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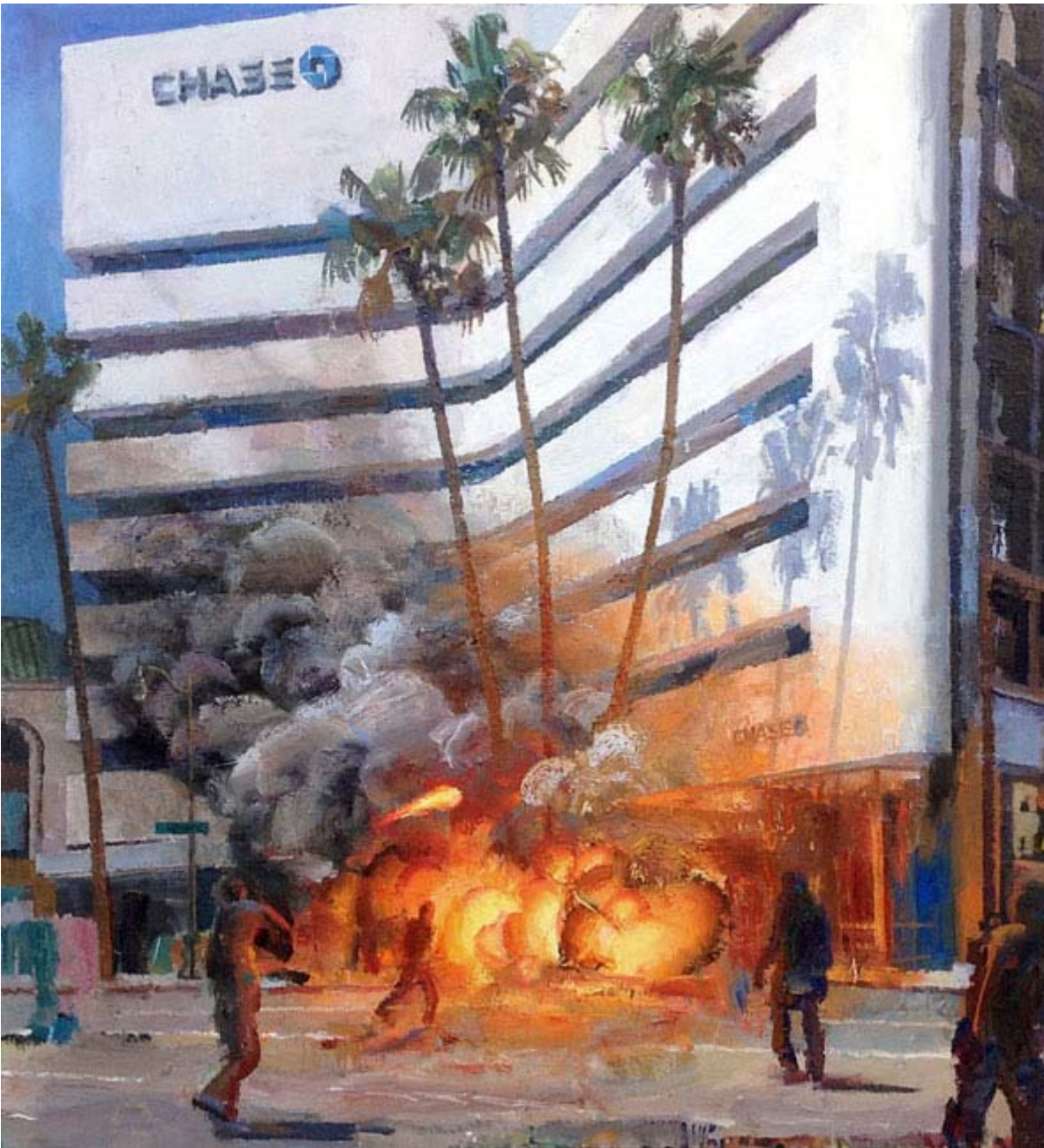
# WHITEHOT MAGAZINE

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**November 2013: We'll Make Out Better Than Okay @ La Esquina**



*Alex Schaefer, Chase Beverly Hills, 2013. Oil on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles.*

*We'll Make Out Better Than Okay*

La Esquina

Kansas City

October 25 – December 20, 2013

By Blair Schulman

"How did you go bankrupt?"

"Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly."

Ernest Hemmingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

Chicago curator Danny Orendorff is the 2013-14 curator-in-residence at Kansas City's Charlotte Street Foundation. He presents a subtle kick in the teeth with his first exhibition, *We'll Make Out Better Than Okay*. The title, taken from the theme song of 1990's comedy *Roseanne*, is fitting. The sitcom ran during the Clinton era, when a brighter future seemed more within reach than it does today. The hangover of Watergate and Vietnam had finally abated, dot.com would soon be in our lexicon and the jingoism of 9/11 and the Patriot Act was still unknown. Featuring work from a smart cross-section of artists, including Theaster Gates, Steve Lambert, Public Media Institute and Brittany Southworth-LaFlamme, Orendorff presents, as he tells it, the "architecture of a crisis that has since rooted itself into status quo."

The onetime dream of upward mobility is now a waking nightmare of text heavy bureaucracy, predatory lending and disenfranchisement and shown here as sardonic and sobering. The most dominant object in the room is Mike Simi's *Mr. Weekend* (2010, Robotic arm, custom software, fabric, 2-channel audio) a 12-foot robotic arm originally intended to replace human labor on the Detroit auto assembly lines. Cloaked in fabric, the arm is retrofitted and somewhat resembles Star Wars' Jar Jar Binks, muttering passive aggressive phrases, like, "At least I have a job." These industrial automations come at a steep cost; an object created and produced by humans renders humans obsolete.

Throughout the space are further responses to globalization and touches on, subtlety and not, of "race gender, sexuality, citizenship-status, age, abilities, (and) educational background."



*Candy Chang, I Wish This Was, 2010-ongoing . Civic input stickers (documentation of sticker in use). Image courtesy of the artist*

Euphemisms used to sedate the masses suddenly become as ridiculous as they really are when uttered repetitiously. *Price Point* (2013, Digital video excerpts documenting a 2013 performance of *Price Point* by Honey Pot Performance, a Chicago quartet. "Chronicling Afro-diasporic feminist and fringe subjectivities amidst the pressures of contemporary global life" spout Marxist sentiments, among others, that question the cost and value of merely trying to live. Elsewhere in the gallery, a music video for the song *Google Google Apps Apps* by Persia ft. DADDIES PLASTIK (2013, digital video) speaks more about the effects of global gentrification on the local culture.

Kansas City's Jennifer Boe repetitive wording with *Always Save & Phillip Morris* (2007, embroidery on linen), is an ode to both couponing and cheap below-market branding. Nearby are Alex Schaefer's series of plein air paintings depicting firebombed banks (Chase Beverly Hills, 2013, oil on canvas). In between both lies the heart of the matter; Blake Fall-Conroy's *Minimum Wage Machine*, (2008-2010, custom electronics, change sorter, wood, plexiglass, motor, misc. hardware, pennies). A hand-cranked contraption that spits out pennies calibrated for the amount of time it takes to earn a minimum wage rate in Kansas City.

Our nation's economic catastrophes lies between Washingtonian bureaucracy and the 24-hour media zeitgeist, both spun out like tweakers, flitting from crisis to crisis, while demands from their constituency go unanswered. The artists in this show shoulder the burden by focusing on the resulting problems with harsh and brutal truths.



*Honey Pot Performance, Price Point, 2013 . Performance still Image courtesy of the artists.*





*Mike Simi, Mr. Weekend, 2010 . Robotic arm, custom software, 2 channel audio, fabric, and plastic.  
Image courtesy of the artist.*



*Blake Fall-Conroy,  
Minimum Wage Machine, 2008-2010. Custom electronics, change sorter, wood,  
plexiglas, motor, misc. hardware, and pennies. Image courtesy of the artist.*



*Steve Lambert,  
Give & Give & Give, 2012 . Aluminum, acrylic, plastic, Jewelite, electronics, software.  
Image courtesy of the artist & Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles.*



Andrea Bowers, *Wall of Letters: Necessary Reminders from the Past for a Future of Choice*, 2006. Pencil on paper framed. Image courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Gallery, Los Angeles





Based in Kansas City, Missouri, Blair Schulman is an art writer/critic and curator. He is Editor of Cupcakes in Regalia and Associate Editor of Art Tattler. Blair is a regular contributor to Ceramics: Art & Perception and Juxtapoz. His writing has appeared in Art Focus Oklahoma, Art Practical, fluent collaborative, The Kansas City Star and was a longtime contributor to the now-defunct Review magazine. He is also co-host of ArtSpeak Radio on 90.1 FM, KKFI, Kansas City Community Radio.

Blair also completed the 2012 Oklahoma Art Writing & Curatorial Fellowship, presented by the Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition (OVAC) The Fellowship is generously funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Kirkpatrick Foundation, Inc. and the Oklahoma Arts Council.

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**Noah Becker: Editor-in-Chief**