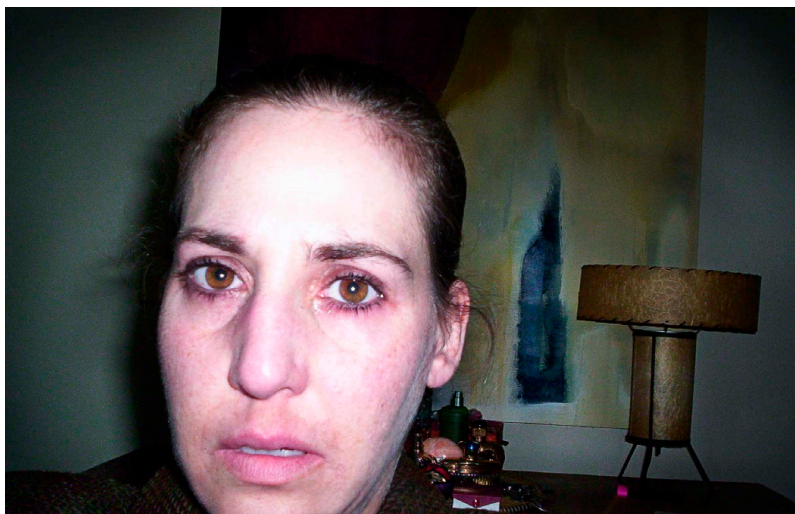
Artist Statement

My late friend Francesca Danieli and I co-founded the “100 Survivors” project in 2004, when Francesca discovered that she had metastatic breast cancer. We decided to collaborate on a project about her struggle and thus created “Project 10” at HopeWell Cancer Support in Brooklandville, Maryland, which evolved into “100 Survivors.” This collaborative, web-based photo and video project for women currently in treatment or recently diagnosed with breast cancer allows participants to share personal and unique photos, videos, and stories.

By featuring up to 100 women and their work, “100 Survivors” is meant to inform and inspire, looking beyond “awareness” and “supporting the cause” and focusing on the experiences of actual women with breast cancer.

About the Artist

Julia Kim Smith is a conceptual artist. Her work explores issues of identity, memory, and the landscape— artistic, social, and political. Her method is interdisciplinary, and her projects take the form of performance, video, film, photography, and printmaking. Smith’s work is exhibited both nationally and internationally. She is an A.I.R. Gallery National Artist (Brooklyn, New York). She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.



From the series *100 Survivors*, 2004–present
24 x 16"
Archival pigment print
Courtesy the artist

Helen C. Frederick

Curator

Helen C. Frederick is an American artist known for printed media and large-scale works created by hand-papermaking and the use of language. She is recognized as a distinguished curator, educator, and coordinator of international projects. She is the founder of Pyramid Atlantic, A Center for Printmaking, Hand Papermaking, the Art of the Book, and Digital Media.

As an advocate for and active participant in the Washington, D.C.–area arts scene for 30 years, she has helped revitalize the Silver Spring arts corridor and served on the directorial boards of alternative art spaces in D.C., various local and national boards, and national peer-review panels. She has exhibited works, curated exhibitions, and fulfilled speaking engagements around the world, always emphasizing collaboration across disciplines. Her recent interests lie in understanding how assimilated technologies grow from indigenous cultures and are a primary trajectory of this century. She serves as an art professor at George Mason University's School of Art and Design in Fairfax, Virginia.

Jessica K. Pavone

Apprentice Curator

Jessica K. Pavone grew up in the American Northeast and studied art history at Bard College. After working for eight years as a magazine journalist, she realized that she wanted to work with words in a different way. Today she is completing a graduate degree in graphic design at Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, exploring the nexus where words, type, and text intersect and overlap.

Her graphic-design approach is highly—and more or less evenly—informed by her two past lives: art history and writing. Yet humor is central to her ethos. She attempts to infuse each project with a sense of play and a measure of levity.

She lives in Washington, D.C., with two cats and one husband.

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