

Issue 02  
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# Art Review:

'A lot of my work has to do with searching for something - that blurriness of a memory where you can't quite pinpoint it' Idris Khan

AUGUST  
2006

**Chris Burden:**  
Shot, crucified,  
electrocuted -  
now mellowed

**American  
History X:**  
Art for the  
death-wish  
generation

**Roxy Paine:**  
Who needs  
artists when  
you've got  
robots?

**Idris Khan:**  
Photography's  
primal scream

ENVIRO  
MENTAL:  
CAN ART SAVE  
THE PLANET?



**LIGHTBOX (98)** The London Fire Brigade archives *Brian Dillon* > Idris Khan's battle with frustration *Mark Rappolt* >



Left: Chris Burden, 747, 1973

Below: Chris Burden, *Prelude to 220, or 110 F Space*, 1971. Both images courtesy Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills



747  
January 5, 1973  
At about 8 a.m. at a beach near the Los Angeles International Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747.

**CHRIS BURDEN (110)** Is the performance art maverick lightening up? *Doug Harvey* > **MIXED MEDIA: DIGITAL (123)** we-make-money-not-art.com blogger *Régine Debatty* says: Let the machine do the rest > **MOVING PICTURES (124)** Tideland: the film that saved Terry Gilliam *Skye Sherwin* > **DIGITAL (126)** Debatty's picks this month > **MUSIC (128)** *Matthew Herbert* on the morals of sampling > **BOOKS (129)** What to read in LA > **REVIEWS (131)** Tal R; Inner Worlds Outside; David Wojnarowicz; Laura Owens; Marcel Dzama; Anri Sala; Marcelline Delbecq; Sharon Ellis; Interstate; Artists Anonymous; Hiraki Sawa; Brian Jungen; This is not another biennial > **ON THE TOWN (148)** > **CALENDAR (151)** > **ON RECORD (154)**



**I Will Always Champion Good Painting**

July 7 – September 3  
Whitechapel  
London

**I Will Always Champion Bad Painting**

September 30 – November 26  
Arnolfini  
Bristol

# CONTENTS

**EDITORIAL (16)** > **CROSSCURRENTS (21)** Studios in Knightsbridge; Messing with London's skyline; Novels by artists; Cynthia Ona Innis; Matt Maden's comics; Andrea Cohen > **BAZAAR (28)** Art objects of desire > **NEXT STOP (31)** Cai Guo-Qiang; Surprise, Surprise; Stuart Hawkins > **OPEN SPACE (35)** Graham Hudson's home-made house; Jean Nouvel's musée de quai Branly >



Mitch Epstein.  
*Amos Coal Power Plant*, 2004  
© Mitch Epstein/  
Black River  
Productions, Ltd.

**ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT (41)** We ask the artworld: Does art have the power to help protect the environment?; Art and the Environment Janet Owen Driggs; Environmental concerns at the International Centre of Photography Daniel Kunitz; Roxy Paine's thinking machines Jonathan T.D. Neil; Whatever happened to British Land Art? Oliver Lowenstein > **AUCTION PIT (65)** Design Art at Phillips de Pury Adam E. Mendelsohn > **MARKET REPORT (68)** Art as collateral for loans James Westcott > **BLANK CANVAS** > **GOOD TO BE BAD (70)** Albert Oehlen's new rules for painting Marcus Verhagen > **AMERICAN HISTORY X (76)** Dominic McGill's insanely detailed logs of America's crimes Martin Herbert > **ART PILGRIMAGE (82)** what to see in Amsterdam Merel Bem > **DISPATCHES (95)** News from Toronto, Warsaw, Basel >



On the cover: IDRIS KHAN  
photographed by ANTOINE D'AGATA



For the next three years, UBS is delighted to be partnering Tate Modern, whose rehang of its permanent Collection promises to make us all think a little differently about art. Together we have created UBS Openings, a dynamic and wide-reaching programme that will include a series of displays from The UBS Art Collection at Tate Modern. It's a partnership that promises to open up art to wider audiences. Sharing new perspectives. It's what drives our business, and it's what drives our partnership with Tate Modern. [www.ubs.com](http://www.ubs.com)

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## LAURA OWENS

Laura Owens' paintings are unabashedly pleasurable. Her colours are clarion-like, and her animals and humans are mythically poised, caught in some titillating or dramatic action or apparently self-consciously composing themselves for the picture. Her still lifes, landscapes and fractured, pattern-like compositions have the naïve musicality of a charming school recorder group.

Apparently in contradiction to her faux-naïve and folk references, Owens' command of paint is exceptional. She displays a consummate range of textures of oil and acrylic, from thin evocative washes to thick glossy worms straight from the tube. And in these recent paintings Owens has upped the ante on affectations of juvenilia, introducing felt as a colourful collage material to enliven an already perky scene with gaudy circles across its surface. Sometimes the raw linen is barely covered by elements of an image, and often a painting peters out at its edges, creating a romantic vignette effect. This selection of works, then, is suffused with a lot of airy space; the work seems design-conscious and, as a result, almost cruelly desirable.



From left: Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2006, acrylic and oil on linen, 76.2 x 106.7 cm. *Untitled*, 2006, acrylic and oil on linen, 74.3 x 94 cm. Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London

Owens is a well-known purloiner of high and low imagery, exercising the push-pull of kitsch and the scandal of the decorative. Popular references, from tapestry – one painting could almost be a direct quote from the Bayeux Tapestry, with its fighting and fallen Norman soldiers, improbable-coloured steeds and rhythmic spears – to children's paintings pinned on fridges, capriciously mix vocabularies in a most post-structural way: a bucking, writhing goat, ecstatic between two trees, recalls heraldic design; a fruity purple-and-blue scene of lust between a curly-haired couple is positively legendary; a fauvist couple with vivid braids and beard kiss. But kitsch and decoratively entertaining painting has been pretty much normalised now – there is nothing scandalous about vacuity, and art on the edge of design is no longer perceived as being at a point of crisis. How long, one wonders, can this disarmed practice be sustained? When a levity intended to counter a perceived ponderous weight has been matched by the context that it originally contested, that levity ostensibly disappears. For Owens the way forward would seem to be a singular, case-by-case approach to criticality or humour, with each image requiring an invention of form or embellishment that marks it apart from the next. A flick of paint that stands in for a drop of blood or an ingenious way of suggesting a lion amongst foliage are like theatrical devices in a an irreversibly fragmented narrative. The inflections within each painting have become the point around which they turn, but the cumulative effect is lost. *Sally O'Reilly*



## TREE WITH ROOTS

14 May – 16 July

IKON GALLERY, BIRMINGHAM

## MARCEL DZAMA

In 1996, when he was a student at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Marcel Dzama co-founded the Royal Art Lodge, an artists' collective whose name is an ironic reference to the fact that hunting lodges far outnumber artists' groups in that state. On the face of it, *Tree With Roots*, a welcome plethora of the artist's recent depictions of a world of sexual innuendo and understated violence, and Dzama's first public solo exhibition in the UK, shows how far he has come since then. Yet the work on display – ink drawings, sketchbook pages, watercolours, and his most recent video and animation – also shows a clear link to the drawings he's developed since childhood.

Works like *You Gotta Make Room for the New Ones* (2005) are recognizably 'Dzama' thanks to his consistent use of a palette that includes a particular shade of brown made from root-beer syrup. Dzama's drawings lack any indication of perspective, and this, combined with the repeated, near-obsessive detail of his hybrid figures gives them an independence from any specific context. Indeed, a *laissez-faire* approach is needed to view Dzama's army of often fornicating people and animals. You can make of them what you will, and he's teasingly evasive about their meanings: "They're just images that pop into my head," he says in the press release. "I don't really know what they are."

Marcel Dzama, *You Gotta Make Room for the New Ones*, 2005, ink and watercolour on paper, diptych, each drawing 36 x 28 cm, 46 x 67 cm. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

Recently, Dzama has begun to transfer his storybook-like images from the page into moving images. *Sad Ghost* (2006) shows Dzama, documented in a distinctly amateur video aesthetic, working on a watercolour in his studio. A person wearing a brown bear costume, with jagged teeth sewn onto the mouth in white felt, comes down the hall and attacks him. A giant snake slithers across the floor in stop-motion. Bears are a frequent motif in Dzama's work, another memory of his childhood in rural Canada.

Dzama's works display a knowing naiveté with their folk art-like rendering and childhood resonances. In a strange way his work interrogates the grand ambitions of mainstream contemporary art by remaining apparently oblivious to it. But perhaps Dzama's greatest asset is that his work is endlessly open to interpretation, a welcome respite in an art world overrun by contrived critique and prescription. *Kim Dhillon*