

ARTFORUM

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Top Ten

Heather Rowe



Heather Rowe recently had a solo exhibition at D'Amelio Terras in New York, where she is based. Her work will appear in the 2008 Whitney Biennial.

- 1** **ONE WEEK (1920)** In this short film, Buster Keaton attempts to construct a house from a number of mismatched boxes from the Portable House Company. The result is a warped architecture of misused parts: The walls are inverted, the floor becomes a springboard, the porch railing a ladder. Despite the absurd narrative, the physicality of Keaton's performance makes it easy to suspend disbelief, which might be why the film has been referenced by artists like Steve McQueen (in *Deadpan*, 1997) and, perhaps unintentionally, Gordon Matta-Clark (in *Splitting*, 1974). Of course, in terms of influence, one need look no further than Johnny Knoxville, who, in the outtakes from *Jackass Number Two*, is shown positioned under the falling facade of a house. Unlike Keaton, however, Knoxville misses the open window and suffers a painful wallop.
- 2** **THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS (2003)** Lars von Trier challenges his mentor, veteran filmmaker Jørgen Leth, to remake his 1967 short, *The Perfect Human*, five times, each under a different set of restrictions. Some are direct (film in Cuba with no set and with no shot longer than twelve frames), while others are more open to interpretation (shoot in "the most miserable place on earth"). Von Trier is determined to break his former teacher, to make him lose control over his process, to allow for the possibility of failure. A compelling film that examines the creative process in terms of perfectionism, control, and the reversal of pedagogical roles over time.
- 3** **MIKE NELSON, A PSYCHIC VACUUM** On a beautiful sunny day in September I found myself wandering through a disorienting labyrinth of decrepit rooms and hallways in a disused building of the Essex Street Market. Mike Nelson's installation, sponsored by Creative Time, made it difficult to know what the artist had appropriated and what was part of a meticulously constructed fiction—an ambiguity that produced a sort of fractured experience not unlike the one I had during a 2006 residency in Utica, New York. A postindustrial city whose heyday has long passed, Utica became for me a collage of vivid scenes. Many of its sites seem imbued with a sense of loss, like the Utica Hotel, where Tiffany lamps are among the few remaining markers of a glamorous past; the always-closed costume store with dingy nurse mannequins in the window; the antiques store plainly displaying questionable World War II memorabilia; and the numerous halfway houses for those displaced by the closing in the 1960s of the city's vast mental asylum.
- 4** **PAPER MONUMENT** This publication's debut issue last fall explored such subjects as fine-art copyists, the legendary East Village gallery Nature Morte, and real estate in New York. The journal gives a fresh slant on art and the art world, and although it exists within that context, it insists on poking, prodding, and puncturing its surface intelligently. Editors Dushko Petrovich and Roger White, in their introduction to the issue, write: "The science of fashion is liking and not liking things at the right times: specifically, liking things a fraction of a second before everyone else likes them." It's a sentiment I can't help but share as I compile this Top Ten list.

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- 5 JEAN-JACQUES LEQUEU** My interest in architectural follies led me to the curious plan for a building called the Temple of Equality and, subsequently, to the man who rendered it, Jean-Jacques Lequeu—an obscure turn-of-the-nineteenth-century visionary who drew fantastical buildings, like the Drinking Den for an Arid Wilderness, the Hammock of Love (replete with copulating couple), and a priapic fountain in a gothic tabernacle, not to mention bizarre, lewd figures and self-portraits in drag. Philippe Duboy's excellent study *Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma* (Thames and Hudson, 1986) puts forth the theory that Marcel Duchamp may have tampered with Lequeu's archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale by inserting texts and modifying his drawings. The possibility only adds to the mystery of Lequeu.
- 6 THE ADJUSTER (1991)** An adjuster appears in your darkest hour—for instance, as you watch your house and possessions go up in flames. Most offer comfort and help you get your life back together, but Noah Render, the adjuster in Atom Egoyan's film, offers much more. Everything in Render's life is a facade, a quality represented literally by his residence: a model home—for a subsequently terminated development community—decorated with fake books and generic furniture. Render pushes the boundaries of his vulnerable clients to exceedingly complicated degrees in a story that involves perverse situations and disturbed characters that are far more interesting than the over-the-top conclusion.
- 7 PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS** In the few years that my partner, Paul Wagner, has been designing for this small publisher, its exemplary list of books has been a constant inspiration. Some favorites include Roberto De Alba's *Paul Rudolph: The Late Work* (2003), Chad Randl's *Revolving Architecture: A History of Buildings That Rotate, Swivel, and Pivot* (2008), and Emily King's *Robert Brownjohn: Sex and Typography* (2005), which details Brownjohn's decadent life, from his days as an innovative designer in New York to his later years as an icon in Swinging Sixties London, where he created the titles for *Goldfinger*.
- 8 FLORENCE BROADHURST** While researching wallpaper designs, I came across an Australian company named Signature Prints that, in 2004, reissued the work of Florence Broadhurst. After enjoying an eccentric, international lifestyle, Broadhurst settled in Australia in 1949, at age sixty, and began designing wallpaper a decade later. Her motto: "Vigorous designs for modern living." In 1977, she was brutally murdered in her studio; although the case remains unsolved, many believe her death to have been at the hands of serial killer John Wayne Glover. Like that of Brownjohn, the biography of Broadhurst is as interesting and significant as the work she produced.
- 9 THE BEAVER TRILOGY (2000)** Most of the time art needs a certain type of plan to be executed, but sometimes the most brilliant works happen by accident. Such is the case with this movie, which began with a chance encounter in a parking lot in 1979 between Groovin' Gary—an Olivia Newton-John fanatic from Beaver, Utah—and filmmaker Trent Harris, who was so impressed that he set out to record Gary impersonating his musical hero in a local talent show. Oddly enough, Harris filmed the story again two years later with Sean Penn playing the kid and a third time in 1985 with Crispin Glover. The film is hard to find, but to watch the Beaver Kid perform is truly liberating.
- 10 ALLSTATE GLASS, NEW YORK** Situated on Kenmare Street for almost fifty years, after being located on Mott Street since 1923, Allstate Glass is a tiny space, packed floor to ceiling with stacks of glass, broken mirrored tables, gilt frames, and venetian blind displays that seem to have been there, gathering dust, since the store's early days. This shop may seem to be an anachronistic time capsule, especially considering its gentrified surroundings, but Allstate's resident glass cutter cuts the straightest lines around.