

# the Stranger

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**CHEW  
ON THIS!**  
POTLUCKS FOR  
**PEACE**  
CONVERSATION  
STARTERS  
BY  
**CHRISTOPHER  
HITCHENS**  
P.16



## DRINKING: A SPECIAL REPORT

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A STRAIGHT GUY DRINKS LIKE A FAG, A FAG DRINKS LIKE A FRAT BOY, A PREP-SCHOOLER DRINKS LIKE A HOBO, & A WHITE LESBIAN DRINKS LIKE A BLACK GIRL? P.18

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**ZAPATA** MATT DRESNER OF THE GITS REMEMBERS MIA.  
SLAMS MEDIA, PRAISES POLICE P.39



**VISUAL ART**

# Age of Convenience

## The Beauty of Monotony by Jeffrey Miller

A SIDE EFFECT of the growth of the service economy is a growth in the time spent being served: time spent, that is, in waiting. It's enough to make me wonder if there's a law of conservation of tedium.

Many of us don't work in sweatshops or grow our own food anymore. Instead, we spend our days on hold and in voicemail, staring into space. George Orwell (who was down and out in Paris and London before it was cool) gave both idleness and backbreaking work the old college try, and concluded they were equally demoralizing. I understand his point. Waiting makes me feel passive and helpless and desperate for distraction. Even Muzak® and goddamn airport lounge TVs are better than nothing.

So I think Anthony Hernandez is on to something with his photos of social-services offices (*Waiting in Line*) at the Seattle Art Museum. Hernandez counsels a quiet rebellion against waiting to be served: a rebellion through perceiving, in infinite detail, the environment in which waiting and service occur. There's a detail of institutional wall tiling (*Waiting in Line #3*), a random pattern of jewel-toned mosaic squares. At first glance it resembles early Ellsworth Kelly. The composition is balanced and fascinating,

with enough irregularity to remain intriguing. To perceive such detail in an idle hour on a plastic chair may almost redeem the wait. Visual art seems obsolete in the age of convenience, but here's one thing it can still teach us: the intensity of focus and attention to pull visions out of idleness.

On my last visit to the ophthalmologist, I was surprised to discover that my eyes have begun to cross whenever they are at rest—left to their own devices, apparently, they focus somewhere inside my head. Before I learned this, an entire school of moody, beautiful, blurred photography (from Uta

Barth to local lensman John Jenkins III) had never really connected for me conceptually. Hernandez's *Waiting in Line #20* puts all the pieces together: Two glass doors—the automatic drugstore type that slide apart from a point in the middle—obscure almost the entirety of a view, from inside to outdoors. Open only about an inch, right at the focal point of the camera, these panels fog the vision, but permit a vividly high-key glimpse of the world through the gap between. Suddenly, blur makes sense, evoking not only the effect of thick plate glass but the inward-direction, the defocusing of the eyes, provoked by extreme boredom.

**Anthony Hernandez**

Seattle Art Museum, 654-3100.  
Through April 6.

**Amir Zaki**

James Harris Gallery, 903-6220.  
Through Feb 2.



ANTHONY HERNANDEZ *Finding intensity in quiet details.*

Amir Zaki's photographs at James Harris Gallery incorporate a variation on the dialogue between blur and focus. Computer-manipulated portraits of tract houses, they are hypersharp in the body of the image: Only snipers and eagles see the world this way. The foreground (usually a lawn or sidewalk) is unintelligible, in extreme close-up.


The houses themselves are alarmingly compressed horizontally, until they appear to form castles and turrets and spires. The middle two-thirds or so have been digitally eliminated, leaving the two outer walls prac-

tically touching each other, sometimes with a tiny arrow-slit window in the middle. Thanks to *The Two Towers*, I kept half-seeing elves in armor on the ramparts—a pleasant and refreshing thought.


Under ordinary circumstances, after all, suburbia is just another big hunk of tedium in the day, seen mostly during the endless daily commute, when the eyes are drained and details vanish—and when, from the window of a moving car, the houses ticking past are nothing more than brief vertical lines. At the end of the day, after a hunk of suburbia, we're exhausted. It's tempting to collapse onto the TV couch, but healthier to use this everyday monotony as a jumping-off point

for visual fantasy.

Monotony is power: That's the lesson of the age. Art is not immune—after all, it seems to make the strongest impression on us only when we stand in line for hours to see it (Picasso and Matisse, Vermeer). Zaki and Hernandez suggest, in different ways, that art can have power over monotony as well. Artistic vision might even be a survival skill; as a kind of psychic defense against tedium, it's an evolutionary adaptation for the age of convenience. Which reminds me—it's time to check my voicemail. ■




## The Kitty that ROARED





*Vignette*  
A contemporary installation featuring Hello Kitty by Seattle-based artist Maki Tamura.

On view now through March 16 at Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park.



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[www.seattleartmuseum.org](http://www.seattleartmuseum.org)





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