ARTPULSE

ARTPULSE NO. 22 | VOL. 6 | 2015
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Theodor Adorno, Art Criticism and the Digital Commons

Liz Deschenes

Lily Cox-Richard

Taylor Davis

Julie Heffernan

Rosa Barba's Metaphors

Marni Kotak: Performing Motherhood

Dialogues: Franklin Sirmans

Rashid Johnson

in Conversation with Oliver Kielmayer

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Kunsthalle Winterthur

Andy Holden – MI!MS
April 26 – June 21 2015

Gianin Conrad
July 5 – September 6 2015

Shaan Syed
September 27 – November 22 2015

Rashid Johnson, Michaels Eyes, Van Dyke Print, 36.25 x 24.5 inches

Featuring works by: Robert Colescott, Frank Bowling
Chakaia Booker, Sam Gilliam, Lucy Slivinski, Juan Logan
Rashid Johnson, Neha Vedpathak, Ed Clark, Al Loving
Hugo McCloud, Nanette Carter, Gregory Coates, Deborah Dancy
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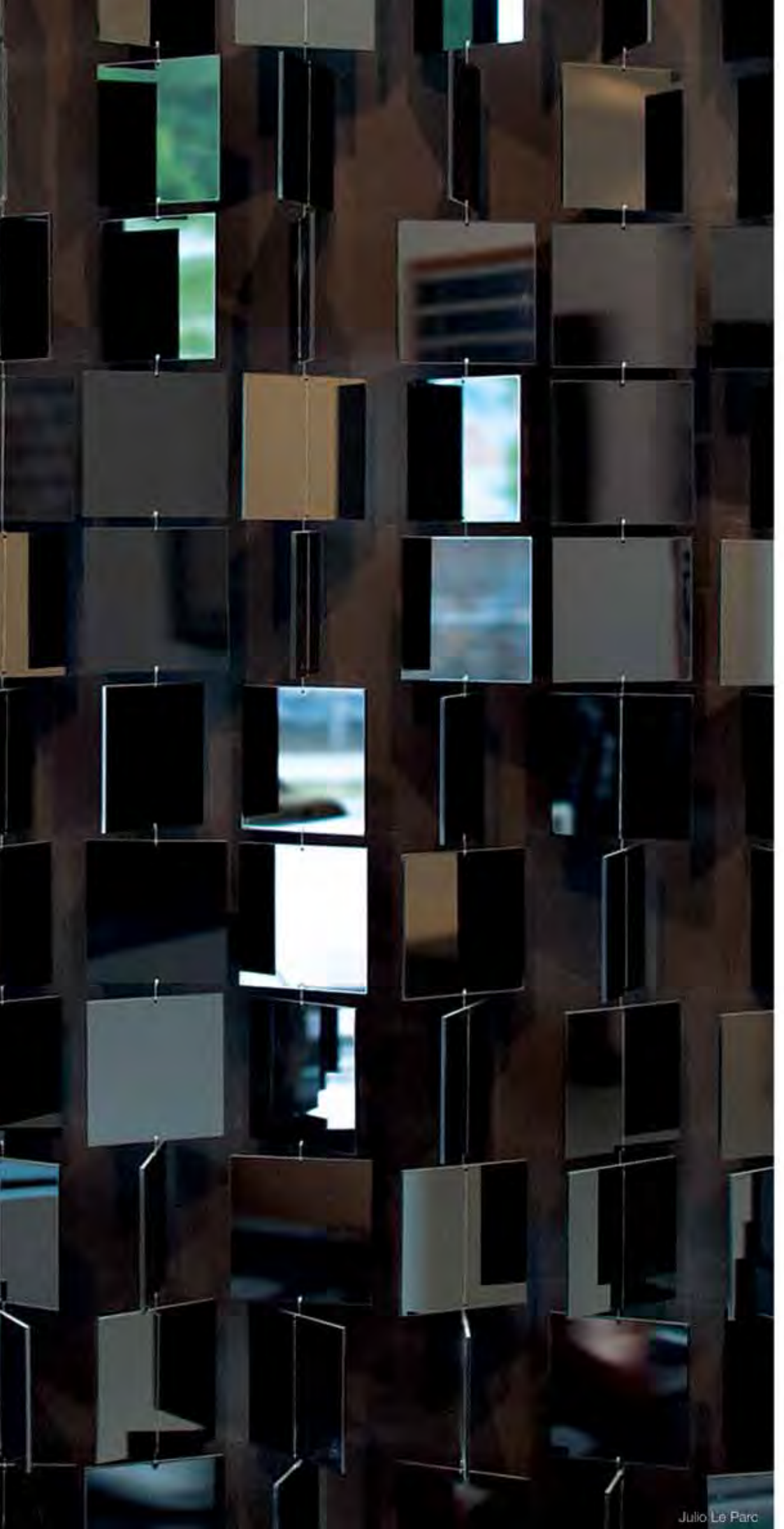

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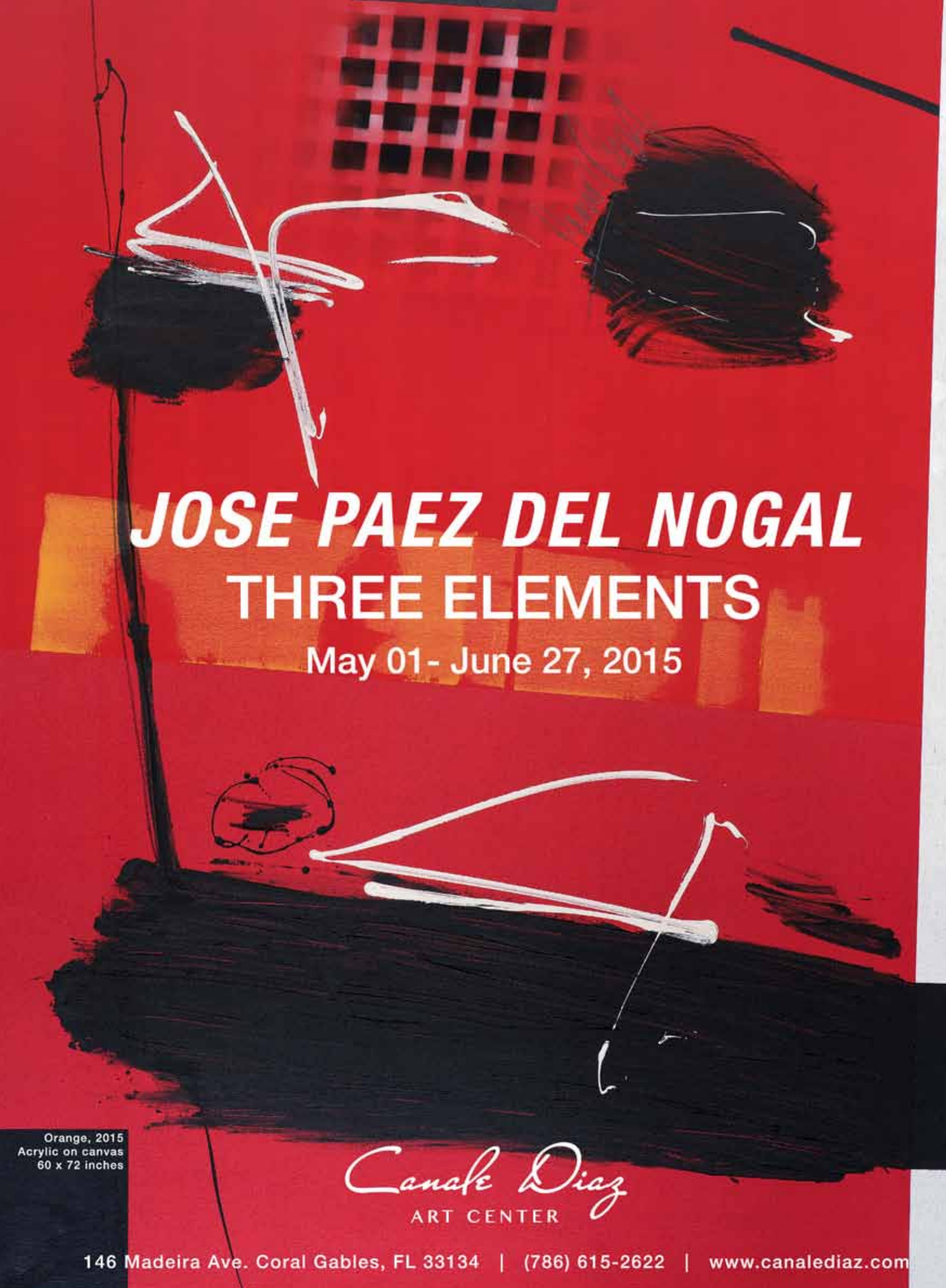

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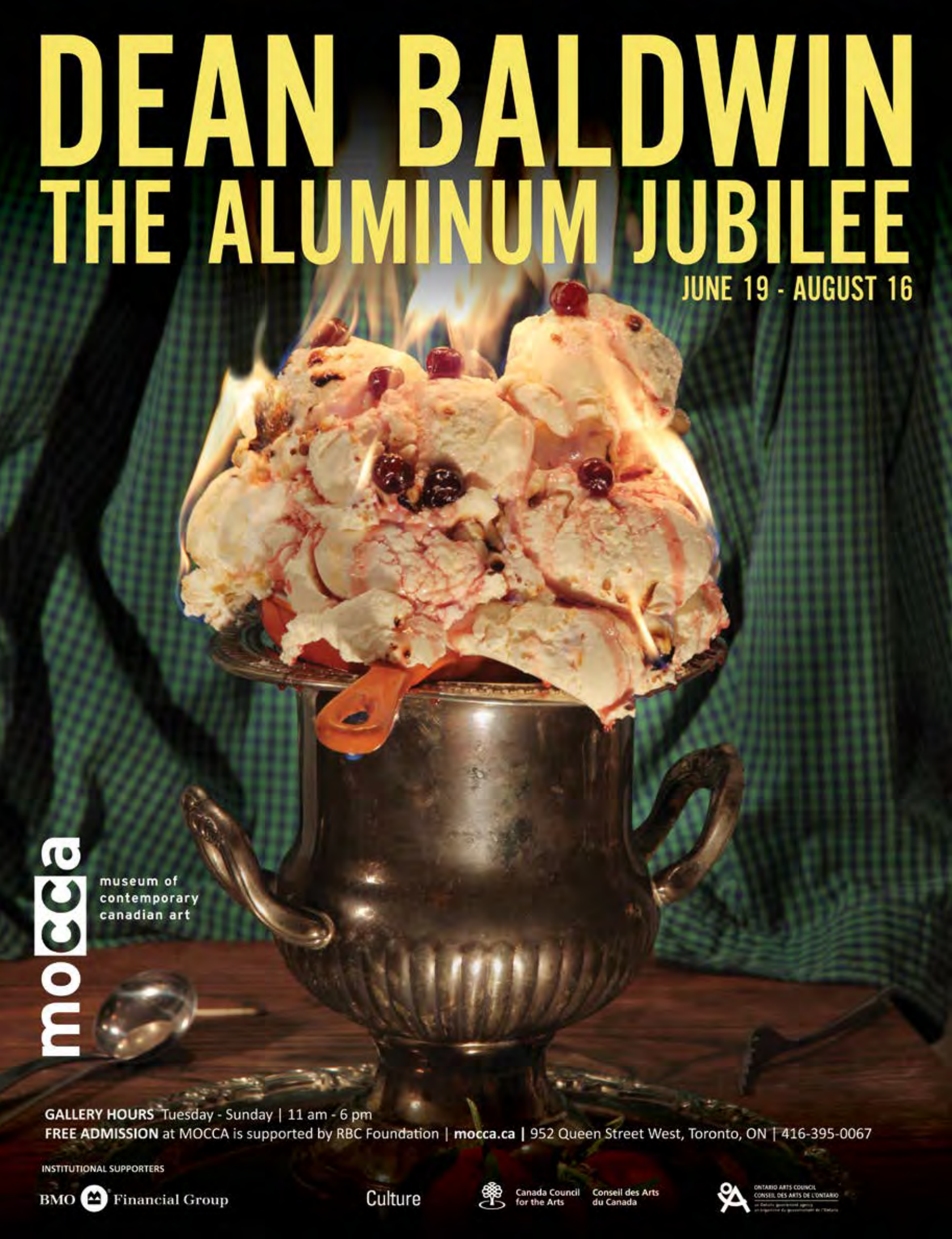

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detrás del muro 2
behind the wall

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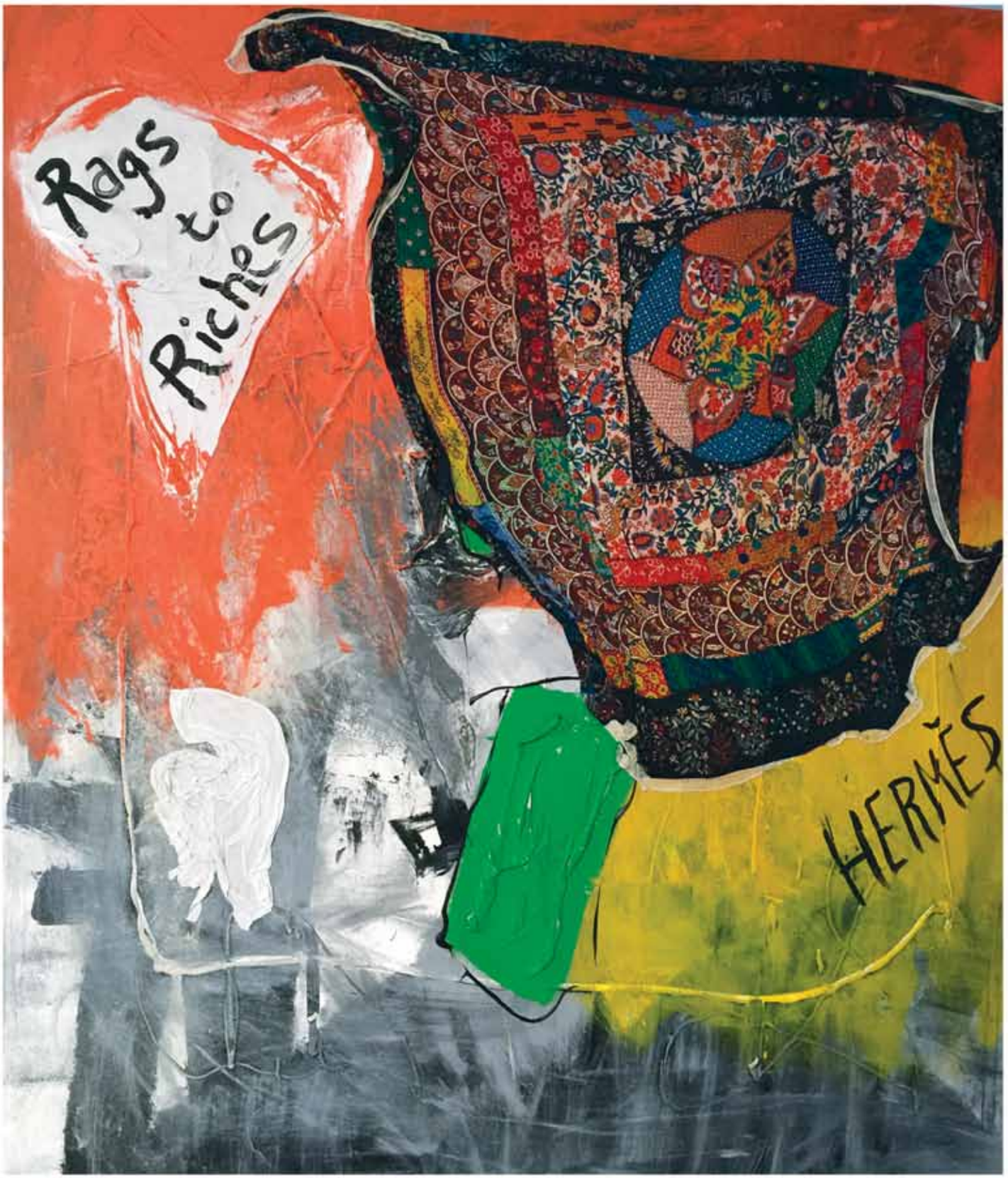
RACHEL VALDÉS CAMEJO

"Blue Cube"

Bienal de la Habana 2015
May 22

Detrás del Muro - Behind the Wall

Nadaleena Mirat Brettmann



Rags to Riches II, 2014, original Hermes scarf, matte medium, acrylic, rags, charcoal and house paint on canvas, 72 x 60 inches

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Luz María Sánchez, Guadalajara

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Eric Bourret, Paris
Efraín Salinas Salinas, Monterrey
Florencia Levy, Buenos Aires
Andrés Felipe Castaño, Bogotá
Pablo López Luz, México, D.F.
Manuela Viera-Gallo, Rome
Roberto Juárez Cervantes, Matamoros
Armando Miguélez Giambruno, Tucson
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Maryam Ashkanian, Bandar-E-Anzali
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"A body on an island, in a river, inside a volcano, in a plaza, on a street, in a city"
Curator: Amanda de la Garza, Monclova

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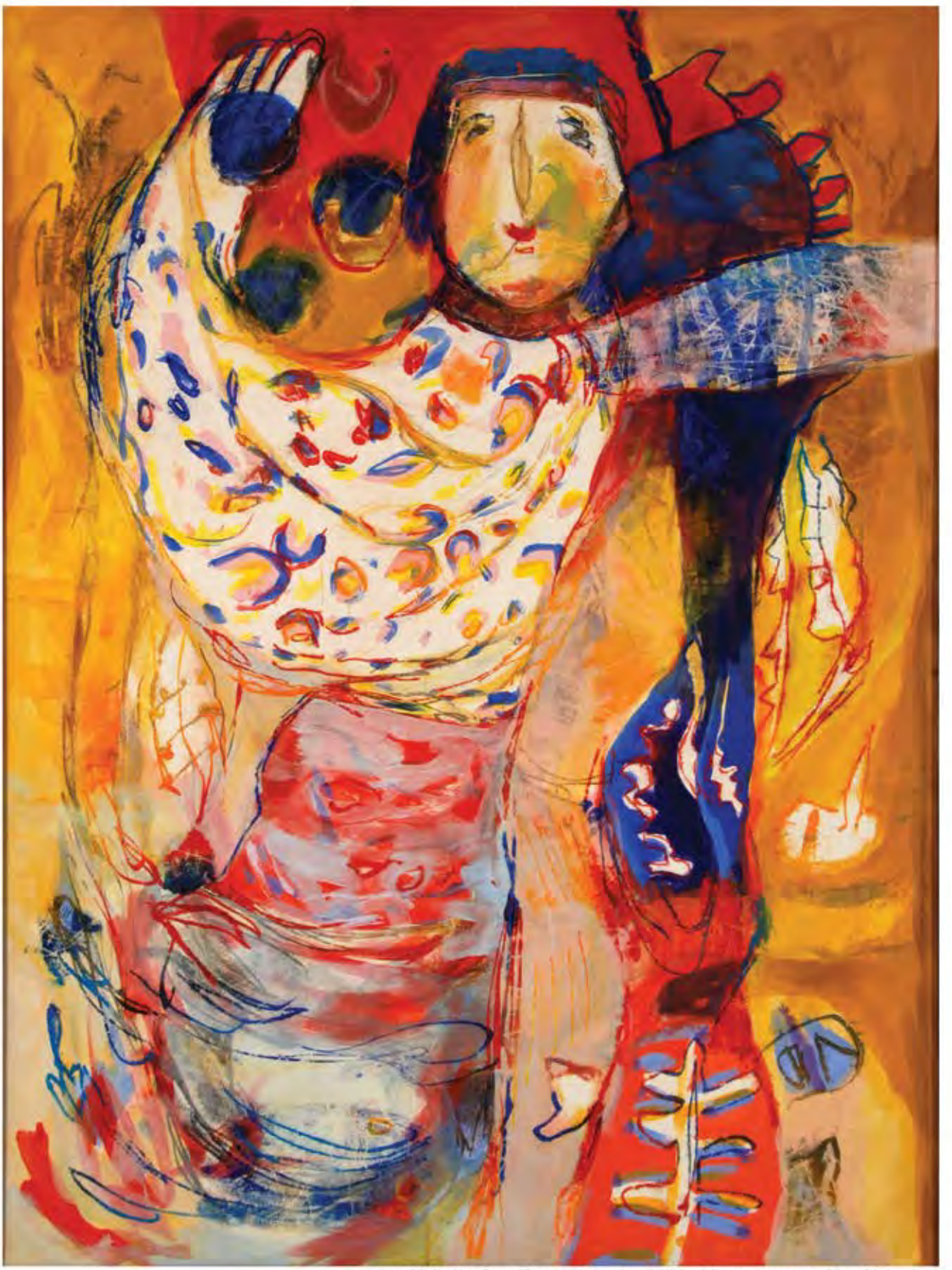

A La Civilette Des Fleurs Volante, 1985, Oil on canvas, 51 x 38 inches

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The Postmodern Trajectory

In 1981, Jean Baudrillard started a conversation that we continue in this issue in dialogical fashion. While so many postmodern theorists pointed to nuclear plumes as the beginning and end of postmodern humanity, Baudrillard conversely saw the apocalypse beginning and ending as humanity imploding into simulacra. Even before the World Wide Web, before social media, before *The Matrix*, Baudrillard saw it clearly: the replacement of all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, maps and models, where human experience degrades into mere simulation of reality.

Precisely on point, Marni Kotak brings urgency to the "real" by giving birth in a gallery in 2011. In E.L. Putnam's interview, Kotak says, "We are living in a contemporary time that is dominated by an anti-life equation, which ties directly into the fetishization of the simulacra. The public's reaction to *The Birth of Baby X* for me highlighted how taboos against birth are essentially driven by a fear of reality, the body, what we can touch and feel—actual human experience. This is built into contemporary medicalized birthing practices, where women are ultimately alienated from their own embodied experience, hooked up to machines and numbed with epidurals."

Dennis Redmond's essay ironically places the video game, a Baudrillardian bane, in a positive light. Redmond argues that the digital commons has leveled the playing field for artistic production, fostering fan labor in production of video games. To create is real, to be seen is real, and the 21st-century digital constellation engenders promise for everyone connected.

If we are speeding off on a Baudrillardian path, it prompts the question, "What exactly does the future consist of?" This question is explored in Rosa Barba's film installations. Scott Budzynski interviews Barba and Michele Robecchi contributes an essay about her work. Barba's Subconscious Society shows us indeterminate figures in cavernous abandoned halls with languid cutaways to boarded-up theme parks and post-industrial detritus. In a manner unintelligible to us, projects are being planned. Relics and human traces also extend into the gallery space as old speakers, and vinegary 35-millimeter projectors perform in an orbit around the screen. Is this simulacra's last breath before the electricity goes out? Kristina Olson's interview of Lily Cox-Richard unpacks *The Stand (Possessing Powers)*. These carved plaster sculptures re-create the bases/props but exclude the nude figures in the works of Neoclassical sculptor Hiram Powers to reveal 19th-century assumptions on gender, race and class. Here Cox-Richard makes postmodern mischief out of Baudrillardian "first order" pre-modern simulacra.

On the topic of "second order" simulacra, Liz Deschenes shows us work that is safe from the "second order" breakdown of the original that mass reproduction brings. Her photograms are not fixed. The works change over time, making still-reproduction of their primary essence impossible. Michael R. Smith, Jr., evaluates this work in his essay "Between Representation and Abstraction."

Then Michele Robecchi reports on recent deliberations on simulacra in a Belgian court, where Luc Tuymans lost a case in which his appropriation of a photograph was judged to be plagiarism.

In the Baudrillardian "third order" simulacra, that associated with postmodernity, there is no longer any difference between reality and its representation; there is only the full-blown simulacrum, the hyper real. In Paco Barragán's essay "A Voyeur's Tale," we encounter Yan Duyvendak's performance *My Name is Neo (for fifteen minutes)*. The artist is dressed as the protagonist, Neo, from *The Matrix*. Duyvendak mimics Neo's moves as part of the film is played on a television monitor. This performance takes us into a Baudrillardian wormhole: a Hollywood tale of "third order" simulacra is an object of indulgent reproduction.

To veer away from Baudrillard, perhaps humanities' machine-driven rush toward the inhuman will be put in check by our own good conscious and growth aided by our technological prowess. Consider, for example, advances in Post-feminism (see my interview with painter Julie Heffernan) and in the Post-black movement (see Oliver Kielmayer's interview with Rashid Johnson). Also contributing to the sociopolitical discussion, Paco Barragán interviews department head curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Franklin Sirmans.

One can also wish for the real and hyperreal to commingle to good ends. Taylor Davis flirts with such sentiments in forests of real wood veneer tubes covered in text. Grain and text exist in "shared status as living history," as Vanessa Platacis says in an interview with Davis.

But then if Baudrillard is right, the hyperreal swallows all. So even if our evolving collective conscience is not enough to save us, then we may have to look to Lyotard's silver lining in his text *The Inhuman*. Perhaps it is a good thing to give our thoughts over to our machines. What else is going to make sure that human thought is carried to gentler cosmic climes when the sun burns up our solar system in another five billion years?

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Senior Editor

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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.

Dennis Redmond is a lecturer of communications at Miami Dade College. He received his Ph.D. in communications from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His teaching and research focus on contemporary video games and digital media, the institutions and practices of the digital commons and transnational fan communities. He is the author of *The World is Watching: Video as Multinational Aesthetics, 1968-1995* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

Vanessa Platacis is an artist and a professor of painting at Savannah College of Art and Design. She has exhibited her work in solo and group exhibitions internationally as well as at the Scope art fair in Basel, Switzerland. Her first museum exhibition was in 2010 at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln, Mass. She has been a guest speaker at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and numerous universities along the East Coast. Currently, she is working on a project exploring the construction of identity through digital media.

Oliver Kielmayer has been the director of the Kunsthalle Winterthur since 2006 and teaches art history at F+F School for Art and Media Design in Zurich. In 2005, he was co-curator of the International Biennial of Contemporary Art in Prague. In 2004, he founded *WeAreTheArtists*, a network project that focuses on open discourse and authentic communication about art by means of a homepage and free newspaper. Some of his recent books include *Meeting Köken Ergun* (2011), *The Telephone Book Special Edition* (2010) and *Aggression* (2008), all published by Kunsthalle Winterthur.

Paco Barragán is an independent curator and arts writer based in Madrid. He recently curated "Erwin Olaf: The Empire of Illusion" (MAC, Santiago de Chile, 2014) and "Enrique Marty: Group Therapy, Act of Faith, Dark Room" (DA2 Salamanca, Spain, 2014). He is also a Ph.D. candidate in advanced studies in art history at the Universidad de Salamanca, Spain. Barragán is co-editor of *When a Painting Moves...Something Must be Rotten!* (2011) and author of *The Art Fair Age* (2008), both published by CHARTA.

EL Putnam is a part-time lecturer at the Dublin Institute of Technology in the School of Art, Design and Printing in Dublin. Her writing and research centers on continental aesthetic philosophy, performance studies, digital studies, feminist theory and examining the influence of neoliberalism on artistic production. She is also a visual artist affiliated with the Mobius Artists Group in Boston.

Michael Smith is a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. He also holds a Master of Fine Arts in painting from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He has written and presented widely on topics related to modernism and the history of abstraction, and his book on the intersection of aesthetics, ethics and metaphysics in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein is forthcoming from Atropos Press. He currently resides in Minneapolis.

Kristina Olson is associate director of the School of Art and Design at West Virginia University. She has contributed to *Art Papers, Art in America*, *Sculpture Magazine* and the former *New Art Examiner*. She is a contributor to the forthcoming *The ART of Critique/Re-imagining Professional Art Criticism and the Art School Critique* and *Kartoon Kings: The Graphic Work of Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio* (2007), and she was co-editor of *Blanche Lazzell: The Life and Work of an American Modernist* (2004).

Scott Budzynski is professor of art history at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and divides his time between Savannah and Berlin. His current research work and publications investigate the relationship between memory and modernity in post-World War II urban spaces, particularly in 20th-century Italy. He completed his Ph.D. in art history at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 2005. Previously, Budzynski was an associate researcher at the Collaborative Research Centre for Memory Cultures at the Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany, where he also taught at the Institute of Art History.

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ARTPULSE

NO. 22 | VOLUME 6 | YEAR 2015

Front Cover:
Rashid Johnson, ***Cosmic Slop "Ground Water" (detail),*** **2013,** black soap, wax, 96.5" x 120.5" x 3." Courtesy of the artist.

From Local to Legal. Painting and Photography still at loggerheads

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI

According to Luc Tuymans, photographer Katrijn Van Giel accusing him of plagiarism started when he received a phone call from the Belgian center-right tabloid *De Standaard*. The paper, on the trail of a story, announced that they knew Tuymans' painting of populist politician Jean-Marie Dedecker was based on a photograph shot by Van Giel, one of their regular contributors. Such an ominous warning, coupled with the fact that the relationship between the notoriously politically quibbling artist and the newspaper has always been defined by mutual disrespect, prompted Tuymans to contact Van Giel directly, who was apparently honored. "I said, 'We'll change it, we'll talk about mentioning your name,'" recalls Tuymans. "And then she said, 'Is that everything?' Then, the next day, front page, painting, photograph, the whole shebang."

When "the whole shebang" hit the court, Tuymans' attorney Michaël De Vroey and his assertion that the work in question was a parody of the original, and as such couldn't be considered a copy, failed to impress both the jury and Van Giel's lawyer, Dieter Delarue, who retaliated by stating that this was the only possible way the artist could hope to escape judgment. "To my knowledge, Luc Tuymans is not really best known for his humorous works. This defense is more of a parody than the work itself." The judge agreed with him, and Tuymans was sentenced to correspond Van Giel's a compensation fee of $57,000 and to pay an additional €500,000 should he create more reproductions of the work or show it publicly again.

Delarue's knowledge of art is evidently scarce. Tuymans has produced some of the most corrosive, ironic statements on every topic, from the bloodthirsty pit-bull-like rendition of Condoleezza Rice (2005) to the beautiful portrait of freedom fighter Patrice Lumumba, which criticized Belgian colonialism (2000). Humor is not just about caricatures and clown noses. It can also be dark and perverse. That said, it is fair to add that the artistry in Van Giel's photograph, either incidental or deliberate, set it quite apart from mere photo reporting. The cropped, shut-eyed head of the politician, with the white sweat on his forehead plainly visible and deeply contrasted by the black background, makes it a rather sophisticated, if not opinionated, portrait. Tuymans' interpretation, when compared to some of his other works, looks unusually weak. It seems that his source of inspiration, for once, has outdone him. Many have accused Tuymans of being either too lazy or arrogant or both. His labeling the area of Belgium where the fracas started as "moronic," accusing photographers of being jealous of his success and trundling out the Queen of Holland among his supporters has done little to dismiss the arrogance part, but he is of course right on one point: Jealousy, in the form of monetary and critical success, is at the core of the issue.

Bob Dylan's recent controversy about his paintings being based on famous photographs stirred a relatively low-key debate in comparison. The general consensus was that Dylan, whose relevance in art is inversely proportional to the one he has in music, was just doing what almost every diligent Sunday painter or art student does—copying. Had Tuymans been a mediocre artist with his painting positioned in a different context, there would have been hardly any trouble. As it was universally deemed a masterpiece and purchased by Groupon CEO Eric Lefkofsky for an undisclosed but presumably large sum indeed, all hell broke loose. Throw in the mix the recent phone/social media proliferation of images and the relative inability of copyright laws to keep pace, with amateurs accusing masters of copying them and vice versa, and you can justify the photography community's increasing sensitivity about the subject.

In strict practical terms, there are two instances in which the accusation of plagiarism stands up—when there is an intellectual paternity at stake (and this is not the case, as Tuymans has always been open about the provenance of his source materials) and when someone is making a profit instead of somebody else (and this not the case either, as Van Giel's photograph would have hardly made it to Lefkofsky's collection on its own merits). In the 1950s, a popular architecture magazine sued a wallpaper company bearing the same name on the grounds that the similarity could have had financial repercussions. The judge dismissed the case, as he viewed it unlikely that a client would go to a newsstand and walk away with a paper roll instead of a copy of the magazine without noticing the difference.

The majority of people who have been involved in any form of litigation are fond of saying that in retrospect they wish they had settled. This is not just because litigation is one of the most expensive forms of entertainment, with clients selecting their boxers and watching them fighting from ringside, but also because once a contention enters legal territory, every verdict constitutes a precedent for similar future cases. At the time of this writing, the Tuymans versus Van Giel sentence has been appealed, but either way, the final decision has all the potential to become explosive. Should the court confirm Tuymans' guilt, the entire concept of appropriation in art will turn into a no-entry zone. Never again will an artist dare to draw inspiration from existing images without the fear of incurring a hefty fine. Should the court rule in favor of Tuymans, however, the last nail in the coffin of the already seriously ill 'Professional Photographer' category will be hammered for good. ■

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UBS

A Voyeur's Tale: Cinema, Video and the Performative

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

From its very inception, cinema has attracted the attention of artists and artistic experimentation. The contrary is also true: an artistic medium such as painting has had a profound impact on the cinematic, from scenographies, cromatism, the characterization of protagonists, the use of famous pictorial scenes like *Las Meninas* and painters like Picasso and Van Gogh to the definition of the cinematic frame.

In this back-and-forth relationship, the advent of Pop Art, the consolidation of cinema, and especially television as mass media, and the introduction of cheap cameras summons a renewed concern with cinema from the artistic field. In classic films like *Sleep* and *Kiss*, Warhol blended real and filmic time; others, like Valie Export, Peter Weibel and George Landow, for example, deconstructed formal cinematic codes by means of performances and multimedia actions. Many artists made experimental videos and films in which they analyzed or often subverted, on the one hand, the critical and technological potentials of media such as cinema and television, and, on the other hand, registered performances (of themselves) in front of the camera in their studios or in faraway places.

In the 1990s, artists such as Stan Douglas, Rodney Graham, Steve McQueen, Sam Taylor-Wood, Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Doug Aitken, revealed in a critical manner the strategies and conventions behind commercial cinema. The use of 'found footage' and the 'remake' of classical scenes from the history of cinema—for example *24-Hour Psycho* by Douglas Gordon, a remake of Hitchcock's classic—became a heavily used mode of working in which filmic time is distorted and fragmented in order to achieve a real sense of malaise in the viewer.

New technical possibilities make video into a hybrid medium in which its relationship with cinema and other media is put into question. The advent of video installations, multiple projections and split screens in the context of the white cube or black box, together with a strong narrative twist, explain the growing introduction and success in a museum setting.

This brings us to the paradoxical nature of the advent of video and cinema installations in a museum, often characterized by a 'finiteness of time' and a historical prerogative for the 'fixed' image. As Boris Groys said, "Film has never inhabited a sacred context" like a museum and has "secular origins."[1]

Now the real problem is how to resolve the antagonism between mobile and immobile images in an exhibition context. This is what explains the MTV-YouTube-like aesthetics of many videos with a strongly condensed narrative that enables the viewer to consume the video or film in a short amount of time.

Traditional cinematic film and experimental gallery videos have also become more similar to each other in recent years. Some visual artists have produced films in cinema format, including, among others, Julian Schnabel, Shirin Neshat and Steve McQueen.

FROM ARTIST GAZE TO PARTICIPATION

Film has always been performative since it assumed a legible narrative—the theatrical element, as Michael Fried would argue. Video has been deployed as a tool for experimentation, but also for documenting performances; recently, more and more videos are of a strong performative nature. Think of Ahtila's extended cinema piece *House*.

Yan Duyvendak, *My Name is Neo (for fifteen minutes),* 2001, DVD, 16.' Courtesy the artist.

The camera—no matter if it records digital video or film—is a professional voyeur that turns the viewer into a co-conspirator or comrade-in-arms. The artistic gaze and viewer become one. With the advent of the 21st-century, some of the most arresting cinematic videos go beyond mere remakes or the manipulation of found footage. They express the ways in which artists can transcend a mere passive manipulation of someone else's narrative to insert themselves in the plot.

Let's look at some examples. Puerto Rican artist Javier Cambre's video *Contempt* (2003) is a re-adaptation of Jean Luc Godard's film from 1963 in which Cambre subverts the deterioration of the married couple—featuring Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli—by cutting out the male counterpart in the dialogue sequence and replacing these frames with shots featuring himself at his New York apartment. In *Screen Kiss* (2005), Canadian Jillian McDonald inserts herself digitally into existing films as a stand-in for the actresses or actor kissing the stars, making eye contact with the camera. Finally, another excellent example is Swiss-Dutch artist Yan Duyvendak with his much acclaimed performance *My Name Is Neo (for fifteen minutes*), in which Duyvendak dressed as the action hero from *The Matrix,* Neo. Duyvendak appears in front of the audience, while at the same time the iconic scene in which Neo starts to believe he is the One and confronts Agent Anderson is played out on a television monitor. Duyvendak performs Neo's action with precision by mimicking his counterpart's moves in front of the audience, in flawless and effortless synchronization.

Whether it is desire (Cambre), empowerment (McDonnald) or illusion (Duyvendak), the artist goes beyond the orthodoxy of appropriation to insert himself not only within the filmic narrative, but also within a wider art historical referentiality.

In this act of self-indulgence, the artist's gaze confronts the camera, which functions both as voyeur as well as the spectator's jealous eye. ■

NOTE

1. Boris Groys, Art Power, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2008, p. 67.

Marble House Project

Marble House Project nurtures the imaginative spirit through artist residencies, workshops and sustainable agriculture. Inspiration, contemplation and creativity are the hallmarks of the program. Residents sustain their growth by cultivating and participating in the surrounding grounds, working on their artistic vision and forging partnerships within the community. Marble House Project is founded on the belief that the act of creating, whether through art or in nature is where human potential begins and community thrives.

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ARTIST RESIDENCIES

WORKSHOPS

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

GAMING THE REVOLUTION

Theodor Adorno, Art Criticism and the Digital Commons

BY DENNIS REDMOND

Vadim Zakharov, *Monument to Adorno.* Inaugurated at the Theodor W. Adorno-Platz, Germany on October 10, 2003, on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Adorno. Courtesy of the artist.

A specter haunts 21st century aesthetics, from its biggest franchise blockbusters to its most abstruse art criticism—the specter of the digital commons. The digital commons has enabled previously disparate networks of artists, fans and players to reappropriate the digital tools formerly monopolized by the planet's biggest media oligopolies. The commons has also created unprecedented opportunities for digital audiences (now 2.8 billion strong and growing fast) to directly support independent artists, forever changing the way video games, films, music and other media are created and distributed.[1] Most important of all, the digital commons has ushered in a flowering of theoretical and social critique, new forms of online and offline political participation, and a vast expansion of art criticism.

Yet perhaps the most surprising aspect of the digital commons is the identity of its most profound theoretical text. This text was not written in the 2000s, the 1990s, or even the 1980s. It was written all the way back in 1966, when advanced computing technology meant mini-computers such as Hewlett-Packard's 2116A, released with 4 kilobytes of memory (by comparison, the average 2015 smartphone has 32 gigabytes of memory).[2]

The name of the text in question is *Negative Dialectics*, and its author was Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno. This is a scandalous assertion, given that Adorno has long been dismissed by the academic and cultural mainstream of the late 20th century as an elitist, defeatist snob, whose main contribution was his staunch commitment to certain mid-20th century European modernisms, cf. the twelve-tone music of Alban Berg, Anton Webern and Arnold Schönberg, the dramaturgic innovations of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, and the visual modernism of Paul Klee.[3]

To be sure, leading theorists such as Fredric Jameson have acknowledged the importance of Adorno's 1947 *Minima Mora-*

lia, one of the first great explorations of 20th century identity-politics, as well as Adorno's 1944 co-invention, along with Max Horkheimer, of the concept of the "culture industry"—crucial anticipations of contemporary cultural studies.[4] Yet very few thinkers have grasped the obvious connection between Adorno's critique of the total system, and the rise of neoliberalism—surely the most total system that capitalism has yet devised.

HACKING THE ADORNO CODEX

This misreading of Adorno has remained extant for three main reasons. First, some of the official English translations of Adorno's most important works are seriously flawed, to the point of being unusable in a classroom context. This is a difficulty I have personally tried to ameliorate through my own original translations of key works of Adorno, freely available online.[5]

Second, Adorno's final and most prodigious text was ahead of its time. *Negative Dialectics* was a critique whose true object had yet to emerge on the stage of world-history: the system called neoliberalism. In case readers are unfamiliar with this term, neoliberalism is the ideology of transnational market fundamentalism, a.k.a. the rule of the plutocrats who ran roughshod over the world economy from the mid-1970s until 2008.[6] One of the truly astounding ideological feats of neoliberalism is that it managed to disguise itself for decades in the garb of local or regional ideologies, i.e. as 1980s Thatcherism and Reaganism, as 1990s Clintonism and Maastricht monetarism, and finally as 2000s US neoconservativism and EU euroliberalism. In reality, all of these things were the localized manifestations of a single unified project: the looting of the planet by plutocrats.

The third reason for Adorno's delayed reception is not so much ideological as biographical. The single most innovative media theorist associated with the Frankfurt School, namely Walter Benjamin, perished in 1940.[7] Benjamin's 1936 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility*, was a ground-breaking theory of the epoch of silent and early sound cinema (the 1910s to the 1930s) which remains a touchstone of contemporary media and cultural studies.[8] With Benjamin's passing, Adorno lost more than just one of his dearest friends. He lost the one theorist who could think on his own level—his key counterplayer, if you will.[9]

MESSAGES FROM MORE FORTUNATE GALAXIES

The result of these three factors was that Adorno's key theoretical innovations lay dormant for decades, like some vast alien artifact abandoned on a far-off planet, waiting for intelligent space-faring beings to rediscover it. Indeed, it was not until the final phase of the neoliberal era that the identification, excavation, and reactivation of those artifacts became an urgent priority.

What Adorno's work helps us to understand is the remarkable paradox at the heart of neoliberalism. This paradox is that whereas neoliberal policies ushered in unprecedented wealth polarization and elite plunder, those same policies also unwittingly ushered in new forms of digital democratization. The essence of this democratization is the rise of what Yochai Benkler called the digital commons, a.k.a. the sum total of the non-commercial institutions and practices of the digital era.[10]

Nowhere is this paradox more evident than in the field of video games. On the one hand, video games are the largest single branch of the culture-industry in the world, with annual revenues of $81.3 billion in 2013. On the other hand, video games also harbor some of the most ferocious and effective resistances to neoliberalism. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* can help us to understand why.

Three of Adorno's most powerful concepts are the constellation, the bane or baleful spell of the totality, and the preponderance of the object. Let's take a closer look at each one.

CONSTELLATION: THE BIG PICTURE

1. *The constellation*, a.k.a. the transnational ensemble, is roughly analogous to what anthropologists call the assemblage, what literary theorists define as intertextuality, and what historians call historicity.[11] The constellation is not a static or fixed set of relations, but a provisional cast or throw, whereby a disparate set of events, narratives or social phenomena can be grasped from a larger transnational framework. The purpose of this framework is not to dissolve those phenomena into a single explanatory or master narrative, but to allow us to understand their collective logic.

Perhaps the most prominent example of a contemporary political constellation is the phenomenon of the Arab Spring. Since 2011, the majority of the Arab-speaking nations of the Middle East and North Africa experienced an unprecedented wave of mass political contestation and participation. While each nation experienced its own unique form of mass mobilization, each mobilization was interconnected in ways great and small with all others.[12]

To be sure, constellations are not limited to political uprisings. One of the most important cultural constellations created during the past decade is the arrival of the Internet-based video game commons. This commons is comprised of the institutions of fan labor, the practices of large-scale fan communities, and the institutions and practices of digital artists as well as far-sighted commercial game studios such as Valve and Kojima Productions.

While each of these practices and institutions altered a specific aspect of the digital media—fan labor changed distribution systems, fan communities changed game-production strategies, and studio artists changed the productive forces of video game production—it is their collective constellation which transformed video games into one of the most productive, popular and democratic art-forms of the 21st century.

BANE: NOT JUST A BATMAN VILLAIN

2. *The bane*. The baleful spell or bane of the totality, one of Adorno's most famous innovations, is also one of the most useful to critique neoliberalism.[13] The bane of neoliberalism, its belief-structure which is also an entire set of institutions and practices, is that plutocratic greed is the most efficient way to organize an economy. From the mid-1970s until the mid-2000s,

***Little Big Planet,* 2008,** videogame. Designers: Dave Smith and Mark Healey.

the plutocracy—a loose alliance of the financial elites of the industrialized nations, and the aspiring oligarchs of the industrializing nations—went on world history's biggest looting spree.

While the specific mechanisms of this spree varied, their end-result was the same: a tiny class of oligarchs got richer, while everyone else got poorer. In the industrialized world, neoliberal oligarchs stole the natural resources, state property, and tourist revenues of the postcolonial nations of Eurasia, Latin America, Africa and Asia. In the industrialized world, neoliberal elites used their monopoly on privately-created money, a.k.a. credit from official banks and from the shadow banking system, to embark on vast financial speculations, while squeezing the middle class. No less an authority than Simon Johnson, former chief economist of the IMF, and James Kwak concluded that these speculations were overwhelmingly exercises in criminal fraud and waste.[14] Instead of funneling savings into long-term, productive investment, the plutocrats starved the real economy in favor of far more profitable and short-term financial bubbles. These bubbles invariably imploded, necessitating expensive state bailouts to prevent the entire financial system from collapsing.

Why did this looting spree go on for thirty years? Neoliberalism's bane consisted of something both completely fictitious and completely real. This was the vast expansion of credit to ordinary citizens. Psychologically, the S & L bubble of the 1980s, the dotcom bubble of the 1990s, and the securitization bubble of the 2000s created the illusion that anyone could become the next billionaire. At the same time, a vast increase in mortgage and consumer debt temporarily compensated for the loss of demand caused by declining real wages. Most folks felt wealthier and less inclined to question the plutocrats, since the fictional value of their homes and retirement accounts kept going up—until the whole house of cards came crashing down in 2008.

NETWORKING THE RESISTANCE

Conversely, the bane also allows us to grasp one of the most hopeful aspects of contemporary video game culture. This is the fact that video game franchises are structured as digital communities, where fans, players and digital artists have the collective means and the motive to resist advertising and distribution oligopolies. Where television broadcasters depend on advertising revenues disbursed by big business, video game companies depend on final sales to hundreds of millions of consumers, which gives consumers real power over franchise. Players have successfully resisted the imposition of push-style advertising and advergaming inside their game-worlds, and an online protest campaign defeated Microsoft's ill-conceived attempt at locking down digital content on its Xbox One console.[15] Simply, interactive media depend on audience participation and player empowerment, and this structural dependence privileges long-term replayability and game-world innovation over short-term profiteering.

Over the past decade, the scale and scope of these resistances have increased dramatically, to the point that hundreds of millions of digitally-connected players and fans have become a genuine force of world history. By the end of 2013, the number of Internet users worldwide crossed the 2.8 billion mark, with billions more due to arrive over the next five years. Over time, the gravi-

tational pressure of this audience moved the center of the video game industry away from the closed corporate monopolies in the 1990s (e.g. consoles such as the Nintendo Famicom) and towards the partly closed oligopolies of the 2000s (e.g. Sony's Playstation 2), and finally towards the partly-open platforms of the 2010, everywhere from Android to online distribution systems such as Valve's Steam and cdp.pl's gog.com. This audience has also forced video games to become increasingly multilingual, multicultural and cosmopolitan, as they must appeal to the varied tastes and sensibilities of 2.8 billion human beings, and not a handful of white, male, Ivy League corporate advertising executives.

PREPONDERANCE OF THE DIGITAL

3. *The preponderance of the object*. Last but not least, there is Adorno's "preponderance of the object".[16] This preponderance was an analysis of the monopoly-era commodity form, and its accompanying restructuring of the division of labor. In essence, Adorno was updating Marx's concept of 19th century commodity fetishism to account for the specific features of 20th century consumerism. Marx's original text showed how capitalism transformed an ordinary table into a commodity, an abstract social relation which was antagonistic to its producers.[17] Where Marx argued that the leading commodities of Victorian-era Britain—textiles, coal, and iron—were structurally rooted in brutal and merciless exploitation, Adorno argues that the staple consumer goods of the mid-20th century, e.g.—automobiles, electric fans, radio receivers—are structurally rooted in oligopoly domination and repressive consumerism. That is, instead of simply extracting labor-time from workers during working hours, US monopoly capitalism transformed the free time of its employees into capital-generating consumerism. The preponderance of the object is thus as much a critique of workplace exploitation as it is of capital's exploitation of our leisure time.

The contemporary version of this concept is what might be called the preponderance of the digital, a.k.a. the 21st century transnational commodities which have replaced Marx's 19th century manufactures and Adorno's 20th century consumer goods. Adorno's concept helps us to grasp the world of digital commodities—the otherwise inconceivably complex proliferation of hardware, software, platforms and networks—as forms of embodied labor. These forms confront their erstwhile creators in the same paradoxical manner in which the textile commodity confronted the 19th century mill-worker: they are both objects of desire, as well as modalities of exploitation.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The true power of Adorno's critique, however, becomes apparent only when we link all three of these concepts together, and grasp the preponderance of the digital object (the digital commodity), the bane (neoliberal financialization), and the constellation (thinking transnational history) all at once. What links all three concepts together is not the transnational commodity per se, nor the abstraction of transnational capital, but rather the social antipode of the commodity form and capitalism. This antipode is the category of transnational labor, without which transnational capital could not exist (capital is, after all, socially-embodied labor). The importance of the digital commons is that it is one of the first concrete expressions of the collectivity of transnational labor, a.k.a. the consciousness of the approximately five billion working people of planet Earth.

In this largest of perspectives, Adorno's concepts are to the digital commons very much what fan labor is to video games, or what open source software is to computer platforms. The former do not arrogate or suborn the content of the latter. Rather, they are the indispensable set of mediations which enable individuals to access the power of collective mediations, in the most democratic and fair way possible.

Transnational labor has been and continues to be the key engine of the democratization of video game culture. Prior to the digital era, mass audiences waged mostly local struggles against media oligopolies, everywhere from the independent artists at the peripheries of the Hollywood studio and marketing system, to the small-scale networks of informal media production and distribution ("samizdat") inside even the most repressive one-party states. These audiences could dissent from the mainstream, but did not have the means to overturn its hegemony.

THE BIG PICTURE JUST GOT BIGGER

Yet today's transnational labor mobilizations are doing more than simply resisting the copyright fundamentalism of the transnational media corporations. The constellation of fans, players and digital artists is transforming the field of cultural production in fundamental ways. This change is most apparent in the realm of the smallest and most independent video game artists. Rem Michalski's indie horror-survival video game *The Cat Lady* (2012), which he wrote and produced almost singlehandedly, delivered the best horror-survival interactive experience since the glory days of *Silent Hill 3* (2003), while Spike Chunsoft's crackerjack *Danganronpa* (2010) and *SuperDanganronpa 2* (2012) delivered the best murder-mystery thrillers in the brief history of transnational mobile gaming.

This democratization is also transforming the institutions of reception and consumption, where fan networks are beginning to supplant the gate-keeping and taste-making functions of commercial video game journalism and its cognate, paid advertisers. Instead of resisting this change, the savviest of the video game studios quickly understood that whatever loss of control studios had over their marketing message would be more than amply compensated for by increased fan goodwill. In a wonderful example of what Adorno forecast as the self-unraveling of the bane, these studios responded to their fans by democratizing their publicity and outreach campaigns.[18]

One of the key moments of this democratization can be credited to Hideo Kojima's studio, KojiPro, creators of the *Metal Gear* franchise. Kojima released several game trailers from 2005 to 2007 in order to promote the 2008 release of *Metal Gear Solid 4*. These trail-

***Minecraft,* 2008,** videogame. Image above: Minecraft Village and castle built by a fan. Designers: Jens Bergensten and Markus Persson.

***Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair,* 2012,** videogame. Artist: Rui Komatsuzaki. Developer: Spike Chunsoft.

ers can be considered works of art in their own right, and offered compelling showcases of in-game cut-scenes and game-play without revealing any plot points or spoiling the storyline. However, these trailers were not released as paid advertisements on commercial broadcasting networks. They were first aired to audiences at leading game conferences such as the Tokyo Game Show or Gamescom, and then released as free-to-view files on video-sharing sites.

FAN LABOR UNBOUND

The year 2008 marked another watershed in the history of the digital commons, namely the rise of fan labor (what the industry calls "user-generated content") to a mainstream feature of the video game industry. This was the year Media Molecule (an independent studio at the time, subsequently acquired by Sony in a friendly buyout) released *Little Big Planet*. This latter was a charming platformer-style game, where players ran, jumped and moved objects in a mostly two-dimensional game-world. What set it apart from all other platformers was that the game came packaged with a powerful set of easy-to-use creative tools. These tools allowed fans to build their own custom levels (i.e. as applied fan labor) and then share, play through, and most important of all, rate these levels online, as part of *Little Big Planet*'s custom-built social media network. The result was an explosion of online creativity, as fans created their own unique levels, critiqued (and were critiqued by) other users, and invented ingenious designs which even Media Molecule's own talented staffers could not have imagined. The commercial success of the *Little Big Planet* franchise, which sold 12.9 million copies from 2008 to mid-2014, has shown that the digital commons can be enormously productive, even where it is structurally bounded by the dictates of digital commerce.[19]

More recently, Markus Persson's *Minecraft* took the next logical step, by removing some of the constraints of digital commerce from the videogame development process. Persson created and distributed *Minecraft* for free, and only later created a commercial company, Mojang, in order to serve as the customer service, testing, research and development center of the *Minecraft* gaming commons. In turn, the vast community of users who downloaded free versions of the game before its official release went on to purchase over 16 million official copies of the game in various formats since its release (personal computers, video game consoles and mobile devices).[20]

Mojang was purchased in mid-2014 by Microsoft for $2.5 billion, a striking example of how transnational corporations are now rushing to keep up with the innovations of transnational fan communities, rather than the other way around. In fact, the beating heart of *Minecraft* is not Mojang, but rather independent digital artists and fan communities. If Microsoft respects these artists and communities, the franchise will continue to prosper. On the other hand, if Microsoft tries to turn *Minecraft* into just another cash-hungry corporate monopoly, the fan community will take its skills and creativity elsewhere, leaving nothing but a desiccated shell behind.

GAME-WORLDS TO COME

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from Adorno is the importance of thinking systematically about the social meaning of art. By thinking systematically, Adorno does not mean a systemized or routined thinking, but rather a thinking willing to grasp the largest of sociological contradictions in the smallest of micrological details.

What this means is that in order to think transnationally, we must be willing to read our digital game-worlds as documents of transnational history. They are laboratories of our digital future, the commons where the innumerable local resistances to neoliberalism are finally converging. This convergence is most apparent in the scriptwriting of the greatest video games of the post-2008 era. Any list of the top ten would have to include Sony Santa Monica's *God of War 3* (2010), Ready at Dawn's *God of War: Ghost of Sparta* (2010), Spike Chunsoft's *Danganronpa* (2010) and *Danganronpa 2* (2012), and finally CD Projekt Red's *The Witcher 2* (2011) and upcoming *The Witcher 3* (2015). Each and every one of these video games is deeply critical of neoliberalism, as well as neocolonial empire.

Where neoliberalism gamed the system to enrich the few while impoverishing the many, then the uprising against neoliberalism must systemize the game of transnational accumulation. It must reappropriate the hegemonic power of transnational capital over the digital commodity, by dissolving that hegemony, Ring-of-Power-style, back into the digital collective from whence it came. At its furthest limit, Adorno's negative dialectics radiates with the positive potential of a world emancipated from market predation, a world free not just to play, but to build. ■

NOTES

1. National data collated by HYPERLINK <http://www.internetworldstats.com/"www.internetworldstats.com/>.
2. The HP2116A was ground-breaking because it was a true general-purpose computer, rather than a specialized digital measurement device. Leslie Goff, "1966: HP's radical move," *CNN*, July 6, 1999, accessed December 20, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/TECH/computing/9907/06/1966.idg/>.
3. One of the greatest ironies of Adorno's alleged academicism is that he never held an official academic position in Weimar Germany, in the US, or in the post-war Federal Republic of Germany. He was fortunate enough to be employed by the Institute for Social Research, an independent think-tank founded in 1923 by Felix Weil (son of a wealthy grain rentier), Kurt Albert Gerlach, and Friedrich Pollock (a friend of Max Horkheimer). Adorno fled Nazi Germany in 1934, and lived in exile in Britain and later the US, before returning to West Germany in 1949. This comparative autonomy gave Adorno the breathing space to write some of the most profound cultural and social theory of his time.
4. Enormous credit is due here to Fredric Jameson for his *Marxism and Form*, which introduced Adorno's work to an entire generation of scholars and critics. Fredric Jameson. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 1971. Fredric Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno, Or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso), 1990.
5. For my new, original translation of the culture industry chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see: "The Culture Industry", accessed January 2, 2013, <http://monkeybear.info/CultureIndustry.pdf>. For my original translation of Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, see: "Minima Moralia", accessed January 2, 2013, <http://monkeybear.info/MinimaMoralia_Full.pdf>. For my original translation of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, see: "Negative Dialectics", accessed January 2, 2013, <http://monkeybear.info/ND_Full.pdf>. These translations grew out of the PhD dissertation I wrote on Theodor Adorno in 2000, for the Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon.

6. The best single account of the Wall Street bubble was written by Nomi Prins. See: Nomi Prins. *It Takes A Pillage: An Epic Tale of Power, Deceit, and Untold Trillions*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2009.
   The best economic critiques of neoliberalism have been written by Ha-Joon Chang, Joseph Stiglitz and Yanis Varoufakis. Chang's *Bad Samaritans* demolishes the neoliberal myth of perfectly free trade, Stiglitz' *Freefall* debunks the neoliberal myth of perfectly efficient markets, while Varoufakis' *The Global Minotaur* shows how the geopolitical foundations which made neoliberalism hegemonic have been slowly but irresistibly disintegrating from within over the past three decades. Ha-Joon Chang. *Bad Samaritans: the Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism.* New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008. Joseph Stiglitz. *Freefall: America, Free Markets and the Sinking of the World Economy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010. Yanis Varoufakis. *The Global Minotaur: America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy* (London: Zed Books), 2011.
7. In 1940, Benjamin and a group of refugees were arrested by the border authorities while attempting to cross the French-Spanish border. Convinced he would be handed over to the Gestapo, he chose to take his own life. When Adorno writes about the guilt of survivorhood late in *Negative Dialectics* (the exact passage is in the "Metaphysics and Culture" section of "Part III, Models: Meditations on Metaphysics"), the primary referent is to the Nazi genocides of WW II, but the emotional charge of the passage is unmistakable homage to Benjamin.
8. My original translation of Benjamin's essay is available online. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility", accessed December 22, 2012, web: <http://monkeybear.info/ReproducibilityTrans.html>.
9. We will never know what theoretical innovations Benjamin would have dreamed up in the US of the 1940s, in a face-to-face encounter with Popular Front and New Deal public arts programs, the jazz modernisms of Charlie Parker and Count Basie, and vocal artists such as Paul Robeson and Odetta. At the very least, Benjamin's affinity to Surrealism and Cubism might have enabled him to grasp the productivities of the US literary, musical and cinematic modernisms, especially their African American incarnations, in ways which would not occur until the rise of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. Given Benjamin's predilection for Spain, it is possible to imagine him settling in Mexico City as one of the occasional guests of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, and writing disquisitions on the church paintings of New Spain, Billy Wilder films, and Nahuatl mythology.
10. Yochai Benkler, "The Political Economy of Commons." *Upgrade 4*:3 (2003): 6-9, accessed October 31, 2010, <http://www.benkler.org/Upgrade-Novatica%20Commons.pdf>.
11. "The unifying moment survives, without the negation of the negation, yet also without delivering itself to the abstraction as the highest principle, not by advancing step by step towards the general master-concept from the concepts, but by these latter entering into a constellation. These illuminate the specifics of the object which the classifying procedure is indifferent towards or uncomfortable with. The model for this is the conduct of language. It offers no mere sign-system for cognitive functions. Where it appears essentially as language, becoming portrayal [Darstellung], it does not define its concepts. It obtains their objectivity through the relationship in which it posits the concepts, centered around a thing. It thereby serves the intention of the concept, to wholly express what is meant. Solely constellations represent, from without, what the concept has cut away from within, the 'more', which the former wishes to be, so very much as it cannot be the latter. By gathering around the thing to be cognized, the concepts potentially determine its innermost core, thinking to attain what thinking necessarily stamped out of itself." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (164).
12. The people of Tunisia and Bahrain invented new forms of civic and cultural mobilization, the people of Egypt and Yemen invented new types of cross-class, cross-sectarian, and urban-rural coalitions, the people of Libya invented new forms of diasporic and interethnic solidarity (e.g. acknowledging their Amazigh population), the people of Syria invented new forms of citizen journalism and guerilla warfare against a murderous ethnic dictatorship, etc. While the outcomes of these uprisings are as disparate as the countries involved – Tunisia has become a stable parliamentary democracy, Egypt is still ruled by military elites, Bahrain is still under lockdown, Syria is in the midst of a fratricidal civil war, and both Yemen and Libya are still deeply unstable – all these revolutions shared the same features of a lack of leaders or centralized parties which could be easily quashed, the construction of popular media networks, and the mass participation of young people and especially young women. Juan Cole has provided one of the best accounts of the deep-seated roots, complex outcomes, and enduring legacies of the Arab Spring uprisings. See: Juan Cole. *The New Arabs: How the Millennial Generation is Changing the Middle East*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014. For timely news and in-depth analysis of the political transformation of the Arabic-speaking region, see: Juan Cole's blog, *Informed Comment*: <http://www.juancole.com/>, and the independent webzine *Jadaliyya*: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/>.
13. "Now as before, human beings, individual subjects, stand under a bane. It is the subjective form of the world-spirit, whose primacy over the externalized life-process is reinforced internally. What they can do nothing about, and which negates them, is what they themselves become. They no longer need to acquire a taste for it as what is higher, which it in fact is in contrast to them, in the hierarchy of degrees of universality. On their own, a priori, as it were, they behave in accordance with what is inescapable.
    While the nominalistic principle simulates individualization to them, they act collectively. In human experience, the bane is the equivalent of the fetish-character of the commodity. What is self-made becomes the In-itself, out of which the self can no longer escape; in the dominating faith in facts as such, in their positive acceptance, the subject worships its mirror-image. The reified consciousness has become total as the bane. That it is a false one, holds the promise of the possibility of its sublation: that it would not remain such, that false consciousness would inescapably move beyond itself, that it could not have the last word. The more the society is steered by the totality, which reproduces itself in the bane of subjects, the deeper too its tendency towards dissociation. This latter threatens the life of the species, as much as it denies the bane of the whole, the false identity of subject and object." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (337-340).
14. Simon Johnson and James Kwak. *13 Bankers: The Wall Street Takeover and the Next Financial Crisis*. New York: Pantheon, 2010.
15. See my own description of Microsoft's debacle here: <http://monkeybear.info/Uplink/Uplink29.html>.
16. "The thorough-going critique of identity gropes for the preponderance [Praeponderanz] of the object. Identity-thinking is, even where it claims otherwise, subjectivistic. To revise this, to account for identity as untruth, establishes no equilibrium between subject and object, no hegemony of the functional concept in the cognition: even where it is only infringed upon, the subject is already disempowered. It knows why it feels absolutely threatened by the slightest surplus of the non-identical, according to the measure of its own absoluteness. Even as something minimal it violates the whole, because the whole is its pretension. Subjectivity changes its quality in a context, which it is not capable of developing out of itself. By means of the inequality in the concept of mediation, the subject falls to the object totally differently than the latter to the former. The object can only be thought through the subject, but always preserves itself in contrast to this as an other; the subject is, however, according to its own constitution, already an object in advance. The object is not to be thought out of existence from the subject, even as an idea; but the subject, from the object." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (184).
17. Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Vol. 1. Translated By Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1990, 163-165.
18. "It is not entirely improbable that the bane is thereby tearing itself apart. What would like to provisionally gloss over the total structure of society under the name of pluralism, receives its truth from such self-announcing disintegration; simultaneously from horror and from a reality, in which the bane explodes. Freud's Civilization and its Discontents has a content, which was scarcely available to him; it is not solely in the psyche of the socialized that the aggressive drives accumulate to the point of openly destructive pressure, but the total socialization objectively breeds its counter-force [Widerspiel], without to this day being able to say, whether it is the catastrophe or the emancipation." Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (339-340).
19. Sales data collated by independent fansite VGChartz and based on official Sony press releases. *VGChartz.com*, accessed September 26, 2014. <http://www.vgchartz.com/gamedb/?name=LittleBigPlanet&publisher=&platform=&genre=&minSales=0&results=200>.
20. *Minecraft.net*, accessed September 26, 2014, <http://minecraft.net/stats>.

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A LIGHTNING ROD OF MATERIAL
An Interview with Rashid Johnson

The oeuvre of Chicago-born artist Rashid Johnson (born in 1977, lives and works in New York) is abundant in references to African-American culture: Shea butter, African animal skins and icons of African-American literature and music are the subjects that appear in ever-changing constellations. Often they are combined with objects that make a reference to a more general domestic background, such as Persian rugs, mirrors or indoor plants. Over the years, these references have merged with an opulence of materials and developed into an individual iconography; the result is a universe that behaves autonomously, mysteriously and in a completely sovereign way while also maintaining a strong connection to the viewer.
I met with Johnson for several days in New York to work on a publication featuring a comprehensive interview with him. The following is a short excerpt of the complete interview, to be published later in 2015 by Mousse Publishing, Milan.

BY OLIVER KIELMAYER

Oliver Kielmayer - What does your name tell us about you? You were born in Chicago, but Rashid is not a traditional American name.
Rashid Johnson - Rashid is a Muslim name. My parents grew up in a generation after the first wave of Afrocentrism, when it was really important to a lot of Afro-Americans to give their children what were perceived to be African or Muslim names. A lot of emphasis was placed on using names to establish a relationship to unknown African roots and avoiding names that could be identified as simply Western or American. My parents' generation was deeply invested in Africanism and the acquisition of Africanness. Because they felt so disenfranchised from the American experience, so incapable of the acquisition of the American dream, they started to distance themselves from a Western, American identity.

O.K. - Being able to identify with a particular group can provide shortcuts to some tedious discussions and can be an option for certain opportunities. You have access to the American discourse and within that, you also have the black community. So even if this option is connected with a lot of problematic history, it still offers you something extra; it can be a bonus.
R.J. - I can't speak for everyone because each experience is an individual one. My work certainly speaks to the fact that I was raised in an environment where I identified myself as middle class. This is an important point for me because there are many ways that I have related to questions about my identity. It's larger than just being a black person. It's also about being a man and an artist, about the full range of my interests and concerns. I think we all have similarly complex definitions of our identities even though we often get stuck with labels that produce a monolithic experience or that don't reflect our individual histories. I guess that's fine if it doesn't lead to damaging prejudices.

O.K. - In Switzerland there are a lot of immigrants from the Balkans. They speak with a particular accent that became popular for other Swiss kids; they imitate or appropriate it. Is there something similar here in the States, when white guys 'speak black' to sound cool?
R.J. - Definitely. Over time, black culture was adapted to form the basis for a lot of U.S. pop culture, including music and popular expressions. There's a lot of mimicking, and in some circles there's cachet or respect from the imitation of contemporary black speech. So I think many people were surprised that I didn't employ that vernacular, that it wasn't mine. My parents were very specific about my speaking a certain way; it may be cool in the street, but it's not gonna work in an office, it's not gonna help you get a job, and it's not gonna help you to be understood and taken seriously in other contexts.

O.K. - In 2004 you moved to New York. I think this changed your life a lot.
R.J. - Yes it did. Chicago was more segregated, as far as how strictly neighborhood boundaries defined who lived where. I happened to live and grow up in a fairly mixed area of the city: black, white, Latino, Asians, et cetera. Moving to New York changed that dynamic quite a bit because there are more people occupying the same space. I was also looking for the opportunity to be around artists that I respected; it's not that I didn't have that chance in Chicago but there weren't as many people to learn from—or with. And I felt New York gave me the opportunity to be around potentially the most cutting-edge, the fastest, the most interesting people and the newest projects and bodies of work that were being made. I wanted to be as challenged as I possibly could. I was a young man, and I wanted to be where the game was being played.

O.K. - And then there is 2008, which is the year of Rashid Johnson. Looking back, all the important works or decisions go back to that year.
R.J. - Two thousand and eight was a big year. I went back to work very seriously. I was a bartender, and Nicole Klagsburn offered me my first solo show in New York. For the first couple of months after she offered me a show I didn't do anything. I was in the new studio space in Bushwick, and I just sat there thinking: 'What the hell am I gonna make, why did I want this show?' And it all started to come together—it was like a lightning rod of material, drawing, photography. That was the year art-making really began to make sense to me. The poetry of it, the conceptual rule of it, the antecedent histories of the things that I was interested in making, it all just kind of hit me at the same time. At this point you see me begin to reference myself, to start to take on drawing, and my own kind of materials, and to take authorship of these materials, creating something that I guess could be called my own history.

Exhibition view "Three Rooms," Kunsthalle Winterthur, with Everybody's a Star (2013) (left), Daybed 6 (2012) (front), and The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club (Shvitz Shaman) (2009) (back). Courtesy of Kunsthalle Winterthur. Photo: Christian Schwager.

O.K. - The first shelf work is from 2008. I think the shelf works highly suggest an iconological reading. Do you think people get something like a message out of such a reading?

R.J. - I think there are messages to be taken from it, but it was definitely not intended to be a specific delivery system. I had started making shelves in the studio for all my stuff. It was as simple as looking over at them one day and thinking: 'Oh, that's what I'm really trying to make.' My idea was a vehicle that would hold all of my things, whether they were kinds of signifiers, or contradictory kinds of conversations, different materials, things to be able to reach out to the world with, from the CB radios–– my father ran an electronics company with CB radios—to some weird books I was reading and pictures of friends. I can take anything that I'm thinking about and place it and it enters the conversation; I can produce contradictions that I don't feel able to accomplish in the same way on a flat surface.

O.K. - What about the domestic aspects of the works? What in the domestic sphere are you specifically interested in?

R.J. - There's something important to me about the use value of these things, that they would live in a home and be employable objects. They could be brought to life, whether you are washing yourself with the *Cosmic Slop* soap background, whether you would talk in the CB radio, read the books or apply the shea butter to yourself, listen to the albums and so on. I thought it provided for so many interesting opportunities. And another aspect of it was wondering: Who's the person who uses this thing? Who is supposed to use this? And when they use it how would they use it? And what is the order in which they use it?

O.K. - When you see the shelf works in a collector's home, is that a moment for you, when you have intruded this other person's space with one of your fictitious lives?

R.J. - I find it really interesting because it doesn't necessarily play well with other furniture—they bully space. You're really bringing this outside narrative agency into your own home. I love to see them in those spaces. I also love to see them in institutions because I think that is where most people will get to witness and participate with them, but I honestly love seeing them in domestic spaces.

O.K. -* The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club *is parallel in some ways to the shelves but looks like a completely different body of work. To me, it seems closer to your older photo works and the use of more historical references to black culture.

R.J. - This body of work again related to escape by an escapist. The idea was of an almost magician-like character, someone like Sun Ra who

Rashid Johnson, *The New Black Yoga,* 2011, 16mm film transferred to video with sound, 10:50 min. Exhibition view Kunsthalle Winterthur. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Joëlle Menzi.

said, "You know what? The problematic here is so difficult for me to engage with, that I'm not even from here. I'm not even a part of this discourse. I'm from another planet. So treat me as such." But at the same time I was thinking about the people who use the shelves; I wanted to put some characters in the room that you could at least consider to be the potential users of the work.

O.K. - I also find the club interesting. A club offers identity because there is a reason why you are together in the club. At the same time, it's not for everyone.

R.J. - I was intrigued by a few things. I had come across a group called the Boulé that was started in 1904. It was founded at a traditional black university and parallels another group at Harvard and Yale called Skull and Bones. I thought it was an interesting moment to talk about the black upper class and how they had developed these clubs in order to help each other. And I found its existence problematic in some ways, and in others, intriguing. I wanted to frame that group in a poetic sense with these portraits, as well as leave a lot of open-ended space to interpret how they might participate with one another. We are not given any information as to how the club works, what their ceremonies or rituals are. All we see are the members.

O.K. - A social and athletic club can basically mean anything. The club is also about inclusion and exclusion. Were you intrigued by dynamics that speak to that?

R.J. - Absolutely. Groucho Marx once said, "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member." But I was very interested in the idea of membership, the goals of belonging, and what might happen after you've acquired membership. It was also an opportunity to create a fiction, whereas so many things in earlier works had been about how I was seeing the world. This was an opportunity to see it from a different lens with a group of characters that might see it from a dissimilar perspective than mine.

O.K. - I think your work has become more and more about gesture and expression. Works like the* Cosmic Slops *are very close to abstract expressionism.

R.J. - They have evolved dramatically over the years: The first works were just poured, there was no gesture in it at all. And when you get to the later works it's all gesture, almost every aspect of it is touched. I began to trust the kind of poetry in my touch. In 2008, I stopped being afraid of being the artist I really wanted to be and I started to make a body of work that talked

Rashid Johnson, ***The Moment of Creation,*** mirrored tile, black soap, plant, album, shea butter, space rock, radio, 71" x 129.25" x 8." Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Adam Reich.

about material and poetry. Before it was like: 'How am I gonna define myself? What am I? Do I talk black?' All that shit. You get older and you're a man. You're like, 'I am what I am.' And I started making art that reflects that.

O.K. - And yet this can be done in a lot of different ways. When I look at your gestures, I think there is a certain moment of aggression. Some of the black blobs look like bags of paint thrown at a building's façade. Also you smash mirrors or parts of them.

R.J. - I'm interested in that aggression. I think there's a kind of physical catharsis in attacking a body of work. I don't want to be delicate with it. I don't want to explore the aspect of craft that some other artists do in a lot of interesting ways. I'm more interested in a physical relationship, the moment of confronting an artwork.

O.K. - At the same time, the materials you apply your gestures to are quite delicate: mirrors, tiles, also the wooden parquet floor that is carefully arranged into a kind of intarsia work.

R.J. - It's a kind of graffiti. A lot of what I call the canvas or underpaint that structures my work is very laborious. So it's this opportunity to destroy something beautiful, what I guess is almost more poetic, than I would even give myself credit for. I've created this constructed moment that becomes the underpainting for this aggressive gestural attack that happens soon after. I like that dichotomy, and I think it provides for an interesting narrative, a set of narratives that can be projected onto it.

O.K. - Gesture can also be seen as an autonomous part of the work. On the other hand, too many references prevent the work from becoming autonomous, because people will instantly focus on them. You use a lot of references in your work, and maybe at some point it gets too much; everything is so loaded and possibly meaningful that you can't see the forest for the trees.

R.J. - I think it's possible to read the work outside of the scope of references. I also think that it's possible to really dig into the work, that there's meat there, and that you maybe need a steak knife to participate. That's okay for me. The heavy referential structure doesn't necessarily exist in every work, but I think it's a really interesting launching pad for the way even the gestural work reads, so that you know there is depth in the way everything in my project is structured. Knowing that and having it as an underlying conversation, even when you see a singularly gestured work, you are able to join it to the complexity of the more referential ones.

O.K. - In 2009, plants appear for the first time; to me they mostly look exotic. Very often households go for exotic plants that come from a place far away.

R.J. - Most of the color that I brought into the work over the last few years has come from a natural intervention. As I brought in more color, I started to think about how plants would add a natural color and softness, that you would have to be obligated to the object in another way again, that you would be forced into

Rashid Johnson*, Cosmic Slop "Signs of Life",* 2013, black soap, wax, 60.5" x 84.5" x 3." Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Martin Parsekian.

Exhibition view "Three Rooms," Kunsthalle Winterthur, with 2x3 (2014) (left) and Samuel in Space (with shea butter and Persian rug) (2013) (right). Courtesy of Kunsthalle Winterthur. Photo: Christian Schwager.

Rashid Johnson, ***The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club (Thurgood),*** **2008**, Lambda print, 64" x 55." Courtesy of the artist.

participation or watch it die. The palm speaks very specifically to our access—or lack of access—to exotic space.

O.K. - In reference to the shelves, I also thought of trophies. When you think about the things that people put onto shelves, it's often memorabilia from travels. They are showing off that they have been there.

R.J. - Absolutely, trophies from my travels. These are the things that I have, that I collected, that I brought back with me. It's the same with all the objects: I've read this, I listen to this, this is who I am, how I can be identified through my souvenirs.

O.K. - You staged the theater play* Dutchman *at Performa 13 in a bathhouse in New York. It's a very different job to direct a play than to work as an individual artist in the studio. The actors are not assistants but artists themselves. I think it's a completely different working process.

R.J. - I learned that you can't control everything, and you have to believe in the people that you're working with. There was a set of skills I didn't have and I needed to rely on other people. Honestly, for me it was quite successful. I learned quite a bit, and it's something that I want to continue to explore. I don't necessarily have to be the only voice in the work for it to be successful. I still consider myself to be a young artist, so I'm very open to learning and finding new challenges. I would love to do another play, and I'd really like to make a film. My work is essentially a film—you almost need to see it all to be able to negotiate its meaning. I don't want to say that that's frustrating, but I would like to see what would happen if I did put that into an hour and 30 minutes. I like that the artwork is taking a new direction. There are two books that I'm very interested in producing as films. One is by Paul Beatty called *The White Boy Shuffle*, the second is *Native Son* by Richard Wright. Those two are very much on my mind, and I'm really excited about them. It's not totally unexpected, but it's very difficult. I will have to work with a professional film crew, so that's a whole new set of challenges that I'm ready to take on. When I get excited, that's the thing. Enthusiasm. That bit of that spark in your brain that says, 'I wanna do this.' ■

Rosa Barba, *Coro Spezzato: The Future Lasts One Day,* 2009, five 16mm color films, five modified projectors on pedestals, 5 min each. Installation at Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK, 2013. Photo: We Are Tape.

ROSA BARBA
Metaphors for History, Time and Society

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI

When the notion of 'Expanded Cinema' theorized by Gene Youngblood at the end of the 1960s became a major reference point for a young generation of filmmakers, it didn't take long to realize that one of the consequences operating in such inter-disciplinary mode was that their work, still intended to be quintessentially defined as 'film' would inevitably fall into additional areas like sculpture and performance. In the experimental and adversarial climate of independent filmmaking in the 1970s, however, unforeseen developments of this kind were rather welcome. Aided and abetted by structures that would play an active physical role within the space, filmmakers could now afford to be more adventurous contents-wise, focusing on one, single, strong idea in a fashion not dissimilar from Andy Warhol's film *Empire* (1964) or adopting expressive minimal forms like abstraction or repetition.

But if this advent would prove to be a liberating creative experience, from a technical standpoint it ushered in a serious set of limitations. Expensive, occasionally defective and often cumbersome, technology was not in a position yet to match artists' imaginations, and it wasn't until the late 1990s, when digital machines supplanted analogical ones, that things started being more viable. Interestingly, at about the same time, a new generation of filmmakers interested in embracing and reviving these antiquated technologies emerged.

Rosa Barba (born in Italy; based in Berlin) could certainly be considered part of this group, but unlike many of her peers, her motivation to explore the potentials of the 8-millimeter or 35-millimeter format doesn't stem from aesthetical or nostalgic reasons. Rather surprisingly, the restrictions that inhibited 1970s filmmakers are one of her principal sources of inspiration. As Barba herself put it, "Film is not the most open medium, but I like the limitations it provides. […] With Super 8 there was this specific limit in that I was working with light, and it had this performative aspect in that the work would have to be done in three-minute takes. So the cuts with the white came from these limitations. This became my language. I used these cuts to break up the film and also the installation, to work with the space. I don't know how to work experimentally without something that has limits. Video doesn't have these limitations so I don't know how to break with that."[1]

Barba's view of white or empty spaces as an active part of a larger visual narrative is indeed one of the cornerstones of her artistic edification. While it set up a rhythmical movement that contributes to defining time as a tangible entity, with black and white alternating respectively to assume the role of interval and action, it also reflects Barba's interest in negative spatial dimensions and how they can be functional to the work, as well as a way to chronicle undocumented history. A particular pertinent example of this latter stance is *It's Gonna Happen* (2005), a film in which a series of subtitles describing an otherwise invisible landscape are echoed (and rhymed) by the soundtrack of a conversation between a top politician and one of his aides. A clear reference to the so-called "smoking tape" that nailed Richard Nixon at the height of the Watergate scandal in 1974, *It's Gonna Happen* underscores the irony of how the gaps, i.e. the non-audible parts, ultimately played a crucial role in the downfall of the President. Similarly, *Western Round Table* (2009) refers to a mysterious gathering of luminaries such as Marcel Duchamp, Robert Goldwater, Arnold Schoenberg and Frank Lloyd Wright that took place in the Mojave Desert in Southeastern California in 1949. As the exact location of the meeting, as well as what passed in it, is to this day unknown, Barba's work re-creates an imaginary account of the event by placing one projector in front of another. Faint chimes are heard all around as if to signify a conspiratorial, unintelligible dialogue going on, while the shadows cast on the wall by the running machines suggest an atmosphere of mutual enlightenment. In a time when the most popular platform used to look for historical information is particularly pliable, works like *It's Gonna Happen* and *Western Round Table* come across as a deft warning of the dangers of these easy revisions and omissions. Yet, their undeniable sculptural quality adds an extra layer, representing history as a monument—a towering organism vulnerable to interpretations and misinterpretations but impermeable to intrinsic modifications.

Barba's fascination with blank spaces, when translated to the most figurative side of her filming practice, quite naturally leads to deserts, those huge, desolate, timeless sceneries where some of the most daring ideas humankind has ever conceived have been tested and occasionally implemented. "I am fascinated with vast, arid landscapes, as they seem to preserve documents in a much more intense way," Barba said on the occasion of her solo exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich in 2012.[2] Works like *The Long Road* (2010), an aerial view of an abandoned oval racetrack, or *Time as Perspective* (2012), a journey through the drilling machines that regularly pump oil out of Texas soil, possess a degree of geological analysis that would make The Center for Land Use Interpretation proud.[3] Both pieces present obvious Land Art correlations, but whereas *The Long Road* captures a still, decrepit presence, which despite its alien status now results in a surprisingly integrated bit of the landscape, *Time as Perspective* paints a much more disconcerting picture. The immensity of the area in which the action takes place, and the machines' constant mechanical movements, act as a metaphor for a Fritz Lang-like sinister industriousness. Their connection with the ground that hosts them is brutal, almost parasitical, and the absence of any trace of human existence evokes a futuristic scenario filtered through a grained 35-millimeter sensibility—a juggle between past, present and future that hints of the methodology often adopted by science-fiction writers (the conjecture of hypothetical future storylines by projecting occurrences from the past), and that fully explains the meaning of the title.

Barba's outing in the U.K. in 2013, with the double solo exhibition "Subject to Constant Change" at Turner Contemporary in Margate and Cornerhouse in Manchester, introduced new elements to her temporal and sociological investigation. The centerpiece of both shows, *Subconscious Society* (2013), is a film designed to es-

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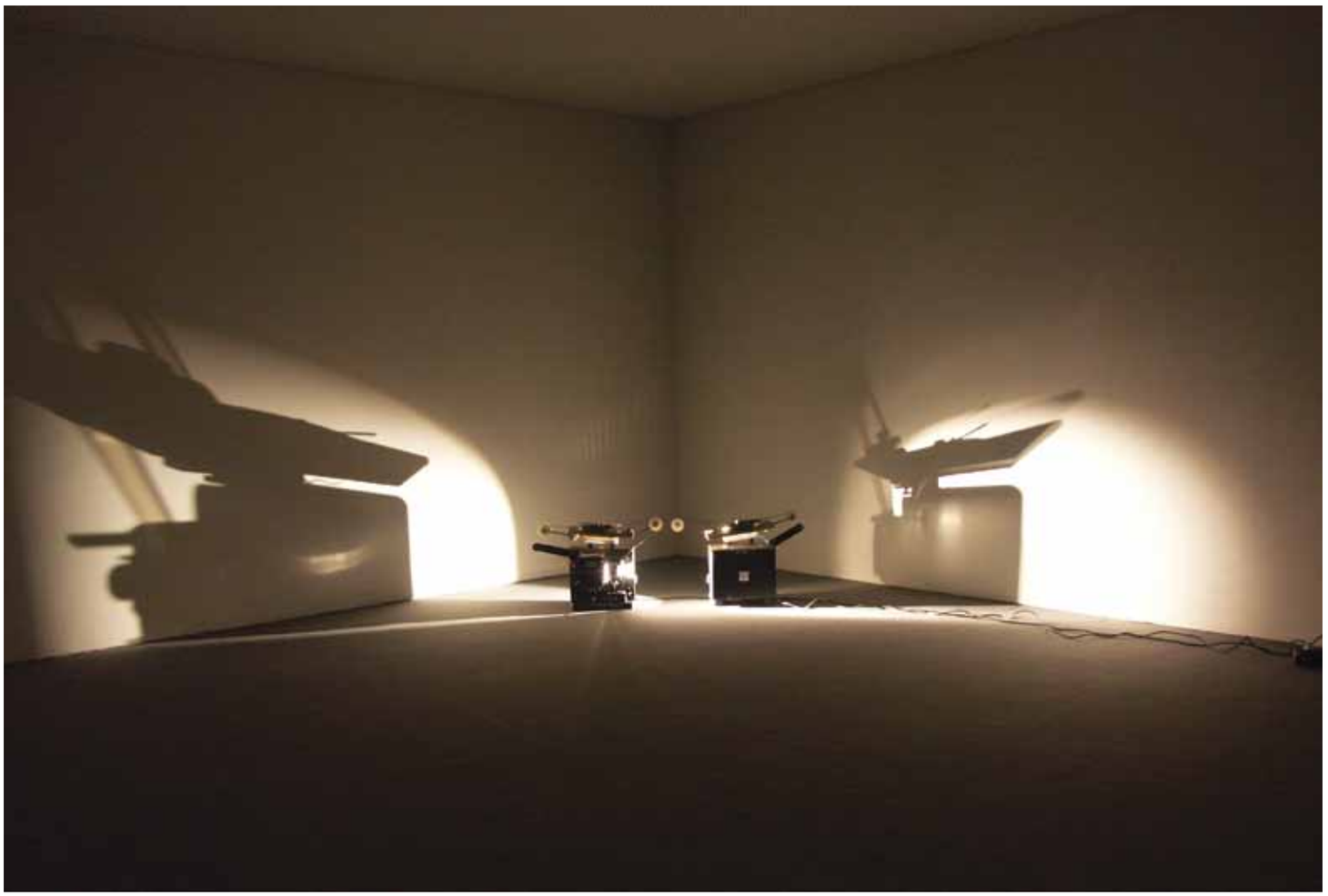


Rosa Barba*, Western Round Table,* 2007, two 16-mm films, two projectors, two loops, optical sound 2 min, installation view.

OPPOSITE PAGE: 1. **Rosa Barba*, The Long Road,* 2010 (film still)**, 35-mm film, color, optical sound, 6:14 min. © Rosa Barba. / **2. Rosa Barba, *Time as Perspective, 2012 (film still),*** 35-mm film, 12 min. © Rosa Barba. / **3. Rosa Barba, *Subconscious Society,* 2014 (film still),** 35mm film. © Rosa Barba.

tablish a critical relationship with the sites in which it was made. If the segment filmed in Margate somehow reprises the same ideas expressed in *Time as Perspective* and *The Long Track*, mainly focusing on the stranded ships and falling piers that disfigure a once lively coastal town to illustrate the definitive demise of the 20th-century industrial age, the one realized in Manchester takes a significant leap. It features actual people (a very rare occurrence in Barba's film work) in the shape of a group of residents interacting with the now abandoned Wesleyan chapel at Albert Hall on Peter Street. Moving around the building in a liberally choreographed manner, the characters in question appear to be suspended in a transitional dimension, caught between the imminent advent of the digital era and the passing away of an older, more reassuring age they seem willing to preserve. Their movements are at times poetic, desperate or futile and range from toying with a majestic but silent pipe organ to trying to interact with a string of obsolete devices dispersed across the room. A strange aura permeates these objects. They look familiar but not totally identifiable, and the inability to successfully activate them leaves the company with a feeling of resignation. Even in its most dry moments, Barba's work is never fully acritical—what she does amounts more to research than observation—but rarely before has conceded so much to romanticism, and the fact that she decided to work with members of a tight-knit community further underscores the general sense of melancholy.

Time-related issues were also prominent in another piece in the show, *Coro Spezzato: The Future Lasts One Day* (2009), an installation composed of five 16-millimeter projectors based on the idea of the early-Baroque Venetian polychorus, where singers are split into two factions and chant at alternate times leaving gaps in between. Programmed to follow the choirmaster in the form of text projected on a large screen, the projectors generate a multitude of sounds. Musicians are generally renewed for having invented highly developed and differentiated ways of dealing with time. *Coro Spezzato: The Future Lasts One Day,* like every work of polyphonic music, is a representation of how a group of people can inhabit time together. But is it a relationship of equity of dominance? The fragmented nature of the piece doesn't provide an answer, but its performing quality was successfully reemployed in *Subconscious Society - Live* (2013), Barba's commission in Performa 13, a semi-performative piece in which a similar social group entrapped in a provisional time metaphorically tries to archive the past in the hope of achieving a more legible present. ■

NOTES

1. See Gil Leung, "White is an Image: Rosa Barba in conversation with Gil Leung," Lux Artists' Moving Image, London, 2010, www.lux.org.uk.
2. See "Rosa Barba in conversation with Miriam Varadinis and Solveif Øvstebø," Kunsthaus Zurich and Bergen Kunsthall, 2012.
3. A research and education organization founded in California in 1994 dedicated to the study and comprehension of human interaction with the earth's surface; www.clui.org.

REMEMBERING THE FUTURE IN *SUBCONSCIOUS SOCIETY*

A Conversation with Rosa Barba

BY SCOTT BUDZYNSKI

I corresponded with Italian-born, Berlin-based artist Rosa Barba over several weeks and then met her in Berlin to discuss her extended-cinema film *Subconscious Society* and its themes of disjuncture, time and space.[1] Visiting the Berlin Biennale last summer (2014), Barba's film/installation was the work that most captured my attention for its innovative use of film in the performative sense to deal with issues of time, space and subjectivity.

In *Subconscious Society*, Barba montages sequences of abandoned industrial sites, such as the science-fiction-like Maunsell Forts in Kent with interior scenes of characters engaging in ceremonial activities, which take place in Manchester's Albert Hall. Originally built as a Wesleyan chapel, the monumental eclectic space features splendid cast-iron arcades, stained-glass windows and a grand pipe organ in rich wood casing. Long-abandoned—and just recently transformed into a trendy club venue—the moldering, dust-covered hall is littered with objects, like odd pieces of furniture, a manikin and piles of wood. Barba chose her protagonists from area residents of different age groups who had known the hall through its various uses. They comment on it in voice-overs often inconsistent with their motionless expressions. The dialogue is fragmented and abstract and insinuates a subconscious chain of associations. At times the theatrically dressed society members engage in the motions of an auction, although it remains unclear on exactly what they are bidding, perhaps memories of the future. For they seem trapped in the eternal present of their environment and only able to travel mentally, by means of images of industrial landscapes, which fade in as projections into the space of the hall and expand into new sequences. In one scene, the camera hovers over a grouping of solar panels in the desert and the voice-over of a girl says, "I don't have a passport, and my mum and dad, they've never been on a plane before. Neither did I go on one."

The landscapes are as uncannily evocative as the ceremonies. The Maunsell Forts from World War II are metal and concrete bunkers set on stilts rising out of the water. Deserted and rusting, they appear as walking fortresses prefiguring later mega-structural and cinematic fantasies. Scenes focus on emblems of technology, like the solar panels in the desert, and effects of the mechanical age on the environment, such as in close-ups of a dismal estuary littered with boating relics. In one montage, the sentence "Dreamland welcomes you" is painted on the side of a desolate industrial brick building next to a vast concrete lot, remnants of the past Dreamland Amusement Park. The incongruity between the text and the setting is one of many riddles in *Subconscious Society*. These environments suggest a nostalgia for industrial progress. As a result, Barba realizes a Deleuzian time-image, relating thought to time through the actors' gestures as they engage in their minimal activities and communications in Albert Hall.[2]

Subconscious Society suggests that material technologies exist as memories and have been superseded by a culture of immaterial communication. Travel no longer occurs physically in this society, but through strong mental images. This cryptic tone is underscored by the film's composition of digitally produced techno sounds, frequently merged together with a murmuring of indistinguishable voices. The sounds create a sense of an unknown and unmet expectation of a dramatic occurrence associated with the sites visualized. Barba also uses the film in its materiality as a sculptural element. A large film projector is set in the spectator area such that the loops of the film on reels as it is projecting can be seen, so dissolving the barrier between projective and spectator spaces. Analogous to ceremonial actions in the film, the spectator thus becomes a kind of ceremonial protagonist in the machinery behind the illusion.

Subconscious Society has transformed since its initial conception in 2012. Evolving versions of the film have been screened in New York, Manchester and Margate, England, each screening featuring different elements. In Berlin's 2014 Biennale, *Subconscious Society – A Feature,* the film installation incorporated the projector plates as kinetic sculpture, mirroring the film's archeological-industrial aesthetic.

Curated by Canadian-born Juan A. Gaitán, the Biennale was spread across three venues in different areas of the city, reflecting the broad and fragmented topography of Berlin.

Scott Budzynski - In* Subconscious Society*, the figures in the film seem to exist in a liminal state between mental and physical spaces. What associations do you hope to create through your montages?

Rosa Barba - The sites in my film represent a mental state of suspension. It's a space where you see and think from a different perspective and it enfolds into details. I can relate to this kind of suspension in my images when objects lose their scale—they don't relate to another or reference each other anymore. This is what I try to reach when filming from the air. The landscape becomes a drawing, especially when I shot on the British coast at low tide, when the sea reveals the structured landscape below.

In *Subconscious Society* we travel through sites that function like chapters. We find ourselves inside an abandoned building in England, a building that has changed its identity over the last hundred years, from being a church, a theater, a cinema and a sort of parliament, and then has been abandoned for many years, although apparently not by ghosts. My protagonists are trying to form a new society in this environment, inspecting the future and past and getting rid of objects. In between, the film cuts into other exterior landscapes—a prison, a river in the desert, the landscape under the sea, etc. I am interested in the architecture of a move-

***Still from Subconscious Society,* 2014,** 35mm film, © Rosa Barba.

ment or a history in the landscape. I investigate the mental states inside the landscapes around us and where we leave our objects.

S.B.* - Subconscious Society *conveys a post-apocalyptic tone in which futuristic sites play a strong role. Are your characters embarking on a type of time travel?
R.B. - Yes, my characters are embarking on a time travel. I never work with actors, and I don't want my characters to act much. It's the layered suspension of the material that moves them. But they do speak. Their statements and their thoughts are part of the soundscape. I think of time as a layered slab, and this is also so in my films, with periods stacked on top of each other rather than in a single stretched line. In order to see it, you need to view it from the right angle. My camera allows me to be synched with 'time,' or near to it, especially when I film in wide-open spaces, where time seems to exist endlessly in every direction—it is almost three-dimensional.

Looking through the camera, I often feel that the process of capturing time requires a specific perspective. The characters are strongly connected to the places I am shooting. I see them as 'documents' as well. By juxtaposing seemingly disparate material, the viewer activates the gaps and develops new layers of reading in terms of social or political issues. I hope the film offers 'activations.'

S.B.* - *Robert Smithson, in his* Spiral Jetty *(1970), picks up this theme, the sedimentation of time, but also of mental and physical places. Do you understand landscape in a similar way? As a type of journey? Can you relate this to your experience as an artist-in-residence at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas?
R.B. - I can relate very much to this experience and to this understanding of landscape. Marfa was a perfect place to work on my film last winter and to further investigate this thinking.

I turned my studio into a light-piece. The studio, a former food-storage locker plant and property of Donald Judd that was created for artists-in-residence, is located next to train tracks. Many times a day, very long trains cross through town, announcing themselves with a huge soundtrack that echoes for some time into the desert landscape. I attached a microphone to the tracks and used the reverberation to connect to a spotlight placed on my studio's large windows. When the train approached, the light started to flicker with the rhythm of the tracks, pumping light into the building.

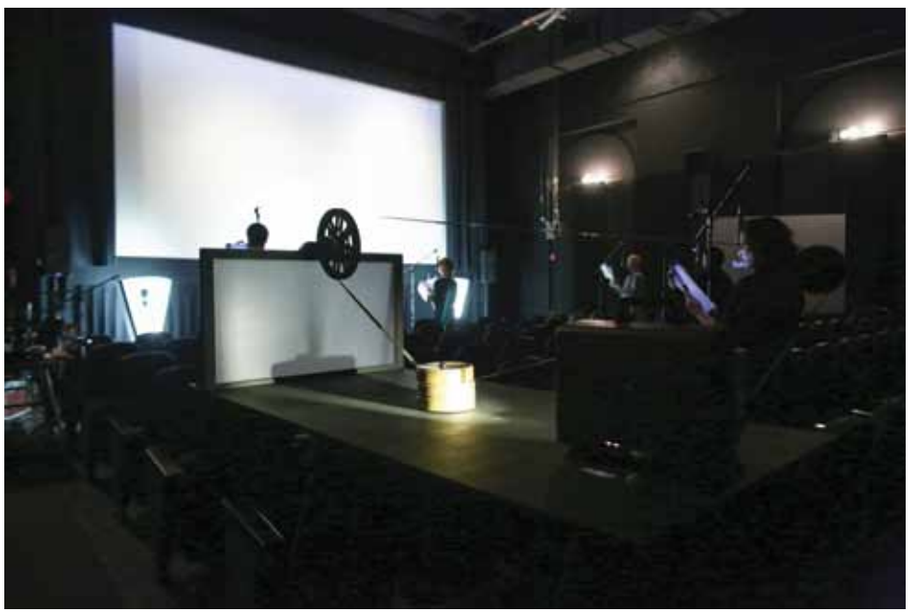
I am interested in land art, especially when it signifies a protest against the exhibit's artificiality, but also land art's conceptual aspects. My work relates to these artists' affinities with their chosen locations, but I am also looking for "documents" in the landscape that manifest themselves in sculptural ways, and which might grow into possibilities of a fictional layer.

S.B.* - *While you have worked with individual characters and narratives of place in your films,* Subconscious Society*, through its very title, emphasizes a more defined sense of community. Can it be seen as an elaboration on previous films?
R.B. - Yes, it draws and expands on visual impressions and social interactions from many of my previous films and picks up on specific forms and appearances from shorter films shot in the desert. The investigation of social interactions is present in my very first film, *Panzano* (2000), in which we observe three people who are orchestrated in vaguely defined, exchangeable roles: sometimes as a typical couple and their child, and at other times an atypical family in its daily habits and conversations.

Subconscious Society also elaborates on my earlier work *The Empirical Effect* (2010). In it, attempts to tame nature are at stake. The characters interact in a scenario about a reawakening of Vesuvius.

S.B.* - *On the one hand, the objects you show have a technological feel, but they also appear antiquated and their precise use is not clear. Is this an interest of yours, the poetic quality of a type of techno-industrial palimpsest?

Installation view of Subconscious Society - a Feature at the 2014 Berlin Biennale at the Museen Dahlem – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, © Rosa Barba.



View of Subconscious Society - Live, performed at the Anthology Films Archives in New York City, November 2013, Performa commission 2013. Photo: Paula Court.

R.B. - I am interested in objects that house many associations and cannot be clearly positioned on a timeline. Also objects that produced a certain knowledge for a certain time, like the objects from the BBC radio that the actors try to buy at the auction in their building. In a similar way, I tried to film the Maunsell Sea Forts in a way that had no military associations—so I emptied them of their original use and offered them as a new housing for your mind.

S.B. - Would you say that you uncover dream narratives in the places you represent throughout your films? How do you choose the material you work with?

R.B. - I would say that I try to zoom into a narrative, which was not obviously visible. Yet still, I am interested in embarking onto an historical fact. When I choose my sites or characters, I go on a research trip. I interview people around those sites with the questions that I would like to pose in my film, even though I don't repeat the question in the film. The different views help me add layers to my construction.

S.B. - In the 8th Berlin Biennale showing of* Subconscious Society, *the film projection plates are given attention as kinetic objects. It is somewhat reminiscent of László Moholy-Nagy's* Light-Space Modulator *(1922- 1930). Movement, projection and the actual sound of the projector are all brought out through it. Do you see a connection between Moholy-Nagy's experiments in light and space and your approach to film?

R.B. - Yes, I do. I have experimented for years with how film expands into space and all elements become part of the action—transport mechanisms that help us enter the narrative. At the Berlin Biennale, I modified a loop device for 35-millimeter film to become a meditative sculpture that resonated with the projected film.

S.B. - Both film and architecture engage with space and time. Constructed objects can structure movement through space for a duration. Film projects the viewer into montaged spaces. Have these qualities contributed to your choice of film as an artistic medium?

R.B. - I was fascinated by the way I could work with light while capturing an image on film and the limited time I had with each roll of film and its materiality. Abstraction has always been an important method for me. Very early on, I started fragmenting my work. With my sculptural approach, the fragmentation became more condensed into observable phenomena, with the strong use of the language of loops to continually trans-

***Still from Subconscious Society,* 2014,** 35mm film, © Rosa Barba.

pose material into an image and back again. Repetition always helped me formulate an idea.

S.B. - The exhibition space also seems very important in your films. Archeology and the meanings associated with objects, for example, also seem important, especially in the Ethnological Museum in the Dahlem museums complex in Berlin. Do the meanings of your work shift in the context of the ethnographical collection?

R.B. - In different exhibition spaces, the concentration shifts in the piece. The Ethnological Museum creates a very interesting time zone for the artworks of the Biennale. I am especially fascinated by the Polynesian boats and the documentary about their construction. A dialogue occurs between the society that intuitively builds those perfect navigation boats without instructions and the performed society in my film.

S.B. - A museum setting presents a more fractured viewing experience than a cinema. How does your cinematic strategy respond to this?

R.B. - I am interested in merging the cinema and the exhibition experiences. In November 2013, I performed the film *Subconscious Society - Live* at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City as a commission from Performa. Parts of the film were performed as live events on the cinema screen in the AFA's screening theater, while also being projected around the space and onto the cinema seats as 16-millimeter films and filmic sculptures. Formal aspects, such as a sentence or a sound, were repeated. These films behaved almost like characters, or stand-ins for the viewer, interacting with one another as if they comprised a splintered ensemble. There was also a live choir seated among the audience.

I am always searching for new ways of dealing with my subjects, and orchestrating them in the same space makes the most sense. For example, using 35-millimeter film in installations gives the subject of 'time' a more layered narrative, as opposed to the sculptural works that experiment with words and objects. And all the works share the theme of 'instability.' The idea of 'transformation' is always tangible; films are transformed into texts, texts into films. Pauses, or intervals, are used in all the works to express a sense of lost time. This is critical for representing movement, but unseen—its 'discontinuity' disappears into the continuous flow. The result is something between a balancing act and a magic theater.

S.B. - To bring this to a close, is there something that many of today's artistic constructions—and your work in particular—express about the current state of society, such as specific fears or desires?

R.B. - Probably the fear of a self-conscious detachment, the fear of becoming a transparent society that is completely coded and the fear of the impossibility to feel close to an idea. Also, the desire of a society that is composed by rational and irrational occurrences of a deeper understanding and respect of the world we share. ■

NOTES

1. See video link from "Subject to Constant Change," an exhibition with extracts from *Subconscious Society* held at Cornerhouse, Manchester, and Turner Company, Margate, in 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHOxafq0Sc8>
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Continuum, 1989, 182-183.

BETWEEN REPRESENTATION AND ABSTRACTION: LIZ DESCHENES

BY MICHAEL R. SMITH, JR.

A yearlong exhibition featuring the work of photographer Liz Deschenes opened November 22, 2014, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN. This event marks the artist's first solo show at a U.S. museum, and it features an entirely new body of work that Deschenes has produced specifically for the occasion. It takes its name—*Gallery 7*—from the former moniker of the Walker's Medtronic Gallery, where it is currently installed.

The exhibition consists primarily of eleven free-standing frames that house nine photograms and two semi-transparent blue monochrome digital images printed on acrylic sheets. The former were created by taking pieces of photosensitive paper, exposing them to ambient light, and then treating them with silver toner. Unlike many photograms, Deschenes images do not index any recognizable objects.[1] They do, however, continuously respond to various factors in their surroundings, including changes in the light, temperature, humidity, and even the presence of viewers. That is to say, in other words, that these images are always developing, and the result is an almost mirror like abstract surface that is in a state of perpetual becoming.

The digital prints, on the other hand, are meant to be impervious to physical change. The colors that they reference are derived from the Blue Wool Scale, a system originally developed for the textile industry that is now used as a means of determining lightfastness. Quite simply, as the artist has put it: "These are not supposed to fade—ever."[2]

This dual emphasis on transience and archival permanence already hints at one of photography's most prominent features throughout its history: the ability to arrest a fleeting moment of light so that it may be preserved for the future. Indeed, it is just this kind of engagement with and re-contextualization of photography's history[3] that has characterized Deschenes' photograms for some time now. While it is true that they are continuously in the process of indexing their surroundings, they remain decidedly abstract, betraying no overt reference to anything. In this regard they intervene in the naïve belief that photography's *raison d'être* consists in the expedient and accurate representation of the physical world, a belief that overlooks the fact that techniques for manipulating the supposed veracity of the photograph have existed for as long as there has been photography.

Although Deschenes' project can be situated within and against a backdrop of the history of photography, they have much to say about the history of painting and sculpture as well. Superficially, of course, they read very much like paintings and sculptures,[4] perhaps more so than they do as photographs.[5] But on a more fundamental level they get to the heart of the long and sometimes tumultuous relationship between painting and photography. Since its inception, the "pencil of nature," as Fox Talbot termed it, has caused painters a considerable degree of consternation and anxiety, leading some—Paul Delaroche amongst them—to go so far as to conclude that, "painting is dead."[6] Indeed, this pronouncement of painting's demise and the several others since have all turned out to be exaggerations. However, one cannot understate photography's impact on the painterly medium. For the first time painters were freed from the obligation to depict the corporeal world, leading, amongst other things, to a proliferation of abstraction the likes of which had never before been seen in Western art.[7]

What, then, does it mean for a contemporary photographer such as Deschenes to employ photographic techniques to create abstract works of art, especially considering how much photography continues to be deployed for its mimetic precision? In what ways does her work constitute a radical reconsideration of photography as a medium?[8] And more importantly perhaps, underscore the ongoing tensions between representation and abstraction that have so long underpinned our assumptions about the function of photography and painting respectively? Segueing through the history of abstract painting to discuss the relationship between photography and conceptual art will lead us to the question of Deschenes' installation at the Walker in relation to these histories.[9] In so doing I hope to show that photography has never been solely or even primarily about the indexing of physical things on a light-sensitive surface, or a tool for documentation, or a vehicle for delivering the visual equivalent of 'the truth.' This is not to say that Deschenes' work makes no references to the outside world—all abstract art does this to varying degrees—but it does complicate photography's mimetic role by recasting it as a plastic medium, a medium that from the onset has been implicitly amenable to abstract applications and rigorous conceptual rumination.

To be sure, abstraction was not entirely an invention of the 20th-century, even though it would come into its own during its early decades. One can find precedents for it in the work of many 19th century artists, including Gustave Courbet, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, and Joseph Mallord William Turner, just to name a few. Of the three, Courbet had the greatest propensity towards conceiving of painting as an essentially "concrete art form" and nature as "superior to all artistic conventions."[10] It should be noted that these comments were penned towards the end of 1861—approximately the same time that new advances in photographic techniques had engendered an explosion in the medium's popularity.[11] It should come as no surprise, then, that this drastic proliferation of the photographic image would have a profound effect on the perceived subordination of painting to nature that had been so central a concept for Courbet. By 1885, this precedent would become virtually irrelevant when Whistler decreed the painter to be under no obligation to take nature "as she is."[12] In the short span of some twenty-four years, painting

Installation view, *"Liz Deschenes: Gallery 7,"* 2014, all images are courtesy of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Photos: Gene Pittman.

had begun to shake loose the fetters of representational fidelity and to move ever nearer to a completely non-objective visual language.

This tendency towards abstraction would continue to increase as the 20th-century dawned, and in 1911 Wassily Kandinsky claimed to have painted his first entirely abstract image,[13] an event that likely would have been inconceivable before the advent of the photograph. The following year, Marcel Duchamp completed what is perhaps his most famous painting: *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. Despite being abstract, we can see just how influenced it was by the chronophotographs of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge,[14] especially the latter's *Descending Stairs and Turning Around*, which uses a sequence of images to depict a female nude as she descends down a flight of stairs. Although Duchamp's nude differs from Muybridge's in that the former compresses the flow of time into a singular frame instead of several, what is just as starkly different is the way they use time to treat one of the most venerable of artistic subjects: the female nude. While there is certainly an emphasis on temporality in Muybridge's chronophotograph, it nevertheless maintains the sensible beauty of the model, whereas in Duchamp's painting, quite the opposite is true. He was all-too-willing to sacrifice beauty in the name of movement—something Muybridge was not. The aggregate effect of all those superimposed images of the body in motion was thus to obliterate the idealized nude into a thousand disjointed planes.[15]

When it was put on display in the Armory Show of 1913, *Nude Descending a Staircase* caused a considerable stir amongst critics and viewers alike.[16] While there are surely any number of reasons for this kind of consternation, part of the outcry surrounding Duchamp's controversial painting is surely due to its flippant treatment of idealized beauty incarnate. Underneath that irreverence, however, is an even deeper threat to the self-satisfied complacency of retinal art: the mechanization of reproduction. By using painting as a means to appropriate the techniques of photography, Duchamp begins to unravel the very logic of painting from the inside. It should come as no surprise, then, that many artists and critics would be wary about the looming conceptual upheaval that photography represented for art as traditionally understood,[17] a fear that would eventually come to fruition when photography was transformed from a tool whose primary function is the two-dimensional copy of the three-dimensional world into an implement of appropriation. Perhaps more than any other technology, it is photography that was responsible for spurring the postmodern love-affair with quotation, parody, and irony. From Richard Prince's pastiche magazine advertisements to Sherrie Levine's

Installation view, "Liz Deschenes: Gallery 7," 2014.

re-contextualization of Walker Evans, the motto for the postmodern photographer became something quite different than that of their modernist counterparts. To put it in Levine's words, "We can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original."[18]

Part of Duchamp's influence on artists like Levine and Prince can be seen in the way photography became an instrument for the propagation of the readymade image—appropriate considering that one of the things the readymade accomplishes is a kind of mechanization of the artistic process. The effects of this rampant automation was to thoroughly undermine the concepts of originality and authenticity that had previously propped up the modernist conception of abstraction. As the 1970s were beginning to draw to a close, Fredric Jameson would come to realize just how much abstraction had become "a tired convention,"[19] one whose new "operative model"[20] was, as Rosalind Krauss saw it, predicated on photography rather than painting. By the end of the 1980s, W. J. T. Mitchell would look back on the accomplishments of abstraction, noting that it had "more institutional and cultural power as a rearguard tradition than it ever did as an avant-garde overturning of tradition."[21] Thus it was that by the end of the 20th-century, painting—and especially abstract painting—was seen by critics and historians as increasingly irrelevant and incapable of breaking new ground, and no doubt photography played a key part in fostering this sentiment.

Where, then, does this brief sojourn through the history of photograph and painting get us in terms of positioning Deschenes' exhibition at the Walker? Well, the first thing to say is that her photograms can be seen as participating in a line of thinking about photography that has evolved from the readymade, and in many ways pushes the idea in an entirely new direction. The readymades have always been about the re-contextualization of objects that normally would not constitute a work of art as traditionally understood.[22] What Levine and other postmodern artists did was to simply use the camera as a way of extending the idea of the readymade so that it could include the whole world of pre-existing images, including other works of art.[23] Deschenes' photograms, however, move the readymade beyond the dualism of object and image into the whole of the environment as it is constantly impressing itself upon the photosensitive surface, thus transforming it into what we might call a *readymaking*.

This, however, could be said about any of the photograms that Deschenes has produced over the years, and not just those that she created for her exhibition at the Walker. What separates this body of work from some of her others is the inclusion of the Blue Wool prints. As noted

Installation view, "Liz Deschenes: Gallery 7," 2014.

above, the juxtaposition created by their being featured alongside the photograms is one of preservation and transformation. In a curious sort of way they allude to the often difficult—and ultimately impossible—job of conservation in the face of the doggedly withering effects of time, a task that is certainly one of the primary institutional functions of the museum. On another level, however, these works suggest a different (although related) concept: the museum as an architectural frame. This reflexive gesture not only hints at the function of the gallery as a space for containing art objects, it also points us back to the progenitor of the camera, i.e., the darkened chamber into which an image is projected. Deschenes herself has expressed an interest in thinking about rooms "as framing devices or view-finders,"[24] and for the installation at the Medtronic Gallery she draws attention to this conceptual facet of her work by circumscribing its walls with three rows of parallel picture rails, thereby enclosing the space with a construct more typically used for the presentation of images inside space.[25]

Another important modification made to the space was the removal of the neutral density filters that covered the gallery's east facing windows. While such filters are generally used by museums to minimize the fade-inducing effects of the sun, for the purposes of Deschenes' photograms this is of little concern—an intense level of natural light is a prerequisite of the work. One might even say that the absence of these filters is a key component in the ongoing dialogue between being and becoming, inside and outside, frame and object that is so much at play in this exhibition. Not only is it a catalyst for change in the photograms (which the Blue Wools stoutly resist), it also rather poignantly opens the literal and conceptual frames of the installation to the broader possibilities of what lies outside their boundaries.

This sort of theoretical and specific engagement is quite typical of all the projects Deschenes has been involved with, a point that is hammered home by the artist's exhaustive research into the archives of the Walker. A good deal of the inspiration for this exhibition comes from *c. 7,500*, a 1973 group show curated by Lucy Lippard that featured exclusively women artists[26]—a show that was staged in the very same room that *Gallery 7* is now to be found.[27] Clearly, then, there is a deep affinity for—and indebtedness to—the project of conceptualism for Deschenes. This affinity can, as I have tried to show, be traced to the origins of photography, which proved to be from the outset, a highly conceptual activity itself. This was implicit in the question that photography raised more poignantly than it had ever been before: What is memetic precision? From this question a whole litany of others inevitably followed. What is representation? What is nature?

And perhaps most importantly, what is art? It seems to me that in raising these questions, photography has sent us hurtling down the path of conceptualism in ways that other mediums have not.

This is not to say that painting was excluded from the development of conceptualism. Even Clement Greenberg was quick to admit that the value of post-painterly abstraction "lies almost entirely in [its] conception."[28] I do think, however, that it is important to keep in mind just how much of a conceptual and ontological challenge photography posed to painting and why it was that it had little choice but to turn to abstraction for an answer. While it is tempting to assume that photography freed painting to pursue other ends besides representation, in many respects it forced it to, and it did this not by being more realistic than painting, but rather by having just as much potential for abstraction as painting did. Whatever else Deschenes might be lauded for, surely one of the most important is just how much her work demonstrates this fact about photography.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the one-on-one encounter with the work itself. One's first impression is of the absolute starkness of the space, its bare and understated simplicity a welcome departure from the gaudy, maximalist approach of some recent exhibitions.[29] This played down effect no doubt suggests a keen sense of self-editing on the part of Deschenes, and for this reason it recalls a good deal of the minimalism of the latter half of the 20th-century, but it in a way that forgoes any semblance of parroting for its own sake. In fact, it is the formal simplicity of these objects that are the greatest source of their perplexity. Upon entering the gallery one cannot help but feel a deep appreciation for what Rothko meant when he said that the shapes in his paintings were on an "unknown adventure into an unknown space,"[30] for despite all the formal boundaries and playful applications of frames, the space manages somehow to imbue an ineffable sense of openness and even mystery.

In emphasizing the simplicity of the exhibition from a formal perspective I do not mean to suggest an equally simplistic conceptual component, but at least from my perspective it is hard not to notice how masterfully crafted Deschenes' work is. One comes to take a conceptual interest in them after the fact, but right from the outset they demand a consideration of their objecthood. Without this it would be difficult, I think, to fully appreciate all the conceptual nuances that this exhibition envisages, one of the most important of which, no doubt, is the reminder that an abstraction of materials and an abstraction of thought are very often inseparable from one another—an idea that had already been central during the earliest days of abstraction, and one that is very much at play here as well.

AFTERWORD: AN INTERVIEW WITH WALKER ART CENTER CURATOR ERIC CROSBY[31]

Michael Smith - One of the first things that strikes me upon entering the space of the Medtronic Gallery is the understated minimalism of the installation, and just how decidedly abstract the work is. Do you see in this gesture an echo of the minimalism and abstraction of the mid-to- late 20th-century? If so, was this a decision that was consciously integrated into the exhibition, or did it grow organically out of Deschenes' work?

Eric Crosby - As you know, Liz Deschenes's work has in many ways considered the legacies of minimalism, so it is not surprising that the exhibition has assumed such a pared down form. What interests me most is how Liz's work has taken such a close and considered relationship to the space of its display. When Edward Larrabee Barnes designed the 1971 Walker building, he did so in close dialogue with director Martin Friedman, who at that time was actively collecting American Minimalism. These spaces were very much designed with the presentation of Minimalism in mind. Liz has quite literally reflected that condition back on itself with her installation. I think the exhibition isn't so much an echo of minimalism, but rather a consequence of her research into site, history, and the conditions of display.

M.S. - And while on the subject of abstraction, what do you take to be Deschenes' relation to that tradition in the visual arts, especially abstract painting (which her photographs very often read like)?

E.C. - It is interesting that you ask about painting. When Barnes designed the Walker's building, he wanted the visitor to experience "paintings in space"—an ambition that Deschenes considered when conceiving her installation. While the resulting work does on first appearance seem abstract, I'm often more fascinated by the representational aspects of her use of photography. The mirrored photograms, for example, can't help but reflect, even "picture," the viewer and the space of their display. The blue pigment prints are certainly monochromes, but they too depict something found in the world—namely the colors of the Blue Wool cards that conservators use to determine how long an artwork may be exposed to light.

M.S. - Finally, you have spoken about the work Deschenes produced for this exhibition as being "alchemical and reflective, digital and absorptive." Could you expand on these ideas a bit, especially as they pan out in terms of the stark conceptual/formal differences between the Blue Wool prints and the photograms? Is there something to be said for the dialogue they set up between preservation on the one hand and change on the other?

E.C. - Yes, absolutely! You are right to think about the dialogue between preservation/conservation and change over time. The blue pigment prints involve colorfast inks whereas the photograms will continue to "develop," taking on new colors and casts over time. In this sense the installation keeps its own time, and the exhibition itself functions as a test of the gallery's evolving light conditions (natural and artificial). "Alchemical and reflective" are words meant to describe the photograms. They are very sensitive and responsive works—they respond to your movement through space and do in fact change color and sheen over time. The words "digital and absorptive" refer to the blue pigment print elements, which began as digital files delivered to a printer and because they were executed on acrylic seem to absorb and hold light with a textured surface that appears like ground glass. ■

NOTES

1. Such as we often (though not always) find in the work of Talbot, Man Ray, and Moholy-Nagy.
2. Liz Deschenes, artist's talk given at the Walker Art Center, November 22, 2014.
3. Or, more precisely put, its various *histories*.
4. Per her talk given for the opening of her exhibition at the Walker, this is the first time that she has worked with freestanding objects placed on the floor.

Installation view, "Liz Deschenes: Gallery 7," 2014.

5. The Blue Wool prints in particular call to mind the work of Donald Judd, and to a somewhat lesser extent, that of Yves Klein.
6. While this phrase is widely credited to Delaroche, it is quite possible that he may not have ever made it. Nevertheless, the popularity with which it is attributed to him is evidence enough of the drastic consequences that the appearance of the Daguerreotype would envisage for the future of representation. See Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted*. London: Reaktion Books, 1997, 264.
7. While this tends to be the usual method for explaining the development of abstract painting in the early twentieth-century, it is, of course, both a simplification of the effect that photography had on painting and also a bit of an exaggeration of painting's response to photography. There are indeed any number of ways that painting and photography have informed and influenced one another throughout their histories, one such example being the appearance of the abstract photogram during the late 1910s and early 1920s. See Susan Laxton, "White Shadows: Photograms Around 1922," in *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925*, ed. Leah Dickerman. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013.
8. Of the sort that accompanied the 20th-century 'abstract revolution' in painting.
9. I must caution that the following historical sketch makes no claim to exhaustiveness. Any attempted gloss on a century's worth of history will inevitably leave a good deal out. By necessity I must therefore limit myself to what I consider some of the essential points. The danger in so doing, of course, is that whatever connections that are made between them might take on an unduly linear and/or teleological tenor. Given the limited nature of the attempt, this may simply be unavoidable, but in any case I should like to make the limitations of this exposition clear to readers before they continue on.
10. See *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, ed. and trans. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992, 204.
11. This was due, in no small part, to the Frederick Scott Archer's invention of the wet-plate collodion method in 1851, which made for faster, cheaper, and sharper images than calotypes. See Todd Gustavson, *Camera: A History of Photography from Daguerreotype to Digital*. New York: Sterling Signature, 2009, 28.
12. James Abbot McNeill Whistler, "The Ten O'Clock," in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, 7.
13. See Hans K. Roethel and Jean K. Benjamin, "A New Light on Kandinsky's First Abstract Painting," *The Burlington Magazine* 119, no. 896 (November 1977): 772–73.
14. See Aaron Scharf, "Painting, Photography, and the Image of Movement," *The Burlington Magazine* 104, no. 710 (May 1962): 188–95.
15. One might say that the vehement response to Duchamp's *Nude* is not so much indicative of a kind of moral indignation about the sanctity of beauty so much as it is a premonition of what Walter Benjamin called "the approaching crisis" that is mechanical reproduction. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1986, 224.
16. A particularly derisive remark dubbed it an "explosion in a shingle factory." Jean-Michael Rabate, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, 40.
17. This general uneasiness is succinctly summed up by Olga Rozanova when she writes, "The photographer and the servile artist, in depicting nature's images, will repeat them." "The Bases of the New Creation and the Reasons Why It Is Misunderstood," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Paul Wood and Charles Harrison. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, 206.
18. Sherrie Levine, "Statement," in *Appropriation*, ed. David Evans. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009, 81.
19. "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate," in *Ideologies of Theory*. New York: Verso, 2008, 446.
20. "Notes on the Index, Part 2," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986, 210.
21. W. J. T. Mitchell, "'Ut Pictura Theoria': Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 349.
22. By which I mean what art that is primarily a retinal undertaking.
23. A move that is no doubt anticipated by Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*
24. "Interview: Liz Deschenes & Bettina Spörr," in *Liz Deschenes: Secession*, ed. Bettina Spörr and Tina Lipsky. Berlin: Revolver, 2012, 28.
25. Deschenes has adopted various other strategies for achieving similar effects in other exhibitions, such as her 2012 show at the Secession in Vienna where she had viewers enter the building via an infrequently used side door and hallway that drew attention, as Johanna Burton notes, "to the parameters of the building." Johanna Burton, "Because There Is No Decisive Moment," in *Liz Deschenes: Secession*, ed. Bettina Spörr and Tina Lipsky. Berlin: Revolver, 2012, 17.
26. The impetus for Lippard's exhibition was, as Deschenes puts it, in "response to a quip that there were no more female conceptual artists. She managed to find twenty-six of them." Artist's talk given at the Walker Art Center, November 22, 2014.
27. Hence the title of the exhibition: *Gallery 7*, the name by which the space was known in 1973.
28. "After Abstract Expressionism," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, 787.
29. Last year's retrospective of Jeff Koons at the Whitney, for example.
30. Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Paul Wood and Charles Harrison. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003, 572.
31. Conducted via email between January 13 and January 25, 2015.

RAPT ATTENTION
A Conversation with Lily Cox-Richard

Lily Cox-Richard is a sculptor currently based in Houston, Texas, whose work is commanding growing attention. Having earned her MFA in Sculpture + Extended Media from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2008, she has had recent exhibitions at Hirschl & Adler in New York, Vox Populi in Philadelphia, the Poor Farm in Manawa, Wisconsin, and Kompact Living Space in Berlin.

Cox-Richard's diverse projects have included indoor and outdoor installations (*Spark Gap*, 2008 and *Fruiting Bodies*, 2011) and interventions (*Strike*, 2012), individual sculptures presented as part of a conceptual group (*Rapt*, 2009), and self-published books (*Lightning Wireless*, 2008 and *thicket*, 2013). Her media have ranged from carved plaster, to cast resin, fiberglass and found objects. Uniting these disparate projects is the artist's exacting representational skill, careful attention to craft, and investment in an object's phenomenological presence.

Our conversation began by considering her recent project *The Stand (Possessing Powers)* (2013)—on view last year at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York May 10 to September 14—that attracted critical interest.[1] The group of carved plaster sculptures carefully recreate only the bases and vertical props (tree stumps, drapery, stone) of American neoclassical sculptor Hiram Powers' idealized female nudes (such as his *Greek Slave* of 1844). With the standing body absent, the viewer is directed to contemplate what was usually understood to be a mostly functional device in the original marble sculpture. The artist has neatly reframed these secondary supports revealing their iconographic contribution to the cultural assumptions regarding gender, race and class in Powers' 19th-century compositions.

BY KRISTINA OLSON

Kristina Olson – You've said that, "My sculpture grapples with charging empty spaces, revealing invisible systems, and reaffirming exhausted objects." Maybe you can begin by explaining those ideas in relation to* The Stand (Possessing Powers) *project.

Lily Cox-Richard – I've become really curious about objects that seem familiar, but when pressed, are difficult to place specifically in terms of their history or importance. For example, lightning rods, or in the case of *The Stand (Possessing Powers)*, a certain kind of sculpture that has the ability to blend almost seamlessly into a kind of architectural ornamentation. Sometimes this vagueness imbues the object with a kind of evasive power, but other times it seems to leave the object mute, receding into the general landscape.

K.O. – Okay, but what prompted your interest in Powers' figures? It seems so anachronistic for you as a twenty-first century artist schooled in contemporary practice to turn your attention to these academic artifacts of long-ago.

L.C.-R. – Yes, exactly. I think my initial *disinterest* is what prompted my interest. When I was working on *Rapt* (2009), I had an impulse to learn stone carving. I wasn't really planning on making those pieces in marble, but I wanted to know how my understanding of them would change if I tried. The *Rapt* forms were inspired by these shrouded obelisk 19th-century grave markers, and I had some questions that I couldn't find answers to in my research, and I thought, maybe if I understand something about the way they were made, maybe if I have a corporeal understanding through carving them in stone, then I will find these answers. So I spent the summer living and working in a quarry near Salzburg. I took an afternoon off to walk around town, much of which was built using stone from the same quarry in which I was working. I found myself looking at stone in a completely new way. Not only did I know which tools made which marks, and have a new appreciation for the challenges involved, but I started noticing the different strategies sculptors used to shore up figures, like having fabric drape from an outstretched arm to the base. I remember seeing a sculpture of Hercules, and his club was really strangely stylized and beautiful, and I thought, wow, what a great form, too bad it's connected to that not-so-great figure of Hercules!

I'm sure that primed me to see Powers' *The Last of the Tribes* (1876-77) for the first time. After the quarry, I returned to Houston, where I was a fellow in the Core Program, so my studio was across the street from the Museum of Fine Arts. I was wandering around the museum, and came across that sculpture. I had walked by it fifty times without ever noticing it, and suddenly it had me. It's a marble figure of a bare-breasted Native American girl "fleeing civilization" and, as she runs, her skirt brushes across the clean hewn edge of a tree stump. She only has one foot on the ground, so the stump/skirt connection is what is keeping her from breaking off at the ankle, and the stump is really big, as tall as her thigh, and in the foreground of the figure, not subtly tucked behind her leg. I thought, okay, not only is this the weirdest possible solution for stabilizing the figure, but also it is by far the most interesting part of the sculpture.

So this introduced a bunch of other questions: Why hadn't I noticed this sculpture before? Why was it so hard to take it seriously as important American sculpture, and why was it so uncomfortable when I tried?

K.O. – Important question. Were you consciously thinking of the appropriation of a male master artist's work by some of the early feminists? Sherrie Levine's re-photographed photos by Edward Weston, Walker Evans, et al., done around 1980, come to mind.

Lily Cox-Richard. Photo: Sharad Patel.

L.C.-R. – No, not really. I don't think appropriation can work the same way if the work being appropriated wasn't concerned with issues of originality and authenticity in the first place. The kind of appropriation that you're bringing up is so much about intervening in the canon, specifically a modernist canon. Powers was once known as the father of American sculpture, but Neoclassicism was so antithetical to the avant garde, he doesn't really have a place in the history of Modernism. Just by taking Powers seriously as a sculptor, multiple canons are in play, and they destabilize each other. Also, I'm not sure what's left at stake in appropriating a body of sculpture that has practically been rendered invisible by ubiquity and disinterest. But maybe there's humor in that, too.

When I do think of it in terms of appropriation, I'm not quite sure what it is that I'm appropriating — it's more of an appropriation of a certain idea of sculptural practice, an outdated route to mastery and legacy, than appropriating the work itself. Maybe this project shares more with Cindy Sherman's untitled film stills, also done around 1980. There's something messier in the remaking that feels more like an unmaking. I think of it more as "taking them on," rather than "laying claim" to them. The sculptural process—the actual making—becomes performative, whether or not it is seen as a reenactment, I am deciding to do them differently, and it is through that process that I make the sculptures mine.

K.O. – By removing the curved female figure, you've really foregrounded the phallic character of the remaining vertical stands as well as given these devices a weirdly-compelling presence.

L.C.-R. – One of the interesting things that happened while working on *The Stand*, is that by not making the figure, I had to puzzle out the connection between that figure and the support. These connections are really odd. I began to understand Powers as a fellow sculptor grappling with complicated issues of history, identity, sensuality and spirituality. That said, I'm not trying to recuperate his sculptures so that we can celebrate him or his work. Rather, my goal is to make new work that creates an even thicker visibility and presence.

I'd also really like to complicate the way we describe sculptural forms with gendered language. In *The Stand: California*, the contact point between the quartz crystal and where the figure would have been becomes the moment in my sculpture where rock goes soft. Without having a clearly delineated body as reference, scale is unhinged: the crystal becomes a whole village or a skyscraper. My hope is that the initial phallic reading will be interrupted by the specificity of the forms: the crystalline structure gives like flesh, and its architecture begins to pucker.

***K.O. – You worked with another phallic form in* Rapt *(2009). In this small group of waist-high sculptures made of carefully-crafted white aqua resin, you've presented the shrouds draped over the obelisks of 19th-century grave markers. The obelisk itself is missing, leaving the empty shroud standing improbably upright, supported by nearly invisible floral foam. You've said that these sculptures are ghosts of the original monuments and they do look like Halloween sheet costumes (without the eye holes). Talk about the similar strategy of playing with absence and presence in* Rapt *and* The Stand.**

Lily Cox-Richard, *Fruiting Bodies,* 2011, cast aqua resin, installation for The Great Poor Farm Experiment, Manawa, Wisconsin. Photo: Sharad Patel.

L.C.-R. – Both the obelisks and Powers' allegorical figures functioned as symbols that held power in specific ways in the time that they were created. I was thinking about what happens to the sculpture when its symbols become signs for something else.

In both of these projects, I choose not to make the symbols that assume the most authority. So, there is a lot of specificity in my sculptures, but it can't be retraced to systems like phrenology, Victorian codes, or cemetery symbolism. Maybe that's why what's left has a weirdly-compelling presence. Formally, it insists on being described in different terms. My sculptures seem to inherit the results of a bunch of formal and conceptual decisions made around that main symbol that is now absent, you can no longer rely on it for meaning. It's as if the sculpture is haunted by the symbols.

K.O. – Was* Rapt *the beginning of your fascination with the 19th century? Why do you return to that period?

L.C.-R. – It began earlier, when I made *At Stake and Rider* in 2007. While working on this project I was doing research on the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), and how strategic these major World's Fairs were in defining and promoting American national identity in the 19th century. *At Stake and Rider* takes the form of a stake-and-rider split rail fence. This kind of fence originated in colonial America and traveled west with the frontier, but I was familiar with it as the kind of fence that traced the civil war battle fields in Manassas, Virginia near where I grew up. It was innovative because it didn't require nails or digging holes, and could be moved as borders and needs shifted. To me this seemed like a very American kind of innovation, because it also uses more wood and takes up more space than any other fence I've seen. So, while it is innovative in its minimal use of expensive/scarce materials, it does so by brazenly exploiting whatever happens to be more readily available. I guess my interest in the 19th century stems from trying to better understand contemporary American culture, by opening up these origin myths to redraw lineages and trajectories—or at least imagine alternatives.

K.O. – The play with solid and void is really compelling here as is the material play of turning soft drapery into stiff, unyielding matter. That dichotomy reminded me of Rachel Whiteread who also works with mundane objects, casting the voids around them and leaving a mere impression of that form which is now destroyed.

L.C.-R. – Thank you. Yes, there is something about leaving a trace of a form that is no longer there, but what's left has such undeniable physicality.

K.O. – For your installation at Michelle Grabner's Poor Farm,* Fruiting Bodies *(2011), you again drew attention to graves. You installed hundreds of cast mushrooms in rings around the unmarked graves of the Waupaca County cemetery in Wisconsin. As with your other work, the mushrooms here created a presence for the absent dead buried below and the depicted flesh of the fungus is an eerie reminder of the decomposition taking place in a graveyard. How did you settle on the organic form of a mushroom for this project?

L.C.-R. – When I heard that the Poor Farm had a cemetery out back, I knew I wanted to do a project there. When I went for a site visit, it became clear to me that I couldn't do anything along the lines of *Rapt*, because that was the wrong kind of monument for a cemetery that was clearly not about monuments. There were several rectangular depressions in the grass, where coffins had collapsed, but these graves were unmarked. It turns out that there may be as many as 100 unmarked graves in that cemetery. I became more interested in trying to somehow

Lily Cox-Richard, *installation view of The Stand (Possessing Powers),* 2013, plaster. Photo: Sharad Patel.

commemorate the Poor Farm as an institution, one that turned out to be very flawed, but was a major improvement in social welfare in its time. Instead of making a monument that points up, away from the burial site, I wanted to make a monument that pointed down—like you said, drawing attention to the decomposition, but not depleting its wonder. Mushrooms seem like a good form for rot and magic. The amazing thing about mushroom circles (fairy rings) is that they look like perfectly arranged individual mushrooms, but are one organism. The mycelium root system radiates outward at a steady rate, and then at some point, sends up its fruiting bodies, or mushrooms. This system—the inherent interdependence of what seems like individuals—seemed metonymically right for this site.

K.O. – It seems that death is a strong theme in your work. You've even done several projects*—Strike *(2012),* Quickie Walkout (Lightning Strike) *(2012), and* Spark Gap *(2008)—addressing the dire effects of lightning strikes. How do you see this theme in your work? Is it related to those "exhausted objects" you spoke of earlier?

L.C.-R. – Ha! It does seem that way, doesn't it? My interest is more in the charge than the destruction. While working on *Spark Gap*, I was collecting old lightning rods from architectural salvage places and auctions. I wasn't using them in that sculpture, but they show up later in *Strike*. The lightning rods are really beautiful and strange, and I loved having them in the corner of my studio because I thought that after standing on a roof for 100 years or so, they might retain some kind of material wisdom of knowing lightning, and in turn charge the space of my studio. These objects are exhausted in that they may be outmoded or unrecognizable, but they still hold power. Most people who visited my studio didn't know what they were, and in this case, that seemed to open them up to having mystical properties, like dowsing rods.

Quickie Walkout (Lightning Strike) goes back to that Hercules club I was telling you about—as if Hercules finally walked out in protest, and the club remains as a witness instead of a weapon. The title is borrowed from #98 in Gene Sharp's *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action,* and seemed most fitting for Hercules.

K.O. – Can you end by talking about your evident pleasure in crafting these time-consuming objects? You seem hard-wired to give yourself these labor-intensive, repetitive tasks.

L.C.-R. – I don't want my sculptures to be unnecessarily about labor. *The Stand* is very much about sculpture, so process and making became really important. However, with another project like *Fruiting Bodies*, if I had been in a position to have someone else cast all those mushrooms, I would have been happy to hand that off. But really, I figure out the work by making it. *The Stand* is a dense project, and I can be pretty slow to process things, so I needed that time to work out how the sculptures can be. Sometimes I think that with these time-consuming tasks, both the research and the making, they are really just an excuse to get deep into something and spend a lot of time there. Even with all of the studying and measuring of Powers' sculptures, I didn't know how my sculptures would work out until I was really far along with each one. I needed all that making time (thinking time) to figure out how to deal with the contact points (where the figure would have been). Conceptually, in this project, I think that 'detail' (how and how much) is more important to the content of the work than 'craft' is, but in this case, the way to detail is through craft. ■

NOTES

1. See Nichols Hartigan and Joan Kee, "Lily Cox-Richard: On the Powers of Taking a Stand," *Art Journal* 72 (Winter 2013): 78-83.

LOOK HERE GO THERE
An Interview with Taylor Davis

In the essay for Taylor Davis' recent exhibition at the Aldrich Museum, "If you steal a horse and let it go, he'll take you back to the barn you stole him from," Exhibitions Director Richard Klein says the following about her work: "The artist's persistent engagement with the issue of orientation utilizes form, space, subject, identity, place, material, and language to make art that consistently-and often vexingly calls what is known into question." Davis has also exhibited her work at the Tang Museum, Dodge Gallery, Office Baroque Gallery, Worchester Art Museum, White Columns, Samsøn Projects, Exit Art, Triple Candie, Incident Report, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston and was included in the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial in 2004. Based in Boston where she has been a professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design since 1999 and co-chair of sculpture at the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College since 2003, Davis was also a visiting faculty member at the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University in the fall of 2008. She has long sought to fuse her many talents in sculpture, painting and teaching with her love of poetry and literature.

BY VANESSA PLATACIS

Vanessa Platacis - Your recent exhibition at the Aldrich Museum consisted of several groups of objects including: text cylinders, built forms, collages and shaped canvases. You have used the phrase 'equitable exchange' to describe the 'relationships created between the forms within a form and the relationship between the viewer and the object.' Would you elaborate on these relationships and why this exchange interests you?

Taylor Davis - I had a studio visit earlier in the year with Nancy Shaver, to show her what I was working on and to talk about an exhibition we were curating together. Nancy was and is my teacher (and now a colleague as well at Bard's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts.) She is a tough critic and a great supporter. She notifies me if she's letting me get away with something, which means I'm not getting away with anything. We were talking about my *Farmtek* collages, many images of switches and fittings, mole-traps and floodlights glued flat to intricately gridded surfaces. Nancy said, "There's no one way in and no one way out. There's no one meaning. And this is a good thing." Visual democracy. An equitable exchange between images on a collage or parts of a built form is a way to demonstrate interdependent non-hierarchical relationships; each part and every perspective necessary and equal. This is very important to me, no *one* (subject or position) dominating. It's also an act between a viewer and an artist in which both are present and respected.

V.P. - In Donald Davidson's "Rational Animals," he writes "attitudes can be attributed, and so attitudinal content determined, only on the basis of a triangular structure that requires interaction between at least two creatures as well as interaction between each creature and a set of common objects in the world."[1] In other words, the contents of our own thoughts, and the recognition of the words of others and the objects and events to which they refer, depend on our sharing with others a pattern of interaction with the world.

T.D. - I can answer with a mental image of me holding an object out to the viewer while I'm saying, "This isn't my subject." One reads a sentence in order to glean content, or—more to a point—be told something by someone. But most sentences do something other than deliver an agreed upon meaning. "Because I couldn't trust my underling Itachi, I'm going to hide the money I planned to bury here elsewhere." The syntax and content of this sentence are nutzo. Even now, when I read it on my computer screen, I experience an erratic back and forth, a mental stop and start that ends with elsewhere. I'm a slow reader. I have to turn things around in my head. Not trusting ones' underling is a problem I'm lucky not to have. Maybe new content is made when I spend more time with a text; the sentence becoming thing. And then I make it a thing by painting it as a four-color line so another creature can share my attitude.

V.P. - Heidegger's emphasis on the temporality and incompleteness of all meaning comes to mind while attempting to read the text cylinders. Are you appropriating text from the past to suggest the direction of the future?

T.D. - I think temporality and incompleteness of meaning make the texts present tense. All the texts articulate sentiment and situations that are contemporary. Simultaneous reading and walking emphasize this. I think about linearity and meaning, about the multi-colored spiraled sentence and its message. Johanna Drucker writes, "The visual line. Not a nice poetic line, carefully controlled and closed. Instead a haphazard line, random line, fulfilling itself by the brute force of its physical reality."[2] The content of the sentence I choose is true; what's stated is what happened happens and is happening.

V.P. - In contrast to the physical engagement required by the text cylinders, the work deep collective lore ***invites the viewer to sit alongside the work and provides a place for the mind to rest.***

T.D. - Painted in copper leather-paint on a double bend of black suede, the text of *deep collective lore* is from a long and baffling sentence from Hellmut Wilhelm's *Eight Lectures on the I CHING*: "[…] not the secondary upsurge of too long backed-up waters that often overtakes peoples after an exhausting period of logical and analytical thought then washes up turbid elements from the individual psyche in addition to the deep collective lore."

When I was installing the room of cylinders at the Aldrich, it became clear to Richard Klein and myself that there had to be a form in the room that contrasted the vertical walking/reading experience of the cylinders. *deep collective lore*—draped across a Corbusier-style upholstered bench

Taylor Davis, *If you steal a horse,* 2014, Wacky wood and oil paint, 471/2" x 29" x 27." All images are courtesy of the artist.

in a corner of the gallery—is a dark horizontal read, a single perspective of lustrous words partially visible in the folds of the suede. It has weight and stillness that allow a moment of rest. Plus "exhausting period of logical and analytical thought" is funny when read in relation to the sometimes laborious "viewing" of the cylinders.

V.P. - Movement, repetition, growth and other such involuntary processes of life create a congruence between text and wood grain, solidifying their shared status as living history. The lines that compose your shaped canvases and form your sculpture are often sourced from naturally occurring patterns, such as wood grain. By relating the directional growth patterns of wood grain to the patterns in linguistics, there is a subtle, yet intrinsic similarity between subject and material.

T.D. - I've always used wood for its structural and visual qualities. With relatively few tools, I mill rough lumber into parts that have specific dimensions and very active visual information. When I'm cutting a quantity of boards in anticipation of a form, the visual qualities of the grain—undulating lines, shifting color, simple and complex patterns—help with my decisions concerning proportion and size. Sometimes the grain is what makes me build a piece. In *WHITE PINE*, a group of sculptures named for their material, I was given a load of lumber that came from a huge old white pine tree that died standing up. It was full of knots, intricately patterned with contrasting golds and grays of the tree's heartwood and sapwood, and riddled with dark holes from the invasive brown spruce long-horned beetle. I used the visual information to design enclosed volumes of horizontal boards, joined edges in, with the undulating line of the tree's outer extremity touching down on the floor. The forms have as many views as sides and each perspective offers a different physical and graphic experience. In terms of relating the growth patterns of the grain to visual patterns of letters and words, I think about the differences and similarities between reading and looking, whether intent looking is reading without words. And this makes me think about the cylinders, where the grain of the wood is 1) an active ground that holds the painted word/figure, and 2) the outer skin of a material that wraps around itself to delineate a volume separate from the viewer's body.

V.P. - What is the relationship between the wood grain and orientation in the Tboxes?

T.D. - Peter Frampton uses an effects unit called a talk box[3]. Think about his 1975 hit *Show Me the Way*. Before he sings, "I wonder how you're feeling. There's ringing in my ears [...]" you hear his guitar and then you hear, "wah, wah-wah-wah-wah waaah." The amplified frequencies of his guitar are directed into the talk box's speaker, up through a plastic tube, into his mouth, and back out into his microphone, producing a sound that is both and neither voice and guitar. The effect of one on the other makes it impossible to hear the singular qualities of either instrument. My first talk box, *TBOX no.1* (2012) is a response to a friend's comment, "It's too bad you can't get other people to see wood grain the way you do." It's a built form, a small double-stacked construction of birch plywood. Open at the top, it has multiple shelves that define the interior space, much like the aperture of a camera. The exterior and interior surfaces and shelves are marked all over with *trompe l'oeil* renderings of blue painter's tape. The shapes, torn strips and arrows, "point out" the soft shifting pattern of the wood grain. *TBOX no.1* over-emphasizes, loudly directing the viewer to simultaneously LOOK here and GO there (no one said equal is "nice"). It performs a rowdy dialogue; an anti-dialectical prattling that celebrates it's own invented self.

V.P. - In* Fingers and Thumbs *a sensual dialogue with Josef Albers'* Structural Constellations *comes to mind.

T.D. - Geometry is a system and a set of forms that allow me to most efficiently isolate and divide space. Straight edges (rounded or sharp) and flat slides let me connect parts, and define a volume, in not so simple ways. *Fingers and Thumbs* are cubes that extend and hold in equal measure. They have six identical sides made of six boards that I mill from a rough lumber. Each board is cut, joined, planed, and routed into same-sized parts, one or two of which slides out, simultaneously creating pointers and holes. I think they're sexy, the rounded bead-edging of every board swelling into its neighbor with cut end profile that looks like a Carroll Dunham doodle. I can't keep the forms together in my mind. They push up off the floor and out

Taylor Davis, *WHITE PINE 3,* 2010, (extended diamond), white pine, 17" x 43" x 43."

Taylor Davis, *Fingers and Thumbs #3,* 2014, Cherry wood, 39" x 39" x 39."

Taylor Davis, *Untitled (FarmTek #3),* 2014, Copic marker and collage on sized canvas, 49" x 77" x 1.5."

into space in equal measure; a still form that looks as if it's continually positioning itself. Albers' *Structural Constellations*!

V.P. - In Alberti's opening of his treatise* On Painting *he echoed the Platonic Academy in stating, "It would please me if the painter were as learned as possible in all the liberal arts, but first of all I desire that he know geometry." [4] ***The shaped canvases start with six superimposed grids of different colors drawn with markers, appears to challenge geometry as a methodology of perfection and logic and play with our intuitive understanding of physical space and orientation.***

T.D. - In *Cardinal Grid No.1* the geometry of the six colored grids is used to make a complicated ground of disarray and order. Ground and figure both, the lines randomly synchronize to create interference patterns of chevrons and mandalas; on a shaped canvas that acts as its own figure on the ground of the wall. I painted sixteen *trompe l'oeil* tape shapes of black, grey, red and yellow so the piece wasn't *about* geometry, to give the coalescing patterns something to talk to. I wanted the color to float and penetrate the grid/ground, like little fish in, on, and behind a net.

V.P. - You move seamlessly between painting and sculpture. What motivated the choice to work in two dimensions and the painting language?

T.D. - I graduated from SMFA (School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) as a painter. I spent a few years in the ceramics department but in my third year I began working with a member of the painting department, Miroslav Antić. He was an excellent teacher but couldn't change my limited understanding of painting space. I thought there was a painted subject and a painted background that held it (no visual democracy!) I sidestepped this problem when I started carving wood reliefs and the grain of the cherry and mahogany I was using acted as a material and visual ground. Eventually I started carving in the round, and then making built forms. In terms of the work I'm doing now, I use paint and I make stretched canvases but I'm not a painter. I'm not splitting hairs, I'm just thinking about artists who know how to paint and I'm not one of them. I think my two-dimensional work is a combination of drawing and construction: building image with flat parts. What motivates me to work two-dimensionally? I want to work with weight differently, to make forms that hang or float on a wall. I want the visual relationship I get when I'm face to face. In terms of watercolor and paper collages, I want to subdivide space with color and line and democratically populate it with many things, plants, and animals.

V.P. - How does your role as an educator inform your studio practice and vice versa?

T.D. - Yes! Teaching is a very important part of my studio work and my life. In terms of my relationship to my students, an important role model is Nancy Shaver. In her first summer (and my last summer as a student), the sculpture disciple went to Storm King. There was a small show of David Smith's work in the museum. Nancy said, "I hate this work!!" paused then asked, "What do you think?" Terrifying! Nancy was fierce. I steeled myself and told her I loved it. She said, "Show me." So I walked her through the exhibition, talking about what I saw in Smith's work. After I was finished she said, "I've changed my mind." Nancy doesn't play the expert. Art and life win out. Sometimes I know more than my students, sometimes they know more. I need the exchange. Also, teaching grounds my studio work with the discipline of engaged looking and critique. I require from myself the same rigor and permission that I require from my students.

V.P. - What's next on the horizon?

T.D. - I presently have work in "I was a double" curated by Ian Berry and David Lang for the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery in Saratoga Springs. I like the show for many reasons, one of which is the juxtaposition of my funny difficult double-cylinder *Da, can ye no tell me* with Kay Rosen's expansive stunner, *Wonderful!*

Next? Me, myself, and I in the studio working many things at the same time. ■

NOTES

1. Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals", Dialectica 36: 318–27; 1982a, reprinted in Davidson 2001c.
2. Johanna Drucker, "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E LINES", 'The Visual Line', edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
3. *You can also hear mind blowing Sly Stone using a similar device, the vocoder, on his 1965 hit *Sex Machine*.
4. Leon Battista Alberti, "On Painting", trans. by John R. Spencer, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1966, 90 (Della Pittura, 1435).

FOR THE LOVE OF PAINTING
A Conversation with Julie Heffernan

Julie Heffernan's "image streaming" paintings show that intelligent, relevant and critically aware iconography is alive and well despite the fact that iconography, sadly, has long been a *bête noire* of postmodern semiotics. Her very personal, even grand paintings deliver Bonnardian multitudes of color and objects while they also recall Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque figuration within a distinctly contemporary context.

A traveling retrospective of her work was organized by the University Art Museum, University of Albany, New York in 2006. In 2013, Heffernan had a solo exhibition at the Palo Alto Art Center, which traveled to the Crocker Art Museum later in the year. Her work has gained critical attention in publications including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *The New York Times*, and *ARTPULSE*. Raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, she now lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

In this interview we talked about a sex–positive attitude and Third Wave feminism as it relates to her work. We also touched on issues of technique and her upcoming solo exhibition at Mark Moore Gallery in LA.

BY STEPHEN KNUDSEN

Stephen Knudsen - When I look at your paintings the idea of a shameless belief in painting prevails—a belief that would never dream of serving up the self-portrait with postmodern air quotes. In fact, if I could be so brazen to just say it, your painting sits so well on the historical trajectory of great and grand painting that it seems to dare us to just try not to believe. What do you in fact believe?

Julie Heffernan - I love that you use the word "shameless" because one of my big breakthroughs as a young artist involved painting something I knew was embarrassing, possibly ridiculous, but which I wanted to see, to look at it closely and consider that which is outside of myself. In terms of the ego, it's the dangerous place shame can take us to that often provides good fodder for an artwork. And don't many of us artists work from a place of needing to see something manifest in the world that we're either afraid to look at, or need to see because it isn't here now?

As far as what I believe goes, I grew up in a very Catholic home in a dreary East Bay suburb we called Hayweird, and the contrast between the holy cards I lived with at home, depicting radiant saints holding their breasts on a plate, versus the dull mall culture that filled out our weekends was huge; in every way possible I wanted to throw my lot in with those outlier creatures we called saints. So when I came of age artistically in the ironic 1980s, I knew eventually that irony and coolness just weren't going to work, that they were, for me, simply boring. I did try, living in an Altbau in Kreuzberg, doing huge, thick paintings of rotten teeth, meeting Heiner Müller, putting graffiti on the Berlin Wall, that kind of thing.

But eventually I discovered the world of interior imagery—or image streaming—and imagination won out over antics or theory on its own. Emerson described the difference between the things that we "learn" (tuition) and the truths that we perceive (intuition), and I see intelligent imagination—scrutinized imagination—as the process that brings these two worlds together. Tom Waits, no stranger to the cool, talks openly about begging the song muses to come to his aid when he's stuck. He knows the importance of humility in the face of trying to create. Working from the imagination in conjunction with a wagonload of things we care about is so much more interesting, and humbling, than just having an idea and illustrating it, which I used to do before I knew anything about image streaming. I have my urgencies––impending environmental collapse is enough to fill a lifetime of canvases––but, filtered through the imagination, those urgencies take on nuances that no screed could have.

S.K. - Would you describe further this phenomenon of "image streaming" and what it means in regard to the "self-portrait," that term so ever-present in your titles?

J.H. - The interior pictures that flood into my brain when I'm in a relaxed state, or when I've been pondering a painting problem for a chunk of time, are the equivalent to me of little miracles, and constitute a road to truth in this sense: if I follow the intuitive prods I get while painting I will inevitably wind up with something that has an integrity to it, a surprise and a jolt. And that confers a kind of wholeness and integrity upon me, in turn. I feel myself getting better and smarter when I work this way, since our brains are constantly growing new neuronal connections in response to fixing our mistakes, and recalculating what we just did in terms of the whole world of the picture, telling us where we've gone wrong, where things aren't hanging together, giving us tiny clues as to what could come next to develop the pattern that is slowly unfolding as we follow along. It's a way of making our minds visible to a viewer, and I look for that component when I look at any art, the part of it that allows me to see the artist outside of himself or herself, available to me now in a form that crystallizes the self in the fullest sense, exceeding mere intellect. That for me is the essence of the Self-Portrait and why I continue to use that term for most everything I make.

S.K. - To anyone versed in art history your paintings seem familiar and yet paradoxically they seem unfamiliar at the same time. We see the Dutch Golden Age, the High Renaissance's radiant Venetian color, Leonardo's tonal unity, and of course the female nude in the acreage. But what would be definitely unfamiliar to the 16th century Venetian would be a Third Wave feminist eroticism that asks not to be objectified but to be empathized with. I see it in the old work like* Self Portrait as Mother/Child *and the new work as well. Does that make good sense and if so would you unpack that idea in the context of some of your paintings?

Julie Heffernan, *Self-Portrait with Talking Stones,* 2011, oil on canvas, 72" x 68." All images are courtesy of the artist.

J.H. - Feminist eroticism reminds me of Jane Campion's depiction of Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady,* where Isabel's complex interior life is metonymically captured in the sensually swishing folds of her long, elaborate skirt, snaking over the ground like some exquisite swamp thing. Or Fragonard's *The Swing,* with all its Rococo ooze, depicting the main female character as a ruckus of swirling pink folds within a quintessentially feminine space, like a fabulous vagina. Feminist eroticism is all over great painters like Titian and Rubens too.

As the figures in *Mother/Child* took shape I saw that, without my planning it that way, the mother's and son's genitalia had merged. The baby is pulling away from her, or maybe she's pushing him away, but either way the mother and child are both one, and also two distinct bodies at the same time, and that kind of merging within the separateness of individual egos is the kind of thing that Peter Sloterdijk is getting at when he talks about the "biune" or the merging of selves through the medium of intimacy. Empathy is, at its core, imagination, since it involves being able to assume the body of another, feel what it's feeling. The act of painting itself can sometimes reach that level of intimacy when dense material slips through your hands and falls into the right place on the canvas as though it had a life of its own. Imagination is like a marriage between our outer and inner selves, and is intoxicating to wield because of that intimacy it creates and fosters. And vision itself can have an eros to it: I've spoken about the ancient Greek theory of vision where psychopodia, or mind fingers, emerge from the pupil as an effluvium that reaches out and 'touches' the object of vision. Isn't that a gorgeous idea, and so essentially true despite the fact that it's not? And doesn't it show such a profound understanding of the intimacy inherent in the gaze?

S.K.** - Indeed it does. And by the way I will never look at the Fragonard the same! You know he put the prone male lover down in the rose bed peering up at that "fabulous vagina." Talk about psychopodia. I wonder, though, if any kind of feminism is subverted because of the male agenda that the contemporary sensibility has become unsympathetic toward (thanks in part to John Berger's* **Ways of Seeing.)*

J.H. - I think it's possible to re-think the male gaze in more sympathetic terms too, ways that aren't quite so much of a scold as in early feminist rants (necessary as those rants were to wake up a generation of men and women stuck in roles that fed neither.) Having two sons and a really good husband I'm inclined to view that penetrating male gaze I encountered in my first theory classes in a less pernicious light. With some awareness of the straightening nature of gender roles, I see the root of that gaze lying in a man's urge to merge with the exquisiteness of the female (read Mother), and that it becomes aberrant only when removed from an empathic understanding that, at its core, is a desire to reenact the experience of the reciprocal gaze of mother and infant. His dearth of imagination is what turns the impulse to adore, to merge faces—a sacred impulse according to Sloterdijk—into a desire to dominate and

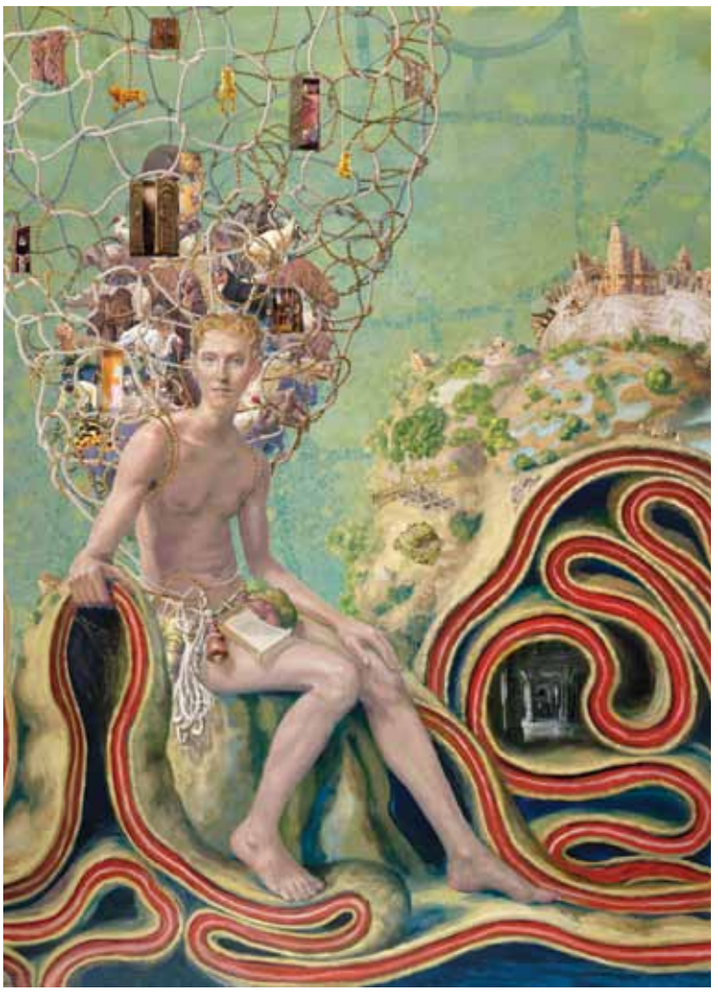
eradicate a woman's agency. His longing and a spectral image of the desired one is all that he has left to him, with no appropriate vehicle to contain it, so yes, it goes awry and gets manifest as a will to dominance instead. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" theorized something we had simply taken for granted—that Marilyn Monroe just *had* to be looked at. Mulvey allowed us to see that behind that act was a need to make her subject to our desires, to deactivate her and position her in ways geared to voyeuristic pleasure.

While Titian, Rubens and Bonnard portrayed women at times in compromised situations, I've been drawn to their paintings for how much it's clear to me they did understand about women. So many of their female figures did not primarily exist, to my mind, for anyone's voyeuristic pleasure, but rather for the access they allowed to a greater depth of women's experience, as in paintings like Titian's *Mary Magdalene*. It tells a story about suffering and how it dis-integrates us, captured in the way Magdalene's hair transforms into consuming fire. As for Rubens, his female nudes are always depicted as muscular, activated and powerful in their agency, and I always look to them as figures of thrillingly complex emotion. And Bonnard, in so many of his paintings, is not looking at his naked wife in an objectifying way but seeking to engage with her deeper mysteries via objects closely identified with her Otherness, and with the mess and mortar of female experience. I take my cue from those kinds of great artists, to look with empathy and imagine my way into the struggles the women I paint are having.

***S.K. - I am appreciating this 21st-century new feminism: making room for the empathetic erotic gaze in our historical interpretations and in the contemporary agenda. And certainly in your own work the empathetic stance—in general—is signified by always titling "Self- Portrait As……" I think your work also displays the sex-positive feminism that emerged in the late hours of the Second Wave and now has so much currency in the Third Wave. In* Self-Portrait Talking With Stones *we can see the female erotic gaze almost identical to Titian's* Venus of Urbino *and here one might wrongly transfer the argument of male-driven oppression—in Titian's work—to your work. Rather, there is female empowerment in* Self-Portrait Talking with Stones. *If a thinking contemporary woman wants to publicly show cleavage and an erotic gaze, and other "fabulous" attributes, even in a sincere stereotypical female way, she should be able to do that (or not) without subverting the work done in the first two waves of feminism. Are you being sympathetic to that construct in a painting like* Self- Portrait Talking with Stones?**

J.H. - In that painting I was determined to use, for the first time, the pose of the semi-reclining female nude (one I had always consciously avoided because of the passivity it confers on her, and how inherently problematic that is) to see if I could activate it and turn it into something that brought life to her instead. I wanted the imagery around her (the burning ship, patient in traction, etc.) to look like it was emerging from parts of her body, as though her body was actually thinking. Really I wanted everything to feel a little bit alive, even the stones themselves that are covered with runes and texts. I wanted everything to look like it was breathing and thinking.

S.K. - How do you see empathy playing out when you paint the males in your life?* Self-Portrait as Mother/Child *depicts your infant son in 1997. You featured a male figure in the 2012 Self-Portrait as Intrepid Scout Leader. Has the child become a man? (There is too much of a familial resemblance there not to be your son.)



Julie Heffernan, *Self-Portrait as Intrepid Scout Leader,* 2012, archival pigment print, museum board, glass jewels, metal fittings, gold leaf, PVA glue, acrylic handwork, 36" x 26."

J.H. - Yes! Those are my sons: *Self-Portrait as Mother/Child* features Sam, my younger son, and *Self-Portrait as Intrepid Scout Leader* is my older son Oliver's body with Ingres' face (can you recognize him?). The first incarnation of *Self-Portrait as Intrepid Scout Leader* showed a young man holding a pile of weapons. I'd been listening to NPR during the first days of the Iraq War, and I found myself really irritated by boy-going-off-to-war culture, so I wanted to make a satirical piece about guys and their weapons, the burden of armaments. I remember very clearly my son coming down to the basement (where my studio was) to ask me something unrelated, and glancing at the painting with the boy and all his weapons, and making a little face. I doubt if he even knew he'd done that but I knew nevertheless right at that moment that I wasn't on the right track. I had been doubting my direction already, but that was the confirmation I needed. If we're good at reading reactions we can garner clues about whether we're on to something in our work from the tiniest of expressions in people whose reactions we trust, and Oliver's response was what I needed to put myself on a new track, and deal with what turned out to be the real subject of the painting: a story about a young man leaving home (Oliver was in fact going off to college), armed with a tool belt (no longer weapons, but books, keys, grigri bags, things he might need to go off into the world) and a backpack holding endangered animals and what I call images of wisdom: copies of

Julie Heffernan, *Self-Portrait Sitting on a World,* 2008, oil on canvas, 78" x 56."

Julie Heffernan, *Self-Portrait as Mother/Child,* 1997, oil on canvas, 74" x 60."

those paintings that have taught me important lessons about life, like El Greco's *Fra Paravicino* and Breughel's *Tower of Babel*.

S.K. - So what is Ingres' face doing on your son's body? Was this in a dream or was it to pay a debt owed to Ingres?

J.H. - It was from the famous self-portrait of Ingres, and I wanted to put that face of an older gentleman on my son's young body, perhaps to create a symbiosis that might magically confer gentlemanliness on Oliver (although he is already quite a gentleman), to help him age well!

S.K. - I have long been intrigued by your signature landscapes folded and rolled like endoplasmic reticulum in a cell body. What are your thoughts on depicting the ground like this?

J.H. - Coming out of paintings like *Self-Portrait as Big World* I was imagining a cross section of the earth like a carpet of flayed flesh the figure was sitting on. The carpet is now a section of landscape holding various temples and architectural structures that embody complexity in their form, as well as landscape features. So it was like the world in miniature with folds revealing labyrinthine enclosures and mysterious caves, and grottoes with roots showing on the underside of the earth flesh. I look for forms that can function metonymically, so they can be several things at once. In this case a carpet to sit on, flayed meat, and the earth itself.

S.K. - I have a number of my students suggesting that I ask you about your technical procedures in making a painting. They are ready to follow in your footsteps. Any glazing secrets to share?

J.H. - I only glaze as icing on the cake. Meaning, the paint has to have substantially created form before any nuancing of that form occurs, and glazing is inherently insubstantial. So I try to paint through all the passages with as much direct tactile paint as I can, and then only at the end, when I want to pump something up or push something down, or fade a thing out, do I use glazes. Glazes can be magic or they can be wimpy, so watch out for wimpiness in painting!

S.K. - Speaking of students, and your teaching endeavors at Montclair State University, what is a primary belief that you hold to in teaching painting effectively?

J.H. - To care about my students is my primary belief. They are putting themselves on the line to pursue this crazy life (many of them don't come from big buck families) and I know how incredibly rewarding an art life can be (if someone gives you some fair warning about the hard knocks), so I want that for them; the world will only get better with more good artists in it, for the right reasons! These students constitute the next generation of art makers and maybe they will bring some sanity to the art world, ease it out of its need to legitimize itself through anti-art self-loathing and a dependence on sophistry masking as scientific legitimacy, obfuscation posing as profundity. The best of them are so smart. They will figure it out!

S.K. - In bringing this to a close would you let us know about your next exhibition?

J.H. - Yes! Mark Moore Gallery in LA opening May 7th—Sam's birthday! ■

PERFORMING MOTHERHOOD
A Conversation with Marni Kotak

Marni Kotak starting her 6-week durational performance Mad Meds, July 21, 2014. © 2014 Marni Kotak. All images are courtesy of the artist and Microscope Gallery.

Marni Kotak has been making waves over the past few years with her controversial durational performances where she shares intimate life moments with her audiences. Approaching her practice with brutal honesty, Kotak regularly frames her life experiences as aesthetic encounters as she explores the complexities of sexuality, family relations, motherhood, and mental health. In 2011, she gave birth to her son Ajax in a performance at Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. Her most recent works, *Mad Meds* and *Self-Medication*, share her experiences recovering from post-partum depression as she weaned herself off her medication and sought out alternative methods of healing. In this interview, we discuss Kotak's artistic practice, what it means to create performance art in the Internet age, and how pregnancy and motherhood can edify creative production.

BY EL PUTNAM

EL Putnam - I understand how when it comes to giving birth for the first time, it's easy to commit to an idealized version of how it is going to play out. This also occurs when developing a work of live art. I learned from my own experience of giving birth, as well as my practice as a performance artist, the actual event does not always coalesce with expectations. For someone birthing for the first time and doing it as a performance in a gallery, in* The Birth of Baby X*, what were the unexpected moments?

Marni Kotak - So much about birth is unexpected, and the acceptance of that was built into this performance. I was aware that all I could do was plan for my ideal vision of giving birth as a work of art, and then be open to the experience as it unfolded, understanding that whatever took place would ultimately be the performance. This is how it is when you are making work out of your real life. Whatever happens becomes the work of art.

E.L.P. - Have there been times where you experienced joy or regret in having this event presented in the way you chose?
M.K. - I did and continue to feel tremendous joy for having presented my son's birth as I did, and I have never had any regret about it at all. Through my exhibition I was able to communicate to the world that real life is the best performance art. And by turning Ajax's birth into a work of art, I am able to hold on forever to this wonderful—usually fleeting—experience.

E.L.P. - With the advent of social media, many people are sharing what can be considered private and intimate moments with the larger public. Numerous women have made videos and images of their birthing experiences available online. In a time when the line between public and private has become increasingly blurred, you decided to present your experience as a work of live art with a restricted guest list and limitations on audience media usage during the event. Even though the birth took place in a public space—an art gallery—it involved strong private and personal boundaries. What are your thoughts regarding the value of live performance during the 21st century, when personal imagery is becoming increasingly public?
M.K. - There is a big difference between virtual sharing and the kind of sharing that takes place during live performance, and this distinction is fundamental to the kind of experiences that I create through my work. It is so easy now to become 'friends' or 'followers' of people that you don't know in any real way. But these online relationships are not authentic. They are based upon spectacle, on a virtual presentation of a person's life. However open one is, Facebook or Twitter cannot present a real experience like live art can. And so, with my performances, I don't share the events online in anyway. The viewers have to attend the actual events and then become active participants in the performances. I would never have streamed my birth live online, and the birth video is not available on the Internet, but only as a limited edition work of art.

The audience members for *The Birth of Baby X* were invited to place their names on a list to be notified of the birth in the event that I went into labour outside of gallery hours. However, it was essential that they attended the exhibition and met with me in order to be placed on the list. There were many in the media who wrote about the performance, and did not make the time to come out and see it. They wanted to be put on the list without coming to the show first, but I would not allow this.

In *Mad Meds,* visitors to the gallery became active participants in my weaning process, often sharing their own experiences with madness and/or psychiatric drugs. People travelled from other states, even in one case, across the country, to speak to me about their own struggles with similar issues, reaffirming my belief in the need for authentic, face-to-face connections.

E.L.P. - In many of your performances you use—with astonishing transparency—intensely personal material. You draw from a range of intimate life experiences, including memories of childhood play, losing your virginity, and mourning the death of your grandfather. What compelled you and gave you the courage to begin working with autobiographical material like this in such an open and forthright manner?
M.K. - I began creating performance art in New York during the height of the Internet boom, feeling the pressure of the media encroaching on every aspect of our lives via the web, the virtual essentially threatening the very existence of the real. When we look outward, we are bombarded by images of a life that the mass media wants to sell us, as if saying "This is who you are," before we even get a chance to figure it out for ourselves. For me, I found that the only way to learn who I really am was to look inward and to focus what is actually happening in my life. You can't do this without delving into the deeply personal. When I began to address my real life experiences, it was very important to me to embrace all aspects of myself without fear or judgement. Whether childhood play, the death of a loved one, giving birth, raising my son, all of these life events are to be fully embodied and honoured as important aspects of my human experience.

E.L.P. - What are some performance pieces by others that have specifically inspired you to create such honest and personal works of art?
M.K. - The work of Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke were my earliest inspirations as I began to create performances focusing on my embodied personal experience. Both of these women artists expressed an empowered representation of the female body and female sexuality that existed outside of the socially prescribed norms for women. Rather than presenting the spectacle of sex and its consonant objectification of the body, Schneemann's *Fuses* depicts a very personal experience of lovemaking, with interposed shots of her cat and domestic space. Wilke's earlier body art in pieces such as *S.O.S. – Starification Object Series* expresses an embodied female sexual power, and her final work *Intra-Venus*, documenting her experience battling lymphoma is intensely brave and personal and I feel it has not yet received enough critical acclaim. Another artist who has had a profound impact on me is Linda Montano. Her *7 Years of Living Art*, and the following iterations of this project, take a bold stance to treat life itself as the work of art.

E.L.P. - Your work brings to mind a 2013/2014 installation by Alfredo Jaar:* Music (Everything I know I learned the day my son was born)*. Jaar built a colored glass cube pavilion that reverberates with recordings of newborn babies' first cries. Taken from three Dallas hospitals, these cries play back during the birth of each child. Through these gestures of recording and playback, Jaar said he made these children's first worldly as one of being an artist. That makes me think of a common saying among artists when having children: "This was my greatest work of art." Do you see Ajax, your son, as an artist-collaborator in this way?
M.K. - I do see Ajax as a collaborator in certain aspects of *Raising Baby X*, which focuses on my performance of mothering. Mothering is done through a constant interactive feedback loop with the child. It is one half of the real-life collaborative performance that is the mother-child performance.

Ajax is a collaborator in *Raising Baby X: Little Brother*, one of the many components of the overarching *Raising Baby X* project, which was launched at the moment of his birth. *Raising Baby X: Little Brother* is an on-going collaborative video project where I outfit Ajax with a wearable video camera to document the development of his life, and my mothering performance, from his own point of view. He has also collaborated in other public performances, such as *Raising Baby X: Family Jam Session* and *Raising Baby X: Playtime!* As I am currently collaborating with a three year old, I am not sure what direction our creative work together will take going forward.

Marni Kotak, *The Birth Of Baby X,* 2011, installation view. © 2011 Marni Kotak.

E.L.P. - What social, theoretical, and/or philosophical underpinnings came clear to you as you imagined the making of* The Birth of Baby X*?

M.K. - My body of performance work comes out of a deep concern for how to maintain the real in a world dominated by spectacle. My decision to go further than photographic depictions or live re-enactments of my experiences, to treating my everyday real life itself as the work of art—beginning with *The Birth of Baby X*—is driven by a desire to hold onto the real as the object of cultural value. Giving birth to an actual human being is one of the most direct experiences of human existence that there is; a moment when the power of the real is undeniable.

The public's reaction to *The Birth of Baby X* for me highlighted how taboos against birth are essentially driven by a fear of reality, the body, what we can touch and feel: actual human experience. This is built into contemporary medicalized birthing practices, where women are ultimately alienated from their own embodied experience, hooked up to machines and numbed with epidurals.

We are living in a contemporary time that is dominated by an anti-life equation, which ties directly into the fetishization of the simulacra, and is evidenced by the current obsession with zombies, vampires, the walking dead. To most, the hollowed out copy is more desirable than the embodied original. A vampire sucking the life out of someone is more palpable than a baby being born into life.

E.L.P. - During pregnancy and childbirth, a woman's body changes rapidly, making it simultaneously foreign and familiar to her as she is hyper-aware of her body—how it moves in space, and its shifting and elusive boundaries. Philosopher Iris Marion Young points out that the mother has a privileged role in this process as she is the one who is most familiar with these changes as well as the movements and growth of an unborn child. How do you consider this relationship when developing your performances? What are some of the ways you communicate these aspects of pregnancy with your audience?

M.K. - I felt incredibly empowered as a pregnant woman, keenly aware that I was creating a life within myself. I never subscribed to the notion of pregnancy as a medical condition, and I understood what I was going through to be natural and beautiful. Also, all along I knew that I would give birth as a work of art, and so this plan inspired me to represent an empowered image of pregnancy and childbirth. During the eighth month of my pregnancy, I created my nude self-portrait *Linea Nigra*, named after the dark line that pregnant women get on their lower abdomens. In the photograph, I look directly at the camera, confident in my maternal sexuality. I also created various elements of my installation for the *The Birth of Baby X*, documenting the joy I felt in my pregnant body in towels, blankets, video projection, and a wallpaper border around the perimeter of the gallery.

***E.L.P. - Iris Marion Young maintains that such advances in medical technology as ultrasound and fetal Doppler have minimized the significance of the mother's insight because these tools externalize the ongoing development of the fetus.[1] In turn, her role as a subject in pregnancy is bypassed along with her firsthand and privileged understanding of the process, resulting in sensations of being alienated from her own body. In addition, certain artistic portrayals of pregnancy, such as images of the Virgin Mary, present the pregnant woman as a container—a prelude to the "real" story yet to be told. As an artist and a mother, how do you consider* The Birth of Baby X

and works related to your post-partum experiences as responses to the associations of pregnancy and powerlessness?

M.K. - There are two sociocultural components that work together to create an interlocking system of oppression towards the pregnant woman: first, the deep-seated cultural taboos against birth, and second, the medicalization of the natural process of pregnancy. As I see it, both of these factors, which feed into each other, stem from an underlying horror of the real.

People in society as a whole are so freaked out by pregnancy and labor, in part because of longstanding taboos that have coded the birthing woman as unclean, that many women feel pressured to turn the process over to doctors, to numb themselves with epidurals, and to submit to medical interventions that ultimately alienate them from their own bodies. The medicalization of my postpartum experience was similar. Instead of compassionately helping me work through this intense emotional state when I reached out for help from the medical establishment in a crisis situation, I was given medication to numb my real human experience and told to lie down in a white room, alone.

***E.L.P. - Since The Birth of Baby X, you have presented a number of performances that relate to your postpartum experiences and raising Ajax. I am intrigued by the contrast between* Postpartum Depression *and* Mad Meds. *In the former, you recreate the stark hospital environment of your time recovering from postpartum depression that peaked three months after giving birth. The setting is barren, cold, and sterile consisting of imagery and memorabilia from your hospital stay as you pump milk perched on a metal cot. In contrast,* Mad Meds, *one of your most recent performances where you wean yourself off the medication prescribed for your post partum depression, involves a warmer, more home-like environment, laden with gold and panoramic scenes of nature. Can you describe the significance of gold and perhaps discuss the meaning objects and images that you incorporate into your installations? For example, I am intrigued by your inclusion of the milk-stained hospital shirt in the installation for* Mad Meds.**

M.K. - *Postpartum Depression* was conducted only a few weeks after getting out of the hospital, when I was still in the midst of my depression and the trauma of this experience was all still fresh in my mind. I did this performance as a way to share what I was really going through at that time. It was not my ideal version of how I would be feeling three months after giving birth to my son. The environment of the hospital was very much opposed to the warmth that I felt being with my baby shortly after the birth. It was a stark, white, fluorescent-lit, medicalized space where I could not be with Ajax at all. And, on top of everything, the hospital staff didn't provide me with regular access to my breast pump as they had promised they would, so my milk was leaking everywhere. It was devastating. That is what inspired me to create the piece that you are referring to with the milk-stained hospital shirt, *This Was Supposed To Be For You*.

When I created my installation *A Shrine To My Madness* for my most recent exhibition, *Mad Meds,* it was my goal to create a more ideal space in which to go through my experience of madness and safely withdraw from psychiatric meds – one in sharp contrast to what I experienced in the hospital. The natural environment imprinted throughout the installation is comprised of images of myself and my son within the Tivoli Bays nature reserve around Bard College. I went to Bard for undergrad and this was a time and a place in my life when I felt happy and centered. I chose to gold leaf all of the surfaces and objects in the space because it was my shrine to honor my real human experience, exactly what I felt did not happen in the hospital.

E.L.P. - Feminist theorist Amy Mullin describes how there is a tendency to separate creative production or conceptual "pregnancy," and bodily reproduction, with the latter being posited as inferior. Plato and Nietzsche regularly evoke the metaphor of childbirth in relation to philosophy, but do not consider the actual biological act to be of any creative or intellectual significance.[2] I believe you reject this division by offering pregnancy and childbirth as aesthetic experiences and sites for creative engagement. Can you talk about this?

M.K. - Throughout *The Birth of Baby X*, I presented the gestation, birth, and raising of my child as a work of art. The creative significance of this real life performance cannot be understated: the physical, intellectual, psychic molding of a real person and his/her life. I believe that the experience of mothering can take on various forms. It can involve a mothering intent by a person of any gender towards another person as well as be found in other types of creative production. However, this doesn't negate the inherent value and power of the biological act of birth.

E.L.P. - Throughout your work, you introduce concepts and ideas in relation to family, motherhood, and sexuality that extend out of what is referred to as Third Wave Feminism, a theoretical movement that almost makes the term "feminism" itself problematic. Specifically, feminism is now understood as being inclusive and concerned with all people, inviting action from all individuals, regardless of sex or gender, to level the playing fields. Do you intend for your work to fit into this new kind of feminist ideology?

M.K. - I do definitely feel that my work expresses various aspects of Third Wave Feminism. I am most interested in the development of my own personal expression of feminism through the sharing of my real embodied experience via my work. A big part of this experience is that of being a woman, but there are all kinds of personal specificities that elaborate upon this fundamental aspect of myself. My focus is on being real and creating authentic interactions with others, and my individual form of feminism arises out of this process.

E.L.P. - I am sure that going into these performances you knew there would be those in the media and digital commons who would challenge your aesthetic decisions as a pregnant woman and a mother. What is your response to critics who say that having a child in a gallery or going off meds puts art above the health and wellbeing of family?

M.K. - It is each of our right as individuals to give birth and take—or discontinuing taking—medication in whatever way we choose. We have the ultimate decision over what is best for ourselves. I realize that for a lot of people, the way in which I live and create art may seem like something they themselves would not feel comfortable with. But what these critics need to understand is that I am a performance artist who makes art out of my real life, and I do this because I derive a certain joy out of this process. For me, by making an important life event into a performance, I am more likely to be successful with it than if I did not. By focusing all of this positive energy on these goals, I am orientating my consciousness towards their actualization. I believe that my birth and pharmaceutical withdrawal have gone so smoothly on account of the fact that I made these events into art works. ■

NOTES

1. See, Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation," in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 58.
2. See, Amy Mullin, "Pregnant Bodies, Pregnant Minds," *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 1, 2002: 27-28.

INTERVIEW WITH FRANKLIN SIRMANS

"We believe in the space of the museum, as this is the place where people come together and get educated and entertained at the same time."

As with most curators, Franklin Sirmans started as an arts writer for magazines, in his case *Flash Art* and *Artnews*. Before being appointed department head and curator of contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2010, he worked as curator for the Menil Collection. He also recently curated 'Prospect.3,' the third edition of the New Orleans International Contemporary Art Biennial. Last January, we visited Sirmans at his LACMA office and discussed some of the topics we consider pertinent in contemporary art: art's potential to change society, the relationship between high art and pop culture, the challenges of the museum in the 21st century and LACMA's coming expansion.

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

Paco Barragán - I have known you since the end of the 1990s in New York. You were working freelance and worked among others for the U.S. edition of* Flash Art. *How did you get engaged with the art world?
Franklin Sirmans - Through writing and an interest in writing about culture in general. I did my B.A. in English and art history. Early on after graduating, thanks to Calvin Reid, I started writing reviews of books for *Publisher's Weekly* and had a great editor there in addition to Calvin's help. I was also writing about music for a number of young hip-hop-oriented magazines like *One Word*, where my friend Kevin Powell was tearing it up. And, I would write for Sheryl Huggins and Beverly Williams on various projects. I saw early that I did not have the music chops of Kevin or Scott Poulson Bryant who I deeply admired and soon saw that I could have an angle when it came to the visual artists and delivering them to an audience that might not have been familiar with their work. Thus, I started art reviews and pitching the magazines. I got a great letter from Jack Bankowsky that was encouraging but not promising for my immediate future, and so I took whatever I could get. *Artnews* was the place. I did my first significant art reviews there, in addition to bringing artists to those other outlets like *Word Magazine*, *Shade* and *Beatdown*. Obviously, these magazines were not on the bedside tables of the art world, but it gave me a raison d'être to go to as many shows as possible, and you had to introduce yourself and talk to people because at that time, you also needed to get images, pre-Internet. Best-case scenario would be getting images from the gallery straightaway.

P.B. – As with many curators, you started writing and from there transitioned to curating. How was that move? What was the motivation?
F.S. – At that time you could write an article of around 500 words about a solo show. As we know, that number seems to have gotten smaller and smaller. So if you wanted to write a bigger article it was only possible if you wrote about more artists. And it became this idea or concept around the work, if you will, of making an exhibition through bigger articles. So it seemed desirable to make these articles and thoughts into three dimensions.

P.B. - In my case it was a bit like that because when you wrote a bigger article with different artists around a same topic I always had the idea of somehow curating an exhibition, but on paper.
F.S. - Yes, exactly!

BETWEEN THE POLITICAL AND POP CULTURE

P.B. – If we look at your CV, we find a series of exhibitions that deal with sociopolitical issues—from the most recent biennial in New Orleans titled 'Prospect3: Notes for Now,' 'NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith,' 'Basquiat,' 'Americas Remixed,' 'Rumors of War.' Do you understand curating as a tool of sociopolitical activism? If so, maybe you could give us some examples of how some of your exhibitions or artists engage with it.
F.S. – I wouldn't define it that way. I would say that I hope I have a voice, one that is perhaps informed by the world we live in and the events of our times. I came out of a conversation like many of us with people like Harald Szeemann. So the foundation of making exhibitions is one of, or at least some sort of, political consciousness or social interest. Even if we do an abstract show, like the one we are doing now like *Variations: Conversations in and Around Abstract Painting*, there is always something there you're trying to say.

P.B. - ***In this same political sense, and referring to* Prospect.3 *you just curated, Julia Halperin wrote in* The Art Newspaper *the following title: 'A Better Prospect for African-American Artists.' You seem to have included more than 60 percent Afro-American artists.***
F.S. - Well, I think it was interesting as she put statistical information I wasn't aware of—it was surprising to me as I was not thinking about the numbers, only about the artists and the resonance to New Orleans.

P.B. - And what about this general complaint by some art critics and artists that curators only use artists to illustrate their ideas?
F.S. - One thing that I stick to this is Walter Hopps' quote: 'The job of a curator is to find a cave and hold the torch.' This is the place you can put the work, and I'm going to help you light it and present it in the best possible manner according to myself and the artist. I think it is a healthy circular conversation, right, because you don't come up with an idea for a show without thinking about the art work. So the art has to be telling you something, no matter what you are reflecting about outside the studios.

P.B. - Yes, exactly, many times we walk around and we see artists dealing with the same topic.
F.S. - And we pick up on this subjectivity.

P.B. – Another angle of your curatorial practice has to do with pop culture and expanding the limits of the white cube. How do you understand the relationship between high art and pop culture?
F.S. – I like to think around those spaces. My curatorial entry point was through music with *One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art*, curated with Lydia Yee at the Bronx Museum in 2001. And then wanting to explore that through sports several times, most recently here at LACMA with *Futbol: The Beautiful Game*.

P.B. - Next time you better invite me, as I'm a frustrated soccer player.
F.S. - (laughter) Of course. It's a show that needs to be revisited every four years, obviously.

'NEW' BUILDINGS FOR 'OLD' COLLECTIONS

P.B. – ***You have worked for LACMA since January 2010. Between 2006 and 2010 you worked at the Menil Collection in Houston. I guess that one of the reasons why you were appointed department head and curator of contemporary art at LACMA was precisely because of your experience and passion in working with the permanent collection.***
F.S. - Yes, I love that. It started with teaching at MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) and Princeton and doing those crazy survey classes of the 20th century, and the ability to talk from Cézanne to the present is actually fun, but being able to actually see those pieces there is nothing like it. And to be able to work from that background of something that has a foundation and a reason for being that goes back over a hundred years I find so fascinating.


Franklin Sirmans, Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head, Contemporary Art. Photo © 2013 Museum Associates/LACMA.

P.B. - But isn't it a reflection of these five buildings that have been squeezed together?
F.S. - Of course being in an encyclopedic space like this and to learn how artists of today teach us about art of the past is something that I find really illuminating. Working with Ai Weiwei and being able to present his 21st-century art inspired by the zodiac sculptures and history of the original sculptures at the summer palace outside Beijing made in the 18th century is exciting! Then we have a set of jade sculptures from the 19th century that were made by an artist who was also looking directly at the summer palace! That sort of layering and revisiting of history is informative and beautiful. Or, take a look at how Jorge Pardo's relatively new designs for the Pre-Columbian Collection give you a new way of looking at the work of the past.

P.B. – How can we engage from your point of view with a permanent collection in order to try to make the experience more accessible and attractive for the audience, and especially younger audiences?
F.S. – I had a meeting this morning with Tavares Strachan, who is working on a project with our art and technology lab. It's an initiative that has started up recently, inspired by the spirit of LACMA's original Art and Technology program (1967-1971), which paired artists with technology companies in Southern California. So this past weekend Tavares did workshops with kids aged five years to eight years old, and he facilitated conversations between them and scientists at the corporation SpaceX. From there, together they made drawings from which he's going to use and reference and create new works for an exhibition here. In the process, and when the work will be up next fall, we will have some kids functioning as docents. This means that they will be walking around with special uniforms on, taking adults around the museum and telling them about the artworks. So this is one way of engaging with an audience.

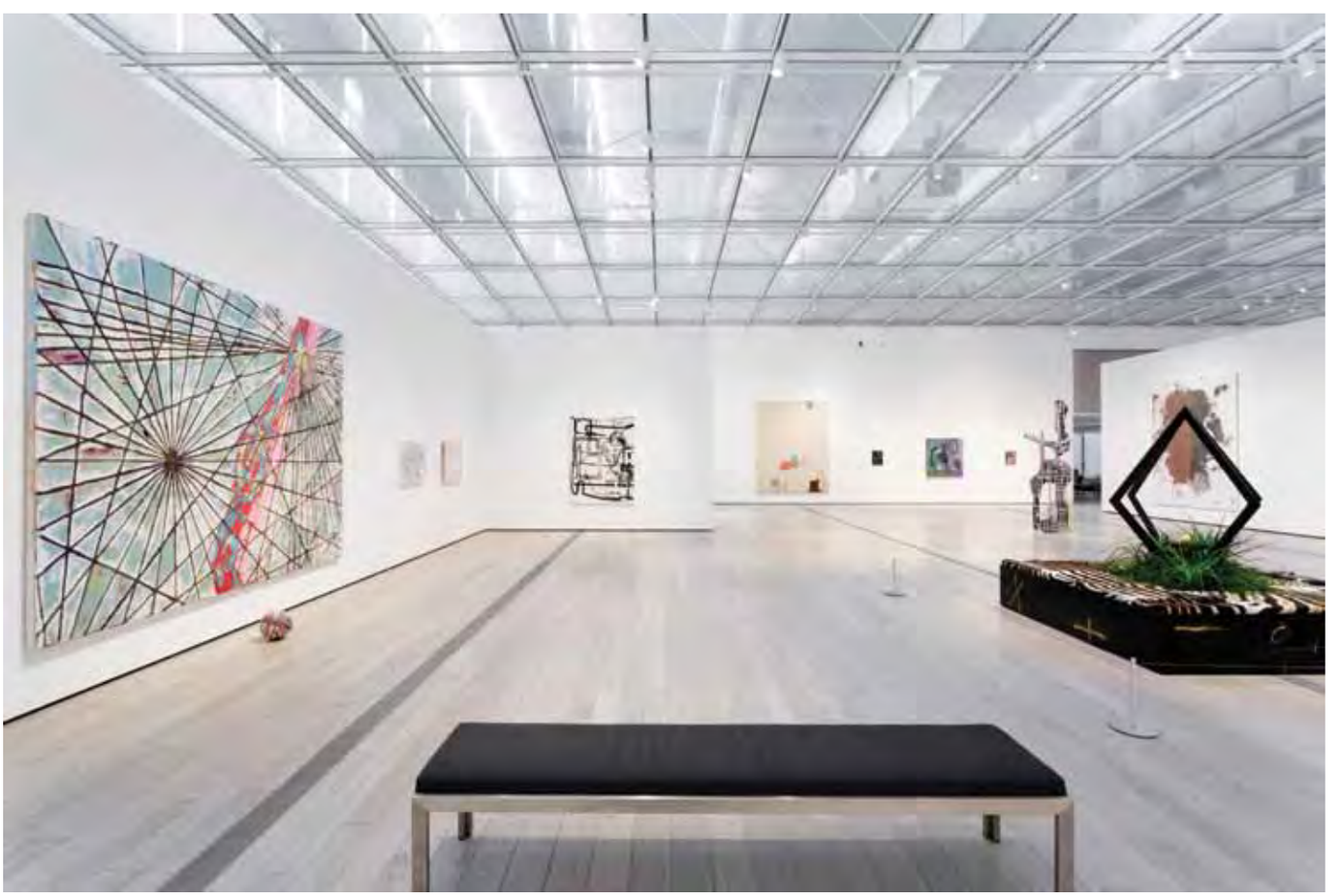
P.B. - So this brings us to the question: What are the challenges of the museum in the 21st century?
F.S. - To be relevant, to make it matter in terms of audience participation. We believe in the space of the museum as this place where people come together and get educated and entertained at the same time—potentially in equal parts. And how do you sustain that engagement, especially amidst all the other things that are available? The museum is hopefully an in-between space for daily life where we can all come to turn on or turn off and recharge our senses.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

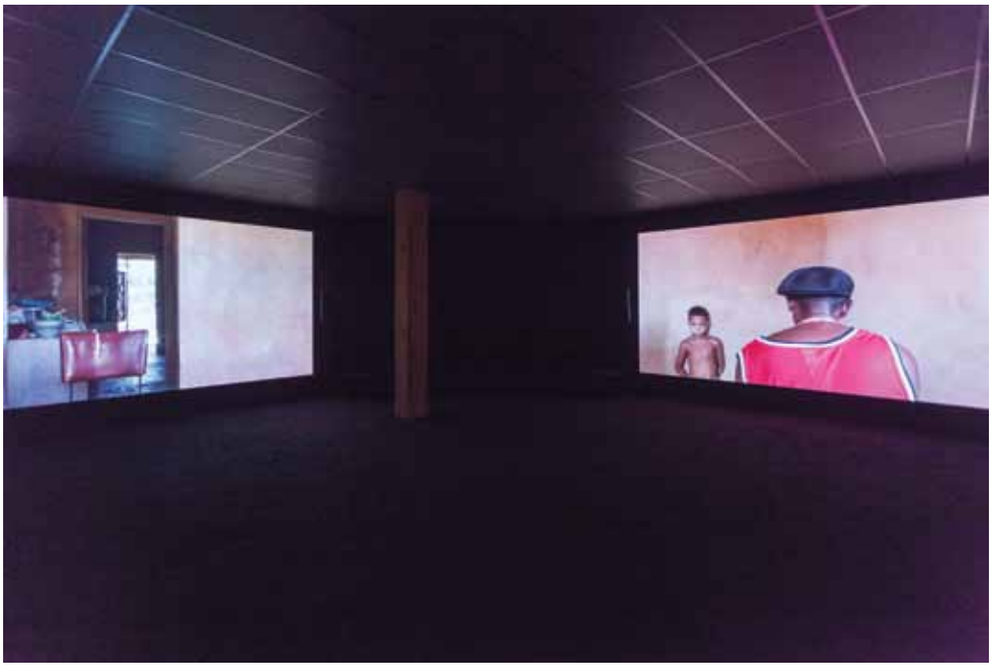
P.B. – ***Are expansions in general —think of SFMOMA, MoMA, Rijksmuseum, The Prado––absolutely necessary?***
F.S. – Actually, yes.

P.B. - In this same sense, what will architect Peter Zumthor's project mean to LACMA?
F.S. – Only time will tell. But it is going to be transformative and certainly will engage space in a way that will be complimentary to a 21st-century museum experience.

Installation view. “Fútbol: The Beautiful Game,” (February 2 – July 20, 2014). Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo © 2014 Museum Associates/LACMA.



Installation view. “Variations: Conversations in and around Abstract Painting,” (August 24, 2014 – March 22, 2015). Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo © 2014 Museum Associates/LACMA.



David Zink Yi (b. 1973, Lima, Peru)*, Horror Vacui*, 2009, two-channel HD video installation, duration: 120 minutes. Installation view at the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans for Prospect.3: Notes for Now, a Project of Prospect New Orleans, (October 25, 2014 - January 25, 2015). Courtesy of the artist; Johann König, Berlin; and Hauser & Wirth, Zürich, London, New York. Photo © Scott McCrossen/FIVE65 Design.

Hew Locke*, installation View at Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University for Prospect.3: Notes for Now*, a Project of Prospect New Orleans, (October 25, 2014 - January 25, 2015). © Scott McCrossen/FIVE65 Design

P.B. - Could this respond to the pressure of art having to compete with pop music, cinema and other sorts of entertainment? Are we able to compete with them?

F.S. - I think in some ways that's our strength: We don't play to the common denominator. We play from a position that is unique, a position that is very focused, a position that is very considered, one that has taken a lot of time to conquer. So that's our strength. I come from the old cliché of poetry. One point in time the poet was hot and then not. These things go in cycles. Part of an expanded museum in the 21st century is that it functions in so many ways.

P.B. – As with most professionals, you're engaged with social media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram et al. How do you think social media have shaped or impacted the art world?

F.S. – Too many ways to discuss here and now. And I think I will have an even better idea after seeing Lauren Cornell and Ryan Trecartin's New Museum Triennial show that opens February 25.

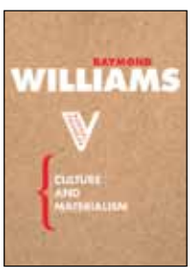
P.B. – Finally, some of the most recent shows you've curated are* 'Sam Doyle: The Mind's Eye' *and* 'Variations: Conversations in and Around Abstract Painting.' *What are the shows you're working on now?

F.S. – Yes, 'Variations' is up through mid-March, and then we are installing 'Noah Purifoy: Junk Dada,' which will open in June and be up through early fall. In 2016, there is the project with Tavares, and we are hosting the Agnes Martin exhibition from the Tate and present Toba Khedoori in the fall of 2016.

P.B. –A pretty packed program. Thank you for your time. ■

ROBIN VAN DEN AKKER

Robin van den Akker is a lecturer in cultural studies and philosophy at Erasmus University College Rotterdam, where he also coordinates the humanities program and Centre for Art and Philosophy. He is founding editor of *Notes on Metamodernism*, an academic webzine and research platform that attempts to map and analyze changes in aesthetics and culture that are symptomatic of the Post-Postmodern condition. He has written on contemporary aesthetics and culture for, among others, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture, Frieze* and *ArtPulse*, and has been advisor for various art exhibitions and cultural events, most recently "Metamodernism: The Return of History" at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.



Raymond Williams. ***Culture and Materialism.*** **First published in 1980. London and New York: Verso, 2005.**

About 10 years ago, as a naïve Dutch student, I packed my bags to chase the legacy of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. Upon my arrival I found out that the CCCS had been axed, as with so many other humanities-like departments in the U.K., and elsewhere, in our neoliberal times. Yet, thankfully, its specter still haunted its classrooms, and I read up on, especially, the work of the British cultural critic Raymond Williams. In his essay collection *Culture and Materialism* (1980; 2005), he argues that the arts, and culture in general, cannot be analyzed in isolation, but rather must be studied in relation to their social and economic conditions. "When we find ourselves looking at a particular work, or a group of works, often realizing, as we do so, their essential community as well as their irreducible individuality, we should find ourselves attending to the reality of their practice *and* the conditions of the practice," he writes with typical elegance. (page 48)

Frederic Jameson. ***Valences of the Dialectic.*** **First published in 2009. London and New York: Verso, 2010.**

It was, and still is, a valuable lesson for art critics and cultural theorists alike, and it is one echoed in the writings of Frederic Jameson, most famously, of course, in his *Postmodernism* book. What attracts me most to Jameson, however, is his insistence, as stubborn as it is consistent, on *dialectical* criticism. When I took up my first post as an academic on a philosophy faculty, my colleagues were engaged in many of the cutting-edge debates in continental philosophy that were highly critical of, and parted with, the dialectic in favor of philosophers of note such as Foucault and Deleuze and relational thinkers such as Latour and Sloterdijk. Meanwhile, my reading habits drifted more and more to the tradition of Western Marxism––Benjamin, Bloch, Adorno, Lefebvre, etc. I highly valued the former, yet was not capable of letting go of the latter. The result was, evidently, some kind of intellectual crisis. Jameson, especially in his masterful *Valences of the Dialectic* (2010), shows how it still is possible, and very much intellectually legitimate and rewarding, to work within the dialectical tradition *after,* as well as *with,* Derrida *cum suis*.

Naomi Klein. ***This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. The Climate.*** **New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014**

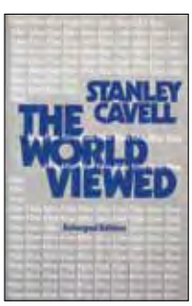
Recently, I have been deeply impressed with Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. The Climate* (2014) and Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014), which, when read in conjunction, form both a very convincing critique of neoliberal globalization and a passionate rallying cry to start changing the ways in which we have organized our societies. For if we don't, we are heading––in 10 or 20 years or so––towards a clusterfuck of world historical proportions in which wealth is concentrated at the top 1 percent of the pyramid, whilst rising sea levels and tropical storms crumble its base, where the rest of us reside. It is in the light of these developments that our children, and our children's children, will judge all of our work today.

TIMOTHEUS VERMEULEN

Timotheus Vermeulen is assistant professor of cultural theory at Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands where he also heads the Centre for New Aesthetics. He has written about contemporary aesthetics and culture for, among others, *The Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, Screen* and *Texte Zur Kunst* and is a regular contributor to *Frieze*. Vermeulen's latest book is *Scenes from the Suburbs* (EUP, 2014). He is co-founding editor of the academic webzine *Notes on Metamodernism*.

Immanuel Kant, *On History.* Edited by Lewis White Beck. London: Pearson, 1963.

There are many books that have influenced my thinking. Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is amongst them, as is Musil's collection of essays, Gertrude Stein's *Biography of Alice B. Toklas*, and Christoph Bataille's *Le Maitre des Heures* deserves a mention. However, a book I return to again and again is Kant's *On History*, edited by Lewis W. Beck, which collects the philosopher's writings on the philosophy of history, among them "What is Enlightenment," "Perpetual Peace" and my favorite, "Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View." In these texts, Kant proposes an understanding of history, mankind's evolutionary tale, in terms distinct from the one Hegel and Marx would later claim as their own. He suggests, as much through his argumentation as through the modality of his prose––in particular the so-called Konjunktiv II, the grammar of possibility, of "could" and "may" and "might"––that there may well be a pattern to history but that we can never be sure; we just have to act as if there is so as to suffuse our lives with meaning and direction—a brilliant method of analysis as well as pretty decent life advice.



Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

Some books help you develop an argument; these are often the books that receive, and deserve, praise. But there are also books that help you formulate, find the words to articulate, a thought. They are less often celebrated but are just as important. Cavell's *The World Viewed* is such a book for me. Whenever I lose grip of my writing, whether because I no longer control it or because I get stuck, I take this little book of essays about the nature of cinema from the shelves. In it, Cavell contemplates in the most straightforward and simple of languages the differences between cinema and the associated arts: painting, photography, music and theater. What is the distinction, he asks, between a sound and a sight? A record, to Cavell, reproduces a sound, but can we say a photograph reproduces a sight? Or: What is the difference, ontologically speaking, between the frame of a painting and that of cinema, or between a screen actor and a stage performer? Lots of questions, a few answers––not always convincing––but so original, creative and yet clear that it always opens up whatever chaos lies before me.

Siri Hustvedt, *Living, Thinking, Looking.* New York: Picador, 2012.

A book I have been reading, and rereading, recently is Camille de Toledo's brilliantly incisive *Coming of Age at the End of History*, a part autobiographical, part fictional, philosophical account of growing up in the 1990s as well as a program for an alternative adulthood in the 2000s. However, the books that have most occupied my mind recently are Siri Hustvedt's *Living, Thinking, Looking* from 2012 and her husband Paul Auster's subsequent memoir *Winter Journal*. Both of these are moving meditations on what it means to live in, or with, or from our human bodies; bodies that are both familiar and strange to us, that are terrorized by migraines and involuntary spasms, that are attracted to others before our minds realize it. I agree with those philosophers who want to think about the ontology of the world, but let's not forget that we can only do so from the slab of matter we inhabit: our bodies.

BEAUTIFUL BEAST

Wilkinson Gallery, New York Academy of Art
Curated by Peter Drake

By Keren Moscovitch

Barry X Ball, *Envy / Purity,* 2008-2012, Envy: Pakistani onyx, stainless steel (23" x 17-1/4" x 9-1/2.") / Purity: Mexican onyx, stainless steel (24" x 16-1/2" x 11-1/4."). Collection of Michael de Paola. Courtesy Wilkinson Gallery, New York Academy of Art.

"Beautiful Beast" at the Wilkinson Gallery of the New York Academy is a dense and dynamic group exhibition of sixteen contemporary artists working in inter-media sculpture that deploys the figure to explore the intersections of the beautiful and the grotesque, the natural and the man-made, and the evolution of human consciousness. The show features the work of Barry X Ball, Monica Cook, Gehard Demetz, Lesley Dill, Richard Dupont, Eric Fischl, Judy Fox, Folkert de Jong, Elizabeth King, Mark Mennin, Evan Penny, Patricia Piccinini, Rona Pondick, Jeanne Silverthorne, Kiki Smith and Robert Taplin.

The strength of this exhibition lies in its ricocheting play between traditional and new media to construct a non-linear narrative about the development of the human spirit through the medium of the body. Curator Peter Drake brings attention to an important quality of figuration, which is the relationship of the Self to the Self. An emphasis on the symbiosis between fear and beauty as aspects of the sublime coheres the works aesthetically and conceptually.

One of the more intriguing artists in the show is Barry X Ball who re-creates sculptural masterpieces in non-traditional, diaphanous stone that allows for subtle reinterpretations of details and gestures of the originals, ushering the work into contemporary discourse. Inspired by Giusto Le Court's Baroque marble bust *La Invidia*, *Envy* is a dramatic depiction of vice in the form of a woman whose hair has transformed into a crest of snakes. Ball then reimagines Antonio Corradini's angelic portrayal of *Purity* as a corroded ghostly phantom, material seemingly rotting away in places where it was once pristine. As *Envy* looks in horror at *Purity*, and *Purity* seems to deteriorate under the gaze of *Envy*, a dialogue emerges between these two allegories, both saturated with historical, religious and philosophical context. Ball's treatment adds a new chapter to the lives of these items, activating them and condensing the psychologically fraught tensions between the Self and Other into a single physical manifestation.

Elizabeth King's *Unreliable Narrative* is a three-channel video installation that functions as a surreal surrogate for the artist herself. An animated wooden hand, eyeball and head interact on three television screens in a quasi-futuristic, but somehow still nostalgic, high-tech sculptural construction. The movements are quiet and deliberate—the hand playfully waving at the eye, the head looking melancholy at moments and confounded at others. Fragmented aspects of the artist's consciousness seemingly question each other, bringing to the surface a line of inquiry about the nature of existence and purpose, and the essential futility of attempting to answer such weighty ontological conundrums.

Recurring throughout "Beautiful Beast" is an emphasis on genitalia and orifices, recasting them as primary sites of conflict and resolution in our bodies. Judy Fox's *Worms* are striking in their anatomical specificity. A triad of giant snail-like creatures display their rumps proudly in the air, showing off uncannily human vaginal structures, and slither at the base of *Mermaid*, a female figure reminiscent of Boticelli's *Venus*. The tableau references a process of creation that links the body to the earth and the earth to time, with its allusions to fecundity and primitive life forms. Monica Cook's seated figure *Snowsuit* casually spreads her legs to direct the eyes toward a zippered slit, gaping open as if split by tension. This gesture calls attention to an uneasy commingling of surface and interior. Eric Fischl's *Tumbling Woman II* relies on a translucent materiality to simultaneously present and seal off the body's openings, thereby deflecting the viewer's intrusive gaze.

The Achilles heel of "Beautiful Beast" is that the hybrid form of man-animal-machine repeats itself so frequently that it threatens to limit interpretations of the grotesque, at the exclusion of a more poetic approach to the comic distortion that characterizes the genre. One must pay close attention to the subtlety of Kiki Smith's *Mary Magdalene* or Jeanne Silverthorne's *Phosphorescent Betty* for their psychological undertones and ability to represent existential crisis without the drama of physical metamorphosis.

Overall, "Beautiful Beast" is an engaging and challenging exhibition with a solid curatorial vision. By positioning these works in relationship to one another, Drake confronts the viewer with uncomfortable truths about the human psyche, complicated visions of the body and unanswerable questions on the nature of self. To walk away from this show peering inward is to understand its most penetrating message. ■

(January 27 – March 8, 2015)

Keren Moscovitch is an interdisciplinary artist 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 The Huffington Post, Playboy, Policy Mic *and* New York Magazine.

***Julie Mehretu, Heavier than air (written form),* 2014,** ink and acrylic on canvas, 48" x 72." Courtesy the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery, and carlier | gebauer, Berlin. © Julie Mehretu. Photo: Tom Powel.

THE FOREVER NOW: CONTEMPORARY PAINTING IN AN ATEMPORAL WORLD

Museum of Modern Art - New York

By Craig Drennen

Curator Laura Hoptman boasts an enviable list of accomplishments, including the surprise 1997 MoMA painting exhibition called "Projects: John Currin, Elizabeth Peyton, Luc Tuymans." What made that exhibition so memorable was that it quietly assessed the state of *fin de siècle* figure painting with the firm, assured touch of someone who had truly located a pulse.

Now jump ahead 18 years later to Hoptman's "The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World," MoMA's anticipated encapsulation of painting's mutable practices. From the onset, the exhibition's overcrowded walls prevent proper experience of even the strongest individual works. Joe Bradley's pieces are the most obvious satires in the exhibition, each a drawn approximation of painting's grand tradition: portraiture, human figure, celebrity, religion and the artist as superhuman genius. The "portrait" titled *Neil* (2008) presents a gentle curved line that reads as a smile on a dirty, distressed canvas. It's an absurdist *Mona Lisa* with just a hint of *bukkake* degradation that makes Rashid Johnson's black wax monochromes nearby seem academic and overly cautious. Oscar Murillo's 7+ (2014) borrows from Tápies and Schnabel while still managing to be non-heroic. This is due in part to studiously accidental detritus included on the surface, such as the slice of plastic bottle that meets viewers at eye level but is somehow not mentioned at all in the wall label. Nicole Eisenman's monumental portraits, equal parts comic and inscrutable, are standouts. The murky expressionist tone in her *Capitalist Guy* (2011) is countered by printed mask images floating by like aquarium fish. Again the wall label describes *Capitalist Guy* as being made from "oil and cut-and-pasted printed paper on canvas," clearly ignoring the two very real 1972 Eisenhower silver-dollar coins that act as eyes. Did the MoMA staff members who printed the labels even look at the paintings?

Julie Mehretu's new calligraphic pieces reveal that audiences may have been so swayed toward understanding her work politically that no one noticed that she's actually an extraordinary painter. The surfaces of Mehretu's paintings are both frantic and tender, conveying the smudged urgency of a rain-soaked letter. Mary Weatherford's paint and neon combinations are equally mature and seem as naturally occurring as tavern signs at sunset. Matt Connors' *Variable Foot* (2014) is the only work in the exhibition that challenges the physical architecture of the exhibition space itself. The painting's vertical stripes reach from floor to ceiling and would have felt at home with the French "degree zero" painting movement from 50 years ago, which presumably reiterates Hoptman's point. Josh Smith was granted a full wall to present nine disparate paintings of identical size, which looks like he is playing a very large game of solitaire, which, like painting, is a generally singular activity in which an individual brings forth endless new combinations of the same old things, with nothing at stake. This might be one of the more cynical takeaway messages of "Forever Now," but significant nonetheless.

It is likely that contemporary curatorial practice might be suspended in a "forever now" situation to the same degree as artists. After reading the catalogue, one gets the feeling that the intellectual framework of Hoptman's curatorial essay is not in total alignment with the works selected, but that it *could* have been. In fact, the overcrowded walls, label omissions and inclusion of three artists from the same Lower East Side gallery makes the entire exhibition feel rushed. I'm nostalgic for the 1997 version of Hoptman, whom I've liked forever and who we need back now. ■

(December 14, 2014 – April 5, 2015)

Craig Drennen is an artist based in Atlanta. Since 2008 he has organized his studio practice around Shakespeare's Timon of Athens.

HEINZ MACK: FROM ZERO TO TODAY, 1955-2014

Sperone Westwater - New York

By Paul Laster

Heinz Mack*, Der Garten Eden (The Garden of Eden),* 1966/76, aluminum, stainless steel, and Plexiglas, 118 1/8" x 316 ¼" x 5 7/8." © Heinz Mack. Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York.

One of the co-founders of the influential Zero group, Heinz Mack was already making avant-garde art when he and Otto Piene organized the first Zero art show in Düsseldorf in 1957. Reacting to the more expressive nature of Tachisme and Art Informel (the two dominant abstract art movements in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s), the Zero artists embraced the use of light and motion to engage new forms of perception.

In postwar, atomic and space age, existentialist Europe, science and technology took center stage. With degrees in both art and philosophy, Mack was interested in moving the discussion about art to a new front. Mack, Piene and Gunther Uecker, who joined the group in 1960, produced publications and exhibitions that brought together like-minded artists making reductive art. The name Zero, itself, referred to the countdown for the launch of a rocket, which was considered a means to reach a new place, a new beginning—a conceptual "ground zero."

The earliest work in the show, the 1955 sculpture *Luftsäge* (air saw), features a light-reflective, rotary saw blade atop a steel rod mounted on a wooden base with similarly jagged edges so that motion is conveyed at both ends of the piece, while the most recent exhibited works—a pair of similarly sized, medium-scale, untitled paintings from 2013—evoke movement through dynamic brushwork and shifting tones of black, white and gray. Mack had stopped painting in 1968 but returned to the medium in 1991.

A group of rarely seen black-and-white photographs from the late-1960s—some that combine light-carrying forms with the stark landscape of the Sahara Desert—take ideas of photomontage explored by Herbert Bayer and Yves Klein (particularly in the Shunk-Kender photo of Klein taking the *Leap into the Void*) to new, somewhat sci-fi or visionary, heights.

Although all of the works in the show could be considered "museum-quality pieces," including 1966/76's *Der Garten Eden* (The Garden of Eden), a 10-foot-by-26-foot assemblage of honeycomb aluminum that abstractly simulates nature, and 1994-2010's *Poème de Silence,* a kinetic piece consisting of strips of stainless steel mounted on a round wooden disk that moved like an LP on a record player—or like Marcel Duchamp's spiraling *Rotoreliefs*—behind rippled glass, which crinkled the view of the moving bands of steel.

Other gems on view included four white, synthetic-resin-on-wood paintings from the late-1950s that share a sensibility with the works from that period of Piero Manzoni and Jan Schoonhoven, who participated in Zero group magazines and shows, and a pair of fan-shaped pieces—a sculptural one from 1960, which uses resin, pigments and sawdust to create a realistic form and an illusionistic one rendered paint on canvas from 1992—that remind viewers of the influence of Zen aesthetics and the Zero group's relationship to the Gutai movement, which was simultaneously taking place in Japan.

While a concurrent exhibition (*ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*) of the Zero group at the Guggenheim Museum in New York focused on the international character of the movement, Mack's third solo show here—strikingly displayed on three floors of the gallery's stylish, Norman Foster-designed building—revealed how his experimental work anticipated aspects of Land art, Minimalism and Conceptual art and how his recent paintings and sculptures continue to contribute to the ever-expanding dialogue about light, motion and abstraction. ■

(October 10 - December 13, 2014)

Paul Laster is the editor of A+, a blog by Artspace.com, and a contributing editor at Flavorpill.com, ArtAsiaPacific, *and* ArtBahrain.org. *He is a contributing writer for* Time Out New York, Art in America, Modern Painters, New York Observer, *and* TheDailyBeast.com.

***Cao Fei, Center Plaza (La Town),* 2014**, c-print, 36" x 51.75."Courtesy of the artist and Lombard Freid Gallery, New York.

CAO FEI: LA TOWN

Lombard Freid Projects – New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Since receiving the Best Young Artist Award from the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards committee in Beijing in 2006, Cao Fei (born 1978) has emerged as one of the most innovative Chinese artists in recent decades. She is widely known for her Internet-based *RMB City*, a digitally rendered utopia created between 2008 and 2011 that has been exhibited at Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin (2010), Serpentine Gallery in London (2008) and the Yokohama Triennale (2008), among other international venues. "La Town" is her fifth solo show at Lombard Freid Gallery in New York.

Cao's explorations in multimedia, photography and video continue to illuminate the complexities of a generation searching for meaning, in which environmental disasters, social restrictions, capitalist-driven attitudes and convoluted political practices cast a shadow over contemporary life in China. These troubles are by no means limited to Chinese society, and Cao's latest video work examines such themes in a global context. Lombard Freid presented the 40-minute feature film *La Town* as a single installation along with Cao's film-still photographs. Full of nostalgia, pain and poesy, *La Town* is narrated in French with English subtitles, culling its dialogue from the 1959 drama film noir *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (directed by Alain Resnais), which documents a personal conversation about memory and forgetfulness between two lovers. While Cao's *La Town* draws upon the sentimentality of this cinematic reference, her rendition is anything but romantic: This collapsed, deserted city harbors a series of disturbing vignettes. The film is composed of moments of ghoulish violence and destruction: Riots can be heard from afar, fires burn haphazardly, gored animals lay strewn about, women are sexually assaulted on desolate rooftops, bloody figures wander through darkened streets and supermarkets, policemen cavort in strip clubs. Humanity appears hopeless, ugly and wretched as a dramatic and chilling sound score adds to the repugnant *mise en scène* of *La Town*.

The apocalyptic nightmare continues for more than half the film before reaching a pause, and suddenly we are carried off over lush green mountains and serene landscapes filled with naked couples skylarking and copulating in *plein air* until we arrive at a peaceful train station—the *La Town* stop. The soothing, disembodied French voice intones: "I know what it is to forget." From there we are taken into a museum to witness the same gruesome scenes as before, but this time displayed as compartmentalized exhibitions; as Cao's audience, we are called to experience these spectacles as voyeurs of the macabre. Tableaus of cruelty and disorder have been recontextualized into ordinary displays of art and "historical specimens" that create an aura of factual interpretation, but stripped of their grisly circumstances. Transposed by the museum setting, the horrendous is made palatable by a candid presentation of past events; "Forgetfulness" as a timeworn strategy for escapism appears to be the ulterior message of *La Town*.

What is most striking about *La Town* is its set construction. Cao painstakingly arranged this catastrophic world on a miniature scale: the town itself is actually comprised of mini plastic figurines, dollhouse-sized props and buildings intended for model train displays. While the morbid myth of *La Town* is disorienting, the work's creation and composition are unforgettable. Cao's merging of lurid human realities with imaginative fantasies into the medium of video and photography reflects her fascination with the end of youth and innocence and the flimsy line between fact and fiction. The overall effect is both ghastly and deliberate. Cao's *La Town* haunts the psyche and lingers in the heart—it is a place we can abandon but we can never actually leave. ■

(September 10 – October 25, 2014)

Taliesin Thomas has worked in the field of contemporary Chinese art since 2001 after living two years in rural Hubei Province, China. She is the founding director of AW Asia in New York, a private organization that promotes contemporary Chinese art. Thomas holds an M.A. in East Asian studies from Columbia University and is currently a PhD candidate in art theory and philosophy at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

MULTIPOLARITY: REUVEN ISRAEL

Fridman Gallery - New York

By Sarah Lehat

Reuven Israel, *SBMBOOL,* 2013/14, copper coated steel rod, painted MDF, 96" x 32" x 32."

"Multipolarity" at Fridman Gallery is a leap into the metaphysics of artifice. Strewn around the room are objects—square, cylindrical, polygonal—all skewered by what appear to be copper rods. Some "skewers" stand propped against walls. Others lie prone on the ground, abstracted flatlandesque bodies begging to be decoded and deconstructed. It is obvious to all that they conceal or contain another dimension, but what?

Reuven Israel first began using the copper rod as a building agent on which to place his works in progress until he had determined how to assemble them. It was only a matter of time before he discovered that the rods were in fact the missing sculptural element he sought. Israel constructs the pierced units, often orbs or discs, out of MDF, a prefabricated material he has been fascinated with for over 10 years. To Israel, MDF can stand in for almost any shape or texture other than its original. It is the mother of artifice, and artifice—to him—is the cornerstone of art. Nothing representative can ever itself be the subject it represents. The representation is inherently distinct. Israel shapes the MDF by hand into various shapes, then stacks, paints and polishes them until no trace of his touch, nor the original MDF material, can be detected. The result is a series of sculptures that "look perfect but don't feel perfect." Polished orbs appear full, heavy, machine-made when they are actually hollow, light and painstakingly crafted. Geometrical shapes resemble plastic nuclear waste symbols or pop art flowers, while others still remind one of piano keys, a xylophone or instrument of similar nature. They are all of these, yet none all at once.

Israel's sculptures are reminiscent of symbols, graphics or icons, familiar elements of our two-dimensional world, relics or reconstructed artifacts of the digital and print cultures we navigate daily, populated by abstracted signs. Even the works' titles ... *SMBTD, SBMBOOL* ... remind us of the encoded universe we inhabit, each one an acronym, a layer of language stacked on top of other programmed layers of translation. Israel shares his inspirations, one being the Speculative Realism School of philosophy. Israel describes his work as an attempt "to break through to outer space," "to be fantastic … to be fantastical" or to make the fantastic out of the ordinary. In effect, the works resemble a type of alchemy, a Hollywoodesque sleight of hand, manipulating ordinary materials multiple times until they transcend their original identity, leaving no trace, hint or clue for the viewer.

But I only truly understand Israel's world when I see his drawings. Drifting orbs and shapes float on a field of black ink. In minuscule form, the characters of Israel's universe remind me of my Pacman and Atari youth. These objects are similar in shape but smaller in scale compared to the "tokens" or "talismans" that he has stacked into monumental totems. I finally grasp what he calls the "intentional randomness" of his world. Returning to "Multipolarity," I see the skewers in a new light. They are of human scale. Those propped against the walls stand about human height. Those lying on the ground seem to be prostrated or at rest. They are companions to us men and women, skewering, hooking, and attaching us to their chain of objects.

In the end, I decide that I prefer those leaning against the gallery's wall. They feel less easily commodified than their supine friends, whom I find too self-contained, self-sustaining, too safe, ready-made, a succinct statement or eager possession for the consumer. ■

(November 7 – December 20, 2014)

Sarah Lehat is a writer, publicist and production consultant specializing in contemporary Israeli art. Sarah studied architecture at The Catholic University of America and at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, Israel.

"Chris Ofili: Night and Day," installation view. Photo: Maris Hutchinson/EPW. © Chris Ofili. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London.

CHRIS OFILI: NIGHT AND DAY,

New Museum – New York
Curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Gary Carrion-Murayari and Margot Norton

By Keren Moscovitch

"Chris Ofili: Night and Day" at the New Museum is more than a thematically provocative and visually arresting exhibition about culture, sexuality and religion. It functions as a concerto, a polyphonic score of cultural landscapes and diverse voices, all emanating from an artist whose transnational identity is at the core of his practice. Raised in the UK by Nigerian parents, Ofili gained American recognition in 1999 when his piece *Holy Virgin Mary* appeared at the Brooklyn Museum as part of the infamous "Sensation" show and became the scapegoat of Mayor Rudy Giuliani's funding war. Strongly committed to narrative—both personal and collective—Ofili returns to US soil with an artfully curated mid-career retrospective that sets his work apart from the ironic abstraction that floods today's market and the cool detachment of the British tradition out of which he emerged.

Ofili is an agile image-maker boldly choosing materials for their physical and sensual qualities and pulling from such diverse sources as ballet, hip hop, literature and cinema, as well as characters he encountered on the streets of London. Visitors are introduced to his intimate approach to figuration by an extensive set of drawings, the *Afro-Muses*. Spanning ten years, they peel the curtain back on the artist's daily drawing practice of working with the human visage. Displayed like a mosaic, heads and necks are adorned with liquid watercolor regalia, showcasing Ofili's interest in mixing European portrait painting traditions with African tribal imagery. In the next gallery, the symbolic trope of dried elephant dung is used, a material that Ofili became intrigued with during his time in Zimbabwe. The dung disrupts any possibility of a pristine surface, entering the viewer's space authoritatively at some moments and delicately at others, producing a contrapuntal rhythmic beat that moves visitors through space. A testament to the artist's socio-political engagement, another portrait from this series, *No Woman No Cry* is an ode to the mother of a black youth murdered in a brutal hate crime in Britain, and is poignantly relevant in our post-Ferguson era.

A highpoint of the exhibition is the "Blue Rider" series, a series of powerful paintings in dark hues of black and blue. Mythic figures slowly emerge from the dim abyss of the gallery—an architectural environment designed and lit by the artist for proper viewing of these works. As eyes adjust to the dark in the meditative space, eerie beings cloaked in mysterious energies traverse a conflicted landscape of romance and trauma.

Ofili's crescendo reaches climax in the "Metamorphoses" series, based on Ovid's tales of transfiguration, heroism and love, for which the artist designed a fantastic environment that evokes stained glass cathedrals and enchanted forests. *Ovid-Actaeon* is an arresting composition of hermaphroditic figures intertwined in what could be a dance, fight, or orgy. Based on the ancient story of a hunter getting mauled to death by his own dogs as punishment for defiling a sacred goddess with his gaze, this painting addresses narratives of prosecution, persecution and the sexual frustration that periodically surfaces in Ofili's work. The artist's increasingly poetic language of color, movement and form rises to a pitch-perfect peak, condensing myriad themes into acts of transformation and spiritual questioning.

The construction of immersive environments unifies the concept of each gallery, while bombarding the senses in a manner that encourages an open-ended reading of a complex body of work. The dance between sacred and profane, totem and taboo, hopeful and sinister, transforms this exhibition into a journey through worlds. Reverence is just as much a part of Ofili's process as iconoclasm. An undercurrent of melancholy and disquiet runs through "Night and Day," producing a kaleidoscopic vision of personal and communal mythmaking. Carefully tuning in to the soundtrack of his epoch, Ofili mixes new tunes to an ancient beat. ■

(October 29, 2014 - January 25, 2015)

DOZE GREEN: OUT OF NOWHERE

Jonathan LeVine Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Doze Green, Dustland Memories, 2014, oil on canvas. Courtesy of Jonathan LeVine Gallery and Alyssa Rapp.

For those of us who grew up in the humdrum of the American suburbs, glimmers of unorthodox aesthetics arrived in the form of cultish alternative art magazines such as *Juxtapoz*. Those coveted issues were fantastical departures from the norm. Within those glossy pages, my generation encountered a universe of artistic magic and mayhem, and one of its principal sorcerers was Doze Green (born 1964). Over the years his art presented a vision unlike that of even his most extraordinary peers—his variety of paintings constituted a singular force.

Green continues to hold court in the 'atypical' corner of the art world, the one that integrates street art, breakdancing and skateboarding among its primary modes of cultural expression. As a champion of this idiosyncratic genre of art, Jonathan LeVine Gallery in New York recently presented "Out of Nowhere," its fifth solo show by the New York-born, California-based Green. Comprised of fifteen new paintings and more than forty ink drawings on paper, "Out of Nowhere" sustains the best of Green's old-school vibrancy while introducing a fresh version of his distinct painterly style.

In new works such as *Black Swan Mystery of Babylon* (2014), Green expresses quasi-scientific metaphysical concepts—reincarnation, transmogrification—through his layering of references to altered states of consciousness, cosmology, and cultures not his own. The result is an eclectic mix of futuristic iconography, and his unique visual vocabulary of stoic elders, alien beings, Hindu mudras, anthropomorphic creatures, double helixes, diamonds and mathematical shapes orchestrated together appear to vibrate with an esoteric energy all its own.

A painting titled *Dustland Memories* (2014) features a cluster of figures (some human, some superhuman) layered against an unfinished background; a blue skull lies on an open highway, a UFO hovers in the far upper left, and a poised bird flutters below a crescent moon. Numbers and symbols are dispersed throughout the piece; perhaps for Green they represent codes, or refer to a kind of arcane semiology. There is a comfortable strangeness to this motley scene, and Green invites us in to navigate the transcendent waves of mystical flux without unease or complete alienation.

Green's forty monochromatic portraits on paper provide an appropriate level of contrast to the complex and entrancing compositions on canvas. These drawings, done in a simple black-line redolent of calligraphy, depict friends and mentors of the artist. Their faces are familiar—reminiscent of the ones we encountered on our journey through Green's visionary paintings—but unusual all the same; stepping closer, we see each appearance is actually a form within forms, morphing from human likeness into conceptual construct and back again.

Green is a both a visual alchemist and graffiti artist at heart, and his latest works reflect an energetic 'mash-up' of the symbolism, figuration, bold lines, bright colors, and geometric combinations for which he has become known. In the universe evident in "Out of Nowhere," abstract tendencies merge with cubist sensibilities and classic b-boy style; within that graphic ensemble we revisit an artist whose intense imagination remains at the forefront of his generation. ■

(November 20 – December 20, 2014)

LOUISE BOURGEOIS: SUSPENSION

Cheim & Read – New York

By Paul Laster

Louise Bourgeois, *Legs,* 2001, fabric, 76" x 34" x 22 ½". ©The Easton Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, NY. Courtesy of Cheim & Read, New York.

Focusing on suspended sculptural works from the 1960s through 2009 (a year before the artist died at age 97) and drawings from the 1940s that depict hanging figures and forms, "Suspension" revealed Louise Bourgeois' interest in art's relationship to both architectural space and the psychological. Featuring 24 autobiographical works made in bronze, rubber, aluminum, latex, plaster, fabric, and ink and charcoal on paper that spanned a 63-year period, this striking show traced the artist's fascination with floating forms back to childhood memories, when her father hung his furniture collection from the ceiling of the attic and her mother suspended food in the kitchen to protect it from rats.

Taking sculpture off the pedestal and into a realm of the psyche, Bourgeois has stated, "Horizontality is a desire to give up, to sleep. Verticality is an attempt to escape. Hanging and floating are states of ambivalence." That ambivalence is expressed in the earliest sculptural works on view, 1962's *Lair* and 1963's *Fée Couturière*, which suggest dangling animal and insect nests that could have come from the artist's backyard in Manhattan at the time, as well as the 1947 drawing of hanging, hairy shapes that allude to Bourgeois' long hair from that prior era.

Two 1968 bronzes from the *Janus* series, *Janus Fleuri* and *Hanging Janus with Jacket*—referencing the double-faced Roman god of myth and pagan faith that looks forward to the future and backward to the past, portray the tips of penises sagging out of their foreskin, while *Fillette (Sweeter Version)*, also from 1968, depicts an erect phallus made from flesh-colored latex stretched over a plaster form. An earlier version of the iconic bronze piece that the Museum of Modern Art acquired for its collection during the 1983 retrospective there, it was made more famous through artist Robert Mapplethorpe's powerful photograph of Bourgeois carrying it under her arm. *Fillette*, which translates from French to "Little Girl," not only looks like an erect penis, but also strangely doubles as a child with her head and truncated legs popping out of a short, collared dress.

The 1985 bronze *Henriette*, which somewhat abstractly represents an artificial leg, is named after Bourgeois' sister, who had to overcome the handicap of having a bad lower limb. *Femme*, a 1993 bronze, portrays a pregnant woman suspended with a wire from her navel, which evokes an umbilical cord or attachment to the artist's mother and children. Although she's most identified with works that aggressively comment on her resentment toward her father for taking her nanny as his lover, Bourgeois' late fabric pieces—stitched from her cut-up clothes—embrace her mother's role as the seamstress in the family's tapestry-restoration business.

Legs, from 2001, alludes to her mother, father and his mistress living in the same household with its three dangling red limbs; the 1999 fabric piece *Single 1* violently displays a decapitated figure strung up by his feet; and 2004's *Untitled* captures a dismembered cloth head suspended from its neck like the victim of a brutal affair. And, making this exhibition special, neither the former nor the latter pieces had ever been previously shown. The *pièce de résistance* here, however, was the 1993 sculpture *Arch of Hysteria*, a polished bronze of a headless man strung up by his pelvis. His boney, contorted, reflective metal body visually shouts out both poetry and pain.

Equally reflective yet tranquil in comparison, *The Couple*, from 2007-09, portrays two interlocked figures that seem to have grown out of primordial mud. A five-foot-tall maquette for a 35-foot-high piece, which was commissioned for a train station in Vienna, the tubular sculpture was one of the final pieces that the artist completed before her death. Hung like a talisman, it has the ability to spin from the atmosphere that surrounds it.

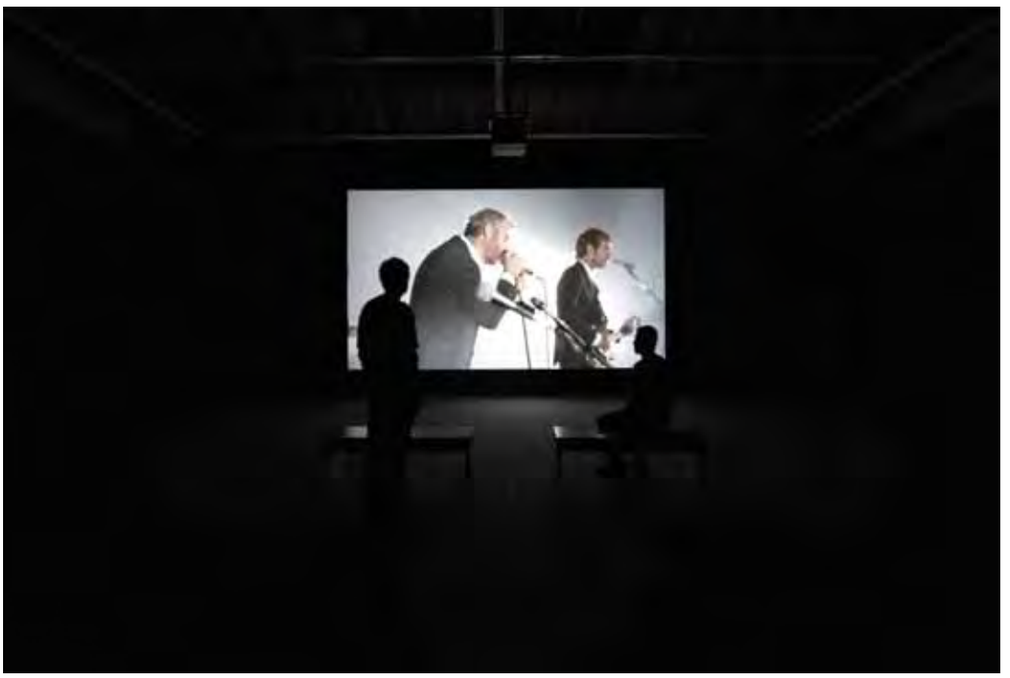
Beautifully installed, so that the audience could freely connect with the work, "Suspension" offered an inspiring overview of Bourgeois' profound oeuvre while making a persuasive argument for her imaginative idea of presenting serious sculpture that never touches the ground. ■

(October 30, 2014 – January 10, 2015)

RAGNAR KJARTANSSON AND THE NATIONAL: A LOT OF SORROW

Luhring Augustine – Bushwick, New York

By Mary Coyne



Ragnar Kjartansson and The National, *A Lot of Sorrow,* 2013-2014 single channel video, 6:09:35 hrs, Luhring Augustine, Bushwick. © Ragnar Kjartansson and The National. Courtesy of the artists and Luhring Augustine, New York.

On May 5 2013, MoMA PS1 presented a performance event for their weekly "Sunday Session" programming a collaboration between Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson and the Brooklyn-based rock band The National. The event assumed the form of a marathon concert in which the band performed their single *Sorrow* 105 times consecutively for over six hours. In September, 2014, Luhring Augustine featured the full-length recording of the MoMA event as a single-channel video installation, *Ragnar Kjartansson and The National: A Lot of Sorrow* (2013-2014).

True to form in *A Lot of Sorrow,* Kjartansson has consistently explored both meta-modernist romanticism and the emotional capabilities of music in his art. Drawing on Icelandic performative oral histories and his own earlier career in a band, Kjartansson's practice often centers around music performance, lyricism and endurance. For example, his early work, such as the 2009 nine-channel video *The Visitors*, featured Kjartansson and eight additional performers playing a plaintive ballad in a historic Hudson River estate. A 2014 project at The New Museum featured live minstrel singers who strummed guitars and lyres, setting to song the text being enacted on a large scale projected video within the gallery space. Both projects share Kjartansson's construct of the musician as artist, as personality that supersedes that of the artist. More importantly, all share an understanding of music as a uniquely temporal format—by repeating a group of lyrics and notes over a set period Kjartansson transforms lyrics into hymns, and harmonies into collaborations to be analyzed and appreciated.

In *A Lot of Sorrow*, Kjartansson feeds off The National's melancholic musical aesthetic. *Sorrow's* lyrics convey a depressed romanticism in which the narrator laments that he "lives in a city sorrow built." Translated into a loop playback of epic proportions, Kjartansson utilized repetition perhaps to heighten the sincerity of the lyrics, or, conversely, to render them meaningless. Steadfastly repeated as a mantra or prayer, its meaning and tragedy were underscored by the fatigue-inducing and arduous event. With each rendition the band members consciously or unconsciously altered their performance, feeding off of their exhaustion, their synergy, and occasional rounds of water, red wine or vittles served to them dutifully by Kjartansson over the course of the afternoon.

In the exhibition at Luhring Augustine, high definition video footage of the entire marathon event was projected in a black-box gallery fitted with no other accouterments. In light of greater discussions around showing, or re-presenting performance, the video recording immediately establishes video's formal limitations and benefits. The new format does away with the marathonesque pull of attending the performance. Boredom, hunger, weariness can compel one to leave the space, knowing that it all will happen again at the same time tomorrow. Kjartansson's work, however, is captivating enough to compel a revised type of staying power. By presenting the work again, in the recorded form, Kjartansson engages with an ever-present debate around performance work in museums and galleries. It is here where he establishes his ability to combine performance and video, allowing his work to speak in both forms. The installation does not, at any moment, function as a "this happened" archival recording. Instead the "concert" is transformed into a medium-specific work able to hold one's attention for six hours at a time when the artist's presence has proved to be of significant importance. While the original performance was conceptualized by Kjartansson, The National quite literally stole the show. The video installation however, functions as a masterful work of visual and emotional narrative which completes, as opposed to imitates the live event. ■

(September 11 - December 21, 2014)

Mary Coyne is a curator and writer based in Brooklyn. She is the founder of Pseudo Empire, a not-for-profit exhibition space in Bushwick.

"Harmony Korine: Raiders," installation view. © Harmony Korine. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery. Photo: Douglas M. Parker studio.

HARMONY KORINE: RAIDERS

Gagosian Gallery - Beverly Hills, CA.

By Megan Abrahams

In a series of thematically connected paintings rendered with squeegees, brooms, masking tape, dye, plastic and leftover house paint in lieu of conventional artist's tools and materials, California filmmaker and artist Harmony Korine opens a window into his process while revisiting aesthetic elements of his films in a static medium.

The paintings evolve as hybrid products of spontaneity and a cumulative approach built up in multiple layers over time. Some of the pieces were repainted over the course of several years. The works embody a curious interplay of the intentional and unplanned, as if the artist approached the canvas with an original concept and then improvised during the process to explore his own reaction.

Included are five in a series of "chex" paintings, characterized by interconnected rows of checks or squares that proliferate the surface of the canvas in a pattern. The checks pave across numerous deliberate folds and creases in the canvas and over the tops of collaged bits of fabric and plastic. The element of collage adds shape to an otherwise level plane, contrasting with the checks, which would otherwise conform to a vague linear grid. From a distance, the contrasting check shapes are muted, subsumed into the overall composition. Up close, they come into sharp vibrant focus.

In a series of seven line paintings, the checks are replaced with repeated freehand horizontal lines in alternating colors. Perhaps derivative of the horizon line, in these works the lines deviate, bending in different directions to create a subtle illusion of three dimensions. Cardboard and plastic articles are collaged into the background, adding real three-dimensional relief. The artist proceeds in spite of the collaged elements he has introduced, painting over them, not around them. Although these elements are covered with the repeated lines, we see the outline of their shapes beneath the painted surface, ghost objects in the indeterminate background. From a distance, with details less defined, the line paintings connote a vague suggestion of landscape.

Korine explores abstract concepts as well as figurative elements. In addition to using unconventional tools, he experiments with alternative grounds for his paintings, such as felt and the metallic-silver reflective surface of a safety blanket, which influence the effect of the paint.

In a few stand-alone pieces, Korine takes a different direction, as in *Slinky Monk* (2014, house paint, acrylic and oil on safety blanket, 124 by 93 inches), in which black gestural marks, reminiscent of the paintings of Joyce Pensato, emerge from the silver background to evoke the features of a face.

In another departure, *Raider Burst* (2014, ink on canvas, 124 by 93 inches), the artist stuck masking tape on unprimed canvas and spread primary-colored dyes across the surface with a broom. In removing the negative image created by the tape an explosive starburst of color is revealed.

The artist's experimentation with a broad range of media and techniques, and an apparent reluctance to stick rigidly to a preconceived concept, removes limiting formality and injects a compelling element of unpredictability to his work. ■

(January 10 - February 14, 2015)

Megan Abrahams is a Los Angeles-based writer and artist. She received her M.A. from the University of Southern California School of Journalism. A contributing writer for WhiteHot Magazine *since 2009, her writing has appeared in a number of publications. She is currently writing her first novel.*

LAURA KRIFKA: REAP THE WHIRLWIND

CB1 Gallery – Los Angeles

By Megan Abrahams

Laura Krifka, *The Prick,* 2014, oil on canvas, 40" x 30." Courtesy of CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles.

In her new exhibit of recent paintings, sculpture, film and video, Laura Krifka makes an unrestrained inquiry into human behavior, psychology, death, violence and sexuality without flinching. Among the range of media presented, the paintings dominate with their intensity, scale and drama. In them, gripping—and at times shocking—subject matter is conveyed with accomplished technical fluency. Neoclassical in style, Krifka's work also seems to reflect some of the core principles of the 18th- and early 19th-century Neoclassicist painters, referring to classical principles as a standard for grasping contemporary morality.

At first look, the stunning impact of Krifka's often disturbing, sometimes violent, subject matter momentarily eclipses the technical brilliance of the work. Pulled inside the moment, the viewer is compelled to look despite, or because of, the disconcerting nature of certain themes the artist is apparently driven to explore. With the luster of oil on canvas, Krifka weaves mythological and historical references into her own allegorical world. Each painting is a scene portraying figures caught in some act. As in the work of F. Scott Hess, another contemporary California painter who creates theatrical and sometimes lurid dramatic scenes expressed through a classical vocabulary, the viewer is conscious of being a voyeur, a witness to a secret—sometimes involving romance, often murder or another form of transgression.

Digging past the initial fascination, the work resonates on other levels. It is impossible to overlook the inherent beauty of Krifka's paintings. Her artistic process involves a series of decisions, momentous forks in the road to realizing a vision. In the course of Krifka's decision-making, it's evident she can rely on her own exquisite instincts about palette. Aura or mood, orchestrated through the use of color, infuses her work, most notably in a piece like *Violet Riot*, (2014, oil on panel, 48 by 96 inches) with its pervasive violets. Also fluent in human anatomy, Krifka is not just convincing in conveying flesh, underlying muscle, sinew and bone, but adept at capturing emotion.

A familiarity with human anatomy does not translate to conformity or confining herself to prescribed conventions. She ignores customary gender boundaries, bending and adapting male and female roles. In Krifka's realm, the murderer, predator or rapist may be a female. The male could be the victim. She also exercises a deliberate degree of gender ambiguity in some of her figures, manipulating the narrative thread and further building on the psychological component. A dark humor and double entendre also pervade some of her work. In *The Prick* (2014, oil on canvas, 40 by 30 inches), a figure with feminine features, except for the naked erect penis, holds a sewing needle.

The scenes are cinematic, laced with narrative, thick with dramatic tension. An ability to leverage the underlying story, perhaps cultivated from Krifka's experience in filmmaking, lends an extraordinary quality of *mise-en-scène* to the canvas.

"Reap the Whirlwind" is one of the inaugural exhibits at the vast, new, light-filled CB1 Gallery space in the frontier warehouse arts district of downtown Los Angeles. ■

(January 24 - February 28, 2015)

@LARGE: AI WEIWEI ON ALCATRAZ

Alcatraz Island - San Francisco

By Taliesin Thomas

Ai Weiwei, Blossom, 2014, installation detail, Alcatraz Hospital. Photo: Jan Stürmann. Courtesy of FOR-SITE Foundation.

These days, when a major exhibition opens somewhere in the world the Internet is instantaneously alight as art aficionados populate social media websites with impulsive uploads. Since the advent of our collective cyber existence, these virtual encounters with art can *almost* feel like the real thing. For dissident Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (born 1957), however, these digital rendezvous with his own art as exhibited abroad *are* the real thing. Confined to his native Beijing since June 2011, Ai's unusual solo show on Alcatraz Island—the first ever art exhibition at America's infamous prison-turned-park—is one of the most noteworthy art events in recent memory, and not so much for the content as for the context.

Arrival on Alcatraz by ferryboat along with hundreds of other tourists is itself a bit campy; the majority of visitors are not there to behold Ai's exhibit specifically, but rather are among the yearly hordes that descend upon the island for a thrill—getting to see work created explicitly for Alcatraz by China's most notorious political artist is an added kick. "@Large" is comprised of seven distinct pieces, including sculptures, sound and mixed media, scattered among four locations of the former penitentiary. Working in collaboration with the locally based For-Site Foundation, Ai composed this show as a message to all people, once again relaying his timeworn slogan in support of free expression through imaginative conceptual installations that reflect his ongoing preoccupation with injustice. This tempered presentation of Ai's work (one piece titled *Blossom* a mere toilet bowl full of small, white porcelain flowers) transposes the eerie and decrepit backdrop that is Alcatraz into a platform for discussion regarding human rights and politically charged current events. Arguably the most impactful installation is *Trace*, a series of 176 colorful Lego portraits of individuals from all around the world who have been imprisoned or exiled because of their beliefs or affiliations. Laid out on the concrete floor in a grid, these depictions appear to be an elaborate carpet; upon closer inspection faces emerge. Accompanying these panels are several podiums with binders that chronicle the names and alleged crimes of these political prisoners of conscience, each story more distressing than the next. The overall effect of this work is chilling. Ai says they are all nonviolent people who have lost their freedom simply because they expressed their ideas, imprisoned for trying to improve their conditions through writing or peaceful protest. In this capacity, Ai exposes a candid affirmation of support: He stands among them as a fellow prisoner whose relative "freedom" was returned.

In the catalogue for this show Ai writes: "In China my name has been censored on the Internet, in the media, and even in exhibitions featuring my own work." Considering his deft use of the Internet to create this exhibit, however, Ai is proving the line between so-called "real" life and "fabricated" existence is often convoluted, much the same way his creative endeavors and ulterior motives as an activist seamlessly weave together to illuminate the complicated corners of Chinese society through his artistic practice.

Widely known for his larger-than-life persona, Ai continues to demonstrate that neither he (nor his art) cannot be held down, despite his standing as a prominent artist unable to leave Beijing as he remains under soft detention for purported crimes such as tax evasion. While "@Large" indicates that his current status as China's leading revolutionary is quite literally behind bars, it also authenticates him as the badass and bogus convict that he really is. ■

(September 27, 2014 – April 26, 2015)

Daniel Fiorda, *White box series 2014,* Typewriter Diptych, wood, plastic, concrete typewriter, 25.5" x 25.5 x 3," each panel

DANIEL FIORDA

Lélia Mordoch Gallery – Miami

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

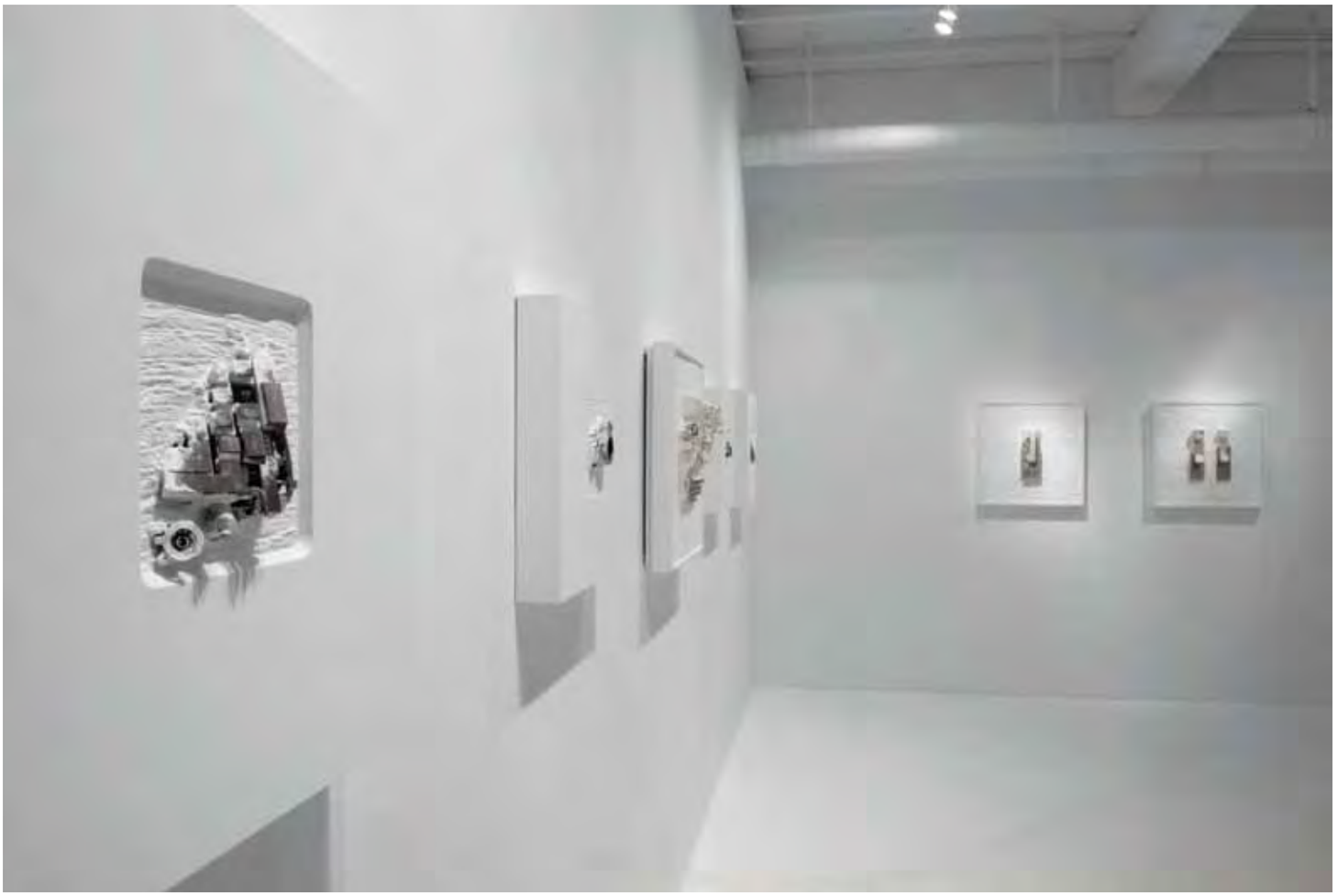
Argentinean-born, Miami-based artist Daniel Fiorda (born in 1963) has been using objects as part of his artwork for years. Perhaps, as the artist reflected on in a recent interview[1], his fascination with them is a consequence of his upbringing in a world in which objects were accumulated and kept around.

His artistic trajectory officially began in 1983 when he was 19 years old, and he held his first exhibition in an art gallery. Back then, his sculptures were made from metal scraps that he collected from his father's welding business. Ever since, the sense of giving a second life to objects that have been discarded has been in one way or another at the center of his work. His recent solo show, "Archeology of the 20th Century," follows this unifying thread, summarizing the evolution of his work.

The homogenous-looking pieces in this exhibition are part of *The White Box* Series, created in 2014, and aesthetically different from the early ones. Although he has been working with gadgets such as typewriters, cameras, telephones and sewing machines for the past 10 years, these new pieces are showing a completely different visual language. He left behind the use of color and "collage" effects of previous works in which he combined elements from various artifacts into the same assemblage. He is also breaking away from the *Nostalgic Series*, in which objects were placed complete, as a vintage piece, almost venerated like a relic. We can easily see these changes if we compare *Typewriters*, from *Nostalgic Series* (2011), and *No More Dialectics #3* (2014). In both pieces he used typewriters; in both instances the objects are included almost intact as part of the piece. However, *Typewriters* shows a shiny golden machine over a black background, while in *No More Dialectics #3* the object is almost interred in a white dusty compound.

In this new series it is still easy to identify the initial gadget used, and it becomes the center of the piece. This visually simple solution makes it possible to concentrate on the object imbedded in each "box." He encapsulates them in a dusty white background made out of plaster, giving it the appearance of previously being "buried." This tableaux effect creates a sort of scenario in which the objects seem to emerge like ghosts from a past. We can't help but imagine the previous life of it, how it was used and to instinctively question through how many hands it passed before ending in Fiorda's. These "machines" used to be passed down from one generation to the next. He collects these objects, probably knows the story of many of them, and keeps them as part of his ever-growing collection until the time is right to include them in his artwork. He is recycling not only the actual artifacts, but also the memories attached to them in the form of images, words and dreams. In turn, the process of interaction includes a dialogue between the artist and the objects first, and then between the finished piece and and viewer—done intentionally by the artist.

As mentioned previously, typewriters are among the machines that Fiorda frequently searches for and later recycles into his works. These hold a special place in his memory, since he used to play with his grandmother's as a child. These childhood memories developed into an obsession that inclined him to collect many of them. Consequently, he started to view them as emblematic objects of a past time, as well as evidence of the changes in technology and ways of life. After being an essential tool for many years, the typewriter has been displaced by the computer, becoming the perfect symbol of all that is thrown away and discarded as obsolete. *Typewriter Divided #1* is another of these pieces with the iconic machines. Fiorda cut a typewriter in half and placed it



"Archeology of the 20th Century," installation at Lélia Mordoch Gallery, Miami. Photos: Mariano Costa-Peuser.

like a diptych, two almost symmetric halves trying to converge in the middle. The ample and neutral background functions like the space left intentionally by the artist for memories.

Tube Phone # 1 is one of several pieces that used telephones. Presented in a similar format to *Typewriter Divided #1* but exhibited as a single piece, a phone is featured on a wall, recalling a day when phones were immoveable, rotary-dial objects that we worked around, rather than those that adapt to our movements, as the current-day versions do today.

A third group of pieces is dedicated to photographic cameras, especially 35-millimeter models. Two of these pieces, *35 mm camera #1* and *35 mm camera* #2, respectively, each show a camera emerging from a white background. The format for this group is slightly different than the rest, with the supporting surface smaller and the frame wide to take the place of that space. The square form reminds us of a bold frame, like those used for old black-and-white photographs, evocative of a distant past. Cameras are precious objects, though perhaps because of their relative extinction, because despite the contemporary obsession for documenting almost every second of our lives, it is now done most of the time with a simple cellular phone. These exercises of endlessly capturing millions of images become a daily occurrence, and without the filters of the past. Consequently, because most photos today are digital, the printed image is almost extinct.

He also uses isolated random elements—pieces from machines, such as a phone charger, fragments from sewing machines or a keyboard. A piece that makes us think again about technology and its short life span is *Panasonic Calculator*, an homage to the days when people actually had one. Now the machines of choice are phones, computers and tablets.

These objects, and by extension the works, represent a past when communication was more personal and "physical' instead of the current-day "virtual" exchange, a time when there wasn't a digital trail left after almost every contact among humans. Part of Fiorda's message is a call to attention towards how ephemeral technology is nowadays, especially in the U.S., when a new phone is out on the market practically every day. He also calls attention to the excessive consumerism of a contemporary society that is constantly discarding.

Fiorda is a recycler of objects as well as a hoarder of memories. He also reflects on the fleeting effect of life through these discarded objects and observes the changes in the ways we communicate with each other and within social groups.

Ultimately, Fiorda is an "urban archeologist" who unearths the things around him, accumulating old "machines" that are, in fact, artifacts from another time that have been pushed aside by the advance of technology. He learns that what might be trash in the eyes of many represent an aesthetic possibility for him to explore in his art by repurposing an otherwise extinct object. At the same time, he is a visitor from the future, looking back at our time and imagining how our civilization might be perceived in the eyes of the generations to come. ■

(January 8 – March 7, 2015)

NOTE

1. Raisa Clavijo. Daniel Fiorda: An Archeology of the 20th Century. *ARTDISTRICTS* No. 34, February/March 2015. Miami, FL., pp. 20-23.

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

Roberto Diago, Untitled, 2012, mixed media on canvas, 40" x 52." Courtesy of Pan American Art Projects, Miami.

ROBERTO DIAGO

Pan American Art Projects – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

A selection of recent works by Cuban artist Roberto Diago, created between 2012 and 2014, was exhibited at the beginning of this year at Pan American Art Projects. Diago has been an active part of the international art scene since the 1990s, winning him deserved recognition from museum professionals, gallerists, art critics and scholars.

Throughout his career, he has explored the ideological and cultural roots that make up the Cuban identity. As one of the results of this investigation, Diago has revealed the persistent racism in the country, in spite of government efforts to eliminate it. It is a racism that "officially does not exist" but still survives in the minds of individuals.

In this way, the artist questions the oft-repeated discourse about social equality that has characterized the Cuban Revolution project over the past 50 years. His works remind us that cultural politics is not enough to change the minds of the people. The stereotypical vision of the black man and the segments of society that reside in marginal neighborhoods has been demonstrated in many of his works for more than two decades. This is a reality that official discourse has attempted to conceal behind a façade of equality and cultural miscegenation.

On occasion, Diago has used a much more direct and explicit language, appropriating fragments of materials that form part of the landscape of these peripheral zones of the city, where blacks and mestizos live in poverty-stricken conditions. This is the case with previous works, clearly influenced by *arte povera*, in which we have seen him incorporate materials such as jute, worn fabrics, worm-eaten wood and pieces of rusty metal that appear to have been taken from makeshift constructions made from discarded materials, as an alternative to the lack of housing. In many of his prior works he has also retrieved texts taken from street graffiti, as well as colloquial expressions and words from popular songs to reinforce the symbolic charge of the pieces.

However, in the pieces he has created in the last few years and displayed on this occasion he embraces abstraction and matter painting in order to structure a much more subtle language, much more mature and sophisticated. Diago appears to reproduce in these works the surface of the walls of the poorest and most marginal neighborhoods, dirty and discolored surfaces that symbolically bear the weight of many decades of living in poverty and despair. He makes imperfection the great protagonist of these pieces, which are, in the extreme, eloquent, despite following the language of abstraction. These works, mostly large format, have been created from collages of fragments and strips of canvas and glued onto the fabric; fragments that in turn echo shreds of clothing, of life and of remembrances. In this way, the surfaces materialize like skin made from pieces of memories and experiences. In some works he overlays an untidy rough seam of fabric or jute over a fabric rich in textures, black or white, in the manner of keloids, those marks that appear on the skin of blacks or mestizos. It is the silent scar of discrimination, of an inexplicit violence that sometimes hurts all the more intensely.

In the pieces grouped together in this exhibition, Diago shows his talent for addressing the theme of racial segregation without losing himself in formulae in order to satisfy the expectations of the capricious collector who favors folklorisms. In these paintings, the abstraction appears to have been taken from the visuality of a marginal Havana neighborhood, as though the artist were assimilating the assumptions of Western culture and nourishing them with the visual experience of his nearby surroundings. ■

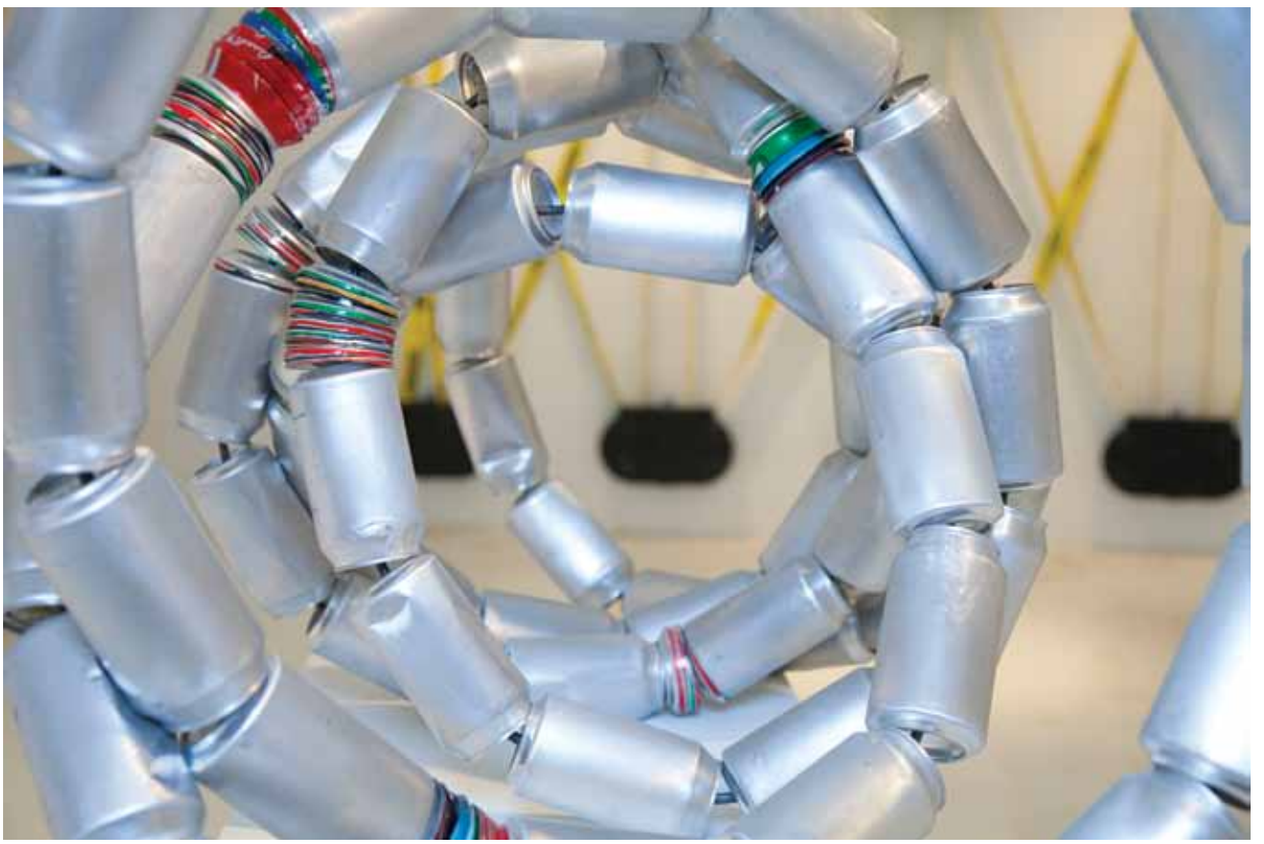
(January 9 – February 28, 2015)

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

DAVID B. JANG: PROPORTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

TUB Gallery- Miami

By Megan Abrahams



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

Evolving from his earlier focus on painting in the Abstract Expressionistic idiom, over the course of the last seven or eight years, David B. Jang's area of artistic inquiry has shifted to that of the artist/inventor. While he continues to create two-dimensional pieces that incorporate painting, a significant thrust of his current work is now directed towards repurposing found industrial materials and consumer products into unexpected and engaging animated sculptures and installations.

Among the mélange of items he has recontextualized are plastic hoses, inflatable pool toys, Mylar potato chip bags, metal lampshades, fluorescent light bulbs, window blinds and electric fans. Stockpiled in his Los Angeles studio for future exploration are a collection of seemingly random items, such as a treasure trove of black umbrellas, refrigerator compressors and copper tubing. Self-taught in the engineering aspect of his art, he uses computer circuit boards and small industrial motors to breathe movement—and incidental ambient sound—into his work.

His first solo exhibition at TUB Gallery includes several pieces which re-envision cast-off materials, juxtaposing them in surprising and often witty configurations. Among the featured installations, *Subjunctive* is the unlikely marriage of 14 automatic toilet paper dispensers—seven mounted high on the wall, seven mounted below—threaded with yellow construction caution tape. Programmed by the circuit board, the tape is propelled through the gears of the toilet paper dispensers in diamond patterns, to the background buzz of the dispenser motors. Another installation, *Intrinsic* is constructed of suspended fluorescent tubes in a rectangular formation that appears to be free-floating. Programmed by connected circuit boards, the fluorescent lights audibly click off and on in timed sequence.

Jang's two-dimensional pieces are also comprised of recycled industrial materials, such as used soda cans, wood board and leftover enamel paint from construction sites. The artist's process involves blasting a blowtorch to distress the metal surfaces, applications of bleach and a matrix of strategically intersecting masking tape, over which he applies enamel paint. Of the two-dimensional pieces, Jang says, "Straight lines are so interesting to explore. It's architectural—all about flatness—the relationship to the wall."

Essentially, all these pieces are about relationships, hence the theme, *Proportional Relationship*. A form of serial Minimalism, Jang's work refers not only to the relational connection he imposes upon objects, but also our relationship with material products we connect with in our daily lives. Less interested in the conceptual approach, Jang says he is driven by the challenge of experimental problem solving and discovery.

All artists are inventors, bringing concepts out of the imagination and into some form of tangible essence. Adding another layer, Jang orchestrates causal relationships between objects that would otherwise never have occasion to interact. The outcome is a sort of experimental parody of contemporary habits of consumption and perception by which Jang invites us to revisit familiar things from our everyday universe in the refreshing new light of artistic innovation. ■

(February 12 - April 11, 2015)

LEON BERKOWITZ: CASCADES OF LIGHT, PAINTINGS FROM 1965-1986

ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries - Miami

By Richard Speer

Taking in the Technicolor orgy that is Virginia Miller's affectionate and nuanced 21-year survey of the paintings of Leon Berkowitz (1911-1987), one confronts just how thoroughly the metastasis of post-ironic eye candy has been assimilated into visual culture since Berkowitz's heyday. In entire sectors of contemporary art (Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, Peter Halley, Beatriz Milhazes, Ryan McGinness, Omar Chacon and Albert Contreras, for starters), not to mention graphic design, advertising, online gaming, cartoons, fashion and cosmetics, we have witnessed the rise of a chromatically gonzo sensibility—replete with fluorescents, pearlescents, metallics, interference pigments, glitters and HDTV pixels—that would have made even the most outré of yesteryear's Pop, Op and Color Field artists blush in abject mortification. Berkowitz was proto- all that. He shone the light and led the way. With his bedazzling, yet ethereal, compositions (think Las Vegas meets Big Sur), he bridged a Neo-Impressionist approach to opticality with the spiritualism of AbEx and the perception-obsession of the California Light and Space movement. This rather astonishing integration is almost tangible in the exhibition at ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries, as are ripples of the man himself, with his inevitable human quirks.

Entering the space, viewers are confronted with a bubble-gum funhouse of pastels and jewel tones emanating from stripe paintings such as *Duality #15* (1970) and *Transition* (1979). An untitled painting from 1966 forces a false perspective that unsettles the viewer's kinesthetic orientation, as does the ramp-like *Galilee* (1965). *Cathedral #5*, with its extreme dimensions (113 inches high and only 19 inches wide), looks like a stained-glass window that got sucked through a black hole and got excreted out the other side, distorted into a flattened-pancake grotesquerie of its former self. Everywhere all around are the kinds of colors that made Berkowitz into an unapologetic "Candy Man," who could, like the song says, "take a rainbow, wrap it in a sigh, soak it in the sun, and make a groovy lemon pie." Despite a penchant for saturational surfeit, the artist was decidedly not interested in retinal effects as ends in themselves. When he deployed the pattern-based tricks of Op art, he did so with another aim in mind: the poetics of light.

In fact, anyone who visits this exhibition will not be surprised to learn that poetry was a major influence on Berkowitz. He was married to poet Ida Fox, was friends with Robert Creeley, and, in honor of his work's affinity to the poetry of nature worship, was feted in 2008 and 2009 with posthumous exhibitions at the Gary Snyder/Project Space in New York. He was fond of quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins, who, in "God's Grandeur," gave voice to qualities that Berkowitz's paintings say without words: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God…Nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness deep down things." From the advent of his exhibition history in 1949, the artist made it his mission to transmute the poetic *Geist*, the *esprit d'espace*, the very atmospherics of far-flung locales into rapturous distillations in oils. He lived and traveled variously in Mexico, Arizona, Italy, Greece and France, to enumerate only a smattering, and it is tempting to see his bold colors evincing the blazing Mediterranean and Mesoamerican sunlight, harsh and honeyed and crowned always in azure. His work was informed by other moods of light, too: thick and diffused by humidity in his native Pennsylvania and in Washington, D.C., where he lived and taught for many years; and the mystical light of Wales, about which he effused, "There is a kind of efflorescence in the light there, as if it were actually made of rainbows. And it's partly, I believe, because of the water vapors in the air, which split the light." (Haifley)

As his work matured, misty, barely discernible gradations supplanted the stripe paintings of his earlier output. Pieces such as *Midday Moon #4* (1978), with its Gottlieb-like burst of tangerine in blue sky above green ground, and *Study #16* (1978), which looks—almost tastes—like a sticky, Indian Summer night lit by fireflies, achieve their miraculous *sfumato* via a disciplined, time-intensive application of almost invisible washes of oil paint and turpentine. Sometimes he layered as many as 40 discrete pigments, each of which had to dry before he added the next layer. In many respects, his methods and intents were aligned with those of Mark Rothko; one sees this clearly in *Transition* (1979), in which a phosphene-like swath of orange merges with aqua within a vaguely rectangular framing device of lavender and ecru. It's a trippy tribute to the master, which in another universe might have been subtitled *Rothko Looks at a Candle Whilst on Psilocybin*.

Like James Turrell and Robert Irwin, a continent away from Washington, D.C., Berkowitz was fascinated by liminal shifts of perception, and his paintings, while uncommonly assertive, do not hit one over the head by sheer force of lumens; they beckon one into a hushed, heightened awareness, an altar within an antechamber within a chapel, in which quietude and ensconcement afford one the leisure to contemplate minute shifts in chroma's gradation from one pole of ROYGBIV to the other. In many pieces, these gradations are so infinitesimal they risk fooling the viewer into assuming they were achieved with an airbrush—but no, they were made the old-fashioned way, with mere quotidian paintbrushes and a lot of patience. The artist likened the aggregate of these myriad layers of thinned-out liquid pigment to "the surface of my skin—because the thing that gives life to my skin is the river of blood under it." (Haifley)

He was not always this eloquent (but then, who is?). And this hints, the more one learns about Berkowitz, at the frictions within his psyche between his intuitive and discursive impulses. When artists who are gifted with fluent visual vocabularies are prompted to explicate their methods, unfortunate things sometimes ensue. In the catalogue for a 1969 exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Berkowitz described his methodology in groan-inducing prose. "The vertical spines," he began, "position the maximum cold-hot intensities within areas of varying light and dark saturation. The relaxed verticals affirm by contrast the assertive verticals, perhaps even adding to the optical effect, synesthetically. Since gesture and optics are here reciprocal, the painting is more apprehensible as a single image held in the senses. It is by such body-response qualities that nature evokes the spiritual in us, evokes an inner realization of the continuum between the material constituents of both nature and ourselves." ("From the Writings of Leon Berkowitz").

Leon Berkowitz, *Ten Lost Tribes of Israel,* 1972, oil on canvas, 78" x 100." All images are courtesy of ArtSpace Virginia Miller Galleries.

Leon Berkowitz, *Unities No.61,* 1973, oil on canvas, 72" x 90."

Well, all right, then. Artists are large; they contain multitudes; and personalities are wide enough to accommodate poetry and pedantry.

It should also be noted that, like many artists, Berkowitz was proud and prickly enough to wander into the schisms, molehill-mountains and teapot-tempests of his time. He took pains to distance himself from the Washington Color School, even though, as a founder of the influential Washington, D.C., collective known as the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts, he was one of that movement's guiding lights. Rather than plotting common ground with other Workshop artists such as Kenneth Noland, Howard Mehring and Thomas Downing, he preferred to ally his work with more eclectic influences such as Kabbalah, Rorschach tests and traditional Chinese painting. "I don't have any of the characteristics of the Washington Color School," he sniffed in a 1979 interview with Julie Haifley. "I'm twice removed from it. My ideas are so divergent, totally, from what their ideas are. The whole notion that I orchestrate the light within a painting so that it changes with the light of day—the idea of the continuousness of space and light and form—it doesn't exist in any of the so-called Color School people." (Haifley)

With a painter of Berkowitz's complexity, it's important to take a long view, and happily, that is what gallerist and curator Virginia Miller has done in "Cascades of Light." Miller, redoubtable doyenne of the Miami art scene, has a long history with Berkowitz's work, having presented it in a solo exhibition in 1978, as well as in group shows in 1981 and 2002. Her gift for mounting rigorous and historically significant exhibitions (her recent Cuban abstraction showcase, "The Silent Shout," was revelatory) is well-suited to Berkowitz's long and faceted trajectory. She has installed the current show's 22 paintings to dramatic effect in her Coral Gables space, whose expansive floors and sharp, pointy corners heighten the artworks' uncanny marriage of containment and histrionics. It is an odd and resplendent paradox, and one that Berkowitz seems ultimately to have understood: an idiosyncratic synthesis of froth and depth; one part Willy Wonka, one part Herman Hesse; a meeting place between "Oh!" and "Om..." In lyrical mode in the late 1970s, he talked with an arts writer about the almost magical ties uniting the physical and metaphysical, a union he strove to capture on canvas. To illustrate the point, he invoked that most romantic of pies in the sky, the moon. Material and immaterial merge, he offered, "when you hold your hands out in the moonlight. If you lift some water from a lake and hold it up in the moonlight, the moon is resting in the palms of your hands." (Haifley) ■

(November 7, 2014 – April 28, 2015)

WORKS CITED

- Julie Haifley, *Oral History Interview with Leon Berkowitz*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, July 17, 1979.
- Leon Berkowitz, "From the Writings of Leon Berkowitz," in the catalogue *The Art of Leon Berkowitz*, James F. Pilgrim, ed., Corcocan Gallery, 1969.

Richard Speer is a contributing critic for ARTnews*,* Art Ltd*., and* Visual Art Source*. His essays have appeared in the* Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Post, Salon, Newsweek *and* Opera News*. His essay, "Floating Free: Peter Halley and Alessandro Mendini's Buoyant Phantasmagoria," was published in 2013 by Mary Boone Gallery.*

LORENZA PANERO: LONG SUMMER

The Americas Collection – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo

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1. Lorenza Panero, ***Rainbow VIII,*** luminograph mounted on dibond with Plexiglass, 78 ¾" x 39 3/8." Courtesy of the artist and The Americas Collection.

2. ***Rainbow VII,*** luminograph mounted on dibond with Plexiglass, 78 ¾" x 39 3/8"

"Long Summer," Lorenza Panero's recent exhibition, was presented at The Americas Collection in Coral Gables. It is a selection of unique works, born in the dark room, from the process of "painting" with light without the aid of a camera. The pieces presented on this occasion arose from this experience, images obtained by exposing photosensitive material like Cibachrome paper to light without the intervention of the traditional photographic process.

At the beginning of the 20th-century, pioneers such as László Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray were already experimenting with luminograms and photograms in which, without the intervention of the camera, light was immortalized on a surface. Panero, who has dedicated more than a decade to investigating and experimenting with what she calls "luminographs," revisits the lessons of the artistic avant-garde and incorporates some processes of her own invention in order to obtain specific colors and tonalities. For her, the dark room becomes a planned and choreographed setting in which light is modulated by controlling the intensity and distance between the luminous bulb and photosensitive surface, a domain in which she has also learned to fix the duration of the exposure times as well as handle certain filters. She told me that she has even created a catalogue of experiments and successes in which she has faithfully recorded certain "formulae" used to achieve the various effects she wishes to obtain, and in that way she attempts to control to some extent the accidents that happen during this haphazard process. She also incorporates objects such as leaves, thread, tissue paper and cellophane paper, which she places between the emitting bulb and photosensitive paper in order to create different effects that can be compared to geometric compositions, cascades of lights and those fascinating chemical reactions that are produced on a microscopic scale in nature.

Conceptually, her oeuvre speaks of communication and empathy generated during the exchange of points of view and emotions, but it also alludes to the fragility of the images stored in memory. The fact that she grew up and lived in different countries allowed Panero to comprehend at a very early age that each culture generates specific communication codes that are unintelligible to people from other regions. However, there exists a common ground that is the universe of emotions. It is precisely the essence of this infinite universe that she tries to capture in her work. In the search for how to conserve the immediacy of sentiments in an image, she arrived at "luminographs," which work directly with light and contain the spectrum of tonalities in their purest and most direct manifestation.

In the works on display the artist plays with the semantics of the titles, many of them associated with atmospheric phenomena, thereby reinforcing the expressive charge implicit in the works. Furthermore, she has exceeded the limits of bidimensionality and expanded upon the gallery space in order to create an interactive installation in which she invites spectators to experience a different perspective of the space by walking on top of luminographs located on sheets of tempered glass that project light from below.

In summary, "Long Summer" is an exhibition that invites reflection about the universe of stimuli and sensations in which we live and that often pass us by unnoticed in the midst of the maelstrom of modern life. Her aim is to challenge the perceptive ability of the spectator, who will deconstruct and interpret the work in accordance with his/her own visual repertoire. ■

(February 6 – March 31, 2015)

Antoni Tàpies, Sóc terra (I Am Earth), 2004, mixed media on canvas, 69" x 79." Fundació Antoni Tàpies. © Fundació Antoni Tàpies/ VEGAP, 2013.

TÀPIES: FROM WITHIN

Pérez Art Museum Miami
Curated by VicenteTodolí

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

Catalan Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012) is perhaps one of Spain's most influential post-war artists. He was known for using unusual materials, always pushing the boundaries of two-dimensionality and treating painting as a medium. His visceral pieces influenced several generations of creators in both Spain and internationally. Currently, the Pérez Art Museum Miami is presenting a retrospective exhibition of his work that contains 50 pieces, including paintings, drawings, assemblages and sculptures. The show was originally organized by the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. It was curated by Vicente Todolí, former director of the Tate Modern, who chose pieces from the artist's own collection and that of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, in Barcelona.

PAMM's chief curator, Tobias Ostrander, along with Todolí and the Fundació Tàpies, worked closely to select the works for the PAMM show, which is the sole U.S. presentation of the artist's first survey after his death. The election criteria was focused on presenting a chronological view of Tàpies' trajectory, starting with a couple of very early works from 1945 and 1946, the time he emerged as an artist, to some of his late pieces from 2011. It is an eye-opening experience to see how he changed his approach to art in just a year, from 1945 to 1946—from *Composició amb figures (Composition with Figures)*, a piece with influence from the Symbolist movement, to *Fils sobre cartó (Threads on Cardboard)*, a prelude to his later conceptual works. "Tàpies: From Within" offers a new perspective on this master, as this is a gaze from within, as the title of the show suggests, since these pieces were, in a way, preselected by the artist.

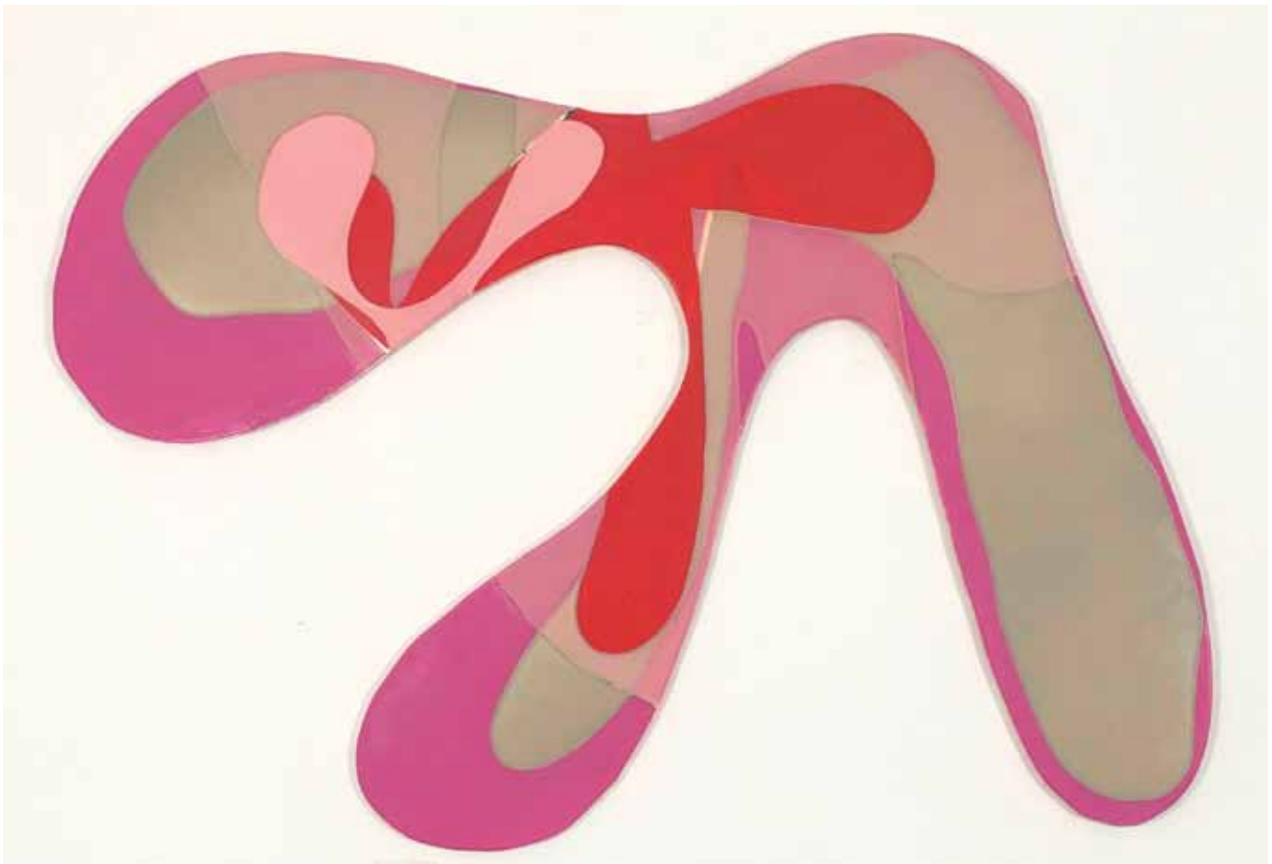
It is easy to see throughout the exhibition what have been considered the cornerstones of his prolific career: One is the matter paintings, and the other is related to his use of materials and found objects. For instance, the way Tàpies treated his surfaces was a point of contention, as he used dirt, hair, marble dust, detritus—basically anything that would allow him to enrich textures. A good example of these works is *Verd-blau palla (Green-Blue Straw)*, a piece from 1968 in which he glued straw on the surface. Perhaps the most recognized quality of Tàpies' work has been his use of everyday objects such as cardboard and old clothes as part of his pieces, as in his assemblage *Cadira i roba (Chair and Clothes)*, from 1970, which proved the radicalism of his ideas about what he considered art.

At the same time, there is nothing simple behind his oeuvre, upon which he reflected his philosophical approach to life and his ideas about human existence and beliefs, which included Buddhist principles. The common materials he used are nothing less than the inclusion of life itself as part of the work. Tàpies was an artist who was very prolific but consistent throughout his career. As early as 1958 he wrote: "I felt the need to persist and go deeper with the entire message of what is insignificant, worn or dramatized by time"[1]—a dialectic exchange that he developed through the years in his work and in some way epitomized in his 2004 painting *Sóc terra (I Am Earth)*. ■

(February 6 – May 3, 2015)

NOTE

1. Antoni Tàpies, *Memòria Personal*, Barcelona: Crítica, 1977, p. 331.



Ron Johnson, *It Runs Out,* 2014, acrylic and polyurethane on panel, 43" x 55." Courtesy of the artist and Reynolds Gallery.

RON JOHNSON: UNBOXED

Reynolds Gallery - Richmond, VA

By Owen Duffy

Over the past decade, Ron Johnson has driven out west almost every summer. He leaves his Richmond home, with no particular destination in mind, in search of big skies and bigger views. Registering the subtle topographical changes over time—how the land gradually morphs from plains to foothills to crags—is the *raison d'etre* of each *dérive*. Removed from spectacle, Johnson characterizes this journey as sense-heightening, enabling him to undertake an "archaeology of seeing" that requires an active approach to looking. One must *work* to detect those subtle instances when shifts in the landscape occur. Johnson translates and unpacks these experiences for viewers in his exhibition, "Unboxed."

For this new series of paintings, Johnson has dropped the square format, which he worked with since earning his MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2003, for a bold and biological one. To produce *Stealing Love Isn't Stealing*—a prime example of Johnson's new oeuvre—the artist shaped an MDF panel and coated it with layers of polyurethane and acrylic. Charged red pigment rests over the peach foundation; in turn, pink is layered over the red, and finally orange over the pink. Johnson's use of polyurethane has two noteworthy visual consequences. It provides the strata with a spectrum of transparency, allowing what lies beneath to float through, thus altering the tone and shade of each subsequent plane. It also leaves the works with a cloaked materiality. The surface of *Stealing Love Isn't Stealing* seems to exist in stasis as a semi-solid, like a gently heated wax or a chilled honey that would undoubtedly stick to one's fingers. Indeed, Johnson's paintings offer viewers much to dig through—an aesthetic excavation.

These artificial "hypercolors," as Johnson calls them, set up an ongoing tension between the synthetic and the natural, particularly when one considers that the biomorphic geometry of such works as *It Runs Out* is rooted in the landscape of the American west. Following each arc and curve of *It Runs Out* encourages viewers to participate in an associative game while directing attention to the space between the panel's three dendrites. In stark contrast to the pulsating presence of *It Runs Out*, the white negative space around the painting conjures a silent, partially formed absence; it is as if Johnson's works are hypothetically subtracted from an unknowable Platonic whole. Consequently, one can think of *It Runs Out* as an enigma, a visual puzzle, that asks how and if the work might "fit" with its neighbors to begin building toward something more total.

From a historical point of view, Johnson's works have much to say about the wooden reliefs of Hans Arp, Frank Stella's irregular polygons, and other traditions within the paradigm of modern painting. This richness cannot be mined in a brief review. However, notwithstanding their strong connections to the past, these paintings emphasize the importance of active seeing in the contemporary moment, ascribing to it urgency that is necessary in our image-saturated culture. ■

(January 16 – February 28, 2015)

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DAYS OF ENDLESS TIME

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden - Washington, D.C.
Curated by Kelly Gordon and Mika Yoshitake

By Owen Duffy

Eija-Liisa Ahtila, *Horizontal,* 2011. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Purchase Fund, 2013 © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / KUVASTO, Helsinki.

Curators Kelly Gordon and Mika Yoshitake have assembled fourteen video, new media, and installation artists from across the globe whose works paradoxically use the technologies often associated with distraction and "disruption" to encourage meditative thinking and careful looking. Cumulatively, the works in "Days of Endless Time" envelop viewers in an air of timelessness, where one is free to become immersed in art and transcend the visually accelerated, image saturated world that suffocates reflective thinking. The chosen works also demonstrate how concepts closely linked to Romanticism—an 18th- and 19th-century intellectual movement that opposed the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality—such as the sublime, the individual in nature, and immersion, continue to matriculate into our present condition in compelling (and perhaps even metamodernist) ways.

These key romantic themes are decisively encapsulated by the work of Luxembourgian artist Su-Mei Tse and Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila. In Tse's video *L'Echo* (2003), the artist, clothed in bright red, solitarily confronts an Alpine skyline with her cello. From the edge of a grass-covered cliff, the sounds she makes are deep and sweet. After resounding through the valley, the melodies return as echoes that eventually meld with Tse's newly produced notes. Over time, Tse's sounds contribute to an absorbing, sonorous crescendo. Visually and conceptually, *L'Echo* draws parallels to the work of the 19th-century romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, who often painted sublime scenes of lone individuals encountering vast expanses of sea and land. Tse's revision of this conceit, however, speaks to a sustained desire to commune with nature, a means of removing ourselves from the technologized world.

Ahtila's *Horizontal (Vaakasuora)* (2011) deploys what could be characterized as expanded cinema to likewise ask viewers to contemplate their relationship with the natural world; it does this through the tactics of defamiliarization. Ahtila has made a massive conifer strange via a straightforward gesture: turning the tree on its side. The artist has divided the total image into six rectangular frames, each of which is separated by a few inches of black space. A single human stands at the base of the tree in the leftmost projection, providing viewers with a sense of scale. Winds rustle through the branches; their breathing interrupted by the songs of birds. Closer inspection reveals that each channel/frame corresponds to a different section of the tree, all of which are shot at a different time of day and in different conditions. This results in pleasing asynchronous combinations that challenge the supposed unity of a work of art without subverting the gestalt of the tree. The sum of these aesthetic choices allows *Horizontal (Vaakasuora)* to present something as ubiquitous and humble as a tree anew, and suggests our understanding and experience of nature remains fragmented. *Horizontal (Vaakasuora)*, like *L'Echo,* points toward a contemporary yearning to be immersed in nature. But Ahtila's piece, and its emphasis on fracture, reveals the ultimate failure of such a search to deliver transcendent wholeness in the present day.

"Days of Endless Time" is successful not only due to the strength of the art, but also because it conceptually dovetails with the Hirshhorn's iconic circular galleries. As viewers drift from space to space, they are sent on a cyclical path that accentuates the exhibition's suspension of linear time. Moreover, these artists demonstrate how technology and new media are not inherently "disruptive" themselves. Rather, it is *how* they are used that dictates their effect. Regarding "Days of Endless Time," the effect is something rapt, memorable, and much welcomed. ■

(October 16, 2014 – April 6, 2015)

WHITFIELD LOVELL: DEEP RIVER

Jepson Museum – Savannah, GA

By Daniel Bonnell

Whitefield Lovell, *Deep River,* 2014, installation view at Jepson Center, Savannah Georgia. Courtesy of Jepson Center. Photo: David J. Kaminsky.

Ambiguity often shows its face of beauty in the light of twilight. It is that liminal interplay between two polarized forces, which draws us near to great art. It is that revered space of sacrifice-to-love, fear-to-freedom, that dualistic drama leading to a non-dualistic rapture and peace. Such is the stage that the artist Whitfield Lovell has built within his exhibition "Deep River" at the Jepson Museum in Savannah, Georgia.

Lovell's work has appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions at venues such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He has also received a MacArthur Fellowship. "Deep River" anchors itself within the framework of metamodernism, portraying the ideas of *with*, *between*, and *beyond*. It is gallery theatre Tadeusz Kantor style—like that used in Lovell's acclaimed work called *Whispers From the Walls* (1999).

Within "Deep River," Lovell's Civil War themed work allows us to enter onto hallowed dirt of deliverance, trials and transcendence, bereavement and baptism. His renowned portraits of anonymous African Americans and tableaux, encompasses sculpture, video, drawing, and music. Lovell does not present to us the horror of slavery. Instead, he allows us to journey through a sacred space revealing a baptismal river to freedom. Curatorial wall text provides context, telling us, "During the Civil War many runaway slaves made the dangerous journey across the Tennessee River to a Union Army site referred to as 'Camp Contraband.' There they were given asylum and shielded from being captured and returned to their owners."

Images of symbiosis fill the gallery. Video projections of river water reflecting luminous light span the walls. Fifty-six wooden cylinders of various sizes containing portraits signifying slaves, old and young, dignified yet unidentified, encircle you. Each portrait rests at an angle, evoking movement. The slave song *Deep River* is heard in the distance. Objects of everyday life rest in a large mound of dirt placed in the center of the space suggesting an abandoned campground, or perhaps the mass grave of those who could not cross to freedom?

The tondo-style portraits of African American men and women symbolize souls in movement, perhaps toward transcendent freedom. At times the round portraits seem like tombstones in transition, or visual round notes of a slave gospel song. Each portrait reveals a person dignified in dress and pose, not a less-than-human slave. Lovell makes drawings from photographs he finds at flea markets. Though anonymous, these figures did live-and perhaps still live.

The exhibition's lighting mimics twilight, underlining the transformation of day-to-night, or bondage-to-liberty. A second gallery contains abandoned suitcases, only one lying open—filled with chains. Other suitcases are arranged to form a triangular ladder ascending to an open door. In the doorway stands a portrait of a distinguished man holding a scepter-style cane. Gatekeeper? St. Peter?

The Jepson Museum was established by Savannah's Telfair family, who owned the largest slave-labor plantation in Savannah during the pre-and-post Civil War era. Thus another circle emerges as the Jepson Museum shows itself to be an appropriate—and ironic—venue to engage Lovell's portraits of freedom in "Deep River." Yet, another way that ambiguity shows its face of beauty. ■

(August 15, 2014 - February 1, 2015)

Daniel Bonnell, is an artist, writer, educator and author of the book Shadow Lessons. The text chronicles an artist's unexpected journey into an inner city, at-risk, high school culture. He is an artist who has exhibited in venues that include St. Paul's Cathedral in London and St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, Washington National Cathedral in D.C., and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

"Abraham Cruzvillegas: The Autoconstrucción Suites," installation view at Museo Jumex, Mexico City. Courtesy of Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo.

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS: THE AUTO-CONSTRUCCIÓN SUITES

Museo Jumex – Mexico City
Curated by Clara Kim

By Othiana Roffiel

Literally meaning "self-built," "Autoconstrucción" references the process of building houses in Abraham Cruzvillegas's neighborhood in Mexico City, according to needs, with improvised materials, responding to social and political circumstances, constructed through the solidarity of neighbors, and never finished. The result: "a space that becomes spontaneous, contradictory, and unstable." A feeling that predominates in Cruzvillegas's "Autoconstrucción," at Museo Jumex.

It is certainly an overload for the senses. Protruding structures of all sorts dominate the colossal scenery of more than two-dozen sculptures. You hear a faint whistling sound, at first thinking it might be a bored guard, later to discover it is coming from one of the pieces itself: *The Simultaneous Promise* (2011), a tricycle with a portable PA system that stands strident in the middle of the back gallery, screams at the viewer to sit on it and perhaps even ride it across the exhibition space.

After taking in this eclectic tricycle, the focus of your eye is drawn to one of the walls, lured by the more subtle, quieter, yet paramount aesthetics of *Blind Self-Portrait as a Post-Thatcherite Deaf Lemonhead. 'For K.M.'* (2011). This piece's nature contrasts strikingly with the tricycle. What appears to be more than one hundred rectangular shaped white paper clippings of diverse sizes are pinned and arranged across an entire wall.

Only after reading the label next to it, the viewer discovers that the piece is actually composed of diverse paper gimmicks: cardboard, postcards, envelopes, tickets, recipes and even napkins, which the artist has painted white. These are familiar items we use in our daily life, even carrying them in our purses as we look at the artwork itself. This generates an inevitable complicity between the viewers and the objects before them, something that does not happen so easily amidst the context of the cold white cube. The construction of the piece continues in the viewer's mind as he or she relates to the object in terms of his or her own history. This familiarity gives the viewer an overwhelming sense of comfort. Yet, the fact that they are out of the safe context of one's pocket, makes the viewer simultaneously uneasy. Objects that would not only pass unnoticed, but could be found in the trash can, are elevated to the realm of art and thus viewers relate to them as they would the *Mona Lisa*. Why? Because it is the only way we will notice them!

Cruzvillegas then decides to transcend the object in itself and paints the papers white. Some might read this as the artist hiding the origin of the material, yet rather than concealment, this aesthetic choice speaks of transformation, of a desire to give the paper paraphernalia a new life, in Cruzvillegas's own words, "proving that destruction is not possible, it is more about creation." The subtle variations of tonality from sample to sample resting before the pristine wall create a mesmerizing field of white; we could pretty much be looking at Malevich's *White on White*. By observing this aesthetic creation, we are forced to look into our own self-composition.

This assemblage of random and perhaps meaningless objects paired in peculiar, even contradictory arrangements, becomes a metaphor for society through which Cruzvillegas shows us that identity is constructed through contradictions: craft and idea, change and permanence, the subtle and the abrasive. Cruzvillegas's sculptures are brilliant dichotomies, odes to the world of dualities in which we are immersed.

Blind Self-Portrait as a Post-Thatcherite Deaf Lemonhead. 'For K.M.' becomes an unfinished portrait of the artist, of the contemporary art world, of Mexico and of the human condition. In the end, they are all one and the same, elements that when arranged together into this intricate web we call the cosmos, prove to be a beautiful whole.

You go back home and see that stack of papers that was intended to be thrown away. Abraham Cruzvillegas's words echo in your mind: "things, they speak." You open a drawer and store them instead. ■

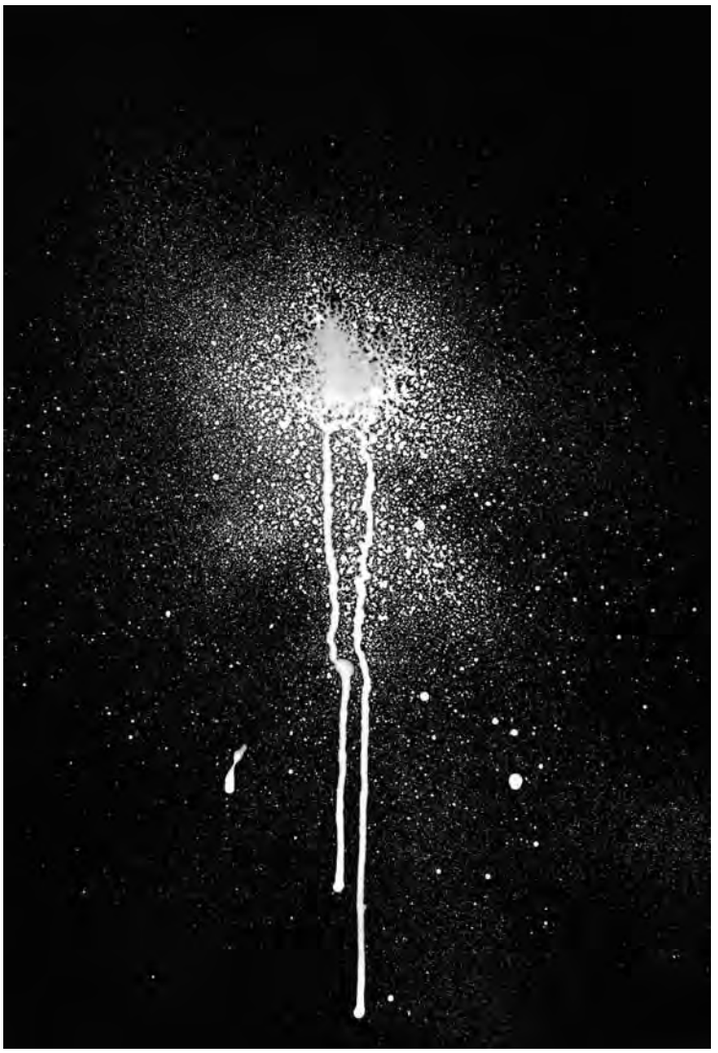
(November 14, 2014 – February 8, 2014)

Othiana Roffiel is an artist and writer based in Mexico City. A fine arts graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design, in 2012 she participated in the Masur Museum of Art 49th Annual Juried Competition and has also collaborated in the curatorial department at the Telfair Museums in Savannah, Ga.

OHAD MATALON: PHOTO OP

Tel Aviv Museum of Art - Israel

By Keren Goldberg



Ohad Matalon, *Sprayogram I (Positive) - 151120141355, Sprayogram I (Negative) - 151120141534*, sprayograms, 64.4" x 42.9, each. © Ohad Matalon.

I visited "Photo Op" close to its ending, when almost all of the walls were covered. The timing of the visit was crucial, as this show evolved through time: "Photo Op" opened as an empty space, and during the exhibition days the artist formulated the images in a kind of marathon, producing 100 pieces within 60 days. These works were gradually hung on or laid against the walls, as if under installation. Ohad Matalon always tried to rethink the ways in which photography is presented and viewed, and most of his previous projects bare a strong political context as well. In this exhibition, he took the reflexive mode into extreme. The exhibition seeks to lay bare the artist's creative process and the production of a show: An entire commercial printing workshop and a framing studio, including their workers, occupied the back rooms of the space.

The images themselves, much like the show, are reflective of the photographic apparatus. These digital prints, titled by the date and hour when they were printed, present the results of various manipulations to photographic paper, including exposure to light, fire and developer fluid, scanning, scale variations and even baking. The outcomes are abstract shapes, pixels or splashes. They are all highly aesthetic, much like previous works by Matalon, who is an experienced and clever photographer.

The feedback loop created between the show and the works raises various concerns, such as the comparison between the empty white cube (as seen in the beginning of the show) and the dark, closed mechanism of the camera, as well as the elimination of the artist's hand from the production process of digital photography. However, the show as a whole seems to deviate from its declared purpose, which is the attempt to merge "the workspace ("studio") and the exhibition space ("museum")." The artist himself is tucked away in his far-off studio, merely sending image files to the workshop in the museum (when he visits the space, he plays the role of curator). Not only does the creative process stay hidden, but also the intriguing chemical manifestation of the mysterious images is concealed. We are left with the less interesting, sterile and mechanical production procedure—printing and framing. In short, the workshop rooms do not add any extra value to the content of these works.

But while the workers are fulfilling the artist's demands at the back of the gallery, they are being watched—by visitors, as if they were a work of art themselves—a performance of sorts. Another reflective aspect, maybe not deliberate, but nonetheless present, seeps into this show: a reflection on art as a product of capitalist manufacturing, its work conditions and laborers. Matalon gives us a behind-the-scenes look into the current art world, in which groups of workers in huge studios are conducted by an artist-cum-curator. While the images themselves try to exist separately from the outside world, the worldly notion of production values refuses to be left out and matriculates into our consciousness from the back rooms.

Another novel and welcome supplement to the show is a series of short texts produced during the exhibition by the poet and theoretician Pioter Shmugliakov, focusing on the new works added to the show over the course of a week. Shugliakov's writing is highly informative, describing the technical creation process of the images, as well as cleverly charting its reflexive complexities. It offers Matalon's prints the respect they deserve.

For example, we discover that print *151120141355*, which looks like a spray of black paint on white paper, is, in fact, created by splashing developer fluid onto photographic paper and exposing it to light. The image is doubled into a negative version of itself, as if white paint is sprayed over black paper (*151120141534*). Shmugliakov calls these doublings, which are repeated in the show, an "ontological scandal of sort," in which original and copy, light and darkness, negative and positive, developing and exposing are all intermingled in a photographic experiment. This is the true experimentation of this exhibition, in which error can become innovation. Perhaps this spontaneous experimentation should have been exposed in the show, rather than the printing and hanging processes, which feel staged and rehearsed. ■

(November 14, 2014 - January 17, 2015)

Keren Goldberg is an art critic and writer based in London and Tel Aviv, writing for various international magazines and online platforms such as Frieze, ArtReview, Art-agenda *and* Mousse.

Eduardo Ponjuán, Bésame mucho, 2014, installation, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.

BÉSAME MUCHO

National Museum of Fine Arts – Havana, Cuba

As Though It Were Possible

By Gretel Acosta

"Bésame mucho" (Shower me with kisses): tender and imperative phrase, demanding entreaty, overture of intimacy. "Bésame mucho" is the title of Eduardo Ponjuán's exhibition at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana in recognition of his winning the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas 2013 (National Prize for the Arts). *Bésame Mucho* is also the title of a song by Consuelo Velázquez, an exuberant and thrilling bolero, just as all good boleros should be.

Arising from a sentimental tone closely related to the bolero, I can say that my first impression was of a paradoxical mixture between transparency and secrecy. However, I should say that I am trying to interpret the complex work of Ponjuán, a creator who experiments and transits through many artistic media, who conceives of the piece as an idea, who likes to astonish while at the same time possessing the happy contradiction of an identifiable authorial stamp. For many, he is the greatest Cuban contemporary artist—despite not belonging to the mainstream—and possibly the most cultivated, one of the pioneers and principal exponents of conceptualism in Cuba, who has also left a recognizable academic imprint on several generations of the Instituto Superior de Arte (Higher Institute of Arts). That referential horizon inevitably accompanies the interpretation of each of his works of art, but he is aware of this and makes use of it. This is why first impressions are not enough and, from an analytical standpoint, the contradiction is then revealed as the transcendent sign of this exhibition.

In the vestibule of the entrance hall, we are greeted by the cryptic intimism of *Unmonumental*, a zinc structure in which the artist has created niches like display cabinets in which we find, behind glass, the electrical layout of his house superimposed on the floor plan of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, a small paper envelope, one of the toy elves that serve as models for his series *Make a Wish* (2009) sitting on a mound of dirt, a nest from his solo show *El ladrón de las manos de seda (The thief of the silken hands)* (Galería Habana, 2013), the base and the fragments of a broken sculpture by Loló Soldevilla, the portrait of his grandmother. This welcome area could be interpreted as a "retrospective"—perhaps making fun of what the public expected from this exhibition or what is traditionally expected to be found in a museum—a scenic pursuit that functions as well, in this case, as a test of knowledge about the oeuvre of the artist. It is a singular retrospective mixed with something that should be its antithesis: introspection.

Inside the hall, large-format realist paintings dominate. These constitute, for the most part, the representation of objects that are commonly utilized to preserve memories and keepsakes, but here they appear empty. The titles (*Stick Notes*, *Hoja de papel arrancada*, *Postal, Desgarrón, Polaroid I* y *II*) are the exact linguistic and mental repetition of the images we see. The needless repetition constitutes the rhetorical closing of a communication that, although direct or literal, turns out to be mute. This sensation is made clear in the contempt transmitted by the gesture of hanging Converse All-Star sneakers on an installation of tension cables like a staff of the song *Bésame mucho*, and of those very same sneakers on crossed legs in the painting *Who cares?*

It is precisely in the phrase of the title *Who cares?* that I find the most telling path of the exhibition. This question reaffirms the sentimentality of personal objects, of the bolero, of the allusion to memory, and hides it behind a defensive attitude. The intention could appear tender, but turns out to be in the extreme cynical.

"Who cares?": tender and imperative phrase, demanding entreaty, overture of intimacy, and also of silence. ■

(October 31, 2014 – February 1, 2015)

Gretel Acosta is an art critic and curator based in Havana. She pursued bachelor's degree in art history at the University of Havana and works as editor for Artecubano publishing house. She is coauthor of TAG. Cosas de jóvenes (Collage Ediciones, 2015).

Miruna Dragan, *The Fertile Void IX: Infinite Prosperity,* intervention with 9 ft diameter tricolour mirror mosaic, 4th hole of Dorado Beach Golf Club, Puerto Rico, 2014. Photo: Miruna Dragan. Supported by arte_FIST FOUNDATION

ART IN GOLF TRIENNIAL 2015

Dorado Beach Golf Course – Puerto Rico
Curated by Marianne Ramírez

By Emilia Quiñones-Otal

In March 2014, artist Carlos Mercado inaugurated the second Art in Golf Triennial (2014-2016) in Dorado, Puerto Rico. In an unconventional approach, projects are exhibited for three consecutive years, with inaugurations twice a year. The triennial is the pioneering effort of the arte_FIST FOUNDATION to support and develop land art in Puerto Rico that reflects on human incursions into the natural environment. Works are developed and exhibited on the golf courses of the Dorado Beach Resort and Club.

The arte_FIST FOUNDATION is the first to have established a triennial featuring land art in the Caribbean. The triennial has sponsored imaginative works from both local artists and artists from other nations. For example, artists such as Aisen & Aisen Chacin often use satellite imaging technology to conceptualize and develop their art projects. Consequently, the projects are worth experiencing both on the ground as well as from a mediated birds-eye view.

The first Art in Golf Triennial (2012-2014) featured works by Puerto Rican surrealist legend Rafael Trelles, Jesús "Bubu" Negrón, Cristina Salas Noguera from Ecuador, Annaité Vaccaro, Vientre Compartido and Chemi Rosado-Seijo.

Trelles' work, *Rebirth of Dorado's Palm Trees,* modified dead palm trees with multicolored plastic and metal tubes that move with the wind in Calderesque fashion. Viewers could sit at the golf course and hear the waves at the edge of the shore while experiencing these trees.

Also, defamiliarizing the golf course was the intervention of Jesús "Bubu" Negrón's cleverly altered pin flags, which provided a humorous experience for viewers. Golfers aimed their shots in disbelief and attempted to make sense of Negron's *Top Flag,* a skinny, 40-foot pin flag that became wildly animated by the ocean winds.

Contemporary artist Chemi Rosado-Seijo also played mind games with golfers. Rosado-Seijo airbrushed several sand traps, making them look invisible with an organic-looking green paint. It is a work of art that needs to be observed from the air and ground and appreciated for the ways in which it subverts the established rules of play. Like many of the artists in the triennial, Rosado-Seijo adds an artificial component to a golf course that tries to imitate nature but is artificial in almost all of its aspects.

Salas Noguera, who specializes in fiber arts, presented *Muñeca Viajera (Traveler Doll)*, a nearly human-sized knitted doll she made from textiles collected from around the world. When Salas took a fabric from a country, knitted by the hands of women from that country, the doll acquired the experiences of the women and the culture. Placed on the golf course, the doll's hair was so long that it orbited around her, forming a circle. The hair is made with knitted fabric and filled with soil and seeds, and because its roots stretched

Cristina Salas, ***Muñeca Viajera,*** **2012**, mixed media.

Chemi Rosado-Seijo, ***Trampa de Arena Verde,*** **2012**, mixed media.

into the ground, the work actually germinated. Various flora sprouted and bloomed, with little bits of chlorophyll adding to the color language of the piece. Being carried to Puerto Rico in a suitcase, *Muñeca Viajera (Traveler Doll)* demonstrates how globalization can occur on a microcosmic level, person to person, one suitcase at a time.

Annaité Vaccaro is an artist working in the United States and Puerto Rico who is celebrated for her original technique of digital scenography, a method she used for her installation *Wind Chime for Clara*. An homage to Clara Livingston, one of the first women to become a pilot as well as the builder of Dorado's airport, the work is comprised of several multimedia elements. There is a series of butterfly-shaped wood sculptures representing Livingston that circle around an airplane at the center, driven by the wind, while a colorful video is projected on the sculptures. The video has a bright blue background and wood airplanes (World War I style) that animate the sculptures with light. The video is connected to a device that measures wind. Depending on its speed, not in the video, but in reality, the sound of the video (wind chimes' sound) changes. If the wind is high, the video will emit a sound as if the wind chimes are receiving high-speed wind, and the opposite happens when the wind speed is low.

Vientre Compartido (Shared Womb) is a group that can be described as one of the most prolific land artist collectives in Puerto Rico. For the first triennial, the collective created a bird-feeder complex to remind the public about the continual and symbiotic process of reproduction in nature. Using materials found around the natural setting, the bird feeders emerge from the ground, which is decorated with lines and organic forms also made with organic matter.

The most recent triennial was inaugurated in March 2014 and will run through 2016. As with the last triennial, artists hail from many countries in addition to Puerto Rico and include Carlos Mercado, Miruna Dragan from Canada, Jaime Rodríguez Crespo, Agathe de Bailliencourt, Jorge Díaz, Melquiades Rosario and Aisen & Aisen Chacin from Venezuela.

Coconuts, pineapples, avocados and plantains seem like clichés of tropicalism in Caribbean culture, but Mercado's fruit installations have something unpredictable built into them. Mercado makes a three-dimensional interpretation of paintings by Francisco Oller, a Puerto Rican artist who worked in an Impressionist style. Oller's still lifes were made at a time when Puerto Ricans were attempting to locate and construct their identity. Thus, Puerto Ricans, such as Oller, included in their paintings symbols that represented island life and cultural identity. Fruits reinserted into nature as contemporary art and Oller's paintings are re-presented as sculpture. The viewer, from every angle of the golf course, can appreciate the absurdity of a landscape dotted with larger-than-life local fruits.

Installed now are pieces by Jaime Rodríguez-Crespo and Miruna Dragan. Rodríguez-Crespo constructed a huge bird nest in a perfect square shape using only materials found throughout the Dorado Beach area. It is four feet tall, 10 feet wide and 10 feet long and includes a golf ball hidden between eggs made of foam and Bondo. The artist intended to make a comparison between the square of the bird nest and the artificiality of the golf course, a piece of land that is almost completely artificial but is presented as a natural landscape.

Dragan is, like some of the other artists, intervening in the functionality of the golf course. She installed a series of mirrors in a geometric pattern that spreads horizontally across the course in an attempt to play with the heavy sunlight that beats down on players from above. Dragan employs an enneagram, a psychological form that connects human personalities in a diagram. It is made with mirrors and features a golf hole with a flag in the middle of it. A person looking into her work (*Fertile Void IX: Infinite Prosperity)* will see the image of himself or herself. Dragan connects human personalities with the golf course to depict is as a place where powerful people get together to talk and often make important decisions.

In the coming months, more artists will be descending on the golf courses and adding their playful installations: One piece will be organic forms that recall a turtle's back, while others will be a rock painted in shades of blue as well as a natural habitat emerging from a lake. All of the artists will propose a new way of looking at how human beings interact with nature. Some will destroy aspects of it, and some will form a more symbiotic relationship with it. All will be concerned with encouraging humans to forge a more sustainable relationship with the natural world.

Attention will also be paid to the artificial constraints we attach to nature, as well as how the idea of the natural might just be something we have constructed ourselves as humans. ■

(March 2014 through 2016)

Emilia Quiñones-Otal is a professor of art appreciation and humanities at the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico and an independent curator specializing in contemporary art from Latin America.

PIPILOTTI RIST, WORRY WILL VANISH

Hauser & Wirth - London

By Bo Bottomley

***Worry Will Vanish Horizon, 2014. Installation view, "Pipilotti Rist. Worry Will Vanish**,"* at Hauser & Wirth London, 2014. © Pipilotti Rist. Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Luhring Augustine, New York. Photo: Alex Delfanne.

"Worry Will Vanish," Pipilotti Rist's solo show at Hauser & Wirth London, is a beguiling promise, indeed, on a winter afternoon in the locus of London's corporate and commercial landscape. But is it one it can live up to?

The entrance of the gallery reveals a couple of sculptural video installations and a circular bench inviting visitors to stop and remove their shoes. This simple custom becomes a gestural casting-off of the stiff, suited and booted public persona. Visitors are then prepared to enter Rist's inner sanctum, which lies tantalizingly behind a floor-to-ceiling denim curtain. About two-thirds of the gallery is reserved for the screening of Rist's titular video. Projected on two adjacent walls and set to Anders Guggisberg's whimsical score, *Worry Will Vanish Horizon* washes sound and image over the space. The floor is littered with marshmallow huddles of duvets and quietly observing bodies. All around, strangers cozy up, sharing duvets, staying for the length of the 15-minute video or watching it on a loop for the entirety of their lunch hour.

Worry Will Vanish Horizon flows through uninterrupted vistas that chart the connection between the human body and natural landscape. A hand is held against sunlight, fingers curl around blades of grass—or is it blades around fingers?—blood-like liquid becomes a wave in an enormous seascape. Viewers float in a cosmic vortex, wade through a jungle of flower stems and through the human gut via an endoscopic lens. The surface of a hand forms a forensic panorama of ridges, lines and creases—supple, rippling. Abruptly the hand appears in full, truncated at the wrist, and we travel through its fleshy tunnel—a kaleidoscopic vision of pulsing veins indiscernible from the striations of the leaf into which the image melts.

Rist is well rehearsed in the creation of immersive environments in which participants are invited to assume an unconventionally horizontal viewing position in and amongst a labyrinth of cushion-like forms. She cites autogenic psychotherapy as her inspiration: the use of visuals to promote relaxation and meditation in the viewer while they assume certain postures, such as lying down. Interesting, yes, but isn't this all a bit familiar? Her last London show, a retrospective at the Hayward Gallery in 2011, offered similar installations and her show at Hauser runs the risk of repeating this form on a smaller and less impressive scale; its novelty recycled in endless Instagrams rather than anything more meaningful.

But the quixotic allure of *Worry Will Vanish* is undeniable, as is the restorative vision of human experience that it provides. Fixations on slick outward appearances are disposed of in favor of human life—up close, inside out and abstracted. Rist defines the body as a gestalt; rich with color, contour, movement and energy. Its intimacy with the natural landscape is inextricable, optimistic even. This purview relegates cerebralized forethoughts into afterthoughts, inviting instead a therapeutic release in which the only space and time of import is the here and now. ■

(November 27, 2014 – January 10, 2015)

Bo Bottomley lives in London, where she works in a contemporary art gallery. She earned her master's degree in the history of art at University College London, concentrating on film and documentary.

Gerhard Richter's recent exhibition in London, installation view. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

GERHARD RICHTER

Marian Goodman Gallery – London

By Laura Burton

Marian Goodman Gallery recently inaugurated its new space off Golden Square in Soho with an exhibition showcasing new and recent works curated by the German artist Gerhard Richter himself. The octogenarian repeatedly makes headlines for his success at auction, yet his work remains thought-provoking and builds upon his existing oeuvre. Richter's new bodies of work, *Doppelgrau, Flow* and *Strip*, are shown alongside a selection of paintings made over the last 15 years, creating a traceable line of thought between then and now. The Victorian-era warehouse, renovated by David Adjaye, spans eight galleries and two floors, throughout which over 40 of Richter's pieces were on view.

Governing the space on the first floor, the sculpture *7 Scheiben (Kartenhaus) 932-2* is reminiscent of Richard Serra's gravity-defying sculptures; its glass panes balance precariously upon each other in mimicry of the house of cards for which the structure was named. Surrounding the sculpture are Richter's softly nuanced *Doppelgrau* works. Enamel is applied to the back of the glass so that viewers catch their own reflection before noticing the details of each piece, which are comprised of two sections of two different gray hues, split vertically. When circling the glass sculpture, the viewer sees an infinite version of herself or himself, with reflections bouncing between the surfaces of the *Doppelgrau* and the monoliths, seemingly leaving the viewer in a perpetual state of disembodiment and suspended reality. The quietly muted grays coupled with the narcissistic hypnotism induced by the endless reflections create an atmosphere of calm that is shattered and reconstituted as you proceed through the exhibition.

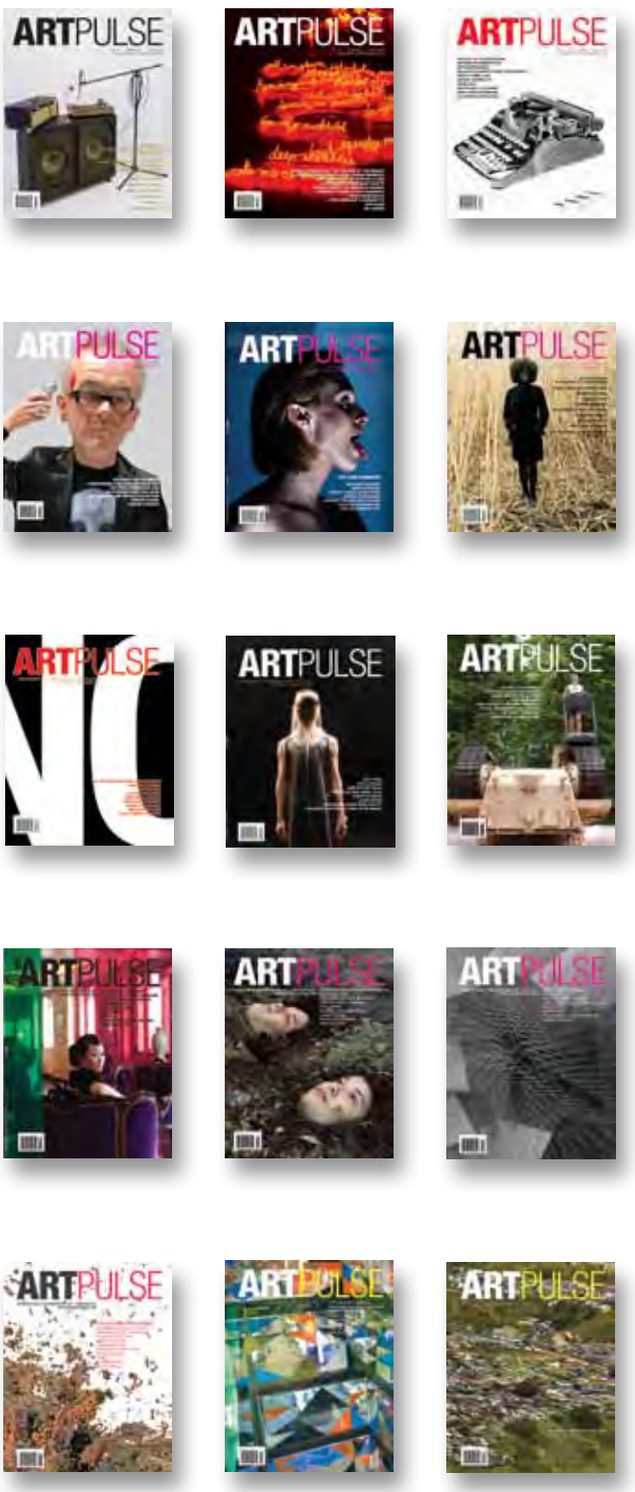
Richter's *Flow* paintings jar the senses with their multicolored striations that resemble layers of the earth's crust or the churning sediment of a freshwater estuary as it reaches the salty ocean and creates a brackish clime. The pieces are created by swirling poured paint onto a flat surface. When satisfied with the composition, Richter places a pane of glass on top of the painted area, so that the eddies and flows of the process are anchored to the verso. The result of this practice is not so different from his iconic squeegee paintings; by applying an external force to the wet paint, Richter allows a degree of chance into the creation of his abstractions. The marbled currents of the paint are halted in a moment, perpetuating the viewer's sensation of suspension. Although the glass creates another highly polished surface, the vivid abstraction dominates our perception, rather than our own reflection.

Upstairs in the main gallery, the *Strip* series resides under the gallery's peaked Victorian glass ceiling. On the far back wall stretches the 10-meter-long *Strip 930-1*. A smooth-surfaced creation, this digital print on paper is mounted between Alu Dibond and Perspex. Richter's algorithmic method for making the *Strip* paintings was to take a photograph of one of his own 1990 abstracts, divide it into two vertical segments, mirror them and repeat the process, so that each half is halved and so on, until 4,096 sections had been created from this one starting point. The selected slivers were cleaved and cloned one last time and then printed to mammoth proportions. The paintings share strong affinities with the optical art of such contemporaries as Bridget Riley and Gene Davis, and as such the horizontal bands of color jump and quiver while the eye tries to focus and detect a pattern. This process-driven art is a departure from his earlier works in that he uses a computer to abstract an abstraction. The result of this systemic prescription is quite literally a direct descendant of Richter's previous work: each mutation could not exist without the piece before it.

At this point, Richter probably would not catch any flack if he settled into a comfortable rhythm of making the same old art. Instead, he continues to explore new mediums and methods—small victories—that stimulate viewers into considering their own experiences, perceptions and consciousness. ■

(October 14 – December 20, 2014)

Laura Burton is a gallerist and writer currently living and working in New York. She is also the creative director of ARTSKIP.com, a free platform designed to help people discover contemporary art.



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Cheryl Maeder, "Hamptons Dunes", 2012, ed. of 10, archival photograph on plexiglas, Mark Hachem, Paris

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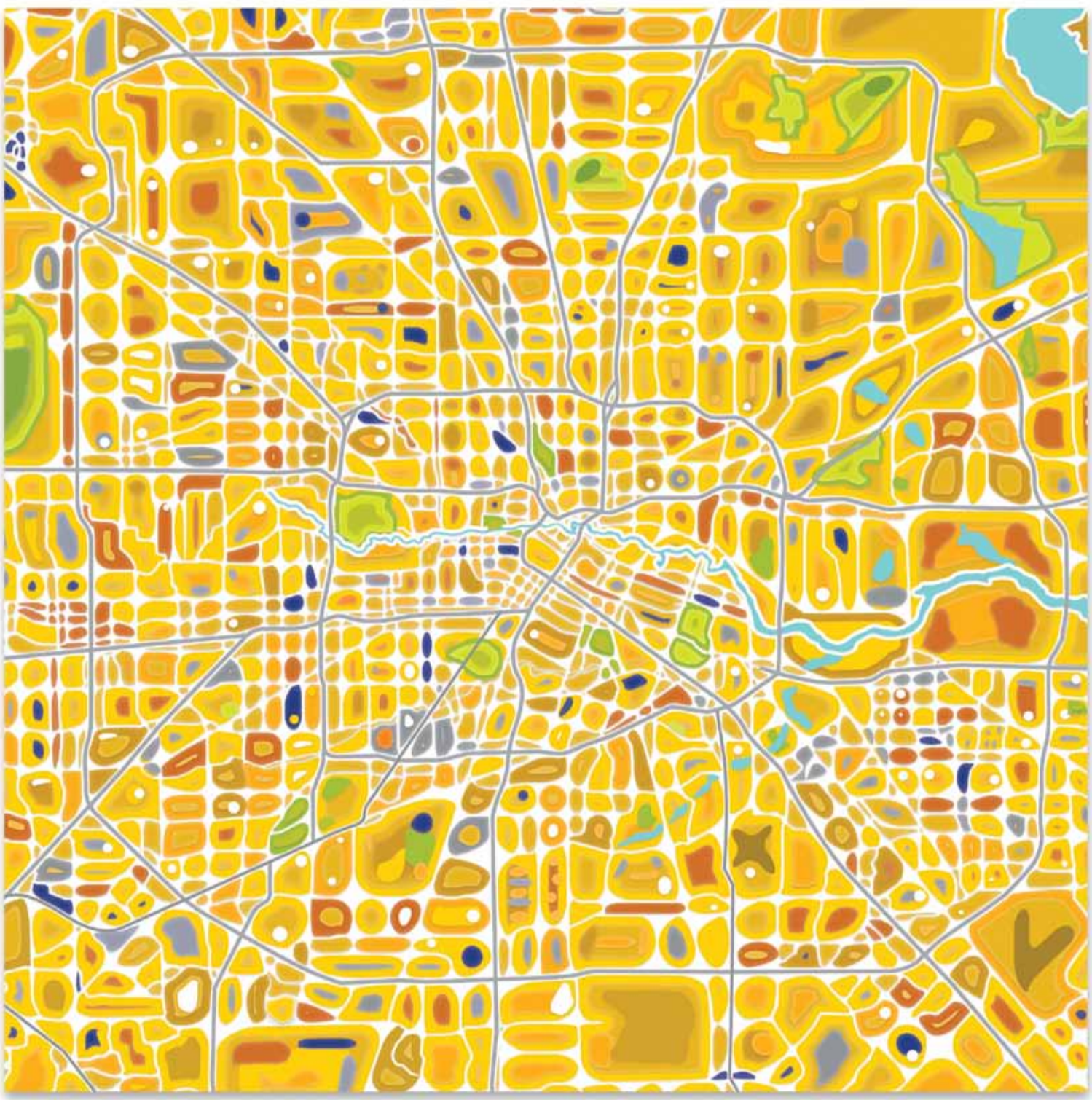

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