

# Iannis Xenakis

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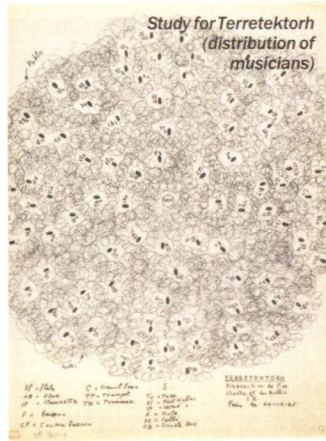
**The Drawing Center**, through Apr 8 (see Museums)

The Greek composer Iannis Xenakis first garnered attention for his piece *Metastaseis*, a sound embodiment of the geometrical formula for parabolas, produced for 61 musicians. With its combination of rigid lines and serpentine arcs, a 1953 study for *Metastaseis* visually evokes a binary tension that serves as a perfect metaphor for the dualities in the life of this remarkable artist, who shifted between music and art.

Xenakis was no stranger to change or alienation. Born in Romania to Greek parents, he experienced the death of his mother at a young age. Trained as a civil engineer, he fled Greece for Paris as a young man, fearing reprisals for his Communist Party ties.

These events instilled in him a profound sense of how relative reality can be, as well as a desire to create order in his work. He began his professional career as an architect working with Le Corbusier, gradually moving into composition, thanks to an interest developed in early childhood, due to his family's enthusiasm for music.

The Drawing Center has wisely chosen to make his music available via small MP3 players that viewers can listen to as they browse Xenakis's extraordinarily detailed sketches and images, including his iconic "musical windows," conceived during his tenure with Corbu. Documentation of performances such as *Polytope de Mycenes*, which was staged at the foot of Mt. Elias in Greece and involved children carrying torches and light-bearing goats, bear witness to the fact that, while Xenakis's music sprang from order, he had an extraordinary ability to incorporate the chaos of life into his oeuvre.—*T.J. Carlin*



# Jessica Jackson Hutchins

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**Derek Eller Gallery**, through Mar 27 (see Chelsea) + **Laurel Gitlen (Small A Projects)**, through Mar 28 (see Lower East Side)

The announcement for Jessica Jackson Hutchins's exhibition at Derek Eller shows two towheaded children, presumably the artist's own, busily drawing and making crafts at a large table. This same table is featured in the gallery, now incorporated into a sculpture titled *Kitchen Table Allegory*, only the top has been pulled open and a large ceramic bowl painted in earthy shades rests precariously in the gap where the leaf would be.



Meanwhile, the table itself looks battered from wear: It's covered with splotches of paint and has a large hole in its scratched surface. The allegorical message darkly suggests that being a mother and making art at the same time can have a sundering effect. And yet the table not only holds the pot, it seems almost to welcome the added weight.

Furniture as support is a prominent motif in Hutchins's work—couches, chairs and benches frequently prop up bulbous, awkwardly shaped ceramic sculptures. Often these are anthropomorphic, as in the amusing *Couple*, in which two lumpen figures get cozy on a love seat while an iridescent blue vessel blooms between their heads.

In a concurrent solo show at Laurel Gitlen, the work seems more focused on the body. Pieces like *Figure with Red Bowl* echo the sinuous gestures found in Indonesian sculpture. But the artist's strength lies in her exploration of family as a source of creativity rather than a distraction from it.—*Claire Barliant*

# Steve Mumford

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**Postmasters**, through Mar 27 (see Chelsea)

Steve Mumford has taken six trips to Iraq in the past seven years and focused his art on depicting the war over there. Although his agenda remains curiously ambiguous, he clearly avoids propaganda. In a style inspired by the 19th-century American Realist painters, he treats his subjects—including Iraqi prostitutes, Islamic leaders, U.S. soldiers and jihadist fighters—with dignity.

War is Mumford's ostensible subject, but the people he depicts are in limbo, not action, putting the emphasis on their individual characters rather than on their symbolic identities. Isolated at the center of an empty swimming pool, the prostitutes are modest and brave, huddling together in their black, one-piece swimsuits; a jihadist pausing to write in a notebook on a rocky hillside assumes the air of a thoughtful intellectual. Mumford's paintings work both sides of the fence—one image elicits sympathy for a beautiful U.S. soldier who lost her arm; in another, a suicide bomber

**The Great Good Friends (Suicide Bomber)**



is seen bidding a tearful goodbye to his friend.

But are these terrorists worthy of our compassion? Mumford shifts the decision to us. He obscures his point of view by framing that painting with cheesy fake flowers and facsimiles of explosives that diminish its sincerity. Likewise, there's nothing heroic in the appearance of U.S. troops skinny-dipping in a marsh. Small text paintings inspired by bathroom graffiti in military camps round out the show, trafficking in disillusioned clichés and acting as foils to the nuances of the portraits that spare judgment and replace dogma with real people.—*Merrily Kerr*



Phil Wagner, *Untitled (Will Oldham) nonecte feu*

# Henry Taylor + Phil Wagner

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**Rental Gallery**, through Mar 28 (see Lower East Side)

It is rare to walk into a gallery and find the artist perched on a crate, hard at work. But that's exactly what happened the opening weekend at Rental, where the Californian painter Henry Taylor, boom box at his side, belting out soul music, was adding the final touches to one of his large paintings. The sight was as jolting as it was refreshing, yet the devil-may-care spirit with which Taylor pursued his task, as visitors perused his art, is befitting of a gallery that champions intrepidity.

Taylor makes paint-laden and purposefully ham-handed figurative works that belie their effortless technique. His portraits, rendered in acrylic swaths and impastos, pay reverent homage to his African-American heritage. The subjects range from athletes to intellectuals to everyday working joes; many of them are seen sitting against monochromatic backgrounds. At first, the paintings and the nearby installations about modern child-slavery and colonialism manifest a stark heavy-handedness. But the works unexpectedly gain dynamism with each subsequent viewing.

Meanwhile, Phil Wagner's swashbuckling assemblages hit the ground running. Combining such elements as raw canvas, drywall, wooden planks and boards, busted-up Formica furniture, cans of generic ginger ale, yellow pages, film posters and photographs, these askew and precariously propped-up geometric compositions cleverly teeter between art and construction. Paired with Taylor's bric-a-brac aesthetic, Wagner's garbage snaffling adds up to an infectious call-to-art response to our cash-strapped times.—*Nana Asfour*

PHOTOGRAPHS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): IANISS XENAKIS ARCHIVES; BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE; PARIS; COURTESY OF DEREK ELLER GALLERY, NY; COURTESY OF POSTMASTERS GALLERY, NEW YORK

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