

The background of the entire page is a dense, repeating pattern of peacock feathers. The feathers are primarily a deep, vibrant green, with some showing hints of blue and brown. The pattern is highly textured and covers the entire surface.

**The
Renaissance
Society**
at The University of Chicago

The Age of Aquarius

March 13 – May 1, 2011

The Renaissance Society

at The University of Chicago
5811 South Ellis Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

Museum Hours
Tuesday - Friday: 10 am - 5pm
Saturday, Sunday: 12 - 5pm
Closed Mondays
www.renaissancesociety.org

Face Whole Book Foods

Within the astrological calendar, each of the zodiac’s twelve constellations has an age. Each age lasts roughly 2,150 years corresponding to a 28,500-year cycle in which the earth’s axis gyroscopically shifts its orientation towards the various constellations. According to some, the Age of Aquarius is upon us. Under this rubric, the world’s strife and upheaval are mere growing pains. Socio-political revolution—the dismantling of old values and institutions—represents an evolution in human consciousness. In a universe where human affairs are governed by the dawning of a new celestial era, the world falls apart only to come together, putting a premium on a belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

The Age of Aquarius is not a period that has yet to be, but a moment that has come to pass. Indeed, the Age of Aquarius commonly refers to the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. It designates a period whose utopian aspirations achieved their fullest expression in alternative lifestyles. These were born of a turbulent decade whose rhetoric devolved from that of effecting social change to that of personal fulfillment: from 1964, in which Lyndon B. Johnson unveiled the “Great Society,” to 1969, which *Newsweek* dubbed “Year of the Commune.” Thanks in no small part to youth culture, the period’s aspirations found unforgettable expression. An endless celebration of the period, however, overshadows the fact that the retreat from the social into the personal took place against an encroaching sense of disillusionment. As an exercise in cultural memory, the Age of Aquarius yields an irony-riddled nostalgia often taking the form of self-mockery by those proclaiming “been there, done that.” But the disavowal of the period by liberals and its demonization by conservatives are what mark the Age of Aquarius’ estrangement from the present.

This three-person exhibition features Carol Bove (b. 1971), Amy Grappell (b. 1964), and David Noonan (b. 1969). For this generation of artists, the Age of Aquarius has become an archaeological site whose findings exist as effects of history. These artists are young enough to claim historical objectivity in relation to events of the 1960s, and simultaneously old enough to have a deeply subjective relationship to its effects. As wide-eyed and silent witnesses to the Age of Aquarius, they are granted an arms-length proprietary interest in the period, an ownership but at a critical and critically specific distance. More important than being linked by way of period-based content (free love, mimes, the inherent expressivity of natural forms), is the extent to which these three very different artists allow the period to speak for itself. Under this constraint, the challenge is distinguishing the generation being spoken *for* from the generation being spoken *of*.

Whether it is Bove’s plinth-based reliquary, *La Traversée Difficile* (The Difficult Crossing), 2008, a curated selection of objects and images linking the unconscious to the expanded conscious via the figures of René Magritte and Gerald Heard; Grappell’s *Quadrangle*, 2009, an unflinching documentary about her parents’ spousal swap; or Noonan’s sustained mining of the period’s performance photodocumentation for its expressive excesses, all three artists are engaged in conspicuous appropriation. While forthrightly invoking the period, their work collectively speaks more to the period’s estrangement from the present, a predicament mirroring the fate of these artists’ generation as it is caught between the “me generation” and digital techno-natives who came of age after the internet’s advent. On the one hand, the Age of Aquarius was eclipsed by New Age, a ubiquitous brand of spirituality cum life-style that, as a major market force, was more aligned with an ever-burgeoning “quality-of-life-revolution” spawned in the 1980s than any spiritual indulgences attributable to hippies. On the other hand, there is the digital revolution whose generational dividing line is not the presence of the computer, but whether you came of age before social networking. But these artists’ generation was weened on a rhetoric of alternatives and spiritual development that produced an itch neither Whole Foods nor Facebook can scratch. As a result, their soul-searching, at mid-life’s eve, has just begun, and what better place to start than the cultural site of their souls’ nascence?

The Age of Aquarius

Carol Bove, Amy Grappell and David Noonan

March 13 – May 1, 2011

Opening Reception: March 13, 4:00–7:00 pm

Featuring a talk with filmmaker Amy Grappell from 5:00–6:00 pm



Related Events

OPENING RECEPTION

Sunday, March 13, 4:00 – 7:00 pm

Featuring a talk with filmmaker Amy Grappell from 5:00–6:00 pm

CONCERT

Tuesday, April 5, 8:00 pm

Ensemble Dal Niente

James Dillon: *A Portrait*

Dillon is often associated with New Complexity, a 1960s British movement begun by Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy and Richard Barrett. The music is highly detailed, featuring multileveled forms of musical notation, microtonality, irrational meters and extended instrumental techniques. A self-taught composer, Dillon, in his early years, was a radical scavenger, involved with Scottish bagpipe music, a rhythm and blues band called Influx, and studying Indian music with Punita Gupta. Later influenced by Xenakis and Varese, he folded his knowledge into a European classical tradition, making him a “new complexity” all his own. His music calls for performers committed to contemporary music with a fearless, experimental and open attitude toward unconventional forms of notation and playing techniques; an ensemble devoted to conquering the utmost challenge in the face of adversity. In short, this is a job for Dal Niente. This concert will take place in Fulton recital hall in Goodspeed (5845 S. Ellis). Entry is in the Southwest corner of the main quadrangle. FREE

CONCERT

Wednesday, April 20, 8:00 pm

Vincent Barras and Jacques Demierre

Based on the formal and conceptual rigor of their spoken word compositions, Barras and Demierre are unabashed moderns, picking up where the likes of Kurt Schwitters and Henri Chopin left off. *Voicing Through Saussure* (2004) is proof that the avant-garde, although historical, is plenty viable. What comes across as dry humor in the duo’s elegant and smart recordings, could only gain traction live. This concert will take place in Bond Chapel located one building east of Cobb Hall on the main quadrangle. (1025 E. 58th St.) FREE

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[this side]
Amy Grappell
Still from *Quadrangle*, 2009

[that side]
Carol Bove
Untitled (detail), 2009
Peacock feathers on linen