

# Digital Dada

Collaborative show shines light on the blurred lines of modern life



"I put my socks on one pair at a time," by Nick Peelor

By [By Baynard Woods](#)

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## Gran Prix

Through Dec. 16

**Often, the text** that accompanies a show seems to have little or nothing to do with the art on display. Either the artist is unable to explain his or her own work well, or multiple works are shoehorned into some conceptual framework that excites a curator but elicits a shrug from everyone else. In the case of the collaborative show *Gran Prix*, the description fits the work so well that one might even start to suspect that there is some kind of movement going on.

After a long series of conversations with Seth Adelsberger and Alex Ebstein (an erstwhile *CP* contributor), of Nudashank, Ajay Kurian, the director of Gresham's Ghost, a roving gallery in New York, began making studio visits to Baltimore. He noticed a number of artists, both in Baltimore and New York, who demonstrated a "proclivity to seize the endless information surrounding them and process it without any pre-established hierarchies. More specifically, they frequently bypass the calcified barrier between nature and culture and navigate the dissolving membrane between real and virtual space."

With the help of Adelsberger and Ebstein, Kurian rounded up 28 of these artists in what amounts to an almost definitive statement on what might be called Pop.o or Digital Dada in four different gallery spaces: Nudashank, Gallery Four, and two reconfigured storefronts on Eutaw Street. Each of the artists seems to be responding in some

way to the overwhelming digitization of our lives or the blurring of the differences between nature and culture as we map the human genome, scan our brains, and create new or genetically modified forms of life, in the same way that Dada rebelled against the mechanization of modern life and Pop dealt with the commercialization of our lives.

Lisa Dillin offers a playful take on the nature/culture divide in "Tiger Tiles" a section of linoleum floor with a tiger meticulously hand-cut and inlaid by Dillin and her husband. The flattened and splayed tiger skin is a representation of a tiger-skin rug—already the conversion of one of the most symbolically wild forms of nature into a comforting bit of culture, but here it is set against the industrial white-speckled floor, like one would find at an office space. Likewise, the plants of "Equivalent Formations" twist the usual bland use of plants to "enliven" corporate spaces into something altogether different. When this piece was shown as part of Dillin's Sondheim finalist show at the BMA, it had a completely different aura about it: In the more institutional halls of the BMA, the planters could almost seem like a decoration in the museum itself. In Nudashank's far grittier space, they seem more out-of-place, highlighting both their own sterile nature and the scruffy nature of the space they inhabit.

A work like Caitlin Cunningham's "Jack/son Torrance"\* brings nature directly into the creation of art as the medium. Cunningham

used chlorophyll and an acrylic medium to produce the paint that rises both vertically to the ceiling and horizontally across the floor. The name refers both to natural phenomenon and Jackson Pollock, the reference to whom is clear in the splashy effect, but the way the colors radiate in planes may be more reminiscent of Mark Rothko.

New York artist Ethan Breckenridge's "Site Specific" brilliantly plays with the blurring of the nature/culture divide, while bringing in the digital element that dominates much of the show. Breckenridge took the storefront window of the 429 Eutaw St. gallery and made a digital print of a dusty, dirty window on vinyl, which he stuck to the window. The effect is both ridiculous and remarkably cool—sleek grit.

The work of some artists fits the show's conception well but are more interesting to hear about than to see. In each of the gallery spaces, Max Guy has a scanned image of an actual clock. "He's really interested in how the scanner sees," Kurian says of the works. There are subtle differences based on the different size of the print, but especially when placed in different rooms, there is not much that is actually visually interesting—as with much conceptual work, the pieces seem like mere illustrations of an idea. Likewise "Blue Clouds," by Dina Kelberman (author of *CP's* "Important Comics"), takes our digital overabundance as a subject without offering much payoff. A series of stills from the credits of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, with the text blurred out with "blue clouds," fails to offer the same kind of surprise as Kelberman's similar works like "I'm Google," on display at the Guest Spot through Dec. 7 ("ReInstitutionalized," [Art, Nov. 7](#)).

Lesser Gonzalez Alvarez (*CP's* "Best Artist" 2012) has created one of the most intellectually and perceptually engaging works in the show. Actually it is a series of works, housed in the back of one of the Eutaw galleries, that amount to the first truly American Zen temple. Projected on one wall is a loop of a film the artist took through the windshield of a car driving down the highway at night and then digitized it, creating the feeling of 1980s driving video games. It both refers to and creates the lulling "white-line fever" effect of the road. Beneath are several prayer bowls filled with motor oil, and in front of that, a mandala in the form of a Goodyear tire, or a Goodyear tire in the form of a mandala. On the flanking walls are two other mandala-tire images. The works together create a brilliant play on the *Heart Sutra's* "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" where the material and the experience, the everyday and the transcendent, surface and depth, and yes, the cultural and the natural come together. It is a profoundly moving and yet remarkably fun work.

Nudashank has been dedicated to creating a dialogue between artists in Baltimore and New York. And in this case, it pays off spectacularly. Kurian's curatorial vision managed to bring out something cohesive and yet astoundingly diverse in a wide range of artists. There are dozens of fascinating works, both whimsical and serious, on display. And the two storefront galleries on Eutaw Street might be thought of as works in themselves, so thorough is the transformation of the space, pointing us to the future and helping us dream of what might be in Baltimore's newest arts district.

\* In the print edition, we misidentified the title of this work.

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