

ISSUE // 08

THE SEEN

CHICAGO'S INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY & MODERN ART





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Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 11.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

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COVER

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 11.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

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Latitudes, founded by Max Andrews and Mariana Cánepa Luna in 2005, is a curatorial office based in Barcelona, Spain, that has worked internationally across contemporary art practices, including more than forty projects encompassing exhibitions, public realm commissions, film screenings and discursive programs. Latitudes has worked with artists including Lara Almarcegui, Maria Thereza Alves, Amy Balkin, Mariana Castillo Deball, Heman Chong, Jan Dibbets, Dora García, José Antonio Hernández-Diez, Nicholas Mangan, Joan Morey, and Lawrence Weiner. They have organized exhibitions at venues including the CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux (2017–18), Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) (2016), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Castilla y León (MUSAC) (2011), and the Kunsthal Århus (2011), among others.

Matt Morris is an artist, writer, educator, and curator based in Chicago. He is a contributor to Artforum.com, *Art Papers*, *ARTnews*, *Flash Art*, *Newcity*, *Sculpture*, and most recently *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly* and *THE SEEN*. His writing has appeared in numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs. He is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned a Master of Fine Arts in Art Theory and Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies. In 2017, he earned a Certification in Fairyology from Doreen Virtue, PhD. Morris is a lecturer at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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Patrick J. Reed is an artist and writer based in Los Angeles. His writing and criticism have been featured in *art agenda*, *Canvas: Art and Culture from the Middle East and Arab World*, *Temporary Art Review*, *Serpentine: A Magazine of Critique*, and *Amodern*, and he has contributed commissioned essays for exhibitions at ART COLOGNE and the Venice Biennale.

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Coco Picard is a writer, publisher, and curator. Critical writing has appeared under the name Caroline Picard in *ArtForum*, *Hyperallergic*, *Flash Art International*, and *The Paris Review*, among others. 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. Her first graphic novel, *The Chronicles of Fortune*, was published by Radiator Comics in 2017.

Dr. Kostas Prapoglou is an archaeologist-architect, contemporary art writer, critic, and curator based in London, UK and Athens, Greece. His texts have been featured in exhibition catalogues and publications in both countries. His reviews and articles are published in the international press on a frequent basis.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Stephanie Cristello



ISSUE 08

The mental state responsible for allowing daydreams to occur is often attributed to the type of brainwave activity known as Theta. The rhythm belongs to just one of five distinct neurological patterns that follow a Greek alphabet—the final in a series of wave measurements preceded by Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta—which describe the range of reactions to human thought and feeling. One can ‘read’ charts of brainwave activity like the score of a piece of music—the graphed image serving as an indication of either harmony or dissonance without specificity, an abstract symphony.

Yet, the Theta wave holds a deeper metaphor for our purposes. In addition to daydreams, it is Theta that brings us memory, Theta that withdraws our minds from sensing the external, luring us instead to redirect our focus to an internal world. The process enabled by a Theta state is not unlike the experience of writing or thinking about ways in which we view art—it is associative and fertile, generative and unpredictable.

This issue is dedicated to daydreams.

In a concrete sense, much of the work explored in Issue 08 of *THE SEEN* traverses territory built upon dreams and fantasies; it is for this reason the cover of this edition is occupied by a work from Yinka Shonibare CBE’s seminal series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, reimagined and installed among the collection at the Richard H. Driehaus Museum, a Gilded Age mansion within Chicago’s Gold Coast neighborhood. As

a complement to a feature on Shonibare’s work written by Joel Kuennen, whose text meditates on the consumption and projection of images born out of colonialism and its structures, an additional insert of the full series of *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* is reproduced within the pages of this publication.

Also contained within this issue are two Special Edition Inserts, one of which includes an extension of noted curator Dieter Roelstraete’s exhibition *Kleine Welt* (which translates to *Little World*) originally installed at the Neubauer Collegium for Art and Society at the University of Chicago. The feature brings together a series of artworks by Caspar David Friedrich and Giorgio de Chirico that have appeared on the cover of books—namely, of twentieth-century philosophy and theory—to propose an alternative way of viewing these paintings within our twenty-first century context. The insert for *THE SEEN* could be said to exist as an expansion of an exhibition about printed matter within another avenue of printed matter. A bibliophile’s dream.

The features section of Issue 08 spans geographies and mediums, tending toward more tactile approaches. Such is the case in the practice of Joan Morey—a name perhaps lesser known within a North American context, but whose exquisite work in installation and performance art is given close consideration by the curatorial collaborative Latitudes, by Max Andrews and Mariana Cánepa Luna. An expansive essay that traces practices of perfume,

its politicized history, and its appearance in contemporary art, written by Matt Morris, brings together three artists in a critique of scent, while a text by Patrick J. Reed on the work of Jason J. Snell—whose sound art and performance work makes use of brainwave detection technology to create compositions—situates the reader within an auditory context (it was by editing this piece that I was introduced to Theta waves).

This is perhaps the best mindset with which to engage in Issue 08; as this abbreviated list of titles indicates, it is an edition enhanced (not lessened) by a reader’s pause.

STEPHANIE CRISTELLO

Editor-in-Chief

An immense thank you to my Staff Writers; Associate Editor, Gabrielle Welsh, for her work in assembling this edition; our dedicated advertisers; Newcity Custom Publishing for managing production and distribution; and Ashley Ryann of the JNL Graphic Design for her artistic direction in designing this edition.

Reviews

Proposals for an In/Exhaustible Image of Identity

PRISONER OF LOVE // MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

By Jameson Paige



[THE SEEN]

It is challenging to describe an exhibition where the central artwork is so overwhelmingly exhilarating, present, and difficult. Yet, such is the predicament for viewers of *Prisoner of Love* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago. Curated by Naomi Beckwith, the show sources its title from Glenn Ligon's piece of the same name. The museum's recent acquisition of Arthur Jafa's acclaimed video piece, *Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death* (2016), acts as the impetus of the show. Though an enormous installation in scale and capacity, Jafa's work is padded by an evolving constellation of artworks that explore the immensities of life and death, love and hate, pleasure and pain—themes pulled from Bruce Nauman's well-known neon piece, *Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain* (1983), also included within the exhibition. The three chapters of the exhibition move between these dualities, mobilizing a rotating cast of canonical artists, such as Carrie Mae Weems, Catherine Opie, and Doris Salcedo, among others.

Beckwith's curatorial approach spatializes what Krista Thompson has termed the 'sidelong glance'—"sidelong glances at Western art and cultures of vision...[are] a knowing way of looking that is very aware of, and in many regards averting, being seen in overdetermined ways on account of 'color.'" As such, one of the permanent fixtures of the exhibition is the opening relationship between Nauman's loud, central, and commercially-cognizant neon work, and Glenn Ligon's shade-throwing, though much quieter

painting installed to its right, entitled *Untitled (Study #1 for Prisoner of Love)* (1992). Through the proximity of these two works, the universalism embedded in Nauman's understanding of the human condition is contested by Ligon's racialized use of appropriated text "WE ARE THE INK THAT GIVES THE WHITE PAGE A MEANING," which identifies a reading of blackness hidden in plain sight. This opening axis to the exhibition provokes a productive tension in subjectivity—questioning who is looking, who is feeling, and how these actions are linked.

For viewers, Jafa's central artwork exists just beyond this first dialectic encounter. Similar to his other filmic works, *Love Is The Message...* amasses a series of found, disparate video clips, that convey an ontology of blackness for Jafa, many representing images of black people across time. The single-channel, 7:30 minute video samples materials ranging from university pep rallies, civil rights movement protests, Gospel music concerts, and Jafa's own footage of theorists, such as Hortense Spillers. Rather than distill black life into a narrow search for survival, the sampled images' final collaged form illustrates how "black subjects navigate the afterlife of slavery in moments that span the emotional register—from laughter to refusal to quiet contemplation." In *Love Is The Message...*, Jafa focuses on images and sound to concentrate a combined affective 'volume' that is so dense it brings nightmare and ecstasy into close proximity—retaining a sublime incompressibility

that somehow becomes singular. The rhythm of Jafa's syncopation of images within the film is guided by the soundtrack of Kanye West's "Ultralight Beam"—a song that has been termed a gospel-infused "street parable." Jafa has remarked on multiple occasions that in his work he aspires "to make a black cinema with 'the power, beauty, and alienation of black music.'" Through Jafa's manipulations of speed, tactful shearing, and incorporation of sound, the varied visual source material congeals into an ever-erupting pulse. The work becomes fragmented, incomplete, and narratively unstable—certainly embodying his aspirations for a black cinema.

Part of the work's ability to stir extreme affect—joy, horror, rage—is designed by its rhythmic hypnotism, which leaves viewers unable to resist complicity in Jafa's peppered images of violence. It is this aspect that forms some of the video's more haunting sequences. One example is a legendary vogue battle between the late Cassandra Ebony and Leiomy Maldonado (known as the "Wonder Woman of Vogue") that curtly transitions via a death drop fake out into a woman being smacked across the room and knocked out. Maldonado's slow motion, gravity-defying stunt recalls *The Matrix* (1999), inspiring exhilaration and joy in viewers—yet that joy quickly evaporates as the infamous death drop seamlessly folds into actual violence. Images continue to leap in content and affective measure—from the skilled scoring of an NFL touchdown, to Okwui Okpokwasili's strained solo choreography—the melding of multiple cultural forms into a single complex schema. This unending compression snowballs into the single video work that is *Love Is The Message...*, focusing Jafa's concept of blackness while sporadically likening its immensity to that of the glaring sun.

Art historian Huey Copeland connects Jafa's work to black feminist artists before him, such as Renée Green and Lorna Simpson—artists who transgressively imagine how black bodies can be imaged in new configurations. Copeland posits that "Jafa's works can be understood as forms of anti-portraiture that qualify the stilled representation of black figures in order to illuminate the dialectical relation between the self and the social." This dialectic is woven as a constant spiral throughout *Love Is The Message...*, attuning viewers to one's inability to control how the self is constructed by perceptions of race,



[PRISONER OF LOVE | 07]

“Whereas the act of becoming visible often provides the relief of representation, it subsequently binds a subject in expectation, calculability, and limitation.”

ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. at the societal level. Within this context, blackness is shaped by the complexity of these signifiers’ interlocution.

— Whereas the act of becoming visible often provides the relief of representation, it subsequently binds a subject in expectation, calculability, and limitation. Jafa’s film adheres to this formulation, but pushes further, so that the images envisioning possibilities of blackness are inexhaustible. The cropped condition of these video clips reminds viewers that much has been left out, also pointing to the conceptual and material limits of visibility. Though Jafa’s work considers blackness’ confrontation with being seen, its fragmentary condition continuously evades seizure.

— There is, however, an inevitable end to the video, signaling a death to the image that simultaneously represents and binds. The ending aptly depicts a collapsing James Brown during a 1964 performance of “Please, Please, Please.”⁶ The original version shows Brown being picked back up to his feet and cloaked in blanket, presumably to care for him, but more so to enforce his responsibility to perform. Jafa’s appropriation cuts earlier, where Brown is still on his knees pulling away from his impending and unwilling resurrection. The screen and music abruptly drown out as Brown

exhaustingly screams.

— Following Jafa’s complex piece, viewers encounter two surprisingly disappointing works by David Hammons and Lynda Benglis, which lazily appropriate Buddhist iconography and the Hindi language respectively. These pieces unfortunately undermine the complex embodiment of identity in *Love Is The Message* by perpetuating the shortsighted notion that Eastern spiritual practices can ‘heal’ the wounds the West has inflicted, illustrating a reductive Eastern essentialism in tow. The remainder of the “life and death” iteration of the exhibition expands upon Jafa’s emotionally raucous film into quieter territory. Melvin Edwards’s *Off and Gone* (1992) welds together volatile and aged metal fragments like chains and hooks to constrict a much more pristine water faucet. Here, the heaviness of history chokes life’s flow. Catherine Opie’s melancholic photograph of a demure, veiled, and empty armchair that floats before a blue drenched backdrop is utterly arresting when viewers note its title, *In Memory/Leigh Bowery* (2000). Anyone aware of Bowery’s exuberance for bright color, wild forms, and outlandish fashions will instantly become cognizant of the deep reaching feeling of loss registering on the body. The residual impression left on the empty chair longingly conjures the beautifully complex, warm fullness

of Bowery’s persona, yet is unable materialize an image for us to grasp. Though much of this exhibition confronts the limits that images impose on us as human subjects, Opie’s work demonstrates that sometimes all we want is just one more photograph to hold onto.

— As the exhibition cycles through its remaining two chapters—entitled “Love and Hate” and “Pleasure and Pain”—younger artists, such as Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Deana Lawson, and Michael Armitage bring further dimension to black figuration. The show’s central grounding of blackness causes a ripple through the imagistic strictures that configure identity’s appearance within the cultural field. However, one wonders if any image—singular, moving, abstract, or collaged—can match Jafa’s reflective use of the sun to depict the immense, astronomical feelings that one life can contain.

— *Prisoner of Love* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago runs through October 27, 2019.



Brick by Brick

PER KIRKEBY // KUNSTHALLE KREMS

By Ezara Spangl



The exhibition of Per Kirkeby's works, currently on view at Kunsthalle Krems, appears to function as a sort of diminutive retrospective. The artist's drawings and paintings are emphasized alongside his multifaceted practice—yet, what can be seen as one of the leading works within the show is a supplementary installation in the garden at the Minorite Church (Minoritenkirche), in nearby Krems-Stein. The brick sculpture, *Untitled* (1993), was commissioned by the Kunsthalle as a permanent outdoor sculpture as part of *Zur Zeit*, an exhibition of open-air sculptures in 1993. Alongside the majority of the works on view within the exhibition—which includes Masonite boards, drawings, bronze pieces, and canvas paintings—Kirkeby's brick sculpture brings lucidity to the underlying logic of his practice within the context of this present show, which exists between abstraction and representation.

— The solo exhibition was originally conceived for the artist's eightieth birthday, but Kirkeby passed away on May 9, 2018 in Copenhagen, marking the exhibition unexpectedly posthumous. This shift in part transformed the exhibition into a concentrated look of his formation, impact, and legacy. Looking toward other artists' work, Kirkeby was naturally influenced by minimalist artists, such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre, but also Kazimir Malevich, and his abstraction of the square. Kirkeby researched history and was interested in the Danish canon, such as neoclassical artist Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard, the Biedermeier master landscape painter



Christen Schiellerup Købke, and sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who was working in Italy in the nineteenth-century, largely seen as the successor to Italian neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova. Among these influences, Kirkeby wrote about Paul Cézanne, Édouard Manet, and Vincent van Gogh. During the 1970s, he was introduced to Michael Werner and became part of the Cologne art scene alongside Jörg Immendorf, Markus Lüpertz, and A.R. Penck. At that time, there was much prejudice against Germans in Denmark; as a Danish artist, Kirkeby was an outlier—actively showing in Germany and participating in the market there.¹

— The earliest piece in the exhibition is the oil on Masonite work entitled

Chac'erne mister orienteringen på grund af det grønne, den nye hovedfarve (1970/71). In this painting, animal and plant forms are visible in a field of green applied by many small brush strokes engaging positive and negative space. Kirkeby continued working for over forty years on square Masonite boards always in the same scale, roughly 48 x 48 inches. This format is shared with the *blackboard* pieces, in which he first used black paint to make a dark ground field for chalk renderings—as well as pencil, enamel paint, and spray paint, among other materials—for incessant portrayals of the natural world, declared as engaging the “Nordic expressionistic landscape tradition.”²

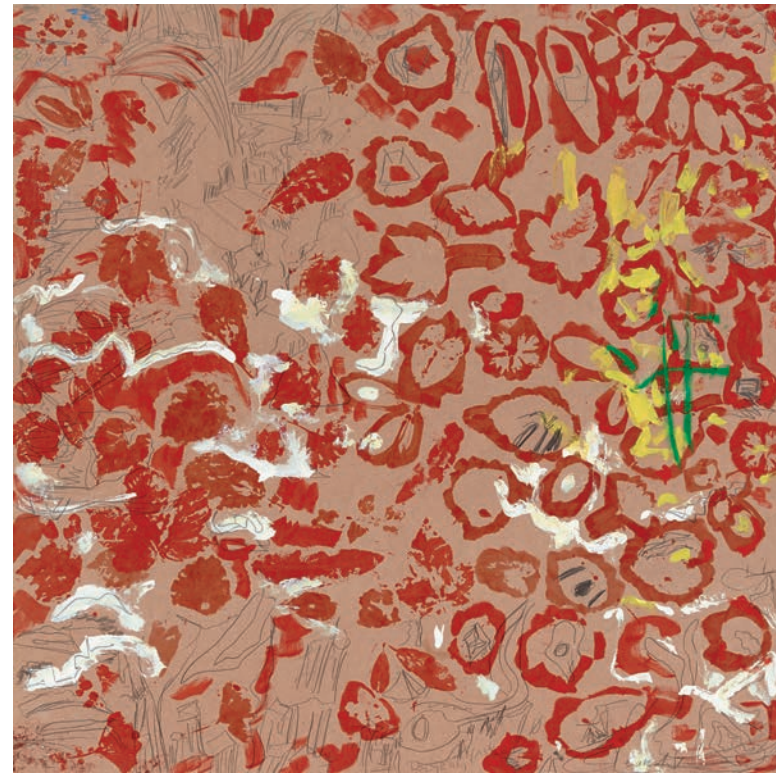
— Throughout Kirkeby's work is



scenography—including being commissioned by Lars von Trier for the films *Breaking the Waves* (1996), *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), and *Antichrist* (2009).⁴

— The *Naturens blyant* (Nature’s Pencil) publication of essays from 1978 includes Kirkeby’s writings on his own practice, aesthetics, and architecture. In this publication—which is one of dozens of his books—he writes of historical influences: Francis Picabia, Öyvind Fahlstöm, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Caspar David Friedrich, and J.M.W. Turner. In the frequently cited chapter, “En arkitekturhistorie (A History of Architecture),” Kirkeby describes his own architectural model as ‘neo-Gothic,’ ‘Classicist,’ and ‘neo-Baroque.’⁵ One review of the book articulates the prodigious nature of Kirkeby’s oeuvre:

...Per Kirkeby is not the first painter who expects the house to double as a picture. The house is a classic motif in visual art, and the painted picture once formed part of the house. What does it mean that the house itself is a picture? Kirkeby addresses the issue philosophically, abstractly, and actually. He refers to artists such as Ledoux, Ruskin, Pugin, and Morris, people regarded by posterity as driving the radical shifts in the development of architecture. Kirkeby shares elements of kinship with these people. He argues his case well: architecture as not merely anchored in systems, but to be reckoned with as works of art.



the expression of the hand the purveyor of ideas. Participating in the European tradition of oil on canvas, he was known for painting large wet-brush strokes of impasto paint, often scrapping off layers of paint and then building up new ones through this same process. Among these works included in the exhibition are also the Masonite boards, which repeatedly engage line to depict the natural world; drawings on brown or white paper using ink, chalk, graphite, and pencil through both line and rubbings; etchings; bronze sculptures cast from clay and plaster forms manipulated by fingers and hands; and the *overpaintings*, a series of painted-over canvases Kirkeby picked up in junk-shops—as the artist states, “... I never painted over any picture I believed to have any kind of ‘value’ in the artistic sense. They were almost always pictures on the verge of being trashed.”³

— Additionally, Kirkeby worked with language through the publication of his poems and essays, as well as worked in experimental film and theater



in 1939 in Copenhagen during the beginning of WWII, Kirkeby was surrounded by public housing buildings made of brick in the Bispebjerg district. One such large structure in his immediate childhood surrounding was the Grundtvig Church, which was finished just after his birth. It is a massive and dominant structure, at once implicitly somber and exhorting rigor. Kirkeby spoke of the influence of its architecture:

Yes, that was Grundtvig church. It is gradual, but also in hindsight it has become a good metaphor, not only for the possibility as far as the use of bricks. I was surrounded by this material since I was a child because there was no other building material. The time back then was before the spread of concrete; there was only brick. But this church had another meaning, because it was an unmodern, anachronistic building. It was only completed in World War II. But at first, it looks as if it comes



Architecture that, by virtue of form, color, and decoration, melts into the imagery of whence we evoke a profusion of experiences...The text has much to offer architects. Per Kirkeby expresses himself succinctly. Not necessarily in overtly accessible and clear terms. But he manages to instill measures of uncertainty in readers with architectural backgrounds.⁶

In his paintings, Kirkeby frequently confronts viewers with expressionism bordering on mannerism. Combined with his multi-layered practice, it all comes across a bit like that of a heroic artist—however, this is not entirely true considering Kirkeby’s brick sculptures, which manifest his inspirations of the geological and natural world, are about the viewer’s perspective and engagement of the work.

— Bricks are modular. They are assembled and laid. In his brick sculptures, Kirkeby locates a system that concurrently realizes his experience of space and light, while also creating form and support to his organic view. In the brick sculptures, the artist makes use of volume and hallow space—just as the use of the negative and positive space of the picture plane is realized in a completely sensorial manner. Coming into contact with the brick sculptures, some of which can be physically entered, the visitor may be guided by the sequence of walls, doors, and curves by entrances and exits, by volume and mass.

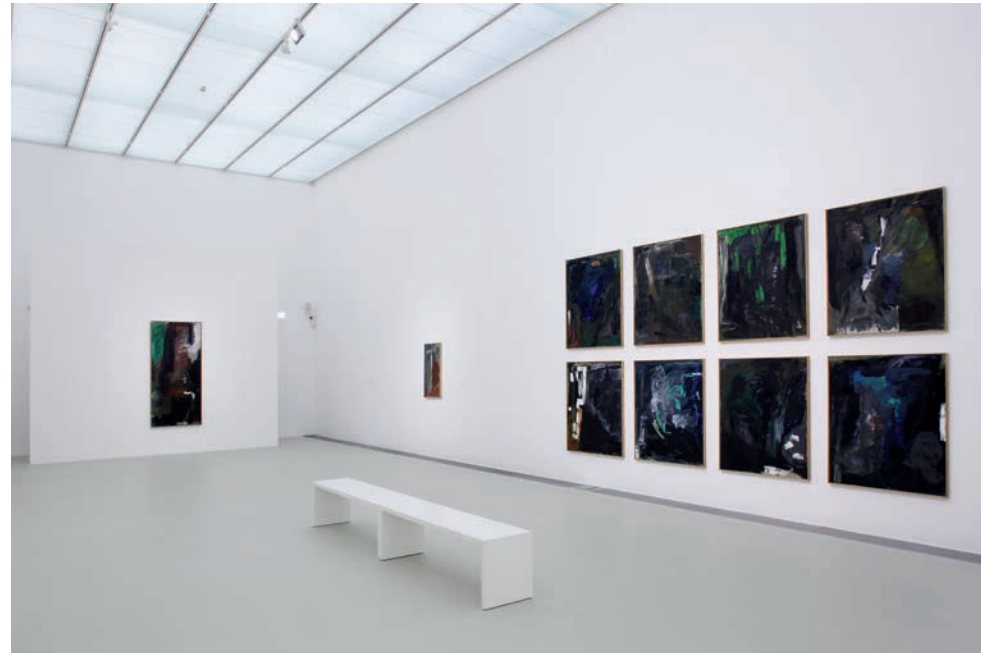
— Born



building in brick; the first brick sculpture that can be physically entered is the *Huset* (1973) in Ikast, Denmark. It is the size of a small children's playhouse, composed entirely of bricks. He went on to design and realize many commissioned public and private outdoor works throughout Europe—particularly in Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Important brick sculptures are far too numerous to list here, but a concise selection of works to contextualize *Untitled* (1993) in Krems-Stein: the house he designed on the island of Laesö (1994/95) as a vacation home for Dorte Mette Jensen and Arne Fremmich; the sculptures on Kirkeby's property also on Laesö: *Laesö I–XV* (undated, but all after 1984); the *Stubbeköbing* (1975), which was first built as a chimney to smoke fish on the property of a friend in Grönsund, Denmark, though it was relocated to Sønderborg, Denmark; the works *Karlsruhe-Universität I–VI*, (1990); *Ballerup I, II, III, Ballerup, Denmark* (1996); and *Grenoble I, II, III* (1991/92) France.

The sunlight and space within the sculptures, at least of those that can be entered, are Kirkeby's intentional secondary experiences. As Lars Morell writes, "Since 1988, Per Kirkeby has also begun to create brick sculptures that are enclosed and secretive on the outside but can be entered. In the inside of the sculptures, there are traces of sunlight which streams in through niches."⁸ The works almost develop an equation: interior is to exterior, as room is to wall. The nonfunctional architecture provides space for the metaphysical; order and unity, calm and stability. The large sculpture at the Gothenburg harbor, *Vindarnas Tempel* (1992)



*from the Middle Ages. I do not think that is good either, because it is not right with the Middle Ages, it gets a little bit weird. I do not know for sure, but sometimes I think that this building imprinted on me.*⁷

Before completing a degree in geology and paleontology in 1964 at the University of Copenhagen, Kirkeby joined the Experimental School of Art in Copenhagen. One of the artist's earliest solo shows was in 1965 in Copenhagen with only four works—two of which were brick sculptures, stacked without mortar. Thereafter, bricks were always present in Kirkeby's work. Later, after travelling to Mexico in 1971 and visiting Mayan ruins, he built his first functionless

“The works almost develop an equation: interior is to exterior, as room is to wall. The nonfunctional architecture provides space for the metaphysical; order and unity, calm and stability.”

can be seen far out at sea like a distant red spot, but also walked around and through from up close.

— Within the body of the brick sculptures, there are multiple categories: unrealized, permanent, temporary, and architectural. Temporary sculptures such as those made in 2017 for *Per Kirkeby: Brick Sculpture* at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paris are executed with the expectation of being de-installed and stored. Other works such as *Brick Sculpture* (1994) outside of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark are built as permanent commissioned works. There was also the occasion that a work was destroyed: work completed in 1982 in Kassel for Documenta 7 was, unfortunately, destroyed four years later. The only brick sculpture as of yet to be realized in the United States was at The Carnegie Museum of Art for the Carnegie International in 1995—this work was inspired by traditional pueblo architecture, built on an outdoor staircase and later disassembled.

— Within his practice, fragments structure new forms: a door, a column. Kirkeby's brick sculptures had their departure in architecture, yet remain primarily detached from function except to make metaphysical space. In his drawings, Kirkeby links canvas to cathedrals and arches to columns. He drew, studied, and photographed architecture, looking at Danish Gothic and Romanesque churches, such as the Haderslev Cathedral in Denmark. Kirkeby's architectural observations into the views of gables, stairs, rounded arches, and colonnades and has been attributed to his 1960s Pop interests.⁹

— It is a singular paradox that part of Kirkeby's practice fits into minimalism, while simultaneously remaining idiosyncratic. As the artist states,

The brick sculptures also contain spatial considerations—about life and death, so to speak. That's it, what makes the fascination of the successful brick works. By "brick" I mean in principal every beautiful material with which you can really make something beautiful. But there are limited construction options when one sticks only to brick, but actually, there are many ways open. Brick buildings, at least those that I consider to be successful, awaken a feeling that is hard to define when entering. What should such a handling of space and proportion, where one has nothing to gain, if one tries to describe the phenomenon formally. For me, the secret of these buildings had nothing to do with thoughts

*of life and death. Why are we here on this earth and how long, and what does death mean and what does it mean to say that death is perhaps the door to eternity?*¹⁰

Of experiencing Kirkeby's brick sculpture, curator Jill Silverman van Coenegrachts rightly articulates: "We are mystified, attracted, put-off, confused, inspired, and occasionally dismissive of their massive power and animation."¹¹ Viewing Kirkeby's work is complicated; The ideal situation is such as that in Krems where the paintings are on view alongside to the brick sculpture—even if not precisely on the same premises—which in Krems and Krems-Stein accordingly requires zigzagging through the town to see both.

— ***Per Kirkeby at the Kunsthalle Krems in Austria ran from November 25, 2018 until February 10, 2019.***

- 1 Kirkeby (n. 10) 33.
- 2 Springfeldt, Björn. "An enormous, textural universe." *Per Kirkeby: Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings, Books, Films: 1964–1990*. Moderna museet, Stockholm, 1990, p.131.
- 3 Kirkeby, Per. "Overpaintings," in Kirkeby, *Writings on Art*, ed. Asger Schnack, trans. Martin Aitken (Putnam, Conn., 2012), n.p. [e-book], quoted in Steininger, Florian and al. *Per Kirkeby, Kunsthalle Krems*, (Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2018), 66.
- 4 Ng, D. "Artist Per Kirkeby discusses painting, critics and 'Antichrist'." *Culture Monster*, Los Angeles Times. 23. Oct. 2009.
- 5 Kirkeby, Per, and Ane Hejlskov Larsen. *Per Kirkeby: Paintings 1957–1977*. König, 2017, p. 233.
- 6 S., "Maleren og arkitekten" [The painter and the architect], *Arkitekten*, no. 10 [1978]: 239, quoted in Kirkeby, Per, and Ane Hejlskov Larsen. *Per Kirkeby: Paintings 1957–1977*. König, 2017, pp. 233-234.
- 7 Kirkeby, Per. "Per Kirkeby Im Gespräch Mit Siegfried Gohr." *Per Kirkeby Im Gespräch Mit Siegfried Gohr*, by *Per Kirkeby and Siegfried Gohr*. Translated by Ezara Spangl. Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994, pp. 51–52.
- 8 Morell, Lars. "Per Kirkeby's brick sculptures," *Per Kirkeby: Paintings, Sculptures, Drawings, Books, Films: 1964–1990*, Moderna museet, 1990 p.157.
- 9 Kirkeby (n. 6).
- 10 Kirkeby (n. 10) 48–49.
- 11 van Coenegrachts, Jill Silverman. "The World is Material." Kirkeby, Per. *Per Kirkeby - Brick Sculptures*, by Per Kirkeby et al., Cahiers D'Art, 2017, p. 61.

TITLE PAGE, PAGE 13:
Peder Vilhelm Jensen-Klint, *Grundtvig's Church* in Copenhagen, Denmark, 1940.

PAGE 14–15:
Per Kirkeby, *Untitled*, 1993–95. Brick Sculpture in the Sculpture Garden in the Minorite Monastery. © Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Gallery Michael Werner, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne & New York. Photo: Sascha Osaka / Lower Austria Festival.

PAGE 16, TOP:
Per Kirkeby, *Ohne Titel / Untitled*, 2014. Mixed media on masonite. © Per Kirkeby Estate Courtesy Michael Werner Gallery, Märkisch Wilmersdorf, Cologne / Cologne & New York. Photo: Jörg von Bruchhausen.

PAGE 16, BOTTOM:
Per Kirkeby, Kunsthalle Krems, 2018. © Christian Redtenbacher.

PAGE 17, TOP:
Per Kirkeby, *Huset i Ikast*, 1973. Photo: Lars Bay Fotografi. Courtesy: HEART.

PAGE 17, BOTTOM:
Per Kirkeby, *Brick Sculpture*, 1994. Brick with copper flashing. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Acquired with the support of the Olga and Esper Boel Fund. Photo: Poul Buchard/Brøndum & Co.

OPPOSITE:
Per Kirkeby, Kunsthalle Krems, 2018. © Christian Redtenbacher.

Stateless

VIEWS OF GLOBAL MIGRATION
// THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

By Noah Hanna



[THE SEEN]

I am acutely cognizant of the repetition in which the discourse of artistic practice finds itself negotiating the infringed humanity of migrants and refugees. In September 2017, *THE SEEN* featured the work of Moroccan-French artist Bouchra Khalili, whose minimalist and celestial topographies mapped migration as a solitary resistance towards traditional nation-states. A year later for this publication, Hiba Ali wrote on artist collective Postcommodity's interrogation of the architectural ideologies of colonialism in the US border region. Yet, continuous artistic reexamination does not seem superfluous. As of June 2018, the United Nations estimates there are some 68.5 million forcibly displaced people. Paired with the confluence of abhorrent hostility toward human rights by so many in power across the globe, the actions of interventionist artists and collaborators must serve to further our discourse surrounding the perpetual complexities of global migration. Such work engages a precarious balance between the conceptual ascription of territories, the movement of foreign bodies en masse, and the individual within systemic anonymity. In *Stateless: Views of Global Migration*, The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP) at Columbia College Chicago joins in a narrative that remains timeless, unresolved, nameless, and stateless. —

— Adopting a variety of methodologies, the artists included within this exhibition make use of photography and video as a means of paying respect to those entrapped within the status of statelessness. However, there can be inherent pitfalls when attempting to humanize a subject that remains broadly unknown to viewers. Push too softly, and the concern seems disingenuous; overexert, and you risk diverting attention away from the subject. Achieving equilibrium requires an understanding of the self equal to the lives of those documented. The artists in this show weave, at times literally, the complex narratives of these stateless subjects to explore the personal traumas and considerations of an uncertain future for refugees around the world. —

For many of these artists, statelessness is the ascription they must bear. The woven tapestries and paintings of Fidencio Fifield-Perez unfurl as a personal topography, constructed laboriously in an effort to bridge the many landmasses the artist has crossed as a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipient. The ephemera of university degrees and United States residency applications—all needed to provide evidence of the artist's legal status—document a journey under statelessness. The envelopes that once housed these documents now serve as canvases for beautifully rendered plants; they speak as much to a sense of home as they do to continued growth. While Fifield-Perez examines his life in the US and his desire to one day achieve permanence,

“The potential ineffectiveness of art to alleviate suffering creates an unpalatable reality for so many who have devoted their lives to it. Yet this is where we reside.”



[STATELESS | 21]





other artists document the detritus of migration. Hiwa K's and Bissane Al Charif's deeply affecting works offer glimpses into the hopelessness and suffering so many refugees endure, providing clarity in lieu of consolation.

In more photojournalistic projects, such as Daniel Castro Garcia's images of the young refugee boys who he mentors in Italy, and Omar Imam's *Live, Long, Refugee*, project which records life within Lebanese refugee camps, the works serve as an honest platform wherein the marginalized can exert their voices above the noise and statistics of contemporary communication networks. In Shimon Attie's *The Crossing* (2017), Syrian refugees are given center stage to reenact the risk they only recently undertook to arrive in Europe, this time upon a roulette wheel.

The multitude of perspectives surrounding statelessness these artists present creates a dichotomy of resolution. During the exhibition's symposium, a clear divide emerged between artists Fifield-Perez and Hiwa K concerning

whether the refugee crisis could ever be resolved. Fifield-Perez emphasized that while protections such as DACA are feeble at best, opportunities and resources remain to aid refugees, and art remains a powerful tool to break stereotypes and encourage greater representation. In contrast, Hiwa K expressed a more pessimistic vision of the future, indicating that he would be abandoning his artistic practice in favor of becoming a nurse, preparing for the inevitable violence to come.

This exchange was critical towards the discourse of migration within artistic practice. The potential ineffectiveness of art to alleviate suffering creates an unpalatable reality for so many who have devoted their lives to it. Yet this is where we reside. Through images, whether as art or media, we are faced with the need to recognize those in pain, but are not always prepared to upend the structures that enable it. A subject's visual representation, though poignant, is not equitable to its existence; and the prospect of alignment between these poles remains an enigma. Aside from the threats of violence

and treacherous seas, refugees find themselves affixed between geopolitical indifference and hopelessness. As viewers, we acknowledge the presence of suffering, but lack the resources to distinguish humanity from the body. We document faces and casualties, but art must strive for more.

In conversation with the MoCP's Executive Director and Curator Natasha Egan, she emphasized the importance of education and visibility for this exhibition. For the multitude of Chicago Public School students who explored the show with us, many of whom may face the same battles as these artists, works like these serve to embolden as much as educate. The MoCP's collaboration with organizations—such as The Heartland Alliance, The Karam Foundation, and The National Immigrant Justice Center, among others—provide awareness to the many people who work selflessly for those in need. It is not that art should be abandoned, but rather that it should be expanded. Hiwa K encouraged viewers to begin to think with their hearts, and for the sake of so many around the world, we must heed his advice.

Stateless: Views of Global Migration ran at the Museum of Contemporary Photography from January 24—March 31, 2019.

TITLE PAGE:

Daniel Castro Garcia, *Catania, Sicily, Italy November 2015*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and East Wing, Dubai.

PAGE 21:

Hiwa K, *Still from A View From Above*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist, KOW, Berlin, and prometeo gallery di Ida Pisani, Milano/Lucca.

PREVIOUS SPREAD:

Shimon Attie, *Still from The Crossing*, 2016. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

OPPOSITE:

Leila Alaoui, *Still from Crossings*, 2013. Courtesy of the Leila Alaoui Foundation.

BELOW:

Omar Imam, *Live, Love, Refugee*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.



"There was only grass, but I couldn't pass it through my throat. Yet I forced myself to swallow in front of the children so they would accept it as food."

Water School

OSCAR TUAZON // MSU BROAD

By Gabrielle Welsh



[THE SEEN]

“East Lansing, huh? I have an uncle out there,” the taxi driver tells me en route to Union Station. I am making the trip to the small town nestled halfway between Grand Rapids, MI and Detroit. “Not much to do.” — This seems indicative of all Chicagoans who I told of my travels; a general nod to a distant relative who attended Michigan State University in the last thirty years, or a place once stopped at for lunch when the end goal was another place. The town is unassuming and quaint, similar to nearly every college town I have visited, with a beautiful campus and a massive student body of 50,000. But the reason I travelled from Chicago to a much more comforting snow-stricken East Lansing was for their contemporary art museum, the MSU Broad, which has surprisingly placed itself as a world-class institution. — Their lead exhibition

the artist pulls influence from 1960s–70s countercultural icons, namely Baer, Buckminster Fuller, and Robert Frank, among others. Copies of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* line display cases next to an early copy of Baer’s *Dome Cookbook* (1969)—if anything, these intangible objects draw a conceptual link to the long history of radical and countercultural publishing. Through these influences, Tuazon draws together his own sculptural and artistic practice, while simultaneously revealing a long lineage of environmentalists-turned-inventors, and vice-versa. — The *Alloy* first found its home at the Art Basel Messeplatz, as part of the fair’s outside installation program, yet was unoccupied, whereas in its current existence at the MSU Broad, the piece is positioned as a library with seating—allowing instead for a further investigation into the histories of land rights and water.¹ In this state, the



currently on view, entitled *Oscar Tuazon: Water School*, enacts a community-based educational model within the museum, which surrounds the LA-based artist’s practice. A large, light-wood honeycomb structure entitled *Zome Alloy* (2016)—shaped after American inventor and pioneer of passive solar technology Steve Baer’s early waste-free *Domehomes*—overtakes the gallery, placing importance on the ability of architecture to create and foster space, and houses the ‘school’ within which public programming occurs. The adjacent galleries of the museum display additional sculptural works by Tuazon, most with some utilitarian use, that

work is more readily able to explore the cultural ways in which water bridges communities, but more importantly the often (quite deliberately) unseen political history that water and its infrastructure has. — The installation at the MSU Broad is one of several iterations of the *Water School*, which at its core seeks to connect vast distances through informal learning and conversation surrounding these issues through a metaphorical proposal that investigates the ways in which a river connects communities. With satellite schools in both Minnesota and California, Tuazon’s *Water School* here feels especially

[WATER SCHOOL | 27]



timely with the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan, less than an hour's drive away; prints done by the artist line the wall and stock the small museum store, tracing maps of where clean water runs in the state.

One gets the feeling that both the university and museum are generally concerned with environmental efforts—not only do the parking garages turned solar farms

give some indication of this, but the view from the MSU Broad looks directly out towards a Moosejaw, a retailer specializing in outdoor wear, and around the corner lies a Birkenstock store. Not quite belonging to a hippie classification, as that era has passed, *Water School* instead brings together the types that are concerned with new-wave environmentalism. The archival material included within the exhibition sparks an element of nostalgia for a



“Through these influences, Tuazon draws together his own sculptural and artistic practice, while simultaneously revealing a long lineage of environmentalists-turned-inventors, and vice-versa.”

time that viewers of a younger generation have never experienced—nodding to the massive popularity of present archival practices in contemporary art, the programming surrounding *Water School* is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exhibition.

Water School convenes twice a month, with weekend events interspersed, and the library within always open during the museum's hours.

backgrounds affect one's relationship to sustainability,' mirroring the ways in which grassroots organizing convenes; and a reading of a poem by Jessyca Mathews, an English teacher in Flint, MI. The weekly sessions range from small discussions to writing workshops.

As curator Steven L. Bridges explains of the focus of the museum's outreach, “Some of the core values at play here



An important element of the exhibition is also an eleven-page bibliography available on the website—the curated selection includes titles close to my heart (that I was surprised to find within a museum), such as Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Writing on the Wall: Selected Prison Writings*, Alexander Vasudevan's *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting*, and the ever-popular *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. If anything, the library is a nice change from the world of artist books and catalogues advertised in nearly every art museum. To give a taste of what the school is like, its first session included an Anishinaabe blessing, acknowledging whose land the Broad sits upon; a sculpture-making workshop utilizing recycled materials; a breakout session with guest artists, educators, architects, and activists to discuss 'how different sociopolitical

are notions such as reciprocal learning and making a concerted move away from more authorial and authoritarian modes of address. Certainly, the artist, the curator, and the museum educator all have knowledge to share, but it is not the end-all-be-all. The bottom line is to try and create a space where people come together and share the knowledge they have—a space in which different forms of understanding and learning are valued.”

In the most positive sense, these community outreach and engagement initiatives work to move the museum away from the rigidness of white-walls and ever-present guards towards the ability of art and learning to incite change. On the other hand, I am quite hesitant towards the art museum as a space for organizing—not only are these spaces entrenched in the capital that radical politics are often

“That perhaps through alternative pedagogy, an environmentalism will come—one that acknowledges indigenous land rights and the destructive nature of colonial capital.”

positioned against, but the popularity of the museum-turned-activist indicates the marketability interwoven with ‘activist art.’ All of this said, *Water School* remains most compelling use of a contemporary art museum as a space for political dialogue I have yet to see. Guides walk through the space making it clear that should viewers have any questions, they would happily answer—so many conversations were happening around me, I was delightfully surprised by the interactions.

My lodging was perhaps the best indicator that there may be some disconnect between greater Michigan culture and the community-oriented learning that the *Water School* presents. I unintentionally stayed in the ‘Indian Summer’ suite at a local bed & breakfast. Various totem poles and troubling caricatures of the ‘universal’ Native American man à la the white imaginary surrounded my bed. The reading list and Anishinaabe blessing pinned on the wall of the *School* burned in my mind as I fell asleep knowing the same museum that housed the library facilitated my stay in this room.

But I think this is the optimism that *Water School* and its programming enacts, one where learning and community-building is key to solidarity; with that I agree. That perhaps through alternative pedagogy, an environmentalism will come—one that acknowledges indigenous land rights and the destructive nature of colonial capital. One that engages young people to stop the destruction that the wealthy few have put in motion. The question is how to move it from the museum into the unsettled space beyond its walls.

—
Oscar Tuazon: Water School runs at the MSU Broad through August 25, 2019.

¹ It is troubling to consider how, if at all, the audiences for the work in Basel, Switzerland have ever been concerned about their access to clean water.

IMAGES:
Oscar Tuazon: Water School, installation view at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, 2019. Photo: Eat Pomegranate Photography.

HUTOPIA



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Forgotten Forms

EDRA SOTO AND YHELENA HALL // CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER

By Susan Snodgrass

[THE SEEN]

“Memory’s architecture is neither palatial nor theatrical but soft,”¹ writes Lisa Robertson. In her manifesto of “soft architecture,” Robertson rejects the “structural deepness” of architecture, embracing instead the surfaces and materials of the city with its textures of the everyday. The exhibition *Forgotten Forms* at the Chicago Cultural Center pairs the works of Edra Soto and Yhelena Hall, whose transformations of architectural elements of the everyday interrogate narratives of place to configure new urban landscapes marked by traces of memory. Working with abstract vocabularies that are distinct and personally derived, Soto’s immersive installations draw on decorative motifs that embellish the vernacular architecture of her native Puerto Rico, while Hall’s sculptural assemblages are crafted from remnants of concrete found in the

“To graft, as the title implies, is both to implant and to acquire unfairly.”

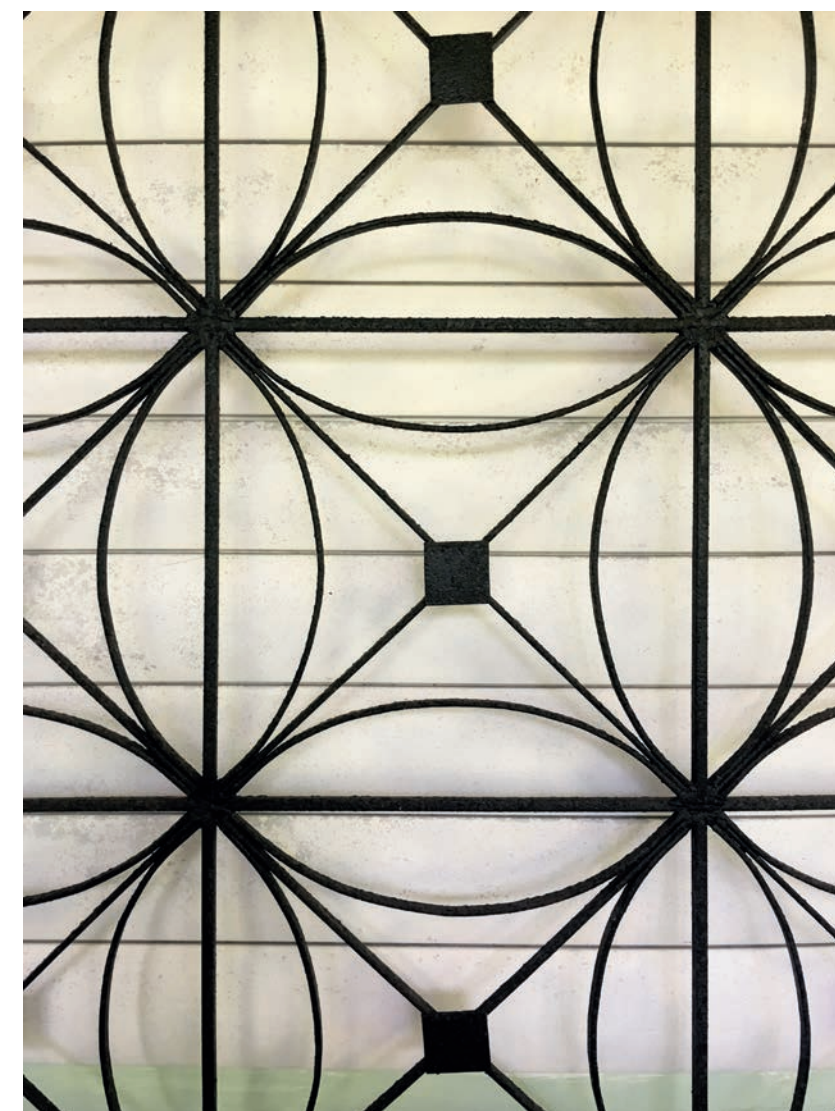
environs of Chicago. These disparate spatial and cultural legacies mark shifting dimensions of absence and presence, a dialectic that also plays out within each artist’s individual body of work. —————
————— *Graft* (2018), the most

recent version of Soto’s ongoing series of architectural interventions, transforms the Cultural Center’s lower-level gallery into a site for active viewing and engagement, in keeping with this civic institution’s public mission and the artist’s commitment to social practice. The central component is a continuous wood screen that runs the length of the gallery’s street-side windows, obscuring our view of the outside world. Instead, the viewer’s gaze is directed to the screen inside, painted a vibrant monochrome coral and punctuated with a rhythmic pattern of geometric cut outs. Architectural in its own right, Soto’s construction (measuring 10 feet tall by 38 feet wide) is based upon the ironwork grills that function as ventilation and protective barriers for homes throughout Puerto Rico. Known as *rejas*, their European and Afro-Caribbean sources are varied, originating from the dwellings of African slaves, then appropriated by the Spanish during colonial rule, and later found on Creole-style houses that populate San Juan’s working-class neighborhoods. —————

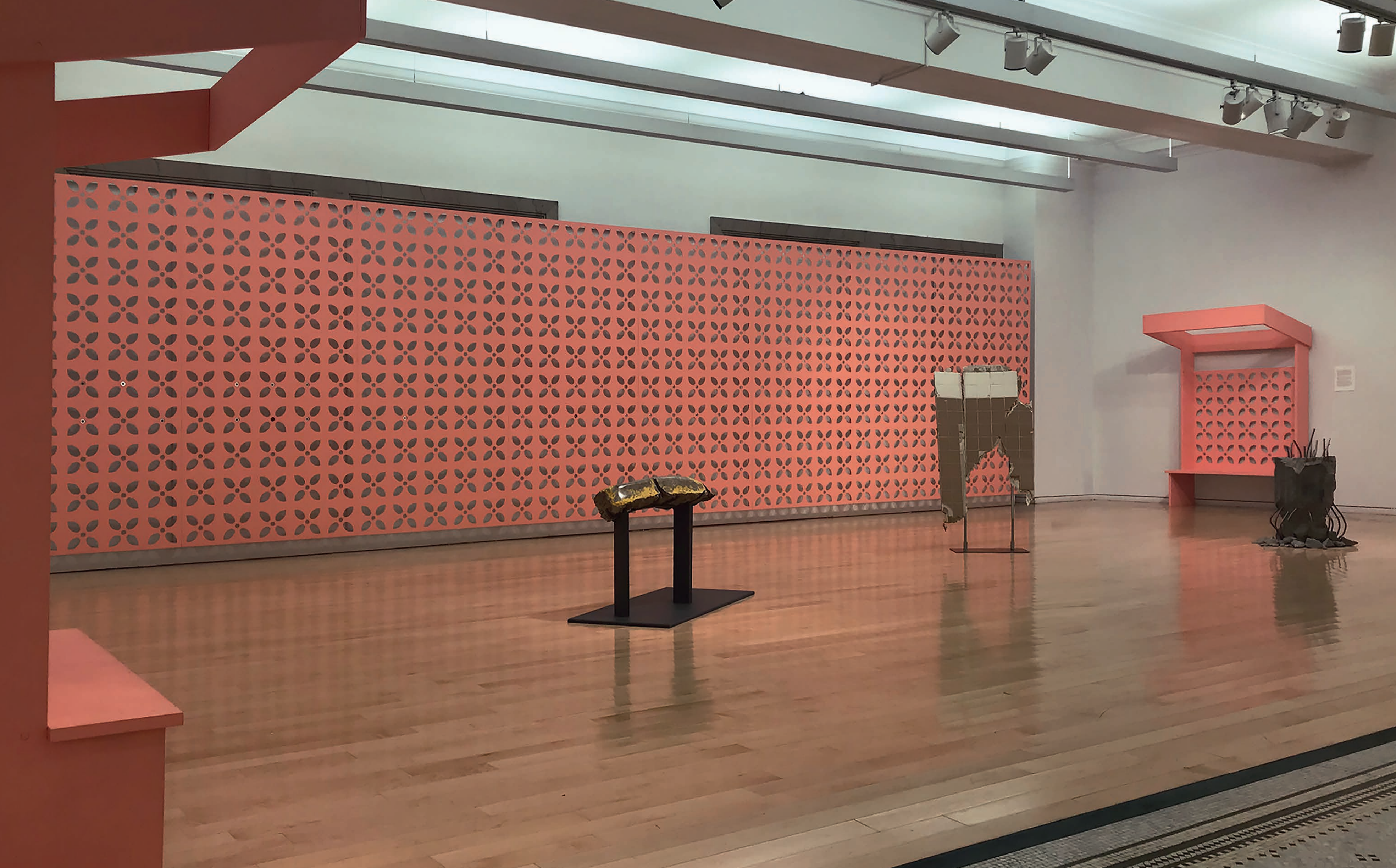
————— Soto’s excavations of these histories are central to the political efficacy of *Graft* and its various iterations, which since 2013 the artist has adapted to other cultural spaces and public sites.

While responding to the specifics of each location, this evolving and itinerant installation reveals how the metaphoric significance of one site might represent another site, akin to Robert Smithson’s notion of non-site. To graft, as the title implies, is both to implant and to acquire unfairly. Thus, Soto’s interventions perform a kind of reverse appropriation: by grafting a cultural marker of the island’s domestic life into Western architectural spaces, she upends legacies of territorial subjugation and privileges the varied range of Puerto Rican identities. These identities, including her own, are given further visibility in several photographic images observed through fifty small viewfinders implanted within the patterned wall. Revealed are everyday street scenes, private interiors, and palm trees, as well as images of Soto’s other works, including previous versions of *Graft*. However, their diminutive scale and placement just below eye level challenge one’s ability to access the images—a conceit that is intentional, positioning the viewer as an outsider or voyeur, at the same time creating a portrait of Puerto Rico that is at once intimate and remote. —————

————— Despite being a US territory, for many Americans, Puerto Rico remains a fictive other, but one whose very real identity has become



[FORGOTTEN FORMS | 35]



indelibly linked, and changed, with the devastation of Hurricane Maria. Just as information is central to our understanding of the political realities of this Caribbean island, so too are the commissioned texts in the form of printed newspapers, handouts, and downloadable PDFs that accompany each installment of *Graft*. To this end, the artist has installed two large shelters at either end of the gallery that provide benches for viewers to pause and read. Similarly painted in bright coral and fabricated using the *rejas* design, these shelters resemble bus stops: public spaces that denote passage and waiting, states of in-between

one might equate with the political and economic conditions that have defined Puerto Rico post-Maria. But to wait is also to share time and space with others. And like Soto's related projects (including her inaugural installation and programming of The Commons, a community space at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago), the *Graft* shelters additionally become hubs for gathering and the exchange of ideas.

Whereas *Graft* offers an expanded field of interaction, the five sculptural works of Ukrainian-born artist Hall present moments of curiosity. Her materials

are residual artifacts of Chicago's buildings, sidewalks and streets—pieces of broken curb, slabs of drywall, and concrete that are subtly polished and mounted onto steel supports. Displayed either directly on the floor, or in the case of *Column 2* (2016) on a traditional white pedestal, Hall's found artifacts are presented as *objets d'art*, a mainly Duchampian exercise of ironical gesture and objecthood. Later works from 2018 are titled by the street address where each remnant was discovered, tangibly situating the artist's intervention. However, Hall's project primarily resides in the artist's fascination for the crumbling

infrastructure of the contemporary urban landscape, and in concrete as the city's foundational material—a quasi-nostalgic “ruin gaze” that forgoes deeper, more complex social and economic histories of urban decay.

As the recent “archeological turn” in art reminds us, objects are never neutral, but rather carriers of meaning that “serve as traces of authentic experience.”²² Architecture also embodies lived experience—one that transcends mere physical structure and static form to become a spatial environment where the public and private are negotiated.



For Robertson, “Architectural skin, with its varieties of ornament . . . express[es] gorgeous corporal transience.”²³ Whether through individual experience or personal encounter, ornamental motif or material fragment, *Forgotten Forms* recuperates lost or forgotten architectural histories in discrete forms that remap the spaces they inhabit.

Forgotten Forms at the Chicago Cultural Center ran from February 2—April 9, 2019.

- 1 Lisa Robertson, *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Canada: Coach House Books, third edition 2011), p. 13.
- 2 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 135.
- 3 Robertson, p. 129.

TITLE PAGE:

Edra Soto, detail of *Graft*, 2019. Photo courtesy of Edra Soto.

PAGE 36:

Edra Soto, detail of *Graft* with photograph, 2019. Photo courtesy of Edra Soto.

PREVIOUS SPREAD:

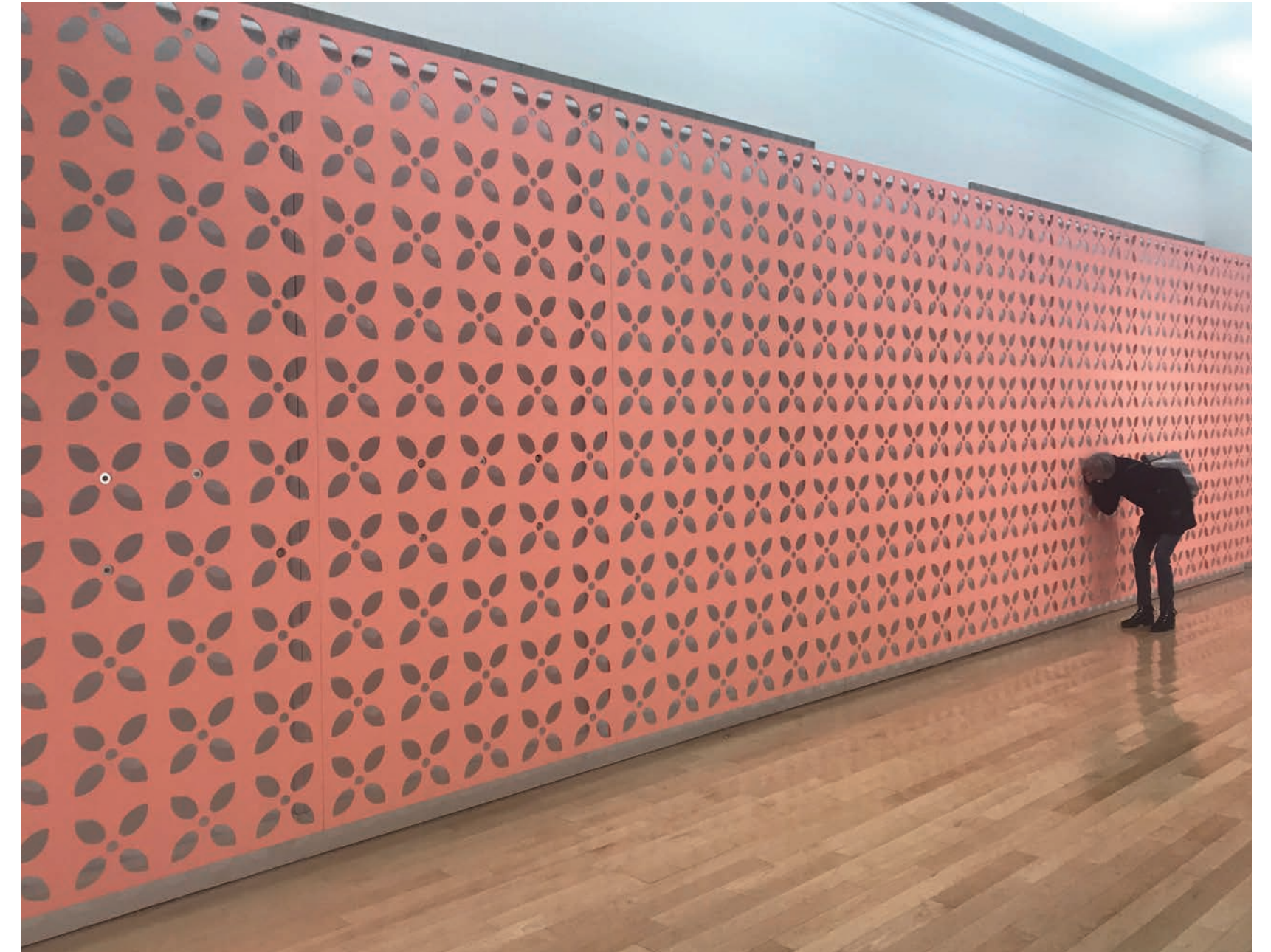
Installation view of *Forgotten Forms: Graft*, 2019, by Edra Soto; sculptural work by Yhalena Hall, from left to right: *2401 S. Loomis St.* (2018), *2313 S. Albany Ave.* (2018), and *Column* (2015). Photo courtesy of Edra Soto.

OPPOSITE:

Edra Soto, detail of *Graft* with photograph, 2019. Photo courtesy of Edra Soto.

BELOW:

Edra Soto, installation view of *Graft*, 2019. Photo courtesy of Edra Soto.



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November 16 & 17, 1979. Photo by Raúl Niño. Taken at Fiorucci, Watertown Place, Chicago, from the portfolio, ANDY WARHOL IN CHICAGO. Serious inquiries welcome.

Special Editions

Under Cover of the Night

KLEINE WELT // PART II

By Dieter Roelstraete



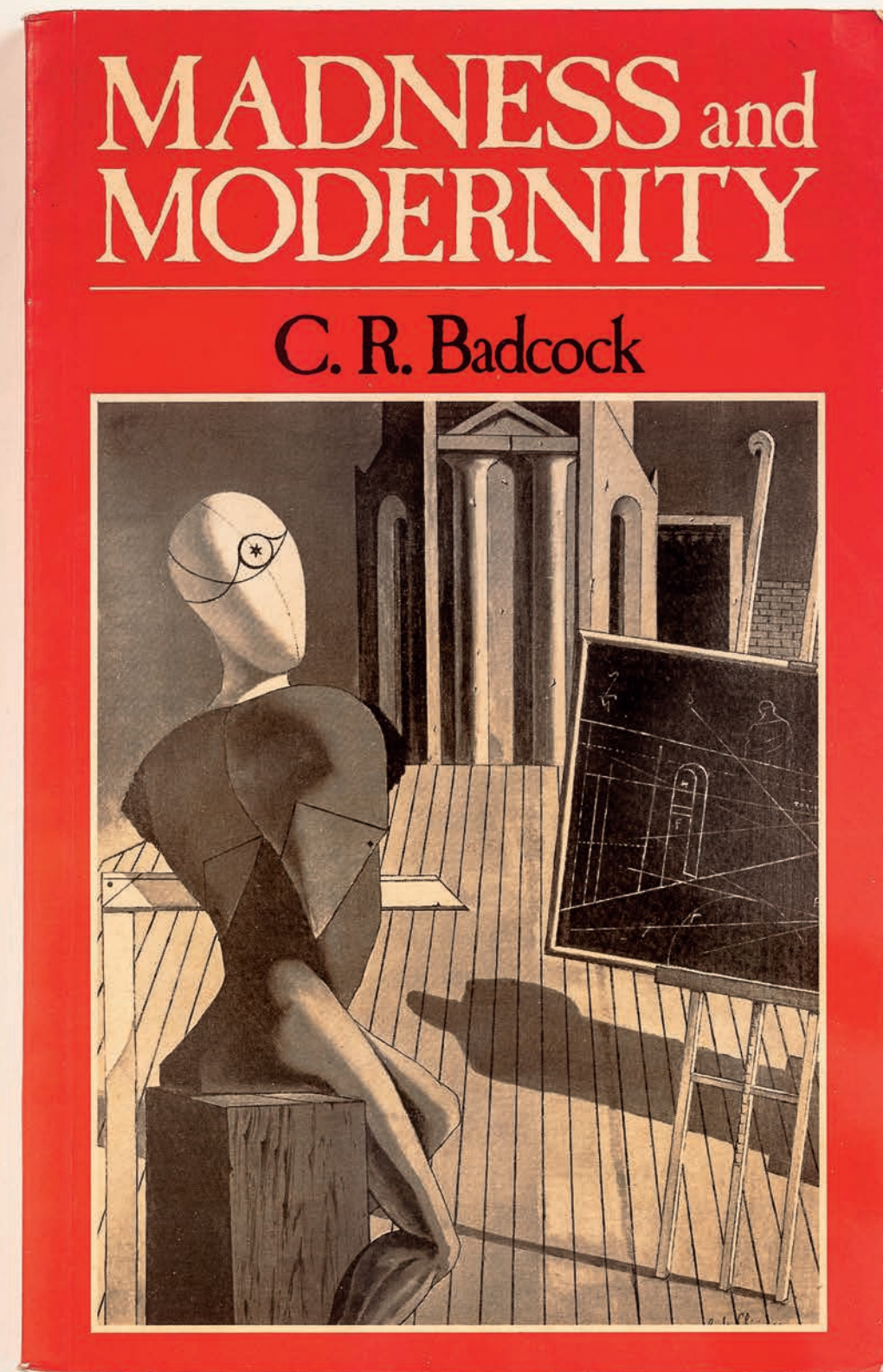
From January 17 until April 6, 2019, the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago hosted *Kleine Welt*, an exhibition devoted to the idiosyncratic art of the book cover named after a 1918 etching by Paul Klee. *Kleine Welt* (which translates to *Little World*) was rooted in a twofold observation I presume to be thoroughly familiar to habitual consumers of scholarly literature. First, why do authors and publishers in the field of twentieth-century philosophy and capital-T Theory so often turn to Paul Klee—often even the same Paul Klee painting, over and over again—to adorn the covers of their books? And second, are the authors and publishers who put Caspar David Friedrich’s iconic *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) on the covers of their books (or CDs, LPs) ever aware of how many others have done the exact same thing before them? Thus was conjured the titular little world of academic publishing, invoked in an exhibition consisting primarily of scholarly books, assembled inside vitrines, with the same dozen artworks or so on the cover, Friedrich’s *Wanderer* and a handful of eternally recurring Klee classics. (Paul Klee appears to be a particularly popular choice for authors and publishers in the philosophical subgenre of Critical Theory.)

On a fundamental level, the *Kleine Welt* project—which has since resulted in a publication—acts as a reflection about the power of the image, of a select handful of images, and their spellbinding grip on the intellectual imagination: early examples, if you like, of viral imagery, or analogue memes. What I am interested in above all is these images’ *afterlife*—the ease with which they have entered the stream of our cultural consciousness and smoothly sail from one frame of reference or system of thought to another. *Kleine Welt* is a homage to the power held by these images over a discipline of the mind that often fancies itself impervious to the lure and surface charm of the world of “pictures,” and often likes to think of itself as above and beyond imaging. (Not so.)

Kleine Welt is an ongoing project. I cheerfully continue to judge books by their covers and to collect philosophy tomes sporting Paul Klee artworks. In the meantime, I have also started to amass books with other Friedrich covers than the omnipresent, immortal *Wanderer*; this has admittedly become something of an addictive habit. And there are other dependable purveyors of philosophical imagery as well of course—Giorgio de Chirico perhaps foremost among them (René Magritte is another favorite). What follows is a selection of book covers, complete with annotations, that did not make the original *Kleine Welt* cut—a De Chirico & Friedrich special.

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Kleine Welt, curated by Dieter Roelstraete at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago, ran from January 17 through April 6, 2019.

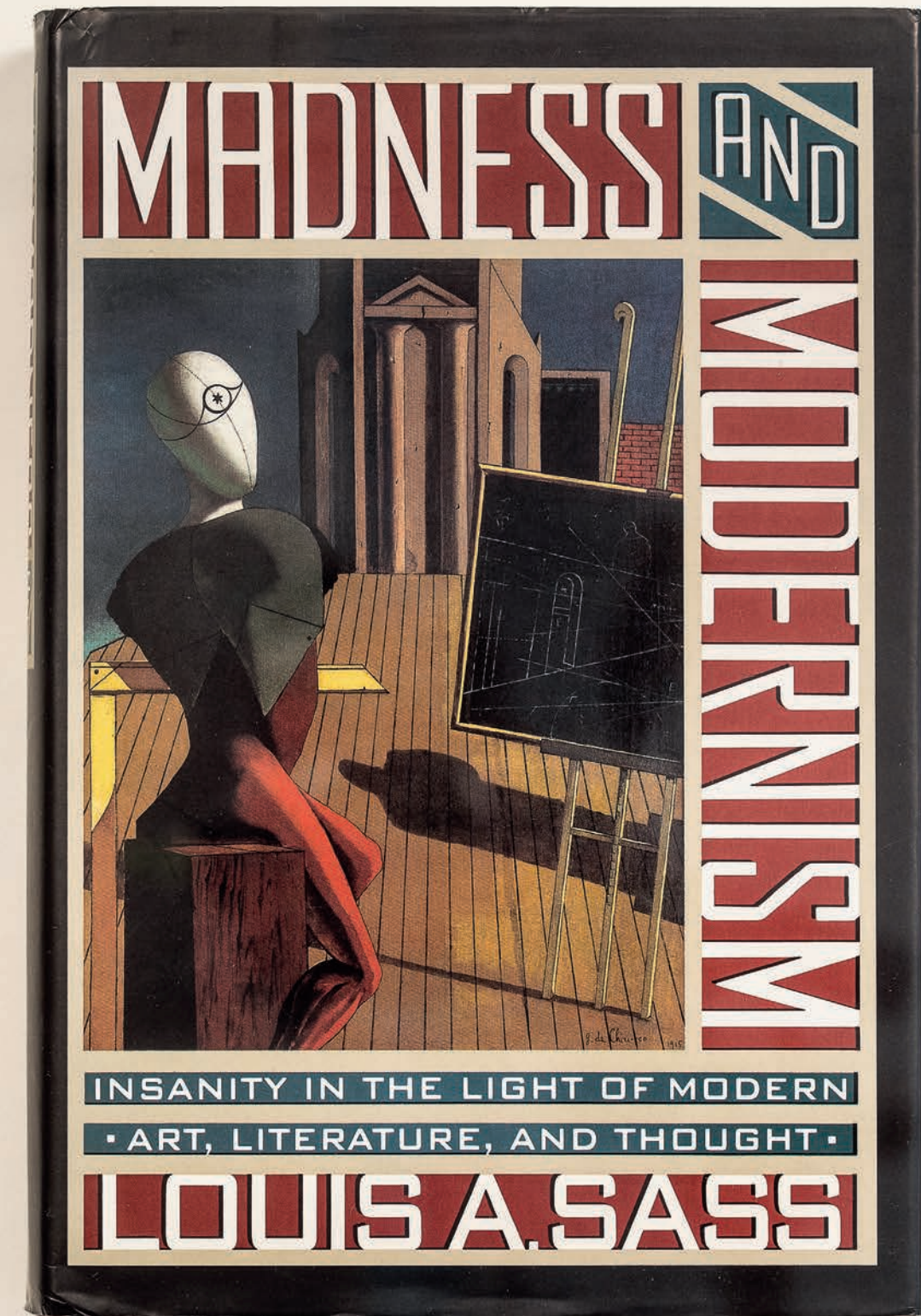
BOOK COVERS: Photographs © Assaf Evron. **INSTALLATION SHOTS:** Installation view, *Kleine Welt*: Paul Klee + Zachary Cahill, R. H. Quaytman, David Schutter, Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society. Photographs © Robert Chase Heishman.



I.

The “little world” of academic publishing in a nutshell. Here are two books with quasi-interchangeable titles and plainly identical de Chirico cover art, published less than a decade apart: *Madness and Modernity* (1983) versus *Madness and Modernism* (1992). Was the author of the latter, Louis A. Sass, at all aware of the existence of the former, authored by one C. R. Badcock? *Madness and Modernism* was published by Basic Books in New York;

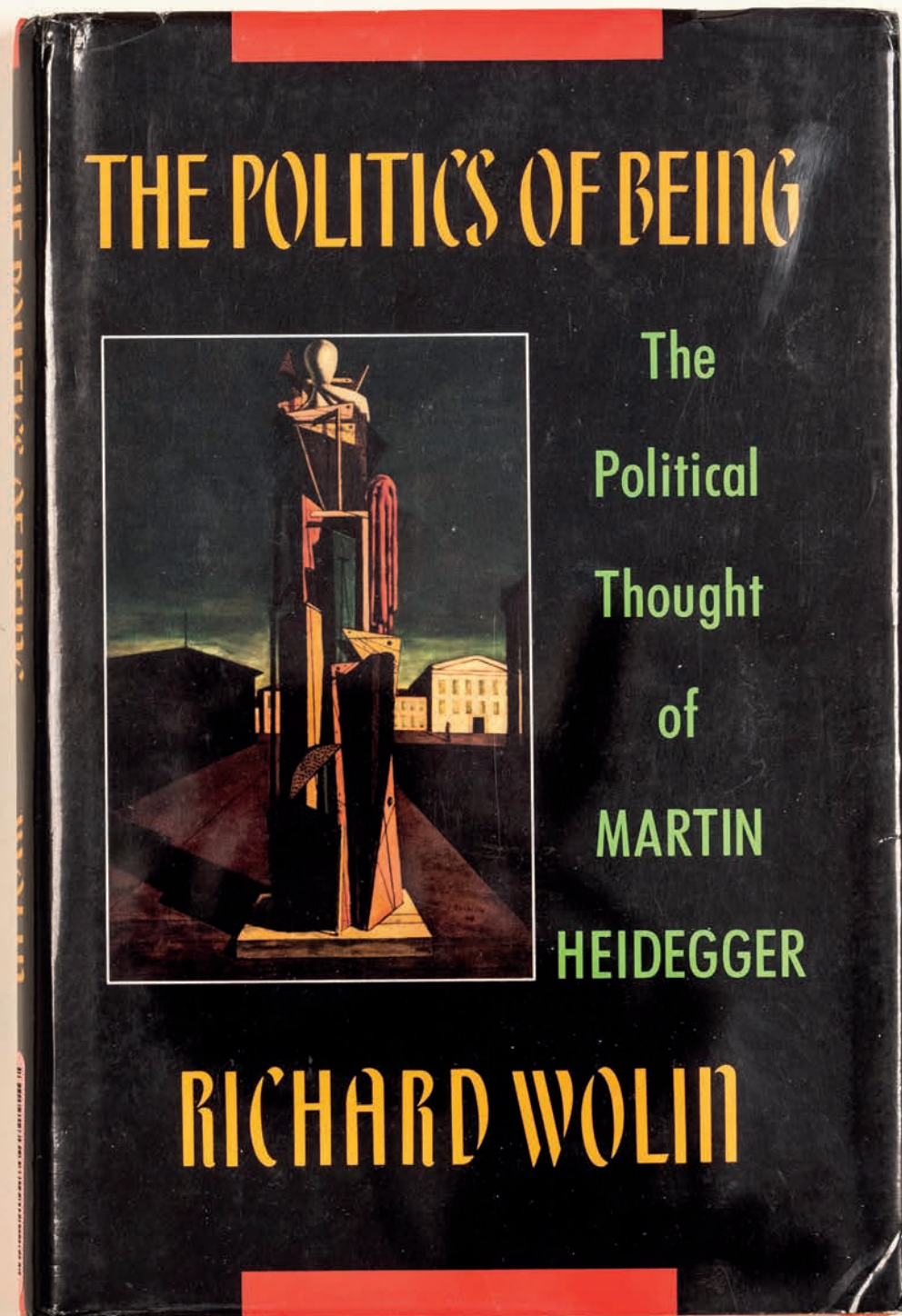
Madness and Modernity was published by Basil Blackwell in Oxford and New York—perhaps the Basic Books designer could have checked in with his colleague and counterpart at Basil Blackwell? For not only do the titles differ by a negligible pair of letters (“ty”/“sm”), they share the exact same artwork: de Chirico’s appropriately titled *The Seer* from 1915, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Appropriately titled indeed—did anyone *not* see?



II.

There is some historical, philosophical justice, at least, in the fact that *Madness and Modernism* appeared after the publication of *Madness and Modernity*: modernity *does* indeed predate and precede modernism. (I eagerly await seeing *The Seer* appear on the cover of a book titled *Madness and Modernization* – any takers?) Both authors clearly believe de Chirico to be the chronicler *par excellence* of the psychopathologies that buttress modern life, which we are encouraged to interpret as figures of agoraphobia,

alienation, anomie, anxiety, paranoia, schizophrenia, and the like. (Sass calls de Chirico a “severely schizoid man,” a historically unsubstantiated claim.) The de Chirico of the 1910s is the painter of modern life as a *lifeless* affair, of a rigor mortis, machinic atrophy and cold that does not look anything like the classic vision of madness as a hot-blooded, choleric passion. de Chirico paints the insignificance of man as thing in a *grosse Welt*.

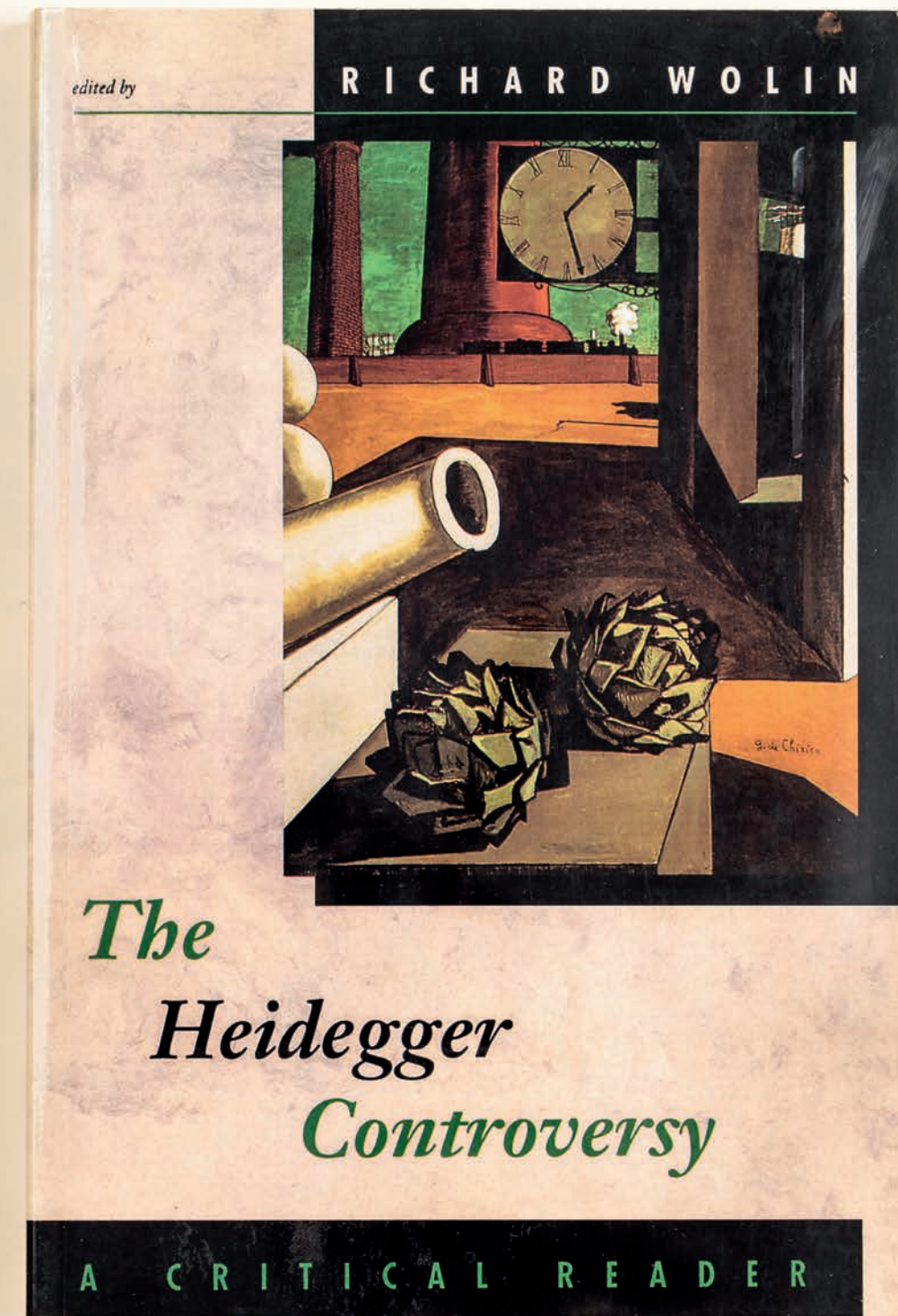


III.

Richard Wolin *loves* de Chirico: the Italian master's work graces the covers of three of Wolin's best known and most widely read books. (The CUNY-affiliated historian of ideas has good taste: other books of his have featured the art of Man Ray—both painting and sculpture—as well as that of the ubiquitous Klee. In fact, Wolin has published two books with the same iconic Klee image on the cover: the ubiquitous *Angelus Novus* (1920). Both books are devoted, of course, to the thought of Walter Benjamin and his Frankfurt School cohorts: an obvious association in the minds of those well aware of the story of this diminutive monotype once owned by Benjamin and now in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

The Politics of Being is the first of a series of books by Wolin devoted to the haunting presence of (one-time Nazi party member) Martin Heidegger shadowing twentieth-century philosophy. That de Chirico and Heidegger seem to belong together, in the imagination of this author, surely relates to the former's controversial courting of a return to classical pictorial values in the midst of the surrealist revolution, as well as to the artist's fondness of imaging rigor mortis—the lifeless vistas and bleak desolation of the human condition that are at the heart of Heidegger's dramatic diagnosis of modernity's "forgetfulness of being".

The artwork shown on the cover of *The Politics of Being*, first published in 1990, is the (very) appositely titled *The Great Metaphysician*, dated 1917, now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

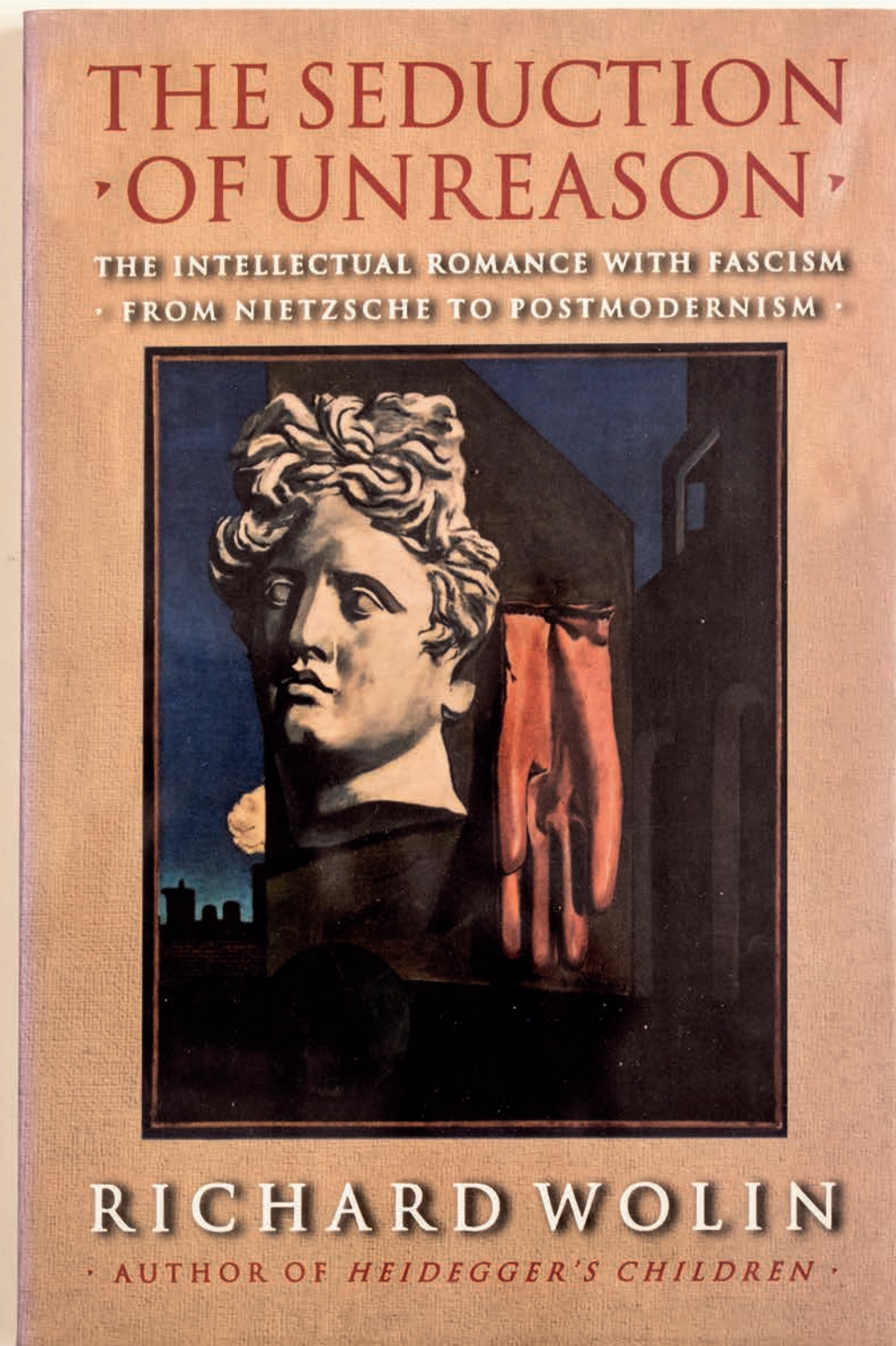


IV.

This is the second book by Wolin devoted to the thought of Heidegger, a critical reader covering the so-called "Heidegger Controversy," centered around what Wolin names "one of the foremost conundrums of modern European intellectual history: (...) the delusion to which Martin Heidegger—probably the century's greatest philosopher—succumbed in 1933: the belief that the National Socialist Revolution represented the "saving power" (Hölderlin) of Western humanity; a power capable of redeeming European culture from the dislocations of a rationalistic, modernizing, and nihilistic bourgeois *Zivilisation*." This was of course all long before the publication, in 2014, of Heidegger's notorious *Schwarze Hefte* or "Black Notebooks,"

the reading of which no longer allows us, at long last, to regard Heidegger's involvement in the National Socialist project as somehow incidental or peripheral to his life in philosophy.

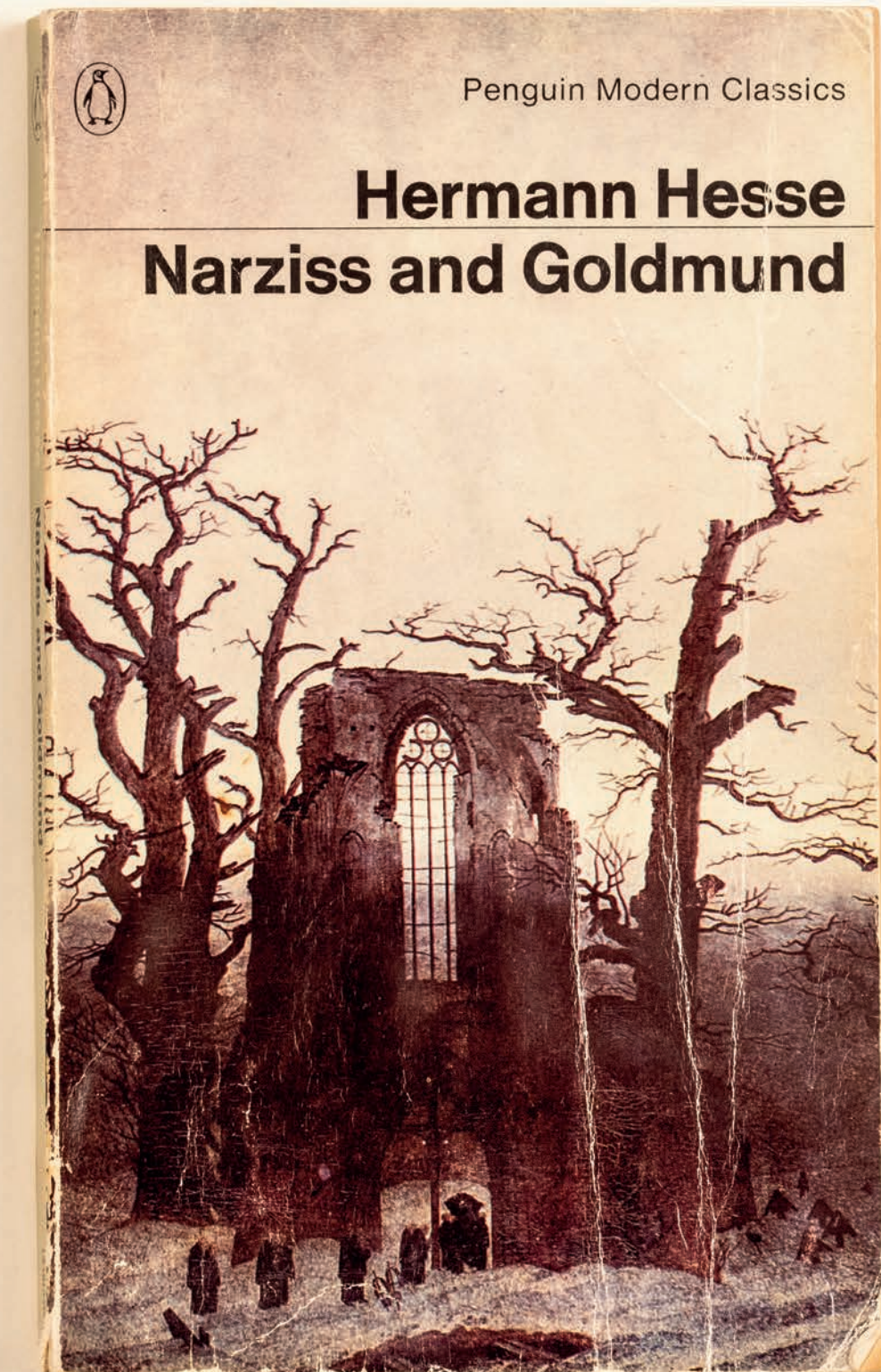
It is interesting to note that this still remarkably forgiving assessment of the "Heidegger controversy," published in 1991, should meet our glance bearing de Chirico's 1914 painting *The Philosopher's Conquest* (now at the Art Institute of Chicago), showing a cannon, among other things, pointing its muzzle at the shaded void between a pair of artichokes and a railway station clock declaring it to be one thirty. In the afternoon or at night?



V.

With this book published in 2004, Wolin's fascination with the suitability of de Chirico's work to "illustrate" ideas percolating in the right wing of the modern philosophical spectrum reaches full circle. *The Seduction of Unreason* aspires to map "the intellectual romance with fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism," which, in the author's reading, unfurls primarily between the twin poles of "German ideology" (Gadamer, Jung, Schmitt et al.) and its "French lessons" (Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida et al.).

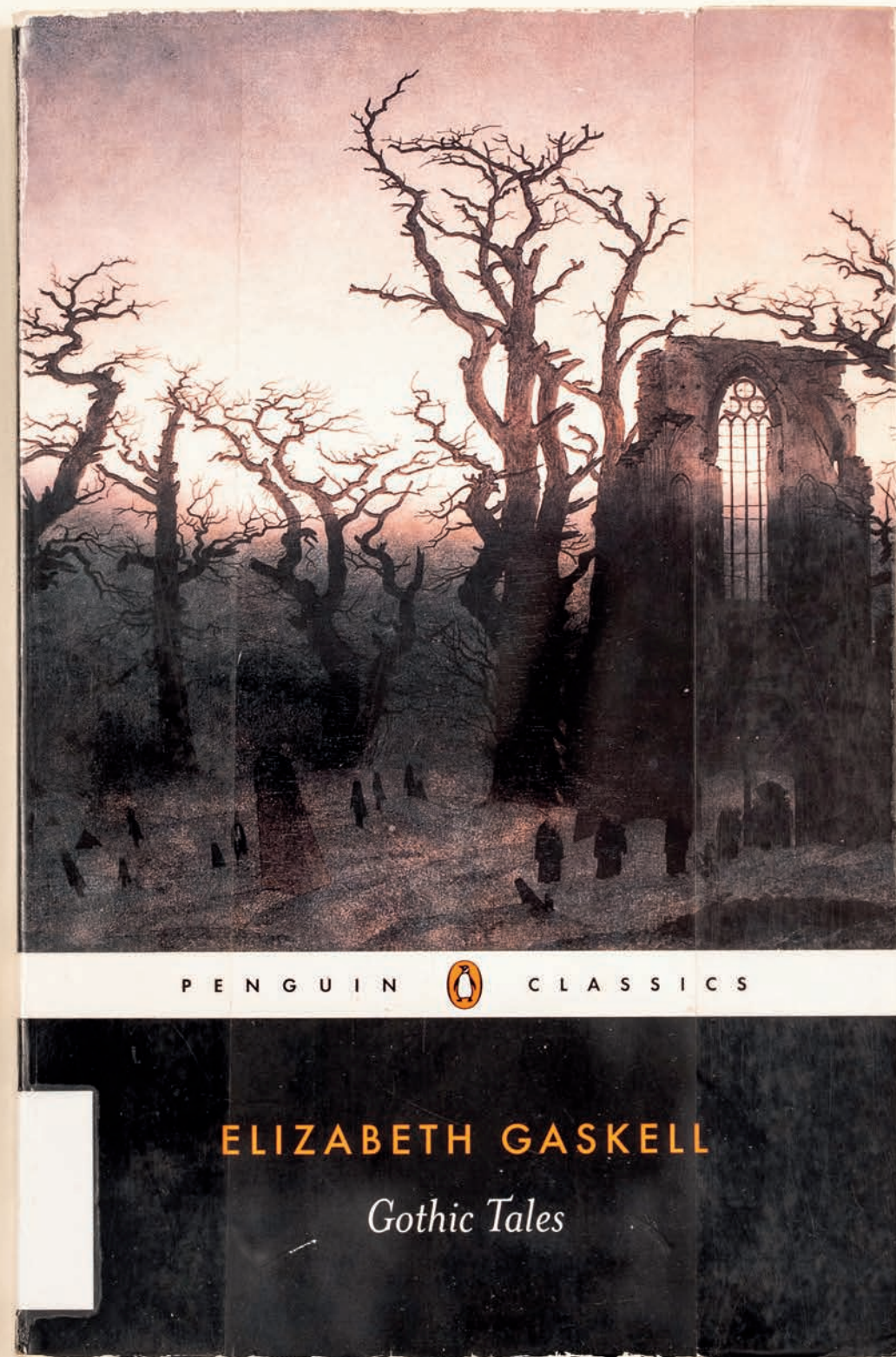
Wolin helpfully prefaces his study with a note on his use of de Chirico's *Song of Love*, the 1914 painting reproduced on the cover (now owned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York), noting that "in many respects the painting's imagery is germane to the theme implied by my title: that 'unreason' has an uncanny power to fascinate and seduce." As in: a limp rubber glove hung next to a portrait of Apollo, the god of insight and knowledge (among many other jurisdictions), here reduced to a lifeless, disembodied fragment spectrally floating atop a dark green sphere. Right?



VI.

No artist is more closely associated with German idealism and the Romantic movement than Friedrich (1774–1840), the undisputed prince of "northern" painting. Friedrich, of course, was a contemporary of the protagonists of this singularly influential movement in art, culture and philosophy (Hegel and Hölderlin were both born in 1770, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel in 1772, Friedrich Schelling in 1775), and his work has come to utterly dominate the market in the business of translating German idealism and Romanticism's complex core ideas into legible images.

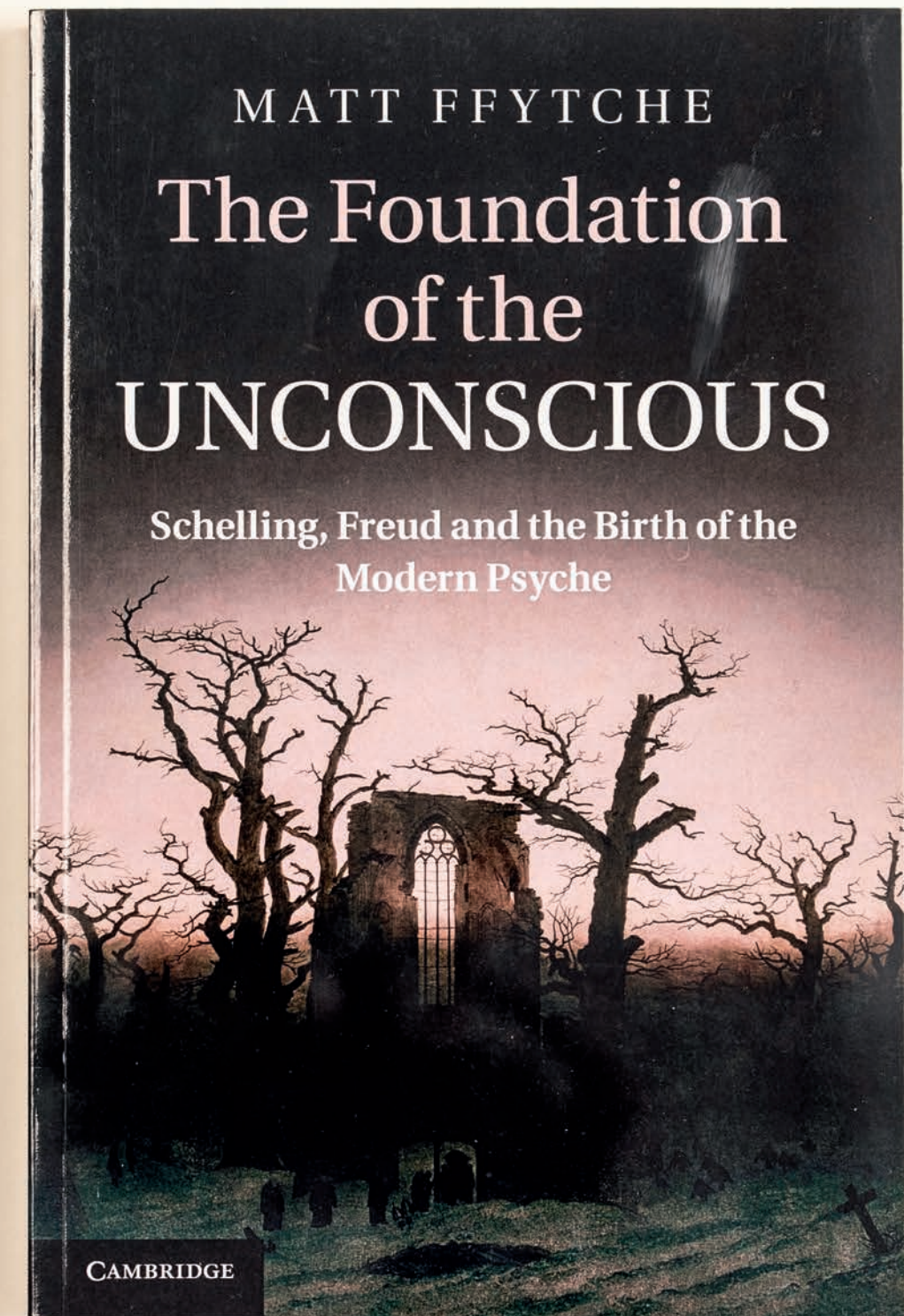
Indeed, nothing quite compresses the very German idea of Romanticism like Friedrich's best known and most widely reproduced image, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (now in the Kunsthalle Hamburg), which adorns no less than sixteen book covers in my personal library alone (a third of them Nietzsche titles, another third histories of modernity). Other Friedrich icons have likewise embarked on a long afterlife of stock book cover fodder—see, for instance, his *Abbey in the Oakwood* from 1809–1810 (now in the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin), shown here atop a 1971 Penguin Modern Classics edition of Hermann Hesse's *Narziss and Goldmund*.



VII.

Whereas Friedrich's *Wanderer* and series of three 'moonwatcher' motif paintings monopolize the publishing fantasy in philosophical and literary quarters, *The Abbey in the Oakwood* looms especially large in the Gothic imagination—also in musical terms: it is the Friedrich painting most likely to grace the cover of a wintery slab of new school black metal, for instance. (In the 1970s, recordings made of both Mozart's *Requiem* and Brahms'

Ein deutsches Requiem were housed in LP sleeves sporting said *Abbey*.) Seeing *The Abbey in the Oakwood* appear on a book titled *Gothic Tales* (composed by Elizabeth Gaskell, who was born in the year this painting was completed), in other words, is about as surprising as encountering *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* on the cover of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: memes, really, *avant la lettre*.

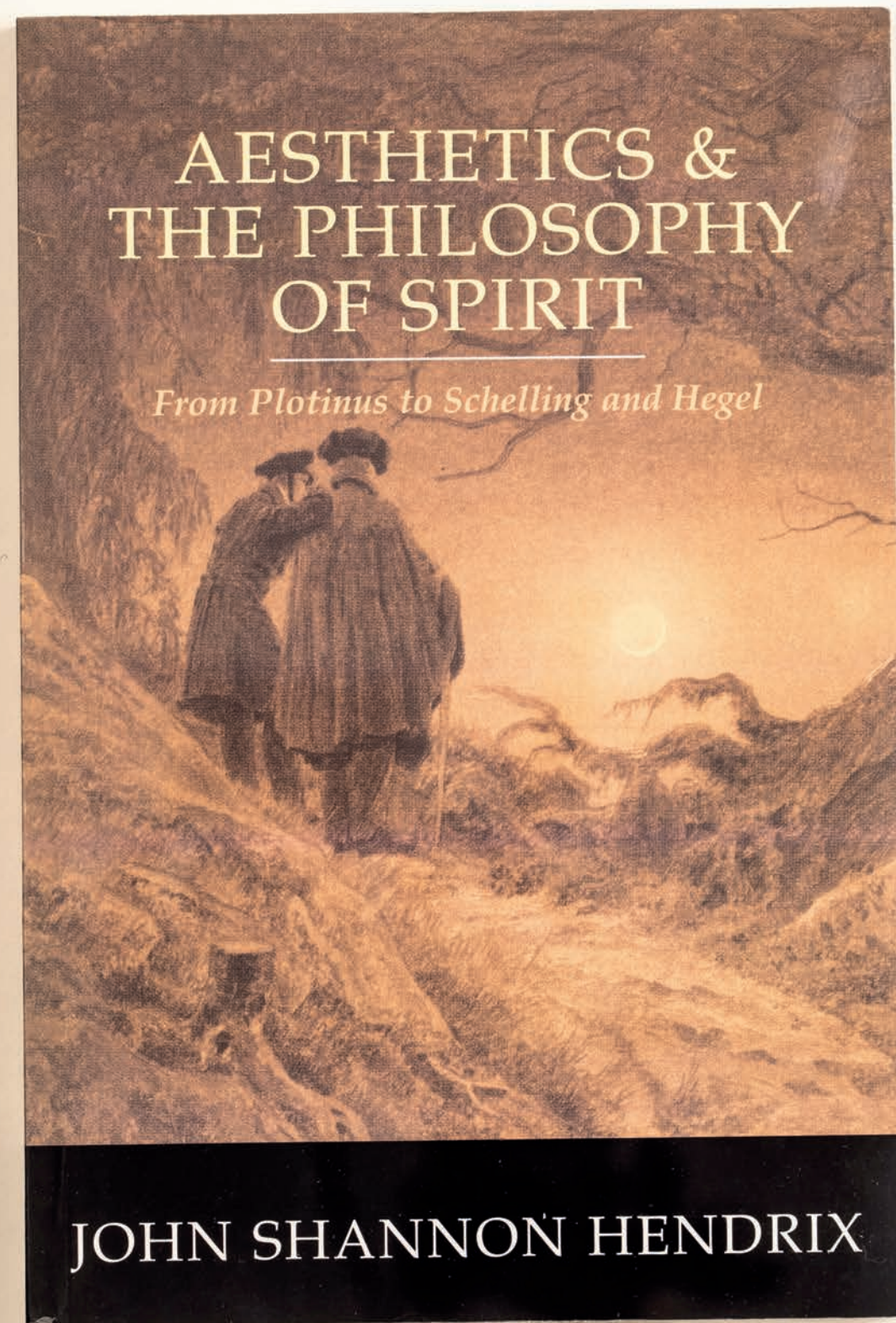


VIII.

The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche by the British historian of psychoanalysis Matt Ffytche was published in 2012. Among the texts quoted in this tentative "historiography of the unconscious" is the foundational "Oldest System Programme of German Idealism," an anonymous manifesto dated to 1796 that has alternately been attributed to Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling: "the first Idea is naturally the notion of *my self* as an absolutely free being." The very first text quoted in Ffytche's study overall, however, is the following challenge, formulated by Freud in the early years of the twentieth century, to

the unquestioned belief in the stability of a fully self-conscious subject: "We want to make the I into the object of this investigation, our most personal I. But can one do that?"

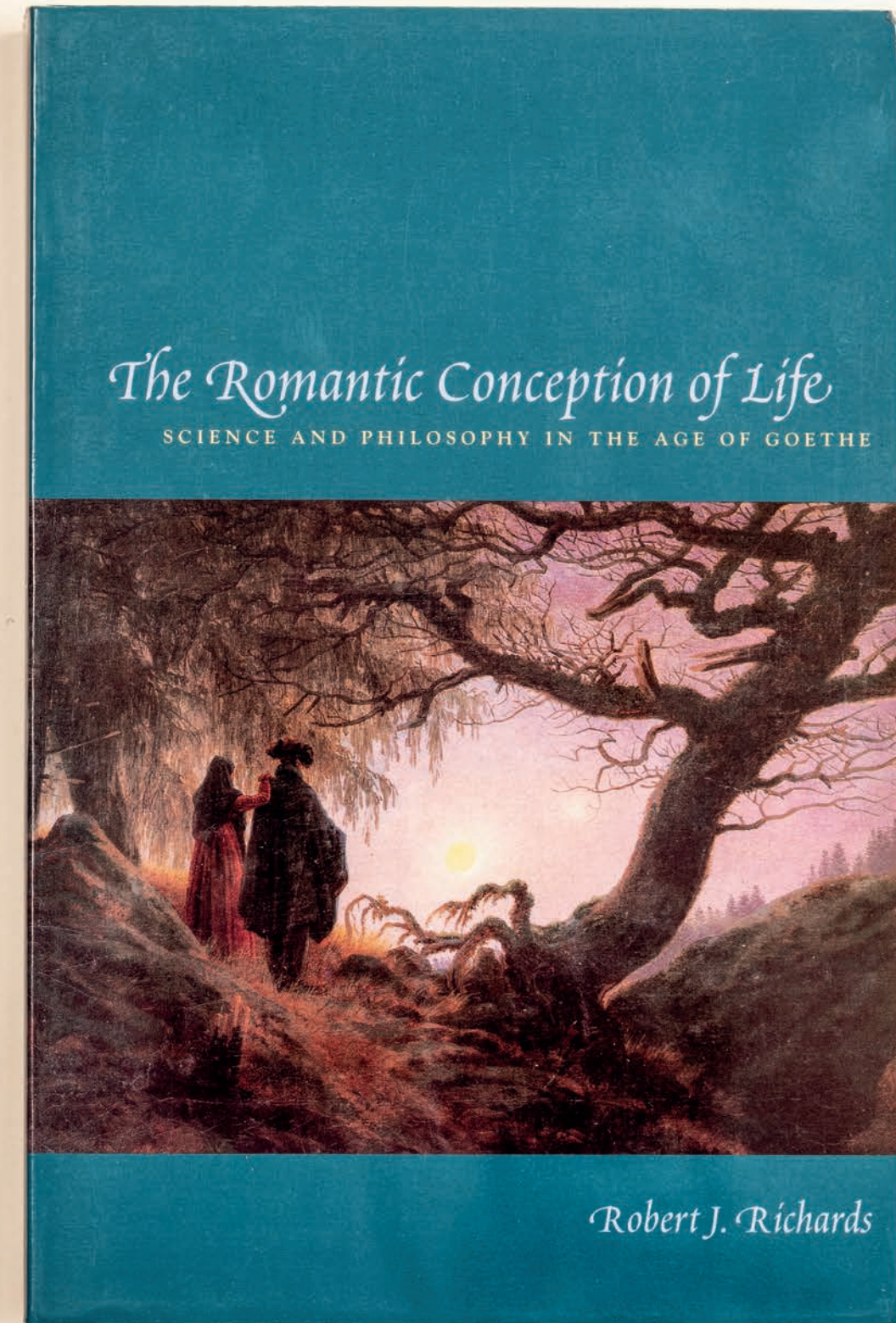
Let us now look back at the painting on the cover, of an abbey in ruins, at dusk, in the snow: a procession of monks carrying a coffin among a jumble of graves. (These details are hardly visible on the book covers in question.) Are we witnessing the unceremonious burial of the grand subject of the Idealist philosophy of self? Was this ruined abbey once the proud fortress of the unchallenged I? Is Friedrich the first painter of the modern *psyche*, rather than the modern *subject*?



IX.

It seems Caspar David Friedrich and Friedrich Schelling belong to each other (“Caspar David Friedrich Schelling”) in much the same way as, in Richard Wolin’s view, de Chirico and Heidegger: Friedrich paints what Schelling thinks—the lunar world of Spirit and teetering reason. John Shannon Hendrix’s *Aesthetics & the Philosophy of Spirit: From Plotinus to Schelling and Hegel* was published in 2005, showing a fragment

of the Dresden version of *Two Men Observing the Moon* (1819–1820) on its cover. Hendrix is interested in this particular painting because of its representation of the dissolution of form into light (*not* darkness), for “it is the formlessness of form which is the symbol of the infinite”—the standard aesthetic intimation of the sublime. And “for Schelling, in *The Philosophy of Art*, [this] sublime *only occurs in art*.” My italics!



X.

The painting on the cover of Robert J. Richards’ *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (2002) is the Berlin version, painted in 1825, of *Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon*. Compare, for starters, the remarkable difference in postures between the “two men” in the Dresden painting (visibly close friends, and one of them is widely assumed to have been Friedrich himself) and “man and woman” (most likely Friedrich and his wife Caroline)—as well as the bizarre omission of the upright figure’s walking stick in the latter and a decidedly

different lunar spectacle (in the Dresden picture the visual emphasis is very much on the waxing moon, in the Berlin picture it has shifted to the gnarly tree). “*Science and philosophy in the age of Goethe*”? The great bard, known for his rather cool and distant demeanor towards the Jena Romantics, started out as a champion of Friedrich’s work, but eventually ended up warning his contemporaries that “one ought to break Friedrich’s pictures over the edge of a table; such things must be prevented.” This world is too small for competing visions of the Romantic.

A CITY IMMERSED

EDUARDO TERRAZAS
// MEXICO 1968

By Stephanie Cristello



[THE SEEN]

“WE NEED A WAY OF THINKING IN A WORLD THAT IS IN CRISIS.
WE MUST THINK THAT HUMANS ARE FANTASTIC.”¹

—Eduardo Terrazas

“The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia,” wrote Svetlana Boym in her 2001 publication *The Future of Nostalgia*.² It is precisely between these two markers that we can critically view the undertaking of the 1968 world Olympics held in Mexico City, whose team was headed by artist Eduardo Terrazas. The commission exists today as a singular example of immersive design within an urban context. =

= During the Olympics, there was not a facet of city’s environment left untouched. Transparent balloons colonized the airports; banners lined the streets, glimmering in the eyes of passengers within each passing car; the plazas surrounding the stadiums were treated as expansive swaths of canvas, transformed into seas of pattern; figures performing each of the Olympic sports, resembling Bauhaus caricatures painted in a vibrant palette, were erected as massive public monuments. The font developed for the identity—an alphabet and numerical system that recalls an Op aesthetic, but was in fact derived from traditional indigenous Mexican arts and crafts, such as Huichol weavings—remains iconic, the logo itself composed of concentric circles that radiate from the five Olympic rings. Mexico 1968. It was both a time and a site, an image and a dream. =

= It has been nearly 500 years since noted Renaissance humanist Sir Thomas More gave a term to the vision of humanity’s return to Paradise—the want of establishing Heaven on Earth: ‘Utopia.’³ Derived from the Greek word *topos* (a polis, a city, a state), utopia has come to mean different things in our recent past. In 1967, just one year before the Mexico City Olympics, Foucault

wrote of ‘heterotopias,’ real sites that oppose the fundamentally unreal places of utopia. Mirrors, cemeteries, museums, libraries. Mexico City could have been said to belong to the same order. =

= To create an entire city that can be consumed as an image is a heterotopic act. Yet, to gaze upon this image in our twenty-first-century moment is also an act that undergoes another facet of engaging with utopia; of connecting with fictionalized place. In his 2017 publication *Retrotopia*, Zygmunt Bauman argues that nostalgia is perhaps just one of the affects born out of imagining this ‘elsewhere.’ The vernacular image of the late 1960s, like an apparition of high-modernist style projected in technicolor, is a prime instance of what he describes as “visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past.”⁴ Bauman argues for the dissolve of the thought that utopia in any format can exist as a fixed place—a sentiment that instead favors a detached, fragmented, and individualized dream. What could be a more fitting model of retrotopia than Mexico City in 1968, whose image was experienced differently, both privately and personally, by every civilian and athlete enmeshed within its image? =

The following insert is comprised of documentation, much unpublished to date, of the graphic and architectural identity enacted during the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, from the studio of Eduardo Terrazas. The spreads are purposefully left untouched and without words of further context so that they may pass the reader’s vision—unaffected, an image of time, a false memory.

1 Interview with Eduardo Terrazas, as stated to the author. Mexico City, February 2019.

2 Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

3 Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516. Published in Latin.

4 Bauman, Zygmunt. *Retrotopia*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.

IMAGES, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE: View of Aztec Stadium Plaza with sculpture by Alexander Calder, Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of international airport and balloons designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of street and banners designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of map denoting urban structure, designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of public structure, designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of information booth in the Zocalo, designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; Aerial view of opening day of the Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of plaza installation designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of *MEXICO 1968* sculpture, designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; View of Janus figures sculpture, *Lifting Weights*, by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.; Documentation of Olympic fire ceremony, cauldron designed by Eduardo Terrazas. Mexico City 1968 Olympics.

ALL IMAGES: Courtesy of Eduardo Terrazas and Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, New York.



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MEXICO 



MEXICO 

MEXICO 68

MEXICO 

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Chicago Manual of Style



Image: Antoine Donzeaud, 2018 and Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I* (detail), 1514.

Saturnine

Theodora Allen, Antoine Donzeaud,
Assaf Evron, and Wim van der Linden

Curated by Stephanie Cristello

Chicago Manual Style
1927 W Superior St
Chicago, IL 60622

04.19.19–05.31.19

Opening reception Friday, April 19, 6–9pm

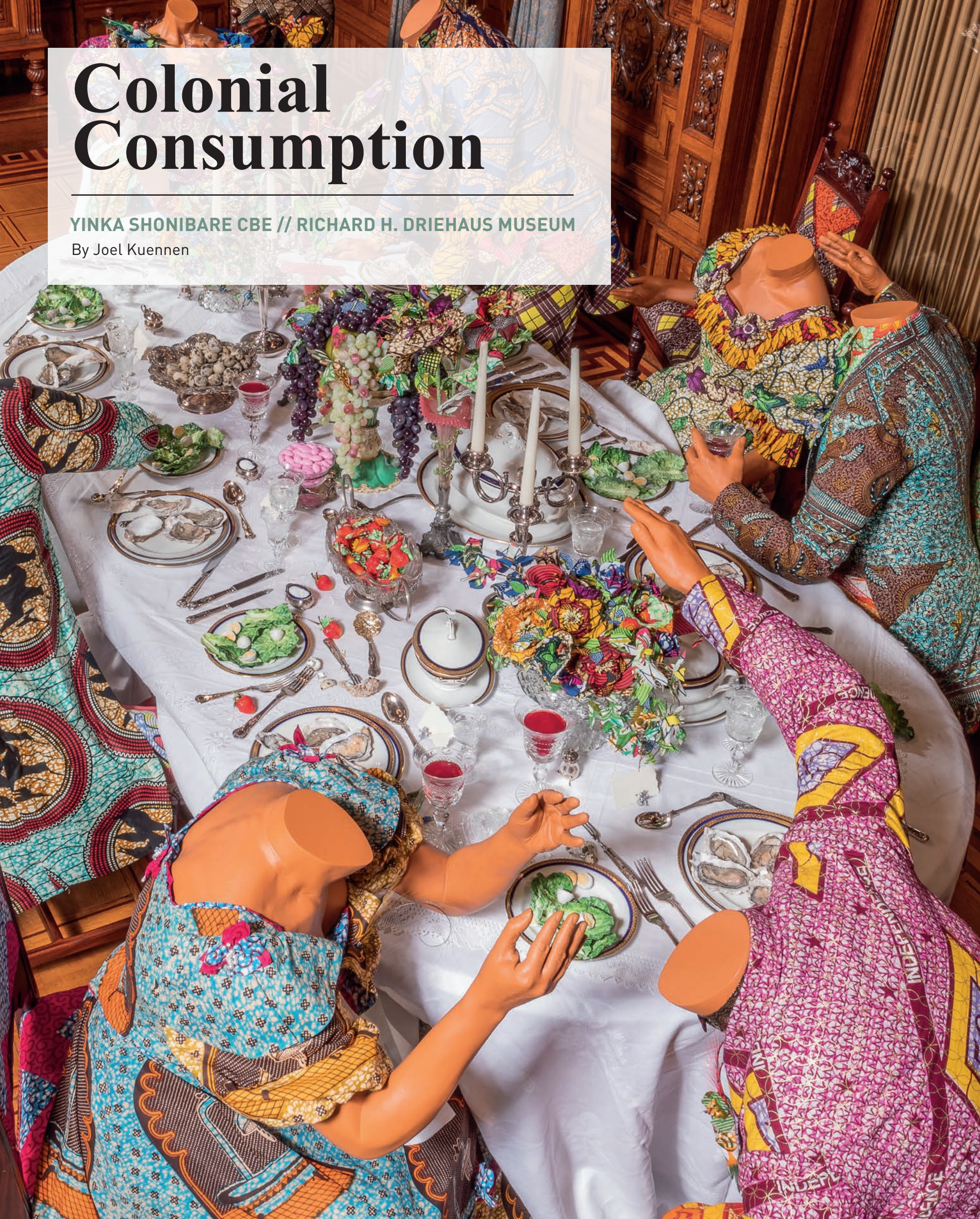
*With support from the French American Cultural Exchange (FACE)
in Chicago*

Features

Colonial Consumption

YINKA SHONIBARE CBE // RICHARD H. DRIEHAUS MUSEUM

By Joel Kuennen



THE SEEN

It is the late 1800s. Robber barons roamed the land like the herds of bison that once had, hoovering up the capital generated by the violent, colonialist westward expansion across the Great Plains. Transcontinental railways, scarring mines, and cotton farms tilled by newly freed slaves fueled factories manned by children, churning out the fabric of an expanding nation. From this hurtling engine, wealth accrued in the highest echelons of society to such an excessive degree that this period would become likened to a lead candelabra plated in gold: The Gilded Age.

At the same time in Indonesia, the Dutch were trying to turn their colonial subjects into consumers by mass producing batik fabric in the Netherlands and shipping it to what at the time was called the Dutch East Indies. However, these cheap rolls of dyed cotton had a flaw, the mechanized process of wax-printed resists created hairline cracks in the wax appliqué. The dye seeped through resulting in a distinctive crackle effect that was offensive to the refined tastes of the Indonesian people who considered batik a highly skilled art form. The would-be consumers rejected the imported product.

However, the Dutch did find buyers on Africa's Gold Coast, and the fashion of Ghana, Nigeria, and much of West Africa was changed forever. Now known as African Wax, Hollandaise, or Dutch Wax, the crackled, colorful batiks are seen as African by outsiders and Africans alike. It is this fabric that British-born, Nigerian-raised, Yinka Shonibare CBE¹ (RA)² masterfully leans on to tell a complex story of power, class, and race that spans our

globe and reaches out from the past to inflect our present. The Richard H. Driehaus Museum will play host to some of Shonibare's most famous sculptures and photographic works through the end of September 2019. It is the inaugural exhibition in their contemporary art series, *A Tale of Today: New Artists at the Driehaus*. Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA) is by no means new to Chicago—one of the works on display at the Driehaus, *Big Boy* (2002) is in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

In the summer of 2014, three of his wind sculptures were installed on the plaza of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

However, the Gilded Age mansion that houses the Driehaus Museum is a venue perfectly suited to the thematic underpinnings of his work. *Party Time: Re-Imagine America* (2009) was first installed at the Newark Museum's Ballantine House, an 1885 beer baron mansion. Here, *Party Time* is installed within the Driehaus Museum's dining room, the headless figures carousing, dressed in Victorian-cut Hollandaise. Shonibare's figures are tailored from the cloth of colonization, but their positionality is ambiguous. Are these figures Europeans dressed in the wealth taken from their colonies? Are they members of the Royal Niger Company?³ Are they Africans who have adopted the customs of Europeans out of necessity? Customers who have taken to a product of global trade? Or is it a complex array of the above?



“Is the ability to dictate the appropriation of symbols to be incorporated into designs which are then sold back to you power? Or are these dandies dipped in African patterns colonization incarnate?”



“Shonibare’s figures are tailored from the cloth of colonization, but their positionality is ambiguous.”

————— *Big Boy* (2002) and *Child on a Unicycle* (2005), the other sculptural textile works included in this exhibition are exuberant, triumphant, and full of confidence. *Child* perches atop a large wheel, headless, arms raised, fingers pointing up and out to the horizon. *Big Boy* struts into the room like large, creaking doors have just swung wide open, finally allowing him entrée.

When Hans Ouwendijk, chief executive of Vlisco Group, one of the oldest Dutch Wax producers, joined the company he said, “What surprised me most when I first started working for Vlisco was that the African consumers really feel like they own our brand, not the other way around. And it’s how they perceive their products that counts.”⁴ Is this entrée? Is the ability to dictate the appropriation of symbols to be incorporated into designs which are then sold back to you power? Or are these dandies dipped in African patterns colonization incarnate?

In the two photographic series on display, *Dorian Gray* (2001) and *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), Shonibare inserts himself into fictitious scenes in an act of interpolation. Shonibare becomes Dorian Gray, the Victorian dandy. These transformations are simple, and it is in their simplicity that they find their edge. While his sculptural works at the Driehaus Museum are without explicit identity, these photo series rely on the insertion of his Black body into a British mythology, an act asked of colonized populations in order to exist within the order of the empire.

————— Given the setting of this exhibition in Chicago’s “Marble Palace,” I am reminded of the mythologies we still buy into. The Gilded Age barons reproduced the royal opulence of the Victorian age in their Midwestern mansions, striving to exhibit wealth as they had imagined it to be.

————— Thorstein Veblen said in his Golden Age treatise from 1899, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, “The domestic life of most classes is relatively shabby, as compared with the éclat of that overt portion of their life that is carried on before the eyes of observers.”⁵ The performance of wealth to this day supersedes the more complex mythologies of culture—mythologies of the spirit, of the social group. When those aspirational, ethically-driven mythologies lost their power, a gilded spirit swept into the vacuum, like the flush of a golden toilet.

————— *A Tale of Today: Yinka Shonibare CBE* runs at the Driehaus Museum through September 29, 2019.

- 1 CBE signifies Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, a chivalric, fraternal designation recognizing Shonibare’s cultural contributions bestowed on him by the Queen of England in 2019. In 2005 he was designated as an MBE, Member of Order of the British Empire. These imperial designations are purposefully touted by Shonibare.
- 2 RA stands for Royal Academician. Shonibare is one of eighty Royal Academicians who makes up the British Royal Academy of Art.
- 3 The Royal Niger Company was a British mercantile group that exploited Nigeria’s resources from 1871-1900 and was the precursor to the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria (1914-1960).
- 4 Robb Young, “Africa’s Fabric is Dutch,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 4, 2012.
- 5 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), 112.

TITLE PAGE, PREVIOUS SPREAD:

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Party Time: Re-imagine America* (detail), 2009. Fiberglass mannequins, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, leather boots, table, eight chairs, and other mixed-media. Collection of the Newark Museum, Purchase 2010 Helen McMahon Brady Cutting Fund. 2010. Photograph by Michael Tropea, 2019.

PAGE 79:

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Big Boy*, 2002. Wax-printed cotton fabric, fiberglass. The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Susan and Lewis Manilow, 2004. Photograph by Michael Tropea, 2019.

FOLLOWING SPREADS, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 11.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 19.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare MBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 14.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 17.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Yinka Shonibare CBE (British/Nigerian, b. 1962) *Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 03.00 hours*, 1998. Series of five chromogenic photographs. 48 x 72 inches. From the Collection of Amy and John Phelan. Image © Yinka Shonibare CBE, courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Diary of a
Victorian Dandy











Brain Trust

PERFORMING BIODATA // JASON J. SNELL

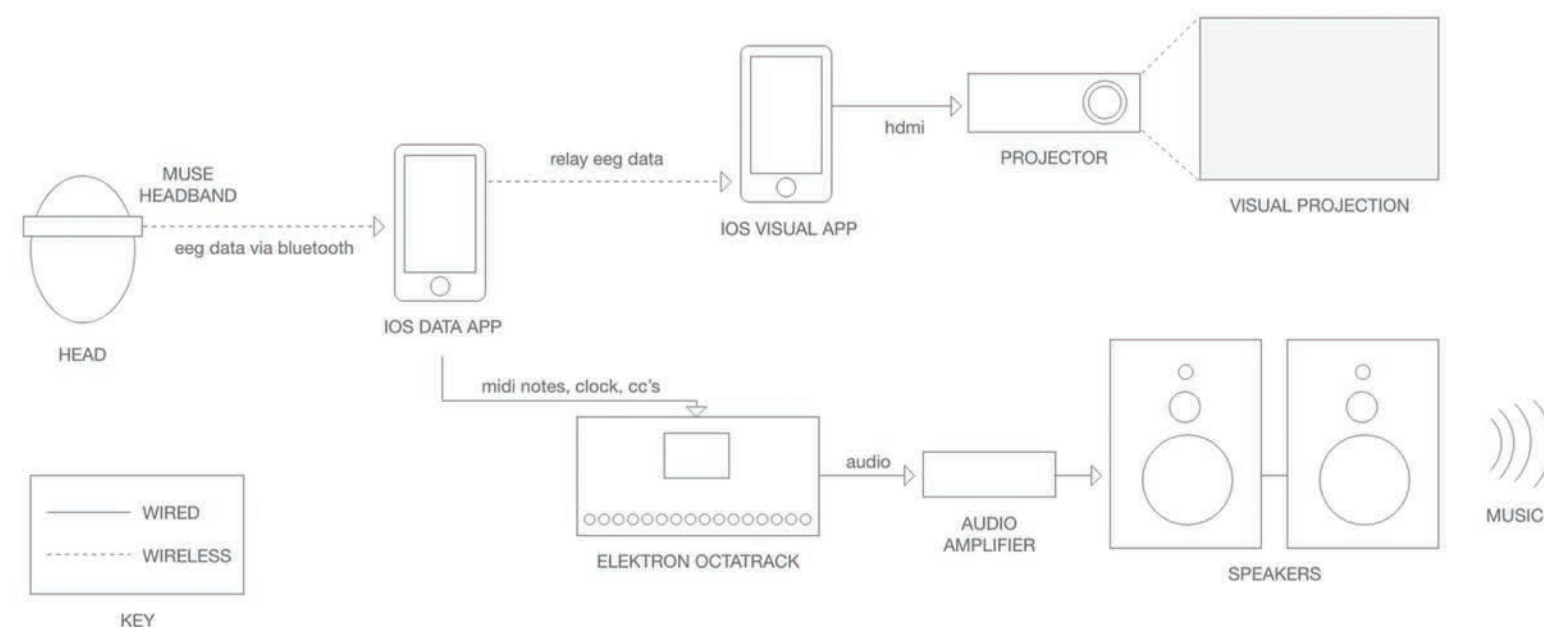
By Patrick J. Reed



Approach Cedar Rapids, Iowa from the south via I-380, and you will find a city center framed in spare geometry. A Quaker Oats factory occupies the northern point of the district with grain elevators and a freight yard that appear unchanged since World War II. The highway bends around the factory, corralling it to one side. Opposite rise concrete embankments, emergency hospitals, a Masonic Temple, and the Hotel Roosevelt, where one man was murdered by another decades ago in room 729.¹ The Cedar River divides Cedar Rapids; it is the source of the city's drinking water, the city's name, and thrice the city's destruction, having flooded in 1993, 2008, and 2016. Sound artist Jason J. Snell calls Cedar Rapids home.

He calls other places home, too. New York City is one, and Los Angeles another, where he spent most of his adult life until recently adding Berlin to the list. And just as he has

and hotel room 729. "The simplicity of being here is great for 'R' and 'D,'" Snell said. He prefers a familiar context for implementing new ideas. "The Iowa connection has helped [to] start things...in a way that would just be different if it were in LA or New York or Berlin. It feels more personable, and I have roots here that go...way back." The research and development to which Snell refers concerns his most intimate project to date: *Primary Assembly* (2019), a machine network that, per a blurb on his website, enables him to compose music with his thoughts. This description conjures Sci-Fi fantasies of a savant loner toiling away in secret chambers—a provocative image, but one that glosses over the technology that makes *Primary Assembly's* operations something less than telepathy and more than mind control. During our talk, I came to



“Since the brain is always active, brain waves are always changing, which means a constantly changing EEG data and a constantly evolving soundscape.”

—PATRICK J. REED

many homes, he has many names: Bombardier, The 5th of July, and The Space Where She Was are a few, each meant for a different project, performance, or persona.

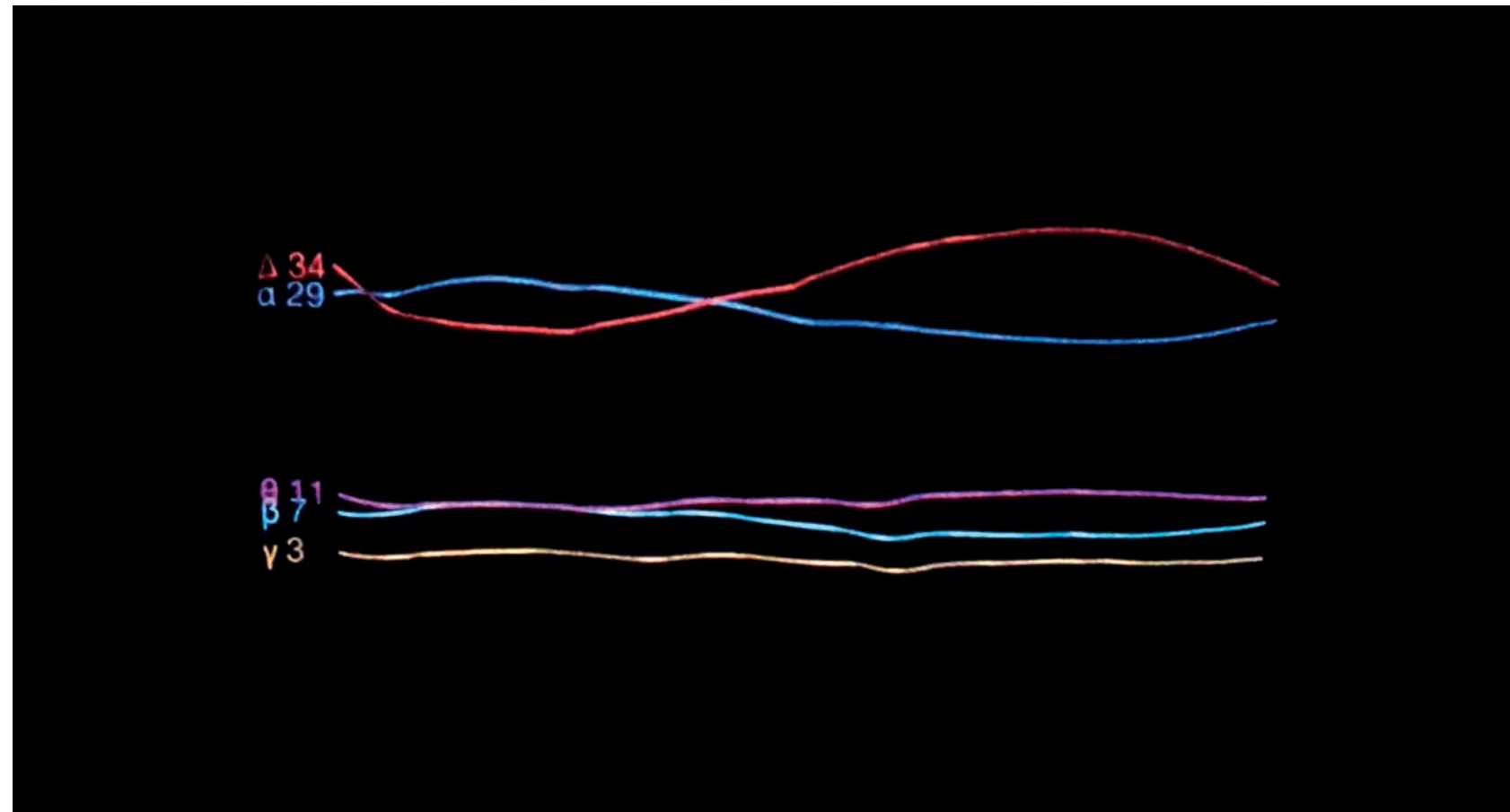
On February 6, 2019, I spoke to Snell, then simply “Jason.” Our meeting was one in a series of formal and informal conversations about his work, ongoing since 2015.² At the time of the interview, the space where he was—where he worked—happened to be a second-story bedroom in his parents’ home in Cedar Rapids, a house surrounded by trees and snow, some miles from the floodplains

realize this slight descriptive finesse spares the reader a steep descent into a hole where neurology, computer coding, and electronic music commingle.

Grasping the basics of these sciences requires study, and to understand how they work together requires a specific mentality. Snell prides himself on his ability to move between music and engineering. “Not everyone is built to be an innovator, and I don’t know why I am,” he said in a promotional interview for *VoyageLA*, “I sit in a very unique overlap, because an engineer can build

something that works, but [is] not necessarily beautiful, and an artist or musician has the vision, but may not have all the technical skills necessary to create the project.”²³ *Primary Assembly* demonstrates his ingenuity. Using a commercially available neurofeedback headband called Muse, Snell initiates a musical procedure with a series of electrical flows from his brain. Muse’s most prominent feature, and the one most important to Snell, is its electroencephalographic (EEG) software, which allows regular users to observe their neural oscillations, or brain waves, in a colorful mobile app. Snell diverts the wireless EEG signal from the Muse headband to his own custom-coded iPhone app that “crunches the numbers” and converts this information into Musical Instrument

relationship with his own thoughts. Marketed as a necessity for living a more centered life, the Muse device and affiliated mobile app collects biodata in order to improve the customers’ meditation routines. Visit choosemuse.com, the official site for all things Muse, and it will tell you to “stop guessing if you are doing it right. Use real-time feedback to guide you and keep you motivated during your meditation practice.”²⁵ The legal fine print explains that the device’s sensors collect “data including without limitation electrical activity of the brain, muscle activity, heart rate, heart rate variability, motion, respiration rate, eye movement and other signals.”²⁶ The website choosemuse.com will also tell you “brainwaves

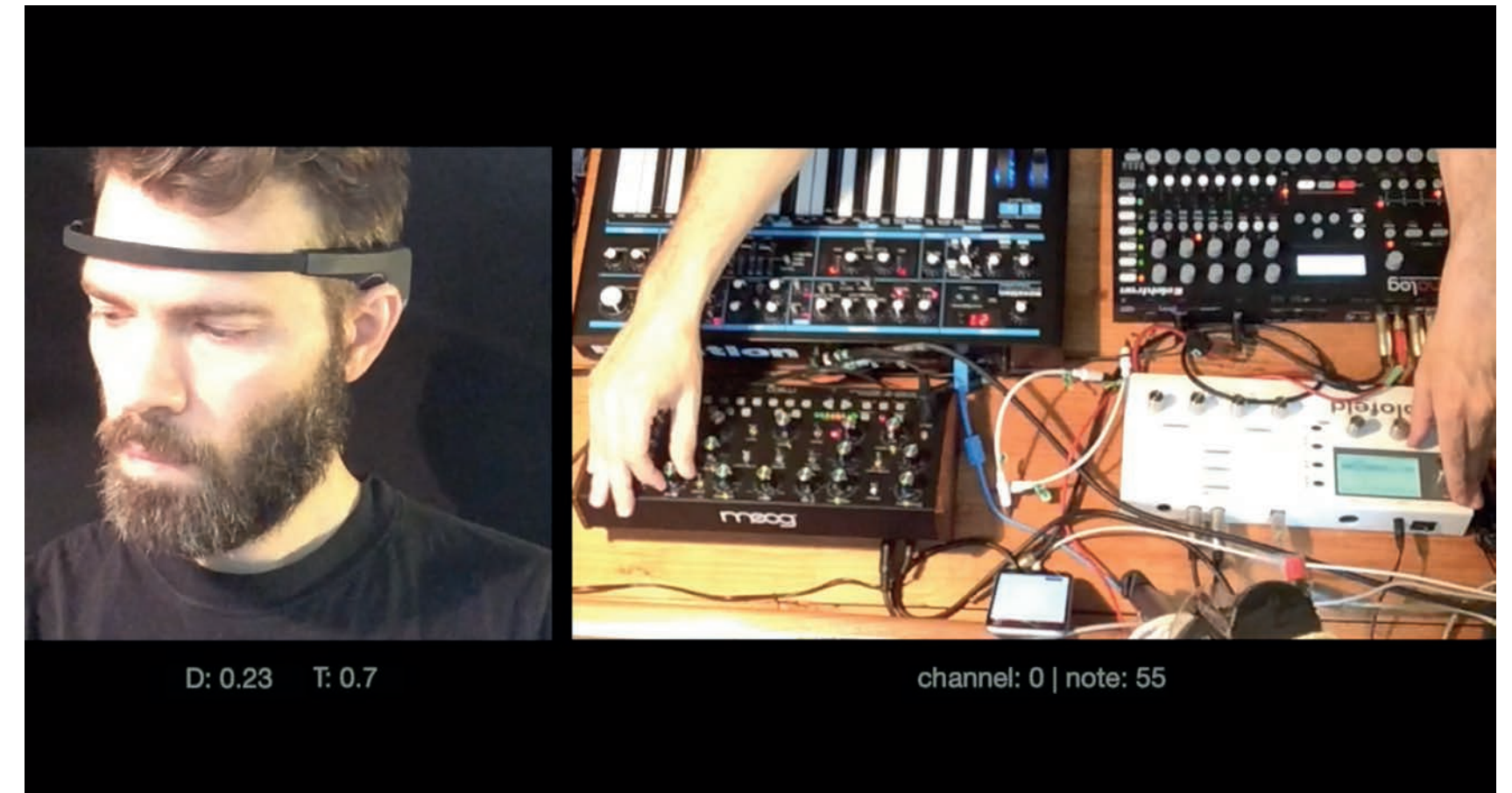


Digital Interface (MIDI) commands that are cabled into an Elektron Octatrack, “a dynamic performance sampler ideal for real-time sampling, remixing and audio manipulation.”²⁴ From there, audio signals pass to an amplifier and out through speakers. Each brain wave read by the EEG is responsible for triggering a specific musical element, like notes and volumes, and the properties of each element are determined by the relationship between the different brain waves at any given moment. Since the brain is always active, brain waves are always changing, which means a constantly changing EEG data and a constantly evolving soundscape. I asked Snell about his knowledge of the human brain before his work on *Primary Assembly*. He admitted that it has been a learning process, but one bolstered by a longtime meditation practice and a close relationship with the Muse itself, meaning a close

come in five flavors, each of which corresponds to a Greek letter.²⁷ Beta flavor, more commonly known as the beta wave, is associated with an intensely focused mental state. Theta waves, on the other hand, are associated with daydreaming. Snell’s favorite flavors for *Primary Assembly* tend to be alpha and delta. They are associated with reflective states and dream states, respectively.⁸ And gamma waves? Buddhist monks cornered the market on those.⁹ On a whim, I asked Snell if the technology of *Primary Assembly* could ever be weaponized—I was thinking of something akin to a sonic nausea device or an acoustic heterodyne ultrasound weapon—and he entertained various speculations with deference to my conspiratorial digression. A realization came later, however, that I missed the mark; the weaponizing potential lies in the information.

Muse is not the only product of its kind to collect biodata from its users, but its manufacturer, InteraXon, “a Toronto-based innovator in the field of brain-sensing technology, with a history of designing memorable experiences from a levitating chair to a brain powered beer tap,” scores higher on the “good ethics” scale than its competitors. Muse users can delete their biodata profiles at any time according to InteraXon’s legal statement.¹⁰ It might take up to 30 days, as the InteraXon customer service representative informed me, but she claimed deletion will happen. EMOTIV, a similar neurofeedback gadget that encourages you to “unlock the power of your mind with affordable brain sensing technology” offers fewer options.¹¹ The third

have globally recognized patterns, each person’s specific patterns are individual, and therefore constitute personally identifying information. “Brain waves are like fingerprints,” she told me. I asked what might happen if companies like InteraXon or EMOTIV were to dissolve the policies protecting users’ privacy vis-à-vis their EEG data. Her immediate concern was for the legal precedents that could be established, precedents that could, for example, allow this information into legal proceedings determining a person’s psychological fitness for a job or parental custody. “If brain waves are indicative of you being anxious or having aggression or personality traits seen as being negative in a certain light,” she said, “this could be used against you down the road. It is the opposite of [the film]



item under the “Your Privacy Choices” section of EMOTIV’s privacy policy reads: “with the exception of your EEG Data, you can request that we erase some or all of your Personal Information from our systems. We retain your EEG Data for scientific, medical, or historical research purposes.” A withdrawal of consent for EMOTIV to process personal information is also limited: “If you withdraw your consent, your EEG Data may still be used by us and shared with our third-party service providers to provide and improve our Services and shared as aggregate information that does not identify you as an individual.” To their credit, they promise to keep personal identification information separate from the personal data they keep forever.¹² I spoke with neurophysiologist and science communicator Dr. Kiki Sanford about bioinformatics companies and the ramifications of having EEG data stored for future use. She explained that, although brain waves

GATTACA. Instead of DNA being used, it is your brain print being used.” Dr. Sanford’s comments resonated eerily with Snell’s own misgivings about *Primary Assembly*.¹³ For his debut performance, presented by Yellow Door Gallery in January 2019 at an art space named Art Terrarium in Des Moines, Iowa, Snell created a light show that projected graphic representations of his EEG readings onto his face and body; both were generated in sync and in real time with the music. He felt exposed. “There is a vulnerability in having my biodata projected on a screen and coming out of the speakers,” he said. For this reason, and because he could not predict what his brain would do “knowing people [were] there while going through different mental states,” he wanted a small audience. But over 100 people attended to witness him sit on the floor and navigate machines like a spiritual medium (a comparison he happily accepts). The show was, much to his relief, a

success, but it left him wondering about the feasibility of grander future performances when the pressures would be greater and the variables less predictable.

— Other artists wielding EEG technology have come before Snell, most notably composer Alvin Lucier, who used EEG in his groundbreaking percussion work *Music for Solo Performer* (1965); Lisa Park, whose EEG work in *Eunoia* (2013) vibrated dishes filled with water; and Masaki Bathoh, whose esoteric album *Brain Pulse Music* (2012) is dedicated to the victims of the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Snell enjoys good company with this brain trust, but he considers himself distinguished by his ambition and taste. He finds most other EEG art either too acoustically experimental or too strong an avant-garde statement. With *Primary Assembly*, he is shooting for mainstream appeal. He plans to produce a show equivalent in duration and production value to the longer techno sets he plays as a DJ, and one that provides an immersive and contemplative experience for his audience. — That January night, in Des Moines, he performed his biodata for fifteen minutes. It was exhausting, but Snell plans to train to endure a performance three times as long. In time, the artist wants to fully utilize all neural oscillations at once—alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and theta. “I have these five brain waves to work with...and the way I am looking at [them] now is that [they are] actually a family...Five entities that all have relationships to each other.” Sounds like a full house to me. Jason J. Snell, welcome home.

— *The author would like to thank Katherine Parker Bryden, CNM; synthesizer expert Daren Ho of Control, NYC; and Dr. Kiki Sanford for their assistance in the writing of this article.*

- 1 Nebbe, Charity. “Murder at the Roosevelt Hotel in Cedar Rapids, Still Remembered after 68 Years.” In *Talk of Iowa*. Iowa Public Radio. August 10, 2016.
- 2 I first met Snell at a paper store in an alley by a gay bar in Iowa City, but it was not until we both lived in Berlin when I became aware of his work as a DJ and a sound artist.
- 3 VoyageLA Staff. “Meet Jason J. Snell of Primary Assembly in Silver Lake.” *VoyageLA*, January 2, 2019.
- 4 Octatrack DPS-1: Dynamic Performance Sampler User’s Manual (Elektron Music Machines MAV AB, 2018) 10. Accessed February 21, 2019.
- 5 “Muse™.” Meditation Made Easy with the Muse Headband. Accessed February 18, 2019. <https://choosemuse.com/>.
- 6 “End User License Agreement.” InteraXon. Accessed February 21, 2019. <https://choosemuse.com/legal/>.
- 7 “Muse™.” Meditation Made Easy with the Muse Headband. Accessed February 18, 2019.
- 8 “A Deep Dive Into Brainwaves: Brainwave Frequencies Explained.” Muse. June 25, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2019.
- 9 Kathy Gilsinan, “The Buddhist and the Neuroscientist,” *Health*, *The Atlantic* online, July 4, 2015. Accessed February 21, 2019.
- 10 “End User License Agreement.” InteraXon. Accessed February 21, 2019.
- 11 “Self Quantification Solutions.” Emotiv. Accessed February 18, 2019.
- 12 “EMOTIV Privacy Policy.” EMOTIV, last modified May 25, 2018. Accessed February 21, 2019. https://id.emotivcloud.com/eoidc/privacy/privacy_policy/. EMOTIV’s privacy policy states that the company collects “electrical biosignals collected using EMOTIV devices and any related monitoring equipment, motion sensor outputs, associated data such as event timing markers, mouse, touchscreen, gestural, and keyboard events, eye movements, survey responses, choices, and preferences, tactile, audio, visual, and other sensory stimuli, reaction times, self-assessment, and cognitive performance.” The company promises to keep identifying information separate from EEG data, but they still “share individualized and aggregated EEG Data with third parties for scientific, medical, and historical research purposes.”
- 13 “Primary Assembly,” a term derived from DNA research, is a nod to both bioinformatics and to Snell’s interest in the human genome. Snell uses human DNA structures as a map for composing musical scores—an idea that came to him in a dream.

TITLE PAGE:

The most important destination for *Primary Assembly*’s EEG-generated data before it becomes audible sound is an Elektron Octatrack, a complex music sampler machine from Sweden. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 95:

Jason J. Snell, *Primary Assembly schematic*, 2019. Image courtesy of the artist. EEG data is relayed from the artist’s brain through a series of devices that produce both music and visual representations of his brainwave activity.

PAGE 96:

Jason J. Snell, *Primary Assembly*, 2019. Digital Performance Artifact. A light projection representing brain wave data used during the debut performance of *Primary Assembly*, presented by Yellow Door Gallery on January 11, 2019 at Art Terrarium in Des Moines, Iowa. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 97:

Jason J. Snell, *Primary Assembly: MIDI Note On / Off*, 2018. Video [color, sound]. 6 min. 14 sec. In his first proof-of-concept test Snell played musical notes on several synthesizers using the EEG data from a Muse headband and his own coding methods for electronic composition. Image courtesy of the artist.



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Collapse

JOAN MOREY // PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

by Latitudes (Max Andrews & Mariana Cánepa Luna)

Since the late 1990s, Joan Morey has produced an expansive body of live events, videos, installations, sound, and graphic works that has explored the intersection of theater, cinema, philosophy, sexuality, and subjectivity. His practice brings together three vitally important genres of contemporary art: performance, appropriation, and institutional critique. Morey draws on a rhetoric of staging, roles, props, costumes, scripts, and spoken word. The artist is rarely an interpreter in his own work—yet, Morey stipulates characteristically rigid rules and uncompromising instructions that govern the formal parameters of what performers do (or have done to them), often extending how the audience experiences his works and the precise manner of their documentation. Morey’s creation of art through the strict control of its production, reproduction, and reception leads to his implication as both an author and an authority in a highly convoluted way.

Morey’s work both critiques and embodies one of the most thorny and far-reaching aspects of human consciousness and behavior: how we relate to others, as the oppressed or the oppressor. This central preoccupation with the exercise of power and authority seemingly accounts for the black and ominous tenor of his art. We might simply say Morey holds a mirror up to a world history that has been shaped by dominance and exploitation, as well as the numerous inequalities of the present. Yet, the work also suggests that it is precisely through the perverse collapsing of severity with sensuality, reality with imagination, degradation with desire, that—under exceptional circumstances—light can emerge from so much darkness. In the realm of these glimmers and shadows, Morey’s participates in a growing *dramatis personæ* of authorities, accomplices, and workers from different disciplines—from public figures such as marginal theorists or dramatists, to the bodies in space and time that realize and witness his works, or the private lives of known or anonymous persons: maybe you, or us.

In an exhibition and performance project that spanned three venues in Barcelona, Spain, recently curated by Latitudes in 2018–19, *Joan Morey. COLLAPSE* traced an overview of the last fifteen years of the artist’s practice. The exhibition, entitled *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, installed at the Centre d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats, documented ten projects by the artist including *IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO [The Language of the Body]* (2015), developed at the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome, alongside a continuous program of audio works and a schedule of live performance extracts.

“Yet, the work also suggests that it is precisely through the perverse collapsing of severity with sensuality, reality with imagination, degradation with desire, that—under exceptional circumstances—light can emerge from so much darkness.”

The concluding segment, entitled *Schizophrenic Machine*, was comprised of a major new site-specific performance set in a former prison in Barcelona, which continued Morey’s long-standing exploration of power structures and control of the body.

Morey has often stated that his work hinges on a relationship between the concept of master-slave from the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel and the practices of BDSM. Although Hegel does not discuss actual slavery in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he offers an account of domination through a history of consciousness. The initialism refers to sadomasochism (SM), combined with other erotic practices and role-play involving bondage, discipline, dominance, and submission. Morey draws on the aesthetics and corporeal drama of this subculture in his projects, yet shows that, rather than a kind of aberrant corner of sex work, it has always been a form of political performance art, where masquerade and ceremony have turned dark and darker.

Morey has a predilection for absorbing scripted works from the stage or screen into his art (including texts from Samuel Beckett and Antonin Artaud, to Pier Paolo Pasolini and Ingmar Bergman), and his engagement with specific histories of contemporary art itself is revealing. The making of art through strict instructions, self-imposed constraints, or severe behavioral rules has been a trait of minimal and conceptual art since the 1960s. Choreographer Yvonne Rainer wrote rules to strip back dance to its bare essentials (*No Manifesto*, 1965), while between 1967 and 1969 Bruce Nauman made several films of himself performing monotonous actions, like prison-yard exercises. Morey emphasizes an undervalued masochistic inclination to this minimal art-as-askesis, not least through references to Nauman and Rainer. The libertine novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, from whom masochism takes its name, was the first to argue that the essence of masochism is neither its affinity between pleasure and pain nor its roles of domination or subjugation, but its contractual relation—in other words, the granting of consent. This contract of consensual submission and domination invests masochism with defined roles that already form a dramatic narrative; and in Morey’s performances, the audience is also a signatory.

Morey’s explorations in contemporary art critique, or actually bring into being, what has seemed impossible throughout history: pure experience without concession to dominant ideologies and patterns of human behavior. Throughout the artist’s projects, we find both the essentially modern will to celebrate order and closure, and the impulse towards irrationality, temporality, and fragmentation.

I. COLLAPSE



POSTMORTEM. POUR EN FINIR AVEC LE JUGEMENT DE DIEU, 2006–2007.

POSTMORTEM originally took place in a large coffin-shaped stage, in which seven distinct performance “panels” presented masochistic and confrontational scenarios, including those that the artist has termed “subordination exercises.” In this extract, a female performer wears a black skin-tight garment and a loudspeaker that plays excerpts from *To have done with the judgment of God* (1947) by Antonin Artaud. Prowling around the gallery, the performer became a cat-like body burdened by a device that amplifies Artaud’s radio play, and its palpable obsession with the misery of existence.

IMAGE:
Joan Morey, *POSTMORTEM. Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*, 2006–2007. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.



**LLETANIA APÒRIMA
[APORIC LITANY] (2009)**

This dramatized, repetitive oration takes the form of a litany of obedience, anguish, and regret, delivered in Catalan by an inscrutable priest-courtier character wearing a distinctive neck ruff. Conventionally, a litany takes the form of a series of set invocations recited by a priest that alternate with the invariable responses of the congregation. Yet here, the script leaves no room for reply: the voice sounds more like a conflicted interior monologue, in which piety is infused with profanity. The performance includes the full version of a text from *GRITOS Y SUSURROS. Converses amb els radicals [CRIES & WHISPERS: Conversations with Radicals]*, Morey’s 2009 performance series which shares its title with a 1972 film by Ingmar Bergman. This work similarly explores dark metaphors for Christian allegory and remorselessly

bleak themes of physical and psychic suffering through visually arresting set pieces and a palette of black, white, and blood red.

IMAGE:
Joan Morey, *LLETANIA APÒRIMA [Aporic Litany]*, 2009. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.



GRITOS Y SUSURROS. CONFLICTE DRAMÀTIC CINQUÈ (AMB L'OBRA D'ART)
[CRIES & WHISPERS: FIFTH DRAMATIC CONFLICT (WITH THE WORK OF ART)] (2009)

This dramatization consists of a part of the concluding performance of the five that comprised *GRITOS Y SUSURROS. Converses amb els radicals [CRIES & WHISPERS: Conversations with Radicals]*, 2009. A female interpreter wears garments of a Catholic religious order and a black leather orthopedic boot with spurs. A hooded serf character directs her reading of a script based on *Éperons: Les styles de Nietzsche [Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles]*, Jacques Derrida's 1978 analysis of fellow philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's discordant conception of women in his work. The performer's body is summarily moved into various positions without warning, forcing the register of her voice and her delivery of the words to compensate differently each time. In the final part, the nun character is made captive and shrouded in a black sack.

IMAGE:
 Joan Morey, *GRITOS Y SUSURROS. Conflictè dramàtic cinquè (amb l'obra d'art)*, 2009. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.



BAREBACK. FENOMENOLOGÍA DE LA COMUNIÓN
[BAREBACK: PHENOMENOLOGY OF COMMUNION] (2010)

In this reading, the speaker—dressed in the clerical attire of a priest—delivers a personal and theoretical address, a form of self-reflective homily or sermon. He is accompanied by an image of a billboard showing an unmade double bed with the hollows left by two heads in the pillows. This image documents artist Félix González-Torres' *Untitled* (1991), a public-art project about private loss, and a memorial to the artist's partner who had recently died of an AIDS-related illness. The sermon comprised a series of digressions around its ostensible topic: the practice of unprotected sex and the homosexual "barebacking" subculture, in which the risk of HIV infection is considered irrelevant or even desirable.

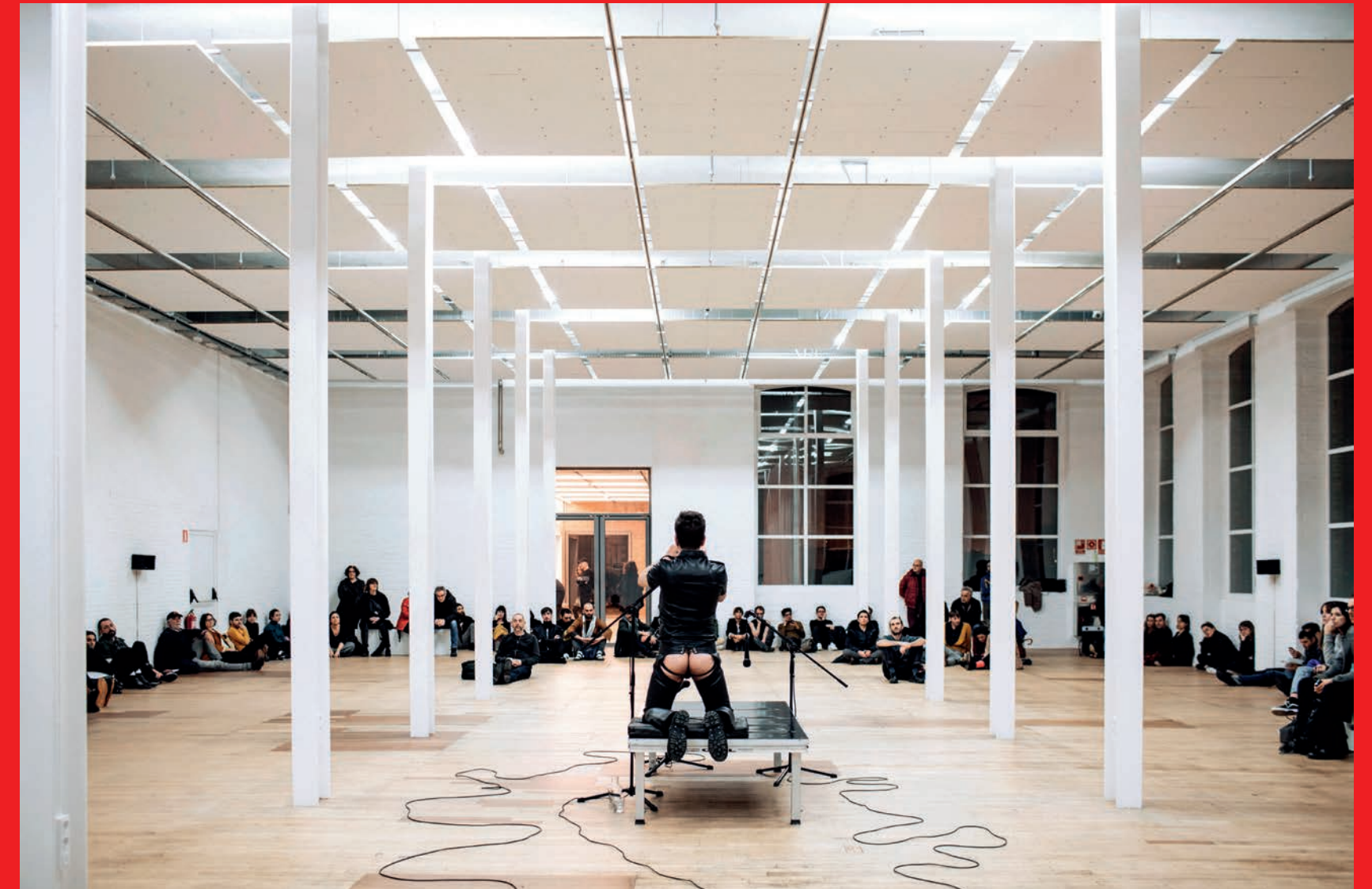
IMAGE:
 Joan Morey, *BAREBACK. Fenomenología de la comunión*, 2009. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.



IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO. PRÒLEG
[THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY: PROLOGUE] (2015–2016)

This three-hour long performance was originally presented as a preparatory study for the project *IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO [The Language of the Body]* (2015), later developed in full by Morey during a residency at the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome. It was a *tableau vivant* that bridged Greco-Roman sculpture and minimalist dance. A nude male dancer adopted the dynamic, sinuous pose found in classical statuary and described by the term *contrapposto* [counterpoise]. At the same time, a female choreographer dressed in black stood silently reading a transcription of a radio broadcast entitled *The utopian body*, given in 1966 by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. At intervals the woman repositions or corrects the posture of the man by referring to images of Roman statues.

IMAGE:
Joan Morey, *IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO. Pròleg*, 2015–2016. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.



TOUR DE FORCE. EL COS UTÒPIC
[TOUR DE FORCE: THE UTOPIAN BODY] (2017)

A performer dressed in black leather garments ritualistically reads from a mobile device, listing the dates since 1987 on which new antiretroviral drugs were approved for use in the United States to treat HIV/AIDS. The brand names of each of the medications joins the litany of dates, while the pill trademarks are repeated as though they are figures worthy of veneration: Saint Genvoya, Saint Stribild, Saint Odefsey, and so on. This performance, originally presented as the fifth act of *TOUR DE FORCE* (2017), was first witnessed by an audience of only six people in the setting of a white limousine driving through Barcelona. The project, as a whole, is comprised by a conceptual history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic—from the fear and stigma surrounding diagnosis and infection in the 1980s and 1990s, to the possibility of its management and control today via pharmaceutical compliance.

IMAGE:
Joan Morey, *TOUR DE FORCE. El cos utòpic*, 2017. Performance reenactment as part of the exhibition *Desiring Machine, Working Machine*, Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats (2018). Photo: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.

II. IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO [THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY] (2015)



Morey's *IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO* (2015) was a performance in three independent acts, lasting one hour each, that took place in three spaces at the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome. It centered on the representation of the body in classical sculpture and its transferal to a live medium by translating the forms of an inert stone body, a figure impregnated with history, into the materials of living and breathing humans. Taking place behind closed doors, each performance was executed by interpreters following the instructions of the artist (who was deliberately absent on each occasion) and was documented by a film crew. The latter acted independently yet, like the interpreters, had to adhere to a manifesto in list form, which governed their behavior. This directive was based on the *No Manifesto* (1965), in which dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer pared dance down to its essence *via negativa*: "No to spectacle. No to virtuosity...". The artistic direction of the project was developed in collaboration with the Italian dancer and choreographer Marta Ciappina, who oversaw the casting of the performers, created a working method for the movements of the three acts based around muscle memory and exercises of resistance, and developed the conditions by which the performers and those responsible for documentation were the only spectators.

The first act, entitled 'Berniniana,' transpired in the courtyard of the Church of San Pietro in Montorio, inside Bramante's *Tempietto* (1510), a diminutive temple which instituted the architectural ideals of the Roman Renaissance. Inside the temple, a female interpreter (Ciappina) holds a series of poses based on *Truth Unveiled by Time* (1646–1652), *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–1652), and *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (1671–1674), three marble sculptures of women by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the Baroque artist

renowned for his extraordinary ability to depict heightened emotion.

The second act, entitled 'Le Fontane' took place in the exhibition galleries of the Academy. Positioned on stage platforms, seven nude male interpreters enact a series of poses derived from the sea and river Gods depicted in three Roman fountains: the Fontana di Marforio, the Fontana dei Tritoni, and the Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi. Between being both actively positioned and resting, each male performer had been asked to drink from bottles of water that surrounded him. Sweating profusely under the gallery lighting in what was the heat of summer, they had been requested to urinate whenever they needed while maintaining sculptural position, becoming human fountains.

The portrait gallery of the Academy was the setting for 'Belvedere,' the third act. In this iteration, five nude male interpreters take turns posing upon a stool, like a statue on a plinth. Each of their poses are based on a celebrated fragmentary marble statue from the first-century BC, known as the *Belvedere Torso*, now within the collection of the Vatican. Each 'human sculpture' was then lifted and carried off the pedestal by a group of women and carefully placed horizontally on the floor on a rubber surface—rolled towels indicated stress points for the men to maintain their rigid poses.

IMAGES:
Joan Morey, *IL LINGUAGGIO DEL CORPO [THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY]*, 2015. Three-act performance at the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome. Photos: Leonardo Aquilino. Courtesy of the artist.



III. MÀQUINA ESQUIZOFRÈNICA [SCHIZOPHRENIC MACHINE] (2019)



Màquina esquizofrènic [Schizophrenic machine] was the concluding performance of *COLLAPSE*, and took place on a freezing evening of January 2019. One hundred and thirteen pre-vetted audience members, each complying with a rigid all-black dress code, were driven by coach to a previously undisclosed location: La Model, a former prison in Barcelona's Eixample neighbourhood.

Inaugurated in 1904 and closed as recently as 2017, La Model was a notorious center for political repression and social control during the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975). Morey's major new performance was his first with no leading human actors. Instead, a cast of drones and a high-speed camera robot arms were the technological interpreters. Or rather, the building itself became the principal character as the spectator-captives were corralled from one scene to the next, led into and out of its different wings and yard, returning each time to the central core of the correctional mechanism. Blinding lights, an architecture-scanning laser, recorded voices, and music including Klaus Nomi's 1981 rendition of the "Cold Song" from Henry Purcell's 1691 opera *King Arthur* dramatized

the foreboding architecture.

With its six radial arms and central surveillance tower, La Model was built to embody the principals of the panopticon. Devised in 1791 by the English philosopher and economist Jeremy Bentham, the panopticon typology produced a device whereby a single omnipresent guard could in principal observe all inmates at the same time. The architecture generated total control of the prisoners, and supposedly instigated their redemption, by inducing an incessant state of self-monitoring and automatically guaranteeing authority over privacy. Overwhelming and unrelenting, Morey's *Schizophrenic machine* was brought to an end with a deafening recording of the siren, once used to signal a prison lockdown.

IMAGES:

Joan Morey, *Màquina esquizofrènic [Schizophrenic machine]*, 2019. Performance at the former prison La Model, Barcelona. Photos: Noemi Jarrod. Courtesy of the artist.





Joan Morey (b. 1972, Mallorca, Spain) lives and works in Barcelona. In 2017 he was awarded the "Premi Ciutat de Barcelona" in Visual Arts by Barcelona City Council for his project *SOCIAL BODY. Anatomy Lesson*, a "performance for camera" realized at the Sala Gimbernat, an old anatomical amphitheater at the Royal Academy of Medicine of Catalonia, Barcelona, and *TOUR DE FORCE*, a dramatic work addressing the history of HIV/AIDS, produced for the 2016–17 exhibition *1,000 m2 of desire: Architecture and sexuality* at the CCCB, Barcelona. Curated by Latitudes, the 2018–19 mid-career survey *Joan Morey. COLLAPSE*, consisted of the exhibition *Desiring machine, working machine* at the Centre d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona—Fabra i Coats, Barcelona; the definitive version of the touring presentation of *SOCIAL BODY*, at the Centre d'art Tecla Sala, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat; and *Schizophrenic machine*, a major new performance at the former prison La Model, Barcelona. Morey's previous projects include *THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY* (2015), Royal Academy of Spain in Rome; *THE CHARACTERS* (2015), Museu Es Baluard, Palma de Mallorca; *CASCANDO: Variations for Another Dramatic Piece* (2013), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA); and *OBEY: Humiliated & Insulted* (2007–09), Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC), Santiago de Compostela.

Changes in Looking

VIEWING CONFLICT PHOTOGRAPHY // DON MCCULLIN

By William Davie



The Tate Britain's deeply moving retrospective of photographer Don McCullin signals a sea change in the institution's outlook on photography. McCullin, the first living British photographer to have a career survey at any of the Tate galleries, forged his reputation as a conflict photographer, an arena that he has worked tirelessly within for over six decades. As a method for restoring a semblance of order to what he has had to witness—an attempt to right a wrong—McCullin photographs the ever-shrinking English countryside.

— These works, which are seen in the final room of the retrospective, are, to put it bluntly, beautiful—if we, the viewer, are to take them at face value. But for McCullin, and now us, these images are loaded. If less overtly, the works are as politicized as his documentation of famine and wars in Africa, the troubles in Northern Ireland, destitution in London's east end, and the industrial north of England. Owing to the rate at which urbanization is destroying the countryside, they are tainted with the poignancy, perhaps even survivor's guilt, that McCullin might have felt as he shot them.

— However, a substantial portion of the rest of the retrospective is dedicated to the aftermath of unimaginable pain, suffering, and violation inflicted upon humans by other humans. There are fewer photographs showing conflict than expected, given the amount of time McCullin has spent on frontlines. But it is within these photographs where we witness, from the removed safety of the grey-walled galleries and inside the uniformly framed, black and white, gelatin silver prints, lives so alien to us, that it feels as if the setting of the gallery remains on the verge of making the suffering of McCullin's subjects palatable.

— In *Cyprus* (1964), the face of woman who has just

[THE SEEN]



discovered that her husband has been killed during the Cyprus crisis is contorted by grief. She clutches her hands together in futile prayer as onlookers and a crying boy pushes his hand against her chest, his fingers splayed open. Likewise, in *A Palestinian Mother in Her Destroyed House, Sabra Camp* (1982), a mother in a long dark robe and head scarf stands with her arms outstretched in exclamation, her mouth open, to a person beyond the camera, in a building that has been destroyed by a bomb.

Both lives are ruined. But it is my reaction to these photographs—to their suffering and their pain, devastated by conflict—that I suspect is shared by many others my age, which is the survey’s greatest asset: it questions our relationship to images of violence and its aftermath.

I am 26-years-old. I grew up with violence in the television shows and in the films I watched; there was violence in the video games I played; violence and its devastating effects from across the globe, even without fully recognizing it, dominating the news daily, and now, thanks to the internet, there is an abundance of violent

images immediately available to me at anytime, anywhere I go. But the image is not real. I have never experienced suffering like this. So, when I see these photographs, a curiosity to know more about their context and a condemnation of the actions that caused them comes in an obvious and superficial manner, but I am never shocked. In fact, I feel a

vulgar familiarity that I fear could all too easily and too soon become indifference.

This comes down to two factors that are outlined throughout the retrospective. First: the demand for and our consumption of these types of images. In the digital age, our ability and expectancy to receive real-time news reports and

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—William Davie



updates about events from around the globe has allowed technology to both give ever-greater credence to photojournalism, of which war photography is just one aspect, but now, is radically redefining it with the proliferation of smartphones and the ability for people directly involved to photograph and record videos. Speaking about the first time he witnessed a public execution in 1965, of a man who had detonated a bomb in a Saigon market, McCullin recalled being surrounded by journalists and photographers as the man was executed by firing squad before one of the executioners stepped forward grabbing the man by the hair and shooting him again, through the head. The photographers and journalists screamed and cajoled, “My God, that was great stuff—did you get it, did you get it?” He did not.

Further still, McCullin never relayed this information back to his handlers at *The Sunday Times* for fear of being labelled “a rank amateur not to have got such a picture.” But what does this say about the demand for images of such cruelty, even fifty years ago? Why are they so highly sought after; because people will see them on the front of a newspaper and buy it? Exclusivity? What right did these photographers have to photograph this man’s execution and, more broadly, what good is it going to do—it will not bring back the people he killed when he detonated his bomb in the market. It will not bring back the woman’s husband in Cyprus. It will not rebuild the mother’s house in Sabra Camp. During a 2016 interview

with CNN, when asked whether he feels his photographs have helped change anything, McCullin stated, “I feel that I haven’t made any change or difference, every year there is a new terrible conflict.” And with each new face rigid with fear, distraught with pain, with every life broken that I see as I go through McCullin’s retrospective, I am reminded of the indelible details that photographer Jon Steele recalls in *Reporters at War*. While on assignment in Sarajevo during the Bosnian war, Steele had heard a high-powered round being fired. It was a Serbian sniper. Minutes before, he had promised to give sweets to children playing in a nearby road. The street went quiet, he says. He rushed out of the building he was in and followed the eye-line of a now-

screaming woman to the body of a little girl lying on her back in a pool of blood in the middle of the road. “I didn’t go rush up to her, I didn’t try and help, I ran to the truck and got my camera, I started filming the situation.” he continues. “Some men picked her up and put her in the back of a car—and they were actually blocking my shot and I grabbed one of the men on the back of the shoulder, yanked him back and I went in with the camera. And I was looking at her through the eyepiece, I don’t know if she was conscious or falling into unconscious, but she just kind of looked into the lens and then her eyes just kind of lost focus and the car took off and went away.” He continues, saying that later, while cleaning dust off the glass of the lens and seeing his face, specifically his eyes, in the reflection, something hit



him: “the last thing she saw in her life, was her own-self dying. I did that to her.”

Second and more nuanced, and as a result of the first, is the language we use in association with such images, and what it does to them.

Harper’s Magazine has described McCullin as “our era’s greatest living war photographer,” his work has been labelled ‘genius’ and his photographs, particularly *Shell-shocked US Marine*, *The Battle of Hué*, taken during the Vietnam War, in 1968, which shows a muddied, shell-shocked marine, stunned and staring without blinking, far beyond McCullin’s camera, clutching his rifle with both hands, as ‘iconic.’

How can we measure ‘greatness’ in this instance, what makes his work ‘genius’? Is that marine proud that his psychological trauma, his suffering, is seen by the world as ‘iconic’?

“I feel that I haven’t made any change or difference, every year there is a new terrible conflict.”

—Don McCullin

During the same interview with CNN, the interviewer asks, in reference to this image, what, after all these years and knowing what an impact this one image has had, what does it say to him now? His response is that he is “Sick and tired of looking at it” and that he feels that “this photograph has cancelled out all the others that came before it,” that he thinks are more powerful, that show the suffering and sacrifice of both the Americans and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians.

This is clearly seen in the retrospective. Yet, nearly every bit of coverage dutifully notes its presence and its iconic stature in

the exhibition, as if it would be incomplete if it was not included.

What the associated language used in relation to these images also does is fan the flames of the myth of the war photographer, or what Finbarr O’Reilly, noted conflict photographer and author calls the “hard-living, scarf-wearing loner dashing from one war zone to the next, with romantic partners as expendable as bullets.” And, although McCullin, now 86, is quick to dismiss this, it is clear from media coverage that there is, in part, a mythologizing appeal to his story: a full-lived-life, demons warded off, and now recognized with one of the highest

accolades of the art industry.

— He continues, “I’m not proud of [conflict photography] and the laurels that come with it sit very uneasily upon my head, I have won prizes that sit in my garden shed, I find it difficult to feel rewarded at the cost of other people’s suffering.”

Long after you have left, with certain distinct details trapped vividly in your consciousness, the answers to the overarching line of questioning in the retrospective I have talked about are sought quietly, in the unexpected and deepest moments of sincere and honest reflection.

—
Don McCullin runs at the Tate Britain through May 6, 2019.

TITLE PAGE:

Don McCullin, *The Guvnors in their Sunday Suits*, Finsbury Park, London, 1958. Courtesy of Don McCullin.

PAGE 115:

Don McCullin, *The Battle for the City of Hué*, South Vietnam, *US Marine Inside Civilian House*, 1968. Courtesy of Don McCullin.

PAGE 116:

Don McCullin, *Protester, Cuban Missile Crisis, Whitehall, London*, 1962. Courtesy of Don McCullin.

PAGE 117:

Don McCullin, *Northern Ireland, The Bogside, Londonderry*, 1971. Courtesy of Don McCullin.

OPPOSITE:

Don McCullin, *Local Boys in Bradford*, 1972. Courtesy of Don McCullin.

BELOW:

Don McCullin, *Grenade Thrower, Hue, Vietnam*, 1968. Courtesy of Don McCullin.



The Weight of a Line

ART AND COMICS // YVAN ALAGBÉ,
JESSICA CAMPBELL, AND EDIE FAKE

By Coco Picard

An age-old mode of artistic research involves bringing a sketchbook to a museum and sketching a painting or drawing in order to understand its operations. Such efforts can yield different insights at different times. The following graphic review follows a similarly intuitive but careful endeavor, looking at three contemporary comic book artists, Yvan Alagbé, Jessica Campbell, and Edie Fake, who also engage the field of contemporary art. Each artist interrogates their own political concerns from sexual politics to gender identity, racial identity, and forgotten histories, using unique mark-making and material strategies that resonate conceptually with the emotive and political landscapes they engage. As a result they capture something of our moment: a deep frustration for society's habits, a frustration that nevertheless unearths new forms of potential.

In addition to his own accomplishments as a cartoonist, Yvan Alagbé (b. 1971, Paris) spearheads multiple publishing efforts, including a contemporary art review he cofounded, *L'oeil carnivore*, a magazine, *Le Cheval sans tête*, and a comics publishing house, Amok. In 2001, Amok partnered with the publishing group Fréon to establish the Franco-Belgian collaboration Frémok, now a major European graphic novels publisher. Alagbé's graphic novel, *Yellow Negroes and Other Imaginary Creatures* (New York Review of Books, 2018) was recently translated into English. Jessica Campbell (b. 1985, Victoria, Canada) is an artist and humorist based out of Chicago; she is the author of two graphic novels, *XTC69* (Koyama Press, 2018) and *Hot or Not: 20th Century Male Artists* (Koyama Press, 2016), and, working in performance, fiber, painting, and drawing often uses carpet remnants to create stand-alone, figurative artworks. Edie Fake (b. 1980, Chicagoland) is a painter and graphic novelist who envisions and explores the potential of queer spaces—imagined, personal, and historical. He is the author of two books, *Gaylord Phoenix* (2011 winner of the Ignatz Award, Secret Acres), and *Little Stranger* (Secret Acres, 2018).

Just as typeset critics must internalize and reflect the work of a given artist or author in their writing, this review aims to explore a parallel effort through drawing and handwritten text—creating a graphic reflection of the artists' work. Bear in mind that each drawing of an artwork or comic panel is a failed copy of the original, a copy that has been translated through the hand of the author.

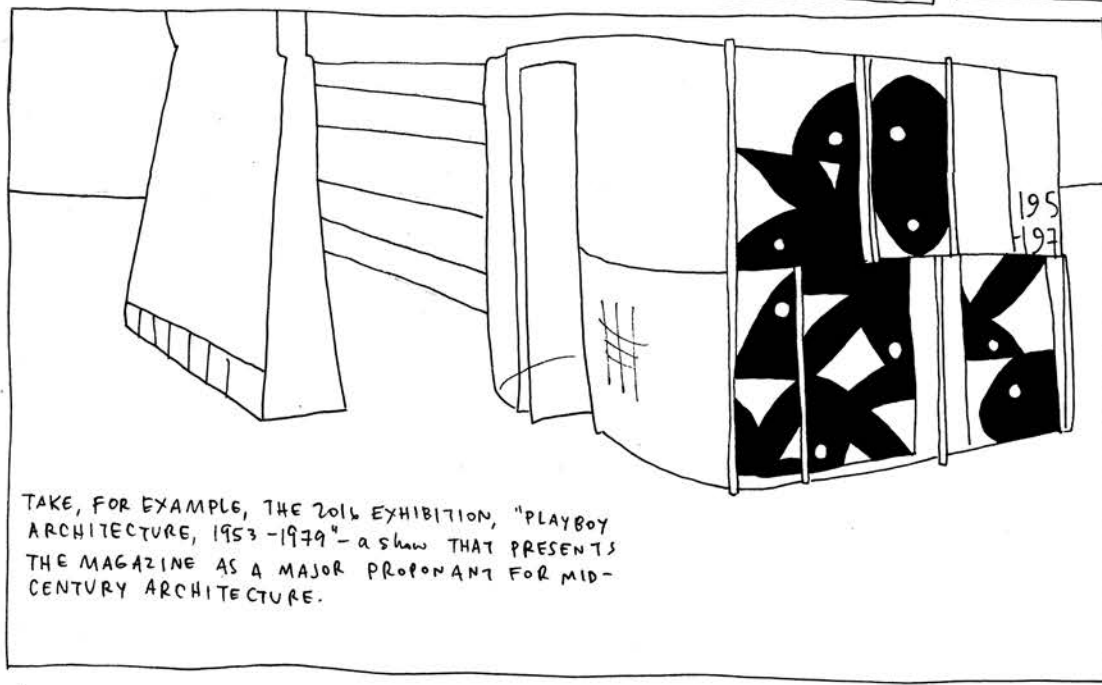
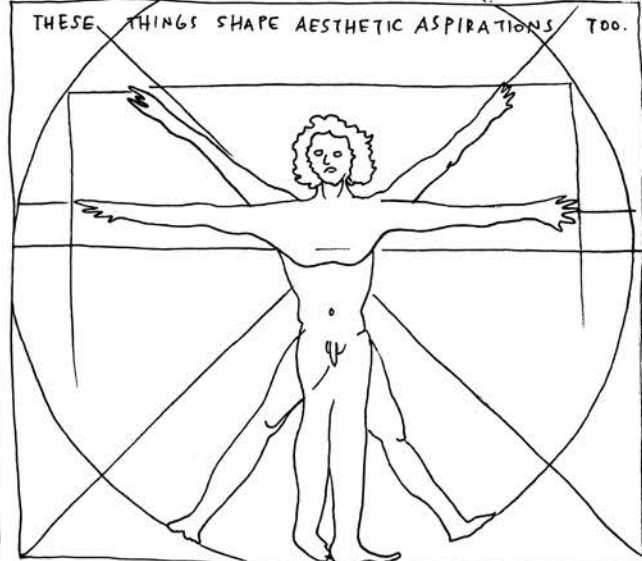
THE WEIGHT OF A LINE

ART **YVAN ALAGBÉ**
and COMICS **JESSICA CAMPBELL** and
with **EDIE FAKE** BY CICO PICARD

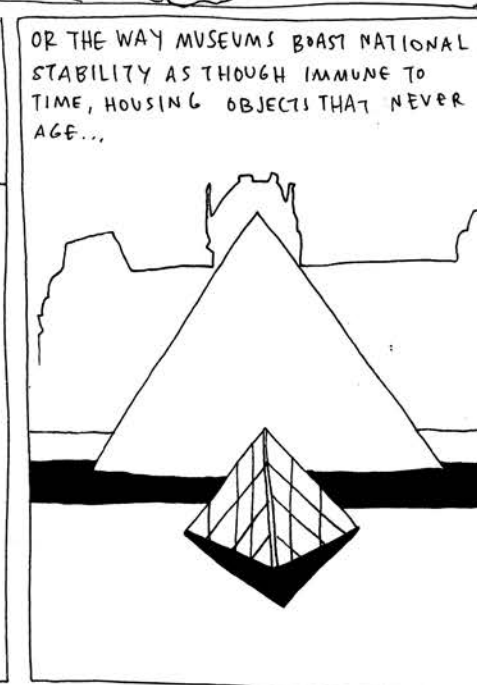
I AM ALWAYS INTERESTED IN THE LINE BETWEEN

THIS *(AND)* **THAT**

WHAT MIGHT FIRST APPEAR LITERAL OR PRACTICAL WILL, ON CLOSER INSPECTION, REFLECT A BIAS — a set of terms or priorities FILTERING DAILY LIFE.



TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE 2011 EXHIBITION, "PLAYBOY ARCHITECTURE, 1953-1979" — a show THAT PRESENTS THE MAGAZINE AS A MAJOR PROPONENT FOR MID-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE.



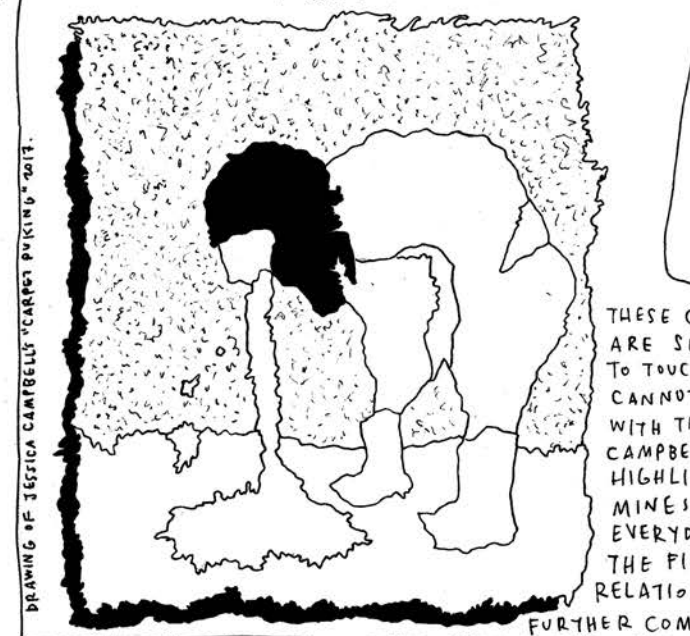
LIKE BORDER! BETWEEN COUNTRIES, THESE PRIORITIES AIM AT IRREFUTABILITY — THEY NEED TO BE CONVINCING, THEY WANT TO BE DUBITLESS —



BUT WHAT IF THE REVOLUTION ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CHOOSE TO BE A PART OF? WHAT IF IT JUST HAPPENS — IS HAPPENING — AROUND US ALREADY?



CAMPBELL'S WORK VOLLEYS BETWEEN HER POSITION AS AN ARTIST TODAY AND HISTORIC PRECEDENTS. SOMETIMES SHE PRODUCES BLACK + WHITE COMICS. IN OTHER INSTANCES, SHE USES TEXTILES — WEAVING PICTURES OUT OF CARPET.



THESE CARPET WORKS ARE SENSUAL; YOU WANT TO TOUCH THEM BUT CANNOT. THIS RESONATES WITH THE CONTENT ALSO — CAMPBELL REGULARLY HIGHLIGHTS + UNDERMINES LATENT, EVERYDAY MISOGYNY. THE FIGURE/GROUND RELATIONSHIP IS FURTHER COMPLICATED BY CARPET PIGERS THAT MAKE ANY OUTLINE LITERALLY "FUZZY" + SO UNFIXED + UNSTABLE.

IN A RECENT EXHIBIT, CAMPBELL CREATED THE "CARR CHAPEL" Juxtaposing AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PANELS FROM CAMPBELL'S LIFE ALONGSIDE THOSE INSPIRED BY FELLOW BRITISH COLUMBIAN ARTIST EMILY CARR (1871-1945). ENTERING THIS LOW-LIT ROOM, VIEWERS ARE ASKED TO CONSIDER THE PARALLELS + DIFFERENCES OF GENERATIONAL CONTEXTS.



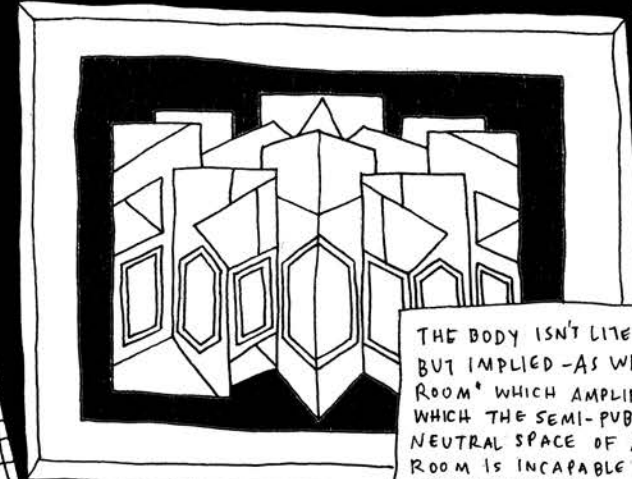
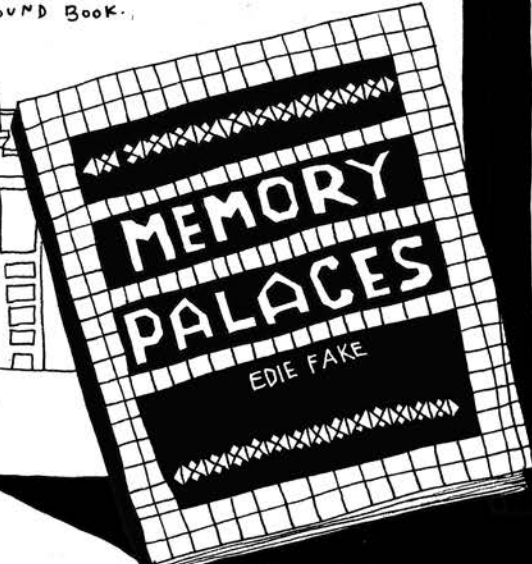
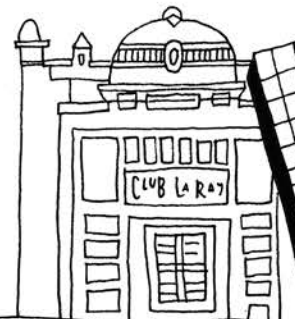
IN HER GRAPHIC NOVEL, "XTC69", CAMPBELL LOOKS TO A FUTURE IN WHICH SHE IS THE LAST SURVIVOR ON EARTH. SHE IS DISCOVERED SLEEPING IN A COFFIN BY FUTURE FEMMES IN SEARCH OF THEIR OWN SURVIVAL.



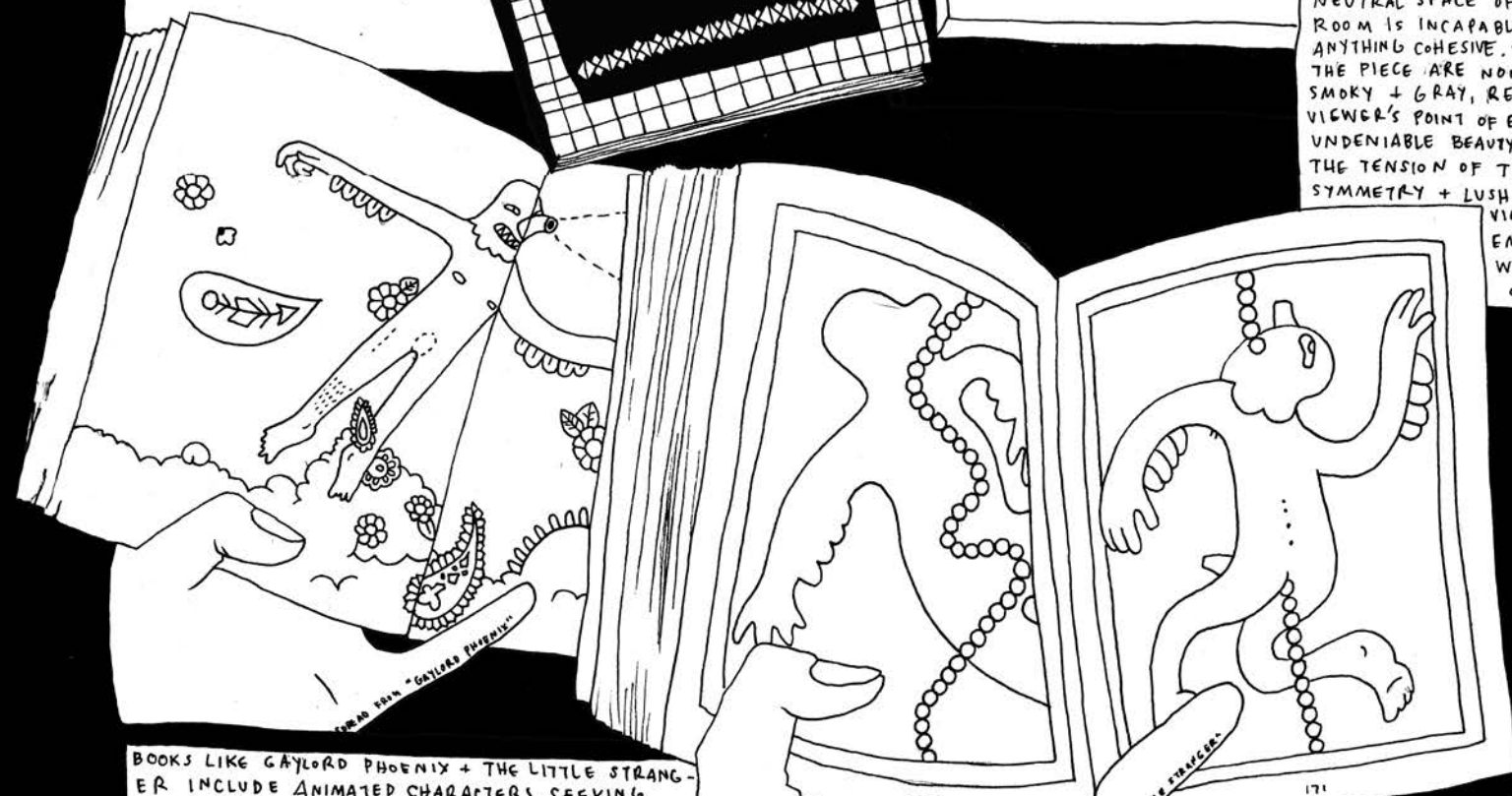
EDIE FAKE

ALSO UNCOVERS HISTORIES—
RECOVERING THE FACADES
OF LONG LOST FEMINIST +
LESBIAN WATERING HOLES IN A SERIES OF DRAWINGS HE
LATER COMPILED IN A BOUND BOOK.

FAKE HAS CONTINUED TO PLAY WITH THE ILLUSION OF SPACE,
PUSHING + PULLING AGAINST THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL PICTURE
PLANE WITH ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITIONS THAT ALMOST SEEM
INHABITABLE.



THE BODY ISN'T LITERALLY PRESENT
BUT IMPLIED—AS WITH "THE FITTING
ROOM" WHICH AMPLIFIES THE WAYS IN
WHICH THE SEMI-PUBLIC + SUPPOSEDLY
NEUTRAL SPACE OF A CHANGING
ROOM IS INCAPABLE OF REFLECTING
ANYTHING COHESIVE. THE MIRRORS OF
THE PIECE ARE NON-REFLECTIVE,
SMOKY + GRAY, REFUSING THE
VIEWER'S POINT OF ENTRY. STILL, THE
UNDENIABLE BEAUTY OF THE IMAGE,
THE TENSION OF TIGHT, GEOMETRIC
SYMMETRY + LUSH COLOR PUTS THE
VIEWER AT EASE TOO.
EMPOWERING THEM
WITHIN THIS HALL
OF MIRRORS.



BOOKS LIKE GAYLORD PHOENIX + THE LITTLE STRAN-
GER INCLUDE ANIMATED CHARACTERS SEEKING
SEEKING TRANSCENDENCE, SEX, LATENT EROTIC POT-
ENTIAL. UNLIKE HIS ARTWORKS, FIGURES IN FAKE'S
BOOKS SEEM UNHAMPERED BY THE PAGE, CAPABLE
OF MOVING FREELY. IT'S INTERESTING ALSO TO THINK
ABOUT HOW DIFFERENTLY THESE TWO FORMS—FINE
ART + COMICS—CIRCULATE DIFFERENTLY.

TRADITIONAL ARTWORKS ARE SOMEHOW MORE PUBLIC,
OR FORMAL. MAYBE FOR THAT REASON FAKE'S
INDIVIDUAL DRAWINGS REFLECT DISCRETE, RIGID
STRUCTURES. HIS BOOKS ARE MORE INTIMATE,
ENGAGING A ONE-ON-ONE RELATIONSHIP WITH
QUESTING PROTAGONISTS THAT MOVE ORGANICALLY
THROUGH ALLEGORICAL
LANDSCAPES.



MAYBE THE DESIRE FAKE CAPTURES—CALL IT HOPE,
DETERMINATION, LUST—AN INNER PRESSURE THAT
FLOWS AGAINST, AROUND, + THROUGH HARD
LINES—MAYBE THIS IS THE THING THAT DRIVES
US ALL FROM INSIDE OUT.

WHEREAS FAKE'S PICTORAL COMPOSITIONS ARE COMPOSED
OF UNBROKEN ~~UNBROKEN~~ LINES THAT OFTEN BIND
THE PICTURE PLANE, THOSE OF

YVAN ALAGBÉ

CONTINUALLY FALL
APART, FLEXING IN + OUT
OF REPRESENTATION
TO PRODUCE A PERVERSIVE
SENSE OF INSTABILITY.

THE NYRB RECENTLY PUBLISHED AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
OF ALAGBÉ'S "YELLOW NEGROES + OTHER
IMAGINARY CREATURES"—A COLLECTION OF COMICS
THAT LOOKS AT RACE, POLITICAL HISTORIES, +
IMMIGRATION IN PARIS.



CHARACTERS—THICK BODIES—
ARE SWALLOWED UP BY

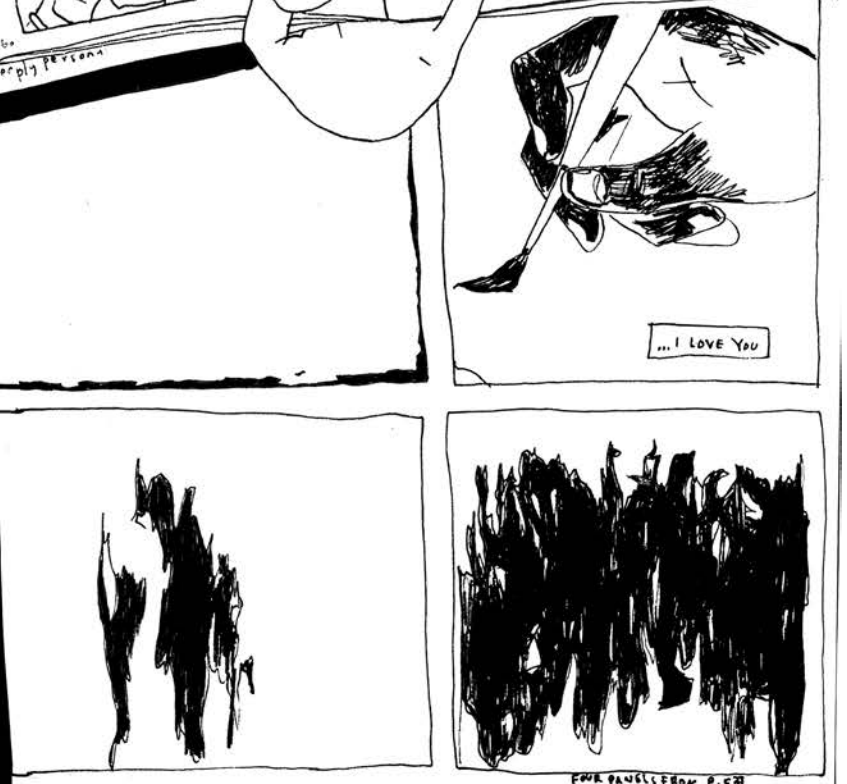
SKIN TONES FLUCTUATE
ACCORDING TO THE MOOD
+ IDEOLOGICAL JUXTAPOSITION
OF CHARACTERS.

EACH PANEL IN THE BOOK IS
COMPRISED OF STARK INK DRAWINGS
THAT EMPHASIZE THE CONTRAST OF
POSITIVE + NEGATIVE SPACE



THE AIR IS COLD, MAGNIFYING THE SHOUTS—YOU PICK UP
YOURSELF COMPLYING WITH A SOVEREIGN URGE, RACING
ALONG THE SIDEWALKS LIKE A KING OF ASPHALT.

ALAGBÉ'S EXPERT
DRAFTSMANSHIP
MAKES THE READER
AS KEEN TO LOCATE
THE FIGURE AS
THE CHARACTERS
ARE TO LOCATE
THEMSELVES—LIKE
FAKE, THERE IS AN
ONGOING SEARCH
FOR INTIMACY; LIKE
CAMPBELL, AN ENDUR-
ING BLUR BETWEEN
FIGURE + GROUND.
ALAGBÉ'S UNFLINCHING
PORTRAYAL SHOWS THE
OVERLAP OF COMPLEX
LIVES + HISTORIES—
EVEN THOSE LEFT OUT
OF DICTIONARIES.



Through Smoke and Across Dissent

POWER PLAYS WITH PERFUMERY // ALEESA COHENE, SANDS MURRAY-WASSINK, AND CLARA URSITTI

By Matt Morris



[THE SEEN]

"I TRY TO REVIEW FRAGRANCES ON HOW THEY MAKE ME FEEL...SO ROMANTIC RATHER THAN ANALYTICAL. THIS ONE IS ENDLESS PURPLE GAUZE...OR A KIND OF MILKY VIOLET RIVER FLOWING FOREVER FAR OUT OF SIGHT."¹



The earliest culturally organized uses of smell were based in Ancient religious activity in Egypt, through the burning of fragrant sacrifices and aromatic smoke for purposes of divination (indeed, the word 'perfume' comes from Latin, meaning 'through smoke'). Across centuries and global regions, perfume (as with painting and its burgeoning art history) serves as a tool for power—passed from churches to governments and enjoyed by upper classes. The conception of 'bad smells' brought together early scientific theories around animal survival instincts compounded with persistent superstitions that associated sulfuric

smells with damnation. In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, rank classism assigned smells deemed most foul to the bodies and lives of the poorest citizens. Xenophobic tendencies against "foreign stench" in Rome at its height of power presaged the later pernicious ways that racism was stoked by widely accepted misinformation about the inferior body smells of people of color.²

— Suffice to say, the stakes around control over one's own smell far exceed discourses around beauty and pleasure; scent has long been used as a tool of ideology, social regulation,

the performance of identity, and economic might. A significant turn toward the practice of modern perfumery as we encounter it today was the abolition of apothecary and perfume guilds in France in 1791 during the French Revolution, and with them the governmental controls around what class of person could be a perfumer and what products they were permitted to produce. Amidst the rise of capitalism and industrialization, perfume shifted in the nineteenth century to become a commodity *par excellence*—a confluence of the artistic expression of the perfumer and the evolving trends of consumer predilections. As new, more cheaply produced

synthetic ingredients became available near the start of the twentieth century, production costs dropped; perfume products became more accessible to lower-income consumers; and profits boomed. Estimates vary, but on average the global fragrance industry's worth in 2018 was measured at 60 billion dollars. And that industry reaches far beyond those glittering jewel-like bottles on display in department stores: one would be hard pressed to find any corner of manufacturing or any component of our lived environments that have not been scented. — It is within this complex politicized history,



alongside the staggering influence of scent across industries and cultures, that the use of perfume by contemporary artists is so compelling. Any overview of these artistic projects should pay devotion to Rose Sélavy, Marcel Duchamp's gender-bending alter-ego who spectacularly released her own celebrity fragrance in 1921, simply by buying a popular department store perfume and collaging a new label onto it. The following century witnessed notable collaborations between artists and perfumery: in the 1930s and 40s, surrealists Leonor Fini and Salvador Dalí designed flacons for the fashion house of Elsa Schiaparelli; Dalí would later join a growing list of artists who have released perfumes, among them Niki de Saint Phalle, Andy Warhol, and Anicka Yi. Perfume houses have likewise taken inspiration from the art world, with scents inspired by art galleries such as Andrea Maack's *Smart* (2010); Memo Paris' *Marfa* (2016); Roads' *Art Addict* (2017); and Comme des Garçons' *Serpentine* (2014), named for London's famed art venue. Complimenting these art-inspired fragrances are many contemporary artists who have come to utilize scent in their work in order to test the veracity of how bodies, identity, and social systems have come to be defined.

Clara Ursitti has pioneered new ways of engaging audiences with scent for more than twenty years. Propelled by inquiries into the ways contemporary life is conditioned by gender, sexuality, commercial brand identities, war, and even the assumptions that designate humans as a species,³ Ursitti's practice includes video, installation, sculpture, and performative interventions. Across numerous projects, her deft incorporation of scent triggers deep psychological and emotional responses. In a recent email exchange, Ursitti reflects, "Reactions to scent are extremely subjective. You cannot talk about it without reflecting on your own subjective position, as there are no words dedicated in most Western languages to describing odor sensations. So, for example, we can describe a visual sensation as yellow, red, etc. ... It is trickier with odors. We rely on our subjective experiences to describe them (e.g. it smells *like* coffee, or it reminds me of being at the dentist) or crude dichotomies of good and bad."

In many works, Ursitti develops blends of ingredients that recreate a body's odors, and at other times incorporates mass-produced commercial perfumes as readymades. For *Jeux de Peau (Sketch No. 1)* (2012), she used one of each: two identical carmine red blown glass bottles are presented side by side. In one is a decant of the 2011 perfume *Jeux de Peau* released from the niche



French perfumery Serge Lutens; the name of the scent means "play on skin," and it smells of burnt toast, apricots, and milk, among other foodie notes. Working from the name of the scent, Ursitti filled the second bottle with a scent she blended based on a skin analysis. Comparatively more challenging, this blend possesses a shocking blast of cumin-like sweatiness and a very animal musk. "I find it interesting that our taboos and conditioning around body odour lead us to often find something that is naturally more offensive than something that is artificial. What does this tell us about our relationship to our body when this is the case?"

Among Ursitti's most striking works are a series of social interventions that she has collectively titled *Air Play*. "These works have three ingredients," Ursitti explains, "A fragrance, a demographic, a social situation." In *Poison Ladies* (2013), Ursitti invited twenty-five women, most over the age of sixty, to attend to an art opening wearing Christian Dior's *Poison*, a fragrance released in 1985, notorious for its pronounced potency and huge fruit-and-flower composition. In the 2007 work *Mesmerize*, a young man arrived at an art opening smelling "of the sea—salty, slightly fecal, slightly fishy." In these and similar projects, Ursitti experiments with the social perceptions and latent eroticization of older women and a young man augmented by particular scents wafting around them. A heady density of perfumed air usually associated with a boutique like Sephora settles over the dynamics of art world socializing.

In 2013, Rotterdam's Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art saw Sands Murray-Wassink in the nude, standing before a pair of glass cabinets packed with perfume bottles of varied sizes, designs, and vintages. He was performing his work *It's Still Materialistic, Even If It's Liquid (From Me To You)* (2013) at the invitation of artist-publisher-mystic AA Bronson as part of a sprawling exhibition of queer and feminist artworks Bronson had curated. Across his bare torso, the words "ACCEPT—ANCE ART" were painted in blue. Throughout the piece, Murray-Wassink offered perfume consultations to gallery passerby, fashioned like an empathic variation on the typical perfume counter clerk. As in much of Murray-Wassink's work, this interactive performance was expressive of an emotional potential for connection. The artist considers this a form of sociality, "When I sniff with other people, be they salespeople or perfume friends, I find myself reveling in the fact of being human and sharing an open secret that we are all organic and 'smelly' as people. It is a bit abject, and also something I am thinking a

“Questions of how scent has been commodified, weaponized, and positioned at the thresholds of some of our most intense emotional associations run nimbly through these artists’ research.”



lot about, because much of my work is blunt and gross and messy and not meant to be beautiful at all, and then there is this counterpoint of beauty in perfume. Because blinding floral beauty is usually what sweeps me off my feet."⁴

The perfume flacons from which he sampled are all part of an artwork *Monument to Depression*, ongoing since 2004, which now comprises more than 500 different bottles. After a six-month period of hospitalization for depression, he says, "I started collecting perfume, just buying what I missed, and loved, things I was not allowed growing up, any perfumes marketed to women." As with his paintings, performances, book projects, and web-based forays into writing perfume reviews and compiling lists of feminist artistic influences, Murray-Wassink's formidable perfume collection surges with affect oriented toward the difficulties of navigating a world defined by gender, misogyny, vanity, and alienation. A self-described "beauty warrior" and progeny of an abstract expressionist great-grandmother, a Freudian psychoanalyst grandfather, and poet father, Murray-Wassink's art proceeds from a rich interior life that blurs daily activity into studio work, "I have started to describe myself as a perfume collector and body artist (performance, writing), but the perfume always comes first, and my work is not about visible things—it is about emotions, relationships, feelings, behavior."

When Aleesa Cohene's background in found footage video work brought her to Cologne to work with artist Matthias Müller, she was introduced to *4711*, the first Eau de Cologne,

popular for over 200 years, since the times of Napoleon. Cohene recalls, "I was working on *Like Like*, a piece about these lovesick people in a relationship with one another," she explains, "And I decided one of the characters should smell because there was a repetitive smell so pervasive in Cologne."⁵ *Like Like* (2009), is among the multi-channel video works Cohene has conceived for gallery installations that remix appropriated film footage into narratives of queer desire, tense psychotherapeutic sessions, and scenes that track the gendered and racial subtexts of received social scripts. "There were a few pieces where I asked myself what I can take from the story and amplify in a space, and have us live in that world even deeper. Scent is a really good way to hold someone in place and transport them at the same time."

Working from the fragrance notes in the citrus and herbal composition of *4711*, Cohene created a new scent that used more or less unusual modern scented materials like Lenor "April Fresh" fabric softener, black pepper, juniper bark, and fibers from security blankets. The scent was diffused from behind one of the video monitors, thickening the atmosphere of the room that was painted in green-blue stripes matched to a porch swing's fabric upholstery seen in one of the video's clips.

Many of Cohene's projects are based in what she calls an "associative parlance," where one piece serves as source material for the next. *You, Dear* (2014), for instance, is a pile of onyx grapes that give off a scent based on dialogue from the preceding video *Hate You* (2014). A young female client speaks with her

dream analyst, asking if she is ever noticed that bunnies smell like ass. As she speaks, the therapist begins to eat—first a grape, then apple, then pear. The resulting scent is built from that fruity bouquet and Cohene’s associations to the soft furriness of a bunny and the smell of a clean ass.

After years of scenting spaces and objects for her video installations, Cohene is currently in the process of developing versions of three of her previous formulations to be released as wearable perfumes. And as with Murray-Wassink’s own tempering of beauty with other worldly concerns, while Cohene finalizes these perfumes, she has also embarked on a research project into the potential development of antidotes for scent-based weapons, particularly those used to control and suppress protestors. “Pepper spray is more pervasive, but I am more interested in the skunk spray. It is really, really cheap. It is made with a yeast compound. There is a neutralizer out there for people who work in disasters and cleaning up dead bodies, protecting themselves. Or, even more, the police and military who are using this spray. Of course, this neutralizer was made for them and not the victims of it.” In exploring what form such an antidote might take, she discovered what products are currently available, “What exists on the market I find kind of precious, which is a lip balm that goes above your lip. It just cancels out the smell for you. So, if you are covered in it, you still stink, but you do not sense it. My interest is in the exact opposite of that: I am interested in what it might mean to neutralize the air—conceptually and chemically.”

Questions of how scent has been commodified, weaponized, and positioned at the thresholds of some of our most intense emotional associations run nimbly through these artists’ research. Working against singular reliance on the visual, as fraught as it is with encoded cultural assumptions around identity, fragrance presents a potential for diffuse, excessive, and even contradictory associations. The forms and displays of artworks often neglect their function within systems of economic exchange. Given its history of classism as a signal of luxury, perfume is used by these artists with curiosities and critiques built into the formats of their work. In recent years, growing concerns about chemical sensitivity has heralded many versions of “scent-free” policies—the city of Halifax adopted a public policy against the use of personal scent in 2009, and since then, museums, offices, and contested public spaces around the world have instituted similar regulations. With note to the argument that these measures are in the interest of public health, the implementation of such policies are not neutral and often disadvantage workers whose cultural backgrounds are characterized by fragrant cuisines, religious practices, and home lives that are not easily appreciated or assimilated into mainstream (read: white) American social space. Indeed, the use of the concept of “freedom” from scent here is especially charged, enacted as it is alongside mounting xenophobia in the United States and abroad. Ursitti’s modes of intervention and infiltration, Murray-Wassink’s emotional labors, and Cohene’s investigations into the radicalized interpersonal valences of bodies and their scents all represent efforts to counter conformity as a mechanism of social control. Tinged with queerness, plunging into the throes of beauty and revulsion, these olfactory artworks propose ways by which we might venture, as if through smoke, beyond the constriction of our current political age.



- 1 Murray-Wassink, Sands. Review of the perfume Quelques Violettes by Houbigant, 1996, under the screen name “jean-marc sinan.” 26 July 2017.
- 2 Much more on this dark chapter of scent can be found in Jonathan Reinartz’s remarkable essay “Odorous Others: Race and Smell” in *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell*, University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- 3 My sincere thanks to Lydia Brawner for introducing me to Ursitti’s practice.
- 4 As shared in an email exchange with the author.
- 5 As stated to the author in a phone interview.
- 6 As stated to the author in a phone interview.

TITLE PAGE:

Sands Murray-Wassink. *Monument to Depression*, 2004–ongoing. Acquired perfume bottles and assorted samples and minis, books and ephemera. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 127:

Clara Ursitti. *Poison Ladies*, 2013. Intervention. Twenty-five ladies, mostly over the age of sixty, were invited to gatecrash an art opening. They were asked to wear Christian Dior’s perfume, Poison. Hand model: Pat Ramsay. Photo credit: Clara Ursitti. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 128–129:

Aleesa Cohene. *Whoa (Moused Wine)*, 2017. Found flass and plastic bath oil bottles, 1990 Domaine des Lambertins Côtes-du-Rhône and 2002 Malivoire Dry Wine, both with volatile acidity. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 130:

Aleesa Cohene. *You, Dear*, 2014. Onyx, galvanized wire, thread, diffused scent. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 131:

Aleesa Cohene. *Like, Like*, 2009. Two-channel video (7 minutes), wall painting, scent. Image courtesy of the artist.

PAGE 132:

Clara Ursitti. *Jeux de Peau (Sketch No. 1)*, 2012. A series of identical bottles on a shelf. One containing the Serge Lutén fragrance *Jeux de Peau*, and another the scent from a skin analysis. Hand blown and etched glass bottles holding 10 ml of different fragrances. Image courtesy of the artist.



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Interviews

Laurie Simmons

BIG CAMERA, LITTLE CAMERA // MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO

By Natalie Hegert



[THE SEEN]

We may already think we know her, Laurie Simmons—she is part of the Pictures Generation; she did the dollhouse photographs; and we might recognize her from her performances on film. Maybe from her full-length movie, *My Art* (2016), but most likely from her appearance in *Tiny Furniture*, as the (real-life) mom of Lena Dunham. Her art is widely reproduced and very influential; she is simultaneously real and mythical. We know her, but is it really “her” that we know? Simmons’ career spans forty years, and for forty years her work has invited the viewer to speculate on surface, artifice, archetype, and appearance in American image culture.

The survey exhibition now showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago, *Laurie Simmons: Big Camera, Little Camera*, had already traveled from the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, so Simmons was surprised that I was interviewing her by phone from my home in Texas. “I love Texas,” she gushed. It makes sense, actually. Texas serves as an archetypal stand-in for all of America in the view of the rest of the world, so it is perfect for Laurie Simmons. “Texas is a super interesting state,” she continued, citing its beauty, diversity, and “weird politics.” It is a state that has always and continues to undergo change and flux, even in short periods of time, she told me—relating how everything seemed to have transformed within the brief time her exhibition was on view. When the show started, there were Beto signs everywhere and it was 95 degrees—a hot summer that pulsed briefly with the hope of the state finally turning blue. The next time she visited, it was 40 degrees and the signs were all gone.

We think we know Texas, and, by extension, America, but it has the capacity to surprise and unsettle us—just like Simmons’ work. Her photographs and films capitalize on the strangeness of what is most familiar and unveil an inherent queerness from behind the mask of conformity—inviting us to ask ourselves who we really believe we are. And in a time when that question is continually invested with new urgency, Simmons’ work finds new relevance, again and again.

NATALIE HEGERT: Now this will have just happened by the time this article goes to print, but in the programming notes for your MCA show, there is a description for a panel discussion, and it was basically my first question for you. It says, “Laurie Simmons has sometimes been cast as a ‘reluctant feminist.’ In this conversation, the artist brings together a panel of next-generation thinkers, including her own child, to consider the tension between personal politics and the making of feminist art in a moment when gender is increasingly deconstructed.” So yeah, that!

Laurie Simmons: [laughing] What should I say about that?

NH: Perhaps it is more like multiple first questions—as someone who has been described as the “reluctant feminist,” how has your view of feminism changed over the years?

LS: Well, my view of feminism has not changed. I do not understand what it would be to not be a feminist. My reluctance to the description of “feminist artist” is based upon the fact that it is the only description of my work that is reductive and limiting. My objection to the word ‘feminism’ is that it does not have the same meaning that it did when I was young, during the second wave of feminism. I think the word is not as useful as it used to be, namely because it

means so many things to so many different people. With my children and all the young people I know as my guides, I am searching for a new language, a new way to talk about some of the same ideas as well as new ideas, without feeling like a fossil using the word ‘feminism,’ or excluding people who are daunted by the word—whether they are very young people who are intimidated by it, or women of color who do not find it to be inclusive. I think that is one of the places we are now. I do not have a completely idealistic hope that we will find a common language, either in our work or our ideas, but I feel like right now we are in a moment where there is an emergence of a new kind of language that will help us communicate more effectively.

[LAURIE SIMMONS | 137]

NH: What are your observations, as an artist, on this cultural flux in our understanding and apprehension of gender—from the limited, culturally imposed restraints and expectations of women in the 1950s, which informed your early photographic series, to today, when concepts of gender fluidity are becoming a mainstream topic? This is not to say that we have, as a society as a whole, entirely “progressed” in terms of gender and identification (though I am sure it is true in incremental ways) because there is still a rampant conservatism that is invested in the status quo and preserving gender roles...

LS: Somebody actually sent me an article today that was so lovely; it was about a woman who had a gender-reveal party for her twenty-two-year-old child who was transitioning from female to male. It was such a celebration and acceptance and support of her own child. The mother did all the gender reveal things—light blue balloons, light blue party favors. Where my work started in the 1970s was firmly rooted in the idea that “pink is pink” and “blue is blue,” “girl is girl” and “boy is boy.” And there is no middle ground; you are either one or the other. One can momentarily be a tomboy, which can be accepted for just so long, and then one moves into the very restrained, constrained phases of femininity—those aspects of life that I was meant to learn from my mother. I was

very observant [of this] and noticed the codes everywhere. It was not as if I was particularly interested in messing with the codes; I was just an observer of the codes and their rigidity. And I was fascinated by them.

NH: Some of your works are experiencing renewed interest because of the changing conversation around women’s rights and realities—you showed the series *Café of the Inner Mind* (1994) again recently, which takes on new meaning in the #metoo era.

LS: Yes, when I made those works in 1994, I gave the ventriloquist dummies these kinds of lascivious thoughts. At the time, I felt like the work was not received that well, or was not understood. But when Mary Boone decided to show the works [in 2018], she had it in her mind as a #metoo statement, yet I saw it differently then too. That is one of the things that is interesting to me in having worked so long: I can re-contextualize my work to myself in whatever the current cultural climate is. I feel like that is really exciting. Probably hard to do if you are an abstract painter, but when you are dealing with images and ideas that are drawing from the current cultural moment, as I am, there are things that I make that do not work as well in the moment as they will in ten years or twenty years.

NH: Your work has been very influential, especially among a young generation of female photographers. Do you look at their work and then experience your work in a different way? How have conversations with them changed your perspective on your own work?

LS: I am not as conscious of that—who I have influenced as much as who has influenced me. Are there any that come to mind?

NH: I have seen a lot of young photographers, in MFA programs or recently graduated, and there is certainly a resurgence in contemporary photography of set-ups and scenes and studio work.

LS: I know that kind of thing changes. I remember when I started teaching at the graduate level, there were different phases—there was the Cindy Sherman meets Nan Goldin phase, a combination of drug-addled tourism and Sherman-like set ups. It is interesting to see these things come and go, and to have been around as long as I have, which enables the identification of some of this stuff. I think, too, that it is probably a result of the fact that a billion people have cameras now, so people are able to capture the everyday reality of life so quickly and beautifully. I do not know what it would mean to be an artist right now; you would have to dig deep in your own interior space to find your vision. There is a surfeit of photography. It is just everywhere. And if you are an artist and you want to use a camera, how do you wade through that, what do you do? Maybe you do not do photography! (laughs)

NH: The inundation of images—

LS: Image glut.

NH: Yes. In your more recent work, like *How We See* (2018), *The Love Doll* (2009–11), and the kigurumi photographs (2014), you continue to examine manifestations of artifice, gender roles, fantasy, and desire—topics which reflect on our current societal obsession with the representation of the self via social media. Can you reflect on that a bit?



LS: The influence and ideas for my work come out of the air around me in that moment. And I feel like I have been so influenced by the internet explosion of Youtube DIY videos, and avatars, and Instagram apps for changing the way you look. All of this has fed into my own work, yet when I approach my own work there is no digital enhancement. My favorite thing is when it looks like it has been digitally done, but has been done by hand and is instead just influenced heavily by digital culture.

NH: What have you observed about the way social media affects us? In some ways it has allowed for connections to be made between people, especially in marginalized communities, but at the same time it reinforces gender expectations on whole new levels. I am thinking of the phenomenon of the “Instagram mom,” which adds another layer of labor to the already overwhelming job of being a mom.

LS: That has already been satirized in movies and such. In the beginning of my daughter Lena (Dunham)’s more recent show *Camping* (2018–present), a character is jumping on a trampoline and turning it into a slow-motion video for one of her “mom Instagrams.” It all happened so fast; everyone participates in it, but at the same time realizes how preposterous it is. I have so many thoughts about digital culture, participating in all the different platforms, and what it is doing to us as a culture. Living in New York, I have been super observant of this. I try not to talk on my phone as I am walking down the street. But there are throngs of people walking down the street just talking into thin air. People with their earbuds in, not even holding their phones. I lived in Soho in the 1980s, and if someone just fast-forwarded me thirty years and had me walking down the same street, I would not know what was going on. I would think everybody was experiencing some kind of group psychosis. Because everyone is looking straight ahead but carrying on a conversation; if you did not know what was going on, you would think they were talking to themselves. It is bizarre, and is really highlighted when you are in a big crowded city. You get snippets of conversations—in sixty seconds you can hear someone yelling

at their mother, having a high-level business call, describing what they had for lunch. It is so overstimulating.

NH: How is that feeding into your work? These observations of the ways it is affecting us?

LS: This is one of the possible very cliché responses, but I think it is definitely an interruption in human interaction. I read things here and there about how young people are going to need to be taught how to interact and to make eye contact. I really believe in a kind of hyper-evolution, that we are going to evolve to be creatures—unless there is a flat-out World War III scenario, a digital war—who will not only have these devices in our hands but will probably have them in our glasses, so close to our head that we will be constantly interacting with people through this device, wherever it is implanted. And that makes a wholly different kind of interaction. Maybe we will not have to smile and frown anymore at some point, maybe we will do it all by emoji.

NH: What about issues of representation, and how people’s sense of themselves has possibly changed through this kind of interaction?

LS: Well, I think the primary way that it has changed is that we have tools to present an idealized version of ourselves. Is that healthy? Maybe we start to believe in the avatar and the idealized version of ourselves, with FaceTune and little fairies flying around our heads...it is very odd to have reality be so fluid around us. And again, I think of myself as more of an observer than a judge. I think it has affected my work, in that I have returned to a kind of human portraiture. For so long, I was looking for avatars and appropriated images, stand-ins, mannequins. But now I crave to photograph humans again—and I think it might be a result of having all of these personas thrown at me. Everybody has the ability to create these surrogates, so where does that leave me? I am back to humans.

NH: I had never heard this story before now, but when you first lived in New York City as a young artist you worked as a freelance



photographer for a dollhouse miniature company. That is amazing.

LS: Not for very long, because I was terrible at it. But I did my first mature artwork—I was twenty-six—while I had that job. I borrowed their sink: the title of the piece was *Sink / Ivy Wallpaper* (1976). I already had an interest in and was playing around with that kind of stuff, so when I saw the ad in the newspaper, I thought, well that is kind of something I could do. But really, I did not have the proper skill set. I think it is significant that I took my first [mature] photo at that time.

NH: Some of your props are on display in the exhibition. Can you tell us which ones you chose to include and why?

LS: Well, I have boxes and boxes...I do not fetishize my props at all. I take them out when I need them. They are jumbled in boxes with their names listed on the outside—they are very well organized but they are not like lined up like exhibits or anything. So, I have often dumped out my furniture, which is color coded—red, blue, green, yellow—and I decided to show it as a kind of rainbow gradient pour. I took all the furniture that I had and laid it out in a vitrine. I love it. It sort of morphed into a sculpture. It feels like more than just props; it becomes its own thing. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as Aristotle said.

NH: So that is a different piece than *The Mess* (2017).

LS: *The Mess* is a photograph. I had been wanting to make a picture about the environmental crisis and making a twenty-foot-long rainbow gradient picture of plastic objects seemed like a great way to address it.





“Artists are either mythologized, caricatured, overdramatized, or misrepresented on screen so often. The day-to-day routine of an artist can be very quiet, very undramatic, and that was very important to me to represent that.”

— LAURIE SIMMONS

NH: But both of them involve rainbow gradients. You are showing some sculptures in the show as well, which ones?

LS: In 1994, I took the dummies from my *Café of the Inner Mind* and six identical chairs and hung them at eye level in a sculptural series entitled *Clothes Make the Man* (1990–92). All the figures are identical except for the suits of clothes that they are wearing. It was my look back on the whole 1950s “universal man” look, the man in the grey flannel suit, and this idea that identity needed to be neutralized for people to fit in. Conformity was something people would strive for. And there are a couple of other sculptural elements, other props I had used in my work, like these boxes that I found at an antique show in New York, maquettes for stage design by an artist called Ardis Winckler. I interrupted the boxes with my own characters, so [in essence] I appropriated another artist’s work and used it in my work. Two of these boxes are included in the show—the dummies, and the pour of color-coded furniture. It is really exciting for me to have a sort of irreverence about my props, because I used to [not allow people to] ever see the scale of what

I do! But that all seems like silliness now, because in and of themselves they are so beautiful.

NH: You also have three films on display—what decisions did you make on how to present your films for the contemporary art venue?

LS: The *Geisha Song* (2011) was always meant to be shown on a looped video, as it is very short. *Music of Regret* (2006) is a 45-minute musical, and it is playing on a loop in a gallery within the exhibition. I finally relented and realized that with the *Music of Regret*, which is a musical in three acts, it is okay if you come and go. There is a story, but each act has its own unique story. *My Art*, my most recent film, is really a movie-movie: you go, you get some popcorn, you start at the beginning, you go through to the end, hopefully you have a feeling about it, and then you leave the theatre. [Laughs] It will be shown at different times throughout the exhibition.

NH: That is interesting, you have these three different approaches to film as a visual artist all in the same show.

LS: You know I did not think of it that way, you are so right!

NH: That is how we experience film in contemporary art: a loop, an installation, or in a theatre.

LS: It is a little bit revelatory to me to think that I have maybe shown films in all these possible ways.

NH: How is it for you in working as a film director as opposed to a visual artist?

LS: Well, I feel like I am a natural collaborator, but I find that these really intense collaborations are very taxing, exhausting, and challenging, so and I feel lucky to be able to get back to a solo practice in my studio. As much as I wish I could make movies all the time, I feel like I am really lucky to have another place to go—another outlet, that does not require a crew, or anything except me and my camera, some film, and some props. I feel like my only regret—and I am known to be a regretful person—is that I did not start making movies sooner. I consider myself a young filmmaker.



NH: Do you have plans to make another one?

LS: It has not been soon enough. It is like having a kid: you never think you are going to want another one. I have not had enough time to come down from the last film, but yeah, I cannot imagine never doing it again.

NH: *My Art* is autobiographical in some respects and in other ways the character is drawn from other female artists you know. What was it like playing this character off of other actors?

LS: The character is really a compilation of all the women artists that I know. She was

me, and she was so many other people. On a really simple level, I wanted to portray the more banal aspects of an artist’s life. Artists are either mythologized, caricatured, overdramatized, or misrepresented on screen so often. The day-to-day routine of an artist can be very quiet, very undramatic, and that was very important to me to represent that.

Laurie Simmons (b. 1949 in Queens, New York) began photographing at age six when her father bought her a Brownie camera. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia and moved to New York. Simmons is an internationally recognized artist who has had solo exhibitions at P.S. 1, Artists Space, and the Jewish Museum in New York; the Walker Art Center in Minnesota; San Jose Museum of Art in California; the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis; the Gothenburg Museum of Art in Sweden; and the Neues Museum in Germany. She received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1984, a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1997, and a Roy Lichtenstein Residency in Visual Arts from the American Academy in Rome in 2005. She currently lives and works in New York and Cornwall, Connecticut. Her husband is painter Carroll Dunham and her children are actress/writer Lena Dunham and writer/activist Cyrus Dunham.

TITLE PAGE:
Laurie Simmons, *How We See/Ajak (Violet)*, 2014. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

PAGE 138:
Laurie Simmons, *Café of the Inner Mind: Gold Café*, 1994. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

PAGE 139:
Laurie Simmons, *Sink / Ivy Wallpaper*, 1976. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

PAGE 140:
Laurie Simmons, *Walking House*, 1989. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

PAGE 141:
Laurie Simmons, *House Underneath (Standing)*, 1998. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

OPPOSITE:
Laurie Simmons, *The Music of Regret IV*, 1994. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

ABOVE:
Laurie Simmons, *Clothes Make the Man: Ask Any Woman*, 1992. Photo: © Laurie Simmons, courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

The Psychology of Painting

DEXTER DALWOOD // PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

By Alfredo Cramerotti



The following conversation between writer Alfredo Cramerotti and artist Dexter Dalwood took place during the preparation for his solo exhibition at Simon Lee Gallery in London in March 2019. Dalwood (b. 1960 in Bristol, England) lives in London and has shown extensively throughout Europe, North America, and Asia. After a studio visit, followed by a number of emails and exchanges, the dialogue developed in sometimes unexpected directions: painting as thought rather than practice; generalization as key to unlock figuration; and the idea of ‘working against’ as guiding principle. And poignantly, it brought to surface the fact that, for Dalwood, recognizing the end of a work is what preoccupies him the most. Paraphrasing a music cultural meme, it is not where you are from – and not even where you are at; it is, rather, knowing when you are done.



ALFREDO CRAMEROTTI: I wanted to start with the main ideas behind your work—I realize this is a broad 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 Dexter for a moment and let me know what you see?

DEXTER DALWOOD: I am first and foremost interested in painting as a conceptual practice. When I say this, I mean the meta-awareness of painting as language: the detached, yet figurative, use of form as language. It has taken me a long time to get to this position. But it is what engages me in still wanting to make paintings at this point in time. In answer to your question, when looking at my work and trying to step outside of it—I think I see disparate images bolted together like words in a sentence that make up a whole.

AC: Did you get any particular source of inspiration for the visual styles of your series of works—for instance, the iconographic ‘non-places’ series; the absence of people; the ‘oblique’ gaze; the tangibility of memories, etc.—or did they arrive in relation to the nature of the materials you have used, and locations (either physical, psychological, or situational) you were positioned in?

DD: With this recent series of paintings, I was thinking of going back to the source of several early modernist paintings. I was particularly thinking about Van Gogh, an artist that has never been particularly important to me, who used the formal language of Japanese prints to create a drawing style with more economy. I was looking at some of these prints by Hiroshige and was not interested in the drawing style but the use of ‘generalization’ in figuration. I mean the simplification of the depiction of something like rain or snow. The visual style of this series started from this point, and as a way of painting an assumption of something—not unlike a label, saying ‘here, this is rain,’ or ‘this is snow,’ etc. That was the starting point. How the paintings formulated had to do with seeing these elements from within the enclosed space of a car, an airplane, or a corridor, all of which lead to a prevailing mood that was somehow psychological.

AC: Can you delve 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 collaborators you work with) have faced in realizing the works?



DD: When it comes to painting, the answers can become very ‘painter nerdy’ as they are about the use of paint, etc. To be brutally honest, in this series, I liked to set up something to work ‘against.’ I had often put down a ground color of neon yellow, and then spent a lot of time at the beginning of the painting trying to get rid of it—this is to do with ‘beginnings,’ and trying to just start a painting and make decisions from there on in. Earlier in my work, I would always begin with a collage, but now I prefer to start with one or two elements, and then begin to make decisions in front of the painting. The editing process has to do with the judgement of when something is ‘enough.’ What takes a long time in painting is knowing when something is ‘enough,’ and most importantly, when something is finished. I have never worked on a painting and then walked away and thought, “It’s finished.” It just comes down to realizing—after perhaps two or three days—that it is no longer preoccupying you or screaming out for attention. Then, after a longer period you realize it is done.

AC: Can you tell me about the relationship you want or aim to have with the viewer? In your opinion, could the visitor go ‘through’ the work, but also miss it? Or is the viewer able to move from and to it, around it and beside it, but not really see it—or experience it from an ‘external’ point of view? I am thinking in particular of the “on-places” series. Is the work meant to be ‘faced’ so to speak? What is the underlying approach to this relationship with the viewer?

DD: I do not think of my work as a ‘gate’ that the visitor can go through. I think of the viewer when making paintings, as I am also thinking of myself as a viewer of the painting. When I am looking at a painted surface, the question I ask myself is “What do I want to see now?” I hope that the viewer also thinks that when looking at my work. The question is: does it engage them and also resist being consumed for a Nano-second? If it does, and they do not dismiss it, then the process of my work for a viewer is one of looking and thinking about what is in front of them. If that process begins, then in some way my job is done.

“...I think I see disparate images bolted together like words in a sentence that make up a whole.”

—DEXTER DALWOOD

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

DD: Due to a knife cut, my blood is mixed into the red of one of these paintings

Dexter Dalwood lives and works in London, UK. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Central Saint Martins, London, UK and his Master of Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art, London, UK. Dalwood has exhibited widely over the last three decades, including a major survey show at Tate St Ives, UK (2010) that travelled to FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France and CAC Málaga, Spain and was subsequently nominated for the Turner Prize at Tate Britain, London, UK in the same year. He has also presented solo shows at Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna, Austria (2017), Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong (2016) and London, UK (2014), Kunsthaus Centre Pasquart, Biel, Switzerland (2013) and Nolan Judin, Berlin, Germany (2011). Group exhibitions include *Hello World. Revising a Collection*, Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum

für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany (2018), *Michael Jackson: On the Wall*, National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2018), *Painters’ Painters*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK (2016), *The Painting Show*, a touring exhibition organized by the British Council that travelled to Korea (2017), Ireland (2017) and Lithuania (2016), *Fighting History*, Tate Britain, London, UK (2015), *Le Corps de l’Absence*, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d’Archéologie, Châlons-en-Champagne, France (2013), and *Dublin Contemporary*, Dublin, Ireland (2011). His work is in major private and public collections, including Tate, London, UK, British Council Collection, London, UK, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France and Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany.



TITLE PAGE:

Dexter Dalwood, *Fire in a Limo*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 63.75 x 51.12 inches. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

PAGE 145:

Dexter Dalwood, *Driving Back After the Argument*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 51.62 x 38.25 inches. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

PAGE 146:

Dexter Dalwood, *Hard 2*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 63.75 x 51.25 inches. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

PAGE 147:

Dexter Dalwood, *Hard*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 51.62 x 38.25 inches. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

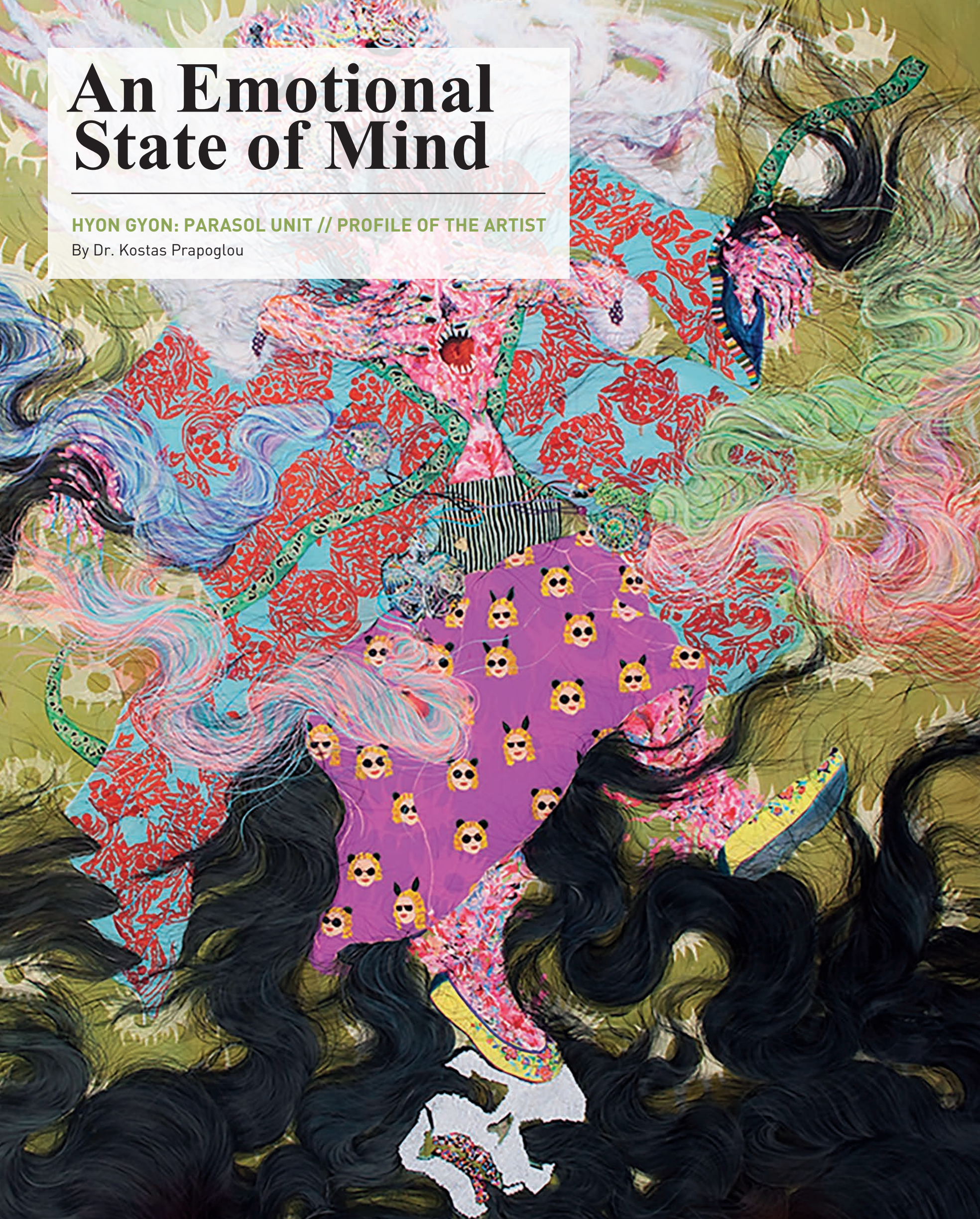
ABOVE:

Dexter Dalwood, *Coming Down*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 59.12 x 73.25 inches. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

An Emotional State of Mind

HYON GYON: PARASOL UNIT // PROFILE OF THE ARTIST

By Dr. Kostas Prapoglou



[THE SEEN]

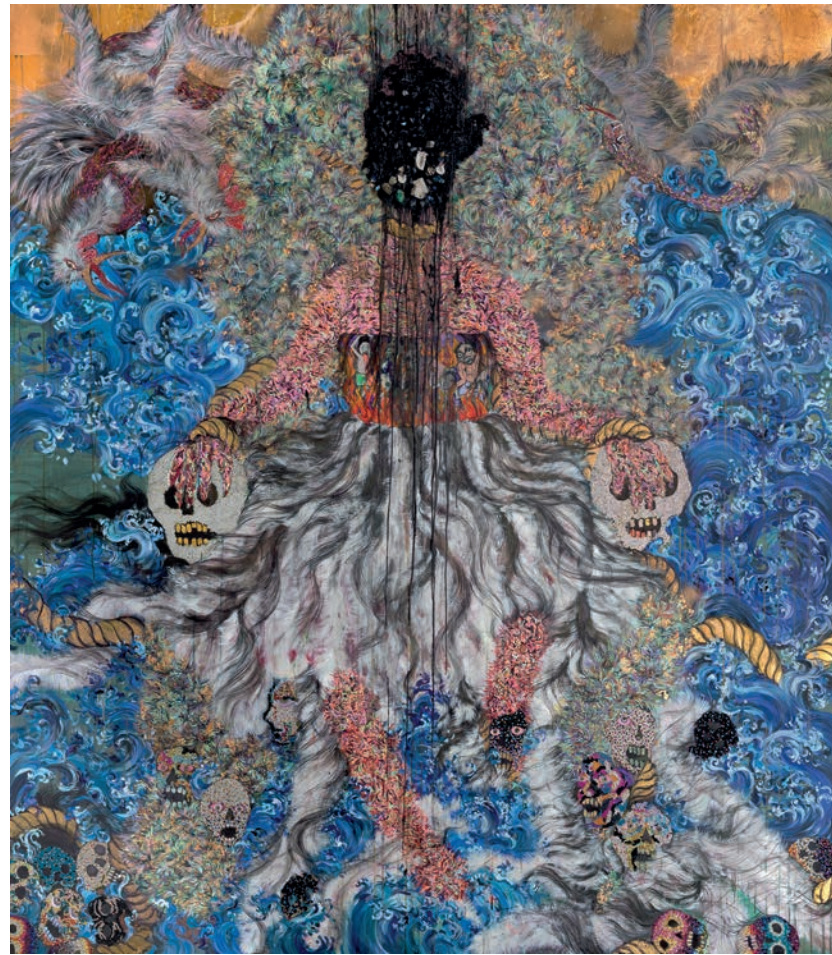
The visual language of Korean born, Poland-based artist Hyon Gyon lies somewhere between contemporary expressionism and the realms of a fantasy world. Colorful and vibrant, yet dark and daunting, her sculptures, installations, and canvases reflect a turbulent esoteric world, where intense emotions and explosive energy levels are pronounced in extreme detail. Within the artist's first solo exhibition in Europe, Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art features recent works that present Gyon's utilization of large range of both conventional and unorthodox materials. Bringing viewers closer to her inspirations and influences, Gyon works with subjects such as Korean shamanism and the labyrinthine journeys of the subconscious.

I invited Gyon to discuss her work and the diversity of her practice—below is a transcription of our conversation, which focuses on her perception of spiritualism, as well as how the subconscious has the potential to locate ideas surrounding our corporeal and emotional experiences.



[HYON GYON | 151]





KOSTAS PRAPOGLOU: How did Shamanism, spiritual healing, and magic start influencing you and the way your ideas are transmitted through your practice?

HYON GYON: The first time I became interested in Korean Shamanism was when my family invited a Shaman to our house after my grandmother passed away. The ceremony was held to comfort and cleanse her spirit, and I was both moved and fascinated by the ceremony itself; people were laughing, crying, and playing musical instruments for two to three hours. Seeing the Shaman perform her rituals shaped my imagination and convinced me that my grandmother had made peace with this world, restoring our faith that her spirit would have a happy afterlife. During the ceremony, I felt a wave of uncomfortable feelings towards my grandmother—guilt, regret, dark and ugly thoughts—that had been trapped inside me all those years. They started to move through and out of my body, turning into other forms of energy. It is really difficult to describe those emotions, which was a physically and spiritually shocking experience for me. Those feelings are very hard to define, but it was certainly cathartic. Ultimately, the ceremony was for the people left in this world, and part of the healing process was for the living ones. The only reason Shaman and Shamanism still exist in the twenty-first-century is because of the fact that they have been involved in all of the most basic human emotions and phases of people's lives—from triumphs and tragedies, to birth and death. The most attractive part of Shamanism is that it affects the negative parts of life, such as sadness, death, disease, hatred, or jealousy. And it was the closest thing ever to the 'fundamental power of art' that I have ever pursued.

KP: To what degree do you believe that art is able to contribute towards psychotherapy, and how does this translate through your own modus operandi?

HG: When I begin creating a work, the healing or cleansing process unfolds, whether I want it to or not, but that is not a goal I set. I believe that art is able to contribute to psychotherapy in one way or another. Sometimes my personal life or my feelings at that time are directly projected onto my artwork, and I often find myself discovering unknown sides of myself. Mostly, I find myself confronted by deep-seated violence, anger, resentment, sorrow, disappointment, depression, and fear that I did not even know existed within me. These 'taboo' emotions might become lost inside me and end up attacking me—instead, I find it important to understand myself and accept my inner, dark emotions rather than ignore them. It is not easy, because I become aware of the cruelty of the world in which we live, and I lose hope again. In the end, the cathartic feeling I experience always gives me hope.

KP: Your work engages a vast range of materials, from paint to cement and nylon. Does the material selection process depend on your chosen narrative or the emotional state you are in each time?

HG: I pay attention to things that surround me: things I eat, people I meet, things I see, and things I wear, to see if I can connect them

“When I reach that point, I suddenly switch from using a brush to using my hands and fists, start to grab my clothes, toys, underwear, and hammers instead of using tools for painting.”

—HYON GYON



with my work. So, I believe that everything that surrounds me carries the potential to be used as material, but I do not particularly start with a certain narrative or concept when I begin the selection. When I either spend long amounts of time in front of a canvas, or I am meticulously painting, certain agonies and worries enter my mind, asking me to repent my faults—every piece of memory appears randomly and disturbs me. When I reach that point, I suddenly switch from using a brush to using my hands and fists, start to grab my clothes, toys, underwear, and hammers instead of using tools for painting. Anything around me can be used as a sacrifice in my work; tires, blankets, pajamas, socks, tapes. Anything can actually be used, torn, or disastrously burnt instead of just painting with paints. I have never tried to anticipate the direction of my work; I just know what materials to choose and how to use them instinctively. I just let it happen.

KP: I detect a pronounced performative element in your practice. Is this something you control, or does it emerge instinctively?

HG: Once I get into an emotional state of mind, I lose control. It is impossible to describe. I just know what I have to do right in that moment. Once I enter into this trance-like state, my body is transformed into a medium that expresses my anger and desire, sorrow and sympathy, or sexual pleasure and violent attitudes. Sometimes I cry, or I laugh, and sometimes I hit—there is no time to think why. I guess, unconsciously, I undergo a primitive version of the psychoanalytic cathartic method. I try to reach in and take out something inside me—that is why it is necessary to use my whole body to shake and wake myself, bringing out the performative element in my work.

KP: How is your art perceived by audiences in different parts of the world? Are your references to Korean and Asian philosophy easily interpreted in diverse sociocultural environments?

HG: Everyone has different attitudes towards art, and I also think that there are differences in how cultural environments shape our opinions or feelings. For instance, I have never seen any Korean or Japanese people showing intense emotions towards my work.



Yet, in the United States, I see people react very emotionally while viewing my work—some even cried during the exhibition. People express their emotions in different ways and, depending on their social environment and culture, they will interpret or react to my work in various ways. In Korea and Japan, I think it is considered a virtue not to express your feelings and emotions (whether it is sorrow or even pleasure). Once my art is displayed and open to the public, my work is done. From there, it makes its own way.

—
Hyon Gyon at Parasol Unit ran from January 3—March 31, 2019.

Hyon Gyon (b. 1979, Dangiing, Korea) lives and works in Kraków, Poland. She has presented her work in group exhibitions and several prestigious institutions, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan, 2010; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, USA, 2012; Brooklyn Museum, 2015, Carnegie Art Museum, Pittsburgh, USA, 2016; Batu Museum, New York, 2017; Kyoto Art Center, Japan, 2017. She has had solo exhibitions at the Kyoto Art Center, Japan, 2011; HAPS, Kyoto, Japan, 2013; Pioneer Works and Chashama in New York, both 2015; Shin Gallery, New York, 2016; and Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, 2017. Her work is included in the permanent collections of Brooklyn Museum, NY, and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Kyoto City University of Arts, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto Bank, and the Takahashi Collection in Japan.

IMAGES:
Hyon Gyon, installation view at Parasol unit, London, 2019. Photography by Benjamin Westoby. Courtesy of Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art.

The Panoptic Loop

ANNA MARTINE WHITEHEAD // IN CONVERSATION

By Mary L. Coyne



[THE SEEN]

On a windy evening, I spoke with Chicago-based dance artist Anna Martine Whitehead, who recently completed a residency at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA). The following transcription traces our conversation, which considers the landscape of dance and performance venues both in Chicago and throughout the United States, the phenomena of performance within the museum setting, and Whitehead's ongoing, and multi-faceted work *Notes on Territory*.

MARY L. COYNE: We could start by talking about the MCA, where you most recently were an artist in residence as part of *Groundings*, on view through June 3, 2019. What did that look like?

ANNA MARTINE WHITEHEAD: Yes—it was many things. The research that I am currently doing is about bodies and their relationship to space. Being at the MCA for a week put my body in a very intimate and charged relationship to the institution; I had a lot of time to think about what a body—an artist's body, or a body that is art—is within the context of a warehouse of art objects.

ML.C: To be a resident is to inhabit or live somewhere. What did you try and take away from a residency experience?

AMW: It is dawning on me that “residency” has the connotation of privacy, and maybe even of being hidden. This is the way I work, I guess: very secretly! Or maybe just interiorly. For better or worse. So, what is a residency when your residency hours are coordinated with the open-to-the-public hours of the institution, when there is no “away” to retreat to, when Black bodies are always already in a “public” role—but even more so in the Art institution (with a capital A), where there are so few bodies of color? I am thinking for some reason about E.J. Hill's performance this past summer at the Hammer Museum, where he stood on a podium throughout the entire run of the show without taking breaks. I had a hard time with that piece because his body was so public. On the other hand, there was a kind of inscrutability to that performance. I know he was in a kind of meditative state the whole time—a deeply interior state. I never thought of it before, but it strikes me that his piece in that show was the definition of being Black, or being a performer, or being a performer of color in relation to the institution. Both hyper-visible, and also necessarily impenetrable.

ML.C: What does performance in the museum context mean to you? You have done a lot of it.

AMW: [laughs] Have I? That is funny, I do not think about that.

ML.C: It is where the art economy is in some ways—as opposed to a movement studio.

AMW: While that is not how I think of myself or my work, perhaps that is true. I just did the work at the MCA, and have a date upcoming at a performance venue called the Jam Handy in Detroit. The more I learn about Detroit, the more I am fascinated by it. There is a burgeoning performance economy there that follows the civic and community structures of the city—horizontally structured, somewhat hard to pin down, and very community-powered. I have also presented work within the San José Museum, The Hammer, the Chicago Cultural Center—so, it is true, I do a lot of things in galleries and museums.

— In a piece that I am working on right now, I am trying to figure out where it is supposed to be. It is a lecture, and it is a dance, and there is a structure that has to live alongside it.

MC: This is *Notes on Territory*?

AMW: Yes. It elides categorization. In some ways, it does not make any sense for it to be held within a tradition theater space, but there are really nice things about theater settings.

MC: Theaters are so malleable; they can become anything that you want them to become.

AMW: Right—Lately, I have been reading Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*, and am also assigning my students *Parable of the*





“I never thought of it before, but it strikes me that his piece in that show was the definition of being Black, or being a performer, or being a performer of color in relation to the institution. Both hyper-visible, and also necessarily impenetrable.”

—ANNA MARTINE WHITEHEAD

Sower by Octavia Butler, so I'm re-reading it. I have been thinking a lot about what is coming and what is happening.

— Last fall, I had a show at the Institute of Cultural Affairs Green Rise Building—a giant old building in Uptown, which was amazing—the site was host to a number of non-profits, but also a few communities that have been living there for decades. Julieanne Ehre, who runs Pivot Arts organized this opportunity—she is so invested in finding ways to bring art in Chicago to alternative spaces.

— We performed on the same floor as one of those communities—the kitchen was across the hall from us, and on the sixth floor of the building where the green room was, there was a fish pond inside the room. Through this context, as an old beautiful art deco building where people are still living, I really had to make work in the space while maintaining its integrity. The experience felt more like what continues to make sense to me; it is a building that has a function, and its function is not to support me or my work—but we could exist within a mutually supportive situation for one week. I liked that.

MC: There are not many spaces like that. We have theaters which are kind of the blank slates to do whatever you need to do; theaters are built to support a fantasy. In this way, it is interesting for work that was made in one context to be brought into a museum—

AMW: Yes, it is challenging—taisha paggett's piece at the Hammer was perfect for that reason.

MC: It was made for that space.

AMW: Yes. There is a part of *Notes on Territory* which is similar to Trajal Harell's *Antigone* (2012) piece which has the small, medium, large. We figured out an “extra small version,” which is basically this thing that me and Damon Locks do where we just dance for thirty minutes. It has meaning, but I feel like what is happening is very site-specific. We can do that piece anywhere and it will be its own thing.

MC: How is *Notes on Territory* being shaped? You have presented it in different variations in different places—I have had the opportunity to see two or so iterations, and each has been so different. Beyond this, how do you think text has fit into your movement research?

AMW: First, I want to share a phone call I had this morning with Sarah Dahnke, who does a program called *Dances for Solidarity*. She has been doing this for four or five years, which is basically a correspondence project in which she creates a choreography with people who are in solitary confinement. This is so exciting to me, as I have been working with folks at Stateville prison for the past two and half years, through the Prison + Neighborhood Art Project. I am actually making choreography, which is so hard. Thinking about score is so hard. I would really like to teach a score class—I feel like nobody does that, and it is really important.

MC: Right, ‘score’ is a term we use so often, almost colloquially. But how do you start at the beginning and format a score for the movement you develop?

ANW: Especially for artists for whom performance is not their primary medium, it is really nice to acknowledge that the performance has a material to it. It can exist. It does not have to be a weird thing that artists do as an aside to their actual practice.

MC: And it does not have to be live—

ANW: Exactly. There is the challenge of the score, but there is also the challenge of getting the dance from inside the prison outside the prison, which is really hard. That is why the score is important. I am hoping to be talking with [Dahnke] for a long time. I am also hoping that the show I am doing in March—which will include a reading room called Freedom Futures Lab—will function as a workshop but also a space where people can come and think about the ideas contained within *Notes on Territory* outside of its existence as a live, abstract, poetic art piece. To instead establish an embodied, reflective, and intimate relationship with viewers.

— I am hoping to receive some of the scores that the folks Dahnke has been working with have made. There are so many reasons why I am excited about the work she and her collaborators are doing—it is really impressive to see people's actual marks, how they decide to make the work,



and what they think the language of the work looks like on paper.

— The scores then get set on dancers. For example, Dahnke has taught the scores to a group of youth who were on probation and parole in New Orleans, and worked with them as they learned the dance that somebody else had made while in prison. There are so many things about this that to me are immensely Sci-Fi and post-body; you can literally be in a “no-place,” where people do not think about you, and yet you have a hyper-raced, classed, gendered body. But also, you are ‘disappeared’ and I am fascinated by how *that* can exist on a totally other body—which in some ways, is “another body,” but is out in the world and visible. My hope is that is that we can have a score for people in Detroit to come and have some embodied freedom experience.

— In *Notes on Territory*, there is so much talking in the performance—part of my interest in using text is that I just want to say some things. If there is a synopsis of this piece, it would be “everything is everything and nothing.” That should be on my tombstone, “everything is everything and also nothing.” And there is a way that the language makes that statement to be true as well. For example, there is a through line in the script which is about factories: the factory is a thing in space—a place that makes thing. It works into the future to produce another thing. Yet, it also works into the past and renders whatever comes into that factory into raw material. A cow becomes meat. I spend a lot of time talking about slave castles. They were called factories. A human gets turned into a slave but also a human gets turned into raw material. What is interesting about the ‘factory’ is that the term is derived from a line of work whose



title was “factor,” meaning a merchant officer. When they first started building these slave castles in pre-colonial Africa, each of the officers that would be in this place were called ‘factors,’ and the buildings, ‘factories.’ At some point in the sixteenth to seventeenth-century the term factory started to mean the thing we understand it as today. Which could be, but is likely not, coincidental. —

In my work, I am trying to loop back to the various meaning of that word, but also how that word works in multiple directions of time and space. I like the way that language can get really confusing when you do that.

MC: How did *Notes on Territory* come to be?

AMW: Two things happened. I had the LinkUP residency at the University of Urbana-Champaign, and I found a book in which Samia Henni had a piece on Women in the Algerian Revolution having their headscarves forced off. She was looking at the *Françaisiation* of these people; they had to have ID photographs taken and remove their headscarves for the photo (much like things that happen recently, actually). Henni talked about tan lines, how your skin could be weathered around the eyes and young on the cheeks. But what she was also looking at was the relationship between architecture and modern warfare. Shortly after that residency, I went to visit

a friend in Paris, and we ended up at the Church of the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The church is beautiful and was built in the sixth-century, before there was theater—the light changes over the course of the hour. I found out that the church was located at the heart of an abbey, and in the abbey there was a prison. Why have a prison in the abbey? I could not find the prison on any map. The prison was built in the sixteenth-century, yet it was not until right before the French Revolution, in the late eighteenth-century, that you can finally find the prison on a map. And even then, it was poorly rendered. Both things happened at the same time: thinking about architecture in relationship to containment and war and population control. —

That is the question of this piece: where is it? On the one hand, you understand that built space is intrinsic to organizing and controlling people, but on the other hand, you cannot have an image of the damn space. That is my question.

MC: It is the ultimate Foucauldian question.

AMW: That is what the Prison Industrial Complex is. We are going to monitor you forever, you are forever visible, and yet, where are you? I think of that every time I come back from Stateville prison, driving back to the beautiful Chicago skyline and the sun is shining,

“ Both things happened at the same time: thinking about architecture in relationship to containment and war and population control.”

—ANNA MARTINE WHITEHEAD

and I think, “I literally could have been in outer space.” It feels so absently different. I cannot imagine, when I am here, that a place like that is anywhere. And it feels like a spiral, which is why this piece seems never-ending.

MC: To go back to Foucault, he also reflected upon the relationship of the museum and the prison as being two sides of the same coin, although on opposite ends of a spectrum. Both are about visibility: being seen, or being hidden. When the museum becomes visible, the prison falls into an invisible sphere. People disappear.

AMW: That is why that map was so interesting actually. It is actually right there. This prison, Riker’s Island, San Quentin, you can see them.

MC: But social consciousness erases them from our sight lines.

AMW: Exactly. But I have not been interested in controlling the expansiveness of this idea, so therefore, it is something I keep working on.

MC: I like that. Most of us get to a point and then dial it down and distill it. But to let it keep going? Maybe that is the territory part? A frontier.

AMW: It does not stop. But it has to stop and it is going to stop this year. That why there is the “extra small version.” But there it also a part where it is really fun to think about architecture and dance and play cool music. Dancing is fun is also part of the story.

MC: And it is also okay. Dance and language can be fun.

AMW: Have you ever seen the film *Synekdoche, New York*? That movie is basically the story of my life, and the story of *Notes on Territory*. My collaborator, Damon Locks, was the one who suggested I see it. In that movie, which was one of the last movies Phillip Seymour Hoffman was in before his death, he plays a director that wins a genius grant and spends the rest of his life making a play that he requires is rehearsed 24 hours a day. It is about everybody in his life. And there is a scene in which one of the actors says to the director: “Caden, we’ve been rehearsing for seventeen years, when are we going to get an audience?!”

—
Anna Martine Whitehead is a dancer, teacher, and writer who makes performances. She received a Master of Fine Arts in Social Practice from California College of the Arts. Her work has been presented at the Chicago Cultural Center, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, and the San José Museum of Art, among others.

She has written about blackness, queerness, and bodies in action for *Art21 Magazine*, *C Magazine*, *frieze*, and *Art Practical*, and contributed chapters to a range of publications, including most recently *Meanings and Makings of Queer Dance* (Oxford University Press, 2017). She has received generous support from Chances Dances, Chicago Dancemakers Forum, City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and she has been in residence at Djerassi Resident Artists Program, Headlands, High Concept Labs, Links Hall, Pivot Arts, University of Michigan, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Whitehead teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and with Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project.

TITLE PAGE:
Anna Martine Whitehead, *Charged Spaces--Changing Bodies* October 2018 Photo: William Federking

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PAGE 158–159:
Anna Martine Whitehead, *Hold-Yourself-In-Mid-Air*, 2010.

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PAGE 160, 162:
Anna Martine Whitehead, *Cristal Sabbagh*, A J Mclenon, and Zach Nicol in Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*. Image credit: The Renaissance Society, 2018.

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PAGE 161:
EJ Hill, *Excellentia, Mollitia, Victoria*, 2018

An interview with TOBIAS KASPAR

By Carter Mull and Laura Dennis



Following a stint in the Spring of 2014 when artist Tobias Kaspar and I shared the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen space with simultaneous, overlapping shows, I have remained attentive to our similarities and differences as artists. As much as it would be a pleasure to illuminate such projects of his as *PROVENCE* (2009–present), in classic Kaspar fashion, where social performance, fiction, and discourse weave together, a collaborator of mine, Laura Dennis, and I sat down to see if it could be possible to get at salient aspects of his practice. Following Kaspar's large-scale project, *Independence* (2018), at Kunsthalle Bern, and current gallery exhibitions at Lars Friedrich, Berlin, and Peter Kilchmann, Zürich, Kaspar refused an interview, delegating in his place his trusted assistant—here named as just 'Dasha'—under the guise of the artist, which aided the formation of a narrative arc particular to Tobias Kaspar, the brand. What follows is a transcription of said conversation.

Carter Mull: Hi Tobias—Laura and I are looking forward to working on this with you. I know you are refusing to give any interviews, why is that so?

Tobias Kaspar: Hello Carter and Laura; Carter it has been a while since we have met. I think the last time was at an ice cream place in Silverlake the day before my opening at Jenny's, and my daughter was not in the best mood—so it was a rather short encounter, was it not? I was on my own with Asja, my daughter of a bit more than three years old at the time. The opening was two days after Trump's election, so that was in 2016—traumatizing. But, in fact, my Los

Angeles stay was great; I met and stayed with this amazing couple, Claudia and Francesca. We stayed in their Airbnb, a studio annex to their own home in Los Feliz. They ended up babysitting Asja during my opening and even came by quickly before with her and their dog; a dream. We are still friends, they were here in Zürich last new year. We became friends through a mutual friend, artist Stefan Burger, who stayed with them as well, but that was pre-Airbnb and arranged through friends. Making Airbnb friends, I started to love and hate this platform at the very same

time—if we were still without it, I am sure I would have stayed with them as well, but arranged through friends, and not with a company taking a huge percentage of the share. On the other hand, it is so convenient.

I just told this anecdote to Dasha, who is here in Riga, Latvia with me. Dasha aided in my show at the Contemporary Art Center entitled *Kim?*, in Riga in summer 2017, but we have known each other for a longer time.

[THE SEEN]



[TOBIAS KASPAR | 165]



Dasha: Hello Carter and Laura, nice meeting you over email.

CM: Nice to meet you Dasha. Tobias, always a pleasure. To begin—what did art look like as an adolescent growing up in Basel?

D: Well, I was born in Sowjet, Riga in the 1980s. Tobias in Basel, Switzerland. Worlds apart, but visiting Basel once a year I assume art in Basel during Tobias' adolescence looked like capital-A Art. Perhaps that is a cliché. I know obtaining an entry tickets to the mega-Art Basel party at the end of the week was a big deal; this must have been before 2008, around 2001–03. In 2004, Tobias graduated from the Gymnasium and moved away. To go back to the Basel cliché, I believe and hoped art looked more like, for example, Holbein's lying Jesus exhibited at the Kunstmuseum Basel. The Kunsthalle and Schaulager were a regular activity for Tobias. He grew up living in a cooperative, where artists like Silvia Bächli, Erik Hatten, Hinrich Sachs, and others lived and worked. Tobias' mother often talked about Mirijam Kahn, and he once told me that he remembers waking up in the middle of the night and entering a smoky kitchen, wineglasses everywhere, and his mother and her girlfriends doing body paintings with crayons. His mother is a teacher, her friends are artists, and his father is a graphic designer.

The house he grew up is located between the Messeplatz where Art Basel takes place and the Rhine, which in the 1990s was one of the biggest open drug scenes in Europe (after Zürich). Needles on playgrounds, junkies digging in bushes looking for their hidden stuff. As kids, they grew up with the junkies. Each of them had a nickname, they knew them all, where they lived. They counted the ambulances coming, until they were gone. But you know Riga was, and in some ways still is, terribly similar. I am sure Los Angeles or New York did not look any different in the 90s, and today continues, but each city gets "cleaned" through another tailor-made program.

CM: Growing up in Basel, when did Tobias first become aware of the social circumstances around art—from fashions, to

gestures, to parties and dinners, to linguistic codes?

D: He moved out from his parents' two apartments to his own in 2001. Since artist Hinrich Sachs was his neighbor, he started doing small works for Sachs, assisting him at Jan Van Ecke school in Maastricht, in The Netherlands at perhaps the age of sixteen. Sachs himself studied in Hamburg with Franz Erhard Walter and Stanley Brown. He shaped Tobias' conceptualism, but I think the whole politics of the guest-list came later during art school.

CM: Why did Tobias go to school in Hamburg as opposed to staying in Switzerland?

D: Well, you cannot have everything: one of the best art museums in the world, an amazing Kunsthalle, the art fair, and a good art school. At the time, art school in Basel sucked, and anyway, it is a small town. He wanted to get out. Plus, in Switzerland it is basically impossible to succeed as an artist; you need to first prove yourself elsewhere. It is ridiculous. Perhaps they sink you with prize money and grants but that does no good.

CM: Rumor has it that Tobias snuck into Michael Krebber's class at the Städelschule in Frankfurt...

Laura Dennis: In the 1990s, the contextual practices of artists in Cologne—the relational aesthetics practices, functioning more globally—and the NYC-based legacies of institutional critique, produced a generative dialogue for critical practice that echoed in the 2000s through the Lower East Side as well as at Städel. By 2009, could an artistic position still be formulated from Michael Krebber's palate?

D: After three years in Hamburg with Jonathan Monk and Andreas Slominski, Tobias wanted something new. He attended the Canvas and Careers symposium at Städel and then invited one of the lectures to Hamburg to revisit his talk from the symposium. Egija Inzule (Tobias' partner), lived in Leipzig from 2005 to 2009 and was close to artists such as Hans-Christian Lotz, Alexander Hempel, and Inka Meissner. They

were just a few years older, but being a student, that mattered. Of course, whatever they did was key to Tobi. Hans-Christian Lotz went to Krebber and although Tobi never painted, he was very interested in his "refusal style."

The school refused him as a guest student, so he simply moved to Frankfurt and just started going to Krebber's class.

LD: In New York, in the Colin de Land era, social refusal amongst artists—e.g. the refusal to participate in all aspects of the art world, except which were deemed productive—was undergirded by a political sentiment that the art world was inherently toxic, and that the bulk of its energy was meant to be avoided at all costs. In as much, certain social spaces, museum relationships, and galleries became safe spaces to work. This "refusal style" in New York, developed concurrently with Krebber's position in Cologne, is characterized by two aspects: one a critical rejection, and the other an overt sense of staging within and a "productive" context. How did this double aspect of refusal play out in Kaspar's work?

D: I think it has all do to with the downfall of subculture; Michael Bracewell wrote a lot about it in *When Surface Was Depth: Death by Cappuccino and Other Reflections on Music and Culture in the 1990s* (2002). It discusses how US-based chains like Starbucks fundamentally changed consumer approaches, work spaces, and much more.

LD: In 2010, Tobias, Inzule, and Axel Wider curated a show entitled *In the Middle of Affairs*, which included artists from multiple generations, such as John Knight, Philippe Thomas, and Hans Christian Lotz, as well as key references to the critic and curator Ghislain Mollet-Viéville. From the outside, the show looks as though it was attempting to open up a new set of terms to be examined with critical thought, notably a continued focus on social space—highlighting lifestyle and also an interest in boundary crossing within culture, for example, transpositions between art and fashion. What were the goals of this project?





D: There was not a goal—the exhibition was interested in analyzing aesthetics of distribution by looking at an older institutional critique generation, and how the younger artists were possibly interested in their approaches.

LD: In the work *Bodies in the Backdrop*, conceived for a solo exhibition in 2012 at Halle für Kunst and later shown in the *Frozen Lakes* exhibition at Artist's Space, there is a “voice” in the works made manifest through the phrasing in the text below the images. The voice speaks of noticeably private aspects of the art process, such as the party for the artist or other less “public” moments in the process of showing. Is the private, or semi-private, sphere of relations within the field of art significant for you to discuss in the public, or semi-public, space of a gallery or not-for-profit space?

D: I am interested in how work and private life are not separable. In the work *Bodies in the Backdrop*, I used text fragments from Peggy Guggenheim's autobiography. It is a total cliché of a book, completely worn out, in a way that using text fragments from this book was an attempt to squeeze out the last essence of something. In Peggy's case, the book is pure gossip—discussing how love and friendship shaped her collection. At the time, I was living in Berlin and the social arena was a mess—a good one. Focusing on gossip instead of academic texts, making a work

look like hard-core conceptual art, combining text and photo like Louise Lawler, and instead of supporting, questioning one another.

CM: Is lifestyle a proposition in Kaspar's work?

D: You know, Alex Gartenfeld told me once that one can tell by communicating with Tobias that he grew up without the Internet—that email and social media started when he was a teenager, or even later. I guess we are the generation who knew the “before,” just not well enough to tell the difference from how it is today. On the other hand, all European aristocrats were at all times perfectly informed about one another. The only thing that had changed was the pace. The first Silberkuppe show was entitled *Living Well is the Best Revenge* (2010), a Gerald Murphy quote. So yes, life plays a matter and definitely influences style too.

CM: Whose voice speaks in the art of Tobias Kaspar?

D: One of many, or “Einer unter Euch,” to quote Kippenberger. Granted, Tobias has nothing to do with Kippenberger because of his disgraces, such masculinity and drinking behavior, no matter how much performed it was or is.

CM: Who does his work speak to?

D: USP? Universal Selling Point? If I only knew, then I could ask “them” directly. What I have noted is that the ones who *buy* his work, and others who seem to be deeply involved and touched by it, are not necessarily the same.

CM: Does Tobias collaborate? Does he not collaborate?

D: All of his work is somehow driven by collaborative forces—it has a lot to do with the desire of being together, with choreographing a moment of people coming together. It has to do with exchange in various forms, and he tries to keep that somehow open, although at the end of the day it is Tobias Kaspar going out there claiming and signing things. Although he, Tobi, as a person has nothing to do with this “Tobias Kaspar” anymore.

CM: Do you think Tobias is a precarious worker?

D: If we look at the art fair and auction housed-based art world, yes. If we look at the world-at-large, he is uber-privileged.

CM: Does Tobias like to hear gossip?

D: Do you? I assume everyone does. I find it interesting, in contrast to “official” communication which is so controlled and regulated. Gossip is somehow a gray space where right and wrong, truth and fiction, are blurred. Lately those categories have gotten a bit abused by right wing politics. I vote left. I do not believe in the bullshit of freedom of choice and freedom to vote. Can you believe we live in a world where individual states—or even worse, religions—tell people how to live together, to marry? The state offers a service to put people together. Soon, we may look at this as disgusted as some cultures look at arranged marriages. Why should the state dictate what a family is? We live in an insanely constructed and over regulated society which such extreme prejudgments.

CM: Do you think Tobias sees politics in different mediums or modes of communication?

D: I think every media requires a different communication/distribution channel, although Tobias Kaspar as a brand is mainly known in the arts. The jeans have slowly found their way into concept stores, and *PROVENCE* lives a life of its own.

CM: What is the role of performance in *The Street*?

D: *The Street* (2016) was a Truman show in arts. Everything was fiction, and this fiction slowly, over the course of twenty-four hours, became reality—so much so that a guest (one of the producers) vomited at the gallery opening dinner and people urinated behind houses that were actually just facades held by scaffolding. Earlier, people sat on the street, read newspaper in the cafe, someone made a flea-market—people treated this highly fictitious setup in a cinema studio street as a reality. Of course, certain characters, such as a group of teenagers hanging in front of brownstone, or a shop owner, or an angry person were cast to perform roles; but they were hard to expose, and instead carried the function of catalyzers or animators to stimulate the scenario.

CM: What is the role of documentation in *The Street*?

D: Since I wanted the street “to be” and not feel like a production place—contrasting with how studios are used to make films—I exhibited there and developed an ephemeral scenario which one could only experience in the here and now. During the set-up, the Italian television network RAI came to film *The Street*, but they were not allowed once guests arrived. I only have the material people posted on Instagram and by one single photographer, which we hired to photograph.

CM: How do the references to cinema in the Kunsthalle Bern show relate to the project as a whole?

D: You probably would not believe it, but I grew up without TV, as a kid I had only seen one movie, *The Lion King*. Growing up in a post-hippy, anthroposophical, Beuys-influenced environment, where mass media

did not exist for me until the age of fifteen, when I moved to Canada on an exchange program. When I was a teenager, I shopped in second hand and charity stores, and just then in the mid 90s, H&M and McDonalds arrived. In my whole life, I had never entered one. So, at age fifteen, I watched Hollywood films, and then when back in Copenhagen, moved out at the age of sixteen and in with Manuel Scheiwiller (Young Boy Dancing Group) into our first own apartment. After graduating from high school at age eighteen, I moved to Germany to study art and was near to the film classes of Marie Jose Burki, but also ‘real’ cinema people, such as Wim Wenders who also taught there.

How people deal with mainstream culture has obviously interested Tobias, as it is something he did not naturally grow up with but learned in retrospect as a teenager. In Bern, we used a discarded theater stage design from a local hobby group rendition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* a year before, and at Lars Friedrich we featured a theater prop car from *Bonnie and Clyde* in the exhibition. Both films are pre-1968—super heteronormative, but nevertheless struggle with society's conformism.

To work with cinema or theater props is, for reasons of uncanniness, interesting—especially when built by hobbyists. Props are not sculptures; they are made to be filmed or photographed or viewed on a stage from a distance. You look at them through a filter (camera, distance) in opposition to sculpture which need to intrigue when standing in front of them.

CM: Is Tobias Kaspar a fictional character?

D: As much as we all are.

Tobias Kaspar, (b. 1984) lives and works in Riga and Zurich. Since 2012 the artist has his own namesake jeans line and is the co-founder of *PROVENCE*—which opened in 2009 in Basel, as an exhibition with John Knight and a survey on Ghislain-Mollet Viéville's practice in advertising. In 2013 Kaspar designed the costumes for Adam Linder's ballet *The Parade*, which premiered at the HAU Theatre in Berlin. In 2015 Tobias Kaspar opened the pop-up store Toby's Tristram Shandy Shop within Berlin's Udolpho and presented the installation and performance NY 1995 at ART Basel. In 2016 Kaspar staged *The Street* inside the Cinecittà Film Studios Rome, using an outdoor studio street as the setting for a theme park.

Kaspar's work has been shown in the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2016), Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2015), Solo Shows, São Paulo (2015), CAFAM Biennale, Beijing (2014), Kunsthalle Wien (2014), Kunsthalle St. Gallen (2014), Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2013), Artists Space, New York (2013), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012), Kunsthalle Zürich (2011), Kunsthalle Basel (2011), Museum Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2011), Kunsthau Bregenz (2011), Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2010).

TITLE PAGE:
The Street, Cinecittà Film Studios, Rome, March 11, 2016. Photographer: Elzbieta Bialkowska, OKNO Studio. Courtesy Tobias Kaspar, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, and Cinecittà.

PAGE 165:
Independence, Kunsthalle Bern, 2018. Photographer: Gunnar Meier. Courtesy Tobias Kaspar and Kunsthalle Bern

PAGE 166–167:
The Street, Cinecittà Film Studios, Rome, March 11, 2016. Photographer: Elzbieta Bialkowska, OKNO Studio. Courtesy Tobias Kaspar, Istituto Svizzero di Roma, and Cinecittà.

PAGE 169:
Why Love Hurts, Lars Friedrich, 2019. Photographer: Timo Ohler. Courtesy Tobias Kaspar and Lars Friedrich, Berlin.

OPPOSITE:
Bodies in the Backdrop installed within *Frozen Lakes*, a group exhibition at Artists Space, New York, 2013. Photographer: Daniel Pérez. Courtesy Tobias Kaspar and Artists Space.

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