ARTPULSE

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Variations in Tone in Contemporary Art Criticism

The Shadow of History and the Simulacrum in the Art of Andreas Angelidakis

In Defense of Menacing Content
A Conversation with Derek G. Larson

Interview with Markus Lüpertz

The Laws of Motion
In-Studio Interview with Alex Kanevsky

The Battle for Attention at the Whitney Biennial

From ZERO to Now
In Conversation with Heinz Mack

Interview with Mary Anne Staniszewski

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CHANGE

Leah Brown

Rosemarie Chiarlone

Naomi Fisher

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Frances Trombly

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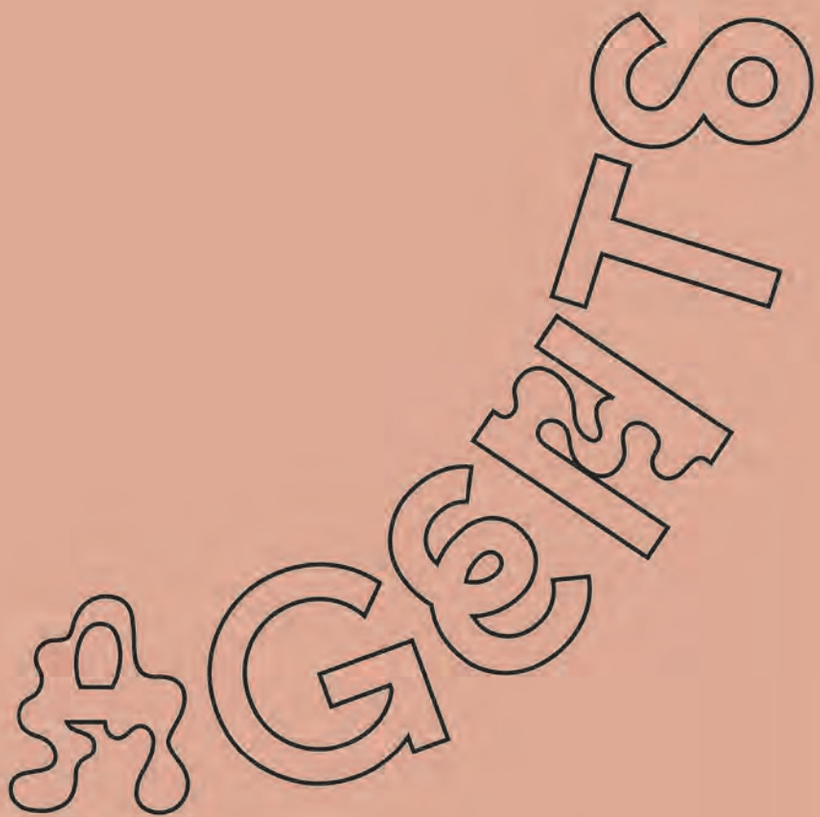

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BANDIT 2, oil, alkyd, aluminum foil, plastic combs on canvas, 72 inches x 72 inches, 2017

CRAIG DRENNEN

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a selection from the gallery collection

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Miguel Chevalier
James Chedburn
Daniel Fiorda
Carolina Sardi
Laura Nillni
Jose Arellano
Emmanuel Fillot
Keith Long
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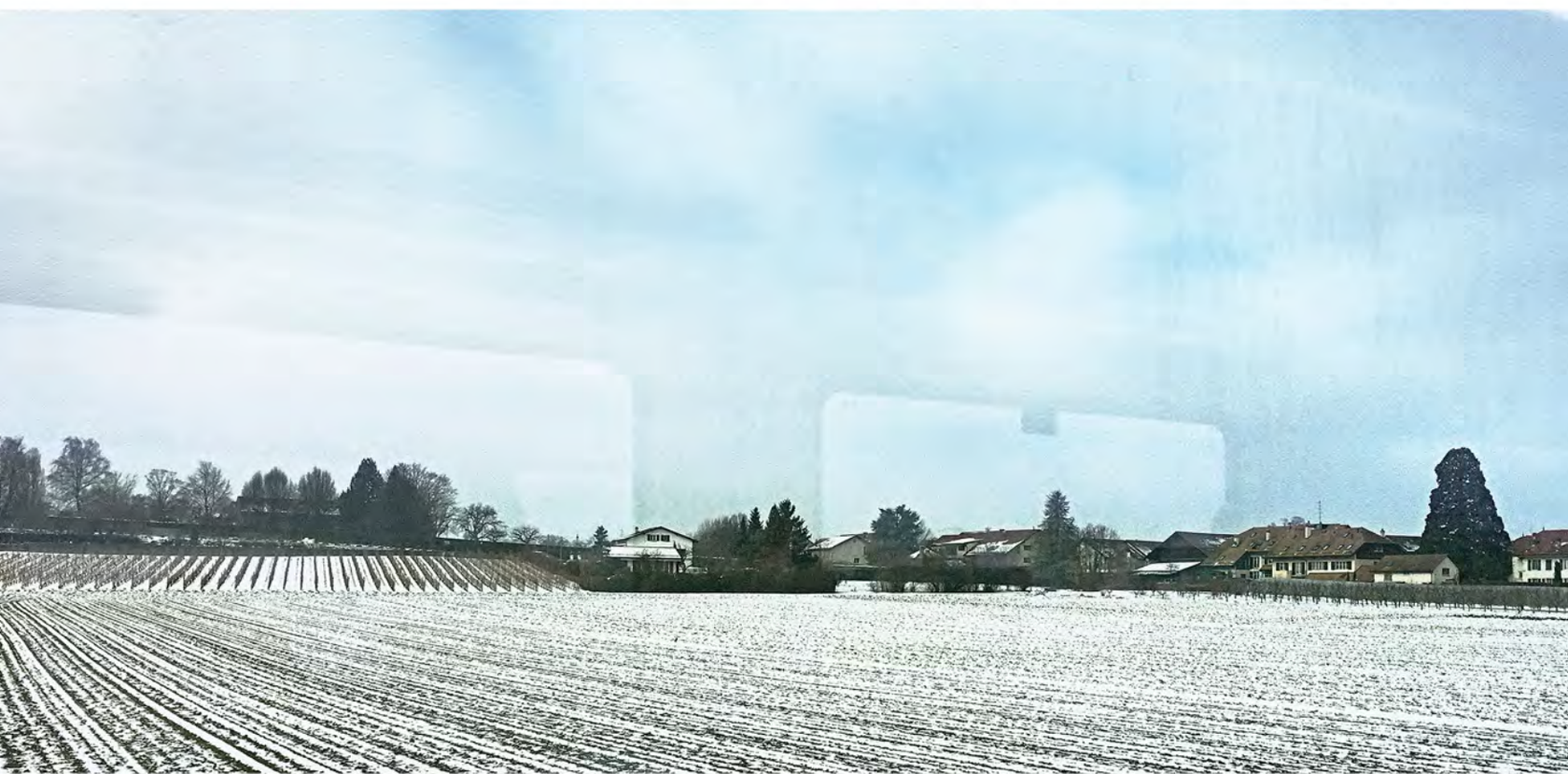

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Xiong Lijun, Hoo Girl Girl Girl, Oil on canvas, 62 x 78 inches, 2003

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Titi Kerndt

" Sea Cave #2 ", 2017, Mixed media on canvas , 64.5 x 45 inches

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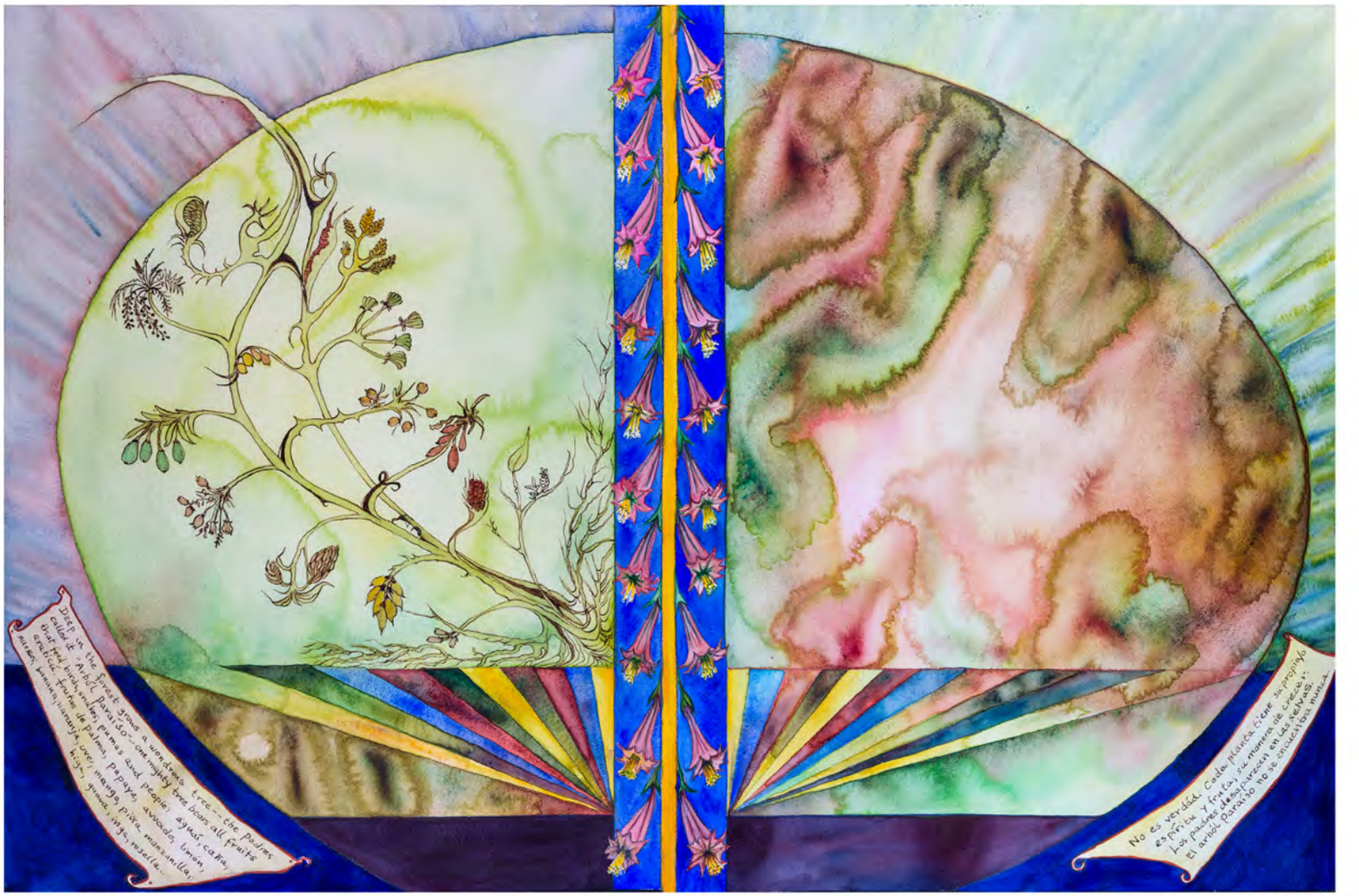

Tree of Life , 2017, diptych:watercolor, prismacolor, ink on two sheets of Arches paper. , 24 x 36 in

November 3 to December 22, 2017

Faith Wilding

Un-Natural Parables

For *Un-Natural Parables*, Western Exhibitions will exhibit for the first time since 1985 Wilding's *Natural Parables* series, originally produced in 1982 and a body of work last exhibited in 1985; large watercolor/drawing hybrids paired with oil-on-panel paintings shaped like pods. This work marked the culmination of years of Wilding's early research into female mythologies, paganism, English Romantic poetry, illuminated herbals, bestiaries, alchemical manuscripts and female imagery. At the time she was seeking to create her own system of representation and illustrate an interconnection between beliefs, mythologies, dreams and fantasy worlds. Forty years later, Wilding made *Paraguay: Republica de la Soya*, a series of mixed-media watercolor paintings, on view in Gallery 2 during the run of this show, that responds to the wanton destruction of Paraguay's dense forests, verdant campos, meandering swamps and waterways through massive mono-cropping of GMO soy. With the help of an Art Matters grant, Wilding traveled back to Paraguay for the first time since emigrating in 1961 to study botanical collections and gardens. The resulting works on paper are part of a larger memoir project that Wilding is currently completing that reflects on her upbringing and her complex relationship to it.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11am to 6pm

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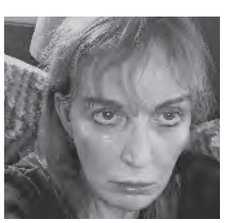
Paco Barragán is the visual arts curator of Centro Cultural Matucana 100 in Santiago, Chile. He recently curated "Intimate Strangers: Politics as Celebrity, Celebrity as Politics" and "Alfredo Jaar: May 1, 2011" (Matucana 100, 2015), "Guided Tour: Artist, Museum, Spectator" (MUSAC, Leon, Spain, 2015) and "Erwin Olaf: The Empire of Illusion" (MACRO, Rosario, Argentina, 2015). He is author of *The Art to Come* (Subastas Siglo XXI, 2002) and *The Art Fair Age* (CHARTA, 2008).

Kim Power is an international artist and writer currently residing in the Bronx in New York. She holds a B.S. in art education from James Madison University and a Master of Fine Arts in painting from the New York Academy of Art. Her reviews have been published in *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Arte Fuse*, *ARTPULSE* and *Quantum Art Review*.

Paul Laster is a writer, editor, independent curator, artist and lecturer. He is a New York desk editor at *ArtAsiaPacific* and a contributing editor at *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art* and *artBahrain*. He is a contributing writer to *ARTPULSE, Time Out New York, The New York Observer*, *Modern Painters*, *Cultured Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, *Galerie Magazine* and Conceptual Fine Arts.

Daniel Bonnell is an artist, writer, educator and author of the book *Shadow Lessons*. The text chronicles an artist's unexpected journey into an inner-city, at-risk, high school culture. He has exhibited his art in a variety of venues, including St. Paul's Cathedral in London, St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. His eclectic studio instructors included painter Ed Ross, photographer Ansel Adams and designer Milton Glaser.



Alexandria Pierce earned her Ph.D. in the department of art history at McGill University in 2003 and now teaches 20th-century art history and graduate courses in art criticism and contemporary art at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Her reviews and essays have appeared in the *Athens Journal of Humanities & Art*, *esse* and *Art Papers*.

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Markus Lüpertz, *Baumstamm Abwärts—dithyrambisch (Tree Trunk Down—Dithyrambic),* **1966**. distemper on canvas, 98 ½" x 70 7/8." Hall Collection. Courtesy of Hall Art Foundation © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

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Hardly the Way

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI

From 1972 to 1981, Jimmie Durham didn't show any art publicly. This wasn't due to inertia or lack of inspiration, but to an interest in activism that led him to enroll as a worker in the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Native American human and civil rights advocacy group founded in Minneapolis in 1968. Durham worked his way through its ranks, eventually becoming executive director of the International Indian Treaty Council and an appointed representative at the United Nations before an increasing sense of disillusionment over the direction AIM was taking prompted his resignation in 1980.

In the aftermath, Durham toyed with the idea of writing a book about his experience with the movement, but lack of funds and confidence resulted in a series of politically charged, text-imbued collages instead. When Juan Sánchez, a fellow artist with very strong political beliefs, saw them, he invited Durham to an exhibition he was organizing. Sánchez, then in his mid-20s, had missed, and as such came to idolize, the first wave of activism propelled by the AIM, the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. What he needed was a battle to fight, and he found one with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981. Sánchez's exhibition, "Beyond Aesthetics: Art of Necessity by Artists of Conscience," opened four months after Reagan's Presidential Inauguration and generated great interest, acting as a precursor for subsequent ventures like Art Against Apartheid and "Artist's Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America."

Durham was in favor of the spirit of the operation, but he was much less enthusiastic about the popularity the representation of his own struggles and that of Native American people had reached. This was, after all, a time in history when artists from so-called "minorities" were largely pigeonholed or patronized when not being ignored. Feeling exploited, Durham revised his approach to art and motivations and decided to resist the stereotypes associated with the image of the "Indian artist" by focusing on the large playing field provided by the advent of Post-Modernism. Anger was replaced with irony, and a great array of materials, mostly animal skulls and used car parts, were deployed to create pieces that challenged the notion of sculpture, Indian folk art artifacts and the way these are commonly perceived. Keen to explore the relationship between the native population of the Americas and objectual art further, in 1987 Durham left New York and moved to Mexico.

Three years later, the introduction of the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act, de facto prohibiting the production and sale of anything falsely presented as Indian, was met with mixed responses. While many hailed the legislation as a landmark in protecting the interests of the Native American community, others felt that it unjustly penalized those without official tribal affiliation. In such a climate, questions about artists not formally recognized began to surface, and two spaces exclusively devoted to Indian art in Santa Fe and San Francisco canceled Durham's exhibitions from their program due to his lack of certification. This was somewhat ironic, as Susanne Rockwell noted in 1991, because "Indian artist" was a label Durham has never sought or desired in the first place. Durham himself gave statements to *ARTnews* and *Art in America* to the same effect. "I am not an 'Indian artist' in any sense. My work is simply contemporary art. My work does not speak for, about or even to Indian people."

After raging on for a while, the debate slowly went quiet. Artists like Fritz Scholder and Brad Kahlhamer continued to perpetuate their commercially successful images of Indians undisturbed, and even Nicole Klagsbrun, who officially represented Durham in the U.S., continued showing and selling his art all through the 1990s.

"At the Center of the World," Durham's recently open first American traveling retrospective, gave his work sufficient visibility to reignite the dispute. It is impossible not to sympathize with the sentiments of the Native American people. Their rights have been denied for far too long, and it's high time that American institutions, chief amongst them the Walker Art Center, start engaging actively and competently with the creative element of such a pillar in their community. The articles that have flooded the web over the past few months failed to offer mega-convincing evidence on Durham's fake Cherokee heritage (unless investigative work alarmingly resembling Donald Trump's wild turkey chase for Obama's birth certificate or affirmations like "he has not married in a Cherokee family or participate in Cherokee dances" constitute evidence). They do, however, say a lot about the disarray in which art criticism is today and the dangers of heading towards an age in which socially related art is allowed only when made by people with a direct affiliation with the subject. ■

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UBS

American Iconoclasm and Painting

(Or Why Dana Schutz's Painting of Emmett Till Goes Far Beyond Freedom of Expression)

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

The recent controversy about Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2016) at the Whitney Biennial is reminiscent of similar incidents in the United States that keep popping up with frenzied fury.

In this case, the attack came from inside the art world: An artist named Hannah Black triggered the controversy against a fellow artist by sending an open letter of complaint to the curators and staff of the Whitney Biennial. "I am writing to ask you to remove Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* with the *urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed* and not entered into any market or museum," she wrote. "The painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about black people because *it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute black suffering* into profit and fun."

Most of the discussions taking place in social media and the press have been articulated around issues of a) freedom of expression b) politically correctness or, to a lesser extent c) the formal or artistic qualities of a painting. But these debates all miss the point. Concerning Schutz's freedom of expression, Whitney curators Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks, said it best. "As curators of this exhibition, we believe in providing a museum platform for artists to explore these critical issues." It has always been very clear to me that while the visual arts don't have the same reach and critical mass as film, advertising or pop music, they can more easily confront difficult, thorny or violent topics to push the limits and provide a new or different perspective, though not necessarily more emancipated or just. Artists are not saints, but they have the right to express themselves.

Secondly, the orthodoxy of political correctness, which manifests itself here in Black´s words of non-black people lacking the morality, sensibility and understanding of violence against African Americans, is a very simplistic, reductive and static view of society. It is also an example of cultural essentialism, which hinders our ability to have a serious debate about urgent topics like racism, injustice, poverty and oppression that affects primarily, though not solely, African Americans in the U.S. As for the formalistic argument, I will quote Los Angeles-based Italian painter Nicola Verlato, who wrote this on his Facebook page: "The choice of making the defacement of Emmett Till coinciding with a 'painted defacement' of the face is inappropriate because it negates the figure and as such neutralizes a potentially wider social engagement of the work. And by choosing to re-present the unrepresentable, Schutz is in a way reenacting the aggression made against the kid by the act of painting the disfigured face."

ICONOCLASTIC UNCONSCIOUS

And here lies the clue that can help us understand the heart of the matter: defacement or abstraction. The history of mankind is basically the history that mediates between the icon and iconoclasm, in other words, from the obedient reverence of the image to the fierce repudiation of it.

Dana Schutz, *Open Casket,* 2016, oil on canvas. (The photo was omitted in order not to fuel this polemic any longer)

This iconoclastic horror is not only present in Islam, but also in Judaism and, in particular, Protestantism. Meanwhile, the relationship of Catholicism with the image has been more tolerant. According to James Simpson in *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition*, Pope Gregory declared famously between 599 and 600 that images were like books for the illiterate.

For the Anglo-Saxon iconoclasts, a long-standing tradition that manifested itself with unusual ferocity in England between 1538 and 1643, the image was an idol that represented the old political, religious and even cultural regime. We have to come to terms with the English Revolution with its iconoclastic vigor in the name of freedom and The Enlightenment that neutralized 'the image' by inserting it into museums, as well as Modernism and its formalist, ahistorical and apolitical interpretation of art history and Abstract Expressionism that finally takes the process to a zero degree level: compositions without forms, narrative or depth. The total disappearance of the (hand of the) artist. Basically, as Alfred Barr, Jr., said, art had nothing to do with society, and Clement Greenberg annotated that painting had nothing to do with representation. What's the conclusion? Socially and politically engaged figurative painting is totally taboo and must be avoided by all means.

This is precisely what I call the "iconoclastic unconscious": a profound and embedded Anglo-Saxon iconophobia and fear of the image about which even most professionals in the art world are hardly aware. The censorship of Schutz is also a severe warning against future practitioners of politically engaged painting.

So the question is: Is there any difference between Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar and his ordered destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001 and artist Hannah Black, who demands Schutz's painting be destroyed?

I think both are equally iconoclastic acts. ■

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Photograph taken at Artistree

March 29–31, 2018

UBS

A MOTLEY CHOIR
Variations in Tone in Contemporary Art Criticism

BY KERR HOUSTON

Clearly, the function of contemporary art critics can be—and has often been—construed in a number of different ways. In his essay *Clichés Reach Critical Mass, Take Writers Down Slippery Slope*, Blake Gopnik suggests that art critics can write the first draft of art history. Elsewhere, Peter Plagens has suggested that we can think of critics as fulfilling a modest range of familiar roles: evangelists, say, or goalies ("This had better be pretty good to get by me."), or cartographers (Rosalind Krauss, claiming that her job is to scan the horizon for blips). Alternatively, as Lucy Lippard, Dave Hickey and a host of other disgusted critics have suggested, art critics can be seen as little more than cogs in the larger capitalist machine: as producers of prose that is then used, cynically and without regard for nuance, to promote or inflate the perceived value of commodified artworks. Or perhaps, as James Elkins has written, the place of the critic is rather less important than that; perhaps art critics are instead practitioners of an almost irrelevant genre that now resembles nothing so much as a diaphanous veil, billowing and yet weightless, airily immaterial, at once broad in reach and broadly ignored.

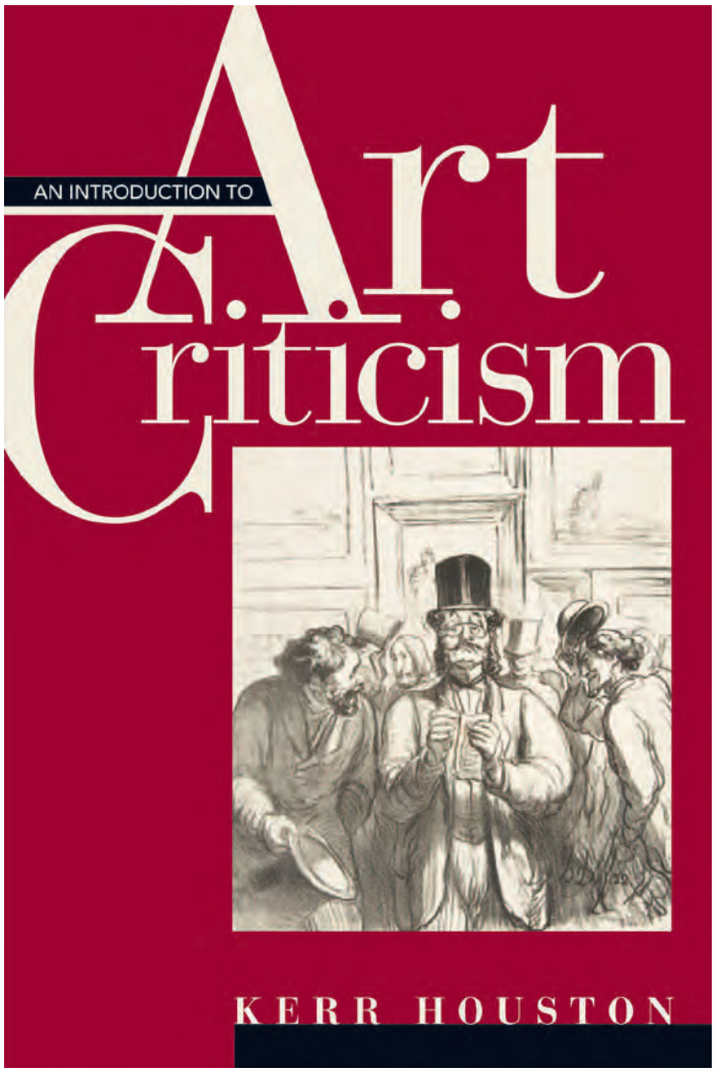
Or perhaps—for, indeed, the topic seems to inspire similes—art critics might be seen as playing the role of the chorus in early Greek dramatic works. Consider: Like the *choros* in a play by Sophocles, art critics offer a live commentary on the action that unfolds before them. They lament, or counsel, or attempt to educate, or they express allegiance or indignation; in any case, they might be said to enact, as August Wilhelm Schlegel once wrote of Greek choruses, a possible response to the events, providing their broader audience with a modeled reaction.[1] As with the chorus, though, the limits of their position are also notable, for they are at once central and distinct from the main narrative; they may actively moralize, but their ability to effect real change is seriously limited, for they are largely limited to the realm of rhetoric, rather than direct physical action.[2] Herbert Golder and Stephen Scully once argued in a 1995 article that the Greek chorus was ultimately a "spectral presence," and perhaps we could say something similar about the contemporary art critic who flits between Miami and Chelsea and café and laptop and manages to be at once passionate and ineffable—or, to cite Elkins again, to produce a vast band of writing while dissolving into the background.[3]

Of course, the analogy has its limits. For, after all, the Greek chorus generally spoke as one, in a communal voice. The actors in the choir usually wore, as far as we know, identical masks and sang the same lines. Art critics, by contrast, tend to emphasize their own individuality. They might do it aggressively, by staking out a baldly contrarian position or mocking the ideas of other critics, or they might do it delicately, by aligning themselves with an obscure theoretical approach or using a rare, idiosyncratic wording. Regardless, at the end of the day, despite their broad similarities, art critics are individuals, with their own tastes, tendencies, political platforms and voices.[4] If they can be said to comprise in any real sense a chorus, it's closer in spirit to the motley group in Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* (in which one member of the Greek choir abruptly steps out, voicing his own views and prompting rebuttals) than to the unified ensembles of Euripides.[5]

But if critics speak in distinct voices, rather than in a single choral unison, then how do they generate, on a concrete level, those various voices? If critical accounts of a work or show differ, *how* do they differ, on the level of syntax and wordings? In short, if we momentarily push differences in philosophy and taste to the side, what are we left with? It's this sort of question that I'd like to consider in some detail here. And, at the risk of oversimplification, I want to suggest that variations in tone can be broadly understood in three basic ways. In some cases, critical tone represents an extension of individual proclivities: It can most usefully be seen, that is, as an embodiment of an aesthetic sensibility or philosophical stance. In other cases, critical tones seem to be primarily motivated by a desire to emulate the artwork under consideration; the words, in such examples, begin to echo their subject. And in still other cases, the tone employed by critics seems largely motivated by an attentiveness to the venue in which the work appears. Three alternatives, then, and note the clean geometry of their relative interests: One depends on the critic, the second on the artwork and the third on the audience. Sure, we might see art critics as evangelists or as unwitting players in a promotional apparatus; they may be mappers or practitioners of a dying art. But the nature of their occupation—writing about art, for a readership—inevitably means that they will speak, and do speak, in a polyphonic manner. So let's file into the theater and begin to listen to their voices.

II.

"I've always had," Okwui Enwezor told Adam Shatz in a 2002 interview, "an incredible sense of my place in the world."[6] And the world, in turn, has proven generous and capacious. Over the past two decades, Enwezor has curated high-profile exhibitions of art in sites as diverse as San Francisco and Johannesburg, Kassel and Gwangju, Venice and New York. In the process, he has become, arguably, the best-known curator in the world and a celebrated representative of the sleek nomadism that has characterized the upper echelon of the art world since the 1990s. But he has also fostered an active and ambitious writing practice. For Enwezor, after all, has long been alert to the force of language: When he moved to New York City in 1982 (to earn a bachelor's degree at Jersey City State College), he penned experimental poetry and soon befriended a number of writers. Over the next three decades, he founded a



An Introduction to Art Criticism: Histories, Strategies, Voices by Kerr Houston, was published by Pearson Education in 2013.

journal (*Nka*, dedicated to analyses of contemporary African art) and authored (or co-authored) several books and numerous essays on a range of artistic subjects.

To read that body of work is to encounter a confident voice that is both resolutely individual and inflected by his interests and complicated background. At times, for instance, Enwezor's critical writing reveals his poetic sensibility and talents. In a 2009 essay on Zwelethu Mthethwa, for instance, Enwezor offers this summary of Mthethwa's color photographs of sugarcane workers: "These magisterial portraits of single figures, attired like medieval warriors in greasy smocks, flowing skirts, and gumboots and wielding long-handled knives, present the laborers in various poses, standing amid the devastation of the burned sugarcane fields, their back to the gently rolling cultivated land, against the backdrop of dappled, open blue sky."[7]

It is a sensuously written passage, unfurling in an undulating manner that almost evokes the pastoral virtues whose loss the photographs seem to mourn. And then there is that rich field of adjectives, none of them exactly surprising in isolation but each of them working in concert to evoke the sheer optical richness of Mthethwa's work. Such a sensitivity is also visible in Enwezor's powerful 1997 essay on South African art, in which he evokes Homi Bhabha's assertion that colonial discourse depends upon the concept of fixity and nervously repeated stereotypes, and then builds on the idea: "This anxious repetition finds itself inscribed again and again in the almost obsessive usage of old photographic images of Africans or in the ethnographic tourist postcards depicting near-naked African women in a state of colonial arrest."[8]

The creative *again and again* solidifies the point, conveying the jittery aspect of the repetition being discussed. Note, too, the soft parallelism of *almost obsessive* and *near-naked*: The colonizer, perhaps, is not so different from the colonized. But the climax, from my point of view, lies in the final word, which economically conflates a sense of inertia with a sense of the violence of the colonial penal system. Here, Enwezor's skill as a wordsmith allows him to suggest that apartheid was rooted both in a pathological circularity and in disciplinary aggression.

At the same time, though, Enwezor's criticism also implies an interest in academic formality: Its tone can lean towards the stiff, or the didactic. Indeed, even his speech habits are revealingly distinctive in this sense, as Adam Shatz has noted: "A product of British boarding schools, Enwezor speaks in a formal, almost aristocratic style, spreading out his syllables in a charmingly affected way."[9] That tendency towards a lofty, genteel tone is discernible in some of Enwezor's writing, as well. The essay on Mthethwa, for instance, contains this aside: "One must remember that in classical Greece, the city (polis) was delimited only for free men, thus the origin of the idea of citizen: one who belongs in the city and is lawfully recognized as such."[10] Note the repetition of the passive voice and the offhanded use of stilted constructions such as *one must remember* and *as such*: the arch, edifying tone is that of a stereotypical Oxbridge tutor.

Relatedly, Enwezor often resorts, in written work, to the airy jargon of the academy, yielding a tone that is intellectually elevated, or even abstract. (In a 2014 article, Zeke Turner remarked that "Enwezor can be unremittingly prolix, and he resorts to heavy words to anchor the thoughts in his mind."[11]) Terms like *abrogate*, *binary*, and *liminal* recur, and entire passages can become dense webs of fashionable terms and keywords. Take, for instance, a passage from a 2013 essay on South African photography: "In the wake of apartheid," wrote Enwezor, "protest signs, accompanied by speech acts by Africans demanding their rights, became unmistakable modalities for communicating the subjectivity and signifying presence of the erstwhile 'native' and therefore offer a dialectical approach to the negotiation of images of Native Studies and black modern political movements."[12] Protest signs as modalities for communicating signifying presence? The tone here feels intentionally ambitious, or even haughtily exclusive.

In the process, Enwezor's prose style can occasionally begin to teeter under its own weight. Rather like his exhibitions, which allegedly often take their initial shape in an air of grand ambition and fitful chaos, his writing can try to do too much or threaten to become unmoored. Too, metaphors are occasionally strained. I'm thinking, for instance, of Enwezor's assertion that "Mthethwa's evident departure from the style of his *Interiors* portraiture series, and his foray into the abyss of documentary realism, expose a smudged gap of interpretation between his concerns."[13] The sen-

Okwui Enwezor in New York City, 2009. Photo: Andrew Russeth.

tence structure feels clear—but what, exactly, is a *smudged gap of interpretation*? And can it truly be exposed by a departure? Perhaps we can call such an approach poetic, in its almost aquatic logic, but in other cases the breakdowns in syntax seem to convey an unintended meaning. In his 1997 essay, for example, Enwezor recalled walking through a show curated by Pipa Skotnes. "As one wandered through the rooms," he wrote, "bludgeoned by a didactic relativism that at times seemed an act of self-mockery, I was forced to ask what this exhibition was all about."[14] Here, the very subject of the sentence shifts confusingly—or perhaps we should say coalesces, for by the end of the sentence we understand that Enwezor is in fact the very *one* with whom he began.

It's not, then, that Enwezor can't write clearly; to the contrary, his criticism is peppered with statements of an almost crystalline force. ("Writing about works of South African art always seems like walking down a cul-de-sac. At the end of the one-way street, what one finds is South Africa's anguish.")[15] Rather, it's that Enwezor tries to do so much in his criticism that his tone is forced to accommodate, at once, a sophisticated writer's ambitions, a globetrotter's cosmopolitanism and a reformist's zeal. For the most part, that is, his tone is dignified, restrained, erudite and generous in its creativity. But the sheer seriousness of the subjects that he addresses and the sobering facts of his early years in war-torn Nigeria mean that a glib tone is flatly impossible. Instead, much of his critical writing is touched by a consistent world-weariness, an indignant but almost resigned alertness to the sheer ubiquity of injustice. You can see this, for instance, in his brief summary of Mthethwa's early pastel drawings, which Enwezor claims were "simplified for profitable consumption by those who want their black images a certain shade of sunny sweetness."[16] Or you can see it in the scathing final line of a 2008 letter to *Artforum* in response to Robert Storr's criticism of Enwezor's assessment of that year's Venice Biennale. "Long believed dead and buried in the sludge of the nineteenth-century colonial game," wrote Enwezor, frostily, "Mr. Kurtz, we learned in 2007, is alive after all. His latest incarnation is Mr. Storr."[17]

Here, of course, the tone (like the content) is personal, or even *ad hominem*—but it remains, at the same time, allusive and literary. And that, perhaps, is the central point here: that Enwezor's criticism consistently involves tonal decisions that echo his experiences and interests, but also his politics and aspirations. Without resorting to biographical essentialism, we might say that Enwezor inhabits his criticism with a fullness that is not a given. Again, his 1997 essay offers a pertinent example. In it, he lambastes two white South African artists—Candice Breitz and Pipa Skotness—for using images of black women without apparent interest in their identity or individuality. He then contrasts their approach with that of Santu Mofokeng, who painstakingly collected a number of archival images of blacks and then researched the historical contexts in which they were made. In the process, Enwezor writes in a register

that is aggrieved, confident and prescriptive. But there's something else going on here, too. At one point, Enwezor quotes Mofokeng's explanation of his methodology at length. At no point, however, does he quote Breitz or Skotnes. The very structure of his essay, then, rectifies the problem that he claims to have identified: too often, white South Africans speak for blacks. Enwezor's criticism, by contrast, offers a space for an alternative, as it gives a voice to the marginalized while also framing that voice in a way that is both alert to, and distrustful of, the levers of linguistic power.

"And the less anxiously repeated the image," Enwezor argues at the end of the same piece, "the better the opportunity to find an ethical ground to use its index as a form of discursive address, for radical revision, as well as to unsettle the apparatus of power."[18] His place in the world, we can thus say, is to identify and to challenge that apparatus in terms that oscillate between limpid prose, mannered erudition, evocative poetry and rhetorical fire.

III.

Enwezor is very much his own writer, then, but even he sometimes seems to craft his prose in a manner calculated to evoke or reflect the work that he is discussing. On a photograph depicting a modestly decorated interior, for instance, he once wrote, "Despite its striking decor, the room is spare. It contains only the barest minimum of possessions…Nothing more is in the room."[19] The restrained, sparse writing style reflects the image. And, indeed, such an approach turns out to have a considerable history. The rhythm of John Ruskin's famous description of Turner's *The Slave Ship*, for instance, evokes the churning of the sea-tossed waves in the painting. In fact, as Elizabeth Helsinger once noted, entire sections of the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* call paintings by Turner to mind in a variety of ways: "Not only the word choice but the word order, rhythm, sound, and sense, reflect the technique, force and equilibrium of the painting [being considered]."[20] The style and tone of a piece of art criticism, in other words, can resemble or allude to the work under discussion.

Hal Foster's review of the 2014 Robert Gober retrospective at MoMA, in the January 2015 issue of *Artforum*, offers a useful illustration of such an approach. Foster, of course, has been a well-known art critic and historian since the mid-1980s, and his criticism often draws on a diverse body of theory—Marxist, psychoanalytic, semiotic—in discussing work that has ranged from Surrealist to postmodern. In the process, he frequently employs a tone that is at once accessible and intellectually nimble and that relates in a meaningful way to his subject. In a 2001 catalog essay on a show of work by Richard Serra, for instance, Foster wrote in an assertive, muscular mode appropriate to the sculptor's massive torqued spirals and toruses. A relatively typical passage thus ran like this: "With the heavyweight piece here, titled *Ali-Frazier*, Serra again recovers an established type in his work, the solid block, which was first developed as a counterpoint to the spatial manipulations of his arcs (single, double, and treble) of the 1980s and '90s. Like the rounds that emerged with them, these blocks absorb space through sheer mass, like so many black holes, rather than define space through steel planes, as in the arcs. Yet *Ali-Frazier* tests our sense not only of mass but of size as well."[21]

Through the punning use of the term *heavyweight*, Foster immediately implies that he is interested in matching language to piece, and the rest of the paragraph echoes the resolute presence of Serra's work (which in this case consisted of two forged-steel blocks). The verbs are primarily active and conclusive: *recover*; *absorb*, *test*. And the sentences are insistent in their directness; repeatedly, verb follows subject, and Foster, like Serra, seems more interested in blunt fact than in mere possibility or ambiguity.

In approaching Gober's very different work, however, Foster altered his tone. Admittedly, his essay still opens firmly, and even dramatically: "From the beginning," he proclaims, "the art of Robert Gober was distinctive, as if it had emerged full-blown from his forehead."[22] But as he turns to individual pieces, Foster is struck by their allusive, fugitive and associative qualities, and his tone soon shifts into a more sensitive and nuanced register. Thus, his second paragraph begins like this: "Gober is best known for his inexplicable objects: unplumbed sinks, unusable cribs, male legs planted with candles or drilled with drains. Although they appear to be porcelain or flesh, they are in fact plaster or beeswax, and this substitution moves them away from the politics of the readymade."[23]

Sure, this excerpt does some important, inglorious work, as it offers a tidy overview of iconographic and material tendencies in Gober's *oeuvre*. But on a more subtle level, it also labors to create a certain mood, or air, that is considerably more refined. Look, for instance, at the recurring use of *or*: these sentences are also working to accent the importance of alternatives. And then, too, there's a certain softness in Foster's claim that Gober's use of creative materials *moves* his works *away* from the sphere of the readymade. Not *denies*, or *rejects*, but *moves away from*: Again, the wording is something less than forceful. Rather, we might even call it gentle, or interested in a rhetorical pliability, or in provisional possibilities.

Foster's turn away from an authoritative, hard-nosed reading is visible in his third paragraph, as well. "It is mostly the illusionism of his materials that estranges his things," Foster writes—*mostly*, that is, but not exclusively, and in short order he explains the need for such qualification: "Indeed, his objects are personally painstaking, and just as pain is often evoked at the level of subject matter (all the body parts), caring and tending are often intimated at the level of process, where work sometimes takes on the resonance of working through."[24] *Often*, *often*, *sometimes*: This is criticism that is uninterested in a reductive attempt at a memorable line. Rather, it embraces ambiguity and openly admits exception and complexity—precisely as Gober's art does, in Foster's view. "There is damage and melancholy in this art," Foster goes on to conclude, "but there is also reparation and mourning, and sometimes…there are all of these things at once."[25] So, too, with Foster's criticism, which uses a carefully crafted tone to convey an openness to alternatives and multiplicity.

Finally, it's also worth noting that Foster tacks between grammatical persons in his review, momentarily departing from his third-person account to thoughtful, affecting uses of the first and second person. "There are times," he writes, "when one is damaged, as so many were during the AIDS crisis, or abjected, as countless gay people and

people of color are every day—times, in short, when metaphor is impossible, when nothing can serve as a substitute, when your heart is broken, when no one can take your place, when you die."[26]

It is a remarkable sentence, from a syntactical point of view, for it opens by positing an impersonal, damaged *one* but then shifts into the second person (*you die*), explicitly demolishing in the process the very notion that *one* could take the place of *you*. As a result, the sentence employs a totally different grammatical logic than Enwezor's use of *one* as a mere proxy for the writer; here, Foster isolates us or exposes us, conveying the melancholy tone of much of Gober's work. In the very next paragraph, however, Foster modifies that grave note with an accent upon the possibility of eerie recuperation, and he does it by shifting persons once again. Gober's installations, he argues, often employ broad symbols and generic spaces, lending his work the force of a folktale. "In such storytelling," Foster goes on to write, "as Benjamin once remarked, we often warm our souls over a dead body. That is true here too, though with the uncanny twist that the dead body might somehow be our own as well."[27] Now the reader is part of a *we*—of a grim ceremony, to be sure, but also of a collective. If we die, we no longer die entirely alone.

Placing so much pressure upon a critic's choice of pronouns may seem a silly exercise. But Foster's attentive prose allows him to draw attention to, and even partially recreate some of the tonal effects of Gober's work. Indeed, reading his account reminded me of a moment from my own visit to Gober's show at MoMA. When I was there, I watched several other viewers approach and peer down into *Untitled (detail)*, a 1997 work that is set into the museum floor and that allows viewers to see a streambed—or, from a single, particularly acute angle, two pairs of feet. And as I looked on, one viewer returned to the piece to direct another uncomprehending museumgoer to the rewarding viewpoint. The *you* had become a *we*: two souls briefly commingled over a body made of wax.

IV.

Foster, then, can modify his tone rather substantially, as a means of conveying the particular feel or mood of the work before him. At the same time, though, he is certainly also alert (like most good critics) to the venue in which he is writing. The generally celebratory tone of a piece written for a catalog essay, in other words, may not be appropriate in a piece conceived for, say, *October*. And so Foster also varies his tone with an eye towards his readership.

For a crisp example of this, we might look at a portion of an analysis of Louise Bourgeois' *Fillette* that he published in 2004: "When hung by wire (as it is often displayed), it seems an object of hate, a castrated piece of meat. But when cradled (as it is by Bourgeois in a well-known photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe), it seems an object of love, a baby held by its mother. According to Freud, women might associate penis and baby in order to compensate the lack of the first with the gain of the second. But this 'little girl' is no mere fetish or penis-substitute; she is a personage in her own right. In this way *La Fillette*…is a feminist appropriation of the symbolic phallus."[28]

This passage appeared in *Art Since 1900*, a textbook authored by Foster and four colleagues; aimed largely at college students, it adopts a tone that might be called conversational but quietly insistent. Throughout, Foster offers variant wordings and stacks ideas—*an object of hate, a castrated piece of meat*—and thus eschews an authoritarian tone. At the same time, he seems to realize that Freudian theory might repel certain readers and thus proffers the carefully qualified claim that "according to Freud, women might associate penis and baby." In short, this is criticism designed to disarm a dubious reader: to deny, as the marketers might say, the denier.

Perhaps the most celebrated example of an art critic who has developed a particular tone in relation to venue and audience, however, is Jerry Saltz. He, of course, first came to broad notice as a critic for *The Village Voice*, where he crafted a voice that was populist, humorous and irreverent: a fine match, in other words, for the iconoclastic alternative in which it appeared. Since 2007, he has worked as senior art critic and columnist for *New York* and has also developed a remarkably robust online presence, writing for vulture.com (an online cousin of *New York*) and acquiring thousands of Facebook friends. To be sure, the earthy, energetic voice that Saltz had employed in his traditional print criticism was a natural fit for online work. After all, its coarse pragmatism and everyman quality was naturally sociable, if also potentially volatile. But in recent years, as Saltz has extended his online presence, he has developed a tone even more suited to that sphere. Thus, as Christopher Bollen has pointed out, Saltz's critical writings often "build to a frenetic, volatile, in-your-face debate that might involve the desire to finish the conversation outside."[29]

"Klaus: You dick! Are you listening?" Saltz wrote in a recent Facebook post that addressed Klaus Biesenbach, the newly appointed director of MoMA P.S.1. "You know I love you but you're sitting on the BEST PHYSICAL SPACE on the East Coast and you're presiding over a pretty boring program."[30] The tone of such writing is enthusiastically vulgar and combative, but is at the same time concise and humorous and thus perfectly suited to a smartphone screen (a fact that is also true of Saltz's three-sentence reviews for vulture.com). Importantly, too, it's also inclusive; indeed, as Leon Neyfakh has remarked, many of Saltz's Facebook friends claim to feel empowered through their participation in the resulting discussions.[31]

In fact, Saltz has worked hard to create a tone that is at once widely accessible and nominally modest. "I find it a pleasure and a thrill," he has said of his online popularity. "It's exciting to be in this room with 5,000 people. It's like the Cedar Bar for me, or Max's Kansas City, neither of which I was ever in and probably wasn't cool enough to be in. Now I get to kind of be one of the barmaids in this place, to put an idea in the air and see what happens."[32] Note the apparent humility in the final sentence: Saltz seems to imagine himself as a barmaid, rather than, say, Pollock, or de Kooning. And yet, he is clearly a strongly opinionated barmaid. In a live appearance on Reddit, Saltz lambasted what he sees as a tendency towards opaque, overwrought prose in major critical venues. "And write reviews," he exhorted, "in fucking English, will you, for fuck's sake! I have NO idea what most of the stuff in *Artforum* is saying. No one does."[33] *Fucking English*, for Saltz, seems to be an idiom that is characterized by epithets, exclamation points and broad generalizations.

Predictably, Saltz's tone has not appealed to every reader. (In-

deed, one might say that it is calculated to alienate certain writers and venues). After all, as James Panero argued in a 2010 essay, "It may be no coincidence that the writers and critics who have found success online have rarely been from the print world. The skill-set is quite different."[34] Saltz, here, is the exception, but he is an exception that fails to move Panero, who sees Saltz as a graphomaniac for whom the new media *is* the message. In short, Panero sees Saltz's democratic tone as emblematic of a larger abdication of responsibility: The critic is now a crowd-sourcer rather than a producer of valuable reactions to artworks. And yet, interestingly, Saltz might not disagree. For, in fact, he has celebrated the thoughts of his readers as an important addition to the project of criticism. In thinking about his appearance on *Work of Art* (a reality television show), for instance, he wrote that the resulting posts represented "an accidental art criticism practiced in a new place, in a new way, on a fairly high level…Together we were crumbs and butter of a mysterious madeleine. The delivery mechanism of art criticism seemed to turn itself inside out; instead of one voice speaking to many, there were many voices speaking to one another. Coherently."[35]

The tone here—one of mild awe, expressing a sense of having witnessed something momentous—says it all. The Internet, for Saltz, is transformative.

V.

Of course, Saltz's inclusive, democratic tone could be understood in terms of larger artistic and political developments, as well (think, for instance, of the Occupy movement, or of the much-discussed social turn in contemporary art, or of hyperrelationality, or of Jane Rendell's observation that "the viewer's interaction, participation and collaboration is central to the production of art's aesthetic dimension.")[36] Or we might see it, equally compellingly, as a fair and honest expression of Saltz's personality, which has apparently long tended toward the populist. In other words, there's nothing gained in being repressively simplistic, or in insisting on the unique importance of aesthetic philosophy here, and venue there. Yes, critics do sometimes write in ways that reveal their interests, or a desire to echo the work that stands before them, or an attention to their likely readership. But art criticism is, finally, a naturally synthetic activity, and the voices of art critics develop in response to a variety of factors.

All of which is to say, once more, that contemporary art critics hardly comprise a unified and monotonic choir. Rather, if they can be seen as a *choros* at all, it is a rebellious and fractious one, which is precisely why *Triple Canopy* can run a piece that skewers the clotted tone of much criticism, or why Michael Fried can attack, in wilting tones, the word choices made by Peter Schjeldahl in a review of a Morris Louis show.[37] They may differ in philosophy, personality and tone, but they understand, on some level, that they play a comparable role in a larger drama. They dance, like the choir in a Greek tragedy, the same dance. But they are never, finally, the same, and the differences between them are often initially apparent on the level of tone. This is why we must, if we want to understand recent art criticism, do exactly what Umit Dhuga once recommended that students of Greek *choroi* do: that is, "We ought to engage closely the language of any given tragic chorus."[38] For if we do, much larger patterns may begin to emerge, much as they once dawned on the audiences of early Greek plays. ■

NOTES

1. For a consideration of the evidence surrounding early Greek instances of the *choros* and a detailed analysis of the physical place of the *choros* in the larger geography of Greek plays, see Graham Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
2. For a complication of this admittedly simple characterization, which was originally advanced by V. di Benedetto, see Helene Foley, "Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy," *Classical Philology* 98/1 (January 2003), 1-30.
3. Herbert Golder and Stephen Scully, "Introduction," *Arion* 3/1 ("The Chorus in Greek Tragedy and Culture, One") (Fall 1994-Winter 1995), 1-5: 1.
4. Relevant here are David Carrier's observations in "Artcriticism-writing, Arthistory-writing, and Artwriting," in *The Art Bulletin* 78/3 (September 1996), 401-403.
5. My thanks to Steve Knudsen for alerting me to Allen's creative re-imagining of the choir and for inviting me to contribute to this collection. Admittedly, there is some slight evidence of a similar arrangement in certain early Greek performances; see T.B.L. Webster, *The Greek Chorus*. London: Methuen & Co., 1970, 202.
6. "Okwui Enwezor's Really Big Show," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 2, 2002, at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/02/magazine/02OKWUI.html, accessed January 8, 2015.
7. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism: Zwelethu Mthethwa's Color Photographs," in *Zwelethu Mthethwa* (Aperture, 2010), 100-115: 110.
8. "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," originally published in *Third Text* 40 (Autumn 1997) and republished in Kymberly Pinder, ed., *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 371-389: 380. My thoughts on Enwezor's tone in his 1997 essay benefit, too, from the work of Aubrey Dunn, a student in a 2014 seminar that I taught at MICA; I thank her for her generosity in sharing her ideas.
9. "Okwui Enwezor's Really Big Show."
10. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism," 105.
11. "How Okwui Enwezor Changed the Art World," *The Wall Street Journal* online, September 8, 2014, at http://www.wsj.com/articles/how-okwui-enwezor-changed-the-art-world-1410187570, accessed January 8, 2015.
12. Okwui Enwezor, "Rise and Fall of Apartheid," in Okwui Enwezor and Rory Bester, eds., *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (New York: International Center of Photography, 2013), 20-45: 28.
13. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism," 109.
14. "Reframing the Black Subject," 383.
15. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism," 101.
16. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism," 113.
17. Letter to the Editor, *Artforum*, February 2008
18. "Reframing the Black Subject," 388.
19. "Photography after the End of Documentary Realism," 105.
20. See Kerr Houston, *An Introduction to Art Criticism* (Pearson, 2013), 214.
21. Hal Foster, "Torques and Toruses," in *Richard Serra: Torqued Spirals, Toruses and Spheres* (Gagosian Gallery, 2001), 7-21: 9-10.
22. Hal Foster, "Robert Gober," *Artforum* (January 2015), 204-6: 204.
23. "Robert Gober," 204.
24. "Robert Gober," 204.
25. "Robert Gober," 204.
26. "Robert Gober," 205.
27. "Robert Gober," 205.
28. Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 501.
29. "Roberta Smith & Jerry Saltz," *Interview* online, at http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/roberta-smith-jerry-saltz/, accessed January 9, 2015.
30. Leon Neyfakh, "The Many Friends of Jerry Saltz," *New York Observer* online, February 7, 2010, at http://observer.com/2010/02/the-many-friends-of-jerry-saltz/, accessed January 9, 2015.
31. Quoted in Neyfakh, "The Many Friends."
32. Quoted in Neyfakh, "The Many Friends."
33. <http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1qk99k/i_am_jerry_saltz_new_york_magazines_art_critic/>, accessed January 9, 2015.
34. James Panero, "My Jerry Saltz Problem," *The New Criterion* online (December 2010), <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/My-Jerry-Saltz-problem-6502>, accessed January 9, 2015.
35. Quoted in Panero, "My Jerry Saltz Problem."
36. Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (New York: IB Tauris, 2010), 3.
37. Michael Fried, "Morris Louis," in *Artforum* (December 2014), 267.
38. Umit Dhuga, abstract of "Divine Agency and Human Agency: Rereading the Chorus in Sophocles' Antigone," online at <https://camws.org/meeting/2010/program/abstracts/06D1.Dhuga.pdf>, accessed January 9, 2015.

THE ENCHANTED MYSTERY OF THE ART OF MARKUS LÜPERTZ

The paintings of Markus Lüpertz present us with doors of possibility, the sheer scale of which begs one to fall in. But you have to approach these works with visceral openness, the way you would approach a new lover. You enter a painter's world that challenges description beyond Neo-Expressionism, incorporating the classical and abstract to challenge the simplicity of shape, form, color and composition within a language of ambiguity and contradiction that leaves you immersed in the enigmatic and paradoxical. Lüpertz's works are those by an artistic voice that has been beaten into the canvas in gorgeous, muddy violence built on questions—as if painting was a question itself. The work has a regard for the sacred akin to that found in the theater of Kantor, the compositions of Rachmaninoff and Franciscan theology. Welcome to the world of Markus Lüpertz.

A principal protagonist and neo-expressionist of the post-1945 generation of artists, Lüpertz is of significant importance, along with other artistic giants such as Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, A.R. Penck, Sigmar Polke, Blinky Palermo and Imi Knoebel.

His first United States retrospective, now at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., is an in-depth exploration of his groundbreaking paintings from the 1960s and 1970s entitled "Markus Lüpertz: Threads of History." His second show at The Phillips Collection's exhibition, also in the nation's capital, spans the artist's entire career.

BY DANIEL BONNELL

Daniel Bonnell - As a renown German artist, your work has been created within a strong culture of fellow European neo-expressionists and sincerely influenced by German philosophers, quite atypical from neo-expressionism in the U.S. The artistic lineages that you protract from are taken seriously so your work is decidedly **not** ***'put in a kind of free floating zone,' one that 'pretends to be heavy and then takes itself lightly.' (Remarks by the late Robert Hughes pointed at one of the facets of neo-expressionism in the U.S.). To add to the gravity of your work, your two concurrent historic exhibitions, one at the Hirshhorn and the other at the Phillips, deliver an even greater seriousness by virtue of the strength of numbers coming together. How does it feel for you to see all of this work together, and could you talk about some of the sincere seriousness that you regard as primary as you scan over this vast collection?***

Markus Lüpertz - I would exclude the American element. Time will tell to what extent America accepts my oeuvre or does not. Furthermore, for me, my exhibitions are a kind of 'company outing' where I then encounter those of my paintings again that are in storerooms or in museums. The exhibition setting is a matter of current activities of the day. And if museums are happy to show my stuff then I am grateful, without having any clear expectations of what the public will think.

D.B. - Within your huge painting entitled **Exekution** ***(1992), (118 by 167 ¼ inches), we see a replay of Goya's work*** **The Third of May 1808; the central figure being executed in Goya's piece is a form of Christian iconography depicting a laborer as the crucified Christ. In 1951, Picasso used the same iconic reference in his Massacre in Korea.** ***In your work, you change the symbol of the Christ figure to a hooded man. The emphasis of the work appears to be on the Nazi helmets and uniforms. Your version appears as a piece that is atypical of your other work within its chronological order. Would you unpack some of the significance of this painting for you?***

M.L. - The photo on which I based the painting is a photo that strangely touched me. So I researched it and found out that the photo was a staged image made by the American occupying forces, who used the photo to reproduce one aspect of the terror of the Third Reich. I am firmly convinced that the photographer knew the Goya image just as he must have known the Manet one. And it was this strangely artificial quality that so fascinated me, as I do not normally tend to respond to such photos. However, in this special context, the artistic association (Goya, Manet) struck me. And that fascination led to this image.

D.B. - The 1960s Bay Area painter David Park had a memorable way of talking of the effect of putting the figure back into abstraction, of marrying the visceral mark with figure. He said it brought the 'sting' back to the painting. Do you agree, and would you speak in the context of your painting **Nach Mareés –**

Markus Lüpertz, *Arkadien - Der hohe Berg,* 2013, mixed media on canvas, 51 ¼" x 63 ¾." © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of The Phillips Collection and Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne and New York).

Jongleur mit Rot *(2002), as to how your process works to get the visceral energy married to the form?*

M.L. - It is true that abstract painting needed to be enriched with a different kind of figuration, as the purely abstract was too limited as it was. Therefore, figures resurfaced in the images, albeit in a much more free and self-confident manner than would have been possible with abstraction. And that is the sensation of our time; namely, that thanks to this phenomenon we have an immense potential of pictorial ideas at our fingertips. I can only congratulate our times and our painters on participating in this new dimension.

D.B. - You are a practicing Catholic. Many masters, such as Matisse, Chagall, Le Corbusier and Léger, were brought into the Catholic church when they reached their 70s to produce complete houses of worship, windows and more. They were ushered in by a Dominican priest by the name of Père Courtier who had a vision to bring high art back into the church. Would you consider doing the same if approached by the church? If so, what would you seek to envision in a sacred space?

M.L. - I work for the church. I create glass windows and sculptures. I would also welcome murals for religious spaces, but primarily as a challenge on how to tackle the occasion and the space.

D.B. - What do you hold sacred within your work?

M.L. - Let us let religion be religion and painting, painting. Painting is important to me, and religion is my private matter.

D.B. - I understand the needed separation of the two, religion and painting. My question needs to be better worded. Within your processes of creating, do you have a pattern of approaching a painting or sculpture that is sacred, or most important? For instance, do you wait for a non-dualistic inspiration or meditate?

M.L. - My painting is pure reflex. Painting is like watering flowers: Forget it once and the flower dies.

Markus Lüpertz, *Exekution*, 1992, oil on canvas, 118" x 167 ¼." Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne and New York.

D.B. - I see your work most closely related to Hegel's hard-to-understand abstract philosophy as he pursued an ultimate synthesis—the absolute idea. Do you approach such an idea in your painting* Rückenakt *(2006) or your sculpture* Athene *(2003), whereby you have semiotics couched within the classical?

M.L. - Classical Antiquity is our usual habitat. All our criteria, standards of measurement, notions of form are based on Classical Antiquity, and nothing has changed in this regard. Since there is nothing new in the fine arts, only new artists, the existence of these templates is a permanent challenge—and to this day we define what counts as quality according to these templates.

D.B. - A Nazi helmet, shovel, skeleton and nude figures regale* Ohne Titel *(2008). A blue sky or moon is revealed, with a lone figure walking off in the distance. A cut-out style profile of a person floats in the corner. I have read all I can about this painting, but no one appears to make an interpretation. There is a narrative taking place in this work that appears to be tragically beautiful. Could this beauty reflect the pursuit of* sehnsucht*, that is, deep emotional longing?

M.L. - Each image is a stage, and the mood it conveys is intentional, meaning your sensation is the artist's intention. Moreover, the attempt by contemporaries to try and explain images is pointless. And only in terms of how it is seen today can we perceive the enthusiasm for an image about faith. Faith is the most beautiful and purest form of addressing painting.

***D.B. - Could you expound upon how faith is the most beautiful and purest form of addressing painting? I understand the statement from a perspective of* sehnsucht*, as a thirst for something beyond ourselves, a faith of hope and desire that cannot be verbalized. Your statement, I feel, is too important to not unpack. Even the statement is its own form of beautiful* sehnsucht.**

M.L. - Faith, for me, is the only way to approach, to understand, the artworks of living paintings because grasping something disturbs the atmosphere and amounts to a caesura, for understanding always also means disenchanting. And painting is, after all, the mystery in the time in which it occurs.

D.B. - What is the art that has influenced you most?

M.L. - Let's differentiate first between art and painting. In today's day and age, the extended concept of art has no qualitative significance any longer. Meaning if we stick with painting, then at quite specific times quite specific painters fire my imagination and

Markus Lüpertz, *Nach Marées - Jongleur mit Rot,* 2002, oil on canvas, 78 ¾" x 63 ¾." Private collection. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne and New York.

Markus Lüpertz, *Rückenakt,* 2006, oil on canvas, 74 ¾" x 51 ¼." Essl Collection. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Galerie Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne and New York.

Markus Lüpertz, *Ohne Titel (Untitled)*, 2008, oil on canvas, 39 ¼" x 32." Galerie Michael Werner Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne, London and New York © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Image courtesy of The Phillips Collection.

Markus Lüpertz, *Der große Löffel (The Large Spoon),* 1982, oil on canvas, 78 ¾" x 130." Museum of Modern Art, New York, Anne and Sid Bass Fund and gift of Agnes Gund, 1986 © 2017 Markus Lüpertz / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Germany. © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. Image courtesy of The Phillips Collection.

influenced me. Moreover, I am in very close contact with contemporary painters, and the criticism of others or their influence on me takes place in this temporal context. That is legitimate. After all, don't we all want to be the person to paint that one big and important picture of the epoch? And the more people work on it, the better it is for painting. The greater the qualitative influence, the greater your own output.

D.B. - Would you share with us an anecdote from your youth that was instrumental in shaping you as an artist?

M.L. - I believe that the Lord decided that for me. I, at any rate, have no conscious memory of it, because as far back as I can recall I wanted to be a painter.

D.B. - You were the head of the Dusseldorf Art Academy for 25 years, one of the major art schools in the world. What is the most important question that you feel art students can ask of themselves?

M.L. - That is a question that as the head of a master class or professor I cannot answer, because I know nothing about youth. I only know myself and my generation and then as the head of the master class formulate offerings based on my own work. There is perhaps one question that people should ask when choosing to attend an academy: Whom do they wish to study under?

D.B. - You built so much of your work upon myth, the human figure and patterns of color forming a statement of respecting a historical past and morphing into a relevant present. Your later works appear to then take the present as a point of departure from the dualistic struggles and contradictions of life to a non-dualistic consciousness, arriving at a more contemplative self-observing space of observing beauty for what it appears to be, such as we see in your painting* Rückenakt *(2005). I see this arrival in your body of work relating to your transformation of objects such as tents, helmets, the human form, etc. We are then left with the beauty of the object minus the content, embracing paint as paint, color as pure emotion and form as being sensual. My observation leads me then to that of a mindful state in which judgments are doused and all that matters is the moment. Would this be a fair observation of your present works? Have you taken us to the end of aesthetic theory, leaving us to contemplate simplicity—even a Franciscan mindset?

M.L. - I find your beautiful explanation for my paintings quite fascinating. It is without doubt your explanation, and I like it, but I also hope that there are or will be other interpretations, too.

D.B. - At age 76, you have journeyed through your own forms of myths and metamorphosis. What is the next level of metamorphosis you can share with us?

M.L. - I am just as curious and fascinated to see what the future brings for me as are you, and I hope that we will both then be enthusiastic about what I achieve. ■

FROM ZERO TO NOW

An Interview with Heinz Mack

One of the co-founders of the influential ZERO group, Heinz Mack was already making avant-garde art when he and Otto Piene organized the first ZERO art show in 1957. Born in Germany in 1931, Mack attended the art academy in Düsseldorf in the 1950s and also earned a degree in philosophy from the University of Cologne. Reacting to the more expressive nature of Tachisme and Art Informel (the dominant abstract art movements in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s), the ZERO artists embraced the use of light and motion to engage new forms of perception, where science and technology took center stage.

Mack, Piene and Günther Uecker, who joined the group in 1960, produced publications and exhibitions that brought together like-minded artists making reductive art. The name ZERO, itself, referred to the countdown to the launch of a rocket, which was considered a means to reach a new place, a new beginning—a conceptual "ground zero." *ARTPULSE* contributor Paul Laster recently sat down with Mack at Sperone Westwater Gallery in New York and the AXA Art Lounge at TEFAF in Maastricht to discuss his fascinating art and life, which have become inseparable.

BY PAUL LASTER

Paul Laster - Having been born in Düsseldorf in 1931, what do you remember of the Second World War?

Heinz Mack - It's still a part of my life. At the end of the war I was 14 years old. I experienced the bombing of the city when 2,800 people were killed in one night and many more were wounded. I had a small Agfa camera and made some photos of the night sky lit with searchlights, and 20 years later I made a drawing that surprised me because it strangely resembled my photo from that night. The sky was lit up like fireworks. I had forgotten about how dangerous it was to be out because I was completely fascinated by this wonder-

Heinz Mack, ***Der Garten Eden [Chromatische Konstellation] (The Garden of Eden [Chromatic Constellation]),*** **2011**, acrylic on canvas, 143" x 236." All images are courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York.

Heinz Mack, *The Sky Over Nine Columns,* 2014. Sakip Sabanci Museum Istanbul, 2015, Private Collection. Courtesy Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art. Photo: Murat Germen. This installation is a project by the Ralph Dommermuth Foundation for Art and Culture, which is managed by Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art.

ful light. Light means a lot to me—to my life and to my art. In the right situation it can look immaterial. Color deserves to be as rich as possible in light, too, so that it can be its most radiant.

P.L. - What kind of art scene rose from the ashes after the war?

H.M. - There was a certain kind of emptiness, of poorness. We were totally poor in information. We didn't know what had happened in art during and even before the war. I was quite young when I entered the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1950. I was just 19 years old, but I was eager to learn. There were only two books in the library. Everything else had been burned or was gone. There was this emptiness, which was a big handicap on one side, while on the other side—by being completely alone—you had to find your own way. You had to discover what was inside yourself before you looked into books. The best artists—such as Paul Klee, who had taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf before the war—had been fired and fled or were sent to the concentration camps.

P.L. - What was your motivation for founding ZERO?

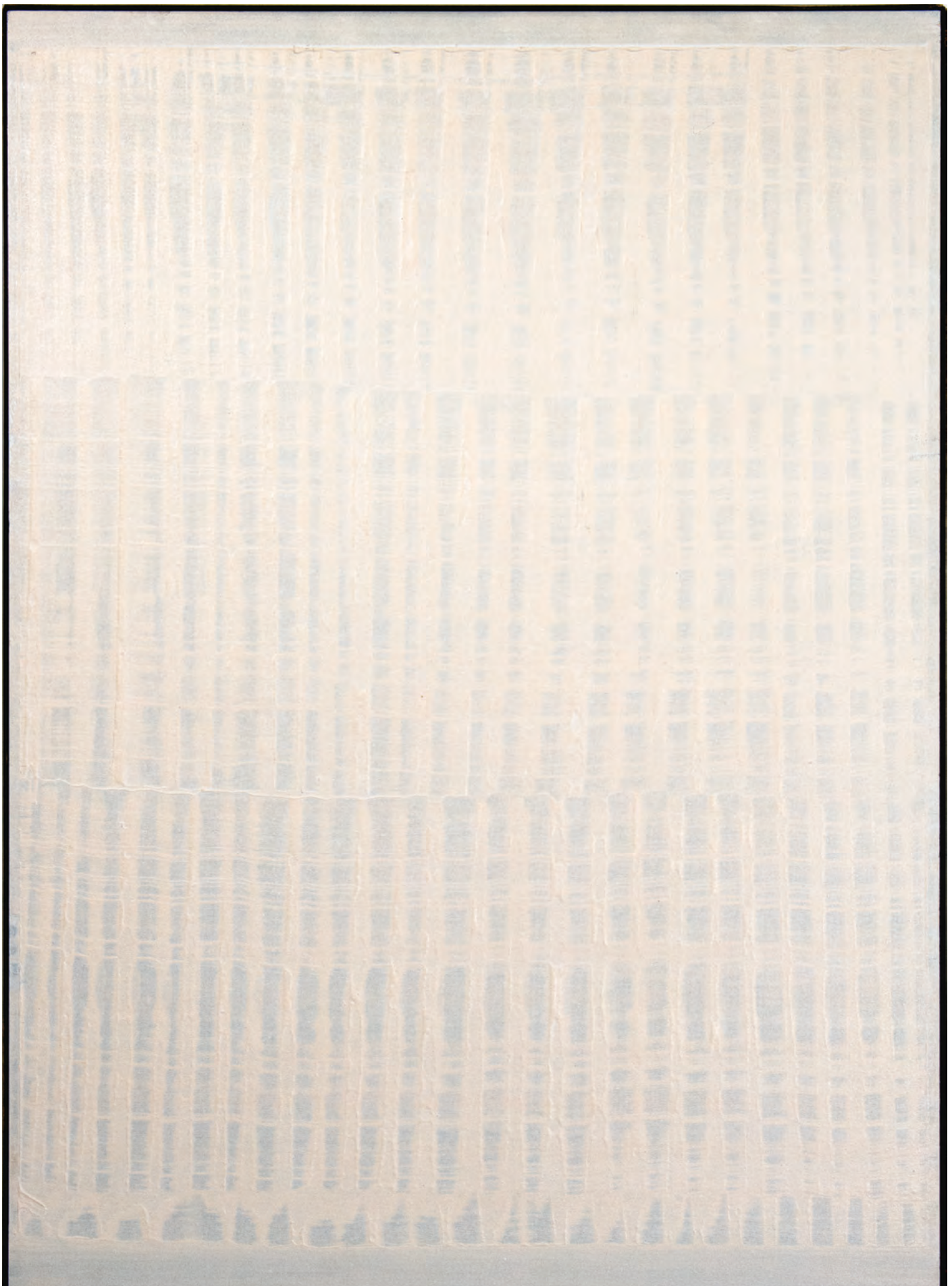
H.M. - We had been very influenced by the Ecole de Paris [School of Paris] and Art Informel. In 1957, I was painting like a wild beast and unexpectedly ran into a deep crisis. I stopped everything and tried to forget what I had learned. I wanted to start at the beginning as simple, as poor and as clean as possible. At the same time, man was starting to journey into outer space. It was an exciting time, a time of evolution. Artists from other countries embraced us. For instance, when I was in New York in the 1960s, I had serious discussions with Barnett Newman. In New York, they asked me what was happening in Europe, and in Europe, they wanted to know what was going on in New York. Information traveled very slowly, whereas now there is too much of it.

P.L. - Was there a manifesto for ZERO?

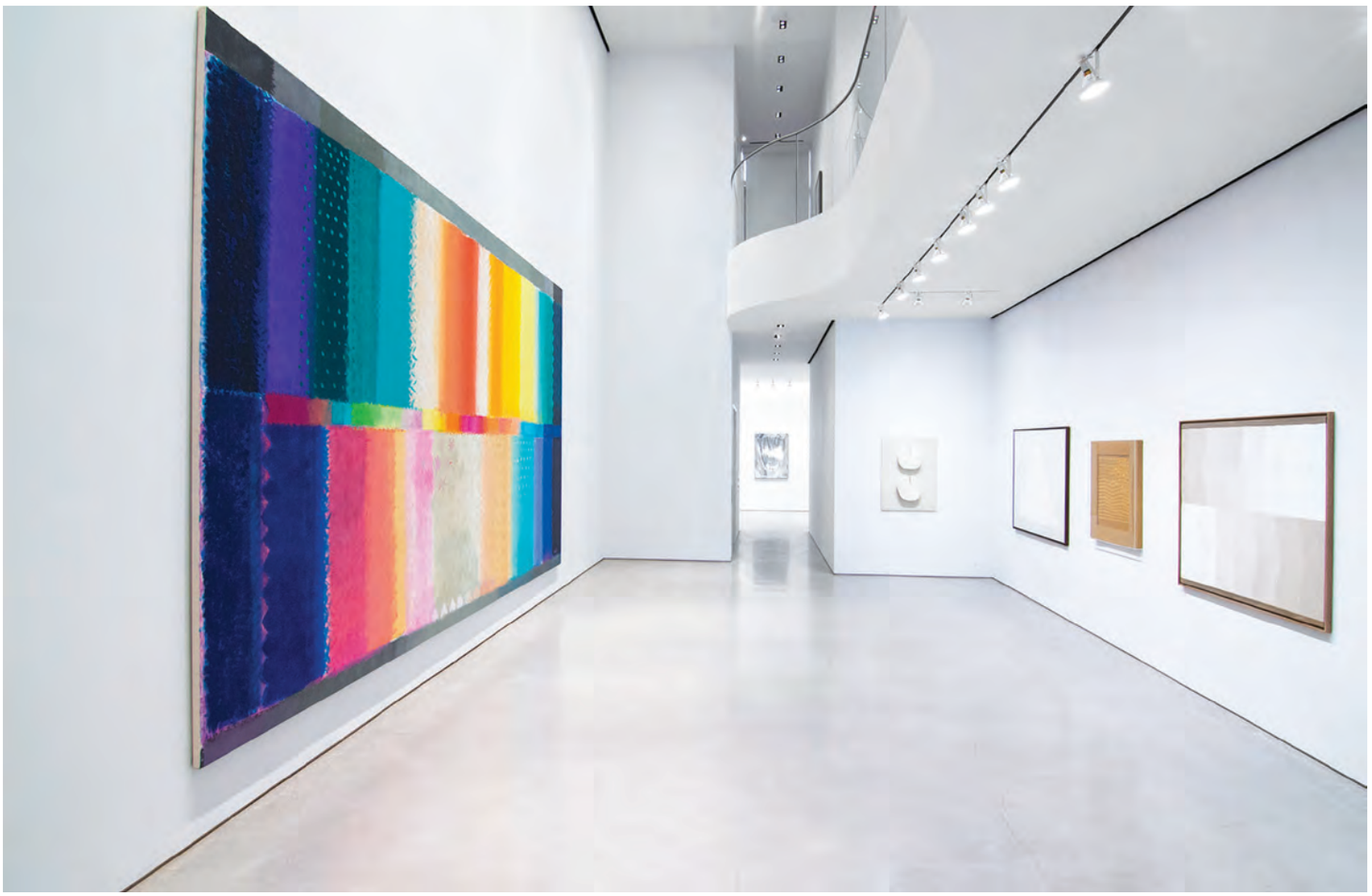
H.M. - Yes, there was a typewritten text. The title of the essay, or manifestation, was "The New Dynamic Structure." Structure means a lot to me because I personally decided to give up the idea of composition and the principle of three-dimensional perspective, which had ruled the art world for more than 600 years—starting with Giotto and ending up with the Cubism of Picasso, who radically destroyed the notion of composition. Picasso replaced the principle of composition with structure. All of the ZERO artists were concerned with structure. It was very important. It was the key. Now we have researchers studying nature with microscopes discovering that nature consists of structures, like fractals. And it goes along with music, such as the compositions of Philip Glass, Terry Riley and Steve Reich. I started with these ideas in 1958.

P.L. - How quickly did the movement grow?

H.M. - Somehow like an explosion. It was a kind of awakening. Before, we had all been alone, and we felt lonely. I was a lone wolf in my studio. No one was looking at me. Then all of a sudden other artists came up and said, "What you are doing is very exciting, because I am having similar ideas." It turned into a beautiful kind of friendship, with cooperation and discussion between artists, even older ones like Lucio Fontana—he could have been my father—while others like Jan Schoonhoven were quite young. Fontana said, "I feel as young as you are." Then in Japan, I met Jirô Yoshihara,



Heinz Mack, *Weisse Vibration [White Vibration],* 1958, synthetic resin on cardboard on wood, 55 ½" x 39 ¾."



Installation View: "Heinz Mack," February 17 to March 25, 2017, at Sperone Westwater, New York.

who was a kind of Japanese version of Fontana. He was one of the founders of the Gutai group. There was a spiritual relationship between our movements, which led to a lot of shows that were created under quite difficult conditions, without money.

P.L. - How did the lack of money impact you?

H.M. - When I made my film in the desert, our budget was ridiculous. We had to keep track of the number of bananas and oranges each member of the team received as food. There was no money. Film was very expensive. I'll never forget the time when the light was magnificent on my sculptures. There was a sunset and a kind of mirage. It was like a Fata Morgana [a mirage], and I cried to the cameraman, "Shoot, shoot, shoot," and he kept still and said that he didn't have any more film. There was nothing we could do. Compared to the American Land artists, who had the collector and art dealer Virginia Dwan supporting them, it was a struggle for me to do what I could do.

P.L. - Did you exhibit with the Land artists, or was that more of an American art scene?

H.M. - No, but there was a big show of Land art in Los Angeles at the Museum of Contemporary Art ["Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974"] a few years ago, and I was finally included. Through research it was determined that I had conceived my "Sahara Project" before the Americans, which makes me very proud.

P.L. - Did you ever make figurative work?

H.M. - At the academy, of course, but I didn't show it, and only one other time for a church. The church had been destroyed in the war and the priest was interested in modern art and asked me to do it. It was an exception to my other work, but I wanted to make a spiritual space—a space that had a certain sacred nature to it. I was uncertain if I could do it, but I was successful with it.

P.L. - What was the appeal of abstraction, which was the path you chose?

H.M. - It's an interesting question, but a very difficult one to answer. For the most part, my work has been non-figurative. Nevertheless, I sometimes feel that my work goes along with nature, but in the dimension of structures. Not far from where I live is a research center where scientists and professors study nature, and when I visited there I saw that my work was very similar to the structures they research. They don't have an explanation for it, but I'm impressed by their work, and mine impresses them. Leonardo da Vinci famously stated, "Study the science of art. Study the art of science."

P.L. - Do you think ZERO had an impact on Minimalism?

H.M. - Yes and no, because in the beginning we had the idea to make things as simple as possible—to reduce everything to its essence. From time to time, I'm a piano player and I used to always play with two hands. But then I had the idea to only play it with one finger and one toe—to forget whatever I had already learned. As soon as I realized that a number of artists were concentrated on Minimalism I refused to follow them, because I dislike dogma, and they had become dogmatic. Art is far too rich in ideas and fascination. I'm not just a mathematician who is solving problems. I like things that end up incorrect.

Heinz Mack, Sand-Relief, 1967, sand and pigment on masonite board, Plexiglas box, 39 ½" x 35 5/8" x 3."

P.L. - Do you think the minimalists were looking at what you guys were doing? We know that they were looking at the Russian avant-garde.

H.M. - The Russians had such a strong anticipation of what was to come, but even Kazimir Malevich with his Suprematist work was constructing compositions. It goes along with the old world of composition, but if you look at the last paintings of Piet Mondrian—paintings like *Broadway Boogie Woogie*—it's already a structure. Jackson Pollock was structure, too. He destroyed composition.

P.L. - What was the New York art world like when you lived here in the 1960s?

H.M. - It was a small world, which was dominated by Leo Castelli and Sidney Janis. Abstract Expressionism was still popular, but after my experience with World War II, I was against expressionism. The whole German art scene that followed—like Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer—was completely expressionistic. They forgot about the Bauhaus, which was another dimension of German art.

P.L. - Were you still painting when you were living in New York?

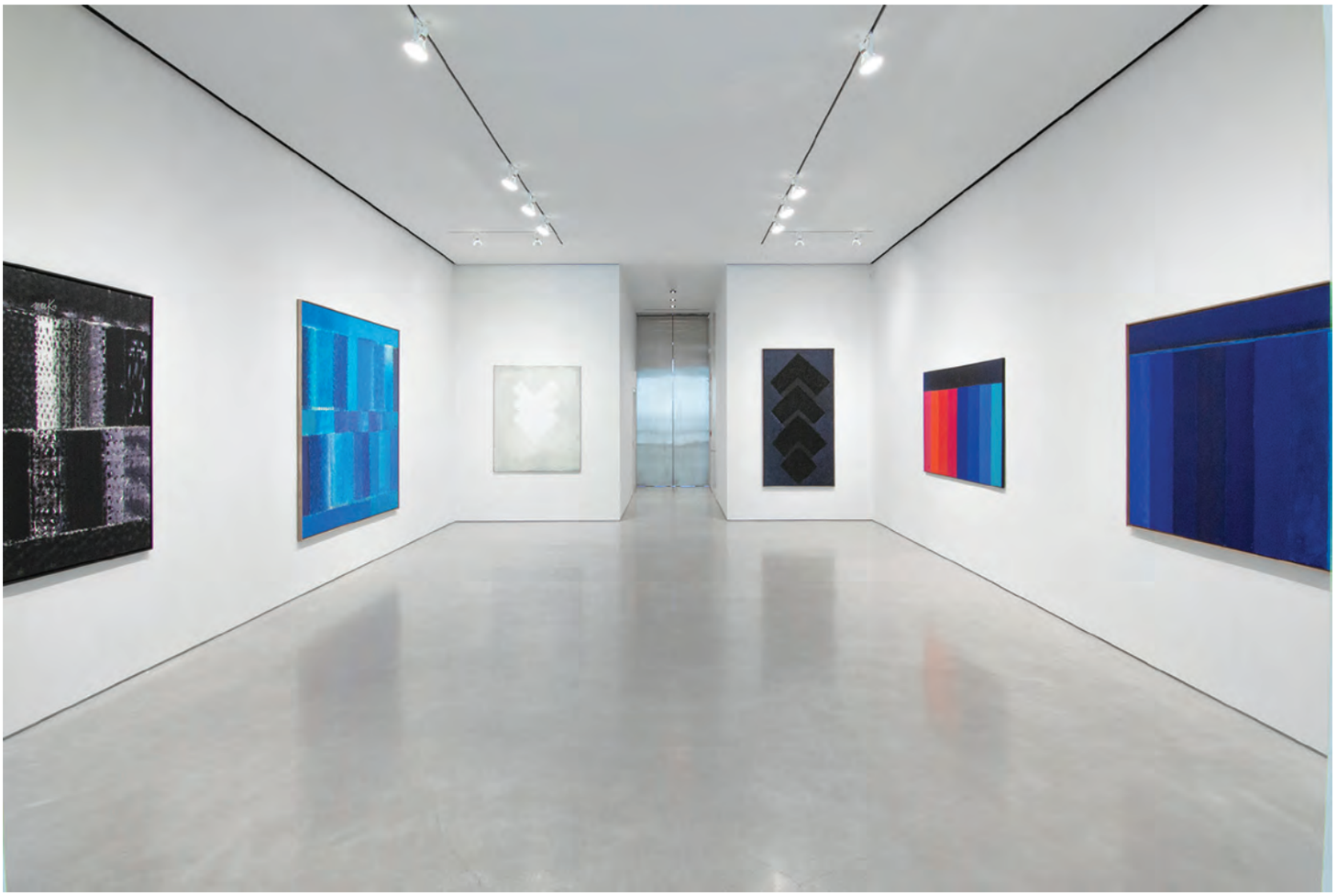
H.M. - No, I was making reliefs and sculptures, which were steles. I had a solo exhibition in 1966 at the Howard Wise Gallery with my steles, which were somewhat of a reflection on Manhattan, with its skyscrapers. It was a very important show for me, and some of the pieces were moving. Wise was the only one involved with kinetic art at the time.

P.L. - Why had you stopped painting?

H.M. - That's an interesting question. After 10 years of making paintings during my ZERO time, I felt that this ZERO idea should not become an institution, because each artist needed to pursue his own work. We had to follow our own ideas, which didn't always relate to those of the other members of the group. In the end, I hated the idea of being part of a group, and together with Uecker—he was on my side—we spontaneously told Piene that we had done what we could do over the past 10 years and that we should stop it. We didn't want to become a family with relatives.

P.L. - Like The Beatles…

H.M. - Exactly, and Piene felt just the opposite. He told us ZERO



Installation View: "Heinz Mack," February 17 to March 25, 2017, at Sperone Westwater, New York.

would stay forever. Even when he became 90 years old—and up until he died—he was still proclaiming ZERO never stopped. But it had stopped in 1967 and my new work started.

P.L. - When did you start using industrial materials?

H.M. - That was very early on. I always used traditional tools that had been used for centuries. That was one point of view, and at the same time the world was starting to become more technological. It was the time when man started to go to the moon. I happened to discover a new material in a shop on the Bowery in New York. This new material was honeycomb aluminum, which is an American product that's used in the aerospace industry. I was interested in this material for its relationship to Goethe's botanical work and morphological nets in nature.

P.L.- Thinking about man going to the moon makes me want to ask what took you to the desert.

H.M. - I had this desire to discover something that had never been seen by anyone else. It was also a question that took control of my heart and my brain: How can I discover a new space? The space that was in museums or galleries was not the space that I was dreaming of, that I was longing for. I wanted to find a new space, because I wanted to experience and discover how a new kind of space would envelop my sculptures. How would that space react to my sculptures? Is there an interaction between my sculptures and the space? This endless space, this enormous dimension without any borders and without any civilization or any fingerprint of civilization—I was seeking a very pure, untouched landscape. If I put a piece of mine in this space, in this landscape, what would happen? This was a big matter of researching and experiment and adventures. Whatever you do in the desert, the light around it has such intensity. Sculptures get a new dimension from this light. The proportions and dimension of the sculptures cannot be estimated and controlled by meters anymore, and without any meter measurement the work becomes more immaterial. This condition of light and space were tested in my first experiments in the desert. It was very fascinating.

I was the first European artist to get involved with Land art. All of these experiments and expeditions to a very strange world—without any kind of tourism—were unknown in those days. It was a big adventure, which made me realize that my sculptures appeared in this landscape like instruments of light. They became immaterial and at the same time luminous through their materiality. In a religious sense, it was a kind of epiphany. There was an explosion of light.

P.L. - Are those the ideas that you are still exploring with* The Sky Over Nine Columns*, the monumental sculpture that you have exhibited in Venice, Istanbul and St. Moritz over the past few years?

H.M. - It's still belonging to this area and, of course, I would like to have it in the desert instead of spaces in Europe, but that means a lot of money. It was in Spain before it was shipped to Switzerland, which meant $300,000 to $400,000 just for shipping. The same thing happened to Christo, who spent his own money on his projects, but now he's given up. I think that was the right decision. Now everything is spoiled by tourism, which is another reason why it's difficult. There's almost no space left for the arts—wherever you go it's just tourists, tourists, tourists! ■

THE SHADOW OF HISTORY AND THE SIMULACRUM IN THE ART OF ANDREAS ANGELIDAKIS

"Do we even need architecture anymore?"
Andreas Angelidakis

BY ALEXANDRIA PIERCE

Andreas Angelidakis's body of work, inspired by the city of Athens, continues to signify the shadow of history and the simulacrum in works like *Vessel* (2016), which is both a sculpture and an animated video. Humorously, it features a *pithos*, a large clay storage pot sometimes used for human burial, adapted as a shelter by Diogenes, a Cynic philosopher, c. 404-323 B.C.E. (Diogenes, unbathed and unshaven, dispersed an ongoing diatribe from his home in the pot.) Heralding a turn to philosophy, Angelidakis' recent projects in Athens and further afield include *Socratis Socratous/Plánetes* at Pafos 2017 at the European Capital of Culture, which runs through February 2017. However, in order to analyze Angelidakis' intellection over time, this essay focuses on certain works in his retrospective "Every End is a Beginning," curated by Daphne Vitali and Angelidakis himself. The exhibition took place at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, from May 5 to July 13, 2014. Theorized here are "non-places" and "flows." "Non-places" are defined by British philosopher Peter Osborne as a "recoding of the museum/gallery space as the location of an essentially abstract cognitive experience."[1] "Flows" are defined as virtual sites, digital images and defunct social media sites.

Of significance, Angelidakis, born in Athens in 1968, is described variously as an artist, an architect, a blogger and a designer of spaces virtual and real. Angelidakis uses the exhibition space as a medium to ask questions and think about the personality of Athens through his works, which he refers to as "Trojan Horses," "to convey ideas from the Internet and history to the here and now."[2] For Angelidakis, Athens was becoming a non-site where banking, currency and markets would short-circuit. In *Study for Crash Pad* (2014), a plasticized pastiche of Doric columns surmounts an historical print of the Acropolis and surrounding area. Thrusting through it is a mall mannequin hand (found online by the artist) holding a vase, suggestive of the culture of tourism in Athens. The clandestine hand references the outstretched palm that makes an offer from the shadows, somehow gauged to be inappropriate or even politically dangerous. Does it refer to the gift by Alexander Iolas of his collection to the Greek state? Is it a critique of the unpayable debts Greece has incurred?

On his blog, Angelidakis ironically proposed that the Parthenon be sold to the Saudis to provide an influx of cash to Greece. As a replacement, there is his simulacrum *Bone Domino* (2014), a three-dimensional print that resembles a Doric temple made from turkey bones with a wishbone on the roof to simulate the cornice of the Parthenon. This may be a sly comment on the theory proposed by George Hersey and Sharon Kivland that the architectural order of Greek temple architecture simulates early pagan practices of hanging the bones, horns, teeth, eyes and entrails of sacrificial animals in trees. Thus, the columns are reminiscent of tree trunks, and other elements of the classical order may be conjectured.[3]

While Hegel held that a sign "is an image that stands for its recollections," stimulating the imagination as "the first reflexive movement of consciousness,"[4] the Parthenon is a symbol of great achievement in architecture, the founding of democracy and the lasting contribution of Greek philosophy. In this light, as Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "The ironic to the first power lies in the erection of a kind of epistemology that annihilates itself."[5] Ergo, Angelidakis deployed irony to make the National Museum of Contemporary Art appear to be already closed before its intended move to its purported new home, the former Fix Brewery. To achieve this, he draped the wide stairwell leading down to the cavernous galleries with scaffolding and orange construction netting. Here a connection can be made to Slavoj Žižek's talk *On Architecture and Aesthetics* (2010), in which Žižek spoke of how being seen at an elite event walking down a stairwell creates "surplus pleasure."[6] The "surplus pleasure" of being seen or seeing others on the staircase perhaps was operative at the opening reception, but in the absence of a crowd, the sound from the videos playing simultaneously in proximity to Angelidakis' self-directed retrospective was sinister, like waltzing with the shades.[7] Was the exhibition space a metaphorical underworld? Footsteps echoed in its vastness, but visitors and museum guards remained unseen. The sound of the footsteps seemed to be coming from the avatars populating the artist's digital works.

Do the avatars represent the artist as he moves virtually through the spaces he designs, or are the avatars objects of desire inhabiting the digital realm? In one immense, shadowy chamber, a number of tall, narrow, topless, sepulchral forms (*System of Objects*, 2013) spoke of internment and airlessness.[8] Hypothetically, in the context of the museum closing, these structures could stand for emptied museum storage vaults. The theme of abandonment continued in the broken-down museum bathrooms.

Uncannily, when Žižek spoke about toilets in his 2010 talk *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, relating the differing ways that French, Anglo-Saxon/American and German toilet bowls function, it now resonates

Andreas Angelidakis, *Study for Crash Pad,* 2013, digital collage. All images courtesy of the artist.

with the defunct bathrooms in the National Museum of Contemporary Art and the tanked Athens economy. In fact, Žižek's statement that signs of imperfection in architecture are erotic correlates with Angelidakis' oeuvre. How? Just as Žižek found the ruins of the Parthenon, viewed through the glass walls of the New Museum of the Acropolis, to be erotic (after all, Zeno, founder of Stoicism, thought Eros stood by to protect Athens),[9] Angelidakis' many ruins evoke pleasure through their suggestiveness of scandals, secrets and erotic liaisons.

Let us follow this thread. For Žižek "Much more is at stake in architecture since it materializes public ideology (the obscene secret)."[10] In Angelidakis' video and installation entitled *Iolas*—a funereal space adjacent to the gallery of crypts—golden drapery and gold-covered armchairs framed archival film footage of the elegant Alexander Iolas as he moves dreamily through his villa.

The eerie filmic presence of the famous Iolas, an international art dealer and collector of art and antiquities, is overlaid with collages of nature and the text "then came the scandal." The "scandal," according to collector and philanthropist Dakis Joannou, who knew Iolas well, was that certain of Iolas's treasures were caught in the time warp between the days when objects moved freely across borders (for example, most of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and the institution of regulations on provenance and the movement of antiquities.[11] Žižek asks, "What truths do buildings articulate?"[12] Angelidakis' video resurrects Iolas' villa, designed and built by the Greek architect Dimitris Pikionis, along with artist Yannis Tsarouchis, as a purloined site. The artist populates it with specters of thieves and a disembodied mannequin arm that removes the treasures. The then Minister for Culture, Melina

Andreas Angelidakis, *Bone Domino,* 2014, 3-D print.

Mercouri, purportedly took offense to Iolas' summation that Greek contemporary culture was "vulgar" and simply ignored Iolas' offer of his collection to the Greek state.[13]

On another screen, Angelidakis animates Iolas' phonebook, found in the Egyptian-born Greek's ruined villa. The pages reveal names, telephone numbers and addresses of Iolas' contacts interspersed with views of the ruined villa, intimating a clue in the search to reveal "the scandal." The animated phone book adds to the mystery of why the Greek state refused to accept Iolas' offer to donate his villa and collection. Was some of the art, like that which Iolas collected in the 1950s and the 1960s, unappreciated by the Philistines who ignored it? Was there a villainous plot afoot? Angelidakis' video seems to reconstruct a crime scene. Mercouri's publicized efforts during the 1980s to have the Parthenon marbles returned to Greece from the British Museum are well known. Angelidakis hints that other treasures were being taken away from Greece under her very nose. Are Angelidakis' avatars simulacrums of Iolas' shadow lovers, or are they tomb robbers? All the rumors are true, in a certain sense, according to Adrian Dannatt, the major contributor to the 2014 catalogue *Iolas*, prepared for the exhibition "Alexander the Great: The Iolas Gallery 1955-1987."

As in the Iolas video, in Angelidakis' digital world, male avatars, whose form appears to resemble that of the artist, walk up and down stairs into disjointed conduits that lead to spaces that are non-places, such as a length of tunnel thrown up on stilts or *pilotis*, void of function. Angelidakis suggests that the ruins he creates are fragments inherited from economic and political chaos and loss of belief in the idea of buildings to preserve the present or envision the future. He points out that the Fix Brewery, designed by Greek architect Takis Zenetos in the late 1950s, built in 1960 and bankrupted in the early 1990s, became the property of the Greek state. In 1994, the property was transferred to "Attiko Metro," and almost half of the building was demolished to make way for a parking lot and ticket booths.

The remaining truncated structure, listed as a heritage site, is the new home of the National Museum of Contemporary Art, even if in 2014 the possibilities to reopen the museum at its new headquarter were at some unconfirmed point in the future.[14] The whimsical cover of his self-designed catalogue for "Every End is a Beginning" features *Fix* (2014), a simulacrum of the Fix Brewery, created with three-dimensional modeling technology. It has the appearance of a salt-encrusted toy barge, perhaps hinting that the sea will embrace it before it ever houses exhibitions again. Furthermore, on the back cover, the artist has written a text in his own handwriting supporting the idea that "Architects who aim at employing themselves with

Andreas Angelidakis. *Cloud House,* 2003, digital collage.

their hands without the aid of writing will never be able to achieve authority equal to their labours."[15] Angelidakis ponders: "The real building is in the architect's mind. The constructed building is a simulation of the architect's idea. Architecture treats reality as a space of simulation, a video game. The authentic building exists only in the architect's mind."[16]

Supporting Angelidakis' thesis, Peter Osborne argues that since technology allows communication without the need to be physically present in a place, the place loses significance as a source of social meaning and becomes a "non-place."[17] An exhibition of video works by Bill Viola was to follow Angelidakis' retrospective at the museum. The irony is that Viola's videos speak of a spiritual realm, a life after death, a morphing from one state to another. However, in 2014 the museum was closed, and the possibility of its resurrection or afterlife was uncertain. Osborne contemplates "post-architectural urbanism," calling it "a qualitatively new spatial form"[18] that corresponds to both Deleuze's concept of "any space whatever," implying disconnection and emptiness, and to the types of non-places Angelidakis has constructed both virtually and as 3-D models. A fantastical example is *Cloud House* (2014), a 3-D print and model for a vacation home based on the shape of a cloud found on the Internet, "but the idea comes from growing up in the Greek summer landscape of semi-abandoned and unfinished haphazardly constructed concrete domino frames on pilotis," Angeldakis recounts on his blog.[19] In *Hand House* (2014), another 3-D print, the ubiquitous mall mannequin arm juts out of the structure, holding in its palm a flat-topped, open-aired pavilion peopled by avatars. *Hand House* resonates with the second-century A.D. scholar Festus' concept, cited by Indra Kagis McEwen, of a *summum templum* as "the place from which one contemplates" or views on all sides and which, in turn, being prominent, is visible from all sides."[20]

Today, this form of contemplation takes place on the Internet. In a different context, Valérie Gonzalez theorizes that "the Greek word for sensation '*aesthesis*' (the root of "aesthetic") suggests aesthetic qualities are those that we appreciate in perception: the sensory, structural, and spatial ones." The effect of this, she writes, stimulates "the cognitive power of imagination."[21] Imagination is engaged, according to Žižek, when there is a secret that cannot be discussed openly. However, it is revealed in architecture built at the time. For Žižek, architecture explains the situation of the people. Therefore, Angelidakis' non-functional structures signify non-places and the flows that render architecture virtual have importance. Consider *Building an Electronic Ruin* (2011), a video animation created by Angelidakis on a program called

Andreas Angelidakis, *Hand House*, 2009.

Second Life. It exemplifies that while an electronic building may erode digitally, or become lost in time like the disused social sites Friendster and Myspace,[22] it can hold an erotic charge, perhaps hinting at digital congress. Angelidakis screened *Building an Electronic Ruin* high on the wall of a dimly lit gallery with mattress-like forms heaped up on the floor and against the walls as part of the installation *Crash Pad* (2014), itself a reference to the migrants seeking shelter as they flood into Greece.

The adjacent gallery housed another component of *Crash Pad*, featuring a space of truncated white columns, carpets and textiles covering or draping all surfaces. Greece's bankruptcy in the late 19th century, repeated in the 1960s and again in the early 21st century, is framed by *Crash Pad*. Angelidakis explains that it is "based a little more on the taboo capacity of the Greek State, which never shook off its Ottoman identity, and remains to this day a European Union member state under examination."[23]

From his orchestration of a body of innovative and critical art, it is observable that Angelidakis as curator retains the artist's aura in the way that Boris Groys proposes that, "The museum exhibition can be made into a place of openness, of disclosure, of unconcealment precisely because it situates inside its finite space, contextualizes and curates images and objects that also circulate in the outside space; and in this way, it opens itself to its outside."[24]

Apropos to this statement is Angelidakis' video *Domesticated Mountain* (2012). It depicts a virtual house created by Angelidakis out of cardboard delivery boxes from Internet purchases, commenting on how suburban housing, situated around transportation corridors and fueled by shopping, rages on the Internet. Of course, as Angelidakis puts it on his blog, *Domesticated Mountain* becomes a ruin, swiped by the hand of a mall mannequin that moves across the keyboard. The artist revisits the idea that functional buildings are not necessary in a virtual world, where it is possible to order the world from a screen or flow. Indeed, animation creates its own world, as evidenced in *Troll,* a social housing block known as Hara and designed after Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation*, built architects Spanos and Papailiopoulos in 1960.[25] Angelidakis animates the ruination of this apartment block into a mountain, overcome by plants and trees, that lumbers out of Athens, accompanied by a powerful soundtrack like that of a Cyclops in pursuit. Art historian and the exhibition curator Daphne Vitali asks, "What roles can virtual and actual architecture play today?"[26]

In response, Angelidakis stated that nostalgia is of interest to him "as a psychological dimension that…mixes up moments in time into a new, non-chronologically organized landscape."[27] For Žižek, it is a large city (like Athens) that is most sustainable, while exemplifying the split between ancient history and subsequent building.

Andreas Angelidakis, *Monument to an Oncoming Disaster,* 2009.

Angelidakis created many models that are open, transparent and already ruins since they are non-functional. Žižek's talk began with the idea that, "The safest way to ruin a work of art is to complete it." For Žižek, "empty spaces with no function can be used as a space of freedom, imagination and struggle."[28]

For Angelidakis, "Ruins are alive." They can run away from the city. In this there is a warning. Angelidakis' animated video *Casinoruin* (2014), narrates how a state-funded hotel supported by the Marshall Plan failed, since it was only shored up by Cold War politics.[29] It bankrupted, was saved and then became a casino that also failed. He asks, "Was it an accident that a building meant to promote the Greek economy, came to illustrate its failure…a networked ruin…a billboard for the Greek economy [over time]?"[30] The gap between the self and the constructed self that Žižek refers to echoes the reality of contemporary Athens. When Žižek changed the architectural adage "less is more" to "less for more," the innuendo could be to how cheap, hastily built housing in Athens is now part of the body of the city. Elsewhere, Angelidakis is critical of the now abandoned mega-expensive Olympic Sports Complex built at a cost of approximately 9 billion euros for the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens.[31] Glorious as it was, Athenians were burdened with a debt so great there was no funding to develop the facilities for re-use. It has fallen into ruin and is overgrown with weeds.

In conclusion, "Every End is a Beginning" created a conversation about political, economic and architectural history in Athens over time, simulated by the idea of the commons. The artist says, "If all those who have come to live in Athens cease to be termed immigrants and we call them Athenians, the psychology of the city will change radically. Athens, with all of its negatives, has become a city completely distinct from the others in Europe, and all it needs to do is embrace its personality."[32]

Angelidakis points out that Greece, like the rest of the world, has an uncertain future. In retrospect, Angelidakis' *Monument to an Oncoming Disaster* (2010) can be read visually as an ATM about to be overwhelmed by the tsunami of the 2015 Greek financial crash. Virtually, the disembodied hand that strokes the keyboard, dreams and desires and conjures the technological world as an experience has much to do with the curatorial hand of Angelidakis and his realized desire to "design exhibitions as experiences."[33] The installations, the video animations with their strident soundtracks and dubbed text, the three-dimensional prints and the mixed-media sculptures formulate a coherent Stoical statement, unflinching no matter what. "Every End is a Beginning" references a maze of dead ends in Athens and, by extension, in the contemporary world. Sumptuous architecture and substandard buildings end in ruins, and the ruins themselves become rendered in three-dimensional prints and animated videos. The artist's rhetorical question, "Do we

Andreas Angelidakis, *Vessel*, 2016, 3D print. Installation view at the Liverpool Biennial.

Andreas Angelidakis, *Vessel*, 2016, models.

Andreas Angelidakis, *Vessel*, 2016, animated video, still.

even need architecture today?" extends to the argument that young artists do not need museums or galleries today since their work is in the clouds of the digital realm, (finally godly?). Angelidakis's work is coherent, smart, funny, ironic, sinister and highly informative epistemologically as a plane of immanence to extrapolate the archaeology (in a Foucauldian sense) of Athens over time. In his evolving animations and Internet works (flows) and in his 3D print architectural models (non-places), Angelidakis continues to forge new beginnings imbued with the critical humor of Diogenes. ■

NOTES

1. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013, p. 112.
2. Andreas Angelidakis and Daphne Vitali, "A Conversation on the occasion of the exhibition 'Every End is a Beginning'," *Andreas Angelidakis: Every End is a Beginning*. Athens: National Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014, p. 27.
3. George Hersey and Sharon Kivland, *George Hersey & Sharon Kivland, Spring Hurlbut: Sacrificial Ornament.* Lethbridge, Alberta: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1991.
4. Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2004, p. 56.
5. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates, together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures*. Edited and translated with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 59.
6. Slavoj Žižek, *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI (accessed December 11, 2014).
7. In a June 16, 2014, interview with Alexandria Pierce, art collector and museum patron Dakis Joannou observed that, "Greece is always associated with its mythology, so why not embrace it?"
8. These were first displayed as unique structures in *The System of Objects: The Dakis Joannou Collection Reloaded by Andreas Angelidakis.* Nea Ionia, Athens: Deste Foundation, 2013.
9. Slavoj Žižek, *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI (accessed December 11, 2014). Based on Žižek's story of a man at a restaurant requesting "a bed for two," in his sexual anxiety, perhaps Žižek, in his own anxiety, was referring to the view of the houses and flats (perhaps "love nests") at the bottom of the Acropolis.
10. Slavoj Žižek, *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI (accessed December 11, 2014).
11. Interview with Dakis Jouannou, Athens, Greece, June 16, 2014.
12. Slavoj Žižek, *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI (accessed December 11, 2014).
13. Interview with Dakis Jouannou, June 16, 2014.
14. Neli Koutsandrea, Urban Frame no 1: The "amputated" Fix brewery and the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Athens,<http://athensinapoem.com/2014/07/13/urban-frame-no1-the-amputated-fix-brewery-and-the-national-museum-of-contemporary-art-of-athens/> (accessed November 28, 2014).
15. Indra Kagis McEwen, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architeture.* Cambridge, MA, and London, England, The MIT Press, 2003, p. 33.
16. Daphne Vitali, editor, in collaboration with Andreas Angelidakis, *Andreas Angelidakis: Every End is a Beginning*. Athens, Greece: National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), 2014.
17. Osborne, pp. 134-136.
18. Osborne, pp. 133-141.
19. See, http://www.angelidakis.com/_PAGES/CloudHouse.htm (accessed January January 23, 2017)
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26. Vitali, 25.
27. Angelidakis and Vitali, p. 19.
28. Žižek, *On Architecture and Aesthetics*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI (accessed December 11, 2014).
29. Casinoruin is an abbreviated online version of *Casino/Networked Ruin*, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBFX-bWb5ws (accessed December 14, 2014).
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33. Angelidakis and Vitali, p. 29.

Derek G. Larson, *installation view of "Psychic Phones,"* 2016, ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA. Courtesy of the artist.

IN DEFENSE OF MENACING CONTENT

A Conversation with Derek G. Larson

On first glance, the saccharine pop imagery, neon colors and DIY aesthetic of Derek Larson's mixed-media works seem one more contribution to our instant culture. (The giant, freestanding screen with projected animation that he constructed for the PRAVA festival in Washington, D.C., in 2015, for example, became a crowd favorite as a selfie backdrop.) But that superficial reading glosses over the considered mash-up of contemporary and historical references that Larson engages to address issues of wealth, youth and time and his careful compositional sensibility that reaches back equally to everything from mid-century modernism to dated video-game imagery.

Larson received his MFA from the Yale School of Art and is currently working in Statesboro, Ga. He was a finalist for the Hudgens Prize in 2014 and teaches in the summer program at Virginia Commonwealth University. The artist has an upcoming residency at the Arteles Creative Residency Program in Finland and is represented by the ADA Gallery in Richmond.

BY KRISTINA OLSON

Derek G. Larson, *Fabergé Egg,* 2013/16, acrylic, black light, metal, fabric, wood panel. Courtesy of the artist.

Kristina Olson — You've stated that you are 'interested in making original objects with infinitely reproducible media.' This sounds like a compelling contradiction. Can you begin by discussing this relationship between your projected animations that incorporate appropriated material and the individually crafted, sculptural screens in such works as* The Forbes 400 *or* The Soros & Dalio*, both from 2015?

Derek Larson – About five years ago I started making large metal screens for shaped/projected animations. They're freestanding GIF sculptures, and I think their contradictory nature is about some gap or in-between state. As for the appropriative aspect, I'm looking at periods in history, film and TV. The Western canon in art and literature is problematic because it ranks culture, or decides what's important and what isn't. By appropriating images and stories, we can retell them to make new ones. What would a new canon look like? Some artists already address this, like Jon Rafman and Bunny Rogers. But, the two pieces you mentioned are mostly about economy and speed. Their titles reference the 2008 banking crisis, and *The Soros & Dalio* is about hedge funds that have eyes and creepily rub their hands together in a loop.

K.O. — That's a powerful and disturbing image. Even though you work in multiple media (sculpture, video, appropriated objects, lights, sound, etc.) you seem to approach everything with a painter's sensibility. Is that a fair characterization, and what were your foundational experiences that fostered that sensibility?

D.L. — Yes, I was a painter until I met Jessica Stockholder at Yale Norfolk. Her critiques are very idiosyncratic and an art form in itself. I connected with her approach to sculpture and later got my MFA at Yale working in video and installation. I still think like a painter even though most of what I make isn't necessarily painting. -

K.O. — And now you are making music, too, under the pseudonym 'Sherbet Marcuse.' You've said that this is a less serious outlet separate from your artistic practice. Have you considered integrating the two?

D.L. — Yes, but it hasn't happened yet. Making music in the studio can free up any mental blocks, and Sherbet Marcuse is a project that uses lyrics written by Dolly Parton, allowing me to make music faster. The name 'Sherbet Marcuse' is an obvious reference to Herbert Marcuse and specifically his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) about capitalism and the working class (also related to Dolly Parton's lyrics.) She wrote beautifully direct tragedies similar to Marcuse's virtues of negative thinking.

K.O. – That description to your approach to making music seems so aligned with your visual work where you make these formal and conceptual comparisons across periods and discourses, eliding any hierarchical distinction. Lately, you've been doing your own research into the psychology of color and have even produced a self-published book analyzing your preliminary results.[1] How does that research inform your work?

D.L. — This project is a year old and is definitely in the back of my mind when I'm in the studio. *Composition, Color & Interactivity* is a study in eye-tracking, color interaction and emotion-correlated design. This winter, I'll work on a long-form publication in Finland, looking for Scandinavian and Russian design archives, and then later I'll visit the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation archives in the spring.

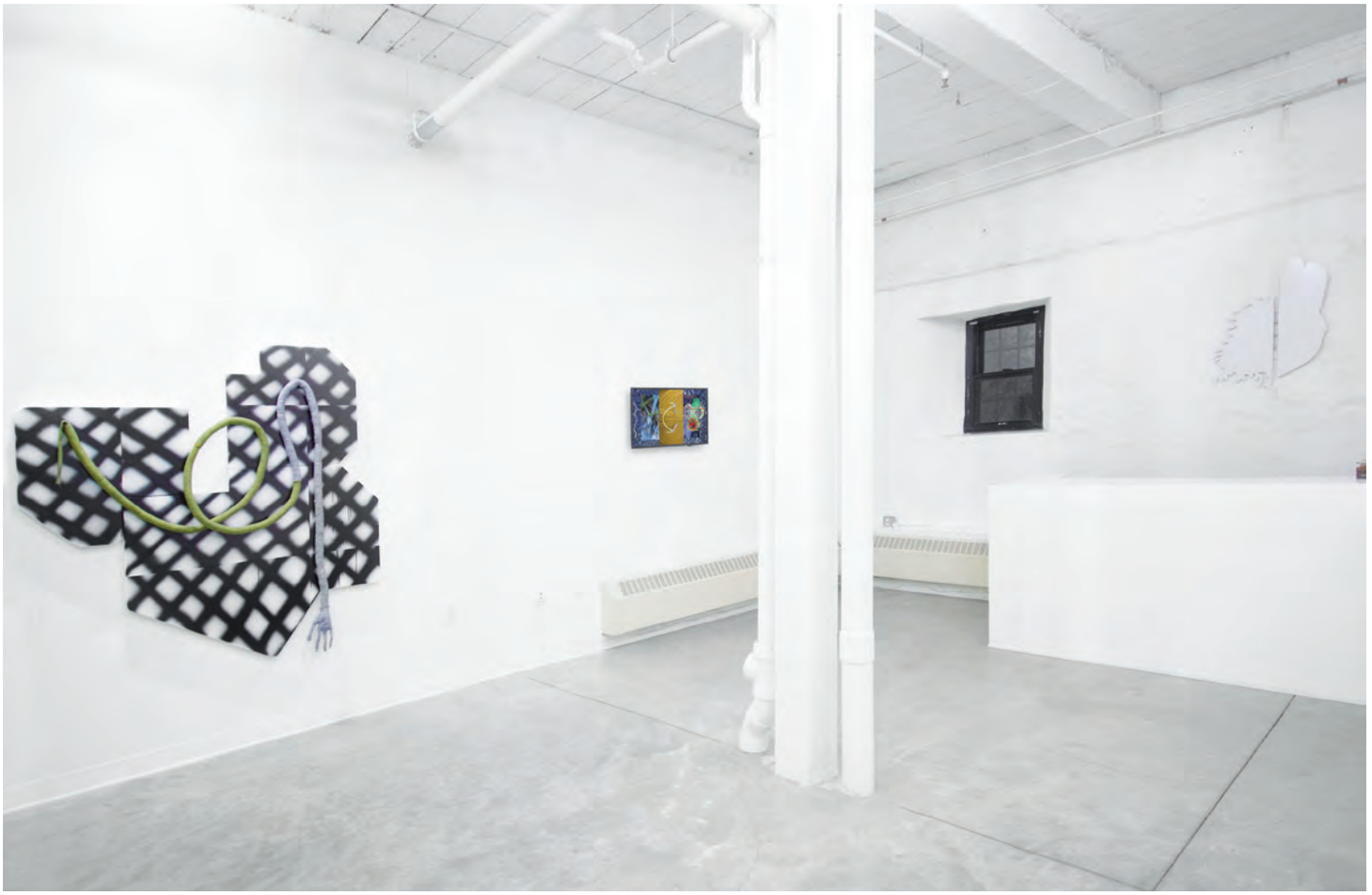
K.O. – What about the formal rigor in your work? On first glance, pieces look very contemporary, with glimpses of video games and screen savers, but you are also candid about your interest in the color theory of a high modernist like Josef Albers or mid-century Color Field painter Morris Louis. Your exhibit "Saf Aleph" (2015)

Derek G. Larson, *Wormwood Tea at exhibition "Saf Aleph,"* 2014, Mulherin + Pollard, New York, NY. Courtesy of the artist.

borrowed the title from a Louis painting and alludes to his poured veils of thinned paint throughout.

D.L. — I'm not a formalist, but the languages of modernism, math and utopia are perfect for analytical thinking. I'm a huge fan of Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler, and they marked a radical time approaching painting as directly as they could. By removing brushes, hands and expression they opened an opportunity for conceptual art.

K.O. – Let's turn from these more formal elements of your work to the conceptual. In the catalogue essay for her recent exhibition "Forever Now" at the Museum of Modern Art, curator Laura Hoptman made the case that artists like Charline von Heyl, Laura Owens and Michael Williams are making atemporal paintings in the age of the Internet. Like you, these artists borrow from a range of sources, including art history and pop culture. She says their work is paradoxical because even though it may contain elements of his-



Derek G. Larson and Marc Mitchell, *installation view of "Nothing Ritually,"* 2016, GRIN Contemporary, Providence, RI. Courtesy of the artists.

tory, it isn't historical; it is innovative but not novel. Do you feel like you're working in this atemporal vein?

D.L. — Somewhat, but I think the "Forever Now" show was more historical than anything. A few of those paintings looked like they could have been from the original 1958 show. Laura Owens' paintings were very good and met the challenge in the essay, and there are many artists making similarly relevant work, like Dora Budor, Hito Steyerl, Anicka Yi, etc.

K.O. – A number of critics are addressing the culture of cuteness that is so pervasive in the art world right now.[2] Your work moves from the advanced psychological and philosophical material with which you are engaged (like the title of your recent exhibit at West Virginia University, "Ever-Pre-Given," taken from a 1971 essay by Louis Althusser and* Étienne *Balibar) to these cute, banal pop motifs, such as the repeated smiley faces in* Summer of Hate*, 2015. Is this a reflection of your 'atemporal' grazing?

D.L. — I think it depends on how the word 'cute' is used. If it's from the perspective of someone labeling another thing or person 'cute,' then no. Did you read about the Berlin Biennale? It was an important show that was initially dissed for being too commercial and slick. But what was so good was its menacing content. At first glance it seemed light, but there was heavy oppression buried under layers of commercialism. If you look at something close and long enough you can go weird with it.

K.O. – Do you feel like you are accessing that kind of 'menacing content?' If so, in what way? Is it about getting at the depth behind the seemingly superficial or cute?

D.L. — Yes, there's always some kind of menace behind the superficial, but it's interesting when intention and message don't match up. I'm trying to use past languages and histories to challenge dominant systems, and it's hard because there's so much nuance in language. The English language borrows from French, Latin and Germanic languages and presents its own challenges as a clearly dominant system.

K.O. — That's certainly true. Finally, do you want to say something about your presentation for the ADA Gallery booth at* Untitled *in Miami during last Art Basel?

D.L. — Yes, was really excited for *Untitled*. I have been making a group of paintings with arms reaching out to show videos on phone-like objects. The arms are trying to share moments from another planet. I'm a fan of sci-fi and telling the story of an organization trying to communicate the mistakes and horrors of their home world. But the problem is that they can only communicate using objects and logos. Thousands of years ago their language was alphabetic, but it transitioned into a kind of hieroglyphics only using logos from private companies.

K.O. — Thanks, sounds like it is another intriguing mash up for you and very relevant. ■

NOTES

1. Derek G. Larson, *Composition, Color & Interactivity* (2015).
2. For example, the book *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*, edited by Joshua Paul Dale, Joyce Goggin, Julia Leyda, Anthony P. McIntyre and Diane Negra, was published by Routledge in December 2016.

Alex Kanevsky, *Battle of San Romano*, 2017, oil on board, 48" x 24." All images are courtesy of the artist and Hollis Taggart Galleries.

THE LAWS OF MOTION

In-Studio Interview with Alex Kanevsky

An apple thrown in the air will fall downwards, obeying the laws of gravity, its velocity remaining constant unless an outside force acts upon it. Similarly, we rely on predictable laws of motion to navigate our daily world. However, in art, and more specifically in painting, these laws may be suspended, allowing us to see outside of our preconditioned perceptions into the realm of possibility.

The works of Alex Kanevsky allow for that door to open wide. Using broken color and broken form through multiple permutations of imagery that are applied in transparent and opaque layers of oil paint, manipulated with brush, squeegee, credit card and even household tools, Kanevsky breaks the rules of motion and, therefore, the parameters of time itself. But these are my words. Kanevsky will tell you, "I don't think a painting is a record of a conception or a perception for that matter. It is a freestanding thing, an entity onto itself, not a documentation of anything."

Kanevsky has had 22 solo shows, and his paintings are included in the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco as well as the Woodmere Art Museum in Philadelphia. His works have been the subject of multiple publications, including *Art in America*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Miroir de L'Art*, *Tianjin Yangliuqing Fine Arts Press*, and *Guernica, Magazine of Art & Politics*. He has received fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and Pew Fellowship in the Arts as well as a grant from the Franz and Virginia Bader Fund.

I sat down with Alex in his spacious schoolroom studio in Philadelphia to discuss his recent work in the exhibition "Alex Kanevsky: Some Paintings in No Particular Style" at Hollis Taggart Galleries in Manhattan.

BY KIM POWER

Kim Power - So, you were born in Russia and studied in Lithuania for your bachelor's degree?

Alex Kanevsky - In Lithuania. That would have been a Bachelor of Science. I studied mathematics there at Vilnius University, but I didn't finish that.

K.P. - And you're teaching now?

A.K. - I teach one afternoon a week at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

K.P. - You had mentioned in your 2012 interview with Larry Groff for his blog* Painting Perceptions *that you made these 'commutative wave paintings.' Does that relate to mathematics?

A.K. - I suppose you could look at it this way, but I wasn't thinking of mathematics. The concept probably does come from some sort of laws of averages.

K.P. - I thought the commutative wave theory had to do with 'the more it happens, the more it's going to stay the same.' It's going to keep returning to the same thing.

A.K. - It is. Like a lot of things that are cyclical, they repeat themselves. There's not a hell of a lot of deep theory behind it. Basically, the idea is that waves move, therefore they're hard to paint, but they also repeat themselves, not precisely and exactly, but close enough.

If you look at them with the same frequency, as I have, you will see different waves but at the same phase of their development. This way, you can treat it as a picture of a wave, but it's not any particular waves that exist, it's more like a cumulative image of many waves.

K.P. - Like an idea of…

A.K. - Yeah, like an average of many waves. This way, it allows you to paint things that move, change and mutate, as long as they repeat themselves.

K.P. - Do you find that that's true with your models too, that they return to the same—well, you ask them, I guess, for a specific pose and then…

A.K. - Yeah, I tried that with the models as well. The drawing started from the idea of the waves; or rather, the waves started actually from the drawings. I didn't draw, really, since art school, so for 15 years I never did any drawings. I'm a painter. I like painting. Why would anybody draw when you can paint?

K.P. - It's clear that you love paint, so I understand that.

A.K. - But then I saw some Antonio López drawings in the Boston Museum, and several other draftsmen, whose work I like very much, like Ann Gale in Seattle and Michael Rossman here in Philadelphia, and I thought, "These are such beautiful drawings, maybe there is something to it. I should try." I always had models coming in. So, the model came in and we thought we would try to do a drawing, which, if you think about it, is completely insane. You try to express space and volumes with line and line doesn't exist, so you're trying to express something that does exist with something that doesn't. So, I thought, "That will be interesting." So my draw-

ings are going to be built around that craziness. If the line makes absolutely no sense and yet it's possible to use, then I'm going to use it to make completely linear drawings, and that's what they are. They don't have shading or anything. They're just lines. So we tried that. I had a big piece of paper with some work on it so we used the other side. I did have a pencil in the studio. I had no eraser.

So, I started working and I was out of practice with the lines, so I couldn't get one shoulder on the model. I tried and I kept on redrawing it, and because I had no eraser I had to redraw on the top of my previous efforts. So, eventually there was a conglomeration of shoulders and arms growing out of that spot, and it all worked out. I found it eventually, and then I looked to that and the drawing itself was fine, it was okay, but there are lots of drawings of naked people in the world. The world doesn't need another one. But that search for the shoulder, actually, was very interesting, because that gave the reason, the *raison d'être*, for the drawing, because that search was very dramatic. It was a desperate search for the shoulder and you see all the wrong attempts and somehow, if you have enough wrong attempts, I apply one right, somewhere amongst them. And I thought, "This is interesting." I can use lines as indications rather than stated fact, like this is here. So we started drawing like that, with the models here, and I got better eventually, just from practice. I stopped making so many mistakes, and I also bought an eraser, so I had to come up with some other ways to derail the process so I would have something to struggle with.

K.P. - That's interesting. I was going to ask you about how you discover randomness in your work, because randomness is actually quite a difficult thing to do.
A.K. - Well, it's also interesting. We tried to discover it with the models by not being perfect, I wasn't being a stickler about the pose; if they moved, they moved. If they came back from a break and didn't get in exactly the same pose, I was OK. I figured I would be able to accommodate all that because that's what people are, they move. They are only still when they're dead, and I'm not interested in death.

K.P. - (Laughs) Right.
A.K. - So, that worked for a while. Then I started asking them to move or to turn around. The two drawings in Rob Zeller's book [*The Figurative Artist's Handbook: A Contemporary Guide to Figure Drawing, Painting, and Composition* (2017)] are a pose of my friends in New Hampshire who were turning at 10-degree increments without changing the pose.

K.P. - So they turn and then you draw and then they turn and then you draw?
A.K. - Yeah. But the things get confusing, once there are a lot of lines.

K.P. - I was thinking about that. How do you keep track of what's essential?
A.K. - The whole idea is to eventually reach a situation where it's impossible to keep track and then to function in that situation. That's when things get interesting.

K.P. – OK. Functioning within chaos.
A.K. - Yeah. You take liberties. You get a little bit better and a little bit better just from pure mileage, and as you get better, you kind of want to take more liberties, because you can. So this was fun. Now I'm sort of at the point with these drawings where I need something else to struggle with, so they sort of slowed down, but I've been thinking of maybe trying to introduce some color.

K.P. - I was noticing that you stick with particular themes in your work. You have multiple horses, you've got history paintings…
A.K. - Five horses.

K.P. - Five horses. You've got the women in the darkness in the water that you sent to Paris, smaller pieces, I think, the bathtubs—do you work on them in a series or do they just come back up again as a theme?
A.K. - It kind of happens like that: You do a painting, and you think, "Oh, this is interesting. I didn't get everything out of that thing. Why don't I do another painting?" And another, and then you think, "This is enough here for a whole show." So you do a whole show, and then when it's over, you say, "Okay, I'm done with this." But then a few months later you think, "Oh, there's a couple more things." So you do a couple more paintings, and then eventually it does work its way out of the system.

K.P. - OK.
A.K. - Paintings in Paris of people in the darkness in the water have to do with my personal obsession with one little Rembrandt painting [*A Woman Bathing in a Stream*, 1654]. His wife Saskia went for a swim.

K.P. - Could you talk about* L.H. in the Dark Pond? *I mean it's dark but it's—
A.K. - Yeah, so that was done directly last summer. Because of that obsession with the [Rembrandt] painting, I basically asked people to go in the pond for me. New Hampshire has a lot of ponds. There used to be one near the house, and now our neighbor has three different ones, and they're in the woods and they're small. Just to do laps or just to see and admire. It has frogs in it. First I asked—it's a small village, I know everybody there—so I asked people if anybody had any nightshirts similar to that one that Saskia had, and I was given a lot of nightshirts. They didn't give me their best ones, of course.

K.P. - (Laughs) Well, yeah, if you're going to walk into a pond with it.
A.K. - Yeah. And then over the years I've had quite a few of the locals in that pond in those nightshirts or without them. It was quite a trying proposition for them. Those ponds are pretty mucky and god knows what lives in there.

K.P. - (Laughs)
A.K. - But it was endlessly fascinating. For me, it looks absolutely beautiful, and there's that sense of not knowing what's down there in this water.

K.P. - Right. Actually, that's something I was going to ask. Do you see it as some sort of primordial darkness?
A.K. - Something like that, or Persephone's story, where she's partially in the underworld and partially here with us. So, that was a more abstract version of those people in the water, where the tops of the bodies were done very realistically, but as you progressed further down, you kind of go down into just pure paint, with no reference to reality.

Alex Kanevsky, *Dinner on a Battlefield,* 2017, oil on linen, 66" x 66."

K.P. - Also,* C.B. with Darkness *was kind of reminding me of the Helga pictures of Andrew Wyeth. I don't know if that's an interest of yours at all.

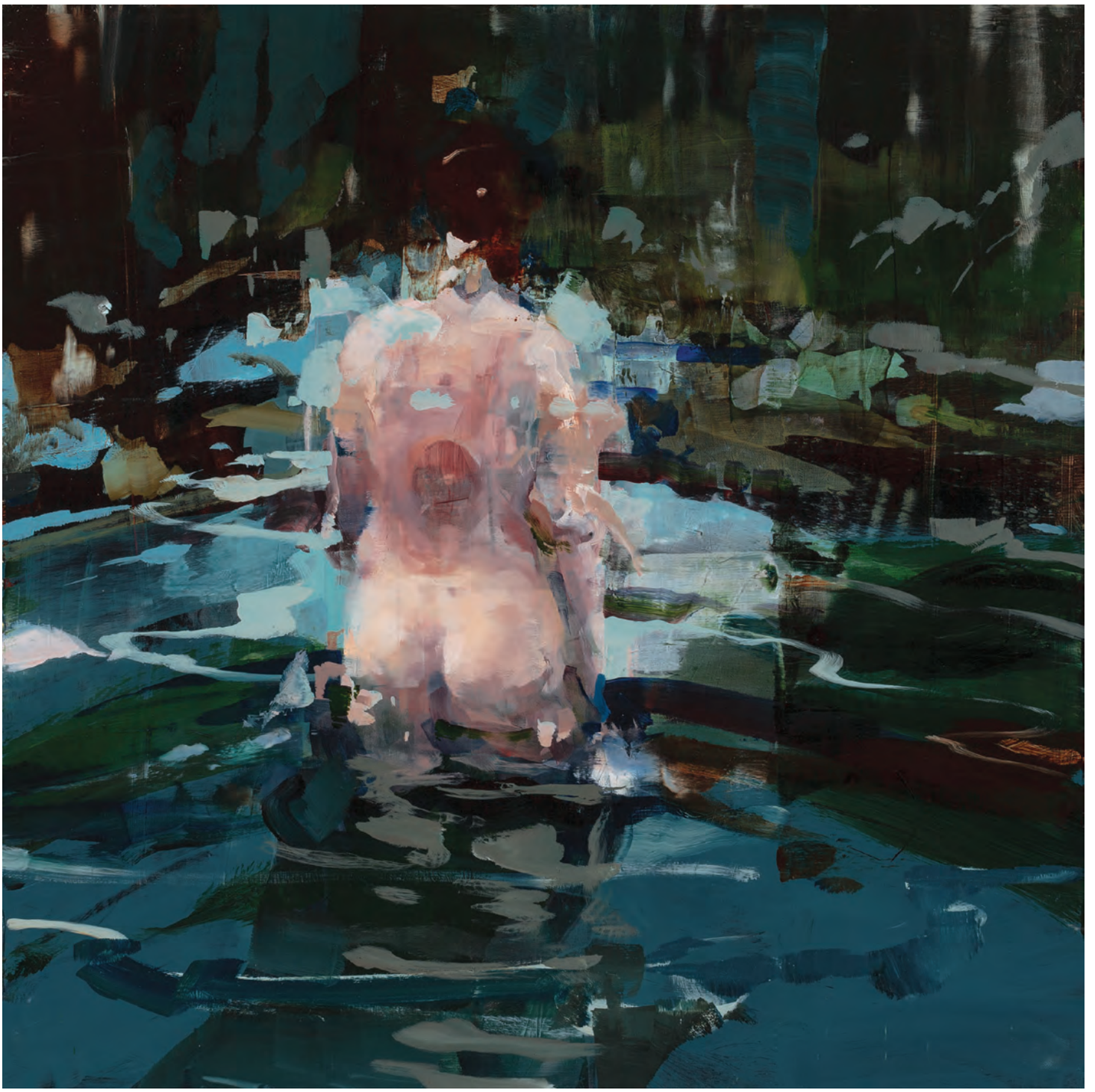
A.K. - Of course I admire them and hold an interest. This particular model I suppose looked a lot like Helga because she's this country girl, healthy like Helga, and with the blond hair and that sort of cool demeanor.

K.P. - Yeah, and also just the way he did paintings of her inside in the barn and where you had the darkness and the window—the light seemed to be emanating from her body. I'm also seeing something similar in yours, like she is, her skin is, the light. She's in this, again, primordial darkness.

A.K. - You don't really think about primordial darkness or metaphors or anything like that. That comes later, when people try to explain or ask you questions about it. You just think it would be really nice to have some darkness, and the light emanating from the body just happens in the way ponds are usually situated in the forest.

K.P. - OK.

A.K. - In the morning or in the afternoon, during the sunset, in the evening, rather, the forest looks dark, almost black and the water looks almost black. But if you can get it at the right time, when the person in the water would be hit by that setting sun and they come out very bright and make everything else around them even



Alex Kanevsky, *L.H. in the Dark Pond,* 2017, oil on board, 18" x 18."

darker—it's a situation that if you happen to be there you would look at and just think, "That looks like Caravaggio or Rembrandt," right there, without any special effort.

K.P. - It also seems like you're very interested in movement and the kinetic energy in your work. I read this wonderful article by Carla Gottlieb called "Movement in Painting" [1958], and she said, "Movement draws the attention. It may hold in store the danger of collision or attack as well as the pleasure of an unsuspected site, of a chance encounter. Movement in art results in a more active participation of the spectator."

A.K. - I don't have a lot of response to it because it goes back to how to engage the spectator. If you are producing something for people, you want them to be engaged. I think that's what she's talking about, but I'm having my own private games here. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm very happy that they're engaged. The movement was there because things move. I'm interested mostly in people. That's one big overarching theme; not so much people in water, but people doing something, just people.

K.P. – OK.

A.K. - People are defined by their movements, they're not defined by their shape, place—it changes all the time. So if you want to paint people you have to somehow incorporate the movement into your paintings, otherwise they look like mannequins.

K.P. - Right, and I've seen that so often that paintings are in stasis. That's something that I enjoy, that I'm able to breathe when I see your work. I feel this sense of atmosphere. I don't feel stifled. I feel like, "Okay, this is more like how I see." Not like photography, which stops everything. Life is not still, so that doesn't make sense.
A.K. - Yeah, well, photography is not at all how we see. I heard something about it once that is very interesting, about how perception works, visual perception. It's very similar to the way that digital video operates now, where only what changes and moves is actually perceived. Like I'm talking to you and you move your head, right now, you're nodding and I see that but at the same time I'm seeing the stuff around and that stuff is not moving, you know, the furniture, the floor, everything. So, apparently what happens is, I don't really see what's going on. What I have is the memory of what was there maybe a second ago or so. It gets sampled with less frequency, so to speak.

K.P. - That's interesting.
A.K. - That's the way our eyes, apparently, and brain works. So, if it stays still, then the brain thinks it's going to continue staying still, and there's no need to pay attention.

K.P. - So, it turns the channel off.
A.K. - Yeah, it continues to sample it, but really, most of the attention goes to the moving part, which right now happens to be you. So I get a lot more visual information from your face than I get from, let's say, this flat file.

K.P. - I guess because you walk into a room and you are, yourself, moving, so of course you're paying attention to where you are because those things are not in stasis because you are moving. But then they become still because you've already become still yourself.
A.K. - More or less. But then, you know, the completely frozen moments, they're also interesting. You know, I love Uccello paintings, and you can't think of anything more frozen than Uccello.

K.P. - You made that painting after Uccello…
A.K. - Yeah, and it's very frozen, because it's based on one, single, very sharp photograph.

K.P. - **The Battle of San Romano** *(2017) was a painting you made based on a photograph?*
A.K. - It's a photograph of one of my university friends who is a computer programmer or something like that, and all the other men there are some sort of mathematicians or programmers or they work in some office anyway. My friend Albert got into some sort of martial arts, I think it's called Daito-ryu, where they hit each other with wooden sticks. This was a photograph of the practice they had in some very nice forest with this kind of very strong raking light. Their formalized poses, and that light and the flatness of the perspective, and that light in the forest, and the lens used, were a little like an Uccello painting to me. I loved it for that, and I thought, "I want to do a painting." I also liked the contrast between their militaristic postures and—they're all middle-aged men, they're developing a little belly, so the softness of that.

K.P. - The softness of their forms in contrast with the brutality or strength of their poses?
A.K. - Yeah, the implications of what's going on. Uccello paintings are usually—there's usually some horrible brutality going on in them. He's not doing anything peaceful.

K.P. - Yeah, there's some crazy stuff going on in his paintings for sure. But also, it has that feeling of possible movement again. They're frozen in the process of…
A.K. - Yeah, they stand completely frozen. I always want to try the other side. I'm usually more interested in the movement, but this time I was interested in their frozen poses, very formal.

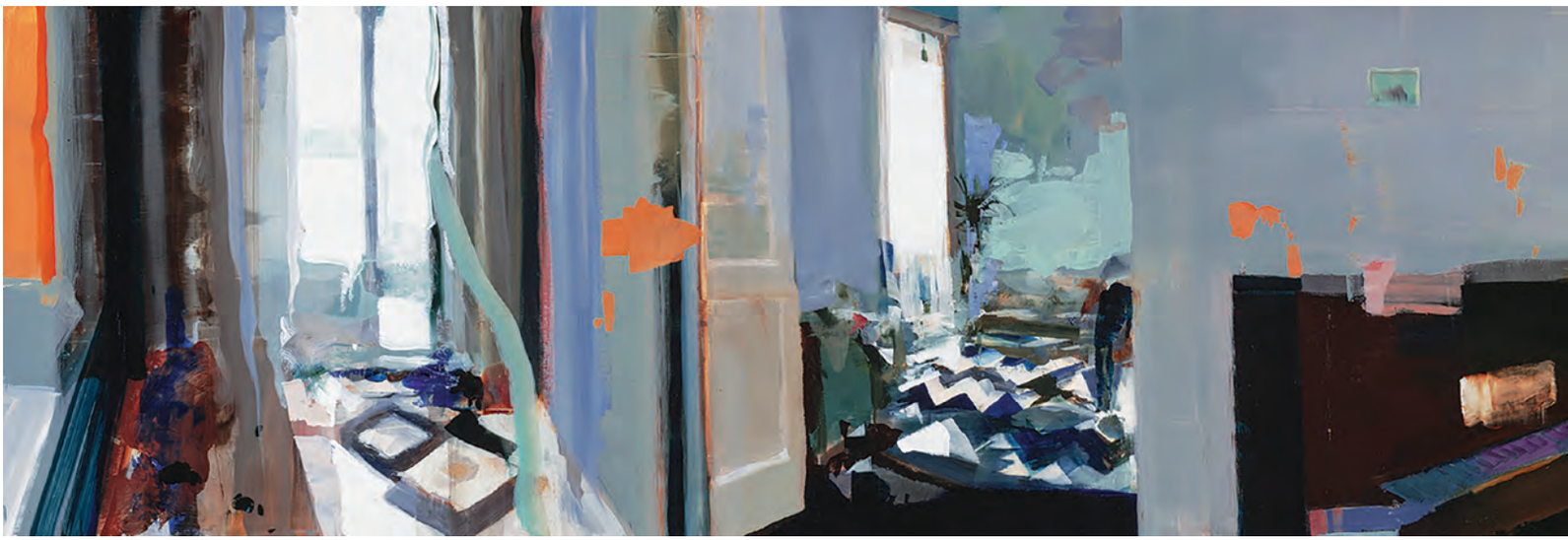
K.P. - That's not the only history painting, though. You have that other painting, **The Dinner on the Battlefield** *(2017).*
A.K. - Oh, yes.

K.P. - You have more than one of those too.
A.K. - I have three.

K.P. - I've seen one online and one in the gallery of the **Dinner on the Battlefield.** *Is that in reference to another painter as well?*
A.K. - Usually I use reality, models, landscapes and interiors directly or take photographs for my paintings. Very rarely, I use (other people's) photographs. I try to avoid doing that because it's not my imagery, and then I'm relating to the photograph and not to reality. So that's already handicapping the relationship.

K.P. - Right, then you're painting about the photograph.
A.K. - I'm painting what's been digested for me. I don't like that, but sometimes the photographs happen that kind of ring true now. You look at it and you feel like, "I recognize this place. I recognize what's going on." I don't have a memory or anything like that, but this photograph was one of a series of five or six that were put up on Facebook by a man who likes to collect photographs, mostly from Russian history. This particular photograph had French and Serbian soldiers having this dinner party during WWI. Probably because it has nothing to do with Russian history, there was no explanation of where they came from and what exactly went on, but one of the pictures was of these soldiers, just what you see in those paintings. They're sitting there and they're trying to have a civilized dinner with napkins and tablecloths and a nicely little laid out spread. They put on clean uniforms, but then there's dirt and snow and everything around. They got some soldiers to be their waiters. They're trying to have a civilized experience together. At the same time, you can see it on them, it's WWI, and they have bayonets attached to their rifles. They were probably poking holes in each other.

K.P. - **(Laughs)**
A.K. - The weird contrast between that impulse towards civilization, the turn to civilization and the brutality of what really goes on and the facial expressions of those soldiers, because they surrounded their dinner table but the two closest to the camera have parted their way a little bit so you can see onto the table and you can see



Alex Kanevsky, *Lulu in Madrid (Twice),* 2017, oil on board, 12" x 72."

their dinner, of which they're proud. So that's kind of a welcoming gesture—opening up the circle—but their facial expressions are anything but welcoming. They look like they might just shoot you, or the photographer. I just liked this ambiguous quality of the proceedings. It doesn't matter to me what the story is. I just like that it sort of implies all sorts of stories, but really remains mysterious. It kind of encourages people to bring their own narratives in.

K.P. - Yeah, definitely.

A.K. - So, I did a painting of that and I was quite happy with it. It was a little smaller, and somebody came and bought it, which was very nice for me, but I didn't get a chance to spend any time with this painting. Usually I do before the show. I always had a feeling that maybe I could have done more to it. So I said, "I'll do another version. I'll to try to make it different, and I'll make it bigger." I did a second version and the same thing happened: Somebody came in and bought it. Somebody else. Anyway, the other one is someplace else, and again, I never got a chance to spend time with that painting. A year later, I thought, "People are going to start asking me, why are you doing these soldiers? I have to lay off this photograph." But I felt like I wasn't done. Then a friend, Karen Reynolds, came to visit, and she gave me a present. She gave me this Indian postcard of Vishnu or Krishna, I'm not sure which. I think both of them are in there, and I really liked the hallucinogenic quality of those multiple faces that Krishna has, the multiple arms, and I thought, "Perhaps I could mix that with the picture of the soldiers and give them a slightly more, not exactly surreal, but that kind of hallucinogenic reality."

K.P. - I'm glad you said that word because that's the word that came to my mind with that painting in the gallery. Maybe it's the wavy lines, but it just felt very hallucinogenic. So, that was your third version of the painting.

A.K. - Third and hopefully the final, yes.

K.P. - So you don't go about just thinking, "OK, I feel like making a history painting now." It's just that you saw something and you were inspired by that and it happened.

A.K. - Whatever interests me. You need a reason to start to painting. The reasons come from outside often. I could totally understand, let's say, Morandi, painting bottles all his life or being Euan Uglow and painting those female models and nothing else all his life. That's fine. That's like what Diebenkorn meant when he said, "Don't discover any subject of any kind." Subject doesn't matter.

K.P. - So, concept, that's not part of it at all.

A.K. - No, not terribly interested. I mean there are concepts. They float about. Some of them are more compelling than others, but it's something that happens afterwards. You can sit here and talk about conceptual, Persephone and six pomegranate seeds, or concept of underworld or concept of hidden versus revealed, whatever. But all of that is extraneous afterwards, sort of like, you know—you have a Christmas tree and you hang all sorts of things on it. It's still the same tree, and once you're done, you take the things off and you have the same tree, so the ornaments don't really change anything. They just embellish, and sometimes embellishment is very interesting and exciting and I enjoy embellishments as much as anybody else. But it's not part of what I do or not something that interests me in connection to painting.

K.P. - The concept pretty much comes afterwards.

A.K. - Yeah, because you have to explain to people. People who read things into it.

K.P. - They want to define it.

A.K. - Yeah. And I like to provoke them with pseudo-narratives so they always look for hidden meaning or hidden story or hidden concept, so that stuff comes up. I know it's my fault because I provoked that, but I didn't build any of that. I'm more interested in sort of like the reflection; you know, this unstable equilibrium idea that comes from mathematics. I mean equilibrium, everybody knows what that is. It's when everything is in balance. Mathematics differentiates between stable and unstable. If you imagine a perfectly round salad bowl and an apple, you could throw an apple into the salad bowl and it will roll around and eventually settle

down in the bottom, and it would want to stay there. It would go right back. That's a stable equilibrium. Now, if you flip the salad bowl upside down, you can balance the apple on the top, but if you push, it will fall off the bowl and onto the table. That's unstable equilibrium. Unstable equilibrium is interesting for a painting. In other words, you do something that seems to be balanced and harmonious but people from the outside, you know, when you come and look at my painting, you're bringing yourself, your life, your everything, all your memories, all your likes and dislikes to my painting. You act as that finger that is pushing the apple on the upside-down bowl. My painting is built like an unstable equilibrium. A small impact from your gaze produces dramatic results, like an apple falling off the dinner table and falling on the ground. So that's really what I want from it.

K.P. - In trying to understand your paintings, I thought about 1950s 'action painting'—especially with that red stripe that you had in* Three Views of a Bathroom *(2016). I'm in love with that red stripe.

A.K. - I am in love with it too, because this is so difficult to do and so unpleasant to fail because it goes back over something carefully constructed. And it's fast, so it's not terribly controlled, so if it doesn't work then it's bad. You just ruined something that you spent a lot of time on.

K.P. - So you build up and then you construct and then you deconstruct?

A.K. - No, I don't deconstruct. I just add something that's a little more dangerous but more fun. And it does carry this possibility of failure with it. It makes it more interesting and more exciting, because there's an adrenaline reward.

K.P. - It's so beautiful in the way it directs you right into the painting. It's an entrance and an exit at the same time, and it has a certain speed to it. Also, there's this concept of time, with* Three Views of a Bathroom *and also in the longer narrow painting—* Lulu in Madrid (Twice) *(2017).

A.K. - Well, in the longer paintings, the composition idea is the same as in the Chinese scrolls, which are the ancient, sort of proto-comic books, which try to introduce a concept of the passage of time, the narrative into static medium. They didn't think of breaking it into frames, like comic books do. They just used very long composition to have some sort of narrative going, so the same characters could reappear several times in the same landscape or interior as they progressed through the story. The importance of the events would be expressed by how much space they allowed. I did a whole project with this once a few years ago when I was really into the scroll painting. I thought I could do a painting of somebody's whole entire day. Well, I tried and I failed like Tolstoy failed when he tried to describe somebody's day. It's so complex.

K.P. - I was thinking specifically of Virginia Woolf. In* Mrs. Dalloway *[1925] she does achieve that. Have you ever read it?

A.K. - I have not read *Mrs. Dalloway.*

K.P. - You might enjoy it. She's very visual. So, you were trying to but failed?

A.K. - Well, the idea was simple. The way Chinese scroll is made is that you kind of stitch a panorama out of separate things. For example, a person wakes up in a bedroom and goes to brush their teeth in the bathroom, then off to the kitchen to have coffee. So you stitch those rooms as they appear in reality together into one panorama and then have the person reappear in different places. That's what I wanted to do, and I actually put it out there. I asked if anybody wanted to be a subject, and a friend of mine, Kara Crombie, who is a performance artist here (she did a lot of media and performance), volunteered. She gave me her keys, so at seven in the morning I was in her bedroom, with my camera, ready to begin, because I knew when the alarm clock would ring. The alarm clock rang, and she had to get up and get ready for work. Her boyfriend was in bed because he was unemployed at the time. She proceeded to go to the bathroom, brush her teeth, do the makeup, go to the kitchen, get some coffee. The kitchen was much bigger than the bathroom, but she spent more time in front of the mirror in the bathroom, so the bathroom became bigger than the kitchen. Meanwhile, her boyfriend woke up and started watching Korean television on the

Alex Kanevsky, *Three Views of a Bathroom,* 2016, oil on linen, 66" x 66."

television set that was in the bedroom. He was pretty much there for the rest of the thing. She just came in to kiss him goodbye and then left. I thought I would be there for the rest of the day, and halfway through I thought, "This is overwhelming."

K.P. - Ah, too much information.

A.K. - Well, too much and too interconnected. Too many things. You would have to build three-dimensional panoramas. I did make some paintings, but that thing would have been endless, so that was a failure. I did make a wonderful painting, for me anyway, of her morning that came out of this project. It was called *Big Bed* (2010). It was a bed that was the size of a city square, and she appeared in this bed many different times as she was waking up, getting up, then coming back to kiss the boyfriend goodbye—and I just kind of imagined this big bed that so many people…

K.P. - All the events there.

A.K. - Yeah, all the events that ever occurred in bed. All of them occurred in the same bed. It's just a big bed. That's the only painting that came out of that, but a lot of scroll-like panoramas were done because it's a very interesting composition to work with.

K.P. - I also think of this word flow when I think of your work. I was thinking about how you are painting these different subjects, but they all relate, in my mind, because it feels like it is a river flowing and how a river changes. Sometimes it's calmer, some-

Alex Kanevsky, *Flying Tangerine*, 2016, oil on board, 18" x 18."

times it's more frenetic. It feels like this ongoing flow that seems to be coming from you.

A.K. - I think that pretty well defines what interests me, yes. Subjects, again, don't matter, but the flow does. It's interesting. You know, everything is in motion and—I remember when I was in grade school and they told us that, those little electrons and protons and all those atoms, nothing is just sitting there. They are all rushing around, buzzing and vibrating. So, if you were to see what this chair is made out of—it's not like atoms that are sitting in their places—it's everything going every which way and buzzing and vibrating.

K.P. - So, everything is connected.

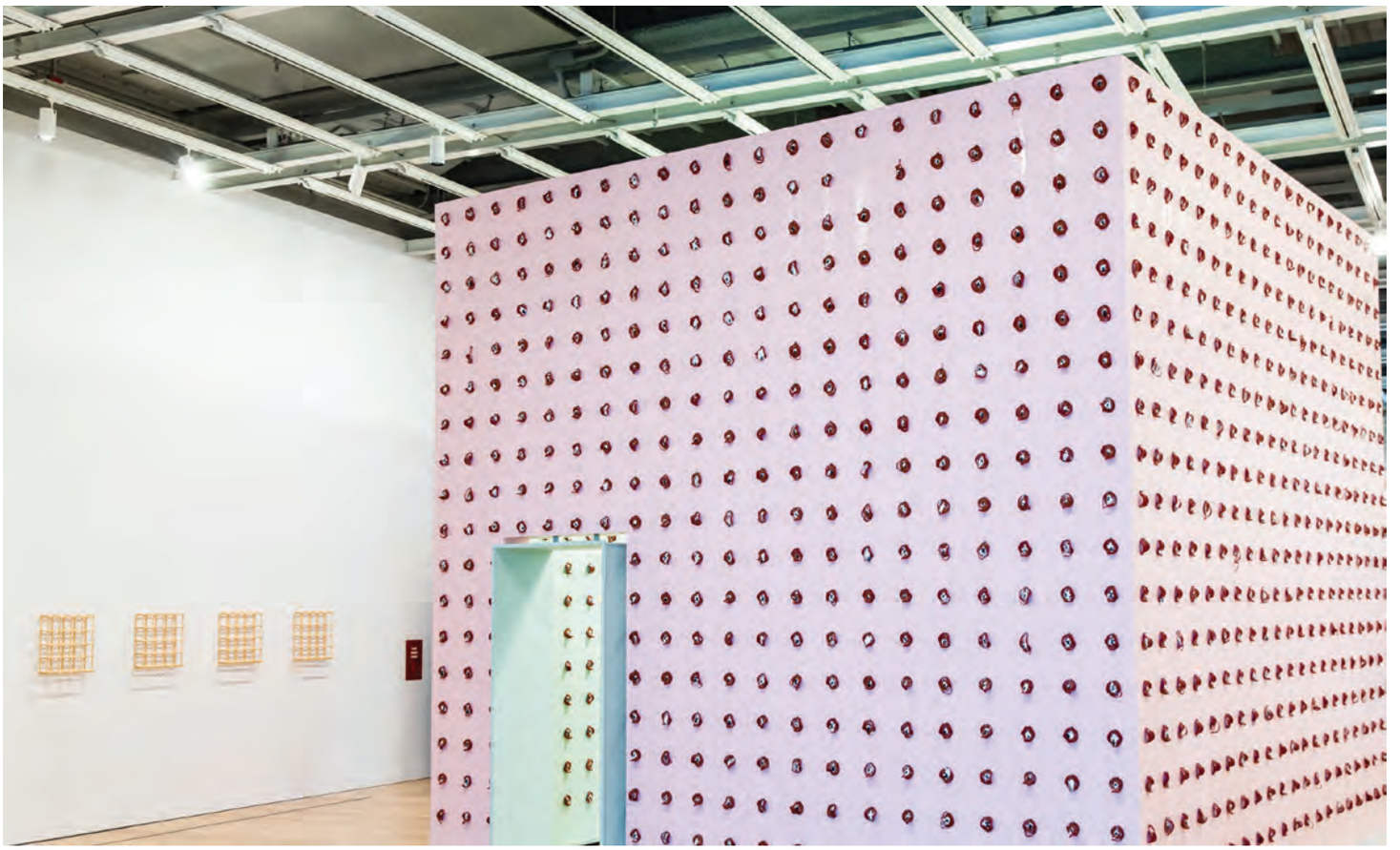
A.K. - Everything is connected, everything is moving. We sort of, for our own convenience, assume that we know where everything is and it's going to stay there, but it doesn't necessarily. It's just maybe that it doesn't move as fast as we do.

K.P. - Do you think it's because we're comforted by stability?

A.K. - Yeah, stability is predictable, people like predictable. It's comfortable. You know what you're going to find there. I'm OK with it moving.

K.P. - Excellent. Thank you again for so very generously sharing your time and for your honest and thoughtful answers.

A.K. - I'm looking forward to reading it. ■



Installation view of Pope.L aka William Pope.L, *Claim (Whitney Version),* 2017. Whitney Biennial 2017, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, (March 17-June 11, 2017). Collection of the artist. Courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York. Photo: Matthew Carasella. With view at left of Matt Browning, Untitled, 2016, wood, collapsed: 3 ½" x 3 ½" x 18 ¼."; expanded: 17 ¾" x 17 ¾" x 4." Collection of the artist.

FIGHTING WITH SCALE

The Battle for Attention at the Whitney Biennial

BY KRISTINA OLSON

Like the Lone Biker of the Apocalypse in the Coen brothers' film *Raising Arizona*, the first Whitney Biennial in the spacious, Renzo Piano-designed building, while impressive, is hard on the little things. Small-scale works like Matt Browning's collapsible wood grids and Ulrike Müller's modest, enamel paintings and works on paper are overwhelmed by the airy new galleries. Rightfully, much praise has been given to curators Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks for the restraint they showed by selecting just 63 artists and collectives, in contrast to the 103 crammed into the overstuffed 2014 Biennial (the last held in the original, Marcel Breuer structure). Lew and Locks take great advantage of the museum's high ceilings and expansive floors, especially for the site-specific and installation projects. Taken as a whole, the exhibition is a striking curatorial achievement, but the vast space and avalanche of debate over just a couple of controversial works made starkly visible that scale may be the most significant issue in the presentation of contemporary art today.

The Whitney had the stated goal of recommitting this Biennial to presenting a diverse range of emerging American artists, and the curators delivered.[1] While more than half come from New York, Brooklyn and Los Angeles, the rest are drawn from across the country and Puerto Rico, with a surprising number, like Browning, living in the Pacific Northwest. Most were born in the 1970s and '80s, but many older artists and a few younger ones are also included. About half are women, and African-American, Latino and Asian artists are well represented.

Most were allowed to show multiple works (in some cases, more than a dozen), essentially creating mini solo exhibitions within divided spaces on the main floors of the exhibition along with a few installed on the entrance level, the outdoor galleries and off site. This works well for the collaborative duo KAYA (painter Kerstin Brätsch and sculptor Debo Eilers), whose massive, torqued panels made of mixed media (collectively and ironically titled *SERENE*, 2017) dominate the entrance to the sixth floor. Many unrelated individual artists are displayed in thoughtful pairings. For example, John Divola's photographs of abandoned student paintings hung in deserted Southern California buildings resonate in proximity to Leigh Ledare's projected film capturing social interactions in Moscow train stations (*Vokzal,* 2016). Less convincing are the divergent combina-

Installation view of Samara Golden, *The Meat Grinder's Iron Clothes,* 2017. Whitney Biennial 2017, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, (March 17-June 11, 2017). Photo: Matthew Carasella.

tions, in terms of both medium and content. Carrie Moyer's abstract acrylic and glitter paintings seem merely decorative in relation to Tuan Nguyen's timely, high-definition video that documents the remaining evidence of the displaced Vietnamese who were repatriated in 1991 after living on a Malaysian island for more than a decade.

In terms of size, most impressive for immediate impact are the large-scale installations that take advantage of the new building's generous attributes. Raúl De Nieves' faux stained-glass mural covers the window wall at the end of one floor, providing an enlivened backdrop for his beaded costumes and sculptural shoes with their celebratory "hot mess" aesthetic and multi-layered iconographies. At the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum, Larry Bell's row of large minimalist boxes, *Pacific Red II* (2017), has a stately presence on the gray exterior deck overlooking the High Line. The subtle transition of ruby color across the doubled, nested walls of laminated glass by this pioneer of the California Light and Space movement makes a surprisingly suitable visual partner for New Orleans-resident Zarouhie Abdalian's multi-channel sound installation, *Chanson du ricochet* (2017), heard overhead.

Samara Golden constructed a fascinating, multi-floored interior placed on either side of the real windows on the museum's Hudson River façade. Like the convoluted stairways in a drawing by M.C. Escher, Golden's installation, *The Meat Grinder's Iron Clothes* (2017), presents a disorienting view into several floors of a building with arrays of furniture built at two-thirds scale. Each room is doubled, with another installed upside down on the ceiling and only visible as a righted space in the strategically placed mirrors. Like levels in a bland, commercial high-rise, the endlessly reflected and unoccupied interiors of a restaurant, beauty parlor, apartment, gym and office seem to summarize the institutional lifespan of a city dweller. The affective and unsettling array called to mind Jean Baudrillard's famous characterization of "the real's hallucinatory resemblance to itself," as Golden's artificial set was barely distinguishable from the views of the actual city beyond the window.

Despite all of Lew's and Locks' care in selection and installation, it seems this Biennial will be primarily remembered for the debate about a couple of works that has overwhelmed everything else. As has been widely reported, Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2016) was immediately challenged by protestors who stood in front of it to block viewers' access along with a call to remove and destroy it.[2] At issue is the appropriation by this white painter of the photo of the lynched-body of the black boy, Emmett Till, taken at his open-casket funeral held in Mississippi in 1955. Schutz presents a closely cropped and abstracted overhead view that uses the visceral quality of oil paint and a projecting surface to draw attention to Till's mutilated face. Not quite as intense is the conversation about Jordan Wolfson's virtual reality piece *Real Violence* (2017), that also addresses issues of race. It has the potential to be so disturbing that the museum provides multiple warnings before queued-up viewers are handed a virtual-reality headset and cautioned to hold on to a railing for stability while they experience a visceral scene of one white man bashing in the head of another on a city street.

These are hardly the only politically charged or violently themed works in the exhibit. Henry Taylor's paintings, including *The Times They Ain't A Changing Fast Enough!* (2017), depicting the shooting of Philando Castile by a police office in his car that was livestreamed by his girlfriend are interspersed with Deana Lawson's seductive photographs of African-American daily life focused on hands and the importance of touch. Though easy to overlook due to their diminutive size, the many disabled gun triggers, such as *Trigger (Glock 22) (permanently disabled by Chip Flynn)* (2017) by the anonymous artist operating as Puppies Puppies, displayed throughout the exhibit also acknowledge the epidemic of gun violence in this country and the futility of individual efforts to curb it.

Channeling Hans Haacke's famously censored example of institutional critique at the Guggenheim Museum back in 1971 (*Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*), a number of projects use a similar conceptual framework to expose financial realities operating behind the scenes in the art world. The collective, Occupy Museums (formed in the wake of the Occupy Wall Street movement), is given prominent placement. For their piece, *Debtfair* (2017), dry wall was removed and members' small-scale works are set between the exposed studs. An adjacent interactive website provides the stories of individual member's crippling art school debt in contrast with the low earning potential for most professional artists.

Ever since the shock of the politically charged, identity-oriented 1993 Biennial, there has been the expectation by some that Whitney curators are obligated to make these kind of selections that reflect the social climate of the country over any other topic or aesthetic concern. This year's curators take a more balanced approach. Though

Leigh Ledare, *Vokzal,* 2016, 16mm film, color, sound; 58 min. Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago, Restricted gift of the David C. and Sarajean Ruttenberg Arts Foundation.

artists for this survey were selected before the November presidential election, Donald Trump is referenced in a couple of works along with issues that have gained traction since his move into the White House. For example, his name appears in Celeste Dupuy-Spencer's drawing *Trump Rally (And some of them I assume are good people)* (2016), and Postcommodity's four-channel video installation, *A Very Long Line* (2016), makes palpable the experience of undocumented immigrants blocked by endless fences on the Mexican border, reminding viewers of Trump's pledge to build a wall there.[3]

Care seems to have been taken in the layout of the show to provide zones of respite after viewing the most challenging work. For example, jazz musician Kamasi Washington's composition *Harmony of Difference* (2017) plays in a dimly lit blue room offering seating for visitors to take a break immediately following Schutz's painting. And Asad Raza's 26 individually potted trees are arrayed in a carpeted zone coming just after Wolfson's harrowing piece. Titled *Root sequence. Mother tongue* (2017), Raza's arrangement soothes the viewer with wafting customized scents, dappled UV lighting and the presence of the trees' "caretakers" and their personal possessions.

Despite these efforts, the exhibition is dominated by the most strident work. The scale of the largest, loudest, smelliest, most preachy pieces bullies the smaller-scale and intimate work, and that's a shame, because there is much to enjoy in the more detail-oriented and crafted projects. For example, Browning's unpainted, 18-inch-square interlocking rectangles hand carved out of a single block of wood are lost along a stretch of wall in the shadow of Pope.L, aka William Pope.L's giant, pink structure *Claim (Whitney Version)* (2017). Here, real slices of bologna schmeared with tiny, black-and-white portrait photos are pinned in a grid to the structure's walls, both inside and out. The number of portraits is purportedly representative of the size of the Jewish population in New York City, but that "fact" and the artist's supposed challenge to knowledge is lost in the experience of the rotting sandwich meat and degrading images.

KAYA's floor-to-ceiling panels of industrial materials, LED lights and aluminum hand bars demand viewers' attention to the detriment of Jessi Reaves' nearby, wall-mounted constructions and furniture sculptures. Her great *Modified Wall Shelf with Racing Purse* (2017) can only be appreciated by getting close to observe this kooky mash up of plywood, bamboo, sawdust and batting with a checkered vinyl purse thrown in just for fun. Her equally enjoyable, and functional, sofas and chairs are interspersed throughout the exhibit (there's a lot of furniture in this show). Their assorted, tactile materials and intentionally unrefined craftsmanship are easy to overlook in the galleries but offer a welcome diversion for those who notice them.

Similar pleasure is available in a number of artists' work that relies on careful attention, but only once you get past the more bombastic efforts. An-My Lê's inkjet-printed photos (from the series *The Silent General*, 2015-17) were shot in Louisiana using a 5-by-7-inch view camera to capture incredible detail. Views of a Confederate general's monument, a burning sugar cane field and a battle scene being shot for a Civil War film reward lengthy examination. Beyond the strength of the individual composi-

Celeste Dupuy-Spencer, *Fall with Me for a Million Days (My Sweet Waterfall),* 2016, oil on canvas, 60" x 48." Private collection. Courtesy of the artist and Mier Gallery, Los Angeles.

tions, the images reflect on larger themes of war, race and America's history of slavery, nostalgia and place.

Instead of addressing grand themes, Dupuy-Spencer's small-scale paintings and drawings depict everyday scenes from a cross-section of American life. Her faux-naïve style complements the mundane subjects. In addition to the folks at the pro-Trump rally, there are guys in a sports bar (that the title tells us used to be a gay bar), a woman dispensing meds at a clinic, a man dressing his baby, teenagers fighting in an alley and well-heeled guests at a swanky art party. Like all of her narrative work, the oil painting *Fall with Me for a Million Days (My sweet waterfall)* (2016) depends upon the artist's keen eye for detail. We are positioned behind a guy engrossed in the process of digitizing his record collection while standing at his bedroom stereo. Dupuy-Spencer celebrates the democratic mix of musicians in the posters on his wall, albums and books acknowledging diverse talents such as Esther Phillips, Nick Cave, Bruce Springsteen and Sam Cooke. The intensity of the young fan hunched over his turntable and laptop resonates with the Jimi Hendrix lyrics quoted in the title. Eschewing the didactic posturing found elsewhere, there is a love and acceptance for the artist's subjects here that feels genuine and inclusive.

So what do we learn from the disparate approaches to scale in this Biennial? Piano's design for the Whitney's new building follows in the trend of current museum architecture that responds to the need to display contemporary art that is often large-scale and space intensive. But this group exhibition made plain the problem for small-sized or less spectacular work in these vast culture halls. One thinks of MoMA's early installations of collection work in Yoshio Taniguchi's addition (completed in 2004). Monet's mural-sized *Water Lilies* and the grand canvases of the Abstract Expressionists—designed to overwhelm in a conventionally scaled, mid-century exhibition space—looked like postage stamps at the bottom of the multistoried atrium. Mercifully, Lew and Locks didn't repeat the uncomfortable install of the 2014 Biennial, where smaller work was often hung salon style in cramped rooms, making it impossible to gain perspective on anything. It is very clear that they were mindful of the need to give individual works appropriate space as much as was possible. There are just a few sad examples of artists who are marginalized due to the diminutive scale of their work (like Müller's quietly beautiful abstractions that went overlooked down a side hallway).

The curators have been equally sensitive in their response to the over-scaled controversies that they couldn't necessarily have anticipated. The Whitney is standing firm in its continued display of Schutz's *Open Casket*. Shortly after Hannah Black's call to remove and destroy it, the curators issued an unequivocal justification for the work's inclusion in their show. In a particularly thoughtful analysis of this debate, artist Coco Fusco suggested that it is Schutz's abstract approach to rendering Till's body that contributed to the outrage.[4] She points out that similarly difficult figurative subjects included here and elsewhere in art history got a pass when treated more realistically. Whether or not this is a convincing argument, it offered a fresh way to consider the contrast between the many examples of abstract and figurative painting included in this exhibit.

As a kind of summary of the issue of scale in this Biennial, it is instructive to consider another painting by Schutz. *Elevator* (2017) was commissioned by the curators and is prominently displayed at one of the entrances, immediately visible when stepping off the real elevator. More than three times the size of *Open Casket*, the equally abstract canvas presents a diverse group of people jammed in an elevator with the metal doors open to either side. While some poor worker attempts to hang wallpaper at the back left, viewers fight with one another for position and perhaps access to the megaphone included at the lower right to broadcast their opinions. One assumes the curators thought the painting would announce their exhibition theme of bringing to light the "many facets of the human experience."[5] However, its size and congested composition are not convincing and seem cartoonish. Much more persuasive are the quieter, smaller-scale paintings by Dupuy-Spencer or Aliza Nisenbaum in which the artist seems to have forged a genuine bond with her very specific subjects instead of treating identity as an abstract category. If any general conclusion can be drawn, it is that the 2017 Whitney Biennial proves, once again, that size really does matter. ■

NOTES

1. Scott Rothkopf, "Sincerely Yours: A Conversation with Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks," in *Whitney Biennial 2017*, exhibition catalog (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017), 17.

2. For details on these events, see Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, "Dana Schutz's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Sparks Protest," *artnet news* (March 21, 2017), https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-painting-emmett-till-whitney-biennial-protest-897929?utm_campaign=artnetnews&utm_source=032117daily&utm_medium=email&utm_content=from_&utm_term=artnet%20News%20Daily%20Newsletter%20USE.

3. The interdisciplinary collective Postcommodity was founded in 2007 by Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez and Kade L. Twist.

4. Coco Fusco, "Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz's Image of Emmett Till," *Hyperallergic* (March 27, 2017), https://hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on-dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/?utm_source=sumome&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=sumome_share.

5. See Christopher Y. Lew's and Mia Locks' statement reprinted in Muñoz-Alonso, "Dana Schutz's Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Sparks Protest," referenced in note 2.

DIALOGUES FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

INTERVIEW WITH MARY ANNE STANISZEWSKI

"The installation design functions to reframe in a very powerful way the meaning of the experience and the meaning of the work of art."

Published in 1998, *The Power of Display* is still one of the most fascinating and essential books if we want to understand the history and practices of Modernist museum exhibitions. We spoke with its author, Mary Anne Staniszewski, about the institutional history of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) heralded by Alfred Barr, Jr., its canon, ideology and display that set the tone both for today´s modern museum and contemporary art spaces.

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

Paco Barragán - Let me start with a complaint. I was very disappointed about the fact that* The Power of Display. A History of Installations at the Museum of Modern Art *was out of print and I could only get a copy at Amazon at an outrageous price. Why has MIT not reprinted the book or edited a cheap pocket version given the fact that it is, in my opinion, a fundamental book for understanding today´s museography worldwide?

Mary Anne Staniszewski - I was 'surprised' about how this all turned out. MIT Press produced what I thought was a beautiful book. But about 10 years ago, I was told that the Press had decided to have the book go out of print. So I asked if I could have the files so that I could reprint it elsewhere. I was then told that there were no files for the book and that the press had shifted to new electronic equipment.

I then asked if I could have the original 'boards' for the book. I had actually taken what I think is a very unusual step in the publishing process and had reviewed every page of the book when it was designed in this hard-copy form. But the Press said they had discarded the boards and the original ASCII files. So there was nothing to print from. I was told, "Every last copy of both hardcover and paperback were sold, and none remain in our warehouse."

I have always thought I would get the book back in print. But I have felt that I should first finish the third book in what I see as a trilogy of books dealing with modern concepts of culture and selfhood/identity. *The Power of Display* is the second in this somewhat unconventional trilogy. The first is *Believing Is Seeing: Creating the Culture of Art*, which was published by Penguin USA in 1995 and is still in print. I am planning to finish this year the third volume, which I have been working on for decades and which is a portrait of the United States set within an international framework and which deals with a broad range of issues, including the invention of race, and other topics such as sex/gender and life and death.

P.B. - Of course MoMA and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., have set the standard for modern and contemporary exhibitions, but how did this research about MoMA come about? Was there something in particular that triggered your special interest?

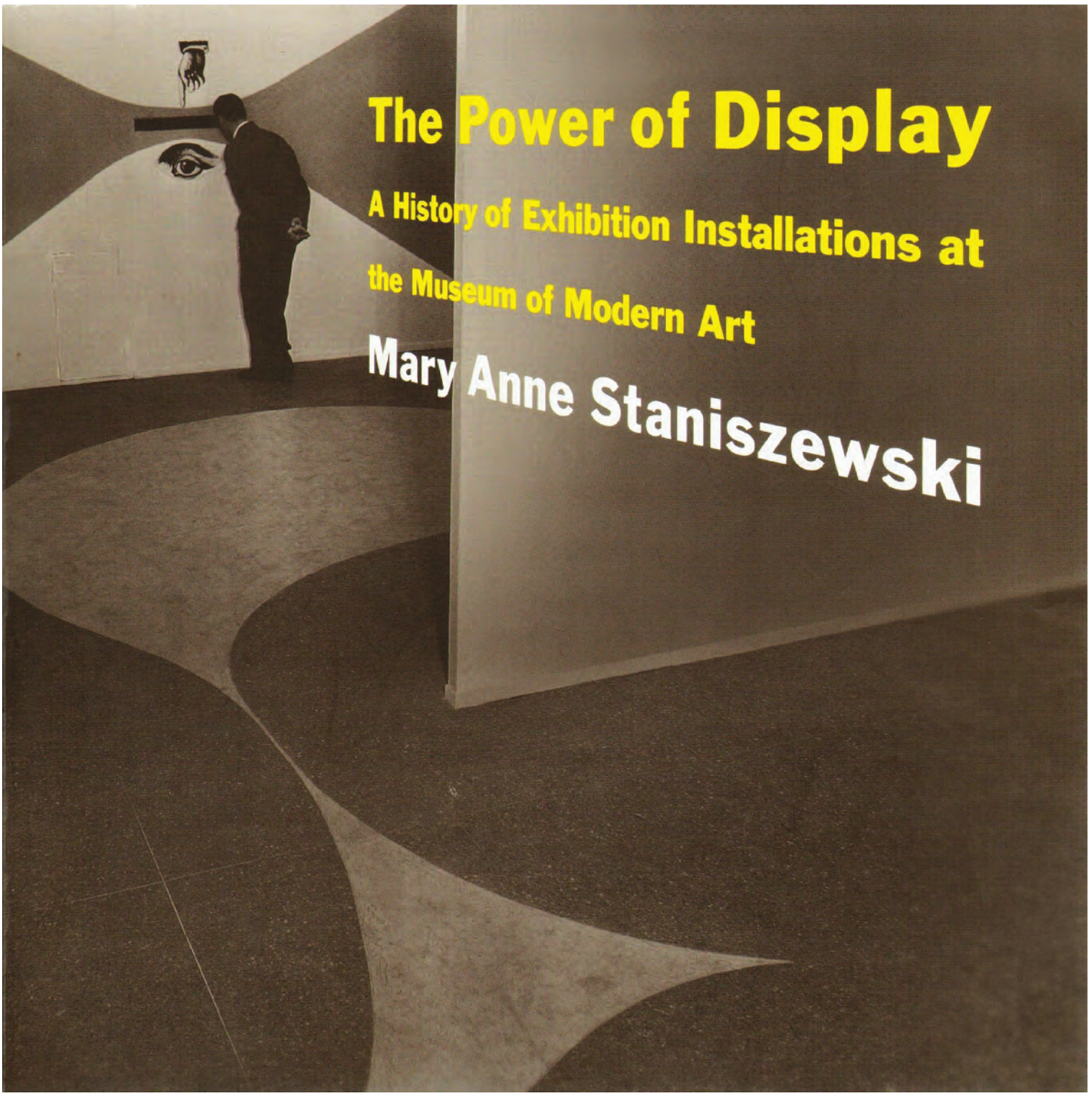
M.A.S. - It took me a long time to formulate the book. My primary concern initially was to frame and historicize the institutions and conventions of what could be called the art system.

Somewhere in the mid-1980s, it all crystalized for me. A confluence of factors both helped me conceive of and also complemented my research on the project: I was participating in the contemporary art world and writing about art institutions, the art market and art world conventions; I was teaching art history and 'critical theory,' focused on these concerns; and finally I was engaged with work of certain artists dealing with what became known as institutional critique, such as Antoni Muntadas, General Idea, and Hans Haacke, writing about their work, and, in some instances, this was in a collaborative way.

I somehow discovered what seemed to be an almost unknown visual archive—MoMA's exhibition installation archive. By analyzing this massive archive of visual history that documented the way art has been seen by the public, I could do an institutional history and also map shifts in art practices and art world institutional conventions.

I spent quite a bit of time initially trying to construct a sense of what this discourse for these museological/exhibition/curatorial/artistic practices would be. I went through artists' primary documents and art history, but also industrial-type exhibition manuals, and there were also a few key texts on exhibition design. Except for Christopher Phillips' article on MoMA's photography shows, there was almost no literature that incorporated these installation photos. Although the book came out at the end of 1997-beginning of 1998, the text had been finished at the end of 1994, and the publications on exhibitions and display of the mid-1990s were not in print when I had been doing my research. As the book was being produced, I added citations for many of these texts in the notes.

P.B. - MoMA is, like most American museums, always very protective of any book, article or essay that gets published related to their



The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art, by Mary Anne Staniszewski. Published by The MIT Press, 1998.

institution. As a matter of fact, their press department always wants to control what gets written, so much so that it borders directly on censorship. How did you manage to get the book published?

M.A.S. - I had to wait close to a year to gain permission to access the museum papers. I resorted to writing the museum director, Richard Oldenburg, and he responded fairly quickly and gave me permission to do this research.

Additionally, the museum had a policy of not granting reproduction rights for more than 25 percent of the images of a book that was not a MoMA publication. I had taken the risk of working for a decade or so knowing of this restrictive museum policy. In the end, I was granted special permission for these rights by Patterson Sims, director for education and research support, and by the museum's publication committee. Mikki Carpenter, who oversaw the installation photo archive, was also a member of this committee. I will always be immeasurably grateful to them for their decision that allowed me to document this history.

P.B. - The book is also generously documented with many important photos of MoMA's exhibition history.

M.A.S. - Yes, the work for this book is representative of a certain kind of visual analysis, and although more traditional types

Mary Anne Staniszewski. Courtesy of Mark Looney.

of historical and theoretical research and analysis are key to the book, the project involved years of studying and analyzing these visual documents. I reviewed the archives of close to 70 years of exhibitions repeatedly and obsessively to construct what was my version of this history. I had to select what might be called the paradigmatic exhibitions and the paradigmatic image or images from each of the exhibitions selected. I loved analyzing documents that were visual. I think a person would have to have found it fascinating to have done it so repetitively and for so many years. There is still so much to be done with this history. I viewed my work as only a formative beginning.

FROM THE UNIVERSAL MUSEUM TO THE MODERN ART MUSEUM

P.B. - With Alfred Barr, Jr., we moved from the typical 'Louvre salon-style' exhibition model, which characterizes the so-called Universal Survey Museums like the Metropolitan, Prado and V&A, to the so-called 'white cube,' which still is the model for modern and contemporary art museums and centers worldwide. What artistic and non-artistic inspirations do you think Barr had that contributed to his iconic and creative exhibition installations?

M.A.S. - From my point of view, so many of the Universal Survey Museums like the Met, which is the survey collection I am most familiar with, did adopt a version of Barr's 'modernist' display style.

In these Universal Survey Museums, artworks are not stacked from floor to ceiling or hung closely to one another according to their shape, size, and general color without reference to the internal themes and content of the display or exhibition, as they generally were in private and public collections before the 1920s and 1930s. Paintings are isolated on walls, artifacts or figures/sculptures, such as a Greek vase or non-Western works, are placed on pedestals and in vitrines, often in very isolated and decontextualized settings. A good example of this can be seen in the photographs of the Prado's 19th-century galleries on the museum's website.[1]

I do want to stress that there has certainly been a shift to create more historically representative installation contexts in recent years, but these often involve the slight 'gesture' of painting the gallery walls what are presumed to be culturally appropriate colors that may evoke something of the works original contexts. Wall labels nowadays also give better contextual information. Examples of these changes can also be seen with the Prado's current installation photographs and videos that it has on its website.

However, in terms of most museum displays overall, from a fundamental and broad view, the autonomy of the work of art is

stressed, and the original function and meaning of the works are subsumed by the aestheticizing and transformational 'power' of the art museum. Or, you might say, by 'the power of display.'

Regarding Alfred Barr's influence, I believe the strongest influence was his awareness of the experiments of the European avant-gardes. I interviewed Philip Johnson as part of my research for the book, and Johnson, who had been curator of MoMA's architectural department from 1932-1934, spoke very explicitly about these influences on Barr, citing "the way exhibitions were done in Weimar Germany—at the Folkwang Museum in Essen especially," and what he described as "the famous rooms of Alexander Dorner in Hanover."[2] Barr and Johnson had traveled throughout Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, separately and together, and both were interested in these new types of displays. Johnson also very memorably for me stressed how they did not think the walls should be white, which they believed drained the color out of an art object, and they used a beige color and thought cloth on the walls was better. As Johnson said to me: "Never, never use white for painting."[3]

Nowadays, of course, white is the standard color for the presentation of contemporary art, and due to issues of scale and site, the spacing between pieces can sometimes be enormous. Consequently, our exhibition experience is often an exaggerated caricature of these earlier formulations.

P.B. - Already in the first exhibition, "Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh," held between November 7 and December 7, 1929 at MoMA, the role assigned to the spectator in Barr's philosophy was of pivotal importance.

M.A.S. - First, as I often like to underscore, Barr's first public creative contribution at the Museum of Modern Art was an installation design. He did not 'curate' the first MoMA exhibition in 1929—the museum's director, A. Conger Goodyear, selected the works for the first show, "Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh." But Barr did install the exhibition, and he did so with what he self-consciously considered to be an innovative and experimental display technique of hanging paintings on beige, light-colored walls with the works placed at so-called 'eye level,' isolated from one another. As Barr's wife, art historian Margaret Scolari Barr, later recalled, in a tellingly anthropomorphic way, "The idea was to let the pictures stand on their own feet."[4]

This type of display manifested an attempt to obliterate all possible contextual references, such as architectural details that would date the building like wainscoting, wallpapers and so on and to create what could be called an idealized space. But, of course, this was a historically specific type of interior. Barr also isolated the works from one another, which was extremely different from conventional Western art display practices.

Viewers then found themselves in what could be described as seemingly idealized interiors, facing one-on-one with 'the *Cézanne*' or 'the *Gauguin*,' and so on—I am here emphasizing the tendency to speak of a work of art as if it is a person.

So this 'project' of installing these artworks created a sense of idealized autonomy for both that which was viewed and for those who were viewing it. The works of art were framed, but so were the viewers. In a very fundamental way, these types of installations can be seen as experiences that heighten a sense of individualism and an idealized, ahistorical subjectivity.

P.B. - You mentioned Philip Johnson before, who was in charge of MoMA's Architecture and Design Department. It is particularly striking that the shows he supervised or undertook himself—think of "Why America Can't Have Housing," "Machine Art"—were audacious, innovative in terms of display, and blurred the line between high art and popular culture. Barr supported these shows totally but did not accept this type of display in the traditional realm of fine arts. Is this not a strong contradiction?

M.A.S. - Yes, you are making an interesting point. But I would first make a distinction between the two Johnson exhibitions you reference. The "Machine Art" exhibition of 1932 I see as very similar in concept and installation design to the work of Barr. Although the pieces featured in "Machine Art" were objects of everyday life, they were framed as fine art, on pedestals, in vitrines, and set in other types of displays that aestheticized the selected items. This, I believe, was part of the astounding popularity of this particular exhibition. It 'made sense' to the critical and general public: Everyone visiting the museum and seeing this exhibition was looking at 'Art.'

The "Machine Art" displays functioned similarly to what we, as a culture, have done to artifacts from pre-modern or non-Western cultures when we place these items in conventional museum settings and to what has become the standard practice for the neutral modern/contemporary installations. The presentation of those bits and pieces, of machine art was similar to what we, as a culture, so to speak, did by framing, for example, *The Venus of Willendorf* as an art object. And, as you point out, these aestheticizing types of displays were the standard and preferred method for Alfred Barr.

But Barr and Johnson were working during what I consider the 'laboratory years' of the museum and the formative decades for the development of modern art and gallery institutional conventions. So while this aestheticized display was Barr's preferred method, he did depart from this idealized realization.

Barr's paradigmatic exhibition of 1936, "Cubism and Abstract Art," was not just a show of paintings on walls and sculptures on pedestals. Due to Barr's educational intent and the practical limitations of not being able to acquire some of the actual works of art at that time, the exhibition was, in many areas, a mix-media didactic display. Certain walls looked like an organized 'collage' of documentary photographs, reproductions, posters, film stills, didactic labels and placards, with not only paintings, but also chairs hung on the walls as well. These sections of "Cubism and Abstract Art" were similar to Johnson's "America Can't Have Housing," which was a didactic collaborative project involving MoMA, the New York City Housing Authority, the Housing Section of the Welfare Council, Columbia University and the Lavanburg Foundation (a low-income, non-profit housing corporation). Johnson supervised the exhibition, but the wall texts were written by Carol Arnovici of Housing Research Bureau; the installation was created by the architect Woodner-Silverman, assisted by photographer Walker Evans; and G. Lyman Payne of the Housing Authority was

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. looking at Alexander Calder's Gibralter (1936) at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1967. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo: Dan Budnik.

the technical director, so this was a very experimental, activist exhibition dealing with the need to design low cost housing.

And yes, I completely agree with you that Barr's practice of installation design, for the most part, featured idealized and aestheticized contexts for works of art and their viewers. However, Barr, I think, envisioned his work as something in dialogue with the practices of the international avant-gardes of the first half of the century. And, as you noted, he supported exhibitions like "America Can't Have Housing," but it is interesting to see that his public statement, published as part of the publicity of the show, stressed the importance of "the artistic or architectural side of housing."[5]

While Philip Johnson could have a mega success of an exhibition composed of things like some screws on a velvet-covered pedestal, Barr, in the end, was not so successful when he ventured in related areas. As the story is often told, Alfred Barr was 'fired,' or forced to resign, by the board of trustees, in part, for showing a highly decorated shoeshine stand and stools, which the then board president Stephen Clark apparently abhorred. Louise Nevelson introduced Barr to this colorfully bedecked work encrusted with ornaments created by Sicilian immigrant Giovanni Indelicato, which was exhibited in the museum's lobby as *Joe Milone's Shoe Shine Stand* during the holiday season from December 1942 to January 1943. Although recent scholarly research emphasizes that Barr's authority and status with the board in the late 1930s and 1940s had been eroding, his curation of this shoeshine exhibit and another exhibition featuring another self-taught painter, Morris Hirshfield, have traditionally been the reasons given for his being sent into retirement.

IDEOLOGY THROUGH (A)POLITICAL, NEUTRAL APPROACH

P.B. - Yes, I think his reputation was being eroded a while ago, but I did not know about the shoeshine stand incident. Barr's modernist autonomous aesthetic displays reveal a profound ideological twist through a seemingly apolitical and neutral approach.

M.A.S. - Yes, this is what struck me so profoundly about all the works of art most of us see in museums. The installation design functions to reframe in a very, very strong and very powerful way the meaning of the experience and the meaning of the work of art.

This emphasis on a decontextualized, idealized and aestheticized context for modern and contemporary works of art is even more ideologically aggressive and transformative in installations of pre-modern (that is, before the late 18th century) and non-Western works. These objects and images from various cultures that were created for some primary function or purpose other than art-as-we-know-it are then framed by these museum/gallery conventions and turned into 'Art.' These installations then serve to transform these traces of these cultures and reframe them within what could be called the orders of 'the West.' Of course, by the late 20th century, the practice of this modern concept of art had been adopted, on some level, by most cultures globally.

Finally, I will add that Barr's successor, René d'Harnoncourt, whose work is so interesting and needs more analysis and research, stated that "There is no such thing as a neutral installation."[6]

P.B. - This was clearly the case with Barr's and MoMA's political engagement with the U.S. Government that proved to be very profound during the war years in the 1940s. Think of exhibitions of photography, exhibitions like "Road to Victory," "Power in the Pacific" and "Airways to Peace," which were curated by Edward Steichen and Monroe Wheeler, and, with the exhibition design of Herbert Bayer and George Kidder Smith, offered a kind of innovative walk-through exhibition.

M.A.S. - Yes, in these overtly propagandistic exhibitions, the political dimensions were, in many ways, very 'transparent' and overt. In later years, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the political and economic dimensions or interests become rearranged. Many of the institutional political-economic dimensions go underground in the form of underwriting and other mechanisms. The overt political and economic messages are, in many instances, 'safely' reinscribed within the 'signature' of the artist, and this can be seen in the practice of site-specific installation work.

P.B. - This openly propagandistic involvement of Barr and MoMA, especially during the Cold War and the repackaging and touring internationally of exhibitions with so-called apolitical themes, have always been considered a polemic aspect of MoMA's unholy alliance of culture and politics. To what extent did this affect Barr´s and MoMA's position and credibility?

M.A.S. - The status of Alfred Barr and MoMA's credibility really depends on who is doing the assessment. There is a spectrum of aesthetic and political positions, subcultures or microcultures, and audiences that might make such a consideration.

There is now a well-known body of literature that critically addresses the appropriation of the mid-century U.S. avant-garde (I am using the term as it was commonly applied in mid-century to mean modern art) as a weapon in the Cold War and, specifically, the U.S. Federal Government and the C.I.A.'s support of certain MoMA exhibitions, and other entities, such as *Partisan Review*. These facts have been incorporated into most mainstream interpretations of this history at this point. I think someone with a more left perspective would see this more critically than someone with a more centrist-liberal, or right-wing, point of view.

P.B. - But still, most exhibitions on Abstract Expressionism—see for example the most recent exhibition "Abstract Expressionism" at Guggenheim Bilbao—refrain from any critical analysis remaining on a pure formal level. But let's focus on MoMA´s collection. For Barr, modern art was basically Cubism and Picasso as the artist-hero ending with Abstract Expressionism, what we can see displayed on the fifth floor. His formalist vision was a historical staging of the liberal bourgeois grand narrative of individuality, freedom and subjectivity. Even moral or political works like Picasso´s* Les Demoiselles d'Avignon *or, even more so,* Guernica*, were totally depoliticized, and there was no room for artists like Hopper in his ideal comprehension of modern art.

M.A.S. - First, to give a brief update: Since 2016, there have been official reconsiderations of MoMA's collections to have more integration of the different media. There is also now less space due the building expansion project overseen by Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with Gensler architects. Currently, the fifth

Visitors at the exhibition “Useful Objects of American Design under $10,” on view at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 26–December 24, 1940. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

floor still does span from the late-19th century work to mid-20th century abstraction. The mixing of the different media has not impacted these earlier installations so greatly; however, there is a slight reduction in the number of galleries due to the renovation.

Your description matches what has been, since the 1970s, the overall character of most of the museum's collection installations, which I see as an exaggerated articulation of very reductive, aestheticized versions of 'modernism,' here using the term to mean more aestheticized practice, as opposed to what I often describe as 'avant-garde' more art-into-life experiments. I will add that in the very recent decades, the curators overseeing the design and architecture exhibitions have often departed from this more reductive aestheticized model.

To my mind, an interesting way to frame this is to look at the second gallery on the fifth floor, the Picasso gallery, titled, "The Cubist Revolution." MoMA frames Picasso's great contribution as 'Cubism,' and if there is anything revolutionary about Picasso it is 'Cubist.' I see such an interpretation as reformist, or perhaps more accurately, conservative, and this is not what I would feature as revolutionary about this artist's work. Yes, Cubism is an innovative experiment, but it remains representational. It is not as radical as going completely abstract, which is what artists like Kandinsky and Malevich do. Picasso remains representational, and in the Cubism work, he remains very respectful of the paint-on-canvas tradition and the limits of a painting's frame.

The really revolutionary contribution is collage. With the invention of collage, Picasso (working with Braque) breaks open the autonomous, sacred space of the artwork's organic materials of canvas and oil paint and disrupts the 'naturalness' of this space by including mass-produced, machine-made, found objects from everyday life. This innovation can be seen as a critique of the authorial and medium-specific mythology of modern art and the articulation of self-hood as an idealized, individualized signature of 'style.'

The invention of collage is the revolutionary gesture, contribution, innovation, and this is akin to Duchamp's ready-made experiments occurring at the same time. The collage and readymade literally open up art to the world beyond and reframe notions of self-hood so that the concept of self, and the domain of creativity, is linked in a new way to history and culture.

There are no collages in MoMA's Picasso gallery; collage does not figure in this tale of modern art history, and MoMA, if I can anthropomorphize this museum, remains blind to the revolutionary implications of this innovation.

And yes, the 'reformist' Picasso remains the key artist in this story. There are, according to my count, 14 galleries on the fifth floor, arranged in chronological order, with several devoted completely, or almost completely, to one master. But Picasso remains exceptional in that his work is often included in these other galleries, so he is presented, as you described, as the 'artist-hero.'

Another way to interpret MoMA's vision of modern art is to look at this in terms of the very clear issue of the inclusion of women artists. What could be called a rationalist and masculinist abstraction has dominated MoMA's version of this history. The former term is related to what was featured about an artist's oeuvre, but, for this discussion, I will just focus on the latter. This emphasis on the masculine characterized MoMA's presentation of their collections and exhibitions through to circa 2010, when there began to be more consistent inclusions of art created by women in the museum's programming.

Recently, however, I have seen an almost shocking revision of whose art is shown at the museum in certain temporary exhibitions based on the collections. I found the "Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction," which is up through August, to be revelatory.[7] As I walked through the galleries, I kept saying to myself, "Why had I not seen these magnificent works before?"

At the beginning of the show is a small jewel of a painting completed in 1946 by Janet Sobel, in which she used a drip technique to create this distinctly beautiful work, which prefigures Pollock's achievements. It could be argued that Pollock did more, went performative and stood in an expanded landscape of painting, but for the innovative technique of dripping instead of painting-with-a-brush—that made me see the connection to surrealist practices ever more closely—the Sobel is certainly an important and historic work.

There were so many other amazing revelations. Magdalena Abakanowicz's *Yellow Abakan* of 1967-68—a huge textile, a swath of cloth, draped on the wall, the fabric woven from sisal, an industrial plant fiber used to make rope—is similar to the famous Robert Morris felt pieces. But Abakanowicz's piece, which has sometimes been sequestered within the category of 'fiber art,' can be seen to raise related but different questions than the Morris in brilliant and important ways.

Finally, earlier this past year I had an even more viscerally dramatic experience when visiting the exhibition of selected works from the collection titled "A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-garde,"[8] and many of these revelations were mirrored in a different way in the Design and Architecture collections exhibition, "How Should We Live? Propositions for the Modern Interior,"[9] which featured the contributions of women architects and designers, such as Lilly Reich and Eileen Gray, very prominently.

The entrance gallery of the Russian-Soviet show was quite stunning, with a large video projection of the 1927 compilation film *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* by Esther Shub, identified with a wall label attributing the innovations of montage to Eisenstein, and to Shub. This was paired with a Popova abstraction on the adjacent wall next to the introductory wall text. The rest of the exhibition's galleries were installed with arrangements that included, in a significant and unusual way, the works of artists who were women in a fully integrated fashion.

That women were so prominent in an exhibition about the Russian-Soviet avant-garde is especially appropriate given the fact that the 1917 revolution was ignited, in large part, by the protests of women on International Women's Day in March (February according to the Russian Julian calendar) of 1917.

MOMA'S CANON OF MODERN ART… AND THE NEO-LIBERAL MUSEUM

P.B. - As such, the fourth floor and the rest of the collection—Pop art, Conceptual art, Minimalism, Performance art* et al*—does not fit Barr's narrative, and it still seems to me like an artificial

Installation view of the exhibition, "Road to Victory," on view at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 21, 1942 through October 4, 1942. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo: Albert Fenn.

or extraneous addenda. Wouldn't it be more logical to provide a new reading of Barr's narrative in order to make the whole collection—the post-Barr additions—more coherent? What I mean to say is that there is no real chain or link between the two, especially as Barr's rooms are linked in such a way that they follow a prescribed route, an iconographic program.

M.A.S. - When you refer to the fourth floor, this was for work from the mid-century through to the 1980s, and the more contemporary galleries were on the second floor. The third floor had prints, drawings, design and architecture galleries, but currently the third, fourth and sixth floors have temporary exhibitions.

The museum's vision of 20th-century art is quite different from mine. I see circa 1912 to 1915 as critical years, when the conventions of art are questioned by certain artists. You have total abstraction as one direction; and collage, which can be seen as a critique of key myths of art and creativity, as another; and the readymade, which functions to go even further to reveal the historicity of art as a cultural invention and practice. The latter two innovations open up art to the universe of everyday life and the diverse practices that are now realized as art, from works created from found objects to activist interventions and rearrangements of all aspects of our social worlds. Can a museum like MoMA be fully engaged with what has broadly been considered art for 100 years now is a good question.

MoMA has made this relatively recent official decision to try to integrate diverse media, but the fifth-floor galleries have not been greatly impacted by this, and there are still relatively few works by women. The recent temporary collection exhibitions, however, have offered a more inclusive sense of the possibilities for modern art, on certain levels. Also, this February, MoMA performed a highly unusual political intervention into its own canon and installed works created by artists from nations whose citizens are being denied entry in the U.S. due to Donald Trump's January executive order. These are beautiful and powerful works, but they are not usually seen in the permanent collection galleries, and similar to the art by women in the temporary collection shows, this gesture makes clear how non-aesthetic factors contribute to cultural validation and taste. Overall, it seems like the museum is in a transitionary moment, with many future expectations associated with the new building and expansion. So we shall see.

P.B. - There are interesting attempts to be more inclusive, especially in terms of gender at MoMA, but also for example at Tate Modern under the directorship of Frances Morris, which is a very positive development. My final question would be: Why do 99.9 percent of the museums of modern art and centers of contemporary art stick to the white-cube display—since we know exactly what

Barr, Jr., ideologically pursued—while exhibiting exhibitions and art works that are very politically and gender motivated? It's a great* contradictio in terminis*, as if the white wall is simply saying: You can hang whatever you want, but I will depoliticize it straight away! Why are museums and professionals so afraid of experimenting or moving away from the white-cube ideology?

M.A.S. - Yes, I agree with your statement that "Museums of modern art and centers of contemporary art stick to the white-cube display," but I think it is important to add that such institutions have actually strengthened, exaggerated and enhanced this 'modernist' model.

What we have seen developing as modern and contemporary museum exhibition conventions in the decades after Barr's innovative, mid-20th century, seemingly-neutral-and-ahistorical displays is a caricature of these earlier groundbreaking prototypes. (I will also note that Barr's work is most renown, but this was part of a discourse of practices that included Dorner's contributions and certain other examples.) During the late 1990s and early 2000s, in particular, I observed an exaggeration of the characteristics of these earlier interiors and discussed this phenomenon in the preface to the Korean translation of *The Power of Display* that came out in 2007 and in some other articles I published after I finished the book.

In terms of color, as I mentioned, Barr and Philip Johnson never would have used white in their installations. Johnson actually used some colors, in some instances like "Machine Art," but Barr preferred monk's cloth, which is beige, and this is a hue that is somewhere between white and very light brown. So there is this exaggerated bleaching of the color of the walls.

Additionally, the scale has become exaggerated as well. Some of this, admittedly, is related to the increase in size of many of the works of art, but, this nonetheless has manifested as an enhancement of scale and expanded distances between artworks. We see this clearly and paradigmatically in Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which opened in 1997, and also in Yoshio Taniguchi's redesign of MoMA of 2004. So the features of Barr's (and others) early- and mid-20th century creamy-colored, domestic-scale, eye-level installations with works spaced with modest distances between them were transformed into electric-white, cavernously massive interiors with often great distances between works.

I see this affecting the viewers' sense of self in these spaces: In these more recent installations, the individual is often dwarfed and the spatial relationships metaphorically evoke those akin to what could be described as corporate dimensions rather than the human. Politically and metaphorically, this is of interest to me, given my U.S. perspective, and the enhancement of corporate personhood in the United States in the 2000s, as seen in the Citizens United Supreme Court case, in particular.

This enormous scale was seen most paradigmatically in Bilbao's large gallery where Richard Serra's *Snake* (1996) was installed for the opening exhibition of the museum and in MoMA's massive atrium where Barnett Newman's *Broken Obelisk* (1963-69) stood alone at the center of the museum like a large phallic monument to the patriarchy for the opening installation of the Taniguchi redesign. Regarding Bilbao, Gehry went on record stating that he did not want this key gallery to be realized in such a gargantuan scale, and it was Thomas Krens, the Guggenheim's director at that time, who had the last word on the non-human scale of the space. Krens is known for his initiation of a new model of entrepreneurial corporate branding and restructuring of the modern art museum with his work overseeing the Guggenheim, as seen in the creation of satellite franchise museums throughout the world.[10]

So rather than answer to your question about "Why are museums and professionals so afraid of experimenting or moving away from the white-cube ideology?" In terms of the 'why' and the 'fear,' I will take a bit different approach. First, I will acknowledge that there have been, of course, some museum experiments and realizations regarding exhibitions, projects and display and building designs internationally, and MoMA has selected an architectural firm that has been a leader in such creative innovation, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, for the current redesign, so we shall see.

However, to move beyond these mostly white, implicitly ahistorical, preserves for presenting modern and contemporary art would entail the development of a different kind of museum and for it to become the standard. This would necessitate a vision of the museum that is not something solely contained within a single building, but would be an enterprise that somehow permeates the social landscape. This would demand a different type of dynamic museum architecture that accommodates more fluid concepts of space and scale and changeability. This could be described as a descendant of Alexander Dorner's 'living museum.'

Expanding my earlier comment about MoMA to museums more generally, this would involve a paradigm shift in the concept of museums and the concept of museum architecture in order for this type of cultural institution to be fully engaged with what art has been for the past 100 years. ■

NOTES

1. See "The Graphoscope," The Prado, 2004, accessed April 30, 2017, https://www.museodelprado.es/en/whats-on/exhibition/the-graphoscope/81bfb972-aade-4c24-93b2-dbd7e26e5e4a
2. See Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: MIT Press, 1998, 64.
3. Staniszewski, 64.
4. Staniszewski, 62.
5. See Untitled MoMA Press Release, October 11, 1934, accessed May 5, 2017,https://www.moma.org/d/c/press_releases/W1siZiIsIjMyNTAyMyJdXQ.pdf?sha=5838a56977e010b4
6. Staniszewski, 61.
7. See "Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction," Museum of Modern Art, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3663?locale=en&page=2 "Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction" (April 15 to August 13, 2017), was organized by Starr Figura, curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, and Sarah Meister, curator, Department of Photography, with Hillary Reder, curatorial assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.
8. "A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde" (December 3, 2016 to March 12, 2017) was organized by Roxana Marcoci, senior curator, Department of Photography, and Sarah Suzuki, curator, Department of Drawings and Prints; with Hillary Reder, curatorial assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.
9. "How Should We Live? Propositions for the Modern Interior," (October 1, 2016 to April 23, 2017) was organized by Juliet Kinchin, curator, with Luke Baker, curatorial assistant, Department of Architecture and Design. As mentioned previously, in recent decades, the design and architecture departments have been more experimental and inclusive than those for painting and sculpture. The exhibitions curated by Paola Antonelli, senior curator, Department of Architecture and Design, in particular, have been very innovative.
10. "Frank Gehry: Plain Talk with a Master," Robert Ivy interview, *Architectural Record*, vol. 189, issue 5, May 1999, 357.

DIANA NAWI

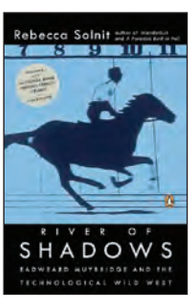
Diana Nawi is an independent curator based in Los Angeles. She previously served as associate curator at Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) for five years, where she curated exhibitions including "John Dunkley: Neither Day nor Night," "Adler Guerrier: Formulating a Plot," "Iman Issa: Heritage Studies" and "Nari Ward: Sun Splashed," a mid-career survey of the artist's work. She has organized newly commissioned projects with Yael Bartana, Nicole Cherubini, Bouchra Khalili, LOS JAICHACKERS (Julio César Morales and Eamon Ore-Giron), Shana Lutker and Haroon Mirza, among other artists. Prior to joining PAMM, Nawi worked as an assistant curator on the Abu Dhabi Project of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and served as a fellow at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Eric Avila. ***Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles.*** **Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.**

This book is a brilliantly researched meditation on the ways in which popular culture is shaped by and reflects our ideologies and anxieties, which in turn shape our built environments. Avila's work, including his more recent publication about freeways, offers illuminating means to understand urban space and the deeply politicized and racialized ways it is imagined and comes into being, something so many artists I've gone on to work with engage in their work. I read this as an undergraduate with particular relationship to Chicana/o studies, but it remains critical to me for offering a meaningful way to understand the inextricably related nature of cultural production, power and context, something so often elided when we begin to stratify high art and popular culture.

Eungie Joo, Jenny Ham-Roberts and Joseph Keehn. ***Rethinking Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education.*** **New York: New Museum and Routledge, 2010.**

I struggled to choose which example of writing or publishing by Joo to offer here; her work both on particular artists and in thinking about shifting moments of art and reception, as well as her open and connective curatorial practice, have been a touchstone for me. This book forefronts art's capacity as a vehicle to think and rethink our world, and like much of Joo's work, it accounts for the specificities of the U.S. context, with particular attention to questions of identity, while placing it within a broader global context. It offers new models, or significantly updates and evolves older models, without discounting the work of the preceding decades. Like so many of her projects, this book brings together a breadth of thinkers and artists to debate, negotiate and picture what's possible in the arts as we engage them in the lived world.



Rebecca Solnit. ***River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West.*** **New York: Penguin Group, 2003.**

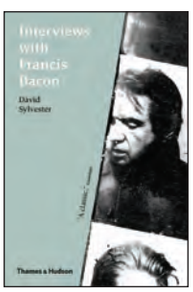
Solnit weaves art history, technology, economy and geography together in a beautifully novelistic way. Muybridge's life and work becomes a metaphor for the forces that shaped the West in the late 1800s. He and his project are situated at the edge of modernization and industrialization, and Solnit's analysis of the promise and degradation of this period of economic and technological growth are devastating, but made human and palpable through the backstory of Muybridge's iconic photographs. Solnit's expansive and interdisciplinary approach to unpacking these works is a lesson in the contingencies of art history, and her book offers some truly revelatory moments about time, photography and seeing.

GABRIEL PÉREZ-BARREIRO

Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro is director and chief curator of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. From 2002 to 2008, he was curator of Latin American art at the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin. In 2007, he was chief curator of the 6th Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Prior to that, he was director of visual arts at the Americas Society in New York, founding curator of the University of Essex Collection of of Art from Latin America and programs coordinator at the Casa de América in Madrid. He holds a Ph.D. in art history and theory from the University of Essex and an M.A. in art history and Latin American studies from the University of Aberdeen. Pérez-Barreiro is the curator of the 33rd São Paulo Bienal slated to take place in 2018.

Guy Brett. ***Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists.*** **London: Verso and Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1990.**

Anyone interested in understanding the issues (both real and imagined) around the presentation of art from Latin America should start with the enlightening introduction to this catalogue by Guy Brett. As one of the pioneering presenters of international art in the U.K., Brett played a pivotal and critical role in introducing the work of artists like Waltercio Caldas, Victor Grippo and Jac Leirner to a mainstream contemporary art audience. At a time when the Latin American field seemed to be limited to either a stereotypical interest in the exotic or a turgid poststructuralist discourse, Brett's clear and perceptive prose presented a new way to engage with the artists and their work. Brett makes no overarching claims for "Latin American art," but rather sounds a note of caution in letting the framework get in the way of the art, and therein perhaps lies his greatest contribution.



David Sylvester. ***Interviews with Francis Bacon.*** **London: Thames and Hudson, 1975.**

Originally published under the title *The Brutality of Fact*, these compelling interviews still serve as a model for the value of the sustained conversation between an artist and a critic. Sylvester was one of the most important critics of the 1960s and 1970s, and the clarity of his questions and prose are still staggering. Even if you are not particularly interested in the work of Francis Bacon, this book will engage you until the end. Far removed from a journalistic interview, the conversation covers everything from the type of paint he uses and Rembrandt to his gambling habits and statement that "painting is the pattern of one's own nervous system projected onto the canvas." Every art historian should read this book to feel a little closer to the artistic process and to understand that asking questions of an artist is a great way to find out more.

Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. ***In Praise of Shadows.*** **Stony Creek, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1977.**

Tanizaki's short book is an eclectic rambling on Japanese culture. What impacted me was his discussion of the Japanese interest in half-light and darkness. According to Tanizaki (and I have no idea if this is true or not), the Japanese avoid stark light in favor of more somber tones. As an example, he discusses the difference between eating soup from a white bowl or from a dark-toned one. In the latter case, he argues that the tones allow for a more meditative and evocative experience. Modern and contemporary art seem to largely favor the well-lit, bright room as a paradigm, and Tanizaki's proposal that we tone down the bright lights to enhance the other senses seems to be a productive and seductive provocation for how we think about art in general.

JOHN WELLINGTON: TEMPLE TOMB FORTRESS RUIN

The Lodge Gallery – New York

By Kim Power

John Wellington, *You and Me,* 2009/2016, oil and copper leaf on aluminum, 68" x 48." Courtesy of John Wellington and The Lodge Gallery.

Reminiscent of heroic fantasy à la Frank Frazetta, John Wellington's exhibition, "Temple Tomb Fortress Ruin," at The Lodge Gallery speaks both to the artist's personal vision and our current sociopolitical climate. Wellington has participated in exhibitions throughout the United States and France, most notably at The Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris ("Chateaux Bordeaux," 1988) and the Arnot Art Museum in Elmira, N.Y. ("Representing Representation," 1998).

Challenging notions of political correctness, Wellington's paintings include naked and scantily dressed Asian women and African Americans in "Oriental" costumes. Wellington does not deny the fetishistic quality of his work, nor does he apologize for their subtly erotic representation. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 1962, French intellectual Georges Bataille wrote, "Man is everlastingly in search of an object outside himself but this object answers the innerness of the desire. The choice of object always depends on the personal taste of the subject; even if it lights upon a woman whom most men would choose, the decisive factor is often an intangible aspect of this woman, not an objective quality." Elucidating, Wellington states, "Everything I paint or sculpt has a fetishistic element, whether it's fruit or a black man or a fortress or a tree or an Asian woman or white woman or a white man—when I start to look at an object and devote hundreds of hours into realizing it, the whole idea is to elevate it into something beyond itself." Wellington's intent lies in his own personal ideal of beauty, which to him is sacrosanct.

To focus only on the superficial elements of erotic fetishism and unintentional links to 19th century colonialism in Wellington's paintings would be the equivalent of missing the forest for the trees. I believe the actual key lies in Wellington's simple vanitas, *For Your Dreams* (2013). In this oil painting, two realistically represented skulls lie on an abandoned beach, interrupted only by an empty canoe. An autumnal forest stands on a distant shore. The parallel thematic concept of the vanitas reveals itself in the fragility of civilization represented in the crumbling Neo-Classical stone ruins and burning military bunkers in such paintings as *Hero* (2016) and *Diana Bathing* (*with Guards*) (2013). Even modern day structures like the water tower in *Come Nearer the Fire* (2008) are not omitted from Wellington's dystopian universe. In these scenarios, his figures become contemporary avatars for Greek goddesses of old and heroic Arthurian knights. The timely allusion to fallen empires and icons raised to god-like stature, like the Takashi Murakami Mr. DOB plushy sitting aflame atop the Great Wall of China in *You and Me* (2009/2016), though not expressly made to order, is not lost on the perspicacious viewer.

Hidden in plain sight, Wellington employs allegorical symbols painted both from life and imagination. In *Bathing Diana* (*with Guards*), moon slivers, representing the goddess Diana, are emblazoned on the white caps of the women soldiers who serve as members of her retinue, marching in time on the shore, guarding her ritual ablutions. The moon appears again in a distant temple where an everlasting flame is lit in her honor. In *Hero*, a red-sheathed sword, adorned with a leather hilt, serves as ballast for a turbaned man seated on a stone pillar as he gazes onto a burning bunker. It shows up again in *Dangerous* (2011) on the lap of a young woman seated on a checkered floor, who glances coyly sideways at the words "And like any artist without an art form, She became dangerous," a quote borrowed from Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*, 1973, written in looping script in the upper right hand corner of the painting.

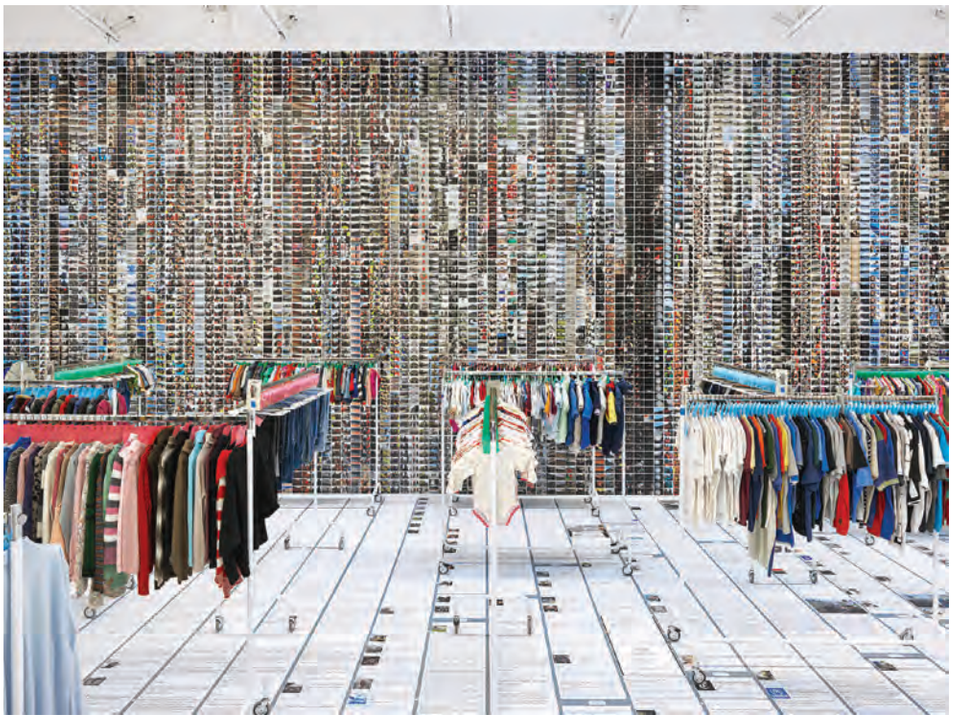
Whatever your conclusions may be regarding Wellington's portrayal of the female form and ethnicities other than his own, I recommend putting down your sword and taking up the mantle of peace to explore the rich narrative presented in this exhibition. Who knows? You might even enjoy it. ■

(January 25 - March 5, 2017)

AI WEIWEI: LAUNDROMAT

Jeffrey Deitch Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas



"Ai Weiwei: Laundromat" installation view, 2016. Photo: Genevieve Hanson. Courtesy Jeffrey Deitch Inc., New York.

Among socially conscious artists meshing the dialogue concerning aesthetics with the controversial realm of international politics, Ai Weiwei (b. 1957, Beijing) is among the leading figures in the fight for justice. Highlighting the most urgent problems of our global society, Ai's dogged dedication to freedom of expression and basic human rights remains unparalleled among his artistic peers. He continues to court worldwide attention for his engagement with social issues by way of remarkable art activities around the globe. This past fall, New York City hosted four gallery shows of Ai's work: two at Mary Boone locations, one at Lisson Gallery and one at the recently reestablished Jeffrey Deitch Gallery. Among these exhibitions, "Ai Weiwei: Laundromat" at Deitch—a purely conceptual non-commercial exhibit—presented a meaningful installation that poignantly portrayed Ai's latest artistic focus: the refugee crisis.

By now, most of us are familiar with Ai's blunt biography: the son of the revered poet Ai Qing (1910-1996) who was ousted by the Chinese Communist Party, Ai grew up as a detested outsider in the hinterland of northwest China. He eventually returned to his native Beijing to study film, though he dropped out of school and moved to New York, where he lived for a decade. Ai went back to China in the early 1990s and became active in the arts scene. He designed the Beijing Olympic Stadium in 2008, but later denounced his involvement while simultaneously rising to international stature in the art world. Ai was detained on dubious charges and kept under house arrest from 2011 to 2015. His story is now legendary to anyone even remotely plugged into the spheres of art and activism.

Over the past year, Ai has spent considerable time at the refugee camp at Idomeni on the border of Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. There he has documented the deplorable conditions of thousands of stranded refugees whose lives have been completely turned upside down. Ai says his interest in documenting a refugee project began when he was living under domestic arrest after his 81-day detention in 2011. During those years, he participated in hundreds of exhibitions in absentia. For the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), the Ruya Foundation invited him to select a series of drawings for publication made by refugees living in the Shariya refugee camp in Iraq, which gave him the opportunity to become involved with the refugee situation from afar.

Ai first travelled to Berlin after his passport was returned by the Chinese authorities in July 2015; there, he met with refugees from Syria and began his journey following their path, which is carefully documented in the "Laundromat" exhibition at Deitch. The show consisted of five distinct "sub-installations" within one: floor-to-ceiling wallpaper comprised of thousands of photographs documenting refugees; a floor covered with hundreds of politically oriented news headlines and images, Tweets and Instagram posts; racks of clothing displaying hundreds of items, ranging from newborn onesies to adult *jilabas*; a lengthy row of assorted shoes; and a video segment chronicling the harsh realities of Ai's travels to various refugee camps around Europe.

Ai says that when he first started filming at the Idomeni camp, he noticed people trying to change their clothes or wash their meager belongings. When the camps were relocated the refugees left behind piles of garments. Ai's team negotiated with local officials, who agreed to let him take away clothes and shoes, all of which were "impossibly dirty," according to the artist. He transported everything to his studio in Berlin, where his assistants carefully washed, dried, ironed and recorded each item. Ai refers to his "Laundromat" installation as a "*Gesamtkunstwerk*," or "total work of art"—the documentary footage, research, archiving of materials and presentation of these activities—all these elements represent the same effort. He sees this particular exhibit as a platform that allows the refugees a voice and offers testimony to their presence in the world. If "Laundromat" is any indication of the desperately muddled state of politics and humanity, we can respect Ai's art as a powerful form of cleansing and care. ■

(November 5 – December 23, 2016)

Taliesin Thomas is a Brooklyn-based artist-philosopher, writer and lecturer working in the field of contemporary Chinese art. She is the founding director of AW Asia, New York. Thomas holds an M.A. in East Asian Studies from Columbia University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in art theory and philosophy at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

Marilyn Minter, *Pop Rocks*, 2009, enamel on metal, 108" x 180." Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum, NY.

MARILYN MINTER: PRETTY/DIRTY

Brooklyn Museum – New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Women's sexuality has been a fascination throughout the sweep of art history, and numerous examples from ancient to contemporary times express the allure of the female form and its power to convey, coerce and captivate. Where feminist-theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jacqueline Rose have considered the "fabrication" and "masquerade" of woman as a cultural construct, female artists employing feminine themes in their work have another responsibility altogether—the transference of these ideas into aesthetic form.

Marilyn Minter (b. 1948 in Shreveport, La.) has fearlessly demonstrated, through her unparalleled artistic exploration of female bodies, that the fantasy of female sex is a subject ripe for continued articulation and appreciation. If the "gaze" of desire remains a contested issue in psychoanalysis and art theory alike, then Minter's ability to court our attention is a symbolic gesture that borders on reverential. Her retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum, "Marilyn Minter Pretty/Dirty," is a stunning, in-your-face depiction of glorious, garish female beauty.

Minter studied at Syracuse University and moved to New York City in 1976. She worked a string of odd jobs, from a plumber's assistant to teacher, while focusing on her art and partying with the motley crowd that defined the 1980s downtown scene. In 1989, she purchased 30-second promotion spots during major television programs to air her *100 Food Porn* commercial while exhibiting a painting series of the same title at a local gallery. Over the years, her work continued to incorporate imagery borrowed from advertising and the porn industry, and the Brooklyn Museum survey includes a selection of these examples. What appears to emerge over time, however, is a more refined depiction of Minter's formation of sensuality. Where earlier works such as *White Cotton Panties* (1992) tend toward a more tawdry expression of female sex—exposed vulva and all—her large-scale paintings titled *Pop Rocks* (2009) and *Orange Crush* (2009) are both sumptuous and superb. In these particular works, colorful tongues pressed hard against glass covered with bubbles of glittered caviar suggest a majestic portrayal of femininity that transcends the semiotic.

The most arresting work in the exhibition is a video titled *Smash* (2014). Projected against a full wall in its own room, this piece features a set of female feet clad in grubby silver heels dancing in a puddle of muddied water. Minter transforms her grimy movements into a state of sublime power, although we never see beyond the scope of her ankles, her motions demonstrate an archetypal sense of passion and release as she spins, prances and kicks the area around her, creating a display that drenches the viewer in its provocative cascade. The shoes and the deluge eventually fade into a slow-motion abstraction of energetic color—the effect is mesmerizing and magnificent.

Where the prickly nature of radical feminist theories implore us to employ "caution" as we consider the tensions inherent in the conversations that inform feminist dialogue, Minter is straightforward about her intentions: "I do try to seduce people with my paintings. I want you to get sucked in by their lusciousness," she states in the exhibition catalogue. Are Minter's modes of sublimated sexual escapade exploitative or exquisite? Does it matter that these women are pretty *and* dirty? Regardless of whether or not we choose to view Minter's work through a theoretical lens bent toward a "fair" description of female identity and corresponding images of femininity, one can appreciate these works for their unabashed display of succulent seduction as commanded by female agency. ■

(November 4, 2016 – April 2, 2017)

ARON WIESENFELD: UNWIND THE WINDING PATH

Jonathan LeVine Gallery – New York

By Kim Power

Aron Wiesenfeld, *Bunker*, 2016, oil on canvas, 33.5" x 44.5." Courtesy of Jonathan LeVine Gallery.

Aron Wiesenfeld's current exhibition, "Unwind the Winding Path" at Jonathan LeVine Gallery in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, invites us to travel into virgin woodlands, down rivers of unknown origin and to lie down in green pastures strewn with wildflowers. It is an imaginary and untamed natural world all his own that has successfully led his work to be included in shows at the Long Beach Museum of Art ("Masterworks: Defining a New Narrative," 2014), Bakersfield Museum of Art ("Aron Wiesenfeld: Drawings and Paintings," 2010) and Casa Dell'Architettura museum in Italy ("Primordial Memory," 2013).

Wiesenfeld's waif-like, pre-and-newly-pubescent girls, isolated in supernatural Whistler-like landscapes and wearing weather-inappropriate schoolgirl clothing, are simultaneously vulnerable and introspective. There is an element of the uncanny as they wait, ponder and reflect, a pregnant moment full of mysterious portent. An unspoken existential angst seems to be implied in these solitary figures. They are not archetypically heroic, but I find myself rooting for the dreamy wanderers who inspire me to wax nostalgic about my own pre-adolescent sense of wonder at the magical possibilities of abandoned and forgotten places.

Evasive when asked to define his narrative, Wiesenfeld prefers to leave room for the viewer's imagination to complete his tableaus. Still, some offer clues, like a trail of breadcrumbs. The charcoal diptych drawing *Picnic* (2016) reveals a dense forest, an abandoned picnic, the barely discernable silhouettes of a girl and boy wandering deeper into unknown territory while a dark castle in the distance signals the way back to civilization. This could be the setting for the Brothers Grimm fairy tale of *Hansel and Gretel*, except for a young woman who stands idly by, witness to the scene.

Daughter (2016) shows us a naked, ageless woman, painted in oil, lying on a forest floor, hair enmeshed with leaves and half of her body obscured in the shadows of emerald green bushes. Her arms reach out towards the overgrowth as if to a lover. Is this a reference to Correggio's *Jupiter and Io* (1532-1533)?

In a large charcoal drawing, *Eleanor* (2016), a young woman with a chrysanthemum in her hair and sporting a 1970s secretary blouse, leans against a tree while gazing wistfully downward, neither revealing sadness nor joy. Arms hanging loosely by her sides, she holds an indecipherable letter in her delicate hands, which obliquely form the shape of a heart. One cannot help but think of another young woman with downcast eyes and unreadable expression—Vermeer's *A Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (c. 1657-1659).

The detailed specificity of plant life in Wiesenfeld's large-scale painting *Bunker* (2016) is reminiscent of *The Unicorn Tapestries* (1495–1505), a similar theme shared by the pop surrealist Mark Ryden's *Dodecahedron* (2016) series of paintings. However, Wiesenfeld's style leans more towards late 18th-century Romanticist painting in sentiment, revealing the remnants of human presence. A neglected bunker is hidden below a field of wildflowers. The naked framework of an abandoned greenhouse is battered by wind and rain in *The Off Season* (2016). Wiesenfeld's youthful tronies display a pioneering heroism in both their submission to, but also stoic existence in the face of, the vagaries of nature and its elements, whether lying half-conscious in a field of flowers under a stormy sky or waiting out a rainstorm under a flimsy blue tarp.

Like a modern-day Lewis Carol, Wiesenfeld stretches the figure into superhuman proportions in his charcoal drawing *The Tower* (2016) and reduces it to insignificance in relation to its environment, as in the painting *Night Grove* (2016) in which a young girl holds a single flashlight before a foreboding black gap between trees too tall to fit into the picture frame. Allusions to Alice's adventures down the rabbit hole and other tall tales cause Wiesenfeld's paintings and drawings to tilt towards the side of illustration. I would be tempted to call it just that without prejudice, being a lover of the Golden Age of Illustration myself, but the Balthusian aspect of the girls he portrays and the Hitchcock-like sense of suspenseful drama tells a different story, deceptively simple yet rife with complex Freudian interpretations. Whether his characters represent the author, viewer or narrator, they allow us to enter into the artist's imaginary realm and invite us to share a solitary experience of uncertain outcome. This is the stuff dreams are made of. ■

(November 19 - December 17, 2016)

Siri Berg, *In Color (installation View)*, 2016. Courtesy of Hionas Gallery and Shirley Fiterman Art Center, BMCC.

SIRI BERG: IN COLOR

Shirley Fiterman Art Center – New York
Curated by Peter Hionas

By Kim Power

Joseph Albers, artist and author of the groundbreaking book *Interaction of Color* (1963), once said, "Colors influence and change each other forth and back. They continuously interact—in our perception."

Siri Berg's solo exhibition "In Color" at Shirley Fiterman Art Center, curated by Peter Hionas of Hionas Gallery, presents a mini retrospective of a life spent examining this very premise, with more than 70 artworks on display. In a career spanning some 30 years, Berg's works have been included in the permanent collections of the Guggenheim Museum, New York; Southwest State University Art Museum, New Mexico; Cornell University's Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, N.Y.; and the Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm, where she was born.

In a reverse time line the exhibition begins with six large rectangular panels, evenly spaced, named for their local colors, *Purple, Red, Orange, Light Green, Aqua Blue and Dark Green* (all created in 2015). Color fields that can be placed in any order, these six panels set the tone for all the other works, as if they are the genesis and not terminus of her explorations, reducing color to its most minimal characteristics and allowing it to be experienced solely on the merits of its factual existence alone. Refreshing as this display might be, it also has the potential for the mundane, and so the mind wanders into subjective query.

Berg presents color like a mathematician proving a theorem. It is formulaic, sectioned and divided, arranged and rearranged in a myriad of possible combinations, in a simplified geometry of space, color and value relationships. The deliberate and conscious way Berg disassembles and reassembles the same problem takes on the characteristics of a Zen koan, in that it becomes not about the question itself, but about the process of questioning.

Take Berg's *Straight Line 1-3* (1999) series of three small square paintings. Berg has utilized the highly chromatic orange, red and purple seen in her larger panels, isolated on a thin strip across the top uniting each square. Below, a wider parallel strip from the same series is painted in darker earth tones. Sandwiched in between, from left to right, is a wide band of vertical rectangles: pale pastels in the first, more neutral earth tones in the second and in the third, the same neutrals are embellished with a stucco-like paint surface. If these colors were assigned numbers, they would appear as a simple divisional equation with the added variable of texture. I can almost hear it in my head: If red is to orange as pink is to brown—the probable combinations are endless.

In Berg's earlier figure/ground explorations *Phases - Works on Paper* (1974) and *Progressions #3* (1974) sectioned circles wax and wane like phases of the moon. Laid out in five-by-five rows on graph paper, the shapes are described in a thinly cut tape. The second work sees them filled in orange marker dn colored pencil, while the third completes the cycle, filling in the background with turquoise. These works along with others such as *Bottom Circle* (1970), a smaller circle resting inside a larger one, reiterate the prioritization of shape and color of the Bauhaus period as well as Kandinsky's design sensibility, without straying from the origin of its influences.

Berg doesn't take on a lot of risks in her works. They are largely a calculated examination of principles laid down by artists like Joseph Albers and utilized by many artists of the early 1970s, and in that sense they are perhaps not entirely remarkable. What is perhaps noteworthy is the dedication to purpose with which Berg has single-mindedly focused all her artistic energy. In a world of distractions where chaos reigns, these seemingly simple, minimalistic and, yes, at times monotonous works, take on the aspects of a quiet revolution. ■

(November 17, 2016 - February 4, 2017)

DAVID GAITHER: AXIOM

511 Gallery – New York

By Kim Power

David Gaither, *The Chromatic Wars: Guerrilla Warfare / Maximal Insurgency,* 2015, mixed media, acrylic, gouache, composite, and solidified paints, plus advanced polymers on panel (triptych), 49" x 75." Courtesy of 511 Gallery and David Gaither.

Maximalism. A term often associated with overabundance and sensory saturation. David Gaither, collagist, painter and self-proclaimed maximalist, takes ownership of the term in his exhibit, "Axiom," at 511 Gallery in Manhattan. Gaither's enthusiasm and consistent work ethic have already landed him a solo show at the Tubman Museum in Macon, Ga., ("David Gaither: Growth & Expansion," 2016*)* and inclusion in group show at the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston ("A Play of Abstraction at Northeastern Crossing," 2015). Gaither has plans to exhibit his paintings at the Albany Museum of Art in Georgia, in 2017 and Detroit's Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in 2018.

Defining maximalism as "an ultra-saturation of complex colors with complex shapes" (Cascade Patch video interview with Marc Richardson, 2013), Gaither applies a flexible methodology in the realization of his vision, adjusting it according to the theme of each painting. Generally, the initial step of creating a rough sketch of the design, which Gaither describes as "mapping it out," is followed by the application of a personal color-coding system to each section of the drawing, a bit like a sophisticated version of paint-by-numbers. The enlargement of this schematic is then realized in a variety of mediums, including acrylic, gouache and composite paint on canvas or MDF board.

Introducing the element of collage, Gaither's triptych *The Chromatic Wars*, *Guerrilla Warfare/Maximal Insurgency* (2015) displays a panoply of interconnected shapes and forms that serve as a colorful camouflage for images of war (tanks, and soldiers with ammunition preparing to shoot, charge and throw grenades), downloaded and printed from the Internet. Gaither has used these symbols not to make a statement about actual warfare but to represent an explosive color war. The contextual dissonance is disturbing when you consider the absence of any reference to the true significance of the original imagery, which is reduced to being one more decorative element among many. The lack of consideration of what is signified undermines the subject matter's authenticity which, as Walter Benjamin defines in his famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), "is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."

The bold colors and shapes in Gaither's works are a virtual minefield of visual information. When your ears stop ringing and your eyes adjust, you begin to see a sort of logic in the cacophony. There is a method in his madness. In all but one of Gaither's paintings in *Axiom*, you will find a star, either five or seven pointed, expanding in layers of orange and yellow. At times it is central to the composition, as in *Guerrilla Warfare* or his tondo painting *Starting to Grow – The Need for Expansion* (2016), while in others, such as his other large triptych, *The Maximal Composition #2 / Maximal Origami* (2015), it is multiplied and becomes just one more element in the mix. It's almost as if Gaither is using this icon as a representation of himself within a sea of visual stimuli.

Other modular forms (both painted on, collaged and applied in variable combinations of both) become evident as well, including circles, squares and rectangles that radiate rainbow bands of color. Windmill-like gears and typographic symbols such as commas suggest movement and use of the symbols as text. The manipulation of scale and shape through digital processes allows Gaither to design a complex web of imagery that has an endless variety of possible combinations. The result is a playful piece of eye candy with bright, primary colors intermixed with pastels and neutral grays in a carefully orchestrated design of hard-edge abstraction that implies a sense of kaleidoscopic depth within a flat picture plane. Gaither's strong use of optical design techniques, such as ambiguous figures, ground relationships, and pulsating rays of color create a sense of motion within this space, ever expanding and receding. Resurrecting the qualities of Pop art appropriation and Bauhaus design through a maximalist tapestry of signs and symbols, Gaither's paintings describe a multifarious universe of personal iconography. ■

(October 20 – December 5, 2016)

PERPETUAL REVOLUTION

International Center of Photography – New York

By Keren Moscovitch

According to Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[1] The International Center of Photography's prescient exhibition "Perpetual Revolution"[2] reveals photography's role in constructing, and deconstructing, these very ideologies. The medium's historical relevance to social and political consciousness is underscored, as is its symbiosis with emerging technologies—a trait that harnesses its power of revolt. This ever-evolving imaginary realm, shifting in concert with social and technological progress, provides a radical alternative to dominant modes of thought that threaten our planet and our humanity. The exhibition explores a range of themes relevant to photography and revolution, including climate change, migration, gender and race, as well as the parallel propaganda machines of the American alt-right and the Islamic State.

Chasing Ice, a striking wall-sized video of a calving glacier by James Balog introduces the first section, *Climate Changes*. As icy blue slabs crumble languidly into the sea, not even the horrifying data provided about the magnitude of such catastrophic geological shifts are enough to distract from the sublime beauty of a planet undergoing radical transformation. Transitioning from the rising sea to the masses of people for whom these very same waters represent both salvation and potential death, *The Flood: Refugees and Representation*, is anchored by Hakan Topal's meditative sculpture *Untitled (Ocean)*. The piece features a tabletop covered in rolling hills of limestone dust and projections of a nomadic framework of contemporary media depicting the swarms of people trapped in migratory flux. A single image serves as punctum in the deluge—the body of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler washed up on the shores of Turkey after his family's failed crossing to freedom. The tiny recognizable form looms large on a sea of empty pixels, his image extracted from its digital framework in acknowledgement of his only remaining life as a symbol of suffering.

While most of the exhibition imagines a dismal reality of inequality, destruction and injustice, the section *The Fluidity of Gender* reveals a world shaped by tragedy yet insistent on the proud celebration of human sexuality and difference. Particularly striking is the role of social media in rupturing harmful ideologies and constructing in their place a new ethic of inclusion. Choreographer Yanis Marshall's delightful music videos of bearded dancers in nine-inch stilettos defy a wide swath of gender constructions to express "liberated, joyful masculinity" in the language of mainstream media. Excerpts from the Instagram account of genderqueer photographer Jarrid Jones and grassroots publications such as *Original Plumbing* complement Caitlin Jenner's historic *Vanity Fair* cover.

The section *Black Lives (Have Always) Mattered* highlights the historic ubiquity of the black imaginary, its aesthetic of resistance emitting from the bodies of the marginalized in the dominant language of Western technology. The preponderance of anonymity in this section emphasizes the persistent invisibility of the uninscribed in the eyes of dominant modes of seeing. We are confronted by the erasure embodied by images such as *Unidentified Woman with Camera, ca. 1935* by "Unidentified Photographer" and *Unidentified Man, ca. 1910* by John Frederick Fasnacht, a proudly stoic military figure wearing the regalia of a country that has enslaved him. A tapestry of black lives reveals whipped backs, beauty parlors and Black Panthers—an image-construction that shines light on realities that have escaped representation and evaded awareness for centuries.

By the end of the exhibition, we are reminded of the role of photographic images in the seemingly least aesthetic of spaces. The curators tread lightly in the section *Propaganda and the Islamic State*, which is set up as a study center rather than a traditional exhibition. The viewer is at once seduced and repelled by the threat of seeing abject violence, leaving this room to feel the most taboo of all. Meanwhile, selective curatorial censorship takes care not to sensationalize, but to educate. In the final room, *The Right-Wing Fringe and the 2016 Election*, the faces of Donald Trump and Pepe the Frog smirk out at us from a cacophony of social media memes, and we are confronted with our own culpability in producing and reifying the imaginaries that construct our ideological prison. It is we, after all, who create images of ourselves in order to both record existing infrastructures and create new ones. It is we who are invited to take responsibility in the perpetual revolution of images. ■

(January 27 – May 7, 2017)

NOTES

1. From Louis Althusser's pamphlet *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970)
2. "Perpetual Revolution" was organized by ICP curators Carol Squiers and Cynthia Young, ICP assistant curators Susan Carlson and Claartje van Dijk, and adjunct curators Joanna Lehan and Kalia Brooks.

Keren Moscovitch is an interdisciplinary artist, curator and scholar exploring the intersection of the sexual and the spiritual. She is based in New York City where she teaches at the School of Visual Arts. Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions in the U.S. and abroad, and reviewed in publications such as Der Spiegel, The Huffington Post, Playboy, Policy Mic *and* New York Magazine.

COMING TO POWER: 25 YEARS OF SEXUALLY X-PLICIT ART BY WOMEN

Maccarone Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Doris Kloster, *Bullwhipping*, 1993, gelatin silver print, 20" x 24." Courtesy of the artist and Maccarone, New York/Los Angeles.

The recent presidential election outcome has many women asking the same question: Did straight-up sexism undermine the balloting process? While the "real" ethos of the coming presidential term has yet to be fully revealed, one marked result of the election aftermath seems to be a reinvigorated discussion concerning the feminist agenda and significance of yesteryear's feminist theory in the light of our current situation. Have the previous 'waves' of feminism been watered down or simply washed out as concerns regarding women's agency become increasingly marginalized in the light of patriarchal zealotry? What can American women hope for when the commander in chief has openly touted his desire to "grab 'em by the pussy?"

One possible response to these urgent questions came in the form of a bold artistic ensemble at Maccarone Gallery in New York this past fall: "COMING TO POWER: 25 Years Of Sexually X-Plicit Art By Women." This was a restated group exhibition of the same feminist show originally curated by Ellen Cantor at David Zwirner Gallery in 1993. Set against bare black walls, this colorfully erotic exhibition included a range of artistic practices, including painting, sculpture, video, photography and installation, by leading female artists such as Lynda Benglis, Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Ellen Cantor, Patricia Cronin, Mary Beth Edelson, Nicole Eisenman, Nancy Fried, Nan Goldin, Nancy Grossman, Pnina Jalon, Joyce Kozloff, Zoe Leonard, Monica Majoli, Marilyn Minter, Alice Neel, Lorraine O'Grady, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Spero and Hannah Wilke, among others.

A motley showing of powerhouse female figures en masse, "COMING TO POWER" reflected a curious cross-section of desire, diversity and sexual significance from a time gone by—the original exhibition is more than 20 years old—yet the overall atmosphere created by this reestablished exhibition aptly reflected the irritation (and irrationality) of the American social-political climate of today. The combination of works literally "strapped-on" and straddled the intersection between feminism, sexual politics, performative porn, queer practice and art praxis. Through its diverse presentation of sexual radicalism and identity politics, the prevailing "COMING TO POWER" message was that of confrontation and provocation. One such example, *Bullwhipping* (1993), a photo by Doris Kloster of a woman clad in leather whipping a naked man whose arms are bound above his head, suggested overt tyranny. Another was *Janus* (1968) by Louise Bourgeois, an impossibly large black dildo-like bronze sculpture hanging from the ceiling like an authority to be reckoned with. Taken altogether, the assorted artworks in this show confess a combination of thrill and threat.

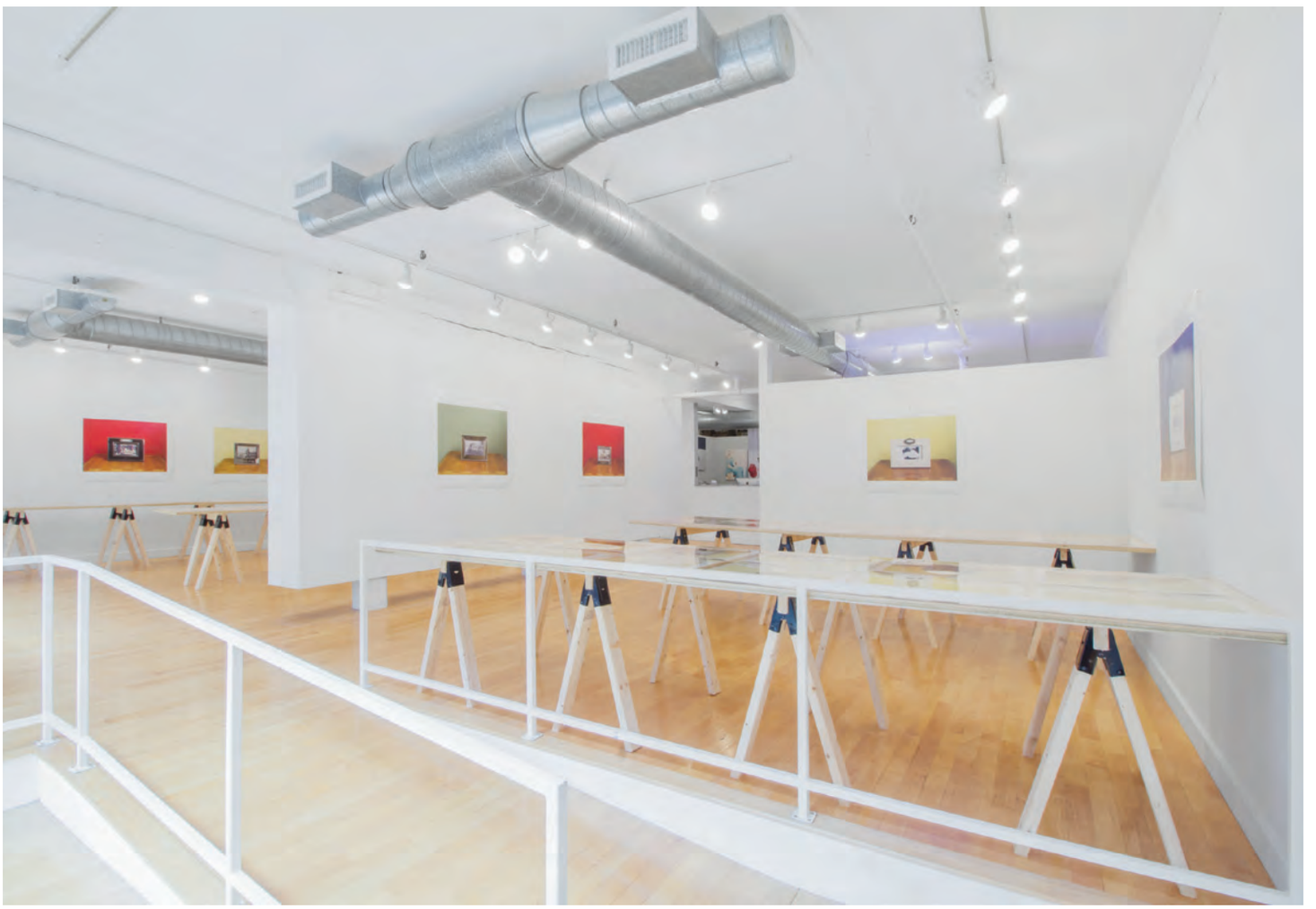
If "COMING TO POWER" is any indication of how art can deal with our conflicted social milieu and its misogynistic attitude toward women, one can feel assured that "pussy" is a powerful concept that expresses both autonomous pleasure and pain. While the alt-right fears the multiplicity of queer, trans, homosexual and gender-bending people, open-minded women and artists especially will continue to embolden the discourse of the sexual self without shame or fear. "COMING TO POWER" suggests that our collective pussy can flaunt, posture, prod and even grab back when necessary. ■

(September 9 – October 16, 2016)

STEVE LOCKE: FAMILY PICTURES

Gallery Kayafas - Boston, Mass.

By Gregory Eltringham



"Steve Locke: Family Pictures" at Gallery Kayafas, Boston, Mass, installation view.

It was a short walk from Samson Gallery, where I attended Steve Locke's opening reception for his solo show "School of Love," to the Gallery Kayafas, some two doors down, where I viewed "Family Pictures," his second and concurrent solo show. "Family Pictures" is a compelling show, not because Locke deviates from his usual painting and sculptural practice, which is on full display in "School of Love," but because he enters new territory, utilizing the medium of photography in conjunction with appropriation and installation strategies, fusing this show into a scathing critique of our alleged post-racial society.

Locke was on sabbatical when he decided he had to make work in response to the increasing number of televised killings of black individuals at the hands of U.S. law enforcement. Utilizing photography to create a series of images as part of a very methodical and purposeful installation, Locke lays bare the core issues that underlie the inability to move forward on race in this country, connecting the events of the past with the detached spectacle we are witnessing today.

Locke lulls us in, setting up the show so that the uninitiated viewer comes to the work unaware, and even after reading the information on the wall at the first switchback on the ramp leading up to the exhibition, one is certainly not prepared for what is to come. The gallery has several rows of vitrines that remind one of a triage room, or tables where evidence from an investigation is laid out for examination after a traumatic event. Locke arranges his series of images so the viewer will be fully focused on what is being presented as they move along the tables. The images on the wall repeat in larger format the images that are presented in the vitrines.

Starting with the first vitrine, an image of a diagram of a slave ship presented in a store-bought, ceramic table-top frame with the phrase "Our Honeymoon" inscribed on it and a relief of two flip flops photographed on a 1960s-style end table in front of a red wall, one is provided with the historical orientation and aesthetic platform in which the images will be presented. This will be a history lesson. In the next image, and the ones that immediately follow, the work evolves from that initial distant reminder to the 20th century, presenting a series of images within these sentimental frames that reveal the full horror of the show. Images culled from souvenir postcards celebrating lynchings, with insipid phrases substituting for the captions that were often included on the original postcards that freely passed through the mail until that practice was banned in the early 20th century, jar the spectator and question their complicity in the event: a charred corpse in a

"Steve Locke: Family Pictures" at Gallery Kayafas, Boston, Mass, installation view.

frame that reads *"Always & Forever"*; two hanging bodies flanked by smiling white males with the phrase "Who wouldn't want to be us"; and another with two bodies suspended over a crowd of men and women with the phrase "I can't believe we did that."

The color shifts represent different rooms in a house, placing them in a shifting domestic context. The 1960s-era end table is reminiscent of the monumental shifts that were occurring regarding civil rights at the time, but the contrast between this historic imagery from the past fused with the contemporary frames provided the reminder that there has essentially been no progress on this fundamental issue.

What Locke presents is evidence of complicity. As a white viewer, I am left with a simple fact: this existed and still exists. It also presents the very real fact that I can't really know how it feels, but I can look at this work and clearly see the issue. I cannot explain it away, I cannot pretend it didn't happen, I cannot pretend to understand. Most of all I cannot pretend that the problem has been solved and that I am somehow not part of the problem. In an interview with Manthia Diawara, the late writer and critic Édouard Glissant said, "A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn't understand. I can accept what I don't understand. Opacity is a right we must have."

Ever the teacher, Locke provides a space at the rear of the gallery that includes a table with books on the racial history of the United States. The niche includes a blue neon piece titled "A Dream," meant to mimic police lights (part of his piece for the *MassArt* biennale faculty show that listed the names of the 262 unarmed African Americans killed or who died while in police custody during Locke's sabbatical from 2014-2015). Locke's table of books is a space of contemplation and, if one wishes, investigation. It is here that Locke generously offers viewers the resources and opportunity to understand their history and their role in that history. It's a painful and necessary show and as an artistic gesture provides the privileged viewer a way to access information that few media outlets provide. It rises above the chatter and whitesplaining and offers a sobering critique, placing the responsibility on the viewer as to how they plan to proceed. ■

(October 21 - November 26, 2016)

Gregory Eltringham is a writer, musician and practicing artist. He is professor of painting at Savannah College of Art and Design and serves as art director and associate editor for the online contemporary art publication, artcorejournal.net. His paintings have been exhibited in numerous shows throughout the United States and Europe.

AMY SCHISSEL: #EVERYTHINGTHATHAPPENSATONCE

Laura Mesaros Gallery, West Virginia University - Morgantown, W.V.

By Jason Hoelscher

Amy Schissel, *#everythingthathappensatonce,* installation view, 2017, dimensions variable. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Amy Schissel has a lot to say, show, reveal and connect in her recent exhibition, titled "#everythingthathappensatonce." This name is apt in that, although the paintings lack the unity and right-here presentness of, for example, a monochrome, the sheer volume of visual incident and energy are so densely entwined they might as well be an inextricable mass of everything happening all at once. Like a screen of shifting, effervescent static in other words, individual components become difficult to disentangle and see at a unit-by-unit level and operate more like a solid surface releasing latent potential.

That said, an equally apt exhibition title might have been #everythinghappenshereandeverywhere. The hashtag in the title indicates an interesting agenda, particularly for such a localizable and object-based discipline as painting. The hash (#) generally precedes and tags a phrase or idea so others can find and cross-reference the wide range of social media posts or comments that mention it. Hashtags bring a disparate set of comments posted by many people, from multiple areas, into relation, and much the same can be said of Schissel's exhibition. Firstly, and most obviously, these works bring together a mesh of visual modes that range from tropes of old-school modernist abstraction and psychedelic imagery to the screen-space protocols of network flows. Many painters have played with such combinations in recent years, and Schissel does it with rare finesse, pitting tropes of modernist opticality against eye-popping color, set off within a picture space that seems flat not so much in a Greenbergian sense, but rather like layered tabs in a browser window.

Of equal interest, however, is the implication of ideas like "everything happens at once" and "everything happens here and everywhere" in the way these paintings want centrifugally to escape the bounds of the canvas while simultaneously and centripetally being drawn back in. For example, in *Painting II*, this happens prominently on the Z axis in the way certain patches of the picture plane look like they want to recede into deep perspectival space while simultaneously being neutralized by jagged forms of cloudier and murkier brushwork, as well as by tiny zips of lateral motion that flitter back and forth across the canvas. Some works even extend the Z axis forward from the picture plane, pushing out along the floor into the space in front of the canvas.

If these paintings' Z axes are spatially complicated, the X and Y axes are truly complex. In the way the canvases are enmeshed in a network of shapes, forms and marks, they act less as individual paintings than as an aggregate object of painterly diffusion that admirably sprawls across the wall. These forms, extending as they do so densely out and beyond the frame of the canvas, smartly suggest that the visual energy unleashed on any individual canvas itself is too much to be contained within the depicted space and needs a release valve into actual space in order to maintain coherence.

Schissel's transgressing of the boundaries of her painted objects' X/Y axes suggests an interesting resonance with Jacques Derrida's notion of an artwork's *ergon/parergon* relationship. This refers to the relationship between an artwork (*ergon*) and its framing mechanism (*parergon*), regarding where the boundary of one stops and the other begins. For example, to a painting, the frame is part of the wall, while to the wall the frame is part of the artwork. A frame, then, acts as a *parergonal* interface that mediates the relationship between two different forces, internal and external, without being part of either one. In this smart exhibition, Schissel breaks this binary down altogether, with the artwork traversing and activating both wall and object. This brings the two into a tense, open-ended series of negotiations regarding how each aspect—the slightly more diffuse paint on the walls and the more densely concentrated paint on the canvas—can work together to rev up and activate the overall context in its entirety. ■

(February 2 – March 3, 2017)

Jason Hoelscher is a painter, writer and educator based in Savannah, Ga. He has exhibited his work in New York, Paris, Berlin, Hong Kong, Stockholm and elsewhere. He has contributed to such publications as ARTPULSE, Evental Aesthetics, Artcore Journal *and various anthologies and conferences. Hoelscher received his MFA in painting from the Pratt Institute and is completing a Ph.D. in aesthetics and art theory at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.*

"The Other Dimension," an exhibition by Antuan Rodriguez at Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. Courtesy of the artist.

THE OTHER DIMENSION

Museum of Contemporary Art – North Miami
Curated by Jorge Luis Gutiérrez

By Raisa Clavijo

"The Other Dimension" constituted an ambitious project conceived of by Miami-based Antuan Rodríguez and curated by Jorge Luis Gutiérrez that became a study of the symbols and codes that contribute to establishing universal communication and overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers.

Antuan starts with the premise that art constitutes a weapon of seduction that provokes the viewer, which leads to reflection and, in the best cases, to action out of a desire to change reality. With "The Other Dimension," this artist proposes an integration of humanity through art. Throughout his career, he has studied the iconographic bases of language from the beginnings of civilization and has detected recurring codes that start with the stylization of the human figure. He reproduces a pattern—known as "The Flower of Life"—in different combinations and proposes communion among human beings through empathy.

Research has always formed the backbone of Antuan's work. Likewise, he has established interdisciplinary ties between art, science, technology, design and industry. Specifically, the relationship between art and industry has been a constant throughout his professional trajectory. In this exhibition, he has blended the healing and uplifting character of art with the design of utilitarian objects. On this occasion, he included a design of tiles that he created in collaboration with Kertiles, a factory with locations in the United States and Spain. Antuan worked on a mosaic that suggests a template for universal communication promoting respect and unity among men.

The curatorial selection in "The Other Dimension" included various previous pieces, although it was not strictly a retrospective. Throughout the years, Antuan has developed a vast body of work with two recurring elements: the object and the human figure. His works constitute visual metaphors through which he addresses themes of political, economic and social interest with universal repercussions. *Words that Kill*, *Left or Right*, *Equipo de limpieza para limpiar tu alma* and *Changing Our Fables* are some examples.

Another interesting piece is *Vibration 7.8*, in which the artist produces, with various healing musical instruments, a vibration that seeks equilibrium and generates a purifying effect in the human body. Antuan minimized the harmful vibrations that cause many illnesses, and through sound he fostered a narrative about the space that the viewer could intuitively decode. The images of these vibrations were represented on canvases also included in the exhibition.

The Other Dimension was a section within the show that, apart from serving as inspiration for the title, included a group of sculptures whose surfaces reproduce a kind of alphabet conceived by the artist consisting of binary codes. Each code signifies a type of situation or human being, with the combination of various codes comprising a message. They are messages motivated by the communication vacuum that currently exists, which has its roots in the loss of the connection between man and his spiritual essence. The artist has explored this combination of binary codes and immortalized them in paintings and drawings. Additionally, he has developed a design project for public spaces in which the diverse elements that make up said spaces communicate a liberating message.

Antuan's works invite reflection on present-day themes, such as the meaning of time, lack of communication, loss of equilibrium between man and his environment, and lack of connection with the past, among other topics. Each piece takes on meaning as it interacts with the viewer and contributes to exploring human behavior. ■

(November 30, 2016 – January 22, 2017)

Raisa Clavijo is an art critic, curator and art historian based in Miami. She is founder and editor-in-chief of ARTPULSE *and* ARTDISTRICTS *magazines.*

SPEEDY GRAPHITO: AN AMERICAN STORY

Fabien Castanier Gallery - Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

Speedy Graphito, *Play*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 55" x 63." Courtesy of the artist and Fabien Castanier Gallery.

Fabien Castanier Gallery opened its new space in the Wynwood Art District with "An American Story," a solo exhibition by Speedy Graphito (Oliver Rizzo), who has developed an imagery inspired as much by popular culture as by the legacy of modernism.

Born in Paris, Rizzo graduated with honors from l'École Estienne in 1983. A year later, he started signing his works "Speedy Graphito." In the 1980s, he was a notable figure within the street art movement in France alongside artists such as Jérôme Mesnager, Miss. Tic and Blek le Rat. Throughout his 30-year career, he has dabbled in media as diverse as painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video and performance. Although his incursion into urban art is a notable element in his artistic career, Speedy Graphito prefers to define himself as a painter. His academic training and knowledge of the history of art have defined his style and creative strategy.

The iconography that populates the works assembled in "An American Story" is based on continued dialogue with the history of painting through which the artist deconstructs and analyzes the role of the image in modernism and postmodernism. Since the beginning of his career, he has addressed with a critical look the symbols associated with rampant consumerism and advertising. This selection of pieces constitutes what the artist summarizes as "my art history" and is an amusing look at the legacy of modernism, above all those moments and figures in the history of art that have been relevant for the construction of his pictorial language. Many of the displayed works were created in Miami and arose as a result of his contact with the city, where he lived and worked for a time. In these works, Speedy Graphito immortalizes images that constitute icons of today's visual culture, thanks to their frequent presence on the Internet.

Speedy Graphito's principal strategy is based on appropriation and the rhetorical quote. He combines iconic elements associated with specific masters he considers integral to the history of art, comic book characters, pop artists and advertising images that have become cultural symbols of globalization. In his works, we see how fragments of the nudes of Tom Wesselmann share the scene with Homer Simpson, Super Mario and Pinocchio. In other pieces, bananas and Campbell's soup cans popularized by Andy Warhol, as well as Warholian versions of Marilyn Monroe and Michael Jackson, pose next to Keith Haring characters, the labyrinthine calligraphy of street graffiti, fragments of the works of Lichtenstein and the Apple logo. At the same time, on other canvases, the models of Wesselmann rest their exuberant curves in landscapes that appear to have escaped from the paintings of Matisse and van Gogh. Speedy Graphito's works constitute a revaluing of painting and mastery while at the same time also revaluing elements traditionally considered "lowbrow" but that have very strong roots in present-day culture. The optimistic smiles of the characters in his works hide a criticism of the social system, calling attention to the accumulation of material objects, the existential vacuum and the cult of the ego, all traits that characterize human behavior today.

Speedy Graphito's work has been exhibited in many major European museums and centers of contemporary art. Through the headquarters of Fabien Castanier Gallery in Los Angeles, he has developed a strong presence in the American art scene over the last six years. Parallel to the exhibition in Miami, Le Musée du Touquet-Paris-Plage presented his first retrospective, "Un art de vivre," which assembled his works from the past 30 years, including the famous poster for La Ruée vers l'art (1985) commissioned by France's Ministry of Culture. The retrospective, which was open to the public until May 21, ended with a selection of works from his latest series, "Mon histoire de l'art" (my art history). ■

(February 19 – April 30, 2017)

Luis Montoya and Leslie Ortiz, *Series Escargot I – Dinner Plate,* 2005, bronze. Courtesy of ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries.

LUIS MONTOYA AND LESLIE ORTIZ'S ADVENTURES

ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

"Culinary Adventures," an exhibition of the works of Luis Montoya and Leslie Ortiz, was presented at the beginning of this year at ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries in Coral Gables. This duo of artists, who have worked together for more than 20 years, explores in the smallest detail forms found in nature. Their bronzes and oil paintings recapture the value of still life, a genre traditionally marginalized within the history of Western art.

Still life dates back as far as ancient art. Scenes that faithfully represent flowers and fruit and that convey details about diet and domestic life have been found in the relics of Ancient Egypt. Similarly, still lifes created with a realist perspective were found in murals in Roman villas, as well as in mosaics in Pompeii and Herculaneum. However, it was in the 17th century, in the Netherlands, that this genre reached its greatest splendor and gained a place in history. Montoya and Ortiz value the effort of Baroque Dutch artists who studied the forms of nature in detail and immortalized them on canvas, even taking into account details like changes in color and texture depending on how light falls on them. This hyperrealist obsession caused Montoya and Ortiz to isolate such objects and turn them into the protagonist of their pieces, a strategy also put into practice by Pop artists in the second half of the 20th century, who embellished them with a subtle sense of humor.

The work of these two artists is based on re-creating natural forms—traditionally considered foreign to the idea of art such as eggs, artichokes, mollusks, bananas, olives, shrimp and grapes, among others—and carrying them to an exaggerated scale. The pieces appear to come from a surrealistic scene, challenging perception and all sense of proportion to be exhibited in the gallery or museum space in an even more surrealistic gesture.

Montoya and Ortiz wager everything on technical skill. Their sculptures have been produced using the lost-wax technique, a process that can take them up to eight weeks to complete. The forms are first modeled in wax and then covered by clay and fired to create a mold into which the molten bronze will be poured. The resulting bronze piece is then carefully polished and patinated to accentuate its realism. At a time when the international art scene has been overrun by artists who rely on pretentious conceptualism to overcome their lack of technical skill, this duo presents us with a body of work that invites viewers to explore every detail so they can marvel at the beautiful texture of a piece of rope, the structure of a leaf and the freshness of a fruit.

Montoya and Ortiz do not reveal a specific iconography that impels us as viewers to create allegoric and metaphoric associations upon observing their pieces. Nevertheless, they cause us to change our perception of the most common objects, leading us to see them in a new light and simply discover the sublime beauty enclosed in their forms. ■

(November 4, 2016 – February 24, 2017)

RAMIRO LLONA

The Americas Collection – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

Ramiro Llona, *Cuestión de género*, 2009, oil on canvas, 78 ¾" x 93 3/8." Courtesy of The Americas Collection.

The Americas Collection late last year presented a selection of canvases by the Peruvian artist Ramiro Llona, all of which were created within the last decade. Parallel to the exhibition in Miami, two expositions were presented in Lima: "El lugar de la pintura" at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo and "El gesto informado" at the Centro Cultural Británico. These expositions occurred 18 years after his first retrospective at the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) and brought together works on both canvas and paper, demonstrating the stylistic evolution of this artist.

Llona is one of the great masters of Latin American art. Some of that is due to the fact that, although his work has gone through several phases, it escapes pre-established categorizations. All the same, his oeuvre has always had its own distinct voice, unique and recognizable.

The art critic Jorge Villacorta observed in 1998, in his essay about the first retrospective, that Llona's painting had been constructed with its own language in constant dialogue with the pictorial legacies of modernism. He stated, "His work requires a reinterpretation of some prior approaches that transformed painting at the turn of the century. Moreover, he relies on them to ironically question the tradition of the new in the art of the last 40 years."[1]

His style has passed through recognizable figuration, where shadows and the color black prevailed, followed by an Abstract Expressionism dominated by movement and color to reach his current body of works in which he has attained a process of reflection on his own language. He understood that the pictorial problem is resolved through interacting with oils, exploring all expressive possibilities that the material could offer. In the current works, he begins the paintings in a very gestural way, applying color and drawing on the canvas. Suddenly, in the midst of the process, a color dominates the canvas and an organizing structure appears. Then, the color becomes the protagonist, a communicator of moods. Edward Sullivan, in an essay about Llona's oeuvre that accompanied the catalogue of the Miami exhibition, said,

Ramiro Llona, *Diálogo suspendido*, 2015 - 2016, oil on canvas, 118 1/8" x 128."

"The color itself—whether strong primary colors or his odd, hybrid colors like his unmistakable flesh tones and sometimes seeringly acidic yellows—functions with roles of their own as carriers of mood and announcers of an aura that permeates the canvas, spreading outward to create an impression on the psyche of the viewer."[2]

For their part, forms appear as though barely suggested, achieved through an extension of a gesture, a stroke. They are forms that at times suggest architectonic elements, furniture, stairs, hallways, silhouettes, parts of the human body. They coexist in combinations that can suggest a certain narrative, which may be interpreted by the viewer in accordance with his experience and visual repertoire. Sullivan called attention to the presence of an "enigma of forms," structures that struggle in a battle between "chaos" and "calm."

From a conceptual point of view, Llona's artistic production is anchored in his cultural background, both pictorial and literary. Sullivan sees in the oeuvre of this artist the influence of Abstract Expressionism (Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko) and Surrealism (Roberto Matta, Arshile Gorky, Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, Fernando de Szyszlo). There is also the undeniable influence of Bacon, Picasso, Cézanne and Matisse that Llona has acknowledged in various interviews. Delving deeper into the meaning of his works, Sullivan adds: "An avid reader not only of fiction but also of historical and philosophical texts, Llona transfers his wisdom, erudition and sensitivity to the human condition into his paintings. His works have always seemed to me like road maps of the valleys and mountains, the depths and heights of the human psyche."[3]

Llona has confirmed in numerous interviews the relationship between his work and the different moods of the human psyche, relating the creative act with an exercise of catharsis, of self-knowledge and of self-analysis. Even the art critic Donald Kuspit visualized his works as kind of "mental landscapes."[4]

In a conversation with Jeremías Gamboa, contained in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition in Miami, Llona said, "You and the painting you create are one in the same and each mark on the canvas portrays you, reveals you."[5] His oeuvre is influenced by how he sees himself and feels about the different events that befall him or those he witnesses. There exists in his work a kind of symbolism that the artist prefers to leave to free interpretation. Kuspit, in a text written in the 1990s, spoke of an eternal erotic-thanatic relationship. The erotic is symbolized by the sensuality of the color and in some forms that might call to mind sex organs or erotic encounters. The thanatic could be present in the ambiguity and uncertainty that some scenes communicate and in the presence of those vigorous, black strokes that Kuspit relates to death.[6]

The works assembled at The Americas Collection seduce due to their expressive force and enormous formats in which this artist manages to develop a narrative dimension that has gained strength in his work over the past decade and that, at the same time, is masterfully diluted in the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Ramiro Llona's works establish and shorten the distance between the piece of art and the public. His scenes and their enigmatic messages draw us in and invite us to dig deeply, to delve into the titles, into the conditions that caused the artist to use this or that language. Standing before them, we can imagine Llona hard at work, wishing to become one with the canvas in an act of total surrender. ■

(December 1, 2016 – January 31, 2017)

NOTES

1. Jorge Villacorta. "La memoria de las formas." In: *Ramiro Llona. Retrospectiva 1973/1998*. Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 1998, p. 19.
2. Edward J. Sullivan. "Dilemmas of Form, Dialogues of Space." In: *Ramiro Llona.* Miami: The Americas Collection, 2016.
3. Sullivan, 2016.
4. Donald Kuspit. "Ramiro Llona: El terreno íntimo del tiempo." En: *Ramiro Llona*. Lima: Wu Ediciones, 1990.
5. Jeremías Gamboa. "La voluntad del todo." In: *Ramiro Llona.* Miami: The Americas Collection, 2016.
6. Kuspit, 1990.

Neha Vedpathak, *Bhaba*, 2016, plucked paper and pigment, 11 x 15ft. Courtesy of the artist and N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami.

NEHA VEDPATHAK: DEFIANT

N'Namdi Contemporary – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

"Defiant" included 13 works by Neha Vedpathak, which offer a look at her most recent artistic production. The pieces, comprised of multiple layers of both materials and meanings, invited the viewer to go beyond the surface to reveal the personal vision of the artist regarding her creative environment and the physical landscape in which she moves.

Most of the works were created during her stay in Phoenix and Detroit, where she currently resides. Through them, Vedpathak proposes an investigation of the landscape, light, architecture and sociocultural context of both cities. For this artist, all physical space coexists and interacts harmoniously with different elements, objects, materials, feelings and memories. In addition, it also impacts viewers' perception of it to the extent that he dialogues with his past and present experiences. Consequently, in the perception of a specific landscape, experiences overlap, deconstruct and interconnect like woven fabrics, like the surface of her works.

Her creative process involves a technique she calls "plucking," which consists of separating and intertwining the fibers of handmade Japanese paper. The surfaces obtained, rich in texture, are then soaked in various pigments of natural origin: sand, earth, graphite and extracts, among other materials. She later submerges them in acrylic polymer in order to give them rigidity and resistance. Occasionally, she adds objects, whether it be a stone, mirror or fragment of a piece of furniture, found during a creative process that, as we pointed out earlier, summarizes her personal experience of living in specific urban landscapes. These objects create invisible links and narratives between the artwork itself and the places from which they come, their sounds and memories. In some works, titles help the viewer piece together these associations of meanings. Ultimately, the working process is as or more important than the final result, combining the basic variables of time and the ritualistic nature of each phase of the work. The process is slow and repetitive, a long series of phases during which the surface of the material begins to change as the artist's thoughts change and mature.

Among the displayed works, of note is *Bhaba*, a piece that was part of a project exhibited last year at the Poetry Foundation in Chicago. *Bhaba* establishes a virtual dialogue between *Particles, Jottings, Sparks* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Erratic Facts* by Kay Ryan and the artist's interpretation of the work of these two authors. *Bhaba* implies an accumulation of reflections on the meaning of life, the objects of desire, the relationship between man and his natural and social environments, as well as the irony and paradigmatic nature of these reflections.

Each of Vedpathak's works constitutes a map of memory. In this way, the gallery space gathers a compilation of moments. Each piece challenges the viewer to initiate a new cycle of interpreting and deconstructing meanings. ■

(March 16 - May 30, 2017)

TRACING ANTILLES: A SHARED VOYAGE

Polk Museum of Art – Lakeland, Fla.

By Raisa Clavijo

Humberto Castro, *Tracing Antilles,* 2013, installation with wooden canoe and video, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

"Tracing Antilles" is the result of Humberto Castro's study of the historical evolution of the Caribbean, as well as an investigation of his own heredity, identity and experience as a 'nomad' living in Cuba, France and South Florida. In his analysis, the Caribbean is a place of cultural encounters, conflicts, fusions and migrations, the setting for the encounter between Old Europe and the New World more than 500 years ago.

The first exhibition of this project took place in 2014 at the Frost Art Museum in Miami. This second exhibition, at the Polk Art Museum in Lakeland, Fla., continues the visual exploration of Castro, who covers the historical, cultural and social evolution in the Antilles, in this case in the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico). For the next phase of the project, he plans to continue his research in Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Trinidad & Tobago.

The project takes its name from the installation *Tracing Antilles*, also included in the presentation at the Frost—an old wooden canoe, behind which a video is projected on the wall, showing images of waves breaking on a beach in the Caribbean. The history of this region is the history of migrations that began with those of the Tainos and Caribs in canoes from South America, a human flow that little by little inhabited and diversified the populace of the islands.

"Tracing Antilles" does not pretend to follow a chronological order of historic events; rather, it is a recounting of Castro's impressions and firsthand experiences living in that region, as well as the cultural influences that shape the Caribbean psyche. The exhibition assembles paintings, drawings, photographs and installations, as well as objects found and collected by him, many with archeological value.

Castro was born and educated in Cuba and spent the first ten years of his professional career there, as well. In 1989, he emigrated to Paris, where he lived and worked for 10 years. In 1999, he moved to Miami, a city with a very strong Cuban community. Miami confronted him with his past and his memories of the Caribbean, and this inspired him to examine his own personal experience as an immigrant, as part of the history of that geographic area.

Throughout this project, Castro addresses not only the first migrations of pre-Hispanic cultures from different points in the Americas toward the Caribbean, but also the extermination of indigenous cultures during colonization, the birth of new cultures, the resulting fusion of traditions, religious beliefs and ways of viewing the world produced in those first moments. He also covers the political disarray prevailing in almost the entire region, the product of a succession of dictatorships and corrupt governments, of misguided economic strategies that have played havoc with the natural resources and development of the islands. "Unfortunately, I have found that the story does not change. History continues to repeat itself," Castro said in his statement.

The exhibition also includes an extensive collection of photographs taken by the artist during his trips, which include snapshots of society in the Antilles, above all in Haiti and Cuba. In these photos, he has not only captured the lifestyle of the people, but also the color of chaos, which dominates everything, that has been established as the foundation of life in these territories devastated by ambition, by political instability, and plunged into a never-ending spiral of poverty.

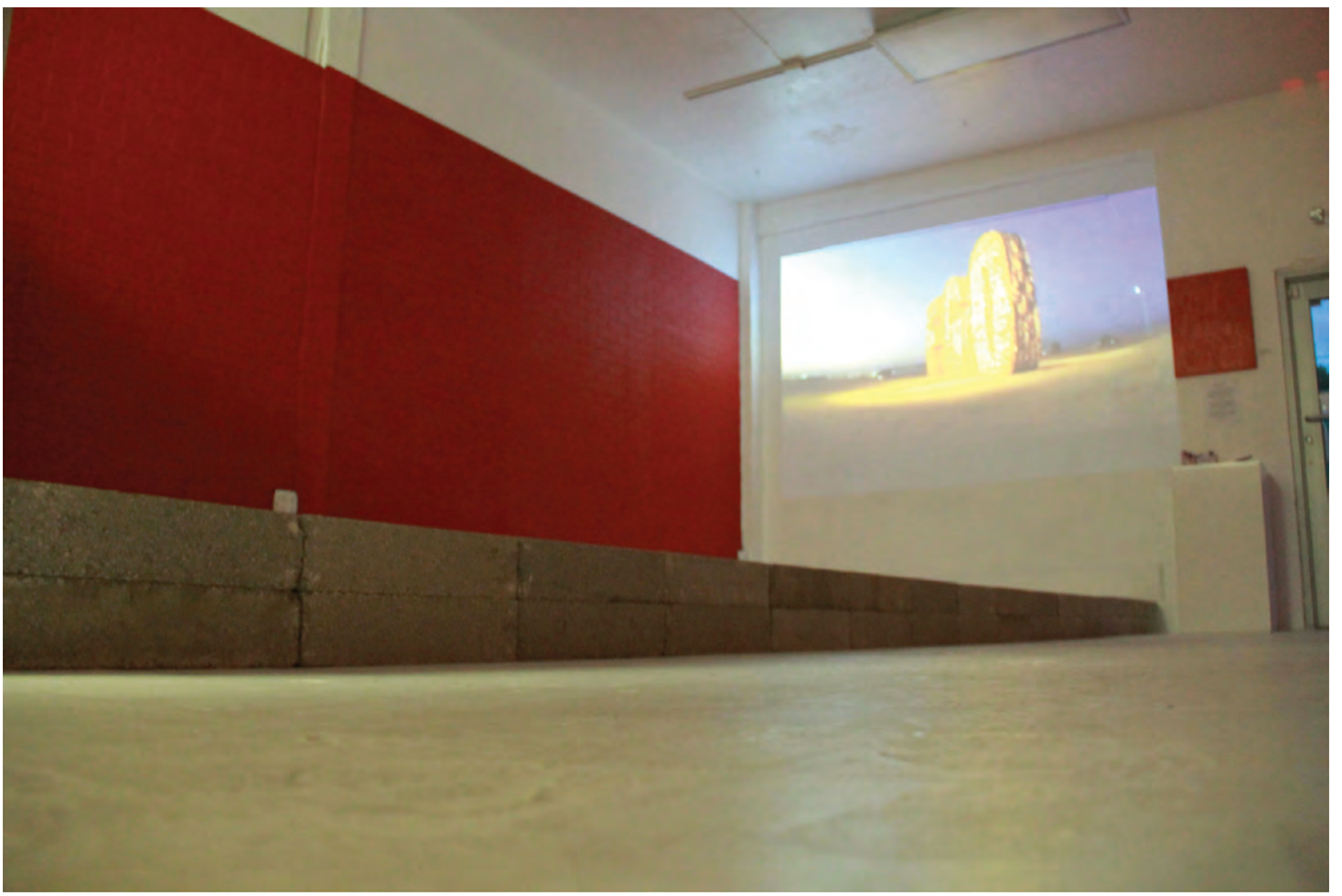
Castro delves into history and the past like an anthropologist. At the same time, his personal journey emulates the thousands of similar voyages undertaken by so many other individuals during the course of the region's history. Consequently, the pieces he assembled in the exhibition tell rich, insightful stories of resilience and survival. ■

(October 15, 2016 – January 15, 2017)

DOMINGO DE LUCÍA: BETWEEN WALLS

MIArt Space – Miami
Curated by Felix Suazo

By Raisa Clavijo



Domingo De Lucia's exhibition "Between Walls," at MIArt Space in Miami. Installation view.

Earlier this year, Domingo De Lucía exhibited in "Between Walls," a show that assembled works from his various recent projects, at MIArt Space in Miami. The curatorial concept proposed reflecting on the barriers that man has constructed around himself and that in the short or long term restrict his individual freedom. These barriers can be both physical and virtual, as well as geographic, political, cultural, racial, economic or based on class. The project is a reflection on how, although for generations man has moved around the world seeking a better life, frontiers that impede free circulation still persist. De Lucía starts with the premise that the root of these problems is in the mind of man, in the fear of "the different," leading to rejection and discrimination.

In a general sense, De Lucía's oeuvre is based on the premise that creation is intimately tied to social processes. Since the 1970s, he has developed an extensive body of work and, since 1997, he has been a member of Grupo Provisional, a collective of artists that includes Juan José Olavarría, David Palacios, Juan Carlos Rodríguez and Félix Suazo. De Lucía conceives of art as an instrument of change. His creative strategy dialogues with the contribution of other creators, and even with that of professionals in other disciplines, in order to recycle objects, processes and products that already exist in the cultural market and which already have a known significance and function. The originality in his work is not always due to creating a new product from raw material, but rather, from giving new meaning to a product and presenting it in a new context of metaphoric resonance with art. His creative work abounds with installations, interventions and social actions. His strategy is reminiscent of that enunciated by Bourriad in *Postproduction* (2002), whereby the artist is seen as a DJ or content programmer whose mission is to identify cultural objects and symbols that he will later repurpose and reinsert. Each of the pieces gathered together in this exhibition are the result of a long process of labor and investigation, a process more important than the final result itself. The work does not conclude with the exhibition, rather it is extended by interaction with the public, who in turn continue it and enrich it.

In this show, the walls were painted red and the space was divided by a low brick wall that visitors were obliged to cross. Large-format desert photographs, which evidenced traces of human footprints, hung on one of the walls. The video *Around Ego*, produced during the 2012 Burning Man festival in Black Rock Desert, Nev., was projected on the front wall. The video consists of a long sequence of circular rotations around *Ego*, the 20ft-high ephemeral sculpture presented at this event by the artists

Domingo De Lucia, *Social Entropy*, 2012, acrylic paint and aerobic bacteria, installation view at MIArt Space, Miami, 2017.

Laura Kimpton and Mike Garlington. De Lucía's video constructs metatextual references based on the work that these two artists conceived to be burned during the festival. The rotations of the camera around the sculpture allude to how the ego dominates human behavior, creating both real and imaginary barriers and impacting laws governing politics, the economy and society in general.

Another project, *Burning Passport*, made its first appearance at Burning Man in 2012. The artist conceived of a passport to freedom that he distributed amongst the public, questioning the existence of a world divided by borders that requires people to carry documentation in order to cross them.

The color red on the exhibition walls did not only allude to the ideologies of the left, many of which turned into dictatorships and the cause of migrations and exiles, but it was also the result of De Lucía's extensive research into this color. In his project *Std. Color* (2011), the artist worked alongside chemical engineers from Artquimia, the paint and art materials factory in Valencia, Venezuela. The project starts with the premise that in the paint manufacturing industry there are formulae that experts use to evaluate the quality of the pigment in order to determine coverage, acidity, texture and resistance to bacteria. De Lucía analyzed the behavior of the color red, and based on that he created a series of stencils and graphics that were part of an exhibition at El Anexo in Caracas. The artist drew a correlation between the technical industrial requirements for evaluating the paints and those expected of Venezuelan citizens in adhering to the ideologies of the left. As part of *Std. Color*, he also produced a collection of scholastic materials in red tones that were inserted in commercial channels of distribution as an analogy of the zeal for ideological homogeneity of this system of government.

As a result of these studies of color, De Lucía was also able to confirm that within the pigment production industry, the color red is the most fragile tone, the most sensitive to degradation as a result of its exposure to light, climatic agents and bacteria. Based on this, the artist developed the series *Analogy* and *Social Entropy*, which were also displayed at the exhibition in Miami. These are comprised of paintings, stylistically associated with minimalism and matter painting, in which the red pigment that dominates the surface was not treated with bactericide. In a short time, bacteria began eating the pigment and eventually ended up devouring each other. The pieces constitute a metaphor for political systems that become ineffective as a result of corruption and the struggle for power. In *Social Entropy*, De Lucía draws an analogy between the decomposition of red pigments on a surface and the crisis of ethical and moral values in today's world, which leads to violence, terrorism and intolerance.

With "Between Walls," De Lucía proposes a set of visual metaphors that basically calls for tearing down mental walls, those invisible barriers that impede human evolution. ■

(May 5 – 28, 2017)

WORKS CITED

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DOCUMENTA 14

Various locations – Athens, Greece

By Santa Nastro

Rasheed Araeen, Shamiyaana—Food for Thought: Thought for Change, 2016–17, canopies with geometric patchwork, cooking, and eating, Kotzia Square, Athens, documenta 14. Photo: Yiannis Hadjiaslanis.

documenta 14 opened in 47 locations in Athens on April 8, shining a light on almost 200 artists. This edition, curated by Adam Szymczyk and a team of 18 other curators, chose the Greek capital as host city for the first time as a prologue to the upcoming quinquennial *kermesse* festival in Kassel, Germany. Szymczyk wowed the crowds at the press preview with a performance of the *Epycicle* chorus, composed in 1968 by Greek musician Jani Christou and executed by the entire curatorial team and all of the artists.

The presentation started at the multi-story National Museum of Contemporary Art's EMST, opened for the occasion with an exhibition on many levels. The monumental installations of Khvay Samnang, who draws on African traditions, as well as the works by Greek artist Danai Anesiadou, stand out. Another star of the exhibition is the result of research by Piotr Uklanski and McDermott & McGough, which became the installation *The Greek Way*. Uklanski invited the two artists to present works based on the famous series *Hitler and the Homosexuals* (2001) as well as his paintings based on stills of Leni Riefenstal's *Olympia* (1938). The duo created a painting with the names of homosexuals who were persecuted or assassinated by the Nazi regime on the face and figure of the dictator, functioning as *memento mori*. EMST also presented a reflection on classical sculpture by Daniel García Andújar, who matches the scientific discourse about the body and the deformities that can materialize, as well as studying the Neoclassical concept of *kalos kagathos*, or gentlemanly personal conduct.

At the Athens Conservatoire, which featured the most alternative though perhaps least successful works of the main exhibition, the interventions built by Daniel Knorr, big canvases by Edi Hila, musical instruments in the style of pieces of furniture by Nevin Aladağ, and highly colored, extremely interesting installations by Guillermo Galindo stood out. There was also a place outside for visitors to relax and Joar Nango's *Odeion*, a kind of hippy tent.

At the Athens School of Fine Arts, 25 artists studied the central issues of education and teaching that emanated from Athens. Another highlight took place in the same district, at the Benaki Museum, founded by collector Antonis Benakis in honor of his father, Emmanuel, an influential politician and merchant who immigrated from Alexandria, Egypt. There, the work of 16 artists

Piotr Uklański and McDermott & McGough, The Greek Way, 2017, installation view, EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, documenta 14. Photo: Mathias Völzke.

were featured, including Miriam Cahn and Sergio Zevallos. Also featured, *Live and Die as Eva Braun – An illustrated proposal for a virtual scenario,* by Roee Rosen recounts, through 10 stations and 66 artworks on paper, the final hour of life of Hitler's lover while in the bunker before their joint suicide.

In Kotzia Square, one of the most popular gathering places in Athens, Rasheed Araeen, an artist and intellectual and former editor of the famous British magazine *Third Text*, presented *Shamiyaana—Food for Thought: Thought for Change* (2016–17). This project consisted of a temporary wooden gazebo decorated with a colored patchwork as well as comfortable seats and tables. Sponsored jointly with the Greek non-profit group Organization Earth, it invited visitors of all races, ages and social conditions to have lunch and dinner within this social and relational space.

At the Gennadius Library, Boubacar Sadek, Mamary Diallo, Anboudalaye Ndoye, Abdou Ouologuem and Seydou Camara show their works as part of *Learning from Timbuktu*, curated by Igo Diarra. Sadek and Diallo are the last two calligraphy masters in Mali, continuing an ancient tradition.

Finally, at Eleftherias Park, work by artists Abounaddara, Andreas Angelidakis, Roger Bernat and Lala Meredith-Vula was featured, as well as rich musical and performative programming. Among the various events that were notable were the parade of horses and jockeys created by Ross Birrell, which covered the 3,000 kilometers between Athens and Kassel through the Western Balkan countries of Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia and imitating the Panathenaic parades of the 5th century B.C., as well as the *Tschiffely Ride* by the Swiss author Aimé Félix Tschiffely.

This is mainly a theoretical documenta, as the venues are almost all in closed places and the curatorial group included a "reader," a textual compendium that goes along with the show catalog as an added consideration. The issue of a distance is discussed, as there is a palpable, stated position against every form of discrimination. This exhibition puts together contradictory realities. While politically the comparison is critical, artistically the discourse is more humanistic, as it investigates the current conservative turn in the West.

But the exhibition was not without controversy. For instance, during the opening, mysterious graffiti that read "Crapumenta 14" appeared under the Acropolis, while in a more official way, the Athens Biennial, which will close in April 2018 with "Waiting for the Barbarians," was already raising eyebrows as it clearly questions the German documenta. ■

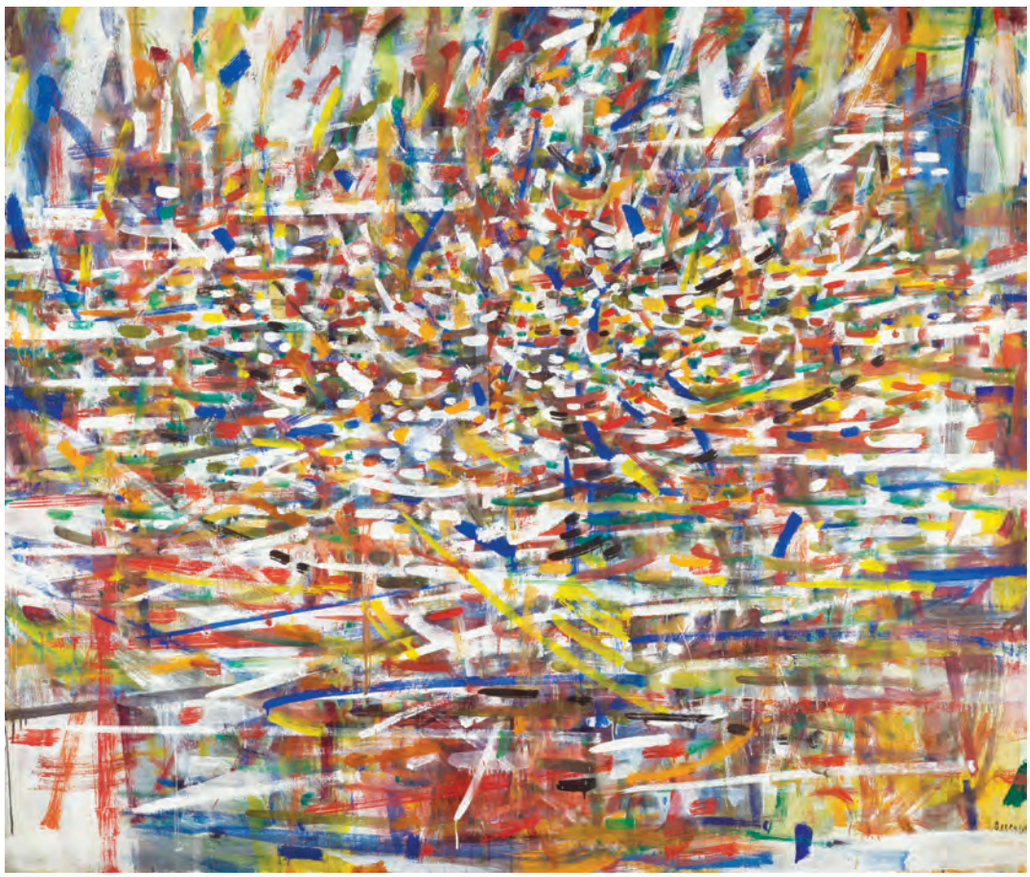
(April 8 – July 16, 2017)

Santa Nastro is an art historian, journalist and art critic based in Rome. She is the author of the project arTVision and member of the editorial committee of Artribune*. Her texts have been published in* Exibart, Il Corriere della Sera, Arte Magazine, Alfabeta2 and Il Giornale dell'Arte*, among other publications and exhibition catalogs.*

TANCREDI PARMEGGIANI: MY WEAPON AGAINST THE ATOM BOMB IS A BLADE OF GRASS

Peggy Guggenheim Collection - Venice, Italy
Curated by Luca Massimo Barbero

By Irina Leyva-Pérez



Tancredi Parmeggiani, *Space, Water, Nature, Sight,* 1958, oil on canvas, 67" x 79." Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Peggy Guggenheim.

Italian painter Tancredi, who was born Tancredi Parmeggiani in Feltre, Italy, in 1927 and died in Rome in 1964, was a prolific artist whose impressive international career was cut short by his premature death at the age of 37. In addition, the circumstances around his death contributed to a litany of myths about his tormented personality, thus adding to his already formidable legend.

This extensive retrospective proves that his work was indeed impressive by offering an exceptional glimpse into his art and life. The exhibition is also his "return" to his most important patron's space. Tancredi met Peggy Guggenheim in the1950s and became the only artist she signed after Jackson Pollock. Guggenheim made sure to promote his work and placed it in the most prestigious collections of their time, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The museographic display conveys that intimate connection between artist and patron, becoming a subtheme in the exhibition. It highlights Guggenheim's role by including pieces donated by her to important institutions. Among those we can mention are *Springtime*, from the MoMA collection; *Space, Water, Nature, Sight*, from the Brooklyn Museum's collection; and *Untitled Composition*, from the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Conn.

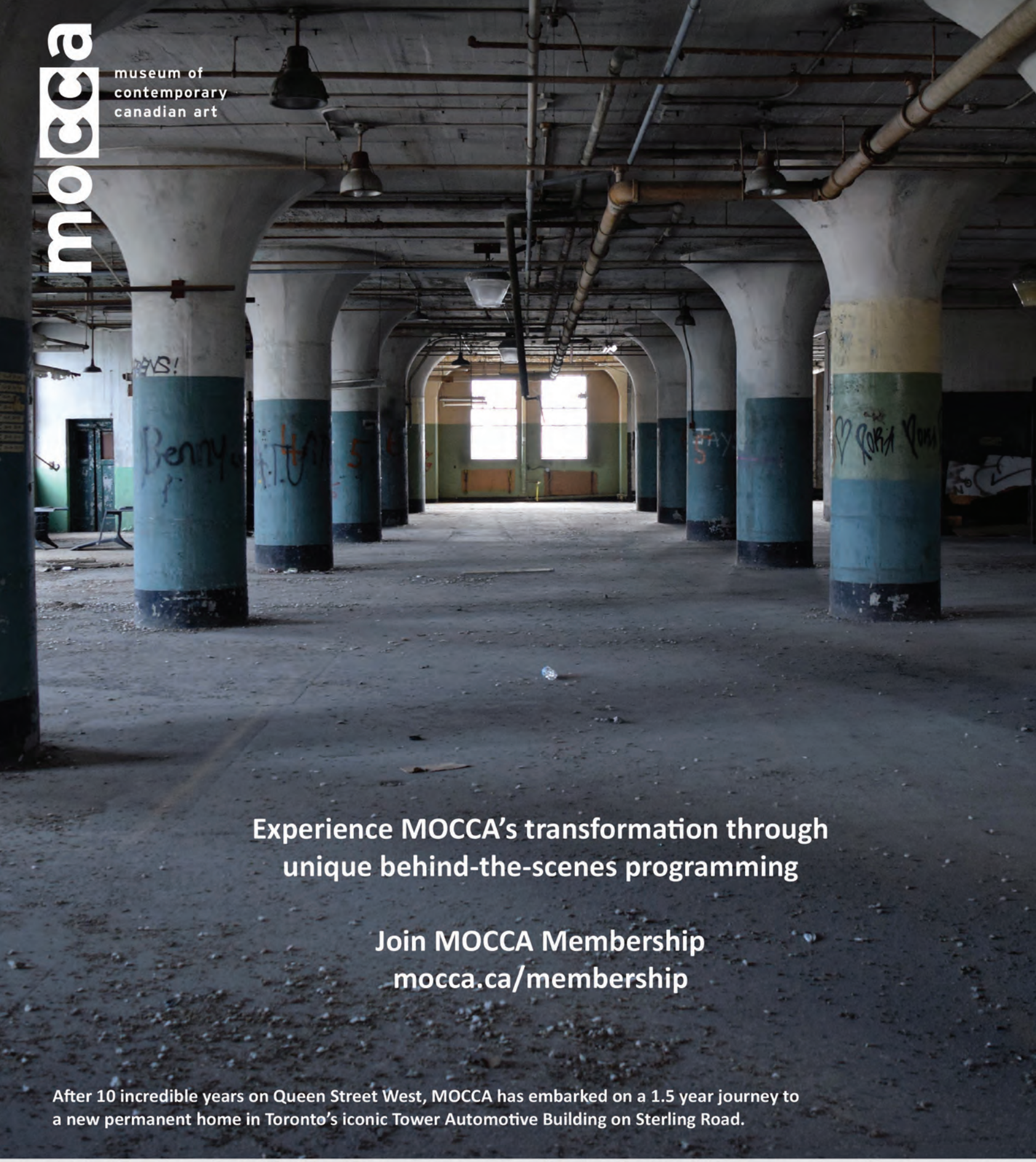
The works in the exhibition are presented in chronological order, showing the artist's evolution from the early 1950s, starting with portraits. Walking through it is easy to see Tancredi's stylistic progression. In the pieces from the early 1950s, it is easy to see his experimentations with some of Pollock's methods, such as dripping, and his eventual move to a more personal formal language. He became especially interested in space, as well as color, as important components of his compositions during this period. Through the development of these two main elements, he created a very distinctive and highly personal style defined as "molecular."

Tancredi brought into his art references to Western art in general, but he also explored aspects known to Venetian traditions, such as bright colors from the palette that Venice's artists used regularly. Another formal solution from this period he studied was the use of geometric elements such as the point, which in his case had a root in Byzantine mosaics. *Harmonious Memory* and *Yearning for New York,* both from 1952, are good examples of that trend.

Like many of his peers, he was interested in theoretical disquisitionsm which is what motivated him to sign the manifesto for the Movimento Spaziale with fellow artist Lucio Fontana. Despite his interest in abstraction and its formal nuances, his work was not completely stripped of political messages, as the show's title demonstrates. "My Weapon Against the Atom Bomb is a Blade of Grass" is an expression created by the artist that symbolizes his pacifism living in a world punctuated by the Cold War, Vietnam War and other world conflicts. ■

(November 12, 2016 – March 13, 2017)

Irina Leyva-Pérez is an art historian, art critic and curator based in Miami. She has lectured at Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts and was assistant curator at the National Gallery of Jamaica. She is currently the curator of Pan American Art Projects, a regular contributor to numerous publications and author of catalogues of such Latin American artists as León Ferrari, Luis Cruz Azaceta and Carlos Estévez.



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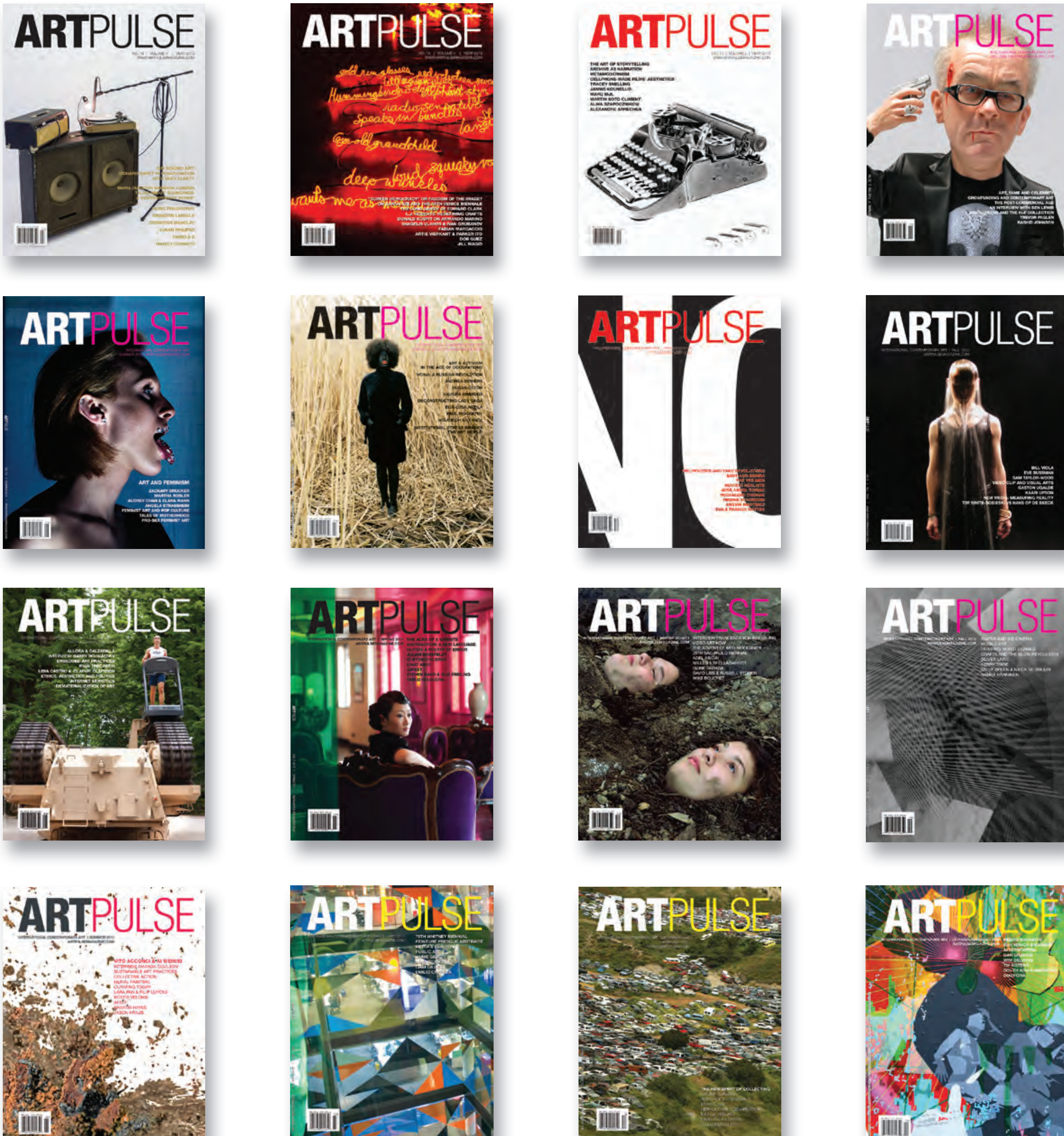

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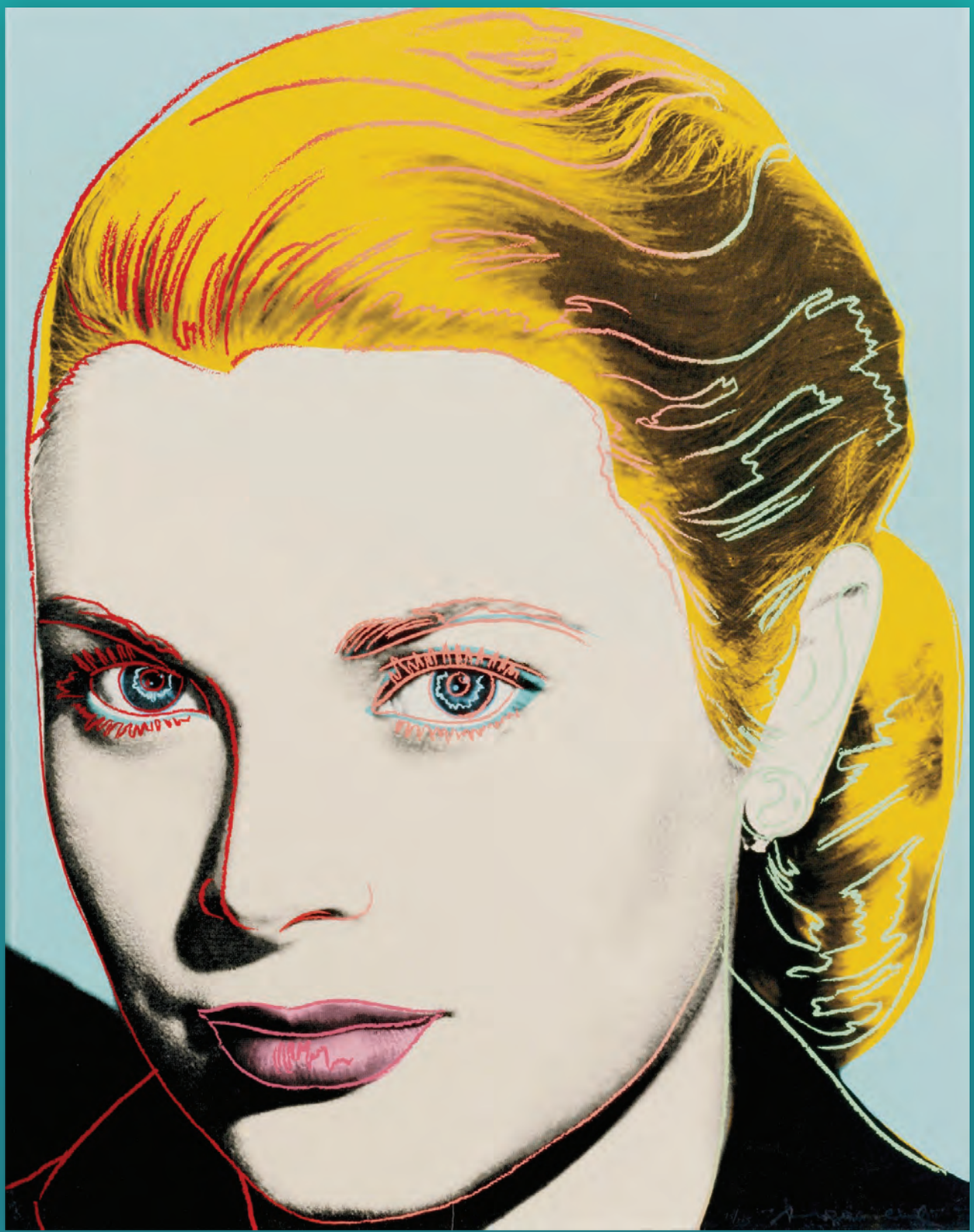

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