

Articles from the Newsletter *Visual Arts Briefs* (School of Visual Arts)

I was the editor in chief and primary writer of this weekly newsletter. Also, I was instrumental in revamping the publication, moving it from an informal e-mail sent only to staff to a CMS based online publication—accessible to faculty, students, staff, and alumni. ([Portfolio page for Visual Arts Briefs](#))

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Commencement 2002: The Glamour, the Grandeur, and the Grunge

Last Friday afternoon Avery Fisher Hall sprung to life as the College's Class of 2002 received their walking papers for entrée into the real world. It was a dazzling display of diversity and ritual that was electric, official, and irrevocable. According to SVA president David Rhodes, it was the largest graduating class in SVA history, as the 12 classes preceding it were. The College's relentless growth and the urgent pace of change form the subtext of these exhilarating events.

The exuberance of the nearly 900 graduates and 2,000-plus well-wishers ricocheted off the proscenium and bounced around the balconies, exploding into a chorus of celebration and engulfing the hallowed hall in a blaze of good cheer. The conflagration was fueled by the boisterous glee and eruption of flashes emanating from camera-wielding kin clogging the aisles and jockeying for shots. Everyone from fuchsia-haired vixens and gnarled visions from the creative life's lower depths to bejeweled art princesses in evening wear were fair game for the ravenous lenses poised to capture a sublime moment. Each graduate collected his/her sheepskin and proceeded past the row of seated SVA luminaries, choosing either a solemn stride or a funky strut across the stage of fate and future.

Commencement speaker Ronan Tynan, one-third of the hugely popular Three Irish Tenors, transfixed the crowd with an inspirational message drawn from his storybook life. He lost his legs due to a congenital disease, then went on to become a champion athlete, doctor of sports medicine, and opera superstar. "Keep your vision, your most cherished dreams can come true," he told the art hopefuls in the audience. "Take risks and don't let anyone stand in your way." Then the towering tenor treated the room to an acappella version of the Gershwin chestnut, Summertime. When he finished, the collective chills of the dead-silent audience segued into a fusillade of applause. It was a feel-good moment of gargantuan proportions and a most fitting send-off to the Class of 2002.

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Photos by Joseph Sinnott

Summer Renovations: The Jackhammer's Sweet Song of Renewal

In what is becoming a rite of summer at SVA, the College is undertaking major renovations. The main project this season is the complete rebuilding of the offices of continuing education, the registrar, and financial aid at 209 and 205 East 23 Street. The job is scheduled for completion at the end of August. It's a major project that involves gut renovation, which includes demolition of the old spaces and the installation of new floors, walls, windows, bathrooms, air conditioning, sprinklers, fire alarms, security systems, network cabling and hardware, and electrical systems.

Nietzsche said he who must be a creator must be an annihilator first, and to build a temple of grand stature one must first be demolished. The gut renovation is truly Nietzschean in its insistence on obliterating the old to make way for the new. The seeds of the glittering new space can be found in the maimed walls, scattered debris, and mangled fixtures of the just completed demolition.

The renovations will result in a more efficient layout for each of the respective administrative offices; they will each have contiguous space, whereas before they were spread out and overlapped with one another in places. The design of the new space is highly functional and is intended to create a comfortable environment that will help expedite and alleviate the administrative tasks of students, faculty, and staff. Visitors to the new offices will, for example, be able to transact their business without having to visit multiple areas.

At SVA, unlike other institutions of higher learning, the renovation process—including approvals, planning, and execution—is quite streamlined; an extensive project like the one described above can take no more than five or six months from concept to move-in. It gives SVA the ability to respond rapidly to a changing environment, especially increasing student enrollment and new staff; this is a tremendous competitive advantage and a great boon to the SVA community.

Be sure to watch VA Briefs and SVA-NET for more summer construction updates.

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Friday, November 07

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Finding the Edge: James Victore Design Graces SVA Poster/Publication

When you see the cover of the summer 2003 Continuing Education Bulletin, chances are you'll look at it again- and maybe a few more times. The striking image that graces the bulletin was created by renowned designer James Victore (he was also a student at SVA and is now an instructor in the Advertising and Graphic Design Department). It was originally commissioned by SVA chairman Silas Rhodes to be one of the College's storied subway posters (look for it "on the rails" sometime in July). The piece is basically meant to simulate a typical advertising poster that has been "tagged" by multiple graffitiists. It percolates with a jumble of typefaces, languages, colors, and seemingly random visual elements like photography and illustration. The jagged, chaotic composition is very deliberate though and forms a rich collage that is, among other things, a valentine to New York City (a "devotional," according to Mr. Victore), a conceptual prank, and a celebration of the artistic life. To receive the new Continuing Education Bulletin, call 800.366.7820, or visit the SVA Web site; for more on James Victore, visit his Web site, www.Jamesvictore.com.

Image: Continuing Education Bulletin cover (2002), by James Victore

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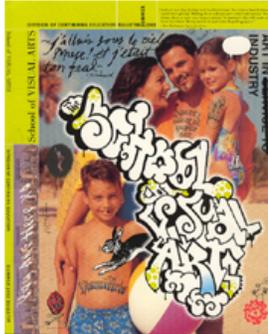
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Image: *Continuing Education Bulletin* cover (2002), by James Victore

Hollywood Does 23rd Street: It's Raining Stars (Anne Heche)

Actress Anne Heche brought her star power to the SVA Amphitheater on September 26 for a Q&A with Film, Video and Animation Department chair Reeves Lehmann. Ms. Heche, a surprisingly witty and down to earth celebrity, was uncensored and spontaneous. True to form, everything she said radiated expressiveness, which flowed from her face to her hands, her feet, and her hair. The engaging movie star answered questions from Mr. Lehman and the audience, then stayed after the session to take pictures with students and answer more questions. Ms. Heche's advice to budding filmmakers: Stay true to yourself and your craft. Big money and fame, she said, don't necessarily add up to good films or work that has integrity.

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SVA Goes to Cuba

Recently a delegation from SVA visited Cuba to explore the possibility of future cultural/educational collaborations. The idea for the trip was proposed to the board of directors less than a year ago by board member Walter Rivera, a partner in the law firm Rivera Hunter Colón & Dobshinsky, LLP. The board heartily embraced the proposal and in late March Mr. Rivera, along with the College's executive vice president Anthony P. Rhodes, provost Christopher J. Cyphers, and executive director of admissions Rick Longo, set off for a week-long trip to Havana that was a mesh of fact-finding, cross-cultural exchange, and plain good will. Travel to Cuba, for Americans, is not a casual undertaking. The U.S. trade embargo prohibits most travel and all exchanges intended for commercial gain; any dealings with the country's government or citizens can be only for cultural/educational purposes. SVA had to apply for a special license from the Department of Treasury that allows educational institutions to visit there.

Cuba has one single fine arts university, the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana, which the delegation visited. The instituo, which offers instruction in the performing and fine arts (including painting, drawing, sculpture, and printmaking), accepts only 20 fine art students a year. There is also another university that specializes in the so-called "industrial arts," such as graphic design. Each of the country's 19 provinces has an intermediate art school, which primarily serves students who are 14 - 16 years-old. The most prestigious of these is the Academia Nacional de Artes Plasticas-San Alejandro, which the delegation also visited. The curriculum in these schools is quite rigorous, with an emphasis on fundamental art training. Students work closely with their instructors in a relationship that could be characterized as an apprenticeship, and the graduates are considered professional artists.

Among the delegation's more fruitful accomplishments on the trip was the relationship they forged with a printmaking collective known as Taller Experimental de Gráfica. Printmaking is one of the more advanced art forms in Cuba and the members of the Taller are among the country's most prestigious artists and teachers. Some of the ideas for future projects the delegation discussed with the artists and educators they met in Cuba include, among others: a program for short-term faculty exchange; student exchange in the form of internships and educational programs; and an exhibition at SVA featuring Cuban artists.

Many Cuban artists, particularly those in what is for them the embryonic and ill-equipped field of computer art, are immensely interested in coming to America to study. They also see such an exchange as a golden opportunity to gain international exposure for their work. For SVA, introducing to America these talented artists from a country steeped in mystique, whose culture has not been touched by some of the more vulgar aspects of globalization, would certainly put a spotlight on the College. At any rate, the delegation's trip laid the groundwork for future collaborations and hinted at major possibilities that could come to pass when the relationship between Cuba and America is defined by something other than political antagonism.

Images:

- (1) One of Old Havana's many crumbling facades
- (2) Carlos del Toro of the Taller Experimental de Gráfica, and his work
- (3) SVA's delegation with members of the Taller

All photographs by Christopher J. Cyphers

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