



The Suburban Milwaukee—16 Years

By Michael Lieberman
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Michael Lieberman reminds us that small galleries are, for the most part, where true contemporary art lives. -- artblog editor

Last month, Grizzly Grizzly Gallery and The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design organized *Alternative Currencies*, a collection of satellite exhibitions at Philadelphia galleries in which independent contemporary arts groups from around the country shared their innovative modes of working. *Alternative Currencies* coincided with the exhibition *Strange Currencies: Art & Action in Mexico City, 1990-2000* at Moore, which we reviewed on October 28. The galleries that participated in *Alternative Currencies* were Grizzly Grizzly, Vox Populi, Rebekah Templeton, Traction Company, and Mount Airy Contemporary.



Amy Park, "NYC Collage" (2014), watercolor on paper mounted on dibond, 27.5" x 22".
Courtesy of the artist and The Suburban.

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The exhibition at Mount Airy Contemporary featured The Suburban, an artist exhibition space run by artists Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam, which after 16 years located in the suburbs of Chicago recently moved to Milwaukee.

Playing an important role

The Suburban describes itself as a non-commercial, “pro-artist and anti-curator site,” which “give[s] complete control to artists in regards to what they choose to produce and exhibit.” The Suburban Milwaukee: 16 Years included work selected and contributed by 37 of the artists who displayed at The Suburban during its first 16 years of life, most of whom appear to be based in Chicago, with a sprinkling of artists from Milwaukee, New York, and other locations. Three of the artists traveled to Philadelphia to install the show. Michelle Grabner, by the way, was co-curator of the 2014 Whitney Biennial, along with ICA Philadelphia’s Anthony Elms and MoMA’s Stuart Comer.



This is actually two pieces: Richard Galling, 15-009 Oil, Alkyd, Stained Stretcher Bars, and Treated Vinyl, 48” x 29” 2015 and John Riepenhoff Fiberglass, mixed media.

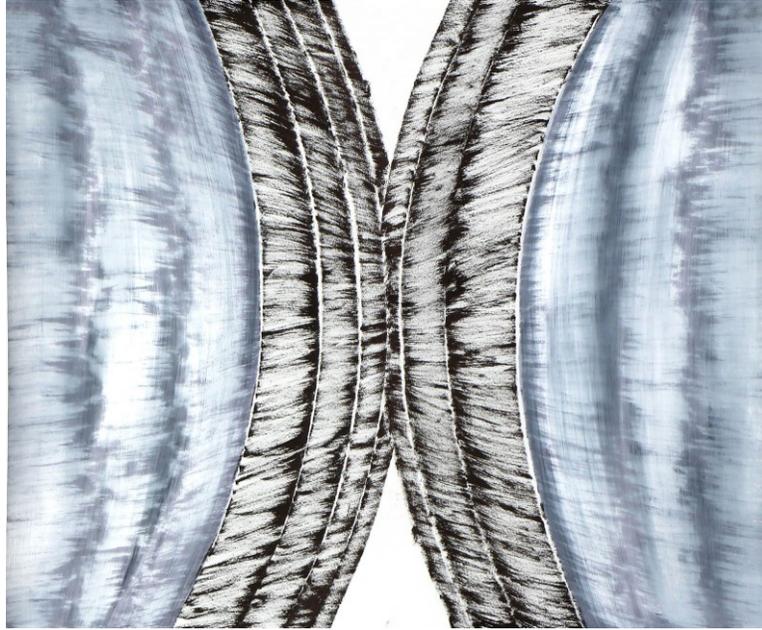
Courtesy of the artists and The Suburban

I was wondering whether there would be a distinctive Midwest vibe to the show, but that proved not to be the case. Instead, The Suburban Milwaukee: 16 Years played essentially like a survey of contemporary art. The group of artists was diverse and accomplished, and the exhibition featured many modalities, from sculpture to drawings,

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paintings, and prints. This perhaps is a reflection of the globalization of the art world. I've included here images of a number of pieces which stood out in the big group.



Magalie Guerin, "Punctuation (small) 1" (2013), ink and acrylic on paper, 14" x 17".
Courtesy of the artist and The Suburban.

Independently run artist exhibition spaces play an important role in today's world of contemporary art. But the public has in large part tragically abandoned them for an art world dominated by big-box commercial galleries, blockbuster museum shows, and mega-mall art fairs, leaving most artists with no visible or viable outlet for their work. The efforts of The Suburban and galleries like Mount Airy Contemporary—a space in suburban Philadelphia run by artists Colin Keefe and Andrea Wohl Keefe—to support contemporary artists and to make their work accessible are to be applauded. This is the avant-garde.