



IRON ARTIST

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A project by Matt Freedman and Sina Najafi,
co-organized with Colby Chamberlain

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3pm

PS1 Contemporary Art Center
Long Island City, New York

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Matt Freedman & Sina Najafi

Iron Artist is an absurdist multimedia spectacle of competitive, real-time art making. Loosely inspired by the adrenaline-infused Japanese cooking show “Iron Chef,” Iron Artist invites the public to witness two duels between four of the most spontaneous and charismatic artists and artist collaboratives working today. Using materials and tools provided at P.S.1, the opponents in each duel created artworks in response to a theme revealed to them on the spot. The duels, each 45 minutes in length, pitted Jude Tallichet against Olav Westphalen, and Big Room (Julian LaVerdiere and Vincent Mazeau) against Type A (Adam Ames and Andrew Bordwin).

To further implicate this event in the contemporary art scene, the works produced by the artists have not been allowed to stand alone even for one second; they were executed in front of a live audience amid the noise of esteemed curators’ on-the-spot commentaries and of banal “up close and personal” video profiles of the artists, and further over-mediated by catalogue essays written even as the works were still in progress.

To make matters even worse, four art world personalities were invited to act as judges and to declare a winner for each duel. Lastly, this catalogue itself is the product of Iron Artist’s fatally accelerated speed—it was produced during the competition and is now being distributed during the reception that has followed the competition. Be careful not to spill your wine on these pages.

DUEL #1

Jude Tallichet vs Olav Westphalen

“Love and Its Discontents”



Sculptor Jude Tallichet has participated in the Shanghai Biennial, the Tirana Biennial, the 2000 “Greater New York” exhibition at P.S.1/ MoMA, and executed a project for the Public Art Fund. She has had solo shows at the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum and at Sara Meltzer Gallery.



Sculptor Olav Westphalen was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial and has had exhibitions at the Sculpture Center, at Oslo Kunstneres Hus, and at Maccarone inc. He completed a project for the Public Art Fund in 2000.



Jude Tallichet



Olav Westphalen

Jude Tallichet

Frances Richard

Jude Tallichet and the Ninja Love Team

Love is an iron secret, a creative problem, a collaborative endeavor, a war, a myth, a cosmos; it is a material imagined to be solid and timeless that is in fact often ephemeral, rushed, competitive, parodic, even cheap. For Jude Tallichet, the myth behind the monument—in this case the love story, the art-historical precedent, and the minimalist or feminist genius—has always been a point of departure. Her work typically takes on a collective belief, say in the power of the American West, or rock-n-roll, or architectural icons like the Empire State Building. These myths are not debunked so much as embraced in all their kitschy foolishness. Tallichet takes seriously the possibility of uplifting revelation. Perhaps the planets really do influence destiny, and Venus and Mars actually can embody timeless principles of creativity and destruction. But, if so, there is nothing pure or immediate about these powers. We can only know them, as it were, through a snow of toxic dust, and the music of the spheres is strangely reminiscent of the hey-ho-let's-go organ riffs echoing in a sports arena. This combination of sterility and spirituality is perfectly encapsulated in Tallichet's speed-grunge performance of the epic/tragic death of Ana Mendieta at the hands—?—of her husband Carl Andre. Mendieta's silhouette is mocked up in Styrofoam and gravel—Andre's Minimalist tiles are simulated in gray carpet remnants. Of course, this pairing speaks to the gender structure of violent competition versus democratic collaborations, and Tallichet comes down squarely on the side of anti-hierarchical cooperation. The ninja team—like a squad of Sawz-All wielding cupids—work together like musicians in a band, or planets in a solar-system, performers in an ad-hoc festival of spontaneous museological mayhem.

Olav Westphalen

Thomas Zummer

Round and Round and Upside-Down

"...and the appointed moment arrived, exactly on time..." —Mark Twain, paraphrased

"Love: and its Discontents releases tropes of all sorts, metaphors, allusions, and even more exotic figures flying around with the same rapidity as shards of styrofoam, and splinters of wood.

Olav Westphalen, begins with a masterfully precise series of cuts with an electric chainsaw, an implement generations ahead of that of his opponent, Jude Tallichet, employing a decidedly less elegant "saws-all". Westphalen has, within minutes produced an elegant wrenching of form out of foam; Tallichet's block looks as if it may tip over.

Tallichet concludes with a quasi-Renaissance-Kabbalistic armature—a large central 'orb' with a series of smaller 'satellites' and a circulation of placards with astrological/ astronomical names and phrases. Westphalen counters with a tripartite, partially-entailed series of spheres, set one within the other (they are continuous, so Westphalen gains points in the classicist/illusionist register, where Tallichet's more slap-dash process-celebratory piece is conspicuously improvisatory.

Olav Westphalen's inverted "snowman" performs a beautiful transposition between conscious/unconscious, up/down, and similar binary "swappings". It brings to mind the tactile displacement performed by Harry in "Dumb and Dumber" when, as he is building a snowman, is handed a carrot and two lumps of coal by a young woman. Harry immediately discerns the proper placement of these elements, and arranges them as penis and testicals, giving the cinematic snowman cojones for the first time on screen. Westphalen is to be congratulated for the sophistication and depth of his allusion, and the poignancy of his adherence to the theme of "Love and its Discontents."



JUDGING

	Originality	Execution	Responsiveness to theme	Total
Jude Tallichet	26	23	34	83
Olav Westphalen	32	40	22	94

DUEL #2

Big Room vs Type A

“Man’s Inhumanity to Man”



Photo Richard Avedon

Big Room, an artists' association co-founded by Julian LaVerdiere and Vincent Mazeau, has worked collaboratively with many commercial directors and fashion photographers. LaVerdiere and Mazeau also exhibit individually. LaVerdiere co-designed the Tribute in Light annual memorial for the World Trade Center and has had solo exhibitions at MOCA Miami, MOCA Cleveland, and Lehmann Maupin Gallery. Vincent Mazeau was included in “Make it Now” at the Sculpture Center and recently had a solo exhibition at Lehmann Maupin Gallery.



Adam Ames and Andrew Bordwin exhibit together as Type A. They have had solo exhibitions at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, at ARCO, Madrid, and at Sara Meltzer Gallery. Their work was also included in “Sport” at Socrates Sculpture Park, “Dating Data” at the Josée Bienvenu Gallery, and the traveling ICI exhibition “Will Boys be Boys?”



Big Room



Type A

Big Room

Andrea Scott

Big Room is a lumberjack in a forest of signs. The artists who once set an ad campaign for Hugo Boss in a bunker designed by Albert Speer, know that the enemy is us. Man's inhumanity to himself will not be put to an end with trash-talking bananas or wrist. But a brick in the perfect proportions of the golden mean might just do the trick.

You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows. In the throw-down of Iron Artist, Big Room opts for the tactics of asymmetrical warfare and political protest: a brick aimed at the glass ceiling of art world spectacle, attached to a big black weather balloon. (They also borrow Joseph Beuys's blackboard.)

From inside P.S.1 it all looks like art. But how will a pedestrian walking down Jackson Avenue feel about the ominous, airborne brick? Freaked out, hopes Big Room. As Guy Debord, author of "The Society of the Spectacle" wrote: "Life can never be too disorienting." To heighten the disorientation (and maybe to spare P.S.1 pesky personal injury law suits) that's no brick, it's a Styrofoam simulacrum, cut to proportions of the Golden Rectangle. But what goes up does not come down. Defying the laws of gravity, their brick is like a Renaissance Machina Paradoxa.

Remember: Information wants to be free, not held hostage by notions of winner or loser. Value can be inflated, but it can also be a sand bag that prevents us from drift. As Big Room sends aloft their ominous black cojones, heed Guy Debord's warning: "All forms of expression are losing their grip on reality."

Type A

Barbara Pollack

Wearing their fear of premature ejaculation on their sleeves—or at least acknowledging that fear of competition will certainly cause them to break a sweat—Type A wearing dorky athletic sweatbands faced the formidable challenge of sustaining our attention for 45 minutes. Performance anxiety is a central theme of this duo's work, recording their pseudo-art-duels in a series of 1970s inspired videos. But here, rather than having the two members of this team—Adam Ames and Andrew Bordwin—facing off against each other, they adopted a more directed, focused style of masculinity, directed against their opponent, Big Room.

More the illegitimate children than the heir apparents of Minimalism—think, oops, a hole in Bruce Nauman's condom—these guys know how to make fun of their forefathers, even while they pay homage to them. Constructing a box made of raw dry wall and aluminum studs, they employed the slap-together-finesse of a Two Stooges, rather than the refinement of the sexually-repressed Donald Judd. In fact, even as they built their box, Type A seemed permanently incapable of actually making a simple 90 degree angle.

In this test of testosterone, self-effacement and sexual insecurity go farther, than the blind machismo of those nerdy-masters of the 1970s. Their final feat of imprisoning themselves within the Juddian box comments on the imprisonment of art history and the impotence of a younger generation of male artists to supercede that history. By violently braking through those walls at the last minute, Type A not only shows that with humor and mayhem—not theory and seriousness—we can get passed these limiting notions of art and of masculinity. When it comes to Man's Inhumanity to Man, Type A reminds us that so much that passes for monumentality is merely a case of Boys Will Be Boys!



JUDGING

	Originality	Execution	Responsiveness to theme	Total
Big Room	35	35	33	103
Type A	35	39	34	108

Credits

Participants

Artists: Big Room, Jude Tallichet, Type A, Olav Westphalen
Reporters: Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Nato Thompson
Critics: Barbara Pollack, Frances Richard, Andrea Scott, Thomas Zimmer
Judges: Mary Ceruti, Monroe Denton, Brett Littman, Becky Smith
Music: Brian Dewan
Commentator: Choire Sicha
Anchor: Matt Freedman
Host: Sina Najafi

Technical

Producer: Colby Chamberlain
Sound and Image mixing: Ned Kihn
Set design: Jake Borndal
Catalogue design: Leah Beeferman, Daniella Spinat
Poster design: Jeff Tackett
Assistants: Katie Fowler, Faten Kanaan, Kavior Moon, Eric Nylund, Courtney Stephens

Videos

The best friends: Robert Hickman
The kids: Caleb Hickman
The moms: Phyllis Kind
Himself: Virgil
Voiceovers: Nina Katchadourian
Videography and editing: Ned Kihn
Script: Matt Freedman
Story: Matt Freedman, Ned Kihn, Sina Najafi

Artists' Assistants

Assistants to Mssrs Big Room: John Dante Bianchi and Brendan McGillicuddy
Assistants to Ms. Tallichet: Timothy Belknap, Tal Ben-Yaacov, Christopher Bowne, Lauren Carbone, Asuka Goto, Walsh Hansen, Juliane Zelwies
Assistants to Mssrs Type A: Michael Berlin, Nick D'Emilio, Dave McDermott, Mark Tichy
Assistants to Mr. Westphalen: Alex Decarli, Nik Gelormino, Peter Kreider, Erin Knudson, Caitlin MacQueen

Curated by Matt Freedman, Sina Najafi
Organized by Matt Freedman, Sina Najafi, Colby Chamberlain

For more photographs from Iron Artist, and to download a full-color PDF catalogue, visit the Cabinet magazine website at www.cabinetmagazine.org/events/ironartist.php.

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