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It's art, but not as we know it

The Art Newspaper's first ever Bartlebooth Award celebrates the improbable, impossible and incredible in international contemporary art. To nominate works for next year's prize [click here](#)

By Adrian Dannatt

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"The Art Newspaper is an invaluable source of information about art and the art world. It focuses on personalities as well as issues, but eschews gossip and stresses accuracy embracing an editorial policy that consistently reveals a high degree of seriousness and sense of responsibility".
Philippe de Montebello, director, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This article is taken from the December issue of The Art Newspaper. Buy this issue or [Subscribe](#)

This festive season sees the establishment of The Art Newspaper's first "Bartlebooth Award" to reward all projects of the previous 12 months that seem outstandingly improbable, impossible or incredible, even by the constantly rising novelty-bar of today's art. Thus the Bartlebooth honours current artists who devote themselves to truly unnecessary, painstaking activities which outside the "contemporary art" world would get one locked in the loony bin.

The award is, of course, named after Percival Bartlebooth, the millionaire Englishman in Georges Perec's novel *Life: a user's manual* who devotes his existence to an endlessly complex, pointless artistic process. Bartlebooth studies watercolour painting for 10 years, then travels the world painting 500 identical format seascapes. These are sent back to Paris where they are turned into jigsaw puzzles. On returning home Bartlebooth re-assembles the jigsaw images and returns the completed watercolour to where it was painted, whereupon it is dipped in a detergent until it becomes blank paper again.

Unfortunately Bartlebooth dies before his project is complete, but he has plenty of descendants, some justly famous, whether it be Hanne Darboven and her long-running "diary" or Bruce Nauman's endless

And the winners are...

Seth Weiner, The Terranaut Project (Exit Art, New York. Part of "Exit Biennial II: Traffic" (until 23 December)

This robotic vehicle is piloted by a goldfish: the fish steers the vessel by its movements. A camera above the cockpit tracks the movements of the Terranaut (that's the name of the fish-pilot). Its location is then wirelessly transmitted to a remote processing station where the data is converted into motion commands and transmitted back to the motion controller of the vehicle.



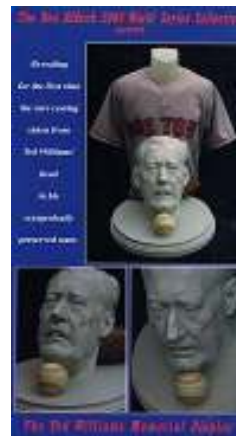
Reuben Henry, All of the places (Exit Art).

This towering stack of thousands of sheets of A4 paper is a comprehensive list of all place names in America, including states, cities, towns, villages and airports. Henry wrote down all the names himself, not from an index, but crossed off, one by one, from the most detailed map available, moving from Maine to Alaska. As the artist puts it: "The challenge of formulating the list via this primitive method, in an age where several internet links and a printout may well have granted an instant alphabetic list, stands as a form of self-punishment..."



Daniel Edwards: Ted Williams death mask from the Ben Affleck 2004 World Series Collection (First Street Gallery, New York).

This is one of the more macabre and creepy nominees for the first annual Bartlebooth Awards. The mask was created from American baseball player Ted Williams's decapitated and cryogenically preserved head, stored at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona. The work has an autographed baseball positioned beneath its chin.



Lisa Tan, Seven year itch—the Touring Club Italiano rubbings (Grimm + Rosenfeld,



film of his studio. Indeed Perec's own fertile imagination came up with such ideas as taking the Panthéon, slicing it vertically and separating the two halves by 50 centimetres, very like Gordon Matta-Clark. Or in The street section of Perec's collection of essays, short stories and writing exercises, Species of spaces, he suggested photographing the same banal suburban road for 12 years, from 1969 to 1981, similar to Tom Phillips' Peckham photos.

However, the Bartlebooth should not be seen as a philistine exercise in mocking the "wackiness" of contemporary art, a too easy target. For much of my favourite art would fall into this category, from the conceptual interventions of millionaire eccentric Michael Asher to Stanley Broun's calibrated walks. The Bartlebooth honours the truly fecund invention of an art system without limits, or one in which the only limits are the number of new artists, collectors and editors can store in their memories. No wonder we have a press-release culture, in which PR companies and savvy artists pitch themselves as sound-bite sensations of immediate appeal.

So, many of this year's contenders may well be highly serious, long-gestated creative endeavours, but the way they are presented to the wider public makes them seem preposterous or comic. But the

Munich).

A long running project in which the artist sneaked into the Getty Museum Rare Book Collection and illegally made rubbings in situ from tiny Italian travel guides.



Lee Walton (Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, New York).

For his contribution to the group exhibition "Sport", Walton carried a set of 35-pound weights all the way from a sporting goods store in Manhattan to Socrates Park in remotest Queens.



Nina

GV/Heart of Village: Studio apt pvt, quiet, bright, small (6X9X7) in very sec bldg, short/long term \$612. No Fee. 334-6833 ASAP

Katcha-dourian, Wanted (Location One, New York).

In Wanted, an audio work from 1995 (a collaboration with Julia Meltzer), an ad was placed in the Village Voice advertising a fictitious studio apartment for rent with the dimensions 6 x 9 x 7 feet, the size of a standard American jail cell. Eager to see the room, 117 callers left messages on Katchadourian's answering machine in the first 24 hours alone.

Sislej Xhafa, Yellow associates in motion and association in Yellow (Performa 05 Festival, New York).

Performers dressed in yellow sportcoats travelled on the back of a flatbed truck around Manhattan calling on New York lawyers listed in the Yellow Pages.



Mungo Thomson (Location One, New York).

For The collected live recording of Bob Dylan, 1963-95, Mungo Thomson compiled the applause from Bob Dylan's live albums. Beginning with a banned appearance



Bartlebooth also honours artists and exhibitions, festivals and themed screenings that bring together exotic combinations of subjects or places, the bizarre global mix, the Biennial aesthetic, that jams together disparate realities.

Throughout 2006, Art Newspaper readers are actively encouraged and implored to gather their own favourite examples of such work, and with absolute anonymity guaranteed, **forward** them for general consideration.

on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1963 and closing with an MTV Unplugged session in 1995, the 30-minute work abstractly captured a history of Dylan's audiences and turned radio space into a place of celebration and unrewarded expectations.

Damali Ayo,



Rent-a-negro.com (New Museum, New York).

As part of Rhizome Artbase 101, Rent-a-negro.com was a service that offered the companionship of an African-American for a price but free of the need of "challenging your own white privilege".

One2one festival (New York). A small performance festival, based on the concept of direct communication between the artist and the audience. All performances were designed for an intimate audience of one, and the festival offered around 30 individual appointments. Some of the performances included:

Michelle Nagai, Untitled sit—an observation score.

Guests were invited to sit with the artist in silence in her kitchen. No prepared "performance act" took place, rather a collection of incidental sounds and movements that arose naturally as visitors entered and left the space. Visitors could come and go as often as they liked. Nagai is a founding member of the American Society for Acoustic Ecology (ASAE) and holds a certificate in Deep Listening from the Deep Listening Institute.



Kathe Izzo, The look of love.

Izzo offered to teach visitors how to "focus their love through their gaze to maximum effect", in appointments lasting around one hour. Visitors were the benefactors of the artist's unconditional love the entire time, "with



all that entails". Izzo has loved the world, one person at a time for the last four years through her True Love Project. To this date, she has loved over 200 people.

Carey Young, Consideration (Paula Cooper Gallery, New York).

The London-based artist's first solo exhibition in the US featured a series of legally-enforceable contracts between artist and viewer.

Created in conjunction with a legal team, the text, video and performative works explored notions of individual autonomy, freedom of speech and the "social contract". Engaging participants in a series of contractual agreements, Young dissected the viewer's experience of the exhibition, from accepting the exhibition invitation, to entering the exhibition space and voicing an opinion about the works. The exhibition was organised with assistance from the British Council.



Other highlights:

Karen Russo, Economy of excess (VTO, London). Russo's latest film installation. Economy of excess was a filmed excursion inside a sewage pipe system in, er, Essex.

Vincent Goudreau (Gallery Boreas, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York). The gallery, based in Brooklyn as well as Lenox, Massachusetts and Reykjavik, Iceland, shows a film titled Harry and Janet by the artist Vincent Goudreau, based in Hawaii, following an elderly Glaswegian couple who face impending displacement from public housing in Glasgow.

Roger Andersson, Four seasons (Galleri Magnus Karlsson, Stockholm). This solo exhibition in the gallery consisted of a sound installation. In the sound piece Goat choir, a choir of goats performed The four seasons by Vivaldi. Roger Andersson recorded a number of separate goats bleating. After that their voices have been pitched and put together to perform as a choir. The title of the show references a popular type of pizza in Sweden, as much as the work by Vivaldi.

Heather Wagner, Attempted-not-known (Location One, New York). Attempted-not-known came out of a longstanding hobby of sending recording devices through the mail, gathering acoustic documentation of their journeys. In this version, the packages were sent to impossible addressees, for example "GOD" or "Amelia Earhart" and were returned to sender. Inexplicably, the reasons for non-delivery—"insufficient address", "outside delivery limits"—varied from addressee to addressee.

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