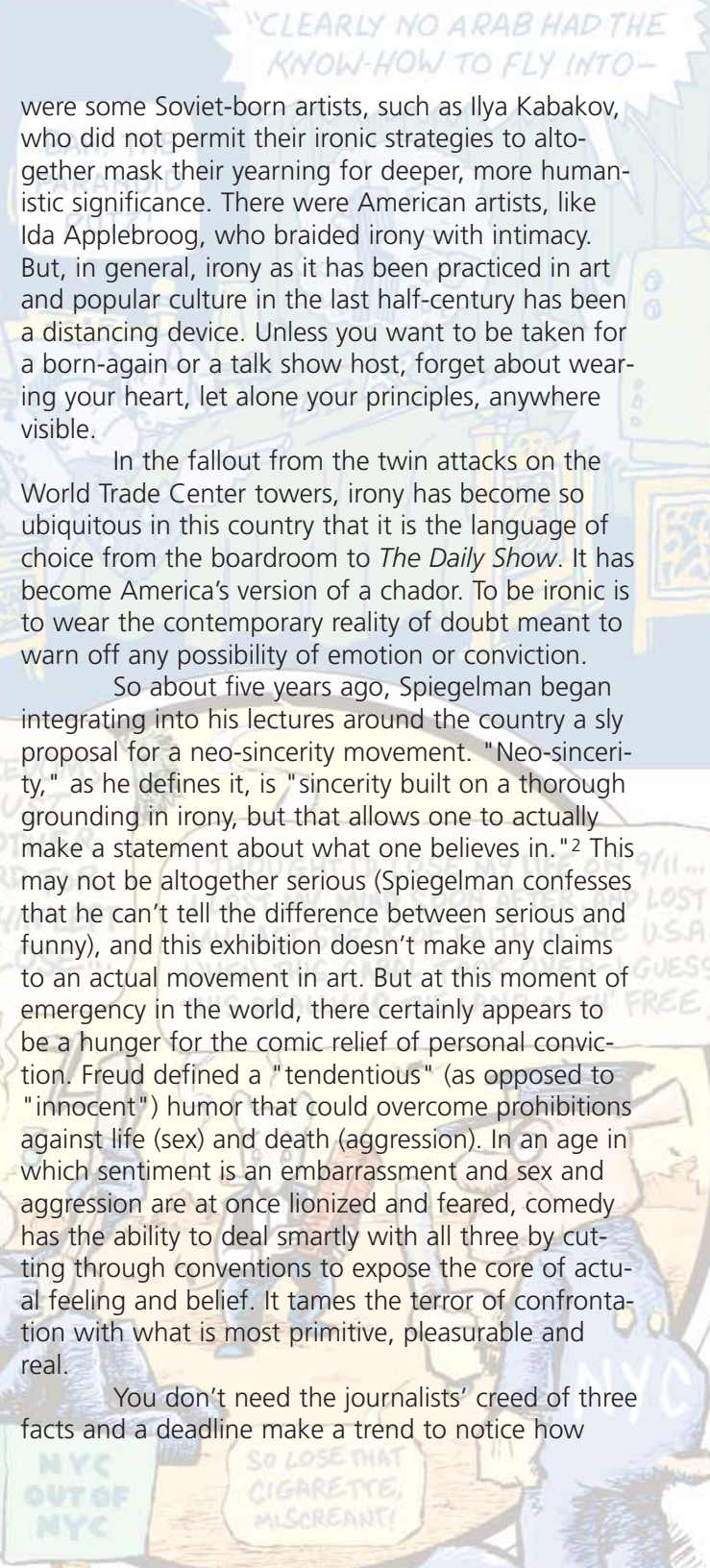
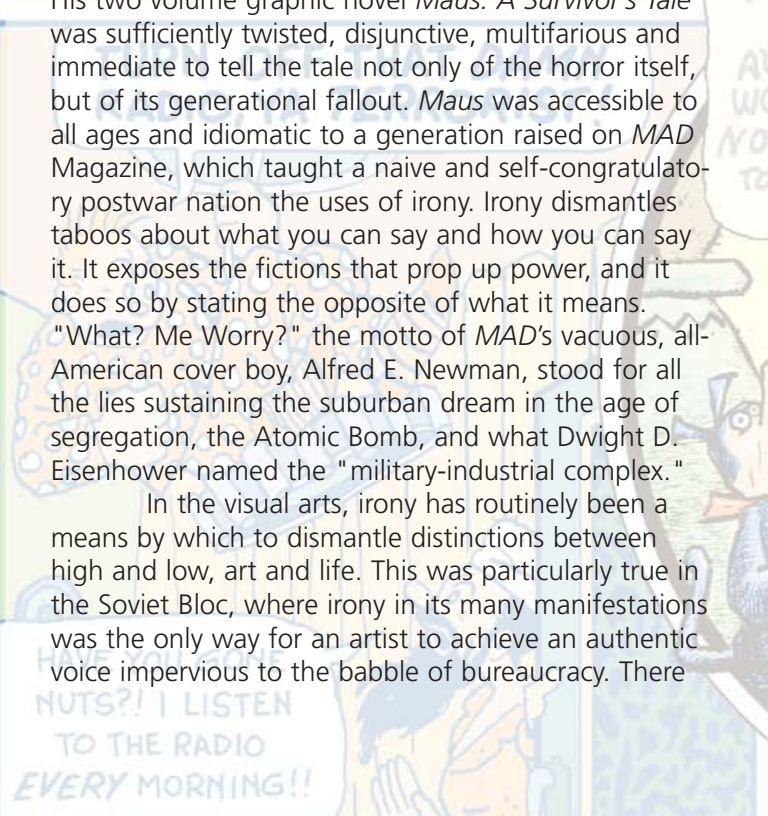
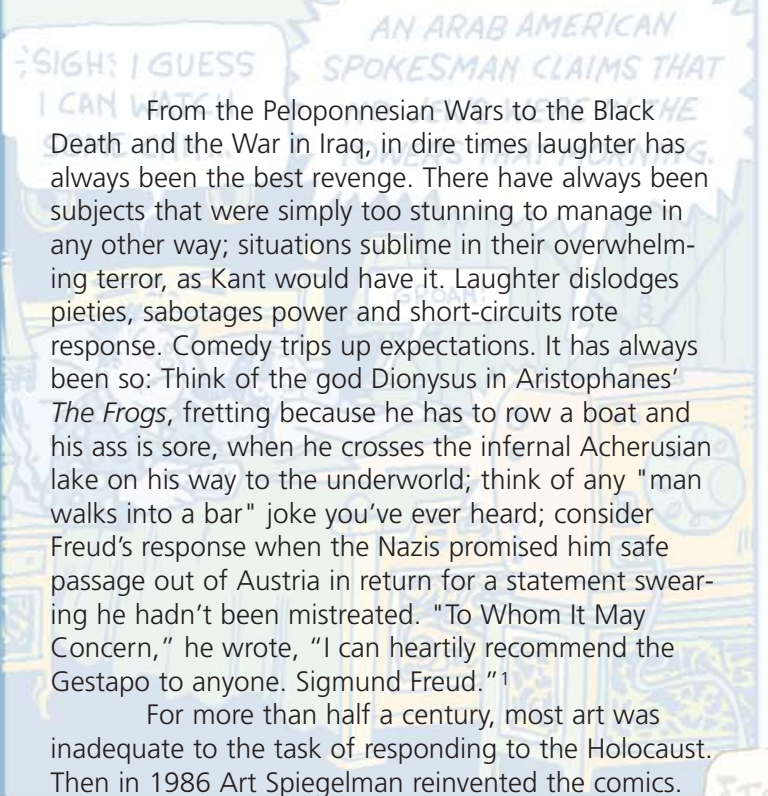


Neo-Sincerity: The Difference Between the Comic and the Single Letter



Curated by **Amei Wallach**
February 22 - April 8, 2006

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| William Anthony | Ilya & Emilia Kabakov |
| Ida Applebroog | Melamid & William |
| Hideaki Ariizumi | McClelland |
| Atlas Group / | Peter Land |
| Walid Raad | Laura Nova |
| Tamy Ben-Tor | David Rees |
| Paul Chan | Skart |
| Michael Combs | Nancy Spero |
| Thornton Dial | Art Spiegelman |
| Matt Forderer | Marie Watt |
| Regina Gilligan | Olav Westphalen |
| David Hammons | Paul Zaloom |

GALLERY TALK: Wed March 1, 6:30 pm
Art Spiegelman, Alex Melamid, & Amei Wallach

PERFORMANCE: Paul Zaloom's *The Mother of All Enemies*
March 30 - April 9. See website for tickets, schedule, location.

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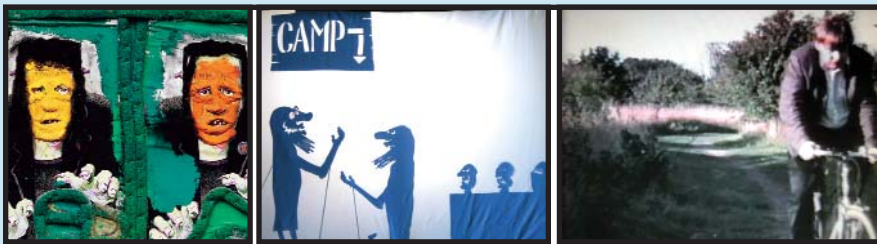
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cover image: Art Spiegleman, *In The Shadow of No Towers*,
2003, graphic novel (detail)

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Thornton Dial, *The Real Deal (Heavyweights)*, 2000, acrylic on plywood, 46 x 45 x 2" (detail); Paul Zaloom, *The Mother of All Enemies*, 2005, performance, 75 min; Peter Land, *The Ride*, DVD, sound, 3 min. loop.



Nancy Spero, *The Bug, Helicopter, Victim*, 1966, gouache and ink on paper, 19 x 23.25 in; William Anthony, *Feminist Andrea Dworkin Thinks Rape Victims Should Be Able to Execute Their Attackers Personally*, 2006, pencil and pastel, 22 x 30 in; Melamid & William McClelland, www.neosincerity.com, 2001, website (detail).



Hideaki Ariizumi, *Woop Fashion*, 2005, digital photograph, 36 x 24 in (detail); Regina Gilligan, *Vote for Lori P*, 2005, wax and Hopi corn, 8.5 x 4 x 3.25 in; Marie Watt, *Flag*, 2003, reclaimed wool, satin binding, thread (hand sewn), 132 x 136 in; Laura Nova, *Playing Dead*, 2005, digital c-print, 13 x 19 in (detail).



Olav Westphalen, *Custom Rim Job*, 2004, DVD, 6:30 min; Matt Forderer, *Wdeck*, 2000/04, 55 digital portraits, 2.5 x 3.5 in each (detail); Michael Combs, *Force of Nature*, 2006, mixed media, 54 x 58 x 41.5 in; Skart, *Your Shit - Your Responsibility*, 2000, street action, Brussels / Belgrade.



David Rees, *Get Your War On*, 2001, screenprint on paper (detail); Ilya & Emilia Kabakov, *Eternal Emigrant*, 2002, 13.5 x 10.5 x 20 in; Tamy Ben-Tor, *Girls Beware*, 2005, DVD, color, sound, 9 min; David Hammons, *In the Hood*, 1993, athletic sweatshirt with wire, 23 x 9.5 in.

thoroughly strategies of buffoonery and sincerity have invaded literature. Young writers like Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, Jonathan Safran Foer, Zadie Smith and Jeffrey Eugenides have taken on subjects such as a parent's early death, the Turkish invasions, the Holocaust and terrorism with comedy which, however schooled in irony, hasn't the least intention of obfuscating feeling.

For a visual artist like Walid Raad, humor is both tool and payoff. It permits him to appropriate the post-modern suspicion of verifiable reality in order to create a loony kind of order from the chaos that the Lebanese Civil Wars made of his country and adolescence. He created a fictional foundation, The Atlas Group, to archive documents and tapes pertaining to the history of those wars, thus facilitating deadpan slips between fiction and anally retentive factoid.³ The multiple *The Missing Lebanese Wars. Water Slid* comes from a group of works that chronicle the contradictory notes of a group of war historians. They would meet at the racetrack to bet on the discrepancies between when horses finished and when photographers snapped the finish - often bribing the photographers so that history would prove their individual positions.

This is a multi-generational show. There is, in fact, nothing neo or new about artists who approach cosmic subjects through comedy. The differences are in attitude and critical mass. Nancy Spero, whose defecating helicopters were a mother's response to the Vietnam War, turns 80 this year. Thornton Dial, who grew up black and illiterate in Alabama, is 76. He's a painter who can find the joke in the way different colored skin

turns ordinary people into Frankensteins in their own country. Paul Zaloom, at 54, has taken liberties with the Middle Eastern "Karagoz" shadow puppet play in *The Mother of All Enemies*, a comic epic that tangles the web of interlocking hatreds and stereotypes currently at play in the world. His hero, a queer-secular humanist-Quaker-agnostic Syrian, makes frenzied attempts to outwit everyone who would take issue with any part of his identity, including Homeland Security, Al Qaeda, and the Statue of Liberty.

The second part of the title of this exhibition, "The Difference Between the Comic and the Cosmic is a Single Letter," comes from something that the Russian-born novelist Vladimir Nabokov wrote about the Russian dramatist Nikolai Gogol. In the context of the "comic" and the "cosmic," he said, Gogol's writing, "gives one the sensation of something ludicrous and at the same time stellar, lurking constantly around the corner."⁴ This would be an apt description of the work of artist David Hammons, who transposes the ephemera of city streets, particularly the streets of Harlem, into incongruous art events. In 1993 he sold snowballs (the punch line: they melted). He has made art out of chicken wings (poor people's food, both real and stereotypical), turned basketball nets into monuments and made drawings on the walls of a London gallery by bouncing dirty basketballs against them. Here he elevates into planar sculpture the kind of hooded sweatshirt that would make many a gallery-goer lock the car if it were encountered in an unfamiliar neighborhood. His art about being black in America is wily and poetic, and the joke is on the viewer who gets it.

Spiegelman pretty much put paid to notions of where comics fit into our culture. So I've included here David Rees, 33, who, in Dada tradition, bent found art and the internet to his purpose. The improbable juxtaposition of his outraged responses to the War on Terror's bombing sprees and the inane corporate clip art workers who mouth them, punched air into the prevalent patriotic fervor after September 11 and touched a nerve on the internet.

Art occurs in places more astonishing than the term "outsider art" makes room for. One recent Christmas, a friend gave me a pack of *Wdeck* playing cards, each card depicting a different version of President George W. Bush in drag. The cards punned on the US Military's "Most Wanted" playing cards from Iraq. *Wdeck* was sold over the internet as a novelty, but its composition was complex, collaged and surreal. They turned out to be created by an artist, Matt Forderer, who didn't consider them his real work, though that too is complex, collaged and surreal.

"I am sincere. I am sincere. I am sincere," the all-American Kilroy and the gypsy whore who could become a virgin on demand swear to one another in Tennessee Williams' 1953 play, *Camino Real*. A thing like that will give sincerity a bad name. But humor, as the comedian John Cleese once said, "frees people up to have new thoughts."⁵ There are more than 22 artists in this show: William Anthony, Ida Applebroog, Hideaki Ariizumi, Tamy Ben-Tor, Paul Chan, Michael Combs, Thornton Dial, Matt Forderer, Regina Gilligan, David Hammons, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Peter Land, William McClelland and Alex Melamid, Laura Nova, Walid Raad, David Rees, the Serbian group Skart, Nancy Spero, Art Spiegelman, Marie Watt, Olav Westphalen, and Paul Zaloom. It's a fraction of what there could be, but their range, guile and passion go far toward making the point: artists are at their most subversive when they amuse and appall.

Amei Wallach, 2006.

1. The Freud and Aristophanes examples come from John Morreale, "Humor in the Holocaust: Its Critical, Cohesive, and Coping Functions." Paper presented at 1997 Annual Scholar's Conference, posted at http://www.holocaust-trc.org/holocaust_humor.htm.
2. Quoted in Calvin Reid, "Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly: Literature of Comics," *Publishers Weekly*, Oct. 16, 2000.
3. The Atlas Group is no longer fictional.
4. Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* ([1944] New York, 1961), 142.
5. Quoted as an exchange between John Cleese and psychoanalyst Jennifer Johns in synopsis of Humour and Psychoanalysis conference, London: Freud Museum, Nov. 5, 1994, posted at <http://www.freud.org.uk/Humour.htm>