



ART REVIEW: “Redacted” - The Art of Presenting the World Anew at Islip Museum

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by Gabrielle Selz

In one form or another, all artists tackle the question of what it means to bring something—an object or an idea—into form. Broadly speaking, they gather together, call in, arrange, edit, transform, transmute, recodify and redact elements in our world and present them to us anew.

“Redacted,” a group show of 17 contemporary artists curated by Janet Goleas and now on view at the Islip Art Museum, explores the complex fascination of the act of erasure and transmutation as it applies to contemporary visual arts.

It could be argued, that it is the very nature of creation to re-create. On more than one occasion, Marcel Duchamp defaced Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, and, as Goleas has noted, Robert Rauschenberg famously erased a William de Kooning drawing in 1953. In the 21st century, it is not just the art of the past that is recycled and reconfigured, but media and garbage as well.

Brooklyn artist Tim Spelios prowls rummage sales for old photos, magazines, history books and trade catalogues, which he then assembles into puzzle-like collages. His images wrestle with the tension between the abstract and the identifiable. Obliterating and obscuring original content, they create a new, crafted memory that is reminiscent of art historical imagery.

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“Prince Octavius” by Tim Spelios, 2010. Handcut found printed matter, framed 13 x 15 inches.

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Josh Blackwell, another artist working with repurposing found materials, began collecting the humble plastic bag as an environmental project. Wanting to disrupt their utilitarian purpose, he sewed his bags shut, thus destroying their consumer functionality. Blackwell’s bags, flattened, fused shut with an iron, embroidered with colorful threads in dense geometric patterns, collaged onto each other and/or cut, have been transformed into both protean shapes and reverential objects

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"Plastic Basket (Crtstal)" by Josh Blackwell, 2013. Plastic bags, silk, acrylic yard, 17 x 16 inches.

Stefana McClure weaves shredded paper into black-and-white tapestries. In the past McClure has worked with favorite authors and texts, like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, a book she sliced up and reformed into playful yarn-balls. But at Islip, Goleas has wisely chosen more recent work taken from redacted CIA documents on torture that have been repackaged by McClure into small hand-knit blankets. As in fairy tales, McClure conceals horror in layers of beauty and enchantment.



"Redacted (Enhanced Interrogation)" by Stefanna McClure, 2010. Cut paper 25.75 x 25.75 inches. Josée Bienvenu Gallery.

Text is inspirational source and hidden object in the work of Sag Harbor artist Ross Watts. In *Journey to the East*, Watts has imbedded 11 Hermann Hesse novels into concrete bricks of beach sand. In Ross's work, surface, material and original source have been enshrined to the point where they are indistinguishable.



"Journey to the East" by Ross Watts, 2014. Plaster, sand, books in 11 blocks, 9 x 9 x 9 inches. Artist and Sara Nightingale Gallery.

Lauren Luloff's freestanding paintings are made of painted and collaged bed sheets. Intimate as skins, these fragile structures bring to mind Robert Rauschenberg's gauzy *Hoarfrost* series. Like laundry drying in the sun, Luloff's curtain-like painting hangs like a translucent veil between the real world of objects, and the dream world of memory and imagination.



"Foley Barn" by Lauren Luloff, 2012. Bleach on bedsheets and fabric, 108 x 83 inches.

Sculptor Bonnie Rychlak, who worked as an assistant to Isamu Noguchi before leaving to pursue her own artistic endeavors, drops old plumbing and electrical wire into vats of paraffin wax. Once her wax forms have hardened, she leaves them out in the sun to weather, soften and deteriorate. The resulting shapes resemble fossil remains. Their minimalist quality gives them the look of remnants from a future dystopia.



“Formless 1, 2008-2009” by Bonnie Rychlak. Hand-carved paraffin and metal drain, 10 x 14 x 6 inches.

Born in Switzerland and now residing in France, artist Mathias Schmied, manipulates comic books and magazines to create stylized wall-images. Using an X-acto knife to precisely cut up imagery taken from Playboy to Spiderman, Schmied forms edgy, explosive and graffiti-like collages. His work invokes the striptease and the medical dissection. The final pieces, often abstract, are debates between color and form, deconstructions of our pop art culture.



“Background” by Mathias Schmied, 2006. Cut on magazine pages, framed 26 x 22 inches. Josée Binevenu Gallery.

To say London based artist Jonathan Callan makes art from old books is to minimize the alchemy of his created universe. He is known for his giant sculptures that resemble waves and cyclones of twisted and wrapped books, and here at Islip Goleas has displayed an exquisite piece, *Zurbaran's Color Plates*.

Callan is fascinated by the materiality of books and maps, and he improvises a conversation with his object by slowly cutting and chiseling away until his pieces become what he calls a fluid “relationship of disembodied knowledge to embodied experience.”



“Zurbaran's Color Plates” by Jonathan Callan, 2001. Chiseled book in Plexiglas case, 18.25 x 28 x 2.25 inches. Josée Binevenu Gallery.

The act of transmuting is often first an act of destruction. Art is a process that begins with absorption and may involve erasure and obliteration en route to bringing the unique into being. Dense and intricate, "Redacted" is a show layered with meaning. Here at Islip, Goleas has brought together and presented a rich compilation of artists exploring other ways of knowing.

BASIC FACTS: "Redacted" will be exhibited from April 13 to June 1 at the Islip Art Museum. An Artists Reception will be held on May 4 from 1 to 4 p.m. The museum is located at 50 Irish Lane, East Islip, NY 11730. www.islipartmuseum.org.

RELATED: "["Redacted" Presents the Art of Alteration at Islip Art Museum](#)"

Editor's Note: Janet Goleas is a curator, artist and art critic. She contributes regular art reviews to HamptonsArtHub.com and to her blog, [blinnk](#).

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