

ARTPULSE

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**Ryoji Ikeda:
Visualizing Data at
the Edge of Perception**

**Beyond Painting: Nathan
Miner and Franklin Evans**

María Raquel Cochez

David B. Jang

Ron Johnson

Paula Crown

Ben Degen

**Dialogues:
Tim White-Sobieski**

**Deborah Dancy:
Between Abstraction
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**Pierre Bonnard's
Other Avant Garde**



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Deferred Action

This issue is dedicated to the concept of deferred action, the idea that the unfinished business of an older avant-garde is often deferred and addressed in a later epoch. Brilliant texts have addressed deferred action, a term borrowed from Freud. To name two, consider Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real* and Jaimey Hamilton Faris' *Uncommon Goods*.

As an example of deferred action, consider Jaimey Hamilton Faris' point that Duchamp's readymades advanced the ontological question of art, and that readymades of a current neo-avant-garde now advance the readymades' unfinished business: questioning the commodity's ontological condition. David B. Jang is interviewed by Megan Abrahams in this issue and this post-Duchampian ontology is clear in his work. One of his most lucid works is *Exercise*, a row of four wall-mounted chip bags connected to food vacuum sealers. As the bags inhale and exhale, under computer control, we are confronted with an emblem of our postmodernity: loss of the best of our humanity in our worship of commodities, all wrapped up in plastic, readied to fulfill every human longing. Such work dovetails nicely with Paco Barragán's "Push to Flush" essay on the exclusion, globalization and alienation systemic in capitalism as we know it today.

Julie Heffernan argues a kind of deferred action in the way some of the most vital figurative artists today are working on unfinished business, extending back to Pierre Bonnard and his mischief directed at our perception of color and reality. Consider Peter Doig, Angela Dufresne, Nicole Eisenman, Lisa Sanditz and Hernan Bas. As Heffernan states, "Bonnard's tangled gardens and thick air are evident in the eccentricities of Sanditz's and Doig's phantasmagoric landscapes; his disappearing figures rematerialize similarly in Dufresne's and Doron Langberg's paintings. Bonnard anticipates the narrative urgency of such contemporary painters, all of whom have distinct stories to tell about gender fluidity, repression, suburban anomie, the stultification of the individual and deprecation of the landscape by mainstream consumer culture." Then Jeff Edwards interviews Deborah Dancy, discussing the artist's contributions to a lineage punctuated by Philip Guston and Richard Diebenkorn.

Scott Thorp's essay on Ryoji Ikeda has a title that says it all: "Visualizing Data at the Edge of Perception." An incomprehensible quantity of data is the new sublime, and we face it in the ocean of numbers, bars and motion in a Ryoji installation. The Romantic sublime of Casper David Friedrich (looking into the infinity of nature) is reimagined in the Postmodern sublime (looking into the infinity of teraflops and terabytes).

Then Owen Duffy interviews Ron Johnson, an artist who makes paintings based on car trips through the U.S. West, thereby capitalizing on Henry Ford's contribution to the act of regarding the sublime while moving through space in comfort. Without any destinations in mind, Johnson travels seeking epiphanies akin to that of Tony Smith's famous 1964 drive down an unopened turnpike.

Paco Barragán's interview with Tim White-Sobieski also reveals installations that regard the sublime but in a metamodern way, both the old Kantian sublime and the sublime of technology.

Craig Drennen's essay on artist Paula Crown illuminates work that brings 21st-century technology to the self-portrait. Crown's *Inside My Head*, a monumental work built out of MRI scans of the artist's head, converses with personal works about her father and mother. Thus, self-reflexiveness reminiscent of early 20th-century inner necessity is sweetened with 21st-century anatomical mapping of real brain landscape.

Jason Hoelscher's essay focuses on painters making aesthetic experiences "strongly resistant to screen-based digital reproduction." For example, Nathan Miner makes codependent paintings that face each other, paintings that bend around corners, etc. This is deferred action that squares with painters in the 19th century, who had to reimagine their artistic intensity due to pressures of photography as a means of reproduction.

Anne Swartz interviews Panamanian artist María Raquel Cochez, whose work chronicles her dissatisfaction with body, from diets to binges to surgeries to a current state of acceptance for her own body. She is in the lineage of Orlan but takes the critique more fully into a statement of acceptance—the female body in all its diversity. The Cochez interview dovetails with an essay by Michele Robecchi, an essay that illuminates Chantal Akerman's four-decade film career, with most works focused on an uncanny balance of comedy and tragedy in depicting women.

And finally, the wilderness-engendered paintings of Benjamin Degen move beyond Henry David Thoreau in a fulfillment of a deferral, giving vision to 21st-century existentialism and writings such as *Ecology without Nature* by Timothy Morton.

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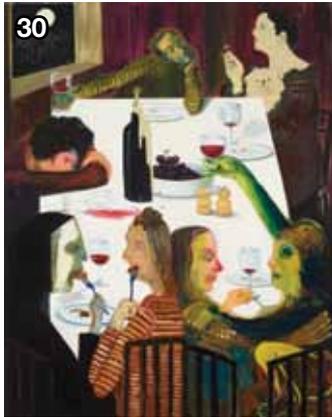
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Front Cover:
Deborah Dancy, *Easy Rider*, 2012,
(detail), oil on canvas, 60" x 60." Courtesy
of N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami.

No News from Home

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI



There is a segment in Jumana Samma's splendid film *A Magical Substance Flows into Me* (2015) in which a rather intense conversation between the artist and a Samaritan priest in his house in Jerusalem is interrupted by the latter's wife announcing that Samma's car has to be moved because the trash truck is coming. Such an abrupt dive from the highest spiritual heights into the most mundane of tasks obviously provides a significant mood changer, and yet Samma's decision not to edit it out proved to be wise, as it testifies how, even when faced with the most dramatic or absorbing circumstances, life fundamentally goes on. Such depiction of reality as a multifaceted entity has been also similarly depicted in Chantal Akerman's 2004 film *Marcher*, in which an intimate exchange between the artist and her mother, Natalia, about the family's experience as Holocaust survivors is cut off by the sound of the kitchen phone ringing. Akerman's mother feels obliged to take the call, and the bit of half-conversation subsequently heard in the background is sufficiently trivial to signal that the journey is now definitely over and that other less important but more pressing issues in present time have to be taken care of. Life, once again, goes on.

If ever there was anyone who elevated domestic routines from ordinary to extraordinary status it was Akerman. Her films chronicling the solitary life and existential troubles of women in what up until then was considered in many quarters as their default habitat, like *Saute ma ville* (1968) and *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) are a monument to this concept. Akerman was little more than 20 years old when she produced these early efforts, and yet they display a rich visual vocabulary and a proclivity for balancing tragedy and comedy difficult to find even in the works of some of the most consummate or acclaimed filmmakers. Akerman's decision around that time to relocate from her native Belgium to New York in response to what she was perceiving as a suffocating atmosphere in Europe put her in contact with the work of Joan Jonas and Michael Snow, eventually leading her to a nomadic life and to develop a practice that would end up having a place both in the contemporary art and film world.

The salutation of Akerman's work over the years as a template for innovative filmmaking as well as for causes such as feminism

and gay rights turned out to be a mixed blessing. Whilst politically very vocal, Akerman was never militant in an orthodox way, and her perception that the ambiguity and subtleties of some her films would often see the most

personal aspects overlooked or sacrificed in favor of a collective vision wasn't misplaced. In what can only be described as one of those "things coming full circle" moments, Akerman's last film, *No Home Movie* (2015), focuses again on a dialogue between the artist and her mother. Once more, the conversation touches on a wide range of subjects, from painful family stories to how to cook vegetables, and although generational differences, divergent views and old unresolved issues still dominate the scene, vulnerability, in the form of Natalia's age and Chantal's more mature understanding of life, partially contribute to redefine the relationship between mother and daughter. Shot with a digital camera, *No Home Movie* couldn't be visually more far apart from the classic notion of film imagery. Yet, each age has its own aesthetics, and as Akerman herself was fond of saying, one of the greatest advantages of technological progress was that it enabled her to film alone—a condition that perfectly resonates with the intimate setting of *No Home Movie*.

Those fortunate enough to be in London until the end of the year shouldn't miss the U.K. premiere of *No Home Movie* along with a robust retrospective of Akerman's work at Ambika 3. Aptly titled "Now," the survey is a unique opportunity to celebrate the life of two remarkable women and a talent that will be greatly missed. ■

Michele Robecchi is a writer and curator based in London. A former managing editor of Flash Art (2001-2004) and senior editor at Contemporary Magazine (2005-2007), he is currently a visiting lecturer at Christie's Education and an editor at Phaidon Press, where he has edited monographs about Marina Abramović, Francis Alÿs, Jorge Pardo, Stephen Shore and Ai Weiwei.



Chantal Akerman. Photo: Marthe Lemelle. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

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This Is What Life Is About

Narratives of Progress, Freedom and Self-Fulfillment in Today's Capitalism¹

BY PACO BARRAGÁN



It is without a doubt that as of today it is easier to imagine the end of history than the end of capitalism, according to Frederic Jameson. Never has humanity known such a long-lasting period of progress, freedom and so many possibilities of self-fulfillment.

Fukuyama already proclaimed this to be the best of all possible systems, and the reconversion of China to the market economy has heralded winds of prosperity worldwide.

From globalization and deregulation of markets to democracy, freedom, security, success and self-fulfillment, this is what today's capitalism is about. More than any other society, 21st-century meritocracy allows for the construction of a new social subject through the mythos of self-fulfillment.

"Impossible is nothing!" and "Just do it!" are the successful slogans of the day.

But if we want to talk about capitalism, we are obliged to talk about exclusion, globalization and alienation. If we want to talk about progress, freedom and self-fulfillment, we need then to talk about capitalism. Complexity and contradiction are the traits that have always accompanied its philosophy. Any other perspective is too simple and too biased.

If we insert ourselves within a frame of critical thinking, then there are two iconic books that delve respectively into this "new spirit" of capitalism and the distribution of wealth that are must-reads: the already classic *The New Spirit of Capitalism* by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello published in 2002, and *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty appeared in 2014.

Modernity and capitalism seem to walk hand in hand. The neo-capitalist system still maintains that complex and contradictory spirit that accompanied its advent back in the 16th century, when it emerged as the dominant—and only—form of social organization of the economy. To paraphrase Piketty, with the advent and growth of capitalism, ideas about the equality among citizens, the right to be remunerated according to merits and the trust in the illusion that economic growth would level the differences between rich and poor have converged in society.

And as such, capitalism, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, has both reinforced and limited itself, in what could be considered a contradiction. On the one hand, "the demand of unlimited accumulation of capital by means of formally peaceful ways" still remains valid, on the other there is "the ideology which justifies a compromise with capitalism." It is this justifying ideology, capable of (re)generating the devotion that the capitalist process requires, that constitutes the new spirit of capitalism.

MERITOCRACY AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

In this sense, Piketty shows us by means of fascinating charts the distribution of wealth from the 18th century on, and how capitalism until the 19th century produces unsustainable, arbitrary inequalities that question in a radical way the meritocratic values upon which our democratic societies are based.

Those inevitably less positive sides of progress, freedom and self-fulfillment are violence and dystopia, migration and exclusion, (neo)colonialism, migration and delocalization, anxiety, alienation and repression.

If we also recall that the places of legitimate declaration—church, school, the state, university, the political elite—have lost their symbolic power of representation to the media and cultural industries of neoliberal capitalism, it's easy to acknowledge that the contemporary subject finds himself disoriented by the lack of new metanarratives that will grant meaning to his life.

So, "building our own biography," as Bauman would have said, is the key to success. It also means that responsibility of 'making it' has shifted from the institution to the individual, who now has to bear the unbearable weight of personal failure, especially now during this long-standing economic crisis.

Artists have become privileged researchers and anthropologists whose narratives and syntaxes engage with and challenge the philosophy of a capitalist society, as the art world is a small but big public arena for critical discourse. Think of Santiago Sierra, Tony Oursler, Julieta Aranda, Allan Sekula, Gabriele Basilico, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Yinka Shonibare, Isaac Julien, Nicola Verlatto, Philip-Lorca DiCorcia, Paul Graham, Muntean & Rosenblum, Gregory Crewdson, Gamaliel Rodríguez, Shoja Azari, Pepo Salazar, Boris Mikhailov and Tracey Moffatt, just to mention a few.²

Words become reality inasmuch as they configure and model our world, although they do not necessarily correspond to it. Language enables the citizen to encounter the conventions of the post-Fordist capitalist economy and its new forms of labor and production. The financial crisis clearly pointed out the limits of the linguistic nature of money. According to Christian Marazzi, "The monetary measures of the central banks, given this profile, are more in the nature of *performative*, one hopes, 'speech acts,' dialogical interventions for 'making things or having them made with words.'"³

The fact is that never in history have inequalities been as flagrant as they are now.

"Today," affirms South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han *En el enjambre* (meaning "The Hive"), "everyone exploits him or herself while thinking that he or she lives in freedom [...] exploitation with domination is possible."⁴

The state has a fundamental role when restraining those polarizing forces for the sake of democracy and in the general interest.

By acknowledging the complexity and contradiction of today's capitalism, we might well end up affirming that this is thus what life simply is about.

End of history. ■

NOTES

1. This column is based on my recent curatorial project with the same title, *This Is What Life is About. Narratives of Progress, Freedom and Self-Fulfillment in Today's Capitalism. Works MUSAC Collection* at Museum Domus Artium (DA2) Salamanca, Spain, between Oct. 8, 2015, and Jan. 31, 2016.
2. These are some of the artists included in the show in Salamanca.
3. Marazzi, Christian, *The Linguistic Nature of Money and Finance*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2014, p. 13.
4. Han, Byung-Chul, *En el enjambre*, Barcelona: Herder, 2014, p. 31.

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Mario Pérez, *Inmigrantes II*, Oil on Canvas, 2015, 63 x 63 inches



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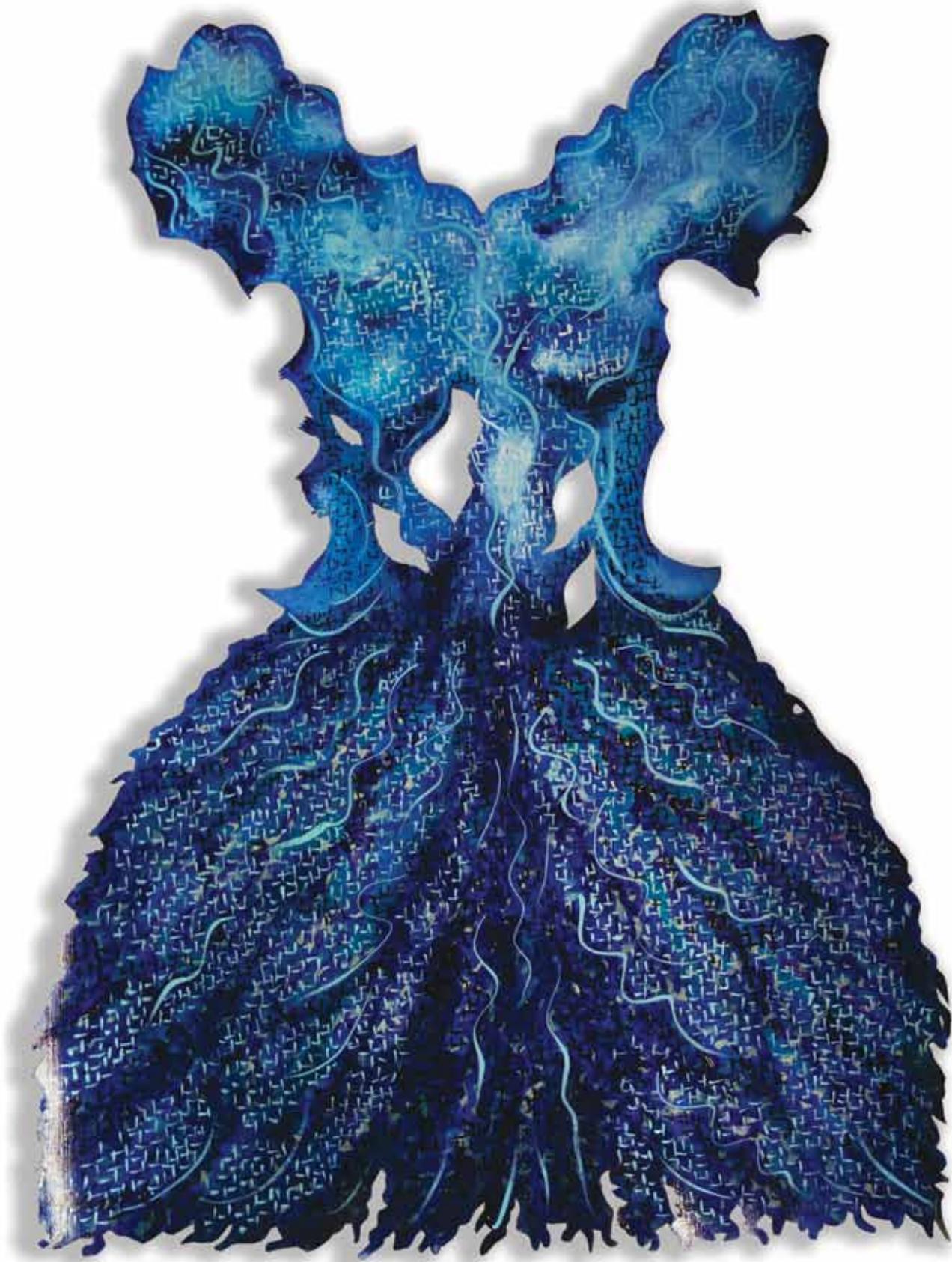
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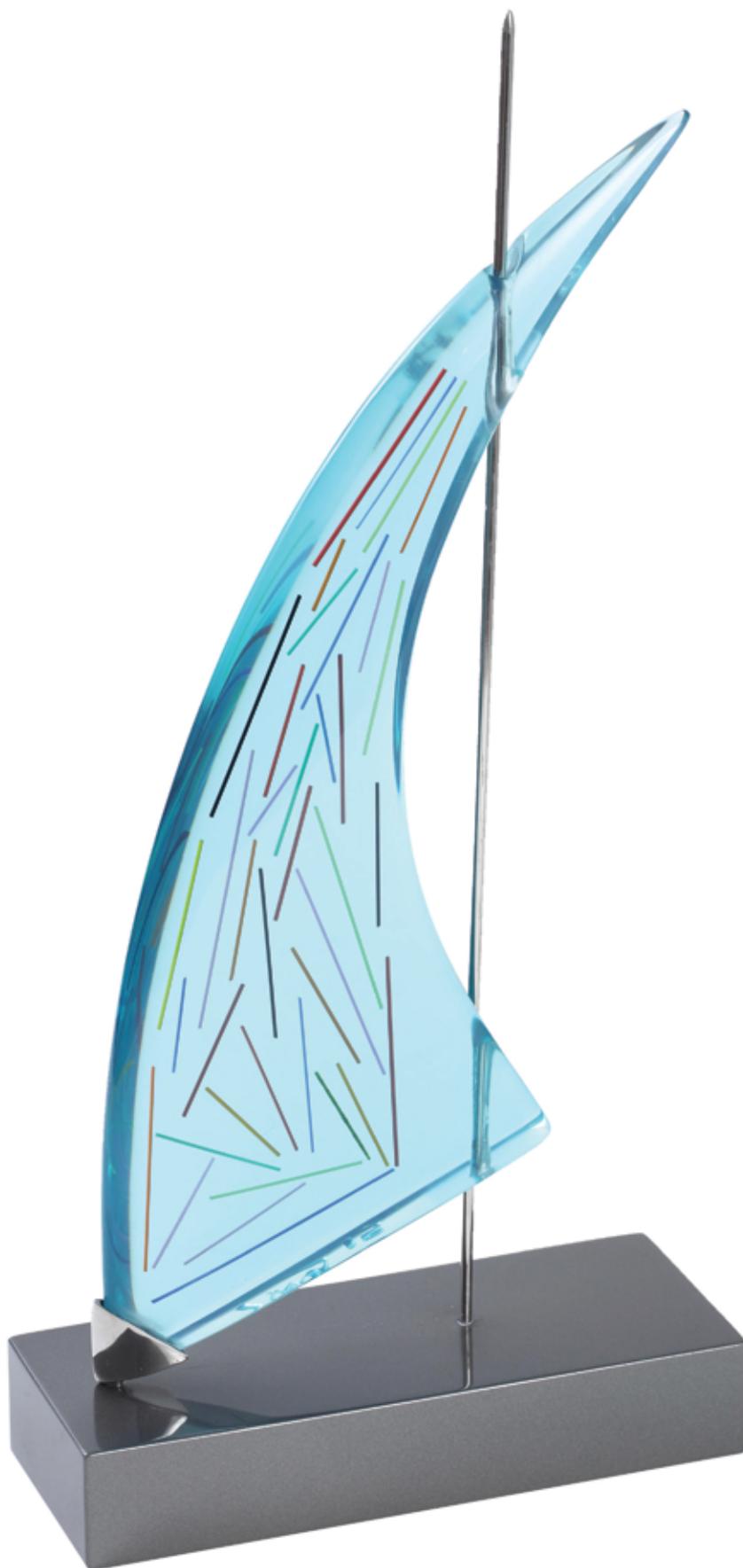


GRACIELA MONTICH



Faithfulness, 2015
Mini Dresses series
oil on linen
28 x 20 inches

ANA GIOVINAZZO



Tranquilidad Absoluta
2015, Resin with glass inclusions
19.5 x 9 x 3.33 inches



Hunt Slonem, *Finches*, 2014, Oil on Canvas, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy of Vertu Fine Art Gallery

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[De]constructions of the Feminine in
Contemporary Society

November 10

— January 3, 2016

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Curator: Paco Barragán

Erika Harrsch: Imagos

November 10

— January 3, 2016

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Paulina Kim Joo: Costume Play

November 10

— January 3, 2016

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Ferocious Voices

Womens' Voice in Contemporary Video

November 3 — December 1

Artists: Andrea Bowers, Tameka Norris, United Colors of Bitchaton (Erikka Party, Roxy Farhat, and DRE feat. Eden Batki), Cara Despain, Agustina Woodgate, Kenny Riches, Sebastian Bellver

Curator: Micol Hebron

Gallery Tally

Taking on Gender Inequity in the Art World

November 3 — December 1

80 Chilean and international artists

Curator: Micol Hebron

The Invencibles

A Womans' Work is Never Done

December 3 — December 31

Artists: Wangechi Mutu, Jana Leo, Regina José Galindo

Curator: Karen del Águila

Image: Nicola Verlato, *The Assumption of Virgin Mary*, 2015, oil on canvas, 81 x 64 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



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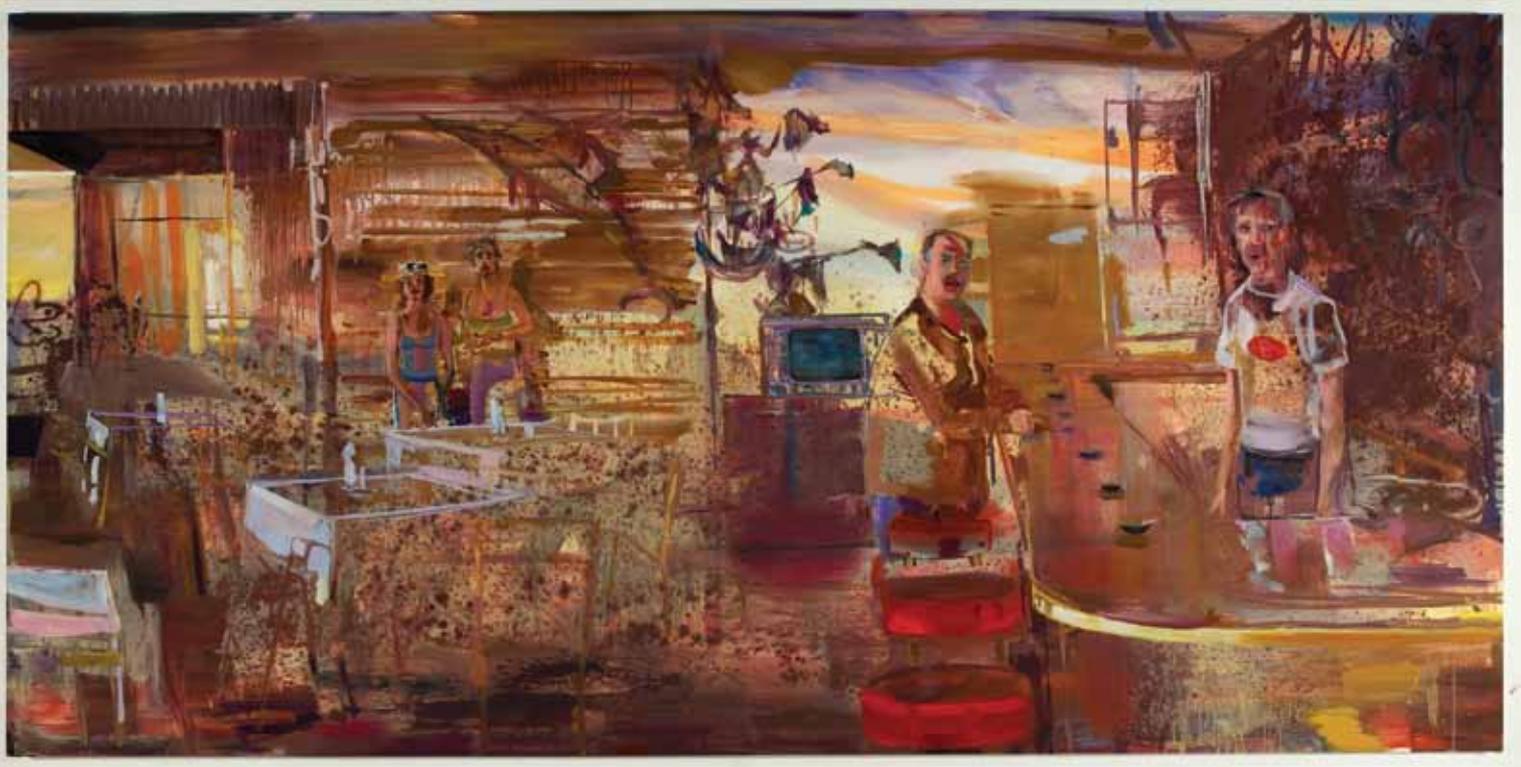


DOMUS ARTIUM
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BONNARD'S OTHER AVANT GARDE

"The brain secretes thought like the liver secretes bile."
Pierre Cabanis, 18th century French physiologist.

BY JULIE HEFFERNAN



Angela Dufresne, *Strangers When We Met Gay Bar*, 2010, oil on canvas, 4.5' x 9.' Courtesy of the artist.

Press your forehead close to someone else's: a single eye will float forth and the nose will dislocate in a decidedly Cubist way. Press your eyelids while facing light and you will see geometric patterns of bright sparks like Op Art. We all know that we can manipulate what we see and that that ability forms a part of our visual knowledge of the world. Learning to notice more of the myriad peculiarities of perception and formalizing them with tools and concepts constitutes the methodology of art making. Those who can communicate something expressive of the unique particulars of their own visual experience and connect it to others—those people are artists. Certain great ones, Cézanne and Van Gogh among them, made work that forges a direct link with viewers in a very specific way, by re-creating how they themselves actively experienced the process of looking. The kinds of marks they made—their dots and dabs, precise erasures, the way they rubbed and overlaid their colors—all those things provide viewers a virtual transcription of the lived experience they had with their painted motifs—whether cypress trees or peaches in a bowl—as viewed in the moment, essentially allowing us to see through their eyes as though we are neurologically linked to them. Much has been written about Bonnard's exquisite mechanisms for notating his world stemming from his oft-quoted observation that painting was, for him, “the transcrip-

tion of the adventures of the optic nerve.”¹ John Elderfield enlarged on that idea by suggesting that Bonnard replaced “artificial perspective with the record of natural vision,”² essentially documenting the processes of seeing with his “stews of multitudinous colors scrubbed and burnished into low value contrast.”³ But Bonnard's vision was a lot more than just optical.

Picasso famously described Bonnard's unique way of breaking up form into many thousands of color marks as mere “daubing,” but that approach to synthesizing vision has been influential to a number of important contemporary artists like, for example, Keltie Ferris and Chris Ofili. Their work also evinces the experience of interior vision—flashes of color, light and hypnagogic abundance. But Bonnard's vision was different. It extended beyond the optical or perceptual into the very nature of thought itself, as the brain seeks meaning, finds patterns and creates associations out of random experience. Bonnard's psychological astuteness, aligned with formal inventiveness, played out in compositions that unfold layer upon layer of sensory knowledge. That's what made him a great painter.

Bonnard was a quiet artist who worked consistently in the fray while other modernists were running pitched battles, attacking the very core of how we conceive of form and style. Yet I would claim



Pierre Bonnard, *The Palm*, 1926, oil on canvas, 147 x 114.3 cm. Philips Collection, Washington DC, USA. Source: <http://www.wikiart.org>.

that Bonnard incited a revolution too, involving an elaboration of what permissible content can be. Bonnard's was a revolution in subject matter, turning a dining room table into a phantasmagoric carnival and a woman at her toilette into a primal spectacle, and that makes him as important to contemporary painters as Cubists were to previous generations. Bonnard rejected Cubism's stylistic imperatives partly because they did not serve his desire to insinuate content directly into the viewer's lived experience. He understood intuitively how to construct, say, a sensory double for our love of a warm bath. I've written about his use of a menstrual rag in *Large Yellow Nude*, and continue to admire the audacity of presenting to the public an item of such utter interiority that no other painter, to my knowledge, has ever depicted. That was a form of bravura too—albeit slyer than the swagger of Cubism's multiple perspectives or Expressionism's collisions of color. Those gestures, once so daring, are now as comfortable to look at as an armchair.

New eras bring the need for new forerunners, whose undervalued innovations and insights make greater sense in light of a new Zeitgeist. Contemporary artists often search out older artists who might provide them with alternative ways of conceiving pictorial worlds for the next wave of picture-making and conceptualizing. The Chicago Imagists, for example, while descended from Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, rediscovered the sinuous eccentricities of the Sieneese School to better express the social changes of the 1960s. They were looking for fresh imagery and figurative styles that deviated from conventional Old Master painting while still engaging with abstraction and narrative, and found those qualities in the likes of Giovanni Di Paolo and Taddeo Gaddi.

I would describe Bonnard as a bridge artist—one who connects to the past and anticipates the future. His work can be seen in the lineage of Piero della Francesca, who shares his appreciation for geometry and taut compositional matrices, and of Diego Velázquez, whose self-conscious subjects and impressions of pulsing

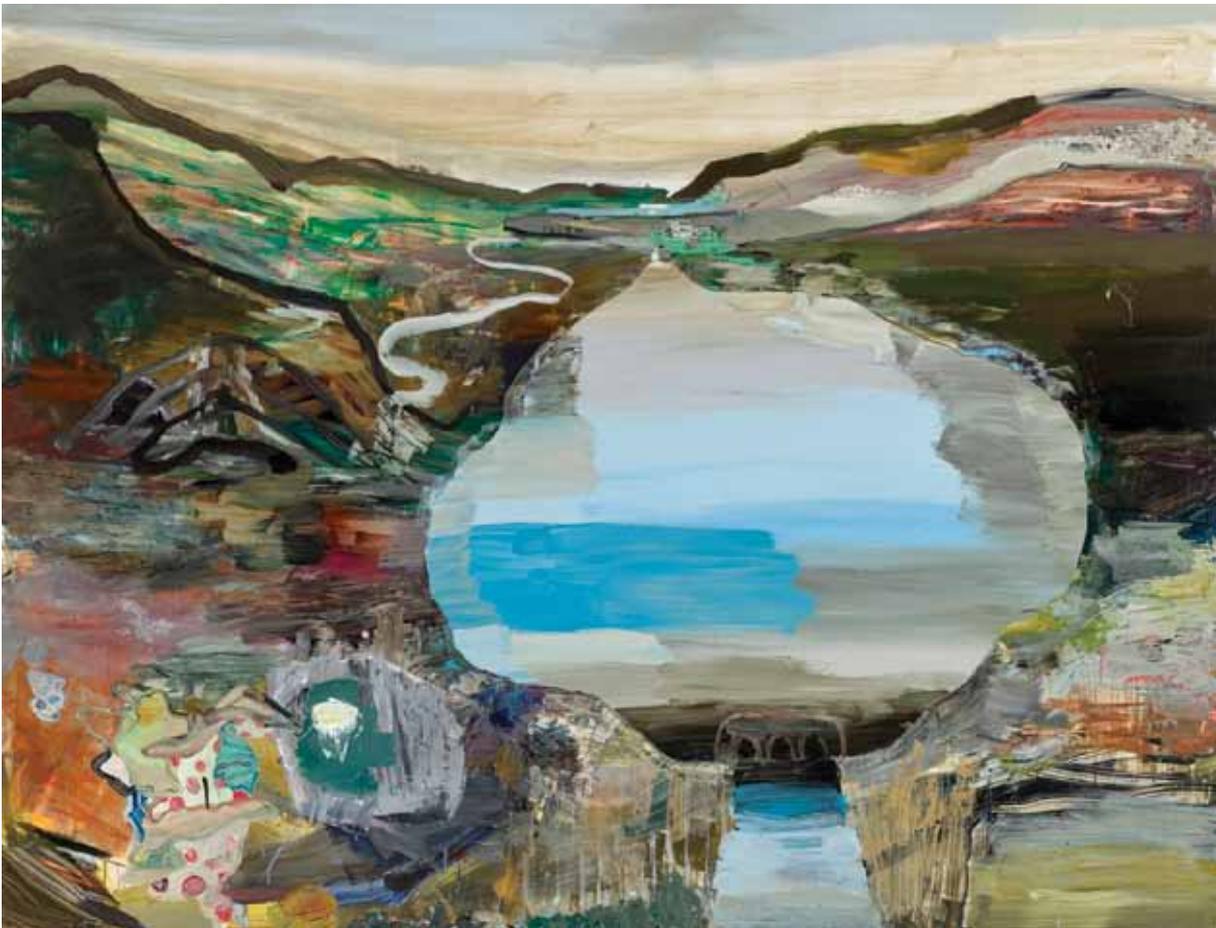
air anticipate Bonnard's flickering marks. Masaccio gave us human sorrow, but Velázquez was one of the first artists to paint so convincingly the vulnerability inherent in social position: his *Infantas*—with their natty wigs, mirroring in shape their royal gowns, that function as psychological tropes for the burdens of wealth, power and position—look more like fashion victims today than royalty. Bonnard's *The Boxer* (1931) expresses a similar pathos. Differences in technique aside, the squall of paint is similar in both artists, overwhelming any sense of authority in Bonnard's supposedly strong male figure, as he succumbs to the storm of mark-making. This too is an image of feckless posturing: "I got carried away with color and I sacrificed form to it," Bonnard admitted. The pose trumps the man and undoes him.

Bonnard's dissolution of form foreshadows American visionary artists like Charles Birchfield, and later *Informel* movements in abstract art. And I see distinct nods to Bonnard in some of the most interesting figurative artists today, whether they know or acknowledge it. I'm thinking for instance of Peter Doig, Angela Dufresne, Nicole Eisenman, Lisa Sanditz and Hernan Bas. Bonnard's tangled gardens and thick air are evident in the eccentricities of Sanditz's and Doig's phantasmagoric landscapes; his disappearing figures rematerialize similarly in Dufresne's and Doron Langberg's paintings. His color palette and contrasting light have clearly influenced Dana Schutz and Kyle Coniglio. And echoes of the awkward revelations and sudden apparitions in his group portraits resound in the bathetic dinner parties of Nicole Eisenman.

Bonnard anticipates the narrative urgency of such contemporary painters, all of whom have distinct stories to tell about gender fluidity, repression, suburban anomie, the stultification of the individual and depredation of the landscape by mainstream consumer culture. His empathy for women stuck in stifling domesticity, the way he understood the repressive nature of bourgeois life, is evident in the way he composed *The White Interior* (1932) with its awkwardly



Kyle Coniglio, *Self Portrait with Bears, Otters and Wolves*, 2009, oil on canvas, 20" x 24." Courtesy of the artist.



Lisa Sanditz, *Underwear City*, 2008, oil on canvas, 68" x 87." Courtesy of the artist.

bent-over woman, hemmed in by background walls, radiator and door. That woman is further cornered, almost pierced, by a foreground table that virtually juts into her stomach.

Bonnard had an approach to the figure that mirrored his and wife Marthe's reclusive natures: he famously shaved his moustache when he went on a cruise, "to look like other passengers"²⁴. His figures disappear into their worlds, as though their relative importance to any situation were up for grabs. Vuillard's bourgeois figures blend into their domestic realms; they're part of the furniture like Betty Draper in *Mad Men*. But Bonnard's are caught up in a game of hide-and-seek; they literally sneak up on you, from behind a tree or bush. Similarly many of Dufresne's figures belong more to the atmosphere that permeates her worlds than they do to themselves: they emerge from tiny glowing TV sets, as in *Me in TV and on the Couch* (2007), or fade into a fog of air, as in *Strangers When We Met Gay Bar* (2010), fully aware that they are bit players in coruscating worlds, where light, the energy of metal music and quicksilver flashes of paint constitute the main event.

Nature looms large in a world where the human is diminished. The town of Le Cannet, Bonnard's refuge from the suffocation of the city, became his muse as much as Marthe. In a painting like *The Palm*, he suffuses the central figure with the same color of blue as the air above the red roofs, literally turning her into the stuff of atmosphere, allowing the large palm frond above her and the rectangles of reddish-orange behind her to come forward and clash and clang like cymbals. She is in effect a hole in the painting, similar to the fetid lake in Sanditz's *Underwear City* (2008), which bod-ies forth through mountains and the ooze of contaminated land, forming a toxic maw that both sucks us in and advances towards us menacingly. Sanditz's muse, if she has one, would have to be the dying landscape itself, a place where human beings have disappeared and the detritus of hyper-consumerism is all that's left.

I see shades of the same suffocation in the garden party of Bonnard's *The Terrace at Vernonnet* (1939) and in Dufresne's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Delusional Dinner Party for Big Daddy* (2007). Bonnard's painting divides the space into a weirdly shaped grid to emphasize the stifling nature of that social situation. The grid subsumes the scene into a tight little cluster of wonky shapes, like a bunch of deflating party balloons squashed and stacked on top of each other. Such sick geometry effectively annuls any flow of vital energy among the sectors of that little bourgeois backyard. Everything is neatly compartmentalized, like partitions in a picnic basket whose food is rotting. In her garden party painting, Dufresne presents us with what might superficially seem like a perfectly charming outdoor gathering, like Bonnard's, here accompanied by Chinese lanterns and a yellow glow suffusing the air with warm light. She then subverts that mood with excessive glazing and transparent veils of paint splashed about that break up any internal coherence and suggest something sinister at play. She describes particulars of the narrative and its composition not through rendering but through bold strokes of paint that are applied and then partially wiped away. The image is attacked as an integral way of telling the story.

Dufresne creates an ethereal light that she then undoes with those glazes and erasures, framing certain areas for focus, such as Big Daddy in the middle of the table. This grid of negative space and positive shapes clarifies some figures and obscures others: a phantasmagoria of perpetrators and victims. Some figures stand out and others are subsumed into the veils of dripping, frantic

paint, but all look to be drowning in the penetrating goo of toxic color, as though the very poison in the pigments that painters use is contributing to the character's suffocation. Only the paper lanterns are left behind as witnesses.

Kyle Coniglio is a young artist very much influenced by Bonnard and Dufresne, and his work evinces a similar interest in illicit characters that dematerialize in climates of thick air. In *Me and the Beasts* (2010) Coniglio paints himself surrounded by a variety of beasts—bears, wolves, otters—all permeated by a melancholic turquoise glow that suggests subterranean malaise, both heartbreaking and comic. This is a demi-monde for *les enfants sauvages*, to prance and cavort in their bestial play.

Bonnard insinuates his fascination with the bathetic and illicit in subtle, sometimes barely perceptible ways—he was too well-mannered to do otherwise. Yet manners don't concern contemporary painters, who often lay bare sexuality of the kind seen in *Large Yellow Nude* without hesitation. What is harder to find in our times are sincere expressions of that experience. Doron Langberg and Nicole Eisenman risk it in ways that manage to be both daring and subtle, as their revelation of secrets is slow and often accompanied by a frisson of discovery.

Hiding the figure in the stuff of negative space—transposing figure/ground relationships—occurs in Doron Langberg's *On All Fours* (2012) and Nicole Eisenman's *Study for Winter Solstice Dinner Party* (2009), to reveal something unexpected and stirring. Like the disappearing figures in *The Boxer* and *The Palm*, we see Langberg's bestial figure first as only a red veil of atmospheric space. Then we notice the clotted clumps of thick paint doing something very specific: they are surrounding a shape. All of a sudden those clumps become the space while the red glaze becomes a positive shape: a figure crawling towards us. That transparent red glaze will forever oscillate now between space and shape, now positive, now negative, as the figure dematerializes into a red glowing light, and rematerializes into the raw, sensual zone of illicit sex. A similar oscillation occurs in Eisenman's *Study for Winter Solstice Dinner Party*. Around a white dinner table, dark and abject figures lounge or sleep. But as the eye moves back in space, ground gives way to figure and the negative space of the white table suddenly becomes positive, as with Langberg's figure, revealing it now as a female torso, splayed out, corpse-like. Its head aligns vertically with two candles (one functioning as the woman's solar plexus and one as the crotch). Eisenman offers us here a vision of a sacrificial body, with the poor and miserable dining on her, like a veritable Mater Amata Intemerata, but spotless no longer.

It's worth recalling that one reason a certain kind of avant-garde art, predicated on shock, worked so effectively on unwitting viewers in the early 20th century and made headway in the culture was because of the unique way that its novel stylistic forms and unconventional ideas complicated the act of viewing. A viewer weaned on expectations of pleasure and realism in her art consumption was suddenly thrown into a state of uncertainty—what Breton described as "convulsive"—when faced with her first upside-down urinal or fur-lined teacup. With the accompanying adrenaline rush from that supercharged surprise, she experienced a kind of euphoria as her mind worked hard to make sense of those new experiences, unmoored from the determining nature of bourgeois certitudes. Such movement, from certainty to doubt and then acceptance, created a unique kind of excitement. As Jed Perl says in his review of Jeff



Angela Dufresne, *Me in the TV (from Antonioni's 'The Passenger')*, 2006, oil on panel, 24" x 30." Courtesy of the artist.

Koons' show at the Whitney Museum, "From the first supporters of the Cubists to the critics and collectors who embraced Abstract Expressionism early on, the bewilderment one sometimes experienced on encountering new art was embraced as a complicated intellectual challenge, demanding new alignments of sense and sensibility."⁵ But decades of challenging art predicated on shock (amply described by Robert Hughes in *The Shock of the New*) with Freudian undertones (analyzed by Hal Foster in *Compulsive Beauty*) may have limited our understanding of what constitutes greatness in art. What shocks us today becomes habitual—even disparaged—tomorrow. Revelatory experience is qualitatively different in its effect on us from shock, and isn't undone by habituation. The slow revelation of a Bonnard painting is similar to the sharing of secrets; it increases awareness, and forges intimacy and connectedness.

In the lineage of Courbet, Bonnard reclaimed realism for a 20th century avant-garde public. The 19th century's breakdown of faith in form, most noticeably its faith in academic Realism to conjure truth and verisimilitude, was for Bonnard an opportunity to move beyond the representation of surfaces and the aesthetics of design evident in his early work, to delve into more truthful depictions of lived human experience: its clandestine underside. Bonnard's *Large*

Yellow Nude gave me my first mature experience of avant-garde shock as a pathway to truth because of its revelatory suggestiveness and timing—how long it takes the viewer to fully comprehend its secrets. Bonnard traffics in slow takes, psychological nuance and subtle hints of illicit subject matter that reveal themselves gradually. The main event of a Bonnard painting is almost always barely visible, involving a figure or everyday object that has been deformed in such a way that you cease to recognize it as itself. While that elicited for me the revelatory thrill I equate with avant-garde art, it is not deployed merely to shock, but to reveal something deeper, maybe even shameful at times, about our humanity. What begins in *Large Yellow Nude* as an apparently simple scene of a woman at her toilette ends with a distinct revelatory thrill—a barely identifiable object, on closer scrutiny, becomes a menstrual rag. Where Cubism or Expressionism bludgeon with harsh striations and wild color, Bonnard whispers. And I am floored.

Many contemporary painters describe Bonnard as important to their development as artists. But Bonnard is no easy reach. The challenge he sets for all narrative painters is formidable: how to use both understatement and wild speculation to tell a bold story well; how to say something about our humanity that is both piercing and



Nicole Eisenman, *Study for Winter Solstice 2012 Dinner Party*, 2009, oil on canvas, 20" x 16." Courtesy of the artist.

poignant, without mockery; how to play out the slow revelation with perfect timing, implicating the viewer in the ramifications of each and every mark made. These are not small tasks.

Many artists I know are looking for imagery that engages more with the local than ever before, with the flawed nature of human kind and a clear critique of human exceptionalism. They seek imagery that depicts formally and conceptually how and why we humans are losing the big game. As Bonnard's world shrank when he left Paris and moved to Le Cannet in 1910 during the height of Cubism and its many stylistic offshoots; as Marthe crawled into her bathtub and gave herself over to the spangle of light reflecting off tiles, becoming all at once a vision of intrauterine plenitude and a speck of flesh within a kaleidoscope of light and color, many of us are oscillating between the hugeness of our growing global awareness of environmental destruction and, at the same time, keeping bees on our roofs and planting milkweed to attract the disappearing butterfly. As the promises of Modernism fade more and more—all

its grand visions and myths of progress essentially trumped by the environmental devastation left in its wake, signaling the failure of the Anthropocene—we need to find imagery to describe that growing self-consciousness, and humility, in the face of our failures. We are witnessing movements all around us, in philosophy, in quantum physics and critical theory that decenter the human from the main field of action. No tragedy is implied here, only a recognition that there is so much more to see, so much else to notice if we humans, like Bonnard, just move a bit out of the way. ■

NOTES:

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2. John Elderfield, *Bonnard*, exh. Cat., Tate Gallery, London; Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1998, p.33.
3. Stephen Knudsen, email conversation with Julie Heffernan, August 28, 2015.
4. Thadee Natanson, *Le Bonnard que je propose*, Geneva, 1951, p.88.
5. Jed Perl, "The Cult of Jeff Koons," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 25, 2014.

RYOJI IKEDA

Visualizing Data at the Edge of Perception

BY SCOTT THORP



Ryoji Ikeda, *data.tron [8K enhanced version]*, 2008-09, audiovisual installation, 8 DLP projectors, computers, 9.2ch sound system. © the artist. Photo: Liz Hingley.

The distance from zero to one may not seem like much, but to the artist Ryoji Ikeda, it represents infinity. The unit interval, as it is known, consists of all real numbers greater than or equal to zero and less than or equal to one. Theoretically, there are just as many points on a line spanning one inch (0 to 1), as there are on a line that goes forever. Ironically, abstract concepts like this, which previously resided in the minds of esoteric thinkers are now being applied to everyday scenarios from shopping habits to traffic patterns. And it is through our increasing abilities to exploit large data sets that we are gaining a new awareness of the power of numbers. Subsequently, as we slip into an alternative universe of 1s and 0s, tech savvy artists are mining data-rich fodder for new modes of expression. At the head of pack is Ikeda, whose edgy, hypnotic audio/visual installations express the paradoxical reality of society's transition to a digitized world.

The data we generate on a weekly basis is often conceived of in terms of teraflops and tetrabytes. Each of those means “trillions”

of things. They are quantities so big, it is hard to understand what they mean. Almost everything we do is recorded in some way via mobile electronics or otherwise, and it is peculiar how accustomed we've grown to the encroachment of technology into our lives. An unsettling premise arising from this is that binary code may be the most accurate representation of who we really are.

Ikeda, Japanese by birth but Parisian by residence, is a leading figure in an emerging field of artists expressing the prevalence of data. His audiovisual installations have a crisp, technological edge as if futurist Ray Kurzweil is throwing a rave party. Exhibiting and performing worldwide, his works form an audio/visual experience bringing attention to the invisible information fueling the digital era. Ikeda's art bridges many categories, existing somewhere between fine art and techno-pop culture. His installations utilize mathematical relationships, such as the unit interval, and are as jarring as they are hypnotic. Their high pitched tones and scratchy noises can be tough to endure though for extended



Ryoki Ikeda, *supersymmetry [experience]*, 2014, audiovisual installation, 40 DLP projectors, 40 computers, loud speakers. © the artist. Photo: Ryuichi Maruo.

periods of time. They verge on the type of art you tell friends you enjoyed for hours, but in reality you left after just a few minutes.

Consistent throughout Ikeda’s work are signifiers of what he calls pure data. Binary code and data points are his forte. Some works, such as the project *datamatics*, reference the seemingly infinite dark matter of the universe through thousands of digits scrolling over walls so fast they’re impossible to differentiate. Others are rhythmic compositions of rectangular bars and lines illuminating areas of floor and wall. These flickering progressions of black and white seem to mimic TV static or computer glitches. His installations beep; they scroll; they flash all in a manner to imply they’re searching for something as you ineffectively attend. The maximal/minimal results are perfected from hours of obsessive programming topped with an edgy synthetic meme. A space-age look of computational data is consistent throughout his work.

Ikeda combines stark, projected imagery and massive scale to confound how we normally determine the relationship between ourselves and the object. Unlike physical sculptures such as those of Richard Serra, whose monumental walls of gently curving steel impose a general sense of helplessness in the presence of an enormous mass, Ikeda’s projections present the viewer as being diminutive within an already microscopic world. The resulting mood is a sense of personal insignificance. In response, two diametrically opposed feelings arise: awe and apathy. Awe in that it’s overwhelming, apathy in that you are left feeling incapable of affecting change. Serra’s works are gigantic due to their nature as physical objects. They’re obviously heavy and their precarious orientations give them a threatening feel. But the absence of mass in Ikeda’s work maintains an ambiguity with regard to viewer/object scale due to its lack of physical features. They’re mostly flashing light. However, they are no less threatening.

One of Ikeda’s largest installations took place at the Park Avenue Armory in New York. *the transfinite*, 2011, consumed the interior of the Armory—the equivalent of a full city block. Two works, *the transfinite* and *data.tron/data.scan*, shared the space on opposing sides of a four-story screen, and met in the center of the space to

become united as one. The combined installation ran the length of the interior of the building.

the transfinite, one of his strongest works, is a precisely choreographed audiovisual experience. Its UPC-like black and white shapes strobe across both floor and wall—their movements tightly synchronized to tracks of synthetic noise. The open design invites viewers into and onto the installation, effectively becoming an element within the work. Disoriented from the flickering visuals, people walk, sit and stare as if isolated and hypnotized. Some perform odd dramatics reminiscent of dancing on the hill at Woodstock. The experience imbues a strange hallucinatory, off balance effect giving one the sense they’ve been slipped a mild narcotic. The work in this sense emits a mood resembling a late-night club spinning trance music—absent the rhythmic beat. *the transfinite* went viral during the reception as videos were posted on social media. Hordes of curious “friends” arriving late into the evening, forced organizers to extend the hours.¹

Often combining his installations with DJ style performances, Ikeda mixes audio tracks linked to visuals displayed on a large backdrop. The nature of these irregular arrangements evoke the notion of experimental electronic music, but they stand more in the realm of noise compositions. *test pattern*, which is essentially a translation program, has taken many forms including the electronic billboards of Times Square. It transforms the programming code of pictures, sounds, and movies into a range of nonobjective imagery moving at over a hundred frames per second.² The combination of acoustic and visual stimuli is a multisensory experience that can be understood as a materialization of pure mathematics.

In some ways, his audio work is a contemporary relative of Musique Concrete from the 1940s where leading-edge composers like Pierre Schaeffer experimented with sound elements woven into avant-garde sound experiences. Schaeffer’s collages of sampled audio tracks and ambient noises dissect music as arrangements of sound elements. Ikeda’s compositions are clicks, beeps and fuzz that capture your attention but never let you settle in. In some ways, they are exercises in complexity and randomness. They usually don’t offer enough regularity to form discernable patterns, but your mind tries continuously to resolve the progressions in such ways.



Ryoki Ikeda, *test pattern [enhanced version]*, 2011, audiovisual installation, 3 DLP projectors, computers, speakers. © the artist. Photo courtesy of Park Avenue Armory and Forma. Photo credit: James Ewing.

The lack of paranoia in discussions about Ikeda's work is definitely a sign of our times. Instead of it being a wakeup call to defend ourselves against the rise of sentient machines, we absorb his work as a realization of things to come (Orwell must be spinning in his grave). The feel is like being inside HAL 9000, the computer from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as he contemplates the change of mission. Forty years ago, at the release of that movie, the mere thought of artificial intelligence was nothing short of apocalyptic. Since then, we've seen the big other—data, and have mostly become resigned to its inevitability. We clearly understand our medical records, shopping habits, and likes are recorded as ones and zeroes. And for the most part, the general population see this as a good thing.

data.tron/data.scan (the work sharing the Armory with *the transfinite*), recently installed at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia, displays two synchronized sources of data. One can be viewed atop a waist high, rectangular top with an LED screen. The other is projected on a large wall where information flows in such rapid succession that there's really no way to make sense of it. Periodically, these numbers transition to scrolling lines of DNA or database entries. It's unclear what the data represents. According to Ikeda, some of the visualized data expresses the unit interval itself. Periodic deviations occur when the monitor and wall projection simultaneously lock in on particular entries, scanning them in greater depth. The program appears to be searching for an answer that doesn't exist. After a while, the program gives up, and the scrolling numbers resume.

Standing in the SCAD installation of *data.tron/data.scan*, the room eventually transitions to a reflective, temple-like space, where

thoughts of computers overrunning the world start creeping in. How long will it take for Google to unleash Skynet as depicted in the *Terminator* movies? The obvious tokens of technology are the phones and computers we see every day. But hardware are only signs of the larger issue—data. And it's the continuous generation of data, day-in day-out, that's growing beyond comprehension. According to a report on data dumping by IBM, it appears we are working toward doubling the amount of data in the world, every day.³

Take a cell phone for instance. How much data have the apps on my phone communicated about my existence over the past week? Paranoid thoughts like that force me online to search for answers, ironically generating more data. A hasty query finds that a new iPhone 6 can have an A8 chip which clocks in at more than 2GHz—1GHz being a billion cycles per second.⁴ So if I have an iPhone 6 (which I don't), in one second it can process two billion bits of information. Maybe we shouldn't carry phones in our pants.

Turning to *data.tron/data.scan*'s wall of advancing numbers, I begin counting. After about five seconds I realize it's futile; they're changing too fast. So I tap the calculator on my phone, creating more data. If it's a 15' x 15' surface, and each number is 1" x 1/2," the maximum simultaneous display is 64,800 digits. That's nowhere near two billion. To clearly represent the potential of an A8 chip, Ikeda's numbers should replenish over thirty thousand times per second. There's no visualization to represent that. It's beyond perception. And that's exactly where Ikeda is taking us—to an understanding that we are beyond our cognitive aptitude.

Ikeda's works bring awareness to the hidden systems around us. They represent systems so vast they surpass our ability to conceive;



Exhibition view, Carsten Nicolai, *unicolor*, as part of the exhibition "City and Nature," Sapporo International Art Festival, Sapporo Art Museum, Japan 2014. Photo: Julija Stankeviciene. Courtesy Galerie EIGEN+ART Leipzig/Berlin and The Pace Gallery. © VG Bildkunst Bonn.

his audio and visual components often range past the threshold of our sensory capabilities. His tones and imagery pulse higher and faster than we can perceive. As a metaphor, it works. Still, Ikeda goes further. His work exceeds the abilities of existing technology. Included in his CD *dataplex* is a warning that his waveform (time-series) data will force your CD player to conduct a *read-test* and consequently fail. I personally didn't test it. But from the reviews online, it appears to do just that.

The genre of data related art and design is growing in many directions, and is a domain where art and design are deeply enmeshed. Closely related to Ikeda, Carsten Nicolai's projections of data-looking imagery primarily focus on the properties of sound and how it functions in the visual spectrum. *Unicolor*, exhibited at the Sapporo International Art Festival, combines large projections of color bands to explore the psychology of color perception as stated by color theorists including Josef Albers and Johannes Itten. Nicolai creates work with a similar aesthetic as Ikeda, ultra-crisp and computer driven. They once collaborated to establish a graphic library of metered sound occurrences. These visual records of sounds plot the information as simple line drawings. The results are catalogued in the artists' monograph, *cyclo.id*, which organizes wave patterns the way a botanist would flora. Using equipment designed to master vinyl records, they are able to capture sound fragments in 2D graphics. Nicolai also delves into the area of glitch art that depicts irregularities or malfunctions in computer visualizations. Picture your television when your signal slows and the image pixelates. In Nicolai's *crt mgn pict lb* series, he projects the distortions of a TV screen that has been effected by external magnets. An interesting component of glitch art is how it demonstrates the inconsistencies or irregularities within complex systems.⁵ People say computers don't lie, but they do get things wrong sometimes.

A consistent attribute separating Ikeda's work from others is that he is visualizing real mathematical and scientific properties to encourage a greater understanding of communication's complexity. After winning the Prix Ars Electronica Collide@CERN award, Ikeda decided to produce work inspired by the processing power of the

world's largest physics lab, CERN. His installation of *supersymmetry*, a revised edition of an earlier work *superposition*, is a symmetrical gauntlet of forty computers and forty projectors rifling through information with an analytic style of distant, cool beauty. Light bars run the length of the installation, and at times mimic the processes of the particle accelerator itself. As is in many of Ikeda's installations, it seems otherworldly and vast. When viewed at a distance, patterns and chaos tend to blend together. And while viewing his installation, one begins to wonder whether it's causality or correlation we in fact experience. Do things happen for a reason, or do they just happen?

The theory of supersymmetry, according to physicists, purports every particle in our universe has an identical twin. These subatomic doppelgangers called "superpartners," create a type of space-time symmetry that fills in unaccounted for gaps within the standard model in physics. It's too complicated to even begin explaining. The topic jumps immediately into words like *fermions* and *bosons*. After that, it all looks like Greek to me.

My take-home from Ikeda's work is one of inevitability. Supercomputing is here and it's only becoming more powerful. The ever increasing power of processors is harnessing the latent information around us on a scale that can't even be described. But within this vast space of what seems dark matter, trends exist. And within the trends are patterns which contain a visual resonance of synthetic beauty. My particular obsession with his work comes from how it distances itself from human interaction. We are making this data, but I'm not so sure that we are totally in control. In his installations, the viewer takes the role of bystander—a passive observer of the complexities and that modern-day electronics handle with ease. ■

NOTES

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RON JOHNSON

An Archaeology of Seeing

Ron Johnson's paintings create tensions. Oscillating between landscape and abstraction, positive and negative space, translucency and obscurity, his paintings encourage careful looking and emphasize the importance of visual experience. Johnson's most recent body of work, which he debuted in 2015 at Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, marks a significant transition in his oeuvre away from square canvases to shaped panels. For the artist, this move more accurately translates Johnson's experiences driving out west each summer, absorbing the crags, rolling hills, and vast plains. In our conversation, we touch on the state of painting today, the American landscape, Johnson's concept of the "archaeology of seeing," and betting sports with Michelle Grabner. He is represented by Reynolds Gallery, Richmond; Duane Reed Gallery, St. Louis; and Angela Meleca Gallery in Columbus.

BY OWEN DUFFY

Owen Duffy - I'd like to start this conversation off by hearing your thoughts on the state of painting today—and in particular abstract painting—to provide readers with some insight into how you see your practice fitting into the broader network. Painting-as-commodity seems to dominate a lot of discussion today, perhaps pointing to our sustained anxieties about the medium's purpose and function in the contemporary world. From a painter's perspective, in the thick of things, are you registering the same sort of uneasy dialogue?

Ron Johnson - I'm an optimist. Painting is always growing, so I think that painting is always, and in particular abstraction, in a better place. Thinking about painting as commodity or art in general as commodity—I think this is a tough thing. I never think about selling work, I think about making it, but sometimes those two aspects have to cross paths to sustain each other. But I know artists who are only thinking of selling, and philosophically I don't get that. And I think you are correct about an unease in dialogue or maybe a distortion of dialogue, because conversations will often turn to questions like: "How much are you selling your paintings for?" and "What materials are you using?" There is a lack of curiosity about the idea. Personally, I would much rather sit around all day talking about the why's than the how's.

Regardless, look around and see what is out there. It's still really kind of mind blowing to think about what is being created today. That isn't to say I love everything, but I do respect the process artists take.

O.D. - Speaking about why's and how's, can you elaborate on the importance of the road trips out west you take each summer to your practice? Why do you take them, and how do these experiences figure into your work? The act of driving always reminds me of the minimalist sculptor Tony Smith's midnight epiphany on the New Jersey turnpike. Illegally driving down the unopened highway, without street lights or road markers, the ride, for Smith, was something that could not be described—it was simply a matter of experience.

R.J. - The trip is very Zen for me in terms of my relationship to the landscape, and I am talking predominantly about the Western landscape. I leave from Virginia and drive. There is no real destination in mind, just West. What I start engaging with is the vastness of the Dakotas, Wyoming, Colorado, etc. The experience of engaging with this vastness is what I like to call an archaeology

of seeing. I like to relate this experience to when you were a child and you were in the back of your parents' station wagon and you would look at the moon and think it was following you. The vastness is very much the same. I'm looking at a mountain or some land marker, and I drive 50 miles or so and the mountain appears to have never moved. Or maybe it seems to be following me. In my mind I know it has shifted, but still. So when I bring it back into my work this archaeology of seeing, a continuous echo of the visual field is the response to "how" the drive plays in my work. It's funny because I do think about the Tony Smith relationship a lot. That kind of feeling or experience of the trip is very private. Not that the trip has to be private, but the experience certainly is.

O.D. - I'm particularly enthralled by the notion of an "archaeology of seeing." It's an idea that implies work—digging, if we are perpetuating the metaphor—on the part of the viewer and the artist. So how does one of your more recent shaped paintings, such as Maybe You Would Understand specifically relate to an "archaeology of seeing?"

R.J. - It really relates to all the works in the way that we see. I originally started thinking about this concept after learning about the Hubble telescope. I remember hearing that they hypothesized that the Hubble might one day be able to see the Big Bang. To me this is an archaeology of seeing, a looking into the past, so I applied this concept to the landscape, particularly that of the west, where the landscape is so vast that you can see for miles, with the shaped panels, they are really moments pulled from the landscape. But when I am there, I can always see moments marked by trees, mountains, whatever. So the shaped work is really a positive space or moment pulled from my visual field. The shapes have always been there, you can see them in my panel works, but now I am allowing them to exist as the ground.

O.D. - So, do you think I would be off in left field if I contextualized your paintings as landscapes cloaked in abstraction? To me, that frames the paintings within a discourse about the duplicity of vision. For instance, what we see through a telescope, or even through the naked eye, for that matter, is never really what is actually present—that utterly immanent moment. Rather, what we perceive is always the past, operating under the guise of an illusory present.



Ron Johnson, *Lost and Found*, 2013, acrylic on panel, 48" x 48". All images are courtesy the artist and Reynolds Gallery.

R.J. - That is absolutely a perfect description. I use and need the landscape for my work, but the landscapes are abstracted and my interpretations of the moments. They aren't supposed to be landscapes, but ideas of moments of landscapes. And you totally get this idea of an archaeology of seeing. Looking is a visual dig, whether it's the literal layers of objects or the vastness of a landscape that goes on for miles. We dig through space to get to the so-called moment or moments of objects. The light we see from a star is millions of years old, but how different of an experience is that really from seeing a reflection in the desert from miles away? One is on a grander scale, but it is a visual dig either way.

O.D. - *I like this concept of visual digging, that in your paintings not everything is given away to the viewer, made easy for him or her. I think some of the best art makes you work through looking—it really underscores the fact that seeing is a fundamentally active experience. Could you speak a bit in regards to how the production process of your paintings lends itself to the visual dig?*

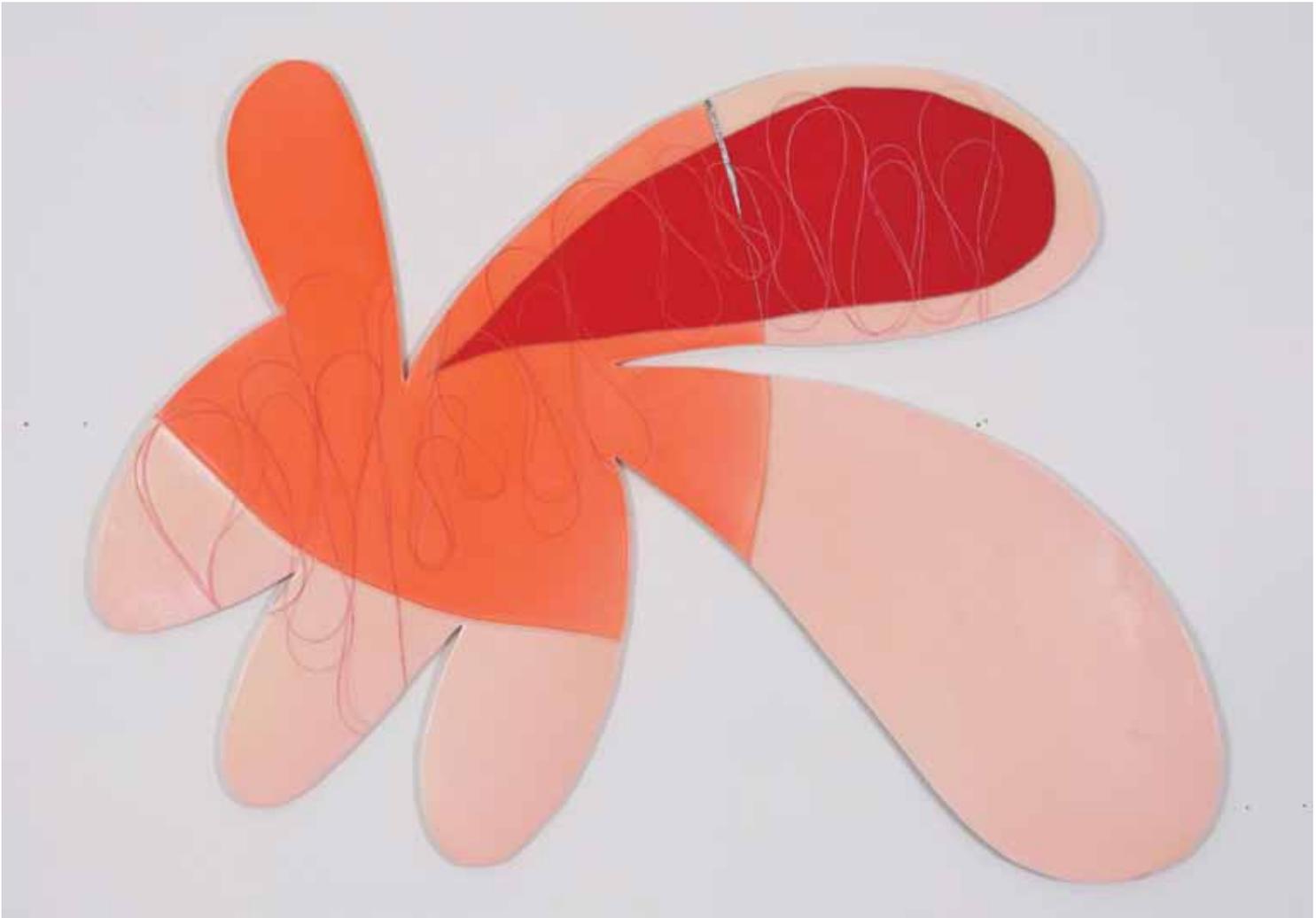
R.J. - I think what you're saying about not getting a read immediately, or ever for that matter, is what I am also getting at; that slowing down of the viewing process. It really, in some ways, mirrors my making in that it is slow and laborious, and also quite Zen at times. There is absolutely a meditative component to my making, which I compare to my drive out west, looking and experiencing. So you are right that there is a real cohesion between seeing and making with my work. I sometimes think of Bill Viola's video work, and how he physically slows down the viewing process.

O.D. - *How do the materials of your paintings contribute to these kinds of viewing experiences? The first time I encountered your work—I think it was back in 2012—I couldn't help but think you were working with a semi-transparent wax. There was an ooze, a perceived stickiness to the surface that I found somewhat perplexing. I really, really wanted to commit the ultimate faux-pas, which we all have done at some point, and feel your work.*

R.J. - [laughs] People tell me that all of the time that they just want to touch my paintings, which of course I am fine with, but the galleries not so much! Most people think that my work is encaustic, but it's not. I think my materials are important, but I really don't want them to be an overriding factor where it becomes all about that. The medium allows me to control (for the most part) this idea of translucency which in turn allows the viewer to access my work in layers. So viewers are literally able to see the archaeology, or experience my thoughts in an archaeology of seeing.

O.D. - *It would seem, then, that a constant in your work for some time has been your materials, notwithstanding the landscape and the act of looking. Why, I must ask, did you feel compelled to move away from the square format to new, shaped, biomorphic paintings? Besides the obvious formal changes the work has passed through, what is different about these paintings?*

R.J. - It is something I have been working out in my head for four or five years, and I have done "shaped" experiments going back as far as maybe fifteen years. The shapes have always been in my panel



Ron Johnson, *Maybe You Would Understand*, 2014, acrylic on panel, dimensions variable.

works. I constantly would look at the forms in the landscape when I was driving and think of them as the painting itself. I would often talk myself out of moving to shaped work because of the relationship to other artists and getting compared to them. I guess in my head I want to think of things more like a scientist in terms of the approach. I eventually told myself this is *my* shaped work. It isn't connected to Elizabeth Murray or Stella, etc. I mean I'm not silly enough to think of originality; I didn't invent shape, but this is my way of dealing with shape and processing my visual response. But it took a long time because I wanted to be sure that this work was mine.

O.D. - *The "shaped" painting does have a long history, a history that goes well back to the Renaissance and before, with roundels and altarpieces, and so on. I think it's important to be aware of this history, and to know why one participates in it, but not to get burdened by the pressure of having to "innovate" and be "new." But with your mentioning of artists like Elizabeth Murray and Frank Stella, I have to ask, who do you see yourself in dialogue with, past or present?*

R.J. - I guess I think of that question in terms of the artists who have been most influential on me. Really there are a lot of individuals, but not all are visual artists. I think about sports, particularly baseball, and players such as Willie Mays, among others. I think about music and musicians quite a lot. But as far as visual artists it would have to be Piet Mondrian, Christian Bonnefoi, James Hyde and James Turrell. I saw the Mondrian retrospective at MoMA in 1997 or 1998. It was kind of a "wow" moment. I love the way the line vibrates in his paintings, as well

as his thoughts on nature and abstraction. I respect James Hyde for his guts and the rawness of his work, and Turrell for the mood and sensory awareness he can create. But probably I would say I am most closely aligned with Bonnefoi. He has this way of articulating the archaeology of painting, and I was lucky enough to study with him at The Ohio State University, and have been able to pick his brain ever since.

O.D. - *You don't usually see Willie Mays being discussed in the same paragraph as Piet Mondrian and James Turrell. Do you care to elaborate about this and the importance of baseball to you more generally?*

R.J. - I think about it in the simplest of terms, and trust me I could go into some deep philosophical ideas and connections, but with baseball and painting you come to a field or an empty panel with all of this knowledge. The knowledge is attained through practice or studio work, but you come to this clean slate, and you know how to play the game, but you never know how the game is going to be played out. It's always new, always unique. I also think about the connection between the infinite in baseball and my paintings' archaeology of seeing.

O.D. - *By the "infinite in baseball" are you referring to the theoretical possibility of a never ending game? To me, this is a useful analogy, not only for your paintings, but also for painting as a discourse and art more generally. How many times have critics, from Paul Delaroche to Douglas Crimp, prognosticated about the death of painting? If art is a game to be played, it is one that is never necessarily complete, and certainly doesn't die. Some artists, such*



Ron Johnson, *What I Did It For*, 2014, acrylic on panel, dimensions variable.

as Marcel Duchamp and Ai Weiwei, for instance, have played it better than others. Then again, Duchamp was an internationally renowned chess player, and Ai was a rated blackjack player who got tons of perks from Atlantic City casinos.

R.J. - The variables are infinite, and there has never been a game played the same way twice, and baseball has no clock, so in theory it could go on forever. I have always disliked this idea that something is “dead.” Rock and roll isn’t dead and painting isn’t dead. People die, plants die, but inanimate things don’t die; they just change. I do like the idea that art is a game, it is not always a good game but a game nonetheless. And then the game of baseball is, like art, so random. In baseball you can hit a screaming liner right at someone, are out, but in your next at bat you can hit one off the end of the bat and get a hit.

O.D. - *I think I’m coming to the conclusion that your paintings, then, speak to both aesthetic experience in a broad sense—particularly in the way that they ask important questions about the act of looking—as well as to the American experience. Baseball and the fabled “West” are critical to your art, after all. I don’t mean to suggest that your paintings are nationalistic or anything like that [laughs], but they certainly seem to be about these quintessentially American things.*

R.J. - [laughs] Yea, I would say so. It’s not necessarily an intentional thing, it just is. I remember being in a show in Paris a few years back and my friend Joe Fyfe happened to be in Paris at the time. He brought the painter Shirley Jaffe to the opening. She told him

something to that effect about my work, that there is something distinctly American about it, and I always remembered that. I’m not sure I really understood it at the time, and maybe I still don’t, but I always remembered that comment.

O.D. - *I’m happy to know I’m not the only one thinking that, but I have to agree with you—those kind of things, like events, just happen in the work. Sorry to circle back around, but I wanted to ask you about your color choices. They’re really quite vibrant, and unnaturally saturated, which seems completely at odds with the fact that your work is so rooted in the landscape. How do you account for these decisions, and what do they mean to you?*

R.J. - The color kind of came to me in a strange way. I was at Ucross, an artist residency in Claremont, Wyoming, and I remember going out of my studio every so often to gaze out at the mountains and hillsides. That red clay at first appears to be just so dull, but after looking at it for some time, it really vibrated and almost became fluorescent. Because of that experience, I really started amping up the colors—the more I looked, the more I became aware of what those colors really were, and the more everything intensified.

O.D. - *Before we conclude, Ron, I’ve heard from somewhere that you have a good Michelle Grabner anecdote.*

R.J. - I have two great Michelle Grabner works that I won from her betting on football. On two separate occasions, I bet that the Seattle Seahawks would beat the Green Bay Packers, and well, they did! ■

THE MATERIAL-SPECIFIC PAINTINGS OF NATHAN MINER AND FRANKLIN EVANS

BY JASON HOELSCHER



Franklin Evans, "Juddrules," 1,500 sq ft, mixed media installation at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts (September 2014). Photo: Bethany Acheson.

Painting today exists across a wide range of forms, objects and environments. For example, artists such as Katharina Grosse, Jutta Koether and Claire Ashley either open up the notion of a bounded picture plane beyond recognition, or incorporate enough non-planar objects and unpainted materials that any flat, painted surface appears as only one component among many. Their paintings seem to function in the realm of scatter art or installation, yet are institutionally framed and exhibited as paintings. This type of work thrusts beyond painterly materiality or medium specificity as those terms have come to be understood in aesthetic discourse.

As culture is subsumed by screen-based experience and increasingly immaterial digital interfaces, many painters today are beginning to explore instead a materialized, spatially expansive mode best described as *material specificity*: a focus on those particular, tangible qualities specific to embodied encounters. Following up on a decade of painterly flatness highly amenable to looking good on screens, material-specific painting is no longer specifically anchored to a flat surface, is resistant to screen-based rep-

resentation—either incidentally or deliberately so—and rewards in-person and on-site experience.

Two recent back-to-back solo exhibitions at the Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, Massachusetts, both curated by Leonie Bradbury, offer compelling examples of how material specific painting takes part in the space/time unfolding of lived experience. Franklin Evans grapples with an expansive approach to painting that constructs and activates space, while Nathan Miner reveals how painterly form endures across states of time and becoming.

Miner's "The Long Now" (from June 19 to August 14, 2014) takes as its starting point the subtle ways paintings operate in and across time. Comprising dynamically positioned and softly painted abstract forms set in motion against each other, Miner's work resembles futurist paintings viewed through deep water—a combination of speedy brusqueness and soft, aquatic shimmer. Germane to the idea of material specificity is Miner's goal of constructing and arranging his paintings to highlight how time is felt—to foreground the "subjective studies of time, materials, and sensory properties," as the artist phrases it.



Franklin Evans, “juddrules,” 1,500 sq ft, mixed media installation at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts (September 2014). Photo: Bethany Acheson.

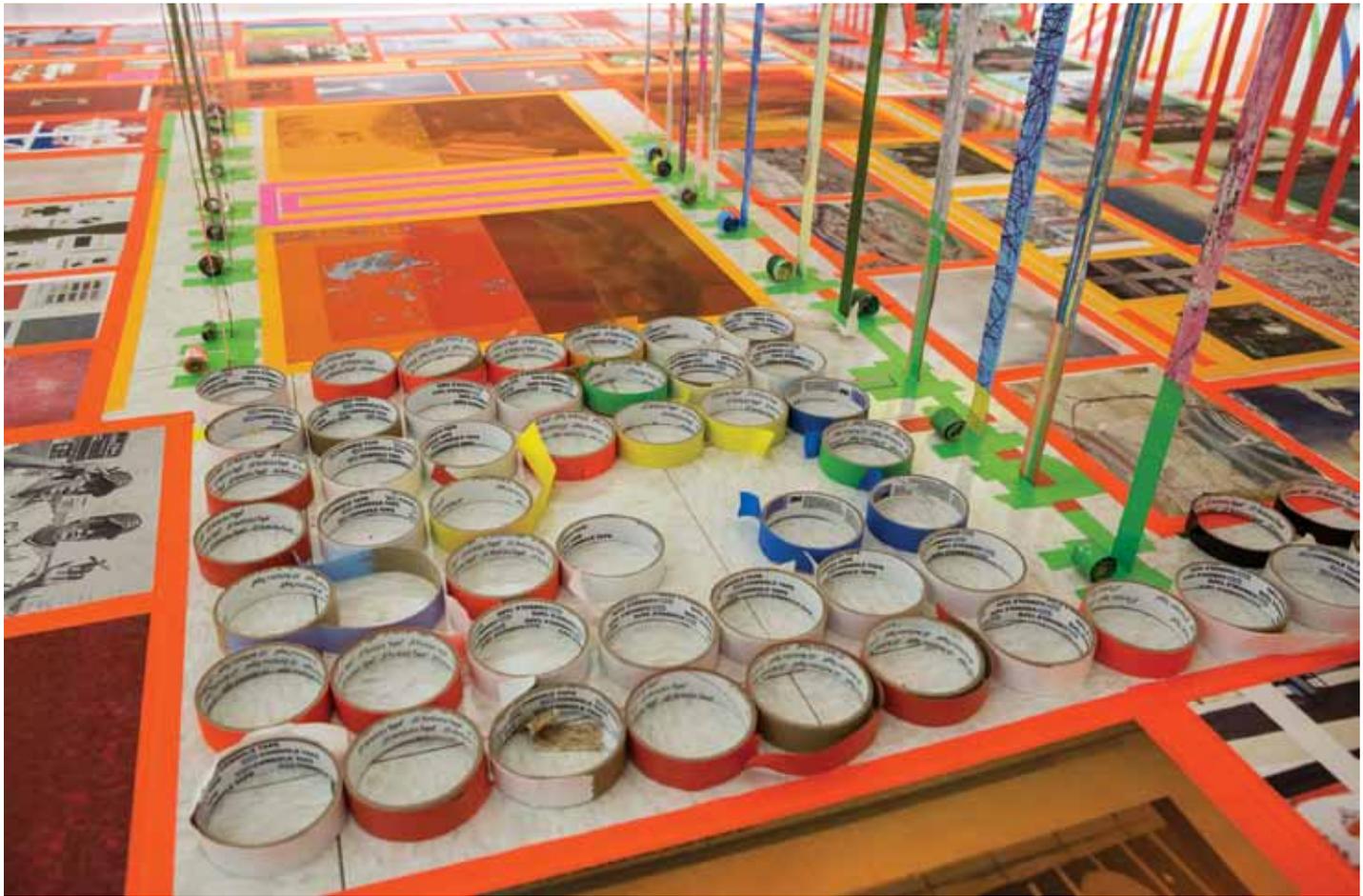
The name of the exhibition lends itself to the experience of time. While it always feels like “now” at any given moment, the things we experience within the mutable framework of the present are always changing—always different from our experience of “now” at other times. Building on this idea, the paintings in Miner’s exhibition change over time. Most paintings enter a gallery having long since been completed, already settled into an unchanging state. For “The Long Now,” however, Miner visited the gallery almost daily, working on-site, modifying paintings already on display, and being present to talk with visitors. The paintings in “The Long Now” might change quite a bit over the span of a few days, creating an exhibition somewhere between a solo show and an artist residency.

In addition to highlighting the instability of time, particular activations of surface and space marked an important component of the exhibition as well. Miner’s paintings, all of them incorporating a mix of pencil, watercolor, gouache, airbrush, acrylic paint, shellac and oil paint on aluminum panels, create highly variable surface layers and tactile qualities that would be extremely difficult to capture through digital representation. In terms of their relations to space, the works include shaped, multi-panel canvases mounted on a concavely curved wall (*Chimera*), paintings that bend around corners, and an impressive diptych, *Field Reflections #1* and *Field Reflections #2*, in which the paintings face off against each other. These latter two paintings, each ten by ten feet and hung parallel to each other on opposite walls ten feet apart, envelop the viewer in a highly activated perceptual space. The correlations of their scale and spatial relationships, in combina-

tion with the push-pull of their visual similarities, make standing between the two works feel similar to intruding on a person’s personal space. While the resonance between the size of the works and their relative distance is subtle, their opposed, face-to-face placement triggers a strong sense of being part of the works’ field of operation. The fact that each painting so forcefully requires the presence of the other, yet both could not occupy the viewer’s field of vision simultaneously, creates not only an aesthetically activated bodily experience, but one also strongly resistant to screen-based digital reproduction.¹

This highlights a primary aspect of material specificity, namely a drive to consider trends other than immateriality and remote, purely optical intake. Painters like Miner and Evans, either overtly or implicitly, focus on qualities specific to direct, material, in-person artistic experience—such as a particular, physical locatability at odds with the everywhere/whenever-all-at-once possibilities of networked distribution. As visual aspects of painting like pictorial representation and abstract opticality become increasingly replicable across a range of screen formats, painters have come lately to emphasize precisely those aspects of art experience that are (for the moment) difficult to convey with pixels.

Where “The Long Now” activated the viewer’s subjective experience of time and space through a range of subtle inversions, the subsequent exhibition, “juddrules” by Franklin Evans (from September 17 to December 13, 2014), aggressively foregrounded space and materiality. Evans considers himself a painter, and his exhibitions are taken as such, but the experience of his work is analogous to a visu-



Franklin Evans, "juddrules," 1,500 sq ft, mixed media installation at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts (September 2014). Photo: Bethany Acheson.



Nathan Miner, *Field Reflections 1*, 2012, pencil, watercolor, gouache, airbrush and acrylic paint with shellac and oil paint on 9 aluminum panels, 120" x 120." Installation view of "The Long Now" at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts (July 2014). Photo: Bethany Acheson.



Nathan Miner, *Echoes Embrace*, 2011, pencil, watercolor, gouache, airbrush and acrylic paint with shellac and oil paint on 12 aluminum panels, 80" x 240." Installation view of "The Long Now" at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts (July 2014). Photo: Bethany Acheson.

ally cacophonous explosion of painterly tools, documentation, modified and unmodified source materials, collage elements, and more. "juddrules"—the exhibition title refers to an amalgam of lines from Donald Judd essays that Evans used as self-imposed limits—suggests the idea of painting not as object or installation, but as the exploded, materialized residue of the process of its own making, in which the painting is its own visual, spatial and material paratext.

Like a decentralized painting, "juddrules" overwhelms the ceilings, floors and walls of the Montserrat gallery with material. Painter's tape stretches floor-to-ceiling, partitioning the space off into sections; low-res computer printouts, press releases, pages from magazines, potted plants, installation shots of his and others' exhibitions, photos of artworks, and actual artworks are mounted to the wall in taped-off, gridded sections; pieces of unstretched canvas, color swatches, stacks of paper, rolls of tape, and more come together to overload the space with objects ranging from the important and stable to the underwhelming and ephemeral.

As a counter to these dense aggregates of art history, discourse, biography, and materiality, Evans takes care to orient the viewer physically and spatially. Amid the apparent chaos of the exhibition, the floor is covered with lines of tape that serve not only to evoke the modernist grid, but also suggest walkways through the space. Folding chairs are situated in key spots as well, inviting the viewer to absorb the exhibition from specifically chosen, incident-loaded vantage points. These chairs serve multiple functions, offering a chance to stop and be part of the total artwork, while arresting movement and corporeally locating the viewer within the space itself.

These chairs' function of locating the viewer points to an important aspect of "juddrules": as distributed and decentralized as Evans' approach to painting may be, it is very much part of a distinct place—specific to the idiosyncrasies of this installation, in a specific location, and at a particular point in time. The distributed nature of most digital artwork effectively negates a sense of location—the

viewer does not travel to a digital file in space so much as she or he activates it onscreen wherever they happen to be at the moment. On the other hand, the visceral impact of Evans's analog art distribution network emerges only through a viewer's step-by-step navigation within its intricately constructed spaces—a version of Michael Fried theatrical space on steroids.

This leads to another consideration: while Miner's "The Long Now" focuses primarily on an experience of time, it deals with space as well, albeit subtly. Similarly, Evans's work is not only spatially complex—from the initial gestalt intake of the entire gallery to the surprising details one has to seek out—but it is temporally complex as well: densely folded, filled, and loaded with experiences that would require all day to take in. Dense books are sometimes described as being skim-proof, requiring time to read, and the same can certainly be said of "juddrules." The overload of intertwined forms and spatially complicated arrangements force the viewer to slow down and take part in the revealing of the exhibition's many layers through via mindful participation.

Creating what might otherwise be termed installation, performance, or any number of names—but which the art world has chosen to define as painting—Miner and Evans are doing important work in the exploration of material specificity. Now that two decades of widespread digitization and virtualization have highlighted aspects of location and material form previously taken for granted, each artist in his own way articulates an experience of culture that unfolds across time and through physical space.

* I would like to thank Peter Plagens for his invaluable assistance and suggestions with this article, which was written as part of the Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Workshop. ■

NOTES

1. The train of thought that led to this article's thesis began with the observation that an ostensibly 2D art form like painting is increasingly coming to share many of the documentation issues typically associated with 3D forms like sculpture or installation.

“IT’S A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO KEEP THE ‘THINGNESS’ AT BAY”

An Interview with Deborah Dancy

Although her art is thoroughly abstract, Deborah Dancy’s paintings, drawings, and works in other mediums are intimately bound to the world of concrete objects and the ephemeral perceptions and feelings of everyday life. On her website (deborahdancy.com), she comments on her fascination with “the poetic terrain of the incomplete, the fragment, the ruin and residue of ‘almost was,’ and ‘might become’” that she’s encountered in the zone between abstraction and representation. In the following interview, Dancy talks about how this notion has influenced her artmaking; the wide and ever-expanding array of thoughts, impressions, and situations that have shaped her artistic practice over time; the interaction of different mediums in her creative process; and ways in which the commonplace and the near-at-hand have often had a profound influence on her most abstract work.

BY JEFF EDWARDS



Deborah Dancy, *Midnight Bloom*, 2015, oil on paper. All images are courtesy of the artist and N’Namdi Contemporary, Miami.

Jeff Edwards - I'd like to start with a quote from the artist statement on your website: "I am interested in investigating the region that exists between the abstraction and representation." What do you mean by that, and how does it play out in your paintings and other works?

Deborah Dancy - For me, the space between abstraction and representation feels like an intermediary region full of potential and trepidation. I try to reconcile how to make an abstract painting interface with this quality of "about to become"- that thingness where an image begins to take on too much specificity by defining itself; that's the space that excites and unnerves me—because it's a constant struggle to keep the "thingness" at bay. So when I make a painting there's always a little battle of controlling all these elements that attempt to dominate the space within the painting. It comes down to making those features ambiguous enough and the space unstable enough so that they exist just on the verge of becoming, but don't.

J.E. - Is your process mostly intuitive and spontaneous, or do you have some kind of plan in advance for things like color, composition, and imagery?

D.D. - I work pretty spontaneously and definitely intuitively. My process is almost always the same—my paintings start out what I call a beautiful mess—I put paint on and scrape it off, back and forth until I find that something that holds my interest, and then expand it until it begins to announce itself with some authority. Over the years my palette has become lighter—but even then, but I usually find myself gravitating toward the same colors and tonalities. Every now and then I force myself to grab some really off base color that I have no real affinity for to see if I can make it work in a painting, and my current palette really is a reflection of the wooded terrain around my home.

J.E. - What other elements or aspects of yourself are embodied in your paintings? Do your personal history or your ongoing relationships with the people, places, and things around you show up in the imagery that you paint?

D.D. - Yeah, relationships, space, place, and history—personal and social seem to end up in the work. They permit me to examine my feelings about relationships or surroundings or even respond to events that unexpectedly catapult into your life and knock the work in a completely new direction. It can be very exciting and a little unnerving at the same time because quite often it's immediate, entering your work right away and other times, it gets tucked away and you forget about it until one day there it is, and you wonder how it found its way into your consciousness. It has taken me years to learn to accept and embrace that concept and not question its legitimacy.

J.E. - I've noticed that over the years, specific forms appear in your paintings at certain points only to disappear later, such as the cartoony legs and feet that appear in your canvases from 2011 and 2012, or the linear forms that look like distressed geometric solids that were in many of your late 2012 and early 2013 paintings. Is there a language to these different kinds of shapes and images that you're exploring?

D.D. - That's an interesting thing about my process, the older I get the more I welcome unexpected life events into my work. The tangled, intertwined legs and feet in the 2011-12 paintings point to a new relationship. The physicality of paint echoed that and the paintings became an extension of what was happening in my life, whim-



Deborah Dancy. Courtesy of the artist.

sical, colorful, and erotic. Prior to that work I was concentrating on the interior world of self, which defined itself in my painting as awkwardly constructed structures in which perspective was askew.

J.E. - Your canvases from the beginning of this year (2015) are generally more muted in tone than a lot of earlier works, while your most recent paintings are much more colorful, but with a flat, medium-gray background that seems new to your work. How do you think your use of color has changed over time?

D.D. - Yes, this year my palette, both in paintings and drawings, shifted from winter, spring and into the summer. I think this may be the first time I painted in a kind of visceral response to the seasons and the shift in-between the seasons. It's about really being aware of when light starts to shift and changes color and intensity, and you feel the air more and smell the dirt and things awaken in you. The drawings done during the winter, because of being housebound—were about starkness and contrast and the geometry and architecture of bare trees. In spring, because as I was walking my dog a lot I began noticing the space between forms, the warming tones of bark, and emerging flora—back in the studio, it translated as nuanced tonalities. The most recent paintings you refer to are 36" x 36", a series



Deborah Dancy, *A House is Not a Home*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 72."



Deborah Dancy, *Look But Do Not Touch*, 2015, oil on canvas, 36" x 36."



Deborah Dancy, *Giotto's Blues*, 2012, gouache and watercolor, 22" x 30."

I call, "Pernicious Beauty." I was thinking a lot about Manet's last flower paintings—where marks and flicks of color speak volumes. I began taking photos of the fungi I found on my walks and a connection was made. I wanted make the beautiful grotesque nature of fungi the singular object and subject of the paintings so I toned the ground to a warm grey and allowed the shape to dominate the space. The flatness of the field and the agitated form of the fungi become perfect counterpoint to each other and there developed a wonderful way in which the space became the object as well.

J.E. - What's your relationship to earlier abstract painters? Certain comparisons seem inevitable: for example, I occasionally think of Philip Guston's Abstract Expressionist canvases when I look at the way you build up and manipulate paint, and his later work when I see some of your more cartoony or whimsical imagery (such as the aforementioned legs and feet). I've also thought about Grace Hartigan and several of the post-WWII European abstract painters at times.

D.D. - Well, the connection to Guston is pretty on point. And I feel like there's at least a surface connection to Joan Mitchell and Cy Twombly. I have always loved Diebenkorn. I respect the work of these artists and have obviously been influenced by them all, and yet other than making a linkage through obvious formal connections, we have operated out of pretty different experiences.

J.E. - Are there any other painters—either abstract or representational—who have had a big influence on you, or whose work you've found particularly inspiring?

D.D. - I love the way Judy Pfaff combines painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking into an installation event, Brenda Goodman's quirky, powerful paintings, Stan Whitney's bold, abstractions, Nick Cave—just because, Arturo Herrera's—wonderful absurd works, full of tension, Amy Sillman's abstractions and color, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye's sublime figurative work and Vincent

Hawkins spare abstractions. These are some of the people I look at because I want to see what they're doing.

J.E. - In a 2012 studio visit that's on Vimeo, you speak at one point about the idea of "missed opportunities" in your work: moments when something is about to emerge as you're painting, but then it gets lost and can't be recaptured. How important is that sense of sudden creative anticipation to your process, and how many of those thwarted opportunities are you willing to let remain visible in a canvas?

D.D. - It's a moment you can't get back, it's kind of a really direct, pure gesture that you have to be willing to trust is genuine. Sometimes you are alert to its potential and other times you aren't so you kill it by over-reacting to it or embellishing it—and then it's gone, you can't get it back, you just have to move on. It's a gift those moments, those opportunities—you have to be awake at the wheel to see them.

J.E. - The topic of humor also comes up in the video (for example, the words "goofy" and "goofiness" are raised in reference to some of your imagery). I'd love to hear you speak a little about that aspect of your work.

D.D. - A number of years ago I did a series of works on paper in watercolor and gouache in which disembodied images floated across the page interacting, abutting and mutating with each other. The titles were full of double entendre and innuendo. Some of my favorites were *Miss Muffet's Tuffet*, *Humpty's Last Dumpty*, and *Cleopatra's Big Bad Hair Day*—they were lighthearted and fun, but at the heart of it was still an attempt to make a good painting even if it seemed silly. The images always came first, and then of course the titles put a final twist on things. The same idea extended into paintings like, *Thou Swell*, and, *Yes, I Know the Muffin Man*.

J.E. - Your works on paper often parallel what's happening in your canvases at around the same time; for example, when quasi-geomet-



Deborah Dancy, *Stump*, 2015, oil on canvas, 28" x 46."



"Deborah Dancy: Lush Life," installation view at N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami, October 10 thru November 14, 2015.



Deborah Dancy, *Opus Incertum 6*, 2012, acrylic on paper, 22"x30."

ric "wirework" forms appeared in your paintings around 2012/2013, the same kinds of shapes were showing up in your smaller acrylic pieces too. What's the relationship between these two bodies of work? Are the works on paper something like sketches for the larger works, or is there more of a cross-influence going on?

D.D. - Usually I'm working in the two mediums simultaneously, drawing/works on paper and painting on canvas and there's almost always a shared language and conceptual framework running through both—though occasionally one medium will shoot ahead of the other. I find that when I'm stuck in big oil painting, I decide to draw or work in acrylic. Not that it's easier...it's just faster—it's somehow in my head feels more forgiving in many ways and it gives me time to think and tease out how to tackle the larger oil paintings. I don't think of the smaller acrylic works as 'traditional' sketches for the larger paintings—they're often the forerunner for things to come.

J.E. - In 2012 when you were living in Florence, you did a series of works on paper titled "Dear Giotto." The most obvious relation between your series and Giotto's frescoes is the bright colors they share, but I suspect that there was more to your inspiration than just that. How did Giotto's work inspire you, and how is that reflected in your work?

D.D. - The series "Dear Giotto" ended up being about the seduction of Giotto's frescoes and the abstractions I saw in them. Those elements of flattened out space between figure and architecture and the abutments of color created such sublime juxtapositions I couldn't get enough of them. I also envisioned the scaffolding that was built to hold the artist and his materials, and I imagined the complexity of those structures in space, the negative spaces between them, and flat shapes of his draped fabric in the frescoes; it all became all encompassing and inspirational for that work.

J.E. - That same year you also did the series "Opus Incertum," which was inspired by the ruins around Palatine Hill in Rome. What was it about that spot that appealed to you as an abstract

painter, and what effect did it have on your art?

D.D. - "Opus Incertum," an early Roman construction technique, involved placing irregular stones randomly in the construction of buildings. Seeing those ancient ruins in Rome allowed this sense of understanding of one history built on top of another for centuries and centuries inspired that work. So the works became a response to what felt like an accumulation of architectural histories, fragments of which lie on the ground scattered about. They became built drawings—about built histories, time and space.

J.E. - You've also done semi-abstract photographic work based on landscapes, objects, and the human body, and a few video collaborations with composer Earl MacDonald and videographer Ted Efremoff. How do those other bodies of work relate to your painting and to one another, and what were your inspirations, intentions, and processes for each?

D.D. - My photographic work and the collaborations have been so exciting and stimulating. It's like having the permission to play with and explore ideas with different media as a way to see another side to my paintings. I've discovered in my photographic work my other voice is one that allows me to examine a narrative about beauty and the sublime that isn't far from my painting but seems more accessible. The collaborative works with Earl MacDonald and Ted Efremoff have been so amazing... getting out of my private studio head and cross pollinating with these amazing artists has forced my artistic vision to expand and develop while creating something so different.

J.E. - Finally, is there anything emerging in your work right now that we don't know about yet? What are you up to in the studio right now, and do you have any hopes or plans for where you'd like to take your work next?

D.D. - Right now I'm feeling a real need to see where the "Pernicious Beauty" series will take me... I'm excited about what seems like an open landscape of potential. ■

MARÍA RAQUEL COCHEZ

Recalibrating the Body Beautiful

BY ANNE SWARTZ



María Raquel Cochez, *María Raquel, Maya, Monica, Ana Berta, and Edna with Nachos*, 2014, from the *Wet n'Wild* series, acrylic on canvas, 45" x 142." All images are courtesy of the artist and The Americas Collection, Miami.

How are women seen? How does society see us? What is erotic about the female body? These questions have different answers for everyone, because of personal associations and preferences. Yet there are certain dominant conventions about women's bodies only being beautiful, sensuous and lovely if they are fit, youthful and curvaceous, but not too much so. Panamanian artist María Raquel Cochez has surveyed the arc of tension and dissatisfaction with the female body—beginning with her own—to more recently have arrived at a place of meditation, contemplation and acceptance for the body in all its diversity.

Much like race, class and gender, body size is considered a meaningful component of one's identity. It has long been the subject of feminist art. For Cochez, the origin of her investigation was her own desire to understand compulsion and her relationship with food, self-esteem, body size, weight and body image.¹ After years of struggling with binge eating, obesity, weight loss surgeries and plastic surgeries, Cochez has now arrived at a place of health. But it was in the midst of some binges that a friend remarked to her, "There's your material." Subsequently, she started photographing herself and then painting her image while struggling with her food obsession. She has made paintings, performances, photographs and video series. In 2005, she had gastric lap band removal surgery. The following year, she had a gastric bypass operation. Then in 2009, she had breast implants and breast reconstruction. Her weight fluctuations remained a part of her life until recently.

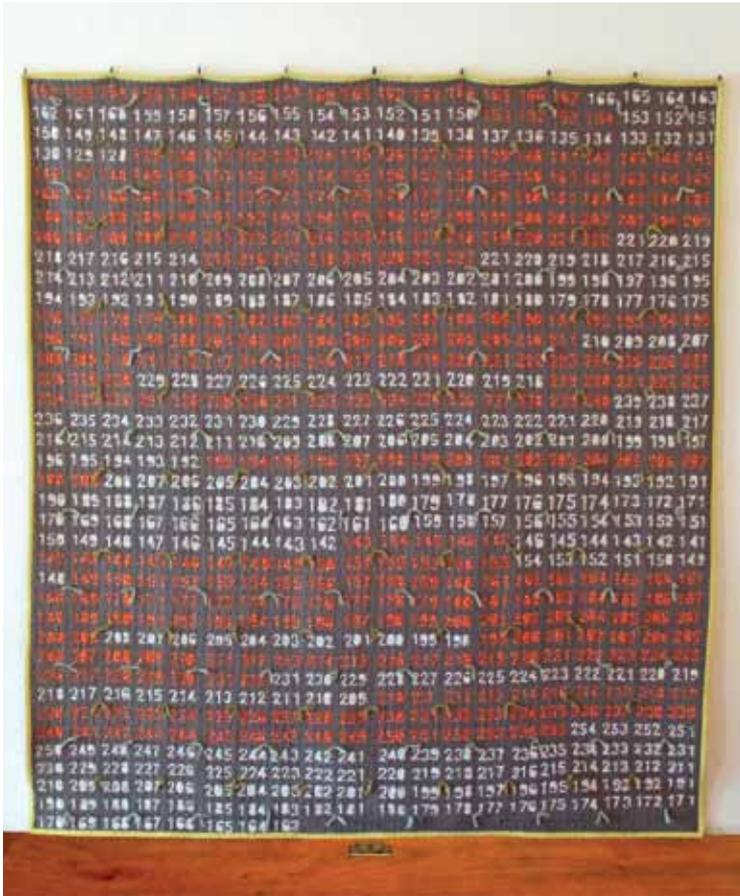
During this time, she continued exploring the effects of feeling out of control with her appetite in her art. In *McFlurries* of 2007 from *The Binges* series, the artist crops the view of herself so that her body is pushed up to the forward picture plane where she is seen holding two ice cream fast-food sundaes mixed with candies. The viewer is pulled into the intimate space the artist inhabits. It is an isolated space from which the action is immediately before us.

The movement from one high-caloric treat to the next is a source of more energy than her body will need. That overabundance is burdensome. There is no retreat from the scenario of the figure eating in this overwrought position.

The body has been a key feature of feminist art since the early 1970s. First, feminist artists used it as a way to look at the universals, the femininity and female genitalia connecting all women, including standards of beauty. In *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* of 1972, Los Angeles-based artist Eleanor Antin famously dieted and photographed herself over the course of 37 days while she lost 10 pounds, showcasing her transforming body as a form of malleable material for the artist. All women have bodies; all share the desire for voluntary transformation.

Much as Antin incorporated the element of time, Cochez relied on it as a conceptual medium in *The Comforter* of 2011, a quilt-formed piece in which she documented the transformation of her body by recording her weight from age 12 until age 33 and how it shifted up and down. This kind of recording is one of the many experiences women (and probably many men) share; that is, the fanatical chronicling of weight, which can slip very easily into a measure of self. The prevalence of eating disorders, including Cochez's own struggle, means this phenomenon is not a unique one. The correlation between appropriate weight and moral decency is a strong one in Western culture. Conventional wisdom sells a formula of something askew and awry about the overweight person and almost appalling about the obese person. To sum up an individual in the form of a list of numbers becomes a narration of success and failure—the individual reduced to the most minimal, and demeaning, of "scores."

As feminist art evolved, the use of the body as a medium became intensified in the artistic search for meanings of presenting the self. Her image and the ways that women willingly manipulated



María Raquel Cochez, *The Comforter*, 2011, blanket with appliqué, 99" x 77."

their form in the name of beauty shifted. Paris-based artist Orlan used plastic surgery as her medium to change her appearance so it matched that of women in famous paintings and sculptures in *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*, a series of performances she began in 1990.

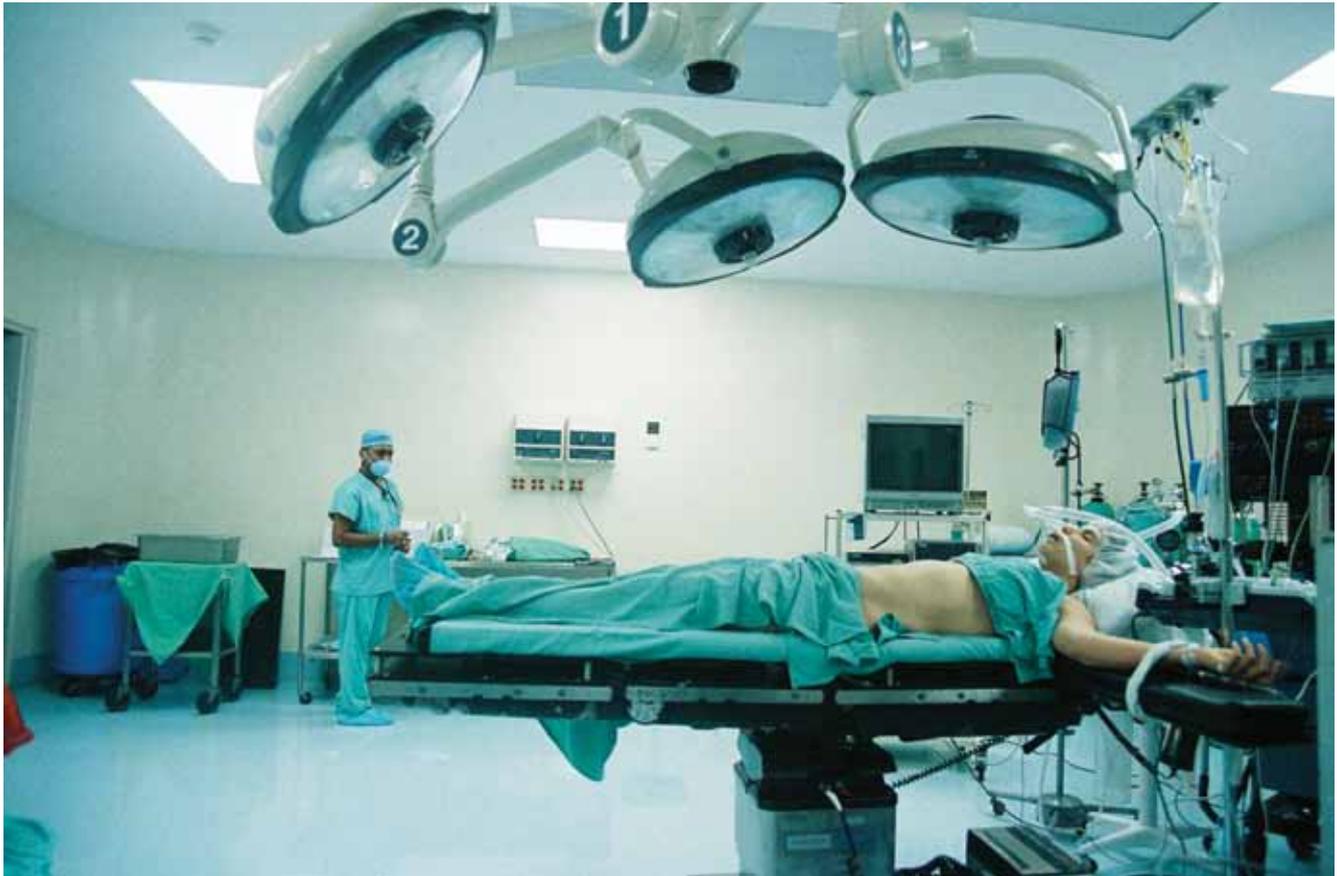
Like Antin and Orlan, Cochez has utilized the transformation of her body as her subject. And like Orlan, she has made *Life Performance No. 1 (gastric lap band removal surgery)*, 2005; *Life Performance No. 2 (breast reconstruction and implants)*, 2006; and *Life Performance No. 3 (gastric bypass surgery)*, 2009—three performance-based works documented in photographs and video—in which she used plastic surgery. Her body is her canvas. But, in contrast to Orlan, Cochez examined the wholesale metamorphosis necessary to render her body into the abstract cultural ideal rather than mimicking an artistic rendering. There

is no glamour in these images, as the artist's body is laid out in preparation for surgery, during cutting, even as she grimaces post-surgery. She reveals her body twisting and turning in its bulky state, as she was just beginning the conversion of her shape towards a smaller size. There is also a perverse pleasure in being given voyeuristic access to such a private scenario. The viewer can literally look inside the artist's body.

As Cochez has achieved a healthy weight and gained control over her eating habits, she has changed the way she images eating and food and women's relationship to it in her work. The bingeing imagery of her earlier painting has now ceded to a more inquisitive approach to consumption and appearance. In *María Raquel, Maya, Monica, Ana Berta, and Edna with Nachos* of 2014 from the *Wet n'Wild* series of 2014, she showcases five women, including herself (the fourth woman from the left), in a rectangular, panoramic, acrylic painting eating nachos with wet hair and wearing bathing suits or casual shirts. Each woman has a unique body type and is set against a non-descript, decorative striped background. Each of the women has a slightly different facial expression as she consumes the nachos from a plastic container she holds in her hand. None of the women look at each other or gaze out at us. And their lowered eyes suggest they are in varying states of pleasure. They are absorbed in the activity of eating. While such a situation could seem alienating, the bright lighting of the image and liberal use of white highlighting prompts a sense of daylight with only the woman on the left in slight shadow. The scene feels like a moment at the midpoint of a summer day. The situation is a strange scenario—familiar in its everyday mundanity, but unusual in its setting.

The dangers of plastic surgeries hit home most graphically for Cochez when she had to have implants removed to prevent silicone poisoning. Following the surgery necessary to remove the extra skin from her extreme weight loss, her surgeon opted to insert silicone implants even though Cochez was not seeking a breast augmentation. She survived the implants rupturing but the experience awoke in her a desire to investigate the real breast since it is largely hidden from view in favor of the unreality of the fake version. Cochez is not alone in such a campaign of "visualization." Los Angeles-based artist Micol Hebron's *Free the Nipple* campaign to draw attention to the beautiful female breast is a guerrilla intervention, a spontaneous series of performances to curtail censorship by exposing her breasts anywhere and everywhere and then photographing herself. In contrast, Cochez visualized the real breast in two complex recent video series of 2015, *The Gift* and *Wet T-Shirt*. Cochez remarked: "I want to tell the world that normal breasts are okay, that they are beautiful as they are." Both of these video series involve a community engagement component. She put out a call for volunteers and located 65 women who wanted to join her in her discourse. She had certain parameters: no silicone, no cosmetic modifications for aesthetic reasons. She made both videos in Panama where there is a wide range of skin tones available, which she wanted to image in these two projects. She advertised her project under the title "Lend Me Your Tits" ("Préstame tus Tetas") in two different magazine publications and on several social media sites. She was overwhelmed by the response.

As a counter to both the conservative withholding of the naked body in popular media and the over-exposure of the fake nude



María Raquel Cochez, *From Life Performance No. 1 series*, 2005, (gastric lap band removal surgery).



María Raquel Cochez, *McFlurries, The Binges*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 60"x 80."



María Raquel Cochez,
From Life Performance
No. 3 series, 2009, gastric
bypass surgery.



María Raquel Cochez, *Still from The Wet T-Shirt video series*, 2015, 10:49.



María Raquel Cochez, *Still from The Gift video series*, 2015, 27:50.

in pornography, Cochez's two series offer a remedy. In *The Gift*, the viewer sees flat gift wrap with a bow torn away to reveal naked breasts up-close filling the frame, with only the torso and occasionally the shoulders evident. The video consists of 65 different pairs of breasts and runs in a loop. *Wet T-Shirt* similarly involves a close-up image of a woman's body in which her breasts occupy the majority of the frame. Her body is slowly wetted and her T-shirt goes from generally following the contours of her body to closely clinging to them. For this series, 65 women have participated. In the quiet progression of each video past the "chorus" of breasts, the viewer sees what constitutes the uncelebrated, the unadorned breast and becomes aware instead of health (all these women have both breasts), prosperity (all of these women have robust breasts, even those who have diminutive ones), and allure (variations on symmetry and asymmetry become graceful).

Cochez makes reference to the woman's body, her own or others, in states of desperation, transition, transformation,

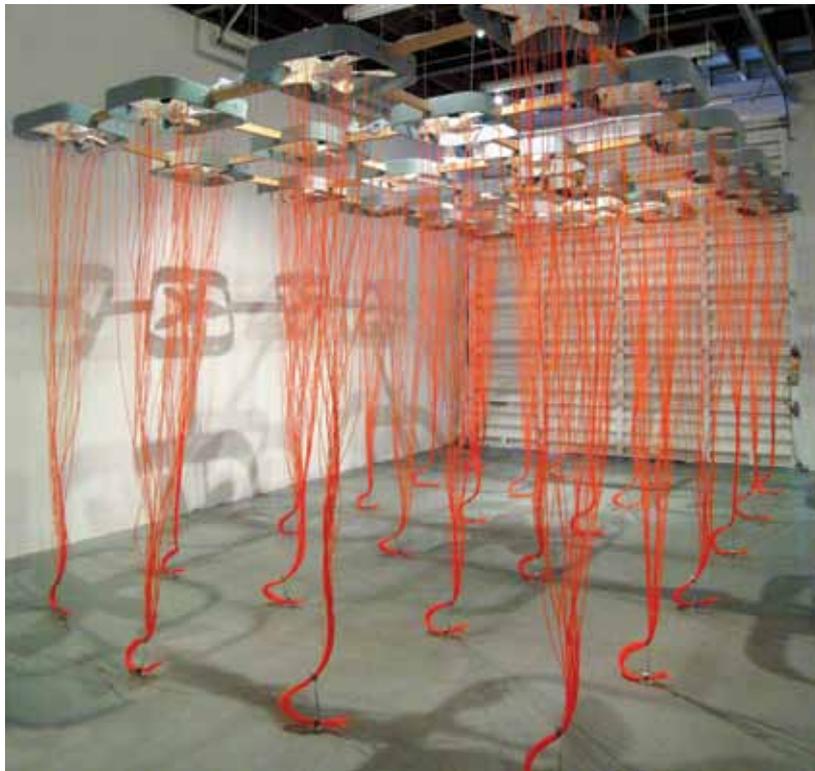
and healing. She looks at the loss of control and the value of acceptance. Feminist artists have been exploring the image of self as "I" want to be seen, engaging with whatever scenarios constitute the daily lived experience. This latter phase is where Cochez's work fits into the feminist art potpourri. Like Antin and Orlan before her, she has interconnected her own body with that of all women. She has used a similar transparency in her art. Further, her reliance on her self-portrait is one of the canonical features of women's art since the image of the self was only as far as the mirror, making it an available subject for women who were often restricted from access to sketching from the model. There's more to come from Cochez, and it will be interesting to see what direction she considers next, whether it is the relationship she has to her body, to her family or to the world. ■

NOTES

* All comments and quotations taken from telephone interview with artist, Sept. 1, 2015. Full disclosure: Cochez took an art history course with me while she was a student at the Savannah College of Art and Design.



David B. Jang, *Subjectivity Value*, 2014, window blinds, steel, electric motor and custom circuit board, 105" x 444" x 150" (dimensions variable). Installation view at LA Art Show. All images are courtesy of the artist and TUB Gallery, Miami.



David B. Jang, *Prevaricate*, 2014, electric fan, trimmer line and custom circuit board, 120" x 240" x 156," (dimensions variable). Installation view at Locust Projects, Miami.



David B. Jang, *Prevaricate*, 2012, electric fan, trimmer line, steel and custom circuit board, 86" x 72" x 216" (dimensions variable).

DAVID B. JANG

Inventions in Art

David B. Jang eludes classification by genre. He doesn't consider himself a conceptual artist. As an art student, he gathered inspiration from an array of disciplines and theories, including Abstract Expressionism, Color Field painting, Hans Hofmann's Push and Pull and Jackson Pollock's Automatism. He absorbed principles from these and other influences as he continued to evolve, eventually becoming a self-taught inventor who repurposes cast-off consumer objects into layered panels, sculptures and animated installations. Ultimately, his work is the product of a dedicated marriage of art and science. What seems to drive him is a boundless love of problem-solving, an insatiable curiosity and a devoted concern about the human condition.

BY MEGAN ABRAHAMS

Megan Abrahams - Painting and sculpture, which you studied in art school, were like stepping stones for you, leading you down a path of artistic inquiry until you arrived at serial Minimalism. How would you define the scope of your work today?

David B. Jang - I work with consumer products and the socially accepted rules and conditions for their performance—what they're meant for and supposed to do. These rules give consumer products their own formal and functional coherence. However, I take these objects from our daily life to examine them, undermine them and raise questions about them.

M.A. - You are a rule breaker, a kind of creative iconoclast, with a deliberate agenda to make art that opens the eyes of your viewers to a new way of seeing things. You've said part of your life's work is to subvert, dissect, comprehend and redirect materials to expose their potential and truth. Do you ever surprise yourself by what is revealed through the process of subversion and dissection? How is the process revelatory for you, the creator? How do you expect the viewer—the consumer of your art—to react? Are you ever surprised by the reaction of your viewers?

D.B.J. - The process of subversion and dissection is necessary so that I can explore unexpected accidents. I'm always surprised by the process. It's the best part—like an exciting adventure. Rather than expecting a certain reaction from viewers, I'd rather watch and learn how they interact with my work. I leave my work open-ended, allowing other projects to unfold, maybe incorporating the reactions of viewers and what I've learned from observing them.

M.A. - You have a diverse, interdisciplinary studio practice, from painting, in which you explore your engagement with color and manipulations of the two-dimensional plane, to sculptural work and complex animated installations that expand on the conventional parameters of Minimalism. A range of disciplines and movements has influenced your work, directly or indirectly, such as Color Field painting, Minimalism, Geometric Abstraction, Conceptualism. What principles of these disciplines do you draw from the most, and how have you assimilated them into your own artistic process?

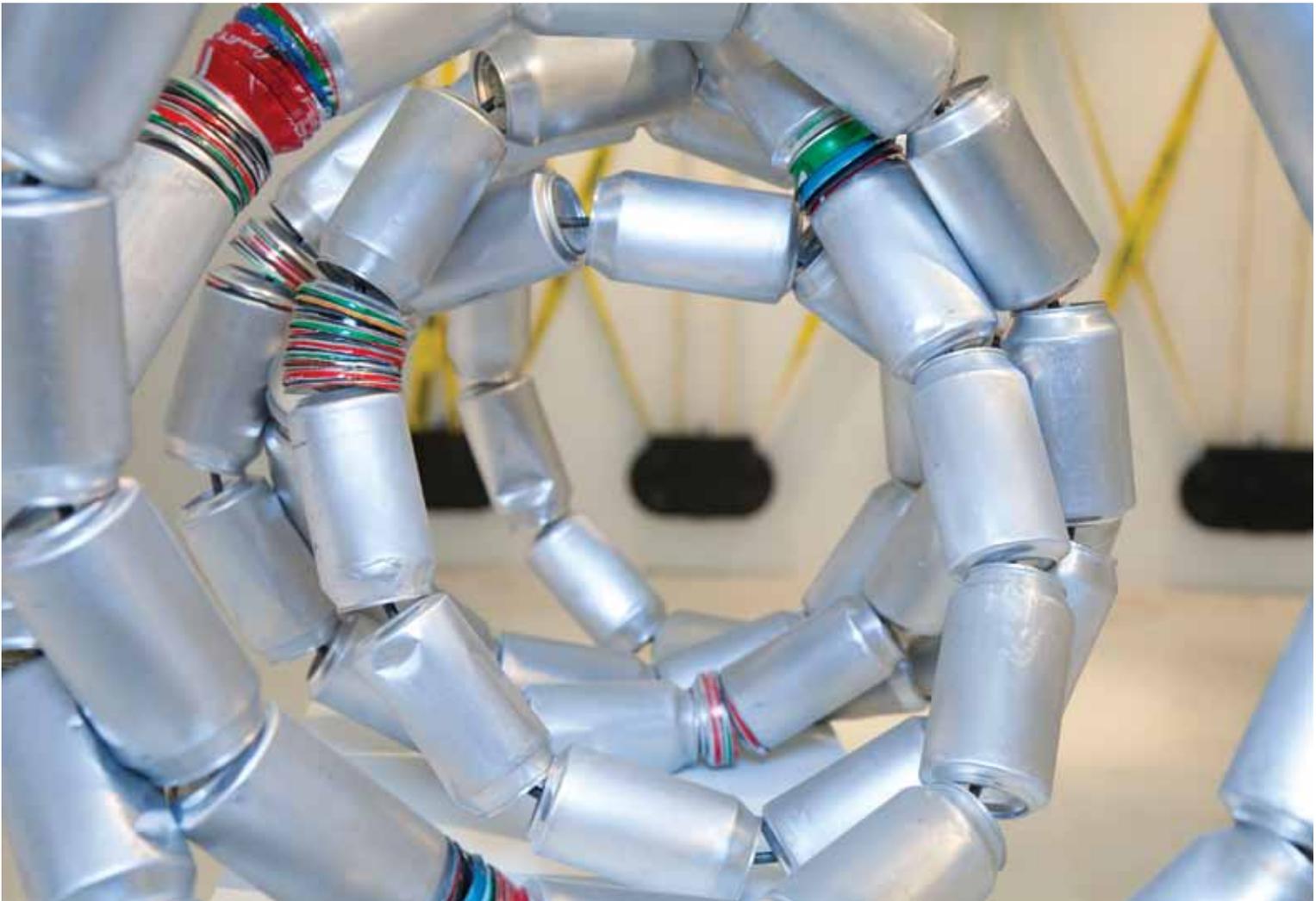
D.B.J. - I'm most drawn to Minimalism and Action in Progress (Action painting and Automatism). I believe almost everything is influenced by Minimalism. Whether it's the straight lines from architecture, simplistic movements or the normal functions of objects from daily life, I assimilate them into my own artistic process.

M.A. - We are not just a consumer society, but a disposable culture, discarding and replacing enormous quantities of materials every day. One of the striking things about your practice is your use and reinvention of cast-off objects. Not only do you give them new meaning, you also animate them, giving them a new purpose, beauty—in a sense, life! What motivates you to repurpose these found objects? How do you go about finding and harvesting them?

D.B.J. - I feel economic freedom brings us different levels of consumerism, including conspicuous consumption and invidious consumption. This brings wastefulness and greed and encourages consuming for the sake of consuming, rather than need. I try to explore the diversity of human activity represented by these consumer materials and disposed artifacts. When I need to find and harvest new objects, asking nicely goes a long way. I ask people to collect their aluminum cans or save their broken electronics. I also search online for cheap and used household appliances or send out email requests to companies, like I did for the Mylar chip bags.

M.A. - What comes first, the consumer product—like the connected soda cans in your piece, Incompatibility—or the concept? Do you find an object and think, 'Wow, I could do something with that!' Or do you have an idea and then seek out the object? Or is it a combination of both? Can you give an example?

D.B.J. - Both. With *Incompatibility*, while I wanted to make drawings in structural sculptural form, I thought of soda cans as one of the components. While some artists' work starts from scratch and goes into a completed form, I prefer to start with the completed form. By using found materials and consumer materials, I work backwards and look at how I can change their form and matter while still utilizing their basic structure, pattern and texture. Afterwards, I build a concept around it, reflecting a new process. The new structure and pattern is the completed form.



David B. Jang, *Incompatibility*, sanded aluminum cans and steel with reinforced foam, 42" x 30" x 27." Photo: Anselmo Sias. Courtesy of TUB Gallery, Miami.

M.A. - To say your work is multimedia is an understatement. As you've pointed out, your work incorporates all forms of matter—solid, liquid and gas—in the shape of tin cans, inflatable tubes, Mylar bags, hacked circuitry boards, pumps, string, Styrofoam cups, air, wood, leftover industrial paint from construction sites, fluorescent tubing, etc. What have I left out? Of all the materials you've adapted to your purpose, which have led to the most unexpected outcomes for you?

*D.B.J. - Right. Multimedia may not be the correct term. However, I think of my kinetic sculptures like segments of video that play continuously, programmed to repeat. I study the replica of normal functions of objects from our daily life and the way we respond to these objects. What's left out is what I still need to discover. When I began experimenting with window blinds for *Subjectivity Value*, I started out small, with only one size of blinds, 18-by-48 inches. At first, I opened and closed them manually. Then I started to add more blinds and set them up like a cubicle and ultimately figured out a way to motorize the controls to open and close the blinds. One surprising discovery led to another, and as it continued, I was able to create a maze-like space that allowed viewers to interact physically with the blinds by walking in and out of the spaces I created.*

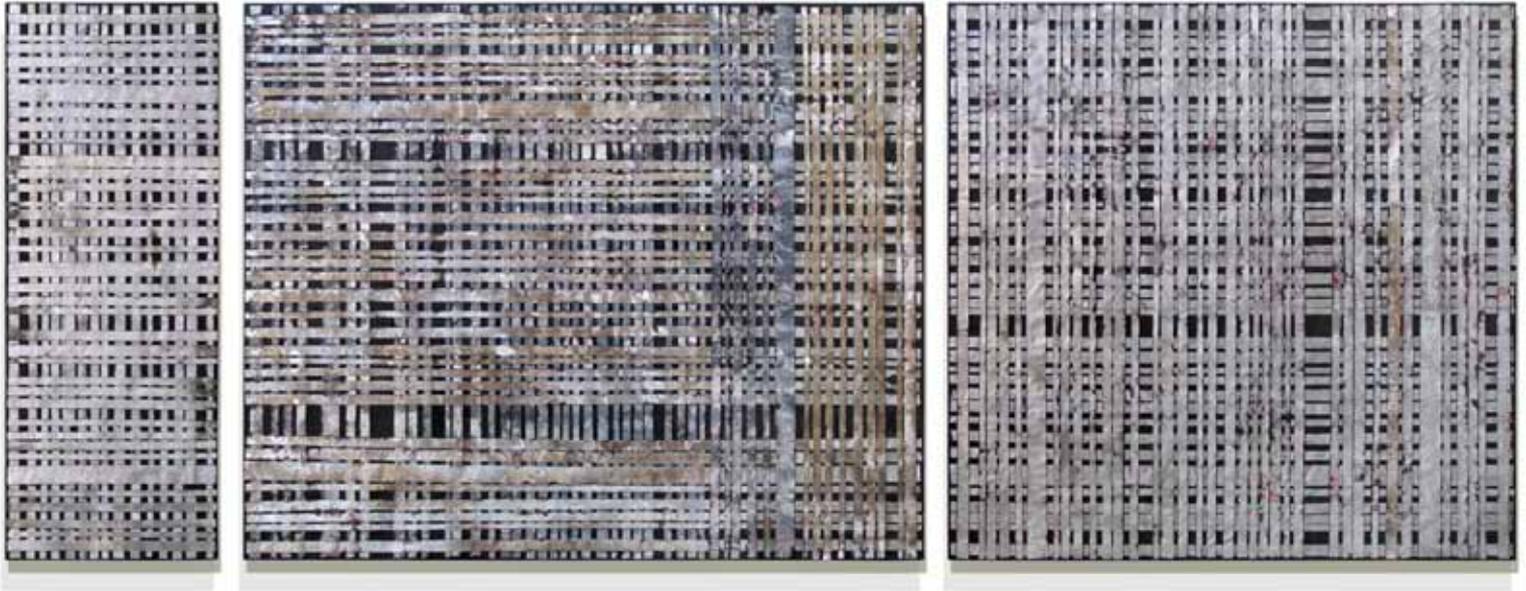
M.A. - To what extent is your finished work what you envisioned at the outset? I gather your process is somewhat organic and that

you allow some leeway for things to happen. How does your concept adapt to the circumstances?

D.B.J. - My work is the result of a series of discoveries made throughout the creative process. I want to discover as much as possible about what my projects reflect regarding life potentiality and truth. Therefore, rather than measuring my finished work against what was envisioned at the outset, what interests me most is what I discovered in the process.

*M.A. - Your pieces are performative in a way, inviting the viewer to approach. Part of what makes your work so engaging is its inherent element of whimsy. In your piece, *Subjunctive*, toilet-paper dispensers propel caution tape. In *Subjectivity Value*, blinds open and close at automatic intervals. The outcomes are unexpected, funny and engaging because of the unlikely juxtapositions you make. Clearly, there is a serious underlying motive at work here, but there's also a sense of humor at play. Can you describe the genesis of your pairing these surprising objects? What makes it fun for you?*

D.B.J. - It's when tinkering and play interact. Much of my approach is intuitive. I thought about how the human labor of pulling toilet paper out of the dispenser can be replaced by an electric motor. Instead of paper, I used yellow caution tape, which is designed to get people's attention. I don't always try to make my work humorous,



David B. Jang, *Hypothesis*, 2015, aluminum, wood, oil and stain, 40" x 103." Images are courtesy of the artist and TUB Gallery, Miami.

but since it ends up being so, I guess my nature tends to think about it that way. The fun for me is in the process of discovery.

M.A. - You do more than connect interesting objects in surprising ways. You cause these objects to interact, make them relational, as in Temporalize, your 2011 piece incorporating printers and fax machines spewing Mylar-chip-bag film. Your work is playful, particularly because you're creating unexpected causal relationships. How do you go about orchestrating these causal relationships?

D.B.J. - Once you understand the formula, you can start replacing some variables. My father was a professional chef all his life, and I learned to cook from him. At one point, I worked as a head professional chef at our family restaurant. When preparing dishes, you realize you can replace the noodles with rice or substitute the onion or garlic with green onions or ginger. While disassembling the printers and fax machines, I discovered how fast or slowly certain machines can function along with the various sounds they make. I simply replace the common variable with another stronger variable—Mylar film instead of paper. Products like Mylar-chip bags are familiar to most people in a consumer society. Printers and fax machines are also widely used. Therefore, the causal relationship between the two becomes less strange.

M.A. - You're also elevating and redefining utilitarian objects, imposing an aesthetic shift on things formerly viewed as mere disposable industrial objects, into components of works of art. In doing so, you cause us to see these objects differently, opening our eyes to the infinite possibilities inherent in the mundane. What do you hope we'll see when we look at your transformations?

D.B.J. - Utilitarian objects such as aluminum cans, electronics and household appliances made by humans always belonged to the domain of things. Though I believe they function according to a certain given purpose, through my discovery and transformation I strive to further continue the reproduction of new entities. Again, I don't expect a certain reaction from viewers, but if there is a reaction, as you say, it'll be for their eyes to be opened to the

infinite possibilities. I would hope they will be able to grasp the transformations and what I've discovered about life potential and truth, along with being more aware of our society, living environments, fast-paced lifestyle, science, technology and the effect of art on life.

M.A. - Although you went to art school, you are a self-taught inventor. For your kinetic installations, you reconfigure the circuitry of consumer electronics, repurposing these products for your own devices. It seems there are no limitations to your ingenuity. In terms of the technical aspect of your installations, what kinds of challenges do you confront in the process of bringing your visions to life?

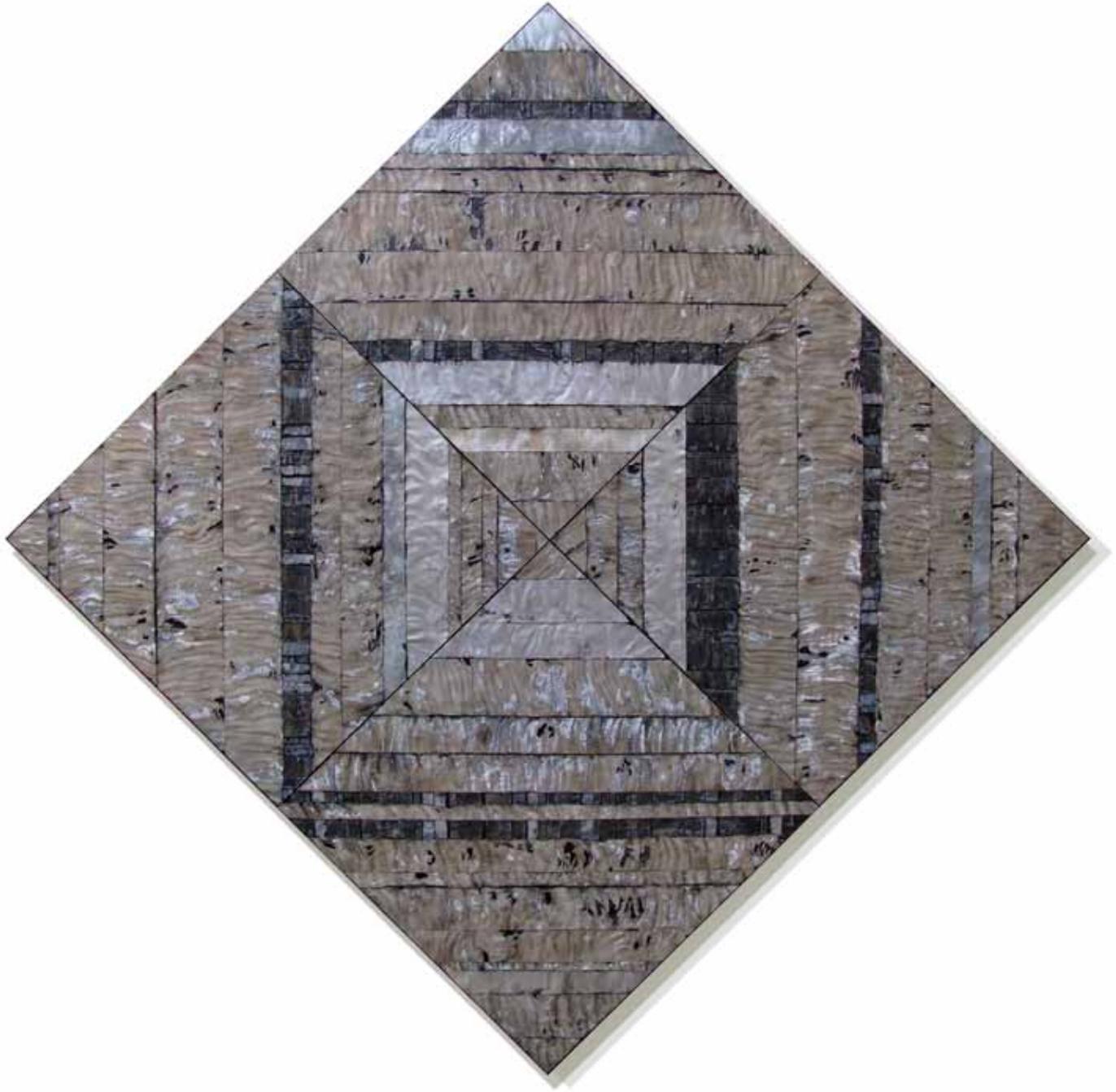
D.B.J. - The fact that I am a self-taught inventor is a challenge. I've been learning through books, the Internet and YouTube videos. I want to challenge myself and see how much I can transform and learn as a human being. Just like a circuit board, I am programmable. When I feel strongly about a certain project or get excited about new concepts, I have to constantly teach myself new skills and learn whatever is necessary. The challenge also includes understanding how far I can push myself.

M.A. - Art can play a profound role in raising social consciousness. In placing commonplace objects from the everyday into new contexts, you alter the perspective of those who encounter your work. In an indirect way, you let us know we need not be controlled by materials that dominate our lives. Your work suggests we are free to reconsider these everyday objects, and in doing so, you prod us to reevaluate our habits as consumers. There are powerful messages encrypted in your art. If the viewer could only take away one message from encountering your pieces, what would you hope that message would be?

D.B.J. - Rather than giving a specific message, I want my work to instill a desire in the viewer to question reality and potentially see reality in a different way. Eventually, this will lead to a chain reaction, which will open doors to other possibilities. My art puts



David B. Jang, Temporize, 2011, disassembled printer, fax machine and chip bag Mylar, 106" x 30" x 264" (dimensions variable).



David B. Jang, *Reify*, 2015, aluminum, wood, oil and stain, 60" x 60" diam.

my discovery in the spotlight. The message will depend on the viewer's own perspective and thoughts on reality. I want my work to encourage undermining and questioning. As I reify categories of identity, my practice with installations and consumer materials shows how things are not as they appear. My discoveries can offer alternatives to the original and the norm.

M.A. - What is the overriding motivation that pushes you forward? What are you working on now? What's coming up for you next?

D.B.J. - I'm pushed forward by my desire to define my objective value in life. My motivation is based on my belief that a person has the task of finding and exercising a path that harmonizes his own value and spiritual improvement while advancing the value and spiritual improvement of others. I seek a path that can maximize

both. Art can increase the depth of consciousness. While others may spend their energy struggling at the level of subsistence, I see art as a necessity to the human condition, not a luxury.

I have several projects in mind for the future, including further development of my foam-cup paintings, additional aluminum cans and wood panels and an architectural installation involving refrigeration and frost. I also have a collaboration in the works with engineering and architecture grad students for a 2018 project at Cal Poly Pomona, involving solar-energy panels or wind-power generators in an outdoor electronic, kinetic installation.

M.A. – Thank you David. I see you have shows coming up in South Korea, Toronto and San Francisco and an installation at LAX. Looking forward to seeing what you will be showing next. ■



Paula Crown, *Inside My Head: A Contemporary Self Portrait*, 2013, video projection, The Isaacson History Room, The Aspen Institute, Aspen.

PAULA CROWN: AS ABOVE

BY CRAIG DRENNEN

My first encounter with Paula Crown's work in summer 2014 prompted a long conversation in her studio. The work I saw that day crossed materials, processes and scale with an ease that provoked much subsequent thought. During the Miami art fairs later that December, I read Ms. Crown's name in the Miami press in relation to a large public artwork that she installed in the Design District. As the third leg of the trifecta, I happened to be in New York City earlier this year and visited her solo exhibition at Marlborough Gallery's 57th Street space.

In each encounter, Ms. Crown's work asserted a formal clarity across what appeared to be a well-managed heterogeneous practice. What struck me about the work, aside from its unfashionable resistance to the provisional and "unmonumental," was that each moment of its iteration felt like a snapshot of a much larger story whose goals were not immediately announced. Crown's own path into the art world was also atypical, since she passed through the professional world of finance and banking before matriculating at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and fully asserting her artistic life. This partially explains the relaxed sophistication of Ms. Crown's work. All of her crucial ontological concerns, as well as her instincts about art's societal place and function, have marinated over years of thought. It might also explain how this rational humanist artist, whose work is informed more by Charles

Sanders Peirce's semiotic writings than by bicoastal gallery trends, appears to have sprung forth into the world full born.

The beauty of Crown's process is that every series within her work provides an equal portal into her imaginative world. *Bomber (Side View)* from 2012 is a pivotal piece within Crown's oeuvre, made with inkjet print on mirrored stainless steel. The impact of the piece is felt in part because of how the polished stainless-steel support amplifies the dramatic horizontal diptych format. The image is from an inherited family photograph of the cockpit of the B-29 airplane navigated by Crown's father during reconnaissance trips over the North Pole in the early days of the Cold War.¹ Mirrored surfaces are certainly no stranger to contemporary art, and Robert Morris' minimalist versions of mirrored cubes from the mid-1960s were an efficient way to include the physical facts of the exhibition space into the self-referential life of the artwork. But *Bomber (Side View)* works differently. The reflective metal suggests fuselage as looking glass, and here is where we are given a glimpse of Crown's artistic compass. A presumably personal photograph is run through a mechanical process and onto an industrial support in a casually deadpan manner. The emotional complexity of the original photograph can be speculated upon but never grasped with certainty.



Paula Crown, *Alpha Bravo*, 2014, raw and gessoed linen, 40" x 65."

As an adult, Crown came to understand that her father's plane sometimes carried bombs, and often in the direction of Russian airspace. The image is a bright visual assertion of America's post-war, can-do optimism while simultaneously being a picture of Crown's father's quietly dangerous jobsite. A viewer sees what the father saw through the cockpit window, ice and arctic desolation. It is possible to imagine *Bomber (Side View)* newly complete in Crown's studio, and, as she looks at the piece for the first time, seeing her own reflection within the image. On some level, Crown might simply be proud of her father and the role he performed. (In the preface to his novel *The Hunters*, James Salter reveals to the reader that no literary accomplishment he might ever achieve would give him pride equal to his airborne duties during the Korean War.) *Bomber (Side View)* portrays a father floating in the air above the North Pole at the very top of the earth, as suspended and unwavering as the coordinates of the holy dove in a Perugino painting.

The "call letter" paintings fall into easy formation around the *Bomber* pieces. As the title *Alpha Bravo* suggests, these paintings list the entire alphabet through military call letters. The capitalized sans serif letters start with "ALPHABRAVOCHARLIE..." and end with "...X-RAYYANKEEZULU." The pale gouache is applied perfectly in the negative space, so that the letters themselves are formed by the color and texture of the linen substrate. The block of letters themselves read as an overall shape suggestive of a speech bubble thanks to the extending "ZULU" in the lower left. With this piece we get another move in Crown's playbook, where chilled detachment and minimalist precision cloak subjective meaning. There is a quiet urgency to this coded language, both in the words themselves and in the rhythm of the frequent two-ness provided by double-syllabled words. Yet it is difficult to believe that *Alpha Bravo* was made only to demonstrate the mutability of linguistic signs or to bracket militarism within the methods of conceptual art. *Alpha Bravo* very literally encapsulates the language of the father, in this case Crown's military navigator father. It extracts *la langue du père* from the Lacanian *nom du père*. Even the title itself delivers a payload of information. If "alpha" simply means first and "bravo" is a public shout of praise, then "alpha bravo" could

mean the legitimizing moment of first public praise. At the very least, *Alpha Bravo* demonstrates that the inscrutable objectivity of Crown's work is not meant to deflect interpretation, but instead acts as a wick that pulls curious viewers further in.

Another recurring trait of Crown's work is her willingness to incorporate the tools and aesthetics of the laboratory. The Aspen Institute showed her multimedia piece *Inside My Head: A Contemporary Self Portrait* in 2013 as part of the Aspen Ideas Festival.² The piece was made from two circular convex screens onto which video images, sourced from Crown's own MRI brain scan, were projected. The two screens mirror each other, as symmetrical as Byzantine heaven, presenting dual images of a glowing neurological structure as an apotheosis of thought. This reads as direct a message as the gold leaf and honey on Joseph Beuys' head as he explained drawings to a dead rabbit. The visual valorization of thought provided by *Inside My Head* aligns perfectly with Crown's stated rationalist position, and yet an interesting slippage occurs within the dim light of the exhibition space, as the circular screens begin to read as hieratic mandorlas surrounding this same objective brain, a glowing, ghostly Pantocrator alone without its body.

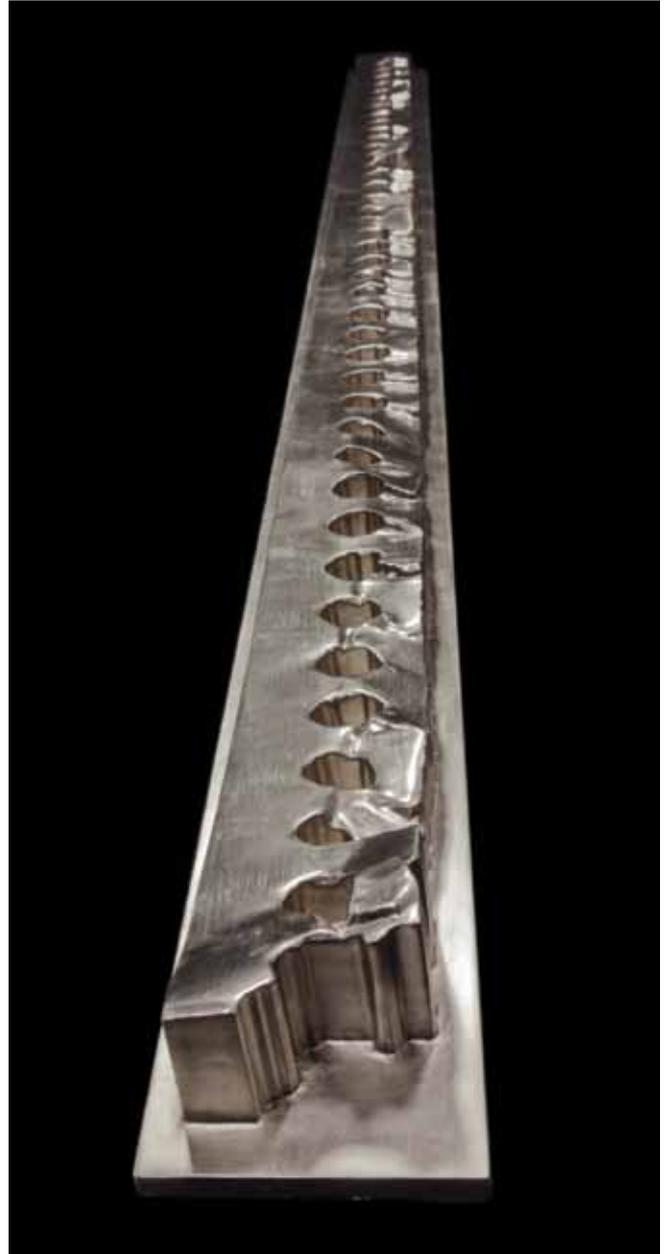
In early 2015, Crown's solo exhibition at Marlborough Gallery in New York City, "The Sublime and the Center: Dimensions of Landscape," attempted a more complete overview of her practice. Individual series of works were linked together by an overarching narrative, and works were installed on every architectural surface in the space—walls, ceiling and floor. The exhibition begins with one small, framed, ink-marker drawing under a single spotlight. The drawing was created when Crown was in a helicopter flying over the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa, exploring her curiosity as to what it would be like to experience the indexical effects of the vehicle and natural elements while she was "capturing images as (she) moved in time and space."³ The resulting drawings' staccato line quality might look Surrealist at first glance, but that has less to do with Modernist automatism than the fact that Crown was sitting in a shaking flying machine. The importance of these so called "helicopter drawings" is very clear, and their physical modesty belies the propulsive power they've had in generating



Paula Crown, *Bomber*, 2012, inkjet on mirror polished stainless steel, 43.5" x 129." All images are courtesy of the artist.



"Paula Crown: The Sublime and the Center: Dimensions of Landscape," installation view at Marlborough Gallery (February 5 – March 7, 2015)



Paula Crown, *PERforation (-) 1.25*, 2015, gilded white gold, 2" x 54 1/8" x 3 1/8."

subsequent works. By way of example, the torn, perforated edges of these drawings were in turn transcribed into the large, metal *PERforation* pieces that populated Marlborough's entryway gallery.

The *PERforation* pieces hit an emotional note very distinct from Crown's other work. The torn edges of the notebook paper change size and material to become three-dimensional metal forms. These pieces may, more than any other of Crown's work, seem the most like mute tomb relics whose value are reinforced by their gold and silver finish. The scale choice is crucial as well, since if the size were too small the objects would look only like combs or cutting tools. But if the size becomes too large then the circular spaces of the holes approach human scale and resemble shackles. As they are, the *PERforation* pieces memorialize the act of tearing away, or more exactly, of having been torn away. These works situate themselves both in and outside their time. On the one hand they have the affectless fabrication finish of 3-D routing, but on the other hand they look like they could have just been brought back from the Crusades.

Viewers entering the central room in the Marlborough space were greeted by a *gesamtkunstwerk* in progress. Standing in the center of the exhibition I had the feeling that an incomplete structure was

being assembled around me and that if I came back weeks later it would have obscured the original gallery walls entirely. The gallery floor had been altered to accommodate *Cloudy embedded*, a mosaic of marble sections cut and installed in accordance with the geometric shapes produced by a magnified image of the helicopter drawing. (Crown gathered the image magnification data through a state-of-the-art optical scanner in Madrid.⁴) To follow the trajectory suggested by the exhibition, the original drawings were first made with the artist floating in the air, then scanned and processed through a digital shape-shifting process that returned them back to earth with gravity and stone; and yet directly above this marble floor hung mirrored organic shapes echoing lines from the original helicopter drawing again, while reflecting the marble geometry of the floor below. In fact, the entire main gallery space was filled to overflowing with sculptures, reliefs, vitrines and even paintings.

The paintings, from the *Disoriental* series were made by taking the carpet pieces from Crown's own former breakfast room, then coating them with enamel that the artist pressed onto stretched linen supports. The resulting images look both clean and curdled, as sturdy as concrete and as delicate as lace. They seem to be less images than residual



Paula Crown, TRANSPOSITION: Over Many Miles. © Robin Hill

afterimages, reminiscent of sun-bleached wallpaper. The paintings' titles insert a quiet wedge against sentimentality yet might be the most direct personal indexical markings in the Marlborough exhibition, a physical trace from Crown's previous domestic life. Even the photograph of Crown's father's plane could exist in multiple printings; the family carpet with its authentic physical wear only exists once. In both *Bomber (Side View)* and the *Disoriental* paintings, the phenomenological position is one of looking down: father looking down on the earth and an artist mother looking down at the floor of her home. It's a very particular type of observation, one that allows the observer to be more accurate and detached with the benefit of some distance, even if it's only the distance of one's own body.

In the catalog essay for the Marlborough exhibition, Michelle Grabner remarks that "To accurately understand Paula Crown's studio practice the viewer/reader is obliged to engage with big and often difficult questions about the nature of knowledge."⁵ That is true, of course, and Crown is an avowed reader in the world of contemporary semiotics. But it may also be possible to look at Crown's work in an alternate way, as an extended self-portrait—coded and metonymic but a self-portrait nonetheless. The momentum originated by gestures such as the helicopter drawings extends outward into an entire spider web of an artistic practice in which differences at the far edges can easily be traced back to an understandable shared center. The heterogeneity of her practice combined with the formal cleanliness she prefers may just be throwing viewers and critics off her scent. Those who think that subjective expressivity comes only from expressionists might revisit the work of Annette Lemieux, Guy de Cointet, or, of course, Félix González-Torres.

Crown has produced ambitious work for gallery booths through the art fair circuit, but her most ambitious project to date might be the *TRANSPOSITIONS* piece created as an outdoor sculpture park in Miami. *TRANSPOSITIONS* debuted in December 2014 and was constructed with the help of Theaster Gates Studio and the Design Apprenticeship Program at the University of Chicago. A vacant lot in Miami's Design District was floored with 3,200 square feet of salvaged material and featured the largest of the *PERforation* sculptures, this one coming in at 25 by 6 by 4 feet. The floor plan of the site

was also derived from an enlarged scan of the helicopter drawing. The geometry of this plan, however, was left more open, creating both triangular green space and covered areas throughout. *TRANSPOSITIONS* has lived on to serve as a place for subsequent sponsored cultural events and has in fact acted as park, playground and stage for the neighborhood. The large *PERforation* sculpture, also executed in reclaimed wood, is positioned in a corner, angled out toward the site in the authoritative manner of a juror's bench. Whereas many of Crown's works seem crisply determined in their conception and execution, *TRANSPOSITIONS* suggests a direction wherein greater collaboration and indeterminacy are present.

Which brings observant viewers to a point where they might very well ask if Crown's work delivers, or points toward, any consistent totalizing content. That's probably a bit premature to ask, since the signifiers in her work seem to accumulate and aggregate over time as with any artist. What one does find in Crown is an artist for whom analogue and digital are one interchangeable data source, for whom an ink pen and an MRI machine are both equally usable artistic tools, and for whom urgency and restraint appear in equal measures. Walking through a Crown exhibition is a bit like watching epic cinema with the sound turned off—we are given prodigious amounts of finely tuned visual information, but nothing is telling us what to feel.

The space created by this openness feels clean and even generous, and maybe this is the takeaway from Crown's work: It gives one a means to remove oneself a bit from the din of media noise, to create a small distance that makes contemplation possible, to find the ideal cruising altitude for the craft you occupy. Or to quote once again from James Salter's novel, perhaps at the end of it all Crown only wants us to have "learned a little of silence, and perhaps devotion."⁶ ■

NOTES

1. Crown, Paula, email message to the author, Sept. 10, 2015.
2. Gardner-Smith, "Paula Crown's artistic vision shared at Aspen Ideas Festival," *The Aspen Daily News*, June 29, 2013.
3. Crown, Paula, email message to the author, Sept. 10, 2015.
4. Feinstein, Laura, *GOOD* magazine, Feb. 16, 2015.
5. Grabner, Michelle. "The Sublime and the Center: Dimensions of Landscape." *Paula Crown: The Sublime and the Center*. Marlborough Gallery, 2015, p. 3.
6. Salter, James. *The Hunters*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1997, p. 8.

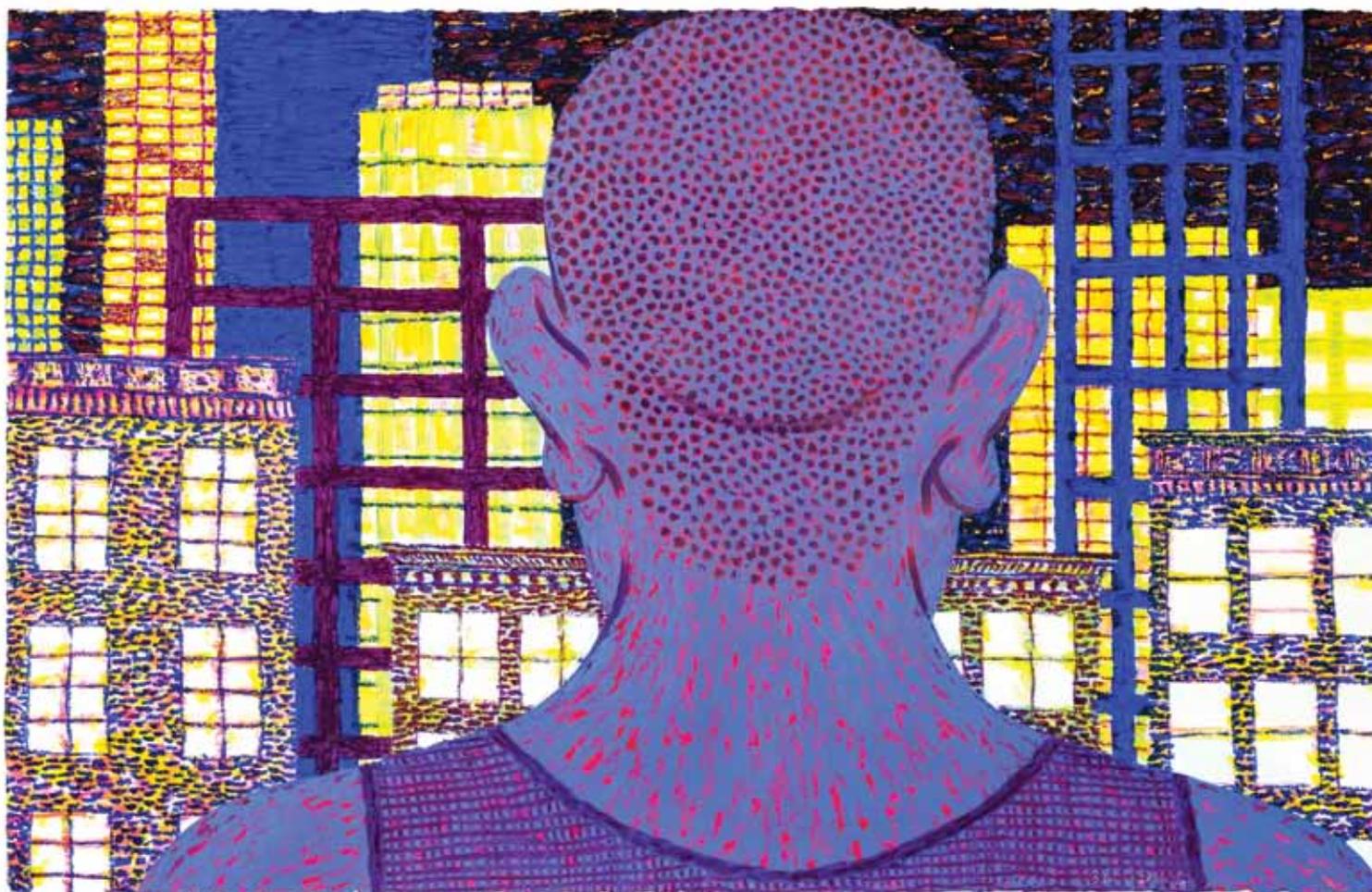
BEYOND OBJECTHOOD

A Conversation with Benjamin Degen

I spoke with artist Benjamin Degen about his paintings that were produced recently in a three-and-a-half-year period living simply in the wilderness of upstate New York. We discussed the socioeconomic, political and deeply personal reasons that inspired him to move away from New York City and then back again and how this played out in his work. As Degen has stated, his work hails from the “current existential situation on this planet (see for example the text *Ecology Without Nature* by Timothy Morton) and the struggle for individuals to have a clear vision of themselves and their environment in this moment.”

The wilderness-engendered paintings, with quirky stringy paint application, read as fresh and unfamiliar even as the subject matter is familiar: sunshine, youthful figures lounging, reading, swimming, setting out and returning, sequestered in verdant woods and clear waters. The city-engendered paintings also have this dialectical quality. All the paintings conjure formal essences and life-affirming interests of Matisse, Bonnard, Seurat, Renoir and Gauguin, but the work is absolutely recognizable only as itself, a multitudinous color play in chords of romantic undertone and metamodern sincerity. Degen’s current solo exhibition at Susan Inglett Gallery in New York runs through December ⁵.

BY STEPHEN KNUDSEN



Benjamin Degen, *Here comes the neighborhood!* 2015, oil stick over acrylic on paper, 26" x 40." Courtesy the artist and Susan Inglett Gallery, NY.

Stephen Knudsen - Your exhibition "Shadow Ripple Reflection" at Susan Inglett Gallery a couple of years ago keeps returning to my memory. You've had me thinking for some time now of that tiny off-grid cabin, wild chlorophyll and nights dark enough to see the stars above the woods, and you've had me thinking of Henry David Thoreau. Have you seen the replica of Thoreau's cabin across the street from Walden Pond? There is a bronze sculpture of Thoreau emerging out of the cabin, the great resister, stripped to pencil and ax, finding something essential in and outside of himself, something transcendent. And those thoughts bring me back again to your painting. Is that something you are finding good to get back to even if it is sort of Thoreau-light, with car keys in hand?

Benjamin Degen - I've never visited Thoreau's actual cabin site, but I've visited the idea of his cabin many times. When I first read Thoreau, Whitman and Muir they defined an ideal for me: the deep natural connection of Transcendentalism; the idea that the American landscape was imbued with spiritual power that is a source of strength and life. I also was attracted to the concept of the landscape as a reflection of our collective humanity and our individual selves. These ideas were definitely in my mind when I recently 'escaped' New York City to live for a few years in the mountains of upstate New York. Some aspects of these concepts of an idealized 'nature' and an idealized 'humanity' are a little old school, and I appreciate some of the more contemporary ideas about nature as expressed by writers like Timothy Morton, but as a pictorial/conceptual vantage point I do like the dialectic idealism of looking 'out of the urban window into the shadow of the forest and conversely looking 'in' to the city from up in the mountains. The titles *Kleos* and *Nostos* allude to this 'going in' and 'going out'; both paintings depict a door as a threshold that is crossed from one world to another. *Kleos* is a concept in ancient Greek epic poetry that alludes to going out into the world to achieve heroic acclaim. This is the theme of *The Iliad*. The term 'nostos' on the other hand refers to the journey of returning home, which is an achievement unto itself. This is the main theme of *The Odyssey*. The woman in *Nostos* is coming home from a run, kicking off her shoes and taking off her clothes as she bounds through the door. It is a heroic feeling coming home after a long run. It is an act of achieving everyday 'nostos!' The painting *Kleos* is a small moment of prosaic heroics as well: The figure is walking out the door into a new day. Both paintings are intentionally a little goofy in this self-conscious conceit, but let's face it: If you can't see the heroism—and the humor of the heroism—in each moment of existence, what's the point of living?

SK - Please tell us more about your cabin/studio and surroundings.

B.D. - In 2010, my wife (and fellow painter and collaborator) Hope Gangloff and I moved into a giant stone building in the woods. As city-dwellers we had a romantic concept of what this would be like. The day-to-day of actually living there was an ongoing process of reconciling our romanticism with reality: The building was unheatable; even with woodstoves blazing it was never warm or dry. Rain came through the roof, and under the doors a spring ran under the floor. We felt the elements—and we became elemental! Anything left unmoved for more than



Benjamin Degen, *Underwater*, 2015, oil on linen over panel, 72" x 48."

a couple of days would grow mold. Everything smelled like the woods, damp leaves, a fire. Snakes chased chipmunks through the kitchen. We raised chickens up from baby chicks, which we kept in the bathtub until they were large enough to keep them outside. We went swimming in the stream and in a big lake. At night when we left the studio we would walk around the woods with our ancient dog. In the summer there were crickets, fireflies and frogs singing everywhere in the swamp that surrounded the building. In the winter there was the sound of the dry trees clicking together and the popping of the ice in the swamp. There were a lot of owls. They would sing all night. It was beautiful. We lived like we were camping. We did what city people tend to do when they go 'country': We went all the way.

S.K. - What happened to you and your work out there in the woods?

B.D. - I went to the mountains to be able to look at new things, to be able to live in a new way. I wanted to be able to see myself and the world around me through a different lens of experience. In the city there are constant intense stimuli. The urban environment is loud. My time in the woods was the first prolonged period I've spent in a quiet place. I had to recalibrate to experience more subtle stimuli. The title of the last show "Shadow, Ripple and Reflection" alluded to phenomenological effects that



Benjamin Degen, *Drinking, Drawing, Sleeping, Dreaming*, 2015, oil on linen over panel, 72" x 108."

can be very understated. Sometimes you need a certain amount of stillness, quiet and focus to see them. They are small events on the periphery that allow you to understand and feel large forces. For example, when you see the zig-zag ripples of a squall puff across the water before it arrives. When the squall gets to you you feel the full force of the wind. You can look up and see the clouds, the front of a huge weather system. But if you are still you can see the tiny ripples, which show the edge and the structure of this very large thing. At first these small details in the stillness could be overwhelming and even terrifying in their complexity and newness. I think the work in "Shadow, Ripple and Reflection" was about this experience: the reality of it and the semi self-conscious archetypal act of going into the woods. It is a theme of 'Gilgamesh' (Sumer, 2,700 B.C). It's the theme of Canned Heat's "Going up the Country" (Woodstock, N.Y., 1969). The call of the wild country never gets old.

S.K. - I see that archetypal act in the imagery but also in the way that your paint builds up in signatures of webbed pigment and color, almost as if you were writing with the paint. It seems to be squeezed out of some kind of tiny tube. It makes me think of Henry David Thoreau's sister Sophie, who inscribed many of her brother's poems onto pressed leaves. Like her leaves, your leaves, your grass, your wood grain have in them other languages beyond thingness. With this kind of juicy formal language, even in the lone shoe in Nostos, there seems to be something Whitmanesque in the object—'I celebrate myself.'

Would you tell us more about your content and the process of painting this way?

B.D. - There is a Shinto shrine in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens—I'm going to talk about another 'cabin in the woods' here—that has captivated me since I first saw it as a kid. It is a small and ancient-looking, unpainted wooden structure. It looks like a small house, but the door is tiny, maybe two feet tall, and it is always shut. There are just tiny slits where you can see the darkness inside. It was explained to me that this was not a house for people, it was built to house a kami or spirit. I love this idea that you could build a physical structure to house a metaphysical spirit or idea. I also like the idea that you can make a thing, and its very 'thingness' becomes an act of ontological self-realization: It becomes an object that then perpetually expresses its specific objecthood—the 'I celebrate myself' concept you were talking about. I wanted to make paintings that had this object presence. When I build up the paint into an impasto I think I may be trying to build a physical structure for the thought to inhabit. I'm making these physical elements to house metaphysical things within the picture plane. I like the idea of the picture working like a mechanism with discrete component objects acting upon each other physically like the gears in a watch or machine.

Usually in my process I take things in one direction and then instinctively want to try the opposite: I do a night picture, then a day picture; a male then a female; a person then an object. I took things pretty far in the built-up-structures direction. I did a bunch of still-life nocturnes that were extensively overlaid

with these dense painted structures and enclosures. The only way I could achieve areas of passage and transition within the image was to paint layer upon layer until these lattices of logic became so dense and caused such interference with each other that they would break down or obliterate and interflow. Now I'm moving in the other direction. My most recent paintings are more open. Rather than pre-planning I'm working out the paintings directly on the canvas: painting and repainting; a lot of wet into wet paint. I'm trying to use the gesture to animate the marks within the painting and to use these enlivened and direct gestures to embody the spirit/idea itself rather than using built-up structures to house or enclose or define it.

S.K. - *Where do you live now?*

B.D. - I am back in New York City now. My three and a half years in the mountains was a sojourn. I can only manage being a part-time hermit.

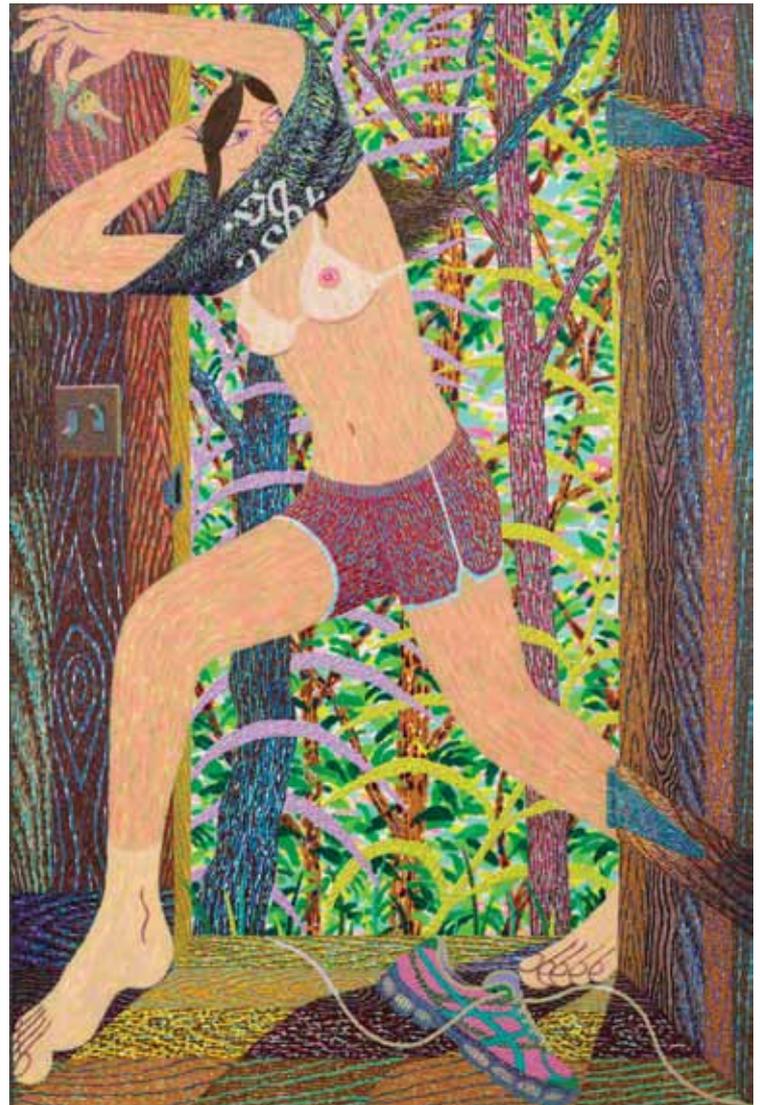
S.K. - *In the painting Here Comes the Neighborhood the lone figure contemplates the city almost as a figure in a Caspar David Friedrich painting contemplating the wilderness. What are you seeing now upon your return to the city?*

B.D. - I see millions of people living and trying to get by. I see people trying to help each other. I see people trying to get away with whatever they can get away with. I see myself. You can look at the 'wilderness' and the city in the same way. Basically, you are looking at an environment. If you see yourself within the wilderness and you can make a life there, it is no longer wilderness, it is your home. If you see yourself within the city and you can make a life there it is no longer the city, it is *your* city.

When I left New York City in 2010 it was an act of protest and rejection. I grew up in New York City. My city always felt open and exciting to me. There always seemed to be a new secret place where something was happening. There always seemed to be a funkiness and a shadow that felt electric with potential. In 2010 these funky shadows—the sacred spaces where people can do the unexpected—seemed to be exterminated everywhere by high rents and a proliferation of 'luxury' condos. My studio rent was increased to an exorbitant amount that I could not afford. Suddenly I could not make a life in the city, and this place that had always nurtured me felt like a harsh environment: a wilderness. I felt pushed out of my city. I headed for the hills.

What I realized when I was in those hills was that I missed my neighborhood—not the buildings, but the people. Going back to the transcendentalists, you can read this feeling in Whitman's writing. He had such a love, and lust, for his fellow human beings that he reveled in the energy, proximity and close contact of urban living. My new show "Where We Live" is more about that: our neighborhoods, our connection to community, and the physical and political structures of our immediate environment. Growing up in Brooklyn I was surrounded by organizers: neighborhood organizers, labor union organizers, educators and creative collaborative organizers. I need the feeling and noise of collective collaboration and neighborhood as much as I need the feeling of solitude and quiet reflection.

In the painting *Here Comes the Neighborhood*, I was thinking about this feeling of being on the outside looking in or the inside looking out—the feeling of inclusion or exclusion. Like the Caspar Fried-



Benjamin Degen, *Nostos*, 2013, oil on linen over panel, 72" x 48."

rich painting: that feeling of being on the edge of an uncontrollable and strong force. In this case it could be the force of exclusion in front of you or the collective force of the people behind you.

S.K. - *In closing, would you tell us about one more of your city paintings? A painting like Dancers puts this narrative to music, yes?*

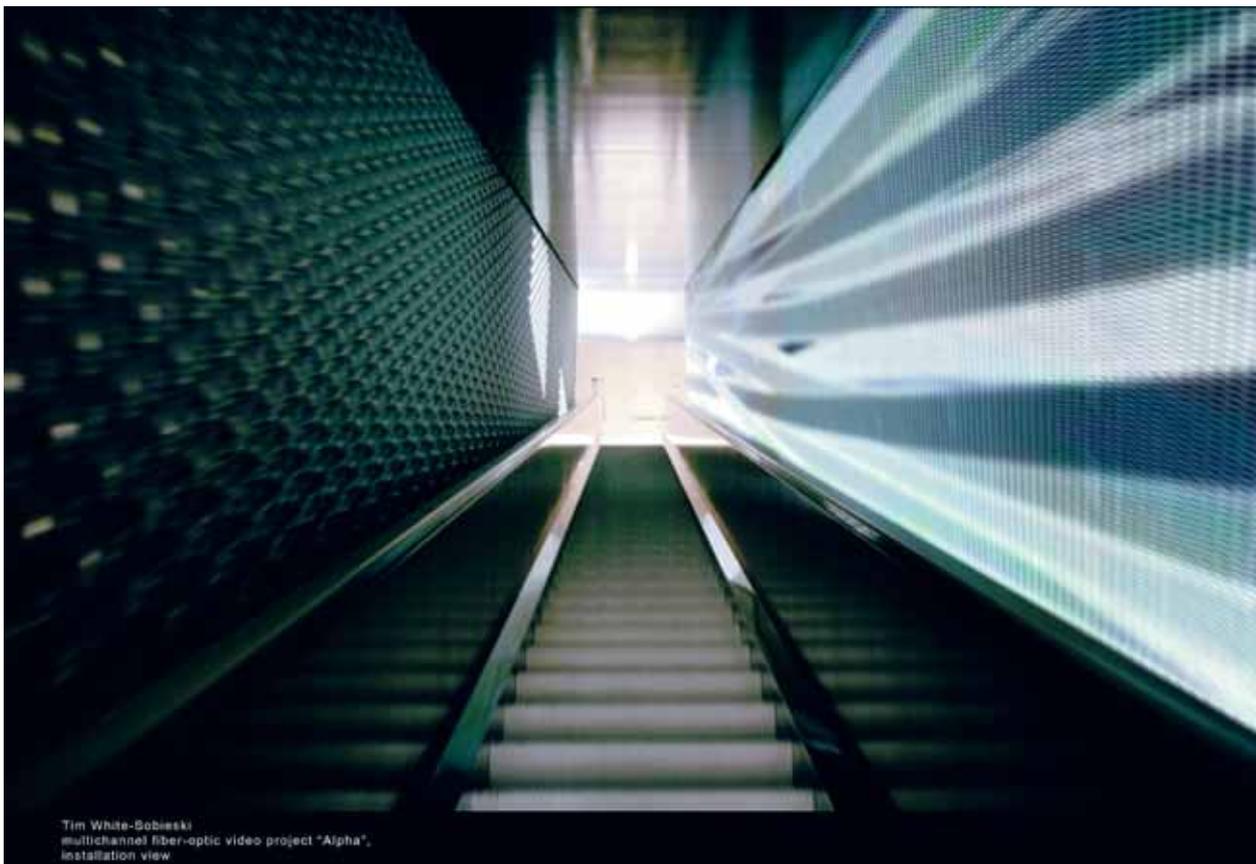
B.D. - There is something incredible that Bonnard does with color in his paintings: he is able to make the painting throw its color into the room with the viewer. As you look at the image you do not feel like you are looking into another space. The color comes out of the painting and surrounds and includes you. You feel like you are in the space of the painting. It makes even his large canvases seem very intimate. I'm not sure how Bonnard does this. It is such a magical effect that it doesn't seem to make chromatic or logical sense. I'm trying to do something like that with the figures through their movement and gesture. I want them to dance with a movement that is hardly contained by the image; a movement that pushes so hard on the edges that it somehow breaks the confines of the picture plane and moves into the space of the viewer. There is something that happens when you are dancing that is similar to when you look at a picture—you lose yourself. For a moment you are not you, you are just a movement or a gesture, or a color, or a sound. ■

INTERVIEW WITH TIM WHITE-SOBIESKI

“I like to consider filmmaking as an extension of a painting, like seeing a blank canvas in front of you and letting the medium lead you.”

Polish-American artist Tim White-Sobieski (born in Warsaw in 1961) is known for his sophisticated videos and films. His additional education in architecture, programming and science has helped him create a challenging mix of technologically avant-garde multimedia installations, like the one at LVMH/Louis Vuitton headquarters on Champs-Élysées in Paris. We discussed his eclectic background, his interest in painting, some of his signature installations and the relationship between video and film.

BY PACO BARRAGÁN



Tim White-Sobieski, *Alpha*, 2005, multi-channel fiber optic video installation, panoramic view at escalator Louis Vuitton, Paris. Courtesy of LVMH/Louis Vuitton and the artist.

Paco Barragán - Let's talk first about your professional background, which is very varied: from video artist to filmmaker to designer to programmer to architect. You also hold a Master of Fine Arts degree in both architecture and fine arts, as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in physics astronomy. How did these interests come about?

Tim White-Sobieski - That's a quintessential question—my education and the concept of having degrees in completely different disciplines helps me tremendously in my life creatively and psychologically. I studied fine arts—painting, academic drawing and sculpture from seven years old, and at 14 I dedicated all my time studying radio astronomy, cosmogony and related to this theory of relativity. My father was very enthusiastic about that and was feeding me with books, which I read nonstop. It helped me to distance myself from everyday routine of life and to be a little bit above the level of everyday activities. It

certainly and absolutely helps me now to make more global and philosophical judgments about making the right decisions.

P.B. - For a while you tried to find the solution to your artistic ambition in the tectonics and aesthetics of architecture. What did you learn from that?

T.W-S. - Everything. Literally everything. I still believe that architecture is the most universal education you can get in your life, which includes every possible technical discipline from the theory of probability, strength of physics and the science of materials to any possible subjects in the humanities—philosophy, literature and the arts. Tectonics—architectonics in architecture—is defined as ‘the science or art of construction, both in relation to use and artistic design.’ It is one of the most essential parts of sciences in understanding architecture and is a discipline that

prompts you to be very self-demanding in your creativity and analyze your working process from every standpoint, staying always aware of what are you doing and how are you doing it.

P.B. - *After this phase around the year 2000 you switched radically to video and filmmaking, basically to the world of moving images. Why this sudden cut with the past?*

T.W.-S. - I would not say it was sudden. For me it was very gradual. I came to moving image and filmmaking through animation. Prior to that I worked only with still images—drawings, paintings, designs, etc. I was interested to see if it would be possible to perceive the process of creation in time, so to say as a slow-motion movie and to analyze where your creation is going to or what path it could have taken. In this sense the interesting starting point was when I discovered that Richard Poussette-Dart was making photographs of his paintings every hour, creating a sequence, a sort of animation of images. Same principle as Eadward Muybridge used in his theories analyzing human and animal motion in his sequences. And we know that the history of recording sequences and creating animations is very rich, from Fernand Léger to Viking Eggeling and Oskar Fischinger.

PAINTING, FILM AND HISTORY AS BURDEN

P.B. - *Your videos and installations are very painterly. What is your relation to painting? As a matter of fact, in many of your works—think of the video *Subset Blues* (1999) with music by Brian Eno, the *Deconstructed Reality* (2006) series, or the *New York City Lights* (2005-2012) video installation—the idea of ‘painting as moving image’ is totally present.*

T.W.-S. - Yes, painting is the base for all visual arts. It's the most passionate, intuitive and spontaneous discipline, and it's great to keep it in your heart while being involved in other mediums like filmmaking, and multimedia. I think the best filmmakers in history came from painting backgrounds, or at least practiced in their lifetime—Fellini, Tarkovsky, Derek Jarman were visual artists, David Lynch, to name a few.

P.B. - *Yes, you're right about that. You once said in an interview with Jerome Sans that ‘Video as a medium can be more abstract than painting.’ The play between abstraction and figuration is a key element in your works—think of the use of blurs and shadows in your videos. How important is abstraction to you, and how do you from a technical point of view achieve this challenging and sometimes even hypnotic interplay?*

T.W.-S. - Thank you for this definition, I consider it as a compliment—yes, ‘hypnotic interplay’ is this essential magical substance that is so important, at least for me in my filmmaking process. And many filmmakers try to achieve it in their films—interplay of stories, interplay of main and accidental characters, interplay of abstraction and figuration in a film, sometimes in one episode—it all weaves the so-called magical fabric of the film, of storytelling, that does not have to be direct and straightforward, but rather like good literature must seed ideas and provide a variety of interpretations to a viewer.

It is a very interesting subject of a conversation about films, and it does not necessarily apply to experimental or art film or video art category per se. Great classical films of Bergman, or again, of Fellini or Tarkovsky, have this intricate interplay of many things planted in the timeline of a movie, leading and misleading us, creating a fabulous spectrum of images and thoughts in our heads thanks to



Tim White-Sobieski, 2013. © Markus Thums Photography, Vienna.

this beautiful ability of the human brain to do associative thinking. It gives freedom to our imagination while we are watching the imagery unfolding in front of our eyes.

P.B. - *In some of your works you start totally from scratch, in some others you use the cityscapes or landscapes around you, and there are works where you even make use of found footage.*

T.W.-S. - Found footage is important but not essential. It's like a beautiful way of a cutaway inserted into the timeline; to give an analogy, it's like having an artifact, a piece of an old newspaper glued to your canvas, creating a little collage, an indication of historic or aesthetic reference or just as an essential image of directing the attention of a viewer. Collage in this sense is a very powerful element in filmmaking, combined with precise editing, finding a frame where to insert it, i.e.—a sudden glance, turn of a head, a wind blow—and your mind is redirected in some other unpredictable way. I like to consider filmmaking as an extension of a painting, or at least as an extension of a painting mentality. It is a beautiful concept to start working on a film from scratch, like seeing a blank canvas in front of you and letting the medium lead you and be your partner in creating the magic.

Did you know that Orson Welles often came to a film set without any script and without any idea what he was going to film? It is a beautiful perception to totally free yourself and to leave space to your imagination. Hollywood hated him for this. It was so alien for most of the producers that eventually they cut him loose. A great filmmaker, I admire him.

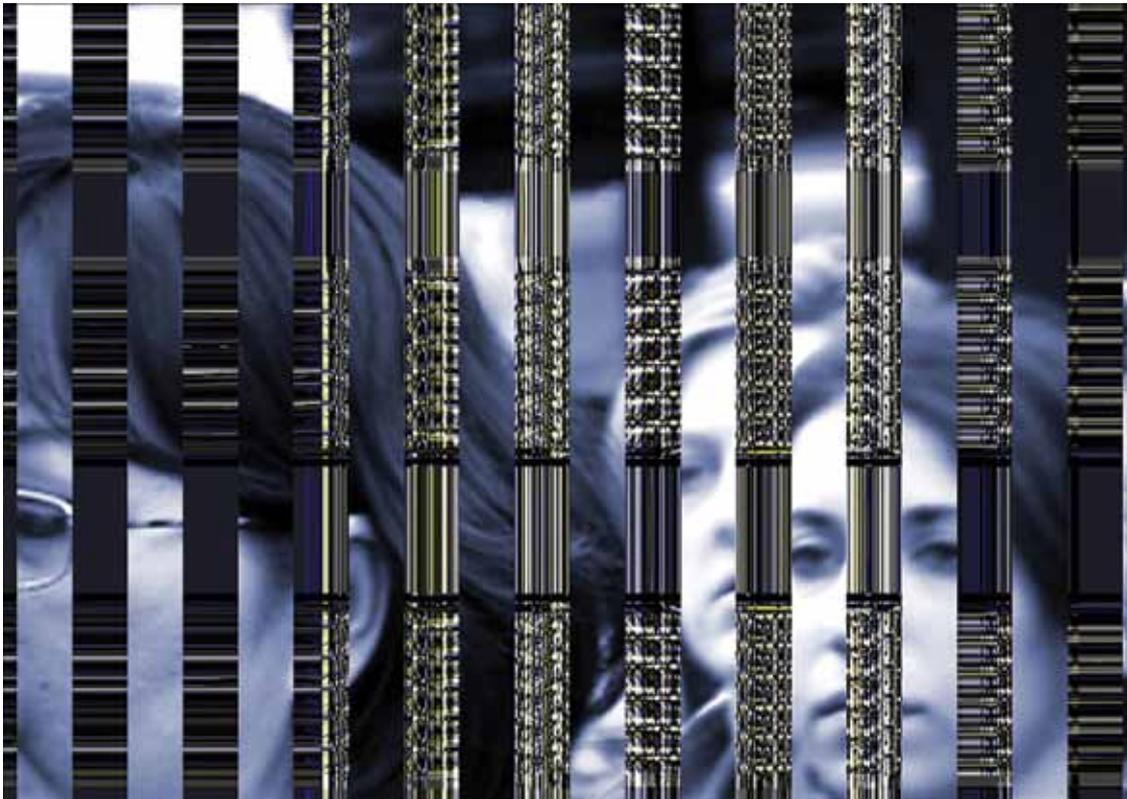
P.B. - *Your artistic practice could be defined by a strong sense of portraying the multiplexity and multilayered reality of the present, but at the same time by an interest in history and memory, which is manifested in the concept of ‘ancestry.’ Would you agree, and if so, how do these two aspects dialogue in your work?*

T.W.-S. - Well, it's complicated. What is our mentality? What is a product of our mentality? What's the source of our mentality and its product? History and ancestry are magnificent things—dogmas—that we carry with us all life long. They give us the starting point in analyzing reality; it's our base. It is not an interest in a history. History is what you carry with you. It's your burden, your cross and your essential starting point. Your mind bounces

DIALOGUES FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM



Tim White-Sobieski, *New York City Suite*, 2005-2013, 8-channel video-installation, panoramic installation view at Kunsthalle Detroit. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Detroit and the artist.



Tim White-Sobieski, *New York City Suite* (detail), 2005-2013. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Detroit and the artist.

between your initial knowledge and what you see. The result is your mentality, or creativity. Multilayering in creative process, in a final work? Yes. Always. It is essential in storytelling, it illustrates your process of thinking, and it defines the parameters of yourself.

FIBER OPTICS AND HAND RENDERING

P.B. - One of the most important moments in your career is for sure the LVMH/Louis Vuitton installation in 2005 for the Headquarters at the Champs-Élysées—Alpha project—where there are also two other installations by James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson. Tell us how you conceived

this ambitious multichannel, fiber-optics, video-sound installation that unites both the inside and outside of the building and was made in collaboration with architects Peter Marino and Eric Carlson.

T.W.S. - I wanted to deliver something truly outstanding, and I developed a new video format that was four times bigger than high definition, which in 2004 had been only just introduced to the market. So this one was like stacking four big film theater screens together horizontally and making one seamless film field out of them. The entire artwork was programmed and based on vector parameters, meaning it was resolution independent, and if needed, could be any projection size. Far in the



Tim White-Sobieski, *project Cold Forest—Stainless Steel*, 2010-2014, sound and light synchronized installation with 16 video channels, 12 light works and light sculptures, partial installation view, Biennale de Lyon Résonance program, Galerie Houg. Courtesy of the artist.

future, when technology will introduce film format 20 times bigger than HD, let's say 50 years from now (my prediction), this video project will be still up to date and will not sustain loss in quality. This technology still exists only in my NYC studio. I am glad these projects happened after September 11th, otherwise it would have been destroyed, as all my stuff that vanished in my downtown studio.

P.B. - *Another project is the commission in 2009 for the Gimpo International Airport in Seoul, Korea: titled Water and Earth, it's an installation consisting of 144 synchronized LCD monitors.*

T.W-S. - *Water and Earth* consists of four video artworks running as a loop, selected by preprogramming from a server. It was a rather quick project, because by this time making multichannel video art installations was like second nature for me, and the number of the monitors was dictated by the physical dimensions of the space where the wall was installed. So it was 144 channels. By this time I could have made a video consisting of even more channels or bigger in combined resolution, the only thing was that I had to build my own computers instead of buying them, because the amount of video data that had to be processed and rendered was enormous, far beyond than any most expensive computer on the market could handle. Eventually, because the file resolution was so huge, I opted for making a sequence and then to render for multichannel distribution, my favorite thing to do. So I ended up hand-rendering about 7,000 high-resolution images and then animating them. The installation was handled by an engineering company in Seoul; it came out exceptionally good. Still it had more of a corporate look, too neat and "correct," but that was the requirement of the airport.

P.B. - *In this same context, I would like to talk about your eight-channel immersive video installation New York City Suite (2005-2012), which I consider a metaphor for today's dystopian cities and the more and more dehumanizing aspects of modernity.*

T.W-S. - *NYCS* was my favorite child. So many beautiful hours of filming in New York, in my favorite places where the crowd is so diverse and also at the same time sometimes so monotonous in its infinite unstoppa-

ble movement from home to work and from work to home, and it never ends and the city never sleeps. Locations were easy to determine—my favorite places, Fulton and Wall Street, Grand Central Terminal, Port Authority. Anyway, after the analog film production came the digital part: animation, coding, putting abstraction and figurative footage together. At this point my knowledge of macromedia lingo computer language came in handy—it is also a resolution independent script, which makes it possible to animate shapes and objects based on an infinite number of parameters. I enjoy working with it so much, and my first films from the series "Moving Paintings and Moving Drawings" were based on it. The final result was initially a two-channel synched video, and then it expanded to eight-channel video composition. I was very inspired by the music track *First Light* from the *The Plateaux of Mirror*, a 1980 album, by two geniuses of ambient music, Harold Budd and Brian Eno, and the first draft of the artwork was made with this beautiful piano play, but then later I had to write my own soundtrack to accommodate a longer duration and the multichannel audio version.

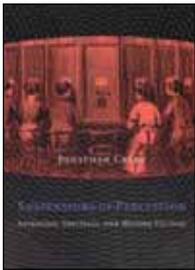
P.B. - *One last thing: Tell us about your most recent movie Waiting for the God.*

T.W-S. - Well, that's a question for a separate conversation, it's such a big philosophical matter. But in a few words, it was my dream to make a film after the play. Who can resist to depict another version of Beckett's play on the screen? I made so far a short, 30-minute version based on the play, a single channel with additional synched camera shootings ready to be displayed as a four-channel museum version, my favorite art format. *Waiting for the God* certainly differs in style to whatever I have worked on before; it has this cinematic quality, merging traditions of theatrical staging with scrupulous cinematography and devotion to every detail in lighting, composition and directing a camera through the story line. The film, which is still in production, is shot in a beautiful, ruined, old Italian city completely abandoned by its citizens many years ago. It is one of the most amazing places on the planet and is under the supervision of UNESCO. ■



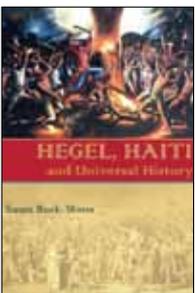
CLAIRE TANCONS

Trained as a curator and an art historian, Claire Tancons practices curating as an expanded creative field and experiments with the political aesthetics of walking, marching, second lining, masquerading and parading in participatory processional performances. She has curated for a variety of established and emerging international biennials, including as the associate curator for Prospect.1 New Orleans, a curator for the 7th Gwangju Biennale (2008), a guest curator for CAPE 09 (Cape Town) and a curator for the 7th Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (2013), among others. She was most recently a curator for "EN MAS': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean" (Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans 2014-15, and Independent Curators International, 2015-17) and a guest curator for "Up Hill Down Hill: An Indoor Carnival" (BMW Tate Live, Tate Modern, 2014). She is currently the artistic director of the opening ceremony of Faena Forum Miami Beach, slated for spring 2016.



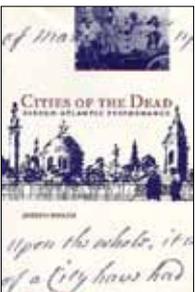
Jonathan Crary. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001.

I was tipped off by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) to think that this book on perception at the dawn of the modern era in Europe referenced Carnival. It does, especially Chapter III: Illuminations of Disenchantment. In this chapter, Crary, the foremost historian of Western Modernity and its aftermath, highlights the dual nature of George Seurat's *Parade de Cirque*: it is modern on account of the pointillist technique yet refers to a pre-modern European entertainment, Carnival, hinted at in the reference to the parade, and a contemporary popular pastime, the circus. The contemporaneity between Seurat's painting and Melton Prior's lithograph of a carnival parade in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, also from 1888 has been instrumental in helping me shape my discourse around Carnival in the Americas as a modern cultural practice and contemporary art form. This is, for instance, relayed in my most recent exhibition "EN MAS': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean."



Susan Buck-Morss. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*. Pittsburgh. University of Pittsburgh, 2009.

To me, Susan Buck-Morss' *Hegel and Haiti* essay is a companion piece to Jonathan Crary's "Illuminations of Disenchantment" chapter in *Suspension of Perception*. How so? It starts on the book's cover. Buck-Morss' daring juxtaposition of Jacques-Louis David's *The Tennis Court Oath at Versailles* (n.d. circa 1791) and Ulrick Jean-Pierre's *Bois Caiman 1 (Revolution of Saint Domingue, Haiti, August 14, 1791)* i.e. of contemporary revolutionary events in France and former Saint-Domingue, present-day Haiti, inspired my own juxtaposition between Seurat's Parisian *Parade de Cirque* and Melton Prior's Trinidadian carnival parade mentioned above. Buck-Morss' aim is to demonstrate that late-18th-century Saint-Domingue more so than France lived up to the revolutionary ideals of equality for all by including the former enslaved population of African descent into the political body. Another one of her aims is to confirm long-held suspicions about Hegel's indubitable knowledge, through masonic circles, of the Haitian Revolution and of its concealed use in shaping his famous theory of the master and slave. I root my own scholarly and curatorial work in the general framework of this philosophy of history, which conceives of a plurifocal modernity.



Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

This book is a treasure trove for anyone who is interested in the performative dimension of African diasporic aesthetics, lives in New Orleans as I do and can appreciate the cultural phenomena described by Roach on a daily basis. Roach's book is one of the first and most eloquent expansions of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) into the field of performance studies. In the book, one follows the tragic and euphoric representation of Self and Other along the circum-Atlantic rim, the Iroquois delegation in 18th-century London to contemporary Mardi Gras Indians performances in New Orleans. I have been a close reader of the introduction in which Roach inscribes the book within a Foucaultian genealogist framework, which I use in my scholarly work. Anyone with a knowledge of my interest in and practice of processional performance can easily understand why. Roach's magnum opus provides me with a genealogical framework to root that interest and practice in the Black Atlantic and in African diasporic aesthetics.



TOBIAS OSTRANDER

Tobias Ostrander is chief curator and deputy director for curatorial affairs at the Pérez Art Museum Miami's new Herzog and de Meuron-designed building. From 2009 to 2011, he was the director of El Museo Experimental El Eco in Mexico City after previously serving as the curator of contemporary art at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City from 2001-2009. Prior to his work in Mexico City, Ostrander was the associate curator for inSITE2000/01 in San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, as well as assistant curator on the XXIV Bienal de São Paulo.



***Jeff Wall: Selected Essays and Interviews.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007.**

This outstanding volume contains 14 essays and 23 interviews by the Canadian photographer Jeff Wall. It was published in conjunction with the retrospective of this work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2007. Wall is an exceptional writer and thinker about art history in general and a particularly acute scholar of photography. This book contains fascinating essays by the artist on other artists, such as On Kawara and Edouard Manet, as well as insightful interviews about his own practice. His essay “Marks of Indifference”: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art,” from 1995, is mind-blowing for anyone interested in the conceptual legacy of photography beginning in the 1960s and ‘70s. I am currently working on a small exhibition of Jeff Wall’s photographs for the Pérez Art Museum Miami, opening October 22, which gave me a good excuse to recently reread these amazing texts.



***Hall Foster. The Return of the Real: The Avante-Garde at the End of the Century.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.**

This book was required reading in the early part of my curatorial career and has stayed with me as a continual resource. Foster has a particularly clear and thoughtful way of structuring his arguments on image-based works of the late 1980s and early ‘90s. His essay “The Crux of Minimalism” is incredibly informative and influential on how Minimalism’s reference to the context of the white cube gallery space and to the viewer’s own body led artists to gender and culturally identify the viewer through their works a decade later, during the period in which “identity politics” was a dominant force within art practices. “The Artist as Ethnographer” is another essay that continually returns as a crucial text regarding how politicized artists were engaging critical theory and investigative techniques borrowed from other academic disciplines during this period.



***Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America.* Edited by Gerardo Mosquera. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.**

This collection represents the beginning of a distinctly critical reading on how Latin American art had previously been discussed within the United States. The book was published around the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’ first trip to the Americas, and the 22 essays included criticize the limited and eroticizing exhibitions of Latin American art that had appeared in several U.S. museums in the late 1980s. These essays represent a seminal shift in discourse and mark a maturing of cultural criticism around Latin American art in the U.S. It was the most engaging writing in English on these topics at that time. The voice of curator Mari Carmen Ramírez, in her essay which gives the book its title, “Beyond ‘the Fantastic’: Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art,” is particularly noteworthy and strong here.

REVIEWS

YOKO ONO: ONE WOMAN SHOW

Museum of Modern Art – New York

By Keren Moscovitch

“Yoko Ono: One Woman Show” strikes a fine balance between dark and light, cumbersome and ethereal, whimsical and sobering. Densely energetic, the exhibition carves a path through a decade of experiments and actions designed to shine a beam of interactivity into the quiet landscape of the artist’s personal consciousness. Visitors are invited to share in the artist’s childlike wonder and playful spirit, and are thus lured into games that surreptitiously assert her fiercely pacifist ideology.

The seeds for “One Woman Show” were planted in 1971, when visitors to the Museum of Modern Art attended what they discovered to be Ono’s unauthorized solo show and were greeted with the audacious news that the exhibition consisted of a jar of flies unleashed by the artist inside the museum in a radical unsanctioned performance. In some sense, the actualization of the current exhibition has been decades in the making, and marks a belated institutional endorsement of an artistic practice that, at the time, functioned as a disruption to the monolith of the art museum complex and the mainstream infrastructure that supported it. The danger of its current iteration is that a body of work of such gravity will be misconstrued in the present neoliberal environment in which commodification of even the most anarchic practices is par for the course.

A trailblazing pioneer of performance practice and the moving image, Ono’s early work remains fresh and lighthearted without lacking in weightiness. *Cut Piece*, a documentation of a performance in which visitors were invited to cut off pieces of Ono’s clothing as she sat motionless on the floor strikes a somber tone of vulnerability and violation. Though the piece is less sensational, perhaps, than the performances of some of Ono’s contemporaries, it nonetheless evokes a quiet distress that becomes all the more palpable in context of her more overtly political pieces such as *Bed-In* and *WAR IS OVER!* The sprinkling of such works throughout remind visitors of the essential role that Ono, along with her partner John Lennon, played in raising consciousness during the anti-war resistance movement of the 1960s and 70’s, but other works also carry a message of peace that is subtle at first but rises in pitch as the piece unfolds. In *White Chess-Set*, visitors are requested to play a chess game of all white pieces, discovering as they proceed that it is impossible to work against each other when everyone is essentially the same. The game thus becomes a discourse on collaboration and cooperation, as the capacity for co-creation overcomes the desire for conquest.



Yoko Ono. *Cut Piece*. 1964. Performed by Yoko Ono in New Works of Yoko Ono, Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, March 21, 1965. Photo: Minoru Niizuma. © Minoru Niizuma. Courtesy Lenono Photo Archive, New York.

In addition to her actively physical methodologies, Ono deconstructs language in a way that a child might, earnestly looking for explicit meaning and action as well as rolling the sounds around on her conceptual tongue to tease out the words’ texture and flavor. Her lingual gaiety is most evident in *Grapefruit*, a series of instructions for actions published in a humble pocket-sized artist’s book graced with poetics, littered with absurdities and punctuated by linguistic disruptions. By inviting the consumer of the artwork into the art-making process itself and shedding light on the arbitrary nature of free play in creative practice, she questions the position of the artist in an individualistic, capitalist society and the role of institutions in sustaining the iconic stature of the genius.

Ono’s work drips with potentiality, as viewers learn to extrapolate upon mundane words, objects and works of art that are seemingly never completed. The true one woman show is the experience produced inside of a person who has been taught to see reality through a different lens, and traverses the world with that new knowledge in place, seeing poetry and performance on every corner. ■

(May 17 - September 7, 2015)

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 US and abroad, and reviewed in publications such as Der Spiegel, The Huffington Post, Playboy, Policy Mic and New York Magazine.

ARAKI: EROS DIARY

Anton Kern Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas



Nobuyoshi Araki, *Untitled (Eros Diary)*, 2015, silver gelatin print, 20" x 24." Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York. © Nobuyoshi Araki.

The contemporary artist-photographer known as Araki (Nobuyoshi Araki, born 1940, Tokyo) has commented that photography ‘was destined to be involved with death.’ His latest exhibition “Eros Diary” at Anton Kern Gallery in New York (his fourth exhibition with the gallery) deals with the binary themes of Eros and Thanatos—lust instinct and death instinct respectively—in a montage of poetic images that echo with equal parts arousal and melancholy.

Araki’s career spans six decades and he is widely considered one of the most prolific photographers of all time, having published over 400 books and having exhibited in over 280 solo shows worldwide. Comprised of 77 new black and white photographs, “Eros Diary” presents a motley combination of raw sexual fascination and bawdy play tempered by somber moments of natural beauty that seem to reflect the artist’s personal anguish over the loss of his wife Yoko, who died in 1990, and his cat Chiro, who passed in 2010.

Read as miscellaneous pages from a private diary, the suggestive narrative that unfolds—one that discloses a strong preoccupation with overt forms of erotica—reveals a calculated but simultaneously erratic arrangement of props and figures, both human and plastic. This highly titillating series of photographs presents a random slew of eccentric protagonists: tiny plastic dinosaurs, naked women in bondage and splayed on beds, kewpie dolls, bowls of noodle soup, ink splashes, sprawling plants, erect dildos, children on the street, trees and passing clouds all take turns captivating our attention. While the story of this intimate chronology can be read haphazardly, the show begins with *Untitled* (2015), the image of two plastic

figures—a sliver of moon standing on two legs wearing a condom at the tip of his moon-shape standing dangerously close to an attractive female head who seems aghast at his approach—and ends with a photo of an iconic Balthus painting of two girls, where one violently holds down another while the hand of the aggressor pushes erotically close to the area between her victim’s legs. Taken together, the record of these moments confesses a strange combination of amusement, sorrow, contemplation, and transcendence.

The graceful visions of natural beauty—trees and clouds—encountered in-between these provocative scenes of sexually explicit acts and comically lewd toys temper the obscenity. But overall Eros and Thanatos take turns stealing center stage, and the entire spectrum of this fleeting dream seems to culminate with *Untitled* (2015), the wistful vision of a small Japanese couple made of paper set against a background of green scrubs and flowers. These stationary lovers smile joyfully toward the camera, encapsulated in a moment of conubial bliss that remains frozen in the passage of time. ■

(July 9 – August 7, 2015)

Taliesin Thomas is a Brooklyn-based artist-philosopher who has worked in the field of contemporary art since receiving her B.A. in Studio Arts from Bennington College. Thomas holds an M.A. in East Asian Studies from Columbia University and she is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Art Theory & Philosophy with the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. She is the founding director of AW Asia in New York.

JOSHUA DILDINE: NOTATING HI POPS

Freight + Volume - New York

By Keren Moscovitch



Joshua Dildine, *False May Minds*, 2015, acrylic, spray paint, oil on canvas, 48" x 36." Courtesy of the artist and Freight + Volume, New York.

Joshua Dildine’s astute solo exhibition at Freight + Volume addresses issues of memory, the archive, family dynamics and technology. An examination of the ways his work leaps off the wall and enters our consciousness may help elucidate the discourse it provokes. In short, to see a Dildine on the wall of a gallery is to look at a painting—a sensitively gestural work of art that reveals its process below the surface of its brush strokes and saturates the viewer’s field of vision with color, action and surface. To see a series of Dildines on a Web site or in a gallery checklist, reduced to two-dimensional flatness and devoid of their distorting scale, reveals another aspect to their meaning, one that is directly tied to the photograph that originated the piece and its violent resolution.

Walter Benjamin warned that a work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is robbed of its aura. Dildine’s recently completed series “Notating Hi Pops” plays with this proverbial sacrificial lamb from multiple directions and on parallel timelines. Dildine prints old family photographs onto large canvases and then attacks them with aggressive, yet graceful mark-making in paint, ink and mixed media collage. Speaking directly from the sensibility of a generation that has grown up looking at “vintage” photographs as throwbacks of another era on up-to-the-minute social media sites, he comments upon a layer of historical narrative in which the image is divorced from its physical context. The photograph itself becomes a character in a contemporary drama, immersed in a process of transformation and flux.

In *False May Minds*, the photograph hiding behind an expressionistic flair of swirling paint seems to be that of a young child lounging on a father, sprawled upon a cozy suburban couch. The once-white high-top sneakers peaking out from below acid wash jeans reveal the scene as

harkening a time recent enough to feel comfortingly familiar, yet distant enough to carry the weight of nostalgia. The two bodies seem to merge into one behind the veil of gyrating forms, constructing a hybrid creature of limbs and retro fabric. The tangled mass of parent and child implies an intense intimacy, palpable and untouchable. Dildine’s painting method is almost digital in its ability to suggest photographic blur, and psychedelic in its relationship to vision. Elements are copied and pasted within the domestic scene, never allowing the viewer to forget the manipulation enacted by digital technology on memories and representations.

Several paintings feature distorted and hidden faces and the assumption that below the scratches, spray paint, cutouts and other annihilating gestures lie the wide smiles of performed domesticity. *Dancing Sharp* leaves little opportunity for analysis, and seems to take its meaning from obfuscation. The composition’s opacity begins with the deep astronomical abyss replacing one face and continues to the crocheted mask covering the other’s, while the inversion of the entire image forces a disorientation and sense of doom. *Damn Matte* takes the sacrilegious approach of desecrating an infant’s visage, his joyful laughter replaced by disruptive gashes of men’s shirt fabric, seemingly displaced from another location, work of art or recollection.

We don’t learn much about Dildine’s upbringing from his artwork; rather, we are invited to confront our relationship to personal history and the ways that we have gotten used to superimposing the domestic space onto the public sphere, gaining and losing meaning in the process. Dildine reminds us that despite our access to information, truly intimate moments remain quarantined in psychic seclusion. ■

(May 21 – July 8, 2015)



Melanie Daniel, *Patchwork Landing*, 2015, oil on canvas, 55" x 63." Courtesy of the artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

MELANIE DANIEL: PIECEMAKER

Shulamit Nazarian – Los Angeles

By Megan Abrahams

In her series of dreamlike landscapes characterized by a surreal palette and tantalizing symbolism, Melanie Daniel presents an alluring synthesis of divergent ideas, disparate cultural references, a confluence of forms and narrative clues. The title of the exhibit, “Piecemaker,” provides an overt insight into the evolution of the artist’s unique worldview. A North American term for quilter, the name refers obliquely to Daniel’s Canadian roots. Born in British Columbia, the artist moved to Israel 20 years ago and has lived in the culturally diverse city of Haifa for the last seven years.

Given its technical elegance and entrancing use of color, the work is compelling even without considering the depth of underlying meaning. Daniel’s background landscapes are infused with the sensibility and tradition of her Canadian forebears, bringing to mind artists such as A.Y. Jackson of the formative Group of Seven. Superimposed upon this foundational Canadian vernacular—vast expanses of land, towering forests, fields of snow—are a variety of unrelated motifs transposed from the artist’s life in Israel, which populate her vantage point and are adapted to her imagery. Curiously, in Daniel’s lexicon, the flower-like, eight-pointed Arabesque star, a recurring motif, derives from a traditional pattern on North American quilts rather than the iconic Islamic symbol.

It’s not surprising to observe a considerable undercurrent of ambiguity in these paintings. In *Woah Cowboy Pinky* (2015), the sky is a surreal, desert-like pink, but the figure could be envisioned camping out on the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. By profound contrast,

Moon Song (2015) implies the desert. The vertical trajectories of palm trees poke out in striking juxtaposition from a flat landscape in front of the yellow background sky. In place of the sun, an orb with an Arab motif is suspended above a green cloud.

Patchwork Landing (2015) evokes a landscape painted by Emily Carr on acid. Tree trunks—one painted like a totem pole—emerge from a mysterious desert setting. In the background, a blue striated sky features vertical green and yellow areas echoing the thrust of the tree trunks. A quilted eagle hovers in the sky.

Daniel’s paintings elude static modes of classification, comfortably straddling the boundary between figurative and abstract. The largest and most prominent, *The Drifting Patch Tree* (2015), is dominated by gorgeous violets strategically counterpointed with cerulean and phthalo blues. The composition gives the impression of abstraction until careful study reveals flowers, leaves, stems, a sky above a decapitated tree, and a female figure in a colorful cardigan and striped skirt looking upward from a foreground suggesting desert.

The work is layered with intriguing allusions to the artist’s make-up as a longtime expatriate in a foreign country rife with sociopolitical discord. Although perhaps unintended, “Piecemaker” could be construed as the subconscious vision of a utopian universe in which conflicting cultural worlds coexist in harmonious beauty, as they appear to in the artist’s mind. ■

(May 21 - July 9, 2015)

Megan Abrahams is a Los Angeles-based writer and artist. A contributing writer for WhiteHot Magazine of Contemporary Art since 2009, she also writes for Art Ltd. Megan studied fine art in Canada and France and received her M.A. from the University of Southern California School of Journalism. She is currently writing her first novel.



Noah Purifoy, *Ode to Frank Gehry*, 1999, installed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) for the exhibition "Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada," © Noah Purifoy Foundation. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

NOAH PURIFOY: JUNK DADA

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Curated by Franklin Sirmans and Yael Lipschutz

By Megan Abrahams

Two bicycles loom near the gallery ceiling from their daredevil perch high on a slanted ramp atop a large trapezoid. Suspended in time and space, the repurposed bicycles are standout components in one of Noah Purifoy's constructions, seen here after a momentous journey to Los Angeles from their desert home. Just as Purifoy recontextualized literal junk, using it as the medium for his inventive and idiosyncratic assemblage creations, this first monographic exhibition of the artist's extraordinary oeuvre transplants his work into a fresh context, reconfiguring our perceptions of his legacy. Mounted in an intriguing, mostly chronological sequence in the pristine setting of LACMA, the exhibit is a transformative tour de force. Among the most stunning features are eight, large-scale, outdoor assemblage sculptures created by the artist in the Mojave Desert, where he moved in 1989, drawn by the quality of the ambient light and opportunity to pursue his visionary work in solitude.

Created in the last 15 years of his life, the constructions, as Purifoy called them, became fixtures of the desert in which they were conceived. As exhibits in the Noah Purifoy Foundation's Joshua Tree Outdoor Museum, the pieces are rarely seen outside the desert, where they co-exist with the vast landscape, small in proportion to miles of terrain and endless sky, mutable with the variable weather and light. Seen in a museum setting, they assume a new gravitas,

framed by a finite background of walls and outdoor urban spaces, which they dominate in scale, grace, humor and eloquence.

Purifoy referred to these large-scale assemblage pieces as environmental sculptures. Comprised of seemingly random assorted found objects—burnt wood, scrap metal, computer components, tires, bicycles, discarded shoes and a miscellany of broken things—these and other pieces in the exhibit were assembled by the artist in such a way as to come together as wholly realized consummate compositions. He allowed the sculptures to remain exposed to the weather, intending them to naturally deteriorate in the elements. Largely thanks to this exhibit, Purifoy's works will remain indelibly imprinted in our consciousness.

The artist made an important statement for his time, one that continues to gather momentum, resounding with meaning in view of the prevailing racial dissonance confronting us today. It's illuminating to see these works in the current sociopolitical context. August was the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Watts riots, a pivotal catalyst in the artist's development as well as the source for much of the material he used in his groundbreaking 1966 exhibit, "66 Signs of Neon"—represented here through a number of assemblage works by Purifoy and other artists, including Judson Powell, Debby Brewer and Arthur Secunda. A founding director of the Watts Tower, Purifoy built his early body of sculpture out of the charred wreckage of the Watts rebellion. His work was about much more than simply repurposing found objects into art. Executed with vision and purpose, Purifoy's art was an instrument of social commentary, creating a profound organic beauty out of violence, calamity and the detritus of society. ■

(June 7, 2015 - January 3, 2016)



Katherine Taylor, *Almost White*, 2015, oil on canvas, 48" x 36."



Katherine Taylor, *Guard Rail*, 2015, oil on canvas 48" x 42." Images are courtesy of the artist and Marcia Wood Gallery.

KATHERINE TAYLOR: MOVING HORIZON

Marcia Wood Gallery - Midtown, Atlanta Ga.

By Jason Hoelscher

The automobile has played a variety of roles in modern art, whether the birth of Futurism after Filippo Tommaso Marinetti crashed his speeding car into a ditch in 1909, or Tony Smith's 1951 experience of suburban sublimity while driving on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. In her exhibition, "Moving Horizon," Katherine Taylor uses the automobile as a starting point as well, albeit in a somewhat less dramatic fashion: the point here seems less on epiphany than on prompting a new look at things easily taken for granted.

The paintings in "Moving Horizon" range from blurred but recognizable images on the one hand, to paintings that for all intents and purposes look like brushy, out of focus abstractions on the other. All are unified not only by a very limited color palette, but by the fact that they depict scenes glimpsed through an automobile window, at different speeds. The approach to landscape here is complicated—not only must the details be taken in quickly, but because over a half century the types of landscape that bound highways have settled into a kind of homeostasis—there often is not much to look at on either side of a highway.

This self-similar sparseness of the landscape combines with the fast-glance look necessitated by the speed of passage, allowing Taylor to focus on the space, paint and surface without getting bogged down in the tight rendering of detail. The most detailed components of these paintings are those elements that are closest, either the edge of the pavement or a guardrail; these, however, move by so quickly and are so linear that they appear more as abstract geometry than as

representation. While elements farther away have more variety, they are blurred by distance and so dissolve into their own different kind of abstraction. These inversely proportionate relationships between depiction, speed and space are shuffled, subtly folding back and contradicting each other. Determining the spatial registers is complex, like determining the space of a Möbius strip seen edgewise.

There is a nice pun that arises from the fact that each of the paintings depicts a scene glimpsed through a car window—an interesting update of Alberti's Renaissance notion of the picture plane as window. This pun is all the better since it is not specifically pointed out anywhere, but only emerges after a bit of consideration. Formalist puns and complex space aside, Taylor uses various strategies to assert the paintings as paintings. Seen from afar the paintings have a shimmering softness to them, which pulls the viewer in for a closer, absorptive look. Up close, however, each painting has some variety of marks that push the viewer back out, or which interrupt one's absorption into the painting. For one thing, the final layer of brushwork on each canvas is a fairly even horizontal mark that zips laterally right across the canvas, a materially present X-axis that counterpoints the desire to push back into the Y-axis of the atmospheric picture space. If these are picture planes as windows, the brushwork functions like streaks or smudges on poorly cleaned glass—the desire to look through the surface is frustrated by the qualities of the surface, but the luminosity of the depiction draws the viewer back in, only to be drawn back, and so on. This oscillation makes for a much more dynamic viewing experience than the initially serene first glimpse might suggest, making for a very compelling exhibition that works as both a quiet meditation on space and a complex consideration on frenetic speed. ■

(April 24 – May 16, 2015)



Verónica Vides, *Eslabón de Lujo (Luxury Link)*, from “*Plagas*” (*Plagues*) series, 2015, installation, 28 pieces, porcelain coated steel from Argentinean ‘Eslabón de Lujo’ washing machines, variable dimensions.

VERONICA VIDES: LUXURY LINK

The Americas Collection - Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

“Luxury Link” is Verónica Vides’ second solo show at The Americas Collection. Vides is a multidisciplinary Salvadorian artist who some years ago established her studio in Patagonia, Argentina. She has created a solid body of works that includes sculpture, video, photography, performance art and artistic actions, through which she captures that sublime beauty that lays hidden in everyday items and situations. Vides’ works have gained recognition worldwide, and she has participated in numerous individual and collective exhibitions in El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Australia, Argentina, Mexico and the United States. Through her career she has received major awards, and her pieces are part of the permanent collections of the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, Fundación Teorética, Costa Rica, Museo de Arte de El Salvador and Ortiz Gudián Foundation, in León, Nicaragua, among other institutions.

Vides has a keen perception of her surroundings and peculiar sensitivity for finding beautiful metaphors in nature. Her work is sustained and enriched by simple objects and situations that appear commonplace.

The exhibition title “Eslabón de lujo” (“Luxury Link”) alludes to a brand of Argentinean washing machines, popular in the 1960s, whose sheet metal was the raw material from which she created a

piece that bears the same name. All of the sculptures included in this show were created using metal refuse salvaged from Patagonian junkyards. “For some time, I have been working with the idea that the human species is the worst plague to inhabit this planet. I want to call attention to the fact that we are turning our planet into a vast dumping ground,” she says. In addition to the sculptural installation *Eslabón de Lujo* (2015), the exhibition included *Semillas de carro* (*Car Seeds*) (2015), with works created from auto scraps, reminiscent of butterfly cocoons, caterpillars and sea cockroaches. This series addresses the rampant consumerism that characterizes our culture. The annual production of automobiles is astronomical, as are the numbers of human beings acquiring them. Within a few years these cars will be scrapped, thereby contaminating the planet.

Since her early iron sculptures, Vides selected industrial waste that she recycled and transformed into pieces whose forms follow patterns established by the natural world, patterns that imitate the forms of insects, mangroves, roots, birds’ nests and animals, among others. Previously, the artist created iron spiders that appeared to float in the air, projecting shadows on a wall like imaginary spiders’ webs. Iron salvaged from the ruins of old construction projects gained new life thanks to her talent. For Vides, these works represent nature transformed by the tension between internal and external forces. The oxidation and corrosion caused by the passage of time carry a singular beauty and play on textures that she utilizes to reinforce her message. These works are explorations in space and materials, which the artist has been developing since 2001 and since “Trama,” a 2008 exhibition, expanded from the traditional



Verónica Vides, *Libros de cocina (Stove Books)*, 2013, fragments of a stove from a burned down home, 3.93" x 5.9" x 1.57."



Verónica Vides, *Semillas de carro (Car Seeds)*, from "Plagas" (Plagues) series, 2015, installation, 20 assembled parts made from fragments of old cars, 11.4" x 7.5" x 7.5." All images are courtesy of the artist and The Americas Collection, Miami.

limits of sculpture to fill the space of the gallery, creating a kind of giant embroidery; animal and vegetal forms made from twisted iron appeared to take shape, exiting and entering the walls like enormous stitches. As the art critic Virginia Pérez Rattón commented about "Trama," this recycling exercise deals with the artist's internal search for answers, one immortalized as silent narratives on the walls of the gallery.

In the exhibition at The Americas Collection, Vides also presented her iron books made from the fragments of stoves, heaters, cars and any iron objects whose form and texture caught her fancy. What was formerly scrap returns in these books, whose pages record vestiges of the passage of time and essence of unknown people and untold events.

Her proximity to nature turned closer and her knowledge of the relationship that human beings establish with their environment became more profound as a result of relocating with her family to Patagonia. Her works from the project "Open Studio on Blue River" include performances, interventions in nature and actions that border on activism¹. The exhibition includes eight photos from her piece *Mimetizada* (2011-2012), in which she intervened in nature for a year, blending into the landscape. This work proposes integrating the human being into the landscape without affecting the physiognomy of nature. "In this series, I intervene in natural landscapes near where I live as a metaphor for the action that we humans irretrievably practice on our environment. Whether we be few or many, regardless

of whether we are 'conscious' and careful with nature, we always bring about changes in her and in the worst case wreak irreversible contamination and destruction," Vides explains.

Another one of her works from this period, *Devoluciones* (2012), which was not included in this show, consisted of a performance during which the artist gathered pieces of plastic thrown in the rivers and forests near the community of El Bolsón. Then, clad with a mask made from woven plant fibers, she returned the pieces of polluting residue gathered during the artistic action to the inhabitants of that small town. This gesture transformed into social activism carries an implicit message, which calls attention to the invasive and negligent behavior of human beings that will end up destroying the planet.

Vides presents us with an oeuvre that observes, studies and explores human behavior. She rediscovers and finds poetry in the situations and via the materials she utilizes, constantly questioning the status quo and reflecting on existence and the role of man in the universe. ■

NOTES

1. Throughout her career, Vides has been involved in social activism, including in her native country, where numerous actions she took became the basis of important works such as *Limpieza* (2010), *La Barrida* (2010), *Comámonos el dulce* (2010) and *Trabajo barato* (2006). www.veronicavides.com.

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



ALEJANDRO PLAZA: IMAGINARIUM

Canale Díaz Art Center – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

Alejandro Plaza, *Come from above Nbr.2*,
2014, acrylic on canvas, 15.75" x 15.75."
Courtesy of the artist and Canale-Díaz Art Center.

“Imaginarium,” Alejandro Plaza’s first solo exhibition in the United States, consisted of a selection of recent works that showcased the vast spectrum of expressive possibilities he explores. Plaza develops an oeuvre that contains the spirit of today’s world permeated by the effects of the frantic pace of modern life and ephemeral experiences that inundate our daily lives.

A devotee of comics, Plaza tended toward illustration and graphic design at an early age. His visuality was enriched by the language of Geometric Abstraction, Kinetic and Op Art, which are part of the urban landscape in his native Caracas. Later on he lived and studied in Denmark, where he started painting, became familiar with the history of European art and was exposed to the work of the grand masters of painting. Upon returning to Venezuela, he pursued studies in illustration at the Design Institute in Caracas.

This exhibition reveals the visual universe of a generation born at the end of the 1980s, who grew up with cartoons, Walt Disney movies and Japanese anime, whose visuality is also closely tied to the aesthetic evolution of the video-game industry. It is a generation for whom experiences are above all ephemeral and interactive, for whom technology, the Internet and social networks are a natural part of daily life. Plaza has even incorporated social networks into his creations, by utilizing them not only to promote his work, but also by having his followers play an active part via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. He constantly shares photos of his studio and his new works with his followers and invites them to comment and become part of the creative process, thereby making this a media phenomenon.

“Imaginarium” brought together several series within Plaza’s artistic production—sculptures, portraits and canvases inspired as much by graffiti as by graphic and typographic design. Some sculptures are reminiscent of Salvador Dalí’s famous surrealist sofa inspired by the lips of Mae West; while others are objects—a Steinway piano and a Porsche—intervened with the artist’s painting, adapting it to the original utilitarian form and function of the object in question.

Plaza’s portraits are achieved in a language inspired by Hyperrealism and Pop art, immersed in a tangle of abstract-geometric lines and planes, which creates optical illusions on the surface of the canvas in the manner of Victor Vasarely or Venezuelans Carlos Cruz-Diez and Jesús Rafael Soto. For the most part, the subjects represented come from real life because the artist often takes photos of individuals, whose facial features he finds attractive, and then later inserts them into his pieces, modifying them in accordance with the situation and message he wishes to convey. Other works, like the series featuring his character Agatha Mouse, construct a narrative, as is done in cartoons, in which in “each delivery” the character is a protagonist in different imaginary stories that make reference to real-life problems and situations. Also of note in the exhibition are canvases, many of them large format, which appear to be extracted from a wall in any city in the world and incorporate graphic design elements, typography and characters from the world of pop.

“Imaginarium” evidenced how Plaza has already managed to construct an expressive language based on the development of his visual universe and synthesis of the diverse experiences that have enriched his work. ■

(August 7 - October 24, 2015)



Florencio Gelabert, *The Site*, 2015, styrofoam, stucco, rebar, found objects, construction debris, plumbing hardware, metal drum and bucket, 119" x 48" x 78.5." © Alejandro Taquechel, 2015.

JOURNEYS: A DIALOGUE WITH TIME

Miami Dade College Museum of Art + Design

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

Florencio Gelabert (born in 1961) started his artistic career 30 years ago in his native Cuba. From early on, his work has shown conceptually his interest in architecture and nature and formally his desire to break away from traditional sculpture. His last solo exhibition in Miami, "Journeys: A Dialogue With Time," was evidence of his long-standing interest in these matters, bringing together 11 sculptures and installations created exclusively for the show during 2014 and 2015, all of which were conceived by him while living in Cuba during the 1980s but never completed.

The space is dominated mostly by two installations, *Stella* and *The Site*; the first one located at the entrance to the main room in a very strategic location and the second further back in the gallery.

According to Gelabert, *Stella* was inspired by Mesoamerican burial steles. The idea behind the work and original sketches were born when the artist was a student, though he never completed the piece. But when Gelabert returned to Havana upon the death of his mother he found the original sketches and decided to make a finished product as a memorial to his mother, who was always fond of the concept. The piece consists of a large checkerboard of mirrors with 60 burned tree trunks positioned as if they were emerging from the floor. Upon close examination, the mirrors reflect the spectators, confronting each one with their own

visions of themselves in the context of destruction and renewal. A version of it was exhibited at the latest Havana Biennial, which completed the cycle of closure for the artist.

The second installation is *The Site*, which could be seen as a recreation of a destroyed building but still inhabited. The evidence of life is the running water through an improvised tube, which is then collected in one of the typical metal drums used in Cuba for this purpose, showing the ingenuity of solving daily needs, a cycle of decadence and regeneration. This theme was explored by Gelabert in 2011 in his show "Huellas" (Footprints) at Galería Villa Manuela in Havana. On that occasion the piece looked more like a space in which nature had taken over.

Ultimately, the installation is a sort of tribute to the old buildings of Cuba, which, in spite of barely surviving decades of neglect and urban decay, are still functional, and people still lives in them. *The Site* becomes a preamble for the following room, which features three pieces, titled *Ruin I, II and III*, respectively. They are like remains of walls, displayed as if mementos of a past time, showcasing Gelabert's anthropologic tendencies, marking him a sort of urban archaeologist who gathers fragments and memories of displacement.

"Journeys: A Dialogue With Time" showcases phases of Gelabert's passage from one place to another, and brings to conclusion incomplete chapters from the past. ■

(June 11 – August 16, 2015)

Irina Leyva-Pérez is an art historian and writer based in Miami. She is curator of Pan American Art Projects Gallery.



Javier Martín, *Dollar*, 2013, UV print on wood and mirror, 42.5" x 30.7." All images are courtesy of the artist and Valli Art.

JAVIER MARTÍN: ON WAR, CONSUMERISM AND OTHER HUMAN HOBBIES

Valli Art Gallery - Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

This fall, Valli Art exhibited at its space in the Wynwood Art District of Miami a selection of recent works by Javier Martín. The show gathered together 16 pieces that offer an insight into the creative strategy of this multidisciplinary artist whose work is based on clever observations of his surroundings, detecting in them semiotic relations that go unnoticed to inexperienced eyes. With this strategy, Martín constructs situations that invite reflection about critical issues that characterize today's world. The pieces presented on this occasion confronted us with such themes as immigration drama, wars, the growing global market of weapons and military technology, brands as a sign of social stratification, money as the center of human ambitions, the games and strategies of politics, the control of individuals by banks, rampant consumerism and deceptive standards of well-being promoted by media and advertising. As observers, we see ourselves reflected and confronted by the works of this artist, who weaves eloquent relations of meaning.

Martín is a self-taught artist who started at a very young age. Never enrolled in an art school, his work has not been influenced by formal artistic education. Instead, he preferred to explore disciplines such as carpentry, furniture painting and sign production, among other trades. These experiences allowed him to learn how to use different mechanical tools and explore the potentialities of the wide range of materials that today he incorporates into his work. On the other hand, his readings about the history of art and his visits to major exhibitions and museums around the world have provided him with the resources to create the solid body of work we appreciated in this show. Through his pieces, Martín suggests virtual dialogues between shapes, surfaces, textures, scenes and situations in which everyday objects talk to each other in unexpected ways. The viewer finds himself challenged by a

series of semantic associations that will be as numerous and disparate as the life experience of the individual in question is rich.

"War, Consumerism and Other Human Hobbies" assembled works completed during the last year, and I will focus on pieces that I find interesting from this selection. A huge photograph of the artist's hands coming out of the water and trying to grab the light opened the exhibition. This image represents a duality: on the one hand referring to the artist as an individual, creator of the concepts and messages presented in this show, and on the other, it points to the variables of creation and destruction. As Martín explained, "This image is a symbol of how man can use his hands for good or evil." From this point of departure, visitors could choose their preferred route along the exhibition, according to the pieces with which he or she most identified.

Blindness is an interesting recent series by the artist. The echo of "nothing is as it seems" resounds in these works like an unvoiced litany. In *Blindness*, Martín reproduces through paintings and collages images of seemingly perfect models, symbols of a canon of beauty and a lifestyle that most human beings on the planet crave to enjoy. Starting by appropriating the language of advertising, a strategy already promoted by Pop Art in the second half of the 20th century, Martín creates subtle relationships of meaning that involve the viewer in an unexpected dialogue with the pieces. Initially, the viewer might feel attracted by the beauty and perfection of the models, the same beauty that magazines and advertising have promoted *ad nauseum*. But then, when he carefully and more closely observes the works, he can see that those images are not so perfect or immaculate. The surfaces that have been constructed from the superimposition of collages and layers of paint produce faces and clothing that are not so smooth or attractive. Furthermore, the models' eyes



Javier Martín, *Social Reflection*, 2012, pigment print on paper, documentation of performance.



are hidden behind a neon light, a material paradoxically often used by the advertising industry. The eyes, typically windows into human emotions, are instead hidden behind a deceptive and unreal light.

His series of weapons made with the leather from genuine Louis Vuitton bags addresses in a startling way the theme of consumerism. Martín comments that the idea for this series came to him from observing how people in Paris stood in line at a Louis Vuitton store to buy the latest fashionable bag. This image returned to his mind when some time later he saw in the media images of people standing in line to receive a weapon to fight in a war. This analogy between two extreme human practices made him think of combining and making both situations coexist in the same piece so that the public could draw its own conclusions. The work also refers to the fact that often wars themselves, or increased consumption, and the resultant increased arms traffic to a certain extent generate much of the capital that later flows into the world economy and sustains the production and consumption of luxurious goods.

Another piece that dramatically alludes to the effect of war is *For All Those Without Voice*. In this photograph, the naked torso of a man reveals dozens of traces of scars and wounds. Martín was inspired by the image and the story of one of his best friends, an Iranian survivor of war. The artist enumerated each of the scars with a marker, creating an image that speaks for itself.

Several of the works assembled in this exhibition approach power and the different mechanisms that typify it. *The Cleansing of Power* is a cleaning brush with its handle made of gold leaf. By creating analogies between the utilitarian function of the object and the power symbolized by gold, the author invites us to reflect on how the strategies of power are sustained in cleaning obstacles and composing at its whim propitious scenarios, no matter what or who might be sacrificed along the way. *Dollar*, for its part, represents an enormous dollar bill with a mirror in the center substituting for the face of George Washington. The piece confronts the viewer with his own idea about the power of money and his role as subject and actor within the mechanisms that govern the worldwide economy.

Martín also included in this show the documentation of *Social Reflection*, a performance that took the urban space as its scenario,



Javier Martín, *The Cleansing of Power*, 2015, wood and gold leaf, 6" x 5" x 3."

placing in it a sculpture in which he has represented with hyperrealistic codes a homeless man strangely dressed in white. The figure is seated and begging for a handout on several corners of Spanish cities; instead of representing it by mimicking human features, his face is a mirror. This action that actively involves the most unexpected observer, the man on the street, re-creates in a gesture which reminds me of certain works of Mark Jenkins (or going further back Duane Hanson) in the sense that they constitute social experiments in which the artist challenges the observer to confront situations he believes himself to be safe from, but in reality he is not, because in a global economic panorama sustained by illusions that promise a false prosperity, no one is safe from falling.

"War, Consumerism and Other Human Hobbies" assembles a body of work inspired by Pop Art, Conceptualism and Post-Minimalism, which in many cases constitutes winks at figures from contemporary art such as Maurizio Cattelan, Jenkins, Juan Muñoz and Urs Fischer, among others. Martín demonstrates in this exhibition his ability to ingeniously manipulate and relate materials and situations, thereby weaving clever visual metaphors. ■

(September 24 – October 27, 2015)

**PETER EMMANUEL GOLDMAN:
LOVE, DESPAIR AND LONGING. NEW YORK-PARIS 1962-68**

ArtMedia Gallery – Miami

Curated by José Antonio Navarrete

By Irina Leyva-Pérez



Peter Emanuel Goldman, *Getting high, New York, ca. 1964*, archival fine art print, ink-jet print, 21.8" x 14.5," edition of 6. Courtesy of the artist and ArtMedia Gallery.

“Love, Despair and Longing. New York-Paris 1962-68,” Peter Emanuel Goldman’s latest show, at ArtMedia Gallery in Wynwood, was a selection of black-and-white photographs that inevitably takes us back to the 1960s.

Goldman was born in New York in 1939 and known as an independent filmmaker there. During the 1960s he made four films: *Echoes of Silence* (1964), *Pestilent City* (1965), *The Sensualists* (1965) and *Wheel of Ashes* (1968), all of which favorably attracted the attention of the critics in his time. However, up to recently he was largely forgotten, until last year when his first film *Echoes of Silence* was screened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and now with his solo show at ArtMedia Gallery.

As the title indicates, this group of images conveys precisely those feelings from an insider’s perspective. Goldman is obviously part of this group that he is documenting from behind the camera. According to him, some of the scenes for his photographs are “staged,” as if he was directing a film, thereby rendering some not as spontaneous as they seem. The contrast between an apparently spontaneous scene and a posed one can be seen by comparing *Lydia Admiring Herself* (1962) and *Birgit Posing* (1965). Lydia is standing in a casual posture, wearing only panties and looking at something in her hand, seemingly unaware of the camera; Birgit has very sexy underwear and is staring directly at the lens. Most of the photographs

were created around the same time that he was shooting *Echoes of Silence*, as well as the following year, so it is not a surprise that he would explore a similar thematic. Goldman, a filmmaker first and foremost, brings that same feeling to the photographs, which then become stills of life.

The intimacy of the scenes is due to his physical and emotional closeness to the subjects. This is like a visual diary of his life during this period, and the protagonists are his close friends and family. Nevertheless, there is not a common thread based on a particular narrative behind these images, and the story is not linear but fragmented. For instance, it portrays apparently ordinary scenes in the lives of these people, such as waiting for the train, as in *A Reflection Called Tired* (1965), or the drug culture of the period in *Getting High* (1964) and *Self-Rolled Medicine Against the Pain* (1965).

These photographs are marked by high contrast, achieved by an ingenious but simple use of light that is reminiscent of the film noir aesthetic. This aspect contributes to the impression that all were shot at night, despite the fact that some were created during the day. They capture the liberating spirit of the 1960s. Through Goldman’s lens we can see the tale of underground life in Paris and New York intimately portrayed, like windows into the past.

(May 22 – July 12, 2015)



Amandine Urruty, *The Book*, 2015, graphite on paper, 24" x 36." Courtesy of CASS.

CORROSIVELY BRIGHT

Contemporary Art Space & Studio – Tampa

An Exhibition of Earthly Delights

By Jon Seals

Amandine Urruty's work has been described as offering a "cheerful gallery of deviant portraits, associating grotesque outfits with baroque decorum which miraculously reconcile lovers of alchemistic symbolism to young ladies with too much makeup."¹ Indeed, Urruty's graphite compositions are packed with as many eccentric characters and wickedly playful scenarios as were exhibited in the "Corrosively Bright" show at Contemporary Art Space & Studio (CASS) in Tampa, Florida. Twelve artists² contributed work to the exhibition, flooding the gallery space with as much intensity and variety as those overfilling in attendance on opening night. Guests were ushered in by a live DJ perched atop a white half-wall room divider spinning music, playing the part of the Pied Piper late into the night and most noticeably providing the sonic pairing to the live-illustration battle for the local installment of *Secret Walls*, with Greg Mike, Denial, Bask and Frank Forte. Ten years ago, Terry Guy, inspired by Marvel comics and graffiti, created the *Secret Walls* art event, something he describes as the "Fight Club" of the art scene. First held in an East London bar, *Secret Walls* has since traveled the world hosted by various art venues throughout 25 countries.³

So this is what it might feel like to be on the wrong side of a Hieronymus Bosch landscape. Fashionistas and gallery goers' plates

were overfilled with luxurious portions of food and their cups were spilling libations. They were entertained with sets of live dueling artists, transfixed by the beats of the MC and surrounded by the slick acrylic paintings of Ben Frost created on McDonald's french fry containers, with the renderings of sharks spray painted directly onto the gallery walls by artist Shark Toof. The lines blurred between reality and magical realism, and it was difficult to define the edges of performance, art and actuality. I was dizzy from the sensory overload until the quietly disturbing whispers of Urruty's work invited my attention like the aroma of a match blown out. Her drawings were not an escape into another world, nor embellishments of reality. They did not entertain, but rather functioned as a fun-house mirror reflecting the Dionysian pop-culture celebrations I found myself in the midst of. I found refuge in her subtle and careful graphite marks exquisitely polished to perfection in each work that were void of color, like ghosts among the living. My own reflection, as well as the exhibition, was brought to order through her peculiar mirror filled with a "cheerful gallery of deviant portraits." ■

NOTES

1. www.amandineurruty.com/biography/

2. Participating artists include Amandine Urruty, Andrea Wan, Bask, Ben Frost, Chris Buzzelli, Denial, Frank Forte, Greg Mike, Indie 184, Rich Simmons, Shark Toof, and Yoskay Yamamoto.

3. www.theseecretwalls.com.

Jon Seals is a master's candidate in religion and visual arts at Yale Divinity School and Yale Institute of Sacred Music and teaches a course called "Exploring the Arts of New York City" at The College of New Rochelle. He holds an MFA in painting from Savannah College of Art and Design.



Left to Right:
 Rodney McMillian, *Stumps In Plain Sight*, 2008-14, latex on bedsheet, 109.5" x 70"; *Untitled (for Francine Hughes)*, 2008-14, latex, acrylic & ink on bedsheet, 100" x 84"; *Untitled (tongue)*, 2014, latex on bedsheet, 100" x 70." Photo: Tony Prikryl.

RODNEY MCMILLIAN: LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Aspen Art Museum

By Craig Drennen

If described empirically, Rodney McMillian's solo exhibition in the Aspen Art Museum's downstairs gallery would seem to be overcrowded. The 10 abstract paintings nearly abutted each other in the enclosed gallery space, bright as carnival posters but silent as tapestries. McMillian is a Los Angeles artist known for his installations and performances as much as for his paintings. The exhibition title "Landscape Painting" was perhaps an irreverent mislead since, if anything, the pieces were anti-landscapes. Each piece was made using a direct, primarily poured application of latex paint onto used bed sheets and blankets that the artist purchased from thrift stores. In many instances the price tag was still attached, and apparently \$2.99 is the going rate for used sheets and blankets.

A pedestrian argument could be made for landscape references witnessed in the topographical effects accumulating on the paintings' surfaces thanks to the indeterminate coagulation of the paint. A more resonant argument could be made that the history of landscape painting is a history of grand approximations larger than the artists' body, as in Jacob Ruisdael's big-sky depictions of Protestant Holland, or the Jackson-era acquisitiveness of the painter's eye demonstrated by the Hudson River School. McMillian's works in this exhibition rejected the traditional ideologies of landscape painting by relocating attention to the paint itself being in bed, the safe and intimate place where the body belongs.

In several pieces, such as *Site #3: Stumps In Plain Sight* (2008-14), the paint spilled off the surface and down onto the floor of the exhibition space. The paintings that did this appeared to step cautiously toward viewers with the reserve of a Greek *kouros* fig-

ure. The abstract vocabulary McMillian prefers undergoes radical transformation thanks to his choice of supports. If his same painterly gestures were executed on traditional canvases then they might blend in with the academic abstractions one sees in regional university libraries. But when his painterly action takes place on worn bed linens, modernist neutrality is unsustainable, and the pieces turn the site of abstract painting into a place of potential trauma. It's easy to anthropomorphize the paint itself since it appears agitated and unsettled on the very surfaces where it should feel restful and safe.

McMillian states in the exhibition catalog that these abstractions allow him to make known "an act of not being able to articulate lived pain." That seems consistent with the visual impact of the exhibition as a whole. Yet closer inspection of individual works reveals something even more complex than the heart-heavy look of a birthing gone awry: Some of the works open up into a place of unexpected humor. In *Untitled (tongue)*, it becomes eventually clear that the large magenta monochrome on the wall is actually sticking its tongue out at viewers—to delayed comic effect. This useful foil proves how McMillian's formal inventiveness may evolve the initial conditions of a piece towards an unexpected finish. Stated another way, each piece in McMillian's exhibition may have been begun in the darkness of a tunnel, but many of them finish near the light at the end. ■

(March 27–June 28, 2015)

Craig Drennen is an artist based in Atlanta.

COVERED IN TIME AND HISTORY. THE FILMS OF ANA MENDIETA

Katherine E. Nash Gallery - Minneapolis
Curated by Lynn Lukkas and Howard Oranksey

A Double Displacement

By Christina Schmid



Ana Mendieta, *Volcán*, 1979, Super 8 film, color, silent. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.

Ana Mendieta's art historical significance can hardly be overstated. Her performances in the 1970s and early 1980s were not only inspired by the allure of prehistoric art but also engaged with events of the day, such as the rape and murder of one of her fellow students in Iowa City in 1973. Unapologetically feminist, her work emphasizes the body, marked by race and gender, and her relationship to the earth, Cuban roots, and spiritual affinities. Until recently, her prolific practice lived on in sculptural objects, photographs that document her often site-specific work, and installations to revive the visceral immediacy of her work: in a recent retrospective, an arrangement of black candles in the shape of a female silhouette greeted visitors, the melting wax in a state of constant embodied transience. Now, for the first time, the artist's films are on view in the United States. Curated by Lynn Lukkas and Howard Oranksey, "Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta" features twenty-one films, all but one digitally transferred super-eight recordings.

Elegantly veiled, the Katherine E. Nash Gallery provides a spacious yet intimate setting to experience Mendieta's films. Grouped by the artist's engagement with different elemental forces, the films are mesmerizing: smoke billows, blood drips, water shimmers, and flames leave charred marks in their wake. *Ochún* (1981), the only film shot on U-matic video, includes a soundtrack of waves and gulls. Accompanied by several suites of photographs that, at times, document the same performance as one of the films on view *Volcán* (1979), the exhibition allows an unprecedented perspective on Mendieta's oeuvre. A handsome hardcover catalog provides additional information about the artist's work and life, as does the short documentary *Nature Inside* by Raquel Cecilia Mendieta, which includes the artist's voice recorded during an artist talk in 1981.

While the films document dynamic, site-specific work, the camera itself remains mostly motionless. Gunpowder ignites, sizzles and burns, tracing Mendieta's famous female silhouettes. Outdoor performances show the artist's body, nymph-like, floating in a creek. In *Burial Pyramid* (1973), a pile of rock slowly tumbles, unearthing her naked body breathing below. In later films, the camera moves to situate Mendieta's work among Mexican ruins, in Cuban caves, or by the seashore. In *Moffitt Building Piece* (1973) the camera placement is even more deliberate. Shot from inside a parked car, the film directs the viewers' gaze from the red bloodstain on the sidewalk to the reactions of passersby. Aside these few notable exceptions, the films offer stationary shots that record the artist's acts and actions.

Given the nature of Mendieta's work, deeply invested in the body, place, and the life and death of materials, it is difficult to see the films as anything other than documentation. In fact, that is how the artist herself describes them in the 1981 artist talk featured in *Nature Inside*. While super-eight still bears a sense of the material's life in its very vulnerability to scratches and decay, digitization doubly displaces the presence of Mendieta's work. Digital files may be more immune to the passing of time, but the heart of the work beats elsewhere. The digital can only hint at the immediacy and profound aliveness of the body of her work. Something intangible but vital is lost in translation. ■

(September 15 – December 12, 2015)

Christina Schmid is a writer, teacher, editor, and critic, who lives and works in the Twin Cities. She is a regular contributor to Flash Art and Afterimage.

REVIEWS

JACK WHITTEN: FIVE DECADES OF PAINTING

Walker Art Center -
Minneapolis
Curated by Kathryn
Kanjo

Hip to the Stars

By Christina Schmid



Jack Whitten, *Apps for Obama*, 2011, acrylic on hollow core door, 84 x 91 in. Collection of Danny First, Los Angeles ©Jack Whitten/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

The paintings sing. Lines dance across the uneven terrain created by countless colorful tesserae of dried acrylic paint. Mosaics of paint pay homage to musicians and writers of African-American descent. Jack Whitten's retrospective, humbly titled "Five Decades of Painting," is a tour de force. Curator Kathryn Kanjo of the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego selected chapters in the painter's life with great savvy: The show reveals a mind constantly looking for new modes of expression, deeply engaged in a material dialogue with paint and its possibilities while, at the same time, aware of the urgency of expressing and representing African-American experiences.

The chronology of "Five Decades of Painting" begins in the 1960s, when Whitten produced paintings in haunting black and white, titled *The Blacks* (1963), *Head IV Lynching* (1964) and *Hide and Seek* (1964). Part of the era of the Civil Rights Movement, Whitten's work is unapologetically political and painfully beautiful. His move to New York later in the decade coincided with the heyday of Abstract Expressionism. Willem de Kooning particularly left a mark in this realm before Whitten pursued a path less enthralled by the mystique of self-expression and more committed to plumbing the space between individual and shared experiences of culture, history and art. In 1970, the Afro comb became his tool of choice. Dragged horizontally across wet paint, the parallel lines left in its wake became stand-ins for history's unfolding. These rakings were not Whitten's only experiments in paint.

In the early 1970s, works such as *Prime Mover* (1974) and *Pink Psyche Queen* (1973) focused on an expanded painterly

vocabulary: acrylic, smeared with squeegee, continues Whitten horizontal histories but considers the material's symbolic significance: drying, the paint turns skin-like, shredding in places. Seen as a continuation of the earlier raked history paintings, these colorful abstractions come complete with holes, rips and tears. Yet the line does not disappear. In a body of work that dates to the late 1970s, Whitten disturbed the smooth geometry of parallel lines by placing metal plates underneath his canvases. These "disruptor plates" challenge the linear progression and suggest that there are other ways to keep time, tell history and move, not just forward but sideways and every-which-ways.

Whitten's profound engagement with both history and current events remained constant in his later work. Notable among the artist's many achievements is his mastery of affective registers. He celebrates black culture in his acrylic-mosaic homages to African-American stars, pays tribute to the children of Sandy Hook Elementary School, and memorializes the victims of 9/11 in a stunning painting that collages ashes, blood and acrylic skins marked by tire tracks. From the deeply introspective *Soul Map* (2015) to the tongue-in-cheek *Zeitgeist Traps (for Michael Goldberg)* (2009) and *Apps for Obama* (2011), this retrospective is a must-see, ideally in conjunction with the in-gallery performances by poets, dancers and musicians who converse and play with Whitten's work. ■

(September 13, 2015 – January 24, 2016)

AMANDA COOGAN: I'LL SING YOU A SONG FROM AROUND THE TOWN

Royal Hibernian Academy - Dublin

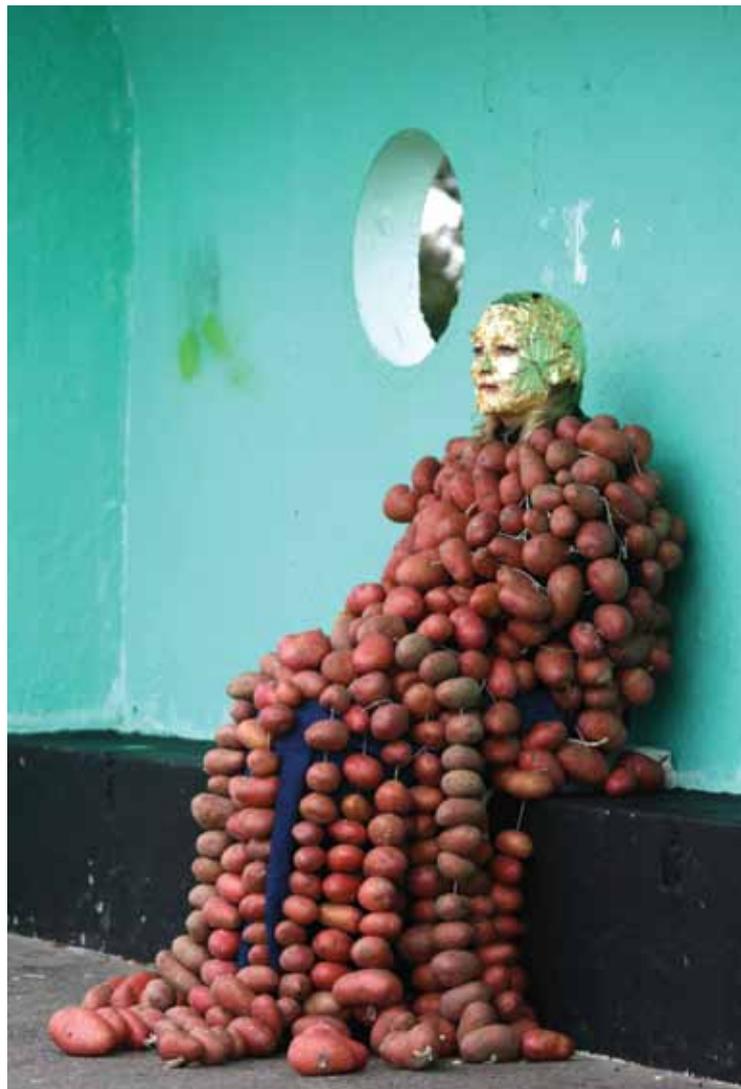
By EL Putnam

A woman is wearing a chain of white down coats; her gestures are minimal, a body on the threshold of stillness and movement. She excretes a bubbly, blue liquid slowly from her mouth, staining the garments that already carry traces of spittle, creating an abstract watercolor on an unusual canvas. I have come upon Tara Carroll re-performing Amanda Coogan's durational performance work *Bubble Up in Blue* as part of Coogan's mid-career retrospective exhibition, "I'll Sing You a Song from Around the Town." Inevitably, performance art presents challenges for curation, especially retrospective exhibitions. How to strike a balance between the ephemerality and liveness that is a trademark of performance art on the one hand and the archival impulse on the other?

I visited the exhibition on multiple occasions, with each instance imbuing a different experience. In one gallery, artifacts from selected performances come alive. These material objects—coated in fingerprints, smears, tears, trails of colored spit—define a presence that makes the absence of bodies all the more apparent. These performance artifacts have impressive sculptural qualities in their own right—rich folds of colored cloth, embedded with traces of performance actions. Considering that Coogan specializes in durational work, these pieces are rich with corporeal and gestural remnants. As part of the exhibition, each week Coogan re-performs a work, then turns it over to a collaborator who takes her place as she moves on to another piece. Like a rhizome, the energy of the work grows and diversifies. Performances only take place in five-hour blocks, Wednesday through Sunday. When performances are not occurring, the installation of artifacts evokes uncanny sensations. Artifacts designed to fit the forms of human bodies, like the six-belted dresses of *Yellow* seated upright, take on a haunting quality when uncoupled, like a *tableau vivant* of the rapture.

In a second gallery, piles of television monitors play documentation of Coogan's performances. The onslaught of kinetic imagery provides a strong contrast to the gallery containing performance artifacts though continues its provocative engagement with the viewers. The looping, repetitive actions may begin appearing silly or frivolous, but as they continue—such as rubbing her nude, soapy buttocks until it is red or consuming chocolate for eight hours—they take a discomfiting turn. The tension between the playfulness of Coogan's actions with the distress of durational performance is a notable quality of her practice. For example, in *How to Explain the Sea to an Uneaten Potatoe*, Coogan wears a dress comprised of 62 kilograms of potatoes (her body weight), with her head covered in gold leaf. The title and gold leaf alludes to how the work is a witty take on Joseph Beuys' actions. While being a physically demanding piece, it also playfully references Irish culture through the absurdity of a woman dressed in potatoes. This piece is not re-performed during the exhibition, though its sprouting remnants occupy a plinth, offering a material testimonial of Coogan's gestures.

In addition to artifacts, re-performance and video, documentation for *The Passing* includes an interview with Coogan, Boston-based performance artist Marilyn Arsem, and other witnesses of the performance. In this work, which was originally presented at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston over the course of 24 hours, Coogan slowly made her way up and down the stairs of the then-new Linde Family Wing for



How to Explain the Sea to an Uneaten Potatoe, Photographic still from live performance at The Bull Walk, Clontarf, Dublin, Duration 4 hours. © Amanda Coogan. Photo: Damien McGlynn. Courtesy of Amanda Coogan and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin.

Contemporary Art. The observations are thoughtful and intimate, giving insight both into Coogan's motivations and determination as the work unfolded, as well as her witnesses' reflections. One of the drawbacks of performance art is that the performer can't experience a work from an audience member's perspective as it unfolds—she never gets a full sense of how a work comes to be. As a form of documentation, the interview with witnesses allows the piece to become more multifaceted, stringing together different voices and intimate perspectives that flesh out a richer sense of the piece that photographs and video cannot do alone.

As "I'll Sing You a Song From Around the Town" displays an overview of Coogan's artistic oeuvre, it pulsates with the energy that makes performance art such an exciting form of creative expression. It takes advantage of performance's immersiveness and emphasis on presence. At the same time, the exhibition communicates what makes Coogan a distinctive practitioner in a scene in which it seems that many claim the moniker "performance artist" at one point or another. ■

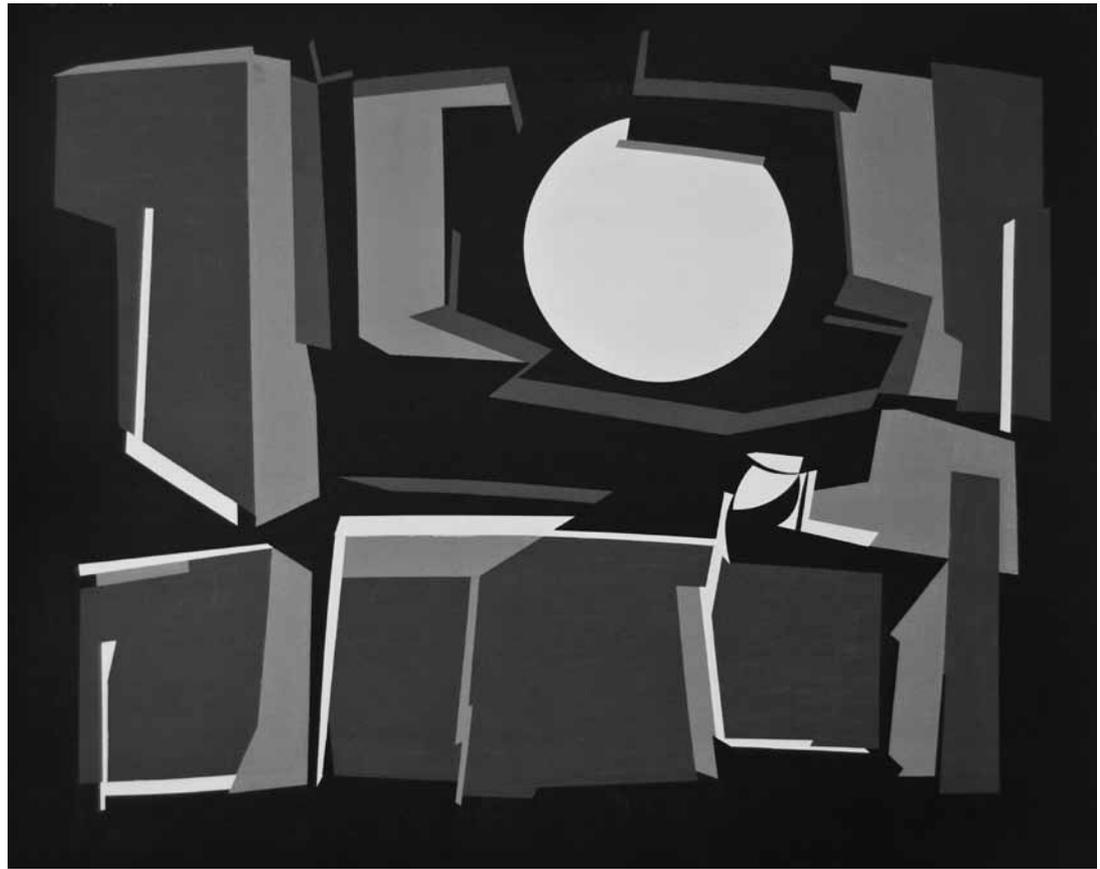
(September 4 – October 18, 2015)

EL Putnam is a visual artist, scholar, writer and lecturer based in Dublin. She is currently working on her research monograph, *Venice Biennale: Freedom Under Erasure* (Atropos Press, 2016). She received her PhD from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts and currently teaches visual arts and media studies at Dublin Institute of Technology and Maynooth University.

**PEDRO DE ORAÁ:
COMPLEMENTARY
OPPOSITES II**

Villa Manuela - Havana

By Beatriz Gago



Pedro de Oraá, *Untitled*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 39.37" x 31.5." Courtesy of the artist and Villa Manuela.

“But there will always be the sullenness of one who is startled at hearing speak of ovoid forms, but nevertheless demonstrates his complacency by staring at a pearl in Stendhal’s cravat.”¹

—José Lezama Lima

In art there are no inert supports on which pure form settles. The plane and referent are two rivals that cohabit and are not able to exclude each other without destroying themselves; they are two parts of a whole.

The exhibition “Contrarios complementarios II” (Complementary Opposites II), on display at Villa Manuela in Havana this past summer, was organized into several main ensembles in which the parts are related to each other like polyptychs. The first of them was formed by elements that have been extracted from nature, as they originally appear. Defined as realist by the author, the referents utilized by Pedro de Oraá speak to the multiplicity of levels on which a keen eye can perceive and read the signs that inhabit our environment.

In the rest of the ensembles, the artist applies to these primitive forms his personal equation extracted from a mathematical certainty: space-time variability. On the strength of this approach, he subdues the pieces, puts pressure on the equilibrium, and as a result, the constituent elements, said cohabitants, in unison transform into a united extension.

It should be noted that such “alter” forms cannot be discerned by untrained sensibilities; as such, they do not pertain to ordinary space. The effect only becomes visible when the viewer stands in certain particular positions—for example, upon entering the area with intense seriousness or when acceding control to the visual poetry. De Oraá then offers us these other compositions or groupings of aesthetic efficacy, resulting from a distortion in vertical or horizontal movements. At the same time, he relies on the rationality of black and white, in their extreme austerity, to focus the attention of this intellectual exercise on the infinite ways in which existence is possible.

In the final analysis, each thing in the universe is a result of its own circumstance.

Claudia Taboada’s impeccably directed curatorship is perfectly orchestrated in almost minimalist fashion, free of any attempt at controversy or antagonism, and delivers a pristine image of the whole, a fresh example of painting and an exercise in contemporary logic.

The artist says all of his work is anchored in reality and, at the same time, defines it as decidedly abstract. Abstraction, as the analytical channel of art, never intended to deny reality but rather reencounter it in the simplicity of its basic forms, to analyze the level of the essences in the artistic form, returning to representation, which had been born stripped of a life of its own and conceived of as a reflection—its ability to contain a movement, vary in time or emit light; in summary, to transform at will instead of just pretending to do so.

This is where de Oraá tries to reconcile through this formal and conceptual undertaking two fundamental, and for a long time opposing, attitudes in the visual arts.

So that we may glimpse the secret intention that his paintbrushes possess, he transforms lumps into strokes and his exhibition of paintings into documentation. He artistically materializes his eternal obsession with the means of converting what Lezama would call “the eternal triangularity of the triangle”² into petaloid stone or a simple, singular “ovoid shape” housing a critical mass that invariably draws us to it. ■

(July 17 – August 24, 2015)

Notes

- 1- Lezama Lima, José. “Rayas y pez raya en el papel rayado de Martínez Pedro”; in *Agua Territoriales* exhibition catalogue, Havana, 1963.
- 2- Op cit.

Beatriz Gago is an art critic based in Havana. For almost a decade, she has worked for Archivo Veigas, Arte Cubano in Havana and Ediciones Vanguardia Cubana in Madrid.



ALL THE WORLD'S FUTURES: THE 56TH VENICE BIENNALE

Curated by Okwui Enwezor

By Keren Moscovitch

Isaac Julien, *DAS KAPITAL Oratorio*, ARENA, Padiglione Centrale, Giardini. 56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia, "All the World's Futures." Photo: Andrea Avezzi. Courtesy of la Biennale di Venezia.

For over a century, the Venice Biennale has served as a staging ground for an international discourse on the ethos—and pathos—of the moment. The 56th edition, titled *All the World's Futures* and curated by the Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor, draws from a multitude of political and philosophical sources to present a predictably critical narrative about capitalism and the systemic global hegemony that supports it. The ARENA program, a series of performances and institutionalized happenings, helps to deconstruct the monolith of capitalism and showcase the methodologies and metaphors of the actions that resist it. A daily live reading of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, directed by artist Isaac Julien and touted by Enwezor as the "linchpin" of the exhibition, invites an interpretation of the age-old institution of the Biennale as a Marxist text in itself—a systematic analysis and unwavering critique of the underlying foundation of our society.

All the World's Futures is unquestionably dialectical in nature, with its emphasis on cross-platform discourses and historical contextualization of what Biennale president Paolo Baratta refers to as our "age of anxiety." Amidst the cacophony of this dangerously didactic exhibition runs a thread of poetics—an aesthetic bridge to what Baratta calls the artist's "inner song" and which Enwezor describes as "Liveliness: On Epic Duration," a "spatial and temporal manifestation that is relentlessly incomplete, structured by a logic of unfolding." This poetic cord, essential to lifting the foundation of protest into a space of existential rumination, interfaces with contemporary Marxist calls for a movement of creative resistance and suggests that such an overhauling of linearity supports what scholar and activist Franco "Bifo" Berardi calls for in a new revolutionary language that challenges capitalism. The works in this exhibition reflect multiple streams of commentary in overlapping layers of metanarratives, comprising what Berardi refers to as a "poetic revitalization of language"¹ and expose how creative practices can break through the dominant ideology of capitalist abstraction and bring us back to the sensuous.

Besides *DAS KAPITAL Oratorio*, other ARENA performances supplement Enwezor's attempt to dramatize the "aura, effects, affects, and specters of Capital" through Epic Duration. In *Latent Images: Diary of a Photographer*, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil

Joreige narrate the contents of Lebanese photographer Abdallah Farah's undeveloped rolls of film shot during his country's long and grueling civil war, referencing the meticulously detailed notebooks he kept in an attempt to index the lost images with language. The resulting polyphonic oration deconstructs the temporal and spatial order, frame by frame, as a series of references. By dismantling the visual experience of time, the artists re-define memory as a set of interpretations rather than snapshots of distinct moments. Through the act of leaving behind the physical representation of memory, the signifiers—the words, stories and metanarratives—become the primary content.

Another striking piece is Wangechi Mutu's video installation *The End of Carrying All*, which features the artist trudging through an African plain landscape carrying an increasingly heavy load of personal belongings until she reaches a precipice. Instead of the expected fall off the side of a cliff, the protagonist turns into a throbbing mass of energetic ooze and slides off the edge of the frame, signaling transformation and a break from physical constraints. Rather than a cinematic synchronicity between body and space, the background seems to move at a different pace than the steps the moving body indicates. Time appears to exist in a dimension of irrationality. Mutu literally slows down the process of migration and, by extension, the viewer/consumer's voyeurism and, arguably, manages to elicit empathy via a process of deceleration. It is precisely this compassionate space that is missing in the abstraction of capitalism and by which Mutu calls attention to a physical act representing a metaphysical experience of marginalization, displacement and deterritorialization.

By divorcing the sensuously "real" from verbal language, and elaborating meaning by expanding time and perception, these works are powerful examples of Enwezor's curatorial vision, proposing poetry as a revolutionary device and saving *All the World's Futures* from being merely a protest in the guise of an art exhibition. ■

(May 9 - November 22, 2015)

NOTES

1. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), Intervention Series. 2012.

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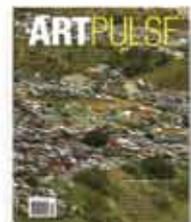
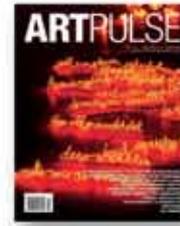
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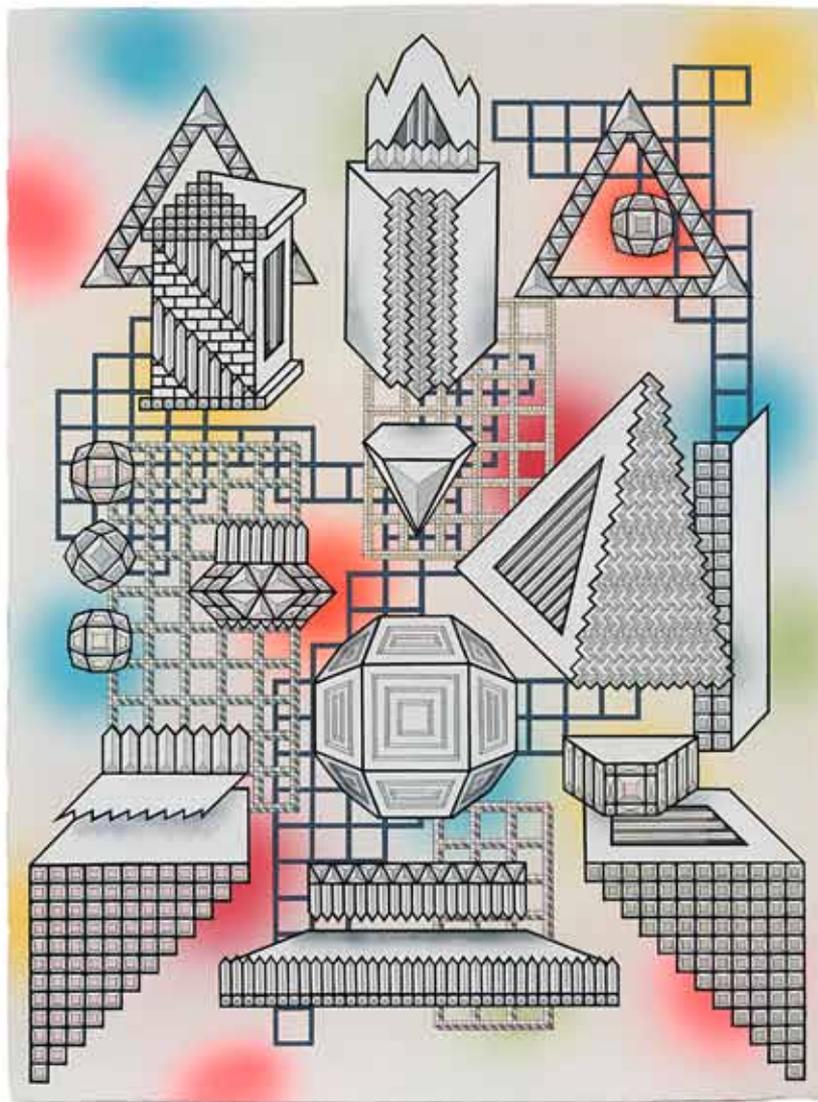
BEN STONE

The Dean

2010

manila rope on polystyrene, wire and steel; leather, varnish and enamel paint

48 x 29 x 24 in



EDIE FAKE

Ivory Tower

2015

gouache, ink and airbrush on paper

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Hans Aichinger, *Sonnenfinsternis (Solar Eclipse)*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 39.4 in, Courtesy Maerzgalerie, Leipzig | Berlin

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*Sueño de Navegante, 2015,
Bronze, 14.5 x 25 inches*

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