

April 2014

RENZO ROSSO

**SURFACE**



ISSUE 107  
APRIL 2014

THE ENDORSEMENTS

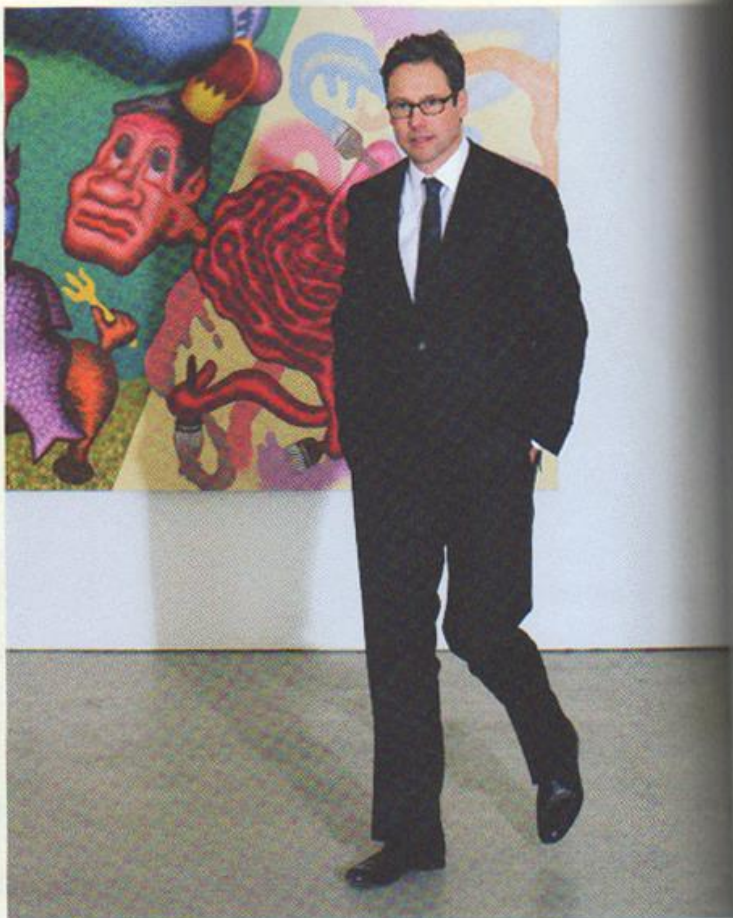
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# Art Wrangler

Curator Chris Byrne sits at the nexus of local and global contemporary art in Dallas.

BY SPENCER BAILEY

PORTRAIT BY ROB KULISEK



Ask Dallas Art Fair co-founder Chris Byrne about his favorite Texas artists, living and dead, and he could talk for days on end. He lists them—those who were born in the state, who have once lived there, or who currently reside there—as a local would recall his preferred barbecue joints: Peter Saul, Gary Panter, Daniel Johnston, Forrest Bess, Mark Flood, Joe Glasgow, Julian Schnabel. (“I’m not a super big Donald Judd fan,” he admits.)

Byrne, 49, may seem like a born-and-bred Lone Star State booster, but he’s actually an East Coast native who grew up in Philadelphia. Upon graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in 1991, he moved to Dallas—not entirely sure what he would find there—and has stayed since. What Byrne found was a wide-ranging group of artists, including Peter Saul, who utterly fascinated him. (Saul now lives and works in Brooklyn.) “People have a sense of discovery with emerging artists,” Byrne says, “but with Peter, there had been a whole body of work from the early ’60s through the ’70s that I had never seen before, and I don’t think a lot of people had been aware of it at the time. The idea of Peter being essentially off the map was intriguing.” He adds, “To be an artist in Texas is to be your own yardstick.”

From his arrival in Dallas until 1996, Byrne co-directed a contemporary art gallery, an experience that was a de facto crash course on the city’s culture and its then-burgeoning art scene. “[ZZ] Top frontman] Billy Gibbons used to actually have lunch across the street from the gallery,” Byrne says, “and he’d be there in his ZZ Top outfit, like he was always in character.” Everything in Texas, Byrne realized, seemed so much more accessible, easygoing, and open to possibility than on the East Coast.

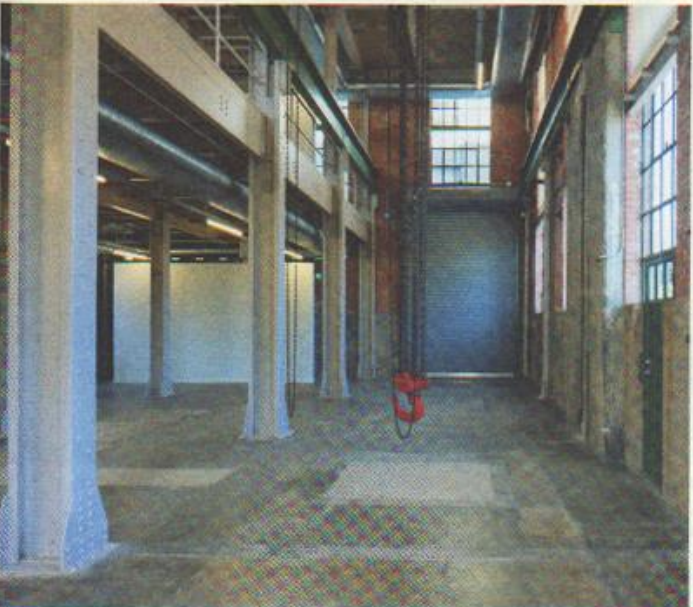
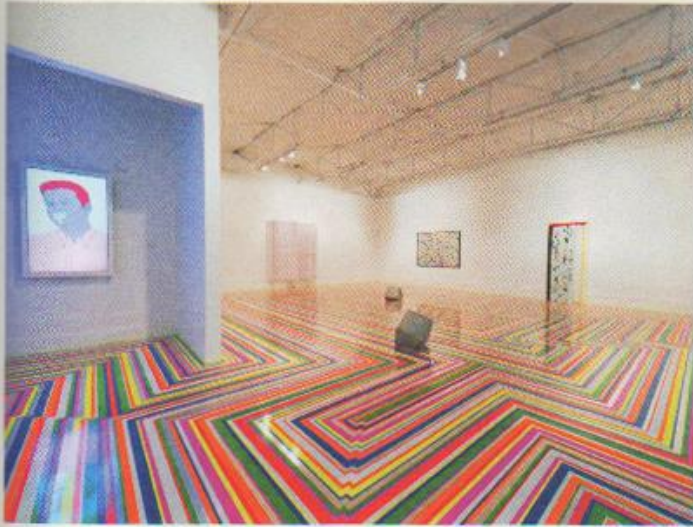
Since leaving the gallery, Byrne has gone on to work as a curator and consultant. Recent exhibitions he’s organized include “Peter Saul: 50 Years of Painting” and “Zap: Masters of Psychedelic Art,” the latter co-curated with Gary Panter. Currently, Byrne is putting together a show of Susan Te Kahurangi King’s drawings for the Andrew Edlin Gallery, scheduled to open in October.

In 2009, with real-estate developer John Sughrue, Byrne co-founded what has become his main focus: the Dallas Art Fair. The idea for a fair started over a lunch with Sughrue, who owned the Fashion Industry Gallery downtown; both felt it would be the proper venue to make a large local impact, connecting both emerging and prominent galleries to the city’s

museums and collectors. “Doing a fair outside of New York or Basel, in a regional city—and I’m not saying ‘regional’ in a pejorative sense—seemed a little chancy,” Byrne says. “But we believed in the working premise that the fair would always be a reflection of what’s happening in Dallas.”

In its first six years, the fair has fulfilled Byrne’s hopes for representing the city’s culture. It also increasingly reflects what’s happening in art globally. Last year, the event attracted 83 galleries (12 of them international); this year, from April 11 to 13, it will host 91 (20 of them from abroad, including Tokyo’s Misako & Rosen, Melbourne’s Tristian Koenig, and Seoul’s Gamo Gallery). Not unlike Art Basel Miami Beach, the fair now coincides with tangential events and major museum openings: Fashion designers Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren threw a party during last year’s gathering, and this year, the nearby Dallas Contemporary museum will host major solo shows of work by Richard Phillips (his first in the U.S.) and Julian Schnabel.

“My feeling has been that you can rub two sticks together and start something here,” Byrne says of Dallas’s can-do spirit. “For me, that’s always a fun project.”



## THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO DALLAS BY CHRIS BYRNE

**01** Byrne admires the Goss-Michael Foundation—the brainchild of British musician George Michael and his partner, Kenny Goss—for its international scope. Michael and Goss collect work by many YBAs (Young British Artists), and since opening in 2007, the space has hosted exhibitions from Nigel Cooke, Jim Lambie, and Michael Craig-Martin, among others. This month, the foundation is putting on a retrospective of the Scottish-born, L.A.-based artist Thomas Lawson. 1405 Turtle Creek Boulevard; 214-696-0556; [gossmichaelfoundation.org](http://gossmichaelfoundation.org)

**02** "Most restaurants in Texas are giant," Byrne says. "They're not so intimate." One of the exceptions is CBD Provisions, designed by New York-based designer Claudia Woods and located adjacent to the Joule Hotel (which was recently renovated and expanded by interior designer Adam Tihany). The menu includes shrimp and grits, pan-roasted quail, and an 18-hour pork shoulder roast. Byrne, who recently had lunch there with Julian Schnabel, says, "He gave CBD a thumbs up!" 1530 Main Street; 214-261-4500; [cbdprovisions.com](http://cbdprovisions.com)

**03** Since opening three years ago, the Power Station not-for-profit art space, located in a 1920s-era industrial building, has hosted ambitious installations and projects by artists such as Walead Beshty, Matias Faldbakken, and Oscar Tuazon. (During this year's Dallas Art Fair, work by Fredrik Vaerslev will be on display.) "The artists come in and deal with that particular context," Byrne says of the shows there, adding, "This is a space for them to let their hair down." 3816 Commerce Street; 214-827-0163; [powerstationdallas.com](http://powerstationdallas.com)

**04** When Byrne saw the exhibition "Refusing Fashion: Rei Kawakubo" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit in 2008, he was stunned by the artistry involved in Kawakubo's clothing. "I'm now a fan," he says of the designer and her Comme des Garçons label. "That stuff transcends fashion." Byrne recommends visiting the new store Traffic LA, which includes a 300-square-foot shop that sells Comme des Garçons Play T-shirts, shoes, and accessories. 1604 Main Street; 214-261-4595; [shoptrafficla.com](http://shoptrafficla.com)

