

## Rethinking Those Words For Screen

Any writer knows the sinking feeling: This line, this draft, this entire project, is not quite working. Time to face that frustratingly blank page again. Revisions are not any easier.

**MELANA RYZIK**  
THE CARPETBAGGER

based on a novel by Matthew Quick, *Of Parker* did 43, for four directors, before *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* was done. Tony Kushner's first pass at "Lincoln," based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's "Team of Rivals" and other sources, was 500 pages long.

Lucy Allbar, who adapted "Beasts of the Southern Wild" with its director, Ben Zaitlin, from her own novel, play, found that her highly personal material needed to be rethought almost entirely for the screen. Chris Terrio spent a year researching the facts behind "Argo," then worried that he was straying too far into fiction.

Here these writers, all hopefuls for the best adapted screenplay Oscar — alongside contenders like Stephen Chbosky for "The Perks of Being a Wallflower," David Magee for "Life of Pi" and Ben Lewin for "The Sessions" — share details about their process.

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## Big City, Crazy Killer, Loner Cop

Just about everything in "Gun Machine," Warren Ellis's dark but pleasantly quirky crime thriller, is a little bit off, not quite what you'd expect. The machine of the title, for example, is not a manufacturing device but an apartment in a rundown tenement on Pearl Street, in Manhattan, that is crammed with guns, and not just ordinary ones. The pistol that once belonged to the Son of Sam killer is here, and so is a flintlock pistol used in the first recorded murder in Rochester. Both have been repurposed for additional killings, and

**CHARLES M. GRATH**  
BOOKS OF THE TIMES

**Gun Machine**  
By Warren Ellis  
208 pages. Mulholland Books, \$25.99.

so has every other gun in the place, which is a virtual museum of murders, 20 years' worth, carefully tended by a figure known only as "the hunter."

The hunter is not your run-of-the-mill serial killer either. Boasted, mysteriously, often mistaken for a street person, he's a schizoid psychopath who, while lethally competent with 21st-century weaponry, imagines himself to be a resident of Manhattan when it was inhabited by the Lenape. He lives on dried squirrel meat and leaves and berries scavenged from Central Park, and while walking or waiting for a traffic light to change frequently has hallucinations.

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## Ambushed by Sundry Treasures



The Museum of Modern Art's Artist's Choice exhibitions rarely disappoint. There have been nine such shows since the series was initiated in 1988, each with its own flashes of imagination, excavations of neglected artworks and subversions of the curatorial status quo.

Past perpetrators have included Scott Burton, the first to be invited, who ruffled feathers by separating several of the museum's Brancusi sculptures from their bases and presenting all elements as independent artworks. In 1995 Elizabeth Murray mustered an impressive exhibition of art exclusively by women.

**Artist's Choice: Trisha Donnelly at the Museum of Modern Art includes, clockwise from top, a 1968 photo by Elliot Porter; a 1989 computer-generated diagram; and Joe Goode's "Shoes, Shoes, Shoes" (1966).**

And in 2008 Vik Muniz created what he called a rebus with a linear sequence of carefully linked works that included merris like Josiah Wedgwood's 17th black basalt coffee cup, one of the most elegant drinking vessels of all time.

Now the torch has been passed to Trisha Donnelly, an admired Conceptual and performance artist

known for her poetic if sometimes hermetic works with mediums like drawing, photography, video, film and sound art. Working with Laura Hoptman, a curator, and Cara Manes, a collection specialist in the museum's department of painting and sculpture, Ms. Donnelly has done the Artist's Choice tradition proud.

For one thing, she has pushed even harder than most of her predecessors at the boundaries among the museum's medium-based departments. In addition, for the first time, the Artist's Choice show has

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## Revealing Superman's Real-Life Identity

By DAVE ITRKOFF

Years before Superman could be easily spotted in the sky among the birds and planes — in motion pictures, or on billboards or lunchboxes or the many other pop-cultural artifacts in the adjacent galleries. The images are spellbinding: small, exquisite and mostly in color of an unusually subtle kind, due to the complex dye transfer process Porter used. They have an amazing clarity of detail.

The backs, their markings, their nests, the plants in which they build them, their frazzled, frantically hungry offspring, all seen vividly present. Ideas about the genius of nature (even more than of art), the alien strangeness of birds, the familiar rituals and bonds of parenthood ricochet through the gallery. It's surprisingly intense mood is summed up by Porter's assertion in a wall label: "Before all else, a work of art is the creation of love. Love for the subject first and the medium second."

The second gallery of Ms. Donnelly's show (Gallery 11, fifth floor) is a kind of delicious, cross-generational, multimedia meditation on artistic vision and striving, with many a canonical artist and masterpiece in print. Drawings and prints and photographs ring the walls,

Left, Stanley Weiss as drawn by Joe Shuster, a Superman creator. Right, Superman's own comic book from 1939.

if he could draw him, resulting in some sketches that have gone largely unseen for nearly 70 years, as well as some insights into the origins of this long-lived American champion.

Shuster's pencil sketches of the square-jawed Weiss, who strongly resembles a certain Kryptonian immigrant and his earthly

alter ego, Clark Kent, will be shown publicly at the Center for Jewish History in Chelsea, at a Jan. 27 event celebrating the 75th anniversary of Superman.

The event, "Superman at 75: Celebrating America's Most Enduring Hero," will also feature a discussion with comic book writers like Denny O'Neil and Jim Shooter; Jenette Kahn, the former publisher of DC Comics; and Stanley Weiss's son, David.

In response to e-mail questions, David Weiss wrote that his father had found

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tion, for the first time, the Artist's Choice show has been inserted into what may be the Modern's very heart: its vaulted painting and sculpture collection galleries. Also for the first time, it consists of three galleries that are not contiguous; they are to be found in the far-flung corners of the fourth and fifth floors, which house the painting and sculpture collection.

The clusters of work Ms. Donnelly has chosen ambush us, quietly but insistently disrupting the still largely chronological, mostly canonical, movement-by-movement canon of modernism put forth in these galleries. Greatly favoring drawings, prints, photographs and several forms of design over traditional painting and sculpture, her arrangements draw you in, charm and mesmerize, while raising questions about what is art, who is an artist and what constitutes greatness or genius.

The first display — in Gallery 4 on the fifth floor — is a solo show devoted to a photographer, and not one of the medium's anointed gods like Eugène Atget or Walker Evans. Its subject is Elliot Porter (1901-80), brother of the painter Fairfield Porter, who devoted much of his career to figuring out how to take extraordinarily beautiful and precise photographs of birds in the wild. His images often appeared in National Geographic and related, as the wall text says, "to be relegated to the genre of nature photography."

The 28 photographs here form a



Left, "Anfibio Convertible Couch" (1971) by Alessandro Becchi; right, "No!" (1981) by Gino De Dominicis.

calm, concentrated oasis centering on a single vision, in notable contrast to the displays of larger works by various artists in the adjacent galleries. The images are spellbinding: small, exquisite and mostly in color of an unusually subtle kind, due to the complex dye transfer process Porter used. They have an amazing clarity of detail.

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hung cheek by jowl. Punctuated by occasional paintings and sculptures, the totality of 55 works by 40 artists ranges over more than 100 years. Landscapes, portraits, the figure and the face mingle with abstract works.

Eccentrics, lesser-knowns and unknowns prevail here, along with unfamiliar works by better-known artists. Odilon Redon is represented by two early landscape paintings on paper that surprise by conjuring Balbus and the young Dalí. Berenice Abbott (1898-1991), known for her sympathetic portraits, is represented by six little-known abstract "Wave Pattern" photographs (1938-61), made using water, glass and lights.

In a text panel Ms. Donnelly states that she considers each selection "an epic entity," an outsize phrase that seems to emphasize that any successful artwork, no matter how slight or seemingly delicate, requires relentless personal conviction. Gossamer textures are the norm and once more invite close looking, whether in James McNeill Whistler's misty 1875 lithograph of the Thames or Jacques Vil-

lor's 1920 etching of the stark terra-cotta portrait head of Baudelaire by his brother Raymond Duchamp-Villón (1876-1918), an image whose fine parallel lines almost seem computer-generated. The same might also be said of "Domesticate," a tightly wound jeweled painting from 1957-59 by Pamela Bianco (1906-1994), a British-born American artist who is one of the show's finds.

"Dunes" (1935), by Augustus Vincent Tack (1870-1949) — an idiosyncratic portrait painter who also produced nature-based abstraction — has a vision a vie, as does "No!" (1981), a large 1981 painting of a starting head by Gino De Dominicis. "The First Step," a starry abstraction from 1910-13 by Franziska Kupka.

The other three-dimensional objects here include sculptures by Isamu Noguchi and Edward Higgins and a swank convertible couch from 1971 by Alessandro Becchi that, exhibited unlabeled, resembles a life raft. Michael Lay's 1988

air ionizer, a tiny black plastic pyramid, also from the design collection, sits on a pedestal, but is plugged in. Put your hand near it and you will feel it altering the atmosphere, as all art should.

In the final portion (Gallery 22, fourth floor) Ms. Donnelly largely forgoes traditional art for design, with the exception of a few photographs: Giorgio de Chirico's 1921 drawing of Euripides with extravagant crossed, unseeing eyes; and "The Fourth Dimension," a small planet-studded painting about death as liberation by Patrick J. Sullivan (1984-1987), a folk artist, that was last exhibited at the museum in 1943. This display also includes a small, elegantly shaped bowl by the great American potter George Ohr, a pear-wood side table by the French Art Nouveau designer Hector Guimard, a pair of amazingly accurate Polaroid sunglasses from 1946 and a streamlined wheelchair from 1986 by the Swiss designer Rainer Kirschlich. These finally made it clear that, consistent with Ms. Donnelly's interest in performance, all the objects in her show evoke the human body or are used by it.

But the dominant work here are 11 large, colorful, intricately patterned prints that bring to mind checked or plaid textiles, abstract paintings and, in one circular instance, the Maysa calendar. All are computer-generated diagrams of integrated circuitry from the mid-1980s designed by Xerox, Texas Instruments, the Intel Corporation and Sam Lacentre, who later became vice president for design at Hewlett-Packard.

Also included is the oldest item in the Modern's collection, a small circular Coptic tapestry from the seventh or eighth century, embroidered with a cartoonish, early modern face. On view for the first time, it serves as an ancient ancestor to the printed diagrams.

Someone told me that at the news conference for the show Ms. Donnelly said that one reason she chose the tapestry was the name of the donor: Little P. Bliss, one of the museum's founders. Emphasis on Bliss, a good word for this eccentric, joyful, finely wrought excursion.

"Artist's Choice: Trisha Donnelly" re-mains through April 8 at the Museum of Modern Art, (212) 708-9400, moma.org.