ARTPULSE

NO. 27 | VOLUME 7 | YEAR 2016
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The Dawn of the Post-Contemporary Art Age

The Art of Trespass: On Morgan Thorson and John Fleischer

Craig Drennen in Conversation with Carl Ostendarp

Sanneke Stigter On How to Preserve Conceptual Art

Interview: Anton Ginzburg

Jesse Jones' Parasitic Interventions

Revisiting Picasso's Guernica

The Psychogeography of Val Britton

Ed Clark: A Life in the Arts, with a Broom

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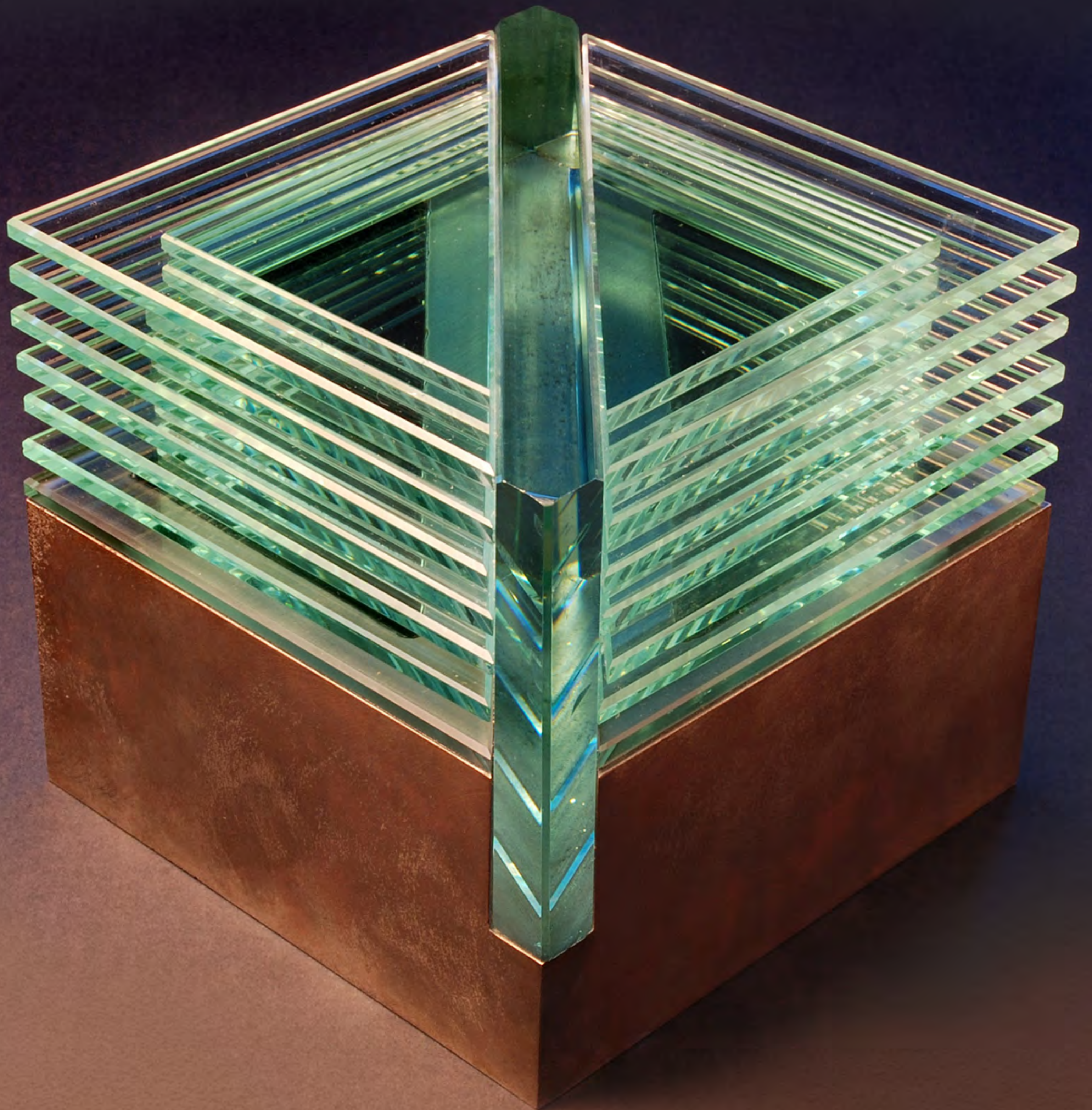

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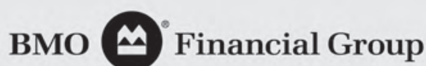

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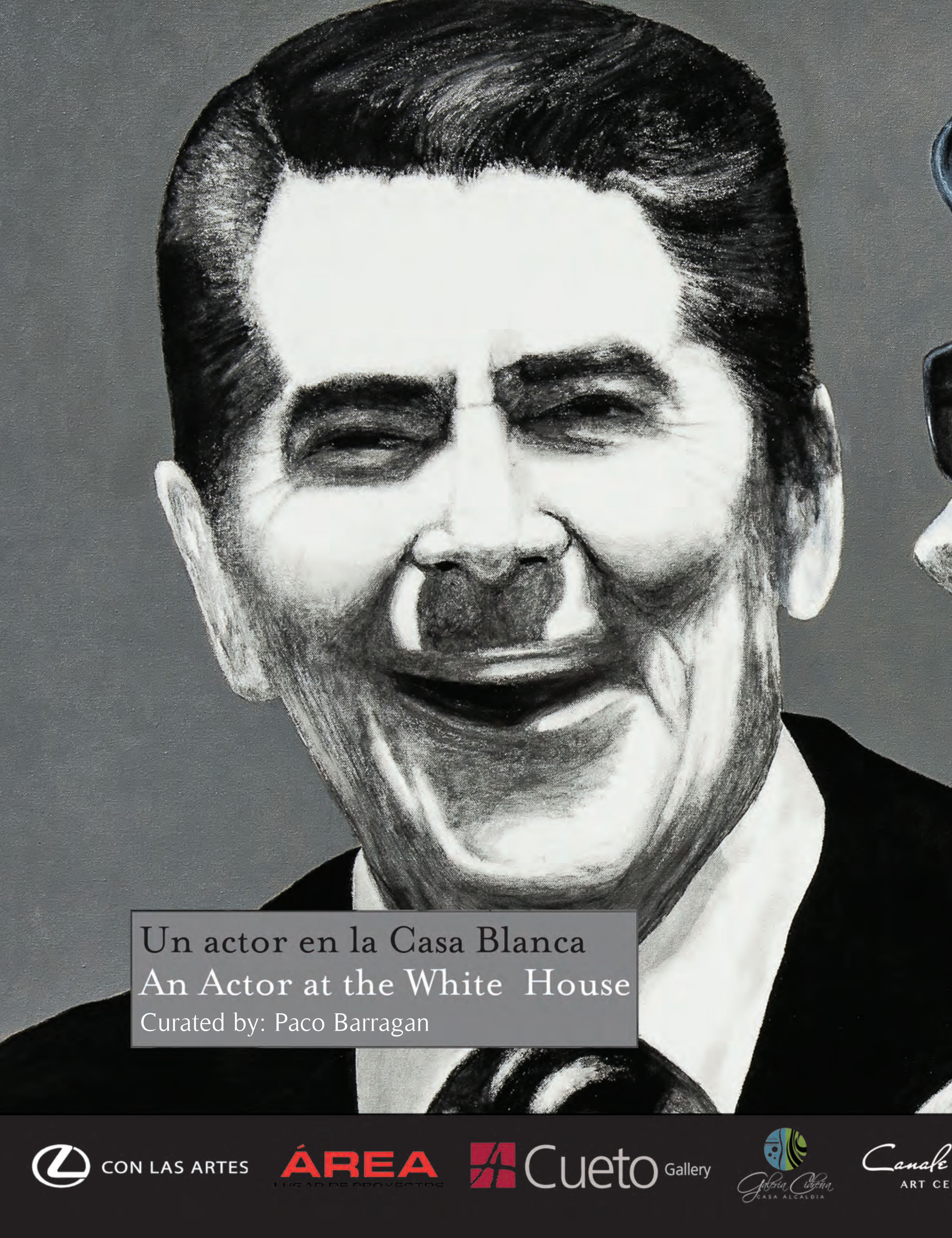

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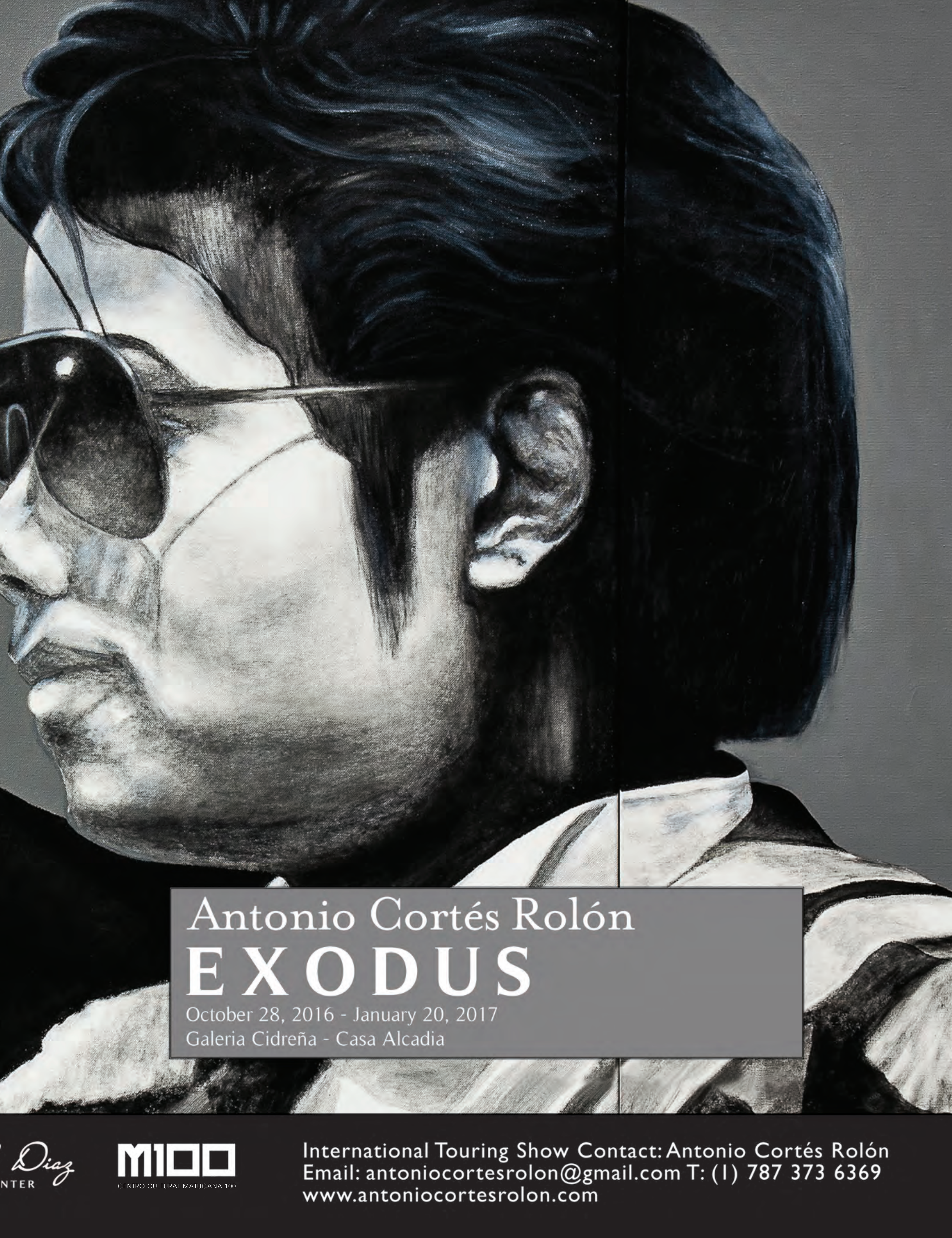
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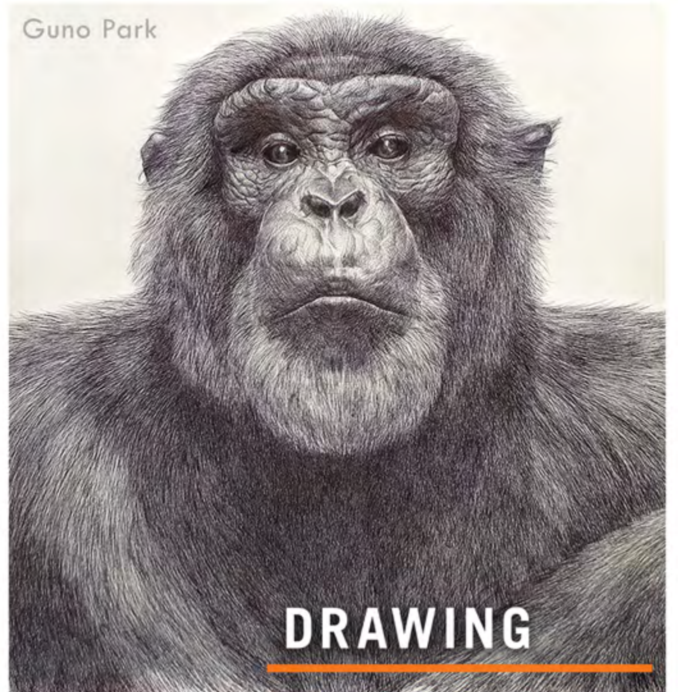

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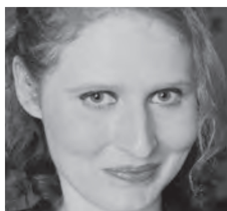

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Cover page: Ed Clark, *Untitled,* 2009, acrylic on canvas, 74" x 55." Courtesy of N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami.

The Dawn of the Post-Contemporary Art Age

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI

Take a stroll around gallery exhibitions and art fairs around the world these days and the increasing tendency of dealers and curators to dig into the past seems to be still going in full swing. In all fairness, it has to be said that for a long time the whole phenomenon was quite refreshing. It was great to see artists who have pioneered work that caused major paradigm shifts being finally acknowledged and reappraised. It was especially good for the so-called "minority" artists—people kept at the margin of the cultural debate for years because of gender or race who better late than never eventually got their fair share of attention. Not to mention the elimination of generational barriers—an occurrence that replaced the tendency of looking out exclusively for the younger and the brightest who dominated the late 1990s and early 2000s. Add to the fray the fact that the old hands are often sitting on a robust amount of work, and you can see how the concept, on top of everything else, makes both financial and historical sense. However, when contemporary art stalwarts start exhibiting, next to their usual roster, artists like Alberto Giacometti, Carlo Carrà or Piet Mondrian, it is legit to ring the alarm bell. This is no longer about being profitable or versatile, it's about crossing a bridge that will inevitably force us to leave something behind. Frieze Masters is no TEFAF, but seeing galleries that made a name for themselves for their innovative programs being there in the hope of reaching out to a new pool of collectors feels more like they are trying to be something they aren't rather than an affirmation of maturity.

A lot of those who chose to navigate less slippery slopes and stick to the post-war period have not seemed to fare any better. It is possible that their career-reviving mission stands for major sensibility and broader horizons and resonates with the gallery program or the curator's intentions. Regrettably, one of the side effects is that it also indicates scarce originality and strong myopia. After all, we are not talking about disingenuous newcomers, but experienced operators who pride themselves on having the pulse of the present. If these artists are so good now, why were they missed out on the first time around? Were they really so way ahead of their time that such temporal distance was needed before assessing their real significance? Or is there something more to it than just that? And what if it's the era of contemporary art that is perhaps coming to its inevitable end? It's admittedly an apocalyptic if provocative proposition—many times in recent history, for the sake of sensationalism, nostalgia and frustration, the definitive obliteration of formats, styles or even entire civilizations have been hailed and punctually contradicted as time went by. Yet, the question, no matter how dramatic, doesn't seem so far-fetched.

Let's start with a simple technical consideration. Every period in art sooner or later comes to an end and is replaced (or augmented) by the arrival of something else. A novelty that doesn't adhere to the current aesthetics or codes comes up. It's partially incomprehensible, but it has undeniable energy and momentum. Just as the unfolding of the events, the response is equally predictable. First there is marvel, curiosity or resistance. When acceptance comes, it's quickly followed by celebration and proliferation. Finally, there is exploitation and repetition. What was new is suddenly old, the initial revolutionary values get diluted, and the new force, borne out of rebellion to what was once alternative itself and is now drifting towards conservative areas, takes over. It happened with Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassicism and Modernism. These movements dominated for an average of six to eight decades, and although their place in history is guaranteed, they all sooner or later had to give pace and space to a new wave. Contemporary art, it is normally suggested, started in the climate of post-war reconstruction of the early 1950s. It's been almost 70 years. So why not start considering that maybe time is up?

Every cultural moment starts with the persuasion that it is built to last. What makes it so strong is precisely the focusing first and foremost on the present. When was the last time you walked into a contemporary art gallery or museum and experienced shock, confusion and perplexity and left with the sensation of having seen something that you can't just say is good or bad because you can't understand it? When was the last time you felt on the wrong side of the fence or that you didn't entirely belong? Scary as it might sound, cherish the moment and make a mental note of it if you did. You might have witnessed the beginning of something special—the dawn of the post-contemporary art age. ■

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.*

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Things You Probably Don´t Know about Picasso´s Guernica

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

Many believe Picasso's *Guernica* is the most important artwork in the history of art. Why? To put it in Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s words: "What makes a great art work really great is always a mystery."

Guernica was exhibited for 11 years at the Casón del Buen Retiro, an annex of the Prado museum, since MoMA returned the painting in 1981 to Spain and after 1992 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in Madrid.

There are still so many mysteries, misunderstandings and stories revolving around *Guernica* about which not only scholars but the larger public in general are unaware that an ekdosis becomes mandatory now that we are about to reach its 80th anniversary.

So here we go.

1) Guernica has no chronotope: nothing in the panting refers either timely or spatially to the Spanish city of Guernica. We don´t find the famous Guernica tree nor the famous "*fueros*," or laws, of Guernica nor any other element that hints at Guernica. To be more precise, the painting should have been titled "Durango," the city that had been bombed to the ground on March 31, 1937, as these were the images that Picasso saw in the French Communist paper *L'Humanité* on April 28 of that same year accompanying the headline of the attack on Guernica.
2) In January 1937 a small group of representatives of the Government of the Spanish Republic—which included Basque poet Juan Larrea and Max Aub, the secretary of the Spanish Embassy in France—visited Picasso with the mission of commissioning the artist to create a large, propagandistic mural for the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition to open on May 25.
3) Picasso had already shown publicly his support of the Spanish Republic by accepting, on Sept. 20, 1936, the position of director of the Prado Museum, which he held until 1939. It was an honorary post de facto while Picasso remained in Paris, as his voice was more important from a propagandistic point of view to be heard from Paris.
4) This was the first and last political commission Picasso accepted, for which the Spanish Republic paid the artist the then-incredible amount of 150,000 French francs.
5) The fact is that until the bombing of Guernica on April 26, 1937, Picasso was entangled in versions of the painter and his model and had no clue at all how to rise to the challenge of creating a truly propagandistic artwork in defense of the Spanish Republic against the fascist forces of Franco. It is Larrea who had personally witnessed the bombing in Guernica and on April 27 informs Picasso of the bombardment and tells him explicitly that this is the perfect theme for the commission.
6) Obsessed, Picasso starts on May 1 with the first preparatory drawing—there were 60 drawings total—and finishes the 26-foot canvas on June 22, but all the symbolism present in Guernica stem already from works from the late 1920s and 1930s.
7) The mural was not deemed sufficiently propagandistic by the Government of the Spanish Republic and was about to be moved to the second floor of the Spanish Pavilion in favor of an explicit painting titled *Madrid 1937 (Black Aeroplanes)* by Horacio Ferrer, which featured women fleeing in terror, their children in their arms, crying out against the bombings. Although the public didn't immediately embrace *Guernica*, the painting attracted great attention, especially by art professionals, and it maintained its pivotal position at the lower floor of the pavilion.
8) It was Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who, during the Symposium on Guernica held at MoMA on Nov. 25, 1947, offered an interpretation that shifted the meaning of the work from a propagandistic mural in defense of the Spanish Republic to a general outcry against atrocity, inhumanity, barbarism and death, contributing to its current lofty standing in the art world. Many years later, United Nations officials covered a tapestry reproduction of *Guernica* during U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell´s Feb. 5, 2003, presentation of the U.S case for war against Iraq.
9) From an iconological point of view, one of the major conflicts even today is whether the dying horse represents the fate of the Spanish people and the bull Franco and the fascists hordes. Just some days after the liberation of Paris on March 13, 1945, in an interview with Jerome Seckler, Picasso explains that the bull represents brutality and the horse symbolizes the people. Juan Larrea sends him a letter on Sept. 6, 1947, exhorting him to state publicly that the horse represents Franco and his fascists. Picasso never did, adding to the confusion.
10) MoMA finally returned the painting to Spain to follow the wishes Picasso set forth in his will, stipulating that *Guernica* should only return to Spain when the country is again ruled as a republic, which absolutely was not the case with King Juan Carlos and the monarchist democracy created and nurtured by Franco.

And, as a final bonus, here is an intriguing fact entrusted to me by artist José Ramón Amondarain: If you play with the letters of Guernica you can spell "*urgencia*" (urgency). Which is pretty amazing, isn´t it? ■

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UBS

IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING THE LAST WORD

BY DAVID PAGEL

Michael Reafsnyder, *Summer Strut,* 2016, acrylic on linen, 60" x 72." Courtesy of the artist and Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe.

I write art criticism for two reasons: 1. To find out what I think about what I'm looking at; and 2. To make the world safe for me. The first is pretty simple. So is the second, but it's a little harder to explain.

When I walk into an exhibition or come across something that asks me to take it seriously as a work of art, I rarely know what this means. So I have to spend some time with it: looking, gazing, glancing and all that, but also pondering, putzing around the nooks and crannies of the experience, and noodling through the impressions the thing generates in my body. That includes my brain (lizard and otherwise), as well as my gut, solar plexus, and spine, along with my skin, the hairs on the back of my neck, and my eyes, which sometimes seem to have minds of their own—certainly the capacity to move more swiftly than

my intellect, which, in front of the really good stuff, scrambles to keep up with the abundance of data that is being sent to it via rest of myself. The point is that I don't know what I think of something the split-second I lay eyes on it. And, more, that I am interested—even compelled, as if by forces beyond my control—to try to figure out what I think of it. Curiosity may kill the cat, but without it art criticism wouldn't exist.

Art's capacity to generate incomprehension, laced with curiosity, urgent and otherwise, suggests that it stands out from much—but not all—of what passes for contemporary communication. Its attractions and satisfactions can be instantaneous and superficial. But they are not only that. Art that sticks in one's craw and makes fascinating demands on one's consciousness requires sustained contemplation and analysis and re-experiencing—a potentially endless process in which parts come together to make wholes, which are themselves parts of other wholes, or fragments of strange, inexplicable worlds that throw more things into question, inviting further adaptations, recalibrations, and developments.

Art's capacity to get me interested in my interest in it sounds as if it could get pretty meta-, or academic, in a house-of-mirrors, navel-gazing sort of way. But it's actually pretty selfish, in a social, sort-it-out-in-the-world sort of way. When I'm paying attention to the ways in which I am paying attention to things, I'm not simply standing back, observing and analyzing a situation as dispassionately and objectively as I can, like a meteorologist on the 11:00 o'clock news. I'm in the thick of things, going back and forth between a world of physical objects and abstract ideas, materials and meanings, events and comprehension, trying to come to understand if my private desires line up or collide with public interests, and what what's in front of me says about how those realities dovetail—and depart from—one another, changing, sometimes subtly and sometimes abruptly, as some kind of understanding is negotiated, between myself and its surroundings. The point is that my self is not a resolved, settled, or polished sort of entity: It's a messy, ever-changing constellation of experiences and contexts, which includes lots of others, as well as good old-fashioned otherness—discoverable and otherwise. Like art, identity is a question, and criticism facilitates and fosters dialogue between the two.

All of this suggests that making the world safe for me has nothing to do with shoring up certainties, reinforcing stereotypes, following formulas, or building barricades, symbolic and otherwise, between me (with the help of my like-thinking compadres) and everyone who seems to disagree with us. Such militaristic models and territorial formats are at the root of our culture's tendency to see everything through the lens of sports, where rules and regulations make it easy to tally wins and losses, distinguishing between the victors and those over which their victories are won (the defeateds?). The winner/loser, us/them, yes/no, all-or-nothing bluntness of such thinking has spilled into, if not taken over, politics, which has become a spectacle unto itself, and not just during election season, which lasts longer than ever before, nearly rivals the late days of the Roman Senate for its short-sighted self-destructiveness, and makes about as much sense as December baseball and playoff basketball in July. Despite the best efforts of the auction houses, art fairs, and some biennials, art has not yet been swallowed up by such thumbs-up/thumbs-down either/or-ism.

Criticism has something to do with this. Freewheeling discussion, contentious disagreement, and rebellious dissent are integral to it. Art of all shapes and stripes provides occasions of all shapes and stripes for arguments of all shapes and stripes, and criticism's job is to cultivate conversations, building blunt, 'I-can't-believe-you-see-it-that-way' confrontations into civilized discussions in which differences are at least tolerated, if not respected—especially when they go on within oneself, and not only between people interested, more or less, in art's capacity to get us to talk about what is important to us, like integrity, justice, and grace, in ways that are funny, elegant, or conflicted, which bring to mind notions of truth and beauty, but without the burdensome solemnity—or ridiculous pretense—of such heavyweight abstractions.

The capacity for conversation, even about stupid subjects, is integral to civilization. Even a few minutes of it reveals a lifetime of experiences. And the greater your perceptual acuity, the more you can see, the more you might know, and the more you have the opportunity to respond to—intelligently, sensitively, and with your eyes wide open—to the consequences of your actions. All of this goes to the heart of what it means to be human, and not merely animal, although the importance of our animal selves is often overlooked by critics whose work too narrowly focuses on logic, rationality, and language. To me, 'making the world safe for me' means making room, in the world, for the unpredictable back-and-forth of thoughtful conversation, between others and within oneself—between one's various selves. None of this would exist without the capacity to see things from various perspectives. Doubt, self- and otherwise, is a constant presence. But so are conviction, clarity, and commitment. And it is the back-and-forth dance between knowing and not, between clarity and confusion, that drives criticism outside of itself, more closely toward the art it seeks to comprehend and more deeply into the world it wants to make sense of. Whatever sort of self starts out on that unmapped path is transformed along the way. A sense of expansiveness is integral to this process. Your world gets bigger, as does your awareness of your place in it, which includes real constraints, but real possibilities too.

So what I try to do as a critic is to make more room in the world for works that make more room for this sort of socialized—and socializing—self-reflection, using my voice and whatever venues I have at my disposal to bring the attention of as many others as possible to art

Ron Nagle, ***Topbana,*** **2013,** mixed media, 4 ½" x 5" x 3." Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.

that seems, to me, to be transformative. The flip side of my attempt to shine a little light on works that change the way I see the world and inhabit it—and invite others to do something similar—involves making less room in the world for works that are not up to the challenge of such intimate originality or, if the O-word rubs you the wrong way, rejuvenating recreation. That lumpy phrase eliminates divinity and emphasizes, instead, playfulness, in a way that shifts America's unholy love of labor (or fetishization of work) toward an acknowledgement of leisure's place in the development of what it means to be a civilized human, while suggesting that every last one of us might be divine, if we only knew how to relax, let go, open up. In any case, time is short and one way I try to make the world safe for me is by trying to get people to pay less attention to art that does little more than tell us what we already know, by shoring up stereotypes, reciting tired stories, patting itself on the back, being pointlessly esoteric, and by fitting, as professionally as possible, into business as usual, which is sometimes referred to as 'the dominant discourse,' 'the institutional infrastructure,' or, my favorite logical impossibility 'contemporary art history.' In the old days, Claes Oldenburg dismissed this sort of stuff as "Art that sits on its ass in a museum." Today, art doesn't even have

to trouble itself with getting into a museum: It sits on its ass wherever it pleases. That's bare-naked privilege. Even though it's the rule of the brave new art world, there are plenty of exceptions. As a critic, that's what I'm after. Time may be short, but attention spans are malleable. Making room for the art I love goes hand-in-glove with getting people to spend more time with it, both face-to-face and after-the-fact, in the mind's-eye, where it resonates with some of the other things that have made an impression on us.

What I do as a critic who writes mostly for a daily newspaper is all about specifics: how, for example, a particular group of pictures at this time and in this place uses color and texture and whatever else might be germane to its purposes to trigger a set of experiences that convey something significant about human purposefulness and futility or, perhaps, about pleasure and regret, ambitions and their diminishment, or anything else, for that matter, that is worth coming to terms with, right here and right now, for whosoever happens to lay eyes on it. I prefer the fleshy pedestrianism of such down-to-earth encounters to the high-minded machinations of academic discourse and, especially, to the tempest-in-a-teacup dealings of over-professionalized specialists, who seem to want, nothing more, than to show themselves to be bona fide members of an esoteric enclave whose interests are too nuanced for most folks to understand, much less to want to share.

I like newspapers because they are not meant for insiders. The writing inside them holds onto the proposition that there is such a thing as a general public, which is worth fighting for, especially in an age of rapidly multiplying niche cultures and what they strive to stand against, or at least out from: the sanitized blandness and rampant superficiality of corporate culture, whose capacity to shape consciousness is as frightening as globalism is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Criticism is not rocket science. Nor is its job to appeal to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. I am interested in it because it holds out the possibility that the sophistication, precision, and mind-blowing effectiveness of the former are not the provenance of experts, but available to just about anyone, and that this come-one, come-all accessibility does not require that its subject's rough edges be smoothed over, its loose ends eliminated, its uncomfortableness made palatable, and its complexities dumbed-down so that it can be consumed as swiftly—and profitably—as possible. The point and purpose of criticism is not to propagate some market-driven illusion of the greatest good for the greatest number. It is to make the goods count for individuals, whose singularity is not diminished by being shared with others. The rub is in determining what works for whom. And criticism, when it works, facilitates the conversation by leaving readers free to make up their own minds, after the critic has made his case, as persuasively as possible. It's a no-holds-barred endeavor, the only caveat being that every reader has the power to determine what counts for him. Turning the page is as effective a form of criticism as is any other.

This check-it-out-and-decide-for-yourself informality is at the heart of criticism that prefers real consequences to good intentions. Everyone means well. Too often, doing well is something else altogether. Getting from the former to the latter is risky business. It involves all sorts of unpredictability, not least of which are the whims and proclivities of one's audience. Jury trials are exciting—and frightening—for that very same reason. Critics make judgments; but every reader is his or her own jury. That's where the real authority, and lasting consequences, reside, rippling out toward and through others, who form a fluid community of art lovers.

What I do as a critic has nothing to do with upholding standards, even though that's what lots of people (who should know better) presume. Critics are not gatekeepers, nightclub bouncers, or security guards hired to restrict access to exclusive establishments. Such conservative thinking takes us back centuries—to the time before Luther. Back then, the faithful could not get to God without the intercession of the clergy. Today, many people act as if critics function as pre-Luther priests, lording their authority over viewers by insisting that a viewer's access to art depends upon the intercession of the critic. This is how those two worlds look: (Graphic 1)

God and art—too difficult, complex, and otherworldly for common folk to understand on their own—need priests and critics if they are to have audiences that understand even some of their infinitely mysterious ways. At the same time, the plebeians at the bottom of this top-down diagram—the faithful and the art viewers—need priests and critics if they want to comprehend anything more than the basics of what is intrinsically over their hands. This setup conveniently puts priests and critics in the most important position on Earth, at least in terms of facilitating the interaction between what's at the top of the heap (God and art) and who's on the bottom (the faithful and the viewers). It's little more than a naked power grab by people too shortsighted to see where the real power resides and transpires, or, if they do, unwilling to go there because it's too risky, open-ended, and difficult to control.

In contrast, the criticism that moves me, and which I strive to emulate, works like this: (Graphic 2)

God and art are still on top. But in the triangular diagram on the left, the faithful have moved up; they are on the same level as the clergy. In the secular version, or the diagram on the right, something similar has taken place. Critics and viewers are on the same level, each just one step away from what they both seek to understand, to be close to, to commune with, and to interact with as directly as possible: art. So, rather than having the situation set up so that critics control access to art, everyone is in the same position in relation to what we are seeking. The mediation of the middleman has been eliminated.

As a critic, I may spend more than time interacting with art than most viewers do, but my relationship to it is no more special or privi-

GOD
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PRIESTS
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FAITHFUL

ART
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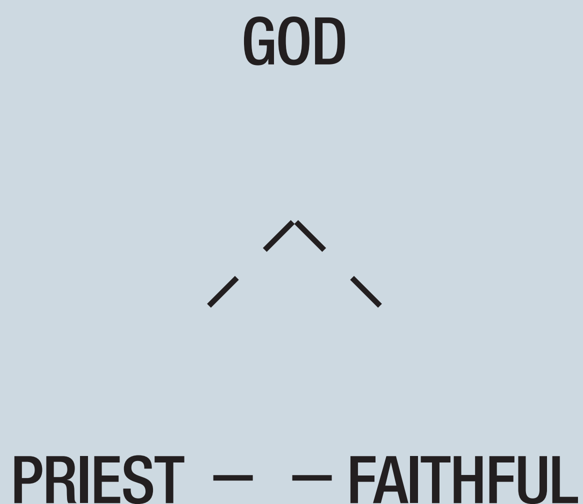
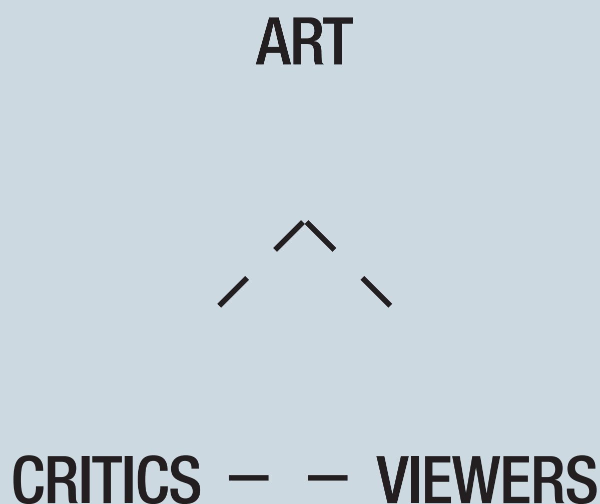
CRITICS
|
|
VIEWERS

Graphic 1.





Graphic 2.

leged or sanctified than theirs is. What I do as a critic is relate myself to art in as unmediated a manner as possible—as intimately and intensely as I can. Then, as clearly as possible, I convey the nature of that relationship—the ins and outs of the experience—to viewers, trying, to the best of my abilities, to persuade them that it is not only worthwhile, but something they might want to experience for themselves. I invite viewers to relate themselves to the art, to see, up-close and in person, how it goes with them, and then, and only then, to compare and contrast their firsthand experience with the way I described and analyzed mine. Ultimately, it's up to each and every viewer to decide if what I said makes sense, whether it gets them to see their world differently or was off the mark and instead got in the way of their understanding of what the art meant to do and actually did. If all of that doesn't generate debate, discussion and argument, I don't know what does. In any case, critics and viewers are on a level playing field, doing, basically, the same thing. No critic has the last word. Hopefully, what we say gets a conversation or two started, and all kinds of words come after ours, some of them civilizing. ■

* This essay is included in the forthcoming anthology, *ART of Critique/ Reimagining Professional Art Criticism and the Art School Critique*, edited and compiled by Stephen Knudsen

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UBS

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE PAGE: John Fleischer, *Tuning Device,* 2015. The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, MN. Photo: Justin Hickman.

THE ART OF TRESPASS:
Still Life and *Tuning Device*

BY CHRISTINA SCHMID

Rather recently, the choreographic has captured the imagination of curators.[1] The choreographic has left the world of dance and performance on stage and entered galleries, where, for the duration of an exhibition, bodies perform scores and gestures amid more traditional art objects and audiences. The effects of this curatorial practice involve both alienation and activation: a putatively neutral gallery space grows strange by containing both the cultural choreography of art appreciation alongside other forms of deliberate and no less disciplined movement. The gallery as an institutional frame and background fades and something else emerges: a charged space of encounter and inter-activation, uncertain and potentially precarious. This exhibition practice is no longer limited to the opening night spectacle but endures. From long-form choreography to random activations of sculptural objects, the choreographic occupies a curious position in the current politics of audience engagement.

"Trespassing into discourses and disciplines of visual-sculptural-audial-philosophic practice, *the* choreographic works against linguistic signification and virtuosic representation; it is about contact that touches even across distances."[2] In Jenn Joy's characterization, the choreographic acts as an unruly interloper whose gestures carve out a vibrant zone of convergence between sculpture and performance, movement and stillness, where bodies experience space and temporality. In what follows, I turn to two artists, Morgan Thorson and John Fleischer to consider how their work opens up uncharted, nameless terrain in contemporary art that invites and even encourages all forms of trespassing. By turning to two recent works, Thorson's *Still Life* and Fleischer's *Tuning Device* (both 2015), I ask how these artists invite us to pass into this convergence zone. What might be learned from entering this zone? What risk does it hold, what promise?

Thorson's trespass begins in dance but has grown to incorporate Lenore Doxsee's light design, wall drawings by Joel Sass, and

a sound track by Dana Wachs. *Still Life,* a work the artist describes as long-form choreography, took place at the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis from June to September 2015. Part of a group show titled "Local Time" and curated by Diane Mullin, *Still Life* brought a different group of performers to the museum each week. For five hours a day, five days a week, bodies would spin, slide, crawl, push and pull, collide and, only occasionally, settle into the slow sway of a shared rhythm.

The score for *Still Life* resembles an instruction manual: pass through three forms in ten minutes. Now, move every thirty seconds. Do ten forms in five seconds. Shaped by time, movements loop. Each form is distilled to its essence over five hours. Muscle memory takes over as gestures recur: a shudder, a jolt, a shimmy of shoulders; a slow rotation on pointed toes, a promenade in twos, chins held in mock mimicry of ponderousness. Never finite, gestures are slowed to the point where they become something else. Movement flickers. Swarms of bodies gather and dissemble. Efficiency meets exuberance, elation exhaustion.

Chairs line the walls. Some of them become props before they return to their positions on the periphery. I sit, unsure about how my position will implicate me. My body turns into another object the dancers to move around. They come very close: there is no separation between stage and audience. I smell bodies that have been moving for hours. Occasionally, one of the dancers meets my eyes. As they stand next to me, I listen to their breathing. I follow the minute movements of fingers, uncurling ever so slowly, up close. Sequences of urgent movement segue into moments of stillness. A body breaks from the group and runs a loop through the museum. A visitor participates for a few moments, cavorting with arms raised high. Laughter erupts from dancers and visitors. *Still Life* opens a space of strange intimacy.

The dancers' bodies act like animated marks in the white gallery box, contracting and extending, marking space and keeping time in a three-dimensional drawing composed of ever-shifting variables. Space acts as material to be shaped and molded by moving bodies. Dressed in black and white, they glint with occasional flourishes of color: a sheer veil, a hint of gold lamé, a whisper of fur.

Still Life is concerned with marking time, with bodies keeping time. The title suggests continuity despite hindrances, something lasting, resilient, capable of perseverance. But just as easily, the title can tilt toward stillness, death, extinction. The wall drawings suggest as much: ancient ferns, a saber-toothed skull, the skeleton of a dinosaur and a pistol, no longer manufactured. Time has run out. Between the drawings, just below eye level, a bar painted in chalkboard black runs across the walls. The dancers have been keeping count: white lines in bundles of four, a fifth line crossing them are reminiscent of prison walls of old where, in the absence of other timepieces, inmates would etch and smear such lines to count the days. But *Still Life* also irreverently riffs on the genre of painting the still life. Traditionally concerned with portraying a particular order in the world, the still life served to stabilize and regulate the proper place of objects in the world.[3] The genre's

Performers: Kristin Van Loon, Arwen Wilder, Sam Johnson, Max Wirsing and Emily Gastineau. Photo: Morgan Thorson.

Performers: Kristin Van Loon, Kara Motta, Sam Johnson and Arwen Wilder. Photo: Valerie Oliveiro.

Performers: Kristin Van Loon, Sam Johnson and Kara Motta. Photo: Valerie Oliveiro.

Performers: Kristin Van Loon and Max Wirsing. Photo: Valerie Oliveiro.

Performers: Kristin Van Loon, Kara Motta, Sam Johnson and Arwen Wilder. Photo: Valerie Oliverio.

Performers: Kara Motta, Sam Johnson and Arwen Wilder. Photo: Valerie Oliverio.

Morgan Thorson, Still Life, dance installation as part of the exhibition "Local Time," curated by Diane Mullin. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (June 13 – September 13, 2015). Concept and choreography: Morgan Thorson. Scenic design: Morgan Thorson and Joel Sass. Lighting: Morgan Thorson and Lenore Doxsee. Costumes: Sarah Baumert.

unspoken rules affirmed that there was order in the world, that the important could be clearly distinguished from the insignificant. *Still Life* continues this negotiation of a political economy of attention. As a result, order gives way to precarity. *Still Life* is equally open to serendipity—when the loops of movement, sound, and light align just so—and, more interesting still, failure.

Failure opens up a space of disorientation, where things no longer make sense. John Fleischer's *Tuning Device,* like Thorson's *Still Life,* deliberately risks illegibility and sets up opportunities for such spaces to emerge. Elusive, such situations cannot be fully determined: what emerges is the result of an interplay, a feedback loop, between being affected by and in turn affecting the unfolding of the work. "To engage choreographically," writes Joy, "is to position oneself in relation to another, to participate in a scene of address that anticipates and requires a particular mode of attention, at times against our will."[4] Enter at your own risk.

Fleischer's practice grows out of sculpture. His work often moves from considering the object to the kinds of actions and activities that the object suggests. If objects come complete with an in-order-to structure, a material intentionality, Fleischer's carefully crafted artifacts point toward forms of interaction conjured by the object. In *Tuning Device*, a work included in the 2015 Minnesota biennial, titled "superusted" and curated by Cheryl Wilgren Clyne for the Soap Factory in Minneapolis, a gated ramp led to a stage of eight by eight feet, where a tangle of wire sat on top of a table. Back stage, a wall held an array of identical masks. Fleischer refers to this area as the dressing room, where "activators" transition into their roles. Painted in black chalkboard paint, the whole set allowed for words, images, and diagrams to be added and erased. At unspecified times during the run of the exhibition, two performers activated *Tuning Device.* One of the masked characters occupied a station on stage, tracing a ring around the coils of wire slowly and with fierce concentration; the other was positioned at the ramp as a "guard" who wordlessly interacted with visitors interested in ascending the ramp.

Tuning Device is rooted in a story Fleischer recounts and perhaps misremembers. Lodged somewhere in the space between memory and imagination, the story involves a figure who appears at a threshold, moves in unfamiliar ways, and departs. The equally fictional observer who witnesses the specter's strange gestures has not yet grown the organs to interpret the visitor's wordless gift. In *Tuning Device*, Fleischer's activators ask us to feel our way through signs and gestures, actions and allusions that do not give in to making sense readily. Masked, their gestures remain cryptic but nonetheless appear purposeful. The work asks us to linger in confusion, to resist, for a little while, the impulse (or compulsion) to figure it all out. It is not futility that Fleischer's work flirts with; instead, a sense of "not yet" permeates the work, as if we are slowly drifting closer to something still un-nameable if only we let the current sweep us along.

The title, *Tuning Device,* alludes to anticipation, a prelude to the thing itself: a tuning fork in music sets the correct pitch for a performance yet to come. A tuning device prepares an automobile for perfect performance. In *Tuning Device,* what is yet to come is unknown and quite possibly unknowable. But the work asks us to attune to the way sculptural objects, writing, and movement interact to create an unexpectedly intimate experience between suspense and suspension: the absurd tension *Tuning Device* is at times capable of creating refuses to resolve. No catharsis, no denouement, no comfort in certainty—only a strange fascination with a possible passage into a nameless, uncharted space, sensed rather than known by reason.

If *Still Life* transforms the gallery space into a three-dimensional drawing that, as soon as you enter, you participate, whether deliberately or inadvertently, *Tuning Device* sets up a threshold that divides space and offers a physical encounter with liminality. Space is no longer neutral or spread evenly but bundles, coils, and thickens in some places more than others. Temporality, too, is negotiated in the choreographic as it manifests in Thorson's and Fleischer's work: *Still Life's* sheer duration allows for a gradually growing knowledge by acquaintance, a slow process of becoming familiar. Expectations based on past experience prove reliable, sequences of movement recognizable, even if the bodies and their numbers differ. *Tuning Device* offers no such metaphors of organic communication honed by the passage of time. And yet the challenge the work presents is not farfetched: how do we attune to the strange, the foreign, that which eludes our horizon of reference but still registers as stubbornly purposeful? Fleischer does not propose an answer; indeed, *Tuning Device* required him to renege artistic control and surrender to the work's unpredictability, its refusal to make itself known. What emerges in the process, though, is an oblique spatial, embodied, and performed narrative that opens a space where something communicates itself.

The art of trespass, then, is not to be misunderstood as artfully mixing disciplines: a dash of dance with a hint of sculpture, flavored by sound, light, and performance. It is not crossing into foreign territory as much as passing across and thus transforming the space we are already in into something stranger than fiction. In Thorson's *Still Life,* this space opens beyond exhaustion and exuberance,[5] after hours of movement, interspersed with frenetic counting and occasional hilarity. Far from convalescence, as Jan Verwoert theorizes the aftermath of exhaustion and exuberance, this space is more reminiscent of ecstatic practices of old, when bodies served as vehicles to achieve transcendence. Here, though, nothing is transcended. We are still here; no specter of divinity to behold. Yet, as *Tuning Device* suggests, once we attune to the place we are in, this 'here' becomes momentarily or irrevocably altered. ■

NOTES

1. At the 2016 College Art Association's conference in Washington, D.C., a panel explored "Thinking the Choreographic," while Jenn Joy's *The Choreographic* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014) offers a rigorous and far-ranging theorization of a contemporary understanding of the practice.
2. Jenn Joy, *The Choreographic.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014, p. 1.
3. In "Abundance," Norman Bryson argues, "still life was able to provide its viewers with images in which the historically unprecedented instability and volatility of their material culture could appear as regulated and stabilized. In this work of visual ideology, the discourse of ethics is joined by a force no less stabilizing, that of craft labor. Amid the general uncertainty and anxiety surrounding consumption, still life affirms skilled labour as a kind of gold standard that will hold its own through all the vicissitudes of (over)abundance." (*Looking at the Overlooked. Four Essays on Still Life Painting.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990, p. 132).
4. Jenn Joy, *Ibid*.
5. Jan Verwoert, "Exhaustion and Exuberance." Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. <http://www.artsheffield.org/2008/pdfs/exhaustion-exuberance.pdf>

IN CONVERSATION WITH CARL OSTENDARP

Carl Ostendarp entered undergraduate study at Boston University in the twilight of the Phillip Guston era. He went on to Yale as part of a cohort group whose work gave a shot of adrenaline to 1990's painting. He is an associate professor and graduate director at Cornell University who has had over 33 solo exhibitions, 170 group exhibitions. Ostendarp is represented by Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York City. I spoke with him on July 10th in the David Smith cabin on the campus of the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture where he is a member of the 2016 resident faculty.

BY CRAIG DRENNEN

Craig Drennen - Not many painters grow up the child of a professional football player. Did that shape your childhood in any way?
Carl Ostendarp - My dad had played for the Giants after World War II, back when their backfield had a roofing business. So it's not like now.

C.D. - Is that true?
C.O. - Yeah it's true. That's what he did in the summers in New York. But he was a coach at Amherst College for thirty years, and Williams before that and at Cornell for a year. We lived in college housing on the street between the gym and the football field. It was total football, plus the Patriots used to practice at UMass in the summers so we'd go over and see them because dad knew those people. But he was unusual in that he used to have team meetings in the Amherst College art museum (Mead Art Museum) and he used to go in there before games to, you know, get calm before the Saturday games.

C.D. - Did the repetition and work ethic built into athletic life have any impact on you?
C.O. - (laughs) I don't know...maybe. The year I played football in high school we lost every single game. Guys would be shocked and horrified and throw their helmets around the locker room and say "Argh! Almost!"

C.D. - I do that every time they announce the artist list for the Whitney Biennial.
C.O. - Me too. (laughs)

C.D. - What was Boston University like when you were an undergrad there? Was the ghost of Phillip Guston still around?
C.O. - Phillip Guston was there my freshman year. The school itself was a bizarre blend of 19th century Beaux Arts instruction—figure drawing, anatomy, and so on—and then German Expressionism, like Beckmann and Kokoschka, by way of the Museum School. It was odd that Guston was there. Jim Weeks was also there and he was really good—from California. This guy John Wilson taught drawing and he was terrific, but my general sense of the school was that they worked really hard to keep you from being creative. They put a lot of work into that.

C.D. - I think that's not uncommon.
C.O. - Guston would give these slide talks and you had the sense that he had time to kill, coming down from Woodstock. The slide talk would be two projectors and he'd show his own work on one and talk about it formally—this was the year before he died I guess—and would talk about the structure of his paintings. Then the other projector would be projecting Piero and Sassetta and early Italian stuff that he would never mention. He would just have it there, so you would understand that he was comparable to that. He wandered into one of the studios where I was doing a freshman drapery study assignment one night when I had decided that I would paint it like Cézanne. Guston walked in, introduced himself and said that he thought my painting looked good except that it looked like I'd glued colored pieces of corn flakes to the canvas. That was my only personal contact with Guston, and at the time I wasn't sure if what he said was a good thing or a bad thing.

C.D. - I'm going to wager that it wasn't good. Was there a period of time before you went to Yale?
C.O. - No, I went straight through. I had done the Norfolk program my junior year and met a lot of people from art schools around the country. This was really the first time I'd worked with people who were really engaged with art. I think Norfolk is the Triple-A team for Yale's grad school in a way.

C.D. - Who were your faculty and peer group at Yale?
C.O. - Mel Bochner and Jake Berthot were the two faculty I really learned from. My first year and the year after were really amazing. Jessica Stockholder was in painting then moved to sculpture. Ann Hamilton was there in sculpture. Richard Phillips was there,

Carl Ostendarp studio (North wall detail), Skowhegan, Maine, summer 2016. Photo: Diego Lama. Courtesy of the artist.

who I had gone to undergrad with. Sean Landers was there, and Jack Risley. Who am I forgetting? Oh yeah, John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage. And lots of others.

C.D. - ***Were they making work that in any way resembles their current work?***
C.O. - Some were, but not really.

C.D. - ***After grad school you went to New York City, and were part of the generation that experienced the demise of Soho. Were artists on the ground aware that an era was coming to an end?***
C.O. - I got to the city in 1985 so it was a while before Soho started falling apart. One thing that happened in 1988 or 1989 was the stock market crash, which to me felt like a bigger deal than the end of Soho as a gallery center. Before then you had the very real sense that there were galleries you could imagine showing at—maybe White Columns—then there was the next tier of galleries. Things were very hierarchical in terms of who would show where....

C.D. - ***But the alternative spaces had a prominent role—Artists Space, Art in General, White Columns?***
C.O. - Yes, I think that was part of it. For me, and a lot of the people I hung out with, it was White Columns. Bill Arning was running it and it was a real center. A lot of friends had White Room shows there. A lot of small spaces also opened up that didn't have to announce whether they were an alternative space, or a project space, or a hardcore gallery, because nobody was buying anything anyway. I think that was the last vestige of gallery artists being a reflection of a dealer's taste, and the beginning of the independent curator era—like outsourcing the selection process. It seemed like a really big shift in a lot of ways.

C.D. - ***Did there feel like there was a scene available to you as a young artist?***
C.O. - We were our own scene pretty much. There was a core group. We worked jobs for money and hung out and drank too much. My studio was on Delancey for a long stretch of time. One up side was that you could get really intelligent response to your work, but there was also this other element of just keeping each other company. It took a while before we realized people were aware of us.

C.D. - ***Do you think alternative spaces still have a role to play?***

Carl Ostendarp, ***Charles Kynard,*** **2014,** acrylic on canvas 49 7/8" x 57 7/8." Courtesy of Elizabeth Dee Gallery.

Carl Ostendarp's "Blanks" exhibition, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, 2014. Courtesy of Elizabeth Dee Gallery.

C.O. - It depends on the place. I'm also shocked by how bureaucratic a lot of professional activity is now. I'm sure I'm wrong, but I can remember, for example, when there seemed to be very few residencies—Yaddo & MacDowell. But now there are hundreds of them that require images and statements and people doing them on a really regular basis. I think the reason is that it is now very, very difficult to do what I did—move to New York, find a cheap place to stay, and a job that allows you to do your work. I think that's very difficult now. People now go to residencies to have the community that they used to be able to have right in the middle of their lives.

C.D. - I think the first time I saw your work in person was back in 2007 at Elizabeth Dee. I was really interested in how you made hard-edge abstraction and the monochrome functioned for you. Thanks to early 1990's art like Neo-Geo I was used to having abstraction instrumentalized in a social way. Your paintings were different and I liked the mechanics of how you made it work—the way I sometimes feel in front of a Mary Heilman painting, where I can see exactly what the artist is doing but still can't explain why it's effective. It seemed to me that your work had a different value system.

C.O. - That was a survey show of twenty years worth of work. I've spent a lot of time looking at historical artists from the mid-1960's to mid-70's who occupied a space between Pop and hard-edge geometric painting, like Ed Avedisian, Ralph Humphrey, Nick Krushenick, and Paul Feely, the guy who did the jacks paintings at Bennington.

C.D. - I saw a great Paul Feeley exhibition at the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio last fall. When you say you were looking at this small group of artists who were between Pop and Minimalism, what was it that you were looking for?

C.O. - I guess I was interested in what happened in that period of time—early Pop and Minimalism up until 1976 or 1977. You see this explosion of new mediums—installation, performance, video, Earth art. You see this profound change in the definition of the term "artist." It seems like a lot of these media developments were about increasing the sense of immanence of the work. And a part of that is having greater control over the context, like making the context part of the work. This seems diametrically opposed to the circumstance now, where shows are curated around curatorial themes and there are art fairs everywhere that have no context whatsoever, operating like walk-in catalogs. There's a funny back and forth during that period between painting that seems involved in the notion of a physical, corporeal thing.

C.D. - Who would be an example of that?

C.O. - Maybe "fat field" paintings and paintings that turn the corner into sculpture. On the other hand there is painting as a kind of drug offering a hallucinogenic experience, like Op art. There was that show that David Reed helped put together, "High Times, Hard Times," that gave examples of those locations where abstract painting went.

C.D. - That show reintroduced me to Al Loving in a profound way.

C.O. - There are a billion people making paintings and art world memory is like five years, so many amazing artists are forgotten. I was doing this curatorial project with the museum collection at Cornell and found this Dan Christiansen painting that they'd been given in 1969 or 1970. It was huge and they'd never stretched it and never shown it. It's a spray paint painting, but not one of the coiled bright ones. It's really Miro-esque. It's not really a color field painting and it's not really an example of post-minimal material practice. It's its own crazy thing.

C.D. - That takes me right back to my early comment about your value system. Your taste in painting is positioned slightly outside the canon. For you Dan Christiansen and the illustrators at **Mad Magazine** ***and Dr. Seuss are all relevant.***

C.O. - I think we're the result of all the visual experiences we have so I don't think acknowledging one's visual culture is necessarily earth shaking, but maybe what it does do is obviate this "high" and "low" thing. For a while I had this VHS collection of cartoons from the teens and '20's. There's one *Felix the Cat* cartoon by Otto Mesmer with a bicycle race on Saturn and the cat wants to get up there so it finds a ladder and uses its tail as a hook or something, then the tail turns into a question mark. In any case, there is a still from it that is almost an exact replica of the Miro painting of the dog barking at the moon, except that the Miro is from 1926 and the Mesmer is from 1914 or 1915. And these short films traveled around the world, right?

C.D. - I think you may have just discovered something.

C.O. - When we look at past things from where we are, it changes what those things mean. This just seems like a much more dynamic situation than the way influence is usually described.

C.D. - That's what permits your work to have a different value system—it has different intake sources from culture.

C.O. - (laughs) Well there is secret stuff in the paintings! In addition to the images, there's a crackpot math thing that I do. And there's an idea about the "field" that's as much American color field painting as it is animated cartoon space. I have this idea, that's also connected to the math, of the 'life-sizeness' of the painting. Abstract paintings especially have tended to function historically as either a cartouche, like when Pollock turns the corner when he gets close to the edge. Or as an interpretive representational thing where the imagery is implied to continue, like a Clifford Still. But in Jean Arp's reliefs and in Barnett Newman—and obviously in the readymade—you have this sense that the image edge and the object edge are contiguous. They happen

Carl Ostendarp's "Blanks" exhibition, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, 2014. Courtesy of Elizabeth Dee Gallery.

at the same time and place, and make you aware of how big you are and increase your sense of present-ness in front of the work.

C.D. - Ok, is it possible for you to describe the math you use for the compositions? I saw some notebooks in your studio filled with math notations and I admit that I was mystified.

C.O. - For the "Blanks" show I did with Elizabeth Dee I made a booklet of mathematical drawings, to just 'fess up in some way. The math comes from this thing that happened right out of grad school when my older brother said he would give me a ticket to Holland if I showed him around museums. At the Stedelijk Museum they have a Barnett Newman painting called *The Gate*. I had an amazing experience in front of that painting and spent a lot of time trying to figure out what had happened. I eventually figured out that he was exploiting difference between ways we experience things and perceive things with our body. We line up with things because we are symmetrical—two eyes, two ears—so you try to meet the center of something with your own center. If you try to talk to somebody, you line yourself up with them symmetrically...

C.D. - I'm with you so far.

C.O. - ...Then there's another more conceptual mode of perception that you do with your eyes, like a reading perception that scans left to right. I sensed that the Newman painting found ways to trigger your body, which wants to line up with the physical center of the painting, then throw you off with the location of the color divisions because your eyes are telling you that you're not at the center. I've watched people do this crazy dance in front of that painting because their bodies and their eyes give them two contradictory senses of center. This extends the duration of the viewing experience and can make it feel more intimate.

C.D. - That seems like a remarkable discovery.

C.O. - I thought there must also be some relation between the nature of the potential affect of the vertical dimension of a canvas and the horizontal dimension. There's a set of calculations I developed to place imagery on the surface. To be completely honest, it's all because I hate the idea of being a stage director making composition the driving force behind image making.

C.D. - Can you explain that?

C.O. - There is this inherited idea that composition is how an image becomes articulate. To me that seemed tied to the assumption that painting is episodic or an interpretation of reality, like a moment in a story. The math guides where the image should be on the surface. More recently, it helps determine how big the paintings should be in relation to the architecture where they are

Carl Ostendarp studio (North wall), Skowehgan, Maine, summer 2016. Photo: Diego Lama. Courtesy of the artist.

shown. In my last show at Elizabeth Dee it was all three: how many paintings, how images were placed, and how the group fit in the space. It was excessive. (laughs)

C.D. - When I saw the recurring "CO" in your paintings in that exhibition it took me a while to realize it was your initials, and not an abbreviation of some kind. It was a powerfully funny payoff moment for me. It was part of a tradition, like Oskar Kokoschka's "OK" initials or Stuart Davis's stencil signature or Ashley Bickerton's silkscreened name. But it also let the air out of the idea of the artist as a brand.

C.O. - There was some sense in my mind that signing the monochrome was like wrecking it, demonstrating the gap between transcendence and market object. It had been a while since I'd done a show in New York—maybe four or five years. I had the idea that I needed to make that show my last show, as if it was my last show ever. Just in case.

C.D. - Why?

C.O. - That was just my notion. What would I make if it were the last chance I had. I wanted to up the ante in a certain way. The "CO" meant "company" and "care of" in my mind and it meant care of the monochrome, care of this long tradition. Mostly I wanted to put together a show that wouldn't make any sense unless you were there. In my mind that was a fight against the art fair, a fight against the lack of contextual control.

C.D. - There was one piece in the back room that just said "Carl" right?

C.O. - Yes, that was me signing the show. The thing that people forget when they mention that show is that the paintings all have titles, and the titles are not my name. The titles are the names of Hammond jazz organ players from the 1960's: Jimmy McGriff, Jimmy Smith, Charles Kynard. There's a quality to that organ music that is both pop and related to the history of jazz, and the nature of the Hammond organ, which goes between melody and noise.

C.D. - How do you follow a show like that?

C.O. - I've been making these star constellation paintings and these question mark paintings. That's what I'm working on at Skowhegan, the question mark paintings. I have this idea that one of these question mark paintings will hang on the wall in someone's home while they're looking for their keys. That's the whole idea.

C.D. - What do you have coming up?

C.O. - I have a solo exhibition opening at Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York on January 14, 2017 at the new Harlem location. ■

ED CLARK: LOCOMOTION

A Life in the Arts, with a Broom

BY JEFF EDWARDS

It seems like Ed Clark is finally getting a bit of the recognition he deserves. In 2013, his bold poured-and-push-broomed paintings were the subject of "Ed Clark: Le Mouvement" a retrospective at Miami's N'Namdi Contemporary Fine Art and followed by New York's Tilton Gallery that also included a handful of artworks by Clark's friends Donald Judd, Yayoi Kusama, and Joan Mitchell. Although N'Namdi has been exhibiting Clark for over 30 years, these shows presented a convincing visual argument that Clark's relative absence from Modernism's grand narrative has been a matter of sheer neglect rather than artistic merit. A similar note was struck two years earlier, with the inclusion of Clark's work in the Guggenheim's collection-based survey "Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949–1960." And 2013 saw the Art Institute of Chicago's bestowal to Clark of its Legends and Legacy Award, a welcome acknowledgement of his importance as an African-American artist with a decades-long career, during which he's made a significant contribution to modern art.

It's wonderful to see this acclaim finally granted to Clark, because he's been a constant but severely underappreciated presence on the international art scene for well over 60 years. Throughout postwar painting's relentless progression of styles, schools, and paradigm shifts, he's been steadily working away, painting what he calls his "big sweeps"[1] with a sense of quiet but unshakeable purpose. At the age of 90 he may be slowing down just a bit—an assistant now helps him with some of the setup when he paints[2]—but despite that there's still the same grandeur and beauty in his work, along with a calm swagger that's always been a subtle but distinctive trademark.

TAKE UP YOUR BROOM AND PAINT[3]

There's a palpable sense of conviction in Clark's canvases and a consistency of artistic vision that make it impossible to cavalierly dismiss him as an Abstract Expressionist stereotype (*oh, he's that guy who paints with a push-broom*). His choice of painting tools—or, more properly, a single tool—was neither a gimmick nor a capricious gesture. Like many artists who came up during the heyday of High American Modernism, he went through an itinerant and somewhat ad hoc apprenticeship that led him gradually through the complex labyrinth of Modernist figuration and out the other side to pure abstraction. His childhood discovery of a natural talent for drawing (along with the alternating praise and jealousy that comes with it) eventually led him to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1947, where he studied painting and art history on G.I. Bill funds he received after a wartime stint in the Army. Finding that he still had a small amount of government money left after Chicago, he decided to pack up and move to Paris, where interesting things were still going on a century after the *avant-garde* first thumbed its collective nose at the Academy.

A POSTWAR AMERICAN IN PARIS

It was both a shrewd and a lucky move on Clark's part, because that initial trip to Paris furnished him with a toolkit of ideas, inspirations, and techniques that have shaped pretty much everything he's done in the studio ever since. It was there that he became aware of how startlingly fresh everyday colors can look in different environments; he's often repeated the tale of being deeply impressed by a specific shade of blue that he saw in the stevedores' uniforms when he first arrived in France. This brief but powerful incident and others like it would pay off hugely in later years, when a conversation with a New York acquaintance about a painting he'd made in Crete made him realize just how significantly his palette changes when he works in different places—an insight that would eventually send him around the world in a quest for new lights and colors to paint. Clark has sometimes been granted the title of Abstract Impressionist alongside such painters as Richard Pousette-Dart and mid-career Philip Guston, and the characterization isn't off base: he's spoken fondly of his acquaintance with Monet's friend and student Louis Rittman, citing the older American Impressionist as a major influence on his own work, and he likes to reminisce about the stunning colors that one could paint under the enormous skylights of the Paris studios.

As he settled into his life in Paris alongside other American expatriates like Al Held and Beauford Delaney, Clark took careful note of what was going on among the postwar European painters. He's mentioned the strong impact that one of Nicolas de Staël's football-player paintings had on him when he chanced upon it in the Salon d'Automne, noting how its sheer *presence* took hold of him (the italics are essential to convey at least some sense of the emphasis he puts on the word when he tells the story). Completely oblivious to the imagery, Clark was instead enraptured by the immediate power of the object's surface, and most importantly the paint as a material fact.

As de Staël and his peers worked out their own idiosyncratic methods for transforming the general postwar feelings of despair and absurdity into a new kind of art, Clark paid close attention, particularly when it came to the innovative techniques of applying paint to surfaces that many of them were developing. The catalog of new theories, effects, and (often literally) attacks toward painting—*art brut, Tachisme, Art Informel, Art Autre*, et al.—provided a crucial impetus for his own experiments. At some point he recognized that painters like Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages were using domestic brooms in their canvases; he recognized the power of those works, but still felt like there was something lacking in the brushstrokes, a straightness that almost sounds downright dull and stiff in his telling. In adopting the push-broom, he carried their exaltation of the brushstroke-as-subject a huge step further, transforming the vigor and intensity of

Ed Clark, *Untitled,* 2006, acrylic on canvas, 58" x 72." Photos: Mariano Costa Peuser. All images are courtesy of the artist and N'Namdi Contemporary, Miami. nnamdicontemporary.com.

their gestures-writ-large into the massive, exuberant swaths of paint that seem just this side of untamable in some of his own paintings. There's a boldness and swagger to Clark's yard-wide broom-strokes that makes his canvases stand out against the works that Hartung, Soulages, and others like Georges Mathieu were doing back then.

Painting with a push-broom is a risky proposition, with only two basic possible outcomes: a work of art or a huge waste of paint. Whenever and however it first happened, that initial viscous sweep across the canvas with a paint-laden push-broom must have been a staggeringly powerful moment of discovery for Clark, a revelation of the near-demiurgic potential of the artist's hand. The big sweep has been a fundamental element in his painting ever since. Each of Clark's canvases is a unique record of the sheer joy inherent in the act of painting, and each stands as a monument to the never-twice-repeated, dizzyingly fortuitous split second when the artist wrenches a new kind of being into existence from out of the void.

A POSTWAR AFRICAN AMERICAN IN PARIS

It was also in Paris that Clark discovered that there are some things in the world that even a pioneer can't change. On being told that he'd been discussed in a review by *Le Monde* critic M.C.L., he was startled to discover that the piece characterized him as a "negro of great talent," the kind of description he never thought he'd encounter outside the U.S. He later learned from the critic that the phrase came from the head of the American Center in Paris, whose discussion of Clark's art was thoroughly marbled with mentions of his skin color. Although Clark has said that he's never felt the question of race was a factor in his own practice, he's also noted that it tends to rear its head in the art world when he least expects it, and he once speculated briefly about whether the success of an artist like Jean-Michel Basquiat might forestall other discussions of discrimination in the art world.

THE LONG SWEEP HOME

Once he discovered the broom, Clark's course was pretty much set, and he's never looked back. After traveling to New York in 1956 at the urging of George Sugarman, he found himself at the center of the booming 10th Street art scene, becoming a core member of both the Brata co-op gallery and the emerging second generation of

Ed Clark, ***Untitled,*** **2005,** acrylic on canvas, 53" x 66."

Ed Clark, ***Untitled,*** **2007,** acrylic on canvas, 57" x 71."

Ed Clark, *Untitled,* 2010, acrylic on canvas, 77.5" x 66.5."

Abstract Expressionists. It was sometime the following year that a happy accident with collage resulted in his first shaped painting—which he argues was the very first of its kind in American Modernism, exhibited and discussed in print years before Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella trod the same ground.

In subsequent decades, Clark's ongoing quest for other kinds of light and color has taken him to Nigeria, Mozambique, Martinique, Bahia, Morocco…the list goes on…but he often returns to Paris, and always ends up back at his home base in New York, where he still lives in the same live/work space he's occupied for many years. The lion's share of the loft is taken up by his studio, where the broad floor so essential to the creation of his often-monumental canvases is flanked on all sides by an ever-shifting array of newly completed paintings and older works.

In his latest body of work—some of which was recently on display at the exhibition "Locomotion" at N'Namdi Contemporary Miami,

Ed Clark, ***Untitled,*** **2012,** acrylic on canvas, 66" x 78."

Ed Clark, ***Untitled,*** **2012,** acrylic on canvas, 53" x 66."

Ed Clark, ***Untitled,*** **2010,** acrylic on canvas, 77" x 51."

with a follow-up scheduled to run from mid-October through early next year at Detroit's N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art—there's no sign that Clark has slowed down or lost any of his razor-sharp creative edge. If anything, there's a tangible sense of new inspiration and vigor, with a rich and varied vocabulary of splatters, smears, speckles, and pours emerging amid the iconic sweeps. It seems like Clark and his muse still have more to show us, and there may be big surprises to come. Let the broom sweep on. ■

NOTES

1. Quincy Troupe, "An Interview with Ed Clark," in *Edward Clark: For the Sake of the Search*, ed. Barbara Cavaliere and George R. N'Namdi. Michigan: Belleville Lake Press, 1997, p. 17.
2. Rachel L. Swarns, "As a Painter Grows Older, His Creativity Endures," *The New York Times*, February 23, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/nyregion/the-art-endures-for-a-painter-who-wont-be-here-for-long.html (accessed September 7, 2016).
3. Much of the biographical and historical material in this and subsequent sections is taken from an interview I conducted with Ed Clark three years ago ["The Long Sweep: A Conversation with Ed Clark about His 60-Plus Years in the Art World," *ARTPULSE*, No. 15, Vol. 4, Year 2013]. The interpretations are mine.

PERSPECTIVE

A Conversation with Anton Ginzburg

BY STEPHEN KNUDSEN

Anton Ginzburg is a New York–based artist and filmmaker. Born in 1974 in Saint Petersburg, Russia, Ginzburg received a classical arts education before immigrating to the United States in 1990. His art has been shown at the 54th Venice Biennale, Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, White Columns in New York, Lille3000 in Euralille, France, the first and second Moscow Biennales, and the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York.

We discussed ideas of aura and transcendence in the 21st century in the context of Ginzburg's recent exhibition, "Hybrid Gaze" at Fridman Gallery, NYC where his 2015 film *End of Perspective* was debuted.

We also spoke of his celebrated 2014 exhibition and film *Walking the Sea* that contemplates the human induced demise of the Aral Sea. This inland sea, once nearly the size of Lake Superior, is now largely a desert with its tributary waters diverted in a longstanding protraction of Soviet utopian dreams dependent on shifting water resources for cotton industry irrigation. In a provoking, philosophical work Ginzburg walked across this desert with a mirror structure on his back through a subject no longer there (the waters of the Aral Sea). The faceted mirror reflects fragments of the landscape back at the viewer as the artist walks across the dried up seabed. Combining myth and document, *Walking the Sea* reconstructs the artist's journey from sunrise to sunset. [1]

Stephen Knudsen - May we start with your recent "Hybrid Gaze" exhibition at Fridman Gallery? The footage of your 2014 extended cinema piece* End of Perspective *was filmed by two drones flying above Dutchess County of the Hudson River valley. The drones dart about like dragonflies with lenses pointed at each other and then at the wild waters and forests, and architectural remnants. In the spirit of deferred action or unfinished business perhaps we are witnessing a third generation, a 21st century version, of the Hudson River School here. Can any semblance of the idea of transcendence be reclaimed here in our postmodern context?

Anton Ginzburg - There are three movements (parts) in the *End of Perspective* video, set in different parts of Hudson Valley. One is a typical setting of the valley, including swamp, creek, forest, and meadow, another is of a man-made environment - an abandoned industrial 19th century structure taken over by nature, and the third is a mountain view described by Henry David Thoreau. Historically these were the themes of the Hudson Valley painting school and poetic mythology of the transcendentalists.

Traditional Western perspective assumes a fixed point of view. I am using two drone cameras that are in constant motion in relation to each other and the environment, continually renegotiating their positions. Not only the POV is in constant motion but the subject is, as well. These two moving perspectives inherent to this particular airborne technology align with my perception of a contemporary fragmented condition. The film is structured as a two-channel video featuring footage from each of the drone cameras, filming the other. In some instances, two screens merge into a full screen that shows both drones in the environment.

Walter Benjamin described an aura of a work of art in terms of its distance to nature. In the *End of Perspective* that distance is constantly being renegotiated through the remotely controlled movement of the drones. The process of filming is conceived of as a form of reflection, revealing the process of its own documentation, where the landscape serves as a context as well as a subject matter. This self-contained mode of representation references new modes of perception and production of images, creating the possibility of transcendence through the mechanical Other.

***S.K. - I work in extended cinema as well, and my "film eye" was drawn to some editing in the projection related to speed that I thought was quite effective. In some sequences, one channel is the POV of the drone zooming forward up river and the other channel is the POV of the drone zooming backward with a view still looking up river. The two channels put adjacent to one another in a split screen worked to double the apparent speed. Had that kind of double speed been actual rather than apparent, it would have seemed too jarring and rushed. The way you did it was a poetry and a paradox of being both fast and slow. Would you like to expand on that idea and other formal decisions that perhaps pleasantly surprised you once everything was put together in* End of Perspective?**

A.G. - In exploring this airborne technology I was interested in abstract categories that are inherent to the medium—the pace, the distance and the rhythm, as well as the relationship between the content of two video channels. It was not just about

Anton Ginzburg. Photo: Rudolf Bekker.

the interaction between the cameras but a way of experiencing nature through technology, for example, how the directional flow of the water stream relates to the trajectory of the camera, producing tension and ambivalence between the medium and the message. I searched for an opportunity to reveal the invisible by deploying structural juxtaposition, what Robert Morris referred to as "sensation of relations" in sculpture. Perhaps it is a way of resurrecting an aura in the age of the Anthropocene.

S.K. - Yes, we have come a long way into the Antropocene, subverting the Hudson River vision with our Global Mischief, since Tomas Cole painted **Oxbow,** ***the 1836 quintessential Hudson River school painting. It is such a lovely image of pastoral humanity harmoniously coexisting with pristine nature. And a great part of that mischief has been in our relationship to images. In the 1980's the late Vilém Flusser wrote of the technical image "where every event aims at the plenitude of our times, in which all actions and passions turn reaching the television or cinema screen or at becoming a photograph. The universe of technical images, as it is about to establish itself around us, poses itself in eternal repetition." Flusser also said, "He no longer deciphers his own images, but lives in their function. Imagination has become hallucination." Would you speak to this in relationship to your work?***

A.G. - As images turn into a technological stream they abandon their role as agents of imagination and instead take on a geological function as "technofossils." The hybrid aura of technological and natural phenomena offers an interplay and a reconsideration of distinct perspectives, distances and spatial relationships. It brings to mind Jean-Luc Godard 's remark that, "a camera filming itself in a mirror would be the ultimate movie."

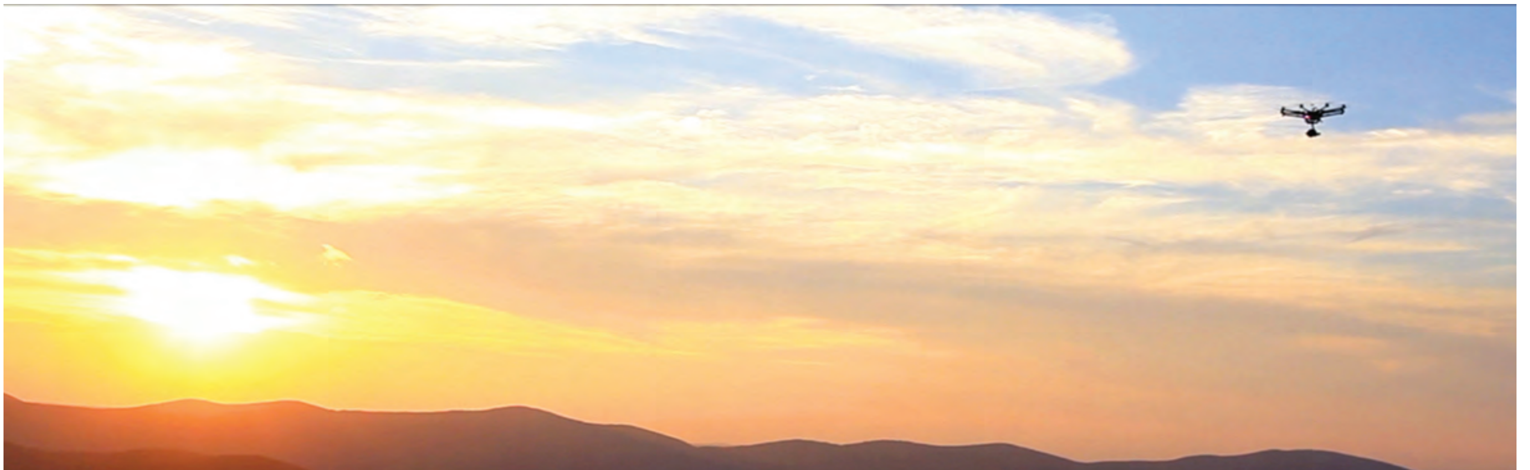
The human body is absent from the *End of Perspective* and appears only indirectly through the process of recording and controlling the digital media. Identifying and mediating the gaze by means of montage is a strategy to resist mastery of vision over the subject.

S.K. - In the "Hybrid Gaze" exhibition, I was also caught by your uplifting challenge to some of the notions like decay of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction in a piece titled **AU01.** ***Would love to know what Walter Benjamin would say about your*** **AU01** ***installation, the photo of an icon that you encountered on your recent trip to Sarajevo, that has been sanctified in a local church in 1971, thus installing an aura in this mechanical reproduction. Would you tell that story and the epiphany that you must have had with that image?***

A.G. - When I was traveling to Sarajevo last summer I saw a photograph of an icon in a local antique store. When I turned it over I found a curious note—the photograph was sanctified in 1971. The traditional function of an Orthodox icon is not representation but generation of an aura. In this case, it meant that the aura that was lost through the act of mechanical reproduction was reclaimed through the ritual of sanctification. I thought it was an interesting unconscious illustration of Benjamin's theory.

AU01 installation was conceived as a deconstruction of this found artifact. The process of dilution and thickening of an aura was continued by employing digital technology. I produced two new artifacts—one by printing both sides of the icon photograph on glass and in this way floating the image in air. The other was generated by fragmenting and mapping the tonal values of the photograph as a relief. In the first case, I was taking away the physicality of the image, while in the other I concentrated on its materiality. The other part of an installation—the murals "AUTO" and "AURA"—engage language as an active agent reflecting the cyclical relationship or "rhymes" between the elements.

S.K. - Your work is also concerned with modernity's planetary toll as well. In **Walking the Sea,** ***with split mirrors on your back you crossed the Aral Sea—an inland salt-water sea that lies between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Previously one of the four largest inland bodies of water in the world with an area of more than 26,000 sq. miles, the Aral Sea has steadily been transformed***



Anton Ginzburg, ***End of Perspective,*** **2015,** (3 movements), 2 channel HD video, sound, 21:11 minutes.

Anton Ginzburg, *Walking the Sea,* 2014, digital HD video, sound, 30 min.

into a vast desert since the 1960s. This due to the Soviet irrigation project which diverted feeder-rivers to irrigate cotton fields in the surrounding desert. Would you unpack the meaning of those mirrors that traveled with you and would you share an anecdote of the making of this work that perhaps you usually do not share?

A.G. - *Walking the Sea*, an exhibition, consisting of the film (of the same title) and sculptural installation was premiered at the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston in 2014. It is a second part of the trilogy that I have been working on, which deals with post-Soviet geography. The Aral Sea was an important topic during Perestroika, the time when I was growing up in the Soviet Union. It was something that became impossible to ignore, the scale of the ecological disaster was so enormous that it became a subject of political consciousness. It was representative of the heroic modernist failures of the 20th century, an unplanned outcome of which was a paradox—a sea without water.

The existing environment is a result of human activity, realized on a geological scale. In thinking of how to represent the extent of this landscape and using Constructivist strategy of the "aesthetic of the fact", I chose my body as a medium of representation. The narrative of the film is a walk—time and scale correlates to my body as a human metronome. I walked across the void of the sea with a mirror structure on my back as a way to map its different parts. The faceted mirror functioned as a camera in constant motion, incapable of recording. Because of its geometry, the structure reflects environment around, yet excludes the viewer. The mirror construction follows the logic of reverse perspective that switches the viewer and the viewed.

The Aral Sea is quite remote and difficult to gain access to, especially from the Uzbekistan side. The local officials avoid discussing the ghost limb of the missing sea. Traveling is strenuous and even though I managed to get the required permits to film, we were constantly harassed by local police and secret service trying to sabotage the project.

In one of the locations, my crew and I were arrested and detained at a local police precinct for a day, intimidating me and urging us to leave the area. Despite numerous challenges we managed to get rare footage of mostly inaccessible parts of the Aral Sea.

S.K. - Your film* Walking the Sea *is a particularly beautiful work. The mirror moving through the desert is quite stunning in a kind of Stanley Kubrick way. In one scene you walk far off in the distance to peer over a cliff. The mirror catches the sun and gives us just a flicker of sunset from the opposite horizon. The Kantian sublime (the cosmos)

Anton Ginzburg, *AU01,* 2015, installation view at Fridman Gallery. Photo: Paula Abreu Pita.

and the postmodern sublime (dynamical human power) seem to intersect at that moment. Would you further summarize your objective with moments like this and with* Walking the Sea *in general?

A.G. - I would like to cite a phrase attributed to Groucho Marx: “Well, Art is Art, isn’t it? Still, on the other hand, water is water. And east is east and west is west and if you take cranberries and stew them like apple sauce they taste much more like prunes than rhubarb does. Now you tell me what you know.”

Recalling Soviet amnesia required a sizable container. The emptiness of the sea seemed to fit that mission. My objective was not only to document the Soviet modernist project but also to observe my individual experience from an historical distance and to create a personal narrative. The locals believe that there is an inner sea underneath what used to be the Aral, so my walk was a form of unlicensed psychoanalysis, tapping into this geographical subconscious.

S.K. - In closing would you like to share the date and venue of your next exhibition?

A.G. - There are several projects that I am currently working on.

I have been developing a public commission with a US-based organization “Art in Embassies.” It is a 24-feet stainless steel outdoor sculpture for the US Embassy in Moscow, called *Stargaze*. It was a conceptually challenging task, where I chose to approach the theme of the cosmos from a human point of view. *Stargaze* serves as an instrument, directing your gaze and framing the environment and constellations, rather than as an ideological object. The sculpture is set on a low black bronze pedestal that is an abstracted stellar map if viewed from above.

I also have an upcoming museum solo exhibition at the South Alberta Art Gallery (SAAG) in Canada in December 2016, called *Iniciatoj / Initiatives*. Exhibition explores collapse of the modern universalist project through formal investigations of Constructivist pedagogical experiments, combined with my personal mythologies. It culminates in “Turo” (“Tower” in Esperanto), a film exploring post-Soviet geography and Constructivist architecture. Modernity is interpreted as an updated Tower of Babel project that currently exists as an archive of ruins. Exploring various methods of representation, the video’s structure combines cinematic narrative, videogame footage and digital abstraction. ■

NOTES

1. See, www.antonginzburg.com

THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF VAL BRITTON

Microclimates of nostalgia and exploration is how I describe the installations of Val Britton. Her complex work is composed of collaged paper forms floating and curving through space like weather patterns guided by gossamer tethers. In our discussion, Val openly comments on the evolution of her work and the relevance of maps as a key component in her artistic endeavors.

BY SCOTT THORP

Scott Thorp - Back in the 1950s, Guy Debord developed psychogeography to explain how our behavior is affected by local geography. With this line of thinking, our emotions and movements are greatly influenced by our surroundings. The main exploit of this view is the dérive—a journey through space and time entirely in reaction to the landscape presented. Your works consistently reference cartography. I see the mapmaker's mind in them. Typographical forms are connected with chains of intersecting lines. As lines connect, they often form nodes signifying destinations. But I get more the sense of a dérive-like odyssey than a mapping of space. It's as though you are taking us somewhere. Can you speak a little about your history with maps and how they serve as inspiration?

Val Britton - I began working with maps in graduate school over a decade ago. While driving across the country from Brooklyn to San Francisco where I was to begin school, I used an atlas to guide my way and to find state parks where I could camp over the two-week journey. This was in the era before GPS and smartphones were part of my life. In addition to being a practical tool, the atlas provided a language I adopted as a way to connect to my father's story as a long-haul truck driver and mechanic, to make sense of his loss when I was younger, as well as a way to think about my own changing geography and sense of place. I began sketching out sections of his interstate routes, tracing them and using the map networks as scaffolding on which to build larger, more expansive drawings where I could insert my hand and identity. These map-inspired drawings evolved organically, and each took on very a different identity as I used various techniques including drawing, painting, staining, printing, cutting, collaging and stitching the paper. This journey became about time as well as space, a meditative experience of charting time spent with the work and developing a visual vocabulary.

This connection to psychogeography and the dérive is resonant for me. Rather than describing a physical place or prescribing a way of looking, I am applying the map language to my internal, invented landscapes. I am suggesting multiple interpretations and ways of navigating these systems and being open to what the viewer may find. I make these works with a sense of searching and being guided by each move that I make along the way: creating a problem, digging in and then trying to work my way out. Over time, my works have strayed from actual places to become more abstract and almost entirely invented.

S.T. - Yes, I get the sense you've gone from describing spaces to inventing spaces. That's where I tend to find your work unique among artists delving into map-like concepts. For instance, Guillermo Kuitca's imagery is descriptive of places he seems to have dreamed up. While they are nonsensical in some manner, they are precise. Your environments, on the other hand, are more ambiguous and experiential.

Many of your installations are large in scale. The one in the Facebook headquarters at Menlo Park is over two stories tall, yet your materials and methods remain delicate. Often times, intricate slivers of paper combine to establish fragile webs that visually connect the cloudlike paper forms, all being suspended from tiny threads—not what you'd think to use when covering 4,000 to 5,000 cubic feet of densely packed space. Working in this way must cause the initial planning for larger installations to be daunting, if not anxiety ridden. Can you speak about how you approach these kinds of works and what's going on in your head as they move forward?

V.B. - The installations are site-specific, so each one is designed for a particular space and responds to the architecture of that site. I usually begin by making a rough sketch that determines how I would like the installation to move through the space and what I want the piece's trajectory to look like. I then create the cut paper elements that will fill that space. I would say the planning is minimal and suggestive, because as I build the pieces by hanging paper elements one by one, the piece takes shape and builds its own momentum from within. And I really love the freedom to build the piece on site spontaneously. Often I respond to what is happening, tweaking and adjusting elements as I go, so the final outcome is not always predictable, even for me. There's a sweet spot in the middle of the making where the piece almost feels like it is making itself. There's a certain type of flow that happens, so it's more exciting rather than daunting.

When I first began working with these installations a few years back, I used very delicate sewing thread because I wanted the hanging support lines to be so fine as to disappear. Yet I discovered I needed many, many lines to stretch and shape the delicate paper in space so it would hold its form, and that these lines were forming a web of connection that was an integral part of the work, a drawing in space. I did not want to hide this aspect but rather to emphasize it, and I began using thicker string, crochet thread and also experimenting with color. The web formed by these lines is still quite delicate, but it is meant to hold its own in the ecosystem of the piece.

Back to your question about fragility, the material choice of paper is important to me. When I first started fooling around with installation, it began as an outgrowth of my collage practice. I was using the paper collage elements from my two-dimensional pieces and playing with them in space. Using paper, a material that I have an intimate knowledge of and comfort with, gave me the confidence to work three dimensionally, which was intimidating to me. I thought about

Val Britton, *Cascade (detail),* 2013, site-specific installation of hand cut and laser cut paper, ink, and thread, approximately 26 x 10 ½ x 25 feet. Commission for Facebook Headquarters, Menlo Park, California.

Val Britton, *The Continental Interior (detail),* 2013, dimensions variable, site-specific mixed media installation of hand cut paper, ink, tempera, and thread. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

Val Britton, *The Continental Interior,* 2013, dimensions variable, site-specific mixed media installation of hand cut paper, ink, tempera, and thread. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

Val Britton, *Reverberation #30,* 2015, ink and collage on paper, 36" x 36." Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

using a more rigid material for the installation, such as plastic, but as I worked with these delicate sheets of paper, crumpling them and torquing them, I was drawn to the sculptural possibilities in manipulating paper. I also felt that this fragility of the material connected emotionally to what I am trying to convey in these works, a feeling of tenuousness, of a tension where one doesn't know whether the forms are in the process of building up or exploding apart, a humbleness of material and economy of means that when accumulated could become bigger than itself. I'm also very invested in the simplicity of paper and how it can be manipulated by hand in so many ways. I value the aspect of work that is built up over time in layers, that has some sort of larger drama but that also rewards a closer looking with a certain amount of detail. The installations are in a sense collages exploded in space, so they give the viewer a multiplicity of experiences depending on how the viewer approaches the work.

I just completed my first installation made of a more durable material, water-jet-cut aluminum, for a corporate building in Houston. Working with a fabricator, I translated paper shapes into cut metal and hand-painted the forms, which were then hung with thin aircraft cables. Throughout the process of working on this piece, I have been thinking about material choices and how this permanent installation had to be metal to exist in the public space where it will live and how to try to preserve the qualities of my paper pieces, the handmade qualities and the delicacy while translating the materials into some-

Val Britton, *Re-mapping,* 2006, installation with printed paper cut-outs and acrylic on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

thing entirely new. This piece is probably the largest I have made, and I used a model to work out the appropriate scale for the space so the piece would fit visually without being swallowed up by the space or feeling otherwise out of harmony. The funny thing is that once the metal pieces were coated with a primer and I was ready to paint them, they transformed from being shiny metal to being soft, matte colors, and visually they resembled paper once more, but because they are metal, they held their curved forms on their own without the need of multiple lines. So that web-like hanging element of the installations fell away, and I used only vertical lines to hang the forms, which gave the piece a new visual rhythm and an elegance.

Creating a more permanent, durable installation has brought me to reflect anew on material choices and sensitivity to the delicacy and/or strength that a particular material can embody. I do not think that I have to choose between delicate constructions in favor of durable ones; rather, they each have their own place and time. Experimenting with new materials and responding to the challenges of different sites has opened up additional possibilities and ideas in my practice.

S.T. - It's interesting how technology creeps into the process. When I look at these, I really get the feeling of handcrafted intimacy. I know the reality of going large is that fragile materials can lead to ephemeral installations. Ironically, the water jet may help you create more detail than you could by hand. In one of your earlier works, **Re-Mapping,** ***an installation covering the side of a free-standing wall, sheets of cut paper curve and bend from the vertical surface. They peal from the wall. In this piece, I get the sense of materiality you are describing in your newest work using sheets of metal. In*** **Re-Mapping,** ***the paper sheets retain a certain fluidity but are also rigid in appearance. Plus, they extend as though pulling from the surface. In this sense, they are both revealing areas and hiding others. I'm reminded conceptually of Robert Ryman's white paintings. I've never been able to figure out whether his intent was to paint new surfaces or to cover over old ones.***

Working as you do is interesting in how it can be used to hide information as much as it divulges. As a kid, I'd make maps of places where I had hidden stuff. They were more about retaining secrets than tools for discovery. As you move through this process of making, is there any sense of covering up or leaving behind things as you move forward? If so, could you describe that?

Val Britton, *Littoral Zone,* 2016, acrylic, ink, collage, and cut out paper, 50" x 50." Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

V.B. - Yes, the technology has crept in in helpful ways. I had the chance to use a laser cutter for the first time with the Facebook installation and have used it several times for subsequent installations. I think about my use of technology carefully. I am able to use my own drawings with the laser and to manipulate them in new, exciting ways. The technology also imparts unique characteristics to the paper, such as singeing or a carving/beveling edge quality that are different than what can be achieved by hand. I try to be sensitive to using the right tool for the appropriate application because I don't believe that quickly producing multiples is what I want for my projects. Sometimes I think that in trying to speed up and focus on productivity we lose stinking space. So I think a lot about protecting slowness and my space to think. Rather, I'm interested in the mutations and new forms that can be created by marrying my handmade practice with technology.

In much of the work, such as *Re-mapping*, there is a balance between discovery and concealment; but rather than trying to hide information, I'm trying to edit the information in order to find clarity. Collage involves the layering of surfaces, so one layer is always being covered by another subsequent layer. In some ways I feel like something is always being lost. I often use the placement of collage pieces to create negative spaces within my composition, to navigate moments of calm amid all the paint. My two-dimensional works involve the figure-ground relationship of sorts, but there can be so much layering that there are multiple

Val Britton, *Voyage,* 2015, laminated glass panels, ceramic glass melting colors, graphite and lacquer paint, 9 ½ x 55 feet. Commission for the San Francisco International Airport control tower, completed Summer 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.

figures and multiple grounds and the surfaces become entangled. What is being revealed is not clear, and I am most interested in that tension between zones and those shifting perspectives.

With Ryman, I admire his seemingly endless experimentation with so many different substrates and mark making/painting materials. I feel like rather than revealing versus concealing, with his work I think about how the paint meets the substrate and what space is being created in the interaction of that collision of materials.

S.T. - I like your description of Ryman's pursuit. And I totally agree that his goal was more process than product. Something I keep noticing, especially in the domain of installation art, is how closely linked art and design are becoming. Design is creeping into all aspects of businesses. And subsequently, commercial spaces are regularly designed around artistic experiences. Designers and artists seem comfortable jumping back and forth from fine-art spaces to commercial ones fairly seamlessly. The graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister's "Happy Show" at Institute of Contemporary Art is an example. And Ernesto Neto's relationship with Nike takes him back and forth from art to design.

In my mind, viewers still see commercial and artistic spaces differently. Works in art institutions like MOMA or the Whitney tend to retain a certain respect and contemplative gravitas, while those equally artistic ones in retail areas get tagged as amazing or awesome in social media. In some ways, I think the art fairs such as Art Basel are associated with this. As your work receives more recognition and your corporate clientele grows, are you experiencing a tug toward more designed-minded spaces? If so, what are your feelings about that, and what do you think about the closing gap between art and design?

V.B. - We're living in an interesting age where artists are often wearing more than one hat. I can see how the line between art and design is blurry and I don't think it's a bad thing. In my opinion, design projects are ones in which the artist is given the design problem or brief and must create work to fulfill a client's needs, rather than projects that allow an artist to exercise their creative freedom purely for the sake of their need for personal expression.

When thinking about different venues such as a corporate commission, retail display or museum show, for me what separates a work of art from a design experience is the level of agency and artistic freedom that the artist has in the project. It's different to invite an artist to do what they do, to make work that is integral and authentic to their already existing artistic practice, to have free reign in the space such as in a museum as opposed to asking an artist to adapt or modify their practice significantly to suit the architecture, bend in response to prevailing trends or to the art direction of the client. The Ernesto Neto Nike project is kind of tricky because the work he produced there looks entirely in line with his other installations for museums. Perhaps it was just a smart pairing: Nike wants to sell shoes and Ernesto Neto happens to make work that embodies characteristics they are trying to promote with their shoe technology, so perhaps it was a win-win for both of them. Maybe it comes down to the artist's intent. Maybe it doesn't matter!

Large corporations, particularly in tech such as Google or Facebook, are becoming the Medicis of our day, commissioning work for their campuses and in effect becoming major art patrons. Artists

need opportunities and patronage, and this is the modern-day equivalent. However, I believe that artists need to be sensitive to pursuing projects that challenge them and advance the growth of their artistic practices and to passing on projects that ask for unreasonable compromises, are purely to promote sales or a corporate agenda or do not meet their standards. It's a very individual choice for an artist.

I don't feel a tug toward design-minded spaces. I consider each opportunity individually and choose projects where I can do what is authentic for me. Luckily I have not been asked to compromise my work but rather have been approached by people who know my work and trust me to do what I do rather than people who want me to make work that follows their agenda. For the large-scale commissions I've completed, I have been excited for the opportunity to respond to given spaces and create site-specific work. The site was the challenge, as well as certain constraints like material durability or wear and tear from being situated in a public space. For me, responding to certain conditions can inspire me to reach in new directions that I may not have sought out on my own and in that way grow my practice.

S.T. -* Voyage *is a large-scale work of a different sort—a huge glass mural. Fifteen laminated panels combine to span 55 feet of an interior wall in San Francisco's International Airport. Each wall-mounted sheet is about 10 feet tall, and together they create a wonderfully fluid progression of colors and shapes visually held together by the lines and nodes for which you are known. To my knowledge, this is your only work in glass. I'm sure it was a fascinating experience creating such a large piece in this media. As with the introduction of new technology you mentioned earlier in this interview, working in glass surely reshaped the direction of your work to some degree. And because of the nature of glass, it usually means collaborating with a studio or manufacturer. Can you speak of your experiences creating this work and also about how it's installed? It has a fascinating 3D quality to it.

V.B. - *Voyage* is my first and only work so far in glass, commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission for San Francisco International Airport. I was awarded the project in late 2012 and worked on it over the course of two years until it was installed at SFO in early 2015.

Conceptually, my approach to making the work was to research the SFO site at the San Francisco Public Library's Daniel E. Koshland San Francisco History Center, a rich archive of information—its history, the diverse population that travels through, weather patterns—and to synthesize the research visually, combining it with my own hand and visual language and extracting elements and symbols in order to create the piece. I used maps and plans of the airport, the bay, wind patterns, flight routes and topography to generate imagery. Of particular resonance for me in researching this history was the way in which SFO has repeatedly remade itself, redesigning and rebuilding on a fixed, partially landfill footprint with limited room for expansion. These layers of history are like palimpsests, traces of what was before, informing each subsequent iteration. I am also drawing from the contrast between elements of the site that are more constant, such as the architecture and land, and the elements of change, such as the seemingly unending flux of people from all over the world who pass through the site, the weather that constantly affects our ability to travel, and how the function of the airport shifts and evolves as our economy and lifestyle needs change over time.

I collaborated with Franz Mayer of Munich, an architectural glass and mosaic company based in Munich, to fabricate the panels. Working with the artisans at Mayer, I learned a great deal about the process and was surprised and excited by the way working in layers of glass resonated with my experience in printmaking and collage, which are both mediums in which images are built up in layers. I made two studio visits to Germany over the course of a year, during which time we determined which techniques would work best to translate the artwork into glass and made numerous samples.

We translated a work on paper that I made to scale using drawing, collage and painting into glass. The glass panels are installed in the wall and have an opaque back layer, so rather than functioning as a window, the piece functions as a painting. The panels consist of two layers of glass that are laminated together using a clear silicone interlayer. Since each layer of glass is transparent and consists of a back and front layer, we had a total of four surfaces of glass to work with, which were essentially sandwiched together. Each layer of glass contains different information, so the resulting work has a subtle floating and shifting quality between layers as the viewer walks past it.

We used a variety of techniques on the glass: hand painting using ceramic melting colors which gave a translucent watercolor effect and were fired in the kiln, sometimes in multiple layers/firings to achieve the desired colors and effects; etching the glass with a sandblasting technique to create a tactile layer and filling the etched areas with pigment, some of it metallic, some black; using stencils to create hard edges between painterly areas; painting with cold lacquer for an opaque back layer; and drawing with graphite on a layer that was first sandblasted to hold the tooth of the graphite.

Working with a structural engineer, we designed a system in which a steel ledge was built into the wall with U-shaped brackets at the top and bottom of the artwork. Each panel slid into this U-bracket ledge system, which holds the panels in place and is strong enough to bear the enormous weight of the glass. The small vertical gaps in between each panel were then sealed with a pigmented caulk. The wood veneer surface treatment which covers the entire wall extends over this steel system and integrates the piece into the surrounding architecture.

This was a rewarding project to work on. I learned about new materials, which had a reverberating effect on my studio work in that it opened up new ideas about making for me and how to potentially work differently, expanding what I can do. Working collaboratively with a fabricator, I realized that I can accomplish more ambitious projects with a team than I can do on my own, and this is an exciting branch of my practice that I've continued to pursue. But one of the best outcomes for me was the collaboration with the studio and how we were able to retain the handmade feel of the artwork even though we produced it on such a large scale. Before this project, I had preconceived notions about working with fabricators, that I had to relinquish a great deal of control to them or the work would be largely created with technology and look cold or computerized. In fact, the majority of the work was made by hand—hand painting, hand stenciling, etc. by the artisans at Mayer and even by me during my last studio visit to Germany. I was able to remain a close collaborator and art director of my work. I feel that the resultant piece retains the tactile, haptic quality that is such an essential element of my work, and I'm very proud of the final installation. ■

PARASITIC INTERVENTIONS

An Interview with Jesse Jones

Dublin-based artist Jesse Jones seeks out modes of resistance through parasitic alliances with institutional structures. While "laughing a defiance," she pushes the limits of cinematic expression, creating aesthetic experiences that weave together art with activist passion. Jones incorporates a range of research-based and socially-engaged practices in her development of collective projects that illuminate events in Irish history while relating to present-day political and cultural concerns, such as the regulation of female bodies by the church and state. In the following interview, Jones discusses her cultivation of feminist artistic practice in 21st-century Ireland, where cultural encounters open up spaces of critique, conversation, and friendship.

BY EL PUTNAM

EL.P. - In your recent exhibition, "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES," you create an institutional critique within the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Ireland. As part of the show, you created the curatorial collective the Parasite Feminist Institution. Can you extrapolate on the use of the term parasite in this context?

J.J. - The use of the term parasitic is strategic; it is an abject term that evokes the abject body. The parasite is a contested creature that occupies a host. It is an agent or actor within a situation where survival depends on the resources of the host, but also on the parasite's own ingenuity and instinct. The Parasite Feminist Institution is based on the proposition of whether a parasite can survive in the context of contemporary art and at what point would the generosity of the host be met with some kind of difficulty or contestation of resources. The parasite gives a living sense to the disruption of the institutional form.

The use of the term parasite was also provocative in a simple way, evoking a feeling of disgust. The word conjures the grotesque, which enables a different imaginary of what feminist practice means to the disruption of an institution and art history. There is a history of women being described in abject ways in art. For example, I considered how early Irish female cubist painters were described as a kind of malaria of modernism and that sense of the female aesthetics as something that diseases or maligns the perfection of the canon, as something unhygienic.

EL.P. - For this show, the Feminist Parasite Institution dug into the Hugh Lane gallery collection, selecting seven works by female artists from the archive to put on display. What is the value of working as a collective in order to perform this intervention?

J.J. - Often in my work, I form a discursive collective around a project as part of the production process. For example, at the California Institute of the Arts I made the project *The Struggle Against Ourselves*, which concerned Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics. I worked with a group of theatre students from the college, where the research process and artistic material created opportunities for consciousness raising with participants. With "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES," rather than having myself curate a show, the curatorial process became a space of non-hierarchical conversations. In addition to showing women's work from the gallery's collection, we were trying to think about what is the role of the curator and is there a way to treat curation as a cultural encounter with the threshold of selection, rather than restricting the perception of the art canon on artworks visible in institutions. As such, we demystify the curatorial process and the building of the canon by dispersing it across a collective voice through the negotiation of the curatorial project. Working with people becomes an extension of the piece itself. This method takes much longer in the production of works. It took weeks to determine the seven art works that were included in "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES," but the consensus space allows for conversations to emerge that would not have been possible otherwise.

At the same time, working in this manner takes advantage of friendship as a feminist practice. The Parasite Feminist Institution included individuals from different circles, such as activism, art, and legal reporting, with many people not knowing each other initially, but coming to know each other and forming friendships through working in the same space of our temporary institution. Friendship is something that has interested me in relation to the challenging circumstances of trying to make art, where I rely on my friends and informal relationships to make work and mobilize resources. Many artists in Dublin work in economies of friendship, which can become modes of resistance responding to the lack of resources. There is a whole other economy at play that is not recognized or given credit that emerges from interpersonal friendships. There is such an intense amount of support that happens between artists through this social conjugate, making it an

Jesse Jones, *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES,* Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 11 February – 26 June 2016. Photograph by Miriam O'Connor.

important support structure of contemporary art that is not articulated in that way.

Also, friendship has critical and historical importance to feminist practice. Circles of women come together and discuss experience, sharing personal perceptions of lived reality. When one person's observations rub up against someone else's take on reality, this double take happens that may result in a social bond of friendship. There is also a reflection onto the self in terms of a person's own experience in this interrelation with others. Such notions are integrated into the making of "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES." The aesthetic of the work is heavily influenced by the Robert Altman film *Three Women*, which has the struggle to find friendship between two women at the heart of its plot.

EL.P. - When presenting the seven artworks of "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES," you provide an intervention into the white cube gallery by applying silver wall paper, transforming the space into a mirrored, radical surface. Coincidently, Liam Gillick had a series of works presented simultaneously in the Hugh Lane Gallery that also concerns mirrors,* What's What in a Mirror. *During a gallery talk affiliated with the show, you commented on how the two of you engaged with mirrors differently in your work—can you elaborate upon this point while discussing the significance of the mirror in mediating the experience of the audience?

J.J. - In *What's What in a Mirror,* Liam Gillick presents mirrors that close down the space of the institution to a facial encounter. The mirrors are isolated, made to the scale of the human face, which forces the viewer to examine the face with concentrated intensity through a clear and direct reflective encounter. In contrast, the use of the mirror in the gallery space of "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES" is obscured, not providing a direct representational doubling. The aim was to create a scenario that when people occupied the space, whether a group of people or an individual, the viewer would see themselves oscillating with the contexts of the artworks, creating a shared space between the audience and the art, making evident a continuation between the artworks, the gallery space, and the person inhabiting that space. While Gillick's mirror involves a rejoicing of and holding onto the self's subjectivity in a public space, it also involves a retreat into the privacy of the self. I was proposing a mirrored space as a collective space that fractures the self into a collective. Since the mirrored image is not clear, it results in a multiplicity of the self in relation to collectivity.

Mirrors have a metaphorical legacy in feminist cinema and artistic practice, including the work of Maya Deren, where mirrors become a place of fracture, disruption, and denial, rather than a kind of reflection. We see examples in art history of how mirrors mean different things to men and women. In Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, we see a rational, unified articulation of the self through the mirror. In contrast, in his painting *The Rokeby Venus*, the reflection of the female subject is a disruption. As part of another project I am working on with Sarah Browne, *In the Shadow of the State*, we have been doing research into gynaecological speculums, where the reflective surfaces penetrate the body, which has been historically violent. Mirrors in relation to the female body are more contested, where questions of subjectivity are not as clear.

EL.P. - You mentioned* In the Shadow of the State, *which is your current collaborative project that concerns the biopolitical implications of statehood on the female body. The lectures, performances, and other public events in Ireland and the United Kingdom that you and Sarah Browne have been presenting in affiliation with the project provide a feminist intervention of the institutional treatment of women's bodies both politically and medically during the early 20th century. The project is supported, in part, by the Irish Arts Council as part of the 2016 programme commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter rebellion. Why is it significant for this project to be part of the centenary exhibitions?

J.J. - *In the Shadow of the State* aims to create a space to think about the female body in relationship to the centenary process and to consider the mythologies of the Irish nation in conjunction with the highly political reality women have been forced to occupy due to the ideological foundations of the nation-state and capitalism. Sarah Browne and I sought to disrupt some of the ideas surrounding the 1916 historical recuperation, allowing us to consider crises that are currently emerging, including those around women's bodies that stem from the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution that bans all abortions. Our instigation for becoming part of the 1916 conversation was a way to consider how the rebellion of 1916 has not been completed for women. As such, it means that Ireland as a whole cannot claim to have achieved the intentions of the rebellion. We wanted to problematize the claims of a singular nationhood perpetuated by the mythologies of the state.

EL.P. - Instead of creating finished pieces, your work unfolds as series of public events, including lectures, tours, screenings, performances, and so on. What is the significance of approaching the creation and presentation of art in this manner?

J.J. - For me, research practice is fundamentally an aesthetic practice. The idea that art is fixed in vision and reception in the cognition of one singular moment is not something that I believe in. Rather, having an art work unfold episodically the same way as knowledge is acquired takes advantage of time being a series of temporary movements from one moment to the next, allowing relationships to build and shift. Acting in this way means perpetuating an unfolding, having an evolutionary relationship to consciousness, and never having one fixed moment.

EL.P. - The ephemeral and transitory qualities you describe are heavily influenced by your interests in cinema. Can you describe the appeal of this medium? How do you translate cinematic techniques into works that exist beyond the screen?

J.J. - Cinema is a temporal experience that is perpetuated by a series of images in sequence with sounds—a narrative that unfolds, providing a way of considering an artwork over a duration of time. At the same time, I have always been interested in the apparatus of cinema in terms of how it perceptually reaches us. Working in film for a long time, I think about that role of the perceptual sequencing of images and how this affects the viewer as an experience. Rather than drawing from cinematic style or instilling a cinematic atmosphere through grand gestures, I think about simple nuts and bolts of the moving image in the structural apparatus of cinema—how can I translate what it does perceptually in a real, lived space? The giant, roaming curtain with the outstretched hand of "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES" emerged from this process and came very quickly to me. It provides a moving image, but the moving image frames a physical space as it glides along its track.

At the same time, being an artist making film, I am on the edges of the space of cinema, acting like a parasite. When I made *The Struggle Against Ourselves* at CalArts, there was a parasitic relationship with the institution. For example, I was able to use the cameras for free as I was working with the school. Because there is a huge movie industry in Hollywood, I acquired cheap film stock by putting together the tails of film. The artist becomes a parasite on the edges of cinematic culture. I find the space appealing since you don't have to play by the rules. Instead, you can create your own flows of communication and a resource exchange that has a more feral exterior.

The influence of cinema extends beyond the image. A lot of my works begin with sound. For the first film I made, *The Spectre and the Sphere* (2008), I was inspired by the sound of the Theremin, tracking it back through the history of the avant-garde and certain political movements. There is always an element of sound in my work, where music functions as a connective tissue for the live and lived contemporary moment and the concepts being referenced. Music becomes a carrier for the research, releasing it into the realm of the aesthetics. For "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES," I worked with Gerald Busby, who composed the score for *3 Women*. He created a new musical composition for the show, making a bridge between the Altman film and the present-day restaging of it through the exhibition. Drifting into the aesthetics of sound, the research and the film's relationship did not have to

Jesse Jones, ***The Struggle Against Ourselves,*** **2011**, California Institute of the Arts. Photograph by Chiara Giovando.

Jesse Jones, ***NO MORE FUN AND GAMES,*** Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 11 February – 26 June 2016. Photograph by Miriam O'Connor

Jesse Jones and Sarah Browne, *In the Shadow of the State,* 2016. Photograph by Miriam O'Connor.

be indexical, but it came into the room through the experience of music. At the same time, music in the context of "NO MORE FUN AND GAMES" had a functional quality, as it carried the audience through the space. When the music moved from speaker to speaker, it tied the space together. The viewer embodied a panning shot between spaces, with the music mobilizing and leading them to the back mirrored gallery where the seven works of female artists were presented. The viewer becomes the actor in the sense where they are implicated in the scene of the space. Busby's score behaves as a distilled element of the cinematic apparatus that translates the perception of film into real time, space, and experience, without the massive visual screen.

EL.P. - You are going to be representing Ireland at the next Venice Biennale. How do you characterize your role as an artist who also functions as a national representative? What responsibilities as an artist, if any, do you affiliate with this opportunity to present on a transnational stage?

J.J. - I treat the national pavilion as an amplifier for the critical ideas that I have been considering in my work in terms of feminist practice, the critique of capitalism and patriarchal forms of knowledge. I aim to carve out a territory where these ideas can be unpacked. As with my previous works, there will be collective participation projects and modes of knowledge production. I am interested in unearthing suppressed histories of women, treating feminism as a historically seismic event, rather than something that emerges from recent history, considering its wider tectonic relationship with knowledge of reality, taking a longer view of history rather than immediately thinking of the first or third waves. I am thinking about how this understanding of feminism relates to a critique of reality going forward in relationship to the massive threshold of crisis that we live on at the moment. Tectonic shifts are going to have to happen regarding our understandings and our desires to reshape reality for ourselves in order to perpetuate the potential for existence.

I consider myself as a parasite in the context of the Venice Biennale. I sit outside the frame of normative engagements of this event, with no commercial gallery representation and lacking a relationship with the art market. Instead, I create collective, episodic works that are not fit for sale, imbuing my practice with resistance to the social formation of commodification. I aim to create a space of awe within an artwork that evokes an aesthetic interruption. Research-based critical collective practice has to interrupt something. It is important to interrupt the dominant form of aesthetics that is late capital. My artistic practice needs to find a way to straddle the aesthetically compelling and the research collective, which is what I plan on bringing to the Venice Biennale. ■

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INTERVIEW WITH SANNEKE STIGTER

"Conservation is about the way the artwork can be perceived and not only about how it is presented."

Dutch Sanneke Stigter holds a Ph.D. in the humanities from the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Between 2004 and 2011 she was head of conservation of contemporary art and modern sculpture at the Kröller-Müller Museum. The title of her recent dissertation at UvA is "Between Concept and Material. Working with Conceptual Art: A Conservator´s Testimony." The conservation of conceptual art is a true challenge for institutions. Consequently, we looked behind the scenes and discussed the methodology, integrity of the artwork and especially the "conservation ethics" that should prevail before intervening in the original artwork.

BY PACO BARRAGÁN

Paco Barragán - You just completed your Ph.D. at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) with the title "Between Concept and Material. Working with Conceptual Art: A Conservator´s Testimony." How did the idea for the doctoral thesis come about?

Sanneke Stigter - I guess the short answer is: fascination. But it has a long history, as it developed from my lifelong interest in photography-based work. As an art historian and later a trained art conservator, it was only natural that my attention was directed towards artists using photography in their work. The interesting thing with conceptual art is that in terms of conservation, it forces you to think critically about the profession of conservation itself. Why keeping the original photograph? What is the importance of the material aspects in conceptual artworks? That is what it makes so fascinating to study conceptual art through the lens of conservation. It is actually a study on conservation. The main research question—how to conserve a concept—directs the attention to both ends of the spectrum.

P.B. - You just mentioned photography. From my own experience as a curator, I have seen how in just 10 to 15 years many photo works have displayed severe imperfections, including works by famous artists like Cindy Sherman. What has happened with photography from your point of view in terms of conservation, in which not only the concept but also the presentation is important?

S.S. - Early color photographs can indeed be characterized by severe shifts in color, a feature that may even distinguish them as vintage prints. Hence, different approaches in the presentation of conceptual artworks can be found. One is that originally provided materials are kept as part of the artwork, even by mistake when it turns out that the concept required it to be changed according to the location, as seen with Joseph Kosuth's "Proto-Investigations," such as *Glass (one and three)*. On the other hand, when photographic material is replaced, regardless of whether this was intended or not, often the photograph's initial appearance turns out to be neglected, even when it contributed to the work's content. For instance, a silkscreen structure, fiber-based paper and a slightly undulated surface as a result from mounting by hand has completely different connotations than the impersonal, super-smooth surface of machine-mounted and 'plexified' prints. Yet, it happens that such variations are found in the lives of single artworks, as well as in various manifestations of Kosuth's "Proto-Investigations."

P.B. - Kosuth´s "Proto-Investigations" are a good example of the challenges conservation faces as his actions and instructions have changed over time and Kosuth himself proved not to be very consistent. How far can that be attributed to the art market and the need of adapting an artwork to a more standard procedure?

S.S. - What I observed is that the "Proto-Investigations" that have been sold at a later date appear differently than ones that have been part of collections for a much longer time. This is only natural when you consider that this kind of work is generally not kept in stock. They are made when needed for display and when they are sold. This means that the ones that are sold more recently are made with materials that are contemporary to that time, reflecting developments in the photographic industry. It becomes interesting when the newer form of presentation, with Sintra-mounted inkjet prints, is also applied for the earlier acquired "Proto-Investigations" that were initially made manifest with gelatin silver prints on fiber-based paper that were push-pinned to the wall. However, considering 'old' and 'new' versions immediately emphasizes the ambiguous relation to the concept of the artwork, whereas it does illustrate how *theoretical* work is displayed in *practice*, determining the way the audience perceives the work.

CONCEPTUAL ART'S PARADOXES

P.B. - The idea of preservation related to conceptual art sounds like a* contradictio in terminis*, and as such there is hardly bibliography on the topic.

S.S. - True. But there is a lot of literature on conceptual art and about the conservation of contemporary art. The number of scholars interested in this field is growing. Also, there are a lot of other sources to turn to. The paradox of conceptual art is, of course, that these works became collected and entered the museum. Hence, there are archives with lots of information, photographic documentation, correspondence, notes, etc. Many conceptual artworks are available in storage, sometimes in parts and sometimes in instructions. Most importantly, often the artists themselves are still available, or people who worked with them, which makes oral history particularly relevant as well as participatory research. When combining all sources, a lot of information becomes available to work with.

P.B. - Can you explain why you specifically chose the lens of conservation?

S.S. - That is my habitus. I am a contemporary art conservator, and I

Sanneke Stigter with Ger van Elk, *As was As is - Portrait 3,* 2012. Photo: Eduard ter Schiphorst Courtesy The Adieu BV and Borzo Gallery, Amsterdam

have noticed that it allows for a research approach that brings special details to light. I have worked in several museums, but especially during my time at the Kröller-Müller Museum, where I headed the conservation department for modern sculpture and contemporary art, I became aware of what a tremendously rich environment this is for research into contemporary art. As the conservator involved, you interpret a work's history from its various manifestations, which may call certain museum practices into question, including your own role. Thus, your own involvement is put into perspective. This lens allows you to read the many documents with different eyes, as in 'crime'-scene investigation. The museum is the place where it happens!

P.B. - This could lead us to one of the claims in your dissertation: that the conceptual artwork's materiality is more meaningful than is generally thought.

S.S. - Material features can reveal art historical details that were previously unknown. They may support the work's message, even when this was considered a 'perfunctory affair' in conceptual art. The growing technical possibilities often inspire artists in their work. For instance, Ger van Elk started using extreme long strips of photographic paper the moment Kodak introduced rolls of 10-meter-long chromogenic paper. In a different manner, Joseph Kosuth chose the Photostat to express the reproducible character of his work. The reverse image of a white typeface on black underlines this aspect as it is characteristic of the Photostat. Kosuth exploited this feature by purposely choosing this appearance, judging from the fact that the Photostat machine had already become obsolete by that time and that Photostat positive paper had entered the market more than a decade prior to that. Hence, he chose the visual language of the Photostat especially for the connotation of reproducibility to underline the idea of his work.

In another case, technical details revealed that a work by Jan Dibbets, *The Shortest Day at the Van Abbemuseum*, never existed the way it was described in the literature. The six-minute delay in the slide projection would render a real-time experience, whereas this had never been possible in practice. So no matter how conceptual a work of art is, its manifestation always includes information on the work that may contribute to the content or its appearance. It only needs to be observed and interpreted.

P.B. - Yes, but in this particular case of* The Shortest Day at the Van Abbemuseum, *the reinstall was totally different from the initial version altering the original slides that were projected at life-size. Has this shift from the original presentation imposed a problematic shift in the conceptual meaning of the artwork?

S.S. - They are different manifestations based on the same idea. But you have a point in the sense that this is a perfect example of the significance of the used materials and techniques in conceptual art. The initial version, a site-specific installation, deals more with time and place than the later photo collage. However, I am not sure whether the installation is 'the original.' That is why I purposely use the word 'initial' to indicate a first manifestation. I like Jan Dibbets' comment about this case, stating that it is not so important to discuss which one is the better solution, but that it is much more interesting that there are two versions. It demonstrates that not only judging past museum practices is relevant, but that it is especially important to investigate these in relation to what the artwork really is. The Van Abbemuseum dealt with the artwork's life in an original way. They provided full access for research and even installed the work in experimental set-up to enter a dialogue with the work's past, leaving its future open at the same time.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND THE IDEOLOGY OF CONSERVATION

P.B. - In terms of your research, what kind of methodology did you use with regard to the conservation of conceptual art in a museum context?

S.S. - When being immersed in your own research environment yourself, the strategy of participant observation automatically turns into critically reflecting on your own contribution, exposing your beliefs in approaching the work. Apart from all other research methods in conservation, from close visual examination and scientific analyses to conducting artist interviews and consolidating paint layers, I turned

Ger van Elk, *The wider the flatter,* 1972, 2007. Photo: Sanneke Stigter Courtesy of Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

Jan Dibbets, *All Shadows...*, 1969 in 2009. Photo: Toos van Kooten Courtesy of Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

to an autoethnographic approach in order to include the reflexivity that is needed to remain critical of your own input. Dealing with the past is one thing, but taking on responsibility for the work's current state and future appearance yourself is quite another. Therefore, it is extra important to be critical and conscious of your own input in the artwork's life. The interesting thing is that autoethnography also *does* something to the reader. It elicits critical awareness with the next conservator involved, or curator depending on who is taking the decisions. Leaving a testimony according to this approach serves the critical stance that is needed in the conservation of complex artworks, as they are shaped by museum practices.

P.B. - Could you elaborate on this autoethnographic approach and provide some examples of how it could be used as a new tool in research?

S.S. - Using this approach provides insight into the way a professional performs within given circumstances and a certain context. The approach illuminates personal experience—even anxiety, engages with the different dilemmas and acknowledges the subjective nature of decision-making. The approach levels with the semblance of objectivity in conservation, supported by the natural sciences. An autoethnographic account makes the inevitability of subjectivity in conservation more transparent. This can be done in retrospect by critically reflecting on

Joseph Kosuth, *Glass (one and three),* 1965, with photographer Hans Meesters, 2010 Courtesy of Sanneke Stigter and Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

personal experiences in considering the context and input for the decisions taken and actions performed. But it is even more useful when one is able to 'do' autoethnography while conducting research and performing treatments. Once it becomes part of one's consciousness, all actions that are undertaken can be steered and adjusted according to new observations made during the process. It raises awareness on a meta-level, which is also helpful while conducting interviews. It allows one to be able to influence the narrative, which means that you can be much more in control while carrying out research or performing treatments.

P.B. - Among your* modus operandi *is also conducting artist interviews. As you have experienced personally, some artists' views can change over time and even change the art they create. How should these changes with regards to the owner of the artwork and even the audience be addressed?

S.S. - This point illustrates the freedom of the artist and the more restrained attitude of the conservator, who is bound to conservation ethics and has a responsibility towards art history. Consulting artists in conservation requires a careful approach, as there is always the change of potential conflict because of those differences in approach. One way to overcome this is thinking out a conservation strategy beforehand and then involve the artists for consent. Another could be building a relationship based on mutual trust and respect for each other's viewpoints. I think involving the audience in research on conservation strategies is certainly valuable and deserves much more attention in academic research. After all, conservation is about the way the artwork can be *perceived* and not only about how it is *presented*.

P.B. - In particular the conversations with Jan Dibbets seemed to be quite fascinating and illustrative of the function of a conservator's testimony. What is it that struck you most in these complex negotiations with Ger van Elk, Jan Dibbets and Joseph Kosuth?

S.S. - This may sound strange, but becoming aware of my own role in the interviews struck me most. No matter how good you are in using interview techniques in order to remain as neutral as possible and to avoid interference in the artist's statements, the interview is never an 'objective' truth. This awareness allowed me to analyze the meta-narrative that informed the interview material, making me able to interpret the source a certain way, which I then, of course, make explicit in a *conservator's testimony*.

P.B. - It looks like if with conceptual art there is a more liberal attitude towards conservation and presentation, both from the artist and the institution. 'Conservation ethics' is the mantra that traverses your dissertation: respect for the original materials, integrity of the artwork and minimal intervention. What are the conclusions that the reader should draw from your experience?

S.S. - I think the importance of involving professional conservators when dealing with conceptual art both in a museum context and a research environment. For museums with contemporary art, it is important to know that there are conservators who are trained to deal with complex contemporary artworks and are capable of conducting qualitative research, which is invaluable to be able to make informed decisions in collaboration with curators and the artist. For research purposes, the manifestations of artworks can be extremely rich in information, but one needs to be able to extract this information in order to expose it as art technological source material. Conservators are able to 'read' physical manifestations especially well. I am not saying that materials cannot be renewed in conceptual artworks, but that the materials used are never insignificant. This is also true for new materials. Making a conceptual artwork manifest and visible to the audience deserves the full attention of highly informed professionals who are able to interpret the artwork in relation between concept and material. A final thing is the importance of documentation with conceptual artworks, as this may be the only thing left after display. Also, there is never one way. This is why it is so important to leave a testimony to make personal involvement as transparent as possible, in order allow complex artworks to enter the future in a most informed way. ■

ALEXIA TALA

Alexia Tala is an independent curator based in Santiago, Chile. She is currently co-curator of the 20th Bienal de Arte Paiz in Guatemala, curator of the Printmaking Collectors Club of Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and artistic director of Plataforma Atacama, an organization that addresses the relationship between art and place in the Atacama Desert in Chile. Tala has curated solo exhibitions by a variety of artists, including Cadu, Marcelo Moscheta and Hamish Fulton, and was co-curator of Deformes, the 1st Performance Biennial in Chile, as well as the 8th Mercosul Biennial in Brazil and the 4th San Juan Poly/graphic Triennial, in Puerto Rico, among other projects.

***Mapping the Terrain, New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy. Seattle: Baypress, 1995.**
I consider this book about social practices, essential reading to understand not only the transformation of public art in the 1990s, but contemporary art in general in these last decades. Furthermore, it was born in a specific context of dissemination of art in public space, which was beginning to critically consider its very nature. The new demands on the field of art and contemporary life itself had begun to ask for more from artists, curators and institutions. Contemporary to related events and other publications, this book was very important to me as it allowed me to reflect on *Travel Notebooks*, a project I developed for the 8th Mercosur Biennial in Brazil while working as co-curator. Articulating the contribution of different authors, this book gives a complete picture of the process of germination of a debate, which is now installed in the art that is in dialogue with specific contexts.

***Textos do Trópico de Capricornio. Artigos e ensaios.* Aracy A. Amaral. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006.**
This compilation by Aracy Amaral influenced me deeply when I returned from London to live in Chile and was instrumental when I started to become more interested in different themes of art in Latin America. This book contains a series of texts that help install contemporary art in the Southern Cone, in relation to their contexts of production and exhibition, a deeply critical and informed view of an author who has written extensively and is a must-read for anyone in the art field. Although the emphasis is on the Brazilian artistic scene, this book also covers other Latin American countries. It analyzes specific proposals, for example, the relationship between the city and architecture, raising interesting questions that go beyond strictly artistic fields.

Lucy Lippard. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997.
This was one of the first books that triggered my curiosity about contemporary process art, probably because of the clarity with which Lucy Lippard exposes the openings of the artistic proposals compiled. I was immediately puzzled and started to think about how process art is and has been developed in Latin America, focused on procedures such as participation, territory and community. Not coincidentally, as a result of this book, the first solo show I curated was entitled *Processes and Procedures*. On the other hand, the publication stands out from its editorial proposal, which includes documents, interviews and text fragments that organically coexist. This encourages us to have a non-linear—not hierarchical—reading experience that makes the information more playful and engaging.

LEONIE BRADBURY

Originally from the Netherlands, Leonie Bradbury is a curator of contemporary art and has served as the director of Montserrat College of Art Galleries in Beverly, Mass., since 2005. Bradbury is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy and art theory at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts and is completing her dissertation "The Expanded Object: Redefining the Network in Contemporary Art." Her recent publication credits include "Franklin Evans: A Moment of Complexity" in *Franklin Evans: Juddrules,* by Montserrat College of Art (2015), and "Infinite Reflection" in *Kelsey Brookes: Psychedelic Space,* by Ginko Press (2015).

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. ***A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*****. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.**

A Thousand Plateaus is an open-ended system, a treatise about flow and flux, movement and multiplicities that proposes a different way of thinking. Deleuze and Guattari criticize the dualism of binary logic as limiting and static. They advocate instead for the diverse form of the rhizome with its characteristics of connection and heterogeneity, with any point of a rhizome having the capability to connect to any other. This text shatters linearity and chronology, both in its physical form and in the radical ideas it introduces. The existent, hierarchical system of knowledge has been replaced with the idea of the "and, and and…" as it reveals a system of relational knowledge and interconnectivity. The book is a call to action to build up intensity in one's life and create a circumstance of heightened awareness and a highly energized state, a plateau, which allows for multiple connections and passages to build between the various hubs of activity to create a mesh of heightened states. All things are in flux, constantly changing and folding in on each other, only to get remixed again.

Nicolas Bourriaud. ***Relational Aesthetics*****. Lyon: Presses du Réel, 1998.**

Bourriaud argues for the art object as a state of encounter, as a dynamic activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions *and* objects. He no longer views the work of art as an autonomous object, but rather as an active participation between artwork and viewer. The artwork serves as an activator, and meaning is generated as a result of this interactive engagement between object and subject. According to Bourriaud, the work of art cannot be reduced to simply a thing that the artist produces, as it is not just a formal, aesthetic endeavor. Instead, the art "object" acts as a trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms and gestures. Art is an act and part of a larger, ever-shifting continuum, a field. For Bourriaud, each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world that give rise to other relations, and so on.

David Abrams. ***The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*****. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1997.**

Abrams' ecological philosophy of language connects sources as divergent as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Balinese magic, animism, Native American sacred storytelling and Aboriginal mapmaking to explore different cultural understandings of time and space and examines alternate worldviews. *Spell of the Sensuous* offers philosophical poetry and suggests fluidity is at the core of our experience of the world, while simultaneously calling into question things we generally assume are fixed, such as our understanding of time, space and perception. We think the world is as *humans* experience it but should consider a more holistic approach that includes other presences in the world, such as the animals and the earth. Abrams quotes from Merleau-Ponty's embodied philosophy: "All knowledge is subjective" and advocates for enhancing our connection to the natural world through a reawakening of our sensorial bond. He introduces intersubjectivity and convincingly presents objective reality as a subjective, theoretical construction. *Spell of the Sensuous* reveals that our entire experience of the world as humans is ambiguous, a subjective awareness and perception within diverse modes of appearances.

INTERESNI KAZKI: SACRED GRAVITATION

Jonathan Levine Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Interesni Kaski, *Spark of Life (by Waone)*, **2015,** acrylic on linen, 59.1" x 86.6." Courtesy of Jonathan Levine Gallery.

The philosopher Aristotle made a distinction between time in the eternal sense and time as the single moments he described as the 'present.' The Ukrainian Kiev-based artistic duo known as Interesni Kazki (translated as *Interesting Fairytale*) explore this curious bifurcation of the Aristotelian interpretation of time in a series of works that collapse moments of everlasting myth with timeless hyper-surrealist visions. The result is a remarkable artistic narrative that explores an esoteric universe of unusual design.

Interesni Kazki have been painting together for more than fifteen years and they are considered pioneers of the graffiti movement in Eastern Europe and the muralism trend in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries. Their large-scale mural works can be found around the world in countries such as Mexico, Spain, India, South Africa, and the United States. The Interesni Kazki artists Aleksei Bordusov and Vladimir Manzhos also go by the aliases AEC and Waone respectively. While the pair considers themselves a creative team, they work independently on their paintings and drawings. Their recent exhibition "Sacred Gravitation" at Jonathan Levine in New York—a gallery committed to cutting-edge art that takes inspiration from the intersection between high and low aesthetic cultures—presented a selection of mind-bending pieces by this talented twosome.

Interesni Kazki offer delightfully strange artistic reconfigurations of the natural world and their visionary imagery reflects a range of eclectic inspiration including history, science, astronomy, cosmology, religion, mythology and folklore. Uncommon figures move about the canvases with a sense of poise and purpose, as in the example *Spark of Life* (2015) by Waone. This magical dreamscape of a painting presents a series of small vignettes that defy gravity and rational explanations: a Lilliputian wizard sits atop a headless half-man whose brain emerges from a cone; mini naked men of various hues run about carrying starry blue orbs; a fantastical winged creature takes to the sky while a multi-armed human carrying a massive eyeball dashes on the beach. Another piece titled Last *Day of the Babylon* (2015) by AEC invites us to consider visual fables of 'realitylessness' as a chaotic universe comes apart at the seams while simultaneously merging the physical and the spiritual. Although their aesthetic is grounded in the dense and colorful style of graffiti, Interesni Kazki infuse their work with a profusion of mystical themes that take transcendental ideas to the next level. These astonishing places defy the imagination and leave us wondering, where do these far-flung epochs exist?

As Aristotle once wrote, single moments of life are comprised of indivisible and unbreakable units, whereas time is the enduring line that links them. He implored that we learn to treasure time for its deepest moments. Considering the otherworldly expanse of this exhibition, Interesni Kazki provide us with a metaphorical clock of the ages for recognizing the everlasting creativity that sustains the cosmos. ■

(January 9 – February 6, 2016)

Taliesin Thomas is a Brooklyn-based artist, writer and philosopher who has worked in the field of contemporary Chinese art since 2001 after living two years in rural China. Thomas holds an M.A. in East Asian Studies from Columbia University and she is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Art Theory & Philosophy with the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. She is the founding director of AW Asia in New York.

Matt Blackwell, *Sailor and Sirens,* 2015, acrylic, oil, pastel on unstretched canvas, 80" x 93." Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery.

MATTHEW BLACKWELL: SOUTHWEST BY NORTHEAST

Edward Thorp Gallery – New York

By Lisa Jaye Young

No doubt the compass spins as I write this review of Matthew Blackwell's exhibition "Southwest by Northeast" from the Southeast. Blackwell's recent exhibition at Edward Thorp Gallery in Chelsea continues the artist's long-standing navigation between Brooklyn, Maine, and Sante Fe, through the dark wilderness of expression, a response to self-recognized rural and urban mythic imagery. Thickly painted surfaces combine easily with nimble brushwork, and found-material sculpture, in Blackwell's work as he forges memorable, peripatetic characters who seem to be spiritual wanderers. They traverse each painted scene in a folk-existential quest. The visual brew of satire and cheer reveals Blackwell's oeuvre as touched by beloved gurus, a merging of Ed Kienholz and Joan Brown respectively. I have admired Matthew Blackwell's work since the early 1990s, his consistency of vision and compositional integrity, his blend of social satire, and wit, along with his bravado through refuse- materiality married with a tradition of painted abstract-figuration.

Fragments of unexpected miniature ex-voto paintings shift the scales in Blackwell's work as tin-retablos. Inspired in part by his work in New Mexico, they appear as paintings within paintings. One stand-out canvas in the show entitled *Sailors and Sirens* sets the exhibition's tone. A frantic hero, alone at sea in a small rowboat, teeters on the edge of self-portraiture. He fights his own demons as the word "row" and other words such as "doldrums" drip from a stormy sky, urging our hero to row harder, to press forward. Blackwell distributes equal amounts of painted and Grimm-like narrative energy into each character on the canvas, no matter how towering or how tiny. Each player is self-aware of his or her own comic angst, from the tiniest squirrely parade leader in *Heart Like Two Grackles*, to the looming figure of fright towering with tumultuous symbolic powers encircling his halo in *Trump at the Ditch*. Painting and sculpture intermingle with ease in Blackwell's oeuvre in which the medium and the content are merged at conception: a chicken is made of chicken wire and a cowboy boot. What else? His contemplative wooden and tin figure of the Biblical *Job*, a wanderer in search of answers, like Donatello's *Mary Magdalene* or Edward Kienholz's *John Doe*, is both hybrid *and* all too human. Blackwell's figures sit and contemplate or they roam a lonely planet as iconic, singular itinerants, caught in a timeless quest for meaning. ■

(February 11 – March 19, 2016)

Lisa Jaye Young, Ph.D. is a professor of art history at Savannah College of Art and Design. She earned her doctorate from The Graduate Center, City University of New York after a B.A. at the University of Pittsburgh. She worked for Deitch Projects and served as faculty and gallery director at SUNY Nassau College. She is also a writer, editor, and independent curator with a focus on contemporary art and photography. She is currently the editorial director for Aint-Bad Magazine, *dedicated to contemporary photography.*

"Andra Ursuta: *Alps" (installation view),* 2016.
Courtesy New Museum, New York. Photo: Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio

ANDRA URSUTA: ALPS

New Museum – New York

By Kim Power

The spring exhibit "Andra Ursuta: Alps" at the New Museum in New York City feels very much like an abandoned set design from the original *Star Trek* (1966) series, empty of actors to bring to life a room of props. The entrance to the installation is guarded by two identical sentries, marble statues (made in China) of an unidentified Roma woman deported from Paris which are decorated with vests embellished with copper pennies and Romanian 5 bani coins (*Commerce Exterieur Mondial Sentimental*, 2012). Ursuta herself is of Romanian descent but relocated to the United States to study while still in high school. Having received her BA from Columbia University in art history and visual art in 2002, Ursuta has exhibited at the 55th International Venice Biennale (2013) in Venice, The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (2014), and in the 13th Biennial of Lyon in France (2015) as well as galleries in Germany, England and the United States.

Alps (2016), white towering walls of aqua resin and fiberglass mesh, wood, urethane and pigment supported by aluminum girders, mimics indoor gym rappelling walls. Randomly attached to the walls are disembodied penises of all sizes, flaccid or erect, cast in resin and attached by bolts and grommets, in an assorted rainbow of bright colors which act as a camouflage or diversion tactic, disguising the deeper interpretation that this is some sort of twisted trophy wall of an unnamed atrocity. Accompanying these protrusions, the wall also sports the bony cavities of eye and nose sockets meant to act as virtual toe holds for the intrepid climber. Here and there seemingly fossilized bones of human beings subsumed by these monolithic barriers surface at varying heights and configurations. The randomness of the objects both protruding from and inset in the wall gives off an air of insouciance that cuts off any possible connection to empathy or horror despite it's obvious attempt to shock, supplying the nonplussed observer with a banal and empty experience.

Mops made of silicone molds of cow's tongues lean against the walls at various corners of the installation (*Floor Licker*, 2014) furthering speculation that some sort of punishment for crimes has taken place here, much like the cutting out of tongues in ancient times. Scattered throughout this artificial environment, nonmatching chairs support irregular geometric shapes, anthropomorphized by their seated position and various displays of teeth, bones and bony cavities. A carry-over from Ursuta's *Whites* exhibition shown at the Kunsthalle Basel in 2015, the figures appear to be an extension of the same visual language used in *Alps*, giving bodily form to the horrors embedded within the surrounding walls. The artist has inserted herself into the narrative with the inclusion of a boneless full-body self-portrait lying on the museum floor. *Crush* (2011) is cast in urethane and covered in cloudy white pools of resinous material meant to symbolize semen. Hidden away in a corner of the exhibit, the possibly more powerful association of this figure with the wall of penises is easily disregarded.

Painted in gunmetal grey, *Scarecrow* (2015), an emblematic stuffed version of an eagle mounted on a basketball backboard adds political commentary to this conflation of objects. Are we meant to interpret these images: a raped woman, penises of castrated men and tongue mops as a cathartic expression of internalized rage given visual voice? Are the images of expulsed Roma women along with the towering wall a timely allegory for current issues of immigration and exclusion? Perhaps the answer is all of the above. Ursuta's predilection for the darker side of political commentary is evident, however, the finer details of the message are unclear, rendering the impact of the exhibition impotent. ■

(April 27 – June 19, 2016)

Kim Power is a Bronx-based mixed-media artist and freelance writer. A graduate of the New York Academy of Art (2014), she regularly contributes to The Brooklyn Rail *and Arte Fuse art blog.*

NINO CAIS: TEACH ME HOW TO DANCE

Fridman Gallery – New York

By Kim Power

Nino Cais, *Untitled*, 2015, horseshoes, fishing rods and kerchiefs, 11" x 53.5" x 5." Courtesy of Fridman Gallery.

Nino Cais' first solo show in North America at the Fridman Gallery asks *Teach Me How to Dance*, openly engaging the viewer to actively participate in the interpretation of a personally visual haiku of objects and their relational meanings. Cais, a Brazilian conceptual artist of humble beginnings, commenced his education in the Catholic priesthood, later switching to art as his chosen vocation and graduating from the Santa Marcelina University (FASM) in 2000. Winner of Acquisition Award at the 33rd Art Salon of Ribeirão Preto in São Paulo (2008), the National Prize by the Iberê Camargo Foundation (2008/2009) and participant in the 2012 São Paulo Biennial, Cais' poetic works have been opening perceptual doors since 1998.

In his ground-breaking book, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) French philosopher Merleau-Ponty states, "Our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as a reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have." Relying on intuition, Cais collects, arranges and manipulates found images and objects, creating a resonating symbiosis of fragility and concrete existence while searching for a "tension that is caused by the strangeness of the combination of objects." In one installation (*Untitled*, 2015), two horseshoes lain flat against each other on opposite sides are held diagonally on the floor by the insertion of two thin fishing rods, which in turn are draped on the ends by two kerchiefs. One would suppose that the weight of the iron shoes implies strength, yet it is the two slender rods that hold them up, the kerchiefs adding a visual yet physically insubstantial counterbalance.

In spite of making a declaration to eschew narrative, the semantic memory of Cais' past seems to have imbedded itself subconsciously in the symbolism of several works. Take, for instance, the draping of a Roman bust with a lavender colored cloth in one of Cais' *Untitled* (2015) printed collages, which brings to mind the veiling of church statues during Passiontide. Then there's the defacement of figures, such as Cais' installation of three vintage photos of athletes, each face marked out with red oil paint (*Untitled*, 2015). Does it not denote a suggestion of iconoclasm? If so, is Cais denigrating the worship of sportsmen as heroes?

Cais likens his work to Lucio Fontana, artist/inventor of the concept Spazialismo in which Fontana cut canvases to create a dimensional space, but explains that, personally, he is trying to "create a subjective area in the object," that is internalized by the viewer. Cais' own face is covered with a ponytail in a single-channel video (*Untitled*, 2015) in which he imitates a horse's trot by slapping his legs and tapping his feet in syncopated rhythm. While the denial of facial recognition might cause anxiety in some, Cais' intention is to transcend the usual signifiers of emotion and, like his decontextualized objects, encourage new definitions of materiality. In this suppositional offering of reorganized material reality Cais seems to be taking a leap of faith that the viewer will find meaning, to which I ask, "Shall we dance?" ■

(April 29 - June 11, 2016)

MARIE LORENZ: EZEKIA

Albright-Knox Museum – Buffalo, NY

By Tim Hadfield

Marie Lorenz ***(American, born 1973).*** Production still from Ezekia, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

Ezekia, the compact, powerful installation by New York-based artist, Marie Lorenz, is derived from the *Tide and Current Taxi* series, in which she makes journeys around the estuaries, rivers and backwaters that surround New York City. She does so in a small boat she built by hand and using manual power only. These journeys, initiated when she was a student at RISD in the mid 1990s are governed, as the title suggests, by the whim of tides and currents. The latest journeys Lorenz mentions are "…with friends, friends of friends, and strangers who find out about the project online."[1]

Ezekia is far from a documentation of five of these exploratory journeys. It is a more nuanced, layered and altogether more provocative narrative, woven together from five projections directly onto the four walls of the gallery. The camera makes the audience a fellow traveler, a surveillance camera, and a part of the earth, water and sky. We dip underwater, skim the sand and observe the participants silently from above.

One is first drawn quietly into the darkened installation by the sound of water lapping the hull of a small rowing boat. Figures are wading through a shallow, dank shoreline dense with reeds at a ribbon of land where water and sky meet. There is no dialog, only an ominous and constant echoing sound of a distant electronic signal, an uneasy feeling of lost contact, or call for help. The environment is cold and unforgiving, empty of technology or inhabitants.

Then we are amongst a group of women all dressed in black clothes of indeterminate origin, wading the waterline towards a presumed destination, with an unmistakable sense of purpose. They have no leader (men would need a leader) and are reminiscent of Buñuel's walkers in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*—on a road to nowhere. At a deserted estuary at low tide, rusted pipes and wooden pilings are now exposed, sentinels of a forgotten era. A few glimpses of a distant factory and empty bridge build the growing feel of a postindustrial, even post-apocalyptical landscape.

Adjacent is a smaller image of intense fragility and separation. High in the sky, we are gazing down vertiginously onto a tiny boat floating adrift below us. Suddenly we have risen hundreds of feet higher yet above the boat, a trembling umbilical line apparently still

connecting us so precariously, it might surely snap at any moment…

On an adjacent wall a hand struggles urgently with the components of an obsolete radio/cassette player, perhaps to fashion a rescue signal? Or is this what has generated the ambient anxious call signal we already hear?

Now we join another group of women on an untidy, sandy beach, they have made a talisman, or an offering. Their concentric design constructed from the human detritus washed ashore. There is hope after all. They gather around the design as we spin around and above held in their gravitational pull, orbiting in celebration with them.

This installation feels so authentic, the narrative so intriguingly contradictory. Each video ebbs and flows with movement and we bob from one to another in the gallery, searching for meaning, as if we are ourselves are caught on a boat in a swirling eddy.

Lorenz' innovative use of lightweight cameras, the attention to the movement and timing between the videos and placement of the projections in this installation is immaculately curated and beautifully executed. *Ezekia* has an atmospheric charge and sublime imagery that hold you in its thrall. You are compelled to watch it cycle through many times before you can pull away, so hypnotic and gripping is the presentation.

If ultimately the intent is elusive and the story is in the telling, as Lorenz herself has put it: "Art is a place where you don't have to decide." ■

(May 14 - September 11, 2016)

NOTES

1. "Marie Lorenz in Conversation with Jarrett Earnest," *The Brooklyn Rail,* March 4, 2016.

Tim Hadfield is a British artist and curator living in Pittsburgh, where he is a professor of media arts at Robert Morris University. He has exhibited widely in the United States and Europe and has been represented by galleries in England, Holland, Germany and the U.S. He has taught at many renowned art institutions, including Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh; Savannah College of Art & Design; and The University of the Arts and the Royal College of Art, both in London. Hadfield is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

PATRICIA BELLAN-GILLEN. WILLFUL WONDERING: DRAWINGS 2011-2016

Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University - Pittsburgh

By Kristina Olson

Patricia Bellan-Gillen, ***Distortion and Distraction/Ratatoskr,*** **2014,** colored pencil, acrylic, and gouache on birch, 82" x 120." Courtesy of the artist.

Roaming this large exhibition of recent drawings was akin to stepping into a life-sized children's pop-up book. Patricia Bellan-Gillen's prolific output over the last five years comes in three formats included here: smaller colored pencil and collaged works, painterly large-scale pencil and acrylic drawings on birch, and mixed-media installations that move from two to three dimensions. All use fairytale imagery coupled with historical and contemporary references to create an entrancing mood shaded by darker forces.

An absorbing example dominates one floor. *The Lure of the Rabbit and the Pull of the Whale/Till Human Voices Wake Us* (2016) begins as a huge wall drawing of a rabbit's head that transitions to a flattened body of collaged paper flowers with grimacing faces. These tumble to the floor, creating a carpet that snakes across the gallery terminating in a spindly child's chair topped with a pink model of a square rigger. Teetering between cute and creepy, the installation introduces the artist's dominant theme of innocent wonder versus authoritative control. Figures inspired by children's stories, illustrations and animated films—especially *Alice in Wonderland*—are imperiled by the adult abyss of harm and deceit alluded to throughout with references to the whaling ship's destructive pursuit in *Moby Dick*.

Elsewhere, images of the rabbit and other magical animals, Alice or substitute girls, and a host of literary and mythical characters from Lot's wife to Pinocchio repeat the theme of squelched imagination. In *Every Day Wear* (2015), a girl in profile wears a dress of surveilling eyes that shrouds her body leaving no outlet for her arms. *Distortion and Distraction/Ratatoskr* (2014) presents a nightmare-sized rabbit dangling a chain of televisions broadcasting a black-and-white "dazzle" pattern over a group of entranced little girls. The title refers to a character in Norse mythology while the camouflaged screens comment on our current intoxication with the distorted information delivered on electronic devices.

The most recent work, *Blind Spots 1, 2 and 3* (all 2016), moves into new and affecting territory. These monumental triptychs form a three-sided installation with an elaborate, distorted cartouche and *putti* figures rendered in grisaille repeated across the birch panels. The theme of control and propaganda is taken to a sophisticated level. The artist's love for the cadence of words is often a starting point leading to further research here. The rich imagery prompted by the subtitles for *Blind Spots 1/Cruel Poetics* illustrates this word/image connection. *Earth Centered Universe* evokes the challenges to church doctrine by early astronomers. *The Open Polar Sea* recalls the deadly search for the fictive northern passageway in the nineteenth century while *Les Pantalons Rouge* summons the red trousers French soldiers continued to wear during World War I, making them easy targets. White blind spots at the center of each architectural ornament provide a visual equivalent for these cautionary tales of misinformation with dire consequence.

The engrossing exhibit demonstrates this established artist's fresh commitment to the power of drawing and themes of innocence, wonder, deceit and regulation. Recently retired from a long teaching career at Carnegie Mellon University, she has produced a bravura body of work that is visually seductive and conceptually deep. Bellan-Gillen doesn't suggest how to get out of the rabbit hole of manipulated knowledge we've fallen into, but she does provide an enchanted environment from which to contemplate our predicament. ■

(June 11 – July 17, 2016)

Kristina Olson is associate director of the School of Art & Design at West Virginia University, a contributor to ARTPULSE *and exhibition reviews editor for* Art Inquiries.

PEDRO AVILA GENDIS: SHARED SECRETS

Kendall Art Center – Miami
Curated by Raisa Clavijo

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

Pedro Avila Gendis, ***From "Inner Space" series,*** **2016,** acrylic on canvas, 80" x 60." Private Collection.

Pedro Avila Gendis' latest solo show in Miami, "Shared Secrets," brings together a selection of pieces from three series encompassing pieces from 2012 to 2016, many of which are on exhibition for the first time. The series include *The Voice of the Earth* (2012-2015), *Sublime Landscapes* (2015-2016) and *Inner Space* (2016). Though the show is not precisely a chronological display, it allows the spectator to get a sense of Avila's work methods, spiritual concerns and progression on both over the past years. The exhibition also serves as a platform to present the last monography dedicated to the artist's work, which comprehensively explores his artistic production during the same period.

Two of these series, *The Voice of Earth* and *Sublime Landscapes,* reflect his appreciation for the natural world. Despite being abstract scenes, the elements in the compositions are structured in a way that could be interpreted as landscapes. Avila resisted the temptation to create a descriptive representation of nature, instead opting to register what seem to be his impressions of landscapes on the canvas' surface, some of which are calm and others more troubled. These pieces become a sort of journal, visually recording his emotional state of mind.

The third and last series in this show, *Inner Space*, stylistically resumes many of the formal traits present in the other series and throughout his artistic trajectory. Although he uses textures in many of his pieces, they stand out in this series. In these paintings, the planes are easier to define, as he treats the surface in a manner that virtually creates tridimensional effects. Avila Gendis approaches the canvas consciously with all stylistic devices available to him and combines typical techniques such as dripping with his distinctive brushstrokes. There is an inherent tension in the paintings between the dripping he often uses as background, whose results can be challenging to control unerringly, and the juxtaposed precise abstract forms in the first plane. He explores color at a new level. Even though he continues to use vibrant colors, in this case they become protagonists in the first planes, contrasting starkly with the gray and white tones used in the background. However, Avila resolves what could be a compositional dilemma for others by effectively balancing all these elements. Technically speaking, Avila's painting style is gestural, expressive and occasionally visceral.

Avila was born in 1959 in Camagüey, Cuba, where he attended the Ignacio Agramonte Cultural Center. His long artistic trajectory includes many exhibitions at galleries across the globe and a consistent body of work that stretches out over decades. A prolific artist who typically works in series, he is most well-known for his abstract paintings, though he is also an experienced sculptor, currently working on a series of pieces made in bronze.

In "Shared Secrets," we can appreciate the evolution of a creator who has transitioned through several stages, including a figurative beginning. Throughout his works, we can see the influences of Antonio Vidal, Hugo Consuegra, Grupo Los Once, among other artists who introduced Abstract Expressionism in Cuban art scene and whose legacy Avila Gendis has taken to a new frontier. ■

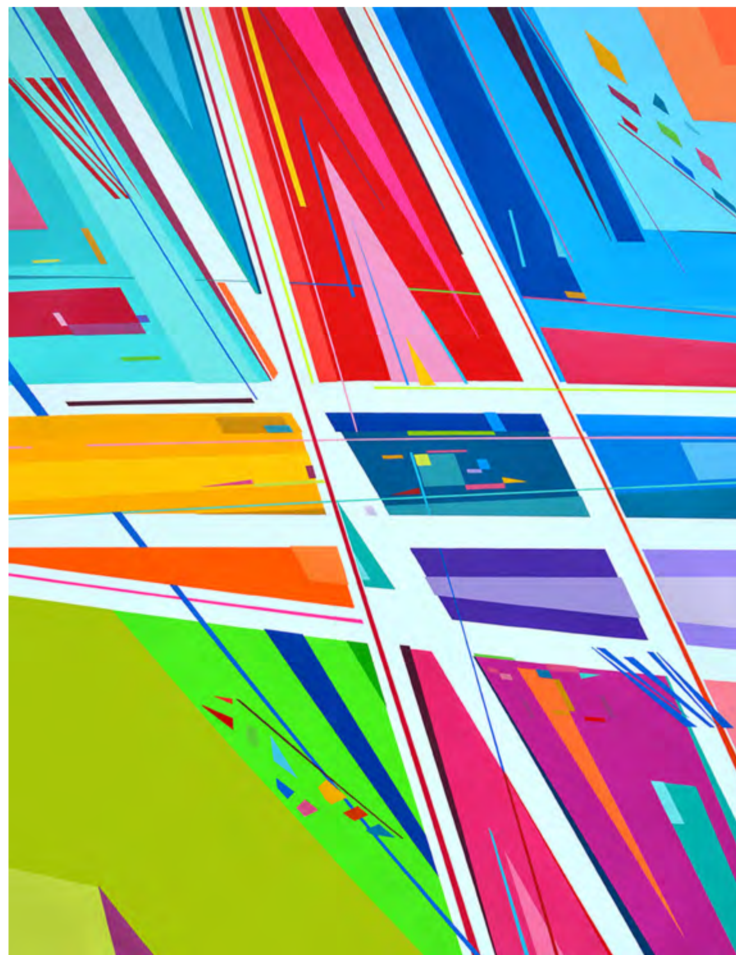
(September 23 – October 21, 2016)

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

KENOR: GENESIS/TECHNO

Valli Art Gallery – Miami

By Raisa Clavijo



Kenor, ***Escape from Acceleration,*** Barcelona 2016, 130" x 97." Courtesy of the artist and Valli Art Gallery.

Catalonian street artist Kenor recently exhibited "Genesis/Techno" in Miami's Wynwood Art District. This is not South Florida's first contact with his work, as he previously left his mark on walls around the city. Kenor's work is the result of his visual interpretation of music; that is to say, the pieces we see gathered in "Genesis/Techno" arose from his interest in Detroit techno, vibrant music, full of textures, which implicitly carries the spontaneity that defines his work, the impulse of the gesture of the mere act of painting.

Kenor got his start in the visual arts painting graffiti on trains at a very young age. This experience gave him a great ability to paint, since he had to do it very quickly to evade the police. Consequently, he learned how to paint without looking at what he was doing, with spray paint, developing a Geometric Abstraction associated with Op and Kinetic art. Painting a composition that he knew would be seen in movement influenced his style. Although he visualizes the structure of the work in advance, the materializing of his ideas always exceeds his initial calculations.

Kenor also composes electronic music, and his abstract works are precisely the materialization of sounds, tones and notes. From its beginnings, abstraction has had a close correlation with the language of music. Kandinsky recognized in abstract art a kind of poetry or visual music. Many of the first abstract works of the precursor of this movement evoked impressions of musical pieces. Kandinsky discovered that by liberating the basic elements of the image from the physical representation of the world—that is, the color, the line and the plane—he could liberate the message and thereby make it transcend from concrete to abstract ideas, closer to the essence of the spiritual. As part of the work process, Kenor listens to a lot of techno music and watches a lot of films. Being inside a movie theater, immersed in a film's plot, in a universe of images, special effects, sounds and sensations, opens doors of perception to him, leaving him in a kind of trance that activates his creativity.

Stylistically, his work carries the imprint of pioneers of Geometric Abstraction like Malevich and Kandinsky. However, Kenor did not know about the work of these creators when he started to paint. His style has arisen intuitively, motivated by the very visuality of the street, by fashion, by CD cover designs and by the contribution that artists like Jesús Soto and Carlos Cruz Diez have made to urban art, which has influenced the work of many graffiti artists.

Kenor has created murals in a variety of cities across the globe, including Barcelona; Paris; Dresden, Germany; Fort-de-France, Martinique; Aarlborg, Denmark; Kiev, Ukraine; and Leon, Spain. He has also dabbled in installations in which he creates a three-dimensional artwork and offers entry into them in such a way that the viewer feels inside the work, akin to being inside a musical composition, coexisting with the notes and even being able to touch them. For "Genesis/Techno," he created two sculptures in a Miami workshop. "In my work, sculpture appears when I tire of trying to make the paint come out of the wall," he said when I interviewed him last June.

The collection of works in "Genesis/Techno" requires different moments of appreciation and awakens the imagination of the observer to a limitless wealth of associations and values as rich as those that culture and the experience of the subject in question are able to produce. ■

(May 19 – June 19, 2016)

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

MOUTHWATER

National YoungArts Foundation - Miami
Curated by Robert Chambers

By Heike Dempster

"MouthWater," installation view at National YoungArts Foundation Gallery, Miami, October 2016.

Envisioned as a "feast of aesthetics in the visual arts" by curator Robert Chambers, the exhibition "MouthWater" metaphorically stands for and conceptually examines works of art as an outcome of the hunger, drive and determination it takes to create new work as an artist. "MouthWater" highlights the National YoungArts Foundation's role as a platform for dynamic dialogue between artists across generations, as the participating artists' shared history of experiencing participation in the YoungArts program between 1980 and 2016 anchors the exhibition.

With a visceral edge, Chambers connects artists whose works span generations and a variety of subject matters explored through painting, sculpture, site-specific installation, video installation and spoken word, among other media.

Many of the artists share their personal struggles and journeys through their works. Eric Rhein pays tribute to friends who died of complications from AIDS and presents pieces rooted in his own life with HIV, and Naomi Fisher's examinations of personal struggles resulted in haunting images that connect the viewer to the artist beyond the immediate interaction with the paintings. Nicole Eisenman and Anais Pérez are both interested in the human condition. Eisenman examines the subject authentically, emotionally and always with a little humor and self-reflection based on her observation of contemporary life and culture, while Pérez, a recent YoungArts alumna from 2015, looks at art's connection to the viewer and grapples with her own anxieties to further her understanding of the human condition.

Another theme connecting the works in "MouthWater" is the visual and emotional exploration of artistic media. Mikayla Brown is interested in walking the line between seduction and repulsion by playing with lushness and beauty and its relation to the grotesque. Her visceral approach, including the smashing of fruit in fake blood, ties the work directly to Chamber's curatorial vision. Brown takes her works even further by painting scenes from her video installations to question how different iterations of the same piece can have varying impacts depending on the medium.

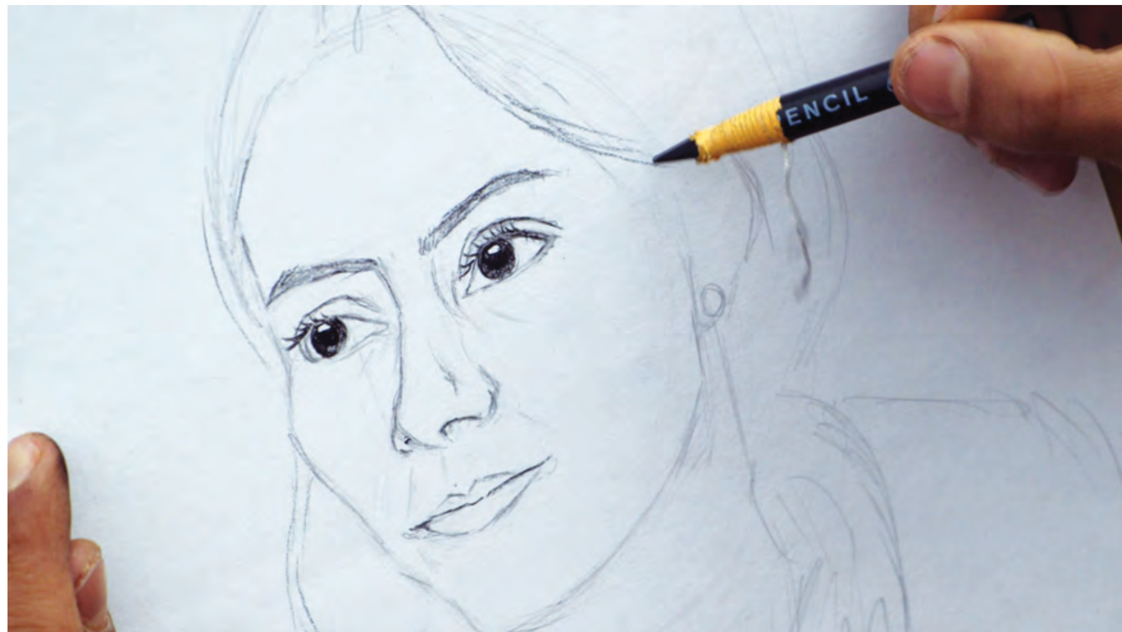
Cheryl Megan Smith's work explores different media and artistic expressions based on her assumption that words have meaning beyond daily usage in conversation. By using words and the sound of her own voice as well as mimicry as her creative tools, thereby juxtaposing language and imagery, Smith questions the boundaries of art while exploring various media from multiple angles. In terms of direct subject matter, her interest in dissecting American culture, gender politics, physics and religion create meaningful contemporary investigations.

Social justice and sociopolitical issues as well as social constructs represent another main thread that connects many of the works and artistic practices represented in "MouthWater." Nadia Wolff reflects on gender, religion, race and class. Sharing deeply personal concerns, Wolff combines embroidery and paint into mixed-media investigations that explore conflicts between femininity and masculinity, cultural groups and religions at each intersection of thread and paint and at each spot where her needle has pierced the canvas. Artists like Lee Heinemann and Rachel London combine research, education, social practice and art into works that position their practices in a flexible space. Their works thereby do not merely depict the communities and people they observe and engage with, but rather become part of said communities' dialogues, internal processes and constructs. By creating resounding artworks that are multi- and inter-disciplinary the works contribute to a discourse and ignite action and change as social catalysts.

Chamber's curatorial approach offers the viewer an opportunity to experience powerful works that are part of the contemporary art discourse. He presents longstanding artistic practices alongside a new wave of creative expression that explore the past as well as hint at what is yet to be expected. The exhibition allows the viewer to anticipate future possibilities, taking the narrative beyond the gallery walls and beyond the immediate viewer experience within a set space. The endless potential and ability of the artists to contribute to society and influence forthcoming developments inspires the viewer to believe in an exciting and powerful future of art and an artistic dialogue that informs other discourses on contemporary subjects, including race relations, gender identity, the role of art and the importance of art education. ■

(October 4 – November 21, 2016)

Heike Dempster is a writer, photographer and communications consultant based in Miami. After graduation from London Metropolitan University, she lived and worked as a music, art and culture publicist, journalist and radio host and producer in Jamaica and the Bahamas. She is a contributing writer to ARTPULSE, ARTDISTRICTS, Rooms Magazine, MiamiArtZine *and other local and international art publications, websites and blogs.*



Carlos Motta, *Deseos (Desires) (still),* **2015.** Courtesy Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon and Galerie Mor Charpentier, Paris.

CARLOS MOTTA: HISTORIES FOR THE FUTURE

Pérez Art Museum – Miami
Curated by María Elena Ortiz

By Raisa Clavijo

At Pérez Art Museum, New York-based Carlos Motta (Bogota, 1978) presents an exhibition through which he explores extremely contradictory positions about sexuality and eroticism in indigenous and European cultures during the conquest and colonization of Latin America. His research addresses the way in which different ethnic groups in the Americas came to terms with homosexuality and the question of gender before the arrival of the Europeans and how these roles changed as Western doctrines were established. His oeuvre revisits the aftermath of the conquest of the New World, offering a totally new cartography that shines a light on appalling stories, which have been erased from official history and denounce violence and intolerance, attitudes that still prevail today in the 21st century.

During the Inquisition, thousands of people were put to death both in Europe and its American colonies, accused of crimes against religious mandates. Notable amongst these "crimes" were sodomy, masturbation and zoophilia, which contravened sexual practices considered traditional. Motta reexamines colonialism, which destroyed indigenous cultures and beliefs, replacing them with orthodox morality anchored in Catholicism. The first piece in the exhibition, *Towards a Homoerotic Historiography*, presents 20 small, gold-plated sculptures arranged as a traditional museographic setting at a museum of history. Each of them re-creates a pre-Hispanic artifact representing a sexual act (most between members of the same sex) not accepted during the Colonial period. The artifacts were discovered in archeological excavations in Latin America. In reproducing them and re-circulating them in this exhibition, Motta creates a space for reinterpreting these vestiges that in most cases were erased from the material history of this region.

For its part, the *Nefandus Trilogy* (2013) includes three videos (*Nefandus*, *Naufragios* (Shipwreck) and *La visión de los vencidos* (The Defeated), each inspired by a real event. *Nefandus* and *La visión de los vencidos* have as a backdrop the Colombian Caribbean and are based on pre-Hispanic oral histories. A narrator recounts the relevant history in Kogi (Amerindian language, spoken only by the natives of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta). In *Nefandus*, the narrator alludes to a passageway in which the conquistadors found objects that represented homoerotic relations. Fragments in Kogi are juxtaposed with other fragments in which Motta in Spanish establishes a transhistorical dialogue with the narrator and through which he reflects on the structure of sexuality and its categorization relative to culture, history and the process of colonization. *La visión de los vencidos* describes a masculine ritual that ended in a massacre when the conquistadors discovered that it included sexual contact. *Naufragios* is an adaptation of the text "Misadventures of a Sodomite Exiled in 17th century Bahia," as told by the anthropologist Luiz Mott. The video describes the life of Luiz Delgado, a Portuguese man accused of sodomy in the 17th century in Portugal and Brazil. The video reproduces the imaginary voice of Delgado recounting how he was tortured for the sin of sodomy and how he managed to survive. The video shows a map of the Portuguese colonies on which Motta has attempted to trace new cartographies in order to make room for voices such as that of Delgado, which was silenced during the Inquisition.

The fourth film shown, *Deseos* (2015), brings to light the story of Martina Parra, a Colombian woman who in 1803 was accused by her lover, Juana María, of being a hermaphrodite. Motta discovered Martina's case while doing research in the Archivo General de la Nación (National Archives) in Bogota. Martina was subjected to a trial and analyzed by doctors and lawyers to determine the gravity of her offense. Hidden in the archives, her story bears witness to the oppression that human beings have had to confront as a result of laws and strict Catholic morality. In *Deseos*, her story connects to that of Nour, a woman residing in Ottoman Beirut who was forced to marry her lover's brother in order to "rectify" her sexual conduct. Through a hypothetical epistolary exchange between Martina and Nour, Motta and the anthropologist Maya Mikdashi make note of the relevance to the battles for sexual emancipation and freedom in contemporary society.

In this exhibition, Motta undertakes a revision of history, relying as much on documentary research as on fiction to create new narratives that reflect on the plural nature of sexual identity in contrast to the totalitarianism that has known no time constraints or geographic bounds as civilization has evolved. ■

(July 15, 2016 - January 15, 2017)

SPEAKING OF ABSTRACTION. LANGUAGE TRANSITIONS IN LATIN AMERICAN ART

Durban Segnini Gallery - Miami
Curated by Dennys Matos

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

Jaildo Marinho, *Untitled,* 2013, wood, acrylic and nylon on pvc, 79" x 48.3" Courtesy of Durban Segnini Gallery, Miami.

Abstraction in Latin America has been the axial point of interest in the region for collectors and curators in recent years. As a result, there have been numerous exhibitions in museums and galleries worldwide devoted to illustrate the many theses about it, as well as the trajectories of different artists. One of these exhibitions is "Speaking of Abstraction. Language Transitions in Latin American Art," currently on view at Durban Segnini Gallery. This show is the second part of "Abstraction and Constructivism. Continuity and Breakdown of Latin American Modernity" presented last year at the same venue and both curated by Dennys Matos. This show gathers together a selection of works by Carmelo Arden Quin, Mateo Manaure, Luisa Richter, César Paternosto, Juvenal Ravelo, Carlos Rojas, Manolo Vellojín, William Barbosa, Flavio Garciandía, Beto De Volder, Emilia Sirrs and Jaildo Marinho.

The curatorial proposal behind this exhibition differs from other attempts in the sense that it is not a chronological or generational survey. Neither is it thematic nor does it pretend to be an encyclopedic presentation of Latin American Abstractionism. Matos is more interested in creating a dialogue between the artists and their pieces regardless of its conceptual or formal departures. His view tends toward an inclusiveness in which many forms of abstraction can coexist in the same space and resist any specific classification. Through the works of these 12 artists, the exhibition brings together pieces from different periods, starting with the earliest, from 1948, to the most recent, from 2015, offering as broad a spectrum as possible. Stylistically, we can see points of contact and divergence between artists such as Garciandía and De Volder, with their sinuous forms that seem to be inspired by nature; in contrast, Pasternosto's and Marinho's works show linear and geometric structures. In another section of the room, again placed side by side, we can appreciate Manaure, Ravelo and Barbosa forming an interesting intergenerational dialogue in a similar formal language linked to Op art that defies perception. The diversity in the way the artists gathered in this show have approached compositions and used methods throughout the years is a clear testimony that the interest in exploring the infinite possibilities and limits of abstractionism has persisted, at least among the creators, despite the commercial level of relevance at any given moment. The selection of artists and pieces responds to the intention to demonstrate that abstraction is not restricted to a specific time frame or country but responds to the personal needs of artistic expression. This second exhibition serves as a new point of reflection about this artistic movement, specifically the opportunity to analyze and discuss how art critics have approached it over time. In his introductory essay to the catalogue that accompanies the show, Matos questions the consensus that he feels has erroneously sought to define a given moment in art as a response to something specific and challenges us to look at these works with fresh eyes. His proposal is to approach abstraction as a whole, to validate the regional contributions but also to perceive Latin American art as part of a global movement and consequently to reevaluate it. ■

(July 8 – October 30, 2016)

LINDA TOUBY: SENSUOUS SURFACES

ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries – Coral Gables, FL

By Michael Mills

Polarities abound in the most recent body of work from the New York-based painter Linda Touby. Abstraction struggles to break free from figuration. Discipline yields to spontaneity. The past nips at the heels of the present. Bold blocks of turbulent color are tamed, tentatively, by thin straight lines running along the edges of the canvases.

Touby was already moving away from the figurative oil paintings of her student days when, in 1985, she encountered a game-changing solo exhibition by the well-established Richard Pousette-Dart, best known as one of the founders of the New York School of abstract expressionist painting. The show further nudged Touby in the direction of abstraction, which she fully embraces in her later work.

That landmark exhibition was "Richard Pousette-Dart: Paintings from the 1940s to the Present," which Helen Kohen, a *Miami Herald* art critic at the time, declared "a highlight of the season." The venue was ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries in Coral Gables, and the show marked the first time Pousette-Dart had exhibited his work in the southern United States. Miller went on to represent both Pousette-Dart and Touby in South Florida, with Touby showing there since the mid-1990s. Touby went on to study with Pousette-Dart in New York, and the older artist became one of her strongest influences.

Both artists were transplants to the city that came to mean so much to them. Pousette-Dart had been born in Minnesota but moved to New York State when he was about 2. Touby was a Florida native whose family relocated to New York while she was still in her teens. She received her B.A. from Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, then continued her studies at the Art Students League and the National Academy of Art, both also in New York.

Given this background, it was especially fitting that Touby's solo exhibit "Sensuous Surfaces" debuted at ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries. Even more fitting that Touby's show arrived in the summer of 2016, coinciding with the centennial of her teacher, whose show at the same venue more than 30 years ago had so inspired her. Such tidy but satisfying circularity is usually found only in books and movies.

The roughly two-dozen paintings in "Sensuous Surfaces," drawn from the past decade, are in Touby's mature abstract style. Pousette-Dart's influence is still evident, although more often obliquely than directly. In place of the spherical forms suggestive of the sun that appeared repeatedly in Pousette-Dart's work, Touby posits the idea of a horizon, which turns up in all but a handful of the "Sensuous Surfaces" paintings. Almost invariably, the broad horizontal bands of bold color that Touby is partial to emphasize the horizon, luring us into the paintings and their perceived depth.

We're pulled even deeper by Touby's layering of dry pigment, wax, and thick glazes, a Renaissance technique that creates the illusion of depth and volume. (Another artist Touby claims as a source is, unexpectedly, the Early Renaissance Italian master Giotto.) What appear at first glance to be blocks of pure color reveal themselves, on closer inspection, to be heavily worked-over surfaces—those "sensuous surfaces" of the show's title.

Take, for instance, *Pigeons 562*, a 60-inch-square painting dominated by a very large block of gold. But the gold is really just the outermost of many layers of pigment—like the surface of the sun, the painting seems to be roiling with oranges and yellows and multiple shades of gold. According to Touby, she started her "Pigeons Series" after visits to Picasso's home in the south of France, inspired not so much by the doves she saw both in Picasso's house and in his work, but by "the clear blue sky and Mediterranean colors."

The underlying colors peek through more subtly in other paintings. *Blue 1059* has wisps of pale purple lurking beneath the surface blue. A series called "Sidney's Door," from 2014-15, features washes of various shades of white overlaying the masked colors beneath. The series was inspired by the oversize studio door of one of Touby's New York neighbors, Sidney Geist, a prolific sculptor and author of *Interpreting Cézanne* as well as several books on the Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi. (Geist died in 2005.)

The same effects can be seen on a monumental scale in *Blue*, at 84 inches wide by 74 inches tall, it is the largest, and most commanding, painting in the exhibition. (Most of the pieces in the show are fairly large.) There are faint highlights of red and orange here and there, but it's the breathtaking blue of the title that sweeps us away, paler above the horizon line, darker and richer below it. Touby has said that this and the other paintings that make up her "Blue Series" came about from "spending long hot summers in my studio in New York City wishing, at times, that I could be at the sea under a beautiful blue sky." Indeed, the painting vividly summons up not only the blues of the sky but also the azure-blue waters of the tropics.

Blue is also the show's finest example of how Touby incorporates wax into her paintings. While it would be a stretch to characterize this as encaustic—that ancient, now largely overlooked medium—Touby uses wax strategically, as an adjunct to her oil paints. It's all but unnoticeable in some works, much more prominent in others.

Another affinity between Touby and Pousette-Dart occurred to me after I had spent an hour or so wandering among the paintings of "Sensuous Surfaces": Both are artists with a spiritual orientation that strongly informs their work. By emptying their art of virtually all figurative content, each achieves the kind of transcendence associated with meditative states.

What we are left with, in effect, is a range of colors that inspire receptivity and encourage contemplation. All those colors simmering beneath the surface can be thought of as the internal chatter that is calmed by meditation, with Touby the Zen master in charge. The paintings in "Sensuous Surfaces" hold together as a self-defined body of work, playing off and reinforcing one another, and fully inhabiting the space they occupy. Even though these works were created over the course of a decade, they're remarkably consistent in style and content. At age 70, Linda Touby has achieved a fully articulated artistic vision of clarity and precision. ■

(May 6 – October 26, 2016)

Michael Mills has written about the visual arts in South Florida for more than 25 years, including seven and a half years as film critic for The Palm Beach Post *and 15 years as art critic for* New Times Broward/Palm Beach. *He graduated with honors in English and creative writing from the University of Alabama. He lives in Wilton Manors, FL.*

Linda Touby, *Homage to Giotto, #435,* 2009, oil and wax on linen, 56" x 56." All images are courtesy of the artist and ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries, Coral Gables, Miami.

Linda Touby, *Sidney's Door 25,* 2015, oil and wax on linen, 60" x 48."

Liu Chuang, ***Love Story No. 8,*** **2006-2014,** old books. Courtesy of the artist and Para Site, Hong Kong.

THAT HAS BEEN AND MAY BE AGAIN

Para Site - Hong Kong
Curated by Leo Li Chen and Wu Mo

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

The 1990s were a convoluted time for China in terms of social and political restlessness. In the world's eyes, it all began with the student movement in 1989, which made headlines after the famous incident in which a man stood defiantly in front of a tank at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing. It continued throughout the decade, and the next big chapter was the transfer of the Hong Kong territory sovereignty from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China in 1997, with its new classification as 'special administrative region of China,' adding more uncertainty about the future. "That Has Been and May Be Again" gathers works by Chen Qiulin, Hu Jieming, Jiang Zhi, Leung Chi Wo, Li Jin, Li Jinghu, Liu Chuang, Liu Ding, Ma Liuming, Wang Youshen, Wang Youshen, Yan Lei, Yin Xiuzhen, Zheng Bo, and Zhu Jia.

This exhibition shows how artists addressed that insecurity through their work, documenting its perception on a social level. One of the first tangible changes in the country, aside from the new free market, was the role of the media. Newspapers started to incorporate new sections such as "fashion," and tabloids made their way to newsstands. This situation translated into an increase in media circulation, changing the structure and interest of the common people up to that time. *Newspaper. Advertising* from 1993, one of the two pieces by Wang Youshen, reflects the reform that changed the media industry. The image shows the Great Wall covered in newspapers, an allegory for the past and future, representing the closed nature of the past and approaching openness. *Love Story No. 8*, by Liu Chuang, covers another side of how the information circulated. The installation consists of two parts, one on the floor, one on the walls. The floor side is a perfectly ordered accumulation of books gathered from secondhand bookstores. These books used to circulate among workers, becoming their favorite literature. They often wrote on them their inner thoughts and then passed them on, creating an informal network of "power to the people." The walls amplify some of the drawings and texts, in English and Chinese, taken from the books.

Zheng Bo's installation *Liang Xiaoyan* is a subtle reminder of political dissidence. It takes a scene from *The Gates of Heavenly Peace*, a documentary about the Tiananmen Square protests. It shows the face of Liang Xiaoyan, who was involved in the protests, made up by plants that are constantly growing.

The hasty urbanization of China was another consequence of the period. So was migration due to all the new construction. Chen Qiulin's video *Farewell Poem* (2002) deals with the mixed feelings that it provoked. The video juxtaposes images from the Peking opera *Farewell My Concubine* with crumbling buildings, conveying the sense of frustration and uncertainty provoked by displacement.

Ma Liuming is an artist known for his provocative performances, which often involve nudity. His photographs in this show are stills from his first performance, *Dialogue with Gilbert and George* (1993), in which he appears shirtless with red paint on his body.

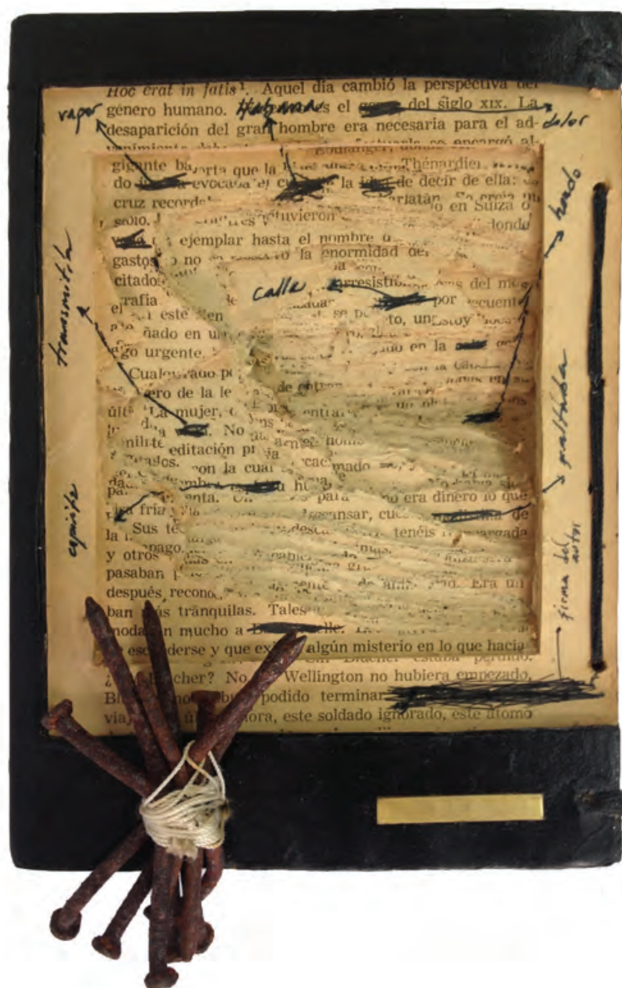
This exhibition mirrors the sociopolitical challenges that face Chinese society; overall the awakening of an individual conscience versus the previous predominant communist idea of a mass. It transmits the anxiety and uncertainty in front of a transformation that is still happening in China. ■

(June 11 – August 21, 2016)

ADONIS FERRO: CONJURO

Punctum Galería – Mexico City
Curated by Juan Antonio Molina

By Irving Domínguez



Adonis Ferro, ***Regla de Oro,*** **2013,** book-object, 8.26" x 7.08" x 1.81." Courtesy of the artist.

"Conjuro" (Incantation), Adonis Ferro's first solo show in Mexico City, is a new chapter in the series *El intenso proceso de descentrar* that he started in 2013. Comprised of small-format sculptures and installations created with materials recycled or found at the exhibition locale, the series uses as motivation the symbolic and material erosion of certain notable events in literary modernity, taken as much from Western culture as from Cuban culture. For this he manipulates examples of texts used as raw material for his artistic production, and they end up combined with objects associated with religious practices different than Judeo-Christian monotheism.

The process of destabilization is taken even further when the artist inserts small texts that he has written himself into some of his paintings, as well as into pages ripped out of books. These are disconnected phrases and word associations full of lyricism, echoing the same deconstructed modernist referents. In this way, Víctor Hugo, José Martí and Rubén Darío are examined in detail in *Regla de Oro* (2013), as well as *Legado del maestro* and *Díptico* (both from 2014).

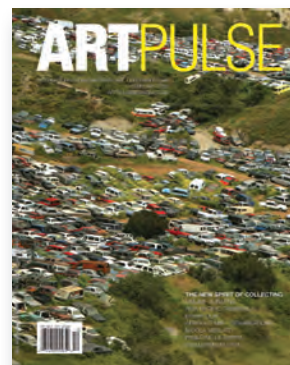
For this exhibition, painting is the axis around which the curatorship of Juan Antonio Molina is organized. The collection of selected pieces is characterized by intense work on each canvas, transforming figurative space conventions into a dense surface, refractive as though referring to black mirrors. Ferro makes modifications on them, revealing the impenetrable character of the representation. Guided by the intervention of the text, inscriptions allow for the incorporation of new elements into the composition. The preceding is very clear in *Tu piel caliente* (2015-2016) and *Conjuro postpasional* (2016). In *Padre* (2015), an indistinct object, perhaps a stone or plastic bag, dominates the painting. Before a dark background, it appears to dissolve, and the word, like a smudge, amplifies the play of dissolutions in which the artist engages continuously.

Since 2013, Ferro has distorted the expectations of the audience vis-à-vis these actions, mise-en-scènes and interactions with the public in the field of contemporary art. Contrary to the conventional consumption of theater arts, this young artist breaks the distinctions between performers and the audience through a process of horizontalization, which compels audience members to acknowledge their role as secondary participants in the actions that they are witnessing. All of his series *Des-concierto* goes to great lengths in this respect.

With a different impact, "Conjuro" is inspired by such interest and seeks to display the ambiguity of production in the current visual arts for which its conditioning as painting, sculpture or object art depends completely on a linguistic designation. Ferro gets ahead of us in this manner, not only entitling the work in advance but also including it in the work itself; that is to say, he inscribes the function in a *useless* object, if we respect the modernist conception of art. However, he does not always get what he wants. An example of this is *Prosopopeya* (2013), a video also included in the show, in which it is futile to define how much is documental and how much is pastoral in the presentation. ■

(July 9 – September 9, 2016)

Irving Domínguez is an independent curator and researcher. In 2015, he completed a decade of curatorial experience. He is the coauthor of Alberto Flores Varela. Esplendor del retrato en estudio*, Nuevo León: CONARTE (2014). He is author of the blog http://usuariobsolescente.wordpress.com/, which compiles his critiques and documentation on his curatorial projects.*



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Harding Meyer, Untitled (28-2015), 2015, oil on canvas, 75 x 98.5 inches, Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto

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