

REPORT FROM WEEK 746 In which we asked for mottoes or tourism slogans for countries around the world: As predicted, we got loads of stuff whose theme was basically "Here's a Country We Never Heard Of." What, you want a prize for trumpeting how ignorant you are? Sorry, the 2000 election is over. (Yes, we know that some of the lands below are not independent countries.)

- 4 France: Visit, If You Must. (Sigh.) (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)
3 Burma: What Happens Here REALLY Stays Here. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)
2 The winner of the can of quite possibly genuine possum meat: United States: We Make the World a Warmer Place (Paul VerNooy, Hockessin, Del.)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER England: Lie Back and Think of Us (Tom Murphy, Bowie)

THE MIS-UNIVERSE SEMI-FINALISTS

- Austria: No Kangaroos (John Alvey, Annandale, almost a First Offender — his only other ink was in 1994)
Bermuda: Come Lose Yourself (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
Burkina Faso: Not Your Father's Upper Volta (George Vary, Bethesda)
We need no signs Nor shaving cream Nor your dissent For our regime Burma. (Brendan Beary)
Canada: Home of the Almighty Dollar (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
China: Come Visit Your Money (Ira Allen, Bethesda)
Colombia: All It's Cracked Up to Be (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)
Denmark: Oh, So Nothing's Rotten in YOUR Country? (Brendan Beary)

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST: WEEK 750

Hit Us With Your Best Shot: Photo Contest No. 4

It's the fourth Style Invitational photo contest, and this time we're doing it a bit differently. First of all, you have four weeks, not one, to submit entries. Second, rather than tell you what to put in your picture (e.g., fruits), this time we're asking you to illustrate, any way you like, any of the following five captions with your own original photo:

- I should have just stayed in bed today.
Washington, D.C.: Sister City of Xplf, Planet Zornog
Seventy-eight percent of Americans consider their pet "an equal member of the family."
Chris has never been quite like the other kids.
This is why it is important to read the directions on the package.

Here are the rules, some of them different from typical Invitational contests: Photos must be your own work and not previously published. They can be prints (no larger than 5 by 7 inches, nonreturnable), or digital photos e-mailed as attachments 1 megabyte or smaller.



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality.

- Norway: Just a Little to the Left of Sweden (Matthew Morris)
Pakistan: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow (Steve Fahey, Kensington)
Qatar: Wish U Were Here (Barry Koch)
Tajikistan: Stan of Opportunity (Cy Gardner)
Tibet: Doormat to China (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)
United States: War Is Peace (Bill Moulden, Frederick)
And Last: Bosnia: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves
Herzegovina: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves

- Croatia: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves
Serbia: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves
Macedonia: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves
Montenegro: The Peaceful Land Surrounded by Nations of Murderous Thieves (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Next Week: Boeing Us Silly, or Off-Pique Air Fare

For the top photo finishers: The never-yet-sold-on-eBay Inker, and the arm-waving Mao watch from Tiananmen Square.

- England: We Couldn't Beat the Patriots Either (Bruce Evans, Arlington)
France: [motto writers on strike in solidarity with the truffle sorters] (Russ Taylor, Vienna)
Galapagos Islands: Guano Happens (Kevin Dopart)
Germany: It Is Not Necessary to Have a Humorous Slogan (Martin Bancroft)
Germany: Genocide Free Since 1945! (Cy Gardner, Arlington)
Greenland: Site of the 2060 Summer Olympics (J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.; Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)
India: For More Information Press 1 (Matthew Morris, Rockville, a First Offender)

- Iran: We're Gonna Party Like It's 999 (Brendan Beary)
Iran: World's Largest Non-American Theocracy (Ira Allen)
Come Visit Liechtenstein: Just Don't All Come at Once (Brendan Beary)
Mexico: A Little Less Crowded Every Day (Dan Milam, Paducah, Ky., a First Offender)
Monaco: Disneyland for Adults — and Almost Twice as Large (Russell Beland, Springfield)
Myanmar: We Liked "Burma" Better Too, but These Guys Have Guns (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)



PHOTOS BY MARTHA WRIGHT — THE WASHINGTON POST

Bailey's 'New Work': Purposefully Familiar

ART, From C1

levels," reads one e-mail sent to dealer and curator Jordan Faye Block, who placed Bailey's project in that Baltimore lobby. An e-mailer on the other side of the issue wrote: "You have breathed life into the Baltimore art scene. I hope you will always have this willingness to take on risk and the tenacity to follow through."

Block says she's happy to be in the middle: "My idea on art is that if it doesn't get you talking, it isn't working." Everything about the show, right down to its title, manages to stir things up. Sure, the exhibition showcases new work by Bailey, the 33-year-old artist who teaches part-time at the Corcoran's art school.

the very different and rather successful female painter who also lives in Baltimore, and often blogs about the city's scene. Washingtonians may know Ober from the exhibition she had a year ago in the Flashpoint space downtown; in March she opens a commercial show at the Randall Scott Gallery on 14th Street NW.

Bailey's paintings capture all of Ober's telltale tricks and tics. Nostalgic imagery is pulled from older sources. Bird books, old encyclopedias, decorative wallpapers? Check. Tender, pastel colors — soft washes of pale yellows, blues and pinks — with brooding splashes of black on top? Check. Scraps of dictionary definitions, presented in old-timey fonts? Check. An overriding sense of capital-P Poetry, without ever making clear quite what that poetry's about? Check.

Since then, after a classic "full and frank exchange of views" between the two women, Ober has grown calmer. But she said in a phone interview this week she still resents the sense she gets — probably correctly — that her work was singled out for copying as an example of what's most sellable in art.

Yet when it comes right down to it, why shouldn't Bailey work in Ober's style, whatever the motive?

There's no copyrighting an artistic look — especially when it's one that's been out there for a decade or two already, and is shared by painters working all around the globe. The fact of such artistic trends — of a trademark style and its subsequent knockoffs — is partly what Bailey's show is about. In a "clarifying note" that she agreed to mount this week on Ober's own blog site, Bailey said she was interested in taking on a business model from the world of fashion — the model of the "designer replica" — "to see how (or if) that could translate to the business of art making within our local community."

Bailey had long asked herself whether there was a way to maintain an ethical studio practice within a marketplace built around providing luxury goods to loft dwellers. But, as she explained in an e-mail to Ober, she suddenly thought, "What if I just dropped that facade, that myth of an ethical studio practice, and just went with a certain business model. Could I be the Old Navy to Cara Ober's The GAP?"

Bailey certainly wasn't interested in "stealing" Ober's style, the way a forger might. "I wasn't trying to pull the wool over anyone's eyes," she said in an interview this week, pointing out that she signed all the works with her own name and gave herself top billing in the exhibition title. Rather, she was interested in the tension between fiction, which is central to most art, and deceit, which is seen as crass and unartful. She achieved that tension, she said, simply by moving the "fictional stuff" of artmaking outside the frame of the picture, where it usually stops.

However much the paintings might look like Ober's, Bailey isn't using that look to the same ends that Ober, or an Ober forger, would. Im-

itation may often be the sincerest form of flattery, but in this case it's hard to imagine that a cerebral artist such as Bailey would like Ober's work enough to want to truly claim it as her own. Bailey's previous projects have included grabbing photographic faces off the Web, then paying craftsmen in China to do them up as oil portraits. Currently, at Baltimore's School 33 Art Center, Bailey has "curated" a show of three imaginary artists, of her own creation, one of whom exists only in the cyberworld of Second Life while another is based on Anna, Ikea's automated online assistant.

In fact, one point of the lobby show is that Bailey's own like — or dislike — for Ober's art is rather beside the point. "I don't know that my opinion on the work really comes into it." Rather, she's adopted someone else's manner specifically as a way to move away from the standard issues of taste and the clichés of personal identity and expression that still tend to govern art, especially in more conservative scenes such as Baltimore's. "I'm really interested in the idea of anonymity, and not having a brand — moving from style to style. . . . I really enjoyed making these paintings, because I didn't have to bring anything personal to it."

Bailey says she could as easily have chosen some other local artist to imitate — the fact that she didn't have much of a connection to Ober, personal or professional or aesthetic, was one reason that she chose her. Another was that Ober herself is happy to incorporate borrowed imagery into her art. So why shouldn't Bailey follow such an artistic principle to its furthest point — to the edge-to-edge appropriation of a single artist's work? That way, Bailey says, she could concentrate on just getting the



JORDAN FAYE CONTEMPORARY

"The Alchemist" is featured in Christine Bailey's Ober-inspired exhibition.

look right, using hand and eye and turning off most of her decision-making mind. "It was a pleasure to just make formal decisions."

But behind that was the knowledge — or at least the possibility, to be investigated — that even the most apparently neutral, mechanical action can unsettle the art world. Most artists make an object and barely feel a ripple when they go public with it. It can seem a useless act, or at least an impotent one. So, Bailey says, she asked herself a question: "Can I make a picture — a benign object — and really make it function socially?" Judging from the heated responses to her project, the answer's clearly yes. It's made "Christine Bailey: New Work" one of the most stimulating local shows I've seen in ages.

If nothing else, Bailey has uncov-

ered an artistic chasm: What for some viewers is an interesting experiment out near the cutting edge can come across, to others, as "one of the most unforgivable and disgusting acts." Two works of art, a Bailey and an Ober, can look nearly the same yet count as absolutely different gestures for all the different kinds of people seeing them.

Four of the lobby pictures are on their way to being sold, but it's hard to know if they're being bought for their tasteful, Oberesque good looks or their hard-hitting Baileyan brains.

Christine Bailey: New Work is on view through Feb. 8 at 100 E. Pratt St., Baltimore. Open Monday to Friday, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., and on weekends by appointment with Jordan Faye Contemporary, 443-955-1547.

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