

Happening, *The Gray Market Weekly*, Text/Tim Schneider, July 3rd 2017.



The Gray Market Weekly

Seven days in the evolving business of fine art. This week, stories that pose eye-opening questions about art-world identities...

Every Monday Tim Schneider, Director of Research at [Kayne Griffin Corcoran](#) Gallery and the brains behind [The Gray Market Blog](#), dissects the most important stories of the week from the art market.

BULL DURHAM

On Monday, the art industry's latest race-based electrical fire (re)ignited, when a collection of self-described "Cherokee artists, scholars, activists, and citizens" published a scathing editorial that accused Jimmie Durham — currently the subject of a major traveling retrospective at Minneapolis's [Walker Art Center](#) — of fabricating his identity as a member of their cultural community.

After a thorough investigation of the artist's roots, the co-authors summed up the findings as follows: "No matter what metric is used to determine Indigenous status, Durham does not fulfill any of them." The same allegation has been leveled against the artist for decades in some circles, it turns out. But in a recent [New York Times feature](#), Durham himself seemed to give up the ghost by admitting, "I am perfectly willing to be called Cherokee. But I'm not a Cherokee artist or Indian artist, no more than Brancusi was a Romanian artist."

All of which compels me to mention that I am perfectly willing to be called a Nobel laureate, NBA champion, and/or Rooney Mara's summer fling, but... well, you know.

Back to business, however: In my eyes, Durham's situation is an order of magnitude worse than Sam Durant's [Scaffold](#) scandal, Dana Schutz's [Open Casket](#) controversy, or Kelley Walker's [Direct Drive](#) debacle. In Durham's case, we aren't just talking about a career marred by an isolated, race-based face-plant. We're talking about a career founded on addressing Native American issues and leveraging indigenous imagery to that effect — and therefore a career potentially undermined all the way to the cornerstone.

In other words, if these allegations are true, Durham isn't the art-industry equivalent of late-night host and self-righteous jackass [Bill Maher](#), who just recently felt comfortable enough with his sociopolitical status to try cracking a joke with the N-word as the punchline. Instead, he's closer to former NAACP branch president and recently unmasked honky [Rachel Dolezal](#), who built an entire personal and professional life out of masquerading as a black woman.

And yet, some might argue that the most bizarre decision in this dust-storm of poor choices was actually made by the Walker. As nearly every article about the Durham controversy points out, the institution was just stung by the scandal bug — specifically vis-à-vis Native American identity — when it tried to install Durant's [Scaffold](#) in its sculpture park a few weeks ago. Cherokee activists reportedly voiced their concerns about Durham to museum officials in advance of the retrospective's opening. And yet, the Walker went ahead with the show anyway.

Why? While I'm sure other factors contributed, we have to remember that major museums are major bureaucracies. They're ill-equipped to pivot when problems streak toward their headline programming. Retrospectives in particular take YEARS to organize and fund. Every one is a tremendous sunk cost on its own — and therefore a near impossibility to replace on short notice if something goes wrong in the final countdown to opening night.

Had the Walker just learned about Durham's shaky past even a few months ago — dubious, but let's give them the benefit of the doubt for argument's sake— trying to change course at that stage would be like trying to steer a sea freighter out of the path of a motorboat full of AK-toting pirates. Essentially, every vaunted museum director lives their entire professional life as [Captain Phillips](#).

I'm not suggesting the Walker deserves a pass here. I'm just pointing out why such a vaunted institution so recently machine-gunned by scandal might not be able to maneuver its way out of similar trouble immediately after. Even if the spirit is willing, the bureaucratic flesh is almost invariably weak. [[Indian Country Today](#)]



Jimmie Durham creates work that examines the notion of citizenship, the interface between art and activism, and the role of art and artists in society. [Visit the exhibition.](#)

POD PEOPLE

On Wednesday, MoMA and WNYC announced that they would team with Broad City co-creator/co-writer/co-star Abbi Jacobson to present a 10-episode podcast about contemporary art. Titled *A Piece of Work*, the show will feature Jacobson discussing specific objects with guests ranging from high-art dignitaries like Thelma Golden and Carolee Schneemann to pop-culture stars like Questlove and RuPaul.

As my colleague Caroline Goldstein pointed out, Jacobson is not an art-world neophyte. She's a graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art, as well as a bestselling author and illustrator. Her latest release, [Carry This Book](#), is even premised in part on visualizing what living and deceased icons—some of them artists — kept in their pockets.

That said, there's still a chasm between those credentials and what tends to satisfy the members of one of the world's most judgmental demographics, i.e. the art world. Which is precisely why I think *A Piece of Work* will be such an interesting mirror onto the niche.

In my experience, many, if not most, art professionals and enthusiasts tend to maintain a contradictory point of view about their passion. On one hand, they often loudly lament that contemporary art doesn't have a bigger presence in the wider culture. "What if as many people went to see '[Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends](#)' as [Transformers: The Last Knight](#)?' they wonder. Wouldn't the world be a better place?

And yet, when pop-culture figures attempt to make that fantasy a reality, many of the same art-world denizens usually tend to recoil in horror and wail, "Oh God, not like THAT!" It's as if they wished for eternal youth, then found out after the blood had dried on the devil's contract that they'd inadvertently agreed to live out the rest of time crapping themselves as helpless, screaming infants.

Granted, not all pop-cultural crossovers are created equal. Personally, I'd much rather see [Shia LaBeouf](#) doing mischievous durational performances than watch [Bret Easton Ellis panelize with Alex Israel](#).

LEO XU PROJECTS

But in general, I don't think we can have it both ways. If contemporary art is going to penetrate deeper into the mainstream, it's unlikely to do so on the terms that purists would approve of — largely because I'm not sure those terms actually exist. And Jacobson's podcast should be another reflecting pool on this increasingly familiar issue. [[artnet News](#)]



'Broad City' star Abby Jacobson. Photo via © ComedyCentral and © Youtube.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Finally this week, let's ride out on a rare wave of positivity. Thursday saw the opening of the first New York iteration of [Condo](#), the month-long collaborative project in which emerging and midsize galleries from different regions link up to counter the increasingly savage economics of the 21st-century art market.

Founded in January 2016 by Vanessa Carlos of [Carlos/Ishikawa](#), Condo was previously a London-only initiative. But New York gallerists [Simone Subal](#) and Nicole Russo — the latter of [Chapter NY](#) — felt compelled enough by the model to work with Carlos on shepherding her brainchild across the Atlantic this year.

The result? Now through July 28, a consortium of 16 New York galleries are "either sharing their [New York] spaces with visiting galleries or co-curating shows with them," per Artforum. The inaugural edition features sellers with home-bases ranging from Detroit to Los Angeles to Vienna to Shanghai, all of whom will now have a presence in the art world's global capital for four solid weeks.

As my longtime readers know, I'm generally almost as cynical about the traditional midlevel-gallery model's sustainability as about Diet Coke's odds of getting sanctioned as a diabetes treatment. Yet Condo gives me hope.

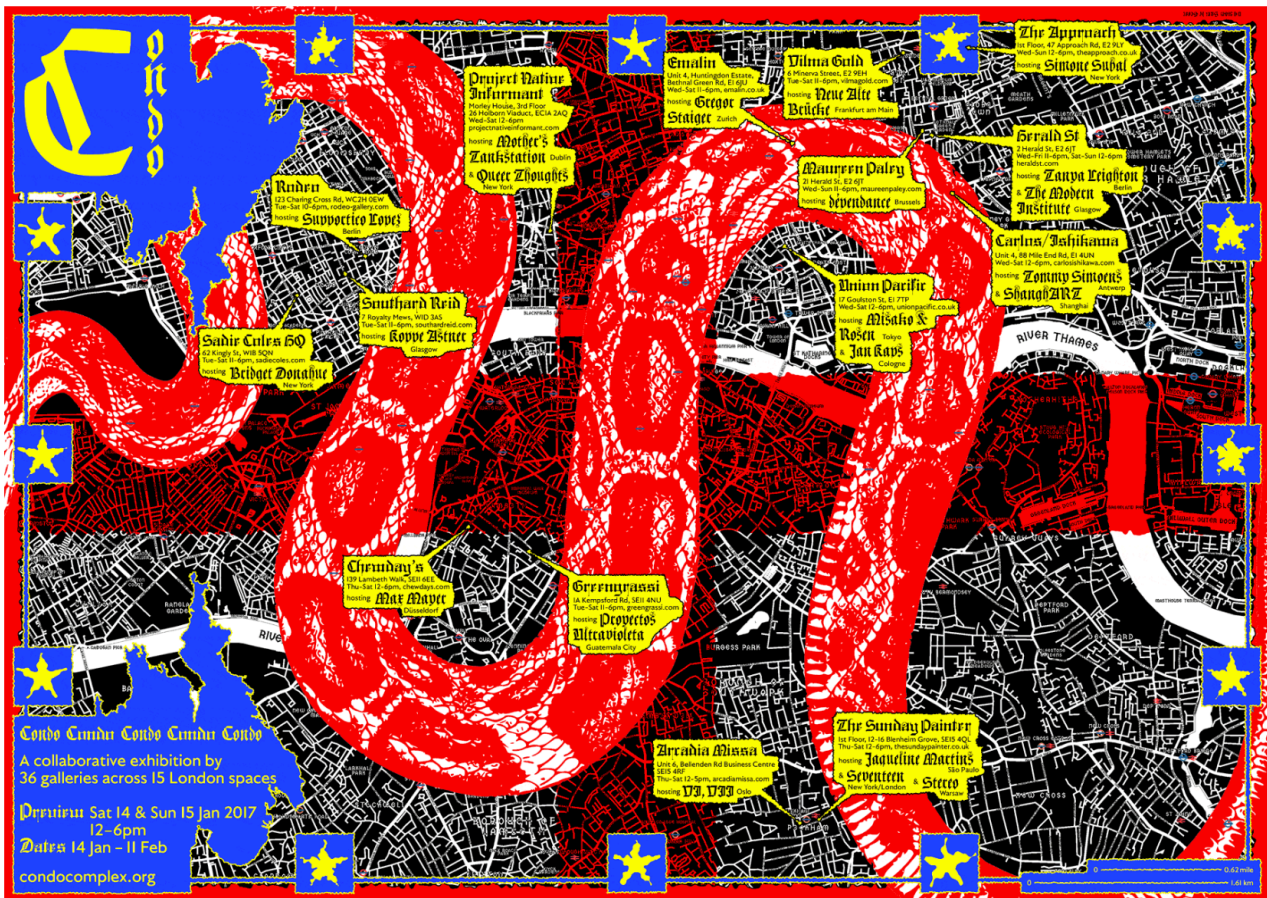
It isn't just that the project temporarily hacks the gallery system from a financial standpoint, allowing single-location sellers to enter multiple markets without committing to the high-stakes, long-term costs of a second permanent location. It's that Condo reflects a larger spirit of cooperation in the sector — one that I believe will be critical to maintaining its diversity in a rapidly consolidating industry.

I don't think mid-level galleries have a prayer at stalemating, let alone checkmating, the mega-galleries if they play by the standard rules. Instead, my sense is that sub-elite sellers increasingly have to chuck the chessboard out the window and pivot to a game that is more progressive, more flexible, and — most important — more cooperative than we've grown used to in the increasingly winner-take-all art market.

In short, I think smaller galleries, unbranded artists, and other non-Zwirners need to see each other not as nemeses, but as allies — and perhaps even as one another's salvation. At least, if we want to avoid a gallery sector that feels like nothing so much as a promenade of globally franchised, high-end department stores.

Condo isn't the completion of this rescue effort. But it's a legitimate sign of life. And for this week, that's enough for me. [[Artforum](#)]

LEO XU PROJECTS



That's all for this edition. Til next time, remember: You can't solve any problem until you're willing to look it square in the face, especially when the problem is yourself.

<http://www.happening.media/category/magazine/en/articles/2906/the-gray-market-weekly-21>