

CORRIE BALDAUF

*Born Chicago, Illinois, 1981
BFA, Kansas City Art Institute; MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art
Lives in Detroit, Michigan*

It is hard to talk about Corrie Baldauf's work without talking about Corrie Baldauf. Fine art culture, by design or default, tends to take on an air of exclusivity and the artist persona can be steeping in irony and detachment. In this respect, Baldauf's personality is a breath of fresh sincerity, and her work reflects the power of optimism, a practice that Baldauf has honed for decades, though never to the point of reflexivity. "Optimism is hard work," Baldauf will tell you.

Baldauf's projects are deeply intertwined with the world and those human interactions taking place around her, and seek in many ways to interact with that world without altering it physically. One mechanism for this are her *Circle Drawings*—at a glance present as mandalas of tight, concentric rings, but further investigation will reveal them to be meticulous registers for snippets of overheard conversations, obsessively charted and detailed in word clusters bordering the circle. Another are her *Optimism Filters*, slabs of colorful plexiglass that Baldauf uses in conjunction with cameras to create filtered views of life encounters, sometimes having her subjects hold the filters themselves, so the device is evident in the picture, sometimes shooting to create entirely tinted or altered images through the filters. Finally, there is the collaborative series produced with father-and-son sign-painters Craig Signs, which Baldauf has been working on since 2007. While the notations in the circle drawings are cumulative and subtle, the **vinyl signs** are bold and definitive, recording the accumulation of messages that reflect the economic state of cities that she is a part of. She views advertisement as far more than a reflection of the specific services being offered; rather they mark the decline or growth in the places we live and work.

These efforts to color reality or look at the world with new eyes become more significant when taken as part of a critical relationship Baldauf has with color. As the majority of art deals in color to a certain extent, the impact of this choice is not readily apparent, but the more Baldauf's work is taken as a whole, the more it becomes clear that *color* is her medium of choice, played out across a number of different expressive media, including photography, film, works in ink on paper, and even her own daily style of dress. More recently, it has cropped up in her *Infinite Jest Project*, a work in which Baldauf marked out every instance of color appearing in David Foster Wallace's masterwork, *Infinite Jest*, with a page flag of corresponding color. The resulting edition, bristling with more than 2,700 flags, serves as an effective case-in-point for the kind of compulsive, addiction-driving mentality that is the work's major theme, but also evidence of the impressive extent to which color appears in Wallace's work—an intentional choice, Baldauf thinks, to help keep readers engaged in what is collectively regarded as a highly challenging literary milestone, equally brilliant and alienating.

But none of this serves to capture the true uniqueness of Baldauf's viewpoint. While it may be generally said of artists that they bring value to society by utilizing their art to showcase a worldview outside the mainstream, Baldauf's perspective is singular above all. Her attention is constantly tuned into things that are ubiquitous to the point of invisibility. Spend some time with her, and you will find that Baldauf possesses little of the common lexicon, often questioning the meaning or exact wording of everyday aphorisms in the manner of a non-native speaker, deeply curious about subtext that most people have long learned to take for granted. Much like a child still learning the world, Baldauf takes nothing for granted, and the act of engaging with her over the meaning of common things gives them fresh light and newness. However, there is deep intentionality to this perspective, and it would be a grave mistake to take this 2011 Kresge Grant recipient and Professor of Fine Art at several metro Detroit universities for a child.

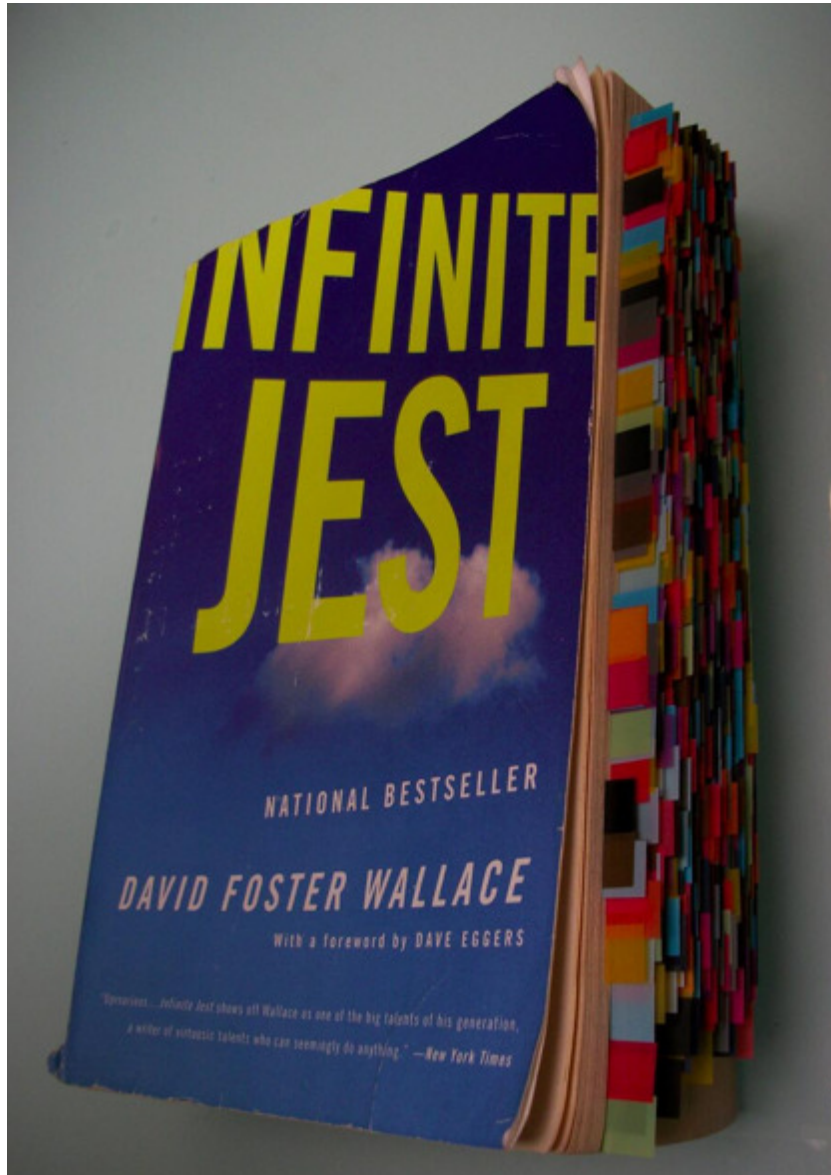
With roots in Kansas City and art and teaching practice based in Detroit for nearly a decade, Baldauf represents the intersection of Midwestern sincerity, an honest love of engagement with people, and a rare humility in seeing the world as it is and as it could be. It seems fitting that she reaches out using color, perhaps the most understandable and most available medium—and one of the first we are given access to as we come to know the world.

Rosie Sharp, Sept 2014

(C) 2014 EDNA CORRE BALDOLF



Ruby Filter, 2014, filter and light
Improvisation with the Lees; photography by Chris Lee
Image courtesy of the artist



All the Colors in Infinite Jest, 2014, Infinite Jest, color flags, 72" x 60"
Image courtesy of the artist



Don't be a Meanie, Be Good to People, Improvisation with Dr. Johann Gudjonsson and Craig Signs (2014)
car paint on vinyl, photography, 17' x 5'
Image by Sarah Rose Sharp