

# THE SEEN

CHICAGO'S INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY & MODERN ART

1e	4a	3
1d	1c	3
3c	6e	4

<sup>1</sup>situation.<sub>1</sub>                      <sup>1</sup>No!<sub>2</sub>                      <sup>2</sup>because<sub>3</sub>

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<sup>1</sup>ideological<sub>7</sub>                      <sup>2</sup>boat,<sub>8</sub>                      <sup>3</sup>in<sub>9</sub>

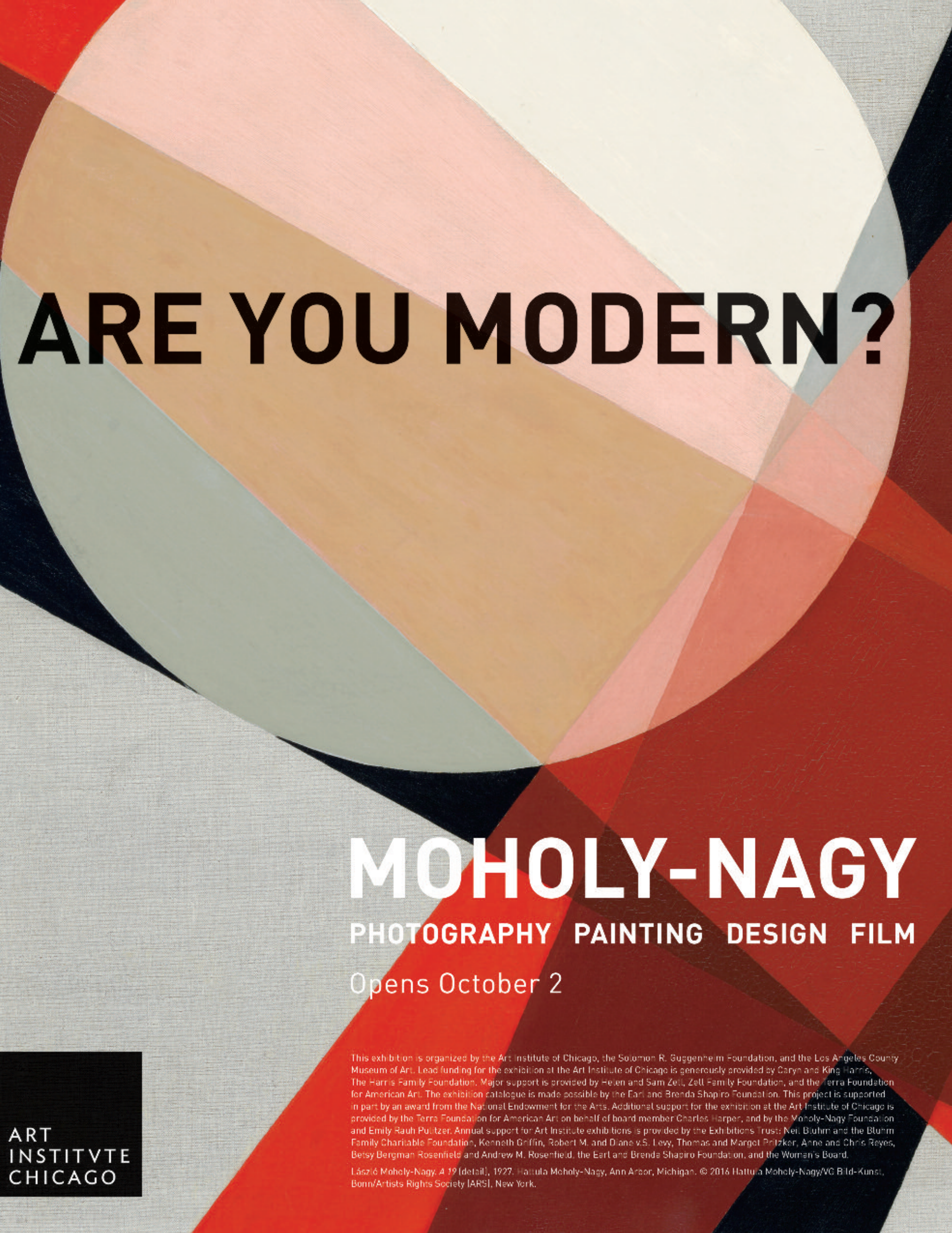
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<sup>2</sup>and<sub>19</sub>                      <sup>3</sup>one's<sub>20</sub>                      <sup>4</sup>situation<sub>21</sub>



# ARE YOU MODERN?

## MOHOLY-NAGY

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Opens October 2

This exhibition is organized by the Art Institute of Chicago, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Lead funding for the exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago is generously provided by Caryn and King Harris, The Harris Family Foundation. Major support is provided by Helen and Sam Zell, Zell Family Foundation, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. The exhibition catalogue is made possible by the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support for the exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago is provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art on behalf of board member Charles Harper, and by the Moholy-Nagy Foundation and Emily Rauh Pulitzer. Annual support for Art Institute exhibitions is provided by the Exhibitions Trust: Neil Bluhm and the Bluhm Family Charitable Foundation, Kenneth Griffin, Robert M. and Diane v.S. Levy, Thomas and Marget Protzker, Anne and Chris Reyes, Betsy Bergman Rosenfield and Andrew M. Rosenfield, the Earl and Brenda Shapiro Foundation, and the Woman's Board.

László Moholy-Nagy: A 19 (detail), 1927. Hattula Moholy-Nagy, Ann Arbor, Michigan. © 2016 Hattula Moholy-Nagy/VC Bild-Kunst, Bonn/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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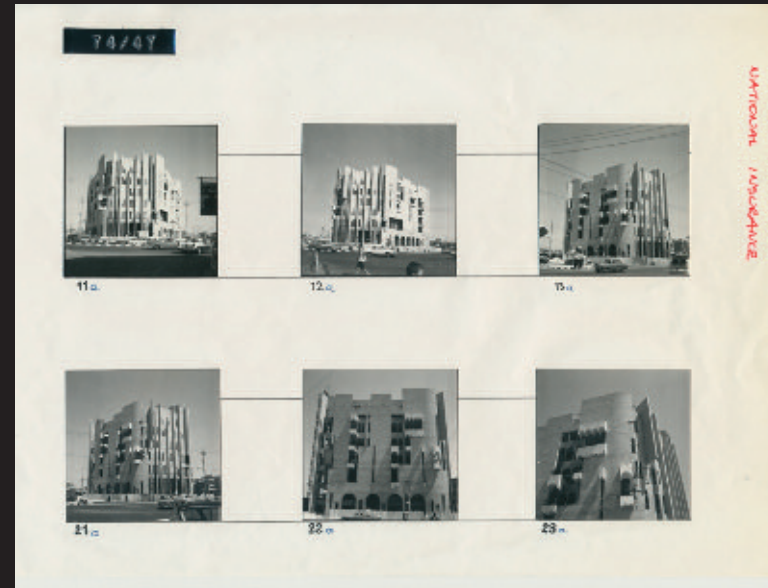
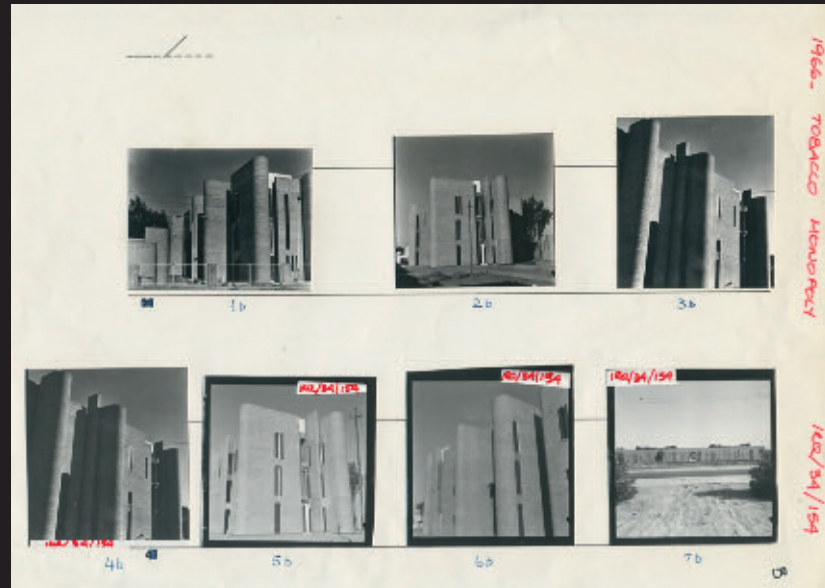
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# THE SEEN

## Issue 03

# Chicago’s International Journal of Contemporary & Modern Art

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(*Emergency Conditionals* Selected by Stephanie Cristello)

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### PUBLISHER’S NOTE



It is apropos that our publication celebrates the context of both art and language, and that Issue 03 of THE SEEN pays homage to the work of a most influential artist collaborative of the same name.

Our relationship with Art & Language happened (as many things do) through longstanding friendships and chance meetings. One of those meetings was with Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts, a curator who has championed the work of the group internationally, and who has partnered with us to invite members Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden to Chicago for a symposium, as well as break new ground showcasing an exhibition of their early work at the exposition. The rest is...well, in this issue.

For personal and professional reasons, I am extremely proud of our feature on the inimitable Rhona Hoffman, whose eponymous gallery is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. Her impact on Chicago’s arts community is profound, and her global influence as a leading art dealer and champion for artists and their practice is inspirational. Bravo.

This issue introduces many firsts, including the acknowledgment and focus an institution, rather than an artist. The centennial anniversary of The Arts Club of Chicago, pictured in these pages as a graphic timeline, presents readers with a unique opportunity to

engage with the Club’s celebrated history, and long legacy of presenting landmark exhibitions and programs with leading international artists, architects, and writers—all of whom have had a great influence on our cultural community.

We also welcome Omar Kholeif as a contributor to THE SEEN—and most excitedly, to our city as the Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago—in an insightful interview with painter and filmmaker Basim Magdy, in advance of his first US museum exhibition at the institution. Omar is a celebrated curator, writer, and influencer who comes to us from his most recent curatorial position at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. I am confident that he will make a huge impact on our city, the museum, and greatly expand our worldview of many new artists and their work.

Finally, as we continue to increase our print run, distribution and international scope, I sincerely thank all of our writers for their contributions, and offer additional thanks to our exceptional advertisers for their support of Issue 03. Collectively, your assistance is propelling this publication in new directions and we look ahead to many more editions in the future.

### TONY KARMAN

Publisher

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Stephanie Cristello** (Canadian b. 1991) is a critic and independent curator living and working in Chicago, IL. She is the Senior Editor US for *ArtSlant*, and is the founding Editor-in-Chief of *THE SEEN*, *Chicago’s International Journal of Contemporary & Modern Art*. She is a frequent contributor to the London-based publication *ArtReview*, and her writing has appeared in *Frieze Magazine*, *BOMB Magazine*, *Elephant Magazine*, and *New American Paintings* among other outlets, and numerous exhibition catalogues nationally and internationally. She graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2013 with a Liberal Arts Thesis. She is currently the Director of Programming at EXPO CHICAGO, the International Exposition of Contemporary & Modern Art.

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curatorial internships at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; No Longer Empty, NYC and Israel Museum, Jerusalem. She writes for THE SEEN, La Pupila, Chicago Reader and Art Slant. Her papers include “The world that reveals that it is a world: On the art of Mono-ha” and “The Value in Context: Michael Asher’s Displacements in Chicago, 1979 and 2005.”

**Alfredo Cramerotti** is a writer and curator in modern and contemporary art, film, video, photography, and new media. Director of MOSTYN, Wales, Head Curator of APT Artist Pension Trust as well as the roaming curatorial agencies AGM Culture and CPS Chamber of Public Secrets, his most recent projects include the Mauritius Pavilion at the 56th Venice Art Biennale, Italy, and Sequences VII, the real-time festival biennial in Reykjavik, Iceland. He is Editor of the *Critical Photography* series by Intellect Books, and his own publications include the book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to inform without informing* (2009).

**Katy Donoghue** is a graduate of New York University’s Journalism School and is currently the editor in chief of Whitewall Magazine. She manages an international team of contributing writers and photographers and has interviewed the likes of Hiroshi Sugimoto, Cai Guo-Qiang, Catherine Opie, Diane Von Furstenberg, Pharrell Williams, among many other artists, designers, and collectors. In 2013, she helped to launch Whitewall China in Beijing. She currently lives in Chicago with her husband and cat Hoagie.

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**Terry R. Myers** is a critic, independent curator, and Professor of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is a regular contributor to *Afterall*, *ArtReview* and *The Brooklyn Rail* and has contributed essays to numerous exhibition catalogues and books. His recent books include *Mary Heilmann: Save the Last Dance for Me* (Afterall Books, 2007), and *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2011).

**Caroline Picard** is an artist, writer, publisher, and curator. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *ArtForum*, *Flash Art International*, *Paper Monument*, and *Artslant* among other publications. In 2014 she was the Curatorial Fellow at La Box, ENSA in France, and became a member of the SYNAPSE International Curators’ Network of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2015. She is the Executive Director of The Green Lantern Press—a nonprofit publishing house and art producer in operation since 2005—and the Co-Director of Sector 2337, a hybrid artspace/bar/bookstore in Chicago.

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**Anastasia Karpova Tinari** (MA, Art History, American University, BA, Washington & Lee University) is a Chicago-based curator, writer, and art historian. She currently works as Associate Director at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, is a Resident Curator for ACRE exhibitions, and contributes regularly to *Newcity* and *THE SEEN*.

**Willem Helmet Pickleman** is a current undergraduate at Brown University concentrating in Modern Culture and Media and History of Art and Architecture. His work has been exhibited at the university’s David Winston Bell Gallery. He was awarded the Dixon Ticonderoga Distinguished Young Scholar award in 2012.



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Stephanie Cristello



## ISSUE 03

Text in space has a double impact. Exhibitions that subsist on the written word are both read and felt, enacted by the reader and affected by them. The delivery of their writing is imagined in many voices, many tones. The experience of text-based art is authenticated differently by each interaction; its legibility is dependent on a close and intimate encounter. The image of this type of work belongs, primarily, in the viewer’s mind—the text becomes an object. In this regard, to think an image is to own it.

It is with that sentiment that we introduce Issue 03 of THE SEEN.

The cover of this publication details a work by British conceptualists Art & Language, whose work since the late 1960s has been credited for introducing an essayistic practice into modern art, which allowed the conditions of conceptual art to emerge. Since 1977, Art & Language has mainly concerned three people, artists Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, who now work in their studio outside of Oxford in the UK, and critic the late Charles Harrison.

Were it not for a first encounter with Art & Language’s work at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, which opened nearly six years ago in February of 2010, one could say THE SEEN would not approach art criticism the same way it does now. I was a Freshman in college, entering my second semester studying toward a degree in Visual Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The show made an impact, eventually subsuming my curatorial

focus, and informing my ongoing interests in publishing and editorial through the lens of text as art.

I was, however, more recently reintroduced to their work intimately and intensely after being introduced to Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts through Tony Karman, in a cafe in Basel last summer. Since then, over the past year we have met in multiple places, across many geographies, slowly developing a program dedicated to Art & Language in Chicago. In the spring I attended an opening of Art & Language at the Château de Montsoreau in the Loire region in France, which van Coenegrachts curated from the Philippe Méaille collection, and a few days later arranged for a brief visit to London, to take a train to meet Mel and Michael in their studio. There, we discussed the inclusion of a text in THE SEEN, and here we have published “Emergency Conditionals,” a most special edition within the pages of Issue 03.

In many ways, the piece sets the tone for the collection of writing within this publication, and is accompanied by another special editioned work by Luis Camnitzer, produced by René Schmitt. The edition, entitled *TIMELANGUAGE* is followed by an interview with Camnitzer conducted in New York. Rhona Hoffman is also featured, through her fortieth anniversary as a gallerist, and Egyptian painter and filmmaker Basim Magdy is interviewed by Omar Kholeif, recently appointed Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, in advance of his first US museum survey at the institution, which will open in December. Issue 03 also features a graphic timeline that pictures some of the hidden histories of The Arts Club of Chicago as it celebrates its centennial anniversary, and includes global reviews from Manifesta 11 and Francis Picabia at the Kunsthau in Zürich; Nan Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* at MoMA in New York; the indigenous perspectives included in SITE Santa Fe’s biennial that looks at art from the Americas; and many other features, interviews, and reviews from Chicago and abroad.

As always, I must thank all the writers who have contributed to this

issue—working with you and giving a platform to your ideas is among the greatest pleasures in editing this journal. Thank you also to all who make THE SEEN a reality, to publisher Tony Karman for his ongoing support in growing this publication, as we expand our print run and distribution, our fantastic advertisers whose support to our mission we are incredibly grateful for, the great look of all three of our issues over the past year by the JNL Graphic Design, and Newcity Custom Publishing for their assistance in production and distribution.

For this and so much more, we hope you enjoy reading.

**Stephanie Cristello**  
Editor-in-Chief

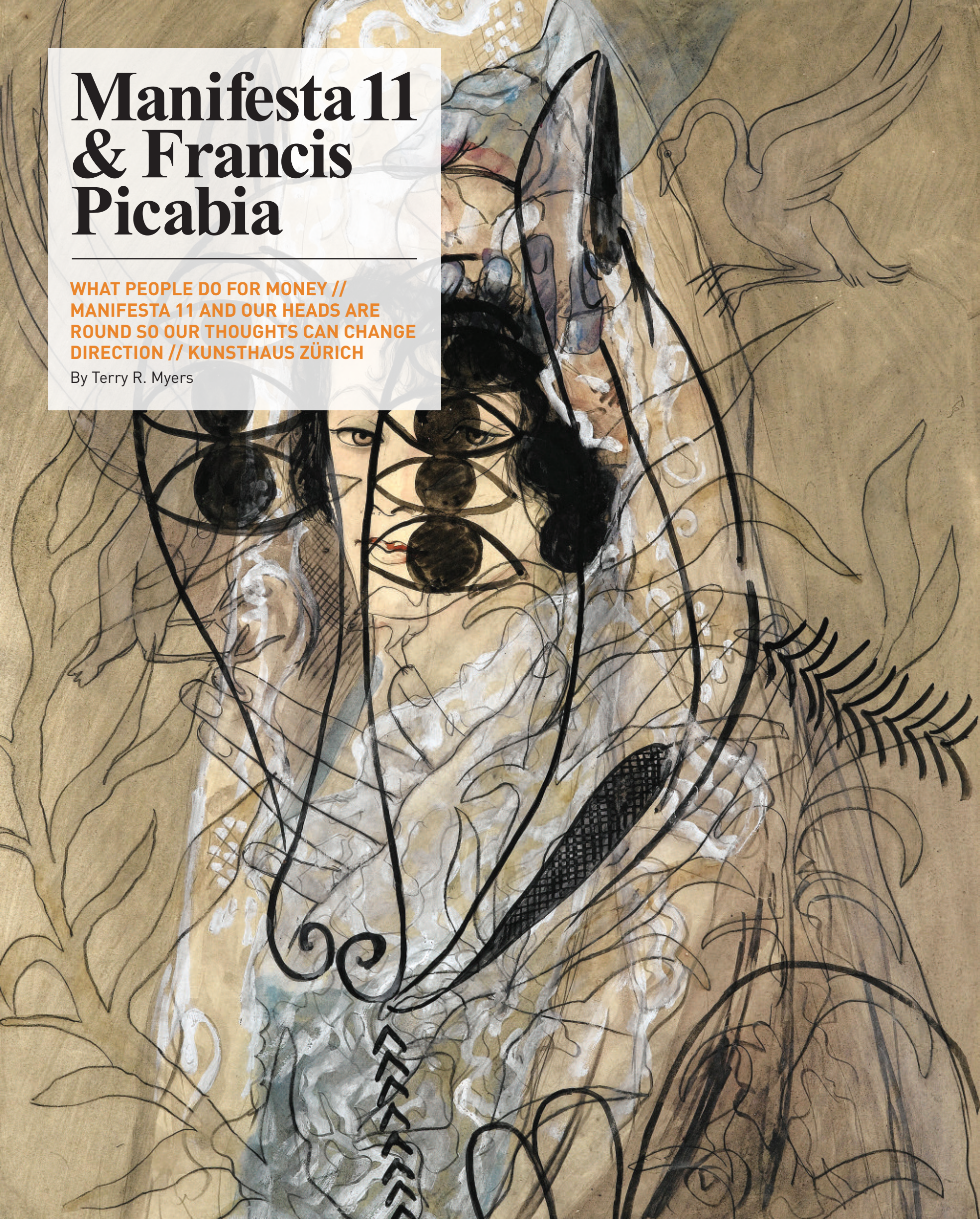
# Reviews



# Manifesta 11 & Francis Picabia

WHAT PEOPLE DO FOR MONEY //  
MANIFESTA 11 AND OUR HEADS ARE  
ROUND SO OUR THOUGHTS CAN CHANGE  
DIRECTION // KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

By Terry R. Myers



[ THE SEEN ]

Who doesn't want a partner in crime? Before arriving in Zürich this summer for the opening of Manifesta 11, I hadn't thought too much about the rich harmonic (and, better yet, dissonant) convergence that would come from pairing the latest version of "The European Biennial of Contemporary Art" with a Francis Picabia retrospective that opened at the Kunsthaus Zürich just a few days before (it will travel in November to MoMA in New York). The story goes that one of the key reasons that Zürich was chosen to host Manifesta 11 was because 2016 is the centennial of the city's contributions to the Dada movement. The story of Zürich Dada is fantastic, even epic,

full of antics and misadventures, refusals and resistance, friends and enemies, and the lasting impact of some killer works of art—none more devastating (in the best way) than some of Picabia's from the early period of his far-reaching career. What could be better for accompanying yet another international biennial than the lasting edge and high energy of Dada, as represented in the work of artist who kept on going? Talk about an opportunity.

Picabia's exhibition is a triumph and Manifesta was not a disaster. Unprepared for the level to which the sustained energy of the former would overwhelm the

substantial ambitions of the latter, the two exhibitions demonstrated the skewed relationship between the general and the specific in contemporary art today. I spent the afternoon before the Manifesta press preview with Picabia; by the time I got to the second room, I was already berating myself as to why the exhibition had not figured in my plans to cover the biennial—perhaps I was too focused on the surprising selection of an artist, Christian Jankowski, as its curator. The surprise was not that it was him, but that an artist was selected at all. Though, given Jankowski's perpetual collaboration with those "outside" the art world in

## I'VE GOT THE BRAINS YOU'VE GOT THE LOOKS LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY

— PET SHOP BOYS, "OPPORTUNITIES (LET'S MAKE LOTS OF MONEY)," 1986









Given that Jankowski’s own artistic production is so dependent upon highlighting the tensions and resolutions between art and, let’s say, life—or artists and others—the films suggest the thin line between an accomplice and a third wheel. Put another way, what good is a partner in crime who always gets in the way?

his own work, he has kept the door open for such an invitation since the beginning of his career. This is not a negative assessment—rather, following Jankowski’s work over the years has more often than not been engaging. During the press conference, I asked what he would think if some of us came away concluding that Manifesta was in fact the largest Christian Jankowski work of art to date. Like most good artists, he sidestepped the question very well.

Overall, the exhibition, refreshingly subtitled *What People Do For Money*, kept to its criteria. Its core section, *The Historical Exhibition: Sites Under Construction*, co-curated with Francesca Gavin, made an admirable attempt to be as broad as possible, setting a wide range of historical art works alongside new commissions, most of which were presented in the “white cube” spaces of the Löwenbräukunst and the Helmhaus. At its best, it pulled double duty by setting up the remaining components of Manifesta spread out across the city by creating moment after moment of varying “collaborations” between works of art rather than artists, in pairings such as Andreas Gursky’s

photograph *Karlsruhe Siemens* (1991) and Trevor Paglen’s *NSA-Tapped Undersea Cable, North Pacific Ocean* (2016). Alternately, in an observational collusion, the exhibition made the extra-meta move of bringing Sharon Lockhart’s multi-part photographic mural *Lunch Break Installation*, ‘*Duane Hanson: Sculptures of Life*,’ 14 December 2002–23 February 2003, *Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 2003* (2003) face to face with its “real” thing, Duane Hanson’s hyperreal sculptural tableau *Lunchbreak* (1989). While presented mainly on a scaffold-type structure across the many spaces, the historical component did not overtake the presentation of the strongest new works commissioned for Manifesta. These included Mike Bouchet’s *The Zurich Load* (2016), 80,000 kgs of sludge made from one day of Zürich’s human waste and presented as a set of eye-nose-and-throat stinging black cubes; and Carles Congost’s faux-documentary film *Simply the Best* (2016), done in collaboration with members of the Zürich Fire Department, about a fictional fundraising concert that would star Tina Turner and provide the city a new slogan. Striking a perfect balance of fantasy and labor, the film not only satisfied the exhibition’s theme, but also likely became even more resonant in its simultaneous presentation in a fire station in the city.

Of the thirty “satellites,” where each artist brought the work they made back to the territory of their collaborators, those that I did visit paid off: *The World is Cuckoo (Clock)* (2016), Jon Kessler’s elegant and mad kinetic sculpture, churning in the working basement of a high-end watchmaker’s shop; *Muthoscaples* (2016), Aslı Çavuşoğlu’s poetic installation of paintings in the display cases of the central station tourist office that depict the Swiss Alps “excavated,” with the help of a conservator, to reveal the mythical lost continent of Mu, thought to have been a cradle of several civilizations; and, quite directly, *Halbierte Western (Halved Vests)* (2015–16), Franz Erhard Walther’s bright orange uniform produced for staff at the Park Hyatt (in collaboration with a textile developer) reminiscent of the avant-garde clothing of the time of Dada. (I saw two staff members wearing them in the hotel’s lobby. They did not seem pleased.) Despite the impossibility of getting to most of these satellites, the next component of the exhibition—thirty short films produced by Jankowski, each artist, a filmmaker from the local art school, and a teenage “detective” who was given the task of following

each artist—made clear that the satellites were the circulatory system of the exhibition. It seems as if Jankowski was influenced by the historical section of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s *Documenta 13* called “The Brain,” located in the center of her exhibition in 2012.

Jankowski’s most brilliant move was the *Pavilion of Reflections*, a temporary floating island on Lake Zürich, that became the nervous system of Manifesta. Elegantly constructed of wood, it contained a bar, swimming hole, and cinema for the perpetual screening of the aforementioned films. However, while sitting through nearly a third of the screenings over two days, all of which were insightful and even entertaining, Jankowski became too present. This, of course, is something that happens to curators of international biennials all too often—though, here, given that Jankowski’s own artistic production is so dependent upon highlighting the tensions and resolutions between art and, let’s say, life—or artists and others—the films suggest the thin line between an accomplice and a third wheel. Put another way, what good is a partner in crime who always gets in the way?

I left before the last part of Manifesta kicked off: the re-deployment of the Cabaret Voltaire as the home for a new guild for artists, which provided Manifesta a place to go completely off script. In this case, it meant anyone could sign up to give a performance, acknowledging the bar’s history as the place to be for the Dadaists in Zürich, including, for a time, Picabia. (It was a good sign that the antics began with the always-reliable group of tricksters known as Gelatin.) Maybe Jankowski was reminding us that he is an artist, not a curator after all.

I ask again: who doesn’t want a partner in crime? Picabia’s exhibition demonstrates that early on he most definitely did. Like so many other artists of his generation, he started with Impressionism, becoming financially successful while still breaking the rules by relying upon photographs to make his paintings— and then quickly junked it all for Cubism. The exhibition reunites his well-known pair of outrageously over-sized contributions to the genre: *Udnie (Young American Girl; Dance)* (1913), and *Edtaonisl (Ecclesiastic)* (1913). Picabia then hits Dada head-on, creating so many works of so many types, including paintings, constructions, as well as handbills like *Funny-Guy* (1921) on which he proclaims: “FRANCIS PICABIA N’EST RIEN!”





Despite all of the ways in which he truly was a partner in crime with the other Dadaists, Picabia was already his *own* best accomplice before moving on to new adventures. This notion, of one being one's own best co-conspirator, is echoed within the exhibition's subtitle, borrowed from Picabia himself: *Our Heads Are Round so Our Thoughts Can Change Direction*.

Anyone up on the machinations of modernism and post-modernism is well aware of the consistent ascendancy of Picabia's reputation over the past three decades. As this exhibition demonstrates, we are just beginning to assimilate the depth of his work's complexities. To see each decade of his enterprise impeccably presented room by room is to witness genuine staying power. First he resorted to the industrial look and feel of Ripolin enamel paint to "return" to neoclassical forms in paintings such as *The Spanish Night* (1922) and *Animal Trainer* (1923). Then he dipped briefly into assemblage with a witty concoction like *Toothpicks* (c. 1924), and immediately followed up with a group of "monster" paintings like *Idyll* (c. 1925–27). This work is a pictorial and material mash-up of the prior twenty-or-so years of pretty much every other modernist painting. Picabia outmaneuvered much of Surrealism in works like *Untitled (Spanish Woman and Lamb of the Apocalypse)* (1927), from his *Transparenices* series of paintings that takes him through the 1930s, then into the unapologetic kitsch "realism" of *Spring* (c. 1942–43), and, finally, to the anything-but-pure "abstraction" of what would become his last works, paintings like *Selfishness* (1950) and the aptly-titled *Salary Is the Reason*

*for Work* (1949).

This last painting is a star. Arguably, in some ways, a wicked "return" to Dada, the way in which it caps a career that looks today as if it never stopped is nothing short of remarkable. I left the exhibition thinking that even Picasso and Matisse don't have that today. Duchamp? Maybe. It seems unfathomable that

**To see each decade of his enterprise impeccably presented room by room is to witness genuine staying power.**

Picabia could have predicted how his ways would become the way for so many. He remains, on his own, a potent challenger to everything from the wishful thinking about the "death" of painting to the shelter of the herd mentality that too often afflicts large-scale group exhibitions. The lesson? Never stop being your own partner-in-crime.

**Manifesta 11: *What People Do For Money* runs through September 18, 2016 and Francis Picabia: *Our Heads Are Round so Our Thoughts Can Change Direction* at the Kunsthaus Zürich runs through September 25, 2016.**

**TITLE PAGE:**  
Francis Picabia, *Untitled (Spanish Woman and Lamb of the Apocalypse)*, c. 1927–1928. Watercolour, gouache, ink and pencil on paper, 65 x 50 cm. Private collection © 2016 ProLitteris, Zurich

**OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:**  
Manifesta 11, Mike Bouchet, *The Zurich Load*, Löwenbräukunst  
Photo (c) Camilo Brau

**FOLLOWING SPREAD:**  
Manifesta 11, Jon Kessler, *The World Is Cuckoo*, Satellite  
Photo (c) Manifesta11/Wolfgang Traeger

**PREVIOUS PAGE:**  
Francis Picabia, *The Spanish Night*, 1922. Enamel paint and oil on canvas, frame with buttons, 106 x 87 x 8.5 cm, with frame Museum Ludwig, Köln Sammlung Ludwig © 2016 ProLitteris, Zurich

**BELOW:**  
Manifesta 11, Carles Congost, *Simply the Best*, Löwenbräukunst  
Photo (c) Manifesta11/Wolfgang Traeger



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# Slipping through the net of a metaphor

MUCH WIDER THAN A LINE // SITE SANTA FE

By Caroline Picard



[ THE SEEN ]



SITE Santa Fe stands close to the downtown historic district of the city, beside train tracks and Warehouse 21, a haven for artistic youth. Contextualized by a landscape that originally belonged (and still partially belongs) to Native Americans, within the architectural residue of a complex colonial and missionary histories, the Southwest reverberates with the fantasy of an American frontier that still, to this day, stutters in contemporary consciousness. This framework makes SITE a tuning fork for sociopolitical discussions of US heritage. It is therefore fitting that the institution would tackle the mythos of America and American identity; acknowledging the rich and complex layers of nostalgia and beauty endemic to the region, while teasing out the murky, and all too arbitrary, history of violence and complicity inscribed upon the land, and the United States as a whole. As part of its continued investigation of these themes, SITE Santa Fe’s 2016 exhibition, *much wider than a line*, is part of an ongoing biennial series, *SITElines.2016: New Perspectives on Art from the Americas*.

Within the latest iteration of this vision, past and present concur through the juxtaposition of historic documentation and newly commissioned artworks, just as conceptions of

North, South, and Middle America mash up throughout the show. With over thirty-five artists from eleven countries, *much wider than a line* presents the entire American continent as a stage upon which individual artists interrogate, refract, and ultimately resist constraint.

To establish that premise, the first room of the exhibition is dedicated to Italian Architect, Paolo Soleri’s historic outdoor Santa Fe *Amphitheatre* (1960–present). Completed in 1970, and open until 2010, the theater was designed to present Native American theater for the Institute of American Indian Arts (now located on the campus of the Santa Fe Indian School). Soleri’s theater design favors a multi-dimensional perspective; the stage is round with different floors for performers to act upon. Built from mud and concrete, with lean but curvilinear lines, that seem in and of themselves tied to late 60s visions for social and artistic change, the sky overhead becomes a participating agent as a result. As if to underscore the ways in which Soleri’s stage provides a platform for the exhibition at large, it is reproduced in multiple ways: a large-scale black and white photograph of the original structure is mounted to a wall, with an architectural addition of a bench that curves into the gallery space by New Mexico-based architect

Conrad Skinner, flanked by a video documenting the theatre’s construction, a small wooden model in the middle of the room, a suite of elaborate notes composed by Soleri as he worked out his design, and beautifully composed instructions provided by Lloyd Kiva New, then-Director of the Institute of American Indian Arts.

In New’s vision, we read the considerations required by a theatrical tradition that is not connected to Ancient Greece or Shakespeare. “The drama would be non-scenic,” New writes, “in the sense that it would at no time attempt to naturalistically create before the audience a specific locale through the use of scenery. The scenic means of this theatre would be tied up in the use of costumes and properties both of which would then need to be elaborate and rich.” With this beginning, one cannot help but imagine an American theater, or art, less susceptible to Western European influence. Indeed, how many voices, poetics, and artistic languages ought to be unearthed in seeking out a true, American aesthetic?

In the next room, across from Argentinian artist Marta Minujin’s *Comunicando con Tierra* (1976)—a large nest-like structure formed out of soil from both the historic Inca site







of Machu Picchu in Peru and Buenos Aires—vitrines contain a slew of paperback publications underneath a wall of page layouts, featuring an installation of US poet Margaret Randall’s and Sergio Mondrogón’s bilingual Mexico City journal, *El Corno Emplumado/ The Plumed Horn* (1962–1969), which integrated aesthetics and nationalities. As it appears here, the publications are at once tied to a specific historical moment and aesthetic, while appearing like playbills or a research library—concrete examples of an “American” (and bilingual) poetics that integrates Latin and South American literature, indigenous voices, jazz, Incan-inspired line drawings, European surrealists, and more.

Nearby, hang lush drawings by Colombian artist Abel Rodríguez, entitled *Selected drawings from the series The Cycle of the Maloca Plants; Studies of Principle Trees in the Forest Trees with Legends; The Cultivated Plants of the Center People; Drawings of Pineapples; Drawings of Cassavas and Other Tubers* (2009–2016)—some framed, others pinned to the wall, and others in vitrines. Among them are a series of twelve labor intensive pen and ink drawings of the same forest clearing at different times of year. Presented in this context, they look like sketches for a set design. And yet, a repeating central brown hut is the most static and prop-like, whereas the surrounding trees, with their variously shifting foliage, seem most like the actors—particularly when, in another series of drawings, Rodríguez painstakingly identifies their unique habits and properties, as one might map out the attributes of specific characters when designing their costumes.

References to theatre continue throughout the exhibition. Cairo-based artist Ann Boghiguian’s *Woven Wind* (2016) produces a manic room of chalk-based wall drawings, paper cut out sculptures, photographic remnants, string, works on paper, and writing that operate like a disorienting story board as she plots the history of the cotton plant. Similarly, Philadelphia-based Xenobia Bailey’s *Sistah Paradise Revival Tent* (1999–present) features a beaded and woven tent, quoting American revival traditions with feminist and Afrofuturist leanings: the colorful, sculpture-painting hangs from the center of a ceiling, suspended above a similarly ornate floor mat, holding space for potential transcendence. In an adjacent corridor is Albuquerque-based sound artist Raven Chacon’s installation *Native American Composers Apprenticeship Project*

## History is the play. We just happen to be a part of it.

(2014–present), a series of different original musical recordings translated to their affiliated scores, each created as part of the Native-American Composers Apprenticeship Project, an outreach program that the artist works on with high school students to draw on their varied influences—tribal music, pop music, videogame soundtracks, or nature. São Paulo-based artist Erika Verzutti installs a series of objects in *Cemitério com Neve (Cemetery with Snow)* (2015) that stand in an organized huddle, waiting like props, while fashion designer and art historian, Carla Fernanández’s series of cotton and hand-woven capes made with artisan collaborators—ponchos made with Indigenous weavers—hang nearby like costumes not yet in use. Visitors are invited to try on the garments, reminding you visitors are actors and the narrative is taking place, by accident almost, between the constellation of artworks. History is the play. We just happen to be a part of it.

Thankfully, no single American aesthetic is resolved within the exhibition’s stage. Nor should it try to be. Nothing is purely itself. Not in the politics of an Indian Theater—an art form that had to be unearthed and rediscovered after the US Government’s genocidal efforts. Not in Zacharius Kanuk’s astonishingly beautiful screening of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), the first feature length film written, directed, and acted in the Inuit language, nor in Jeffrey Gibson’s *Like a Hammer* (2016), where the artist performs by painting text works wearing a robe adorned with metal jingles, the garment and two-dimensional pieces hanging in the space—instead there is a constant interactive excavation that destabilizes notions of authenticity, while amplifying the diverse and promiscuous layers of cultural influence. *much wider than a line* digs into the premise of American identity, highlighting a complex intersection of legacies, languages, politics, and architectures.

—  
SITE Santa Fe, *much wider than a line*, runs through January 8, 2017.

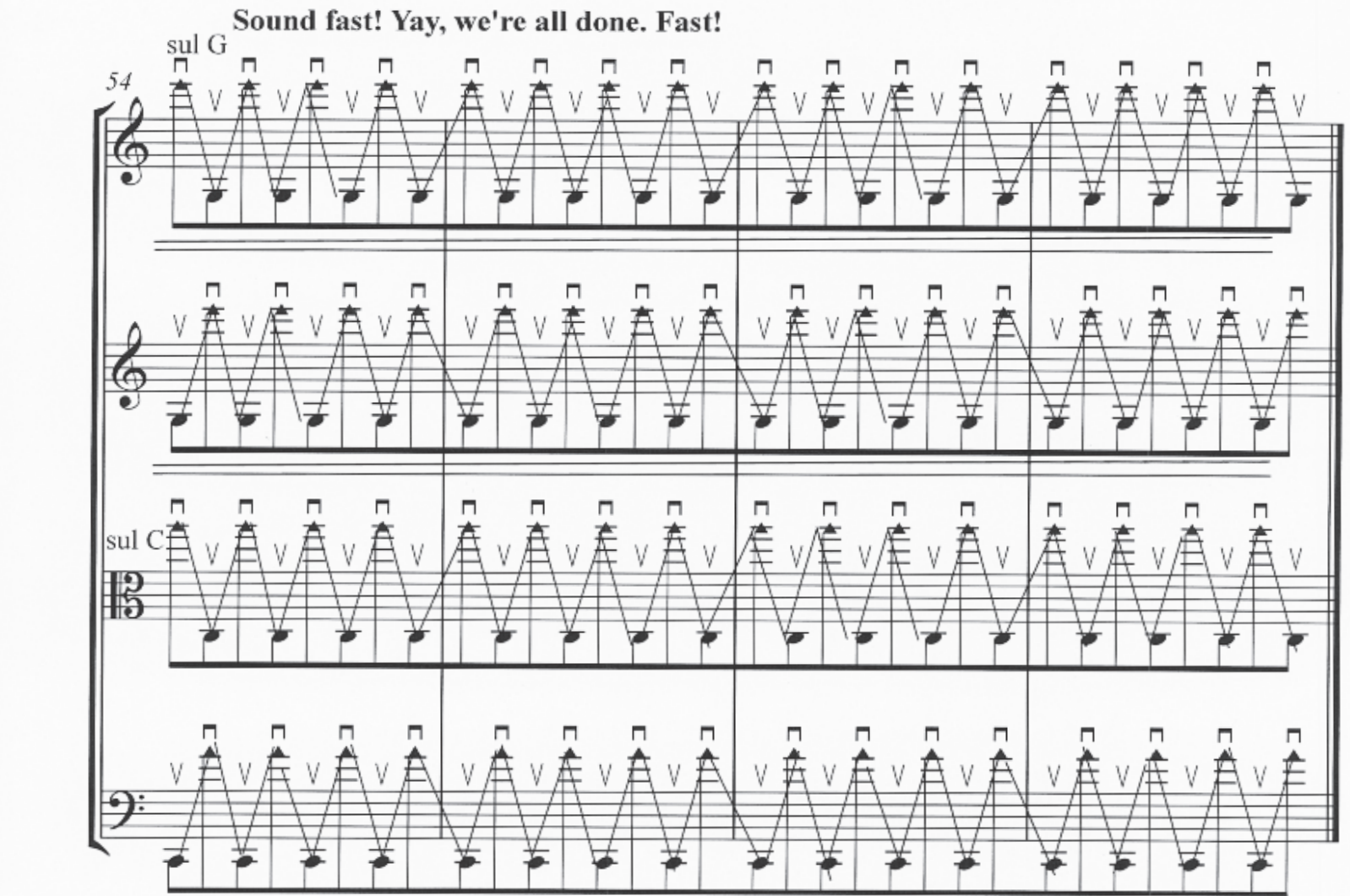
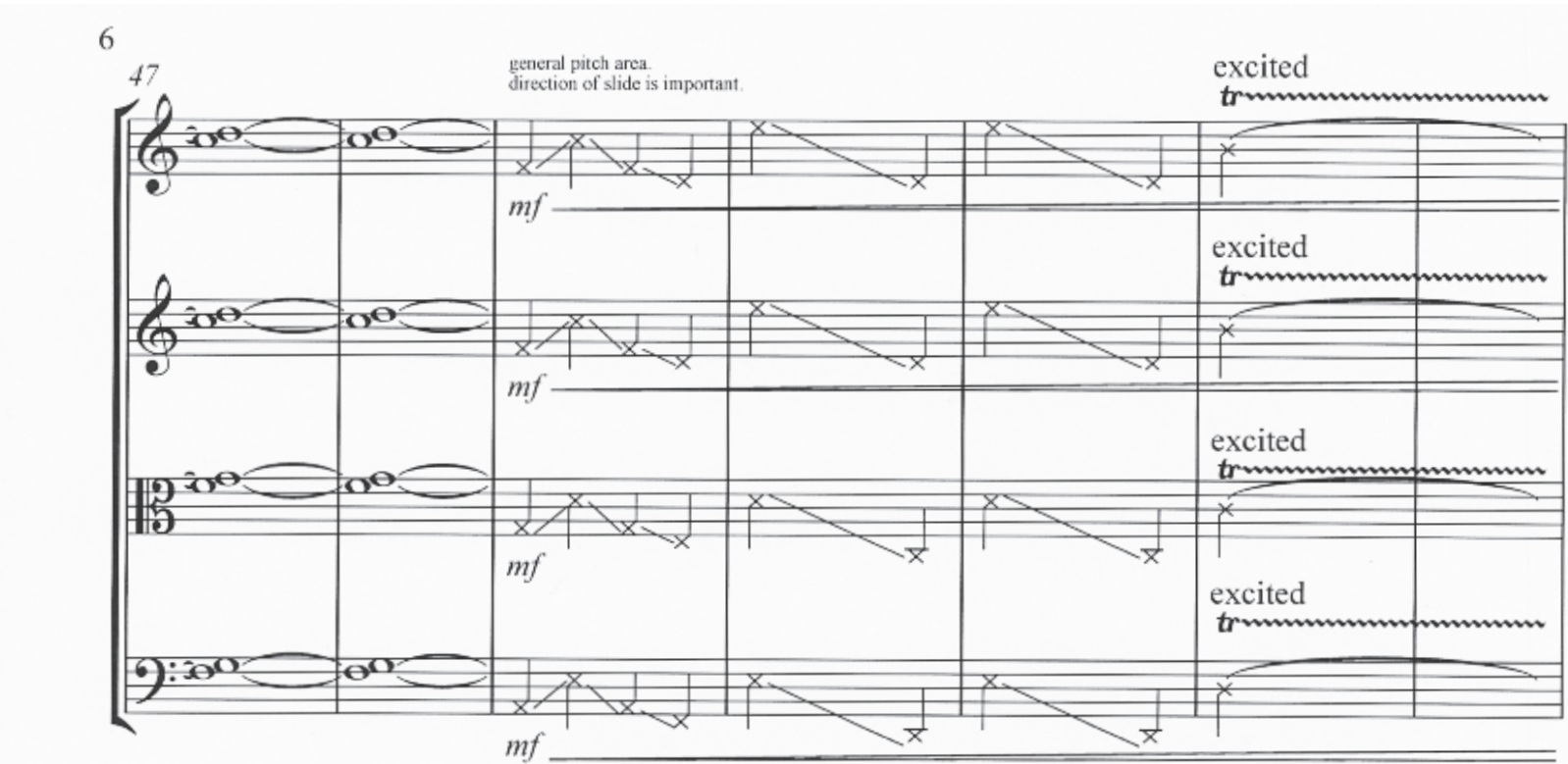
TITLE PAGE:  
Graciela Iturbide (b. 1942 Mexico City, Mexico; lives and works in Mexico City)  
*Self Portrait with the Seri Indians, Sonoran Desert, Mexico, 1979*  
Photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

—  
OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:  
Zacharias Kunuk (b. 1957 in Kapuivik, Nunavut, Canada; lives and works in Igloolik, Nunavut, Canada)  
*Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner, 2001*  
Film, 2 hours 54 minutes  
Courtesy of the artist

—  
PREVIOUS SPREAD:  
Paolo Soleri (b. 1919, Turin, Italy; died 2013, Paradise Valley, AZ)  
*Amphitheater, c. 1975*  
Commissioned by the Lloyd Kiva New for Institute of American Indian Arts, 1964  
Image courtesy of the IAIA Archives, Santa Fe

—  
RIGHT:  
Raven Chacon (b. 1977 in Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation, Arizona; lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico)  
*Native American Composers Apprentice Project, 2004-present*  
Workshop, scores and performance  
Score for string quartet [excerpt], Celeste Lansing, *Pink Thunder* (2009)

—  
BELOW:  
Selected drawings from the series *The Cycle of the Ma-loca Plants; Studies of Principal Trees in the Forest; Trees with Legends; The Cultivated Plants of the Center People; Drawings of Pineapples; Drawings of Cassavas and Other Tubers* (2009), by Abel Rodriguez.  
Courtesy of Tropenbos International, Colombia CAP.

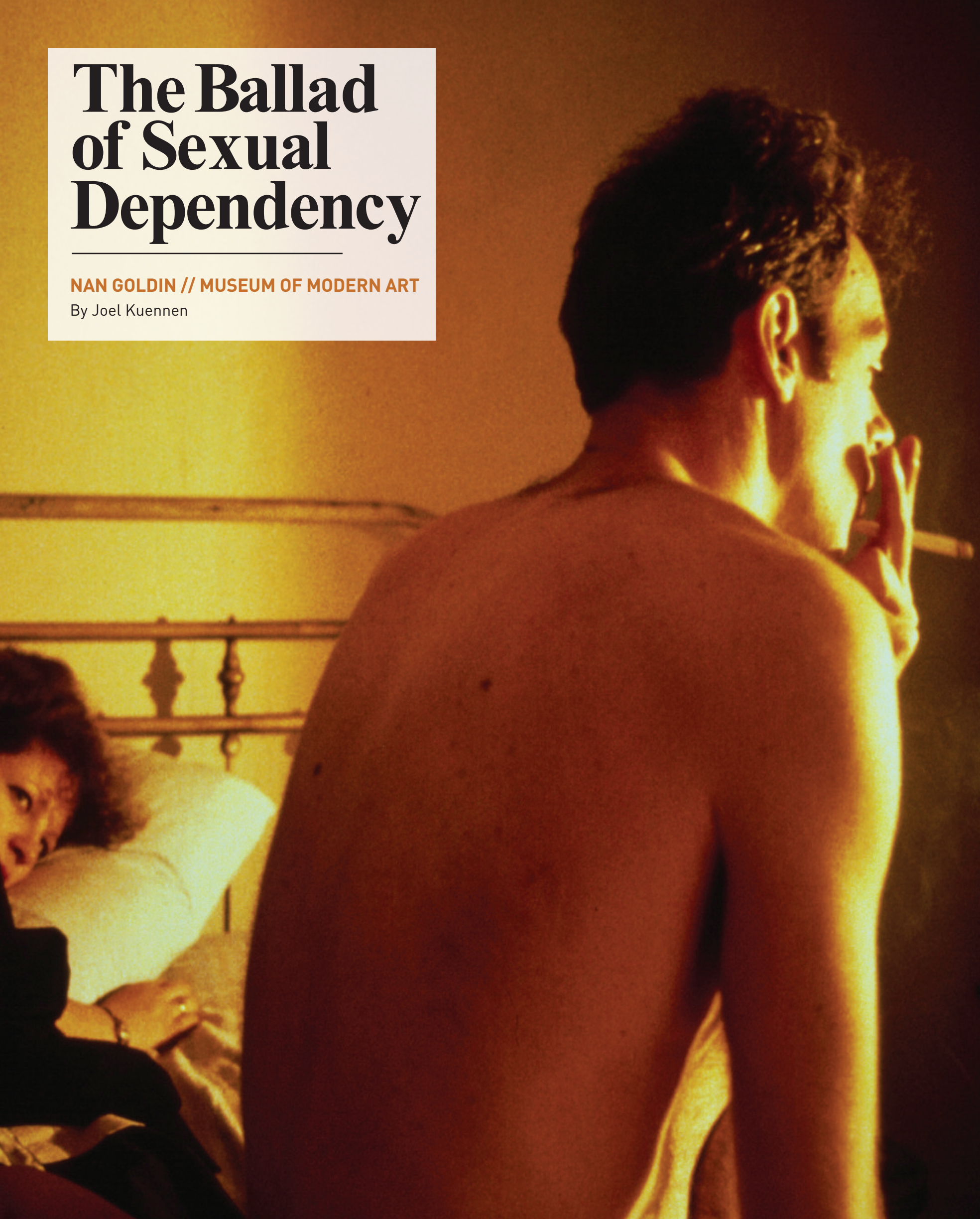




# The Ballad of Sexual Dependency

NAN GOLDIN // MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

By Joel Kuennen



## Dirty Work:

THERE'S ONE THING YOU MUST FINALLY REALIZE  
NO MATTER HOW YOU TRY TO TWIST AND TURN IT  
FIRST COMES THE GRUB AND THEN YOU CAN MORALIZE  
THERE MUST FIRST BE A CHANCE FOR NOW ALL POORLY FED  
TO GET THEIR SLICE OF LIFE'S GREAT LOAF OF BREAD.

HOW DOES A MAN SURVIVE?  
BY DAILY CHEATING... [REPEAT]

MISTREATING, BEATING OTHERS  
SPITTING IN THEIR FACE  
ONLY THAT MAN SURVIVES  
WHO IS ABLE TO FORGET  
THAT HE IS A MEMBER OF THE HUMAN RACE.

THIS TRUTH YOU CANNOT SHIRK  
MAN LIVES EXCLUSIVELY  
BY DIRTY WORK.<sup>1</sup>

The self is the first refuge in an unjust world. At age eleven, Nan Goldin's eighteen-year-old sister committed suicide on the rails of a DC commuter line. Her family shattered, Nan was enrolled and expelled from school to school until a camera gave her a voice and she began to collect a new family. Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1985), a now iconic piece of work from the grit and grime of 1980s New York, depicts this family. *Ballad* is technically a series of 700 snapshots set to music; without the museum setting, one can imagine sitting with friends and family to watch a vacation slideshow. There's a familiarity to the format: comfort, intimacy. The images, though lit harshly and depicting a raucous reality, in format and care depict a tight family of characters<sup>2</sup>. Their memories of love, joy, loss, pain, tragedy and death float like specters in the projector light. —









There's an arc to *Ballad* that loads the work like no single image could.

**MIRRORS**  
**FEMININITY**  
**IN BED**  
**FORLORN WITH**  
**BEAT UP**  
**CUTS**  
**SADNESS**  
**GUNS**  
**WASH CLEAN SHOWER**  
**PREGNANT**  
**STRIP CLUBS**  
**CITY HALL MARRIAGE**  
**PREGNANCY**  
**CHILD**

**A MAN'S WORLD**  
**BODY BUILDERS**  
**ADDICTS**  
**GUNS**

**SUMMER DAYS**  
**BEAT BLUR BIKERS**  
**TATTOOS**  
**MORNING LIGHT**

**LOVE**  
**MEN**  
**POWER AND FRAGILITY**

**PUNK HEROIN**  
**QUEENS**  
**COCAINE**  
**PARTIES**  
**WARHOL AND HERRING**  
**BEACH AND BEER AND SEX**  
**HOTEL WITH MOM AND DAD**  
**MOTHER FATHER BABY DAUGHTER**  
**SISTER**

**SNOW ON GRAVES.**<sup>3</sup>

The familiarity evoked by this work not only comes from the slideshow format, but the draw of danger. Goldin stated in a 2014 interview with the Guardian, "I wanted to get high from a really early age. I wanted to be a junkie. That's what intrigues me." This wanderlust for the seedy turned out to have a broad cultural impact in the United States. Goldin's candid, sordid style still reverberates, from Ryan McGinley to Instagram<sup>4</sup> and the Vice brand. In 1997, she was singled out by then President Bill Clinton as

contributing to an epidemic of "heroin-chic" amongst models.<sup>5</sup> But under the haze of drug use, something developed.

Goldin's subjects were not just "characters", they were the new subjectivities, coming out under the light of a flashbulb. Gays and lesbians, bikers and Estar Roto, drag queens and kings. As Hilton Als said of Goldin's fascination with drag queens, "She had no interest in trying to show who they were under the feathers and the fantasy: she was in love with the bravery of their self-creation, their otherness."<sup>6</sup>

Cookie Mueller, a frequent subject and friend of Goldin's, was raised by parents who couldn't stand each other. They bonded in their disaffection, in the experience of growing up in the strictures of 1950s and 60s America. A place where "the main goal was not to reveal too much or pry into the well-manicured lives of your neighbors."<sup>7</sup> The duplicitous nature of life—the impulse and need to mistreat and cheat under the guise of moral righteousness—was too much to bear for a generation, and off they went to find themselves in the hidden spaces.

The self is the first refuge in an unjust world. *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* is not only a look into Goldin's refuge, but her return from it—offering us, the contemporary viewer, not the other from another time, but a reflection. The family returns, the promise of death. Snow on graves.

*Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* runs at MoMA through February, 2017.



#### TITLE PAGE:

*Nan and Brian in Bed, New York City* (detail), 1983, Silver dye bleach print, printed 2006 15 1/2 x 23 3/16" (39.4 x 58.9 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker.

—

#### OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:

*Max and Richard, New York City*, 1983, Silver dye bleach print, printed 2006 15 9/16 x 23 1/16" (39.6 x 58.5 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Family of Man Fund

—

#### PREVIOUS SPREAD:

*Philippe H. and Suzanne Kissing at Euthanasia, New York City*, 1981, Silver dye bleach print, printed 2008 15 1/2 x 23 1/8" (39.4 x 58.7 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase.

—

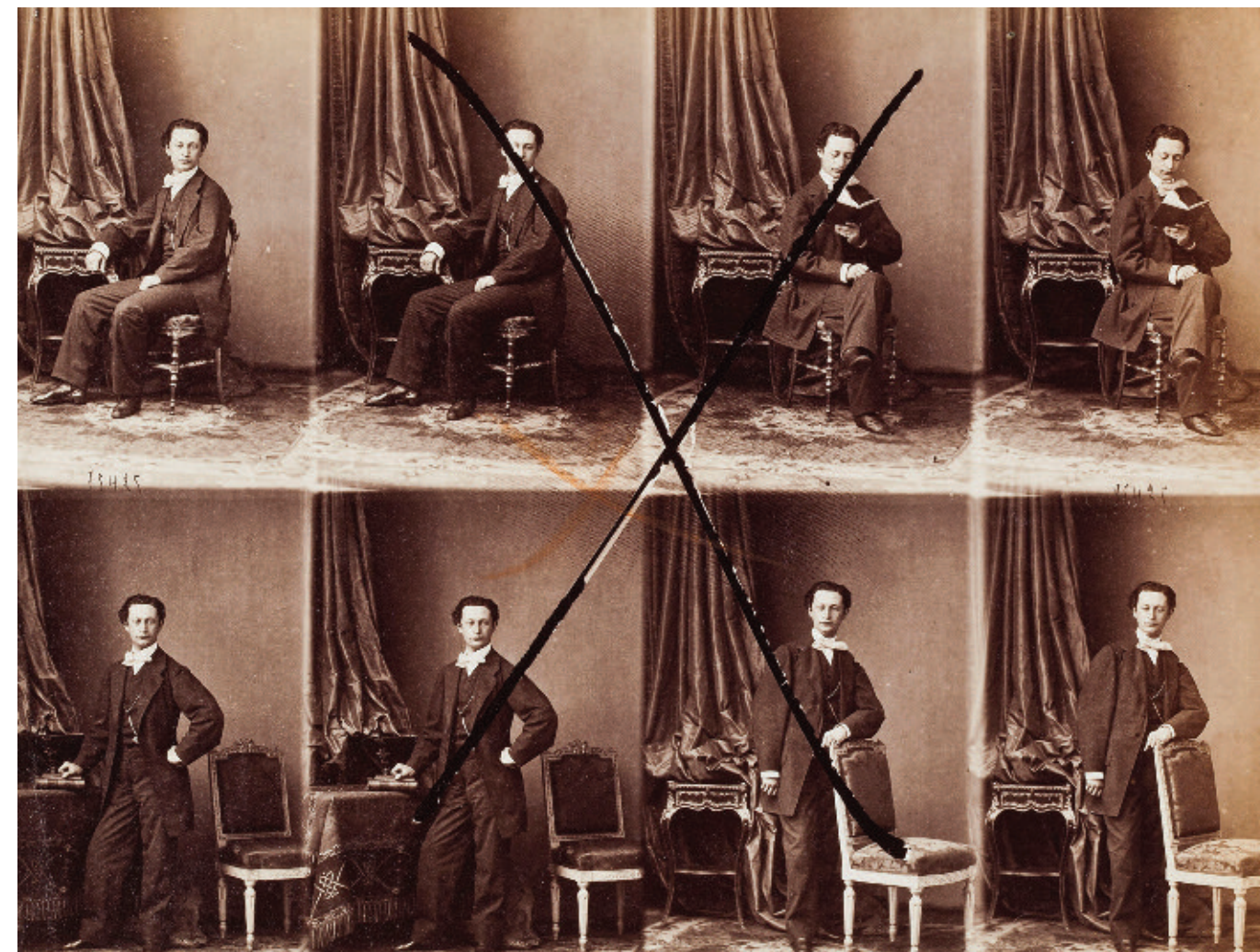
#### BELOW, LEFT:

*C.Z. and Max on the Beach, Truro, Massachusetts*, 1976, Silver dye bleach print, printed 2006 23 1/8 x 15 1/2" (58.7 x 39.4 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker.

#### BELOW, RIGHT:

*Nan One Month After Being Battered* (detail), 1984, Silver dye bleach print, printed 2008 15 1/2 x 23 1/8" (39.4 x 58.7 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase.

- 1 Opening song to G.W. Pabst's 1931 version of Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, The Criterion Collection (DVD). Nan Goldin's title for this work, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, originates in the *Threepenny Opera*, written by Bertolt Brecht and composer Kurt Weill.
- 2 Goldin is known for altering the slideshow during her many performances, including and playing to her friends that comprised the audience.
- 3 A response list to the image order of the MoMA copy of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Each iteration of the work is uniquely ordered.
- 4 <http://nyti.ms/2bsyvua>
- 5 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/a-smack-in-the-face-for-the-gurus-of-heroin-chic-1262928.html>
- 6 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/04/nan-goldins-the-ballad-of-sexual-dependency>
- 7 Ibid.

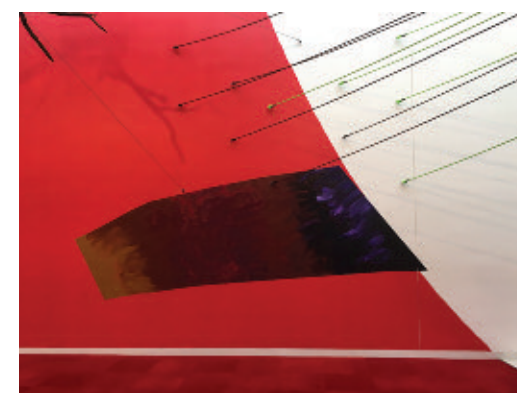


André Adolphe-Eugène Disder, *Untitled/Unidentified sitter, cancelled plate*, ca. 1860. Albumen print from wet-collodion unmounted negative. Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago. Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman, 2014.271.

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Jessica Stockholder, *Rose's Inclination*, 2015

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# George Kuchar

BOCKO // ICEBERG PROJECTS

By Hiba Ali

“It doesn’t matter whether you love a human, animal, vegetable or mineral. Love can work miracles...”

— GEORGE KUCHAR

Our relationships are precious. For George Kuchar, this message is prominent in *Bocko*, his recent exhibition at Iceberg Projects, featuring work on and inspired by his dog and lifelong companion. Known for his campy, over the top aesthetic, this exhibition reveals the softer and more intimate side of Kuchar’s practice.

George and Mike Kuchar, his older twin brother, were born in 1942 and were innovators of the low budget, DIY aesthetic—growing up in the Bronx,

through their neighbors, Bill Griffith and Art Spiegelman.

In the 1970s, Kuchar relocated to San Francisco for a teaching position. Not an extremely social person, he spent the majority of his time on both coasts with his dog Bocko and cats, Blackie, Tippy, and Lily.<sup>1</sup> The exhibition at Iceberg Projects focuses on Kuchar’s paternal relationship with Bocko—an eponymous painting (1970) is a portrait of the dog laying asleep on the floor of his Bronx apartment; his legs are spread



New York, they got their start working with 8mm. After noticing the increase in visual quality, they began working in 16mm. Though perhaps lesser known than their contemporaries, which included Stan Brakhage, Jack Smith, and Bill Griffith, they were pioneers of queer cinema, and part of the 1960s underground and avant-garde film counterculture. The Kuchars’ work had inspired, amongst others, John Waters, Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, David Lynch and contemporary artists Felix Bernstein and Ryan Trecartin—they were also a part of the underground comics scene

open, exposing his deep purple testes, and a warm ambience radiates from a red ball, which sits at the left of the canvas. Kuchar’s brush marks are precise and smooth, lovingly capturing his companion in repose.

Much like the work of Brakhage and Michael Snow, Kuchar’s experimental films, such as his 10-minute piece *The Mongreloid* (1978), refer to the materiality of the medium and its experience. The film opens with Kuchar narrating experiences the two of them have shared; the camera alternates between



he and Bocko at home, and out in the world. In the film, Kuchar's tone mimics how a mother speaks to her children; in a classic Kuchar-ian, raunchy manner, he refers to an itch located in Bocko's "Mookie," the parks Bocko has defecated in, what operations Bocko has had, what Bocko likes to eat, and where he has played. The film, alongside other works by George and Micheal Kuchar, will be part of a screening at the Gene Siskel Film Center while the exhibition is on view.

— In this exhibition, Kuchar documents the human condition through his canine recounts. In an excerpt from "Farewell, My Pet" from *The George Kuchar Reader*—an expansive anthology edited by Andrew Lampert and published by Primary Information in 2014—Kuchar states, "It doesn't matter whether you love a human, animal, vegetable or mineral. Love can work miracles..."<sup>2</sup> Bocko, perhaps more than any of Kuchar's work, visualizes a relationship as a lasting testament to the artist's existence.

— *George Kuchar: Bocko* at Iceberg Projects runs through October 30, 2016.

**TITLE PAGE:**  
Courtesy of Anthology Film Archives & the Estate of George Kuchar

**OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:**  
Photographer unknown, courtesy of the Estate of George Kuchar

**BELOW TOP:**  
Image by Curt McDowell, courtesy of the estate of George Kuchar

**BELOW BOTTOM:**  
George Kuchar, *BOCKO*, 1970, courtesy of the Estate of George Kuchar



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Steve Rowell, Production still from  
*Midstream at Twilight*, 2016

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# Sharon Lockhart

RUDZIENKO // THE ARTS CLUB OF CHICAGO

By Susan Snodgrass



[ THE SEEN ]

In Sharon Lockhart’s newest film *Rudzienko* (2016), teenage girls cope with the anxieties of adolescence—fear, loneliness, distrust, self-doubt, parental misunderstanding, the longing for friendship and love—while reconnecting to the lost vestiges of childhood. Set amidst the quietude of the open fields and woods of Rudzienko, a

Rudzienko’s Youth Center for Socio-Therapy, a boarding school for troubled girls, including Milena, whose long-standing friendship with the artist is the impetus for the works on view. *Rudzienko* continues the themes of childhood and adolescence that have been central to Lockhart’s work, from her early *Auditions* (1994) series,

readings, writing, and other activities served as catalysts for sharing personal stories, creating self-confidence and building trust. The result is a two-channel film installation that interweaves silent vignettes of the girls, interacting within the natural environs of the Polish countryside, with text culled from fragments of conversations:

## Lockhart operates on a dual register, bringing a photographic lens to her filmmaking and a cinematic approach to her photographs.

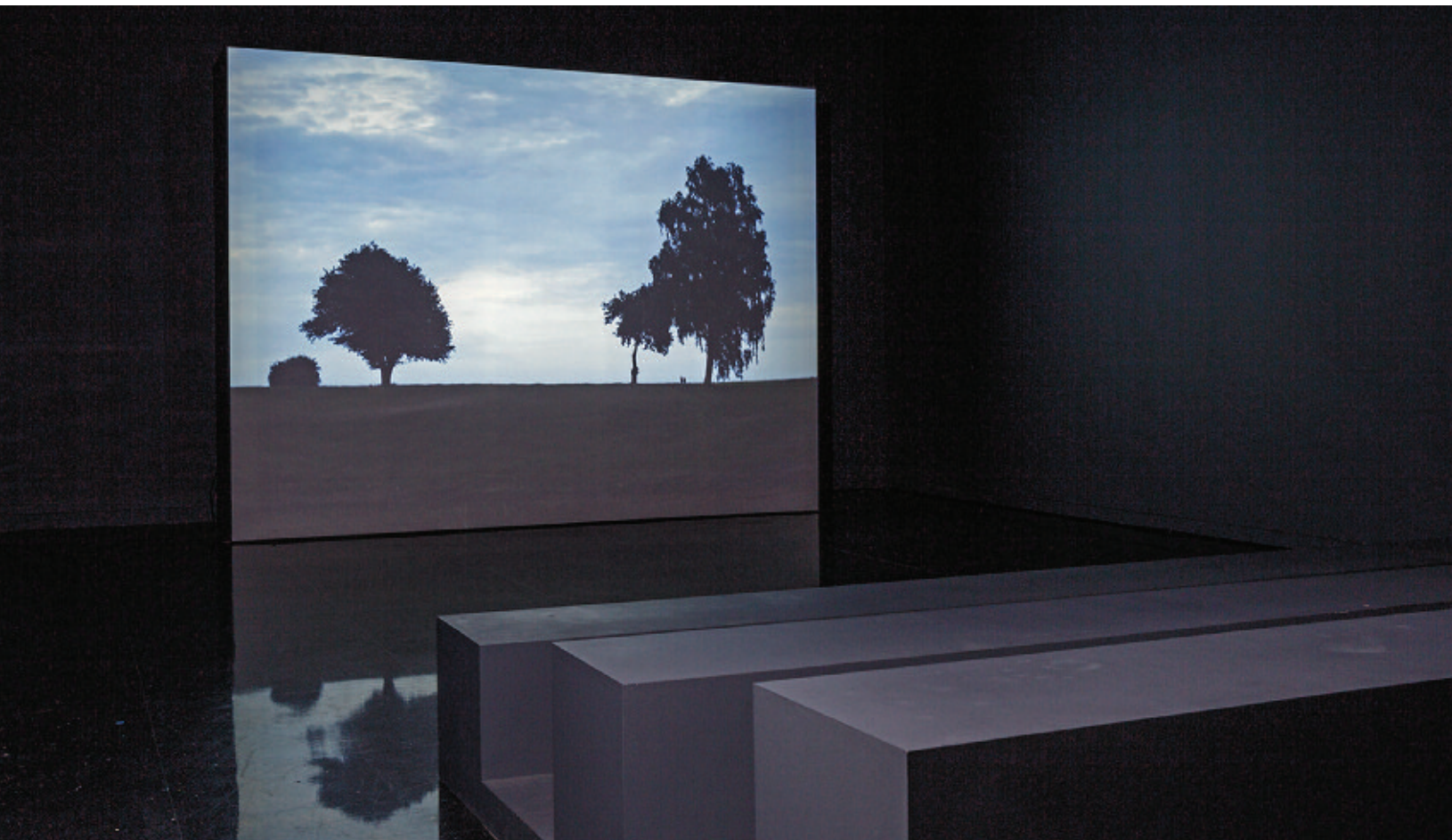
small village in East-Central Poland near Warsaw, for which both the film and recent exhibition at The Arts Club of Chicago is named, the work offers a compassionate yet coolly distanced portrait of female youth.

Compassionate is Lockhart’s immerse practice and commitment to her subjects, here the young women of

photographs of young boys and girls awkwardly kissing in staged scenes directed by the artist, to her later *Pine Flat* (2005), which consisted of full-length portraits of children from Pine Flat, California. Inspired by the ideas of Janusz Korczak, a Polish-Jewish pedagogue and advocate for children’s rights, Lockhart organized retreats for the teens, where movement and dance,

“Sometimes I think God controls everything.” “I just don’t buy it. I think everyone controls their own life.”/ “My mother blames me for why my father hung himself.”/ “My whole life has been a series of fuck ups.”/ “What is your favorite food?” “Spaghetti.”

An untitled poem by one girl (Andzelika Szczepanska) scrolls in English across









the screen in The Arts Club’s small corner gallery, expressing sentiments of loneliness, hurt, and isolation. A voice-over of her reading it in Polish serves as the soundtrack and prologue to the main installation of the exhibition in an adjacent gallery, which is transformed into a theatrical black box. Projected floor-to-ceiling, the approximately 40-minute long film unfolds slowly; each scene, with a new cast of characters, quietly fades into another as a series of related, yet independent tableaux. Employing a cinéma vérité documentary style, alongside the artist’s signature full-frame, fixed-camera views, Lockhart achieves a stillness and slowness that demands a committed viewing. Such techniques often hope to elicit within the viewer the same kind of deep engagement and empathy that Lockhart has for her subjects. This challenge is met most successfully in the scenes that appear less controlled or staged, including one where two young women slow dance in a tender embrace oblivious to the camera’s gaze. In one of the film’s defining moments, fear turns to laughter when one teen is unable to jump to the other side of a broken bridge that her friend crosses effortlessly.

— But *Rudzienko* is as much about landscape as it is the lives of the young women we encounter, and often it is these images that resonate the most, at least with this viewer. In the opening scene, a man rides his bike down a country road; the viewer is suspended within a sunlit vista—as evening falls, two girls hidden within the branches of a tree suddenly emerge and run away. The film ends with a similarly panoramic view of a grassy meadow at dusk; though, the solitary expanse is interrupted when a group of girls, at first concealed, rise at once to run out of the camera’s view. In another vignette, two figures walking along a distant horizon silhouetted by lush trees recalls the haunting landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich. These types of referents to art-historical painting (Courbet, Millet) and landscape photography are intentional. Lockhart operates on a dual register, bringing a photographic lens to her filmmaking and a cinematic approach to her photographs. This is evident within the exhibition in three images from her related series *When You’re Free, You Run in the Dark* (2016). Each photograph captures a young girl, dramatically lit with her face hidden from the viewer, either running or dancing (the catalyst for the captured movement is unclear) at the edge of a wooded area at night.

— Lockhart embeds herself within her chosen

communities and geographic sites, although our understanding of the cultural context for the work in *Rudzienko* is oddly absent. The complexities of present-day Poland—with its right-wing government, a powerful and influential Catholic church, strict abortion laws, high unemployment among youth—alongside the legacies of its socialist past, give way to a kind of universal portrait of female adolescence disconnected from current political realities. On the other hand, societal constructions of identity are subtly revealed when juxtaposed with Lockhart’s re-photographed snapshots of her own family installed in The Arts Club’s hallways, where images of the artist as a young girl playing with her siblings or vacationing at the beach create an idealized portrait of American youth decidedly other.

— Missing too is Milena, the artist’s muse and central protagonist, whose presence in The Arts Club show is only intimated by the title of a single photograph, *Milena, Radawa* (2016), depicting black-and-white studies of children taped to an aquamarine wall. Lockhart first met Milena in 2009 while shooting *Podworka* (2009), a short film that observes young children playing in the courtyards of Łódź, a Polish industrial city and an important center for film. She has since appeared in several of Lockhart’s other works, including *Antoine/Milena* (2015), a film based on the final scene of François Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*. Although exhibited elsewhere, most recently at Gladstone Gallery, this exhibition might have benefited from the inclusion of some of these related works, offering a broader, more intimate view of Milena, whose identity frames the issues of selfhood at the core of *Rudzienko*.

Working at the intersection of portraiture, documentary, and social practice, Lockhart’s ethnographic approach seems, at times, overly aestheticized and detached; her subjects observed versus known. Yet, in the end, it is this nebulous space between truth and subjectivity that makes *Rudzienko* so compelling.

— **Sharon Lockhart: *Rudzienko* at The Arts Club of Chicago ran from May 12–August 13, 2016.**

**TITLE PAGE:**  
*When You’re Free, You Run in the Dark, Selena*, 2016  
Chromogenic print  
49 x 62 inches  
Courtesy of The Arts Club of Chicago

**OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:**  
Installation view of *Rudzienko*, 2016  
Two-channel film installation  
Dimensions variable  
Photos by Clare Britt.  
Courtesy of The Arts Club of Chicago

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:**  
Sharon Lockhart, *Rudzienko*, 2016  
Two-channel HD video installation  
Channel 1: 48:41 min., continuous loop;  
Channel 2: 20:00 min., continuous loop  
© Sharon Lockhart, 2016. Courtesy the artist,  
neugerriemschneider, Berlin, and Gladstone Gallery,  
New York and Brussels

**BELOW:**  
Installation view of *Rudzienko*, 2016  
Two-channel film installation  
Dimensions variable  
Photos by Clare Britt.  
Courtesy of The Arts Club of Chicago



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## Features



# A Century in Images

100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY //  
THE ARTS CLUB OF CHICAGO

By Anastasia Karpova Tinari



[ THE SEEN ]

The Arts Club of Chicago was founded a hundred years ago with a mission to promote Modernism, preceding like-minded institutions such as the Société Anonyme, Inc., Barnes Collection and Museum of Modern Art in New York, and was the first in Chicago to exhibit works by Brancusi, Alexander Calder, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Rauschenberg, among many others.

The Club's interdisciplinary member programming has featured an incredible array of the avant-garde: literary figures Margaret Anderson and Harriet Monroe, Gertrude Stein, Carl Sandburg; musicians Igor Stravinsky Prokofiev, Leonard Bernstein, John Cage; and dancers Adolph Bohm, Ruth Page, and Merce Cunningham. Yet through the years the visual arts exhibition program has remained at the institution's core. Its original mission expanded as Modernism gained acceptance, and Chicago's museums embraced contemporary art, but The Arts Club has always remained forward-looking and interdisciplinary in its approach. Since 2000 alone, the Club's galleries have hosted impressive installations by internationally renowned artists including Pedro Cabrita Reis, Josiah McElheny, Marcel Broodthaers, Marlene Dumas, and many more.

## NOVEMBER 3, 1915

The 1913 Armory Show in Chicago highlights the divisive nature of avant-garde art in the United States. Even as Modern Art becomes institutionalized with the first Picasso hung in a U.S. museum, public outrage at the affront on classical ideals culminates in art students burning Matisse's *Blue Nude* in effigy. In the wake of that historic moment, Chicago's cultural elite meets at the Art Institute of Chicago to form a club devoted to avant-garde, international art. The Arts Club opens in The Fine Arts Building, 410 S. Michigan Ave., in 1916. Founding members included Mrs. Potter Palmer, Mrs. McGann, Mrs. John Winterbotham, Mrs. Arthur Ryerson, Mrs. Ray Atherton, and others.

## FALL 1917

Renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who also had an office in the Fine Arts Building, exhibits his collection of Japanese prints, screens, and baskets, accompanied by a catalogue and related lecture. *The Chicago Sunday Tribune's* Louise James Bargelt writes "The collection of Japanese color prints... is proving to be quite as much of a charmer as even the most fervid enthusiast of this uniquely oriental branch of art could possibly desire. Against the pastel gold of the gallery walls these prints stand out in daring color combinations, effecting a fairylike brightness of hue which is amazingly different from any exhibition of western art ever seen." Notable exhibitions from this early period included Post-Impressionism, Paintings by Joseph Stella, Oscar Bluemner, and Jennings Tofel, and Sculpture by Gaston Lachaise and Stanislaw Szukalski.

## 1918

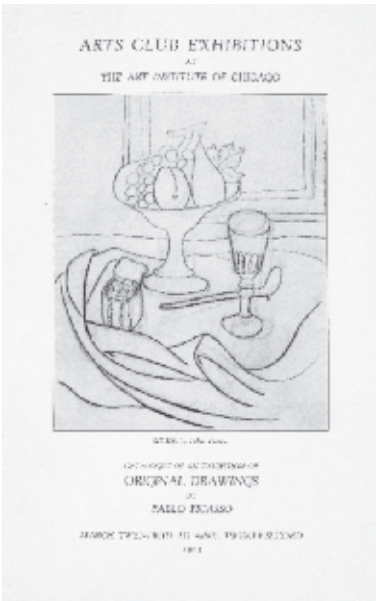
Rue Winterbotham Carpenter and Alice Roullier take the helm as President and Chair of Exhibitions Committee, respectively. The Arts Club moves in to new galleries at 610 S. Michigan Ave., designed by Club member and architect Arthur Heun.



One of The Arts Club's galleries, 610 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, 1918/23. Designed by Arthur Heun, William Ernest Walke, and Rue Winterbotham Carpenter. Photo: Frederick O. Bemm. Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library.

## 1922–1927

The Arts Club occupies a gallery of Art Institute of Chicago. Exhibitions Chair Alice Roullier works with dealers, institutions, and private collectors to bring exhibitions by Picasso, Matisse, Braques, Laurencin, Chagall, Rodin, and more. Because The Arts Club exhibitions feature works for sale, they also become an important source for important Chicago collections.



Cover of *Original Drawings by Pablo Picasso* exhibition catalogue, March 1923. Arts Club Files.

## 1923

Among the most important of the exhibitions arranged at the Art Institute was North America's first show to focus solely on Pablo Picasso's drawings. The Arts Club starts a Purchase Fund and acquires Picasso's *Tête de Femme* as the inaugural work in its collection.

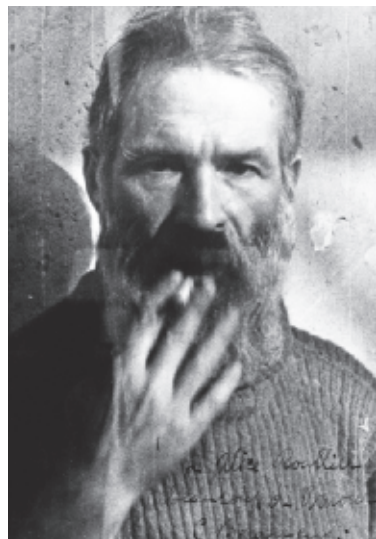


Pablo Picasso, *Head of a Woman (Tête de Femme)*, 1922. Red and black chalk with chalk wash on tan laid paper, laid down on lightweight Japanese paper; 24 7/16 x 19 in. Collection of The Arts Club of Chicago.



## 1927

Marcel Duchamp organizes an exhibition of work by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi, the artist's first in the United States. From the exhibition, The Arts Club acquires *Golden Bird* for \$1,200. The sculpture becomes central to the collection and later saves the Arts Club from ruin when its sale to the Art Institute allows the Club to purchase land for its current headquarters.



Constantin Brancusi smoking a cigarette, 1933. Inscribed "to Alice Roullier with much love, C. Brancusi." Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library.



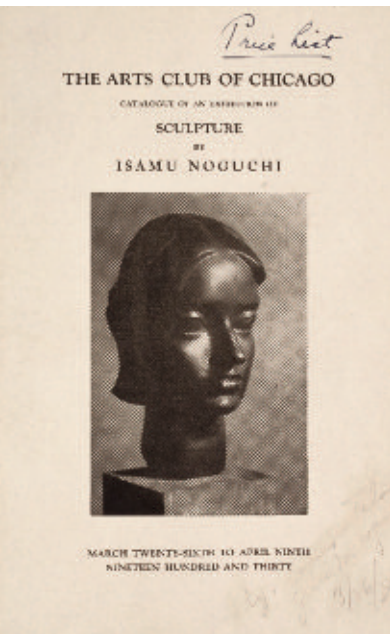
Constantin Brancusi, *Golden Bird*, 1919/20. Bronze, stone, and wood; 86 x 11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches. Installation view at The Arts Club, c. 1951. Arts Club Papers, Series 10, Newberry Library.

## 1930

The Arts Club hosts an exhibition of portrait sculptures and drawings by Isamu Noguchi, initiating a long-lasting, important relationship between the artist and The Arts Club. 50 years later in 1981, Noguchi would deliver a Rue Shaw Memorial Lecture.

## MARCH 1931

*Bauhaus, Dessau, Germany*, organized by Harvard Society of Contemporary Art is one of few Bauhaus exhibitions while the school is running. The exhibition connected Chicago to the Bauhaus and raised the Arts Club's reputation as "unparalleled in its progressive and intrepid attitude."



Cover of *Sculpture by Isamu Noguchi* exhibition catalogue, 1930. Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library

## 1933

Alongside the "Century of Progress Exposition" world's fair held in Chicago 1933–34, The Arts Club hosts *Special exhibition of Modern Sculpture*, featuring Archipenko, Brancusi, Coubine, Degas, Duchamp-Villon, Epstein, Gargallo, Gerard, Kolbe, Lachaise, Laurent, Laurens, Lehbruck, Loutchansky, Maillol, Matisse, Modigliani, Noguchi, Picasso, Popelet, Rodin, Zorach, and more.

## 1934

Taking her first ever airplane trip, Gertrude Stein arrives in Chicago to promote her 1933 *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Gertrude tours the city with her partner Alice Toklas, signs books, and gives a lecture titled "The History of English Literature as I See It."



Cover of 1933 Century of Progress Exposition

## 1936

The Arts Club moves into its Wrigley Building quarters, opening with an exhibition of abstract art by Naum Gabo, Antoine Pevsner, Piet Mondrian, and Cesar Domela three months before Alfred Barr, Jr.'s *Cubism and Abstract Art* at MoMA.

## 1939

As part of the Spanish refugee campaign, the Arts Club exhibits Picasso's *Guernica* (1937, Collection Reina Sofia, Madrid).



The Arts Club's main gallery, designed by Arthur Heun, Gilmer V. Black, and Elizabeth "Bobsy" Goodspeed, South Tower, Wrigley Building, 400 North Michigan Avenue, 1937

## 1941

Rue Winterbotham Shaw, Alice Roullier, and Arts Club member William Eisendrath commission Alexander Calder to create a stabile for Arts Club's octagonal sculpture gallery. *Red Petals* remains on view at the center of the Arts Club today.



Alexander Calder, *Red Petals*, 1942, photographed June 10, 1943. Plate steel, steel wire, sheet aluminum, soft-iron bolts, and aluminum paint, h: 102 in. Collection of The Arts Club of Chicago. Photographed June 10, 1943.

## 1942

John Cage directs a percussion orchestra of eight musicians playing "on kitchen utensils and washtubs." Among those attending is architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.



From the left: unidentified, John Cage, Rue Winterbotham Shaw, unidentified, Xenia Cage, c. 1942. Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library

## 1945

Peggy Guggenheim organizes a Jackson Pollock exhibition, marking the first exhibition of Pollock's work at The Club.



Peggy Guggenheim and Jackson Pollock in front of Pollock's *Mural*, 1943. © Photo: George Kargar.

## 1951

The Arts Club opens a new building at 109 E. Ontario St., designed by Mies Van der Rohe. Jean Dubuffet's *Art Brut*, his first exhibition in a non-commercial space, opens this historic space. Dubuffet begins an important relationship with Chicago and delivers his influential lecture "Anticultural Positions," which gave indispensable validation to Monster Roster artists like Leon Golub, who was sitting in the audience. The talk articulated Dubuffet's preference towards the "primitive" or unconscious mind over "Western" humanism or "Occidental culture." "Painting now can illuminate the world with wonderful discoveries, can endow man with new myths and new mystics, and reveal, in infinite number, unsuspected aspects of things, and new values not yet perceived." —Dubuffet

## 1958

Chicago collector Joseph Randall Shapiro organizes the exhibition *Surrealism Then and Now*, thereby strengthening a foundation for the Monster Roster and Hairly Who. Shapiro became the Museum of Contemporary Art's first president in 1967.

## 1960s

During the 1960s, as "Modern" became the establishment, the Arts Club expands its mission. Exceptional music performances and lectures continue; notable exhibitions include the first Chicago shows of Balthus (1964), Marisol (1965), Robert Rauschenberg (1966), a MoMA-organized Victor Vasarely exhibition (1967) and exhibition of sculptures by Louise Nevelson (1968).

## 1971

*Second Talent* exhibition by 19th and 20th century writers, including works by Goethe, Victor Hugo, Wyndham Lewis, and others.



Jean Dubuffet with his oil painting *Supervielle, Large Banner Portrait* at the Art Institute, December 1951, © Archives Foundation Dubuffet, Paris



## 1982

Exhibition Mies van der Rohe: *Interior Spaces*, 1982, highlights the design work of the architect so central to The Arts Club’s history.

## 1989

*The Objects of Sculpture* curated by the Art Institute of Chicago’s Neal Benezra features works by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Jeff Koons, and Tony Tasset.

## 1992

John Cage returns to The Arts Club to direct a public concert for the 75th anniversary.



Installation view of *Mies van der Rohe: Interior Spaces*, 1982. Photo: Michael Tropea. Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library

## 1993

“Fluxus Vivus” festival is organized by a group of Chicagoans for the 30th anniversary of Fluxus. The Arts Club partnered with University of Illinois at Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago to celebrate the movement’s living, experimental spirit. “As far as I know, nothing like it has ever been tried elsewhere. It was fantastic.” —Hannah Higgins, Professor of Art History at UIC and daughter of Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles



Poster for “Fluxus Vivus,” 1993. Design: Thirst. Designers: Rick Valicenti and Mark Rattin. Arts Club Files.

## 1995

The Arts Club is forced to move, as the 109 E. Ontario St. space designed by Mies van der Rohe is demolished. “I well remember the 1995 exhibition of Richard Pettibone at the... space on Ontario Street, its final presentation in that Mies designed interior. This selection perfectly concluded that chapter by this important, prescient Appropriation artist, whose work consistently offers intelligence, invention and grace. In that exhibition, Pettibone revisited the modernism of art and design, integrating Brancusi (numerous smallish Endless Columns), Ezra Pound (portraits and text) and Shaker designed furniture.” - Richard Rezac, Chicago artist and Arts Club member.

## 1998

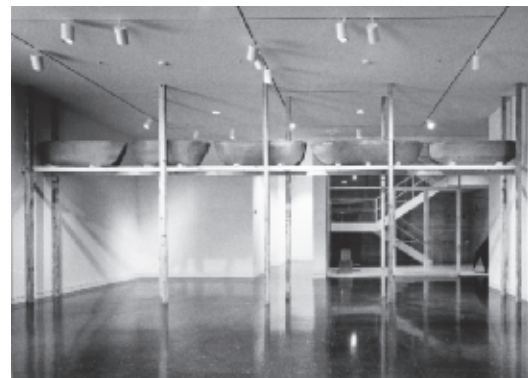
With funds from selling Brancusi’s *Golden Bird* to the Art Institute, the Arts Club moves into new quarters at 201 E Ontario. designed by John Vinci to incorporate the salvaged Mies stair case without changing its proportions. Vinci later reflected on the design, “Several people have commented how the staircase becomes an art object within the space, like it’s an exhibition within a case.”



Gallery area on the second floor of The Arts Club’s quarters, 109 E. Ontario St., designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Showing the floating staircase connecting to the entrance vestibule below on Ontario Street, 1959. Arts Club

## 1990s and 2000s

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Club continues to exhibit internationally-renowned artists and bring new artists to Chicago. As Anne Rorimer points out in her essay for the Centennial catalogue, exhibitions by Yayoi Kusama (1997), Wolfgang Laib (1998), James Lee Byars (1998), Mario Merz (2008), and others pushed the material and spatial definition of sculpture. Experimental installations continue with exhibitions like Daniel Buren (2006), Marcel Broodthaers’ *Décor: A Conquest (XXth Century Room)* (2008), Richard Deacon (2009), and Pedro Cabrita Reis (2015).



Installation view of *Wolfgang Laib: You Will Go Somewhere Else*, January 21–April 4, 1998. Photo by Michael Tropea. Arts Club Papers, Newberry Library.



Artist Yayoi Kusama with her exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: Obsessional Vision*, June 11–July 30, 1997. Photo: Michael Tropea, Arts Club files.

## 2006

The Arts Club returns to its roots with an exhibition of Picabia’s drawings, held over 75 years after Marcel Duchamp arranged the Club’s first Picabia exhibition and 70 years exactly after another exhibition organized by Gertrude Stein. Another highlight from 2006 is Daniel Buren’s solo exhibition, in which he completely transformed the quarters and infused color with “in situ” Plexiglas panels in four colors.



Francis Picabia, *This Thing is Made to Perpetuate my Memory*, 1915, Collection of The Arts Club of Chicago



Installation view of Daniel Buren: *Crossing Through the Colors*, a work in situ, April 25–July 21, 2006. Photo by Michael Tropea.

## 2011

*Andy Warhol* brings to Chicago a large number of panels from *Shadows*, a work typically on view at Dia:Beacon. Famed painter Kerry James Marshall delivers a lecture to commemorate the occasion.

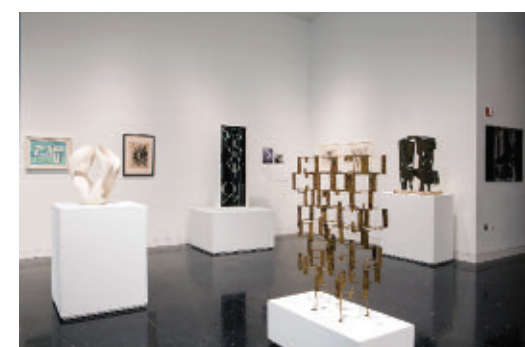


Installation view of Andy Warhol: *Shadows*, 2011. Photo: Michael Tropea.



## 2011–12

*Bertrand Goldberg: Reflections*, installed and designed by John Vinci and Geoffrey Goldberg, intermixes the famed architect's building, furniture, fabrication, and jewelry designs alongside his personal collection.



Installation view of Bertrand Goldberg: *Reflections*, December 17, 2011 – February 8, 2012. Photo by Michael Tropea.

## 2013

Josiah McElheny's *Two Clubs* presents a glass box (built by John Vinci), with time periods amalgamated by performers dressed in vintage attire in decades from the 1920s–70s. The installation creates hybrids of High Modernist periods and private vs. public space, reflecting McElheny's view of The Arts Club itself. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Fluxus, Alison Knowles hosts a night of performances using sound and paper.



Installation view of *Josiah McElheny: Two Clubs* at The Arts Club of Chicago, September 17 – December 14, 2013. Photo by Michael Tropea.

## 2015

Claire Pentecost presents "*the force that through the fossil drives utopia drives my greased age*," a 17-foot motor boat crashing into the frame of a geodesic dome, an example of the artist's ongoing investigation into climate change, natural resource use, and ecology. Pentecost's project is part of a new outdoor sculpture series, "Garden Projects," which started "to activate the corner with dynamic installations... to further our mission to make art accessible to the city." – Director Janine Mileaf

## 2016

As The Club celebrates its 100th anniversary, and President Helyn Goldenberg and Executive Director Janine Mileaf show no plans of slowing down. A new bar is under construction to reinvigorate cultural conversation exchange, and an extensive book with commissioned essays will be published this fall. Mileaf reflects: "The Arts Club centennial encompasses everything that we have stood for over the past 100 years—supporting the creation of new work; working across the disciplines of music, art, and performance; and, bringing challenging ideas both to our members and to the public." On October 22, the Centennial will culminate with a day of artists' talks and performance.



Installation view of *Claire Pentecost: the force that through the fossil drives utopia drives my greased age*. September 4–November 7, 2015.

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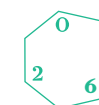
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# The Grid & The Jester

## ON THE TROPE OF THE GRID IN ART

By Paul Michael Smith



When is the appearance of distance merely the effect of an object’s vagueness? And when is the sensation of vagueness simply the apprehension of, no matter how fine the weave of your net, someone slipping away? Like nets, we describe grids either by looking through them, at what they encase and structure, or we see what clings to their surface. There must exist an algorithm for determining the fineness of screen door mesh—to avoid the opacity of when it’s too tight, or the distraction of when it’s too loose—to achieve a seamlessness when effecting a haze. Despite the totalizing appeal of the grid, writ large in high-modern aesthetics, weaves are the only functions of the grid—not the extant objects they are mapped onto. Modernism both hung onto, and

While the grid once possessed these polar qualities, David Joselit carefully outlines a shift in its characteristics as we approach the twenty-first century—the grid becomes a figure *proper*. Turning from Mondrian to 1960s Warhol, Joselit identifies a shift in the grid’s dichotomy. The spiritual pole is subsumed within the concrete one, the latter an analogy of the organization of bodies in space, and the distribution of things within it. What modernism tried to empty, contemporary art attempts to fill.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1 TERMS OF ANALYSIS

If the contemporary grid is for filling, it follows that we further refine its use as an icon. The work

The restraining closeness of this painting’s affect evokes a variety of other grids—fishnets, meshes, or screens—that, putting belief into revelation, give us a powerful sense of constraint. Perspective in painting is always an architecture that holds back the surface so as to acquire depth. Representations of the grid are themselves restrained by the weave of the canvas, while restraining the space of the canvas to create an illusion of depth. This illusion gives us illusory possession over the painting’s proximity, and the pleasure of the image is this closeness. Morris’ grids restrain vague color fields, their soft background neutrality suggesting that what is held back from us is little more precious than the world, or walls, we live in.

## COMPARED TO FACTS WORDS ARE ONLY NETS. WE GO ON HAULING IN WHAT TRACES OF AFFIRMATION WE CAN CATCH.<sup>1</sup>

was seen through, the grid. Images processed through today’s grid don’t only approach extant structures, they reformat them.

Grids occupy even the most banal settings. The bar near my house has erected standing grids with holes nine inches square. A vine grows on them like a trellis, making a short partition between bar patrons and the pedestrians on the sidewalk. Because the vine is young you can still see through this grid, and use it to map out people eating on the adjacent patio—and thus divide, or separate, yourself from the patrons. But the window-screens inside the restaurant are ripped, and those holes disrupt a seamless division of what is outside and what is within. Grids occupy a central role in Rosalind Krauss’ theories of modernity: “the grid’s mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief.”<sup>2</sup> The seminal essay “Grids,” published in *October* (1979), traced the tension in modernity between the secular and the sacred—“between the empirical and the transcendental,” as David Joselit notes in his text “Mary Heilmann’s Embodied Grids” (1990).<sup>3</sup>

analyzed in this text continues where Joselit’s essay leaves off—focusing on several recent instantiations of grids in contemporary art, with an eye towards the way medium-specificity is interrogated by, in, on, and through the grid. Grids are reminiscent of cages or prisons, entrapping the image and becoming architectural in scale. Grids are transformed into indexical gestures and point towards the history of canvas painting. How has the grid warped since the advent of the pixel? Each of these modes is traced through the work of Rebecca Morris, Lutz Bacher, Sarah Ortmeyer, Sam Moyer, and Laura Owens, among others.

### 2.0 CAGES

If the modernist grid peddled flatness and simultaneity, the effect of works such as Rebecca Morris’ *Untitled* (2002), which features unevenly spray-painted grids, impress a sense of distance. Morris’ strokes either *hold us back from* the painting or *hold the (landscape) painting down*. The grids become jail bars, and it is their exuberance and vibrancy that is most repressive—the image is arrested—or blinded—in its certainty.

### 2.1 CHESSBOARD—CAGE ON THE FLOOR

The architectural inclination of the grid is evoked in strategies by Lutz Bacher, such as her 2013 exhibition at Portikus in Frankfurt, Germany, which features as its main work a giant chessboard, and Sarah Ortmeyer’s *GRANDMASTER* series, which uses the grid of tiled floors as chessboards while staging sultry glamor shots of women chess-masters on the walls, as in her 2014 installation at Dvir in Tel Aviv. Bacher’s chessboard does not easily demarcate white from black. Instead, the cardboard cutouts and uneasy sculptures (giant chess pieces, a camel, a replica of Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel*, Elvis, a ferocious t-rex) sit on a near-camouflage of many grays. Camouflage patterns can be made from any pixellation of an even surface—these are “lossy images,” meaning ones we tried to make bigger (or get closer to), but which resisted resizing and turned their distance into incomprehension. The grid of the pixel, and its subsequent loss, is as common an experience of grids as any other. By situating a







vague-cultural chess game on a vague grid—one with the function not of organization but of confusion—Bacher disperses our usual suspicions of the grid. She is not only locating exterior figures on a chessboard, but locating that same surface as exterior to its own gaming. In a similar way, Ortmeyer fashions the grid as an architectural inevitability—floor-to-ceiling reproductions of women chess champions abstract and obscure the flatness of the space through their scale, while original productions of oversized marble and onyx pawns, knights, and rooks scatter the floor of the installation in clusters. In a grid of this scale, where the whole room is a board, Ortmeyer stages a game uncomfortably situated next to its players.

## 2.2 GRID AS WALL

Freestanding grids seem a prescient emblem of the present. If the coordinates of the contemporary grid are unfixed, the grid moves around as we walk around it, plotting point lines along and into our usual surroundings, architectural systems seamlessly becoming display mechanisms.

When searching the term “grid walls,” the first hit on Google is “Gridwall Warehouse - enhance your retail display space.” Unlike the modernist grids Krauss described, whose composition and materials were part of a cohesive whole, the “gridwall” is a purely visual effect when evoking the cognitive mapping and scheming we apply onto peers at art openings, or a purely material effect when used as a frame for the hooking, hanging, and display of merchandise. The porosity gridwalls suggest lets us move from one mechanism to the other, from one side to the other, connecting platforms for playing or sales.

The latter strategy is evoked in another of Morris’ works, *untitled* (#09-13), where gestural, painted marks *hang off* the grid. The painting/grid is not filled, like Warhol, but sparingly populated instead. Similarly, Ortmeyer uses the grid for broader structures of architecture and their exclusions (filliping the austere positive and negative of the chessboard), just as Bacher explores the arbitrariness of the placement of icons on her faux game-board. Morris and, as will be seen, Laura Owens, make rich use of the grid’s sales-rack aesthetic in painting. It seems that, no matter the medium, the grid reflexively calls on the medium, through strategies of holding and hanging.

## 2.3 HANGING OUT, OR, THE GRID AS BRAND

In a 1992 lecture delivered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Yves-Alain Bois said of the 1912 shift in Picasso’s work that the grid was “now devoted solely to the syntactic function of linking discrete elements, as a basic structure on which to hook up the various marks.”<sup>5</sup> The mirror of this idea of togetherness, of ‘hanging out together’—basically structured—is like a slick sales tactic of lifestyle marketing. For Bacher, sculptures hang out, playing themselves on a game of calculation (underwritten by the ordered, but smudged, grid). In Morris’ notations, the grid functions as though dredging abstractions from the sea, netting up whatever may wash up on its shores.

Sam Moyer’s marble abstractions, such as *Malini* (2015), use a disordered grid to hold slanting planes of marble. The weighty material is arranged as though on display, as though selling its connotations to be rearrange-able in different lights. For Moyer, the surface is simply whatever is set best for sale. The grid is reduced to its most banal—and salient—function, the multifold referents of advertising.

## 2.4 WINDOW GLASS

In Laura Owens’ work around the turn of the millennium, soft, cutesy landscapes and abstractions are thrown into relief as though viewers look through dirty glass. Splotches of color hang on the surface of the painting—here marks, not lines, create an architecture.

Writing on Owens’ most recent work, Joanna Fiduccia observes, “the virtual sun is setting.”<sup>6</sup> The drop shadow, a feature pioneered by Apple Computer Inc. with the 1983 release of the Apple Lisa personal computer, which separates our world from that of pixels—giving them a correlated space with a sun of its own—is being phased out of computer interface design. Owens isn’t ready to let go, as she slips the drop shadow back into her paintings, deftly flattening and shadowing strokes of color. The real-world application of what look like Microsoft Paint gestures come laden with a digital sun. Fiduccia calls these “new gestures for a new body... just as [computer] interface looks to reject its corporeal concessions altogether.”<sup>7</sup>

Owens foregrounds corporeality, by muddling the space of our

apprehension. If the grid is our most accessible articulation of digital space, Owens makes rich use of the ocular changes it has wrought. In her 2012 exhibition at Sadie Coles, *Pavement Karaoke / Alphabet*, grids appear as paint-tool stroke textures. Here, the grid—belonging to the rigid, gingham, collage, or the classified-section variety—is both a place to hang onto, and a thing hanging onto a surface.

## 3.0 THE GRID AND THE JESTER

For Owens, grids are applied quickly in strokes or swaths—though the provenance of their digital-looking-gestures is handmade. In Owens’ works, the specter of the author’s mark begins to undermine the gesture even as it grids it. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s holy trinity of hand, eye, and canvas rests precisely on its ‘ungriddability’—one could never seize the gesture and submit it to mapping, dividing, extrapolating, or resizing, as the gesture was supposed to be indexical. This formula was that of pure belief in the painting, without the cover of material. But in an era of “remote-control painting,” networks subtend and transfer our work before it even happens.<sup>8</sup> Gestures are now *across* space.

## 3.1 MAGNIFYING GLASS

Grids on a painting magnify the weave of canvas and linen. Canvas found popularity because it is easier to transport (and thus sell) than panel pictures.<sup>9</sup> Painted grids, then, evoke the very warp and weft of painting, a history determined through the transactions its early-modern form facilitates. In the twentieth century “the grid came to coincide more and more closely with its material support and to begin to actually depict the warp and weft of textiles.”<sup>10</sup> For Owens, the evocation of the medium itself with the grid is underlaid with a surface aesthetic, where broad strokes cling closest to our vision. And while Morris either slaps soft abstractions on grids, or blurs our vision with their intensity, Owens uses the tropes of painting to break the grid into display displaying itself.

## 3.2 FLEX—THE HARLEQUIN

A fabric was recently developed which changes color when stretched. Unlike the lossy jpeg, which creates grids and blurs others by offering a general camouflage out of pixels, this fabric uses the usual confusion to expand—like a sort of

analog vectorized image.

The harlequin print, associated with its namesake and court jesters, is a pattern resembling a slightly stretched grid. Its failure to be an even grid presumably makes games unplayable on its surface (unlike the perfectly square chessboard). But this fabric vests the wearer with the ability to actualize play in the space before them—in front of the surface, not on it. The grid is thus exteriorized.

While Morris’ grids vacillate between the light touch of snakes-and-ladders and binding, bright jail bars, Owens inserts the grid *into* the gesture, producing endlessly predicative objects. Although occurring on different planes, Bacher and Ortmeyer’s chessboards similarly rely on this gesture of the unruly jester—for where is the jester’s place in the court of chess? As the one with the quality of *parrhesia*, or the tendency to speak the dangerous truth, the medieval court was structured around the jester as the exception that proves the rule. Perhaps his exclusion from the formal organization of chess has been recouped by these four artists, who locate him as the ordering principle which cuts across the grid, thus letting them disrupt it.

Though perhaps not as substantive a historical shift as the one Krauss elaborates in “Grids,” the no-end-in-sight reverberations of unfulfilled classic modern



thought has provided space for certain contemporary artists to recuperate the exclusionary principles that the modernist grid rested on. The contemporary grid is collapsed onto what is gridded, from the grid as cage that holds the painting, to the borderline loss of its legibility through pixelation, to its sales tactics. This grid becomes a specter of medium specificity, which it resists, too. Nets pulling things in often get pulled in themselves.

### TITLE PAGE:

Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2012. Acrylic, oil, Flashe, resin, pumice and collage on canvas. 108 x 84 inches. Courtesy the artist / Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York / Rome; Sadie Coles HQ, London; and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

### PREVIOUS SPREAD:

Lutz Bacher, Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany. February 9 – April 19, 2013.

### BELOW LEFT:

Sarah Ortmeyer, *GRANDMASTER*, Haus Wittgenstein Vienna, 2013. Photo credit: Georg Petermichl. Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery

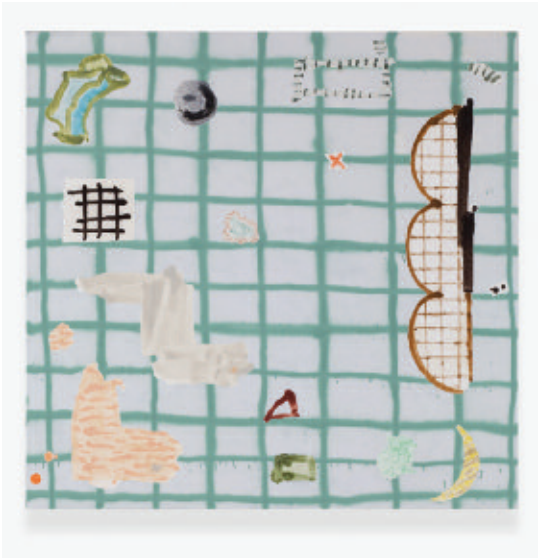
### BELOW RIGHT:

Rebecca Morris, *Untitled*, 2002. Oil and spray paint on canvas. 60 x 60 inches

### FOLLOWING SPREAD:

Sarah Ortmeyer, *GRANDMASTER*, Haus Wittgenstein Vienna, 2013. Photo credit: Georg Petermichl. Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery

- 1 Howe, Susan. *The Quarry*. New York: New Directions, 2015. 123.
- 2 Krauss, Rosalind. “Grids,” *October* Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 50.
- 3 Joselit, David. “Mary Heilmann’s Embodied Grids [1990]” in Ryan, David, *Talking Painting: Dialogues with Twelve Contemporary Abstract Painters*. New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2002. 104.
- 4 “Instead of emptying the grid... Warhol filled it.” *Ibid.*, 105.
- 5 Bois, Yves-Alain. “The Semiology of Cubism,” in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*. Qtd in Joselit, David, “Reassembling Painting” in *Painting 2.0*. Achim Hochdörfer, David Joselit, Manuela Ammera, Eds. Munich, New York, and London: Prestel Publishing, 2016. 185.
- 6 Fiduccia, Joanna. “The Shadow of the Virtual Sun,” *Spike Art Quarterly* No. 41 (Autumn 2014). 90.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 8 Birnbaum, Daniel and John Kelsey. “Painting by Remote,” in *Michel Majerus*. New York, Matthew Marks Gallery, 2014. 16-18.
- 9 As Isabelle Graw observes in *High Price*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010. 25.
- 10 Krauss, Rosalind. “The Grid, the /Cloud/, and the Detail” in Mertins, Detlef, *The Presence of Mies*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994. 145.









# Four Decades A Gallerist

RHONA HOFFMAN // 40 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Katy Donoghue



“I BECAME MORE FEMINIST, NOT JUST BECAUSE OF THAT, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN THE WORLD, AND THERE STARTED TO BE MORE AND MORE WOMEN ARTISTS WHO WERE SICK OF THE MALE GAZE AND STARTED DOING THE FEMALE GAZE.”

— RHONA HOFFMAN

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago. The momentous occasion will be marked with consecutive thematic shows this fall and winter, in three parts—starting in mid-September and running through mid-February, 2017. The first portion of the exhibitions will focus on minimal and conceptual artists previously shown at Rhona Hoffman, such as Mel Bochner, Fred Sandback, Sol LeWitt, Art & Language, and Richard Nonas. The second, looking more at identity and gender, will include work by Natalie Frank, Robert Heinecken, and Luis Gispert. The final, geared towards work that is more social and political, will include Huma Bhabha, Dara Birnbaum, and Leon Golub. Over the summer, while preparing for her suite of anniversary exhibitions, Hoffman was kind enough to sit down with me in her West Loop space. At a table in the back of the gallery we went through exhibition postcards and photos of installations and projects from over the past forty years.

— Hoffman moved to Chicago from New York in 1958. She was on the Woman’s Board of both the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in the sixties, where she stayed until 1974 (she and fellow board member Helyn Goldenberg opened and ran the MCA store during that time). Hoffman and Donald Young opened Young Hoffman Gallery in 1976, first doing

shows with Realist and Abstract Expressionist artists, before carving out their own voice in conversations of Minimalism, Conceptualism, and more, with shows that included work by LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, and Robert Ryman. They showed Gordon Matta Clark, Richard Tuttle, Charles Gaines, Gilbert & George, Laurie Anderson, and Vito Acconci all before 1980. —

— The gallery split in 1983, and Hoffman began working with artists like Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, Dara Birnbaum, Bruce Nauman, Tim Rollins, and Nancy Spero. The nineties brought in shows by Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Dawoud Bey, among others—and the early 2000s introduced emerging painters such as Kehinde Wiley and Mickalene Thomas. Hoffman continues to look for new talent, such as Derrick Adams, Spencer Finch, Deana Lawson, and Nathaniel Mary Quinn. She has been showing black artists since the first years of the gallery, has shown over 80 female artists over the past four decades, and can be credited with giving many artists their first gallery exhibition. —

— That Hoffman has represented and put on shows with some of the same artists over several decades—like LeWitt, Matta Clark, Kruger, Sherman, Tuttle, and Acconci—is a testament to the strong friendships she’s forged outside the gallery, as well as the work she has put into both selling

and placing art in important collections, institutions, and special projects. Hoffman’s admirable eye and taste extend beyond painting and sculpture to architecture and ceramics, and her knack for spotting ability and potential in young artists has never wavered. —

— Over a few visits and phone calls in the months leading up to her anniversary shows, Hoffman shared anecdotes and stories that were funny, jaw-dropping, and awe-inspiring. Times certainly have changed—you can’t just look up someone in the phone book and call them for a studio visit anymore—but Hoffman’s instinct and spirit certainly hasn’t.

**KATY DONOGHUE:** Let’s start at the beginning. Tell me about the first shows you did with Donald Young when you opened the gallery in 1976.

**RHONA HOFFMAN:** We first did a show on Realism [Oct 8–Nov 10, 1976] and a show on Abstract Expressionism [Around 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Nov 12–Dec 15, 1976]. With the Realism show we got lucky. There was a man in Detroit who died and whose collection of Realism had really major art figures. We had had got some more from Susan & Lewis Meisel in New York, so we rented a truck in New York, we drove to Detroit, picked up this collection, drove it back to Chicago, and then hung it. —

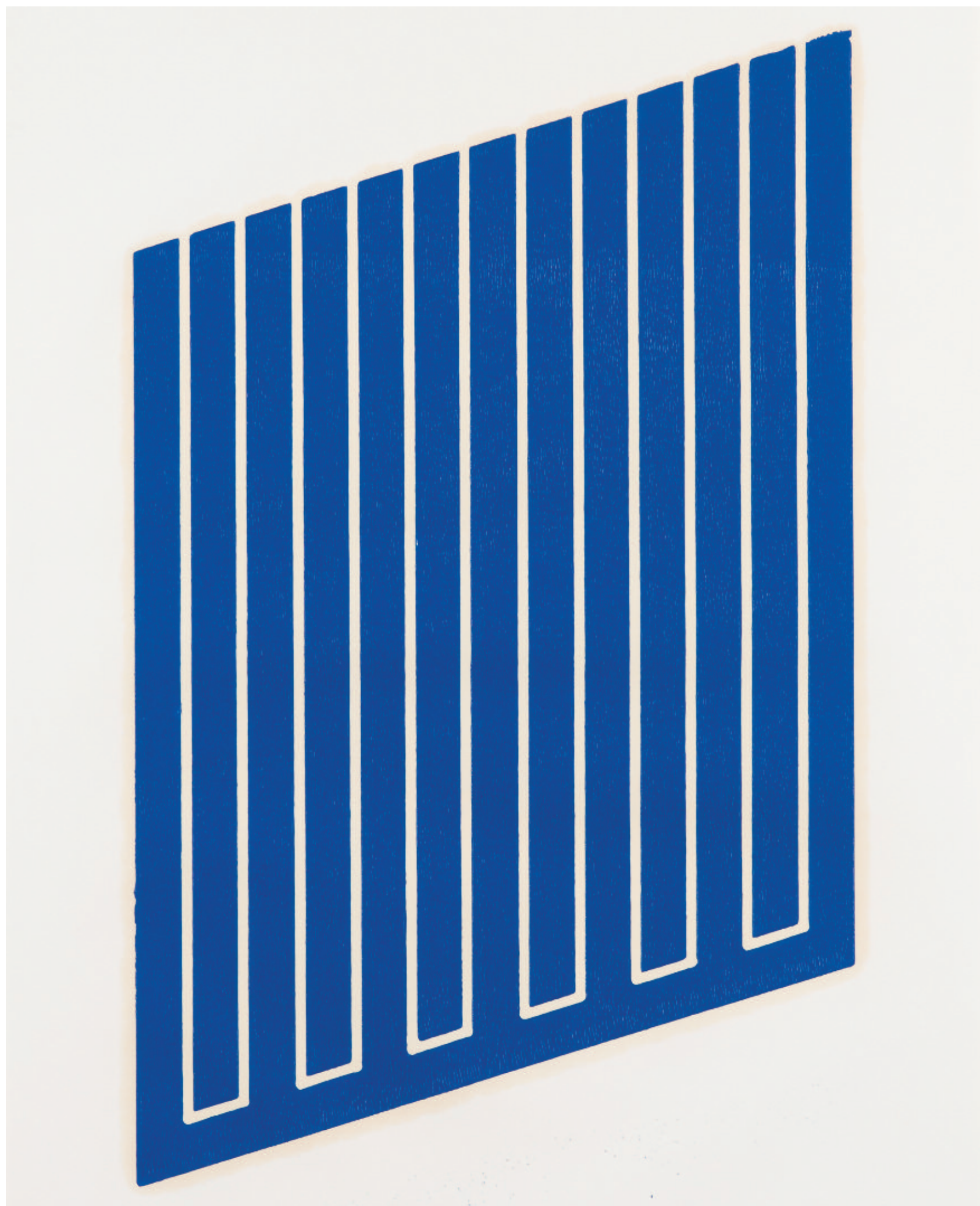
— In the beginning, we went and got the art, hung it, I cooked dinner, invited people over, washed dishes, went to bed, and then got up and got to work the next day. The art world then was really simpler—it was not very costly; a Joan Mitchell painting was \$4,500. Art was for people who were middle class. It was accessible financially. You didn’t have to sell the kids to buy a painting! [Laughs].

**KD:** Do you remember the first thing you sold?

**RH:** The first thing we sold was a Larry Rivers out of the back room to Lou Kaplan from Paris. Starting from the get go we were very fortunate. Chicago had another generation of really good collectors like Paul and Camille Oliver-Hoffmann or Mort Neumann. They were wonderful, serious collectors of art that came to the gallery and their taste identified with ours.

— The Hoffmanns bought Vito Acconci’s *Maze Table* (1985). They lived at 209 East Lakeshore—she was really an amazing collector. She knew that they weren’t owners of art, they were trustees for it. She took out all her dining room furniture and the *Maze Table* became what was in the dining room. Behind it, they also had a Ryman, there was a Kelly, there







was a Twombly, and there was a LeWitt on the floor.

**KD:** What was the next show, after those first two?

**RH:** A show of prints with Parasol Press that had Agnes Martin, Brice Marden, Robert Mangold—that whole Minimalist group [Jan 8–Feb 16, 1977]. Then we started showing Donad Judd, Vito Acconci, and Sol LeWitt was one of our first shows. Sandback we picked up later.

————— I have been so fortunate; these are people who really became friends. When you can identify an artwork that you really like in your soul, you probably like the person too. There are lots of things you’re agreeing about, including where to have dinner!

————— It was different

then. You went to the phone book, you picked up the phone, you’d say, “Hello my name is Rhona Hoffman, Donald Young and I would like to visit your studio.” It was easier.

**KD:** It’s different now?

**RH:** I don’t know what the situation is starting out now because now I’m privileged and I can call people.

**KD:** But you still want to get along with them, I guess.

**RH:** No, but it is better. Mostly without exception, the art I like comes with people I like.

————— Julian Schnabel and I like each other still, but we did a show. The show was called *Ornamental Despair* [October 17–November 18, 1980], we did a postcard of the painting he did

by the same name (1980), it was black velvet, all white paint, gorgeous. But he didn’t like the size of the postcard; it was too small, so we reprinted it this big [*holds her hands a foot apart*]. It was done nicely, but it was done for his ego [*laughs*].

**KD:** What were some of the big shows for you in the early eighties that you recall?

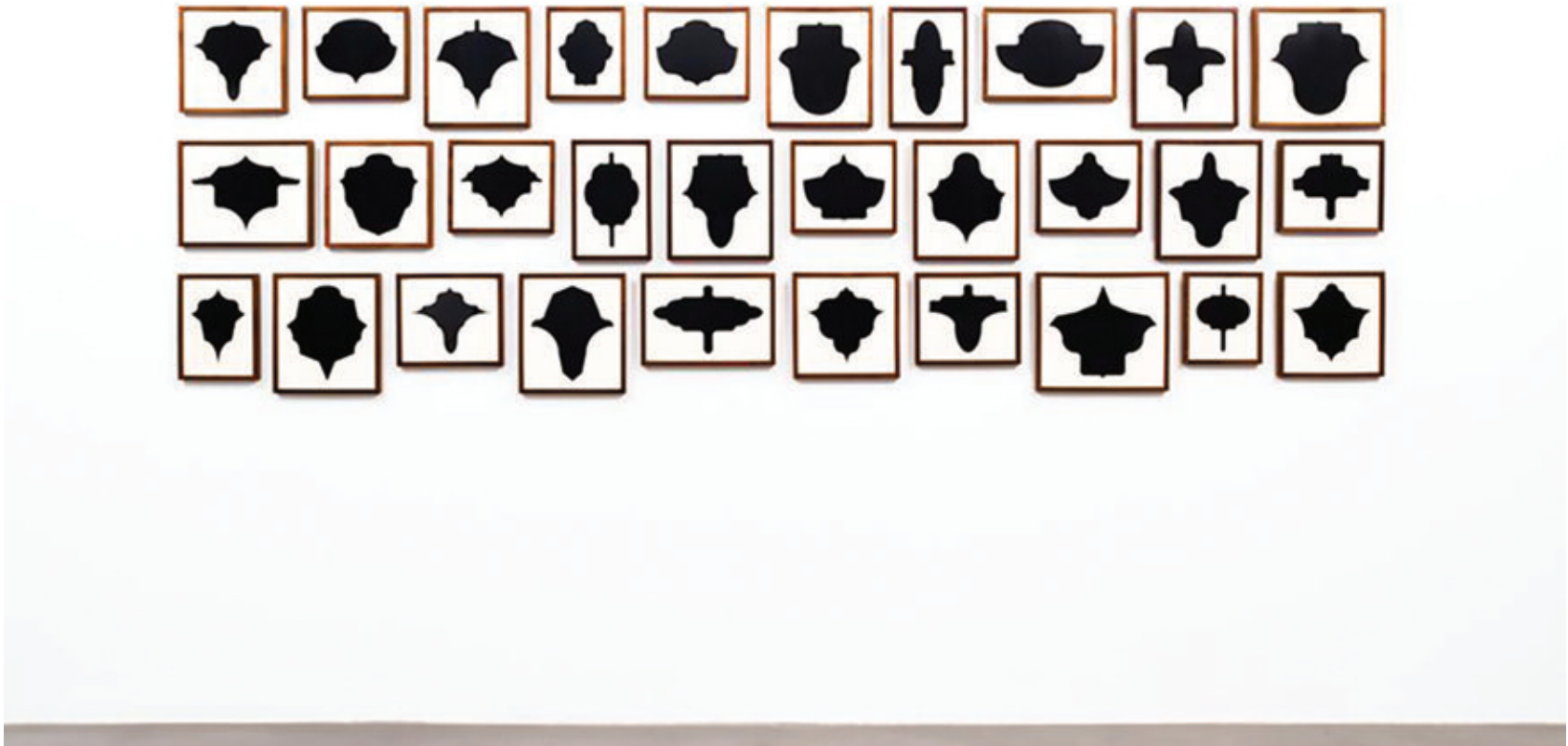
**RH:** In 1982 we had a great show of Robert Ryman’s work [March 12–April 13, 1982] that went to dOCUMENTA that year. We also did a big exhibition of Georg Baselitz [May 11 – May 22, 1982], and most people in Chicago didn’t know who he was, so they were startled by the price. We were like, the man is over forty years old, he’s been selling art for years! It was a great exhibit, and we were able to sell two out of the whole

show. A year later, the head of the Art Institute called and said, “Do you still have any?” We said we did not.

**KD:** And then the next year, 1983, you and Donald split the gallery, and you established Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

**RH:** Yes, so in 1983 Donald and I split our galleries, and you can see by the shows that the Minimal and Conceptual focus continues, but it becomes more socio-politically focused. I show more black artists, more women artists—unconsciously done, of course. This was not a thing where I said, “I’m going to show black or women artists.”

————— We showed Barbara Kruger. You know that famous work that says, “It’s a small world but not if you have to clean it?” That was in our exhibition [April 6–28, 1990], the



Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles bought it from us. We did a fun project with Kruger; David Meitus used to own a match factory, so we made Barbara Kruger matches. [*Takes out a Ziploc bag full of them to show me*] I used to just give them away!

**KD:** I heard you have a good Leo Castelli story.

**RH:** I don’t know when it was but it was in the eighties. The Chicago art fair had really become a place to be, and people started realizing that Chicago had really wonderful collectors—the reason I’m still in business is that I figured that out, by the way!

So Leo comes to Chicago for the art fair and at that time I was driving a checker marathon limousine with jump seats that sat twelve comfortably.

**KD:** I’m sorry, you were driving a limo?

**RH:** Yes! When I moved into the city after my divorce, a friend of mine, David Markin, owned checker cab! It was maroon with a black top, really funny! It got about twelve miles to the gallon on the open road but it was so superb, I loved it. I remember in 1978 when Gordon Matta Clark was doing the project for the MCA where he cut the building, it was February and Gordon hadn’t seen anything, so myself and Judith Kirshner, who was the curator for the MCA at the time and one of my dear friends, put him in the back of the car and we drove him around Chicago.

————— But back to Leo, he was in town for the fair and had said he hadn’t seen anything in Chicago. I said, “Oh, come in my limo! I’ll take you for a spin!” [*Laughs*]. And I was taking him and his wife all over Chicago. At around noon we

were in the banking district and I ran out of gas. So there I am, in the middle of the street at noon with no gas with Leo Castelli, a hero of mine and maybe the most famous art dealer in the world, along with his wife. Leo was laughing, so I got out of the car. I was much younger, much cuter, so I went to the back of the car and I put my hands on the trunk. It was lunch time, so all these guys are coming out of the banks, and I’m staring at people on the street, until I caught one! [*Laughs*]. And now Leo is really laughing, as this guy help pushed us to the side of the street. And then I would never have the nerve to do this, but because it was Leo, I turned off the motor, and I left the car there, and Leo and I and his wife went off.

**KD:** No!

**RH:** It was incredible. I mean the nerve! I was trying so desperately to please him. He was someone who really *loved* women, but he also admired women. He didn’t show very many, maybe Lee Bonticou was it.

**KD:** Your exhibition history is quite different from that; You’ve shown over 80 female artists, right?

**RH:** At least. You know, in 1974 when I got divorced, I wanted an American Express card and they wouldn’t give it to me because I was divorced. And I said, “I spent all the money! What are you talking about?” Anyway, I still don’t have an American Express card.

I became more feminist, not just because of that, but there are certain things that happened in the world, and there started to be more and more women artists who were sick of the male gaze and started doing the female gaze. There had always been Nancy Spero, but in the

late seventies you started to see Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Nancy Dwyers, the list is really long. —

————— It was really lovely to have this thing that was in my personal life, and the things that I subscribed to, be part of a conversation in the art world, and to become friends with the artists who shared my feelings. The art world is a fascinating one because it involves all the worlds, including language, literature, movies, so it becomes a way to stay plugged in.

**KD:** Did you always feel comfortable with your eye?

**RH:** Yes, for good or bad, or maybe delusional, but yeah I did. I do. If I walk into a room, I know.

————— You can’t make an eye. You either have one or you don’t. You can improve a bad or mediocre eye. Over time, I’ve begun to respect my eye. There is something that happens when there’s a confluence of your head and your stomach agreeing. And if those two things don’t come together, you really shouldn’t buy it. Your intellect and your emotional situation really have to be in agreement for you to like something enough to buy.

————— A man was here last week, he showed me something and I asked him, “What more do you want to get from it? There is nothing more for you to see in it, so there is no point in buying that.” You have to buy something where you can



keep discovering new things about it, learning something or feeling something. It has to be more complicated.

————— Rhona Hoffman Gallery will present *40 Years: Part 1* September 16–October 22, 2016; *40 Years: Part 2*, October 28–December 23, 2016, and *40 Years: Part 3*, January 13 - February 18, 2017.

**TITLE PAGE:**  
Richard Tuttle, *Boys, Let’s be Bad Boys*, 1998. Image courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

————— **PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT:**  
© [2016] Donald Judd / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

**PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT:**  
© [2016] Donald Judd / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

————— **BELOW, LEFT:**  
Alan McCollum, *Collection of Thirty Drawings*, 1988/1991, Artist’s pencil on museum board. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York.

**BELOW, RIGHT:**  
Pier Paolo Calzolari, *Untitled (Senza Titolo)*, 1970. Image courtesy of Rhona Hoffman Gallery.



# Art & Language: Emergency Conditionals

ISSUE 03 // SPECIAL EDITION

Selected by Stephanie Cristello

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In April of 2016, I was invited by Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts, as part of a research trip for EXPO CHICAGO through Tony Karman, to attend the opening of the Philippe Méaille Collection at the Château de Montsoreau—a beautiful renaissance style castle installed at the convergence of two rivers, the Loire and the Vienne in France. The château was built on the remains of a XI-century construction, then used as a strategic military point, until renovated to completion during the second half of the XV–XVI century. The perfectly picturesque building held, contrary to its outward expectations, one of the largest collections of work by British conceptualists Art & Language.

Defined by their rigorously stark and administrative aesthetic, the collaborative group of artists began working in the late 1960s; today it is Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, working in their studio just outside of Oxford, UK. The essayistic practice of Art & Language has been described as art if not philosophy, and philosophy if not art—sidestepping the judgement placed on the value system of either form, transforming instead into a third, more transitive style of artistic production. As van Coenegrachts notes, “They named this predicament *Emergency Conditional*, and it announced the birth of a new genre, which was neither literature, philosophy, nor criticism—a new kind of textual category that incorporated philosophy and Conceptual Art.”

I visited Ramsden and Baldwin at their studio a few days following the opening of the château. The inclusion of *Emergency Conditionals* within THE SEEN was born out of this conversation; the piece is structured as an interview, and reads as such, though as with all work by Art & Language, text is not a substitute for an object, it *is* the object. For this reason, the piece is filed under ‘Features’ rather than ‘Interviews’—a minor, but nevertheless significant, detail.



# EMERGENCY CONDITIONALS

## PREAMBLE

We were surprised to be invited to speak at the conference on Philosophy and Conceptual Art. In fact, the invitation was made to Charles Harrison. He is sometimes an academic. But he felt a) that it would be inappropriate to respond as such, and b) that together we would probably represent our relations with philosophy (whatever that is) to greater practical purpose; that’s to say that we might be able to represent our practice—as something that absorbs or spits out ‘philosophy’—in such a way as to reflect the thirty-odd years of our conversation.

———— The brief for the conference seemed historically naïve—unaware of the vicissitudes and variations in the use of the term ‘Conceptual Art’. So we began to trace a sort of narrative. To do this, it was necessary to distinguish our sense of Conceptual Art from at least two possible others. To this extent, we were adding philosophical and practical flesh to what seemed at the outset some very meagre bones—or not even bones, just vague and ambiguous usage.

...Not that that’s always so bad.

———— What was disturbing was a sense of the dreariness of aestheticians: a sort of killing abstraction that failed to recognise the practical and philosophical connectedness of the territory. Edwardian uncles get round to it after thirty-five years and get it wrong. (Imagine philosophy discovering Cubism in 1947.)

Anyway, what we offered was not a performance. It was a sort of expository paper converted to the representation of an artistic practice. This practice is discursive and reflexive—talkative. How do we represent ourselves among philosophers? Not as philosophers. Was what we said philosophy? Is it affected by the faint whiff of scandal or insecurity that is expressed by what we call the emergency conditional?

———— The ‘voices’ that are connected to particular speeches have no urgent or unique connection to what they say. They do not record an actual speech event. The text was divided up into speakable portions. Each portion section was assigned a number from 1 to 3—on a more or less arbitrary basis. 1 was spoken by Michael Baldwin, 2 by Mel Ramsden, 3 by Charles Harrison. There is no necessity in this, either psychological or factual.

———— We have collaborated on several occasions with the members of the Jackson Pollock Bar, a performance group from Freiburg—we write theoretical texts, and they ‘install’ them. Professional actors perform the lines and actions variously assigned in the script to as Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, and Mel Ramsden. In the case of the following text, the speakers could have been rearranged. As to whether there would have been some loss as a consequence of the a rearrangement, we do not know, nor will we ever know what loss there may have been as a consequence of the arrangement we followed. To this extent, it was a performance as in live theatre—or as in instruments playing from a score.

———— At the same time, the text is readable, translatable and so forth—a mere text. Was our reading of it art, philosophy, or drama? It is possible that it belongs to a genre that could include *The Blue and Brown Books: the Musical*, or *Painting as an Art on Ice*?

———— It is more likely, though, that it bears a passing family resemblance to what the Jackson Pollock Bar calls *Theory Installation*. But how would it then be distinguished from what might normally be presented at an academic conference?

**MB:** By way of an opening, we need to ask just what the term ‘Conceptual Art’ is supposed to pick out. It has lately come to mean more or less any kind of art that does not explicitly seek to attach itself to a technical tradition and is not medium specific. Art is no longer conceived on the basic principle of a painting/sculpture axis, but rather as a current and continuing generic product capable of installation and distribution within some institution of an art-world.

**MR:** As an alternative, we could think of Conceptual Art as a specific critical development in the historical ambience of high Modernism during the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s. In talking of high Modernism, we mean not just a selection of transatlantic art made retrospectively in accordance with a purified Greenbergian theory—not just the paintings of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, and the sculpture of Anthony Caro—but also the work that both overlapped and competed with theirs: Frank Stella’s, Don Judd’s, Dan Flavin’s, Robert Morris’, Sol LeWitt’s. A Conceptual Art movement conceived along these lines is associated with a specific historical period, though we can still argue both about how that period is defined and about what work does or does not come up for the count. Thus, by analogy, while Cubism was a movement with fuzzy boundaries, and while the epithet ‘Cubist’ was used by non-professionals as late as the mid-twentieth century to refer to odd-looking avant-garde art, it could be said that a Cubist painting made in the 1950s would have been unlikely to deserve much serious critical attention.

**CH:** It might seem that these two different modes of usage of the category of Conceptual Art are easily enough reconciled. We could simply consider a continuation of generic Conceptual Art as a long-term outcome of the historically specific Conceptual Art movement—of what has been called ‘Modernism’s Nervous Breakdown’. But we have to be careful. It was not as though practical dissent from hegemonic Modernism had one single possible outcome. It might have seemed for a while that everyone was busy disinterring Marcel Duchamp, playing the same game of appropriative and nominative gestures. (I think of this as the ‘When Attitudes become Form’ moment, which lasted until around the summer of 1969.) But it very soon became apparent, at least to Art & Language, that this could develop in several quite different ways, from which we pick out a contrasting pair.

**MR:** It could go towards a kind of institutional theatre: from Joseph Beuys and Daniel Buren, to the more recently celebrated works of Ilya Kabakov, or to more or less anything liable to be installed in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern.

**MB:** Alternatively, it could lead to a kind of essayistic practice that reflected upon its own conditions and considered the language and vocabulary and historicity of the appropriative gesture itself.

**CH:** But these were not possibilities with equal pragmatic legs. The first may have been the complaisant client of demotic institutional theory, but by the early 1970s, informal versions of that theory were spreading apace both through the avant-garde sectors of the art-world and through the graduate departments of American universities. The art of institutional theatre both rode and was ridden by various types of fashionable postmodernist theory—particularly by those that were vehicles for virtuous anxieties about the consequences and inequities of class, race, gender, and expansion of the media. Its various practical modes were unified under the sign of the curator, and were supported from the world of cultural studies and corporate radicalism.

**MR:** In the climate of taste this alliance has served to encourage, pathetic Modernists like Cy Twombly and anti-Modernists like Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud could be recuperated alongside such exciting newcomers as Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin. ‘You’ve got to choose between Mondrian and Duchamp’, Ad Reinhardt said in 1967. Now choice means the right to consume everything indifferently.

**MB:** Not long ago we participated in a symposium addressed to the question, ‘What work does the art work do?’ On that occasion, we suggested that for the sake of argument a distinction might be made along the following lines: on the one hand, there are works of art—and theories about works of art—based on the proposition that ‘work’ is what the spectators do, variously animating the work of art through interpretation and exegesis. It should be clear enough that the art of institutional theatre tends to conform to this mode on the whole, and that it delivers itself with some facility to journalism, whether of the popular or of the academic variety.

**MR:** Media-led critical bullshit sticks easier to the slight and the trivial than it does to the articulate and the complex.

**MB:** On the other hand, there are works of art—or theories about works of art—based on the proposition that whatever work is done is intimately connected to the intentional character of the artwork, and that it is what that artwork does in animating its suitably attuned and attentive spectator.

**CH:** We should make it clear, perhaps, that we do not here mean to invoke that Wollheimian gentleman who is the artist’s boon companion. We simply mean to suggest that there exists the possibility of interpretative failure, and that to a significant degree, the work of art will be the arbiter of that. When we refer to the intentional character of the work, we do not want to suggest that this is the intentionality of a single individual, but that there is some critical dialogue that the work and the viewer enter into regarding what is relevant and resonant in a given interpretation, and that one of the participants in this dialogue will be the work itself conceived as intentional.

**MB:** The second, essayistic, type of Conceptual Art tends to look to the second of these modes. Separated from the permissive melange

of ‘When Attitudes become Form,’ at a point when it no longer seemed defensible to treat Modernism’s Nervous Breakdown as an occasion of opportunity, it developed out of a kind of anxiety regarding the relaxed, ostensive practice of dematerialisation-as-liberation. One couldn’t just live in a relaxed world of wilful artistic ostension. How, we asked, might one make work with detail, in a circumstance where the possibility of detail is not given among the resources of a specific medium? By detail, what we had in mind was some aspect or set of connected properties that both required and arbitrated a complex description—one that was not just an account of how the work interacted with the art-world.

**MR:** The problem was not that one objected to art getting away with things under the artistically demotic forms of an institutional theory—‘If someone calls it art, it’s art’ and so on. For the most part, that the emptiness of Conceptual Art was amenable to such theory just seemed critically harmless.

**CH:** Nor was the problem how to have something of aesthetic interest in a Wollheimian sense that nevertheless didn’t have the physical properties by which that interest was supposed to be provoked. At a certain level, the issue of aesthetic interest was simply beside the point. Art is theory-laden and concept-laden whatever anyone claims to be seeing and feeling in front of it—and not just any old concepts or any old theories. Peter Lamarque has made a similar point with respect to the work of Rembrandt. It could be said that essayistic Conceptual Art simply made an issue of this.

**MB:** The difficulty was that neither of these senses of the problematic took the consequences of the collapse of the Greenbergian mainstream into adequate account; nor did they properly acknowledge the insecurities attendant on the institutional theory—the concern that it might simply be wrong in its accounting for the relations between perceiving and describing, or that, in accepting it, artists might find themselves in an invidious position vis-à-vis actual institutions—a dead end so far as art was concerned.

**MR:** In fact, it could be said that one consequence of institutional theory was its ability to licence an obsession with the idea of art as generic, when much of what is produced in the name of generic art could quite well be accounted for as continuous with the critical concerns of late modernism. After all, there are actually very few Snow-Shovel like things, but many paintings with words and tasteful arrangements of stuff, which do no more real damage to modernist ideas about medium-specificity than did Frank Stella’s black paintings.

**CH:** As we have already suggested, the alternative modes we have labelled institutional theatre and essayistic practice were not actually equivalent and parallel developments. The consequences of the development of generic Conceptual Art were such as to suppress the discourses of autonomy and internality, and to obliterate the sense of a parallel development that retained some investment in their continuity. It grew fat on the very theoretical



resources it claimed to have transcended. In the new hegemony, even the supposedly outmoded modernistic discourse on autonomy was somehow incorporated and represented.

MR: But we do clearly identify the practice of Art & Language with the essayistic alternative. We are therefore unwilling to accede to the idea that generic Conceptual Art is the unchallengeable outcome of the original Conceptual Art movement. This does not mean that what we have been, and are still trying, to do is flog Greenbergian Modernism back into life, nor to reinstate its concepts of autonomy and internality. It may be that our form of Conceptual Art had in common with painting the fact that it did not actually *require* a specifically institutional kind of theory to tell it what it is. But given the way things were going, autonomy was always going to be a contested and insecure project. It was not as though the question of what work the art work does was ever really going to be settled one way or the other. Indeed, if it were, art would almost certainly be a thoroughly uninteresting business.

CH: We should try to review some of the conditions of problems. One is that the critical negativity [bankruptcy?] of Modernism was part of the reason that the Conceptual Art movement could emerge.

MR: A second is that ‘institutionality’ is, or has become, a sort of enslavement to management.

MB: A third is that only by the means of some form of internality, combined with some capacity for detail, could death by curatorship be effectively resisted.

MR: A fourth is that the denizens of the happy world of wilful ostension failed to grasp the complexities and difficulties of the very language by which that ostension was being effected. Instead they relied both on the artist being accorded a kind of ‘Romantic’ authenticity and on a complaisant acceptance of the transparency of his words.

MB: A fifth problem is that this authority and mystification could only be resisted by description, and by a theory that was in some way internal to the work itself. What was required was a social world in which and into which the work could be uttered.

CH: In fact, it is not entirely clear which came first: the imperative to beat the curator by creating a descriptive circumstance, or the need for some sort of internal complexity in the work.

MB: The best way to resolve that issue is to say that a sort of context of conversational concentration was ‘naturally’ established once one recognized that art is vacuous unless it is describing as well as described.

MR: And once you have got a conversational process going it tends quite naturally to take on a project-like character: in being conversational, it tends also to take account of the world of which it is with difficulty a part, and in which it is uttered. It is thus availed as

a matter of course of the grounds on which to contest claims for the internality of its own outcomes. This is to say that a conversational practice will be disposed to sustain a degree of tension between, on the one hand, its contextual and institutional circumstances, and on the other the kinds of claim it might make to internality (to having an oeuvre, and to there being some degree of formal integrity in its products, and so on).

CH: In fact the conversational practice tends to militate against any purified sense of what the work is, so that its capacity to constitute an oeuvre is severely impeded. There is a popular representation of Art & Language according to which we are held to having made an avant-garde claim to the effect that our conversations and proceedings are art. This vexatiously misses the point. It takes us, as it were, back to the original point of bifurcation, and associates us with the institutional theatre of such figures as Ian Wilson—who did indeed claim around 1970 that his conversations were art.

MB: We can recall having had conversations with Ian Wilson. We can recall nothing of their content. The presupposition was presumably that as artworks, they need have none. ‘Conversation’ was a quasi-Duchampian readymade—in this case an appropriated category, or...what? In fact, were one able to remember the content of a conversation with Ian Wilson, one would be the less likely to recover conversation itself as a ready-made.

MR: For us, the conversational process was not a Duchampian gesture. Though it may have had heir-lines to it, it also had heir-lines to the ‘internal’ critique of high modernism and its penumbra. But first and foremost, it was a means of exchange and production. The point was that we were in no position confidently impose a sense of artistic hierarchy on the distinctions between verbal discussions, informal on-paper exchanges, essays, and pieces of paper stuck to the gallery wall. Of course, certain hierarchies did get established for purposes of publication and display, but they were matters of practical contingency.

MB: It would be wrong, though, to suggest that there were no normal aesthetic considerations in play. Whether we cared to admit it or not, certain matters of taste were relevant, and these were of a more-or-less Wollheimian kind—to do with the physical properties of things.

MR: That which was produced for distribution and display was not without its vestigial aesthetic aspects. There was no pink Conceptual Art, and absolutely no green. What tended to predominate was the black, white, and grey of the office and of the otherwise socially unspectacular. There was a kind of truth to materials in this. In those days there were no colour photocopies. In the case of a great deal of Conceptual Art—some of our own included—there may in the end be little remainder once considerations of graphic taste are accounted for. It is an open question just how far Wittgenstein-on-the-wall escapes significantly from the kind of aesthetic admonitions that were associated with the work of Don Judd, without in the process simply

being reduced to an inefficient form of Wittgenstein-on-the-page.

MB: We did have some anxieties about this at the time. What followed were texts printed in green and red and so on. The point was to evade the myth that neutral taste was co-extensive with critically significant dematerialisation—and that there was a progressive political aspect to both.

CH: We were well enough aware of the silly hypostatizations. Some of the talk about dematerialisation certainly muddled the waters. In fact, it was in muddy water that we saw our work as in constant transition between the conversation, or the theorising that it recorded, and the gallery wall it had syndicalised or taken over. In so far as it achieved some independence from graphic considerations, the work put itself in the way of aesthetic virtues that were literary—either theoretical or descriptive.

MR: It did not follow, however, that in so far as it achieved virtue of a kind, it must therefore be embedded in the theoretical discourses of literature or philosophy. To say that it was theory was false, since the work it did as art absolved it of the standard assumptions that it was truth-telling, coherent or extensible in ways that theory and philosophy are supposed to be. Nor was it literary in a normal sense. It did not, and could not, demand of the viewer that they be a literary reader.

MB: This sense of permanent transition and instability brought us to what we called an emergency conditional. The work was theory (or something) just in case it was art, and it was art just in case it was theory. Could we say then, that in its strangeness it resonated with both?

CH: And, further, that this permanent quality of transition and instability called forth other emergency conditionals. We were artists just in case we were critics and critics, or teachers or art historians, just in case we were artists. This ‘homelessness’ gave the work a brief independence; paradoxically, a place of production that was not wholly subservient to institutions and disciplines.

MR: But what if someone objects that the work actually was ‘theory’; that it could be read and (occasionally) used as theory. Is it then displaced or disqualified as art? We are not sure that it is. It may end up, like Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, as a kind of book about nothing. But if it *is* theory, then on the whole it will try to be about something—some object or relation or process; this would then map it back to the circumstances of the original bifurcation consequent upon Modernism’s Nervous Breakdown.

CH: What is perhaps more to the point, even if more problematic, is the thought that by around 1968–69 the original ontologically iffy artworks—air-conditioned rooms, columns of air, and what have you—had been swamped or themselves partly displaced by the theory that was intended to be ‘about’ them. The *Air-Conditioning Show* of 1967 furnishes an example. This consisted of a text proposing the air in an air-conditioned room as an art object, and

expanded on the problems that that proposition entailed. The question raised was, ‘Is it necessary actually to install air-conditioning as described in the text, or will the text do just as well?’ Was the text to be identified as the art—the meaning—we make, and was any concrete ‘realisation’ of that which it described merely a conservatively contemplative distraction?

MB: We might think of this question as marking the distinction we have already proposed between Conceptual Art thought of on the one hand as a kind of Duchampian extension of Minimalism, occasionally outside the realm of middle-sized dry goods, and on the other as a fundamentally textual cultural practice.

CH: Imagine that someone asserts that ‘Everything in the unconscious perceived by the senses but not noted by the conscious mind during trips to Baltimore in the summer of 1969’ is his work of art, and someone else says, ‘What do you mean?’ The ‘What do you mean?’ is supposed by the artist and his admirers not actually impinge on the assertion. To treat that assertion as a speech act—or its textual equivalent—is to commit a kind of foul. It seems nevertheless necessary to treat it as the speech act it actually is. But to do this is to impede it. What we had in mind was a kind of text in which the interrogative is included along with the appropriative claim, one which would therefore be an object of a quite different order. The consequence was considerably increase the detail of the appropriative gesture—the theoretical content that it wore on its face.

MB: The difference entailed is more than merely quantitative. The viewer is made a reader of sorts—a conversationalist of sorts. This seems a not undesirable outcome. It is one with which we have tried to render our subsequent practice consistent. Conceptual Art may entail a way of making art. If it is one in which painting, as traditionally understood, can only be sentimentally pursued, it is not necessarily one in which the possibility of internality is ruled out. What may be ruled out is the idea of an oeuvre as unified by some biologically authenticated style. A conversational practice will tend to rule against certain kinds of consistency and purification.

MR: If Conceptual Art as we understood it had a future, it was not as Conceptual Art—not, at least, if what that means is simply the Duchampian model emptied of its transgressive potential, and rendered congenial to the managers of interdisciplinarity.

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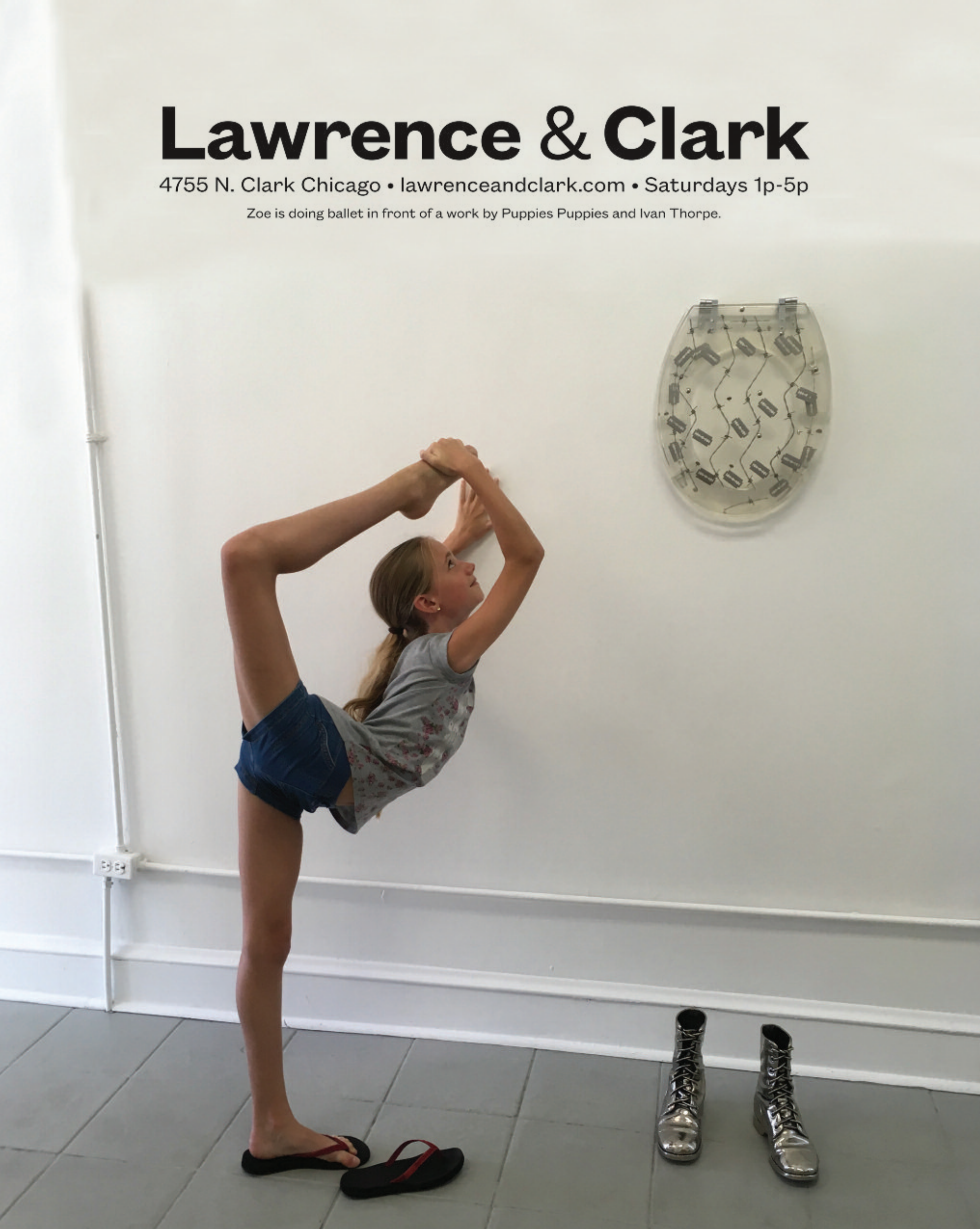




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## Interviews



# Solution, Problem, Problem, Solution

ON THE ART OF  
LUIS CAMNITZER

By Ionit Behar



German-born Uruguayan artist and writer Luis Camnitzer moved to New York in 1964. He was at the vanguard of 1960s Conceptualism, working primarily in printmaking, sculpture, and installation. Camnitzer developed a body of work that explored language with both humor and politically charged strategies, and has been shown at important institutions since the 1960s. We met at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and quickly walked through an exhibition of Dada planned by Tristan Tzara in 1921. Afterwards, Camnitzer and I spoke about his first experiences in New York and the relationship between the center and the periphery that he perceived. He revealed that his main artistic strategy is to find a solution to a problem, or a problem to a solution—he approaches this strategy in part through “poverty-thinking.” A transcription of the conversation is below.

IONIT BEHAR: At the time you moved to New York City, one could argue that the hegemonic centers were changing Latin America. Can you explain how you perceived this happening?

LUIS CAMNITZER: The center was exerting political and informational (and military) pressure—in a word, colonization—something that my generation considered offensive to say the least. When I came to New York, however, there was some intellectual and cultural electricity in the place. Pop Art was coming up and climaxing, minimalism started to show, as well as conceptual art. All this made it influential. There were things happening, in terms of spectacle, so New York City was an interesting place, and Latin American artists looked very much toward New York. But it also was loud and dirty, and was not really a livable place.

IB: There is a lot of writing on the decentralization of the world, what do you think about that claim?

LC: I would agree—centers disappeared. I do not think geography is an important issue

**“At that time, I was a printmaker, and thinking in terms of craft. He kept telling me that printmaking was a secondary and minor way of doing art; he was right, but he did not realize that painting was also a minor, secondary way of making art.”**

— LUIS CAMNITZER

anymore. Maybe on the level of neighborhoods, but not much beyond that. The world is dominated by flows of information, and I would say there are some people who control information and some people who receive information. So the new center is rather ubiquitous. The periphery is formed by those who consume information and then are unable to counter the flow. For me, the analogy is in some ways an emulsified state; the person sitting next to you may be the center and you are the periphery, or vice versa. It is not based on a geographic situation anymore.

IB: Who were some of the people you found when you moved to NYC? What was the community of Latin American artists and other intellectuals who were your support?

LC: First, I have to mention the influence of Luis Felipe Noé, the Argentinean painter, with whom I shared an apartment during my first year here. The discussions with him took me out of crafts as a starting point to make art. At that time, I was a printmaker, and thinking in terms of craft. He kept telling me that printmaking was a secondary



and minor way of doing art; he was right, but he did not realize that painting was also a minor, secondary way of making art. The exchange helped me see that I had to decide on what to do, more than how to do it. We then formed the New York Graphic Workshop, with Liliana Porter and Jose Guillermo Castillo, where we explored the limits of printmaking, and how to get beyond them. In that process, we arrived at something that later would be called “conceptual art,” although at the time we did not like the title for ourselves. We preferred to refer to our work as “contextual art.” We were looking at how a minimum input might produce a maximum output, and explode the senses and mind by making use of the context. It was not purely a matter of “dematerialization”, of using materials or not, everything depended on the circumstances. For me, that became something very connected to politics. There was also another friend in NY at the time, the Argentine architect Susana Torre; she, in turn, was a friend of Lucy Lippard and introduced us to her. Lucy was the person who opened the doors for us; at the time, the art scene in New York was very xenophobic and we had difficulties exhibiting.

**IB:** So the Latin American artists helped each other?

**LC:** Yes and no—I rather would say no. There was competition, and politically speaking, other artists were rather conservative. There was a moment when this was temporarily overcome, and we got together like a community. It was thanks to what now is called the Americas’ Society in NYC, at the time it was still the Center for Inter-American Relations, which was basically a front for the CIA that was used as a cultural façade. Some artists felt it did not do enough for them, others had political gripes. The board of directors at the Center was composed of individuals who were prominent symbols of U.S. imperialism in Latin America. At some point, we asked that the board resign and that they form a new cultural board. And that brought together the Latin American community, including both visual artists and writers. We started a boycott; the art director resigned in support of our ideas, but nothing else happened. I do not know what the place is like politically today, but I am probably the only one left

that continues the boycott, although I am friends with the current director of the gallery.

**IB:** Some time ago we talked on the phone because, very generously, you offered to help me with the research for my dissertation. One of the questions I was dealing with was about Latin American artists working with sculpture and ideas of space. Very wisely, you said: space is not only present in sculpture or installation art, space is everywhere. And you suggested I look into mail art. This anecdote, to me, represents the way you think about material, and the way you work with language—the processes of language and thinking. Can you speak about how you perceive material?

**LC:** When you speak about material and non material you are basically talking about the borderline that separates them. In my work, I try to erase these borderlines, so it does not matter to me if it is material or not. What matters to me is that at some point of the creative process—either at the beginning or at the end—I end up with an interesting problem. At some point in the process, I will have to focus on that problem and hone in on its relations and implications. Then I have to compare the problem with whatever solution I am finding for it. Both must produce a perfect match, to the point where the two cannot be pulled apart from one another anymore. Sometimes, I end up with a solution for which I do not have a problem, and other times it is the exact opposite. What I find important is that in the process of answering a question, I may realize that the question I began with was not the right question, and that the answer is leading to another question. It is a very flexible multi-directional process of making connections, and by the end of the process, I can only hope that I will find a good match. So, it should not be predetermined if it is going to be a materialized thing or not; it does not matter. By the way, when the New York Graphic Workshop did mail art in 1967, it was because we needed an exhibition space, and envelopes seemed available and cheap. We were not really focused on postal issues.

**IB:** But once you have that perfect match for a problem and solution, a solution and a problem, then there is that next step.

**LC:** Yes, the next thing I have to consider is what I want to have happen with the communication, and what I want to generate. Whatever object I am presenting is not an end in itself, but rather a beginning for an important process that is not mine anymore. Until then, it is me and my presentation. The other part—from the artwork onward—is art as a cultural agent, and that is really what matters.

**IB:** You defined the term “Conceptualismo”—I wonder, if you could define it again, would you change anything?

**LC:** No, I think I am dogmatic, and I always continue believing the same thing. Conceptual art is a style and conceptualism is a strategy. The main break that happened with conceptual art, of hegemonic conceptual art, was to produce an art that took away, or minimized, the material. The material was considered an obstacle, and conceptual art tried to explore the essence of art. There was a mystical source of sorts in this kind of approach. In Latin America, and also on the periphery in general, art was more concerned with politics. The presence or non-presence of material was not a mystical issue, but one related to more general positions referring to the surrounding crisis. Under repressive regimes, the questions that artists were asking, and the messages they were communicating, were easier to circulate with dematerialized objects than with objects that had a heavy material presence. That led to questions, such as how one communicates information efficiently. The cultural context was not simply an art context, but a more complex situation of things that were happening at that time. In Latin America, for example, art was not really art as a restricted discipline, but more of an eruption of its general cultural and political context. So to compare the art of Latin America at the time with the art of hegemonic centers would lead to something that does not make sense. They might look alike sometimes, but the conditions were entirely different.

**IB:** It makes me think about the theories of new materialism that are now very present in academia, where the idea of material is expanded and given more power.

**LC:** Yes, but to some extent it is also

continuing the craftsman’s approach to art—focusing on the art object, and seeing it less as an approach to knowledge. I think art is a trans-disciplinary or meta-disciplinary approach to deal with the world. I believe that a good education system should start asking the student to develop a personal utopia, and only then think in terms of art. Art for me is more general than science and includes it. Art deals with the predictable, like science, but also with the unpredictable, and therefore is richer. There is the ignorance of the predictable; mathematics in certain ways deals with that.; and there is the ignorance of the unpredictable. That’s wehere art comes in, which is what actually interests me about it. To learn how to think in art means to use imagination with no constraints. And that is done best within Utopia. And Utopia is important because it helps you to develop the ethics in the task. So now you have ethics with imagination. The next step then is ingenuity. Ingenuity is particularly clear in states of poverty. Ingenuity is actually a mode of poverty-thinking. We become aware of the limits of available resources, and try to expand them by connecting things creatively—multiplying the possibilities that are there without having to add anything. That is poverty-thinking. And lastly, there is the negotiation with reality, when you see what you are allowed to do and what you are not allowed to do. What is allowed depends on your resources and on the conventions or the laws of society. And then you know what you cannot do, but you also know why that is the case. You can identify what ways of communication are ethical and which are unethical, and that leads you to develop your politics. That is my construction, and if all this makes art or not is really irrelevant. Art is just a name and I do not care about the name.

**IB:** So an artist cannot be unethical?

**LC:** I think many artists are unethical because of a lack of examination. Once you examine your “concessions” or deviations from your Utopia you are, or should be, conscious of what you are doing and why. Here, you develop a kind of ethical cynicism that allows you to keep a critical distance from yourself, and wait for the right moment.

**IB:** The art you make reminds me of the

Uruguayan economy where artists do not have the same resources or commercial galleries like, for example, in the U.S. Once, you said that you could conceive a piece consisting in taking the Empire State Building, and bending it into the shape of a U. That would cost millions of dollars but if instead you wrote: “The Empire State bent into the shape of a U,” it would be a much better artwork. Can you say more about this action? What led you to decide to write the sentences rather than perform the action itself, beside the obvious economic reason?

**LC:** Well, in part it is “poverty-thinking.” But it also takes into account where you want the work to happen. This example of the Empire State Building bent into a U shape, when I thought about it in 1966, I thought that first of all it is an absurd and useless idea. Second, I did not particularly like it, and third, were it to be built, it was totalitarian in its presence. But in thinking all that, I also realized that if I just described that image it would be created in the mind of the reader, so I did not really need the object. Then I thought, what is the purpose of having this happen? Is it useful, is it not useful? I realize that during the 1960s a shift took place in the history of art. Until then, there was a dialogue between the artist and the object (or the material), and the public was secondary in the process. As an artist, I was working for myself. It is a kind of dialogue still performed in certain art

schools—where students are taught on how to do things, instead of dealing with what to do. When information theory came around as an important thing during the 1960s, suddenly artists focused on both, on who emits the information, but also on the vehicle and the receptor of that information. The recipient became very important, and the concern appeared about the possible loss and erosion of information during communication. These issues were picked up by conceptual art and by conceptualism. All these issues, for me, became clear with the use of language. At the time I wanted to see if I could use language as a photographic tool: to make a description that was so perfect, that anybody that would read it would conjure the same image in their minds.

**IB:** So there is always a problem and a solution, or a solution and a problem, in whatever order?

**LC:** Yes, I would say always. I often find the solution or the problem in the act of writing.

**IB:** It must be comforting in a way to know that you can find out if something is right or not.

**LC:** At least for as long it lasts. I think you have to bring your gut reaction to an absolute minimum. I am not saying you should get rid of it and, also, I do not think it is about explaining the meaning of the work.





I think a good piece of art has to have a residue that cannot be explained. There are many works that have been inexplicable for a while, and then became explicable. These then disappear: they are internalized socially. The inexplicable is what we call mystery—the unknown that remains there, and that presents the challenge to keep working.

IB: What do you think is, and should be, the role of museums and art institutions today?

LC: Museums are defenders of the canon. They believe in the walls of the building and the material space they occupy. They do not think of the enclosure as an osmotic membrane that is both outside and inside at the same time. Museums are consumed by the idea that the more people that circulate through the building, the more important the institution is, therefore they may seek for more material space to accommodate more circulation. It becomes a vicious circle that basically deals with expanding the consumer base, rather than generating creativity among those who do not usually exercise it. A good museum for me—like a good church—enables the believer to work with heresies instead of forbidding heresy. A museum in particular should promote the possibility of heresies, the questioning of the canon. For this, the

education department in a museum is crucial and should have the same rank the curatorial staff has. The function of the museum should not be to grow the number of visitors, but to help transform them. The institutional role should be educational, and not a training ground for taste.

IB: What do you mean by transforming the visitor?

LC: Make the visitor aware of their own activities. I believe in what I call a socialism of creation, to break the arbitrary monopoly of what we call artists. It is not about appreciating art, but rather about figuring out the conditions that generated the piece and made it inevitable and indispensable. The public should work with that, comparing their solutions with what is presented, to then decide which one is more effective. In terms of pedagogy, that is how I approach it. Art appreciation is a limited and consumerist approach. Basically it is a form of vandalism.

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Luis Camnitzer’s (b.1937) work has been shown at important institutions since the 1960s, including one-person exhibitions at El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos, Santiago, Chile (2013); Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis, MO (2011); El Museo del Barrio, New York (1995); Museo Carrillo Gil, Mexico City (1993); and List Visual Arts Center at M.I.T., Cambridge, MA (1991). Retrospectives of his work have been presented at Lehman College Art Gallery in the Bronx, New York (1991); Kunsthalle Kiel, Germany (2003); Daros Museum in Zurich, Switzerland, El Museo del Barrio, New York; and Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Bogota, Colombia (2010–13). The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía is planning a large-scale retrospective of the artist scheduled to open in 2018. His work has appeared in numerous group exhibitions, including *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2014); the seminal *Information* show at Museum of Modern Art, New York (1970); among others. He has been featured in several international biennials, including the Bienal de la Habana, Cuba (1984, 1986, 1991, 2009); Pavilion of Uruguay, 43 Biennale di Venezia, Italy (1988); Whitney Biennial (2000); and Documenta 11 (2002).

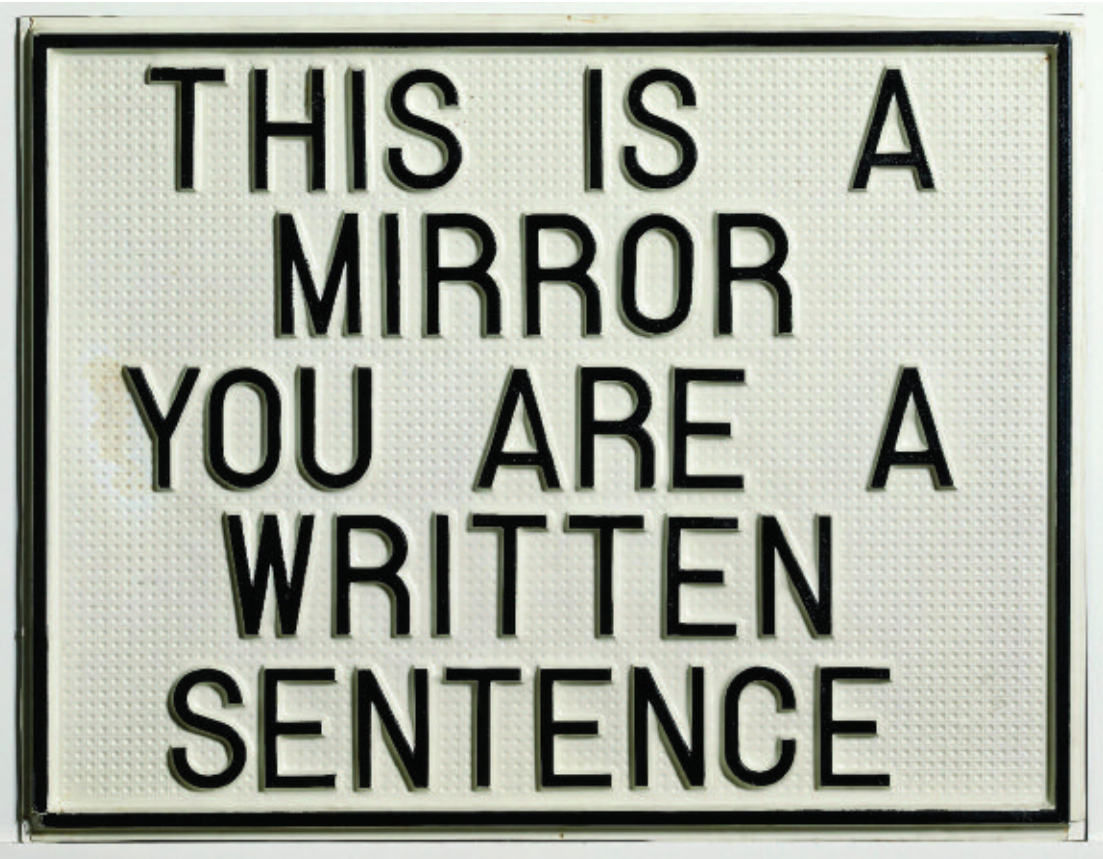
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**TITLE PAGE:**  
*Landscape as an Attitude*, 1979. Vintage silver gelatin print, 9.5 x 13.1 in (24.13h x 33.27w cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © 2016 Luis Camnitzer/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

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**PREVIOUS PAGE:**  
*The Discovery of Geometry*, 1978/2008. Silver gelatin print, 11 x 14 in (27.94h x 35.56w cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © 2016 Luis Camnitzer/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

**LEFT:**  
*This Is a Mirror, You Are a Written Sentence*, 1966–1968. Vacuum formed polystyrene, 19.06 x 24.61 x 0.59 in (48.41h x 62.51w x 1.5d cm). Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © 2016 Luis Camnitzer/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



## RHONA HOFFMAN

### 40 Years

#### Part 1



Vito Acconci | Derrick Adams | Stephen Antonakos | Art and Language | Richard Artschwager | Mel Bochner  
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Peter Halley | Suzanne Harris | Jacob Hashimoto | Susan Hefuna | Jene Highstein | Jenny Holzer | Donald Judd  
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Sylvia Plimack Mangold | Gordon Matta-Clark | Alan McCollum | Bruce Nauman | Richard Nonas | Robert Overby  
Lucio Pozzi | Michael Rakowitz | Pedro Cabrita Reis | Edda Renouf | Richard Rezac | Robert Ryman | Fred Sandback  
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# Basim Magdy

THE STARS WERE  
ALIGNED FOR A CENTURY  
OF NEW BEGINNINGS

By Omar Kholeif

“film does not attempt to mimic reality in its finest details. It has its own color and quality. It has its own interpretation of reality.”

— BASIM MAGDY

Basim Magdy was born in Assiut, Egypt, and now lives and works between Basel, Switzerland and Cairo, Egypt. Magdy’s work introduces viewers to the world through a satirical eye—his drawings, sculptures, videos, and installations are conceived with a taste for the absurd. Like dreams, elements of a familiar landscape stem out of reality where past, present, and future exist within a single realm of depiction. Within his practice, images—often depicting foliage and ruins, astronauts and rockets, airplanes, soldiers, cranes, and modernist structures—take on an aggressively surreal quality. Magdy’s references, from the slick veneer of advertising and sinister tropes of science fiction, to the televised style of nature and science documentaries, adopt an array of classical and unconventional media, including chemically altered film stock, a term the artist has coined ‘film pickling.’ Magdy spoke with Omar Kholeif, Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, on how his painting process has impacted the production of his films, his self-taught photographic practice, and the role of humor in his work.

OMAR KHOLEIF: You studied as a painter in Egypt before you moved to Europe. I am curious how important is the practice of painting to you? Who were the figures that inspired you? And can you tell me more about them?

BASIM MAGDY: Painting is something I have enjoyed immensely for as long as I can remember. There is something about making creative decisions every second for hours at a time that I find gratifying. For the past sixteen years, painting and creating works on paper have been an essential part of my practice, running parallel to anything else I did—be it a film, a photography project, or an installation. Although, I am a slow painter, it is still the fastest way for me to capture ideas. The logic behind the layering process I use when I paint, which could mix as many mediums as acrylic, gouache, oil, spray paint and collage elements together, is the base for how I layer images, text and sound in my films. The framing of images in my films and photographs is always influenced by the way I compose my paintings. I guess I could say that the one painter whose work I have been consistently fascinated by since I was fourteen is Joan Miró. During the early years of my development as a person, my father—an artist and a writer himself—introduced me to his art book collection, which became a valuable source of inspiration to me. It was one of the main reasons why I decided at that early age to become an artist.

OK: Many of your early works on paper and canvas evoke a pop cultural sensibility: what was the inspiration for your early subjects and how did you construct them into works—was there a narrative floating between them?

BM: This was an experimental phase. I was trying to figure out what I was really interested in; it was a time to try different things. I guess part of what you describe as a ‘pop culture sensibility’ has to do with my fondness of bright colors and simple forms at that time. I was working a lot with stills from war movies. Later on this somehow evolved into an interest in more complex issues like the different visions of the future that never materialized, (i.e. where are the flying cars?) or a logic that proposes absurdity as a communication tool.

OK: Over time, you taught yourself how to use film and photographic technologies: what moved you in this direction?

BM: It started with my first encounter with a Super 8 camera, which





was probably around 2008. Growing up in Egypt meant that, unlike in the US and Europe, owning a Super 8 camera to document holiday memories was not a common thing. This made that first encounter more of a discovery than a reason for nostalgia. I immediately became fascinated by how film does not attempt to mimic reality in its finest details. It has its own color and quality. It has its own interpretation of reality. Another thing I love about film is its tangibility as a material which allows me to see my fingerprints on it and change the image by introducing elements to its surface, may that be punching holes in it, drawing on or scratching it or even dunking the film in the most unexpected of household chemicals to see how the film emulsion reacts to this exposure it wasn't designed for. Later on I moved on to working mainly with Super 16mm film but I also started exploring photography from a similar angle. I didn't know much about film or photography when I started, but I consider myself lucky that it happened at the time of Youtube tutorials, because that is how I learned everything I know about shooting film and operating all

the cameras I own. I found myself in this awkward situation, where I was obviously using what most other people would think of as an outdated medium, but was insisting on educating myself through Youtube tutorials because I believed printed manuals were outdated.

**OK: You have devised this term 'film pickling': tell me what this formal process means conceptually for the work?**

**BM:** I think of what I do with moving and still image as fiction. Exploring different ways to alter a photographic representation of reality is one of the tools I use to construct fictional narratives. I personally become more receptive to believing fiction when it visually defies my expectations. It started with an online post by a film enthusiast who put a roll of film in the dishwasher and posted scans of the outcome. I was fascinated by how the ordeal altered the film's colors beautifully. I started using different chemicals and initiating my own process. What I also like about the process, apart from the painterly colors and the partial unexpectedness, is its flexibility to

respond to different conceptual frameworks. I have processed images this way in works that deal with the blurred lines between hopefulness and failure, recording possible post-apocalyptic landscapes, or to construct the setting for a complex failing love story. Somehow the colors are always capable of making reality look otherworldly—while the photographed subjects sustain the familiarity of what we see around us.

**OK: Your subjects: in any media always seem to be confronting the future, negotiating whether they are living in a world of utopia, or post-apocalyptic science fiction failure. Where has this perspective emerged from?**

**BM:** I guess it has something to do with my very early interest in both surrealism and the theater of the absurd, but it really mostly evolves from my own observations of the world around me and how I, like most people, am constantly trying to analyze things for a better understanding of the world. When I was in my 20s, it felt as if the 20s were going to last forever, but suddenly you realize you're in you're 30s and that's

when the future and the passing of time become pressing daily thoughts. It is also the time when my personal experiences allowed me to mature in different ways, and I realized that there were no utopias—so I started seeing the world from that perspective.

One of the rewards of making fiction is that you can let your imagination run wild. My films are often embedded with subtle political observations, investigations of how societies function, and the active or passive roles individuals play within them. There is also the constant fluctuation of how images, text, and sound describe one another in what I hope is a poetic way. All of this is showcased inside endless questioning of what it means to be alive, in the sense that being alive is a process of going through time with all of its events, accomplishments, failures, and aspirations.

**OK: Where do you think technologies are taking us?**

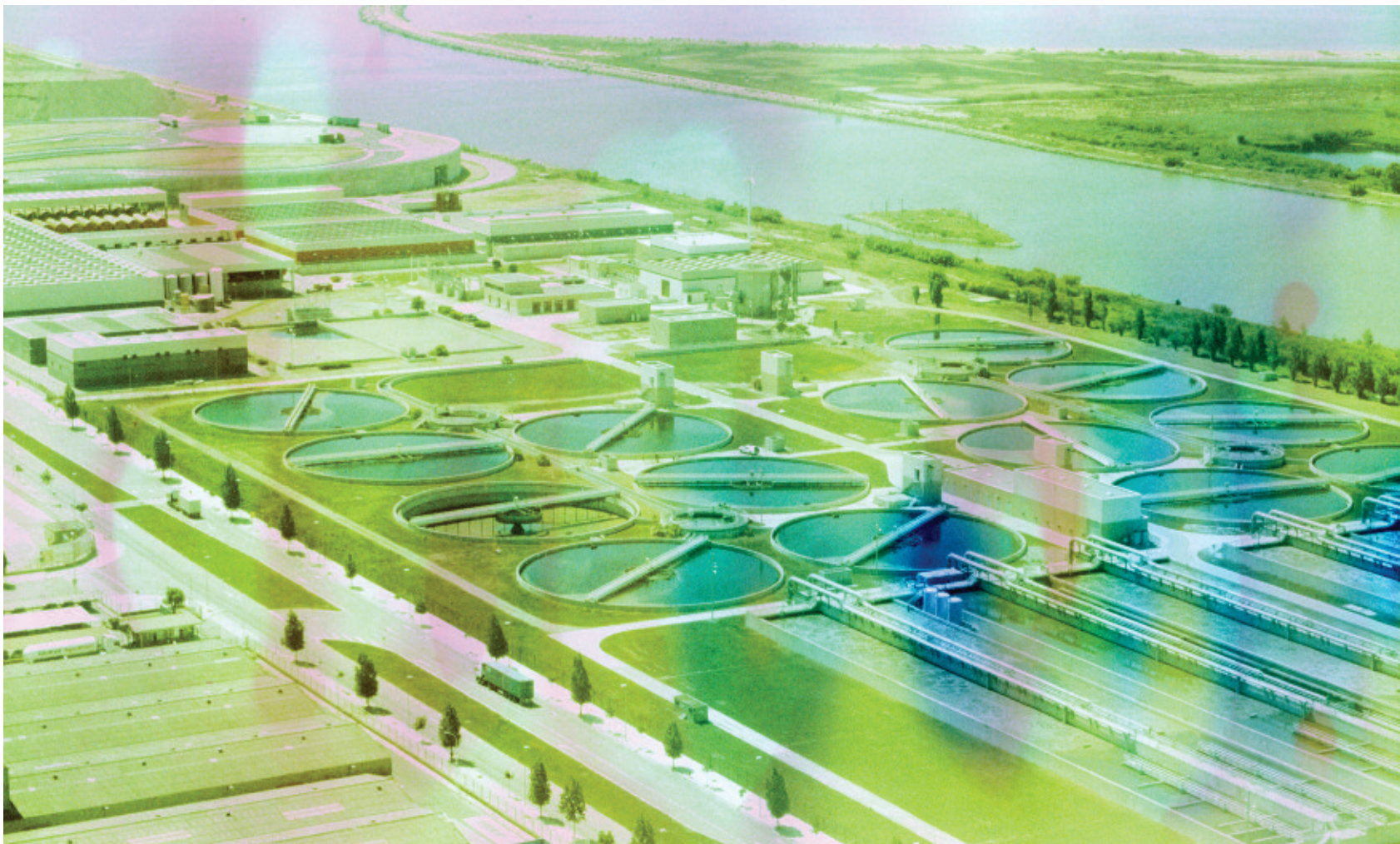
**BM:** It is very hard to tell, but I hope it will take us towards a balanced mix of

hopefulness and failure. I am confident, though, that we are heading for a future with much bigger gaps between the mega rich, the rich, and the poor. I believe this also applies to countries as much as individuals. We are already at a time where generating technology is a form of wealth and progress. I myself fall for the trap of reducing an answer to this question to how we will communicate in the future, and what the future holds for art—both of which are somehow related—but I think things will be a lot more challenging than how we communicate, and whether or not art will be collected twenty years from now, as the generation that casually shares millions of intricately composed images, videos, and writings for free on a daily basis comes of age. Technology will continue to serve the industry of creating debt for people and nations alike, just as it will continue to produce more capable weapons to fuel that debt. At the same time, it will continue to look for exit routes in our oceans, outer space and finding cures to incurable diseases. The future is a tangled web of billions of unexpected events. It will be an algorithm gone wild, and there is no way to

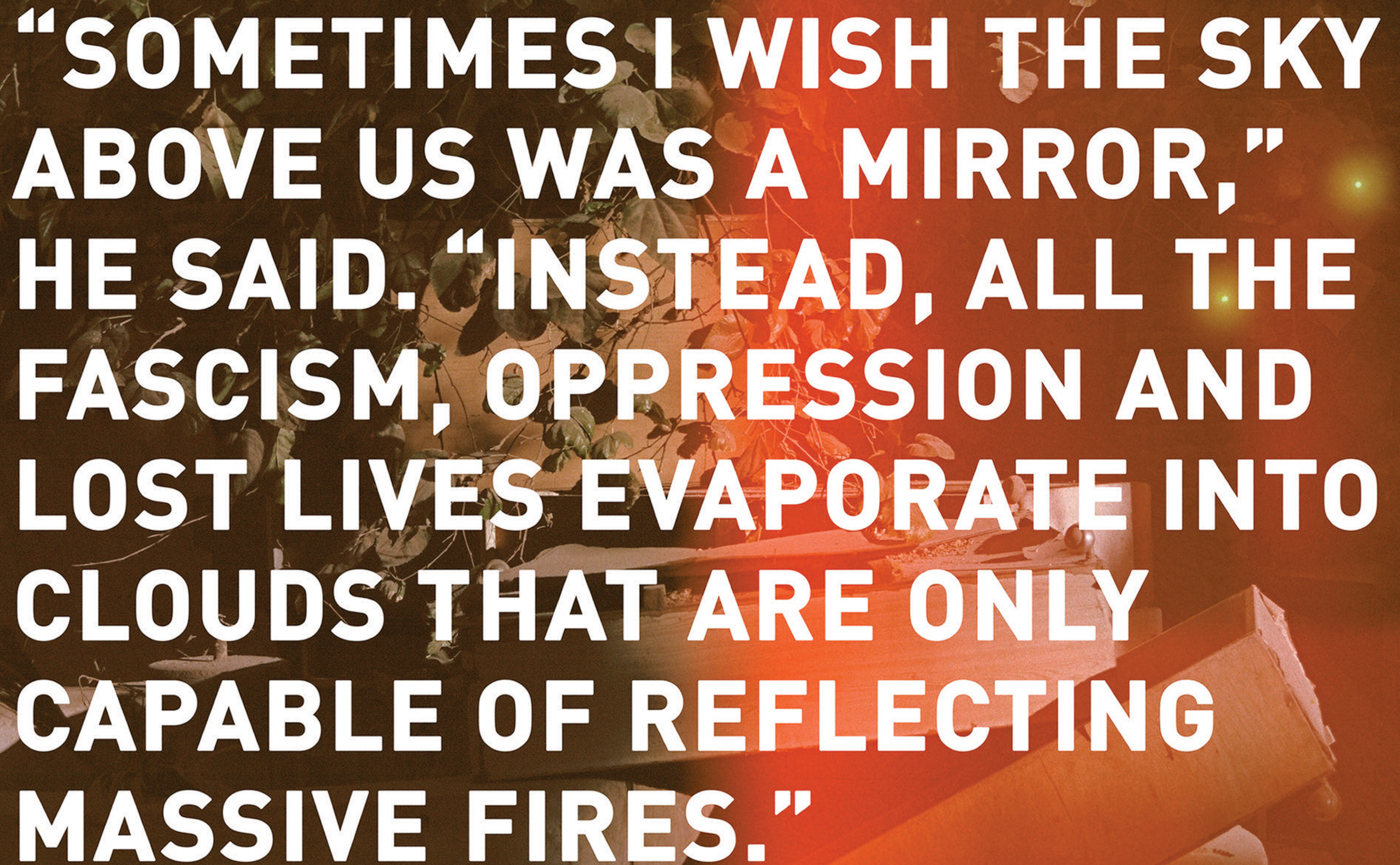
anticipate what could happen.

**OK: You often deploy humor as a technique through titles and sub-titles—do you have any specific comedic interests or references?**

**BM:** Not particularly—I watch South Park, The Simpsons, Family Guy and Bob's Burgers like a lot of people, but I do not know how much that influences my use of humor. My real interest in humor comes from a growing obsession with creating works that instigate an emotional reaction. I believe we all have the same feelings regardless of the languages we speak, our backgrounds or life experiences. We may express our feelings differently, but we all tend to laugh when we hear or see something funny. I like to use humor when I feel the subjects I am dealing with are too heavy, to balance things out. This started in my film *13 Essential Rules for Understanding the World* (2011), which I see as a defeatist film, but also extremely realistic. I like to observe how people respond to it, which usually starts with laughs and smiles with the appearance of tulips with faces drawn on their petals and their seemingly narrating the 13 rules. By the 6<sup>th</sup> rule, people start







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CLOUDS THAT ARE ONLY  
CAPABLE OF REFLECTING  
MASSIVE FIRES.”**





realizing what is really happening there and the smiles are gone. No one wants to be confronted with the problems of the world without even a little bit of sarcasm or a smile.

OK: This is the first survey show of your work in the U.S.—what does it mean to look at all this work together and to consider in the same breath?

BM: It is an amazing feeling. The U.S. is the country where I have shown the most since I started working as an artist, and the number of shows I have had here exceeds any other country by a huge margin. So to finally have a solo museum show of this scale in the US and particularly at the MCA is really a milestone for me. It is also kind of emotional because of a personal story. On my first trip to the US in 1998, I passed through Chicago for 5 hours. I chose to spend 3 of them at the MCA—I was still an art student then, but I distinctly remember dreaming about showing at the MCA one day. It is finally happening.

—  
*The Stars Were Aligned for a Century of New Beginnings* curated by Omar Kholeif will be on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago from December 10, 2016–March 19, 2017.

Basim Magdy (b. 1977) is an artist based in Basel, Switzerland and Cairo, Egypt. His recent exhibitions include *Surround Audience*: 2015 New Museum Triennial, New Museum, New York; *Lest the Two Seas Meet*, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw; *The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things*, HOME Manchester, UK and Lismore Castle Arts, Ireland; La Biennale de Montreal, Canada; MUMA – Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne and a solo presentation at Art in General, New York. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group shows including the SeMA Biennial MediaCity, Seoul, Korea, 2014; the 13th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, 2013; Biennale Jogja XII, Indonesia, 2013; the Sharjah Biennial 11, UAE, 2013; La Triennale, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2012 and Transmediale, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2012. He was shortlisted for the second edition of the

Future Generation Art Prize, Pinchuk Art Centre in 2012 and is the winner of Abraaj Group Art Prize, Dubai and the New:Vision Award, CPH:DOX Film Festival, Copenhagen in 2014. Magdy is the recipient of the 2016 Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year award.

ABOVE:  
*13 Essential Rules for Understanding the World*, 2011. Courtesy of artSümer, Istanbul; Gypsum Gallery, Cairo; hunt kastner, Prague.

—  
TITLE PAGE, 108,109, PREVIOUS SPREAD:  
*An Apology to a Love Story that Crashed into a Whale* (detail), 2016. Courtesy of Gypsum Gallery, Cairo; hunt kastner, Prague; artSümer, Istanbul



Kaveri Raina  
Detail of Hanuman Mukut  
Acrylics, burlap  
70 x 40 inches  
2016



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- Joan Gunzberg, Former Executive Director of the Arts and Business Council of Chicago

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# Dead Images

TRACES // CREATIVE  
CO-PRODUCTION 4

By Ruslana Lichtzier

“This discovery provided a crucial key for my understanding of the collection, and the role of photography in this project; in a way, the thousands of photographs of living people, captured as biological specimen through systematic procedures, are housed within a collection of human skulls that were originally gathered there by the same scientific rationales. Although the photographs of the living showed their faces, and sometimes something of an environment, they simultaneously omitted the very element that was missing from the skulls—the human story.”

*Dead Images* is the title of just one of the multi-disciplinary teams presented as part of ‘TRACES: Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts, from Intervention to Co-production,’ a three-year multi-disciplinary research project from eleven European partners that investigates the role of contentious heritage in contemporary Europe. *Dead Images* addresses the implications of human remains exhibited and stored in museums and institutional collections, often hidden from the public eye. The heart of *Dead Images* is a 1:1 scale panoramic photograph of a cabinet with human skulls. Thirty meters long, and three meters high, over 8,000 human skulls are displayed within the picture. The site of the photograph is located in the collection of the Anthropology Department of the Natural History Museum in Vienna, a restricted access area. The image reveals only a fifth of the entire collection of over 40,000 skulls, and is in many ways an anchor of the multi-disciplinary international research project led by a team of six individuals:

artist Tal Adler; art historian Anna Szoeké from the Humboldt University in Berlin; Osteoarcheologist Linda Fibiger; artist Joan Smith; social anthropologist John Harries from the Edinburgh University; and former head of the Anthropology Department at the Natural History Museum in Vienna and physical anthropologist Maria Teschler-Nicola.

Tal Adler, an artist and inter-disciplinary researcher, is the photographer behind the panorama that defines *Dead Images*. He is also the designer and coordinator of the ‘Creative Co-Production’ teams (CCPs) for TRACES, and a member of one of the CCPs that focuses on the philosophical, aesthetic, historical, and scientific implications of human skulls in public collections. I spoke with Tal to discuss his practice, below is a transcription of the conversation.

**RUSLANA LICHTZIER:** It seems to me that the fact you chose to work within the photographic medium forced you towards a research base practice. Can you expand on this? What made you turn inwards and ask questions regarding the medium itself, its histories and its practices, and then turn back, outwards, to apply the same questions toward other disciplines?

**TAL ADLER:** I am not really sure what happened first. It might be that the research potential, which is inherent to photography, drew me to the medium in the first place. Let me attempt to answer this with an anecdote. After photographing the skull collection, I came back to the museum with a small print of the “stitched” panorama and asked the head of the Anthropology department: what were the doors in the middle of the cabinet? I considered the doors as a mere visual interference in my photograph. She opened the doors to show me: behind the middle door was the historical photo laboratory of the department, and behind the narrower doors on both sides were boxes with hundreds of glass-plate negatives of anthropometric research. As the chemical photo laboratory is no longer needed nowadays, they recently installed the rest of their photographic collection in that room. This discovery provided a crucial key for my understanding of the collection, and the role of photography in this project; in a way, the thousands of photographs of living people, captured as biological specimen through systematic procedures, are housed within a collection of human skulls that were originally gathered there by the same scientific rationales. Although the photographs of the living showed their faces, and sometimes something of an environment, they simultaneously omitted the very element that was missing from the skulls—the human story. They too were deprived of their individuality and humanity; they were objectified just as the skulls that surrounded them.

The founder of the anthropology department’s photo laboratory, Josef Wastl was, as other prominent anthropologists have been, an enthusiastic photographer. In 1935, he curated an exhibition about the role of



photography in science, for which the Photographic Association in Vienna honored him with the silver medal. As an early loyal member of the Nazi party, Wastl became the head of the department during National Socialism reign in Austria. He conducted ‘racial surveys’ on victims of the war and the holocaust and acquired skulls of murdered Jews and Polish POWs.

It became clear for me that my use of photography in this project could not be taken for granted, or be excused with technical considerations alone. I needed to address photography’s legacy, and define ethical questions for the use of photography in the context of scientific racial research and collections of human remains.

RL: I would say that your work goes beyond what is now defined as a traditional institutional critique-based practice, in the sense that you do not address a specific institution—as is usually the case with these practices—but rather, you expose and utilize an appearance in one institution as an example for a wide phenomenon that is relevant to many. Your intention is to then directly affect the phenomenon through what you call ‘Participatory Critique,’ which involves different stakeholders. Would you agree with this historical reading? How do you situate yourself within this evolution?

TA: Every institution that I can think of is part of a larger system, network, or phenomenon. Some connections are very obvious and transparent; others might be harder to perceive. An anthropological museum in Europe, for example, is obviously part of a phenomenon of similar museums, at least in the West. It is probably a member in some professional networks of scientific museums and anthropological societies, but it also possesses, and depends on, various ties with government, academia, private and public capital, and so on. While it is important to address specific local problems and challenges in specific institutions, one has to remember that these problems are often expressions of deeper and wider processes. Personally, I find it inspiring and motivating to think about a work through a local and specific situation, while also being able to invoke or propel its

effects on a larger scale. ‘Participatory Critique’ is one of the concepts I am developing currently through the TRACES project, which is funded by the European Union through its Horizon 2020 program. Together with a “dream team” of top researchers and creative minds from ten European countries, the concept, coined by my colleague, art historian and curator, Suzana Milevska, draws on the title of one of my previous projects *Voluntary Participation* (2012) (which was done in collaboration with the historian Karin Schneider). In this project, we initiated a process of dialog and research with groups, associations, and organizations of Austrian civil society about their engagement with difficult chapters of their past, specifically their participation in National Socialism. I invited them to collaborate with me on their groups’ photographic portraits. Not all groups accepted the invitation, but for some, the participatory long-term engagement produced meaningful processes and insights pertaining not only to the role of civil society, and its ‘voluntary participation’ in extreme regimes, but also to the processes underlying memory work of collective contentious legacies.

RL: Can you further explain your strategy to effect permanent change within the institution? What is the difference in intention between your project and other hosted interventions in heritage or anthropological museums?

TA: I am one of the developers of TRACES, which contains five multi-disciplinary teams, that we call CCPs – Creative Co-Productions. Each team consists of artists, researchers and hosts of cultural heritage. These CCPs develop creative ways to mediate the contentious heritage to broader publics and to establish sustainable solutions for the problems they address. In order to draw significant conclusions from the work of the CCPs, theorize them, and make these insights publically available, the CCPs will be supported and analyzed by other research teams, the Work Packages (WP) that are based at notable European research institutes. The WPs will address different research foci: ethnographic

research on and with the CCPs; development of artistic methods and education programs; relation to museums and collections; and dissemination work. As far as I know it is unprecedented for artistic research to be set up for academic investigation in such a comprehensive and programmed way.

This structure was developed to counter inherent issues with what I call “hosted interventions.” In recent years we see more and more institutions of cultural heritage, such as museums of anthropology or history, public and private archives and collections, community centers, education institutions or memorial sites invite artists to create new artworks based on their encounters with the institutions and the heritage they mediate. The artists are usually invited to visit the collections or stay as a resident artist for a short period of time, usually a few weeks. Think about the sensitive nature of the material they may encounter; its complex history, the different communities affected by it, the fields of knowledge associated with it, the decades of research material produced in its relation—with such little time for research, reflection and production, artists are forced to produce anecdotal, symbolic reactions. These artworks might very well be interesting or provoking, but they risk a superficial engagement with the subject and might not be able to challenge its complex problematics in a sustainable way. Furthermore, it has become common practice to publish open-calls for these residencies, asking for project proposals in advance, which further promotes the superficialization of the artistic practice in this sensitive context. The relationships between the artist and the hosting institution are polarized: the initiator of the engagement is often the host, or a third party in collaboration with the host; the artist is a guest, he or she is granted access, they are let-in by the ‘owner’ or the custodian. The artists usually receive payment from the institution, and are expected to deliver their ‘intervention’ within a predetermined period of time. After the delivery of the intervention, the relationship usually ends. These clear and unchallenged relationships reflect positions that might limit further the scope of the

artwork. The intervention itself, be it a sticker on a vitrine, a performance, a guided tour or an installation, is usually temporary; at the end of the evening or the festival or the exhibition, it is removed, leaving the space and the subject it referred to unchanged. It did not provide a significant, sustainable change. So, in spite of the significant resources and intentions invested in such engagements, their prospects of generating a sustainable process of change are not great. One of the ways in which we propose to tackle these shortcomings is through the establishment of the CCPs in which the institution, the artists, and scientists work together over a longer period and share the same budget. They are expected to manage the budget and to design the research and artistic production in a mutual process of discussion, negotiation and consent.

However, this structure poses great challenges for the CCPs: it’s not easy or natural for artists to share their artistic process and it might be difficult as well for researchers to participate in collaborative

research in which their usual methodologies are challenged or altered. It might be extremely difficult for cultural heritage institutions to open up, let go of the privilege of power and ownership and accept an equal co-production and a possibility of sustainable change. I’m very curious to see how this big experiment develops over the next three years.

RL: Can you trace your own evolution as an artist that brought you to this practice? What projects led to your current work?

TA: Initially I was attracted to photography and film for their capacity for documenting and representing social realities. I was excited to discover that photography enabled me to approach people and social phenomena that I was curious about, but never dared or knew how to approach. With the camera and the excuse of a “project” I could suddenly engage with strangers, enter their private spheres, discuss with and learn from them. While studying in different art institutions, I explored a broad spectrum of documentary approaches. Though, pretty soon after, and with the development of a more coherent political understanding and

stance, I began exploring different ways that my work can interfere and influence the social realities I was relating to. In a way, a shift has been made in my priorities and the way I was constructing new projects: rather than a photographer interested in people, I slowly turned into an artist-activist and researcher who uses photography and other creative means according to strategy and specific project needs.

So in a way, this reflexive process you describe as looking at the legacy of photography first and then applying these questions to other disciplines happened to me in reverse. In 2003 I began working on *Unrecognized*. This project engaged with communities of the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev, the southern region of Israel, and their difficult stories.<sup>1</sup> My introduction to this topic and my decision to engage in a long-term project focusing on it, didn’t initiate with a photographic attraction. Rather, it developed as part of being politically active and in a network of civil and human rights circles. My research and first phases of constructing the project conceptually concentrated on the historical, social, economic and political circumstances of the unrecognized villages in the Negev and the Arab citizens in Israel in general. While





looking at the history of colonialism and orientalism, it became clear to me that the way the Bedouin in the Negev were seen and represented by the European Jews who came to create a new state there had direct consequences on the lives of those people whom I was about to work with.<sup>2</sup> This posed great challenges to my position in relation to the Bedouin, and my use of photography as a representational medium, as photographer, Israeli, of European Jewish descent.

To conclude, looking at photography and its legacy and assuming responsibility for the way I use the medium only occurred as a consequence of researching first the legacies of the situation I was about to intervene with.

**RL:** You describe your approach as one that follows equally an emotional urgency and a logical path, can you talk about it more?

**TA:** Let's take the skull collection as an example. When I first saw it, in 2009, I was so overwhelmed (or shocked) that it took me quite some time to rationalize my emotions. I knew I wanted to research this, but I did not know if, and how, I should photograph it. It took me three years until I actually photographed it, in 2012. It will take six more years of research, development and discussions until the planned exhibition of this photograph, planned for late 2018. The education program planned with this project will probably take place in 2019 and beyond. So yes, the initial trigger is a very strong emotional reaction and a kind of an abstract, wild attraction to the subject. But then, I slow down considerably, in order to rationalize, plan strategies, learn the subject, design a research rationale, get familiarize and involved with stakeholders, invite collaborations, create synergies and construct a well thought program. *Dead Images* is a process of ten years, so in some ways, at least in respect to its duration and

involvement of scientific partners, it has more in common with scientific research than with typical art production.

**RL** How does it relate or differentiate from the way you perceive a scientific practice?

**TA:** Current contemporary practices allow artists to not only combine and 'mix and match' different methodologies, but also to invent new methodologies that suit better the needs of a specific project. In comparison, most scientific practices that I'm aware of are more confined to predefined methodologies, to stricter procedures and rigid standards for research and the dissemination of its results. This is definitely not to say that there's less creativity in science. I think that good science involves great creativity and as we know from the history of science, many great discoveries and developments were obtained through irregular practices, mistakes or intentionally noncomplying with regulations. Interestingly, often they are described as "inspired moments of revelations," using similar terminology as in the arts.

With all that in mind, there is still a difference in the way contemporary artists can approach their projects and the amount of freedom they have with choosing the tools, mediums and methodologies compared with scientists from other fields. In my case, I enjoy being able to move more freely between different fields and develop a more creative approach to research methodologies.

TRACES is a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program. Through an innovative research methodology, TRACES investigates the challenges and opportunities raised when transmitting complex pasts and the role of difficult heritage in contemporary Europe.

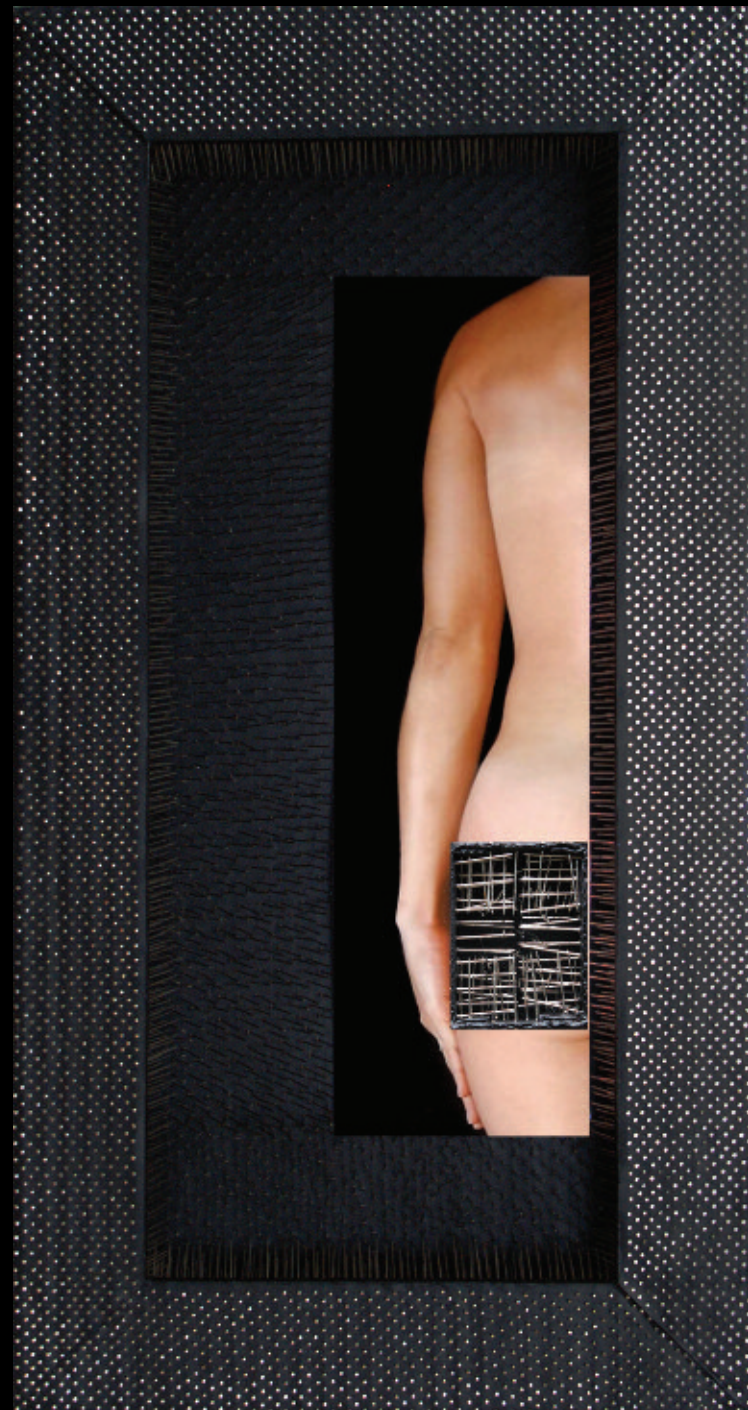
#### TITLE PAGE, BELOW:

Detail from the 30 meter panoramic photograph of the skull cabinet at the Natural History Museum Vienna. © Tal Adler.

#### PAGE 117:

Tal Adler shooting the skull collection at the Natural History Museum Vienna, March 2012. Video still; photography – Michael Zupraner; © Tal Adler

- 1 While most of these communities of Arab Bedouin, who are Israeli citizens, can be seen as the indigenous people of the Negev, and most have definitely been living there long before the establishment of the state of Israel, they are regarded by the state as illegal trespassers to 'state lands' and their villages are unrecognized by the state. These villages suffer from radical neglect; lack of basic services such as water, health and education; frequent house demolitions and evacuation threats. In this project, alongside a public program of events, I exhibit panoramic photographs of people from the villages, and the stories they told me about the different aspects of living in an unrecognized village.
- 2 I looked at the way the local Negev population was represented in old photographs from the first half of the 20th century, and compared it to the way the new, mainly European settlers were represented. I found two old postcards from roughly the same time: in one, a romantic desert landscape with small distant silhouettes of A Bedouin shepherd and his sheep, on the horizon. In the other postcard another shepherd – a European Jewish 'pioneer' with his sheep behind him. He is photographed from a close distance, his body almost filling the frame. These visual representations clearly correlated with the Zionist ideological view of this place and its inhabitants: "A land without a people to a people without a land". I then chose to work with a wide angle, panoramic format for capturing environmental portraits of the people from the unrecognized villages who tell the stories. I wanted to portray a comprehensive image of the various challenges and struggles that they were facing. At the same time, I wanted to refer to, and challenge, the colonialist way of seeing / not-seeing them with photography. In this project, my portraits try to not romanticize the Negev's landscape and the Bedouin, and at the same time to refrain from the aestheticization of poverty and neglect. I worked with large format, color film to render a contemporary, detailed, political and respectful panoramic overview of an unfolding civil struggle. What's more important, the portraits and stories are a result of a participatory work in collaboration with the unrecognized Bedouin villages community representatives. To conclude, looking at photography and its legacy and assuming responsibility for the way I use the medium only occurred as a consequence of researching first the legacies of the situation I was about to intervene with.



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# Nairy Baghramian

SCRUFF OF THE NECK //  
MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

By Dr Kostas Prapoglou



[ THE SEEN ]

Iranian born, Berlin-based artist Nairy Baghramian most recently presented a solo show at Marian Goodman Gallery in London, her first major exhibition since *The Walker's Day Off* (2010) at the Serpentine Gallery, where her work was shown alongside British artist Phyllida Barlow. Entitled *Scruff of the Neck*, the gallery exhibition encompasses a site-responsive installation, characterized by explorations of three-dimensional forms, permeated through her immense interest in minimalism and conceptual extensions of art.

Transferring viewers into a surreal domain, the gallery space was transformed into a colossal mouth entered from behind. Mixed media sculptures redolent of dental topography were mounted onto the building's existing architectural elements. By symbolically portraying the gallery space as a talking vehicle, Baghramian evinces the importance of the venue—not only as a locus of idea generation, but also as a conduit that signifies the role of the viewer as a conveyor of ideas into the outside world.

Baghramian's visual vocabulary engages with notions of spatial negotiation and perception, as well as corporeality and an esotericism that unavoidably leads towards a form of concealed spiritualism.

Enhanced by elements of surrealism and abstraction, her oeuvre responds to past forms of conceptualism, current art trends, interior design, and modernist architecture. Reinterpreting and remapping the role of women artists and other personalities who were overshadowed during twentieth century art historical movements, nearly dissolved from the cannon, Baghramian emphasizes aspects of memory control, and institutional criticism via socio-historical constraints.



KOSTAS PRAPOGLOU: Your work engages with interior space, design history, furniture, and minimalism — often rewriting the past of overlooked personalities such as interior designer Janette Laverrière (1909–2011). What is the process of evoking such narratives, and what draws your inspiration from these realities?

NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN: You could also add to that list: post-feminism, abstraction, surrealism, the role of the viewer in institutional critique, site-specificity, post-modernism and so on. For me, all these things interrelate in contemporary sculpture. Maybe it is just about notionally assembling a critical mass of ideas, which through their contradictory potential can generate new perspectives. Going back and forth in history, and specifically revisiting modernist avant-garde movements, has been a general concern in the art production of the last years. But one of the aspects of this phenomenon that concerned me was what I would describe as a kind of condition of retreat—in the sense of getting too comfortable with the supposedly secure

ideological forms of the past. This observation—and scepticism about it—was my motivation for research into dissentient makers and positions, for example Jean-Michel Frank, Clara Porset, and as you mentioned the designer and interior architect, Janette Laverrière. While learning about her oeuvre, I was not only mesmerized by its formal stringency, but also by her work titles which add tangential layers of meaning, evidencing a political thinking mind. So, it is not so much interior design or furniture per se that interests me, but rather the social and cultural-political implications entailed. For example, gender roles in those fields: there is a productive tension between the introverted world of the protected inner space, and the public sphere with its representational claims.

Laverrière’s career—spanning nearly a century—reveals how, in that time, the possibilities for women have both changed and not changed. When she started out in the early 1930s, Laverrière wanted to become an architect like her father, but

quickly came to the realization that architecture’s built façade seemingly belonged to her male contemporaries. For me, it is sobering to see how little has changed despite the valiant efforts of feminist movements. It has also always been a part of my practice to stress and visualize this membrane between the inner and outer realities with the intention to re-mould, pierce, break or re-form it. Take for instance, a sculpture like *La Colonne Cassée* (2008), which I made the same year for the 5<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale in the Neue Nationale Galerie, a work dedicated to Laverrière and inspired by her mirror *La Commune* (2001). The sculpture consists of two identical black lacquered solid steel ‘J’ forms perforated with holes originally positioned right up close on either side of one of the imposing glass panes constituting the façade of Mies van der Rohe’s iconic building. The only thing stopping these massive twin forms from crashing into each other were heavy white lacquered steel counterweights laying on their base. Craning them into position inside and out was a high wire act around a monument.

“I believe sculptures have a discursive life of their own. They can be consciousness of post-minimalist allowances of the body, and their attendant subjective resonances. They have a materiality that is at once at ease with sculptural canons, at the same time it sits uneasily with them.”

— NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN



Incidentally, the one on the exterior was used like a public sculpture, even sometimes as a skate ramp.

KP: How do meanings with social-political extensions emerge through your work?

NB: Somewhat contrary to the more generally held view that socio-political issues in art are best negotiated through, for example, the documentary modes of political activism or in mediums like performance art through physical presence or vocal manifestations, I also believe in the political potential of sculptural form by stressing and exhausting the possibilities of the object. Every form carries information about its representational mode—and through its very positioning in a contextualized space, also recalls certain ideological presumptions, affiliations, and debates.

I believe sculptures have a discursive life of their own. They can be consciousness of post-minimalist allowances of the body, and their attendant subjective resonances. They have a

materiality that is at once at ease with sculptural canons, at the same time it sits uneasily with them. In my practice, this allows for deviations or excursions. My series *Privileged Points* (2015) consists of solid steel bars hand bent into rough open circles through the application of a blow torch and considerable muscle and then repeatedly dipped into pastel shades of paint. In any given art space, they simply hang or lean on the walls or lay on the floor. My intention is to demarcate (and thus cultural-politically charge) these ‘privileged’ vantage points for the display and experience of works of art: what does it mean to take center stage, to put yourself in a corner, to pose as casual, to hang up high? The installation of the works function as placeholders for past or future ‘masterpieces,’ or prize possessions and I hope I make visible to viewers certain hanging traditions and hierarchies.

KP: *Scruff of the neck* was your first major solo exhibition in London since *The Walker’s Day Off* at the Serpentine Gallery back in 2010. What do you feel is the impact of your

work on the London audience and how is this read by different audiences worldwide?

NB: I cannot really talk about the reception of my own work, but I can say that as a viewer and recipient of art in different contexts that when, for example, I see a work by Cady Noland at the Art Institute of Chicago or in the Museum Ludwig Cologne, or somewhere else in the world, the initial impetus of the work stays with me the same whilst my view on the surrounding realities can be affected.

KP: Your visual repertoire negotiates the perception of space challenging the human presence and hypostasis in immediate relation to it. Where has this impetus derived from?

NB: The notion of ‘space’ as a component is as much Minimalist as it was the fantasy-filled and Coldwar frontier of mid-twentieth century. So, there is not only space as a sculptural dimension to the thing, but also the cultural utopias around the notion of space. In the day-to-day world, this utopia is







in fact also an indicator of social class, and a status object.

KP: Your show at Marian Goodman gallery in London entailed a unique spatial interpretation. How did this concept emerge and what are your inner processes to implement its narrative?

NB: I hope the exhibition in London entails a postmodern approach to the idea of space in a good sense; it still allows the modern utopia of perfection or self-improvement, but it is also unafraid of the inherent problems and their subjective reflections. The show is an extension of my work *Retainer* (2012) at SculptureCenter in New York that tried to create a possible utopia by attempting to imagine optimizing a given spatial structure. My sculptural space *Bridges* (2016) in the exhibition at Marian Goodman raises the question: who owns idealism? Braces are for your future, bridges are too, but they address real imperfect conditions. An internal support is something invisible that is needed to keep things going: holding the space, not making a fuss, continuing. The London exhibition was also imagined as if you enter it from the back of the head. You do not enter from the front opening, the orifice that everyone uses socially, and one that is repeated in the architectural idea of the façade as a face, but as something more subversive—coming from behind, and within. There is some absurdity in the wide smile, showing imperfections. Like with the talk of ‘space’ there is a lot of talk of ‘the body,’ but both of these things are actually highly charged and difficult to talk about (art sometimes fills the awkward pause); what if the sculptures might allow that difficulty?

KP: What are your immediate future plans after your London exhibition?

NB: I am currently working on the completion of the *Bridges* series as recipient of the Zürich Art Prize at Haus Konstruktiv. In November, a touring exhibition will open at the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK) in Ghent, Belgium, which then will travel to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in 2017.

There, I will also have a contribution to the newly constructed sculpture garden. This touring exhibition will be a kind of ‘survey’ of my work, but it will be structured around a series of new works that each rebound off some of my work to date, thus attempting to critique the usual static nature of institutionalized surveys or retrospectives, while at the same time allowing some rethinking to take place about conditions and the sound of my own making. In 2017, I will also participate in the Documenta 14 and in the Skulptur Projekte Münster. Exhibitions are also planned for the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen and the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. I am trying to remain conscious in all this of the privilege and the welcome pitfalls involved; in each and every space, and each object, and the reverb that might surround them.

—

Nairy Baghramian has been featured in numerous exhibitions worldwide including Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico (2015); Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy (2015); the Serralves Museum, Porto, Portugal (2014); the Art Institute of Chicago, USA (2014); Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany (2014); MIT Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, USA (2013); the Sculpture Center, New York, USA (2013); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL (2011) and at the Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2006). She has participated in the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, UK (2012); the 45th International Venice Biennale, Italy (2011); the 8th Berlin Biennial, Germany (2014) and the 5th Berlin Biennial, Germany (2008). She is the recipient of the Zürich Art Prize, Zürich, Switzerland (2016) the Bode Prize, Germany (2014), the Hector Prize, Germany (2012) and the Schering Prize, Germany (2007).

TITLE PAGE:

*Scruff of the Neck*, installation view Marian Goodman Gallery, London, 2016. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

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PAGE 123:

*Retainer* (2012), installation view SculptureCenter New York, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

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PREVIOUS SPREAD:

*Le Colonne Casée* (2008), installation view 8th Berlin Biennale at Neue National Galerie Berlin, 2014. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery.

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BELOW:

Nairy Baghramian, portrait shot. Photo: Oliver Jackel.



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Image: Damon Locks, Planet Woman



Image: Leonard Suryajaya, Musing

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# Melancholy and its Discontents

PROFILE OF THE ARTIST // CAMILLE BLATRIX

By Alfredo Cramerotti



This conversation with Paris-based artist Camille Blatrix took place after an exhibition that happened in Summer 2015 at MOSTYN in Wales, his first institutional solo show in the UK. His work, based on a deep and thorough understanding of materials, processes and studio practice, develops in the form of sculpture, installations, video and photography, as well as appropriation of objects and artifacts which he “corrects” according to the context and the nature of the exhibition. Blatrix won the prestigious Fondation d’entreprise Ricard in 2014 and has had several solo and group shows in both Europe and the US. Cramerotti and Blatrix sat down under a sunny sky and, being both Mediterranean creatures, let the words flow, savoring the moment.

“I trust the machines and their decisions. Just as in a love story, we have to deal with someone that necessarily reacts the way we want.”

— CAMILLE BLATRIX

ALFREDO CRAMEROTTI: Let’s start with the main ideas behind your work—I realize this is a big question, and of course I have my own reading of your work, but it may not be the same with what you think are the main guiding principles of what you do. I am interested in knowing how you yourself “read” your work. Can you step outside Camille for a moment and let me know what you see?

CAMILLE BLATRIX: I see someone that spends more time in the studio rather than experiencing real life, using the frustration as a motivation to produce and work. Therefore any desire becomes a form. Sometimes I feel weird about spending time honing resin instead of kissing someone in a bar, but I find this schizophrenia rather exciting. I have big windows in my studio that face a large building. At night, my studio must look like a large TV-screen for the neighbors. I am somewhat an exhibitionist so I like to imagine what they are thinking when they look at my studio. I put on some loud music and I touch my works and drink Japanese whisky.

AC: Did you get any particular source of inspiration for the visual styles of your recent series of works—i.e. the collaboration with your family members and friends for your exhibition in MOSTYN; the nostalgic take; the tangibility of memories, etc.—or did they arrive in relation to the nature of the materials you have used, and locations you were positioned in?

CB: My inspirations generally come from emotions—it could be a song, a situation, a meeting. Before I start producing I like to imagine a context first, a bit like the set of a movie that nobody can see, almost as if the works in their loneliness were orphans of a much stronger feeling.

AC: Can you dive a bit into the technical aspects of the works? Such as the gathering of raw material, software or hardware (in the wide sense; they could be thoughts and bodies) used, as well as the selection and editing process? What are some of the particular challenges you (and your team, or the collaborator you work with) have faced in realizing the works?







CB: My technique is a just a tool, and when I work I am always learning new ones on the spot; all that technique is a way to generate forms. In the case of my marquetry's I am intrigued by the time-consuming aspect of it and the fact that, in a way, I am obliged to draw, limited by the choice of materials that drive the composition. I began by working with manual tools and the forms were more organic. Now, my studio is filled with machines and the forms have become more structured. I love this relationship, I trust the machines and their decisions. Just as in a love story, we have to deal with someone that necessarily reacts the way we want. I see every small detail as a challenge and as soon as I get bored I just stop.

AC: I saw an installation of your work at the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard in Paris. It was basically a sort of a 'gate' although extremely subtle – the visitor could have easily missed the works as they were placed on two opposite corners of a gallery arch. The viewer was able to move around them, beside them, or between them, but could not really see them from an external point of view. They were not meant to be 'faced,' so to speak. You chose instead to have an immersive type of installation. What was the underlying approach to this?



CB: I am not particularly interested in bringing the people into my work, but more into creating an initial feeling of attraction that is meant to be subsequently rejected by the viewer. I am interested in creating confusion when people try to understand the object, driven by a form of possessive insecurity

AC: Tell me a secret about your work. Even a small one.

CB: If I stop working, I gain weight.

—

French-born Camille Blatrix is a visual artist born in 1984 in Paris, France. He graduated from the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2011. He has had solo exhibitions at venues including Wattis in San Francisco (2016), MOSTYN in Wales (2015), Galerie Balice Hertling in Paris (2014), and Gasconade in Milan (2013), and numerous group exhibitions in both Europe and the US, including the 2015 Lyon Biennial.

TITLE PAGE:  
Camille Blatrix. *NiNa*, 2014. Mahogany, wood marquetry, aluminum, silver, glass and tamper-proof screws. 88 x 55 x 27 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Balice Hertling.

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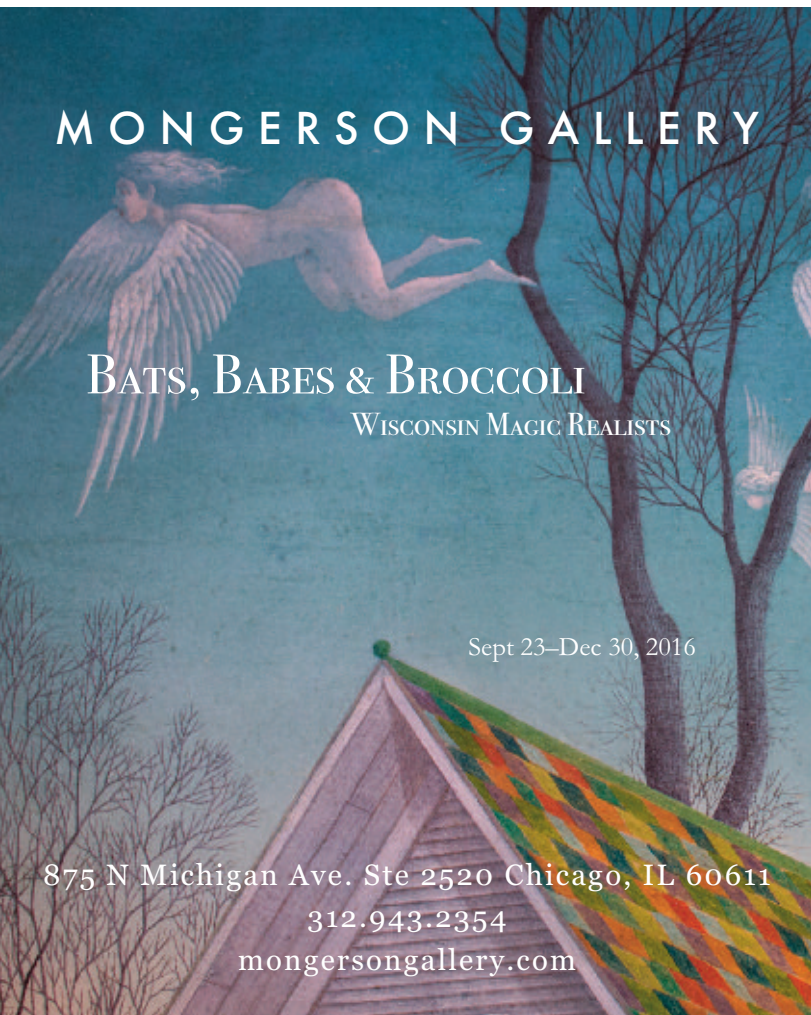
PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT:  
Camille Blatrix. *Je veux passer le reste de ma vie avec toi*, 2014. Aluminum, anodized aluminum, silver, glass, marquetry, ipod, speakers, electronics. 89.2 x 43.2 x 2.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Balice Hertling.

PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT:  
Camille Blatrix. *Tosh 4*, 2015. Maple, aluminum, reconstituted ivory, milk stone, painted wood, paper. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Balice Hertling.

—

BELOW, LEFT:  
Camille Blatrix. *No school* [exhibition view], Mostyn Gallery, 2015. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Balice Hertling.

BELOW, RIGHT:  
Camille Blatrix. *No school (love tape and everyday shit)*, 2015. Aluminium, marquetry, maple, reconstituted ivory, plexiglass. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Balice Hertling.



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# Diana Thater

BOUNDLESS VIVIDITY  
// THE SYMPATHETIC  
IMAGINATION

By Noah Hanna



A group of divers drop into the water; greens and blues wash over the gallery’s walls, floor, and ceiling as the camera sinks below the surface of the waves. Quick yet calculated shots project a pod of dolphins and an enamored film crew in tow. Diana Thater’s film and installation *Delphine* (1999), like much of her work, is as much about capturing the aesthetic beauty of nature as it is a deeply attentive discourse into the multitude of perspectives which encompass the Anthropocene. Moving through her installations, viewers find themselves in places and with beings that feel intrinsically connected, but whose presence you have yet to completely embrace. Instead, Thater offers dualisms in her work—an acute awareness of the present, as well as an acceptance of the constraints of human perception. A moment of conscious clarity and a sympathetic bond to creatures whose perception of time exists outside of our broadest imaginings.

— In April, Diana Thater concluded the first stage of her mid-career retrospective *The Sympathetic Imagination* (2016) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the exhibition now traveling to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago for its October

opening. Surveying her film and installation work from the early 1990s up to *Life is a Time-Based Medium* (2015), the exhibition casts Thater as not only an adept filmmaker but also as an artist with a remarkable awareness of space; a capability that becomes increasingly essential when organizing the volume of work and locations that have become synonymous with the contemporary retrospective. While categorizing Thater as a filmmaker seems appropriate in the most general sense, I’ve found that the title may be constrictive when attempting to place her work in *The Sympathetic Imagination*. Thater’s projections are immeasurable, free of narrative cinematic intentionality and devoid of the tropes of classical or even conceptual filmmaking, but rather they are moments of silent meditation. “Thater is influenced by structuralism and what you can do with the medium rather than narrative filmmaking,” says Joey Orr the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow at the MCA, who is organizing the Chicago exhibition, “She’s interested in making and thinking of film and video as form.”

— A conscious activist for environmental protection and preservation, Thater

recognizes the complexities to that title—demonstrating how these capacities of engagement become interrelated with that of an artist. In both positions, she continues to examine the roles humans play on the planet, as both actors and observers. A fair conclusion may find that the act of simply looking may be the purest form of kinetic conservation for the natural world.

— As *The Sympathetic Imagination* makes clear, despite its staggering scale and color, viewers never lose sight of the gallery setting. And purposefully so—in Thater’s exhibition, while the space exists in an altered state, the museum walls continue to stand tall, projectors and lengths of wire are intentionally visible. It’s rather nature that permeates into the human sphere, rather than the opposite of which we have become painfully apathetic to. Within Thater’s work, a meditative collision occurs between our human occupied space and the wild; from the soft flower petals of Monet’s garden to the melancholy landscapes of Chernobyl. There can be no denying this changing landscape, nor can we harken back to a former state of wildness—rather, it is within this synthesis that Thater sees a beauty in itself.









**NOAH HANNA:** In April, you concluded the first stage of your mid-career retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. What was that experience like for you?

**DIANA THATER:** It was wonderful. I have installed many exhibitions, but this was by far the largest that I have ever done, seeing that it is a retrospective. I am sure it is going to go the same way in Chicago, I can see that it is already going really well.

**NH:** And the transition from LACMA to the MCA?

**DT:** It is difficult because I am going from one exhibition space—which is designed in a certain way, and for which I designed the show—into a space that I did not know about when I had originally mapped out the installation. The Chicago exhibition came on after the first iteration was developed; I had to redesign it to fit into the MCA. It is going to look completely different—while it will contain most of the same work, the layout is obviously totally different. The one thing we were able to maintain was that at LACMA the show was set up in two parts; and at the MCA we were able to do that again, separating the two chunks of the show into two spaces on the same floor.

**NH:** In the past, you have said that you prefer to use pre-existing architecture over fabricating a new space. When you go into a space, do you prefer to have an ideal vision, or is this something you prefer to conceive of more spontaneously?

**DT:** Usually, there is a brand new piece that I am putting into a space for the first time. I much prefer to experience the space, and to be able to play with the work when I go to install. That said, a retrospective is something that you do not want to play with; you do not want spontaneity when installing a show of this size. You want it figured out to the last inch. While I need flexibility with something like moving projectors a little bit to the left or right, I did not want total flexibility—it simply would not have been possible.

**NH:** Tell us more about the title of the exhibition, *The Sympathetic Imagination*—

**“People who make film about the natural world, or about the wild or about animals, usually try to make it understandable from a human perspective. What I would prefer to do is to let it be the way it is, and to not try and fit it into our understanding of the world.”**

— DIANA THATER

**DT:** It is a quote from one of my favorite books, “Elizabeth Costello” by J.M. Coetzee. It says, “There is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination.” It means that we have the ability to have sympathetic relationships to other beings that are both bodily and physical, which can lead to the emotive and intellectual. But it begins with the body. That is what I am really interested in—kinds of physical, sympathetic responses to other living beings. Those living beings in my work are presented in film and video installations; but the installation is designed around the viewer’s presence in the exhibition space. In other words, in terms of size, the arrangement, editing, and motion—everything is designed to allow a kind of response from the viewer that I see as sympathetic to the beings that are represented in the work. Like the dolphins or the bees, or the horses in Chernobyl.

**NH:** Your work aims to make viewers conscious of the space they are in, yet the locations depicted in your work are often very far from a traditional gallery setting. Can you expand on this connection, between the immediacy of a conscious space and its extension far outside that worldview?

**DT:** Yes—I am interested in overlaying spaces, such as positioning Chernobyl onto a museum space. There’s an interesting simultaneity of the two spaces. The viewers are conscious of what Chernobyl is, what it looks like, what it feels like; and also simultaneously being fully present in the museum and knowing they are experiencing a representation and physicalization of an image. A kind of twin consciousness: the reality of this distant place, and the reality of where you are when you are looking at it. It is the same with *Life is a Time Based Medium* (2015) which is a temple that I filmed in India where a troupe of monkeys lives. The temple is overlaid on the gallery space with a theatre element as well. While you know you are in a museum, you experience the space, the proportions of the building, the thickness of the walls; all of those things you experience are simultaneous with the imagery of this temple. So becomes two places at the same time. And that is a complicated phenomenon—that is it possible to think and feel the two places at the same time.

**NH:** Animals and the entire Anthropocene in general are a critical focus of your work—you have paid attention to what it means to be wild, and have worked both with trained, and non-domesticated animals. I often feel that filmmaking has a directorial organization to it, that things are laid out in a plan. How do you balance between the kind of innate organization in film, and the unpredictability that comes with nature?

**DT:** People who make film about the natural world, or about the wild or about animals, usually try to make it understandable from a human perspective. What I would prefer to do is to let it be the way it is, and to not try and fit it into our understanding of the world. In other words, when you see something like a National Geographic documentary about gorillas or dolphins, they tell you a story. They always give you something to latch on to, a kind of narrative. But the reason I chose to work with animals, nature, and the imagery of the wild is because they are inherently non-narrative. Nature has different kinds of time; not a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is circular time, parallel time, dimensions

beyond the three we comprehend—there are all kinds of different ideas of time in nature. Human beings do tend to live their lives narratively. We see our lives as having beginnings, middles, and ends. We see peaks and valleys, achievements, and low points—all kinds of things that mark the times in our lives. We do not know if animals see their lives that way. It must be that they see their lives in ways that we cannot perceive. Though, by not attributing narratives to my films, I am trying to give animals space to express their being and not impose a kind of being on them.

**NH:** Is that why you ultimately stopped using domesticated animals in your work, such with as the wolves in your piece *China* (1995)?

**DT:** Well, I have worked with some domesticated animals, but really just horses. Those were trained wolves, but of course they are not domesticated. They are wild animals; I have worked with trained animals a few times, such as falcons who are all trained but are simultaneously wild. I am interested in the relationship that humans construct with animals when they train them, when they become companions. I do not believe there are any animals or places that are truly wild anymore. Everything is inscribed by the human; and everything, if you think about the Anthropocene, has been transformed by human intervention. I am interested in the places where those things crash together—where intervention and the wild meet one another.

Chernobyl is kind of a perfect negative example, and most of them are negative examples. There is this territory called the “Exclusion Zone” that has been completely destroyed, irradiated, and poisoned by human beings, and animals are struggling to live there. They are trying to survive in a place that has been completely inscribed by human beings, the radiation like a physical map over the space, and the animals are within that space trying to live and needing to thrive.

**NH:** Humans make very fleeting appearances in your films—for the most part they are exclusively focused on

**animals. As a viewer, what perspective would you want someone to take? Should they see your work as an animal, as a human observer, or something else?**

**DT:** There are actually lots of people in my work—the crew is always in it, I am always in it. In *Delphine* (1999), you see the crew swimming around the dolphins filming them. In *Chernobyl* (2011) you see people with cameras everywhere. There are possibilities for you to identify with the people in the films who are doing the looking—mainly the film crew and the artist herself. I do not want people to identify with animals. I think anthropomorphism is weird. It is for little kids to pretend they are dolphins or run around among the bees in the bee piece. Adults do not do that, adults have a more distracted and sometimes considered relationship with the natural world. It is sometimes inhibited as well—my intention is not to inscribe your relationship to the natural world, I want to open it up.

**NH:** While your work is much more meditative and contemplative, you are someone who is actively concerned with wildlife and environmental preservation. How do you engage with what you would consider traditional activism and your artwork?

**DT:** I have an activist side of my life. I worked for the Dolphin Project for 10 years. I made a documentary called *Welcome to Taiji* (2004) with dolphin rights activist Ric O’Barry. We tried to stop the capture and slaughter of cetaceans, particularly the slaughter of dolphins and whales in Taiji, Japan, which happens for several months every year. The documentary inspired the film *The Cove* (2009) which won the Oscar for Best Documentary in 2010. Right now I am working on another short film about elephant poaching in Kenya. So there is an activist side to my practice and an artistic side. And I prefer to not to mix them and to keep them separate. I do not want my artwork to be overlaid with activist rhetoric; I want to put that where it belongs, and where it gets the most traction, which is with the documentary pieces.

Born in 1962 in San Francisco, Diana Thater studied art history at New York University, before receiving her MFA from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, where she is currently the faculty chair of the Graduate Art department. Over the past decade, her work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at prominent institutions that include the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2011); Santa Monica Museum of Art, California (2010); Kunsthau Graz, Austria; Natural History Museum, London (both 2009); Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany; Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany (both 2004); Dia Center for the Arts, New York (2001); Secession, Vienna (2000); and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1995). Thater lives and works in Los Angeles.

**TITLE PAGE:**  
*Untitled Videowall (Butterflies)*, 2008. Installation view, 1301PE, Los Angeles, 2008. © Diana Thater. Photo © Fredrik Nilsen, courtesy of 1301PE, Los Angeles.

**OPPOSITE TITLE PAGE:**  
*Oo Fifi, Five Days in Claude Monet’s Garden, Part 1*, 1992. Installation view, 1301PE, Los Angeles, 2012. © Diana Thater. Photo © Fredrik Nilsen, courtesy of 1301PE, Los Angeles.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:**  
*Delphine*, 1999. Installation view, Diana Thater: *The Sympathetic Imagination*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015–16. © Diana Thater. Photo © Fredrik Nilsen.

**BELOW:**  
*Chernobyl*, 2011. Installation view, Hauser & Wirth, London, 2011. © Diana Thater. Photo: Peter Mallet, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.







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