

ARTSWESTCHESTER

THE BANK & TRUST SHOW

AN EXHIBITION ABOUT THE ECONOMY, TRUST AND VALUE IN TODAY'S SOCIETY





From the Director

Old buildings have ghosts. While I know of no empirical data supporting this theory, I have heard much anecdotal evidence from theater managers who swear they have heard the spirit of Al Jolson or Laurence Olivier in their old theaters. Personally, I myself have heard, perhaps in dreams, but maybe not, the hushed voices of transactions taking place in the old People's National Bank & Trust building, which is now

home to ArtsWestchester. The tellers are all behind ornate metal enclosures as they dole out change, deposit hard earned paychecks, sum up Christmas Club balances and take both late and timely payments from mortgagees. I can hear the ladies bringing in their treasured furs for summer storage in the vast fur vault, and the perfect diction of those who pore over their jewels and stock certificates in safe deposit boxes. On a raised carpeted platform, the very proper bank officers review credit and approve and deny loans in utmost impersonal tones. Some customers grumble about financial challenges; many ponder why this first-of- its-kind skyscraper was built in White Plains in 1928 just before the Great Depression. What were they thinking? Others moan about the years the old bank was vacant. Some vow to keep the bulldozer away. After all, it is "the people's bank."

In the ten-plus years ArtsWestchester has owned the building, the ghosts are still talking and newcomers have joined the conversation. The talk is still about "value," but more about the value of the arts to the community. The vault now serves as a depository for video installations. The large



Palladian windows give natural light for art exhibitions or hide behind blackout shades for musical performances. The painting of the bare-breasted lady who was sheet-rocked over in the forties due to convention, is now uncovered and presiding over the activities in the Grand Banking Room as in the past. In the spirit of authenticity, gold leaf rosettes have replaced the massive florescent light fixtures that covered them on the ceiling.

Some of the old customers can be heard complaining that banks aren't as beautiful as they used to be. Others seem content that the Neo Classical architecture is intact and that restoration has brought the place back to life. Still others question the value of art in both the economic and intrinsic sense. Many, like me, are content, even hopeful, that in a world of changing values, the bank still serves the community as a place for people of all economic brackets to gather and talk about the things that matter most to them. It is these conversations on issues of value and trust in our society that this exhibition addresses.

Janet Langsam
CEO of ArtsWestchester



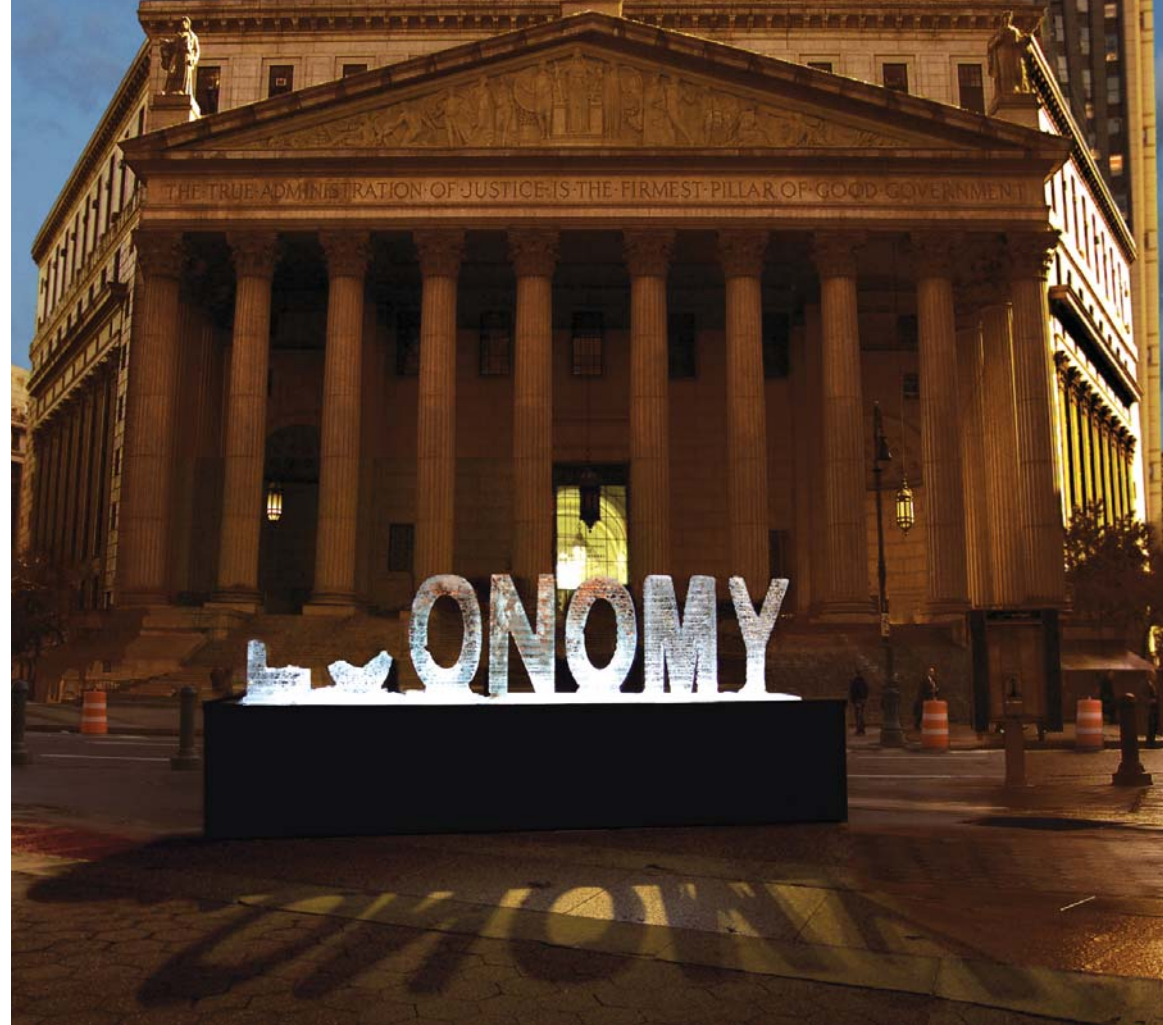
Diane Tuft, *Safely Hidden 28*, 2007, archival pigment print, courtesy of the artist

From the Curator

ArtsWestchester's home is the former People's National Bank & Trust Company in downtown White Plains, purchased by ArtsWestchester and transformed into a contemporary art space. Janet Langsam, CEO of ArtsWestchester, had always envisioned an exhibition that would highlight the building and its transformation, which J.P. Morgan Chase and others made possible, and invited me to organize this show that responds to its downtown location and to the many decades of transactions that it has witnessed. At the building's acquisition more than 10 years ago, there was hopeful optimism about the future of the arts in a burgeoning and rejuvenated White Plains. A decade later, the U.S. economy is in trouble, and we, as a nation, have dramatically changed notions of value and trust.



Tom Otterness, *Embezzler and Cop*, 1999, bronze
Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, New York



Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese, *Main Street Meltdown*, 2008, color video, courtesy of Ligorano/Reese.

For this exhibition, I invited artists whose work takes the pulse of contemporary commerce at a critical moment in the 21st century. It provides a snapshot of the range of emotional and intellectual responses we have all had to the economic crisis our country faced in recent years articulated by 21 artists who come from Westchester county and beyond.



Michael Vahrenwald, *Untitled*, Buffalo Wild Wings, White Plains, NY, from "Banks" series, 2011, pigment print on vellum, courtesy of the artist

This exhibition also celebrates ArtsWestchester (formerly the Westchester Arts Council) as a key underwriter of the arts in Westchester County today – a kind of bank with its own transactional model. In funding arts programs and institutions, ArtsWestchester's support is like venture capital, invested in the promise of cultural projects and institutions. The return-on-investment is measured in communal benefit, not in dollars. In an era many times removed from that of the Grand Banking Room, it seems appropriate to celebrate this contemporary art space, which gives new value to a building that no longer serves its original purpose.

"The Bank & Trust Show" includes works that look at our economy and consider how notions of trust and value have changed.

Some of the works are made, quite literally, of money or other valuables so we question art as asset and its value relative to our other belongings. We realize: what we own defines who we are. And we think about our relationship to the American Dream. The exhibition has works that articulate the fear that we're taken advantage of, and also works of optimism; works that recognize our humanity in precarious situations; and works that critique powers beyond our control along with those that make us laugh at our condition.



Jennifer Dalton, *Are Times of Recession Good for Art?*, 2008
Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman NY, The FLAG Art Foundation



Kim Beck, *Bare Walls*, 2009, charcoal and pastel on paper, courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, NYC



Kambui Olujimi, *The O' Woof Woof*, 2006, mixed media, courtesy of the artist

Artists Kim Beck and Michael Vahrenwald look directly at our cities and suburbs to see how the economy affects the shopkeeper, the consumer and the homeowner. Kim Beck's hand-drawn sign sited in an exhibition window ("Selling Out to the Bare Walls") is an all-too-familiar sight on the commercial streets of White Plains and throughout America. Michael Vahrenwald's photographic exploration of the repurposing of classic bank buildings and contrasting storefronts that have become banks, was commissioned by ArtsWestchester for this show.

Challenges to the American dream are the theme of Kim Beck's "Ownership Society" drawings of houses in foreclosure and not getting what is promised or expected is the theme of Kambui Olujimi's "The O'Woof Woof," an installation with a raffle basket and tickets as centerpiece, titled after a Southern Black vernacular expression.

In Loren Eiferman's "They Robbed Us Blind," sculpted clay busts of mythical CEOs from mythical corporations sit atop a gold ingot. The artist suggests we've been robbed of earth and air, and even our health, all in the name of an expanding corporate bottom line. Tom Otterness' witty bronze sculptures depict his signature cartoon-like figures associated with both power (as in "Embezzler and Cop") and the disenfranchised (as in "Last Penny" with its emptied money bag).

While these works are critical, others ask questions. Jennifer Dalton's interactive sculpture "Are Times of Recession Good for Art?" surveys the public by inviting visitors to take a candy from the "yes" or "no" side of a dispenser. Over the duration of the exhibition we will chart prevailing opinions. Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese also gauge public reaction. Their work "Main Street Meltdown," an art installation comprised of an ice sculpture in the shape of the word "economy," was placed in Foley Square in Manhattan and melted over a period of hours in 2008. The couple videotaped the collapse of the sculpture in time-lapse photography; creating a symbolic mirror to what happened, literally, to our economy.



Loren Eiferman, *They Robbed Us Blind*, 2011, clay, bronze metal coating, acrylic paint, engraved brass plaque (detail) courtesy of the artist



Joan Linder, *Documents*, 2008-2010
 Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, NYC

Other artists take a look at how we live and how our personal assets define us. In Joan Linder's monumental drawing installation, "*Documents*," she recreates a stack of 80 pieces of mail that she's received that include a \$600 artist stimulus check from the U.S. Treasury, a check from the university where Linder teaches, and bills and junk mail luring the recipient into spending hard-earned cash. Elise Engler's drawings of anonymous women's handbags are a form of portraiture. Here the artist faithfully represents literally everything in the subject's satchel: every single credit card, coin, bill, tissue, bit of make-up, keys, and band-aids. With each scrolling inventory of personal effects, a true portrait of a person emerges.

What we value is another major theme in the exhibition. Works made of actual U.S. currency in the show include Ray Beldner's "*Money bag*," hand-sewn sacks made of dollar bills; Mark Wagner's collage work forming a diamond-shaped cautionary "*Yield*" sign; and Mary Temple's "*Screen Tests*" with hand-



Mark Wagner, *Yield*, 2009
 Currency collage, Courtesy of Pavel Zoubok Gallery

drawn portraits of President Obama printed onto sheets of uncut \$5 bills in direct relationship to the visage of President Lincoln. What emerges is a dialogue between or merging of the men depending on the relative placement of the portraits. Tabitha Vevers hand-painted currency alludes to the power-play at work between government officials and those affected by the government's actions.



Laura Carton questions what is more valuable – an artwork that she's created or the raw materials that she's employed – in this instance – gold. For her "*Cash for Gold*" project, Carton creates custom-made gold ingots imprinted with words that have meaning both on Wall Street and in the pornography industry. They are for sale at the price of gold per ounce on the day the collector purchases the work. Should the collector wish to sell the work, s/he is faced with the dilemma of whether the object will have more value as a work of art or as melted-down gold.

Laura Carton, *Back-End Load*, 2011, from "*Cash for Gold*" series, gold, wood, ink on paper, courtesy of the artist



(Above) Mary Temple, *Screen Tests (Front)*, 2010, 100 hand drawings printed on uncut US Treasury notes, thread, archival ink
 Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, NYC



Elise Engler, *Everything in Her Bag #23*, 1999, colored pencil on paper, courtesy of the artist



Chris Kaczmarek, *Access Code*, 2011, Mixed media, courtesy of the artist

Safety and trust are other themes addressed by artists in the show. Diane Tuft's elegant photographs of bank vault doors taken with infra-red lighting remind us of a past when we saw the beauty and the power of the bank as a safe haven for our most precious and valued possessions.

Safety of our personal information is addressed by Chris Kaczmarek in "Access Code" comprised of a photograph imprinted with a new QR bar code and wireless camera in the gallery. Those visitors to the gallery with a device (smart phone) that can read a QR code are given access to a website that allows them additional information that might otherwise be private.

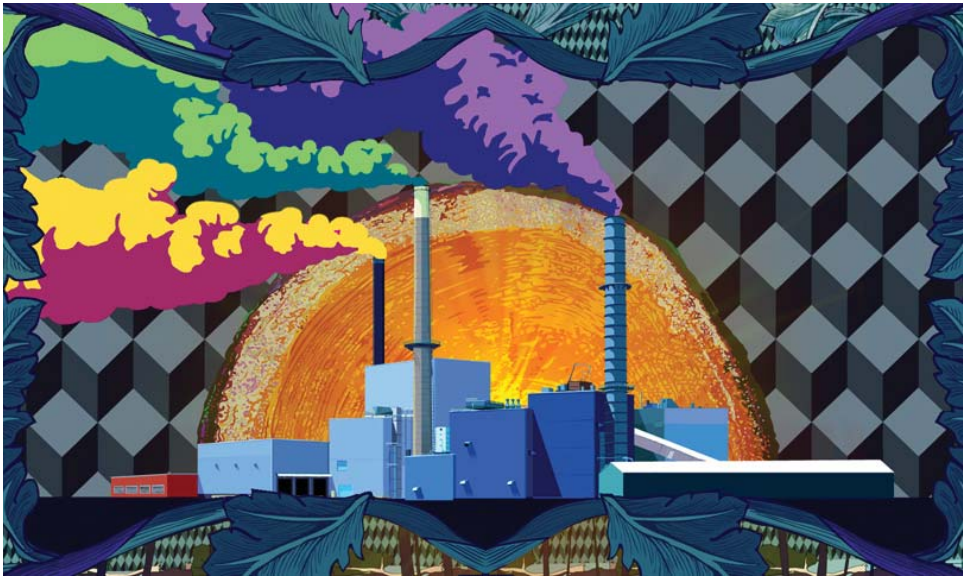


Jennifer Levonian, *The Figure in the Carpet*, 2006
Cut-paper animation using watercolor, paintings and collage, Courtesy of the artist and Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia

Fantasies of protection and violence are played out in the work of Jennifer Levonian and Susan Graham. Levonian – a financially strapped young artist – creates a video envisioning herself involved in a bank robbery complete with a Busby Berkeley-type dance number. The contents of Graham's porcelain "Vessels for Safekeeping" contain what many of us would consider critical to survival and self-protection, from a credit card (and scissors) to a first aid kit.



Susan Graham, *Vessel for Safekeeping – Survivalism*, 2009
Glazed porcelain, Courtesy of the artist and Schroeder Romero & Shredder, New York



Chris Doyle, *Waste_Generation*, 2010 digital animation on mini Mac, courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery

Chris Doyle's "Waste_Generation" animation presents a changing world so dependent on technology that it consumes it while simultaneously creating it in a seemingly never-ending recycling process. The cyclical imagery in the work includes a dump-site filled with computers and oil drills that dissolve into a paper mill whose smokestacks generate paper money. The currency then morphs into a jungle where the falling trees become a factory in silhouette that spews polluted clouds.



Jean Shin, *Chance City*, 2001. Lottery tickets
Courtesy of the artist and Artist Pension Trust, New York

There are also those who retain their faith in our economic system and share optimism through their work. This optimism is represented in the exhibition "Chance City," a monumental installation by Jean Shin comprised of thousands of used lottery tickets that have been hand built – without any adhesive – into the shape of a city-sized "house of cards," precariously standing in the gallery. The work is awesome not only for the technical skill and patience needed to build the piece, but also for elucidating the precious and delicate balance we strive to strike: holding it together while still building dreams for a better future in an uncertain world. ■



Tabitha Vevers, *Value Added: Watching I Five*, FA73305241A (After John Snow), oil and gold leaf on U.S. Currency, 2009, courtesy of Clark Gallery

About ArtsWestchester

ArtsWestchester is your complete guide to the arts. Founded in 1965, it is the largest, private, not-for-profit arts council in New York State; its mission is to provide leadership, vision, and support, to ensure the availability, accessibility, and diversity of the arts. ArtsWestchester provides programs and services that enrich Westchester: our grants help fund concerts, exhibitions and plays; we bring artists into schools and community centers; we advocate for the arts and build audiences through our marketing initiatives. In 1998, ArtsWestchester purchased the nine-story neo-classical bank building at 31 Mamaroneck Avenue which has since been transformed into the Arts Exchange, a multi-use resource for artists, cultural organizations, and the community.

About the Curator

Dara Meyers-Kingsley is an independent curator specializing in contemporary art and media. Her exhibitions have been presented at The Brooklyn Museum, the Andy Warhol Museum, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the New Museum and the Mattress Factory, among others. Previously she was the Director of the Film and Video Collections for the Andy Warhol Foundation in New York and taught at Parsons School of Design. She serves on the Board of Usonia, a postwar cooperative designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Pleasantville, NY and Smack Mellon, a contemporary art space in DUMBO, Brooklyn. She currently teaches at Hunter College in the Macaulay Honors College Program.



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Cover Image Credit: Ray Beldner, Money Bags, 2011, Courtesy of Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, CA

