CATHY WILKES
PITTSBURGH

The patient, attentive touch of Irish artist Cathy Wilkes has always transformed mundane objects into disarmingly vulnerable artifacts. These seem to herald from a paradoxical realm where unmasked intimacy is the only possible mode of relationship, yet all intimacies remain totally remote. A number of these artifacts populate Wilkes' current installation at the Carnegie Museum of Art [November 12, 2011—February 26, 2012]. Some are stupefyingly powerful. Yet the show's most surprising revelation is a group of small, harrowingly wrought canvases. These punctuate the exhibition with uncanny vistas onto spaces, textures, and colors.

Wilkes uses three low, broad-surfaced display tables to loosely define zones associated with particular experiences or identities in the cool, stone-floored gallery. On the table closest to the entrance, objects and images related to World War I "doughboys" draw the visitor into a consideration of that international conflagration, which ushered in a century of bloody conflict and atrocity. As we approach the one-hundredth anniversary of that war, Wilkes fashions her own doughboys from mannequins with papier-mâché heads pinched and poked to resemble the stuff of their nickname. Loose-fitting civilian clothes hang on their skeletal frames, and their vacant expressions are among the show's most affecting images. Those faces, with tiny, weak eyes and sparse, brittle hair, embody more fully than most actors' portrayals the ways in which mechanized warfare prevents its agents from returning to anything resembling healthy human existence.

Another zone seems devoted to the intimate belongings and activities of a young girl, with distressed dolls, carefully cut-up rags, and other remnants gathered near a female figure that bends forward convulsively. The grotesque figure may be the girl herself, now grown up, an adult presence remembered from childhood, or a monstrous fabrication. This table, like the others, carries a few small canvases with images so belabored, eroded, and fragile that they seem not to have been painted, but rather excavated in a mysterious process parallel to the real archaeology by which the artist unearthed at the Somme battlefield many of the objects on display.

The objects on and around the remaining table seem intended to bridge the other two zones, and are more resistant to association. The overall effect is an effortless link between the impossible horror of trench warfare and the quotidian processes of enculturation, memory and relationship. As she has been lauded for doing in the past, Wilkes establishes these connections without relying on cliché or formula. Her stumbling veterans insist with startling clarity that, in the end, war always makes its way into the very homes it was supposed to protect. And the table of tortured mementos at which the monstrous woman bows insists that far from evaporating into metaphor, war remains a real presence in those homes for generations.

Merging these ruminations on the legacies of war, domesticity, and childhood, the small paintings resonate on a frequency distinct from all of the other works. Their cracked, flaking surfaces seem to betray a current of self-annihilation that harmonizes perfectly with the theme of war. And yet their forms are clearly the result of intense consideration and revision. In some, the familiar bell-curve of the doughboy's helmet transmutes into a hero's bower, an abstract cipher, and a reclining beer belly, while remaining just a helmet, as well. In another, a ghostly bunny seems transfixed by an abyss where the image of which he is a part simply dissolves into unpainted linen. All of these paintings, unframed and with their tack-heads and canvas edges exposed, retain a resolute objecthood, especially when presented on the tabletops. When hung, their smallness emphasizes fragility and vulnerability against the vast expanses of wall, while puncturing those expanses like gunshots in the distance.

—Grant Johnson

ADRIAN KELLARD
ST. LOUIS

Adrian Kellard's wall-hanging tableaux and freestanding sculptures are carved and painted wood assemblages of palpable physicality. Kellard (1959–1991) synthesized an astonishingly disparate range of histories, personal realities, and modes of art-making in his uniquely masterful and fearless craft. *Adrian Kellard: The Learned Art of Compassion* provides an intimate and affecting retrospective of the brief career of this working-class, Irish-Italian, gay, devoutly Catholic artist [Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, St. Louis University; September 24—December 11, 2011]. The exhibition reveals a singular artist who could hold at bay the deficiencies of identity politics and institutional religion to produce uncompromising, exuberant, and radically faith-driven work.

Poised to mark the twentieth anniversary of Kellard's death at age 32 to AIDS-related causes, this exhibit also allows us to revisit a lost strain of inquiry begun in the heady froth of the Reagan-era art world. Echoing the title of MOCRA founder and curator Fr. Terrence Dempsey's dissertation, that research examined the "reemergence of spiritual and religious concerns in American art of the 1980s." Dempsey first discovered Kellard's work while conducting his dissertation research. It had been included in the capacious 1985 group exhibit *Precious: An American Cottage Industry of the Eighties*, curated by Thomas W. Sokolowski for New York University's Grey Art Gallery. Sokolowski put Dempsey in contact with Kellard as well as Kellard's mentor, the pioneering artist Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt—also a working-class, gay, devout Catholic included in *Precious*. Arguing for a new sense of overt religiosity in an adamantly secular age, Kellard and Lanigan-Schmidt, along with other artists, pursued an antidote to what they perceived as spiritually-bereft market-driven art as well as twentieth-century Modernism's more oblique and perhaps rarified evocations of the nebulously sublime.

Over two decades later, in this exhibition, Kellard not only resurfaces as a key part of this significant alternative history—whose momentum, directly and indirectly, was

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Cathy Wilkes**, installation view at the Carnegie Museum of Art, 2011, mixed media (courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow; photo: Tom Little); **Adrian Kellard**, *Lovers*, 1986, latex on wood with trouble lamps (collection of the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, Saint Louis University; photo: Jeffrey Vaughn)

JANET BIGGS
TAMPA

radically hampered by the AIDS pandemic—but also appears freshly as a remarkable artist in his own right. In *Prayer of the Faithful in Ordinary Time*, 1988, a red-and-white checker pattern curtain parts to reveal Jesus, haloed in bright yellow and orange beams, praying under the star-riddled light of the full moon. Characteristically integrating the everyday with the otherwise lofty, the moon is in fact a store-bought plastic clock, its hands marking the agitated passing of earthly time. *Lovers*, 1986, deploys a similarly hybrid approach. Jesus appears again, now cradling a portrait of the recumbent artist, while a looming Christ-figure, crucified, dangles two construction-grade floodlights from his palms. The central scene is brightly lit, while a populous, nighttime city spreads around them: a finely etched series of high-rises, tenements, and neighborhood churches, rendered in the manner of a woodblock printer—as with all of Kellard's imagery—framing the couple and scaffolding the crucified form. Each row of windows is an intricate pattern piled on top of other patterns. Dimly primary-hued, it recalls newspaper-printed comics. Time is always of concern: a reminder of something fundamentally common and a critical exigency to heed. In the hinged room-divider *St. Francis Screen*, 1985, the saint is carved in a pose quoted from Giotto's fresco *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*, 1297–1299. The third panel of this piece is a functioning calendar. Not only were Kellard's days marked by this piece, his apartment was bisected by it: his art, so closely linked to his faith, was hand-etched in the stuff of daily life. It also formed a space for him to live fully.

Kellard's was an eight-year, compactly meteoric career. Since his death, however, his work has rarely been shown. What is its importance here? Irascible, irrepressible, and boldly honest, the work not only communicates a plain sense of humanity but a brave and uncluttered sense of self. Our current moment may well be marked by as much conflict with identity and meaning—spiritual and otherwise—as Kellard's not-so-distant era, making his story as pertinent as ever.

—Jessica Baran

No Limits, a mid-career survey of video works by Janet Biggs, turns most of the second floor at the Tampa Museum of Art into an ethereal theater [October 8, 2011—January 8, 2012]. Throughout the darkened space, moving images on monitors with headphones alternate with immersive room-sized single- and multiple-channel video projections. Evocative high fidelity soundscapes—compositions of classical, gospel, and rock music, and atmospheric recordings—elaborate each display. A tightly choreographed spectacle, the exhibition features over a decade of Biggs' performance-based videos and documents the fulfillment of a desire to expand her creative terrain.

Biggs looks at performance as a way to understand the role of gender and power in defining the self. Exploring the psychology of control and release, she has sought out the testing grounds of synchronized swimmers, wrestlers and equestrians, speed motorcyclists and NASCAR racers, kayakers and coal miners. The claustrophobic space beneath the surface of a swimming pool is one realm in which the artist has contemplated notions of resistance and constraint. A seminal project, *Flight*, 1999, is an immersive four-channel, room-filling installation. Juxtaposing views of geriatric women striving to synchronize their underwater routines with that of a white horse lying unconscious and quivering on bare ground, the work depicts the struggle and transcendence of aging. Two other aquatic videos show the strength in a teenage performer's graceful defiance of gravity, and empathize with polar bears that assert their power by swimming endless arcs in a tank at the Chicago zoo.

Biggs explains that, initially, she focused on athletes in order to determine whether they lost or found their identity in the drive to excel at a sport. As performers lacking the freedom to choose a particular course, horses have played a parallel role in the artist's portrayal of domination and submission. In this vein, as Biggs sought to understand what happens to identity when the individual's own nature is the limitation, she looked into the vacant eyes of her autistic, obsessive-compulsive aunt. Life-sized projections of trotting horses with flared nostrils flank a full-on view of the elderly woman's mindless rocking motion in the three-channel *BuSpar*, 1999, which is part of a series of works exposing the use of pharmaceuticals to normalize or enhance behavior. In counterpoint, *Like Tears in Rain*, 2006, seeks to find beauty in the rigors of complex militaristic performances. The freestanding two-channel video installation pairs a blind equestrian's elegant, sound-coded dressage with the perfectly executed drill of a silent rifle corps.

Fast cars and motorcycles are more recent signifiers of harnessed power. The most affecting work, *Vanishing Point*, 2009, invites us to follow a solitary motorcyclist in her race through the hot, dry heat of the Utah salt flats. In the video's breathtaking finale, a gospel choir bears witness as the motorcyclist's speeding form evaporates into the wavering horizon—leaving us with an ecstatic sense of loss.

No Limits follows Biggs' widening search for extremes as she submits herself to the physical demands of increasingly remote settings. Timed to alternate, the giant projections of two adjacent works in the room at the exhibition's endpoint revel in the artist's polar discoveries. *Fade to White*, 2010, communicates the overwhelming awe of her first encounter with the High Arctic. An operatic elegy accompanies a kayaker as he paddles across a vast glacial tableau that Albert Bierstadt might have painted. *Brightness All Around*, 2011, gives testimony to the artist's most recent reckoning with the arctic environment. Dramatic scenarios featuring a female coal miner as she wrestles with heavy drilling equipment in the obscurity of an icy cave segue to an inky space dominated by the wild rhythmic outbursts of the woman's alter ego, a dark-skinned, leather-clad musician. The exuberant energy that marks this latest work is evidence that Biggs sees no boundaries to her practice. Indeed, she is more than ready to take on her next protagonist: the formidable character of an active volcano in Indonesia.

—Cathy Byrd

ABOVE: **Janet Biggs**, production still from *Brightness All Around*, 2011, single-channel video with sound (courtesy of the artist, Conner Contemporary Art, Washington, D.C., and Winkelman Gallery, New York)