

If Cura means “to know,” then Cura! Cura! Cura! was an education

Early in our discussion of what she might create for Cura! Cura! Cura! Dallas artist Sunny Sliger talked about having water skiers on White Rock Lake splashing past the Bath House. The skiers would wear the colorful collage fabrics we'd seen in her work so many times before. Unfortunately, there's no skiing at White Rock because boat motors powerful enough to pull them are illegal. But just the thought of it made for happy daydreams — wild colors flailing in the wind.

Then she and her sometimes collaborator Marianne Newsom, were going to wrap the back porch of the Bath House in their densely colorful fabric. That was an exciting and doable notion that, though it would have required long hours and massive material, would only have been visible from the lake. Terry and I both love their medium, but I was afraid having artists we didn't invite in the show would tip our careful gender balance.

Much later, we learned on Facebook, that invited artist Sam England had collaborated with Eric de Llamas [pictured in my story about installing the show] on their big, lush and partially gilded painting. Actually, Eric said his work would be featured in the show, which startled us, although he would have rebalanced my precious gender equation, and I again wondered about the need to so carefully adhere to such egalitarianism. At our first meeting with the artists to decide whose work would show where in the galleries, Sam said he planned to collaborate with studio-mate Ashley Bryan, but that did not work out.

Instead of collaborating, Sunny created new work. I had concerns about stopping her from working with someone she liked working with, but I was gratified when I realized what she had accomplished solo. But before we'd figured all that out, Terry and I pushed her to continue our needs for her older work, which bothers me now, though then it seemed appropriate.

The red piece in the lobby, comprising three types of clothes forms covered with shredded, dyed fabric, was initiated by us over-collaborating curators. I'm still promoting the notion that we chose the artists, then let them do what they wanted, but we provided too much guidance for Sunny's red piece. For it, we threw together the notion, size and form, from what Sunny brought, then left her to make it happen.

"Why don't you," we suggested, "put some of those fabrics on one of those mannequins?" And, of course, we liked it when she did. Then the Bath House got carried away and put it up on a riser, setting it off like a museum piece and making it the only piece in the show on a riser. I suppose it does add pizzazz, but I liked it on the floor better. There, it was integrated with the reality of walking through the lobby.

Bath House administrators, afraid the next person who bumped into it — at least one already had — might trip and fall. So without consulting curators, they parked it up on the only pedestal they could find, adding yet another level of unintended collaboration and forcing visitors to look up at what I thought of as a human-scale object. It was not what I hoped for but if we hadn't butted in, it would not have existed, and nobody would have bumped into it.

There was at least one more instance of us curators getting carried away with what we wanted. Sunny brought in several collages including these, which we loved the looseness and mixed-media melange of. For awhile, it was difficult to explain to others what those drawings were about. But later, during the opening reception, a serious artist friend asked, and I lead her across the gallery to stand before the wholly

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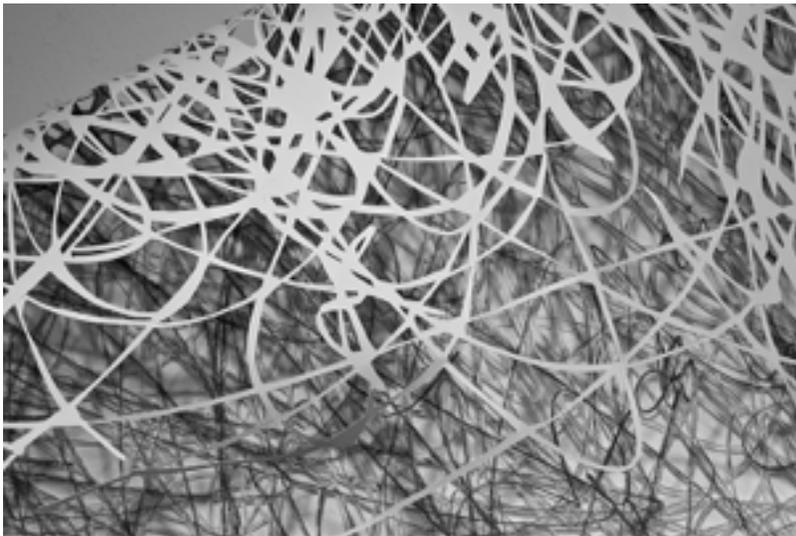
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Sunny-generated figures. I hadn't known how to describe it, but in the moment, looking into the large, wall-filling forms, it just seemed obvious.

I told her Sunny called them drawings. And that what she was drawing with, were the same or visually similar materials as the two fobs she'd created on the center's front porch. Sunny thought the rope-hung fobs, rich with subtle colors, odd shapes and engaging textures would be obvious to anyone coming through the front door, although we did talk with one guy who had walked between them into the building without noticing. A matter of scale, I suspect. When one puts that much detailed time and effort into work, they grow larger and more obvious. Much larger and they would have created difficulty hoisting and may have blocked the way.

Bath House Art Coordinator Enrique Cervantes, who has been hoisting both fobs every day the Bath House has been open since, reported September 18 that one fell, and Sunny had been notified, so she's probably already working on new moorings, and it will be back up soon. I still like staring at the slowly circling, not-quite monochromatic multi-media ornaments swaying in the breeze. Leaving it out over nights was okay with her, but the Bath House wanted it safe, so it comes down every Saturday night and goes back up on Tuesday mornings. A lot of hassle, and with that much handling, a fall seemed more possible.



Harding, *Scribbled Wall*

Terry and I were serious about finding the right wall to hang Sunny's drawings, and we were pleased they fit the space left of Bernardo Cantu's wall — together, they even seemed color-coordinated. Bernardo nestled his major installation piece that I still think is the best he's ever done, visually between the two of those

squared-off columns just into the main gallery. The same one Tim Harding is leaning on in the photo below. Sunny's drawings pair for the two fobs fit perfectly between Bernardo's and Sedrick Huckaby's spaces. Terry and I had been excited about the placement, but we were even more intoxicated by the wild shadows cast by the irregular edges of Sunny's large collages supported only by pushpins in their tops. But when Sunny saw them, she push-pinned them all the way around the two pieces, rendering them nearly flat into the wall, so few such of the shadows we thought so dynamic showed.

We missed those wild shadows and told her. She didn't care. We were disappointed, but she got to show the three-dimensional piles-of-stuff drawings the way she wanted. I, at least, admire her gumption, although I still miss those shadows.

Later, when I wasn't there, and I don't think Terry was either, Sunny returned with an unanticipated and unannounced piece that should, by all reasons rational and fair, have supplanted the too-often collaborated-upon red one. I usually think of the new one as "the wedding dress," because it is mostly lacey white with dangling colors, reflective shapes, glitters and glitzes. But Sunny titled it Disco Chatelaine. You probably understand the disco reference, but chatelaine means "a woman in charge of a large house" with her keys and chains dangling from her belt.

I later heard that Sunny wanted it hung in the middle of the main gallery, but somebody — probably Enrique — instead hung it just outside the theatre door opposite side our red piece. Terry and I and Sunny had earlier discussed how theatric her costumes were, so that placement seemed thematically appropriate, but because it's on the other, unexpected side of the lobby, it is visually confusing. It looks okay there although it's too close to the dark piano, but distant like part of some other show or maybe a costume from a play. It would have better for us as curators, to hang it instead of the red piece, since we had no business directing her to do any work to please us, when she's so clearly on her own path. But we didn't even know she was working on it.

Much later, perusing the Exhibition Checklist to get correct caption information here, I noticed a strange new title. The red pieces are called hats, and the work is titled Air Pudding and Wind Pie, which seems somehow appropriate, even smile-worthy.



Harding, *Rolled Wall*

I got plenty opportunities to learn while co-curating Cura! Cura! Cura! at the Bath House Cultural Center through September 29, 2012. Most of what I discovered was via interesting — often fascinating, albeit sometimes subtle — experiences with the artists Terry and I chose. Those ongoing circumstances are probably why I've hung onto this job so long. So the learning-from-other-artists part was hardly new, but though I've often promised to do a "carefully curated" exhibition over the past dozen years, this is the first one I've actually pulled off — We have actually pulled off.

Bath House Visual Arts Coordinator Enrique Fernández Cervantes invited me to start a new exhibition series called Curate.Collaborate, wherein I was to invite another curator, and we would collaborate to produce an exhibition. I choose Terry Hays, and we worked together to produce all aspects. Not that sharing responsibilities for such an undertaking was particularly easy for either of us. I'm not used to first finding out what somebody else wants to do about everything that comes up during the often long and involved process of producing an art show.

As great a procrastinator as I am, I love to get exhibition things done when they need doing without talking it over first. I usually would rather decide things quickly than be right all the time, so the show's progress continues. But we shared responsibilities on this one. All the way through. And no, we did not always agree, or else why bother collaborating.

I know I quote Phillip Glass too often about this, but I actually heard him say it at SMU's McFarlin Auditorium some years back, so it rings especially apt: "The best thing about collaborating is that you get to work with other people, and the worst thing about collaborating is that you get to work with other people."

I've blogged about most of the shows I've produced, because the artists who read these page want or need to know how they are executed. Studio visits are among this websites' most popular pages, and I missed sharing with you each step. But I decided early to stay covert about this show's inner workings. Maybe just because it'd be different. Maybe because it really needed to be collaborative, and I still don't know how much to share about that interaction. Maybe I don't know why I passed on the opportunity to write about it every step; then, of course, sometimes I do.

But I have photo-augmented memories of moments to share about putting this show on those walls, and I've already procrastinated too long, although it was nice to finally catch up on sleep, get a few birds photographed and tell at least one Art Here Lately tale. Now it's back to art show business.

I'm starting with Tim Harding because my memory of him leaning on that first pillar [photo above] in front of his wall just staring and thinking and imagining for what seemed like hours, came up every time I thought about starting this page — not because I like his work the best, although it turned out very well. I have too many favorites in this show, as you will learn as this story continues. But the first time he brought work he only brought that one big scribble, leaving a major gap between his work and Sam England's paintings wrapping around the corner to the right.

Tim had shown something similar before, he told me, I forget where, Houston maybe, but it was a similar large, cut-out scribble, and next to it were what he called "the voids." Tim's scribbles are drawings in graphite on thick white paper. The voids were the meticulously excised spaces between the lines. He kept them in place, flat on the wall next to the positive drawing. Like his big scribble, only for Cura! Tim very precisely placed the flattened scribble, so it adjoined the vent (that shows blue sky light in the image below) that I'd never noticed it before in the upper corner of the gallery wall over his piece.

Then, after more consideration, Tim tried several ways to ripple and shape the otherwise flat scribble. Eventually, after several, long reconsiderations, Tim rolled the top left edge over, so the white base showed curled above the etched graphite lines of the positive side, and he gently folded another "corner" to achieve a similar effect slightly lower on that same side.

I watched Tim staring off into his space again, later, when he delivered four more pieces, after I'd reminded him he'd talked about two pieces on his wall when we'd met in the space to divvy up walls and at Terry's and my "studio visit" with him at his show at 500X.

This show turned out to be much more what the artists we chose wanted than what we planned, so I was conflicted about telling him to bring more work. But there was that big, gaping hole between the Scribbled Wall he brought initially and Sam England's corner, where Sam had already begun hanging paintings. I emailed Tim, and told him we needed at least one more big piece.

Days later, when he brought four large squares of heavy white paper scribbled solid with graphite on one side, none of us were sure what he'd do. At first he mentioned the possibility of hanging all four in a

checkerboard pattern up that wall. I probably didn't look too enthusiastic — although he probably could have pulled it off, and after he dropped back into Tim Concentration - Imagination Mode and just stared long minutes into the space he'd left, maybe an hour or so, most of which time, Terry and I did things else to keep the show going up.

After running other variations in the presentation and surface warp as he stared, Tim settled for one nail, low on the wall and bent in the left side, then gently rolled the bottom edge, as you see below. Now it's such a simple thing, superb in execution and placement, that it has taken over that wall, showing two vary different paper art forms at Timothy Harding's command. Our apprehensions were quieted, and we were startled at the sudden transformation.



Harding, *Folded Wall*

Meanwhile, we'd been holding back a blank wall opposite the main gallery directly visible through its entry. We could have left it blank to lead visitors deeper into what Diane Sikes would do with its space. Like we'd left another, similar possibility — maybe art here, maybe not — near the far end of that hall, past her major piece I always thought of as a waterfall, though it made from shredded paper, so it was more of a paperfall. Back there, we eventually placed two small, dark pieces by Kimberly Alexander that didn't look right on her wall of large, bright colored paintings on white. But that's a different story, for later.

Here now was a new opportunity. Tim asked if we wanted another piece. And at that triumphant moment, yes, definitely. We pointed him at the wall, and he gave it its due time consideration, and eventually hung another dark, graphited square by one of its corners there, just so, and began attenuating its surface this way and that, till he came up with a uncomplicated diagonal fold, very nearly as elegant as the roll in one in the main gallery. We liked. Immediately. It [two clicks down] looked great there.

Many months previous, we'd met with all but one artist to introduce them to the spaces we had for the show. Terry's and my plan was to get each artist to take a wall or decide among themselves whether they wanted a wall or part of a wall that might include a corner. Terry was always insistent that we not fill up the area between the walls in the main gallery where the load-bearing columns were, so everybody's work could always be seen. We were amazed when no two — or more — artists wanted the same space. I'm sure we could have handled it otherwise, but to have such a potentially contentious decision decided quickly and easily by the people most involved was a pleasant surprise and a great start.

We had emailed a diagram of the space to everybody, but only by standing there, in that space, would it make any real sense to artists who wanted to use the vertical spaces completely missing in that floor diagram. I wish we'd got everybody's email addresses and phone numbers and addresses at that meeting.

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— it would have saved time later, but getting the walls and corners allotted was a major accomplishment, and we were happy. Several artists even talked about sharing space and/or collaborating in the spaces between them. It felt like a productive meeting.

Afterwards, I remember Enrique commenting how startled he was at how young all the artists were. That wasn't part of our plan. It just happened that the art we were amazed by came from relatively young artists. Not altogether surprising, really. Our only guiding principles for choosing artists was that we'd include equal numbers of women and men, because Bath House shows usually shows about 67% women — and way more older artists.

-J.R. Compton

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