



<< BACK



CONTACT



SEARCH



FACEBOOK



TWITTER

THE \$249
LAPTOP
FROM
GOOGLE

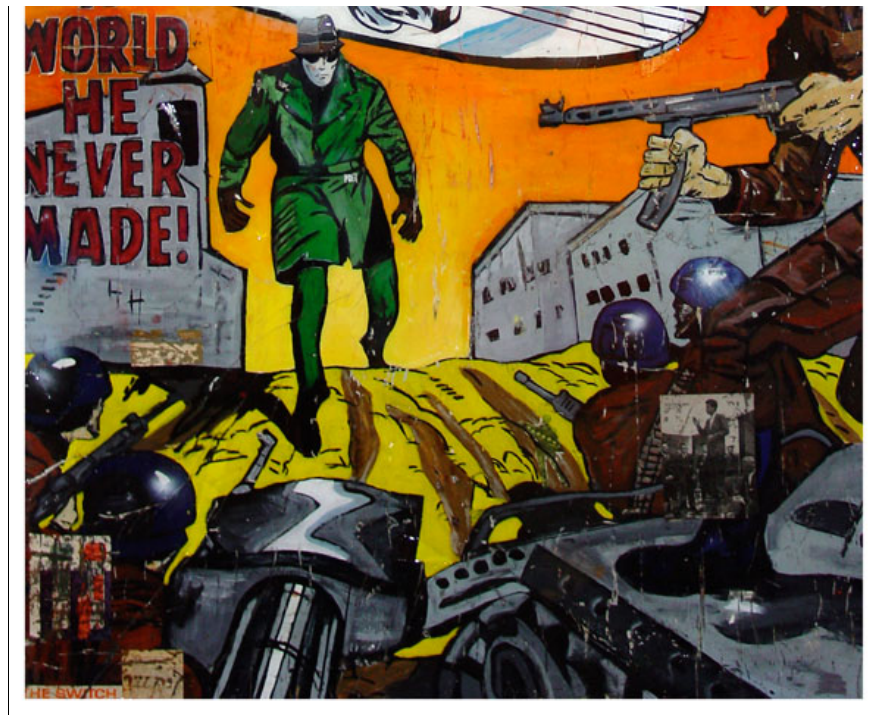


chromebook

Buy now

Greg Miller, *Silver Surfer in Disguise*,
2005, mixed media on wood panel





Gajin Fujita, *Ride or Die*, 2005, spray paint, paint marker, paint stick, gold and white gold leaf.



Archie Scott Gobber, *In Loving Memory of You*, 2008, enamel on wood panels.

Work that is not 'Street Art' in an Exhibition about 'Street Art'

Kemper at the Crossroads
 33 W. 19th Street
 816-753-5784
 Kansas City
Ride or Die
 September 6-December 6, 2013

By BLAIR SCHULMAN

Ride or Die would be an intriguing show were it not spoiled by asking viewers to see this work as inspiration from graffiti, or "street art." The problem with that recommendation is that much of the selected works from the Kemper Museum's permanent collection are not inspired so much by the uninhibited, immediate freedom and anarchy of street art, but anchored to a narrow, tenuous idea.

The exhibition's title is taken from Gajin Fujita's *Ride of Die* (2005; spray paint, paint marker, paint stick, gold and white gold leaf), that one will assume was the impetus for creating this exhibit. Beautiful on its own, Fujita's work does embrace the similarities between historical Eastern storytelling and a Western dilapidation.

Every line, stroke and movement is intended to convey some sort of meaning and much could be read from this work if only the other pieces surrounding it supported such strong philosophical styles as well.

Regarding meaning, structure and philosophies of tagging in relation to the museum setting, I took this opportunity to speak with Claudia Gold, aka Claw Money, a New York City graffiti artist tagging for almost three decades.

I asked Claw what she thought about street art placed within such confines and she replied, "Graffiti loses its magic, energy and realness once it hits a smaller condoned space. Usually when it is scaled down to canvas size its majestic omnipresence is reduced ... as opposed to something one just happens upon ... it is now expected and no longer holds the power of surprise."

The point, if it hasn't already been made, is if it is street art, then it is best viewed in the streets, to be seen by everybody. We no longer view it as something that "breaks faith with the social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it."

What Ernst Fischer, an early 20th century Austrian journalist says in this quote is that decay is the first line of action in a society who sees itself as able to evolve from the writing on the wall, so to speak.

Expecting us to feel much of these works as inspiration with street cred is somewhat backwards. For example, Greg Miller's, *Silver Surfer in Disguise*, (2005; mixed media on wood panel) being a Marvel comics superhero from the mid-1960s, would, in fact, be the inspiration for street art and not the other way around. This large scale rendering of a comic book cover bears snippets of other imagery too, including, I think, Bridget Bardot and possibly John F. Kennedy, thereby sourcing this as a great, big, bold piece of Pop Art.

To see Archie Scott Gobber's work within this exhibition (*In Loving Memory of You*, 2008; enamel on wood panels) is a disservice to what the artist employs; that is, folksy, Will Rogers-like witticisms utilizing a very traditional painting style. There is no decay, and there is little to be discerned in streetwise influence immersed within his clever wordsmithing.

A more intuitive approach for *Ride or Die* would have been to ask the observer to actually participate. A great imagining would invite the public to muck up the space a bit by becoming, in a sense, street artists. Allowing the Kemper's wall space, both inside and outside, to be tagged could do something engaging and no longer denying us the show's intended origins. This idea could, in turn, invite viewers to look to the works from Frank Stella, *Ohanao*, 1994; (ink and paper collage), and Jim Hodges, *Dot*, (1999; light bulbs, ceramic sockets, wood and metal panel) for their own inspiration, rather than build bridges to now here.

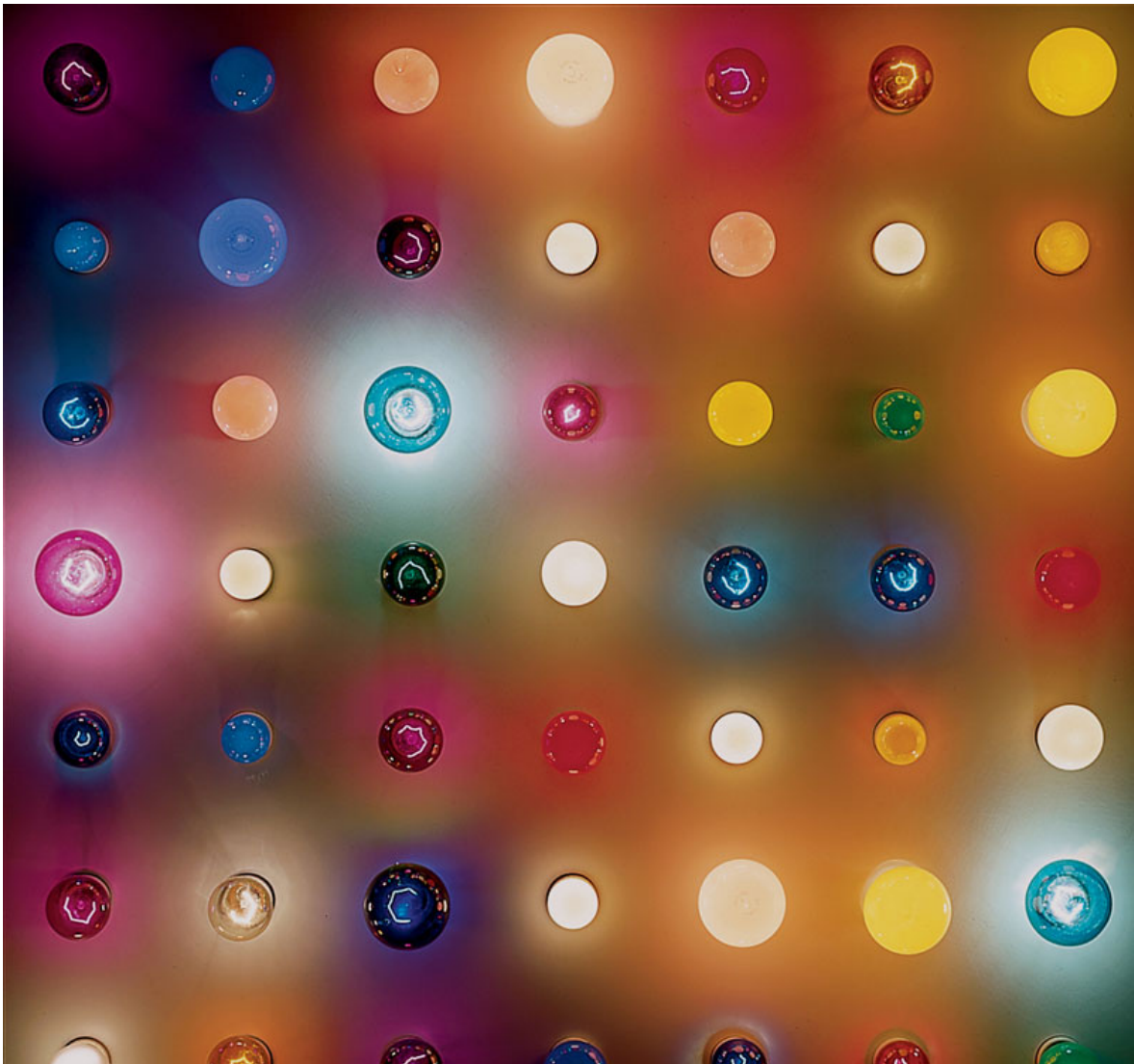
Capitalizing on an opportunity to bring the street inside, or outside, could have paid big dividends as a train of symbolism and decay are deployed. Imagine then how the space might have looked, covered and trembling with deviant engagement. It would have meant taking a risk and possibly asking for trouble, but street art is anything but safe.

The work in *Ride or Die* is fine as a conversation about Pop Art or even, on a lesser scale, Op Art. The work here shows those ideas clearly and beautifully. The biggest curating obstacle was imposing a universal archetype that does not draw its audience closer to the inspiration and milieu from whence this show is intended.





Frank Stella, *Ohono*, 1994_ ink and paper collage.





Jim Hodges, *Dot*, 1999_ light bulbs, ceramic sockets, wood and metal panel,