

# Brooklyn to Baltimore: A Celebration of Artist-Run Spaces



*From left to right: Patricia Zarate, “Zig Zag, Step, Side (brown, orange),” 2011; Julie Torres, “Room with A View,” 2015; Norm Paris, “Crate For Sculpture of Kyrie Irving,” 2012; Bonny Leibowitz, “Sweet Dreams,” 2015.*

The collective behind Brooklyn’s [Transmitter](#) gallery has partnered with [Guest Spot @ The Reinstitute](#) in Baltimore to present the exhibition *Self-Organized — Aesthetics Politics of the Artist Run*. The show ambitiously offers a cross-section of work by twenty-nine artists who have co-founded or directed art spaces or publications in New York, Baltimore, Latin America, Holland, and beyond. *Self-Organized* opened at Guest Spot’s Calvert Street gallery; in conjunction with this exhibition, the gallery hosted a sister-booth at the [Artist-Run Art Fair](#), located just a few blocks away.

Overall, the show felt timely—part of its thesis was considering the rise of artist-run venues as reactions to institutional or commercial contexts that have lost the trust and/or affections of many culture-makers. (A history of artist-run spaces across the nation definitely exists in this century; for a quick example, see the [Artists Run Chicago](#) exhibition in 2009.) Here in Baltimore, there’s an obvious correlation to the relative triumph of smaller DIY endeavors in the shadow of Artscape proper—where actual content is typically drowned-out in a sea of sponsors, spectacle, and obligatory fun for the whole family.

Interestingly though, the visual artists in *Self-Organized* seemed less overtly concerned with institutional critique or political statements in the exhibition text or the DIY publications available in the gallery’s pop-

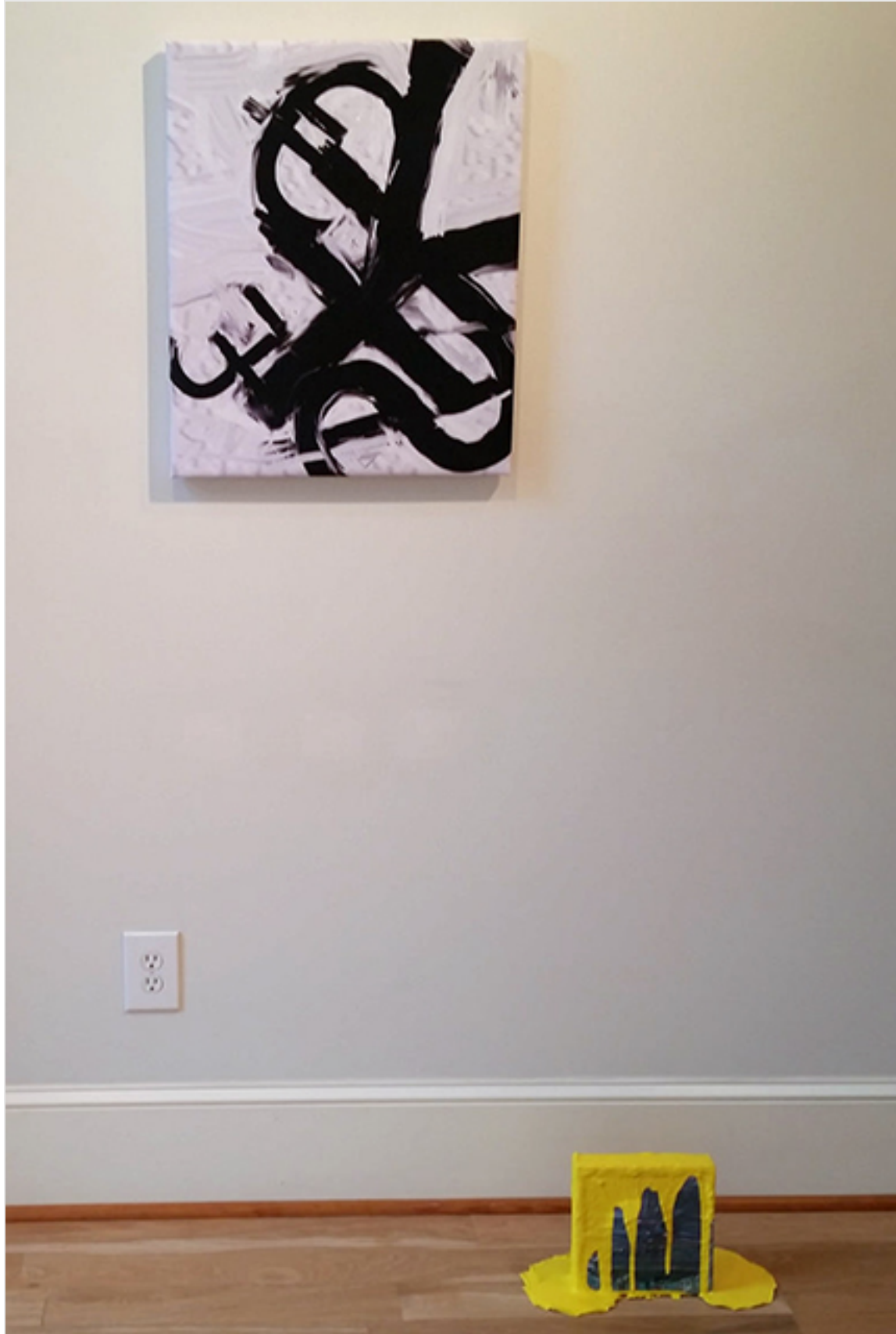
up library would suggest. Perhaps that's indicative of a major, though often-overlooked quality of artist-run platforms: the freedom to focus on art for art's sake. There's an increasing expectation that institutions and more established non-profits must justify their existence with socially-engaged, politically relevant, or even vaguely charitable programming. The artwork here, by comparison, is almost introverted. That's not necessarily a bad thing—if anything, it's refreshing to see ontological concerns, process-based studio practices, and, well, aesthetics contextualized as a set of “politics.”



*The library*



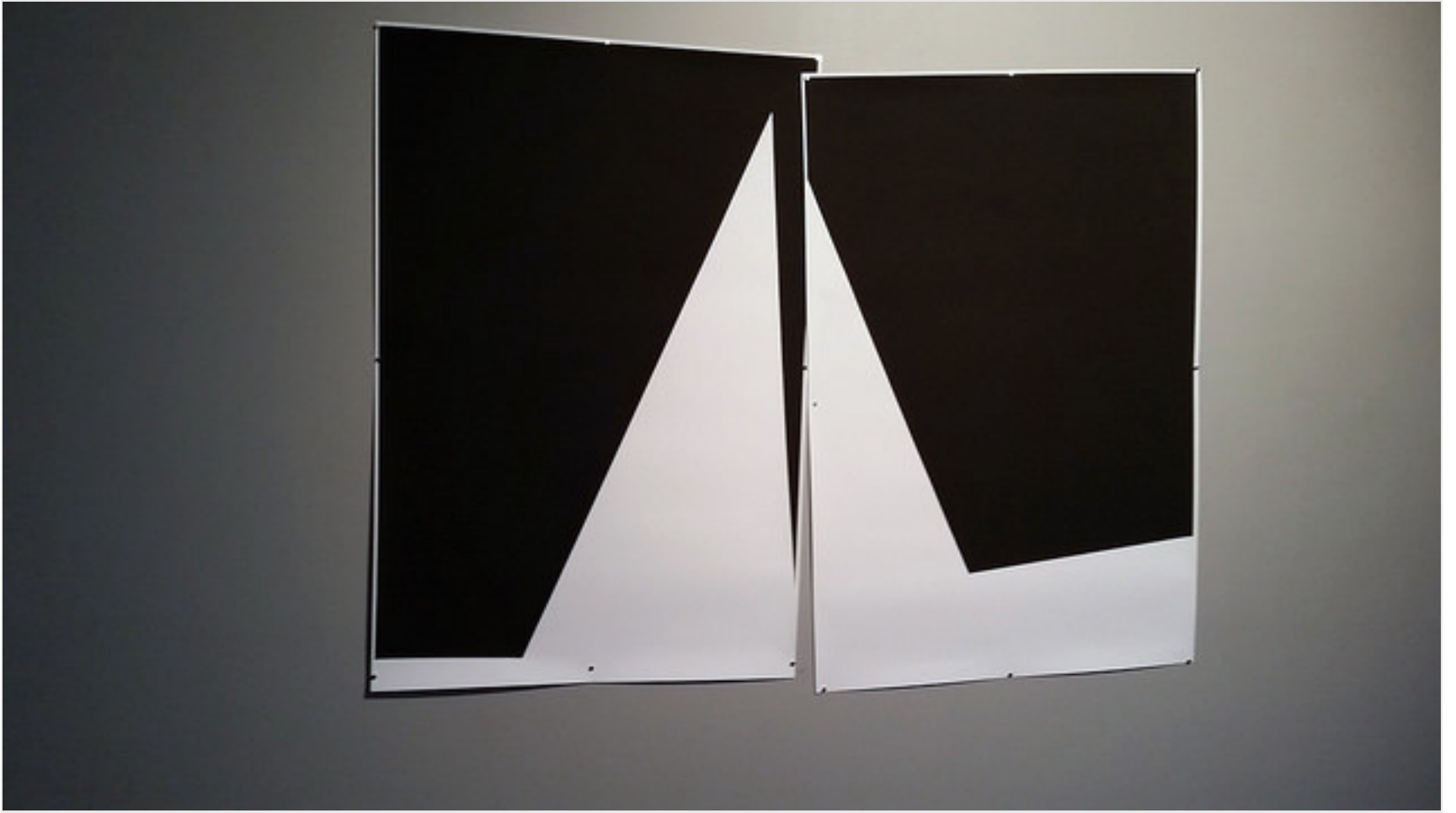
*Bonny Liebowitz, "Sweet Dreams" and "Threader," both 2015.*



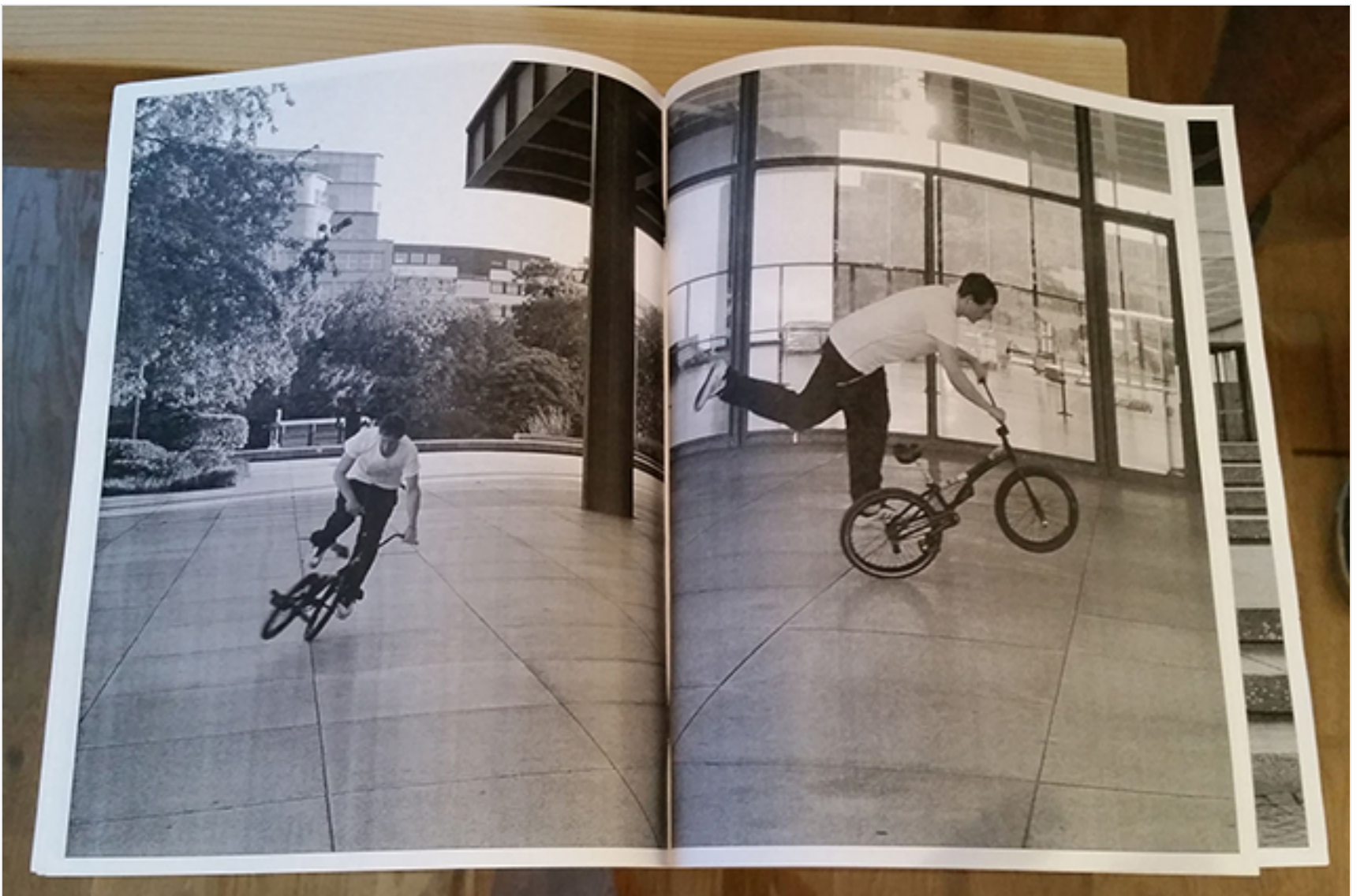
*Matthew Mahler, "Liquidity II," 2014, Julie Torres, "Free Falling," 2015*

Most people in the gallery assumed Mathew Mahler's *Liquidity II* was a painting. In reality, it's a vinyl print with transparent texture brushed over it in acrylic gel medium—complete with digital artifacts such as faint pixelation and Photoshop-looking smudges. I like the pairing with Torres's *Free Falling*, which similarly uses globs of acrylic to blur distinctions between media. In neither piece is the paint used to create an image per-se, rather it brings a surface into the realm of 3D. In *Free Falling*, the paint supports the panel, an inversion of the materials' usual relationship.





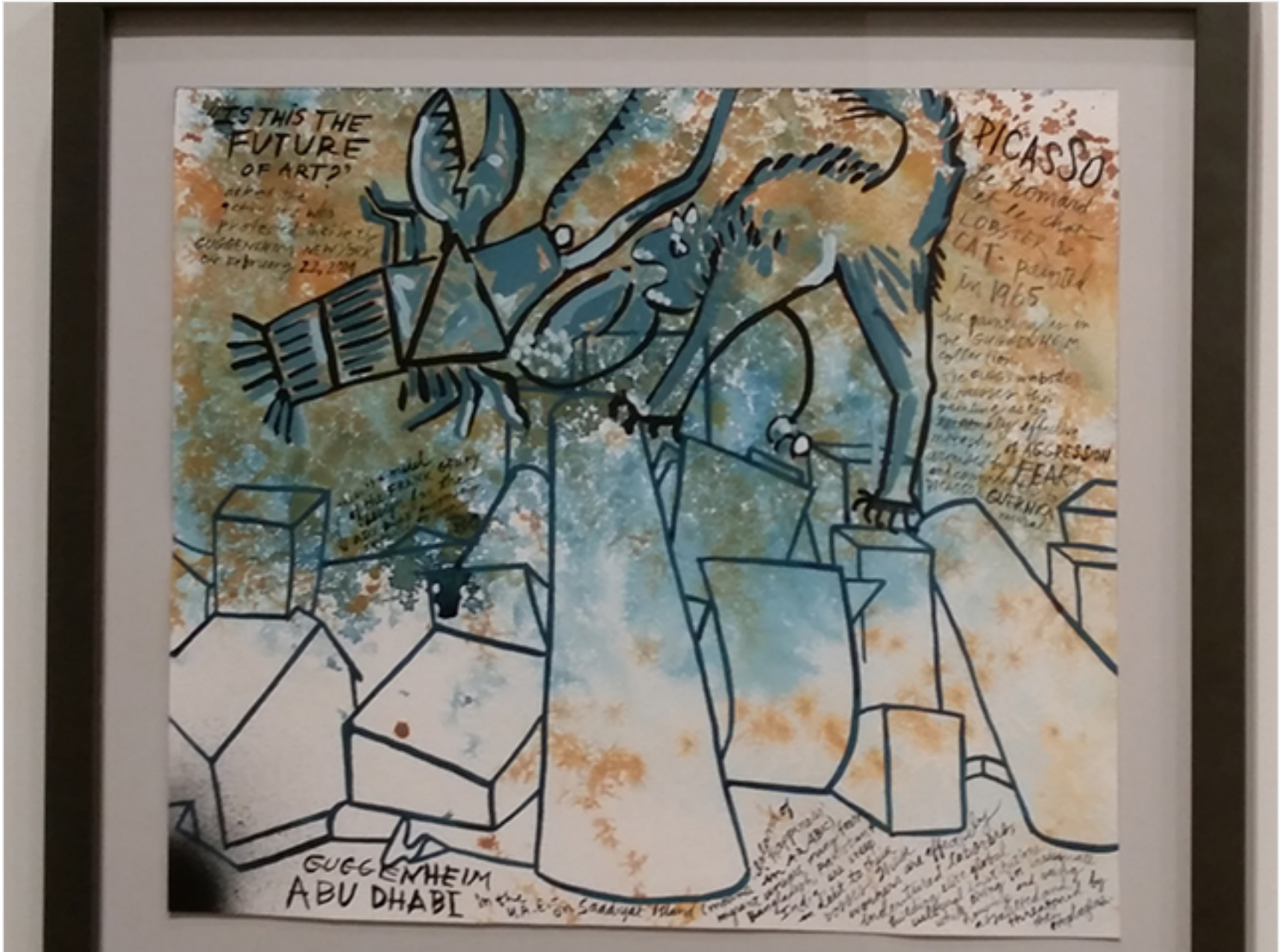
*Phillip Tomaru, from the series “Young Man with International Style,” 2012.*



*Phillip Tomaru, of the publishing/curatorial group Arts & Sciences documents scenes within gorgeously sculptural midcentury modern buildings.*



There's an obsessive quality bordering on nerdery with Phillip Tomaru's work. He photographs both iconic and overlooked [International Style](#) buildings for accessible, inexpensive multiples that the collective [Arts & Sciences Projects](#) releases. I really like these—the early practitioners of the International Style believed mass production could make good design and quality architecture available to the masses. These seem to follow that ideal. Although Arts & Sciences Projects is active internationally, their first project was a series of film screenings called [Building Character](#); it was organized by Tomaru in 2010, and took place in a Baltimore condominium designed by Mies van der Rohe.



Lauren Adams, "Decorum #4," 2014.

I said earlier that apart from the publications, little of the work in *Self-Organized* read as overtly political or an act of institutional critique. Lauren Adams is the exception. This piece is from a series [we saw last year](#) at the Sondheim Finalist exhibition at the Walters Art Museum. Adams researched the history of slavery in museums—from depictions similar to Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* to the contemporary labor conditions at the under-construction Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. Aesthetically, this isn't a very strong piece on its own (when shown together, the paintings on paper read more successfully like pages from an in-progress notebook for a research project), but it deserves recognition for calling out—like [Gulf Labor](#)

and other groups have as of late—how institutions comply with human-rights abuses committed by their benefactors.

Tagged as: [artist-run space](#), [Arts & Sciences Projects](#), [Artscape](#), [baltimore](#), [bonny liebowitz](#), [Guest Spot](#), [julie torres](#), [Lauren Adams](#), [matthew mahler](#), [philip tomaru](#), [publications](#), [The Artist-Run Art Fair](#), [transmitter](#), [zines](#)