

VIEW OF REALITY FROM A CHARTEUSE COUCH

DEATH OF CONTEMPORARY ART MONTH PARADE, ON THE RIVER

INTERVIEW WITH JASON JAY STEVENS AND LESLIE RAYMOND by Gene Elder



At the Death of CAM Parade, SA
Photos courtesy Lesley Raymond

Gene: Hello and welcome to the Chartreuse Couch. I understand you two have been creating problems on the River Walk, I mean parading art on the river. That is all it takes to be invited to the Couch.

Jason: Thanks for having us, Gene. I've never sat on a couch so chartreuse! Seat be sate!

Gene: Oh I bet you say that to all the couches. Well, so what brought this parade on?

Jason: After several years of debate, the San Antonio arts community had concluded that for Contemporary Art Month to graduate to "the next level"—that is, grow, develop, raise the City's profile in the greater art world—it would behoove us to move the celebration to the more climatologically amenable month of March. We've sweltered through 23 Julys, and had a fabulous time doing it, but, frankly, nobody north of New Branfels is interested in studio visits in July. But in March, people from the snow belt are dying for a good reason to leave the grey skies for sunny San Antonio. Our party will get bigger, better, greater!

Gene: Well, that definitely sounds like that good ol' "Come Visit San Antonio" propaganda that they keep trying to teach us. But it is true, everyone did agree that we had worn out our welcome in July.

Jason: Of course, the flip side of that is that we need to let go of July—and it ain't easy. There's something sadistically romantic about having all these events at the peak of heat season. Also, CAM's roots run deep and strong in this community, and change doesn't come easy. The "Death of CAM" Parade was created to address that. It was a "letting go" ceremony. A symbolic "Death."

Gene: Well, I do approve of all these antics, but after being in the parade I was not sure about the death aspect. It would seem that now you need to have a birth March Parade to give the life back to Contemporary Art Month in March.

Leslie: We launched the parade at sundown not

only because the day begins to cool off at that time, but also because of the obvious metaphorical association with death—the sun is going down. And we do also know that it is going to come up again in the morning. Images underscore the primal language of ritual. I shouldn't have to spell out the richness of the symbol of the water that SAMA offered us during our march—this is the language that we all understand on a subconscious level, at the very least.

Gene: It is nice that you gave the parade that much thought. Well, March 2 is Texas Independence. That is what I liked about the move. July 4th to March 2nd is a good move.

Leslie: Ritual is something we often forget about, but can be essential to making sense of our place in the world. The acting out of grief through the ritual of our funeral parade represents a way to honor our moving on to another phase of our life as an artists' community. ... The move to March for CAM represents, to a degree, the growing up of the San Antonio art community. I wasn't here when CAM started, but I understand that it was in reaction to the cancellation of an exhibition which showcased a group of local artists at the San Antonio Museum of Art. Now 23 years later, I am seeing a different kind of relationship between artists and institutions here. Even in the short period of time I've been here (4 years) some big things have happened. For example, new curators David Rubin (SAMA), Rene Barilleaux (the McNay), and Scott Sherer (UTSA) who relate to the community.

Gene: Well, it looks like the queers are taking over. That is definitely a change for San Antonio.

Jason: I can't believe you would out all those folks in one swell foop like that, Gene! It is no longer a dirty little secret that the entire art world is carried on the backs of gay men and non-profits staffed with overworked young ladies!

Gene: So who is outing? They're out. I have been openly working for gay visibility since 1973 when I plopped out of Trinity with my art degree. And I am proud of it. I consider this progress. New to town are you?

Jason: I was joking, Gene. How new in town, indeed.

Gene: Well, how about the other artists in the parade. I noticed Hills Synder led, and Jason - you had some strange instrument

you were banging on?

Jason: Hills and Leslie took turns leading, and I played the obligatory parade monkey role, bouncing from front to back to front again. I had a big mobile of chimes and cymbals hanging over and in front of me from an armature strapped to my back, like a junkyard carillon, that rung beautifully as we marched. There were times I felt like I was floating in a cloud of bells...hallucinatory and fun. And tiring! With counterweights the whole thing weighed a good forty pounds. Worth every ounce, though.

Leslie: Sixty people were a part of the parade! Mimi Kato was in town for 2 to Watch, Tish Stringer and Harbeer Shandu from Houston, and Hills Snyder headed up the Drum Corpse.

Jason: We had a great turn out of local artists, and friends of the arts.

Gene: I'm advocating that July become PAM: Political Art Month. Well, so you both have been here four years. From where? And give us your impressions about San Antonio; not necessarily the arts.

Jason: We lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the years leading up to our move here, and we both actually grew up around the bordertown of Detroit. And I can say, in so many ways—not just geographically—San Antonio is the other side of the country.

Gene: Well, in what way?

Leslie: We get super-summer here. I also notice, generally, more traditional gender dynamics, and less investment in digital literacy and new technologies.

Jason: The contrasts are striking, but if I attempt to articulate them, I'll lapse too close to stereotyping, and that ain't my bag.

Gene: Well, we are a better and brighter art community with you both here I can see that. And what do you think we should be doing here to upgrade our art consciousness? What would be some helpful long term goals?

Leslie: I'd like to see San Antonio shift the cultural exchange into high-gear on a national AND international level. We have quite a few artists who are getting out there, as well as people who come here through programs like Art Pace-- we need more of this kind of thing.

show about the goose that lays the golden eggs. They performed this for City Council to save the river from being covered over for a storm sewer. This is how art has been used in San Antonio's past. You can see the puppets at the Conservation Society and you should make a point to see them and to read about this puppet show. It is very important. And certainly more important than anything Andy Warhol ever did. And your parade is now one of those golden eggs. This puppet show that saved the river is what started the Conservation Society.

You should be teaching this in your class.

Leslie: This is a great story, Gene. I am always advocating for my students to find ways to positively and directly impact society. Art can, and should, be for everybody.

Gene: Well I guess our time is up. I always let my guests ask the last question. Go ahead and ask me anything.

Leslie: What did the zero say to the eight?

Gene: OH dear!! I hope this isn't one of those, "What's the sound of one hand clapping?" questions. I always thought that was so dumb and we all thought something profound was being asked. OK, this is either about siamees twins, pregnancy or a split personality. What?

Leslie: "Nice belt!" ;)

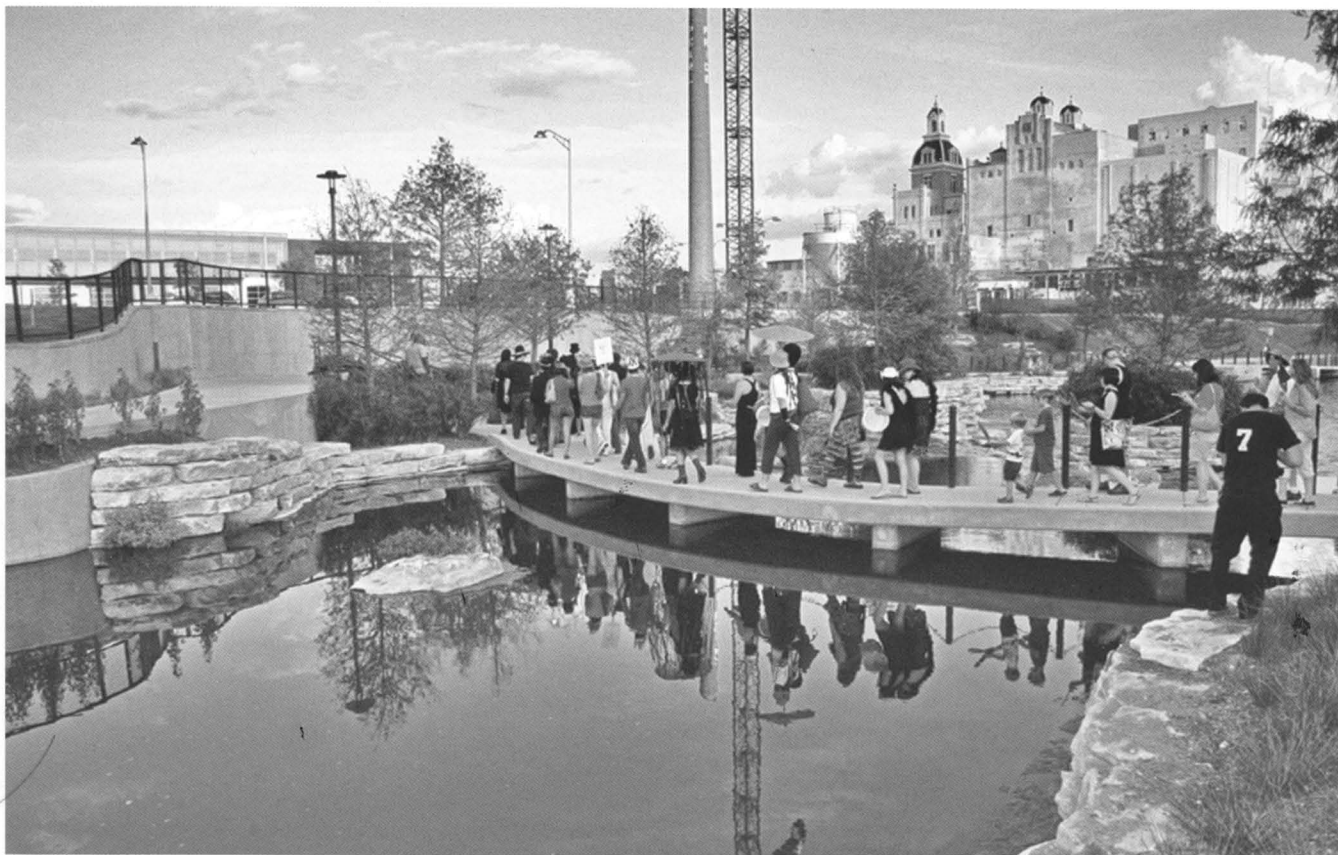
Gene: HAHAAHHA!!!!!!

That's good! Well, thanks for talking about the CAM parade. CAM is dead. Long live PAM. And thanks for visiting the Chartreuse Couch. Here sign your names.

Jason

Leslie

Gene Elder is the Archives Director for the HAPPY Foundation, a foundation dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, etc, etc... and art, and history, and getting this magazine out on time.



Death of CAM Parade, SA

Gene: Since you have added another layer of art history to the river, here is a little pop quiz. Do you know who Emily Edwards and Rene Maverick Green are? And do you know about The Goose That Lays The Golden Eggs?

Jason: Clueless. Do tell.

Leslie: The magical goose got it's throat slit by the greedy and ignorant bastards she was generously supplying with gold.

Gene: They are two women artists that created the puppet