

HOUSTON

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Meet the Artists of the Year!
H-Town's Film-Biz Breakthrough
The '09 Philanthropy Report
& Opening Night at HGO**

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HOUSTON ARTIST RAY PHILLIPS' 'IMAGINE'

Renaissance Fare

When the mayor said last year we'd begun an 'artistic renaissance,' he was spot on. And our innovators and institutions are still pushing through the downturn with passion and promise. Here's who's making magic now. | By Peter Barnes, Mitchell Alan Parker, Jody Schmal & Nancy Wozny | Photography by Julie Soefer |



1

Curator Cool

U of H's nation-leading **Blaffer Gallery** hired from within and promoted former interim director **Claudia Schmuckli**, 39, to director this year. "It's one thing to know that you are ready," she says proudly, "quite another for people to recognize that you are." She hit fast—with sculptor Leonardo Drew's smash survey—seeming to have a knack for knowing when an artist is ready to break through. Now the MoMA and Guggenheim alum is prepping for a major May show, *Tomás Saraceno: Lighter than Air*. It's the Argentine installation artist's first big U.S. exhibition. How does Japan-born, German-reared Schmuckli attract hot artists at their peaks? "I put their needs and desires first. You get rewarded for that kind of attention."

Claudia Schmuckli
at U of H's
Blaffer Gallery



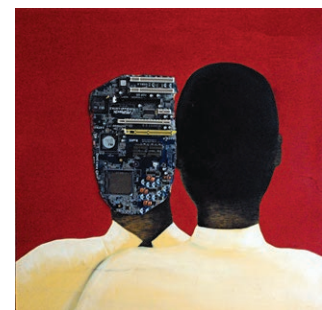
2

Symphony's Heavenly Heights

Others have married Gustav Holst's 1918 score "The Planets" with celestial images, but as **Houston Symphony** honcho Hans Graf points out, "Not many orchestras are in Houston and have NASA." The agency offered the Symphony a stunning palette of new, high-def images from the Hubble telescope and planetary rovers, which Graf and noted science filmmaker Duncan Copp have forged into *The Planets—An HD Odyssey* (Jan. 21, 23, 24 at Jones Hall). Not only will the project serve as the cornerstone of the season, but it also elicited a coveted invite to Carnegie Hall (Jan. 28). Expect a big screen flashing an eye-popping tour of the solar system. "Fresh and new and beautiful," assures Graf.

A NASA image of Jupiter and its moon, Io, set to flash behind the Symphony during 'The Planets—An HD Odyssey' next month.

3



'I See a Bit of Myself' by Rahul
Mitra at G Gallery Dec. 5-28

We Are The World

MFA epitomizes Houston's growing global outlook with its Asian art. "We've been collecting aggressively," says boss Peter Marzio. Besides the stellar, antiquities-rich permanent collection, new Korean artists weigh in with *Your Bright Future* (through Feb. 14)—preceding '10 shows from Japan and China spanning 5,000 years. Also, the India gallery hit in '09, and planning for the Islamic wing continues. The worldly trend is also hot at **The Menil Collection**—Italian surrealist sculptor Maurizio Cattelan comes soon—and top galleries. Notable now: **G's** emerging contemporary in *Blast India*.

CONTINUED...



4

Top Billing

Arning, with the first show he personally curated for CAM, the edgy solo exhibit 'Matthew Day Jackson: The Immeasurable Distance'

Fast-talking New Yorker **Bill Arning** was hired as director of the **Contemporary Arts Museum** in April for his art smarts—he left a curator post at MIT’s arts center—and to generate funds for the free museum. So far so good for the CAM, which celebrated its 60th anny in '09, and, in its boffo *No Zoning* exhibit, the city’s penchant for ignoring boundaries. Shaking things up is easy for Arning, who in the '80s worked on a gallery board with artist Andres Serrano when he offered his controversial “Piss Christ” (a photo of a crucifix in a jar of urine). And although he’s not giving much away, Arning says his next big project, *Hand+Made* (May 15-July 25), will include live craft-making at the museum and other public spaces, adding, “A contemporary curator that’s not on the verge of getting fired is probably not doing the job right.”



Jonathan Leach's 'Paved With Good Intentions' at Galveston Art Center

Hopping Island

Galveston’s post-Ike art scene, led by **Galveston Art Center** and its curator **Clint Willour**, is coming on strong. With 17 years experience bringing cool artists to the island, Willour wasn’t about to let a storm slow him down. “We lost one gallery,” he says, and the Center is operating out of a temp Market Street space because its 1878 building has flood damage. “But everything else is sort of the way it was.” (This month’s exhibit through Jan. 10, featuring Patrick Renner’s colorfully painted found pieces of wood and architectural abstracts by painter Jonathan Leach, is getting buzz.) Galleries like Wagner Sousa and Buchanan are back in biz, too, and Bogan Gallery, which highlights work as diverse as impressionist landscapes and abstract sculpture, is new. Meanwhile, how goes the effort to raise cash to restore the Art Center?. “That’s the \$2.5 million question,” says Exec Director Alex Irvine.

5

Opera Divas

This is HGO Artistic Director **Anthony Freud**’s first full season—and it’s full of lady love. Next month’s *Tosca* (opens Jan. 22)—Puccini’s three-part Roman tragedy, for which HGO mounts all-new sets and costumes—touts famous soprano **Patricia Racette** in her role debut. In April, another star soprano, **Tatiana Monogarova**, makes her HGO debut in Tchaikovsky’s melodrama, *The Queen of Spades*, while mezzo-soprano **Susie Graham**, performs at the opera gala April 10. This year’s “Yellow Rose Ball” honors longtime supporter and glam-dame **Lynn Wyatt**. (The theme was inspired by a bash Wyatt once threw for Princess Grace of Monaco.) “Lynn Wyatt is Houston’s yellow rose,” gushes HGO’s Guyla Pircher.



Wyatt and the late ballet star Rudolf Nureyev at the Opera Ball in '85, top, and, just above, Patricia Racette belts it out in Houston Grand Opera’s new ‘Tosca.’



7

Live From Houston...

Although H-Town's been a player in the recording biz in country and hip-hop for years, the city only now is finding its kooky, indie-rock-savvy *live* music voice. Places like the Warehouse District's **Super Happy Fun Land** and **Khon's**, a Midtown coffee shop, are hosting new bands and building buzz. Omar Afra of café-turned-live-music hotspot **Mango's** is among the scene's pioneers. He organized both August's Summerfest, which drew thousands to Eleanor Tinsley Park to hear Canada's Broken Social Scene and several local acts, and the Westheimer Block Party, a multi-venue local-band showcase. "When people say 'Everything was better back in the day,' I'm hoping right now is 'back in the day,'" he says. "We're at one of those points."

Tuning up at the huge new Super Happy Fun Land, a BYOB music venue and graffiti-leaning gallery space



8

Hoping for Catastrophe

Catastrophic Theater has a hot year in store. Besides regular shows like this month's *Life is Happy and Sad* (for more on *Life*, see Look Who's Talking), **Jason Nodler's** ensemble and ex-Pixie Charles Thompson are reading *Bluefinger* about the wild, tragic life of a Dutch artist. After its premiere here next fall, *Bluefinger* will tour the U.S. Meanwhile, on April 24, Nodler's former troupe-mate **Jim Parsons**, now star of TV's *The Big Bang Theory*, guests at the org's gala. "We will *destroy* you this season," jokes Nodler. "We are big, cheap theater. In catastrophic times, you need us."

H-Town's Parsons and Johnny Galecki in 'Bang'



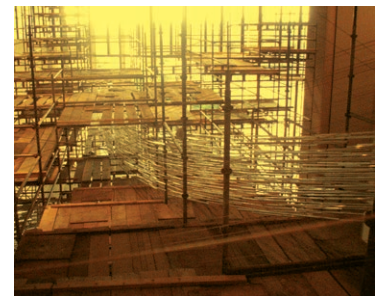
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Alley In 'Wonderland'

Two months before Tim Burton's film *Alice in Wonderland* hits, the Alley Theatre offers its musical *Wonderland*, which premieres first in Tampa then runs here Jan. 15-Feb. 14. In the minds of playwrights Alley head Gregory Boyd and the Tony-nominated Jack Murphy, Alice is a Manhattan writer and a single mom. Expect a fantastical urban landscape where people in Alice's life morph into the Mad Hatter et al.

Janet Dacal is Alice in 'Wonderland.'

10



Richard Lippold's '60s 'Gemini II' at Jones Hall got a facelift this year

Go Public

Public art is a priority, says Jonathan Glus of the **Houston Arts Alliance**, which curates the city's collection. In the last decade, leaders have hustled to expand public art—currently 400-plus pieces—setting aside some of the construction budget in large city projects for creative work. Ten new pieces were added in 2009, including the waterworks-inspired Matthew Geller sculpture in Bayou Park. And Glus says projects by major artists will soon be announced for '10, including a piece along Buffalo Bayou. Nearby, Downtown's **Discovery Green** continues to rotate temp works, such as Andy Mann's new video Christmas tree. In January, **Rice** erects a light-filled, sky-framing piece by **James Turrell**, and five of Lawndale founder **James Surls'** large-scale bronzes are also moving on campus (three more go up on Heights Boulevard) soon. And Hermann Park will soon erect 15 spiral-like sculptures by French artist **Bernar Venet**. Says Discovery Green's Susanne Theis: "It changes your experience to see art in a setting like this." ■