

ARTS CRITICISM AND THE ARTS OUTPOST

panel discussion at PMFVI in Baltimore, Maryland

Alex Ebstein, *co-founder, Nudashbank Gallery; artist; writer*

Marcus Civin, *acting director of MICA Curatorial Practice MFA program; artist; writer*

Max Guy, *co-founder, ROCK512DEVIL; co-founder, Szechuan Best; curator; writer*

moderator **Colin Alexander**, *founder, Post-Office Arts Journal; artist; writer*

ARTS CRITICISM
AND THE ARTS OUTPOST

a panel discussion at Open Space's Publications and Multiples Fair VI in Baltimore, Maryland
organized by Post-Office Arts Journal

MG: Max Guy
MC: Marcus Civin
AE: Alex Ebstein
(moderator) **CA:** Colin Alexander

EDITORS NOTE:

The discussion in this publication occurred at Open Space's sixth annual Publications and Multiples Fair, on March 28, 2015, at 3:30 PM at the Baltimore Design School.

A few days before that, Max Guy asked me why I only invited Baltimore-based (or in his case, Baltimore-anchored) participants to speak about “the non-capitals of art” and criticism.

It was a straightforward question that I had considered when I decided to pass over critics, artists, and writers from other nearby, similarly sized cities, but I still had trouble answering straight. Surely Richmond, D.C., Philadelphia have plenty to offer as resources, but every time I research, I can't shake the feeling that the situation in Baltimore remains separate for the moment. For this initial inquiry, it seems that a deep understanding of this city ecology (that has an equilibrium of accessibility to real estate, concentration of artists, and presence of criticism) is necessary to efficiently dive into the conversation.

What other spaces are like this? Providence? Leipzig? Kansas City? Do they always rely on the initial presence of an art school? Do they always rely on being overpowered by the magnetic draw of larger, nearby, more affluent arts communities? Is my interest in these spaces and the discourse they produce actually about diversity in voice or just a mutated home-team Rah-Rah? I did the usual small-talk blabbering that you do when you hold a microphone before introducing the panel:

CA: Alex Ebstein is a Baltimore-based artist, curator and writer. She co-founded and directed Nudashank,¹ an artist-run gallery in the H&H building from 2009-2013. She is a current MFA candidate at Towson University, graduating this May.

Max Guy is an artist/writer/curator who has maintained various curatorial practices between the apartment gallery project Szechuan Best,² involvement in Open Space's collective at its previous Remington space, and the book store/gallery Rock512Devil.³ He is currently working towards his MFA in Northwestern's Art Theory and Practice program in Chicago and has written for What Weekly magazine.

MG: --and ACRES, who has a table on this side of the building.

CA: Yep.

Marcus Civin is an artist/writer/curator as well and is the acting director of MICA's curatorial practice MFA program. He maintains a performance practice, is an advisor for ICA Baltimore, has written for a variety of arts publications such as Artslant, Recaps, Art Papers, Artforum.com, Afterimage, Sculpture Magazine, and has edited for What Weekly's arts column.

I love all these folks.

Baltimore seems to simultaneously be unique in its ability to create some sort of semi-autonomous cultural community, but common in other ways, in that it seems to [embody] a trend that's happening more and more in a variety of smaller, strong arts communities.

And I feel like the question that is there is that the criticality of these spaces seems to be in flux, regarding how well the artist can operate outside of influence from institutions and/or the market sector, something that seems to be the case much of the time in Baltimore. In that relationship,

there's a lot of agency that each artist can choose to grant themselves (or not) to reinforce that insularity of this space or to go towards something more towards connecting the community to a "global contemporary art." So, I feel like that is my primer, thoughts on this discussion; so let's start it off. I first wanted to ask you about how you feel like Baltimore as a creative space can be defined, if so? I feel like talking about criticism in a space... What we deal with a lot here is that there's this overlap between roles in artist and audience and curator, and there's a closeness between those roles, so maybe you can speak on that for a moment.

MC: To define the community or define the community through its closeness?

CA: Right--Obviously you can't get too specific without being domineering or trying to fit it into a square hole.

MC: Yeah. Well, I think that, we're sort of in a good visual of what the community is, both in this school, in this talk, and also in the space out here.

It does seem like Baltimore is a number of overlapping communities, which are more or less represented in different kinds of things. I think that, you're right, the role of the critic or somebody, who would be something of a Critic As Tastemaker or As Judge would be really hard to take on in this environment. I think the way to do it, I was just writing down, would be to "be only a writer and do nothing else," so you had no other wants except the writing, and you'd have to live very simply because there is very little pay in it, and you would have to have no friends in art. And, probably, you'd also not teach art because that is another way of making acquaintances in art. So, its a tough position. But in terms of defining the community, you guys know it better than me, lets hope.

AE: I mean, we're small; we only have a handful of institutions that show contemporary work and the artists are making up for the community in between. They often take on a lot of roles in criticism and in starting a number of different blogs and journals and things that create dialogue. And also in creating spaces and that is sort of necessary for a community of our size.

MG: I would only speak about what I'm familiar with—so that's the community that kind of emanates from MICA [Maryland Institute College of Art] and from the West side, like downtown and the overlap there. So, that's alumni, that's current students, and, also, part of it is evolved from the music scene, which has also been incredibly influential in the arts. I would describe it as DIY, which means that you take on multiple responsibilities. So, instead of having a full on administration that runs a space or an organization or puts on a fair, it might be one person, it could be one to ten people. It's just a very grassroots effort. And it takes place in houses, storefronts, restaurants, wherever it could happen. And I think that is really a strength, or the strength, that it happens anywhere.

AE: And we have an entire (outside of traditional arts spaces) art economy that has a lot of different, like, PNC grants⁴ that go directly back into the community and are more transformative of spaces, or belong in the outdoors and are sort of completely outside of the community that you're talking about.

MG: But, Marcus, I like what you were saying, too, about how in order to answer that question, you'd have to be so far from it. Because even there, I still kind of trace roots back to the various institutions. Or, I'm just not including them.

AE: Yeah. I mean, MICA kind of—it has its own business. It's kind of everywhere.

MG: Yeah, and I guess also that's just the DIY aspect of it.

AE: But when you have institutions that are shaping a city and are sort of the money behind changing a community, like Station North is transforming things and providing the opportunities, it becomes hard to separate where the institution and the artist stop, so you find a lot of people wearing multiple hats, there. Their administrators are overseeing the

distribution of this money, and they're also trying to do what's best to represent the artist community that exists outside of or beyond the institution.

MC: So, when everyone is wearing multiple hats and has multiple responsibilities in the DIY community, does that naturally mean you're going to get an art writing that is bland and inoffensive?

AE: I mean, I've tried to not have that happen. I tend to write in other cities, because it's easier--I mean, it is easier to not have to face the social repercussions of writing critically about your peers. That would be my answer.

CA: Is there a way to use that closeness as a tool to go into a separate realm of criticality? If what we know as "academic criticism" (which is trying to go towards the illusion of objectivity, or like what Marcus is saying with removing yourself so far from the community that you have nothing at stake at all)--I'm curious what a criticism looks like that wears that [closeness] on its sleeve.

MG: That is biased towards a friend?

CA: I don't know: That acknowledges the fact that people are friends with or know each other.

AE: I think when people start to write about smaller projects that wouldn't necessarily get a lot of attention, or because you're friends with that person--I know there's this project called Axis Alley⁵ that I wrote about a long time ago⁶ (that maybe only happened twice) that was a community based project that some roommates of mine were involved with, and I thought it was a really great project. And it was sort of atypical for coverage, but it was something for which I used my insider knowledge of to become involved with and to be able to write about in a way that it might not have been covered. And I think that is helpful.

MG: Yeah, because it also just depends on how you write. Because I think that what you're talking about with academic writing leaning towards objectivity--I kind of don't always buy that [or that style's actual success in that], you know? Just because you're using a certain jargon, that already has roots in some history of rebelling against or supporting a certain M.O. But if you're gonna use that, you take those languages and you make them instrumental to whether

you are into somebody's work or whether you're not into somebody's work, or whether you're promoting somebody. I mean the same thing happens when you're writing a press release for someone, or a statement for their show. So you can just select a certain style--like, style is one thing. I mean, I tend to have a pretty cynical or stoic voice when I write about other people's art or shows, so I don't write that way when I write about my friends; I'll write, like, a poem instead, or try to think of it as something like a love letter. So, I dunno, it just changes.

MC: Yeah, I think the art writing that I like to do most, it's almost like I see the exhibit as an opportunity to write something that's more art that goes next to the art in the exhibit, so it's a conversation with what's being presented on the terms, somewhat, of what's being presented and somehow trying to take on the language of what's there. But when I say that I feel like I am sort of dodging the question about criticality that doesn't really let somebody know if, for example, this is worth seeing or if this is any good. I think most criticism, in general, not just in Baltimore, is criticism by omission, like things don't get covered, and that's the criticism: that it's ignored.

AE: Unless, if it's at a major institution--then it gets shredded, like Bjork.

CA: Because it stands for something.

AE: Right.

MC: Right.

MG: But then even when it gets shredded, it's significant of something else, like symptomatic of people being tired of Klaus Biesenbach and his Pop shows.⁷ Just like, sick of it. They'll be like, "Ah, this Bjork show sucked," but meanwhile, there's a David Bowie show at the MCA and everybody loves it⁸ and it's like the grossest... like the highest grossing show that they've had for years.

MC: Or the grossest grossing show.

MG: So it's like, those are equally biased things, but when you're talking about criticism, in that situation, are you discussing moral obligations that you project onto people's work, or are you talking about it as being like, "Oh, so what's going on with urban development and how does this artist's work relate to that?" Or, are you saying "Oh, I love this artist. I don't know, I feel like their last show was saying something completely different; they've changed so much." Like there are a lot of things you can do. You can make people recognize that this person has been off their radar for a really long time. That can go so many different ways.

AE: And then, in a place like Baltimore, in a certain way, writing about an artist or a project helps to archive it in the history of the city's writing institutions, like City Paper, or other things that have extensive archives that will maybe outlast the spaces and maintain those archives. So, that's important in and of itself for the preservation of the project, or for it to have life and go to other cities and be in dialogue with things in other cities.

CA: I think that was the next thing I was going to ask about: how those shifts in style or closeness translate [between] articles that are being written for a community (to be able to talk about the community or an artist within that community) VS. documentation that is trying to be a document that other communities can look into, if that makes sense? I guess, the question of local conversation vs. making Baltimore, or the things that happen here, be seen elsewhere.

AE: You're asking what the difference is?

CA: Yeah.

AE: OK. Well, it also depends on where you're writ-

ing and what the goal of your editor is, or, if you're working for yourself, if you're doing something like Post-Office you're obviously looking for something beyond the community audience. And then, you know, you're starting to hopefully tie it in with larger trends in other cities and looking at cities of similar sizes that have similar trends and you're either talking about the show with relation to that, or where it sort of is doing something that is erratically different and is making itself an anomaly that should be paid attention. I would say that in terms of having an editor that directs something towards a community, I think when you are working for something such as City Paper, something that knows its audience, that is local, there's a tone that is different, references that get omitted, that keeps it towards a local tone, and that might not be the way you intend to write, but that is, in the end how it comes across.

MC: You're talking about the accessibility of the language, in part?

AE: Sure, but also the mission of your publication.

MC: Right. I struggle with if an art writer is a PR agent for artists. I hear a lot in Baltimore this

sentiment that there isn't enough criticism, and that there aren't enough art writers. Which I think is offensive to us! And it seems to suggest that art writers are supposed to be doing something that they're not doing--

AE: Yeah.

MC: --Which I think is a kind of boosterism or promotion, which I'm just not interested in.

MG: Or speaking in a certain language like we were talking about with academic or "objective" language. I mean, that is something that I really struggled with understanding at City Paper for a very long time: that there is like a culture there that wasn't necessarily inaccessible, but I was just being pretentious, you know. Like there is a certain style of writing or a certain context I was looking for.

But that's an interesting question because, how does that also fit into the way that shows are being produced? Like the kind of culture of white cube spaces and how people talk about that in the lineage of conceptual art, when really it might just be a recent trend because of things like Contemporary Art

Daily,⁹ or like an aggregate online that distributes very nice documentation of really blue chip galleries, but then people start to take on that model as well. So how often-- or how much is that happening in art criticism here. It's a tough question, you know?

CA: When you mention that, are you thinking of that as an export gesture?

MG: Like the documentation or something?

CA: Yeah.

MG: Yeah, I don't know if that's--or, I think that it works well here because so much of the art, like you're talking about the lack of a private sector market, like, secondary or primary galleries or something, but at the same time there's such, like, a spatial fetish, where people--I mean it's the beautiful thing about here, because there are so many spaces that you can just work in--But when you look at a website that's just showing documentation of the gallery space, they're really showing off the space a lot more than they're showing off the art. And they're also trying to get those spaces out there. So, I don't know, I feel like there're similar things happening in other

cities, like that was really big in Chicago for a long time and that might be a cultural thing but it might also be because it's remote. But we're not so remote; we're coastal. We're very close to other centers. It's just the economy here is different. It's based a lot on real estate, if you think about it.

MC: And, a lot of people in Baltimore (to generalize) are really concerned if Baltimore is getting enough attention, when I go to other places and I say I'm from Baltimore, other people say, "Oh my god! There's so much going on in Baltimore," so something about that messaging is "working," somehow, even if people are skeptical of it.

AE: The document?

MC: Yeah, yeah.

AE: And I think in order to change it up, if it's something that needs to be more conceptually tied into the show though, that's on the artist or the gallery, I mean, something that's different. But, in so many cases it does sort of white wash the art world, where any work can go in any white space and look good. I think there's a ubiquity to the white space that makes it important to show work from other cities in that space so that it can travel, and that it's easy for curators and writers in other cities to find work and make the work travel.

I mean, that's the artist in me as well as the critic that wants to see my own work like that so that it can be seen in other spaces.

CA: I feel like perhaps the shift in spaces [in Baltimore] has entered into a zone of turning into that “white space” situation, where, maybe, artwork is more interchangeable. I just think back to earlier Open Space events where things were so casual and--casual is probably the best word--and it was so much about community.¹⁰ Is that something that gets exported as well when you talk about something like, “Oh, there’s so much happening there?” Is that a criticality in work that gets created, or, rather, in the vibes that exist?

MC: Yeah, well, I feel like the fair--I was just reflecting with some people outside--the fair is so much bigger than it was two years ago. And two years ago it felt like it was mostly an audience of people who make work like this, or were local, and this feels totally different. This feels like there are more people coming who are coming as “audience,” not as the DIY participant.

AE: --And sharing that overlap with the BMA is really helpful to the fair,¹¹ but yeah, I think, definitely, “the vibes” is an important part of it, I think people hear about events like this in other cities and either want to mimic it or want to go see what it is like. I

think there was like that critical time around 2008 when all the artist-run spaces were starting and all the coastal smaller cities with art schools in them were having students go to other spaces and take notes on what was going on and bring that back to their own city and there were all these artist-run spaces and that's when you started to see a lot of walks and galleries, that also had zines and produced blogs and participated in criticism locally, come out of that.

MG: Yeah, I don't know if I was reading criticism then, also. So, I think in terms of criticality, it was like, "Oh cool, I just got this Brian Chippendale zine and now I want to start a collective, too." And so, there were real, like, you know, those kinds of mentalities. Like, if you're talking about a critical moment or something, it's a consumer moment then, too.

AE: But they're also putting out their own writing with zines through their collectives, too, that was pretty influential, and made that style travel as well as the books and the consumerist parts. I mean, I found all that writing to be really interesting.

MG: Yeah, I mean I suppose I just read the comics, I didn't read much of the...

AE: The essays and stuff.

MG: Yeah.

AE: I don't know, I think that stuff was all pretty influential to the way I thought about writing then.

MC: I think that for artists and for an art community like this one, it's always a challenge because you want to be recognized, right? And if you start to do a little bit better, then maybe you have a little more money for your shows, so you can do things that start to look a little slicker, a little bigger -- and everyone's looking at, and part of being an artist is pushing yourself and part of how people push themselves is by looking at other artists, so there's always the danger of starting to look the same. I think part of the relationship of the local and almost the fetish of the local in relationship to the art-- what do you call it-- the art center, "We're an Art Outpost, that's the Art Center." Part of the fetish of it is the newness of it. Part of it is, is like "Oh My God there's something that's going on at Fort Thunder that we have

never seen before!” “There’s something that’s happening in Baltimore that’s totally new!” and I think there are implications culturally if you start talking about “the newness” -- like “the totally new language that’s being spoken in Korea in the art world” or in China! There’s a lot of potential problems there to say the least.

AE: But, I think all that comes back to and is validated by, still, the art centers through art fairs and the times in which the art world comes together and shares ideas. I mean, I don’t think--I mean, sure, geographically it is, but-- I don’t think it could ever really be an outpost after the internet or a global art economy.

MG: Yeah, I wrote this thing down where it’s like--at first I forgot that I replaced it with non-central when you said “non art capitals” when [Colin] emailed us, and I kind of agree that “capital” is a better word because it talks about various economies or different ways that things are administrated, so I have a definition which is like “the most important city or town in a country or region,” which is like, whatever. Usually, it’s “seat of government and administrative center or a place associated more than any other with

a specified activity or product"-- so like "Milan is the fashion capital of the world." (That's what it says.) But when I think about the capital of New York or Illinois or California or Maryland, I don't really think about Albany, or Springfield or Sacramento--

MC: But if you were a politician, you would.

MG: Yeah, I mean, yeah-- I guess that's true. But as an artist, I just don't, and I suppose that's the context that I was coming to it from, whereas--

AE: You don't vote?

MG: What?

AE: You don't vote?

MG: Oh yeah, I vote.

AE: That's what hands down all the artist funding.

MG: From Annapolis?

AE: Yeah, sometimes! I don't know. That's what YPR says (one day a week).

MG: (I guess I don't really get that much funding...)

MC: But, you were going somewhere.

MG: But, yeah, I guess in thinking about that, you don't really think about Albany or Springfield; you think about New York City or Chicago or LA or, in this context, Baltimore.

I don't really think about Annapolis. But all that is to say that as administrative centers, if we were to think about New York as the art capital or something, or LA as the art capital, what would that really mean? And would we actually cater to that system, necessarily, administratively? Whereas I think that Baltimore has something incredibly new coming to it developing in terms of an ecology-- and it's very unique: it's personal--or like interpersonal, and it's based a lot on domestic space--we kind of mapped that out in the beginning of the conversation.

But if you're gonna talk about criticism that way, are you obligated to talk about and to let the rest of the world know that people are running things in their house? And I think in that context of a local/domestic criticism vs. a global (or whatever) criticism, you

start thinking about what you're telling people. Like how a business is operated, or if there is a business, or if people are just doing stuff. Because that's the difference where people could be like, "Oh yeah, this space is a weird kind of anarchic space if you think about it." vs. "This is the city's only secondary market gallery, or something." I dunno, you know. So, those contexts kind of serve to, like-- you might be able to find cues for the instrumentality of different aspects of spaces.

MC: Can we do a poll? I'm curious, because people say that there's no art market in Baltimore and this is a representative sample of people, or at least a slice-- I don't know if it's a representative slice, but it is a slice.

MC: Can we ask if people have engaged in any arts related business over the last year? Like will they declare anything on their taxes?

CA: How do you want to do that, do we want to raise hands?

MC: I--

AUDIENCE MEMBER: --Why does that matter?

MC: Well, because I think that part of the claim about Baltimore that's important to Baltimore is that it's non-commercial and I just don't know if that's true. I just don't know, I've always wondered. It seems to me that there are people who make a living in the arts maybe not necessarily from selling objects, but I hear of people selling objects.

MG: I guess I don't want to cut you off from that, but I also want to know, Colin, do you think that the purpose of criticism is uniquely to develop a market? Like when you're talking about the subject of non-capitals or working outside of the market, I have the feeling that it was more than just saying, "what is the purpose of having criticism outside of the market,"

you know? But, do you feel like it just functions for that?

CA: Well, that is my skepticism in it. And one of the reasons why I love having this conversation is because there *is* that question underlying, where it's like--in an idealistic sense, is criticism just to have everyone talking more and creating more work that is better and self-reflective and asking, "how can this work be better," and, "how can we all enjoy this work more?" Or is it towards creating a market in which Baltimore will be considered a different kind of cultural capital where people spend money, or rent apartments. So, that's what is in flux for me, if that's valuable. I don't know where you guys fall on the spectrum.

AE: I think its role ends up being sort of to push voices that are really outside of the market, I mean, that's what I would hope, and voices that reconsider what art can be in a smaller city and outside of the confines of a commercialism or a commercial market or, you know, a fair schedule, or even the institution. And I know that a lot of the articles I was more proud of writing were about the community sector of art in Baltimore because I think its really unique

to this city, and just that it provides another kind of outlet for art that you don't see and really doesn't get the same attention in other cities and "art capitals." And really trying to engage with that in a city that is of this size that has the problems that we do.

MC: It's like a criticism without a market, in a sense.

AE: I mean, I think criticism should exist regardless.

MG: Yeah, I don't know if the two are mutually exclusive in the way that they might be presented. Like, most of the artists or the shows that I've written about are already a part of another economy or something, or I feel like convicted to it, or I feel a conviction to writing about them because I feel sensitive about them. So whether it's the work of my friends or the work of people I don't even know so it's kind of both. It's interesting, though, cause the way that people are getting work out there, sometimes, especially in a larger context, the criticism becomes really docile, or non-existent. And can even get to the point of just documenting peoples shows at this point. Like blogging.

MC: Like journalism or travel writing, almost.

CA: I feel like recently, also, there's been a couple publications, like *Temporary Art Review*¹² or *Outpost Journal*,¹³ that seem to be in that documenting spirit of traveling from place to place, kind of like that travel journalism. Do you feel that the gestures within those are kind of working with the move of Artforum or larger spaces to speak to a "global contemporary art," or if that gesture is more about networking smaller places, or if it feeds into that fetishization of the untapped?

MG: Like prospecting cities? That would suck. That would be too insincere, I don't think it's that.

CA: I don't think that is it, here, and that's not necessarily the underlying question; I'm just curious. I'm sure it's sincere--I'm mostly wondering if that is a different gesture than something like Artforum being interested in biennial culture or something, where it is very international, where it is about exchange between different communities, but also seems to have a different twist to it.

AE: Yeah, sort of, like a weird portrait of a community that you haven't really experienced. Yeah, it's more travel journal, for sure, but I think when you look at

Artforum and larger publications that do reviews in small cities, they're picking the shows that fit within their agenda and sort of linking the trends that they see in other cities. So there is a benefit to things like Outpost and stuff that sort of looks for things that are outside of that, but it's not necessarily the most productive form, I guess, for me.

MC: Yeah, I mean, I was just thinking, what makes a Baltimore artist a Baltimore artist?

AE: Geography.

MC: The place, right. But I feel like there's an attempt in that kind of searchlight approach to criticism, that place-based approach to criticism, there's an attempt to define what the look of Baltimore is, or what the style is, or the feel. And I just can't imagine any one of the people in this room waking up and saying I'm Gonna Make A Baltimore Artwork Today.

AE: Yeah, and I think that's the danger and the limit of a thing that comes in and tries to project its idea of a city back to other cities without really getting involved or spending any time getting to know what's

going on. Just sort of doing it through other people's photos.

MC: But simultaneously, one of the things we maybe learn in school, or maybe there's this quasi-religious-utopian idea artists have about themselves is that art can communicate across real and imagined boundaries, so there is this idea that I can make something in Baltimore and it will communicate across continents and oceans, and I'm always asking myself if that's even true, you know? Like, maybe part of the strength of art making is its communication between a group like this, like in this room. Maybe that's one quality of what art making is, it's part of this conversation that sometimes involves writing, it sometimes involves making, it sometimes involves documentation, but why does it even have to speak beyond a small network?

AE: The aim of the artist, I guess? I dunno. But I guess I think work does speak everywhere. I mean, we all know what's going on in NYC and Chicago and LA and other cities and, yeah: that's where the money is, and that's where money for arts writing is, and so there's super supported criticism that comes out of those cities. But I can also tell you what's go-

ing on in Richmond and Philadelphia and other sort of smaller cities in the region...

MG: Do you feel like, stylistically, trends are similar at different times?

AE: I think because everything is so networked, absolutely. But trends are also really cyclical; I think you sort of see things come back, things that were really popular when I was getting out of undergrad are reemerging and the same artists are reemerging and it's kind of nice. I dunno, I feel like that's really hopeful.

MC: Maybe you're smarter than me, I came to San Francisco and then I went to LA and then I came here, and at every move it was like, I understood parts of what people were talking about, but I didn't, for the most part, when I first got there, really understand what people were talking about. But maybe you're smarter than me.

AE: I mean, I dunno, it just kind of depends what kind of conversations you want to have with people. And it also, I guess, depends like where you're going with work, your criticism, your conversations, what

kind of venues you're looking at--if you're looking at the institute vs if you're looking at smaller settings. And I think where ever you find your niche, you find people that are interested in the same things that you are and that allows you to see a city through whatever lens you choose. And I think that makes each city reflect with other cities and be more unified, and more connected.

MG: Yeah, like what do you do when you coincidentally see people using the same material at the same time in different cities? I get really obsessive about that.

AE: Yeah.

MG: Like this one year, I went to three or four different cities and I saw all different uses of drop ceiling, and I was like, Whoa. Is this a regional trend? Can you analyze the use and root it back to--

AE: --The First Tumblr Post?

MG: Yeah, is it The First Tumblr Post? Is there that kind of genealogy to it?

MC: Or is it that drop ceiling is there, artists are

looking at what's there...

MG: Yeah, I guess it's the different approaches, talking about this work historically, or archaeologically. I dunno. But maybe part of criticism is being a little paranoid in that way. Like, "What's going on in Instagram performance right now."

AE: I mean, I think that's also speaking to technology and those things that are new and interest artists and those people that always gravitate towards what's new. And I think you see that in the history of art forever, like people using The Brightest Blue because it became available and that pigment became the thing that could be part of it.

And that's just sort of the way things continue. Especially with Instagram, I think that's so ubiquitous right now. People are really trying to figure out how to make it theirs.



¹ <http://nudashank.com/current.html>

² <http://szechuanbest.tumblr.com/>

³ <http://rock512devil.us/>

⁴ <http://promotionandarts.org/grants/pnc-transformative-art-prize/>

⁵ <https://axisalley.wordpress.com/>

⁶ Alex Ebstein, "Blight Star," *City Paper* Vol. 33 No. 46 (2009):
<http://www.pdf-archive.com/2015/08/21/axis-alley-ebstein/axis-alley-ebstein.pdf>

⁷ Fittingly, the response to Biesenbach's Bjork show at MOMA received the sort of rabble rousing, torches and pitchforks style criticism that pop controversies all seem to share (loudly and briefly hating it, but often not in a critically minded way). Here was one of those hype reports: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/how-will-momas-bjork-debacle-impact-klaus-biesenbach-279582>

⁸ There actually was a little more critical discussion back and forth on this show in writing, but there was not the same sort of sprawling, unanimous reaction as there was to the Bjork show.

⁹ <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/>

¹⁰ Documentation images of the O.S. annual Sculptyard wars, the WIN-WIN-WIN fundraisers, and the gallery exchange with Houston's The Joanna are difficult to find and also don't function for the same utility that spacial fetishization gallery shots do.

¹¹ <http://www.baltimoreprintcity.com/>

¹² <http://www.temporaryartreview.com>

¹³ <http://www.outpostjournal.org/>

listen to audio of the discussion at
<https://soundcloud.com/postofficeartsjournal/arts-criticism-and-the-arts-outpost>
to hear the follow up Q+A and all the funny, funny jokes in their original form.

© 2015

Edited by Colin Alexander
Published by Post-Office Arts Journal, Baltimore, MD
427 A N. Eutaw, Baltimore, MD 21201

Made possible by Open Space
Printed by Indigo Ink, Columbia, MD

Thank you to Alex Ebstein, Marcus Civin, Max Guy, Jasmine Sarp,
Brendan Sullivan, and the Baltimore Design School.

edition of 75



Post-Office Arts Journal
post-office.tk
Baltimore, MD