

ARTPULSE

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Experiencing Art and Beauty

Joan Jonas: Venice

Edgar Heap of Birds:
Don't Believe Miss Liberty

Alfredo Jaar's Epic Poem

Ronald Ophuis
on History Painting

Oscar Santillan:
Breaking the Paradigm
of the Latin American Artist

Donald Kuspit
on Roberto Fabelo

Recalling Baudrillard: Interview with
Sylvère Lotringer



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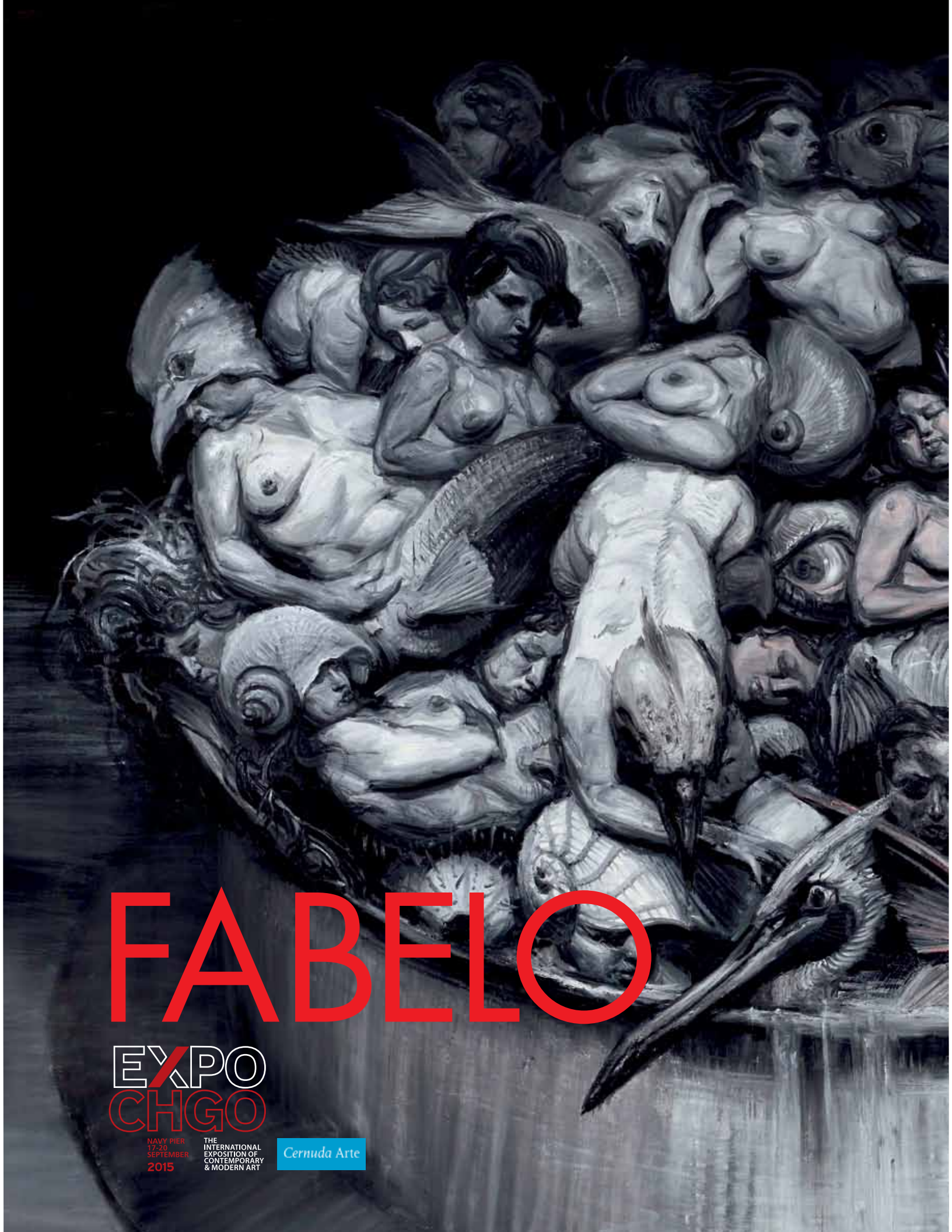
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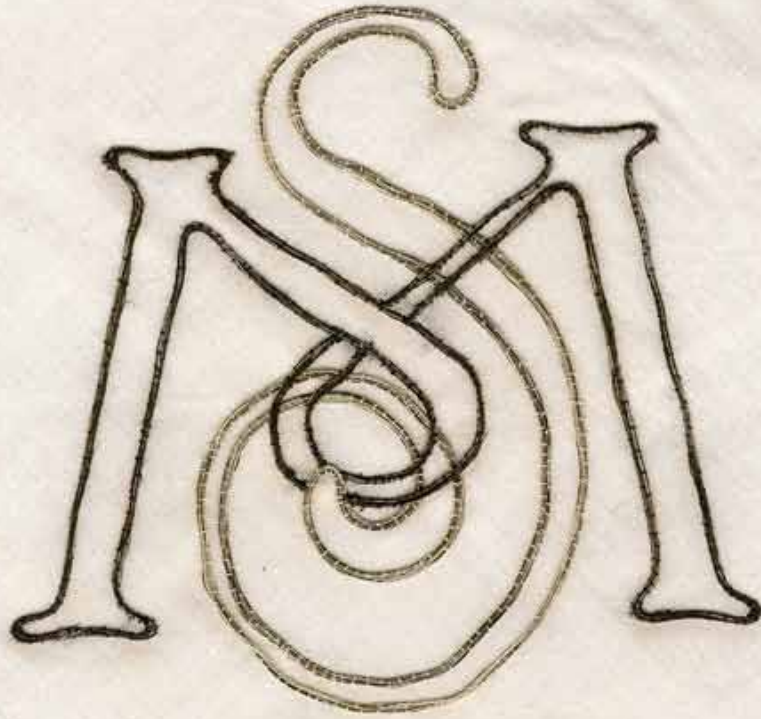
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Eyes Wide Open

As a follow-up to our last issue, we have again focused on the postmodern social theorist, the late Jean Baudrillard. No one has more colorfully voiced our apparent postmodern trajectory into suicide by simulacra—our dehumanizing descent into the hyperreal—than Baudrillard. For anyone unfamiliar with his ivory-towered brimstones, his text *Simulacra and Simulation* is a must first-read.

We welcome Sylvère Lotringer into this issue, the renowned philosopher and interpreter of Baudrillard's theories. Jason Hoelscher interviews Lotringer and dutiful whispers of Baudrillard underpin the conversation. Lotringer has life-affirming ideas about "resistance" and "doing philosophy playfully." This got me researching Baudrillard for humor. I am ashamed to say that I missed the levity before. Here, for example, is a Baudrillard gem from the conclusion of his 1987 lecture at the Whitney Museum (and published in Lotringer's *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*). I am now seeing the twinkle in Baudrillard's eye as I read him:

"I will change perspective to end on a note of hope. I placed this analysis under the sign, 'after the orgy'—what do we do after the orgy of modernity? Is simulation all we have left? With the melancholy nuance of the idea of a 'vanishing point' and the 'degree Xerox of culture?' I forgot to say that this expression—'after the orgy'—comes from a story full of hope: It is the story of a man who whispers into the ear of a woman during an orgy, 'What are you doing after the orgy?' There is always the hope of a new seduction."

As I edited another piece in this issue, Scott Thorp's interview with artist Edgar Heap of Birds, I was in the midst of escaping into the U.S. wilds with my wife and young daughters. We had seen Mount Rushmore, and later that same day we stood at the mass grave at the 1889 Massacre at Wounded Knee, the site where Lakota men, but mostly women and children, were murdered by the U.S. Cavalry—by some estimates, 300 Lakota casualties. Imagine the grand pageantry of Rushmore and then imagine the opposite, the lowly Wounded Knee Memorial. And visitors? Mostly tumbleweeds. At the entrance we walked under a dirty white arch on which a Lakota sympathizer had written U.S. history with a marker—facts most of which had been conveniently absent from my history books growing up in Minnesota. Those cleansed texts now make me remember Baudrillard's critique: "all of America is Disney Land." One line on the arch read: "1862, PRESIDENT LINCOLN SIGNS THE DEATH SENTENCES OF 38 DAKOTA SIOUX."

As Thorp states in his intro, "Even the Great Emancipator isn't clean. His order to execute Dakota Indians in Minnesota resulted in the largest mass hanging in our country's history." And Edgar Heap of Birds, Cheyenne by birth, discusses his work that takes aim here as he also has words about President Obama's sanctioning of the code name "Geronimo" for Osama bin Laden. What blunders we make when history "is recounted along vertical lines," as Michele Robecchi writes in his piece *Let's Twist Again*. Robecchi reminds us to "walk around our times with eyes wide open."

And that is the stance of Heap of Birds and other artists included in this issue. For example, on the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, Briana Gervat interviews Alfredo Jaar and in doing so uncovers new nuances concerning Jaar's Rwanda projects. Then, Paco Barragán interviews the history painter Ronald Ophuis. If you do not think that grand narrative painting of violence in the tradition of Géricault is relevant today, a counterargument awaits you in this piece. Barragán's second piece in the issue is a nuanced argument regarding forms of censorship.

Robin van den Akker, the go-to scholar on metamodernism, interviews Oscar Santillan just after the artist "had stolen" the tip of the highest mountain in England to place on a pedestal in his latest exhibition. There has been a public outcry calling on the artist to return the one-inch stone to the mountain top that makes me think of the outcry about "giving back" in the aftermath of British colonialism.

Anne Swartz gives performance artist Joan Jonas her due in an essay that honors the artist for being chosen to represent the U.S. in this year's Venice Biennale. And Donald Kuspit, always a treat, and no stranger to the art-writing pantheon, gives Cuban artist Roberto Fabelo praise. Fabelo paints the human soul as Goya did in the darkest times. But unlike Goya, the figures in the paint of Fabelo are, as Kuspit writes, "not driven mad by social forces beyond their control, but are uncontrollably mad by nature."

John Valentine's piece delves into a more subtle kind of darkness called biomechanical reductionism. Valentine states, "It falsely claims that art and beauty experiences are really nothing more than brain experiences as causally governed by DNA, protein robots and various locations of brain geography and the action of neurotransmitters." Valentine argues that experience is more than this. Perhaps whatever that "more" is, it will redeem us, even lead us into a Baudrillardian "hope of a new seduction" that affirms what is fully human.

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Paco Barragán is the visual arts curator of Centro Cultural Matucana 100 in Santiago, Chile. He recently curated "Intimate Strangers: Politics as Celebrity, Celebrity as Politics" and "Alfredo Jaar: May 1, 2011" (Matucana 100, 2015), "Guided Tour: Artist, Museum, Spectator" (MUSAC, Leon, Spain, 2015), and "Erwin Olaf: The Empire of Illusion" (MACRO, Rosario, Argentina, 2015). He is author of *The Art to Come* (Subastas, 2002) and *The Art Fair Age* (CHARTA, 2008).



John Valentine is a professor of philosophy and has taught at the Savannah College of Art and Design since 1990. His publication credits include the textbook *Beginning Aesthetics* (McGraw-Hill, 2007), as well as articles in the *Florida Philosophical Review*, the *Southwest Philosophy Review*, the *Journal of Philosophical Research*, the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* and *The Philosopher*, as well as poetry published in various journals, including *The Sewanee Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly* and the *Southern Poetry Review*, among others, as well as six chapbooks of poetry.



Anne Swartz is a professor of art history at the Savannah College of Art and Design. She has focused her lectures, writings and curatorial projects on feminist artists, critical theory and new media/new genre. She's currently co-editing *The Question of the Girl* with Jillian St. Jacques and completing *Female Sexualities in Contemporary Art* and *The History of New Media/New Genre: From John Cage to Now*.



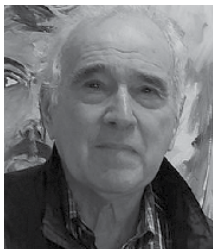
Jason Hoelscher is a painter, writer and educator based in Savannah, Georgia. He has exhibited his work in New York, Paris, Berlin, Hong Kong, Stockholm and elsewhere. He has contributed to such publications as *ARTPULSE*, *Evental Aesthetics*, *Artcore Journal* and various anthologies and conferences. Hoelscher received his MFA in painting from the Pratt Institute and is completing a Ph.D. in aesthetics and art theory at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.



Scott Thorp is an artist and chair of the department of art at Georgia Regents University. Specializing in creativity, his book, *A Curious Path: Creativity in an Age of Abundance*, was published late in 2014. His essay "You've Got Talent" is forthcoming in the anthology *The ART of Critique/Re-imagining Professional Art Criticism and the Art School Critique*.



Briana Gervat received her M.A. in art history at the Savannah College of Art and Design in March 2014. After graduating, she travelled to Rwanda for two months to continue her research on the Rwandan Genocide and the art of East Africa. She now lives in New York City, where she is writing about life in Rwanda, 20 years later.



Donald Kuspit is an art critic and professor of art history and philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He is a contributing editor to *Artforum*, *Sculpture* and *New Art Examiner* magazines, as well as the editor of *Art Criticism* and a series on American art and art criticism for Cambridge University Press. Kuspit is the author of more than 20 books, including *Redeeming Art: Critical Reveries* (Allworth Press, 2000) and *Idiosyncratic Identities: Artists at the End of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).



Robin van den Akker is a cultural philosopher working at Erasmus University College Rotterdam and is co-coordinator of the Centre for Art and Philosophy there. He has written about contemporary aesthetics and culture and the digitization of everyday life for, among others, the *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, *Frieze* and *Monu*, and acted as advisor for various art exhibitions and cultural events about metamodernism. With Timotheus Vermeulen, he is working on two books on metamodernism and organized the symposium *Metamodernism Marathon* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014).



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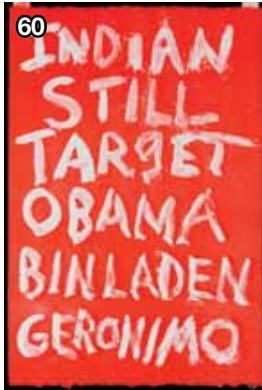
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Front Cover:

Roberto Fabelo, 42, 2006, oil on canvas, 64 1/2" x 48." Courtesy of the artist
www.fabelostudio.com.

Let's Twist Again

BY MICHELE ROBECCHI



One of the acknowledged limits of history, and as such the history of art, is that things are usually recounted along vertical lines. Whilst there is an undisputable logic in the method—evolutions and developments are much easier to read in this way—one of the downsides is that it tends to deny the possibility of studying a specific age on an extensive basis. What was happening in New York parallel to Pop Art in the 1960s? Or in Turin at the beginning of the 1970s next to Arte Povera? Many wouldn't know how to answer these questions, with the consequence that a determinate period of time ends up being reductively defined by the most influential movement of the day. Say, for example, "painting" and "Leipzig" in the same sentence, and the Neue Leipziger Schule that emerged in the post-Berlin Wall days will automatically spring to mind. Similarly, put "London" and "1990s" together and "YBA" will naturally follow.

The suffocating legacy resulting from the equation "performance" plus "Vienna" equals Actionism is the subtext of *Let's Twist Again: Performance in Vienna from 1960 until Today*, a publication edited by Carola Dertnig and Stefanie Seibold in 2002. Written in response to what in their eyes was an unforgivable overlook by historians of what has been going on in the Austrian capital on the front of performance art since the late 1960s, Dertnig's and Seibold's book takes the stance that the Viennese sociopolitical climate in the second half of the 20th century simply cannot be confined to the disruptive actions of Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch and company.

Other important battles like gender equality and sexual equality were taking place, and the artists who perpetuated them (mostly women) deserve to be remembered and recognized for their contribution, no matter if they are still active on the scene or not. This is a crucial point, as performance art, in contrast with other creative expressions, is renewed for being time-sensitive, independent from designated channels, and more prone to accepting outsiders within its ranks. Performance can germinate in galleries and art spaces, but also in clubs, fashion shows, theaters and, most poignantly, in the street, entertaining a particularly fluid dialogue with other disciplines and reaching out to a broader audience. The medium can actually be so spontaneous that it is not rare to hear

performance artists declaring that they had no idea that what they were doing was performance until someone with a more strategic or contextualizing mind came along to tell them so.

The other issue, of course, is that performance art is extremely difficult to document. Films and photographs, when they exist at all, rarely do it justice, and this is where *Let's Twist Again* provides a unique service, as a great deal of the materials collected in the book (most of them black-and-white prints from the pre-digital era) are rare and dangerously exposed to oblivion. Amongst the many gems, just to name a few, are Erika Mis' early works. One of Valie Export's close collaborators (she was involved with the iconic *Tap and Touch Cinema* in the late 1960s), Mis' debut in Vienna in 1972 was *Selbst ist Die Frau (Do It Yourself Woman)*, a performance in which she had herself carted down Mariahilfer Straße locked in a cage—arguably the strongest viewpoint on the debate over the legality of abortion that was dominating Austrian politics in those days. Or Susanne Widl, who decided to follow the dress code dictated by the Vienna Opera House in the 1980s by showing up to a ball in a tailcoat, generating some confusion when the German Secretary for Foreign Affairs mistook her for a man. And then there were mystical figures like Gerhard "Struppi" Stecharnig, the sexually ambiguous artist whose stunning performances and clothing proved to be too ahead of their time even for the Viennese underground scene, and who mysteriously vanished in the mid-1980s without leaving a trace—and to this day his whereabouts are unknown. Or, more recently, Elke Krystufek and Barbara Kraus' famous identity-based art, or Ursula Mayer's 2001 fire-spitting performance on top of the very same anti-aircraft tower where Lawrence Weiner installed his *Smashed to Pieces (In the Still of the Night)* a decade earlier, instigating a metaphor within the metaphor.

The minor presence of women in history is often justified as being a reflection of their actual role in society. And while this was true for an unfortunate long period of time, it cannot certainly be right for the European post-feminism society of the 1970s and the 1980s. *Let's Twist Again* is a tribute to all the artists who played their significantly big part far from the official spotlight, as well as a reminder to walk around our times with eyes wide open. ■

Intimate Strangers: Politics as Celebrity, Celebrity as Politics

July 24 - September 29

Artists: Shepard Fairey, Andy Warhol, Arturo Duclos, Kepa Garraza, Marina Abramovic, Nicola Verlato, Mariana Najmanovich, Noah Becker, Ronald Ophuis, Federico Solmi, Prem Sarjo, Susan Siltan, Santiago Sierra / Jorge Galindo, Muñoz de Marco, Judas Arrieta, Jim Fitzpatrick, Enrique Marty, Marc Bijl, Antonio Cortés Rolón, Miguel Aguirre, Ai Wei Wei, Ismael Frigerio, Sami Lukkarinen, German Tagle, Marta Minujín, Alexis Esquivel, Flavia Contreras, Eugenio Merino, Walter Bortolossi, Patricio Rueda, Martín Sastre, Josie McCoy, Alfonso Fernández, Melvin Martínez, Ramón Tormes, Carlos T-Mori, Cristián Zabalaga

Curator: Paco Barragán

Alfredo Jaar: May 1, 2011

July 24 - September 29

Curator: Paco Barragán

Political Dali:

Communism, Falangism, and Francoism
in Salvador Dali's Life

July 10 - September 29

Curator: Paco Barragán

July, 24 - September 29, 2015

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The Artist as Activist

July 24 - August 22

Artists: Christian Jankowski, Cecilia Vicuña,
Cristina Lucas, Gianfranco Foschino

Curator: Paco Barragán

Federico Solmi:

A Song of Celebrities,
Politicians, and Dictators

August 25 - Septiembre 23

Curator: Paco Barragán

Antonio Cortés Rolón:

An Actor at the White House

July 24 - September 29

Curator: Paco Barragán

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More info and images: www.m100.cl

The Curator as Censor (On Censorship and Curating)

BY PACO BARRAGÁN



The suppression of speech or other written information goes back a long way. Just remember how Socrates in 399 B.C. was put to death via the forced ingestion of hemlock because he challenged the Greek state's attempt to censor his philosophical ideas.

From time to time we are confronted with the control or suppression of certain exhibitions, but usually censorship is directed at a particular work of art within the context of an exhibition that is considered morally, religiously, ethnically or politically offensive or obscene. Some recent examples include at the 2012 ARCO art fair in Madrid by Spanish artist Eugenio Merino, whose sculpture *Always Franco* featured former dictator Francisco Franco hibernating in a Coca Cola refrigerator, which led to attacks on Merino by the Franco Foundation; in December 2012, a work by Kara Walker that showed a slave performing oral sex was covered after employees of the Newark Library said they did not like the image; and finally, the last-minute cancellation of the Hermann Nitsch show at Museo Jumex in Mexico City in March because the foundation, according to former director Patrick Charpenel, was concerned about the “political and social times Mexico is going through.”

Now the question we can ask ourselves is whether in the art world censorship is used as a recurring and deliberate instrument.

At first glance I would even argue that there is too little censorship, as hundreds of art exhibitions are opening worldwide and we hardly hear of the problematic effects of “filtering.” And this is really astonishing. Maybe the explanation lies in the fact that, unlike cinema, advertising and pop music, the art world is just too small and too unimportant to construct models of actions that affect society profoundly.

Is there hardly any censorship in the art world? What has the curator to do with all this?

ANTE/SOFT NOT INTER/HARD CENSORSHIP

The curator “manufactures the consent,” as Walter Lippman would have put it, between the artist and his artwork, the museum and the spectator. All filtering is intercepted at its source, *id est*, the artist and the curator discuss and negotiate what's possible and what's not according to the agenda of the art institution, its program, the patrons—be it public, private or corporate—and the audience. In sum, any dissent that might disturb the reputation of the institution will be eliminated by the curator *ante*-exhibit.

Thus the curator exercises indirect, or *soft* censorship, which forms a barrier between the artist and the public that rarely or never reaches the public sphere. After all, an exhibition only becomes a hard fact when it gets displayed to the audience. Before that it only exists as a mere possibility. Both the artist and curator

engage in a dialogue of censorship of their own artistic works and curatorial projects in an act of self-censorship in which the conflicting rights of the artist and institution are being balanced to determine what can and cannot be censored.

And this is the reason why we never hear much about censorship, as the curator who does his job “properly” prevents art works that are considered objectionable from ever reaching public exposure.

Censorship really becomes controversial when it's carried out *inter*-exhibit: that is, once the exhibition has opened or is about to open. This is what we could frame as direct or *hard* censorship: it means that one of the mediators—be it the curator or (artistic) director—in the exhibition chain is not willing to support the project any longer because of (the fear of) objections by patrons or the audience.

The Hermann Nitsch show at Jumex Museum is not the only clear example of this, but so is what happened in Spain at Barcelona's MACBA. On March 18, director Bartomeu Mari censored a work by Austrian artist Ines Doujak, *Not Dressed for Conquering*, part of the larger group show “The Beast and the Sovereign,” ridiculing the King of Spain because it was deemed to be pornographic. It led to the cancellation of the exhibition a day before its opening. Then, national and international pressure convinced the director to reconsider his decision and open the show four days later, including with the sculpture by Doujak.

Bartomeu Mari claimed he never got to see the full list of works of the exhibition. If he had gone through the list he could have negotiated with the curators to identify the works to be exhibited according to the public interests of MACBA. And, if the curatorial team denied the withdrawing of any of the works from the exhibition, then either he or the curators could have decided not to carry out the project. As curators, we deal with this kind of censorship on a daily basis, so it is nothing new.

Hence, the kind of curatorial censorship that rules the art world is always “ante” and never “inter.” And even if it's romantically hard to accept, artists and curators are subject to different levels of self-censorship, and each one has to decide where to draw the line of what's acceptable and what's not in this ‘liquid’ negotiation.

As of today, there are no laws against self-censorship. ■



Eugenio Merino, *Always Franco*, 2012. sculpture and fridge, 78.7" x 23.6" x 23.6." Courtesy of Unix Gallery, New York.

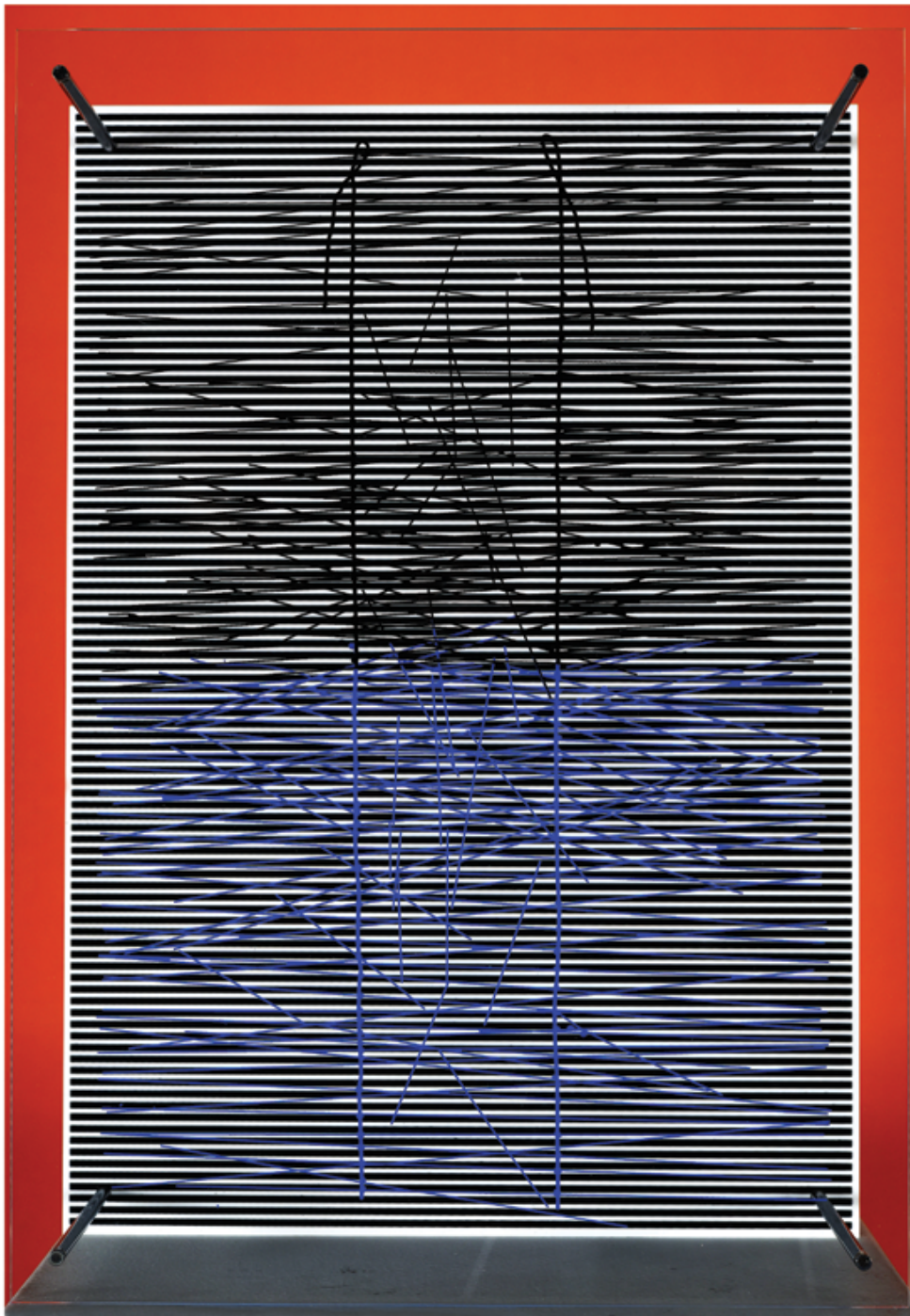
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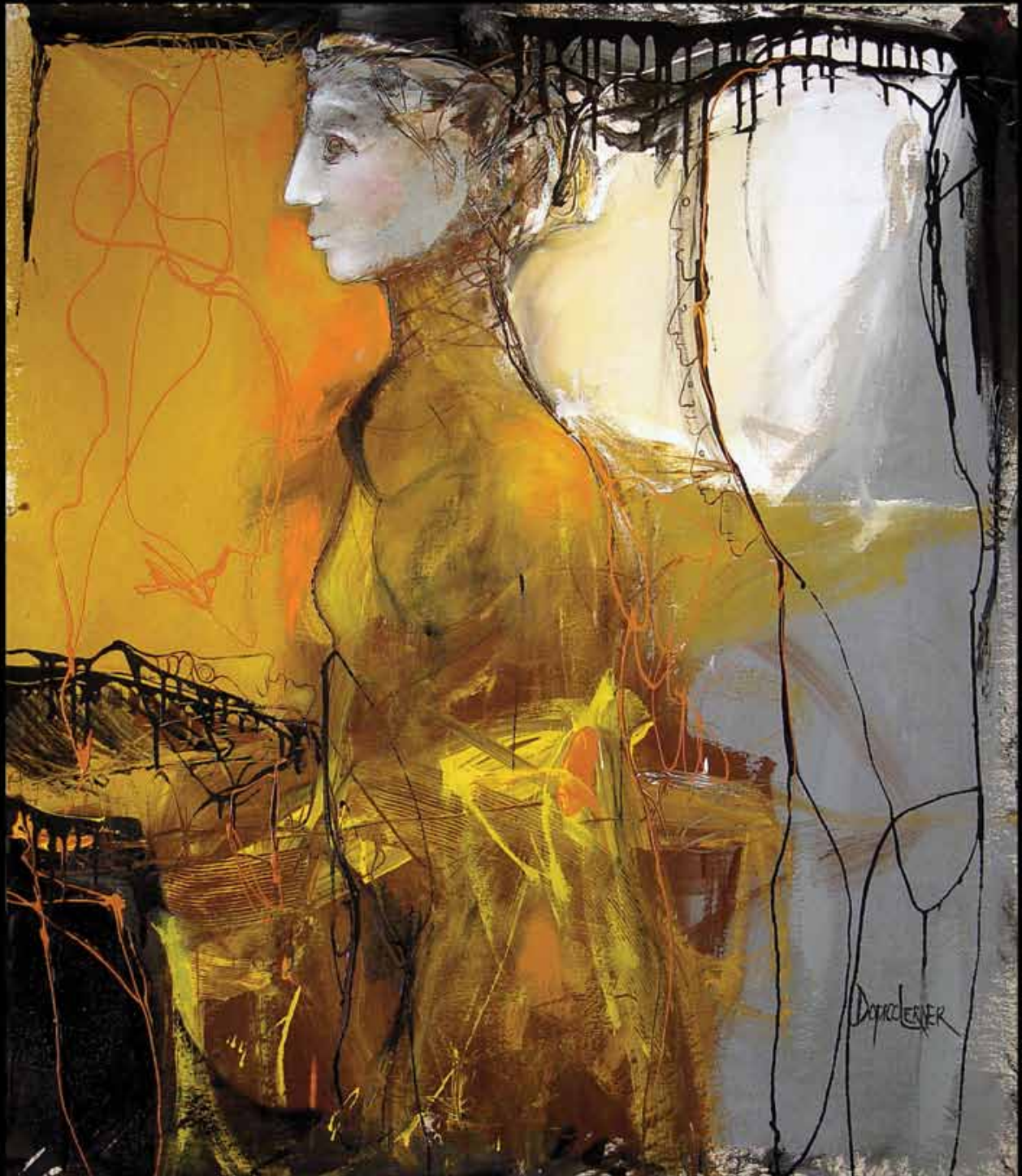
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THE NETS WITH WHICH WE TRY TO CAPTURE ART AND BEAUTY

BY JOHN VALENTINE

Let me begin by confessing considerable agnosticism about the essence and/or definition of art and beauty. I shall not attempt to deal with that issue in this essay. Rather, I want to look at some of the nets or narrative stories about art and beauty experiences that some scientists and some defenders of Romanticism employ in the culture war of scientism vs. non-scientism.

In his book *The Science Delusion*, Curtis White has laid out the general landscape of this conflict. While not opposed to science per se, White argues that bio-mechanical reductionism in many scientific quarters has become a kind of dogmatic model or ideology that he labels scientism. The advocates of scientism, he says, have gained a widespread voice, if not a monopoly, in the way that we look at physical phenomena and human nature, as well as how we understand art and beauty experiences. The model is found in the writings of the so-called New Atheists, including Richard Dawkins, the late Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and others. Briefly, the model articulates the view that the universe is a thoroughly physical phenomenon governed by the laws of physics and that humans (specifically, human brains) are bio-mechanical computers utterly reducible to the workings of neurons, DNA, and a variety of neurotransmitters. White also claims that this relentless empiricism involves a dim view of statements about art and beauty experiences, either regarding them as completely emotive utterances or irrelevant narratives that have been superseded by the inevitable march of scientific methodology, a view not unlike that held by the Logical Positivists who attempted to reform philosophy in the 1930s by ‘disabusing’ it of its untestable propositions.

Advocates of non-scientism (including White himself) maintain that physical or bio-mechanical reductionism has serious conceptual problems: it is based on over-extended and unprovable metaphors—for example that the brain is like a physical computer and conscious experience is completely reducible to the accumulated effects observable on MRIs; it thereby confuses the correlate of consciousness with consciousness itself; and it falsely claims that art and beauty experiences are really nothing more than brain experiences as causally governed by DNA, protein robots, and various locations of brain geography and the action of neurotransmitters. White believes there are other problems connected with scientism as well, but I want to focus especially on the latter claim about the reducibility of art and beauty experiences to neurophysiology.

White notes the irony of how some scientists speak of the ‘wondrous beauty’ of the physical order of the universe and also of the human brain as a product of materialistic evolution. Such effusive language is not uncommon and yet, says White, how can scientists give a rational, self-consistent account of their use of this language?

Many of the New Atheists believe that art is functionally dead or irrelevant to the question of true reality and that any kind of beauty experience—in particular the qualia or felt-quality of said experience—is reducible to the ‘jiggling of atoms’ and ‘squirting’ of brain chemicals. But such an understanding of the beauty experience in effect eliminates it as culturally or symbolically meaningful. Thus, according to White, the purveyors of scientism are at best self-referentially inconsistent in their language, or at worst attempting to mislead us by means of a monolithic, materialistic worldview that ultimately cannot be proven.

By contrast, those in the tradition of Romanticism hold that the inner life of consciousness is autonomous and irreducible to mere brain states, and that narratives about art and beauty experiences are central to the human search for meaning. White finds his inspiration at this point in 19th Century German idealism, especially the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling. In *The System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling attempted to synthesize empiricism’s focus on matter with idealism’s focus on consciousness and the observer self. His arguments, as summarized by White, are complex and I have no desire to oversimplify them, but essentially he suggested that we can only speak meaningfully of experiencing sensations caused by the physical world if there is a perceiving self. The originary form of this perceiving self Schelling called the Absolute Self, a sort of common mind shared by all humans which works through various stages or ‘moments’ of development leading from universal consciousness to individuated human consciousness and the awareness of the world of sensations and things to the highest stage in which the ‘I am’ of the self and the ‘It is’ of the world become synthesized and reciprocally conditioned by one another.

In terms of his attitude about art and beauty experiences, Schelling set the stage for the later Romantics with his belief that such experiences express the synthesis of self and world in the most symbolic and culturally significant ways, especially including music, literature, poetry, and visual art. Thus, for him, art and beauty experiences are vital and irreducible aspects of human being-in-the-world and our quest for significant meaning in existence. Schelling’s views are therefore the perfect contra pose to the rampant scientism that White skillfully identifies and critiques.

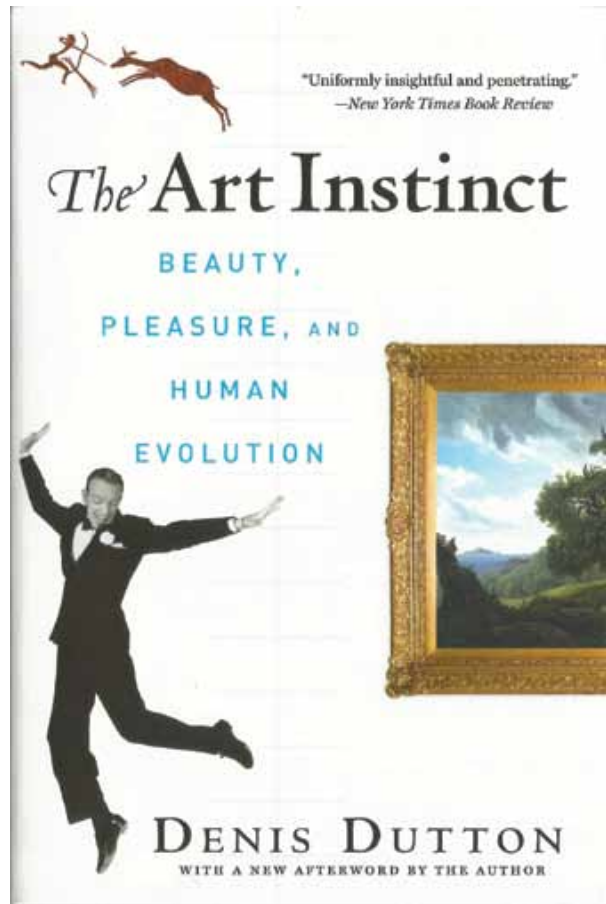
What, then, are we to make of this cultural agon of scientism vs. non-scientism? Again, without wishing to oversimplify such a complicated debate, I would suggest that there are conceptual difficulties on both sides that have not been resolved as yet. The following are some preliminary and tentative thoughts.

First, it is very unclear that bio-mechanical reductionism has offered us anything close to an adequate definition or understanding

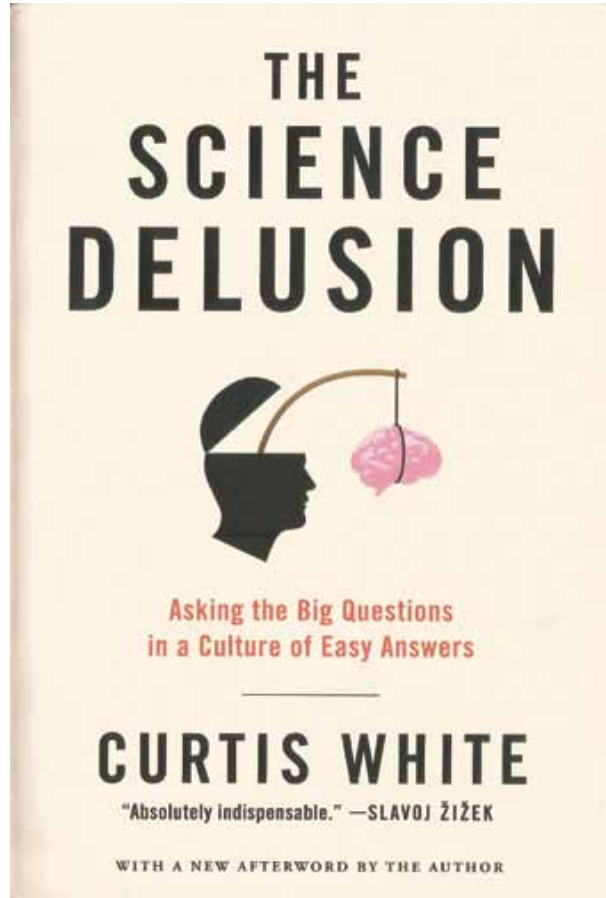
of matter as such. It is all well and good to assert (usually dogmatically) that the human brain is nothing more or less than the product of material evolution and that it constitutes a collection of bio-chemicals. But what *is* matter? The mechanistic view as offered by most contemporary neuroscientists and the New Atheists as well is likely to be revealed as rather primitive or plainly false in the wake of future work in quantum physics. Actually, this has been apparent for some time now inasmuch as quantum phenomena are anything but mechanistic. But I have in mind here the current plethora of theories surrounding the adequacy of the Standard Model of particle physics, the discovery of new particles by accelerators such as the Large Hadron Collider, and the current disagreements over a mathematically viable and empirically verifiable unified field theory. It seems safe to say that we are only beginning to understand what matter is. Many scientists now believe that discussions of matter at the quantum level must involve discussions of the 'observer effect' and the role of some kind of consciousness in establishing what matter is in its most fundamental form. New paradigms await, undoubtedly ones that will not be reductive or eliminative about the qualia of conscious experiences in general and those of art and beauty in particular.

Additionally, the defenders of scientism and its eliminative attack on art and beauty experiences might do well to consider the late Denis Dutton's book *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution*. There are, of course, conceptual problems connected with evolutionary aesthetics—for example, the lack of relevant fossil records—but Dutton's book is a sustained and fascinating attempt to show how something like an art instinct may have arisen out of the thousands of developmental generations of the Pleistocene Period. Dutton's arguments are subtle and non-reductionistic. Through myriad examples, he suggests that the human desire to make and appreciate art and beauty is not merely conditioned by culture but also has deep evolutionary roots in natural and sexual selection. For instance, Dutton argues that proto-narrative skills during the Pleistocene Period that had survival value in terms of hunting, group solidarity, and sexual selection also gradually established a sort of early predisposition for the making of verbal forms of art, such as story-telling. Dutton thus corrects an important omission in scientism's dismissive attitude toward art and beauty experiences; namely, the failure to explore a holistic, non-mechanistic account of these experiences within the parameters of evolutionary theory itself.

As White indicates, there are other conceptual and cultural problems with scientism, but I want to turn the focus for a moment to Romanticism. In many historical manifestations (such as that found in Schelling), the question of the nature of consciousness is looming and unresolved. What *is* consciousness? What is Schelling's Absolute Self? And is it true to say that consciousness is *sui generis* and irreducible? Just as we do not yet deeply know the nature of matter, we may say the same about consciousness, and especially the qualia of art and beauty experiences. Certainly, a great virtue of the Romantics is that they do not wish to ignore the lived aspect of human experience, but the defenders of non-scientism sometimes show a dogmatic aspect on *their* side of the culture war. That is, they can be dismissive of any scientific attempt to address the nature and origin of conscious experiences. This is surely a closed-minded mistake. Useful scientific research programs do not have to be bio-mechanically reductionistic.



The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution, by Denis Dutton. Edited by Bloomsbury Press, 2009.



The Science Delusion: Asking the Big Questions in a Culture of Easy Answers, by Curtis White. Edited by Melville House, 2014.



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, circa 1665, oil on canvas, 18.3" x 15.7." Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis. Photo: www.geheugenvannederland.nl. Courtesy <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.



Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), *Flaming June*, 1895, oil on canvas, 47 3/8" x 47 3/8". Museum of Art of Ponce, Ponce, Puerto Rico. Photo: Artrenewal.org. Courtesy <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

The current culture war between scientism and non-scientism as to the nature of art and beauty experiences is not unlike Jastrow's famous duck/rabbit image. As used by Wittgenstein, the image embodies a conceptual or perceptual shift of focus: looked at in terms of one perceptual set, only the duck is seen; looked at from another set, only the rabbit is seen. It is impossible, Wittgenstein thought, to see both simultaneously. But if we apply this imagistic metaphor to scientism and non-scientism, we often find only entrenchment and an unwillingness on each side to consider the other side. White is correct: some kind of rapprochement is vital. And Schelling's ideas could be fruitful. What we need perhaps is an intellectual paradigm that is, as it were, an 'empirical idealism' whereby whole new categories for understanding the complex relations between consciousness and matter can be postulated and explored. The notion of 'conscious

matter' may one day be a common and verifiable tenet in science such that there will no longer be the reign of a simple-minded scientism, largely under the influence of Galilean methodology, that denies the cultural importance of art and beauty experiences.

Interestingly, when scientists speak of the beauty of equations, the beauty of cosmic pictures from the Hubble telescope, the beauty of new theories and new empirical discoveries about the world, they are, says White, speaking about beauty as a form of lived and exciting *dissonance*: old theories and facts colliding with new and better theories and facts. There is truly something glorious and beautiful about the new visions science is giving us of the cosmos and human nature. How strange and sad it is when such visions are virtually dissolved by an eliminative materialism that only sees clusters of neurons lighting up in various parts of the brain. ■

IRRESISTIBLE

A Conversation with Sylvère Lotringer

Philosopher Sylvère Lotringer is the founder of Semiotext(e) and organizer of the seminal Schizo-Culture Conference that introduced French theory to the United States. He is professor emeritus at Columbia University and professor of ethico-aesthetics at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts. In this interview, Lotringer discusses networks of networks, the art world, meaning and whether resistance is still possible.

BY JASON HOELSCHER

Jason Hoelscher – Over the last few days I've been looking over some of your writings, and a thought stuck out that I'd like to get some more input on. Paraphrasing, you stated that, 'Contemporary culture is a capitalist Möbius strip. There is no longer another side to it.' To start off, I was wondering if you could elaborate on that idea.

Sylvère Lotringer – Well, we live in a world where everything evolves, revolves constantly, in which everything circulates through networks that can recover each other and communicate with each other instantaneously. So it is very important to understand how the entire system works. It is totally decentralized, it works with the speed of light, and even to call it capitalism is a bit preposterous. It is blocking the entire horizon so we don't have the distance necessary to identify it. For the last 10 to 15 years, we have entered a different era, which is not entirely new, but a dizzying escalation in abstraction of everything that existed before, post-Fordism and consumerism, diffused labor, Neoliberalism, private entrepreneurship, financialization of society. That is why it is so important to give ourselves the tools to figure out what we are confronting. It is an ambivalent situation. We are totally immersed in what I would call a techno-capitalism. We are seduced by the relentless stream of technological inventions and at the same time repulsed by the increasing control that comes with it.

J.H. – Decentralization seems to have really taken root in the art world as well. It seems in the last decade the art world's relationship to culture at large has changed dramatically, turning over more rapidly and diffusing into the markets.

S.L. – One thing is for sure, now art is everywhere. It stopped being a private vocation, or a local activity, and totally depends on the market worldwide. It has become an industry, as Jeffrey Deitch once announced triumphantly. This is something new. I was fortunate enough to get involved with the art world in the early 1970s in New York and I can measure up the incredible leap that we made, and it is not always for the better.

J.H. – As art becomes part of everything, from fashion to commerce, do you think there are still ways it can invest meaning in mass culture?

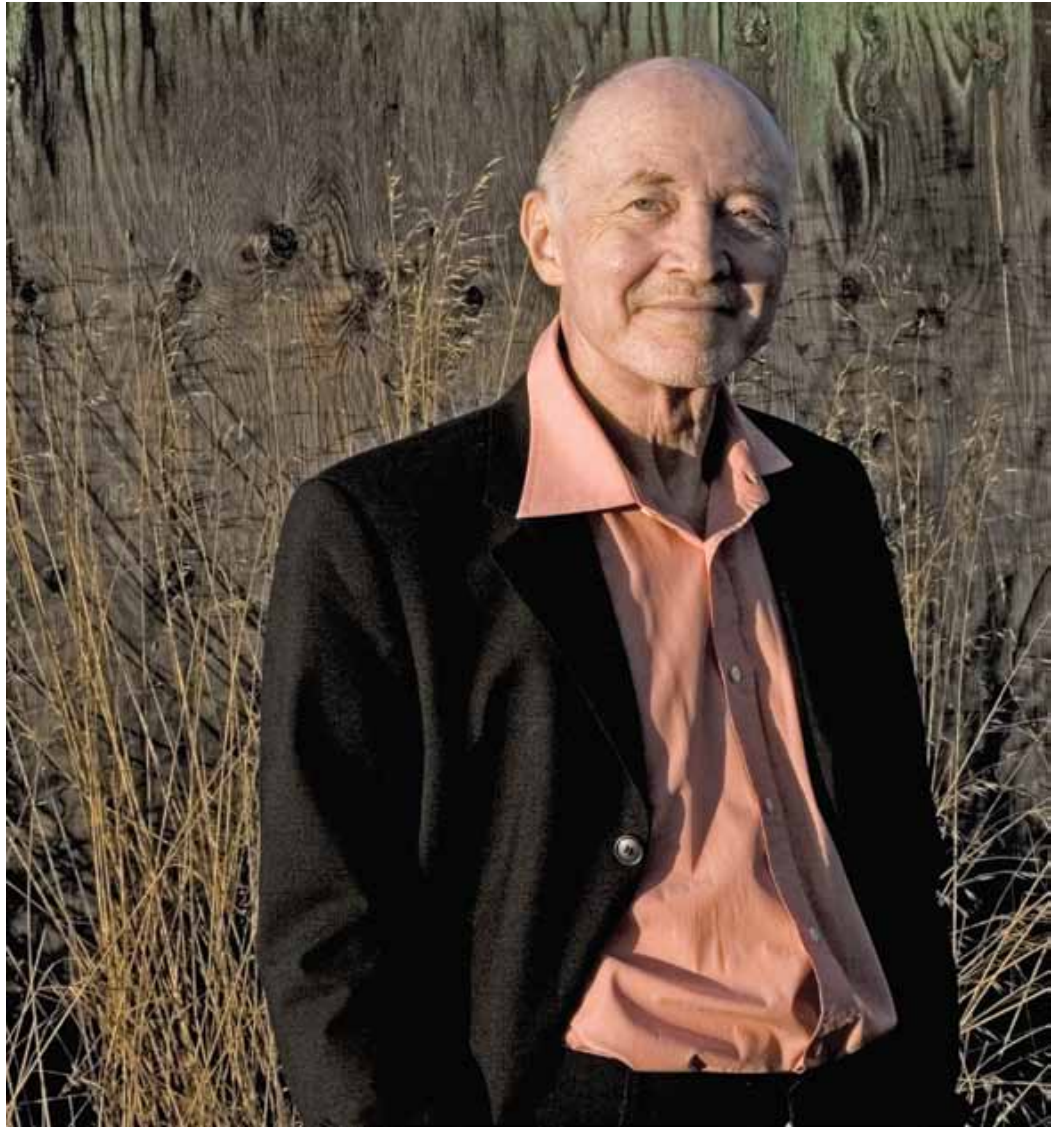
S.L. – Today art is everywhere. In the 1980s, Baudrillard already talked about the trans-aesthetization of art. Meaning doesn't mean

anything. Marshall McLuhan was the first media philosopher to reveal it. Contrary to other theorists at the time, notably Enzensberger who believed that the media could be turned into a democratic instrument, McLuhan didn't believe in ideology (meaning), it was the medium that mattered. It was the medium that we craved and provoked the "ecstasy of communication." It was mere "phatic function." Pure contact. Messages go through us like a river, always different and always the same. They are just there to hook us up on the media. Investing new meaning in mass culture won't do. It is like flushing the toilet. The best way to resist at this point would be to turn off our computers, throw our smartphones in the garbage and stop working. Zero work. But it is more easily said than done.

McLuhan made a difference in the 1960s between medium and message. Meaning belongs to the message, right? And what he was first trying to announce is that messages are not that important. We are saturated with messages, but in fact messages are not as important as the fact that we are hooked on the media. So this is like a very easy way of answering your question. The best way to resist that would be to turn off the computer, to turn off your cell-phone. That's become impossible. So the possibility of resistance has become much more ambivalent, much more embedded in the networks of the entire culture.

So new strategies have to be invented. Resistance is something in some way preposterous, but it is something that should be reinvented constantly. Same with saying that art is now becoming very similar to everything that circulates in society. Art becomes the question itself, in a way. We don't really know what art is at this point; that is expected, and at the same time is very puzzling. So resistance itself is part of the situation. To resist is what the system encourages.

I will refer here to the critique of the art world. Paradoxically, the more the art world is subjected to commerce and to the industry and the stock exchange, the more it creates a point of resistance, but this point of resistance is again reappropriated. This type of situation through critique constitutes the complement of the system itself. Jean Baudrillard in 1969 in *Consumer Society* was revealing that critique is part of what it criticizes. Think of the critique of the institution: In itself the critique is very valuable, but the fact is that it functions within the institution it neutralizes. That is the big



Philosopher Sylvère Lotringer.
Photo: Iris Klein.

problem we have. Resistance is expected, resistance is tolerated, resistance is encouraged. But it is very difficult to resist.

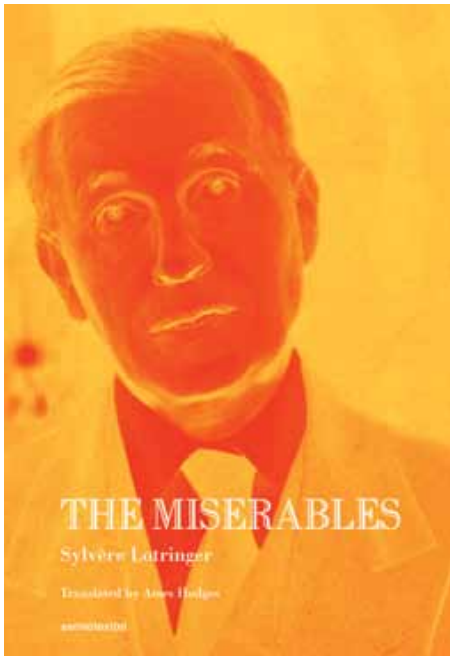
J.H. – Might part of the problem arise from the fact that, as everything is equalized, it becomes more and more difficult to find sites of difference? Are there still gaps within which an artist or philosopher can create friction, can place systems in opposition to each other?

S.L. – Well, first of all, the fact that the system is not very perceptible, but permanently imposed upon us, allows us also to think through in advance. The capitalist system works through crashes and leaps, always ready to break down something and to reform it somewhere else. Resistance itself is not the same. In other words, you have to find new forms of resistance at least in power with what the system creates. In other words, a sustained type of resistance by writing, by criticizing, and so forth. We live in the same temporality as capitalism itself. So, new forms of resistance could be invented by breaking down, by displacing, by constantly re-creating and escaping the grasp of resistance itself.

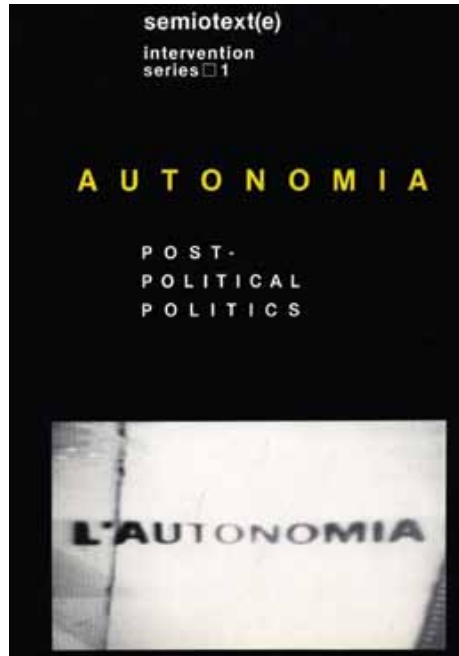
It's the same if you think of Nietzsche's definition of history. Until the middle of the 20th century, history was something that

was linear, predictable, totalizing, synthesizing. Now history, in the same way as personal life, is much more difficult to linearize, although the system constantly wants to impose the principle of equivalence into everything we do. One way of resisting is precisely not to let yourself be seduced by this equivalence, which offers the possibility of meaning, which offers the possibility of rewards, the possibility of establishing something stable and predictable, like a career. Everything that can be anticipated should be broken down.

That is what you could get from Nietzsche. The artist-philosopher is someone who constantly has to take various strategies at the same time in order not to be predictable. It is very difficult to break down something. We have to be as fast and disjunctive as capitalism itself. So the difference between the two is very tenuous. We live in an era of total equivalence, and equivalence means that everything is ambiguous, everything is impossible to evaluate. That is why I rely a lot on Nietzsche, because Nietzsche understood very well that what is important was not just to make a local resistance, but to reevaluate what art is about, what philosophy is about, and what life is about. Life and art and philosophy, being very connected, are contradictory to tendencies of society that present as victory the extermination of subjectivity.



The Miserables by Sylvère Lotringer. Translated by Ames Hodges. Publisher: Semiotext(e), 2014.



Autonomia: Post-Political Politics, edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi. Publisher: Semiotext(e), 2007.



Pure War by Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer. Translated by Mark Polizzotti and Brian O'Keeffe. Publisher: Semiotext(e), 2008.

J.H. – *You mentioned earlier the notion of speed, which brings to mind your collaborations with Paul Virilio. In terms of the speeding up of contemporary culture, do you think there is an end point in terms of speed or acceleration? Or are we stuck in some sort of self-amplifying feedback process?*

S.L. – We are getting close to the speed of light, but we are not quite there yet. What is important is that speed is not unified; speed is part of a series of forces. When you go very fast you produce what Virilio calls a polar inertia. If you are going 50 miles an hour you are going very fast, but the way you experience it you are immobile unless something happens, something happens on the road and suddenly there is an accident. Because you are going too fast you become unaware of the fact that everything is speeded up, right? So, the idea of the accident becomes essential, because the accident becomes one of the ways of revealing what you cannot perceive. What you cannot perceive is always something that is obvious. But you need thinking and you need experimentation to bring what is not obvious into the obvious.

That would be the first thing if you tried to resist the system. Resistance becomes a bit of a shallow word if it is not as sophisticated as the system that is being created for us, and in which we participate. You could say that even in terms of computerization. After the first stage, which was deterritorialization of professions, everyone is sitting at the desk in front of the computer, whether you are an architect, a performer, anything. Everyone is made to be stable and not circulate. But stability is not stable, and immediately you had a new deterritorialization that made the computer unstable, mobile, replaceable, etcetera. So what Deleuze was saying about the capitalist system is that it is a very formidable adversary in the sense that it constantly territorializes and deterritorializes. We can't count on it, we try to understand it. The only way to understand is to be part of it, right? We are being

turned by techno-capitalism into a situation where we have to have a high degree of intelligence, but at the same time a high degree of stubbornness in relation to it. In other words, everything that appears so seductive, everything that appears so useful and helpful turns around and destroys a certain possibility of life. We are in contact with everything instantaneously, but at the same time what we are losing is life itself. We don't know there is a certain continuity of life. Everything becomes destructible, instantly, before it has time to grow into anything else. So resistance, to now answer your question, resistance will always be double edged, a variation of what should be done at a certain time. There is no other lesson that we have to learn, even to learn from philosophy, except the fact that you constantly have to evaluate what is active and what is reactive in a situation and try to separate the two. Emphasize what enriches your life and enriches your art and try to discard what is reactive and what makes you less creative.

Modern art has been made through a series of disjunctions, through a series of leaps, starting with Duchamp. Was Duchamp an artist? We don't really know. He imposed something that has reverberated through the culture and the art world, making a fool of himself—representing art and life in profile, without any depth. So it is a type of resistance that you connect to art. The resistance Duchamp made to the art of his time, to Impressionist or Post-Impressionist, etcetera, was to create an art that was not accessible, that was not perceptible, that was on the level of concept only. Did it have meaning? It is difficult to say. We don't really know because he was the first to be both an artist and not an artist. A philosopher, but a very irregular philosopher and a very irregular artist, claiming that he would rather spend time playing chess and hiding the studio where he continued to make art. You need to have duplicity in a system that makes everything ambiguous. I would say at this point that what Duchamp taught us is that we have constantly to rethink what is art and what

is not art. And that, I think, is the most urgent question. In our world where art is equivalent to everything else, art needs some possibility of evaluation, a possibility of reinvention. You don't have it ready-made, that is why art is important, because someone can constantly reinvent what art is, to critique not just art as it is, and the art world as it is. At the same time, nothing is taken for granted; there is a need to constantly reevaluate what resistance could be.

J.H. – The way out or through imposed, serial deterritorializations, then, is to deterritorialize oneself? A constant and creative reevaluation of where one is?

S.L. – An artist cannot obey recipes or try constantly to stay away from the system that metamorphoses everything into a deal. Art should be doubled, in the sense that on the one side it is impossible not to seek some recognition, some accreditation, but at the same time you pay ideally for that because the system instantaneously takes over and turns what you wanted to do for artistic reasons into commercial reasons. I think that is the most perverse way of the system and society. It constantly takes you away from the reasons you have to make art. Reasons to make art were clear in the 1970s: You made art because you are an artist, and because you somehow had a feeling of succession, of moves that kept art ahead of its time. Artists knew that they were in some sort of a history, that some sort of an itinerary was taking place. Now we don't have a place, we don't know what is happening, everything is happening at the same time, and the degree of equivalence worldwide is incredible. So now, again I go back to these prophetic words of Nietzsche.

The art world is now the platform for the entire society, is where the new values are being produced, and they connect directly to the market. And that is exactly what we have to resist, otherwise art becomes a career as any other, and then being an artist is no better than being anything else. So if we want to, since we are dealing here with learning about art and learning about how to deal with art in a world that metamorphoses constantly, it is very important to maintain this kind of capacity to withdraw, capacity to step aside, a capacity to be double and to be unpredictable.

J.H. – As universities become increasingly corporatized, more intent on creating workers rather than thinkers, it seems mobility of thought and a capacity to withdraw becomes harder to find. You've been teaching the ethico-aesthetics course at IDSVA for three years now, where the goal is to create the artist-philosopher—a mobile, creative thinker. In your opinion, what is an artist-philosopher?

S.L. – An artist-philosopher is someone who is pinned neither as an artist nor as a philosopher, in some sort of realm of multiplicity, constantly reinventing itself. In other words, the artist-philosopher is, must be, a certain experimenter. He must also be some sort of traitor. According to Deleuze, the traitor is an inventor, is someone who constantly experiments with the limit that is being offered or the limit of what should be refused—someone who does not know in advance what they are going to find, who doesn't know in advance what the itinerary is going to involve, who constantly remains alive in one's

art and one's life. An artist-philosopher is someone who does not use theory as a recipe, whose concept of relation is a tentative relation, someone who knows and absorbs a system in order to be able to apply it. A philosopher does not apply it; a philosopher is someone who thinks given the situation that they are in, constantly experimenting and branching out from whatever is being offered, someone who has a kind of freedom in a world that doesn't really allow it anymore. It's also important to relay that philosophy has to be embedded in your life, in everything you do, in your actions, in what you put on the canvas or what you demonstrate in a performance. Everything constantly has to be reevaluated, to provide a springboard for the treason: You have to be a traitor to academia in order to remain an intellectual, you have to be a traitor to the art world in order to remain an artist. You have to use one side against the other, being an artist in the academy and being a philosopher in art, constantly using one against the other, never coming to any conclusion and never settling into any position.

So constantly you have to defy, be defiant of your own reaction, of what is offered to you as something that would be worth selling your way for. It is constantly dancing, and that is what Nietzsche was doing. Philosophy is a dance. It's something that should permeate everything you do. And art is part of everything you do and philosophy is part of everything you live and of everything you get involved with. It is not a totalizing position, but it is constantly that you have to take nothing for granted and try constantly to reinvent the itinerary. To have, say, a group show and a mid-career show and etcetera, etcetera, you know everything in advance. Do you want to spend your life repeating what everyone else has done before?

If you do philosophy do it very seriously, but, of course, at the same time you have to be playful with it. I don't know if you know this little tale by Kafka, called *A Report to an Academy*. It is a beautiful little tale. It tells the story of a monkey who is captured in the jungle and is put in a cage on the boat back to the metropolis. On the boat, the monkey suddenly realizes he is not going to learn their language of the capital, he is going to remain in a cage all of his life. He is a monkey, so he begins to imitate, of course. He imitates the behaviors of the people around him and he imitates their language, becoming so proficient that he becomes superior to any of them. At one point the academy recognizes this achievement, and they call him up and ask him to explain how he achieved such proficiency, superior to men. Because he is a monkey he says, 'Well, I am going to tell you.' He turns around and he begins to tell his story. 'I have been wounded in the jungle, and I can tell you that the way I've been wounded,' and he turns his back to the academy, drops his pants and shows his ass. And that is the kind of humor that I find philosophical, that you don't have to turn into an ass in order to belong somewhere. If you are both a monkey and a human, if you are both truthful and inventive, then maybe the possibility of resistance exists. But if you are only serious then you are going to be swallowed, if you are only a baboon then you are going to be reduced to nothing. But constantly being a monkey is a real promotion to humanity. ■

* With thanks to *ARTPULSE* editorial assistant Othiana Roffiel for transcribing the recording.

MYTHIC MAGIC AND MORBID MEMORY:

Roberto Fabelo's Visionary Fantasies

BY DONALD KUSPIT

Now I challenge anyone to explain the diabolic and diverting farrago of Bruegel the Droll otherwise than by a kind of special, Satanic grace. For the words 'special grace' substitute, if you wish, the words 'madness' or 'hallucination'; but the mystery will remain almost as dark....and I cannot restrain myself from observing (but without pretension, without pedantry, without positive aim, as of seeking to prove that Bruegel was permitted to see the devil himself in person) that the prodigious efflorescence of monstrosities coincided in the most surprising manner with the notorious and historical *epidemic of witchcraft*.
Charles Baudelaire, *Some French Caricaturists* ¹

The Devil is the symbol of evil....he has a multitude of shapes at his disposal, yet always remains the Tempter and Tormentor. His fall from grace is symbolized by his debasement into animal shape. The Devil's entire purpose is to deprive humans of the grace of God and to make them yield to his control.
Dictionary of Symbols ²

A man is only as big as the diabolic in himself he can assimilate.
Paul Tillich



Roberto Fabelo, *Fifteen Mad Portraits*, 2008, oil on canvas, 64 1/2" x 48."



Roberto Fabelo, *Como moscas (Like Flies)*, 2010, watercolor on amate paper, variable dimensions.



Roberto Fabelo, *Proyecto saltamontes (Grasshopper Project)*, 2010, watercolor on masonite, 48" x 96."



Roberto Fabelo, *El hombre, la mosca y la esperanza* (*The Man, The Fly and The Hope*), 2009, crayon on masonite, 88" x 48."



Roberto Fabelo, *Gran angel (Big Angel)*, 2004, oil on fabric, 56" x 55."



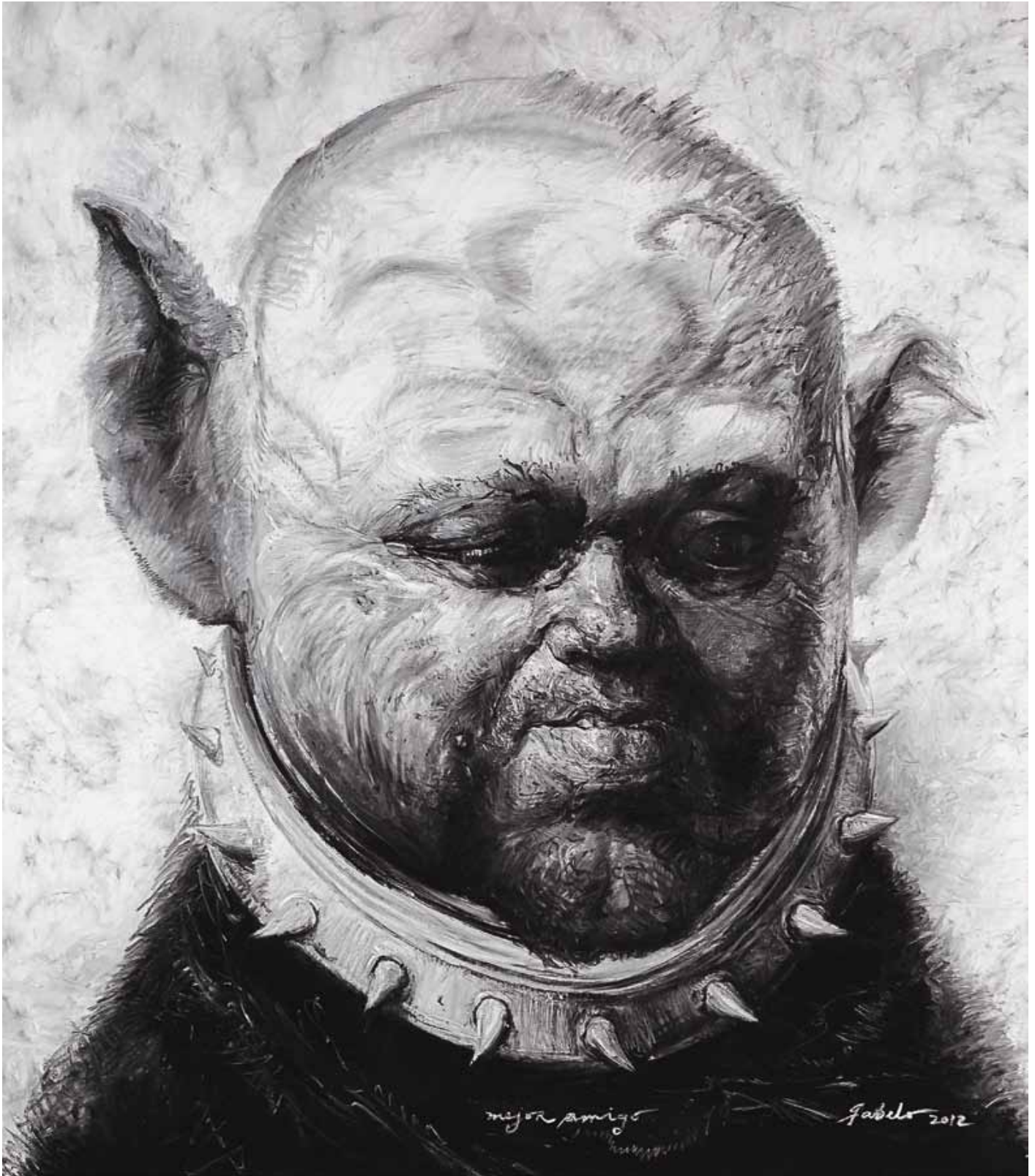
Roberto Fabelo, *Delicatessen*, 2012, crayon on heavy paper, 43" x 29 1/2."

What is one to make of Roberto Fabelo's wide-ranging art, with its different subject matters—human faces and figures, animals and inanimate objects, sometimes all thrown together, sometimes synthesized into hybrid monsters—and different methods, ranging from the use of found objects in installations to delicate linear drawings, exquisite watercolors, and painterly works, sometimes on canvas, sometimes on cardboard, sometimes on wood, sometimes on fabric? Fabelo can be meticulous, scrupulously attending to detail, and intensely instinctive—passionately expressionistic—in his handling. The extremes sometimes converge, uneasily yet convincingly. Fabelo's technical mastery is self-evident—he is the master of every medium he touches—and so is his morbidity: it is the common emotional thread in the vast tapestry of visionary works he has created. He is technically, materially, formally astonishingly versatile, but he is emotionally single-minded: he is obsessed with the innate absurdity—dare one say madness, as his recurrent series of *Mad Portraits* (2003, 2004, 2006, 2008) permits us to do—of human beings, more broadly society as a whole. For Fabelo both are irreparably malformed—damned and doomed in emotional hell.

Fabelo has what Baudelaire called that "prodigious talent for the grotesque and the horrible" that is the sign of modern imaginative genius. For Baudelaire, who found it above all in Edgar Allan Poe's stories and poems—which is where the morbid Symbolist Odilon Redon also found it—it releases the artist from the chains of didactic classicism. Rebelliously permissive, it allows the free play of critical fantasy—fantasy that uncovers the diabolical truth about people and society. Like all the great modern fantasists, Fabelo shows, with a Goya-like vehemence that epitomizes the ambition of all of them—from Bosch and Bruegel through Redon and Ensor to Picasso and the Surrealists—that human beings are more sinister, not to say devilish and insane—diabolically

mad, possessed by the devil, insidiously evil—than they appear to be on the surface. The figures wearing helmet-like birds' beaks in the series *A Bit of Us* (2008)—they appear also on the heads of some of the figures in the *Mad Portraits*—have their precedent in Bosch's hellish scenes. One figure has a beak-like mask, as though participating in a Venetian carnival, another has a dog's head for a helmet, others pointy snail shell helmets, still others with the ceremonial type Attic helmets worn by warriors in some Renaissance paintings: all convey their belligerence and brutishness. Identifying with animals, they have become devils, perhaps most explicitly in Fabelo's tempting mermaids, bewitched and bewitching sirens—the *Main Dish* (2002) as one of his works declares. The point is made explicitly by the large portrait of a man with devil's ears that dominates the far-right panel of *A Bit of Me*.

The title suggests that Fabelo doesn't exempt himself: he's a host of demons, if not the devil incarnate. One can read this confrontational masterpiece from left to right—each of the eight panels is in effect a page in a picture-book displaying the damned in all their infinite variety—or be drawn into it anywhere by staring into the eyes of any of the many figures that stare at one. Their faces mirror one's own inner face. It has been said that the spectacle is an expression of false shallow consciousness, but Fabelo's spectacle of the mad—worthy of Goya's maddening spectacles of the emotionally damaged in his so-called Black Paintings—shows that it can tell the deep emotional and social truth. Goya depicted the social madness of war and religion, as though without them human beings were sane, but Fabelo shows that everyone is born mad: madness is universal—human beings are inherently mad, whatever the social reality. The magic of Fabelo's art is even blacker than Goya's, and his figures are more mythically memorable, for they are not driven mad by social forces beyond their



Roberto Fabelo, *Mejor amigo (Best Friend)*, 2012, oil on canvas, 90 1/2" x 79."



Roberto Fabelo, *Ten Nymphs on the Wall*, drawing on metal pot, 17" x 14" x 18."



Roberto Fabelo, *Meditación en el jardín de la noche* (*Meditation at the Night Garden*), 2014, acrylic on embroidered silk, 55" x 42."

control, but are uncontrollably mad by nature, as the wild animals they identify with suggest. Their wildness suggests that madness cannot be tamed or treated, but is incurable and inevitable.

Madness is demonic, and the wild animal associated with Fabelo's figures—as though it was a kind of alter ego—is their own “objectified demonic power,” as the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt remarked, implying that all human beings are possessed by demons. Fabelo's figures are demons in human disguise. Women are particularly demonic for Fabelo, as his numerous images of full-bodied mermaids—all monstrously beautiful—in the ironically titled *Delicatessen* series (2004) makes clear. On one sheet of drawings they endlessly fuck with the devil, confirming that they are witches. (*Delicatessen*, that is, delicate essen, “essen” being German for “to eat.” Fabelo's female figures are not exactly delicate food for philosophical thought, however much they may be on the mind of some of his male figures—clearly sex mad—much the way animals are on the minds of most of them. The female body is perhaps the grandest of Fabelo's obsessions, as it has been for male artists throughout the ages.) These sadomasochistic masterpieces—the female figures passively submit to their abuse, are resigned to their horrible fate, which is to be cannibalistically eaten alive, as the bowed head and downcast eyes of the crippled *Big Angel* (2004) makes very clear—are consummate examples of the ironical method in Fabelo's madness, for the fabric on which the mutilated female bodies are painted is imprinted with a lovely floral design, belying the violence done to them. Bondage and torture—not to say hatred—are rarely so explicit in Fabelo's works, but then his mad people are inwardly tortured and hateful, for they are in bondage to the demons that inform them.

Fabelo shows their true demonic character when they become *Like Flies* (2010)—insects, whether grasshoppers, cockroaches, or flies, traditionally associated with the devil and death. It has been said that cockroaches will be the only survivors of a nuclear holocaust, which is why Fabelo's *Survivors* (2009), a sculptural installation of gigantic cockroaches, has been read as a social statement—which undoubtedly it is—but the cockroaches are implicitly human, as Fabelo's half-human *Beetle* (2008), *Grasshopper Man* (2009), and, less morbidly, as its title suggests, *The Man, the Fly, and the Hope* (2009). In the latter work the pure white milk of human kindness fills a small shallow plate far below the bloated filthy black flyman, eternally ugly however exquisitely beautiful his delicate wings. Thus the devil rides high in heaven—the fallen angel has triumphantly risen. Much the way hope was found at the bottom of Pandora's box of ills and evils, so Fabelo finds hope deep in hell—a dialectical inversion that signals the unresolved relationship of evil, embodied in the devilish insect, and goodness, epitomized by the heavenly milk. The sacred and profane—the pure and impure, the blessed and the cursed, the angelic and the demonic—are perversely at odds, the former not standing a chance against the latter, yet holding its own, a small steady presence despite the powerful presence of the devilish flyman. The monstrous insect has pride of place, but the sacramental milk is irreplaceable: they are tied together in an emotional Gordian knot. Fabelo's ingenious masterpiece is an eloquent re-statement of a timeless paradox.

The naturally gross—the ugly insect—made aesthetically subtle, even surprisingly beautiful, is one of the hallmarks of Fabelo's transformative genius. It is worth emphasizing that the indomitable cockroach-



Roberto Fabelo, *Untitled*, 2008. From "Local Warming" (*Calentamiento local*) series, oil on canvas, 63" x 79."



Roberto Fabelo, *Untitled*, 2007. From "País en que los desechos son amados todavía" (*Land Where the Waste is Still Loved*) series, oil on canvas, 63" x 47."



Roberto Fabelo, *Survivors*, 2009, mixed media installation at National Museum of Fine Arts, 10th Havana Biennial, variable dimensions.



Roberto Fabelo, *Mundos (Worlds)*, 2005, mixed media installation, variable dimensions. Installation at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Havana.

es with human heads—rather than human beings with animal heads as in the *Mad Portraits*—signify the priority of the demonic animal over the socialized human, indicating Fabelo’s belief that we are more animal than human—crawl over the façade of Havana’s National Museum of Fine Art. This adds yet another provocative apocalyptic note to Fabelo’s morbid thinking; he seems to be suggesting that museums of art will be over-run by insect-like masses who understand nothing about art, certainly not that his art is about them—their soul portraits. They will consume the works of art like locusts, eat them as though they were pieces of cheap delicatessen. Looking at Fabelo’s *Survivors*, I was reminded of Nathaniel West’s *Day of the Locust*, a novel about Hollywood made into a Hollywood film: the same mad spectacle of the blindly destructive crowd that West describes haunts Fabelo’s work.

Art historically speaking, Fabelo is working in the grand tradition of caricature. The caricatural *Art Collector* (2008) makes the point clearly. Some of the earliest caricatures were made by Leonardo da Vinci. Many of Fabelo’s caricature heads have a clear affinity with the famous five caricature heads Leonardo drew. Leonardo’s grotesque head is the ancestor of Fabelo’s even more grotesque heads. “When men’s faces are drawn into resemblance of some other animals, the Italians call it, to be drawn in caricature,” the English physician Sir Thomas Browne wrote in 1716, confirming that the point of caricature is to show that people are inwardly animals however outwardly human. “Caricature” is derived from the Italian *caricare*, meaning to charge or load; a caricature is a “loaded portrait”—a devilish portrait, as it were, for, as Browne said, it makes the portrayed person look “monstrous” and “hideous.” Human beings are two sided or two-faced, as the English caricaturist James Gillray shows in his famous *Doubleures of Characters;—or—striking Resemblances in Physiognomy* (1797), with their “sublime debunking,” as Gillray said, of prominent English politicians. Gillray offers us two portraits of the same politician, one showing him as he

outwardly appears, the other showing his inner reality. One is a social portrait, the other a psychological portrait; Fabelo, another sublime debunker, tends to combine the two while suggesting they are in conflict. The irreconcilable opposites are absurdly reconciled in one bizarre physiognomy, making for a more complex, ruthlessly double-edged—emotionally cutting—portrait. Fabelo’s idea that the animal in us is the devil has its precedent in Gillray’s depiction of James Fox’s double as Satan with a snake around his neck and standing in the flames of hell. *We Are Not Animals*, Fabelo’s 2008 series ironically declares, but we are certainly grubby devils, to allude to *Grub*, a 2009 installation. Like Gillray, perverse comedy—satiric irony—is used to ward off impending tragedy in the act of acknowledging it, to emotionally resist apocalyptic awareness of the decline and fall of humanity while accepting its inevitability, to mockingly assert the devilish self-destructiveness of society and the imbecility of human beings as though mocking them would prevent one from becoming like them. All of Fabelo’s *Mad Portraits* are portraits of demented imbeciles: their personal dementia bespeaks the dementia of society as a whole. It seems Fabelo is a pessimistic fatalist who makes it clear that the world is a living hell with no hope.

I suggest that even Fabelo’s circular *Worlds* (2005) and totemic *Towers* (2007), among other constructions of found objects, many household bric-a-brac, others bullets and bones, are caricatures: comic defenses against social tragedy, exemplified by *Local Warming* (2008) and *Land Where the Waste is Still Loved* (2007). The found objects are relics from a dead world, the tragic remains of a world gone to hell, absurdly comic in their isolated grandeur, like the mounds of domestic clothing, useless eyeglasses, and human hair in Auschwitz. Caricature is a species of satire, and satire arises when society seems decadent, more destructive than constructive, and thus tragically flawed, failing its members. Climate warming and ceaseless warfare will turn the world into a wasteland, but for Fabelo it is



Roberto Fabelo, *Un Poco de Nosotros (A Bit of Us)*, 2008, watercolor on heavy paper, 60 ½" x 44 ½."



Roberto Fabelo, *Hot Coffee*, 2003, mixed media, 8" x 6 ½" x 4."



Roberto Fabelo, *Ronda infinita (Endless Round Dance)*, 2015, iron pot and 33 bronze sculptures, 75" x 98.5."



Roberto Fabelo, *Untitled 02*, 2008. From "Encuentro con la Virgen (Meeting with the Virgin)" series, oil on canvas, 53" x 44."

already an emotional wasteland inhabited by mad men and women, often acting out their devilishness in devilish sex. Again Bosch's perverse *Garden of Earthly Delight* (1490-1510) and Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel* (1563), a futile attempt to reach heaven that ends in diabolical irony—the confusion of languages that bespeaks confused, overambitious, irreconcilable human beings—updated in contemporary terms and with modern means by Fabelo.

Floating in a small boat, alone with his dog—suggesting his doggedness, the doggedness of a survivor—like the small figure precariously perched on a volcanically molten black sea in the *Dreamer* series (2007), Fabelo dreams of salvation, as the series *Meeting with the Virgin* (2008) suggests. She's a kind of benign mirage, unexpected, considering the morbidity and madness—not to say viciousness and suffering on display—in Fabelo's other works, but then she's Our Lady of Charity (Our Lady of El Cobre), the Patroness of Cuba, and thus a symbol of Cuba in all sacred glory, suggesting that Fabelo deeply believes in Cuba, and has high hopes for it, however much he may question it, as he implicitly does. Fabelo has survived the apocalyptic deluge, like Noah—but he sits alone in his rowboat, his ship having sunk, while Noah's ark survived the deluge, being unsinkable because it was built following God's directions. Fabelo brilliantly re-figures the old symbolic myth, making

it more memorable—and contemporary—by making it more personal and existential. The Virgin walks on the boiling white water like Christ, suggesting that she is God's representative on Earth, and Fabelo now sits in his rowboat with two other survivors, suggesting all is not lost, however few earthly beings are found and chosen to survive the devastating flood. They are no longer animals, but humbled human beings, isolated in the cosmic emptiness. Is the Virgin real or is she a mirage? Do they see her or are they blind to her presence? Are they hallucinating her into existence or does she really exist independently of them? Like the milk that symbolizes hope in *The Man, The Fly and the Hope*, she seems out of place however clearly in the place. She seems to notice them, but they don't seem to notice them. She turns to them, but they don't turn to her. Sometimes they seem to be rowing toward her, sometimes they are clearly rowing away from her. Salvation is more a hopeful fantasy—perhaps a diabolic deception—than a real possibility for the apocalyptically minded Fabelo. He is clearly a major artist because he has fearlessly assimilated the diabolical contradictions in himself. ■

NOTES

1. Charles Baudelaire, "Some French Caricaturists," *The Mirror of Art*, ed. Jonathan Mayne. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956, 190.
2. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*. London and New York: Penguin, 1996, 286-87.

JOAN JONAS: VENICE

BY ANNE SWARTZ

American Joan Jonas' art is a subtle and complex interplay of images arranged like words in sentences and paragraphs engaging with the simultaneous denotative and connotative meanings of language. She has used video and sound, installation and performance to showcase the essence of social, lived experience, first exploring gender, then visuality, and more recently, the environment and our relationship to it. She emerged as a second-generation feminist artist in the 1960s and 1970s, merging her chosen imagery into personal, but not autobiographical, meditations on contemporary life.

This year, she represents the United States in the 56th Venice Biennale with her exhibition "They Come to Us without a Word," curated and organized by Paul Ha, director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) List Visual Arts Center, and Ute Meta Bauer, founding director of the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, and previously an associate professor in the Department of Architecture at MIT. It is on view from May 9 through Nov. 22. The exhibition was accompanied earlier by "Joan Jonas: Selected Films and Videos, 1972-2005," a complementary show presented by the MIT List Visual Arts Center that ran from April 7 to July 5. Jonas is Professor Emerita in the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology in Boston.

The Italian exhibition is organized around the spatial necessities of the pavilion building itself. The U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale is a classical-style structure made in the Palladian symmetrical form. Built in 1930, it is the work of American architects William Adams Delano and Chester Holmes Aldrich. At the entrance of Jonas' multifaceted piece, the viewer first encounters a bundled group of nine tree trunks from nearby Certosa Island. The colonnaded and pediment-topped façade at the pavilion entrance brings the visitor into a circular rotunda where Jonas has inserted a series of manipulated mirrors—intended to recall the variations in aged mirrors—alternating with windows and arches allowing passage to the two galleries located in each of the wings on either side of the central passage. Above, this circular space is lit by crystals arranged in large swooping circles and curves, almost like chandeliers. In each of these four galleries, there are two video projections accompanied by more mirrors, along with drawings, kites and props.

The overarching notion guiding the viewer through this complex series of images and forms is that of the philosophical, cum environmental, fantasy of our Anthropocene age by Icelandic Nobel Prize Laureate Halldór Laxness's 1968 novel *Under the Glacier*, translated into English in 2005. This selection by Jonas resembles her past explorations into literature as a subtext, such as her reverie about Italian poet Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, a 14th-century text centering on a protagonist's journey (in that earlier text, specifically a passage through hell, purgatory and finally, heaven). In Laxness's work, the journey takes the hero and his helpers into a volcano on an Icelandic glacier, into a subterra-

nean realm. One subtext of this book is the encounter with nature that dominates and commands our attention, its small subtleties, like a bee pollinating a flower, becoming necessary but occurring without human intervention like miracles.

In Jonas' project, the entry installation of the trees is significant because of the source, which references the fleeting reality of nature and human interaction with it. Certosa Island is close to the main Venetian island and was being developed into a multi-use park, housing development and recreation area when a massive tornado delayed the expansion and, notably, destroyed much of the island's forests. The trees are also evocative, to me, of Dante's use of the tree in the ring of the suicides in the seventh circle of his *Inferno*. In Dante's *Weltanschauung*, the suicides are besieged by the terrifying harpies, mythic female birds who violently rip and gnash at their branches and trunks, forcing the damned soul to re-experience death eternally. Since many species of deciduous and coniferous trees continue to grow a season after they are cut down, the tree is a symbol of sadness and loss vis-à-vis the suicide metaphor, but also an emblem of resurrection and rebirth—the reality of nature sustaining itself (and ultimately humanity). The copper wire binding these logs together puts them in a complementary and linked state with each other, thus making them dependent as well as interconnected and reliant.

The idea of hope continues into the pavilion. In another example of Jonas utilizing prominent literary source material, the mirrors are her inheritance from Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges' short stories. In these stories, the mirror is a persistent leitmotif. Borges' mirrors are numerous and varied, named or referencing the monstrous to the alternative. They are a material Jonas has utilized since the 1960s in performance and video. Alongside the lighting she has had produced for this space, the mirrors have an intentionally distorting visage. They recall the sensuous and surreal encounter Orpheus had with his image prior to tripping into the netherworld in French filmmaker Jean Cocteau's 1950 film. The peculiar insertion of these manipulated mirrors, which Jonas had specifically fabricated in nearby Murano, which is internationally known for its glass production, adds to the fantasy of her presentation. The strange and inaccessible appearance of these mirrors also invokes the idea of change since the mirrors are no longer clean, clear and entirely functional, another attribute recalled by the tree trunks at the entrance. The narrative of aging as loss is not what Jonas is after here, because she installs these mirrors in a well-lit, bright location. They do not suggest the dark, dank interior of one of Charles Dickens' spaces. However, they do suggest another realm, which Jonas has summoned as a theme in this project: that is, the invocation of ghosts into the space of the exhibition.

In each of the four galleries, Jonas includes two videos and a range of objects.¹ The recordings are a combination of older and newer pieces used as backdrops for filmed actions by a group of children whose ages range from five to 16. They were made



Joan Jonas at MIT, 2014. Photo: L. Barry Hetherington.

in Nova Scotia and Brooklyn. The over-arching atmosphere of natural change, play and beauty are central and steadfast images in these projections, which include underwater scenes, close-ups of bees, and views of the ocean and forest. The benign and exuberant children interact or move as if in theatrical performances of the everyday—braiding one another’s hair, walking, reading. The artist also appears, often masked, in her videos, as she does in these ones. Several narrators, also including the artist, read text, which have the effect of giving the impression of a fantastical world of fairy tales, a source for Jonas. The sound is synchronized with the movement of the performers and animals in certain instances and arbitrary in others.

Each of these gallery spaces is complex. Between the two projections, one acts as a ghost-like presence for the more dominant version in the same room. Within each, as has been Jonas’ tendency in the past, the point of view changes regularly. Sometimes, the action is pushed to the forward picture plane of the screen or the screen is split, skewing the orientation in one or more directions. Sometimes the speed is standard and other times slowed or expedited. One recurring component in the installation is the use of a pleasing, bright lighting. A not-unusual feature of artistic fascination with Venice has been the light with all the reflections cast by the water. From the rotunda, with its strong natural light to the four galleries with video, the light is ambient but ever-present.

Sometimes projections must be showcased in dark interiors, heavy curtains blocking all light. Even in the places where darkness does shroud some of the pavilion space, enough to make it possible for the viewer to see the images, the lighting in Jonas’ videos is strong, daytime lighting (which is another component by which I see Jonas contemplating the human encounter with nature in her subtext to the whole project).

Drawing has been a major component of Jonas’s oeuvre, so it is not surprising that she includes them in the Venetian installation. They mostly appear in large, gridded installations of single objects presented in monochromatic contour drawings on a white background. In one example, images of bees in honeycomb-shaped nodes are perpendicularly abutted by a large grouping of drawings of bees.

While this role as the American artist selected to represent the United States at this major international art festival could be seen as a culmination of Jonas’ career, it is, in fact, one more step in her artistic production. But it definitely brings together many experiments that have been perennial for her. The artist grew up in New York City, then studied art history and sculpture at Mount Holyoke College. Next, she went to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston before returning to NYC and completing her graduate work at Columbia University. She has lived, worked and exhibited internationally but calls New York her home.



Joan Jonas, *They Come to Us without a Word II*, 2015, performance with music by Jason Moran, Teatro Piccolo Arsenale, Venice. Pavilion of the United States 56th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia. Presented by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Moira Ricci.



Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, 1972. Photo: Roberta Neiman.

Active since the 1960s, Jonas started as a sculptor and shifted into more performative modes. As she experienced the avant-garde investigations of New York artists in the early 1960s, she found herself propelled into new directions. As the artist said in a recent interview, “What attracted me was that you could be a visual artist and do something time-based.”² These include a single occasion visiting Claes Oldenburg’s two-month installation *The Store* of 1961 at the Museum of Modern Art. The milieu of the day and much exciting activity were there, which included alternative concerts at composer and musician La Monte Young’s studio. Subsequently, she encountered many of the artists associated with Judson Dance Theater from 1962 to 1964, including Robert Rauschenberg and choreographers Lucinda Childs, Deborah Hay, Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, and Yvonne Rainer. They were also participants in the original collaborations of numerous artists and engineers for the grand art and technology performances known as *Nine Evenings* in 1966, largely orchestrated by Bell Labs engineer Billy Klüver. They were all tackling different perceptions of art and visuality, breaking away from the doctrinaire ideas about media and art. As well, there was experimental theater, also downtown, that was another influence on Jonas.

The artist took a cue from their innovations, splicing completely different and distinct forms into single works. She began performing, working with video and then choreography, the leap that

would take her on a trajectory into an interdisciplinary approach to her practice. Jonas’ work has numerous traces and resonances from her encounters with these artists in her art even now.

Jonas would heartily engage with technology, above and beyond the performance that remains a stalwart component of her practice. Recently in an interview she remarked about its predominance and import: “I’ll say one thing about technology—you can’t separate my work from technology, because my work exists within the fabric of technology. And it’s also affected by it. So technology is inseparable from my work.”³ Video was emancipating for her, as well, since it was an area relatively unexplored or dominated by male artists.⁴ She was able to utilize it in original ways. In 1968, working with other artists who would make themselves available for one another’s projects, Jonas created *Wind*, a video lasting under six minutes made using a Sony Portapak. Made in Long Island, the wind was ferocious, and the temperatures haltingly silhouette the figures moving in precise and arbitrary ways to showcase their bodies and render them into anonymous figures. The compression of narrative, the straightforward emphasis on the visual and the simplicity of the movements recall works like Rainier’s *Trio A* of 1966, a radical and simplified presentation in which the performers exist in a domain separate from the spectator, never making eye contact, but remain accessibly grounded in the present.



Installation view of Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us without a Word (Bees)*, 2014-2015. The US Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia; commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Photo: Moira Ricci.



Installation view of Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us without a Word (Mirrors)*, 2015. The US Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia; commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Photo: Moira Ricci.



Installation view of Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us without a Word (Homerroom)*, 2015. The US Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia; commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Photo: Moira Ricci.



Installation view of Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us without a Word (Nine Trees)*, 2015. The US Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia; commissioned by the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Photo: Moira Ricci.

Jonas used video and performance to craft intimate visual ruminations, allowing her to showcase the female form and experience. She filmed an alter-ego she called *Organic Honey* in videos in the early 1970s, examining ideas about social expectations of women.⁵ She began considering that video and performance combined gave her opportunities to craft multivalent compositions. Even as her work took up the revolutionary mantra of the Women's Liberation Movement that "the personal is political," they are not autobiographical. One such example would be *Good Night Good Morning* of 1976, in which the artist captured herself greeting a welcome or gesturing a farewell (or both) as a daily ritual. It is intimate and showcases her engaged in the most basic kind of everyday exchange, like a circadian action. She also segued in the 1980s and beyond into relying on textual references more and more. *Double Lunar Dogs* of 1984 is a video project that Jonas based on the short story "Universe" by American science fiction author Robert Heinlein. This kind of appropriation would continuously expand and evolve in Jonas' work. From 2002 to 2005 in *Lines in the Sand*, a performance commissioned for Documenta IX in 2002, the artist probed two poems by the American poet Hilda "H.D." Doolittle to produce a present recasting of the mythical Helen of Troy using the Hotel Luxor in Las Vegas as a way to contemporize the situation.

One of the fascinating trajectories Jonas has also explored recently is stage design. For the 2014-15 installation of *Safety Curtain*, an ongoing project to display contemporary art on a large-scale before, during and after an opera performance, Jonas developed beautifully colored patterned and abstract surface treatments. Whitney Museum of American Art curator Chrissie Isles

noted the recurrence of the theatrical space in Jonas' art, creating "a dialogue between depth and distance within framed space, with the usual elements of live performative action displaced onto the performers of the opera, hidden behind the screen."⁶ It is a three-dimensional, lived translation of seeing and experiencing, as she has merged them often in her art.

Jonas joins an august group of artists in representing the U.S. at the Venice Biennale. She is only the eleventh woman exhibited there.⁷ While she has garnered widespread and extensive attention in Europe, she is only now getting similar recognition at home for her multisensory, polysemic projects. "They Come to Us without a Word" is a fascinating and intense work in the continuum of Jonas' career. It also coalesces many of her approaches, forms and themes, making it a useful way to explore the range of her achievements. ■

NOTES

1. A short video glimpse into Jonas's installation can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/3cp8wYljFco>.
2. Joan Jonas, Interview by R.H. Quaytman, "Interview with Joan Jonas," *Interview* (December 2014) <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/joan-jonas#> (accessed on June 5, 2015).
3. *Ibid.*
4. "Joan Jonas on Feminism," *MoMA Multimedia* (2010), <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/110/508> (accessed June 1, 2015).
5. Esther Adler, "Joan Jonas," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, edited by Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mack. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007, p. 251.
6. Chrissie Isles, "Joan Jonas – *Safety Curtain* 2014/15," *Wiener Staatsoper* (2014), https://www.wiener-staatsoper.at/Content.Node/pressezentrum/Pressemappe_Jonas-en.pdf (accessed June 1, 2015).
7. The women who have represented the U.S. in the past include: Louise Nevelson (1962), Helen Frankenthaler (1966), Diane Arbus (1972), Agnes Martin (1976), Melissa Miller (1984), Jenny Holzer (1990), Louise Bourgeois (1993), Ann Hamilton (1999), Jennifer Allora (from Allora & Calzadilla 2011) and Sara Sze (2013). Only Holzer, Bourgeois, Hamilton, Sze and Jonas were solo installations.

THE PENETRATING EPIC POEM

A Conversation with Alfredo Jaar

BY BRIANA GERVAT



Alfredo Jaar, *The Silence of Nduwayezu*, 1997, one million slides, light table, magnifiers, illuminated wall text, overall dimensions variable. Courtesy Galería Oliva Arauna, Madrid, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin and the artist, New York

For his retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland (April 11 – Sept. 7, 2014), Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar paid homage to the late American poet Adrienne Rich by choosing as his epitaph: “Tonight No Poetry Will Serve.” That these words, written by a poet who dedicated her life to raising political and social awareness, are also used by Jaar to reflect upon his life’s work is no small coincidence, for poetry is the fundamental element in his work. In her poem, Rich writes: “Asleep but not oblivious/of the unslept unsleeping/elsewhere.”

This poem, a solemn promise made by Rich to remain awake even while she sleeps, embodies the wakeful vigilance employed by Jaar when representing the social injustices of this world. This borrowing of title lends itself so aptly to Jaar’s work, suggesting both the interconnectivity between artist and author and also alluding to the global implications of seemingly singular catastrophic events that take place “elsewhere”. “No Poetry Will Serve” consisted of a survey of Jaar’s works, totaling 44, from 1974-2014, including a

key work of the Rwanda Project, *The Silence of Nduwayezu*.

But it is not only the poetry of Rich that appears in the work of Jaar. Over the course of his career, Jaar has incorporated lines written by the American poet William Carlos Williams, the Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran and the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe into his work. Each of these poets and writers has influenced Jaar as an artist committed to changing the reality of the world, and nowhere is this more evident than in his creation of the *Rwanda Project (1994-2000)*.

On April 6, 1994, genocide began in Rwanda. For 100 days it raged across the country, claiming the lives of almost one million Rwandans. Although the genocide was perpetuated mainly against the Tutsis, moderate Hutus and the indigenous Twa that populated Rwanda also lost their lives in the violence. In August, following in its violent wake, Jaar traveled to this war-torn country to bear witness to the unimaginable violence of the genocide, which is now regarded as one of the greatest failures of humanity in the 20th century.

After returning from Rwanda, a journey he describes as “the

most horrific experience of my life,” Jaar questioned the purpose of representing suffering if it only serves as a reminder of what has been done without further contemplation of what can be done. In defiance of what he terms “the barbaric indifference of the world,” Jaar created the *Rwanda Project*. Executed between the years 1994 and 2000, the *Rwanda Project* can be regarded as a form of epos, an epic poem dedicated to the Rwandan Genocide, in which the lines from each poem are an elegy to lives that were lost; the words that accompany the photographs and installations are an ekphrastic account of catastrophe, each piece of the project a canto demonstrating the power of visual and written poetry, and the project in its entirety is a poetic lamentation of the suffering of humanity.

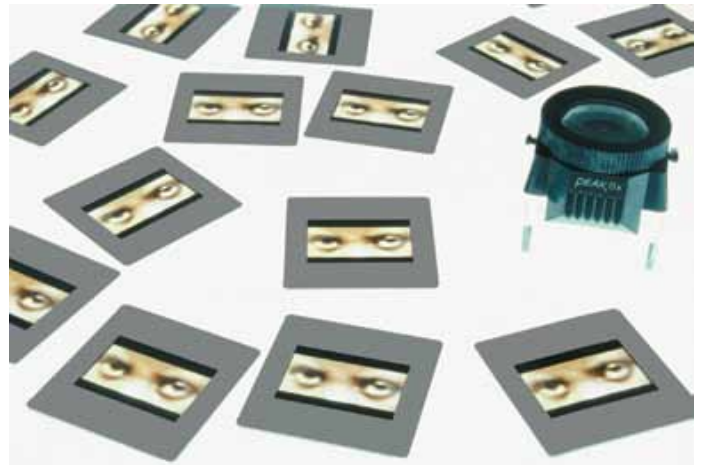
For Jaar, each canto of the *Rwanda Project* translates a particular moment of the Rwandan Genocide. Whether they are moments of condemnation as found in *Untitled (Newsweek)*, moments of loss, as found in *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, or moments of celebration, as found in *Signs of Life*, they are all poetic exercises in representation that are at once a dirge and exaltation, an effigy and an elegy, a promulgation and a denunciation of the Rwandan Genocide and the world’s failure to respond to it.

One example of the poetic that is found in the *Rwanda Project* is *The Silence of Nduwayezu*, (1997), which consists of a light table, slides, slide magnifiers and a light box with black-and-white transparencies. Within the space of a gallery, viewers are presented with words written in a single line across the wall, where “the public, who had ignored the crimes, have to make their pilgrimage with their eyes on the text.”¹ This pilgrimage of text relays the story of Nduwayezu, a five-year-old boy, who watched as the *Interhamwe* killed his family. In the weeks that followed, Nduwayezu remained silent, refusing to speak of the atrocities that he had witnessed, his silence reflecting the silence of the world.

Accompanying the text is a table in the center of the room, where Jaar once again revisits *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* to convey the horrors of witnessing. Here, Jaar’s reliance on one image, a single pair of eyes, demonstrates his refusal to use a proliferation of images to portray the unimaginable violence of the genocide. These eyes are an example of Jaar’s use of litotes throughout the *Rwanda Project*, in which the eyes of Gutete Emerita do not represent her survival but rather are a representation of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans over the course of the genocide. They are one million pairs of pleading eyes, asking the world to remember her family, to remember Rwanda, and to remember the genocide that occurred there.

In his awareness of the limitations of photography to portray the suffering of others without further perpetuating their suffering, Jaar’s inclusion of poetry becomes an act of resistance, if not an act of rebellion, against stereotypical representations of the genocide, thereby creating a deeper, more resonant representation of the crimes against humanity that took place. This inclusion of poetry throughout the *Rwanda Project* reiterates Susan Sontag’s observation that, “Literature can train, and exercise, our ability to weep for those who are not us.” Through words, often present, and images, sometimes absent, Jaar relays the stories of the Rwandan Genocide with compassion and conviction, allowing the viewer to respond with indignation to the violence and weep for the victims, survivors and even the perpetrators of this crime against humanity.

Whereas Jaar often regards the *Rwanda Project* as a failure, it must be viewed as a success due to the incorporation of visual and textual poetry into each canto. For poetry, whether in the form of



Alfredo Jaar, *The Silence of Nduwayezu*, 1997, one million slides, light table, magnifiers, illuminated wall text, overall dimensions variable. Courtesy Galería Oliva Arauna, Madrid, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin and the artist, New York.

words or images, conveys the contrasts and contradictions of the human experience: hope and despair, joy and sorrow, light and darkness, life and death. Throughout the *Rwanda Project*, Jaar’s skillful combination of these poetic and all too human elements ensures that the tragedy of the Rwandan Genocide will not soon be forgotten.

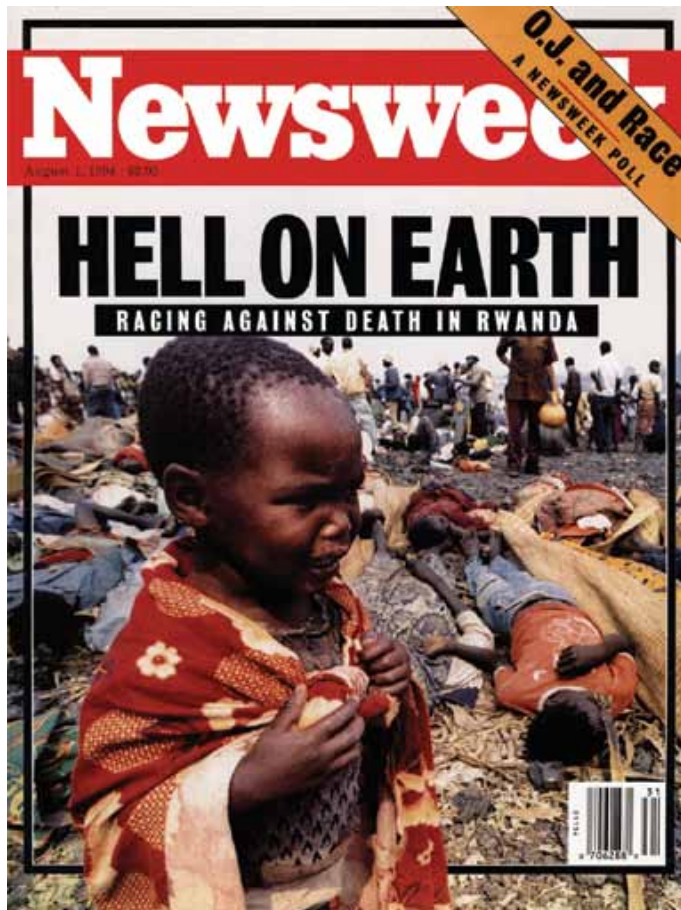
On the 20th anniversary of the beginning of this infamous moment in time I sat down with Jaar to discuss his *Rwanda Project*. Though his work has been discussed at length elsewhere I wanted to get new insights into his use of the poetic in that work. This interview dovetails with my two-month research trip to Rwanda in 2014.

Briana Gervat - Scholars often describe your work as poetic. Is this something that is important to you? If so, would you regard the Rwanda Project as an epic poem?

Alfredo Jaar - Poetry is fundamental for me and it is always a fundamental element of my work. What I try to do is strike the right balance, or the perfect balance, which is something that is very difficult to do, between information and poetry. When the work falls into the information category and there is not enough poetry, I think it becomes like the news: It is not interesting and it is not really a work of art. When it falls on the side of poetry sometimes it is too beautiful or too sweet and people dismiss it because it has no content. So, it is very difficult to balance these two: the content, which is the information with all of the educational aspects, and the aesthetic



Alfredo Jaar, *Untitled (Newsweek)*, 1994, seventeen pigment prints, 19" x 13", each. Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg / Cape Town, Galerie Lelong, New York, kamel mennour, Paris, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin, and the artist, New York



Detail from *Untitled (Newsweek)*, 1994. August 1, 1994: Newsweek magazine dedicates its first cover to Rwanda.

part, which is the poetic component. When those two are balanced you get, in my view—this is very personal—the perfect work of art.

B.G. - *In interviews you have said you read newspapers with your father as a child. Did he also have you read poetry?*

A.J. - No. My father was obsessed with reading newspapers, and he could not go out into the world without seeing these papers. He had to know what was going on in the world before going out. Since then, reading the newspapers and being informed has been very important for me, and I have always said that for me it is fundamental to understand the world before acting in the world. It has become my *modus operandi*. And so the news element was always present from the beginning, and thus the first works that I created, I felt, were too didactic. They were too direct, and I felt the need to incorporate this aesthetic element and to force myself to balance those two, so that is when I started to incorporate poetry. And when we say poetry, it is visual poetry, and sometimes it might be written poetry but it is always visual poetry, and that has been a very long process where I learn how to balance the ethics. The balance is in the content, it is in the information, in the news aspect of the work, and the aesthetic is in the visual poetry of the work.

B.G. - *You have said that you found it difficult to use the images that you collected in Rwanda. Is that why you reverted to using pieces of the news in the Rwanda Project? Is that why you use text and literature in your work, just in case you are not able to convey the poetic?*

A.J. - During those six years I created more than 20 works and each one was an exercise, and each exercise had an objective. As I went along, and I could not stop making this exercise because I felt I was failing to convey what I wanted to convey, I kept going. The first works dealt with the indifference of the media, what I call the barbaric indifference of the world media. I wanted to inform people and to do it in a way so to move them into action. So, as to the *Newsweek* piece, I am not sure there is much poetry in there. It was brutal denunciation. What is most interesting for me is that I do not add anything to those covers, and underneath those covers I try to give a timeline on what was happening in Rwanda and try to get them to understand why I am showing them these covers. The typical reaction was, 'Did you fake these covers? Are they real?' They could not believe that for 17 weeks there was no reporting on these covers on the Rwandan tragedy. I am not sure there is a poetic component, but perhaps I am trying to suggest some poetic justice by incorporating the timeline next to the covers.

B.G. - *You have dedicated over 10 years to this endeavor. Will this continue to be a lifelong project?*

A.J. - I don't think so. It was very difficult to work on it. It took a personal toll, and it was difficult to stop and it was difficult to get out. And so the fear of going back to it would be that I would not be able to get out. I was invited back to create a memorial for the people of Rwanda and then the funding fell. Perhaps this would be one reason to go back to it, if they call and say they found the funding, then let's build it; then, of course, I will go back to it because this memorial is very beautiful. There are no traces of what happened, it is a very poetic ending to my work. It would be the perfect ending if it is realized.

B.G. - *Do you see the Rwanda Project as representative of the grieving process?*

A.J. - I normally feel very uncomfortable speaking about this because what I experienced was nothing compared to what I witnessed other people experiencing. The trauma of genocide, death and dis-

placement was such an immense, horrific tragedy.

B.G. - *In interviews you often speak of those that you admire. Can you tell me what poem or poet has had the greatest influence on your work?*

A.J. - The entry to my website has a poem by William Carlos Williams, which is one of the most extraordinary poems ever created.

B.G. - *Have you read Adrienne Rich?*

A.J. - Absolutely. My next exhibition has the title of one of her poems: 'Tonight no poetry will serve.' This is one of the last poems that she wrote before dying.

So, besides these two poets, there is one other Italian poet that I like to mention and his name is Giuseppe Ungaretti. What is important with him is the economy of means in his work because he is able to convey so much with so little. It is almost like a Japanese haiku. The challenge of the haiku is to manage to convey an explosion of meaning with the fewest of words, and this is what I do in my work. All of my work responds to the haiku structure, which means I am trying to convey as much as I can with as little as possible because I do not want to overwhelm the spectator with information. I want to convey the simple idea in the deepest possible way. That requires a lot of editing.

B.G. - *Since you do not want to overwhelm the viewer, do the theories of memory and visual trauma play a part in your work?*

A.J. - Absolutely. In the *Rwanda Project* I wanted to offer a comprehensive whole, so each exercise focused on a specific issue, moment or theme within the genocide, and I developed different ideas so as not to repeat myself. I learned, and from what I learned I moved on to the next exercise. So they are installations, they are films, they are projections, etc., so that each one is focusing on a particular aspect of the tragedy that I wanted to convey.

B.G. - *You speak of learning as being important in your work. Do you feel that you have taught viewers anything? Have people not only reacted to your work, but also acted because of it?*

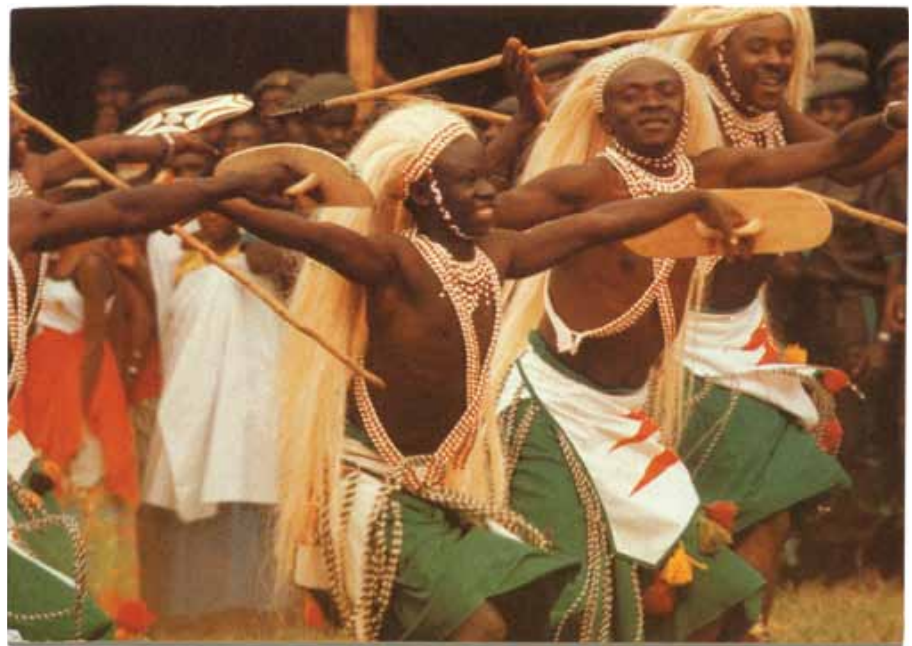
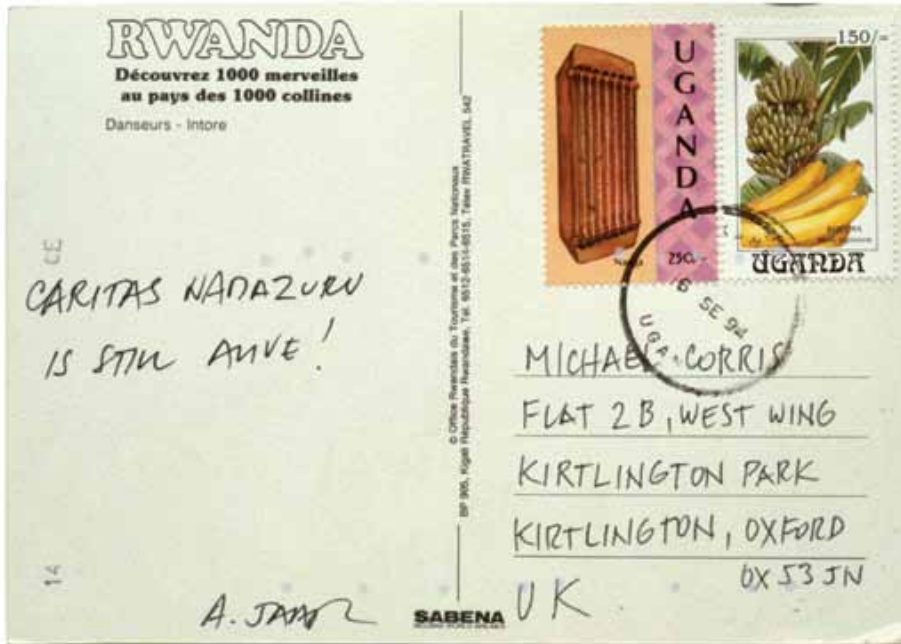
A.J. - Well, that is part of the objective. The ideal work of art is to inform and to move you to action and to touch you, to illuminate you. Most of the time I failed but this is the ideal—to fill you with sadness and joy.

B.G. - *What do you feel is the most poetic force in your work?*

A.J. - I am an architect and I am an architect making art, so I use different elements from the language of architecture: space, scale, movement, light, darkness, silence, and I invite the spectator through this maze, this architectural maze that I use as a language. Light is one of these elements because of its enormous potential. Light is necessary; it is the origin of photography, and light has this extraordinary spiritual element, so I end up using a lot of light.

B.G. - *You also use darkness. With *Emergency*, I found that this exercise was the most different of all your exercises. Did people stay to watch the immersion and the submersion of the continent?*

A.J. - I am aware of the limited capacity of the audience. Sometimes I provoke that and I say that if you do not see it, that is your problem. They would walk by the center and see this pool. Most of the time the pool was quiet. People will not see it, and I thought that it was the perfect metaphor because it was happening and it was there and they don't see it. So I liked that. We had a very slow rhythm, as if saying you weren't aware of what was happening in Rwanda.



Alfredo Jaar, *Signs of Life*, 1994. Courtesy of Michael Corris and the artist, New York.

B.G. - *You often speak of hope. Is there a message of hope in you last Rwandan exercise, Epilogue?*

A.J. - *Epilogue* is a very sad piece too. It is of an 80-year-old woman, Caritas, who walked hundreds of kilometers to escape the tragedy, and she is there in a refugee camp, the largest refugee camp in the world, in Goma. She is looking at the camera and she is dressed very dignified. In this work you have her face fading in, and when you are trying to understand her, to capture her, she fades away. You could not colonize her; you missed her like you missed so many things. It is a fitting image because it comes in and comes out, comes in and comes out, and it becomes air, nothing. It was my very sad epilogue to the project, almost like a farewell. I wanted to remind you of the genocide.

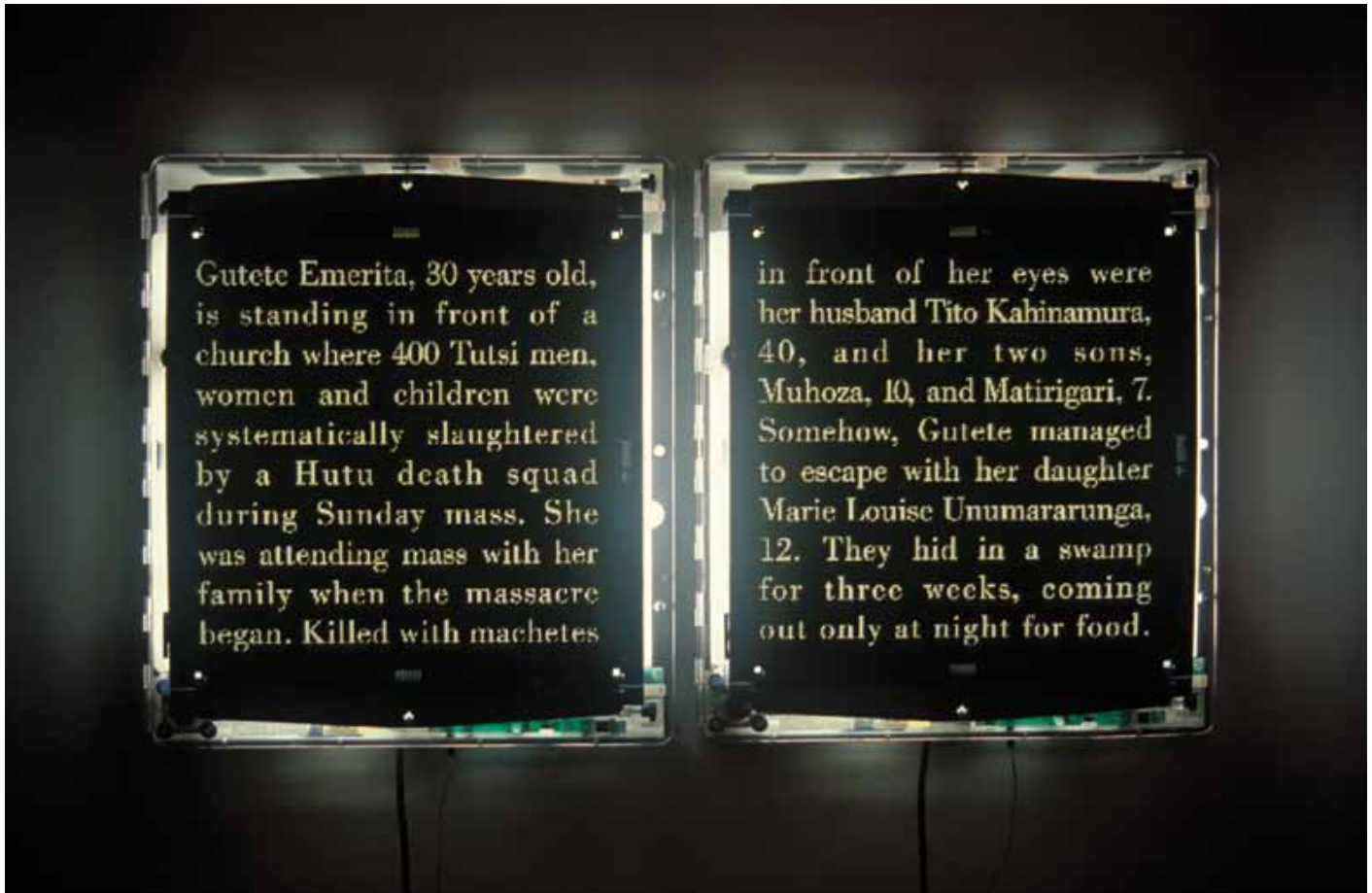
B.G. - *Although The Sound of Silence is not an exercise within the Rwanda Project, there are similarities between the messages*

that you are attempting to convey. Do you believe that project relates to the Rwanda Project?

A.J. - The spirit of that work is similar to the *Rwanda Project*. It is a theater built for a single image because I wanted to tell a story and I wanted the spectator to dedicate eight minutes to a single story, a single image. It is an homage to photojournalism, to the power of a single image, and that is what I was doing with that piece.

B.G. - *You speak of hope and sadness in a way that parallels Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran, to whom you dedicate your project, In Memoriam. Do you find that quote to be indicative of your experiences with the Rwandan Genocide?*

A.J. - If I could pick a poetic manifesto, it would be the Cioran quote. This harmony that it expresses between joy and sadness/despair is something that I experience all the time. The despair comes from



Alfredo Jaar, *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, 1996, two quadvision lightboxes with six b/w text transparencies and two color transparencies. Courtesy the artist, New York.

witnessing the suffering that takes place in this world. At the same time, I hang on to the joy of life. We have sun, we have beauty, we are here, sitting on sofas, we have shoes, and we have food. This is something that is not normal. This is not what the entire world experiences or has the privilege of. I am always perfectly aware of the privilege of my life and my capacity to think and to move around in the world. All of those things give me joy, so I am always aware of all of those privileges that give me joy and at the same time I am aware of moving around the world filled with despair. I have used this poem for 10 years, and I cannot change the entry to my website because this poem says everything that I need to say about my work.

B.G. - After concentrating on social injustices and the suffering of others over the course of your career, what pushes you forward? What keeps you going?

A.J. - What keeps me going is that this is what we have to do—my work as an artist, I am not a studio artist. The projects are based on the reality around me. It is natural that I do what I do. Chinua Achebe, an author whom I greatly admire, has said, ‘Art is man’s attempt to change the order of reality that has been given to us’ and that is what I do in my work. As an artist I try to change the reality that has been given to me. So it is perfectly natural, in spite of the pain and the suffering and the personal toll, that this is what we have to do. We have no choice. That is living.

B.G. - Did you find that while you were in Rwanda that people were hopeful?

A.J. - They want to turn the page. The country is littered with reminders of things that do not help to turn the page. You will see hundreds of memorials. You are going to see more bones that you have ever seen in your life and they are all visible because Rwandans felt betrayed by the rest of the world, as if no one cared, and almost as if no one believed them. You will see all of these physical demonstrations of the genocide, almost as if it’s being suggested to you, ‘You see, it’s true.’ They want to leave traces. How do you live in this world, surrounded by these signs? They seem quite hopeful, but it is difficult.

B.G. - In Field, Road, Cloud, you reached out to see the landscape. Did you find it necessary to look away from the tragedy?

A.J. - I had to because I could not breathe. When you witness what I did you stop breathing. I was looking for breathing spaces, so my camera took me to the sky, to the trees, to the flowers, and I didn’t even realize I was doing it at the time. I have a collection of flowers from Rwanda that I have never shown.

B.G. - Do you feel that there is hope in giving the people of Rwanda art?

A.J. - We need to do whatever we can to create cultural institutions and to bring creativity and educate people with art and culture. ■

NOTES

1. Vicenc Altaio, “Land of the Avenging Angel.” *Let There Be Light, The Rwanda Project 1994-1998*. Barcelona, Spain: Actar, 1998.

DON'T BELIEVE MISS LIBERTY

A Talk with Edgar Heap of Birds

In the national conversation on racial inequity, one group is continuously left on the sideline—those who were here first. Given that Native Americans precedently inhabited America, one would think their inalienable rights should at least match those of any settlers. But as history demonstrates, they don't.

Of the many atrocities against Native Americans, the thousand mile death march known as the Trail of Tears is probably the most recited. But throughout U.S. history Native Americans have suffered numerous injustices, many of which have left our collective memory. Even the Great Emancipator, President Lincoln, isn't clean. His order to execute Dakota Indians in Minnesota resulted in the largest mass hanging in our country's history.

Edgar Heap of Birds is a provocative artist bringing attention to the sad irony which is the plight of Indigenous Americans. Cheyenne by blood, his work utilizes contemporary conceptual and postmodern tactics to expose some of the less civil accounts of American history, ones that get little attention in today's press. From large scale celebratory sculptures like "Wheel" to road-sign-looking text based installations, his work addresses the issues of land ownership, displacement and cultural imperialism still haunting those of Native American descent.

Recently, I spoke with Edgar about his life, his art and his views of contemporary culture. During our conversation, what struck me most was the level of compassion and generosity coming from an artist making such aggressive, politically charged work. As you will see, he embodies the core value by which Cheyenne chiefs are defined, generosity.

BY SCOTT THORP

Scott Thorp - For well over thirty years now, you've created work directed at the issues of identity and the plight of indigenous peoples, mainly Native Americans. Looking back, when was the first time you experienced an inequity concerning your race? How did that make you feel, or how did it change your view of mankind?

Edgar Heap of Birds - My presence in the art world, and my usefulness, does deal with social injustice. But that's not all I do. It's an interesting discussion because that's what everyone knows about. But I also make paintings that are celebratory and sort of diarist drawings and printmaking. And I've always done that.

But when I was in college as a second year student at Kansas, I wanted to make a figurative painting of trophy heads—chiefs who were taken, killed or massacred. And one of my instructors encouraged me not to do that. In fact, he discouraged me. Of course, he wasn't native or a person of color. He said, "Why don't we just put all the Indians in national parks.... They'll be better off anyway." That was his outlook.

S.T. - Your work seems to jump from different ends of the aesthetic spectrum. Some of your most notable works are designed to look like factory-made street signs placed in common areas—something a passerby might assume was made by a local county commission. Then, at the other end of the spectrum, you've created monoprints appearing impulsive, almost like someone made them on the way to a protest. "Secrets in Life and Death" is a recent series of work related to that latter category. These are 15" x 22" with solid colored backgrounds, and mostly consisting of white, hand-brushed text such as: Delicate Fingers Travel Across Your View, Did Not Know Death Was Coming and Nuance of Sky Blue Over You. One particular one reads, "Indian Still Target Obama Bin Laden Geronimo." Can you speak to this particular work and what this series signifies?

E.H.B. - Yeah, that one is about when they killed Bin Laden. Hillary Clinton and Obama were in the situation room when they all got happy after they received a radio transmission that Geronimo was killed that day—an enemy killed in action. They gave Bin Laden the code name Geronimo, an Apache name.

Obviously, that brings all kinds of horrible issues to bear. They gave the worst terrorist an Apache name of all names. And there are Apaches in the armed services, all over the place. They hunted Geronimo and they put him in prison and put his whole tribe in prison for like ten years. So maybe there is a linkage there—they hated Indians so badly they tracked them, hunted them and killed them. And they hated Bin Laden the same. They're all put together as strange bedfellows, Bin Laden, Geronimo and the President of the United States.

S.T. - To follow up on that, what does it signify when an African American President considers a famous leader of indigenous people synonymous with being an enemy of the state?

E.H.B. - Ya know, the president is clueless about a lot of history. He's got his own education; he's got an American education. And he's mixed race. But it's more like his education has many blind spots. That's really the biggest challenge with all the art we are making. We have just such a bad education about history. Even in his first inaugural address, he (the President) called everybody "settlers." Obama used that in his inauguration so he doesn't understand the Native American thing at all.

S.T. - Incidents regarding the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner's police-related death in New York, situations pertaining to social injustice, are coming to the forefront of political discussions. Do you feel the urge to create works inspired by recent events of social injustice? If so, what?

E.H.B. – I was in China a few years ago, Beijing and Shanghai. I made a whole piece for the time surrounding Tiananmen Square. It showed in China, and I was there lecturing. It was just the text saying “DON’T BELIEVE MISS LIBERTY”. For all indigenous people, the Statue of Liberty has her back to them, and she faces the rest of the world.

I have a lot of interest in topical issues. And I’ve been thinking about the black/white issue. We need to reveal that lie and see how we are much more mixed together, from sexual abuses of the U.S. slavery era, than we admit we are.

S.T. – *You use short pithy statements with a specific cadence that I’m assuming mimics the cadence of the Cheyenne language. But it’s very contemporary in the way it mimics twitter or texting. What are your thoughts on that?*

E.H.B. – It’s in threes. Three words and then they go together to make two sets, six words total. So it’s usually two events described in three words. I’ve been at it for a long time, 30 years or so. But when I think about the cadence, I go back to “Heap of Birds.” There’s three words. I’m not sure, but that could be the reasoning behind the cadence. I also like the Talking Heads, the new wave band, their work like “Fear of Music” and “Life Under Punches.” It might have to do with David Byrne and the way he wrote lyrics and music.

S.T. – *Can you tell me a little about the color blue? Wougim is the ceremonial Cheyenne word used to describe the sacred blue sky above.*

E.H.B. – That’s my son’s name, Wougim. It’s a ceremonial concept. The sky is made every year. I’m actually involved in the ceremony where the sky is made. I was working in the ceremonial tipi just before my son was born. I was actually privileged enough to hold the sky, Wougim.

In the ceremony, I brought it out of the tipi, showed it to Wougim’s mother. To me, the sky is something that’s ever present. As a traveler, I like the stars a lot. I wanted to give him something that would always be with him. Wherever he goes, the blue sky is there.

S.T. – *Who has been the greatest influence in your life as an Indigenous American?*

E.H.B. – It would have to be my ceremonial instructors. Those four men have given me a major education, plus they are mentors and colleagues. I’m very close to all of them.

S.T. – *Being a Cheyenne and creating art of cultural awareness brings to mind traditional Native American art forms more identified with craft like beading, for example. However, your body of work doesn’t resemble this at all. Much of your work is text-based signage, fairly postmodern in the way it deals with semiotics. How does your education from the Tyler School of Art and the Royal College of Art separate you from the traditional practice of Native American art making?*

E.H.B. – England is a different kind of place from America. It’s more cosmopolitan as to what it interjects into society. It’s an awkward thing with all the colonies they’ve created throughout the world. Their society is prolific. They’ve essentially abused the whole world. Being in England gave me insight into society.

The educational boundaries told me to go back home to Oklahoma. After Oklahoma I went to Philadelphia and finished my MFA. By then I was more politicized, which hit a brick wall in Philadelphia. Philadelphia was more of a troubling engagement. That existence reversed at the end of my thesis show when my mentor said, “I understand now.” He learned. I suffered, but he learned. I guess I educated him with all the



Edgar Heap of Birds, *For China*, 1989, Photostat, 40" x 48." Courtesy of the artist.

money I paid into the system. But Vito Acconci and other wonderful artists came and gave me influences and new ideas.

I’m still connected with the East coast. I was just there (New York) the other day. I’m going to show this piece in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in March. I’m showing in New York. And I’m working with colleges in New York and Baltimore and what not.

S.T. – *There’s a certain irony in protesting the spread of white culture and being educated within its elite institutions. How do you reconcile this?*

E.H.B. – It’s something that you have to learn from. I even taught at Yale. I was senior professor at Yale, which was horrible. But now I know, I know. I think it’s better now with Bob Storr. It was a tough place for me as a professor. You weren’t free to express yourself, even as a professor, or as a student at that institution in the 1990s. But there were useful things.

It’s kind of like the wizard and the curtain. You have to raise the curtain to see what’s behind the curtain. Then all the power goes away. That’s what happened with Yale; it’s a big power. But when I raised the curtain, I laughed.

One of my great mentors was Stanley Whitney. Stanley studied at Yale and taught at Tyler. He is still a leading painter in New York City. I saw some of his wonderful paintings the other day in Soho. He’s a black American painter. I met great people there. Maybe it wasn’t hospitable to me, but I met some great artists along the way.

S.T. – *Much of your work points to the transgressions of society. In your mind, which piece does it best? Please elaborate.*

E.H.B. – That would be *Building Minnesota* in Minneapolis. It's about Lincoln hanging thirty-eight Dakota warriors and Andrew Johnson hanging two more during the civil war era. As I said, how do you reveal the real history of this continent? Lincoln signing that letter is a hidden story. That piece will be shown at the MET with the sign, my picture and a discussion of Lincoln doing that. Most Americans don't know that happened.

S.T. – *I didn't until I read it last week.*

E.H.B. – Yeah, it's a big thing to hide. We need to break through and get to the real story and truth. That project was painful. People got upset about it. They called me a hatemonger because they felt I attacked this mythical hero.

S.T. – *Moving to another piece. Wheel, a fifty-foot installation at The Denver Art Museum inspired by the Medicine Wheel of the Big Horn Mountains, is an incredibly complex work. The more I read on it, the more complex it becomes to me. Can you describe its context and significance to the community?*

E.H.B. – They just had the 150 year anniversary memorial of the Sand Creek Massacre. Many of the tribal members came. Two busloads of Cheyenne and Arapaho People from Oklahoma were there, just last week. They go to *Wheel* to have a candlelight vigil.

The structure of the piece is those trees, the fork trees, which are part of the ceremonial lodge. I meant for it not to be a bona fide tribal instrument. The real lodge has rafters above and 12 forks. Those rafters are not in the sculpture and my piece has only 10 forks. I see what goes on in the Native American life as completing the lodge. In essence, the candlelight vigil completes the piece. Symbolically, it supports the universe. So, I support the people's activities with the poles as well. Additionally, the history of the whole Middle West is there on every tree from pre-history to Fort Marion in Florida to reservation life and massacres.

It's also an autobiographical piece about being empowered with advanced degrees from college and coming back to inherit the tribal ceremony and system, and to practice it.

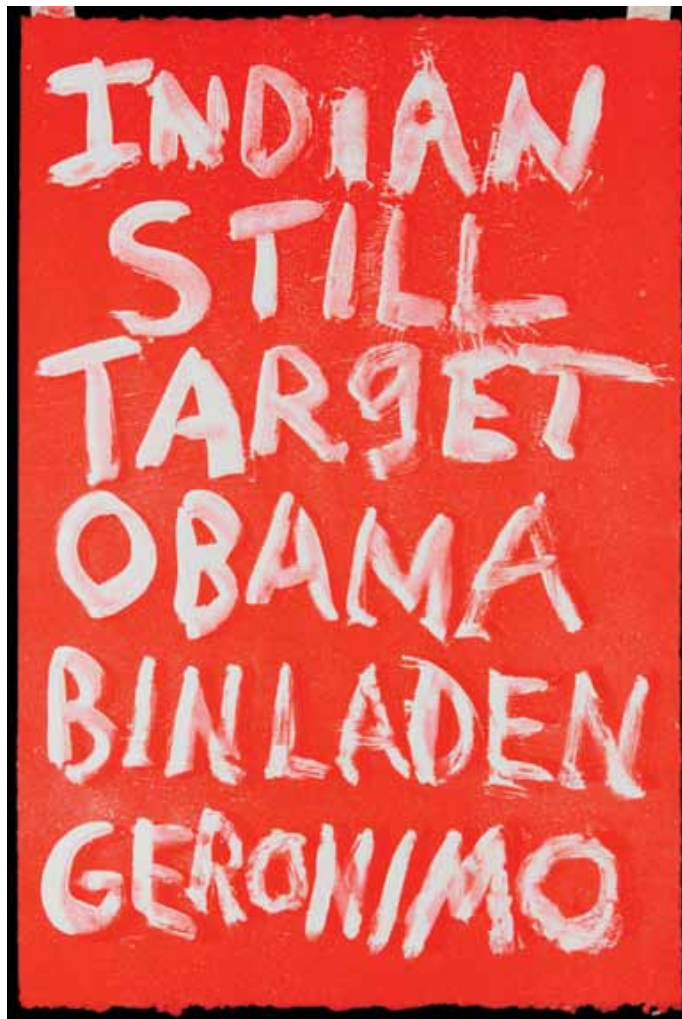
S.T. – *Let's talk about the number 4 for a second. You, personally, have 4 "paints" from the Earth Renewal ceremony on your reservation close to Oklahoma City, meaning you've completed 4 cycles of it, 16 years. The ceremony takes place over 4 days, and is a series of 4 songs repeated 4 times. And dancers/participants have to commit for 4 years. And you have a series of paintings titled, Neuf, meaning 4. Can you speak to the significance of the number 4 to you?*

E.H.B. – Primarily it's a balance number. It's an axis of the northeast, southeast, southwest and northwest. Across that axis goes the solstice. The high end of the continent is the summer solstice, summer sunrise. The low sun rises in the southeast and sets in the southwest. It's about weather and animals migrating. It's about the extremes of the sun. And once you understand those four places on the continent, you are set up to understand where you live.

In a weird way, it's similar to how Anglos think of their world when they say things like, Middle East. And they perceive Europe as the center of the world.

S.T. – *So to the Cheyenne, where's the center?*

E.H.B. – South Dakota is where a lot of the articles of the ceremony come from.



Edgar Heap of Birds, *INDIAN STILL TARGET OBAMA BIN LADEN GERONIMO*, 2011, monoprint, 15" x 22." Courtesy of the artist.

S.T. – *Back to one of your works, in placing signage with provocative text referring to historical land usage such as "Beyond the Chief" installed at the University of Illinois in Champaign, you are establishing a commentary about ownership, and essentially boundaries. The way government entities like the Corps of Engineers view boundaries is much different from the Cheyenne concept. Can you explain the Cheyenne concept of land usage and boundaries? And how have these differing concepts added to confusion in negotiations between the two?*

E.H.B. – I'd like to turn toward what happened in Champaign. They have a mascot. But they didn't pick one from the tribes in the area like Meskwaki or Peoria. They picked one from Hollywood, a buckskin-wearing one with a war bonnet. Even if they did pick one of those chiefs, those chiefs are chosen within the chief society.

And with the chief society, everything you own becomes the tribe's. So if someone were to ask you for something they need to use, they can just take it. If you don't want to be that generous, you don't want to be a chief. Being a chief is normally associated with being president, CEO or a general of an army. But those plains native chiefs are practitioners of this very loving and generous perspective of being mediators and giving away everything they own. That's how they rule, through generosity.

And the way they use the mascot to do gymnastics at sports games is all a disgrace. That's why I made *Beyond the Chief*. We had local



Edgar Heap of Birds with Wheel, 2005, sculptural installation at Denver Art Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

chiefs come in to speak at the university. They were not mascots or icons, they were real people. We were trying to get them to wake up and understand where they were and who was around then and how a chief really behaves.

S.T. – The fact that it was vandalized, and it was repeatedly vandalized, does that mean it succeeded?

E.H.B. – In part, they responded to the work—even though it was through violence. There was some theft too. It became a provocative newsworthy activity for the city in a national way. It’s made to get an inflammatory discussion going, so we can learn about the truth.

S.T. – You have a long standing practice of placing some text backwards in your work. For instance one of the signs in Beyond the Chief reads, “FIGHTING ILLINI/TODAY YOU HOST/IS/MESKWAKI.” The first line, “FIGHTING ILLINI” being in reverse. Please explain the significance of this methodology?

E.H.B. – I started doing that in 1988 when I came to New York. I did a piece for the Public Art Fund. I learned from another tribal member, who was from Rhode Island, that when you enter another tribe’s jurisdiction, you need to acknowledge that. I thought that was important. So when I came to New York, I made a piece that said things like, “Today Your Host Is…” Shinnecock, Mohawk or Cayuga. I wanted to say, to New York, these are your host people, not Edgar Heap of Birds. I was in New York, so it should be about tribal people from the area. I flipped the text backwards for people to look at their past differently. I sent these to the public art fund and they said the Dutch began history here. And I replied “what happened before the Dutch?” You have to turn them around physically. They think they’re looking in the right direction.

S.T. – That’s a fairly postmodern concept of bringing meaning. Do you consider yourself to be a postmodern artist?

E.H.B. – Sure, a conceptual artist, postmodern artist.

S.T. – I feel that your work is about telling stories in unique ways. The stories at times aren’t pretty, but have a powerful moral lesson.

Every culture has its stories that continue the traditions. What’s the most profound or your favorite story of the Cheyenne culture?

E.H.B. – There’s one I tell my daughter when I put her to bed about the eagle. It’s about how the Cheyenne selected the animals that would be prized and those who would be prey; they had to make a choice. It deals with a big race around a mountain. Some of the birds glanced off the mountain and left the color on the rock from their feathers. The eagle is one of the fastest and highest flying birds. From this, it became revered. The slower birds became more earth-bound and sustenance for the tribe. The eagle remains one of the most prized entities we have in the tribe. My grandmother told this story to me. And I tell my daughter. It’s about being competitive and gaining respect. The other animals aren’t disrespected, though. They fulfill your life as food.

S.T. – How do you wish to be remembered?

E.H.B. – Being accessible and participatory with our tribal people, as a father and teacher, being a ceremonial leader and tribal citizen, all of those layers of engagement are important. The art thing is just one layer. I’m empowered for that one (art) through them. That’s how I get my energy, my guidance. I’ve continued to live that way.

Also, contributing on multiple levels and not being stingy with my energy and knowing it’s not just about art, gallery presence or being a professor. I think it’s great for the native community that you are accessible to your own people. We’ll have an event next week with my mother and sister, a senior citizens’ holiday party. All the senior citizens of the tribe will come and I’ll be sitting there playing bingo with everyone. Blackbear Bosin would have sat there too. That’s how the artists in the tribe work differently from the artists in Chelsea. For us here it’s more about how the birthday parties and the ceremonial camp merge with the art career.

S.T. – It seems like you are absorbing the mentality of the chief. You are very generous.

E.H.B. – Thanks, thanks a lot. ■

* This conversation took place in February 2015.

MY WORK IS A REACTION TO THE IDEA OF THE LATIN AMERICAN ARTIST

An Interview with Oscar Santillan

BY ROBIN VAN DEN AKKER

In March 2015, Oscar Santillan hiked to the top of England's highest mountain, Scafell Pike, and removed its tip. The tip was the focal point of the installation *The Intruder* (2015) that was on display in Santillan's first U.K. solo exhibition at the Copperfield Gallery, London¹. It is a tiny rock. A one-inch stone, in fact. Yet in the British popular imagination it has taken on immense proportions after public outrage turned into media frenzy (or the other way around, of course). Tabloids, broadsheets and, yes, even the BBC endlessly recycled accusations of vandalism and thievery whilst avoiding—or unwittingly circling around—questions concerning national pride and regional identity, natural conservation and cultural geography, as well as any critical engagement with the work itself.

Oscar Santillan (born in 1980) is South American by way of Europe. Born and raised in Ecuador and living and working in London and Amsterdam, he once described his oeuvre as a reaction to the *idea* of the Latin American artist. *The Intruder* is the most recent addition to a body of work that set out from being a very direct commentary on the social conditions and political tensions in the Americas, but by now encompasses highly speculative yet subtle inquiries into our conventional conceptions of historical time and the mundane relationships between humans and animals, subjects and objects.

We recently met to discuss these, and other, aspects of his work that have been absent from the coverage of “Scafell Pike” and in the midst of the demands—and I kid you not—to return its top.²

Robin van den Akker – *What do you mean when you say, ‘My work can be seen as a reaction to the idea of the Latin American artist?’*

Oscar Santillan – A prominent part of the art produced in Latin America is instrumental to what I called ‘the temptation of reality.’ Often the first impulse of artists in conflicting social conditions is to react to those conditions. Latin America is one of those parts of the world where the social dynamics are so strong, so obscenely visible, that often artists give in to confronting that immediate layer of reality, while discarding other potential scenarios and corners of reality. The artist, then, sees himself as a citizen, or, I should say, as an anxious citizen, who is sucked into a grid of preexisting categories and narratives that attempt to tell us where the world starts and ends, what is possible and impossible. There were moments in the recent history of Latin America in which that confrontation demanded inventiveness and courage. There is powerful political art in the continent, art made in the most ferocious conditions. But through time it has become too academic, too safe and politically correct. A moralizing postcard. It is often said ‘everything is political,’ but I do not believe it since there are areas of reality, potential realities as well, which are absolutely untouched by those concerns.

R.V. – *What about yourself? Did you ever—at any moment in your career—succumb to this temptation of reality?*

O.S. – At the very beginning of my career I tried out some very abstract exercises, such as my first solo show “Art for Dogs” (2002), an exhibition in which only dogs were welcomed in. The content of the show was undisclosed, and people would have to wait outside while their dog would explore the exhibit. But soon after my political concerns took over, washing out the inquiries I was developing. During that period my work was strongly related to History and its present consequences, or what I see nowadays as a conservative view of the present: the present as a mere prolongation of the past. Anyway, those were really tumultuous times in Ecuador, the political left and the social organizations were in the streets protesting and resisting, and as many other young people did, I became a militant.

R.V. – *How was this militancy translated into your art practice at the time? Can you give an example?*

O.S. – My work of that period deconstructs and comments on big topics; they are about a world written with capital letters. Works such as *Prácticas Degeneradas* (*Degenerated Practices*, 2005) and *Prolongación* (*Prolongation*, 2007) are perfect examples of that way of working. The first one is a large mass of solid oil paint modeled after Colonial imagery and represents a self-castrated boy. The second piece was part of my work within Lalimpia collective, formed by self-taught artists, and is an installation that explores the promises of the oil-dependent economy of Ecuador. In both cases, the concerns move around topics of national history and power understood in its more evident way.

R.V. – *So what made you reconsider this ‘Latin-American mode?’*

O.S. – The left won the elections in 2006, and the language we used to understand and criticize our reality became the official discourse. It became the language of the ruling class, yet they turned it into shameless jargon. The moment critical discourse was taken into the territory of real politics I did not know where to position myself. Many of my friends who were among the most lucid critical voices in the country started to work for the government, which initially was formed by a coalition of the new left, indigenous organizations, ecologists and intellectuals. At the beginning so many of us were hopeful about the promised changes, and indeed several of those changes have taken place, but often including second agendas aimed to secure the permanence of this new ruling class. Coincidentally at the time I was reading Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, and his differentiation between the mirror image and the crystal image struck me. It helped me to realize where to position myself: It was outside of the mirror image, outside of any loyalty to the immediate reality. So I turned away from those big discussions towards the territory of existence.



Oscar Santillán, *The Intruder, The highest inch of England on a pedestal*, 2015. Installation view. Courtesy of Copperfield Gallery, London.



Oscar Santillán, *Prolongation*, 2007, fuel pump and a 1,3 Km long hose. Work in collaboration with Lalimpia collective. Installation view at Havana Biennial 2007. Courtesy of Lalimpia, Ecuador.



Oscar Santillán, *The Telepathy Manifesto*, 2011, event documented on video. Courtesy of Copperfield Gallery, London.

R.V. – Existence?

O.S. – In *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera makes the distinction between ‘reality,’ or what does not need to be demonstrated, and ‘existence,’ which is the territory of possibilities. For me this means narrowing down the scale of the world as I used to see it in search of lost corners or hints of the future. By narrowing down the scale of the world I am pointing to a sense of ethics, to what theologian Leonardo Boff calls ‘the dimension of carefulness,’ to care for what is overlooked, to care for what is neglected, and I would say to care for what does not even exist. It is a sort of pre-modern mindset in which all categories are negotiable. It means working at the edge where noise and knowledge fold together, the edge where facts and fiction fold together. So after 2006 I went back to my previous concerns and some newer ones that I had put on hold during those previous years.

R.V. – What kind of concerns—both older and new?

O.S. – The old concern that I returned to explore is the relationship between animals and humans, or in other words, the possible relationships among mammals. From “Art for Dogs” (2002) I reconnected with those concerns with *Memorial* (2008), *The Manifesto of Goodness* (2012), *La Clairvoyance* (2012), which is a work that introduces a newer concern in my practice, namely the way we

look at the world, and the mechanisms of vision that are present in obsessive works such as *The Permanent Blink* (2010) and *All the Eyes of the Universe* (2012). And another concern or strategy I am currently developing consists of connecting what is unconnected: a marble sculpture to a cloud, in *Cloud* (2012); Carl Jung to jaguars, in *Zephyr* (2014); trance dance to Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Afterword* (2015); and bird sounds to karate, in *The Whisperer* (2015). These later works are aimed to insert a meaningful narrative where there was none. They insert a sense of possibility where no possibility was even needed.

R.V. – About this relationship between humans and animals or mammals, it seems that you engage with these relations beyond some kind of Nature/Culture divide by incorporating domesticated animals such as a cow, a horse, a cat, dogs, etc. What kind of other possible associations do you want to investigate, other than the association between pet and master, property and owner?

O.S. – Nietzsche has an interesting view on this topic. He makes a distinction between culture and civilization rather than culture and nature. Culture admits, welcomes and celebrates animality; while civilization is the taming of animality. So I try to reframe this well-known dichotomy in our understanding of reality and look at the relationships in those terms.

So far I have mostly worked with animals that live closely with humans. So they are used to human presence and there is an actual historical bond there. We tend to see the relationship between animals and humans—and taming and breeding—as humans engineering something. But Michael Pollan puts forward the hypothesis that we—humans—are the instruments in a larger interaction in which we are actually, or arguably, instrumentalized by animals in order to provide them with nurture. So we are accomplishing a task that has always already been potentiality there, as a property of animals.

With my work I try to speculate on this. I see my self as a kind of vessel. For instance, in *The Manifesto of Goodness*, I am an instrument to accomplish a task that connects different mammals. So I position myself in that kind of territory.

R.V. – *The Manifesto of Goodness is structured around a long walk in which you bring cow milk, taken straight from the tit and kept in your mouth, from the cow to a thirsty cat. Could you elaborate on the use of body fluids—sweat, sperm, milk, tears—as a medium of connection in many of your works?*

O.S. – There is a certain tension in these materials. They are still part of the body that secreted them. They show the metamorphosis continuously happening within the body of mammals but are often not manifest in the relationship between mammals.

R.V. – *So does your work attempt to cultivate the relation between humans and animals rather than civilize, and therefore deaden, some sort of animal spirit or animality within animals and humans?*

O.S. – Yes. This is extremely interesting, especially in light of the connection to Nietzsche’s ideas on forgetfulness and forgiveness. He talks about animals as beings that are able to move forward because of their capacity for forgetting. And he talks about not-forgetting-but-forgiving as part of the weakness of civilization. Yet at the same time the question of animal consciousness is often surrounding my work. The question: ‘Who is there?’ Think of *Clairvoyance*. It’s simply a picture of a horse, but a horse arguably reflecting on himself.

R.V. – *Do you mean as some kind of individual?*

O.S. – I wouldn’t be afraid to speculate about, or even say that, animals—or at least mammals—have traces of individuality. Yet we should criticize the idea of the individual as some kind of product of the Enlightenment. I don’t think we can come up with such an understanding of the self in our historical period.

R.V. – *Earlier, you mentioned the notion of a ‘pre-modern mindset’; here, you criticize the ‘Enlightenment’ conception of the self. Could you say that your work engages with the Latourian idea of a non-modern, symmetrical relationship between subjects and animals-as-objects by ‘subjectifying’ animals and ‘objectifying’ yourself?*

O.S. – I would say that is at the core of many of my works, yeah. But it also extends to relationships between humans. In the case of *The Telepathy Manifesto*, for instance, there is an inequality in pain and suffering, yet I try literally—even though it is absurd—to equalize the relationship between the person who feels the pain and the person who doesn’t. The paradox is that while all these hierarchies get moved around and get rearranged in all kinds of new constellations, I actually *make sense* out of them, somehow. In that regard, I do not follow the arguably postmodern way of dealing with that problem.



Oscar Santillán, *The Manifesto of Goodness*, 2012, event documented on slides. Courtesy of Copperfield Gallery, London.

R.V. – *Is this where your inquiry into a sense of purpose comes in? To me, your works contain a strong sense of purpose. There often is some kind of relatively simple task or physical activity at hand that needs to be carried out in a very direct manner.*

O.S. – I am very interested in the idea of a sense of purpose. To get purpose you need to speculate about the meaningful relations among things. You can’t just spread them around and leave them like that. So in the end I try to create a string that allows me to move from A to B and gives direction, and no matter how absurd the connection is, it is meaningful.



Oscar Santillán, *Zephyr*, 2014, the breeze of jaguars trapped in a marble container, and a slide projection. Installation view. Courtesy of The Ridder, Maastricht.



© Pierre Antoine
Oscar Santillán, *Afterword*, 2015, a piece of paper belonging to Friedrich Nietzsche, a slide projection, two prints, and a video projection. Installation view. Courtesy of STUK, Leuven.

R.V. – *So do you aim to look anew at all kinds of associations to not only draw out and deconstruct the hierarchies and categories imposed by our conventional ways of thinking but also to speculate about and reconstruct more symmetrical relationships?*

O.S. – I would say so, yeah.

R.V. – *In A Hymn (2013), but also in works such as The Telepathy Manifesto (2011-2012) and Accompaniment for a Falling Leaf (2012), the medium of cultivating relations is focus or concentration. Why this use of ‘close attention’ as a trope?*

O.S. – I am searching for the power unleashed in small things. In this quest I got rid of metaphors by moving to the ‘things in themselves,’ which of course is a problematic premise since we all experience the world through the mediation of our senses, perceptions and cultural categories. Metaphors are the enemies of small things. Small things are present in front of our eyes but get overlooked. Metaphorical thinking is anxious, it avoids looking at what is here and now since it distracts us with what is somewhere else. I want to focus into what is around me.

A prominent modus operandi of my work consists in generating actual events in the world, which initially are triggered by this careful observation. The works that you mentioned are about humans distilling power in a sort of unknown ritual that is only possible in their proximity. Tiny parts of the human body—sweat and tears are part of our body even if we look at them as independent entities—become the only significant element of the work. The paradox is that my work often enacts a deeper commitment to the physicality of the world but its end result does not belong to the physical causality that seems to surround us.

In *A Hymn*, the body is shown to a level of maximum exhaustion, and then the consequences of that exhaustion, the drops of sweat produced by the body, become the main focus of what is to come. It is unclear then how the drummer who beats the drum every time a drop reaches the floor can even see them with such accuracy. It is another reality invading the previous one. The same applies for the leaf of *Accompaniment*. These things do not belong to meaningful categories; when they are out in the world they can be seen as noise: one more drop of sweat on a sweaty person, one more leaf in a forest, but somehow the context of their existence is reframed in the event showing that they carry meaningful information, that they are able to enact a certain power.

R.V. – *Could the same be said about The Intruder, which was structured around the tiny rock you took away, or stole, from the highest point in England?*

O.S. – *The Intruder* is also about the distinction between noise and knowledge—what holds information. What is interesting is this idea about small things and where the power of small things is located. This rock has always been noise—because we are not talking about some cartoonish tip—and from one second to the next it is turned from noise into a holder of a whole cultural geography and a landscape of power.

R.V. – *This distinction between seemingly insignificant noise and knowledge also seems to play into your critique of the conservative view of History—in which the present becomes a mere prolongation of a past intertwined with modernization—without any real sense of futurity. Is your work also a way of re-investigating history, and*

re-narrativizing History, from the perspective of noise—seemingly insignificant moments or things that officially can’t have any place in any narrative about one’s personal history or official History?

O.S. – Did it ever happen to you that you have a memory of something that hasn’t happened?

R.V. – *Perhaps. Yes.*

O.S. – These kinds of moments really intrigue me. When we have memories of things that haven’t happened but might have happened and we are sure that they have happened. The first memory I have of my life is a memory that rationally is a fake memory. During the weekends I used to sleep at my grandfather’s. It is a memory of me jumping from one bed to the other. But the distance between the beds is at least two meters and I was about four or five years old. It cannot have happened. You can take these non-memories of moments in which the rational way of conceiving reality is broken and insert them in reality as a meaningful narrative. Similarly, I am interested in futurity as any kind of possibility that was present in the past as potential and it never occurred. My work *Zephyr*, for instance, is really a work about futurity, about the future, in the sense that I take an accomplished desire of the past—something that a person wanted to happen but never happened.

R.V. – *So in this case Jung’s wish to travel to Latin America, something he never managed to do.*

O.S. – Yes. So for this piece I made a sculpture out of a replica of his own, by now lost birth chart, used it as a container to replace a vacuum cleaner bag, took it to the Amazon, asked a shaman where I could find jaguars and used the vacuum cleaner to suck the scent of the jaguar into the sculpture-container. In this way, I accomplished his wishes as literally as possible while trying to find what wasn’t there—that is, this moment of future in the past. And in the case of *Afterword*, in which I stole a piece of paper from a manuscript of Nietzsche, from the past as it were, in order to go back to that past and speculate about a moment that wasn’t public knowledge, the moment of Nietzsche dancing to reach a state of trance.

R.V. – *This brings us back to the Deleuzian notion of the crystal image and a multilayered reality, right?*

O.S. – Yes. For Deleuze, the crystal image entails an interaction of the actual and the virtual, ‘resulting,’ if that’s the correct word, in a multilayered apprehension of time and a multi-modal production of temporality. Another way of saying this would be by using the notion of sparks, small sparks that contain meaningful narratives. These sparks do not aim to confront or replace the mainstream narratives about reality—or the real—in itself. Rather, they are aimed to last for a second before they vanish. So what interests me about the spark is that it shows the potential of how things could be, whilst avoiding creating a new system that replaces an older system. ■

NOTES

1. “Oscar Santillan: To Break a Silence into Smaller Silences” was on view at Copperfield Gallery, London, from March 26th through May 9, 2015.
2. For further reading on ‘Scafell Pike’-gate, see:
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3012562/We-want-mountain-Artist-accused-vandalism-stealing-England-s-highest-peak-gallery-London-s-South-Bank.html>>
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/environment/tourism/11496376/Artist-who-took-1in-rock-off-Scafell-Pikes-summit-vandalised-Englands-highest-mountain.html>>
<<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cumbria-32053132>>
<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/27/stone-mountain-peak-gallery-art-vandalism-scafell-pike-oscar-santillan>>

INTERVIEW WITH RONALD OPHUIS

“With the introduction of violence and sexuality the identification with the victim or the perpetrator is stronger and more intense.”

Dutch artist Ronald Ophuis (born in 1968, Hengelo) has, since the late 1990s when I first saw his work in Amsterdam, built up a consistent pictorial oeuvre in which history, memory and narrativity emerge as key elements in a thought-provoking, critical and confrontational artistic practice. Our conversation dealt basically with the state of history painting today.

BY PACO BARRAGÁN



Ronald Ophuis at his studio, 2015. Courtesy the artist.

Paco Barragán – The first show in which I saw your work was in the group show “Life is a Bitch” at de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam in 1998. The art world has changed a lot since then.

Ronald Ophuis – Indeed, the discourse and the art changed massively. From my perspective, especially the social aspect and the request for a social influence of art on society became much stronger. It also raised a huge gap between the artists with works more suitable for commercial galleries and the artworks made from a more social or societal point of perspective which finds their way to the biennales, and so on.

P.B. – One of the works in the show was the-then-and-still-today very confrontational painting titled Execution from 1995.

R.O. – The work was based on the war stories that came out of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I imagined a scene where some men were killing the prisoners of war, and they would play with a ball that they found after the killing with the dead body in the background. And, as you could say, ‘One wound tells more

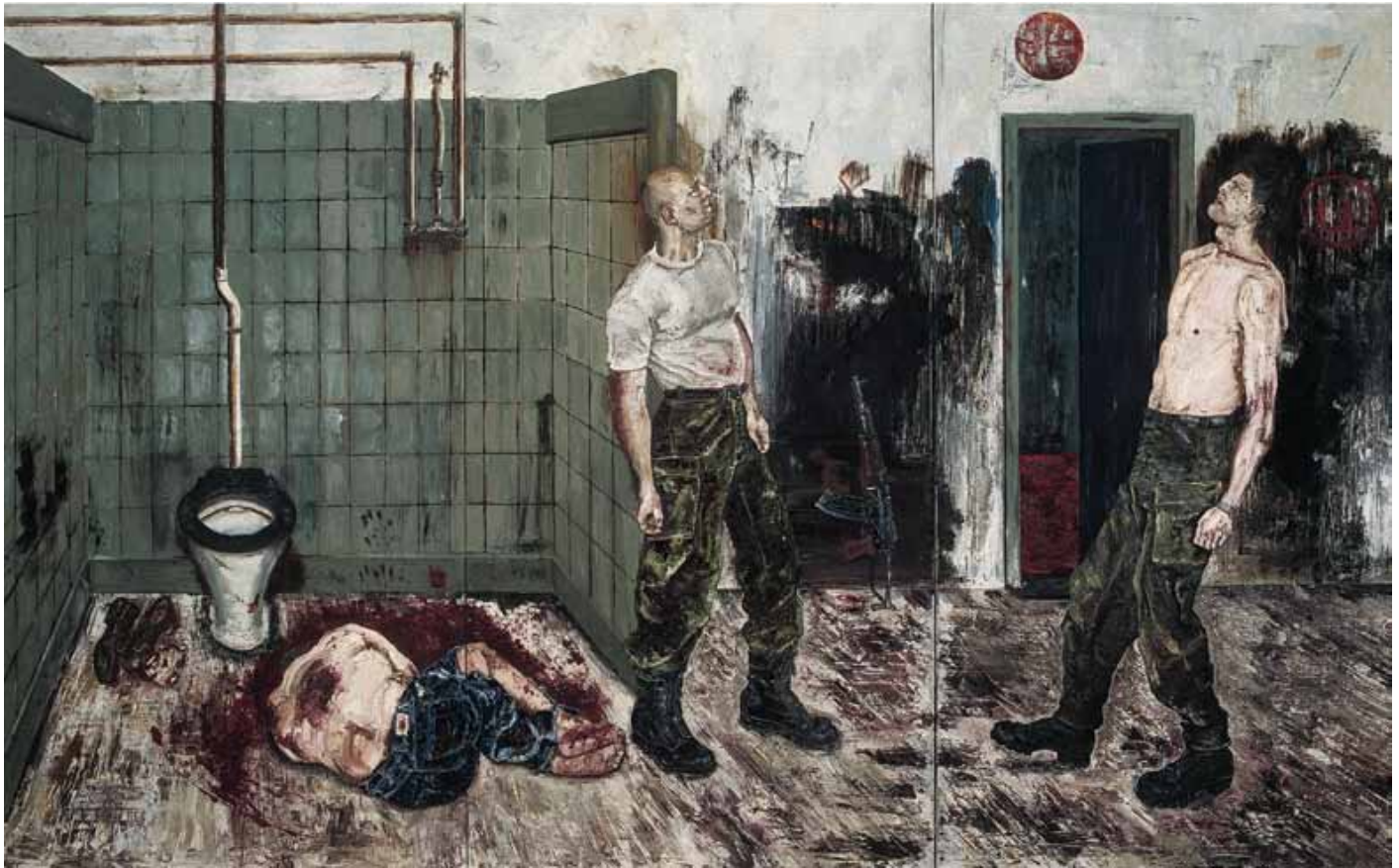
than a thousand angels.’ In a way, it’s also a revenge on Mother Nature, a deed driven by fear and of anger towards life. First you have to return the pain and after that there will be time for the giving.

P.B. – Another work was the composition of a group of soccer players violating a boy with a Coca-Cola bottle—Soccer Players—from 1995 as well. What was the inspiration for that particular work?

R.O. – In my childhood this scene happened on my football team. One of my team members was deeply humiliated in this way—an almost classic perversity that exists and dooms groups of men.

P.B. – I remember these two works very vividly. In many of your works—think also of Sweet Violence (1996)—there is a poignant or unapologetic mix of violence and sexuality. Why?

R.O. – Of course, thinking about a scene and trying to find the strongest moment or ‘still’ from this story, which is about suffering and then sexuality, is never far away. The interesting thing is that



Ronald Ophuis, *Execution, Srebrenica 1995, 1996*, oil on linen, 8.5 ft. x 13.7 ft. Courtesy Gallery Aerooplastics, Brussels/Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam.

with the introduction of violence and sexuality the identification with the victim or the perpetrator is stronger and more intense. In a way, it is a strong strategy to make a connection between the viewer and the artwork. Which is basically the difference between the ‘subjective’ artist and the ‘objective’ journalist: The artist is the one who wants the image, and it raises the question why does an artist want us to see it; the journalist, on the contrary, finds the image and uses it to inform us. It creates an important psychological confusion, when more or less the same image is made by the artist. People ask: Why does the artist want to create this image and why does the artist want me to see it? Which makes the image much stronger when the power of journalistic actuality has disappeared—a completely different position and effect.

FACTS, VIOLENCE, AND PAINTING

P.B. – Resonating with Walter Lippmann’s classical book Public Opinion, maybe then the important question we should ask ourselves here should be: How do we get the facts on which we base our opinions?

R.O. – That’s a true mission, because the most important is the how, in which way are the facts presented to us? When do we feel ourselves in the role of a committed witness? Only then we feel the need to judge the facts. We need new judgments. That’s why we create new images and new forms of context in all media by creating a moved witness. Our new or more mediated society also needs new impulses and new strategies to feed the urgency to judge. It is existential to judge over and over, and we can only find or develop these impulses to create new judgments when we don’t think within the boundaries of a fixed morality. A completed and

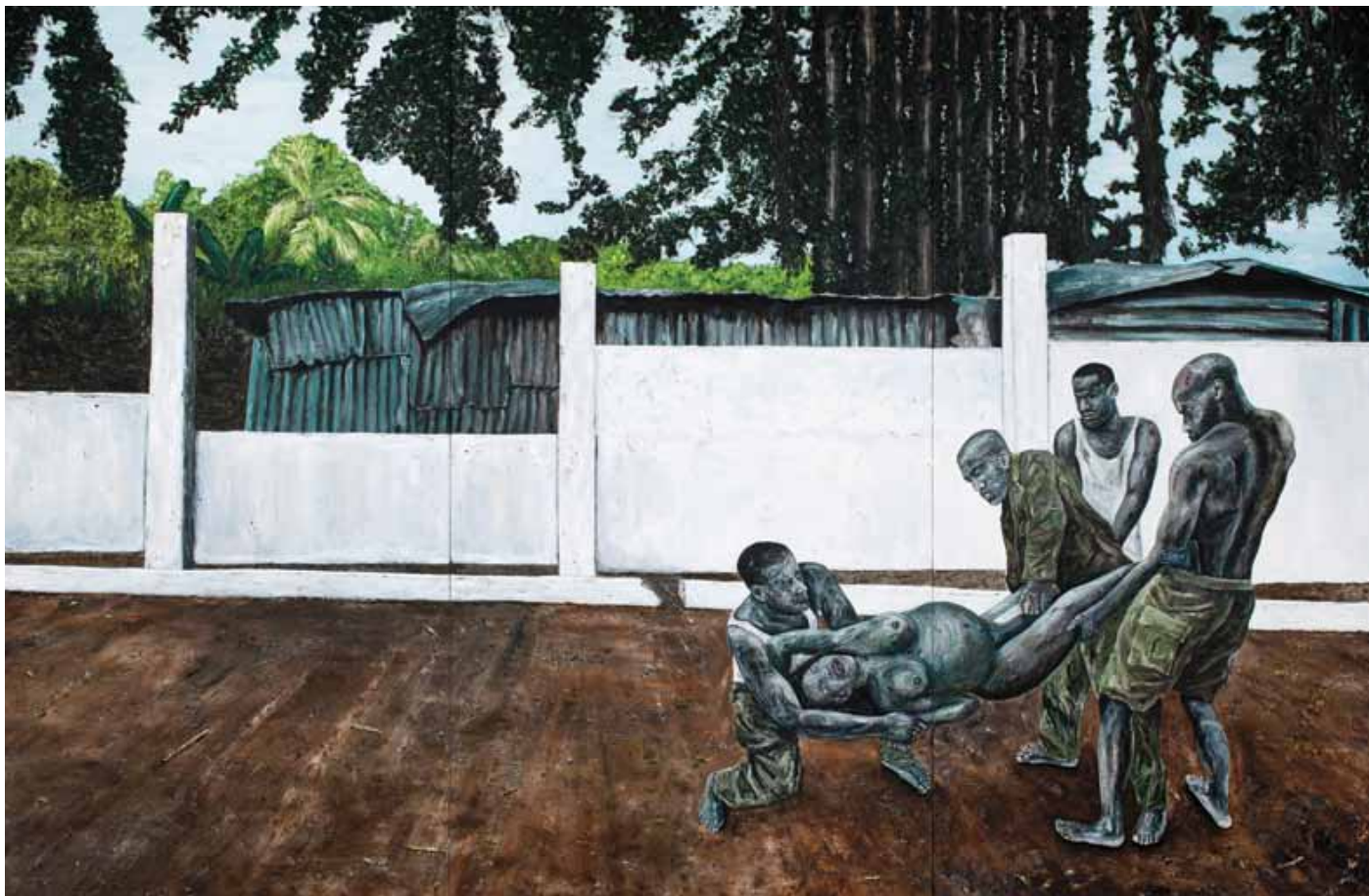
finished morality is a dead end for good humanity in general and for finding judgment for both sides.

And we also have to work on how society wants to remember its history. Many times when there’s a regime change there’s also a change of view of the past. So, for instance, there’s only one small museum in Russia left, which tells about the Gulags, the Russian concentration camps, and then also from the perspective that the inmates were traitors, but you can also mention lots of different other regimes, Rwanda, Indonesia, The Netherlands, etc., and how they try to dominate the view on their history. Historical painting never loses actuality.

P.B. – In contemporary society through social and mass media we see more and more violence—think of ISIS’s videos. Your work is very sociopolitically engaging. What can painting say in this context? Or put differently, why do you prefer to paint instead of using photography or video?

R.O. – It’s the other way around for me. First, I was inspired by the history of painting itself and then the subjects came along. Being a painter is a think-and-act model that fits me. I get irritated by the idea that I have to accomplish an artwork in another medium like video, photography, sculpture, even drawing. I don’t really like it when it has to be more than a study to check ideas out. So I have to take the risk to find out if it’s worthwhile to engage these themes in oil paint in a way that people forget the limitations of painting.

P.B. – So if we rephrase the question, why do you prefer to paint? Or what does painting offer you that makes it still very attractive to engage with?



Ronald Ophuis, *The Bet, Boy or Girl, Sierra Leone* 2001, 2014, oil on linen, 133.8" x 212.5." Courtesy Gallery AeroPlastics, Brussels/Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam.

R.O. – That must be the action of painting. It has been done completely by a human being, whether it is colorful drawing of a child or a beautiful painting done by an artist. When we see a well-painted image we get inspired, and when you are inspired your neurotransmitters cause a reaction of a feeling of deepness, pureness, open mind, and that causes a commitment and meaning to life. So when you are in that state you receive the information or background of the painted scene in another way.

P.B. – *I am of the opinion that your whole oeuvre is a critical re-writing of the grand genre in a 21st-century perspective: History painting from a critical, anti-didactic and even anti-history perspective. It's rather surprising because since at least for a century history painting has fallen out of favor. Why do you think?*

R.O. – A question for me too. When I was a kid, I was always already drawing scenes, so for me it was logical to follow this road. Somehow we also believe the suffering or action on a painted image. It was never Christ himself who posed for a painting, but a body-double, but we still can easily believe in his suffering. And I always have the existential idea that historical thinking enlarges the meaning or experience of life.

P.B. – *Maybe the disappearance of the influence of academies of art through the training of young artists had something to do with it?*

R.O. – Sure, that must have played an important role, but still I don't get it why there aren't more painters working in this tradition. It is such a rich tradition with still new possibilities.

NEW POSSIBILITIES OF HISTORY PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

P.B. – *In which direction do these new possibilities go that you are thinking about?*

R.O. – New stories, new aesthetics and still the viewer is schooled by the tradition on how to read historical paintings, which gives you an advanced change, the viewers understand the newly used possibilities immediately, because they can compare it to the collected image of the historical painters from earlier times. So, from storytelling painter Giotto to Gericault you don't only judge the beauty and the story, but also the differences between these two painters. So tradition adds.

P.B. – *How did your interest in history painting get triggered?*

R.O. – Being raised as a Catholic we weekly went to the services in the church, especially the church in the village of my grandmother, which had some amazing frescoes telling the story of the Via Crucis. During the service I was totally into that story and tried to take different positions, an emotionally overwhelming experience. At the age of 17 my father gave me a part of his working place and built an easel for me. Then I was much more inspired by the works of Willem de Kooning, Antoni Tàpies, Emil Schumacher, etc. But at art school we went during the first year to Paris and I got to see Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*, and that hit me like no painting before. That was the real trigger to work in this tradition.

P.B. – *Most painters that have tackled the genre, like Luc Tuymans, Gerhard Richter, even Marlene Dumas in some of her*

latest works, paint directly from a photograph; that is, they reproduce the scene depicted in the photo. Isn't that a little old fashioned? Aren't we able at this point to create a whole new image instead of re-creating it?

R.O. – The painters you are mentioning are masters in choosing the right image and are satisfied with the found or chosen existing images. They also have an amazing hand when painting and are more focused on an authentic aesthetic gift. So it works for them, they don't want more. I want to work completely differently. I start from texts written by historians, journalists, writers, poets. I watch documentaries, movies. I collect the images of a certain theme in the media, old images, new images. I try to collect stories from the people who got involved in the conflicts I am painting about by doing interviews with them. I visit the places where it happens, make my own documentation at the places where it happened, if necessary build the decors in my studio, have the clothes made for the actors I use to stage the drama.

I always feel the need to stage the scene. I can't find the images that pop up in my thoughts through imagination. I need to work with actors/models before I can start, and I believe in the idea that a fictional image tells the story with truth and power—you can lie about the truth.

P.B. – *Let's delve a bit more into your modus operandi. You use a mix of images from mass media and a staging with models to create the image you're looking for.*

R.O. – Mass media is a check-out context to me to find out how certain themes are already visualized, and this provides me a visual context. But I also depart from written words, literature or journalism and the interviews I take. And most importantly, I like to think in images instead of searching for the right already-existing image. Through thinking and sketching, developing a more or less new image is something I really enjoy, and it gives me the feeling of freedom, of no boundaries. Then I'm productive in my mind and checking my feelings and intellect through the new images that I imagine. The idea starts to develop.

In a way an idea is always perfect. Just at the point when you make it visible through a simple drawing you create a problem that has to be solved. I like that challenge as a mind and emotional game. It creates new images, thoughts, feelings. I get closer to myself, more confronting to myself.

P.B. – *In the exhibit I saw at Galerie Bernard Ceysson in Paris in December 2014, you started to push the limits between abstraction and figuration—think of the flower series for example. Can you elaborate on this?*

R.O. – In my earlier paintings I always took the chance to paint some flowers in the background whenever it was possible. I always enjoyed painting flowers, but also to look at the painted flowers. When I travelled through the former Yugoslavia collecting stories and images, I photographed the flowers which were growing on the mass graves around Srebrenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the place where the Serbs killed more than 7,000 Muslims in 1995. I started to paint these mass grave flowers back home. The last year I felt finally free enough to paint just wild flowers, without a direct narrative story, and I have to admit I was always truly a fan of the flowers Manet painted at the end of his life when he was so ill he hardly could do much more.



Ronald Ophuis, *Miscarriage*, 2014, oil on linen, 102.3" x 78.7." Courtesy Gallery AeroPlastics, Brussels/Upstream Gallery, Amsterdam.

P.B. – *And another direction in your practice has been the introduction of parts of photographs in your pictorial narrative in which you then intervene. Is this interaction with photography something you're eager to explore in the future? Has it to do maybe with the slowness of painting itself?*

R.O. – For years I was looking for a way to use the photographs that I make from the actors/models in my studio. I always find them very inspiring, these sketches. And now I found a good way to use them sometimes in an artwork that I think is strong enough to be on its own. Only showing the photographs didn't work, because they were studies and meant to be studies. They work in a catalogue as extra information, but not on an exhibition wall. Now they do, combined with other images and some painted details. But still they are just details in the total oeuvre.

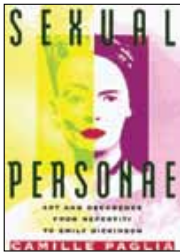
P.B. – *As a final remark, would you agree that between then and now your work still has this confrontational edge but has become more subtle, less direct? I think of works like *Marches Funebres* or the more recent *Arab Spring. On their way to their Revolution. Syria 2011, (2014)*.*

R.O. – When the years of painting passes by, you don't only think of what you want to make next, but you also start thinking of your next work in perspective to your oeuvre. Not again the same stories—your sensibility for other moments somehow develop. The violence is still existing and will never be far away, but also in the longer past there were works with a more subtle perspective on violence. ■



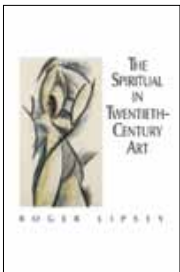
JAMES LOUGH

James Lough teaches nonfiction writing at the Savannah College of Art and Design in the writing department, which he formerly directed. His book *This Ain't No Holiday Inn: Down and Out in New York's Chelsea 1980-1995* was published by Schaffner Press in 2013. He is also the author of *Spheres of Awareness* (University Press of America, 2009) and *Sites of Insight* (University Press of Colorado, 2003), as well as over 80 articles, essays and short stories.



Camille Paglia. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Reports of the author's death, says Paglia, have been greatly exaggerated. Artists in the Western world have always asserted their dramatic personalities and creative skill against nature's tyranny. But nature, in its amoral chaos, is "no respecter of human identity." Paglia bemoans the French Post-structuralist invasion of U.S. critical culture. Its high-abstract theory, and the overhyped, month-long Situationist liberation of desire, can only pale next to the U.S. counterculture's 30-year, real-world Romantic pleasure quest. The American lunge at libidinal freedom via sex, drugs and rock and roll, launched by Little Richard and culminating in 1980s S&M dungeons, was a tragi-heroic lost cause. "The search for freedom through sex is doomed to failure." Whether we rebel in theory or in practice, Paglia reminds us, "Nature is always pulling the rug out from under our pompous ideals." And art leaves us artifacts of our spectacular defeat.



Roger Lipsey. *The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1988.

As Lionel Trilling put it, modern art is characterized by "the bitter line of hostility to civilization." Artists, recovering from the trauma of World War I, were deeply cynical about cultural values that permitted such technological savagery. And they looked for alternatives. One was spirituality. Not of the vague "human spirit" kind, but spirituality rooted in ancient traditions of Buddhism and Boehme or their more recent incarnations--Jung, Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Picasso's return to the "primitive" was an essentially spiritual impulse. Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual Art* proposed ideas of "contemplative watchfulness," and "inner sound." Later, Pollock declared that artists were "part of universal energy." Rothko spoke of "the urgency for transcendent experience." Academic critics, often uneasy with spiritual ideas, tend to muffle Modernism's spiritual facets. Lipsey does a thorough job returning the repressed.



Ben Davis. *9.5 Theses on Art and Class*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013.

Like many critics today, Davis focuses on art as a reflection of political and economic realities. Unlike many critics, he focuses on the actual art world of galleries, museums, money and luxury consumer spectacles like Art Basel Miami Beach. Davis asks thorny questions. Is there a well-defined line anymore between commercial and fine art? Are the visual arts irrelevant in the face of a dominant mass media? And finally, in a hyper-monetized art world, where "the ruling class, which is capitalist, dominates the sphere of visual arts," what role can working- or middle-class artists possibly play? Davis is a Marxist of the streets, unsheltered by the hothouse of academe, where ideas thrive without being tested in the actual world. His proposed solutions may seem dreamy and utopian, but his observations are as incisive as razor cuts.



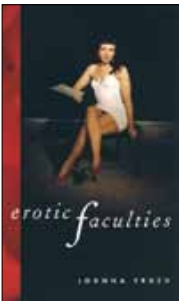
MARIA ELENA BUSZEK

Maria Elena Buszek, Ph.D., is a scholar, critic, curator and associate professor of art history at the University of Colorado Denver. Her recent publications include the books *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Duke University Press Books, 2006) and *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Duke, 2011). She has also contributed writing to numerous international exhibition catalogues and scholarly journals, including, most recently, essays in *Dorothy Iannone: Censorship and the Irrepressible Drive Toward Divinity* (JRP-Ringier, 2014) and *Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2014). Her current book project, *Art of Noise*, explores the ties between contemporary activist art and popular music.



Ellen Willis. *The Essential Ellen Willis*. Edited by Nona Willis Aronowitz. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

It's thrilling that the University of Minnesota Press has begun its new series publishing the essays and criticism of the late feminist journalist and educator Ellen Willis. I grew up a working-class kid in the Midwest who didn't know art history existed as well, *a thing* one could study until halfway through undergrad. But as a music nerd and record collector who avidly read the popular music press, I longed for the kinds of edgy-but-erudite sensibilities I found in music criticism in the art writing I discovered when I finally found my calling. Ellen Willis was my "bridge" between these fields, and even now I find myself returning to her decades-old, even-handed, whip-smart and lusty takes on everything from the Sex Pistols to pornography to parenthood when I'm looking for inspiration—or courage—in my own scholarship. Every volume is worth reading, but for the uninitiated, *The Essential Ellen Willis* is a perfect primer.



Joanna Frueh. *Erotic Faculties*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1996.

Frueh's book was published at precisely the moment in my life when I was working out whether an Ellen Willis was even possible in the comparatively elitist field of art history—and Frueh was it! I've been somewhat evangelical about her work ever since. This book is a formidable defense of eroticism's intellectual potential, with essays written for both the page and (as performance lectures for) the stage. Frueh's flamboyant style, humor and warmth liberated me to approach art writing from what she calls one's "soul-and-mind-inseparable-from-body." I feel that *Erotic Faculties* represents the best kind of intimate, embodied art writing, alongside kindred spirits like Chris Kraus and Lynne Tillman, that emerged in the between-the-waves era artist-critic Mira Schor once dubbed feminism's "Generation 2.5," which increasingly feels poised to eclipse the influence of the then-dominant, theory-jock *October* school.



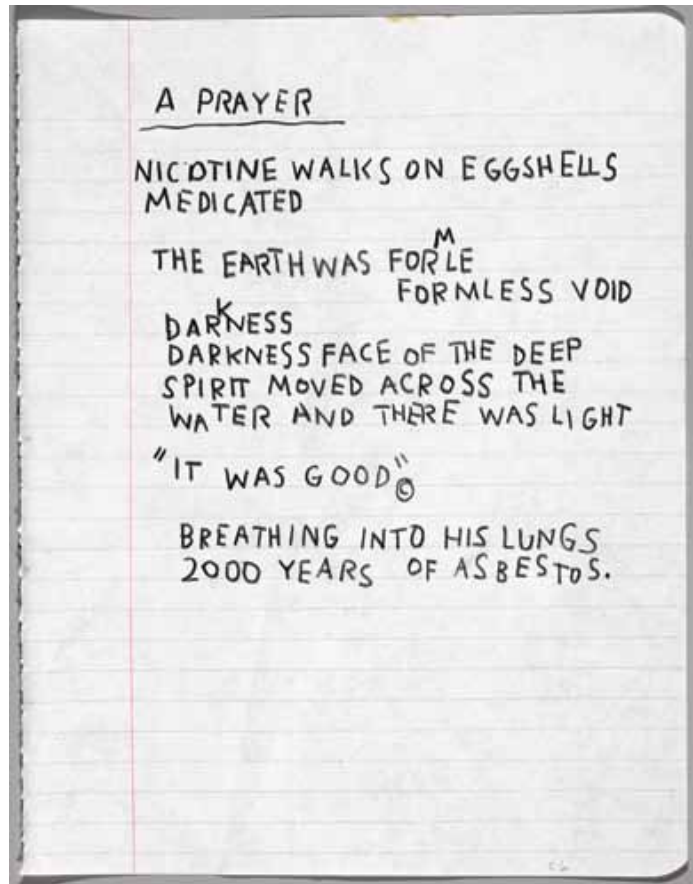
Jennifer Doyle. *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Jennifer Doyle is the heir apparent to writers like Willis and Frueh—her intelligence and fearlessness are awe-inspiring, as are the wide swaths she cuts through visual culture since the 1960s in *Hold It Against Me*. In her latest book, she takes on "difficulty and emotion" in controversial, activist art with a perspective and style that admits collusion with these very subjects she's analyzing. To borrow from one of her chapter titles, Doyle is "thinking feeling," and vice-versa, in a way that art historians rarely allow themselves for fear of being dismissed as sentimental or subjective—positions that Doyle here champions for offering opportunities for us to "feel history moving through us." As both an art historian and educator, I strive for just this effect (affect?) in my own work and envy the seeming effortlessness with which Doyle manages it in hers.

BASQUIAT: THE UNKNOWN NOTEBOOKS

Brooklyn Museum – New York

By Taliesin Thomas



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled Notebook Page (Notebook 5)*, circa 1987, ink on ruled notebook paper, 9 5/8" x 7 5/8." Collection of Larry Warsh. Photo: Gavin Ashworth. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1987) is one of the most compelling heroes in the history of art; he rose to meteoric success amid the celebrity circuit in New York City during the energetic 1980s and died at the youthful age of 27, just as his career was bursting into monumental stardom. While he is best known for his prodigious artistic output as a painter and a graffiti artist with the tag SAMO©, he was also a tremendous wordsmith and textual thinker.

An honorable ‘homecoming’ exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum (where he was a junior member during his childhood) presents “Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks,” an intimate show that is years in the making and offers a once-in-a-lifetime look at the private ramblings of a considerable genius. While one hundred fifty individual pages of text from eight disassembled classic marble-covered notebooks comprise the foundation of this show, additional word-filled works on canvas, paper and wood provide an expanded vision of Basquiat’s rhapsodic nature and courageous integration of language and image. Together this careful selection of work reveals the mischievous, amusing and cryptic narrative of an artist who exploded the trajectory of American art for all time.

Born in Brooklyn, NY to a Puerto Rican mother and Haitian father, Basquiat had no ‘formal’ training in aesthetics. His creations reflect a hybrid of cultural and artistic influences: street life, cinema, music, jazz, advertising, Pop Art, African and Caribbean culture. Over time Basquiat developed an anomalous visual lexicon that employed the written word as the emblem of his fearless spirit, blending metaphor and allusion to explore real themes such as racial inequalities through his absurdist-manifesto style of expression.

Smaller works on paper such as *Untitled (Ego)* (1983) and *Anti-dote* (1981) indicate candid commentary while larger pieces such as his oversized collage *Untitled* (1986) demonstrate Basquiat’s deft use of street art materials—a blending of sharpie markers, spray paint, and oil stick—but the notebooks shine as the truly brilliant spotlight of this

show. Basquiat’s unflinching black line and all-capital block-style font fill the pages with a magical storyline while the imaginative verses therein serenade us into a wistful state of reflection and cheer. Many of Basquiat’s one-liners are downright giddy, such as ‘THE LAW SITS DOWN FOR A FREE SLICE OF PIE.’ Some pages indicate lists of ideas, dialogical narratives, phone numbers, and descriptions of random New York moments, contents or disjointed scenarios.

Other pages demonstrate recurring phrases that seem to have a special meaning for the artist: ‘COME BACK A DRIFTER’ is one such example. While many notebook pages disclose a delightful madness (‘STOPPED IN TRANSIT SEVEN TIMES’), others leave us longing for greater explanation (‘A DESIRED SEXUAL EFFECT A’). Each notebook page functions independently, each is an autonomous work of art that reflects Basquiat’s unique psyche and his particular command of uncommon artistic phraseology, even the page that simply states ‘EFFECTIVE 12:01 AM©.’

It is said that all great philosophy eventually returns to the vast ocean of poetry, and in the case of this exhibition Basquiat’s extraordinary philosophy as an artist does indeed coalesce into poetic verse, textual prose and writings that illuminate the bravest and also the darkest corners of his mighty soul. With so many engaging notebook pages to ponder, anyone who appreciates the extraordinary talent of Jean-Michel Basquiat will encounter a veritable feast at this atypical presentation of his work. ■

(April 3 – August 23, 2015)

Taliesin Thomas is a Brooklyn-based artist, writer and lecturer working in the field of contemporary Chinese art. She is the founding director of AW Asia, New York and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Art Theory and Philosophy with the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.

HOPE GANGLOFF

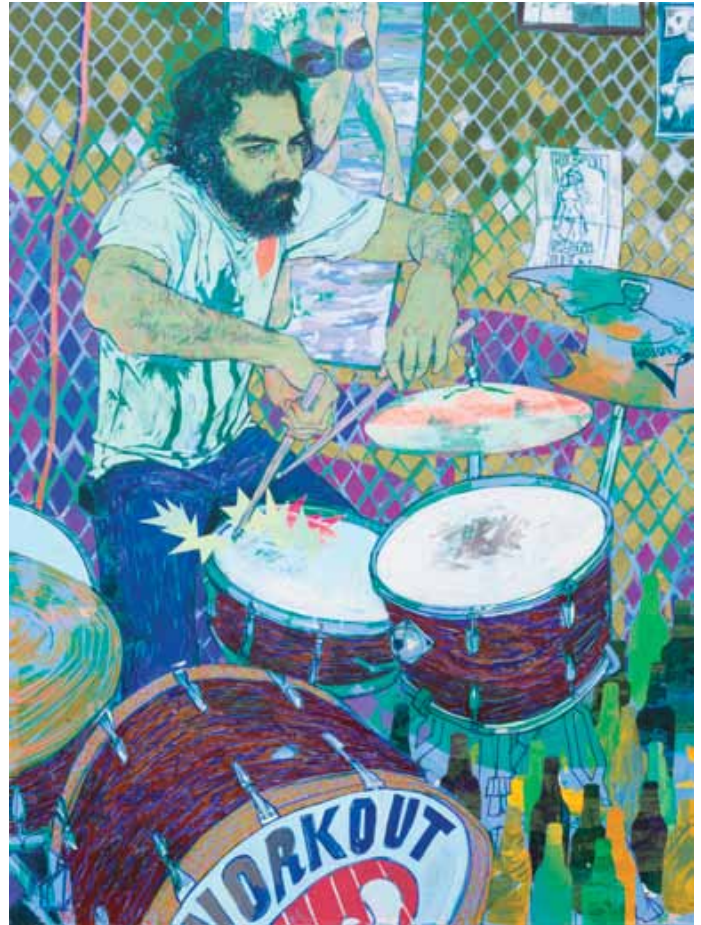
Susan Inglett Gallery – New York

By Julie Heffernan

Hope Gangloff's new, large-scale portraits are like Bonnard paintings on steroids: figures disappear into a cacophony of pattern and color that upends the usual dominance of figure over ground and shows a real appreciation for how much we like to look at the particulars of a person's life, the worlds they inhabit. They call on a host of other influences too—Klimt, Schiele, Neel—figurative artists who showed us how to look at the inside through the arabesques and natty angles of the outside. There is no concern with light and shadow to disclose mystery or secrets—everything is on the surface here, flat patterns and nuanced line work abound. Any intimacy we feel with these people comes from the many details of a life Gangloff provides for optimal optical pleasure—a myriad of particulars, with no abbreviation allowed. Hair wins the day, since hair, on a flat surface, is ultimately line. How best to paint a beard, she asks. How to represent skin without the stunning stuff of oil paint? By all those marvelous little hairs, of course.

Skin is the least important thing in Gangloff's universe. It practically disappears into what is essentially insistent background pushing through, giving way to pattern and detail as the primary mechanisms to express personality. Blue outlines around forms separate objects from their environments. Gangloff's figures don't exist in an integrated space; all the separate parts look as if they could become unglued from each other, as in a jigsaw puzzle. The effect is of the human decentered, the environment around them now insisting on its primacy. Accoutrements take over: figures are wedged into their settings via pattern—flat color invigorates stripes, windowpanes, background trees, all either butting up against her sitters and framing them, or, like camouflage, becoming part of them, as with Dad's blue hair with the green and blue leaves behind him. The bantam cocks he's holding become like weird bruises on his whitish t-shirt, melding with it in the white of their stripes. This is an example of how Gangloff uses objects well to modify our understanding of who these characters are, like saints' attributes, taking us to a deeper level of connection.

Gangloff's figures are full of ennui, half asleep, but weirdly compelling too, their lassitude an honest expression of their pose. In *Dark Horse (Tim Traynor)*, the man's blue-black hair and beard jump in front of the rest of his body, its greenish tone melting into



Hope Gangloff, *Dark Horse (Tim Traynor)*, 2015, acrylic and collage on canvas, 96" x 72." Courtesy of Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC. Photo: Adam Reich.

the lavender and blueish background, with one strange wedge of bright orange pushing out from under his beard, as if the tiny spot of tumescent orange on his lip had metastasized onto his t-shirt. Everything is slightly awry here: his hands and arms appear to be sinking into the space around them as they hold the drumsticks limply, fecklessly. On the bass drum is printed "Workout," but this is a drummer who cannot do so, despite the posters of semi-nude women behind him, one merging with his head, like a prurient thought bubble. Is Gangloff making a statement about ineffectuality here? A Beckettian kind of resignation: "I can't go on; I'll go on"?

Gangloff's is an intriguing vision, counter to the mythmaking of our media drumroll, and akin to what Elizabeth Peyton did in her portrait of Kurt Cobain. It is ultimately an existentialist vision: her figures appear tainted or sickened, as though the contamination around us had seeped into their skins: they embody our excesses, the residue of our empty lifestyles. But they are also weirdly captivating despite all that. Their vividness comes from the energy of Gangloff's hand, flying wildly around the space of the canvas, dipping, flecking, and striping, activating the space in a way that speaks against the ironizing nature of bloat or caricature that some figurative artists use to critique the Romantic. Her characters may be slack but Gangloff herself is as spry and agile as a hare. ■

(May 1 – June 6, 2015)

Julie Heffernan is a Professor at Montclair State University, NJ. She is represented by PPOW (New York), Catharine Clark Gallery (San Francisco) and Mark Moore Gallery (Los Angeles).



© Erwin Olaf, *Shen Zhen 2*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Hasted Kraeutler, NYC.

ERWIN OLAF: WAITING

Hasted Kraeutler – New York

By Laura Burton

Dutch artist Erwin Olaf's recent solo exhibition at Hasted Kraeutler explores the suspended state of being experienced during the increasingly rare act of waiting. The show includes a selection of the artist's older photographs culled from the pages of his Aperture monographs, but hinges on his new body of work. A fifty-minute film, shown in a narrow, triangular space with low ceilings, accompanies the photographs in this black and white series, which deepen the melancholy tone of the exhibition.

To view the film, one must enter a strange, isosceles structure built into the middle of the gallery and painted black. After walking through the door, the viewer is confronted by two large flat screen televisions—one mounted on each of the longer walls that converge only eight or so feet past the threshold. The televisions show different perspectives of the same scene; our lone heroine seated at a table, waiting for her companion. She is elegant and poised, with not a hair out of place. A waiter drifts in and out of the scene, eventually clearing away the second place setting, but the woman never leaves her chair. As other diners pass by, she looks up with a hopeful anticipation that is quickly replaced by disappointment as she looks down at her hands.

The viewing room itself is narrow and uncomfortably designed with no benches, and the oppressively low ceiling is somewhat awkward. To be in the room alone presents no complications, but as soon as one or two others enter the space, the tension in the film is heightened by the experience of the viewers viewing each other, as

they glance from screen to screen. These tight confines mandate that only a few people can experience the film at once, an element that surely is not lost on Olaf. The artist had even originally planned to dramatically decrease the temperature in the small room to further heighten the viewer's discomfort. Feelings of melancholy and unease are enhanced by a somber requiem that aptly scores the film.

In an era when time is our most valuable commodity and the act of waiting verges on extinction, Olaf's oeuvre coaxes the viewer into slowing down and taking a moment to experience the tension and stillness that coexist when we turn off our own screens. The protagonist in Olaf's film is not checking her iPhone while she waits for her companion. She has no book to read and nothing to distract her. Olaf is committed to documenting the rare state of waiting and the unease that it brings. However the efforts that he goes through to mimic this unrest in his immersive film piece also act as a deterrent. If he does not intend for anyone to watch the entire duration of his film, isn't that self-defeating? But perhaps this is his intention with the film, to provide a glimpse at a state of being that is slipping away from us, and leave it at that. ■

(January 8 – February 28, 2015)

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

THE SOUND OF ON KAWARA'S SILENCE

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum - New York

By Keren Moscovitch

To stroll along the Guggenheim's iconic spiral during "On Kawara—Silence" is to take a mind-spinning journey through time, history and the obsessive mind of the prolific Japanese artist. The museum's gyral architecture echoes a cyclonic sense of time into which visitors are swept as they embark on a cyclical journey through the last half-century. Amidst a sweeping presentation that spans decades of Kawara's work, a moving portrait emerges of an artist who compulsively documents every aspect of his own existence, situating his practice in a grey zone between fevered obsession and devoted meditation. Throughout its unwinding, the exhibition unfolds as a lyrical homage to a life dedicated to creative rigor and spiritual consciousness.

Most art aficionados are familiar with Kawara's date paintings, the *Today* series, an impressive set of canvases spanning 40 years during which the artist produced thousands of paintings of dates on solid backgrounds in a variety of typographic styles and punctuation methods that pay homage to the stylistic conventions of the location in which each piece was produced, and employing the ritualized methodology that defines the whole of his oeuvre. Few, however, have experienced the works beyond their formal minimalist aesthetic to see them contextualized within the historical chronology that informs them. For this exhibition, thoughtfully choreographed by Curator Jeffrey Weiss and Assistant Curator Anne Wheeler in close consultation with the artist, the paintings are displayed alongside the boxes in which they have been stored, each lined with a newspaper clipping from that day. Drifting through the exhibit and viewing the works in a different order each time highlights the infinite narratives and combinations offered by history and its ability to be continuously re-written.

Kawara's work functions like a pinch to one's side, a demand to confirm consciousness, a reminder to himself that he persists, that he is indeed still here, that he survived the night to once again open his eyes. In the series *I Got Up* Kawara sends a postcard every day to one of a select group of people in his life, stating the exact time he got up that day and the address he inhabited. They are displayed between two panes of glass, allowing viewers to see all the fronts of the cards at once, or all the backs of the cards at once, but not the front and back of a single card at the same time. This formal decision results in a temporal and geographic dislocation that mimics the nomadic life of Kawara himself, as he struggles to ground his migrations within a constant stream of self-generated data. Repetition abounds, as multiple postcards of icons like the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower form geometric blocks of redundancy. Periodic breaks in practice do not reveal their origin, and feel like they could be momentary lapses in hope, or perhaps respites from the need to affirm one's existence.

Alongside *I Got Up* is displayed the related *I Went* series, a set of maps upon which the artist traced his daily movements through the city in which he was situated, and the *I Met* series, consisting



On Kawara, *JUN 10 1975, From I Got Up, 1968–79*, stamped ink on postcard, 3 1/2" x 5 1/2". Collection of Keiji and Sawako Usami. Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

of stacks of typed papers displaying a list of names of people he encountered that day. Seeing the same name repeated at the top of most pages—his wife Hiroko Hiraoka's—offers a touching level of intimacy that is rarely revealed so directly in Kawara's work, the punctum of humanity at the core of his exhaustive archive.

The series *I Am Still Alive* points to the gravity of the matter. A grouping of telegrams to his friends, sent periodically over many decades, assures them that indeed he is still alive and has not committed suicide. There is a somber tone to these pieces that puts a new spin on Kawara's other work, the emotional and existential content becoming clear once one sees through the lens of a man waking up every morning and choosing to remain a part of this world.

On Kawara no longer persists in physical form. Having passed away in 2014, he no longer assures friends that his eyes have opened that morning, that he did not spend the day alone, that his feet touched the earth, that he witnessed another day on earth. But the sound of his footsteps, the scratching of his pen and the turning of pages lingers in memoriam and celebration, a poetic system of coded language that brings time to life. ■

(February 6 – May 3, 2015)

Keren Moscovitch is an interdisciplinary artist exploring the intersection of the sexual and the spiritual. She is based in New York City where she teaches at the School of Visual Arts. Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions in the US and abroad, and reviewed in publications such as The Huffington Post, Playboy, Policy Mic and New York Magazine.



HOW & NOSM: A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

Jacob Lewis Gallery - New York

By Taliesin Thomas

How & Nosm, *Calm Prevailed*, 2014. Courtesy of Jacob Lewis Gallery, New York.

Known for their large-scale murals that adorn city walls around the world, twin brothers who go by the moniker How & Nosm (b. 1975 Raoul and Davide Perré) continue to inspire with a signature style that blends the bold energy and attitude of graffiti with the sophistication of cutting-edge design. Born in San Sebastián (Basque Country, Spain), and raised in Düsseldorf (Germany), How & Nosm have been experimenting with the effects of spray paint since their youth. The identical pair moved to New York in 1999 and rose to artistic prominence as part of the underground Bronx-based graffiti collective TATS CRU. They have since been collaborating to produce an unrivaled technique that reflects their hybrid of cultural influences. How & Nosm's latest works on canvas were recently on view for the inaugural exhibition at Jacob Lewis Gallery in New York, a home-run show for the launch of this new space in Chelsea.

The seven paintings included in "A Different Language" appear like overlapping chapters in an exploding surrealist narrative. Each piece is a fantastic dystopian vision and viewed as a suite, the story that unfolds suggests a modern world gone awry, where technologies and apparatuses collapse and coalesce to confess the seething 'realitylessness' of it all. In this highly controlled disarray, How & Nosm's intense orchestration of bulbous and billowing imagery yields layer upon layer of dynamic representation. The careful illustration of their iconography is a performance all its own; the viewer is completely absorbed by the thriving surge of this frenetic current.

How & Nosm's art is a striking combination of a limited color palette—red, fuchsia, black, and white—and trademark rhizomatic

imagery that oftentimes includes subtle references to the dark side of human behavior. Figures and faces buried deep within the matrix of these mesmerizing sci-fi landscapes appear in states of drink-or drug-induced torpor. In *Beneath It All* (2014), arrows penetrate a bundle of structural vignettes with traces of characters seemingly piled up on top of one another as fingers and toes are distinguished amid the pandemonium. Everything seems on the verge of combustion but held together by the magnetic force of How & Nosm's wizardly organization of discord. While the overall allure of these works is the combined eruption of content with the composure of composition, the artistry of the details truly illustrates the masterful ethos of How & Nosm's craft. In *Calm Prevailed* (2014), for example, the work is characterized by a raging red ocean at the bottom and a stoic geometric landscape at the top, while the middle of the painting is occupied by geometric commotion. Each singular work takes us on a journey from blustering turbulence to transcendent sublimity.

The unequalled How & Nosm duo continue to produce a highly refined genre that transcends the 'look' of tagging while maintaining a street art vibe; the result is an original interpretation of space, illusion and contour that reinterprets graffiti into a truly exquisite form of narration. The beautifully tangled and coordinated chaos of How & Nosm's art defies the very walls and canvases that contain it while the extraordinary artistic energy of their paired talent packs double the magnitude. ■

(February 20 – April 4, 2015)



Installation view of "Jon Kessler's Gifts" at Salon 94, New York, February 15 to March 28, 2015. Courtesy of the gallery.

JON KESSLER'S GIFTS

Salon 94 - New York

By Taliesin Thomas

Our hyper-connected society seems increasingly dis-connected from the ulterior structures of control that drive the neoliberal economic system. While we enjoy the convenience of advanced technologies, we don't seem to recognize the idiosyncratic power that these objects exert over our lives. Artist Jon Kessler (b. 1957) has a special talent for not only revealing the automated workings of a thing and its 'thingness,' but also for disclosing the covetous motivations dwelling beneath the surface of the actual devices that define culture.

Past installations of Kessler's work have included hundreds of television screens, cameras and interactive feedback at venues such as Deitch Projects in New York. These sprawling Kessler shows tend to reveal the sinister and subversive side of his techno-aesthetic; a recent exhibit titled "Jon Kessler's Gifts" at Salon 94 Freemans in New York, however, presented the polite and poetic aspect of Kessler's versatile repertoire of artistic tricks.

"Jon Kessler's Gifts" displayed twenty-two small kinetic sculptures that the artist created for friends and family to commemorate special occasions over the years. The sensible placement of pieces in this modest alleyway gallery coupled with the gravitas of the expert lighting produced a compelling atmosphere for these intimate works to transmit their charm. While the bobbing and swaying of the mechanical doo-hickeys filled the room with an elegant motorized hum, the shadow play of their movements on the walls was equally captivating. The star of this homage to his loved ones was daughter Juliette, whose birth and several subsequent birthdays are chronicled by Kessler's thoughtful tinkering with assorted media. *Juliette Kessler's 13th Birthday Gift* (2007) com-

bins a protruding silver finger lodged in a lump of plaster that balances a white fistful hand holding a wire stabilizing severed fingers. The poised equilibrium of this pulley system and its delicate elements illustrated a motley confluence of artistic and philosophical influences such as Beuys on the one hand (physical collage) and Žižek on the other (brazen irreverence) but possessed by Kessler's particular allure. By the time we reach the tiny toy-like work *Sarah Hoover and Tom Sachs Wedding Gift* (2013)—a single plastic figurine on a platform genuflecting before two silver poles with the capital letters T and S—we recognize the truly personal nature of this eclectic menagerie.

While Kessler's art can be counted in the permanent collections of prestigious institutions such as The Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum and The Walker (among others), this playful show demonstrated that his art is provocative and lyrical in the most intelligent sense. The 'sculpturalness' of Kessler's objects is to be experienced *in situ*, not just viewed from a distance. In the case of *Titty Twister* (2014), the likely grand dame of the show, visitors were welcome to turn the erect nipples of this bare-breasted mold to solicit a melodic response from the analogue sound box below her severed torso. The bizarre tune that emanated from her porcelain colored bosom expanded into the space with a peculiar acoustic—that of a wobbling radio signal attempting to find its modulation—reminding us that we are at once experiencing the cheeky creations of an artist who remains one-part mad scientist and one-part imaginative theorist. ■

(February 15 – March 28, 2015)

SUMMER WHEAT: WALK-IN PANTRY

Fridman Gallery - New York

By Owen Duffy



Summer Wheat, *Walk-in Pantry*, installation view. Courtesy of the artist and Fridman Gallery.

Summer Wheat continually experiments with what painting can do, what it can become, and the narratives that have constructed its grand tradition. For her most recent endeavor at Fridman Gallery, “Walk-in Pantry,” Wheat created what amounts to art historical parafiction—with, as art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty would say, “one foot in the field of the real.”¹ Taking Johannes Vermeer’s *The Milkmaid*, an illusionistic 17th-century masterpiece of a domestic servant pouring milk, as a point of departure, Wheat presents viewers with a wonderfully strange glimpse into what the milkmaid’s pantry could have been.

Wheat’s seven paintings are gritty and dramatic. A liberal application of charcoal gives these discrete views into the Milkmaid’s pantry, such as the painting *Reflection*, a weighty material presence. Negative space is made into a thing. In turn, Wheat uses the “thingness” of the negative space, contradictorily forging physical presence rather than absence, to give form to the sundry objects rendered in *Reflection*—bottles, jars, and what appears to be a slice of cake. Within one of the bottles, wide-eyed fish congregate. All their bodies turn toward another bottle streaked with peach, yellow, and ginger. Perhaps enamored with their own reflections, they lead our eyes to the center of the composition. Wheat’s quirky hand anthropomorphizes the pantry’s odds and ends, transforming bottles, food, and the like into energetic supporting characters for her parafictional world.

Rather than hanging paintings in a white cube, Wheat has installed her new works on walls painted black and gray. Around the highest gray stratum, Wheat outlined a black, sketchy frieze, replete with triglyph-like forms. This modest faux-architectural addition sets up an interplay with the gallery’s imposing columns in the center of the room. Together, they begin to recast the space as a kind of temple. Driving this experience home, Wheat blacked out the windows of the gallery’s apses, save for two small, square transparencies—self-descriptively titled *Oranges* and *Bananas*. Made from resin, ink, and vinyl, these works function like stained glass, allowing polychromatic light to filter through. Wheat has thus imagined the milkmaid’s pantry—a domestic space—as a quasi-spiritual site, part temple, part church.

Swept Under the Rug, the acme of “Walk-in Pantry,” occupies the center of the space. To create this multi-paneled piece, Wheat pressed vibrant, almost psychedelic pigment through a window screen. This process bestows each panel with a tactile, fibrous surface, like short shag. With ink, Wheat scrawled a dumpling recipe over the textured paint. The panels rest over a bed of granular charcoal, a gesture that suggests the *Milkmaid*, a largely anonymous historical character, had dirt of her own, secrets, and a life not fully represented in the Vermeer original. We can read *Swept Under the Rug* as an endearing conflation of many things: painting and sculpture, text and image, past and present.

What makes Wheat’s *Walk-in Pantry* successful is how the work mines art history, not simply for the sake of being clever or demonstrating the artist’s self-awareness, but to open up a clearing where the viewer can inscribe contemporary urgency onto the past. Vermeer’s nameless milkmaid, though sensitively depicted, is painted as a type. Wheat’s *Walk-in Pantry* constructs an alternate world for this subject, restoring her individuality via the artist’s own haphazard, expressionistic, and visceral touch. In the contemporary context, giving the milkmaid such a tribute, such a *life*—no matter how imagined—critiques the notion of domestic servitude defining her identity or any woman’s. By deeming this worker worthy of such an exploration, Wheat initiates a discourse on status, class, and gender that warrants further exploration: questioning who can participate in an increasingly stratified contemporary art world. ■

(March 14 - April 25, 2015)

NOTES

1. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,” *October* 129, (Summer 2009): 54.

Owen Duffy is a Ph.D. candidate studying contemporary art history at Virginia Commonwealth University, a curatorial assistant at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and a consulting editor for ARTPULSE.



Charles Gaines, *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance, Set #11, 1980-81*, color photographs and ink on Strathmore paper. eight parts: 4 small drawings, 11" x 19 1/2" each, 2 large drawings and 2 photographs, 16" x 20" each, 31 1/8" x 84 1/2" x 2", (overall framed). Collection of Dean Valentine and Amy Adelson. Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

CHARLES GAINES: GRIDWORK 1974 – 1989

Hammer Museum – Los Angeles

Curated by Naima J. Keith

By Megan Abrahams

The years 1974 to 1989 were a formative time for Los Angeles artist Charles Gaines, a period during which he diverged from his early training in painting to embark on a new direction as a conceptual artist. A bridge figure in the conceptual movement, Gaines explored numerous theories to come up with a systematic approach to his art, one that propelled his creative process and conferred layers of significance to the finished pieces.

Much of the work Gaines produced during these early years was conceived serially, as in the 27 images that comprise the *Walnut Tree Orchard* series (1975-2014). Rather than relying on the medium of painting for this study, Gaines sought a degree of detachment. In a tour of the exhibit before the opening, he explained, "In terms of practice, I wanted to find a way to make work that didn't involve subjectivity."

Using photography as a jumping-off point, the artist achieved the distance he was seeking. Multiple photographic images of walnut trees became the foundation for the series. "I tried to engage the object systematically," he said. Gaines imposed his own complex set of rules—almost a scientific method—on a multi-step process. Extrapolating from the photographs, he created a series of color-coded drawings on graphs, plotting the location of the trees with numbers, each number documenting the position of a tree, superimposing one on top of the other. "I wanted to focus on the spirit of conflict between the real world and the world of representation, to show a disharmony between the two, rather than a seamlessness."

A similar process was repeated in *Faces* (1978-79), a series portraying human subjects, which Gaines found to be more dynamic. Graphed individually in negative and positive versions, ultimately, the faces in the series are superimposed. In a sense, he deconstructed the face, deperson-

alizing it through objective study, features plotted as if in a comparative survey. In a later series, *Motion: Trisha Brown Dance* (1980-81), the artist leveraged his unique process with profound effect. Once presumed lost, this elegant series of images captures the movement of dancers by sequentially plotting the flow of their figures in motion. As Gaines said, "It's really a linear way of making works of art."

Trees represent a recurring theme, a biological subject that Gaines revisited in a later series, *Numbers and Trees* (1988-89). Here, he collapsed photography and painting on handmade plexiglass cases with photographed landscapes in the background. While his earlier representations of trees were more utilitarian, using primary colors, in these works Gaines allowed himself to paint freely, injecting more vibrant pigments like magenta and yellow.

Instead of merely isolating each individual subject, Gaines was interested in conveying the full system, showing the conceptual framework by capturing the entire series in a single entity. "I was very much interested in that paradox. I wanted to make a piece where I collapsed seriality in one object."

What is realized in the finished works is a subtle harmony of form, color and shape, a merging of scientific method and unexpected artistic innovation. ■

(February 7 - May 24, 2015)

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

ED MOSES: DRAWINGS FROM THE 1960S AND 70S

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

NOW AND THEN

William Turner Gallery – Santa Monica, CA.

By Megan Abrahams



Installation photo of the exhibition "Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), May 10 – August 2, 1-15. © 2015 Ed Moses. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

Ed Moses: A Los Angeles Icon

Terror is my driving force. Paint is the medium.
Ed Moses, September 2014

If art appreciation has something in common with detective work, early in his career, Ed Moses left a trail of clues foreshadowing the artist he was yet to become. In the past year, a string of landmark solo exhibitions focusing on phases of the artist’s oeuvre have offered breathtaking insight into the extraordinary depth and range of his enthralling and important body of work, along with evidence behind his motivation and method.

Visible throughout “Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) are keys to both the man and the eventual paintings he went on to create and continues to produce today, decades later. The 89-year-old artist systematically laid the foundation for his future work by devoting almost two decades primarily to drawing. Moses has persisted in the continual evolution of his vision throughout a 60-year career of constant reinvention after becoming an artist almost by accident. For someone with a self-declared compulsion for creating art, it’s striking that Moses was introduced to art via such a serendipitous route.

“How I came to be a painter is a joke. I was struggling in pre-med, couldn’t even use a slide rule,” Moses said during a private visit to his studio last September.

In 1948, Moses was enrolled at Long Beach City College, disillusioned after two years of pre-med studies, when some friends urged him to meet an art teacher they called a Bohemian. “I wanted to see what a Bohemian looked like,” he said.

The teacher was Pedro Miller from the Chicago Art Institute. The first time Moses saw him, Miller drove into the art department park-

ing lot in his convertible and stepped out of the car barefoot, his hair caked with clay and paint. The teacher proceeded to the classroom, overturned a trash can, sat down and started lecturing.

“I’d never seen a teacher do anything like that,” said Moses. “So I immediately signed up.”

When Miller set up a still life à la Cézanne, the other students assessed the composition by holding their pencils in the air. Moses didn’t know what to do. As Miller approached, Moses dipped his fingers into the pots of color and made a finger painting. Miller took one look and said, “Now here’s a real artist.”

It was a turning point for the young student. “He saved my life,” Moses said.

Today a Los Angeles icon, Moses has played a formative role in the West Coast art scene. One of the first artists to show at the famed Ferus Gallery, Moses later joined the art faculty at UC Irvine, where he went on to teach many young artists who followed. Painting is still part of his daily routine. From 6 in the morning until 2:30 in the afternoon, he works in a large outdoor studio in the light-filled courtyard of his home on a quiet residential street in Venice, Calif. An outdoor studio was a requirement, as Moses discovered after hosing down his canvases in a previous New York studio—causing water leakage to the floor below.

Next to the courtyard, behind a storage room stacked with canvases, is a hidden gallery featuring a magical installation Moses created, inspired by *Labyrinths*, a collection of stories by Jorge Luis Borges. Canvases in solid colors and crackle paintings alternate with warped mirrors on which Moses painted delicate droplets. Reflected in the mirrors, the paintings morph into wavy shapes. From the vantage point of the spinning chair in the center of the room, the reflected images change in infinite hallucinatory variations.

Last September, Moses was busy selecting work to be featured in “Cross-Section,” his retrospective at UC Irvine Claire Trevor



Ed Moses, *Stares Down*, 2015, wood, aluminum rails, angle iron and paint, 80" x 70." Courtesy William Turner Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.

School of the Arts (Oct. 11-Dec. 13, 2014). While his studio assistant displayed different canvases for consideration, Moses demurred on the very notion of being labeled an artist. "I'm an obsessive painter. I'm not an artist," he said.

The topic of obsession comes up a lot and may be a key to the resonance of his work, the longevity of his career and his success in realizing his vision. Moses likens his art to the study of anthropology, referencing how early man became conscious of his own existence when he saw his footprint in the mud. "That's why I exist," he said. "I had to leave marks, compulsive marks, repetitive marks, pressing, pressing, over and over again, showing I exist. I guess that's what I was doing in a way."

Among the most compelling early marks Moses made are his flower drawings of the early 1960s. Moses acknowledges the influence of Jasper Johns in his use of repeated design motifs. The series of graphite flower drawings were inspired by an oil cloth the artist found on a trip to Tijuana. The flower images tie in with the theme of obsession, repetition, making an indelible mark in the mud. The drawings are also precursors to the large-scale *craquelure* paintings Moses produced 50 years later. The crackle paintings came about when Moses was creating monochromatic works on canvas, trying to replicate a crackle effect with paint. He developed what he calls his "secret sauce," which he applies beneath the layer of paint. When Moses hit the canvas in a certain way, he discovered it produced a rippling crackle, which he can manipulate to create a gorgeous repeated floral effect.

The mechanical drawing classes Moses took in high school gave him an added technical acuity, informing his drawing and approach to painting. Although Moses has produced numerous vast abstract canvases without a figurative, representational or literal narrative, much of his work is anchored by a concern with line. This is particularly telling in the grid drawings of the 1970s, a theme that re-emerged in the later diagonal grid paintings. Subtle vestiges of the grid crop up in the new generation of paintings in his latest solo

show, "Now and Then" at William Turner Gallery from June 6 to August 15. These paintings would be a complete surprise if not for the traces of intersecting lines in the form of crosses repeated across the surface. Created by a stencil, the presence of the crosses is a thematic thread superimposed over other marks in the compositions. Layers of marks allow an intriguing glimpse into his process.

"I like the idea of seeing evidence of the process and application. That's part of the beauty of it. The work reveals some of the history of the mark making, and then one day it lights up, self-illuminates. Wow!" Moses said in a conversation with LACMA curator Leslie Jones, hosted by William Turner the week of the opening.

Mostly rendered on wood panels, the new series reflects the solid substantive ground on which it is painted. Primary colors—a preponderance of reds—and black predominate. The work is characterized by dots, drips and other marks that interplay with the crosses. Moses added unexpected embellishments—a soupçon of assemblage—although that's not the intention.

"I never liked the idea of assemblage. It just sort of grew out of the situation," Moses said.

Incorporating a sculptural element, in *Stares Down* (2015), ledges, which Moses calls "pockets," project from the painted surface. Assorted wooden items rest inside—paint sticks used for stirring house paints, a stencil-cut tarantula and star shapes. Aluminum rails form a frame outside the border. Several of the new paintings have aluminum or copper rail frames as well as chains draped across the surface, hanging in loose curves—another version of line. Moses included the chains, found in a hardware store, because, "I like them. They look good."

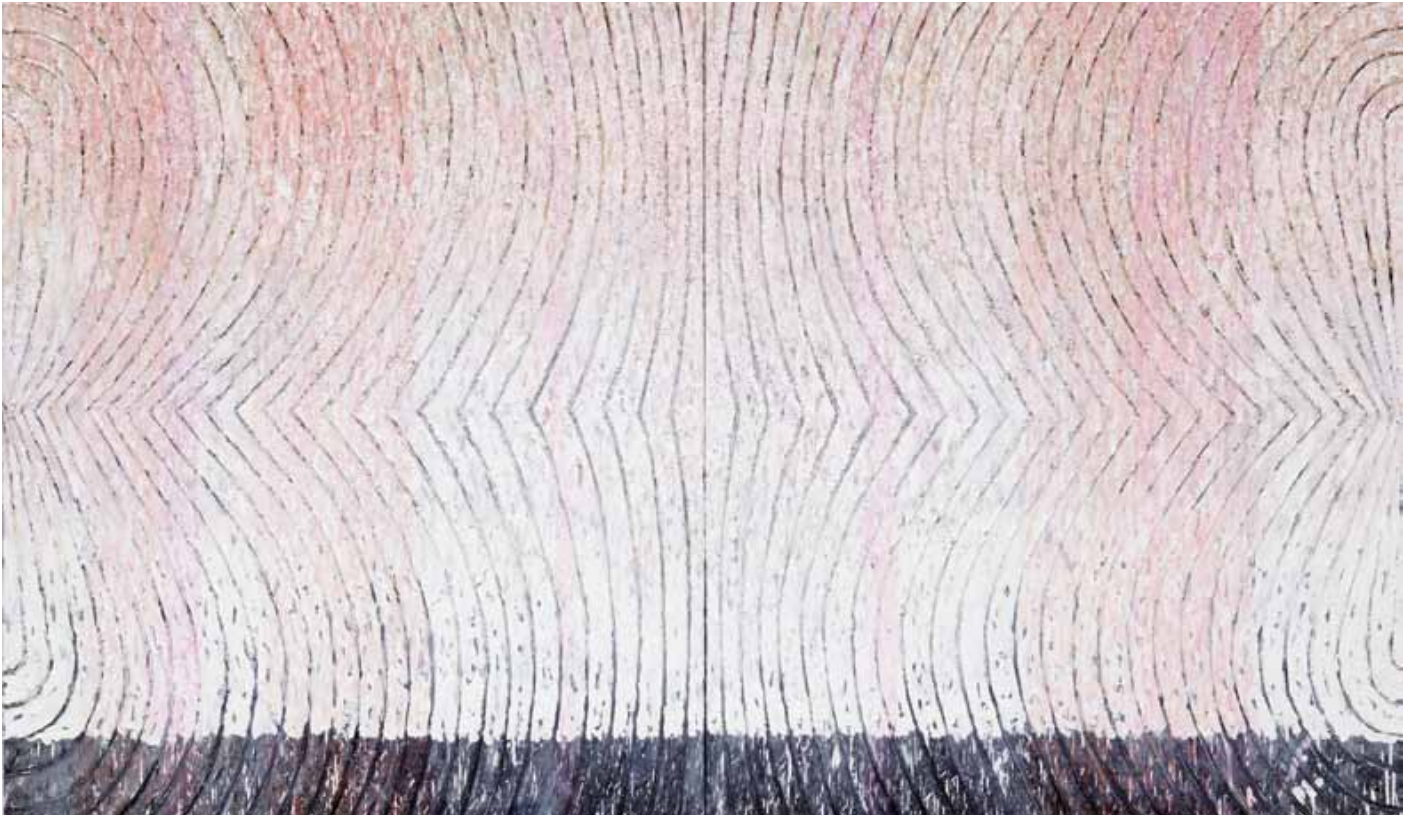
The metal rails are more integrated in some of the pieces than in others, as in *Aleff* (2015), in which Moses painted the rails in the blue palette of the painting they frame. What's compelling is not that the embellishments complete the work, but how the paintings become more dynamic and engaging because of the added dimensional elements.

Last October, Moses and a coterie of artists and friends traveled on a bus chartered by Turner from Bergamot Station in Santa Monica to UC Irvine for the opening of the retrospective. There, Moses led his entourage through three galleries of paintings, each more stunning than the next, discussing his process with humor and candor while using his cane to point out details. The comprehensive survey showcased the vast range of the artist's strategic exploration of the painted medium from the 1970s to the present. It's apparent the life work of Moses is a continual exploration, in which he refuses to be harnessed to any single idea or avenue of expression, regardless of how rewarding that one direction might be. Instead, he excels at each concept and leaps on to the next.

Ultimately, Moses' paintings are a fortuitous marriage of contrasts, a meeting of contrived accident and deliberate control. The artist, who abhors the label "artist," prefers to be thought of as an inventor and discoverer. For Moses, it's all about the continuing experiment. "It's always the same," he said. "I never get better, I often get worse. And sometimes I get lucky." ■

Ed Moses: Drawings from the 1960s and 70s
(May 10 - August 2, 2015)

Now and Then
(June 6 - August 15, 2015)



Christine Frerichs, *Warm Winter Kiss (for Constantine Brancusi)*, 2015, oil and acrylic on two canvases, 36" x 60." Courtesy of Klowden Mann Gallery.

CHRISTINE FRERICHS: SERENADE

Klowden Mann – Culver City

By Megan Abrahams

The metaphor of music permeates this series of paintings by Christine Frerichs—characterized as they are by mood, the gradation of color building towards crescendo, composition approached with almost mathematical deliberation and flowing lyricism of line. The artist connected this series to music, in particular, music as a statement of romantic love. Fittingly, the exhibit is named “Serenade,” in reference to one of the largest paintings. “This body of work touched on how abstraction can stem from emotive states,” the artist said, in a one-on-one conversation at the gallery during the run of her show.

Riveting for their layered complexity, richness of texture and dramatic color, the paintings are also infused with narrative significance, like painted memoir. For Frerichs, the larger canvases—those approaching the size of a human body—are symbolic portraits, abstract embodiments of a person or people. In them, the artist delves into the feelings evoked by relationships, and the building of personal identity.

The genesis of this recent work is a previous series of ten paintings, in which Frerichs created allegorical motifs to describe what she calls, “the stages individuals go through to become who we are through vulnerability.” Under each canvas, she articulated a figure 8, an abstracted rendition of the human form. In the new series, Frerichs re-contextualized the figure 8 further, breaking it down into subtle repeated lines. Beginning with a thick layer of acrylic modeling paste, she carved grooves, creating a figure 8 pattern based on the scale of her own body. The curved lines repeat like ripples. Partly derived from the artist’s observations of how ocean tides meet, creating cross-cur-

rents that may be gentle or full of friction, the paintings are also meant to represent the dynamic between partners in a relationship.

The underlying concept was also inspired by Brancusi’s sculpture, *The Kiss*, in which two integrated figures are carved from a single stone. In each painting, the artist joined two canvases to construct one composition, dividing the symbolic figure in half. The half figures represent two beings coming together, forming a whole. Alluding to the inherent paradox in the way the halves reflect, Frerichs said, “The meeting point is the place they split.”

Beyond the abstract reference to figures, the works evoke landscape, water and sky, connoting the light and atmosphere of New York, Lake Tahoe and Los Angeles—places with special emotional meaning in the artist’s life. Up close, the fine marks across the surface almost appear pointillist in technique. From a distance, the canvases glow with diffused light—a gradation of color and intensity with a palette ranging from modulated light-filled pastels to dark colors with depth and intensity, expressing an emotional spectrum from ecstasy to heartbreak.

A series of smaller paintings, (each 8.5 x 11 inches, oil on canvas) in the gallery’s project room, are like letters Frerichs has written to herself, or, “diagrams to describe relationships I’ve had in my life, or loves or places I’ve been.” Like studies, they are light-hearted steppingstones to the stunning emotionally charged larger works—the profound rendition of the artist’s unbridled introspection. ■

(March 7 - April 11, 2015)

CRAIG TAYLOR: ENFACE

CB1 Gallery – Los Angeles

By Megan Abrahams



Craig Taylor, *Internal Friction Stacked*, 2014, oil on canvas, 72" x 54." Courtesy of CB1 Gallery.

Derivative of portraits or sculptural busts, Craig Taylor's recent complex abstract paintings achieve striking visual tension through the contrast of scraped-out layered backgrounds and the built-up application of paint on the dominant shape—or subject—configured in the foreground.

The theme of the exhibit is a revealing double entendre—*Enface*, meaning to write on the face of something, usually paper. In this series, the artist embellishes the suggested portraits or busts—in effect, faces—through systematic marks made with thick marks of paint in a stringently limited palette. There is a sort of start-stop to the marks, surfacing above an historical record of various versions of different backgrounds.

The forms in the foreground—subjects, or perhaps faces—appear in subtle relief from backgrounds comprised of layers of paint that have been applied in succession and then removed, leaving the echoes of assorted pigments visible in ghost-like shadow through a film of muted green-gray blue. The end result of the scraped-out backgrounds is a smooth burnished patina of exposed under-painting, revealing an intriguing glimpse into the artist's process, a deliberate and intricate method that requires hours of working, undoing and reworking to achieve its profound nuanced effect.

If it weren't for the pedestal shapes at the base of each abstracted bust, the portrait connotation might be less apparent. The shapes dominating these canvases could be construed as maps, satellite im-

ages or organic forms, like islands or rocks in the desert. In *The Absolute Fragrance* (2015), Taylor mostly confined his palette to muted grays, greens and blues, reminiscent of the colors found on camouflage fatigues. The gold background magically glows with light. Little vertical raised relief marks in the background coexist like a negative or reverse image of marks in the dominant foreground shape.

Internal Friction Stacked (2014), features a still subdued, but more varied palette—pale lavender, a hint of rose, umber, green, blue—each muted with white to create subtle tints. Spaces in the large mass, which loom from the canvas, provide a window into the background. There is architecture, solidity, in the prevailing shape. Demarcated by the built-up application of paint, it becomes a mesmerizing though inconclusive entity, enveloped in a mysterious aura, anchored with a sense of gravitas.

Lines confer dimension to the central form, or subject, most notably in *Without the Transistor of Reason* (2015), which features an abstract extrapolation of the head of a cartoon rabbit. Here, the artist has described the pedestal at the bottom of the frame in a horizontal plateau that almost appears to jut out from the plane of the canvas. Not sculpture, or even bas-relief, these paintings defy the flatness of the surface, capturing the essence of abstract sculptural shapes and compelling the eye to linger.

(March 7 - April 11, 2015)

SÁMI STORIES: ART AND IDENTITY OF AN ARCTIC PEOPLE

Anchorage Museum - Anchorage, Alaska
 Curated by Marit Anne Hauan and Charis Gullickson

By Jeff Siemers



Marja Helander, *Buollanoaivi (Mount Palopaa)*, photograph on aluminum, from the series "Modern Nomads." Courtesy of the Sámi Collections, Karasjok.

The juxtaposition of ancestral artifacts with contemporary representations of culture highlights the integral aspect of the exhibition: the collective identity of the Sámi people. The impetus for the exhibition is a “commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and the 200th anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution, which, in 1988, was revised to offer unprecedented formal recognition of the Sámi people, language, and culture.” The exhibition of approximately 25 works, co-curated by Marit Anne Hauan from the Tromsø University Museum and Charis Gullickson from the Northern Norway Art Museum, invites the viewer to reflect on past and present markers of identity for a specific people, successfully creating a rich dialogue of timeless voices that depict the complexity and richness of Sámi identity. The exhibition provides for an ongoing dialogue of self and culture and captures the interchange of cultural representational artifacts and art.

The gallery space contains artifacts from as early as the 17th century; items such as woodcarvings and ornamental objects give a glimpse into the visual culture of the past that effectively strengthens the visual narrative of the Sámi culture. The artistry and aesthetic consideration not uncommon to works from other indigenous peoples is exemplified through colorful and ornamental carvings and fiber arts. Video monitors and historical displays articulate the struggle for the Sámi people to receive formal recognition from the various governmental authorities and illuminate the perseverance and determination inherent in the collective Sámi identity. These works serve as an aesthetic historical foundation and effectively converse with the contemporary works in the exhibit.

The eight contemporary artists, seven of whom are of Sámi descent and hail from Sweden, Norway, and Finland, bring a present-day relevancy to the exhibit. The success of the works by these artists comes from the narrative of the individual pieces wed with the traditional stories of the past. The synthesis of timeless and contemporary environments is exemplified in the piece *Buollanoaivi (Mount Palopaa)* (2001) by Marja Helander where the main figure navigates

the harsh conditions of the arctic landscape in a business-casual wardrobe that beautifully mimics the visual temperature of her surroundings. Helander’s command of color allows the photograph on aluminum to emphasize the compositional aspects of the figure with the environment. Although the functional aspects of high heels and a handbag do not correspond with snow and frozen tundra, the outfit is coordinated with the harsh environment and the aesthetic balance puts the viewer at ease. She is where she belongs. Her posture, as she navigates through the deep snow, reinforces the determination of her own individuality and the appropriateness of her situation. The red hat worn by the woman is a striking hue and has a marked relationship to the traditional knit-hats of the Sámi people, which are displayed at the title wall of the exhibition. Not only does she know where she is going, she knows where she has been.

Departure (2000) and *Departure – Black* (2000), two woodcuts on paper by Arnold Johansen, together illustrate the destruction experienced in Norway during World War II. These pieces are displayed as a two-staged timeline as the white print is placed to the left of the gray and black piece. Lines in both images create a patterned geography of the community and imagery of boats, houses and children. The pair accentuates the transition a community experiences through the devastation of war. Both works have a map-like perspective and their positioning depicts the movement from a peaceful community to a burnt, chaotic society.

The exhibition evocatively provides a vision of narratives within a contemporary culture, not bound or hindered by its past, but empowered through it. The impact of the exhibition comes from the visual voices of Sámi artists that have, in the past, not been allowed a venue. ■

(February 27 - May 10, 2015)

Jeff Siemers is an artist and educator residing in Kenai, Alaska. He is currently pursuing a PhD from the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts.



Nari Ward, Installation view, featuring (left to right): *Swing* (2010), *Mango Tourist* (2011), *Loisaidas LiquorsouL* (2011), *We the People* (2011), *King Buoy* (2010). Courtesy SCAD Museum of Art.

NARI WARD: SO-CALLED

SCAD Museum of Art - Savannah, GA
Curated by Laurie Ann Farrell

By Fred Gross

The first works in “So-Called,” an exhibition of Nari Ward’s recent sculpture and mixed-media work at the SCAD MoA, are two of Ward’s *Canned Smiles* (2013), neatly shelved, glib references to Piero Manzoni’s *Artist’s Shit* (1961). For Ward, *Canned Smiles* are the product of an encounter with people from an identity-specific area, such as Jamaica, or Sugar Hill, Brooklyn. The cans contain a mirror, onto which a person Ward met on the street has smiled. Ward then “cans” the smile by placing a lid on the can and pressing it down with a hand-cranked canning machine.¹ If the Neo-Dada Manzoni cans of *merda* deadpanned the abject material products of the artist’s physical body, then they suggested that the persona of the artist and the products of the artist’s body are consumable substances. Ward, on the other hand, cans the *image* of someone else’s smile, of a momentary encounter with a passerby on the street, which then becomes a commodity.

After Yves Klein, Manzoni critiqued the contemporary artist’s role as a producer of goods, proliferating consumerist practices like commodification, display, and package design. Indeed, Manzoni condenses that capitalist system humorously, with no small measure of Duchampian irony. Ward cans the mirror image of smiles of African-Americans and Jamaicans in these serialized works, suggesting an ironic, yet identity-specific context for the image of the stereotyped commodifiable body fragment. This is but one layer in the dense tissue of complex meanings Ward weaves around his works.

The SCAD Museum of Art has previously been a site for contemporary African-American artists to engage with black history and the museum’s collection, as Fred Wilson did in his 2012 “Life’s Link” exhibition by using slave-made bricks as sculptural ready-mades (bricks which also constitute the façade of the museum itself, once a building in a train yard). In *Spellbound*, Ward was able to engage the use of an historic candy store owned and operated by African-American Savannahians as

a found object from the era of Jim Crow and segregation, to be re-used in the form of installation art in the museum’s outdoor sculpture area. Inside the clapboard store are an upright piano with keys affixed to it, and on the back of the piano a flat video projection surrounded by Spanish moss. The compelling video features poetic sights and sounds from Savannah, perhaps the most poignant of these being the holes in the floor of the First African Baptist Church in the form of a diamond-shaped Congolese cosmogram.² The holes appeared to be decorative, but were in fact breathing holes for sheltered runaway slaves, as the church was a part of the underground railroad. Ward’s *Spellbound* powerfully thematizes living black history in Savannah, which is often secret, or overlooked in narratives on historical tours of the city.

As with David Hammons, the found object for Ward takes on significance specific to ethnic identity, but in a global context of consumerism, commodification, and power. For instance, tires, shoelaces, and shoe tips can be seen as ciphers for identity, but also urban experience and economies of reuse. This is apparent in the striking *Swing* (2010), part toy, morning star, and hangman’s noose. In *Loisaidas LiquorsouL* (2011), a sculpture affixed to the wall includes metal, plexiglass, a fluorescent liquor store sign, PVC piping with artificial flowers, shoelaces, and shoe tips. The first part of the title refers to the Hispanic section of the Lower East Side of New York, and the materials evoke the type of spontaneous shrines for someone who died on the streets. Yes, the work appears to be an upside-down liquor store sign, but the work is haunting, cheap, and ephemeral; a double meaning for those in the know from the local community. ■

(February 5 – June 28, 2015)

NOTES

1. A video of Ward’s *Sugar Hill Smiles* of 2014 is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/104024881>. It seems clear that the encounter between the affable Ward and the person surrendering the smile is pleasant and positive.

2. See, firstafricanbc.com/history.asp

Fred Gross is a Professor of Art History at the Savannah College of Art and Design, where he teaches contemporary art and the history of photography. He is currently working on a book entitled Diagrammatic art of 1980s New York: Basquiat, Halley, Anderson.

**ABSTRACTION AND CONSTRUCTIVISM:
CONTINUITY AND BREAKDOWN OF LATIN AMERICAN MODERNITY**

Durban Segnini Gallery - Miami

Curated by Dennys Matos

The Hard Edge of Latin American Modern Art

By Janet Batet

I- THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS.¹

In the early- to mid-1910s, experimentations in art led by Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian opened the way for the advent of non-objective art. This shifting point in the history of art created a gateway into the abstract, self-referential tradition that would fuel a significant number of 20th-century art movements, such as Constructivism, Suprematism, De Stijl, Bauhaus, Abstract Expressionism, Color Field, Minimalism, Post-Painterly Abstraction and Hard-Edge painting, among others.

In the case of Latin America, abstraction meant, for the first time, the non-derivative participation of the region in Western art history. With its pervasive influence, Constructivism² found adherents across the Old World, rapidly spreading from Russia to Europe and then into Latin America. Joaquín Torres-García³ and Manuel Rendón⁴, who along with Antoine Pevsner and Naum Gabo were instrumental figures in European Constructivism, introduced the new radical art in Latin America.

II- OUR NORTH IS THE SOUTH.⁵

In 1934 Joaquín Torres-García returned to his hometown of Montevideo where he opened *Asociación de arte constructivo* (*Association of Constructivist Art*) and continued the publication of *Cercle at Carré*, known as *Círculo y cuadrado*. “*La seconde époque de Cercle et Carré*.” In 1943, the artist started his own Constructivist school, el Taller Joaquín Torres-García, and one year later published his *Universalismo Constructivo* (*Universal Constructivism*), a groundbreaking book gathering the 150 lectures given by Torres-García between 1934 and 1943⁶. Through his school-workshop, publications and conferences, Torres-García spreads his vision of Constructivism in Latin America. The *School of the South* combines European Constructivist ideas with Latin American identity, linking the abstract spirit to Pre-Columbian traditions.

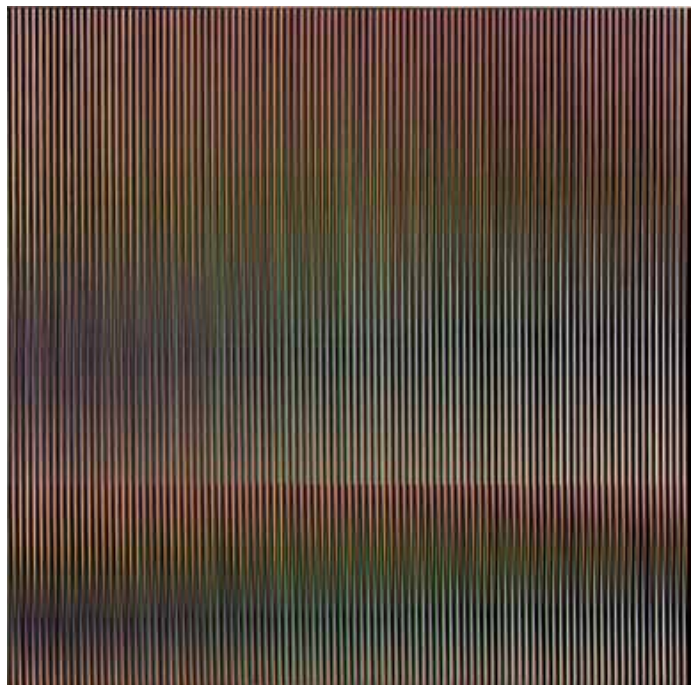
**III- LATIN-AMERICA MODERN:
THE TRIUMPH OF CONSTRUCTIVISM.**

By the 1940s, Latin America had become fertile ground for experimentation in the newest trends in art worldwide. Three main focuses, thanks to the lessons of Torres-García, began to surface in the region, radiating Abstract-Constructive art throughout Latin America.

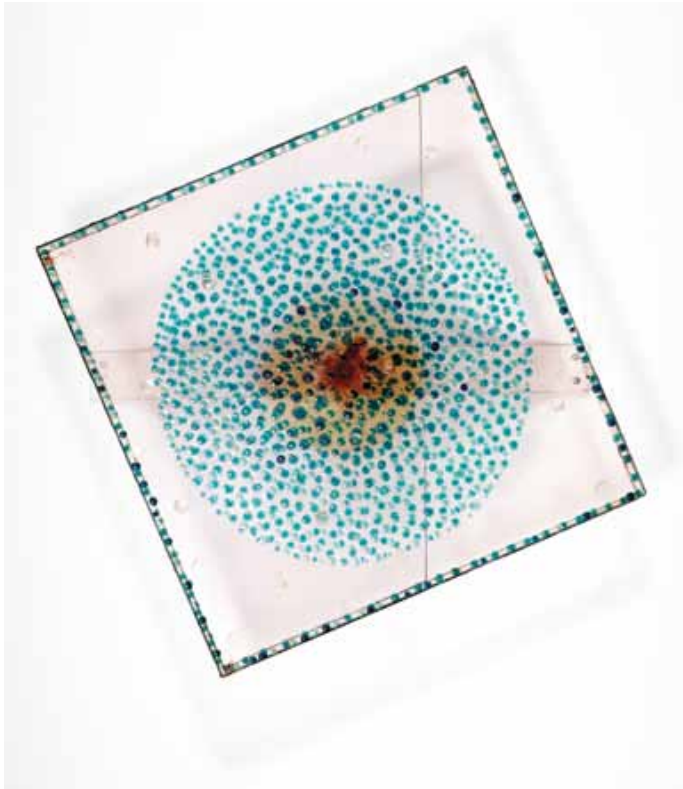
Arturo was published in Buenos Aires in 1944, and even though the magazine produced only a single issue; its influence over Argentinean constructivist movements is crucial. That same year the *Asociación Arte Concreto-Invencción*⁷ (*Concrete-Invention Art Association*) was founded, followed by *Madi*⁸ in 1945, and the *Perceptis-*



Manolo Vellojin, *Beato*, 1989, acrylic on raw linen, 35.5" x 35.5." All images are courtesy of Durban Segnini Gallery.



Carlos Cruz-Diez, *Physichromie # 1194*, 1982, 39.3" x 39.3.



Gyula Kosice, *Revolving water*, 1964, plexiglas, metal and water, 23.6" x 23.6" x 6.2."

mo⁹ in 1947. In Brazil, Max Bill's retrospective at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art was the catalysts into the concrete revolution. In 1952 *Grupo Frente*¹⁰ (Rio de Janeiro), and *Ruptura*¹¹ (São Paulo) were founded; both of them interested in mathematical art. Venezuelan artists educated in Caracas and living in Paris founded *Los Disidentes*¹² (The Dissidents) in 1945. Caracas was an experimental hotbed for abstract and concrete art, mainly in the optical and kinetic versions. Some of the artists would travel later to Paris. They contributed significantly to the development of kinetic art¹³.

By then, the abstract-concrete adventure is in full swing throughout the South American continent.

IV- ABSTRACTION AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN LATIN AMERICAN MODERNITY.

"Abstraction and Constructivism: Continuity and Breakdown of Latin American Modernity," presented at Durban Segnini Gallery, is an immersive exhibition offering an overview of this remarkable period in Latin American art. With artworks from Carmelo Arden Quin, Omar Carreño, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Fernando De Szyslo, Gyula Kosice, Julio Le Parc, Raúl Loza, Mateo Manaure, César Paternosto, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, Omar Rayo, Carlos Rojas, Fanny Sanín, Jesús Soto and Manolo Vellojín, the show surveys 23 years of dedicated work by this landmark Miami gallery, which specializes in the promotion, study and sale of Latin American abstract art. Curated by Dennys Matos, the exhibition is divided into three main areas: concrete art, optic art and kinetic art. The first group highlights the work of Carmelo Arden Quin, Omar Carreño, Carlos Rojas, César Paternosto and Manolo Vellojín.

Fountain (Paqcha IV) (1993) by Paternosto is a powerful sculpture inspired by Inca architecture and terrace irrigation engineering. The totemic structure, known as a double *clin d'oeil* to Pre-Columbian

cultures and Duchamp's notion of the *objet trouvé*, is an excellent example of the survival of the ideas promulgated by the Constructive Universalism of Torres-García.

Beato series (1989), by Colombian artist Manolo Vellojín, is one of the most spiritual works in the exhibition. These pious portraits, always in the subtle color range of ocher, black and gold, conciliate in a startling harmony rational order and religious creed.

In the second group, the artworks by Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesús Soto, Mateo Manaure, Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar and Omar Rayo resume the optic explorations, while the third group, confined to kinetic art, includes some genuine historic jewels by Gyula Kosice and Julio Le Parc.

Revolving Water (1964), by Kosice, incites the viewer to activate the structure of the translucent Plexiglas receptacle of tiny colorful beads and water. The weight of the moving water acts then as a gravitational force animating the mechanism, which offers an evocative spectacle reinforced by the subtle sound of the falling water.

"Abstraction and Constructivism: Continuity and Breakdown of Latin American Modernity" is a must see exhibition during this summer. ■

(July 10 - October 30, 2015)

NOTES

1. This phrase, attributed to Piet Mondrian, refers to the turning point in art history undertaken by the audacious abstract adventure, when abstract-art influences first flexed their collective muscle.
2. The origins of Constructivism can be traced back to 1913 Russia, when Vladimir Tatlin, who during his journey to Paris had discovered the works of Braque and Picasso, returned to his homeland and began producing sculptures out of assemblages. Kasimir Malevich coined the term Construction art in 1917 in reference to the work of Alexander Rodchenko.
3. Considered the father of Latin American Constructivism, Joaquín Torres-García actively participated in European Constructivism. Torres-García lived in Paris in the 1920s, where he met Piet Mondrian and learned about Neo-Plasticism. In 1929, along with Michel Seuphor, Torres-García founded Cercle et Carré (Circle and Square), which opposed Surrealism and promoted Constructivist trends. Members of the movement included Hans Arp, Le Corbusier, Kurt Schwitters, Luigi Russolo, Fernand Léger, Wassily Kandinsky, Mondrian, Amédée Ozenfant, Antoine Pevsner and Georges Vantongerloo, among others. The group published a journal of the same name before it was succeeded by the Abstraction Création group in 1931.
4. Born in Paris to Ecuadorian parents, Manuel Rendón studied at the L'académie de la Grand Chaumière in Paris. In 1937, Rendón exhibited in Guayaquil, and two years later in Quito. The imprint of his work was influential in Ecuador, the rest of Latin America and Europe.
5. The phrase is an excerpt from Torres-García's manifesto *La Escuela del Sur* (The School of the South), 1935. "I have said School of the South because in reality, our North is the South. There should be no North for us, except in opposition to our South... This is a necessary rectification; so that now we know where we are." En: Torres-García, Joaquín. Lecture delivered at La Escuela del Sur, 1953. First published in *Universalismo constructivo* (Buenos Aires, 1934) and translated by Anne Twitty, then reprinted in Mari Carmen Ramirez's *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and Its Legacy* (University of Texas Press, 1992), 53-57.
6. Torres-García, Joaquín. *Universalismo Constructivo. Contribución a la unificación del arte y la cultura de América*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Poseidón, 1944.
7. Founded by Tomás Maldonado in 1944, Arte Concreto-Invencción embraced experimental art and pure aesthetics. Among its members were Manuel Espinosa, Lidy Prati, Enio Iommi, Alfredo Hlito and Raúl Loza.
8. Founded by Carmelo Arden Quin, Gyula Kosice and Rhod Rothfuss, Madi's commitment toward a non-objective expression characterized by pure geometrical forms, contrasting colors, movable architecture, ludic sensibility and open irregular frames (shaped canvases) brought on an international wave of art in which the goal was to engage the viewer. In 1946, Quin moved to Paris, and in 1951, along with Volf Roitman, he launched the Madi Research and Study Center, which evolved into Madi International, which remains active today.
9. Founded in 1947 and led by Raúl Loza, Rembrandt van Dick Loza, Abraham Haber and Alberto Molenberg, *Perceptismo* focused on the objective plane and autonomy of form.
10. Founded by Ivan Serpa, Grupo Frente was interested in representing organic forms while remaining within the nonfigurative, geometric realm. The group's members included César Oiticica, Hélio Oiticica, Décio Vieira, Aluísio Carvão, João José da Costa and Lygia Pape.
11. The seven founding members of the group were Anatol Wladyslaw, Leopoldo Haar, Lothar Charoux, Kazmer Féjer, Geraldo de Barros, Luiz Sacilotto and Waldemar Cordeiro, and they were later joined by Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Judith Lauand and Maurício Nogueira Lima. Interested in the aesthetic theories developed by Theo van Doesburg and Max Bill, the group favored rational geometric abstraction.
12. *Los disidentes* was a Venezuelan movement based in Paris, interested in geometric-abstractionism. Its members included Alejandro Otero, Pascual Navarro, Mateo Manaure, Hermíny Perán and Omar Carreño. The group had significant impact in their native Venezuela.
13. Among them, the figures of Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesús Rafael Soto and Alejandro Otero are vital.



Luis Cruz Azaceta,
Surveillance II, 2012, acrylic,
pencil on canvas, 48" x 48."

LUIS CRUZ AZACETA: STATE OF FEAR

Panamerican Art Projects – Miami

By Janet Batet

The Middle East conflict is one of the most convoluted and enduring problems in the world. Encompassing exacerbated religious differences, camouflaged ruses for geopolitical dominance and economic interests (mainly focused on the control of the vast natural resources of the region), the magnitude of this unruly quarrel must be faced as a global conflict. Dating back to the Ottoman Empire, when it was the epicenter of interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds for over six centuries and followed later by the expansionist European colonial powers interested in securing territories and controlling access to Asia, the conflict has persisted to this day, accompanied now by the meddling of the present-day imperial superpowers, including France, Britain, Russia and the U.S.

“State of Fear,” the most recent solo show by Luis Cruz Azaceta, is this acclaimed artist’s response to the current conflicts in the region. “These works address the chaos, fragmentation and death and their impact on the West,” Azaceta says.

Since his career began, Azaceta has been interested in studying the human contemporary condition when confronted with despair, fear, manipulation and dislocation. Consequently, the nine works represented in the exhibition tackle different axes of the Middle East conflict, including

drilling, borders, intolerance, greed, surveillance, control and death.

With the exception of *Surveillance II* (2012), *El Dorado* (2014) and *Drone Zone 1* (2015), the prevailing palette is somber. Murky ink splashes like blood puddles, located at the center of the compositions *Gaza* and *Target Iraq*, both from 2014, allude to the true nature of the international fixation with the region: crude oil reserves.

In *Gaza*, the smuggling tunnels, excavation machinery, fiery tongues, flying blasts and monochrome silhouette of Jerusalem surrounding the centered splashed puddle illustrate this wrenching portrait of life on the Gaza strip, while the recurrent use of the grid—expression at once of control, repression and deprivation—is highlighted in works such as *Syria*, *El Dorado*, *War=Death* and *War Zone*, all from 2014.

Unlike the grid concept prevalent during the Renaissance, the grid in these works appears to be devoid of any depth. For instance, *El Dorado* shows a sort of golden Cartesian map, where the promised territory is traced and defined by a hidden external agenda that ignores the interests and well-being of the region itself.

Mostly abstracts, each of the works should be considered as a piece of a puzzle, all of which help unravel the chaos, while the gallery serves as the perfect setting to view the conflict, giving visitors a chance to consider the tragic effects of the carnage on the human condition. ■

(May 1 – June 28, 2015)

Janet Batet is an arts writer and curator based in Miami.

THE MEANING MACHINE

Dotfiftyone Gallery – Miami

By Irina Leyva-Pérez



Daniela Luna, *Research and Development of Best Damn Me*, 2015, installation, performance and public experiment. Courtesy of the artist and Dot Fiftyone Gallery.

“The Meaning Machine” aims to depict the quintessential need that human beings feel to find purpose in their lives. Through the works of Daniela Luna, Ariel Cusnir and Martin Legón, three artists from Argentina, this exhibition shows different ways of recording proof of existence, the ultimate evidence of a life. It also functions as a sort of reunion, as these three artists used to exhibit at the gallery *Appetite* in Buenos Aires, which is now closed. Some of the pieces were produced exclusively for this exhibition.

Luna presented her ongoing project *Research and Development of Best Damn Me*, supported by the Laboratory of Experiential Analysis and Design (LEAD). In this series of physical experiments, the artist becomes both the subject and researcher. Her goal is to accumulate as much data as possible about herself and analyze it. She tracks her food intake, exercise habits, physical activity, etc., testing her potential and limits. Her intention is to keep records of all that tracking devices allow. This is an evolving piece, and over the course of the show she changes the configuration of the space according to the activity that she was doing. This rotation includes the position of auxiliary furniture such as a desk, a chair and exercise equipment used to produce the data. The work develops constantly as the artist changes activities. The resulting data is then illustrated in graphics and drawings, emerging as a commentary about how our lives become statistics, algorithms of contemporary society.

Ariel Cusnir is represented by three videos and four watercolors on paper. The watercolors are titled *Cirques* and represent scenes of an act from a circus, according to the artist, from a film he made about an Australian show in Buenos Aires in which he took snapshots of the film and created the pieces. The images look fragmented; nevertheless the narrative is almost sequential. It's not placed on a particular timeframe; it could have been happening a year ago, 10 years ago or yesterday. This could be a banal scene, simply part of the daily routine for somebody, perhaps for a dancer. Cusnir takes common objects and considers them out of context, something he explores in his videos filmed at common places such as restaurants and bars, as with *Saturday*, part of the exhibition.

Martin Legón's project *Personal annotations over the 48 volumes of the Globus collection*, encompasses 48 pieces. He selected the entries from the *Globus* encyclopedia, focusing on artists from the 20th century he admires and commenting about how they are remembered. In a way, Legón is reflecting about how his lifetime work as an artist will be remembered, if it will be reduced to an entry in a book.

“The Meaning Machine” is, after all, about perception, how we perceive ourselves versus how technology registers our existence and records it as data. It is also about memory, the personal one versus the collective. It is, in a way, how humans find meaning in their lives: either through their emotions or as statistics. ■

(February 12 – March 30, 2015)



José Páez del Nogal, *Black-Orange*, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 51" x 60." Photos: Leo Di Tomaso. All images are courtesy of Canale Díaz Art Center.

JOSÉ PÁEZ DEL NOGAL

Canale Díaz Art Center – Miami

Balancing Choreography with Calligraphy

By Elisa Turner

His is a choreographic art. In recent mixed-media paintings on canvas, José Páez del Nogal achieves a dance-like balancing act, playing fluid and splashy calligraphic gestures in ink against the architectural boldness of geometric forms in such colors as red, black, blue and yellow. Abstraction reigns in “José Páez del Nogal: Three Elements” at Canale Díaz Art Center in Coral Gables, Florida.

Throughout this exhibit, a gathering of 15 paintings from 2014 and 2015, there’s a curious tension between those fluid, mercu-

rial lines and the presence of obdurate, occasionally off-kilter blocks of saturated color. While that tension can sometimes devolve into a formulaic flatness that loses its edge in a painting like *Blue and Violet* (2015), in many examples paintings propel the eye into a vibrant visual maelstrom of form, line and color. These visual elements often seem to shift and shimmy before our very eyes, even suggesting an echo of earlier geometric, kinetic art by celebrated Venezuelan artists Jesús Soto and Gego.

No wonder, as Carol Damian explains in the introductory catalogue essay for this show, that form, line and color are the three visual elements coming into play in this exhibit, in addition to its frequent references to an Asian and specifically Japanese aesthetic. For example, the layered geometric compositions of *White Square* (2015) and *Black-Orange* (2014) are energetically threaded with gestural lines recalling Japanese calligraphy. In *Black-Orange*, a tiny red stamp with Japanese letters spelling out the artist’s name is visible, as it is in several paintings in this

exhibit. Furthermore, both *White Square* and *Black-Orange* are rife with evocations of cosmopolitan bustle. Grid-like rectangles reminiscent of skyscrapers seem to appear and disappear within abstract meditations on what are apparently congested, ever-changing urban landscapes.

It's fitting, then, that this exhibit takes place at Canale Díaz Art Center, a recent newcomer to the current, lively energies of Coral Gables, a city in Greater Miami, where construction and an evolving mix of business and culture give familiar streets a new look. Open since March 6, the center is directed by Marco Canale and his business partner Manuel Díaz. Previously, the two were working as private art dealers in Venezuela. They matched up collectors who wanted to buy specific artworks with those who wanted to sell artworks. In Coral Gables, they've embarked upon a new, brick-and-mortar venture.

"We've never had a physical space," said Canale. "We named it an art center because our focus right now is to fuse two or more artistic lines of expression." Recently this space played host to a violin concert, and theater performances are a future possibility. "We are finalizing details to have more performing arts," Canale continued. "It is to give the visitor more than just visual arts so this can be a mutually enriching experience. No, it's not that that the visual arts are not enough for viewers. The visual arts make up such a vast domain. In the end, there are so many galleries, perhaps not in Coral Gables but in Wynwood. You need to differentiate yourself. We want to give more space to different forms of expression."

Long active in a career that evolved from his passion for drawing and painting, José Páez del Nogal studied graphic arts and design, including etching and lithography, in the 1970s at the Cristóbal Rojas School of Visual Arts in his native Venezuela. Early in his career, his artwork was part of group and solo exhibits in Rome, Caracas and Havana. From the mid-1980s to early 1990s, he worked on exhibition planning and design at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas. More recently, his art has been exhibited in Venezuela, the Netherlands, Aruba and Italy. According to the catalogue published by Canale Díaz Art Center, his art can be found in various collections, including those of the National Art Gallery, Alejandro Otero Visual Arts Museum, Bank of Venezuela and Simón Bolívar University museum, all in Caracas, as well as the Venezuelan Consulate in New York City.

It's clear, even now, that drawing was a particularly early passion for Páez del Nogal. It is still the core of his visual expression. Describing the various sizes of brushes he uses for creating his calligraphic swirls, splashes and meandering lines of ink upon these canvases, the artist launches into an animated discussion about the effects generated by brushes that are thick, medium-sized and quite slim. A short video at Canale Díaz Art Center shows the artist at work in his studio in Venezuela, selecting various brushes to dip into cans of ink, moving his brush with a dancer's forceful grace above the canvas so that the drips of ink become an evolving register of his physical actions. As Adriana Herrera Téllez observes in her catalogue essay, "José Páez del Nogal: Rewriting the Grammar of Abstraction," in reference to this technique, "It is impossible not to recall the dripping in the painting of the American Abstract Expressionist Pollock, fluttering in the air before reaching the canvas."

Certainly *Red* (2015) engages the viewer with its swiftly created and dramatically contrasting textures in the black markings applied to this canvas, which is a flat surface largely saturated with red acrylic paint. An illusion of depth is created, akin to the "push pull" style of abstrac-



José Páez del Nogal, *Resistencia III (Resistance III)*, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 43" x 35."

tion made so famous by Hans Hoffmann in the mid-20th century, by which artists can employ contrasting colors to create the spatial illusion of abstract shapes receding and moving forward on a flat picture plane.

And yet, Páez del Nogal contributes his own aesthetic to this influential legacy by manipulating multiple splatters of ink with his signature calligraphic technique. In addition, heavy opaque rectangles of gray and black, placed at the periphery of this painting, surely bring to a screeching halt those deftly orchestrated references to the spatial dynamic of Hoffmann's "push pull." These rectangular forms exhibit an almost architectural strength and gravity. They also show his work firmly rooted in Venezuela's 20th-century tradition of geometric abstraction, suggesting specifically an affinity with the chiefly red acrylic painting *Tú* (1969) by Mercedes Pardo, belonging to the National Art Gallery in Caracas.

It's this gathering of intriguing visual tensions within the composition of *Red* that gives the painting its arresting power to the eye. Such riveting visual tensions often reward viewers as they follow dancing forms animating the exhibit "José Páez del Nogal: Three Elements." ■

(May 1 – June 27, 2015)

Elisa Turner is a Miami-based award-winning art critic and journalist. She holds an M.A. in comparative literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Turner is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, United States Section, and ArtTable, also serving on the Curatorial Advisory Board for Miami Dade College Museum of Art + Design. From 1995 to 2007 she was The Miami Herald's primary art critic, with international assignments in Cuba, Haiti, Italy and Switzerland. Her writing has appeared in Art Circuits, ARTnews, Hamptons Art Hub and other publications. Since 2009, she's taught at Miami Dade College.

REVIEWS

PROSPECT.3

Various locations – New Orleans

Curated by Franklin Sirmans

By **Tori Busch**



Tavares Strachan, *You belong here*, 2014, video recording of blocked out neon sign on the Mississippi River and Industrial Canal. A project for Prospect.3: Notes for Now (October 25, 2014 - January 25, 2015). Courtesy of the artist. Production: David Meinhart, Joseph Vincent Gray, Michael Hall, Chris Hoover, Speed Levitch, Erica Sellers, Bob Snead, Taylor Snead, and Christopher Thompson. Photo © Vincent Gray.

Recently New Orleans has proposed city legislation that addresses the changing cultural and political landscape of the city: a stalled-out ordinance that regulates noise and limits music in bars and on the street, a recently passed smoking ban and, most controversially, an update to its zoning ordinance. New Orleans, for better and for worse, is becoming a more institutional and organized place. Prospect.3, curated by artistic director Franklin Sirmans, is a reflection of that peripatetic reality. No longer the boisterous, ballsy affair that was Prospect.1, Prospect.3 takes a more academic, institutional approach.

This most recent iteration opened on October 25, 2014, with 58 artists spread around 18 locations. The majority of works were located inside museums; for example, 21 of the 58 artists were on view at the Contemporary Arts Center. Douglas Bourgeois, a Louisiana-based painter whose oil paintings combine spiritual themes with cultural icons, was an excellent example of Sirmans' ability to amplify the work of Southern artists. In *Womack and Del Rey*, Bobby Womack and Lana Del Rey perform together on an icy planet while the earth rotates far away in the distance. If Southern Gothic took too much acid, Bourgeois' paintings would be the result. International artist stars were not forgotten at the CAC either. Bhimji's *Waiting* is a meditative video of a sisal-processing factory near Mombasa, Kenya. Long shots show huge mountains of white filament piled up in a warehouse. Strands of fiber sway in the breeze and walls creak. People are present, but always at the edges of the camera, slipping in and out of the shot like ghosts. Even with the film's slow pace and rich texture, there is a very clear sense of dread, a chorography of displacement, rooted in colonization that still reverberates in the region's tumultuous present.

Tavares Strachan, a conceptual artist based in New York and the Bahamas, was one of the few artists for Prospect.3 who chose to create projects outside the bounds of museums and galleries. *You Belong Here* is a 20-foot-tall sign attached to a river barge that declares in bright pink neon script its title. *You Belong Here*, glowing on the Mississippi River, at first seems like an anodyne message but takes on a darker tone as the barge fights the river tide. The "Here" is fast

moving water whose basic function is to flow to another location. Hence, we belong nowhere that remains constant.

Tucked between a bank and a barbershop, the University of New Orleans St. Claude Gallery is an easily overlooked spot, but *Shrine*, the collaboration between the Propeller Group and Christopher Myers, is one of the most visceral works of Prospect.3. As Sirmans says in the catalogue, "that one learns much about oneself in and through the Other is at the crux of this project." Nowhere can you see this as clearly as in the film *The Living Need Light, the Dead Need Music* (2014), part of a collaborative installation with Myers. The film, which takes its title from a Vietnamese proverb, reveals the connection between the culture of Vietnam and New Orleans through enigmatic and rich funeral rituals. Characters such as a bandleader with a peripatetic orchestra lead us through marketplaces, streets and into a marsh. Notably, *The Living Need Light* unites two countries that, only one generation ago, perpetrated unspeakable acts on each other.

Curating a biennial that speaks for, and reveals itself through, the context of a city is difficult when that city itself is in such flux. As Sirmans said in an interview, "The conversation that Prospect.1 started was urgent and still heavily influenced by shock and loss. But I think, further removed from the catastrophic events of Katrina, Prospect.3 can do something quite different." And Prospect.3 did do something different: It calmly and academically revealed a narrative of moving and traumatic histories of inequity, not just of New Orleans, but throughout the world. ■

(October 25, 2014 – January 25, 2015)

Tori Bush is a freelance writer for arts publications such as Art in America, ArtVoices, Daily Serving, Pelican Bomb and The Art Newspaper. She has contributed to multiple exhibition catalogues, including, most recently, the New Orleans international arts biennial, Prospect.3: Notes for Now. Tori is also a member of the artist group New Orleans Airlift.

KADIR LÓPEZ: LIGHTING UP THE NEIGHBORHOOD

12th Havana Biennial

By Irina Leyva-Pérez



Restored sign of Cine El Megano, a theatre located at Industria No. 416 in Centro Habana. It is part of Kadir López's "Lighting up the Neighborhood" ongoing project.



Kadir López and his staff repaired Payret Theatre's sign as part of "Lighting up the Neighborhood." Havana, May 2015. All images are courtesy of the artist.

Kadir López's work in recent years has been based on memories from a past that wasn't precisely his own. This is particularly evident in his series *Signs*, in which the artist used old commercial signs made of enameled metal surfaces dating from before 1959. Using them as his surface, he then printed over images from the same period, creating visual collages that seem like vignettes from the past. Another piece inspired by this concept is *Havana Monopolio (Havana Monopoly)*, which is also made with images from the 1940s and '50s selected to reflect the economic situation of the country at that time.

Lighting Up the Neighborhood, the project that López presented in this edition of the Havana Biennial, is a continuation of this idea. It consists of the restoration and placement of neon signs in their original locations, like they were in the 1950s. López chose the façades of a number of movie theaters, which surprisingly are the same ones that were operating back then. Many of them still had the rusting structure where the signs were placed initially, while others had worn away over the years. The working method always requires the same lengthy process he has used for all his other series, including first recovering visual information, and then searching for the actual signs with private collectors and antique dealers. In some cases he had to re-create the signs virtually from scratch, as many didn't survive years of neglect and the effects of time.

With these interventions throughout the city, López has sought to bring the memory of nocturnal Havana back to life, where illuminated, neon signs were symbols of a vital, prosperous city. The project's roots can be traced back to 2007 and his exhibition "Kasting," which featured a series of monochrome, thick impasto paintings of movie theaters' signs. In these latest manifestations, López has moved on to a three-dimensional phase whereby his creations materialize at their original sites: Five movie theaters were the lucky recipients of a working sign, including Payret, El Megano and Arenal. In this ambitious, ongoing project, López hopes to restore 40 movie-theater façades. In addition, he also plans to re-create signs of other businesses and incorporate them into the project in the future, including hotels (New York and Nueva Isla) and a hardware store (Ferretería Las Américas), among others.

Ultimately, López's pieces both bring back memories of the past and make note of what is missing in the country today—and may be a hint of what is coming in the future. ■

(May 22 – June 22, 2015)

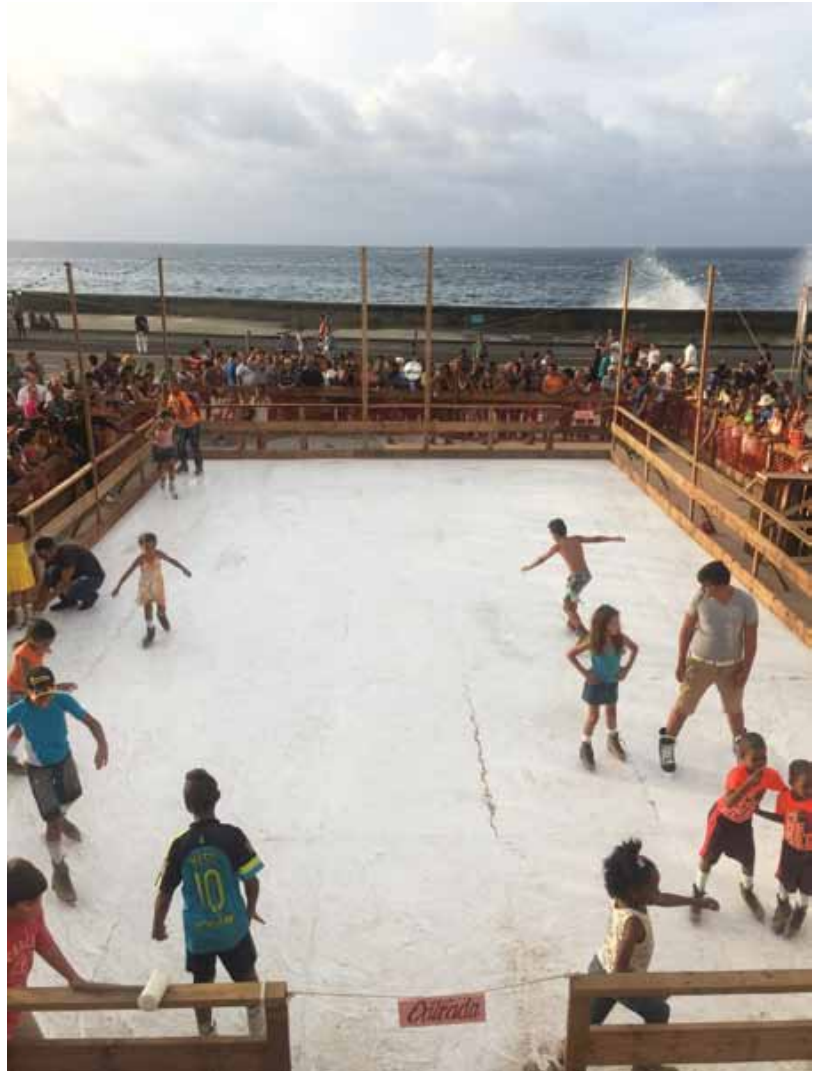
Irina Leyva-Pérez is an art historian and writer based in Miami. She is curator of Pan American Art Projects.

BEHIND THE WALL

12th Havana Biennial

Curated by Juan Delgado Calzadilla

By Noel Smith



Duke Riley, *La Esquina Fría del Malecón*, 2015. “*Detrás del Muro*” project, Havana Biennial. Cuban kids skate on ‘ice’ for the first time. A handful of old-timers remember past attempts to introduce ice skating into Cuba. Photo: Victor J. Webster.

“*Detrás del Muro* (Behind the Wall),” the installation of public art works on the Havana Malecón, was one of the most appealing and accomplished projects of the recent 12th Havana Biennial. Curatorially, the variety and quality of works and the poetics of their placement on the storied seawall was effective, and it achieved one of the major objectives of recent biennials: accessibility. The 12th biennial reached far into remote and often impoverished areas of Havana, bringing art to people where they live; the Malecón is where Havana meets: it’s what curator Juan Delgado Calzadilla calls the “*gran sofá*.”

“*Detrás del Muro*” is the creation of Delgado, who from his home perch on the crumbling line of mansions facing the sea, has long observed the ever changing complexion of the water and various activities of the people who gather there daily and nightly to lean against the balustrade and find a refuge and relief from the crowded hot city in the ocean breeze. Delgado, director of Cuban Art Projects, began to see the possibilities of the Malecón as an urban museum, a place for the universalization of art. “*Detrás del Muro*” represents a massive effort by the workaholic Delgado, project advisor Elvia Rosa Castro, and a host of supporters and funders, artists, gallerists, and helpers all of whom devoted extraordinary resources in a country where materials are still so scarce that foreign artists exhibiting there must expect to bring in anything they will need, including hammers and nails.

The variety of works presented by the group of some fifty Cuban and international artists¹ is striking, a collection including: sculptures, visual

art and musical performances, murals and billboards, smaller works and large-scale interactive spaces encouraging reflection and recreation. On the more or less mile and a half of Malecón, the works are sited according to a canny rhythm, as the prominent larger works draw the viewer on a path to also discover the more subtler creations tucked into corners or mounted on façades facing the sea.

Two showstopper installations more or less bookended the trajectory and highlighted elements of the history of the Malecón and the city. Cuban artist Arlés del Río conjured a typical beach scene, complete with sand, palm trees, and lounge chairs enthusiastically occupied by passersby. It was good fun, but the work’s title, *Resaca*, can be translated as “hangover” but also as “undercurrent,” and “reaction,” and its installation near the remains of abandoned public baths carved into the rocks of the shoreline, hinted at the consequences of the dearth of such recreational opportunities for today’s citizens of Havana.

On the other end of the Malecón, the US artist Duke Riley built *La Esquina Fría Hielo* (*The Ice Corner*) with a plastic surface that mimics ice, and brought in 200 pairs of skates to lend to the children thronging the rink at all times and who did particularly well with the unfamiliar bladed skates. The artist’s typical historical research uncovered the surprising presence of an ice hockey team, Los Trópicos, in pre-revolutionary Havana; the aesthetics of the installation recalled small town mid-century America with its wooden architecture and hand painted signs, not out of place in contemporary Havana with its fleets of vintage automobiles.



Rachel Valdés Camejo, *Cubo Azul (Blue Cube)*, 2015, mixed media installation, stainless steel and laminated glass, 118" x 118" x 118." Courtesy of the artist.

Riley was not alone among artists referencing an ongoing diplomatic “thaw” between Cuba and the United States, and the Malecón is an historically significant locale in which to do it. The first stretch of the seawall, from La Punta to Crespo Street, was actually built between 1901 and 1902 during the 1st American military occupation and the US embassy, or Interests Section, has been located there since 1953.

Cuban artist Kadir López, whose multi-media works often employ material vestiges of the American presence in pre-revolutionary Cuba, contributed an uncharacteristic sculpture, *Opuestos (Opposites)*. This airy, absurdist steel work, formed by two bows facing each other attempting to send the same arrow, the whole pointed north-south, is perfectly positioned in an apron at a natural bend and is nearly in sight of the US Interests Section located further down the road.

Moroccan artist Mounir Fatmi, who lives and works in Paris, created *Obstáculos (Obstacles)*, from poles used to make jumps for equestrian competitions; painted in the red, white and blue of the American flag, they resembled a pile of pick up sticks, oriented north, blocking the path to the United States across the Florida Strait.

Rachel Valdés (Cuba) invited a more phenomenological experience with *Proyecto Reality: Cubo Azul*. Entering the minimalistic cube formed by transparent blue panels, viewers stood on a mirrored floor and observed sky, clouds and sea merged and reflected off one another, creating a visually and sensorially distorted panorama of the Malecón.

Fidel Álvarez (Colombia) also considered the environs in a work from the series *Verbo insular*; he brought a telescopic viewer trained on the horizon, with a text inscribed therein: “Discovering the horizon is seeing beyond the blue.” The access to this piece, like some other interactive sculptures, was limited, as the mechanism was removed when there was no one to attend it.

Performances included Aimée García’s (Cuba) handsome bearded model slowly removing a bright red military styled gown; the striptease drew curiosity and applause on the opening evening, but for display during the month long event, *La dama de rojo (The Lady in Red)* consisted of an empty vitrine with the dress lying crumpled on the ground, accompanied by a life sized photo of the model. Tapping into current fashion’s fascination with androgyny, the piece also drew attention to Cuba’s growing LGBT community.

In *Destino Final (Final Destination)* a performance blending savvy public relations and the growing practice of collecting data on consumers, Álvaro José Brunet (Cuba) gave away his original, signed photographs to viewers in exchange for registering their official identity cards.

History and nostalgia distinguish the works of several Cuban American artists. José Rosabal, born in 1930 in Oriente, was a member of the pioneering group *Diez Pintores Concretos*, who were important proponents of abstraction on the island in the late 1950s. Rosabal’s three vertically oriented panels composing *Fuente de Luz (Fountain of Light)* fit neatly onto the ongoing patterns of the buildings around them.

Emilio Pérez, born in New York in 1972 of Cuban exile parents, contributed *Un Verso Sencillo (A Simple Verse)*, inspired by the poetry of José Martí. The 64-foot long mural features background sea greens and blues and the rhythmic movement of large masses painted in faded pastels echoed the surrounding buildings and the cadences of Martí’s verses.

Like Rosabal, Glexis Novoa impacted the Cuban art scene before leaving for the United States in 1995. His site, a ruin that was once a hotel at the prominent corner of Paseo del Prado and the Malecón, was occupied by long time squatters, who along with others in the neighbor-



Arlés del Río, Resaca, 2015, tiki huts, palm trees, beach chairs, sand, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist.

hood, helped Novoa to clear the space of detritus and clean it up; they also stood guard on the site and welcomed visitors. Novoa prepared walls and columns with plaster and gesso, and using a jeweler's loupe, made drawings no larger than 2 x 8 inches at eye level. The precise graphic images depict fantastic futuristic cities that might be Havana or Moscow, that blend symbols of bygone and current power—Tatlin's tower, a toppled Lenin, a foreboding Kim Jong Un—and offer social and political critique. Here on the opening night, violinist Alejandro Junco played Shostakovich, creating an irresistible ambiance of romanticism, while visitors milling through the site discovered the drawings. The eye was drawn to the play between the intimate drawings, and the unlimited horizon beyond, linking the immediacy of the moment to the grand sweep of history that is Novoa's subject.

Well-known and established Cuban artists contributing works were Manuel Mendive and Roberto Fabelo. Mendive's *Mi energía y yo* (*My Energy and Myself*), a slight bronze figure accompanied by the representation of a spirit, was poised on the south side of the Malecón, as if to cross the street.

Fabelo's *Delicatessen*, a large steel and aluminum cooking pot, was a black hole that absorbed everything around it and gave up nothing to the forks attempting to pierce its surface.

Inti Hernández (Cuba) continued the theme of the pleasures and pitfalls of collectivization with traditional rocking chairs grouped cozily together, in *Balance Cubano*. Their often-witty entanglements provided ample opportunities for group confabs, but prevented any one individual from rocking in peace and solitude, as is the Cuban domestic habit and entitlement.

"Detrás del Muro" was on display for a month during the run of the 12th biennial. The street was closed to traffic on Sundays, which greatly facilitated the enjoyment of the inaugural event on May 24. A soft breeze wafted in from the calm Caribbean Sea, the sky was clear and the temperature reasonable. Thousands of Cubans and tourists strolled along the Malecón, looking and interacting with the art, listening to the jazz band, hearing the venerable lady singing praises to goddess of the sea Yemayá, enjoying the perfect evening. "Detrás del Muro" was a fabulous party on the *gran sofá*, with art the honored guest. ■

(May 24-June 22, 2015)

NOTE

1. "Detrás del Muro" participating artists included the Cubans Adonis Ferro, Adonis Flores, Aimée García, Alexander Guerra, Alvaro José Brunet, Ariel Orozco, Arles del Río, Carlos Montes de Oca, David Beltrán, Dayán Díaz Curbelo, Duvier del Dago, Ernesto García Sánchez, Ernesto Javier Fernández, Florencio Gelabert, Glexis Novoa, Inti Hernández, Jacqueline Maggi, José Rosabal, Juan Milanés, Kadir López, Jorge Enrique Valdéz, Ludmila López, Manuel A. Hernández Cardona, Manuel Mendive, Nereida García Ferraz, Pablo Rosendo, Rachel Valdés, Rafael M. San Juan, Rafael Villares, Reynier Leyva Novo, Ricardo Rodríguez, Roberto Fabelo, Víctor Piverno and Stainless (Alejandro Piñeiro, José Gabriel Capaz and Roberto Fabelo Hung). They exhibited along with Andreas Feist (Germany), Carlos Nicanor (Cuba-Canary Islands), David Opdyke (USA), Duke Riley (Ireland-USA), Emilio Pérez (USA), Ewerdt Hilgemann (Germany), Fidel Alvarez (Colombia), Humberto Vélez (Panama), José Parlá (USA), Lina Leal (Colombia), Mounir Fatmi (Morocco), Othón Castañeda (Mexico), Oweena Fogarty (Mexico-Ireland), Pilar Rubí (Bolivia-Spain), Tijuana-based Proyecto NOEMA (Lance A. Olsen, Luis Ituarte, Chris Warren and Roberto Romero-Molina), Raquel Paiewonsky (Dominican Republic), and Saafa Erruas (Morocco).

Noel Smith is curator of Latin American and Caribbean art and curator of education for the Institute for Research in Art: Contemporary Art Museum and Graphicstudio (IRA) at the University of South Florida in Tampa. She also directs the USF Museum Studies Graduate Certificate program.



Luz María Sánchez, *V.F9(in)_1*, 2014, sound sculpture, installation, 74 “shoot gun” audio players, 74 Micro-SD cards, 74 MP3 audio tracks, MDF white cubes 13.77 x 13.77 x 11.81 inches, variable dimensions. Installation view at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Tamaulipas – ITCA – CONACULTA. Photo: Cecilia Hurtado. Courtesy of Bienal de las Fronteras (Biennial of the Frontiers), 2015

BIENAL DE LAS FRONTERAS (BIENNIAL OF THE FRONTIERS)

Museum of Contemporary Art of Tamaulipas
Matamoros, Mexico

By Leslie Moody Castro

Matamoros, Mexico, is the most unlikely of places to travel to see and witness the shaping of an annual international exhibition of contemporary art. There are many layers to the complexity of the Bienal de las Fronteras, the inaugural biennial that took place in Matamoros in early March 2015, and an exhibition of this magnitude in this region certainly lays a foundation for a plethora of questions that must remain unanswered. The city of Matamoros is situated directly on the Texas/Mexico border in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas and is directly across the international bridge from Brownsville, Texas. The relationship between the border cities of Brownsville and Matamoros is one of divisiveness: You are either from “here” or “there,” U.S. or Mexico, and nothing in between. Add this to the recent spike in violence in the area and Matamoros has been almost completely forgotten, its citizens live in a constant state of fear, and it has the general feeling of a civil war zone.

It was beyond strange to travel to Matamoros to attend an international biennial at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Tamaulipas (MACT).

This is not by any means a region known for its contemporary art. The museum itself is a building designed and constructed by the famed Mexican architect Mario Pani in the late 1960s and was part of a major country-wide initiative to beautify the Mexican border between the 1960s and early 1970s to highlight the ever-increasing wealth in the region. This history, however, is a far cry from the current state of the project, much of which was left abandoned, but the MACT still stands as an example that the city of Matamoros once stood as a landmark across the border. Currently, Matamoros is witness to the slow state of decline it has undergone for the better part of the decade. Random street shootouts between local drug traffickers and Mexican police have become the

norm, and the level of violence has become such a ubiquitous part of life that violence has become remarkably normalized.

I arrived on the ground the day before the opening of the biennial. I was greeted at the airport by Enrique, a government employee at the museum, who graciously answered the many questions I had about the biennial and how it might be perceived by city residents. This was a huge initiative on its own, not to mention the fact that Matamoros has few if any resources to support artists, and the arts are not particularly valued in terms of culture or education. Hosting a biennial of international artists and gaining visibility on an international scale was beyond the scope of anything anyone had ever seen in that area.

Enrique was happy to talk about it, and as our conversation turned from the general logistics of hosting an international exhibition of this scale I began asking about his life in Matamoros, then turned back to the nature of the work in the exhibition in general. While the museum had received work from international artists in the past, this was radically different, and it was really obvious even before I had arrived. This was an exhibition that required site specificity, where many of the artists would be present and where the work wasn’t just being shipped from one place to another but required artists’ involvement in it.

As my conversation with Enrique unfolded, we began to talk specifically of the work in the exhibition, and mainly that of first-prize winner Luz María Sánchez, whose contribution *V.F9(in)_1* (2014) is an installation of speakers that look exactly like plastic guns that play audio clips of sounds extracted from YouTube videos of shootouts from across the country. I asked Enrique if he believed the audience would take offense to the installation. A befuddled look came over his face, and he explained that “People are so used to guns, and the sounds of shootouts are so normal in the city, that it won’t actually be any different from daily life in Matamoros.” Enrique went on to explain that he was more concerned with a photograph by Verónica Meloni “that would probably shock the public much more.” When I pushed him to explain why, he went on to describe it as “a photograph with a woman’s legs wide open, and in between she was holding another image of another woman’s legs wide open.” He was blushing as he talked about it, and I moved the conversation in a different direction while making a mental note to look for the photograph, while



Verónica Meloni, *Collage*, 2014, Digital photograph printed on Harman Crystal Luster 260 g. Epson Ultra Chrome K3, 59" x 43.3." Courtesy of the artist and Bienal de las Fronteras (Biennial of the Frontiers), 2015

also considering the irony that objects of violence would be better received than images that involve the naked human body.

My first stop after crossing the border was the museum itself. I had been there before, multiple times, in fact, but every other time the historical significance of the place had been completely lost on me. This time, however, I was witnessing the beginning of something that could shape culture in an area that so desperately needed it, and in the space that Mexico itself had created for culture more than 40 years prior. As I stepped into the Paní construction, the flurry of activity was obvious, and while the show was only mostly installed, the work was incredibly strong, and the design reflected the labyrinthine Paní aesthetic (at least in this building) quite seamlessly.

In an impressive showing for its inaugural year, the biennial boasted applications from artists and curators spanning 55 countries, whittling down its choices from the overwhelming 1,600 applicants to 55 artists who embraced the inaugural theme of "borders." Partnerships such as those with El Museo del Barrio and the Guggenheim Museum strengthened the curatorial proposals and initiatives, and input from jurors such as Guillermo Santamarina of Mexico City's Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, art historian and curator Julia P. Herzberg, and Emiliano Valdés, chief curator of the Museo Arte Moderno de Medellín, led the selection process.

I wondered how the theme of borders would translate in a space that was so clearly defined by so many borders, and mainly, how the chosen artists would articulate and translate the theme. The final exhibition was a maze of ideas, images and curatorial proposals that played with and problematized the definition of borders. First-prize winner Sánchez's sound installation exposed the continued violence in Mexico, second-prize winner Maya Yadid's video *443* follows a young couple driving a car along a desolate highway singing along at the top of their lungs to a song lamenting a better world. The work in the exhibition, and the exhibition in general, blurred borderlines and spoke of geographical borders, such as in that of Armando Miguélez Giambruno (USA), Emilio Chapela (Mexico) and Pinar Ötenci (Turkey), of metaphysical borders, such as in the curatorial proposals of "Punto Ciego" and "Límites Nómadas," and of borders in language, just to name a few examples.

While the exhibition in and of itself was a strong representation of work, the statement of organizing a biennial in this region is far

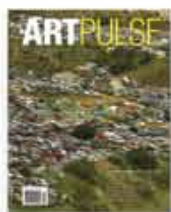
more powerful than a traditional exhibition of contemporary art. I had the pleasure of having an informal conversation with the Biennial's director, Othón Castañeda, during which I retold my story of Enrique's comfort with seeing plastic guns in an exhibition but shock in response to the naked body. This prompted me to ask Castañeda why he had conceived of a biennial in Matamoros, and along the border region no less. It was obvious that his commitment to the show was far beyond a professional one, and he hoped that it would "open up the conversation about borders in order to show residents that they actually are not alone in this border conversation."

One of the most interesting things he recounted to me was that he had long wanted to start something similar in his hometown of Ciudad Victoria, but "Matamoros has the only institution that is dedicated and devoted to showing and exhibiting contemporary art. While the cultural implications and how the two cities go about those exhibitions and programs is obviously different, Matamoros was a natural site to host the project and creates a really important platform to shift the conversation about violence into one about the arts and education. With this biennial comes international attention for a good cause, not because another shooting has been reported in the media."

Castañeda continued to elaborate, but more importantly explained his commitment to make the Bienal de las Fronteras a place of education, an initiative to open the dialogue between local and international artists and shift the common perception of violence to help develop a sense of pride within residents once again. The results remain to be seen, and if this is a project that takes root and sticks, the bigger impact will position the visual arts and culture as integral to the growth of the city as it attempts to rebuild itself post-drug wars. Hopefully, Matamoros will see the day when images of weapons are much more shocking than a nude body. ■

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Leslie Moody Castro is an independent curator and writer, living between Mexico City and Austin. She is a contributor to the online Texas visual arts journal Glasstire, as well as the Austin-based contemporary art e-journal, ...might be good.



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