



Summer Guide: Brian Chippendale Paints Up a New Burst of Color Hysteria

Brooklyn's Cinders Gallery hosts the artist's new show

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Courtesy Cinders Gallery



Retinas awake!
Lay Down With Ghosts

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Have you heard the tale of Fort Thunder? Formed in 1995, dispersed by developers in 2001, the Providence-based printmaking studio/party space/art collective has assumed a semi-mythical aura in creative circles since its demise. It began with four guys taking advantage of super-cheap warehouse space, and grew into a live-in art experiment with a vast tribe of followers, its every surface caked with posters, comic art, and other DIY art projects.

Former Whitney curator Lawrence Rinder once remarked that there hadn't been "such remarkably gifted artists working in tandem since the legendary Black Mountain College." That's a bit of hyperbole, but you get the idea. Fort Thunder still casts a long shadow.

Brian Chippendale—a compulsively creative musician, author, and artist—was a Fort Thunder co-founder. Brooklyn's Cinders Gallery will be hosting his next solo show, set to kick off June 4. A dropout from the Rhode Island School of Design, Chippendale started the Fort as a way to re-create the community of art school minus the pesky classes and assignments. His rambunctious sensibility helped define the Providence space's ambience, and his Cinders show is another chance for those who missed out to get a taste.

Fort Thunder is remembered, above all, for its contributions to two fields, both of which reflect a romance with immediate, un-intellectualized experience: noise music and underground comics. Chippendale has made big contributions to both. He's one half of the band Lightning Bolt, which is known for his overflowing, relentless drumming, as well as for the fact that the band plays on the floor, embedded in the audience, not

onstage.

In the comics world, the Fort Thunder style centered on willfully naïf drawing, monstrous protagonists, and sheer, boyish enthusiasm. Chippendale's 2006 book *Ninja*, in which he expanded his childhood comic strip about a cartoon warrior into a 128-page underground epic, is obsessively detailed and gloriously semi-coherent. It feels like it's been shot straight from his brain onto the page.

When it comes to "gallery art," Chippendale tends to work with dense, collage-like surfaces, packed with colors and cartoons. He likes to say that his artistic influences are the Smurfs and GI Joe. The similarity of his all-over art style to his drumming, packing every second with maniacal experience, has often been noted. In 2006, his poster art was prominently featured in "Wunderground," the RISD Museum's canonization of the art scene that Fort Thunder helped spark. The man who flunked "Printmaking 2" officially became one of contemporary art's most notable printmakers.

Critical minds might say that Fort Thunder's concerns sound like typical hipster Peter Pan-ism. But its spirit was impressively genuine—it really was about an ethos of living the art, not some ironic hobby. This can be measured by the anguish provoked for all involved when a developer evicted the artists to put in a shopping center. Since then, Chippendale has been, in his way, processing the loss of this immediate community in his art. *Ninja* is an anti-gentrification allegory about the city of "Grain," threatened by the evil troll, "Groin." For "Wunderground," he produced an installation, "Home on the Run," that was more or less about the experience of being evicted.

At Cinders, Chippendale's overall concerns remain the same—"drawing and mass color hysteria"—but he's working on an expanded scale, letting his marks breathe a little more. Given how connected his everything-at-once method was to the entire ethos of Fort Thunder, this more expansive tone seems mildly significant. These days it's about re-creating an immersive experience, rather than inhabiting it, which produces some room for greater reflection.

Don't take this thought too far, though—Chippendale is still all about world-building. "I don't ever intend to get away from that," he says. "We need new world ideas all the time." In other words: The past ain't where it's at, no matter how rad it looks.

Brian Chippendale, June 4–July 3, Cinders Gallery, 103 Havemeyer Street, Brooklyn, cindersgallery.com

Kambui Olujimi: 'Wayward North'

June 5–July 2

In a style reminiscent of African-American conceptualist David Hammons, Bed Stuy-born Kambui Olujimi weaves streetwise culture with more lofty references—very lofty indeed, in the case of his new Art in General commission, which consists of 12 rhinestone-embroidered tapestries, each with a precise "star map" depicting invented constellations, suggesting contemporary riffs on cosmic mythology. The project is ambitious enough in scale that it wouldn't fit into the storied nonprofit's Tribeca gallery, so the show goes up in a special DUMBO space. *81 Front Street, Brooklyn, artingeneral.org*

Ben Gocker: 'There is really no single poem'

June 10–July 17

Ben Gocker got an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, and works at the Brooklyn Public Library. No surprise, then, that his artworks have been described as "acute visual poems." For Gocker's first solo show, he offers a collection of colorful handmade objects, scroll drawings, and scraps of paper, evoking the kinds of fleeting observations that might come together to inspire verse. *P.P.O.W Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, ppowgallery.com*

'Tradition Transformed: Tibetan Artists Respond'

June 11–October 18

Works by nine contemporary artists, all either currently based in Tibet or of Tibetan extraction, mingle traditional Buddhist symbols with more restless modern media and concerns. Among this Himalayan avant-garde are Gonkar Gyatso, Losang Gyatso, Tenzing Rigdol, and the one-name-only Dedron. *Rubin Museum of Art, 150 West 17th Street, rmanyc.org*

'Andy Warhol: The Last Decade'

June 18–September 12

These days, we know that everything Andy Warhol touched turned to gold. But everything he peed on? This touring exhibition makes the case that Warhol's torrent of '80s work was not the tidal wave of schlock it's usually thought to be, but actually corresponded with a refreshed interest in painting. The show starts with his "Oxidation" series (for which Andy urinated on canvases), runs through his collaborations with Basquiat, and climaxes with his giant variations on *The Last Supper*. *Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, brooklynmuseum.org*

Rivane Neuenschwander: 'A Day Like Any Other'

June 23–September 19

Brazil's Rivane Neuenschwander is one of those contemporary artists who works in all genres at once—"ethereal materialism," her own sometimes-description of her practice, is about as specific as you're going to get. Neuenschwander's Richard Flood–curated mid-career retrospective sounds suitably eclectic. Expect maps that have been left out in the tropical rain, abstracting their geographies, and videos that draw parallels between the lives of insects and human society, among other curious things. *New Museum, 235 Bowery, newmuseum.org*

Ragnar Kjartansson: 'The End'

June 25–August 13

Dandyish Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson specializes in a comic but ultimately sincere Romantic sensibility. Representing his country at the 2009 Venice Biennale, he executed a six-month-long performance for which he spent each day in a Venetian palazzo on the Grand Canal, painting portraits of a Speedo-clad male model, approximately one painting per day, every day. It was never quite clear how much it was about the paintings and how much about the performance of being a painter. Decide for yourself as the products of the epic act go on view, minus the Italian ambience. *Luhring Augustine Gallery, 531 West 24th Street, luhringaugustine.com*

Jeff Soto: 'Lifecycle'

June 26–July 24

Jonathan LeVine Gallery is an NYC stronghold of what is called, approvingly, "lowbrow"—contemporary figurative art influenced by graffiti and pop culture. Soto, for his part, is an accomplished practitioner of the genre, making paintings that resemble cartoon mindscapes, impressively skilled and groovy to look at. "Lowbrow" fanatics be warned, however: The artist says the new show "is about growing mentally and physically, becoming an adult." *Jonathan LeVine Gallery, 529 West 20th Street, jonathanlevinegallery.com*

'The Group Show: Younger Than Moses'

August 10–September 6

We all remember "Younger Than Jesus," the New Museum's 2009 showcase of international artists under 33, right? That super-hip tribute to, er, age discrimination receives a late reply with "Younger Than Moses" at newish, dynamic Chelsea gallery Benrimon Contemporary. The show solemnly promises to "exclusively feature living artists under the age of 120," which should open up the selection process a bit. *Benrimon Contemporary, 514 West 24th Street, bcontemporary.com*

