

## 'Dear Picasso'

How today's artists are rediscovering the master

- Ai Weiwei:**  
Crossing the Line
- Degas Sculpture:**  
Mysteries Unraveled
- Leo Steinberg:**  
The Scholarly Maverick



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faceted commentary on not just the  
physical effort involved in producing  
and transporting a work of art, but also  
on the artist's perennial imperative to  
work at other jobs and to draw distinc-  
tions between the two realms.

—Margery Gordon

## Gina Phillips

**Jonathan Ferrara**  
**New Orleans**

Gina Phillips's new mixed-media series, "Heroes and Villains," explores the 16th-century clash between European and Native American cultures with tongue-in-cheek humor and a sense of comic tragedy. The cleverly constructed images are composed of an acrylic underpainting on canvas or muslin with built up layers of sewn appliqués of fabric and thread.

For fanciful but gruesome works such as *Limbs* (2010), *Let's Split!* (2011), and *Cat Island Encounter... Macaroni Meets Jean-Baptiste* (2010), among others, the Kentucky-born, New Orleans-based artist took inspiration from the 16th-



Gina Phillips, *Adam and Eve*, 2010, fabric, thread, ink, paint, and synthetic hair, 109" x 222". Jonathan Ferrara.

century engraver Theodorus de Bry's depictions of Native Americans, first published in the 1590 illustrated edition of Thomas Harriot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*. Another source was Richard Campanella's 2002 book *Time and Place in New Orleans*, which describes late 17th-century French Canadian encounters with Native Americans in the lower Mississippi River Valley.

In *Adam and Eve* (2010), Phillips seems to imply that pre-Columbian North America was a paradise in its natural state, but an endangered paradise. The figures lurking in the trees behind Adam and Eve are vultures, not snakes. In *Score!* (2010), a bald eagle flies off, clutching in its talons the severed head of a Native American man.

In the timeless words of Brian Wilson, "Heroes and villains, Just see what you've done."  
—John R. Kemp

## Brian Dettmer

**Saltworks**  
**Atlanta**

For this show, titled "New Worlds to Conquer," Brian Dettmer set out in new, political directions, critiquing the unconscious assumptions of the early 20th century, and, implicitly, their lingering influence.

Dettmer, who uses books as a sculptural as well as a conceptual material, begins by sealing his volumes, mostly history tomes between 50 and 100 years old. He then carves inward, excavating to reveal text and pictures as he discovers them. The resulting compositions, associational and loosely thematic, juxtapose coats of arms, maps, and portraits to highlight much about once-prevailing attitudes toward the army, the nation,

and political heroes, among other things.



Brian Dettmer, *The March of Democracy*, 2010, altered books, 18½" x 19½" x 4". Saltworks.

Though some fragments of text achieve a certain wry humor (the word "thrust" repeated in a vertical column in *The R.O.T.C. Manual* (2010), for example), images do most of the work in analyzing an age of scientific and geographic exploration, colonial conquest, and romanticized racism. In *The Secret Museum of Mankind* (2010), Dettmer isolates portraits of what would once have been called "primitives," in all their exoticized glory. The comparable celebration of architecture as tourist spectacle is revealed in *Encyclopedias of World Travel* (2010)—here the books are bent back upon themselves to form a freestanding circular sculpture, distinct from Dettmer's usual wall pieces.

*The March of Democracy* (2010) connects five volumes of an encyclopedia in a five-sided arrangement, forming a schematic representation of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., at its center. Where most of the pieces here focused on the period between 1890 and 1930, this work brings the analysis of war and politics up to World War II, and by extension suggests a continuity of ideas. This theme is picked up in *The War on All Fronts* (2010), featuring a map of desert warfare in which such terms as "wadi" and "Euphrates" label a filigree of curving lines amid confusingly intertwined strands of text, insinuating that some things have changed very little.

—Jerry Cullum